



# TOWN OF EXETER

## *Planning and Building Department*

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**Date:** April 8, 2021  
**To:** Planning Board  
**From:** Dave Sharples, Town Planner  
**Re:** Master Plan Action Agenda Analysis

I'm writing this memo to provide the board with an analysis of the Action Agenda in the Master Plan. The Exeter Master Plan was formally adopted in February of 2018. The Master Plan is a living document that sets forth the vision for the town and specific action items that move the town toward the vision. The Master Plan includes the Action Agenda that contains sixty-seven (67) specific action items. Action items are categorized under six headings that include Support, Prepare, Steward, Grow, Connect, and Communicate. Each category is listed below followed by a determination if the task is completed, being worked on, or is yet to be accomplished followed by some examples if it is completed or is underway. For the sake of brevity, I do not include the action item but the numbers below correspond to the action item in the Master Plan.

**SUPPORT:** Standing behind and helping the people who live, work and visit Exeter is essential to maintaining our quality of life. People of all ages and backgrounds should have access to basic goods and services, sound infrastructure, a safe place to live, and chances to gather with friends and family.

1. This item is being worked on. A senior survey was conducted in 2019 and a Senior Council was created. The council took a break during COVID but has plans to start up again soon. Members on the council are St. Vincent DePaul's, YMCA, Meals on Wheels, residents, Langdon Place, Riverwoods, Seacoast Mental Health, Exeter Police, Exeter Fire, Exeter Parks, and Recreation.
2. This item is being worked on. Started evaluating Recreational needs however it is not compiled into a 6-year plan yet.
3. This item is being worked on. The Recreation department has evaluated recreational needs as part of the 2019 Recreation Facility plan. The Conservation Commission (CC) and the natural Resource Planner (NRP) collaborate with Parks and Recreation to offer joint programming including Exploring Exeter hiking series in 2020 and the winter hiking series in 2021.
4. This item is being worked on. The town engaged Disability Access Consultants to develop an ADA evaluation and Transition Plan for the town. Town staff has started the public input component of the program by surveying the community.
5. This item is being worked on. The voters approved a warrant article in March 2021 for \$1 million to develop groundwater sources in the town.
6. This item has been completed. The Planning Board adopted new stormwater regulations that require treatment of runoff that prioritizes green infrastructure.

We are one of the few towns in New Hampshire that requires minimum pollutant removal efficiencies for stormwater infrastructure.

7. This item is being worked on. The NRP is again offering the annual spring rain barrel program in 2021 with outreach materials discussing stormwater runoff and each purchaser receives a water quality friendly lawn care magnet from the Healthy Lawns Clean Water effort. Magnets are provided at the Town Clerk window. We promote a pet waste clean-up program using the PREP EveryDrop pet waste pledge campaign, and the NRP regularly posts on Facebook about water quality. NRP is also presenting the student program she created for the Cooperative Middle on stormwater pollution, buffers and water quality sampling techniques at the Saving Special Places conference Friday. Exeter did not conduct VRAP sampling in 2020 due to Covid but NRP intends to reinstate the effort with volunteers this year. All of these items are included as compliance efforts for our MS4 and Nitrogen Control permits.
8. When the Town Manager returns, I will provide an update on the status of this item.
9. When the Town Manager returns, I will provide an update on the status of this item.
10. This item is being worked on. While the town had several meetings after adoption of the Master Plan where “wrap around” services were provided, that has all been put on hold due to the pandemic and the fact that we no longer meet in person.

**PREPARE:** Municipalities across the country are beginning to focus on the concept of ‘resiliency,’ which speaks to a community’s ability to recover from disasters or adapt to new stressors. Rising temperatures, cybersecurity, emergency response, and flooding are examples of increased challenges for which Exeter must prepare.

1a. This item is being worked on. The town engaged CPSM to conduct an analysis of the Fire and EMS operations and several recommendations are made in the report regarding staffing levels and facility needs.

1b. This item is being worked on. Town staff is working with various boards and committees (Facilities, Budget, Select Board) on how to address the needs of the Public Safety departments. The voters approved a warrant article in March 2021 for \$100,000 to work with a consultant. The intent is to issue a Request for Qualifications in the coming months and work with a consultant and engage the public to evaluate the various alternatives to come up with a preferred option.

2a. This item is being worked on. Town staff collaborated with UNH and the CC to present a virtual training event for board members and staff to expand understanding of the resources available on climate related impacts and recommendations. This event was well attended and offered suggestions for incorporating regional plans in project planning and analysis. Future steps could include expanding the audience for this information.

2b. This item is being worked on. The CC does consider sea level and groundwater rise projections in project review, and evaluates applications/conservation opportunities based on recommendations from the Coastal Conservation Plan update for Water Quality (among other resources), and considers salt marsh migration barriers in development review.

2c. This work has not begun. However, the CC and NRP did discuss the benefits of adopting regulations that require 2' freeboard above base flood elevation (several local communities have adopted this already) and have discussed the benefits for a stormwater utility.

3a. This item is being worked on. DPW obtained a grant from NHDES to prepare an Asset Management Program (AMP) for the town's stormwater system, which was completed in 2020. This included an asset inventory, condition assessment, prioritizing critical infrastructure, and identifying long-term funding needs. The AMP is a tool that DPW uses to develop projects for the 6-year CIP. DPW is also evaluating watersheds in town for opportunities to improve stormwater quality as part of both the EPA MS4 (2017) permit and the EPA Great Bay Total Nitrogen Permit (2021) which will replace the EPA Administrative Order on Consent (AOC) for the Wastewater Treatment Plants NPDES Discharge Permit.

3b. This item is being worked on at multiple levels. The Planning Board develops the CIP annually based upon input from Department Heads. In addition, the Select Board, Budget Committee and Facilities Committee are all working on prioritization of public infrastructure. Examples include the sewer siphon project, public safety complex, and the Public Works Garage. Also see the response to 3a above.

3c. This item is being worked on at multiple levels. DPW continues to incorporate "green infrastructure" in their town projects wherever feasible. For example, the DPW incorporated bike lanes or "Sharrows" in the Hampton Falls Road project and bike lanes and sidewalk in Kingston Road project. DPW upgraded the culvert over Norris Brook to minimize flooding, and the Town Planner is overseeing a grant funded sidewalk project that connects existing sidewalks that is currently under construction to provide a more walkable community. Also see the response to 3a above.

**STEWARD:** So much of Exeter's character is defined by the wealth of natural and cultural resources within its borders. Stewardship of these resources is critical to maintaining the Town's sense of history, health, and identity.

1a. This item has been completed. The CC's acquisition criteria does include development potential. The majority of recent acquisitions has occurred through the development process.

1b. This item has been completed. The CC does include these criteria in their conservation priorities

2. This item is being worked on. The CC has a list of priority parcels, has reached out to landowners and has annually worked through the budget process to add additional funds to the conservation fund.

3. Although discussions have taken place with the Town Manager, no decisions have been made or proposals brought forward.

4a. This item is being worked on. The town identified Winter Street Cemetery as an important resource and applied for and received a grant to perform some rehabilitation work on the grave sites and markers. The town also funded tree removal in the

cemetery and conducted an historical survey of the Park Street area through a Certified Local Government grant.

4b. This work has not begun.

4c. This work has not begun.

5. This work has not begun. However, the Town Planner did redesign the pocket park downtown and proposed an area for local artists to showcase their talents. This has not been brought forward for funding but is on the list for funding through the Park Improvement fund.

6a. This item is being worked on. The town rehabilitated the cupola, added new bathrooms, and conducted an ADA evaluation on the building to identify deficiencies.

6b. I am unaware of any work being done on this item. I will discuss with the Town Manager upon his return and update the board at that time.

6c. This item has been completed. All recommendation in Trail Plan have been implemented with the exception of a trail endowment which is determined unnecessary at this point. The CC budget includes funds for trail supplies and labor is generously provided through the trail volunteers.

7. This item is being worked on. The town is fortunate to have a very strong network of volunteers in the two town forests and are working to expand volunteer stewardship for other properties.

8. This item is being worked on. The town continues to promote invasive removal with a core volunteer group. In 2021 we are participating in the state-wide Garlic Mustard challenge. The NRP provided educational workshop to DPW water/sewer staff in invasive species ID, what steps they can take to avoid spreading seeds or plant parts during maintenance activities on cross country sewer and water lines, and what species to avoid mowing.

9. This item has been completed. Timber management has a 25-year implementation. We are still working on invasive plant management within harvest areas. Given the risk for invasive expansion the CC is not currently planning on an expansion of harvest in the near future.

**GROW:** In order to foster vitality on both the local and regional scales, Exeter will need to grow. Identifying the appropriate types of growth and the areas where growth should occur in this plan can lay the foundation for decades of sustainable economic success.

1. This item is being worked on. The Housing Advisory Committee (HAC) has worked diligently to address regional housing needs. The HAC organized and hosted a regional housing summit with surrounding communities and discussed the need for a comprehensive approach to providing a variety of housing options in the region.

2. This item is being worked on. Town planner has done a GIS analysis on all available land in Exeter. The final component of putting all the data together and determining the buildout will be a collaborative effort between the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) and the town as budget and time allows.

3a. This item is being worked on. The HAC is also following several housing bills in the State Legislature that would provide options for towns to develop zoning that encourages new types of housing developments (i.e. cottage communities, tiny homes, etc.). The HAC has not yet made any recommendations as they are considering the options and what, if any, would be a good fit for the community.

3b. This item is being worked on. The HAC developed a Multi-Family Story Board in collaboration with the RPC. The Story Board identifies a variety of multi-family structures in Exeter that shows that this type of housing is prevalent in our community and is part of the character of the town. The HAC has also started working with several local businesses on the lack of affordable housing in the seacoast area. The HAC met with several business owners (Riverwoods, Exeter Hospital, Las Olas, Sig Sauer, Osram, and Cambridge Trust Bank) last month to discuss this important issue.

3c. This item is being worked on. The Planning Board proposed and the voters approved a zoning amendment in 2020 (Mixed Use Neighborhood Development) that provides incentives to construct affordable housing and commercial space in the downtown and Lincoln Street while requiring high quality urban design that is harmonious with the character of our vibrant commercial centers. Town staff, the Master Plan Oversight Committee (MPOC), the Planning Board and other town committees/boards are constantly reviewing town ordinances to determine potential amendments to achieve this action item.

4a. This item has been completed by adoption of the Mixed-Use Neighborhood Development ordinance but the MPOC, Planning Board and HAC continue to seek opportunities for quality infill development.

4b. See response to 4a above.

5a. I am unaware of any work being done on this item. I will discuss with the Town Manager upon his return and update the board at that time.

5b. I am unaware of any work being done on this item. I will discuss with the Town Manager upon his return and update the board at that time.

6. This work has not begun.

7. This work has not begun outside a brief discussion at an MPOC meeting.

8. This work has been completed. The Lincoln Street public areas were reconstructed where crosswalks, wide sidewalks, benches, plantings, and innovative stormwater control measures were implemented.

9. This work has not begun.

10. This item is being worked on. Staff worked with the TIF advisory Board to revise the Epping Road TIF to fund a corridor study and improvements within the Epping Rd corridor that was approved by the voters in March 2020. We have completed the corridor study and are moving toward design of improvements between Cronin Rd and the new traffic light on Epping Rd which was also part of the TIF.

11. See response to Steward # 5. In addition to that response, the town funded a downtown improvement program where over 20 benches, a table, and bike racks were installed throughout the downtown area.

12. This item is being worked on. The Economic Development Director is constantly looking for opportunity to redevelop underutilized or under-developed parcels. Town staff continues to meet and identify these parcels.

13. This item is being worked on. The TIF has seen 3 iterations and infrastructure improvements have been made such as the construction of Ray Farmstead Road, extension of public water and sewer on Epping Rd, a new traffic signal at Continental Dr and Epping Rd, and a corridor study of Epping Rd. The Economic Development Director worked with several land owners that applied and received tax relief to renovate downtown structures for residential and commercial use (Sea Dog, Ioka theatre, etc.)

**CONNECT:** A big part of unlocking Exeter's potential is strengthening the connections between residents, business owners, institutions, and special places. The ability of residents and visitors to access important areas of Exeter and participate in different aspects of community life, including in public affairs, will play an important role in local quality of life and regional economic presence.

1a. This work has not begun. However, the study has been in the CIP for the past several years but hasn't made it to the finish line. In addition, the Select Board will be discussing this at an upcoming meeting.

1b. See response to 1a above.

2a. This work has not begun. However, this plan has been in the CIP for several years but has not received funding or put before the voters.

2b. To be worked on following the completion of 2a.

2c. This work has not begun. However, the Planning Board has been very cognizant of providing bike and pedestrian facilities for new development and has incorporated these features into development as part of the approval.

3. This work has not begun. However, the item is listed in the CIP for funding in 2022.

4. This item is being worked on. There was a push to incorporate a Riverwalk into the Library project to connect to the Great Bridge and String Bridge sidewalks but it was removed from the budget. However, the site was designed to allow it to be constructed at a later date. Town staff has also had conversations with property owners on the westerly side of the river about potential public access along the river.

5. This item is being worked on. An intersection improvement fund was established to examine intersections and this analysis is under way. Safety measures were also incorporated into the grant funded sidewalk project on Epping Rd that will make improvements to the Brentwood Rd/Columbus Ave/Epping Rd intersection.

6a. This item is being worked on. Through the Epping Rd TIF, the town has completed a corridor study of Epping Rd and these findings will be presented at the 4/12/21 Select Board meeting. The study recommends any future improvements accommodate all modes of transportation.

6b. This work has not begun.

7. This work has not begun.

8. This item is being worked on. There was considerable discussion on this before the pandemic. Staff and local residents examined other stations and discussed options for the Exeter Station. However, the pandemic significantly impacted ridership and these discussions have been put on hold for the time being. I anticipate these discussions starting up again as train ridership rebounds.

**COMMUNICATE:** Maintaining a high quality of life in Exeter will continue to become more complex as time goes on. Effectively sharing information among municipal departments, boards, and committees; different local government agencies; the business community; and the general public, will require continued commitment, innovative procedures, and investments in technology.

1. This item has been completed. The Select Board created the Communications Advisory Committee as a direct result of this action item. The Committee continues to meet and formulate and implement strategies for communications across a variety of platforms such as social media and the town website.
2. This item has been completed and is ongoing. The Town manager holds monthly department head meetings where staff updates other departments on their initiatives. Due to this, staff collaboration across departments has improved over the last several years.
3. This item is being worked on. The Economic Development Director engages in collaborative efforts with regional partners to attract businesses and developers on a daily basis. Collaborators include area economic development directors, regional chambers of commerce, SBDC, REDC and BEA.
4. This item is being worked on. This task is broad but staff and our citizen volunteers continue to organize a variety of forums as described in several items above. Due to the pandemic, food and child care has not been needed.
5. This item is being worked on. This is consistent with the charge of the Communications Advisory Committee described above.
6. This item has been completed and is ongoing. Every RFQ or RFP that has been issued lately always includes a public engagement process. The most recent one is for the Public Safety Complex analysis RFQ and this includes this language. Another example is the ADA study that has a strong public outreach component.

## **SUMMARY**

As you can see from above, the Master Plan has not collected dust on a shelf. Out of the sixty-seven (67) specific action items, forty-six (46) of them are either completed or being worked on. Twenty-one (21) items have not started yet that I am aware of. For a document that is only three years old, significant progress has been made. I believe this is a testament to the dedication of Exeter's engaged residents, business owners, town staff, and elected and appointed officials.