

LANCASTER MASTER PLAN

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Volume I

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K. "Draft Traffic Improvement Plan, Lancaster Community Development & Planning Department," undated.

I. THE TOWN WE WANT

BACKGROUND

As members of the Lancaster community, notwithstanding our diversity, we are united in wanting our Town to maintain and strengthen the qualities which make it the town we want.

The things we cherish most about Lancaster include its heritage, its farmland, woods and open space, its beautiful rivers and ponds, education, and its people. We want to preserve its rural, historic character at the same time as we want business and job opportunities for local residents to expand. We want the new homes and buildings that come to Lancaster to be located, designed, and used in harmony with the historic land use tradition and pattern of the town. Too often, in Lancaster as in other towns, this hasn't been achieved in the current era.

We also want affordable opportunities for our young people to have their own homes and to be able to continue living in the town in which they grew up. We want to continue to preserve and 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 town center where we can encounter and mingle with our community neighbors from around the town.

We value all the residents of our community, and we want a town government that continues to give priority to services to meet citizen needs, at the same time as it continues mindful monitoring of municipal expenditures and seeks appropriate expansions of the tax base. We cherish our children and our youth, their enthusiasm and their energy, and are committed to working to meet their needs for activities, gathering places, and ability to move safely around the town. We respect and value our elders, and are dedicated to working to ensure that they can remain living in their own community in their later years, and that they, too, have a gathering place which they can call their own. We will work to improve communication between town government and the community it serves, between the town and its institutions, and among town departments

themselves.

We see a future where visitors and tourists come to Lancaster to admire its beautiful, historic buildings, its 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 the day when our working citizens no longer have to commute long distances to far away jobs and endure hours of traffic congestion, but rather can work at locations in or near Lancaster, or even telecommute from their own homes. We see a time when the currently ever-increasing traffic through our town begins to decrease as a result of our efforts to work together with the other communities in our region to better coordinate land use, new development, and improve public transportation. We see the day when we and our children can bike and walk through large areas of town on trails connecting to neighboring communities and the larger region, safe from traffic.

Even as the town has grown larger, the quality of life here has remained high, in large measure owing to our good public and private schools, the institutions of higher learning in our community, and our ability to preserve our small town atmosphere and history. We recognize the value and increasing fragility of our natural resources – our water, our river, our woods and open fields with their wildlife inhabitants – 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 better how our human behavior directly affects that ecosystem – for better or for worse – and we are committed to being good ecological citizens within that ecosystem.

The Lancaster we want in 25 years will be as different from today as today's Town is from that of the 1970s; but we want it to be recognizable as Lancaster – its historic village character intact, open space, woodlands, wild river frontage, and rural character preserved - a place for people of all ages and types.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

These are our most basic goals and objectives for the town we want.

- To protect and preserve the Town's rural and historic character, its ponds, rivers and wetlands, its physical landscape and historic buildings, its classic New England pattern of village and working countryside. We recognize that the regulatory structure of our Town is largely what will make this possible.

diversity of the various villages, neighborhoods, and other distinctive areas of the Town, while at the same time unifying them in terms of connectedness, shared vision, and equitable services.

January 26, 2007 PLAN TOWN WE WANT.DOC

- To create a Town Center where people of all ages can come together at gathering places, where small businesses of appropriate scale and type thrive, and where people can safely walk among these businesses and civic places for service, visiting, and recreation.
- To encourage business development that is appropriate in type, location, and design so that it enhances its surroundings, rather than having to be shielded from them.
- To participate in long term regional initiatives to reduce the volume of traffic flowing through Lancaster, and in shorter-term initiatives for safer traffic flow and control.
- To promote and increase safe biking and pedestrian alternatives and, if feasible, public transportation alternatives to drive-alone car travel.
- To continue to preserve and manage important farmland, open space and woodlands in Lancaster, including:
 - Improvement and support for recreation facilities such as trails, fields, and public beach areas;
 - Protection for Lancaster's important natural resources, including the Town water supply, ponds, wildlife habitat, and the Nashua River.
- To increase the supply of affordable housing in Lancaster so as to enable Lancaster's young people and elders to continue to live in their home community.
- To continue to maintain a balance among appropriate service provision, community investment, and a moderate tax burden.
- To reflect in all that we do the uniqueness and

II. LAND USE

BACKGROUND

The land use legacy for which the current Lancaster community is the steward is a very special one. In the broadest terms, Lancaster is much like other New England towns at the edge of metropolitan areas. It enjoys a relatively compact central town area surrounded by a lower density landscape largely made up of agriculture and forest, but also containing a substantial share of the Town's homes and businesses. Expressways cutting through those outer areas link the Town to its region and to metropolitan centers.

Looking more closely, however, Lancaster departs from that typical New England town norm. The town's central area has developed in a way which does not yet achieve the interrelations among business, institutional, and residential uses which the classic village center exhibits. About a third of its outlying rural-appearing land is within federally-owned Devens, and an important part of the rest is State-owned for institutional uses.

Much of Lancaster's land resources have been given special recognition for their cultural or natural resource value. Two areas have been recognized for their cultural value in having been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. A singularly large portion of the Town's outlying area has been designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) by the State, and much of that area plus more has been designated by the State as a core Bio-Reserve area in recognition of its importance as habitat¹.

At the same time, the combination of the Town's location, resources, and what it has done with those resources has led to the Town being judged as one of the most technology-friendly communities in the Commonwealth, auguring well for its economic development and resulting fiscal prospects.

Current Land Use

The following table gives an indication of how land use in Lancaster has changed between 1998 and now, and how it might change over the next two decades.

¹ See the Open Space, Natural Resources and Recreation Chapter for further discussion.

LANCASTER LAND USE INVENTORY

Category of use	Acres of land used			
	1998	2002	2005	2025
Urbanized				
Residential	1,796	2,160	2,470	2,910
Business	122	130	140	290
Recreation	125	130	130	150
Transport	361	390	490	510
Urbanized subtotal	2,400	2,810	3,230	3,860
Non-urbanized (use)				
Cropland, pasture	1,760		1,700	1,700
Other disturbed	2,270		2,100	1,800
Forest & shrubs	10,770		10,170	9,840
Water & wetland	710		710	710
Non-urbanized (status)				
Protected private	250	250	250	550
Protected public	1,290	1,290	1,290	1,890
South Post Devens	4,940	4,940	4,940	4,940
Undevelopable	1,870	1,870	1,870	1,870
Developable	7,160	6,750	6,330	4,800
Non-urban subtotal	15,510	15,100	14,680	14,050
Total	17,910	17,910	17,910	17,910

Sources:

1998: MRPC Lancaster Community Development Plan, page IV-12.

2005-2025: Herr & James LAND-based modeling.

LU Analysis 2.xls

Less than a fifth of the Town's land area has been developed for housing, business, institutions (other than their extensive grounds) and roads, but that share has grown sharply just since 1998 (the baseline year for available air photo-based data). Projecting forward from that using a land use-based growth model, we estimated a reasonable approximation for likely land use in 2025, as shown in the above table.

That table assumes implementation of the kinds of measures which this Master Plan calls for, including ones which create reserved open space by reducing residential land use. If they are not implemented, the total of urbanized land will be distinctly higher, and the total of protected open land will be substantially lower.

Land Use Policy Areas

A useful way to approach future land use in Lancaster is to structure the Town's land area into four broad policy areas based upon current circumstances and future intentions, shown

schematically on the map Land Use Policy Areas (see last page of this Chapter)².

- Community Areas
- Town Center
- Countryside
- Enterprise

COMMUNITY AREAS (designated “CA” on the map)

These are the areas of the Town in which the great majority of Lancaster’s residents live, largely along Main Street and the southern portions of the Town, but also along Route 117.

Virtually the entirety of the areas serviced by the Town’s water and sewerage systems lies within the Community areas, as do the two areas in Lancaster which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. On the other hand, very little of the areas designated as being of special environmental importance, including the *ACECs*, Bio-Reserve Core areas, high yield aquifers, and flood plains lie within the Community areas.

Given its size, there is a great diversity of places, types of land use including both residential and business activities, and categories of zoning within the broad Community area. One sub-area is of particular interest, which is the portion of the Community area in the south which is being designated as the Town Center policy area. It is discussed and is shown on the Policy Areas map as a separate area, but like the portions in the north discussed above, it is really simply a distinctive sub-area of that which is being called “Community” area.

TOWN CENTER (TC)

Following the suggestion of the Town Center Topic Group, both the Center Village and South Lancaster areas are incorporated into a single “Town Center” policy area stretching for more than a mile along Main Street from the Clinton line to somewhere north of the Town Green. Taken as a whole, the Town Center policy area has all of the elements of a classic mixed-use center, although spatially organized in an unusual way, with a large spatial separation between civic and business areas. Main Street is its spine, and can provide it with vital coherence as it changes over time.

² See Herr & James Associates, “Policy Area Mapping,” December 28, 2006 for source maps and further details of bases for choosing the configuration.

The Center begins at the southern entrance to the town with a mixed commercial and residential area having the potential for even better serving local demand for commercial services. It is followed by a major stretch largely occupied by institutional uses which are a vital part of the community. That area is next followed by gorgeous open lands revealing the Nashua River. The Town’s Green and its surrounding array of remarkable public and institutional buildings, uses, and open spaces marks the northern end of the Center as now constituted, perhaps in time extending to also include the compact cluster of buildings between Packard and Harvard Streets.

COUNTRYSIDE (CS)

In many ways, the Countryside areas are everything which the Community areas are not, and vice versa. Relatively few of the Town’s homes or businesses lie within the Countryside areas. Very little of the Countryside land area is served with Town water, let alone sewerage. Almost the entirety of those areas has been designated by state agencies as being of special environmental importance, such as being in the Central Nashua River *ACEC*, the Core Bio-Reserve areas, or an NHESP priority habitat area. A large share of the area is in designated flood plains, from which new residential development is prohibited. Almost half of the area shown on the Policy Areas map as Countryside lies within the Devens South Post.

However, the Countryside areas are far from devoid of human engagement. A certain amount of residential development lies within them, chiefly in the northern parts of town. A large share of the Town’s active agricultural and managed forest land lies within the Countryside area, along with the majority of the Town’s currently active and former earth mining operations. A majority of the publicly owned and protected open space lies within those areas, serving human as well as habitat interests.

A recent water resource study³ proposes expanding and reconfiguring the Water Resource District established under Lancaster Zoning. The resulting Water Resource District would be almost entirely within the area designated as Countryside based on the above bases. That study contributed importantly

³ Comprehensive Environmental, Inc. (CEI), *Environmental Overlay District Pilot Project: Final Report, Lancaster, MA*. Milford, MA, 2006.

to the inclusion of some areas around the ponds in the north being included in the Countryside Area.

ENTERPRISE (E)

The three identified Enterprise areas are distinguished from other areas containing business by their location, largely lying along Route 2, and with that, a number of other characteristics differentiating them from other areas containing businesses. They enjoy the business-attracting benefit of proximity to and, at some locations, visibility from that highway. Land parcels, whether developed or vacant, are typically large relative to others in the town. A number of region-oriented businesses have recently located there. The Enterprise areas contain almost none of the land designated as being of special environmental importance, few homes, and nearly all existing developed uses within it rely upon on-site systems for water and sewage disposal. The largest use is currently a State correctional facility.

Lancaster 2025

The intention of this Plan is that land use in Lancaster in 2025 will seem little different than now, with two exceptions. The Town Center will have an enhanced vibrancy, with strong visual coherence and a vital local role as a business hub, a civic center, and a location for community interchange, sense of place, and civic pride.

The Enterprise areas will have further developed to serve as a location for businesses which draw on a wide area for staffing, customers, or clients. That business development will have been configured in a way which accommodates both business and mixed residential/business uses in a way which achieves compatibility with the special context of Lancaster.

The Community areas will have further developed, but will have done so in a pattern which closely resembles the pattern of what already exists in those areas, largely single-family homes on reasonably-sized lots, complemented with carefully scaled multi-family structures at locations where they are compatible with the context both visually and environmentally. Special efforts will have been made to protect the integrity of those sensitive environmental resources which, like the northern lakes, exist within the Community areas.

The Countryside areas will, as in the past, experience less development than the other policy areas as a result of an array of public efforts to achieve that outcome with fairness to those who own property or

live there. Through that outcome, the integrity of the special resource importance of those areas will be protected, perhaps even enhanced.

The Policy Areas map at first glance may appear to represent a major intervention, but in fact it really is a simplified diagram of both that which now exists and that which is sought: a vision of stability more than one of change. Achieving that stability does not require a massive change in regulatory measures or public investments. Rather, it requires only a carefully executed set of relatively small changes in the framework of what already exists, because fortunately that framework provides a sound place from which to begin.

Guiding Residential Development

Master Plan studies have projected growth in housing units at about one percent per year over the next two decades, less after that, which is slow enough to be comfortably accommodated but rapid enough to avoid population decline as households grow smaller, and sufficient to meet housing objectives, so keeping growth close to that rate over time is a suitable objective.

The qualities of residential development, however, deserve more careful guidance than has been provided in the past in order to ensure that new housing is consistent with the established character of the vicinity in which it is located, that its impacts upon the natural environment are well managed, especially in those areas where that natural environment is of great value, and that it is consistent with maintaining the full social and economic diversity exhibited in the community today.

The location of residential development also deserves more guidance than has been provided in the past. Generally speaking, added housing is preferable in the Community policy areas (including the Town Center) rather than in the Countryside areas. The intention of implementing that preference can be carried out essentially through a series of incentives for both property owners and developers.

One incentive could be clear priorities which favor the Community areas for public facility improvements, enhancing development prospects there, and favoring Countryside areas for open space protection efforts, offering the prospect of being paid for the land without it being developed. Another incentive could be review and growth timing procedures made less demanding in Community

areas than in the more environmentally critical Countryside areas.

One potentially potent tool could be authorization for “transfer of development rights (TDR),” which is related to but more potent than “cluster zoning,” which the town now uses. With TDR provisions, a developer who voluntarily imposes permanent development restrictions reducing allowable units on land in the Countryside areas could be rewarded with permission to increase the number of units allowed on non-contiguous land within the Community areas, even if originally owned separately.

The Housing Chapter spells out in detail the kinds of housing which will be needed over time. From a land use perspective, the most important outcome of that consideration is a growing need for housing relatively small households, which among other things indicates a growing importance of multi-family housing in the development mix.

Guiding Business Development

The amount of land necessary to accommodate the amount of business development which has been projected for the Town over the next two decades is small compared with the amount of land the town has zoned for such uses as retailing, offices, and manufacturing. The Town has about 1,500 acres of land zoned for business, while currently only about 140 acres are in such use, and the regional agency projections for business employment indicate a likelihood of less than twenty percent growth between 2000 and 2030. As indicated in the Economic Development Chapter, the Town would like to have more growth in those kinds of jobs than has been projected⁴, and having ample land zoned for them is one of the reasons why this town has been determined to be one of the most “tech-friendly” communities in Massachusetts⁵.

Most of Lancaster’s acreage zoned for business is in Limited Office, Light Industry, and Highway Business districts abutting or near Route 2. Most of that land is within the “Enterprise” policy areas as proposed. Those areas are well-located for serving businesses having a larger-than-local orientation, and

able to operate without reliance on having public water and sewerage. To attract such businesses, strict performance-based rules could ensure compatibility with nearby uses without excessive restriction.

A planning challenge in the Enterprise areas is to guide development so that, despite the relatively large scale and regional orientation of businesses in those areas, development there will reflect the special qualities of the town in which it lies, providing at least some measure of design coherence along the Lancaster portion of Route 2, some degree of character connection with the town, and sensitive compatibility with the nearby residential uses already within the area. Facilitating mixed-use development, combining both business and residential uses, could be of value on all those counts, and would be fully consistent with contemporary approaches to economic development, which strongly support mixed use for its functionality and strong market appeal.

The large acreage in the Countryside area just south of the Enterprise area and west of Lunenburg Road, zoned Light Industrial, is largely either now or prospectively in use for earth products removal or in some protective form of ownership by the State or the Town. It may be many years before detailed planning for its ultimate use can be done, but the potential of that area for serving both the vital environmental concerns reflected in its inclusion in the Countryside policy area and its economic potential will then need to be addressed.

Business in the Town Center has been discussed above. The remaining business areas are relatively small, with nothing more than small refinements in regulation apparently needed for their continuing positive role in the community.

Guiding Institutional Development

Educational, religious, and governmental uses are the largest employers and the largest land users in the community. Federal and state use of land cannot be regulated by municipalities, and municipal regulation of non-profit educational and religious uses is severely limited by Massachusetts law, but many communities have demonstrated that cooperative planning for such uses can be highly effective.

Carefully articulating policies applicable to all uses for geographic areas, as this Chapter does, provides an initial basis for seeking cooperation in institutional development. The Town and the private institutions within it can, working together, craft and agree upon

⁴ See “IV. Economic Development,” page IV-4.

⁵ See Massachusetts High Technology Council, *MassTrack: Tracking Massachusetts’ Support of Technology*, www.masstrack.org.

zoning criteria and procedures for exercising the limited zoning authority which exists regarding such uses. In the process, they would be establishing a dialog about coordinating town and institutional planning.

The consistency of this plan with State plans and policies is strong. For example, this land use chapter closely reflects State identification of critical natural and cultural resources, and the housing chapter is shaped to reflect the criteria of the State's Planned Production initiative. Throughout, the Plan reflects the smart growth criteria developed by the Office of Commonwealth Development. That congruence should serve the Town well in seeking to provide input into State decisions regarding its extensive land holdings within the Town, as well as being helpful as the Town seeks State help for land use shaping efforts through, for example, open space acquisition within the Countryside area.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Residents participating in the master plan process have consistently expressed their appreciation for the qualities of the Town as it now is, with having a better-functioning town center being the largest expressed change that is sought. From a land use planning perspective, that suggests these as land use goals.

- Manage future land use so as to maintain the social, cultural, and environmental qualities which make Lancaster the special place which it is today;
- Do that in a way which also reflects what the Town seeks in other respects, such as strengthening of the Town's fiscal balance, accommodating good jobs nearby, and addressing housing needs;
- Strengthen the vitality of the Town Center and the role which it plays both functionally and symbolically for the Town.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

ESTABLISHING A SOLID POLICY BASE

Implementation of these land use objectives will depend upon many parties joining in that accomplishment. To gain that collective

participation, it is important that it be clear that these directions enjoy broad community support.

- *Seek town meeting approval of this concept for Policy Areas.* That could be achieved through adoption of the Master Plan. Massachusetts law currently does not provide for adoption of a municipal master plan by any body other than the Planning Board, but approval of such plans by town meetings is increasingly common, and can provide clear evidence of broad community support for the major directions being outlined which, in turn, makes implementation far easier than it would be otherwise.

Alternatively, a zoning amendment could be crafted which would have the effect of gaining approval more narrowly for this set of Policy Areas.

- *Create a process which better facilitates a "partnership" approach to development,* through which those interested in pursuing development, including those contemplating Chapter 40B projects or institutional projects largely shielded from Town control under zoning, can gain early and well-coordinated guidance from the Town's agencies concerned with development.

That process can provide not only information about the mechanics of the system, but also policy guidance about the Town's intentions, conveying the view that development in Lancaster should reflect accommodation among Town-wide concerns, immediate neighborhood concerns, public official's concerns, future user's concerns, as well as the concerns of those undertaking the development.

BUILDING A VIBRANT TOWN CENTER

- *Undertake a professionally-aided study of how best to guide the incremental changes over time through which a more vibrant town center can evolve.* The Town Center Topic Group has prepared an excellent outline of topics which such a study might include⁶. Materials published by the Boston area's regional planning agency

⁶ Town Center Topic Group, "Vision of and Growth Strategies for a 21st Century Lancaster Town Center," November 17, 2005.

(MAPC) offer further detailed guidance⁷. A manual published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation offers step-by-step guidance for conducting a community design assessment, really intended for larger centers, but possibly of assistance⁸.

- In conjunction with the Town Center study, *consider the appropriateness of a measure such as the initial draft Town Center Overlay District zoning* prepared in relation to this planning effort.⁹

GUIDING RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

For two decades Zoning Section 4.60 has provided for “Flexible Development,” a more advanced alternative to the usual cluster zoning. Revisions to it were drafted earlier in this program¹⁰, but just as anticipated, they now need to go further to incorporate the results of later planning efforts. These are among the key planning provisions which might be involved in such revisions.

- *Allow transfer of development rights (TDR) from the Countryside area to the Community area, including the Town Center, with rules such as described above, designed to make that option attractive to both land owners and developers. Widely discussed, TDR has only occasionally succeeded in the northeast: nearby Groton is one of the success cases. Lancaster’s circumstances of clear distinctions between the potential “sending” and “receiving” areas augers well for its success here.*
- Maintain the present 2-acres per dwelling unit density, but *oblige all but very small developments to set aside part of those two acres*

of parcel area as open space, and provide density bonuses for those developments in the Countryside area which exceed the required minimum open space rule.

- *Allow attached single-family units in the community area. Their use can facilitate compact context-sensitive development.*
- *Require substantial buffers between any new buildings and identified critical environmental resources.*
- *Require review for siting compatibility relative to any identified historic resources.*

Beyond that, these are further actions for better guiding residential development.

- *Revise the Planning Board’s twenty-year old Subdivision Regulations to update them and, more importantly, to reflect different design guidance rules for different Policy Areas. The current rules are really “Community” rules, but they also govern development in the fundamentally different Town Center, Countryside, and Enterprise Areas. “Districting” subdivision regulations is not common, but it also is not unprecedented, and has performed well where adopted.*
- *In that revision, ensure that the especially sensitive resources of the Countryside Area are specifically addressed.*
- *Revisit the growth timing controls now contained in Zoning (Section 14.10) to assure that they are consistent with both this Master Plan and with recent case law in Massachusetts.*
- *As called for in the Housing Chapter, ensure that all new residential development above some threshold scale contributes to addressing the Town’s need for affordable housing.*
- *Explore revision to the configuration of the current Apartment overlay district in the Zoning Bylaw (Section 3.33(a)), possibly removing it from some areas already wholly developed for single-family dwellings and extending it to some others having more realistic potential and appropriateness for that use, including consideration of expansion of the Sewer District.*

⁷ Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), “MAPC Toolkit Available,” www.mapc.org/whats_new/regional_record/may2006/mixed_use_toolkit.html. While the title focuses on zoning, the content is broader in scope.

⁸ Kennedy Smith and Leslie Tucker, *The Community Design Assessment: A Citizens’ Planning Tool*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2006.

⁹ Herr & James Associates, “Village Center Zoning,” for the Town of Lancaster, August 31, 2005.

¹⁰ Herr & James Associates, “Flexible Development Zoning Provisions,” September 21, 2005.

- *Include exploration of wastewater management options for the pond vicinities in the northern Community areas a priority task in the forthcoming Town-wide wastewater management studies.*
- Once wastewater management questions have become better understood, *undertake an area development study for the northern Community areas*, given that their relationship to fragile lake ecologies, absence of public water and sewer, and superior access to the highway network make them very different from the other portions of the Countryside area.

GUIDING LAND-EXTENSIVE BUSINESS USES

Address the guidance needs of the most land-extensive business uses in Lancaster, which are agriculture and mining, with the following.

- *Adopt overlay zoning to guide location and operation of new earth mining activities.* After lengthy exploration of zoning revisions to provide better protection, at this writing such rules appear to now be ready for approval. Earth removal can potentially have disruptive impacts during removal and negative long-term environmental consequences, but with care neither of those is unavoidable, which is the objective of the draft legislation.
- *Reform zoning rules which inadvertently hamper agriculture's potential contribution to the economy of the Town* and to support that industry's ability to remain vibrant and contributory to the Town's health and character, all as outlined in an earlier memo prepared for this initiative¹¹. Many misread Section 3 of Chapter 40A as exempting agriculture from all zoning control, but it only provides that local zoning may not prohibit or require special permits for or unreasonably regulate agriculture. In a number of ways, Lancaster can be more helpful to agriculture than just that.

In the memo cited above, a careful set of provisions has been crafted to ensure that agricultural and residential uses can remain in harmony, with provisions "tilted" to favor pre-existing agriculture versus new residential uses,

¹¹ Herr & James Associates, "Agriculture and Smart Growth," September 7, 2005.

and creating a review process potentially useful for other purposes as well as the town evolves.

- To give agriculture better standing in the municipal framework, *create an Agricultural Commission and adopt of a "Right to Farm" bylaw*, both as drafted in the memo cited above, the Commission to provide agriculture with an assured voice in Town government, and the "Right to Farm" bylaw to give notice of the intention of the Town to be supportive of agriculture in resolving compatibility issues concerning its legitimate activities.

GUIDING OTHER BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

A key objective of guidance for business development is to assure that it is in all ways a good partner in the future of Lancaster going beyond its value as an economic resource in terms of jobs and taxes. It should be an asset without unmitigated impacts on nearby properties, whether in financial value, health and safety, or quality of life.

- As discussed in the Community Facilities Chapter, *give consideration in upcoming wastewater management studies to the potential role of sewerage in facilitating the kinds of business development which are wanted*, especially in the Enterprise Zones, where the appropriateness of regulations importantly depends upon whether all uses must, as now, be autonomous regarding water supply and waste disposal.
- *Act on new zoning provisions for business in the Town Center.* Current regulations in that area make achieving the intention of a well-integrated and vital town center impossible. Whether by pursuing regulation like that suggested in the "Village Center Zoning" cited above or through some alternative which may emerge from the Town Center studies called for under "Building a Vibrant Town Center" above, the current rules need major revision.
- *Craft controls for the Enterprise areas* to provide strict performance-based rules to ensure compatibility with nearby uses and to provide visual character coherence along the Lancaster portion of Route 2 and coherence with the character of the Town, and where those changes make it appropriate, revising current regulations which may impose functionally ineffective impediment to development. Use design charrettes or other participatory techniques for

engaging the community in the design of those controls.

- *Include in those controls requirements for paths, sidewalks, and landscaping to provide connectivity among uses and among areas of the Town.*
- *Explore measures to enable contemporary mixed-use development to occur at suitable locations in the Enterprise area.* The current essentially single-use district controls preclude the possibility of even a brilliantly-designed integration of a variety of business, civic, recreational and residential uses.
- Given the above control improvements, *review the mapping of basic zoning districts in the Enterprise area* so that the portions most directly bordering Route 2 are all contained in the same category of district, rather than being fragmented among Limited Office, Limited Industrial, Highway Business as at present, with no apparent rationale for the differences.
- *Explore measures to assure that any impacts of business development upon facility needs is supported by that development,* implemented so as to assure that benefits go to those who are in some way burdened by the development.
- After the above steps have been shaped, *reconsider the provisions of the basic business zoning for the Town as a whole,* particularly the Neighborhood Business and General Industry districts as they exist at locations outside of the Town Center, and coordinate them so that they work together as a set.

GUIDING INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Working together with local institutions and organizations, *prepare guidance materials, including allowable zoning regulations, for that development which is protected from much local control through the so-called "Dover Amendment"* in Section 3 of Chapter 40A, MGL, the Zoning Act, chiefly involving nonprofit educational and religious institutions.

GUIDING PUBLIC FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT

- *Explore the creation of a capital planning process which gives weight to the consistency of the impacts of municipal capital facility*

investments upon land use consistency with the policies of this Master Plan. Such investments as provision of utility service to locations previously not served can have more impact on land use than has zoning. A careful system should be developed to ensure that those impacts will be given explicit attention, and will be a routine consideration in setting priorities and selecting locations for municipal capital facilities.

APPENDIX

Resident Topic Group memos:

- Business and Economic Development Topic Group, "Summary of Results," November, 2005.
- Housing Topic Group, "Summary of results following meeting of 10/6/2005."
- Town Center Topic Group, "Vision of and Strategies for a 21st Century Lancaster Town Center," November, 2005.

Herr & James memos:

- "Agriculture and Smart Growth," September 7, 2005.
- "Encouraging Truly Flexible Development," August 30, 2005.
- "Flexible Development Zoning Provisions," September 21, 2005.
- "Lancaster Census Data," March 20, 2006.
- "Lancaster Growth Expectations," March 20, 2006.
- "Policy Area Mapping," December 28, 2006.
- "Village Center Zoning," August 31, 2005.

OTHER REFERENCED MATERIAL

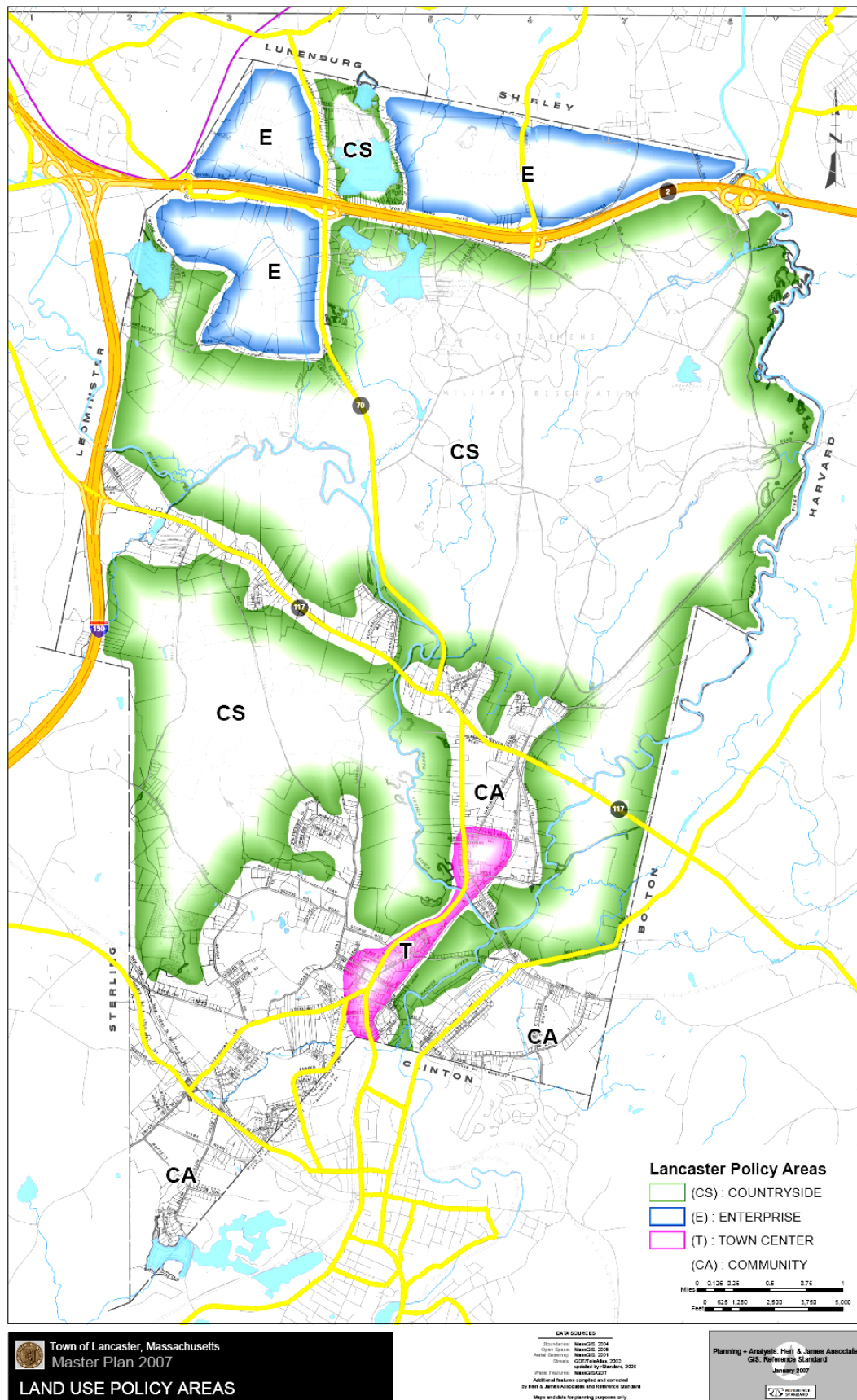
Kennedy Smith and Leslie Tucker, *The Community Design Assessment: A Citizens' Planning Tool*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2006.

Massachusetts High Technology Council,
MassTrack: Tracking Massachusetts' Support of Technology, www.masstrack.org.
Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC),
"MAPC Toolkit Available,"
www.mapc.org/whats_new/regional_record/may2006/mixed_use_toolkit.html.

Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC), *Lancaster Community Development Plan*, "V. Economic Development Chapter," prepared under Executive Order 418, June 2004.

Weisman, Robert, "Hopkinton ranks at top of tech-friendly communities," *Boston Globe*, March 31, 2006, page B1.

January 26, 2007 PLAN LAND USE ELEMENT.DOC



III. HOUSING

BACKGROUND

The vision of housing in the future Lancaster which we want is easily described, but not easily achieved. In that vision, people much like those living here now are still (or again) able to afford the housing which is available. Achieving that will require a significant amount of housing development, which in the vision would be joined harmoniously with the existing community both physically and socially, making it welcome.

That vision would be achieved through a mix of added compact housing in parts of the Town where such housing already exists, while in the rest of the Town where open land dominates the landscape any new housing would be carefully subordinated to that landscape through its compactness, siting and design.

Affordability is an important part of the vision. The intention is to achieve affordability as much as possible through facilitation and incentives rather than through heavy-handed rules. Perhaps most of all, in this vision the Town is not at the mercy of mandates from higher levels of government about what would be built where. Achieving that degree of community control is possible through energetic pursuit of the Town's own housing goals, using positive incentives and support to gain the housing that the Town wants.

Housing Needs

- COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

The make-up of Lancaster's population, except for the Town's unusually large institutional population, departs little from the pattern of demographics in nearby and similarly situated communities elsewhere regarding age distribution, ethnicity, typical household size, and other housing-related characteristics. Lancaster shares a similar demographic future with those others as projected by State and regional organizations: household size continuing to drop, small growth or possible decline in school-age population, stability or slow growth in the working age population, and very sharply growing senior population, as the "baby boom" generation reaches that age.

PROJECTED CHANGE LANCASTER RESIDENTS BY AGE GROUP

Age Group	% change 2000-10		% change 2010-20	
	MAPC	MISER	MAPC	MISER
All Ages	5%	-5%	6%	-6%
0-4	-27%	-12%	-1%	-9%
5-19	6%	-12%	-8%	-15%
20-34	-1%	-8%	12%	3%
35-64	11%	-3%	2%	-16%
65+	9%	11%	36%	26%

Source: Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC), 1/2006, and MA Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER) 2005.

Those projections suggest a growing need for relatively small housing units to serve smaller households, a continuing need for housing serving "starter" households, and an accelerating need for senior housing.

- EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

As with demographics, Lancaster's existing housing stock departs little from regional norms. That housing stock is dominantly single-family, owner-occupied, with only rare instances of concern over housing conditions. A large share of Lancaster's housing units is relatively new, reflecting the Town's recent growth: according to the US Census in 2000 15% of Lancaster's housing was no more than ten years old, double the share which is that young in the Boston metropolitan area.

Lancaster's largest housing needs are cost-driven. The price of houses in Lancaster has tripled since 1993, which is rapid even by regional norms. The cause is not any shortage of local housing production. Housing growth rates in Lancaster in recent years have been six times as high as they were in the early nineties. Rather, the need is one driven by regional forces. One town alone can't satisfy that need, but if Lancaster and others in the region act strongly, together they can meet it.

In 2000 the distribution of family incomes in Lancaster closely matched that of the Boston region: Lancaster's median was \$60,800, ten percent above the Boston metropolitan area median of \$55,200. However, the median value of an owner-occupied house in Lancaster was then \$170,000, far below the

region's median of \$234,000. That didn't mean that housing prices in Lancaster were easily affordable, but those prices did make it possible for people much like current residents to move into the town.

However, since 2000, housing prices in Lancaster have soared, but incomes have not. From 2000 to 2005 the median price of single-family homes sold in Lancaster grew almost 70 per cent to a median price of \$325,000, which for most buyers would require an income of more than \$100,000 per year to afford¹. For the first quarter of 2006 the median has spurted to more than \$400,000². That means that a large share of Lancaster residents by then could no longer afford to buy the house they live in at its current market value.

Another indicator of housing need is the rule of thumb and the implication of a growing set of State policies and requirements that serving a responsible share of regional housing needs requires that at least 10 per cent of the local housing stock must be assured of remaining priced so that people having incomes no higher than 80 per cent of the regional median can afford it. That is the Chapter 40B requirement. For 2006 for the East Worcester region with which Lancaster is now grouped for such purposes, that median income is \$91,600. "Affordable" for these purposes means housing priced to be affordable at no more than 80 percent of that, or \$73,300, which is enough income to support a house price of about \$230,000, or \$200,000 for a condo. Lancaster units at such prices were easily found five years ago but not any longer.

Under Chapter 40B, until the community reaches its 10 per cent affordability threshold, developers may seek comprehensive permits which bypass all local regulations, and if denied, may appeal to the MA Housing Appeals Committee (HAC) which most commonly supports developer's proposals.

The current percentage of housing in Lancaster which is "affordable" as calculated under State rules is just 4.5 per cent, indicating a need for another 116 affordable units in order to reach the 10 per cent threshold, and more than that after 2010, since the need is calculated based on the decennial Census

¹ Based on a 5% down payment and spending no more than 30% of income on housing, including mortgage, insurance and taxes.

² Per the Warren Group website at www.thewarrengroup.com

count of year-round housing units, certain to be higher in 2010 than in 2000. At the rate of development being used in this *Plan*, the need for affordable units calculated that way grows by almost 50 units between 2000 and 2010.

LANCASTER & CHAPTER 40B

40-B Consideration	Decade	
	2000-10	2010-20
Initial yr-rd units	2,103	2,575
10% threshold	211	258
40B "Counted" 2005	95	95
Post-95 gap to fill	116	163

The bulk of the Town's affordable inventory is the 70 low-income elderly units at Bigelow Gardens. Demand for them is now very high, resulting in a two- to three-year wait for a unit. The remainder of the Town's affordable units is in much smaller numbers within several private developments.

- DEVELOPMENT CONDITIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

Lancaster has a large inventory of undeveloped land, enough to support development of more than 2,000 additional housing units³, but much of that land has qualities which impose constraints on development. An unusually extensive share of that land area has been identified at the State or Federal level as having special natural or cultural resource value (See Open Space, Natural Resources, & Recreation Chapter).

About two-thirds of the Town is included in portions of two MA EOEA-designated *Areas of Critical Environmental Concern* (ACECs), and a similarly sized share of the Town's land area has been identified as Core BioReserve area by the MA Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program's (NHESP's) mapping program⁴. Two substantial districts have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the US Department of the Interior. Those designations subject development within them to special scrutiny, and suggest the importance of the Town playing an appropriate stewardship role for their protection.

³ See Herr & James, "Growth Expectations," March 11, 2006, page 4.

⁴ MA Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NH&ESP), *BioMap: Guiding land conservation for biodiversity in Massachusetts*, 2001.

The Town's regulatory system reflects its concern for protection of those natural and cultural resources, but the measures which could reconcile concern for housing with those other concerns have yet to be adopted. For this *Master Plan*, a group of Town officials reviewed the Town's efforts on, among other things, housing, using a diagnostic checklist published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation⁵. The checklist has nine items specifically probing housing actions, ranging from such common measures as widely allowing multi-family housing or accessory apartments or small house-lots to more complex measures such as mandating inclusion of affordable housing in new development. The officials were in agreement that none of those items has been acted upon by the Town, evidencing that there is much which could be but has not been done to advance the Town's housing goals.

As of 2006, Lancaster's zoning bylaws require two-acre lots essentially everywhere in the Town. For senior living facilities and within a small and substantially fully-developed area, multi-family dwelling units may be built at four or more times that density. There are no specified bonuses or incentives or relaxations for developments which provide affordable units. Accessory apartments are not allowed. Any residential development of eight or more dwelling units is subject to a special permit and a strict review process, and may be subject to development rate controls. However, flexible residential rules provide substantial freedom in development design.

As discussed below and in other elements of the *Master Plan*, the Town's intention is to achieve reconciliation of interests in a way which continues to provide careful resource protection and to also make important progress in meeting Lancaster's housing needs. Any of the constraints on reasonable housing development cited above can be overcome, and this *Plan* indicates the Town's intentions for doing so.

- MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY.

As covered in the Community Services and Facilities

Element, the capacity of the Town's infrastructure, just as its natural and cultural resources, importantly conditions how housing can be soundly provided. Public water lines serve most of the Town's population, though only a small part of the Town's land area. The developed water supply capacity is seriously stressed, and development of additional supplies has been frustrated over the years by water quality and other limitations.

Town sewerage is less extensive, but still serves a major share of the Town's population and the portions of the Town most appropriate for higher-density development. However, again there is a capacity constraint in the treatment facilities, which are located in Clinton.

As discussed in the Services and Facilities Element, the capacity of existing schools at elementary, middle, and senior high levels each are of concern, with studies now under way to find means of expanding capacity to accommodate anticipated growth without compromising educational quality.

The Town has infrastructure capacity concerns, and this *Plan* among other things indicates the intention of ensuring that those capacity concerns and the concerns over housing needs both are to be met, and can be met through careful management of change.

Housing Strategy

The strategy for achieving the Town's housing goals has a number of components. One is to pursue housing objectives through efforts which also serve other community goals, such as natural or historic resource preservation, so that the same efforts can serve multiple purposes, and so that proponents from multiple interests can join their energies and persuasion in pursuit of actions benefiting housing.

In light of the important natural resources which cover much of the community and in light of the community's strained infrastructure, using existing housing as a resource for future affordability is an important part of the overall strategy. Building five new housing units in order to provide a single affordable one, as 40B developments commonly do, is an inefficient use of many kinds of resources. Creating new affordability through actions which create few or even no new housing units, such as buying, rehabilitating, and writing down the price for existing housing, can conserve space, resources, and political support.

⁵ Adapted from Philip Herr, *Massachusetts Place*, Northeast Regional Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1991.

Over the next ten years, this strategy involves adding nearly 200 affordable units to the total now existing in the Town, as later detailed. Review of likely change over that period suggests that the characteristics of the existing housing stock would serve well as a template for what is sought in the added affordable units. What that suggests numerically would be something like this for the next 200 affordable units created:

- 50 to 60 units in multi-family structures.
- 40 to 50 rental units as a minimum, but perhaps more at least during the period before the Town has “caught up” with Chapter 40B.
- 20 to 30 units suitable for one-person households.
- 45-55 units for persons aged 65+.
- 20 or more units for persons with disabilities.

A basic choice in the strategy is to pursue approval of a Lancaster Affordable Housing Plan under the MA Department of Housing and Community Development’s (DHCD’s) Planned Production Regulation and subsequent certification of compliance with that Plan.

Massachusetts housing regulations (760 CMR 31.07(10)(i)) provide that local decisions on Chapter 40B developments will not be subject to override at the State level if the municipality, following an approved affordable housing plan, has produced affordable housing at a rate of 0.75 per cent of the housing stock per year or 1.5 per cent per two years. For Lancaster, that annual rate would enable the Town to achieve having 10 per cent of its housing (as counted under Chapter 40B in the then most recent decennial census) in affordable units by 2015, and possibly sooner if recently proposed revisions to that law actually are adopted.

TARGETS: AFFORDABLE UNITS PER YEAR

Method	Pre-2010	Post 2010
Zoning requiring 15% of units to be affordable, assuming 40 housing units built per year	6	6
Existing units rehab & price controlled	3	4

Accessory apartments and “Great Estates”	1	2
Local initiative 40Bs	6	7
TOTAL	16	19

Achieving that rate would, so long as sustained, remove the threat of adverse Chapter 40B decisions at the State level. For the remainder of this decade, the 0.75 per cent rate means adding 16 affordable units either each year or averaged across each two years (one big project plus nothing else doesn’t satisfy the rule for more than two years). After the 2010 Census, the requirement is likely to rise to about 19 affordable units per year. Here is how the challenge might be met through the methods which are indicated in the table above.

Lancaster’s current growth timing provisions have a basic control threshold of 30 units per year, and the Town averages only a little over 40 new units per year. Given that rate of development, achieving 16 affordable units per year (or 19 starting five years from now) will be a challenge.

Development, of course, would not proceed as neatly as shown in the accompanying table with exactly, say, one accessory apartment each year and three units gained through rehabilitation. However, Lancaster would reach 10 per cent of its units counted as affordable by the year 2015 with Town growth occurring at the rate projected and with affordable units being added at the annual rates likely to be prescribed by State regulation.

Unless the law is by then changed, after that the 40B challenge would simply be to continue to gain affordable units in pace with overall housing growth. That then would probably require no more than five units per year, declining as the Town’s growth slows with declining land availability.

On the other hand, the challenge of preserving Lancaster’s current character and sense of community despite escalating housing costs would likely require efforts no smaller and possibly larger than those required to meet the “Planned Production” challenge, since really preserving Lancaster as the kind of community which it requires more than just assuring 10 per cent of the Town’s housing being affordable at 80 per cent of the area median income. It also requires assurance of access to Lancaster’s

housing for a wider range of incomes, as discussed earlier.

As of January 1, 2006 fifty-three Massachusetts municipalities (about one in seven MA cities and towns) had Planned Production plans which had been approved by DHCD. As of the same date, only 8 municipalities (about one in seven of those having approved plans) were certified by DHCD as currently being in compliance with those plans through satisfying the production standard. Planning is the first step. Achievement is clearly more demanding.

The plan and the strategy will involve four kinds of effort: building institutions, strengthening support resources, refining regulations, and continuing affordability and access.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The basic housing goal is to preserve Lancaster as a diverse community of people, sustainable over the long term, with equity and access for all.

Just as protecting the natural environment requires a long-term commitment, so too does protecting equitable access to housing. Neither this nor any other housing plan can “solve” the housing problem in Lancaster for once and for all. What we now need to do is to institute a series of measures which over time can enable this community to continue in much its present social and physical form.

At this time, however, there are some fast-moving dynamics which call for rapid response. One of the most important is the threat of permanent change resulting from development taking place under Chapter 40B’s Comprehensive Permits, which elude local regulatory control. Accordingly, one process goal is to rapidly achieve the numerical objective of no longer being subject to 40B overrides of local authority. At Master Plan workshops, achieving that by the end of the decade was suggested as a goal. Careful analysis suggests that, although reaching the 40B 10% standard by then is almost certainly beyond reach, there is an alternative method of precluding unwanted 40B development which can feasibly be achieved in months rather than years. It is called “Planned Production,” and as discussed above, entails adopting and following a plan under which the share of the Town’s housing which is “affordable” per Chapter 40B is increased by 0.75% per year.

Truly preserving housing affordability for all levels of a diverse population requires more than satisfying the Chapter 40B mandate. First, the 40B method of “counting” gives no assurance that having 10 per cent of our housing units “counted” really means that 10 per cent of our units are affordable at below-market prices. Second, our needs go beyond the income levels addressed under Chapter 40B. A family of four with an income of \$75,000 earns too much to qualify for housing “counted” under Chapter 40B, but too little to afford almost all of Lancaster’s housing in the open market. To preserve this community, we need to preserve the ability of people of such income levels to be able to afford to live here.

Finally, our goal is to achieve that preservation of our social community without damaging it through harsh regulatory measures or heavy fiscal burdens, and without destroying the qualities of the natural and cultural environment which are so much of what makes Lancaster the special place that it is.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

As discussed in the narrative above, these are the implementing actions through which those goals and objectives can be achieved.

- BUILDING INSTITUTIONS

- Prepare and submit a “Planned Housing Production Plan” based on this plan together with documentation of implementation consistent with it for DHCD approval of the Plan and certification that it is achieving the targeted levels of affordability. That is the key to relief over time from Chapter 40B bypassing local decisions.
- Create a Lancaster Housing Partnership. Just as we have a Conservation Commission to address natural resources and we have a Historical Commission to address historic resources, we should have a citizen organization within government which is charged with ensuring the adequacy of our housing resources.
- Explore gaining eligibility for federal housing subsidy funds through joining an eligible regional consortium, such as the Fitchburg and

Leominster HOME consortium.

- BUILDING SUPPORT RESOURCES

- Pursue participation under the Community Preservation Act (CPA) as a means of establishing a local source for funding housing actions. Under that act, funds raised by a real estate tax surcharge of 1% or more is matched at least in part by State funds, and are earmarked for housing, historic preservation, open space, or recreation.
- Be alert for grant opportunities. Support for a full-time planner's position would be of importance in pursuing this objective.
- Partner with those proposing new development to gain a responsible share of the affordable housing needs which such development creates. When provision of affordability is linked to adequate regulatory "give-backs" such as density bonuses, neither land owners nor developers will have a substantial net burden as a result.

- REFINING REGULATIONS

- Explore potential revision to the limited area of the Town within which multi-family dwellings are currently allowed.
- Within the revised multifamily overlay district, reconsider the two-acre "threshold" for allowing multi-family use, and consider revision of other dimensional rules for consistency with the relatively small lots existing in that area.
- Explore the possibility of designating one or more areas outside of the southern part of the Town for the multi-family overlay district.
- Pursue implementation of the draft of a Village Center Overlay District to complement the provisions of the multi-family overlay, allowing multi-family housing in conjunction with business development.
- Consider revisions to the current regulations for senior and assisted housing, acting on the basis of careful examination of the experience with the current provisions with an eye to their

possible revision in light of that experience and the future need.

- Adopt a demolition delay bylaw to provide an opportunity for an alternative use, such as affordable housing, to be found for structures which would otherwise be demolished.
- Explore adoption of an Estate Preservation provision under zoning, allowing the adaptive reuse of existing structures for additional units as an alternative to dividing the land into lots.
- Authorize "in-law" or accessory dwelling units within existing dwellings.
- Provide a density incentive for those developments which include affordable units.
- Revise Flexible Development zoning to incorporate credits for affordable housing as noted just above, and also to strengthen credits for contributing open space, even including open space which is not contiguous to the development, such as foregoing development on land in the Countryside policy area in return for being allowed an equal or greater amount of development on land within the Community Area.
- Explore offering a density incentive, just as in the item above, for development which includes either on- or off-site the rehabilitation of existing housing units and their deed-restriction for on-going affordability.
- Reconsider the Town's rate of development provisions which restrict the number of housing units which may be allowed in any year (Zoning Section 14.10) to really achieve its intentions and to be consistent with recent case law.

- CONTINUING AFFORDABILITY AND FAIR ACCESS

- Apply controls to ensure continuing affordability and fair access. Use restrictions and/or re-sale controls and regulatory agreements should ensure that the same level of affordability and the same assurance of fair access as applied initially to units continues to apply to them to the full extent allowable by law.

- Explore means of facilitating long-term affordability of energy in housing. Seek ways through creative funding or educational efforts to encourage initial investments in energy-saving design, construction, and equipment which although initially somewhat more expensive than “standard” will pay dividends over time through reducing heat and utility demands and costs for the occupants.

APPENDIX

Herr & James Associates, “Lancaster’s Preparedness for Guiding Growth: A Diagnostic”. November 9, 2005.

Herr & James Associates, “Lancaster 2000 Census Data,” March 30, 2006.

Herr & James Associates, “Lancaster Growth Expectations,” March 11, 2006.

Herr & James, “Village Center Zoning,” August 31, 2005

Herr & James, “Zoning for Housing Affordability,” August 31, 2005.

OTHER REFERENCED MATERIAL

MA Department of Housing and Community Development, “Guidelines for the Planned Production Regulation under MGL Chapter 40B 760 CMR 31.07(1)(i),” August 2005.

MA Department of Housing and Community Development, “Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory,” February 2006.

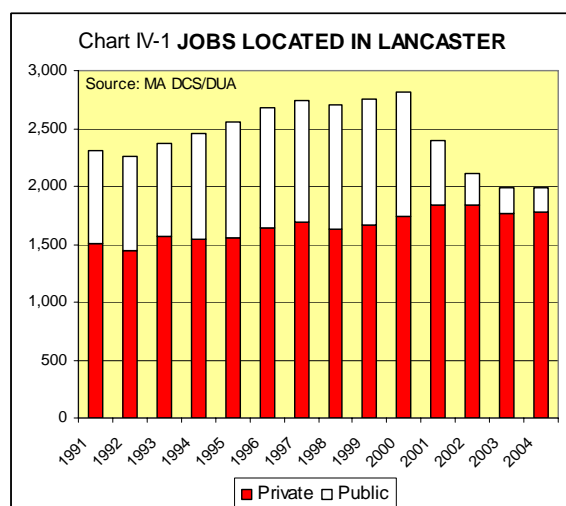
Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, *Lancaster Community Development Plan 2004*, prepared under Executive Order 418, June, 2004.
US HUD, *Research Works*, March, 2006, “Several Roads to Increased Energy Efficiency,” found under www.huduser.org .

IV. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND¹

Consistently, Lancaster planning participants have underscored the central importance of improving the Town's fiscal circumstances as a major reason for local efforts at economic development. Gaining good jobs at good wages is also often cited as an important motivation for local economic development, even though only a minority of the workers living in Lancaster work within the Town. Further, economic development can enhance the quality of life in Lancaster, possibly broadening the array of services available nearby, and perhaps shortening commuting time, distance, and environmental costs².

Jobs in Lancaster



According to 2000 Census commuting reports, a total of 2,800 people then had jobs located in Lancaster,

¹ This Chapter draws upon "V. Economic Development Chapter" in *Lancaster Community Development Plan* prepared by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) under Executive Order 418 in 2004, and attempts to complement rather than being redundant with it.

² This statement and many of the action items in this Chapter are drawn from the memo of the Business and Economic Development group formed for this effort. See Business and Economic Development Topic Group, "Summary of Results," November, 2005.

compared with a total of 3,100 Lancaster residents working either within the town or commuting elsewhere. That means there were then about 90 percent as many jobs in Lancaster as there were employed Lancaster residents, very nearly achieving the balance of jobs and housing which many planning efforts set as a goal.

In the years since then Lancaster's population has inched upwards but local employment has dropped sharply due to relocation of several State facilities, probably dropping the ratio of local jobs to local workers to as little as 60 percent.

That same Census data indicates that in 2000 some 720 Lancaster residents were employed in Lancaster, of whom 170 worked at home and another 224 walked to work, a strikingly high number. Many others found jobs (in descending order) in Clinton, Marlboro, and Worcester, as well as in many places elsewhere. Comparing where residents worked versus where holders of local jobs lived, it is striking that Lancaster workers went to Middlesex County jobs in far greater numbers than did Middlesex County residents commute into Lancaster, a pattern not repeated to a similar degree elsewhere³.

The incomes derived from the combination of local jobs and jobs to which residents commuted elsewhere resulted in Lancaster incomes being about 10 percent higher than the median for the Boston metropolitan area but about 10 percent lower than the median for the 11-town East Worcester region with which Lancaster is grouped for housing price considerations³.

Much of the change in jobs located in Lancaster over the past decade or more has been changes in State positions in correctional facilities and elsewhere. Private employment has grown slowly since 1990, but not nearly enough to offset public sector job declines. Job projections for Lancaster from 2000 to 2030 made by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), having ignored the public jobs dip indicate slow growth, the strongest growth coming in education and health services jobs⁴, industries in which the Massachusetts outlook is strong, but having below-average wages.

³ See Herr & James, "Lancaster Census Data," March 20, 2006, Selected Economic Characteristics.

⁴ See Herr & James, "Lancaster Growth Expectations," March 20, 2006, Tables 5-7.

Interestingly, a recent study by the MA High Technology Council ranked Lancaster 34th out of the 351 Massachusetts communities in being welcoming to high-tech businesses, higher than either Marlborough or Leominster, the only other nearby communities also rated “four stars” in that study.⁵ Choices made by the Town which resulted in the Town’s high rankings were:

- Having only a single tax rate, not one which is higher for business than for residences;
- Having a Tax Increment Financing program through which in certain cases taxes from development can be earmarked for infrastructure improvements;
- Having an unusually large area of land zoned and available for business development (enough for 23 million square feet of building area per their data, 19th highest in the State).

Two other rating items were less directly the results of Town choices: ranking 23rd on the basis of 10th grade MCAS scores, and ranking 350th in housing starts per 1,000 households in 2004 (low production). The remaining five evaluative criteria were simply geography, such as the size of the workforce within 30 minutes drive time, rather than being the results of Town actions.

The study probably isn’t useful as a predictor of job growth, but it is instructive regarding what the High Technology Council members judge to be important.

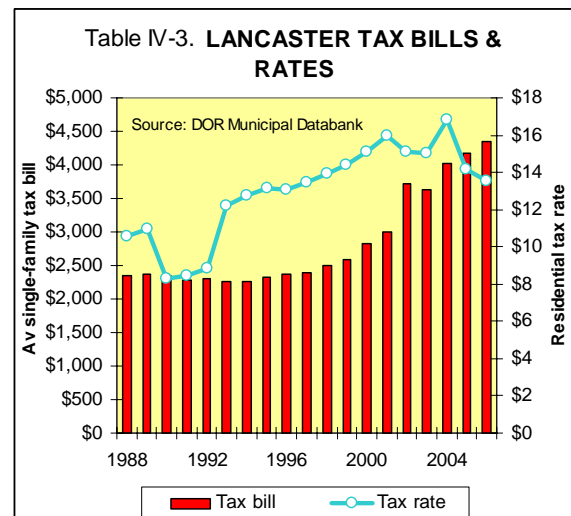
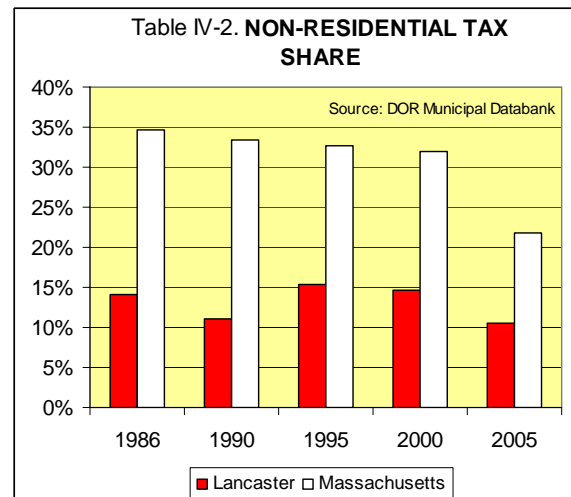
For at least two decades the non-residential share of the Lancaster property tax levy has consistently been lower than is true Statewide despite Lancaster having nearly as many local jobs in relation to housing units as is true State-wide.

Part of the explanation lies in the large share of Lancaster jobs being in either public or tax-exempt facilities. Another part of the explanation is the single tax rate: many Massachusetts communities have a “split tax rate” through which the non-residential share of the tax levy is increased, in some cases doubled. The recent decline in the non-residential tax share both in Lancaster and Statewide largely reflects the relative strengths of the residential and business real estate markets in recent years:

⁵ “Hopkinton ranks at top of tech-friendly communities,” Robert Weisman, *Boston Globe*, March 31, 2006, page B1. Details can be found at www.MassTrack.org.

residential values soared, while business values stagnated.

Lancaster Fiscal Structure



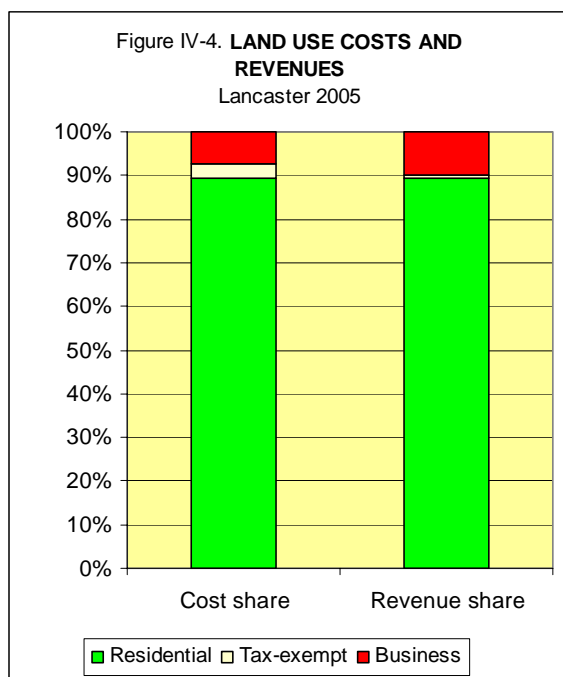
The average single-family **tax bill** in Lancaster has steadily grown in recent years, even after adjusting for inflation as was done in the chart above. The **tax rate** in dollars per \$1,000 assessed value has fallen over the past five years despite rising tax bills, reflecting that the great increases in the value of residential real estate have moved faster than Proposition 2 ½ will allow the tax levy to rise.

Lancaster’s fiscal circumstance is not exceptional. Lancaster was about in the middle of the group in comparisons made with Berlin, Bolton, Clinton, Harvard, Lunenburg, Shirley and Sterling regarding median single-family tax bills, the percent of the tax levy carried by non-residential taxes, and the frequency of reliance on, and level of success with, Prop 2½ overrides and capital or debt exclusions.

The lone non-middle position was Lancaster's residential tax rate, virtually the same as Bolton's at the upper edge of the group⁶.

Cost-Revenue Comparisons

To better understand the relationship between development and the Town's fiscal circumstance, we made an analysis of the Town's fiscal year 2005 General Fund revenues and expenditures of about \$12.4 million⁷. The results are shown in Chart IV-4. Residential property's share of the tax levy and other revenues going into the General Fund was about 90 percent, and its share of costs paid from the General Fund was nearly identical. For businesses the share of revenues was about 10 percent, while its share of costs was only about 7 percent. Tax-exempt properties made up the remainder.



The implications of those relationships are clear. For residential development, tax revenues almost match Town costs. That means that any residential development which has unusually high tax revenue in comparison with its public costs will be fiscally beneficial. Examples include the obvious cases of age-restricted development which has no school-age residents, and very high-end homes, even if they have school children. With few exceptions, multi-family

⁶ See table 11 in Herr & James, "Growth Expectations," April 3, 2006.

⁷ See tables 12 and 13 in the above memo.

housing in Massachusetts communities similar to Lancaster have few school-aged children, so have low school cost impacts, usually making them fiscally beneficial by a substantial margin.

More subtly, otherwise "average" housing which makes unusually light demands upon Town infrastructure systems of roads and utilities by virtue of location and design can also be tax-beneficial. On the other hand, "average" family housing which is price-restricted to ensure affordability is unlikely to fully cover its service costs with its tax payments.

Residential developments which trigger unusually high public costs will not be fiscally beneficial even if otherwise they would have been. The aggregate figures used above deal with average costs, not marginal ones. If new development triggers the necessity of major capital investments, then marginal costs per added housing unit can soar. Lancaster's infrastructure of water, sewerage, and school facilities are all strained. That places special importance on land use configurations and project designs which minimize the added burden which they place on those systems.

On the business development side, the percentage margin between costs and revenues is very wide, chiefly because business has no direct impact on education costs. The numbers suggest that in Lancaster's case the popular impression is correct that business development is fiscally beneficial, with only unusual exceptions.

It is important to recognize, however, that the total dollars involved in business costs and revenues in Lancaster is small relative to overall costs and revenues, and as a result the scale of net contribution by business to the Town's fiscal balance is also small: a large percentage "profit" from a relatively small number results in a small number. For business development to make a substantial difference in the share of tax burden carried by homes it would need to be expanded by a very large percentage. Adding 50 percent to business tax revenue, whether by new development, a reversal of recent market value changes, or splitting the tax rate applicable to business versus residences, would lower the residential share of the burden by only 5 percent.

On the other hand, should out-of-control business development damage the Town's image and value as a fine residential community, the net fiscal impact could be negative. Symmetrical with the above, a drop of 5 percent in residential values could almost

wholly wipe out any fiscal gain from a 50 percent increase in business valuations.

The importance of land use configuration and project designs in minimizing burdens on municipal service systems cited earlier with regard to residential development also applies to business development, along with the further consideration that business location can not only impact public costs but it can also indirectly impact public revenues if as a result of location and design it has a damaging impact on nearby property values.

The policy aim clearly should be for well-managed quality in both business and residential development. Among the seven communities with which we made fiscal comparisons, Harvard had by far the lowest share of tax burden carried by non-residential property (4.1 percent), but only two of the eight communities had tax rates lower than Harvard's. Berlin had the highest levy share carried by non-residential property (23.7 percent), but its tax rate was higher than all but three of the eight communities. There is no correlation between the non-residential share of tax levy and the level of tax rates discernable among those communities.

Tax-exempt property by definition directly pays no property taxes, but it occasions some public costs and is the source of some non-tax revenues which show up in the Town's General Fund. By definition, tax-exempt use of property is on first examination a "fiscal loser," but that topic needs more careful examination. First, tax-exempt properties commonly do produce positive but indirect fiscal benefits through the support their clientele provide to local tax-paying businesses, and through the support their presence provides for the taxable value of residential properties.

More importantly, tax-exempt institutions have made great contributions towards establishing and protecting the character of Lancaster. They contribute richly to the Town's cultural landscape. Without them, Lancaster would be a far different and less attractive community. Had the organizations owning those properties not been exempt from property taxes over many years there would have been added pressure on their finances that would have made it less likely that they could have been as effective as they have been in holding open land open. In considering measures to address the short-term fiscal concerns of the municipality the reality of that stewardship certainly should not be overlooked.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Our goals for economic development are quite simply the achievement of the vision framed in the first paragraphs of this Chapter: to strengthen the Town's fiscal ability to provide good services without excessive burdens, to attract good job opportunities nearby, to enrich the range of services easily available to Lancaster residents, and to do all of that with emphasis on positive efforts rather than prohibitions, and to do it in ways which are carefully supportive of the Town's cultural and natural resources.

The strategies for pursuing those goals can be put into just a few major approaches:

- Supporting the emergence of a mixed-use Town Center, including institutional, commercial and residential development. That could serve all of our economic development goals, as well as our goals for land use, housing, and other topics.
- Shaping the patterns and kinds of residential growth so that they result in a substantial amount of housing which serves both social and fiscal objectives, encouraging that through both reformed zoning and infrastructure support.
- Diversifying the tax base to include a larger non-residential share to ease the tax burden on residential property.
- Working to forge positive connections between business and Lancaster's rich natural and cultural landscape.
- Reforming regulatory and infrastructure frameworks to enable highway corridor business development in Lancaster to become a model for the region regarding achieving economic development together with environmental protection and compatibility with the Town's character.
- Taking other helpful actions.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

MIXED-USE TOWN CENTER

- As also discussed in the land use and housing Chapters, pursue the development of a more complete Town Center, to include institutional, commercial, and residential components, all of which can benefit from their proximities within that setting, and conjunctively are likely to support all of our objectives for economic development.
- As a means of testing Town support for the Town Center concept, further develop and propose adoption of “Village Center Zoning,” beginning from the draft described in the memo of that same name⁸.
- Follow through with the set of further studies suggested by the Town Center Topic Group to provide the groundwork for consolidation of the concept⁹.

SHAPING RESIDENTIAL GROWTH

- Multi-family housing by its nature is likely to be fiscally beneficial, so as outlined in the Housing Chapter:
 - explore expansion of the area which currently allows multi-family development; and
 - consider revision to zoning’s dimensional regulations to make them more compatible with the areas where multi-family may be proposed; and
 - consider allowing multi-family housing to be developed in additional areas in other parts of the Town where, at appropriate density, it is appropriate to its context.
- Senior housing by its nature is likely to be fiscally beneficial, so as outlined in the Housing Chapter, explore refining the regulations under which it is allowed.

⁸ Herr & James, “Village Center Zoning,” August 31, 2005.

⁹ See Business and Economic Development Topic Group, “Summary of Results,” November, 2005.

- Estate preservation is a clear fiscal “winner,” so as outlined in the Housing and the Historic and Cultural Resources Chapters, explore creating the regulations necessary to enable it.
- Ensure that the revisions to Flexible Development which are being reviewed¹⁰ make it likely that they will result in a format which is inviting to at least some high-end single-family development.

LINKING BUSINESS AND THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE.

- Support agriculture-based business by revising regulations to facilitate such activities, as outlined in the memo “Agriculture and Smart Growth.”¹¹
- Link business to recreation activities such as the Youth Soccer Development both through programmatic linkages, each contributing to the other, and through locational choices regarding business development.
- Use the natural resources and historical character of the Town as a draw for tourism and related support businesses, through an effort coordinated with those working on open space and recreation and on historic preservation.

HIGHWAY CORRIDOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- Undertake a study of actions which the Town might take to leverage the business traffic being drawn to the Route 70 and Route 2 area by the soccer complex and new businesses in both Lancaster and Leominster so as to benefit growth in business activity in both communities in a mutually supportive way including, for example, analysis of the demographics of customers to aid in targeting business prospects.
- In coordination with upcoming wastewater management studies, provide enhanced infrastructure and regulation for the Route 2 corridor.

¹⁰ Herr & James, “Encouraging Truly Flexible Development,” August 30, 2005.

¹¹ Herr & James, “Agriculture and Smart Growth,” September 7, 2005.

- Ensure that potentially beneficial development is encouraged through enhanced infrastructure, both for circulation as discussed in the Transportation Chapter and for public water and sewerage as discussed in the Services and Facilities Chapter.
- Explore the possibility of zoning regulations facilitating pedestrian-scaled village development for the large-scale businesses which are the likeliest candidates for corridor locations.
- Going beyond that, explore measures enabling the creation of mixed-use development within business-zoned areas, to include business, residential, civic and recreational uses.
- Ensure compatibility of business development with existing residential uses through, among other things, strict performance controls for buffering and mitigating impacts, rather than relying only on dimensional set-backs for protection.

OTHER HELPFUL ACTIONS

- Create an Economic Development Task Force to undertake efforts listed earlier, such as leveraging the Route 2/Route 70 aggregation of businesses as a magnet drawing activity capable of supporting other businesses, and linking business development with the natural and cultural landscape.
- Give strategic priority for sewerage to areas of potential business development in the northern portions of Lancaster and also in programming extensions within the present Sewer District, importantly including service to the entirety of Sterling Road and through District extension to the upper portion of Sterling Street, both areas currently zoned for industry and potentially served by the same pumping station.
- Explore refinements in the Zoning Map's current mapping of business districts, such as considering extension eastward of the General Industrial District on Sterling Street, and the potential rezoning from existing business districts into a new mixed-use zoning district along Route 2 better able than current districts to assure that new development will be compatible with its context and reflective of Lancaster's

special character, while also taking advantage of the benefits provided by easy access to Route 2..

- Explore creation of a new business district at the Route 117/Route 190 interchange, carefully configured to avoid damage to Bartlett Pond or other environmental resources, and perhaps with controls parallel to those to be developed for the Route 2 corridor.
- Devise incentives to encourage non-conforming businesses to relocate to conforming sites, such as favorable regulatory treatment to allow profitable adaptation of the existing sites and buildings for conforming uses.
- Explore the means by which the Town might enhance telecommunications access primarily for its business areas but also for its residential areas to further enhance Lancaster's well-deserved image as an excellent place of residence for the high technology professionals whose presence in the community can do much to improve the likelihood of attracting the industry within which they work.
- Explicitly recognize that business recruiting is a proper function for Town staff, together with performing such services as surveying town businesses and institutions to identify needed services which could be provided by Lancaster vendors, and compiling other helpful data about the Town and providing it to both potential businesses and to residents.

APPENDIX

Resident topic group memos:

- Business and Economic Development Topic Group, "Summary of Results," November, 2005.
- Town Center Topic Group, "Vision of and Strategies for a 21st Century Lancaster Town Center," November, 2005.

Herr & James memos:

- "Lancaster Census Data," March 20, 2006.
- "Lancaster Growth Expectations," March 20, 2006.
- "Village Center Zoning," August 31, 2005.

- “Encouraging Truly Flexible Development,” August 30, 2005.
- “Agriculture and Smart Growth,” September 7, 2005.

OTHER REFERENCED MATERIAL

Massachusetts High Technology Council,
*MassTrack: Tracking Massachusetts’ Support of
Technology*, www.masstrack.org.

Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
(MRPC), *Lancaster Community Development Plan*,
“V. Economic Development Chapter,” prepared
under Executive Order 418, June 2004.

Weisman, Robert, “Hopkinton ranks at top of tech-
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January 26, 2007 PLAN EC DEV ELEMENT.DOC

V. OPEN SPACE, NATURAL RESOURCES, & RECREATION

BACKGROUND

Lancaster's natural resources such as its rivers and wetlands, ponds, forests, special wildlife, and natural areas are prized at the state, regional, and local levels. Lancaster has many wonderful publicly and privately protected natural areas, forests, open space, farmlands, and trails that are available for access and enjoyment by the public. Because of the interrelatedness of natural resources, open space, and recreation in Lancaster, these are presented in one combined Chapter of the Lancaster *Master Plan*.

During the May and November 2005 master planning community workshops, protection of natural areas and open space emerged as a major priority for the Town. A citizen group met and worked over a period of months to explore and recommend actions to better protect the important open spaces and natural resources of the Town and to improve access to these areas as an important source of recreation and enjoyment for the Town's citizens and visitors.

Two previous studies addressing open space, natural resources and recreation provide important complements to this *Master Plan* Chapter. Lancaster's 2000 Open Space & Recreation Plan contains important background data and mapping of open space in Lancaster. The 2004 Lancaster Community Development Plan developed under the Executive Order 418 Plan also provides a complementing study and background data. This *Master Plan* Open Space, Natural Resources, & Recreation Chapter provides updates where needed of material in these previous studies.

Open Space Land Use Inventory

As of the most recently-available McConnell land use data inventory of 1999, 10,650 (59 per cent) of Lancaster's 17,910 acres were in forestland, with cropland, urban open land, and open undeveloped land accounting for another 21 per cent. Water bodies and wetlands constitute another 4 per cent, all totaling about 84 per cent of Lancaster's total land area. Following 2-3 decades of substantial regional

development, this amount of open space and natural areas is fairly remarkable.

A major contributor to this sizable amount of open space in Lancaster is the amount of publicly-controlled land in town. The U.S. Government owns 4,376 acres of land in the Devens South Post. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns another 1,421 acres, with the Town of Lancaster following with 1,207 acres. All total, publicly-controlled land comprises about 45 per cent of Lancaster's total land area.¹ Of this amount, 1,288 acres are permanently protected. (Specific descriptions of these lands are included in the Lancaster 2004 E.O. 418 Community Development Plan).

There are 250 additional acres of permanently-protected privately-owned open space, including land owned by the New England Forestry Foundation. And finally, as of 2006, there were 1328 acres of land in "Chapter 61" – privately-owned land with agricultural restrictions, assessed at lower rates, according to the Lancaster Assessor Office. (See Open Space & Recreation Map at the end of this Chapter for public and privately-protected open space locations).

Water Bodies & Water Resources

The North and South branches of the Nashua River are the 'spines' of the Nashua River Watershed area in which Lancaster is located. Connected to these water spines are a network of brooks, including McGovern, Spectacle, Ponakin, Cranberry, Slate Rock, and Wekepeke Brooks. Lancaster's nine ponds include the South Meadow Pond, White Pond, Slate Rock Pond, Fullers Pond, Oak Hill Pond, Cranberry Pond, Big Spectacle Pond, Little Spectacle Pond and Fort Pond. Not surprisingly, Lancaster's system of rivers, streams, and ponds is interspersed with considerable wetlands. These wetlands constitute part of 1,900 acres of a regional wetlands system identified and listed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to be among its Priority Wetlands of New England.

Two aquifers underlie land within Lancaster – one underneath the Cook Conservation Area, with another underlying much of the Devens South Post.

¹ MRPC, *Lancaster Community Development Plan*, June, 2004.

The Nashua River Watershed Association has identified South Meadow Pond as a “eutrophic” water body and has made this a priority for attention in its 5 year action plan.² Other ponds whose ecosystems similarly are threatened include Spectacle and Fort Ponds.

The Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

Much of the Central Nashua River Valley *Area of Critical Environmental Concern* lies within the Town of Lancaster’s boundaries. It also encompasses area in the neighboring Towns of Bolton, Harvard, and Leominster. Lancaster citizens and officials were instrumental in obtaining state designation of this area to bring attention to, and hopefully to better protect, the important natural resources in this region, most notably its rivers, wetlands, and ponds.

While not triggering any particular regulatory action, an *ACEC* designation has the effect of garnering particular attention on the part of the State Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) concerning the impacts of proposed federal, state, or local projects upon the resources contained in the *ACEC*. The EOEA is then charged with the responsibility to “take action, administer programs, and revise regulations in order to: (a) acquire useful scientific data on the *ACEC*; (b) preserve, restore, or enhance the resources of the *ACEC*, and (c) ensure that activities in or impacting on the area are carried out so as to minimize adverse effects” upon the natural, historic, and cultural resources identified in the *ACEC*.³

The centerpiece of the *ACEC* is the Nashua River. The north branch of the Nashua River flows from Leominster into Lancaster, where it combines with the south branch flowing north from Clinton. The river then flows north to empty into the Merrimac River.

A twenty-mile corridor along the river contains many diverse forms of wet areas, such as sedge marshes,

² *Eutrophication* is a condition where, due to an excess of nitrogen and phosphorus, plant life in a water body grows excessively, taking up most of the dissolved oxygen, thereby killing other forms of life such as fish.

³ Massachusetts EOEA, 301 CMR 12.00: “Areas Of Critical Environmental Concern”.

swamps, spruce bogs, oxbows⁴, brooks, streams, dry and wet kettle holes, vernal pools, and floodplains. These diverse wet areas contain in turn a wide range of wild life – plants, animals, amphibians, insects and fish – who are particularly adapted for living in these special riparian (water-based) ecosystems.

McGovern, Slate Rock, Ponakin, Big Spectacle Pond, Little Spectacle Pond, and Cranberry Brooks in Lancaster are all part of this interrelated ecosystem. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the 1986 Emergency Wetlands Resources Act, and the Environmental Protection Agency all have designated these wetlands to be of priority for protection in New England due to their critical importance in supporting waterfowl of the Atlantic Flyway. Estimated wetland habitat covers approximately 3,925 acres, or 30 per cent of the *ACEC*, according to the GIS mapping carried out for the *ACEC* nomination. Priority habitat covers approximately 4,375 acres, or 34 per cent of the *ACEC*. Together, with considerable overlapping, wetland and priority habitat cover approximately 4,975 acres, or 39 per cent of the entire Central Nashua River Valley *ACEC*.

- WILDLIFE WITHIN THE *ACEC*

The Natural Heritage Program identifies 19-state listed critical species – four plants, 15 animals – within the *ACEC*. Six of these are “Endangered,” five are “Threatened”, and eight are listed as species of “Special Concern” according to the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. Rare bird species that inhabit or pass through the area include the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Harrier, Cooper’s Hawk and the Sharp-shinned Hawk, the Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern, Least Bittern, Upland Sandpiper, Vesper Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow.⁵

- SOUTH POST HABITAT AND WILDLIFE

Many rare species inhabit the wide variety of habitat types found in the relatively undisturbed area of Fort Devens’s South Post, such as pitch pine barrens, rare grassland, and wetlands. Two threatened bird species and one endangered bird

⁴ An oxbow is a U-shaped bend in a river, or the land included in the bend.

⁵ A list of the BioMap critical wildlife species are included in the Appendix.

species inhabit its extensive grassland area. Its pitch pine barrens are important habitat for three state-listed species of moths. Its wetlands and adjacent uplands are home to three species of aquatic turtles. According to the Natural Heritage Program, possibly the largest-in-New England population of Blanding's Turtle, a threatened species, lives in the South Post as well as in the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge and the adjoining Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area. Two South Post vernal pools that are habitat for the rare Blue-spotted Salamander have been certified by the Natural Heritage Program.

- FARMLAND AND HISTORIC RESOURCES IN THE ACEC

Critical farmland and historic resources also are part of the ACEC designation. Agricultural lands in South and West Lancaster are part of a greater area of agricultural lands in Bolton Flats, Lunenburg, and Sterling, which have contributed to the region's natural resource and historic landscape. The confluence of the North and South Nashua Rivers and its importance as a fishing area provided the home for the Nipmuck Native Americans. Archeological finds provide evidence that early peoples hunted and fished at the confluence of the rivers, known historically as the "meeting of the waters", as long as several thousand years ago. Both the National Register Historic Districts of Lancaster – Center Village and North Village – are included in the ACEC designation.

- WATER RESOURCES IN THE ACEC

Aquifers within the ACEC include the high and medium yield Wekepeke and Still River aquifers, as well as additional medium-yield aquifers lying in a north to south direction within the area. Public water supplies and wellhead protection areas located within the ACEC include the North Main Street well in Lancaster, presently in the "New Source Approval" process, but not currently in active use. According to the ACEC state designation, the South Post has a non-community public water system that will be registered by the Mass. Department of Environmental Protection in the future. Additionally a portion of a Leominster Zone II wellfield in the Wekepeke aquifer extends into Lancaster beneath the North Nashua River and adjacent wetlands in the vicinity of the Cook Conservation Area.

- SCENIC LANDSCAPES IN THE ACEC

The Massachusetts Scenic Landscape Inventory has designated sections of Route 117 as it crosses the Still River and Nashua River in Lancaster, and between Langen Road and North Main Street in Lancaster as "Distinctive" landscapes. "Distinctive landscapes" are landscapes that are ranked statewide in the top 5 per cent of all scenic areas for landscape quality and value. The State Inventory also has designated additional landscapes adjacent to Lancaster's Distinctive landscapes as "Noteworthy".

Public recreational areas within the ACEC include the Cook Conservation area and the Lancaster State Forest. The Lancaster Land Trust's Ballard Hill and Turner Pond parcels are also available for recreational use.

In December of 1993, the Lancaster Board of Selectmen submitted the Central Nashua River Valley region nomination as an ACEC to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA). On January 29, 1996, the Secretary of EOEA officially designated the ACEC, in so doing, recognizing the critical importance of the Central Nashua River Valley region, of which Lancaster is a part, to the state of Massachusetts as a whole.

Core Habitats in Lancaster

Lancaster has three to four special natural areas for wildlife that have been identified by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program as *core habitats* – areas found to be the most critical sites for biodiversity conservation throughout the state. These areas contain a wide variety of rare or endangered plants, animals, insects, as well as almost all other species that live in Massachusetts.

Why do we need to think about, let alone work to safeguard, the biodiversity of species? The renowned biologist E.O. Wilson has said:

"...the question I am asked most frequently about the diversity of life [is]: if enough species are extinguished, will the ecosystems collapse, and will the extinction of most other species soon follow afterward? The only answer anyone can give is, possibly. By the time we find out, however, it might be too late. One

planet, one experiment.”⁶

Other scientists have pointed out:

“[We] do not really know what we are losing when we lose a species. Some ecologists have likened the loss of biodiversity to an airplane flight during which we continually pull out rivets as the plane cruises along. How many rivets can we pull out before disaster occurs?”⁷

-CORE HABITAT BM494⁸

This core habitat in Lancaster bands a long stretch of the Nashua River that includes wetlands, meadows, floodplain forests, oxbows, and a special eco-system called a Riverside seep that occurs at the base of steep riverbanks. (‘Seep’ refers to groundwater that seeps out of the bottom of the slope). This enriched area brings about a high diversity of species. Three endangered plant grow in this core habitat, including one of only two known populations in the state of Wild Senna. Two other endangered species of plants – the Ovate Spike-Sedge and Small Bur-Reed grow along oxbows. The threatened species Blandings Turtles are found here, as well as Wood Turtles, Spotted Turtles, and the Blue-spotted salamander.

-CORE HABITAT BM567

This area includes Turner Pond with adjacent meadows and wetlands that extend into Lunenburg. Although it is surrounded by development, this core habitat has not been fragmented so far, and is close enough to other core habitats to enable species, for example, the rare Elderberry Longhorned Beetle, to travel to these other areas.

-CORE HABITAT BM590

This core habitat, again including the Nashua River, supports one of the most diverse assemblies of rare animals in the state, most notably the largest known populations of Blandings Turtles in the state and

⁶ E.O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992, p.182.

⁷ Richard Wright & Bernard Nebel, *Environmental Science*, 8th edition, Pearson Education, Prentice-Hall, p.281.

⁸ Core habitat numbers are assigned by the Mass. Natural Heritage Program. See accompanying Natural Resources Map for locations.

perhaps in New England, according to the Natural Heritage Program. The Fort Devens meadows of this core habitat support Grasshopper Sparrows and its heathlands and Pitch-Pine Scrub Oak barrens support a variety of rare species of moths. Several rare plant populations of the Sedge family are found here. Again, Spotted Turtles, Wood Turtles, and Blue-spotted salamanders are found in the vernal pools and forested wetlands of this core habitat. (See Natural Resources Map at the end of this Chapter for locations).

The Natural Heritage Program created the BioMap and Living Waters Programs, including extensive mapping and inventorying of rare and endangered wildlife, to help towns and cities set priorities for their land protection efforts, and to help communities “appreciate the biological treasures in their cities and towns.” It is clear, from studying the BioMap data for Lancaster available to anyone on the Web,⁹ that some of the most critical and important wildlife ecosystems in the state exist in Lancaster.

Town Forest

The 290-acre Lancaster Town Forest consists of 125 acres of undeveloped land that were donated to the Town in 1946 by Arthur Blood, coupled with other Town-owned parcels between Brockelman and Old County Roads and another gift of land on the west side of Brockelman Road. It is a natural area within a greater ecosystem that includes the Lancaster Land Trust’s Ballard Hill property, abutting Conservation Commission land, the Cook Conservation area, Devens South Post, and the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. A trail system links the Town Forest with these other important natural areas. Naturalists, hikers, horseback riders, cross-country skiers, campers, children, and seasonal hunters all use and enjoy the Town Forest for recreation and for just being in nature. An annual Halloween parade and treasure hunts used to be held in the Town Forest.

The Town Forest Committee, chartered by the Board of Selectmen oversees the responsible recreational and educational use of the Forest, and is charged with preserving and enhancing the ecological health of the Forest, including the habitat of its threatened and endangered plants and wildlife.

⁹ Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, <http://www.nhesp.org>

In July 2003, the Town Forest Committee commissioned a study and ten-year forest management plan for the Town Forest. The major types of woodland found in the Forest were: northern red oak, eastern white pine, red pine, softwood, and maple. Major recommendations of the forest management study to maintain and increase woodland and wetland health were to thin inferior trees with defects or insect problems, remove interfering vines, and mark boundaries of particular stands. The study recommended carrying out the thinning in a manner that creates trails for people to enjoy the experience and scenery of the Forest.

The Town Forest Committee is working to improve the camping sites in the Forest in a low-impact, reusable approach, with the help of Lancaster's Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. The Committee is also planning to develop a walking tour of the Town forest to increase local awareness of what it has to offer, and an informational sign at the forest entrance. Goals of the Committee are to carry out sustainable forestry practices to foster diverse wildlife habitat, in accordance with the ten-year forest management plan, and to purchase land or conservation restrictions on land abutting the Town Forest that could connect with other protected parcels, hence providing wildlife corridors.

Other Conservation Areas in Lancaster

Besides the Town Forest, there are many protected open space and nature areas that are available for public enjoyment. The Lancaster State Forest, a Massachusetts state park, and the Cook Conservation area, overseen by the Lancaster Conservation Commission, consist of about 800 acres connected to a six-mile trail that runs along the Nashua River's North Branch. Johnny Appleseed's original homestead was contained in what is now the Cook Conservation Area. The Bartlett Pond Conservation Area (about 20 acres) and the Atherton Bridge River Greenway also are owned by the Lancaster Conservation Commission. The 38-acre Turner Pond Conservation Area and the 34-acre Ballard Hill Conservation Area are owned by the Lancaster Land Trust. The Bolton Flats Management area, about 923 acres, is owned by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. The 3.5-acre Dexter Drumlin is owned by the non-profit organization The Trustees of Reservations.

Other Recreation Areas

Thayer Field, located behind Town Hall, is the Town's main recreation area for field and ball games. It is overseen by the Recreation Committee. The Recreation Committee also oversees the Town Beach. Lancaster has an active Little League. Many of the Little League games, however, are played on fields in Bolton, Harvard, and Berlin.

Canoe and kayak launching areas are found at: Ponakin Bridge, I-190 Bridge, Route 117 Bridge, Center Railroad Bridge, Fort Pond State Boat Launch, and the Bartlett Pond Conservation area.

Lancaster has a network of trails that is illustrated on the Open Space and Recreation Map at the end of this Chapter. Some of these trails, plus several proposed trails, are components of the Nashua River Greenway Plan – a vision for a green protected area along either side of the Nashua River that would run through Lancaster, Bolton, Devens, and Shirley – that evolved out of Lancaster's 1967 Master Plan. The idea for a Greenway Plan has been strongly supported by the Nashua River Watershed Association, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, and the Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Supporting and expanding Lancaster's network of trails emerged as a high priority of the citizen workshops and citizen working groups during the 2005-2006 master planning process.

Land Use Policy & Regulations

While Lancaster has some policies and land use regulations that help to protect open space and natural areas, there is much yet to be done. In June, 2005, a diagnostic workshop of Lancaster's policies and land use regulations involving several Town officials and land use policymakers revealed that Lancaster has not adopted laws as strong as have many towns controlling wetlands alterations, development within floodplains, or protecting aquifers and other water resources.

The Land Use Chapter and Policy Areas Map of this *Plan* identify what are called "Countryside" areas of the Town which contain most of the Town's most critical natural resources and open space. The Land Use Chapter proposes that development be guided away from these critical areas, and toward the other more thickly settled sections of Town. Designing and adopting a system of regulatory and policy controls to accomplish this goal will be a major step forward

toward protecting and preserving the critical natural areas and open space of Lancaster – that contribute so much to Lancaster’s quality of community life, not to mention the ecosystem in which the Town exists.

The Nashua River Watershed Association’s 5-Year Action Plan 2003-2007 similarly has identified a series of recommended land use regulatory steps that can be taken by communities within the region to better protect water quality, natural resources, and open space.

Oversight of Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation in Lancaster

A variety of boards, organizations, and non-profit and private institutions in Lancaster have responsibility for or oversee various types or properties of open space and recreation in Lancaster.

The Lancaster Conservation Commission has responsibility for reviewing development proposals and issuing permits for development occurring within 100 feet of water bodies or wetlands, and is the local authority for administering the state Wetlands Protection Act. The Commission is also charged with overseeing open space in Lancaster, in particular the Cook Conservation and Bartlett Pond areas. The Lancaster Land Trust is empowered to hold conservation easements and restrictions on privately-owned land, and also oversees some conservation lands in Lancaster and Lunenburg. The Trust currently owns the 37-acre Turner Pond Conservation Area, the 33-acre Ballard Hill Conservation Area, and holds a conservation restriction on 28 acres adjacent to the Lancaster Town Forest.

The Town Forest Committee oversees the Town Forest and its use. The Recreation Committee oversees the use of Thayer Field and the Town Beach Landing. Private organizations organize soccer and baseball games. The Community Development & Planning Department and the Planning Director also are involved with open space protection.

Regional organizations promoting open space and natural resource protection include the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, of which the Town of Lancaster is a member, and the Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA). Several Lancaster organizations and individuals work closely with these regional organizations.

At the same time, there is no one organization or individual in Lancaster charged with the responsibility of overseeing and coordinating all open space, natural resource protection, and conservation efforts in the Town. Nor is there one department, staff person, or organization who oversees all recreation and recreation facilities in the Town. While a remarkable amount of conservation and open space protection has been accomplished in Lancaster – for example, the nomination and successful designation of the *ACEC* - there still remain challenges to ongoing natural resource and open space protection. Many of these challenges would be more easily dealt with through a coordinated approach to open space and natural resource protection, as well as recreation that would enable all those concerned with these areas to communicate easily and effectively, and to work together toward a common agenda of goals and objectives.

The Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA) has completed a Five-Year Action Plan (2003-2007) for the communities within its region, of which Lancaster is a part. Several Lancaster citizens participated in the development of this Plan, whose extensive mapping, data, and detailed action items present a significant resource for Lancaster individuals, boards, and officials in continuing to work toward protecting the Town’s significant natural resources and open space. The NRWA Plan recommendations for Lancaster are included in the Appendix of this *Master Plan*.

A study exploring the use of environmental controls to protect both water quantity and quality has just been completed, covering the central and northern portions of the Town, funded as a pilot by the MA Riverways Program, with additional funding by the Town. That study¹⁰ contains an array of proposals for water resource protection, addressing pollutant removal, water temperature control, groundwater recharge, flood control, aquatic habitat protection, and aquifer sustainability. Proposals include reshaping and strengthening the existing Water Resources District, extra controls on large flow septic systems, and strengthened storm-water controls.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

¹⁰ Comprehensive Environmental, Inc. (CEI), *Environmental Overlay District Pilot Project: Final Report, Lancaster, MA*. Milford, MA, 2006.

At the May and November, 2005 master plan community workshops, Lancaster citizens made it clear that protection of open space and natural resources was a goal of high priority. Their detailed review of the Lancaster 2000 Open Space and Recreation Plan by the Master Plan Open Space & Recreation Topic Group revealed that a substantial number of the 40 goals and recommendations in that plan had not been met. A review of the 1967 Lancaster Master Plan revealed the same thing. The Topic Group then focused upon ways that the Town could improve its communication, distribution of information.

One significant finding was that responsibilities and oversight for open space, natural resource protection, and recreation are fragmented among several Town boards, committees, non-profit and private organizations in Town. This in itself could account for much of the inability to move forward on conservation and protection goals that have long been articulated. Accordingly, one major goal of this *Plan* Chapter is to improve coordination and communication among the diverse organizations, boards, and groups that oversee open space, natural resources, and recreation in Lancaster.

Overall, Lancaster's goals for open space, natural resource protection, and recreation are to:

- Improve the fragmented oversight and responsibility for open space, natural resource protection, and recreation in Lancaster.
- Seek and find the appropriate balance between safeguarding important natural areas, wildlife habitat, and providing opportunities for human recreation and enjoyment of Lancaster's rich natural resources. Protect critical habitat for Lancaster's populations of rare, threatened, or endangered species from human activity.
- Move forward on implementing the goals and recommended actions of the 2000 Open Space and Recreation Plan, as well as this Chapter of Lancaster's *Master Plan*.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

-OPEN SPACE & NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

- Work with large landowners to participate in the Agricultural Restriction Program and explore other means of keeping agriculture viable in Lancaster.
- Purchase land or conservation restrictions on land that abuts the Town Forest that would connect it to other protected parcels, thus creating corridors for wildlife to travel from one place to another.
- Develop a preservation strategy and plan for the Pine Hill area.
- Preserve and protect the Hilltop Road parcel that is home to endangered spotted turtles.
- Support the South Meadow Pond and Nature Association in its environmental remediation efforts as well as survey and control invasive plant infestation (spread of noxious aquatics) in South Meadow Ponds, as recommended by the NRWA. Work to restore other ponds with threatened ecosystems such as Fort and Big and Little Spectacle Ponds.
- Work to carry out the recommendations for improved water quality and quantity, open space and resource protection outlined in the NWRA 5-Year Action Plan 2003-2007.¹¹
- Pursue improved water quality and quantity throughout the Town, including but not limited to consideration of the proposals outlined in the CEI *Environmental Overlay District Pilot Report* 2006. Assure that whatever measures are adopted will not impose implementation demands which could damage the viability of the smaller-scale businesses most appropriate to Lancaster, and that their administrative demands can and will be well handled by the Town.

-RECREATION & OPEN SPACE ENJOYMENT

- Improve trails for biking, hiking, walking,

¹¹ Relevant NRWA Plan recommended actions for Lancaster are included in the Appendix.

including:

-Clearing brush, posting signs
-Put in a bike path along Route 70, Old Shirley Road, Route 117, Langer Road, & George Hill Road
- Develop bike paths and extend sidewalks along Route 70 to connect North and South Lancaster

- Expand and enhance the existing trails of the Town Forest in an ecologically sound and interesting way that includes clear marking. Discourage inappropriate use of the Town Forest that can disrupt wildlife or destroy its habitat, for example ATVs.
- Improve and publicize Lancaster's trails system, and develop new trails that connect the Town Forest, State Forest, and the various conservation lands.
- Develop educational and recreational programs that would encourage and foster passive recreation use of the Town Forest by all Lancaster citizens, and give the Forest more visibility.
- Restore and reopen the tennis courts in the Town center.
- Restore and reopen the playground in the Town center.
- Provide signage and public information about the river canoe/kayak access points, and explore alternatives for public parking at these sites.
- Develop a new canoe launch site off Bolton Road on the Nashua River.
- Develop new recreational fields for soccer, baseball, football, and general use.
- Approach the Massachusetts Youth Soccer Association to propose occasional Town recreation use of their fields.
- Allow the Conservation Commission or Recreation Commission first priority for Town-owned lands as they become available before auctioning for private development.

- Improve the Town Beach landing and provide swimming lessons, and access for disabled people. Allow kayakers and canoeists to launch from here. Address the erosion caused by heavy rain.
- Explore locations and resources for a gymnasium and teen center in Town.
- Develop a community garden and a farmers' market.

-LAND USE POLICY & REGULATION

- Work to implement the regulatory, as well as other, recommendations of the Nashua River Watershed Association 5-Year Action Plan, such as adopting development controls that preserve significant amounts of open space.
- Implement the policy and regulatory actions contained in this Plan's Land Use and Housing Chapters that work to concentrate development in or near already settled areas, and away from critical natural areas in Lancaster's proposed "Countryside" designated areas.
- Revise site plan review criteria and create performance standards to include extra "points" for commercial development that creates recreational or open space.

-ORGANIZATIONAL

- Form a coordinating committee with representatives from the range of boards, organizations, and groups concerned with open space, natural resources, and recreation. The mission of this committee would be to advance the goals, objectives, and implementing actions of the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan and those of the *Master Plan* Open Space, Natural Resources, and Recreation Chapter.
- Assign this committee with the responsibility, among others, to recommend the most appropriate use – for example natural open space, active or passive recreation use – of Town land as it becomes available.

APPENDIX

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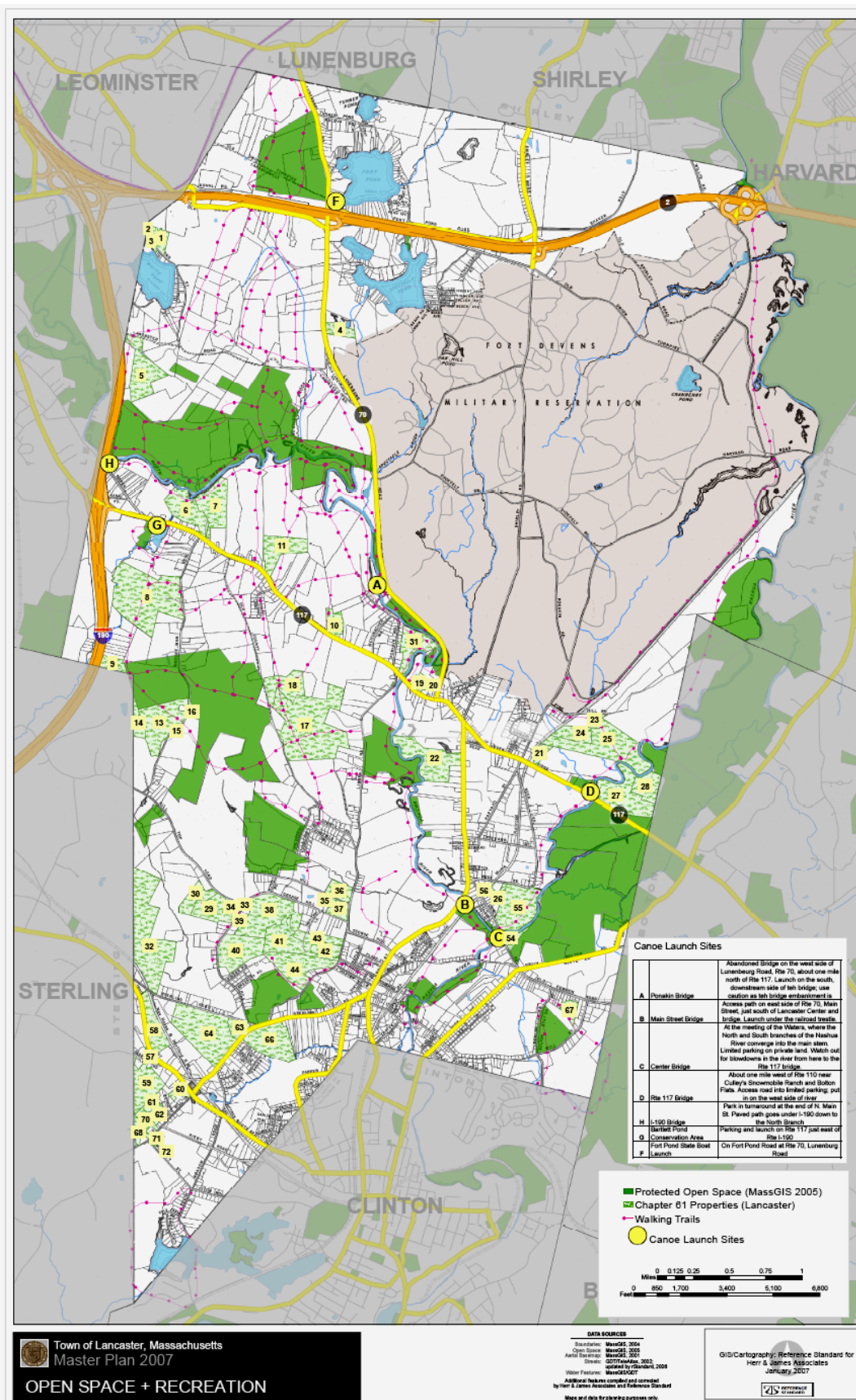
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VI. HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

BACKGROUND

Lancaster's historic and cultural tradition is at the centerpiece of its community. Lancaster is the oldest town in Worcester County, and was the original "mother" town for much of central Massachusetts, including what are now Leominster, Sterling, Harvard, Bolton, Clinton, Berlin, Boylston, and West Boylston. The first early settlers came to what is now Lancaster in 1642, and the Town was officially incorporated in 1653 with nine families.

Lancaster was founded by John Prescott, who gave the Town its name based upon his home town in England. Lancaster was home to Mary Rowlandson, who was captured by the Native American's in the attack on the Rowlandson Garrison during King Philip's War. She survived and went on to write a book about her captivity – a book which is considered to be one of the greatest captivity narratives ever written. Lancaster's elementary school is named after Mary Rowlandson. Lancaster was also home to Luther Burbank (1849-1926), the American horticulturalist who developed the Idaho potato credited with helping Ireland recover from its great famine, and the Shasta daisy. Lancaster's middle school is named after Luther Burbank.

John Chapman, who came to be known as Johnny Appleseed, was born in the section of Lancaster that was incorporated as Leominster in 1740. John Chapman was a nurseryman, who came to own many tracts of land throughout Ohio and Indiana. He used this land to plant apple seeds, transplant seedlings and set out orchards. He sold and gave trees to pioneer settlers.

Beginning its town life in the 17th century as a pioneer and farming community, Lancaster became a summer residence for prominent citizens of Boston during the early 19th century. The location of the Carter and Andrews Publishing Company and the Ponakin Mills in Lancaster contributed to the next wave of town growth. Beautiful, tree-shaded roads and large New England style homes came to characterize Lancaster during this phase of its history. In 2006, a Special Town Meeting voted the American Elm as the Town tree, continuing the

recognition of the importance of trees to Lancaster's town character today.

Lancaster's rivers, its riverfront land, its traditional settlement pattern, and its extensive natural resources also are at the centerpiece of its historic heritage. Early settlers built homes and hamlets at the confluence of the rivers. Access in and out of town depended upon the bridges over these rivers. The largest oak tree in Massachusetts, the Beaman Oak, was in Lancaster on Route 117 east of Main Street. This oak, whose circumference was 17 feet, was located on what was the land of one of Lancaster's earliest settlers, from around 1659 - Gamaliel Beaman. The tree had come to be known as the Beaman Oak. The tree severely damaged during a storm in 1989 and had to be removed.

One particular family was critical in shaping Lancaster's history and in creating many of the beautiful historic homes that grace Lancaster's Main Street and South Village. Four brothers of the Thayer family, who made their fortunes in banking and railroads, during the 19th century, built beautifully designed summer mansions, many of which remain to this day. Their grandfather, Rev. Nathaniel Thayer, was ordained in Lancaster in 1793 and served as the pastor of First Church until his death in 1840. He lived in the parsonage, known as "The Homestead", which is now the site of the Thayer Performing Arts Center. Rev. Nathaniel Thayer was pastor when architect Charles Bulfinch designed the Fifth Meeting House for Lancaster. It was completed in 1816. Rev. Nathaniel Thayer had seven children, Sarah Toppan, Martha, Mary Ann, Nathaniel Jr., John, and Christopher Toppan. The four sons of Nathaniel Jr., Eugene V.S. Thayer, Nathaniel III, Bayard, and John E. and grandson, Eugene V.S. Thayer, Jr. built mansions that still exist today in Lancaster. Fairlawn, now the "White House" at Atlantic Union College, was built by Eugene V. S. Thayer, Sr. John E. Thayer built a Tudor-style mansion part of which still exists on George Hill Road. Bayard Thayer built a mansion called Hawthorne Hill, now the site of the Maharishi Veda Health Center. Crownledge, a mansion built by Eugene Thayer, Jr. in 1908-09, is now the home of the Trivium School. Only one of these many historic mansions built by Nathaniel Thayer III – the Homestead" – is presently listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is now known as Thayer Performing Arts Center, Atlantic Union College. The Lancaster Historical Commission is working to inventory the other mansions and list

these on the state register of historic places.

Lancaster also has developed as an educational center. The Town is now home to several private schools and a college. Atlantic Union College, founded by the Seventh Day Adventists in 1882 as a secondary school, is now one of the most highly thought-of liberal arts colleges in the Northeast. Many of its campus buildings, especially Founder's Hall are of historic importance and interest. The Herbert Parker mansion on Sterling Road is currently privately owned. The Dr. Franklin Perkins School, founded in 1896, is located on 120 acres of land along Main Street that is the former estate of the industrialist Iver Johnson's widow, Mary Speirs Johnson, who built the mansion. The Perkins School is a nationally recognized leader in providing education and services to troubled children, adolescents and adults. Other private schools in Lancaster include the Robert F. Kennedy School, New River Academy, Living Stones Christian School, South Lancaster Academy, Browning School, and the Trivium School.

Lancaster's National Register Districts

Lancaster's rich historical heritage is reflected in the more than sixty historic sites and places of cultural interest, noted on the Historic & Cultural Resource Map. It is home to two national historic districts – Center Village, and North Village, whose boundaries are shown on the accompanying Historic District Map. Center Village and North Village were placed upon the National Register of Historic Places on June 8, 1976.

The Lancaster Historical Commission describes these two districts as follows:

“The Center Village District includes 110 early buildings and homes dating from 1727 to 1961, which include architectural styles of Cape style, Colonial, Classical revival, Colonial revival, federal, Greek revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, Victorian Eclectic, and Ranch. The Center Village is a quiet residential area of this earliest town in Worcester County. The district extends eight-tenths of a mile along Main Street from the Sprague-Vose Bridge over the Nashua River to the northern end of Main Street joining Route 117 near the North Village. Center Village District includes the beautiful center green, which is an unusual quadrangle upon which one side is Main Street, and on the opposite side stands the Thayer Memorial

Library, the Prescott Building (Center School), and on the south side stands the Georgian Colonial Town Hall and on the north side stands the neoclassical First Church of Christ, designed by Charles Bulfinch as the Fifth Meeting House, listed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks.

The North Village District, once known as Union Village, is a fine example of a rural nineteenth century community, and forms a significant architectural unit. North Village has a small green at the eastern end of the district. The historic district is roughly defined geographically by the Nashua River on the west, the Ponakin Brook on the north, a small brook on the south, and a series of hills on the east. The oldest house is c.1717. The architecture in the district incorporates various Federal and Greek Revival details. The houses vary in size and design, but are unified by their common building materials and setting. In the North Village, 22 buildings and homes received National Register Status. In 2006, the number went to 21 because one of Lancaster's only remaining inns (Fisher's Inn c. 1810) was sold, dismantled and is to be moved to Ohio where it will be rebuilt. The buildings and homes in this district date from 1717 - 1929.” (*Lancaster Historical Commission*)

A complete list of all properties within both National Register Districts is included in the Appendix.

In the 1980s, a local initiative developed in Lancaster to create a local historic district for Center Village. This would provide local review authority and greater protection for these important historic buildings and sites that National Register listing does not. This initiative was voted down at the 1987 Town Meeting. In 2002, the Lancaster Board of Selectmen appointed a Historic District Study Committee to reexamine the establishment of a local historic district and to determine what properties in addition to Center Village might also be included. The Historic District Study Committee continues to examine this alternative.

Historic Bridges

Lancaster's geographic location at the confluence of two rivers has made bridges an integral part of the Town's history and character. The Lancaster Historical Commission has found many references to

bridges in historical records as early as 1658. At the beginning of the Town's recorded history, the citizens who lived near the bridges were responsible for their cost and maintenance. The floods of 1936 wiped out many of Lancaster's bridges.

Today, two historic bridges remain in Lancaster. The Atherton and the Ponakin Bridges, built in 1870-71, were constructed using a design patented by Simon Post, a famous engineer, called a "Post-Truss" design. While this design was used for many 19th century bridges throughout America, few remain today. Both the Atherton and Ponakin Bridges are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Historic Cemeteries

There are seven town historic cemeteries in Lancaster, each with important contributions to Lancaster's history and early days. The Old Settlers Burial Ground, located on Main Street behind the Middle Cemetery became a public cemetery around 1643 and contains graves of the earliest pioneers. Old Common Cemetery on Old Common Road opened around 1700. North Cemetery on Old Turnpike Road opened around 1790; Middle Cemetery beside Bigelow Gardens on Main Street opened around 1800, while North Village Cemetery opened around 1854. Eastwood Cemetery on Old Common Road at the Bolton town line opened in 1876, and is the only Town cemetery with available new grave sites. There is a state graveyard on the site of the former Industrial School for Girls located off Old Common Road. Finally, the private Thayer Family Cemetery is located off Bull Hill Road. (See Historic & Cultural Resources Map for locations).

Many of the monuments in these cemeteries are fragile and deteriorating. A high priority of the Lancaster Historical Commission is to preserve and protect the monuments and landscapes of these cemeteries that hold important keys to Lancaster's past.

Endangered Properties

There are many historic buildings and sites in Lancaster that are in danger of being lost to physical deterioration, inadequate maintenance, inappropriate renovations, or outright demolition. Fragile historic monuments in the early cemeteries are crumbling; historic homes and buildings in private ownership are in need of restoration. New development along the river is affecting both the traditional riverfront

character, an important contributor to Lancaster's historic town character, and affecting the remains of historic river use such as historic water level markers.

The Lancaster Historical Commission has identified the historic features of the following public and private properties and sites to be so 'endangered':

Public Sites:

Town Hall
Prescott Building (Center School)
Memorial School
Tercentenary Building
South Lancaster Engine House (Hose House)
Atherton and Ponakin Bridges
All cemeteries: Old Settlers Burial Yard, Old Common Cemetery, Middle Cemetery, North Cemetery, North Village Cemetery, Eastwood Cemetery, Thayer Private Cemetery
All open land, including Pine Hill
Meeting of North and South branches of the Nashua River

Privately owned:

Deershorn Road schoolhouse
Thayer Mansions: Nathaniel (presently Thayer Performing Art Center), Eugene (presently Atlantic Union College's White House), John Thayer Tutor Mansion, Eugene Thayer, Jr. Crownledge (presently Trivium School), Bayard Thayer (presently Maharishi Veda Health Center)
George Hill Orchards (formerly owned by the Thayer brothers)
Rowlandson Garrison site
Herbert Parker house on Sterling Road

A priority of the Lancaster Historical Commission is to raise awareness about the importance and fragility of these historic resources and to develop strategies and measures to better assist and protect them.

Cultural Traditions

Until 2000, Lancaster was home to the Thayer Symphony Orchestra. Founded in 1974 by Dr. Jon Robertson as the Thayer Conservatory Orchestra, the Symphony moved to Fitchburg at the end of the 2000 season. Its home auditorium is now at Montachusett Technical High School.

One Saturday each fall during fall foliage and apple-picking season, the annual Horseshed Crafts Fair opens on the grounds of the First Church of Christ (the Bulfinch Church) on Lancaster's Town Green. The Fair is housed in 15 connected wood-framed

horseheds, part of the original sheds built in 1816. Scores of craftspeople sell crafts ranging from silk and dried flower art, Victorian dolls and jewelry. Several thousand people attend the Fair each year on the grounds of this National Historic Landmark.

Lancaster has a Cultural Council that supports the arts and cultural events and administers state-funded grants for local events. The Cultural Council has supported events such as the Three Apples Storytelling Festival, annual concerts and fireworks, musical performances at Thayer Public Library, and the Lancaster Coffeeshouse.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

At the May and October, 2005 master plan community workshops, Lancaster citizens made clear that one of their highest priorities was the preservation of Lancaster's rural and traditional character. Preservation of Lancaster's historic heritage, historic buildings and sites, and landscapes are a critical part of preserving this Town character. Accordingly, Lancaster's objectives for historic preservation and preservation of its traditional Town character are to:

- Preserve and protect the important and valuable historic properties and sites in Lancaster that contribute so much to its character and that are part of its heritage.
- Raise the awareness within Lancaster and beyond about Lancaster's rich historic heritage and the scores of important historic sites throughout town.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

The following actions are identified to implement Lancaster's goals for historic and cultural preservation:

- Inventory, restore and protect Lancaster's early cemeteries, giving priority to Old Settlers, Middle, and Old Common Cemeteries. Seek grants and funding to help restore these important historic resources. Work to list these cemeteries on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Conduct public education in Lancaster and beyond to make townspeople aware of the

importance and value of Lancaster's historic heritage, buildings, and sites.

- Continue to explore the possibility of creating a local historic district for the Center Village historic area to better protect this "crown jewel" of Lancaster's historic heritage.
- Preserve the integrity of the Town Green and its tradition as an open gathering place.
- Preserve and protect Lancaster's historic bridges, in particular the Atherton Bridge and the Ponakin Bridge, and the river edges, major contributors to Lancaster's historic town character. Explore how to better feature these historic bridges as tourist attractions.
- Develop strategies to protect and preserve the historic properties and sites in Lancaster that are endangered by deterioration, inadequate maintenance, demolition, and floodplain development.
- Explore the creation of a museum to safeguard and display Lancaster's historic assets and records.
- Develop and adopt a demolition delay bylaw as also noted in the Housing Chapter to allow time for finding alternatives for historic structures threatened by demolition – for example, their relocation and reuse as an affordable housing resource.
- Reconsider participation in the Community Preservation program as one means to generate local funding for, among other things, historic preservation.

Identify and investigate a diversity of approaches to preserving the character and architectural features of historic homes while allowing for appropriate re-use if desired. One such approach might be an estate preservation bylaw that guides appropriate redevelopment of historic mansions and estates, such as that of the Town of Lenox, MA.

APPENDIX

Central Village National Register of Historic Places
survey of properties, June, 1973.

North Village National Register of Historic Places
survey of properties, June 1973.

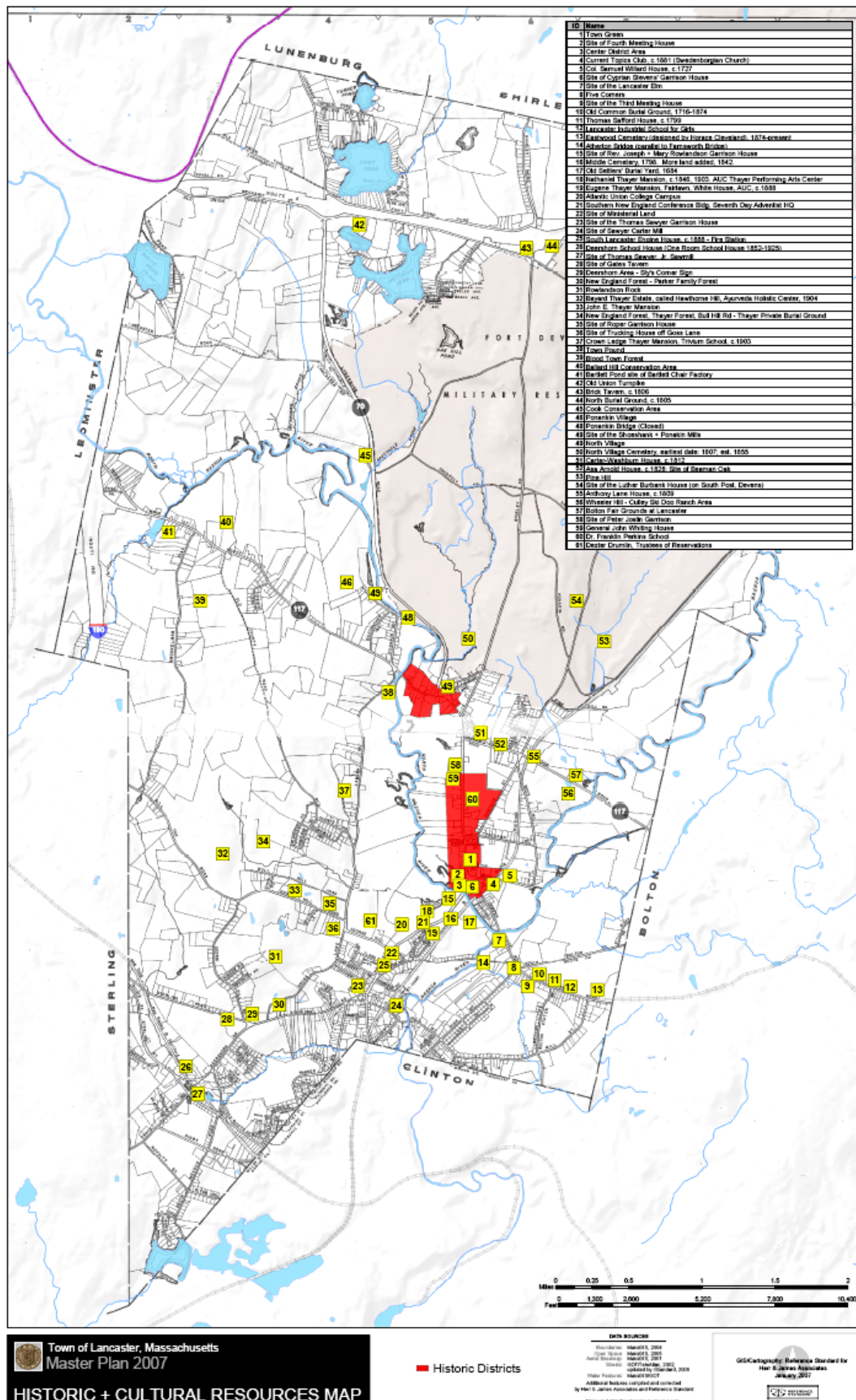
Memorandum from Lancaster Historical Commission
re: endangered properties, February 21, 2006.

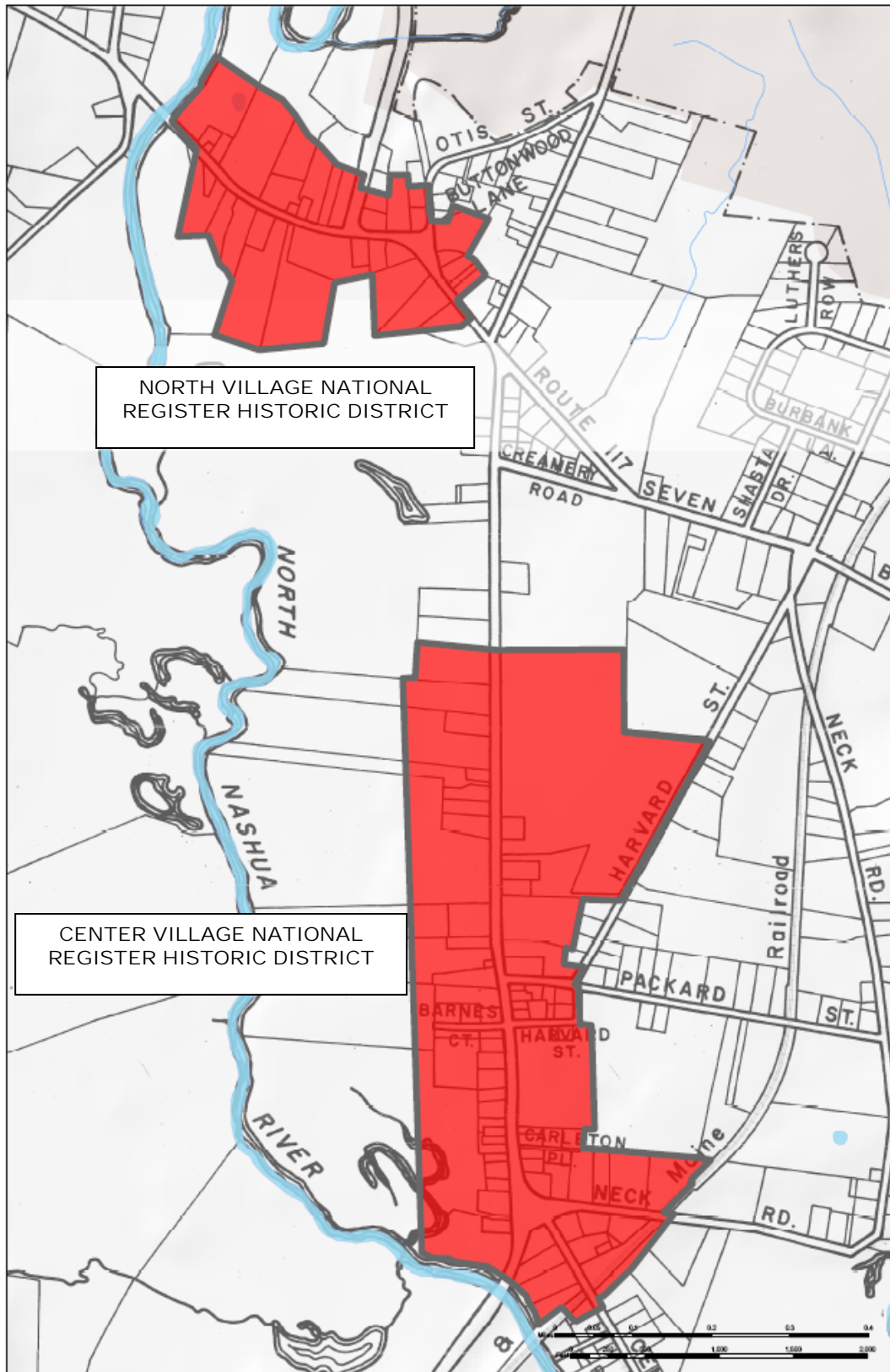
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NORTH VILLAGE NATIONAL
REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT

CENTER VILLAGE NATIONAL
REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT



Town of Lancaster, Massachusetts
Master Plan 2007

HISTORIC DISTRICTS MAP

■ Historic Districts

DATA SOURCES

Boundaries: MapInfo, 2006
 Open Street: MapInfo, 2006
 Aerial Imagery: MapInfo, 2006
 Topography: MapInfo, 2006
 Other: Various sources

Additional features compiled and corrected by: [Name] and [Name]

Maps and data for planning purposes only

GIS Cartographic Reference Standard for
Map & Data Preparation
January 2007



VII. COMMUNITY SERVICES & FACILITIES

BACKGROUND

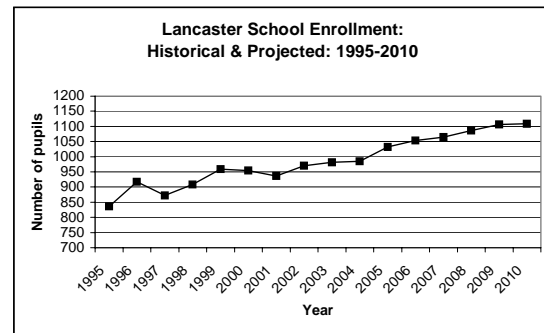
The community of Lancaster is served by many dedicated Town departments, boards, agencies, and commissions. They provide many of the services and facilities that Lancaster citizens need to live and function within their community. They struggle to provide these services often within limited budgets, mindful of taxpayer burdens, while coping with rising costs of supplies, energy, and costs-of-living. The work and commitment of these individuals, whose efforts often are unrecognized, are the unsung heroes of Lancaster, along with the countless volunteers who donate their time and energy to keeping the Town functioning and services in operation. This Plan, and this Chapter in particular, acknowledges these unsung heroes of Lancaster.

This Chapter provides an overview of Lancaster's community facilities, and outlines ongoing actions to strengthen those facilities and community services.

Schools

Lancaster's elementary school – the Mary Rowlandson School – and the Luther Burbank Middle School are within the Nashoba Regional School District. The School District also serves the communities of Bolton and Stow. Lancaster's high school students attend the Nashoba Regional High School in Bolton.

According to the New England School Development Council (NESDEC), every grade level between kindergarten and eighth grade in Lancaster's schools experienced in-migration during the last year. In particular, enrollments of grades 2,5,and 7 increased 110 percent or more. NESDEC factored this growth into their projections for 2006-2010, estimating that Lancaster total enrollment will increase by 7.5 per cent from its 2005 enrollment to a 2010 enrollment.



Source: New England School Development Council
November, 2005

Lancaster School Pupils Changes in Historical Enrollment 1995-2006

Year	Total	# Pupil Change	% Change
1995-96	836		
1996-97	917	81	9.7%
1997-98	872	-45	-4.9%
1998-99	908	36	4.1%
1999-00	959	51	5.6%
2000-01	955	-4	-0.4%
2001-02	937	-18	-1.9%
2002-03	970	33	3.5%
2003-04	982	12	1.2%
2004-05	985	3	0.3%
2005-06	1032	47	4.8%

Source: NESDEC 2005

Lancaster Enrollment Projections 2005-2010

Year	# Pupils	% Ann.Increase
2005	1032	
2006	1054	2.1%
2007	1065	1.0%
2008	1086	2.0%
2009	1107	1.9%
2010	1109	0.2%

Source: NESDEC 2005

While Lancaster's enrollment decreased during the 1997-98 and 2001-2002 school years, NESDEC projects enrollment to grow approximately 1-2 per cent annually between now and 2010. This is consistent with the housing and population growth projections carried out for the Lancaster Master Plan that estimate approximately the same number of pupils for the year 2010. (See *Lancaster Growth Expectations*, Appendix).

According to the Superintendent of Schools, both Lancaster schools – the Mary Rowlandson School and the Luther Burbank Middle School – are filled to capacity. The Nashoba School District is currently working with the Lancaster Capital Planning Committee to build an planned addition of eight classrooms to the Mary Rowlandson School. The cafeteria of this school also needs to be expanded and upgraded. According to the School Superintendent, if enrollment continues to increase, an expansion of the Luther Burbank School may also be needed. It is also possible that the Nashoba Regional High School, where Lancaster high school students attend, may need additional classroom space as well. Overall, according to the School Superintendent, the school buildings of Lancaster are well-functioning.

Lancaster is rich with private educational institutions as well. The Atlantic Union College and The Dr. Franklin Perkins School have national reputations. Other private schools in Lancaster include the Robert F. Kennedy School, New River Academy, Living Stones Christian School, South Lancaster Academy, Browning School, and the Trivium School.

Town Offices

Overall, the current Town office facilities are functional, although space occupied by several Town departments does not always meet their needs. Sections of the Town Hall – in particular the first and third floors – are not handicapped accessible, as required by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Town has made interim arrangements to accommodate people with disabilities. The Town Green Building Advisory Committee and the Town Administrator are working on a plan to reorganize and create additional space for Town departments and certain Town Commissions. The plan would use one floor, consisting of about 5,000 square feet of space, in the old Center School, the former Lancaster High School. To accomplish this plan, interior rehabilitation will need to take place in the Center

School and the Tercentenary Building. As of May, 2006, the former Memorial School building is still a candidate for Town department space. Some of the school property is deed-restricted for recreational use. Due to rising energy costs, it is important to design the ultimate space used space to maximize energy efficiency and to explore renewable energy sources such as geothermal heat/cooling for heating, air conditioning, and power needs, and/or solar panels for electricity and heat production.

Town department locations would be reorganized to group departments and offices, in particular those that participate in permitting processes, to improve communication among these departments and make access easier for permit applicants and the general public.

Through this reorganization, space would also be created for the Lancaster Historical Commission and perhaps also the Lancaster Historical Society to operate a museum and meeting space.

Staffing needs include making the Planning Director position full-time, increasing the Conservation Agent to half-time, and strengthening and professionalizing the job of the Animal Control Officer. As the Town grows, additional job needs likely will include a recycling coordinator, additional public works staff and library staff.

Senior Center & Teen Center

As of 2006, the Lancaster Council on Aging , which has been assisting seniors in Lancaster for over 30 years, presently has no offices or facility to serve seniors. The office has been operating out of a small shared office (a former dressing room) in Town Hall, and is working to use a local church hall for activities. Its programs include: meals-on-wheels, bingo, blood pressure clinics, van transportation, tax service, fuel assistance application, a monthly newsletter, and information and referrals to other agencies. It is run by a part-time director, and also staffed by a meals-on-wheels driver plus three additional part-time drivers.

Among the goals of the Council on Aging are: to help enable seniors to stay in their homes even if activity-impaired, connect those in need to service providers, enrich life through provision of educational, social, and recreational opportunities, transportation and nutritional services. The overriding facilities goal is to have a facility of about

6,000 square feet dedicated for seniors that includes a hall, kitchen, first-aid room, activity rooms, consultation rooms, a lounge, and receptionist and staff office space.

During the 2005 master planning process, participating citizens and officials discussed the need and potential for development of a senior center and also a center for teens and teen activity. Next steps include evaluating the possibility and feasibility of expanding or transforming existing facilities to serve these important needs, or development of new facilities.

As of 2005-2006, the Town is planning and seeking funding for a combined senior/community center in the Tercentenary Building adjacent to the Memorial School. A new post office is planned to occupy the Memorial School. This plan will also create additional space in Town Hall that will allow existing departments to function more effectively.

Solid Waste and Recycling

Since the Town Landfill was closed and capped in the early 1990s, Lancaster's solid waste has been hauled by private companies. As of 2006, five private haulers are collecting solid waste in Lancaster. Accordingly, at the time of this Master Plan writing, the Town does not have information about how much solid waste is generated by Lancaster residents, businesses, and institutions.

Recycling efforts in Lancaster began in 1990 when the Town's landfill was closed and capped. The Board of Health contracted with a private company who set up a drop-off center and recycling bins. In 1991, a proposal to fund a Town recycling center was turned down at Town Meeting. Since that time, no funding has been made available for recycling in Lancaster.

That same year, however, a group of volunteer citizens formed a recycling committee and organized a twice/monthly drop off and pick-up for old appliances, styrofoam, and waste oil. The committee was able to find private companies willing to take these materials. The following year, the Committee applied to the Mass. Department of Environmental Protection to obtain recycling bins. Over the following years, the committee was able to identify and locate companies willing to take additional materials; hence citizens were able to drop off and have recycled a growing number of materials. As of

2006, the recycling drop-off center, still run by an all-volunteer group, of citizens, now allows residents of Lancaster to drop off and recycle paper, cardboard, glass, scrap metal, tires, plastics, waste oil, car batteries, bikes, kitchen appliances, and electronics. Besides Lancaster residents, people from the neighboring communities of Clinton, Bolton, Lunenburg, Leominster and beyond bring materials to be recycled to the Lancaster drop-off center, since their own communities do not handle this wide array of materials. For materials that private companies charge to recycle, the Committee passes along the cost to residents dropping these off, such as charging \$1.50-2.00 per tire. In this way, the recycling center is able to take a wide array of materials for recycling. At the time of this Master Plan update, no estimates of recycled materials taken at the recycling center are available.

Water

Two artesian wells in South Lancaster provide 90 per cent of the water supply for Lancaster residents, businesses, and institutions. Together, the wells can provide a safe yield of 1.5 million gallons per day (GPD). According to information collected by the MRPC, the yields of these wells on average are between 40-50 per cent of capacity but during dry summer months, yields can be close to capacity. In 2003, the Lancaster Department of Public Works, whose Water Division oversees the water system, instituted a voluntary water ban and a water restriction plan due to an excess of pumping over the daily demand limit established by the Mass. Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in 2004. In 2004, the annual water demand reached an all-time high – over 261 million gallons – an average of about 716,000 gallons per day.

The following table shows the annual amounts of water pumped and the annual per cent change from the previous year. From 2001 to 2005, water pumping increased by over 6 per cent.

Lancaster Water Pumping 2001-2005			
	Annual Gallons Pumped	% annual change	% cumulative increase 01-05
2001	240,883,600		
2002	234,198,000	-2.8%	
2003	245,330,400	4.8%	
2004	261,194,000	6.5%	
2005	255,899,000	-2.0%	6.2%
Source: Lancaster Department of Public Works			

The safe limit set by the Mass. D.E.P. in 2004 for water pumping in Lancaster was an average 630,000 gallons per day (.63 million gallons per day). The amounts that Lancaster is exceeding the DEP threshold pumping amount in 2004 and 2005 was:

Year	Av.GPD	%over DEP limit
2004	715,600	13.6%
2005	701,093	11.3%

Sources: Mass. DEP & Lancaster DPW

Between 2004 and 2005, Lancaster was able to reduce its water consumption by 2 per cent – a total reduction of 5.3 million gallons for the year, or an average 14,500 gallons per day. Large users (the Mass. Division of Capital Asset Management (DCAM), Atlantic Union College and Perkins School) used approximately 13 per cent of water pumped in 2004 and 14 per cent of that pumped in 2005.

Since 2003, the Lancaster Department of Public Works has been investigating sites in town to locate another water source. According to the 2004 Lancaster Community Development Plan, two unconsolidated aquifers could support well yields of 100-300 gallons per minute. One aquifer is located in the Cook Conservation Area; the other underlies Fort Devens South Post.

Mass. D.E.P. can require communities who do not meet pumping standards to institute water conservation plans. Measures could include:

- adoption of bylaws to regulate automatic sprinklers;
- adoption of bylaws to limit land clearing for lawns;
- encouragement of rain barrels for outside watering;
- public education & outreach;
- implementation of an at-cost low-flow

fixture program.

The Lancaster Department of Public Works reported to the Town in 2003 that the water distribution system is inadequate. According to the DPW, many water lines in Lancaster need to be replaced and increased in size, including and especially the following areas:

- Neck Road from Center Bridge Road to Route 117
- Packard Street
- Harvard Road
- Route 117 from Harvard Road to Shasta Drive
- Old Common Road from State school meter pit to Town line
- Center Bridge Road from Five Corners to Main Street
- Mill Street from Bolton Station Road/Mill Street Extension to Sterling Road water line connection
- Carter Street to Pine Hill Road

The Services and Facilities Map shows the section of South Lancaster served by water lines.

Wastewater

Much of South Lancaster is within the Lancaster Sewer District. Buildings in the remainder of the Town are served by individual septic systems.

The Lancaster Sewer District Commission, overseeing and regulating the sewer district, was established in 1967 by a special legislative act. It is separate from Lancaster's municipal government and is governed by a commission of elected members.

The Lancaster Sewer District, shown on the Services and Facilities Map, connects about 660 properties to the sewer system. This represents about 60 per cent of the 1,100 properties within the District area, including North and South George Hill Road. Wastewater is collected through this system and piped to a sewage treatment plant in Clinton, owned and operated by the Town of Clinton and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority. The estimated average daily flow (ADU) of wastewater from the District was 211,319 gallons per day, as of February, 2006.

Residential customers along with a few businesses account for 60 per cent of the average daily flow of

211,319 gallons. The remaining 40 percent is created by the District's two largest single users – the Atlantic Union College (AUC) and the Mass. Division of Capital Asset Management (DCAM). Atlantic Union College creates 54,201 gallons per day and DCAM generates 29,957 gallons of wastewater per day. The following table shows the combined annual wastewater/water usage generated from the Town's three largest users – DCAM, AUC, and Perkins School for 2004-2005:

WASTEWATER/WATER USAGE LANCASTER LARGE USERS (Annual Gallons)			
	2004	2005	% Change
DCAM,AUC, Perkins	31,482,415	35,717,438	13%

Source: Based upon Lancaster Sewer District records, 1999-2006

The District's sewage collection system was recently extended to include the south end of George Hill Road. Sewer line extension to the north end of George Hill Road is expected to be completed by Fall, 2006. Three pumping stations at Bigelow Gardens, George Hill Road, and Mill Street, constructed in the 1970s, are scheduled for upgrading or replacement as of Fall, 2006. The Sewer District Commission (LSDC) is undertaking an infiltration and inflow initiative to address problems created by leaking service lines, sump pumps, roof drains, cellar drains, foundation drains, and yard drains. The multi-year initiative will include a public awareness program to encourage voluntary cooperation, a compliance and enforcement program for those who cannot act voluntarily, and a follow-up program. As of early 2006, the Lancaster Sewer District Commission has focused on improving the existing system. The 2006 Wastewater Management Study by Weston & Sampson Engineers has identified three areas for expansion of the Lancaster Sewer District - North George Hill Road and East Mill Street areas, within the current boundaries of the Lancaster Sewer District, and the Poulin Drive/Kelly Drive area south of Sterling Road which borders the District.

The 2006 Weston & Sampson Engineers study of the Sewer District's existing and protected future needs is being completed at the same time as this Master Plan. According to this study, the remaining wastewater capacity within the present Sewer system is between 140,000-193,000 gallons per day (gpd). The study finds that there are 96 existing service connections remaining with room for approximately 330 to 490 new service connections. The study also identifies a significant water infiltration problem that is accounting for an estimated 57 per cent of

wastewater flow. Hence, if this infiltration problem were to be corrected, the capacity of the sewer system could be increased by that amount.

Also as of 2006, the Town is in the process of selecting a consultant to carry out a comprehensive wastewater management study for North Lancaster, supported by state funding. The Town is also exploring the possibility of expanding this study to include the entire Town area.

Police, Communications, Ambulance Services

The Police/Communications Department is located on Main Street near the entrance to Perkins School and less than a mile from the Town offices. The facility was opened in 2001, is in excellent condition, with no need for expansion or substations in the foreseeable future, according to the Chief of Police. The Department currently operates with four police vehicles, and expects, given the Town's growth, that two additional cruisers will be needed between 2006-2009. Lancaster's 10-year Capital Improvement Plan (FY05-FY15) contains annual contributions toward vehicle purchase of approximately \$28,000-\$45,000 per year. Other planned Capital Improvement Plan upgrades over time for the Police Department include computer upgrades, carpeting and painting for the station, bullet-proof vests, and a radar trailer.

Including the Police Chief, the staffing level as of 2006 is 12 full-time and six part-time officers and staff. The Police Chief estimates that given the Town's growth, there will be a need for an additional three officers over the next five years.

Central Dispatch, Lancaster's Communications Center, is also located at the new facility on Main Street. Lancaster has had central dispatch since 1983. In 2004, Central Dispatch received 6102 calls. Its latest new feature is a "Reverse 911" facility, allowing the Town to contact all residents in case of an emergency.

Fire Protection & Ambulance Service

The Fire Department presently operates out of two facilities – a central station and a south station. The core central station presently houses six vehicles and office space for the fire chief and officers. Its second floor provides space for training. More office space will be needed in the future.

Lancaster's FY2007 10-Year Capital Improvements

Plan includes needed upgrades to the central station, including a new bay to consolidate public safety vehicles. The plan also calls for replacing of the ladder truck and three engine trucks by 2015. The existing 75 ft. truck ladder is unable to reach the top floors of the increasing number of 3-story buildings in town and should be replaced with a 110 ft. platform or tower ladder that can reach higher floors and is also safer for firefighters.

The south station location provides critical reduced response times to the most densely-populated section of town. Given commercial expansion on the west side of town, coupled with increase in Route 2 traffic and population growth, the Fire Department anticipates a future need for a fire station in this area. A mapping study of present and future growth and a response study for the two existing stations can help determine appropriate locations for future station construction.

The Fire Department recommends that the Town's Ambulance Service station be closed and that ambulance service moved to the central fire station, whose expanded space will accommodate these vehicles. The Ambulance Service continues to be a self-sufficient operation, receiving over 500 calls in 2004, the largest number of calls in its history. The Town's 10-Year Capital Improvement Plan has budgeted \$127,500 for an ambulance in FY07.

Roadway Infrastructure

Increased traffic has had a significant impact upon the condition of Lancaster's roads. Several roads are in need of upgrading, including:

- Langen Road, used as a by-pass for Main Street
- Goss Lane from George Hill Road intersection to Sterling Road
- Sterling Road, a major route for east-west traffic between 495 and I-190
- Consider making Chace Hill Road one-way eastbound from Route 62 between Deershorn Road and Route 62.
- Route 117, including traffic signals at Main Street/Route 117 intersection; Main Street/Lunenburg Road intersection, and Langen Road/Route 117
- Upgrade Five Corners intersection to a four-corner intersection.
- Widen North Lunenburg Road from Fort

Pond Road to Lunenburg town line

Drainage improvements are needed at a variety of locations throughout town, including:

- South Meadow Road from Route 62 to Moffett Street intersection
- Sterling Road from George Hill Road to railroad tracks
- Route 117 from power lines to Bartlett Pond
- Brockelman Road from power lines to Town Forest
- Hill Top Road from George Hill Road west 3000 ft.
- George Hill Road from Goss Lane to Sterling Road
- Old Common Road from Five Corners to Bolton town line
- Mill Street Extension from Old Common Road to High Street extension
- Carter Street to Pine Hill Road

Sidewalks need to be installed on all major roads.

Library

The Thayer Memorial Library's roots are imbedded in Lancaster's history. Established in 1862, its predecessor library was formed in the late 1700s. The Library, located on the Town Green, is part of the Center Village Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Thayer Memorial Library's most recent expansion and renovation was completed in 1999. The expanded facilities now allow for larger collections of adult and children's books and services, historical collection, rare book and artifact collections. The renovated Library facilities now meet all building safety regulations and codes. It is compliant with the access requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The renovations doubled the amount of available library space and provided two community meeting rooms available upon reservation during library hours or after hours by special arrangement.

Before FY2003, the Thayer Library served as the school library for kindergarten through fourth grade. Since that time, the Lancaster schools include substantial space for libraries that support the schools' curricula. Despite the predicted 15 per cent drop in circulation due to the departure of the public

schools, in FY2005 the Library's circulation had risen to 72,332, a 24 per cent increase from its FY2002 level. According to the Library Director, this is due to the public's enthusiasm about the library renovation, its new and improved film section, increases in adults and youth programs, and a staff dedicated to public service.

The Thayer Memorial Library is supported and operated in part by a dedicated cadre of volunteers as well as a full-time director and several part-time librarians and technicians. In 2004, these volunteers donated about 720 hours of services, saving Lancaster taxpayers almost \$6,000 in wages. The Thayer Memorial Library is a state-certified public library, which enables it to access the collections and services of over 330 other public libraries. To maintain this certification, and remain eligible for an annual state award of about \$9,000 the Library must meet state regulations for its annual appropriation as well as meet other standards for hours of service and materials purchased.

The Library trustees recently completed a five-year strategic plan whose goals are to continue to expand service hours and staff for general services and special collections and to reach out to potentially underserved populations in the community. Library needs over the next ten years will include renovations to the HVAC system that were not carried out during the 1999 renovation, parking lot resurfacing, possible roof work, and ongoing maintenance such as carpet replacement and painting of public spaces.

Cemeteries

There are seven cemeteries in Lancaster – Eastwood, North Village, Middleyard, Old Settlers Burial Ground, Old Common Cemetery, North Cemetery, and the Thayer Family Cemetery. With the exception of Eastwood, all cemeteries are full. Eastwood Cemetery contains 46 acres of land; less than half of this is developed, according to the DPW's Cemetery Division. As of the beginning of 2006, Eastwood has 40 grave lots available with room for about 40 additional lots. The DPW cemetery Division estimates there are about 50 burials per year in Lancaster, 15 of these requiring a new lot. Assuming the same burial rate, the remaining lots in Eastwood will be filled in about 5-6 years. At that point, some of Eastwood undeveloped land will need to be developed, along with an access road. The DPW estimates that Eastwood's undeveloped land can supply grave lots in Lancaster for another 100 years,

assuming the same burial rate.

According to Lancaster's Department of Public Works, the Eastwood Cemetery water system should be extended to include Border Avenue and the new avenue. Additional work required includes drainage installation at Oak and Maple Avenue, paving on Hope, Border, Deepdene, Crossgate, and new Avenues, Oak Avenue, and Pine and Crescent Avenues.

Communication in Lancaster

A major priority of the May and November 2005 citizen workshops in the master planning process was to improve communication between the Town and the public, the Town and its institutions, and among and in between Town departments, boards, and agencies themselves. A significant step toward this goal began in 2005 with periodic informational meetings among board representatives to discuss particular projects and issues organized by the Town Administrator. At these meetings, boards may communicate concerns and also provide insights which other boards or departments may not have considered. One board member suggests instituting a similar, but broader communications process involving businesses, residents, and planners with regard to major development proposals or pressing issues that come before the Town. The West Boylston Town-Wide Planning Committee may provide an example.

Capital Improvements Planning and Budgeting

The discussions above and the actions listed below make clear that the Town has a daunting array of capital facility improvements which would truly be "improvements" for the community, but the funding which could make their implementation possible is not easily found. No matter how successful the Town is in its economic development efforts, finding the means for meeting all of the identified capital improvements within a small number of years will be challenging. The response to that in many communities begins with a formal process of inventorying what capital needs have been identified by various department and interests, much as is being done in this *Plan* but ideally at a more detailed level.

Proposals are then translated into capital costs, and aggregate costs are summed and tested against available revenues. Following that comes scheduling the sequence of actions and methods of financing, and laying out a program for implementation over a

series of years, most commonly comprising the next fiscal year to come plus the five years beyond that.

Such a Plan ideally is prepared through an open public process, allowing for debate around the commonly painful choices which must be made to keep costs within revenues. When well done, such multi-year planning helps in gaining well-considered decisions, and when the planning is faithfully turned into actions, that planning gains credibility and becomes the basis for departments and even individuals to make their plans consistent with a more-predictable schedule of when critical public facilities will become available. Lancaster with its increasingly professionalized government clearly could carry out such a process.

A key part of capital planning is having and following adopted criteria for setting priorities, both with regard to overall fiscal guidance (e.g. a specified limit to the planned percentage of the annual tax levy to be committed to capital expenditures) and for project prioritization (e.g. priority for projects enhancing public health and safety or which encourage expansion of the Town's tax base).

One potential criterion for project prioritization can be consistency with plans which have been formally approved, such as not only a comprehensive plan but also such plans as a water system expansion plan, provided that such plans are not just consultant products accepted by some agency but rather are plans formally approved by some Town board.

Making that link between priorities for funding and consistency with planning has the ability to transform plan-making from being an exercise given little credence to becoming one of the most vital activities in town government.

When that happens, plans become subjected to far more serious scrutiny than would otherwise be the case, since those plans then would be highly consequential. That is demanding on the plan-makers, but results in far better planning and planning follow-through than would be the case otherwise. Given that link, comprehensive planning can move from being chiefly related to regulation and exhortation and take on another dimension of relevancy.

Truly linking capital funding and comprehensive and topical planning in such a way is not common, but it is well worth pursuing, and it appears to be within

the reach of this community.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Lancaster's goals for community facilities are to:

- Ensure that there are continuing links of correspondence between Lancaster's provision of municipal services, capital investment, and appropriate level of community growth.
- Continue to maintain a balance between appropriate service provision, community investment, and a moderated tax rate.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

The following actions are identified to implement Lancaster's goals for community facilities:

Process

- Manage the annual funding for planned capital improvements such as needed police cruisers, ambulance, fire engines, highway improvements, and Town buildings, through an annual capital improvement planning and budgeting process which links capital spending to consistency with Town-approved plans, including but not limited to this one, through a process aided by the Planning Board and its staff.
- Expand and institutionalize the process of interdepartmental meetings begun by the current Town Administrator to discuss particular development proposals. Investigate the West Boylston Town-wide Planning Committee as a possible model for Lancaster.
- Explore other ways to increase and foster communication between the Town and its citizens, the Town and in-town institutions, and between Town departments and agencies. Investigate increased use of the Town Web site as one alternative.

Schools

- Continue to support the planned class room addition to the Mary Rowlandson School, and expand and improve the school cafeteria.
- Inform the Nashoba Regional School District of annual changes in housing units in Lancaster.
- Proceed with the redesign and renovation of the former Central School to create needed additional space and reorganization of Town Department office space for greater efficiency.

Public Works

- Take steps to address the issue of water over-pumping in Town, including:
 - Investigating and locating a third well to increase Lancaster's existing water supply, and provide for adjacent land protection to protect water quality.
 - Developing public and private water conservation strategies and promoting these through public education.
 - Including impact on water demand as a criterion in new development approval, such as creating regulatory incentives for major users whose demands on either the Town system or the strained Wekepeke aquifer are reduced through water use conservation efforts.
- Increase water line capacity throughout the water supply system.
- Consider planning for the formation of a full-time sewer department to handle the upkeep and maintenance of the existing and new pipes being installed in the Sewer District. Clarify the responsibilities of the Sewer District Commission and the Department of Public Works concerning sewer lines, pipes, and maintenance.
- Pursue actions to correct the infiltration problems in the Lancaster Sewer District System that accounted for an estimated 57 per cent of wastewater average daily flow in

2005 found in the 2006 Weston & Sampson District wastewater study.

- Support and expand recycling efforts in Lancaster, and investigate alternative solid waste disposal strategies such as a "pay-as-you-throw" program. Investigate use of the former capped landfill as a location for an expanded recycling facility and solid waste operations.
- Consider creating a Town position for a recycling coordinator.
- Install sidewalks on all major roads.
- Recalibrate water service connection fees to require developers to provide mitigation funds for water system improvements and future water supply research.

Other Town Facilities

- Proceed with the redesign and renovation of the Tercentenary Building or one of the vacant school buildings for a senior/community center.
- Pursue plans and funding for design and retrofit of Town Hall for accessibility by persons with disabilities, for compliance with federal ADA requirements, for greater energy efficiency, and for the possibility of using renewable energy sources such as solar and/or geothermal heat/cooling.
- Plan for Eastwood Cemetery expanded lot availability in 5-6 years' time.
- Continue to support expansion of library services and hours, ongoing maintenance, and possible long-term upgrades such as HVAC and roof repair.
- Relocate ambulance service to the central fire station when its expansion is complete.
- Revise the 10-Year Capital Improvement Plan to reflect the higher cost of the needed platform ladder fire truck.
- Plan for a population and growth mapping and fire response study to determine need

and appropriate future location for a possible third fire station.

APPENDIX

“Lancaster Enrollment Projections”, New England School Development Council, November 29, 2005.

Report from Nashoba Regional School District Superintendent, December 22, 2005

Letter from Lancaster Department of Public Works, February 3, 2006

Letter from Lancaster Sewer District Commission, February 20, 2006.

Letter from Lancaster Commission on Disability, January 13, 2006.

Report from Lancaster Council on Aging, February 9, 2006.

Letter from Library Director, January 12, 2006.

Letter from Lancaster Town Administrator, December, 2005.

OTHER REFERENCED MATERIAL

Town of Lancaster Capital Improvements Plan, FY 2006

Annual Town Reports, 2003, 2004, Town of Lancaster.

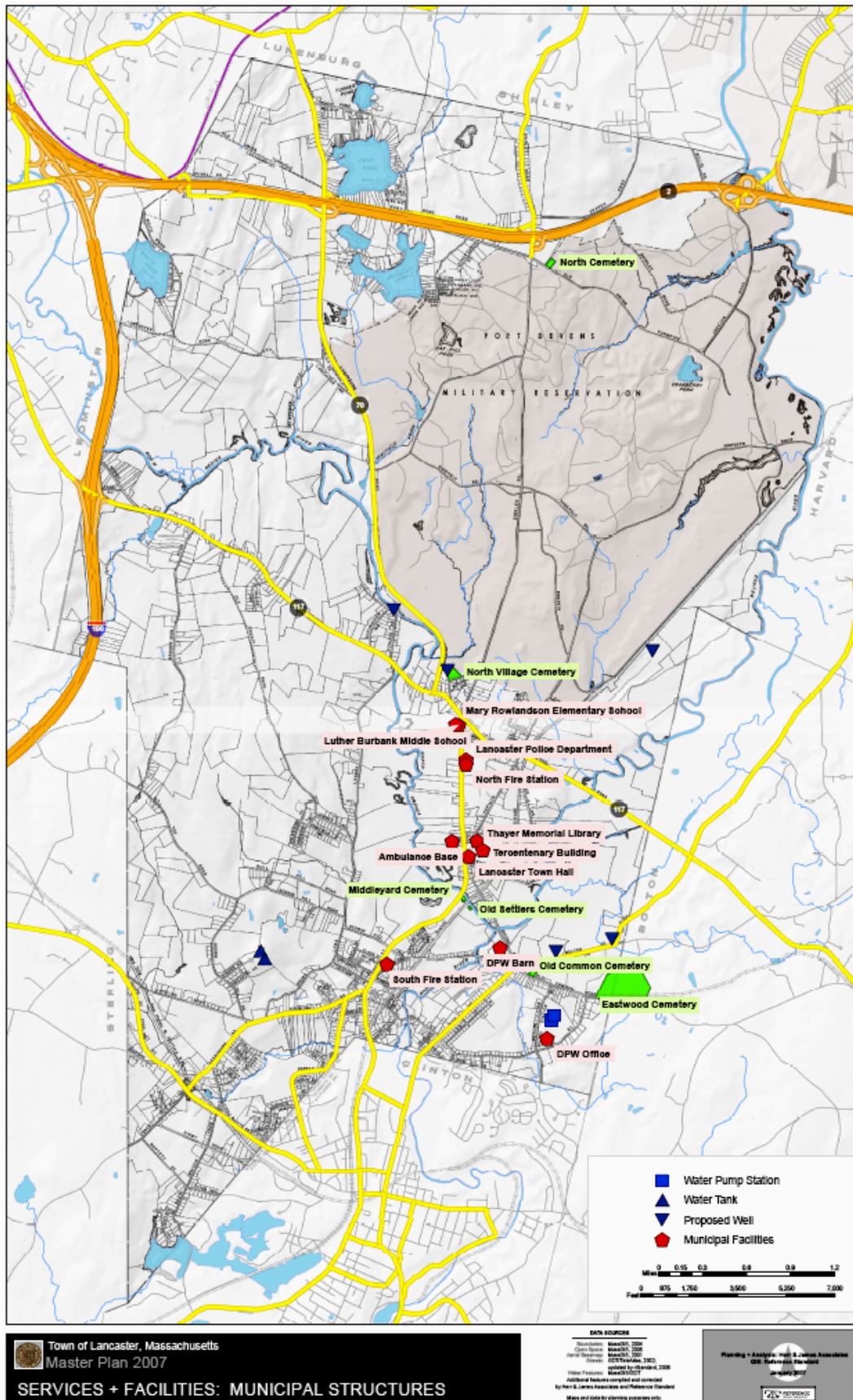
Lancaster Community Development (EO-418) Plan, Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, June, 2004.

“Lancaster Growth Projections”, Herr & James Associates, February, 2006.

Thayer Library Strategic Plan FY2006-2008, Trustees of Thayer Library, 2006.

Weston & Sampson Engineers, *Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan for the Lancaster Sewer District Commission*, April, 2006.

January 26, 2007 PLAN FACILITIES
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VIII. TRANSPORTATION & CIRCULATION

BACKGROUND

As of 2006, the private vehicle still dominates as the main mode of transportation and mobility in Lancaster. Many factors contribute to this – land use patterns that separate homes from shopping and school areas, regional growth and transportation patterns that make it possible for people to live far from their places of employment and few feasible alternatives to driving alone, such as public transportation, van pools, organized ride-sharing, walking, or biking. At the same time, there is a growing awareness in Lancaster of the importance and preference of walking and using bikes to driving cars, and also the need to increase these alternatives for young people who cannot yet drive to get to where they want to go. During the 2005-2006 master planning process, there were clear calls from citizen working groups to increase the options throughout town for people who wanted to see more alternatives for walking and biking.

The following Table illustrates the average amounts of travel time Lancaster drivers going to work took to get there, comparing the latest data for 2000 with that for 1990. Average commuting time increased by almost a third in that decade, and the share of workers driving themselves to work increased. The increase in driving a car alone and decreases in carpooling and use of other means of transport are reflective of trends occurring throughout the country.

LANCASTER RESIDENTS WORK TRIP MODES

Commuting Mode	1990	2000	% change
Drove car alone	75.2%	79.1%	5.2%
Car pool	10.7%	7.1%	-33.6%
Public transport	0.0%	0.3%	n/a
Walked	12.6%	7.3%	0.8%
Worked at home		5.4%	
Other	1.4%	0.8%	-42.9%
Mean min. to work	20.3	26.2	29.1%
Workers counted	3,255	3,087	-5.2%

Source: US Census 1990 & 2000.

Traffic

By all accounts, traffic in and through Lancaster has increased steadily and substantially through the last few decades. The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) has been monitoring traffic at many locations throughout its region over the past two decades, including several locations in Lancaster. Here are some results:

TRAFFIC CHANGES IN LANCASTER

Street Name	Location	Period	Av annual change
Local street traffic change			
Lunenburg Rd	S. of Rte 2 (Exit 35)	1988-2005	3.9%
Lunenburg Rd	N. of Main St (Rte 117)	1983-2003	3.8%
Lunenburg Rd	N. of Fort Pond Rd	1999-2005	3.7%
Lunenburg Rd	S. of Old Union Turnpike	1995-2005	3.2%
North Main St	E. of Interstate 190	1998-2004	3.0%
Seven Bridge	E. of Main St (Rte 70)	1983-2003	3.0%
Main Street	E. of Otis St	1980-2000	2.5%
Main Street	S. of Sevenbridge Rd	1983-2003	1.9%
Main Street	W. of Lunenburg Rd	1983-2003	1.9%
Shirley Rd	N. of Main St (Rte 117)	1983-2005	1.6%
Mill Street	W. of High St (Rte 110)	1980-2003	0.5%
Chase Hill Rd.	N. of Clinton Rd (Rt 62)	1984-2005	0.2%
Mill Street	Btwn Main & Sterling Rd	1984-2004	0.1%
Main Street	At Perkins School	1988-2005	-0.5%
High Street	S. of Old Common Rd	1980-2005	-0.6%
Major Highway traffic change			
Route 117		1992-1998	4.9%
I-190	N. of N. Main St	1983-2001	4.8%
Route 2	W. of Lunenburg Rd	1985-1999	2.0%
Trip generators change			
Population	Lancaster	1985-2005	0.3%
Employment	Lancaster	1985-2005	0.3%

Based Upon MRPC traffic counts, Census data, DET data, Herr & James analysis

An annual rate of almost 4 per cent growth per year, as on Lunenburg Road, means that traffic more than doubled in two decades. Other locations show a more moderate increase. Growth in Lancaster is not the major contributor: local population and jobs increased only about 5 per cent from 1985 to 2005.

The following Table shows the type of vehicles passing along Route 117 in Lancaster from surveys conducted by the MRPC in 1992 and 1998:

VEHICLE TYPE AND OCCUPANCY Route 117 in Lancaster

Consideration	1992	1998
Vehicle Types		
Passenger car	95.5%	93.1%
Light truck	1.5%	1.8%
Heavy truck	2.6%	4.4%
Motorcycle	0.4%	0.6%
Bus	0.2%	0.1%
Occupants per vehicle	1.2	1.3
Average daily traffic	11,392	29,500

Source: MRPC 2003 *Transportation Plan*

Similarly, a heavy truck goods movement survey conducted by MRPC noted a 45 per cent increase in the number of heavy trucks (weighing 10,000 lbs. or more) registered in Lancaster, from 89 in 1990 to 132 in 2001, and observed the following about truck movement through Lancaster¹:

There is considerable heavy truck use on the residential streets of Sterling, Old Common, and Deershorn Roads. Truck routing improvements may be needed at these locations.

- Heavy trucks are using a bridge deemed in need of repair located on Route 117 near the Bolton Town Line.
- Heavy trucks must detour around the railroad bridge on Main Street near the Clinton Town line.
- The Main Street Bridge (Route 70) and the Bolton Street Bridge have been sites where heavy trucks were involved in vehicular accidents.
- Better designation of preferred truck routes is needed on Carter Street.
- Route 117, east and west, especially near the intersection of Route 117 and 70, has road sections with steep slopes that could use better truck warning signs or escape ramps.
- Extra lanes on Route 117 east and west, especially near the intersection of Route 117/70 are needed to allow slow moving heavy trucks to pull over and let traffic pass.

Safety

According to data collected from the Mass. Registry of Motor Vehicles, Lancaster rated 6th highest in number of vehicles injuries, accidents, and fatalities out of the 22 MRPC communities during 1993-1995. During that time there were 457 vehicle-related injuries, four fatalities, and 669 accidents.

Quite a few of these accidents have occurred at some of the key intersections described in a section to follow. Additional roads to study for safety concerns are Gross Lane and Old Turnpike Road, which have

involved a number of fatal accidents.

Road Classification

Based upon a State classification system, Lancaster's 68 miles of roads comprise 2.0 miles of interstate roads, 15.6 miles of arterial roads, 13.7 miles collector roads, and 36.9 miles local roads, according to the MRPC 2003 Regional Transportation Plan. Repair or reconstruction on 8.9 miles of those roads is eligible for federal funds.

The road design standards which must be followed to make use of federal or state funds dramatically changed in January 2006 when the Massachusetts Highway Department adopted a *Project Development & Design Guide*, modernizing those rules. They now are far more context-sensitive than in the past, and friendlier to the environment, bicyclists, and pedestrians than in the past. While in the past many rural communities were hesitant to use those funds because of the standards which came with them, they now are far more accommodating to contexts such as Lancaster.

All streets in Lancaster are also classified on the adopted Zoning Map, and setbacks and landscaping rules differ on that basis (Sections 4.21, 13.43 and 13.44). New streets in subdivisions are also classified under subdivision regulations (Section 21 and later), based on different criteria than those of the Zoning or of the State/Federal system. The new *Design Guide*, available for download from the Mass. Highway Department, provides a good resource both for crafting revisions to such local rules and for designing improvements to key intersections in Lancaster, such as those described in the following section.

Key Intersections

There are several intersections throughout Lancaster that have been identified as needing study for possible signalization, redesign, and pedestrian adaptation. The Town has compiled a list (see draft Traffic Improvement Plan, Appendix) of several intersections in need of improvement, as well as railroad crossings. The Lancaster E.O. 418 Community Development Plan, the MRPC 2003 Regional Transportation Plan, and the MRPC September 2006 Lancaster Intersection Study also list some, but not all, of these intersections for improvements.

Deleted: ¶

¹ MRPC, 20003 Regional Transportation Plan

- 1) Route 117(North Main St)/Route I-190 intersection:

Lancaster's Community Development Plan contains a detailed operational and safety analysis of this intersection of I-190 ramps with North Main Street(Route 117), and recommends that actuated traffic signals be installed by 2010 if potential Lunenburg developments have not occurred that could help cover costs. The MRPC has included this intersection as one of the regional project needs in the 2003 Regional Transportation Plan. Signalization and possible redesign are two alternatives for study.

- 2) Route 70 (Lunenburg Rd) and Old Union Turnpike.

This intersection, located near entrance/exit ramps to Route 2, also is targeted in the Lancaster Community Development Plan, accompanied by an operation and safety analysis. It is also listed in the future projects summary of the MRPC Regional Transportation Plan. Possible improvements are signalization and redesign.

- 3) Route 70 (Lunenburg Road) and Fort Pond Road

This is the third of the three intersections targeted in the Community Development Plan (but not in the MRPC Plan or the Town list of targeted intersections). The Plan recommendation is to paint pavement markings on Lunenburg Road on the approaches to Fort Pond Road.

- 4) Route 70 & Route 117, north and south locations

These two intersections are targeted both by the Town and the MRPC Regional Transportation Plan. They may require signalization, a pedestrian signal cycle, and redesign. The south location may require grade changes on the east side to increase visibility. This area was identified as needing redesign and realignment in the 1967 "Background Studies for the Lancaster Comprehensive Plan" by Planning Services Group.

The following intersections are additional ones identified by the Town as needing study and improvement:

- 5) Route 70, Sterling Road, Mill Street

Possible signalization, pedestrian cycle, street narrowing.

- 6) Route 110, Old Common Road, High Street extension, Center Bridge Road, Bolton Road (Five Corners)

Possible signalizations, pedestrian cycle only, redesign to reduce five-way intersection to four-way, sidewalks, reduce curb cuts. This intersection as well was identified in the background study for the 1967 Master Plan for redesign and realignment.

- 7) Route 110 (High Street extension) and Mill Street.

Possible signalization, safety study, curbs, sidewalk, traffic calming approaches.

- 8) a) Deershorn Rd & South Meadow Rd
b) Deershorn Road & Ice House Road
c) Deershorn Rd, Chace Hill Rd, & Sterling St (Rte 62)
d) Ice House Rd & Sterling St (Route 62)

These four intersections within close proximity to each other as well as involving the Ice House Rd/rail crossing need to be studied as a group for possible redesign, road closings, and/or signalization.

Other sites to study for possible signalization include sites on Route 70 at the following locations:

Police and fire stations
Ambulance building
Perkins School entrance
Post Office
South fire station

Signalization at these locations should also be studied as a group, since signalization at five locations within a relatively short distance could create significant traffic congestion.

Railroad crossings

Lancaster presently has 12 at-grade rail crossings where roads cross actively-used railroad tracks. Eleven (11) of these are public crossings; one is with a private road.

MRPC, in its 2003 Regional Transportation Plan, has identified the following rail crossings that are in need of safety improvements. The first three of these are included with cost estimates in the Plan's summary of recommended regional projects:

a) Route 62 (Sterling Road) crossing: an accident occurred here in 1993. The rail tracks cross the intersection at an angle, creating potential for driver confusion. MRPC recommends installation of reflectorized gates. This crossing is included in the Town's list of priority crossings.

b) Seven Bridge Road (Route 117): two accidents occurred in here 1996 and 1997. Despite flashing lights and bell, drivers failed to see or hear the train. Traffic volumes are high on this road. MRPC recommends installation of reflectorized gates here as well.

c & d) Mill Street and Center Bridge Road: these crossings should be considered as well for reflectorized crossings. These are both among the Town's first priorities for gate installations.

Elsewhere in the Plan, MRPC recommends attention to these additional Lancaster rail crossings:

e) Rte 62/South Meadow Rd and Route 117: MRPC recommends installation of gates and a warning system at the railroad crossing here as well. This crossing is among the Town's top four priority crossings to address.

f) Kilbourn Street crossing: this crossing is marked only by a stop sign on one side of tracks. MRPC recommends a standard 'crossing' sign be placed on each approach to the crossing.

For locations of these intersections and railroad crossings, see the Transportation Map at the end of this chapter.

Bridges

MRPC's 2003 Regional Transportation Plan identifies 12 bridges in Lancaster – four of which are identified as functionally obsolete (but not structurally deficient)²:

² According to the Mass. Highway Department, 'structurally deficient' means a bridge that is considered unsafe. 'Functionally obsolete' refers to bridges that may not have a safety issue per se, but

Lunenburg Rd/Route 2
Shirley Rd/Route 2
Jackson Rd/Route 2
I-190 over Wekepeke Brook

The Regional Transportation Plan also identifies a bridge on Route 117 and another on Bolton Road as being functionally obsolete.³

Other Transportation Modes

PUBLIC TRANSIT

The MBTA commuter rail runs from Leominster along the northernmost Lancaster border with Lunenburg and Shirley. The nearest commuter rail stops to Lancaster are in north Leominster (Nashua Street), and in Shirley (Shirley Center, Front Street). At peak hours these trains run every 25-55 minutes and off-peak every 1-2 hours. The Massachusetts Regional Transit Authority (MART) and the MBTA are currently reviewing plans for a regional parking facility and rail station at Devens in Ayer/Shirley. Possible cost estimates for this station range from \$4.1-8.6 million in the 2003 Regional Transportation Plan.

The Worcester B&M Rail route passes through Lancaster as well as Clinton, Harvard, Ayer, and Sterling within the MRPC region, but does not stop in Lancaster.

During the citizen master planning workshops, a recommendation emerged to pursue locating a new commuter rail station in Lancaster. Because of the existing stations in North Leominster, Shirley, and a possible new station at Devens, it may be many years before MART and MBTA consider locating an additional station in this vicinity. Nevertheless, this can remain as a long-term objective in Lancaster's planning goals.

The Massachusetts Regional Transit Authority (MART) offers commuter rail buses in Fitchburg,

rather may not comply with federal regulations in some other aspect, such as slope, sight distance, or width relative to that of the road.

³ Bridge numbers : Route 117 bridge #LO2002; Bolton Road bridge #LO2025 (MHD and EOTC, as indicated in MRPC 2003 Regional Transportation Plan.

Leominster, and Gardner, but not Lancaster. MART offers rides for disabled persons and Dial-a-Mart rides to human service agencies for certain sections of Lancaster, but not for the entire town.

AIR TRAVEL

There are four municipal airports that serve Lancaster and the region – Fitchburg Municipal Airport (460 flights per day), Gardner Airport in Templeton, Shirley Airport in Shirley, Sterling Airport in Sterling. The largest of these, Fitchburg Airport, offers facilities for personal and corporate flights, air taxi services, scenic rides, and two aircraft maintenance companies. The Fitchburg Airport is located one mile from the North Leominster commuter rail stop.

BICYCLE PATHS AND TRAILS

There is already an existing network of trails in Lancaster, as illustrated on the Transportation Map and also on the Open Space & Recreation Map in the Open Space, Recreation, & Natural Resources Chapter of this Master Plan.

Upgrading existing trails and creating trails that connect existing open space and conservation lands in Lancaster was a priority that emerged from the 2005-2006 master planning process.

The MRPC 2003 Regional Transportation Plan includes the proposed Nashua River Bikeway as part of the Nashua River Greenway System. As described in the Open Space, Natural Resources, & Recreation Chapter of this Master Plan, the idea for the Nashua River Greenway system evolved out of Lancaster's 1967 Master Plan and has been endorsed and promoted by the Nashua River Watershed Association and the MRPC. The entire proposed Nashua River Bikeway would be 14 miles long and would connect the urban areas of Fitchburg, Leominster and Clinton. Its section in Lancaster would serve primarily recreational purposes. As a unique regional bikeway, this bikeway is eligible for 100 per cent state funding. MRPC will pursue the project in conjunction with NRWA, Fitchburg, Leominster, Lancaster, and Clinton.

Land Use & Transportation

Most of the transportation improvements discussed in this Chapter are *mitigating* measures – that is, measures designed to lessen the impact of traffic as it

increases. To be sure, these are important approaches to reduce the hazards created by traffic and to increase the safety of travelers throughout the community. What is also important, however, is to examine and start to address the conditions that generate traffic in the first place. These conditions almost always involve the way land is used for development, not only in the community-at-hand, but in the larger region. As both residential and business development spreads out from urban areas, supported by highway systems, people are able to live farther from the places they work, but forced to commute by private vehicles, especially when there is no easy or quick mode of public transportation. In Lancaster, much of the increasing traffic in the last two decades is residents and out-of-towners commuting from their homes to work, passing through Lancaster to access Routes 2 and I-190.

The substantial increases in freeway and major arterial traffic measured within Lancaster shown on the Table on p. VIII-1 substantiate this observation – increasing traffic is a regional phenomenon. To address a major cause of increasing traffic within its boundaries, Lancaster will need to join with its neighboring communities in a regional effort to slow down, and hopefully, eventually to reduce traffic volumes throughout the region. Such an effort will need to address issues of curbing sprawl through 'smart growth' land use and transportation strategies, involving changing land use patterns to make it more possible for people to live and shop near their workplaces and vice versa.

While this may seem like a monumental task, working through a regional planning commission such as MRPC makes an initiative such as this possible and feasible. Lancaster can also start to reshape its own land use regulations in the directions outlined in the Land Use Chapter of this Plan. That will also eventually bring about a reduction in traffic as people become more able to reach destinations with shorter and fewer vehicle trips.

Fiscal and Institutional Context

Lancaster appropriates about \$500,000 per year for Public Works services, most but not all of which goes for road maintenance and improvements. With 68 miles of roads that leaves little for funding improvements other than localized problem-solving. Under Chapter 90 the State allocates funds from Highway Bond revenues for local street work and related efforts under a formula which in recent years

has provided less than \$200,000 per year in Lancaster for reimbursing eligible expenditures. The “wish list” of needed improvements is far larger than such funding can cover.

Additionally, non-formula state and federal assistance to localities for streets and related transportation and related enhancements efforts is made annually through a process of allocation from the State to its Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), which for Lancaster is the Montachusett MPO. The MPOs in turn respond to municipal proposals for funding, placing them into an annually updated five-year plan, and then into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for the region.

In recent years the Montachusett MPO TIP serving 22 municipalities has scheduled about \$25 million annually for highway-related projects and \$30 million for MART, or about ten times as much per community as Lancaster appropriates for similar purposes. Even so, those funds fall far short of filling all regional needs, so the process for gaining funding is a highly competitive one, but one worth competing in, because that process is the basic source of most aid over and above the routine Chapter 90 distributions.

Some federal and state transportation funding comes via alternative routes. Transportation-related enhancements for historic preservation, open space protection, or similar efforts is supported through funds earmarked just for such enhancements of the transportation experience, so don’t have to compete with funding for bridges or transit. The areas at the Ponakin and Atherton bridges would be candidates. Finally, the General Court often earmarks funds for specific local projects, in effect short-circuiting the TIP process. It is a court of last resort for projects which for whatever reason appear unlikely to be funded through the usual channels within a reasonable period of time.

It has become routine that municipalities support the early design costs of projects proposed to be funded through the TIP. At the state level that is seen as a means of stretching scarce state dollars while also ensuring that there is a demonstration of strong local support for any proposed project.

Frustrations with the pace of that procedure have led many communities to in recent years reverse the tradition of localities providing infrastructure to

attract business. Increasingly, municipalities are getting businesses to participate in the costs of transportation improvements which relate to their development, thereby more rapidly gaining needed infrastructure. There are many variations on the approach, including use of gifts, fees, and earmarking of tax revenues from benefiting development through the state’s TIF and DIFF statutory provisions.

That context creates incentives for municipalities to plan a rich array of potential projects well ahead, and to also carefully assign priorities among them. It also creates incentives for municipalities to guide their development in ways which will reduce to the extent to which they impose unmitigated impacts on the transportation system.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Citizens at both the May and November, 2005 master planning workshops identified goals, objectives, and actions to improve the Town’s transportation and circulation. Based on that and on later studies these goals have emerged:

- Improved traffic control and flow throughout Lancaster, including better traffic enforcement and controls at key intersections.
- Enhanced mobility for those not able to drive or who choose not to use automobiles, including:
 - Lancaster being more bicycle-friendly, creating paths that connect destinations and designating bike lanes on major roadways.
 - Lancaster being more pedestrian-friendly, for example, installing sidewalks at key areas.
 - Other mobility support being provided, such as ride-sharing and public transportation.
- Land use and development being well-shaped for compatibility with transportation objectives, and transportation shaped to improve, not disrupt, neighborhoods.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

The following actions are identified to implement the above goals:

TRAFFIC MITIGATION

- Improve both vehicular and pedestrian safety throughout the Town through traffic enforcement, education, exhortation, and improved signage, in particular focusing on the main roads including Route 70, Lunenburg Road, Sterling Road and Main Street. Consider hiring another part or full-time traffic officer with costs to be recovered from citation revenue.
- Conduct traffic and redesign studies for key intersections listed in this Plan Chapter to reduce traffic accidents, and to enable safe pedestrian crossings and emergency vehicle access. Local participation in preliminary engineering costs is commonly critical to success in applying for state highway funds to defray detailed engineering and construction costs.
- Press for installation of railroad crossing gates and signals at identified locations in this Plan Chapter. If neither the railroads nor the State will take action, then seek funding through grants from the State's Highway Funds.
- Explore the possible establishment of truck routes to direct truck traffic along specific corridors. Particular attention for truck rerouting should be given to Sterling, Old Common, and Deershorn Roads, as recommended in the MRPC Regional Transportation Plan. Review potential proposals with the Mass. Highway Department
- Explore possible new road alignments to potentially reduce traffic congestion and neighborhood disturbance issues. Seek Mass. Highway Department input on any potential proposals which emerge.

ROAD STANDARDS

- Develop and adopt context-sensitive road standards for new subdivision roads to provide for road design appropriate to the differing characters of the Town areas (Town Center, Community, Enterprise, and Countryside, as described in the Land Use Chapter).
- Reconsider and potentially revise the existing classification of roads under zoning in light of the new MA classification and the potential use

of such classifications as one basis for setting intensity of use standards in the Zoning Bylaw.

BIKE-FRIENDLY ACTIONS

- Work with the MRPC, Fitchburg, Leominster, and Clinton to implement the long-proposed Nashua River Bikeway, seeking state and federal funding to accomplish this.
- Prepare a bicycle plan compliant with the new MA Highway *Design Guide* to assist in gaining funding support and to facilitate integration of street and bicycle planning.
- Develop paths and trails to connect the various conservation lands in Lancaster for both bicycle and pedestrian use. Amend Subdivision Regulations to require developer participation when land being subdivided contains a portion of such routes. In addition, seek both private donations and volunteer time to accomplish this.
- Designate bike lanes on major roads where feasible, such as along Routes 70, 117, 110 and 62. Include bike lane painting and signing as part of the street striping program that could be paid for through highway funds and grants.
- Pursue obtaining access to old Shirley Road through military conservation land (the future Oxbow area) for creation of a bike path connecting through Jackson Road and Devens.

PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY IMPROVEMENTS

- Conduct traffic and redesign studies for key intersections listed in this Plan Chapter to reduce traffic accidents, and to enable safe pedestrian crossings. Apply for state highway funds to defray costs.
- Provide sidewalks along major roads, in particular Routes 117, 62, and 110, in conjunction with any proposed street reconstruction or where new development occurs on adjacent land.
- Install benches along these sidewalks to create resting areas for pedestrians.
- Restore and enhance the Ponakin and Atherton bridge areas to create pedestrian and bicycle

opportunities. Possible improvements include creating picnic and fishing areas and bicycle parking. Seek funding through the federally funded Transportation Enhancements program, administered by the MA Highway Department.

- Through a resolution or other action, seek Town Meeting endorsement of a policy that roadway modifications should never, on balance, degrade either bicyclist or pedestrian accommodations. Wherever possible, they should improve accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians by fully as much as they improve auto accommodations.

LAND USE

- Implement the regulatory implementing actions of the Land Use Chapter of this Plan as a means of reducing in-town traffic over the long term.
- Revise land use regulations to include trip generation as a criterion for permit approval, using appropriate trip generation standards to ensure that the traffic generated by new development will be consistent with the Plan-intended capacity of the roads being impacted, with those planned capacities in turn being tuned for appropriateness in the different Policy Areas in Lancaster.
- Adopt zoning and subdivision regulation amendments ensuring that new developments over a threshold size make provisions for or contributions towards pedestrian and bicycle accommodation, including as appropriate either sidewalks or off-road trails, bicycle racks, and easy pedestrian access into business complexes.
- Amend zoning's parking controls to better ensure well-designed access between streets and large parking areas.
- Work with neighboring communities and the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission to find solutions to trip reduction, more compact, mixed-use land development patterns, and expanded public transportation throughout the region.

For example, in 2000 more than half of the jobs in Lancaster were held by residents of just Lancaster, Leominster, and Clinton, while more

than a third of all Lancaster resident workers had jobs in those same three communities. Is there a possible regional initiative to take advantage of that pattern to support alternatives to drive-alone?

OTHER

- Develop and establish a sponsorship program for parks and intersections ("Adopt-a-street") in Lancaster. Sponsors would provide some minimal landscaping maintenance and improvements such as plantings. Install signage at the locations to identify and acknowledge these sponsors.
- Explore establishment of a program for over time laying out and proposing for acceptance by town meeting those private roads which have been improved to meet standards to be established for such streets. Following acceptance, those streets would then be maintained by the Town and traffic enforcement by the Town would be enabled.

APPENDIX

Herr & James Associates, "Lancaster's Preparedness for Guiding Growth: A Diagnostic". November 9, 2005.

"Traffic, Transportation, & Mobility Topic Group Report", November, 2005

Bruce Hamblin, "Draft Traffic Improvement Plan, Lancaster Community Development & Planning Department," undated.

OTHER REFERENCED MATERIAL

Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, *Regional Transportation Plan 2003*.

Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, *Traffic Study of Selected Intersections for the Town of Lancaster*, September, 2006.

Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, *Lancaster Community Development Plan (E.O. 418)*, June, 2004.

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IX. IMPLEMENTATION

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 1941, just prior to the United State's involvement in World War II, "A Preliminary Country Life Report for the Town of Lancaster" was distributed¹, prepared by a town committee. It greatly resembles a master plan, although it is not so-titled. Just like this *Plan*, it featured a division of the Town into four kinds of policy areas, made future projections, framed goals for the Town and policies for the districts, and then recommended a series of just ten specific actions. The central thread through the document and the actions was preservation of the viability of the Town's agricultural industry in order to preserve the fundamental nature of the Town.

One of the 1941 report's recommendations was for the adoption of zoning. Nine years elapsed between the report's publication and the town's adoption of zoning in 1950. None of the nine remaining recommendations, which included such familiar ideas as creation of a recreation center for young people, appear to have been implemented. However, if that 1941 report importantly contributed to the climate of opinion that supported adoption of zoning in 1950, then perhaps the effort of the study was well justified.

Much has changed since 1941, including our understanding of how to improve the chances of achieving implementation of planning proposals. Plan documents don't implement themselves. Implementation of each specific action item requires an initiator, which can be an individual or an organization, in or outside of Town government, who brings it forward for action efforts. It also requires a proposal developer, again an individual or an organization, able to move the proposal forward from being only a briefly outlined direction into an actionable item, ready for a town meeting warrant or other decision-making point.

Implementation ideally doesn't await final completion of a comprehensive plan, even though the essence of such plans is to make connections across topical areas. Much can be gained from early action through how that can improve understanding and minimize the "propose/dispose" dichotomy which too often damages plan accomplishments

¹ Country Life Committee of Lancaster, "A Preliminary Country Life Report for the Town of Lancaster," August, 1941.

Reflecting that recognition, this Master Plan program has already included a number of steps towards implementation. First, several action items were taken to the first level of development as actionable items early in the program in order to meet requirements of a funding source, to gain understanding about the topics, and to address current concerns. As a result, first drafts of a number of items have been prepared. They include revised versions of Flexible Development and Major Residential Development provisions, new inclusionary zoning, earth products removal control, and town center zoning provisions. They also include a cluster of items related to support for agriculture: creation of an Agricultural Commission, a Right to Farm bylaw, zoning provisions for Agricultural Protection and Resource Protection.

Further, the program has budgeted time and funds for the initial development of a few further items towards being at an actionable level. The selection of those will be made reflecting the understanding hoped to be gained through the public hearing on this plan.

Choices also need to be made regarding how to structure the process for *Plan* implementation beyond the currently committed program. Some communities leave implementation initiatives to their planning boards. Some others create a special Plan Implementation Committee which acts as an initiator and developer for actions outlined in the plan.

Either a planning board or a special committee can and should also act as an advocate for policies and perspectives as well as initiating actions on specific proposals. Such should include long range and comprehensive viewpoints being taken on actions over time. The Board or committee should also act to gain incorporation of the learning from later actions into revisions to the Master Plan, making it truly the dynamic instrument which it should be.

It is often noted by planners that the half-life of a comprehensive plan is about five years. Comprehensive plan updates each five years are mandated by many states, including all New England states other than Massachusetts, and has been proposed by those seeking reform of Massachusetts planning law. Five-year updates of open space and recreation plans is required for state or federal grant eligibility for those topics. The American Planning Association's model for state planning legislation calls for a five-year major review of local comprehensive plans and their complete replacement after ten years. That further reinforces the concept of a master plan as a dynamic reference, not a static one.

To help in consideration of how to move forward with further implementation steps, the following table lists the action items currently contained in the *Master Plan*, noting the chapter of the *Plan* in which it is first suggested (some are repeatedly suggested, but not all repetitions are listed).

should be the lead in initiating and developing those actions. Actions upon which other actions depend or which are critical to a current issue are entered in boldface type. That doesn't mean that those are the most important actions, but rather just that delay for them could prove to be more costly than for others.

The table also indicates in the third column a tentative identification of the organization which

LANCASTER MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

(**Boldface type** denotes actions upon which others depend or are critical to a current issue).

ACTION	CHAPTER	LEAD
ORGANIZATION AND FINANCE		
Explore organizational change re sewerage.	Community Facilities	Selectmen
Create a Housing Partnership	Housing	Selectmen
Create an Economic Development Task Force	Economic Develop	Selectmen
Revise capital planning to explicitly reflect adopted plans.	Land use	Selectmen
Revisit participation in the Community Preservation Act	Housing	Selectmen
Create an Open Space and Recreation Coordinating Committee	OS, NR, Recreation	Selectmen
Assign above Committee to recommend use for available Town land.	OS, NR, Recreation	Selectmen
Adopt policy: no-degradation of pedestrian access to be allowed to result from road construction	Circulation	Selectmen
Expand recycling	Community Facilities	Selectmen
Explore joining a regional consortium for housing funding.	Housing	Planning Board
FACILITIES AND OTHER EXPENDITURES		
Pursue Mary Rowlandson school expansion	Community Facilities	School Dept
Reconstruct key intersections	Circulation	DPW
Railroad crossing gates	Circulation	DPW
Sidewalks on all major roads	Community Facilities	DPW
Tercentenary (or other) Building for a senior/community center	Community Facilities	Selectmen
Town Hall improvements	Community Facilities	Selectmen
Library improvements	Community Facilities	Selectmen
Other improvements.	Community Facilities	Selectmen
Explore creation of a Lancaster history museum	Historic, cultural	Historic Commission
Pursue various land acquisitions and restrictions	OS, NR, recreation	Conservation Comm
Improve trails and related facilities	OS, NR, recreation	Conservation Comm
Develop Nashua River canoe launch off Bolton Road	OS, NR, recreation	Conservation Comm
Pursue the NRWA plan's proposals	OS, NR, recreation	Conservation Comm
Develop new recreation fields	OS, NR, recreation	Recreation Comm
Approach MA Youth Soccer re occasional Town use	OS, NR, recreation	Recreation Comm
Improve Town beach facilities & functions	OS, NR, recreation	Recreation Comm
STUDIES AND PLANS		
Resolve wastewater management for North Lancaster	Land use	Selectmen
Study leveraging the Route 2/Rte 70 aggregation's magnet.	Economic Develop	Econ Dev Task Force
Integrate zoning & infrastructure planning along Route 2	Economic Develop	Planning Board

ACTION	CHAPTER	LEAD
Pursue Town Center, seek zoning, do other studies.	Land use	Planning Board
Prepare and follow a Planned Housing Production Plan.	Housing	Planning Board
Explore telecommunications as a tool for economic development.	Economic Develop	Planning Board
Explore new road alignments.	Circulation	Selectmen
Explore a gym and recreation center	OS, NR, recreation	Selectmen
Explore water supply and distribution improvements	Community Facilities	DPW
Pursue sewerage system Infiltration & Inflow	Community Facilities	DPW
Devise strategies for historic property preventive maintenance.	Historic, cultural	Historic Commission
Explore historic bridges as historic attractions	Historic, cultural	Historic Commission
LAND USE REGULATIONS		
Make trip generation a permit consideration under zoning.	Circulation	Planning Board
Parking buffer controls in zoning.	Circulation	Planning Board
Adopt Earth Products Overlay	Land use, Ec Dev	Planning Board
Get town meeting vote on Policy Areas	Land use	Planning Board
Modernize regulations for the Enterprise Areas	Land use, Ec Dev	Planning Board
Develop context-sensitive subdivision regulation standards	Circulation	Planning Board
Revise road classifications under zoning.	Circulation	Planning Board
Pursue bike accommodations.	Circulation	Planning Board
Oblige developments to provide pedestrian & bike accommodations.	Circulation	Planning Board
Explore “inclusionary” approaches	Housing, Land use	Planning Board
Explore expanding locations allowing multi-family housing.	Housing, Econ Dev, Land use	Planning Board
Update multifamily zoning rules.	Housing, Land use	Planning Board
Explore village overlay district.	Housing, Land use	Planning Board
Adopt Estate Preservation rules.	Housing	Planning Board
Authorize accessory dwelling units	Housing	Planning Board
Reconsider rate of development provisions.	Housing	Planning Board
Adopt continuing housing affordability rules.	Housing	Planning Board
Adopt means of assuring housing energy affordability.	Housing	Planning Board
Adopt agriculture-friendly zoning changes.	Land use, Econ Dev	Planning Board
Reconsider zoning rules and mapping for business town-wide.	Land use, Econ Dev	Planning Board
Revise Subdivision Regulations	Land use	Planning Board
Undertake “Dover Amendment” zoning enhancement re “exempt” institutional uses.	Land use	Planning Board
Revise site plan criteria, give business development “points” for creating open or recreation space.	OS, NR, recreation	Planning Board
GENERAL REGULATIONS		
Explore water demand management approaches	Community Facilities	DPW
Designate truck routes	Circulation	DPW
Recalibrate water fees so developers provide mitigation funds for water system improvements.	Community Facilities	DPW
Pursue a local historic district.	Historic, cultural	Study Committee
Adopt demolition-delay bylaw	Housing	Historic Commission
CONTINUING EFFORTS		
Safety-oriented enforcement, education, exhortation	Circulation	Selectmen
“Adopt-a-street” program	Circulation	Selectmen

ACTION	CHAPTER	LEAD
Enhance communication between town & citizens	Community Facilities	Selectmen
Create a “partnership” approach to development.	Land Use	Selectmen
Allow Conservation & Recreation Commissions priority for Town-owned lands before private use	OS, NR, Recreation	Selectmen
Work with MRPC re regional efforts at trip reduction.	Circulation	MRPC reps
Link business and the natural and cultural landscape.	Economic Develop	Econ Dev Task Force
Public education re preservation	Historic, cultural	Historic Commission
Seek grants or other funds to preserve cemeteries and bridges.	Historic, cultural	Historic Commission
Encourage participation in the APR program.	OS, NR, Recreation	Conservation Comm

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