

**ALTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**(Accepted at Town Meeting May 26, 2004)**

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## CHAPTER 1. - History of Alton

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased the land which makes up today's Town of Alton from the Penobscot Tribe of Indians in the late eighteenth century. It later ceded the land to Waterville (now Colby) College. Lots were then sold to individual settlers, or given to them in exchange for homesteading the land.<sup>1</sup>

The first settler in what is now called Alton arrived in 1818. More settlers and homesteaders continued to come, and within twenty-five years, the population of Alton had grown to 200. The location of Alton is shown on the map on the following page.

Alton was incorporated as a separate town by an Act of the Maine Legislature in 1844, with the first town meeting being held on May 7, 1844.<sup>2</sup> Three selectmen were elected to govern the Town at this time, and this form of government is still used today.

The Bennoch Road (today's Route 16) was built in the 1820s, and quickly became the central road in town. It followed the gravel ridge (or esker) which runs north and south through the town, and began at Pushaw Falls and ended near Lagrange Village. Other roads were also built during this period, however, many of those no longer exist.

In 1860, a hotel was opened on the Bennoch Road, supplying a stopping-off point for food and lodging for the teams of horses hauling freight and wood supplies between Bangor and points north. The hotel flourished until the Bangor and Piscataquis Railroad (later the B & A) built a rail line through Alton in 1869, which ran somewhat parallel to the Bennoch Road.

By the 1860s, a second wave of settlers had come to Alton, and the population increased to 531 individuals. The increase in population was primarily due to the fact that several sawmills were in operation at that time, on Pushaw Stream and Dead Stream, and to the fact that one of the largest tanneries in the country had been built in Alton.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the history set out here was obtained from *Alton Then and Now*, written by local historian William Sawtell. The Methodist Women's Society of Alton engaged Mr. Sawtell to compile a history of the town back in 1988, and copies of his book are can be obtained from the Women's Society. - A great deal of useful information was also found in a history of Alton published in the Town's Annual Report in 1944, the year of the Town's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. - A paper entitled *Brief History of Alton*, written by University of Maine student Joyce Smith, was also helpful in compiling this review.

<sup>2</sup> The name "Alton" was chosen for the town at this time, the township having been previously known as the "Birch Stream Settlement". It has been suggested that Alton was probably named after the small English town of Alton, located near the English port of Southampton, a departure point for many new immigrants to America.

<sup>3</sup> In 1860, Luther Lewis' mill on Pushaw Falls had a yearly output of 900,000 feet of sawed lumber, and Daniel Milliken's sawmill on Dead Stream produced 100,000 feet of logs and 500,000 shingles. In the same year, the local tannery had an output of leather goods worth \$126,000 (a large sum in those days), from 15,000 hides and 30,000 sides of leather.

The tannery was built in the early 1850s, located at the falls of Dead Stream. At the time it was built, it was the largest tannery in the country.<sup>4</sup> During the tannery's heyday, the population of the western area of Alton increased to over 400 people. After the tannery had been closed for several years, it then burned to the ground in 1878. The foundation of the tannery can still be located today, on the western side of Dead Stream, where it crosses the Tannery Road.

As the population of Alton increased, so did the number of schools, and at one time, the Town had as many as five one-room school houses. While the tannery was in full swing, the school in that area of Town alone had 114 pupils. After the tannery and the sawmills closed, Alton's population declined, as did the number of schools and school-aged children.

In Alton's earliest years, there was no church in town, and those wishing to worship together did so in private homes. Later on, services were held in local school houses, and in the Good Templars Hall, built in 1873. A Methodist Society was organized in 1894, and the construction of the first church in town was begun, with the help of many townspeople. The church is still in use today.

In 1903, the Alton Grange was formed, and it soon became the focal point for much of the social life in Town, with membership increasing to over fifty. Town socials, in which local residents provided live music, were held at the Grange Hall, as were school plays and town meetings.<sup>5</sup>

In 1910, rural mail delivery began in Alton. In 1912 the local phone system was built (by residents of Alton), and in 1931 electrical power, through the *Rural Electrification Act*, was brought to the upper portion of the town, the lower portion having obtained electricity a few years earlier.

Until fairly recently, many residents of Alton earned their living through family farms, and it has been reported that in the 1930s, residents of Alton did not feel the effects the Great Depression as much as people in other areas since nearly everyone in town had crops and livestock to help support them. Other individuals during this period worked in the timber industry, or in the mills of neighboring towns.

The railroad station in Alton was located where the line intercepted the Tannery Road, not too far west of the Bennoch Road. Local residents relied on the railroad for years in order to travel and to get their products to market. The railroad discontinued the line for

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<sup>4</sup> The operations at the tannery was conducted by Daniel Milliken and other members his family. During this period, Maine's production of tannery goods was amongst the highest in the nation. - In 1881, the executors of the Milliken estate sold all of the property the family owned in Alton property to J.P. Webber for twenty thousand dollars. Today, descendants of J.P. Webber are still owners of large tracts of land in Alton.

<sup>5</sup> The Grange finally closed its doors in the early 1980s, although the old Grange Hall (located across from the Methodist Church on the Bennoch Road) still stands.

economic reasons in 1933 and closed the station, which was a great loss for the town. The old railroad grade still exists, and is used as a trail by the local snowmobile club.

At one time, especially during the latter part of the nineteenth century, nearly all of the good, well-drained land in Alton was cleared and used for agriculture, and until fairly recently, most land along the Bennoch Road was cleared land for hundreds of yards. Even today, many residents remember a time when much of the land in Alton was cleared and still being used by local farmers.

Today there is only one family farms still operating in Alton, although in the early 1900s, there were over fifty such farms. Most of the old farm buildings that used to be located in town no longer exist, and much of the property formerly used for farming has been divided into smaller house lots.

Another significant change in the town's landscape is due to the fact that much of the land along the esker (following the Bennoch Road) has been significantly disturbed as a result of gravel extraction, leaving behind many large open pits. Much of the extraction that has occurred took place in the 1960s, when the nearby section of Interstate 95 was built. There are currently still several operating gravel pits in Alton.

As will be discussed below, the population of Alton experienced a large rate of growth in the 1970s and 1980s, but appears to now be leveling off, and is expected to grow moderately in the next ten years. The population of Alton in the year 2000 was 816. Most residents of Alton currently commute to work in neighboring communities, where they work in a large variety of local industries and occupations.

## Chapter 2. Population and Demographics

**Related State Goal** - There is no State goal specifically addressing the issue of population as such. However, other State goals clearly depend on a municipality, such as Alton, understanding population changes that are taking place, as well other demographic data.

### Inventory and Analysis Section

#### A. Population

The Table below shows that Alton's population has increased from 340 in the year 1970, to 816 in the year 2000. In the 1970s, Alton's population grew by 38%, and in the 1980s, its population grew by 65%. In the 1990s, however, Alton's rate of growth slowed to 5.8%.<sup>6</sup>

The Table below also contains population projections developed by the Maine State Planning Office (SPO), which shows that Alton's population is expected to grow by 6% in the next ten years, and increase to roughly 882 individuals by the year 2012.

TOWN	1970 pop.	1980 pop.	% chg. 1970 to 1980	1990 pop.	% chg. 1980 to 1990	2000pop.	% chg. 1990 to 2000	2002 est. pop.	2012 est. pop.	% change
Alton	340	468	37.6%	771	64.7%	816	5.8%	832	882	6.0%

The Table below compares Alton's population changes in the last decade to what has occurred and is expected to occur in neighboring towns, and to the region and the State as a whole.

Population							
TOWN	1990 pop.	2000 pop. <sup>7</sup>	% chg. 1990 to 2000	2002 est. pop.	2012 est. pop.	% chg. 2002 to 2012	
Alton	771	816	5.8%	832	882	6.0%	
Bangor	31,181	31,473	0.9%	31,317	30,947	1.9%	
Bradford	1,103	1,186	7.5%	1,202	1,248	3.8%	
Hudson	1,048	1,393	32.9%	1,472	1,721	16.9%	
Lagrange	557	747	34.1%	790	926	17.2%	
Old Town	8,317	8,130	-2.2%	8,146	8,343	2.4%	
Penobscot County	146,601	144,919	-1.1%	143,931	146,720	1.9%	
Maine		1,274,923		1,282,777	1,345,401	4.9%	

The table shows that while Alton's population grew during 1990s, larger nearby communities such as Bangor and Old Town lost population. However, Alton's

<sup>6</sup> The high rate of population growth and the high rate in the growth of number of households that occurred in Alton during the 1970s and 1980s was at least partly linked to the opening of Alton's two mobile home parks, which came into existence during this period.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. 2000 Census

population increase was not as great as occurred in other small towns in this area, such as Hudson and Lagrange. The increase in Alton's population that is expected over the next ten years (6%) is only slightly greater than what expected for Penobscot County and the State of Maine as a whole.

### **B. Proportional Make-up of Alton's Population**

The U.S. Census data in the following Table shows the composition of Alton's population by age category for the years 1990 and 2000. The Table also contains population predictions for those age categories for the years 2002 and 2012 which were developed by the State Planning Office.

Age Category	Alton residents in 1990	% of total pop.	Alton residents in 2000	% of total pop.	projected no. of residents in 2002	projected no. in 2012	% of total pop.
0-4	90	11.7	52	6.4	49	40	4.5
5-17	159	20.6	154	26.5	159	140	15.9
18-29	151	19.6	126	15.4	129	136	15.4
30-44	211	27.4	230	28.2	229	218	24.7
45-64	119	15.4	170	20.8	183	225	25.5
65 to 79	36	4.7	64	7.8	76	116	13.2
80+	10	1.3	8	0.9	7	7	0.9

The above projections for how many of Alton's residents will be in the different age groupings in the years to come is significant for planning purposes.<sup>8</sup> For example, the projections indicate that the number of school age children in Alton is expected to decrease in the next ten years – both in absolute numbers [from 159 to 140], and as a percentage of the overall population [from 19.1% to 15.8%]. This obviously relates to Alton's need (or lack of) for new school construction in the immediate future.<sup>9</sup>

The population projections also indicate that the population of elderly residents in Alton is expected to increase significantly in the next ten years, from 83 residents who were 65 years or over in 2002, to 123 individuals in 2012. This is an absolute increase of 40 individuals, or 48%.

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<sup>8</sup> The 0-4 and 5-17 age brackets obviously relate to the number of students and a town's educational needs. The 18-29 bracket generally relates to an entry level work force, consisting of individuals in college, or just starting out in their careers. This group tends to be relatively low-income, childrearing, and to out-migrate from the state – i.e. more leave than come in. The 30-44 age bracket represents more experienced workers, with children still living at home. This group in-migrates to the state, and tends to move to the suburbs. The 45-64 group represents individuals in their highest income working years, with children beginning to move out on their own. The 65 to 74 and 80+ age brackets relate to various issues connected with aging.

<sup>9</sup> The expected decline in the number of Alton's school age children in the next ten years shown by the SPO data is consistent with a recent study commissioned by the local Union 90 School District.

## Household Characteristics

### Average Household Size

The meaning of “household”, as used here, is defined as a housing unit occupied by 1 or more individuals.<sup>10</sup>

The Table below indicates that the size of the average household in Alton (as in the rest of Maine) has been growing smaller for years, declining from an average of 3.51 individuals per household in Alton in 1970, to 2.64 individuals per household in 2000 - a decrease in size of 25% over this 30-year period. The Table also shows that the size of the average household in Alton is projected to decline further in the years to come, to 2.35 in the year 2012.<sup>11</sup>

Average Household Size – U.S. Census data

Community	1970	1980	% change- 1970 to 1980	1990	2000	% change 1990 to 2000	2012 projection	% change 2000 to 2012
Alton	3.51	3.14	-10.5%	2.94	2.64	-10.2%	2.35	-11%
Penobscot County				2.71	2.38	-12.2% <sup>12</sup>	2.09	-12.2%
Maine				2.64	2.39	-9.5%	2.16	-9.5

### Number of Households in Alton

The Table below, derived from U.S. Census data, indicates that number of households in Alton has increased steadily in recent years – from 86 households in 1970, to 309 in the year 2000. Most of the increase in the number of households occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, with the rate of increase slowing somewhat during the last decade.

<sup>10</sup> The definition of “household” differs from that of “family”, which is defined as a housing unit occupied by 2 or more individuals related by blood or marriage. The average “family” size in a particular community should always be larger than the average “household” size since a “family” requires two or more individuals – whereas a “household”, as defined here, could consist of just one individual living alone in a housing unit.

<sup>11</sup> The average household size in some Maine communities is already as low as 2.3, with most communities now being within a 2.3 to 2.6 range. The 2.35 projection for Alton for the year 2012 was arrived at by taking into account the fact that what occurred the last decade is one of the best single indicators of what will occur in the next ten years. If Alton’s average household size continues to decline by roughly the same rate between 2000 and 2012 as it did between 1990 and 2000, the average household size can reasonably be expected to be approximately 2.35 in the year 2012.

<sup>12</sup> The 2012 projections for average household size for both Penobscot County and the State of Maine were based on the assumption that rates of decline between 2000 and 2012 would be approximately the same percentage changes as occurred between 1990 and 2000.



No. of Households in Alton	1970	1980	% change from 1970 to 1980	1990	% change from 1980 to 1990	2000	% change from 1990 to 2000
	86	149	73.3%	262	75.8%	309	17.9%

The Table below compares the changes in the number of households that occurred in Alton between 1990 and 2000 with the changes in number of households that occurred in the larger Penobscot County region during this same period. As can be seen, the rate of increase that occurred in Alton in the last decade was more than double what occurred in the larger region, although in the years to come, the number of households in both Alton and the larger region is expected to grow by approximately the same rate.

Number of Households – U.S. Census data

	1990	2000	% change	2012 projections	% change
Alton	262	309	17.9%	375	21.3%
Penobscot County	54,063	58,096	7.5%	70,201	20.8%

For planning purposes (see Housing chapter below), it is especially important to note that the number of households expected to be in Alton in the year 2012 is 375. This is an increase of 66 new households from the year 2000 to the year 2012.<sup>13</sup>

### Median Household Income

In 1969, the median household income in Alton was only \$6,429. However, when adjusted for inflation, this same income (in 1999 dollars) would have been \$29,188.<sup>14</sup> In 1999, the median household income in town had increased to \$35,263. This was an increase of 20.8% from 1969 to 1999. However, despite the overall increase in median household income over the 30-year period, the median household income in Alton did, in fact, slip and decrease by 6% during the last decade.<sup>15</sup>

Median Household Income Adjusted for 1999 Dollars

Community	1969	1979	% change	1989	% change	1999	% change
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<sup>13</sup> The 375 projection for the number of households in Alton in the year 2012 was arrived at by using the population projection for Alton developed by the SPO. If, as discussed above, the average household size in Alton in the year 2012 is 2.35 individuals per household, then we can expect approximately 375 households in 2012 (882 individuals/ 2.35 individuals per household = 375 households). - The same kind of calculation was performed for Penobscot County.

<sup>14</sup> The CPI Index for 1969 was 36.7. For 1999 it was 166.6.  $166.6/36.7 = 4.54$   $4.54 \times \$6,429 = \$29,188$ . Similar CPI calculations were done for 1979 and 1989 income data.

<sup>15</sup> Whether this decline in median household income in the last decade will be a trend that will continue into the future is difficult to say at this point, as many varied factors (national, state and local) would influence what the actual figure turns out to be.

Alton	29,188	30,892	5.8%	37,603	21.7%	35,263	-6.2%
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The Table below compares Alton's median household income with that of Penobscot County and the State. The Table shows that in 1989, Alton's household income was higher than that of both the region and the State. Ten years later, in 1999, Alton's median household income was still slightly higher than that of Penobscot County, but was also slightly less than the State as a whole.

#### Median Household Income

Community	Median Household Income in 1989 <sup>16</sup>	Median Household Income in 1999 <sup>17</sup>
Alton	29,500	35,263
Penobscot County	26,631	34,274
Maine	27,854	37,240

### Proportional Makeup of Alton's Households by Income

The Table below indicates the number of Alton households that were within various different income brackets in 1999. As noted above, the median household income for all of Alton's households in 1999 was \$35,263, which means that 50% of Alton's households had an income greater than this amount, and 50% had incomes that were less. One of the things that is significant in the Table below is that it shows the number of Alton households that are within the lower income brackets, which relates to the issue of affordable housing in town.

#### Alton Household Income in 1999

Income in 1999	Number <sup>18</sup>	% of Total
<b>Households</b>	312	100.0
Less than \$10,000	32	10.3
\$10,000 to 14,999	21	6.7
\$15,000 to 24,999	50	16.0
25,000 to 34,999	51	16.3
35,000 to 49,999	66	21.2
50,000 to 74,999	70	22.4
75,000 to 99,999	17	5.4
100,000 to 149,999	5	1.6
150,000 or more	-	-

## E. Education

<sup>16</sup> 1990 Census – STF3 File 80A

<sup>17</sup> 2000 Census – Table DP-3

<sup>18</sup> 2000 Census – Table DP-3 – This Table lists the total number of households in Alton as 312 – whereas Table DP-1 lists the number of households as 309. This difference is probably explained by the fact that Table DP-1 is based on 100% or complete data, whereas Table DP-3 is based on a sampling of the population, which is then extrapolated and projected.

In 1980, only 53% of Alton's adults had completed high school, with 6% having a college degree or higher. In 1990, the number of high school graduates increased considerably, to 78%, with the number of residents having college degrees also increasing, to 10%. In the year 2000, the number of high school graduates increased to 83%, while the number of individuals with college degrees remained at 10%.

#### U.S. Census Data

Education Level of Alton Residents	1980	1990	2000
High School or higher	53%	78.4%	83.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	6%	10.3%	10.1%

**Analysis** - Alton's population is expected to grow moderately, by 6%, in the next ten years. Current projections indicate that the number on school-aged children will decline during this period, while the number of elderly will increase. The number of households in Alton is expected to increase by approximately 20% during the next ten years, to 375 in the year 2012. Data relating to the expected number of new households in the next ten years is very relevant to how many new housing units will also likely be built during this period.

### Policy

No clear policy relating to Alton's population and demographics emerged as a result of the data contained in the above Inventory. However, as already noted, understanding population and other demographic data is very important in being able to successfully carry out other policies and goals and goals of the town.

### Implementation

While no clear policy emerged from the data alone, it is, nevertheless, the goal of the Town of Alton to monitor demographic information on a regular basis, whenever it is available, in order to provide a basis for informed growth management decisions. This applies in particular to the number of pre-school aged children, and Alton will work closely with the local School District in this regard.

Alton will improve its record keeping in respect to the number of building permits issued annually. In this regard, the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board will work with the Code Enforcement Officer to ensure that a formalized record keeping system is set up, and that this system will provide as much useful housing (and household) data as possible. Putting such a record keeping system in place should occur within one year of acceptance of this comprehensive plan.

Alton will continue to maintain assessor's records. In this regard, the Board of Selectmen will review the current record keeping system with the Town Assessor in order to ensure that it provides as much useful demographic information as possible. This review should also take place occur within one year of acceptance of this comprehensive plan.

## Chapter 3. Local Economy

**Related State Goal** –To promote an economic climate that increases job opportunities and overall economic well-being.

### Inventory and Analysis Section

#### Labor Force

The Table below shows data taken from the U.S. Census concerning the employment status of the civilian labor force for the Town of Alton, and for Penobscot County. It shows that 447 of Alton’s residents were considered to in the labor force in the year 2000, and 5.4% of them were unemployed. This is very similar to Penobscot County as a whole, which had 5.5% of its labor force unemployed.

Employment Status – 2000

<b>Employment Status in 2000<sup>19</sup></b>	No. in Alton	%	No. in Penobscot County	%
<b>Population 16 years and over</b>	<b>637</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>116,139</b>	<b>100.0</b>
In labor force	447	70.2	74,297	64.0
Civilian Labor Force	447	70.2	74,022	63.7
Employed	423	66.4	69,846	60.1
Unemployed	24	3.8	4,176	3.6
% of civilian labor force	5.4	-	5.5	-
Not in labor force	190	29.8	41,842	36.0

#### Place of Work

The Table below indicates the majority (79%) of Alton’s workers were employed within the Bangor Metropolitan Statistical Area (“MSA”) in the year 2000. Of those workers who worked within the Bangor MSA, nearly half worked within the City of Bangor itself, while other workers were employed in other towns such as Orono and Old Town.

Place of Work

Alton Workers:	Place of Work in 1990 <sup>20</sup>	Place of Work in 2000
Worked in an MSA/PMSA	292	327
Central city	96	160
remainder of MSA/PMSA	196	167
Worked outside any MSA/PMSA	71	89

<sup>19</sup> Data obtained from 2000 Census – Table DP-3

<sup>20</sup> 1990 Data obtained from U.S. Census, Table P046 - 2000 data obtained from Table P28

## Means of Transportation and Travel Time to Work

The Table below indicates that the vast majority of Alton workers (91.3%) drove to their place of work in 2000, and that the average/mean travel time to work was 24 minutes.

<b>COMMUTING TO WORK – Alton in 2000<sup>21</sup></b>	Number	Percent
<b>Workers 16 years and over</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>100</b>
Car, truck, or van - - drove alone	335	80.5
Car, truck, or van - - carpooled	45	10.8
Public transportation (including taxicab)	-	-
Walked	3	0.7
Other means	8	1.9
Worked at home	25	6.0
Mean travel time to work (in minutes)	24.4	

As one would perhaps expect, considering the number of workers who drive to their place of work, over 99% of the housing units in Alton in 2000 had at least vehicle available, 49% had 2 vehicles available, and 22% had 3 or more vehicles available.<sup>22</sup>

Data contained in both the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census indicates that no workers in Alton use public transportation in order to get work. This is hardly surprising since there is no regular bus service in Alton.

## Proportional Make-up of Alton's Labor Force by Industry

The Table below shows U.S. Census data indicating which types of industries residents of Alton and Penobscot County were employed in, in the year 2000.<sup>23</sup>

<b>INDUSTRY</b>	Alton residents employed in 2000	% of Total	Penobscot County residents employed in 2000	% of total
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining	10	2.4%	1,607	2.3%
Construction	31	7.3%	4,037	5.8%
Manufacturing	69	16.3%	8,308	11.9%
Retail trade	50	11.8%	9,745	14.0%
Wholesale trade	19	4.5%	2,658	3.8%
Transportation and warehousing	38	9.0%	3,899	5.6%
Information	8	1.9%	1,662	2.4%
Finance, insurance, real estate	27	6.4%	2,859	4.1%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative	16	3.8%	3,908	5.6%
Educational, health, and social	99	23.4%	19,968	28.6%

<sup>21</sup> 2000 Census – Table DP-3

<sup>22</sup> 2000 census - Table DP-4

<sup>23</sup> The particular 2000 U.S. Census data (Table DP3) contained in this Table are not based on a complete count of everyone living in Alton, and there is therefore a certain amount of possible error based on the extrapolation that was done from the partial data that was used.

services				
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food service	18	4.3%	4,785	6.9%
Other services (except public administration)	19	4.5%	3,445	4.9%
Public Administration	19	4.5%	2,965	4.2%

### Proportional Make-up of Alton's Labor Force by Occupation

The Table below indicates which occupations workers in Alton and Penobscot County were engaged in, in the year 2000.

OCCUPATION	Alton Residents Employed in 2000 <sup>24</sup>	% of Total	Penobscot County in 2000 <sup>25</sup>	% of total
Management, professional, and related occupations	89	21.0%	21,156	30.3%
Service occupations	71	16.8%	11,641	16.7%
Sales and office occupations	103	24.3%	18,728	26.8%
Farming, fishing, and forestry	4	0.9 %	901	1.3%
Construction, extraction and maintenance	55	13.0%	6,844	9.8%
Production, transportation, and material moving	101	23.9	10,576	15.1%

### Major Employers

Major employers within the town of Alton - There is only one business in town which could currently be termed a "major employer". This is the First Student bus company, whose primary business is transporting school children, within Alton and other communities.

Alton did have one other major employer until recently, a sand and gravel ready mix concrete facility, located along the southern portion of Route 16. This company used to provide approximately thirty jobs, but it closed its operation in the late 1990s, resulting in a loss of jobs and tax revenues for the town. The facility is currently for sale.

Information obtained from Maine's Department of Labor, and from the 1990 U.S. Census, indicates that there were 68 jobs in Alton in 1990, and that there were 95 jobs in town in 1997.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> 2000 Census – Table DP-3

<sup>25</sup> 2000 Census – Table DP-3

<sup>26</sup> Information obtained from the SPO website. More recent data does not appear to be available at this time.

Major employers in the region - Alton is located just north of the Bangor Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).<sup>27</sup> As noted above, the majority of Alton's workers are employed within the Bangor MSA. The major employers within the Bangor MSA are well known and include such employers as: the federal government (U.S. Postal Service, the Department of Immigration etc.); town governments such as those for Old Town, Orono, and Bangor; health service organizations such as Eastern Maine Medical Center, St. Joseph's Hospital, and the Bangor Mental Health Institute; educational institutions such as the University of Maine, Husson College, and Eastern Maine Vocational Technical Institute; and large private companies such as MBNA, Georgia Pacific, and Bangor Hydro.

### **Value of Taxable Retail Consumer Sales**

The value of the annual taxable consumer retail sales in Alton and the region in the years 1997 to 2001 is shown in the following Table. "Retail sales", as used here, refers to the sale of any goods subject to State sales tax law.

The Table indicates that the value of Alton's taxable consumer retail sales declined by 68% in the five-year period between 1997 and 2001, while at the same time, taxable retail sales in the larger Penobscot County increased by 27.5%. The steep decline in retail sales in Alton was mainly the result of the closure of the sand and gravel plant referred to earlier.<sup>28</sup>

Taxable Retail Consumer Sales – expressed in Millions <sup>29</sup>

Community	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	% change 1997 to 2001
Alton	1.233	.826	.474	.542	.390	-68.4%
Penobscot County	1218	1315.2	1461.1	1528.7	1552.8	+27.5

<sup>27</sup> Old Town is part of the Bangor MSA, and Old Town's northern boundary is also Alton's southern boundary. - The Bangor MSA is made up of the following communities: Bangor, Brewer, Eddington, Glenburn, Hampden, Hermon, Holden, Kenduskeag, Milford, Old Town, Orono, Orrington, Penobscot Indian Reservation, Veazie, and Winterport.

<sup>28</sup> As can be seen, when the closing of a large business occurs in a small town such as Alton, the effect is tremendous, especially in percentage terms. Whereas if a similar sized business closed in a larger community such as Bangor or Old Town, the effect, percentage wise, is not nearly as great.

<sup>29</sup> Data obtained from the SPO.



## **Taxable Retail Sales by Industry Sector**

Information on the proportional make-up of the value of Alton’s taxable retail sales “by retail sector” was not available.<sup>30</sup>

## **Economic Development Policy**

In general, Alton will neither encourage or discourage new development, but will work to ensure that any new development that does come to the town is compatible with our environmental concerns and the rural tradition.

## **Implementation Strategies**

The Town will explore the benefits of hiring a professional grant writer in order to better utilize sources of money that may be available to develop economic growth in small communities such as ours.

The Board of Selectmen will also consider appointing an Economic Development Committee, within two years of the acceptance of this comprehensive plan, to take on the primary responsibility for the town’s economic development efforts. Amongst other things, the Committee could explore, with State officials, the possibility of constructing additional on-off ramps for the portion of Interstate 95 located within the Town.<sup>31</sup>

The Town will pass a revised Land Use Ordinance, within one year of the acceptance of this comprehensive plan consistent with the Town’s economic development objectives and environmental concerns. The new ordinance shall establish an appropriately located Growth Area, with different development requirements than in the Rural Areas - see Future Land Use Plan below. The ordinance will also regulate and/or prohibit certain types of economic development that would unduly threaten our primary aquifer and recharge area – i.e no pottery sheds, solid waste dumps, fuel storage locations should be located over our identified aquifer.

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<sup>30</sup> The information is not available in this case because it would be considered a breach of confidentiality for the State of Maine to provide information on particular retail sectors (such as food retail or construction) for a small community such as Alton. If the State were to do so, it would often be obvious which particular local business the data was referring to – especially in cases where there is only one business operating in a particular retail section.

<sup>31</sup> The problem which exists in Alton is that there is only one set of exit and entrance ramps to Interstate 95. Travelers going north on the Interstate can exit at Alton (Exit #53), but travelers coming from points north cannot get off the highway at Alton, as there is no exit ramp. Instead, they have to continue south to Exit 52, exit there, and then get back on the Interstate heading north, and then exit at Exit 53. Similarly, when in Alton, one can get on to the Interstate heading south, but there is no entrance ramp heading north. One has to first go first get on the Interstate heading south, get off at Exit 52, and re-enter the highway heading north.

The Town will continue to maintain a high level of support for its public services and facilities, such the fire department and school system, in order to attract compatible economic development to this area.

## 4. Historic and Archeological Resources

### Inventory and Analysis Section

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission maintains records concerning three areas of historic and archeological interest. These categories are used here to review Alton's resources in this area. The three categories are:

- 1.) Historic buildings and structures
- 2.) Historic archeological sites
- 3.) Prehistoric archeological sites

### Historic Buildings and Structures in Alton

The term "historic", in the sense that it is used here, means:

"...a district, site, building, structure, or object significant in American history, architecture, engineering, archeology, and culture that is at least 50 years old."<sup>32</sup>

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission has not identified any historic structures or buildings existing today in Alton. This does not mean that there are not some old structures in Alton. For example, the foundation of the old tannery, located on the Tannery Road, is certainly an old structure, but it is doubtful that it would meet the definition of "historic", as used here.

### Historic Archeological Sites –

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission has not identified any "historic archeological sites" in Alton. It also noted, however, that there has been no professional survey of historic archeological sites done in Alton, and that a survey could help identify first settlement sites from the early nineteenth century.

### Prehistoric Archeological Sites

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission reports that there are fourteen known prehistoric archeological sites located within the boundaries of Alton. However, only two of these sites, known as the Hirundo Site and Young Site, are considered significant enough to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Although much of Alton has been surveyed for the existence of prehistoric sites, there are still many other areas that archeologists would like to examine.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> This is the definition of "historic" used by the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>33</sup> The report received by the Town from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission stated that the bog and pond margins in Alton needed to be professionally surveyed. It also noted that while the lower portion of Birch Stream had been surveyed, the rest of the stream needed survey, as did the west branch of Dead Stream. It also noted that eskers, especially near water, were archaeologically sensitive.

The Hirundo and Young sites are located on opposite banks of Pushaw Stream, as shown on the map at the end of this section.<sup>34</sup> The existence and physical integrity of the Hirundo and Young sites are currently protected by Alton's Shoreland Zoning Ordinance, and by a private land trust, administered by the University of Maine. The area protected by the Hirundo land trust (encompassing land in both Old Town and Alton) is shown a map of Public and Conservation Land set out at the end of Chapter 10.

Dr. David Sanger, Professor of Anthropology and Quaternary Studies at the University of Maine, Orono, who was in charge of excavating the Hirundo Site, most generously provided Alton with the following report on the archeology in this area:

#### ARCHEOLOGY IN THE ALTON AREA

Within the Township limits our records show a number of pre-European period sites left by people ancestral to today's Penobscot Nation. These sites show a minimum 7,500 year history. It is possible, based on our finds just outside Alton, that human presence began at least a thousand years earlier. The earliest period, which archeologists call Middle Archaic, is well represented on the banks of Pushaw Stream at the Hirundo site, and just across the river at the Young site. There are technical publications on both available. It seems that people at this time located their camps to take advantage of the waterways and other wetlands, especially marshes that were more prevalent at this time than later. People hunted with a diagnostic stemmed spear point known as "Neville" points that occur at Hirundo manufactured out of felsite, a hard volcanic rock. They made wood-working tools from local phyllite and other metamorphic rocks that they sharpened with cigar-shaped whetstones. Spear points were also made in slate. Due to the acid soil, we have no evidence for bone or antler tools and very few animal bones on which to judge diets.

Around 6,000 years ago (the Late Archaic period) changes occurred in the form of spear points to what archeologists call "Otter Creek" points. These are large and notched on the side. Semi-lunar ground slate knives and plummets – looking like modern plumb bobs – are also added. Other tools are little changed from the Middle Archaic and we suspect no change in the overall lifestyle. Again, Hirundo provides the best record, but it is duplicated at the Young site and in several sites downstream. Throughout the Middle and late Archaic period people buried their dead with red ocre and fancy artifacts that lead to the concept of the Red Paint People. They were not a separate people and the name should be dropped. The Late Archaic period ends with the arrival of Susquehenna Tradition artifacts, distinctive spear points, drill forms, a different manufacturing technique, and changes in burial practices. Many archeologists think this represents the migration of people into the area from the south.

The final period, the Ceramic period, begins at 3,000 years ago with the advent of pottery vessels. We know much about lifestyles. Sites of this period occur along Pushaw Stream and Lake and also a number in the lower reaches of Birch Stream. Artifacts of this period include small, well-made arrowheads out of chert imported from the Munsungun Lake area of northern Maine. Others are made from local felsite that derived from Mt. Kineo but which can be picked up as cobbles in

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<sup>34</sup> The Comprehensive Planning Committee knows the location of the Hirundo and Young sites, however, the location of the other 12 sites is not known. The MHPC would not supply this information to the Town, primarily for fear that if the locations of these other sites was public knowledge, there would be high risk that they might be disturbed. Based on other knowledge that it has obtained, the Planning Committee assumes, however, that these other sites are primarily located along the banks of Pushaw and Dead Stream on the west side of Town, and along Birch Stream in the east.

the streambeds. Also present are small scrapers manufactured from chert and felsite. Wood working tools diminish in number. Pottery in the form of vessels enters from the south and west. No complete pots are known from the area, but reconstructing the shards provides us with an idea of shape, while we can see the manufacturing techniques and the impressions on the outside of the vessels, often called "decoration". Little evidence of houses has survived, but tight clusters of artifacts leads us to suspect wigwam style huts about 10-12 feet across. Bones of animals hunted show a preference for beaver and muskrat with occasional deer/or moose. Turtle were also eaten. Fish of various sizes, including perch, sturgeon and other yet unidentified species were taken in large numbers. We suspect weirs placed in the streambeds. Some plant remains have been found. These sites were occupied in the warmer months. To date we have not been able to identify winter sites, probably because our research has focused on the large sites found along the waterways, rather than protected areas. People did not regularly go to the coast in the summer until after the arrival of Europeans in the area, despite popular assertions.

## **Policies**

It is the policy of Alton to protect and maintain its historic, architectural and archeological heritage, and to prevent encroachment by future development incompatible with these resources.

## **Implementation Strategies**

The Board of Selectmen and the Planning Committee will take steps to encourage the formation of a local Historical Society. This has been talked about in the past, and nothing as yet has come of this idea, however, it should be seriously explored again. The Planning Board will take the lead in trying to bring this about, and this will be addressed within two years of the acceptance of this comprehensive plan to see if there is sufficient local interest in this idea.<sup>35</sup> If and when historic objects (such as old tools or photographs) concerning Alton are assembled by the Historic Society, or by other Town residents, the local Methodist Church could be approached to see if the Church would allow these object to be displayed in the recently built annex to the church.

The Historic Society, or the Planning Board, will also explore, within two years of acceptance of this plan, the possibility of obtaining a grant from the Maine Historic Preservation Society to do a survey and inventory of Alton to determine whether there are any historic buildings and structures within the Town.

Alton will pass subdivision legislation within two years of acceptance of the Comprehensive Plan, containing provisions protecting the integrity of any prehistoric or historic archeological sites located on the land to be developed. If such an archeological site is found on the land, that does not mean that development cannot occur, however, the

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<sup>35</sup> Certain members of the Methodist Women's Society, which commissioned the book *Alton Then and Now* back in 1988, might be willing to serve as a nucleus of such a Society. Many other residents are also keenly interested in Alton's History. - As already noted, several good histories of Alton have already been written, which will provide a good base for further study, and there is at least one oral history of an Alton resident (the late Alice Philbrick) that has been collected by the Folklore department at the University of Maine. Older residents of Alton are also a wealth of knowledge (and a source of photographs and artifacts), and they should be contacted by the Historical Society, if and when it is formed.

developer will need to work with appropriate professionals to preserve the integrity of the site.

## 5. Water, Topography, and Soil Resources

**Related State Goal** – To protect the quality and manage the quantity of the State’s water resources, including lakes, aquifers, great ponds, estuaries, rivers, and coastal areas

### Inventory and Analysis Section

#### A. Topography, Land Cover and Watersheds

Alton is a rural community of approximately 26,000 acres, located in Penobscot County, approximately eighteen miles northeast of Bangor. Alton’s eastern boundary (see Topographical Map set out at the end of this chapter) is quite irregular, following Birch Stream, which separates it from Argyle Plantation. It is bordered on the north by the town of Lagrange, on the west by the Hudson and Bradford, and on the south by Old Town.

Alton is a low-lying community with only modest variations in elevation. This can be seen on the topographical map on the following page. The hills in Alton are rolling, the ponds shallow, and the major streams are twisting and slow-moving as they flow south to the Penobscot River. The highest point is on the horseback, just east of Pickerel pond, with an elevation of 350 feet. The lowest point is on the south end of the Alton Bog, with an elevation just less than 100 feet.<sup>36</sup>

An aerial view of Alton indicates that, with the exception of the gravel pits, the maintained openings along the town’s major roads, and the open peatlands or bogs, most of Alton is currently covered by forest. This can be seen on the Aerial Photography Map set out at the end of his chapter.

Much of Alton’s gravel esker (or “horseback”) has been cleared for gravel pits, agriculture or single family housing, but the remaining wooded areas on the esker tend to support mixed stands that run heavily to white pine. The knolls of the glacier till tend to support mixed stands, while the lower, wetter land supports mixed softwoods with a strong red maple component, with cedar swamps in the wettest areas. The flood plains used to support stands of elm, ash and red maple, but Dutch elm disease has all but eliminated elms so these floodplains today support maple swamps. Much of Alton’s forested land came about from field abandonment, or else has been cut over repeatedly, so forests tend to be young.

Almost all of the water in Alton drains into Pushaw Stream (via Dead Stream) or into Birch Stream. These, in turn, empty into the Penobscot River. The watersheds for Alton’s three great ponds [Holland, Pickerill and Pug] are located entirely within the town, however all three of Alton’s major streams drain portions of abutting towns. A map of Alton’s watersheds is set out at the end of this chapter.

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<sup>36</sup> Very little land in Alton has a slope of greater than 15%.

**How Alton Evolved** - Dr. Sanger of the University of Maine wrote an excellent report on the paleoecology of Alton for the town, which discusses how the topography, forests, and ecosystems of the land making up today's Alton evolved since the last Ice Age. Dr. Sanger and his colleagues researched the history of Alton thoroughly in connection with the excavation of the Hirundo site. Amongst other things, the report discusses how the climate in this area has changed over thousands of years, how the Alton bog was formed, and how the forests in Alton evolved over time. Dr. Sanger's report also notes that the land in Alton was once under hundreds of feet of sea water. It is believed that there is much in Dr. Sanger's report that will be of interest to the residents of Alton, and for that reason, it is reprinted here in its entirety:

#### PALEOECOLOGY IN THE ALTON AREA

During the Pleistocene, a continental ice sheet from the north overrode Maine more than once. The final ice cap began to retreat about 14,000 radiocarbon years ago in response to global warming. The land, which was depressed from the weight of the ice, was slow to rebound and the sea flooded the coastal lowlands to an elevation of about 300 ft. above current sea level. Modern Alton was thus under water. This is responsible for the blue-gray marine clay that is found throughout the township. As the land rebounded, the sea fell away to levels almost 200 ft. below modern sea level.

With the withdrawal of ice and sea, vegetation began to colonize the area. Initial vegetation was tundra, much like that of the north today, with scattered patches of dwarf willow and birch amid various grasses and heaths. Depressions were filled with water. For example, research has shown that Pushaw Lake was substantially larger 10,000 years ago: it covered the Hirundo site. The evidence comes from a series of cores driven into the bog lands and from Mansell Pond, Alton. These cores contain pollen and materials we can date by radiocarbon. By 9,5000 years ago, spruce, poplar, and larch dominated the open woodland regions. These were replaced by white pine. Hemlock was most important by 7,400 years ago, followed by another influx of pine. Hemlock all but disappeared from the area at 4,700 years ago, probably due to a pathogen that obliterated hemlock forests from the great Lakes to the Atlantic coastline. Northern hardwoods with oaks, maples, and beech colonized the newly open landscape. Temperatures were probably higher than today's average with less moisture. By about 3,000 years ago, hemlock began to replace the oaks, and shortly thereafter pine and fir, together with other more boreal species such as larch, poplar and juniper. Cooler, moister conditions are implied.

The wetlands dominated today by *sphagnum* (peatland) bogs, evolved over time. Initially, much of Caribou and Whitten Bog was open water, followed by a cattail (*Typha*) marsh, and then peatlands. Timing varied. Alton Bog was different. Here the evidence suggests that the modern bog formed over forested land, not a lake. Cores taken from Mansell Pond indicate that water levels in this closed basin changed through time. Water level started off as high or higher than today, but by 9,000 years ago it was dropping and eventually reached a level 25 feet lower than today, around 6-7,000 years ago. This was the period of lowered precipitation and higher temperatures hypothesized from the pollen data. Geological evidence from the riverbanks shows a period of few to no major floods, supporting the warmer, less moist climate idea. Water levels rose in Mansell Pond from 5,000 years ago with the most rapid rise seen in the last 1000 years. Thus, water levels in the Alton area were highest just as Europeans arrived in the area.

These data were gathered to help interpret the archaeology. The cattail marshes following the lakes would have been most attractive to people as they were home to a number of wetland plants and animals. As these marshes became peatlands, the ability to support people became less.



Lower water levels would have impeded canoe travel and resulted in more difficult travel in those waterways that tend to dry out in the summer. At the same time, habitat for fish, especially those that need cool water, such as trout and salmon, were impacted. As we reconstruct the vegetation history, these periods dominated by hemlock (with as much as 40% of the pollen of that species) would have reduced ability to support deer. The decline of the hemlock, and the subsequent increase in hardwoods, increased browse and food for beaver and then muskrat, both species important for Native peoples. The important point is that the kind of forests, wetlands, and river levels documented by the first Europeans in the area was relatively new. Ecosystems, like human cultures, continually evolve. There is no baseline, except an artificial one, and no ideal or “natural” state to which to aspire.

## B. Soils

The land and the soils located in Alton has been mapped by the U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation Service. There are 4 10” by 15” soil maps covering all of the land in Alton. These maps are available for viewing in the Town Office, but were not reproduced and included here.

Several soils characteristics are important to land use planning. These characteristics include the suitability of various types of soils for agriculture, woodland production, and for development.

Prime Farmland Soils - The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines prime farmland as the land that is best suited to produce food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply need to produce a sustained yield of crops while using acceptable farming methods. Prime farmland is a limited strategic resource, and no more of it is being created.

The USDA has compiled a list of over 30 kinds of soils in Penobscot County considered to be prime farmland soils.<sup>37</sup> Many of these types of prime farmland soils are located in Alton.

The U.S.D.A. has also prepared a map of “Important Farmlands” in Alton.<sup>38</sup> This map has been obtained by the Planning Board, and is available for viewing at the Municipal Building. The map shows the locations of “prime farmlands” in Alton, and indicates that 7.3% of the land in Alton is considered “prime farmland”.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See USDA publication *Soil Survey for Growth Management in Penobscot County*.

<sup>38</sup> The farmland soils map was prepared cooperatively, in 1979, by the Soil Conservation District, U.S.D.A., Penobscot County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Penobscot valley Regional Planning Commission. Aside from the 7.3% of “prime farmland”, the map shows that Alton also has 1.2% of its land as “additional farmland”. The precise definition of “additional farmland” is not known.

<sup>39</sup> The land considered to be “prime farmland” in Alton is located in patches, primarily along either side of the Bennoch Road (Route 16). There is prime farmland along either side of the southern portion of Bennoch Road, however the prime farmland along the northern portion is located mostly on the western side.

Prime Forestland<sup>40</sup> – The USDA has also compiled a list of soils in Penobscot County rated by woodland productivity. There are over 100 types of soil considered as prime forestland, and many areas of Alton, except for the wet or boggy areas, have these kinds of soils.

Hydric Soils - Hydric (or wet) soils are very unsuitable for development. Most of the hydric soils located in Alton are found in the town’s wetlands and bogs, as well as in the floodplain area. Development in almost all of these areas is already regulated by the town’s Floodplain Management Ordinance, and its Shoreland Zoning ordinance.

Sand and Gravel Aquifer Soils – These are soils commonly developed in geological surficial formations such as the esker (aquifer) which runs through Alton. The Planning Board has obtained a “Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer Map” from the Maine Geological Society which shows the boundaries of Alton’s important aquifer. A map of this aquifer is set out on the following page.

Alton’s Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer contains many of these kinds of sand and gravel soils (hence the many gravel pits), and the existence of these soils is a real benefit in respect to the permeability of ground water, and the usefulness of the esker as a recharge area. However, because of the rapid permeability of these kinds of soils, pollutants can also move quickly through the soil and into the groundwater. The location of Alton’s sand and gravel aquifer is shown on the map on the following page.

Low density growth area soils - The USDA has also developed a soils rating based upon the each soil type’s potential for development. In doing this, it rates each soil type in respect to the following categories: septic, dwellings, roads, and development. Based upon these factors, the various types of soils are also ranked in respect to what is termed its potential for “low density urban development”, and given a number or score in this regard ranging from 1 to 100. Soil potential for development is high for soil that does not flood, is not wet (good drainage), has adequate permeability, has suitable texture, has relatively deep water table, has adequate depth to bedrock, and has a mild slope. Soil potential is low for soils that do not have these qualities.

## **F. Water Resources**

### **Surface Water**

Ponds - Alton has three ponds that are large enough to qualify for “great pond” status:<sup>41</sup> Holland Pond, Pickerel Pond and Pug Pond (see topographical map). As noted above,

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<sup>40</sup> Prime forestland is land that has soil capable of growing wood at the economic productive rate of a given tree species.

<sup>41</sup> In case of natural un-dammed bodies of water, a “great pond” is defined as any pond over 10 square acres in size. Under Maine law, “great ponds” belong to all residents of the State, are subject to special access considerations, and are afforded special environmental protection.

the watersheds of all these ponds are located wholly within Alton. Alton also has two other significant ponds that are privately owned, Mansel Pond and Lost Pond. All of the aforementioned ponds are shallow and surrounded by floating peat beds, which make the water dark and acidic. Alton's ponds support warm water fisheries that receive some pressure during open water season, and during the winter from ice fishing.

Streams – The major waterways in Alton are: Pushaw Stream, Dead Stream, and Birch Stream, which afford many miles of navigable water (see map...), The upper stretches of Dead Stream and Birch Stream offer several sections of moderate whitewater canoeing in the spring, and also provide excellent family boating opportunities. There is only a short section of Pushaw Stream located in Alton, but it is important as it provides the only available public access to Dead Stream. It also supports a warm water fishery and carries seasonal runs of eels from the Penobscot River, and runs of white perch from Pushaw Pond.

Brooks – Alton has several brooks: Ten-mile Brook, Pug Brook, Costigan Brook, and Judkins Brook. These are important to local residents as they support trout fishing, and provide the fire department with reliable water sources at conveniently located points in town.

Water Quality – Maine DEP's data base does not contain water quality data for the ponds and streams in Alton.<sup>42</sup> However, the Planning Committee is not aware of any pollution threats, at the present time, to any of these water bodies. The drainage areas for each of Alton's great ponds are located entirely within the town, meaning that Alton is somewhat master of its own fate in respect to protecting the water quality of these ponds. Alton's ponds are small, shallow, and warm. The flushing rates are very low, and if these ponds were more accessible or had more shoreline capable of development, they could be polluted in a very short time.

The major brooks and streams are subject to any pollution coming from neighboring towns, although we are not aware of any current problems in this regard. They do not appear to be at risk except from logging operations that fail to leave adequate shading buffers, or that fail to construct proper water crossing facilities.

**Surface Water Protection** - Alton's surface water is protected under the State of Maine's *Natural Resources Act*, which protects rivers, streams, great ponds, and freshwater wetlands by requiring permits through DEP for any construction adjacent to water resources, and outlining restitution policies if any water resource is damaged through incompatible use. Land adjacent to Alton's surface water is protected by our *Shoreland Zoning Ordinance*.

**Floodplain** – Alton maintains a set of flood plain maps in the town office that show the location of the 100-year flood plains. The 100-year flood plain maps show those areas of

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<sup>42</sup> June 6, 2002 letter from Maine DEP.

land that have a 1% chance of flooding in any given year, and are the basis for the *National Flood Plain Insurance Act*. Development in the floodplain area is regulated by Alton's *Floodplain Management Ordinance*. A map of Alton's very large floodplain area is set out on the following page.

**Ground Water** - Alton has no public water system, therefore, all of Alton's residents obtain their water from ground water. "Ground water" is the portion of rain and snow that has seeped into the ground, rather than running off to become surface water, or evaporating. It is subsurface water that fills spaces between particles of rocks and soil.

Geologic deposits and bedrock containing large quantities of water are known as aquifers. An aquifer is defined as any subsurface water supply that yields useful quantities of ground water to wells and/or springs.

Alton residents obtain their ground water from two kinds of aquifers: the first is aquifers made from unconsolidated surface sediments, such as sand and gravel,<sup>43</sup> and the second is aquifers contained within fractures within the bedrock formations. These bedrock formations lie beneath the unconsolidated subsurface sediments discussed above. Most Alton residents obtain their groundwater from bedrock aquifers.

Recharge Area – Land with coarse or sandy surface soils capable of absorbing rainwater easily and replenishing an aquifer is called a recharge area. As noted, these areas also deserve special attention because any pollutant discharged into the soils of these areas may eventually flow to the aquifer and contaminate the ground water contained there.

It is most likely that the gravel esker running along the Bennoch Road is the major recharge area for most of the deep wells located in Alton. However, the horseback soils afford little filtration for petroleum, salt, or toxic waste, and Alton needs to work very hard to ensure that the sands and gravels that supply clean drinking water for all of the wells in town are not contaminated by poorly planned or illegal waste disposal

Public and Community Water Systems –There is no public water system in Alton, although there are five public or community wells. Two wells support the town's elementary school and municipal building. A third well is located at the old elementary school, and two other wells supply the two mobile home parks in town.

### **Threats to Water Resources**

The Planning Committee is not aware that Alton has any known "point source" of water supply contamination. There are, however, potential "non-point" sources of water contamination. These includes two salt and gravel piles used for winter work on the roads. One facility is located in the northern portion of town, on Park Road, just off the

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<sup>43</sup> The unconsolidated surface sediments aquifers were formed from deposits made by glaciers over the last two million years. Wells within Alton that obtain their water from this type of aquifer would include the wells that obtain their water from soil within Alton's large sand and gravel esker, or horseback. These wells do not go all the way to bedrock.

Argyle Road. This facility is maintained by the Town of Alton and the State. It has a cement floor and is covered to protect it from the elements. The other facility is located along the southern portion of the Bennoch Road, just off the Interstate. It is maintained by the State and is also covered.

Agricultural practices should not be source of pollution to our water resources since there are no family farms any longer in Alton which could cause a problem in respect to run off. Nor are there any landfills or petroleum storage facilities, and the town's individual septic systems appear to be in compliance with State regulations.

Timber harvesting could become a threat to our brooks and streams if State-mandated harvesting provisions were not followed, but the Planning Committee is not currently aware of any violations in this regard, and we currently do not have issues of sedimentation from resource management activities.

Alton has no municipal storm drain system. Stormwater and rainwater either soak down through the soil surface, or are carried by roadside ditches and natural waterways to natural catchments.

Although Alton is a rural community with lots of undeveloped land, it does not have any landfills at this time. Neither are there any municipal statutes defining who may open a land fill or what procedures must be followed in choosing a site. The potential for groundwater contamination from a poorly planned or illegal landfill could be severe given the high permeability of Alton's sand and gravel deposits.

It is clear from the recent public opinion survey that was taken that the gravel pits located in Alton are a major land use issue for our residents for several reasons. The most significant reason is probably related to these sand and gravel deposits as groundwater recharge areas, and continuing sand and gravel extraction must therefore be contingent upon protecting the quantity and quality of this public resource. Alton is also at risk for contamination of groundwater because of the tremendous amount of acreage in abandoned or little used gravel pits, which connect to our water supplies.

**Analysis** - As Alton's population, number of housing units, and overall growth increases in the years to come (and it will), the demands on Alton's ground water supply and the threat of ground water pollution will also increase. It is therefore proper to take reasonable steps now to protect the major recharge area in Alton for the individual wells of our residents.

As the State's *Comprehensive Planning Manual* points out, aquifers and related recharge areas that are the source of private water supplies would be considered "a significant constraint to development", although maybe not as severe as in the case when the recharge area is the source of the public water system. Alton does not have a public water system, and hopefully we will never need one, as the cost of building such a system would be very prohibitive. But that could happen if our ground water supply should become contaminated in the future.

## **Policies**

The Town of Alton will continue to protect the waters of its ponds, streams and brooks. It will also protect the quality and quantity of its groundwater by taking steps to protect its Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer and major recharge area. It will avoid the problems associated with floodplain development, and will ensure that any new development takes place on soils suitable for the intended purpose.

## **Implementation Strategies**

Alton, through its Planning Board and Board of Selectmen, working closely with our Code Enforcement Officer, will continue strict administration of the State plumbing code, and the Town's Shoreland Zoning, and Floodplain Ordinances, all of which protect our unique natural resources.

Alton's Board of Selectmen and Planning Board shall, within one year of acceptance of this Comprehensive Plan, explore the possibility of obtaining a funding grant from the State for the development of zoning, subdivision and impact fee ordinances. These ordinances, when drafted, will be consistent with the Town's policy of preserving and protecting the quality and quantity of our groundwater, and consistent with our policy of preventing inappropriate development that would threaten the quality of our environment, in particular, our water bodies.

Alton will amend its current Land Use Ordinance, within one year after acceptance of its Comprehensive Plan so as to prohibit and/or regulate land use activities such as petroleum storage facilities and solid waste dumps over the town's major aquifer.

Alton will pass a Gravel Extraction Ordinance, within two years of acceptance of the Comprehensive Plan, which will be consistent with the Town's policy of preserving and protecting the quantity and quality of our groundwater supply. The Planning Board will be primarily responsible for the preparation of a draft ordinance to put before the residents of Alton for their consideration.

Alton's Planning Board will begin (within two years of acceptance of this plan) to monitor and begin to keep an inventory of all available information regarding the quality and quantity of the ground water in our community. Some information (flow and depth) concerning some of our wells is already available through information contained on the Maine Geological Society's Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer Map. The Geological Society has also collected a fair amount of data from local well drillers concerning many of the wells that have been dug in Alton recent years. All of the available information should be brought together, and expanded if possible, so that the Town can monitor what is occurring in this regard.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Alton will also take steps to expand the amount of information available regarding the quality of our groundwater. This will include trying to obtain (from the State's DOT) information on the quality of our ground water already collected. DOT collected information in the summer of 2001 on the water quality of

## 6. Other Significant or Critical Natural Resources

### Inventory and Analysis Section

#### I. Significant Wildlife Habitats

Alton's forests, ponds, streams, and wetlands provide high quality fish and game habitat for a diverse array of species. Alton supports hundreds of hours of outdoor recreation each year that is directly linked to our wildlife resources. Our wildlife resources are also important economically as several residents earn income from guiding and trapping.

**Endangered and Threatened Species Habitat**– The State of Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife Division has identified three animal species located in Alton which are considered to be either "threatened", or of "special concern".

The only species in Alton that is listed as "threatened" is the yellow lamp mussel, which has been found along the shores of Dead Stream (see map at end of this section). This species falls under the protection of the federal government's *Endangered Species Act*. It is also protected under the State's *Natural Resource Protection Act*.

Two other animal species in Alton are considered to be of "special concern".<sup>45</sup> One is a mussel called a Brook Floater, located in the same general area as the yellow lamp mussel, along the shores of Dead Stream.

The other animal species in Alton listed as of "special concern" is the wood turtle, which has been found in the northern, unsettled part of Alton, near where the railroad line crosses into Lagrange.

Habitat issues relating to protecting for the two mussel species are related to maintaining the water quality of Dead Stream. The habitat requirements related to the protection of the wood turtle are related to maintaining a forested habitat, and there is no known immediate threat in that regard.

**Riparian Habitat** – The State of Maine's Department of Conservation has developed a Water Resources and Riparian Habitats Map for the Town of Alton. This map (located at the end of this section) shows Alton's mapped water resources. The purple areas on this map represent buffers around the water resources. Great ponds and wetlands of at least

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wells located along the southern section of Bennoch Road that was undergoing widening. To date, DOT has not shared this information with the Town, and further steps should be taken to try and obtain it.

<sup>45</sup> The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife defines a species of "special concern" to be one that does not meet the criteria as "endangered" or "threatened", but is particularly vulnerable and could easily become threatened or endangered. The "special concern" category is not used in environmental regulation, but is for planning and informational purposes only – it does not have the legal bearing of "endangered" or "threatened" status.

10 acres in size have a 250' buffer zone, while streams are surrounded by a 75' buffer zone. Most of the area on this map is currently protected by Alton's *Shoreland Zoning Ordinance*.<sup>46</sup>

**Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat** - The Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife has identified eight, relatively small areas of wetland, spread throughout Alton, which serve as important habitat for waterfowl and wading birds. These habitat areas are all currently protected from development by Alton's *Shoreland Zoning Ordinance*. The location of these habitat areas can be seen on the High Value Plant and Animal Habitat map (developed by Maine's Dept. of Conservation) at the end of this section.

**Significant Plant Habitats** - Alton has several bogs within its borders, the largest and most well-known being the Alton Bog. The location of Alton's bogs can be seen on the High Value Plant and Animal Habitats map which is included at the end of this section.

The bog areas are clearly unsuitable for development, for many reasons, and it is most unlikely that anyone would wish to develop or build a structure in these areas. In any event, Alton's bogs are also currently protected from development by Alton's strict adherence to the State's plumbing regulations regarding sewage disposal. Many of these bog areas are also protected by our Floodplain and Shoreland Zoning Ordinances.

**Deer Wintering Area** - The Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife has identified a large deer wintering area located in the central, interior portion of Alton. The location of this area can be seen on the High Value Plant and Animal Habitat map at the end of this section. The deer wintering area has been known to local residents and wildlife biologists for years, and is an important resource of the Town. There is currently no State environmental protection afforded to deer wintering areas in organized towns such as Alton, although some of this area is currently protected from development by Alton's *Shoreland Zoning Ordinance*.

## Policy

To protect and manage Alton's unique plant and wildlife resources from adverse land use impacts.

## Implementation Strategies

Alton will continue its enforcement of its Shoreland Zoning and Floodplain Ordinances, thereby protecting important plant and animal habitats from unsuitable development.

Alton will continue to support landowner participation in the State's *Tree Growth Tax Act*, since the participation in this program tends to preserve Alton's natural habitat for local wildlife.

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<sup>46</sup> National Wetlands Maps were used in making this particular map, and these were based on high altitude aerial photos taken in the mid-1980s. These maps are not intended to be a substitute for on the ground investigations when more specific and detailed information is required.



The Alton Planning Board will explore, within three years of acceptance of this plan, the possibility that a land trust may be interested in acquiring an area of land in Alton in order to preserve its natural state from unsuitable development.

## 7. Agricultural and Forest Resources

**State Goal** –To safeguard the State’s agricultural and forest resources from development which threatens these resources.

### Inventory and Analysis Section

#### Forest Resources

There is undoubtedly much more forested land in Alton today than there was a century ago, when much of the land in Alton was cleared for agricultural purposes.<sup>47</sup> Except for the relatively small parcels of cleared land going back from the homes located along Alton’s roads, and except for its bogs and wetlands, most of Alton today is covered by forest. This can be seen in the aerial photo included with the Water, Topography, and Soil Resources Inventory above.

Alton’s forests provide habitat for a diverse array of wildlife, as discussed above. Alton’s forested lands are also an important source or area for recreational activities, both locally and in the region.

Alton’s timberlands are highly varied in both species composition and age distribution. The species of timber growing on each tract are highly influenced by the soils that support them, and by past land use, principally agriculture and timber harvesting. Alton is a low-lying town and much of the low-lying forested area supports mixtures of spruce, fir, larch, and cedar. There are also significant acreages in the hardwood floodplain type (elm, brown ash and red maple) along the major waterways such as Birch and Dead Streams.

Much of the best land in Alton was at one time cleared. Today, old fields which have grown over support a variety of timber species, depending on the soil, the topography, the time past since last pasturing, and recent cutting history.<sup>48</sup> Because field abandonment has been a gradual but continuing trend in Alton, Alton’s old-field forests today provide an incredibly diverse array of species and ages. This diverse pattern affords ideal habitat for a likewise diverse array of forest-dwelling wildlife. The old-field stands are growing

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<sup>47</sup> There is abundant evidence that a far greater proportion of Alton was once cleared land, and it appears, with the possible exception of Murch Ridge and Porcupine Ridge, that most of the deep, well-drained land in Alton was at one time cleared. Most of the cleared land has now returned to forest, but old rock walls and barbed wire fences still exist in the present day forests, running back from the fields and roads to the wetlands that characterize much of the back lands in town.

<sup>48</sup> Old fields throughout the northeast usually fill in with brush in the low spots, and white pine or white spruce in the better drained places. Occasionally a field will fill in with eastern larch. The fields that fill in with brush fill in first along the edges and in the wet spots; gradually the entire field fills in with brush, and then the trees gradually come in through the brush. Often birches and aspens come in first, then fir, spruce, pine, hemlock and maples take over.

on some of the best soils and on some of the most accessible lots in town, which are also the most suitable lots for conversion to residential and other uses.

### Timber Harvest Activity

Alton's timber resources reflect a harvesting pattern that is typical of all the small towns in the Penobscot Valley. Because Alton is within easy hauling distance of seven paper mills and numerous sawmills, the accessible woodlands in town have a history of frequent harvesting, which continues to provide wealth and jobs to the local and regional economy. The following Table indicates the amount of harvesting that has taken place in Alton between 1992 and 2000. There were, on average, five timber harvests a year in Alton between 1992 and 2000, and the average amount of land harvested each year, in total, was 375 acres.

#### Timber Harvest Activity in Alton<sup>49</sup>

Year	Selection Harvest – No. of Acres	Shelterwood Harvest - No. of Acres	Clearcut – No. of Acres	Total Harvest – No. of Acres	Change of Land Use – No. of Acres	No. of Timber Harvests
1992	530	190	88	808	8	3
1993	249	25	9	283	0	3
1994	127	0	0	127	0	5
1995	465	0	50	515	0	5
1996	152	0	2	154	2	4
1997	195	133	0	328	0	4
1998	187	75	0	262	0	5
1999	289	20	0	309	0	7
2000	512	72	0	584	0	11
Totals	2706	515	149	3370	10	47
Average/yr	300.7	57.2	16.6	374.4	1.1	5.2

**Related Forest Activities** - Alton continues to be an important source of primary wood products for local area mills, and logging and firewood production continues to support a small number of Alton families. Logging contractors from other communities find regular employment in Alton's woods as well. Several Alton residents drive trucks that haul wood to the various mills at least a part of the year, and many Alton families are supported wholly or in part by jobs in the various mills located in the surrounding region.

**Tree Growth Tax Act** - In 2002, there were 12 parcels of land located in Alton enrolled under the State program set out in *Tree Growth Tax Act*. In total, 13,945 acres of Alton's land was in Tree Growth in 2001. This is a large percentage (54 %) of Alton's total taxable acreage, which is 25,630 acres.

**Agricultural Resources** – There is only one “family farm” still operating in Alton. Because of its rural nature, several residents own horses or other animals, but there is

<sup>49</sup> Source: Department of Conservation – Maine Forest Service, year-end Land Owner reports. 03/06/02

only one resident who could be said to be operating a “farm”.<sup>50</sup> There are no landowners in Alton participating in Maine’s *Farm and Open Space Tax Act*.

The situation in Alton today is in marked contrast to situation at the turn of the last century, when there were at least 50 family farms, some quite large in operation. As recently as fifty years ago, a time many current residents can easily remember, there were still a number of small farms in operation. Prime farmland soils in Alton was discussed in the previous Inventory.

**Analysis** – It is clear that Alton is principally a forested township, and there are currently far more acres of land that are undeveloped than there are developed. The location of the four large undeveloped blocks of land which are contained in Alton can be seen on the Undeveloped habitats Blocks map, provided the town by the Department of Conservation, which is included at the end of this section.

In addition to the contributions that Alton’s woodlands make to the rural character of the town and to the local and regional economy, these lands are of great recreational importance to Alton residents, as local people hunt, fish, canoe, cross country ski, and snowmobile throughout the undeveloped lands. The undeveloped and forested lots in Alton also provide some of the largest contiguous forest tracts in central Penobscot County, which provide abundant habitat for wildlife.

Much of the undeveloped forest land in Alton is concentrated in a very few large parcels, many of which are owned by non-residents, and is assessed under Maine’s *Tree Growth Tax Act*. If these large landowners should decide to change the use of any of these large parcels (e.g. converting the land from Tree Growth to residential lots), it could significantly affect the rural character, tax base, and demand for municipal services within Alton.

Large-scale development, such as housing subdivisions, are believed to be the primary long-term threat to Alton’s forested land. However, at the moment, there is no indication that this type of development is likely to occur in the immediate future.

Alton’s forests are currently protected by the State’s *Natural Resources Protection Act*, and, to some extent, by our *Shoreland Zoning Ordinance*.

In respect to the present-day lack of farming, there is little that the Town of Alton can do on its own to create viable markets for traditional local agricultural products. The Town does have the ability to affect the expense side of a farming operation through its rate of property tax, but it is believed that the current economic difficulties that our local farmers face are not primarily related to property tax issues.

However, while traditional agriculture faces tough economic times, there is a rapidly growing agricultural niche market in Maine related to a trend towards direct marketing to

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<sup>50</sup> Alton’s one active farm, owned by Mark Estes, is located along the east side of the Bennoch Road, just north of where the Tannery Road and Bennoch Road meet.

the consumer, and an increased demand for organic produce. Whenever possible, the Town should encourage such niche agricultural activity, as it provides employment, as well as preserving the rural nature of the community.

As noted previously, there are a number of areas in Alton containing prime farmland soils. These soils are a very limited natural resource, and once destroyed, cannot be replaced, since no more of it is currently being made. For that reason alone, we should try to protect such land for the future residents of the community.

## **POLICIES**

To protect Alton's forest and agricultural resources from unsuitable development which would threaten them.

## **IMPLEMENTATION STRATAGIES**

Alton will continue to encourage local landowners to participate in the State's agriculture, tree growth and open space tax programs.

Alton's Economic Development Committee and/or Planning Board shall explore what options the Town has in encouraging local agriculture, both traditional agriculture, and agriculture that is attempting to fit into more of a niche market.

Alton will pass a revised Land Use Ordinance within one year of acceptance of this comprehensive plan that will afford a greater degree of protection against development in Alton's rural areas than in Alton's Growth Area. For example, the Wildlife Protection Area (see Future Land Use Plan below) will require a much greater minimum lot size than will be required in the Growth Area. Cluster (or open space) subdivision development will also be required in the Wildlife Protection Area. Requirements such as this will tend to protect Alton's forest resources located in our rural areas from development and land clearing activities that might have occurred otherwise.

## 8. Housing

**State Goal** – It is a state goal to “encourage and promote affordable, decent housing opportunities for all Maine citizens.”

### Inventory and Analysis

#### Number of Housing Units

There were 347 housing units in Alton in the year 2000, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Virtually all of these housing units were year round, as only 9 units, or less than 3%, were for seasonal or recreational use. The majority of the seasonal units are believed to be cabins located on forested land.

The number of housing units in Alton has increased from 101 in 1970, to 347 in 2000. This was an increase of 244% over the 30-year period, with most of the growth occurring in the 1970s and 1980s, which coincides with the opening and development of two mobile home parks in Town during this period. During the past decade, from 1990 to 2000, the rate of growth in the number of new housing units in Alton was three times the rate of growth experienced by Penobscot County as a whole (28% to 8.9%).

It is believed that the number of housing units in Alton can reasonably be expected to increase by 66, to 413 units by the year 2012. The 66 new housing units expected between 2000 and 2012 will mean an increase of 19% in the total number of units, which is virtually identical to the rate of growth in housing units expected for Penobscot County as a whole during this period (19% to 18.1%).<sup>51</sup> All of this information is shown on the Table below.

Housing Units – U.S. Census data

Community	Units in 1970	Units in 1980	% change 1970 to 1980	Units in 1990	% change 1980 to 1990	Units in 2000	% change 1990 to 2000	Units projected for 2012	% change 2000 to 2012
Alton	101	159	57.4%	271	70.4%	347	28%	413	19.0%
Penobscot County				61,359		66,847	8.9%	78,952	18.1%

<sup>51</sup> The projection for the increase in the number of new housing units in Alton and Penobscot County is based on the assumption that the number of new units will correspond fairly closely with the number of new households expected. In other words, since 66 new households are expected in Alton between 2000 and 2012 (see Chapter 2 on Alton’s demographics above), we are assuming here that there will also be an increase of approximately 66 new housing units during this same period. – All of this, of course, is also based on an assumption that there will continue to be a viable housing market in Alton, in which people will be able to afford to purchase new homes, or to purchase land on which to build new homes.

## Occupancy Status

### Number of Housing Vacancies in Alton

The vacancy rate of Alton's housing units for the year 2000 was 11%, as 38 of Alton's 347 housing units were vacant at that time. In 1990, only 1.1%, or virtually none of Alton's housing units were vacant.

#### Housing Units Vacant

Total units in 1990	No. of units vacant <sup>52</sup>	% of units vacant in 1990	Total units in 2000	No. of units vacant <sup>53</sup>	% of units vacant in 2000
271	3	1.1%	347	38	11%

The reason for Alton's 38 housing vacancies in the year 2000 was primarily due to the fact that these units were either seasonal, or they were for sale.

#### 2000 U.S. Census Table H5

Total Vacancies in Alton in 2000:	38
For rent	1
For sale only	11
Rented or sold, not occupied	1
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	9
For migrant workers	0
Other vacant	16

### Housing Units by Structure Type

In the year 2000, 56 % of Alton's housing units were single-family homes, and 44 % were classified by the U.S. Census as "mobile homes". There is no multiple-unit housing in Alton. It is expected that the percentage of mobile homes in Alton will continue to grow slightly in the next ten years.<sup>54</sup>

Alton	Number in 1990	%	Number in 2000 <sup>55</sup>	%	Estimated Number in 2012	Percent

<sup>52</sup> U.S. Census STF3 file H004

<sup>53</sup> U.S. 2000 Census SF1 file H3

<sup>54</sup> In 1990, 38% of Alton's housing units were mobile homes (1990 U.S. Census Table DP-1). In 2000, 43.9% of Alton's housing units were mobile homes (Table DP-4). The estimate for the number of different types of housing units in Alton for the year 2012 was arrived at by assuming that the percentage of mobile homes, based on what occurred in past decade, will continue to grow slightly, to approximately 48% of all units.

<sup>55</sup> The data used in this Table was taken from Table DP-4 in the 2000 Census, which states that the total number of housing units in Alton in the year 2000 was 353. Whereas Table DP-1 in the 2000 Census states that the total number of units was 347. The difference is probably explained by the fact that Table DP-1 is based on a full count, while table DP-4 is based on a sampling of data which was then projected to the total population. – The same reasoning also probably accounts for the discrepancy between the total number of housing units shown in 1990 census Tables, 262 compared with 271 for the full count.

Total housing units	262		353		413	
<b>UNITS IN STRUCTURE</b>						
1-unit, detached	157	59.9%	192	54.4 %	206	50%
1-unit, attached	3	1.1%	6	1.7%	8	2%
2 units	4	1.5%	-		-	
3 or 4 units	-	-	-		-	
4 or more units	-	-	-		-	
Mobile home	98	37.4%	155	43.9 %	199	48%

### Proportional Make-up of Housing Units by Tenure

In the year 2000, the vast majority of the housing units in Alton (89%) were owner-occupied, with only 11% of the units being rented. A similar situation existed in 1990.<sup>56</sup>

Total occupied housing units in Alton in 1990 <sup>57</sup>	No. Renter occupied in 1990	No. Owner occupied in 1990	% of units owner occupied in 1990	Total occupied units in 2000 <sup>58</sup>	No. Renter occupied in 2000	No. Owner occupied in 2000	% of units owner occupied in 2000
259	23	236	91.1%	309	34	275	89%

### Make-up by Physical Condition – Age of Housing Stock

Most of Alton's housing units are believed to be in fairly good condition. The following Table indicates that the majority (56%) of the housing units in Alton were built after the year 1980. The median year that Alton's housing units were built is 1983.

Year Housing Unit Built<sup>59</sup>

Alton	Number	Percent
Total housing units	353	
<b>YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT</b>		
1999 to march 2000	12	3.4 %
1995 to 1998	36	10.2 %
1990 to 1994	55	15.6 %
1980 to 19989	93	26.3 %
1970 to 1979	64	18.1 %
1960 to 1969	20	5.7 %

<sup>56</sup> In 1990, 713 of Alton's 771 residents (or 92.5%) lived in owner-occupied housing units (1990 Census DP-1 file QT-H1), and in the year 2000, 742 of Alton's 816 residents (or 90.9%) lived in owner-occupied units. (2000 Census - SF1 file H11).

<sup>57</sup> 1990 data on this Table comes from U.S. Census 1990 DP-1 data, file QT-H1 (STF1)

<sup>58</sup> 2000 data on this Table comes from U.S. Census SF1 file H.4

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Census Bureau – 2000 Census – table DP-4



1940 to 1959	31	8.8 %
1939 or earlier	42	11.9 %

The median number of rooms in each housing unit in Alton is 5.2, which is virtually the same as the county average of 5.1. Census data (Table DP-4) indicates that 88% of the housing units in Alton used fuel oil to heat with in the year 2000, while 8% used wood. Census data also indicates that less than 1% of the housing units in Alton in 2000 lacked complete plumbing and kitchen facilities. This is a marked improvement over the situation in Alton back in 1980, when 16% of the housing units in town lacked complete bathrooms. Based upon the town assessor's CDU (Condition, Desirability and Use) ratings for the units in Alton, upon interviews with the Code Enforcement Officer and other town officials, and upon windshield surveys, it is believed that most of Alton's housing units are currently in fairly good condition. In fact, the condition of Alton's housing stock appears to be improving as older substandard housing is gradually being replaced.<sup>60</sup>

### **Affordable Housing**

In simplest terms, affordability is a question of household income versus the cost of housing. This section will examine whether affordable housing for certain income groups is currently available in Alton.

Definition of "Affordable" The State of Maine defines an owner-occupied housing unit as "affordable" if the price of the unit results in monthly housing costs that do not exceed 28% to 33% of the household's gross monthly income<sup>61</sup>. For purposes of discussion here, a figure of 30% will be used.

The State of Maine defines a renter-occupied housing unit as affordable to a household if the unit's monthly housing costs (rent and basic utilities) do not exceed 30% of the household's gross monthly income.

Income Groups - The State of Maine's objective is to assure a supply of affordable housing is available to households in following three income groups:

- 1.) "Very low income" households are defined as those that do not exceed 50% of the median income in the county. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the median income for Penobscot County in the year 2000 was \$34,274. Therefore "lower income" households in Alton would be those with incomes of less than \$17,137.

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<sup>60</sup> Alton's Code Enforcement Officer has pointed out that many substandard units in Alton have been replaced in recent years, often by new pre-built modular or double-wide units.

<sup>61</sup> "Housing costs" consist of the following: 1.) mortgage principal and interest, 2.) insurance, 3.) real estate taxes, and 4.) basic utility costs. - Mortgage payments are based on down payment rates and interest rates generally available to lower and moderate income households.

For renters in the “very low income” category, an affordable rent would be one that is less than \$428 per month.<sup>62</sup>

For homeowners in the “very low income” category, an affordable mortgage (including taxes, insurance and utilities) would be one which is less than \$428 per month. Excluding taxes, insurance and utilities, an affordable mortgage payment for those in this income category would be approximately \$200 per month.<sup>63</sup>

- 2.) “Lower income” households are those that have income between 51% and 80% of median income in the county. In Alton, this would be households earning between \$17,138 and \$27,419.

For renters in the “lower income” category, an affordable rent would be one between \$428 and \$685 per month.

In a similar manner, for homeowners in the “low income” category, an affordable mortgage (including taxes, insurance and utilities) would be one between \$428 and \$685 per month.

- 3.) “Moderate income” households have between 81% and 150% of the median income in the county. This would be households earning between \$27,420 and \$51,411.

For renters in the “moderate income” category, an affordable rent would be one between \$685 and \$1,285 per month. For homeowners in the “moderate income” category, an affordable mortgage (including taxes, insurance and utilities) would be one between \$685 and \$1285 per month.

Trend in Income - To begin the analysis of affordable housing, we should first compare the trends in median household incomes in Alton over the last several decades to the trends in median sales prices and rents. It would obviously be best if household incomes in Alton were keeping up with housing costs. The Table below, taken from U.S. Census data, shows how Alton’s median household income has increased from 1969 to 1999.

Median Household Income Adjusted for 1999 Dollars

Community	1969	1979	% change	1989	% change	1999	% change
Alton	29,188	30,892	5.8%	37,603	21.7%	35,263	-6.2%

Trend in Housing Sale Prices - Accurate data regarding the median sale price of homes in Alton is more difficult to obtain because of the paucity of actual sales, which makes it

<sup>62</sup>  $30\% \times 17,137 = 5,141$      $5,141 / 12 = \$428$

<sup>63</sup> Assumes \$100/mo. in taxes and insurance, and \$125/mo. for utilities.

very difficult to identify any trends.<sup>64</sup> In 1996, the last year in which there were a substantial number of home sales in Alton, the median value (from 11 sales) of the homes sold was \$ 46,500.<sup>65</sup>

There is U.S. Census data regarding the median value of all of the housing units in Alton indicating that the median value of these units is going up. In 1990, the median value of homes in Alton was \$57,600.<sup>66</sup> In 2000 dollars, that 1990 value is \$75,889. In the year 2000, the median value of housing units in Alton was computed to be \$82,400. This is an increase of 8.6% in the median value since 1990. Based upon the increase in median home value in the last decade, it is believed that the median sale price for housing units in Alton must be increasing as well, probably by roughly the same amount, or by about 8% every ten years.<sup>67</sup>

Rentals - U.S. Census data indicates that the cost of rental property in Alton has been rising slightly over the last decade. In 1990, the cost of the median contract gross rent in Alton was \$356. In 2000 dollars, this cost was \$469. The median contract gross rent in the year 2000 (out of 37 total rentals) was \$506. This is an increase of 7.8% since 1990. Many of the rentals in Alton are believed to occur in the town's two mobile home parks.

**Analysis** - As will be seen below, it appears that there generally is affordable housing currently available in Alton. This tends to be confirmed by the results of the recent Alton community survey in which 68% of those who responded stated that they felt that there was enough affordable housing available, and only 10% felt that affordable housing in Alton was very difficult to find.

Alton's median household income increased, on average, by approximately 7% per decade the last three decades. In the last decade (1989 to 1999), however, the median household income declined by 6.2%. It is not known and it is difficult to say whether this is a trend that will continue into the future. At the same time, it appears that housing

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<sup>64</sup> For example, data obtained from the Maine State Housing Authority indicates that the average sales price for a home in Alton in the year 2001 was \$69,133. This data was obtained by the MSHA from the Statewide Multiple Listing Service (MREIS), but was based on just six sales. The average sale price for the year 2000 was listed as \$84,500, but this was based on just one sale! In 1999, there was one sale for \$62,750. In 1998, there were two sales for an average price of \$78,500, and in 1997, no sales were recorded by the MREIS. It is very difficult to identify any particular trend in housing sales prices from this kind of data.

<sup>65</sup> The 1996 data was obtained from the Sales Ratio Analysis compiled by the State comparing homes sale prices in Alton to the municipal valuations at the time.

<sup>66</sup> Based on how residents responded on the long-form questionnaire - respondents were asked to state the value of their homes and property.

<sup>67</sup> This 8% estimation for an increase in the median sale price is somewhat confirmed by the fact that the median sale price for the 12 vacant housing units offered for sale in Alton in 2000 was \$55,000 (2000 U.S. Census Table QT-H6). In 1996, the median sale price for the 11 homes that were sold in Alton that year was \$47,500. In 2000 dollars, the 1996 median sale price would have been \$52,132. This was an increase of 5.5% between 1996 and 2000.

prices and rental costs both increased by approximately 8% over the last decade. If this situation should continue, with housing costs rising while incomes decline, affordable housing could become more of a problem for Alton's residents.

At the present time, however, not many of Alton's residents living in owner-occupied housing units spend more than 30% of their household income on their housing needs. This is evidenced by U.S. Census data indicating that only 16% of the town's homeowners spent more than 30% of their income on housing in 1999.

2000 U.S. Census Table DP-4

<b>SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS IN ALTON AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN 1999<sup>68</sup></b>	Number	Percent
Less than 15.0 percent	38	39.2%
15.0 to 19.9 percent	16	16.5%
20.0 to 24.9 percent	18	18.6%
25.0 to 29.9 percent	9	9.3%
30.0 to 34.9 percent	8	8.2%
35.0 to 34.9 percent	8	8.2%
Not computed		

Housing Market - U.S. Census data (Table QT-H6) indicates that there were 12 vacant housing units (which includes mobile homes) for sale in Alton in the year 2000, and that the median asking price for those housing units was \$55,000.<sup>69</sup> Since one half of the 12 units would have been for sale for less than the median price of \$55,000, this would seem to indicate that there are lower priced housing units on the market that would be affordable to those in the lower income categories discussed above. There are no housing units in Alton with subsidized rents or prices.

As discussed above, much of the growth in the number of housing units in Alton over the next ten years is expected to come about as a result of an increase in the number of mobile homes. Many of the additional mobile homes will not be brand new, and as a result, are relatively inexpensive. As noted above, the percentage of mobile homes in Alton is expected to increase to 48% of the total housing stock by the year 2012. Since there are still opportunities to place a new or used mobile home, or a modular home, on a relatively inexpensive parcel of land in some areas of Alton, much of the future growth in affordable housing units for lower income residents is expected to occur in this manner.

Rental Data – There are not a great number of rental housing units in Alton. Census data indicates that ten of Alton's households (or about 27% of the total number of renters) paid more than 30% of their household income for rent in 1999. This is shown in the following Table.

<sup>68</sup> The Boston office of the U.S. Census Bureau has stated that the housing costs in this Table include mortgage payments, as well as payments for taxes, insurance and utilities.

<sup>69</sup> Figures relating to the median value of all the homes in Alton (discussed above) are not the same as the median value being asked for the homes that have actually been put on the housing market. This data would appear to indicate that the housing units actually being put up for sale are generally below the median value of all the units in Alton.

2000 U.S. Census Table DP-4

<b>GROSS RENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN ALTON IN 1999</b>	Number	Percent
Less than 15.0 percent	7	18.9 %
15.0 to 19.9 percent	3	8.1%
20.0 to 24.9 percent	5	13.5%
25.0 to 29.9 percent	2	5.4%
30.0 to 34.9 percent	-	-
35.0 percent or more	10	27.0%
Not computed	10	27.0%

The median gross rent in Alton in the year 2000 was \$506, with 13 of the housing units being rented for less than \$500. Since an affordable rent for those in the “very low income” category is one that is less than \$428, it appears that there are not too many rental units in Alton in this category. An affordable rent for a “low income” household is one between \$428 and \$685, and there appears to be more of those available.

2000 U.S. Census Table DP-4

	Number	Percent
Specified renter-occupied units	37	100%
<b>GROSS RENT</b>		
Less than \$200	2	5.4%
\$200 to \$299	7	18.9%
\$300 to \$499	4	10.8%
\$500 to \$749	14	37.8%
\$750 to \$999	-	-
\$1,000 to \$1,499	-	-
\$1,500 or more	-	-
No cash rent	10	27%
Median (dollars)	506	(X)

## Housing Policy

It is the policy of Alton to allow and facilitate a range of housing opportunities within the town, and to ensure that there are clear and reasonable ordinances in this regard. It is also the policy of the town to develop land use strategies that will help ensure that housing prices will be affordable in the future, to promote the rehabilitation of existing housing, and to encourage senior citizen housing.

## Implementation Strategies

The majority of the strategies for housing in the Town of Alton will be put into place through land use ordinances that will be put into place as part of Alton’s complete growth management program. Alton’s land use ordinances and performance standards can have unintended effects on the cost of housing. For example, land use regulations that require excessive lot sizes, road frontages, or setbacks will add development costs to individual house lots and to subdivisions. As a result, the Town of Alton Planning Board will

review existing ordinances, and when drafting proposed land use regulations, will do so with the understanding of the effects of excessive requirements on housing affordability. Requirements dealing with lot size, frontages and setbacks will nevertheless vary according to the particular land use district in town, and with the particular concerns and requirements for each of those districts.

Alton's land use ordinances will contain a variety of housing alternatives and allowances for households of different income levels. Multi-family housing and mobile home parks will be allowed within the Growth District, as this type of housing, whether owner occupied or renter occupied is less expensive than single-family homes.

In-law apartments and single-family conversions will be permitted in all of Alton's land use areas. Conversions of older larger homes can provide affordable units in buildings that might otherwise deteriorate because of high heating and maintenance costs. This can be particularly beneficial to elderly homeowners, where accessory apartments can provide additional income, as well as the possibility of some assistance in return for lower rent.

In-law apartments can provide one form of senior citizen housing. An in-law apartment is usually an additional dwelling unit within a single-family dwelling, or is included in new construction on to an already existing dwelling. In order to address the need for elderly and rental housing, these types of units will be permitted within all areas of the town. The Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board will also contact the Maine State Housing Authority to obtain information on any grant opportunities which can assist in providing additional senior housing opportunities. Information regarding grants or other assistance for housing rehabilitation shall also be obtained.

In the recent Alton community survey, most respondents felt that new mobile home parks should be regulated to some extent by the town (75%), and that they should only be allowed in certain areas (65%). Based on this and other planning priorities, Alton's revised land use ordinance will only allow new mobile home parks to be located within Alton's Growth Area. In addition, Alton's Planning Board will draft a Mobile Home Park Ordinance within two years of acceptance of this plan that complies with State law, and regulates the development of mobile home parks in Town.

In respect to the quality of the housing units located in Alton, the Board of Selectmen, working with the Code Enforcement Officer, will continue to enforce applicable State and local regulations.

## 9. Transportation

**State Goal** – It is a state goal to “plan for, finance and develop an efficient system of public facilities and services to accommodate anticipated growth and economic development.”

### Inventory and Analysis Section

**Location, Mileage, and Jurisdiction of Roadways in Alton** - Based on information provided by Maine’s Department of Transportation, there are currently five non-town maintained roads in Alton, with 19.73 total miles of roadway (see DOT map at the end of this Chapter). These roads include: Route 16 (Bennoch Road), Route 43, the Tannery Road, the Argyle Road, and a small portion of Interstate 95. Note that the Tannery Road and the Argyle Road are both maintained by the town.

There are also several roads in Alton not maintained by either the State or the Town, along which a number of Alton residents live. These privately maintained roads include the Stagecoach Road, the Dollof Road, and the Bradford Station Road, and can be seen on the map at the end of this Chapter. These privately maintained roads are not paved. All other roads in town are paved, except for the Tannery Road, which is only paved for a mile at either end.

Alton’s roads fall into the following three categories:

<b>Federal Functioning Class</b>	<b>Mileage</b>
<u>Local</u> (Argyle and Tannery Roads)	6.63
<u>Major/Urban Collector</u> (Rt. 16 and Rt. 43)	11.22
<u>Principal Arterial Interstate</u>	1.88

The jurisdiction for Alton’s roads breaks down as follows:

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Mileage</b>
Townway	6.63
State Aid	2.15
State Highway	10.95

**Level of Average Daily Traffic** - DOT data indicates that the average daily traffic on the Bennoch Road (Rt. 16) and on Rt. 43 is between 1500 and 3000 vehicles daily. The traffic on Interstate 95 is between 3000 and 7,500 vehicles daily, and on the Tannery Road and Argyle Road it is less than 750 vehicles daily. There are no locations in Alton which the DOT considers to be “high crash locations”.

**Road Projects** – In the summer of 2002, DOT completed its highway improvement project on the southern portion of the Bennoch Road (Rt. 16) in Alton, greatly improving

the surface quality, as well as rounding out some of the elevations of the road.<sup>70</sup> In 2003, DOT will complete similar work on the northern portion of the Bennoch Road.<sup>71</sup>

In 2002, the Town had two major road improvement projects. Residents of Alton voted to allot \$125,000 for the improvements, and \$120,000 of that allocation was spent.<sup>72</sup> The work included the resurfacing of the paved portions of either end of the Tannery Road by stripping the previous surface and applying a new 2" binder surface. The improvement work also included the paving of the greater portion of the Argyle Road, for the first time. The Argyle Road is now entirely paved, and aside from greatly improving the surface quality, this step will cut down maintenance costs in the future by eliminating the need for grading and dust control on this road.

While the 2002 road work on the Tannery and Argyle Roads described above greatly improved the surface quality of these roads for the time being, the Board of Selectmen has been advised by the contractor who supplied the paving material for this work (Sunrise Materials, a Division of Lane Construction Corporation) that an application of a further 1 1/4" overlay (of finer grained material) should be applied to the present surface within the next five years to better seal the road surface and prevent it from breaking up prematurely. While the additional coating would be a fair-sized capital expense, it is now believed that it would save the Town money in the long run by not having to replace the work that was just done years before its time. The contractor's current estimate for this additional work is \$94,000.<sup>73</sup>

There are also three current, or recently completed, bridge projects in or nearby Alton, covering the small bridge on the southern portion of the Bennoch Road, the bridge on the Interstate overpass, and the bridge between Alton and Argyle.

**Road Maintenance Costs** - For the year 2002-2003, Alton residents approved a town budget which allotted \$34,500 for road maintenance. This included \$7,000 for the Tannery Road, \$1,500 for the Argyle Road, and \$26,000 for snow removal. Snow removal (75% of total) is obviously the largest expense.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This work ((project no. 9194) began .4 of a mile south of the Alton-Old Town line and proceeded north for 4 miles.

<sup>71</sup> This project (no. 10207) for the northern portion of the Bennoch Road is already funded. The work will begin .8 miles south of the Lagrange line and then go south 4.6 miles.

<sup>72</sup> The funding for the road improvement project came mostly from property and excise tax revenues, although \$8,000 did come from a Highway Block Grant, and \$30,000 came from Alton's Capital Improvement Fund.

<sup>73</sup> Sunrise Materials furnished the Town with an estimate for the overlay work in November of 2002 which stated that the additional coating for the Argyle Road would cost \$30,087 (4,950'), and \$31,262 for the Rt. 16 side of the Tannery Road (5,125') and \$32,512 for the Rt. 43 side (5,350').

<sup>74</sup> In the recent community survey, Alton residents were asked to rate the quality of the general road maintenance in town, and the quality of the winter road maintenance. The town's winter road maintenance received slightly higher scores, with 14% of respondents saying that the service was "excellent", 38%



**Alternative Means of Transportation** - There is very little public transportation in Alton. There is no regular bus service, although taxi service from neighboring communities such as Old Town and Bangor can be obtained. As already noted, census data indicates that no one in Alton uses public transportation to get to work.

Alton is served by Eastern Transportation Services (ETS) from Bangor, which provides bus service for the elderly and those in need of social services. Service is provided at least one day a week by appointment. ETS uses a combination of hired private cars, vans and buses. There is also Penquis CAP, which, through its Project Ride, provides free transportation to doctor, dentist and other medical appointments for disabled, elderly and low-income residents.

There is one active rail line passing through a small portion of the northwest corner of Alton, however it does not stop in Town. It is not located near any roads and is therefore not causing any traffic hazards.<sup>75</sup>

## **Transportation Policy**

To ensure that the Town's system of roads is safe and adequately maintained so as to meet the current and future needs of the residents. To ensure that prior to the acceptance of any private road or public easement road as a town road, minimum road standards must be met.

## **Implementation Strategies**

Alton will ensure, through its Code Enforcement Officer, that any future development provides for a safe access onto the town's roads. Alton's subdivision regulations and/or ordinance, to be passed within two years of the acceptance of this plan, will require developments to include proper access management standards. Alton's subdivision regulations will also provide guidelines to meet the needs for public safety and emergency vehicles, such as fire trucks.

Alton will begin to plan now for financing of the additional overlay which will be required in approximately five years for the sections of the Tannery Road and Argyle Road, and this future capital expense will be noted in the Town's Capital Improvement Plan, discussed below.

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saying the service was "good", 31% saying the service was "fair", and 18% saying the service was "poor". In respect to general road maintenance, 3% of the respondents said it was "excellent", 38% said it was "good". 23% said it was "fair", and 43% said it was "poor".

<sup>75</sup> The line, a portion of the Bangor and Aroostook line, runs from Hermon to Brownsville Junction, where it connects with the Canadian Pacific which continues on to Aroostook County. It carries pulp, paper, lumber, and wood products.

The Town, through its Board of Selectmen and Planning Board, will prepare a minimum road acceptance standards ordinance, within three years of the acceptance of this plan, which will set standards regarding accepting private roads as a town road.

The issue of obtaining two additional on-off ramps for the portion of I-95 located in Alton was discussed above in the Local Economy section. As stated there, Alton's Economic Development Committee and/or its Board of Selectmen will explore with State officials the possibility of having the additional ramps constructed.

## 10. Recreation and Open Space

**State Goal** – To promote and protect the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities for all Maine citizens, including access to surface waters.

### Inventory and Analysis Section

Alton has few public recreation areas and facilities. It does have a one-acre playground connected with the K-5 school, which includes swings, a basketball court, and baseball diamond. There is also a park/playground area located behind the Municipal Building which was developed by a group of interested residents several years ago. The area contains a baseball field, and horseshoe and picnic facilities.

Many of the recreational activities enjoyed by Alton residents are connected with access to the Town's water bodies, and to access to the forested and undeveloped land. As discussed above, more of Alton is forested today than it was 50 or 100 years ago, and the undeveloped blocks of land provide deer wintering areas and habitat for a vast array of wildlife. These areas also provide wonderful opportunities for those keen on hunting, fishing, hiking, canoeing and other outdoor activities. These activities do not appear to be unduly threatened by future development over the next ten years.

There are no public access points to any of the streams or ponds located in Alton, although there are numerous informal access points which residents use to gain access to these water bodies. These informal access points include the bridge area on the Argyle Road, where it passes over Birch Stream, and paths through the forest land (which is in Tree Growth) surrounding Pug and Holland Ponds.

Snowmobile Club - Snowmobiling is a very popular winter activity for a large number of Alton residents. Many residents are member of the local LA (Alton-Lagrange) Sledders snowmobile club, a club originally started back in the early 1970's. The club has been particularly active since 1987, and there are currently 70 families (from Alton, Lagrange and elsewhere) who are members. Each year the Town of Alton applies for and receives a grant from the State of Maine (of approximately \$5,000) to maintain the snowmobile trails located in Alton, and to keep them connected with the trails located in the neighboring communities of Hudson, Bradford, Lagrange and Arglye. The Town in turn contracts with the LA Sledders club to do the actual maintenance work, and turns the grant money over to the club. The Town also gives the club the reimbursement payment it receives from the State each year (approximately \$600) from the registration fees Alton residents pay each year for their snowmobiles.

The LA Sledders club has a mutually beneficial arrangement with the Town by which it uses the old elementary school (located next to the Municipal Building) as its clubhouse. The Town allows the club use of the building rent free, and in return, the club's members keep the building properly maintained, and heated during the winter months. Work on the building by the club has helped prevent the building from falling into disrepair, which is a great benefit to the Town, and the members greatly appreciate the opportunity to use

the building in return. The club also greatly appreciates the local landowners in Alton who have given the club permission to maintain trails on their property.

Hirundo Wildlife Refuge - Alton is also fortunate to have the Hirundo Wildlife Refuge located within its boundaries. The site is located on the east bank of Dead Stream, and is where the Hirundo prehistoric archeological site is also located. A map showing the location of this area is included at the end of this chapter.

The refuge was founded by Oliver Larouche in 1976, who then donated it to the University of Maine, with the proviso that it remain in trust as a wildlife refuge forever. The number of acres within the refuge has grown over the years, from the original 356 acres to currently well over 2500. The refuse straddles the line between Old Town and Alton and is located on the Rt. 43 side of town.

The Hirundo Refuge contains, amongst other things, sixty acres of fields on which numerous swallow nesting boxes have been placed. Thousands of wildlife plantings have been planted around the periphery of the fields in order to improve the habitat, and there are well-cleared trails for nature walking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. The refuge is open seven days a week from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and is one of Alton's chief natural attractions, with over a thousand visitors coming every year.

Methodist Church - Another source of social and recreational activity for residents of Alton is connected to the local Methodist Church, whose Women's Society, amongst other things, puts on a weekly luncheon for seniors every Tuesday at the newly-built annex of the Church. These luncheons are also social activities, as they provide a way for people to meet and stay in touch, and are very popular with many older local residents, both within and outside of Alton. The Women's Society also puts on monthly breakfasts the second Saturday of every month, which are also well attended. Aside from providing an excellent breakfast at a reasonable price, the breakfasts are another excellent opportunity for local residents to meet and socialize with one another.

There is no public library in Alton, but many excellent libraries located in nearby towns and colleges are easily available. For activities such as movies, restaurants, and musical concerts, residents can choose from a number of options which are available and easily accessed in the nearby Bangor MSA.

Analysis - Guidelines for town recreation and park services established by the Maine Department of Conservation suggest that Alton is not doing too poorly for a small town with limited resources. The guidelines do recommend, however, that communities such as Alton, with populations under 1000 people, should have a recreation and park board, or a recreation committee. At the moment, Alton has no such board or committee. The guidelines also suggest a summer swimming instruction program run by the town, but in the opinion of the Planning Committee, this need for swimming instruction is probably best handled by the programs already available through the nearby Old Town YMCA (which has excellent facilities), or the local summer programs which are available to Alton's children through scouting or other organizations. Other activities and facilities

suggested by the guidelines include a baseball field, which the town has, and an auditorium or assembly hall, which is available through the use of the hall located in the Municipal Building.

Many of the outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing that are so important to Alton residents are dependent on private land owners continuing to allow access to their land. At the present time, continuing access does not appear to be a problem, although this could, of course, change in the future if, for example, large landowners were to take large amounts of acreage out of tree growth protection and use it for residential development instead. Based on present conditions and expected demand in the near future, it is not expected that this will occur to any significant extent within the next ten years. However, since this is such an important concern of local residents, it is also an area that should be monitored in the years to come.

## **Policy**

To make available a wide range of outdoor and indoor recreation opportunities for residents of all ages, within the ability of local taxpayers to pay for them, and to protect open space and areas of ecological significance within the community.

## **Implementation Strategies**

A number of steps which Alton will take relating to protecting open space and areas of ecological significance were discussed in the Inventories above. These steps include encouraging landowners to participate in the State's tree growth program, the use of open space development for new subdivisions, exploring the possibilities of interesting a land trust in acquiring and preserving some of Alton's undeveloped land, and strictly enforcing relevant legislation such as Alton's Shoreland Zoning Ordinance.

The Board of Selectmen will also work with the owners of large parcels of land in Alton who currently keep their land open to the public in order to consider any problems these landowners may have with this arrangement, and attempt to alleviate them. For example, Webber Timberlands has been bothered in recent years by the dumping of garbage and refuse on their forest land. The resulting damage to the property has led to the company to seriously consider closing off some of the forest roads which currently allow residents access to much of this property. Closing access would be a great loss to local residents, and the Board will work with the company to press strongly for the prosecution of anyone caught illegally dumping garbage in this manner.

The Board of Selectmen will consider appointing a Recreation Committee, if there is sufficient interest by Alton's residents, whose role would be to promote recreation opportunities that would be affordable to the town. These activities might include such matters improving the baseball diamond located behind the Municipal Building, the formation of a summer softball team or league, and the construction of a winter ice skating rink, which could be located behind the Municipal Building.

The Board of Selectmen and/or the Recreation Committee will also explore, with the Bureau of Parks and Lands whether there are any grant monies available to assist the town in its recreational needs, and in particular, Alton will explore whether any funding may be available through the Maine Community Block Grant Program.

The Town of Alton will continue to support the LA Sledders snowmobile club, especially since so many residents gain pleasure from the club's activities, and because the current arrangement in respect to the club's use of the old elementary school benefits both the club and the Town.

## 11. Public Facilities and Services

**State Goal** – To plan for, finance and develop an efficient system of public facilities and services to accommodate anticipated growth and economic development.

### Inventory and Analysis Section

Public facilities and services in Alton include the following:

Water Supply and Sewage - There is no public water supply in Alton, and nearly all residents obtain their household water from ground water taken from individual wells. There is also no public sewage system, with residents using individual septic fields instead.

Solid Waste – Alton employs a regional refuse hauling company for roadside pick up of Alton’s household garbage one day each week. For a pre-determined set fee, the hauling company in turn takes the garbage to the PERC incinerator located in Orrington, where Alton pays another fee for the disposal of its garbage based on the amount of tonnage that is delivered.

Alton has a bi-annual trash pickup, which occurs each Spring and Fall. The town pays a hauling company a set fee to pick up the all trash town residents put by the roadside, which in turn is hauled to the Norridgewock Landfill, where the town pays another fee based on the tonnage.

Alton also has a recycling program, in which the town pays a hauling company a set fee to pick up (one day each month) paper, plastic, cans and glass set aside by individual households. These are taken to the City of Bangor’s recycling program, from which the town receives some payment based on the value of the recycled goods.

Municipal Facilities and Services - Alton owns its own Municipal Building. It was built in 1981, and is located on the west side of Route 16, about one half mile south of the intersection with the Tannery Road. It is a multi-purpose building containing all Town offices, and provides a meeting place for the Board of Selectmen and Planning Board. It also contains an auditorium, which is used for annual town meetings and as a voting station. The auditorium can also be rented for private functions such as parties and weddings. Another section of the municipal building is used as the Town’s fire station. Alton also owns one third of the salt shed located just off the Argyle Road.<sup>76</sup>

Administration and Government – Alton is governed and managed under the selectman form of government. Alton has three Selectmen who serve three-year, staggered terms. One new Selectman is elected at each annual Town Meeting. Other Town Officers

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<sup>76</sup> Penobscot County owns all of the land on which the shed is located, and has a two-thirds ownership in the building itself.

elected at the annual meeting include the Treasurer, Tax Collector, Clerk, and Registrar of Voters. Members of Alton's School Committee, Budget Committee, and Sexton are also elected.

Alton's Fire Chief and Assistant Fire Chief are not elected, but are appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The Animal Control Officer, Planning Board, and Cemetery Committee are also appointed.

The Board of Selectmen meet every other Monday of each month, at 5:30 p.m., at the municipal building. These meetings are open to the general public. The Planning Board meets every third Wednesday of the month, also at the municipal building.

The Town offices for the Selectmen, Clerk/Registrar of Voters, and Tax Collector are located in the municipal building. These offices are open from 3:00 to 6:00 PM every Monday and Thursday.

Alton has a number of employees who receive a salary from the town. The town's 2001-2002 expenditures for salaries totaled \$21,850. None of the Town's employees are full-time. Those receiving a salary include the Selectmen, Town Clerk, Treasurer, Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief and other paid firefighters, Animal Control Officer, Sexton, Code Enforcement Officer<sup>77</sup>, and the Ballot Clerks. Members of Alton's School Committee also receive an annual stipend. Alton does not have any full-time public works employees, but relies instead on contracts with local contractors.

Education: Education costs are the largest single expenditure in Alton's annual budget. Alton spent \$1,113,726 on education in the 2001-2002 school year, which was 84.9% of the Town's total expenditures. Alton has one school, which serves the approximately 60 children currently attending grades K-5. The school building, built in 1991, contains eight classrooms, as well as a gymnasium and library.

School officials expect that the K-5 school will have adequate physical capacity for all of Alton's children for at least the next ten years, if not longer. This conclusion is supported by the demographic data discussed previously. Alton students in grades 6-12 must attend schools located out of town, with most going to school in Old Town. Alton pays students' tuition cost for any 6-12 schools in the area, but only provides bus service for those attending school in Alton or Old Town. The town contracts with the First Student bus company to provide this service.

In respect to school administration, Alton's K-5 school is part of School Union #90, along with the towns of Milford, Bradley, and Greenbush. This system allows Alton to share the costs of a School Superintendent and the costs of specialized teachers. Alton also has a five-person School Committee, whose members are elected for staggered terms.

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<sup>77</sup> Our Code Enforcement Officer works for other neighboring communities as well, and Alton shares his time with these other communities.



Fire Protection: - Alton has its own Fire Department with a Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief, and eighteen paid volunteers, who are called out to fight fires on a case by case basis, as needed. The fire station is located in the Municipal Building. Alton's fire protection expenditures for the 2001-2002 fiscal year were \$20,984.

Alton's fire fighters are professionally equipped with OSHA-required safety clothing and self-contained breathing apparatus, and training and maintenance drills are held regularly. In 2001, the Alton Fire Department responded to 38 calls in total, with some of the calls being in response to assistance requests from neighboring fire departments. Alton has signed mutual aid agreements with the neighboring communities of Old Town, Hudson and Lagrange, as well as being part of a larger county wide mutual aid system.

Alton's Fire fighting equipment includes a 1986 FMC fire engine with a 1000 gallon holding tank and a 1000 gallon per minute pumping capacity. This engine currently serves as the Town's lead engine, however, it is unreliable and, in the opinion of Alton's Fire Chief, needs to be replaced as soon as possible. The all-important pump on the engine needs to be rebuilt, but parts are difficult to obtain, and the pump currently breaks down frequently. Another problem is that the holding tank on this engine is made of steel, rather than aluminum, and is at risk of rusting through soon.

If the 1986 engine were not able to properly respond to a fire today, Alton's Fire Department would not have any vehicle which could supply a 1000 gallon per minute pumping capacity, which in all likelihood would mean that fire fighters would not be able to enter a burning building (for safety reasons) to aggressively fight a fire, and would have to be content to simply try to contain the fire from the outside with the lower capacity pumps on the Town's pumper trucks.

Not being able to fight a fire offensively could lead to a great deal of unnecessary property loss, or, in the very worst case, even loss of life. As things stand now, the Fire Department cannot risk taking the current 1986 engine out of operation, even in order to make necessary repairs, because if a fire should occur while the engine was not in service, the town would have no fire-fighting vehicle available which had the pumping capacity to fight a fire offensively.

The Fire Chief feels strongly that a replacement lead fire engine should be obtained, and the current engine moved to a secondary or back-up status and the Planning Committee agrees with this assessment. The needed capital investment for a replacement engine is discussed below in the Fiscal Capacity section.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> The Town of Alton recently applied for a FEMA grant, which would have greatly reduced the Town's share of the costs of a replacement fire engine. Unfortunately the Town did not receive the grant. - Alton's Fire Chief currently estimates that a suitable replacement engine will cost the Town between \$160,000 and \$190,000. For this purchase price, Alton will not get a "top of the line" fire engine, but it will get a fire engine that will meet and even surpass the Town's current needs. - Although financing this needed expenditure will be somewhat costly, it will also result in some savings, such as reduced maintenance and training costs for the Fire Department. In addition, it may result in the reduction of the Town's ISO insurance rating, which could lead to significant insurance savings for many residents.

Alton's Fire Department also currently has a 1976 converted oil truck which carries 2200 gallons of water. When a replacement engine is obtained and the current engine moved to back-up, the back-up engine can function as an additional pumper, and the 1976 can be gotten rid of. Alton also has a 1966 converted oil truck which carries 2000 gallons, and It also has a 1968 2½ ton military style brush truck, which has a pumping capacity and carries approximately 600 gallons with it. It also has a military style trailer/water pump which can pump 880 gallons per minute.

Police: Dispatch calls for police service/response coming from Alton residents are handled by the county's regional dispatch system. In response to such calls, either the Penobscot County Sheriff's Department, or the Maine State Police will respond.

Ambulance Service - Alton's obtains its ambulance service from Old Town, for which it pays an annual fee. Alton is a participant in the Enhanced 911 program

Health Care: There are no doctor or dentist's offices located in Alton. Nearly all residents obtain their health services from hospitals and health professionals located in the nearby Bangor MSA.

Cultural Resources – Alton does not have a museum or public library. However, these and other types of cultural resources can be obtained from a number of sources located in the Bangor MSA, in particular, the resources offered by Old Town and Bangor, and the nearby University of Maine campus in Orono.

Road Maintenance: Alton has no full-time public works employees, relying on contracts with local contractors in order to maintain the Town's roads and to provide snow removal service.

Flood Plan/Storm Water Management: Alton has a Floodplain Management Ordinance. It does not have a storm water management system.

**Analysis** –It appears that Alton's public facilities, with the exception of its current fire engine, are more than adequate for handling the Town's needs, and they should also be adequate to meet the Town's needs for the next 5 to 6-year period. However, Alton should find an adequate replacement for its fire engine as soon as possible. The estimated cost of replacing the fire engine and how it most likely will be financed is discussed in the Fiscal Capacity section below.

## **Policy**

To ensure the availability of required municipal services and facilities in an efficient and cost effective manner for the Town's current and future needs; and to ensure that no capital improvement or replacement of public facilities or services shall be undertaken without determining the impact on the financial health of the Town and its residents.

## **Implementation**

At the Town's next annual meeting, Alton's Board of Selectmen will raise the issue of funding a replacement fire engine. If town residents approve the funding, an appropriate replacement engine will be obtained as soon as possible.

Alton will develop a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) within one year of passing this Comprehensive Plan to better plan for future capital improvements to public facilities that may be required by the Town. Alton's CIP is discussed in more detail in the Fiscal Capacity section below.

## 12. Fiscal Capacity

**State Goal** –For the community to finance an efficient system of public facilities and services in order to accommodate anticipated growth and economic development.

### Inventory and Analysis

The term “fiscal capacity”, as used here, is a measure of a town’s ability to meet its present and future financial needs. In considering its fiscal capacity, Alton needs to examine its current levels of annual revenues and expenditures, and what is expected to occur in this regard in the future. The future cost of any needed capital improvements also needs to be considered.

#### A. Assessed Value and Tax Rate

In respect to the revenue side of things, a major factor in the fiscal health of a municipality is the assessed value of its property. Valuation figures are important because the greater the total valuation, the lower the tax rate can be in order to raise a given sum of money. Conversely, the lower the total valuation, the higher the tax rate must be.

The Town of Alton and the State of Maine both track the assessed value of the property located in Alton. The State’s assessment figures are adjusted each year to try to better reflect actual market value, but the Town’s figures are not adjusted each year. The Table below shows Town and State assessment figures for the years 1992 to 2002. It also shows the mil rate during these years.

#### Assessed Value and Tax Rate in Alton 1992 - 2002

Year	Local Assessed Value	State Assessed Value	Annual % Change in State’s Assessed Value	Annual Real % Change of State’s Assessed Value	Tax Rate
1992	\$16,783,420	\$15,850,000	-	-	12.75
1993	\$17,842,352	\$17,250,000	8.12%	5.56%	12.75
1994	\$17,971,545	\$19,300,000	10.62%	8.44%	15.30
1995	18,671,327	\$19,050,000	-1.31	-3.93	16.00
1996	\$19,208,936	\$19,500,000	2.31%	-0.463%	17.00
1997	19,348,153	\$19,950,000	2.26%	-0.13%	17.00
1998	\$19,208,936	\$20,250,000	1.48%	0.07%	17.00
1999	\$19,784,880	\$20,250,000	0.00%	-2.06%	17.00
2000	\$20,455,122	\$20,450,000	0.98%	-2.39%	17.00
2001	\$20,332,987	\$21,600,000	5.32%	2.69%	17.00
2002	\$20,821,123	\$23,650,000	8.67%	7.43%	17.00

The assessed value figures, as determined by the Town of Alton, increased from \$16,783,420 in the year 1992 to \$20,821,123 in 2002. In absolute dollars, this was an increase of \$4,037,703, or an increase of 24.1%. However, when you take the effects of

inflation into account, the total assessed value of Alton's properties actually decreased by 6.4% between 1992 and 2002, despite the fact that a number of new housing units were added during this time.<sup>79</sup> By contrast, the State of Maine's assessed value of Alton properties, expressed in "real" or inflation-adjusted dollars increased by 17% between 1992 and 2002.<sup>80</sup>

In 2002, the State's valuation or assessment figure for all of Alton was \$23,650,000, which is 13.6% higher than the Town's 2002 assessment.<sup>81</sup> State law prohibits a municipality's assessed value figures from getting too far out of line with the State's.<sup>82</sup> Alton's Board of Selectmen and Assessors are aware of this requirement and intend to update the assessment figures in the near future to more closely reflect actual market value of the properties.

**Mil Rate** - The above Table also shows that Alton's current tax rate, or mil rate, is 17. In 1992, the mil rate was as low as 12.75, however, by 1996 it had increased to 17. The increase in the mil rate which occurred in the mid-1990s corresponded to a large extent with the decline in State educational funding which took place during this same period. As noted above, Alton's mil rate is also greatly influenced by the total assessed value of Alton's properties, since the lower the assessed value, the higher the mil rate needs to be in order to raise the same amount of property tax revenue.

It is very difficult to predict how Alton's tax rate may change over the next ten years, as that will depend to a large extent on how much money Alton will need to raise through its property tax. And how much money will be needed from property taxes depends to a large extent on what the Town's future needs or expenditures will be, as well as how much revenue can be raised from other sources, most importantly, intergovernmental revenues. All other things being equal, if the Town's expenditures should increase

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<sup>79</sup>When the 1992 assessed value figure of \$16,783,420 is converted into 2002 dollars, the 1992 value becomes \$21,400,954 (the C.P.I Index for 1992 was 140.3. In the first half of 2002 it was 178.9.  $178.9/140.3 \times \$16,783,420 = \$21,400,954$ ) - In 2002, assessed value for the Town was \$20,821,123, a \$1,363,250 decrease in total assessed value (in "real" dollars) between 1992 and 2002, or a decrease of 6.4%.

<sup>80</sup> In 2002 dollars, the State's assessed value for 1992 was \$20,210,727 ( $178.9 / 140.3 \times \$15,850,000 = \$20,210,727$ ) The 2002 valuation was \$23,650,000, a 17% increase over the 1992 figure ( $\$23,650,000 - 20,210,727 = \$3,439,273$   $\$3,439,273 / 20,210,727 = 17.0\%$ )

<sup>81</sup> The current situation differs from the one that existed ten years ago, in 1992, when the Town's assessed value figure was actually 5.6% higher than the State's.

<sup>82</sup> Section 327 of Title 36 M.R.S.A. s. 327 requires all Town assessors to achieve a minimum "assessment ratio" 70%, and a "quality rating" of 20. The calculations going into each of these ratios is complex and will not be set out here. However, if a municipality fails to achieve the minimum assessment ratio required by the State, the Maine Revenue Service is authorized to take administrative action, including hiring additional appraisers and performing a physical inspection and inventory. The Town will also lose 10% of its Tree Growth reimbursement funds from the State for each percentage point it falls below the statutory minimum, currently set at 70%. In 2002, Alton's assessment ration was 86%, which is still well above the minimum requirement.

significantly (which is not expected), or if the State should cut back on its educational funding (which is uncertain), then more money would need to be raised from property taxes, which would require an increase in the mil rate.

## B. Operating Expenditures and Revenues

**Revenues** - The Table below shows the amount of the annually recurring revenues for the Town of Alton, listed by major revenue source for the last five years. Amongst other things, it indicates that Alton's largest single source of revenue comes from intergovernmental revenue, made up primarily by the educational funding received from the State. In 2002, intergovernmental revenues were 63.9% of Alton's total revenues, followed by property taxes at 24.5%, and excise taxes at 7.2%.

**Expenditures** - Alton's major annual expense by far is its educational funding. In 2002, educational funding accounted for 83.2% of the Town's total expenditures. This was followed by general government, public safety, public works and health and sanitation, each at about 3% of total spending.

### Revenues and Expenditures in Alton 1998 - 2002

<b>Revenues</b>	FY 1998	FY 1999	FY 2000	FY 2001	FY 2002
Property Taxes	\$314,664	\$308,720	\$310,426	\$315,993	\$334,550
Excise Taxes	\$84,852	\$89,726	\$92,406	\$96,556	\$98,649
Intergovernmental Revenue	\$852,816	\$782,297	\$740,210	\$850,395	\$873,647
Other	\$52,982	\$60,704	\$55,932	\$73,355	\$61,173
<b>Total Revenues</b>	\$1,305,314	\$1,241,447	\$1,198,974	\$1,336,299	\$1,368,019
<b>Expenditures</b>					
General Government	\$29,528	\$31,443	\$38,823	\$38,536	\$42,766
Public Safety	\$20,938	\$27,072	\$26,087	\$28,869	\$30,546
Public Works	\$28,177	\$26,417	\$49,517	\$42,474	\$46,313
Health and Sanitation	\$32,723	\$39,010	\$37,086	\$36,704	\$40,103
Social Services	\$1,456	\$2,549	\$3,197	\$1,979	\$1,121
Debt Service	\$7,050	\$6,870	\$6,690	\$6,510	\$6,330
County Tax	\$17,416	\$17,921	\$18,185	\$19,019	\$21,060
Education	\$1,149,647	\$891,950	\$1,002,782	\$1,113,726	\$1,045,448
Overlay	\$9,096	\$7,293	\$8,242	\$15,102	\$15,491
Unclassified	\$10,171	\$25,029	\$5,515	\$6,089	\$6,999
Capital Improvements			\$100,449		
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	\$1,306,202	\$1,075,554	\$1,296,573	\$1,309,008	\$1,256,177

The figures set out in the above Table are all in actual dollar amounts. To get a better idea of any trends that may be occurring, it is best to convert actual dollars to "real dollars" using the Consumer Price Index. As will be seen below, the use of "real dollar" figures indicates that Alton's total revenues and its total expenditures have both been decreasing over the last five years.

Alton's total revenues, expressed in "real" dollars, decreased by 4.5% between 1998 and 2002.<sup>83</sup> Intergovernmental revenues are the Town's largest single source of revenue, and these revenue funds, expressed in real dollars, have decreased by 6.7% during this period.<sup>84</sup> Revenues from property taxes declined by 3.1%.<sup>85</sup>

Alton's total expenditures have also been declining. Expressed in "real" dollars, the Town's total expenditures declined by 20.2% between 1998 and 2002.<sup>86</sup> As noted, education costs are the Town's largest single annual expense, and expressed in "real" dollars, education expenses declined by 17.1% between 1998 and 2002.<sup>87</sup>

**Debt** - Alton currently has two outstanding loans, and is in relatively good financial shape in respect to its debt load. The Town's total debt in 2002 was \$531,000, and the majority of this debt will be paid off in full by 2005.

One of Alton's two loans was taken out in 1981 for the construction of the Municipal Building.<sup>88</sup> There is approximately \$51,000 left to pay on this loan, and the debt is expected to be repaid in 2011. In 2002, the annual servicing charge for principal repayment and interest charges on this debt was \$6,330.

Alton's other current loan was taken out in 1990 to provide funds for the construction of the Town's K-5 school.<sup>89</sup> There is approximately \$480,000 remaining to be paid on this loan, but it will nevertheless be paid back in full in 2005. The annual debt service charge

<sup>83</sup> In 1998, Alton's total revenues were \$1,305,314. In 2002 dollars, this amount is \$1,432,624 ( $178.9 / 163.0 \times \$1,305,314 = \$1,432,624$ ). Alton's actual revenues in 2002 were \$1,368,019, which, when using "real" dollar figures, was a 4.5% decline from the revenues received five years previously ( $\$1,432,624 - \$1,368,019 = \$64,605$ ) -  $64,605 / 1,432,624 = 4.5\%$

<sup>84</sup> In 1998, Alton received \$852,816 from the intergovernmental transfer of funds. In 2002 dollars, that amount is \$935,004 ( $178.9 / 163.0 \times 852,816 = 936,005$ ). In the year 2002, Alton received \$873,647 in transfer payments, a 6.7% decline from the 1998 level ( $936,005 - 873,647 = 62,358$  -  $62,358 / 936,005 = 6.66\%$ )

<sup>85</sup> In 1998, property tax revenues were \$314,664. In 2002 dollars, that amount is \$345,358 ( $178.9/163.0 \times 314,664 = 345,358$ ). In 2002, Alton received \$334,550 from property taxes. In "real" dollars, that is 3.1% less than what was received in 1998 ( $345,358 - 334,550 = 10,808$  -  $10,808 / 345,358 = 3.129\%$ ).

<sup>86</sup> In 1998, Alton's total expenditures were \$1,306,202. In 2002 dollars, this amount is \$1,573,460 ( $178.9 / 163.0 \times \$1,306,202 = 1,573,460$ ). In 2002, Alton's actual expenditures were \$1,256,177, which was a decline of 20.2% from the 1998 annual expenditure level. ( $1,573,460 - 1,256,177 = 317,283$  -  $317,283 / 1,573,460 = 20.2\%$ ).

<sup>87</sup> In 1998, educational expenses were \$1,149,647. In 2002 dollars, that sum is \$1,261,790 ( $178.9 / 163.0 \times 1,149,647 = 1,261,790$ ). In 2002, Alton spent \$1,045,448 on education, which in "real" dollars is 17.1% less than what was being spent in 1998 ( $1,261,790 - 1,045,448 = 216,342$  -  $216,342 / 1,261,790 = 17.1\%$ )

<sup>88</sup> On April 22, 1981, Alton borrowed \$95,000 from the Farmers Home Administration. The interest rate on this note is 5%, and payments are due annually until maturity in 2011.

<sup>89</sup> On October 25, 1990, Alton borrowed \$1,825,000 from the Maine Municipal Bond Bank at 7% interest.

was \$162,176 in 2002. Fortunately, Alton is being assisted greatly by the State of Maine in paying off this loan, and only pays a small percentage of the total debt repayment costs. In 2002, Alton paid \$10,513 for debt service, which is not an extreme financial burden, while the State paid \$151,663, or 93.5% of the total cost.

**Debt Limit** – Under Maine State law, a municipality is only allowed to incur debt up to 15% of the total assessed valuation of its property. The State’s valuation for Alton in the year 2002 was \$26,650,000, and Alton could therefore legally incur debt up to approximately \$4,000,000. Alton’s current debt load of \$531,000 is considerably below the legal limit, and only 1.9% of the total assessed value.

**Future Debt** - Alton is not expected to have an exceptionally high debt burden over the next ten years. In respect to current debt continuing on, the \$480,000 still owing on the school loan will be paid off by the year 2005, although the \$51,000 owing on the municipal building loan will not be completely paid down until 2011.

In respect to new debt that may be acquired, it is expected that Alton will need to incur an additional debt of \$190,000 within the next year or so in order to replace the current fire engine. This new debt will overlap with the school debt for a couple of years, but even before the school debt is paid off in 2005, Alton’s total debt during this time would still only be \$720,000 at the most, well below the legal debt limit of \$4,000,000.

If Alton should decide to borrow money in 2007 or 2008 to pay for the roadwork that is recommended (instead of using a capital improvement fund), the school debt will have been paid off by then, and Alton’s total debt load in 2007 would still only be about \$155,000.<sup>90</sup> Unless new debt was taken on after 2007 (and none is foreseen at this time) Alton’s total debt would only go down from this point.

**Per Capita Debt** – It is recommended that a municipality’s “per capita debt” (total debt divided by population) should not exceed 4% - 5% of the Town’s average per capita income. In the case of Alton, the per capita debt is 4.4% of the per capita income.<sup>91</sup>

The 4.4% figure would, at first glance, appear to indicate that Alton’s per capita debt is very close to being too high, but this figure is misleading. Alton’s largest debt is the \$480,000 (out of a total of \$531,000) still owed on its school loan. However, the State pays over 90% of the annual debt repayment costs, making the financial burden of

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<sup>90</sup> With the school debt already paid off by 2007, Alton’s total debt would consist of the approximately \$90,000 for the roadwork required on the Argyle and Tannery Roads, plus whatever is still owing at that time on the \$190,000 fire engine debt. Using figures based upon a ten-year repayment schedule for the \$190,000 fire engine loan, and assuming the loan was taken out in 2003, there would be only be about \$65,000 left to repay on that debt when the \$90,000 for the additional roadwork was required in 2007.

<sup>91</sup> Alton’s per capita debt in the year 2002 is \$638 ( $\$531,000 / 832 = \$638.22$ ). Alton’s per capita income in the year 2000 was \$14,202 (2000 U.S. census Table DP-3). Assuming here that Alton’s per capita income in the year 2002 is roughly the same as it was in 2000, the calculation indicates that Alton’s per capita debt in the year 2002 is 4.4% of the Town’s per capita income ( $638.22 / 14,202 = 4.4\%$ ).



carrying this amount of debt a great deal less than it would be in the case of an ordinary loan.

Except for a brief two or three-year period before the educational loan is repaid in 2005, Alton's future per capital debt is expected to be well below the recommended limit of 5% of its average per capita income for the next ten years.<sup>92</sup>

## Capital Investment Plan

**Planning for Capital Improvements** - The Capital Investment Plan set out below is intended to be a precursor to a more formal Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). A CIP is a fiscal tool that assists in planning for major capital improvements over a 5 or 6-year period. In its simplest form, a CIP is no more than a schedule listing needed capital improvements, in order of priority, together with cost estimates and the proposed method of financing them. The Comprehensive Planning Committee believes that the Town of Alton should use the Capital Investment Plan set out here as a basis for the preparation of a more formal CIP. After the first CIP is prepared, it should then be updated annually.<sup>93</sup>

The first step in preparing a CIP is to identify the capital improvements that will be needed in order to accommodate projected growth and development.<sup>94</sup> Alton is fortunate in this regard in that it does not maintain a public water or sewer system, or have any other expensive infrastructure needs of this nature, as this would likely require much larger capital expenditures by the Town.

Alton is also fortunate in that there do not appear to be any education needs for some time that would require a significant capital expenditure. The physical plant of the K-5 school is in good overall shape, and projected school enrollment for the next ten years indicates that additional classroom facilities will not be required for some time.

The only needed capital improvements for the next five or six years that were that identified in the previous Inventory sections were a need for a replacement fire engine and a need for additional coatings on the Tannery and Argyle Roads. These capital expenditures are set out below.

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<sup>92</sup> Using figures based upon a ten-year repayment schedule for the \$190,000 anticipated fire engine loan, and assuming the loan was taken out in 2003, there would be only be about \$65,000 left to repay on the fire engine when the \$90,000 for the additional roadwork was required in 2007. This would make for a total debt of \$155,000 in 2007. Assuming Alton's population in 2007 has grown to around 850, as predicted, the per capital debt at that time would be \$182 ( $\$155,000/850 = \$182.35$ ). Even if Alton's per capita income had not increased from its 2000 level in 2007, Alton's per capital debt would still be only 1.2% of its per capita income in 2007, well below the recommended limit of 4.5% - 5% ( $\$182/\$14,202 = 1.28\%$ ).

<sup>93</sup> Each year the CIP should be reviewed and updated to reflect changing community priorities, unique opportunities, cost changes or alternative financing strategies.

<sup>94</sup> Capital improvements differ from annual maintenance costs in that they are relatively expensive, do not recur annually, last a long time, and result in fixed assets.

### Capital Investment Plan

Capital Investment	Year Needed	Priority	Estimated Cost	Probable Method of Financing
1. Replacement Fire Engine	2003	Urgent	\$190,000	low interest loan
2. Argyle Road	2008	Necessary	\$30,000	cap. improvement fund
3. Tannery Road – East End	2008	Necessary	\$32,000	cap. improvement fund
4. Tannery Road – West End	2008	Necessary	\$31,000	cap. improvement fund

**Financing** - Several methods of financing capital improvements are potentially available to a municipality.<sup>95</sup> In respect to the fire engine, the most probable method of Alton financing the cost will be by means of a low interest loan. Preliminary information obtained by the Board of Selectmen indicates that Alton can borrow the \$190,000 required by a financing method referred to as a “tax exempt municipal lease proposal.” Under this arrangement, Alton’s annual debt repayment for the fire engine, if spread over a ten-year period, would be \$24,000, which is a manageable figure in terms of Alton’s overall budget.

In per capita terms, the debt to be incurred for a replacement fire engine represents an additional expense of less than \$30 a year for each Alton resident, over a ten year period.<sup>96</sup> The Planning Committee feels that this is an expense well worth taking on, especially when weighed against the risk of what could occur if the present engine is not replaced.

In respect to the road work for the Argyle and Tannery Roads, it is currently the intention of the Board of Selectmen to finance the projected \$90,000 cost out of a capital improvement fund, which will be set up in 2003 specifically for that purpose.

In respect to having some funds in reserve for unexpected emergencies or developments, it is generally recommended that a municipality’s undesignated (or reserve) fund balance be kept at approximately one-twelfth (8.3%) of its current budget. Alton’s undesignated fund balance is currently about 10% of its budget.

**Analysis** - It is believed that, in general, Alton’s fiscal condition is good. Debt is low, and expenditures have not been increasing disproportionately in respect to revenues, nor are they expected to do so in the future.

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<sup>95</sup> The potential methods of payment include obtaining grants or participating in cost sharing programs with government agencies, taking out low interest loans, paying from a stabilization or reserve fund, or paying from the current operating budget.

<sup>96</sup> SPO population figures indicate that there were approximately 832 people living in Alton in the year 2002.  $\$24,000 / 832 \text{ persons} = \$28.85 \text{ per person}$ . If the population increases during the ten-year period, as expected, the per capita figure will go down even further.

It is difficult to predict what Alton's expenditures will be in the future, but based on what has occurred in the past five years, and upon what is known at the moment, no sudden increase in expenditures is expected in the near future.

Alton's future revenues will undoubtedly follow the expenditures. If more funds are required, and there is little choice in the matter, then revenues will have to be increased accordingly.

It should also be noted that Alton has little control over its largest revenue source, intergovernmental revenues. If these revenues should decrease, as in the case of the State decreasing our educational funding, then Alton would have to try to make up for this loss by cutting some expenditures, but it would almost certainly also have to make up for this loss by increasing revenue from another source, most likely property taxes. However, it is also the intention of Alton's current Board of Selectmen to try hard to continue to keep expenditures in line with revenues, without having to raise the tax rate.

## **Policy Section**

It is the policy of the Town of Alton to maintain a fiscal situation that is healthy and affordable, and which results in cost savings. It is also the policy of the Town to promote long range financial planning that avoids unnecessary increases in property taxes and which reduces the indebtedness of the Town. This includes continuing to anticipate and plan ahead for financing larger capital investment items.

## **Implementation Section**

Alton, through its Budget Committee and Board of Selectmen, will develop a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) in order to identify needed capital improvements, assign priorities, and identify funding sources.

The Capital Improvement Plan will be developed within one year of passing this comprehensive plan, and it shall be reviewed and updated annually. Advice and input from other Town officials and employees, as well as other residents, shall be sought during the development of the first CIP, and during the annual review process.

## 13. Land Use

**Related State Goal** –To encourage orderly growth and development in appropriate areas of each community, while protecting the State’s rural character, making efficient use of public services and preventing development sprawl.

### A. Current Land Use

#### I. Inventory and Analysis

The State of Maine’s *Growth Management Act* states that each community’s comprehensive plan must describe the current and projected development patterns of the community. Other State legislation, the *Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule*, sets out more specifically what information must be included in this section of a comprehensive plan. The required information includes:

- a. current land use - the location and general amount of land devoted to various existing land use classifications (such as residential, forestry etc.),
- b. recent changes in the land use patterns, and how these changes may reflect future land use patterns,
- c. location and general amount of land physically unsuitable for development.

**Existing Land Uses** – Except for the relatively small parcels of cleared land going back from the homes located along Alton’s roads, and for the bog and wetland areas, most of Alton is currently covered by forest, which can be clearly seen from the aerial photo of Alton taken in 1996, included in Chapter 5.

Most towns have some sort of “town center” which has developed naturally over the years. Alton does not. In fact, except for a brief period in the middle of the nineteenth century when there was a cluster of homes located near the large tannery, Alton has never had anything that could be termed a “town center”, and its residents have generally relied on other towns in the region for the centralized goods and services they require.

Alton’s development (almost entirely residential and farming) has historically spread out along its roadways, at very low densities. The Existing Land Use map included at the end of this chapter indicates where Alton’s development is currently located.

This pattern of development (primarily along what today is Route 43, on the south-west side of town, and along the Bennoch Road) was true in the nineteenth century, and is still true today. One can see how Alton had developed as of 1875 from the town map dating back to that period which is included at the end of this section. This development pattern

along the existing highways has not changed much in the ensuing years, except that in recent decades, the housing densities in these areas have become increasingly greater.

Existing Land Use Controls – Alton’s current *Land Use Ordinance*, passed in June of 1997, states that all lots in Alton are to be considered “rural”, except for the areas protected by the town’s *Shoreland Zoning Ordinance*. The relatively brief ordinance sets a minimum one-acre lot size for new buildings in all areas of the town, and a minimum set back of fifty feet from the center on the traveled way.<sup>97</sup> There is no minimum frontage requirement in Alton’s current Land Use Ordinance, which, no doubt, has led to the increasing stripped development along Alton’s roads.

Alton also has a *Shoreland Zoning Ordinance* and a *Floodplain Management Ordinance*. Other relevant State and federal statutes also apply to land use development in Alton. These include the *Natural Resources Protection Act*,<sup>98</sup> the *Forest Practices Act*,<sup>99</sup> and Maine’s site location and subdivision legislation.

Residential Land Use in Alton – The current pattern of development, and the general location of Alton’s 360 or so housing units, can be seen on the Current Land Use map on the following page. Except for the two mobile home parks located along the southern end of the Bennoch Road, where the dwelling units are somewhat concentrated, Alton’s homes are spread out on individual lots, to a greater or lesser extent, along the roads shown on the Current Land Use map

Institutional Land Use – Very little land in Alton is used for what could be classified as “institutional” purposes. The land that could be classified this way includes the location of the Municipal Building along the southern portion of the Bennoch Road, and the location of the K-5 school, just off the Argyle Road. These locations are shown on the Current Land Use map.

Agricultural Use – As discussed, there is currently only one active farm in Alton, although a few other residents cut open areas of their property for hay.

Resource Extraction - There are currently four active gravel pits in Alton, located at the northern end of the Bennoch Road. These active pits are also located on the Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer which pretty much follows the Bennoch Road. There are also numerous dormant pits located along the entire length of the Bennoch Road. The general

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<sup>97</sup> Alton’s *Land Use Ordinance* also specifically refers to matters such as subdivisions, gravel pits, and automobile junkyards, but it merely states that the legislation passed by the State of Maine on these matters should be followed – it does not set out any standards of its own.

<sup>98</sup> This legislation regulates development activities around streams, wetlands, and great ponds.

<sup>99</sup> This legislation regulates timber harvesting practices to a certain extent. For example it requires landowners to develop forest management practices, signed by a professional forester, for clear-cuts of 50 acres or more.

location of the gravel pits in Alton can be seen on the Topographical map included in Chapter 5.

Forest Activity - Forest activity takes place on much of Alton's land every year. The total amount of forested land in Alton is proportionally very great, as can be seen by the aerial photo. As noted previously, 13,945 acres (out of a total of 25,630 acres) of Alton's land was in Tree Growth in 2001. Maine Forest Service data indicates that for the last ten years, Alton had, on average, slightly more than five timber harvests each year. The average number of total acres harvested each year was 374.

Park/Recreational Land – The only land located in Alton which could be classified as “park” land is the Hirundo Wildlife Refuge located in the southwestern corner of town. This refuge area is shown on the Current Land Use map. Much of the other undeveloped land in Alton is also used for outdoor recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking and snowmobiling.

Commercial/Industrial – No land in Alton is currently being used for what could be classified as “industrial” activity. There is, however, a small portion of land in Alton being used for what could be classified as “commercial” activity. This includes the land being used by the First Student bus company, located along the southern end of the Bennoch Road, and the location of the ready mix concrete facility (currently inactive and for sale), located at the southern end of the Bennoch Road. There are also two mobile home parks in Alton, also located along the southern portion of the Bennoch Road. The location of the mobile home parks is shown on the Current Land Use map.

**B. Recent Changes in Land Use** – Maine legislation requires that a comprehensive plan identify changes in the community's land use over the last ten years, and that a community identify and understand how those changes might reflect future land use patterns.

In respect to land use in general, Alton has changed from primarily a farming community, to a community in which there is currently only one family farm. The vast majority of Alton's residents now commute to work in the greater Bangor area. The change from a farming to a “bedroom community” has been going on for some time, and had already taken place as of ten years ago.

In respect to “patterns” of development, as already noted, nearly all of Alton's homes and businesses are located along one of Alton's four public roads, and along a few private roads. This pattern has not changed significantly since the time Alton first came into being in the nineteenth century.

This same pattern of random development along Alton's highways is what has taken place in the last ten years as well. According to the U.S. Census, Alton gained 76 new housing units between 1990 and 2000. Conversations with Town officials, the Code Enforcement Officer, and with other residents, all indicate that there was no particular pattern to the development that took place during this period, except for the fact that the

development occurred along nearly all public and private roads, and that no single area of town experienced a significantly greater amount of growth than another.

The rate of growth in the number of new housing units in Alton slowed considerably in the last ten years. Between 1970 and 1980, the rate of growth in new homes was 57%, increasing from 101 housing units in 1970 to 159 units in 1980. Between 1980 and 1990 the rate of growth reached 70%, with the number of housing units increasing from 159 in 1980 to 271 in 1990.<sup>100</sup> However, between 1990 and 2000, the rate of growth slowed to 28%, increasing from 271 housing units in 1990 to 347 units in 2000.

According to the classification system used by the U.S. Census, virtually all of the new housing units built in Alton between 1990 and 2000 are classified as either “1-unit detached” or as “mobile home”. No multi-unit housing was built in Alton during this period.

The number of new homes in Alton is expected to increase from 347 units in 2000, to approximately 413 units in 2012. This is a total increase of 66 new housing units, and a rate of increase of 19% between 2000 and 2012. Almost all of the new housing units will be classified as either “1-unit detached” or “mobile home”. Based on the previous pattern of development, it is believed that the vast majority of the 66 new housing units will continue to be located somewhat randomly along Alton’s public and private roads, in the same general areas of Alton where homes are currently located. These areas are shown on the Current Land Use map.

Alton has only had one small subdivision development during the last 10 years.<sup>101</sup> Based upon the past development pattern, it does not appear that Alton will likely experience a great deal of subdivision development in the next ten years. Nevertheless, the possibility of a large-scale subdivision development coming to Alton at some time in the future (as well as its potential effects on the community) is something the Comprehensive Planning Committee has recognized, and for that reason has suggested that some minimal controls relating future subdivision development be included in Alton’s revised *Land Use Ordinance*.

**C. Land Physically Unsuitable for Development** – The vast majority of the land in Alton should, for a variety of reasons, be considered “physically unsuitable for development”. The great extent of this type of land is shown on the two Physical Constraints maps set out at the end of this section.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> As discussed in the Housing Inventory section, the large increase in the 1970s and 1980s also coincided with the establishment of two mobile home parks in town.

<sup>101</sup> The 5-lot subdivision is located just north of the Municipal Building, along the west side of the Bennoch Road. The Planning Board approved the development in the summer of 2001. As of the spring of 2003, only 2 lots had been developed and built upon.

<sup>102</sup> Two constraints maps were produced. The first, labeled “Physical Constraints Map”, overlays the 100-year floodplain area, the Conservation area (i.e. Hirundo), NWI wetland areas over 10 acres, the aquifer area, and areas with slopes greater than 15%. - The second constraints map, labeled “Broader Constraints

This does not mean that no development at all can occur on this land, but it does mean that development should not be encouraged in these areas, and that steps should be taken to instead direct new development towards areas more suitable for future growth.

An example of land in Alton physically unsuitable for development is the land within the 100-year floodplain zone. As can be seen on the Physical Constraints maps, approximately 50% of Alton is within the floodplain area.<sup>103</sup>

In addition to the large floodplain area, Alton's water resources, wetlands, and critical natural habitats, as well as land use activities on Alton's Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer, or on areas with unsuitable soils, or with slopes greater than 15%, also require more regulation than other areas in town which do not have these physical limitations.

**Analysis** – A vast majority of Alton's residents (85%) who responded to the recent community survey said that the rural atmosphere, open space, woods and privacy available in Alton was a "very important reason" as to why they live in Alton. These residents clearly like the way of life currently available in Alton. However, in order to protect this way of life in the future, and to protect other values identified in previous Inventory sections, it is believed that it is very necessary that Alton adopt a policy of planning ahead now in order to ensure that this way of life will still be available to our children, and to the next generations.

Without a plan for the future, there are too few rules existing at the moment relating to future development in Alton – and without some guidelines in place, developers, not town government or town residents, will determine the future of our community. Unfortunately, corporate developers in particular (as opposed to individual residents) seldom have a conscience or a concern for a community's character. Since our residents clearly appreciate the quality of life now available in Alton, some steps need to be taken now to ensure that the qualities and resources that make Alton such an agreeable place to live will still remain in the years to come.

As an example of a potential threat that is very real, under Alton's current *Land Use Ordinance*, if a developer wanted to develop a large solid waste dump on top of one of the abandoned gravel pits located over Alton's very important sand and gravel aquifer, then once the Department of Environmental Protection's criteria was met, the developer could

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Map", shows all the areas on the first map, but is also overlays Alton's deer wintering area, the waterfowl/wading bird habitat areas, and the rare plant areas identified by the Department of Conservation.

<sup>103</sup> Approximately 50% of all the land in Alton is within the 100-year floodplain zone, a very high amount. Although development in a floodplain zone is not entirely prohibited, in general, this land should be considered unsuitable for future development. - New construction in the 100-year floodplain area can take place, but Alton's *Floodplain Management Ordinance* requires that any new construction be built to certain specified heights above the potential flood level, depending on where in the floodplain the structure is to be located. In many parts of the floodplain area, this requirement will effectively prohibit any new development.



proceed – and the only solution that would be available to residents at a later date if their drinking water was to become polluted as a result would be to instigate costly litigation to try to recover damages.

A much better solution to these kinds of threats is not to allow them to occur in the first place. It is believed strongly that regulating (and prohibiting as far as it is legally permissible) dangerous land uses in Alton, especially over Alton’s important aquifer, is a step that should be taken as soon as possible to ensure that our water supply is preserved for the future. With some local controls over development in place, Alton can also determine, to some extent at least, where certain kinds of development (such as mobile home parks) can take place, and what standards need to be followed.<sup>104</sup>

Other issues relating to land use raised in previous Inventories include protecting Alton’s open space, forest and agricultural land, wetlands, and deer wintering area from unsuitable development or over-development. These matters should also be addressed, and are, in fact, addressed in the Future Land Use Plan set out below.

**Policy** - Alton residents have a tradition of independence and privacy typical of the rural lifestyle. Historically this tradition has imposed few limitations on the activities a private landowner can undertake on his or her property. This Comprehensive Plan respects that tradition and recommends very few limitations on activities a private landowner can undertake on his or her property, and then only for compelling reasons.

One of the stated legislative goals of the State of Maine is: “To encourage orderly growth and development in appropriate areas of each community, while protecting the State’s rural character, making efficient use of public services and preventing development sprawl.” This is a policy that the Town of Alton wishes to adopt as well, and to further that policy, the Comprehensive Planning Committee has developed a Future Land Use Plan, which will be set out in the following section.

Please note that the Future Land Use Plan is not a zoning map, and the narrative accompanying it is not a zoning ordinance. Even after the Comprehensive Plan is accepted by both the residents of Alton and the State Planning Office, the recommendations set out in this plan are only that, just recommendations. In order for the recommendations to have the force of law, Alton will still need to pass a revised *Land Use Ordinance* consistent with this plan, which the Planning Committee recommends occur within one year of the acceptance of this Comprehensive Plan.

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<sup>104</sup> This concept of some kind of local control over certain kinds of future development is also very relevant to the issue of gravel extraction, which is now regulated mostly by the Department of Environmental Protection. This Comprehensive Plan recommends that Alton pass its own gravel extraction ordinance to supplement the requirements imposed by the State.

## B. Future Land Use Plan

The State of Maine's *Growth Management Act* states that each municipality's comprehensive plan must identify and designate at least 2 basic types of geographic areas:

(1) **growth areas**, - which are those areas that are suitable for the orderly residential and commercial development that is expected over the next ten years, and

(2) **rural areas**, - which are those areas where protection should be provided for natural resources such as agricultural, forest, open space and scenic lands within the municipality.

**Growth Area** - The area recommended as the Growth Area for Alton is shown on the Future Land Use Plan on the following page.

The Growth Area comprises approximately 2,115 acres (or 8% of Alton's total acreage), and is located in the southeastern portion of the town, adjacent to the entrance for Interstate 95. The area is bordered on the south by the Alton-Old Town line, on the east by the Bennoch Road, and on the north and west by the approximate boundary lines shown on the Future Land Use Plan.

To help Alton residents understand why the Comprehensive Planning Committee came to recommend the Growth Area for Alton that it has, some of the legislative requirements of the State of Maine for selecting "growth" areas will be set out. Maine's *Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule* states that land areas designated as growth areas must be consistent with five specific provisions. These five provisions are set out below exactly as they appear in the legislation:

1. Growth areas must be limited to land areas within which public facilities and services are efficiently provided or can be efficiently provided during the planning period.
2. Growth areas must be limited to land areas that are physically suitable for development or redevelopment. (Growth areas may include land areas that are physically unsuitable for development if such areas constitute small areas or corridors of land surrounded by growth areas – such as a river, stream, floodplain, small natural hazard area, small lake, or small natural resource area running through or located in the middle of a growth area.)
3. Growth area must include enough land area suitable for development or redevelopment to accommodate all growth and development planned to occur during the planning period, based on the plan's policies and implementation strategies.

4. Growth areas must be limited to an amount of land area and a configuration that will encourage compact, efficient development patterns and discourage sprawl and strip development along roads.
5. Growth areas may not include an unreasonable proportion of the municipality's total land area – that is, growth areas must not include so much land area as to encourage development sprawl or to hinder the efficient provision of public services.

The characteristics of Alton's Growth Area meet all of the legislative requirements set out above. Alton has few public services, but those it does have, such as its fire department and K-5 school, are both located within easy access to the Growth Area. Unlike much of the rest of the land in Alton, the vast majority of the land located within the Growth Area is, in fact, physically suitable for development. For example, this area is generally composed of good soils,<sup>105</sup> and the area is not located within the town's large floodplain area.

The number of acres in the growth area (1,959 acres) certainly can accommodate all of the future growth expected in Alton in the next ten years.<sup>106</sup> Yet this area is still a relatively small proportion (7%) of the total acreage in town, and the configuration of this area will not encourage sprawl or strip development along Alton's public roads.

Characteristics of Growth Area – Part of the reason for selecting this particular area was to provide an appropriately sized area for potential future development and growth, which has few physical constraints, that has adequate soils, and is located away from the important sand and gravel aquifer. As already noted, this area has access to Alton's public facilities, and is also located near to the Interstate 95 entrance/exit ramps. The minimum lot size in this area will be one acre, with a per family unit requirement of as little as 20,000 square feet in the case of multi-family dwellings, providing there is proof of adequate soils in the form of a soil evaluation by a licensed soil evaluator.

A variety of land uses will be permitted within the Growth Area, including: single family homes, apartments and multi-family dwellings, mobile home parks, and commercial and industrial development. All development will, of course, need to comply with relevant State and local legislation.

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<sup>105</sup> Soils located within the Growth Area include the following, as shown by their abbreviation: BxB, BuB, HuB, SuB, ScB EwB, CnB, CnD and PrC.

<sup>106</sup> The State Planning Office has said in the past that a reasonable objective would be to have 70% to 80% of a municipality's new growth in the next 10 years located in growth area. While this might be a reasonable objective for many towns, it should be acknowledged up front that such a result will almost certainly not occur in Alton, which, based on its previous pattern of development is a somewhat unique town. Without a naturally occurring town center, or an already existing growth area, the only way to currently force 70% to 80% of the new development into the Growth Area would be to adopt really draconian restrictions for new development in the other areas, which is something the Planning Committee is not prepared to recommend. However, it is believed that over a much longer period of time than just ten years (a 20 or 30-year time frame would be more realistic), that much more of the town's future growth will occur in the Growth Area than would have if this issue had not been addressed.

Subdivision development in this area will not be subject to open space (clustering) requirements, and frontage and setback requirements for subdivision development, as well as single-family development will be less stringent in this area than in the rural areas, in order to provide for higher density development.

Unlike in the two rural areas, there will be no limitations on the number of building permits per year that will be allowed for subdivision developments located in this area. The minimum set-back requirement for all residential development in the growth area be 50 feet from the center of the road, with a minimum frontage requirement of 200 feet.

## **Rural Areas**

Maine's *Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule* states that a municipality's future land use plan must designate as "rural area" those land areas within the municipality which the municipality intends to protect from incompatible development as agricultural, forest, scenic and open space areas, and that the designation of rural areas is intended to provide for the long-term protection of resource production, and for the protection of open space and scenic lands from incompatible development. The legislation then goes on to state that lands selected as "rural area" must also be consistent with the following five provisions:

1. Rural areas must include agricultural and forest lands important to the local or regional economy.
2. Rural areas must include land areas consisting of large areas of contiguous open space, farmland, or forestland. They must include land areas in which the predominant pattern of development is intended to consist of very low intensity development broadly dispersed within what would otherwise be a rural landscape. They must also include land areas containing other rural resources that significantly contribute to the municipality's character.
3. Rural areas must include land areas in which the municipality can ensure that the level and type of development will be compatible with maintenance of rural character and will not constitute or encourage development sprawl or strip development along roads.
4. Rural areas may include, but may not be limited to, land areas containing natural resources and scenic open spaces that are intended to be protected.
5. Rural areas may not include land areas in which a significant portion of the municipality's future residential development is planned to occur. Nor may they include land areas in which the municipality plans the occurrence of large-scale or widespread residential development that would alter the municipality's character.

The rural areas recommended here are entirely consistent with these State legislative requirements, and, in total, comprise approximately 24,597 acres, or 92% of Alton's total acreage. <sup>1</sup> For example, virtually all of the 13,000+ acres of Alton's land that is in Tree Growth is included in the rural areas, as are important natural resources such as Alton's Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer, wetlands, deer wintering area, and most of the area identified as contiguous open space.

The characteristics of the nature of the development can take place in the rural areas also promote the rural character of our community, and does not encourage strip development along our roads. In this regard, note that Alton's current Land Use Ordinance has no minimum frontage requirements, whereas this Future Land Use Plan has at least a 250' minimum frontage requirement in all areas located outside of the Growth Area.

The Planning Committee recommends that Alton's overall rural area be divided into two separate areas, with different characteristics for each. The two areas are the following:

1.) Rural Residential Area, and

2.) Wildlife Protection Area.

**Rural Residential Area** – Alton's Rural Residential area will include all the land located outside of the growth and wildlife protection areas. The Rural Residential Area can be seen on the Future Land Use Plan, and is by far the largest of the three land use areas, encompassing approximately 19,426 acres, and making up approximately 73% of Alton's total acreage.

The purpose of this area is to maintain the rural character of the Town, to protect our valued natural resources such as forest and agricultural land, as well as the scenic beauty and outdoor opportunities that our residents value. The future Land Use Ordinance should clearly reflect these goals

It is important to note that the Rural Residential Area will contain the area identified by the Maine Geological Survey on their Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifers maps. The location of the aquifer area in Alton can be seen on the Future Land Use Plan. The aquifer area, making up approximately 1343 acres or 5% of Alton's total acreage, is the major recharge area for much of our ground water, and once ground water is contaminated, it is very difficult and expensive to clean up.

In order to protect and preserve this vital resource and other areas within the Rural Residential Area, protection standards should be set out within a new Land Use Ordinance to regulate or prohibit certain land use activities that may pose a potential threat to our ground water.

An example of a land use activity that should be prohibited (or strongly regulated) would be the use of underground fuel or chemical storage tanks. Other activities that should be prohibited (as far as it is legally permissible to do so) is the establishment of a solid waste dump, and pottery sheds which use lead in their processing, especially if these activities are located over our Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer.

Based on the experience of other Maine towns, Alton should also prohibit the spreading of sludge (sometimes used in gravel pit reclamation projects for example) in all areas.

Single-family, commercial and subdivision development will be permitted within the Rural Residential Area. The types of commercial development that would be most appropriate for this area would be natural resource based, such as timber harvesting or tree farms. Home-based businesses would certainly be permitted, as well as other businesses that do not leave a large imprint on the land or unduly interfere with the rural nature of this area. Convenience stores or even small office buildings are good examples of such low-impact commercial activities. Alton would also benefit from a nursing home facility being located in Town, and such a business would be very appropriate in the Rural Residential Area.

Alton should include performance standards in its Land Use Ordinance that are strong enough to permit commercial and business uses, while protecting the quality of life and rural nature of this area. Activities that are antithetical to the rural nature and/or constitute environmental threats to valued resources such as ground water should not be permitted. Examples of such activities include automobile graveyards, junkyards, and automobile recycling businesses, as well as businesses that create undue noise, or, as already mentioned, use underground fuel or chemical tanks. Year round or semi-permanent yard sales should also be prohibited as they would take away from the rural nature of our community.

The development of new mobile home parks will not be permitted in the Rural Residential Area, although the two existing parks will not be affected by the passage of a new land Use Ordinance.

The minimum lot size for single-family homes in this area will be 2 acres, with a minimum frontage of 250 feet, and a minimum setback of 100 feet from the center of the road.<sup>107</sup> These requirements are greater than those in the Growth Area, which will, over time, tend to direct more new development to the Growth Area, as well as promote the rural nature and scenic beauty of our town by tending to protect against strip development along the road way.

The Town's growth management strategy should also be aware of the effects that public investment in its roads has on the location of residential development. Currently the Tannery Road is only paved at the east and west ends, where homes are located, while the majority of the road, which passes through a large contiguous block of undeveloped forest land, including the large deer wintering area, is made of packed gravel. While this road must obviously be kept in a safe a passable condition, it is not recommended that further areas be paved in order to discourage further residential sprawl in this rural area.

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<sup>107</sup> If Alton's residents were to decide, when considering a new *Land Use Ordinance*, that the minimum lot size in this area should be 3 acres, or even greater, instead of the two acres recommended above, that too would be acceptable and consistent with this plan. What is most important is that the density of new development in this area be, at a minimum, a two-acre lot, thereby making the density here be somewhat less than the density in our Growth Area. Aside from protecting our aquifer against over-development, the greater minimum lot size in our rural areas will, over time, tend to encourage a greater proportion of new development in the more suitable Growth Area.

Subdivision development will be allowed in the Rural Residential Area. However, the number of building permits issued for any one subdivision in the course of a one-year period will be limited to five, which will tend to protect against a very large development occurring over a short period of time. Subdivisions in this area will not be required to adopt an open space (cluster) form of development.

In respect to access, new subdivision lots will not be permitted to exit on to public roads directly. Instead, such lots should be required to access the public road by means of one subdivision road, approved by DOT. All forms of development in this area, not just subdivisions, will need to comply with all relevant State laws in respect to road access requirements.

**Wildlife Protection Area** – The boundaries of the Wildlife Protection Area shall be drawn so as to include the area identified by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife as a deer wintering area. This area of approximately 5,444 acres (or 20% of Alton’s total acreage) is shown on the Future Land Use Plan.<sup>108</sup>

The purpose of the Wildlife Protection Area is to protect this valuable natural resource valued by Town residents. New development activity within Alton’s deer wintering area would tend to reduce the overall ability of the area to support deer during periods of severe winter weather, and the greater the habitat loss from development within these areas, the greater the impact would be on the local deer population, which is an important natural resource for Alton that should be protected.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> It is recommended that Alton’s future *Land Use Ordinance* contain a provision, in case of any dispute, that allows either the land owner or the Planning Board to engage the services of a wildlife professional to determine whether the land in question is in fact, within a deer wintering area. - In addition, before a new Land Use Ordinance is drafted, Alton will request that the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife re-examine the boundaries of the deer wintering area it has identified to determine if the boundaries shown on the current plan are still correct. An official of that department has already been contacted, and he indicated that his department would most likely be able to do this service for the town.

<sup>109</sup> A booklet published by the Department of inland Fisheries and Wildlife explains the importance of deer wintering areas, and why they should be protected. It reads in part:

....Winter has long been considered a “bottleneck” for survival of white-tailed deer in the Northeast. During winter, deer in northern climates often subsist on limited quantities of low quality foods, while simultaneously coping with low temperatures, chilling winds, and high energy requirements to stay warm. In Maine, studies indicate that mortality of deer can exceed 35% during severe winters. Frequent severe winters, or marginal protective winter habitat, may reduce a deer population to a small fraction of its summer potential.

The primary behavioral mechanism for deer to conserve energy during winter is to move to traditional wintering areas or “yards”. These wintering areas provide deer with shelter from radiant heat loss as well as improved mobility in snow. The softwood canopy in a deer yard moderates the effects of winter by maintaining warmer than average temperatures and greatly reducing wind velocity. The softwood cover also interrupts much of the snowfall and ground accumulations become firmly packed. This makes traveling much easier for deer and decreases their energy demands....

The minimum lot size for this area will be within a range of 5 to 10 acres, depending on what Alton residents decide when Alton's revised Land Use Ordinance is being considered.<sup>110</sup> The minimum frontage requirement in this area will be 300 feet, and the minimum setback requirement will be 75 feet from the center of the road.

Subdivision development will be permitted in this area, but any subdivisions will be required to conform to the open-space (or cluster) subdivision format, and the number of building permits allowed for any one subdivision will be limited to five per annum. Under the open-space requirements, 75% of the total area being subdivided will need to be retained as open space. Mobile home parks and multi-family development will not be permitted in this resource area.

### **Land Use Ordinance Performance Standards**

The future Land Use Ordinance will be developed consistent with the identified needs of the Town. In order to protect and preserve natural resources, property values and public safety, and to ensure the proper future development of the Town, performance standards will be developed and included within Alton's Land Use Ordinance. The performance standard topic areas will include, but are not limited to the following:

Access Requirements – Standards will be developed which will minimize the creation of strip development within the community.

Buffer Provisions – Standards will be developed to minimize the negative impacts of inconsistent development and to protect Alton's water resources. [Dean – what is this about?]

Home Occupation – Standards will be developed by which home occupations may be established minimizing their impact on existing neighborhoods.

Industrial performance Standards – Standards will be developed which will ensure appropriate industrial development within designated areas of the community.

Manufactured Housing – Standards will be developed to ensure the safety, health and welfare of mobile home occupants and owners.

Mobile Home Park – Standards will be developed regarding the placement and design of mobile home parks in Alton.

Oil and Chemical Storage – Standards will be developed regarding the storage of combustible material.

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<sup>110</sup> What is most important is that the minimum lot size be somewhat greater than the one-acre minimum lot size in the Growth Area. The exact figure can be decided by Alton residents when the new land use ordinance is being considered.



Soils – Standards will be developed to ensure development is located on appropriate soils.

### **Other Considerations**

The Planning Board and Code Enforcement Officer, with input from other town officials and residents, will annually review the Town's Land Use Ordinance, other Town ordinances, and the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that no changes are required. In particular, they will be reviewed as to whether there have been any changes in the minimum requirements of state or federal law that would require local amendment of land use regulation. Any changes in the type or degree of development in Alton that was not anticipated at the time of writing the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Ordinance should also be considered.

### **Implementation Strategies**

After the acceptance of this Comprehensive Plan, Alton shall pass a new Land Use Ordinance, within one year of acceptance, consistent with this Comprehensive Plan and the included Future Land Use Plan.

Alton's Planning Board and Board of Selectmen will be responsible for drafting the Land Use Ordinance that will be presented to Alton's residents for their consideration. The Planning Board and/or the Board of Selectmen will also apply for available State funded implementation grant monies in order to draft the new Land Use Ordinance.

Alton will continue to encourage owners of active agricultural lands and owners of commercially viable woodlands to take advantage of the state's *Farm and Open Space Tax Law* and the state's *Tree Growth Tax Law*.

The Planning Board and Board of Selectmen will keep neighboring communities informed of planning initiatives to ensure compatibility along town borders. When any development or change in the Town's land use ordinance occurs on town borders, or within a shared resource, a copy of this information will be forwarded to the adjoining community by the Planning Board.

## Regional Coordination Program

**Shared Resources – Natural Resources** - There are a number of resources and facilities that Alton shares with other municipalities. These include natural resources such Birch Stream, Dead Stream, Pushaw Stream, as well as various brooks. Some of Alton’s wetlands also overlap with neighboring towns. All of this is shown in various maps set out above. Alton’s Significant Sand and Gravel Aquifer also passes through the neighboring communities of Old town and Lagrange. Alton’s three great ponds, however, are all located wholly within the town.

**Education** - Aside from natural resources, Alton also shares a public services and facilities with neighboring municipalities. For example, Alton does not have its own independent school system, but instead is a member of school union (with the communities of Milford, Bradley and Greenbush) in order to share the expenses for services such as payroll needs, having a school superintendent, and special education costs. Alton does has its own K-5 school, but has no middle school or high school, and pays tuition to other area schools (mostly Old Town) for these services.

**Police, Fire and Ambulance** - Alton does not have its own police department, and its police needs are provided by the Penobscot County Sheriff’s Department and the Maine State Police. Alton does have its own fire department, but has also entered into mutual aid agreements with the neighboring communities of Hudson, Bradford, Lagrange, and Old Town. Alton also has a contract with Old Town for rescue and ambulance service, paying an annual fee for this service.

**Salt Shed** - Alton also entered into an agreement with Penobscot County to build a salt-sand shed, located in town, just off the Argyle Road. Sharing the construction and maintenance costs with Penobscot County made this mandated facility much more affordable for a small town such as Alton.<sup>111</sup>

**Waste Disposal** – Alton’s waste disposal also has a regional component. Alton’s weekly curbside garbage pickup is hauled to the PERC (Penobscot Energy Recovery Company) facility located in Orrington, as is the garbage of most nearby communities. Solid waste not accepted by PERC is collected twice a year and hauled to the Norridgewock landfill.

**Recreation** - Alton also shares recreation services and facilities with neighboring communities. Old Town offers many recreational programs, which our children join. Also residents of Alton, Lagrange and Medford have joined together to form the “LA Sledgers” snowmobile club, which receives State grants to maintain a number of trails crossing municipal boundaries.

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<sup>111</sup> Penobscot County has access to and stores their salt/sand on one side of the facility, and Alton on the other.

### **Regional Policy and Cordination**

Alton will participate in any regional natural resources initiatives and programs that are applicable to the town, and Alton's Planning Board and Board of Selectmen will work with neighboring communities for the mutual protection of natural resources, and will provide adjacent communities with copies of its Land Use Ordinance.

The Planning Board and Board of Selectmen will also keep neighboring communities informed of planning initiatives to ensure compatibility along town borders. When any development or change in the Town's Land Use Ordinance occurs on town borders, or within a shared resource, a copy of this information will be forwarded to the adjoining community.

The Town of Alton should also continue to support regional recreational opportunities, and in particular, should continue its support of the LA Sledders snowmobile club by participating in the State's snowmobile trail maintenance program.

Alton will continue to participate in mutual aid agreements with neighboring communities for fire protection and in cost-effective regional solid waste management solutions.

Alton will seriously consider participating in any applicable regional initiative regarding economic issues, affordable housing, transportation initiatives, or any other matter of this nature that affects the lives of its residents. Based on the current paucity of initiatives such as this that are applicable to a small town like Alton, it is difficult to say for certain what opportunities may arise in this regard in the future, but when or if they do, Alton will not hesitate to work with other municipalities on a regional level.