

SAVE OUR TOWN

A LESSON IN RINDGE HISTORY



TOPICS

- Overview
- Agenda 21
- Crossroads Overlay District
- Proponent Viewpoint
- Save Our Town Viewpoint
- Pros and Cons
- Final Outcome
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OVERVIEW

- What was Save Our Town?
 - Save the Town (SOT) was a citizen group/movement that emerged in the early 2010s as a local grassroots effort opposing the proposed *Crossroads Overlay District (AKA 4-Corners Overlay)* at the intersection of Routes 202 and 119.
 - Additional opposition was focused on regional and global initiatives that residents believed could undermine local governance and property rights.
 - The group also opposed any article on the town warrant that requested or involved federal grants or influence, advocating to keep the federal government out of town politics.

AGENDA 21

A PRECURSOR

AGENDA 21

- What is it?
 - A comprehensive, non-binding action plan developed by the United Nations at the Earth Summit (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. It is designed to promote sustainable development globally, nationally, and locally. The "21" in the name refers to the 21st century.
 - Some of its principles—especially regarding land use, environmental sustainability, and local governance—align with existing state and local planning policies in New Hampshire.
 - Critics claim it is a threat to private property rights, national sovereignty, and individual freedoms. Some believe it is a framework for global governance under the guise of environmental sustainability, despite its voluntary nature. Agenda 21 was consistently referenced by SOT'ers throughout their campaign against the Crossroads Overlay District.

AGENDA 21

- Key Aspects:
 - Sustainability
 - Encourages governments at all levels to integrate economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity.
 - Local Implementation
 - Emphasizes local governments playing a key role in adopting sustainable policies.
 - Four Main Groups:
 - Social and Economic Dimensions
 - Combats poverty, changes consumption patterns, and promotes health.
 - Conservation and Resource Management
 - Focuses on protecting ecosystems, reducing pollution, and promoting sustainable land use.
 - Strengthening Major Groups
 - Enhances the role of women, youth, Indigenous people, and other groups in decision-making.
 - Implementation
 - Includes science, technology, education, financial resources, and international partnerships.

AGENDA 21

- Relevance to local governance in Rindge:
 - Agenda 21 doesn't directly affect local policies, however, some of its principles are reflected in state and regional planning initiatives that promote conservation, economic development, and sustainable land use.
 - New Hampshire State Laws & Policies
 - RSA 9-b, 483-b (Shoreland Protection Act), and NH Climate Action Plan
 - Local Planning in Rindge
 - Rindge Master Plan
 - Guided by the Planning Board, sets long-term development goals, considering environmental conservation and economic sustainability.
 - Zoning and Land Use Regulations
 - Influence housing, commercial development, and resource protection—topics discussed in Agenda 21.
 - Regional Influence
 - Organizations like the Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) assist municipalities in land use and infrastructure planning, aligning with some sustainability concepts.

AGENDA 21

- So why the controversy?
 - Some opponents argue that Agenda 21 could erode private property rights or impose unnecessary regulations. However, in New Hampshire:
 - Property Rights Are Strongly Protected
 - NH is a home-rule limited state, meaning local governments only have powers explicitly granted by state law. Any policy perceived as infringing on property rights would require state legislative approval.
 - Municipalities cannot force sustainability mandates beyond existing zoning, conservation, and land use laws.
 - Local Authority Overrides International Influence
 - Rindge and other NH towns develop independent Master Plans and zoning regulations that prioritize local priorities over international frameworks.
 - The NH Legislature Opposes Global Mandates
 - In 2012, NH lawmakers passed a resolution rejecting Agenda 21 (House Concurrent Resolution 13), citing concerns over property rights and state sovereignty.

AGENDA 21

- How might Agenda 21 concepts relate to Rindge's future?
 - While the UN has no legal authority over Rindge, sustainability planning is already embedded in NH municipal planning laws. This means:
 - Land Use & Conservation
 - Rindge's zoning ordinances and conservation efforts aim to preserve wetlands, forests, and rural character, which aligns with some aspects of sustainable development—but these are locally controlled, not UN-directed.
 - Infrastructure & Energy
 - Grants for energy-efficient buildings, solar installations, and broadband expansion align with modern sustainability efforts but are driven by state and federal incentives, not Agenda 21.
 - Economic Development
 - Programs to attract businesses while protecting natural resources are common municipal strategies, regardless of global sustainability frameworks.

AGENDA 21

- Should Rindge residents be concerned about Agenda 21?
 - No. All local policies are voted on by the residents of Rindge—nothing can be imposed by an external body.
 - NH is one of the strongest states in the country for local control and property rights.
 - If residents believe that sustainability efforts could lead to excessive restrictions, public engagement at Town Meetings is the best way to influence local policy.

AGENDA 21

- Key Takeaways:
 - Agenda 21 has no direct legal impact on Rindge or any NH municipality.
 - State and local governments already have sustainability planning measures that align with NH laws—not international mandates.
 - NH protects property rights and local autonomy through zoning, Town Meetings, and state law.
 - Residents who oppose or support sustainability initiatives should stay involved in Town Meetings and planning discussions to ensure policies align with Rindge's values.

CROSSROADS OVERLAY DISTRICT

RINDGE PLANNING BOARD



CROSSROADS OVERLAY DISTRICT

- What was it?
 - In late 2013 and early 2014, the Rindge Planning Board introduced the concept of the Crossroads Overlay District, AKA 4-Corners Overlay, targeting the intersection of Routes 119 and 202. The proposal was linked to a planning grant awarded through Plan NH's Community Planning Grant program, which was funded by NHHFA using federal HUD funds.
 - The proposal sought to implement new zoning regulations that would:
 - Reduce the minimum lot size from the existing 2-acre requirement to ½ acre within the overlay district.
 - Encourage higher-density development in the specified area.
 - The project was centered on economic development, smart growth, and infrastructure planning.

CROSSROADS OVERLAY DISTRICT

- Proponents, including members of the Planning Board and local business advocates, supported the proposal based on the following key points:
 1. Economic Development & Local Business Growth
 2. Smart Growth & Land Use Planning
 3. Infrastructure & Traffic Management
 4. Alignment with the Town's Master Plan
 5. Housing & Community Benefits
 6. Potential State and Regional Collaboration

PROPONENT VIEWPOINT



PROPONENT VIEWPOINT

I. Economic Development & Local Business Growth

- Advocates believed the Crossroads Overlay District would attract new businesses and provide economic opportunities, particularly at the intersection of Routes 119 and 202, a high-traffic area.
- The development could lead to an expanded tax base, reducing the burden on residential property owners by increasing commercial tax revenues.
- By allowing higher-density development, the proposal aimed to create a business-friendly environment that would encourage investment in Rindge.

PROPONENT VIEWPOINT

2. Smart Growth & Land Use Planning

- The ½-acre lot size reduction was designed to concentrate growth in an area that was already well-connected by major roads, preventing urban sprawl into other rural parts of Rindge.
- Supporters saw the proposal as aligning with “smart growth” principles, which encourage compact, walkable, mixed-use development to balance economic growth with conservation.
- Proponents argued that without a planned district, Rindge could face disorganized growth, with businesses spreading across town rather than being strategically concentrated.

PROPONENT VIEWPOINT

3. Infrastructure & Traffic Management

- The development would encourage infrastructure improvements, including road maintenance, traffic flow management, and potentially expanded water and sewer services.
- By focusing commercial development at this intersection, it would reduce traffic congestion on smaller town roads by creating a centralized business area.

PROPONENT VIEWPOINT

4. Alignment with the Town's Master Plan

- Supporters pointed to the town's Master Plan, which called for strategic planning to support sustainable growth while maintaining Rindge's rural character.
- The overlay district was seen as a compromise solution that would allow some development while still keeping most of the town's rural landscape intact.

PROPONENT VIEWPOINT

5. Housing & Community Benefits

- The proposal allowed for the potential development of affordable housing options, which could benefit young professionals, families, and seniors looking to downsize.
- A mixed-use zoning approach (businesses and residential areas together) could create a more vibrant, pedestrian-friendly community.

PROPONENT VIEWPOINT

6. Potential State and Regional Collaboration

- Advocates suggested that an economically vibrant Crossroads District would make Rindge more competitive for state and federal economic grants to support infrastructure, roadways, and municipal services.

SAVE OUR TOWN VIEWPOINT



SAVE OUR TOWN VIEWPOINT

- Members of SOT raised several concerns regarding the project:
 1. Lack of Transparency
 - The movement criticized the sudden introduction of the overlay district late in the planning process, feeling that it lacked sufficient public discussion and awareness.
 2. Property Rights
 - Reducing minimum lot sizes was seen as a potential infringement on existing property owners' rights and a shift towards higher-density housing that could alter the town's rural character.
 3. External Influence
 - The movement was wary of external organizations, such as Plan NH, influencing local zoning changes, viewing them as potential threats to local autonomy.

SAVE OUR TOWN VIEWPOINT

I. Lack of Transparency

- SOT'ers believed the Planning Board was being deliberately deceptive in the Crossroads Overlay District proposal for a few reasons:
 - Late introduction and first use of the name "Crossroads Overlay District". SOT'ers claim it was never mentioned until late November or early December, just weeks before it was to be placed on the ballot.
 - Non-descriptive verbiage on the proposed warrant article in favor of adopting the project, leading to speculation that the Planning Board was hiding details of the zoning changes from 2-acre lots to ½ acre lots.
 - Claims that town officials falsely suggested that Rindge residents want to adopt the article, based on 500 surveys from more than a decade prior.

SAVE OUR TOWN VIEWPOINT

2. Property Rights

- SOT'ers believed that adopting the project (specifically the lot size requirement changes) was a guarantee that nearby residential areas would be affected, thus violating homeowner's property rights.
- Claimed that high-density housing would negatively impact Rindge's rural character, create unnecessary strain on local resources leading to higher costs, and would ultimately result in undesirable low-income housing.

SAVE OUR TOWN VIEWPOINT

3. External Influence

- Principally opposed to 'regionalism', SOT'ers opposed the project because they felt it was driven by outside groups rather than a truly local initiative, linking it to Agenda 21 style planning. The use of federal grant money and involvement of state planning organizations raised concerns about top-down governance and loss of local control, opening the door for state or federal interference in local zoning. The committee also claimed the town had kept the plan a secret until an SOT member attended a "visioning" session and discovered the 'truth'.
- Statements such as "we do not need the federal government's help" and "we take care of ourselves" became popular sentiments for the SOT movement.

SAVE OUR TOWN VIEWPOINT

- Due to these concerns, SOT actively and aggressively campaigned against the adoption of the project.
 - Attended Planning Board and Board of Selectmen meetings
 - Sent out flyers to every home in Rindge.
 - Held an informational meeting with State Reps
 - Canvassed neighborhoods with petitions
 - Rallied numerous members of the community

PROS AND CONS



PROS & CONS

Category	Proponent Argument	Save Our Town Argument
Economic Development	Would attract new businesses, increase tax revenues, and reduce reliance on residential property taxes.	Could favor large corporate interests over local businesses, changing the town's character.
Tax Impact	Expanding the commercial tax base could help stabilize or reduce residential tax burdens over time.	Potential increase in property values could raise assessments, impacting long-term tax rates.
Smart Growth & Planning	Encouraged compact, controlled development rather than sporadic, unregulated growth.	Could lead to overdevelopment, reducing green space and contributing to urban sprawl.
Infrastructure & Traffic	Focused growth could lead to road improvements, better traffic flow, and expanded municipal services.	Increased development might overwhelm existing infrastructure and lead to higher long-term costs.
Alignment w/Master Plan	Supported strategic planning efforts outlined in the town's Master Plan for balanced growth.	Some residents felt it violated the town's rural identity and vision for slow, controlled growth.
Housing Development	Allowed for mixed-use zoning, potentially creating affordable housing options.	Increased housing density could alter the town's rural landscape and strain local services.
State & Regional Collaboration	Made Rindge more competitive for state and federal funding for infrastructure improvements.	Concerns that regional organizations had too much influence over local decisions.
Local Control	Provided a structured way for the town to guide and regulate commercial development.	Viewed it as an outside push for top-down planning, rather than true local governance.
Public Awareness & Transparency	Supporters felt it was a reasonable, well-planned proposal that followed legal town procedures.	Many residents were unaware of the full proposal, leading to distrust and lack of support at Town Meeting.

FINAL OUTCOME



FINAL OUTCOME

- The efforts of the SOT movement culminated in the rejection of the project by residents who felt it would fundamentally change Rindge's small-town identity. Additionally, the town:
 - Voted in favor to remove Rindge's membership from the Southwest Regional Planning Commission
 - Voted in favor to require voter approval for the acceptance of any HUD grants
 - Removed all reference to the 'charette' from the Rindge Master Plan.
 - Elected one SOT member to the Board of Selectmen
 - Elected two SOT members to the Planning Board
- Opposition was not necessarily against development itself, but rather against the scope, density, and perceived external influences shaping the proposal.
- The SOT movement also highlighted the active civic engagement in Rindge, reflecting the community's dedication to participatory governance and local decision-making.

LESSONS LEARNED



LESSONS LEARNED

I. Activism Is A Powerful Tool

- Lesson: The SOT movement was a successful endeavor because it was organized, strategic, deliberate, and aggressive. Their ability to distribute information and assemble their base led to increased citizen participation in government and town meetings, and election turnout.
- Future Approach:
 - Acknowledge citizen groups/movements and consider them stakeholders in town decisions.
 - Encourage public involvement and volunteerism in local governance.
 - Use the defeat of the Crossroads project as a case study on the importance of community voices.

LESSONS LEARNED

2. Public Engagement & Transparency Matter

- Lesson: A major reason for the opposition was that many residents felt uninformed about the proposal. Some believed the plan was being pushed without sufficient public input.
- Future Approach:
 - Hold more public forums before drafting proposals.
 - Ensure that all information is clearly communicated, using mailers, social media, public hearings, and the town website.
 - Encourage small-group discussions with stakeholders to address concerns proactively.

LESSONS LEARNED

3. Align with the Town's Vision and Rural Character

- Lesson: Many residents felt the proposal didn't fit Rindge's small-town, rural identity and that it favored large-scale development.
- Future Approach:
 - Ensure that any future growth aligns directly with the Master Plan and reflects Rindge's rural character.
 - Encourage smaller-scale, locally owned businesses over large corporate developments.
 - Maintain zoning regulations that preserve open space and minimize overdevelopment.

LESSONS LEARNED

4. Clearly Define Benefits and Trade-offs

- Lesson: While proponents argued that the overlay district would boost the local economy and increase tax revenue, opponents felt unclear on how much tax relief would actually be provided.
- Future Approach:
 - Provide detailed tax impact studies to show how commercial expansion affects the residential tax base.
 - Balance economic development with controlled growth by proposing mixed-use zoning that maintains Rindge's character.

LESSONS LEARNED

5. Avoid External Influence Perceptions

- Lesson: Some residents were wary of outside organizations, such as Plan NH, influencing Rindge's local decisions.
- Future Approach:
 - Any collaboration with regional or state planning organizations should be fully disclosed and explained.
 - Make it clear that final decisions rest with Rindge residents, not external entities.

LESSONS LEARNED

6. Address Infrastructure and Traffic Concerns

- Lesson: A major fear was that increased development would put strain on roads, traffic, and emergency services without a clear plan to fund improvements.
- Future Approach:
 - Conduct traffic impact assessments before proposing new zoning changes.
 - Ensure impact fees are included so new developments contribute to town infrastructure costs.

LESSONS LEARNED

7. Consider a Phased or Scaled Back Approach

- Lesson: The broad scope of the proposal likely contributed to its defeat. A smaller, phased plan might have been better received.
- Future Approach:
 - Start with a smaller pilot project that demonstrates success before proposing a town-wide change.
 - Consider overlay zoning in limited areas first, focusing on sections of town where commercial growth is already happening.

LESSONS LEARNED

8. Learn from Other Towns' Experiences

- Lesson: Similar zoning issues have come up in other NH towns. Learning from their successes and failures could help craft a better proposal in the future.
- Future Approach:
 - Study neighboring towns that have successfully expanded commercial zoning without harming rural character.
 - Adapt strategies that worked elsewhere but customize them to fit Rindge's unique needs.