



Application for Community Design Charrette Program

This proposal is hereby submitted on behalf of (Name of Organization Applying):

Town of Kensington, NH

Date: April 10, 2017

Name and Title of Officer Authorized to Sign: Norman DeBoisbriand, Chairman

Signature of Officer Authorized to Sign _____

Mailing Address: 95 Amesbury Road

Town or City Name and Zip: Kensington, NH 03833

Telephone: 603-772-5423

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What is the date of your latest Master Plan? 2011

On separate pages, please address the following: See following pages for narrative discussion

- **How would you describe the community project for which your group or town is asking Plan NH to provide planning assistance?** Please provide any appropriate information about the site's or area's geographical location, limits, and historic significance, current uses or unique features. Please indicate who owns or controls the use of the project site or area. *How would the project enhance the health and vitality of your community?*
- **What changes are occurring in your community** that are having an impact on how you think about your future? How could this project address one or more of them?
- **Your town has four distinct, yet inextricably-linked sectors:** Social, economic, environmental and governance. What vision does your community have for each of these, and what kinds of recommendations (for the target area or project) coming from the charrette process could support these visions – as well as the Vision Statement that is in your current Master Plan?
- **Just as the four sectors (above) are interwoven,** different sections of your community are also inter-related. Looking at your target area/project, what influence might it have on other parts of town, and how do other part of town affect this target area? Further, does this target area have any influence or impact on your bordering towns, or do they have any influence or impact on this target area/project or your town in general?

Please also provide letters of support indicating consensus amongst the leadership and governing boards within your community. Consistent, unified cooperation from your governing Boards (eg Select Board, Planning, Zoning, Conservation, Economic Development, etc,) is critical to the success of the project, and we cannot consider projects that these governing boards do not support. *Unless otherwise discussed, a fee of \$5000 will be required on or before the first day of the charrette.*

Please submit your proposal in PDF format to r_leblanc@plannh.org.

Please do not hesitate to call with any questions, or to discuss a project you have in mind: 603-452-7526.

Kensington, NH / PlanNH 2017 Design Charrette Application

Narrative Responses

1) **Project Description.** The town of Kensington, NH, is seeking a PlanNH Design Charrette to assist with its goal of improving functionality and usability of its downtown village core in a way that will encourage people to gather, communicate, learn and experience a sense of community pride and togetherness.



Incorporated in 1737, Kensington is a seacoast-area community in Rockingham County consisting of 12 square miles of land area, and approximately 2,100 residents. It is a rural community comprised mostly of homes and a limited number of small businesses. The Town's web site prominently states that "Kensington is a community where old fashion values still prevail". Kensington has a rich history dating back to colonial times, and retains a wealth of historic and cultural assets. The community would like to capitalize on these resources by developing an integrated, multi-use plan for the village area that would create a community gathering spot centered around the Grange Hall, Library, Cemetery, Unitarian Church and the Hilliard-Prescott House. Additionally, this project would endeavor to build upon the recent community success in saving the historic Town Hall. We see this as a springboard opportunity to unify the Upper and Lower Villages into one recognizable historic area (see attached "Kensington Town Center, Summary discussion" for more detail).



The cornerstone of our initial vision is the Hilliard-Prescott House. This property has recently been purchased by a Kensington resident (and Prescott descendent) with the intent of securing it for future use by the Town or a non-profit at such time as this project comes to fruition. The Hilliard-Prescott House sits prominently at the gateway to Kensington village as you enter from the south on Route 150 (Amesbury Road). It is adjacent to the Grange Hall, across the street from the Library, and

just a short distance from the cemetery, Unitarian and Congregational churches, and Town Hall. The Hilliard-Prescott House and accompanying barn have the potential to be a community and historical interpretive center, group meeting venue, repository for historical artifacts, community coffee shop, among others. Additionally, its sizable lot provides opportunities for outdoor spaces to be created for enjoyment by residents and visitors to Town, and for collaborative activity with adjacent historic buildings and properties. The land also



offers opportunity to develop parking that would make all of these buildings more viable.

One of the challenges in the town is that the town center developed linearly along the road between Exeter and Amesbury, MA. This is present day NH Route 150, a major commuter route to Massachusetts. Because of this the traffic is fairly fast moving making it hard to “stroll leisurely” through town. The lack of sidewalks or bike paths or parking are also challenges. Connectors between buildings and uses need to be considered.

It is our expectation that the project will enhance the health and vitality of Kensington by:

- Creating an anchor in the Lower Village that will draw residents and visitors alike to learn about town history, meet up with each other, and serve as a community “hub”.
- Providing additional outdoor spaces for people to gather and recreate.
- Tying together several historic properties in a way that will encourage their shared use, and leverage each to enhance overall functionality of the Lower Village.
- Creating a community sense-of-place in which residents can feel pride, ownership and worth.
- Laying the foundation for linking the Upper and Lower Villages into a unified historic area.

2) **Community Changes.** Not unlike many similar communities, Kensington has experienced a shift away from locally-based work to a pattern of residents commuting to jobs in more populated areas. Additionally, the lack of a central post office, country store and related gathering spots reduces the opportunity for residents to naturally connect and communicate. These organic types of connections between people is what helps to build strength, trust and understanding in a community. The revitalization of Kensington village will create a central gathering/meeting place, better utilization of historic buildings, and the likelihood of a stronger community fabric.

3) **Town Sectors.** Kensington updated its Master Plan in 2011 by, first, conducting a community survey and, second, by holding two visioning sessions led by the UNH Cooperative Extension Service. The purpose of this exercise was to gain current thoughts and direction from Town residents to supplement the Goals outlined in the 2001 Master Plan. These Goals were determined to still be relevant, and they are:

- Preserve the rural character of the Town.
- Encourage and foster development that is low impact and discourage and avoid development that is high impact.
- Retain rural characteristics and community atmosphere existing in Kensington.

Considering the **social, economic, environmental and governance** sectors that comprise a community, the Town of Kensington identifies its vision for these in its Master Plan Visioning Chapter that was adopted by the Planning Board in August, 2011. Following are some relevant

vision statements in each of the four identified sectors that support the concepts and intent of this Design Charrette application:

Social

- Enhance and define a “Downtown Kensington” that contains a mixture of uses, is walkable and aesthetically attractive.
- Utilize existing spaces for community services such as the Grange Hall.
- Consider reviewing areas around the Library or “Downtown area” where parking could be expanded.
- Maintain the historic features in Town.
- Promote walkability to and around the library, church, Sawyer Park and school.
- Preserve community character defined by natural, historical, cultural and architectural assets.
- Ensure a safe, walkable downtown area for Kensington residents.



Economic

- Allow for development of small, viable retail stores that is architecturally intertwined with the historical/rural atmosphere in town.
- Analyze the possibility of a mixed-use downtown area where architecturally appealing residential and commercial uses share the same building.
- Promote economic development that fits the nature of the town.
- Promote a town with a greater balance of development.

Environmental

- Conserve key parcels of land for recreation, habitat and agriculture.
- Protect Kensington’s water, forested land, farm and historical assets.
- Create and connect a multi-use pedestrian-friendly trail system.

Governance

- Develop policies that plan for limited business growth and prevents business/commercial sprawl.
- Balance the tax rate by encouraging a balance in commercial input.
- Preserve Kensington’s rural character and small town atmosphere.
- Support the economic and cultural vitality of regional and local centers by providing ingredients needed for successful mixed use.
- Encourage the reuse and repositioning of obsolete or underutilized buildings and sites.

The Kensington Planning Board believes that good planning principles should be applied to local decisions. The Board sums it up this way in the 2011 Master Plan: “Development should be encouraged to create a community that offers such attributes as town centers with mixed uses, walkable neighborhoods, housing affordable to a wide range of incomes, aesthetically

attractive buildings that “fit” the character of the community, the preservation of historical landmarks and scenic landscapes. **It also means planning for development that provides ample opportunities for daily interaction and which builds the social and cultural fabric of the community.**”

4) Community Connections. The target area of this project is the historic “village” area of Kensington. Though contained along a relatively short length of Route 150, locals think of it as being separated into Upper and Lower Village sections. If it were more interconnected with itself, the Village would function as a unified central core that could be a stronger “draw” to residents and visitors alike. The preservation of key historic buildings and grounds, along with improved usage of them, will encourage more gathering opportunities for townspeople, and more communication among them. A more prominent Village core will also foster a stronger sense of place for all Town residents.



A significant step has already taken place by saving the historic Town Hall in the Upper Village. It was National Register listed in 2013, but was being considered for demolition and disfiguring, unsympathetic remodeling by the Town. Townspeople formed the Friends of the Kensington Town Hall group and rallied support to maintain the historic character of this prominent structure. The building was designated as one of New Hampshire’s “Seven

to Save” historic properties in 2013. Successful Warrant Articles followed with funds appropriated to conduct mold abatement, correct drainage issues around the building, and conduct work to repair the building and return it to active service to the Town in 2016. It is, once again, a beautiful historic structure and the hub of Town government.



Also in the Upper Village is the Congregational Church. This northern “anchor” of the village is the active spiritual center of the town.

As previously stated, the target area is bisected by State Route 150 (Amesbury Road). This significant travel way carries traffic from surrounding communities on their way to other destinations. This project will create attraction points and opportunities for travelers to stop, instead of merely passing through. This destination “mindset” could also benefit other businesses in town such as a local eatery positioned just north of the Village.