

F. Royalston Implementation Action Plan

Overview

The following pages describe the most needed and most promising steps for Royalston to implement the objectives of the Greater Gardner Sustainable Growth Management Plan. These objectives include:

- Protecting open space and preserving scenic character
- Stabilizing municipal finances
- Protecting natural resources and public water supplies
- Accommodating new growth where the environment can best support it

The action steps described here were arrived at by Royalston's leaders involved in the planning process over the past nine months, in collaboration with the Greater Gardner planning team.

Preserving Open Space and Town Character

1. In the next few decades, much of Royalston's new development will likely be on Approval-Not-Required lots. Royalston's treatment of ANR development during this time will determine whether or not the town's scenic roadways are protected for the future. **At a minimum, Royalston should implement a scenic roadways bylaw that regulates the design of new roadside development both within and outside the road right-of-way. Scenic roadways bylaws can significantly improve the look and feel of ANR development, with little or no burden to landowners or developers.** Access management is a more powerful tool for redirecting ANR development, and may be well-suited to portions of Royalston. See *Appendix 19, Volume II - Sheet 4* for a more thorough discussion of these tools.
2. Much of Royalston's land is currently held in large parcels, but most of these could be subdivided and developed at any time. **Recognizing that most landowners ultimately need or want to profit from the sale of their land, the town must begin working with its large landowners to identify alternatives to development now, before the landowners decide to sell. In Royalston, sensitive properties surrounding the historic town center, might be a logical place to begin these efforts.** This package contains information on options available to large landowners, strategies for working with landowners to identify alternatives to development, and contacts to land trusts that are willing to assist Royalston in working with landowners.
3. Royalston's historic town center helps to define the town's character, and is an attraction for locals and visitors alike. However, development adjacent to this historic area, if not property sited and designed, could detract from this unique resource. **Establishment of a local historic district or an overlay district specifying certain design standards would**

be a pro-active step to preserve the character of Royalston center. Such a provision could be implemented as an expansion to the existing HR district, and might include site and building design standards that are compatible with the existing character of the area.

Protecting Water Supply/Natural Resources

4. Royalston depends upon a combination of private individual groundwater wells and public wells for its water supply. The quality of water reaching the public water source in South Royalston may be affected by upstream activities in Winchendon (see water resources map included in this package). As Royalston and its neighbors seek to maintain the quality of their existing public water sources, cross-boundary cooperation may be required to protect watersheds and aquifer recharge areas. **The Board of Selectmen should ratify the Statement of Collaboration (Appendix 10, Volume II), which is a multi-town agreement to examine the critical issue of water supply protection over the next eighteen months.**

Changes to Local Zoning

5. In the longer-term, Royalston may begin to see multi-lot subdivisions as prime road frontage is developed. Cluster zoning is perhaps the best low-cost tool for protecting open space in the face of development, and is compatible with Royalston's rural character and lack of public water or sewer. While Royalston already has a cluster zoning bylaw, the town may want to consider making the following changes to improve its effectiveness, if and when the market for subdivisions moves into Royalston. Appendix 19, Volume II – *Sheet 5* (cluster zoning), *Sheet 3* (sewage disposal options for cluster developments) and the sample bylaws may be helpful in informing the decision to amend the cluster zoning bylaw.
 - A. The existing cluster zoning bylaw allows the number of units in a cluster subdivision to be only 80% of the number allowable in the district in a normal subdivision. This reduction in the overall number of units is a major disincentive for developers, and should be eliminated if the town wishes for the cluster provisions to be used.
 - B. Cluster zoning in Royalston requires a special permit from the Planning Board, which may be a major disincentive for developers considering cluster subdivisions. See *Appendix 19, Volume II – Sheet 5* for possible ways to remove this disincentive.
 - C. Royalston's current cluster bylaw requires a 1-acre minimum lot size in cluster developments. Reducing this requirement to as little as 10,000 s.f. is feasible given today's decentralized wastewater treatment technology (see Appendix 19, Volume II, *Sheet 3*), and could result in more protected open space.
 - D. Current requirements for Open Land appear to allow wetlands to be included in the calculation of Open Land area. With this provision, very little of the open space protected in a cluster development might actually be usable upland that would not have been protected anyway. Limiting the contribution of wetlands to Open Land will result in greater protection of usable open space resources for recreation, forestry, and other purposes.

Next Steps

By May 2000:

- Present this plan to the Board of Selectmen, solicit their feedback, and decide on next steps. If possible, arrange to present updates to the Selectmen every two months on the progress of implementing the plan.
- Meet with the Board of Selectmen to present and ratify the Statement of Collaboration. Use the water resource map and Q&A page included in Appendix 10, Volume II, if needed.
- Distribute fact sheets and other relevant materials in Appendix 19, Volume II to town officials and citizens to encourage public discussion of growth management issues.
- Give a brief presentation at spring 2000 Town Meeting about this plan and how it can help Royalston direct future growth, preserve its rural environment, and save money. Solicit volunteers to work on different aspects of implementing the plan.

By December 2000:

- Meet with the Board of Selectmen to discuss the problems of and potential solutions to ANR development and solicit feedback for next steps.
- Contact land trusts, state agencies and others to discuss strategy for working with large landowners.
- Continue discussion of water supply protection issues. If appropriate, prepare Town Warrant for water supply protection measures for spring 2001 town meeting.

By May 2001:

- Begin working with large landowners on financially feasible alternatives to developing their land, starting with landowners near historic Royalston center.
- Meet with local boards, commissions, and individuals interested in historic preservation about the need for development design standards near historic Royalston center.
- Continue discussions of ways to limit and/or improve ANR development.
- Town meeting vote on water supply protection measures, if appropriate. Give a brief presentation at spring 2001 Town Meeting about progress of implementing the plan.

By December 2001:

- Begin discussions with town boards and the public about revising the cluster zoning bylaw.
- If appropriate, prepare Town Warrant for scenic roadways General Bylaw and/or access management bylaw, to address ANR development, for spring 2002 Town Meeting.
- Continue working with large landowners on financially feasible alternatives to developing their land.
- Continue discussions about the need for development design standards near historic Royalston center.

Resources Included in this Report

- Tools for Communities 1-5: Fact sheets on water supply protection, compact growth centers, sewage disposal options, alternatives to ANR development, and cluster zoning (Appendix 19, Volume II).