

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY : A FIVE PART PLAN FOR CARVER

Protecting our town character while responding to the challenge of growth

The town of Carver is at a crossroad. According to most predictions, the population of Carver will increase by 50% over the next 20 years, and the population of the town could eventually reach 34,000 or even higher. Whether this growth takes a positive shape or degrades the quality of life in Carver depends largely on decisions that will be made in the next five years.

The urgency of our situation is brought on by two factors: regional growth pressure, and the downturn in the cranberry industry. Southeastern Massachusetts is the fastest growing area of the state, and the pressures are only expected to increase. In Carver, the cranberry industry has provided a significant buffer against these forces of growth by keeping thousands of acres of land out of development. In so doing, it has suppressed the rate of population growth, helped to stabilize the town's finances, and protected the environment. Now that many growers are being forced to sell their developable land in order to survive, a sudden surge in the growth of our town seems inevitable.

Sprawl growth

It is time to make choices about the shape this growth will take. On the one hand, we can allow the sprawling development patterns of the recent past to continue. This approach, which could be called "letting nature take its course," would be devastating to the quality of life in Carver in the long term. Under this scenario, low-density strip-style commercial development would continue along the main roads. Numerous new residential subdivisions of mid-priced single-family homes on acre and a half lots would gradually gobble up most of the buildable open land. All of these homes would cost several thousand dollars more in services each year than they pay in taxes, so their impact on the town's budget would be severe. This dispersed growth would also seriously stress the natural environment, as large tracts of woodland are replaced by streets, houses, and lawns. Our precious groundwater could easily be compromised, to the detriment of the residents and the cranberry industry.

Smart Growth

The alternative to the sprawl scenario is for the town to actively pursue some of the goals of the smart-growth movement. As it has been promoted in the last decade or so, smart growth planning seeks to direct development to areas where infrastructure already exists, creating compact, walkable mixed-use areas, much like the traditional village centers of the past. Within these VILLAGE AREAS, a variety of housing types is encouraged, including townhouses, apartments, and small-lot homes.

Outside these higher-density village cores, growth is limited and open space and agricultural lands are preserved within RURAL AREAS. The clustering of new housing is encouraged so that open space can be set aside and septic treated collectively. In the most remote and sensitive areas, large areas of open space are protected, and buffers around important natural resources carefully maintained.

The smart-growth approach has a number of benefits to a community. The dense, village-like areas foster a sense of vitality and identity, and create economic opportunity. A wider variety of housing options meets the needs of residents of all ages and incomes more effectively. The mix of uses promotes fiscal stability for the town. Environmentally sensitive areas are protected and large areas of open space are preserved for recreation and beauty.

These community benefits of smart growth are very much in line with the goals which the Master Plan Committee has outlined for Carver. These goals fall into three key areas:

Three key goals for Carver:

- Preservation and enhancement of community character
- Environmental protection
- Fiscal balance

The Master Plan outlines a smart growth plan that can work in our own community. Many of these ideas are not new in Carver – in fact, much of the groundwork was laid in 1998, when we revised our zoning bylaws to include such innovations as village zoning and cluster development. But we need to build on these accomplishments in order to realize a true village-centered vision. The plan encompasses five broad steps:

A FIVE-PART PLAN FOR CARVER

- Identifying the mix of land uses that will create fiscal balance
- Identifying VILLAGE AREAS and creating strategies to encourage desired development in these areas
- Planning for a decentralized water system to serve village areas
- Identifying RURAL AREAS of vital open spaces and creating strategies to protect them and divert development to village areas
- Planning for the staffing and organizational changes needed to manage growth

The right mix of development for fiscal balance

As we stated earlier, a town cannot expect to remain solvent when the vast majority of development consists of mid-range homes with children in the public schools. We have calculated that the average house in Carver today, with an assessed value of \$140,000, costs the town \$3,366 per year over and above what is paid in taxes. In fact most homes valued at less than \$340,000 (which constitute over 95% of the homes in Carver) create a deficit. Carver has escaped the full impact of this deficit in recent years because of two factors: a split tax rate which has partially closed the gap by shifting a larger burden onto commercial property owners, and a big inflow of equity aid from the state. But neither of these factors can be relied upon to continue.

The solution that has been advanced in the past to counter-balance this deficit has been to promote commercial and industrial development. This is a worthwhile objective, and various strategies for encouraging economic development are taken up in the Master Plan. But the reality is that commercial and industrial development alone are not the answer. Given the location of Carver, it is unlikely that our town will ever have enough economic development to offset the residential development that is coming, or that we would like the community that would result even if it were possible.

The Master Plan proposes a broader mix of residential uses as a more viable way to maintain financial health as we grow. This mix would contain not just mid-priced single-family housing, but also a significant percentage of the types of housing that are revenue-positive, such as townhouses, age-restricted housing, and higher-priced homes. While there are many formulas that could achieve fiscal balance, we have suggested the following percentages as an attainable goal:

<u>Housing type</u>	<u>Average value</u>	<u>Mix %</u>	
SF moderate	\$230,000	10	Assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break-even valuation for SF house with children: \$340,000 • Break-even for 2-br townhouse w/o children: \$67,000 • Great estates = 5+ acre lot
SF middle	\$275,000	35	
SF high	\$375,000	35	
SF great estates	\$500,000	10	
Townhouses	\$210,000	10	

In the Housing section of the Master Plan, we give more detail about the likely financial impact of each of these housing types, as well as an overview of the market forces at work in Southeastern Massachusetts that suggests that this mix is feasible.

The benefits to expanding our range of housing types go beyond simply achieving fiscal balance. By offering more variety, we provide more options for the people who live in the community. Currently, a young couple, single person, or retired couple looking for an apartment or condo cannot find one in Carver, and the family hoping to upgrade to a nicer home without moving out of the community has very few choices. We also will draw *new* people to the community who would not currently consider settling here. Carver would benefit from attracting a certain percentage of more affluent homebuyers. The low-to moderate income demographics of the town, (including lower education levels than most surrounding towns), are often reflected in low

levels of citizen participation in town government and lack of support for local businesses. Carver will never be affluent, but a greater demographic range would bring needed resources into town.

And what about affordable housing? Compared to many nearby towns, Carver is already quite affordable. And fully a third of our housing units are mobile homes, which provide a very affordable option to seniors. This existing housing stock will continue to provide a solid base of affordably-priced homes even as the cost of new construction continues to rise. In addition, our smart-growth plan includes some apartments, townhouses and other moderately priced housing.

For families and the elderly who are unable to afford even these options, M.G.L. 40B has required that 10% of the housing in every Massachusetts town be subsidized. Although we could argue that this standard is excessive, because it disregards our huge stock of mobile homes and converted cottages, it is clear that a need exists. But the town's efforts to meet that need must rest on the foundation of fiscal stability. A town with a healthy mix of market-rate housing is most able to provide for the needy.

Village Areas

As we have said earlier, the fundamental principle of smart growth planning is to increase density in areas where infrastructure exists and to reduce density where open space and natural resources exist, rather than let development sprawl evenly all over the landscape.

The Master Plan, proposes several Village Areas including the existing historic village centers and some adjacent lands with potential for development:

- *North Carver*: includes Route 44 Study area and North Carver Green
- *Center Carver*: includes village and general business areas adjacent to Town Hall
- *South Carver*: includes historic village area
- *Future development*: includes the Makepeace lands

Of the four, Center Carver has the greatest potential for developing a lively mixed-use village – a true town center. The area would improve with the addition of quite a bit of compact housing, and some commercial infill to give the area more of the feeling of a town and less of a strip. Apartments on the second floor of commercial buildings would increase housing options. And finally, the area needs to be unified with generous sidewalks, attractive lighting and other streetscape improvements. The Master Plan suggests some new design guidelines that would help this vision of a town center become a reality.

The North and South Carver village areas can also accommodate a modest amount of new housing and commercial development, as long as it is sensitive to the historic character of the areas. South Carver Village should be given Historic District status to help protect it as it grows. This will be especially important since South Carver will serve as the gateway to the Makepeace development and will be under considerable pressure from the additional traffic. North Carver includes the Route 44 study area, where several parcels with development potential have been identified.

Besides these three traditional areas, it is likely that other sites for higher-density development will emerge as large chunks of land come on the market, such as the proposed Makepeace project. We hope that the Makepeace project will serve as a model for evaluating and shaping other such proposed developments.

To encourage the appropriate mix of development in these HD areas, we are proposing a number of strategies, such as reducing lot sizes and setbacks and encouraging townhouses, which are outlined on page 7.

Creation of a decentralized water system

Development of town water lies at the heart of any village-centered planning. Without some kind of public water system, compact village areas are very difficult to achieve because of the wide separation required between wells and septic systems. A *town-wide* water system is neither necessary nor economically feasible. The cost of such a system would be prohibitive because of the total length of roadway relative to future density. In addition, it appears that our current system of private wells meets the needs of most residents, and should continue to be sufficient as long as the aquifer is protected.

However, a *decentralized* system is both feasible and desirable. This decentralized system would have three distinct water districts taking water from three different sources and delivering it to strictly defined high-density areas adjacent to those sources. (See Map 1.)

- *North Carver*: piping from Middleboro
- *Center Carver*: served by the Town Hall well (land acquisition is necessary to expand the well buffer zone and increase output)
- *South Carver*: served by the Cranberry Village well (land acquisition also necessary.)

In South Carver, the municipal wells at Cranberry Village would be developed to serve not only the village area, but also the new project proposed by Makepeace, and to possibly provide a revenue source by supplying the water deficient areas in South Middleboro. Outside the strictly defined Village Areas, residents would continue to use private wells (or small community systems such as the well in South Meadow Village), unless there is a problem such as contamination.

A word about sewerage: at this time it does not seem feasible that the town will ever have a town-wide sewer system, for the same reason that it won't have a town-wide water system. However, in order to promote more compact development in certain Village Areas, the town should encourage small private treatment systems. Standards need to be defined for these systems so that they don't become a problem for the town or its citizens.

Rural Open Space Areas

Promoting village areas in a rural community only makes sense when paired with the other half of the equation – the reduction of the final buildout density in priority open space areas. Map 2 shows a broad-brush scheme for identifying the most vital open space lands in Carver. It is our goal that when property within these areas comes out of agricultural use, the land is either:

- permanently protected in its entirety
- developed into oversized lots (defined as lots of 3 acres or more), or
- developed in a cluster pattern that groups the houses compactly on the land, leaving the balance of the land protected and allowing construction to stay well away from resource areas like wetlands.

In the Master Plan we recommend a number of strategies to help attain this goal. These strategies, which are outlined on page 7, include increasing lot sizes and frontage, revising the cluster bylaw to provide more incentives for clustering, and protecting up to 4,500 acres of key open space through acquisition or conservation restriction.

Staffing and Organization

On page 8 are outlined a number of facilities and services that will be necessary to make this vision a reality. First and foremost, there is a need for a staff planner. Many of the strategies outlined in this report require more study. And even when the whole plan is implemented, a much more sophisticated level of review will be required than has been needed under our current system. This kind of flexible response is beyond the expertise of most volunteer boards without professional guidance.

Summary

Carver's greatest assets are its open space and its small-town character. With the wave of growth coming to Southeastern Massachusetts, these assets could easily be lost to sprawl. Encouraging compact mixed-use village centers while steering development away from open space areas is a viable way to prevent this erosion of our unique character.

The strategies outlined in this report would also reduce the final build-out population of Carver by about 25%. The increase in lot size alone would decrease the ultimate population by 5,600 people or 2,050 housing units, while the protection of land via acquisition or conservation restrictions would further reduce the buildout by 3,000 residents or 1,200 units. This would be beneficial to our environment, our quality of life, and our fiscal health.

ACTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING FIVE-PART PLAN

Village Areas

Zoning

- Map boundaries of Village Areas by examining current land-uses and identifying parcels with potential for additional development
- Allow smaller residential lots within Village Areas where water system is in place
- Allow apartments over stores (in accordance with performance standards)
- Refine list of allowed commercial uses
- Allow townhouses on smaller lots in Village Areas

Design Standards

- Adopt maximum front setback to bring buildings closer to street
- Decrease side lot setbacks to bring buildings closer together
- Promote streetscape improvements such as better sidewalks, street trees, lighting
- Encourage infill of existing low-density strip-style development

Health and Environmental Standards

- Adopt water and septic management regulations for Village Areas

Organizational

- Create public/private task force including new EDIC to seek additional funding for planning, streetscape improvements and infrastructure development within Village Areas

Decentralized Water System

- Create Water/Stormwater/Wastewater Planning Committee
- Seek funding for water/stormwater planning through DEP Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan
- Obtain support of Buzzards Bay Project to assist in stormwater planning
- Undertake hydrologic studies of target areas
- Negotiate connections to Middleborough to supply water to Rt. 44 area
- Acquire bogs adjacent to Town Hall and South Carver wells to allow expansion of pumping capacity
- Obtain funding for system development

Rural Areas

Zoning and Planning Board Regulations

- Increase lot sizes to two acres and frontage to 200 ft. in order to reduce overall development and protect resources
- Revise cluster bylaw to provide more incentives for clustering, including as-of-right clustering, and density bonuses for certain public benefits
- Adopt new road standards to allow for a reduction of width, etc. for smaller subdivisions
- Adopt site-plan review for large residential developments

Additional strategies to protect natural resources

- Adopt stormwater protection standards
- Update Aquifer Protection Bylaw
- Update Wetlands Bylaw: mapping and resource area protection
- Adopt Flood Hazard District zoning
- Establish a land bank to accept donations and hold protected lands
- Enact Community Preservation Act to create a source of funding for open space protection
- Develop a system for transferring development rights away from most sensitive areas towards areas more suitable for development (TDR)
- Acquire land or development rights to @ 4,500 acres of critical open space, including a 3,000 acre greenbelt linking Rocky Gutter in Middleboro to Miles Standish State Forest via the Edaville site.

Staffing and Organizational Changes

- Retain economic development/planner
- Re-organize EDIC
- Adopt Economic Opportunity Area Designation (with Plymouth)
- Complete 2-year Housing Program (Executive Order 418)
- Institute inter-board review process for major projects
- Complete GIS data base and acquire GIS mapping and analysis capability

Vision for the Town of Carver

The Action Plan diagram locates the Village Areas where infrastructure improvements including public water, road, and new development will be encouraged as well as the Rural Areas where there will be an effort at land preservation and the encouragement of cluster housing. In pursuit of this Action Plan, the town envisions itself in the year 2020 as having:

VISION STATEMENT

- *A regional system of trails interconnecting major open spaces including Myles Standish, Makepeace, Edaville Railroad, and Rocky Gutter Wildlife Refuge (Middleborough) in order to promote tourism and protect local agriculture;*
- *Higher density, new growth in self-sufficient, mixed use, village areas where water supply and wastewater needs will be fully addressed according to Town standards;*
- *A campus setting for municipal facilities bounded by a revitalized New England town center and an improved Route 58;*
- *Quality schools and public safety;*
- *Staffing of local government to provide the diverse management, regulatory, economic development and environmental protection needs its citizens and businesses requested in order to not be overwhelmed by growth;*
- *The presence of a historic town spirit which increases the involvement of students in local affairs and of its citizens in managing local government.*

Following this Executive Summary are the eight elements which comprise the Master Plan.

Section I: Land Use, presents a description of the existing land use, development capacity under existing zoning, a discussion of alternative land use strategies for managing growth, and a series of recommendations.

Sections 2-7 address the different components of the community including *Housing, Economic Development, Open Space, Historic Resources, Public Facilities, and Transportation*. For each of these sections basic inventory information is presented, followed by an analysis of issues and opportunities, the presentation of a Vision and Goal statement, and ending with a series of Recommendations.

Section 8, Implementation Strategy. An Action Plan is discussed which identifies by Phase the tasks and responsible party for carrying out the Master Plan.