

Economic Development

OVERVIEW

Lincoln's economy is a part of the larger Boston regional economy, which serves as a major asset for local residents, yet this very fact causes ambivalence about the best economic development direction for the town. The local employment base includes small retail, professional services, government, non-profit organizations, agriculture, and home-based businesses. Lincoln has traditionally framed its conversations about economic development in terms of land use, zoning, and tax base expansion while maintaining its quality of life as its guiding principle. Despite a history of spirited debates about commercial development, there has only been broad agreement about the desirability of a village center at Lincoln Station and some rare instances of agreement about other locations. As a result, Lincoln relies almost exclusively on residential property taxes to pay for local government services. The town continues to face pressure to find other sources of revenue to meet its financial needs.



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Key Findings

- ❖ Lincoln's population is exceptionally well educated. Overall, many of its employed residents have very high earnings and as a result, median households have high incomes.
- ❖ Excluding military employment at Hanscom Air Force Base (HAFB), Lincoln has a small employment base that supports approximately 1,330 private-sector jobs and 1,760 total jobs.
- ❖ Compared with the urbanized area around Boston, Lincoln's employment base includes larger percentages of jobs in education, the arts, cultural institutions and advocacy organizations, and smaller percentages in the construction trades, retail, health care, transportation, and utilities.
- ❖ Lincoln has approximately 190 employer establishments, including for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies.
- ❖ Unofficial estimates place the number of non-profit organizations in Lincoln at ninety-seven.
- ❖ Lincoln's economy includes several farms that provide locally grown produce to local and regional consumers. The total amount of productive agricultural land in Lincoln today is 547 acres.

- ◆ Lincoln has zoned approximately twenty-seven acres for commercial uses, including eighteen acres in the South Lincoln business area and nine acres in a planned development district in North Lincoln. An additional twenty-three acres may be available for business or mixed-use development in South Lincoln if Town Meeting decides to create more planned development districts there in the future.

Key Challenges

- ❖ While there is general support for providing opportunities to develop more businesses and housing in the Lincoln Station area, there is opposition to allowing commercial development in other parts of town.
- ❖ Maintaining Lincoln's land use policies and financial sustainability needs will require close collaboration between the Planning Board, Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee and other town officials, and an open and inclusive process for building consensus with residents.
- ❖ Lincoln's 547 acres of productive agricultural land include 158 acres with no protection against a change in use. Since the town is committed to preserving its agricultural heritage and farming as an important part of the local economy, Lincoln needs to be prepared to respond to the possibility that one or more of these properties may be offered for sale in the future.
- ❖ Non-profit organizations play a very important part in Lincoln's economy. Many but not all of these organizations provide jobs in Lincoln and they also attract people to the community. Working with non-profit groups to coordinate special events with local businesses and providing "wayfinding" information to help steer patrons to the Lincoln Station area could be a useful economic development activity in Lincoln. Strong partnerships between non-profit organizations, for-profit businesses, and local government require leadership, commitment, and resources, and Lincoln may want to consider having a "point person" or special committee to focus on economic development.

EXISTING CONDITIONS & TRENDS

In most suburbs, a comprehensive plan's economic development element focuses on ways to retain, attract, and grow businesses for the tax revenue and jobs they bring. Building a local employment base involves zoning land for commercial and industrial uses and providing the infrastructure and utilities that turn vacant land into construction-ready sites. Sometimes it involves business recruitment through marketing and financial incentives, too. Throughout the Boston area, commercial development usually consists of a downtown and suburban commercial pockets along major roads, with industrial uses next to highways and at the outer edges of town. In the region's older industrial centers, historic mills can still be seen along waterways, yet often the mills lay vacant if they have not been converted to other uses.

Owing to its history, setting, and political culture, Lincoln is not one of these communities. It has a long history of spirited debates about the merits and drawbacks of commercial development, but with the exception of seizing an unusual opportunity in North Lincoln some twenty years ago, the town has not pursued economic growth by zoning for commercial uses or actively recruiting businesses. Indeed, Lincoln has taken a different approach. Lincoln brings several assets to the development and preservation of its own local economy: its extraordinary people and entrepreneurship, its still-strong rural character in a location not far from Boston, and its commuter rail service and access to interstate highways. Its economy is part of the Boston regional economy, and this works to Lincoln's advantage because most of its residents are employed in Boston, Cambridge, and other inner-core cities and economic centers.

A town's economy is shaped by its location and land use pattern, the characteristics of its resident population and those who work in the community, and most importantly by the neighboring and regional economy. The zoning regulations that a town adopts can influence, restrict, enhance, or impede the evolution of its economy. Its regulations can also create consequences, both positive and negative, for people within the town and for adjacent towns. Communities that do not provide for all the work and consumption needs of their residents send their consumer demands and labor to neighboring communities or to the larger regional economy. This generates income for businesses in other communities and provides labor for their enterprises, but also adds traffic to their streets. Such spillovers are unavoidable, and they will probably increase as services such as retail and health care become more specialized. Each community, including Lincoln, makes a unique contribution to the larger regional economy.

Lincoln's small businesses provide some goods and services for local consumers, but the vast majority of consumer spending by residents occurs elsewhere.¹ Most Lincoln residents work elsewhere, too, because the town's highly skilled labor force is more reflective of the regional employment base than the local employment base. In addition, the local employment base is very small because Lincoln has chosen to evolve as a predominantly residential community. In addition to its small businesses and many self-employed entrepreneurs, Lincoln has numerous non-profit organizations that provide local employment and attract consumers to the community. Institutions such as the Massachusetts Audubon Society, the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, the Gropius House and Codman House, Codman Farm, and the Carroll School provide services to the region and bring traffic and visitors to Lincoln. Furthermore, the town's conservation land and working farms attract visitors from surrounding communities as well. They come by car, bicycle or train to cycle, hike, ski in the winter, walk their dogs, or engage in farm work at Lindentree Farm or the Food Project. Some of people who visit Lincoln's non-profit institutions, farms, and open space also purchase goods at local stores. Overall, the composition of Lincoln's economy makes the town an educational, cultural, and recreational destination, not a commercial destination. While most of the economic activities that draw people to Lincoln do not generate tax revenue for the town, they provide jobs and services, and in many cases they contribute to preserving the town's high property values.

Labor Force Characteristics

A community's labor force consists of its local residents 16 years of age and over, employed or looking for work. A *labor force participation rate* represents the ratio of civilians in the labor force to all civilians 16 and over. Lincoln's labor force of 2,586 represents a sixty-five percent participation rate, which is about average for the Boston metropolitan area.² The unemployment rate in Lincoln usually falls well below that of the region, and its residents tend to remain employed even under weak economic conditions.³

Lincoln has an exceptionally well-educated population. Forty-nine percent of its adults hold graduate or professional degrees, which places Lincoln ahead of the surrounding communities and the Boston metropolitan area for *educational attainment*. Residents tend to be employed as scholars and industry professionals in science and technology, and as educators, design professionals, healthcare practitioners, and specialists in business and

1 Claritas, Inc., Site Reports, and Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Labor and Workforce Development; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table P43, "Sex by Employment Status for the Population 16 Years and Over," 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 3, Table P070, "Sex by Employment Status," [Electronic Versions], American FactFinder, <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

financial operations.⁴ Given Lincoln’s very high level of educational attainment and the concentration of its labor force in high-wage occupations, it is not surprising that residents have comparatively high annual earnings from employment. Though not quite as high as the wage and salary income of Weston or Sudbury residents, the average for Lincoln residents is 1.65 times that of employed people throughout the Boston metropolitan area.⁵

Table 8.1 compares the percentage of Lincoln’s labor force employed in each major industrial class with the percentage of the labor force with jobs in the same industries throughout the Boston area and in the state as a whole. The comparison is expressed in employment-by-industry ratios, or *industry quotients*. When an industry quotient approximates 1.00, it means that the industry employs the same proportion of Lincoln residents as the proportion of residents from a larger geographic comparison area. For Lincoln, the very high industry quotients in the finance, professional, scientific and management, and education and health care industries speak to the education and skill levels of its residents.

**Table 8.1
Lincoln Civilian Labor Force: Industry Quotients (2000)**

Class of Industry	Lincoln Residents Employed by Type of Industry	Industry Quotient	
		Lincoln Compared with State	Lincoln Compared with Boston Metro
Construction	115	0.81	0.88
Manufacturing	156	0.47	0.61
Wholesale Trade	45	0.53	0.56
Retail Trade	239	0.83	0.89
Transportation, Utilities	40	0.37	0.39
Information	108	1.12	0.95
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	337	1.59	1.35
Professional, Scientific, Management	516	1.73	1.41
Education, Health Care, Social Services	706	1.15	1.15
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	126	0.72	0.74
Other Services	69	0.61	0.62
Public Administration	111	1.01	1.03

Source: Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table P49, “Sex by Industry for the Employed Civilian Population 16 Years and Over,” and Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

About half of Lincoln’s labor force works for employers in Boston, Cambridge, Waltham, Bedford, Concord, Burlington, Lexington, Newton, or within Lincoln. Residents also commute to jobs all along Route 128 and west to employment centers within the I-495 corridor and beyond.⁶ Federal census data suggest that a small percentage of Lincoln residents work locally, but due to the increasing popularity of telecommuting, the town probably has a larger daytime population than one might imagine. In addition, Lincoln has an unusually large percentage of self-employed residents. In the Boston metropolitan area, about nine percent of the labor force

⁴ Claritas, Inc., and Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table P36, “Sex by Educational Attainment for the Population 25+ Years,” Census Tract 3602 (Lincoln, excluding Hanscom AFB)

⁵ Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table PCT47, “Median Earnings in 1999 by Work Experience in 1999 by Sex for the Population 16+ Years with Earnings in 1999,” Census Tract 3602.

⁶ Census 2000, Summary File 3, “MCD/County to MCD/County Worker Flow Files,” Census 2000 Special Tabulations, <http://www.census.gov/mp/www/spectab/specialtab.html>; and Summary File 3, Table P39, and 1990 Census, Summary File 3, Table P049, “Means of Transportation to Work for Workers 16 Years and Over,” Census Tract 3602. See also, Chapter 9, Transportation & Circulation.

Table 8-2
Employment in Lincoln by Industry, Wages, and Location Quotients (2007)

Class of Industry	Number of Employers	Average Employment	Average Weekly Wage	Lincoln Compared with Boston Metro
Total	192	1,759	\$1,243	
Construction	12	29	\$1,097	0.41
Wholesale Trade	8	16	\$1,838	0.24
Retail Trade	6	50	\$566	0.32
Transportation and Warehousing	5	46	\$643	0.81
Information	4	39	\$1,375	0.64
Finance and Insurance	10	44	\$2,164	0.32
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	9	12	\$931	0.43
Professional & Technical Services	54	191	\$2,829	1.03
Administrative & Waste Services	8	44	\$3,150	0.41
Educational Services	4	515	\$1,197	3.02
Health Care & Social Assistance	11	94	\$581	0.36
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	7	101	\$570	3.54
Accommodation & Food Services	3	9	\$274	0.07
Other Services	44	371	\$590	5.84

Sources: Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development, ES-202, Lincoln, Massachusetts, and Boston-Cambridge-Quincy New England City and Town Area (NECTA); and Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

is self-employed, with roughly three percent owning an incorporated business and six percent working as sole proprietors. By contrast, just over twenty-three percent of Lincoln's labor force is self-employed. The average household income from self-employment in Lincoln is more than twice that of the region.⁷

Employment and Wages

A community's employment base is made up of the wage and salary employees of local establishments: for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies. The employment base statistics published by government agencies exclude self-employed individuals, which is important because in Lincoln, many residents work for themselves. Still, the size and composition of an employment base and the wages paid by local industries can enhance or constrain the job opportunities available to residents of a community and other towns nearby. Lincoln has a small employment base with a limited mix of jobs. The total number of public- and private-sector wage and salary jobs (1,759) is sixty-eight percent of the number of people in Lincoln's labor force today, i.e., 0.68 jobs for every one resident in the labor force. Lincoln employers draw workers from a large area. About twenty-two percent of the local employment base consists of people who live in Lincoln. The town attracts a small percentage of workers from adjacent communities. Another sixteen percent come from Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Bedford, Chelmsford, Maynard, and Arlington. The remaining sixty-two percent travel from more than 100 communities in Eastern Massachusetts.⁸

An employment base can be described by the distribution of jobs by class of industry, but on its own this information has limited value. Comparing the percentage of a community's jobs in each industry with the percentage of jobs in the same industry in a larger area helps to illustrate a local economy's unique characteristics and poten-

⁷ Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table P60, "Self-Employment Income for Households," and Table P69, "Aggregate Self-Employment Income for Households."

⁸ Census 2000, MCD/County to MCD/County Worker Flow Files. See also, Chapter 9, Transportation and Circulation.

tial strengths and weaknesses. The device for expressing this type of comparison, a *location quotient*, is similar to the industry quotients for Lincoln’s resident labor force reported in Table 8.1. The difference between industry quotients and location quotients is that the former focuses on what a community’s residents do for work and the latter focuses on the industries that provide jobs within a community, regardless of where the employees live. Table 8.2 reports location quotients for employers by industry in Lincoln. Relative to the Boston metropolitan area, Lincoln’s employment base is concentrated in education, the arts, and “other” or unclassified services. Lincoln residents work in some of these industries, locally or in other communities. Some industries in Lincoln pay fairly high wages relative to other communities in the region, such as wholesale trade, professional services, and education.

Table 8.3
Lincoln Tax Levy, FY 1999-2008

FY	Total Tax Levy	Residential	Percent Total	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property	Percent Total
1999	\$12,812,114	\$12,272,833	95.8%	\$361,061		\$178,221	4.2%
2000	\$13,430,590	\$12,866,034	95.8%	\$391,168		\$173,388	4.2%
2001	\$13,564,223	\$13,028,274	96.0%	\$375,613	\$5,587	\$154,748	4.0%
2002	\$14,713,033	\$14,173,439	96.3%	\$380,861	\$8,183	\$150,550	3.7%
2003	\$15,630,931	\$15,091,427	96.5%	\$384,282	\$11,674	\$143,548	3.5%
2004	\$16,823,429	\$16,257,277	96.6%	\$392,825	\$18,645	\$154,682	3.4%
2005	\$17,513,552	\$16,827,429	96.1%	\$472,545	\$23,050	\$190,528	3.9%
2006	\$18,859,651	\$18,099,792	96.0%	\$512,293	\$41,113	\$206,453	4.0%
2007	\$19,626,567	\$18,843,965	96.0%	\$512,626	\$36,924	\$233,052	4.0%
2008	\$19,829,190	\$19,021,180	95.9%	\$495,236	\$34,419	\$278,355	4.1%

Source: DOR, Municipal Data Bank.

Average monthly employment in Lincoln declined from 2,051 jobs in 2001 to 1,721 in 2006, or a sixteen percent decrease, and the total number of establishments declined by about five percent. Considering only private-sector jobs, employment declined from 1,607 to 1,315 and the number of private establishments, from 192 to 183. In 2007, employment increased by a modest thirty-eight jobs, with no change in number of establishments. While these statistics imply that Lincoln’s employment base is contracting, they say very little about changes occurring within the economy as firms in some sectors decline and others grow. Focusing exclusively on net employment changes would neglect a substantial fraction of gross job flows that occur as some firms add workers and others shrink. Analysis of job creation and job destruction – or *job churning* – tells more than a simple net change in jobs. For every one job lost from Lincoln’s employment base between 2001 and 2006, 1.07 jobs turned over or were reallocated within the local economy. In Lincoln, the professions with the highest incidence of job reallocation included finance and insurance and educational services.⁹

EMPLOYER CHARACTERISTICS

It is hard to document the number of employers and self-employed people in Lincoln. The town is so small that some of its employment statistics are protected as confidential due to the limited number of establishments and employees in a given industry. Public and proprietary sources provide fairly consistent estimates, however: 170 to 190 employers, including the town itself. Several of Lincoln’s employers are small establishments with five to ten employees – from churches and non-profit charitable organizations to gift shops and banks – but

⁹ Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development, ES-202, Lincoln, Massachusetts, and Boston-Cambridge-Quincy New England City and Town Area (NECTA); and Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

smaller, one-to-four-person establishments are more common. Lincoln's smallest businesses are one- or two-person operations, located in the Lincoln Station area, in single-family homes throughout the town, and in the handful of older commercial and mixed-use buildings on South Great Road, Route 126 and Route 2. These *microbusinesses* include architects and engineers, interior designers, psychologists, social workers, attorneys, photographers, custom woodworkers, publishers, auto mechanics, and others.

The town's larger employers are its major institutions: the Carroll School, the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and the Lincoln Public Schools. Non-profit organizations with tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status are an important component of Lincoln's economy. According to a national source that maintains a database of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) records, Lincoln currently has ninety-seven non-profit organizations.¹⁰ Lincoln's large institutional employers and most of its very small employers and self-employed people provide the economic infrastructure that enables some residents to work locally. In addition, they provide Lincoln with a daytime population that helps to support the town's few commercial businesses.¹¹

Tax Base

Lincoln's tax base reflects its land use pattern. Ninety-six percent of the town's tax levy is generated by residential uses and about four percent by commercial uses, including taxes on personal property. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2005, the town for the first time adopted a split tax rate instead of charging a uniform rate for all types of property. Lincoln's current tax rate is \$10.32 per thousand for residential property and \$13.55 for commercial, industrial and personal property. Table 8.3 reports the total amount of property tax revenue and distribution of tax revenue by land use class in Lincoln from FY 1999 to 2008.

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

The \$808,000 in commercial, industrial, and personal property taxes reported in Table 8.3 represents a very small number of nonresidential taxpayers. In nearly all cases, "nonresidential taxpayers" exclude private residences with a home office or another type of accessory business.¹² Lincoln has twenty commercial and industrial parcels with a combined total of about forty-three acres, but it has no industrial uses. The industrially taxed parcels in Lincoln are owned or leased by utility companies. The largest commercial project, a 138,000 sq. ft. office building known as Lincoln North, is located off Old Bedford Road in North Lincoln and in a setting barely visible to most Lincoln residents. The most well-known commercial property in Lincoln is small by the standards of most towns: a mixed commercial area around Lincoln Station, owned by the Rural Land Foundation. Most of Lincoln's other commercial properties are concentrated in the Lincoln Station area, too. Isolated pockets of non-conforming businesses (two garden centers selling nursery stock and three gas stations) exist on South Great Road, Route 2 and Concord Road.¹³

10 GuideStar, www.guidestar.org/.

11 "Employment and Wages (ES-202)," 2006; Lincoln Business List, retrieved from InfoUSA; and Susan Brooks, Lincoln Town Clerk, Business Certificates List, [Electronic Versions].

12 Classification for tax purposes depends on the highest and best use of the property. Since a home located in a residential zoning district cannot be converted to a business, its highest and best use is a single-family residence. The presence of an at-home office is an accessory use and for appraisal purposes, it does not materially affect the value of the property. By contrast, a mixed-use building is one in which all or a portion of the market value is based on the capitalized value of income from leases. In these cases, the property is classified either as primarily residential or primarily commercial. Lincoln currently has five mixed residential and commercial properties and several others with a mix of commercial and agricultural uses.

13 Harald M. Scheid, Regional Tax Assessor, "FY 2008 Lincoln Data Extract" [Electronic Version], to Community Opportunities Group, Inc., 18 April 2008.

Zoning

Lincoln has three basic nonresidential use districts: B-1, the Retail Business District, B-2, the Service Business District, and B-3, the Selected Light Industrial District.

- ❖ The **B-1 District** applies to the site occupied by The Mall at Lincoln Station and land on the opposite side of Lincoln Road. It also includes the former town hall on Lincoln Road, just south of the present town office building. B-1 is the more permissive use district, for it allows a limited set of business uses as of right, subject to site plan review, and requires a special permit for a restaurant. It includes a total of 8.7 acres of land.¹⁴
- ❖ The **B-2 District** includes land in the South Lincoln business area as well, generally land along both sides of Lewis Street. The only uses allowed of right in the B-2 District are residential uses permitted in the General Residence (R-2) District. Business uses such as offices, service businesses, and light manufacturing require approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals, and restaurants require approval from the Planning Board. This district includes 8.6 acres of land.
- ❖ Lincoln has zoning regulations for an **Industrial District (B-3)**, but the town has not placed any land in the district.

These three districts reflect the basic recommendations of Lincoln’s first master plan, but they do not fully represent the town’s approach to commercial zoning. Over time, Lincoln has used *overlay districts* as the preferred mechanism for guiding major development and for accommodating substantive changes to the Zoning Bylaw. Lincoln currently has special overlay districts in North Lincoln and South Lincoln. The regulations establish the process that applicants must follow in order to propose developments that need greater dimensional flexibility or more use privileges than the underlying use districts allow. The process culminates in a town meeting warrant article to establish a planned development district and approve a preliminary development and use plan, which in turn establishes what can be done on the parcel. Together, the two conventional use districts, the South Lincoln Overlay District, and commercial land in a planned development district in North Lincoln provide twenty-seven acres of business-zoned land and another twenty-three acres that could include some business uses if Town Meeting decides to create additional planned development districts in South Lincoln at some point in the future.¹⁵



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¹⁴ Unless stated otherwise, the land area for each zoning district is derived from the Town of Lincoln’s digitized zoning map, supplied courtesy of the Conservation Department.

¹⁵ The South Lincoln Overlay District covers approximately 41 acres of land, including all of the B-1 District in South Lincoln, all of the B-2 District, and the General Residence (R-2) District. The South Lincoln Planned Development District 1, for the Mall at South Lincoln, includes 3.9 acres for which B-1 is the underlying zoning. The North Lincoln Planned Development District for the Lincoln North office building includes 9.2 acres.

Lincoln recently considered three development proposals that would increase local employment and generate additional tax revenue for the town: the commercial development at Lincoln Station and The Groves, which Town Meeting approved as planned development districts in 2006, and an office building proposed for land near the Lincoln/Waltham line, located in an existing residential neighborhood. This proposal did not go forward.¹⁶

- ❖ Renovations at The Mall at Lincoln Station began in September 2007. Ten months before groundbreaking (November 2006), Town Meeting established a planned development district (PDD) within the South Lincoln Overlay District to facilitate the project, which the Rural Land Foundation had been discussing with town officials for several years.¹⁷ In 1999, for example, the South Lincoln Business Area Planning Committee issued a report and recommendations for the evolution of South Lincoln as a village district, organized by quadrant. The Committee's work formed the basis for the South Lincoln Overlay District, created in 2004 as the "parent" zoning for future planned development districts in South Lincoln.¹⁸
- ❖ Also in 2006, Town Meeting approved a new planned development district in North Lincoln. The Groves, a 197-unit New England Deaconess senior residence compound, includes independent living and semi-independent living units for people over 62 years. As a managed residential community, the NEDA "Abundant Life" development will employ a recreation director, geriatric specialists, and food services, housekeeping, and maintenance staff.
- ❖ In 2007, Leggat McCall Properties approached the town about rezoning 8.6 acres off Winter Street and Old County Road for a 200,000 sq. ft. office building. A traffic analysis prepared for the town indicated that Leggat McCall's plans, coupled with the four million sq. ft. of office and retail development already permitted in Waltham and Weston, would generate significant traffic impacts.¹⁹ Opposition from residents, doubt about the fiscal benefits of Leggat McCall's project, and community-wide concerns about unwanted traffic made it very unlikely that Town Meeting would support a zoning change. The developer's purchase and sale agreement expired and the project was abandoned.²⁰

NEEDS, ISSUES & CHALLENGES

Although some exceptions exist under state law, cities and towns have considerable statutory and home rule authority to regulate residential, commercial, and industrial development. By long-standing policy, Lincoln has confined commercial development to a handful of places. The desire for more activity around Lincoln Station led Town Meeting to establish an overlay district there in 2006, a move that enabled redevelopment of the Mall at Lincoln Station. The overlay district creates a process for considering more commercial uses, mixed uses, and residential uses in the same area.

However, there is considerable disagreement in Lincoln on the pros and cons of allowing more commercial development in other parts of town. Many residents have misgivings about locating commercial uses in or near established neighborhoods. They believe that high costs to neighbors would outweigh any anticipated gains to

16 See also, Chapter 2, Land Use & Zoning.

17 Town of Lincoln, Special Town Meeting, 4 November 2006.

18 Town of Lincoln, Report by the South Lincoln Business Area Planning Committee (1999).

19 VHB, Inc., "At-Risk Property Study-Transportation," 10 March 2008, 2-3.

20 See also, Chapter 2, Land Use & Zoning.

the town from such a commercial rezoning, and that estimating the net fiscal impact of commercial growth should account for the possibility that abutting residential property values will decline. In this case, they believe Lincoln should take steps to protect abutters, such as requiring commercial developers to compensate residents who stand to lose from a zoning change that may reduce the value of their homes. Other residents think Lincoln should be more receptive to commercial development outside the Lincoln Station area, mainly as a way to increase the tax base. They say the town needs more sources of recurring, predictable revenue in order to manage the rate of growth in residential property tax bills. Accordingly, they believe Lincoln should not close the door to proposals for commercial or mixed uses in areas currently zoned for residential development, and they cite projects such as Lincoln North and The Groves as examples of successful local initiatives.

Mixed-Use and Commercial Development

Lincoln has evolved largely as residents intended when they made a series of zoning decisions between 1929 and 1955. These decisions culminated in zoning for large-lot residential development and limited business development. The Town subsequently acquired many acres of conservation land. When other Boston area suburbs were zoning large amounts of land along highways such as Route 2 for commercial or industrial uses, Lincoln took a reserved stance and sought to protect the town and its neighborhoods from excessive commercial growth. This land use policy framework was largely endorsed in Lincoln's first and second planning reports, and it continues to have broad support today. The early planning studies demonstrate that even then, residents recognized the tension between preserving local character and the need to develop alternatives to the residential property tax in order to fund increasingly costly town services.

Conversations about commercial development would be more productive if discussion focused on outcomes and impacts, particularly because commercial uses are not homogenous; some would harm the quality of life in residential neighborhoods, and others would co-exist inconspicuously with nearby homes.

Nevertheless, other than in South Lincoln, the town chose not to designate specific areas of the town to be rezoned in advance for commercial development, opting instead to consider development proposals on a case-by-case basis. Development proposals having merit have historically been handled through overlay districts that are not general in nature, but fairly specific in the use and design elements that must be approved by a two-thirds vote at Town Meeting and honored by the Planning Board as it works out the details prior to granting the necessary special permits. This process requires a high degree of public consensus to complete successfully, and it gives the town significant leverage with developers to shape their proposals to Lincoln's benefit. This approach resulted recently in successful developments at Lincoln Station, The Groves, and Minuteman Commons, as well as in earlier efforts at Battle Road Farm and Lincoln North. On the other hand, it also resulted in the disapproval of an earlier proposal by the Marriott Corporation for senior housing known as Brighton Gardens as well in the abandonment of a commercial development prospect on the Arshad property at the Lincoln/Waltham boundary on Winter Street. With respect to the latter, it became clear that potentially severe traffic impacts on the Winter Street/Old County Road neighborhood would preclude the necessary support from town boards and Town Meeting to secure the approval of an overlay district.

A combination of Lincoln's fiscal challenges, unmet capital improvement needs, and aging population have led some to question whether Lincoln should reassess its long-standing ideas about commercial development.

Rather than a change from past practice, Lincoln is considering an institutionalization of past practice. There does seem to be more agreement about the financial, economic, and social advantages of mixed-use development, with or without some commercial uses, and Lincoln has opportunities to consider both mixed uses and free-standing commercial uses. The town has to reach agreement about what it wants to accomplish, however. Conversations about commercial development would be more productive if discussion focused on outcomes and impacts, particularly because commercial uses are not homogenous; some would harm the quality of life in residential neighborhoods, and others would co-exist inconspicuously with nearby homes.

In the past few years, developers and communities throughout the Greater Boston area have decided to redevelop obsolete or underutilized commercial space and construct new commercial space. Retail developments have burgeoned along Route 128 in communities with direct highway access, from Dedham to Reading, sometimes coupled with office space and housing. In Lincoln's area, Waltham and Weston recently approved a combined total of more than four million sq. ft. of commercial space. Some of the region's newest projects relied on the willingness of city councils and town meetings to adopt special legislation such as Chapter 40R, which offers financial incentives to communities in exchange for allowing higher-density housing by right, and Chapter 43D, the Expedited Permitting Law. In addition, local efforts to rejuvenate downtowns, village centers, and neighborhood business areas are underway in Wayland, Needham, Wellesley, and many other communities in the Boston region. The renovation of the Mall at Lincoln Station is consistent with these trends. Like other village centers, Lincoln Station competes to some degree with commercial areas in adjacent towns, larger-scale developments along major highways, and the growing use of the internet for consumer purchases.

LINCOLN STATION

The Lincoln Station area has some advantages that many town centers lack. As the financial and environmental costs of private vehicle commutes become unacceptable to many, Lincoln Station could draw more commuters from Lincoln and adjacent towns. In addition, many Lincoln residents work at home during all or a substantial portion of the week, and they could provide the kind of loyal customer base that small businesses need. The business mix at Lincoln Station will largely determine the size of the district's market area, which primarily includes the town itself, along with portions of neighboring towns and in some cases, national markets. For example, local residents, nonresidents employed in Lincoln, and commuters passing through Lincoln to non-local destinations generate sales for the grocery store, other shops around Lincoln Station, and gas stations. Specialty shops and "destination" areas, including facilities owned by non-profit organizations and town's conservation land, also draw non-local people to Lincoln, and local landscaping firms service both local and regional customers.

The amount of retail and restaurant space that can be supported in a setting like the Lincoln Station area could be estimated with a retail market study, but no community should tailor its zoning policies to assumptions about market demand.

- ❖ Retail is a highly dynamic environment. The industry's health and well-being hinges upon the ability of retailers to adapt to changing consumer demands. For example, national and regional grocery chains that had only one large building product to offer not long ago have created an alternative that is much smaller and designed to compete with high-end specialty food markets in wealthy suburban areas.
- ❖ The amount of retail space that a small town can support depends heavily on the presence of similar retail establishments and the size of population centers in nearby communities.
- ❖ What Lincoln can theoretically support in the Lincoln Station area is not the same as the amount of space that a particular type of business would have to own or lease in order to obtain financing. A survey con-

ducted for this Comprehensive Plan indicates that Lincoln residents would like to have more retail opportunities in town, particularly a pharmacy. However, wanting a pharmacy and having the disposable income to support one do not mean that a pharmacy is a bankable enterprise in Lincoln.

- ❖ Growth in internet sales continues to have a profound impact on the retail industry. The amount of store-front space devoted to retail will change in the future.

Lincoln needs to decide how much business development it wants to encourage around Lincoln Station, given all of the other goals the town wants to meet there – in terms of architectural design, the public realm, village-scale development, water conservation, walkability, housing mix, tax revenue, and so forth – and communicate these expectations clearly to proponents of planned developments. Most importantly, the town needs to be receptive to more housing near the train station. Disputes over commercial uses outside the Lincoln Station area had a significant impact on discussions about economic development during this Comprehensive Plan process. However, the town has not yet been asked to wrestle with a “live” planned development proposal for higher-density housing in the South Lincoln business area or its potential economic and fiscal impact. The small businesses currently operating around the train station may find it very difficult to survive in the future unless the area includes more housing and ironically, more businesses. It is not clear that Lincoln’s appetite for density will be consistent with the density that may be required to maintain a vital business district at Lincoln Station.

POLICY OBJECTIVES

Like many towns, Lincoln has historically framed its conversations about economic growth in terms of zoning, and tax base expansion. Except for general agreement about the desirability of a village business center around Lincoln Station, there has rarely been majority consensus about the appropriateness of other locations for commercial or industrial development. The Lincoln North office project is a noteworthy exception. In the late 1980s, Lincoln had an opportunity to gain control of a forty-seven acre tract of land near the airport, and Town Meeting agreed to acquire the property. The disposition planning for this site culminated in the offices at Lincoln North, which currently generates about \$300,000 in real estate tax revenue, and Battle Road Farm, Lincoln’s award-winning mixed-income housing development. This development also resulted in a protected open space buffer along the adjacent Minute Man National Park.

Over time, Eastern Massachusetts suburbs have instituted zoning that separates land uses, yet in Western Massachusetts, many small towns have decided against limiting or prohibiting businesses in residential areas. They like the random mix of homes, farms, and small businesses that they currently have, for this mix is often characteristic of rural communities. In addition, they worry about turning healthy small businesses into nonconforming uses: the effect of zoning changes to prohibit uses that legally exist today. Underneath these two approaches to land use regulation lie different ideas about the meaning of “quality of life,” about the responsibility of local government to protect private interests, and different expectations about the character and size of businesses seeking to locate. Lincoln needs to consider whether or to what extent it is willing to accept either mixed uses or commercial development on sites beyond those currently zoned for business. It also needs to weigh the anticipated tax revenue gains from commercial development in other parts of town with the potential impact, positive or negative, on nearby homes and the vitality of businesses near the train station.

EMPLOYMENT BASE

Lincoln may need to think about setting goals for the size and composition of its employment base. While goals for commercial development typically focus on location and sizes and types of business establishments, goals for an employment base are different. They are more likely to center on wages, quality of employee benefits and working conditions, compatibility with characteristics or needs of the local labor force, and an integrated

approach to economic development and affordable housing. Lincoln's ability to realize employment base goals will depend on conditions in the regional economy, demand from firms to locate in the town, and the capacity of existing and new firms to grow. For nearly all communities, meeting economic development goals involves building on local assets. For Lincoln, these include its human capital and entrepreneurship, reflected both in the number of home-based businesses and in the number of self-employed residents, the number of non-profit organizations located in Lincoln, regardless of their size, and the town's agricultural businesses.

Agriculture

Lincoln has been committed to agricultural preservation and productive farming for decades. The town has acquired agricultural land in order to protect it from development and leases just under ten percent of its total conservation land inventory to farmers. Income from these leases helps to offset Lincoln's cost to take care of its conservation land, but in addition, food produced on Lincoln's leased land and its small, privately owned farms benefit local and non-local residents seeking local sources of food and organic crops. While agriculture is not a key revenue generator in Lincoln or any other town that still has productive farms, it supports a way of life that has been extremely difficult to maintain in Eastern Massachusetts for well over fifty years. Compared with other towns in the Boston metropolitan area, Lincoln is poised to provide locally grown food better than most. To Lincoln residents, preserving and supporting productive agriculture is a crucial aspect of planning for sustainable development. In the future, the town may find it more difficult to preserve the 158 acres of farmland that still have no protection against a change in use. This represents twenty-nine percent of Lincoln's total inventory of productive agricultural land.²¹

Home Occupations

Lincoln's zoning requirements for home occupations are fairly standard, yet in most communities, the standard rules for home occupations contain vague or ambiguous descriptions of an allowable home business. In many cases, this is because the regulations governing at-home employment have not been updated for years. Lincoln allows home occupations as an accessory residential use by right in all districts except B-1, which prohibits residential uses. The town attempts to regulate home occupations by defining a series of intensity and impact thresholds that separate the permitted accessory use from that which requires a special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals. Specifically, a permitted home occupation has to meet all of these standards [from Section 6.1(f) of the Zoning Bylaw]:

- ❖ It must be clearly incidental and subordinate to use of the premises for a residence;
- ❖ It is limited to one person employed or otherwise involved in conducting the business on the premises, except for residents of dwelling;
- ❖ Prohibited impacts include offensive noise, vibration, smoke, dust, odors, heat, glare, or unsightliness, and traffic that is inconsistent with traffic typically associated with a single-family residence;
- ❖ Prohibited activities include public display of goods, posting signs that do not comply with Lincoln's sign regulations for residential areas, outdoor storage of materials or equipment, which includes parking of more than one commercial vehicle, other exterior indications that a home occupation exists on the property, and any variation from the residential character of the property;

²¹ Town of Lincoln, Open Space Committee, *Open Space and Recreation Plan* (2008), 44.

- ❖ It must provide adequate off-street parking spaces for employees and for visitors, and the parking cannot substantially alter the appearance of the premises as a single family residence;
- ❖ The parking needed to serve employees, clients, customers, or patients on a regular basis must not exceed spaces for four vehicles.

The Zoning Board of Appeals has authority to allow more than one non-resident employee and more than four parking spaces on the premises.

These standards and special permit waiver provisions are common, yet Lincoln's bylaw contains wording that has the potential to create administrative and enforcement problems: a permitted home occupation is defined as a "professional office, studio, laboratory, and workshop accommodating *occupations customarily conducted in Lincoln...*" [emphasis added]. While the Zoning Board of Appeals also has authority to allow an occupation not customarily conducted in Lincoln, subject to certain requirements, it takes little imagination to see that many types of home occupations conducted today could not have been customarily conducted twenty years ago simply because new technologies have changed the way people work.

Aside from needing to update some of the terminology used in its home occupation bylaw, Lincoln's approach to home occupations is about as permissive as that of any other town. For many at-home entrepreneurs, their challenges have less to do with zoning than organizational capacity, ease of networking and business-to-business collaboration, working relationships with town hall, access to promotional opportunities, access to adequate utilities, notably telecommunications, and opportunities to move into low-cost commercial space as their business grows. According to a study recently published by the Bureau of the Census, home-based businesses now account for nearly half of all businesses operating in the United States. Technology, the high cost of transportation and child care, and personal needs such as workplace flexibility or additional income have converged to create a nearly invisible system of employment.²² In some towns, the growing number of home occupations has begun to generate controversy as neighbors find themselves with businesses in their own back yards. It seems unlikely that home occupations will spawn serious land use conflicts in Lincoln, however, simply because of the types of occupations held by so many Lincoln residents.

A local economic development committee could act as an advocate for home-based employment in Lincoln and help to maintain an accurate inventory of home entrepreneurs. While the Town Clerk is required by law to maintain an index of business certificates filed by local businesses, in nearly all communities the index is difficult to maintain due to competing demands placed on town clerk departments. Unless motivated business owners update their business certificates every four years, the Town Clerk has no way of knowing whether a business still operates. Moreover, the statute does not require businesses operating in the owner's name to file a certificate at all. Many consultants working as sole proprietors, writers, artists, musicians, family day care providers, and others use their own name as the name of their business. These kinds of microbusinesses do not appear on a city or town clerk's business list, yet in Lincoln, they may be far more numerous than the town realizes.

Tax Levy

The property tax levy is the amount of revenue a community collects from real and personal property taxes. In Massachusetts, Proposition 2 ½ allows communities to increase the tax levy by 2.5 percent of the prior year's levy plus "new growth," or revenue from an increase in assessed valuation due to real property improvements not reflected in the previous year's tax base. Despite the small number of commercial properties in Lincoln, the

²² Bureau of the Census, *Characteristics of Businesses: 2002*, Survey of Business Owners (2006).

town's FY 2008 residential tax rate of \$10.32 was lower than that of all adjoining towns. This has historically been true as well.²³ The average homeowner tax bill is high by state standards despite Lincoln's low tax rate, and this is partially because Lincoln's home values are so high. However, the primary determinants of a community's tax bills are town meeting appropriations for local government services and the amount of money generated by non-tax revenue sources. The tax rate is set by dividing total appropriations, minus non-tax revenues, by a community's total assessed valuation. Throughout Eastern Massachusetts, towns with high property values and high household wealth tend to have relatively low tax rates and high residential tax bills.

Communities wishing to exceed the levy limit under Proposition 2 ½ must approve an *override* by ballot vote at a town election. They also can vote to exempt debt service from the levy limit, i.e., without permanently lifting the base upon which each year's 2.5 percent increase is calculated. Lincoln has passed several overrides and debt exclusions since Proposition 2½ went into effect in 1981. Proposition 2½ overrides seem to be affordable to most residents of Lincoln because the town is so affluent, yet not everyone would agree. Lower-income households spend a much higher proportion of their incomes on housing, so property taxes consume a higher proportion of their incomes than is the case for households with higher incomes. As a result, raising the tax rate is a more serious issue for lower-income households and those with fixed incomes.²⁴

Town officials familiar with the town's finances are very concerned with the town's ability to maintain services in an environment where costs largely outside of town control are rising rapidly and thus, about the long-term consequences of Proposition 2 ½ overrides. Property taxes have become an increasing burden to a significant and growing portion of the population as residents continue to age.²⁵ If Lincoln remains committed to preserving a population with diverse incomes, it will need to find ways to pay for community services that permit homeowners at different income levels to live in and pay taxes to the town. Given the constitutional and statutory constraints on municipal taxation policy and the limited range of tools available to assessors to provide relief to struggling taxpayers, the issue of retaining the economic diversity of the community may become one of Lincoln's greatest challenges.

Non-Profit Organizations

Non-profit organizations abound in Lincoln. Many of them contribute to the town's employment base, and they provide services valued by Lincoln's own residents and people from other communities. The town does not have organized or systematically collected data to measure or track the economic impact of these organizations. However, the prestige of some non-profits in Lincoln suggests that their economic impact extends well beyond Lincoln's borders. Some towns with a large base of non-profit organizations and institutions have taken steps to forge partnerships between these groups, the for-profit business community, and local government. This kind of collaboration can be seen in a few small towns in Berkshire County, for example, where the arts and a variety of cultural, environmental advocacy, and outdoor recreation organizations make up a significant part of the economy.

Lincoln could pursue opportunities to increase the economic benefits of its non-profit sector through similar means. An example of a partnership activity might involve coordinating special events sponsored by non-profit organizations with promotional and sales events in South Lincoln and farm tours already supported

23 DOR, Division of Local Services, "Tax Rates," 1981-2008, [Electronic Version], Municipal Data Bank.

24 Bureau of the Census, *Housing of Lower-Income Households*, Statistical Brief 94-18, September 1994.

25 For a detailed review of Lincoln's financial condition, fiscal policies, and near-term fiscal challenges, see Chapter 12, Lincoln Town Finances.

by the town. A simpler example would involve providing unobtrusive “wayfinding” signage between the larger non-profits and Lincoln Station, keeping promotional literature about stores in the Lincoln Station area at the reception desks or front offices of non-profit facilities and similarly, providing informational literature about the non-profits in business establishments. In communities with active partnerships engaged in these kinds of activities, there is typically a town committee, such as an economic development commission, to coordinate local government’s role. Lincoln does not have an economic development commission or committee today, but the town could establish one.

Some towns with a large base of non-profit organizations and institutions have taken steps to forge partnerships between these groups, the for-profit business community, and local government. Lincoln could pursue opportunities to increase the economic benefits of its non-profit sector through similar means.

Some have suggested that Lincoln should seek a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) from its non-profit organizations. This practice is common in cities with large tax-exempt educational and charitable institutions, but it is much less common in small towns. Currently Lincoln receives PILOT revenue from the state for land and facilities at Hanscom Civilian Airport and Walden State Reservation,²⁶ but none of the non-profits provides PILOT revenue. PILOT is a voluntary action by tax-exempt organizations, and it requires a negotiated agreement between the host community and the non-profit. Lincoln officials have considered requesting non-tax payments from local non-profits, but the town determined that most of the non-profits are too small to generate much revenue. Many towns in the Boston metropolitan area have explored PILOT agreements, too. Like Lincoln, they eventually abandoned the idea because the very small amount of revenue involved did not justify the level of effort by local officials or the strain placed on municipal and non-profit relationships.

GOALS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal ED-1. Develop the Lincoln Station area as a higher-density mixed-use village that complements and reinforces the vitality of Lincoln’s existing small businesses, consistent with smart-growth principles and Lincoln’s core values.

- ED-1.1. Create a Lincoln Station Area Planning Committee appointed by the Planning Board to undertake an initial study of the opportunities, factors and constraints that would inform the necessary steps toward incenting desirable development in the area.
- ED-1.2. Review and build upon the Report to the Lincoln Planning Board by the South Lincoln Business Area Planning Committee that was the outcome of the 1998 charrette, and prepare a report that adjusts, refines, or adds to its recommendations to apply to current conditions.
- ED-1.3. Prepare a needs analysis and feasibility study to determine what commercial activities would best serve the town’s interests.
- ED-1.4. Develop realistic economic goals and evaluate the fiscal impact of enacting any recommendations to increase the density of development in the area.

²⁶ Town of Lincoln, Schedule A Year-End Revenues and Expenditures Report, 2006-2008 [Electronic Versions].

- ED-1.5. Prepare a comprehensive development plan including the infrastructure required to encourage desirable development.

DISCUSSION

In light of general consensus that the primary location for higher-density mixed-use development is the Lincoln Station area, town government should consider appointing a task force to identify and examine the town's options for economic development in this area. As discussed in Chapter 2, Land Use, Lincoln Station needs a comprehensive development plan. Part of this planning process should include establishing realistic economic goals for the South Lincoln business area. For example, an economic development plan might include a needs analysis and feasibility study for a flexible office and business services cooperative for very small businesses and at-home entrepreneurs.

In addition, the town should explore the feasibility of a Business Improvement District (BID) at Lincoln Station. A BID is a type of special revenue district that allows communities to impose a surcharge on properties within the district in order to finance infrastructure or utility improvements, and sometimes improvements on private property. A majority of business property owners would have to agree to nominate the area for BID designation and also to create the BID. Many towns have found it difficult to build property owner support because of concerns about the surcharge, so communications with the business community will be very important. District Improvement Financing (DIF) is another potentially useful tool for financing infrastructure needs, such as wastewater disposal, to facilitate development around the train station.

Goal ED-2. Provide for economic development that respects Lincoln's rural character and adds to the quality of local residential life by providing goods and services desired by residents, jobs and livelihoods for Lincoln residents, and tax revenue that support the town services that are important to Lincoln residents.

- ED-2.1. Create an Economic Development Committee with members appointed by the Board of Selectmen to identify and assess Lincoln's economic development opportunities and advise the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and other town boards about economic development policy.
- ED-2.2. Consider opportunities for new mixed uses or commercial uses that can be developed and operated for the benefit of the town.

DISCUSSION

In light of unresolved tensions about commercial development in Lincoln, town government needs an appointed body to identify and examine the town's options for economic development. Some of these options may require additional planned development districts in the Lincoln Station area or new types of zoning in other parts of the town, but zoning is not the only tool for economic development. Lincoln needs to take a creative approach both to defining "economic development" and identifying ways to achieve its goals. An economic development committee could include designees of existing boards such as the Planning Board and Finance Committee, but it needs representation from a wide set of interests: Lincoln's for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, farmers, at-home business owners, developers or realtors with knowledge of demand for commercial, mixed-use, and non-profit institutional space in Lincoln and the immediate region, and citizens at large. Some projects that should be assigned to an economic development committee include the following:

- ❖ **Business Inventory.** Lincoln currently has very little data about the characteristics of its businesses, particularly its home-based businesses. An economic development plan or strategy should be informed by accurate, timely data and a trends analysis. Although numerous public and private data sources provide

business statistics, they are rarely complete, often inaccurate or out-of-date, and sometimes industry- or membership-driven, which in turn creates a risk of bias. Moreover, many business databases and statistics collections omit non-profit organizations and sole proprietors.

- ❖ **Public Participation.** Lincoln should continue to hold community conversations about its economic future. The town's appetite for economic development is cautiously limited, as suggested by the mostly negative response to Leggat McCall's proposal on Winter Street and the results of a survey conducted for this Comprehensive Plan. On one hand, survey respondents indicated a desire for more retail opportunities but virtually no interest in new commercial office developments; on the other hand, many respondents expressed frustration with the wording of survey items and the lack of information about the choices they were asked to evaluate. Since economic development is a controversial subject in Lincoln, the town needs to communicate with residents clearly, openly, and often. This task should be delegated to a new committee that represents many types of interests.
- ❖ **Fiscal Impact of Commercial Development.** Lincoln needs to be prepared to address resident concerns about the possibility of negative impacts on home values from new commercial development. While there is no current literature in juried publications about the impacts of commercial land uses on residential areas, local assessors frequently work with adjustment factors to increase or decrease home values based on external conditions such as high traffic volumes. This type of analysis is more difficult than many people realize because the characteristics of commercial developments vary significantly, and large scale does not always correlate with negative impact. If the town plans to consider more commercial development opportunities, within or outside of South Lincoln, some attention should be given to the process and local assumptions used to forecast net tax revenue.
- ❖ **Sole Proprietor and Microbusiness Support.** Interest in home businesses and small, locally owned businesses suggests that Lincoln residents may be receptive to types of business development that impose few if any impacts on neighborhoods. A study of needs and opportunities for self-financed business start-ups and business expansion, such as sole proprietors and microbusinesses providing health care, educational services, social services, and personal services, could be valuable to the town's near-term economic development planning.
- ❖ **Building Partnerships.** Lincoln would benefit from a more organized arrangement for working with its businesses, non-profits, and farms. Collaborative programs could include marketing and promotions, special events, planning, employee training and professional development, and public-private financing for services such as "wayfinding" signs and publications. Good models for these types of partnerships exist in several Berkshire County and Essex County communities (as discussed under ED-1).
- ❖ **Revenue Enhancement.** The economic development committee could work with the Town Administrator, Finance Committee, and Board of Assessors to identify opportunities to enhance revenue from nonresidential and non-tax sources and also protect very small businesses from a tax burden they cannot manage. Timely reviews and adjustments of user fees (which Lincoln already does every year), the feasibility of converting some general fund services to municipal enterprises, and the advantages and disadvantages of impact fees should be explored.
- ❖ **Mitigation.** The economic development committee should serve in an advisory capacity to the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen about appropriate, realistic ways to mitigate the impacts of economic developments, both within and outside of the Lincoln Station area.

Goal 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-3.1. Encourage partnerships between non-profit organizations and local businesses for special events, programs, and other forms of joint marketing that would be mutually beneficial for them and of interest to Lincoln residents.
- ED-3.2. Support non-profit organizations by including their programs and activities on a community-wide calendar maintained on the town’s website.
- ED-3.3. Encourage non-profit organizations to provide a variety of educational and enrichment opportunities for Lincoln’s youth, both in and outside of the classroom.

DISCUSSION

Opportunities to implement these recommendations are discussed above and in Chapter 4, Cultural and Historic Resources.

Goal ED-4. Promote local businesses and home-based businesses as a source of local, “zero-commute” employment.

- ED-4.1. Periodically evaluate the needs of local businesses, such as business services, expansion space, communications technology, networking, or supportive policies from town government.
- ED-4.2. Review the town’s zoning regulations in order to identify and remove barriers to, and to encourage, at-home employment.
- ED-4.3. Encourage local businesses to collaborate and coordinate with the town’s non-profit organizations and institutions to address mutual interests, such as planning and cross-promotions of special and seasonal events, and wayfinding for visitors to the Lincoln Station area.

DISCUSSION

Working at home has increased locally, regionally, and nationally over the past decade. Home-based businesses and telecommuters have become very common, particularly in affluent suburbs due to the educational and occupational characteristics of their residents and proximity to major employment centers. Work-at-home employment provides the private benefits of jobs, income, and convenience, and the public benefits an employed daytime population without the environmental and aesthetic impacts that people often associate with large industrial and office developments. Since the prevalence of at-home employment is a fairly recent phenomenon, its long-term impacts are difficult to determine. Various surveys by the Bureau of the Census, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and the Small Business Administration have begun to focus more on the social and economic consequences of working at home. Lincoln should try to develop a better understanding of its existing home-based farm and non-farm employment because the town has so little information about this “silent” layer of the local economy.

Lincoln also has very little information about its local businesses, i.e., businesses that operate in designated commercial areas or as non-conforming uses. Any attempt to analyze the Lincoln Station area’s retail and office market will hinge on quality data about the businesses that already exist in town, not only the types of businesses but also their trade areas, competition, rents, barriers and opportunities to business development, factors that could enhance the prospects of success in their present locations, and their anticipated future space needs.

Encouraging home-based employment is consistent with many aspects of this Comprehensive Plan, yet in some communities, growth in home occupations has begun to generate neighborhood complaints. At times, ambiguous zoning bylaws have made it difficult for building inspectors to enforce zoning requirements, and residents with home offices or workshops do not have a clear sense of what their communities will allow. As part of a general update of the Lincoln Zoning Bylaw, the Planning Board should evaluate the existing home occupation regulations and determine whether they need to be revised. This process should include consultation with the Building Inspector, residents with home-based businesses, the (proposed) Economic Development Committee, and the Town Clerk.

Goal ED-5. Continue to encourage agriculture as a way of life and a source of local employment and food.

- ED-5.1. Adopt a right to farm bylaw.
- ED-5.2. Support and collaborate with local and regional organizations to promote agri-tourism in Lincoln and increase the base of loyal customers for Lincoln agricultural products.
- ED-5.3. Continue the Conservation Commission’s agricultural leasing program and explore opportunities to expand it, where appropriate.

DISCUSSION

The Conservation Commission and local organizations have worked successfully to promote active agriculture and protect land for agricultural use, as evidenced by the farms that continue to operate on public and private land. Although Lincoln has done far more than most towns to preserve agriculture as part of the local economy, there are steps the town could take to reinforce and enhance its existing actions. For example, the state recently produced a “model” right to farm bylaw as a guidance document for farm-friendly communities seeking to establish a local agricultural policy. The model bylaw contains a declaration of support for agriculture and agricultural practices that sometimes generate complaints in suburban communities, a process for resolving grievances about farm operations, and a requirement that prospective buyers be notified of the town’s pro-farming policy before they purchase or lease property. The purpose of the advance notice is to inform new residents and business owners that the community tolerates agricultural impacts that some may consider a nuisance, such as dust, odors, noise, and slow-moving equipment on public ways. While Lincoln residents seem to hold the town’s agricultural establishments in very high regard, there is no guarantee that future residents will have the same appreciation for farming. The model bylaw or a similar one would convey Lincoln’s position on agriculture and institute a clear process for addressing grievances.

Lincoln’s recently appointed Agricultural Commission and the proposed Economic Development Committee (below) should work with the Conservation Commission and Lincoln’s non-profit institutions to explore ways to expand the base of support for Lincoln’s farm businesses. By building upon existing efforts to promote local farms, the town may be able to develop more formal agri-tourism and eco-tourism programs and increase visitorship to Lincoln in ways that benefit the farms, non-profits with compatible missions, and small businesses in the Lincoln Station area. Some communities in Essex County, Worcester County, Franklin County, and Berkshire County have formed successful agri-tourism/eco-tourism partnerships that sponsor special events, recreational and educational programs, and a variety of direct marketing enterprises.