



FRANCONIA  
MASTER PLAN  
2024



Adopted by Franconia Planning Board \*DATE\*



## Acknowledgements

The 2024 Franconia Master Plan was a joint effort of the Franconia Planning Board, Town Staff, Community Members who participated in the update and community input opportunities, and the planning staff of North Country Council who served as the Master Plan consultant for Franconia.

A particular thank you to the community members who lent their voices and gave their input to this update. Thank you for your time and for sharing your hopes, concerns, and experiences at an outreach event, the survey, or a Planning Board meeting.

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- Mary Grote, Conservation Commission
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Special thanks to the Conservation Commission and the Recreation Department for their input. They represent the two most abiding values expressed by the residents of Franconia: the environment and our enjoyment of it.

We also owe gratitude to the North Country Council for their guidance and technical expertise, especially to Kaela Tavares and Cathlin Lord.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Master Plan, enabled under New Hampshire State Statutes, Revised Statutes Annotated (RSA) 674:1-4, is the non-regulatory guiding document that serves the community concerning the development of regulations, capital expenditures, and long-range planning decisions. The purpose of the Master Plan is to “set down as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development of the area” and to “aid the board in designing ordinances that result in preserving and enhancing the unique quality of life and culture in New Hampshire.” The Master Plan also guides the Planning Board in the development of smart-growth initiatives to provide the soundest planning for the future of their community.

It is recommended that this document be updated every 5 to 10 years. The Town of Franconia’s Master Plan includes the required elements, as well as other chapters on housing, recreation, transportation, community design, community facilities, and natural resources.

The Vision Section gives direction for the other sections of the Master Plan, including transportation, economic development, natural resources, and housing. The RSAs describe the Vision Section as a “set of statements which articulate the desires of the citizens affected by the Master Plan” with “guiding principles and priorities to implement that vision.” The Vision Statement in Chapter 2, along with general goals and more specific obtainable methods of implementation in Chapter 3, make up the overall vision of Franconia’s Master Plan. The Land Use Section of this Master Plan (see Chapter 4) gives direction to the other sections of this Master Plan in a physical sense. The placement of roads, land use, business, and the location of downtowns, natural areas, and cultural resources are integrated into the Land Use Section, which do show existing land use conditions in a community and how the recommended goals relate to a future land use vision for the Town.

It is the intention of the Franconia Planning Board to continue to utilize this Master Plan as a guide to future activities and priorities.

## CHAPTER 2: VISION STATEMENT

The Town values its many assets and wants to protect them. The overall vision for the Town of Franconia is as follows:

Town Vision
To preserve the village atmosphere of the Town’s center and the rural forested character of the Town outside the village center.
To value its water, parks, natural forest resources, and its non-motorized trail system.
To maintain an economically viable infrastructure that supports living-wage employment and commercial non-industrial enterprise.
To accept its responsibility for the development of youth into responsible citizens.
To encourage a broad range of housing for socio-economically diverse population.
To create and maintain a broad range of recreational opportunities.
To develop safe, pedestrian friendly, inviting walkable communities.

The specific goals for achieving this vision are set forth in Chapter 3 of this Master Plan.

## CHAPTER 3: GOALS & METHODS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Below is a list of some specific goals and some corresponding means for obtaining these goals for the Town of Franconia. These goals and methods of implementation will help guide the Town in its decision-making process concerning its annual budget, updating zoning, other regulations and in preparing future planning documents.

### I. SMALL-TOWN CHARACTER

Goal: Maintain the small-village commercial atmosphere:

- Encourage new small businesses to locate in the village center of the Town
- Develop regulations to encourage that such businesses are consistent with Franconia's small-village charm and atmosphere

Goal: Protect the scenic beauty and small-town character of Franconia:

- Continue to purchase land for conservation purposes and protection of mountain views and explore putting the land into conservation easements or a land trust
- Continue to develop and protect the Town's recreational assets
- Consider burying utility lines and examining other beautification projects.

Goal: Protect the physical integrity of Main Street and the Village:

- Continue to encourage the development of green space areas along Main Street
- Improve the appearance of Main Street through clean-up programs and keep the small-town architecture by examining sign, architecture, and design ordinances
- Place welcome signs at the entrances to Town and along Main Street
- Continue to maintain the new town Welcome Center

### II. RECREATION RESOURCES

Goal: Protect and enhance recreational opportunities throughout the Town:

- Continue developing recreation programs for children, young adults, and residents of all ages
- Enhance the walkability of Franconia's downtown and surrounding areas
- Continue to improve recreational opportunities at Dow Field
- Encourage the protection and development of multi-use walking and hiking trails

### III. NATURAL RESOURCES

Goal: Balance new development with the protection and preservation of the Town's natural resources:

- Encourage habitat sensitive development.
- Protect slope degradation from ridgeline construction.
- Protect Franconia’s natural resources as an economic benefit to the Town.

Goal: Preserve Franconia’s rural character by protecting Franconia’s natural resources:

- Update the existing Natural Resource Inventory for the Town.
- Identify prime areas of Town for protection and conservation.
- Prioritize additional conservation plans for purchase of land and conservation easements.

Goal: Protect Franconia’s groundwater:

- Promote awareness and education about risks to our headwater environment.
- Continue to develop storm water retention areas on sites affecting groundwater recharge.
- Undertake periodic assessments of surface and groundwater quality
- Continue to expand buffer zones along waterways.

#### IV. TRANSPORTATION

Goal: Maintain and/or upgrade the existing transportation infrastructures in Town to include bicycle and pedestrian facilities:

- Develop bicycle lanes along state bicycle-designated roadways.
- Examine options for pathways for bicycle and pedestrian use.

Goal: Modernize Franconia’s infrastructure by making it more vehicular friendly and safe:

- Continue to research ways to expand granite curbing along Main Street to provide a safer buffer between vehicular traffic and pedestrians.

Goal: Promote infrastructure that enhances Franconia’s commerce but protects its visitors, residents, and natural resources:

- Research and derive solutions for access management and parking issues along Main Street business district.

#### V. HOUSING

Goal: Provide a variety of housing opportunities to meet the needs of all citizens in the Town of Franconia:

- Encourage development that takes advantage of the strategies described in the Housing Chapter.
- Designate areas of Town where a developer should provide a certain amount of affordable housing per subdivision and locate these areas close to the village center.
- Research ways to provide affordable housing for year-round residents.



- Work with local affordable housing non-profits to develop long-term affordability for new housing.
- Ensure the availability of a variety of housing types to support an economically diverse residential population.
- Promote housing opportunities that sustain Franconia’s rural character and residential population.

## VI. PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Goal: Enhance Franconia’s community facilities/utilities for community residents and visitors:

- Continue a coordinated approach to addressing the needs of the community’s infrastructure through capital reserve funds and mitigation grants.
- Develop a plan of construction, renovation, and support of the infrastructure for the future.
- Improve the Town’s infrastructure through capital reserve funds or mitigation grants.

## VII. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal: Encourage professional businesses that harmonize with Franconia’s rural setting.

- Support economic development that corresponds with the rural character of Franconia and protects the Town’s quality of life.
- Create business opportunities that balance economic development with village appeal on Main Street.
- Enhance the Main Street to attract commerce and recreational activity while preserving the village charm.

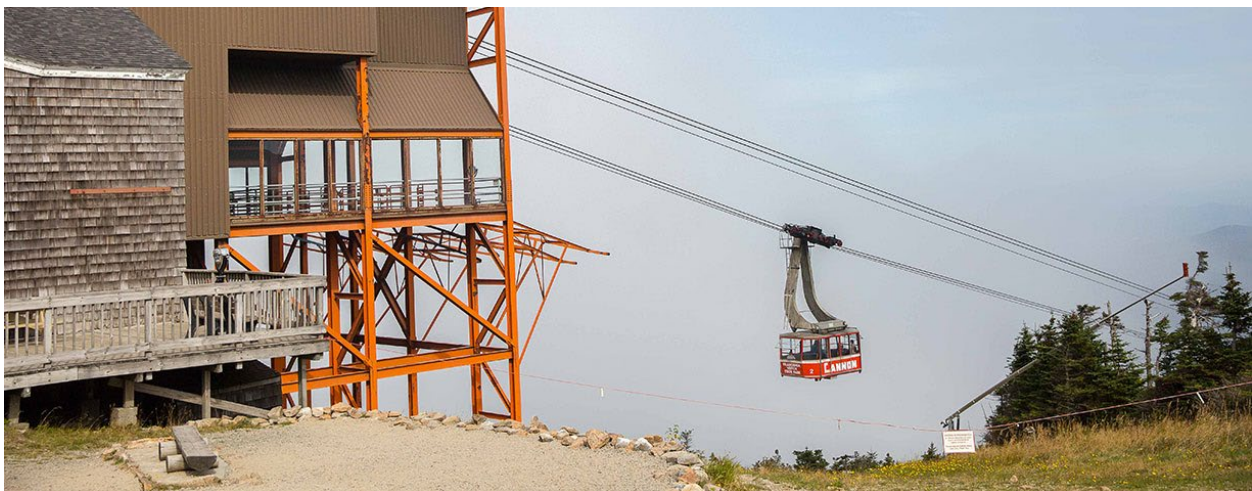
## CHAPTER 4: LAND USE

### I. HISTORY AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF FRANCONIA

Franconia is in the heart of the western White Mountain region of New Hampshire, approximately seventy-five miles north of Concord. It was first granted as Indian Head in 1764, but the settlers were unable to meet the terms of their charter. It was then incorporated in 1773, regranted as Morrystown and later named Franconia due to its resemblance to the Franconian Alps in Germany.

The discovery of iron ore in the present-day Town of Sugar Hill led to a development surge in Franconia. In 1805, the New Hampshire Iron Factory Company was formed, followed three years later by the Franconia Iron Works. This business flourished for 50 years until it was displaced by coal and iron industries in the expanding West, and environmental awareness and recreational tourism overtook the towns' industrial roots.

The biggest and most enduring industry in Franconia is tourism. The area of Franconia Notch is well known for its natural features, including the once-standing Old Man of the Mountain, Profile and Echo Lakes, The Flume, The Basin, and Mounts Lafayette, Lincoln, Garfield, and Cannon. The Cannon Mountain Aerial Tramway was the first passenger tramway built in North America. Franconia has proved to be an attraction for many people, the most notable being Robert Frost who lived and wrote in a house on Ridge Road from 1915-1920. The house has been preserved as The Frost Place Museum. Owned by the Town of Franconia, it is a center for poetry and the arts.



Cannon Mountain Aerial Tramway, New Hampshire State Parks

The Town of Franconia also flourishes from its proximity to recreational and outdoor activities. Besides the numerous natural features within Franconia Notch, there is also Cannon Mountain ski area, cross-country skiing, and other ski resorts in nearby towns. Once looked at as a

beautiful place to own a second home, the Town of Franconia has recently seen its fair share of year-round housing. The demands on the Town which once served workers at the iron companies have increased tremendously over the decades.

*(Information gathered from the Franconia Public Library and Chamber of Commerce)*

## II. POPULATION EFFECT ON EXISTING LAND USE

### Statistical Summary

To understand the dynamics of the land use and development trends in the Town of Franconia, it is important to view some demographic information. The number of people moving into Town, the number of households, and the number of people per square mile significantly influence land use and development patterns in this community.

- The population in the Town of Franconia has been increasing over the last 30 years apart from a slight decrease between 1990 and 2000 when the population in all of Grafton County decreased.
- The Town of Franconia comprises 65.7 square miles of land area equaling approximately fifteen persons per square mile. However, occupied land, subtracting out the White Mountain National Forest, equals approximately forty-two people per square mile.
- In the 2021 U.S. Census 5-year estimates, there were 825 residential units in the Town of Franconia: 394 were housing units occupied year-round, and 431 were vacant housing units, of which 374 were seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.
- Using the 9<sup>th</sup> Generation of the ITE Trip Generation Manual the number of vehicle trips for year-round homes (9.57) and recreational homes (3.16), the number of locally generated residential trips can be estimated as 5,475 per day, an increase of 19% since the last Master Plan was adopted. This assumes, of course, that all seasonal homes are occupied at the same time.
- At 64.07% (42.3 square miles), the White Mountain National Forest (federal lands) is the greatest single land use in the Town of Franconia. Franconia Notch State Park accounts for 7.48% (4.93 square miles).

## III. COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS REGARDING LAND USE

The Town of Franconia Planning Board developed and made a survey available to all Franconia residents in the Fall of 2021. The survey asked questions about their views of the Town, housing, and land use preferences, and opinions on the future of Franconia. The Planning Board received one hundred twenty-two (122) responses. Information from the survey responses assisted the Planning Board in the creation of the Town's Goals and Methods of Implementation, outlined in the third chapter of this Master Plan. In addition, the responses provide essential information in examining existing land use, patterns, and trends. Of the hundred and twenty-two (122) responses, 84% are full-time residents of Franconia, while others have vacant land or seasonal housing and reside in Franconia only a few months of the year.

An overwhelming number of respondents identified Lifestyle/Recreation and Small/Rural perspective as the most important reasons why they reside in the community. A fair number of respondents live in Franconia because they are familiar with the area and/or have family connections in the area, or they have chosen Franconia with its rural, small-town feel as a wonderful place to retire.

### Residential Development/Housing

There are a total of 825 Housing Units in the town which are divided into two categories – Occupied (394) and Vacant (431 units). 82% or 323 of the Occupied units are owner-occupied with the balance of 71 renter occupied. 87% or 374 of the Vacant units are in the category of “seasonal, recreation, or occasional use” and are occupied at points throughout the year but are not primary housing for residents.

Between 2010-2020 there were fifty-four single family building permits approved and two multi-family building permits (for a breakdown see the chart in the Housing Section). However, only fifteen housing units were built in this period. Beginning in 2021, building permits increased dramatically although when the housing is built cannot be projected. When asked which types of housing development should be encouraged or discouraged in Franconia, the respondents strongly preferred affordable housing including senior and work force housing. The town has balanced these needs by allowing several types of residential developments. This includes cluster development, planned unit development, and village mix-use overlay district.

### Commercial Development

Most commercial development is focused in the Franconia village in the form of small, locally owned businesses. There are larger commercial properties along Route 116 and Route 18, but most of these consist of bed and breakfasts and inns, which fit in with the rural, small-town character of Franconia. In the survey, respondents stated they preferred small shops, arts and crafts, home-based services (internet/broadband) to businesses in Franconia. In sum, residents enjoy the types of business that currently reside in the community.

### Natural Resources and the Environment

One clear and universal vision for the Town is for the protection of natural resources and conservation of land. The citizens of Franconia are aware of the natural beauty that surrounds them and support finding ways to protect these features. Other indicators throughout the survey showed support for protecting land and natural features throughout town.

There are some environmental concerns that the respondents raised. When planning for protection of natural resources and conservation of lands, these concerns should be taken into consideration. They include the alteration of the landscape, rural overcrowding, wildlife habitat depletion, the quality of groundwater, the quality of surface water, light and noise pollution,

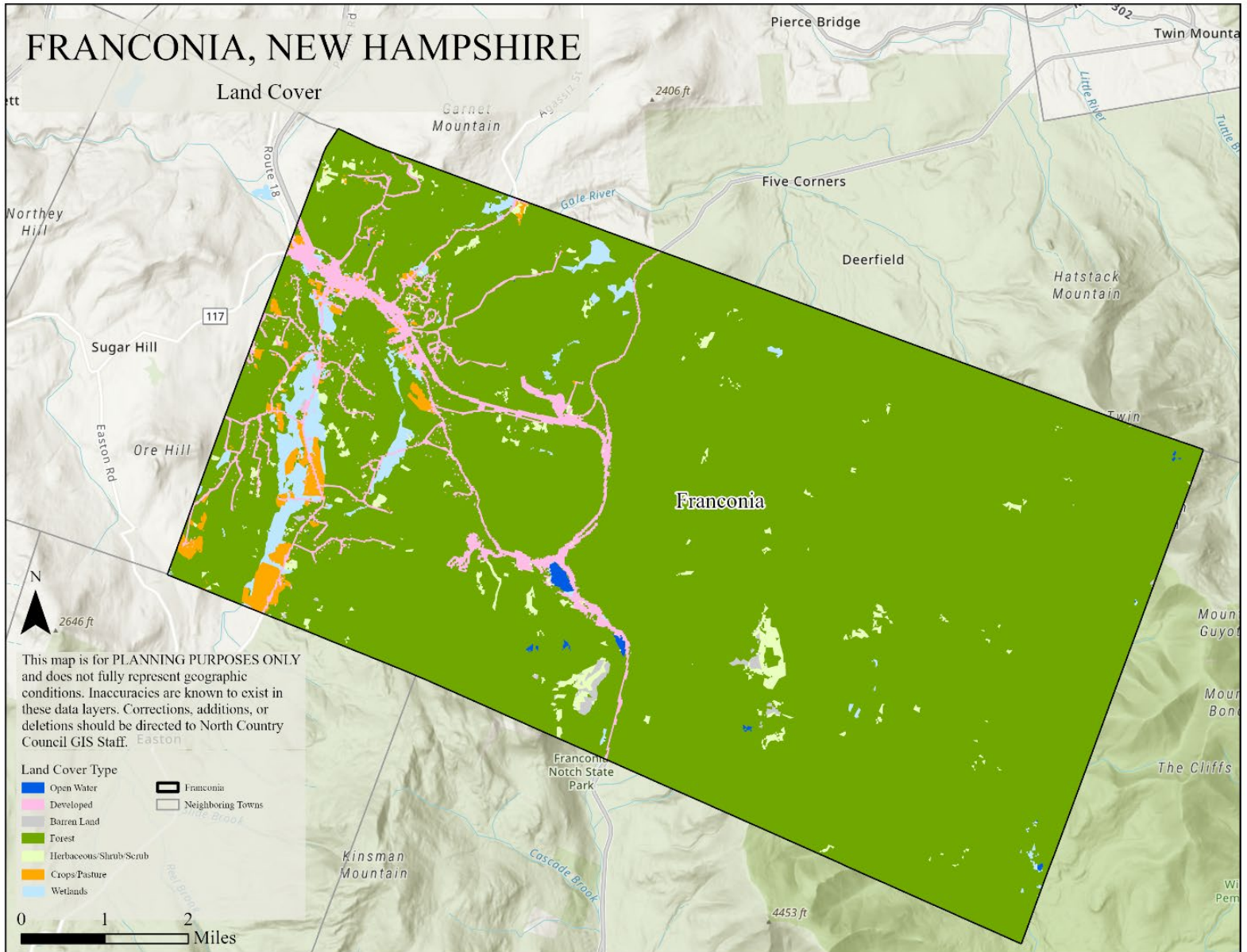
automobile traffic and resilience to increasing extremes of climate change. Some of these concerns can be addressed with the use of cluster developments, where houses are clustered, creating more open space and intact wildlife habitat.

### Recreation

Another mainstay of Franconia's character and lifestyle is recreation. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the land in Town is in the White Mountain National Forest, and around seven percent (7.48%) of the land is in the Franconia Notch State Park. These areas provide many hiking trails in and around Franconia Notch; the Franconia Notch Bike Path running from Lincoln to Artist's Bluff and Cannon Mountain, a major downhill skiing destination; and several rock and ice climbing opportunities. The citizens of Franconia value and enjoy their recreational lifestyles. Connecting some of the existing recreation trails, as well as developing further opportunities for all ages to enjoy recreational pursuits, are an important part of the vision for Franconia's future.

## IV. EXISTING LAND USE CATEGORIES AND MAPS

The map and chart below describe the land cover type.



Land Cover Type	Percentage of Town
Barren Land	0.2%
Crops/Pasture	1.1%
Forest	91.7%
Developed	3.6%
Wetlands	1.8%
Herbaceous/Shrub/Scrub	1.4%
Open Water	0.2%

### Residential

The Town of Franconia is comprised of 42,219.83 acres of land, of which 10,279.88 acres, nearly 25%, is in residential zoning. There are several categories of residential lands as follows:

- Residential - used to identify those lands under five acres that currently have buildings on them and are inhabited.
- Residential Land Approved - identifies land that has been either approved for residential growth under a recently approved subdivision plan or granted a building permit.
- Residential Land Over Ten (10) Acres - identifies any land that currently has a residential building on it but is over ten acres, therefore could be subdivided into more residential lots.
- Residential Land Vacant & Five (5) Acres or More - used to identify vacant land that for tax purposes is categorized as residential land use, which is five acres or more and cannot be further subdivided under current regulations.
- Residential Land in Current Use - describes any other vacant residential parcels that are in current use that are over ten acres and unlikely to be further subdivided.

The current zoning in Town allows 3-or 5-acre lots for residential construction. The residential land over ten acres and the vacant residential land over five acres, currently 19.99% of the land, approximately 8,400 acres, can be further subdivided into residential lots. Taking out fifteen percent of the land for roads and utilities and not taking into consideration wetlands and current residential building locations on that land, approximately 1,400 are possible in this current existing residential land. Identifying areas for protection within this residential land is key in determining location and density of future residential development.

Currently, there is a mixed use of residential housing from a few multi-family and rental housing properties to large secondary seasonal homes. Although a lot of residential homes historically have been located close to the village, recent residential construction has been occurring along Route 116/Easton Road for its magnificent views of Kinsman Ridge, and along the southern end of Route 18 which also provides excellent views and proximity to Cannon Mountain ski area. Other areas where new residential construction has concentrated are along Scrag Hill, Franconia Mountains Road, and Butterhill Road. The Town must seek to balance the residential needs and preferences of the community with those of the landowners by providing creative opportunities for a mixed variety of houses in the future (see Chapter 5).

The Town should also consider investigating ridgeline protection regulations. The Town has identified on the future land use map a few areas that are high elevation points in town. One of the main reasons people in Franconia reside in town, based on survey responses, is for the scenic views. However, new development is sometimes located on ridgelines, offering those homeowners magnificent views of the area but obstructing the view for others to enjoy. The Town should review sample ridgeline protection ordinances and consider adopting standards for protecting their views and ridgelines. A possibility, for example, is to not allow the building of structures on the crest of the ridgeline, but just below it. This will maintain the scenic views for the homeowners, while maintaining the natural integrity and aesthetics of the ridgeline itself.

### Commercial

There is not a lot of existing commercial land use in the Town, only 1.45% (610.78 acres). Most of the commercial development is in the village and is a mixed variety of small-town services and businesses. There is a commercial development located on Route 116. The Town has no industrial uses; and the only light industrial/heavy commercial use is a recycling and landscape yard. One reason commercial development is not currently expanding is because the land zoned for commercial use is almost completely built out. Another reason is the constraints of limited municipal water, and no municipal sewer.



Town of Franconia

As noted throughout the survey, the respondents do favor some slight expansion of commercial facilities, but only ones that fit with the small-town feel of the village, and the preference would be to keep these new businesses near the village. The one existing condition that must be



examined by local officials is access to the various businesses in the village. As with many typical small New England villages, driveway cuts and parking were never truly established. Over the years, people have accessed these businesses by entering and exiting at several points along the property, causing unsafe driving conditions and poor sight distances throughout the village. As Franconia implements sections of the Master Plan and prepares for the potential of new small businesses in the village area, the access management issues should be addressed.

Zoning Districts	Permitted Uses	Lot Size Minimum
Residential A	One family residence, general farming, timber removal, manufactured housing, occupied tourist home	Five acres
Residential B	Permitted Residential A uses, except for manufactured housing. Additionally, schools, institutions, multi-family units, inns, hotels, motels	Three acres
Business A Dwelling	Permitted Residential B dwelling uses	One acre
Business A Non-Dwelling	Permitted Residential B uses, retail stores, offices, wholesale and light industrial, garage and filling station	½ acre
Business B Dwelling & Non-Dwelling	Single-family, B&B, retail, professional office, home occupation	Two acres

Recreation

Franconia prides itself in the abundant recreational opportunities that are present; but for land use planning purposes, it is important to examine the several types of recreation within the Town, because the approach to future land use planning can be different for each. The types of recreational land use can be broken into three categories: Commercial Recreation, such as Cannon Mountain and Mittersill; State Park and Federal Lands; and Town Recreation (including legacy trail networks managed by the community).

Commercial Recreation

Mittersill Village is situated adjacent to Cannon Mountain and comprises approximately one hundred residences, mostly consisting of single-family chalets, several duplexes, and eleven rowhouses. In 1941, Austrian Baron Von Pantz acquired 550 acres on the north slope of Mt. Jackson (also known as Mittersill), including a section of the infamous Taft Trail constructed in 1933. He and business partners developed a hotel, constructed several chalets, installed a ski lift, and in 1946, Mittersill opened for business. Mittersill experienced its glory days in the 50s and 60s but faced challenges with several bad snow years, leading to its closure in 1984. The hotel was converted into a timeshare in the late seventies.

After closure, discussions arose about merging Mittersill/Cannon, and gained momentum throughout the 1980s. After years of negotiations, Mittersill became part of Cannon Mountain ski area in 2009 through a land swap with the National Forest. A new \$3 million double chairlift replaced the old Mittersill chairlift, opening on January 1, 2011.

Thanks to substantial efforts of the Franconia Ski Club (FSC), this non-profit organization raised over \$7 million to clear, widen, grade, add snowmaking, install a new T-Bar, and build the 9,000+ square foot Mittersill ski lodge. All improvements occurred between 2013-2020.

Mittersill Village is unlike any other part of Franconia with chalets, condominiums and rowhouses that were situated on approximately ¼ acre lots, with minimal setbacks from road centerlines, side, and rear yard lines. The Town of Franconia instituted a zoning overlay that was more restrictive than the original standard in that neighborhood. In recent years, most of the variance requests have been from this Village and most, if not all, such requests have been granted. As a result, the Planning Board should consider a review of the zoning district and consider changes to reflect the original conditions more appropriately prior to adopting zoning regulations.

### State and Federal Lands

As mentioned in the previous section, 71.55% of the land in Franconia is state or federal land, approximately 64% in the White Mountain National Forest and 7% in Franconia Notch State Park. Both areas offer recreational opportunities. Cannon Mountain, discussed above, is located within Franconia Notch State Park. Although these lands belong to the state and federal government, it is essential that decisions be made and discussions about these lands include town officials so that the Town can plan for future land uses and growth. Currently a lot of tourism traffic from these areas filters into the Town, whether for service-related reasons such as lodging at one of the various hotels and bed and breakfasts in Town, for dining and entertainment, or to view the historical and cultural resources of the Town such as the Iron Furnace, the Art Walk, and the Robert Frost House. Also, some of the seasonal housing in Franconia has come from the many outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers who have visited the state and federal lands over the

years and have decided to purchase a second home in Franconia. The state and federal government should work closely with the Town, and vice versa, on decisions about the area.

### Town Recreation

In addition to the many recreational opportunities within the state and federal lands, Franconia has several town recreation facilities and has worked hard over the years to maintain these



Town of Franconia

facilities and to expand them when needed. The Dow Field is an area that has expanded to allow for additional recreational opportunities.

The Town also owns ninety-nine acres of land, within Fox Hill Park and the Hockey/Ice Skating Rink next to the Town Hall and Library, which is heavily utilized. In addition to the parks and fields in Franconia, there are also several trails and easements for trails throughout town, forming a system that connects the Town's recreation network with the legacy community trail system. One trail, the Riverstone Beach Trail, connects the village businesses to the Iron Furnace Historic Site. Several new subdivisions throughout Town have ski and other non-motorized recreation trail easements through them. It is the responsibility of the property owners and/or homeowner's association to maintain these easements; however, if they are not mapped or identified in a plan, it

is difficult for the Town to keep track of the maintenance of the trails and potential future connections to the trails.

### Future Land Use

Future land use plans begin by examining the existing land uses and their locations and comparing them to the goals set forth in this Master Plan. The idea is to get a visual image of what the Town would look like if the goals were obtained. The Land Use Section and map are not to be confused with the Town's zoning map. The Land Use Section, as well as the entire Master Plan, serve as a vision for the Town, a guiding document that will assist in making future planning decisions. Regulations and long-range plans should be reviewed and edited to be compatible with the Master Plan, and the Land Use Map should be used to examine existing zoning districts and permitted uses. However, the Land Use Map is not a regulatory map.

## Residential

When planning for future residential development in Franconia, it is important to allow for a variety of housing options. The more recent residential development trend in Franconia has been large, single-family houses on large parcels. While this may be desirable housing for some, not everyone can afford or wants a large home on a large lot. Current zoning requires five acres for most residential development. This standard encourages large single-family development and is not conducive to affordable housing. In addition, property taxes have gone up in town and people who have spent their entire life in Franconia are now finding it hard financially to remain here.

The Town allows for, and promotes, various housing types throughout the town. This includes, notably, the addition of a village mix-use overlay district, and both attached and detached accessory dwelling units (ADU). The Town supports open space and natural protection. The Natural Resource Inventory (NRI), which will be updated in 2024, will identify key areas in town to protect. These areas could be protected through purchase or conservation easements. The NRI will also provide guidance for sustainable future development and approaches in planning new projects. Avoiding fragmentation and assuring continuity of existing wildlife and trail corridors as part of initiative-taking planning, and increased appreciation of vulnerabilities to our water resources can help achieve this goal. The Natural Resource chapter 10 of this masterplan includes an overview of the work currently being updated. The Town allows open space developments in these environmentally sensitive areas by promoting the clustering of houses in one area to protect a prime natural resource in another area. The Town has incentive zoning through planned unit developments. This incentive is allotted to a developer who provides a certain number of additional housing units within their new residential development proposal. Although the town cannot require a developer to build affordable housing, it can encourage them to provide it.

## Commercial

Most commercial businesses are in the village district or along Route 116, but they are small service-type industries. The citizens support their village and frequent the stores and services within it. Some would like to see a slight expansion of the district with new businesses that would fit in with the rural village character. However, the clear consensus is not to have large retailers and chain stores in Franconia. Whereas a town cannot prevent a certain business from locating in its jurisdiction, regulations on size, landscaping, architectural features, and other design standards could be developed to make any large commercial business or chain store comply with the character of the existing commercial district. The Town may also investigate access management techniques throughout the village district. Currently, driveways and access points are not clearly marked nor planned in relation to neighboring parcels. The result is traffic merging, turning, and stopping in various locations throughout the village, thus creating a potential safety hazard. The Town should study the current traffic flow between these businesses and make plans for improvements to access and driveway points. Then, any new development

proposing to move to the village would need to comply with the access management plan for the village.

### Recreation

Recreational opportunities are especially important to the people of Franconia. The Town has invested time and support into providing municipal recreation opportunities, as well as working with developers to provide trail easements to connect to a larger trail system throughout town. The new Natural Resource Inventory may help the Town decide what areas in town to protect through conservation easements and low-impact recreation—such as trails, bird watching viewing areas, etc.— that may be appropriate land uses for those areas. In addition, the Town should use the information from the inventory to map a trail plan identifying key connections/trail segments that should be constructed and to map existing corridors with maintenance and right-of-way issues to be addressed.

### Natural Resources

The Town of Franconia is rich with natural resources, and residents have expressed the need to develop strategies to protect these resources (see Chapter 10 on Natural Resources). The Town will complete a new Natural Resource Inventory in 2024, giving it more insight into the various resources throughout town.

The Land Use Map identifies the aquifer and wetland areas following the Gale River and the Ham Branch. Additionally, the aquifers are a significant resource to the future water needs in the Town of Franconia. As the Water Commission outlines a plan for future water sources, it would be optimal to restrict development upon most of the aquifers. The Town should research aquifer protection ordinances and reevaluate any wetland regulations to make them more restrictive. Allowing developers, the option to use open space regulations in these areas, where the houses are concentrated in one section to protect the wetlands and aquifers in another section may be an appropriate planning technique. The Town should also encourage developers to retain as much of the natural setting on site as possible, including stands of trees, open fields, or other important natural features.

There are additional natural features for which the Town should consider adopting protection plans or developing regulations to eliminate overdevelopment, such as softwood stands and open fields. Again, the Town is characterized by these natural areas and the plants and wildlife they provide for. Placing future residential development around these areas by allowing flexibility in lot size and other incentives could allow the Town more options for protecting these important natural resources.

## CHAPTER 5: HOUSING

A summary of findings from the 2023 Town of Franconia Housing Listening Session- conducted with support from North Country Council is summarized below:

To better understand the housing needs in Franconia, a Housing Listening Session was held in September 2023, open to the residents and homeowners of Franconia. When asked if their current housing meets their needs and if it will ten years from now, most participants said it does currently, but will not in the future. Many participants noted that in the future they will need to downsize, live in one level housing, and other needs will be dependent on health, cost, and accessibility. Participants were also asked what the housing needs are for the Franconia community. The community needs were determined to be more senior housing, workforce/affordable housing, smaller and more affordable starter homes, more longer-term rentals, and multi-family housing. A concern about Short-Term Rentals (STR) having a negative effect on local housing needs was also expressed. While recognizing that Franconia is a tourist destination, there needs to be a reasonable balance between the needs of residents and tourists.

Additionally, there was a consensus that changes made to fit these needs should keep the small-town charm and cultural heritage of Franconia. Lastly, participants were asked what a vibrant and thriving Franconia looks like ten years from now. Common answers included walkability within town, young families and multiple generations of residents, senior facilities, infrastructure improvements, preservation of outdoor spaces and increase recreational opportunities, and support to local schools.

### I. DEMOGRAPHICS & EXISTING HOUSING TRENDS

The Town of Franconia has seen an increase in housing development over the past few years and anticipates continued increases in the upcoming years. The intent of this section is to look at the most recent housing trends as calculated through the Town documentation, the U.S. Census Bureau, the New Hampshire Finance Authority, the New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning, and North Country Council's Housing Needs Assessment. This information will give us a better understanding of the types of housing, the size and age of population, and the rate of increase of both in the Town of Franconia. Examining our past and current trends will help us plan better for our future.

#### Summary of Findings

Listed Below are some of the highlights of housing and population information that will be further examined in this chapter.

- Based on median age, compared to Grafton County as a whole, Franconia has a significantly older population base.
- Over the past five years, Franconia has seen a 9.1% net migration to Town.

- Although owner-occupied housing is increasing at a steadier rate, Franconia has seen an increase over the past ten years in both owner-occupied and renter-occupied housing.
- Vacation and seasonal homes have continued to increase over the past decade.
- Most households are either 1 or 2 person households, comprising 84% of all households in the Town.
- Franconia’s annual household income average is consistent with the state and the county, yet over 36% of the population is spending over 30% of their household income on housing costs.
- Franconia has seen more new construction housing permit requests than any other type of residential building permit requests over the past few years.
- The Littleton Labor Market Area (LMA), which is comprised of several towns including Franconia, needs an estimated 1,260 more housing units by 2040, including 812 ownership units and 448 rentals according to population and 2housing unit projects completed for the LMA’s in the 2023 Housing Needs Assessment.

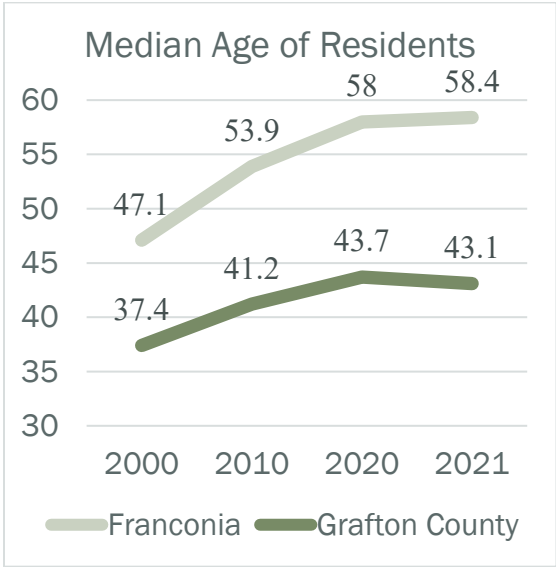
### Population Trends

Compared to Grafton County as a whole, Franconia’s population concentration is above average in the 60+ age group but under-represented in the under 19 age group.

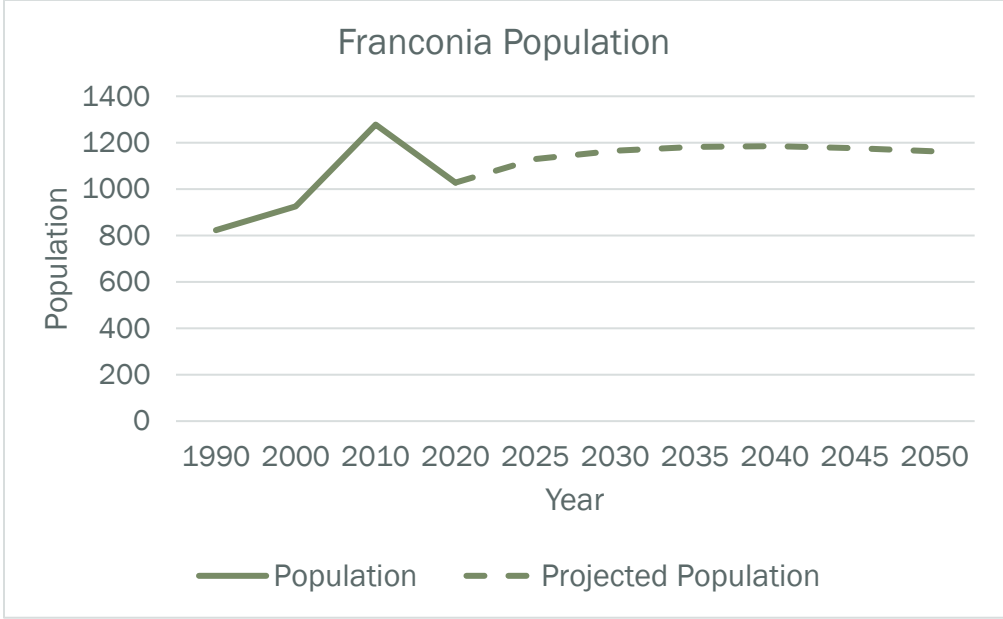
Franconia’s median age has continued to trend 10-15 year’s older than Grafton County as a whole. Looking forward to 2050, Franconia resident population is projected to flatten-out around 1,100 to 1,200 persons.

Grafton County Population Trends				
Years	Total	Under 19	20-59	60 and over
1990	74,929			
2000	81,743	21,782 (27%)	45,531 (56%)	14,430 (17%)
2010	88,356	21,015 (24%)	48,834 (55%)	18,507 (21%)
2020	90,331	18,959 (21%)	45,805 (51%)	25,567 (28%)
2021	91,025	19,236 (21%)	45,829 (50%)	25,897 (28%)

Franconia Population Trends				
Years	Total	Under 19	20-59	60 and over
1990	823			
2000	949	191 (20%)	484 (51%)	274 (29%)
2010	1,278	214 (17%)	647 (50%)	417 (33%)
2020	1,028	101 (10%)	471 (46%)	456 (44%)
2021	982	125 (13%)	394 (40%)	463 (47%)



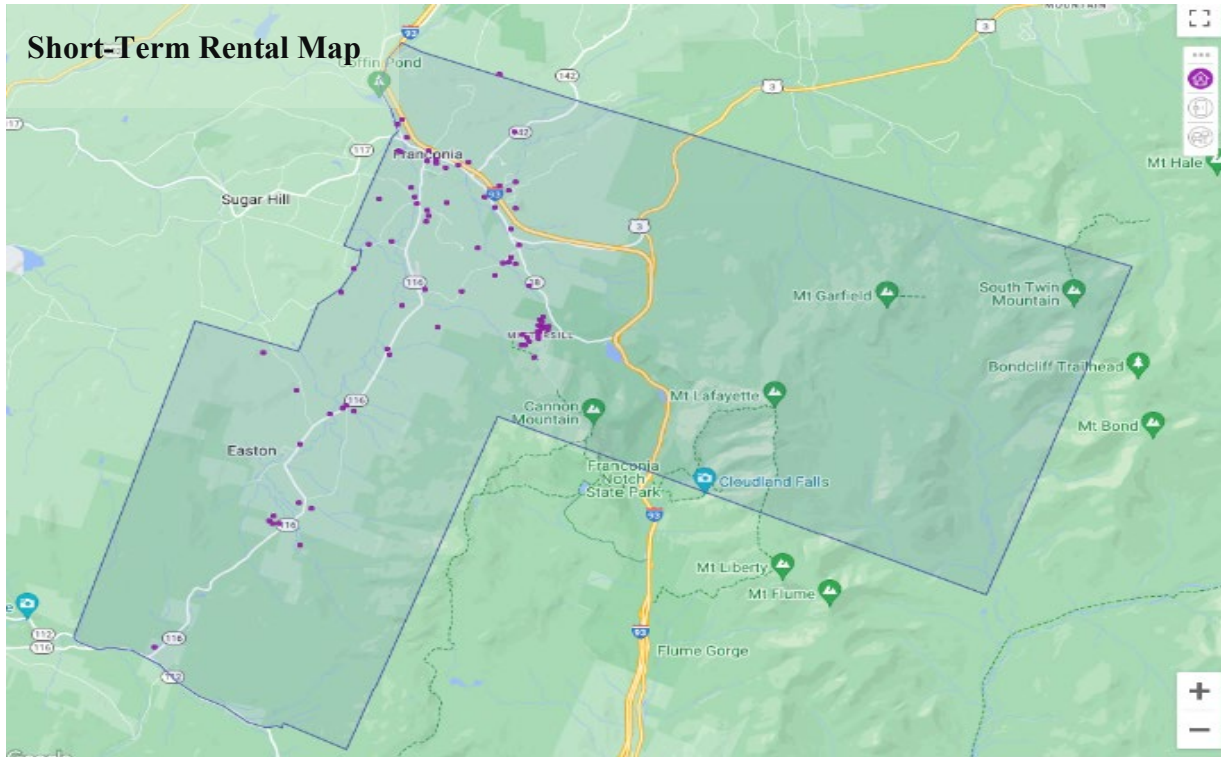




Housing Occupancy

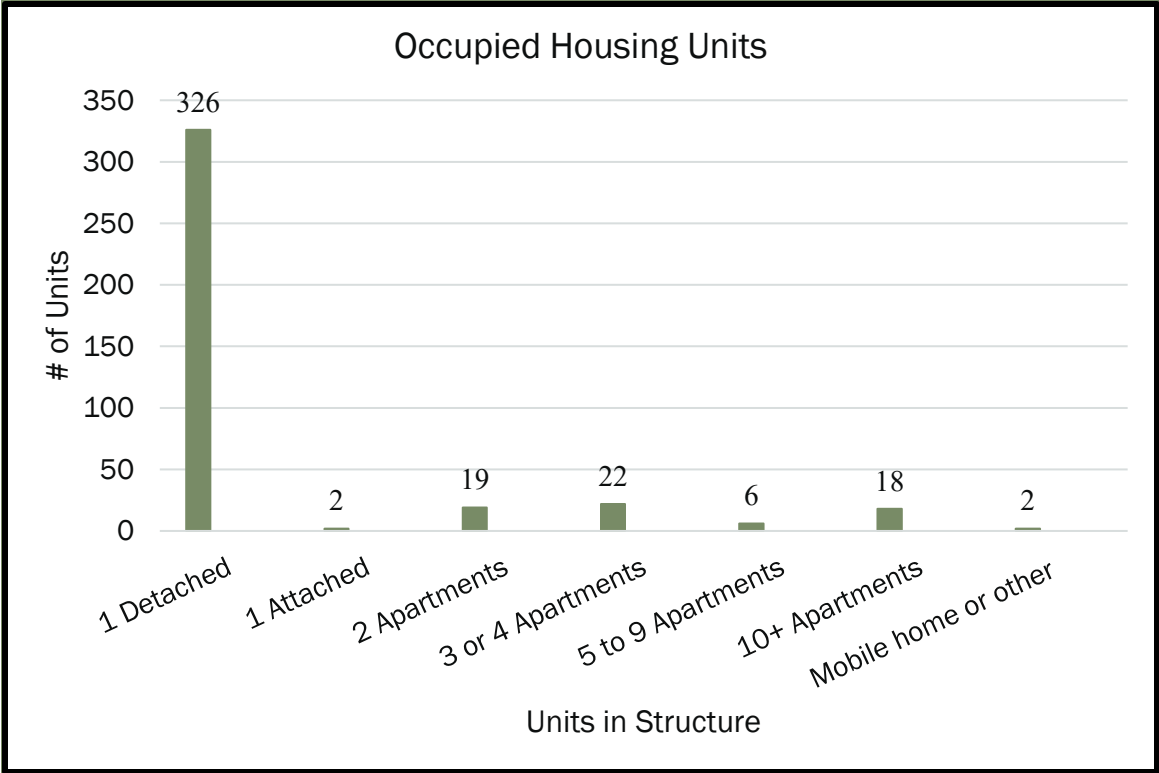
Occupancy Category	No. of Housing Units	Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied	For Rent	Seasonal	Other Vacant
Occupied	394	323	71			
Vacant	431			20	374	37

- 82% or 323 of the Occupied units are owner-occupied and 18% or 71 units are used as rental housing.
- Most so-called ‘vacant’ unrented housing units (87%) are seasonal, weekend, or occasional use homes, indicating a vibrant second home community. With almost 48% of Franconia’s housing being non-primary and vacation/recreational in nature, this needs to be kept in mind with any future planning.
- Franconia’s increasingly growing Short-Term Rental (STR) market is also part of this elevated level of non-primary vacant housing units
- Source: ACS 5-year estimates 2021



- In 2023, there were seventy-six currently identified, full home STR rentals within Franconia.
- Most short-term rentals within Franconia contain 3-4 bedrooms.
- Short-term rentals in Franconia are mostly clustered around Mittersill, Route 18, and Route 116.
- Source: Air DNA – These numbers include Easton, NH because it shares zip code with Franconia

Number of Bedrooms	Number of Rentals
Studio	1
1	4
2	14
3	36
4	26
5+	10



- As expected, the majority of the owner-occupied housing units are single family homes.
- Under “Mobile home or other” section of the above chart are resident owned cooperatives (ROCs) with multiple units.

Household Income & Housing Goal

	Franconia		Grafton County		New Hampshire	
Income (household) ACS 2022 5-Year (S2503)	Owner-Occupied	Renter-Occupied	Owner-Occupied	Renter-Occupied	Owner-Occupied	Renter-Occupied
<b>Median Income</b>	<b>\$81,250</b>	<b>\$35,000</b>	<b>\$93,718</b>	<b>\$49,804</b>	<b>\$109,809</b>	<b>\$53,472</b>

Location	Median Income
State of New Hampshire	\$90,845
Grafton County	\$79,949
Franconia	\$68,750

Homeowners earn notably more than renters in Franconia, Grafton County, and NH. While the highest number of homeowners in Franconia, Grafton County, and NH are earning \$150,000 or more within the household. This differs from renters, where the highest number of households are earning between \$50,000 and \$74,999. However, Franconia has a smaller share of its households (both renters and homeowners) in the lowest income brackets, when compared to the county and state.

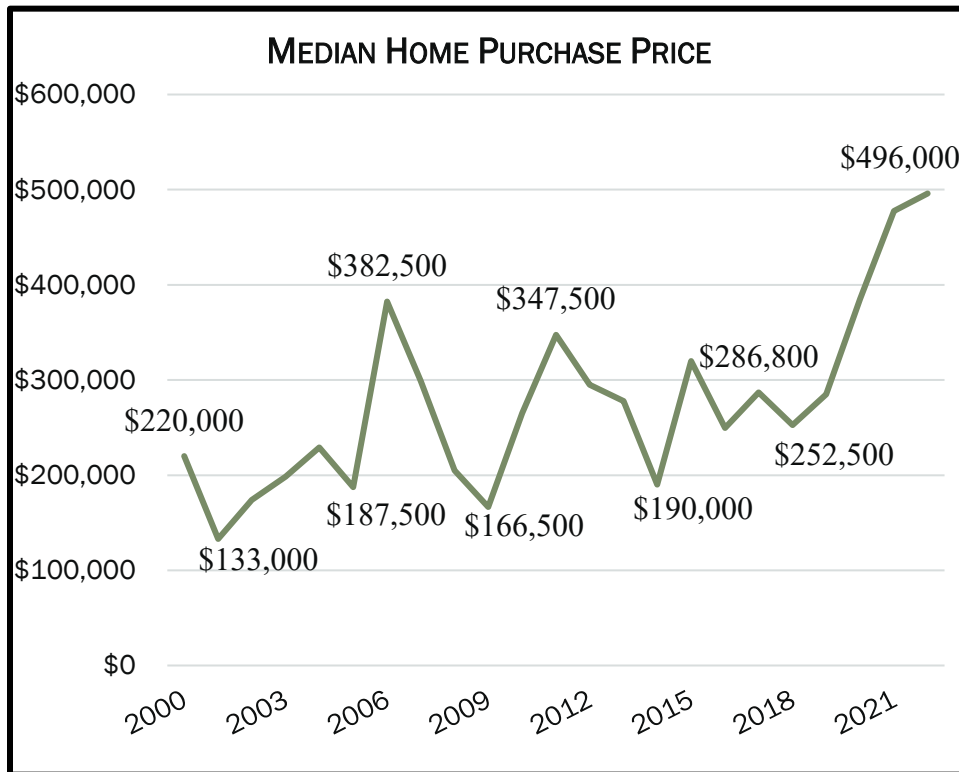
The blended Median Household Incomes for the State of New Hampshire, Grafton County, and the Town of Franconia reflect the differences in the low-range income levels and the high-range income levels, as shown. The Town of Franconia is significantly lower than the median average household income (including both renters and owners) of both Grafton County and the State of NH.

Source: ACS 5 year estimates 2021

## Home Sale Prices

- Reflective of trends throughout the country, Franconia has seen a steep increase in home purchase prices. In 2022, the median home purchase price for Franconia saw an all-time high of \$496,000. This is over \$100,000 more than the last peak in home purchase prices in 2007, which was \$382,500.
- This continuing robust growth trend in home purchase prices, combined with the ongoing demand for STRs, make it increasingly difficult for young and/or work force families to be able to afford housing in Franconia. This was reflected in the 2021 Master Plan Survey.
- An important characteristic to examine related to housing costs and income is the average monthly housing cost. A house is considered “affordable” if less than 30% of the household income is dedicated to housing costs. In other words, a family or household member spending more than 30% of their total annual earnings on housing costs is living in a home which is considered unaffordable to them.
- The median percentage of 2021 household incomes spent on home ownership was 17.7% which is below the 30% affordability standard. However, 32% of households were spending 30% or more of their annual household income on home ownership.

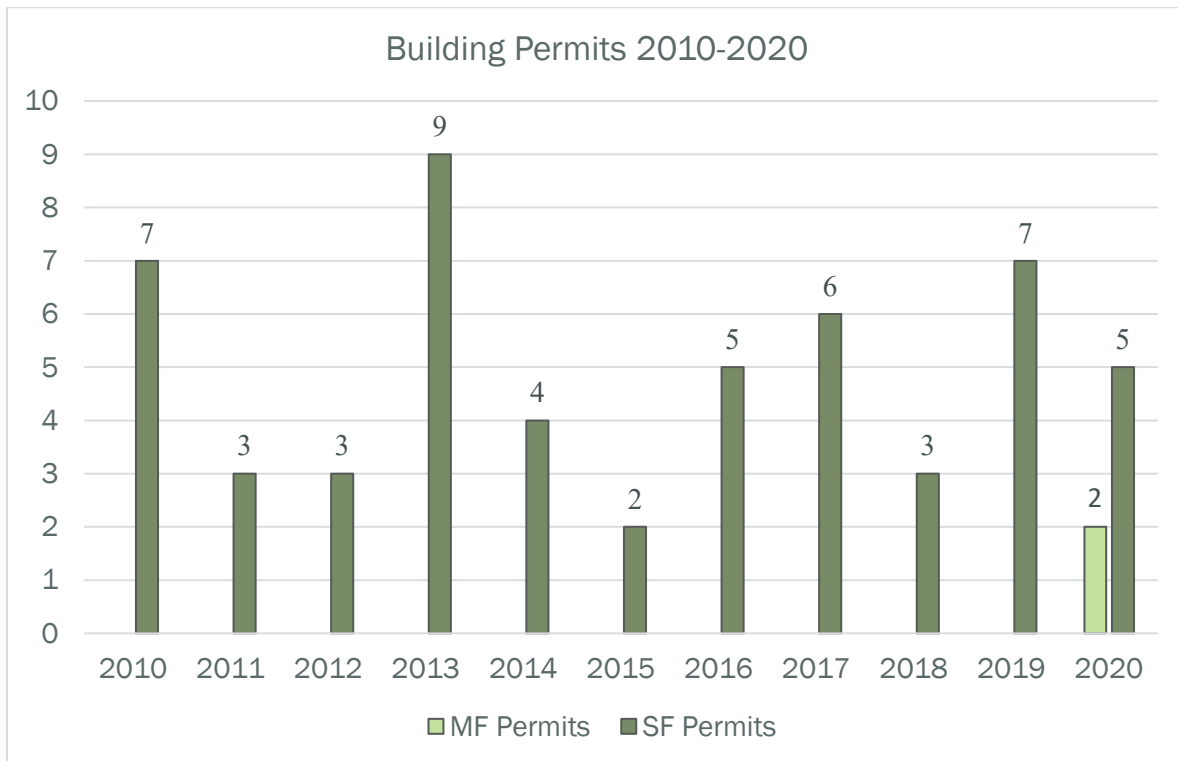
Source: New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority, Purchase Price Trends



## Housing Development Trends

The last variables to consider when planning for housing are the current housing development trends which include an evaluation of the number of building permits issued over the past few years and an examination of where housing development is most likely to be located and where it has occurred in the past.

The chart below shows the residential building permits issued by the Town from 2010 to 2020. The residential building permits shown are broken down by single-family and multi-family units.



MF = Multi-family Permits

SF = Single-family Permits

From 2010 to 2020, a total of fifty-six building permits for new structures were issued, of those the vast majority (96%) were for single-family homes. The trend of housing in Franconia is for new, large, and usually moderate to expensive homes. From 2010 to 2020, only two multi-family building permits were approved. In 2022, two additional multi-family building permits were issued as well. Over 60% of the town's rental housing is 50 years or older, so any growth in

multi-family building permits is positive. There is a significant demand for more affordable rental housing.

There is evidence of a recent significant increase in new construction not reflected in the chart above, which is data through only 2020. Moreover, there are a few areas in Town where new homes are being built more frequently. For example, new residential development is occurring along Route 116/Easton Road. This area abuts many recreational opportunities and magnificent views of the Kinsman Ridge area. New homes are also being developed along Route 18, which also provides excellent views and proximity to Cannon Mountain ski area. Other areas where new residential construction has concentrated are along Wallace/Scrag Hill (in Franconia as well as the neighboring Town of Bethlehem), Franconia Mountains Road, and upper Butterhill Road.

## II. HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In June of 2023, the North Country Council, the Regional Planning Commission whose jurisdiction includes the Town of Franconia, published *Our Homes* a Regional Housing Needs Assessment. It is required under RSA 36:47 II that the Regional Planning Commission compile and update every five years a housing needs assessment which provides the basic information needed by Planning Boards for assessing their local housing supply and demand. Because housing is affected by and affects more than one town, Labor Market Area (LMA) compiled the housing “needs-assessment” data to show the need in a particular subregion, as opposed to assuming that one town may need more housing than another. Statistics show that employment and services attract people and housing. Examining housing demographics and predicting housing needs will be more accurate for the LMA than they would per town, since most people who live within the LMA are willing to commute for employment and services.

The housing needs assessment examines a lot of the same housing demographic information that previously has been provided in this chapter such as population, housing size, housing costs and income levels, and age of housing stock. It uses population projections (based on birth and death rates, as well as migration data) to forecast out the units needed based on recently historical growth trends, household size trends, tenure (owners vs. renters) averages, and income trends to determine the number, type, and affordability brackets for units. Affordability brackets used align with NH’s Workforce Housing statutes which look specifically at units needed based area median incomes. Using the methodology created through a state committee of planners, researchers, and housing representatives, the following housing unit counts show Franconia’s anticipated Fair Share of area need:

### Fair Share Housing Estimates

- AMI = Area Median Income
- 100% AMI for homeowners and 60% AMI for renters is defined by NH state law as the threshold for workforce income.

- In total eighty-seven additional units will be needed in Franconia by 2040 to meet the needs of residents.
- Source: Our Homes, North Country Regional Housing Needs Assessment.

Year	Total Units	Owners (# of units)		Renters (# of units)	
		Below 100% AMI	Above 100% AMI	Below 60% AMI	Above 60% AMI
2025	31	7	14	2	8
2030	59	14	25	4	16
2035	76	18	33	5	21
2040	87	20	37	6	24

The Town of Franconia is located within the Littleton LMA. The towns located within the Littleton LMA include Bath, Benton, Bethlehem, Carroll, Dalton, Easton, Franconia, Haverhill, Landaff, Lisbon, Littleton, Lyman, Monroe, Sugar Hill, and Whitefield. The Littleton LMA has more towns than the other LMAs in the region. Listed above are the housing needs assessments for the Littleton LMA based on the three housing models.

The model shows a need for an increase in the total housing stock. The estimate shows a need for 1,260 new housing units (812 owner-occupied and 448 renter-occupied) in the LMA. The Littleton LMA represents the second highest housing production need in the North Country, with the Conway LMA requiring the greatest production need, with 1,305 units.

### III. HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the town’s Master Plan was last updated in 2008, a variety of regulations have been put in place in Franconia to encourage more affordable housing, flexible and creative housing development options, as well as increased preservation of open space.

- Cluster development zoning regulations were added as a viable development option allowing for more affordable single-family housing while also helping preserve more open spaces



- A designated “village mixed use” district was created to allow for more development density in the core village area (where municipal water exists), as well as the ability to combine residential and commercial spaces to create more affordable housing.
- More options are currently being proposed, such as detached ADU’s as another method of creating more extended family housing options and/or long-term rental units that are affordable.
- Based on feedback from the 2021 Master Plan survey, and 2023 Housing Listening session, it was identified that the town may benefit from more regulatory control on the growth of short-term rentals in Franconia.
- **With** its unique history and concentrated development format, it has been suggested that Franconia consider developing a set of zoning regulations specific to Mittersill.

### Affordable Housing

One issue regarding housing that emerged from the 2021 Master Plan survey was the recognition of the widespread lack of available affordable housing. The Town of Franconia is a desirable place to live with its proximity to recreational opportunities, scenic views, local elementary school and nearby high school, and proximity to the highway. Another attraction for Franconia is its proximity to the Town of Littleton, which is a major commercial and employment hub for the region.

The town may want to explore various planning and zoning options that will not adversely affect the feel of the community but assist and address affordability concerns. Areas to be considered: Conservation development, age friendly neighborhoods, Form Based Codes, Missing Middle Housing Types, wastewater system alternatives, and potential work force housing. A valuable resource these options are defined in the NH Housing Toolbox – Planning and Zoning strategies for housing production in New Hampshire communities. This toolbox was prepared by the NH Office of Planning and Development, members of the Regional Housing Needs Assessment Committee and staff at NH’s Regional Planning Commissions.

A valuable resource the Town already has for its elderly is the Lafayette Senior Living Center, but the Town should research ways to encourage the development of independent living housing for the elderly. This is a form of affordable housing geared towards the senior population of the Town. Independent living housing would include smaller, affordable single-housing dwellings clustered in a particular area with shared common space, parks, and gardens where a population of elderly citizens can live in a communal setting while keeping their independence.

## CHAPTER 6: RECREATION

This section includes an inventory of existing recreation facilities and a corresponding recreation facility location map. The existing recreation facilities in the community include:

1. Dow Recreation Area - The grounds adjacent to the Dow Academy were donated to Franconia to be used for recreational purposes. The fields at Dow Academy are used for many recreational activities including cross-country skiing, soccer, concerts, lacrosse, baseball, disc golf and ultimate frisbee. There are picnic tables, a playground, a recently constructed gazebo, and pavilion. The area is also used for special community events like the Halloween bonfire and Old Home Day events and fireworks. Because this area is so heavily used, maintenance is needed to keep the recreational fields safe and clean.
2. Fox Hill Park - This area is primarily used for mountain biking, hiking, river swimming, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and wildlife and flora viewing. The many trails in Fox Hill Park connect throughout the village and residential community.
3. New Hiking Trails/Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT)- There are many hiking trails located throughout the town, used by hikers, mountain bikers, cross-country skiers, and snowshoers. The Franconia Area Trail System, extending from Fox Hill Park, through the Lawrence Family Forest to the Franconia Inn, is managed and signed by the Franconia Area New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) in partnership with the Inn. The Lawrence Family Forest consists of about 115 acres of undeveloped forest land along Beaver Brook and Meadow Brook and is adjacent to the Franconia Town Forest. The Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT) has held a conservation easement in the Lawrence Family Forest since April of 2017 to allow for low-impact recreation, education, forestry, and open space use on the property for perpetuity. Maps of the trail systems and conservation lands can be found at <http://www.franconianh.org/trails--parks.html> and [www.act-nh.org](http://www.act-nh.org), respectively.
4. Recreation Easements - The area located along Route 116 and abutting the Ham Branch has recreation easements. It is known as the First Track Circle trails and is used primarily for cross-country skiing as part of the Franconia Inn ski trail system.
5. Franconia Notch State Park - The park spans from the Town of Lincoln to the Town of Franconia and although it offers many amenities, only some of those amenities are within the borders of Franconia. One of these facilities is Cannon Mountain. Cannon Mountain has 285 skiable acres, ninety-seven ski trails and glades on approximately twenty-five miles of trails, and 10 ski lifts. Cannon gets an average of 160 inches of snow a year and is usually open from November through April for downhill skiing. Cannon Mountain is perceived as being both challenging and family friendly. In the summer, visitors can ride the Cannon Aerial Tram which takes one to the 4100-foot summit in less than eight minutes. At the summit there are walking paths, an observation deck, cafeteria, and restrooms. At the base of Cannon Mountain is Echo Lake and Beach where people enjoy sunbathing, swimming, and other lakeside recreational activities. Echo Lake also includes

an RV campground and bathroom facilities. Both Echo Lake, and neighboring Profile Lake, provide excellent fishing, kayaking, and canoeing. The memorial to the Old Man of the Mountain is on the shores of Profile Lake accessed by a paved pathway. Across the street from Echo Beach are Artist's Bluff and Bald Mountain. There are hiking trails that lead to the summits of both peaks. This area is also used for rock climbing, as are the Echo Craggs located on the opposite side of I-93 and the Cannon Cliffs on the back side of Cannon Mountain ski area. The Franconia Notch Recreation Trail also begins in the Town of Franconia. This trail is used frequently by bicyclists and travels the length of the Notch to the Flume Gorge area in Lincoln. Although most of Lafayette Campground is in the Town of Lincoln, a handful of sites at the northern end are in the Town of Franconia. The area of the park located within Franconia's town borders also contains several hiking trails, most notable, the Appalachian Trail which travels from the State of Georgia to Maine, cutting through the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

6. Mittersill - A land swap between Franconia Notch State Park and Mittersill resulted in the Mittersill ski trails becoming part of the Franconia Notch State Park and a vital component of Cannon Mountain.
7. The Rink - The Town has a rink located next to the Town Hall off Main Street. The rink is used for ice skating and hockey in the winter months and for skateboarding, basketball and potential pickleball in the summer.
8. River Rock Walk and Franconia Art Walk - The Franconia Artwalk commenced in 2019 as a self-directed outdoor walking tour of sculptures, mosaics, paintings, and ceramics, and a venue for art-related events and attractions. It is free of charge and is open annually from July through Columbus Day Weekend in October. The walk consists of a loop across the Hillwinds Bridge, past the Dow Academy, and along the Gale River. Information on each year's Artwalk is distributed in a free brochure/map available at over 30 area venues, as well as on the Artwalk's website: <https://artwalkfranconianh.org/>. Artists from all over New England have displayed their works in the yearly exhibitions. In the coming years, the Association intends to develop other attractions to promote the Arts, along with its yearly exhibitions.
9. Notchway Trail System - The trail system land is owned by the White Mountain National Forest but lies within the Town of Franconia's boundaries. The trails are used for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking and mountain biking. This trail system also connects with the Recreational Path in Franconia Notch State Park. The Notchway trail is used during the Top of the Notch Triathlon for the bike portion of the race.
10. Gale River - The Gale River meanders through the Town of Franconia. Many residents and visitors use the river for fishing, swimming, and kayaking. The river is listed in whitewater kayaking guides.
11. Ham Branch - The Ham Branch, which follows Route 116 south through Easton, also provides recreational opportunities such as fishing, swimming, and kayaking. It too is listed in whitewater kayaking guides.

12. Franconia Airport - Franconia Airport is located on Route 116 across the street from the Franconia Inn. It contains a 2100-foot turf runway and is used by local and visiting pilots. The airport is owned by the Franconia Soaring Center (FSC) and is used for taking visitors on glider rides above Franconia Notch State Park and the surrounding area. Additionally, the FSC is used to train pilots.
13. Profile Golf Course - This private golf course is located off Interstate 93 near Butter Hill Road. The golf course has a nine-hole regulation course and a 15-tee driving range.
14. Fransted Family Campground - This campground is located on Route 18 and has ninety-six campsites. The campground also includes a playground, picnic tables, miniature golf, and a volleyball area, as well as opportunities for fishing, swimming, and hiking.

## I. RECOMMENDATIONS & FUTURE NEEDS

The Lafayette Recreation Department accepts responsibility for the development of school-age children in our community into responsible citizens. All past, present, and future decisions on programs, facilities and events use this vision as a guide.

It is acknowledged that meaningful progress has been made in adopting recreational recommendations from the 2008 Master Plan. These include Dow playground, pavilion, disc golf and ultimate frisbee. The following are recommendations for improving the existing recreational facilities in town to continue to provide a high-quality recreational experience and lifestyle for the citizens of Franconia and for the visitors to the area. This includes continuing to develop recreation programs for children, young adults, and residents of all ages.

### Hiking and Biking Trails

The recreation department would like to partner with the conservation committee and the planning board to develop a plan for maintaining the current trail system and identifying future trail ways. A study should be done to include mapping, parking, signage, and promotion of the trail system.

### Cross Country Skiing

Undertake efforts and devote resources to revive and maintain Franconia's reputation as a destinate for cross-country skiing. This could include coordination with neighboring towns and private owners to develop and maintain cross-country ski trails. (i.e., Ski Hearth Farm, Franconia Inn, etc.)

### Bike Paths

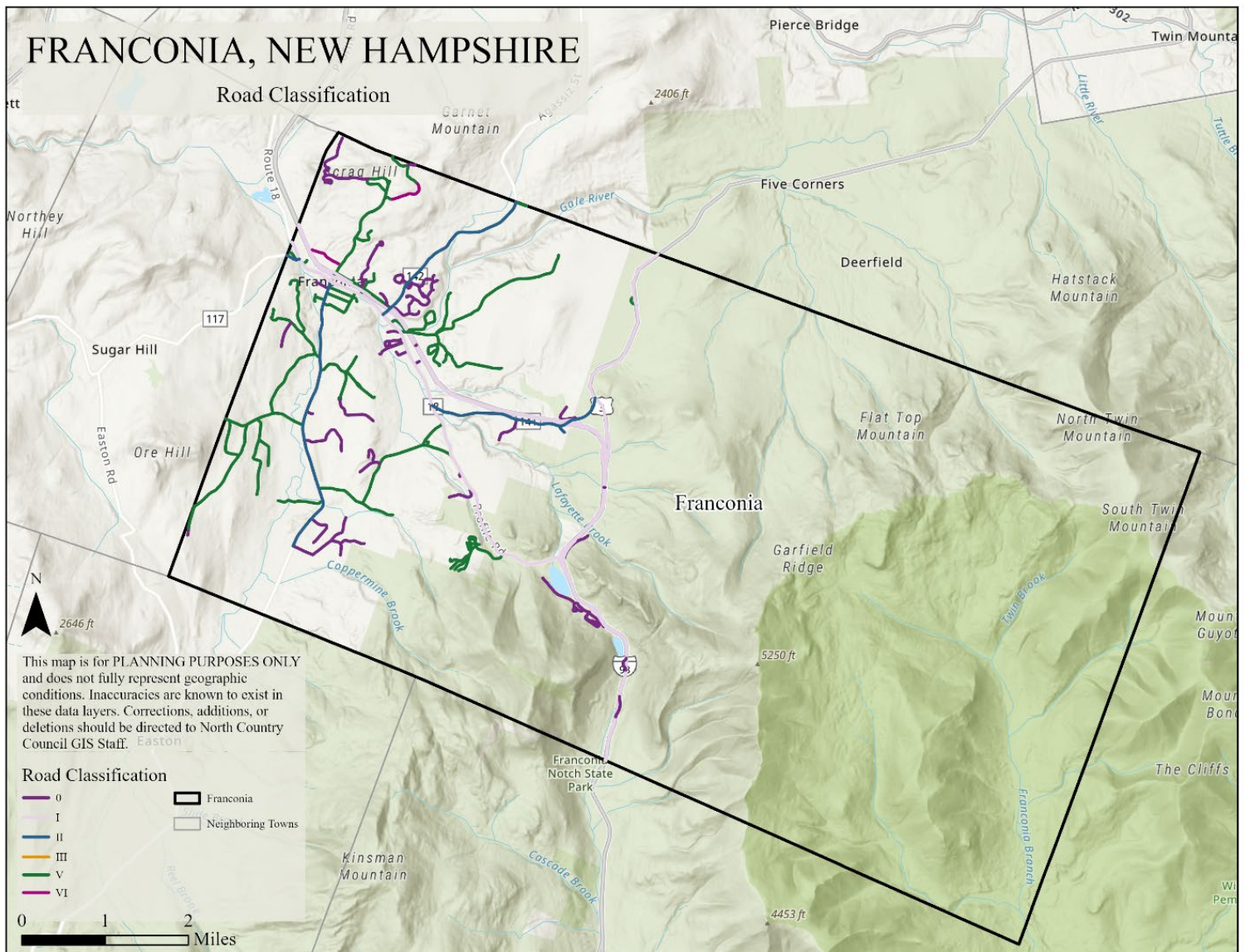
The Town of Carroll is currently working on a proposal to build a new bike path along Route 3 from the Franconia Notch Parkway north into Twin Mountain. Although the Town of Franconia does not own a lot of land that abuts this new proposed corridor, it is important for the Town to stay involved with the planning process because it has the potential of bringing more people into the area.

# CHAPTER 7: TRANSPORTATION

## I. GENERAL TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION

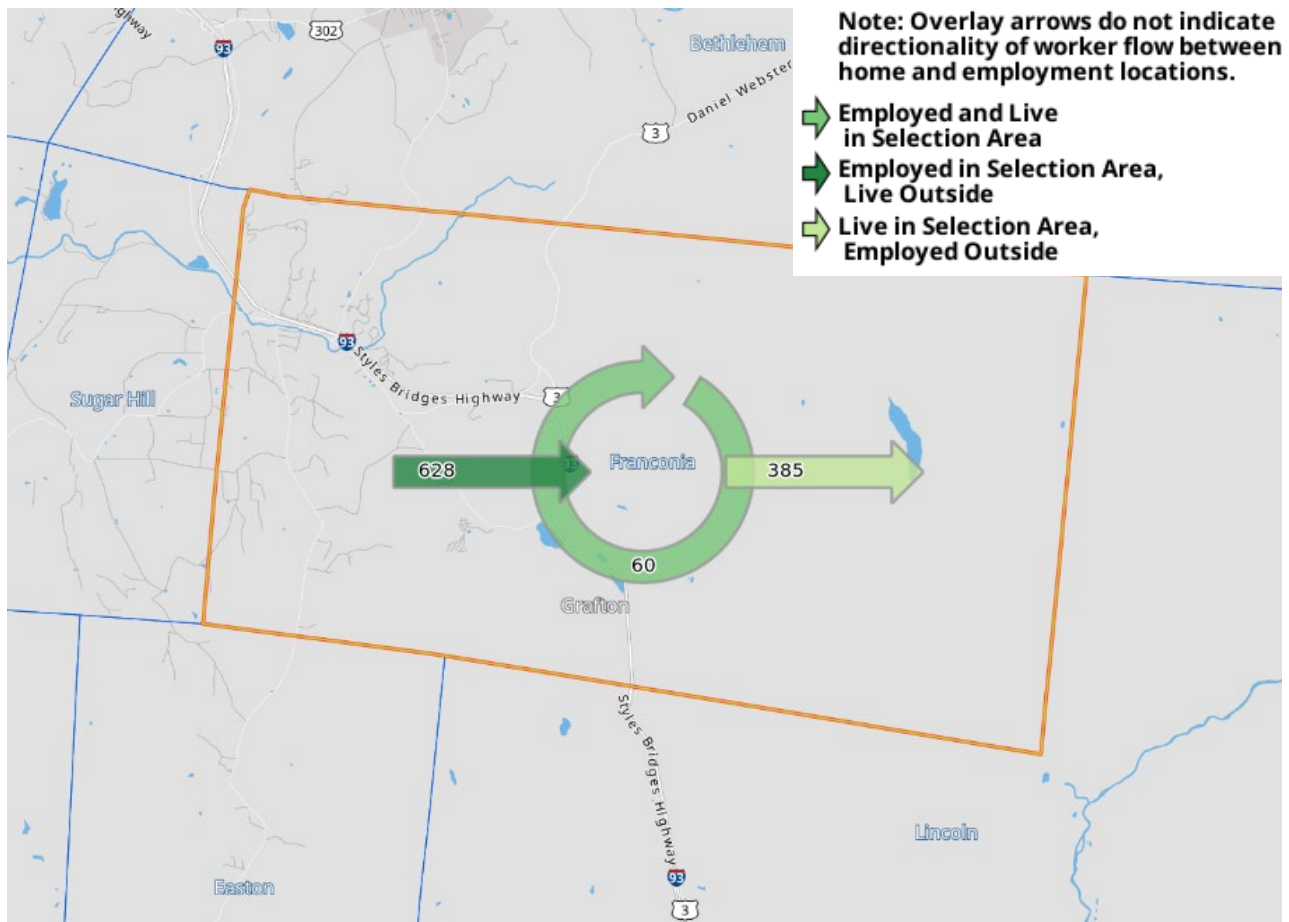
Transportation facilities play a significant role in the development of communities and the transformation of land uses. The movement of people, goods and services can sometimes adversely change the nature of an area if not planned properly and developed in context with the area. Transportation facilities are more than just roads but also include public transportation, airports, sidewalks, bike lanes and trails. A good combination of transportation facilities usually results in a more context-sensitive transportation network in a community.

Below is a chart of the Town of Franconia's general transportation network as compiled by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation.



As seen above, the Town is served by one interstate, Interstate 93, one federal route, Route 3, and five state routes, Route 18, Route 116, Route 142, Route 141, and Route 117. For a rural town where more than half of the land acreage is in a National Forest, Franconia has a lot of major roadway mileage. Additionally, the Town has several local roads of importance that are part of the town’s road network which sustain constant flows of traffic.

A principal element to examine when planning for transportation needs within a community is the commuting patterns and behaviors of residents. The 2020 U.S. Census contains information on commuting habits which is displayed below.

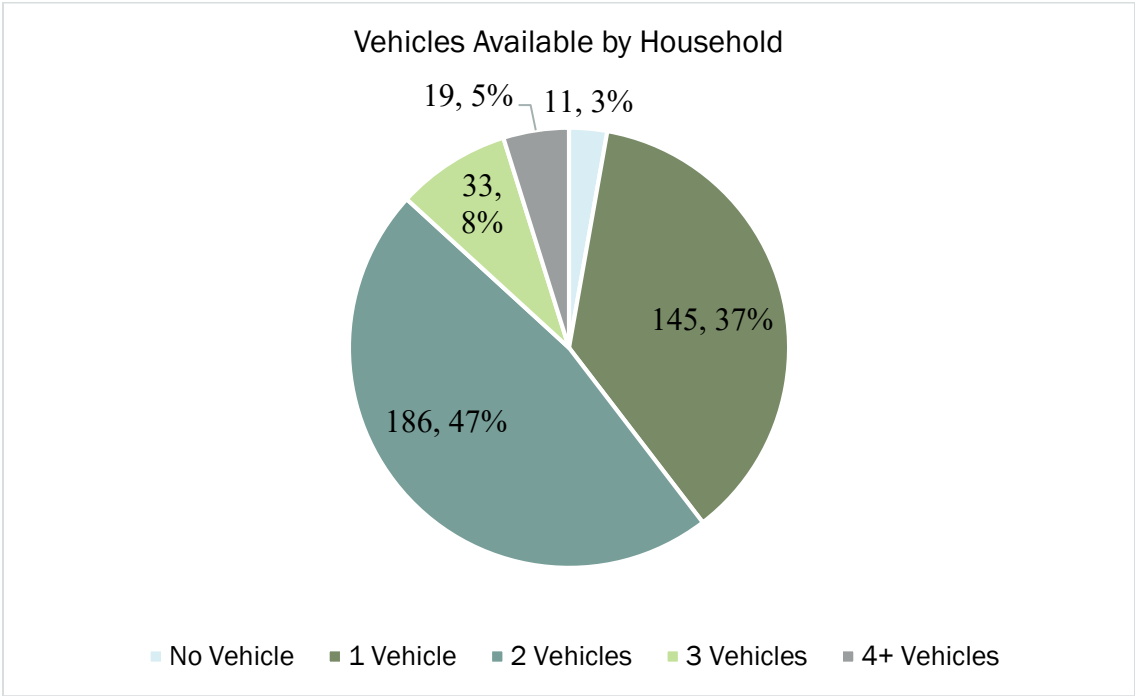


As with all towns throughout northern New Hampshire, most people commute to work via car, truck, or van, and most of them commute alone. Only a few people, 6.7%, carpool to their places of employment. Approximately 4% commute to work by walking, those living close to the village who work in the village. No one in town commutes via public transportation because it

does not exist in town. Although 42% of residents commute to other New Hampshire towns for employment, they are only commuting an average of 19.7 minutes which is a short commute in comparison to other towns in the region. Additionally, 5% are working in town, which also lowers the average commute time to work.

Mode of Transportation for Commuting to Work	Number of Residents
Car, Van, Truck (Drove alone)	326
Car, Van, Truck (Carpooled)	28
Bicycle	11
Walked	18
Motorcycle/other	15
Worked from home	16

Vehicles are an integral part of most households with 84% having two to three vehicles. Only 3% have no vehicle. (See chart below)





## II. FRANCONIA'S ROAD NETWORK

It is important to examine the road network more closely in town because it is the largest transportation facility that exists. In this section, road classification, the major roadway network, and the local roadway network will be examined.

### Road Classification

The Department of Transportation's Bureau of Municipal Highways classifies roadways throughout the state and uses these classifications to determine where municipal aid can be used. RSA 229:5 lists the types of classifications that exist and describes the differences among classes. The RSA outline classifies roads as follows:

- **Class I highways** shall consist of all existing or proposed highways on the primary state highway system, excepting all portions of such highways within the compact sections of the cities and towns listed in RSA 229:5, V, provided that the portions of the turnpikes and the national system of interstate and defense highways within the compact sections of these cities and towns shall be class I highways.
- **Class II highways** shall consist of all existing or proposed highways on the secondary state highway system, excepting all portions of such highways within the compact sections of the cities and towns listed in RSA 229:5, V.
- **Class III highways** shall consist of all recreational roads leading to, and within, state reservations designated by the legislature.
  - o **Class III-a** highways shall consist of new boating access highways from any existing highway to any public water in this state. All class III-a highways shall be limited access facilities as defined in RSA 230:44. Class III-a highways shall be subject to the layout, design, construction, and maintenance provisions of RSA 230:45-47 and all other provisions relative to limited access facilities, except that the executive director of the fish and game department shall have the same authority for class III-a highways that is delegated to the commissioner of the department of transportation for limited access facilities. A class III-a highway may be laid out subject to the condition that it shall not be maintained during the winter months. A class III-a highway may be laid out subject to gates and bars or restricted to the accommodation of persons on foot, or certain vehicles, or both, if federal funds are not used. The executive director of fish and game may petition the governor and council to discontinue any class III-a highway.
- **Class IV highways** shall consist of all highways within the compact sections of cities and towns listed in RSA 229:5, V. The compact section of any such city or town shall be the territory within such city or town where the frontage on any highway, in the opinion of the commissioner of transportation, is mainly occupied by dwellings or buildings in which people live or business is conducted, throughout the year and not for a season only. Whenever the commissioner reclassifies a section of a class I or class II highway as a

class IV highway, the commissioner shall prepare a statement of rehabilitation work which shall be performed by the state in connection with the turnback. No highway reclassification from class I or II to class IV shall take effect until all rehabilitation needed to return the highway surface to reputable condition has been completed by the state. Rehabilitation shall be completed during the calendar year preceding the effective date of the reclassification. A copy of the commissioner's statement of work to be performed by the state shall be attached to the notification of reclassification to class IV, and receipt of said statement shall be acknowledged, in writing, by the selectmen of the town, or the mayor of the city, affected by the reclassification.

- **Class V highways** shall consist of all other traveled highways which the town has the duty to maintain regularly and shall be known as town roads. Any public highway which at one time lapsed to Class VI status due to 5-years' non-maintenance, as set forth in RSA 229:5, VII, but which subsequently has been regularly maintained and repaired by the town on more than a seasonal basis and in suitable condition for year-round travel thereon for at least 5 successive years without being declared an emergency lane pursuant to RSA 231:59-a, shall be deemed a Class V highway.
- **Class VI highways** shall consist of all other existing public ways, and shall include all highways discontinued as open highways and made subject to gates and bars, except as provided in paragraph III-a, and all highways which have not been maintained and repaired by the town in suitable condition for travel thereon for 5 successive years or more except as restricted by RSA 231:3, II.
- **Scenic Roads: Designation.** Any road in a town, other than a class I or class II highway, may be designated as a scenic road in the following manner. The process for such a designation is provided in NH RSA 231:157 and includes a warrant to be voted on at the Town Meeting.

The chart below represents the number of miles per classification of road in the Town of Franconia. There are more miles of Class V roads in Franconia than any other classification, but the Town also has a significant amount of Interstate, Class II, and private roads. No road is classified as Class IV.

State Highway System			Town Roads			
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Total
32.87	8.93	0.11		26.56	0.87	69.35 miles

### Major Roadway Network

The Town of Franconia includes seven federal and state roadways which make up the major roadway network. These roads include Interstate 93, Route 3, Route 18, Route 116, Route 142, Route 141, and Route 117. As with many towns, some of the state roadways are also local connectors and local main streets that accommodate multiple transportation uses and multiple land uses. Keeping that in mind, it is important to strike a balance with the through traffic that is

using these roadways to connect from one town to another and the local traffic serving the village businesses and residential areas.

**Interstate 93:** Although the Interstate travels north of Lincoln into Franconia Notch, technically, Route 3, known as the Franconia Notch Parkway, is the roadway in the Notch itself. Interstate 93 reconnects where Route 3 splits north towards Twin Mountain at Exit 35. The Interstate in Franconia runs from this intersection northwest towards Littleton. Exits 35, 36, 37, and 38 are within the Town of Franconia providing access to various parts of the Town. Although traffic counts for the Interstate decline north of the Notch and the intersection of Route 3, the Interstate continues northwest to Interstate 91 bringing truck traffic and tourism traffic into Vermont and Canada. The roadway remains busy throughout the year with winter, summer, and fall foliage tourism activities.

**Route 3:** Route 3 is also known as the Franconia Notch Parkway in the southern portion of town where the roadway travels through Franconia Notch State Park. This section of roadway experiences heavy traffic due to the many recreational facilities in the Notch. Some of the most visited facilities, such as Cannon Mountain, the former Old Man Viewing, Echo Lake, Bald Mountain and Artist's Bluff are all located in Franconia along Route 3 or by access from Route 3. Just north of the Notch, Route 3 splits from Interstate 93 and heads northeast towards Twin Mountain. This section of Route 3 is also heavily used because it is the main route for all traffic heading into northern New Hampshire.

**Route 18:** This is an important roadway in Franconia's roadway network because of its multiple functions. Traveling north, Route 18 intersects Route 3, the Franconia Notch Parkway, at Echo Lake, Cannon Mountain, and Artist's Bluff exit, Exit 34C. From this recreational area, the roadway travels northwest and connects to several residences and local residential neighborhoods. It also intersects Route 141, also known as Butter Hill Road. As it enters the village, Route 18 becomes the Town's Main Street, providing access to local businesses, town recreation areas, and additional residences. It is intersected by Route 142 and Route 116; and before it continues out of town, it is also intersected by Route 117, which is the main roadway into the Town of Sugar Hill.

**Route 116:** Route 116 travels from the intersection of Route 18 in the village south through Easton and intersects with Route 112, also known as the western portion of the Kancamagus Highway. Route 116 primarily serves residential neighborhoods and lots but also provides access to hiking trails, hotels and inns, and the Franconia airport. It is intersected by many important local roadways such as Wells Road, Old County Road, and Lafayette Road. It is also a designated bicycle route which is used frequently by bicyclists from the area as well as visitors.

**Route 142:** Route 142 begins at the intersection of Route 18 just south of the village and heads north into the Town of Bethlehem. There are several residential developments along this roadway in the Town of Franconia, and there is also development on this roadway in Bethlehem.

This is important because people from Bethlehem can easily access Franconia, Sugar Hill, and Interstate 93 by traveling on this roadway.

**Route 141:** This short state route is also known as Butter Hill Road. It begins at its intersection with Route 18 and ends at its intersection with Route 3.

**Route 117:** Only a short portion of this state route travels through Franconia from its intersection with Route 18. However, Route 117 is the main street into Sugar Hill, and many residents of Sugar Hill access the Town at this intersection.

### Local Roadway Network

There are a few local roadways, maintained by the Town, which are an important part of the overall transportation network in town. Most of these roadways are connectors to other major roadways or to other towns, and some are important because of the volume of residential development along them. Below is a list of the significant local roads:

- Wells Road - Roadway connects Route 18 and Route 116 without having to travel into the village; it gets people from one side of town to the other and into other towns in the southern part of town.
- Coal Hill Road - Roadway is access to several summer cottages and experiences more traffic during peak seasons.
- Lafayette Road - At its intersection with Route 116, connects the southern part of Franconia to Sugar Hill, connecting to Sugar Hill's Main Street.
- Wallace Hill Road - Traffic is picking up due to residential development. The upper portion of the roadway is Class VI.
- Toad Hill Road - A connector roadway that intersects Lafayette Road (see above) and travels south providing access to southern Sugar Hill and roadways into Landaff.
- Old County and Franconia Mountains Road – These roads have seen increased residential development.
- Timber Lane – More residential development is increasing traffic.

### III. OTHER MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

The Town of Franconia also supports other modes of transportation. The Town has a privately owned airport, which is primarily used for recreational purposes. The airport has a grass runway that operates under visual flight rules and hosts a glider towing operation in the summer. There are no public amenities available. The Franconia Soaring Association is currently (2023/2024) building new training facilities. Pilots needing to use a larger commercial airport can access Whitefield's airport which has a four-thousand-foot paved runway with instrument approaches and is within proximity to the Town of Franconia.

Franconia also has sidewalks within the village. These are located along Main Street, Route 117, Route 142, and Route 116. Some of the sidewalks have been recently constructed, however, the remaining are in poor condition and need to be replaced.

Additionally, in 2023, the Town Energy Commission collaborated with a local business to install the first publicly accessible Level 2 EV charging station. This initiative highlights the town's commitment to clean transportation and paves the way for further expansion.

Bicycles are a popular mode of transportation for residents and tourists. Biking infrastructure and trail systems have expanded in the recent past. More work is needed to improve the facilities that support biking in Franconia and create safe routes. The “Bike the North Country” path map is available at the Franconia Welcome Center. It can also be accessed online at [www.bikethenorthcountry.com](http://www.bikethenorthcountry.com).

There is no public transportation service currently within the Town of Franconia. Concord Coach Lines stops at Franconia Market and Deli in route to Littleton and Concord/Boston.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the Town of Franconia is intersected by major highways and routes, keeping a balance between through traffic, tourist traffic, and the local traffic is especially important. Additionally, some of the state routes that carry through traffic and tourist traffic are located within the Village of Franconia and/or residential neighborhoods where conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists can occur. To provide a safer and more efficient transportation network, the Town recognizes a few needed projects and improvements to the current transportation system. Additional recommendations are:

- Existing sidewalks that are in poor condition and need to be replaced.
- Access to public parking should be addressed and improved.
- Construction of additional charging locations for electric vehicles should be encouraged. This is currently under discussion by the Energy Commission.
- Providing safer, practical bike and walking routes/lanes should be a future goal for the town.
- Encourage greater availability of public transportation options in the town.
- Lastly, the Town should assess the economics and feasibility of unpaved versus paved roads.

## CHAPTER 8: COMMUNITY DESIGN

### I. INTRODUCTION

Community design is a key component of any community’s vision where the character and image of the community are valued assets. In Franconia, the citizens’ most valued features include the small village, mountain views, and the rural character. Community design includes the scale and appropriateness and aesthetic value of the built and natural environment within the community. It takes into consideration the size of structures, placement of facilities, access to important places, and the overall look and feel of a given area. In Franconia, community design ideas and recommendations have been limited to the village area.

### II. CORRESPONDING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

It was determined that community design is an important aspect to consider based on the responses from the 2021 Master Plan Survey. Responding citizens of Franconia stated that the small village, views, rural character, and Main Street were valued resources and that measures should be taken to protect them and enhance them.

The following are goals that were created in the Vision Section of this Master Plan as they relate to aspects of community design:

#### Town Character

Goal: Maintain the small village commercial atmosphere:

- Encourage new small businesses to locate in the village center of the Town
- Any business should complement the smaller village feel and environment of the town, while discouraging large commercial retailers

Goal: Protect the scenic beauty, and small-town character of Franconia:

- The town, in concert with the Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT), should continue to purchase land for conservation purposes and view shed protection
- Continue to develop and protect the Town's recreational assets
- Consider burying utility lines where feasible

Goal: Protect the integrity of Main Street, and the Village:

- Continue to encourage the development of green space areas along Main Street
- Continue to improve the appearance of Main Street through clean-up programs and keep the small-town architecture by examining sign, architecture, and design ordinances
- Place welcome signs at the entrances to town and along Main Street and promote recreational biking
- Continue to maintain the new town Welcome Center

### III. COMMUNITY DESIGN COMPONENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Community design can include many attributes such as the placement of buildings or the specific locations of infrastructure and green spaces. The Town of Franconia examined the following attributes: landscaping; lighting; and bicycle facilities as they relate to the village area of town.

#### Landscaping and other Amenities

In the 2021 Master Plan survey, several responding citizens stressed the need for green spaces in the village area of Franconia. There is some landscaping at a few businesses in town but no consistent landscaping throughout the village. A plan is devised to view parking and access opportunities in the village landscaping can be placed in areas where parking or access no longer exists. Landscaping not only improves the aesthetics of the village but also serves as a buffer between pedestrians and automobiles. In addition to landscaping, site furniture should be incorporated throughout the village. Site furniture includes, but is not limited to, benches, trash receptacles, and planter boxes. Having safe sidewalks and crosswalks makes an area pedestrian friendly but having appropriate landscaping and other pedestrian amenities encourages and invites people to walk through the village and mingle with others. To promote a more walkable community, a Welcome Center has been erected with restrooms, Wi-Fi, and additional parking.

#### Lighting

Although lighting is currently not an issue in town, it is important that the town officials realize the significance lighting plays in community design. A rural town with a quaint village could be negatively affected by large, bright lighting cantilevers. Also, the direction of the lighting could have an impact on the rural setting of the community. Lighting should face downwards to not cast lights into the night sky and impact the view. The Town should review current lighting requirements for residential and commercial developments to ensure that the standards meet the vision of the community.

#### Bicycle Amenities

Biking is an important recreation, as well as transportation, element of the community. However, the village area could use some improvements in designing bicycle amenities. Bicyclists should be encouraged to use multi-use trails, and the Town should work on connecting those trails to the businesses in the village. A system of trails would keep children off the roadway through the village where parking and access are already a potential safety hazard. The Town should continue this system as part of the town's trail planning efforts.

## CHAPTER 9: COMMUNITY FACILITIES

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Town of Franconia has many community facilities within its jurisdiction and the condition, availability, and use of these facilities are impacted by the rate of growth and development. Community Facilities include the Town Hall, Safety Service building (police and fire), Tri-town Transfer Station, Highway complex, Water Department, Abbie Greenleaf Library, Welcome Center and skating rink, Heritage Museum, Frost Place Museum, Iron Foundry Interpretive Center, and the Dow strip recreation area.

### II. GOALS RELATED TO COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Goal: Enhance Franconia’s community facilities/utilities for community residents and visitors:

- Continue a coordinated approach to addressing the needs of the community’s infrastructure through capital reserve funds and grants.
- Develop a plan of construction, renovation, and support of the infrastructure for the future.

### III. PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES – CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP)

The Town’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Committee is a nine-member Committee that consists of the Town Administrator, a Select Board representative, a Planning Board representative and six citizen appointees. Annually, the Committee meets with all town department heads and reviews their capital requests for equipment and projects. The Committee maintains a spreadsheet to assist in future planning for all areas (facilities and capital inventory).

The CIP plan objective is to outline capital requests over a five-year period including estimates for future year expenditures. The CIP plan is tied to the goals of the Master Plan. It puts the operating budget and the capital budget in perspective. It is based on the existing fixed asset inventory and presents a replacement and renewal schedule that makes sense. The plan also requires cooperation among department heads, the town officials and planning board members. The CIP acts as a bridge between the planning process and the budget process. Using all the information gathered during the annual CIP process, town officials can help voters make informed decisions about appropriations and policies.

## CHAPTER 10: NATURAL RESOURCES



## I. INTRODUCTION

The natural landscape and its many resources are important to the citizens of Franconia. There are various natural resources in Franconia, including wetlands and waterways, steep slopes and ridges, forested mountains, low-lying valleys, and open fields. Citizens of the Town feel the natural resources are integral to the community and are a major factor in their decision to reside in Franconia. Identification of the resources and strategies for protecting them are important steps the Town should continue to take.

The Town is collaborating with Watershed to Wildlife, which conducted the existing Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) in 2007, on an update to be completed in 2024. Meanwhile, elucidation of emerging priorities of the new inventory are included in this summary chapter. The inventory will examine existing conditions in many natural resource categories and will include a list of recommendations for protecting these resources. This chapter will link the recommendations from the study to the Land Use Section of this Master Plan. Master plan priorities related to housing and transportation should be implemented in a way that respects the sensitivities identified in the Natural Resource Inventory.

## II. RELATED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives were identified in the Vision and Goals sections of this Master Plan and are related to the natural resources of the Town of Franconia.

### Natural Resources

Goal: Balance new development with the protection and preservation of the Town's natural resources:

- Encourage habitat sensitive development
- Protect slope degradation from ridgeline construction

Goal: Protect and promote Franconia's natural resources as an economic and community benefit.

Goal: Preserve Franconia's rural character by protecting Franconia's natural resources:

- Update the Town's existing Natural Resource Inventory.
- Identify prime areas for protection and conservation, including those for protection in emerging cluster zone sustainable developments.
- Prioritize additional conservation plans for the purchase of land and conservation easement.

Goal: Protect Franconia's groundwater:

- Promote awareness and education (e.g., through improvement of local web-based tools) about risks to our headwater environment associated with contamination, both current and emerging (including to water sources, aquifer, and surface waters).
- Continue to develop stormwater retention areas on sites affecting groundwater recharge.
- Periodic assessments of surface and groundwater quality.
- Identify areas for remediation where threats to water resources are identified.
- Secure funding for appropriate professional geologic/hydrographic study to better understand the dynamics and threats to our valley water supply, ideally in collaboration with our neighboring valley municipalities.
- Continue to expand buffer zones along waterways.

Goal: Promote awareness of local environmental risks and identify potential mitigations, including:

- Existence of legacy heavy metal residuals associated with mineral veins and 19<sup>th</sup> century mining operations and risk of excavations
- The presence of 20<sup>th</sup> century landfill residues' interaction with drinking water resources.
- Climate change associated risks of drought, wildfires, and floods
- Invasive plant species and biodiversity loss
- Locations with naturally occurring radon in homes and mitigation
- Light Pollution and its adverse impact on birds and insects

### III. NATURAL RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

The information contained in this section is a summary of the results collected in the 2007 Natural Resource Inventory conducted by Watershed to Wildlife, which is undergoing an update in 2024. The summary includes an overview of rivers and large water bodies, riparian habitat, wetlands, permanent openings, forested lands, bedrock geology, soils, prime, state, and local farmland, stratified drift aquifers, slope, rare species and exemplary natural communities, conservation lands, and invasive species. It contains reflection of recent insights and an initial assessment of interval changes since the previous inventory. Notably, insights into the fragility of some of our resources, their interconnection with our neighboring municipalities and the need for improved public awareness of the multiple threats from climate change are included.

#### Rivers and Large Water Bodies

The Town of Franconia contains approximately 0.1 square miles of inland water including the two largest water bodies, Echo Lake, and Profile Lake. Also included in the White Mountain National Forest and identified as large water bodies are Garfield Pond and Eagle Lakes. The largest river in town is the Gale River which flows through the center of Franconia Village. The Gale River Watershed is also the public Drinking Water Supply for the Towns of Littleton and Bethlehem. Other significant rivers and streams include the Ham Branch, Pemigewasset, and Meadow Brook, along with many small tributaries that flow into these resources.



Chris Whiton Photography

#### Riparian Habitat

Riparian areas are those adjacent to most rivers and streams and are in the form of floodplain forest, scrub- shrub, grasslands, and meadows. In this transitional zone between the water bodies and the open fields and forests, many wildlife and plant species thrive. These areas are rich in bird species and aquatic and terrestrial mammals. These areas are used for feeding, mating, and resting as well as travel corridors for wildlife. Franconia is full of riparian habitats, especially in the form of forested floodplains, along such rivers and streams as the Gale River, Ham Branch and Meadow Brook. The importance of these riparian floodplains in recharging our valley aquifers and buffering downtown from flash flooding events has been increasingly appreciated.

## Climate

The Franconia valley has a temperate climate that is shielded from marine influence and is less subject to cold air damming than the uplands in the Eastern side of the township and Franconia Notch. The mountains have traditionally assured minimal periods of extended drought, and water has been a plentiful resource. The high mountain ridges from Mt. Moosilauke in the south and extending the full length of the town's southern border subjects the town to strong downdraft southerly winds, especially in advance of frontal passages and low-pressure systems passing to the west and north. These winds can be extreme and are associated with blowdowns in forested areas and newly exposed forest edges created by land clearing. In typical Franconia winters the winds also result in periodic valley thaws.

While our valley is relatively water rich, it is anticipated that regional extremes in both excess precipitation and extended hot/dry periods will take place across New England and elsewhere across the Continental US. For an overview of expected changes, see the chapter on the Northeast of the report of the Fifth National Climate Assessment.

<https://nca2023.globalchange.gov/chapter/21/>

## Wetlands

Wetlands are critical natural resources for several reasons, including:

- Essential plant and wildlife habitats.
- Water resource protection, enabling significant storage of flood/runoff during high-water events.
- Contributors to groundwater recharge, acting as a filter for groundwater.

The Town of Franconia has a low percentage of wetlands due to sandy soils and steep slopes. Therefore, the wetlands the Town does have are extremely important to protect. There were roughly 544 acres of wetlands delineated as of 2007, not including wetlands in the White Mountain National Forest and Franconia Notch State Park. There are also smaller wetland complexes that have not been delineated that reside on hillsides in Franconia. These areas may be a threat to future residential development and should be identified and protected. The acquisition of the Lawrence Family Forest and additional land abutting the town forest have added an important conservation parcel including riparian flood plain and wetlands since 2015.

## Permanent Openings

Permanent Openings are identified as grasses, forbs, wildflowers, brambles, and shrubs in open fields that may have once been active agricultural lands. In the transitional zone between the forests and these open fields reside many wildlife species. There were 104 different openings (543 acres) as of 2007 identified during the Natural Resource Inventory, ranging in size from one-fourth of an acre to sixty-one acres. Most of these areas are old active agricultural lands and

some are fields of various vegetation. There are also some smaller permanent openings in residential areas in town. The management practice in powerline corridors and best environmental practices in managing for open space habitat for flora and fauna is an educational objective deserving prioritization. Development activities and forestry have modified this balance, and updated estimates will be quantified pending the natural resource inventory update.

### Forested Lands

Excluding the White Mountain National Forest, approximately 90% of Franconia was forested as of 2007. Common trees include white pine, eastern hemlock, red oak, yellow birch, white birch, red maple, sugar maple, American beech, white ash, black cherry, poplar, red spruce, American basswood, and balsam fir. Dense softwood stands are important for wildlife, especially for coverage during long winters and severe weather. Franconia has approximately 1,400 acres of dense softwood stands. Hardwood and mix stands provide mast production which are fruits, seeds and nuts. Many wildlife species' diets rely heavily on mast production of hardwood and mixed stands. Franconia is rich with hardwood and mixed stands. With proper forest management, the Town should be able to maintain its forest wildlife habitat in these areas. Emerging research is showing that older and more complex forest areas promote increased biodiversity and climate change resilience.

### Bedrock Geology

Ledge and rock outcrops are common in Franconia, particularly in the White Mountain National Forest and Franconia Notch State Park, including unique geological bedrock formations of granite and volcanic rock. Throughout the eastern portion of Franconia, it is common to find granite bedrock formations which are widely spread throughout the Granite state.

Bedrock lies below the glacial deposits and sediments that dominate our valley floor. Most of the deep wells serving the community tap this bedrock. Bedrock is also a source of radon that can be a risk to homeowners if not monitored and mitigated. Moreover, historical mining activities have disturbed some locations, releasing heavy metals into local environments. Excavation in such disturbed areas can pose risks of mineral and heavy metal contamination in water and soil.

### Soils

Franconia contains approximately forty various soil types, which support diverse plant and animal habitats. The most dominant type is excessive- to well-drained sandy soils, accounting for about 70% of the Town's soils. Most of these sandy soils can be found in forested areas, residential areas, and open fields/inactive agricultural lands. Residential development can be problematic in these areas because the soil shifts frequently creating an unstable surface. In addition, these fine sandy soils have high permeability causing runoff and filtration problems. Nitrogen and industrial chemicals absorption and clearance is reduced in glacial soils and can be a risk to water quality.

### Prime State and Focal Farmland

Out of the 11,633 acres in Franconia, excluding the White Mountain National Forest and Franconia Notch State Park, as of 2007, 443 acres of land were classified as USDA prime farmland, 631 acres of statewide importance, and 4,225 acres of local importance. Together, these three categories of soils, as defined by USDA, represent the land that is best suited to produce food, feed, fiber, oilseed crop, and forage. Some of these agricultural lands have already been lost to development. The Town should consider conserving some of those that are still available for agricultural use.

### Stratified Drift Aquifers and Bedrock Aquifers

Stratified Drift Aquifers are composed of unconsolidated glacial deposits and are sorted by grain. These areas are considered the most important source for groundwater. Approximately 2,709 acres (23%) of the area in western Franconia has Stratified Drift Aquifers, the majority lying along the Gale River, Ham Branch and Meadow Brook. In Franconia, Stratified Drift Aquifers are mostly made up of sandy material with small amounts of glacial till material.

The Town currently has two wells drawing from bedrock aquifers, for Franconia Village with 350 hookups and for Mittersill with 150 hookups. Critically it is the stratified drift aquifers that recharge the bedrock aquifers. As a headwater's location, all of Franconia's water flows from our immediate proximity and resides below us.

Community practice dictates what if any pollutants are added to our community water. As noted previously, due caution is required if contaminated sediments from 19<sup>th</sup> century mining and industrial activities as well as 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century landfill operations are disturbed. Public education is required regarding these risks, along with the importance of best practice procedures and diligence with respect to all disturbances to our soil. A deeper understanding of the movement of ground water and the recharge of aquifers is of relevance to the water resources available to the Tri-town valley. Such knowledge can also serve as an important guide to policies related to sewage treatment, waste disposal and risks associated with existing ground water contamination.

### Slope

Slope is an important land feature that supports not only unique habitats but also potentially natural features in lower lying areas. On steeper slopes, soils are shallower, so the volume and velocity of surface water runoff is higher and erosion downhill is more likely. Typically, slopes between 15 - 25% are too steep, and development should be restricted and/or limited. In areas where the slope is greater than 25%, development should be completely restricted. In Franconia, approximately 4,133 acres (35.5%) of land contains slopes that are over 15% and of that, 1,933 acres (16.6%) are over 25% slope. This does not include the White Mountain National Forest or Franconia Notch State Park.

## Rare Species and Exemplary Natural Communities

Most of the rare species that have been documented in Franconia are in the White Mountain National Forest and Franconia Notch State Park. The 2007 NRI focused on the western portions of the Town outside of the state and federal lands. However, it is possible that many of the same rare species' features, such as peregrine falcon nesting areas, can be seen in the western portion of Franconia as well.



Franconia Notch, New Hampshire Parks

Since the 2007 NRI, at least three wildlife species designated as NH Special Concern have been documented in western Franconia: Northern Redbellied Dace, Wood Turtle, and Chimney Swift. Additional detailed studies would have to be conducted to determine what other rare species may exist in this area. A conservation commission-sponsored bioblitz on I-Naturalist could be considered as one such wildlife and plant study.

## Scenic Resources

As emphasized in the 2021 Community Survey, there are many scenic resources in the Town that make it a desirable place to live and visit. Scenic resources include views of the White Mountains, thick forested lands, lakes, ponds, and streams. Scenic vista points observed during the 2007 Natural Resource Inventory include Scragg Hill, Gale River, Coal Hill Road, Wells Road wetland, Ridge Road, and the Profile Golf Club. There are, of course, several other sites outside of the study area in the White Mountain National Forest and Franconia Notch State Park.

## Conservation Land

Approximately 73% of Franconia is protected in the White Mountain National Forest and Franconia Notch State Park. In the remaining land in western Franconia, 34% is also in conservation.

Franconia's conservation lands include:

- White Mountain National Forest – approximately 27,000 acres
- Franconia Notch State Park – approximately 3,400 acres
- Fox Hill Park - 95 acres
- River Bend Trail - 5.7 acres
- Gale River Easement – 3.8 acres

- Franconia Village Water land - 8.9 acres
- Frost Place - 7 acres
- Town Forest and abutting parcel – 41.1 acres
- Butterhill Partners - 49 acres
- Fobes/Toad Hill Farm - 188 acres
- Dow Field - 8 acres
- McKenzie Woods easement - 34.3 acres
- Lawrence Family Forest – 114.7 acres
- Wells Road Preserve (ACT) - 10 acres
- Grote Wildlife Sanctuary – 19.7 acres
- Splude’s Place – 1.2 acres
- Franconia Heritage Museum – 1.5 acres

### Invasive Plant Species

Invasive species are plants and wildlife that are not native to an area but take up residency and which can out-compete native species. Four invasive species were observed in Franconia during the 2007 NRI: Japanese Barberry, Tartarian Honeysuckle, Purple Loosestrife, and Coltsfoot. Since then, Japanese Knotweed, Oriental Bittersweet, Morrow’s Honeysuckle, Yellow Iris, Common Reed, Garlic Mustard, Burning Bush, Glossy Buckthorn, Cypress Spurge, Greater Celandine, Bishop’s Goutweed, and Lupine Polyphyllus have been documented. Some of these have only recently been added to the NH Invasive Plants list.

### Wildlife Corridors

As a gateway abutting the White Mountain National Forest, Franconia links adjacent communities to the reservoir wildlife habitat associated with the National Forest. Interstate-93 is a significant barrier to wildlife movement, and fragmentation of property outside the Forest presents an additional threat to the movement of wildlife. Recognition and preservation of wildlife corridors is a continuing priority given ongoing development in the community. Waterways and riparian buffers should be protected, and future development should be designed to respect and enhance wildlife corridors.

### Identified Environmental Threats

Environmental risks have become more widely appreciated since the 2007 NRI. Disturbance of subsoils during an excavation project in one location resulted in the identification of surface water contamination with heavy metals including lead and cadmium. Environmental test wells under the former Hunt’s automotive junk yard have tested positive for PFAS in the resident ground water. Furthermore, water quality monitoring in Echo Lake has identified storm water associated increases in coliform bacteria resulting in beach closures in Franconia Notch State Park. As Franconia values itself as a pristine mountain environment, lessons learned from these



experiences must be applied to future development activity and options identified to mitigate existing identified contaminations.

Climate change poses an additional set of risks including, notably, those related to water resources. The Tri-town conservations commissions of Franconia, Easton and Sugar Hill have been collaborating with environmental science faculty at Plymouth State University to better understand the challenges we may face at a local level. A Story Map has been developed to provide additional information and will continue to be refined. Studies completed by the US Geological Survey branch in Pembroke have demonstrated that wells on south facing slopes are especially prone to reduced water levels, which has resulted in some recent well failures in the greater valley. Although the overall water supply to the valley is not in ultimate jeopardy, accessibility may be impacted for individual households and neighborhoods. At the same time extremes of precipitation and storm strength may increase the risk of flooding, and disturbances to ground water may impact water quality.

#### IV. FUTURE APPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY

It will be important to raise awareness of the 2024 Natural Resource Inventory upon its completion. Pending recommendations from that Inventory, the following are consistent with responses to the 2021 Community Survey, the goals and objectives that have been developed, and the future Land Use Section of this Master Plan. The recommendations are as follows:

1. Identification and Protection of Wetland Complexes - a.) complete an in-depth inventory of vernal pools and use information to deter new development in these sensitive areas, and b.) compile previously delineated wetlands, documented wetland locations, and other areas containing wetlands, and conduct future expanded wetland delineations.
2. Protect Groundwater, Brooks, Rivers, Shorelines and Aquifers - a.) implement best management practices, b.) monitor septic system plumes, c.) monitor placement of future septic systems, and d.) utilize the Shoreland Protection Act.
3. Research and develop ridgeline protection ordinances to conserve mountainous topography and steep slopes.
4. Protect existing stands of softwood trees and investigate potential to extend stands by connecting patches of existing softwood stands.
5. Additional Conservation Lands - connect adjacent conserved lands, permanent openings, softwood stands, and wildlife habitats. There is potential for purchasing some of these lands outright or placing conservation easements on these lands.
6. Encourage scenic easements in town.
7. Continue to work towards updating data available for mapping important natural features in town.

8. Work with other organizations in town and share data collected from the Natural Resource Inventory to make comprehensive land use decisions.
9. Evaluate risks associated with climate change, and implement plans to mitigate them, especially associated with water resources, wildfires, biodiversity loss, and sustainability.

Long-term recommendations include:

- Determine least impacted sites for future development.
- Promote protection plans for large aquifers in town.
- Identify lands for purchase or conservation easements.
- Get plans in digital format so that Natural Resource Inventory data can be overlaid on sites for decision making.
- Prioritize wetlands on Wiseman Brook and Wells Road
- Enhance continuity of wildlife corridors, including on Scragg Mountain
- Focus on resilience to climate change in all its manifestations when making decisions on land use practice.
- Develop mitigation strategies for prioritized invasive flora and fauna.
- Raise awareness of the damaging impacts of light pollution and strategies for its mitigation.