

MEMORANDUM

TO: Tom Poirier, Gorham & Steve Puleo, Windham

CC: Carol Eyeran, Town Planner Gorham

From: North Star Planning

RE: Villages Master Plan – Zoning Implementation Project

Date: May 23, 2024

Overview

This memo provides an overview of the approach to zoning work that North Star Planning (NSP) has been contracted to develop for the towns of Gorham and Windham to implement the zoning for the Villages Master Plan for Little Falls/South Windham. This ongoing work involves both mapping updates for proposed zoning districts, as well as written zoning language which includes purpose statements, permitted uses, dimensional standards, and design standards.

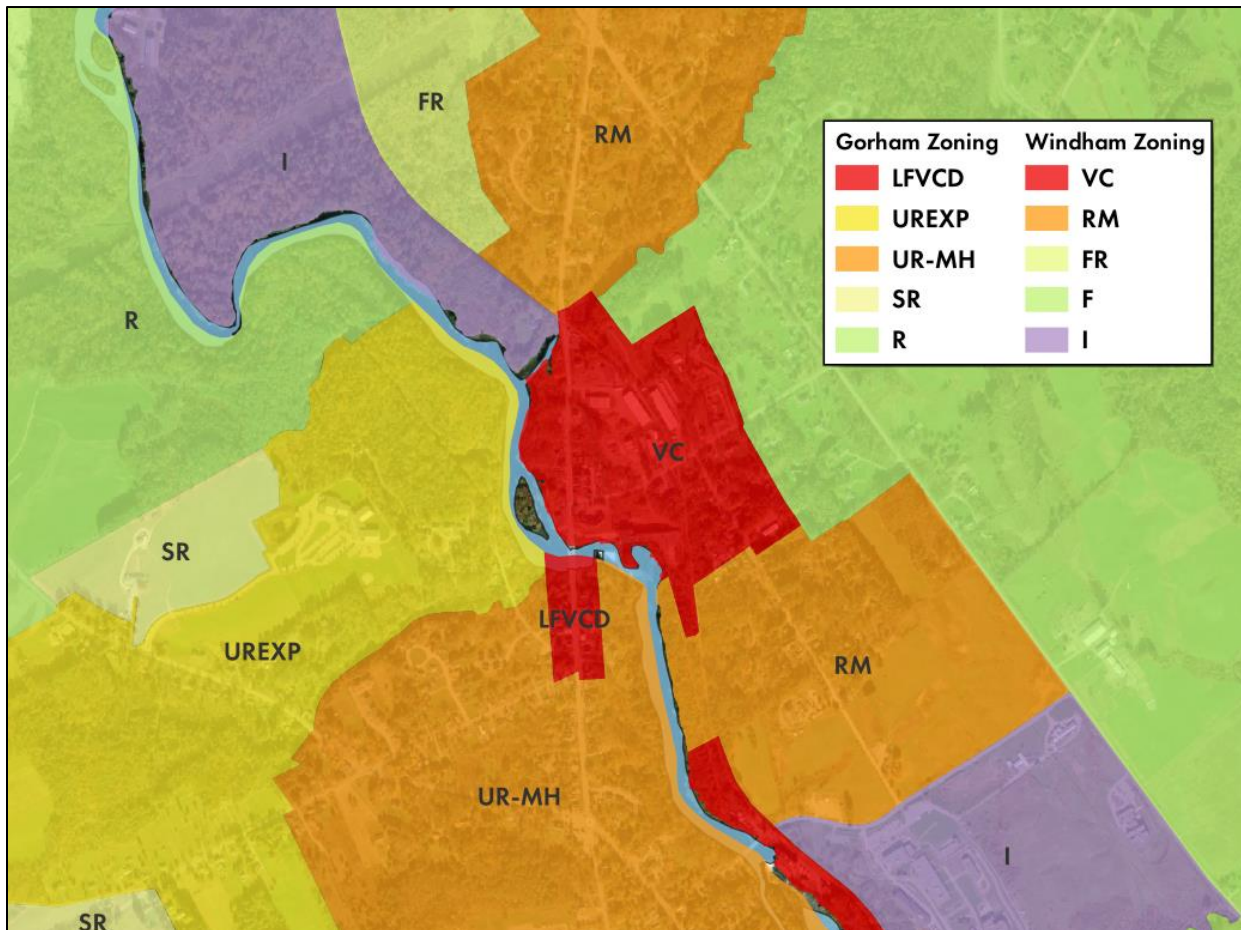
The Villages Master Plan laid out several key policy recommendations including revitalizing economic development, providing for a wide range of housing types, improving pedestrian connectivity and placemaking, and prioritizing open space connectivity. These policy recommendations ultimately shaped the zoning recommendations from the Master Plan, which include the following:

- Create and coordinate standards that allow and encourage increased residential density and a diverse mix of businesses and services in a revitalized urban village (Village Core)
- Permit increased residential density throughout the area at levels to support an active Village Core along Route 202 while preserving neighborhood building character for neighborhoods at the edges of the study area (Supporting Residential).
- Establish building and development standards to require building and site design that will be an asset to the area, with the most prescriptive standards in the Village Core and the most flexible standards in the Supporting Residential areas.

Zoning

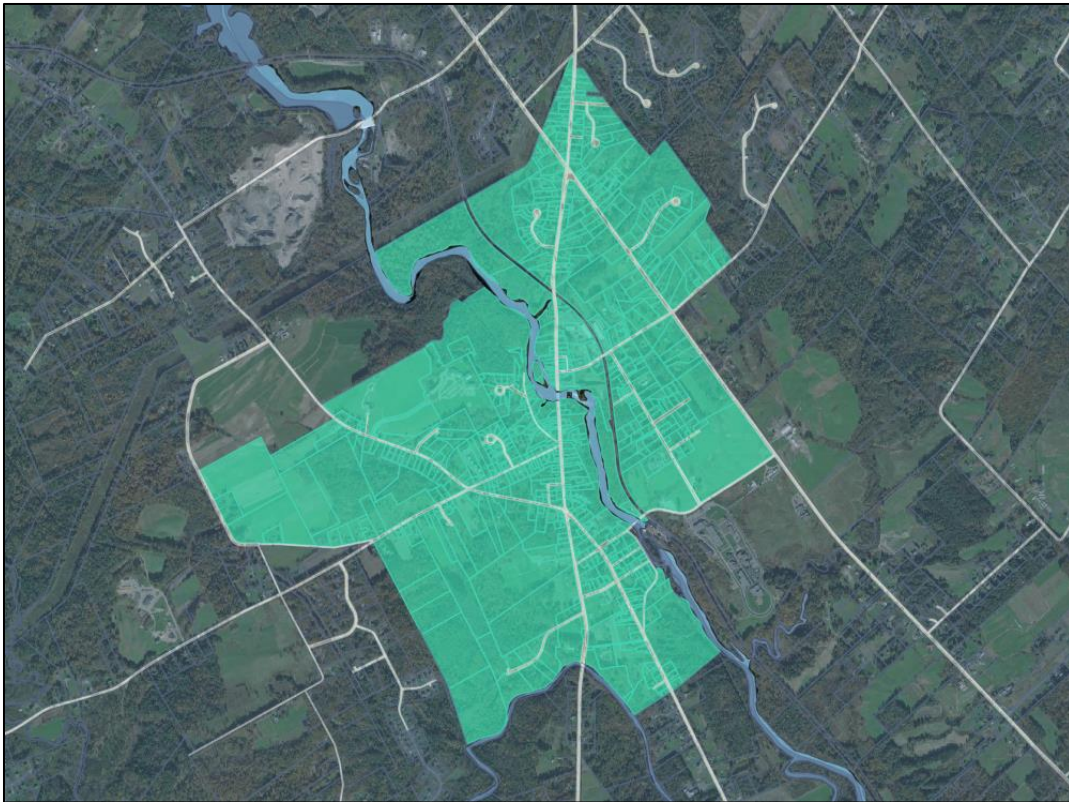
NSP proposes a singular 'South Windham Little Falls Village' zoning district with three subdistricts. This would provide a unified framework that both municipalities can incorporate into their respective land use ordinance, with the aim of having standards that are virtually identical in corresponding areas on both sides of the Presumpscot River. The overarching zone would establish general guidelines and objectives for land use and development across the entire area. The three subdistricts provide more specific regulations and designations tailored to distinct areas within the villages area, addressing unique roles, needs, characteristics, and desired outcomes of each subdistrict.

South Windham and Little Falls form a single growth area, encompassing two adjacent growth districts in the communities of Windham and Gorham. This area is covered by multiple zoning districts including village commercial (LFVCD + VC), light residential (UREXP, SR, FR), medium residential (UR-MH + RM), rural (R+F), and industrial (I) as well as shoreland zoning regulations in both communities.



Proposed Boundaries

NSP utilized the recommendations of the Villages Master Plan, informed by the existing zoning and future land use maps in each Town's Comprehensive Plan, to identify an appropriate boundary for a new South Windham Little Falls Village zone. This process involved overlaying these maps to highlight areas of alignment and divergence, allowing NSP to draw a boundary that accommodates anticipated growth while respecting existing zoning regulations and other community plans.

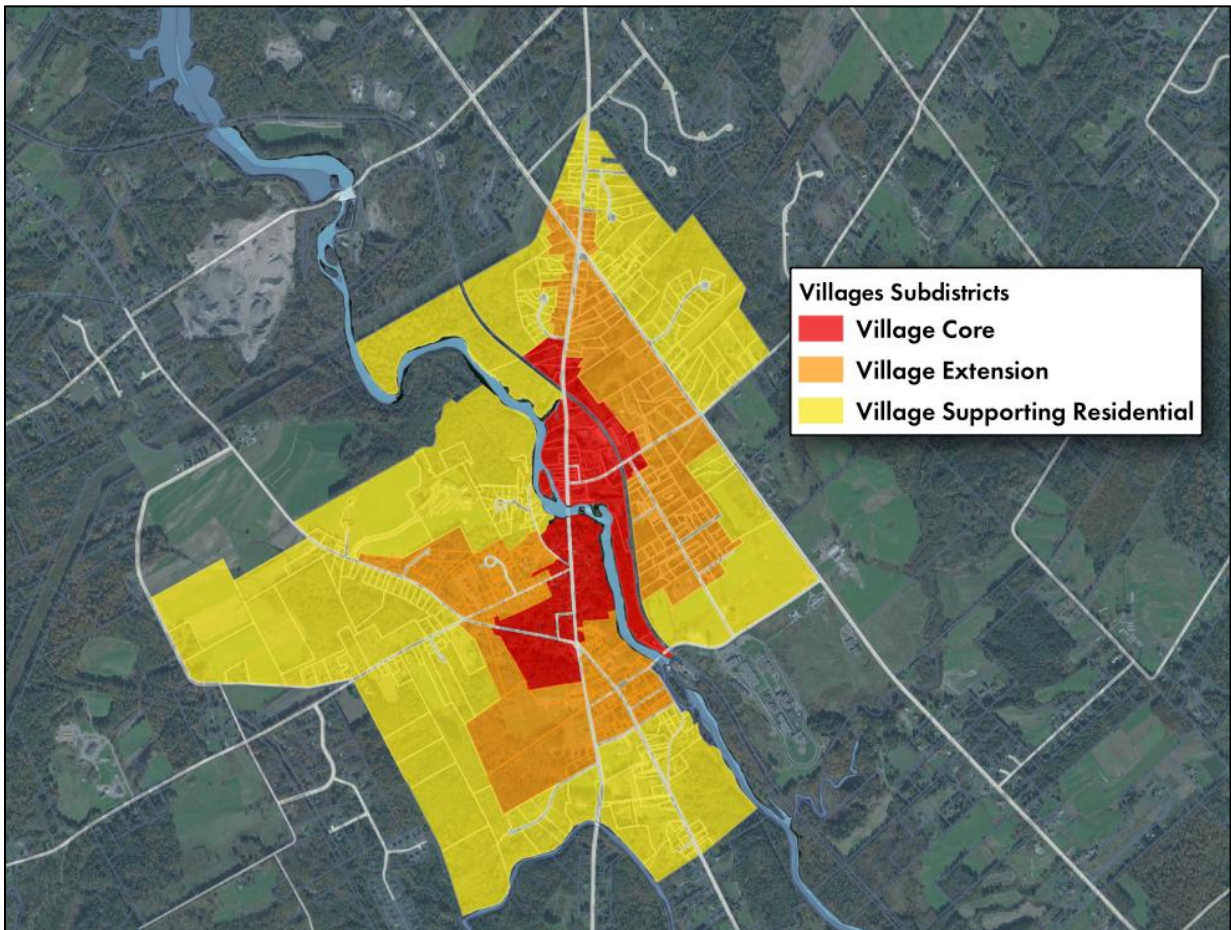


These proposed boundaries integrate existing zoning, future land use planning, and the Villages Master Plan and ensure that the zoning boundaries reflect both the existing built environment and future aspirations in the villages. Since the last conversation with town staff about the zoning boundaries, NSP has added parcels where it seemed to make sense to match existing zoning lines and avoid creating small remnant pockets of RM in Windham, UREXP in Gorham near the school, for example. The result is a larger village area.

Subdistricts

Upon review of the Villages Master Plan and feedback from both towns, NSP proposes the following three subdistricts within the South Windham Little Falls Village district:

- **Village Core** – to cultivate a dynamic, pedestrian-friendly downtown village characterized by versatile mixed-use development. This district envisions a lively blend of commercial and residential spaces, with ground floors designed for active engagement through inviting storefronts and active public spaces.
- **Village Extension** – to create walkable residential neighborhoods that enhance and sustain the Village Core. This subdistrict prioritizes the creation of sidewalks, trails, and paths for better pedestrian infrastructure to seamlessly integrate residential areas with commercial services, open space, and key village activity centers
- **Village Supporting Residential** – to preserve existing neighborhood building character, while allowing for additional infill residential development. This subdistrict creates a balanced transition from the more active Village Core and Extension areas to surrounding rural spaces and resources and enhances connectivity and access from the Village to natural landscapes.



Zoning Approach

The zoning updates discussed below are being developed to strike a balance of flexibility and creativity in project design and uses, while requiring a higher level of quality urban design and aesthetic appeal. These standards aim to promote private development that is attractive, cohesive, and pedestrian-friendly by specifying building heights, setbacks, and other requirements that complement and contribute to the village’s character. At the same time, some flexibility is key; by allowing for design variations and alternatives, zoning standards can avoid placing undue burden on developers. This balance ensures that new developments contribute positively to the village’s charm and functionality without stifling innovation or making projects prohibitively expensive. These standards seek to achieve a synergy between the village design envisioned as part of the Master Plan and the practicality of promoting private investment throughout the Villages area.

Dimensional Standards

Villages Zoning – Dimensional Standards			
	<i>Village Core</i>	<i>Village Extension</i>	<i>Supporting Residential</i>
Lot Size (min.)	no minimum.	5,000 sq. ft. (sewer/water) 15,000 sq. ft. (septic)	20,000 sq. ft. (sewer/water) 25,000 sq. ft. (septic)
Net Residential Density (min.)	750 sq.ft. / DU	2,500 sq. ft. / DU	7,500 sq. ft. / DU
Front Setback (max.)	10 ft.	15 ft.	20 ft.
Side Setback (min.)	None	None	10 ft.
Rear Setback (min.)	20 ft.	20 ft.	20 ft.
Frontage (min)	25 ft.	50 ft.	100 ft.
Height (max.)*	4 stories	3 stories	2 stories
Lot Coverage (max.)	None	None	80%

Density

NSP proposes higher densities than currently allowed in the proposed Village Core and Village Extension areas to make it more feasible to see new residential construction and renovation of existing residential structures. More people living in and in proximity to the Village Core will also help support new services and businesses in the Village Core.

Lot Coverage

There should have no maximum requirement for lot coverage (impervious surfaces) in the urban village envisioned in the Village Core and Village extension areas. NSP suggests capping lot coverage at 80%.

Projects requiring subdivision or site plan review will still have to meet existing stormwater and erosion standards, but removing lot coverage maximums allows for full utilization of site potential, enabling the design of a more dynamic and versatile spaces that can foster a more contemporary urban space.

Frontage

Although there could be larger buildings and lots in the Village Core, the minimum frontage requirement should be low enough to allow for infill development on a smaller project scale, and a 25 ft minimum frontage requirement is proposed here. Minimum frontage is proposed to increase to 50 ft. in the Village Extension and 100 ft. in the Supporting Residential, commensurate with larger lot sizes and higher densities.

Height

Height in the proposed villages zone will step down from four (4) stories in the Village Core subdistrict, to three (3) stories in the Village Extension, and two (2) stories in the Supporting Residential. Implementing a height limit of four stories can strategically support growth and investment by ensuring new developments complement the existing character and scale of the village. This height restriction fosters a human-scale environment that is pedestrian-friendly and visually cohesive, which can enhance the village's appeal as a desirable place to live, work, and visit. North Star Planning is also proposing an incentive related to height bonuses discussed below.

Permitted Uses

NSP recommends keeping permitted uses relatively open-ended for the Village Core district. A wide range of multifamily residential building types should be allowed to support density and activity goals, and new single-family homes should not be allowed. General categories of Business and Professional Services and Office should be permitted along with a handful of uses that promote and support active streets. NSP also recommends including a Special Exceptions category for other uses that may not be envisioned at this time but could support the district goals of active streets and storefronts, like retail, restaurants, and entertainment.

The Village Extension should mirror residential uses within the Village Core but focused on supporting residents within the walking distance of the Village zoning district to meet local needs and be local amenities, like small retail and corner stores.

New nonresidential uses in the Supporting Residential district will be more limited, with a focus on infill and redevelopment of smaller scale residential uses.

Design + Performance Standards

Open Space + Natural Features + Public Space Design

As noted below, there are several improvements to the construction and character of public spaces and streets that are beyond the ability of zoning regulations for private development to achieve. However, to the extent that private development can build new public or quasi-public spaces, provide for connections to trails and the Presumpscot, that should be built into the zoning and site plan review requirements.

NSP recommends a zoning requirement for at least a 25-foot access easement over all properties with frontage on the Presumpscot River, with the location of the easement to be determined when any permitting or approvals are required. Additionally, both communities should be thinking about access easements to the River from points on Route 202 and the Mountain Division Trail.

Landscaping + Buffering

Landscaping requirements in the Village Core and Village Extension should be limited to requirements for planting street trees and plantings within the small front setback areas. Larger buffers between uses and properties are not appropriate, as the focus here should be on the pedestrian experience and interface of building and uses on the property with the street network. Any onsite parking should be visually screened from streets through building placement, village scale plantings and fencing (short picket-type fencing).

Native trees and shrubs should be required for street trees, decorative plantings and use in low-impact development style stormwater treatment/infiltration design.

Signage

All new signage in the three subdistricts should be limited in size and be of improved quality and design, as it serves an urban village context. Highway sized signs, designed to be legible when traveling in an automobile at more than 40 miles per hour are not appropriate in these areas.

Sign standards for these districts should limit sign size, but also address materials and sign lighting.

Parking and Traffic

NSP recommends eliminating onsite minimum parking requirements for all three sub-districts and encouraging shared parking agreements between abutting property owners where there is not enough room for adequate onsite parking. Parking associated with new development must not be in any required setback and all parking should be screened from streets as described above.

Drive Throughs should not be allowed in the Village Core but may be appropriate in the Village Extension with high standards for design and access control.

Building Design Standards

NSP recommends developing relatively high standards for buildings and building materials in the Village Core. Building design and building entrance locations can contribute to active 1st floors at the street, whether the use on the 1st floor is residential, non-residential, or a mix of both. New buildings should use high quality building materials, and certain building types and building materials should be prohibited.

Standards will be augmented with detailed subdistrict purpose statements and guidelines in the form of images or graphics of desired building typologies.

Incentives and Land Use Tools

Review Thresholds

NSP recommends increasing the Planning Board review thresholds for applications in the villages zone. For example, NSP recommends Staff, or a Staff Review Board, review any projects under say 12 dwelling units or 10,000 sq. ft. of impervious surface. Establishing clear criteria that determine when a Planning Board review is necessary streamlines the approval process for smaller or less complex projects. By setting these thresholds (could also consider size, use, impact), municipalities can expedite approvals for developments that fall below the threshold – saving time and resources for both developers and Planning Boards. This target approach allows minor projects to proceed with minimal delay, encouraging investment and development activity. At the same time, it ensures that more significant projects, with larger impacts to the surrounding community, undergo comprehensive review. This balance helps maintain rigorous oversight when needed while facilitating efficient growth and development for smaller, less impactful projects.

Reducing Subdivision Reviews

The new Villages zone anticipates increased density across the subdistricts. Any application with greater than three dwelling units would be subject to the Subdivision Review standards – increasing requirements and burden of review. NSP

recommends increasing the threshold for subdivision reviews to more than 10 dwelling units. This aligns with the increased thresholds for staff review.

Height Incentives

As noted above, height incentives strategically encourage developers to incorporate community benefits or identified measures into their projects by offering additional building height as a reward. These incentives can promote the inclusion of affordable housing, green building practices, public amenities, and other desired features into new developments. For example, Gorham and Windham could consider allowing a developer to exceed standard height limits if they provide a certain percentage of affordable housing units or green space. By linking increased height allowances to provision of public goods, height incentives provide valuable additional floor space to developers, while the community benefits from the improved infrastructure, services, and environmental sustainability.

Other Considerations

There are a few other considerations primarily related to development within public spaces and public street rights-of-way that will have a large impact on the character and experience of residents and visitors to this area that are beyond the scope of zoning updates. A common set of Technical Design Standards for the two Towns that would specify details for improvements within the right of way would ensure that public and private improvements over time related to curb and sidewalk materials, light poles and fixtures, street furniture, etc. are consistent. Additionally, standards for improvements related to signage, wayfinding, and street and traffic calming could be included in that work. Finally, Windham and Gorham should work together on a public parking plan for the Village.
