

Town of Lincoln, Massachusetts

# Comprehensive Plan



**September 22, 2009**

Prepared for:

**Lincoln Planning Board**

Prepared by:

**Community Opportunities Group, Inc.**

In association with:

Dodson Associates, Ltd.

Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.



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*Photography*

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# Preface

That Lincoln may be unique among communities in Massachusetts is evident to all who drive its country roads, walk its conservation trails, or engage with their fellow citizens to shape its destiny. The way Lincoln looks and acts did not happen by accident. Rather, its appearance and culture are the result of its long tradition of approaching challenges in a thoughtful and deliberative manner, and doing so for the benefit of the wider community.

The roots of ingenuity, action and perseverance are deep, going back to 1729 when the town fathers began a twenty-five year struggle to form a separate community from Concord, Lexington and Weston because of the hardship of traveling so far to worship every Sunday. Their efforts were finally rewarded when the Legislature granted their petition and established the Town of Lincoln in 1754.

These same qualities have been passed down through the generations of Lincoln's citizenry and have created a culture that has successfully retained its distinctively rural, small town character despite its proximity to Boston and the intense development of the region over the last six decades.

Throughout its history, Lincoln's residents have engaged in planning through consensus decision-making, starting with the adoption of its first zoning bylaws in 1929 to guide development. Shortly after implementing two-acre zoning in 1955, the town began to embrace the concept of preserving open space, resulting in much of the protected beauty and agricultural heritage that we enjoy today. As stated in the 1958 *Planning for Lincoln* report authored by Charles Elliot and Morton Braun, "Different parts of the metropolitan region should be expected to serve different purposes, peculiar to the physical conditions, history and potentialities of the particular area."

Lincoln has long been pro-active around planning, having hosted a number of town-wide conferences and charrettes that have laid the foundations for key land acquisitions and changes in the zoning bylaws to permit creative development through the use of overlay districts. Guided by Lincoln's Vision Statement, its policies, practices, and fiscal planning continue to implement the community's desire to maintain its unique character.

## Lincoln's 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.

Embedded in the Vision Statement, and no stranger to the deliberations over land use, are the tensions that exist in balancing competing interests, whether public or private, fiscal or ideological. There have always been trade-offs, and because it is the land that ultimately is the source of tax revenue to pay for services desired, the attitude and decisions about land use remain pivotal in how to go about preserving the physical and social character of the community. The Comprehensive Plan seeks to articulate a process for decision-making that best represents the will of the Town as Lincoln's faces even greater challenges. It is hoped that the actions that result from this effort are worthy of remembrance as Lincoln continues to move pro-actively and optimistically into the future.

KENNETH E. HURD, CHAIR  
Comprehensive Long-Range Plan Committee

# Acknowledgements

The following Lincoln residents and Town staff served on subcommittees of the Comprehensive Long-Range Plan Committee (CLRPC).

## **Steering Committee**

Ken Hurd, Chair  
Jim Meadors  
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Catherine Perry, Planning Board Administrative Assistant, provided support to the Steering Committee.

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## **Open Space and Natural Resources Subcommittee**

Jim Meadors, Chair  
Angela Seaborg, Conservation Planner  
Peter Von Mertens, Conservation Commission



# Introduction

On March 25, 2006, the Annual Town Meeting voted to authorize the Planning Board to explore the creation of a Comprehensive Long Range Plan for the Town of Lincoln. Although each town has been required by the State for some years to prepare such a plan, not all have done so. Lincoln's decision to move forward on creating a master plan was driven not so much by the state's requirement as it was by the desire to continue the legacy of controlling its destiny by innovative and pro-active means using all available tools.

As a result, the Comprehensive Long Range Planning (CLRP) Committee was formed with representatives from nearly all town boards and commissions to discuss how to best approach such a task. There was early agreement that this effort needed to represent a broad spectrum of concerns in as broad a context as possible with respect to our place in the region and to anticipated changes over time. The group agreed that it should not be, nor become a one-issue committee, and that its recommendations had to represent what is best for the Town over time.

There were some initial public outreach meetings that allowed the Committee to get a reading on the kinds of issues and interests that were most relevant to the attendees and to seek volunteers to participate in the sub-groups to be formed to address the various topics required by the State. These included Land Use & Zoning, Natural Resources, Cultural & Historic Resources, Open Space, Housing, Economic Development, Transportation & Circulation, Community Services & Facilities and Governance. The topic of Built Environment was added as being of particular relevance to Lincoln.

In the Autumn of 2006, a Steering Committee was formed to help guide the efforts of the soon-to-be-formed sub-groups. Although it was initially thought that this could be an entirely volunteer effort, it became very clear early on that it would require the help of a consultant. Accordingly, the Planning Board asked for and was granted funding at the Annual Town Meeting on March 19, 2007. After issuing a Request for Proposals and the subsequent interview process, Community Opportunities Group (COG) was engaged in September of 2007.

The sub-groups comprising nearly 50 people were formed in the Spring of 2007 and began their work in earnest under the guidance of Judi Barrett of COG. Her team met several times with each sub-group and helped to host another public forum in February 9, 2008, in which each sub-group posited the issues that would elicit the greatest response from the public, either pro or con. As work continued, there was a report to the March Town Meeting followed by a televised meeting with the Selectmen on June 23, 2008. Each sub-group provided an update of their work and the competing issues that were beginning to surface. This was followed by a well-attended State of the Town Meeting in Fall of 2008 which was devoted almost exclusively to the Master Plan, including presentations on each topic as well as an open forum for any concerns by the general public. As a result of more input, refinements were made to the draft chapters, including their goals and recommendations, and on January 21, 2009, the CLRPC hosted an all-boards meeting to solicit input on five key issues that had surfaced as having the highest collective priorities: 1) Lincoln Station Area, 2) Land Use Assessment Criteria, 3) Town Meeting/Volunteerism, 4) Communication, and 5) Open Land Management. The results of this discussion were reported at the Annual Town Meeting on March 28, 2009, and copies of goals and recommendations for each topic were available for everyone. During the Spring, the Executive Summary and the Implementation Plan were completed, there was another televised meeting with the Board of Selectmen in June, and the Planning Board held a hearing on July 21, 2009 to receive any other public input. Finally, the Planning Board voted to approve the plan on September 22, 2009.

The original goal of this Comprehensive Long-Range Plan was to create a dynamic document, one that:

- ❖ Would articulate the core values of the Town;
- ❖ Could be updated periodically by Town Meeting vote in order to keep it current and relevant, allowing it to adapt to change over time;
- ❖ Provides guidance:
  - ◆ To leaders and decision-makers, rather than leaving it to guesswork,
  - ◆ To developers and property owners as to what the Town wants,
  - ◆ For a more comprehensive approach in managing growth;
- ❖ Provides coordination:
  - ◆ To mesh new and existing plans into a single document in a single location,
  - ◆ To encourage big-picture thinking with respect to planning for housing, open space, recreation, town facilities, etc.,
  - ◆ To allow the creation of a balance among competing interests for all plans,
  - ◆ To help coordinate our efforts with respect to common regional interests,
- ❖ Provides accountability:
  - ◆ To articulate who is responsible for achieving goals and objectives,
  - ◆ To set timelines for doing so, and
  - ◆ To provide a mechanism to develop an implementation strategy for meeting goals and objectives.

This document is organized to appeal to multiple ways of using it. The Executive Summary gives a quick glimpse of the issues, goals and recommendations, whereas the individual chapters give the reader an in-depth analysis of existing conditions, issues, and the thinking behind the goals and recommendations. The Implementation chapter is designed to provide the framework for an Implementation Committee to track and report on progress on various actions that would lead to fulfillment of the recommendations.

Finally, the CLRP Committee wishes to acknowledge the efforts of so many citizens who have participated in this massive effort, some of whom have moved away from town since the process began. Truly, we hope this document remains vital and relevant as it guides us toward the future.

KENNETH E. HURD, CHAIR  
Comprehensive Long-Range Plan Committee