

## Future Land Use Plan

### Brighton Plantation’s Comprehensive Plan Vision:

*Our vision for Brighton Plantation is to protect and preserve the natural beauty and ecological integrity of our forests, waterways, and landscapes, while respecting the property rights of all landowners. We are committed to maintaining the unique rural character of our community by ensuring that development remains in harmony with the environment. Through careful stewardship, sustainable land practices, and a focus on organic growth, we strive to foster a resilient community that can provide basic municipal services to its citizens without compromising the area’s natural resources. We believe in promoting thoughtful, gradual development that aligns with the values of the Plantation, its residents, and environmental character of the area. At the same time, we are dedicated to ensuring that Brighton Plantation remains a self-sustaining, independent community, preserving its status and autonomy. Ultimately, Brighton Plantation strives to create a future where the landscape is preserved, property rights are respected, municipal services are provided, and development is carefully managed to maintain the rural character for generations to come.*

### Future Land Use Plan:

Future Land Use Plan aligns with Brighton Plantation’s vision by reinforcing residents’ desire for local control, rural character, and protection of natural resources. It reflects concerns raised through public participation, survey results, and committee input—particularly regarding absentee land ownership, environmental degradation, and the desire to prevent unchecked development.

The purpose of this Plan is to guide future land use decisions in a way that reflects Brighton’s character and limited infrastructure. While it does not enact regulation directly, it provides a foundation for future updates to the Land Use Zoning Ordinance and supports informed decision-making by the Planning Board, Board of Assessors, and residents.

Brighton’s 1995 Land Use Zoning Ordinance currently governs land use through zoning districts, minimum lot sizes, and performance standards for sensitive areas. In 2025, the Plantation plans to update this ordinance to reflect the policies and strategies outlined in this Comprehensive Plan.

As part of that update, Brighton Plantation intends to seek an exemption from the state’s requirement to designate formal growth areas, under the provisions allowed by state law for low-growth, rural municipalities. The Plantation’s small year-round population, lack of municipal water or sewer, and minimal development pressure support this exemption. Rather than identifying growth areas, Brighton will continue to guide future development based on:

- Access to existing roads and infrastructure

- Avoidance of sensitive environmental areas (wetlands, watersheds, shorelands)
- Proximity to existing developed areas to limit sprawl

This approach aligns with Brighton’s vision of compact, appropriate growth that protects working lands, open space, and natural resources—without mandating growth where it may not be wanted or supported.

*Delineating Growth Areas:*

Brighton Plantation intends to seek a state-approved exemption from the requirement to designate growth areas, as allowed under Title 30-A §4326(3-A) for low-growth, rural municipalities.

This request is supported by the following conditions:

- Minimal growth pressure: Brighton’s population is small and aging, with no recent commercial development and only minor residential growth. The 2025 Comprehensive Plan projects no significant change in development patterns over the next 10 years.
- No public utilities: Brighton has no public sewer, water, or other infrastructure typically associated with compact development. These limitations naturally restrict density and make high-intensity growth infeasible.
- Land ownership and use constraints: Roughly 80% of Brighton’s land is owned by industrial timber companies, primarily Weyerhaeuser. These lands are not available for residential or commercial development and are managed for long-term timber extraction.
- Existing development is dispersed: Residential uses are scattered along Route 151, Route 154, and near the village area, with no established commercial center. Most commercial activity occurs through home-based businesses or resource-based enterprises like logging and guiding.
- Designated growth areas are underutilized: The 1995 Land Use Zoning Ordinance already designates the village center as a General Development District (D-GN), allowing residential, commercial, and light industrial uses. However, the area is not near capacity and no new commercial enterprises have located there in over five years.
- Natural constraints: Brighton’s rugged terrain, poor soils, wetlands, shoreland zones, and lack of infrastructure limit development opportunities and reinforce a low-density, rural pattern.
- Community vision: Residents have clearly expressed their desire to maintain the town’s rural character, conserve natural resources, and avoid sprawl. The Comprehensive Plan reflects this by supporting compact, appropriate development where infrastructure exists, not by expanding growth areas unnecessarily.

Given these factors, Brighton’s current zoning and land use policies already guide limited development to the most suitable areas without the need for formal growth area

expansion. A waiver would allow Brighton to remain under local control while continuing to prioritize land conservation, rural character, and responsible land use consistent with its scale and capacity.

The location of current development is already shaped by logical factors: proximity to travel corridors (Routes 151 and 154), historical settlement patterns, and avoidance of environmentally sensitive areas. No additional growth areas are needed or warranted.

### **Current Land Use Patterns:**

Brighton Plantation's Future Land Use Plan reflects and reinforces recent development trends, which have remained minimal and largely residential in nature. Over the past decade, development has occurred at a low rate, with most new structures being year-round homes or seasonal camps. No new commercial or industrial development has occurred during this time.

The 1995 Land Use Zoning Ordinance divides the Plantation into five primary zoning subdistricts, grouped under three umbrella categories:

- Development Districts
  - General Development District (D-GN)
  - Residential Development District (D-RS)
  - Shoreland Development District (D-SL)
- Management District
  - General Management District (M-GN)
- Protection Districts
  - Wetlands, Floodplains, and other resource-specific zones

These zoning districts have helped guide new residential development toward appropriate areas—particularly along existing travel corridors (Routes 151 and 154) and near the village center—while discouraging growth in environmentally sensitive zones.

The designated growth areas, especially the General Development District near the village center, are not at capacity and remain the most logical locations for any future growth. Maintaining these existing areas supports the community's goals by:

- Directing new development to areas with existing road access and settlement patterns
- Avoiding sprawl into remote, forested, or conservation-priority areas
- Preserving open space, natural resources, and rural character
- Aligning with the community's expressed vision for modest, well-sited growth

The Future Land Use Plan does not propose expanding these growth areas, as the current zoning framework continues to accommodate the limited growth that is expected. This approach is consistent with recent trends and supports Brighton's request for an exemption from the state's growth area designation requirements.

## Constraints and Natural Opportunities for Development

Brighton Plantation's designated growth areas have been shaped by a combination of natural constraints, infrastructure limitations, and long-standing development patterns. The configuration of these areas reflects where development is most feasible—physically, environmentally, and economically—while avoiding areas where it would place undue burden on municipal services or threaten natural resources.

Environmental constraints are a key consideration in land use planning and are discussed in more detail in the Natural Resources chapter of this Plan. These include wetlands, steep slopes, shallow or poor soils, floodplains, and areas important to groundwater protection. Such features reduce the suitability of land for development due to erosion risks, septic system limitations, or habitat concerns. The town's existing zoning ordinance reflects these constraints by designating sensitive areas as either Management or Protection Districts, where development is limited or prohibited. These measures help preserve the integrity of Brighton's water resources, soil health, and scenic landscape.

In addition to environmental limitations, public service constraints also shape where growth can occur. Brighton does not have public water, sewer, or transit services. Road maintenance is minimal, especially on private or seasonal roads. Fire protection is provided by a volunteer department with limited equipment, and electricity access can be inconsistent in remote areas. Extending services to new or scattered development would place unsustainable financial pressure on the community and its residents.

Despite these limitations, the Plantation's designated growth areas present several natural advantages. These locations are characterized by:

- Proximity to existing public roads, including Routes 151 and 154
- Clusters of existing development, particularly near the village center
- Fewer environmental constraints
- Access to civic buildings and other public facilities

These areas represent the most suitable locations for future growth, and the current zoning already supports a mix of residential, commercial, and municipal uses. While most recent development has occurred outside the designated growth areas—often along rural corridors or lakeshores—the Future Land Use Plan seeks to gently redirect future development into areas already equipped to handle it. This approach protects Brighton's rural character, avoids costly infrastructure expansion, and aligns with the community's stated vision.

In summary, the location and size of Brighton's designated growth areas are both a response to and a reflection of the town's physical geography, limited public services, and evolving land use needs. These areas remain the most logical and cost-effective places to accommodate any future residential or small-scale commercial growth.

## Land Use Districts and Their Relationship to Growth and Conservation:

Brighton Plantation's Land Use Zoning Ordinance divides the community into districts that reflect development suitability, environmental sensitivity, and long-term land use goals. These are grouped into Development, Management, and Protection districts.

Development Districts—including the General Development (D-GN), Residential Development (D-RS), and Shoreland Development (D-SL) districts—make up the Plantation's designated growth area. These are centered near the village and along primary travel routes (Routes 151 and 154), where development has historically occurred. These districts allow for a mix of residential, home-based commercial, and municipal uses, with the General Development District offering the greatest flexibility. The Shoreland Development District is being phased out and replaced by updated shoreline protection standards.

Outside these areas, the Management Districts and Protection Districts cover the remainder of the Plantation and are intended to conserve rural character and natural resources.

- Management Districts include:
  - *General (M-GN)*: low-density residential and resource-based uses
  - *Highly Productive (M-HP)*: areas with better soils for limited farming or forestry
  - *Natural Character (M-NC)*: scenic or undeveloped areas where development is discouraged
- Protection Districts include subzones that safeguard wetlands, floodplains, aquifers, wildlife habitat, mountain terrain, lakeshores, and other sensitive features. These zones impose stricter development standards and often prohibit certain uses altogether.

This zoning framework protects critical natural resources by steering growth into already developed areas and restricting high-impact uses in ecologically sensitive zones. The current zoning districts reflect both physical constraints—like poor soils, steep slopes, or lack of services—and community values emphasizing environmental protection and rural identity.

Approximately 80% of Brighton's land is owned by timber companies, primarily Weyerhaeuser, whose holdings are almost entirely located outside the designated growth areas. These parcels fall within Management or Protection Districts and are managed for long-term timber extraction under the Tree Growth Tax Program. If Weyerhaeuser were to sell large tracts of land, the resulting development pressure would likely occur outside the growth area, where roads, services, and oversight are limited. This possibility underscores the importance of maintaining strong land use standards across all zoning districts.

No major municipal investments are anticipated to support future land use changes, as the current zoning structure is sufficient to guide the limited growth projected in the next decade.

### **Anticipated Growth:**

Based on current zoning, population projections, and recent trends, Brighton Plantation is not expected to experience significant development during the next 10 years. The State Economist projects a population decline from 62 in 2020 to 54 by 2040. This modest decrease, coupled with an aging population and smaller household sizes, suggests that demand will remain flat or shift toward smaller, single-family or seasonal homes.

No new commercial, institutional, or industrial development is anticipated. Survey responses reflect strong public support for conservation-focused land use:

- 58% of residents prefer to limit or discourage commercial uses
- 55% oppose industrial development
- A majority support protecting natural resources and preserving the Plantation's rural character

The most likely development scenario includes:

- Occasional new seasonal camps or homesteads, primarily off-grid
- Small home-based businesses, not requiring new commercial buildings
- Minimal subdivision activity due to large lot sizes and limited demand

If any development occurs, it will likely be located in or near the village area, which already has road access, electricity, and is within the designated growth area. Areas outside the growth zone are largely owned by timber companies or constrained by environmental protections and lack of infrastructure.

Brighton's land use strategy is not to expand growth but to guide any future development into areas already suited for it, maintaining services while protecting open space, shorelands, and working forests. This approach reflects both practical constraints and the community's clearly expressed values.

### **Land Use Regulation and Monitoring:**

Brighton Plantation adopted its Land Use Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map in 1995 to establish local control over land use following decades of state oversight. These documents provide standards for zoning, permitting, subdivision review, and environmental protections, including compliance with the Mandatory Shoreland Zoning Act and basic stormwater and phosphorus control measures.

As of 2025, Brighton is working with KVCOG to update the ordinance and map to ensure compliance with current state law and to better reflect the community's present-day

needs. This update will also modernize the Plantation's Subdivision Ordinance, which is currently embedded in the 1995 document.

Development activity in Brighton remains low. Only 28 permits have been issued between 2013 and 2024. Most permits are for small-scale residential work or seasonal camps. Given this limited volume, Brighton does not require a large-scale monitoring system, but there is recognition that permit tracking should be improved. The Administrative Assistant is currently working with the Assessors to digitize permit records and begin maintaining a more usable, accessible database for internal review.

Due to the Plantation's small size and limited budget, Brighton is unable to support a full-time Code Enforcement Officer (CEO), Licensed Plumbing Inspector (LPI), or Local Health Officer (LHO). These roles are currently filled on a part-time or as-needed basis. Recruiting and retaining qualified individuals to fill these positions remains an ongoing challenge. As such, Brighton should consider:

- Exploring a shared or regional CEO and inspector model through KVCOG or nearby towns
- Working proactively to retain existing officials by supporting training and coordination
- Holding annual or biannual coordination meetings with neighboring municipalities (e.g., Athens, Kingsbury, Bingham, Pleasant Ridge) to share resources, address regional issues, and align on zoning or enforcement challenges

To support internal planning and maintain oversight of land use patterns, Brighton should adopt the following practices:

- Continue digitizing permit records and improving access for Planning Board and Assessors
- Produce an annual summary of permits issued, including any seasonal-to-year-round conversions
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the Land Use Ordinance at least every five years, with minor updates as needed following state law changes or local concerns

By improving internal systems and exploring regional partnerships, Brighton can continue to enforce local land use policies and respond effectively to future development, even with limited staff capacity.

#### Comprehensive Plan Implementation:

Given Brighton Plantation's small size and limited administrative capacity, implementation of the Comprehensive Plan will be the shared responsibility of the Planning Board and Board of Assessors, with support from the Clerk/Administrative Assistant. Rather than forming a separate implementation committee, these existing officials will oversee progress and ensure that decisions remain consistent with the community's vision.

It is recommended that the Planning Board and Assessors conduct a formal review of the Plan every five years, ideally in coordination with the annual town meeting or budget process. This review should assess progress in key areas, including:

- Implementation of Future Land Use Plan strategies
- Any growth-related municipal investments and whether they align with designated growth areas
- Location and type of new development relative to growth and rural zones
- Protection of critical natural resources through local actions or partnerships

If the review indicates that aspects of the Plan are outdated or not being followed, the Planning Board may propose amendments or seek technical assistance from KVCOG.

Following adoption of this Comprehensive Plan, KVCOG will lead a full update of Brighton's 1995 Land Use Zoning Ordinance, including revisions to the Subdivision Ordinance and Shoreland Zoning provisions. This work will ensure consistency with current state law, clarify outdated sections, and align local land use policies with the priorities expressed in this Plan. These updates will support the Planning Board and Assessors in applying clear, enforceable standards and maintaining local control over future development.

This approach provides a manageable and realistic framework for Brighton to monitor and implement its land use vision, without creating new committees or placing additional burden on limited municipal staff.