



A Pathway for the Future

Planning for Future Land Use and
Development



City of Dover
Master Plan
Adopted February 10, 2026



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION



Dover has spent the past two decades laying the groundwork for a strong and vibrant future. As one of the fastest-growing Cities in New Hampshire, it has established a reputation for thoughtful land use planning, strategic investment, and community visioning. At the same time, the City recognizes there is still important work ahead.

From its revitalized, walkable downtown to its growing mixed-use centers, well-maintained public spaces, and commitment to community resilience, Dover continues to evolve while staying true to what makes it distinct. Land use planning has played a central role in this success, guiding development to the right places, creating local assets, like the Community Trail, and supporting infrastructure improvements, while preserving the city's scenic riverfronts, rural areas, and distinctive neighborhoods.

Dover's Land Use Chapter builds on Dover's progress, aligning the next phase of land use strategies with the "Distinctly Dover" vision—ensuring that growth continues to reflect community values and enhances the quality of life for all who call Dover home.

PURPOSE OF DOVER'S LAND USE CHAPTER

The 2026 Land Use Chapter of Dover's Master Plan offers a clear strategy and roadmap for guiding future growth while preserving the city's most valued resources—its vibrant downtown, diverse neighborhoods, historic charm, and natural landscapes—and addressing emergent challenges and issues that impact the city. Rooted in the Distinctly Dover Vision, the chapter provides direction for where and how development should occur, while balancing housing choice, economic opportunity, and environmental stewardship. Informed by recent planning efforts, local data, and broad community input, the chapter outlines a Future Land Use Strategy that supports infill development, redevelopment, and open space protection, ensuring Dover remains desirable, resilient, and inclusive for generations to come.

OUR COMMUNITY VALUES

Dover's community values were shaped through an inclusive outreach process during the creation of the city's Vision Master Plan Chapter that invited residents, business owners, and community members to share their priorities for the city's future. Through workshops, surveys, and public forums, participants consistently expressed a desire to preserve Dover's unique character while embracing thoughtful, sustainable growth. These community conversations highlighted values such as environmental stewardship, housing choice, walkability, civic participation, and respect for Dover's historic and natural assets. The resulting values reflect what people love most about Dover today—and their shared vision for what the city should continue to be tomorrow.

2. DOVER TODAY





LAND USE TRENDS AND ISSUES

Dover is a growing city of over 33,000 residents, encompassing nearly 17,000 acres of land that includes a historic, walkable downtown, several emerging mixed-use development areas, and large tracts of open space and conserved land. The more densely developed portions of the city are balanced with the surrounding neighborhoods, working farms, forested hillsides, and scenic riverfront shorelines along the Cochecho, Piscataqua, and Bellamy Rivers that reflect the city's identity within the Seacoast region. These assets attract a wide variety of people and contribute to why so many residents choose Dover as a place to live, raise families, work, and age in place. As housing demand and development pressures increase, Dover has both the opportunity and responsibility to guide future growth in ways that support livability, economic resilience, and environmental stewardship.

Existing Land Use

Overall, Dover's land use pattern today reflects a thoughtful balance of urban vibrancy, residential neighborhoods, and rural landscapes.

Residential uses make up the largest share of land use in the city—more than half (52%) of Dover's total land area—with a range of housing types that include compact neighborhoods near downtown and more dispersed, larger-lot homes in rural areas. Commercial and industrial development, which support Dover's strong and growing economy, is concentrated along key corridors like Route 108, Central Avenue, and Sixth Street, and together account for about 14% of the city's land. Open space, conservation land, and undeveloped parcels are defining features of Dover's landscape.

Roughly 22% of the city's land area is permanently conserved, helping to preserve natural resources and rural character. Separately, approximately 9% of the city—about 1,400 acres—is classified as vacant land, of which one-third overlaps with land already under permanent conservation. Vacant land could be defined as land that lacks permanent buildings or structures and has not been substantially altered or improved for a specific developed use. And, according to the 2020 Culture and Recreation Master Plan chapter, recreation properties account for ~8% of Dover's land area. As housing and economic development continues, particularly in mixed-use districts and infrastructure-supported areas, Dover must carefully direct growth to suitable locations while protecting its rural edges, agricultural lands, recreation assets, and natural resources.

Dover has 18 primary zoning districts and 9 overlay districts—each designed to regulate land use intensity, dimensional standards, and permitted activities. A significant portion of the city's land area is zoned for low-density residential development, with approximately 37% of parcels located in the R-20 and R-40 zoning districts. At the same time, Dover allows mixed uses (defined on page 16) throughout their zoning districts, reflecting the city's efforts to support development diversity and adaptability.

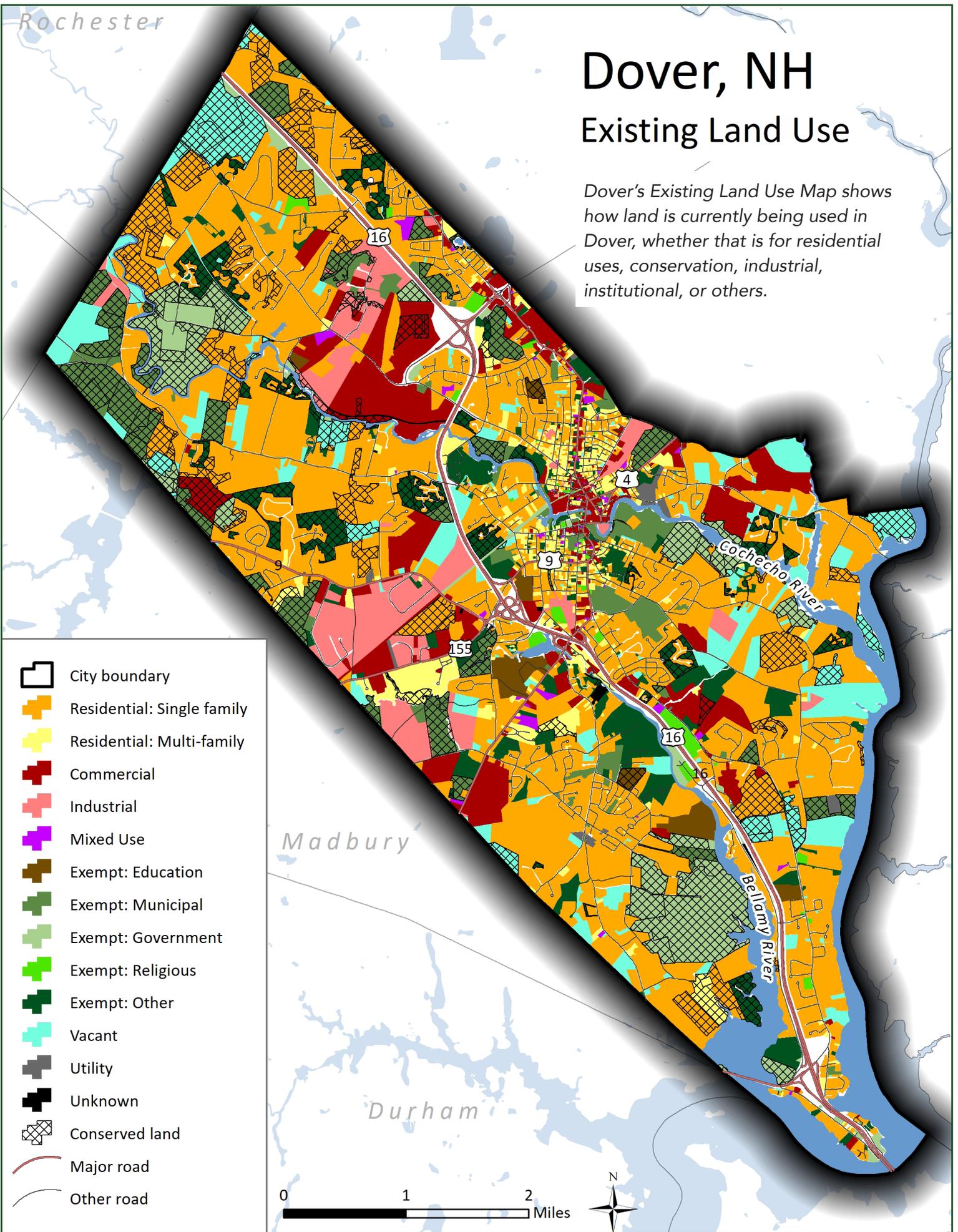
However, there is an opportunity to continue working to modernize the zoning ordinance to better reflect the "Distinctly Dover" vision. This includes enabling a wider variety of housing types—especially small-scale infill and missing middle housing (defined on page 21)—and further supporting mixed-use design in appropriate locations that meet evolving housing, mobility, and sustainability goals.

Rochester

Dover, NH

Existing Land Use

Dover's Existing Land Use Map shows how land is currently being used in Dover, whether that is for residential uses, conservation, industrial, institutional, or others.



-  City boundary
-  Residential: Single family
-  Residential: Multi-family
-  Commercial
-  Industrial
-  Mixed Use
-  Exempt: Education
-  Exempt: Municipal
-  Exempt: Government
-  Exempt: Religious
-  Exempt: Other
-  Vacant
-  Utility
-  Unknown
-  Conserved land
-  Major road
-  Other road

Madbury

Durham



Demographics and Housing

Dover is experiencing steady housing and population growth, but challenges remain in meeting the needs of all residents.



Dover’s population grew by 9.4% between 2013 and 2023, making it one of the fastest-growing cities in New Hampshire over that time period. The city is seeing an increase in single-person households, a growing senior population, and sustained demand from younger adults and families drawn to its many amenities and walkable neighborhoods. In 2023, Dover’s median age was 37.6, similar to the county and below the state. Currently, the 25–34 age group is the largest, growing 37% from 2013–2023. School enrollment data indicates a decline in the number of school-age children attending Dover’s public schools, reflecting broader census trends showing fewer youths in the community. Between 2019 and 2023, enrollment fell by 9%.



Although approximately 1,440 housing units are approved for construction in the coming years, housing costs in Dover continue to rise faster than incomes. Driven by a persistently tight housing market, the median home price in Dover rose by 36% between 2020-2023 resulting in a median home price of \$450,000 by March of 2025. Between 2013 and 2023, median rents nearly doubled, surpassing both county and state averages and placing growing pressure on younger residents, lower-income households, and the local workforce.



The homeownership rate—that is, the percentage of occupied homes that are owner-occupied—is about 51.3% in 2023, with a renter-occupied share of around 48.7%. Roughly 38% of renters are considered cost-burdened, paying more than 30% of their income on housing. And, Dover continues to be a high demand city, where people want to live and work. While new units are primarily multi-family developments and infill development near downtown, there remains a shortage of housing types that are

affordable and accessible across all life stages and income levels.

Land use policies play a key role in addressing these challenges. Encouraging compact, mixed-use development, further incentivizing accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and revisiting zoning standards can help support a broader range of housing types. ***As demand grows, Dover will need to continue planning for housing in ways that support walkable neighborhoods, promote equity, and align new development with infrastructure and transportation access.***

Economic Development

Dover’s economy is growing steadily, driven by strong employment in healthcare, education, and professional services. The city has become a regional job center with increasing demand for mixed-use development and supportive infrastructure.



Dover’s economy plays a central role in shaping land use needs and trends throughout the city. With over 1,500 business establishments, according to the 2020 U.S Census, Dover is the largest employment center in Strafford County and among the top ten employment hubs in New Hampshire. Major employers include Wentworth-Douglass Hospital, Lincoln Financial Group, and Community Partners.



These institutions, among others, clustered in and around downtown, along the Route 108 corridor, and near the hospital campus, drive demand for transportation infrastructure, commercial space, and housing to support a growing workforce. Dover’s Central Business District also remains an important commercial area in the city, featuring a diverse array of businesses, offices, and service providers. As Dover continues to experience population and job growth, land use planning will play a critical role in ensuring space for economic expansion while maintaining the city’s livability.

To support continued economic vitality, Dover's planning efforts must balance commercial growth with quality design, housing affordability, transportation needs, and the preservation of open space. Economic growth in healthcare, education, professional services, and advanced manufacturing requires thoughtful land use strategies that direct new development toward designated nodes and corridors. ***By aligning land use policies with economic priorities, Dover can sustain its momentum as a regional employment center while reinforcing its identity as a vibrant, inclusive, and well-designed city.***

Transportation

Dover is increasingly prioritizing multimodal transportation—expanding its pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and rail infrastructure—to support walkable development, reduce congestion, and align future land use investments with sustainable mobility options.



Dover's transportation system plays a critical role in shaping land use patterns and supporting future development. Major corridors like Central Avenue, Sixth Street, and Broadway serve

as critical arteries for both local circulation and regional access. Traffic congestion—especially during peak commuting hours—has become a challenge in some areas.



At the same time, the presence of the Amtrak Downeaster station positions Dover as a regional hub for rail transit, enhancing access to Boston, Portland, and beyond and supporting transit-oriented development opportunities near the station.



Land use and transportation are closely linked in Dover's growth strategy. The city is actively promoting multimodal connectivity and walkable developments, especially in its downtown and surrounding mixed-use areas, and safe streets for all users, including youth traveling to school. Improvements to sidewalk networks, bicycle infrastructure, and intersection safety continue to be essential to supporting higher-density, pedestrian-oriented land use in these locations. ***Dover's ongoing planning efforts aim to align future land use decisions with investments in transportation infrastructure to ensure that new development is accessible, efficient, and consistent with the city's sustainability and mobility goals.***





Community Resilience

Dover's community resilience efforts focus on sustainable land use, proactive climate adaptation, and thoughtful infrastructure planning that protects natural resources while supporting a healthy, connected, and prepared community.



Dover's approach to land use planning is increasingly centered on building community resilience—ensuring that people, infrastructure, neighborhoods, and ecosystems are prepared for and can adapt to changing environmental conditions. As a city within the Seacoast region with riverfront areas, Dover is vulnerable to flooding, sea level rise, and more frequent extreme weather events. In response, the city is incorporating resilience planning into zoning, infrastructure investments, and capital improvement decisions to reduce risks and improve safety for residents and businesses. This includes mapping hazard areas, supporting and deploying green infrastructure, and encouraging development patterns that reduce exposure to climate threats.



Community resilience in Dover also means protecting the systems and places that contribute to quality of life. To that point, climate resilient lands were also a priority in the 2024 Open Space & Conservation Chapter of the Master Plan. Preserving wetlands, forests, and open space helps manage stormwater and buffer neighborhoods from natural hazards. At the same time, promoting compact, energy-efficient, and walkable development can lower emissions and reduce long-term infrastructure costs. ***As Dover continues to grow, integrating resilience into land use policies will help ensure that neighborhoods remain safe, livable, and sustainable in the face of future challenges.***

Land use impacts everything.

Land use planning is a crucial process that shapes many aspects of our community. It determines how we travel within our community, the look and feel of our neighborhoods and public spaces, where homes are built, how traffic flows, the locations of parks, and what types of businesses are permitted.

Thoughtful land use planning protects what people value most—scenic views, natural resources, and neighborhood character—while guiding new development to the right places with the right infrastructure. Planning balances growth and preservation, supports affordability and walkability, and helps create livable, inclusive, and resilient communities. Local policies, regulations, and investments ultimately shape the kind of place a community becomes.

A SNAPSHOT OF DATA

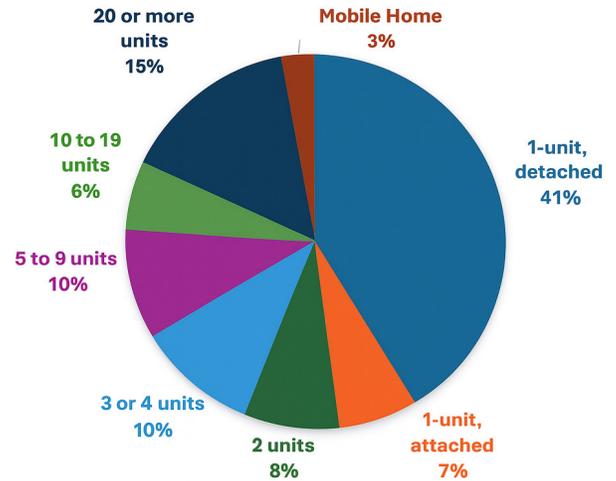
2024 MAJOR EMPLOYERS IN DOVER

Business Name	Industry	Employees
Wentworth-Douglass Hospital	Healthcare Services	2,668
Lincoln Financial Group	Financial Services	1,032
Community Partners	Counseling and Mental Health Services	494
Strafford County	County	487
Dover Schools/SAU 11	Education	410
City of Dover	Local Government Services	363
Stonewall Kitchen	Manufacturing	225
Hannaford Supermarkets (combined locations)	Retail/Distribution	118
HiRel Systems/Vishay	Manufacturing	94
Randy Whitney	Manufacturing	54
Nemo Equipment	Manufacturing	38
Forward Merch	Manufacturing	37
Agility Manufacturing	Manufacturing	36
Reylco	Distribution	28
Children's Museum of NH	Arts and Entertainment	14

Source: City of Dover (includes only those businesses that responded to employer outreach)

HOUSING UNIT TYPES IN DOVER

2023 5-YEAR AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES



MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME TRENDS

Med. Household Income	2013	2023	Growth Rate
Strafford County	\$58,825	\$84,869	+44.2%
Dover	\$57,389	\$92,748	+61.6%
Durham	\$71,250	\$126,658	+77.7%
Portsmouth	\$64,577	\$105,756	+63.7%
Somersworth	\$53,223	\$79,677	+49.7%
Rochester	\$62,398	\$79,388	+27.2%

Source: 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

HOUSING COST TRENDS

Year	Median Purchase Prices			Median Rental Prices		
	Dover	Strafford County	NH	Dover	Strafford County	NH
2013	\$248,475	\$200,000	\$220,000	\$953	\$942	\$1,108
2014	\$243,500	\$210,000	\$219,000	\$958	\$974	\$1,037
2015	\$228,100	\$205,000	\$221,000	\$1,026	\$992	\$1,069
2016	\$233,500	\$211,500	\$230,000	\$1,073	\$1,043	\$1,113
2017	\$268,000	\$229,000	\$240,000	\$1,143	\$1,108	\$1,143
2018	\$290,000	\$244,900	\$254,000	\$1,166	\$1,146	\$1,177
2019	\$288,000	\$255,000	\$270,000	\$1,347	\$1,259	\$1,251
2020	\$315,000	\$284,500	\$302,300	\$1,439	\$1,210	\$1,283
2021	\$365,000	\$320,000	\$350,000	\$1,470	\$1,356	\$1,373
2022	\$403,000	\$390,000	\$400,000	\$1,801	\$1,518	\$1,510
2023	\$430,000	\$390,000	\$418,000	\$1,981	\$1,571	\$1,644

Source: New Hampshire Housing and Finance Authority

A SNAPSHOT OF COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Feedback collected from residents on the complexity of land use planning in Dover indicated some tensions that should be recognized. This feedback illustrates some foundational dilemmas for Dover to be aware of while implementing this Chapter. These are not problems to solve, but priorities to balance in the years ahead:

- **Growth and Preservation:**

Residents value targeted growth and also emphasize preserving open spaces, rural character, and wildlife habitat.

- **Housing Diversity and Neighborhood Integrity:**

The need for affordable, flexible housing options (including accessory dwelling units and rental units) appears alongside a strong desire to maintain established neighborhood character and support homeownership opportunities.

- **Fiscal Sustainability and Quality of Life:**

Some residents stress thoughtful development to support the tax base and fund city services, while others worry about impacts on long-term livability, community feel, walkability, access to amenities, and rising costs.

These notable tensions — growth/preservation, housing diversity/neighborhood integrity, fiscal sustainability/quality of life — are important to understand. They each need to be addressed as dual priorities, not solved separately. By recognizing the need for this work we have a better chance of accessing the upsides of each and avoiding the downsides.



3. WHERE WE ARE GOING



As the city implements a future land use strategy that reflects community priorities, growth trends, and the existing land use pattern, it is important to keep in mind Dover’s recently adopted Vision Statement and Pillars. The Future Land Use Strategy presented in this chapter is a direct expression of the **Distinctly Dover Vision**, adopted as part of the Vision Chapter on July 25, 2023. This vision translates community values into a geographic strategy for how and where the city should grow. It reflects the community’s desire for walkable neighborhoods, a thriving downtown, protected natural resources, housing choices, and resilient infrastructure. By aligning land use policies and investments with this vision, the strategy helps ensure that growth in Dover is intentional, inclusive, and reinforces what makes the city special.

VISION PILLARS

1. We are a welcoming, connected, and engaged community with a high level of civic participation and a transparent, responsible local government.

Dover fosters meaningful civic engagement by providing consistent opportunities for residents to participate in decision-making and community life. The City prioritizes clear communication, accessible information, and responsive governance to build trust and strengthen community connections.

2. We are a City with an emerging urban vibrancy, guided by intentional growth to create connected neighborhoods, attractive streetscapes, and accessible open space, while maintaining what makes Dover distinct.

Growth is directed toward walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods with high-quality design, complete streets, and convenient access to parks and open space. Development respects historic character while promoting compact land use patterns, infill, and connectivity between neighborhoods.

3. We have an attractive, thriving downtown, connected to a lively waterfront, that serves as a City center and gathering place, and is known as a destination for visitors, businesses, and community events.

Downtown and the waterfront function as vibrant social, cultural, and economic hubs with active public spaces, diverse businesses, and community gathering areas. Pedestrian-oriented design, enhanced public amenities, and seamless connections to surrounding neighborhoods support year-round activity.

VISION PILLARS

4. We have affordable and attainable housing and support services that are accessible to, and utilized by, individuals, families, and households of diverse backgrounds and needs.

Dover’s vision emphasizes a diverse mix of housing types across income levels, ages, and household sizes, supported by policies that increase availability and reduce barriers. Integration of housing with transportation, services, and amenities ensures households can thrive and access daily needs.

5. We are a community committed to supporting, attracting, and expanding business and employment opportunities that foster economic growth and community well-being.

The City supports a resilient and diverse economy by nurturing local businesses, attracting new industries, and providing space and infrastructure for job growth. Workforce development, entrepreneurship, and strategic economic planning ensure long-term prosperity and broad community benefit.

6. We have a robust transportation system that encourages safe and appealing pedestrian, transit, and other alternative transportation options that connect us to the broader region.

Dover prioritizes multimodal mobility through safe sidewalks, bike routes, transit access, and transportation options that reduce reliance on cars. Regional connections and complete streets improve accessibility, safety, and convenience for all travelers.

7. We have outstanding schools, recreation, and cultural activities for all ages, and our community organizations collaborate to provide us a strong foundation and promising future.

High-quality education, diverse recreation opportunities, and strong cultural assets contribute to residents’ quality of life. Partnerships among schools, nonprofits, and cultural institutions expand programming, foster lifelong learning, and build a vibrant, inclusive community.

8. We are leaders in incorporating innovation to create resilient and environmentally focused infrastructure, energy, and utility systems to responsibly steward our resources and cherished environment.

The City advances environmental sustainability through resilient infrastructure, renewable energy, modern utility systems, and climate adaptation strategies. Stewardship of natural resources—such as water, open space, and ecological systems—ensures long-term environmental health and community resilience.

4. HOW WE WILL GET THERE





A FUTURE LAND USE STRATEGY

The **Future Land Use Strategy**, provides a visual overview of how land use change, new development activity, infrastructure investment, and resource protection will be guided over the next ten years and beyond. It examines the distinct areas of the community and describes how land use activity will be guided in different ways depending on the location, existing character, desired character, opportunities, and needs of those areas. The Strategy also brings forward elements of Dover’s other Master Plan Chapters and incorporates them into a broad policy statement that is a companion to the vision statement. Together they will guide the city over the next decade. Overall, Dover’s Future Land Use Strategy aims to balance development needs with the protection of natural resources and open space assets.

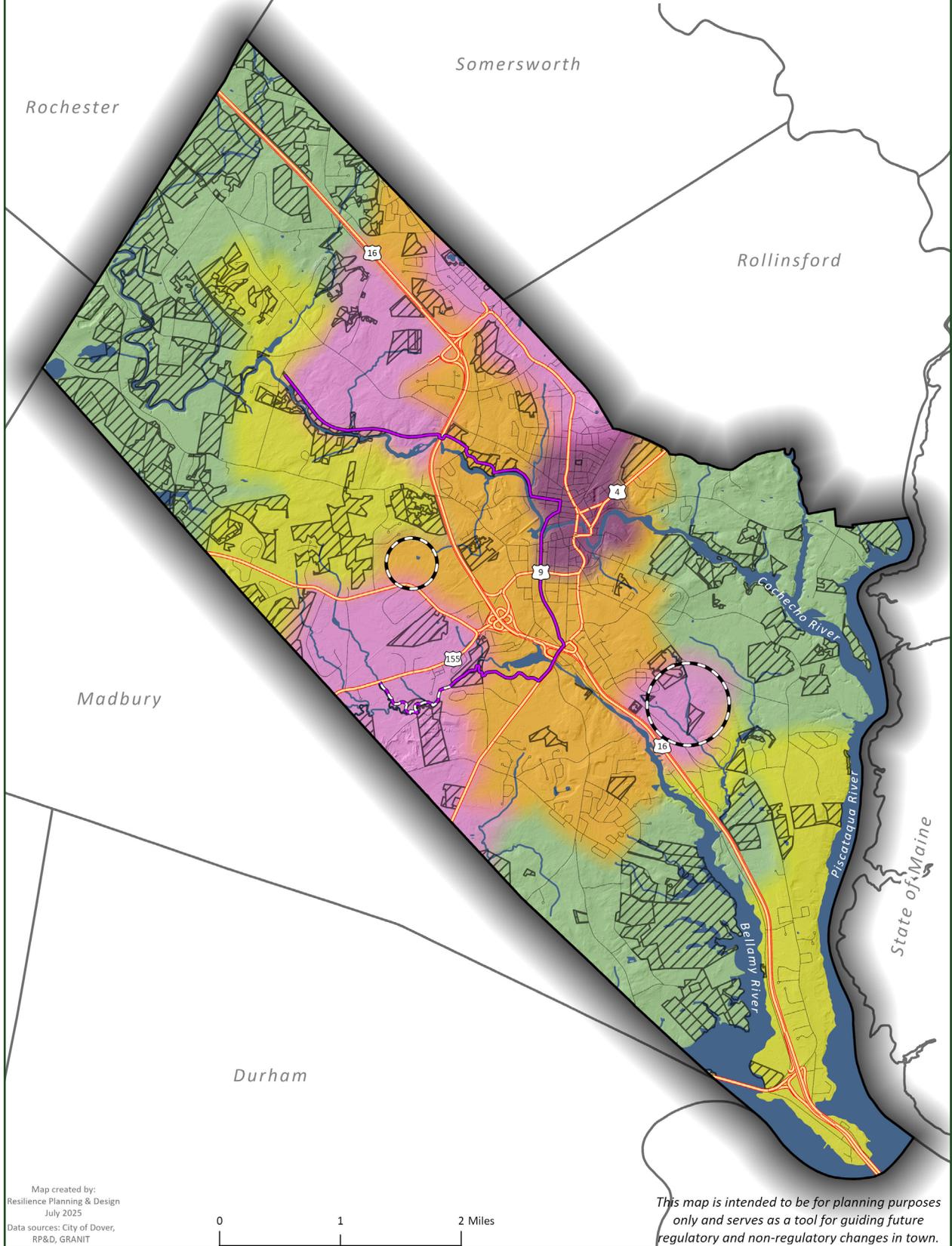
The **Future Land Use Map**, shown on page 17, is the visual representation of the Strategy and illustrates primary areas where land use will be guided and shaped. These areas include:

- **Downtown** - which serves as the anchor and community hub within the city
- **Integrated Development Areas** - with two identified village centers for compact, mixed use development and areas characterized by existing or expanding industrial and commercial uses
- **Primarily Residential Areas** - with three sub-areas that each have their own character, land use pattern, and level of development intensity

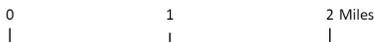
Each of these areas is connected, to varying degrees, by Dover’s transportation network, while the city’s open space and conservation land weave between developed areas.

City of Dover, NH Future Land Use Map

-  City boundary
-  Major road
-  Other road
-  Waterbody
-  Stream
-  Community Trail
-  Community Trail Extension
-  Conserved land
-  Integrated Development Area
-  Downtown
-  Area 1: Primarily Residential
-  Area 2: Primarily Residential
-  Area 3: Primarily Residential
-  Village Centers



Map created by:
Resilience Planning & Design
July 2025
Data sources: City of Dover,
RP&D, GRANIT



This map is intended to be for planning purposes only and serves as a tool for guiding future regulatory and non-regulatory changes in town.



DOWNTOWN

Dover's Downtown is the heart of the city—a place where people come to connect, gather, and experience a sense of community.

Dover aims to focus on increasing mixed-use activity—residential, commercial, and social—in this area to support a vibrant sense of place where people can live, shop, dine, recreate, and work. To this end, future land use change in the Downtown will prioritize infill development and the thoughtful redevelopment of underutilized sites that enhance the area's character and vitality. This activity-rich district should continue to be a hub for small business development and entrepreneurship, fostering spaces where businesses can thrive and residents can easily access goods, services, and jobs within walking distance of their homes.

To strengthen community connections, the Downtown must support a mix of housing types—ranging from upper-story units in mixed-use buildings and medium-to large-scale multi-family housing—designed to fit seamlessly into the historic fabric. The vision is for a mixed income Downtown to ensure a diverse and inclusive community where people of all ages and incomes can live and engage with one another.

To this end, the Downtown should offer a higher level of activity and intensity than other areas of the city, while remaining welcoming, accessible, and human-scaled. The continued use of form-based zoning and design standards that emphasize building relationships and the surrounding physical environment will guide context-sensitive redevelopment that integrates harmoniously with existing structures and reinforces a walkable, attractive streetscape. Prioritizing public access to the waterfront, open space areas, and green infrastructure is equally important—because Dover aims to bring nature into the city center to support

WHAT IS MIXED-USE? Mixed use refers to development that combines residential, commercial, cultural, institutional, or industrial uses within a single building, site, or neighborhood, designed to promote walkability, reduce reliance on cars, and create vibrant, connected communities.

WHAT IS MULTIMODAL? Multimodal transportation refers to a system that supports multiple forms of travel—such as walking, biking, driving, and public transit—ensuring people can move safely and efficiently using the mode that best suits their needs.

community well-being, environmental sustainability, and climate resilience. Public parks, the riverfront, and green corridors are essential gathering places that promote social cohesion and access to nature for all.

Transportation connectivity is also a central goal. Dover intends to create safe, multimodal routes that link Downtown to other parts of the city, especially the surrounding neighborhoods and mixed-use nodes—making it easy to get there by foot, bike, bus, or car. Reducing car dependence and encouraging walkability and transit use will improve accessibility, reduce congestion, and support Dover's climate and sustainability goals. A Downtown for everyone means accessible public spaces, affordable housing options, and inclusive community design that fosters civic pride, prosperity, and connection.

NATURE-BASED CLIMATE

NATURE BASED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS are strategies that use natural systems—such as forests, wetlands, rivers, and soils—to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve resilience to climate impacts, and enhance overall ecosystem health. These solutions include protecting and restoring forests, expanding tree canopy in urban areas, conserving wetlands to manage flooding, and using green infrastructure like rain gardens and vegetated buffers to absorb stormwater. Integrating these strategies into zoning, subdivision design, and land use planning supports climate resilience while enhancing quality of life and preserving Dover's natural character.



INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT AREAS

Dover's Integrated Development Areas are characterized by a blend of commercial, light industrial and residential land uses.

Some serve as key entry corridors into the city, while others are distinct mixed use development nodes or active industrial parks. These areas—such as the Central Avenue corridor, the Spaulding Turnpike exits, and the Knox Marsh Road and Littleworth Road corridors—offer critical opportunities to:

- promote mixed-use development that support both economic and housing goals
- encourage growth of high-employment commercial and industrial development (such as manufacturing, life sciences, or medical sectors), and;
- support Dover's growing workforce and existing businesses, while reinforcing Dover's identity as a dynamic, connected community.

While each of these areas has its own mix of uses and distinct character, the intent is to encourage the transformation of corridors into multi-modal, walkable, internally connected places, similar to the Pointe Place development off of Dover Point Road, where commercial and residential development coexist in cohesive neighborhoods. Littleworth Road presents a promising opportunity for future development that aligns with Dover's land use and economic goals. Situated near existing infrastructure and in close proximity to employment centers, the area is well-positioned to support a mix of light industrial, commercial, and potentially residential development. Improved transportation connections from Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods to Littleworth Road are a priority, especially to enhance access for the local workforce and reduce reliance on personal

vehicles. With strategic planning, this corridor can support job creation, increase tax revenue, and serve as a key mixed-use employment hub in Dover's future growth strategy.

Future land use policy should promote redevelopment and infill development that includes a diversity of housing types—from single-family homes to townhouses and multi-family dwellings—alongside retail, office, and service-oriented businesses. However, existing industrial development should also be maintained, as it plays an important and unique role in the city's economy. Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs can be strategically used to focus growth in these areas, relieving development pressure from more rural parts of the city.

Given their proximity to the Community Trail, many of these areas are well-positioned to support sustainable, multimodal transportation that could also serve as city-wide connectivity corridors. As development continues, future investments should expand and connect the Community Trail to each Integrated Development Area and to the Downtown and key residential neighborhoods. Improved transit service and road connections—particularly between Downtown, Dover's industrial parks, and Littleworth Road—will be essential to better serve workers, residents, and businesses.

In areas such as the Central Avenue and Knox Marsh corridors, land use planning must also consider natural resource protection. These gateways contain important groundwater recharge areas that should be preserved through smart design, open space integration, and low-impact development practices. The goal is to guide growth that is vibrant, inclusive, and environmentally responsible, while strengthening transportation access, housing diversity, and economic vitality.



PRIMARYLY RESIDENTIAL AREAS

Dover's Primarily Residential Areas vary from each other by their intensity of development and the mix of land use activity, but they are all similar because residential uses are the predominant land use type. There are three distinct primarily residential areas in Dover where the primary focus is on maintaining and creating neighborhoods that have a distinct sense of place and community, ensuring a variety of housing types for people of all ages, incomes, and abilities, and balancing the protection of natural resources as future development occurs.

AREA 1:

Encircling Dover's vibrant Downtown, this area serves as a critical transition between the city center and the more suburban and rural parts of the community. It encompasses neighborhoods found in parts of Central Avenue and Back River Road and within the Heritage Residential District, such as the Silver Street and Locust Street neighborhoods. It is characterized by a higher intensity of development, walkable streets, diverse housing types, and a strong sense of identity. Dover envisions these neighborhoods remaining primarily residential, supported by thoughtful infill and redevelopment that reinforces their historic charm and neighborhood character.

These neighborhoods currently include a variety of housing options—from single-family homes to accessory dwelling units, two-, three-, and four-family structures. Dover intends to preserve this diversity to promote multigenerational and transitional housing that can meet the needs of residents at different life stages and income levels. Any new development or redevelopment should reflect the established scale and pattern of the neighborhood, ensuring that change integrates smoothly with its surroundings while building on the area's history and character.

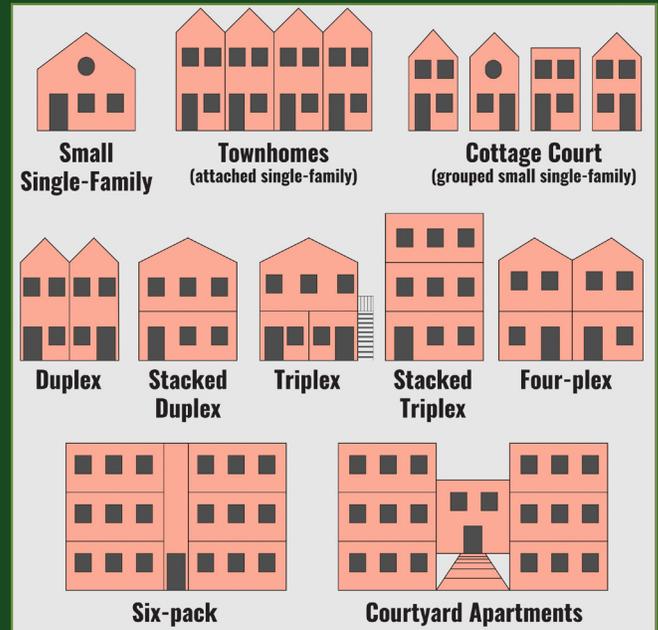
Maintaining strong connections—both physical and social—is central to the future of these neighborhoods. These areas are well-served by sidewalks and are ideal for biking and walking, especially for residents commuting to Downtown or accessing nearby parks, schools, and civic spaces. Improving these connections further—through bike infrastructure, safe crossings, and greenways—will support active transportation and strengthen neighborhood-to-downtown ties. Portions of these neighborhoods also connect to Dover's surrounding conserved lands along the Bellamy and Cochecho Rivers, offering opportunities for outdoor recreation and deeper integration with the city's natural landscape.



EXPANDING DOVER'S HOUSING DIVERSITY

Dover is aiming to create a balanced and diverse housing stock within the city. Often this is referred to as missing middle housing or a range of housing types—such as duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, townhomes, and cottage courts—that offer a scale between single-family homes and large apartment buildings. These housing types can blend into existing neighborhoods while providing more diverse, attainable options for residents of all phases of life.

In Dover, missing middle housing can be thoughtfully integrated across a variety of land use areas—from infill housing above shops in the Downtown, to small clusters of duplexes in walkable neighborhood corridors, to open space subdivisions in more semi-rural areas that offer smaller homes while preserving natural resources. This flexibility helps support affordability, walkability, and a vibrant community fabric across the city.



AREA 2:

This area represents transitional residential development that bridges the city's in-town neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown with its more rural and conservation-focused residential development on the outskirts of Dover. This area is characterized by conventional single-family housing patterns, including open space subdivision developments, typically found in the R-40 district, with some areas served by municipal sewer and water infrastructure. The layout of these areas supports gradual shifts in development intensity—from higher-density areas via main roads and sidewalks to low-density areas via smaller roads, trails, and green buffers.

Dover envisions these neighborhoods continuing to function as primarily residential places that offer privacy, community, and connectivity. Future development should promote compatible alternative housing options such as smaller-lot single-family homes, duplexes, or cottage-style subdivisions where

appropriate. Continuing to encourage open space subdivision designs in this area can help protect Dover's valuable groundwater resources and wildlife habitat—particularly important in this part of the city—while also introducing more attainable housing types that support a broader range of household needs.

While commercial uses are not envisioned within these neighborhoods themselves, maintaining strong non-vehicular connections to services and amenities remains a high priority. Many subdivisions in this area have included open space set-asides, though much of this land is currently not publicly accessible. Over time, expanding the network of open space set-asides could strengthen neighborhood identity while displaying the creative balance Dover strikes between development and natural resource protection.

AREA 3:

These areas, located primarily in the southern, northwestern, and eastern parts of the city, are defined by their interspersed residential neighborhoods, scenic landscapes, important wildlife habitats, forested land, and natural resources that provide vital ecosystem services—including flood mitigation, water quality protection, carbon storage, and recreational benefits. They reflect the city’s commitment to protecting its natural assets, supporting climate resilience, and maintaining the open spaces that many residents value.

Dover aims to preserve the natural character of these areas to support environmental health, biodiversity, and climate resilience. To this end, land use policies should prioritize permanent open space conservation and encourage residential development patterns that are compatible with natural resource protection. Most land in these areas is low-density residential, typically featuring larger single-family lots, or conservation land. However, Dover can guide future development by encouraging or requiring open space subdivisions where appropriate. This approach protects priority environmental areas while allowing for a more diverse range of single-family homes—including smaller, more affordable homes—within a rural context.

In certain parts of the city, open space priorities overlap with residential land use. For example, conserved lands in southern portions of Dover support critical climate resilience objectives such as stormwater absorption and habitat connectivity, while the northwest and eastern conservation areas contain significant wildlife corridors. These goals should shape future land use decisions, with a focus on preserving contiguous open space, maintaining ecosystem functions, and avoiding habitat fragmentation.

Some of these areas are served by municipal water and sewer, while others rely on private wells and septic systems, making thoughtful planning around infrastructure particularly important. As the city continues to grow, enhancing trail connectivity, signage, and bike/pedestrian access will be key to integrating these lands into Dover’s broader recreation and mobility network. The goal is to create lasting public and environmental benefits while allowing for limited, well-designed development that is sensitive to the natural setting.



5. NEXT STEPS





The following implementation actions are designed to help Dover translate its future land use strategy and vision into action - supporting intentional growth, protecting natural resources, and preserving the character and vitality of our neighborhoods.

Grounded in community input, local data, and best practices in planning, the recommendations provide a roadmap for how zoning, infrastructure investments, and conservation efforts can work together to promote affordability, sustainability, resilience, and a high quality of life for all residents. Dover has a long history of carefully tracking and reporting on Master Plan implementation efforts, and the effort to implement this chapter will be no different.

These recommendations are organized by type of activity and identify the local department and entities that will be most responsible for carrying out the actions. Each action also identifies a time period for implementation. The following are the time periods for implementation:

- Ongoing Actions, which are continuous or are already being carried out
- Immediate Actions, which should be undertaken in 1-2 years
- Short Term Actions, which should be undertaken within 3-5 years
- Long Term Actions, which will take more than 5 years to be initiated or completed

IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES

This Master Plan chapter was informed by these resources, and they should continue to be instrumental in working towards the vision for future land use in Dover.

DOVER'S MASTER PLAN

Dover's Master Plan is a long-range planning document that outlines the community's vision and strategic goals to guide future growth, development, and preservation efforts. The Land Use Chapter is interrelated to other chapters like the 2023 Vision Chapter, the 2024 Open Space and Conservation Chapter, and the 2016 Stewardship of Resources Chapter, and should work cohesively together.

NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY

Dover's Natural Resource Inventory identifies and maps the city's critical environmental assets—such as wetlands, floodplains, wildlife habitats, forests, and groundwater resources—to support informed land use decisions and long-term resource protection. This should be a driving resource in future open space protection efforts.

2024 LAND USE REGULATION AUDIT REPORT

Dover's 2024 Land Use Regulation Audit Report provides a comprehensive review of the city's zoning and development regulations, identifying barriers to housing diversity, sustainability, and economic development, and offering recommendations to modernize and streamline the code. This should be a helpful resource in determining future zoning changes, especially pertaining to housing, as they align with the future land use vision.

2023 CITYWIDE RESILIENCE PLAN

The Citywide Resilience Plan outlines strategies to prepare Dover for climate-related risks, promote sustainability, and strengthen the city's ability to adapt and thrive in the face of environmental

and social change. This should guide the city as it works towards maintaining and ensuring a sustainable land use pattern that meets the city's resiliency goals.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Dover's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) outlines the city's planned investments in public infrastructure, facilities, and equipment over a multi-year period, helping prioritize projects that support growth, safety, and quality of life. Dover's Capital Improvement Program supports implementation of the Land Use Chapter by prioritizing infrastructure investments in designated growth areas, guiding development, and aligning budgeted projects with long-term goals for livability, sustainability, and resilience.

THE DOVER BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY'S STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This Plan outlines a forward-looking strategy to strengthen the city's economic vitality by supporting business growth, workforce development, and placemaking initiatives that align with Dover's community values and long-term vision. As the city directs business growth strategically in the city, this will be a resource to ensure consistency with economic development efforts and ensure they are grounded in the city's vision for future land use.

SRPC REGIONAL MASTER PLAN

The Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) is updating its regional plan in 2026 that will guide land use, housing, transportation, economic development, natural resources, and quality-of-life policies across its 18 member municipalities. This updated plan will serve as a strategic tool for coordinating cross-town policies, projects, and investments over the coming decade.

The following action items will be tracked and reported on annually to clarify progress being made on implementation efforts.

ACTION MATRIX FOR DOVER'S LAND USE CHAPTER				
#	Action Item	Priority (High, Med, Low)	Responsible Party	Timeframe (Long, Med, Short, Ongoing)
1. Transportation				
1.1	Improve multi-modal connectivity, including bike and pedestrian infrastructure, between mixed-use nodes and key destinations (e.g., Pointe Place, Downtown, neighborhoods, businesses, schools) to reduce car dependence and improve safety.	Medium	Planning, Community Services	Medium
1.2	Implement recommendations from Dover's recently completed Transit Access Study, which identifies future investments to address needed last-mile access improvements. Last-mile access improvements enhance the connection between major transportation routes and final destinations by adding sidewalks, bike paths, and other facilities that make it easier and safer to walk, bike, or take transit.	Medium	Planning, Community Services	Medium
1.3	Monitor Amtrak and Downtown transit loop ridership to inform future transit investments.	Low	Planning	Ongoing
1.4	Continue to expand, and improve, the Community Trail to further connect distinct areas of Dover.	Medium	Planning, Recreation, Community Trail Advisory Committee	Long
1.5	Continue to strategically expand public EV charging infrastructure and promote this infrastructure as part of a broader economic development strategy to increase visitation to Dover's Downtown and other key destinations.	Low	Planning, Office of Business Development, Energy Commission	Medium
2. Housing				
2.1	Review, prioritize, and implement recommendations aimed at addressing Dover's housing challenges provided by the Ad-Hoc Committee to Address Community Housing Needs. These include actions like increasing community engagement and education on the benefits of affordable housing and housing programs, expanding affordable and workforce housing options, addressing homelessness and housing insecurity.	Medium	Planning, Planning Board	Ongoing

#	Action Item	Priority (High, Med, Low)	Responsible Party	Timeframe (Long, Med, Short, Ongoing)
2.2	Expand opportunities for Missing Middle Housing by allowing a wider range of 2–4 unit dwellings by right in appropriate zoning districts, in an effort to increase housing diversity and walkable neighborhood living.	Medium	Planning	Medium
2.3	Promote mixed-income neighborhoods by implementing equitable housing policies that ensure a range of housing options within new developments, supporting economic diversity and housing choice throughout the city.	High	Planning	Ongoing
2.4	Encourage the development of pocket neighborhoods and cottage courts—small clusters of homes oriented around shared open space—to provide diverse, community-scaled housing options that fit within existing neighborhoods. Update zoning and design standards to allow this form of infill development in walkable areas while maintaining or enhancing the character of existing neighborhoods.	Medium	Planning	Medium
2.5	Promote adaptive reuse of existing structures and historic buildings to support housing and mixed-use development opportunities while preserving Dover’s architectural character.	High	Planning	Medium
2.6	Incentivize mixed-income and upper-story housing in the Downtown to foster diversity and livability.	Medium	Planning	Medium
2.7	Continue to identify and promote financing tools that make it easier for homeowners to build or convert accessory units, expanding housing options for residents of all ages and incomes.	Medium	Planning	Short
2.8	Collaborate with local businesses and financial institutions to develop programs designed to increase housing access in appropriate locations within the city.	Medium	Planning, Office of Business Development	Short
2.9	Develop an online Housing Dashboard to track and share information on current and recently approved housing developments in Dover.	High	Planning	Short
3. Economic Development				
3.1	Collaborate with the Dover Business and Industrial Development Authority and other partners to ensure Dover’s regulations, within appropriate areas of the city, are business friendly.	Medium	Planning, Office of Business Development	Medium

#	Action Item	Priority (High, Med, Low)	Responsible Party	Timeframe (Long, Med, Short, Ongoing)
3.2	Review and update land use ordinances to expand opportunities for context-sensitive and small-scale commercial development, such as incremental business spaces, accessory commercial units, or refined home occupation standards.	Low	Planning, Office of Business Development	Medium
3.3	Identify strategies and locations to support small business development, including a possible small business incubator.	Low	Planning, Office of Business Development	Medium
3.4	Support opportunities for small businesses to own their buildings through targeted programs, partnerships, and flexible zoning.	Medium	Planning, Office of Business Development	Medium
3.5	Review current Economic Revitalization Zone and RSA 79-E policies, and target locations and areas identified for future commercial growth.	Low	Planning, Office of Business Development	Short
3.6	Expand “Discover Dover” initiatives to market conservation land, open space, recreation, and quality of life as economic assets.	Medium	Planning, Office of Business Development	Short
3.7	Educate local employers and property owners about the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program to encourage reinvestment and efficient land use in Dover’s employment areas.	Low	Planning, Office of Business Development	Medium
4. Natural Resource Protection and Community Resilience				
4.1	Continue the protection and stewardship of Dover’s natural resources and open space resources according to the Natural Resource Inventory and the plan laid out in Dover’s Open Space and Conservation Master Plan Chapter.	High	Planning, Open Lands Committee, Conservation Commission	Ongoing
4.2	Expand public access to the waterfront and open space parcels, including green corridors, riverfront parks, and urban green spaces.	High	Planning, Recreation, Open Lands Committee	Medium
4.3	Integrate nature-based climate solutions (e.g., green roofs, rain gardens, urban tree canopy, no and low mow areas, pollinator gardens) into municipal land management and future redevelopment projects.	Medium	Planning, Conservation Commission	Medium

#	Action Item	Priority (High, Med, Low)	Responsible Party	Timeframe (Long, Med, Short, Ongoing)
4.4	Ensure climate resilience strategies are embedded in growth scenarios and infrastructure planning, especially in vulnerable areas and flood prone locations.	High	Planning, Community Services	Short
4.5	Partner with regional universities, environmental organizations, or state agencies to conduct a study that quantifies the value of Dover’s ecosystem services—such as flood mitigation, water filtration, and carbon storage—to inform land use planning and highlight the economic and environmental importance of conservation.	Medium	Planning, Open Lands Commission, Conservation Commission	Medium
5. Land Use				
5.1	Continue implementing and refining form-based zoning and design standards to ensure high-quality, context-sensitive infill development and redevelopment projects.	Medium	Planning	Medium
5.2	Encourage infill and redevelopment of underutilized sites to increase housing, mixed-use, commercial and industrial development opportunities.	Medium	Planning	Medium
5.3	Implement changes to the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Ordinance based on recommendations from the TDR subcommittee.	High	Planning	Short
5.4	Explore the use of pattern zoning as a tool to guide context-sensitive residential development. Pattern zoning identifies and codifies the scale, form, and design of existing neighborhoods so that new development fits seamlessly with Dover’s character while allowing for more predictable, streamlined permitting.	Medium	Planning	Long
5.5	Promote mixed-use redevelopment while preserving existing industrial activity within the Integrated Development Areas, including along Central Avenue, Knox Marsh Road, and Littleworth Road.	High	Planning	Ongoing
5.6	Guide density increases in residential areas in a reasonable and context-sensitive way according to Dover’s Future Land Use Strategy.	High	Planning	Ongoing
5.7	Balance the protection of Dover’s open space assets and future compatible housing development in the residential areas on the outskirts of the city.	High	Planning, Open Lands Committee	Ongoing

APPENDICES