

Economic Development

Introduction

Known throughout the region as a great place to live and grow up, Londonderry has a high quality of life standard – or livability – that makes the community a wonderful place to reside. However, more often the town is being hailed not only for its residential attributes, but for its economic characteristics and potential. This new perception of Londonderry will certainly increase as a series of planned infrastructure projects are completed including construction of the airport access road and widening of I-93. Transportation and infrastructure improvements notwithstanding, businesses already want to locate in Londonderry. Commercial operations want to take advantage of the town’s two exits on I-93, proximity to the growing Manchester Airport (two-thirds of which is actually located within Londonderry), highly educated workforce, and existing business support resources such as the Foreign Trade Zone and eco-industrial park.

This plan and its economic development vision recognize the need for commercial growth. However, the vision statement also highlights a desire for growth that best suits the town’s natural and cultural characteristics and contributes positively to life in Londonderry. This section of the Master Plan provides strategies to help Londonderry reach these grand, far-reaching objectives.

“Potential Boomtown” – In studying the impacts of the I-93 widening project, many of the expert panelists charged with estimating future consequences felt that Londonderry’s location, available land, and good highways would yield substantial economic growth.

Source: I-93 Manchester to Salem Expert Panel Analysis, Final Report, December, 28 2001, NHDOT.

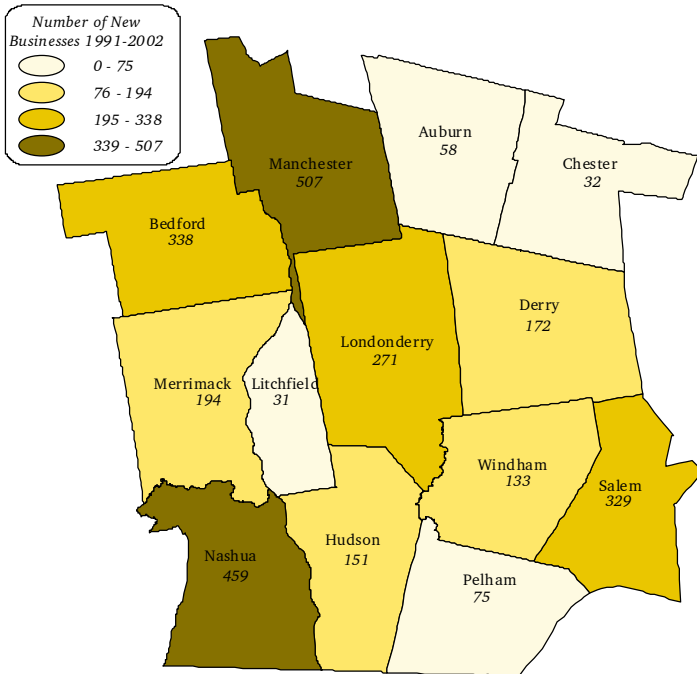
Key components of Londonderry’s Economic Development Vision

- Balanced growth
- Maintenance or reduction of residential tax rates
- Development does not result in adverse impacts to quality of life
- Businesses attracted here will be appropriate to Londonderry’s environment and character

Business Development

In terms of businesses and employment, Londonderry is one fastest growing communities within the region (5,700 new jobs and 300 new businesses since

1991). Furthermore, each year it seems that the town is playing a stronger role in the economic development potential of southern New Hampshire. For example, the town's 11,330 jobs in 2002 represented 10% of all the employment in Rockingham County - compared with only 7% in 1991.



Number of new businesses added within area towns from 1991 to 2002. Source: ES-2 Data.

Londonderry is certainly a community with vast economic potential. However, as the physical components come together (e.g., land and infrastructure) the community's vision for appropriate development must be articulated and acted upon. Growth and change should

be guided so that economic development not only leads to prosperity, but also contributes to the overall betterment of the community and the town's vision and goals.

Develop an economic growth strategy or "Action Plan"

Municipal governments across the region and nation are becoming more aggressive at targeting specific industries or business sectors to encourage local economic growth. Like many of these communities, Londonderry has already taken significant steps to ensure for future economic development - primarily through the provision of infrastructure and zoning. However, the town should formalize economic development objectives and strategies prior to completing major infrastructure improvements.

Working with the existing business groups, committees, and organizations, the town should develop an economic growth action plan to identify how Londonderry can best utilize its strengths to enhance economic opportunity.

The plan should consider the following:

- Establish measurable economic objectives (e.g., number of new jobs or businesses);
- Identify appropriate businesses to target in attraction efforts;
- Identify financing and funding opportunities such as grants, loans and other incentives the town can offer or promote;
- Review and update marketing strategies; and
- Identify ways to increase local residents' participation in the local economy (and thereby reduce the need for out-of-town commuting).

The plan should also identify ways to better utilize state resources such as the Department of Resource and Economic Development (DRED), Office of State Planning and Energy (OSP&E), Office of Business and Industrial Development (OBID) and Londonderry's state representatives.



Insight Technologies, manufacturer of night vision equipment and located in the North Londonderry area, recently expanded operations adding over 80,000 square feet and 75 employees

|| Promote Green Londonderry

One of Londonderry's key growth areas revolves around businesses that not

only use low-impact construction and site development techniques, but those whose operations are considered “environmentally friendly.”

Londonderry's Eco-Industrial Park, putting concept into practice

An excellent example of Green Londonderry already occurring in town is found at the Londonderry Eco-Industrial Park. This business park brings together commercial operations interested in working together to maximize the economic success of their companies, while minimizing impact on Londonderry's environment. As stated in the industrial park's vision statement, “Eco-Park occupants are committed to establishing high environmental standards in business practices, to cultivating positive relations with employees, and to working closely with the community.”

Specific opportunities to expand the “Green Londonderry” concept should be discussed in the economic development strategy recommended above.

Some options to consider include:

- Expand promotion of the town as a home to environmentally-friendly businesses, technologies, and practices.
- Expand participation in the town's Eco park (promote it to businesses and entrepreneurs outside of town) and consider utilizing similar concepts at

other locations in Londonderry.

- Establish a reward or recognition system for businesses utilizing the “green” concept.
- Develop an education and outreach component to help businesses throughout town to identify cost cutting/conservation opportunities and

apply for grant or low interest loan funds to establish a program to help cover environmental audits.

- Review and update the towns zoning regulations to encourage and/or require construction and development practices that have minimal impact on Londonderry's natural environment. (Note: for a longer discussion of low impact development see the environment section on page 4 – 19.)



|| *Generate a “business friendly” environment*

Primarily in response to community concern over fast-paced growth and projects considered out-of-scale with the town’s existing character, Londonderry has instituted relatively high standards for the review of proposed projects. For example, in addition to the growth management ordinance limiting the annual number of residential permits, Londonderry recently established and expanded a Performance Overlay District (POD) to regulate the site and architectural design of commercial structures along portions of Routes 102 and 28.

These and other town standards related to development reflect the community’s desire to see high quality commercial growth that fits in with the scale and character of Londonderry. However, during workshops and interviews conducted in support of this plan, it became clear that Londonderry’s project review procedures and development regulations had in part contributed to an unfavorable perception of the town by the development community. The town can begin to address this issue by taking a series of business enhancement steps aimed at improving the local business environment including: review of existing procedures, establishment of a process for streamlining projects that meet community goals, and development of an overall “business friendly” attitude. These concepts and recommendations are discussed below.

|| *Audit project review procedures*

The town should also undertake a comprehensive audit of the town’s project review procedures to identify excessive requirements and opportunities for improvement. For example, a specific problem has been identified during the final review of the conditional approval process. One useful task would be to analyze the review procedures conducted by local towns similar to Londonderry (in terms of population and growth rates) to identify alternative methods and techniques.

|| *Streamline site and structural design that meets town goals*

To speed up the review process and promote good design, the town should establish a streamlined review of development projects that are consistent with the values of the community. For example, site and structural design that provides for a pleasant public realm (including roads, pedestrian amenities, and infrastructure), protects natural areas, important environmental resources, and historic amenities (during and after construction), and minimizes pollution (noise, light, air, etc.), should be rewarded by an easier and shorter review process. Use of the streamline technique should coordinate with the above referenced action plan (e.g., after determining more specifically what types of businesses the town is trying to attract) as well as to promote the recommendations of this plan, particularly in the economic development sub-areas (described later in this section), and along the town's thoroughfares.

|| *Generate a "business friendly" attitude*

Londonderry should identify methods to improve the town's perception among the development community without sacrificing standards or community goals. To meet this objective, the town should continue to encourage an open dialogue with applicants, businesses, and the development community (e.g., attend business group meetings) and improve the readability, clarity, and overall ease of use of the town's zoning ordinance. Additional opportunities should be investigated and discussed in the recommended action plan.

|| *Support the local business community*

Londonderry is already home to almost 800 commercial operations. These businesses include those that provide the necessary services for daily life in town as well as the opportunity to work near one's home. Not unlike operations looking to re-locate or start-up in town, existing businesses often interact with the town government's development regulations – primarily when considering expansion or other physical alterations to their site. However, these companies will also look to the town for support regarding ongoing or daily needs.

The town should enhance and expand ongoing coordination efforts with local business groups and leaders to better understand their needs and improve town-wide awareness. This can be accomplished primarily through communication and outreach. For example, a town representative should regularly interact with the business community (e.g., Londonderry's Business to Business Association) for the purposes of identifying needs and concerns before they become major difficulties or grievances. Additional local business enhancement concepts to consider include:

- A "buy local" or Londonderry First policy to promote local businesses for town purchases.
- A review and analysis of technology infrastructure needs for 21st century businesses to ensure that Londonderry remains competitive in retaining and attracting businesses.
- Establishment of a promotional entity to publicize the benefits of doing business in Londonderry (could also be accomplished by existing groups)

Future Economic Development Sub-areas

For the most part, Londonderry's major economic growth opportunities are located in the northern portion of town. In general, these areas are considered desirable for economic development purposes due to their close proximity to major transportation resources and the availability of undeveloped, industrially-zoned land. The following section provides background, discusses general needs, and sets out a series of recommendations for three of the town's primary economic growth areas – the airport area, Jack's Bridge, and future Exit 4a. (Note: Commercial nodes and opportunities along Routes 102 and 28, two significant economic development generators, are discussed in detail in the Thoroughfares section of this chapter.)

Airport Area



Vision of the Airport Area, developed during the Londonderry Business Park Charrette. Source: Randy Knowles, Knowles Design.

The majority of the part of town described as the “Airport Area” is relatively undeveloped due to a lack of infrastructure and access. However, establishment of the airport connector road will open approximately 800 acres of industrially-zoned land to potential development and tie the area in with the regional transportation system and surrounding industrial areas. This area was the focus of a multi-day community workshop (Londonderry Business Park Charrette) held in the Spring of 2003, to plan for future growth, establish a vision, and discuss potential land use patterns and design standards. This area represents a major regional commercial and industrial opportunity, and according to the workshop’s summary report, could generate between 5,000 to 6,000 new jobs and 3,620,000 square feet of commercial space in the Town of Londonderry.¹

Encourage development to follow the vision established at the Londonderry Business Park Charrette

Participants at this community workshop developed a far-reaching vision of land uses and development scenarios for the airport area. The report, on file at the town’s planning department, describes a mixed-use area of office parks, manufacturing and warehousing operations, supporting retail, a convention center, and educational facilities connected by a limited access boulevard (Pettingill Road).

To achieve this goal, the current zoning regulations for this area should be reviewed and amended to allow for the variety of land uses, desired intensity/density, architectural design, landscaping, treatment and protection of

¹ Source: Denis Delay report generated in support of the Londonderry Business Park Charrette

the natural environment, and provision of public amenities as described in the workshop report. The current zoning for most of this area is Industrial-II and does not provide the flexibility or guidelines necessary for creating a high quality commerce environment discussed in the charrette summary report. In addition to the development of design guidelines that would “codify” the recommendations of the airport workshop, the town could also establish a process to streamline approval for projects that meet use, architectural, and site design standards.

For projects that do not meet certain requirements (e.g., a project that requires a special permit), the town could utilize the amenity zoning technique to mitigate adverse impacts. In this case, approval would be based on exchange for specific community enhancements (e.g., purchase of open space, contribution to a planning fund for nearby neighborhoods, etc.).

|| *Minimize environmental impact of development*

The airport area includes a variety of sensitive natural resources including a major aquifer, small streams and water resources, and of course – a significant amount of open space. As this area grows, Londonderry should ensure that development in the airport area minimizes impacts to the natural environment. For example, open spaces and natural habitats should be protected and connected, there should be a minimum use of impervious surfaces, and during construction special considerations should be made to limit soil and natural vegetation disturbance. (Note: more information regarding environmentally sensitive design and development is provided in the environment section of this plan and within the charrette summary report.).

|| *Establish the financing mechanism to provide necessary infrastructure*

The airport access road will enhance access to this area, thereby increasing its value and economic potential. Additional infrastructure improvements, such as

roads and sewer expansions, will be necessary to take full advantage of the area's economic potential.

To pay for these infrastructure improvements without burdening existing taxpayers, the town should consider establishment of a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district in the airport area as well as other financing options (e.g., bonds, grants, etc.).

Highlight: the airport area Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district

Improvements to the TIF district would be paid for by the town through the use of a bond (municipal loan). The bond would be paid off using an innovative financing mechanism known as a TIF.

Under the TIF concept, all existing tax revenue for the district will continue to go into the general fund. However, additional tax revenue generated subsequent to infrastructure improvements will be set aside to retire the bond. Essentially, increased value within the district will cover infrastructure costs and associated improvements.

Specific district enhancements to be covered by this financing would include items such as roadway construction, sidewalk and pathway development, purchase of land for parks and conservation, and other needed infrastructure improvements required for development of the area.

If the town wishes to pursue the TIF concept, as a first step the legislative body must adopt Chapter 162-K of New Hampshire law. Subsequently, the town must create the district development plan and bond the project to fund specific site improvements (Note: the bond is currently in the town's capital improvements for 2006).

Jack's Bridge

This portion of town, known as Jack's Bridge (north-west of route 28), is similar to the airport area in that it consists largely of undeveloped, industrially zoned land. The area's potential is based primarily on its proximity to I-93 and the Manchester Airport. Many recently established businesses here are involved in distribution and warehousing.

Encourage appropriate industrial development

Similar to the concepts and recommendations discussed for the airport area, the town should revisit the zoning regulations for this area to ensure for the proper mix of uses, design, and intensity of development. In particular, the town should take steps to encourage development that has a low environmental impact. (Note: more information on this topic is provided in the natural resources section.)

Exit 4a

Along with the widening of I-93, a new highway exit is scheduled to be constructed in Londonderry between Exits 4 and 5. Similar to the impact that the airport connector road will have in the northern part of Londonderry, this exit will provide regional access to generally undeveloped lands. Currently, the area is characterized by forest lands surrounded by residential pockets in close proximity to some active farmland (apple orchards).

Establish a vision for the Exit 4A area

The provision of highway infrastructure will likely increase the value of land in this area for commercial or industrial development. Nevertheless, the town should initiate a planning process to establish a vision and identify potential areas and resources for protection, as well as future uses and density. The town could utilize a process similar to the methods used for analysis of the airport area. While development of this exit is likely several years away, the town should establish the vision for this area and take the steps necessary to make sure that vision is carried out. The town might also consider protecting valuable open space resources in advance of construction of the new exit. Similar to other growth areas, Londonderry must work to balance its economic development needs along with sensitive and important cultural, agricultural, and historic resources. (Note: as the primary impacts of Exit 4a will likely be felt in the Town of Derry, Londonderry's planning efforts here should be coordinated with the their planning staff and officials through regular updates and meetings.)

