

LAND USE

Inventory and Analysis

The land use section is one of the most important components of the comprehensive plan as it identifies the location and amount of land available and suitable for particular purposes can be determined by reviewing past and present land uses. The planning program inventoried agricultural and forest lands, soil types and characteristics, natural resources, transportation networks, housing needs, demographics, local and regional economy, and public facilities and services. These inventories are then analyzed and reflected in a Land Use Plan. Implementation of the land use plan is accomplished through the development of a set of land use regulations.

Since the comprehensive plan is a long-range guide for the growth and development of Easton, it cannot be too specific or rigid. It has to be flexible and adapt to unforeseen changes and demands. An overall framework is provided to make intelligent and informed land use decisions within which adjustments can be made to any inevitable changes.

Easton, to some extent, is a bedroom community for its Service Center, Presque Isle. However the town also has a vibrant agricultural community, a growing Amish influence, and two major industrial complexes. The town is known for its educational system, recreation program, low taxes and the services that it provides. Easton's land area is approximately 24,915 acres or 38.93 square miles. The town is relatively flat and could be considered gently rolling terrain but there are areas that have steep slopes. Mars Hill borders it to the south, Presque Isle and Westfield to the west, New Brunswick to the east, and Fort Fairfield to the north. Easton is seeing some subdivision growth that has been spurred by the forethought of Town Officials who are focusing on potential residential land as it become available.

What does Easton Look Like Today?

Land ownership patterns are characterized by large farm parcels that range from 100 to over 500 acres. Approximately 70% of the land area is controlled by a few property owners and any change in their status can lead to development pressure or a change in land uses. Town officials maintain a positive relationship with the large land owners

One of the more recent changes in Easton's landscape has been an increase in the number of smaller farms that utilize the fallow and hayland that was once abundant and available within the community. These smaller farms, typically associated with the Amish, have somewhat changed the setting of the community as more livestock and organic type farming is occurring. In the past, much of this land was either underutilized or not utilized at all.

While Easton has seen relatively little development pressure, it could be considered a bedroom community to Presque Isle and with its significantly lower tax rates and well known school department and recreational programs, it is an attractive community for those wishing to locate to the region. Easton has retained its rural character and has a very distinct and compact village area located along the Center and Station Roads.

An inventory of land uses was completed by the University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI) in 2011. UMPI students inventoried all of the land uses in town and developed a GIS database and map that provides acreages for a number of land uses located in Easton. The map is located at the end of this section and the following lists the land uses in Easton:

Easton Land Use, 2011

Land Use	Acreage	Percent of Total Acreage
Cropland	4,988	15.59
Badlands * (undeveloped)	516	1.61
Developed-Residential	936	2.92
Developed- Industrial	472	1.47
Fallow 1	1,861	5.82
Fallow 2	943	2.95
Forest	12,276	38.36
Pasture	576	1.80
Hayland	7,630	23.84
Water	261	0.82
Wetland	1,544	4.82
Total	32,003	100.00

Source: University of Maine at Presque Isle, 2011

*Badlands refers to the small open lands that are almost always next to croplands but not used as cropland due to several reasons. They may be used for dumping waste such as rocks. They may be wet or steep. Or they are the corners of farms used for turning around tractors or used as paths.

Forestland comprised the largest land use in Easton with over 38 percent of the land area being considered forested. Hayland and cropland were the next two largest land uses.

Residential Properties

Residential properties are spread through the community and according to UMPI's database there are 238 lots with some form of residential development. Development for the most part has occurred in a piecemeal fashion along existing transportation corridors. There have been three recent subdivisions approved by the Planning Board and development is beginning to occur there. The Moose Meadow subdivision is located on Duncan Drive and the recently acquired portion contains seven (7) lots while the Perry Drive subdivision has 14 lots of which two (2) are vacant. These subdivisions are proving to be somewhat popular as they provide an affordable land purchasing option for those wishing to locate in town. Town officials are open to expanding these subdivisions as land is sold within them and as land surrounding them becomes available.

There are also three (3) mobile home parks which are fully occupied. Two of these parks are located on the Center Road and the other is on the West Ridge Road. At the time of the writing of this plan, the owners do not intend to expand.

Because the town does not have a building permit system, it is difficult to obtain exact numbers of new residential development. However, according to the US Census and a report completed by a Planning Board member, there were 32 new housing units constructed in Easton since 2000. Most of the residential development has occurred on former agricultural lands as this tends to be the least expensive to develop and contains the best soil suitable for on-site wastewater disposal. It should also be noted that as development occurs in the more rural areas, the Town is still obligated to provide basic services to these areas. Sending school buses and plowing roads can become expensive in an area where there is sparse population. There appears to be adequate land available in Easton to accommodate new residential development. The limiting factor in many cases is the landowner's willingness to sell the property for development.

Some residential development is projects over the next 10 years. The Amish are developing property and purchasing active farmland, mainly east of Route 1-A. This population is homesteading the area and oftentimes are bringing fallow or abandoned farmland back into production.

In the western portion of town, Duncan Drive and Perry Drive are projected to see some residential development due to the development of subdivisions. These town owned subdivisions are proving to be popular and town officials are looking for potential additional land. The Town does provide access in the form of roads and provides some regulations as to what could be developed.

Minor additional residential development is projected to occur on the Hersom Road and some of the smaller lots scattered throughout town.

Commercial and Industrial Properties

Easton has two major industries: McCain Foods and JM Huber which are located in a large industrial park along the Station Road, Conant Road, and Richardson Road. This area is served by the Maine Northern Railroad. The area has seen major road upgrades in order to accommodate heavy truck traffic leaving each of the plants. There is also a former large industrial waste pond. The industrial park is surrounded by agricultural land and open space which allows for land spreading of wastes from the food processing plant. Currently, there are no plans to expand either industrial use at the Park. Located directly across from the main entrance of the park is a small convenience store which offers food, fuel, and some everyday items.

According to UMPI, there are 45 lots in Easton that contain some form of industrial or commercial development. There are several smaller scale commercial establishments located throughout the community. Most are located in the village area and include a bank, grocery store, and small retail shops. Recently, a new medical center opened on the Center Road just west of the municipal office next to the bank. Seven new businesses have located in Easton

since 2012. These consist mainly of services related that support McCain and Huber but a couple of small retail establishment have been located in town. Town officials are looking at the creation of a redemption center.

Increasingly, there are some small retail type establishment being located outside of the village area and along Routes 1-A and Center Road as well as on Route 1-A near the Mars Hill Town line. In some cases, there are small farm stands and maple sugaring operations that have been developed, with most of these located off the Ladner Road. While these businesses are welcomed and have not created traffic or safety issues, town officials may want to be watchful that future development of this type does not impact traffic on major corridors.

Public Property

Nearly all of Easton's public property is located in the center of the community near the village area. Properties include the municipal building, fire station, recreation center and park, town garage, elementary school, high school, Post Office, various commercial buildings that the town leases. There is a US Customs and Border Protection port of entry located on the Ladner Road at the Maine/New Brunswick border. There is also a town owned subdivision located on the Station Road.

Land Use Regulations

Easton has adopted two land use ordinances that regulates various land use activities. The Shoreland Zoning Ordinance is a minimum standard ordinances that follow models developed by the State. The Floodplain Management Ordinance is also a minimum standard ordinance that follows models developed by the State. Easton employs a part-time Code Enforcement Officer and maintains an all volunteer Planning Board and Board of Appeals that administers these ordinances. Permits are issued by either the Code Enforcement Officer or the Planning Board but many activities do not require a permit as long as they are conducted in accordance with the land use standards found in each ordinance. The Town maintains copies of the ordinances and official maps at the town office.

Shoreland Zoning Ordinance

Easton's Shoreland Zoning Ordinance applies to all land areas within 250 feet, horizontal distance, of the normal high-water line of any great pond or river, or upland edge of a freshwater wetland, and all land areas within 75 feet, horizontal distance, of the normal high-water line of a stream. The ordinance was adopted in 2008 and follows the current state minimum guidelines. A copy of the Shoreland Zoning map is located at the end of this section.

Three (3) districts have been established in this ordinance including: Resource Protection, Limited Residential, and Stream Protection. The three districts are also officially identified on each of the communities' Official Shoreland Zoning map. The zones are described as follows:

- **Resource Protection:** Areas where development would jeopardize significant natural, scenic, recreational and historic resources, including but not limited to flood plains,

precipitous slopes, wildlife habitat, and other areas critical to the ecology of the region or state.

- **Limited Residential:** Areas suitable for residential and recreational development.
- **Stream Protection:** This district generally includes areas within 100 feet of streams.

Amendments to the State's Shoreland Zoning Guidelines will become available in 2015 and town officials should be watchful for those and amend their ordinance as needed.

Floodplain Hazard Area Regulations

Easton adopted a Floodplain Management Ordinance in 1995. Town officials should consider contacting the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry's (MDACF) Floodplain Management Program for technical assistance relating to floodplain management, ordinance updates, and mapping. MDACF provides assistance to municipalities which includes the development of ordinances and permit applications. These ordinances are designed to ensure that floodplain management measures are appropriately applied in flood hazard areas and in many cases, ordinances follow state minimum guidelines

Townwide Zoning and Regulation

There is no townwide zoning or land use ordinances in place. Town officials have attempted to develop and adopt ordinances in the past but they have not been approved by residents. A recent public opinion poll indicted a nearly even mix between adopting some minimal form of land use regulation and leaving regulations as is. As a result, town officials are considering the development of a smaller, more specific land use ordinance that regulates certain activities and creates three land use districts.

In this new ordinance (see Land Use Plan), officials are considering creating minimum lot sizes and setbacks, regulating mobile homes, automobile graveyards, junk yards, automobile recycling facilities, and kennels. Town officials are also considering the development of a minimal and inexpensive (free) building permit system that that helps them better understand the amount and type of development that is occurring within Easton.

Existing Land Use Analysis

Land Use Analysis

Easton has an attractive future. It is known for its rural quality of life and for recreation and leisure-time activities. The town's small village area with developed residential and commercial areas is surrounded by large outlying areas that have retained much of their rural character, despite the current residential development pressures and a large industrial area. The map of current land uses and the information about development pressures allows town officials to effectively maintain existing land uses and prepare and plan for future land uses by prioritizing those areas of the community which are best suited for residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, forestry, and public uses. Easton has also identified other areas as seen of the

development constraints map where little or no growth should be encouraged, such as areas unserved and unserviceable by sewer, prime forest lands, prime agricultural lands, wetlands, areas of endangered natural resources, aquifers, etc.

Only a very small portion of the land area in Easton has been developed. There is still ample land for additional growth. However, it is important to target future growth in specific areas able to accommodate development to preserve existing rural resources within Easton. There has been an increase in the past several years of residential development outside of the traditional village area, and this has put pressure on existing forest and agricultural land. This could eventually lead to added expenses for the town in terms of utilities, public facilities and services, and busing costs.

It appears that most of the future growth in Easton will occur in the rural farming areas and the town presently does not have the regulatory measures in place to help guide growth to appropriate areas. The Town's Shoreland Zoning Ordinance and Floodplain Ordinance provide some form of regulation for a relatively small percentage of the town's land areas. Outside of those zones, growth can occur anywhere. Town officials have taken steps to develop two subdivisions in areas where growth should occur, near the village area schools, and most of the commercial development.

Commercial development pressure has been minimal. For the most part commercial development has occurred along the Center Road, Station Road, and Route 1-A. The Richardson Road is also beginning to see some commercial development. The commercial development that has occurred is supportive of the region's and community's natural resources based industry.

Residents and town officials have an excellent opportunity to plan for the future through the preparation, adoption, and implementation of this Plan. Through preparation of the plan, residents must decide what they want their community to look like in the next 10 to 20 years. There is a strong potential for growth in the rural area with the general movement of people out of the urban areas, especially Presque Isle.

The comprehensive plan cannot provide detailed solutions for all of the community's economic development issues. It does, however, identify many of the basic resources, facts, and local concerns so that the town's leaders, along with the residents, can have better information for future decision-making on some of the town's most pressing land use matters and issues.