

Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan

Lancaster Planning Board

August 26, 2024



North Nashua River at Cook Conservation Area

The ***Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan*** adopted by the Lancaster Planning Board, in accordance with M.G.L. C. 41, § 81D: August 26, 2024.

Coordinated by Wayne Feiden, FAICP, Plan Sustain, Inc. Plan Sustain’s mission is to assist communities to advance planning, sustainability, resilience, placemaking and livable communities, equity, and economic development.

Thanks are due to the hundreds of residents and stakeholders in public forums, public meetings, interviews, and the survey, and Town of Lancaster boards and staff:

Town Staff	Select Board
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Assistance Planning Director/Conservation Agent Brad Stone	Ralph Gifford, III
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Mike Favreau	Eric Jakubowicz	Dennis Hubbard, Jr.
George Frantz	Jeanne Rich	David Mallette
Regina Brown	Frank Sullivan	Thomas Seidenberg

Acknowledgement

Lancaster was built upon the unceded homelands of the ***Nashawogg*** (also known as ***Nashaway***) band of the ***Nipmuc tribe***, part of the ***Algonquian nation*** and other indigenous and first Americans who inhabited this landscape since time immemorial. Lancaster has benefited from their extensive contributions, assistance, and traditional land stewardship. We commit to acknowledging and learning from its rich intertwined history.

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1. The Town We Love and Want – Lancaster Community Vision

We are united in wanting to maintain and strengthen the qualities that make Lancaster the town we love and want. We cherish our people, education, heritage, village centers, farmland, woods and open space, beautiful rivers and ponds, and rural and historic character. We are, however, far more than simply a rural or suburban town. We want more business and a more diverse tax base, all developed in harmony with our historical patterns.

We want to preserve Lancaster as a diverse community of people, sustainable over the long term; with equity and access for all. We want affordable opportunities for our young people to have the opportunity to own or rent, as they wish, their own homes and apartments to be able to continue living in the town in which they grew up, and we want the opportunity for all our residents to stay in town even as their space needs evolve.

We want to protect the Town Green and its ring of historic buildings – the jewel and centerpiece of our community. At the same time, we look forward to having an enhanced ability to walk among both businesses and public facilities that serve our needs within an integrated South Lancaster center and nearly adjacent commercial village center where we can encounter and mingle with our neighbors.

We want a town government that continues to prioritize services to meet all our residents' needs, at the same time as it continues mindful monitoring of municipal expenditures and expanding our commercial and industrial tax base. We cherish our children and our youth, their enthusiasm, and their energy, and are committed to meeting their needs for education, activities, gathering places, and the ability to travel safely. We respect and value our elders. We are dedicated to ensuring that they can live in their own community as long as they want with comfortable gathering places. We will ensure that all of our residents, whatever their backgrounds and economic conditions, have the opportunity to be fully engaged in town governance and civic life.

We see a future where visitors come to Lancaster to admire its beautiful, historic buildings, traditional New England green, to canoe and kayak on the lovely Nashua River; and to pick apples and buy fresh produce from local farms.

We look forward to our working residents being able to work from home and in or near Lancaster without needing to drive long distances to far away jobs on congested roads. We see a time when the traffic may begin to decrease due to our efforts to coordinate land use, new development, and improve public transportation. We see the day when residents can bicycle and walk through large areas of town on trails connecting to neighboring communities and the larger region, safe from traffic.

Even as Lancaster grows, we want the quality of life here to remain high owing to our good schools, institutions, development opportunities, and ability to preserve our small-town atmosphere and history. We recognize the value and increasing fragility of our natural resources – our water, rivers, woods, fields, and wildlife habitat – and we understand their critical importance to both the local and regional ecosystems and to our quality of life as residents of our town and also members of that ecosystem. We have come to understand how our human behavior directly affects that ecosystem – for better or for worse – and we are committed to being good ecological citizens.

Lancaster in 2035 will evolve from today, but it must be recognizable as our Lancaster – our historic village character intact, open space, woodlands, rivers, and rural character preserved - a place for all.

2. Executive Summary

The *Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan* provides a long-term vision with a shorter-term strategic focus.

The Town We Want and Love – Lancaster Community Vision, above, provides Lancaster’s shared vision and community values.

Land use goals include strengthening town focal points at the Lancaster Center/Town Green, South Lancaster Center, and a South Lancaster Main Street village by the railroad bridge, the successful redevelopment of the DCAMM state-owned property, supporting the eventual Atlantic Union College property redevelopment, simplifying and strengthening zoning to address this plan and the new MBTA Communities requirements, and supporting opportunities for commercial and industrial development while protecting residential areas from needless adverse impacts. Continue to focus on the previously identified Priority Development Areas in North Lancaster.

Housing goals include protecting the physical pattern of existing neighborhoods while allowing more flexibility to encourage smaller homes and changing community needs, expanding deed-restricted affordable housing to reach a minimum of 10% of Lancaster housing, and expanding attainable housing so that our children, our new residents, and our seniors aging in place can afford housing.

Economic development goals include expanding the commercial and industrial tax base by attending to the needs of local established and emerging businesses (economic gardening), implementing zoning changes, undertaking infrastructure improvements, and creating stronger focal points at the Town Green, South Lancaster Center (which includes Atlantic Union College), North Lancaster, and an evolving South Lancaster village immediately north of the Main Street railroad bridge. Continue to focus on the previously identified Priority Development Areas in North Lancaster. Without economic development and expanding our tax base, none of the other goals can be fully achieved.

Natural and cultural resource goals include reducing the risk of natural and climate change-induced hazards, celebrating natural and human-built landscapes and environments, improving the presence of the Nashua River and other rivers in everyday life, monitoring the Devens South Post environmental cleanup, and addressing problems with invasive species in Lancaster.

Open space and recreation goals include implementing the current Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) and drafting a new 2025 OSRP, preserving and managing Lancaster’s most ecologically valuable areas, natural systems, and farmland, and managing trails, parks, recreation, and open space to serve residents.

Sustainability and resilience goals include mitigating Lancaster’s carbon and greenhouse gas footprint with a goal of the community and town buildings being carbon neutral by 2050, improving Lancaster’s ability to be resilient and thrive even with chronic and acute stress from climate change and other challenges, and ensuring that all residents have an opportunity to fully participate in governance and decision making.

Services and facilities goals include ensuring that Lancaster town public buildings and facilities are carbon neutral by 2040, maintaining and updating town public buildings and facilities to ensure that they meet current needs and are resilient to adverse climate change impacts, facilitating the rehabilitation of the former Town Hall to put it back into productive use, evaluating the full life-cycle costs of all capital investments to lower life cycle costs, and improving the Town Green, municipal building civic campus, and the infrastructure needed to serve comprehensive plan goals.

Circulation and mobility goals include ensuring the safety of all modes of transportation on all non-limited access roads, prioritizing projects on safety and addition of currently underserved modes, being an active player in regional planning of transportation improvements, improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities to allow access throughout town, and setting priorities for pedestrian-scale villages and nodes.

Implementation and action plan goals include mapping out short- and medium-term actions, ensuring that the vision and goals help guide longer-term actions over the next two decades, dedicating staff and committee time to implement consensus actions, improve accountability, and strengthen local and regional partnerships and collaborations.

The Lancaster 2035 focus area map (Figure 2-1), below, identifies focus areas with the unique opportunities:

- **North Lancaster** – Continue to explore the possibility of brining municipal water to the area, increase the compatibility of commercial/industrial and adjacent and nearby residential areas, and expand commercial and industrial opportunities.
- **Devens South Post** – Federal cleanup of the release of hazardous materials.
- **North Nashua River and Nashua River (mainstem)** – Further protect and celebrate and expand recreation on Lancaster’s most visible and most important historical water features.
- **Town Green and municipal campus** – Protect and improve the Town Green, keep the municipal campus vibrant and resilient, and get the former Town Hall into productive use.
- **South Lancaster Center (including Atlantic Union College)** – Demonstrate the opportunities and incentives for redevelopment of the former Atlantic Union College, encourage additional commercial and residential activity in the town center, and improve the center as a focal point.
- **South Lancaster village by the Main Street railroad bridge**– Allow and encourage the long-term transformation of the auto-oriented strip just north of Clinton and the railroad bridge into a pedestrian friendly area with additional commercial and residential activities.
- **DCAMM State-owned Property** – Facilitate the redevelopment of the campus with housing, commercial, conservation, and recreational opportunities.

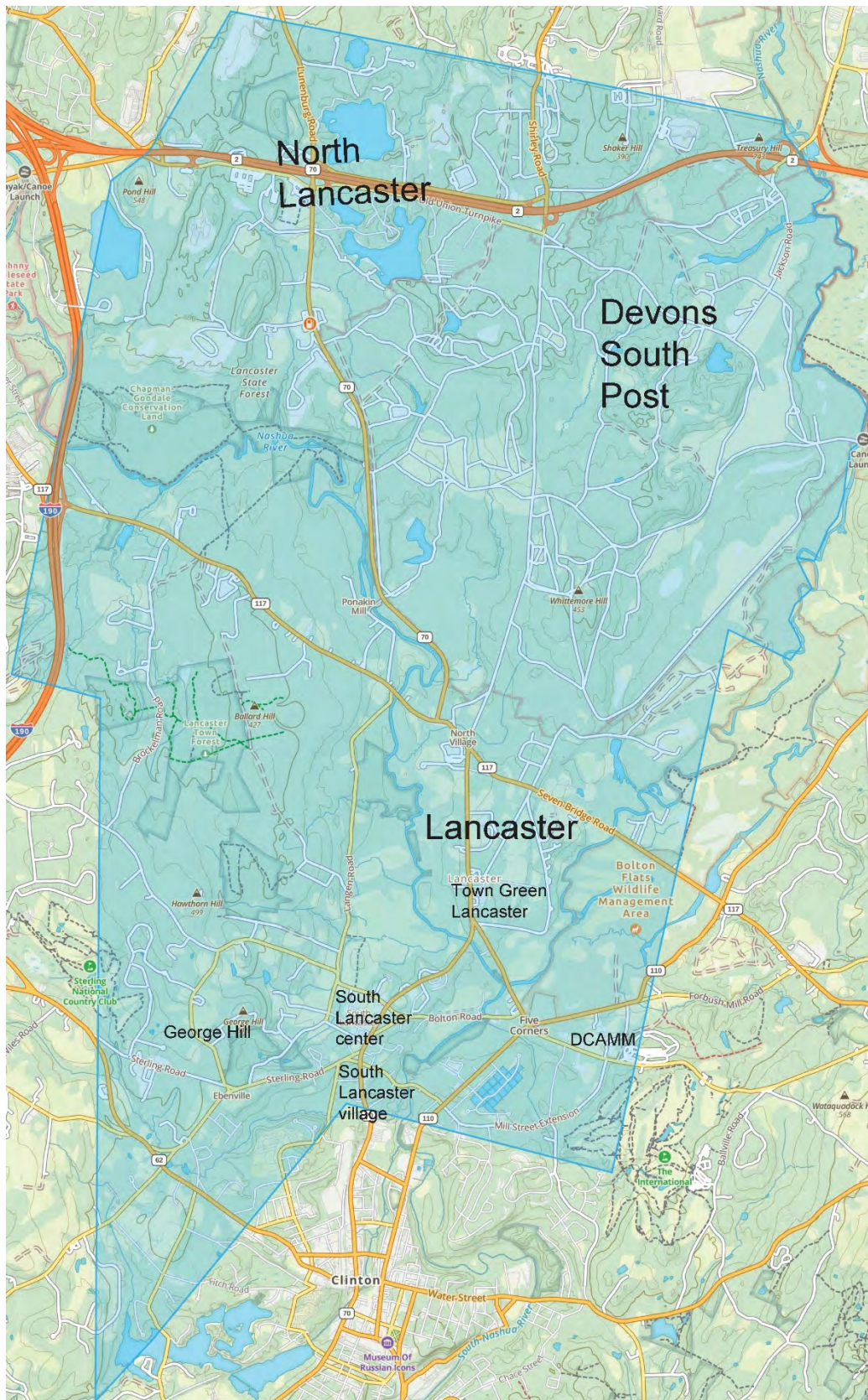


Figure 2-1. Lancaster areas referenced in plan

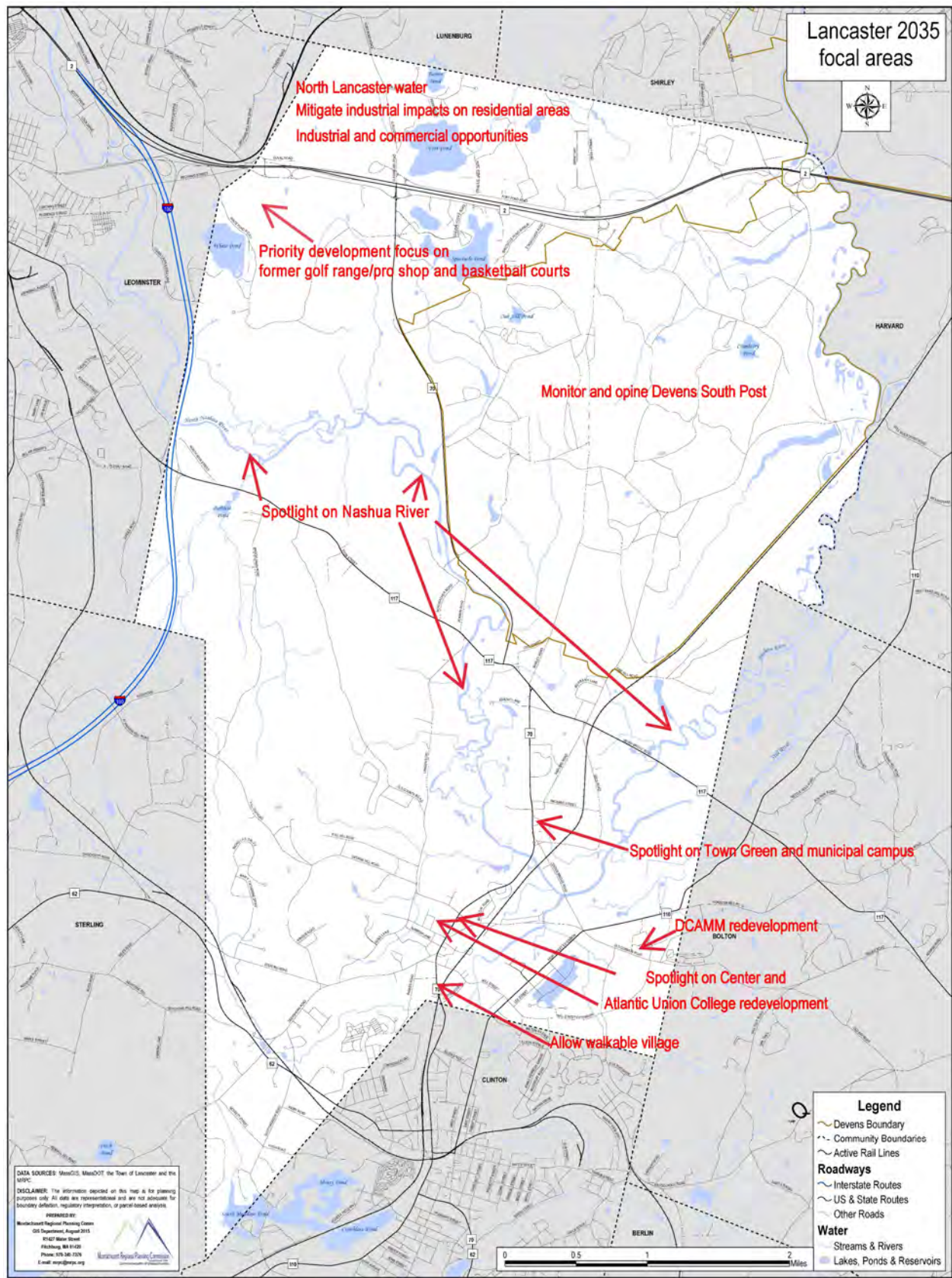


Figure 2-2. Lancaster 2035 Focus Areas

3. Community and Board Engagement

Lancaster 2035 engaged community and board members in a number of ways:

- Kickoff meeting with Planning Director and Planning Board chair (10/27/23)
- Project web site (www.Lancaster2035.org) comments received (10/28/23 to 5/15/24)
- Weekly coordination meeting with the Planning Director throughout the planning process
- Planning Board kickoff meeting (11/28/23) (Figure 3-1. Community Engagement-Kickoff Forum)
- Planning, Police, Building community tour (12/5/23)
- Public forum (kickoff) at Mary Rowlandson Elementary School (Saturday 12/2/23)
- Planning Board working session (2/12/24)
- Invite all town boards to review and comment on the plan (2/19/24)
- Public forum (draft plan outline) at Mary Rowlandson Elementary School (Thursday 2/29/24)
- Community survey (on web and paper) (opens 2/29, closes 4/12/24)
- Planning Board working session (4/22/24)
- Public forum and public hearing (review final draft plan) (6/4/24)
- Planning Board working session (6/10/24)
- Planning Board adopts final Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan (8/26/2024)
- Select Board endorses final Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan (after Planning Board action)

Invitations for public forums and the public hearing were sent out to the 2,800 people on the Thayer Memorial Library and town mailing lists, 110 people who signed up for the www.Lancaster2035.org mailing list, and people who attended a previous public forum. They were also posted on social media sites and at sites throughout Lancaster.

Exhibit A includes the comments and summaries from the three public forums, the high school student focus group, the community survey, and the www.Lancaster2035.org project website.

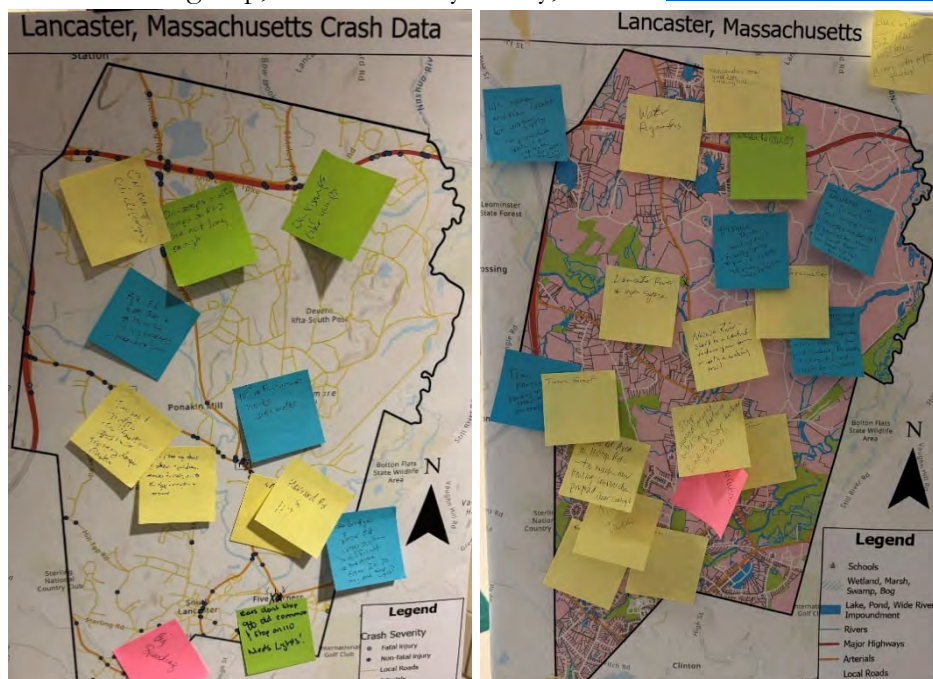


Figure 3-1. Community Engagement- kickoff forum

4. Background

Lancaster was built upon the unceded homelands of *Nashawogg*, or *Nashaway*, a band of the *Nipmuc tribe* of the *Algonquian nation*, and other Indigenous and Native Americans who inhabited this landscape since time immemorial. The Town of Lancaster acknowledges that Lancaster has benefited from their extensive contributions, assistance, and traditional land stewardship. We commit to acknowledging and learning from its rich intertwined history.

English and European settlers arrived in what was then called Nashaway in 1643. They created small agricultural settlements, trading with the Nipmuc and with an initial and then abandoned goal of extracting iron ore. Lancaster was the first European first settlement in what is now Worcester County. Lancaster was incorporated in 1653, initially as Lancaster on the Nashua. By 1675, relations between the European settlers and Nipmuc and other Indigenous people deteriorated to violence, and the Nipmuc lost their land with no formal treaty ever ceding those lands.

Berlin, Bolton, Boylston, West Boylston, Clinton, Harvard, Leominster, and Sterling were all part of the original Lancaster settlement and were carved off into separate municipalities. (Figure 4-1. Locus.)



Figure 4-1. Locus

Residents enjoy Lancaster's sense of place, the attractive South Lancaster Center, North Village Historic District, recreation and conservation areas, and Lancaster Center and Town Green and municipal campus. The Nashua River, extensive open space, attractive rolling hills, farmland, and healthy neighborhoods enhance the natural bucolic feel. The town seal, Lancaster on the Nashua, represents both the town's historical and current connection to the river (Figure 4-2. Town Seal). Lancaster provides a vibrant civic life and a degree of civic trust, that **Lancaster is us not them**, that is missing in many communities.



Figure 4-2. Town seal

Lancaster is located within the Nashua River watershed, with the two major branches of the river (North Nashua and Nashua mainstem) flowing through or bordering Lancaster. Its soils are primarily of glacial origin, including glacial tills (30%), and glacial outwash alluvial sediments in low lying areas of rivers and Glacial Lake Nashua, a proglacial lake (OSRP, 2017).

Lancaster is in northern Worcester County and is part of the Montachusett region. The towns of Leominster and Sterling border Lancaster to the west, Lunenburg and Shirley to the north, Bolton to the east, and Clinton to the south. Lancaster has distinct villages and neighborhoods, including current and historic neighborhoods of Ebanville, Deershorn, South Lancaster, Five Corners, South Lancaster Center, North Village, and Ponakin Mill.

The North Village Historic District, Center Village Historic District, Lancaster Industrial School for Girls, and Shirley Shaker Village are on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). There are no local Lancaster Historic Districts. Hundreds of properties, both listed on the NRHP and not

listed, have been inventoried for historic value. Those inventories are available at the [Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System](#).

Interstate I-90 to the west and Highway Route 2 in the north provide excellent access. Lancaster is easily accessible to nearby employment centers, 5 miles to Devens, and 10 miles to the closest place on the Route 128 corridor. Larger cities are slightly farther, Worcester is 15 miles south and Boston is 36 miles east.

Lancaster has only minimal fixed route bus service (Route 8 with a single Lancaster stop at Old Union Turnpike off Route 2) and the Boston shuttle that passes through Route 2 but makes no stops in Lancaster through the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART). MART recently started an on-demand evening micro-transit program that covers a portion of Lancaster and complements its Council-on-Aging program. There is no rail transit to Boston or Worcester, but the MBTA's Westborough station (Framingham/Worcester Line) and MBTA Shirley, Leominster, Ayer, and Littleton stations (Fitchburg Line) provide some options (Figure 4-3. Regional Transit).

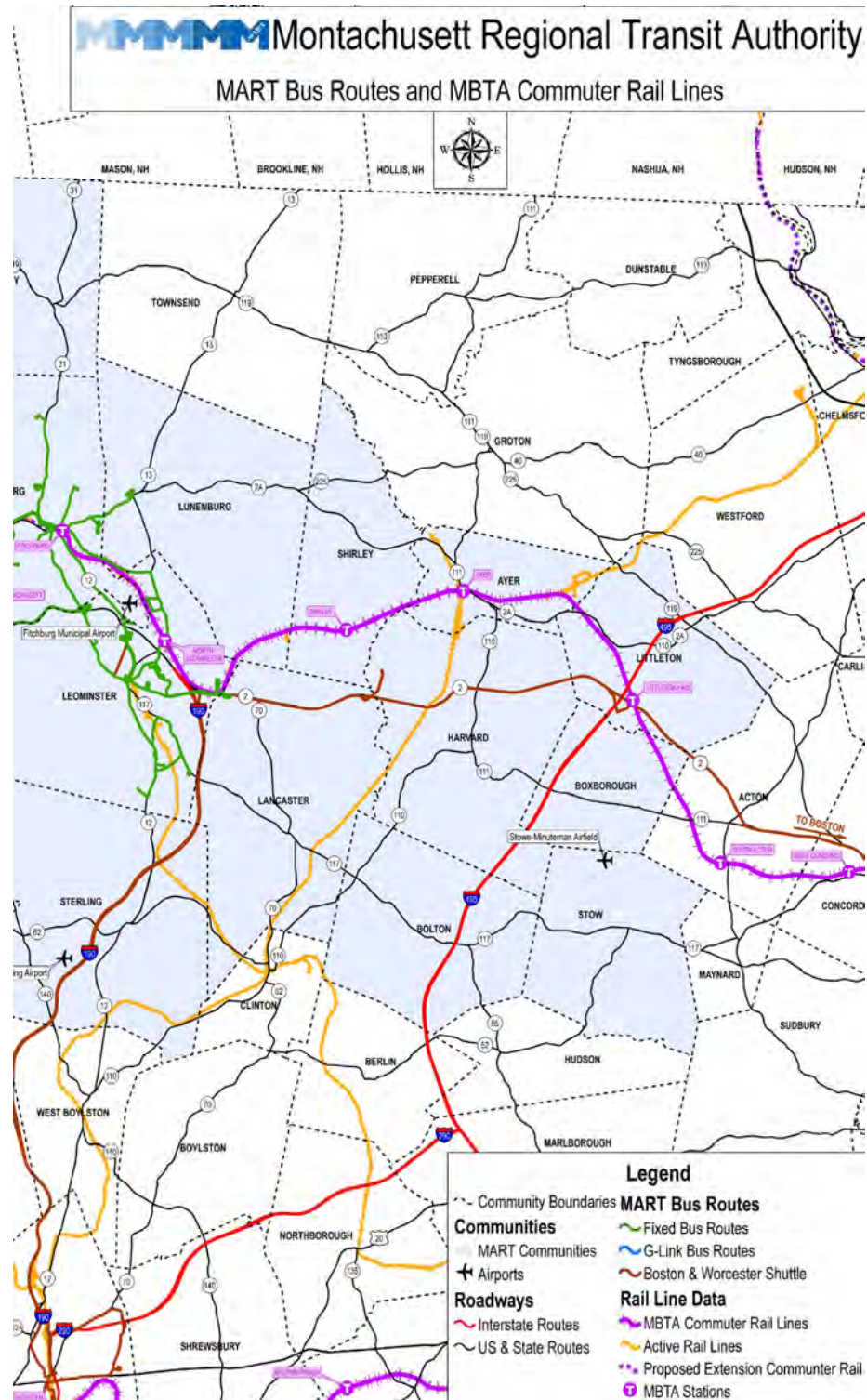


Figure 4-3. Regional Transit (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission)

Lancaster, on average, is better educated, higher income, more white, more likely to have been born in the United States, more likely to live in their own home, less likely to live in a subsidized deed-restricted dwelling unit, and more likely to live at lower density than the average for residents of both Worcester County and Massachusetts (Table 4-1. Summary Demographics).

The high rate of homeowners who are cost burdened (see Table 4-1) is misleading because long term residents who experienced housing inflation often have enough basis or equity in their home to be able to afford to live there even when they could not afford to buy their own home if they were moving to Lancaster today. This creates a “demographic bomb,” where new residents will need higher incomes to own a home in Lancaster and the gap in those who can attain market-rate housing will grow.

Table 4-1. Summary demographics

	Lancaster	Worcester Co.	Massachusetts
Population (2022)	8,394	862,927	6,982,740
White alone (not Latino/Hispanic)	84.2%	73.8%	69.6%
Median household size	2.45	2.52	2.46
Persons under 18 years of age	17.7%	20.3%	21.7%
Persons 65 years and older	18.1%	17.2%	17.3%
Owner-occupied dwellings	82.5%	65.9%	62.4%
25+ age with bachelor's degree	51.1%	38.4%	45.9%
25+ age with high school diploma	93.7%	91.4%	91.2%
Foreign born	6.8%	13.4%	13.7%
Travel time to work	29.4 minutes	29.3 minutes	29.5 minutes
Population density (2020) (persons/sq. mile)	307.3	570.7	901.2
Median household income	\$111,506	\$88,524	\$96,505
Poverty rate	3.1%	10.6%	10.4%
Area in square miles (in acres)	27.47 (17,600)	1,511	3,533,038
Subsidized/Affordable Housing (7/1/23)	5.04%		9.68%
Cost-burdened owner-occupied homes	29.7%		
Cost-burdened renter-occupied homes	54.8%		

Sources: Population Estimates July 1, 2022 (U.S. Census), Subsidized Housing Inventory (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities), MRPC, American Community Survey (2017-2021)

Lancaster has an older population (median age of 42.7) with fewer young people than Massachusetts as a whole (median age of 39.6). Massachusetts is already older than that of the United States (median age of 38.9).

Population Distribution by Age and Sex, “population pyramid,” (Figure 4-4) shows the bulge in older residents, especially older women. This female bulge reflects of Lancaster’s aging population and women’s average longer longevity.

With its aging population and changing housing patterns, Lancaster has an increasing number of single older residents. Many of those residents are over-housed in larger homes than they need and more expensive to maintain. The bulge in older residents and the increase in smaller and single-person households has increased Lancaster’s median age (half the population is older than the median and half is younger).

The older bulge will continue to move up as the existing middle-aged residents age. With fewer young children and that aging bulge, Lancaster’s median will continue to increase over the next two decades. This will continue to influence housing demand towards smaller units with greater accessibility.

Lancaster has experienced a slow but steady population growth (0.6% annually) in the 21st century (US Census), because of net in-migration. (See Figure 4-5 and 4-6. Median Age and Population trends.)

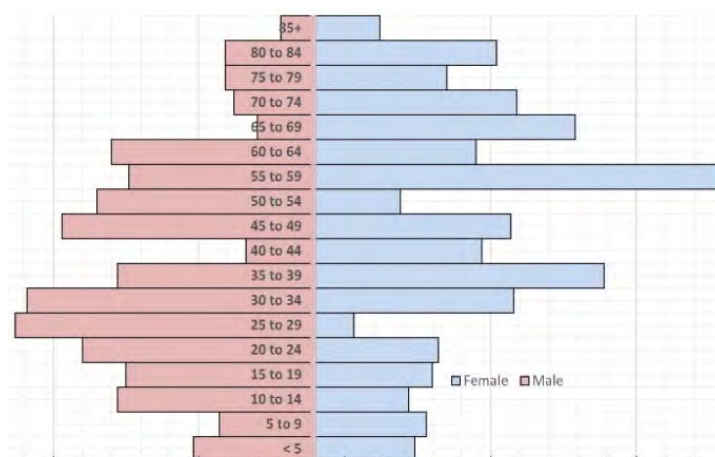


Figure 4-4. Population Distribution by Age and Sex (American Community Survey)

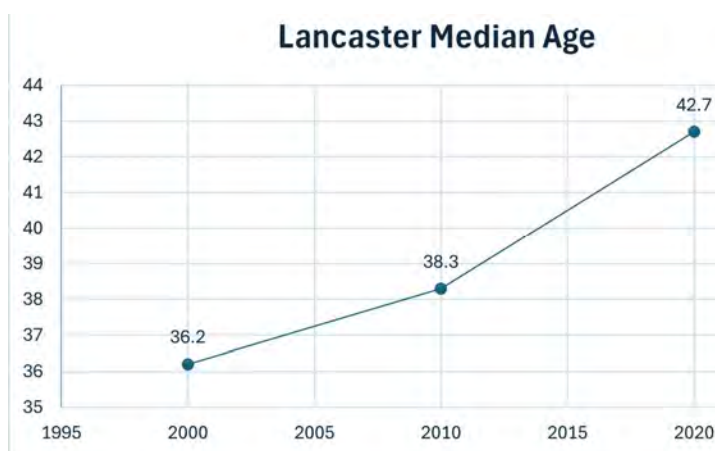
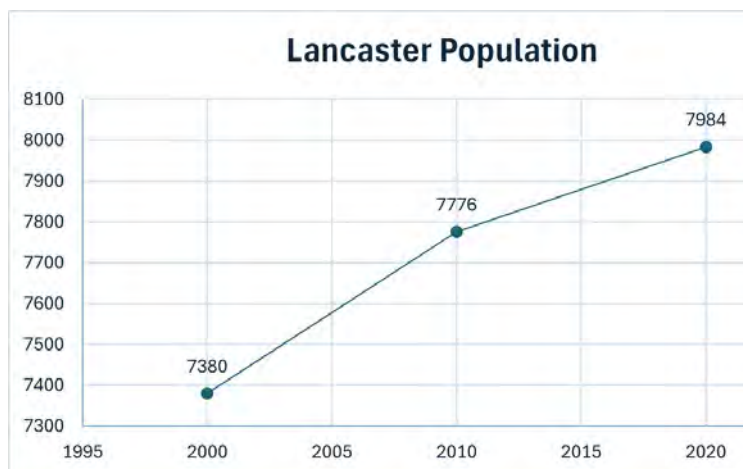


Figure 4-5 Lancaster Median Age trends (above) and Figure 4-6 Population trends (below)



With slightly more deaths than births in most years, however, Lancaster is experiencing a slight “natural decrease” in its population. Lancaster has experienced, however, a small population growth

because in-migration exceeds out-migration by slightly more than the natural decrease in most years (See Table 4-2. Lancaster Births and Deaths).

The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) has projected a small but steady population decrease based on the natural population decrease (Table 4-3. Population Projection). It is more likely that new housing and in-migration will lead to a more stable population, but the small population of youth and the aging population will make it highly unlikely that Lancaster will experience significant population growth over the next two decades absent the development of significant new housing.

Lancaster and most communities in Massachusetts have an aging population and a decline in household and family size. As a result, it will take more dwelling units to house the same number of people. MRPC projects (2023) that Lancaster will grow from 2,619 households in 2020 (US Census) to 3,019 households in 2050, even with their projected small decline in the total town population.

Lancaster has healthy municipal finances with an average debt burden, low pension liability, high median incomes, and a decent tax base (Moody's reports www.moodys.com/credit-ratings/Lancaster-Town-of-MA-credit-rating-800020593/). However, for aging residents on a fixed income and for households earning below the median income, Lancaster's cost of living, especially for those needing new housing, can be a significant burden.

13% of Lancaster's land use, by value and excluding tax-exempt properties, is industrial and commercial, which is higher than the average residential suburban communities but a bit lower than the statewide average of 17%. This is not nearly high enough to balance the amount of tax-exempt properties in Lancaster and avoid high property tax burdens.

The median single-family home property tax bill is slightly higher than that of the Commonwealth and abutting communities to its north, west, and south, but is significantly lower than abutting communities to its east (www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-average-single-family-tax#fy2022). Lancaster has a single tax rate for residential, commercial, and industrial properties, making it desirable for commercial and industrial uses to locate and remain in town, even with a higher-than-average tax rate of \$17.46 (FY24) per \$1,000.

Planning

The *Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan* grew out of Lancaster's last *Master Plan* (2007), a wide range of independent but relevant plans, independent analysis of trends and opportunities, and extensive community and board engagement outlined above.

Table 4-2. Lancaster Births and Deaths

Year	Births	Deaths
2022	52	84
2021	79	61
2020	52	71
2019	57	63
2018	58	47
2017	49	61
2016	60	69

Source: Massachusetts Vital Records

Table 4-3. Population Projection

2020	8,441
2022	8,394
2030	8,277
2040	7,922
2050	7,305
US Census (2020 decennial, 2022 estimate) and MRPC (2023)	

Comprehensive or master plans (comprehensive plan is the more common term), tend to have a planning horizon of about 20 years, but need to either be kept up to date with revisions every few years or significant revisions every decade or so. With the previous comprehensive plan now 17 years old, the time has come to reimagine Lancaster's future.

Lancaster Master Plan (Lancaster Planning Board and Herr & James Associates, 2007)

The 2007 Lancaster Master Plan opened with its own “***The Town We Want***” vision statement. That vision statement shares Lancaster's vision and values. It is still mostly relevant today. As a result, our new 2024-2035 vision statement (page 4, above) updates the previous vision with revisions as necessary to address changing conditions and opportunities.

Since 2007, Lancaster is making significant progress towards achieving the 2007 vision and the goals set forth in that plan. For example, Lancaster has:

- Focused on the **Town Green** and the buildings around it. Community Preservation Act funding has already helped to restore the Bulfinch (UU) Church and the Thayer Library (2023-2024), two of Town Greens anchors, as well as many other investments in public facilities.
- Significantly expanded inclusionary zoning to encourage **affordable and attainable housing** with CPA and other funds used to capitalize the relatively newly (2020) created Affordable Housing Trust.
- Modernized its zoning in many other ways, from accessory dwelling units by-right to inclusive affordable housing requirements.
- Expanded **open space and recreation** opportunities in the last 26 years as summarized in Lancaster Open Space and Recreation Plan (2017-2024).
- Improved environmental preservation and advanced climate readiness by implementing its Stormwater Management Plan and Stormwater Management Rules and Regulations (2007 and 2018). The Town is collaborating with the Army and EPA on the cleanup of the Devens South Post superfund site.
- Created of the **Tax Fairness** Committee (2023) to explore how to maintain services while exploring fair resident taxation with a strong focus on seniors and others living on fixed incomes.
- Analyzed **business and market conditions in the South Lancaster** commercial district (2021) which can inform the recommendations in this plan for future rezoning.
- Worked with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to improve **roadway safety** at major intersections and roadway corridors (e.g., Main Street/Route 70/117).
- Received a Commonwealth grant to support creating a **wayfinding program** to build a sense of place and support economic development (2024).
- Collaborated with MassDevelopment to plan for the State's **planned surplus** of the former campus located at 220 Old Common Road and prepared the necessary state legislation (2023-2024).

Other Lancaster plans also informed this comprehensive plan:

Community Resilience Program: Community Resilience Building (BETA Consulting, 2020)

The plan identifies Lancaster's climate change resilience priorities. These priorities are eligible for competitive Commonwealth Municipal Vulnerability grants. The plan can be revised anytime as priorities and MVP grant opportunities present themselves. At some point, Lancaster will want to

apply for a MVP 2.0 Planning grant to fund an update of this plan with deeper engagement from traditionally underrepresented populations, receive \$50,000 in seed funding for immediate implementation, and retain eligibility for future MVP grants.

The plan identified the top hazards including inland flooding, severe winter storms, invasive species, fire hazards, especially in North Lancaster, and other severe weather events, all more severe hazards because of climate change. This information, and the hazards identified in the plan, were used for the Hazard Mitigation Plan summarized below.

The highest priorities in the Community Compliance plan (with no order within the list) are:

- Culverts: Upsize culverts on Rt 117 and Rt 110, repair Sterling Rd. culvert, adopt culvert cleaning program, conduct town-wide culvert mapping and assessment, pursue grants and funding for culvert upgrades, and conduct preventative maintenance; Beaver Plan.
- Major Roads (Rt 117 and Rt 70): Raise Rt 117, make drainage improvements on South Main, evaluate drainage town-wide, update zoning and stormwater bylaws, and install permanent signage advising of flooding.
- Shelter Facility/Long-term Emergency Shelter: Study to find location for shelter, communicate with neighboring towns for short-term shelter available options, acquire generator for senior center, evaluate and local shelter opportunities and plans, and assess whether the middle and elementary school can be used as emergency shelters.
- Low-Income Population: Target study to alleviate flooding impacts, add translation services, and increase outreach.
- Municipal Buildings: Evaluate needs for upgrades and additional generators, especially Town Hall, increase communication prior and during hazard events, upgrade highway radio, and ensure buildings can function as winter and summer shelters.
- Elderly Population: Provide transportation, target study to alleviate flooding affecting elderly, and provide targeted info on evacuation.
- Evacuation Plan: Convene emergency management committee, post signage on roads, post route on town website and broadcast on local cable and maintain and upgrade the plan.
- Housing Authority (Elderly and Low-Income): Ensure reliable power source is available.

Medium priority projects in the plan, again with no order within this list, are:

- Bridges: Replace two Rt 117 bridges, at Bolton town line and near the Leominster town line. Work with MassDOT to evaluate the condition of bridges townwide.
- Pump Stations (sewer): Evaluation of pump stations with options to fortify against flooding.
- Highway Department: Feasibility study to relocate the DPW garage and develop options for reuse of highway facility.
- Wells, water protection, and water storage tanks: Relocate salt shed out of floodplain, maintain use restrictions, update well bylaw, purchase generators, evaluate adequacy of water system for future development, and assess runoff from the tank site and upgrade back-up generators.
- Rt 117 Bridge over Nashua and Culvert: Design Bridge to accommodate drainage for current and future storm forecast and traffic loads; and conduct annual inspections.

- Railroad Crossings: Improve communications and understanding of protocols with rail companies.
- Code Red: Maintain and upgrade as needed and provide information to residents on availability.
- Nashua and Still Rivers: Update zoning for building in flood plains, purchase land along river for flood storage, and determine opportunities to reduce flooding through river improvements.
- Wetlands: Maintain, review and update wetlands bylaw as necessary and investigate mosquito control options.
- Town Forest: Update forest management plan and include invasive species in plan updates.

Low priority projects identified are:

- River Terrace (private nursing home): Ensure reliable power source is available.
- Agricultural Properties: Assess ability to deal with vulnerabilities on these properties (i.e., hydrant availability) and management plan for invasive species.
- Town Forest and Open Space: Maintain open space, review open space plan and update as needed, secure funding to purchase additional open space, conduct annual brush cleaning programs, evaluate condition of trees and susceptibility to invasive species, develop program to combat invasive species, and evaluate erosion potential and identify additional land to expand at Conservation Area adjacent to Rt 70.
- Brooks and Ponds: Evaluate the health of ponds and brooks and develop weed maintenance program for White's Pond.
- Open Space partnerships: Strategic application of the open space plan in the acquisition of priority parcels and coordinate with U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game to protect critical habitat areas.

Learning Along the Great Road, Strategic Plan / 2022-2027 (Nashoba Regional School District, 2022)

The plan identifies the school district's mission as "...inspire and challenge all learners to realize their unique potential to become active contributors to their community." Some of the school district's strategic plan initiatives that go beyond the schools' doors are relevant to ***Lancaster 2035***:

- Grow civic engagement and volunteerism.
- Increase authentic learning opportunities, including community partnerships and internships.
- Conduct an audit for equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.
- Improve and sustain physical environments that promote healthy and vibrant learning conditions in all buildings.

Montachusett Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy- 2019-2024

(Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2019)

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a regional strategy. It focuses on populations with the greatest financial challenges and the largest economic development engines. As a result, none of the identified CEDS projects are in Lancaster, reducing Lancaster's ability to obtain assistance from the U.S. Economic Development Administration. Key findings of the plan include:

- The region is aging faster than the Commonwealth with most communities even older than Lancaster.
- While manufacturing in the region has declined, it remains critical to the regional economy.
- Education attainment is increasing, especially for young women, but remains lower than the Commonwealth.

Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan- 2024, Journey to 2050 (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission/Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2023)

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) represents the Montachusett region's consensus transportation plan. Items funded from the region's allocation of federal and state transportation funding and listed on the region's annual Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) must be consistent with the RTP. The plan sets a vision of "*...a multimodal and inclusionary transportation system that is safe, secure, efficient and affordable to all individuals while supporting and encouraging environmentally-sustainable economic development, growth, and revitalization...*" It establishes seven goals to achieve that vision.

- Goal 1 – Improve and Maintain Safety and Security
- Goal 2 – Reduce Congestion and Improve Mobility
- Goal 3 – Promote and Seek Equitable Transportation for All
- Goal 4 – Improve System Preservation and Maintenance of All Modes
- Goal 5 – Improve Economic Vitality
- Goal 6 – Improve and Promote Healthy Modes and Transportation Options
- Goal 7 – Reduce Green House Gas and Promote Environmental Practices and Sustainability

The plan provides a wealth of background transportation data, crash data, and traffic counts. It notes that while Lancaster has received construction funding twice through the Commonwealth's Complete Street Program, it has never participated in or received Safe Routes to School funding. The report includes a brief list of projects in various levels of planning:

- Improved freight access from Route 2, Exit 103 on Route 70 to the P.J. Keating mining and asphalt plant.
- Freight study with Ayer, Lunenburg, and Shirley, including access to Capital Commerce Center and Unified Global Packaging.
- Examining Route 2 as a congested corridor.
- Route 117 access to Interstate-190 at the Lancaster/Leominster town line and more generally Route 117, building off of a detailed Route 117 corridor profile completed a decade ago.

Open Space and Recreation Plan (2017-2024), (OSRP Committee and Conservation Commission)

The current Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) expires in November 2024. Although it is near the end of its shelf life and Lancaster will soon be starting an update, the plan provides a relevant inventory, background information, vision, goals, objectives, and actions. The OSRP

informs the Open Space and Recreation and the Natural and Cultural Resources elements of this comprehensive plan.

The OSRP vision is to protect Lancaster's natural resources - its water supply, agricultural lands, and contiguous blocks of forestland, allowing residents and visitors to enjoy their benefits, improve Lancaster's recreational opportunities and facilities for the benefit of all age groups to access and enjoy, and retain Lancaster's natural beauty, rural nature, and historic character while integrating development.

The plan's goals are to protect Lancaster's public water supply, conserve and protect agricultural lands and farming viability, protect contiguous blocks of forest land, enrich recreational resources, improve connectivity to foster a sense of community, improve townwide communications, preserve and enhance our open space and animal and plant habitat, develop resources to support the goals of the OSRP, and integrate growth and development to preserve Lancaster's rural feel, scenic vistas, historic character, and natural landscape.

South Lancaster Commercial District: Analysis of Business and Market Conditions to inform Rezoning and Economic Development Policy (FinePoint Associates with Lancaster Community Planning and Development Department, 2021)

The plan examined South Lancaster, including both South Lancaster Center with the former Atlantic Union College campus and the small commercial node just north of the Main Street railroad bridge near the Clinton town line. The plan identifies opportunities and challenges:

- It is the only area of town with full water and sewer and is already a significant economic engine.
- The commercial node functions as an auto-oriented strip and not a walkable village.
- There is ample available real estate.
- Clinton helps provide both a critical commercial mass and direct competition to existing and new activities.
- The key to the area's potential is the redevelopment of Atlantic Union College, whether it is for education which would provide little municipal revenue or a different use. As a privately-owned property, the timing of AUC moving forward is not within the Town's control.
- South Lancaster's distance from highways limits but does not eliminate potential.
- There are significant rezoning opportunities that can make both South Lancaster center and the small commercial node near the Main Street railroad tracks more likely to succeed.
- There is significant leakage of money out of Lancaster that can potentially be reduced with South Lancaster redevelopment, enabling more purchases within Lancaster.

Thayer Memorial Library: Strategic Plan FY2024-2029 (Thayer Memorial Library, 2023)

The plan defines the Library's strategy, noting that Lancaster has a more extensive library, including a Museum and Special collections with more holdings, than comparable communities. The library is vibrant even with 25% smaller budget, per capita, than those comparable communities. Aspects of the strategic plan that are especially relevant to ***Lancaster 2035*** are providing equitable services, removing barriers to participation, and fostering a strong connection with Lancaster's present and past.

Town of Lancaster Economic Development Plan (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2015)

Although the demographic data in the plan is somewhat dated, the plan provides a useful and still relevant background, especially for the economic development section of this plan. The plan's recommendations are:

- Establish a local Economic Development Committee [created July 13, 2022, and appointed 6/3/2024].
- Prepare a market study to identify potential business.
- Review the adequacy of zoning and identify new areas for economic development.
- Work to redevelop any Brownfields properties (e.g., the completed Lancaster Landfill Solar Farm).
- Enhance communication with businesses (survey and/or informal personal visits).
- Aggressively seek funding for road/infrastructure improvements, in partnership between the Select Board and the independently elected Public Works board.
- Explore regionalization of services and consolidation.
- Consider ways to guide development to enhance community character and promote smart growth and connectivity.

Town of Lancaster Hazard Mitigation Plan (Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2022)

The Hazard Mitigation Plan was written to FEMA and MEMA standards, making Lancaster eligible for FEMA and MEMA hazard mitigation funding once the plan is finalized, FEMA approves, and the Select Board adopts the final plan. This funding can be critical to funding plan recommendations. The plan documents the natural landscape and climate and identifies Lancaster's natural hazards, many of which are worsening with climate change.

The plan reports, based on the MassGIS database (2015), that Lancaster is 25% forest, agriculture, open land, and water; 27% residential; 28% recreation and institutional lands (which includes the South Post); 13% commercial, industrial, mixed-use, and other; and 7% rights-of-way (road and railroad)

The most significant hazards for Lancaster are:

- Flooding
- Severe winter storm hazards
- Other severe weather hazards, especially tropical storms and hurricanes, strong winds, prolonged rain, and sudden snow melt
- Drought and extreme temperatures
- Infectious disease and pandemics
- Invasive species hazards
- Fire, especially in North Lancaster

Earthquakes, other wildfires, and other risks are less likely.

The Hazard Mitigation Plan, citing the MVP plan summarized above, identifies inland flooding, severe winter storms, other severe weather including drought, and invasive species as the hazards that will most likely become more severe with climate change.

Town of Lancaster Housing Production Plan: 2020-2024 (Lancaster resident volunteers and Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, 2019). EOHLC approval expired on 3/10/2024. The Housing Production Plan (HPP) combines a complete needs assessment with a strategy for creating additional deed restricted affordable housing units in Lancaster. The plan proposes a path to annually permitting and developing new deed-restricted affordable housing units of at least 0.5% of total housing units until at least 10% of Lancaster’s permanent housing stock is deed-restricted affordable housing, the state’s goal for every municipality. That will give the town safe harbor to reject or condition 40B/Comprehensive Permit projects when those projects do not in align with town goals.

Lancaster is currently updating the HPP with the assistance of an outside consultant. They expect the new plan to be complete in late 2024 or early 2025. The Needs Assessment remains relevant although it needs updating to reflect more recent subtle demographic changes (e.g., 2020 decennial census, 2022 American Community Survey, Lancaster housing production and permitting data, HUD affordable housing income limits).

The housing goal from the Housing Production Plan and 2007 Master Plan is “***To preserve Lancaster as a diverse community of people, sustainable over the long-term, with equity and access for all.***”

The housing objective in both plans is “To produce nearly 200 new affordable units in the next 10 years:

- 50-60 units in multi-family structures
- 40-50 rental units as a minimum
- 20-30 units suitable for one-person households
- 45-55 units for persons aged 65+
- 20 or more units for persons with disabilities

Implementation measures include building institutions, refining regulation, and continuing affordability and fair access. Lancaster has made progress in many of these areas, from creating the Affordable Housing Trust, adopting the Community Preservation Act, adding inclusionary housing requirements and ADU and 40R smart growth option to the zoning code, and raising the profile of the Lancaster housing conversation.

5. Land Use

Goals

- Simplify zoning regulations and strengthen site plan and subdivision standards.
- Implement MBTA Communities zoning requirements.
- Expand commercial and industrial opportunities and increase the compatibility of commercial/industrial and adjacent and nearby residential areas.
- Strengthen focal points at the Town Green, South Lancaster Center, a second walkable South Lancaster village by the Main Street railroad bridge, and the DCAMM 220 Old Common Road campus.
- Add compliance with Lancaster 2035 vision and goals to zoning.
- Continue to focus on the previously identified Priority Development Areas in North Lancaster.

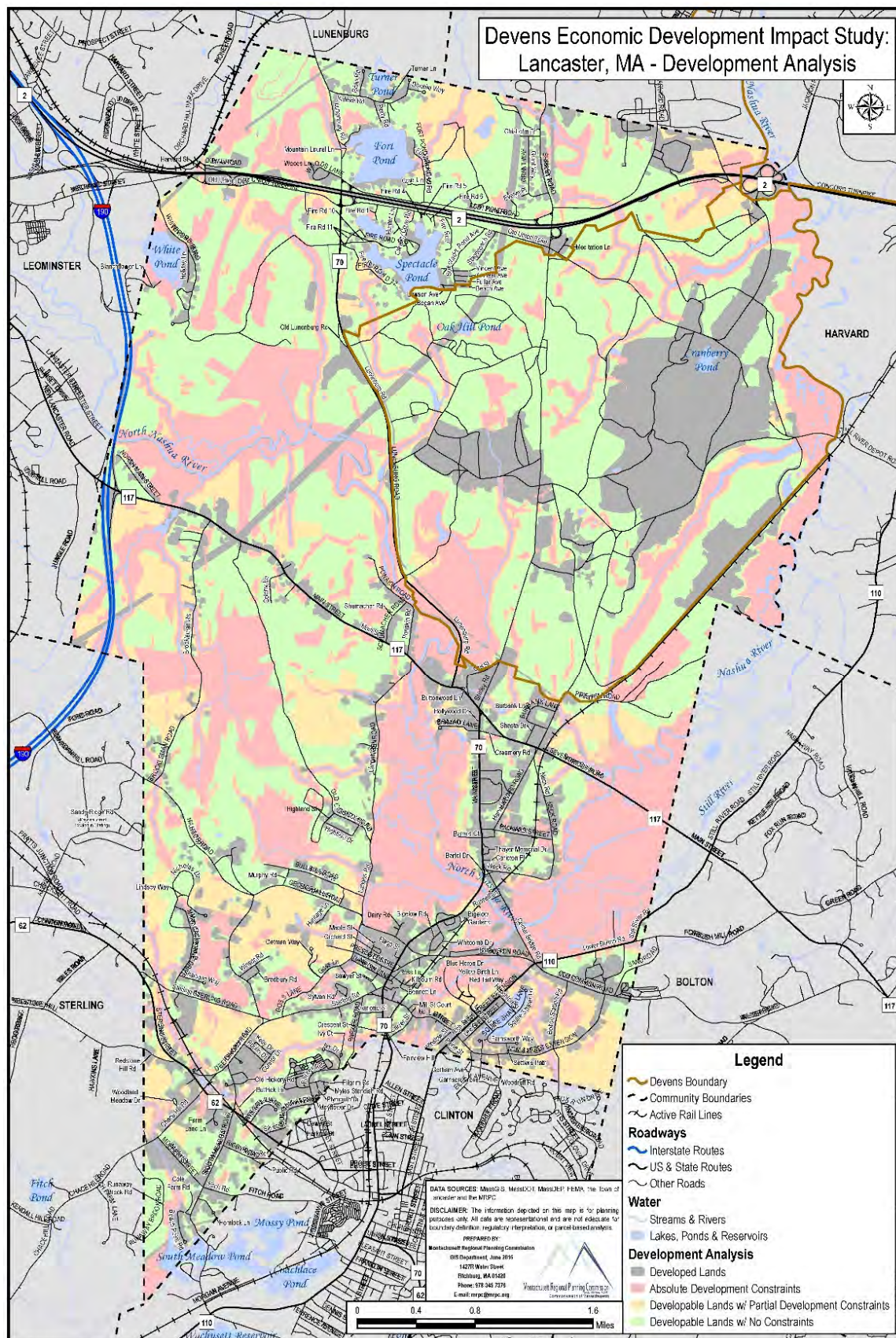
Lancaster retains its feeling as a rural and small town, even with extensive suburban development and industrial development along Route 2 (See Figure 5-1. Lancaster Land Use).

Lancaster is classified as an MBTA Community under the "MBTA Communities Zoning Law" (MGL Chapter 40A, Section 3A). As such, Lancaster is required to have a zoning district where multi-family housing of at least 15 units per acre is allowed as-of-right without any discretionary approval. Requiring Site Plan Approval, which regulates not whether a project occurs but how it is laid out, is allowed.

Lancaster's current zoning does not allow multifamily housing by right except for as part of a MGL 40R Smart Growth mixed-use overlay. "Multifamily dwelling other than a living facility for seniors" requires special permits or is not allowed, depending on the zoning district. South Lancaster Center provides the most desirable redevelopment opportunities with its municipal water and sanitary sewers, but only if sanitary sewer capacity issues can be addressed.



Figure 5-1. Lancaster Land Use. Lancaster retains its rural and small-town feel, even while 25% of the town, Fort Devens South Post, is off limits.



The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission's 2016 Development Analysis identifies, in general terms, the development potential of land in Lancaster. Lancaster is currently working with MRPC to update this plan and an accompanying build out potential map (Figure 5-2).

Some of the land shown as developable includes farmland and open space preservation goals. Lancaster should adjust its zoning and land preservation to protect prime farmland and land with the highest agriculture values and sensitive environmental features. Specially, Lancaster should downzone and attempt to purchase land or development rights on such critical farmland and open space.

The Land Use policies below will help make Lancaster a more desirable community for its residents, protect residential neighborhoods, and simultaneously expand the tax base.

Simplify zoning regulations and strengthen site plan and subdivision standards

Lancaster has strong zoning that directs development in the areas and patterns it desires. Zoning often reflects, however, that the bylaws are the result of a series of amendments adopted by Town Meeting. They do not read as a unified development code with clear easy to read language. Lancaster's zoning would benefit from a plain English revision, clarifying and simplifying language without changing the intent.

At the same time, site plan approval standards would benefit from a clear revision, strengthening the protection of abutters, improving internal and external circulation standards, incorporating more modern environmental performance standards (e.g., light, noise, emissions, vegetated buffer, green infrastructure) into the site plan or a zoning wide performance standards section. This would benefit neighbors, who want to be protected from adverse impacts, and would benefit property owners and developers who want clear understandable standards even when those standards are strict. Clearer standards will also reduce appeal litigation risks and legal fees from developer appeals, which the Town needs to defend, and from abutter appeals, where the Town usually just appears and leaves it to permit holders to defend their permits.

Subdivision regulations would benefit from improved clarity and modernization of regulatory, construction, and performance guarantee requirements in the subdivision regulations. Because this only requires Planning Board approval after a public hearing, it can be a much faster process than zoning changes, which require Town Meeting approval.

Subdivision regulations and zoning should protect against developer defaults. For example: The applicant shall guarantee the required improvements in the subdivision regulations and on the plan with a performance guarantee in accordance with MGL c. 41, § 81U **prior** to the Planning Board endorsing the subdivision definitive plan by posting a covenant not to sell lots or a financial guarantee, as detailed below.

Financial performance guarantee (surety bonds, deposit of money, three-party lender agreement, or letters of credit) to the Town in an amount determined by the Planning Board to be sufficient to cover the cost of all or any part of the required improvements, street acceptance and as built plans, and legal, engineering, and project manager time at state prevailing wage rates and state procurement requirements, plus a 20% contingency/inflation factor. At least two lots shall also be included in a covenant not to sell until all work is completed. All financial performance guarantees must be drafted so the only requirement that must be met for the Planning Board to draw on the funds is to

notify the financial institution (grantor) that: "We have incurred liability by reason of the failure of the developer/owner, within 90 days of the expiration of this guarantee or the time limit in the permit to complete the construction the project in accordance with the definitive subdivision plans, submittals, approval, the subdivision regulations. The amount drawn, which may be more than required to complete the project, will be held in a segregated bank account until the work can be bid, completed, and paid for, including the completion of street acceptance plans, as-built plans, and any covenants or other legal documents. Any excess over those costs will be returned to the grantor."

Planning Board approval is required for the language and form of such guarantee, considering the credit rating and location of the financial institution, the manner of execution, and an agreement that the financial institution agrees that any litigation stemming out of the guarantee will take place in Massachusetts and citing all of the terms shown above. Any guarantee must have no expiration date (e.g., surety bonds) or be valid for at least two years (e.g., letter of credit).

Covenant not to sell lots, instead of a financial performance guarantee, executed and duly executed and recorded concurrent with recording the subdivision approval by the owner of record, running with the land, that no lot in the subdivision shall be sold and no building erected thereon until such ways, services and, whenever applicable, temporary turnarounds are constructed and installed, and until record plans, street acceptance plans, and other required work are accepted by the Planning Board in accordance with the subdivision regulations so as to adequately serve the lots. Such covenant shall be on a separate document referred to on the plan and delivered to the Planning Board. Upon approval of the covenant by the Planning Board, the applicant shall note the Planning Board's action on the definitive plan and the applicant shall record the covenant, endorsed definitive plan and other appropriate documents at the Registry of Deeds or Land Court, as appropriate.

Implement MBTA Communities zoning requirements

Lancaster has begun planning for the required multifamily by-right requirements that apply to MBTA and MBTA abutting communities. This is an opportunity to comply with those standards and to use the requirements to drive development to the areas that have the potential to serve town goals: development near Route 2 within easier access of commuter rail service, in mixed use areas in South Lancaster Center, and in an evolving South Lancaster village immediately north of the Main Street railroad bridge. It is also an opportunity for the creation of other multifamily housing within walking distance of the Town Green/Municipal Campus, South Lancaster Center, and the Main Street-South Lancaster village.

Such zoning can be part of a Smart Growth Overlay (40R) zoning district, which would further advance town affordable housing objectives and allow the town to benefit from 40R incentive and density payments.

Expand commercial and industrial opportunities while increasing compatibility with adjacent and nearby residential areas.

The most passionate conversations during the development of the ***Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan*** were about land use in North Lancaster.

Lancaster, with a huge proportion of the town in tax-exempt properties and a limited tax base, has been trying to broaden its tax base with industrial, gravel extraction and processing, and warehousing along Route 2, the area with the properties most suited for those uses. These uses, however, must be designed and operated to ensure their compatibility with adjacent and nearby residential areas, mitigating the effects of high-volume car and truck traffic, unattractive industrial uses and dust, heavy water withdrawals, and potential groundwater contamination.

The uses along Route 2 are critical to the tax base and the local economy. At the same time, it is important to mitigate neighborhood impacts and advance public conversations.

Expanding the tax base with economic development and protecting neighborhoods should be designed as mutually supporting policies to the reasonable extent possible.

Land use compatibility can be ensured, and impacts mitigated through the regulatory clarity improvements suggested above (“Simplify zoning regulations and strengthen site plan and subdivision standards”) and by the following policies and actions:

- Improve the zoning environmental performance standards, regulating everything from noise levels, light levels, and other emissions, meeting current state of the art standards practiced in many other communities.
- Improve earth removal regulations, in zoning or general bylaws, to provide greater protection against noise, dust, and other impacts.
- Require greater green buffers, planted with trees and, if necessary, sight impervious fences and sight and sound impervious earthen mounds.
- Provide clear benefits to the residents of North Lancaster from the industrial uses, primarily in the form of exploring opportunities for municipal water, funded by users, in North Lancaster.
- Build community dialogue by emphasizing the need to find common ground and address the need to protect residents and the environment while expanding the tax base.

Strengthen focal points at the Town Green, South Lancaster Center, a second walkable South Lancaster village by the Main Street railroad bridge, the DCAMM 220 Old Common Road campus, and North Lancaster.

These focal areas provide the opportunity to create a stronger sense of place and quality of life, both for local residents and to attract footloose businesses, those businesses that can locate most anywhere and make locational decision based on quality of life and the owner’s personal preferences. These focal points are critical to improve the quality of life in Lancaster, provide needed housing, protect neighborhoods, and expand the tax base.

- **The Town Green and municipal campus** is arguably Lancaster’s single most identifying area or node. This area includes the Bulfinch First Church of Christ, the Thayer Memorial Library, the Prescott Building (Town Offices), the former Town Hall, the Lancaster Community Center, the former and empty school attached to the Community Center.



Figure 5-3. Town Green and Municipal Campus

- The Town Green and municipal campus would benefit from an overall landscape architecture master plan, ranging from addressing the debate about the appropriateness of the Town Green gazebo to pedestrian and traffic flow to wayfinding. Any work on the Town Green will need to be consistent with the recorded open space restriction
- The former Town Hall is a wasted resource that should be brought back into productive use, whether it is a new town community use, a use operated by a community group, or redeveloped for private use. The ***Lancaster 2035*** survey identified this as one of the largest areas of agreement (see also Facilities and Services element).
- The former Memorial School, built on land deed restricted by Thayer for open space and recreation, is already part of an extensive public discussion and study. Whatever the final conclusions, this site is an important anchor for the municipal campus.



Figure 5-4. Atlantic Union College campus, South Lancaster Center, with the spectacular Founders Hall (left)

- **South Lancaster Center, including the Atlantic Union College (AUC) campus**, is Lancaster’s largest redevelopment potential and the best opportunity to shape Lancaster positively for years to come. The Atlantic Union College (AUC) property, along with the DCAMM property discussed below, provide Lancaster with the greatest opportunities for redevelopment that can added needed housing, mixed-use, and increased tax base, without land use conflicts.

The most critical steps for South Lancaster Center and the AUC properties within the Center are:

- Rezone the urban core of South Lancaster Center for mixed-use with a Smart Growth Overlay (MGL 40R district) that encourages mixed-use, not simply mixed-income, in the Center without requiring mixed use in each building. This redevelopment has the potential to increase Lancaster's tax base with the greatest density of offices, education, and mixed-income housing in Lancaster. The current zoning, however, makes that difficult if there was ever a developer interested in this approach.
- Regularly communicate with the Seven Day Adventist community that owns the AUC and build collaboration with them. For Lancaster, this is the best way to get an eventual redevelopment, on the property owner's timeline, which serves town goals. For the property owner, this is the best way to reduce development unknowns and add value to their property.
- If AUC is interested, jointly explore Commonwealth Underutilized Property funding to get some buildings ready for reuse.
- Explore MassWorks, Housing Choice, and other state grant programs that can help pay for necessary infrastructure, needed to serve redevelopment.
- As discussed elsewhere in this plan, implement sewer Infiltration and Inflow and water saving measures that can open up sewer capacity, and dedicate that capacity to mixed use and mixed income projects, including in South Lancaster.
- Adopt a clear Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and District Improvement Financing (DIF) policies, with Town Meeting approval, targeted for South Lancaster Center, including the AUC properties. This property tax policy will encourage property tax collections to rise while dedicating some small percentage of new taxes to infrastructure or private investment to make redevelopment possible.
- Address unsafe intersections for vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic to improve the Center's functioning.
- Identify wayfinding improvements and improve the sense of place for South Lancaster Center.



Figure 5-5 South Lancaster village by the Main Street bridge

The portion of South Lancaster village by the Main Street railroad bridge is an uninspiring strip development area, with gas and convenience commercial, offices, a diner, and no sense of

identity, not even a shared name. It has the potential, however, to become a walkable desirable mixed-use area that can increase Lancaster's tax base, retain retail spending that is leaking out of Lancaster to other areas, and provide needed affordable and attainable housing. No Town action is going to make this happen anytime soon, but there are several steps that Lancaster can take to allow this to happen when market conditions are ripe for this kind of work. For any site in private hands, where the Town cannot force private action, the Town should be leading in creating an environment that will attract the appropriate kind of development and not simply waiting to respond to specific proposals.

- Currently Lancaster's zoning would not even allow the creation of a walkable village or walkable uses. Change zoning to dramatically reduce or eliminate minimum lot size, frontage, and setbacks.
 - Require parking for new uses be on the sides or rear of buildings, not in front of buildings.
 - Add clearer landscaping, internal sidewalk pedestrian circulation, and green infrastructure requirements.
 - Create a community charrette to collaborate with community members and property owners to explore what the area could become.
 - Seek infrastructure funding to address necessary improvements to enable a walkable center, including improved sidewalks, tree belts, green infrastructure, and narrower curb cuts.
- **The DCAMM property at 220 Old Common Road**, (former Massachusetts Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance surplus property unit) along with South Lancaster Center discussed above, provide Lancaster's best redevelopment opportunities for needed housing, mixed-use, increased tax base, and community identity, without major land use conflicts.

The DCAMM is further along than AUC, with a clear State plan and a willing Town partner. Town actions are underway, with a mix of town ownership and retained state ownership, and need to move forward:

- Continuing to build a Lancaster dialogue and consensus is a critical step.
- Regulatory changes (Smart Growth Overlay or other zoning changes) are advancing.
- Applying for grants for necessary work.



Figure 5-6 DCAMM surplus property at 220 Old Common Road

- **North Lancaster, with its access to Route 2**, is the fast-growing contributor to the non-residential property tax base. This growth is needed, and market conditions will continue this trend. The proposed regulatory changes and North Lancaster public water supply in this plan can ensure that that growth is consistent with preserving the quality of life and residential neighborhoods in North Lancaster.
- **Address sanitary sewer capacity.** This capacity is a limit to growth. Rather than allow any project to use up any surplus capacity:

- Reserve sewer capacity for these three focal areas: Business and commercial growth, mixed use, and as discussed in the housing element, for projects that include at least 25% affordable housing.
- As discussed elsewhere in this plan, apply for MassWorks and other infrastructure funds to reduce stormwater infiltration and inflow (I&I) into sanitary sewers, invest in water saving devices to further reduce flow, and identify and remove capacity bottlenecks (e.g., pumping stations), freeing up capacity for new growth.
- To achieve this work, either the independent Sewer Commission should merge with Town government or sign a memorandum of agreement to achieve these goals.

Add compliance with Lancaster 2035 vision and goals to zoning.

A plan is only as strong as its implementation, and zoning is one of the major ways that Town policy is translated to action. In addition to zoning changes discussed throughout this Comprehensive Plan, using the plan to inform discretionary action (e.g., Special Permits and technical details of Site Plan Approval) can ensure that the community's vision and goals are discussed when major projects are considered. This could include:

- Add compliance with Lancaster 2035 vision, goals, and policies as one of the criteria that applicants must document to be considered for a zoning special permit application. Special permits are partially discretionary permits, but only to the extent that zoning has clear criteria that the special permit granting authority can apply. This would only affect major projects which require special permits, but it would allow greater discussion and action when considering those projects (e.g., the objective of accommodating both an expanded industrial and business tax base in North Lancaster while better protecting residential areas.)
- Site Plan Approval is not discretionary, and an applicant has the right to a site plan approval when they comply with the criteria. The criteria that are specific and measurable in the comprehensive plan, however, can be added to site plan approval (e.g., ensuring safe pedestrian movement on and off site).

6. Housing

Goals

- **Protect the general physical pattern of existing neighborhoods.**
- **Increase flexibility to encourage smaller homes and changing community needs, including attainable housing for our children, new residents, and seniors aging in place.**
- **Expand deed-restricted affordable housing to 10% of Lancaster’s housing.**
- **Explore limited development projects to protect open space or serve other municipal needs while providing affordable housing.**

Housing in Lancaster, as in most of the Commonwealth, has been increasing at a rate far exceeding overall inflation (Consumer Price Inflation). For example, in 1994, the median priced single-family home in Lancaster was assessed at \$129,739.

Twenty years later, reflecting actual sales prices, the median priced single-family home was assessed at \$488,767. If that same median priced home, however, had increased in value only based on overall inflation, it would only be worth \$273,692. For homeowners who stay in their homes, it’s great news that their net worth has increased so much. It’s horrible news, however, for households entering the housing market and for renters.

Table 6-1. Single Family Home Assessed Values

	Assessed Value Actual (mean or average)	IF housing increased with overall inflation
FY1994	\$129,739	\$129,739
FY2004	\$223,321	\$164,348
FY2014	\$280,826	\$207,579
FY2024	\$488,767	\$273,692
Source: MA Dept. of Revenue		

Because housing inflation has been so much higher than overall inflation, residents moving into Lancasters or renters who want to purchase a home must have substantially higher incomes than in the past, making Lancaster increasingly unaffordable to wage earners earning median incomes and below. This includes many of Lancaster’s children, new residents, and elderly who need to purchase.

With Lancaster’s aging population, decreasing family size, and increasing percentage of elderly single-person households, many of its housing units are far larger than needed for today’s families and households. This creates a need for additional attainable units, market rate housing that is affordable to meet the current market demand.

At the same time, Lancaster is committed to increasing the amount of deed-restricted affordable housing, defined as affordable to those earning no more than 80% Area Median Income (AMI). Income Limits by Housing Size (Table 6-2), below, shows these limits for common household sizes.

Table 6-2. Income Limits by Housing Size (Federal FY2023)

Eastern Worcester Co. HUD Metro Area	Unit mix with Federal LIHTC	FY23 Income Limits by Household Size			
		1	2	3	4
Low-income (80% AMI)	Maximum 80% of units	\$66,300	\$75,750	\$85,200	\$94,600
60% of AMI	Minimum of 40% or	\$58,260	\$66,600	\$74,940	\$83,220
Very low-income (50% AMI)	Minimum of 20%	\$48,550	\$55,500	\$62,450	\$69,350

For small projects, such as those built by Habitat for Humanity, there are often a variety of funding sources. For large projects, the Federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is the most common funding source, with its affordability requirements and a minimum of 30 years of guaranteed affordability.

Lancaster is also committed to attainable or market-rate affordable housing, typically affordable those earning between 80% and 120% of AMI. Lancaster has focused on 120% of AMI for their attainable housing target. The Community Preservation Act allows CPA funds to be used for projects supporting housing up to 100% of AMI, so some communities use this as their funding target while focusing on 120% through regulatory incentives.

Housing is considered affordable or attainable when the owner or renter does not need to spend more than 30% of their income on housing. People paying more than 30% of their income are considered housing cost burdened. In an area such as Lancaster, where most people rely on private cars for transportation, the metric often used is that residents are cost-burdened if they need to spend more than 45% of their income on housing (30%) plus transportation (15%).

Lancaster has made progress towards this goal with inclusionary housing zoning, accessory dwelling unit zoning, and supporting affordable housing projects. Currently 5.04% of Lancaster dwelling units are considered affordable housing, based on the Commonwealth's methodology (Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory, Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, June 29, 2023). (See Table 6-3. Subsidized Housing Inventory for Lancaster.)

Lancaster joined a regional consortium that is jointly hiring assistance in tracking affordable housing and the status of affordability agreements.

Table 6-3. Subsidized Housing Inventory for Lancaster (EOHLC, 2023)

2020 Census Year-Round Housing Units	Units in developments containing SHI units	Subsidized Housing Units (SHI)	% affordable (EOHLC methodology)
2,736	224	138	5.04%

With 5% of its units counted as affordable, based on the State's methodology, Lancaster is halfway towards Massachusetts' goal of 10% affordable housing. Most towns are below that goal, statewide, including cities, 9.68% of housing units are affordable. Communities below the 10% threshold have less flexibility in responding to affordable housing projects requesting zoning and other regulatory waivers and receive fewer points for some for some competitive grants awarded by the Commonwealth.

Lancaster has also made some progress towards attainable, workforce, or community housing (there are several different terms for housing at the lower end of the market without deed restrictions). Lancaster has made some progress with accessory dwelling units, but the large size of many Lancaster homes, coupled with the declining household size especially for seniors, has limited this success.

Recent Lancaster affordable and attainable housing measures include adopting or approving:

- Housing Production Plan and Needs Assessment (2019) – currently being updated
- Affordable Housing Trust (2020).
- Inclusionary Zoning (2021)
- Community Preservation Act (2021)
- Smart growth overlay (40R) mixed-use and mixed-income zoning (2022)
- Accessory apartment by-right zoning (2023)
- Housing Production Plan updates consultant contract (2024)
- Identifying affordable housing as the goal for redevelopment projects (e.g., DCAMM property)

Lancaster’s current Housing Production Plan (2020-2024) expired on March 10, 2024, but much of the demographic data and many of the recommendations are still relevant. Lancaster has engaged CommunityScale and Levine Planning Strategies to coordinate an update planning process, working closely with the Lancaster Affordable Housing Trust. The plan is on target to be completed by early 2025.

Protect the general physical pattern of existing neighborhoods

Lancaster consists of medium-density neighborhoods South Lancaster, suburban development scattered around town, and rural neighborhoods near farms and forests. Residents by and large report being happy with their development patterns but are sometimes fearful of large projects changing their neighborhoods. Many residents have generally identified the need for regulatory changes that allow smaller homes and address changing demographics.

- As discussed in the land use element, update the subdivision regulations to provide more protection to Lancaster, purchasers, and abutters to ensure that the standards the Town has imposed are followed.
- Lancaster has strong and modern subdivision regulation standards. It might be worth, however, amending subdivision regulations to ensure that new development does not make Lancaster’s new developments less desirable. For example, subdivision regulations could require curb extensions at new street intersections to slow the speed of traffic across crosswalks and through intersections and they could expand green infrastructure requirements.
- While zoning changes are necessary to meet the needs for small homes and more affordable housing, (see “Increase flexibility, below) the best opportunities for denser housing is in South Lancaster Center, the evolving South Lancaster just north of the Main Street railroad tracks, and in well thought out cluster and housing projects in other areas.

Increase flexibility to encourage smaller homes and respond to changing community needs, including attainable housing for our children, new residents, and seniors aging in place

As discussed above, the biggest challenge for residents entering the Lancaster housing market is that the cost of housing has and continues to increase significantly faster than overall inflation and wage

growth, making market rate housing affordable to fewer and fewer residents. This is the “missing middle” between subsidized affordable housing and the housing that is available to high wage earners, those significantly above area median income.

In the ***Lancaster 2035*** survey (see Exhibit A), the highest overall community priority, just a very small amount higher than respecting physical patterns of existing neighborhoods, was to allow more flexibility for smaller homes and changing housing demands. Although there is no requirement for large homes in Lancaster’s zoning, and regulating or restricting the interior area of a single-family home is not permitted in Massachusetts, Lancaster’s zoning, in its minimum lot size, creates a strong incentive for larger homes. If a builder or investor can build a small home or a large home on the same lot, their return is greater if they build a larger home. Lancaster’s zoning allows accessory dwelling units and, in some circumstances, two family homes and multifamily homes, but it is still not enough to meet the demand.

- Consider a change from a minimum area per unit approach, which requires large expensive homes to provide a developer with a reasonable return, to a floor area ratio (FAR) approach, which specifies the amount of home that can be built per lot area, allowing smaller lots for smaller homes. To comply with state law, the default would remain zoning based on minimum lot size, with an option for a smaller lot for an owner who records a restriction on the size of their home.
- Consider amending zoning to allow a two-family home by-right, with no special permit and no requirement that the home was previously a two-family home, on any area which is currently a single-family home district or lot. Lancaster could add site plan approval and performance standards to ensure no adverse impacts from this change, such as limiting the number of cars that can be parked in front of a two-family home or adopting design or form-based standards for two family homes.
- In the R district, allow Multifamily dwelling units with site plan approval only, no special permit, with specific criteria for when they will be allowed, to remove the cost and uncertainties of requiring a special permit.

Expand deed-restricted affordable housing to 10% of Lancaster’s housing

Lancaster is already committed to increasing deed restricted affordable housing to those earning less than 80% of area median income. For example, Lancaster has adopted inclusionary zoning, supported affordable housing at the DCAM property on Old Common Road, and invested in its Affordable Housing Trust.

Other actions discussed earlier in this plan include:

- Adopting a Smart Growth Overlay for all or most of South Lancaster Center, including but not limited to the Atlantic Union College property, for the DCAMM property on Old Common Road, and for the evolving South Lancaster village just north of the Main Street railroad bridge.
- Reserving sewer capacity, especially new capacity made available by reducing inflow, infiltration, and water use, for both the target growth areas and for deed restricted affordable housing (projects with at least 25% affordable housing).

In addition, Lancaster can adopt a Town Meeting policy authorizing Tax Increment Financing for

30 years of affordable housing, a program where the town waives a portion of the new taxes that would result from development in return both for affordable housing and the tax increases that will occur with that development.

Explore limited development projects to protect open space or serve other municipal needs while providing affordable housing

Although there are limited opportunities, some municipalities and land trusts approach tax title, surplus land, and open space and other land acquisition projects as an opportunity to serve multiple municipal needs, including affordable housing. For example, Lancaster could:

- Conduct an annual review of tax title properties and consider acquisition of properties that could be used for any public purpose, especially affordable housing and/or open space. Potentially, Lancaster could acquire a deed in-lieu of tax title foreclosure or CPA or other town-funded purchases knowing that part of the money comes back immediately to Lancaster in the form of paying off back taxes.
- Formalize a process of reviewing any chapter land (Chapter 61 Forest Land, Chapter 61A Farmland, and Chapter 61B Recreation) where Lancaster is given a right of first refusal for land exiting the Chapter program, for both affordable housing and conservation, and developing non-profit partners with whom Lancaster could partner for such programs.
- Review any surplus or underutilized town-owned parcels and consider their feasibility for affordable housing.
- For any town open space, recreation, or purchase for any town use, consider whether a portion of the property is appropriate for affordable housing.

7. Economic Development

Goals

- Expand the commercial and industrial tax base through attention to the needs of local established and emerging businesses (economic gardening) and new businesses.
- Create stronger focal points at the Town Green, South Lancaster Center, a South Lancaster village at the South Main Street railroad bridge, and the DCAMM property on Old Common Road
- Improve infrastructure to serve economic development needs.
- Implement zoning changes to ease business location.
- Continue to focus on the previously identified Priority Development Areas in North Lancaster.

There are slightly more jobs in Lancaster than there are Lancaster dwelling units (3,128:2,736) for 1.14 jobs to housing ratio. Likewise, approximately there are half as many jobs in Lancaster as there are Lancaster workers (3,128:7,000 or 0.5). For a small town without a huge tax base, this is healthy. Trying to increase the local jobs and shorten potential commutes remains part of the Town's economic development aspirations.

Lancaster's has a narrow tax base, with 87.09% of all properties taxes coming from residential properties. Many other suburban and rural communities have the same challenges of a small amount of the tax base from commercial and industrial properties. In Lancaster this already heavy reliance on residential tax payers is aggravated by the large amount of property tax exempt properties which creates financial pressures on municipal government and property taxpayers. Residents, business owners, and municipal officials typically identify Lancaster's narrow tax base as the primary economic challenge. The limited number of jobs in Lancaster is not nearly as important to those stakeholders. As a result, investments that increase the tax base without a significant increase in required municipal services (i.e., commercial and industrial development even if warehouses provide limited employment) have become the highest economic development priorities. As with any use, of course mitigating adverse impacts from development, including off-site traffic and on-site layout, is part of good development.

Economic Indicators (Table 7-1) compares Lancaster to Worcester and Massachusetts. The more detailed charts of

indexes provide more interpretation of what this means. The index shows to what extend variations in employment, output, value added, and value added per employee are the result of regional

Geography	Year	Employment Index		Output Index		Value Added	Value Added Index	Output Per	Value Added
		Employment	to Base Year	Output	to Base Year		to Base Year	Employee	Per Employee
Lancaster	2018	3,307	1.00	\$ 514,000,000	1.00	\$ 326,000,000	1.00	\$ 155,427.88	\$ 98,578.77
Lancaster	2019	3,276	0.99	\$ 526,000,000	1.02	\$ 331,000,000	1.02	\$ 160,561.66	\$ 101,037.85
Lancaster	2020	3,082	0.93	\$ 511,000,000	0.99	\$ 321,000,000	0.98	\$ 165,801.43	\$ 104,153.15
Lancaster	2021	3,004	0.91	\$ 530,000,000	1.03	\$ 326,000,000	1.00	\$ 176,431.42	\$ 108,521.97
Lancaster	2022	3,128	0.95	\$ 600,000,000	1.17	\$ 364,000,000	1.12	\$ 191,815.86	\$ 116,368.29
Worcester	2018	471,000	1.00	\$ 84,000,000,000	1.00	\$ 46,000,000,000	1.00	\$ 178,343.95	\$ 97,664.54
Worcester	2019	475,000	1.01	\$ 87,000,000,000	1.04	\$ 49,000,000,000	1.07	\$ 183,157.89	\$ 103,157.89
Worcester	2020	451,000	0.96	\$ 84,000,000,000	1.00	\$ 48,000,000,000	1.04	\$ 186,252.77	\$ 106,430.16
Worcester	2021	461,000	0.98	\$ 93,000,000,000	1.11	\$ 53,000,000,000	1.15	\$ 201,735.36	\$ 114,967.46
Worcester	2022	479,000	1.02	\$ 103,000,000,000	1.23	\$ 59,000,000,000	1.28	\$ 215,031.32	\$ 123,173.28
Massachusetts	2018	5,000,000	1.00	\$ 931,000,000,000	1.00	\$ 582,000,000,000	1.00	\$ 186,200.00	\$ 116,400.00
Massachusetts	2019	5,000,000	1.00	\$ 972,000,000,000	1.04	\$ 609,000,000,000	1.05	\$ 194,400.00	\$ 121,800.00
Massachusetts	2020	5,000,000	1.00	\$ 944,000,000,000	1.01	\$ 601,000,000,000	1.03	\$ 188,800.00	\$ 120,200.00
Massachusetts	2021	5,000,000	1.00	\$ 1,000,000,000,000	1.07	\$ 660,000,000,000	1.13	\$ 200,000.00	\$ 132,000.00
Massachusetts	2022	5,000,000	1.00	\$ 1,000,000,000,000	1.07	\$ 714,000,000,000	1.23	\$ 200,000.00	\$ 142,800.00

Table 7-1. Overview of Economic Indicators (IMPLAN database)

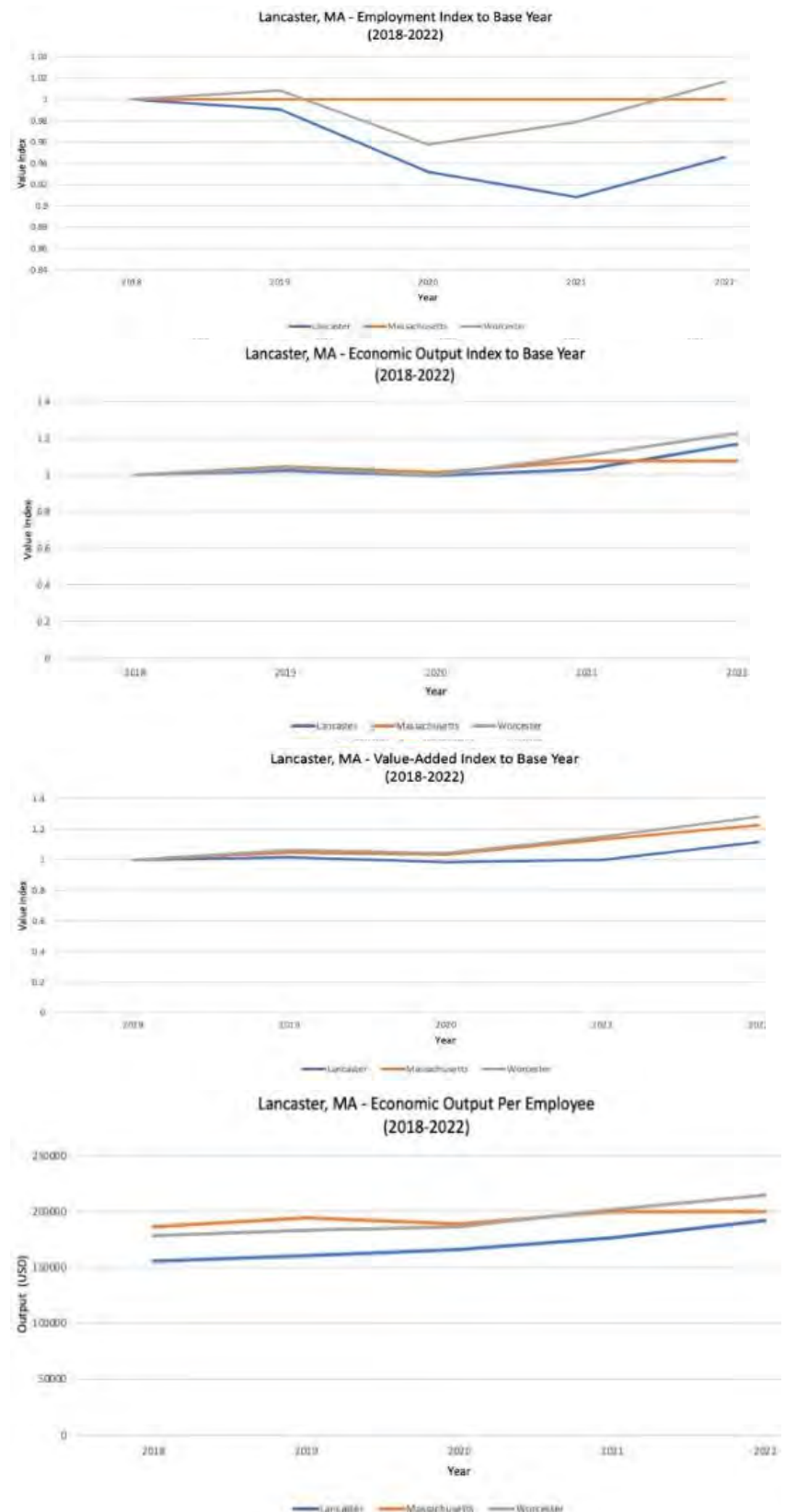
trends, and to what extent they are unique to Lancaster.

As compared to Massachusetts and even Worcester, Lancaster's employment index has fluctuated more, especially during COVID (see Figure 7-1. *Employment Index*). This is partially simply due to the noise that exists in a small community, where a small change in raw numbers is a large percentage of the workforce, and mostly due to the unique challenges of the COVID recession and recovery.

Lancaster economic output and value-added indexes fluctuations mostly mirror Massachusetts and Worcester's output variations, but Lancaster is losing a small amount of ground in comparison. (See Figures 7-2 to 7-4. *Economic Output and Value-Added Indexes*.)

Economic output per employee, or worker productivity, is slightly lower per Lancaster employee than its comparison communities (Figure 7-4). That may be partially due to older economy businesses (e.g., farming, earth extraction, warehousing) and locational issues (e.g., restaurants in lower traffic areas), but it can sometimes mean that businesses are slightly less competitive.

Lancaster Economic Overview (Table 7-2) provides a snapshot of Lancaster's economy.



Figures 7-1 to 7-4 (top to bottom) showing Employment, Economic Output, Value-Added Index, and Economic Output per Employee

Table 7-2. Lancaster Economic Overview (source: IMPLAN economic database)

Lancaster	2021	2022
GDP	\$326,192,854	\$363,926,228
Number of Industries	159	163
Total Employment	3,004	3,128
Population	8,144	8,417
Households	2,810	2,924
English only spoken at home	85%	85%
Occupied housing	97%	N/A
Race/Ethnicity: White alone	81%	N/A
Race/Ethnicity: Hispanic	9%	N/A
Race/Ethnicity: Other	5%	N/A
Race/Ethnicity: Black alone	5%	N/A
Education attainment (age 25+) high school diploma or above	90%	N/A

The Economic Development Committee, created on July 13, 2022, to replace the former ad hoc committee, is currently inactive. That committee, if reactivated, could spearhead business calling and other policy actions.

While focusing on regulatory and infrastructure changes to attract new businesses, it is critical to grow existing and emerging businesses. The best first step is to create a business calling program to identify needs for both those businesses and, indirectly, for new business locating in Lancaster.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is an important tool to incentivize new affordable housing and commercial and industrial projects while still ensuring that town property tax collections increases from those projects. In TIF, a small portion of the new increment of property tax that comes from a new project is abated. Lancaster has explored Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) for affordable housing. It does not, however, have a clear Town Meeting approved TIF policy that can be put on its website, potentially with pre-approval from Town Meeting authorizing the Select Board to grant TIFs. Such an approach would send a clear message to commercial and industrial investors and encourage new projects.

Likewise, District Improvement Financing (DIF) is a tool where some portion of the increment of increased property tax that comes from new development goes to infrastructure to support that development. This tool can help fund critical infrastructure investments, such as water, sewer, and sidewalk improvements, while still increasing municipal revenues. Again, getting Town Meeting approval of a DIF policy that can go on Lancaster's website would send a message to developers.

Lancaster has a robust regulatory system which has allowed a healthy inventory of commercial and industrial real estate available for tenants and Smart Growth Overlay (40R) zoning. The regulatory system, however, can be challenging to navigate and the site plan approval language is not always clear. Regulatory reform that maintains or strengthens land use and environmental protection can provide more certainty and clarity for investors, improve the Town's tax base, and provide more certainty to abutting neighbors concerned about development.

North Lancaster and Business and Industrial Tax Base

As discussed earlier, the most passionate *Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan* conversations were about the critical need for an expanded industrial and commercial tax base while mitigating impacts on residents of North Lancaster. The Land Use element discusses land use solutions.

In most subject areas, the survey results were significantly the same regardless of where survey respondents live (see Exhibit A-Community Engagement). For responses to economic development priorities, however, North Lancaster survey respondents had different priorities and concerns. Those residents, who live with the adverse consequences of the industrial, warehouse, and extraction businesses that are fueling new growth, ranked the need for an expanded industrial and commercial tax base lower than residents of other areas of town.

Interestingly, there is greater consensus on encouraging local businesses to grow. While it cannot be an either-or decision, there is generally town-wide support to grow local businesses and grow the tax base.

The recommendations below attempt to address both the need for tax base growth, including that from local businesses that are ready to grow and from new businesses, to serve all residents everywhere in Lancaster.

As a cross-cutting strategy, never compromise on substantive protections from adverse impacts from businesses. Business want clear rules. Our goal is to encourage reasonable and balanced development.

Expand the commercial and industrial tax base through attention to the needs of local established and emerging businesses (economic gardening) and new businesses

- Adopt a business calling program with high level officials (Town Administrator, Director of Community Development and Planning, or members of a revitalized Economic Development Committee) ensuring that every business in town gets visited and interviewed every couple of years to identify their needs, desires, and opportunities and explore what Lancaster can do to help them.
- Invite Town Meeting to adopt a Tax Increment Financing and District Improvement Financing policy that will send a message to businesses that Lancaster is open for business that meet zoning performance standards. Knowing what Lancaster can do to help them upfront, instead of waiting for uncertain outcomes later, is the best way to attract desirable businesses.
- Appoint a single point of contact (Town Administrator or Director of Community Development and Planning) who will be there for any business inquiry from permit applications, permit process, and any Town assistance to support desirable businesses that want to grow.
- Improve the information that businesses need to locate, grow, and thrive that is posted on the Town website. For example, Massachusetts Municipal Association 2024 web awards include several sites with a strong business information focus.
 - Plymouth, with a very simple business focus: www.plymouth-ma.gov/985/Starting-a-Business

- Pittsfield, which includes information on their small business fund and other information: www.cityofpittsfield.org/business/index.php
- Norwood, which includes an inventory of available sites and information on their expedited permitting program: www.norwoodma.gov/departments/economic_development.php
- Focus on and advertise Lancaster's high quality of life. Many businesses have options where they can locate and non-financial features, quality of life within an easy drive of Boston, can help attract some of those businesses.

Create stronger focal points at the Town Green, South Lancaster Center, North Lancaster, the evolving South Lancaster village north of the Main Street railroad bridge, and the DCAMM Old Common Road property

- Focus on regulatory and other investments to help these areas to attract offices and commercial businesses who want Lancaster's high quality of life, especially businesses that are currently in Lancaster and might be expanding.

Improve infrastructure to serve economic development needs

Critical economic development infrastructure investments include:

- Improving sanitary sewer capacity for the evolving South Lancaster village just north of the Main Street railroad tracks, the Town Green/Municipal campus, and South Lancaster Center, primarily through investments in infiltration and inflow (I&I) reductions, water saving devices, and any limiting factor to sewer flow (e.g., any pipe tuberculous or point constriction). To achieve this, the Town needs to formalize its partnership with the Sewer Commission or work to merge the Sewer Commission into Town government.
- Research feasibility for providing municipal or other public water services in North Lancaster, including the feasibility of obtaining water from a neighboring community or accessing existing private and military high-yield wells in North Lancaster.
- Expand infrastructure capacity to serve businesses in those target areas, including reducing inflow and infiltration into sanitary sewers and encouraging water saving devices for sanitary sewer users all to increase capacity of those sewers to serve new uses.

Implementing zoning changes to ease business location

Lancaster has generally has a well thought out zoning, especially as it relates to commercial and industrial uses. Some of the standards, however, are not as clear as they could be, creating uncertainty both of businesses trying to grow and for neighborhoods concerned about the impacts.

There are four rules of zoning and other regulations that could guide Lancaster regulatory revisions, especially for Zoning Special Permit approvals, Environmental Controls, Design guidelines (Section 220-35), Disturbance controls and lighting (Section 220-36 et seq.), and Erosion and stormwater control (Section 220-37.2).

1. The "right path," the **route that best aligns with town goals, should be the easy regulatory path**. That is often, but not always true (especially as it relates to housing).
2. **Uncertainty** should be avoided because it **is the enemy of sound investments**, increases legal exposure, and makes both investors and nearby abutters nervous. The site plan, special permit, and environmental performance standards could all be clearer.

3. A **robust resilience focus**, including green infrastructure, with clear rules and minimum interpretation, does not add significant cost. It can add to Lancaster's cachet or prestige and improve quality of life.
4. Finally, all regulatory requirements **need articulate rationale** so that they can easily be explained to applicants, to the public, and, if ever necessary, to the courts.

In addition, Zoning Signs, Sign content (Section 220-27(E)), should be reviewed in light of *Reed v. Town of Gilbert*, where the U.S. Supreme Court severely limited the ability of communities to regulate sign **content** outside of traffic safety signs (135 S.Ct. 2218, 2015). Size, materials, location, lighting, and other variables can be regulated, but not the actual words on the sign.

8. Natural and Cultural Resources

Goals

- **Improve the presence of the Nashua River and other rivers in everyday life.**
- **Monitor and encourage the Devens South Post environmental cleanup.**
- **Address problems with invasive species in Lancaster.**
- **Celebrate human-built landscapes and environments.**
- **Celebrate and protect natural landscapes and environments, including water supplies.**
- **Reduce the risk of natural and climate change induced hazards.**

Lancaster has the blessing of a large amount of open space, both permanently protected and currently maintained as open space. Water resources help define the unique character of Lancaster, and all of them have very high ecological value:

1. The entire town is in the Nashua River watershed.
2. The Nashua River (mainstem) and North Branch Nashua River in many ways define Lancaster. Bow Brook, Goodridge Brook, Ponakin Brook, Slaterock Brook and one of its tributaries, Spectacle Brook, Still River, and Wekepeke Brook have been designated by the state as cold-water fish resources. Other brooks, including McGovern Brook, Ropers Brook, White Pond Brook, and other smaller streams add to Lancaster's rich flowing water resources.
3. Rich wetlands complexes, including Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area, Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge are part of Lancaster's eastern boundary, benefiting both visitors and providing management resources.
4. Extensive floodplains overlap with some of the wetlands, providing a buffer for changing climate if they are managed appropriately.
5. Numerous lakes and ponds include six Massachusetts "Great Ponds" over ten acres and with public access: Fort Pond, Spectacle Pond, Little Spectacle Pond, South Meadow Pond West, Turner Pond, and Whites Pond. Other significant ponds include Cranberry Pond, Oak Hill Pond, Shirley Road Pond, and Slate Rock Pond as well as the human-built impoundments at Goodridge Brook.
6. Groundwater from public and private wells provides most of the potable drinking water for Lancaster residents and businesses fr.
7. Much of Lancaster is part of one of the largest Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (Figure 8-1) in Massachusetts.

The designation of the **Central Nashua River Valley** (including Nashua River mainstem and the North Branch Nashua River) as a state approved Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), highlights the statewide ecological and historical significance of these resources.

The MassWildlife Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has further mapped some areas in Lancaster as Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife and as Priority Habitats of Rare Species.

The Hazard Mitigation Plan, described above, is currently in draft form. The hazard mitigation actions identified in the final adopted plan, as may be amended, are referred to by reference as part of this comprehensive plan.

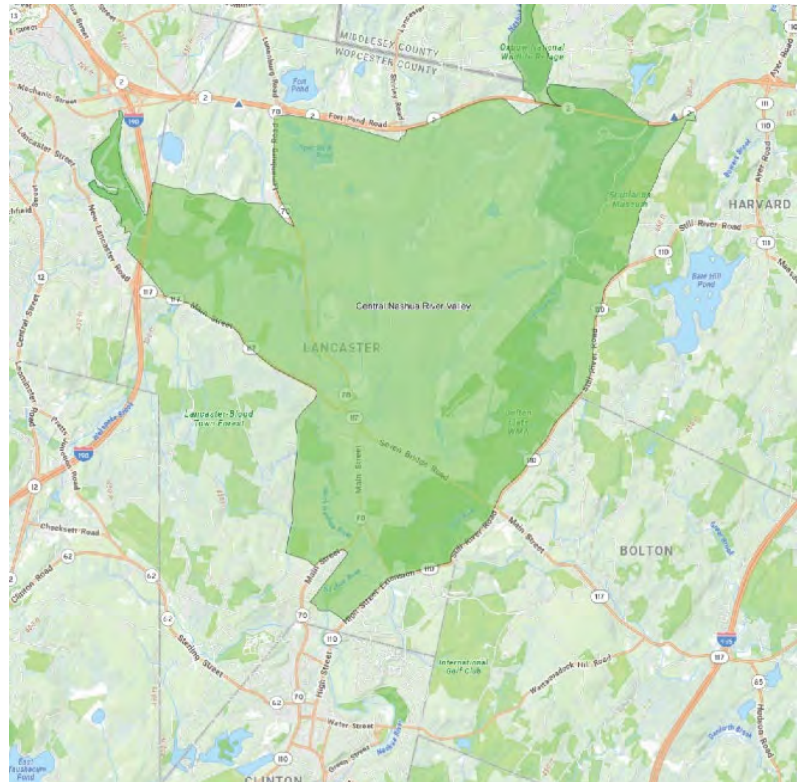


Figure 8-1. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Improve the presence of the Nashua River and other rivers and streams in everyday life

Lancaster residents love the Nashua River and want it cleaner, more visible, and with more public access. The community's highest priority in the **Lancaster 2035** survey was to “Celebrate and protect natural landscapes, environments, and the Nashua River.” Action policies include:

- Prioritize land preservation efforts for land along the banks of the Nashua River.
- Improve access to the North Branch Nashua River at the Cook Conservation Area, improve the quality of the trails at the Pellecchia Conservation Land and Canoe Launch, improve the boat launch and fishing access, and make them accessible to people with mobility disabilities.
- Increase the number of river access points.
- Improve wayfinding to river access points.
- Clean up the river of debris, especially after the spring freshet.
- Address more significant sources of river contamination, working with local health and conservation and state environmental officials.



Figure 8-2 Pellecchia Conservation Land and Canoe Launch at the Nashua River and Route 70



Monitor and encourage the Devens South Post environmental cleanup.

Given on-going military and police uses, contamination, and inertia, Deven's South Post is not going to be surplused and made available to the Town of Lancaster within the 20-year planning horizon of this plan, if ever.

The Department of Defense already manages the property for wildlife and natural systems.

It is important that Lancaster continue to monitor the environmental cleanup and follow the planning process to remain at the table. Since the site will never be cleaned up to pristine conditions, it is likely to have US EPA Institutional Controls and

Massachusetts Activities and Use Limitations, in which the site is cleaned up to a safe level consistent with use restrictions. The fewer restrictions the better for future uses in the decades ahead (e.g., restrictions on child care centers are appropriate but permanent restrictions on public access are not).



Figure 8-3 Deven's South Post off Route 70

Encourage partners organizations and volunteers to remove invasive species in Lancaster

Like everywhere in the Commonwealth, even as more land is being preserved there is more damage to natural ecosystems from non-native invasive plants and animals. Very few invasives will ever be eliminated, but with the help of partner organizations and volunteers, many of the invasives can be held in check. Conservation volunteers can be especially helpful, but they need proper training (e.g., Japanese Knotweed can spread from vegetative reproduction, sprouting from root and stem fragments, so sloppy cuttings and leaving the materials on the ground can aid its expansion). The town should consider funding educational programs and trainings on invasive removal. Many other municipalities have undertaken invasive removal efforts with only very limited resources (e.g., CPA).

Celebrate human-built landscapes and environments

The Lancaster Historical Commission and others have developed an extensive inventory of historic properties, landscapes, and structures, and the Commission is expanding its inventory information. The Commission and the Thayer Memorial Library have focused on honoring and celebrating those resources.

The existing National Register of Historic Places historic districts provide some measure of protection for historic resources that could be threatened by actions requiring state or federal permit approvals or funding, but they do not have any effect on most local action.

Potential actions include:

- Lancaster could consider creating a local historic district, which would regulate projects not requiring state and federal permits or funding, for its most prized historic districts and landmark buildings.
- Expand interpretation (signs and website presence) of special Native American and historic landscapes and buildings in Lancaster.



As discussed in the Nashua River discussion, residents are proud of Lancaster's rich and diverse natural landscapes. They provide a unifying feature to Lancaster and are present in almost every corner of Lancaster.

Potential actions include:

- Expand interpretation (signs and website presence) of natural landscapes, geological features, and unique environments.
- Collaborate with partners (see the Open Space and Recreation element) to preserve the most valuable natural landscapes and environments for future generations.
- Lancaster's municipal water supply wells, Zone 1 (wellhead protection area), and Zone 2 (the cone of influence around wells where groundwater drops as water is pumped, potentially drawing in contaminants) are in the southeast corner of Lancaster. Currently no water treatment plant is required, but it could be in the future with a growing emphasis on virtually eliminating PFAS contamination. Strict water supply protection is needed in this area and monitoring of any threatening land uses.
- In addition to Lancaster's municipal supply wells, there are other high yield wells in Lancaster, ranging from a well on Devens South Post to private wells in North Lancaster. All of these wells should be protected. There is a potential that some of them could help serve some future North Lancaster municipal water supply.

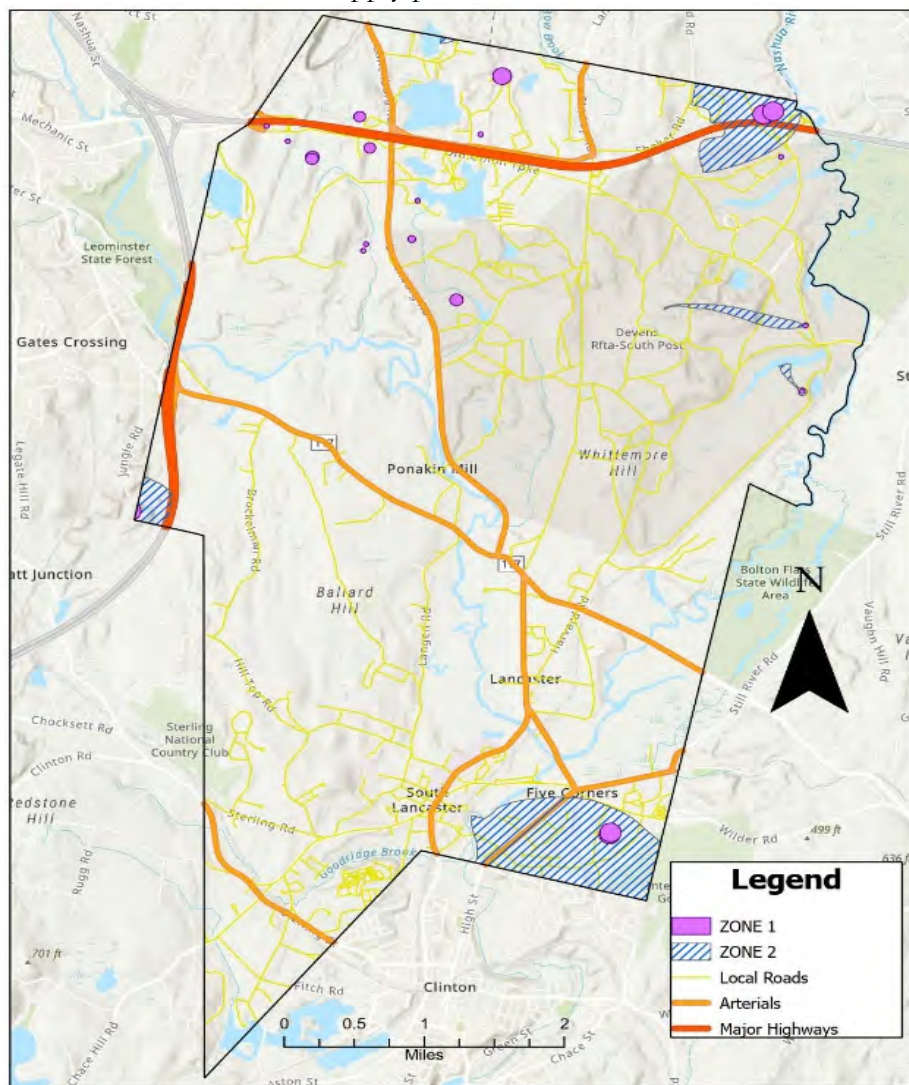


Figure 8-2. Wellhead Protection Areas. Lancaster's public water supply comes from well fields in Lancaster's southeast corner, but other high yield wells serve South Post and private and non-town water supplies.

Reduce the risk of natural and climate change induced hazards

Lancaster previously adopted a FEMA-compliant *Hazard Mitigation Plan*. A draft revision was written by MRPC and Lancaster needs to complete the update process to adopt that plan, which can help guide Town actions and allow Lancaster to apply for FEMA funding assistance. In addition, Lancaster adopted the State MVP program funded *Community Resilience Program: Community Resilience Building* plan, which can further guide this process. Both plans are incorporated into the *Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan* by reference.

9. Open Space and Recreation

Goals

- Implement the *Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)* and draft a new 2025-2032 OSRP.
- Preserve Lancaster's most ecologically valuable areas and farmland.
- Manage Lancaster's protected conservation land to preserve natural systems.
- Preserve and manage trails, parks, recreation, and conservation open space to serve residents.

Lancaster has a clear open space and recreation program, outlined in its Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Rather than replace that plan, the *Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan* incorporates it by reference. The actions below supplement the current OSRP and provide items that should be considered for the 2025 update.

Implement the *Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)* and draft a new 2025-2032 OSRP

The current OSRP expires in 2024 and should be revised in 2024-2025. Its vision, inventory, and recommendations are still relevant and can inform the new plan.

With the plan's expiration, Lancaster is no longer eligible for state open space and recreation grants. These grants include the LAND grant for open space purchases, the PARC grant for recreation, and the state-administered Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund for open space and recreation

purchases and improvements. Even without a new OSRP, Lancaster remains eligible for MassTrails and MVP grants, both of which can fund certain land preservation and improvements. The Community Preservation Act, including its state grant money, does not require a plan, but the plan can help inform these priorities.

Preserve Lancaster's most ecologically valuable areas and farmland

Lancaster and its Federal, State, and nonprofit partners do an exemplary job of preserving valuable parcels of land through conservation ownership and regulatory actions. There are opportunities to better integrate ecological preservation into local regulatory programs and CPA and state grant investments.

Farmland in particular is at risk in Lancaster. There are no agriculture preservation restrictions (APRs) in Lancaster. APRs are a state and federally funded program, usually with a small municipal contribution, which allows farmland to remain in productive private ownership while removing the development rights to the land and ensuring that the farmland will remain protected and productive forever.

Manage Lancaster's protected conservation land to preserve natural systems

Volunteers primarily manage conservation areas, with most of the focus on limited trail maintenance. The next OSRP should include more detailed habitat assessments and a habitat management plan.

Preserve and manage trails, parks, recreation, and conservation open space to serve residents

Open space and recreation resources abound in Lancaster. A clearer maintenance plan and maintenance resources could serve residents of Lancaster.

The Lancaster ***Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)***, as may be amended from time to time. It fulfils most of the Open Space and Recreation element of this comprehensive plan.

OSRP Goal 1 and Objectives: Protect the town's public water supply

1. Expand town water supply by partnering with surrounding towns, particularly in North Lancaster.
2. Educate the public and developers about nonpoint source pollution and low-impact development.
3. Control invasive vegetation in our conservation areas.
4. Encourage wetlands and waterways buffers and connect to other wetlands or upland habitat.
5. Practice water conservation and water quality management.

OSRP Goal 2 and Objectives: Conserve and protect our agricultural lands and farming viability

1. Preserve lands that support agricultural uses.
2. Partner with the Agricultural Commission to educate residents on the value of farming.

OSRP Goal 3 and Objectives: Protect contiguous blocks of forestland

1. Permanently protect forestland that abuts existing conserved forestland.

2. Develop and implement a certified forest management plan.
3. Work with neighboring towns to link adjacent blocks of forestland.

OSRP Goal 4 and Objectives: Enrich our recreational resources

1. Create a central recreation area near the Town Green, connecting the Community Center, the baseball and soccer fields, and the tennis courts with a new walking trail (completed).
2. Expand recreational offerings accessible for all ages and for persons with disabilities.
3. Improve access and signage to existing paths and trails.
4. Construct additional trails, bike paths and sidewalks.
5. Seek long-term, sustainable financing for the management of facilities and volunteer stewardship.
6. Create a mitigation mechanism where developers provide facilities or cash to support recreation goals.
7. Use the Complete Streets program to improve existing sidewalks and create new bike lanes.

OSRP Goal 5 and Objectives: Improve the connectivity of people and places to foster a sense of community

1. Improve the accessibility and ease of use of Lancaster's open space and recreational opportunities to benefit persons with disabilities.
2. Connect existing trails and bikeways to each other and improve neighborhood access to public open space.
3. Provide a pedestrian connection from northern to southern Lancaster.
4. Encourage sidewalks and trails in new developments.

OSRP Goal 6 and Objectives. Improve townwide communications

1. Empower the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee to coordinate the goals and actions of the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan.
2. Improve the internal communications on availability of tax-title properties.

OSRP Goal 7 and Objectives. Protect and enrich our open space and animal and plant habitat

1. Preserve and protect priority sites for biodiversity.
2. Connect large blocks of contiguous habitat with wildlife corridors.
3. Encourage use of and respect for public lands.
4. Developing a stewardship program as well as a management plan for all town open space.

OSRP Goal 8 and Objectives. Develop sustainable human and financial resources to support the goals of the OSRP

[Partially achieved with the adoption of the Community Preservation Act.]

1. Develop the sources of funding to support the Open Space and Recreation Plan.
2. Communicate with Town committees and offices to leverage their work and share resources and effort.

OSRP Goal 9 and Objectives. Integrate growth and development to preserve Lancaster's rural feel, scenic vistas, historic character, and natural landscape

1. Deliver on the State's sustainable principles of Smart Growth and Smart Energy by creating policies, zoning and programs that will assist Lancaster to grow and flourish while keeping its natural and historic landscape intact.
2. Foster collaboration between those boards, commissions, and departments that review development proposals, especially in those areas designated for economic development.
3. Consult with the Planning Board on possible re-zoning plans to incorporate more open space and conservation area into existing zoning districts.

Action agenda to build onto and complement the existing OSRP.

- **Preserve Lancaster's most ecologically valuable areas.**

See Open Space and Recreation Plan - Action Plan map below for top priorities for land preservation. These include expanding water resources in North Lancaster, protecting NHESP priorities for biodiversity in several locations, preserving the Nashua River Greenway, and protecting forest land that abuts existing conserved forests in several locations.

Build partnerships with other land preservation agencies (e.g., US Fish and Wildlife, MassWildlife, Mass Parks and Recreation, Lancaster Land Trust, The Trustees of Reservations) to preserve land.

Update the OSRP to remain eligible for State LAND and Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grants.

- **Manage Lancaster's protected conservation land to preserve natural systems.**

The OSRP prioritizes invasive removal, improved trail signage and accessibility, new resources, and volunteer stewardship.

- **Preserve and manage Lancaster trails, parks, recreation, and conservation open space to serve residents.**

The OSRP action plan map, below, prioritizes improved beach access at Spectacle Pond, a recreation area near the Town Green, a trail from North to South Lancaster, and sidewalks on Main Street to improve connectivity.

Advance conversation about honoring the Town Green as permanently protected open space, sending a clear message that it will never be used for parking and making the Green eligible for Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds.

Making accessibility improvements for those with disabilities options for all recreation and some conservation opportunities, in accordance with ADA and AAB standards, can potentially be funded with CPA, Massachusetts Office of Disabilities, and EOHLC CDBG Small Cities funding.

Enhancing canoe and kayak launching sites, and providing accessible fishing opportunities, would serve diverse users (e.g., at the closed Ponakin Bridge/Lunenburg Road, Mill Street Bridge, Center Bridge/Nashua River confluence, Rte. 117 Bridge/Bolton Flats). Access road into limited parking; put in on the west side of the river, Fort Pond State Boat Launch/Fort Pond Road, and just over the town line at Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge/Still River Depot Road, Harvard.



Figure 9-1. Cook Conservation Area at the Nashua River

- **Preserve Lancaster farmland**

The OSRP prioritizes preserving land that supports agricultural use. The most common way is to work with the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources and land conservation organizations to jointly acquire Agriculture Preservation Restrictions.

In addition, Lancaster should work with its Agriculture Commission to identify farmland in Chapter 61A that should be permanently protected:

- Identify farmland in Chapter 61A with high agricultural value, and federal, state, or local prime agricultural soils.
- Approach all farmers with valuable agriculture farmland in Chapter 61A to explore opportunities for purchasing Agriculture Preservation Restrictions (APRs) to protect that farmland.
- Work with the Lancaster Community Preservation Act committee and area land trusts to identify contingency plans so that Lancaster can exercise its right of first refusal to buy the Chapter 61A if it is sold or otherwise proposed for conversion of Chapter 61A.

The recommendation of the Lancaster Open Space and Recreation Plan are incorporated into the ***Lancaster 2035 Comprehensive Plan*** by reference. (See *Figure 9-2. Open Space and Recreation Plan-Action Plan*.)

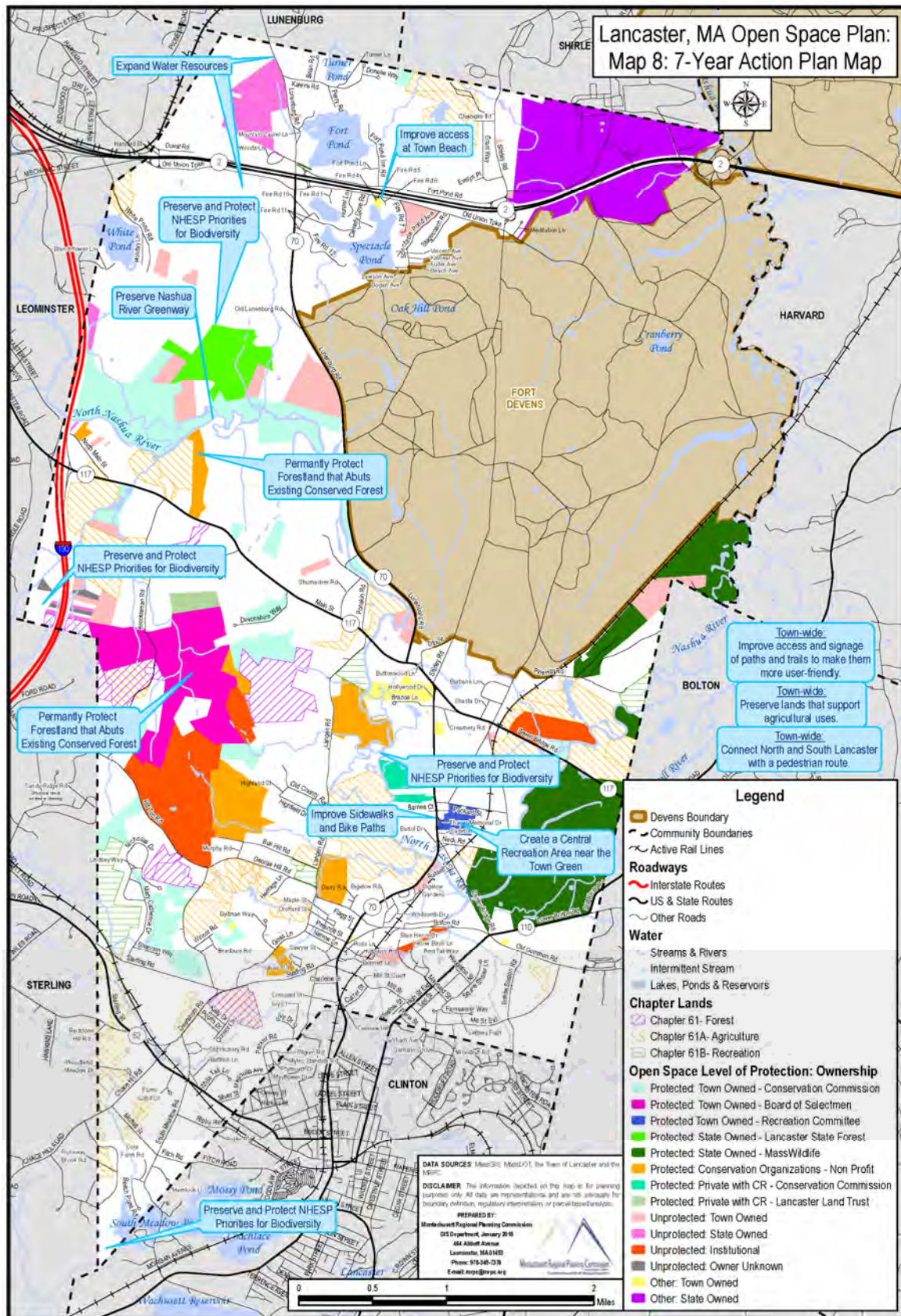


Figure 9-2. Open Space and Recreation Plan – Action Plan

10. Sustainability and Resilience

Goals

- **Reduce Lancaster’s carbon and greenhouse gas footprint so Lancaster is carbon neutral by 2050 and exploring making all town buildings carbon neutral by 2040.**
- **Improve Lancaster’s ability to be resilient and thrive even with chronic and acute stress from climate change and other challenges.**
- **Focus on equity, including ensuring that all diverse residents have an opportunity to fully participate in governance and decision making.**
- **Develop green infrastructure standards for zoning, subdivision regulations, and Town stormwater, park, and street tree operations.**
- **Analyze climate change impacts in the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP).**

Sustainability is often defined as ensuring the long-term stability of the community’s environment, economy, and social equity with the right balance to ensure that all people thrive without damaging their resources (Figure 10-1. Sustainability). This includes a focus on climate change mitigation by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprint, and climate resilience ensuring that the Town can thrive even with the chronic and acute stress from climate change.

Resilience, however, is far more than simply about climate change. It is also about reinforcing the social compact that supports the community against any natural hazard, rapid dislocations in the economy or social system.



Figure 10-1. Sustainability. A harmonious balance of environment, economy, and equity.

Sustainability and Resilience is a Priority for Lancaster’s Youth

Youth and young adult respondents (those under 18 and those between age 25 to 34, with no survey respondents 18-24) set sustainability, resilience, and addressing climate change as a very high priority, far higher than Lancaster residents overall. Unfortunately, youth voices were underrepresented in the survey, but assuming that the respondents do represent the community, this is a critical priority for them.

The focus on a **resilient environment** includes making public and private buildings and infrastructure more resilient to climate change. For example, 3.32% of Lancaster’s roads (4.98 miles out of 150.22 miles) are in a floodplain and are subject to flooding. Journey to 2050, Lancaster, MA, Vulnerable Infrastructure (Figure 10-2, Regional Transportation Plan, MRPC, 2023-) highlights some of the most vulnerable infrastructure. Numerous other culverts that are potential points for localized flooding and road damage are not shown on that map.

Climate mitigation includes reducing the carbon and greenhouse gas footprints of public buildings. This can include encouraging and requiring municipal projects to be net zero energy and adopting the Specialized Stretch Energy Code that eases the conversation away from fossil fuels. It also includes reducing the carbon footprint of transportation by encouraging electric vehicles through the use of EV chargers, adopting new zoning requirements, and by providing more alternatives to single-occupancy automobile use, including walking, bicycling, micro-mobility, and transit.

As of May 2023 (MRPC), Lancaster had four public electric vehicle charging stations:

- Ron Bouchard's Nissan, 490 Old Union Turnpike
- National Grid Lancaster, Thayer Memorial Drive
- Perkins Manor, Perkins Drive
- Perkins Hermann Building, Pinfeather Lane

Lancaster uses Hampshire Power for its Community Choice Power Supply Program, the default supplier for electric power supply generation for ratepayers who do not opt out. Hampshire Power aims to provide ratepayers with the same or better rates as the default rate charged by National Grid for customers using them for power supply. The cutting edge of community choice is to set a higher priority at encouraging new local renewable energy ("additive" to existing renewable energy supply), which often requires that a small mix of contracts be for longer term power supply agreements.

Reduce Lancaster's carbon and greenhouse gas footprint so Lancaster is carbon neutral by 2050 and exploring making all town buildings carbon neutral by 2040.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a goal of having net zero emission (carbon neutrality) by 2050. Lancaster having the same goal will allow Lancaster to access state resources to help it meet the goal (Green Communities, Climate Leader Communities, and Municipal Vulnerability Program, among others) when such programs serve Town needs.

A Lancaster target of carbon neutrality for its own buildings by 2040 will inform its architects, building managers, and building performance partners. Increasing building performance will lower the operating costs of buildings and increase building comfort. Pacing improvements to match the life cycles of windows, mechanical systems, and similar will allow Lancaster to achieve this goal and lower long-term costs. As discussed in the Facilities and Services element of this plan, any building investment should do a full Life Cycle Assessment, so that investments pencil out or pay for themselves, but acknowledging the long payback periods of public buildings.

Improve Lancaster's ability to be resilient and thrive even with chronic and acute stress from climate change and other challenges

Climate change can be very scary for young residents, who are going to live through a rapidly changing climate in a way that older residents are never going to experience. Longer periods of excessive heat, more intense rain and wind storms, flooding, new insect vector-borne disease, and more climate driven migration will impact them. Fortunately, with the long-time scales (e.g., carbon neutral town buildings by 2040), Lancaster can thrive, not merely survive climate change by incorporating a resilience perspective and voice into every major town policy.

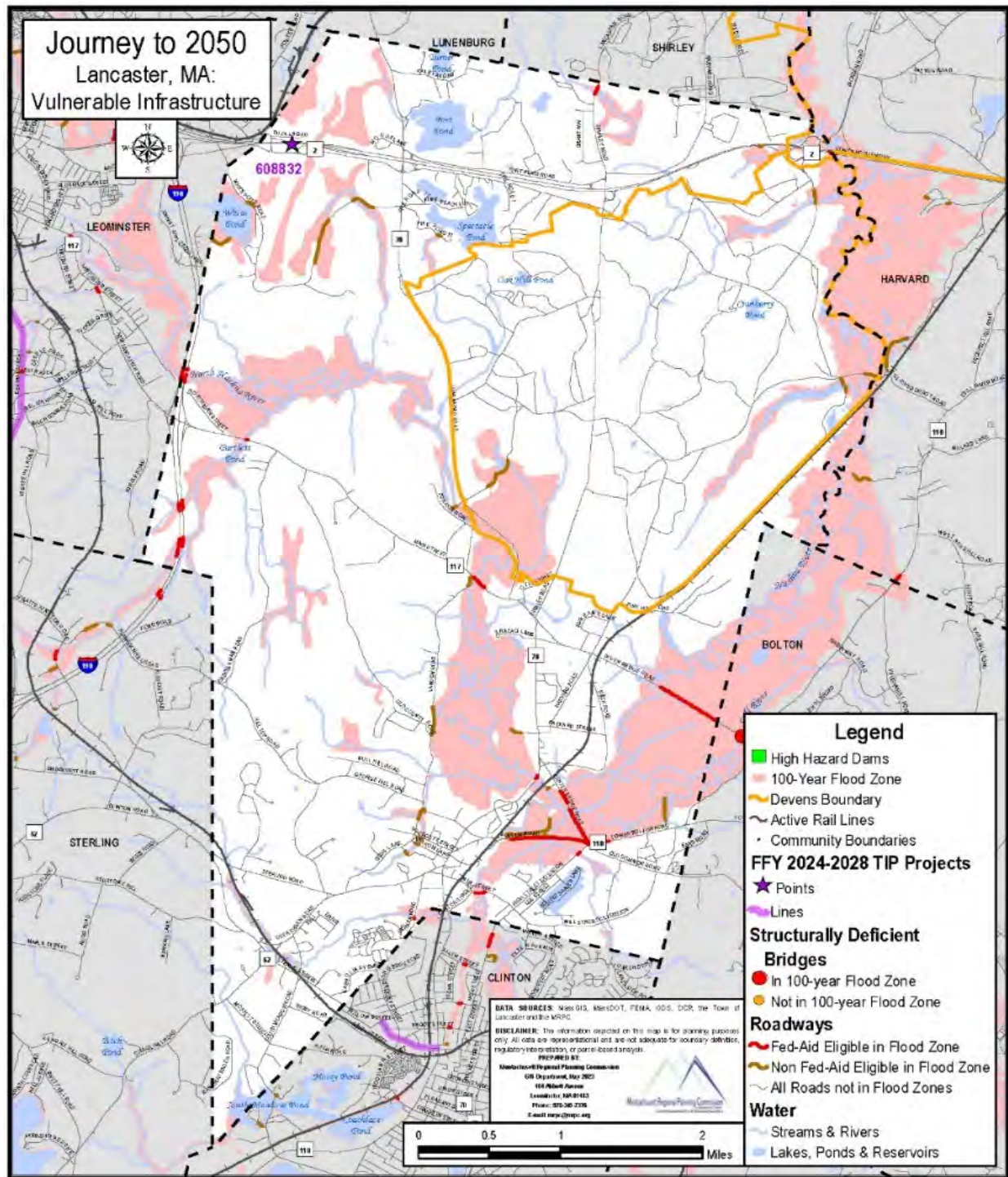


Figure 10-2 Vulnerable Infrastructure (Hazard Mitigation Plan)

Focus on equity, including ensuring that all diverse residents have an opportunity to fully participate in governance and decision making

Lancaster would benefit from more inclusive opportunities for residents to be involved in government and ensuring that all members of the community feel that they are empowered to participate in Lancaster's governance.

Lancaster has significantly lower voter participation rates for local elections (e.g., 1,346 votes cast on 6/29/20 and 1,194 votes cast on 5/22/22) than for national elections (e.g., 4,277 votes cast on 11/3/2020, a presidential election, and 3,133 votes cast on 11/8/22). There are opportunities to increase community engagement:

- Obtain an MVP 2.0 Planning Grant to update the Municipal Vulnerability Program resilience plan to meet the state's new standards. Use the MVP funding to expand outreach attract members of the community who are statistically underrepresented on town committees (e.g., renters, residents in affordable housing, and youth), including paying stipends to reduce the barriers to participation from those who have to hire childcare, arrange for transportation, or take time off from work in order to participate in local governance.
- Expand the town email list to improve the ability to reach out to community members with newsletters and information on ways to stay involved in governance. Inviting residents on the Library's extensive email list to sign up for town email and using other outreach can help build real time communications.

Develop green infrastructure standards for zoning, subdivision regulations, and town stormwater, park, and street tree operations

Lancaster regulatory programs and tree maintenance programs can benefit from more focus on green infrastructure, especially green infrastructure that is low maintenance and can lower town life cycle costs. Examples of these kinds of standards include:

- Requiring structured soil or large tree boxes under street trees (zoning and subdivision regulations) and parking lot trees (zoning) to increase the longevity of trees and reduce root damage to pavement.
- Requiring that the first flush of rain from road drainage in new subdivisions (subdivision regulations) and parking lots (zoning) drain into grassed swales or tree boxes/structured soils, to decrease stormwater impacts.

Analyze climate change impacts in the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP)

Addressing climate change involves both climate resilience and mitigation actions. A few of these actions may be solely for climate change purposes, but generally these investments serve other purposes as well. Replacing a culvert at the end of its useful life, in an era of climate change, also involves resizing the culvert for increased stormwater flow. Improving building performance to reduce fuel costs and increase comfort also includes reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

The best way to ensure that all CIP investments, major durable goods and services investments, are analyzed to consider climate resilience and mitigation. (Table 10-1. 1 Lancaster Capital Improvements Plan sample climate impact assessment approach.)

Table 10-1. Lancaster Capital Improvements Plan sample climate impact assessment

<i>Department and project</i>	
<i>Does capital investment expand services or maintain the current level of services? How?</i>	
<i>Does investment reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and how? (E.g., decrease energy)</i>	
<i>What alternatives would further reduce GHG emissions? Are those viable?</i>	
<i>List any policy, study, action, or other documentation that explains why and how GHG will decrease.</i>	
<i>Specify the GHG emission reduction pathway from Lancaster 2035.</i>	
<i>Does capital investment increase resilience and how? (E.g., can accommodate larger storms).</i>	
<i>What alternatives would further increase resilience? Assess whether alternatives are viable and realistic.</i>	
<i>List any policy, study, action, or other documentation that explains why and how resilience will increase.</i>	
<i>Specify resilience pathway from Lancaster 2035.</i>	
<i>Include a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) documenting upfront costs and operational savings. Would a longer projected life (the full life of an improvement, not the period of bonding for that improvement) justify greater GHG or resilience investments?</i>	

11. Public Services and Facilities

Goals

- Ensure that public buildings and facilities are carbon neutral by 2040.
- Maintaining and updating town public buildings and facilities to meet current needs and build resilience to adverse climate change impacts.
- Rehabilitate the former Town Hall to put it back into productive use.
- Evaluate all Capital Improvement Plan investments using a cost benefit analysis to identify full life cycle costs and climate change impacts.
- Improve the Town Green, municipal building civic campus, and the infrastructure needed to serve comprehensive plan goals.
- Explore feasibility of infrastructure improvements to serve land use, housing, and economic development priorities.

Town Buildings and Related Capital Facilities

Except for the former Town Hall and the closed Memorial School, Lancaster's public buildings and related facilities are generally in excellent condition. There are a few opportunities to consider in future Capital Improvements Planning that will advance Lancaster 2035.

- **Town Hall (former), 687-695 Main Street (Town Green/Civic Campus)**

The former Town Hall has been vacant since town offices moved to the Prescott Building. It was built in 1908 (designed by Alexander W. Longfellow, Jr, and Luman D. Willcutt and Sons) in a Classical Revival and Colonial Revival style. The building has significant and expensive challenges, including mold. Any options for this property must include addressing parking needs.

- **Prescott Building (current town hall), 701 Main Street (Town Green/Civic Campus)**

The Prescott Building (designed by Herbert Dudley Hale, Park and Kendall) was built in 1904 in a Classical Renaissance Revival style. It was used as a school until 2001. In 2011, the Spencer Preservation Group conducted a feasibility analysis of adapting the building to new uses. They prepared the design to rehabilitate the building and convert it to town offices, oversaw the 2017-2018 rehabilitation.

- **Thayer Memorial Library, 717 Main Street (Town Green/Civic Campus)**

The Thayer Memorial Library, formerly Lancaster Town Library, (designed by Galliher, Baier and Best; C.H. Harris, and Charles A. Wulff) has a Classical Revival Style. It was built in 1868, expanded in 1888 and then doubled in size in 1999. The Library is one of the anchors of Lancaster's civic campus.

- **Town Green, Main Street (Town Green/Civic Campus)**

Town Green is the heart of Lancaster's civic campus. It is permanently protected as open space (Article 97, Massachusetts Public Lands Preservation Act, and, as part of the Nathan Thayer Memorial Park rehabilitation project, by Article 6(f) of the Federal Land and Water Conservation Act). It contains a World War I memorial (circa 1919).

Note: Other open space park, recreation, and conservation holdings are not integrated into the civic campus and are inventoried separately in the Lancaster Open Space and Recreation Plan.

- **Community Center and Senior Center, 39 Harvard Road (rear of Civic Campus)**

The Community Center serves as Lancaster's Senior Citizens' Center and welcomes residents of all ages. It is the only part of the now closed Memorial School currently in use.

- **Memorial School, 39 Harvard Road (rear of Civic Campus)**

The former school, built in 1957, is vacant except for the wing used for the Community Center. The Memorial School Re-Use Committee has been charged with exploring options, but Town Counsel has determined that deed restrictions limit its use to recreation (Ivria Fried, MiyaresHarrington, 2023) under the terms of the original donation, Article 97 of the Amendments to the state constitution, and the Public Lands Preservation Act (2023).

- **DPW Office and Water Department, 392 Mill Street Extension**

The facilities (c. 1983) are in adequate condition.

- **DPW Cemetery and Tree Division, Eastwood Cemetery Building, 330 Old Common Road**

The building (c. 1983) is in adequate condition.

- **DPW Highway Department, DPW Facilities, Barn, Salt Storage, 432-435 Center Bridge Road**

The Highway department buildings (c. 1964 and c. 1970) are in adequate condition.

DPW facilities are located within the 100-year floodplain (the area with >1% chance of flooding in any given year based on historical rainfall and streamflow patterns). The facilities are wet floodproofed for the historical floods the facilities have received (approximately 6" of water). This includes raising electric outlets, heating facilities, and plumbing fixtures, and the elevation of salt storage all located above historical flood elevations (DPW, personal communication). Floods disturb daily operations, including some critical services, but do not threaten the integrity of the buildings or prevent rapid reuse when floodwaters recede.

With climate change and the likelihood of more frequent flooding and potentially higher elevation, Lancaster should assess the risks beyond the work already completed in the Hazard Mitigation Plan, and additional mitigation measures are advisable.

- **Police Department, 1053 Main Street (Fire/Police campus)**

Opened in 2001, the Police department is a modern building, but after almost 25 years it has a failing roof, windows that need repairs, and an HVAC that needs to be upgraded. It includes the emergency operations center shared with the Fire Department.

- **Fire Department and EMS (Headquarters), Center Station, 1055 Main Street (Fire/Police campus)**

The combined Fire Department headquarters and Station 1 (built in 1967) is functional but many not be adequate to serve current needs, with no bunk room, apparatus that doesn't fit into garage

bays, and inadequate electrical systems. It includes the emergency operations center shared with the Police Department.

- **Fire Department, South Station (Station #2), 283 South Main Street (South Lancaster)**

The Victorian and eclectic South Lancaster Engine House was built in 1888 (designed by C.H. Harris, H.F. Josmer, and C.A. Woodruff) and rehabilitated in 2008. From the outside, it retains much of its historic integrity. It is, however, functionally obsolete. Other than storage, is not adequate to fire department uses. Lancaster should consider a reuse for the building, ideally a commercial reuse that can help catalyze a South Lancaster renaissance.

Other Town Public Work Capital Facilities

Lancaster's public works facilities are generally well maintained. For Comprehensive planning purposes, there are a few opportunities to consider in future capital improvements planning.

- **Public water system (wells, storage tanks, chlorination facility, and water distribution)**

There is no public water north of Route 117 (i.e., North Lancaster) and users rely on private wells. For the most part, water is available in wells. North Lancaster residents often report that their water is discolored and stains white clothing and other surfaces. North Lancaster residents have urged the creation of a public water supply serving North Lancaster with water from new wells or purchased from neighboring communities. There are some moderately high-yield wells in North Lancaster, but none of these are Town owned.

From Route 117 south, most of Lancaster's denser development is served by public water from two town-owned wells on Bolton Station Road. Public water is generally confined to area south of Route 117 along Main Street, South Main and South Lancaster, Center Bridge Road, Old Common Road and adjacent streets. Lancaster has begun the process of planning for a third town well.

Water is treated with Chlorine (as a disinfectant). No other filtration or treatment is required. There is currently no Town water treatment plant. If one is needed in the future, especially with new Environmental Protection Agency PFAS standards, there may be an opportunity on Town property near the well fields. Under the current EPA standards, PFAS levels are currently extremely low (less than 20% of the maximum contaminant level).

The water system is operated as an enterprise fund with all costs covered by user fees, not general tax revenue.

Many of the water transmission and distribution pipes in Lancaster are very old and nearing, or exceeding, the end of their useful life. Some of the pipes suffer from tuberculation, where ferrous oxide (iron) is deposited on the inside of the pipes, reducing the volume of water that they can carry and increasing friction that must be overcome by pumps to deliver water.

- **Town-owned streets, bridges, storm sewers, and culverts (MassDOT manages highways)**

Undersized and at-risk culverts are one of the largest natural hazard and climate-change induced hazards. Some of the culverts are nearing the end of their useful life and several are at risk of failure with increased storm events and stream flows. None of the culverts most at risk meet the habitat

requirements to be eligible for the current Division of Ecological Restoration's Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant Program (DPW Director, personal communication).

Lancaster can pursue FEMA and MVP grants for culvert replacement.

- **Old Settlers' Burial Ground, North Burial Field, North Village Cemetery, Eastwood Cemetery, Old Common Cemetery, and Middle Cemetery**

The six town-owned cemeteries all have rich historical features and are managed by the DPW's Cemetery Division with historical interpretation help from the Historical Commission. The Historical Commission recently completed nominations to the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP) for the Old Common, North Burial Field, North Village Cemetery and Eastwood Cemeteries.

Independent (Non-Town) Capital Facilities

There are several public and quasi-public facilities of interest to and funded by Lancaster residents, but not part of Town government.

- **Sanitary sewerage collection and pump stations (South Lancaster to Clinton)**

The sanitary system (including collection pipes and six sewer pump stations) is managed by the Lancaster Sewer Commission, which is independent of the Town. DPW involvement is limited to logistical coordination. The Sewer Commission contracts for any needed repairs and maintenance (currently using Weston & Sampson for engineering and project management. Sewage disposal is at the MWRA wastewater treatment plant in Clinton. The service area is most of the medium developed areas south of Route 117. There may be opportunities to increase capacity by reducing unnecessary water flows. Specifically, reducing inflow and infiltration of stormwater and groundwater into sanitary sewers and installing more water saving devices to reduce sewage flows can free up capacity for new growth, especially economic growth, mixed use, and affordable and attainable housing.

- **Luther Burbank Middle and Mary Rowlandson Elementary Schools, 103 Hollywood Drive**

The Nashoba Regional School District (Lancaster, Bolton, and Stow) manages these schools, as well as schools in other regional communities. The District is independent of the Town, with funding through a regional funding formula determined by the state and through a mutual agreement between the District and the three host communities.

The schools are located within the 500-year floodplain (the area with >0.2% chance of flooding in any year). With climate change, school district planning should continue to examine the need for flood mitigation measures.

- **Bigelow Gardens (70 dwelling units in 14 buildings), 449 Main Street**

The Lancaster Public Housing Authority, which is independent of the town, manages the property, built in 1960. Most board members are elected as part of local elections. There are 70 one-bedroom affordable apartments reserved for residents above age 60 and those with disabilities of any age. There is a waiting list for potential new tenants. Vacancy rates are very low, mostly to allow units to be repaired. There is a waiting list for new tenants.

Energy efficiency and mechanical systems upgrades at Bigelow Gardens would reduce energy costs and climate change impacts and increase tenant comfort.

Ensure that public buildings and facilities are carbon neutral by 2040.

As discussed in the Sustainability and Resilience element, and as supported by the Select Board, every investment that is needed in building and building performance should be designed to advance this goal, subject to a Life Cycle Assessment to see if these investments are saving the community resources in the long term.

Maintaining and updating Town public buildings and facilities to meet current needs and build resilience to adverse climate change impacts and natural hazards.

Rebuilding after a crisis is far more expensive and riskier than anticipating hazards and needs. It does require, however, that all maintenance and management efforts consider the future needs before any investment.

Rehabilitate the former Town Hall to put it back into productive use.

As discussed in the Land Use element, there appears to be a broad consensus that the former Town Hall is ready for a new life. Any municipal use of the building would require a substantial investment, presumably including CPA investments. If there is no municipal need, the building could be privately operated, either sold for a price that reflects the investment needed, with Lancaster holding a historic preservation restriction to ensure that the building is maintained and preserved, or leased, with the lease cost paying back rehabilitation costs.

Evaluate all Capital Improvement Plan investments with a cost benefit analysis to identify full life cycle costs and climate change impacts.

All proposed Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) projects should be evaluated with a cost benefit analysis (CBA) and a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA). The evaluation should include all upfront costs, on-going maintenance costs, benefits, and operational savings, including resilience and climate benefits. For example, while improving the building performance for new and rehabilitated municipal facilities adds upfront cost, the costs may be lower over the facilities' life time.

Cost Benefit Analysis success

For MassDOT and many of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) that prioritize how limited transportation funds get spent, one of the common metrics is the cost per vehicle mile traveled, along with crash rates and many other metrics.

When cost per vehicle mile traveled was a primary determinant, major intersection improvements were often designed with traffic signals instead of roundabouts because they are typically less expensive. As MassDOT got experience with roundabouts, and their lower crash rates and long-term benefits, they started doing Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) for some intersections that met the warrant for traffic signals. When the full Life Cycle Assessments (LCA) were done, the value of lower maintenance and decades of expected lower crash rates, were brought into the picture, roundabouts often became the more cost- effective choice.

Capital facilities should always be evaluated for their climate change impacts. Often, this evaluation grows out of a LCA for carbon and greenhouse gas accounting over the lifetime of a project.

Cost Benefit Analysis Approach (as part of Life Cycle Analysis)

Costs	Net Present Value	Benefits	Net Present Value
Direct: staff, consultant, capital, interest...	Sum of all costs calculated to the current year (NPV)	Direct: return on investment	Sum of all costs calculated to the current year (NPV)
Indirect: staff time, impacts on bond rating...		Indirect: resident satisfaction, reputational...	
Operating: maintenance, energy, consumables...		Avoided costs: energy costs...	
Opportunity: trade-offs, risk premium...			

Improve the Town Green, municipal building civic campus, and the infrastructure needed to serve comprehensive plan goals.

As discussed in the Land Use element, Lancaster would benefit from a comprehensive municipal campus plan considering the landscape architecture and streetscape, including the former Memorial School and the former Town Hall.

Such an effort should examine whether a campus-side ground source for thermal loads (space heating and cooling and water heating), although very expensive upfront, would save money over the full life cycle of such a system. Wells can last in excess of a century and such a system would release far more energy (from heating and cooling captured from the ground) than the energy required for water and air pumps.

Explore feasibility of infrastructure improvements to serve land use, housing, and economic development priorities.

Public infrastructure (e.g., roads, sidewalks, shared use paths, sanitary sewers, stormwater systems, and municipal water) and private infrastructure (e.g., telecommunications, electricity, natural gas, cable, and fiber optics) are major determinants to growth. Priorities for expansion should include traditional measures, such as technical considerations, cost, and payback periods, as well as meeting Town priorities for where and what kind of development is desired. Economic development, affordable housing, and focal points at the South Lancaster Main Street Village, South Lancaster Cener, and Municipal Campus.

- Seek design and implementation funds (e.g., MassWorks and Housing Choice) to reduce stormwater infiltration and inflow (I&I) into sanitary sewers.
- Invest in water saving devices provided to sanitary sewer users (e.g., using grant funds or sanitary sewer user fees) to reduce sanitary sewer flow, saving ratepayers money and opening up capacity for other uses.
- Seek feasibility study funds to explore opportunities for municipal water for North Lancaster, especially properties with PFAS contamination or dirty water. Funds for feasibility and eventual implementation could include MassWorks (if affordable housing and/or economic development would result), District Improvement Financing (if property taxes are likely to increase as a result of the investment), or Betterment or Special Assessment Districts surcharges (if beneficiaries agreed in a vote to fund this mechanism).

12. Circulation and Mobility

Goals

- Ensure the safety of all modes of travel.
- Be more active in regional transportation planning.
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities on all surface roads.
- Prioritize projects based on safety and addition of currently underserved modes.
- Prioritize pedestrian-scale villages and nodes.

Lancaster has fewer crashes than many communities, but it also has very limited pedestrian and bicycle accommodations on many of its major roads, isolating those without access to cars, including

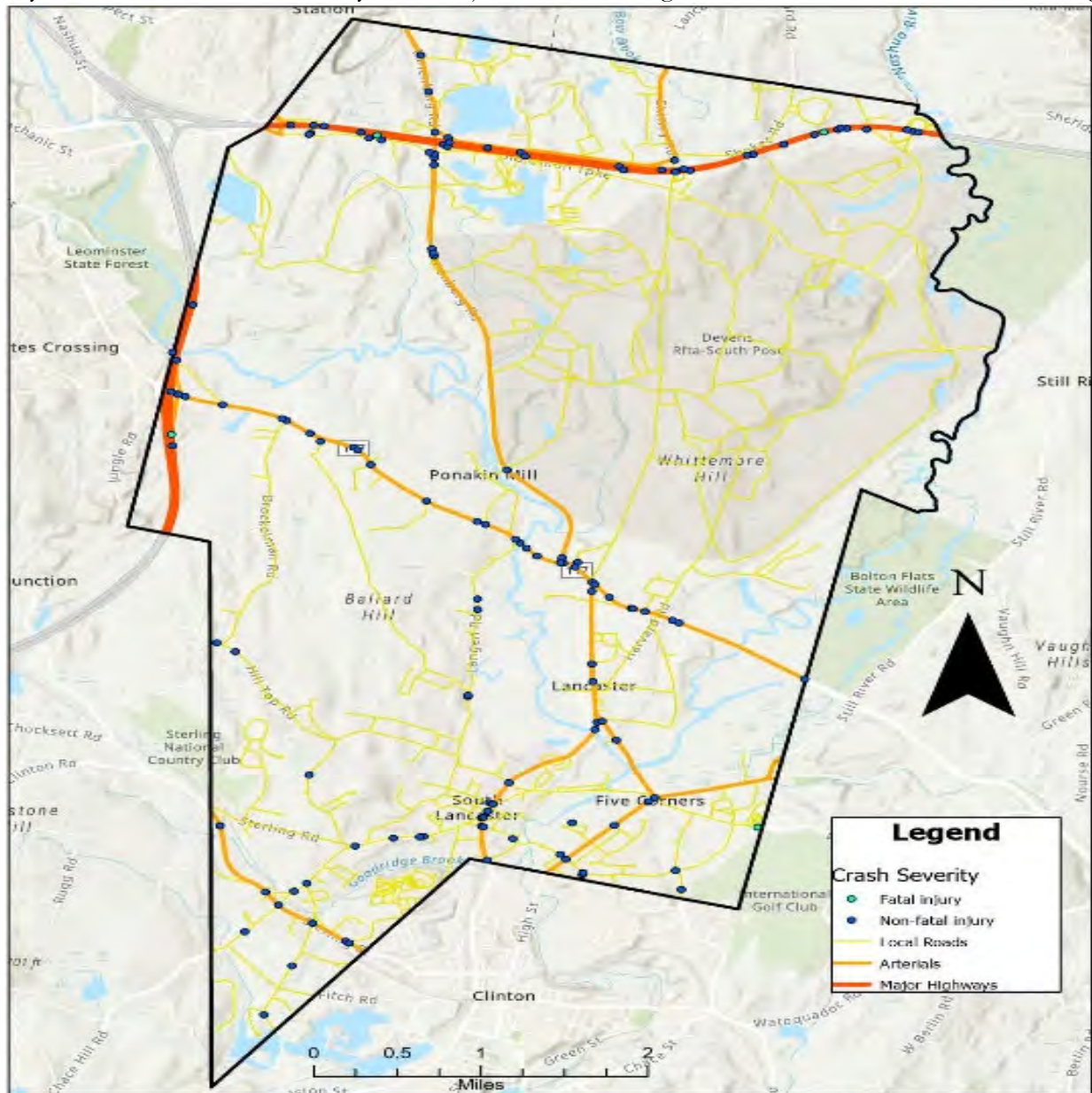


Table 12-1. Crash Locations (MassDOT)

many young, older, lower income, and persons with disabilities. This, in turn, encourages people traveling even relatively short distances to drive when walking might otherwise be desirable, or to avoid taking a trip at all.

Ensure the safety of all modes of travel

The recent MassDOT Route 117/Main Street project significantly reduced crash rates in that corridor.

After that work, Lancaster has three **High Crash intersections**, out of 106 in the MRPC region. Bolton Road at High Street Extension/SR 110 (listed by MRPC as Lower Bolton Road at Bolton Road/Rte. 110) is also one of the state's 200 highest crash intersections. From 2017 to 2019 it had 28 crashes, including one with a fatality or serious injury and ten others with minor or possible injuries.

MRPC reports that Lancaster has 11 of the **highest at-risk road segments**, sections of roadway with the highest crash rates, out of 160 in the MRPC region. They list four of those in their Journey to 2050 plan as:

- Center Bridge Road
- High Street Extension
- Lower Bolton Road
- Main Street

The *High Crash Locations* map shows vehicle crashes and injuries (Mass DOT Impact 2020-present, 2023). Compared to many communities, outside of Route 2 and the Route 2 ramps, Lancaster has relatively few high crash locations. The Route 2 problems are often associated with short highway ramps and geometric limitations and are under MassDOT control.

What the *High Crash Locations* map does not show, however, are the areas that pedestrians and bicyclists avoid because of a perception of danger.

Lancaster has problematic intersections with **geometric challenges** that create or exasperate high crash risks. These include:

- Limit line-of-sight
- Non-right angle intersection angles make visibility difficult, especially for trucks and those with more limited neck mobility
- Large diameter curb or corner radius with wide roadway entrances that allow for higher speed movements onto roads with limited visibility of other cars, bicycles, and pedestrians.



Figure 12-2. Geometric challenges, such as the Harvard Rd. flyway southbound from Seven Bridge Rd./Rte. 117, increase crash risks

Some of these are high crash intersections. Some, because of lower traffic volume, are not high crash intersections but still post significant risks. This list does not include areas that are completely

within MassDOT jurisdiction where the town is typically far less involved in the design (i.e., Route 2 and I-190 and their ramps)

- George Hill Road at Main Street (high crash intersection)
- Still River/110 at Center Bridge Road, a/k/a Five Corners (high crash intersection)
- Harvard Road flyway southbound at Seven Bridge Road/Route 117
- Two intersections of George Hill Road and Langen Road/Goss Lane
- Neck Road at Center Bridge Road
- Center Bridge Road at Main Street
- Sterling Rd., Goss Lane, and Deershorn Road intersection

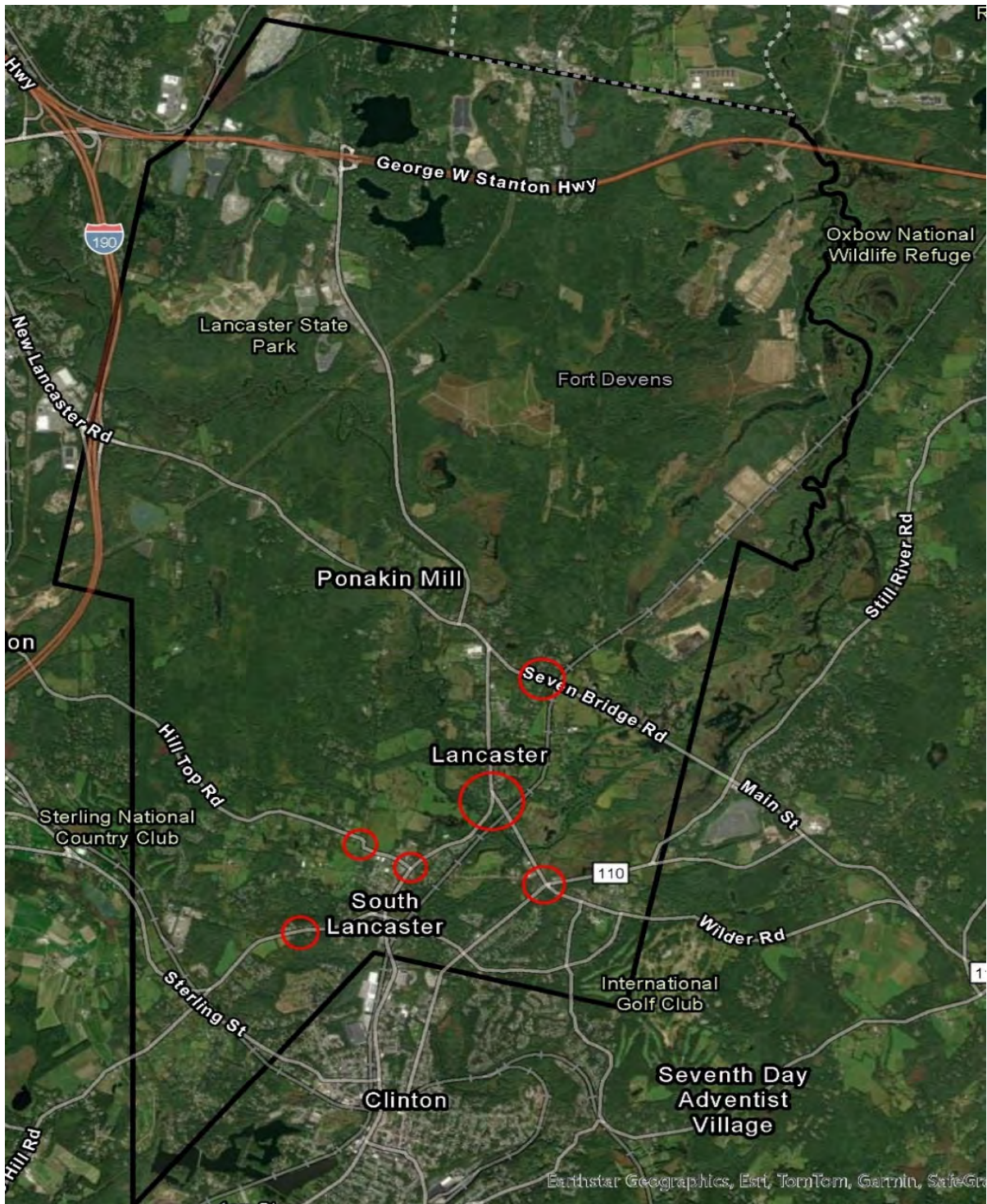


Figure 12-3. Intersections with Geometric Challenges

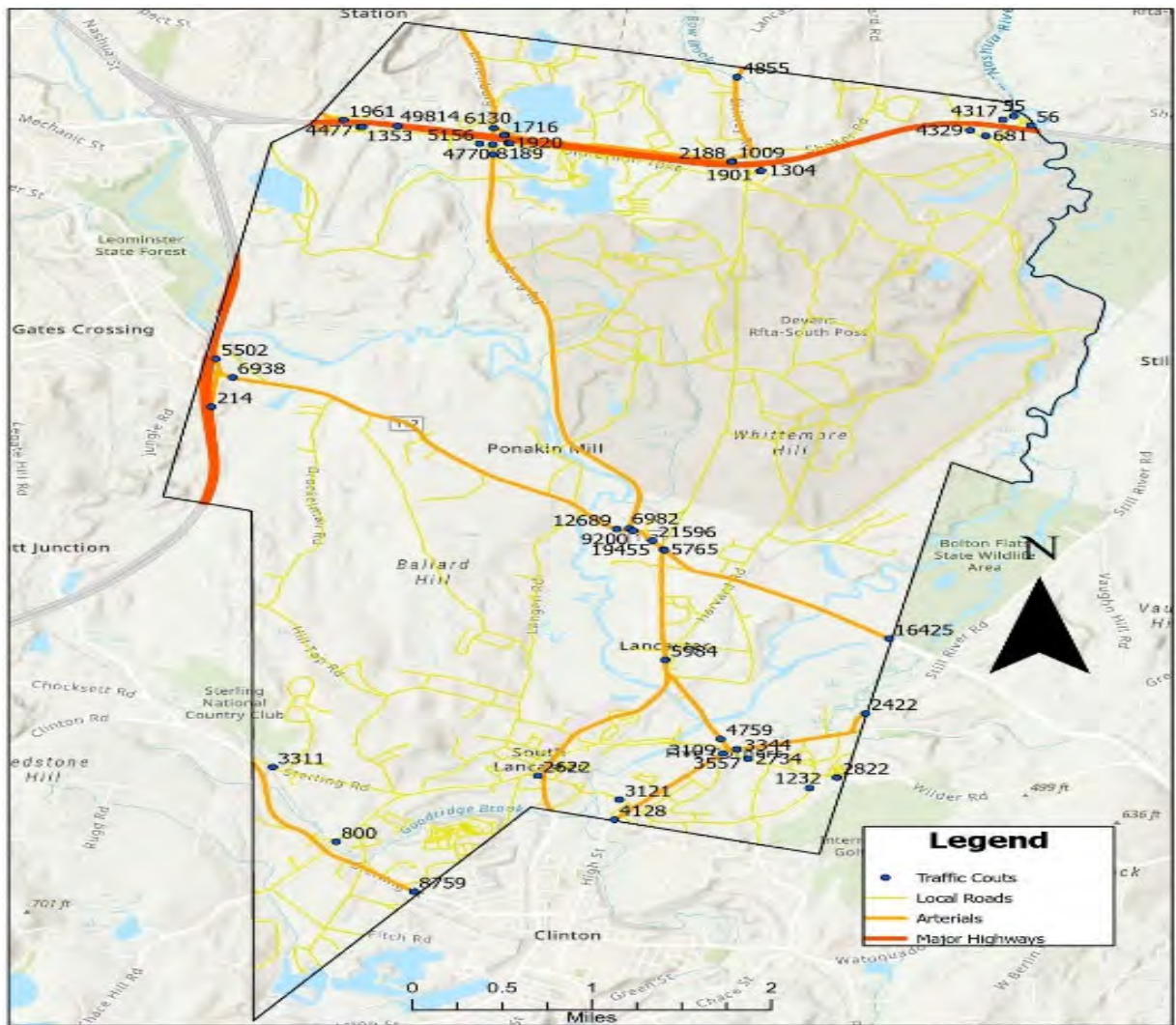


Figure 12-4. Traffic Counts (2022-2023 MassDOT)

Several of these intersections can be addressed with very low-cost solutions, either to test approaches or as permanent installations. For example, the flyway from Seven Bridge Road/Route 117 southbound to Harvard Road poses some safety concerns, allowing higher speed movement and a non-right angle at Harvard Road that limits driver visibility, especially for trucks and older drivers with more limited head movement. While this is not a high crash intersection, the solution is very simple, and could be evaluated simply with Jersey Barriers.

On limited access roadways and major arterials, lane departures or inattentive drivers drifting across the center line or off the roadways are a major risk factor. Most other crashes, including bicycle and pedestrian crashes, happen at intersections. Narrowing the intersections slows the speed of traffic and reduces crash rates, while allowing sufficient width and curb radius to allow most vehicles to remain in their lanes at slow speeds.

Improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities on all surface roads

In addition to other high crash intersections, road segments, and geometric problems, much of Lancaster is **not friendly for bicycles or pedestrians**. In the community survey of Lancaster 2035 priorities, this was one of the most commonly community identified priorities.

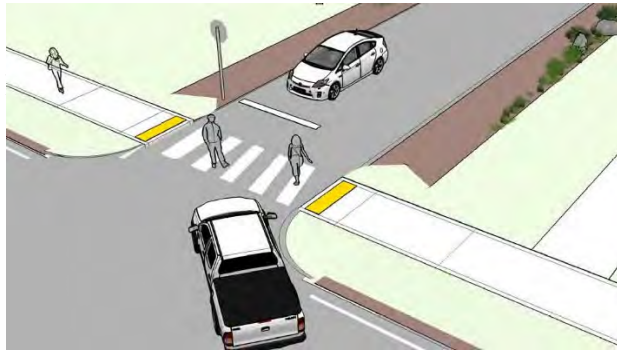
Main Street south of Lunenburg Road has sidewalks, mostly in decent shape, although they could benefit from better crosswalk advance warnings.

Bicycle accommodations on Main Street and pedestrian accommodations in other areas are far more limited.

Figure 12-4. *Traffic Counts* shows permanent and short-term traffic counting stations in Lancaster. Except for along Route 2, none of these counts are anywhere close to roadway or intersection capacity. Most crashes, danger areas, and congestion are problems with intersection alignments and geometry, a lack of advance warnings, limited visual line-of-sight, and poor or non-existing bicycle and pedestrian accommodations.

The design concepts (Figure 12-5) provide options to improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities, reduce crashes, and calm traffic.

Figure 12.5 Urban, Rural, and Suburban Complete Streets Design Manual (excerpts)



On local streets without large truck volume, reduce the street entrance to 20' and the corner radius to 10-15'



Driveways should rise up to sidewalk using the same material as the sidewalk for driveway crosswalks. The sidewalk should not drop down to the driveway.



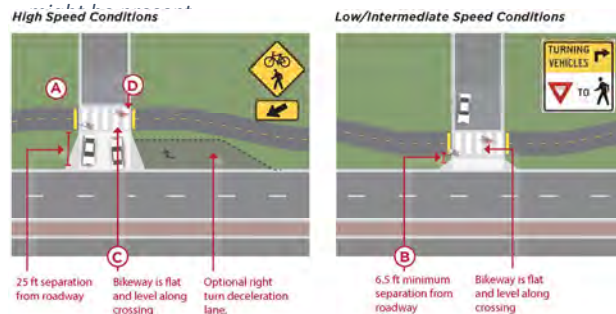
Use raised crosswalks for pedestrian or aspirational pedestrian areas (e.g., Town Green municipal campus, South Lancaster Center, and South Lancaster by the Main Street railroad)



When there is no room for bicycle lanes, advisory bike lanes are more effective than sharrows at messaging that bicycles



At higher cost, but appropriate as sidewalks are being added or replaced, are shared bicycle and pedestrian side paths.



Shared bicycle and pedestrian side paths require advance warning for driveways and especially street crossings

Source: Alta Planning + Design, 2017

Be more active in regional transportation planning

Lancaster needs to remain active at the regional and statewide level to lobby for regional transportation projects. For example:

- The CSX rail line that runs through Lancaster is feasible for future commuter rail service, although this is a very slow process requiring large state and federal capital and operating commitments. Lancaster should be part of any regional conversation and, if it ever moves forward, assist in station location and planning.
- Lancaster has no commuter rail stations and less than ideal connections to commuter rail in other communities. Lancaster can help the region explore whether a transit shuttle from commercial and population centers and a park and ride lot to commuter rail is viable.
- The Metropolitan Planning Organizations, staffed by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, sets the priorities annually for how federal and state transportation dollars will be spend in the region. Lancaster should be part of that regional priority setting.

Prioritize projects based on safety and addition of currently underserved modes

Safety should be paramount in prioritizing projects. Simply looking at crash rates and the potential for crash reduction leaves out the users who currently do not use a roadway (often pedestrians and bicycles) because of actual risk, perceived risk, or an undesirable experience. Those opportunities need to be calculated into priorities.

Prioritize pedestrian-scale villages and nodes

Although Massachusetts policy is that pedestrians and bicyclists should be accommodated on all surface (non-limited access) roads, the reality is that the desire lines for where pedestrians want to travel are primarily within villages, dense areas, and areas within approximately 0.4 miles before they switch to other modes. As a result, investments in pedestrian-scale villages or places where that is an opportunity should be prioritized.

Those desire lines are most likely to go beyond that 0.4-mile target when they are connecting strong nodes. This includes the Municipal Campus to South Lancaster Center, South Lancaster Center to the Main Street railroad bridge, and the DCAMM property to South Lancaster Center and the Municipal Campus. The first two connections already have sidewalks the entire distance, while the third does not. A minority of people, but still significant, will walk 1 to 1.2 miles if there are strong nodes at each point and the walk is attractive.

With most Lancaster transportation by single-occupancy vehicles (SOV), parking is a critical aspect for pedestrian-scale villages and nodes. Currently, each business creates their own parking. Lancaster can collaborate with master developers at the DCAMM property and, once the SDA moves forward, at Atlantic Union College, and other developers for other projects to encourage shared use parking opportunities that are sufficient to meet parking demand, but ideally shared so that uses with different peak periods can share parking.

13. Implementation and Action Plan

Goals

- **Prioritize short- and medium-term actions and identify responsible staff and committees.**
- **Ensure that the vision and goals help guide longer-term actions over the next two decades.**
- **Link Capital Improvement Plan to Lancaster 2035 life cycle analysis and climate change analysis.**

Partial Action List	Coordinator	Timeline	Funding
Implementation and Action Plan			
Accountability: Determine the best way to keep Lancaster 2035 to help set an action agenda- create an implementation committee, charge the Planning Board with setting aside the first half-hour of each meeting to review actions, or charge planning staff with taking the lead and reporting back regularly to the Town Administrator and the Planning Board.	Planning Director; Town Administrator	Permanently	Staff time; board time
Accountability: Track Lancaster 2035 and other plan recommendations and implementation actions in the Annual Town Report. Make Lancaster 2035 plan widely available.	Planning Director; Town Administrator	Annually, permanently	Staff time
Funding and Planning: Apply for MVP 2.0 planning assistance to update MVP plan for grant eligibility, to receive seed funding for the first small project, and for an increased equity focus.	Planning Director	Short-term	Staff time
Strengthen local and regional partnerships (e.g., MRPC, Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts to Fitchburg State) for plan implementation support.	Planning Director; Town Administrator	Annually, permanently	Staff time
Create annual workplan of Lancaster 2035 actions.	Planning Director; Town Administrator	Annually, permanently	Staff time
Land Use			
Update site plan review zoning to mitigate industrial/residential impacts on residential uses.	Planning Director	Short-term	Staff time, MRPC, and/or a consultant with EEA or MVP funding.
Update site plan and environmental performance standards noise, lighting, emissions, vegetated buffers, and green infrastructure to reduce impacts on abutters and provide more predictability.	Planning Director	Short-term	
Update subdivision regulations to improve the clarity of regulatory, construction, and performance guarantee requirements.	Planning Director	Short-term	

Partial Action List	Coordinator	Timeline	Funding
Update zoning for MBTA multifamily housing by right requirements.	Planning Director	Short-term	
Add that applicants demonstrate compliance with Lancaster 2035 in zoning as special permit and site plan approval criteria.	Planning Director	Short-term	
Amend zoning to remove obstacles and add incentives to a pedestrian-scale village on Main Street by the Main Street railroad bridge, South Lancaster Center, the DCAMM property and other key focal areas, such as adjusting dimensional and use requirements, adding 40R Smart Growth Incentives, and expanding mixed use zoning.	Planning Director; Building Commissioner	Short-term to medium-term	
Reserve sewer capacity from I&I work for focal area development.	Sewer Commission	Medium-term	Funding for I&I
On-going <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the success of the DCAMM redevelopment. • Focus on the success of the AUC redevelopment. • Expand focus on South Lancaster Center beyond AUC. • Focus on encouraging Main Street by the railroad bridge to move towards a walkable village. 	Planning Director; Town Administrator; Economic development staff	Medium to long-term	Staff time, consultants, master developer requirements.
Housing			
Revise regulatory incentives and requirements to make affordable and attainable housing standards clearer.	Planning Director; Housing Trust	Short-term	Staff time, consultant
Expand zoning flexibility to allow smaller homes , such as providing an option for smaller lots with small homes or homes size based on Floor Area Ratio.	Planning Director; Housing Trust	Medium-Term	Staff time, consultant
Explore limited development projects with housing and open space.	Planning Director; Housing Trust; Conservation	Medium- to long-term	CPA, staff, consultant, land trusts
Create 40R Smart Growth Districts in all walkable village areas	Town Administrator; Planning Director	Medium-term	CPA, staff time, consultants
Reserve sewer capacity from I&I work for affordable housing (see also Land Use, above). (Sewer Commission is independent of Town)	Sewer Commission	Medium-term	I&I work
Adopt Tax Increment Financing policy for affordable housing	Town Administrator; Finance Director	Medium-term	Staff time
On-going	Planning Director; Housing Trust	On-going	

Partial Action List	Coordinator	Timeline	Funding
Focus on affordable and attainable housing in every project review from review of tax title properties to examination of all regulatory processes			
Economic Development			
Improve neighborhood buffers and protection around major projects	Planning Director	Medium-term	Staff time or consultant
Improve environmental performance standards to protect abutters	Planning Director; Conservation Agent	Short- to medium-term	
Request Economic Development Committee to undertake a business calling program	Select Board	Short- to medium-term	Committee time
Laser focus on three key focal points (DCAMM, South Lancaster Center, and an evolving village by the Main Street railroad bridge) from ED perspective and easing business expansion	Planning Director; ED committee	Medium-term	Staff or consultant time
Adopt Tax Increment Financing policy to attract business and publish policy	Finance Director; Town Administrator	Medium-term	Staff time
Appoint single point of contact to steer new businesses through permitting, infrastructure, and TIF process	Town Administrator	Medium-term	Staff time
Improve ED web landing page to guide businesses with the information they need for expansion	Town IT staff	Medium-term	Staff time
Align zoning for more predictable zoning process (“four rules of regulatory systems” in this plan)	Planning Director	Medium-term	Staff or consultant
Natural and Cultural Resources			
Cemetery and grave restoration at all six town-owned cemeteries	DPW; Historical Commission	Medium to long-term	CPA; Mass Historic
Implement wayfinding from state wayfinding grant program	Planning Director; DPW Superintendent	Short- to medium-term	CPA, state grants
Improve Nashua River access to and awareness	Conservation	Medium-term	CPA
Create invasive removal program with volunteers	Conservation	Medium-term	CPA, volunteers
On-going: Implement Hazard Mitigation Plan Implement MVP Resilience Plans Apply for and implement MVP 2.0 planning program	Planning Director; DPW Superintendent; Conservation Agent	Medium-term	MVP, MVP 2.0, FEMA, Water Enterprise

Partial Action List	Coordinator	Timeline	Funding
Open Space and Recreation			
Draft new Open Space and Recreation Plan (2025)	Planning Director; Conservation Agent; Recreation Coordinator	Short- to medium-term	Staff, CPA, town funds, consultant
On-going: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Open Space and Recreation Plan • Protect most ecologically valuable land • Protect farmland • Review all Chapter 61A farmland and create a plan. • Manage conservation land to protect natural systems • Manage open space to serve residents 	As detailed in OSRP	Medium- to long-term	Staff, CPA, L&WCF, LAND, MassTrails, MOD, town funds
Sustainability and Resilience			
Explore moving local elections to even numbered years in November (legislative petition)	Selectboard; Govt. Study Ad-Hoc	Medium term	Time only
Work to evolve Lancaster Community Choice to create some longer-term power purchases to encourage additions in carbon-neutral electricity supplies.	Hampshire Power contract manager	Long term	Time only
Add climate change analysis to each Capital Improvement Plan request and include in the final CIP.	Finance Director	Short-term	Staff time, perhaps assistance from MRPC
On-going: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use climate change as a lens to review all regulatory and policy actions 	All department heads	On-going	Staff time, resources for other projects
Services and Facilities			
Replace culverts , prioritizing those in poor condition, undersized, and in habitat rich environments that might be eligible for the state's culvert replacement program.	DPW Superintendent	Annual plan, replacement within next decade	DER Culvert Replacement; FEMA HMG; MVP
Expand water line repair and replacement program for water lines at the end of their useful life or suffering from excessive Tuberculation.	DPW Superintendent	Annual plan	Water enterprise funds (user fees)
Implement sanitary sewer I&I and water saving device programs	DPW Superintendent; Sewer Commissioners	Medium-term	Water and sewer enterprise funds, grants

Partial Action List	Coordinator	Timeline	Funding
On-going: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess all town buildings for energy conservation and GHG reduction improvements that can pencil out in a life cycle analysis over the life of the building • Explore reuse of Memorial School • Explore reuse of former Town Hall • Explore feasibility of infrastructure projects to encourage village centers, economic development • Implement facilities recommendations in Hazard Mitigation Plan 	Town Administrator; Facilities Director	Medium- to long-term	CPA, bonding, state grants, Green Communities
Link Capital Improvement Plan to Lancaster 2035 in evaluating CIP requests. Use life cycle assessments and climate assessments as part of those evaluations.	Finance Director; Town Administrator	Annually, permanently	Staff time
Circulation and Mobility			
Be more active in regional transportation planning	Planning Director; DPW Superintendent	Short-term & on-going	Staff time
On-going: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sidewalk and bicycle improvements • Prioritizing pedestrian-scale villages • Improve high crash roadways with MassDOT • Fix bad geometric roads with low cost (paint, barriers) 	DPW Superintendent	Medium- to long-term	Chapter 90, MassDOT work, Complete Streets, Shared Streets