

## Existing Land Use

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***Vision: Winthrop will strive to sustainably provide a healthy mix of choices for living, learning, working and playing in a community that embraces people fully being their genuine selves. Winthrop will pursue all this with an eye toward preserving a unique sense of place created by the town's rural flavor, its inviting village and its elemental natural beauty.***

Existing land use patterns and future land use considerations are key elements in a community's Comprehensive Plan. In fact, every chapter of the Comprehensive Plan can be tied into both the Existing and Future Land Use sections. As such, relating the community's Vision Statement into the Existing Land Use chapter and Future Land Use Plan is a fundamental practice in ensuring alignment throughout the plan.

A vision is only as good as a community's commitment to work toward it. This work is broken down into a series of strategies, ranging from recommendations for regulatory changes to ideas for better interlocal and public-private collaboration. In addition to ideas, there must be a plan for priorities and implementation to support a successful vision.

### **Introduction:**

As a community grows, its character is defined by the use of its land area. The community's self-image as a small city, farm town, or a suburb is molded by the actions of its residents in the development of their various enterprises.

Most people live in a certain area because they appreciate the character of the community. However, a community's character can shift over time. The shift needs to be managed to ensure it remains desirable. This often means walking a fine line between enacting regulations and allowing personal preferences.

Trends that will not be welcomed, such as loss of open space, loss of productive farmland, increasing cost of public services, or lack of vitality in the village center, can be addressed through proper management of growth.

The Existing Land Use Chapter serves to review the land use patterns and development in Winthrop. Like many rural municipalities in Central Maine, Winthrop can be characterized as a rural, residential community within commuting distance to larger, regional hubs, including Bath/Brunswick, Lewiston/Auburn, and Augusta. Winthrop remains committed to providing residents with high-quality housing at affordable prices, ensuring the elderly can age in place, offering appropriate economic development opportunities, protecting natural resources, and maintaining the community character of the town, consistent with the vision statement.

### **Settlement Patterns:**

The Town of Winthrop comprises about 24,256 acres, of which 19,980.8 acres is land, with 11 lakes constituting approximately 4,276 acres of water. Winthrop is at the heart of the Winthrop Lakes Region, which is why it was originally known as Pond Town. The town's landscape is mostly open farmland, forest, and scenic views of lakes and hills, which account for the rural character.

Like many towns in Maine, Winthrop is the culmination of historical growth patterns based on settlement over the course of more than 250 years. Initial settlement, of course, came about in the form of homesteaders, intent on converting land from forest to farmland to sustain their families. Prosperous settlements eventually led to the need for a mercantile center. The historic Winthrop Village was the logical candidate, being the passage between Maranacook and Annabessacook lakes, and a source of water-generated power at the Mill Stream.

Winthrop Village emerged as the economic center of the town at the end of the 19th Century, with the much smaller villages of Winthrop Center and East Winthrop fading. Winthrop Village (currently, the village or downtown) remains the most densely settled square mile in town, but it is not the development powerhouse it was in the past. Residential development has shifted to lakefronts and rural areas, a result of the abundant supply of land and the ease of access brought on by improved transportation and roads.

In more recent years, the location for new commercial development is along U.S. Route 202 and in the business park just off Route 202. This location provides ease of access and high visibility, plus undeveloped land for growth. Modern commercial development tends to require more land, which is not available in quantity inside the village.

### **Characteristics of Winthrop's Land:**

Winthrop has an abundance of natural resources, outlined further in the Natural Resources chapter. When considering land-use planning, it is imperative to plan with consideration of these fragile, natural resources, if not just for their inherent values, then also for Winthrop's property values. The University of Maine and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) launched numerous studies on the relationship between property values and degraded water quality, all with the same results: impaired water quality results in reduced property values.

The primary threat to Winthrop's natural resources is phosphorous from runoff due to development, which can be abated through proper precautions such as proactive stormwater management and Low Impact Development design requirements (*LID Guidance Manual for Maine Communities, Approaches for Implementation of Low Impact Development Practices at the Local Level*, 2007). LID describes an approach to land planning and engineering design that manages stormwater runoff to mimic natural processes, resulting in the infiltration, evapotranspiration, or use of stormwater to protect water quality and associated aquatic habitats.

Further, the Cobbossee Watershed District office is in Winthrop and, as a member of the District, Winthrop is provided with free site plan review assistance. Other layers of protection for natural resources include the town's Zoning Ordinance, which includes the mandatory Shoreland Zoning Ordinance, a Resource Protection Zone, a Stream Protection Zone, and a Public Water Supply Zone; the Subdivision Ordinance; the Code Enforcement Officer; and the Planning Board.

Upper Narrows Pond is the source of Winthrop's public water supply and, as such, should be preserved and protected. Some of the other lakes and ponds throughout town also serve as private household water supplies.

### **Residential Land Uses:**

Residential land uses are most concentrated in the village due to smaller lot sizes and access to public water and sewer, which negates the need for water wells and septic systems. While the Village District remains the most densely settled area in town, there is currently little land left that can be developed due to zoning restrictions. Residential development has shifted to lakefronts, major travel corridors, and more rural areas.

Winthrop implemented the online permitting system, iWorQ System, in summer 2022 to maintain records and track permits issued. Prior to this system, there was no efficient method for tracking permits and development, including conversion of seasonal housing into year-round housing. The online permitting system will enable and encourage tracking of development by type (for example, residential versus commercial), location, and type of permits issued. This system will allow the town to look more closely at the locations where most permits are issued and where new development takes place. This further allows the town to evaluate how effective its current regulations are at encouraging growth in the designated growth areas and away from the rural areas.

Housing construction is primarily a function of economic factors. The supply of land in the rural district is the chief influence on siting new homes. Few homes can be built in the Village District because of the lack of available land. The availability of public services – roads, sewer, and water – are also a factor. Most of the vacant land in the General Residential District has not been built upon because of a lack of road frontage and/or sewer service. The town has not constructed any new roads in decades, and current policies prohibit the Winthrop Utilities District from extending sewer availability at its own expense. These factors will continue to discourage construction in those districts.

For the construction of multifamily and high-density housing, public sewer service is essential for viability and affordability. The presence of public water and sewer connections greatly enhances the opportunities for high-density housing development. Without public sewer connections, a development must occupy land equivalent to the minimum lot size for each individual unit – generally 40,000 square feet in the General Residential District. On public sewer, only 5,000 square feet per additional dwelling unit is required beyond the first unit. Winthrop has several assorted styles of multi-family units in the Village and General Residential Districts, with the potential to add more of these

types of housing in underdeveloped properties such as the Commerce Center (also known as the mill or Carleton Woolen Mill) and other vacant buildings throughout town.

### **Subdivision Developments:**

New subdivisions typically reflect patterns of development throughout town and beyond. Subdivisions are regulated in Winthrop by both the Zoning and the Subdivision Ordinances. Winthrop's current Subdivision Ordinance was adopted in 1990 and updated once in 1995, thus in need of updating to reflect current standards.

There have been minimal subdivisions created recently. One of the most recent, Mountain View Subdivision, produced a total of 10 lots. With the increase in price of construction, infrastructure, and land, building new subdivisions has become too expensive for most developers. Mountainview, developed roughly eight years ago, and Cathedral Acres, one year ago (with only one lot available for sale), have not yet had electric service run to them and thus have not been built upon. Demand for this area is great, so it is expected these areas will be developed once they are connected to electric service. For a number of reasons, particularly building costs and related expenses, there remains a few subdivision lots available for building from previously created subdivisions. The roadblock of rising expense to develop exceeds what developers are willing to invest.

Adding to the cost of construction, there are not many parcels of land left under current lot size restrictions that could take advantage of the town's 21 miles of public water and sewer. If Winthrop could expand public utilities to areas of undeveloped land, the price for future development would be less prohibitive.

The analysis and statistics on the number of subdivisions in Winthrop is based on the state definition of "subdivision." Maine defines subdivision as:

*The division of a tract or parcel of land into three or more lots within any five-year period that begins on or after September 23, 1971. This definition applies whether the division is accomplished by sale, lease, development, buildings or otherwise. The term "subdivision" includes the division of a new structure or structures on a tract or parcel of land into three or more dwelling units within a five-year period, the construction or replacement of three or more dwelling units on a single tract or parcel of land and the division of an existing structure or structures previously used for commercial or industrial use into three or more dwelling units within a five-year period.*

For comparison, the state does not consider the following to be subdivisions:

1. Gifts to [of land] relatives,
2. Transfer to governmental entity,
3. Transfer to conservation organizations,
4. Transfer of lots for forest management, agricultural management, or conservation of natural resources,
5. Unauthorized subdivision lots in existence for at least 20 years.

The specific details relating to what constitutes subdivision and what does not are outside the scope of this plan. For a deeper understanding, review the enabling statutes (MRS Title 30-A §4401 et seq. Municipal Subdivision Law, and MRS Title 12, §682-B. Exemptions from Subdivision Definition).

### **Industrial and Commercial Development:**

Winthrop developed an industrial center early on, surrounded by farms and forestland. Over the years, with the advent of the automobile and railroad, Winthrop could not compete with larger, urban areas and the town returned to primarily a farming community. Today, Winthrop serves as a regional hub for smaller communities, and acts as a bedroom community for those who commute to other towns for employment.

Traditionally, most commercial development in Winthrop has occurred along the Route 202 corridor. There are many small home businesses and single-person operations in Winthrop. Winthrop's Zoning Ordinance allows for home occupations in all districts and requires approval only from the Code Enforcement Officer. Encouraging small businesses in town is in keeping with the community's vision as it promotes character, drives the economy, and increases available services in town.

Winthrop developed a business park on Winada Drive that originally had nine lots specifically designed for business growth. Three lots remain in this park. Due to significant wetlands on these three parcels, a developer is considering combining the three and developing them as a solar farm. The business park is in keeping with the community's vision, as it provides an appropriate location for commercial and industrial businesses where there will not be incompatibility issues with residential neighborhoods and away from natural resources. Ongoing business growth is important for Winthrop's future.

In addition to traditional commercial businesses, there are several recreation-based businesses. Augusta West Campground brings people to the area for camping opportunities. Camp Metchuwana, which is affiliated with the Methodist Church, runs overnight and day programs on the shores of Lower Narrows Pond. Winthrop has the only YMCA in the state that has no buildings but runs many programs throughout the town. There is also a state YMCA camp on Cobbossee Lake. These facilities provide a venue for private functions when the camp is not in session. These recreation-based businesses fulfill the community's need for activities and encourage community involvement.

There are several unoccupied, vacant, and/or underutilized buildings throughout town, both in the downtown area and in the rural areas. Most of these buildings previously housed commercial or industrial businesses and have potential to do so again.

Continued growth of commercial and industrial development along the Route 202 corridor is anticipated since this area is served by public water and sewer connections and is easily accessible. (See XXX Map in Appendix)

## **The Institutional and Service Sector:**

A range of businesses in Winthrop provide critical services to people throughout the town and the region. Many of Winthrop's public facilities and services are in the village area. The Town Office, the Charles M. Bailey Public Library, Winthrop schools, the State salt shed, the town garage, the Winthrop Utilities District, and the volunteer fire and rescue department are near the town center.

Winthrop's largest employers include Progressive Distributors on Route 202, Dave's Appliance on Central Street in the downtown areas, Hannaford Supermarket on Main Street, and Alternative Manufacturing, Inc. (AMI) partially in the Village District and partially in the Shoreland District (located prior to adoption of any Shoreland Zoning Ordinances). Progressive Distributors employs between 250 to 499 employees at any given time and supplies the local grocery store chains. AMI employs approximately 100 individuals and manufactures electronic parts. Dave's Appliance sells and services appliances as well as heat pumps and has roughly 55 employees. Hannaford Supermarket employs roughly 150 people.

Winthrop Utilities District supplies public water and sewer connections, extending through the Village, the General Commercial, and the Industrial Districts. According to staff at the Winthrop Utilities District, the system has the capacity to accommodate an expansion.

## **Retail Development Patterns:**

As with many other rural towns in the region, Winthrop initially experienced a gradual but steady decline in its retail sector since the interstate was built. Retail chains, fast-food establishments, and other highway-oriented businesses have chosen to locate in areas with ease of access on and off the highway. This competition has affected Winthrop with the closing of some retail operations. Recently, there has been a revival of businesses in the downtown area that has brought new life to the town.

While some national and regional chains have a presence in Winthrop, the town also still has unique character and offers many small businesses and retail options with specific appeal of buying locally. The retail businesses in Winthrop seem to be ever-growing and changing. Changes include moving to accommodate growth and new ownership of existing businesses.

The town is in the unique position of offering goods and services to neighboring, more rural towns that do not have such amenities. Winthrop also draws many visitors both passing through and coming for the numerous lakes and ponds in town. Winthrop's village center is the hub of the community, as well as the critical contributor to the retail sector.

The number of retail businesses in Winthrop is increasing. The new businesses coming into or starting up in Winthrop far surpass businesses leaving. Another added benefit of the growing retail sector is the redevelopment of buildings. For example, Dunkin Donuts

renovated a building that previously housed a bank. The old bank drive-up window was repurposed for a drive-through.

These business opportunities give Winthrop the chance to concisely form the future character and direction of the downtown area while developing even more attractive entrances. The growing retail sector is an opportunity for the town to reconfigure its denser village area while taking advantage of the link between needed goods and services, and the number of consumers within Winthrop's market area, especially those coming to visit.

### **Land Use Trends:**

New development in Winthrop has not been strong in the last several years whether in the residential, retail, or commercial sectors. The recent recession has slowed both residential and commercial development in Winthrop and surrounding areas. However, this downturn in the economy will not last, and Winthrop's Future Land Use Plan will prepare the town for an economic rebound with a strong plan to support the local economy.

Currently, most of the newer development in Winthrop has been spread throughout town, on a lot-by-lot basis. Predominantly, new development has been residential in the past several years. Minimal new subdivisions or new commercial developments have been created.

New residential development is more challenging to direct into growth areas than commercial development because there are fewer regulatory and nonregulatory incentives. For example, most new commercial development would opt for a location served by public water and sewer connections (a nonregulatory incentive); however, this is rarely a consideration for residential development. Additionally, most people moving to Winthrop appreciate the town's rural atmosphere, resulting in housing construction in rural areas.

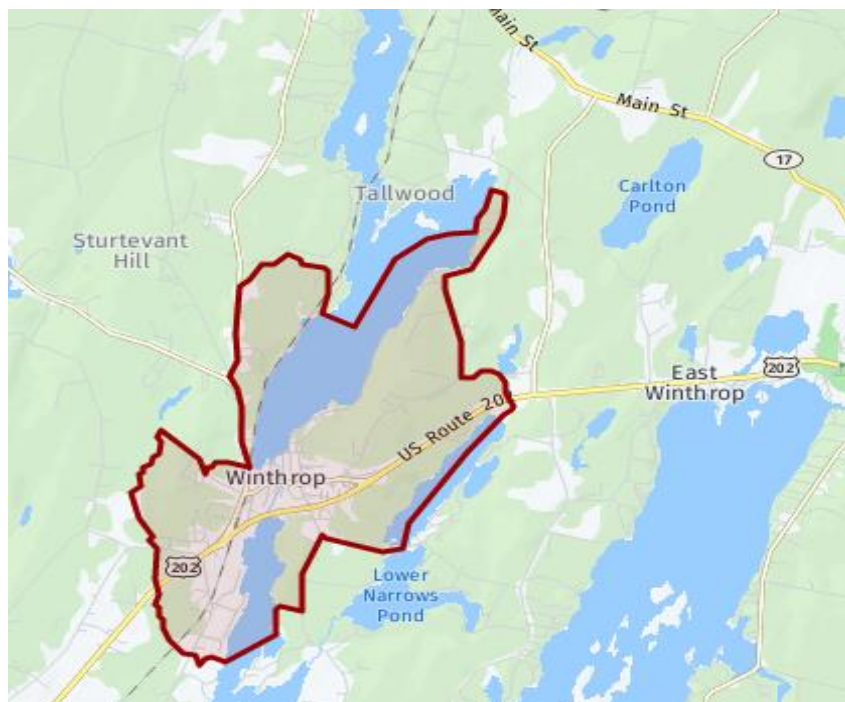
As previously stated, Winthrop did not have an efficient method for tracking recent development permitting until the summer of 2022. This was an issue also noted in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan. Until the online permitting system was initiated, there was minimal documentation of past permits available for analysis. For this reason, it is not possible to evaluate the success of directing development to the designated growth areas or for consistency with the community's vision. More importantly, the town has recognized the need to address this issue and implemented an online permitting system.

## Census Designated Place:

Winthrop has the notable feature of having a Census Designated Place or CDP. A CDP is a concentration of population defined by the United States Census Bureau for statistical purposes only. A CDP is not the same as a town; it is a location delineated by the Census Bureau based on population density in that area.

Winthrop's Census Designated Place had a population of 2,666 as of the 2020 Census. The boundaries of the CDP are comprised of the primary, original settlement in Winthrop and consists of approximately 7.2 square miles, of which 5.6 square miles are land, with the rest being water. Winthrop is classified as U1 Census Class Code, which means it is a Census Designated Place with an official federally recognized name. In the figure below, outlined and shaded in red is the official, federally recognized Census Designated Place in Winthrop. The CDP is only the more densely populated and developed portion of town. Winthrop's entire town population, per the 2020 census is 6,121; approximately 43.6 percent of the population in Winthrop live within the CDP. Winthrop's CDP ranks 75th for population density when compared to the 153 other CDPs throughout the State of Maine.

**FIGURE 1: WINTHROP'S CENSUS DESIGNATED PLACE BOUNDARY**



*Source: 2020 Census*



## Land Use Regulation:

The Town of Winthrop employs a full-time, fully certified Code Enforcement Officer (CEO) to work with and advise the Planning Board. The Town's Planning Board consists of seven members and two alternates, who are involved and care about what happens in their community.

The Town has recently added two positions to help support planning and enforcement activities. These positions are Town Planner and Executive Assistant, which will be shared between the CEO and the Town Manager. The Town Planner will deliver technical assistance to the Planning Board and other municipal officials, on an array of land use, development, environmental and infrastructure topics. Responsibilities include researching, drafting, reviewing and revising local plans, regulations, ordinances and related materials, and developing funding proposals and preparing grant applications for development initiatives. Additionally, the Executive Assistant to the Town Manager and Code Enforcement Officer will provide support to the CEO, allowing that person to spend more time in the field engaged in enforcement activities.

Winthrop first adopted its Zoning Ordinance in 1972; it has been amended through 2019. The Subdivision Ordinance was adopted in 1990 and amended in 1995. The Subdivision Ordinance requires Planning Board review for creation of new lots. It does not give the size or location of lots, but standards offer a level of regulation regarding environmental impacts of development. The Subdivision Ordinance lacks many contemporary standards that would more effectively ensure efficient development while protecting public values and natural resources. The town will soon begin updating the Subdivision Ordinance, a task the town manager will assign to the new Planner.

Overall, Winthrop's Zoning Ordinance is complete, though it could use refreshing and updating. The Zoning Ordinance includes the Shoreland Zoning standards and seeks to preserve and protect natural resources. The Ordinance does not specify the designated growth areas, though it is written so that growth is directed away from certain areas. The town should update the Zoning Ordinance to be clearer and to include the latest standards and legislation.

Winthrop's Zoning Ordinance includes:

- Article 1- General
- Article 2- Nonconforming Uses, Buildings, and Lots
- Article 3- Zoning Districts
- Article 4- Performance Standards
- Article 5- Administration
- Article 6- Definitions

Under the current Zoning Ordinance, the town is divided into 10 zoning districts (see Existing Zoning Map in Appendix). Four of the zoning districts are related to Shoreland Zoning or wetland protection (provisions incorporated into the general Zoning Ordinance)

or the public water supply, so do not directly influence development patterns. The other six are described below.

*General Residential District:* This encompasses the area surrounding the Village District and includes several existing neighborhoods. Some portions of this district are extensively built up, while others are only built-up along the roadway with undeveloped land in back lots. All forms of housing are generally permitted in this district with only multifamily housing requiring Planning Board approval. This district includes areas that provide locations suited to mixed residential and commercial development on a limited scale, compatible with existing development and close to town services and utilities. Low- and medium-impact commercial development is subject to Planning Board review; manufacturing is not permitted, nor is re-establishment of industrial uses. In areas with access to public sewers, the minimum lot size is 30,000 square feet, while areas without access to public sewers have a minimum lot size requirement of 40,000 square feet. The road frontage requirement throughout the district is 100 feet.

*Limited Commercial District:* This includes areas of mixed, residential, and low- and medium-impact commercial uses\*. Two sections of this district are located along Route 202, east of the town village. A third section is along 202, west of the town center, bordering the General Commercial zone in that area. This district is devoted to a mix of residential and low-intensity business and commercial uses. Single- and two-family houses are permitted, while multi-family homes require Planning Board review, as do low- and medium-impact commercial uses. High-impact commercial uses are not permitted, nor is manufacturing. The minimum lot size is 40,000 square feet, with a requirement of 150 feet of road frontage.

*General Commercial District:* This establishes areas intended for high-impact commercial uses\*, which may not be compatible with other land uses, such as residential or recreational activities. This district provides an area suited to such development due to site conditions such as soil, slopes, proximity to highway access, and public water and sewer services. The General Commercial District is divided into two sections: along Route 202 south from ME Route 133 to the Monmouth town line and a second exists near the intersection of Main Street and Route 202 on both sides of the road. Low-, medium-, and high-impact commercial and industrial land uses are permitted, via Planning Board review and approval. New housing of any type is subject to Planning Board review and approval as well, as these land uses are generally discouraged in this district. The minimum lot size required is 40,000 square feet with a road frontage of 100 feet. Also, no more than 40 percent of the lot is permitted to be developed with impervious surface without a Conditional Use Permit from the Planning Board, in consideration of the district's proximity to the lakes.

*Industrial District:* This establishes an area in Winthrop intended for intensive commercial\* or industrial enterprises, which may not be compatible with other land uses, such as residential, recreational, or agricultural activities. It is located to provide an area suited to development due to site conditions such as soil, slopes, proximity to highway and railway access and public water and sewer services. The Industrial District consists of strips of

land extending from the edge of the Commercial District for an additional 500 feet on either side of Route 202 between Hoyt Brook and the Monmouth town line. The district is meant to encompass the Winthrop Business Park. It has the same dimensional requirements as the General Commercial District, and permits the same uses, with a little broader range of industrial uses allowed.

*Village District:* This includes the most highly developed areas in town. Development is denser than in other areas and covers a broad mix of land uses, including commercial, recreational, public, and residential. This district seeks to maintain the existing village character and land use mix. This district is generally located between Route 133 and Highland Avenue, from Route 202 to the southern tip of Maranacook. Because of the density of development, there is little vacant land available; however, there are underutilized buildings and sites. Generally, permitted uses include single- and multi-family residences, small businesses, and light industry. High-impact commercial uses\*, manufacturing, and re-establishment of industrial uses are subject to Planning Board review. Based on the current development pattern and the availability of public sewers and water, the minimum lot size in the Village district is the smallest in Winthrop, at 3,500 square feet.

*Rural District:* This includes land presently characterized by low-density development, forests, abandoned fields, and farms. This District seeks to protect the existing open space, forestry, agricultural and residential uses, and to restrict commercial activities. The Rural District includes all land not otherwise zoned and encompasses roughly 60 percent of Winthrop's land area. Dimensional standards are 80,000-square-foot minimum lot sizes with 150 feet of road frontage.

These zoning designations can be seen in a simplified table below.

\*Definitions for high-, medium-, and low-impact commercial uses can be found in Article VI - Definitions of Winthrop's Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance can be accessed on the town's website at [www.winthropmaine.org](http://www.winthropmaine.org).

**TABLE 1: CURRENT ZONING DISTRICTS**

Growth Areas	Village District	Most densely developed area. Includes a broad mix of land uses, including commercial, recreational, public, and residential. Seeks to preserve character of town.	Minimum Lot Size: 3,500 SF	
	General Residential District	Supports higher density residential, and limited public and commercial development near town services and utilities.	Min. Lot Size with Sewer: 30,000 SF	Min. Lot Size without Sewer: 40,000 SF
	General Commercial District	Designated for high-impact commercial uses not compatible with residential or recreational land uses.	Minimum Lot Size with or without Sewer: 40,000 SF	
	Limited Commercial District	Includes areas for mixed-use residential and low-/medium-impact commercial uses.	Minimum Lot Size with or without Sewer: 40,000 SF	
Rural Areas	Rural District	Low-density development, forests, fields, and agricultural uses. Seeks to protect existing open space and agricultural land uses. Restricts commercial activity.	Minimum Lot Size with or without Sewer: 80,000 SF	
Shoreland Districts	Shoreland District	Allows low-intensity residential and recreational development within Shoreland Zone.	Min. Lot Size with Sewer: 40,000 SF	Min. Lot Size without Sewer: 80,000 SF
	Public Water Supply District	Surrounds ponds which serve as water supplies to Augusta and Winthrop to provide additional protection.	Min. Lot Size with Sewer: 60,000 SF	Min. Lot Size without Sewer: 80,000 SF
	Resource Protection	Preserve water quality, productive fish and wildlife habitat, and scenic and natural values.	Min. Lot Size with Sewer: 60,000 SF	Min. Lot Size without Sewer: 80,000 SF
	Stream Protection		Min. Lot Size with Sewer: 40,000 SF	Min. Lot Size without Sewer: 80,000 SF
Industrial	Industrial District	Designated and limited to intensive commercial or industrial land uses.	Minimum Lot Size with or without Sewer: 40,000 SF	

Source: Winthrop's Zoning Ordinance, 2019

Cluster residential development is another regulatory tool included in the Zoning Ordinance with the purpose of encouraging development in designated growth areas. Winthrop's Zoning Ordinance defines cluster development as follows:

*A development controlled by a single developer on any size parcel of land which contemplates an imaginative, more compact grouping of residential housing units. Cluster developments treat the developed area as an entirety to promote flexibility of design, architectural diversity, the efficient use of land, a reduction in the size of road and utility systems, the creation of common open space, and the retention of the natural characteristics of the land.*

This provision allows clustered residential development in any zoning district where single-family dwellings are allowed. Clustered residential development mandates connection to municipal sewer services due to the significant decrease in required minimum lot size.

Further, the Zoning Ordinance is relatively permissive in allowing two-family and multifamily homes; both types are allowed in all zoning districts with approval from either the Code Enforcement Officer or the Planning Board.

Growth Areas Explained: The Maine Growth Management Act requires towns to prepare Comprehensive Plans to designate areas preferred for new development, called "growth areas," and areas where new development is not encouraged, termed "rural areas." This approach directs new development to parts of town with amenities and capacity for growth and away from areas with environmental or other constraints. The purpose of the Growth Management Act is to prevent sprawl. Sprawl in rural areas increases the town's expense in road maintenance and other municipal services. It also has a negative environmental impact on natural resources, such as habitat, biodiversity, water quality, and loss of farmland.

### **Non-Regulatory Measures:**

In addition to a Zoning Ordinance with a full suite of regulatory measures aimed at encouraging and promoting development in designated growth areas, Winthrop could introduce non-regulatory means to encourage development in growth areas, as well. The most obvious way to promote a growth area and encourage appropriate development is expansion of sewer and water availability. This would lower development costs and result in future development in desired locations.

There are other, non-regulatory options the town could consider, too. One option is to revitalize Winthrop's downtown by improving the sidewalks and crosswalks. Encouraging walkability or creating bike lanes, where feasible, is a viable way to promote the village area. Creating or improving pocket parks or outdoor places for residents to gather not only revitalizes the downtown and encourages growth, but also creates a sense of community.

The town collaborates with several organizations and municipal committees in preventing sprawl, protecting natural resources, and directing development away from Winthrop's rural areas. Non-regulatory measures to direct growth away from rural areas also preserve open space, farmland, and forestland. These non-regulatory measures are in addition to the regulatory protections of the Zoning Ordinance.

### **Agriculture and Open Space:**

As farming and forestry were the historical economic cornerstones of the community, these resource-based practices should be supported and afforded protection. They are as important today as they have always been. Winthrop partners with the following organizations to protect and conserve forests, shorelands, fields, farmland, and wildlife habitat: Kennebec Land Trust, Maine Farmland Trust, Cobbossee Watershed District, Maine Woodlot Owners Association, and Land for Maine's Future, as well as others.

Enrollment in the Open Space, Farmland, and Tree Growth Tax Law are encouraged to reduce property tax valuations. The amount of acreage enrolled in the Farm Tax Law, Open Space Tax Law, and Tree Growth Tax Law adds up to 3,726 acres.

This number does not include land that has been conserved in a trust or protected in any other way; the 3,726 acres accounts only for land enrolled in one of the State's Tax Law programs (see **Existing Land Use Map** in the Appendix). This acreage accounts for 18.65 percent of the total land base in Winthrop. For further information on agriculture and forestry in Winthrop, see the Agriculture and Forestry Chapter of this Plan.

### **Winthrop's Rural-Urban Balance:**

The largest Zoning District in Winthrop is the Rural District. The Census Designated Place accounts for only about 18 percent of the town's total land base and houses nearly 44 percent of the population, underscoring the increased density in this area. With about 19 percent of the land base in a State Tax Law program, and 9.5 percent of land in conservation (excluding land used for ballfields, beaches, or undeveloped land) Winthrop's provides the best of both rural and urban life to its residents.

Winthrop's more rural areas are less likely to see any high-density development simply because they lack public utilities to support these land uses. When considering options to promote growth areas, availability of public utilities is at the forefront of the discussion. To encourage appropriate development in keeping with the town's character, protecting the rural areas from future over-development and sprawl is key, as is providing amenities residents want and need in more appropriate areas.

### **Floodplain Management Ordinance:**

The town participates in the National Flood Insurance Program and agrees to comply with the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 (P.L. 90-488, as amended) as outlined in the

Floodplain Management Ordinance, adopted in 2011. Maps are updated with federal data releases.

### **Projections:**

Referring to the population projections in the Community Profile, it is difficult to anticipate any future demand at all for housing – projected population estimates by two outside sources have Winthrop’s population between 5,930 in 2038 (State Economist’s projection) - a decrease of 3.12 percent or 191 residents from the current population in a 16-year period, and 6,200, which is an increase of just 79 individuals (KVCOG’s projection). Obviously, these are quite different scenarios and underscore the undependable nature of population projections.

It is important to note that these projections do not consider the decline in household size, which requires additional housing to accommodate individuals living alone. Winthrop’s average household size has decreased steadily since the 1970s and is now 2.31 people per household, on average.

With Winthrop’s current population of 6,121, and an average household size of 2.31, the population occupies 2,646 housing units (2020 Census). If that same population in 2030 had an average household size of 2.19 (a decrease of just 5 percent), they would need 2,795 housing units. Based on the 2020 Census data, Winthrop can accommodate this population with its current housing stock of 3,297 and will not need additional housing.

The baseline scenario for Winthrop is no population change. However, “no population change” does not mean “no growth.” Even if Winthrop’s population *numbers* do not change by 2030, the *components* of the population will most assuredly be different. Currently, the trend with the greatest impact on growth is declining average household size. This “no population change” scenario includes the assumption that the decreasing household size will eventually plateau, and average age will continue to increase for some time based on the Baby Boom generation.

The aging population is presently an essential consideration. This demographic has a specific set of requirements, such as handicapped accessible homes so residents can age in place, the construction of more one-story homes and appropriately sized homes. With the increase in residents, young and elderly, living alone, smaller homes will grow in demand. In short, the population may not be increasing, but the changes in the demographics of the population may result in the need for more homes or a different type of home.

Depending on the growth/change scenario the town chooses to adopt, the number of new houses and land that goes with that will change. It is unreasonable to assume no new houses will be built, regardless of existing housing stock and population stagnation or decreases. The construction of new houses will consume more land for development. For example, if 20 new houses are constructed over the next 10-year period in the Rural District (approximately 2-acre lots per house), that would add up to at least 40 acres; in

the General Residential District (approximately 1-acre lots per house), that would be at least 20 acres. These speculations are not counting the land required for utilities or other necessities that go along with new home construction.

In either scenario, Winthrop will undoubtedly experience new development within its existing residential districts. Ideally, those new homes would be in the designated growth areas, which is consistent with comprehensive planning guidelines.

New commercial and industrial development in Winthrop in the past 10 years has been minimal. Based on these trends, no significant new commercial or industrial development is projected in the planning period. That is not to say there are not new businesses coming into Winthrop, just that these new businesses are inhabiting existing buildings rather than constructing new buildings.

### **Analysis:**

Winthrop is undeniably changing. The town will need to find ways to protect its natural resources, rural areas and open space to prevent negative impacts related to growth and sprawl.

The town may need to examine the type of available housing stock to continue to provide adequate housing for existing senior residents so they can age in place. As of mid-2023, there are no small houses available for sale or being built, which forces young adults and the elderly to look outside of Winthrop for housing. This may mean encouraging the construction of specific types of homes, such as one-story, handicapped-accessible, or elderly housing.

The town's Zoning Ordinance will need to be reviewed for consistency with this Comprehensive Plan update and new legislative requirements based on affordable housing. The Zoning Ordinance should also be reviewed as it relates to directing growth to prevent sprawl. The Subdivision Ordinance needs review and updating to reflect amendments to Zoning Ordinance. These recommendations will be analyzed further in the Future Land Use section.

### **Issues for Further Study and Discussion:**

- ❖ Does the existing Zoning Ordinance provide for the land use patterns that Winthrop wants for the future? Does it provide a balance between agricultural, residential, and commercial uses to accommodate Winthrop's residents? Are there the right number of zoning districts?
- ❖ Are all existing zoning districts relevant? Does the General Residential District accomplish that for which it was created?
- ❖ How can Winthrop Village be kept sustainable and viable? Are there any areas that need special attention? Is there anywhere that should be expanded?
- ❖ What measures can Winthrop take to be prepared for increased development? How can the town better direct the location of residential development?



- ❖ How can the town promote the Village District as an inviting area for future development? For example, can walkability be increased? Are there enough parks or green spaces for the public to gather?
- ❖ What utilities should be considered if density bonuses were offered? Should broadband be included?
- ❖ How effective is current zoning at protecting water quality and open space?