

RESIDENTIAL 1 AREA (Robbins Road Area)

“EXISTING RIVERFRONT HOUSING AREA”

Purpose

To establish a protected residential area which recognizes that all properties in the area have access to public sewer and which encourages the renovation of existing houses and construction of new houses by allowing housing at lot sizes that are similar to most current development.

Overview of Past, Present & Future Use.

Until the early 1990's, many homes in this area were 40+ years old and were quite modest in size. Most were located on lots that were less than ½ acre (21,780 square feet) in size, and some on lots as small as 4,000 square feet in size. The small size of the lots, the area's proximity to the Passagassawakeag River, and the questionable status of subsurface wastewater disposal systems in the area, prompted the City, with the assistance of State Community Development Block Grant monies, to extend public sewer service to the area in the early 90's. Soon thereafter, the character of housing construction in this area began to change.

In the past 15 years, many of the former modest homes have been extensively renovated or have been demolished and replaced with newer, larger, more expensive homes. Newer residents appear to be attracted to the area's location along the upper reaches of the Passagassawakeag River and consider this narrow strip of land along Robbins Road a desirable place to live. This trend also has resulted in many of the former residents 'moving on'. In many respects, this area likely has seen greater change than most any other area in Belfast, and this transition appears to be continuing.

The area's changing character also is reflected in how the City proposes to regulate development. In 2004, the City amended the Shoreland Zoning standards that apply to this area to establish it as a residential only zone. Prior to 2004, the area was included in the General Development Subdistrict of the Shoreland Zone, a Subdistrict that allowed most types of uses; industrial and commercial uses as well as housing. The area is now in the Urban Residential Subdistrict, which is the same Shoreland Zoning designation that applies to properties along streets such as Bay View and North Ocean Street (located inside the bypass along the coast).

The City now proposes to establish consistency between the Shoreland Zoning adopted in 2004 and the main underlying zoning. The recommended approach is to establish this as part of the Residential 1 zone, which is the same zoning district that now applies to the

Cedar Street – Court Street area. This zoning would allow houses on small size lots, about ¼ acre, and with minimal street frontage, 60 feet. At present, this area is part of the General Development–A zone which allows most uses, including industrial and commercial. It is also believed that it would be appropriate to extend this land use district to the area located immediately adjacent to the inland side of Robbins Road; an area which also has public sewer. If this approach is adopted, there could be some increase in the number of new houses constructed, but it should ensure that the main future use will be housing renovations and expansions.

This area is considered a residential ‘growth area’. The small size of the area results in it being unable to support a significant number of new homes, however, the availability of sewer and the density permitted classifies it as a ‘growth area’.

Recommendations

Permitted Uses (Examples of Main Uses)

- 1) Single-Family & Two-Family
- 2) Home Occupations, Small Scale Only, including Bed & Breakfast
- 3) Municipal Uses
- 5) Schools, Churches, Day Care Centers & Similar Uses

Minimum Lot Size

- 1) ¼ acre – 10,000 square feet (sewer)
- 2) ½ acre – 20,000 square feet (septic)
- 3) 60 feet street frontage

Density (Number of Housing Units per Acre)

- 1) 4 single-family houses per acre (sewer)
- 2) 2 single-family houses per acre (septic)
- 3) 8 two-family (duplex) units per acre (sewer)
- 4) 2 two-family (duplex) units per acre (septic)
- 5) 0 multi-family units per acre. Multi-family is a prohibited use.
- 6) No specific lot coverage requirement in the zoning ordinance for either residential uses or the limited number of nonresidential uses that can occur. It is noted, however, that most of the area on the southerly side of Robbins Road along the River is in the Shoreland Zone and that maximum lot coverage requirements apply.

Setbacks (Distance Structure must be Located from a Lot Line)

- 1) Variable front setback for residential based on existing development patterns, with the possibility of reducing the setback to as little as zero feet from the Robbins Road

right-of-way, particularly for properties on the water side of Robbins Road. It is noted that many of the homes, particularly on the water side, are located close to Robbins Road because of the small size of the lots. It also is noted that existing development patterns for many of properties on the inland side of Robbins Road would result in a structure setback that is larger than on the water side. One reason cited for instituting this provision is that Robbins Road is a 66' wide right-of-way.

- 2) Side setback of 15 feet, but perhaps some flexibility to allow a lesser setback for structures located on existed undersized (nonconforming) lots.
- 3) Rear setback of 15 feet for dwelling units and 5 feet for an accessory structure, if the accessory structure is detached from the main structure.

Major Changes Compared to Current Requirements

- 1) The water side of Robbins Road would change from the General Purpose A zoning district to the Residential 1 zoning district. The General Purpose-A zone allows most uses, retail, service businesses, light manufacturing, and others, while in the Residential 1 zone, housing is the main permitted use. That said, this change would have little effect on most properties on the water side of Robbins Road because nearly all of the land is in a Shoreland Subdistrict that now only allows housing uses.
- 2) On the inland side of the Robbins Road, from the intersection with Patterson Hill to the point at which Robbins Road meets the River, the City would amend the zoning district from the current Protection Rural 2 zone to the Residential 1 zoning district. The main effect of this change would be to reduce the lot size from ½ acre with sewer to ¼ acre with sewer. There would be little affect on the range of uses permitted since the Protection Rural 2 zone is also largely a protected residential area.

The proposed change is consistent with the overall guidelines that were used to prepare this Plan, including:

- In most areas outside the by-pass, the zoning on both sides of the road should be the same;
- In areas with public sewer, smaller size lots should be permitted.

This proposed change results in 18 lots which have frontage on the inland side of Robbins Road being included in the proposed Residential 1 zone rather than the Protection Rural 2 (Residential 5) zone.

Other Issues & Ideas to Consider:

- 1) There is a need for improved stormwater management along Robbins Road.
- 2) Robbins Road experiences both local and non-local traffic, which appears to contribute to speeding in the area. Robbins Road provides a connection to Oak Hill/City Point Road, which is the nearest alternative to the Veterans Memorial Bridge to cross the Passagassawakeag River.
- 3) Longer-term, the City should consider constructing a sidewalk along this section of Robbins Road, or widen the road to accommodate a bicycle lane. The Coastal

Mountain Land Trust is in the process of acquiring the former Belfast and Moosehead Lake Railroad line from the Memorial Bridge to City Point (Train Station on City Point Road) and converting the former railroad bed into a bicycle/pedestrian trail. It also has been suggested that this trail system should link to the Belfast Footbridge via Kaler Road and Robbins Road. If there is a substantial increase in foot traffic or bicycle traffic on this road, the City may need to consider providing pedestrian oriented amenities. That said, the proximity of houses to the road along Robbins Road and the slope of the road could make it very difficult to construct a good quality sidewalk or paved shoulder. The potential need to construct a sidewalk is one of the reasons why the City should continue to own a 66 foot wide road right-of-way.