

**CONWAY PLANNING BOARD AND
MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE**

MINUTES

DECEMBER 14, 2023

PAGES

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Work Session

**CONWAY PLANNING BOARD
AND MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE**

MINUTES

DECEMBER 14, 2023

A meeting of the Conway Planning Board and the Master Plan Steering Committee was held on Thursday, November 16, 2023 beginning at 5:30 pm at the Conway Town Office, Conway, NH. Those present were: Chair, Benjamin Colbath; Selectmen's Representative, Steve Porter; Vice Chair, Ailie Byers; Secretary, Erik Corbett; Eliza Grant; Mark Hounsell; Josh McAllister; Ben Wilcox; Kate Richardson; Debra Haynes; and Town Planner, Ryan O'Connor.

WORK SESSION

The Board and Committee reviewed the attached Promote a Local Economy That Works for Conway, and Enhance Municipal Services and plan for the Future documents.

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Holly L. Whitelaw
Planning Assistant



C. Promote a Local Economy That Works for Conway

C. Promote a Local Economy That Works for Conway

INTRODUCTION

Economic development is a community-wide project that extends far beyond individual commercial developments. It includes raising incomes, creating jobs, improving infrastructure, providing basic necessities and enhancing quality of life, and building a strong sense of community. This chapter presents goals and strategies related to Conway's comprehensive economic development. Conway's economy, once driven by industrial activities, is now primarily driven by recreational tourism. This shift comes with a new set of challenges and opportunities. For example, as more and more people seek to visit and live in Conway, there is an ongoing need to protect the special qualities that draw people to the area, such as scenic views of the surrounding mountains and access to recreational opportunities. There is also a need to promote affordability of housing and the overall cost of living for full-time residents. As the community's recreation economy grows, there is also a growing need to provide a variety of workforce development opportunities beyond recreation and tourism-related jobs, which are often low-paying and temporary. Conway functions as a regional economic center for Carroll County and the Mount Washington Valley; although Conway represents 1/5 of the county's population, it supports 1/3 of the businesses and jobs in the county. As such, many of the Town's economic development approaches must be regional in nature.

Through public engagement conducted during the Master Plan process, residents indicated strong concerns regarding the imbalance of the area's workforce needs and housing supply. Residents also shared that some of the Town's recreational amenities, such as the Saco River, were experiencing unsustainable levels of visitation. Because recreational tourism is so central to Conway's economy, crowding issues at trailheads and other recreational areas are economic development concerns as well as resource management concerns.

Conway promotes a strong local economy by cultivating a strong community. Conway supports its village centers, which contain ample housing opportunities, thriving businesses, and a vibrant arts and cultural scene. Town policies and actions support the economic health and wellbeing of the community, encouraging tourism in balance with other industries and within the capacity of community infrastructure.

C. Promote a Local Economy That Works for Conway

Recent Economic Development Projects

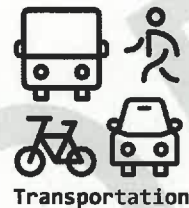
Recent Projects:

- Cranmore Mountain Resort has expanded its offerings to reflect changing market demands for recreational tourism. The mountain has been investing in new condo-style on-mountain residences, a bike trail, downhill mountain biking, among other projects. The newest condominium accommodations, which are currently under construction, sold out extremely quickly.
- The Mount Washington Valley Economic Council recently created a Technology Village Business Resource Center, which offers commercial office space and coworking spaces along Route 16.

Desired Outcomes

- *Conway's village centers are hubs of activity and prosperity for the town. Residents and visitors alike are drawn to Conway's village centers for their community events, businesses, and arts and cultural opportunities.*
- *The Town of Conway expands housing opportunities, making it easier for residents and workers to find and afford housing in Conway*
- *The Town derives more economic benefits from visitation through Rooms and Meals taxes*
- *The Town works to increase its revenues associated with property taxes, particularly through the development of land-efficient housing types in village centers (e.g., mixed-use buildings with ground-floor retail and apartments above)*
- *The Town encourages the development of small businesses and places restrictions on the development of large-scale commercial uses*
- *The Town collaborates on economic development goals with regional partners, including the Mount Washington Valley Housing Coalition and Mount Washington Valley Economic Council*
- *Conway makes continuous improvements to its services that improve overall quality of life and quality of visitation experiences*
- *Through thoughtful land use ordinances and other policies, Conway preserves important landscapes and recreational opportunities and encourages small businesses in Conway's villages and adjacent areas*

RELEVANT MASTER PLAN TOPIC AREAS



C. Promote a Local Economy That Works for Conway

GOAL C-1:

Support Conway's Tax Base & Capture Economic Benefits From Commercial Activity Associated with Tourism

CHALLENGE:

Conway is limited in its ability to capture revenues from commercial activities, as New Hampshire does not have sales tax and does not enable communities to levy additional taxes, such as a local option tax. As a result, Conway depends on property taxes revenue for its budgets and programs. This creates a unique challenge for Conway: as visitation increases, the town does not necessarily have additional funds to address some of the impacts of visitation (e.g., upgrades to roads and infrastructure). Conway should continue to support the local tourism economy and try to retain revenues locally to the extent possible.

STRATEGIES:



C-1.1: Examine options for capturing additional revenues from the local tourism economy to offset the cost of local services and infrastructure. Since sales taxes are not viable in New Hampshire, Conway should consider applying other fees and funding strategies to support necessary upgrades to services. For example, Conway could explore Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) with tourism-focused local businesses to invest in and maintain local infrastructure.

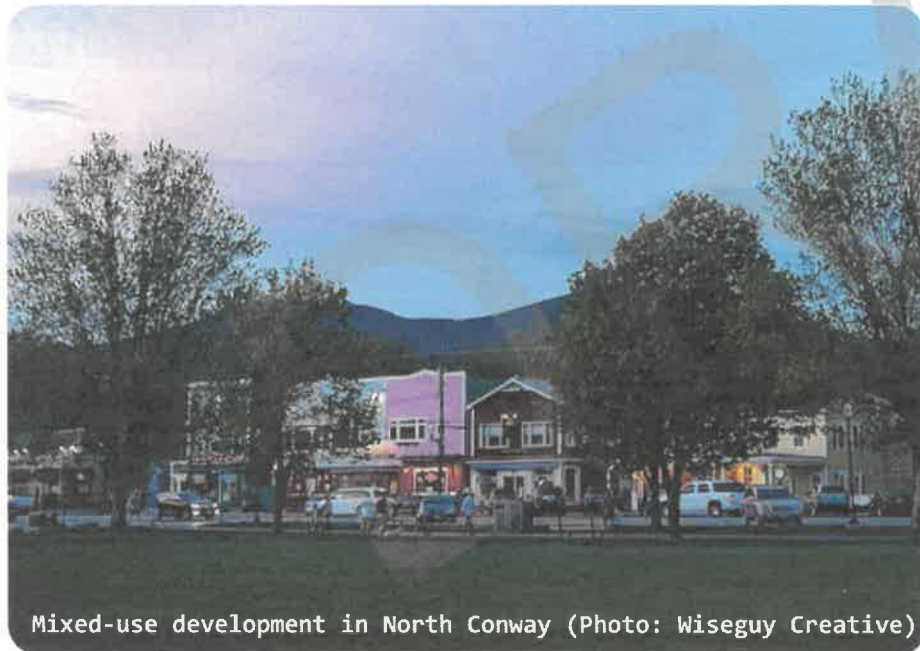
C-1.2: Encourage the development of locally-owned and operated tourism businesses to help keep tourism revenue within the community. The Town of Conway can take steps to reduce barriers for prospective business owners seeking to open a small business in Conway. For example, the Town could consider offering an expedited development review process to businesses that will be locally owned and operated for a certain period of time after opening.

C. Promote a Local Economy That Works for Conway

C-1.3: Encourage locally oriented residential, mixed-use, and commercial/retail uses in Conway's village areas; capitalize on opportunities to generate additional property tax value for the town. Conway's zoning code should allow a variety of uses that support local business activity and provide housing opportunities. As discussed in the housing chapter, mixed-use development in downtowns yields high property tax values on a per-acre basis, making it a very desirable land use in Conway's village centers.

The Value of Mixed-Use Development

Which generates more tax value for the Town of Conway - a large single-family home, or a small apartment building with a store on the ground level? According to a report conducted in 2020 by Urban3 and the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority that examined 15 New Hampshire communities, multi-family and mixed-use development consistently generate more tax revenue compared to single-family structures.



Rochester, NH Case Studies



Single-family home
Value per acre: \$0.4 M in 2020



Mixed-use development
Value per acre: \$3.9 M in 2020

GOAL C-2: Balance Tourism with Local Quality of Life

CHALLENGE:

The popularity of tourism can be a double-edged sword. While tourism is a major economic engine for the community, it can also lead to traffic problems, crowding at local trailheads and recreation areas, and affordability issues. There is a need to balance tourism promotion efforts with actions that aim to preserve quality of life and the quality of recreational amenities for Conway's full-time residents.

STRATEGIES:

C-2.1: Promote sustainable tourism that emphasizes responsible recreation and stewardship of the natural landscape. Promote the MWV Pledge, which encourages visitors to respect the environment during their visit.

C-2.2: Ensure that investments in local infrastructure support the local community as well as visitors.

Infrastructure improvements could include transportation improvements, enhancements to parks and public spaces, and water/wastewater service area extensions.

Strategies to Promote Sustainable Tourism

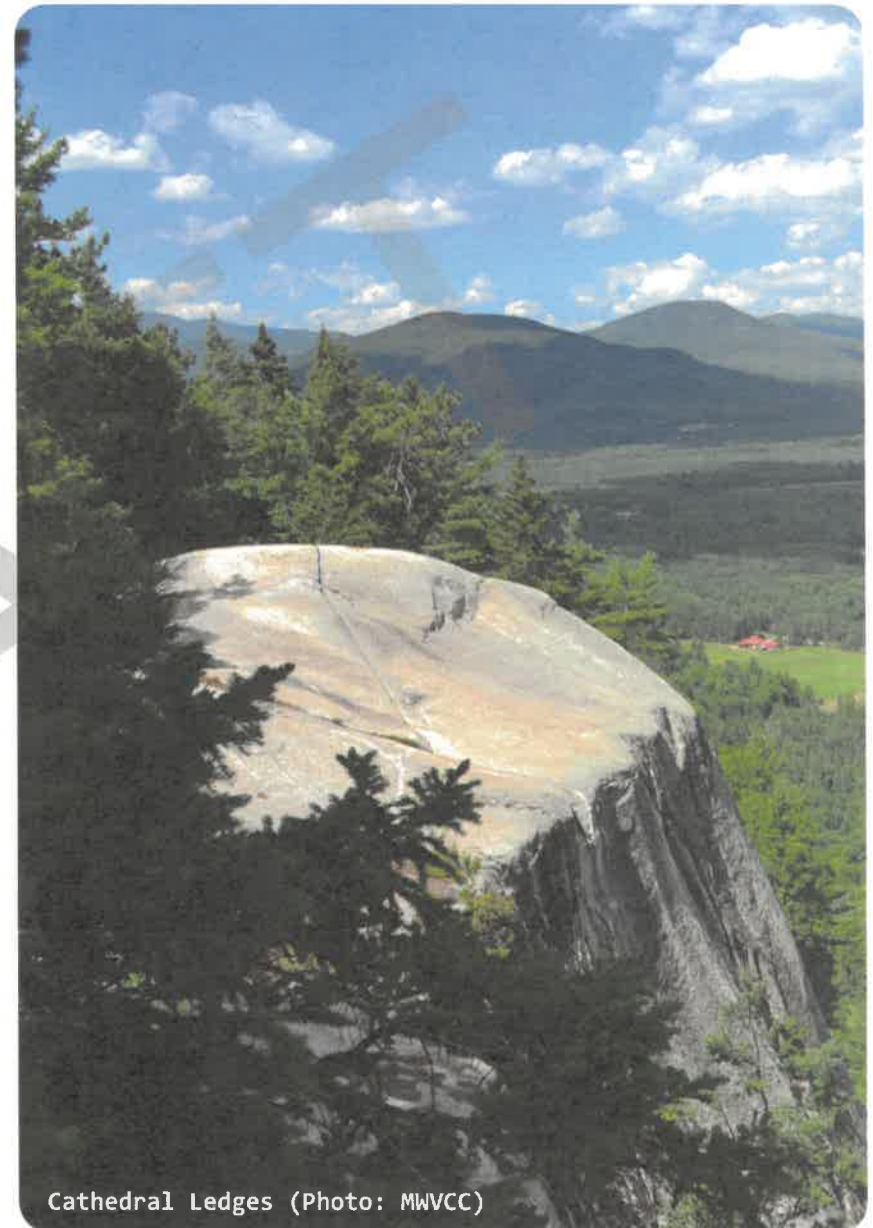
What makes tourism “sustainable”? Following the traditional definition of sustainability, sustainable tourism is tourism that does not degrade the ability of future generations to enjoy the tourism location and amenities. One strategy to promote sustainable tourism is a stewardship pledge, which is a voluntary pledge that visitors can take stating that they will take certain actions to protect natural resources during their visit. The MWV Pledge is one example of a stewardship pledge.

Other strategies include providing clear recreation and trail information, including information about where to park. It can also be helpful to provide multilingual information as applicable.



C. Promote a Local Economy That Works for Conway

C-2.3: Create a destination management plan for Conway and Mount Washington Valley in collaboration with the MWV Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders. Destination management planning can help a community identify actions that can reduce negative impacts associated with tourism. For example, in the Adirondacks, the Town of North Elba and the Village of Lake Placid recently collaborated with the Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism (ROOST) on a Destination Management Plan for the community aimed at “improving the relationships between visitors, the industry that serves them, the community that hosts them, and the environment.”



GOAL C-3:

Support A Diversity of Housing Options for Conway's Residents and Employees

CHALLENGE:

Conway is suffering from a severe housing shortage; workers and families cannot find places to live in Conway, let alone homes they can afford to purchase. The Town should support employee housing to ensure that Conway's workers and families can live affordably within the community. Housing is a critical ingredient to Conway's economic and social health: without enough places to live, Conway's businesses will struggle to retain workers. If most workers are forced to live elsewhere and commute long distances to Conway, then it will become increasingly difficult to build a cohesive, inclusive community in Conway. Long commutes also generate more carbon emissions, which runs counter to the sustainability goals articulated in this plan.

STRATEGIES:

C-3.1: Support efforts to provide technical assistance to help interested local employers navigate the process of providing housing for employees.

C-3.2: As recommended in the Housing chapter, take necessary changes to the land use code to allow for more housing types and encourage affordable housing.

C-3.3: As recommended in the Housing chapter, build Conway's capacity to address housing issues by hiring a Housing & Economic Development Coordinator.

Lack of Housing, Long Commutes

Nearly 20% of Conway residents commute over 50 miles one-way to their primary job. For workers commuting into Conway, over 25% travel from over 50 miles away. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau on the Map, 2019)

Providing Employee Housing in Dover and Durham, NH

Architect Maggie Randolph and contractor John Randolph have been working to create housing opportunities for their employees at the assisted living and memory care facilities they run in Durham and Dover. In Durham, they built 7 1-bedroom apartments and a childcare center in a mixed-use building. In Dover, they are building a tiny home community that will provide 44 units of housing for their employees priced at 30% of their income.

GOAL C-4:

Promote a Diverse Economy that Supports Conway's Year-Round Community



CHALLENGE:

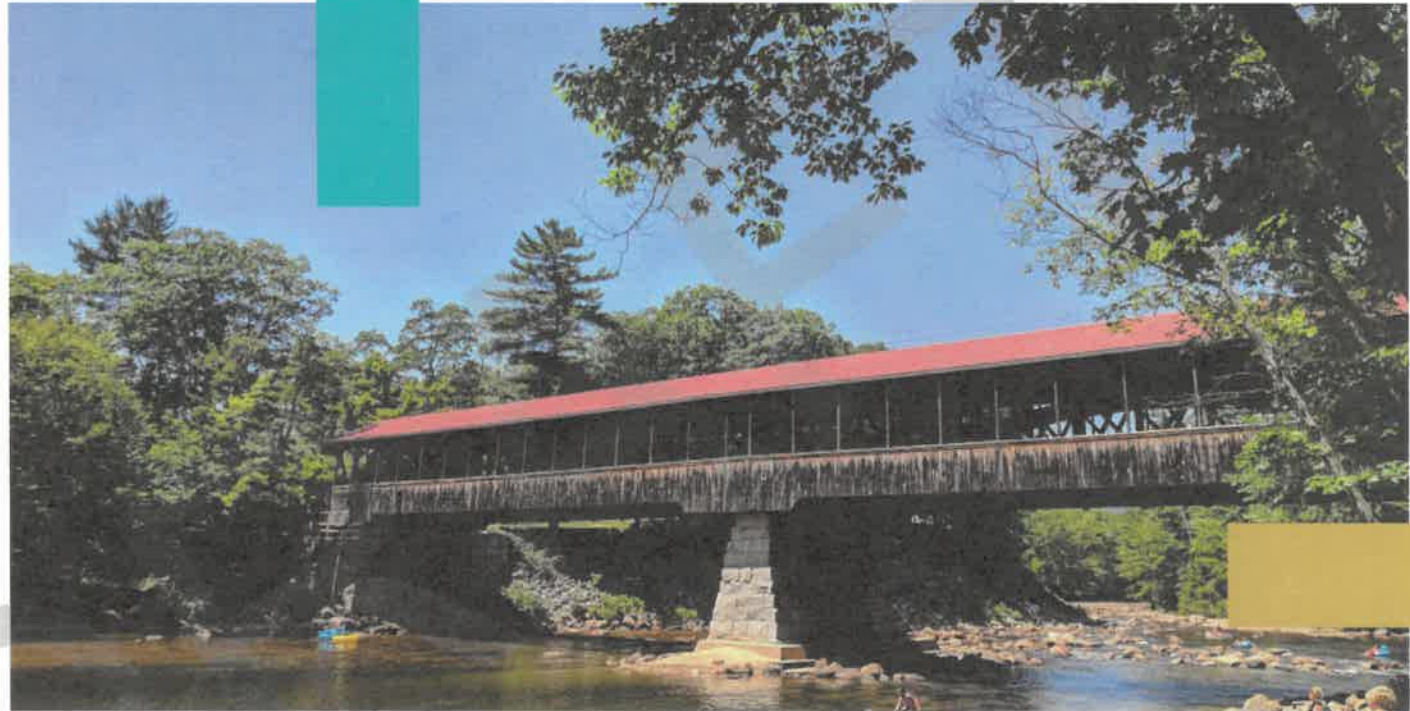
Conway's economy is highly dependent on recreational tourism. While some of Conway's major employers, including Memorial Hospital, are not part of the recreational tourism economy, much of Conway's economic activity is associated with recreational tourism and visitation. As Conway's economy continues to evolve, there is a need to ensure that a variety of industries can grow and thrive. This goal is especially important because of Conway's status as a regional economic center; Conway accounts for about 1/5 of Carroll County's population and supports about 1/3 of the businesses and jobs in the county.

STRATEGIES:

C-4.1: Support the efforts of the Mount Washington Valley Economic Council to diversify the region's economy and encourage new business development.

C-4.2: Update and strengthen the town's Business Guide. Consider offering annual or bi-annual workshops for new businesses and prospective business owners to learn about relevant regulations and opportunities for support.

C-4.3: Pursue creative ways to support economic activity in Conway's village centers. Community events, festivals, and "shop local" initiatives can all help spur economic activity in Conway's village centers. Create a guide and dedicated webpage for individuals and groups looking to host an event in Conway.



H. ENHANCE MUNICIPAL SERVICES AND PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

H. Enhance Municipal Services and Plan for the Future

INTRODUCTION

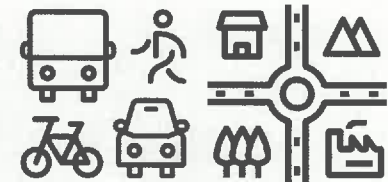
This chapter presents goals and strategies for enhancing municipal governance in Conway, including how the Town should approach short-term and long-term planning for the implementation of the Master Plan. This chapter also addresses other governance issues, such as communications and transparency and stewarding key municipal services and facilities.

In the early 2000's, the Town invested significant resources into an update of the Town Master Plan. This process produced a comprehensive and robust planning document; however, the Town was not able to make significant progress towards many of the plan's key recommendations, including changes to land use regulations. The impacts of this missed opportunity are visible in Conway today. With the development of a new Master Plan in 2024, the Town has both an opportunity and a mandate to engage in proactive and effective planning to address land use regulations, municipal infrastructure, affordable and attainable housing, and other planning challenges.

The Master Plan comes at a key inflection point for municipal governance in Conway. During the development of this plan in 2023 and 2024, the Town was also engaged in a process to update the Town Charter - an opportunity to rethink the structure, roles, and responsibilities of municipal boards and committees and other aspects of town government. Also in 2023, voters moved to dissolve the Conway Village Fire District, with the District's services (water, sewer, fire, and ambulance) to be absorbed by the Town. As part of the implementation of the Master Plan, the Town should consider additional strategies for improving municipal governance to complement these initiatives, such as improved municipal communications and transparency. Additionally, the Town will need to consider strategies for needed enhancements of municipal facilities (e.g., library, fire stations) as well as long-term management of all municipal facilities and assets.

**THROUGH PROACTIVE PLANNING
AND THOUGHTFUL INVESTMENT
IN MUNICIPAL FACILITIES, THE
TOWN WILL ENHANCE MUNICIPAL
GOVERNANCE AND IMPLEMENT KEY
STRATEGIES OF THE MASTER PLAN
TO MOVE CONWAY FORWARD.**

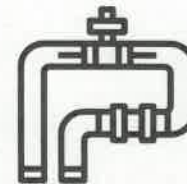
RELEVANT
MASTER
PLAN TOPIC
AREAS



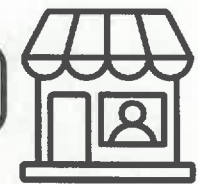
Transportation Land Use



Municipal
Services



Infrastructure



Commercial
Development

H. Enhance Municipal Services and Plan for the Future

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Conway moves forward on addressing key goals and strategies articulated in the Master Plan.
- Municipal governance is efficient, effective, and transparent, and residents have a clear understanding of municipal processes and projects.
- Conway has a strategic framework for short-term and long-term management and enhancement of municipal facilities and infrastructure.



GOAL H-1:

MOVE FORWARD ON KEY GOALS AND STRATEGIES IN THE MASTER PLAN

CHALLENGE #1:

Conway currently has limited staff capacity to undertake significant planning initiatives. Currently, the Town Planning Department dedicates most of its resources towards administrative matters, such as reviewing applications for private developments. There is a need to create additional capacity to move forward on needed planning projects and strategic initiatives to implement the Master Plan.

STRATEGIES:

H-1.1: Create strategic capacity to move forward on specific Master Plan implementation actions.

- Create an annual special projects budget for the Planning Department.
- Identify and engage in strategic partnerships with local and regional organizations, such as the Mount Washington Valley Housing Coalition, Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, and North Country Council Regional Planning Commission.

H-1.2: Consider creating a new Housing and Economic Development Coordinator staff position within the Planning Department.

- For building long-term capacity and continuity within the Planning Department, the Town should consider adding an additional paid staff position. Additional staff capacity would allow for dedicated stewardship and spearheading of long-term planning initiatives that will stretch over many years, such as overhauling land use regulations and planning for water and sewer infrastructure enhancements.

H. Enhance Municipal Services and Plan for the Future

CHALLENGE #2:

Conway lacks the type of ongoing planning processes and programs needed for stewarding and implementing the Master Plan. Master Plan implementation is long-term process that will require dedicated and consistent attention from staff, boards, and committees. Conway should develop processes and programs dedicated to plan implementation to ensure that the Town is able to move forward on the challenges and strategies articulated in the plan.

STRATEGIES:

H-1.3: Develop an ongoing process for stewarding and tracking Master Plan implementation.

- Create a calendar of relevant grant funding opportunities and deadlines.
- Perform public-facing Master Plan implementation tracking.
- Create a Master Plan implementation sub-committee of the Planning Board, or include Master Plan implementation as a regular Planning Board agenda item.

- Perform a five-year Master Plan review to assess progress and any needed minor plan updates.

H-1.4: Develop a 10-Year Capital Improvements Program (CIP).

- A long-range CIP provides a roadmap for completing capital projects identified in the Master Plan, such as water and sewer system expansions or municipal building enhancements. A CIP informs annual and long-term budgeting, and is a useful tool for identifying which capital projects should be completed using municipal dollars and bonds versus outside grants and funding programs.
- Create an advisory Capital Improvements Committee with representation from Selectboard, Planning Board, and municipal departments.
- As a component of capital improvements planning, the Town should develop a strategy for tracking and applying impact fee payments that the Town receives from private developers.

H-1.5: Update the Master Plan by 2034.

- NH RSA 674:3 recommends that towns and cities update their Master Plan every five to ten years. A ten-year window provides ample time for the Town to move forward on plan implementation, while recognizing that conditions on the ground will likely change over time. Interim updates to the plan can be done to address emergent issues if needed.

GOAL H-2: ENHANCE TOWN GOVERNANCE

CHALLENGE #1:

CHALLENGE: Conway has identified significant changes to town governance that will be adopted in the coming years. The Town has been engaged in a process to update the Town Charter – an opportunity to rethink the structure, roles, and responsibilities of municipal boards and committees and other aspects of town government. In 2023, voters moved to dissolve the Conway Village Fire District, with the District’s services (water, sewer, fire, and ambulance) to be absorbed by the Town. As a result, in the coming years, the Town will need to thoughtfully adopt and incorporate a series of changes to municipal governance.

STRATEGIES:

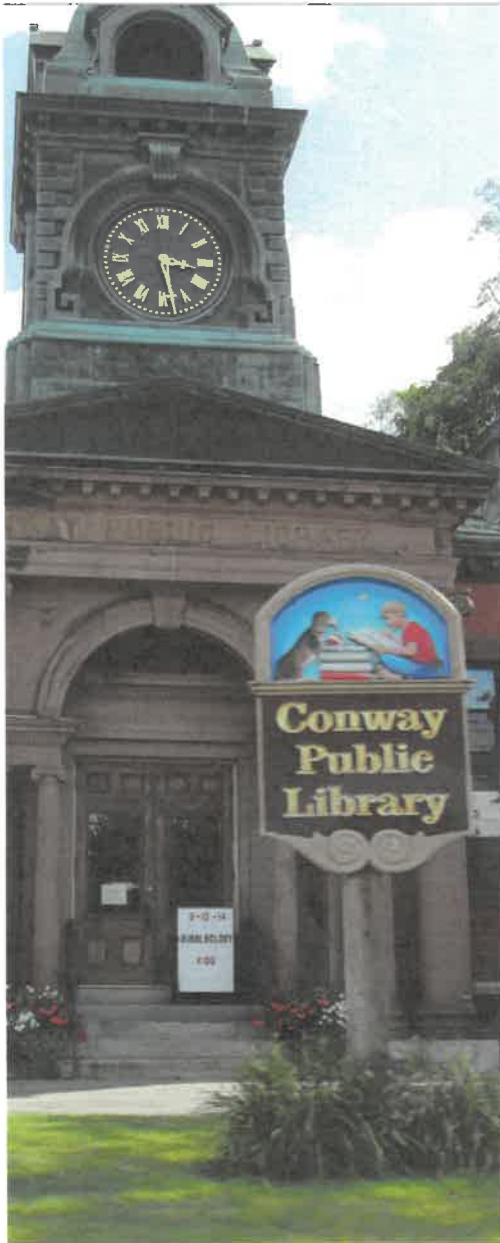
H-2.1: Implement the recommendations of the 2023-2024 Town Charter Commission.

H-2.2: Review the Town Charter every five-to-ten years.

H-2.3: Create clear public communications about how and when charter changes and new municipal services will be implemented.



H. Enhance Municipal Services and Plan for the Future



CHALLENGE #2:

Conway has underdeveloped communication channels and informational resources for municipal government. As the Town embarks on a period of change for municipal government and tackles key Master Plan implementation strategies, it will be critical to provide clear and informative public communications about the scope, purpose, and impact of these changes. As part of these efforts, the Town should consider additional strategies for fostering civic engagement to help move conversations and projects forward.

STRATEGIES:

H-2.4: Consider overhauling the Town website to become more user-friendly.

- Provide complete board and committee meeting packets and create special project pages, including a page where all pertinent information about Master Plan implementation efforts can be accessed.

H-2.5: Create improved channels for communication of Town news, meetings, and updates, such as increased use of social media platforms and use of email communications.

H-2.6: Consider creating a volunteer or paid Public Information Officer (PIO) position.

- The PIO can serve to standardize and enhance Town communications using consistent methods and well-advertised channels.

H-2.7: Provide alternative venues for public engagement and conversation.

- Create opportunities for community members to engage with Town staff and local officials outside of formal board and committee meetings.

GOAL H-3:

SUPPORT CAPITAL NEEDS OF MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENTS

CHALLENGE:

Conway must balance needed municipal facilities investment and enhancement with long-term maintenance needs. Like many towns, Conway's municipal facilities are in need of capital improvements to ensure the delivery of high-quality municipal services. A thoughtful, long-term approach is needed to ensure that these investments are made using practical financial considerations.

STRATEGIES:

H-3.1: Develop a 10-Year Capital Improvements Program (see strategy 1.4).

H-3.2: Support a needed expansion of the police station, including needed water and sewer connection.

H-3.3: Support needed upgrades to the Conway Public Library, such as improved parking, storage, and space utilization.

H-3.4: Proactively identify and plan for capital improvement needs for facilities and infrastructure previously managed by the Conway Village Fire Precinct.

H-3.5: Limit deferred maintenance of municipal infrastructure and assets to avoid long-term cost increases for maintenance projects.

H-3.6: Plan for future contingencies in municipal facility and infrastructure management costs, such as inflated material and labor costs and increased costs of regulatory compliance.

