Ways to Deal with Growth and the Loss of Open Space

1. Growth Management Ordinance

A Growth Management ordinance would limit the number of building permits issued each year with safeguards in place to insure that one person or company cannot capture all the permits. Such ordinances are voted on annually, giving the town the opportunity to try this often-effective measure.

The purposes of a Growth Management Ordinance are:

- To manage orderly growth in Washington in coordination with the Washington Master Plan and Capital Improvements Program;
- To establish a rate of residential growth in Washington that does not interfere with the Town's capacity for planned, orderly, and reasonable expansion of its services to accommodate such growth.
- To ensure that adequate and appropriate facilities are available to those who locate themselves in Washington, and allow the Town the opportunity to absorb increased needs to Town services in an orderly manner.

2. Feature-based Density Ordinance

Feature-based density is a zoning technique where the permitted density is calculated based on a set of factors contained in the ordinance, as opposed to a uniform standard being applied to all of the land in the town. Conventional zoning specifies one minimum lot size for the whole town, along with a residential density uniformly applied to each parcel of land.

If all land parcels in a town were the same, this approach would not be a problem. But the landscape in many areas, such as Washington, is hilly and challenging to develop, and zoning has evolved to incorporate mechanisms for adjusting the rules. We have rules for features such as steep slopes and wetlands to make exceptions to the minimum lot size/maximum density provisions in the town. Some towns use overlay zones and districts to limit density in certain areas and preserve features within those areas. When you move toward multiple density districts, multiple overlay zones, etc.; they can become more and more complex. Using a feature-based density approach can actually simplify the process by replacing the need for multiple district-specific density regulations, overlays and certain other provisions, and result in more successful implementation of the Town's Master Plan.

Basing the permitted density on the features of the parcel is not a new concept. Soil-based lot sizing is an approach used by some communities and is based on a single factor-suitability of the soils for treatment and dilution of septic system effluent. Also, subdivisions proposed in outlying areas on inadequate roads are often disallowed or reduced in size by the applicant after the Planning Board raises concerns that a large subdivision might be scattered and premature (as provided by RSA 674:36II(a)) without a substantial upgrade of the road at the applicant's expense (pursuant to RSA 674:21V(j)). Using Feature-based Density, in addition to the existing requirement that development be kept away from wetlands and steep slopes you would count up the areas unsuitable for development and exclude them from the area used for calculating the maximum number

of lots in a subdivision, thereby reducing the density to a number, which is appropriate for the parcel.
Feature-based density can strengthen the ability of the Planning Board to ensure that the zoning ordinance and individual subdivision layouts achieve many goals of the local community.

3. Conservation Subdivision Ordinance

A Conservation Subdivision is a subdivision in which a substantial amount of the site remains as permanently protected open space and the homes are clustered together on a portion of the site. The open space that is conserved can provide a variety of benefits to the community and the town: it may support wildlife, be used for forestry or agriculture, or provide recreational opportunities.
Under this approach, the community works with the developer to fit the development into the landscape in a way that maximizes the protection of important natural and cultural amenities on the site and maintains the character of the community. The conservation subdivision approach supplements efforts to protect whole parcels through outright purchase or conservation easement. As housing demand increases in NH, conservation easements or the outright purchase of land are proving to be increasingly costly. Thus, communities need to pursue a variety of approaches for managing growth, protecting important resources, and maintaining community character.
The Conservation Subdivision provides numerous economic, environmental, and social benefits to a community. Some of these benefits include:

- Reducing the area of land over which homes will be built can reduce the cost of developing the lots, which in some cases can translate to lower housing prices.
- Future service costs for public infrastructure, such as roads, sewers and water lines, are reduced because roads and water/sewer lines can be shorter within a Conservation Subdivision approach.
- Travel distances are reduced for school buses, snow plows and other service vehicles such as fire, police and rescue.
- Property values within Conservation Subdivisions can appreciate faster than properties in conventional subdivisions due to the added amenities provided by the adjacent open space.
- The availability of open space can improve the quality of life in a community.
- Conservation Subdivisions help communities preserve open space, including important and unique natural and cultural features, such as archeological or historical sites and resources.
- These subdivisions generally create less impervious surface, thus reducing to local water bodies, such as rivers and streams.
- The open space can provide a buffer to protect water bodies and other natural areas, lowering the impact that development has on fragile natural features.
- The open space can be linked to other open space developments or protected areas to create a larger network of protected areas.

• The clustering of houses can encourage more walking and more frequent interaction with ones' neighbors, fostering a stronger sense of community.
• The open space can be linked to other open spaces to create trail networks for walking, biking, and hiking.