

## **GROWTH, POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **4.1 OVERVIEW**

In 1991 the Town of Foster was growing at a rate faster than expected given the economic recession of that time (1990-1991). Growth has continued at an accelerated rate over the last 12 years. Thus the issues of growth management and tax rate stabilization are very real concerns to town residents.

The town's physical appearance and rural quality of life are marketable real estate attributes. The special factors that attract new residents to town are those that are the most sensitive to growth and development.

The 1991 Foster Community Survey demonstrates that the people moving to Foster are young, upwardly mobile, of child-bearing age, commute to work elsewhere and seek a rural "country" environment. The in-migration to town in the decade prior to 1991 explains, in part, why Foster is now ranked fifth in Rhode Island for median income. The 2003 Community Survey indicates that people who have moved to Foster in the last decade are slightly older, but their reasons for moving into town are essentially the same.

Prior plans (1982 Comprehensive Plan) and technical projections from the Rhode Island Department of Administration, Division of Planning show a maximum population growth in Foster of between 4800 and 5400 people for the next 20 years. Based upon past and current growth trends, the desirability of the town for those escaping Providence and its suburbs, and the availability of developable land, this may not be a realistic appraisal. Near term, 5-10 year growth projections based upon past trends, current employment and real estate market activity (in a "down" year) are more reliable.

Studies for the 1991 Comprehensive Plan show that in the near term, Foster will grow, most likely at the current rate or faster. The 1991 population estimate was a little over 4200 people. According to the 1990 US Census, Foster's population was 4316 people. According to projections prepared for the 1991 Plan, the population was estimated to reach 5200 within the next decade or an increase of 1000 people, 10 years sooner than prior projections.

One indicator of growth is the number of new residential homes built in any given year. For the year 1990-1991, 36 building permits were issued for new homes. This indicates that in a time of economic recession and a statewide slowdown in residential real estate sales, the rate of new home construction in Foster was significantly higher than the ten year average (28). At the growth peak for the last decade in 1986, 58 permits were issued for new housing unit construction.

### **2003 Update**

The 2003 census does not show growth in Foster's population, however, there has been consistent new home construction over the last 12 years, indicating that the census statistics may be questionable.

State and Federal population information reported for 2002 show a decrease in population of 42 persons, or approximately 0.97 percent. There exists a general consensus that these figures are not accurate. A growth management study conducted in 2002-2003 by Teitz and Shamoon, consultants hired by the Town of Foster, used housing permits to establish what they believe to be a more accurate population for Foster in 2002.

Teitz and Shamoon used permit data collected by the Foster Zoning Department to determine that 122 more dwelling units than estimated by the Census Bureau were constructed in Foster. (The Census Bureau cites a figure of 1,578 in 2000, where the Consultants project a number of 1,700. Using a ratio of 2.82 persons per dwelling unit, Teitz and Shamoon project the 2000 Foster Population to be over 4,800 residents. There is every indication that a higher growth rate than the ten year average will continue in the near term, particularly as the regional economy recovers within the next five years.

In 1990, according to Rhode Island Housing, Foster ranked as the fourth fastest growing community in Rhode Island, with a ten year growth rate of nearly 22% - exceeded only by the growth rates of Charlestown (25.9%), Block Island (25.8%) and Richmond (24.9%).

Residents responding to the 1990 Foster Community Survey undertaken for the Comprehensive Plan, who planned growing families, reported that they would contribute approximately 307 children over the next 5 years. Averaging 62 children annually - not including in-migration by new residents moving to town.

Less than five percent of the approximate 700 respondents to the 2003 community survey indicated an interest in adding one to two children to their household. A five percent increase to the 1,770 households in Foster would increase the school-age population by approximately 80 children. Adding an estimated 24 housing units per year (as projected by Teitz and Shamoon), will also add to the number of school age children.

Not only will growth, at this rate, cause significant change to Foster's rural character, but it will result in an increased demand for the Town's services and facilities, including school facilities. The ability of the Town to provide these services and facilities in pace with development without over-taxing the existing population is questionable.

#### Residential Build-Out

*The Planner's Database* (Fusco, et al) provided a residential build-out of the town. This analysis, calculates the number of new housing units that could be built in town based upon current zoning regulations. It concluded that based upon the construction of an average 28 housing units per year residential build-out would occur in 2071. If the rate increased to 50 homes per year, build-out would occur by 2036. Significantly, the number of residents that build-out would bring to Foster approximately double the existing population or 9,311 people. While this population appears small for a town the size of Foster - 52

square miles - it is a significant change from the current population of 4800 people. To accommodate such growth an additional 2000 housing units will have to be built together with additional classrooms, town offices and an increase in town staff. A straight line projection is overly simplistic. As the size of the town increases in terms of population and housing units so will the rate of growth.

#### 4.2 GROWTH MANAGEMENT

The intent and purpose of growth management is the same as that for all sound planning: to ensure that growth occurs in an orderly and planned manner so that the Town can plan for continued high quality services for an expanded population and can provide these services when they are needed. A critical component of growth management is the ability of the Town to manage the timing of growth and change such that services and facilities are available at a reasonable cost and in synchronization with development.

A fundamental component of this Plan is the establishment of a growth management strategy. This strategy, based upon demonstrated need, accepted planning practice and State Law, sets forth in the Future Land Use Plan map and the text of the Plan where future growth is appropriate and under what conditions.

The growth management component also proposes for *consideration* a growth rate timing strategy based upon a rate of growth Foster can sustain in terms of providing services and facilities and protecting the environmental character of the town. In this strategy the rate, timing or phasing of new residential growth will be held in step with the ability of the Town to provide essential services to the new development, including the building of school facilities and the provision of basic community services such as police and fire protection. It is recommended that Town officials begin the process now of evaluating in detail the relationship between the rate of growth and the rate of increase in town capital budgeting to provide services. The rate of growth may be timed to correlate with an acceptable rate of increase in town spending to accommodate growth, as well as the ability of the town to adequately evaluate the impacts of new development, plan and build facilities such as town offices and schools as well as the maintenance of vital services such as roads, fire and emergency services.

The growth management study undertaken in 2003, and incorporated as an appendix to this Plan, will provide methods to manage growth and a series of formulas to use to assess the cost of schools, infrastructure and community services that arise with an increasing population in the Town of Foster. Tools will also be provided for the adoption of growth control strategies that will allow for the phasing of development projects. The Town will also review the option to assess impact fees for new development to offset the cost of capital development. These fees will be based on information provided in the growth management study and will be similar to those in effect in many of the surrounding communities.