

Certification of Chapter 14 Comprehensive Plan

I, Robin Patterson, hereby certify as the Municipal Clerk of the Town of Berwick that Chapter 14: Future Land Use of the Comprehensive Plan attached hereto is a true copy approved at the Annual Town Meeting on June 9, 2026.

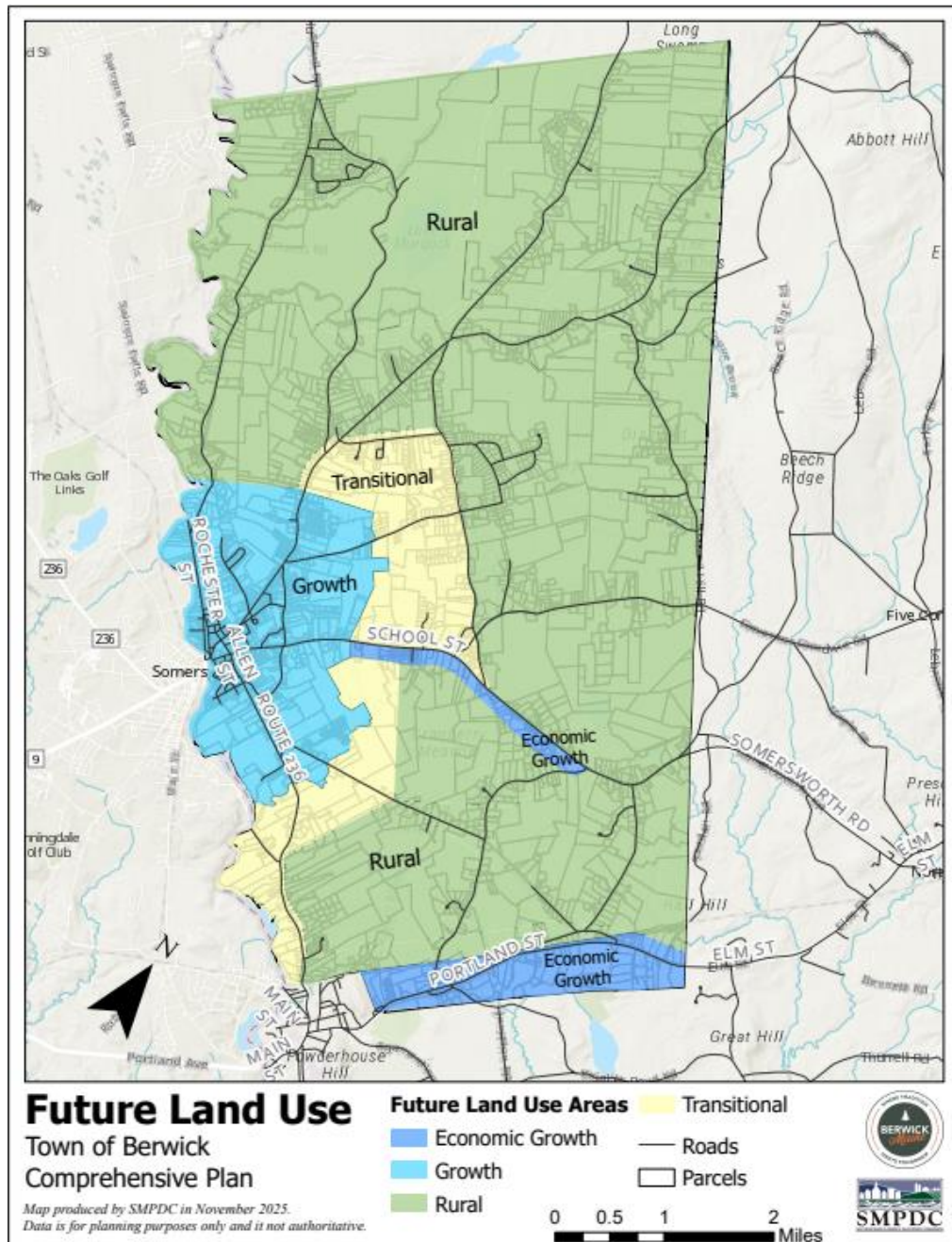
ATTEST:



Robin Patterson
Town Clerk

CHAPTER 14:

FUTURE LAND USE



Summary and Plan for the Future

Berwick's planning efforts focus on balancing growth with preservation to ensure the town continues to evolve while keeping the rural character, open spaces, and small-town feel that define it. The Future Land Use Plan establishes a vision for where and how Berwick should grow over the next decade and beyond, building on the town's strong village center and vast natural and agricultural resources.

The Plan divides Berwick into several land use designations that guide how development should occur: Growth Areas, Transitional Areas, Rural Areas, and Economic Focus Areas. Each designation reflects a distinct role in Berwick's future, from vibrant mixed-use neighborhoods in the downtown to the farmland and forest corridors that sustain Berwick's rural economy and natural systems.

This chapter sets forth the framework that will guide future zoning, subdivision, and capital investment decisions. It reflects both state law and local priorities, supporting growth where infrastructure already exists, protecting sensitive areas from overdevelopment, and maintaining Berwick's identity.

Moving forward, Berwick's land use policy should encourage compact, walkable growth within and around the downtown where public water and sewer services are available, reinforcing the town's traditional village center while managing growth responsibly. At the same time, Berwick will work to preserve its rural landscapes, farmland, and forests through low-impact and clustered development patterns that protect open space and maintain the town's rural character.

The town will continue to strengthen protections for high-value natural resources such as aquifers, wetlands, and wildlife habitat, ensuring that development is compatible with environmental stewardship. Clear transitions between higher-density and rural areas will be maintained to preserve Berwick's distinctive sense of place. Along key corridors such as Route 4 and Route 9, future commercial and light industrial growth will be guided by strong design standards that enhance visual quality and community identity.

Above all, land use policies will be aligned with infrastructure capacity and environmental goals to support a resilient future for Berwick. By directing growth to the right places and protecting what makes Berwick unique, the town can sustain both its small-town character and its capacity to thrive in the years ahead. The Future Land Use Plan is not a static map, but a living framework to be refined as conditions change and as Berwick's vision continues to take shape.

Introduction

The Future Land Use Plan provides the framework for how Berwick will grow and evolve in the years ahead. It serves as the foundation for future zoning, ordinance updates, and land use policies following adoption of the Comprehensive Plan. Its purpose is to guide where growth should occur, and where it should be limited to ensure development supports community values, protects critical resources, and uses public infrastructure efficiently.

Berwick's land use pattern has long reflected a careful balance between growth and preservation. Earlier Comprehensive Plans emphasized protecting the town's rural landscape while fostering a vibrant village core, a philosophy that continues to shape Berwick's identity today. The town's traditional development pattern remains centered around its historic downtown and surrounding neighborhoods served by public water and sewer, while vast areas of forest, farmland, and open space preserve Berwick's rural character.

Building on this foundation, the Future Land Use Plan bridges Berwick's enduring values with modern realities, including state housing mandates, market pressures, and shifting economic trends. It is designed to ensure that future development strengthens the town's sense of place, directs growth to where services exist, and safeguards the natural and working landscapes that define Berwick.

Growth Areas

Berwick's Growth Area encompasses the downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods where public water and sewer are available. This area represents the heart of the community, a walkable, mixed-use environment that blends homes, shops, services, and civic spaces.

Under new state law, lots with both water and sewer must be at least 5,000 square feet. Because Urban Residential (R1) currently requires 10,000 square feet, this effectively doubles the allowable density. Through thoughtful planning, the town can position itself to achieve goals for infill, housing diversity and affordability, and a stronger town center while helping to limit sprawl in rural areas.

Over time, expansion of the R1 zone may be appropriate in adjacent neighborhoods where infrastructure can be extended cost-effectively. Encouraging small-scale multifamily housing, accessory dwelling units, and mixed-use buildings will help meet housing demand while maintaining New England architectural character and Berwick's sense of place.

Growth in these areas should follow a historical development pattern, characterized by compactness, connectivity, and design that prioritizes people over cars. Walkability and access to destinations should remain priorities.

Transitional Areas

Berwick's Transitional Areas serve as visual and functional buffers between the town's compact growth zones and its rural countryside. These areas help define gateways into the community, ensuring that development patterns shift gradually rather than abruptly.

The current Transitional Residential zoning district already supports this purpose by allowing moderate-density housing and low-impact commercial uses that maintain rural aesthetics. Future design standards should emphasize landscaping, building scale, and setbacks that complement adjacent land uses.

Transitional areas also represent long-term potential for future growth if infrastructure or community needs change. Maintaining flexible yet protective zoning will help Berwick adapt without compromising the integrity of its rural landscape.

Economic Growth (Route 4 and Route 9 Corridors)

Berwick's economy is closely tied to its regional location and transportation corridors. The Route 4 and Route 9 corridors function as economic gateways, connecting Berwick to North Berwick, South Berwick, and the greater Seacoast region.

While these corridors are not designated growth areas, they play an important economic role by supporting commercial, industrial, and service uses. Continued development, if left uncoordinated, could diminish the aesthetic quality of these entrances to town. As such, these areas should be managed through enhanced design standards, access management, and targeted zoning updates that encourage high-quality development such as clean manufacturing, technology-based industries, or small-scale business parks.

Berwick's goal is to create corridors that are both economically productive and visually appealing places that signal the town's forward-looking approach while preserving its rural gateway character.

Because the Growth Area is defined at a district scale, portions of established residential neighborhoods fall within its boundaries. Future planning should incorporate measures to mitigate impacts at locations where commercial development may adjoin residential uses.

Rural Areas

Most of Berwick's land area is rural, characterized by forested landscapes, working farms, and scenic backroads. These areas are vital to the town's identity, economy, and environmental health.

Residents have consistently affirmed their desire to preserve these rural landscapes while allowing for reasonable, low-impact development that complements the character of the land.

Many of Berwick's rural lands contain high-value natural and agricultural resources, including aquifer recharge areas, large wetland complexes, wildlife habitat blocks, and some of the town's most productive farmland soils. These features reinforce the importance of maintaining low-impact development patterns in rural areas and ensuring that new growth does not compromise Berwick's long-term environmental health or its rural economy.

The existing Rural Residential zoning largely achieves this balance by limiting density and supporting uses compatible with the natural environment. These areas should continue to accommodate farming, forestry, home-based businesses, and appropriate housing, while discouraging major subdivisions that fragment farmland or wildlife habitat.

To help preserve farmland, forestland, and rural open space, subdivision activity in rural areas should prioritize conservation or cluster design. Cluster developments should be arranged to keep large tracts of land intact, maintain wildlife corridors, and ensure that conserved open space connects logically to existing protected lands whenever possible.

When reviewing subdivisions or major development proposals in rural areas, particular attention should be given to parcels that contain prime farmland soils or soils of statewide importance. Site design should minimize the conversion of these agricultural soils to non-farm uses and support long-term agricultural viability consistent with the town's agricultural goals.

The Town should continue to maintain and strengthen aquifer protection measures in areas where rural land use overlaps with important groundwater resources, ensuring that future zoning and subdivision standards support long-term water quality and public health.

Many rural areas overlap important groundwater recharge zones, which further reinforces the need for low-impact development patterns.

Examples of Rural Areas with Significant Resource Value

Each Rural Area has a set of unique challenges and opportunities that include natural and agricultural value. These include:

- **Beaver Dam Heath**, a wetland complex of statewide ecological significance that supports rare species and unique natural communities such as white cedar swamp.
- **Hatfield Pond, aka Lake Murdock** in the northwest, where wetlands, forested buffers, and the town's largest aquifer.
- **Little River corridor** along the northern boundary, a sensitive riparian system.
- **Farmland between Route 9 and Route 4**, an area of active and historic agricultural use whose proximity to highways and developable land increases the pressure for conversion.

Implementation Considerations

The Future Land Use Plan serves as the foundation for Berwick's next generation of zoning, subdivision, and development policies. To put this plan into action, the Town should review and update the Land Use Ordinance to ensure consistency with new state housing laws and the designations outlined in this plan. Berwick should also evaluate opportunities to establish Conservation Overlay Districts that strengthen protections for sensitive natural and agricultural areas. Subdivision and design standards should be refined to improve the quality of cluster developments, guide smooth growth transitions, and enhance the appearance of major corridors.

The Town should update subdivision standards to strengthen conservation and cluster development requirements in rural areas, ensuring that subdivision design preserves open space, maintains wildlife corridors, and protects agricultural soils where appropriate.

The Town should continue to maintain and strengthen aquifer protection measures, including reviewing zoning and subdivision standards to ensure development does not compromise groundwater recharge areas or public water sources. Land use decisions should also support the Town's resilience goals by protecting wetlands, floodplains, and other natural systems that help reduce storm impacts.

Capital improvement planning, including investments in water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure, should be aligned with designated growth areas to support efficient and sustainable development. Continued coordination with SMPDC, KACTS, and neighboring communities will be essential to advancing shared regional goals related to land use, housing, and transportation.

The Town should maintain close coordination with the Berwick Sewer District and Maine Water Company regarding service capacity, system upgrades, and long-term needs within designated growth areas to ensure that land use decisions and infrastructure planning remain aligned.

The Town should periodically review Future Land Use boundaries to ensure they reflect evolving community needs, infrastructure capacity, and development trends.

As Berwick grows, the Town should monitor housing demand, development patterns, and infrastructure capacity to ensure that land use policies remain responsive and effective. The Future Land Use Plan is a reflection of Berwick's values, guiding the community to grow with care, balance, and protect its rural character and sense of place in the years ahead.