



# CITY OF CONCORD

## REPORT TO PLANNING BOARD

**FROM:** Matthew R. Walsh, Deputy City Manager - Development

**DATE:** June 12, 2026

**SUBJECT:** 2050 Master Plan Update

### **Recommendation**

1. Accept this report;
2. Identify potential dates for a kick off meeting with Utile; and,
3. Decide if the Board wishes to establish a potential Steering Committee for the Master Plan update.

### **Background**

Municipalities are authorized to prepare master plans in accordance with NH State Law RSA 674:2 and 3. As noted in these statutes, the purpose of the master plan is to *“set down as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development of the area under the jurisdiction of the planning board, to aid the board in designing ordinances that result in preserving and enhancing the unique quality of life and culture of New Hampshire, and to guide the board in the performance of its other duties in a manner that achieves the principles of smart growth, sound planning, and wise resource protection.”*

In accordance with State Law, the Planning Board is entity responsible for the creation and adoption of the City’s Master Plan.

Presently, the City operates under the 2030 Master Plan, which was adopted in 2008. During the ensuing 18+ years, the City has accomplished many of the goals, objectives, and recommendations included therein.

On March 4, 2024, the City Council adopted their 2024-2025 priorities for the City. Recognizing that many of the goals of the 2030 Master Plan had been achieved, the City Council’s 2024-2025 priorities included updating the City’s master plan.

As part of the FY2026 Budget, which was adopted on June 5, 2025, appropriated the sum of \$400,000 for a Master Plan update (Capital Improvement Project #563). Funds became on July 1, 2025.

Following the appropriation of funds, staff prepared a Request for Proposals (RFP) to engage a team of consultants for the project. The Planning Board reviewed the draft RFP during their November and December 2025 meetings. Additionally, public input was received on the draft RFP during the Board's December 2025 meeting. The Board affirmed a desire for the City to engage a consultant team capable of preparing a Master Plan which would be comprehensive, dynamic, visually engaging, and easy to interpret.

The RFP was issued in December 2025. Responses were received on January 29, 2026. Interviews were conducted on February 18 and 24<sup>th</sup>. On March 17, 2026, the preferred consultant team was selected. Contract negotiations were completed on May 20, 2026. On June 1, 2026, a Purchase Order was issued to Utile for the project.

## **Discussion**

1. **Consultant Selection:** Staff is pleased to report that Utile has been selected for the Master Plan Update. Founded in 2002, Utile is an urban planning and design firm based in Boston, with satellite offices in Providence RI and Burlington VT. Utile currently employs 92 professionals, and has completed municipal planning and zoning projects throughout the northeast. Utile is well respected firm, and has a reputation for producing quality comprehensive plans which are dynamic, visually engaging, and easy to understand. Utile recently completed master plans for Salem NH and Nashua NH, and is currently working on Portsmouth's comprehensive plan update. Recently, the Salem NH Master Plan received the New Hampshire Planners Association 2026 award for Master Plan of the Year.

Utile has assembled a team of well qualified sub-consultants to support the planning process, including: U3 (formerly Landwise) (demographics / housing / economic development), Nelson Nygaard (natural resources / transportation), VHB (transportation, historic/cultural resources), and Nitsch Engineers (utility infrastructure / energy & sustainability).

2. **Scope of Work:** Utile's scope of work is consistent with that included in the City's Request for Proposals. Specifically, Utile will utilize a 4-phase approach, comprised of 9 distinct tasks (each with sub-tasks) as described below, to complete this project. The overall project schedule will be July 2026 – April 2028 (19 months). The contract amount is \$400,000 (which is total amount of funding available for this project).

- **Phase 1: Learning.**

The first phase of the planning process will focus on learning about neighborhood and Citywide opportunities and needs, exploring previous studies, assembling and validating data, and conducting analysis to fill in any gaps in knowledge. To reach as many community members as possible, a mixture of public outreach and engagement activities will occur including City-wide visioning sessions, 6 neighborhood / village forums, a community survey (translated into as many as 3 languages), as well as meetings with stakeholder groups. Tasks 3, 4, and 5 primarily comprise the learning phase.

- **Phase 2: Visioning**  
The second phase is focused on creating a productive dialog with stakeholders and community members that responds to the patterns and observations uncovered in the Learning Phase, and builds on them to shape the vision and goals of the plan. This includes initial spatial mapping of desired degree of change (from preserve on one end to transform on another) and aspirational development patterns or character areas. Task 6 is part of the Visioning Phase.
- **Phase 3: Developing the Plan**  
The third phase is focused on the development of concrete recommendations that flow from, and materially work towards the vision, goals, and spatial plan developed under Task 6 in the Visioning Phase. The intent of this phase is to allow for focused discussion and feedback on potential recommendations before developing the full chapter narrative and illustrative graphics to support those recommendations. Task 7 is part comprises this Phase.
- **Phase 4: Documenting**  
This final phase is focused on developing a concise yet comprehensive final report document that provides a compelling and accessible narrative which drives a shared public understanding and delivers collective implementation momentum. Tasks 8 and 9 are included in this Phase.

Tasks referenced in the 4-phase process are described below.

- a. Task 1 Project Management
  - i. This task is largely administrative in nature and includes such items as: kick-off / introductory meetings with City staff and the Planning Board; data compilation, development of operational plan for implementation of the multifaceted public engagement strategy (detailed in Task #3), establishment of a graphic design format / vocabulary for the project, as well as ongoing coordination meetings between staff and the consultant.
  - ii. Schedule: Summer – early Fall 2026; however, ongoing coordination meetings with staff will continue for the full duration of the entire project.
- b. Task 2 Stakeholder Participation
  - i. This task is focused on supporting the Planning Board, as well as other City subject matter Boards / Commissions, and includes the following:
    1. Planning Board: A total of 5 “milestone meetings” throughout the duration of the project (i.e. project launch, presentation of draft plan framework, presentation of draft recommendations, draft plan presentation, and final adoption) and assistance with the formation of a Planning Board Steering Committee (*if such a Committee is desired by the Board*), with four Steering Committee meetings through the duration of the project.
    2. Subject Matter Boards and Commissions (i.e. Conservation Commission, Economic Development Advisory Committee, Energy & Environment Committee, Heritage Commission, Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee, Transportation Policy Advisory Committee):

- a. Two group briefing sessions with these boards / committees (project orientation, and results of public participation); and,
    - b. Two meetings with each Board / Commission / Committee individually to present data, and receive input on potential recommendations (likely following Task 5 and during Task 6).
  - ii. Schedule: Throughout the project process.
- c. Task 3 Public Participation:
  - i. This task includes the following:
    - 1. Two City-wide Visioning Sessions / Forums (completed in conjunction with the NH Listens initiative from Mayor Champlin).
    - 2. Neighborhood / Village Forums (one session for each of the following neighborhoods: Penacook Village, West Concord, Downtown / West End, South End, Concord Heights, East Concord) anticipated to take place in early 2027.
    - 3. Community Survey (translated into up to 3 languages other than English) to take place in Fall 2026.
    - 4. Subject Matter Focus Groups: Meetings with separate focus groups dedicated to Housing, Economic Development, and New Americans to take place in Winter / Spring 2027.
    - 5. Promotional materials including website, press releases, social media for key project milestones.
    - 6. A report summarizing the results of community engagement.
- d. Task 4 Review of Existing Plans and Regulations
  - i. This task will include:
    - 1. A review and synthesis of the 2030 Master Plan, as well as other plans and studies which were completed subsequent to the adoption of the 2030 Master Plan in 2008.
    - 2. Review of existing land use regulations.
    - 3. Review of current economic development programs and policies.
  - ii. Schedule: Summer / Fall 2026.
- e. Task 5 Concord Today Analysis
  - i. This task includes:
    - 1. Creation of a comprehensive demographic, housing, and economic profile for the City (as a whole), as well as the 6 neighborhoods / villages in the community.
    - 2. Existing conditions mapping and analysis for:
      - a. Historic and cultural resources;
      - b. Natural resources and open space;
      - c. Community facilities / parks and recreation;
      - d. Utility infrastructure;
      - e. Transportation infrastructure;
      - f. Housing;
      - g. Economic development; and,
      - h. Land Use.

3. Review of emerging trends and drivers identified through these data.
    - ii. Schedule: Summer 2026 / Fall 2026.
  - f. Task 6 Plan Framework Development
    - i. This task includes:
      1. Identifying key themes which will form the basis of the Master Plan topics; creation of vision statements, and identification of goals associated therewith; identification of key areas for growth / redevelopment / adaption / development, and creation of spatial plans for certain locations (2D and 3D modeling / plans / drawings); and creation of a Community Design Framework to guide future development for neighborhoods and Villages throughout the City.
    - ii. Schedule: Fall 2026 – Winter 2027.
  - g. Task 7 Recommendation Drafting and Prioritization
    - i. This task involves drafting of recommended policies, programs, and investment actions for the City, and will specifically include:
      1. Community design principals to guide future amendments to zoning and other land use regulations.
      2. An analysis of the City’s current ordinance and the recommendations developed as part of the Master Plan process, to make specific zoning amendment recommendations.
      3. An implementation plan for draft recommendations.
      4. Preparation of content which will be the basis of the various Master Plan Chapters (Historic / Cultural Resources, Natural Resources / Open Space, Utilities, Transportation, Community Facilities / Parks and Recreation, Economic Development, Housing, Energy and Sustainability, and Land Use / Community Character)
    - ii. Schedule: Winter 2027 – June 2027
  - h. Task 8 Documenting
    - i. This task involves preparation of the draft Master Plan for review.
    - ii. Schedule: March 2027 – October 2027
  - i. Task 9: Final Master Plan
    - i. This task involves finalizing the draft Master Plan and will involve:
      1. Presentation of the Draft Plan to the Planning Board
      2. Review and editing of the Draft Plan upon final comments from the Planning Board and staff
      3. Adoption public hearing by the Planning Board
      4. Publishing of the adopted final Master Plan
    - ii. Schedule: October 2027 – April 2028
3. Kick Off Meeting with Utile: Utile’s scope of work includes a kick off meeting with the Board. The purpose of the meeting is to get the Board acquainted with Utile’s team, as well as further discuss how the project will move forward, schedule, and other pertinent details. Potential meeting dates are: July 21<sup>st</sup>, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, July 28, or July 29<sup>th</sup>. **The Board**

**should advise staff about dates / times that would be conducive for the Board to host a workshop meeting.**

4. **Planning Board Management of Master Plan Project:** As previously noted, the Planning Board is entity responsible for the creation and adoption of the City’s Master Plan. As the community moves forward with the Master Plan, the Planning Board should decide how it would like to oversee and manage this process.

Similar to the 2030 Master Plan (completed in 2008), the Board could elect to manage this process itself. Alternatively, if desired, the Planning Board could appoint a Steering Committee to guide and advise the Board throughout the Master Plan process. The Steering Committee would be subcommittee of the Planning Board. Potential representation on the Steering Committee could be as follows. All members would be appointed by the Board, and serve at the Board’s pleasure.

	Total Representatives
Planning Board	6
Conservation Commission	1
Economic Development Advisory Committee	1
Energy & Environment Committee	1
Heritage Commission	1
Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee	1
Transportation Policy Advisory Committee	1
<u>Total</u>	<u>12</u>

**Staff recommends that the Board consider these options and provide guidance at its July regular meeting, or work session meeting with Utile (to be scheduled).**