

INTRODUCTION

"Foster is rich in resources; historic houses, farmsteads, roads and mill ruins, and in the natural beauty of its setting; brooks, waterfalls, woods, swamps, and the plant and animal life they shelter. All of these resources are fragile, and most of them are non-renewable. All of them are threatened by development.

The Town's rugged topography, generally poor soil, and small-scale streams, coupled with its isolated location twenty (20) miles west of Providence, have largely determined its historical and physical development, delaying the initial colonial settlement until about 1704 and town incorporation until 1781 and contributing to a period of decline and outmigration which lasted from the late 1820s until the early 1950s.

The location of the town within easy automobile commuting distance to Providence and major employment centers has brought significant development pressure in the last decade.

The face of Foster's landscape has changed dramatically in the last two hundred years. Originally covered with hardwood forests, Foster, by the early nineteenth century was almost totally cleared, a result of both agricultural endeavors and forest processing industries. Today much of the land has reverted to forest, and only the seemingly endless stone walls leading away from the roads, numerous scrub-grown cellar holes, and old photographs showing hayfields instead of trees indicate the extent of the change.

In the nineteenth century, farm complexes were spread across the landscape. At key focal points pivotal cross roads, usually located near the local saw or gristmill, villages grew up. Hopkins Mills was the first to develop in the early 1700s. Foster Center, the present seat of government, developed later in the eighteenth century, and it was here that the first Foster town meeting was held in 1781. The villages of Clayville and Hopkins Mills took form in the early nineteenth century as did hamlets in Moosup Valley, North Foster, Foster Center and Mount Vernon.

These hamlets and villages were linked to each other by a series of roads which turned and jogged around natural features; wetlands, rock outcroppings and farmer's fields. Many of these roads have resisted modern straightening and about a third of them remain one lane wide and still unpaved; others are a minimal two lanes wide. Most are lined with stone walls and edged either by open fields or, more often, by fern- and wild flower-filled woods. They exist in relation to the land much as they did when first laid out in the last half of the eighteenth century (1700s.)"

- Foster, Rhode Island, Statewide Historical Preservation Report P-F-1,
Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1982.

The Town as a Cultural Landscape

Change, then, did not occur until recently. This, alone, accounts for the richness and importance of Foster's sense of place. It is not hard

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to view the entire town as an important and unique cultural landscape which retains the image and feel of an earlier time of rural tranquility and quietness. Although prosaic, this description is meaningful in that it is these qualities which Foster residents value more than others.

The public opinion survey undertaken by Mount Vernon Associates for the Comprehensive Plan in 1990 and reissued in 2003 demonstrates that in defining "rural," the residents of Foster responded by listing the following characteristics:

<u>Characteristic Mentioned</u>	<u>In 1990</u>	<u>In 2003</u>
Strict zoning/minimum acres	36.1%	29%
Open/wooded space	29.8%	27%
Minimal development	19.1%	0%
Farming/living off the land	18.8%	0%
Wild animals and livestock	17.1%	40%
Dirt/country roads	16.6%	24%
Quiet/peaceful	14.0%	24%
Sparse population	12.3%	20%
Little Commercial Development	0%	20%
Community/Political Involvement	20.0%	0%

Others mentioned cleanliness, beauty, few town services, few restrictions, friendliness, neighborliness, low taxes, historical resources, and volunteer town departments. Ninety three percent (93%) of respondents to the 1990 Foster Community Survey conducted for the Comprehensive Plan agreed that Foster's leaders should maintain the town's rural character. This alone is a measure of the value Foster residents hold for the physical character of their town. Nearly a third of all respondents said they would actually move from Foster if the town became too suburban in character.

According to the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, a town's comprehensive plan is "a statement (in text, illustrations or other media of communication) that is designed to provide a basis for rational decision making regarding the long term physical development of the municipality. The definition of goals and policies relative to the distribution of future land uses, both public and private, forms the basis for land use decisions to guide the overall physical, economic and social development of the municipality." *The Comprehensive Planning Act has set forth for us a process and scope for planning the future of the town.*

The Foster Comprehensive Plan, contained in this document, has been developed in accordance with the Comprehensive Planning Act as our statement of what we want our town to be in the future. In its most simple terms, our Plan calls for retaining as much as possible of Foster's *sense of place* which is the town's most valuable asset

1991 Town Council and Planning Board Members:

The Town Council: A. Edward Pearson, President

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Colette Matarese, Vice President
Raymond Capobianco
Richard Ruggieri
Frances Gast

Planning Board: Steven Fusco, Chair
Elizabeth Rogers, Vice Chair
Joseph McGinn, Secretary
Marge Vanner
Kurt Smith

Citizens Advisory Committee:

Robert Hohler, Chair	
Joyce Prew, Secretary	Gregory Drew
Charles Borders	W. Raymond Hohler
Robert Cushing	Robert E. Cushing
Margery Matthews	Richard Levesque
Viola Ulm	Mark Greenleaf
Karen King	Frances Johnson
Muriel Walker	Helen Hardy
Ernest Picard	Gregory Laramie
Maggie Fennessey	Barbara Boyden
Kevin Fennessey	Don Boyden
James Lannan	Warren Ducharme
Robert Charlwood	

The 2002-2003 re-write of the Comprehensive Plan has been completed by the Planning Board with consultation from the Conservation Commission, Foster Preservation Society, the Public Works Director, other Town boards and officials, and interested citizens. The Plan has updated statistical information and includes work accomplished since the 1991 version, such as the construction of the South Foster Fire Station and the renovation of the DPW garage. Some of the Land Use innovations called for in the 1991 Plan have been accomplished, notably the implementation of Residential Compound Zoning District. Some features, such as flexible zoning, designed to preserve Foster's rich resources, have yet to be implemented. Constructing and implementing these Land Use innovations should be priorities for the Town in the next decade, as development pressure increases.

Town Council and Planning Board Members present during the 2003 revision of the Comprehensive Plan:

The Town Council: Janet G. Dannecker, President
Harold R. Shippee, Sr., Vice President
Peter A. Baribault
Ralph A. Berkowitz
Lynne S. Rider

The Planning Board: Helen Hardy, Chair
John L. Lewis, Vice-Chair
Colette Matarese, Secretary

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Julia Parmentier
Michael Carpenter
Robin Fish
Don Moyer

Joseph McGinn	(Member 1990-2002)
Ronald Cervasio	(Member 1999-2002)
Richard Grant	(Member 1999-2003)
Roland Pelland	(Member 2001-2003)

Foster, 2004