

Existing Land Use



Introduction

Land is a finite resource, and the thoughtful use of land is a critical issue for all communities. The purpose of this chapter is to identify land use trends in Berlin, and suggest future land use policies for the community to pursue. Since February 17, 1964 Berlin has regulated land uses with a zoning ordinance. The zoning ordinance is based on the Berlin Master Plan, and NH RSA 674:2 II (B). This statute requires master plans to have a vision and a land use section at a minimum. How a community decides to use its land base clearly has a direct impact on natural resources, on community character, on transportation infrastructure, on housing affordability, the tax base, and the cost of providing services. Changes in demographics, evolving housing needs, and the economic and conservation needs discussed throughout this plan have had, and will continue to have, a direct impact on the landscape of the community.

Attitudes toward the land have changed nationally over the past decade. Experience has taught us that land is a complicated resource, and that one parcel of land may be better suited to a particular use than another. Natural factors such as slope, soil, groundwater, and surface water may vary across the landscape and growing communities must take these factors into consideration when planning their future, or face a decreasing quality of life.

With significant portions of Berlin protected as conservation land in the White Mountain National Forest, and with little population growth in recent years, the city retains much of its traditional central-place development pattern. With little suburban growth, Berlin exhibits the Smart Growth development pattern that many communities hope to achieve: dense development around a downtown core, surrounded by residential development with easy access both to the core and to the natural resources that surround it. Unlike many communities that are seeking to achieve this, Berlin needs only to recognize it and work to retain it wherever practical.

Existing Land Use Patterns

Berlin's existing land use pattern is diverse in nature and consists of a wide array of uses. For the purpose of this master plan the existing land uses have been grouped into generalized categories

in order to facilitate a better understanding of Berlin's existing pattern of development. They include:

- Commercial/Industrial
- Residential
- Public/Tax Exempt
- Utilities
- Forestry
- Agricultural

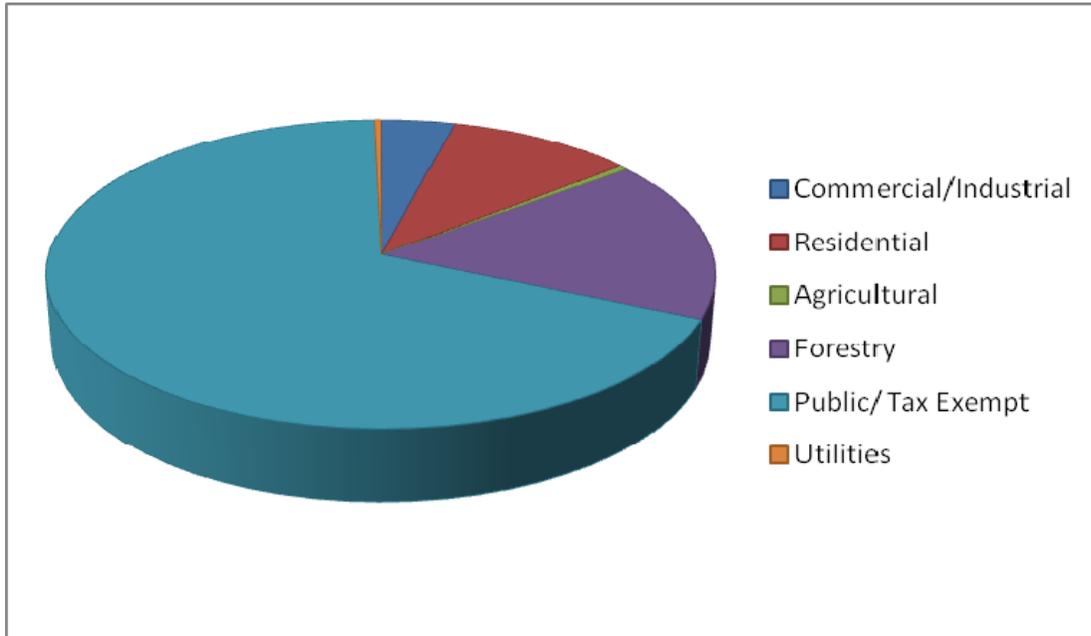
Berlin is a product of its location and environment. The city's natural features, such as topography and geology, as well as its politics, transportation system, and economics have greatly influenced its development. Berlin's development into a regional center is a result of its geographic location, and early commercial and manufacturing growth in the area. The Androscoggin River provided the early power for manufacturing, and the City's location provided easy access for neighboring communities. Berlin's downtown is located along the Androscoggin River, with the majority of the population settled at a relatively constant density within convenient distances of the downtown area.

Berlin contains several open water bodies, perennial streams, large wetland complexes, and uplands with numerous rock outcrop peaks offering spectacular views. Berlin is comprised of a combination of dense forests, large areas of exposed and shallow ledge, and wide floodplains. The City also includes the Upper Ammonoosuc River headwaters, the Dead River, and the drainage of the Middle Androscoggin River. Approximately 45% of Berlin is in the Kilkenny Unit of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF). Another 20% is owned by the State of New Hampshire and others for recreation and conservation purposes. The WMNF land and state owned lands are contiguous throughout the western portion of Berlin, providing protection from development for over half of the City.

Table 1 Land Uses by Valuation

Land Use	Acres	Percent	Total Value	Percent
Commercial/Industrial	1,564.91	4%	\$61,102,449	9%
Residential	3,959.69	10%	\$313,194,788	44%
Agricultural	189.05	0.50%	\$26,042	0.003%
Forestry	6,636.32	17%	\$288,443	0.04%
Public/ Tax Exempt	26,509.63	68%	\$221,376,400	32%
Utilities	149.94	0.40%	\$101,103,600	15%
Total Area	39,009.54	100%	\$697,091,722	100%

Figure 1 Percent of Berlin Land Area by Property Type



The Working Landscape – Forest and Agricultural Lands

Forestlands are by far the most dominant land use in Berlin. Approximately 85% of Berlin, or 33,000 acres of land, is covered by forestlands. Most of the forest land in Berlin falls within the White Mountain National Forest. Other areas are steeply sloped and generally unsuited for other uses. There are also lands throughout the community that were once pasture land, but are now abandoned and in the process of returning to a natural state. Generally land that is presently unsuitable for development due to steepness or inaccessibility remains in woodlands until the pressure to develop, or the demand for the wood exceeds the natural barriers of the land. A small amount of agricultural land (190 acres) remains in Berlin, and very little agricultural activity takes place within the community currently. Berlin is fortunate to have such a high percentage of its working landscape intact.

Residential Lands

Residential land in Berlin is utilized in a number of ways: single-family homes, multi-family dwellings, mobile homes, and seasonal homes. Year-round residential units still dominate the residential usage, but second-home development and land subdivision continue. The majority of residential units are single-family and multi-family dwellings concentrated around the downtown area. There are an abundance of apartments in Berlin, and during the last decade the community has seen many of these multi-family structures fall into disrepair. The City is currently working to remove unsafe buildings from the downtown, and to identify new housing types that will appeal to the changing demographics of Berlin residents.

Currently 10% of the community is classified as residential. Some of this land is on the rural edges of the city and also encompasses open space and natural resources, but a great deal of the residential development has been accommodated at a higher density around the downtown due to

the availability of services. As more residential development crops up in the rural sections of the community, land becomes fragmented, natural resources are impacted, the character of the community is altered, and services must be extended to meet the needs of these residents.

Commercial and Industrial Lands

Approximately 1,600 acres, or 4% of Berlin's land area, is identified as commercial and industrial. Although the percentage is small, these properties have a dramatic effect on surrounding land use, and contribute to the tax base. The majority of commercial land use is concentrated in the downtown and along Route 16. The commercial uses in Berlin support the needs of local residents as well as other communities in the region.

Many future development opportunities exist within the downtown core and on the mill site. The commercial core of the downtown extends for approximately three-quarters of a mile along Main Street and Pleasant Street, parallel roadways that form a one-way traffic loop. The eastern boundary is formed by the Androscoggin River and to the west the area is loosely edged by the railroad right-of-way and Hillside Avenue. The western quadrant is comprised primarily of multi-family residential properties. The prosperity of downtown merchants and property owners has fluctuated considerably over the last two decades and efforts to support and stabilize the city's economic core have been numerous throughout this period. The presence of local, county and state government buildings have helped to provide an anchor for other private businesses in the area.

Berlin's primary industrial development property has been the Maynesboro Industrial Park located on East Milan Rd. This 66-acre site, which is managed by the Berlin Industrial Park Authority (BIDPA), has been slow to develop, but has only approximately 12 acres remaining, all of which is privately owned. The other major tract of potential industrial or business park land is the former Fraser Paper mill site, which encompasses approximately 120 acres. Adjacent to this site is the so-called "Dummer Yard" which contains approximately 400+/- acres, but contamination and on-going legal issues make the potential of this property for redevelopment unknown.

Public and Tax Exempt Lands

This category includes schools, City-owned property, churches, federal property, parks, recreational areas, libraries, hospitals, etc. There are approximately 26,500 acres, or 68%, of the community devoted to public use. Like many communities around the WMNF Berlin has a high percentage of public lands. The combination of WMNF property and City owned parcels creates the beginning of a great network of unfragmented blocks of land that contribute to the character of the community, and focus the development activity in the downtown core. These areas contain valuable natural resources, habitat, recreation resources, and working lands. These areas also support many of the public uses in the downtown and elsewhere in the community.