

TOWN OF GRAFTON

MASTER PLAN

DRAFT ADOPTED: JUNE 23rd, 2025



COMMONWEALTH
OF MASSACHUSETTS



TOWN OF GRAFTON



CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS
REGIONAL PLANNING
AGENCY





TOWN OF GRAFTON



A COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN PREPARED WITH TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (CMRPC), AND FUNDING FROM THE MASSACHUSETTS EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, THE TOWN OF GRAFTON, MASSACHUSETTS, AND THE CMRPC DISTRICT LOCAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (DLTA) PROGRAM.



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GLOSSARY

VISION STATEMENT:

A statement that describes a community's long-term aspirations based on shared purpose and values. Expresses uniqueness and standards of excellence, focusing on people and quality of life. Provides a framework or hook upon which to hang ideas or information. The foundation that supports more specific goals and objectives.¹²

GOAL:

A general statement about desirable future conditions the community seeks to achieve to realize its vision for the future.

OBJECTIVE:

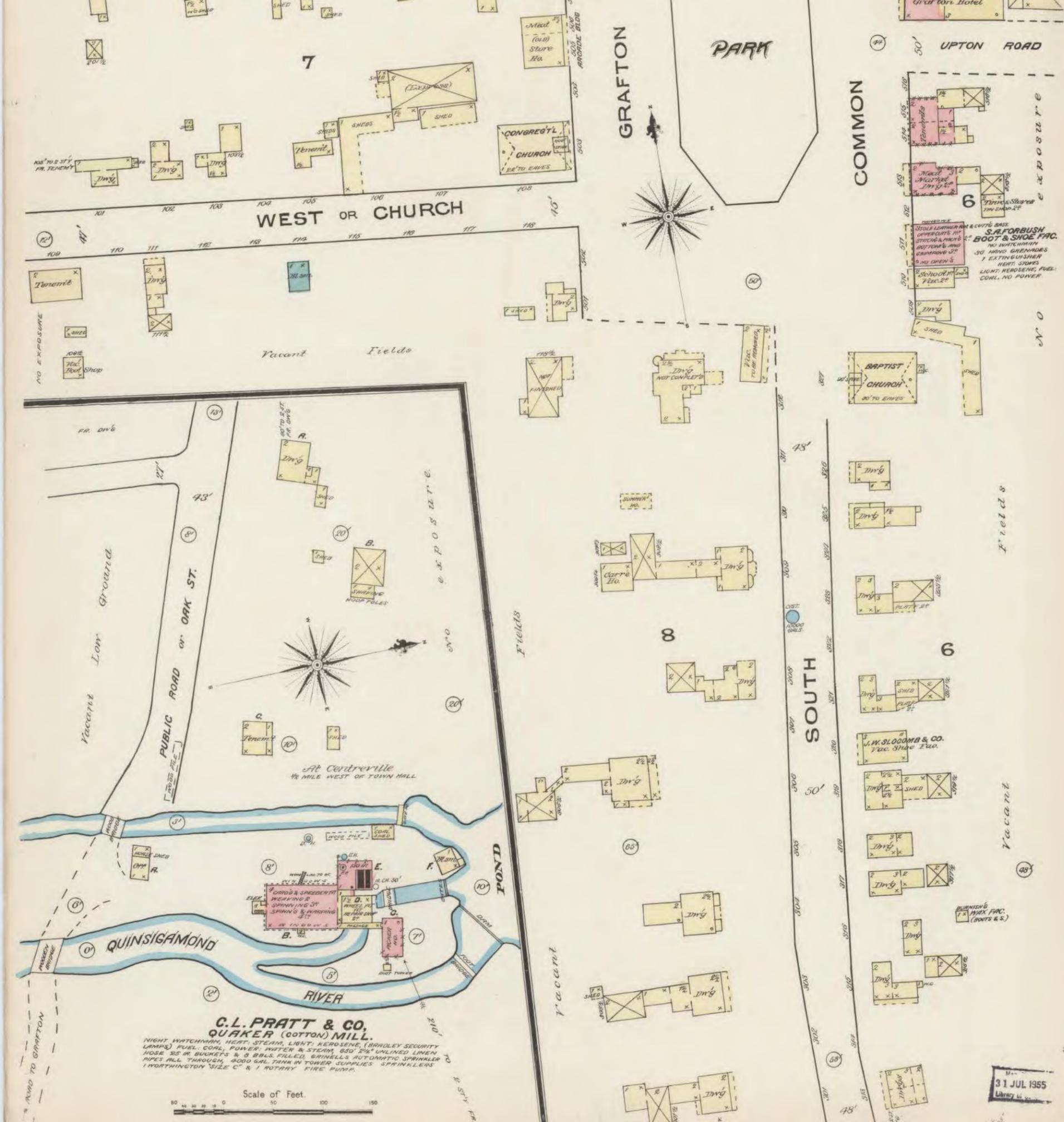
A statement of specific and measurable outcomes in furtherance of a certain goal; a condition that must be attained to accomplish a goal.

ACTION ITEM:

A task carried out within a specific time frame as part of the strategy to achieve an outcome; a directive intended to guide the implementation of objectives.

¹ For a discussion on developing policies, goals, objectives, and action items, see, Rouse, David, and Rocky Piro. *The comprehensive plan: Sustainable, resilient, and equitable communities for the 21st century*. Routledge, 2021, 41.

² Haines, Anna. "Using Visioning in a comprehensive planning process." *University of Wisconsin Extension* (2001).



WHAT IS A MASTER PLAN

Sometimes referred to as a "comprehensive plan," a Master Plan is the foundational policy document for local governments. It establishes a framework to guide public and private decisions about future growth, preservation, and change within a municipality over ten to twenty years.

The Master Plan was created by Grafton residents and is a statement of how the community plans to navigate development, economy, and social change. The plan was developed using accepted frameworks and best practices, but is a product of local effort and input. It summarizes community preferences and should be used to guide town leadership and voters when decisions on spending, infrastructure projects, and zoning are made.

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 41, Section 81D requires planning boards to prepare Master Plans for the communities they serve. Master Plans should be regularly updated to reflect community changes and priorities. The Town of Grafton undertook its master planning process in accordance with these provisions.

The implementation matrix at the end of this plan provides timelines, priorities, and required stakeholders for each recommendation.

It is important to note that in Massachusetts, master plans do not create, mandate, or implement anything. This plan is a roadmap based on conditions and priorities at the time of plan publication. It is expected that the needs of Grafton will evolve over the lifespan of this Plan.

The benefits of having a Master Plan include:

- Consistency in decision-making
- Ability to make informed decisions
- Predictability in land use
- Wide use of departments, boards, and committees
- Preservation of community character
- Renewed civic engagement and interest

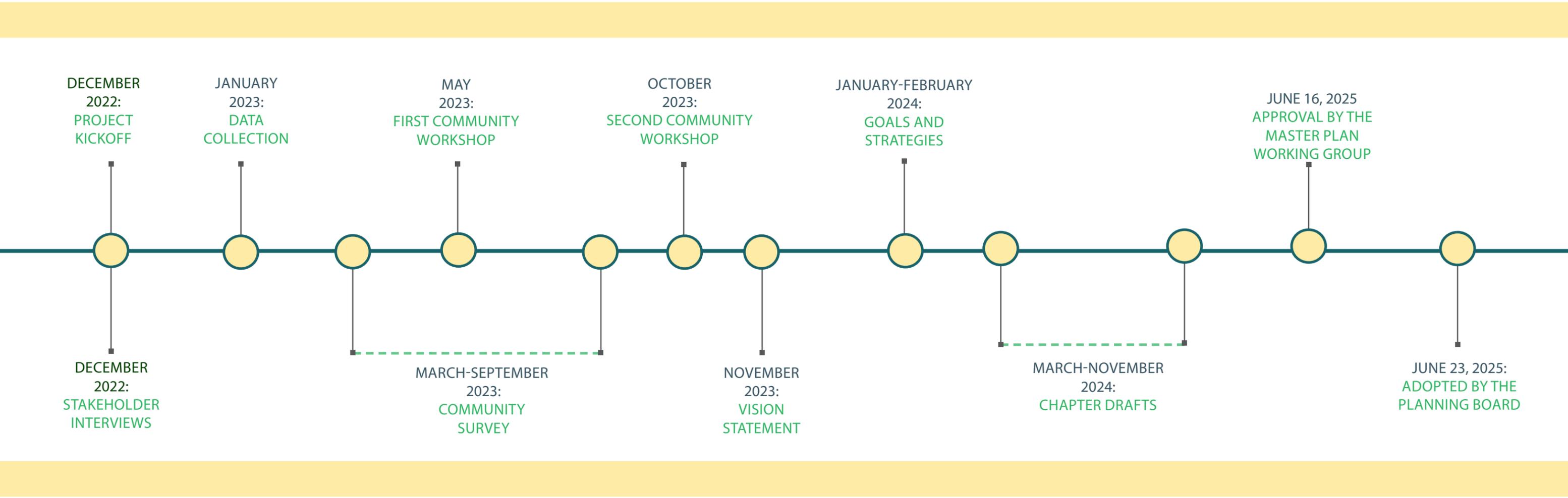


GRAFTON RESIDENTS' VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Welcome to Grafton! Our community is a thriving, mid-sized town with a small-town feel. Our commitment to inclusivity is reflected in the town's supportive and sustainable neighborhoods. As our community continues to grow, residents are accommodated through a diversity of housing for families of all income levels. We continue to diversify our multi-modal transportation system, so our streets are safe for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike. The town continues to balance growth to build a strong economic base while preserving our cherished natural landscapes and cultural resources. A welcoming and accessible town, Grafton continues to steward the land and support the rights and interests of Indigenous People. To prepare the next generation for their role as responsible citizens, our schools promote excellence in education and lifelong learning.



PLAN TIMELINE





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Overview

Grafton, a historic yet rapidly changing town in Central Massachusetts, is home to approximately 20,000 residents. The town's strategic location- adjacent to Worcester and near the Massachusetts Turnpike- ensures convenient access to major cities like Boston, Hartford, and Providence, positioning it as a commuter-friendly destination while maintaining its historic development patterns and rural character.

Historical Development Patterns and Contemporary Growth

Grafton was incorporated in 1735 and has since transitioned from a small rural community into one of the fastest-growing towns in Central Mas-

sachusetts. Its evolution has brought challenges, such as balancing economic development and housing construction with environmental preservation, but it has also provided opportunities for revitalization and innovation. With an attractive town common, three village centers, and natural resources like the Blackstone River and surrounding open spaces, Grafton retains its historic character even as it continues to accommodate growth. Recent efforts to draft village plans and update the Open Space and Recreation Plan underscore the community's commitment to shaping the direction of its development thoughtfully.

Economy and Industry

Grafton's economy features a strong base in manufacturing, supported by companies like Washington Mills and Wyman-Gordon. The town



has great potential to capitalize on life sciences and advanced manufacturing. The establishment of the Grafton Science Park, an 84-acre commercial park adjacent to Tufts University's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, has positioned Grafton as a hub for biotech development. With a platinum-level "bio-ready" certification from the state, the town has attracted high-paying jobs in this sector. Additionally, Grafton has a diverse mix of employers in retail, education, and other services, contributing to its economic resilience.

Transportation and Connectivity

A commuter rail station in Grafton enhances its appeal for those working in Boston and Worcester. The town's transportation infrastructure also includes limited WRTA bus service and ongoing initiatives to improve walkability and bikability. A recent Complete Streets prioritiza-

Grafton has put a significant amount of work into developing multiple plans. As residents have expressed in our community workshops, implementation is a priority.

tion project focused on developing sidewalks to better connect neighborhoods and commercial areas. However, transit options remain limited for accessing local resources, highlighting the need for expanded multi-modal transportation strategies. The transportation chapter assesses these needs and recommends actions for improving transportation infrastructure in the next 10-20 years.

Land Use and Housing

Grafton's land use is predominantly residential, with 87% of its zoning dedicated to hous-





ing. Most residential zoning is for single-family homes on large lots, though the town is actively exploring ways to diversify its housing stock. Efforts include permitting affordable housing projects under Chapter 40B and considering zoning changes to promote townhouses, condominiums, and multi-family housing. These initiatives aim to address rising land use costs and a growing demand for varied housing options.

Since 1980, Grafton has seen significant land development, with nearly 2,509 acres developed for residential use. Despite this growth, 15% of the town remains as permanently protected open space, reflecting a commitment to preserving its natural environment. Future goals outlined in the Land Use chapter include evaluating parcels for potential development and aligning zoning to support mixed-use, village-style growth.

Community and Quality of Life

The people of Grafton are the Town’s greatest asset, with high levels of volunteerism and civic engagement contributing to the town’s sense of community. Public schools are recognized for delivering high performance relative to lean funding, and the Town offers a variety of recreational and cultural amenities. Grafton’s history is evident in the architectural character of its village centers and historic buildings, which the community continues to prioritize for preservation and adaptive reuse.

Challenges and Opportunities

Rapid growth has brought challenges, including strains on infrastructure, public services, and the environment. The town faces the dual task of maintaining its historic identity while embracing its future potential. Grafton’s focus



on transit-oriented development, infrastructure upgrades, and strategic economic planning reflects its proactive approach to these challenges.

Efforts to revitalize areas like North Grafton exemplify this strategy. North Grafton, a historic industrial hub anchored by Washington Mills, is being reimagined to enhance walkability, improve commercial activity, and attract new businesses. Proposed improvements include upgrading parks, adding sidewalks, and creating vibrant public spaces to foster a more connected and thriving community.

Public Services and Regional Collaboration

Grafton routinely partners with neighboring municipalities to deliver cost-effective services,

including emergency response mutual aid. The Town also maintains a five-year capital improvement plan to address infrastructure, facilities, and service needs. Future priorities include expanding utilities, maintaining public buildings, and enhancing recreational spaces.

Vision for the Future

Grafton’s transition from a rural town to a suburban hub underscored the importance of strategic, long-range planning. Town board members and residents have shaped a vision that balances economic development with environmental stewardship and quality of life. Whether through fostering life sciences innovation, increasing housing diversity, or enhancing public spaces, the Grafton Master Plan charts a path toward sustainable growth while preserving Grafton’s historic roots and community values.





COMMUNITY INPUT & PARTICIPATION



Community Input and Participation

Community engagement is essential to effect planning processes. It is the basis upon which CMRPC conducts its planning work- community desires, preferences, and needs directly inform the goals and strategies of the Master Plans we develop. Community engagement served as the foundation of the Grafton Master Plan update. In March of 2023, a Facebook page and a website were created to spread information about the Master Plan update. The website included information on CMRPC and Town of Grafton contacts, the link to the Community Survey, and invitations to workshops.

The Community Survey

The Community Survey was developed in February of 2023. Questions spanned all master plan topics, including land use, housing, economic development, transportation, public services and facilities, open space and recreation, and natural and cultural resources. The survey

Table 1: Race and Ethnicity Distribution among the survey respondents

Comparing Race/Ethnicity Distribution Town of Grafton & Respondents		
Race/Ethnicity	Town Pop., 2021	Respondents
White Alone	89%	75.5%
Black or African American Alone	2%	0.70%
Some Other Race Alone	2%	6.60%
Two or More Races	7%	N/A
Hispanic	7%	2.60%
Decline to Answer	N/A	17.10%

Residents want a revitalized community with modern amenities, while seeking to preserve their way of life and the town’s rural character.

was distributed through paper copies at the Public Library and Municipal Center and on-line distribution through Facebook, the Town website, the Grafton Master Plan website, and Town of Grafton contact lists. Flyers were posted around prominent businesses to promote the survey. A press release to local print and media outlets announced the Master Plan effort and provided the link to the survey.

Survey Respondent Demographics

Demographic information was collected to understand areas of the population that are overrepresented or underrepresented by these survey responses in comparison to the demographics in Grafton’s population. Around 17% of respondents declined to answer demographic questions, leaving a high margin of error.



SIDEWALKS: WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Millbury St. Elementary School area. Students & residents reported unsafe conditions and walking on the road.

“Close the Common to cars on specific weekends, as case study for longer term options.”

“Collaborate with state for 140 solution.”

“Redo the area around the Common (heavy traffic & pedestrians).”

Community Workshop, October, 2023

35
PARTICIPANTS IN THE JULY 2023 VISIONING WORKSHOP

427+
RESPONDENTS TO THE 2023 COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN SURVEY

75
PARTICIPANTS IN THE OCTOBER 2023 COMMUNITY WORKSHOP



Figure 1: Comparing the age distribution of Town of Grafton Population and Respondents

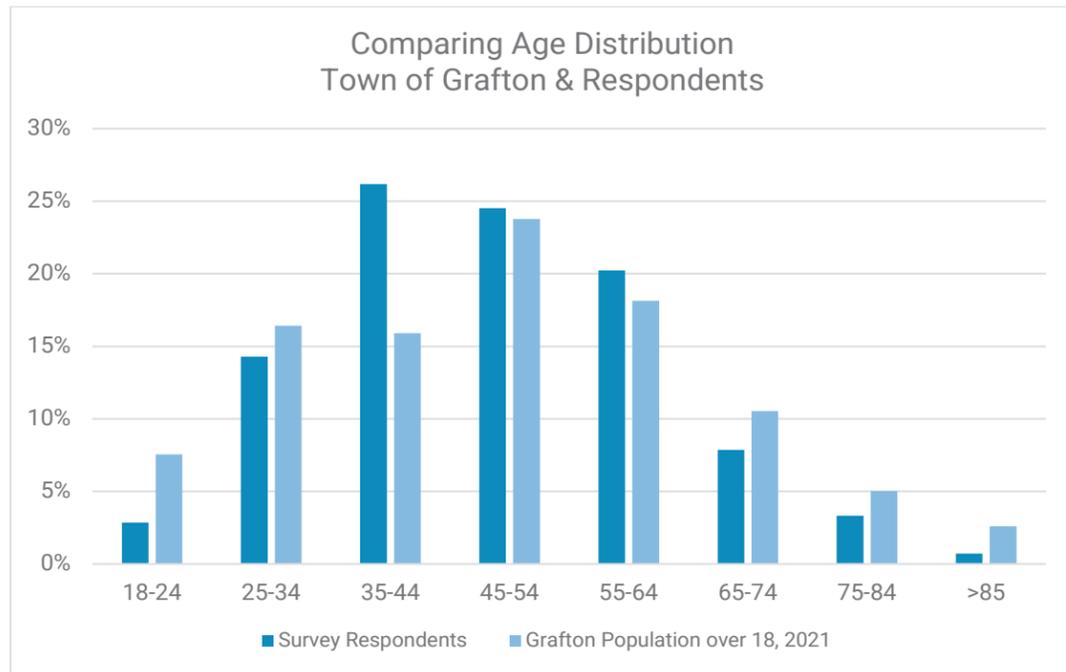


Figure 2: Estimated combined Family Income of Grafton 2021

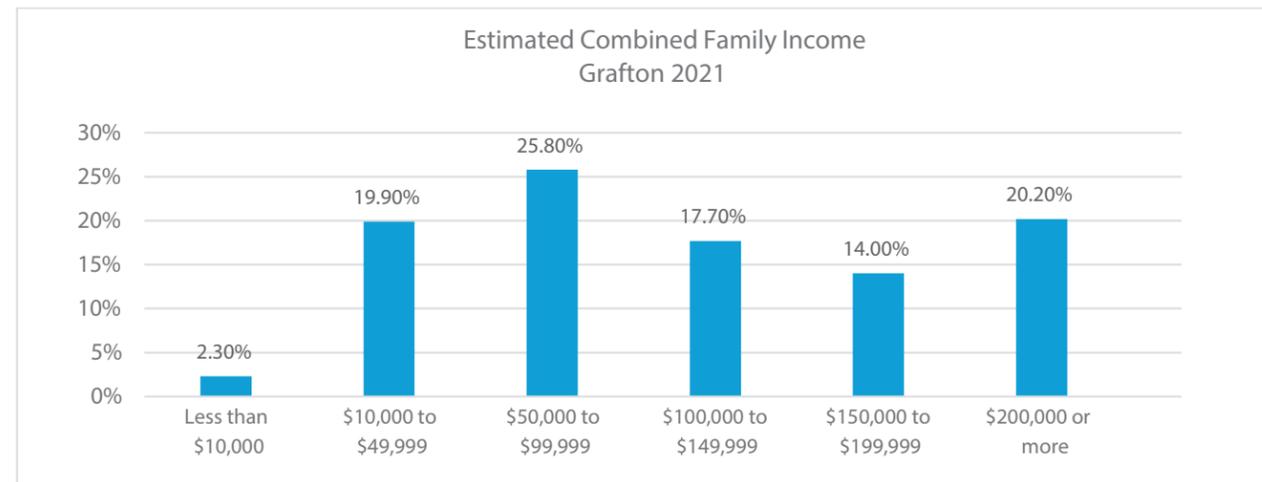
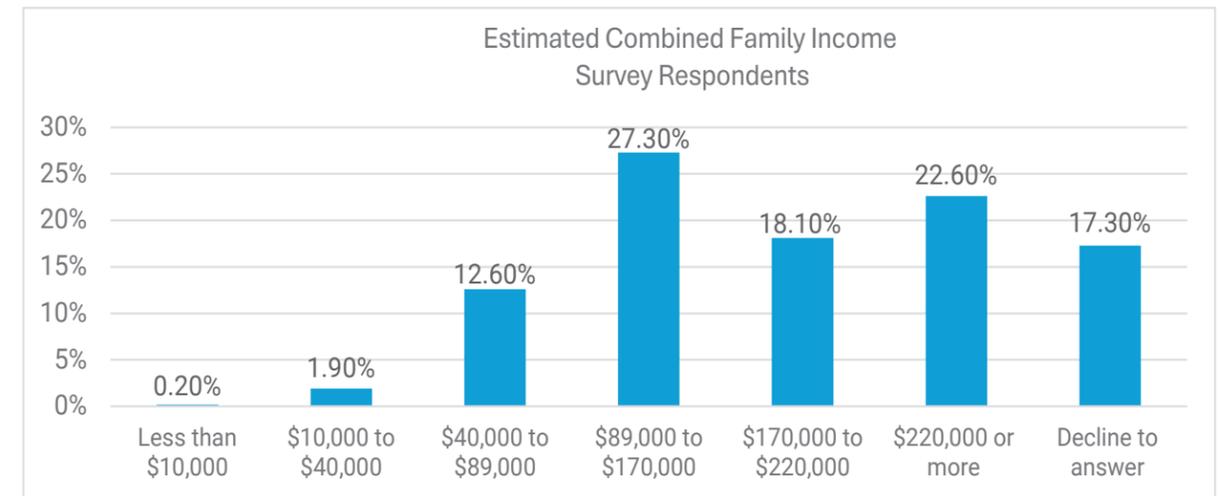


Figure 3: Estimated combined Family Income of the Survey Respondents



Survey Results

Figure 4: Survey response on balancing housing needs and open space preservation.

The 2020 Grafton Open Space and Recreation Plan found that more than 2,100 acres of new development was located on former farms and forests since 1971. How should Grafton balance future housing needs and open space preservation?

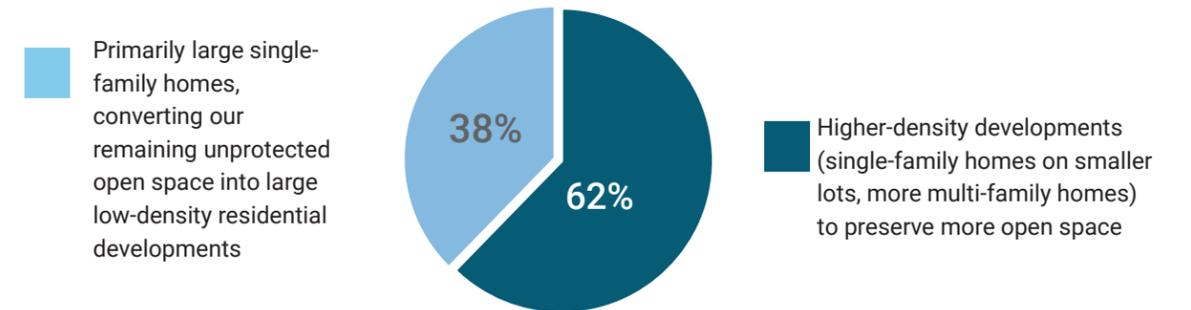


Table 2: Survey Response to increase involvement in local government.

What would increase your involvement in local government?	
More public awareness about opportunities for public participation	73%
Improved communication with Town departments	38%
Accessibility of meetings (time of day, location, inclusivity)	36%
More opportunities for volunteering	28%
More opportunities to serve on boards and committees	20%
Other	17%

Table 3: Survey Response on types of businesses.

What types of businesses would you like to see in Grafton?	
Drinking and eating establishments	78%
Small businesses/microenterprises	77%
Larger commercial stores	34%
Industrial/light manufacturing	28%
Other	7%
Open-ended answers include: Recreational Opportunities, Healthy Food Options, Entertainment	

Table 4: Survey Response on recreational opportunities

What recreational opportunities would you like to see more of?	
Expanded Use of Lakes/Ponds	67%
Hiking Trails	65%
Playgrounds/Parks	52%
Biking Trails	50%
Picnic Areas	40%
Athletic Fields	26%
Fishing	25%
Other	15%
Open-ended answers highlight: Dog Park (11), Pickleball Courts (9), Sidewalks (6)	

MOBILITY:

Most residents use cars for everyday transportation.

People would like to bike, but non-existent infrastructure makes many residents apprehensive.

Only a few participants mentioned the MBTA station as a frequent destination.

Community Workshop, 2023



Table 5: Survey Response on future development

Which of the following options for future development would you support in the...					
Grafton Historic Common		South Grafton Mill Village		North Grafton Mill Village	
More diverse business opportunities in existing buildings	59%	New mixed-use development (retail on lower floor, housing on upper floor)	63%	New mixed-use development (retail on lower floor, housing on upper floor)	59%
New mixed-use development (retail on lower floor, housing on upper floor)	54%	Increased opportunities for river access	56%	More diverse business opportunities in existing buildings	53%
Building façade improvement program	30%	More business opportunities in existing buildings	47%	Small-size multi-family housing	39%
Small-size multi-family housing	22%	Small-size multi-family housing	38%	Building façade improvement program	38%
More flexible design guidelines	19%	Building façade improvement program	27%	More flexible design guidelines	26%
More restrictive design guidelines	17%	More flexible design guidelines	25%	More restrictive design guidelines	13%
		More restrictive design guidelines	9%		



Public Workshops

June 21st, 2023: Attended Grafton Farmers' Market

Members of the Grafton Master Plan Working Group and CMRPC attended the Grafton Farmers' Market on June 21st, 2023 to share word of the Master Plan update, promote ways to get involved, and collect answers to the questions "What do you love about Grafton?" and "What are Grafton's Opportunities for Improvement?". 158 responses were collected.

Key Findings

What do you love about Grafton?

Top 5 answers:

- The people/community

- The Common
- Open Space/Landscape
- The Businesses
- Small Town Feel

What are Grafton's Opportunities for Improvements?

Top 5 Answers

- More Businesses
- More parks/recreation opportunities
- Traffic calming and road restructuring
- More sidewalks
- Housing that is affordable

July 11th, 2023: Public Workshop 1, Apple Tree Arts

The first Master Plan workshop was held at Apple Tree Arts on July 11th, 2023. Approximately twenty-five residents were present. The CMRPC team presented preliminary findings





GRAFTON

Master Plan

The updated Master Plan will serve as a vision and policy guide for the Town. Below are two opportunities to engage with the process & help guide Grafton's future

1. SURVEY	2. WORKSHOP
<p>Take the 10-minute survey on your experiences working, living, and enjoying the Grafton community.</p> <p>Results of the survey will inform the Master Plan's top priorities</p> 	<p>July 11th, 6:00-8:00 pm AppleTree Arts</p> <p>We will create Grafton's Vision Statement & discuss findings from existing conditions and survey results.</p> <p>RSVP on Facebook</p>

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 /GraftonMasterPlan

from the previous Master Plan process, data analysis, and survey results to begin the process of strategy articulation. Participants also weighed in on a potential vision statement.

October 19th, 2023: Public Workshop 2, Grafton High School

The second Master Plan community workshop was held on October 19th, 2023. This workshop took place in the cafeteria of Grafton High School. Participants walked through activities focused on each master plan chapter. The top themes from each table activity are below.

Top Themes:

- Grafton residents prioritize sidewalk expansion, especially around schools.
- Participants value community in Grafton, and would like to see an increase in opportunities to build connections.

- Residents value the Town Common's character, but would prefer safer streets for multi-modal transportation.
- Participants value opportunities for recreation, especially playgrounds and spaces around water features.

Table 1: Sidewalks

What did we hear?

Sidewalks needed in the following areas:

- Millbury St. Elementary School area. Students & residents reported unsafe conditions and walking on the road.¹
- "Close the Common to cars on specific weekends, as case study for longer term options."
- "Collaborate with state for 140 solution."
- "Redo the area around the Common area (heavy traffic and heavy pedestrians)."

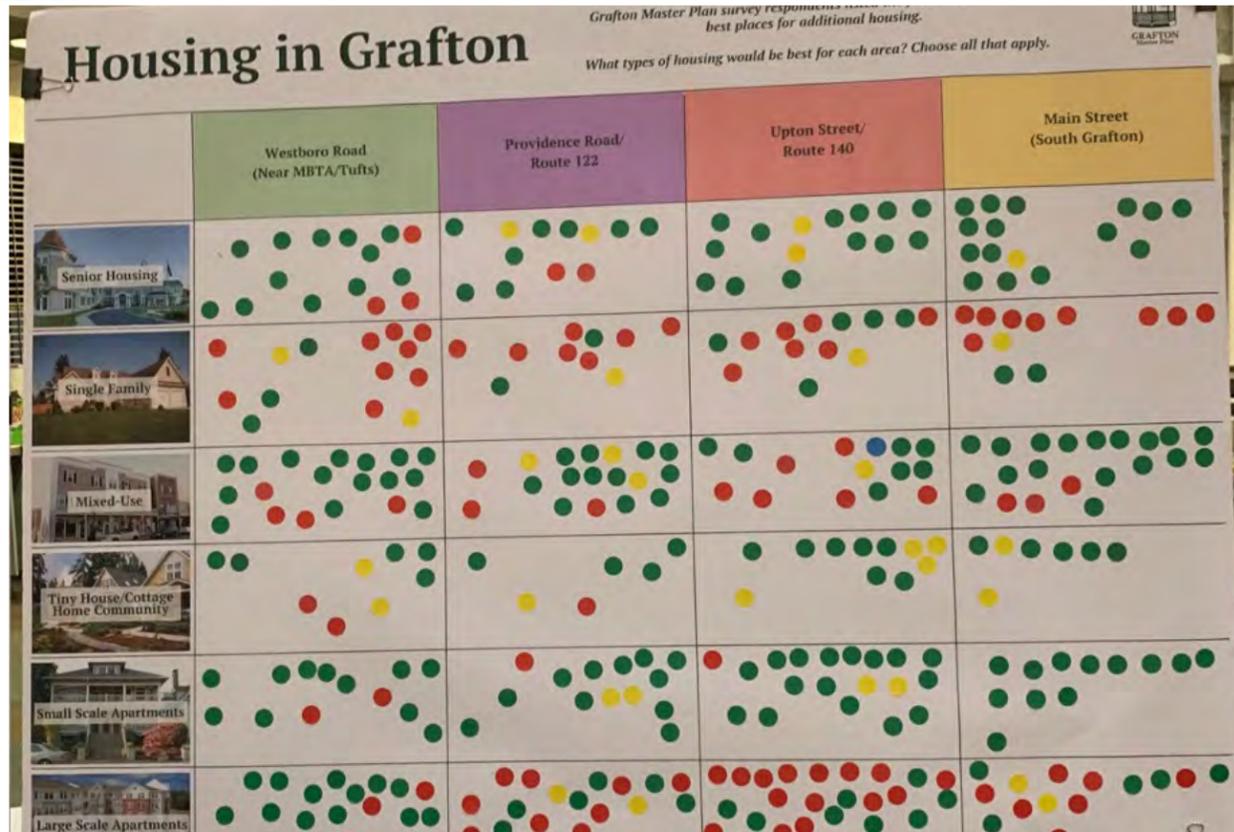


Table 5: Housing

What did we hear?

- South Grafton is great spot for mixed use – needs investment
- Senior housing is a priority
- Large lot, expensive single family home trend is not sustainable

Table 6: Economic Development

What did we hear?

- Town Common and South Grafton (Main Street) are priority areas
- Traffic, parking, safety, and walkability are top concerns
- Mixed use development preferable

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION:

Fisherville Pond needs weed management & better signage

Lake Ripple needs more trash disposal and markers for activities

Silver Lake needs parking “when not open” and accessible trail maps

Quinsigamond River/Ekblaw Landing access can be improved

Community Workshop, October, 2023



Table 7: Quality of Life (Community in Grafton)

What did we hear?

- Many people desire more opportunities to engage with the Grafton Community
- Top Existing Supports: food bank, pickle ball, religious institutions, neighbors
- Top Requested Supports: Rail Trail, Walkability (trails and streets), entertainment offerings

Table 8: Visioning

What did we hear?

Community

- “Inclusion” x5
- “People” x6
- “A welcome community”

Open Space

- “Saving as much open space as possible. Once it’s gone its hard to get back”
- “Natural beauty” x2

Small Town Character

- “A charming New England town...”
- “Tight knit”

Education

- “Education for all”
- “Education” x7

Balancing housing & open space needs

- “Smart Growth”
- “Well balanced”
- “friendly, diverse community with lots of open space and plenty of affordable housing”

Economic Development Work-

A Vision for Grafton

What is a Vision Statement for a Town?

The Town identifies their purpose, core values, and a vision for the future. A community can define the future it wants.

- Include:
- Qualities that make Grafton unique
 - A focus on people & quality of life
 - Emphasis on Grafton’s assets
 - Important issues
 - Shared values
 - An ideal future

GRAFTON is a small Town with a strong sense of community made up of historical New England villages and new neighborhoods, whose residents are its most vital asset, where pastoral landscapes are valued, where open space preservation is considered integral to our town’s character, and where carefully-planned residential as well as non-residential development enhance the community’s economic stability.

Town of Grafton Vision Statement (2001)

	In 20 years Grafton will be...	Grafton should be committed to...	Grafton will be a town that values...
2023 Vision	vibrant friendly prosperous welcoming accessible thriving growing tight-knit	transportation preservation recreation social justice community education housing inclusivity	people community natural beauty open space conservation history livability

Fill out the worksheet to suggest ideas for the updated vision statement

shop January 24th, 2024

In partnership with Grafton Economic Development Commission, CMRPC and the Town of Grafton invited business owners to a night at Post Office Pub for networking and sharing ideas. The Master Plan team gathered insight from one on one conversations on easing cost of doing business, potential partnerships between business owners and the Town of Grafton, and additional services to benefit residential quality of life.



HOUSING & POPULATION



Overview

A vibrant, desirable town of distinct villages and neighborhoods, Grafton is home to a community that values its small-town charm and historic character. The town has evolved in the last several decades, experiencing notable population growth, demographic shifts, and newly constructed homes. While Grafton has embraced this growth, the town still faces challenges related to affordability, sustainable land use practices, and diverse home options.

This Master Plan chapter evaluates Grafton’s current and future housing needs by examining

population and household trends, housing stock conditions, and affordability patterns. Data from the Census Bureau and other sources has been combined with qualitative data from interviews and community engagement events to inform the recommendations made in this chapter. By understanding how historic development patterns, local decision-making, environmental factors, social and economic changes, and housing market conditions have affected Grafton, the Town can position itself to implement policies and strategies to address local concerns effectively.



Key Findings & Priorities

Population Change – Consistent Growth with Projected Increases

The Town of Grafton is home to 19,664 residents according to the 2020 Decennial Census. Since 1980, the town has experienced consistent and rapid growth with nearly a 10% increase over the past decade, adding almost 2,000 residents. Projections by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission¹ forecast continued growth, with the town reaching 22,931 residents by 2050.

Population growth in Grafton is largely driven by the town’s proximity to Worcester, Boston, and Providence and the relative affordability of housing in comparison to eastern Massachusetts. Additionally, factors such as the highly rated public school system, safe neighborhoods, and outdoor recreation opportunities make Grafton an attractive town for families and individuals. The town’s growth has a direct impact on housing demand and

prices. Housing unit production that does not keep pace with rising population places pressure on the housing market. This increases the cost of housing and exacerbates the challenges of securing affordable living options for both current residents and those who wish to move to Grafton.

Demographic Shifts – A More Diverse Grafton

Grafton is experiencing notable shifts in demographics, including a substantial increase in racial diversity, changes to family and household composition, and increasing populations of middle-aged residents and older adults.

Grafton remains predominantly white; however, its diversity has expanded. In 1980, just 0.5% of the town’s population was classified as non-White. By 2020, that figure had risen to 20% (Figure 2). Additionally, about 4% of all Grafton residents identify as Hispanic or Latino of any race. A small fraction of Grafton’s residents identifies as American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander.

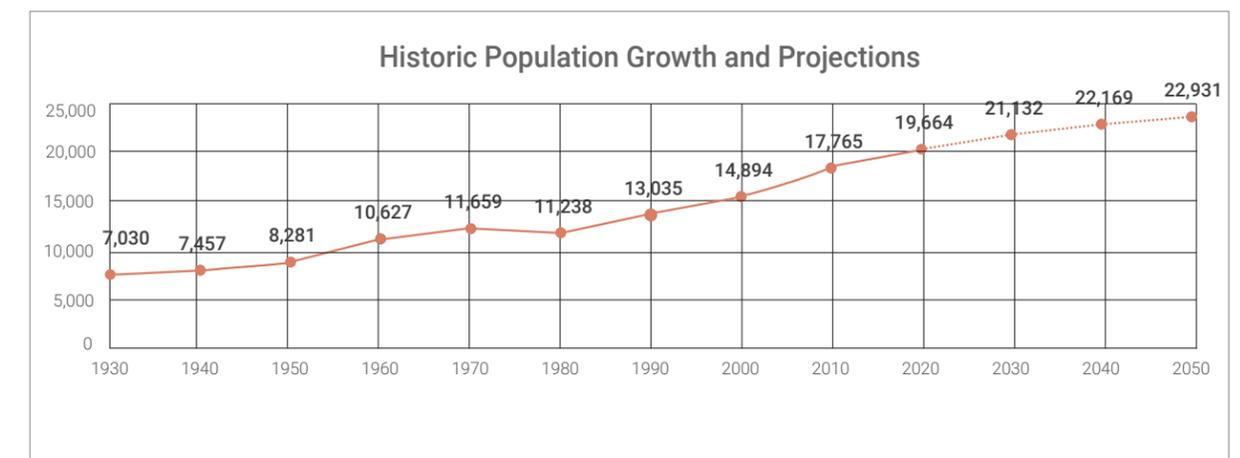


Figure 1. Historic Population Growth with Projections³

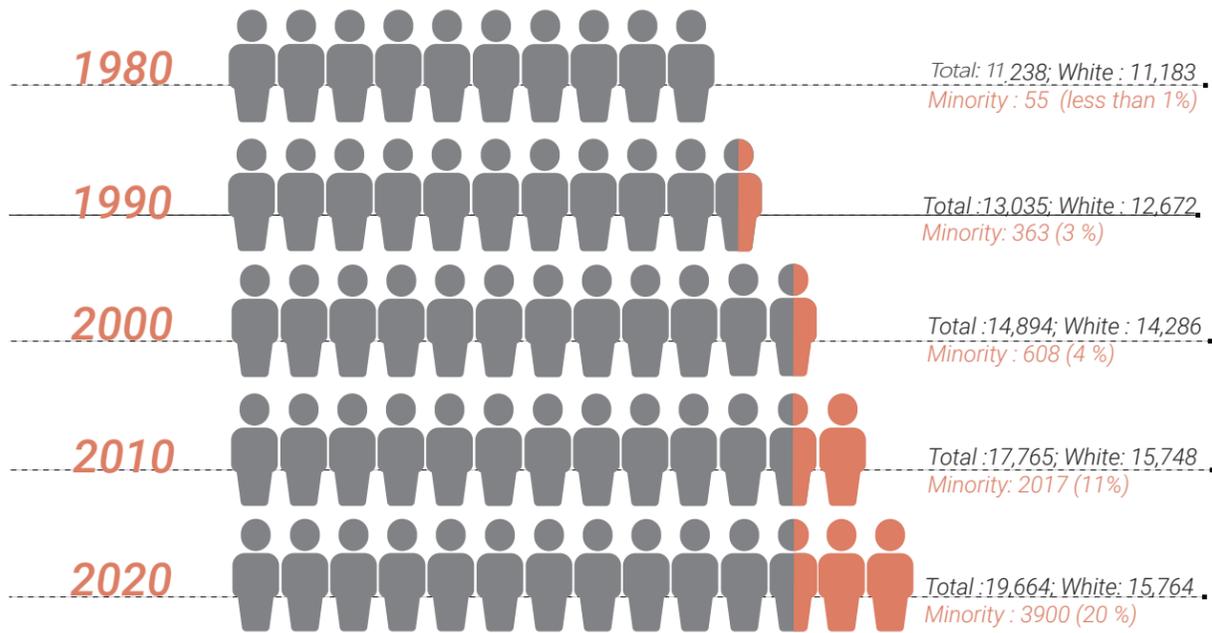


Figure 2. White vs. Non-White Population in Grafton⁴

Household Composition – More Families & Fewer Single-Person Households

Grafton has 7,573 households and an average household size of 2.55 people per household.² Data supports the town’s standing as an attractive place to raise a family, as one-third of all households have children under the age of 18, a rate higher than the state average (Figure 3). Since 2000, the number of single-person households has decreased from 1,404 to 1,086. Furthermore, both the average family size and average household size in Grafton have increased over this period.

Changes in household demographics can have implications related to housing and call for an assessment of whether the existing housing stock is meeting the lifestyle needs of residents. The decline in single-person households may reflect the limited supply of

studio or 1-bedroom units, or an increase in shared housing arrangements to afford rising housing costs.

Age Distribution – Increases in Middle-Age, Senior, and Under-18 Residents

Like most rural and suburban communities in Worcester County, Grafton’s population is aging. Figure 4 shows how the median age in Grafton has been gradually increasing from 33.3 years in 1990 to 40.4 years in 2020. Furthermore, Grafton’s population over the age of 55, has grown from 19% in 2000 to 29% in 2020. Grafton now has a greater proportion of older adults, including those in the Near Seniors (55-64 years), Seniors (65-84 years), and Elderly (85+ years) age groups (Figure 5). According to results of the Master Plan Community Survey, only 23% of respondents agreed that Grafton is accessible to elderly residents, while

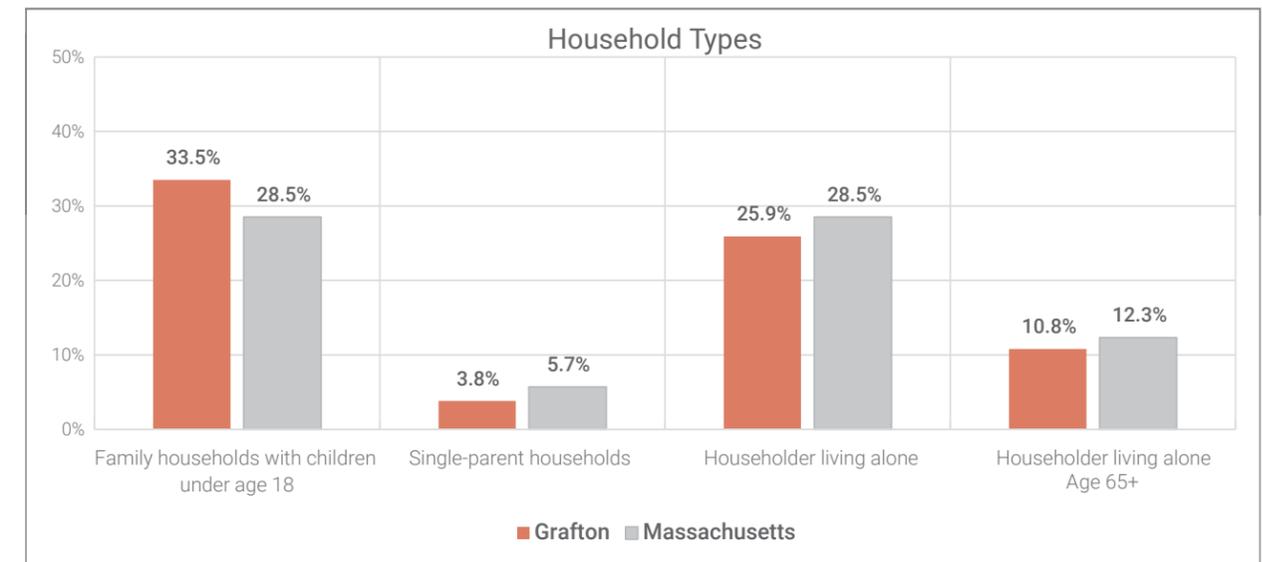


Figure 3. Household Types⁵

only 21% of respondents agreed that it is financially feasible to age in Grafton.

An aging population trend signals a need for appropriate housing options and supportive services. These could include single-level homes, smaller units for downsizing, affordable housing for those living on fixed incomes, housing with accessibility features such as ramps or handrails, accessory dwelling units for elderly parents to live independently or with caretakers, homes in walkable neighborhoods,

assisted living, skilled nursing facilities, or other types of retirement communities. Currently, Grafton has modest availability of these housing types, making it a challenge for those who have established roots here to remain in the community as their needs change.

Meanwhile, the number of school-age children (5-19 years) and parents of school-age children (35-54 years) has also experienced a notable increase. Figure 6 shows how student enrollment in Grafton Public Schools increased

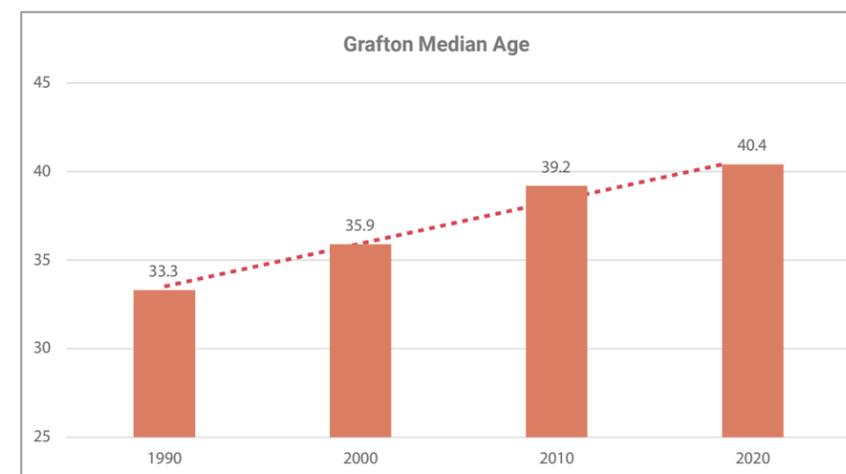


Figure 4. Grafton Median Age⁶

by 27%, or 821 students, between 2000 and 2023. However, post-COVID trends project Grafton’s school population decreasing (see Town Services Chapter). Grafton’s population under age 18 has increased by 620 residents, or 14%, over the past two decades; in contrast to neighboring communities like Millbury and Northbridge, where

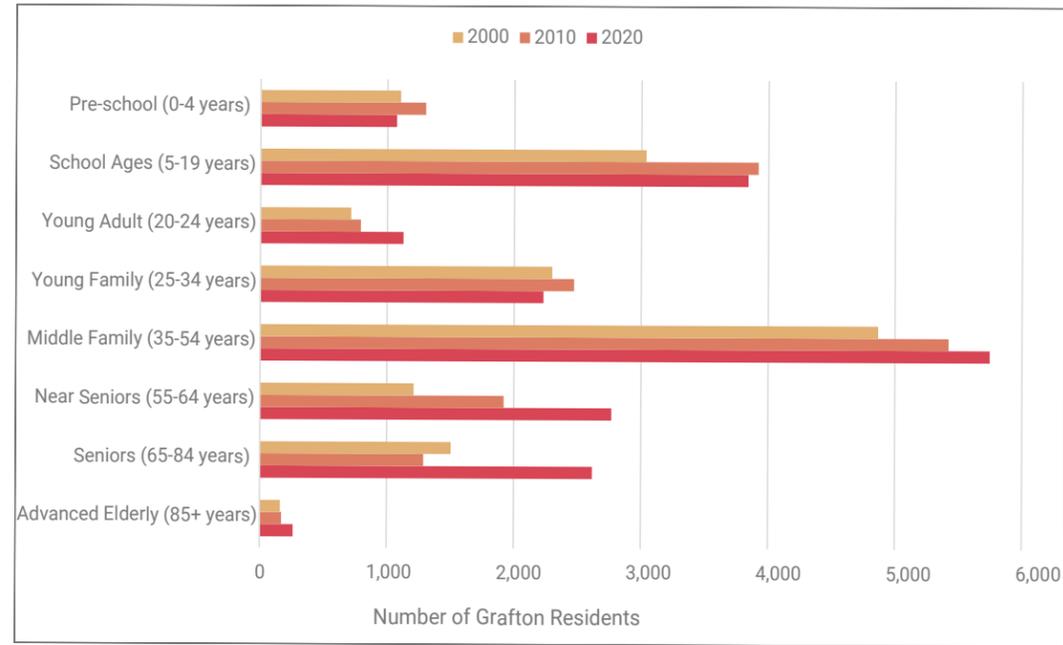


Figure 5. Age by Lifecycle Group in Grafton⁷

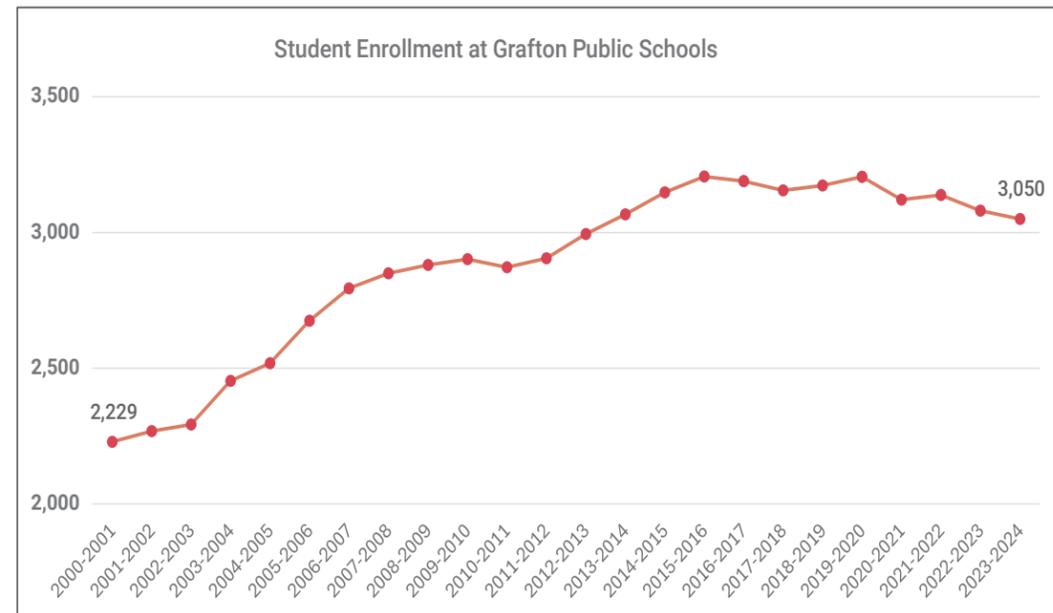


Figure 6. Student Enrollment at Grafton Public Schools 2000-2024⁸

the under-18 population has declined.

Demand for More Diverse Housing Options

Maintaining a variety of housing options will establish Grafton as a resilient and inclusive

community for all residents. Housing should be affordable and accessible to all community members including recent college graduates and young professionals, working families, seniors and retirees, and those living with a disability. Availability of a variety of housing types and price ranges will ensure that



as residents' lifestyle needs evolve, there are opportunities to remain in the Grafton community.

Housing Stock by Type – Single-Family Homes Continue to Dominate the Housing Stock

As shown in Figure 7, the current housing stock is primarily composed of single-family detached homes. This type of housing is the least efficient for supplying homes to current and future residents in terms of infrastructure needs and land use. Only 11% of the town's housing stock is in multi-family buildings with 2-4 units and another 11% is in buildings with 5 or more units.

Grafton's changing population demographics indicate a demand for diversified housing

types, as owner-occupied, single-family homes are not the most affordable, nor suitable forms of housing for all members of the community. However, Figure 7a and 7b show that the town has seen substantial construction of single-family homes since 1990, and limited production of multi-family units. Furthermore, the rate of population growth has outpaced the growth of Grafton's housing units, making Grafton's housing market more competitive.

Housing Tenure – Ownership Unit Production Outpacing Rentals

According to the 2020 Decennial Census, 25% of Grafton's housing stock is occupied by renters. Between 2000 and 2020, the number of owner-occupied units increased by 1,494 units compared to just 306 rental units. The construction of single-family homes between 2000 and 2020, primarily targeting owner

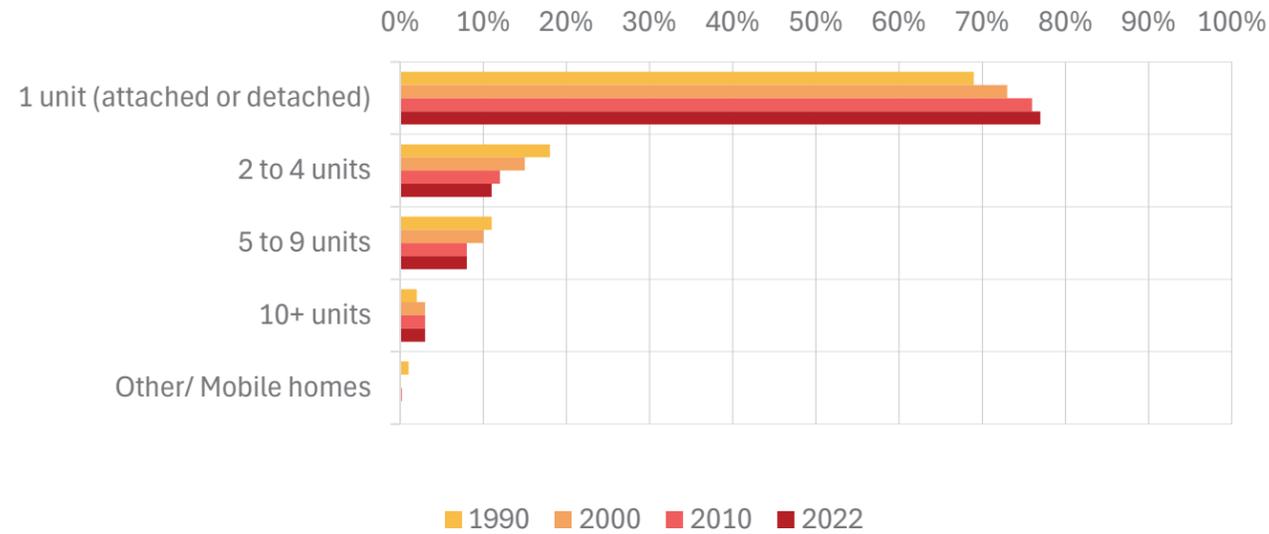


Figure 7a. Grafton Housing Type by Percentage of Units in Structure⁹

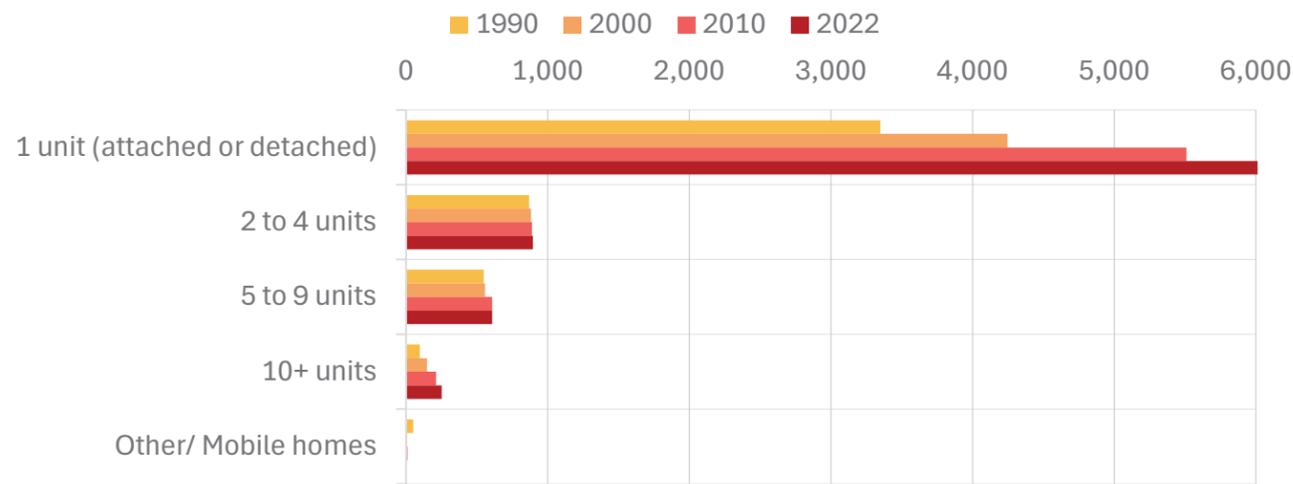


Figure 7b. Grafton Housing Type by Amount of Units in Structure 1990 to 2022⁹

occupants but occasionally built for renters, has contributed to Grafton's increasing proportion of ownership units compared to rental units. Three-quarters of Grafton's rental housing is occupied by single-person or two-person households. Rental housing provides affordable options for many families, young professionals,

seniors on fixed incomes, and those who are not ready for homeownership.

Housing Development – Accelerating Affordable Housing Production



There are 7,740 year-round housing units in Grafton according to the 2020 Decennial Census. Since 2000, 1,920 new units have been developed, with the majority of units considered market-rate housing. Only 117 new units of deed-restricted affordable housing have been built during this time period.

Currently, Grafton has 704 affordable units eligible for inclusion in the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), a statewide comprehensive list of units that comply with state affordability requirements under M.G.L. Chapter 40B. This translates into an affordability proportion of 9.1%, falling just short of the 10% affordable housing threshold mandated for every municipality by Chapter 40B. As of 2020, Grafton needs a total of 774 affordable housing units to meet this requirement, which calls for another 70 housing units to be built

or converted with affordability restrictions. Approximately 1,000 units of new housing which are at various stages of planning and permitting, are anticipated to be added to Grafton's housing stock in the coming years. It is expected that, once constructed, these new units will support the town in exceeding the 10% affordable housing mandate.

Housing Market Conditions – Costs Continue Rising for Homebuyers and Renters

Rising housing costs are a growing concern for Grafton residents. Long-term residents may experience difficulties paying their taxes, insurance, utility bills, maintaining upkeep of their homes, or affording market-rate rentals.

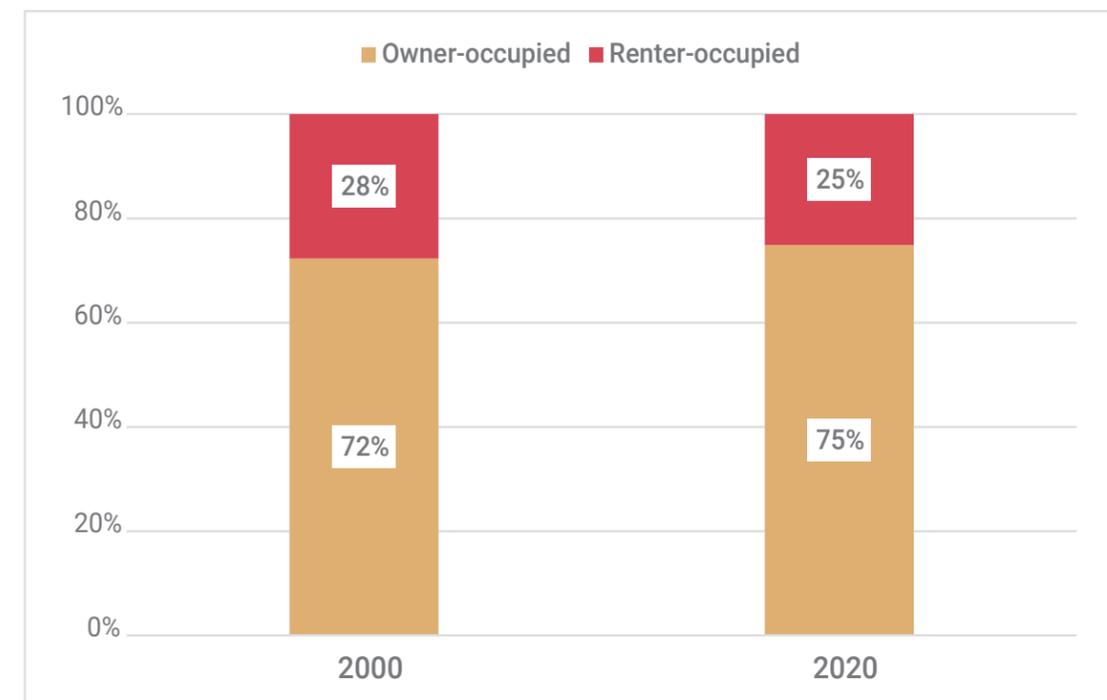


Figure 8. Grafton Housing Units by Tenure¹⁰

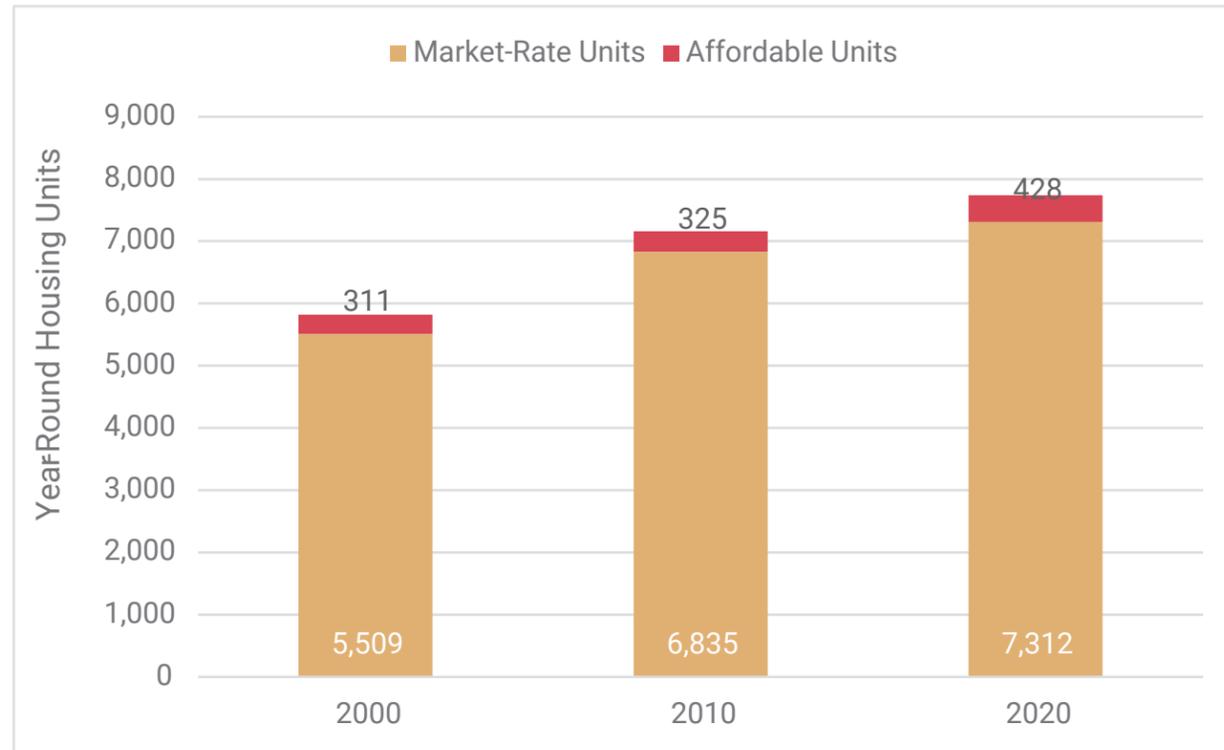


Figure 9. Grafton Year-Round Housing Units¹¹

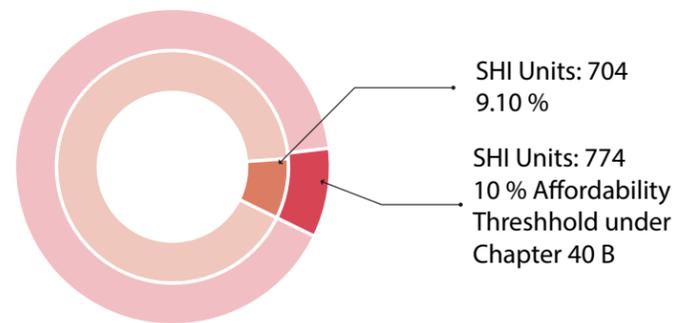


Figure 10. Grafton Subsidized Housing Inventory, as of 2024. ¹²



In 2000, the median value of a home was \$183,500 with 87% of homes valued under \$300,000. As of the 2022 American Community Survey, the median value of a home rose to \$453,000 with only 19% of homes valued under \$300,000. Figure 11 shows the rapid increase in sales prices for both single-family homes and condominiums with the median sales price of a single-family home reaching a record-high \$707,500. Condominiums, which are typically a more affordable homeownership option have prices comparable to single-family homes with the median sales price of \$426,500. As of the time of writing, Grafton has 704 affordable units eligible.

The rental market has also seen a significant rise in costs since 2000 when the median rent was \$625 per month. The 2022 American Community Survey estimates that the median monthly rent in Grafton is now \$1,291 per

month. Rental values tend to be underestimated by Census and ACS data while actual market rents are typically even higher. Of Grafton's estimated 1,916 total rental units, only 304 are deemed restricted as affordable.

Affordability Mismatch – Widening Gap Between Income and Housing Costs

As housing prices rise faster than incomes, home ownership is increasingly unattainable. Annual income has a direct connection to the amount of money that householders can allocate for housing. Housing that is affordable for lower-income households is key to household stability and economic self-sufficiency. Readily available working class and middle-class housing builds and retains a strong workforce, improving

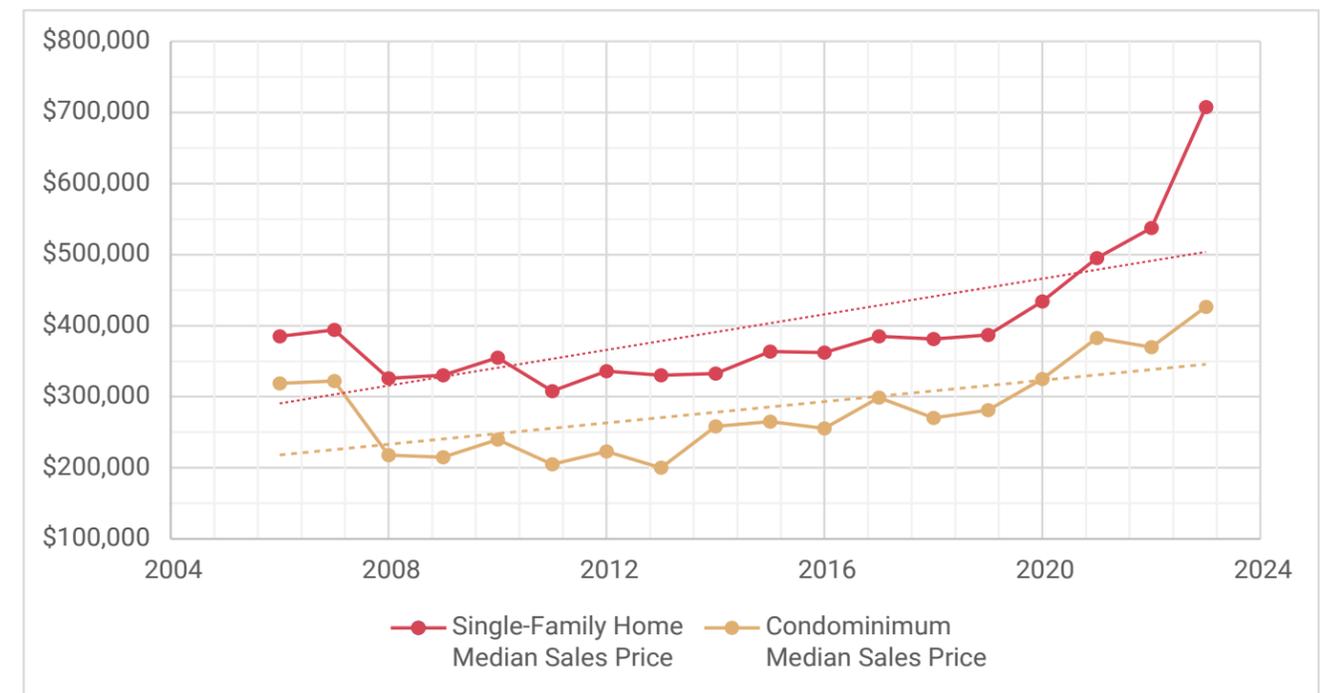


Figure 11. Median Sale Price in Town of Grafton¹³



regional and state economic competitiveness.

A common guideline for home buyers is to not exceed 2.5 times the buyer’s annual household income in the cost of the home. For a household earning Grafton’s median household income in 2022 (\$118,252) this would allow for a home priced at \$295,630. This is dramatically less than the median single family home price of \$537,500 in the same year (Figure 12).

Goals

Goal 1: Focus future housing development in Village Centers.

Objective 1.1: Encourage and incentivize development of higher-density multi-family dwellings in mixed-use “village” areas.

What are Grafton’s Village Centers?

Village centers are mixed-use areas that serve the surrounding population with a cluster of residential, civic, religious, cultural, and commercial uses within a reasonable walking distance. Grafton has eight (8) village centers, each with unique characteristics:

Five historic mill villages:

- Grafton Center
- New England Village
- Farnumsville

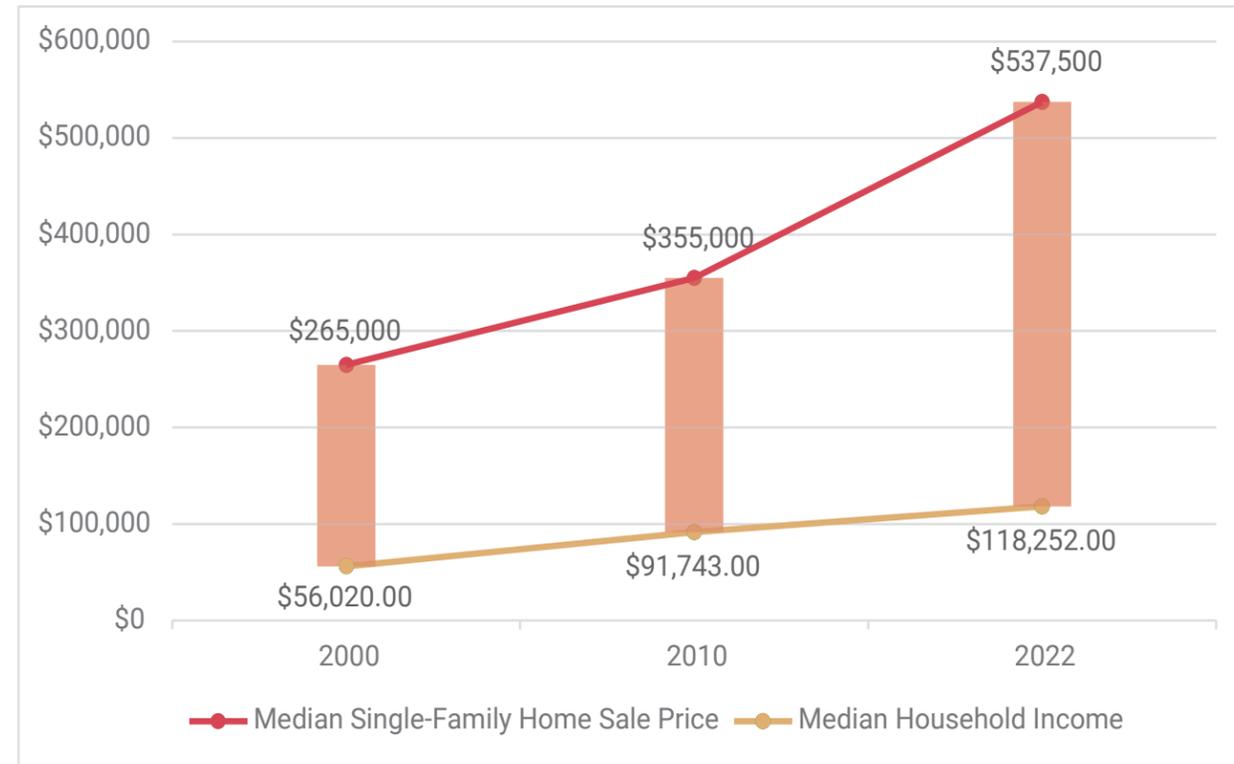


Figure 12. Grafton Median Household Income vs. Median Single-Family Home Sale Price¹⁴



- Fisherville
- Saundersville

Two business districts:

- Central Business District
- Northwest Business District

One transit-oriented district:

- North Grafton Transit Village

Action Item 1.1.1: Conduct a suitability assessment for each village area, evaluating the existing land use, conditions, built environment, and other factors that may influence the development of multi-family housing.

Grafton’s diverse village areas offer vibrant living opportunities with greater walkability, access to businesses and amenities, and connectivity to neighbors. Each village area has an array of opportunities and challenges for future multi-family housing development. An assessment that evaluates the conditions for each neighborhood would be exceptionally valuable in facilitating residential development that serves the needs of the community while blending with the existing areas. The Town should pursue multi-disciplinary suitability assessments that document physical limitations such as soils and topography, existing land use and zoning, municipal sewer and water services, transportation infrastructure, market conditions and sale prices, vacant or underutilized lots, and other factors that will indicate the feasibility of residential development. Such assessments will be beneficial in sustaining partnerships with interested developers.

Currently in Grafton, the opportunities for constructing multi-family or mixed-use development are considerably narrow. The Town should amend its zoning code in ways that will expand or incentivize denser housing production without compromising the community’s small-town characteristics. A reexamination of the Village Mixed Use Districts to potentially expand locations and/or increase flexibility for more diverse development is recommended, especially in the Worcester Street area. Currently, barriers such as inflexibility with waivers and inconsistent definitions complicate the use of this zoning tool. Furthermore, expanding the potential for mixed-use properties to be constructed within districts zoned as Business should be considered as a way to support both the town’s housing demands and economic development.

Action Item 1.1.2: Identify and pursue opportunities to leverage funding or other incentives to support multi-family development in village areas.

Fluctuating market conditions, including interest rates on construction loans, costs of material, labor and land acquisition, global supply shortages and high demand, plus other building factors considerably impact feasibility of real-estate development. While these conditions are out of the control of local municipalities, there are still ways that Grafton can support multi-family housing development by offering incentives to developers. Opportunities such as tax relief, capital subsidies, density bonuses, dimensional relief, decreased parking ratios, expedited permitting, reductions of land costs, brownfield site remediation incentives, and



more can increase flexibility for developers. The Town is encouraged to consider implementing appropriate incentives to attract developers to its village areas as well as pursuing any available funding sources that could help offset development costs.

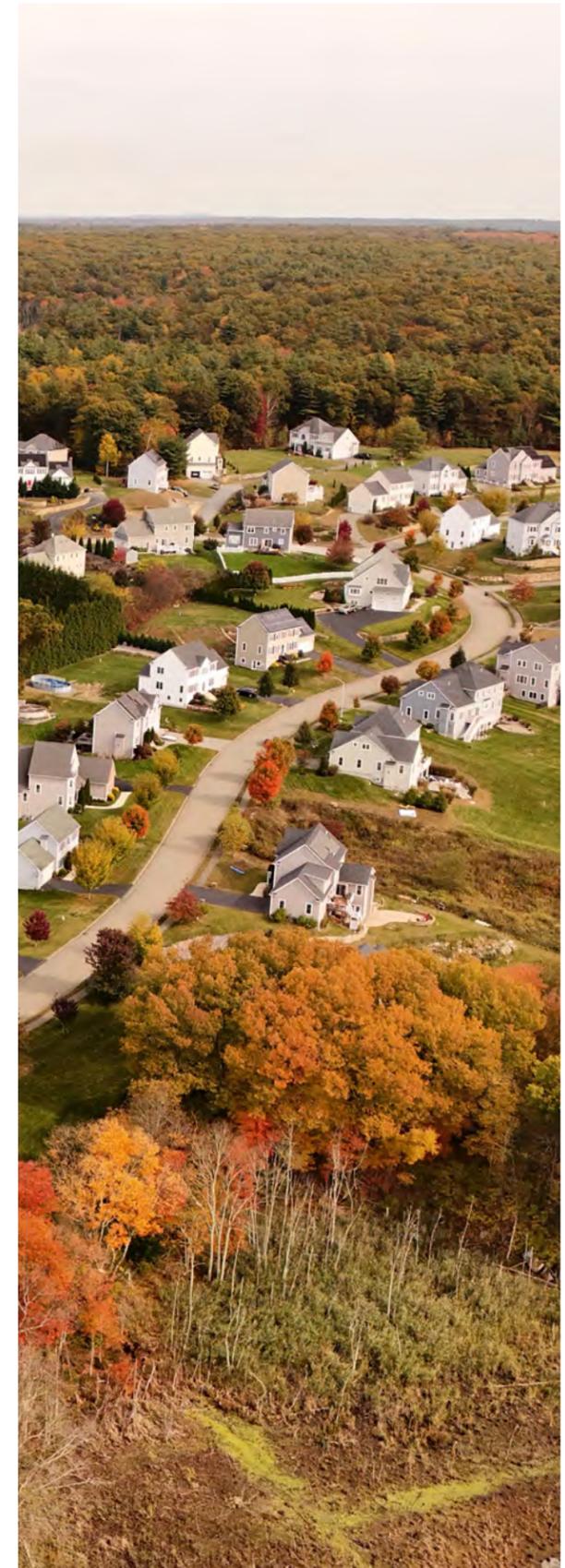
Objective 1.2: Strengthen subdivision requirements for preserving open space.

Strengthening Grafton’s subdivision requirements can strike a balance between meeting housing demand and preserving open space. The subdivision regulations can more clearly incentivize protection of natural resources, dedication of conservation easements, and cluster development. Clear subdivision regulations that align with Grafton’s long-term vision will aid developers in creating site plan proposals.

Action Item 1.2.1: Provide incentives to developers willing to create subdivision homes in compact neighborhoods, allowing a substantial portion of the subdivision area to be left undeveloped.

Supporting clustered development can deter the trend of large-lot single family homes on a cul-de-sac while providing the same number of homes and preserving open space. The Town of Grafton can incentivize the use of clustered development to encourage developers to allow an area within a lot to remain undeveloped, with the ability to subdivide at a greater density.

Adopted by Town Meeting in 1991, the Flexible



Development Zoning Bylaw allows a Major Residential Development of single-family homes to be developed in clusters of one or more groups while encouraging the permanent protection of open space. There are ample opportunities for improving this bylaw. While developers are required to set aside common land, there is not a mandate that open space preservation be included. Minimum lot sizes could be reduced to allow for more compact development, as well as permitting two-family or three-family dwellings within the sites. The bylaw could also be amended to include density bonuses for developers who include affordable units in proposed developments.

Goal 2: Expand the supply and diversity of housing.

Objective 2.1: Encourage and incentivize development of a wider variety of housing types (e.g., accessory dwelling units, two-family homes, three-family homes) in residential zones.

Action Item 2.1.1: Revise and streamline the development review and re-zoning process.

Revising the development review and re-zoning process can be an effective tool for ensuring that developments that match the town’s vision are feasible for developers. A review of past application processes for gaps, stalls, and areas of confusion can guide this process. Offering



user-friendly guides to the review process and requirements and pre-application meetings for developers can expedite review procedures for projects that align with the town's goals.

Action Item 2.1.2: Promote Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as an opportunity to create affordably priced housing in established neighborhoods.

In response to the Massachusetts Affordable Homes Act signed in August 2024, Grafton is reviewing its current zoning and identifying provisions that are not consistent with the new law. The law includes a policy that requires all communities to allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) by right in single-family residential zoning districts. There is no requirement for EOHLC to review and approve ADU zoning,

however it is important for the town's zoning to not be in conflict with M.G.L. Chapter 40A Section 3.

The Town should ensure that residents are fully aware of the new opportunities for creating ADUs and clarify what can legally be constructed. Greater transparency and promotion of this housing type under local regulations is highly encouraged.

Action Item 2.1.3: Review and pursue local zoning changes to eliminate regulations that disincentivize two-family, three-family, and other diverse types of housing.

There are a variety of regulatory barriers preventing diverse types of housing from



being constructed in Grafton. It is feasible to construct house-scale buildings with multiple units that are compatible with the existing single-family neighborhoods. However, local zoning and policies currently disincentivize two-family, three-family, and other diverse housing types from being added to the housing stock. Multi-family housing is prohibited in all residential districts other than RMF. Detached two-family dwellings are only permitted by-right in the RMF district, by special permit in the R20 district, and are entirely prohibited in the R40 and A districts. Meanwhile, detached single-family homes are permitted in the A, R40, R20, and RMF districts. A thorough review of the zoning code is needed to determine the most appropriate changes to pursue.

Objective 2.2: Foster the development of Town-owned property.

Action Item 2.2.1: (Re)develop surplus municipal property in a manner that reflects the town's housing priorities.

The disposition of underused land owned by the Town but not essential for municipal purposes can be an effective catalyst for affordable housing production. Two properties have been determined to have the greatest potential for development, including 25 Worcester Street (the site of the former Grafton High School) and 53 Millbury Street. The Worcester Street site is approximately 2.3 acres, and the affordable housing segment of the Millbury Street site is approximately 4.4 acres. As additional municipal properties are identified, the Housing Trust should conduct basic physical site assessments, which typically determine the potential development yield

of the site, best area(s) to locate buildings, and a course of action to protect any natural resources and mitigate any negative environmental impacts. Furthermore, the Trust should prepare a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit developers based on the Town's specific project requirements. Selection of a developer should also be based on its funding thresholds and underwriting criteria (to be incorporated in the RFP). Furthermore, the Trust should prepare a Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit developers based on the Town's specific project requirements, as was completed for 25 Worcester Street.

Objective 2.3: Provide housing options for the town's growing elderly population while making more houses available for younger families.

Action Item 2.3.1: Advocate for additional affordable housing units specifically for seniors.

As Grafton's population ages and reaches retirement, the housing stock should reflect the needs of older residents. Many older residents, especially those on fixed incomes, require smaller, more affordable, and accessible homes as well as living arrangements with supportive services. The competitive housing market has resulted in escalating housing prices that are beyond what seniors can afford. Future residential growth in Grafton should add options for downsizing, prioritizing units that are income-restricted, age-restricted, and meet the unique needs of the town's aging population.

Grafton's zoning code does not include any



provisions for housing that is restricted by age, therefore the town may consider pursuing adoption of a 55+ community overlay zone or other age-restricted zoning bylaw. The Town is encouraged to explore the implementation of development bonuses or incentives for providing additional accessible units or income-restricted and age-restricted units.

Action Item 2.3.2: Motivate the Community Preservation Committee to assist in funding affordable senior units.

Based on the demonstrated need for affordable senior housing in Grafton, Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds can be used to facilitate the development of affordable senior housing. CPA appropriations can be particularly useful in filling the gap between the cost of development and what qualifying occupants can afford to pay. Developers rely on multiple subsidies and these funds can help in offsetting the cost of land acquisition, pre-development activities, site improvements, rehabilitation of structures, or other costs associated with development. Using CPA funds as gap funding can make affordable senior housing developments financially feasible.

Action Item 2.3.3: Create a fuel assistance program for seniors.

With rising energy costs, many seniors face financial challenges when trying to heat their homes. One way that the town can help alleviate this burden is to implement a local fuel assistance program. Such a program would assist eligible households, both homeowners



and renters, with paying their winter heating bills. The town would need to determine funding sources as well as set up eligibility criteria and an application process for such a program.

Goal 3: Increase Grafton’s Affordable Housing Stock.

Objective 3.1: Incentivize affordable housing unit development



and locally produced affordable units. The Town has implemented a Local Initiative Program Procedures Manual that details the respective roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders such as the Housing Trust and the Planning Department, ensuring that all state requirements are being met to create and retain affordable housing units.

Local Initiative Program (LIP)

A state program under which communities may use local resources and EOHLC technical assistance to develop affordable housing that is eligible for inclusion on the state Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). LIP is not a financing program, but the EOHLC technical assistance qualifies as a subsidy and enables locally supported developments that do not require other financial subsidies to use the comprehensive permit process. At least 25% of the units must be set aside as affordable to households earning less than 80% of the Area Median Income.

Action Item 3.1.1: Leverage the Local Initiative Program (LIP) to collaborate with developers via comprehensive permits (“Friendly 40B”) to create affordable housing that meets Grafton’s needs.

Comprehensive permits issued through the “Friendly 40B” process and the state’s Local Initiative Program (LIP) can be strategic ways to generate new affordable housing. LIP is a technical assistance subsidy program to facilitate Chapter 40B developments

Action Item 3.1.2: Adopt density bonuses or other incentives as a tool to encourage the inclusion of affordable housing units in developments that do not rely on comprehensive permits.

Developers seeking comprehensive permits must include 25% of units as affordable in proposed projects in order to build more densely in districts where multi-family housing is not permitted. However, for projects not reviewed as comprehensive permits, Grafton has an inclusionary zoning policy in which



Action Item 3.1.3: Continue to incentivize mixed-income developments near transit areas.

Strategically located near commercial or village areas and transportation nodes, mixed-income developments can help address housing demand, particularly for smaller households and seniors. Incentives that the town should explore include density bonuses, parking reductions or other dimensional reductions, and reduced sale price of land.

Action Item 3.1.4: Research appropriate ways to establish linkage fees to fund affordable housing development.

Linkage fees, also referred to as impact fees, are a policy tool that charges developers a fee for new construction and is calculated based on square footage or the number of new houses. The fees can be used to fund the development of affordable housing, or other community purposes such as transportation improvements, education, or youth recreation. The collected fees could be deposited in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The Town should assess the local growth and development trends to ensure that added fees will not create unintended consequences.

Objective 3.2: Establish town support system for affordable housing.

Action Item 3.2.1: Allocate adequate funding to the Affordable Housing Trust.

multi-family projects with more than 8 units must include 25% affordable units, or in some cases 20% or 10% affordable units. The town can further explore implementing affordability requirements for subdivisions greater than an identified threshold of units.

Grafton can adopt alternate incentives to encourage the inclusion of affordable housing. While inclusionary zoning policies which require affordable units may deter residential development under challenging market conditions, incentives such as density bonuses, expedited permitting, or cost offsets (i.e. tax breaks, parking reductions, fee reductions) can be a more appropriate policy for Grafton to implement. Incentives can be paired with Grafton's existing inclusionary zoning policy to projects with affordable units.



The Grafton Affordable Housing Trust has been active since 2007. The town should continue to use this effective resource to respond to housing opportunities as they arise. The Housing Trust can be capitalized through a variety of funding streams, including:

- Commit a larger portion of CPA funds for affordable housing.
- Support state legislation or a Home Rule petition for transfer taxes or impact fees on high-value home sales to be used for the Housing Trust.
- Obtain funding contributions from area institutions and major employers that have a vested interest in helping solve the community's housing crisis.
- Use regional appropriations of CPA funding.
- Provide information to property owners on the potential tax advantages of donating or selling property at a discounted price for charitable purposes.
- Hold special fundraising events or an annual appeal to generate donated funds.
- Establish a fee in lieu of producing actual affordable units as part of the Village Mixed Use affordability requirements.

Action Item 3.2.2: Establish an ongoing rental assistance program for those facing emergency or temporary situations.

A rental assistance program was established in 2023 through the Community Preservation Budgeted Reserve to support Grafton Housing Authority (GHA), allocating \$10,000 from the FY24 Community Preservation Budgeted Reserve to support Grafton Housing Authority (GHA) residents and applicants that may be

experiencing a hardship or need one-time financial assistance. These funds can be used for rent only and may be applied to a new tenant moving in who may not have the funds to pay their first month's rent or an existing tenant who may be struggling to pay rent.

The FY24 funds need to be expended by June 30, 2025, however the town can pursue implementation of a more permanent program. Coordination between various stakeholders, including the Grafton Community Preservation Committee, Finance Department, and Grafton Housing Authority, will be crucial to establishing clear policies and procedures for ongoing rental assistance.

Action Item 3.2.3: Consider hiring a dedicated full-time staff member to oversee affordable housing initiatives.





Strategies targeting local affordable housing initiatives require a significant time commitment from town officials or volunteers on boards and committees. Additionally, they require specialized expertise in planning as well as housing programs, policies, and development. A full-time staff member dedicated to housing coordination could provide a variety of services to Grafton, including:

- Public education and outreach
- Grant writing
- Maintaining the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI)
- Outreach to establish relationships with developers, lenders, funders, service providers, etc. to promote community housing efforts
- Overall coordination of the implementation of strategies outlined in the Master Plan and Housing Production Plan, and providing necessary professional support as needed.
- Improve advertising of affordable housing lotteries.

A professional staff person or consultant could be funded through CPA resources pending approval of the Grafton Community Preservation Committee and residents at town meeting.

Objective 3.3: Encourage partnerships between the Town and for-profit and non-profit housing providers and developers.

Action Item 3.3.1: Host roundtable discussions with local leaders and developers to discuss opportunities for affordable housing development in Grafton.

Collaboration and cooperation between private developers, non-profit and for-profit entities, and the town will be fundamental in the success of future housing development projects. Grafton can consider hosting round-table discussions in which one or more developers are invited to speak with representatives of the town including the Town Administrator, Select Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Affordable Housing Trust, Community Preservation Committee, Council on Aging, Water Districts, the Sewer Department and any others wishing to be involved in the process. By establishing itself as an active partner to developers, the town can ensure the development process is fluid and housing units will meet the needs of residents.

Action Item 3.3.2: Secure community buy-in by conducting ongoing community engagement and education on housing issues.

Since zoning changes rely on the approval of residents at town meeting and developers can be hesitant to build in a town with significant resistance from locals, community support is a priority. A prominent barrier to implementing



housing initiatives is the negative perception of affordable housing and concerns surrounding the integration of new multi-family housing into the overall fabric of the community. To ensure residents understand the benefits and opportunities of affordable housing, there are a number of outreach and public education efforts that the town can consider:

- Host community meetings or special forums on specific housing initiatives
- Offer town officials the opportunity to present various proposals and solicit feedback from the public
- Provide the public with information on existing housing-related programs and services
- Expand the town website to include a housing section
- Make general information on housing and affordability easily accessible to the public
- Host roundtable discussions between developers and town officials

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**ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT**



Overview

This chapter discusses Grafton’s opportunities and challenges in diversifying its tax base and supporting local businesses. Currently, residential properties account for over 91% of the property tax levy, a figure that has remained relatively stable for two decades. This dependence underscores the importance of diversifying the town’s economy to reduce the tax burden on residents and preserve the Town’s fiscal health. Through a balance of facilitating growth in key economic sectors and small businesses, Grafton can mitigate the impacts of economic disruptions and ensure funding for essential services.

The town’s strategic location near major transportation routes and the MBTA Commuter Rail makes it an attractive destination for potential employers of all sizes. Residents would especially like to see growth in the number of small businesses. Challenges to business growth include employee retention, inflation, and Town regulatory processes. Town support in the form of more streamlined permitting, financial incentives, and enhanced communication could bolster economic growth. The Town should also invest in the prosperity of key commercial corridors and village centers through neighborhood planning, physical improvements, and programming.



Key Findings

Grafton’s Property Tax Burden Predominantly Falls on Residential Properties. Diversifying the Town’s Tax Base Can Reduce the Burden on Homeowners and Renters.

Like many Massachusetts communities, residential properties make up the largest share of the Grafton’s property tax levy. As of Fiscal Year 2024, the residential share was 91.32%.¹ Over the past two decades, the residential share has fluctuated little, with a low point of 89.3% in 2003 and a high of 92.69% in 2008.

The relative stability of the commercial and residential shares of the Town property tax levy is also evident in the town’s employment landscape and housing growth. Between 2010 and 2022, both the number of housing units and employment establishments increased by approximately 20% (see Table 1). Looking forward, it is likely that residential properties will continue to make up the largest share of the Town’s tax levy. The average single family tax bill in Grafton for 2023 was \$7,980, slightly higher than many neighboring towns.² To ease the tax burden on individual homeowners, the

Town should focus on smart housing growth and economic development.

Diversifying Grafton’s economy and tax base can strengthen the Town’s fiscal resilience. Relying on a mix of industries rather than a single industry or employer ensures the Town can better withstand economic disruptions. When one sector experiences a downturn, others may remain stable, helping to maintain the property tax revenues that fund investments in essential services like schools, public safety, and waste management. For instance, the Wyman Gordon Company paid an estimated \$ 344,483³ in property taxes in Fiscal Year 2023 or around 10% of Grafton’s entire Commercial and Industrial Tax Levy (Table 2). This demonstrates the importance of the company to the Town’s tax base but also highlights the significant gap that would emerge if the company were to close.

To maintain fiscal health and enable preservation of critical habitat and open spaces, Grafton must ensure that its developed land is used as productively as possible. This means that the land should generate enough economic activity and value to cover the costs of maintaining the infrastructure and services it requires. Research on land use productivity and fiscal health highlights the importance of compact development patterns—such as smaller lot sizes with higher building coverage, which tend to generate more tax revenue per acre while requiring less infrastructure per unit of development.⁴

Table 1. Job, Establishment, and Housing Unit Growth 2010-2022

Job, Establishment, and Housing Unit Growth 2010-2022				
	2010	2022	Change	Percent Change
Average Jobs*	4054	4604	550	14%
Total Employment Establishments*	374	447	73	20%
Housing Units	6,516	7,826	1310	20%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Economic Research, Employment and Wages Report*; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates



Table 2. Fiscal Year 2023 Property Taxes from Commercial and Industrial Uses

Fiscal Year 2023 Property Taxes from Commercial and Industrial Uses		
Use Category	Estimated Property Taxes	Percent of Total Tax Levy
Manufacturing and Processing	\$929,187	1.74%
Retail Trade	\$657,661	1.23%
Storage Warehouses and Distribution Facilities	\$414,480	0.78%
Auto and Other Engine Propelled Vehicles	\$213,878	0.40%
Multiple Use (Primarily Commercial)	\$211,774	0.40%
Office Buildings	\$188,649	0.35%
Vacant Land - Ind	\$135,694	0.25%
Outdoor Recreational Properties	\$87,907	0.16%
Utility Properties	\$74,491	0.14%
Electric Generation	\$60,573	0.11%
Utility Properties - Communication	\$53,024	0.10%
Transient Group Quarters	\$43,056	0.08%
Public Service Properties (Non-exempt)	\$33,154	0.06%
Cultural and Entertainment Properties	\$12,544	0.02%
Vacant Land - Comm	\$8,474	0.02%
Mining and Quarrying	\$7,659	0.01%
(Not identified)	\$248,214	0.46%
Total Commercial & Industrial Levy	\$3,380,419	6.33%
Total Personal Property Levy	\$1,564,623	2.93%
Total Residential Levy	\$48,488,952	90.75%
Total Tax Levy	\$53,433,994	

Source: Local Assessors Data from MassGIS, Tax Rate and Tax Levy Data from the MA Division of Local Services

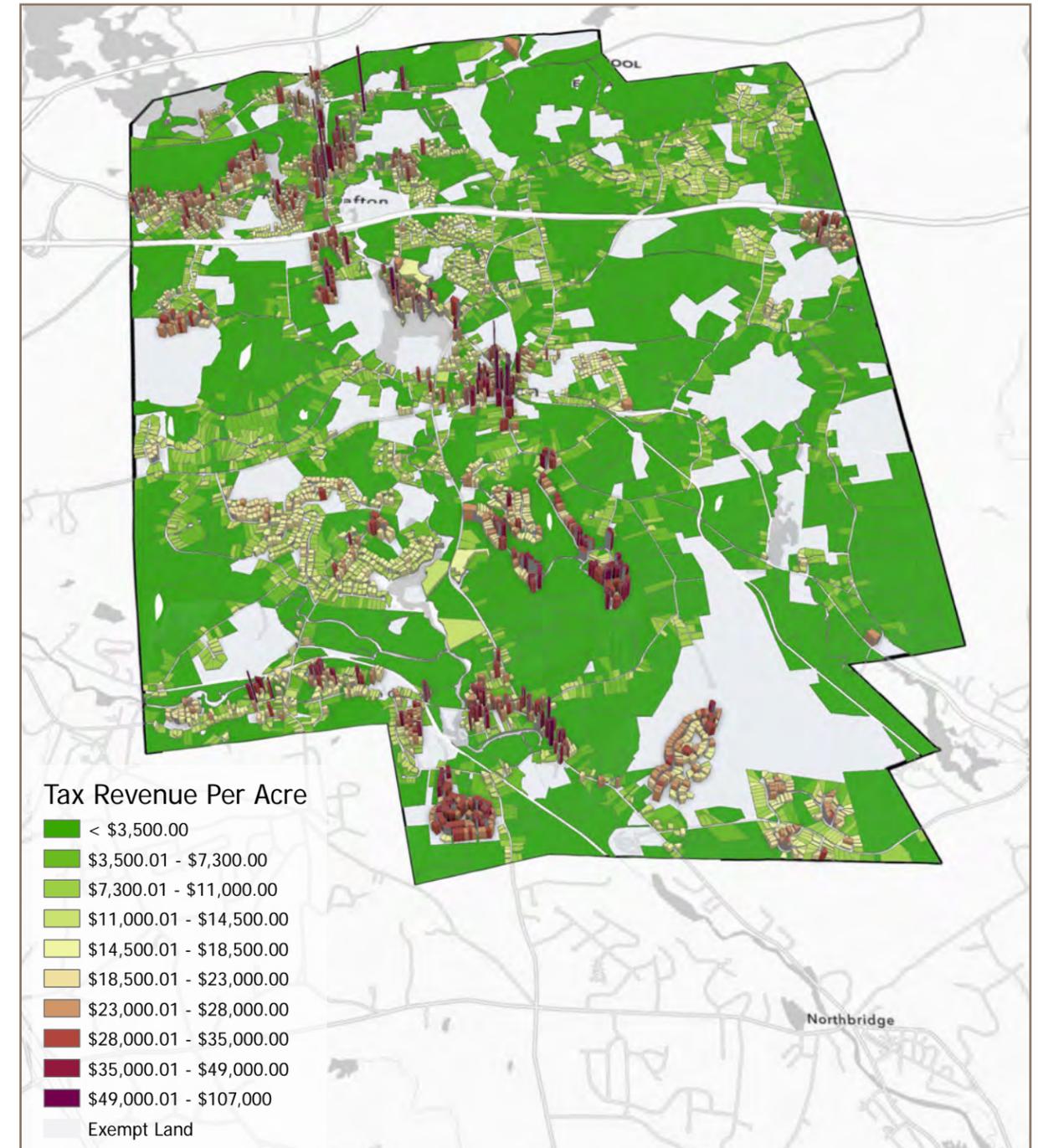
Grafton can encourage more dense, mixed-use development in key village centers and corridors. A 62% majority of respondents in the Grafton Master Plan Survey supported denser development patterns if it meant more open space preservation. This indicates alignment between what is financially productive for the Town and resident preferences. Small- to medium-sized commercial spaces not only contribute to the local economy but also align with the Town’s long-term fiscal goals by spreading out the sources of property taxes.

Small local businesses are desirable to residents and would benefit from more Town support, collaboration, and communication.

Residents overwhelmingly support bolstering the local business community. In the Master Plan survey, three-fourths (3/4) of respondents expressed interest in seeing more small businesses/micro enterprises and drinking and eating establishments (Table 3).



Figure 1. Tax Revenue per Acre in Grafton



Much like we evaluate a vehicle’s efficiency on a mile-per-gallon basis instead of a total mileage basis, property tax revenue per acre can help identify the most efficient and productive areas within a town. Higher revenue implies that the property taxes generated from these places are more likely to cover the cost of the infrastructure that supports them. It also identifies the type of commercial, residential, and industrial development that will most efficiently raise revenue and diversify the tax base. The map above does not reflect tax breaks or similar circumstances.



Table 3. Survey Respondent Desired Businesses

What types of businesses would you like to see in Grafton?		
Type of Business	Number of Responses	Percentage
Small businesses/microenterprises	328	77%
Drinking and eating establishments	333	78%
Larger commercial stores	147	35%
Industrial/light manufacturing	120	28%
Other	28	7%
TOTAL	425	

Source: Grafton Master Plan Survey (425 responses).



In a 2023 survey of local businesses, most respondents reported neutral to positive experiences working with the Town of Grafton to open and operate their business. However, some respondents indicated that navigating the Town departments could be challenging and that they have found it difficult to do business with the Town. The most common economic challenges that respondents cited were finding and retaining employees and inflation and rising costs.

During an economic development workshop attended by more than 17 local businesses, participants identified several ways that the Town could better support them. These included advertising/promotion assistance, financial incentives/grants for retention and startups, more streamlined permitting processes, and fostering development that increases foot traffic around local businesses. Additionally, several businesses expressed a need for more direct engagement with the Town to communicate and address ongoing needs, experiences, and concerns.

Key Finding 3: The town is in a strong position to become a regionally competitive employment center.

Grafton is well-positioned to become a regionally competitive hub for employment and business. First, its proximity to major transportation routes—including Routes 30, 122, and 140 and Interstate 90—connects the town to larger economic centers such as Worcester and Greater Boston. This accessibility makes Grafton attractive to businesses seeking easy access to both local and regional markets, as well as a robust labor force. The MBTA Commuter Rail station in North Grafton, offering direct service to Boston, further enhances the appeal to both residents and businesses. A 2023 survey of local businesses found that 70 percent were satisfied with Grafton’s location and accessibility to nearby towns.

Grafton benefits from several major employers that contribute to its economic stability and growth. Tufts University’s Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine in North Grafton is a significant institutional presence that offers jobs and attracts professionals and students to the area. Washington Mills, a manufacturer of



Table 4. Town of Grafton, 2023 Business Survey (26 responses)

Reason (s) for being generally pleased with doing business in Grafton	Percent
Grafton is centrally located and easily accessible to customers from nearby towns	69%
Good customer support and repeat business	50%
Other Grafton businesses patronize my business and are helpful	38%
My business is thriving	31%
The Town is receptive and helpful	23%
Support from local Chambers of Commerce	19%
All of the above	8%

Source: Town of Grafton, 2023 Business Survey (26 responses).



abrasive materials, provides industrial employment. Wyman-Gordon, a leading manufacturer of aerospace and industrial components, offers skilled manufacturing jobs and supports the town's economy by connecting it to the high-tech manufacturing sector. These major employers play a crucial role in maintaining a diversified economy and supplying foot traffic to support other local businesses.

Demographically, Grafton's population growth and relatively well-educated workforce are significant assets. The town has grown steadily and as of 2020, had a population of about 19,664 with a median household income of \$118,252, well above the state average.⁵ Over half of the population holds a bachelor's or advanced degree, providing a skilled labor pool that can support a diverse array of businesses, such as professional services, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing.

Since the 2001 Master Plan, Grafton has made efforts to develop targeted industrial and commercial zones, such as the North Grafton Transit Village and the recently adopted MBTA communities overlay zone, supporting its competitiveness in attracting businesses. By continuing to leverage these advantages, Grafton can capitalize on opportunities to diversify its tax base and strengthen its role as a regional employment center.

Table 5. Household Income, Home Value, and Gross Rent 2012 to 2022

Household Income, Home Value, and Gross Rent 2012 to 2022			
	2017	2022	Percent Change 2017 to 2022
Median Household Income	\$100,605	\$118,252	18%
Median Home Value	\$352,000	\$453,000	29%
Median Gross Rent	\$1,121	\$1,291	15%
Gross Rent as a % of HH Income > 30%	36%	47%	31%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates

Key Finding 4: Market dynamics, housing availability, and developable land may be constraining factors for business growth.

National and local market trends may pose limitations to business growth in Grafton. The United States, and Massachusetts in particular, have not scaled housing development in line with population growth since the 2008/2009 financial crisis. In Massachusetts alone, there is an estimated shortage of 222,000 units.⁶ This demand for housing has two consequences for business growth in Grafton. First, housing development has become a safer bet than commercial development and is currently preferred by developers in Central Massachusetts. This means that improvements and construction of commercial buildings may be limited.

Second, as housing costs have outpaced wage growth in Grafton (see Table 5), workers are finding it increasingly difficult to afford housing in town. Between 2017 and 2022 household income grew by 18% while the median home value increased by 29%. Gross rent⁷ increased by 15%, but those paying more than 30% of their income toward rent increased by 31%,



Table 6. Grafton Buildout and Vacant Parcel Analysis - Developable Acres by Zone

Grafton Buildout and Vacant Parcel Analysis - Developable Acres by Zone			
Developable Acres			
Zone	2024 Buildout	2000 Buildout	Vacant Parcels
Community Business Districts (CB)	12	50	5
Industrial Districts (I)	51	209	21
Neighborhood Business Districts (NB)	13	14	2
Office/Light Industry Districts (OLI)	551	800	141
Village Mixed Use (VMU)	20	N/A	11
Total Acres	647	1073	181

Source: CMRPC Buildout 2024, 2000

Note: The vacant parcel analysis does not consider underdeveloped land or constraints to development. It is a representation of the total land that is categorized as vacant in local assessor's data from MassGIS. Vacant properties currently under development are excluded.

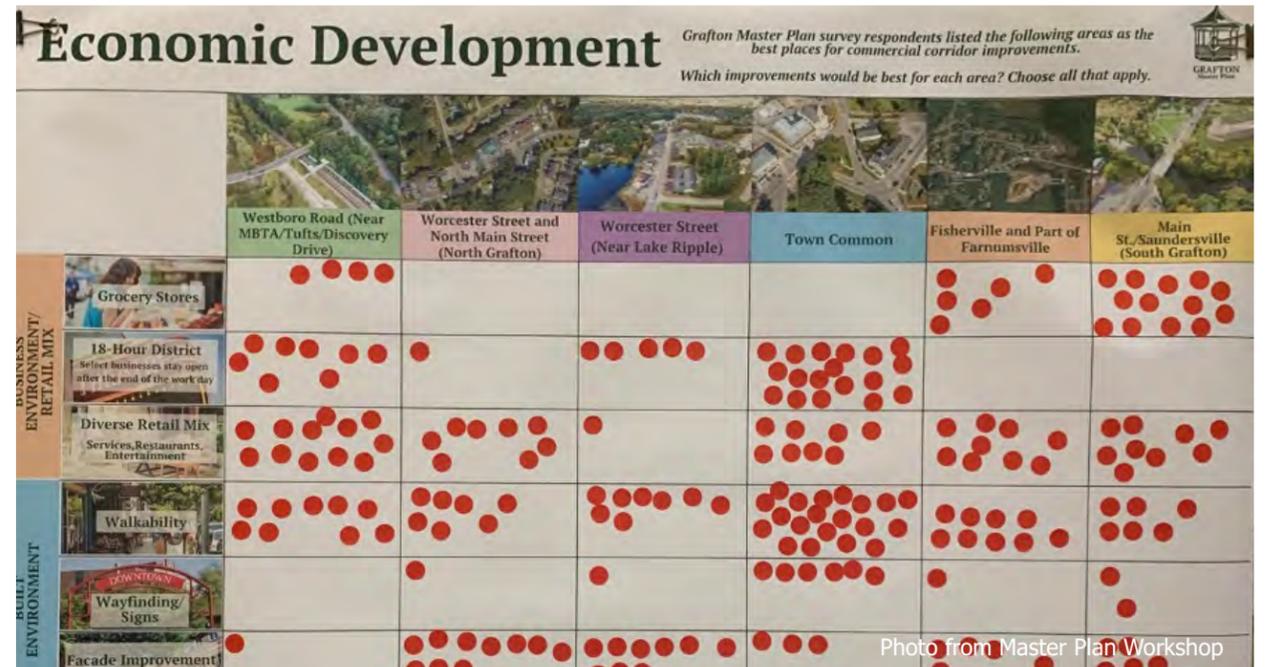
reflecting an increasingly challenging rental market. These pressures can mean that lower wage workers may need to locate outside of town, resulting in added transportation costs, traffic, or a mismatch between employers and the labor market.

A 2016 Economic Development Self-Assessment of Grafton by Northeastern University's Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy identified Grafton's workforce composition as

a key strength. But the rising cost of housing has the potential to partly negate this advantage.

Commercial real estate has also faced headwinds over the past five years from the COVID-19 pandemic, rising costs / inflation, interest

rates, labor shortages, and the increase of e-commerce.⁸ Despite concerns about e-commerce, neighborhood businesses, especially those that provide in-person services and fast-casual dining, have performed relatively well, especially in more densely populated areas. This has led to a preference for spaces that are more flexible and adaptable to multiple business needs. As Grafton works to address needed housing production, commercial and industrial development may lag in the coming



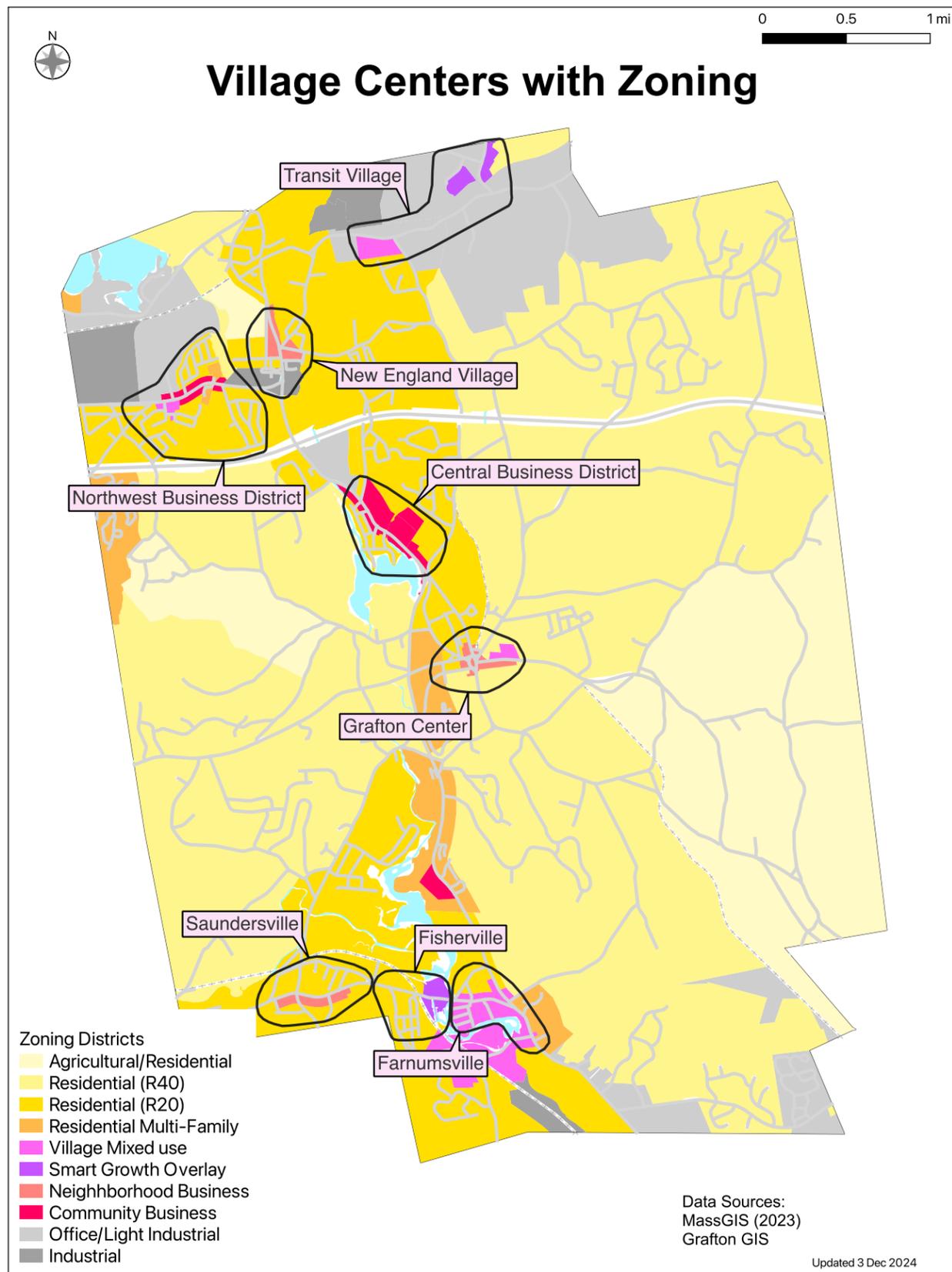


Figure 2. Grafton Commercial Centers – North Grafton, Grafton Center, and South Grafton



years. However, if market trends, such as interest rates, trend more favorably, it is likely that it will become more lucrative. At the same time, housing and population growth may lead to increased demand for local services.

A limited supply of available vacant and developable commercial and industrial land — as shown in Figure 4 —also presents challenges for business growth. Vacant undeveloped land is the most attractive to commercial developers as it comes with the least risk and uncertainty. Smaller businesses and startups, preferred by residents, are unlikely to develop property on their own, instead relying on developers to build spaces that they can lease. Buildout analysis offers another lens into the amount of developable land available in Grafton. Buildout analysis examines the existing development pattern in a community and estimates the amount of additional development that could be supported under current land use regulations. Table 6 shows the quantity of developable acres in Grafton based on a 2024 buildout analysis. It also shows the results from the buildout that was conducted for the 2001 Master Plan. Total developable land has decreased by roughly 426 acres over the last 20 years.

To address these challenges Grafton has taken numerous steps to maximize the potential of undeveloped and underdeveloped property. The Town strategically zoned areas around the Grafton MBTA Commuter Rail station and the Grafton Science Park for commercial and industrial development. A new zoning category, Village Mixed-Use, was also introduced to facilitate ground-floor business uses and upper-floor residential spaces in part of South Grafton. The 2001 Master Plan also outlined several land use options for future growth, including the preservation of land by focusing appropriately scaled but denser development in three village centers.

However, the 2001 Master Plan also identified another limiting factor that remains relevant today, especially in a difficult real estate market: adequate utilities and infrastructure to service new development. While Grafton is fortunate to have an extensive water and sewer service area that touches almost all its commercial corridors and village centers, further investment in these systems may be required to support new, higher demand uses. Sewer extensions in industrial-zoned areas of North and South Grafton in particular could unlock additional development opportunities. Adequate water volume and pressure are critical to comply with sanitation and fire safety regulations, but future restrictions on water withdrawals from both surface and groundwater supplies by the Massachusetts Water Management Act (MGL c. 21G) may pose a constraint to new development unless new conservation efforts are made. The Town should closely consult with Grafton’s two water districts on this topic to address these concerns effectively.

GRAFTON MASTER PLAN SURVEY, 2023 RESIDENT FEEDBACK:*

“Any [types of businesses] are fine if the location is thoughtful. (South Grafton mills would be an ideal spot for larger stores or businesses. Areas along 122 would be appropriate for small business/retail.)”

*Comments edited for clarity.



Key Finding 5: There is an opportunity to facilitate diverse business development in the town's existing commercial centers.

Resident feedback reveals a strong interest in supporting a variety of businesses in Grafton and for services that will cater to various community needs.

As outlined in Key Finding 2, residents would like to see more small businesses in town. To balance new development with the preservation of natural resources and open space, Grafton will need to focus on how the town can better leverage its existing commercial areas. These areas consist of several villages and districts concentrated in the north, south, and center of town. See Figure 2 for a map detailing these areas. The town should facilitate additional business development by identifying the types of businesses and development projects that align with community priorities while fitting each area's circumstances (e.g., built form and infrastructure capacity). When asked about the types of services and goods that residents purchase outside of Grafton, respondents' top answers were groceries, retail, and restaurants.⁹ A market and retail analysis could help the town further understand local market demand and business opportunities.

Each of the three commercial centers have their own distinct characteristics and opportunities:

Grafton Center

Grafton Center is a traditional New England town center, with commercial and residential uses that surround the Town Common. Busi-



Aerial Image of North Grafton



Aerial Image of Grafton Center

nesses in the area tend to be small, service or retail-oriented, and there is good pedestrian infrastructure. Heading north along Worcester St., newer development includes several strip malls and a grocery store. Opportunities in the area include:

- Additional parking
- More community events
- Wayfinding signage and placemaking

North Grafton

North Grafton contains both commercial and industrial development. Along route 122, there are strip malls and individual businesses as well as the large Wyman-Gordon campus. Notable developments like CenTech Park and the Grafton Science Park reflect campus-like or planned industrial park development. The area includes a 33-acre parcel, formerly part of Grafton State Hospital, which is being transformed into a 200,000-square-foot flex-use space catering to life sciences, biotech, and industrial uses. Opportunities in the area include:

- Additional industrial development
- Better use of the strip mall areas
- Redevelopment of underutilized sites
- Improvements / extensions to pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure

South Grafton

South Grafton encompasses three historical mill villages. Since the closure of the mills, the area has seen minimal economic development, and most businesses in the area are service oriented. A few retail establishments, such as a pizza restaurant and liquor store, offer minimal opportunities for local commerce. Recent investments in sidewalk and bike infrastructure have increased connectivity and accessibility from residential areas to the local Mill Village Park. Within the area, additional needs include:

- Local business development and support
- Increased residential development and density that supports walkability
- Additional job opportunities



Goals

Goal 1: Invest in the Future of Key Economic Sectors

The Housing and the Land Use Chapters discuss Grafton's historical population growth and future population projections in detail. They show that from 2010-2020, the population grew by 11%, reaching 19,664 people. However, the rate of growth is expected to decline to about 3% between 2040 and 2050.¹⁰ Table 7 shows that between 2010 and 2020, the working age population (aged 16 and older) in Grafton grew by 16.65%, substantially more than the population as a whole. However, the Civilian Labor Force growth mirrored the population increase. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate stayed in a range that fluctuated around 4%.

Table 8 shows the sectors in which Grafton residents were employed in 2010 and the changes to 2022. There is not any clear pattern of a shift from production towards services or from "blue collar" to "white collar" employment sectors.

Research by the National League of Cities and the Rural Community Assistance Partnership¹¹ shows that economic performance is significantly improved by increased levels of con-

Table 7. Employment and Unemployment Rates of Grafton Residents

Employment and Unemployment Rates of Grafton Residents				
Year	Population 16 Years or Older	Civilian Labor Force	Unemployed in Civilian Labor Force	Unemployment Rate
2010	13,043	9,674	580	4.50%
2015	14,280	10,146	547	3.80%
2020	15,215	10,750	638	4.20%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates

Table 8. Industries Where Grafton Residents are Employed

Industry-wide Employment Details in Grafton			
Industries Where Grafton Residents are Employed	2010	2022	Percent Change 2010 - 2022
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	9094	10645	17%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	50	56	12%
Construction	425	691	63%
Manufacturing	1072	1393	30%
Wholesale trade	302	145	-52%
Retail trade	988	1202	22%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	280	389	39%
Information	301	193	-36%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	1017	911	-10%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	1175	1691	44%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	2052	2454	20%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	563	630	12%
Other services, except public administration	435	508	17%
Public administration	434	382	-12%

nectivity, "demonstrated through markets for goods and services, entrepreneurship, workforce and supply chains." One of the most accessible ways of measuring this is the extent to which the workforce of a town reflects the employment patterns in the economic region. Figure 3 shows how the employment sectors in which Grafton's residents work compare with the dominant sectors of Massachusetts and Worcester County. This reflects that the town's skills and experience base is broadly in line with the region in which it is located, with the exception of the "Educational services, and health care and social assistance" sector which lags slightly behind the rest of the region.

It is notable that the population of Grafton is highly educated. As shown in Table 9, 96% of the population over 25 years old has graduated high school and 54% has

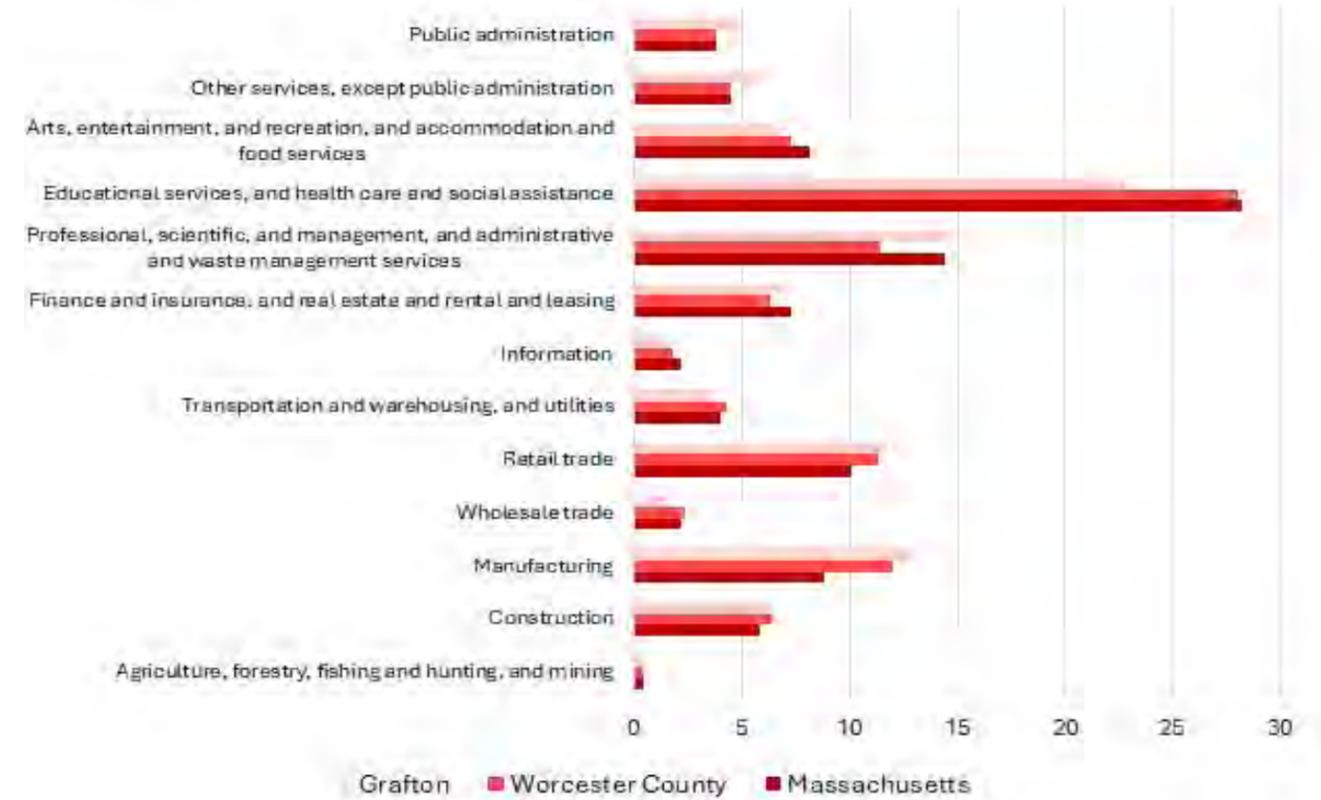


Figure 3. Employment Sectors Compared with Massachusetts and Worcester

a bachelor's degree or higher. These figures show what the Town of Grafton has to offer potential employers in terms of the education levels and range of skills of the workforce. By comparison, only 91% of adults 25 and over in

both Massachusetts and Worcester County had graduated high school and 47% of adults 25 and over in Massachusetts and 38% in Worcester County had bachelor's degrees.

Table 9. Educational Attainment - Population over 25

Educational Attainment - Population over 25		
	2022	%
Population 25 years and over	13547	100%
Less than 9th grade	198	1%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	357	3%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	2944	22%
Some college, no degree	1813	13%
Associate degree	986	7%
Bachelor's degree	4065	30%
Graduate or professional degree	3184	24%
Percent high school graduate or higher	12992	96%
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	7249	54%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2022 5-Year Estimate

As of 2022, only slightly more than a quarter of residents live and work in Grafton. Table 10 shows how Grafton compares to its neighbors in this metric. Table 11 shows the twenty largest employers in Grafton. These employers make up more than half of the estimated 5,108 persons who work in Grafton according to information collected from employers and Data Axle.

This list of major employers reflects a broad range of industries including education, scientific research, manufacturing, construction, transportation, and retail, similar to the range of industries in which Grafton residents are employed. The largest employer is the Tufts



University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, which, according to a communication from the Executive Associate Dean on October 15, 2024, has increased to a total on site staff establishment of 662 people.

This broad range of sectors in which Grafton

Table 10. Residents Living and Working in Grafton

Percent population that work and live the city/town	
Worcester	53.70%
Westborough	40.80%
Northbridge	31.80%
Shrewsbury	31.70%
Grafton	27.00%
Upton	26.40%
Millbury	24.70%
Sutton	23.70%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2022 5-Year Estimate

Table 11. Largest Employers in Grafton

Largest Employers	
Employer	Employee Count
Tufts University Cummings School	662
Grafton Public Schools	517
Washington Mills North Grafton, Inc	300
Wyman-Gordon	300
Grafton Job Corp Center	140
Stop & Shop Supermarket	111
CentralSquare Technologies	100
Grafton Fire Department	80
Dimitria Delights Baking Co	75
Temp-Flex Cable Inc	75
Highfields Golf & Country Club	70
Borggaard Construction Corp	70
Key Program Inc	65
IDEXX Laboratories Inc	60
Jcsi	55
CVS Pharmacy	50
Dana Transport Inc	50
Post Office Pub Restaurant	50
Hueson Corp	40
Sunshine Sign	40

residents are employed is also visible in the 223 organizations that are registered to do business in Grafton. These sectors are listed in Table 12. Note that not all businesses are required to obtain a business / "Doing Business As" certificate.

As well as the workforce, skills and experience in a town's population, another important requirement for connectivity is infrastructure that provides the basic requirements for economic activity.

Grafton is well served by transportation infrastructure that connects it to the region. Interstate 90, the strongest east-west connector, passes through the town and features an interchange link in Millbury west of the town border. Grafton also lies in close proximity to Route 20, Route 146, and Route 495, providing it with connectivity to major metropolitan centers in Worcester, Providence, and the Metro-West area of the state. The road linkages are strongest in North Grafton, with Route 122, Route 140 and Route 30 playing particularly important roles in economic connectivity.

Relative to neighboring communities, the town is also exceptionally well served by rail, with an MBTA Commuter Rail station within its borders. Although this station is not located close to Grafton's residential centers, it still provides a convenient multi-modal interface for commuters, especially those traveling to Boston. As the surrounding areas develop, it has the potential to be the center of a commuter hub. The town is also integrated into the state and national freight rail network via the Grafton Upton Railroad, further enhancing its logistical connectivity.

Another requirement for economic development is the availability of essential infrastructure. Grafton is well served by water lines. The



Table 12. Employment Sectors of Grafton Residents

Doing Business As Registrations	
Business Category	Businesses Registered as Doing Business in Grafton
Consulting/Management/Accounting	20
Contracting	4
Food and Beverage Services Establishment	9
Heavy industry	3
Home Services Establishment	41
Miscellaneous	11
Online Services Establishment	13
Personal Services Establishment	52
Real estate/construction/design/architecture	16
Retail	16
Small production/crafts/art/literature	19
Transportation/delivery	19
Total	223

recent upgrades to the water main along Westborough Road have significantly improved both capacity and quality. It is unlikely that the cost of extending a water main to any potentially developable property in the town would be a significant constraint to development. However, water withdrawal limits under the Massachusetts Water Management Act (MGL c. 21G) may restrict development without water conservation efforts.

In comparison, the Town's sewer system is more limited, particularly in the northeast region, which holds high potential for development. This could present challenges to growth in that area.

Internet service is another necessity in today's digital age. The provision of broadband internet service, which was one of the recommendations of the 2001 Master Plan, is now provided by Charter and Verizon to virtually every location in town according to the Massachusetts Broadband Institute.¹²





Objective 1.1: Strengthen Grafton’s economic opportunities through large-scale investments in industrial and technology parks.

Grafton is well positioned to be competitive in attracting investments that require a highly educated labor force, robust infrastructure, and exceptional linkages. The presence of vacant land in close proximity to a leading university like Tufts and Grafton’s MBTA Commuter Rail station represents an opportunity that should be fully leveraged.

Action Item 1.1.1: Study the feasibility of Grafton becoming an innovation hub.

Grafton is in a strong position to become an innovation hub. According to R.W Holmes Commercial Real Estate, an innovation hub is a geographical area that is developed intentionally with the goal of hosting facilities that “nurture new ideas and help develop inquisitive perspective in youths of today.”¹³ Suburban innovation hubs share several characteristics: 1) proximity to higher education institutions, which can be a source of talent; 2), access to industry clusters, such as healthcare, that can drive innovation and create a system of related businesses; 3) and access amenities that enhance quality of life and help attract a diverse workforce. Because of these characteristics, innovation hubs are attractive places for life science, biotechnology, and pharmaceutical companies to locate their facilities. Existing examples of innovation hubs in Massachusetts include Kendall Square in Cambridge, MA and

the N2 Innovation District in Needham and Newton, MA.

The feasibility study should explore partnerships, assess demand, and outline how to meet it. It should detail site acquisition, design specifications, infrastructural needs, management plans, revenue, and financing.

Action Item 1.1.2: Review and amend the Zoning Bylaw to resolve competing land uses that have reduced the amount of available industrial land.

This action item needs to be responsive to the zoning diagnostic recommended in the Land Use Chapter.

Key steps include:

- Ensure that necessary changes to the Zoning Bylaw do not create a situation in which land that should be used for employment and economic development purposes is used for housing
- Ensure that land is not so rigidly zoned that it cannot be used for commercial purposes because of proximity to heavy industry, while still protecting established industries and potential investors from negative impacts.
- Ensure that coverage limits or barriers that may have been appropriate to shield residents from heavy industry do not unnecessarily sterilize space around unintrusive businesses.
- Ensure that parking requirements are appropriate and do not unnecessarily constrain development

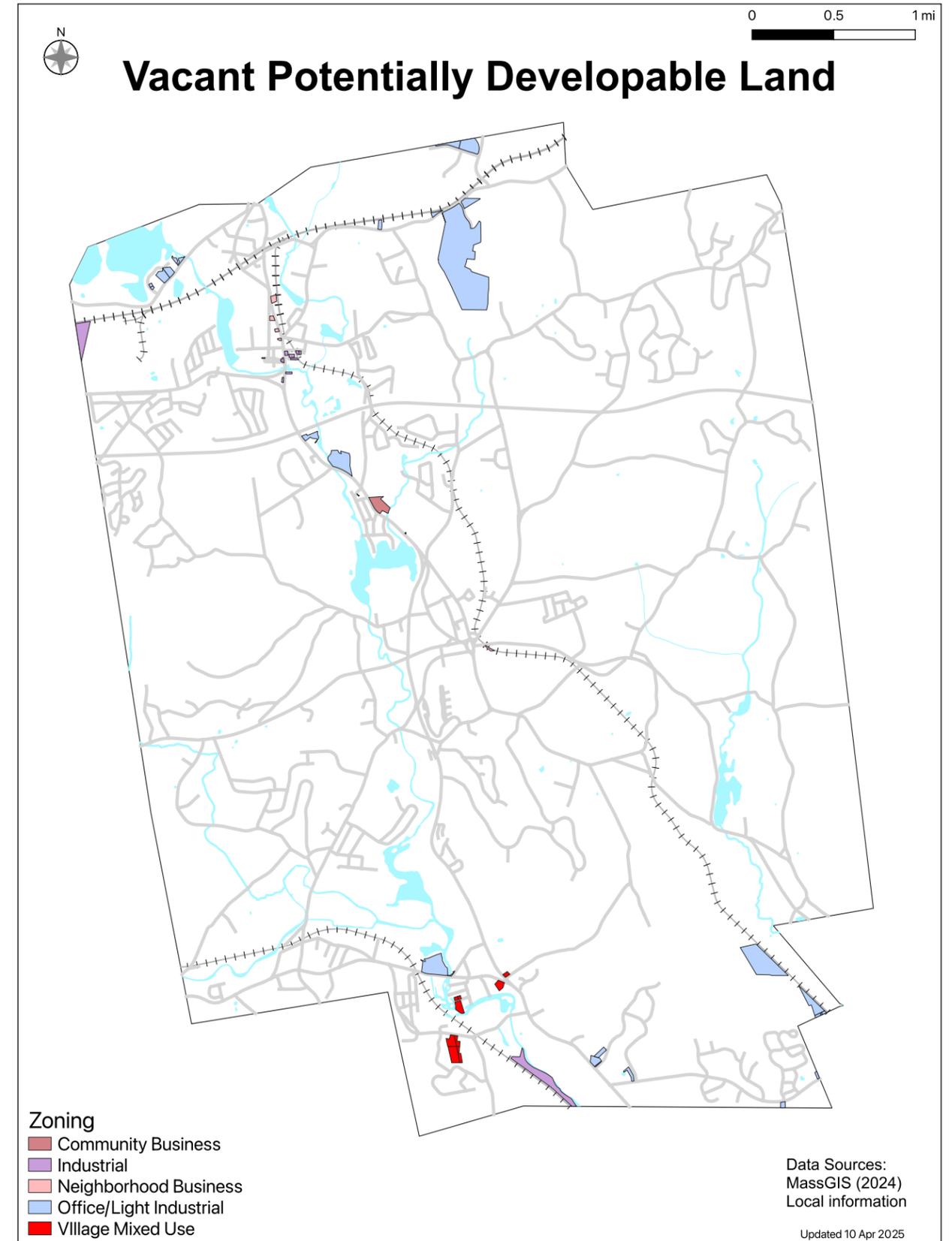


Figure 4. Vacant, Developable, and Potentially Developable Land by Zoning District



Objective 1.2: Capitalize on Grafton’s recreational and natural assets through ecotourism and the hospitality sector.

Grafton’s rural charm and historical character provide an opportunity for economic development through ecotourism and the hospitality sector.

Many small farms in Central Massachusetts face challenges competing with large-scale agricultural producers. As a result, local farms tend to try to emphasize quality over quantity and to find ways to sell their produce directly to customers. They often reinforce this by creating aesthetic, educational, social, and recreational experiences to add value to their products. This is a trend throughout Central Massachusetts and a good example is to be found at Houlden Farm in North Grafton.

This type of enterprise has the potential to grow in Grafton, but one of the difficulties faced by this sector is visibility and promotion since farms are usually located in rural areas. The Grafton Farmer’s Market hosted seasonally on the Town Common offers local producers with a unique opportunity to showcase their goods. With the success of the Farmers Market in drawing people from outside Grafton into town and as more farms establish a foothold

GRAFTON MASTER PLAN SURVEY, 2023 RESIDENT FEEDBACK: *

“Somewhere teens can socialize without getting kicked out. Or an after-school activity center. Grafton rec doesn’t have teen programs.”

*Comments edited for clarity.

in experienced-based agriculture, there is potential for the town to establish a reputation for eco-tourism and other tourism-based ventures.

Action item 1.2.1: Add ecotourism strategies to the mission of the Grafton Agricultural Commission.

The Agricultural Commission is a five-member commission appointed by the Select Board with a charge to “Serve as facilitators to encourage the pursuit of agriculture in Grafton; Promote agriculture-based economic opportunities in the town; Act as mediators, advocates, educators, and/or negotiators on farming issues for established town committees and departments;” and “Pursue all initiatives appropriate to creating a sustainable agricultural community.”

Given the increasing importance of ecotourism



to local farmers and the potential that it has to strengthen Grafton’s economy, reference to the promotion of ecotourism should be included in the mission of the Agricultural Commission.

Action Item 1.2.2: Attract and encourage hospitality industry establishments.

Grafton’s rural beauty, historic character, and sense of community are attractive to locals and may also be to out-of-town visitors. The town should capitalize on this appeal through hospitality-oriented businesses, including farm stalls, bed-and-breakfasts, and hotels that cater to people visiting farms, the Town Common, and other open spaces. To promote this, implementation of the Land Use Chapter should:

- Ensure that the review of the Town’s Zoning Bylaw considers the desirability of hospitality-oriented establishments and that the relevant regulations support and



accommodate such establishments to the greatest extent possible.

- Ensure that the Grafton Center Neighborhood Plan optimizes the use of the Grafton Common for the annual farmer’s market and similar events. This includes the provision of adequate parking.

Goal 2: Retain and Attract Businesses That Contribute to Diversifying Grafton’s Tax Base and Increasing Employment Opportunities.

Businesses play many important roles in a community. They promote quality of life, provide employment opportunities, generate tax revenue, and form an essential part of the community fabric. To realize more of these benefits, the Town of Grafton should pursue several strategies to attract and retain businesses.

Objective 2.1: Build town capacity to recruit, retain, and market local businesses.

Grafton already boasts several assets that can support business recruitment, retention, and marketing. The town has an active Economic Development Commission (EDC) that in recent years has hosted events to highlight development and commercial investment opportunities and facilitate business-to-business networking. It also created a directory of local businesses that is available on the EDC website. Grafton is also served by three chambers of commerce that offer a suite of events, educational opportunities, and other resources for local businesses. The town should continue to leverage these assets as it strives to attract and support businesses.



Action Item 2.1.1: Enhance communication between the Town government and local businesses.

A recent survey indicates that business owners generally have a positive perception of their experience working with the Town of Grafton to “set up and maintain” their business.¹⁴ Nearly two-thirds of respondents to the survey rated their experience as “Excellent” or “Good.” However, public workshop and survey results revealed that some business owners found it difficult or to work with the Town or certain Town departments. A 2016 economic development analysis also identified communication with local businesses as a priority to address, especially on permitting matters.¹⁵

Multiple approaches could be taken to improve communication with local businesses. The Town could publish a more detailed permitting guide modeled after those of Acton and Franklin, MA. The Town’s existing permitting guide is a two-page brochure largely limited to department roles, meeting schedules, and contact information. Another option is publishing a newsletter to inform businesses and residents alike about town events, programs, and projects, similar to the Town of Oxford’s “Onward Oxford” newsletter. Grafton’s Recreation Department already disseminates a seasonal newsletter, but this is limited to recreation events and programs. A broader newsletter encompassing more town activities could complement the Recreation Department’s newsletter. Additionally, the Town could host an annual business forum for Town staff to update the business community on municipal initiatives and to allow for business owners to provide feedback.

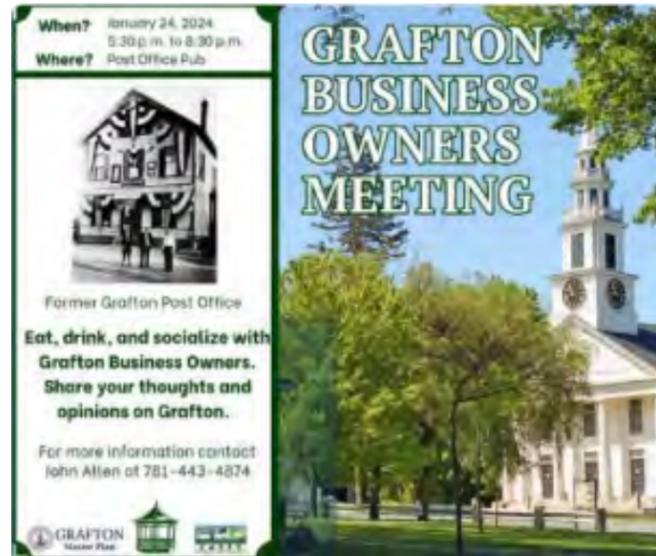


Figure 5. The Grafton EDC hosted a social event for local business owners. Source: The Post Office Pub.

Action Item 2.1.2: Host events to promote local business activity and facilitate business-to-business networking.

The Grafton Recreation Department hosts many events throughout the year, such as the Fall Festival on the Town Common, which provide sponsorship and participation opportunities for local businesses. Workshop attendees expressed a desire for more events to generate business activity in the center of town. The Town’s former Economic Development Specialist also suggested the idea of hosting events at other Town parks. The EDC should collaborate with the Town’s Recreation Commission and Department to develop new events that offer local businesses tabling or vending opportunities.

The EDC should also continue to host events to connect local business stakeholders, such



as the one held in January 2024 at the Post Office Pub. Holding networking events with regularity is important to increasing turnout. Such events can foster relationships that benefit businesses and the local economy. They may also start conversations that lead to stronger forms of organization, such as a local chamber of commerce or a small business association. The chambers of commerce that already serve Grafton would be a valuable partner in organizing and publicizing networking events.

Action Item 2.1.3: Overhaul the Town’s economic development webpage to continue outreach toward prospective developers, retail, & restaurant businesses.

A 2016 economic analysis identified marketing as a weakness for Grafton.¹⁶ The 2021 Rapid Recovery Plan for the North Grafton / New England Village area also recommended that the Town increase efforts to recruit critical businesses and services. To this end, the Town should overhaul the business and retail marketing page on the EDC website to more effectively market the value and opportunities that Grafton can provide to businesses. By having a page dedicated to marketing, Grafton is ahead of many of its neighboring communities. But the page could be enhanced with more graphics, images, and interactive features, creating a product that impresses prospective businesses and developers.

Inspiration for a business and retail marketing page can be found from many different sources. The Downtown Hudson Business Improvement District’s website uses video and imagery to depict a dynamic, prosperous community. Framingham’s Economic and Community Development Department also maintains a website coined “Choose Framingham.” The website highlights opportunities to work, live, play, learn, and enjoy in the community. Looking outside of Massachusetts, the Town of Bel Air, MD utilizes an interactive business location map and a real estate dashboard to highlight existing establishments and tenancy opportunities in the local economy. Finally, Esri ArcGIS StoryMaps offer another platform to tell the town’s economic development story.

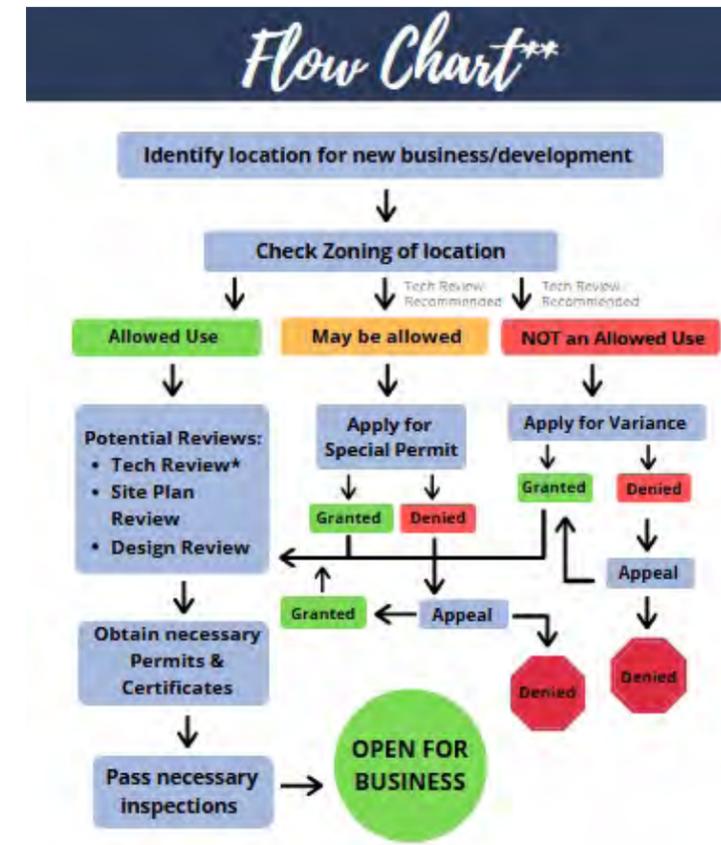


Figure 6. Town of Franklin

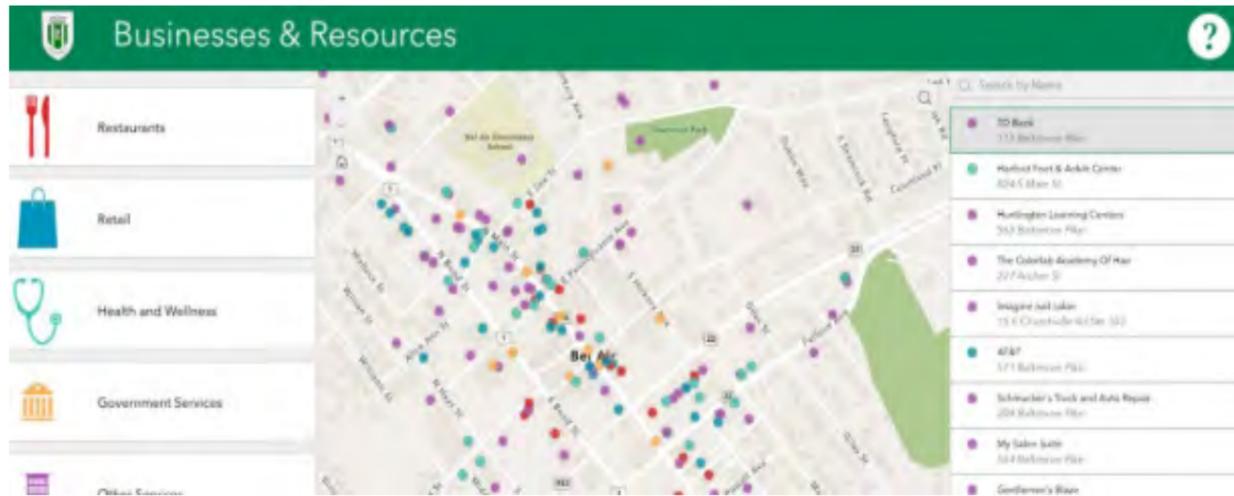


Figure 7. The Town of Bel Air, MD, offers an interactive business directory/location map on their website. Each dot represents a business color coded by establishment type. Source: Town of Bel Air, MD

Action Item 2.1.4: Strengthen the town’s relationship with regional chambers of commerce.

Grafton is fortunate to be served by three active chambers of commerce: the Corridor 9/495 Regional Chamber of MetroWest (“Corridor 9 Chamber”), the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce (WRCC) and the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce (BVCC), which is an affiliate chamber of the WRCC. Discussion with the BVCC revealed that collaboration between the chamber and the town fell off during the pandemic and has not picked up since. This presents a missed opportunity. The town, especially the EDC, should renew efforts to collaborate with its regional chambers of commerce to organize events, improve marketing, and enhance workforce development. For example, the Webster-Dudley-Oxford Chamber of Commerce organizes an annual Town Administrator’s Lunch that provides business owners with an opportunity to hear from and engage with local municipal staff.

Action item 2.1.5: Stimulate private investment by offering tax exemptions to expanding and relocating businesses.

Offering businesses financial incentives is another way to attract economic activity. In Massachusetts, municipalities may offer property owners several types of tax exemptions through the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP). Depending on the type of EDIP exemption, a tax abatement is either applied to the full fair cash value of the property (special tax assessment; STA) or a percentage of the increase in the parcel’s fair cash value due to incentivized development (tax increment financing; TIF). Personal property may also be exempted under the EDIP TIF. EDIP tax exemptions present a way for municipalities to incentivize businesses to relocate to or expand within their community. But the tax exemptions are temporary, and after the agreed upon tax exemption period lapses, the Town resumes using the full fair cash value of the



property as the basis for property taxes.

Grafton has utilized TIFS with the United Parcel Service (UPS) for a warehouse on the Grafton-Shrewsbury town line and for Feedback Earth. Leading these efforts has been the Town’s TIF Committee, which is charged with negotiating TIF agreements with private parties and offering recommendations on whether to approve agreements to the Select Board and Town Meeting.

Objective 2.2: Build a resilient local economy through investments in small businesses.

The economic history of Grafton, like much of Central Massachusetts, underscores the importance of economic diversification. Fueled by the power of the Blackstone Canal and other regional rivers, Central Massachusetts developed into one of the country’s earliest manufacturing centers in the early 19th century. But in the 20th Century, the Great Depression and later increasing competition from elsewhere in the United States and overseas resulted in the precipitous decline of the region’s industrial base. Grafton was not left untouched. According to the town’s 2001 Master Plan, by 1960, there were only 17 manufacturing firms in Grafton, compared to 72 in 1922.¹⁷

Action Item 2.2.1: Conduct a community-led retail needs assessment to identify demand for specific essential goods and services in Grafton.



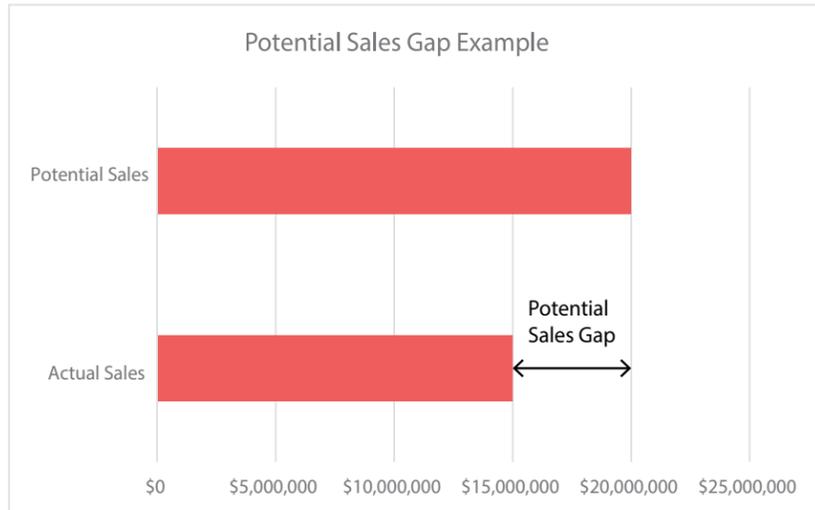


Figure 8. Potential Sales Gap Example. A retail needs assessment may involve trade region gap analysis, which estimates potential sales in a defined trade area. Potential spending is then compared to actual sales to find the potential sales gap. This gap could represent a market opportunity for new business activity.

To keep its economy resilient through potential economic downturns and industry shifts, the town should encourage investments in small-scale businesses. Currently, over 80% of businesses in Grafton employ 10 or less employees.¹⁸ This amounts to 1,331 (or 23%) of the 5,737 employees that are estimated to work in Grafton.

Supporting the success of new small businesses requires understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the local economy. Grafton can increase the chances that it recruits the right types of businesses to succeed in the local market by conducting a retail needs assessment. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, a retail needs assessment can help the town identify gaps in the market and highlight where new businesses could thrive. The results can be used to tailor outreach to business sectors and as a marketing tool to attract new businesses to move to town. Identifying relative weaknesses in the

local economy compared to neighboring communities also offers the opportunity to analyze what policies might be contributing to those communities' success. A consortium of midwestern universities has released a methodology for how communities can undertake a retail needs assessment.

Action Item 2.2.2: Facilitate new small business startups by offering business assistance grants.

Grafton may also support new small businesses by offering grants and assistance. While Town funds are not eligible to be spent directly supporting private businesses, there are exceptions. For instance, Grafton could apply for the Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program (MVSP). The MVSP offers a tax credit and matching local grant funds for businesses leasing and occupying a vacant storefront in a Certified Vacant Storefront District. Several of Grafton's neighboring municipalities have applied for and received vacant storefront district designations from the state, including Oxford, Westborough, and Worcester. New England Village and Worcester Street are both possible candidates for MVSP designation in town. Grafton may also consider a façade improvement program as recommended in the 2021 Rapid Recovery Plan. Neighboring municipalities such as Shrewsbury and Worcester already host façade improvement programs that local businesses can take advantage of.

The Town should also explore opportunities to allocate eligible federal dollars to business



grants. For instance, the Town of Westborough offered a Small Business Recovery Program up until February 2024 using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. However, federal funding is likely to be far more limited in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Additionally, the Town should strive to educate local businesses about other loan and grant opportunities offered by Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED) agencies, the federal Small Business Association, regional chambers of commerce, and more.

Goal 3: Encourage Economic Development in Grafton's Commercial Corridors and Village Centers

Grafton is home to an assortment of commercial corridors and village centers. The village centers emerged in the 19th Century around hubs of manufacturing activity. Today, even after the decline of these industries, the village centers remain the primary places for commercial activity in town. They are also home to the densest concentrations of housing. Grafton's village centers are interconnected by several key corridors, namely Main Street / Route 122A and Route 122.

These corridors and village centers present strong opportunities to promote mixed-use development. Mixed-use development comes in two forms. Vertical mixed-use consists of a combination of different uses in the same building. For instance, a storefront located on the ground floor of a building and apartments located on the upper floors. On the other hand, horizontal mixed-use involves a combination of different uses in the same area. For example, townhouses placed across the street from a

business plaza. Besides being good for business, mixed-use development offers the promise of appeal to many different demographics. Young professionals and seniors alike often appreciate being within walking distance of services, retail, and food establishments. A majority of Master Plan Survey respondents were also supportive of mixed-use development in and around North Grafton, the Grafton Common, and South Grafton.

To take full advantage of key corridors and village centers, Grafton should engage in area-specific planning processes and invest in physical improvements and programming. South Grafton should receive priority for these actions.

Once a mill and industrial hub, South Grafton has experienced noticeable disparities in economic development over the past few decades compared to other parts of Grafton. Two census block groups in South Grafton are classified as Environmental Justice areas under the criteria that the minority population is greater than 25% and the median household income is less than 150% of the state's median household income.¹⁹ South Grafton currently has a lower median household income, a longer average commute time, and a smaller concentration of jobs per square mile compared to North Grafton and the center of town.²⁰

Since the 2001 Master Plan, the Town has worked to increase the vibrancy of South Grafton. For example, the Town invested in new sidewalks and bike lanes along Main Street / Route 122A to improve access to the three historical mill villages. A Village and Neighborhood Mixed Use District (VMU) was also adopted in the Farnumsville section of South Grafton, with the aim of revitalizing the historical area through higher density mixed use development and pedestrian friendly design. This added flexibility



has already prompted new housing development in the area, with the construction of the Providence Village Townhomes in 2020.²¹ Economic development in South Grafton will likely center on smaller local businesses that fit the scale of the neighborhood.

Objective 3.1: Create more vibrant, sustainable commercial areas that will foster economic and social opportunities.

Creating vibrant commercial centers involves thoughtful planning, design, and active community engagement. Some of the elements that contribute to vibrant spaces include:

Mixed-Use Development: Combining residential, commercial, and recreational spaces in close proximity encourages people to live, work, and socialize in the same area. This leads to increased foot traffic for businesses, convenient retail and service options for residents, and less trips taken by car. Mixed-use development in the Farnumsville area of South Grafton is allowed under current zoning and viewed positively by many Grafton residents.

Multi-modal Infrastructure:

Sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes are vital to making commercial corridors more inviting and accessible. By encouraging walking and biking, this infrastructure can lead to more interaction with local businesses. The provision of adequate parking is also essential to the success of commercial areas, given Grafton’s suburban development pattern. The Town is currently in Phase II of the MassDOT Complete Streets program, which provides technical as-

sistance and construction funding to municipalities for improvements to all modes of travel. Grafton has identified improvements to deteriorated sidewalks and sidewalk extensions in several commercial areas as priorities. Carrying out the Complete Streets Plan is incorporated in the Transportation Chapter.

Water, Sewer, and Other Utilities Infrastructure:

There must be adequate infrastructure for new commercial development to comply with health and safety codes and to meet economic feasibility. To ensure this, water, sewer, and other infrastructure capacity in Grafton should be expanded in commercial corridors and villages projected to experience future growth, in accordance with the Town Services and Facilities Chapter.

Public Spaces and Placemaking:

Open spaces, plazas, parks, and seating areas are key to creating vibrant communities. Together with placemaking initiatives—such as public art installations—and events, these spaces draw people to spend time in an area. In South Grafton, recent improvements to infrastructure connecting residential areas to the Mill Village Park offer the opportunity to host more town events in the area.

Retail Mix:

Businesses can benefit from proximity to a diverse range of complementary businesses. Concentrations of different types of businesses—such as retail stores, service establishments, and restaurants—increase overall foot traffic and thereby grow exposure for each business.

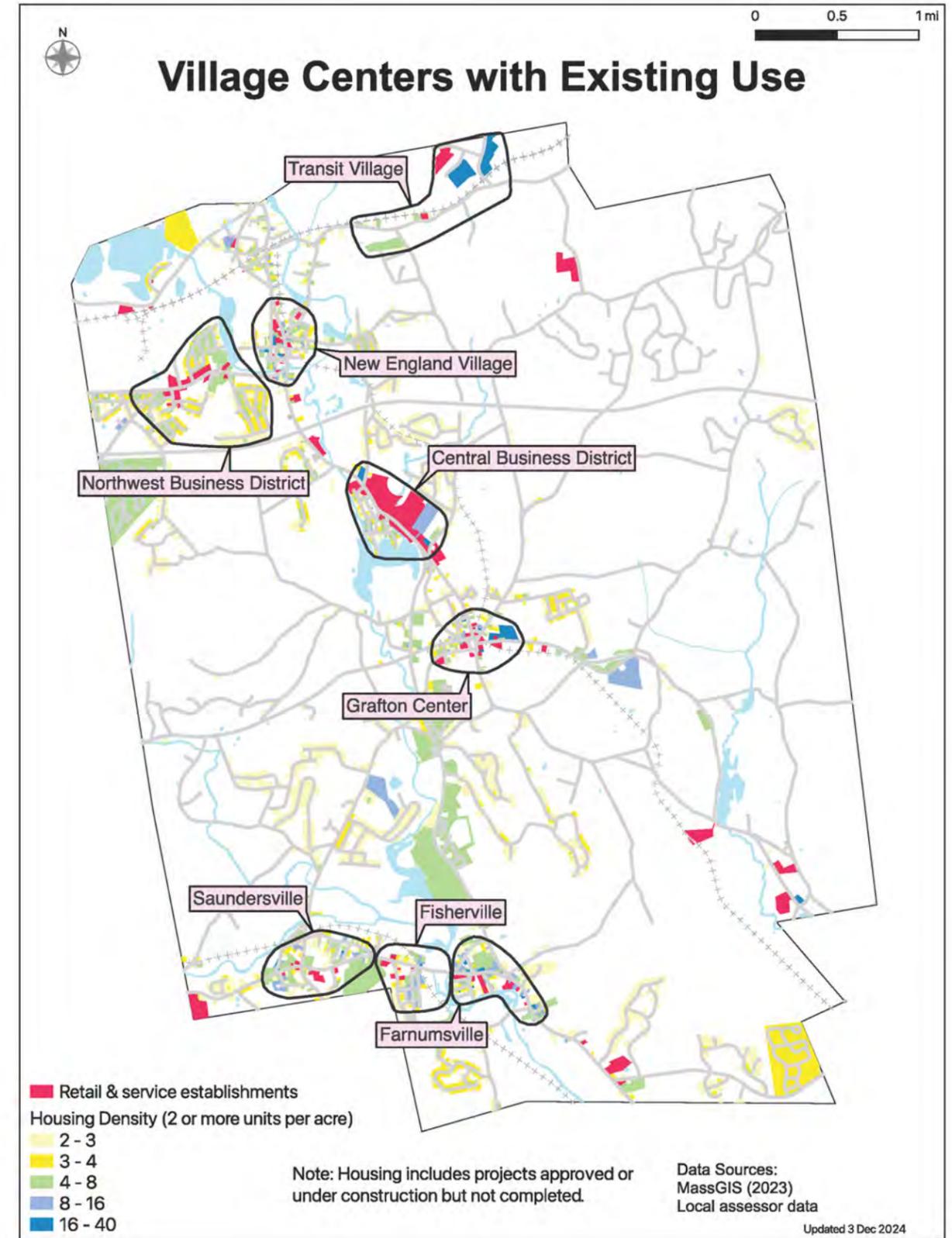


Figure 9. Village Centers with Existing Use



Action Item 3.1.1: Task the Economic Development Commission (EDC) with identifying priorities for Grafton’s distinct commercial corridors and village centers.

Grafton’s diverse commercial areas require tailored economic development strategies. The EDC should review previous plans—such as the 2021 Rapid Recovery Plan, the 2018 North Grafton Transit Village Master Plan, the 2018 North Grafton Worcester Street Master Plan—to address unfulfilled action items and identify strategies that may apply to other commercial areas in town. The process should involve community engagement with property owners, businesses, residents, and Town officials. Developing a community vision for each area is essential before moving forward with policy changes.

Action Item 3.1.2: Undertake an analysis of targeted commercial corridors and villages, to gain deeper insights into potential development constraints and opportunities.

Conducting an analysis of parcels in Grafton’s commercial corridors and village centers would provide valuable insights into development constraints and opportunities. This analysis would consider factors like current use, zoning regulations, ownership stability, building-to-land value ratios, and infrastructure capacity. Properties with low building-to-land value ratios may be prime candidates for redevelopment, as they could support higher density redevelopment or infill development.

Examining the makeup of property uses in an area, such as Grafton’s village centers (see Figure 9), may also reveal opportunities to pur-

sue complementary residential and commercial development that could form the backbone of walkable, livable community hubs. This directly aligns with one of the goals from the town’s 2024 Housing Production Plan Update: Pursue Mixed Use and Transit-Oriented Development.

However, redevelopment is unlikely to occur without the right infrastructure being in place. That is why it is important to study the capacity of existing infrastructure and its ability to accommodate new uses with higher service demands. Zoning is also critical to facilitating new development. Grafton’s 2021 Rapid Recovery Plan suggested rezoning parcels zoned for industrial use in the New England Village area of North Grafton. This should be explored as part of the Zoning Diagnostic recommended by the Land Use Chapter. Rezoning options could include changing the area to “Neighborhood Business,” like the rest of New England Village, or “Village Mixed Use.”

Objective 3.2: Make commercial areas more inviting through physical improvements and programming.

Aesthetics play a crucial role in the success of commercial districts and are a powerful tool for fostering economic vitality. Research shows that visually appealing commercial corridors improve pedestrian traffic, boost sales, and increase property values by making areas more appealing to potential customers, investors, and new businesses.

For example, the Project for Public Spaces has found that physical improvements, such as landscaping, attractive facades, and public art, support economic activity by encouraging people to stay longer, explore more shops, and return frequently.²² These enhancements reflect



“placemaking,” a concept that emphasizes creating spaces with unique character and vibrant social settings, which makes areas feel livelier and more attractive to diverse groups. Grafton can make its commercial areas more attractive through investments in physical improvements.

Hosting events and activities at public spaces in and around commercial areas can also better unlock the potential of Grafton’s village centers. The Grafton Town Common is ideal venue for such events, but the town should also leverage public spaces in other parts of town.

Action Item 3.2.1: Implement placemaking strategies to activate commercial areas.

Grafton’s village centers and key corridors could benefit from placemaking enhancements.

Public-private partnerships could help to fund these efforts, with contributions from businesses benefiting directly from increased foot traffic. Some of this work is already underway. The Town of Grafton was awarded \$25,000 from the MA Downtown Initiative Program (MDI) through the Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED) in 2023, to assist with a town-wide wayfinding and branding plan. The plan, including design concepts and prospective sign locations, was completed in 2024.

The Town also recently procured concept plans for improvements to Whitney Park (5 Mill Street) in the New England Village area of North Grafton. This fulfills a recommendation from the 2021 Grafton Rapid Recovery Plan, which advised improvements to Whitney Park in order to create a stronger sense of place in the village.

Case Study: Boston, MA

The City of Boston, MA created a program coined “PaintBox” where it invites local artists to submit designed for painting utility boxes. Selected artists are paid a stipend of \$500 per utility box painted. The program has resulted in dozens of uninviting utility boxes being turned into works of art. The City even maintains an interactive map identifying the location of each “paintbox.”

Source: City of Boston





Figure 10. Wayfinding design concept. Source: 2024 Grafton Community Wayfinding and Branding Project, Favermann Design.

Action item 3.2.2: Organize events in outdoor gathering areas to increase foot traffic.

Events are a traditional and time-tested way to increase foot traffic for local businesses. Visitors are already drawn to the Grafton Town Common with events like the July 4th celebrations, movie nights, and the Grafton Farmers' Market. There is an opportunity to extend events like these to other parks in town, such as Mill Village Park in South Grafton and Whitney Park in North Grafton. In fact, the Town recently took an important step to enhance the appeal of its parks by installing Wi-Fi hotspots. New sidewalks along Main Street also greatly enhance the connectivity of Mill Village Park to the surrounding community.

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TRANSPORTATION



Overview

The transportation network in Grafton is a multimillion-dollar taxpayer investment that directly impacts a community's economic well-being and quality of life. While the automobile is the predominant mode of transportation, Grafton's network offers a variety of options to accommodate different travel needs, ensuring a safe, inclusive experience for all.

Through community engagement events and responses to the Master Plan Community Survey, residents have expressed the desire for a safer road network throughout Grafton, especially around the Common. Key priorities include improved pedestrian accommodations, traffic calming, and better parking way finding.

Key Findings

Infrastructure gaps hinder multi-modal transportation in Grafton.

While most Grafton residents use cars for everyday transportation, a lack of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is a major barrier to multi-modal transportation. Formal bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, such as sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and cross walks can promote biking and walking. Additionally, traffic and intersection calming measures can support a perception of safety for multi-modal road users.

Key feedback included concerns over road



safety, with Pleasant Street, the Town Common, and Worcester Street topping the list of dangerous roads or intersections. Similar areas were identified for prioritizing bike and pedestrian infrastructure.

Grafton Residents feedback on improving safety for pedestrians and bicyclists:

- Add a pedestrian walkway along Route 122 and Route 140
- Develop roads within two miles of the MBTA station
- Construct bike paths and sidewalks around Route 30

Residents also suggested improvements including additional sidewalks and traffic calming at the Grafton Farmers' Market.

Commute Times are Rising.

The average commute time for a Grafton resident has risen steadily from an average of 20.3 minutes in the 1980s to plateauing just over 33

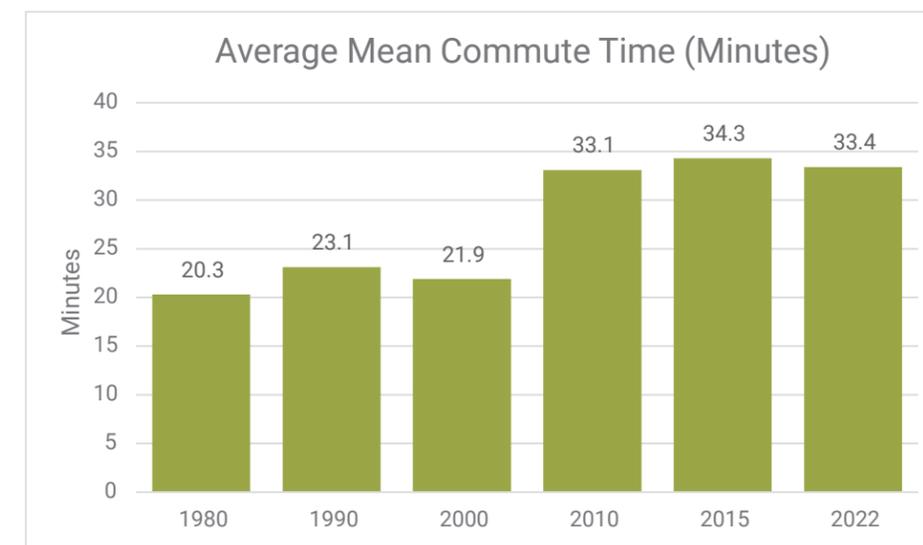


Figure 1. Average Mean Commute Time in Minutes³

GRAFTON RESIDENTS:

"Rt 30, especially because that is where the train station is! People should be able to safely walk out of that area/bike."

"Sidewalks on Millbury Street (especially at the elementary school.)"

Source: Grafton Master Plan Survey, 2023

minutes starting in the 2010's as shown in Figure 1. This trend could point to more residents working in the greater Boston area.

Table 1 shows that ninety-two percent of commuters who travel over an hour daily use public transportation and board the commuter rail at Grafton Station before heading towards Back Bay and South Station in Boston.

A majority of Grafton residents commute by automobile, and 51% of households have access to two vehicles as shown in Figure 2. Only 2% of households do not have a vehicle, a small fraction that must rely on other means of travel such as ride share, public transport, cycling, or walking.



Table 1. Grafton Commute Patterns, Travel Time⁴

Grafton Commute Patterns, Travel Time				
Travel Time	Total	Drove alone	Carpooled	Public Transportation
Less than 10 minutes	12%	11%	18%	0%
10 to 14 minutes	6%	6%	5%	0%
15 to 19 minutes	12%	12%	23%	0%
20 to 24 minutes	13%	13%	15%	4%
25 to 29 minutes	11%	12%	5%	0%
30 to 34 minutes	12%	13%	11%	2%
35 to 44 minutes	8%	8%	9%	0%
45 to 59 minutes	12%	12%	11%	2%
60 or more minutes	15%	13%	2%	92%

Source: 2020 ACS 5-year estimates

Grafton residents do not rely on the Commuter Rail.

Since the beginning of 2021, CMRPC has taken monthly parking lot vehicle counts of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Grafton Station. These rates saw drastic drops during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Counts occurring in February and April of 2021 saw only 13 vehicles in the lot, a utilization rate of 3.4%. Usage increased to 58% (227 vehicles) in 2024. Grafton should continue to promote the MBTA station as a benefit of living in town.

Grafton Residents:

- "I rarely take the commuter rail. I did occasionally before Covid."
- "Parking in Boston is so much easier than worrying about timing and the extra time it takes to ride the commuter rail."
- "Time to travel to Boston is a barrier to using the commuter rail."

According to the U.S. Census, approximately 50% of 25- to 44-year-olds and 34% of 45- to 54-year-olds commute by train. However, 50%

of survey respondents to the Master Plan survey noted they "never" use the commuter rail, and many commented on a need for increased frequency and lower cost to use the commuter rail on a regular basis. The town can partner with the MBTA to advertise train offerings, continue to encourage the development of housing around the station, install free EV charging at the station, and provide more multi-modal access to the station through shared-use paths and sidewalks to enhance convenience for travelers.

In addition to the Commuter Rail, the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) provides limited service routes through Grafton. The town can continue to promote the WRTA shut-

GRAFTON RESIDENTS:

"I used to take the commuter rail when I lived in Boston."

Source: Grafton Master Plan Survey, 2023

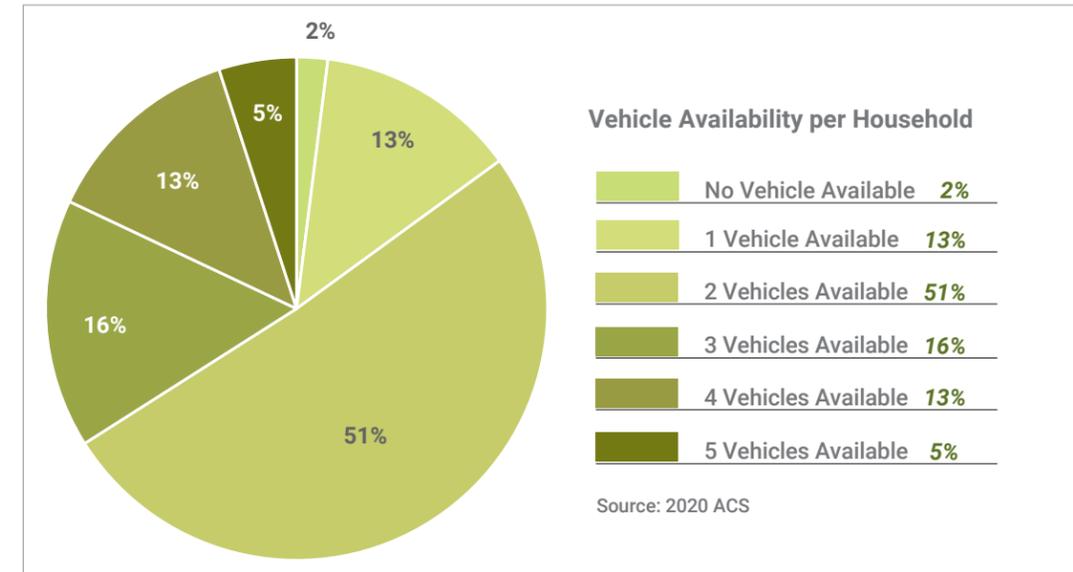


Figure 2. Vehicle Availability per household⁵

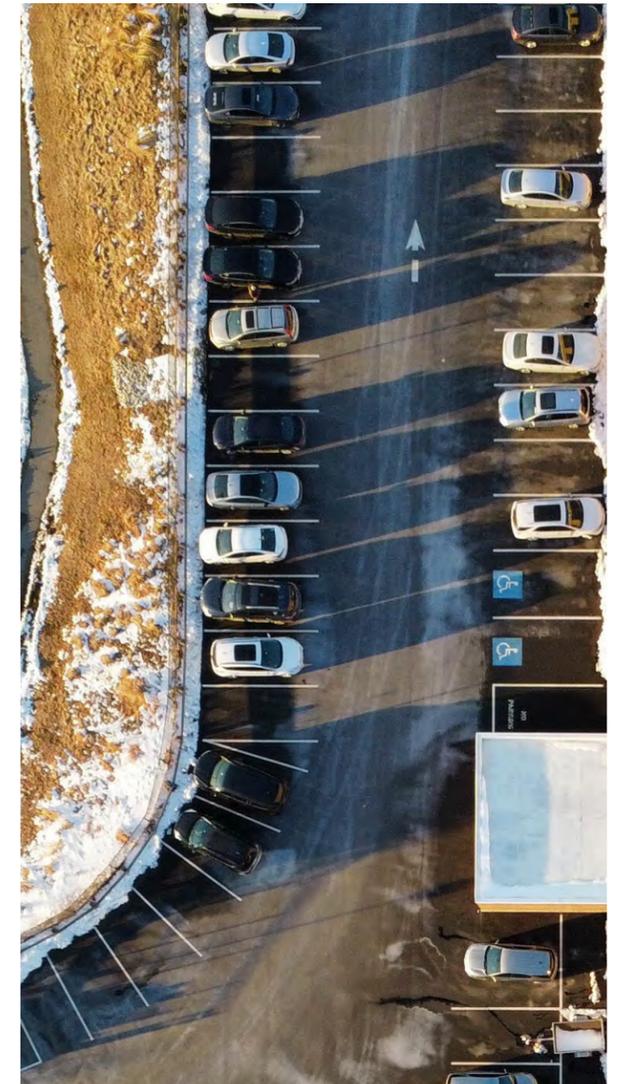
tle service in town through bus stop improvements and advertisements. Via is an on-demand transit service currently utilized by neighboring Worcester suburbs. Partnering with the WRTA to fund a similar on-demand transit model can promote last mile connectivity for public transportation users.

What specific improvements should the town make to increase ridership of the MBTA? Grafton Residents:¹

- "Needs a better outbound schedule."
- "More frequent trains."
- "It is cheaper for me to drive."

A Strong History of Conducting Comprehensive Studies.

The Town of Grafton has a strong history of conducting comprehensive studies to inform improvements to the transportation network. Notable plans completed include the 2016 Bicycle Plan, the Tier 2 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, the Open Space and Recreation Plan, and the Whitney Park Assessment. Each





of these plans focused on specific aspects that did not always center solely on transportation; however, they all included recommendations for enhancements such as parking improvements, trail connectivity, and traffic calming measures. As future plans are developed with a focus on transportation, implementing the findings from past plans will help achieve the goals outlined in the Grafton Master Plan.

Goals

Goal 1: Improve the safety of Grafton’s road network for all users, especially in priority areas listed in this Master Plan.

A safe transportation system is one in which all users feel comfortable and confident using a variety of modes of transportation. This allows individuals to choose the best option to suit their needs, enhancing accessibility, mobility and safety for everyone in the community.

To support Grafton’s efforts to improve road safety, data from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and its Impact Portal, provides insight into crash patterns across the town. This tool compiles crash data reported to the Registry of Motor Vehicles and local police departments including the Grafton Police. Based on data from the Impact Portal from 2019 – 2021, a total of 764 crashes were recorded in Grafton. Of these, eleven resulted in suspected serious injuries, three in incapacitating injuries, and one resulted in a fatality. The high majority of crashes occurred on I-90.

MassDOT uses the available information to

GRAFTON RESIDENTS:

“We need sidewalks to promote walking to more places in town.”

Source: Grafton Master Plan Survey, 2023

create crash clusters which are areas with a higher frequency of crashes. These clusters are ranked by Equivalent Property Damage Only (EPDO) using a methodology developed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). EPDO assigns greater weight crashes involving injuries compared to those with only property damage. This system allows areas to be compared across geographies. While there are no Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) crash cluster locations in Grafton (the top 5% of clusters in each region qualify for special funding), three vehicle crash clusters have been identified in town. These clusters are all located in different areas or villages in town (Grafton Center, North Grafton, Saundersville). The cluster with the highest EPDO of 89 is Worcester Street and Williams Road in North Grafton, followed closely behind by Main Street and Pleasant Street in Saundersville (EPDO of 87). The last cluster is located west of Grafton Common at the intersection of Providence Road (Route 122) and Millbury Street with an EPDO of 71.

In addition to the vehicle crash clusters, there are other notable crash clusters involving bicyclists and pedestrians. There is a bicyclist crash cluster (EPDO of 42) and two pedestrian crash clusters, one at the intersection of Providence Road and Main Street (EPDO of 84) and another focused on Worcester Street, north



of Hitchings Road including the Usher Street intersection ending at the Country Plaza Shopping Center (Stop & Shop). This location sees a large amount of foot traffic by pedestrians, especially students who frequent nearby shops and restaurants to congregate and socialize.

All pedestrian and bicyclist clusters occur on Route 140/Route 122. In this stretch of road, there are many businesses with driveways. The road also varies in lane size and number of lanes. Additionally, the presence of the middle and high schools and housing authority properties contributes to the interaction of both young and old road users.

Objective 1.1: Improve traffic calming measures and sightlines.

Traffic calming and improved sightlines are important strategies to enhance road safety and livability within Grafton. The area around the Grafton Common sees a heavy mixture of

pedestrian and vehicular traffic, with the Common hosting many community events including the Farmers’ Market, the recently renovated Grafton library and a collection of shops including The Grafton Country Store, Off the Common Antiques, and restaurant Uncommon Cow. Additionally, this area contains an active train yard and at-grade railroad crossing, belonging to the Grafton and Upton Railroad (GURR). Given the heavy traffic mix and frequent pedestrian activity, it is important to create a safe environment for all transportation users through traffic calming and improving sightlines.

Traffic calming refers to the implementation of physical and visual measures, such as speed bumps, raised crosswalks, and curb extensions designed to slow down vehicle traffic and encourage safer driving behaviors. These measures reduce the likelihood of accidents and encourage a more pedestrian-friendly environment. Many traffic calming elements exist around the Common, but variable speed feedback signs, raised crosswalks, and median strips can fur-





ther support the area. As one heads north on Route 140 to the 140/122 merge, traffic calming measures lessen. Instead, traffic is slowed by vehicles making left turns into or exiting the many driveways belonging to businesses on this stretch.

Improving sightlines involves modifying the physical layout of roads and intersections to ensure that drivers have clear, unobstructed views of the roadway and any potential hazards. This can be achieved by trimming overgrown vegetation, adjusting the placement of signs, and redesigning intersections to eliminate blind spots. Enhancing sightlines will allow drivers to anticipate hazards earlier, providing them more time to react.

Pairing traffic calming and improving sightlines fosters a safer, more efficient transportation network that accommodates the needs of all road users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.

Action Item 1.1.1: Prioritize road and intersection improvements in and around areas anticipating high density development.

The locations of crash clusters listed in Table 2 should be considered when making improvements to the local roadways.

With areas of Grafton seeing new housing developments, existing intersections will see more volume. It is important to anticipate growth and the traffic that comes with it. Housing developments such as the 5 Millennium Drive by Claremont Grafton LLC will create multifamily transit-oriented travel near the Grafton MBTA station. A second development, The Griffin, is planned on Upton Street at the former Grafton Department of Public Works site. The proposed development would be



Table 2. Crash Clusters⁶

Crash Clusters		
Location	Equivalent Property Damage Only	Type
Worcester Street and Williams Road	89	Vehicle
Main Street and Pleasant Street	87	Vehicle
Providence Road and Millbury Street	71	Vehicle
Worcester Street north of Hitchings Road to Country Plaza Shopping Center	42	Bicycle
Providence Road and Mair Street	84	Pedestrian

Source: MassDOT Impact Portal Statewide Crashes by Severity and Year Dashboard

four stories and bring 122 units to the Grafton Center, of which 31 units will be affordable. With the latter development happening so close to the Town Common, it is imperative to ensure safety of road users through proactive planning measures.

Action Item 1.1.2: Partner with MassDOT and other state and federal agencies to acquire additional traffic signage, traffic lights, and crosswalks at dangerous intersections and along dangerous roadways, especially around the Common, Route 30, and Route 140.

The town can partner with MassDOT and other state and federal agencies to take advantage of programs offered to improve the safety of the road network.

Currently, Grafton participates in Safe Routes to School, a federally funded program administered by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. This program, which is at no cost to the municipal budget, aims to increase safe walking, biking, and rolling among public elementary, middle, and high school students. Benefits of the program for students, families, schools, and communities include increased safety, independence, exercise, attendance, and air quality while decreasing traffic congestion.

Grafton also participates in the Complete Streets program. Complete Streets are streets designed and operated to enable safe use and support mobility for all users. Those include people of all ages and abilities, regard-

less of whether they are travelling as drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, or public transportation riders. The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program addresses critical gaps in transportation networks by giving Massachusetts municipalities tools and funding to advance Complete Streets in their community. The Complete Streets program is three-tiered - Tier 1: Complete Streets Training & Policy, Tier 2: Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, and Tier 3: Complete Streets Project Construction. The Town of Grafton is currently in the Tier 2 phase of the Complete Streets program and is working towards Tier 3.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program provides grants to local, regional, and Tribal communities for implementation, planning, and demonstration activities as part of a systematic approach to prevent deaths and serious injuries on the nation's roadways. The



Town of Grafton can apply for demonstration or implementation projects with the completion of the Central Massachusetts Safety Action Plan by CMRPC.

Action Item 1.1.3: Implement speed management to realize safer speeds.

A speed management program is a set of strategies and actions designed to control vehicle speeds with the goal of reducing accidents, enhancing safety of all road users and creating a more efficient transportation environment. A program typically includes measures like setting appropriate speed limits, using traffic calming devices (such as speed bumps or roundabouts), and increasing enforcement of speed laws.

The Town has implemented various speed management practices, especially around the

Common where textured crosswalks, medians, rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs), and other traffic calming measures can be found. Additionally, variable speed feedback signs (VSFBS) and vulnerable road user signs can be found on Route 140 as you approach the Common. Data was provided for the VSFBS on Worcester Street, just north of the common which provided vehicle count and speed in 30- minute increments. As shown in Figure 3, speeds over 40 MPH entering Grafton Center are rare, occurring 4.12% of the time. At these speeds, serious injury and fatality risk to pedestrian and other road users increase.

Action Item 1.1.4: Support "Vision Zero" Initiatives to reduce road fatalities.

Grafton should utilize the Safe Systems Approach, shown in Figure 4, and adopt Vision Zero policies. Vision Zero is the idea that even one fatality or life-altering injury from a crash

Figure 3. Speed Breakdown of Worcester Street Variable Speed Feedback Sign

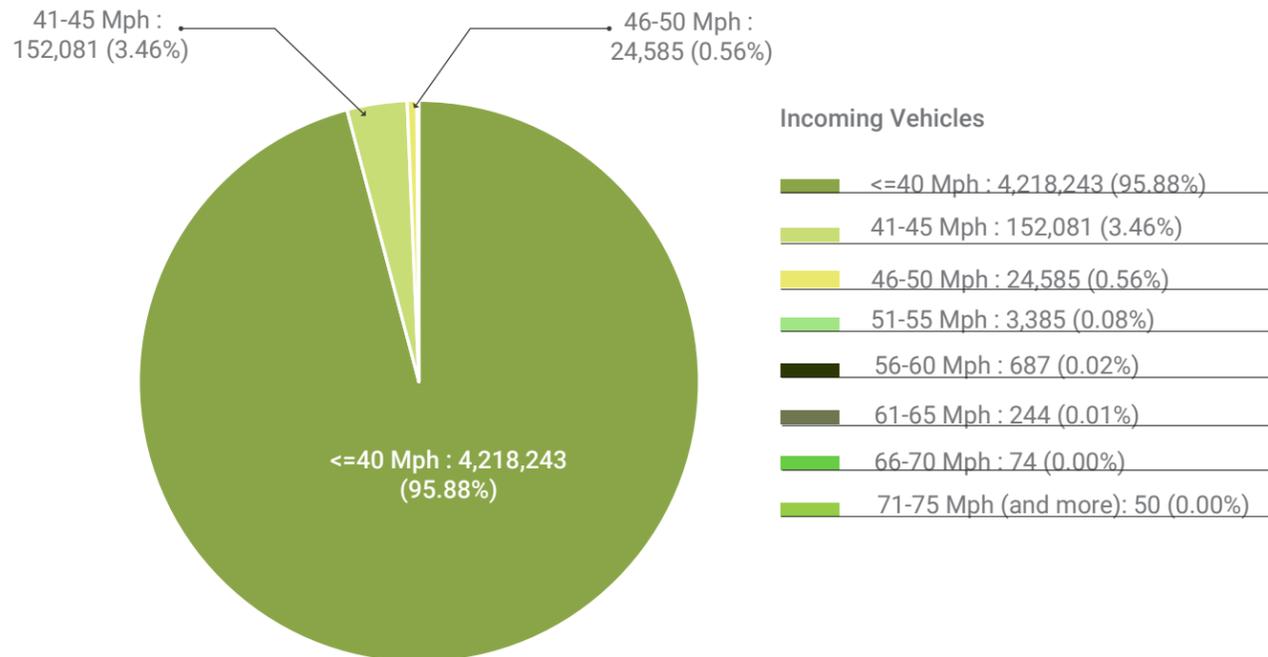


Figure 4. The Safe System Approach²



on Grafton's roads is too many. The Safe Systems Approach, which is endorsed by USDOT, is a framework for addressing roadway safety that acknowledges humans will make mistakes on roadways and minimizes the energy impact on the human body.

None of the aspects of the Safe Systems Approach can be advanced by Grafton alone, but by implementing the principles of the program and working in collaboration with MassDOT and others, a safer transportation system can be achieved. Elements that Grafton can focus on to help improve safety are safe road users, safe roads, and safe speeds.

While implementing the Safe Systems Approach should be a town wide effort, initial focus should be on high impact and high visibility locations such as the Town Common area, near the Tufts University Campus, and areas surrounding schools.

Action Item 1.1.5: Implement findings from traffic studies.

The Town of Grafton has been proactively pursuing improved safety in the Town Common area and throughout the community for decades including traffic studies, participation in the MassDOT Complete Streets Program, and the development of a 2016 Bicycle Plan among others. In conjunction with the Master Plan survey, Grafton should conduct further assessment to collect common findings. Based on the results, supplemental data gathering may be warranted such as vehicle, pedestrian and cyclist counts and surveys of residents and businesses. Recommended improvements such as redesigning street layouts, adding pedestrian crossings, enhancing public transit options, or implementing traffic calming measures can then be made. Grafton is also actively seeking funding for the completion of a traffic and circulation study which would improve the vitality of the town's historic district.

Action Item 1.1.6: Form a working group to pursue state and federal funding opportunities for road safety initiatives.

To secure necessary funding for road safety, the Town of Grafton should create a working group composed of key stakeholders, including school personnel, public safety officials, DPW staff, and town planning representatives. This group would coordinate efforts to secure state funding for programs such as Safe Routes to School, Complete Streets, and Safe Streets for All. Many funding programs in Massachusetts, like the Safe Routes to School, give evaluation points to communities that actively



participate in the program and work towards achieving community goals through various funding sources. These grant sources focus on the “6 E’s of the Safe Routes to School Program” (Education, Encouragement, Engagement, Evaluation, Engineering, and Equity), to enhance safety and integrate these principles into the community’s standard practices.

Objective 1.2: Achieve a state of good repair.

Maintaining roads in a state of “good repair” within a pavement management system offers numerous benefits that extend beyond the quality of surface pavement. From an economic perspective, regular maintenance is cost-effective, preventing the need for more expensive, extensive repairs or complete road reconstructions. Well-maintained roads contribute to better traffic flow, reducing congestion and the associated environmental impact by lower emissions due to less idling.

Well-maintained roads for drivers additionally enhance safety by reducing the risk of accidents caused by potholes, cracks, and other surface irregularities. This proactive maintenance approach minimizes vehicle damage, leading to lower repair costs for motorists and extending the lifespan of their vehicles. Additionally, keeping roads in good condition improves fuel efficiency, as smoother surfaces reduce rolling resistance. Overall, a pavement management system that prioritizes good repair enhances safety, economic efficiency, and environmental sustainability.

The CMRPC Asset Management System helps to inform the project on federal-aid eligible roads and their associated assets. Federal eligibility is determined by a combination of functional classification and urban/rural des-

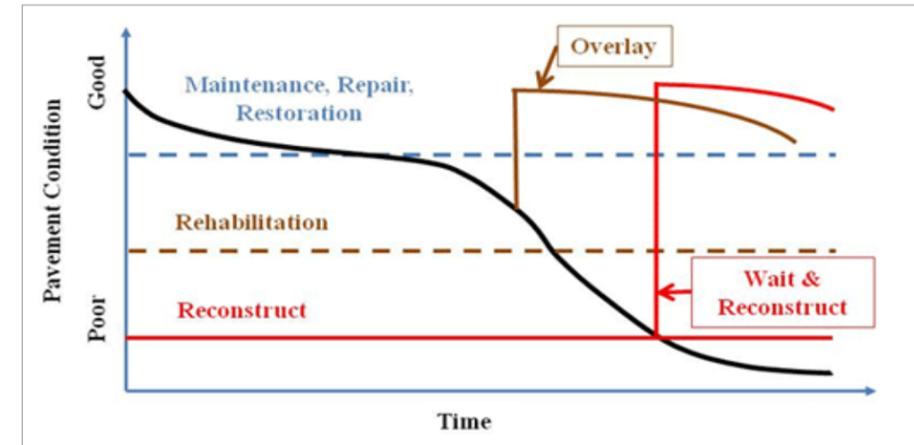


Figure 5. FHA Pavement Deterioration Chart

ignation, including all interstates, urban/rural arterials, urban collectors, and rural major collectors. Rural minor collectors have capped federal-aid funding eligibility. The CMRPC AMS helps to inform the project initiation and selection process. For the purposes of this report, assets like sidewalks, ramps, signals, culverts and bridges along federal-aid eligible roads (pavement) are also considered to be federal-aid eligible.

In addition to maintaining the roads pavement surface, it is the responsibility of the town and private road owners to maintain the accompanying infrastructure such as lights, guardrails, and storm water infrastructure. Grafton has the additional responsibility of complying with the State Stormwater Standards and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) permit. Compliance efforts include regularly required maintenance activities and infrastructure upgrades with the cost burden falling on the town. To mitigate these costs, Grafton should continue to promote Low Impact Development (LID) principles, reviewing proposed projects using these standards and monitoring its Subdivision Rules and Regulations for possible revisions in the future.





GRAFTON RESIDENTS:

“Sidewalks needed one mile from the school to the intersection at Millbury St.”

Source: Grafton Master Plan Survey, 2023

Action item 1.2.1: Conduct a review of available funding and staff resources.

The Town of Grafton is responsible for maintaining a multi-million-dollar transportation network that continues to grow in size and variety of transportation modes. However, funding for the operation of these assets is often not included in future budgets. A comprehensive review of funding and staffing is recommended to ensure that town departments, particularly the Grafton Department of Public Works (DPW), have adequate resources to meet all federal and state requirements, such as the MS4 permit, and to maintain both existing and planned infrastructure in good condition. Additionally, all future network expansion projects should take into account the necessary funding for ongoing maintenance.

Action Item 1.2.2: Repair and maintain roads to increase miles of pavement in good condition.

As shown in Figure 6, sixty-six percent of Grafton’s federal-aid eligible roads are in either ‘good’ (344.1 miles) or ‘excellent’ (398.2 miles) condition, indicating that the town is in a good place for pavement management.

A key to maintaining roads in a state of good repair is an efficient pavement management program. Every dollar invested in constructing a new asset such as a new road to improve mobility or reduce delays, adds future expenses in maintaining, operating, preserving, and eventually reconstructing that asset. Preservation strategies can extend the life of an asset

and postpone reconstruction at a cost-benefit ratio of more than 10 to 1, meaning that for every dollar spent today, ten dollars can be saved in the future. Geographically related services, including water, sewer, stormwater, and electric upgrades should be coordinated during repaving when appropriate.

Action Item 1.2.3: Repair and maintain sidewalks to increase miles of sidewalks in good condition.

Much like pavement, sidewalks follow the same rules when it comes to the pavement deterioration curve, where early minor repairs are more efficient than redoing the entire sidewalk. Although sidewalks have less wear compared to road surfaces, problems such as vegetation, debris, and obstructions can create a disconnected sidewalk network.

As shown in Figure 7, almost all of Grafton’s sidewalks (94%) are considered to be in either “good” (45%) or “fair” (49%) condition, with major improvements happening on Route 122A

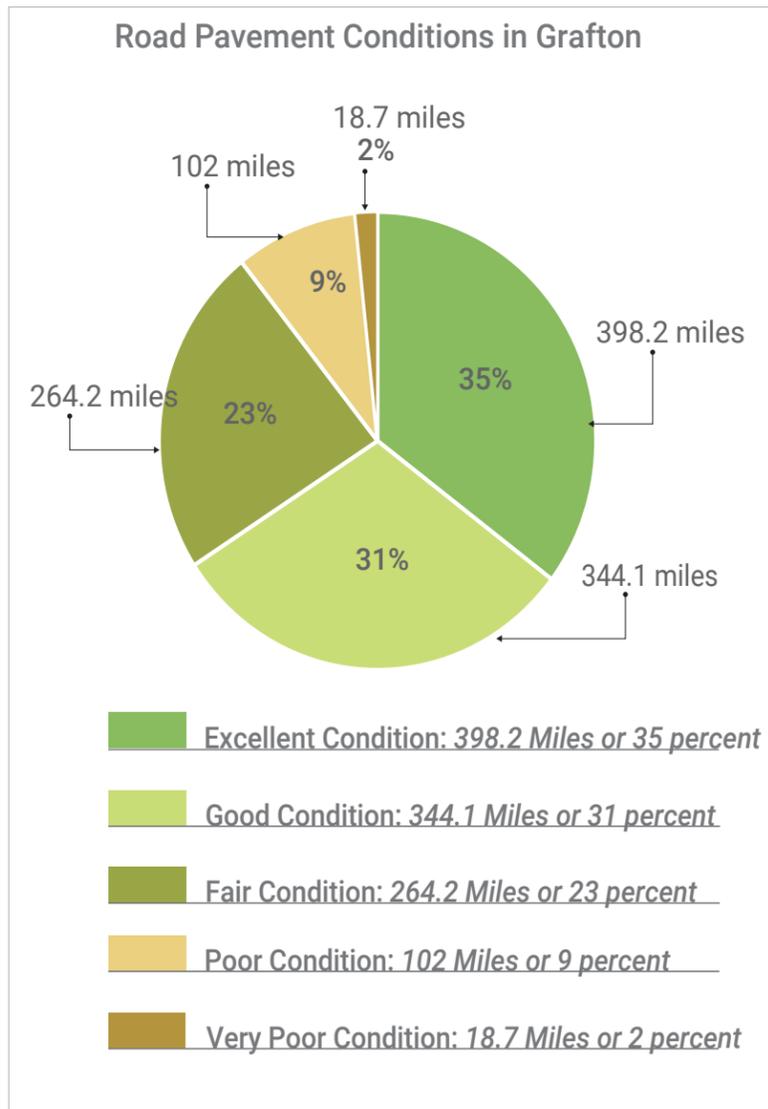
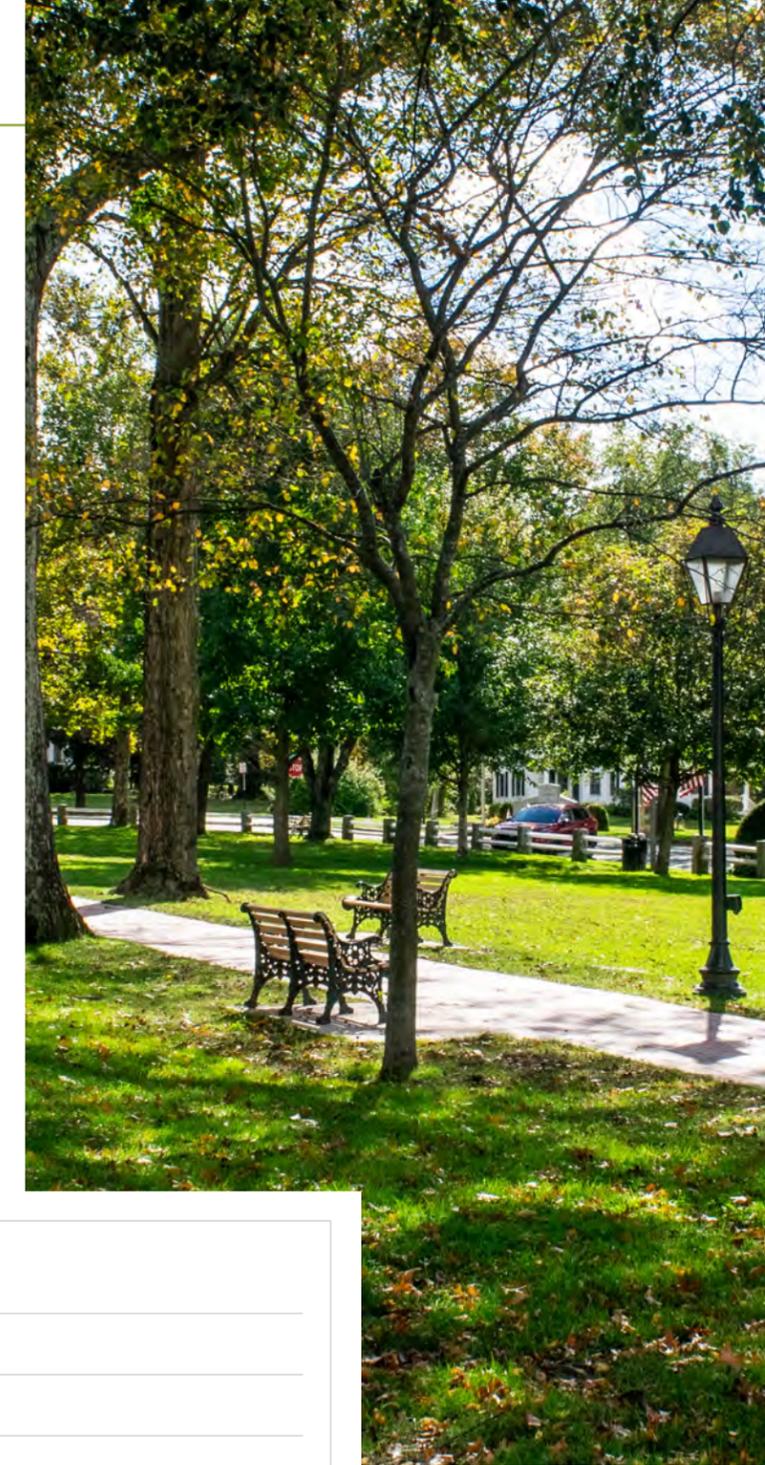
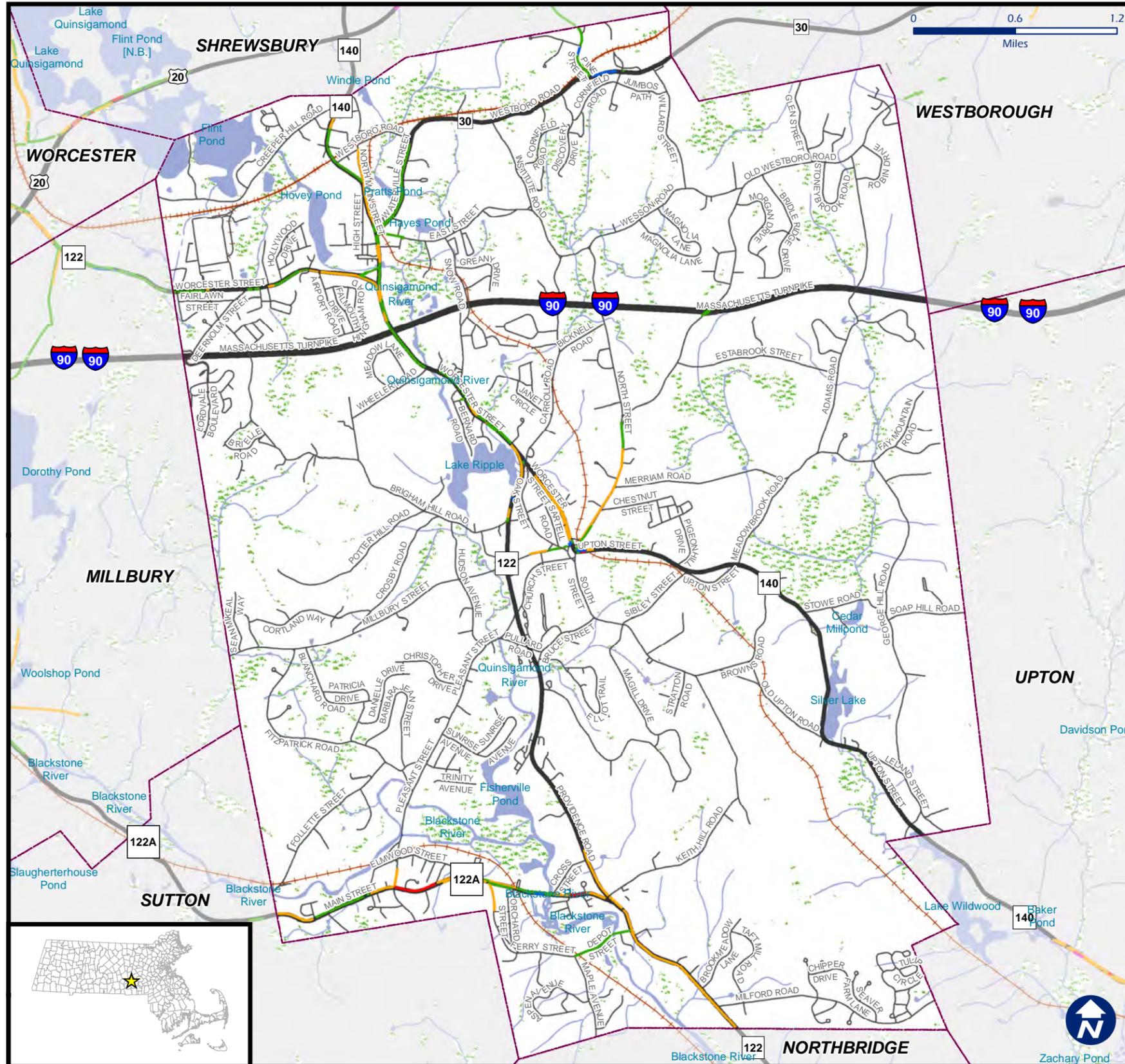


Figure 6. Pavement Conditions⁷



Figure 7. Sidewalk Conditions⁸





Town of Grafton 2025 Master Plan

Legend

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------|--|-----------|
| | Town Boundary | | Good |
| | River, Stream | | Fair |
| | Lake, Pond | | No Data |
| | MassDEP Wetlands | | Excellent |
| | Active Rail Service | | Poor |
| | Major Road | | Dirt Path |
| | Local Road | | Gap |

Information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis. Use caution interpreting positional accuracy.

Produced by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC)
1 Mercantile Street, Suite 520
Worcester, MA 01608



Source: Data provided by the Town of Grafton, CMRPC and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

Figure 8. Federal Aid Sidewalk Conditions Map

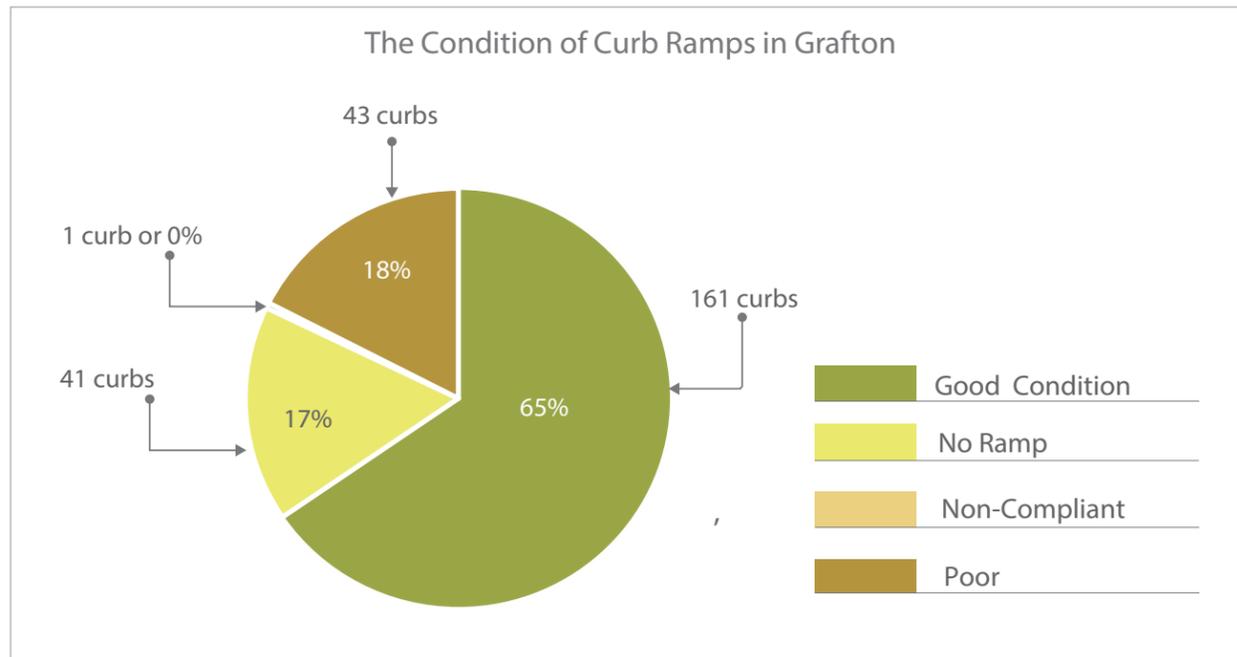


Figure 9. Number of Curb Ramps⁹

that coincided with road pavement. Moreover, Grafton's sidewalk network is going to be expanded, with the new construction of a sidewalk on Route 140 from Grafton Library to the Upton town line.

Action item 1.2.4: Increase number of ADA curb ramps in good condition.

Curb ramps provide pedestrians with a sense of safety and direction, allowing all road users to safely and efficiently cross streets. Grafton has a total of 246 inventoried curb ramps along federal-aid eligible roads. Of the 246 curb ramps, 161 (65%) are in 'good' condition while the remaining ramps are either absent, in poor condition or non-compliant (Figure 8). In fact, 85% of the intersections in Grafton lack proper curb ramps. For example, North Main Street and Mill Street, do not have ramps, with only a painted crosswalk bound by high curbs. Ensuring the transportation system is equitable and accessible to all, from pedestrians with strollers

to those with mobility challenges, is crucial to improving Grafton's infrastructure.

Goal 2: Encourage multi-modal transportation to reduce congestion and improve quality of life.

Diversity in transportation modes, including walking, biking, public transit, and carpooling, can reduce traffic congestion, lower pollution, and enhance accessibility for all community members, including those without vehicles. Currently, the town's multi-modal transportation network is disconnected and fragmented, creating a car-centric feel. For example, Elmwood Street has sidewalks at each end but is missing a sidewalk in the middle, which if present would connect a substantial portion of Elmwood Street to South Grafton Elementary School. To address this, the town should encourage more diverse transportation options to foster healthier lifestyles, reduce reliance on cars, and make the community more con-



nected and resilient, particularly during road disruptions or changing travel needs.

Grafton has the benefit of an MBTA station located within the town, though it remains isolated and car-dependent for its commuters. The Grafton MBTA station is on the Framingham/Worcester rail line, between Worcester to the west and Westborough to the east. However, according to master plan survey responses, only 5% (21 people) use the MBTA frequently.

In the Master Plan Community Survey, respondents noted the following improvements as strategies to increase their ridership:

1. Increased frequency
2. Parking (increased, free, overnight)
3. Fare (less expensive, family rates)
4. Updates to the commuter rail station, including climate control, awnings, cafes/shops, increased bus connections
5. Service extensions for later nights
6. Faster speeds to Boston (compared to driving times)

In addition to the MBTA's Grafton Station, Grafton is served by the Worcester Regional Transit Authority's (WRTA) Route A and Route B. The two routes utilize the smaller shuttle buses and have stops in Grafton, providing direct access to Northbridge and Millbury and connections to Worcester. The two routes connect in Fisherville.

Community Shuttle A

Community Shuttle A spans approximately thirteen miles, connecting Northbridge to the Blackstone Valley Shoppes in Millbury via South Grafton, with service provided Monday through Friday. Shuttle A provides a connection to Worcester and the rest of the fixed-route system at the Shoppes via Route 4. Riders can access key points of interest, including the Northbridge Walmart, Northbridge Sen-

Table 3. Survey Respondent Commuter Rail Usage

Survey Respondent Commuter Rail Usage		
Level of Use	Number of responses	Percentage
Frequently	21	5%
Occasionally	174	42%
Never	215	52%
Other	14	3.4%
Total	410	

Source: Master Plan Community Survey

ior Center, Tri-County Medical Center, South Grafton, and the Shoppes at Blackstone Valley.

The Community Shuttle A operates from 9:00 am to 4:45 pm, running every hour to one hundred minutes.

Community Shuttle B

Community Shuttle B spans approximately fifteen miles, connecting Northbridge to the Grafton MBTA Station and Grafton Center, with service provided Monday through Friday. Riders can access key points of interest, including the Northbridge Walmart, Northbridge Senior Center, South Grafton, Grafton Center, and the Grafton MBTA Station.

The Community Shuttle B operates from 5:20 am to 7:35 pm, running every hour to one hundred twenty minutes. Even with multiple stops in town throughout the day, according to Master Plan Community Survey respondents, the service is seldom used. Two respondents noted frequent use, compared to the 406 respondents who never use the WRTA (Table 5).

Ridership numbers for the two routes serving Grafton are found in Table 6. Ridership was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic but has recently risen higher than pre-pandemic numbers.



Table 4. Grafton WRTA Service

Grafton WRTA Service					
Grafton Stops	Route	Origin	Destination	Frequency Outbound	Frequency Inbound
Fisherville	A	Northbridge, Walmart	Millbury, Blackstone Valley Shoppes	4	4
Fisherville	B	Northbridge, Walmart	Grafton Train Station	10	8
Grafton High School	B	Northbridge, Walmart	Grafton Train Station	1	0
Grafton Town Common	B	Northbridge, Walmart	Grafton Train Station	8	8
Stop and Shop	B	Northbridge, Walmart	Grafton Train Station	10	8
Grafton Train Station	B	Grafton, Train Station	Northbridge, Walmart	5	5

Table 5. Survey Respondent WRTA Bus Usage

Survey Respondent WRTA Bus Usage		
Level of use	Number	Percentage
Never	406	96%
Occasionally	14	3%
Frequently	2	0%
Other	3	0%
Total	425	

Even with the increase, both Route A and B have among the lowest ridership numbers of all WRTA routes. The low use was examined through the Master Plan Community Survey and followed up with the question “What specific improvements would increase your WRTA ridership?” (Table 7).

Of the 218 respondents, over half (57%, 124 respondents) requested greater coverage in Grafton and 33% (72 respondents) requested greater coverage outside of Grafton. The lack of physical stops and structures could be a barrier to people trying to use the WRTA service in Grafton, as well as a general lack of awareness regarding the service provided.

Objective 2.1: Partner with the WRTA to improve public bus service.

The WRTA is an important service for the Central Massachusetts region, providing transportation options around the region and connections beyond. Grafton can continue to partner with the WRTA to increase awareness and improve ridership on the two current routes.



Action Item 2.1.1: Increase ridership through targeted marketing of available routes and schedules.

Comprehensive marketing can raise awareness about bus routes and schedules. The town should use both digital and physical advertising methods including maintaining schedules at bus stops and on community shuttles, distributing paper schedules to prominent businesses and community groups, and updating the town website and social media.

Action Item 2.1.2: Increase paratransit services.

The Grafton Senior Center Elderbus provides transportation services for Grafton residents that are age 60+ as well as those with disabilities of any age. Transportation to medical appointments is free thanks to community donations. In-town service is available every day for errands (\$3.00) and medical appointments. Daily service is also available on weekdays to the Senior Center for lunch and activities. Elderbus users can leave town borders

- with service available on the following days:
- Worcester: Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, \$4.00 round trip
 - Shrewsbury & Westborough: Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, \$3.50 round trip
 - Millbury and Sutton: Tuesdays, \$3.50 round trip
 - Milford: Tuesdays & Thursdays, \$4.00 round trip

Table 6. Ridership of Grafton WRTA Routes A and B

Ridership of Grafton WRTA Routes		
Year Total	Route A	Route B
2019	1,808	4,173
2020	1,721	3,206
2021	1,605	3,475
2022	1,521	3,024
2023	2,777	4,171
2024 – Through May	2,900	4,434

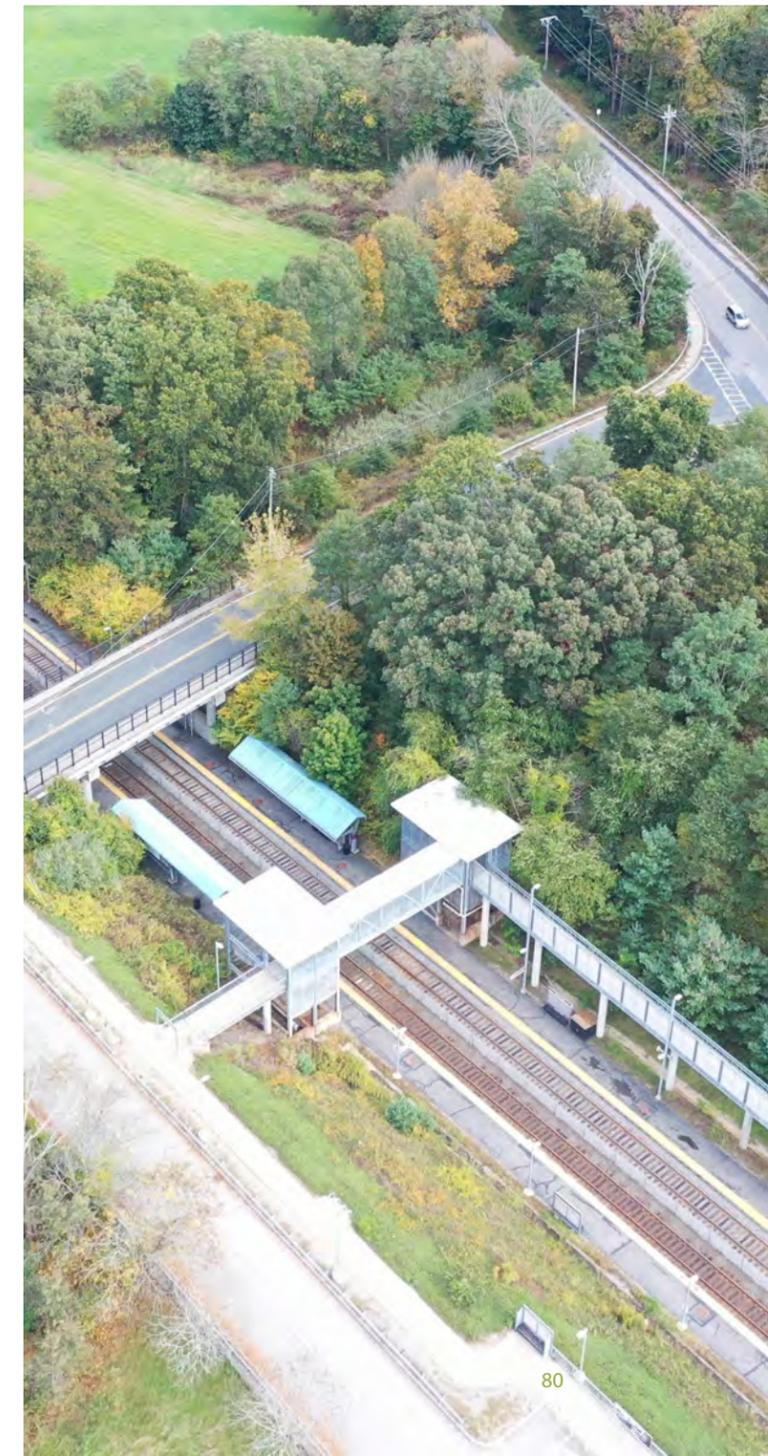




Table 7. Survey Respondent Desired WRTA Improvements

Survey Respondent Desired WRTA Improvements		
Suggested Improvements	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
More frequent pick up and drop off times	70	32%
Reduced cost/rates	31	14%
Greater coverage in Grafton	124	57%
Greater coverage outside of Grafton	72	33%
Other	62	28%
Total	218	--



- Northborough: Tuesdays & Thursdays, \$3.50 round trip
- Auburn: Mondays, \$4.00 round trip

Service expansion of the Elderbus could help in reducing the number of vehicles on the road while providing a valuable service. Additional opportunities for increasing paratransit offerings could be through the WRTA's Mobility Management Model, or outsourcing paratransit service to SCM Elderbus or a volunteer driver program.

Action Item 2.1.3: Increase routes and frequency of WRTA buses in Grafton.

The first step toward expanding WRTA bus services in Grafton is to raise awareness and increase ridership of the existing WRTA routes. Once ridership grows, the town can partner with the WRTA to increase frequency of service and consider expanding the number of routes. In the meantime, Grafton can evaluate the financial feasibility of on-demand service expansion, such as Via, a service provided in neighboring Worcester suburbs. Further feasibility studies of the financial impact of increased frequency



and in demand routes can prepare Grafton for future expansion of WRTA service.

Action Item 2.1.4: Improve bus stop accommodations.

Enhancing bus stop facilities by adding seating, shelters, and ridership information can make public transportation in Grafton more appealing and accessible. The town should collaborate with the WRTA to identify the best locations for improvements and the types of accommodations best suited for the existing bus stops. Due to land ownership restrictions, the responsibility for the installation and maintenance of these facilities may fall on either the town or private landowners.

Objective 2.2: Partner with the MBTA to improve commuter rail service.

Grafton benefits greatly from having an MBTA station located within the town. The Grafton MBTA station is located on the Framingham/Worcester line between Worcester to the west and Westborough to the east. However, according to master plan survey responses, only 5% (21 responses) said they used the MBTA frequently.

Many survey respondents, 52% (215 responses) never used the MBTA and 42% (174 responses) of survey respondents occasionally use the MBTA. The MBTA Commuter rail numbers for Spring 2018 show an average onboarding for inbound trains at Grafton Station of 27.6 people and average offboarding of 25.9 people. Peaks were seen during the commuting hours of 7:00A-9:00 AM and 4:00-7:00PM.

Action Item 2.2.1: Increase ridership through targeted marketing of the train schedule.

Grafton can promote the train schedule, as well as the WRTA Route B that travels to Grafton Station. Targeted marketing can be done through online sources and physical advertising in popular areas in town such as the library, Town Common, businesses on Route 140/122, and bus stops.

Objective 2.3: Improve first and last mile connectivity to public transit.

A barrier to public transit use in Grafton is the difficulty in reaching final destinations from transit stops. For example, Grafton Station is not easily walkable to many destinations unless one is heading to Tufts Veterinary School. While the WRTA provides a bus, options are still limited. To address this Grafton should focus on improving sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure around transit stops to help facilitate greater use. In addition, Grafton can continue to provide more access to destinations from transit hubs, such as trails or shared-use paths.

Action Item 2.3.1: Increase miles of roadway available for bicyclists to ride safely per the 2016 Bike and Pedestrian Plan.

Grafton has a limited number of federal-aid eligible roads that scored highly on CMRPC's Bicycle Compatibility Index (BCI). The BCI builds off the 2018 Regional Bicycle Plan and is a measure of the capability of urban and rural roadways to accommodate bicyclists as shown in Figure 10. Aligned with the 2050 Connections (Long Range Transportation Plan) goals, the BCI spotlights individual road segments as it pertains to the larger bicycle network.

The town should focus its efforts on the two areas with high BCI ratings. Upton Street (Route 140) leading into Grafton Center from Upton had the highest BCI score, as wide shoul-

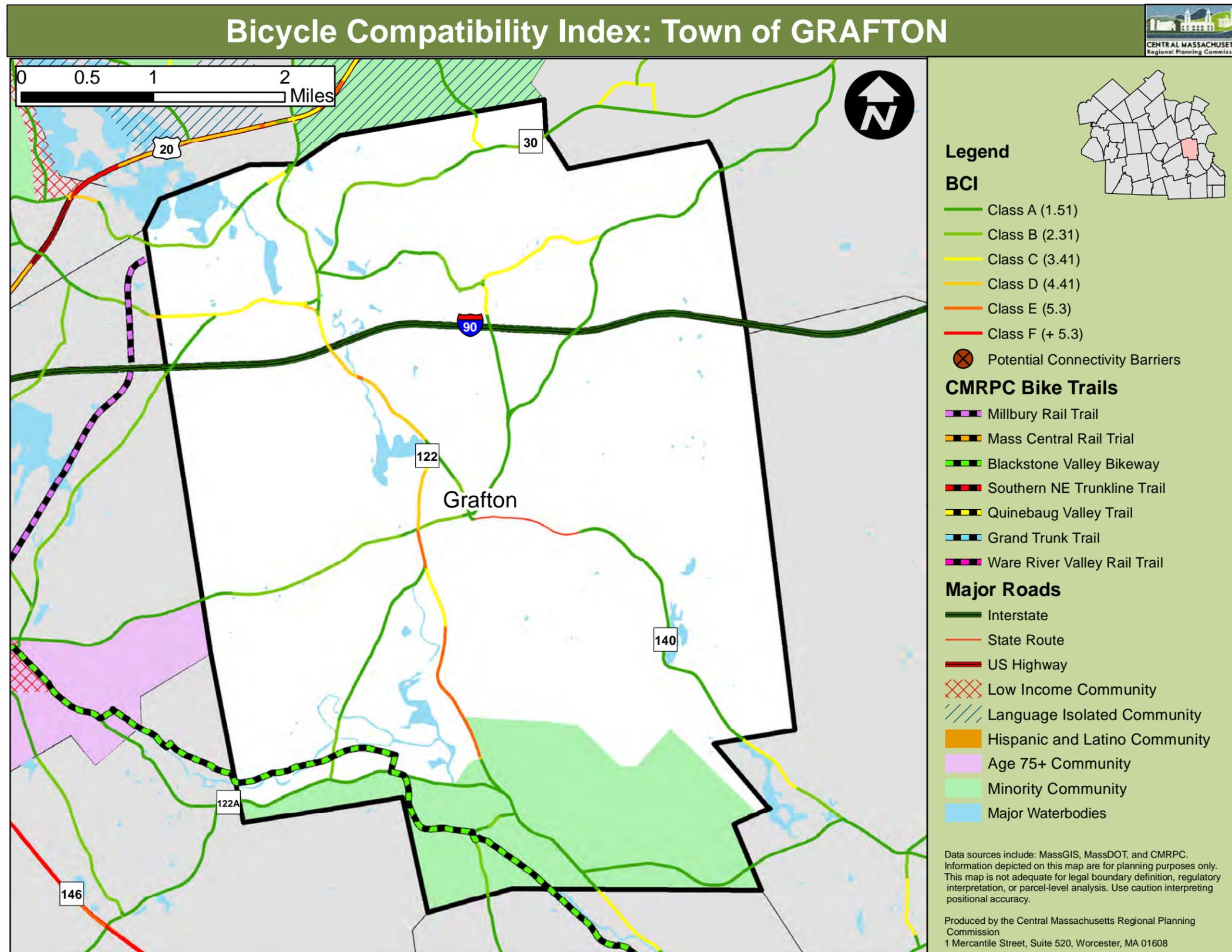


Figure 10. Bicycle Compatibility Index in Grafton¹⁰

ders make this road ideal for bicycle expansion. Milford Road in South Grafton, which intersects with Route 140 in the south, was the other large road section to be ranked a 'C' or higher on the BCI. The lack of high scoring BCI roads makes it all the more important for Grafton to utilize their trail system to better connect the community.

Action Item 2.3.2: Increase miles of sidewalk for pedestrians.

Figure 8 shows the sidewalks in Grafton and the condition of the sidewalks. While the "poor" sidewalks on Route 122A in South Grafton have been replaced as part of a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) project, sidewalks on Worcester Street, near the Worcester Street/Providence Road merge, remain in "fair" condition. This section, which experiences heavy foot traffic from students, is a priority for improvement.

Action Item 2.3.3: Construct new sidewalks to be accessible for all pedestrians.

All newly constructed sidewalks should exceed ADA standards to provide a safe experience for all users, including those with mobility challenges and visual impairments. Sidewalks should be designed to allow users to 'stroll or roll', regardless of age or mobility. The town can work with a disability consultant to understand specific pressure points.

Action Item 2.3.4: Carry out Grafton's Complete Streets plan.

At the time of writing, the town is implement-



ing a Complete Streets program. A complete street is a safe street for all users, regardless of mode of travel. This transformative strategy ensures that the transportation network is planned, designed, built, operated, and maintained to support safe mobility and access for all road users, including, but not limited to, pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders across a broad spectrum of ages and abilities. By adopting a Complete Streets plan, Grafton hopes to reverse the trend of increasing fatalities and serious injuries on roadways to reach the goal of zero deaths and to create a healthier, greener, and more equitable roadway system in Grafton and beyond.

Objective 2.4: Increase regional trail access.

Grafton is home to numerous scenic landscapes and publicly accessible trails to explore them. In addition to existing trail properties, the town owns parcels throughout the community that could potentially contain their own trail system or serve as connections to other trails. Trails are multifunctional, providing both recreation and transportation. With enough trail connections, students, specifically middle and high-schoolers, would be able to ride bicycles or walk to school, taking cars off the road in one the town's high crash locations.

Action Item 2.4.1: Utilize findings from the recently completed Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) to connect the Blackstone River Bikeway through South Grafton.

The Blackstone River Bikeway is envisioned to stretch 48 miles from Worcester, Massachusetts to Providence, Rhode Island. As of this report, 24 miles of the Bikeway have been completed, but there are gaps. South Grafton presents

Table 8. Existing and Potential Trails

Existing and Potential Trails	
Property with Trails	Acres
Ainsworth/Engvall Farm Memorial Park	17
Brookmeadow Village Open Space	39.31
Great Meadow	175
Hassanamesit Woods	224
Hennessy I Fields	104.3
Merriam Road Conservation Area	52.4
Pell Farm	132.25
Silver Lake	75
Property Without Trails	
4 Airport Road	28.8
Bridle Ridge / North Grafton Estates Open Space	23.5
Cider Mill Pond	6.4
63 Creeper Hill Road	10.8
80 Creeper Hill Road	1
Fay Acres Open Space	11.1
43 Fitzpatrick Road	7.5
8 Joys Road	9.4
Lake Ripple Dam and John Wilson Memorial Boat Ramp	0.8
Maplevale Estates Open Space	34.8
4 Millenium Drive	19.16
Peters Estates Open Space	4.3
Rosewood Estates Open Space	4.1
39 Snow Road/Greany Land	1.2
14 Sunset Lane	0.15
240 Upton Street/Taft Parker Prescott	6.5
22 Rear Vincent Road	1.2
Total Acreage	989.97



an ideal location for a connection to Millbury and beyond. The town should work with the Blackstone Heritage Corridor and Department of Conservation and Recreation to secure the route of the future Blackstone River Bikeway along the river and through South Grafton. The Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) can guide prioritization of parcels and assist in planning for this important regional connection.

Goal 3: Employ emerging transportation technologies and sustainability measures.

Objective 3.1: Mitigate groundwater contamination from the transportation network through stormwater management.

Mitigating groundwater contamination through stormwater management is crucial for clean water. Grafton can reduce runoff and filter pollutants by using rain gardens, permeable pavements, and bioswales. Additionally, educating residents on proper disposal of hazardous substances and using native plants can further protect groundwater. These strategies help keep Grafton's water supply safe and the environment healthy.

Action Item 3.1.1: Assess culvert infrastructure regularly through the NAACC Protocol and Scoring System.

The North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative (NAACC) is a network of individuals from agencies and organizations focused on improving aquatic connectivity across a thirteen-state region, including Massachusetts. The NAACC provides protocols for road-stream crossings (culverts and bridges) to assess and





score crossings for the ability of fish and wildlife to pass, as well as culvert condition and other data useful for evaluating risk of failure. Grafton can partner with the CMRPC to receive training in the NAACC Protocol and Scoring System.

Culvert inspections ensure the proper functioning and safety of drainage systems. Regular inspections help identify blockages, structural damage, or erosion that can lead to flooding, road damage, and water contamination. By detecting and addressing issues early, maintenance costs are reduced, and the longevity of infrastructure is increased. Inspections also help protect local ecosystems by preventing uncontrolled water flow that can erode landscapes and harm wildlife habitats. Overall, culvert inspections are essential for public safety, environmental health, and effective water management.

Action Item 3.1.2: Deploy Nature-Based Solutions to reduce stormwater runoff.

Nature-based solutions leverage natural processes to mitigate stormwater runoff. For instance, rain gardens are shallow, planted depressions that absorb rainwater runoff from impervious surfaces like roofs, driveways, and streets, helping to filter pollutants and promote groundwater recharge. Green roofs, covered with vegetation, also absorb rainfall, reduce runoff, and provide insulation. Permeable pavements, such as porous asphalt, pervious concrete, and interlocking pavers, allow water to infiltrate the ground, reducing runoff and enhancing groundwater recharge. Bioswales, which are landscaped channels, slow, collect, and filter runoff with the help of native plants, promoting infiltration and pollutant removal. All of these tactics are ways to help improve

run-off in a natural, sustainable way. Constructed wetlands mimic natural wetlands to treat and store stormwater, reducing peak flows, filtering pollutants, and providing wildlife habitat. Riparian buffers, or strips of vegetation along waterways, intercept runoff, filter pollutants, and stabilize banks to prevent erosion.

Urban forestry initiatives increase tree coverage help intercept rainfall, enhance infiltration, and reduce surface runoff. Additionally, retention and detention basins capture and slowly release stormwater, reducing the risk of flooding while promoting sedimentation and pollutant removal. These nature-based solutions not only manage stormwater effectively but also provide added benefits like improved air quality, enhanced biodiversity, and recreational spaces for communities.

Action Item 3.1.3: Implement MS4 Requirements for Roadways.

State MS4 requirements require municipalities to implement strategies to avoid stormwater runoff pollution. Many towns choose to use street sweeping as a solution. Regular street sweeping helps remove debris, litter, and pollutants from roadways, preventing these materials from washing into storm drains and contaminating local water bodies. This reduces the risk of flooding by keeping culverts clear and prevents harmful substances from entering waterways.

A clean street also improves the town's appearance, making it more attractive to residents and visitors. Regular street sweeping extends the lifespan of road surfaces by preventing the accumulation of abrasive materials. Additionally, sediment removed from the road does not have the chance to build up on the sidewalk,



making for a safer and more inviting pedestrian experience. Overall, having a street sweeper supports a healthier, safer, and more aesthetically pleasing community.

Objective 3.2: Achieve the state goal of reaching Net Zero by 2050.

Achieving Net Zero balances the amount of biogenic fuels combusted with the amount of carbon sequestration and GHG emissions on natural lands. The Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050, published in 2022, set the goal of reaching Net Zero emissions by 2050.

Action Item 3.2.1: Prepare for the phasing out of gas-powered vehicles.

With new technologies constantly emerging, Grafton should be prepared for the widespread adoption of electric vehicles and phasing out of internal combustion engine vehicles. Grafton can look to work with electric providers to prepare for the grid for an increase in electric vehicle charging and other emerging technologies.

Action Item 3.2.2: Identify locations for additional Electric Vehicle charging on public property.

To support electric vehicle adoption, the town can conduct an inventory of existing electric vehicle charging stations on publicly owned property and identify additional locations where they are needed. Prioritizing locations with existing utility infrastructure will streamline the process of expanding the EV charging network.

Action Item 3.2.3: Support ride-share programs.

Expanding the WRTA's Via rideshare program into Grafton would help reduce traffic congestion and promote sustainable transportation options. Via currently operates in Shrewsbury and Westborough, providing low-cost service that could benefit Grafton residents. The program allows users to go anywhere within those communities from 7 am to 7 pm for a flat rate of \$2. Partnering with the WRTA to assess feasibility of expansion into Grafton aligns with the Master Plan Survey Respondents' desire for greater coverage in Grafton and surrounding areas.

Action Item 3.2.4: Support E-Bike initiatives.

E-bike initiatives offer a variety of benefits, including urban transportation, environmental sustainability, and public health. By promoting the adoption of E-bikes, Grafton can help reduce traffic congestion in densely populated areas.

Through the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center's Mass E-Bike Program, Grafton residents are eligible to participate in an initiative aimed at increasing access to E-bikes in Worcester County. The program offers a new incentive option that provides a 60-75% rebate (up to \$1,500) on a self-purchased E-bike based on income level, along with the existing 100% rebate for E-bikes and accessories provided by the program.

Grafton should continue supporting and expanding initiatives such as the Mass E-Bike Program. E-bikes are an efficient alternative to cars for short to medium-distance trips, which can ease the burden on road networks. This reduction in traffic leads to shorter travel



times and less stress for commuters. E-bikes also offer more accessibility than a vehicle, as teenagers can operate one without a license. This could be beneficial in reducing the number of vehicles on the road around Grafton Middle School and Grafton High School, making for a safer environment for all road users.

Additionally, E-bikes are a sustainable transportation choice, producing zero emissions during operation, which contributes to improved air quality and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Beyond environmental benefits, E-bikes

also promote physical health. Riding an E-bike provides cardiovascular exercise, strengthens muscles, and improves overall fitness, contributing to the well-being of residents while benefiting the environment.

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6. MassDOT Impact Portal Statewide Crashes by Severity and Year Dashboard
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TOWN SERVICES AND FACILITIES



Overview

Municipal services and infrastructure drive long term economic development and determine the feasibility of commercial, industrial, and residential development. Grafton's recent land use patterns have led to greenfield development and sprawl in areas previously not serviced by water, sewer, electric, and roads, leading to increases in municipal costs and resources. The land use pattern this master plan recommends focuses development in existing village centers, which can accommodate population growth without increasing the number of miles serviced by the town. Adjusting future development patterns will place less of a burden on town services, allowing for improved maintenance and upgrades.

In addition to infrastructure, the town provides

services for all residents, ranging from a highly rated school system to a holistic Council on Aging. As the population ages, increased access to these resources and services will be needed to support crucial programming.

Towns across the Commonwealth struggle to fund necessary new facility construction due to high costs of materials and labor. Grafton, however, has been successful in adapting municipal functions into the previous high school building, saving taxpayers the construction costs of a new town hall. The next priority will be rebuilding Fire Department facilities.

This chapter includes the following topics:

- Police
- Fire
- Council on Aging



- Public Schools
- Library
- Sewer
- Water Facilities
- Municipal buildings
- Municipal vehicles

Key Findings

An increase in water and sewer capacity is needed to accommodate anticipated population growth.

Grafton's land use patterns support infill development and increased density in existing areas, reducing the need for infrastructure expansion. New connections to existing systems will help lower user fees by spreading the costs among households. Additional revenue from user fees can potentially support the water districts and sewer department in maintaining modern treatment facilities that ensure reliable and safe services. Areas not serviced by public water and sewer, primarily in pockets of east Grafton and west Grafton, require resiliency plans in the case of well contamination or drying. In areas with rising density, larger pipes will be necessary to handle the increased demand.

Public water services are split between the independently operated Grafton Water District and South Grafton Water District. The Grafton Water District serves 85% of public water supply. Over 5,000 water services supply water to approximately 14,000 people. Demand for water fluctuates based on average temperature. The average day in 2022 used 1,138,000 gallons. The largest usage day used 1,899,000

gallons. The Grafton Water District performs routine leak detection and fixes to ensure efficiency of the system.

As the population increases, so will the demand for water. Grafton residents use an average of 57 gallons of water per capita every day. Projected population increases would result in an increase of 142,785 gallons per day by 2050. Water conservation programs can alleviate some of the demand, however population projection numbers should be considered for future water demand models.

In addition to expected demand, federal and state regulations for water and wastewater continue to fluctuate. Future capital costs are expected to treat chemicals similar to PFAS related to point and non-point pollution.

Infrastructure upgrades are key to the Town's ability to respond to increasing demand for industry.

North Grafton is well-positioned for continued manufacturing growth due to proximity to freight, I-90, Worcester, and greater Boston. Life science manufacturing demand will continue to grow as talent emerges from the Harvard/MIT node and moves to Central Massachusetts for space to grow. Bio manufacturing requires access to water, sewer, and a strong electricity connection. Grafton has been successful in attracting industry to Grafton Science Park and Centech Park through infrastructure improvements. Continuing outreach and incentives are key to growing this industry and diversifying the tax base. Massachusetts is investing in the emerging Climatetech industry to develop tools



to address climate change and increase jobs. North Grafton's location and resources make the town a strong contender for future development.

The relationship between the Town of Grafton and the water districts is crucial for understanding infrastructure improvement costs related to new development projects before they are approved.

New fire department buildings are needed to support department growth.

In assessing existing conditions of all Town owned facilities, Fire Stations 2 and 3 appear as top priority for replacement. Station 2 was constructed in 1950, followed by Station 3 in 1969. Both stations cannot accommodate the size of modern fire engines. Grafton recently upgraded fire safety to include a full time chief and full-time inspector to support a growing volunteer staff. The call volume is increasing by 13% annually, causing demand for call responders to increase. New facilities will be necessary to support this growth and attract volunteers.

Capital funding maintenance costs for the existing stations are adding up as the buildings age. The town should move forward with feasibility studies and cost analysis to prepare for this capital improvement.¹

Support the Council on Aging (COA) and public schools to anticipate population pyramid shifts.

As the population ages, expanding senior services will be critical. By 2040, an estimated 30-35% of Grafton's population will be over 60, resulting in 3,000 more people requiring the services of the Council on Aging.² This population shift will require unprecedented funding for senior support. Expanding the current Council on Aging and providing additional services, such as senior housing and financial assistance, was a top priority for Master Plan Survey respondents and Workshop participants. Increased resources for Council on Aging facilities and services will ensure Grafton's senior population is healthy, safe, and connected to the community.

The Council on Aging drives two 14-passenger vans with plans to expand. Meals are provided for seniors through Elder Services Meals on Wheels. The COA is run by a full-time director, full-time transportation coordinator, and full-time outreach coordinator. Work is supported by two part-time drivers and a kitchen worker provided through Elder Services. The COA offers nutrition services, education, health care, exercise classes, and support groups.

In tandem, supporting the Grafton Public School system will continue to attract young families to move into town to balance the age distribution. Fifty-seven percent of the town budget is allocated toward schools, and with good reason. The school system supports six facilities and over 3,000 students as shown in Table 1. Only 2% of the school budget is allocated for administration, the other 98% going directly into instruction and student services.³ Grafton is spending thousands of dollars less than the average public school per pupil.⁴ An increased school budget is required to continue to retain talented teachers and quality services.

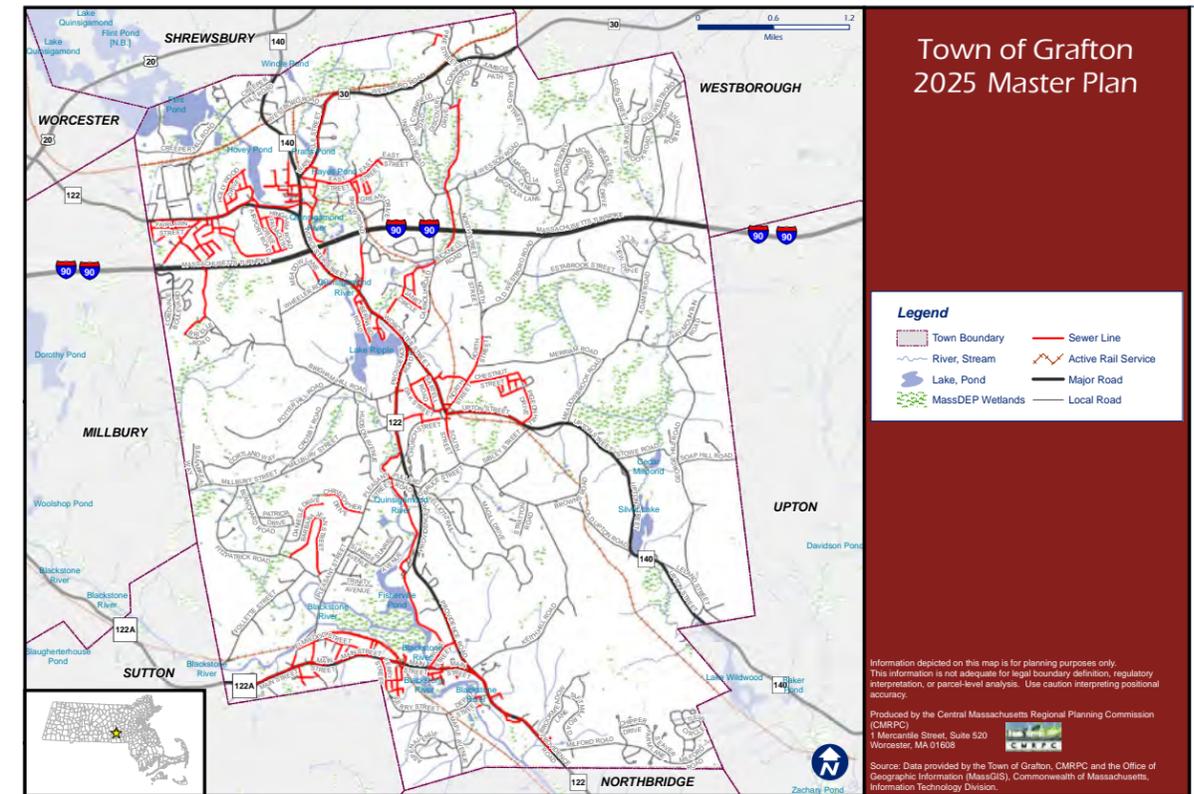


Figure 1. Sewer Systems

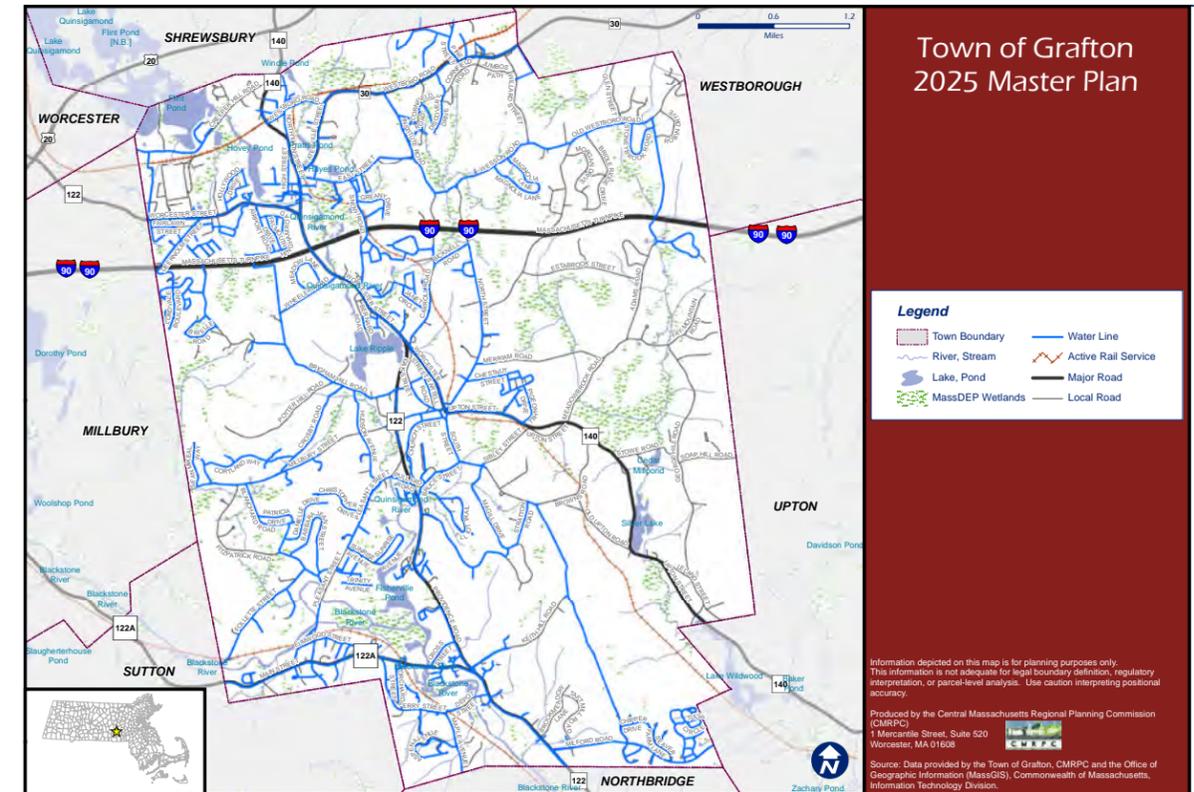


Figure 2. Water Systems



The Central Massachusetts Age Friendly Plan outlines several key strategies to help towns grapple with the consequences of aging populations.

The Central Massachusetts Age Friendly Plan Key Strategies:

- Expand connectivity between Councils on Aging, senior housing, and the broader community/region.
- Support the financial sustainability and maintenance of localized and municipal older adult transportation services.
- Emphasize senior centers and Councils on Aging as primary community resources for older adults.
- Expand mental health resources and services in the region.
- Encourage collaboration and communication between local Councils on Aging, senior centers, schools, colleges, and municipal departments.
- Support continued educational and interactive opportunities for older adults to engage in new and emerging technologies.
- Increase access to local and regional informational resources among older adults.

Goals

Goal 1: Ensure quality services for all Grafton residents and businesses.

Quality of life in Grafton is directly influenced by town services such as emergency preparedness, the Council on Aging, Grafton Public Schools, public water and sewer, and the Library. To align funding with community goals, this chapter presents strategies to both invest more resources, as well as reduce costs. As the town faces increased costs for regular maintenance of facilities



GRAFTON RESIDENTS RESPONSE:

“I would like to know what impact the expansion of town have on the school system.”*

Source: Survey 2023

and equipment, this balance will support quality services and taxpayer affordability.

Objective 1.1: Balance an Aging Population by Encouraging Young Families to Choose Grafton Public Schools.

As the needs of the Council on Aging and senior services increase, it is crucial to maintain a strong school system to retain children. Sustaining Grafton Public Schools’ reputation will encourage young families to stay in Grafton or relocate to Grafton as a strategy to balance the population as life expectancy increases. The following action items represent large capital projects and focus shifts for the public school system.

When asked in the master plan survey, Grafton residents requested curriculum changes that

emphasize core courses and more offerings for arts and sciences, and salary increases for teachers. The master plan team heard numerous residents call for increased special education support and increased after school activities and athletics.

Action Item 1.1.1: Evaluate the need for and plan for future expansion, renovation or replacement of Grafton Public School facilities, especially North Grafton Elementary School and South Grafton Elementary School.

North Grafton Elementary School (built in 1955) and South Grafton Elementary School (built in 1978) should be routinely assessed to ensure the facilities meet the demands of the student population in size and quality. Should it be decided that replacement of the current elementary schools is feasible and appropriate, additional capacity for Pre-K educational facilities can be accommodated in a new facility. The current older buildings have potential to be repurposed as a town recreation facilities, a youth center, or community space.

Action Item 1.1.2: Increase vocational offerings within the public school system.

Table 1. Public School Enrollment Trends

Year	Households	Public K-12 Enrollment	K-12 Students per Household
1990	4,799	1,913	0.40
2000	5,694	2,174	0.38
2010	6,892	2,726	0.40
2023	7,573	3,138	0.41

Source: NESDEC, Grafton Public Schools



GRAFTON RESIDENTS RESPONSE:

A high majority (70%) of master plan survey respondents are satisfied or somewhat satisfied with Town infrastructure.

Source: Survey 2023

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School, Grafton’s affiliated vocational/technical school, currently has a wait list for Grafton students wishing to attend. This limits career opportunities for students post-high school. The current high school building was designed with an option to add a third floor expansion. The Town may choose to utilize this option for vocational offerings or increased student population in the future.

Action Item 1.1.3: Perform maintenance and renovation needs outlined in Grafton Public School Capital Improvement Plans.

In 2022, Grafton’s total expenditures per pupil was \$16,191.85, nearly \$4,000 less than the state average.⁵ To ensure a state of good repair for all six schools, it is vital to leverage funding sources like the Massachusetts School Building Authority Accelerated Repair Program and follow the Grafton Public School Capital Improvement Plan. This will address issues such as increased maintenance for the middle school and new HVAC systems with air conditioning that were concerns brought forth during community engagement. As needs arise, a mechanism to pay for major capital needs, such as new roofs, should be explored.

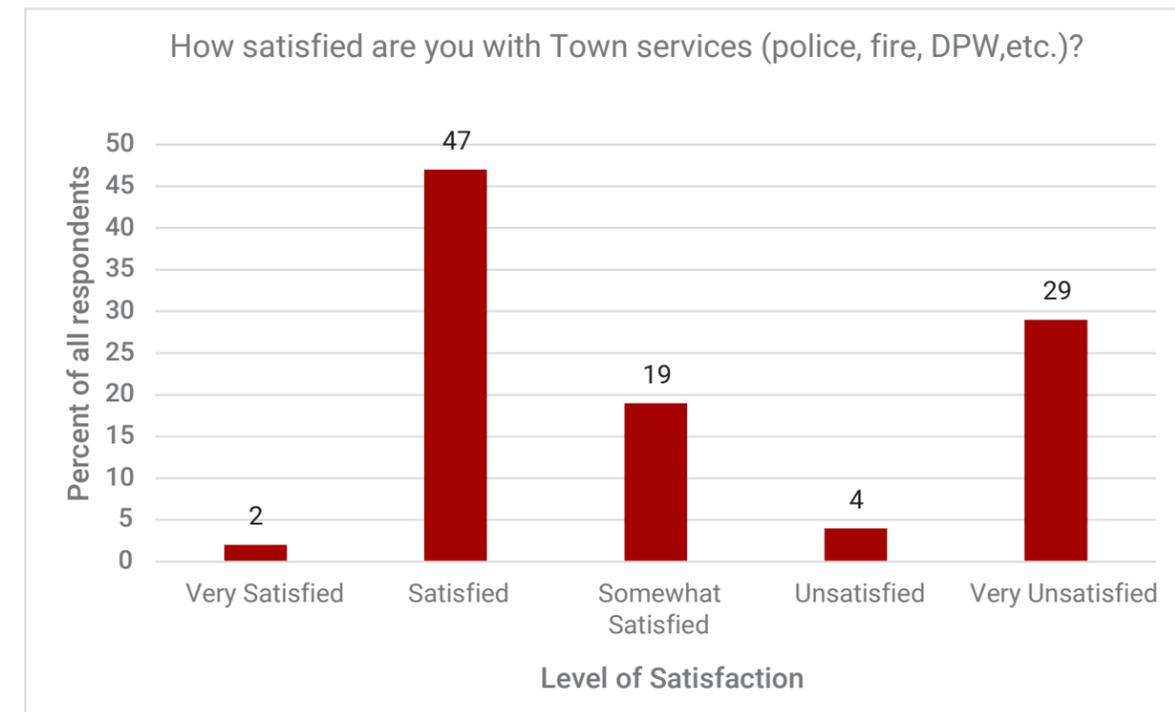


Figure 3. A majority (68) of master plan survey respondents are satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or very satisfied with town services. Specific strategies to improve satisfaction with town services are listed below.



Table 2. Grafton Public Schools

Grafton Public Schools				
School Name	Year Built	Address	Grades	2024-2025 Projected Enrollment
South Grafton Elementary School	1974	90 Main Street	PK, K, 01	297
North Grafton Elementary School	1958	46 Waterville Street	PK, K, 01	243
Millbury Street Elementary School	2002	105 Millbury Street	02, 03, 04, 05, 06	579
North Street Elementary School	1969	60 North Street	02, 03, 04, 05, 06	556
Grafton Middle School	1960	22 Providence Road	07, 08	474
Grafton High School	2012	24 Providence Road	09,10,11,12	912

Source: MassGIS Data: Massachusetts Schools (Pre-K through High School), May 2022; Grafton Public Schools; Grafton Public Schools Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget; *Currently planning on 20 students leaving for Blackstone Valley Tech and private schools; **Kindergarten projections based on 2023-2024 enrollment

The South Grafton Water District received a state grant to design a long term PFAS treatment system. Currently, PFAS water testing remains below the state action limit of 20 parts per trillion on all well sources. However, future chemical regulation mandates for public drinking water are expected. The Town of Grafton can anticipate unexpected costs associated with treatment requirements to prepare for this future. Plans to construct water treatment facilities for both districts were approved by the planning board and construction is underway.

Objective 1.2: Upgrade current water treatment facilities to comply with EPA standards for PFAS and reduce sediment in drinking water.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of chemicals used in stain-resistant, water-resistant, and non-stick products since the 1950’s. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection published a PFAS public drinking water standard in 2020, followed by a national Environmental Protection Agency standard in 2023.⁶

Action Item 1.2.1: Assist Grafton Water Districts in obtaining grant funding for necessary upgrades.

State-issued water treatment warnings can incite fear and confusion for residents unfamiliar with Maximum Contaminant Levels and risks associated with PFAS contaminants. The Town should support efforts by the water districts to open conversation with residents to communicate risks and related treatments.

Objective 1.3: Support the library staff in expanding services and capacity.

The library is home to over 20 staff members, ten of which are full time. The library is in need of additional staff to support passport and notary services, art gallery plans, 3D printing, and optimizing hours based on community feedback.



Library services can be made more accessible by expanding library partnerships to use meeting spaces, exploring public transportation options to the library (especially from public schools), and seeking solutions for additional teen programming.

Action Item 1.3.1: Increase capacity for teen services and programming.

A popular concern heard from Grafton residents is a lack of “third places” for pre-teens and teens in Grafton. Third places, or places in a community that are not home or school/work, are important to this age group as safe and inexpensive spaces for social connection. The library’s teen room is one strategy to support this need and complement after school offerings.

Library staff have encountered large demand for after-school and weekend services for children and teens. The current teen room has a 22-person capacity due to low staffing capacity, only a third of the current after-school teen demand.

Table 3. Water Infrastructure

Water Infrastructure	
Grafton Water District	
Water main connections	4,452
Average safe yield capacity	1,138,000 gallons per day (mgd)
Gallons pumped annually	418,145,000 gallons (2022)
Wells	5
Stand Pipes	2
South Grafton Water District	
Water main connections	798
Wells	3

Source:Grafton Water District 2023, Grafton OSRP 2020

Action Item 1.3.2: Collaborate with the Council on Aging to support education for older adults.

The Council on Aging has requested support for additional programming through the library, especially for technology education. Expanding staff by 4 full-time positions will fill the current programming gaps and allow the library to operate at full capacity for Grafton residents. Additional expansion may be needed due to population growth.

Objective 1.4: Support emergency preparedness services.

Emergency preparedness and public safety services work in tandem to prevent and react to natural and social public emergencies. Action should be taken to implement the 2022 Town of Grafton Hazard Mitigation Plan and periodically update the plan to increase resiliency of Town infrastructure during natural hazardous events. Preventative measures can complement reactionary measures undertaken by Grafton Police and Fire Departments.

Action Item 1.4.1: Support expansion of police and fire force to anticipate population growth.

The police department is expanding to twenty-five staff to accommodate future population growth. Expanding the role of the Grafton Emergency Management Agency and



creating an additional detective position will further increase departmental capacity. The relatively new police headquarters, located adjacent to the municipal center, includes more room for training and increased number of officers. Additional storage for the police department may be a concern in the future. The building will require a new roof and HVAC system before the next master plan. The current parking lot is seventeen years old and requires new pavement. There is opportunity to add a carport to the existing parking lot with solar panel functions.

The police department maintains fourteen vehicles, including five administration vehicles for the chief, detective, and deputy director. An additional two marked vehicles will be needed as the department expands.

Table 4. Grafton Police Activities 2021

Grafton Police Activities, 2021	
Activities	Number of Activities
Total Calls for Service	19,201
Total Incidents Investigated	687
Total Arrests	199
Summons Arrests	133
In-Custody Arrests	60
Protective Custody	6
Total 911 Calls Received	3,836
Total Accidents Reported	366
Total Accidents Investigated	193
Accidents with Injuries	84
Fatal Accidents	0
Pedestrian Accidents	2
Hit and Run Accidents	46
Accidents with Animals	17
Motor Vehicle Stops	1,545
Motor Vehicle Citations	1,391
Summons Service	44
Scams/Attempted Scams	68
Harassment & 209-A Served	110
Total Alarm Calls	775
Disturbance Calls	251
Well-Being Checks	256

Grafton Police Dept. Report, 2021



Action Item 1.4.2: Implement strategies to increase recruitment of call fire fighters.

The Fire Department employs three full-time members, including a fire chief, inspector, and an office manager. Inspectional services complete approximately 700 inspections each year. Fifty-five volunteer, on-call first responders answer more than 600 calls annually. The Department is looking to expand paid staff to include a full-time Fire Officer. A call for twenty additional volunteers is also needed as population increase is anticipated. The Town can consider creative ways to maintain a healthy pipeline of call fire fighters, including workforce education programs within the public schools and potential payment options.

Goal 2: Maintain the consistent condition of municipal facilities and equipment.

Strong, modern facilities are key to effectively dispatch town services. This goal focuses on fire and police stations, the library, and the municipal center. As the costs of maintenance and replacement facilities consistently rise, it is important to anticipate the following investments and other projects listed in capital improvement plans. The biggest project in the coming years will be constructing two new fire stations. However, routine maintenance for other facilities in good condition should not be ignored to increase the lifespan of existing buildings.

Objective 2.1: Invest in priority facility equipment.

The Fire Department uses thirteen pieces of equipment, including two command cars, four Class A engines, three brush trucks, heavy rescue, light and air unit, tanker, and a utility vehicle. One ladder truck was commissioned in 2000 and is in need of replacement soon. Fire hydrants cover 80% of town land, excluding the eastern portion of Grafton. Ambulance services are outsourced through MedStar. The cost of new fire equipment has increased drastically and should be accounted for.

Action Item 2.1.1: Replace or Renovate Stations 2 and 3.

The Fire Headquarters (Station 1) was built in 2009. However, Stations 2 and 3 were constructed before 1970 and require new construction. New standards for fire engine height exceed the size of the station bays. Additional feasibility and financial studies are necessary to prepare for these costs. Renovating current buildings may prove more financially feasible.

Action Item 2.1.2: Support future maintenance of restored portion of library.

A source of pride, the Grafton Public Library recent renovations have revamped potential programs and services offered by the facility. 70,000 annual visitors enjoy full ADA compliant accessibility, a children's room, a teen room, rentable study rooms, events and programming, maker space, and borrower services. In 2022, 140,310 physical and 36,421 digital items were provided to nearly 9,000 resident cardholders. Nearly 5,000 attendees enjoyed



Figure 3. A high majority (70%) of master plan survey respondents are satisfied or somewhat satisfied with Town infrastructure.

382 programs. Friends of the Grafton Public Library continue to support library operations and staff through annual fundraisers and volunteering.

The library facility is in need of additional renovations and maintenance, especially for the restored portion of the facility. Lead paint abatement, new windows, and UV screening will all be necessary in the forthcoming years.

GRAFTON RESIDENTS RESPONSE:

“Ensure capital [funding] keeps buildings current to protect investments, invest in technology in all grades, look for a model citizenship program...”

Source: Survey 2023

Objective 2.2: Update the Municipal Center to meet the function of a Town Hall and Council on Aging.

The adaptive reuse and frequent remodeling of the former Grafton Junior-Senior High School to fit

the needs of a Municipal Center is a welcome success since the previous Master Plan. The Municipal Center currently holds the Senior Center/Council on Aging, Town Hall offices, and Grafton Food Bank. Conveniently located near the High School, Middle School, Police Headquarters, and sports facilities, the Municipal Center has great potential to serve the residents of Grafton.

The municipal center has opportunities to expand electric vehicle charging and ADA compliant doorways. The building can further adapt to its current function by adding service windows for sewer, board of health, and recreation departments.

Grafton Community Television (GCTV), located in the former Police Station, next to the Municipal Center, is a trusted news source, responsible for recording public meetings and providing technical assistance for hybrid meetings. GCTV is an excellent asset for the community that should continue to be supported. Upgrades to Grafton’s IT/AV services will be necessary to continue to facilitate government transparency, as noted in the quality of life chapter.



In addition to supporting current uses, additional use of the Municipal Center to encourage meetings and events for nonprofits and organizations should be explored. Underutilized rooms can be slightly altered to become free-use public spaces, as well as designated areas for storage and archives.

Action Item 2.2.1: Add service windows for Sewer, Board of Health, and Recreation Departments.

Adding service windows for existing department rooms can increase transparency and accessibility of local services, fostering a welcoming environment in the Municipal Center.

Action Item 2.2.2: Provide a new kitchen and air conditioning for the Council on Aging.

The Council on Aging (COA) is comfortable in

its current space within the Municipal Center, utilizing a “main room”, gym, and accessory rooms for televisions, crafts, and offices. The facility welcomes an average of 60 senior citizens each day, with demand expected to increase. The space requires a new kitchen and air conditioning in the future.

Goal 3: Build Town capacity to provide resilient infrastructure for future generations.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) consists of administration, highway, parks and cemetery, engineering, urban forestry, sanitation, and street lighting divisions.

The Highway Division maintains approximately 108 miles of public road. Staff positions include Assistant Superintendent of Streets, Mechanics, Heavy Truck Driver/Equipment Operators,



Light Truck/Labors and one Office Manager. The Division is responsible for plowing snow, repairing potholes, maintaining street signs, cutting brush and trees, cleaning catch basins, painting traffic lines, picking up roadkill, and maintaining streets and sidewalks. The Highway Division enjoys a new facility, built in 2019. The Division handles concerns with roadway elevations, age of underground pipes, and areas with no stormwater drainage. Future climate change concerns, including flooding and extreme temperatures, will provide additional work for the DPW, especially for the highway division. Communication from DPW regarding flooded roads, stormwater runoff best practices, and weather emergencies will be crucial for Grafton residents.

The Engineering Division of the DPW oversees inspection of infrastructure projects, administers the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Phase II Permit and MS4 Compliance, maintains plan files, and acts as liaison between the Town and engineering consultants. The Parks and Cemeteries division utilizes three full-time staff and five seasonal part-time staff. Additional staff will be necessary to satisfy growing demand.

The DPW is the Town's best defense against heightened natural hazards and extreme weather patterns. Increasing proactive measures to protect Grafton's infrastructure and increasing staffing of the DPW will be crucial to avoiding emergency infrastructure repairs.



Objective 3.1: Provide sufficient resources to comprehensively address climate change-related challenges, such as flooding, stormwater management, vulnerable roads, bridges, culverts, water and sewer infrastructure, environmental damage, and vulnerable populations.

Recent flooding incidents in Worcester and Leominster have reflected the pressing need to incorporate Low-Impact Design principles and nature-based solutions into existing and new development design. Not only will decreasing the amount of impervious surface help avoid flooding catastrophes, but it will also reduce stormwater runoff with potential to contaminate public water sources.

Grafton's strong stormwater regulations and zoning bylaw ensure new developments do not inadvertently contribute to stormwater run-off. To retrofit existing parcels to meet modern day regulations, support should be given to DPW staff.

Action Item 3.1.1: Continue efforts to mitigate stormwater runoff and groundwater contamination.

"Nature-Based" solutions mimic the natural flow of water. For example, clustering development to preserve more open space is a Nature-Based Solution to stormwater run-off. On a smaller scale, integrating Low Impact Development designs increase the percent of rainwater



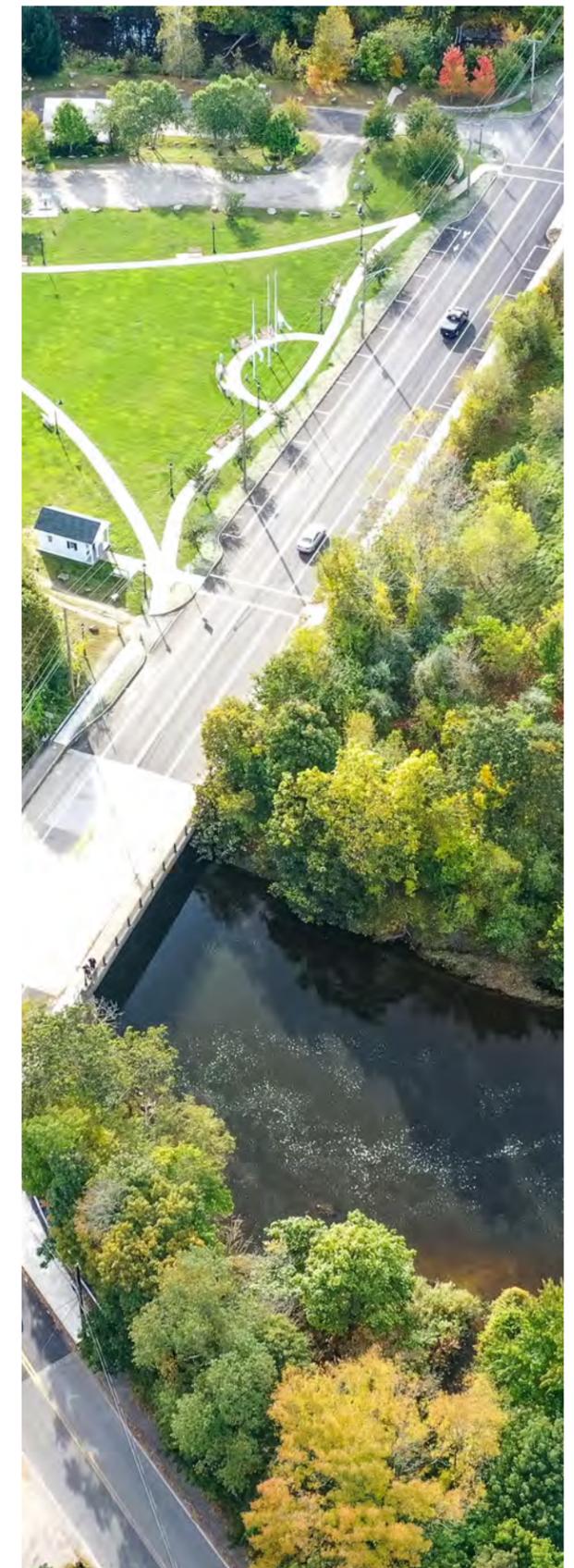
able to permeate the soil underdeveloped land. Best practices include permeable paving, green parking lots, stormwater planters, bioretention bump outs, rain gardens, and planting trees.

The Town can consider a Stormwater Utility Fee, which is calculated based on the amount of impervious surface on a lot. A Stormwater Utility Fee understands stormwater mitigation as a public service, similar to electricity and water, that is consistently underfunded. The addition of a fee will help reduce private property costs related to flooding incidents and groundwater contamination, as well as reducing the risk of drought and improving the condition of fishing and water recreation.

Some neighboring towns operate a Stormwater Enterprise Fund to administer stormwater management programs and comply with MS4 Permit requirements, which is estimated to cost \$1.75 million per year. Their utility fee costs the average residential home between \$90 and \$325 annually.

Additionally, the highway department can mitigate potential groundwater contamination by exploring alternatives to road salt (also known as rock salt) treatment during winter months. Road salt has corrosive effects in large quantities, damaging vehicles and roads, costing the U.S. \$5 billion in repairs annually.⁷ Alternative chemical solutions and upgrades to salt trucks can control the amount of salt distribution. Roads passing over brooks and rivers can be designated as signed areas of “no salting” to further protect waterways from contamination.

Action Item 3.1.2: Plan for population growth and new industry through water and sewer improvements.



Overseen by the Board of Sewer Commissioners, the sewer department is responsible for billing sewer use fees, payment of bond issues, review of construction plans, and the operation and maintenance of the wastewater treatment facility. Revenue generated through sewer use and betterment fees are used to operate the entire department, including the handling 630,000,000 gallons of wastewater annually through 15 pump stations, 70 miles of gravity sewer main, and 4 miles of pressure main.

Approximately 60% of Grafton residents are connected to the public sewer network. The eastern side of Grafton is not serviced due to topography and open space conservation concerns. Areas around Maple Avenue, Millennium Drive, Keith Hill Road, East Street, and Wesson Street have been identified as priority areas for future sewer expansion. The oldest portions of the system are nearing fifty years old. A comprehensive wastewater plan ensures future maintenance and upgrade needs are accounted for.

At present, sewer capacity satisfies the need of commercial and residential demands. The new wastewater treatment plant is permitted for 2.4 million gallons per day. Average daily flow was at 70% capacity in 2022. If Grafton continues to grow, concentrating development along commercial strips can assist with cost sharing of necessary main and pump station upgrades.

The sewer department has successfully upgraded the treatment plant and two major pumping stations to satisfy wastewater discharge requirements and expand capacity. Major expenses are expected as data software and wastewater discharge standards evolve. Water managed by the two water districts, as discussed above, will also need to antici-



Table 5. Sewer Infrastructure in Grafton

Sewer Infrastructure	
Main pumping stations	2
Remote pumping stations	15
Miles of gravity sewer main	70
Miles of pressure main	4
Pipe diameter	8-36 inch
Average daily flow	1.7 million gallons per day (mgd)
Service connections	4,500
Residential population served	60% (12,000 residents)
Source: Grafton Sewer District	

pate increased capacity for population and biomanufacturing increases. Preparing water infrastructure for potential industry increases in North Grafton will attract more desired developments. To meet this need, continued efforts to conserve water are of great importance. Water withdrawals from both surface and groundwater supplies are regulated by the Massachusetts Water Management Act (MGL c. 21G). Under the act, each of Grafton's two water districts are permitted to pump a limited supply of water each day. Population growth and new development may put pressure on the Town's allotted water supply unless efforts are made to more effectively conserve water.

The Town can provide education and materials for rainwater capture and low-water landscaping practices and can establish district-wide conservation programs to build resiliency. The Town can consider establishing a greywater recycling program as the technology advances. Emergency water interconnections with neighboring municipalities and alternative sources of water in the case of contamination or public emergencies should be continually supported.

Public water and sewer costs can be decreased by implementing development patterns that cluster development within existing nodes. This strategy reduces the need of water and sewer line expansion and shares the cost of connections between numerous households. Encouraging infill development can also reduce costs of water and sewer.

Action item 3.1.3: Develop resiliency plans for areas of town not serviced by public water and sewer.

Areas not serviced by public water and sewer,



primarily over east Grafton, require resiliency plans in the case of well contamination or drying. Communication with residents served by private wells and septic systems on contamination prevention and infrastructure upkeep can prevent future issues.

Action item 3.1.4: Align planning board processes with water and sewer district needs, especially to review and update the floodplain and WSPOD.

New developments looking to connect to public water and sewer should be reviewed by water and sewer consultants before approval to ensure capacity increases are noted and requests to expand public lines can be considered. This process can add needed predictability to the permitting process and help the Town attract light industrial and residential development.

The 124 Westboro Road mixed use development is a successful example of this proactive process. Through outreach to the developer and an early dialogue with responsible parties for all relevant utilities—Water (Grafton Water District), Municipal Sewer, Natural Gas, National Grid (Electric)—the Town was able to anticipate the infrastructure needs of the development. Building on these successful precedents, the Town can continue to create major industrial complexes that attract large employers in the life sciences and pharmaceutical manufacturing industries.

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OPEN SPACE & RECREATION



Overview

This chapter outlines a vision for the preservation of natural lands and the enhancement of recreational amenities to preserve Grafton's natural beauty and support the well-being of residents. Grafton residents strongly support the preservation of natural lands and there is strong interest in expanding the inventory of recreational amenities such as trails, playgrounds, and parks. The Town has already begun the process of identifying priority parcels for conservation, with these areas selected based on criteria including ecological value, connectivity to open spaces, and potential for public enjoyment.

Grafton faces challenges with its capacity for maintaining its recreation spaces, especially as

demand grows. The Recreation Department has limited resources, with staffing levels flat for over a decade despite doubling program offerings and continuing facilities maintenance. This has led to overuse of fields and limited access to facilities. The Town has taken measures to address these concerns.

The new Recreation Facilities Strategic Plan identifies needed improvements, including new athletic fields, ADA-compliant upgrades, and the potential of synthetic turf installation to reduce field overuse. As the town grows, resident desire for expanded use of lakes & ponds and more hiking trails is a catalyst for the preservation of open spaces. Engaging community members in the planning process ensures that recreational resources are maintained in a way that meets the needs of all residents while preserving Grafton's natural charm.



Key Findings

Development Has Resulted in the Fragmentation of Natural Lands

Throughout the community engagement process, residents noted that they value the existing open space resources and would like to see more natural lands preserved and more recreational facilities. Many residents expressed concern with the decades of low-density development projects fragmenting the preservation of farm and forest land.

When asked how Grafton should balance future housing needs and open space preservation, sixty percent of survey respondents said they would prefer "higher-density developments (single-family homes on smaller lots, more multi-family homes)" to preserve more open space. 230 of 262 respondents suggested they were in favor of preserving more open space. Some respondents expressed that they were unsure where land should be preserved.

Many areas are designated through the state Biomap program as core habitats and critical natural landscapes that have limited protections in place. Many of these locations serve as vital corridors linking vulnerable wildlife habitats across the region. Protecting these areas helps to conserve biological diversity and provide natural pathways for transportation and recreation. Only forty-eight percent of the 2250 acres of these lands are permanently protected in Grafton.²

The Planning Department and the Grafton Open Space and Recreation Committee (OSRC) worked with CMRPC to complete an Open

GRAFTON RESIDENTS SURVEY RESPONSE:

"We need to preserve as much open space as possible. We need to make a plan that considers protecting our natural resources, including water, and stick to it."¹

Grafton Master Plan Survey, 2023

Space Parcel Prioritization project to identify open spaces with potential value for future protection measures, based on ranking criteria including whether the parcels have Biomap land or wetlands. The OSPPP data is being incorporated into the Town's GIS platform. The OSRC and Planning Board have used the findings to inform conversations around future protection measures.³

Community feedback identified properties for preservation. The Master Plan survey asked respondents, "What areas would be good options to preserve as open & non-developed land?" The top choices included: Silver Lake, Lake Ripple, Brigham Hill, and Pleasant Street. Other answers with multiple entries included: Merriam Road, Tufts, Old Westborough Road, Worcester Street, and Institute Road.

At the Open Space and Recreation Plan forum in October 2017, residents called attention to parcels at Estabrook, Merriam, Silver Lake, and Adams Road as priorities for habitat and biodiversity longevity.

Community engagement efforts from various planning projects over the last two decades



have identified scenic areas in Grafton. The undeveloped eastern part of Grafton features many favored views and farms along Adams Road, Fay Mountain Road, portions of Merriam and Meadowbrook Roads, and Estabrook Street. Great Meadow and Tufts have a mixture of forest and open farmland, varying elevations, wetlands, and streams that make them noteworthy. Attendees to the OSRP public forum identified potential scenic roads at Potter Hill Road, Fitzpatrick Road, South Street, and North Street. The Fisherville historic district was identified as a scenic road location that should be a key neighborhood in Grafton.

The 495 MetroWest Development Compact Plan identified three Priority Preservation Areas (PPAs) in Grafton. Several factors were used to determine which lands are suitable for preservation. These lands are not permanently protected. The three PPAs identified are: land to the west of Fisherville Pond, land off Upton Street between Browns Road and the Stowe Road intersection, and the Knowlton property off Estabrook Avenue.

Preserved open spaces offer accessible areas for outdoor activities and scenic beauty, enriching the quality of life and maintaining local rural character and historical ties. The desire for natural preservation is in direct conflict with historic land use practices. Natural lands

GRAFTON RESIDENTS:

“[Preserve] lands abutting and around Lake Ripple. Any lands providing connectivity to existing trails and open space. We need to think about wildlife habitats.”

Grafton Master Plan Survey, 2023

have been progressively depleted over the past century through suburban low-density sprawl. The development of low-density homes and land-intensive amenities disperses forests and divides large, continuous habitats into small, isolated fragments.

The more a forest is fragmented, the more likely it is to see disruptions in its structure, biodiversity, and ecological processes. Isolated patches cannot support the full range of species found in continuous forests. Some species need large areas to survive, and fragmentation increases the risk of extinction for these species. When forests are fragmented, the amount of “edge” habitat where the forest meets open land increases. This exposes the forest to outside influences like sunlight, wind, and invasive species, which alter the microclimate and soil conditions and can make it unsuitable for native species that thrive in interior forest environments. The negative ecological effect of fragmentation is a main reason prioritizing the conservation of contiguous lands is critical, and the legacy of suburban sprawl has had a significant impact on forests in Grafton.

Strained Capacity and Resources for Recreation

Over the last decade, Grafton has developed a thriving recreational scene with strong municipal and community partnerships to create enjoyable and fulfilling experiences for people of all ages and abilities. Developing a diverse array of quality recreational offerings provides an overall boon to the town’s prosperity by fostering a sense of community, boosting the local economy, and enhancing the physical and mental health of residents.

Grafton has many publicly available opportunities for recreation on land and water. This includes several fields and courts across the town



for team and individual sports, playgrounds, lakes & rivers with boat access, hiking trails, parks and picnic areas, hunting and fishing opportunities, and a beach at Silver Lake with kayak rentals and swimming. The Recreation Department offers various programs including after-school activities, youth sports, group exercise programs, adult sports, and adaptive programs. The Recreation Commission holds annual events including Summer Concerts on the Common and “Grafton Celebrates the Holidays.”

The number of residents has grown while the Recreation Department staff capacity is limited. The Department has held stagnant at 2.5 full-time employees for over a decade, while they

have doubled the number of programs and revenue they bring in.⁴ Facilities are overused, and programs compete for the use of fields and facilities. Organized adult and youth recreation areas have limited availability as many of the facilities are located on school property and compete for space with school programs. Indoor gymnasium space availability is especially limited.

New fields are required to meet demand and lessen usage of existing fields, or to replace existing fields due to poor condition and water-use restrictions limiting their maintenance. The 2024 Recreational Facilities Strategic Plan found that most fields in Grafton are over scheduled and overused, even with significant



annual maintenance and renovations.

New recreational opportunities were valued in the survey. One question asked respondents which types of recreation they would like to see expanded. The top responses were: expanded use of lakes and ponds, hiking trails, and playgrounds and parks, with most respondents supporting each. The totals for each option are shown in Figure 1 below:

In addition to the recreation opportunities provided as options, 62 comments were left on the question, where survey respondents requested additional recreation options:

- Dog park – mentioned 12 times.
- Pickleball – mentioned 9 times.
- Walking – mentioned 9 times. This includes a mention of the need for accessible walking trails for those who have difficulty walking or use wheelchairs. Improving and expanding sidewalks was mentioned 6

times. One resident called for the use of the high school track for walking & running during non-school hours and summer months.

- Parks, playgrounds, and community space – mentioned 7 times.
- Pool – mentioned 4 times.
- Skate Park – mentioned 3 times.
- Marksmanship ranges – mentioned 2 times.
- Other Sports facilities listed included tennis courts, indoor basketball courts, an outdoor street hockey rink, a dirt bike track, and a pump track for cycling.
- Various outdoor activities residents mentioned included outdoor yoga, hunting, horseback riding trails, and camping areas. One respondent called for organized pickup games and other supervised activities for teens. Another respondent called for a recreation center featuring many of the above items.

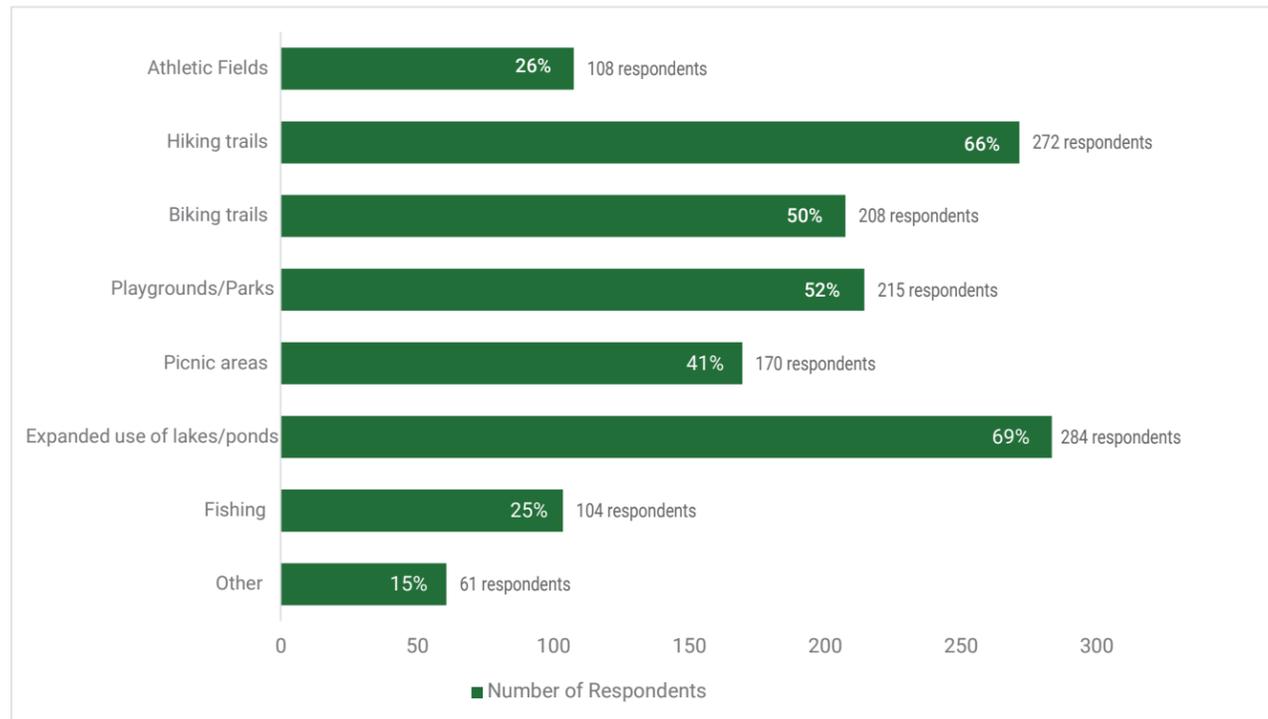


Figure 1: Survey Respondent Desired Recreation Options



Embrace the Shift Towards Agritourism

Preserving prime farmland and agricultural operations is essential to supporting local farmers, the local economy, food systems, and the historic roots and landscapes of the Grafton. Though under ten percent of the land is used for agriculture, residents cherish the farms that remain and can celebrate these lands through the promotion of agritourism.

Agritourism refers to economic activity generated by travel to agricultural businesses and operations, such as apple orchards or farmers' markets. Grafton should embrace the regional shift towards agritourism through the promotion of its small farms, community farms and gardens, farmers market, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs). This chapter explores the various resources and avenues available to promote this social and economic shift.

Many Massachusetts farms, including Houlden Farm in Grafton, offer attractions including farm stands, playscapes, U-Pick, walking trails, and events with food, beer, music, and more. These resources and events can support community-building and engagement opportunities by enriching the community's connection with its agricultural roots. Agritourism capitalizes on the demand for more sustainable, immersive travel experiences that can benefit the local economy and deepen connections to farming practices and food production.

Grafton Can Leverage its Trails for Outdoor Recreation and Eco-tourism

Trails help achieve two important objectives in a town like Grafton—they enhance the

GRAFTON RESIDENTS:

"[We would like] supervised activities for teens. For example, organized pickup game times at soccer, baseball, basketball. Meet up nights at local places for ice cream or movie."

Grafton Master Plan Survey, 2023

sustainable transportation system necessary for a walkable community and serve as an asset for outdoor recreation and regional ecotourism. Providing a strong system of protected bike lanes and safe sidewalks is important for creating a walkable community and reducing a town's dependence on motor vehicles. Trails can serve to connect areas of town that otherwise may be difficult or impossible for cyclists and pedestrians to access safely. Sheltered from inclement weather and the loud sounds of traffic, these can make walking or biking around town more pleasant and approachable.

Central Massachusetts is a part of the state with strong potential for an outdoor recreation economy. Grafton is well situated next to the City of Worcester to serve as a local hub for the region. Trails can serve as an asset to attract local tourism and connect local attractions with each other.

It is important to develop trails as an asset for the community. While inexpensive compared to some infrastructure improvements, trails can become costly to maintain and require careful planning and management to succeed. Trail planning should be integrated into any plans for developing pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure in Grafton. The Trails Committee

and Conservation Commission can spearhead these efforts with the support of the Town of Grafton, and relationships can be developed with local & regional trail user groups, relevant land trusts, and private landowners to ensure this network can grow and serve the Town of Grafton for years to come.

Master Plan Survey respondents indicated a need for more hiking and biking trails, with sixty percent selecting hiking trails and fifty percent selecting biking trails as recreational options they would like to see more of. These were the second and fourth most selected options, respectively, out of eight choices in total.

A 2018 Grafton Land Trust (GLT) survey found that the most popular trails tended to have designated parking, though other “gem” trails with good parking had low visit counts. GLT determined that this was due to a need for better promotion of these sites.

Another need, cited in the Open Space and Recreation plan survey, was to expand connections for walking, including sidewalks and connecting trails. Fifty-three percent of respondents listed this as “Very Important,” in response to the question of what the Town’s

GRAFTON RESIDENTS:

“[Preserve] the places we already have: Merriam-Wheeler, Merriam, Nelson Park, Airport Rd. Park, North St. parks and trails, Ferry St. Park, Whatever is near St. Mary’s church, any trails behind Lions Club”

Grafton Master Plan Survey, 2023

priorities for expenditures should be. The next most popular option, at thirty-four percent, was expanding options for biking, including off-road paths and on-road lanes.

The above survey data notably indicates a greater desire for trail connectivity than new parking facilities.

Participants at the Open Space and Recreation Plan Public forum in October 2017 discussed the need for more trail connectivity, suggesting improving sidewalks with a specific focus on sidewalks around schools, continued trail maintenance, improved trail markings, and improved biking opportunities. It was agreed that paths with the most existing use should be prioritized for future sidewalk extensions or new trail projects.

Rail trails are a commonly cited aspect of a trail network, and under the right circumstances can provide a safe and easy-to-use thoroughfare for pedestrians and cyclists alike. There are some prominent rail trails in Central Massachusetts, including the Mass Central Rail Trail and the Blackstone River Greenway. Rail trails provide many benefits, as disused rail lines may go through or near important hubs in a region, and due to the physics of rail travel, these routes are very flat, making them accessible for users of all skill levels.

Despite these benefits, the implementation of rail trails in Grafton will prove difficult. Rail trails require the presence of disused rail rights-of-way, and even successful projects like the Mass Central Rail Trail are faced with the challenge of persuading many different property owners to allow trail construction and the presence of trail users on their property. There are three rail lines in Grafton: the MBTA Commuter Rail Framingham/Worcester line, The Grafton and Upton Railroad, a freight line that has undergone several repairs in the last decade,



and the Providence and Worcester Railroad, a significant regional freight rail network. The construction of a rail trail would require one of those lines to close, or a significant widening of the right-of-way into abutting properties to allow trail users safe access separate from an active rail line.

Goals

Goal 1: Enhance Grafton's existing open space and recreation resources and plan new amenities.

Broadly speaking, open space can be defined as primarily undeveloped land preserved for environmental, agricultural, scenic, or recreational purposes. Grafton has a total of 5,120 acres of open space, including space for active and passive recreation. Active recreation refers to land designated for sports and other organized or higher-intensity activities that require facilities and physical infrastructure to accommodate. Active recreational activities

include team sports, tennis, golf, swimming, and skateboarding. Passive recreation refers to low-impact recreational activities that do not require significant facilities. It often takes place in spaces managed to protect natural resources. Passive recreational activities include walking and hiking, wildlife observation, and picnicking.

The town has an abundance of active and passive recreational resources, though many of the resources are difficult to maintain or in need of renovation. Residents and relevant town committees have also noted a need to develop additional recreational facilities to accommodate demand. Although the town has many conservation properties, residents understand the importance of conserving more land and increasing opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Objective 1.1: Increase resources to maintain active and passive recreation areas and facilities.



As the town grows, managers of active and passive recreation will need to evolve to meet the growing demand. This will take a multipronged approach of increasing staff and developing efficient maintenance practices, developing support from local and regional organizations, identifying public-private partnerships, and increasing funding.

The Recreation Commission recently worked to improve some internal processes and address the overuse of the fields and courts by implementing a new field and facility rental process, including a fee structure to support maintenance. The Department may consider further work to improve operational efficiencies through strategic planning and implementing additional digital workflows for processes like maintenance scheduling and tracking equipment.

A coordinated, proactive approach is essential to ensure the sustainability and accessibility of the Town's open space and recreation resources.

Action Item 1.1.1: Regularly update the Capital Expenditure and Program Strategic Plans for recreational facilities and programs.

Following the completion of the Recreation Facilities Strategic Plan in 2024, the Recreation Commission and Department completed both a Capital Expenditure Plan and a Program Master Plan for Fiscal Years 2026 - 2030. Both plans have a single page listing anticipated projects and relevant details in tabular format. This approach makes the plans more accessible and easier to read, with clear realistic targets. These tables should be continuously updated as details change, including projected costs and timelines for all expected

projects. Some general recommendations from the Recreation Facilities Strategic Plan could also be added to the updated tables, including:

- Reconstructing basketball courts
- ADA improvements
- New playground equipment
- Conversion of natural grass fields to synthetic turf

The need for new facilities has been reported in recent planning efforts. One major capital item listed as needed was a new community center with classroom and programming space, a community meeting room, storage space, and a room to provide youth and teen services. This would help reduce reliance on school facilities, which operate on a tight schedule. The community center is listed in the Capital Expenditure Plan, with a design phase slated for Fiscal Year 2029. Other capital items cited in the recent OSRP were two multipurpose fields, a gymnasium, and an athletic field open to the public and free for organized Town leagues to use.

Another long-term goal cited in prior planning efforts is the development of a large community park with a pavilion, walking paths, restrooms, open green space picnic areas, open unstructured areas, bike path, casual play areas such as volleyball, bocce, multi-purpose fields, a playground, and appropriate parking, following the model of Dean Park in Shrewsbury and McAfee-Ellsworth Park in Northborough. Additionally, there was a clear desire for a new skatepark throughout community engagement. ARPA money was allocated in 2024 to study a potential skatepark at Perry Hill, though the location was deemed unsuitable. The Town remains open to the possibility of developing a new skatepark and a new site will need to be identified.



Action Item 1.1.2: Explore Alternative Revenue Streams such as Mitigation Fees to Fund Open Space and Recreation Efforts

The Conservation Commission, Trail Committee, Open Space and Recreation Committee, Recreation Commission, and other relevant Town boards and committees have a tight budget and limited resources to implement the many tasks they are assigned in these and other plans. These groups may want to consider new approaches for funding these efforts.

Grafton may be a good candidate for mitigation fees or similar measures, given the high development pressure and abundance of ecologically sensitive lands. The Wetlands Bylaw includes provisions for the developer to carry out the mitigation themselves, constructing compensatory flood storage areas, in cases where there are no feasible alternatives that provide for fewer impacts on the wetland resources. The Town can consider using the same approach or a fee-in-lieu option for Biomap lands or other significant natural resources. However, using a fee-based structure runs the risk of projects being approved with less caution because of the expected payment

GRAFTON RESIDENTS:

“[We need] to allow residents to use of the high school track for walking/running during non-school hours and summer months.”

Grafton Master Plan Survey, 2023

and it leaves the responsibility of protecting new land to the town. Instead, the town may consider a mitigation in-kind approach, having the developer put a conservation restriction or other land protection mechanism on another environmentally sensitive parcel in town of equal or greater size.

The Town can also create new programs to encourage donations from community members. This can be a great source of funds for items like tree plantings or park benches. The Trail Committee or Conservation Commission could run an “Adopt-a-Trail” program to have individuals or businesses sponsor trail upkeep, signage, or other improvements in exchange for recognition such as signs or mentions in town communications.

Action Item 1.1.3: Partner with existing organizations, such as Mass Audubon and Trustees.

The Planning Department continues to work with the Grafton Land Trust, the Conservation Commission, and other local and regional groups to protect land and open space resources. They have recently worked with CMRPC and the Open Space and Recreation Committee (OSRC) to complete the Open Space Parcel Prioritization Project (OSPPP) mentioned above. The data from the OSPPP should be updated as parcels are developed or protected. It can be used as a prescreen for various land preservation efforts, such as for developing a ranked inventory of Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B properties. Inventorying the chapter lands is particularly useful as a first step in preparing the town for when these properties go up for sale. The Planning Department actively coordinates with the OSRC to protect land parcels within subdivisions and permanently protect dedicated open space.



The 2020 OSRP identified a few examples of how different stakeholders in town could be engaged in implementing the items of the plan are shown in Table 1.

Regarding recreational groups, the Recreation Department partners with vendors to run programs at their facilities. These vendors are primarily focused on youth activities and sports. The Department is open to forming partnerships for new programming ventures to expand the Department's capacity. Partners can share resources including equipment, facilities, and marketing support. This also provides an opportunity for cross-promotion and overall enhances the Department's ability to sustain and grow its offerings amid limited staff capacity. To rely less on vendors without significantly straining staff capacity, the Department can

work to engage local performers, artists, and craftsmen to provide programming. Artists could promote and manage their own programming, with recreation department support for coordination. Some potential strategies for the Recreation committee to consider without too much extra burden on staff capacity could include:

- Connecting with the local cultural council, chamber of commerce, libraries, and schools to handle outreach and logistics with artisans and performers
- Creating and promoting a performer roster where interested individuals can register to be contacted for events
- Engaging artists as event coordinators on a rotating basis (bringing in their own networks)

Table 1. Examples of Stakeholder Engagement Plan Implementation

Stakeholder	Strategies
Town Athletic Leagues	Assist in an advisory capacity regarding usage, maintenance needs, and fundraising for fields and courts.
Grafton Land Trust	Conduct regular consultations regarding potential cooperative access agreements between the Town and the Land Trust.
The Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor and the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce	Cross-promote educational programs.
Town boards, commissions, and agencies	Meet periodically to consider collaboration that will make progress on action items. The Senior Center, the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Community Preservation Committee, and the DPW can consider accessibility needs to improve access for all ages.
Tufts University	Share resources to provide for community events.
State and Regional Agencies	Agencies such as the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Office of Ecological Restoration, the Bureau of Water Resources, the Massachusetts Council on Aging, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission have opportunities (land acquisition funds, park improvement funds, signage, and other resources) that should be reviewed regularly.



- Using existing events to promote artist engagement (open mic nights, art walks, maker fairs)

The Department already makes great use of social media which can further amplify their outreach to artists. On top of the money from programming fees, artists can benefit from the opportunity to access public venues to promote their art.

Action Item 1.1.4: Increase group usage of existing resources, such as trails, bird watching, community gardens, and pickleball tournaments.

Group activities represent an important area of potential growth in recreational offerings. The Recreation Department offers programs for youth and adult team sports as well as group exercise programs, though the portfolio of group activities offered has room for expansion. Plenty of facilities and outdoor areas also exist for residents to form groups to experience. When the Town offers and promotes group usage of resources, it can reduce barriers that residents might face in coordinating events, finding participants with similar interests, and assembling equipment and trained facilitators. By centralizing information, offering structured programming, and promoting events, the Recreation Department can make group activities more accessible and appealing.

Objective 1.2: Ensure open space and recreation amenities are accessible for people of all capabilities and ages.

Accessibility considers whether locations are



physically accommodating, as well as whether there are barriers to knowledge and awareness of locations, transportation to and from locations, and whether users feel comfortable and safe at locations.

The Town has recently undergone some accessibility and safety upgrades for open space facilities, including paving parking lots and walkways at Ferry / Fisher Street Park, Perry Hill Park, and Norcross Park. The Recreation Commission is also always working toward expanding offerings for all age groups and user groups within the population. Since 2023, the offerings have expanded to include new teen and adaptive programs, and it has been a priority to continue expanding accessible programming, equipment, and facilities.

As Grafton strives to make its open space and recreation facilities more accessible, the overuse and strained capacity to maintain



Improving signage and wayfinding has been an ongoing effort for Grafton. The Town was awarded \$25,000 from the MA Downtown Initiative Program (MDI) through the Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED) in 2023 to assist with a town-wide wayfinding and branding plan. The study, conducted by Favermann Design, involved the formation of an advisory committee and community engagement involving a survey and a workshop on April 18th, 2024. This study identified numerous potential signage locations around the Town of Grafton, as well as design guidelines for these signs. The committee presented their final designs to the Select Board on October 1st. The designs and recommended locations resulting from this project can serve as a guide for the installation of new signage around Town.

Grafton Land Trust properties are typically identified with a large sign near a road, and trailheads and boundaries are marked with smaller signs. All Conservation Commission properties have identification signage. New trailhead kiosks have been installed at all trailheads. The Conservation Commission plans to soon install a kiosk at Cider Mill Pond and update the Silver Lake Trail map to include this new trail. The Commission is in the process of updating the blazing of trails and has made substantial progress in the last year.

There is a notable concern that Grafton residents are unaware of access to water features such as ponds, rivers, and lakes, and the boat launches associated with them. To improve access to aquatic recreation, these resources should be highlighted on new signage where applicable. The results of the wayfinding & branding plan can help with identifying locations for improving aquatic recreation signage.

Some identified locations for better signage are along Creeper Hill Road next to Flint Pond,

the facilities will only further compound the challenge. As mentioned in Action Item 1.1.1, the Town released a Recreational Facilities Strategic Plan in 2024 to plan for the maintenance, reconstruction, and expansion of existing recreation facilities town-wide. The study included a review of six Town-owned parks and a look at the usage of town-owned athletic fields. The Town also completed an ADA Transition Plan in 2019, in which municipal facilities are assessed and provided with a detailed roadmap for achieving ADA compliance. Further strategies for improving accessibility are described below.

Action Item 1.2.1: Improve signage and other wayfinding, identifying the location & access points for all conservation lands that are open to the public.



along Worcester Street off Hollywood Drive leading down to Hovey Pond, at the intersection of Worcester Street and Carroll Road, along Providence Street, next to Lake Ripple, and at several signage locations near Fisherville Pond.

Action Item 1.2.2: Prepare paper and digital resources (including social media) promoting the Town’s recreation facilities, public open spaces, trail systems, and other resources to new residents and visitors.

The Recreation Department has had success promoting its programs and facilities through the Town’s website and social media. The Department has developed a MyRec.com website, a mobile-friendly site including descriptions and details of all the programs and facilities the town offers. Registration for programs is offered through this portal. Availability charts

and calendars for facilities usage and programs are also available. Special events and updates are posted on the Grafton Recreation Facebook Page.

Most Grafton Land Trust parcels are promoted and have trail maps available for home printing at www.graftonland.org. Conservation lands in town are promoted on the Conservation Commission page of the Town website. Access points and parking areas are noted on trail maps.

The Recreation Department can expand the reach of its physical and digital resources with a greater variety of information sources and offer materials in multiple languages. These could include seasonal or themed guides, such as the “Best Fall Foliage Trails,” or “Family Friendly Picnic Spots.” Grafton could promote a hiking circuit, such as the top scenic hikes, most challenging hikes, or a circuit covering most trails in Grafton.

Additional content could also attract a wider



variety of users. Detailed accessibility information such as ramp availability, terrain type, and nearby parking could help users plan visits based on their individual needs. This could include a section on the MyRec.com site dedicated to “Accessible Recreation Spots.” Information on hunting, trapping, and fishing opportunities on conservation lands can be made available. The Town GIS portal can be continuously expanded to include more publicly available data, such as the location of unique destinations around town. Attendees of the Open Space and Recreation Plan public forum in October 2017 noted it would be useful to have continuously updated maps for paths and hiking areas in town with supplemental information such as trail difficulty. Using modern interactive applications such as ArcGIS dashboards could be a viable option for providing updated trail data in real-time.

Action Item 1.2.3: Increase available parking and improve the condition of parking at conservation properties, especially at Silver Lake.

Parking is a notable concern for some Conservation Commission properties. Merriam Road, Brookmeadow, and Great Meadow only have streetside parking. Silver Lake has a parking lot that is only accessible during the summer months when the beach is open. When the beach is closed, there is space for two cars to park off-street. Hassanamesit, Hennessy, and Pell Farm all have off-street parking areas.

The Conservation Commission can conduct a needs assessment for each site, particularly high-traffic locations like Silver Lake. Based on peak demand, the Town can explore options for expanding existing parking lots or con-

verting roadside parking to formalized offstreet lots. For properties like Silver Lake with seasonal limitations, the Town can consider a community feedback program or pilot projects to establish overflow parking areas or designated carpool spaces for times of high use.

Objective 1.3: Expand open space and recreation facilities into areas lacking amenities.

Active recreation facilities are dispersed across town. The Recreation Department has not identified areas that have disproportionately fewer facilities. There are some key locations mentioned in the survey as deserving of new passive recreation facilities.

As mentioned in the key findings section above, the Town has already taken steps to identify lands warranting protection for passive recreation and open space preservation. With the assistance of the OSPPP, the Planning Department and OSRC should continue evaluating potential parcels for protection or acquisition under the authority of the Conservation Commission.

As mentioned in the 2020 OSRP, many options are also available to private landowners with land they would prefer to remain preserved. These include donations, deeded development restrictions such as conservation restrictions, cooperative agreements, and Chapter 61 Land restrictions. Residents are encouraged to reach out to the Conservation Commission or other relevant Town committees to discuss their options.

The Town of Grafton has made significant use of conservation restrictions as a land preservation



tool in the past, with twenty-one conservation restrictions totaling 1,630 acres. A conservation restriction is a legal agreement between a landowner and a conservation organization or government entity that permanently restricts certain types of development or land use, ensuring the protection of natural lands, while allowing landowners to retain ownership and many uses of their property, such as farming or forestry. They are far more cost-effective than outright land purchases, and the landowner can maintain the responsibility for managing the land, while the Town, Grafton Land Trust, or another conservation restriction holder monitors and enforces the terms of the restriction. This makes them a valuable tool for preserving priority parcels identified in the OSPPP.

Although the Town has identified priority parcels to target for protection, general measures to pro-

tect natural lands through regulation are another available tool. A recommendation of the most recent OSRP was to amend the Subdivision Rules and Regulations to require the retention of open space for wildlife corridors on all parcels located between or adjacent to open space. It is also recommended that developers should also be required to permanently mark open spaces in subdivisions through the installation of signage or another permanent method. The Planning Department also prioritizes the preservation of contiguous lands, where possible, when folks file applications for subdivisions & Special Permits.

Residents are in favor of regulations to expand conservation & open space areas. The Open Space and Recreation Plan survey indicated:

- Eighty-two percent would support a requirement for all new residential developments to include conservation & open space areas;
- Seventy-nine percent would vote to allocate town funds to acquire or otherwise conserve more open space;
- Seventy-six percent would support the Town of Grafton acquiring land and allowing just enough development to offset the cost of acquisition while preserving the remainder of land (a.k.a. Limited Development); and
- Sixty-three percent would favor zoning that provides for increases in density in existing developed areas in exchange for open space in less developed or environmentally sensitive areas.

Respondents notably called for a walking trail around Silver Lake and along the Blackstone Canal. Historic sites and cultural locations were also emphasized, with one person calling for a “storybook trail.” The Town should also continue partnering with the Nelson Memorial Park and Memorial Library Trust to optimize use and amenities at the existing recreational field.

Grafton adopted the Community Preservation Act, though other regulatory measures such as zoning bylaw changes, can be made. The Town can consider performing a full zoning diagnostic, determining where zoning bylaws can be updated to further protect open space areas in the community.

Action Item 1.3.1: Introduce Additional Natural Amenities along Worcester Street

A few respondents discussed wishing to “break up the ‘gasoline alley’ feel of the business area” along Worcester Street. The most impactful aesthetic improvements to this location would be achieved through zoning changes and redevelopment with greater density and reduced setbacks. Introducing natural elements like street trees or gardens could add visual appeal and help to diversify the landscape. The town might achieve this by adopting some of the design aspects of the VMU district zoning for the Worcester Street Corridor. Green infrastructure like bioswales or rain gardens have the added benefit of reducing stormwater and improving the water quality of the nearby bodies of water. The high commercial activity of this location makes it a suitable candidate for greater connectivity to a future townwide trail system and the Town could explore options for setting up a trailhead in the area. Some respondents to the survey wanted to explore future passive recreational access to nearby wetlands in the area.

Action Item 1.3.2: Finish implementing the Mill St & Whitney Park Assessment completed by CMRPC

In July 2023, CMRPC completed a report for the redesign of Whitney Park at 5 Mill Street. The plan included two conceptual designs with



cost estimates and how the projects could be phased as funding is obtained. Implementation is in progress, starting with sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic signage, and an accessible connection to Perry Hill. Future amenities include tree and shrub plantings, a pavilion, and outdoor fitness equipment.

Action Item 1.3.3: Provide more passive recreational opportunities at water features for residents to enjoy.

Expanded recreational opportunities at water features in town are deeply sought after by residents. In the community survey, sixty-seven percent of respondents called for expanded use of the lakes and ponds as the number one





option for new recreation in Town. Grafton has enormous potential to tap into the cultural and economic legacy of rivers, lakes, and ponds.

Prior to European Colonization, the Nipmuc people, also known as the “freshwater people,” lived alongside lakes, rivers, and ponds and used waterways like the Blackstone for transport and commerce throughout the region. Post-colonization, rivers and ponds were essential for powering mills, especially during the industrial boom of the 19th century. As industrial demand declined, the town’s water features functioned as hubs for recreation, community gatherings and leisure activities. This rich legacy could be promoted to address both recreational and environmental needs and provide a vision to build upon with ecotourism initiatives.

Much of the aquatic recreation in town is focused on Silver Lake, though there are some other options available. Kayaking and canoe launches are available at Riverview Park, Ekblaw Landing, Lake Ripple Conservation Area, Southern Reach (below Lake Ripple Dam), and along the Blackstone River south of the Main Street Bridge. Notable kayaking and canoe locations include Snow Marsh, the Quinsigamond River, Lake Ripple, and Fisherville Pond. Some of these also allow boating. Swimming and swimming lessons are limited to Silver Lake. Fishing is available at Silver Lake and Grafton Lions club at Lake Ripple. Many bodies of water are valued for their scenic beauty, with hiking opportunities along their shores, although this is becoming hindered by the prevalence of aquatic invasives. A more detailed breakdown of the various natural lands in town can be found in the Natural & Cultural Resources chapter.

Expanding recreation to bodies of water is difficult at present for a few key reasons. As mentioned above, staff capacity in the Recreation

Department is limited and they do not have the additional staffing needed to operate a large water body. There are also no other beachfronts in town other than Silver Lake, and Silver Lake’s beachfront has no room to expand to accommodate additional aquatic activities. Lastly, the overgrowth of invasives has limited the ability of other bodies of water to support new activities.

As the capacity to support additional recreation in town grows, special consideration should be given toward expanding aquatic activities. Better wayfinding and signage will be needed to call attention to the existing access points, scenic trails should be developed and maintained along the shores, and new recreation features such as fishing and swimming docks can be installed.

As the population grows, seeking grant funding for projects at its water features will be necessary for scaling up recreation while preserving ecological health. The expansion of aquatic recreation will create a more vibrant and accessible experience for residents and promote a greater appreciation of the town’s natural beauty.

Objective 1.4: Expand the town-wide system of trails to provide hiking, jogging, horseback riding, and biking options and increase usage of trail network.

A key component of outdoor recreation is the trail system throughout town. Trails in Grafton should be expanded and improved to support multiple types of trail users, such as hikers, runners, cyclists, and equestrians.

The Town of Grafton can draw on numerous

partners to achieve this task, including the Trails Committee and Conservation Commission, regional trail user groups, the Grafton Land Trust, private landowners, and regional partners at the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission and Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization.

A townwide trail system should include off-road trails for hikers, cyclists, and equestrians, connected by a series of paved bicycle corridors consisting of multi-use paths and on-road protected bicycle lanes and sidewalks. These trails and corridors should be well documented to ensure ease of use by visitors and residents alike and to allow emergency responders access in the case of an incident. Development of a local bicycle corridor plan, based on past and ongoing regional bicycle plans, can ensure a townwide network that serves the Town of Grafton and can provide access to neighboring towns, contributing to regional recreation opportunities and the local economy.

Action Item 1.4.1: Support the Trails Committee and Conservation Commission in addressing issues regarding the Town’s trails.

Given the Town’s limited staff capacity, responsibility for moving projects forward often falls upon volunteer committees. Through these goals and action items there are several ambitious initiatives that will require the Town of Grafton to adequately support its Trails Committee and Conservation Committee. Lack of support for these committees may result in less projects being completed.

Action Item 1.4.2: Fund the operation of the Trails Committee.

The Trails Committee has no budget – any purchases made on its behalf must go through the Town of Grafton. Subsidizing the Trails Committee annually with a small budget under \$10,000 dollars would allow the committee to pay for new trail markers and signage and enable committee members to attend regional conferences and webinars more easily, which will lead to the expansion of the programming capacity of the Trails Committee.

The Committee has been taking on a variety of tasks including:

- Coordinate the oversight and maintenance of the trails with responsible parties
- Organizing guided hikes
- Connecting regional trail systems
- Auditing trails for accessibility

Action Item 1.4.3: Promote partnerships with local and regional clubs.

Partnerships should be developed between the Town of Grafton, the Trails Committee, Conservation Commission, and local and regional clubs relating to hiking, cycling, running, and equestrian activities. By engaging with all types of trail users, we can ensure that trails are not dominated by a single user group and that accommodations and specializations can be designed for trails where necessary. These partnerships can help the Town of Grafton meet the needs of trail users and ensure that trail access and safety are prioritized for everyone. While these groups may not be in Grafton specifically, they can provide key insights from a regional perspective.

Organized group activities, such as hikes or casual bike rides, can be coordinated with trail user groups to build connections with municipal staff and committee members. This can high-



light challenges and opportunities with the trail system.

Potential user groups include:

- Cycling: MassBike, Seven Hills Wheelmen, the Blackstone Valley Chapter of New England Mountain Bike Association, Worcester County Women's Cycling
- Hiking: Appalachian Mountain Club
- Running: Central Mass Striders
- Equestrian: City to Saddle

Action Item 1.4.4: Develop a plan to ensure coordination between land trust, local clubs, and other agencies & organizations to make data on trails publicly available on the same platforms and in the same formats.

In addition to partnerships with user groups, it is critical that the Town of Grafton continue relationships with the Grafton Land Trust and other key landowners. Developing a robust trail network will require the coordination and buy-in of private landowners who may or may not have their land in conservation. The inability to do so may result in an incomplete trail network that has limited use for trail users who do not wish to travel on the road to move between incomplete sections.

Land trusts, private landowners, and trail user groups should be brought together to ensure that up-to-date and accurate trail data is shared and publicly available. This data can be incorporated into mapping software such as Google Maps, Apple Maps, OpenStreetMap, Trailforks, FarOut, and RideWithGPS. Making this data easily accessible will help trail users both plan their outings and navigate the trail



network. This can ensure a quality and low-friction experience that will encourage regular visitation.

Action Item 1.4.5: Ensure all coordinated trails data is made available to emergency services personnel.

As Grafton expands its trail system, it is vital that emergency responders in the region have access to high-quality maps and information to limit response time. If accurate and up-to-date trail data is established and shared through the efforts described in the prior action item, town staff should ensure that the data is easily accessible to emergency responders in the event of an emergency on the trail or at trailheads. Outreach should be conducted with local emergency responders to determine how they access this navigational information and if any other details need to be included so it is effectively used.

It should be noted that new trails for emergency vehicles must meet expensive and frequently unattainable standards. Because of the North Street school's vicinity to a propane facility, the Town recently wanted to create an emergency vehicle access route on a trail leading from the school to a nearby subdivision. They conducted a feasibility study which found that it would cost over a million dollars for each option because the trails needed to be paved and meet certain width and weight standards for vehicles.

Action Item 1.4.6: Update Grafton's local bike plan.

Following the completion of the 2025 Regional Bike Plan, the Town of Grafton should begin work on an update to the 2016 Grafton Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.



The regional CMMPO plan will identify existing and potential infrastructure locations, though there is work to be done at the town level to determine the prioritization of on-road bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, as well as alignment with an expanded trails network. The local bicycle and pedestrian plan should be structured to fill in what is missing from a regional perspective.

The biggest benefit of a local plan is easier access to real infrastructure users in the town. The previous plan included a meeting with a local bike and pedestrian advocate, in addition to surveys that targeted both residents, as well as participants at Walk to School Day in Grafton. Any new plan should feature heavy input from local cyclists and pedestrians.

Various regional organizations may have members in and around Grafton, including MassBike, Seven Hills Wheelmen, New England Mountain Bike Association, and Central Mass Striders. Outreach should focus on students in Grafton, with targeted outreach to the school system and surveys distributed through school communication channels. Young people are some of the most frequent cyclists and pedestrians in a town, often lack access to an automobile, and may have unique insight.

In addition to these groups, there should be outreach conducted with the Grafton Land Trust and the Department of Conservation and Recreation, to provide insight into the interaction between on-road cycling and pedestrian infrastructure with the trail network.

As part of the prior plan, CMRPC staff conducted fieldwork to document the conditions of infrastructure in Grafton, as well as mapping existing conditions, areas of concern, and proposed projects. Another element of

professional input that should be incorporated into a plan update is the insight of an engineer. An engineer can provide unique input on the realistic costs of proposed infrastructure, which can aid in a prioritization process, and can help determine whether recommended infrastructure upgrades are even feasible or should be adjusted.

Action Item 1.4.7: Identify trail signage goals and funding.

In the next three to five years, the Town of Grafton should establish a source of funding for trails signage. Through the Trails Committee, under a local trails plan or an update to the bicycle plan, signage locations and corresponding priorities should be identified and cataloged to guide the efficacy of the funding.

Action Item 1.4.8: Work with CMRPC to collaborate with neighboring communities for bike path connections.

As important as it is for the Town of Grafton to develop its own trail and bike lane network, an equally important next step is for these newly developed routes to connect with neighboring towns. When considering connections to surrounding towns, the CMMPO recommends pursuing a connection to the planned bicycle infrastructure on Route 20 in Shrewsbury. This connection would provide improved access from North Grafton to numerous destinations along Route 20. The 2018 Regional Bicycle Plan categorizes Route 140 in Grafton as a major priority, and the northern segment of Route 140 represents an opportunity to improve active transportation in Grafton while also providing improved regional connectivity. The CMMPO recommends working with the Town of Shrewsbury as well as MassDOT to complete



this connection.

The Blackstone River Bikeway is an opportunity to improve regional connectivity in the southern part of Grafton. According to the 2018 Regional Bicycle Plan, Grafton has a segment of on-road bicycle infrastructure programmed along Route 122A from the Sutton town line to Route 122. This roadway segment is in the immediate vicinity of the potential route of the Blackstone River Bikeway. As these projects are developed, it is recommended that connections between on-street facilities and potential offstreet facilities are made available, improving regional connectivity for active transportation methods.

There are many challenges with bringing these projects to fruition including:

- Challenging topography and river crossings
- Securing grant funding for planning and design, land acquisition, and construction.
- Regulatory compliance
- Coordination with a large body of stakeholders
- Concerns from residents regarding property impacts, perceived costs, or potential changes to local traffic patterns

- Multiple municipalities and property owners with their own priorities and constraints

Collaboration with neighboring communities and local organizations like the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative is essential to overcoming these challenges. CMRPC also conducts regional dialogues and facilitates regional meetings to support these collaborative efforts. The new Trail Committee can take on the role of facilitating these connections at the local level. With assistance from partners, the first step can be to address environmental and engineering concerns early on. Grafton will need to work closely with neighboring towns to conduct feasibility studies, reassessing the proposed path and proposed alternative alignments based on terrain, existing infrastructure, and land ownership. They should also look at where it can connect with commercial or recreational areas to increase strengthen the bikeway's overall utility. These studies should also identify potential environmental impacts, such as wetlands, protected habitats, floodplains, or other sensitive areas. The Town can





work alongside environmental organizations and regulators to address environmental requirements and minimize delays. The Town can work with engineers and other consultants to develop high-level estimates for planning, permitting, construction, and maintenance costs for each potential alignment.

With the initial planning underway, the Town can work with collaborators to develop conceptual maps or visualizations of the bikeway that outline its potential benefits, such as increased recreation, improved connectivity, and economic opportunities. The Town can then engage in public information campaigns, educating the community about the bikeway's potential benefits and gathering input through town workshops, surveys, or online platforms. By demonstrating the route is feasible, thoughtfully planned, and that environmental and legal hurdles have been considered and minimized, the project is more likely to see buy-in from property owners. The initial planning also ensures that there are multiple route options in case there is pushback from landowners. There is a lot of time and funding that will need to go into this effort to ensure it runs smoothly, and so working with regional partners will be essential, including grant writing assistance.

Goal 2: Preserve Grafton's rural character by retaining what is left of the Town's agricultural roots.

Like many communities in Central Massachusetts, the Town of Grafton was an agrarian community for the early decades of the 19th century. The economy in Grafton was partially supported by the local agriculture throughout the industrial revolution. During this time, Grafton was known for its fruit orchards, while

leather and shoe manufacturing were the town's primary industry. By the 1960s, less than a quarter of land was used for agricultural activities. Today, only eight percent of land in Grafton is used for agriculture.⁵ Recognizing the rapid loss of local farmland and taking steps to protect existing farmland and agricultural operations are crucial as the price to purchase prime farmland in Massachusetts continues to soar. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Agricultural Statistics Service, the national average farm real estate value in 2022 was \$3,800 per acre, compared to \$15,200 per acre in Massachusetts.⁶ In order to protect farmland from being sold for development, the Town must promote the importance of local farmers. Preservation of remaining farmland supports local food systems and the local economy and promotes conservation of the community's historic roots and landscapes.

Objective 2.1: Promote and support local agriculture and farms.

Many of the undeveloped uplands are a mixture of agricultural fields, pastures, brush, and woodland. Among the remaining agricultural land are several cherished farms, including small fruit and vegetable farms and some with livestock, like chicken or cattle. These farms directly support local food systems, supplying healthy food options to a range of households and families, and support the local economy through agritourism. Some of these farms include the businesses listed in Table 2.

The Massachusetts Community Harvest Project also has a location in Grafton. The Community Harvest Project (CHP) is "dedicated to addressing food insecurity through sustainable farming practices and community engagement." The Grafton Farm is on two adjacent properties:



Table 2. Grafton Farms

Farms in Grafton	
Farm Name	Types of Products
Houlden Farm ⁷	Perennials, annuals, starter vegetable plants, produce, preserves, honey, maple syrup, meats, baked goods, Christmas trees, and more.
Potter Hill Farm ⁸	Organic heirloom vegetables, eggs, meat, and more.
Bearfoot Farm ⁹	Hay, candles, and more.

Brigham Hill Community Farm, owned by CHP, and White Farm, privately owned and leased to CHP. These two properties make up the 15-acre farm where over 40 varieties of fruits and vegetables are grown. Volunteer groups are welcomed seasonally to assist the permanent farm team with operational practices. Rather than distributing directly, CHP partners with local hunger relief agencies to distribute produce grown on the Farms to ensure it reaches those in need.¹¹

With both private farms and a public agricultural operation, the Town of Grafton has multiple agricultural operations that would benefit from increased local support. Local support may include providing opportunities for farmers to express their concerns and needs to municipal staff. Support may also include promoting available protection avenues or enacting a Right-to-Farm bylaw. These approaches promote and support agricultural business and preserve the remaining agricultural resources in Grafton.

Action Item 2.1.1: Provide outreach opportunities for agricultural landowners to express their concerns, needs, and priorities.

Providing an avenue for feedback leads to an increased understanding of concerns, needs, and priorities. On the municipal level,

outreach opportunities, either among the public or with specific groups, allow municipal staff the chance to hear concerns and needs related to a specific topic or among a specific group, so that future improvements may be prioritized. Planning and conducting outreach targeting agricultural landowners and farmers would allow the Town of Grafton to better understand challenges its local farmers may face in relation to Town bylaws, Town infrastructure, or other municipal operations. This would allow the Town to effectively plan for the implementation of any priorities that may be within the municipal purview, such as hosting an educational workshop about the Chapter 61A Program or Agricultural Preservation Restrictions. Another potential implementation measure that may result from increased outreach opportunities for agricultural landowners could include enacting a Right-to-Farm bylaw.

One avenue for engagement could include scheduling stakeholder interviews between local agricultural landowners and the Grafton Agricultural Commission, the Grafton Planning Board, and the Grafton Board of Health. Other options could include facilitating a group discussion among all agricultural landowners



or conducting an annual survey. Engagement should occur at least annually. Results should also be considered on a regular basis and used as a tool to effectively plan for the improvement of local agricultural operations.

Action Item 2.1.2: Consider ways to support agricultural landowners through agritourism, farmer’s markets, and agriculture-based businesses.

Agritourism refers to travel and economic activity generated by agricultural production, usually in more rural areas. As noted, there are several beloved farms and agricultural operations in the Town of Grafton. Although many of these farms either sell their products on-site, through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares, or donate their produce to near-

by food-distribution networks, the Town should consider creative ways to support these operations that may also boost the local economy.

One method that the Town has already implemented is a community farmers’ market. The Grafton Farmers Market occurs every Wednesday afternoon on the Town Common throughout the Summer months. The market is volunteer-managed and highlights nearly forty local vendors. The Grafton Farmers Market aims to provide fresh, local food directly from farmers to consumers and support the health of local farms while educating the community about healthy and sustainable living and providing a social experience that builds community.

To increase the accessibility of this farmers market to more local operations, the Town and the Grafton Farmers Market can work together to coordinate with local farmers to designate



GRAFTON RESIDENTS:

“Natural playgrounds, not the prefab stuff we currently have.”

Grafton Master Plan Survey, 2023

one rotating booth for farms, farmers, or related businesses based in Grafton. On days where no Grafton-based business is available, municipal staff or members of the Grafton Agricultural Commission could table and promote engagement opportunities, farmland protection programs, or other available resources.

Another option the town could explore is the creation of mini markets in North and South Grafton, to expand the reach of local food in the community. The markets could bring in customers that may be unable to make it to the town center for transportation or mobility reasons or scheduling conflicts.

Asset mapping is another method the Town may consider boosting its agritourism industry. Asset mapping refers to conducting an inventory of specific types of resources in each area to inform the development of a map, which then may be used as a planning tool or public tool and promotion method. In this case, the Town of Grafton could conduct an inventory of its agritourism or potential agritourism assets to inform the development of a Grafton-specific agritourism map. This map could be shared on the Town website, promoted on social media and through newsletters and email blasts, to promote the Town’s agricultural resources. This map would serve as a tool for municipal staff, residents, and visitors and may be updated regularly as the industry evolves. The Town could also consider overlaying the map with other

relevant data, such as inserting active transportation networks to display alternate transportation options to these destinations.

Action Item 2.1.3: If Chapter 61A land becomes available, consider retaining and using it for activities such as community gardens.

Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapters 61, 61A, and 61B provide tax relief to owners of forestland, farmland, and recreation land, respectively. If a landowner decides to convert their Chapter land for another use, the municipality has the Right of First Refusal. Specifically, Chapter lands cannot be sold or converted unless the landowner has issued a Notice of Intent to its municipal Select Board, Planning Board, Assessor’s Office, Conservation Commission, or State Forester. Once the Notice of Intent is received, the municipality has 120 days to exercise its Right of First Refusal and either purchase the land or assign the land to another entity.¹² As land comes out of Chapter, the Town of Grafton should maintain a plan of action to leverage this Right so as the opportunities arise, the Town may ensure that Chapter land remains protected or used for its intended purpose.

The Town of Grafton could set aside money in its annual budget to support a local land acquisition fund. Once sufficient funds are raised, the Town may be better prepared to exercise its Right of First Refusal and purchase any land that is going out of Chapter. Once acquired, these lands may remain protected as forestland, agricultural land, or recreational land, or opened to the public. Public use of these lands could include a community garden, a shared plot of agricultural land that is farmed by various people from within a community. Some com-



community gardens charge an annual fee for each sub-plot, which could be used to support the garden and any relevant land acquisition funds. The community garden could also be used as a space to host relevant workshops or public events or as an educational space for volunteers of all ages and backgrounds.

Action Item 2.1.4: Consider adopting a Right-to-Farm bylaw

Massachusetts' Right-to-Farm Law protects farmers and farm-related businesses from nuisance lawsuits. Specifically, Massachusetts municipalities can enact Right-to-Farm bylaws to protect farming and agriculture at large from nuisance lawsuits over matters that impact neighboring properties and property owners. This protection is supported so long as the matter concerns "an ordinary aspect of said farming operation" and the farm or agriculture operation has been in operation for over one-year. Local governments, usually through Boards of Health, retain some authority to determine if an operation is a nuisance. If a Board determines an operation is a nuisance, operators may file a petition, though the Board can also order the activity to be abated within 10 days.¹³

Although the Right-to-Farm law and subsequent bylaws do not directly protect farmland, the legislation does protect farmers and other agricultural-business operators from nuisance lawsuits. This indirectly protects farmland by ensuring that as development occurs around existing farmland, agricultural operations may continue with business-as-usual.

Action Item 2.1.5: Work with Grafton's working farmers and agricultural landowners to encourage the continued preservation of the Town's remaining agricultural resources.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts offers various resources to agricultural landowners, including the Massachusetts Chapter 61A Program for Agriculture and the Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR) Program. Specifically, the Chapter 61A Program offers preferential tax treatment to landowners who maintain five or more contiguous acres of active agricultural or horticultural land. This preferential tax treatment includes being taxed for the land's agricultural use rather than developmental value.¹⁴



The Massachusetts APR Program is a voluntary program that is intended to offer non-development alternatives to farmers and other owners of prime agricultural land who are faced with decisions regarding the future of their land. In this case, the alternative includes offering landowners the difference in cost between the "fair market value" of their land and the "agricultural value" of their land.¹⁵

Programs such as the Chapter 61A Program and the APR Program should be considered as Grafton strives to maintain its agricultural land and support its local farmers. According to the Massachusetts Bureau of Geographic Information Systems (MassGIS) and the local assessor's office, there are nearly twenty acres of farmland enrolled in the Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Program and over one thousand acres in the Massachusetts Chapter 61A Program.

To increase local utilization of these programs, the Town may consider hosting educational workshops or webinars for its agricultural landowners. These opportunities could include in-person, public workshops, virtual webinars, or simply promoting existing events that are hosted by nearby non-profits or community organizations. The Town could also consider developing infographics about these opportunities or promoting existing infographics.

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**NATURAL &
CULTURAL
RESOURCES**



Overview

The Town of Grafton has a diverse collection of natural and cultural features due to its Indigenous history, environment and topography, and mill village industrial heritage. There are opportunities to preserve and value the natural, cultural, and historic resources that make Grafton so unique. Top resources include agricultural land, environmental diversity, the Town Common, the Grafton Library, and local museums. Grafton can take advantage of state funding sources and regional collaboration efforts to optimize these resources. The top priorities from community engagement were the desire to preserve more land in Grafton, protect endangered species, and prevent invasive

species. The following chapter outlines recommendations for protection, preservation, and maintenance of important natural, cultural, and historic assets.

This chapter addresses three main topics: protecting and preserving natural resources, agriculture, and historic & cultural assets. Goal 1 focuses on interventions designed to protect water resources and sensitive habitats; Goal 2 looks at what can be done to build the Town's capacity and funding to continue to preserve its historic features and support the Indigenous community, and where to target efforts.



Key Findings

Opportunities for Regional Partnerships to Conserve Natural Resources in Grafton

The Town of Grafton boasts a diversity of natural features, from rivers to woodlands, rolling hills, and undeveloped open fields. These features contribute to the Town's scenic character and its ecological significance, supporting a range of habitats that are critical for both common and rare species. These natural resources provide essential ecosystem services, including water filtration, carbon sequestration, flood control, and wildlife habitat, which benefit both the local community and the broader region. These landscapes offer recreational opportunities, such as hiking, birdwatching, and fishing, enhancing residents' quality of life while fostering a connection to the environment. According to the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife's (MassWildlife) Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP), there are six plant and animal species of conservation concern in Grafton shown

Table 1. Species at Risk in Grafton

Species of Conservation Concern		
Species	Scientific Name	Classification
Triangle Floater	<i>Alasmidonta undulata</i>	Mussels
Oak Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium favonius</i>	Insects: Butterflies
Blue-spotted Salamander	<i>Ambystoma laterale</i>	Amphibians
Four-toed Salamander	<i>Hemidactylium scutatum</i>	Amphibians
Spotted Turtle	<i>Clemmys guttata</i>	Reptiles
Pale Green Orchid	<i>Platanthera flava var. herbiola</i>	Plants

in Table 1. These six species are particularly vulnerable in the face of habitat destruction, invasive species, climate change, and human disturbances, such as development or logging.

The NHESP identifies core habitats of rare species throughout the State. In Grafton, there are three general areas identified as core habitats for the above-mentioned species: north of Lake Ripple, both around Doris Drive Land and the Quinsigamond Marsh, the southwestern corner of Town, northwest of Fisherville Pond, the southeast corner of Town, southeast of Silver Lake, and along West River.

There are 1,120 acres of core habitat in Grafton, constituting under eight percent of the total land. Out of the core land, only a third is permanently protected. In addition, NHESP has identified twenty-one certified vernal pools in Grafton. Vernal pools are small, shallow ponds that experience seasonal dry periods.¹ Though they lack fish, many amphibians breed exclusively in vernal pools, and some organisms, such as fairy shrimp, spend their entire life cycle there. So, when considering unique wildlife habitats, both NHESP core habitats and NHESP certified vernal pools should be considered.

In addition to core habitat, NHESP identifies large blocks of land that are minimally impacted by development and buffer core habitat, both enhance connectivity and resilience. In Grafton, these areas exist around the core habitats and extend to nearby forested areas and water resources. In total, there are 2,034 acres of critical natural landscape in Grafton, constituting thirteen percent of the total



land, only a quarter of which is permanently protected.²

Wetlands make up nine percent of land in Grafton. Wetlands are critical to flood control as they offer necessary water storage and absorb stormwater runoff. Wetlands provide valuable wildlife habitat and scenic beauty. To protect these essential areas, a permit is required by the State Wetlands Protection Act (WPA) Regulations for any development activities within 100 feet of a wetland or 200 feet of a perennial stream. All projects within the 100-year floodplain require a permit. The Grafton Conservation Commission manages this permit process.

Floodplains are located along either side of the Town's major waterways, the Quinsigamond River, Blackstone River, Cronin Brook and Miscoe Brook. Floodplains surround the shorelines of larger bodies of water, including Flint Pond, Lake Ripple and Silver Lake. All told, Grafton has 1,423 acres of land falling within the 100-year flood hazard areas. Grafton adopted a Floodplain Protection Overlay District, which regulates development within the Town's flood hazard areas as identified on the Town's Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), dated September 30, 1992.³

The Conservation Commission, the Grafton Land Trust, and other local entities are stewards to these resources, protecting their quality and advocating for increased protection, where possible. Like many other communities in Central Massachusetts, environmental challenges, especially in the face of development, are growing as a significant obstacle. Capacity to manage these difficulties wavers when competing for time and resources with other priorities, such as roadways, infrastructure, and housing. To continue protecting and promoting an array of natural resources, the Town should consider more local, regional, and statewide partnerships.

The natural ecosystems existed long before Town boundaries were drawn, and many resources extend beyond these boundaries. From rivers and ponds to protected woodlands, natural resources throughout Central Massachusetts consistently cross geopolitical boundaries. Containing preservation and improvement efforts within each municipality disregards the regional nature of these resources and may lead to inefficient use of municipal staff and volunteer time. Regional partnerships, such as on a watershed basis, can alleviate capacity burdens and cultivate new and more efficient projects.

Table 2. Critical Natural Landscapes

Critical Natural Landscapes	
Critical Natural Landscape (CNL) Name	Element
CNL 673	Aquatic Core Buffer
CNL 712	Aquatic Core Buffer
CNL 729	Landscape Block
CNL 801	Wetland Core Buffer
Source: BioMap 2, Massachusetts Department of Fisheries and Wildlife	

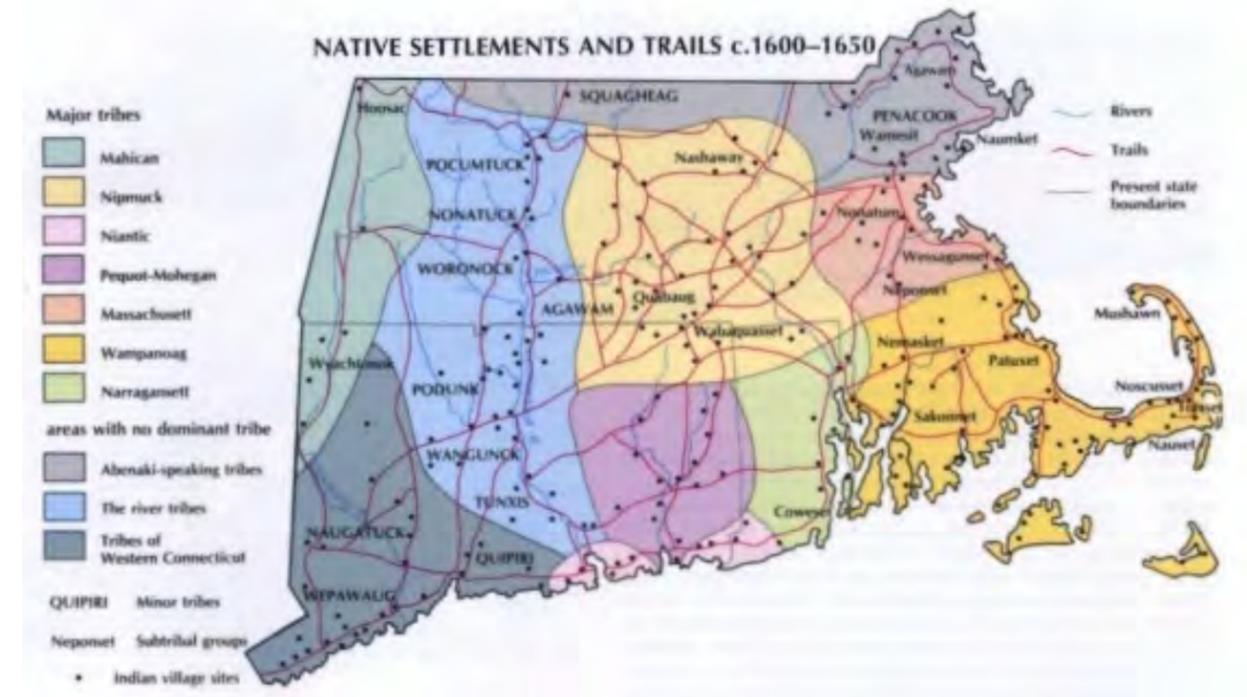


Figure 1. Native Settlements and Trails

If one community wishes to manage aquatic invasives within a river, other communities where this river runs must work to manage the species for the effort to prove worthwhile. Additionally, one town may have access to specific tools that their neighboring community is lacking. Partnerships could facilitate the exchange of physical resources, in addition to time and knowledge.

tive on the homelands of the Nipmuc and other peoples in the northeast at the start of the Colonial Era.⁴ Records indicate that the Nipmuc homelands extended into New Hampshire and Vermont. Discrete boundary lines between different native groups in the region cannot be mapped because there were no real boundary lines. The Nipmuc shared kinship, trade, and food networks with many of the other nearby native groups.

Explore Opportunities to Support The Hassanamisco Nipmuc Band

Long before Grafton was incorporated as a town in 1735, the land had already been inhabited by the Nipmuc people. Indigenous populations have lived in the region for thousands of years. The above map represents one perspec-

In present-day Grafton, the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Band (HNB) holds a 3.5-acre parcel of land referred to as "The Reservation." This site is unique in that it has maintained its legal status since before the creation of the Town and the State of Massachusetts. It has no title or deed, and the Nipmuc do not pay taxes on it. The Parcel was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2011. The Hassanamisco holds various gatherings and events at this site.



A Brief Summary of Nipmuc History from European Colonization to Present

The Nipmuc faced severe hardships immediately following colonization, including epidemics, loss of land, and restrictive laws imposed by the English. Praying towns were established for native peoples by Puritan missionary John Eliot and during King Phillip's War, all indigenous peoples in Massachusetts were confined to these villages, leading to further suffering and displacement.⁵ In the 18th century, the Nipmuc were forced to surrender ownership of most of their lands, as they were assigned state-appointed guardians to make decisions on their behalf. Management of the trust holding funds from these sales was mismanaged by the guardians and the Hassanamisco received minimal interest payments and none of the principal. The 19th century brought further forced assimilation and the Enfranchisement Act of 1869, which gave the Nipmuc citizenship and rescinded their guardianship. This led to even greater loss of land, as Natives struggled to find adequate employment and were forced to sell land to pay debts, which were often issued fraudulently through the actions of their guardians.^{6,7}

Assimilationist policies, land displacement, and social stigmatization forced many native peoples in the 19th and early 20th centuries to stop or conceal engagement in traditional ceremonies and practices. As the 20th century progressed, there was a cultural resurgence as policies began to shift and decolonization movements took off. The Nipmuc partook in this shift, more openly celebrating their heritage and campaigning for government support. The Hassanamisco band in Grafton, holding the last piece of unsold Nipmuc land, became

a central point of Nipmuc activity and identity.⁸ Around the mid-20th century, former Sonsq (woman leader) Zara CiscoeBrough had petitioned the state for the return of 500 acres on the Grafton/Westborough border, which was a vacant state hospital at the time. The Nipmuc would have used the land for housing, employment, and farmland. The state instead sold the land for one dollar to Tufts University for a new veterinary school.⁹

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts formally recognized the Hassanamisco in 1976. In the 1980s, the Nipmuc submitted a formal petition to the federal government for recognition. The Hassanamisco received a final negative determination from the BIA in 2004, stating that the Nipmuc failed to meet some of the requirements, largely because the requirements follow a strict definition of indigeneity that doesn't mesh with the historical way of life of the Nipmuc and similar native groups living in the Northeast. For example, it requires that there historically existed a single governmental entity rather than the common culture and kinship and shared space that bound the various Nipmuc bands together.^{10,11} The Nipmuc unsuccessfully tried to appeal the process and filed a complaint, though the federal government has failed to recognize their sovereignty.

"Tribal Sovereignty" is the federal legal recognition in the United States of the inherent sovereignty of American Indian Nations and confers sovereign powers to native groups in the United States to make laws and impose taxation. The Hassanamisco are state-recognized and are granted some protections at the state level.¹² The Nipmuc continue to maintain their Indigenous Sovereignty, which is distinguishable from Tribal Sovereignty in that it continues to exist independently of what the nation-state does or does not do. It refers to the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to govern them-

selves, control their lands and resources, and maintain their cultural, political, and legal systems independently of external governments. The 1982, "Resolutions Recognizing and Protecting the Ancient and Aboriginal Claim of the Indians of the Commonwealth" recognizes "the Aboriginal claim" of Indigenous peoples to hunt and fish the wildlife of the Massachusetts for the sustenance of their families. Members of the Hassanamisco and other Indigenous groups have adhered to public hunting and fishing regulations and have tended to avoid private property, in part due to past conflicts with law enforcement.

The current Hassanamisco band runs various programs to encourage cultural preservation and self-sufficiency. They began a language reclamation program in the 1970s, which now includes onsite and online classes. They have a food sovereignty program and practice historic preservation, tribal education, and youth programs.

As the site of the Hassanamisco reservation is within Grafton, the Town is in a unique position to support the Nipmuc community. The Town staff in Grafton have been supportive when the Tribe reached out for assistance in the past. The tribe has had a long history of oppression and exploitation from outside actors and the Town can play a unique role in actively identifying and working to overcome barriers or threats to Nipmuc sovereignty such as self-governance, cultural preservation, and control of their land and resources. A critical first step is to build meaningful relationships and establish trust, acknowledging the legacy of colonization, and creating a space for reconciliation.



Opportunities for Further Utilizing Historic Preservation Assets in Grafton

Grafton has an impressive group of historic areas, buildings, and properties that highlight the community's history and diverse cultural heritage. The Town has several assets which have helped it become a leader in historic and cultural preservation work in the region, including:

- Designation as a Certified Local Government,
- Several properties listed on the National Register of Historical Places,
- Early adopter of the Community Preservation Act,
- An active Historical Commission,
- An active Historic District Commission for the Grafton Common Historic District,
- Several museums,
- A survey of historic properties completed in 2019, and
- A Town-Wide Wayfinding and Branding Plan (in progress)

The Town should continue to use its resources to enhance cultural and historic preservation. It should be more closely partnered with the Hassanamisco Band, local museums, and private owners of historic properties in helping with preservation efforts; it can do so in part by publicizing and aiding in applications for state and federal historic tax benefits. It can use its designation as a Certified Local Government to apply for federal funding through the Massachusetts Historical Commission under the Survey and Planning Grant Program. In addition, it can continue to work to enhance the library of information about local history which is ac-



cessible on the Town's website. The Community Preservation Act plays an important role in helping to balance these goals alongside the more standard operational and maintenance needs of the community.

Goals

Goal 1: Identify, preserve, and protect the Town's natural resources from ecological harm and further development

Grafton residents have enjoyed and benefitted from the Town's natural resources for centuries. Natural resources include soil, waterways, bodies of water, vegetation, and wildlife. Grafton is rich in natural resources, with its various woodlands, several notable hills, and numerous brooks, ponds, lakes, and marshes.

In terms of notable woodlands, there is the Grafton Town Forest, the Great Meadow Conservation Area, Pell Farm Conservation Area, Browns Road Conservation Area, the Brigham Hill Estates Conservation Area, and more. Some notable hills include Brigham Hill, Potter Hill, and Lazy Hill. In addition to the Quinsigamond and Blackstone rivers, Flint Pond, Lake Ripple, and Silver Lake are the Town's most prominent bodies of water. For more information about these areas and all the other natural resources Grafton has to offer, refer to the 2020 Grafton Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) and the 2007 Grafton Reconnaissance Report.¹³

As discussed throughout this plan, Grafton can best protect its natural lands by prioritizing higher-density development. The Town should continue to leverage the Open Space Parcel Prioritization Project (OSPPP) as a tool for planning open space protection measures. The

OSRP and the Reconnaissance Report are useful resources to supplement the findings from the OSPPP. State-level resources, such as the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, can provide more recent data. The Town may consider local and regional partnerships for the implementation of protection and improvement measures. For this Chapter of the Grafton Master Plan, the following objectives and actions focus on activities that may improve or protect natural resources in Grafton.

Objective 1.1: Protect surface and ground water resources, wetlands, vernal pools, unique habitats, and wildlife corridors.

With an abundance of local natural resources, the Town of Grafton must consider how the condition of each resource may impact the next. For example, the condition of local terrestrial wildlife habitat may impact soil quality, which then may impact groundwater resources. Once connections and concerns are identified, the Town may streamline and prioritize improvement and protection measures. The Town may consider implementing these improvements and protection measures through local and regional collaboration efforts, both among municipal entities and with local groups that are effective stakeholders in natural resources in Grafton.

Action Item 1.1.1: Leverage local and regional partnerships to tackle anthropogenic and ecological harm to natural resources, such as development and invasive species, respectively.

The 2020 Grafton Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) referenced funding and available staff time as the two most limiting factors re-



lated to open space and recreational needs in Town. The 2020 Grafton OSRP noted that the implementation of the actions included in that Plan "will require high levels of involvement from staff, board members, and volunteers." The same may be said about the actions included in this Chapter of the Grafton Master Plan, which align with the OSRP and other previous planning efforts, as applicable.

Capacity constraints are widely recognized as a barrier to improvement for municipal governments across the State of Massachusetts. Oftentimes, needs related to historical, cultural, and natural resources fall to the wayside when competing against needs related to municipal

infrastructure. Local and regional partnerships present a unique opportunity for municipalities to tackle needs related to historical, cultural, and natural resources without pooling in all a municipality's time and money. Since historical, cultural, and natural resources do not always acknowledge geopolitical boundaries, regional collaboration efforts may prove more effective.

To collaboratively protect the Town's natural resources from development, the Town may consider conservation partnerships between municipalities, local land trusts, State entities, and other non-profits. This would allow the municipality to share the cost and management of land among various entities while





opening doors to additional networks of volunteers and stakeholders. So, as priority open space parcels become available, the Town may consider connecting with partners to pursue conservation measures.

In addition to conservation partnerships and acquisition related efforts, the Town of Grafton should consider leveraging local and regional partnerships to tackle ecological challenges. According to the 2020 Grafton OSRP, "Grafton's primary environmental challenge is improving the water quality of its lakes, ponds, rivers and streams." Specifically, development is noted as a main driver of deteriorated water quality, leading to weed growth, poor erosion control, and non-point source pollution. In 2015, the Town worked with CMRPC, Mass Audubon, Horsley Witten Group, and the Blackstone River Coalition to produce a low-impact development (LID) stormwater management analysis. This analysis, a great example of a collaborative effort, provided the Town with a breakdown of its existing land use regulations concerning the use of low-impact and green-infrastructure

technologies, primarily in residential development.

Many local and regional organizations play a role in improving the environment and quality of life for residents of Grafton and surrounding towns. Several groups work together to address critical issues at the watershed scale to rectify the legacy of industrial pollution and suburban sprawl that has degraded the natural lands in the Blackstone region. The Conservation Commission staff are already in contact with numerous local organizations and regularly attend conferences and training. The commission can benefit from the capacity and resources of collaborative efforts like the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative and ensure Grafton remains engaged in efforts to restore the vitality of the watershed.

In the future, the Town of Grafton may consider similar partnerships and collaborative efforts for the management of invasive species, especially the management of aquatic invasive species within water bodies that cross town borders. Like every other community in Central Massachusetts, natural resources in Grafton



are at risk due to the rapid spread of both terrestrial and aquatic invasive species. Common terrestrial invasive species that impact Grafton include Bittersweet, Japanese Knotweed, and Glossy Buckthorn.¹⁴ Common aquatic invasives that impact Grafton include Water Chestnut, Eurasian Milfoil, and Fanwort.¹⁵

Between May and October, Lake Ripple becomes choked with weeds that make it unappealing for recreation activities. The Town can begin by testing the dissolved oxygen, nutrient levels, and contaminants in the water at inflow points, including Quinsigamond River at Ekblaw Landing, the Big Bummet Brook at East Street, and stormwater drains, and other strategic points like outflow points to determine the water quality and identify points of contamination.

The Conservation Commission is planning an initiative to seriously address invasives in 2025. The state has earmarked some funds to help with the effort, and Conservation staff plans to start the permitting process in early 2025 to hopefully start treatment that summer. The initial focus areas will be Fisherville Pond and Lake Ripple. A regional approach to managing these invasives could include a regional grant application to support the removal of a specific species or developing a citizen-science approach, using volunteer power to seasonally eradicate a specific species. The Town could begin by organizing a series of collaborative workshops and stakeholder meetings that bring together key partners, providing a platform specifically for discussing challenges, potential solutions, and funding strategies. Grafton can position itself better for these funding opportunities by highlighting a unified, regional approach.

Action Item 1.1.2: Ensure there is a water quality plan in place for all town surface waters that is actively maintained and implemented.

Bodies of water in Grafton have been significantly altered by urbanization, which has accelerated in recent decades as the Town continues to grow. As development has expanded, impervious surfaces like roads, parking lots, and buildings have replaced natural landscapes, increasing stormwater runoff into streams, rivers, and ponds.

Stormwater runoff often carries pollutants such as oils, heavy metals, pesticides, and excess nutrients from fertilizers, which can lead to water quality degradation. The increased flow and pollutant load disrupt aquatic ecosystems, causing issues like algal blooms, reduced oxygen levels, and the decline of sensitive species that depend on clean, stable water environments. Additionally, higher runoff volumes contribute to streambank erosion, which can alter the natural flow of water systems, causing sedimentation and further loss of aquatic habitats.

Beyond the physical impacts of runoff and erosion, the development of lands around water often leads to the reduction of vegetative buffers along shorelines. These natural buffers play a role in filtering pollutants, providing habitat, and stabilizing soil, which mitigates erosion. When development encroaches on these areas, it removes vegetation, decreasing the land's ability to absorb and filter water. This alteration harms local wildlife and increases flood risks for surrounding communities, as natural water absorption and flow regulation are compromised.



The resulting ecological imbalance harms biodiversity and diminishes the recreational and scenic value of aquatic resources in Grafton, an issue further compounded by the introduction of aquatic invasives like water chestnuts and Eurasian water milfoil. These invasive species often form dense mats or populations that monopolize resources, such as light, oxygen, and nutrients, which native plants and animals need to thrive. As they spread, invasives can alter water chemistry and increase water turbidity, impacting both water quality and the aquatic food chain. The disruptions they cause cascade through the ecosystem, further resulting in reduced biodiversity, habitat degradation, and diminished water clarity, impacting recreational uses such as fishing, boating, and swimming. As invasives spread, their removal can require costly, ongoing management efforts which can have mixed results and pose additional environmental risks.

Grafton is primarily situated within the Blackstone River Watershed, with the northeast corner of Town situated in the Concord River Watershed. The Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) requires states to report on the condition of its water bodies every two years. These reports are called "Integrated Lists of Waters" and for the State of Massachusetts, are completed by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). The following waterways are either partially or fully within Grafton and are recognized by MassDEP as an impaired waterbody, meaning a state or federal water quality standard is not being attained:

- The Blackstone River
- Cronin Brook
- Hayes Pond
- Lake Ripple
- Quinsigamond River
- West River

The Town of Grafton has a "municipal separate storm sewer system" (MS4), meaning stormwater runoff is partially captured through a network of catch basins, stormwater pipes, swales, ditches, and stormwater treatment facilities like infiltration trenches and oil/grit separators.¹⁶ The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires all MS4 communities to maintain Stormwater Management Plans (SWMP), which the Town of Grafton updated in June 2024 to comply with most recent regulations. The 2024 Grafton SWMP details Minimum Control Measures (MCM) and Best Management Practices (BMP) the Town will implement to protect water quality and aquatic habitat. These measures include a public education program about anthropogenic stormwater pollution, a program to identify and eliminate illicit discharges into the MS4, and a good housekeeping program to minimize pollution from municipal operations. As mentioned above, Grafton produced a low-impact development (LID) stormwater management analysis in 2015, with a detailed breakdown of the



Town's land use regulations and where they could be improved. The Town has stormwater bylaws and stormwater protections in the Zoning Bylaws. The Subdivision Rules and Regulations and Zoning Bylaws are being updated to incorporate more Low-Impact Development Principles, which are scheduled for completion in FY27.

The DPW is responsible for managing the MS4 in town and meeting compliance is currently a big strain on departmental capacity and resources. Partnering with neighboring communities is not viable, as each town has a different set of standards to meet. New grant funding opportunities should be sought out to ensure the Department can continue meeting MS4 compliance and implement additional targeted stormwater management practices, such as installing new green infrastructure (rain gardens, permeable pavements) or sediment traps.

A dense web of interconnected organizations, businesses, and advocacy groups that all have

a stake in working together to restore local waterways and the Blackstone Watershed as a whole. Many studies and plans have already been published that offer valuable insights and frameworks to guide restoration efforts, such as the Blackstone Watershed Needs Assessment Report by the Narraganset Bay Estuary Program. This report and many other documents produced over the years by organizations in the region provide recommendations on best practices for habitat restoration, invasive species control, water quality monitoring, and sustainable land use. By leveraging this wealth of knowledge and building partnerships, Grafton can coordinate initiatives across multiple sectors, ensuring a more holistic and impactful approach. Through coordination with regional partners, municipal staff can mobilize local resources for restoration projects, establish community-based monitoring programs, and secure grants for green infrastructure improvements that strengthen the ecological health of the entire watershed.

Action Item 1.1.3: Map and Prioritize Locations for Wildlife Crossings

Wildlife corridors are natural pathways that allow animals to move safely between habitats. These corridors help species find food, mates, and shelter while avoiding human-made obstacles like roads, buildings, and agricultural fields. Because Grafton is a heavily suburbanized community, many of these pathways are interrupted by roadways and developments. Consequently, this interrupts natural movement patterns of species, reduces biodiversity, and increases roadkill, which are harmful to the local ecology as well as a safety hazard.

The town can develop wildlife crossings to mitigate the harm. These often take the form of tunnel underpasses or modified drainage culverts. Some locations may just need fencing or



other barriers to direct wildlife towards existing culverts. The Town can start by assessing where interventions may be needed in town. The town could analyze available crash or road-kill data from local police and animal control reports as well as crash data from MassDOT to identify hotspots. They can identify high priority habitat and movement corridors from Biomap and the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program data. After vulnerable locations are identified the town can determine how best to address the issue. If data supports the presence of severe barriers to wildlife migration, the town may even advocate for MassDOT to construct a highway wildlife overpass, as is being done across the Mass Pike in Beckett for deer and hikers along the Appalachian Trail.

Objective 1.2: Partner with both water districts to secure additional protection for groundwater resources.

The Town of Grafton is served by public water systems from two water districts: the Grafton Water District and the South Grafton Water District.¹⁷ The Grafton Water District serves most of the Town, roughly 14,000 out of the 19,664 people recorded in the 2020 Census.¹⁸ To serve this amount of people, the Grafton Water District has 4,500 water connections.¹⁹ Most of the remainder of residents are served by the South Grafton Water District, which services the southwestern corner of Town, as shown in Figure 2.

Since water supply protection is regarded as a major environmental concern for the Town of Grafton, there may be opportunities for increased collaboration between the two water districts in Town. Specifically, the water districts may consider partnering with the Town

to assist in land acquisition efforts. This may include identifying priority parcels, developing a Right-of-First Refusal action plan for land coming out of Chapter, or lending expertise to the Town or other water district as they pursue land acquisitions. Increased collaboration between the water districts may involve reviewing the water supply protection overlay district.

Action 1.2.1: Prioritize land acquisitions to protect drinking water supply and surface water resources.

Massachusetts municipalities have access to various land acquisition programs and incentives. Land acquisition, specifically open space acquisition, is a viable method of water supply protection, as development is recognized as a main driver of pollution. Massachusetts municipalities with active Open Space and Recreation Plans (OSRPs) have access to the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services' (DCS) Land Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND) Program. OSRPs have a shelf-life of seven-years, meaning "active OSRPs" refer to Plans that have been updated within the last seven years. The 2020 OSRP will remain active through 2027. The Town of Grafton may consider pursuing the LAND Grant Program to implement some of the strategies included in the OSRP and this Chapter to protect its land and water resources. For this application process, the local entities such as the Grafton Water District, South Grafton Water District, Open Space and Recreation Committee, and Conservation Commission may consider working together. A collaborative approach to grant application processes and similar efforts expands local capacity and promotes the exchange of knowledge.

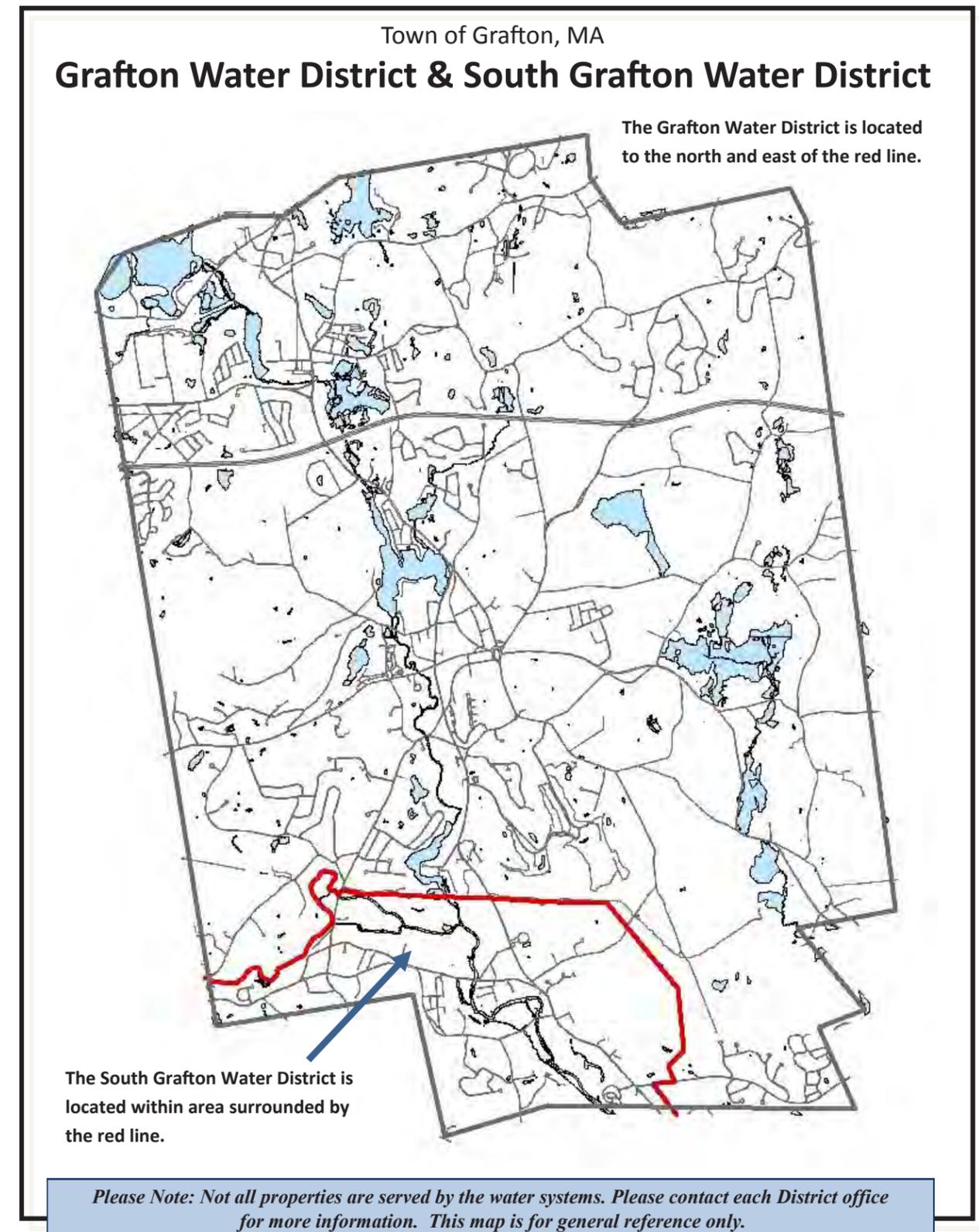


Figure 2. Water Districts²¹



Action 1.2.2: Review and update the water supply protection overlay district at regular intervals.

The Grafton Water Supply Protection Overlay District has been implemented to safeguard water resources. The Town has nine different zones, from residential to industrial. On top of these zones, Grafton has implemented a few overlay districts, areas on top of the regular zones that promote different types of development or protections. Grafton has five zoning overlay districts: North Grafton Transit Village, Fisherville Smart Growth, Priority Development, Campus Development, and Water Supply Protection.²⁰ The Water Supply Protection Overlay District bylaws detail the following findings:

1. Groundwater is the primary source of existing and future drinking water in Town
2. Groundwaters are integrally connected to the Town's surface waters
3. Accidental spills and discharges of pollutants are a continued threat to the water supply
4. Development and impervious surfaces threaten aquifer recharge areas

The Zoning Bylaws detail the allowed and prohibited uses of land within the Water Supply Protection Overlay District. To continue to protect the Town's water supply, regular revisions of these bylaws will be necessary. To ensure these revisions are inclusive and informed, both the Grafton Water District and the South Grafton Water District must be consulted.²²

Goal 2: Preserve Grafton's historic character and cultural resources.

The Town of Grafton exists on the former site of the Hassanamesit Praying Town, which was

settled on land occupied by the Nipmuc. The Nipmuc developed various trails along the Blackstone and Quinsigamond rivers, including prominent regional routes which were often traveled by stagecoaches after colonization. Grafton later became a center for missionary activities until the start of the King Phillip's War.

The Town was bought by the Massachusetts General Court and incorporated on April 18th, 1735. The land was apportioned to English settler-farms at around 40-acres per lot, with some of the stone wall boundaries standing today. Eventually, the crosspoints of the regional stagecoach routes became a focal point where rapid residential development spread from. Mills soon took advantage of the waterways, leading to two prominent mill villages in North and South Grafton. Following the World War II and the subsequent decline of the mill era, Grafton became a notable bedroom community to Worcester. Many historic buildings stand today.

The following are sites of historical and cultural value in Grafton that shine light on its cultural history:²³

The Town Common (District is NR)

The Grafton Town Common is located at the intersection of Worcester, Upton, Millbury, Church, and South Streets in the Grafton Town Center. First laid out in 1728, it is an excellent example of traditional New England town center character and is valued by the community.²⁴ It is managed by the Town's Historic District Commission, is protected in perpetuity, and is fully publicly accessible. Pedestrian improvements were made around the Common in the late 2010's, though more improvements to the roadways and sidewalks near the Common are needed.

The Grafton Common Historic District is in the

Town's historic village center. The Town Common lies at the center of the district, which includes major buildings in town including the Grafton Inn, the Library, the Congregational Church of Grafton, and the Unitarian Universalist Society of Grafton and Upton building. The District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.²⁵ Over half of Master Plan Survey respondents want to see more diverse business opportunities in existing buildings and new, mixed-use development with retail and housing in this Historic District.

Grafton Public Library

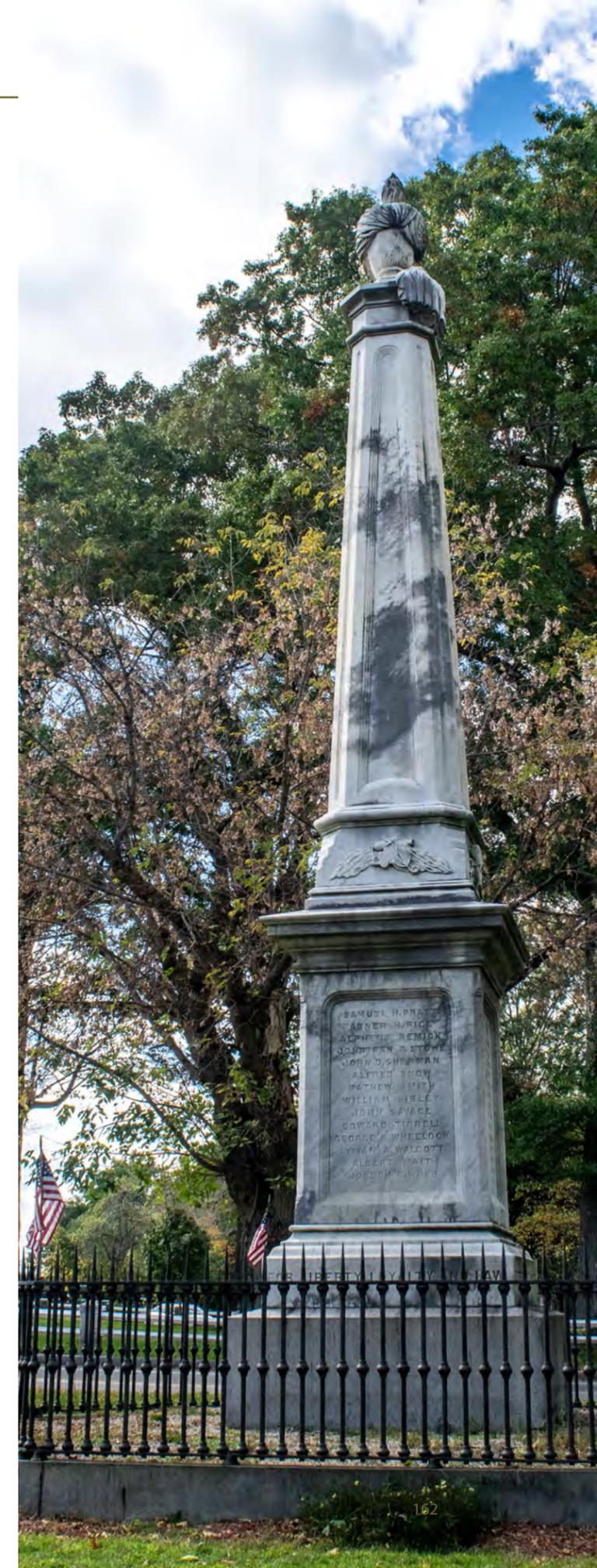
The Town's public library is located at 35 Grafton Common, directly southeast of the Town Common. The library was established in 1866 and moved to its current building in the late 1920's. The current building was designed by Oscar Thayer, a renowned Boston architect. The library is open each week from Monday to Saturday. In Fiscal Year 2022, it served over 46,000 visitors and loaned over 107,000 items.²⁶

The Grafton Inn (NR)

The Grafton Inn is located at 25 Grafton Common, directly across Upton Street from the Grafton Public Library and directly east of the Town Common. It was built in 1805 in the Federal architectural style.²⁷

The Grafton Country Store

The Grafton Country Store is located at 2 Grafton Common, directly north of the Town Common. A store has been located at this location since the mid-1730's, and the current building was constructed in 1806. The store changed ownership and was renovated many times in the 1800's and 1900's. The current Grafton Country Store was established in the early 1980's, though it has changed hands several times since then.²⁸





Old Fire Station

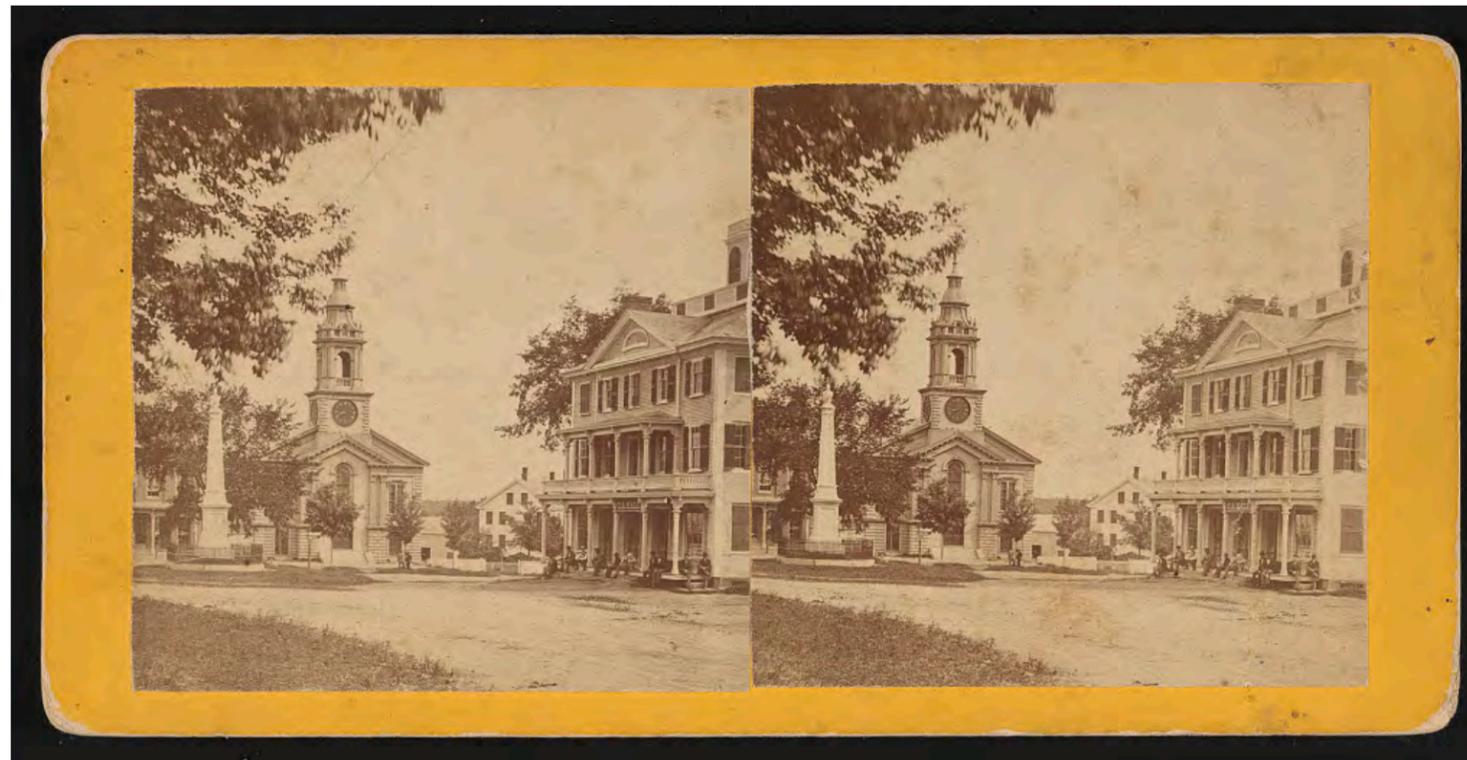
The Old Fire Station is located at 3 Worcester Street, just north of the Grafton Country Store. It is currently being used by Grafton Public Schools to store and maintain vehicles. Whether the building will be renovated or demolished so that a parking lot can be created was discussed at a January 2024 Select Board meeting, which decided to retain the building.

Willard House & Clock Museum (NR)

The Willard House and Clock Museum are located at 11 Willard Street in North Grafton. The Willard House is one of the oldest buildings in town, having been built in 1718; it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Four preeminent 19th-century clockmakers, Benjamin, Simon, Ephraim, and Aaron, were members of the Willard family. The Clock Museum was founded in 1969 by Dr. Roger and Imogene Robinson and opened to the public in 1971. It is in the Willard House as well as the Benjamin Willard Clock Manufactory (built in 1766) and has three more recently built galleries. Its collections include 90 Willard Clocks, Willard family portraits and furnishings, Nipmuc artifacts, and documents signed by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. It is open on Thursdays through Saturdays.²⁹

Ethan Allen House and Gun Shop (NR)

The Ethan Allen House and Gun Shop is located at 37 Waterville Street in North Grafton. The Gun Shop was built in 1833, and the House was built from 1834 to 1836.³⁰ The House has a Greek Revival style. Allen ran one of the earliest gun-making businesses in the region, and he was the inventor of the pepper-box revolver. The property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995.³¹



George Clapp House (NR)

The George Clapp House is located at 44 North Street to the northeast of the town center. Built in the mid-1830's, the House is the only example of high-style Greek Revival architecture in town. Clapp was a prolific builder of Greek Revival houses. The House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997.³²

Mill Villages

Three mill villages in town, Farnumville, Saundersville, and Fisherville, grew along the Blackstone River with housing for textile workers as well as shops for them.³³ More than half of respondents to a question in the Grafton Master Plan survey stated that they would like to see new mixed-use development with retail on the lower floor and housing on the upper floor as well as increased opportunities for river access in South Grafton mill village areas.

Farnumville Historic District (NR)

The Farnumville Historic District is in South Grafton, to the east of the Blackstone River. It is home to a historic mill village which is centered on Farnum Mill, which began operations in the 1820's. The District includes a surviving mill building that was built in 1844 as well as a diverse housing stock of which the majority was built between 1820 and 1930. The District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.

Fisherville Historic District (NR)

The Fisherville Historic District is in South Grafton. Peter Farnum built a brick mill in the area in the early 1830's, and the presence of this mill led to dense residential development being built in adjacent areas. Notably, many Italianate and Queen Anne-style houses for mill workers were built in the district between



1880 and 1900. The District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.³⁴

Saundersville

Saundersville is in South Grafton. In 1835, the Saunders brothers built a new three-story granite mill and established the Saunders Cotton Co. The mill employed Irish and French workers, and tenements were built nearby to house the workers. Saundersville included a 200-acre farm, a schoolhouse, a store, a post office, a church, a library, 50 houses, a blacksmith shop, a wheelwright shop, and the Saunders Mansion on Elmwood Street. The mill closed in 1929 due to the decreased demand for cotton products.³⁵

Hassanamisco Reservation (NR)

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Hassanamisco Reservation is the remaining 3 1/2 acres of land of the Hassanamisco Band of the Nipmuc, the Indigenous people of the area.

Continuously managed by Nipmuc community members, the Reservation is a significant location which helps assist in the tribe's cultural survival. It is a convening location for the annual Hassanamisco Indian Fair. The site features a homestead, which was originally constructed in 1801.³⁶ The homestead is currently undergoing renovation.

Nelson Park and Nelson Library

Nelson Park was given to the town of Grafton by Charles H. Nelson in memory of his father, Jasper S. Nelson, founder of the Nelson shoe factory, which became the largest industry in North Grafton in the late 19th century. Charles expanded the family home into a mansion, landscaped the grounds into an 18-acre es-



tate, and provided land for housing his employees. In his will, he designated the property as a public park and library, ensuring it remained intact. After his death in 1905, the mansion became the new site of the North Grafton Branch Library in 1935. The park faced challenges, including the division of the land by Route 140 in 1937, the 1938 hurricane that damaged its orchards, and the 1974 fire that destroyed the mansion and library. Today, the park includes a new library building, playground, ball field, and a grove of spruce trees planted in the 1950s, preserving its legacy as a community landmark.

Grafton Community Barn

Beginning in the 1970s, the efforts of Bill and Rose Abbott to donate vegetables to hunger relief organizations in the Boston area grew to form the non-profit organization Food for the Needy; Food for the Needy became the Community Harvest Project with the completion of the Grafton Community Barn in 2002. The Grafton Community Barn is home to the Community Harvest Project and the Grafton Land Trust.³⁷

Other significant sites brought up frequently in the survey and at the workshop include:

- Masonic Lodge
- Old Oak Street Burial Ground, Oak St. (West of Route 140)
- Burial ground on Providence Road / Route

Table 3. National Register of Historic Places in Grafton

National Register of Historic Places	
Name	Address / Location
Allen, Ethan, House, and Gun Shop	37 Waterville Street
Clapp, George, House	44 North Street
Farnumsville Historic District	Roughly bounded by Providence Road, Cross, Main, Harding and Depot Streets, and Maple Ave.
Fisherville Historic District	Roughly bounded by Main, Elmwood, Fer and Sampson Streets
Grafton Common Historic District	Roughly Worcester, Oak, Millbury, Church South, Upton, and North Streets
Grafton Inn	25 Central Square (Grafton Common)
Hassanamisco Reservation	80 Brigham Hill Road
Willard House and Clock Museum	11 Willard Street

- 122.
- Hassanamesit Woods
- Former Tupperware factory Mill property on 122A
- Polish Hall (demolished).

The properties and areas shown in Table 3 are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Objective 2.1: Build financial capacity and grow partnerships to ensure historic resources are supported by the Town of Grafton.

The Town of Grafton would like to ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy the many cultural and historic resources in town. The Town can take several important steps to increase its financial capacity and level of partnership with community organizations and the Hassanamisco Band to protect, preserve,



continue to remember, and celebrate these resources.

Action 2.1.1: Support partnerships and resources for cultural organizations such as the Willard Clock Museum, the Library, the Lions Club, and the Grafton Historical Society.

There are many organizations available for partnerships that can bolster municipal capacity for historic preservation efforts. Local museums such as the Ecotarium in Worcester and the Willard Clock Museum can support historical and ecotourism opportunities like a heritage trail and cultural events. Some other groups that the town could work with or could continue to work with further preservation efforts include:

- Preservation Mass is a statewide organization supporting historic preservation through advocacy, education, and partnerships. They maintain a Preservation Directory of consultants and firms with various specialties, making it easier to find expertise for specific needs.
- The Grafton Public Library offers a wide range of services including book lending, digital resources, educational programs, and community events. The library serves as a hub in the community for historical research, education, and community engagement. The library can work with other local groups to curate exhibits, lectures, and workshops to educate the public about the Town's heritage.
- The Lions Club already serves the local community through various service projects and initiatives, including environmental projects, youth programs, and disaster relief efforts.
- The Grafton Historical Society actively en-

gages the community through educational programs, lectures, and historical reenactments. Additionally, the Society collaborates with other local organizations to promote and protect historical sites and resources within the town.

Action 2.1.2: Maintain Massachusetts Historical Commission designation as a Certified Local Government.

The Certified Local Government Program is a federal program created by the National Historic Preservation Act Amendments of 1980 to facilitate greater participation from local communities in national and state-level historic preservation programs. It is administered in Massachusetts through the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) in partnership with the National Parks Service of the United States Department of the Interior.³⁸

Grafton should strive to maintain its designation as a Certified Local Government (CLP), which it achieved on October 29th, 1992, and has maintained since then. Grafton is the only community in Worcester County besides the City of Worcester which is a CLP.³⁹ This designation allows the Town to:

- Apply to receive part of a pool of ten percent of the Massachusetts Historical Commission's federal funding which is designated for certified local governments under the Survey and Planning Grant Program.
- Have an enhanced role in the nomination of places for the National Register of Historic Places.
- Receive increased Massachusetts Historical Commission Technical Assistance, such as specialized workshops for certified local governments.
- Be officially recognized as a local govern-



ment dedicated to historic preservation.⁴⁰

Grafton must continue to meet its responsibilities under the following standards to maintain its certification under the Certified Local Government program. The Town is evaluated every three years to see if it meets these standards.

- It must continue to enforce state and local laws which designate and protect historic sites.
- It must continue to have active Historic and Historic District Commissions with a memorandum of understanding between one another.
- It must continue to have an inventory of historic properties in town.
- It must continue to ensure that the public is meaningfully involved in local historic preservation programs, such as the recommendation of properties to be nominated for the National Register of Historic Places
- It must comply with open meeting law.⁴¹

The Town should ensure that it maintains this designation, and relevant grants should be used to build capacity. The commissions should seek funding for community engagement efforts, strategic planning, and training for members.

Objective 2.2: Secure funding to identify, protect, and preserve Grafton’s historic resources that are vulnerable to natural hazards.

With the many historic resources in Town, it is important for the sites to be maintained and funded. This can be done in many ways, beginning with identifying sites that are most vulnerable to hazard threats, such as storms and flooding. Once identified, the Town can apply for various sources of funding to improve and

maintain the historic sites to preserve the cultural legacy of Grafton.

Action 2.2.1: Create a list of historical resources that are vulnerable to natural hazards and potential improvements.

To preserve historic resources in Town, creating a list of the sites that are potentially vulnerable to natural hazards is essential. With a comprehensive list, the Town can efficiently mitigate harm from hazards. This is done through resource allocation and targeted interventions, as well as prioritization of sites that may be more vulnerable than others.

Action 2.2.2: Apply for different sources of funding to preserve and maintain historic resources.

There are many opportunities for funding that will benefit historic sites in Grafton. Applying for grants geared towards historic property maintenance such as Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) is an example of a program that offers funds to preserve historic sites. The Massachusetts Cultural Council is another opportunity to maintain the Town’s history. The council offers support, funding, and information about cultural resources and should be promoted to community stakeholders managing historic properties.

Objective 2.3: Encourage a Relational Environment Wherein the Town can Respectfully and Effectively Integrate Indigenous Perspectives and Engage in Authentic Collaboration with the Hassanamisco Nipmuc.



The Town of Grafton has adopted a Land Acknowledgement that is read prior to Town Meetings and other events to recognize the original stewards of the land. As part of the Knowing Nipmuc video series, Troy Philips, member of the Massachusetts Commission on Indian Affairs, shared this statement regarding the Hassanamisco perspective on Land Acknowledgements:

“Hassanamisco asks those involved in land acknowledgment to learn about our people and our government in order to establish a positive working relationship. The people involved in doing land acknowledgments need to understand, from our point of view, as best they can, that when we discuss land acknowledgments, we use terms such as stolen lands, forced removal, and genocide to reflect the actions of colonizers. We use terms to reflect the past, the present, and the future. It is important that they see us as being a very present society with a bright future and not as a past relic. In the words of Sonsq Cheryl Holley, “Land acknowledgments can be difficult for us because in this time of day, everyone is trying to prove that they can diversify and can support people that are different from them, and sometimes a land acknowledgment is just that little checkbox for them. We prefer to have a relationship with the people we assist with land acknowledgments.”

A Land Acknowledgement, in the form of a statement at the beginning of an event, does little to support the Nipmuc without a continuous effort to build meaningful relationships and collaborate. As mentioned in the key findings section, Grafton has been friendly with the tribe and responsive to their needs. The Town



can take steps to build a more reciprocal, trust-based relationship.

A strength of municipalities is their ability to encourage dialogue and understanding across cultural or social divides. Leaving aside the moral reasoning, this dialogue can benefit the community. For example, being able to draw on the collective wisdom of the community can allow the town to navigate challenges more effectively.

The Town of Grafton is in a unique position, with the Reservation within its borders and the active Hassanamisco band stewarding the site, which means that it can lead the way for other municipalities in the Commonwealth to adopt better approaches for connecting and collaborating with Indigenous peoples in their communities. This would involve creating a space for perspectives to meet and co-create solutions in a manner that respects Nipmuc sovereignty, cultural values, and lived experience.

The eventual formal mechanism chosen for creating this space could take various forms, such as a Nipmuc Advisory Committee or Memorandums of Understanding. The specific path-

way to formal collaboration should be informed and shaped by preliminary dialogue and trust-building efforts. What is most important is that Nipmuc voices are not just heard but are made central in municipal decision making involving the tribe.

Action Item 2.3.1: Support the Nipmuc and Other Stakeholders in their efforts to Revitalize the Blackstone River.

One feature of particular significance to Nipmuc history in Grafton is the Blackstone River, referred to in Eastern Algonquin as the Kitatuck or "Great River." The river served as a transportation route for people in the area, allowing goods to be moved back and forth from the estuary in Providence to as far as Holden. Factories set up during the 18th to 20th centuries led to the river becoming one of the most polluted in the country. Wastewater treatment facilities have released sewage into the Blackstone to prevent backups during big rainstorms. This has led to pathogen impairment in fifty-six percent of the assessed river miles. Invasive species, such as phragmites, have flourished along the river, reducing biodiversity, aesthet-



ics of the river, and recreational potential due to limited access.

Efforts have been made in recent years to restore the river and honor its history, most notably with the establishment of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor by Congress in 1986. The corridor is managed today by the Blackstone Heritage Corridor Inc. nonprofit. Recently, the National Park Service established the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park, which covers much of the Blackstone Valley Region and focuses on stewardship and historic preservation efforts for the river and surrounding region.

The Hassanamesit are currently working with the various watershed groups on a project to clean up the river. They are currently in a contract with the Klein Lab at Brown University to roll out a technique for encapsulating heavy metals to restore and revitalize the Blackstone. Along with its cultural significance, the river has enormous potential to bring social and economic benefits to the entire Grafton community, and the Town can identify opportunities to assist in the revitalization efforts. The Blackstone Watershed Collaborative has a suc-

cessful working relationship with the Hassanamisco on these matters.

Action Item 2.3.2: Partner with the Hassanamisco Band to identify sites of importance.

As the site of Hassanamesit, one of the Nipmuc praying towns, the entire town is of historical significance to the Nipmuc people. Some specific locations may merit additional recognition and protection. The Reservation on Brigham Hill Road functions as a community gathering area with gardening space, secluded areas for more private rituals, burial grounds, and the Hassanamisco Indian Museum. The Museum was opened in 1962 in the house on the Reservation. The building is undergoing a restoration process with funding from the Community Preservation Act and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

The Hassanamesit Woods host the Sarah Burnee/Sarah Boston Farmstead archaeological site, which has offered a detailed look at life for the Nipmuc in the 18th and 19th century. The site features findings of Nipmuc occupation going back 6,000 years. Throughout Grafton, there





are other potential archaeological sites, albeit less preserved.

Any Town staff working in departments related to land use or economic development should understand and receive training on the importance of these and other Nipmuc sites and how to address matters pertaining to Nipmuc artifacts, remains, and culturally significant locations according to legal and ethical standards.

Action Item 2.3.3: Ensure native artifacts and remains are returned to the Nipmuc.

Indigenous artifacts and remains are present in soils and sediments throughout the region. Many may not be very well preserved due to a history of colonial deforestation and farming, industrialization, and suburban sprawl taking place on young (around 12,000-year-old) soils, with limited depth to protect from surface exposure. This makes it especially important for the Hassanamisco when new artifacts do get uncovered. Unfortunately, developers and construction workers have no monetary incentive to report findings of artifacts, and it is a concerning reality that many construction projects in the region involve the conscious destruction of artifacts and remains. Cultural Resource Surveys by archaeologists may be required ahead of large-scale construction projects taking place in designated areas, the town could explore creating its own mapping and identification of high-risk areas, and a more streamlined survey process for select project types.

Municipal staff should understand federal, and state regulations related to the protection of archaeological sites, such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), and their implications for sites in Grafton. Consulting with groups like the Native Land Conservancy, or the Hassanamisco

Tribal Historic Preservation Officer may help in identifying where there are gaps in regulations that could be addressed through local policies. There is an agreement from the 1970s between the tribe and the town that if Lake Ripple is dredged, any artifacts uncovered will be returned to the tribe.

Action Item 2.3.4: Include the whole community in the process of reflection and reconciliation.

Though the Town of Grafton Staff have been generally courteous and respectful, the Hassanamisco has not always experienced positive engagement with community members. Residents are often less informed about the status of native people in the region and often are not even aware that the Hassanamisco live in the region. Some that visit the Reservation expect to find them living in Wetus. The Town can contribute to greater publicity and educational efforts about the Hassanamisco and how to support them. This could include developing more accurate signage about their culture and history in the area, educational workshops (e.g., an introduction to indigenous planning), and community events. The Town should work with historians and Nipmuc knowledge keepers to revise any existing public-facing materials to ensure they reflect indigenous histories accurately.

The Tribe is looking to establish a new Community Resilience Center to both support the Nipmuc community and have a physical center for people to learn more about the tribe. The Hassanamisco reached out to CMRPC in Fall 2024 for assistance in finding a building for sale in Grafton that would be viable for a community center, though little was available at the time. The Town can keep an eye open for potential suitable sites.



Action Item 2.3.5: Assist with Efforts to Rematriate Lands.

Despite the vast land area that makes up the Nipmuc Homelands, the 3.5-acre parcel on Brigham Hill Road in Grafton is the only location in Massachusetts being held “in common” for the Nipmuc community. Land back projects are underway, including the 181-acre Pequoig Farm in Athol and the 443-acre Lampson Brook Farm in Belchertown. The Hassanamisco advocated for the acquisition of these properties from the state, arguing that it was owed to them in lieu of the outstanding unpaid principal for the sale of their land. The process for Lampson Brook Farm appears to be stalled at the state level. The Farm School in Athol volunteered to give back the Pequoig Farm parcel with the process funded entirely by the Farm School.

The Town and Grafton Land Trust could explore mechanisms for acquiring land and transitioning its ownership to the Hassanamisco for

uses like tribal housing and agriculture, while maintaining its affordability. The Hassanamisco have divided up who to contact for matters of opening land access, by the amount of “access” involved. If the matter involves something like the rematriation of land, the outside organization should contact the Hassanamisco government. If it is land meant for conservation and the Nipmuc would not be able to use it except for something like a cultural easement, there are other Nipmuc organizations, like Nipmuk Cultural Preservation, inc. or Nipmuc Indian Development Corporation that could help.

Action Item 2.3.6: Integrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge into the Rehabilitation of Ecological Sites of Importance.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) encompasses the cumulative wisdom, practices, and beliefs developed by Indigenous communities through their intergenerational place-based knowledge of the environment. The Hassanamisco



misco has been active in applying for grants to fulfill their own project goals. They recently received \$823,446 from the MA Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program for projects aimed at achieving climate resiliency via TEK. The funding will be used to apply Indigenous-centered climate adaptation strategies and approaches to adapt to changing conditions while protecting and stewarding lands.

If the Hassanamisco are comfortable with sharing some of the methods they are using to carry out this work, conservation commission staff and other relevant parties could support them in the work and learn both the skills and perspectives to carry out this work at other sites in Town.

Objective 2.4: Encourage preservation of privately-owned historic assets.

There are many privately owned properties and areas of historical significance in Grafton. The Town does not have direct control of these important properties, though it should work with the private owners of these properties to preserve them.

Action 2.4.1: Work with private owners of historic properties in town to utilize tax credit and incentive programs to preserve and rehabilitate these properties.

Grafton should encourage owners of historic properties in town, and especially owners of historic properties which are in poor condition and/or are under threat, to participate in the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program and/or the Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program. The Town can publicize information about these tax benefit

programs on its website and social media pages and aid applicants in pursuing benefits from these programs. These programs incentivize the rehabilitation and re-purposing of historic properties so that they can be preserved.⁴²

Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program

The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program is administered by the National Park Service and the Internal Revenue Service along with State Historic Preservation Offices³⁴ such as the Massachusetts Historical Commission.⁴³

Under this program, a twenty percent income tax credit can be received for the rehabilitation of buildings which the Secretary of the Interior determines to be "certified historic structures." Owner-occupied residential buildings are not



eligible for this tax credit, and buildings must have a commercial, business, or other income-producing current use to be eligible.⁴⁵ All applications for funding from this program should be submitted electronically.⁴⁶

Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program

The Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program is administered by the Massachusetts Historical Commission and was established in 2003.⁴⁷

Under this program, state tax credits equivalent to twenty percent of the money spent on rehabilitation projects certified by the MHC can be received by eligible income-producing properties. There is an annual cap of \$55 million of state tax credits available under this program,

and the MHC allocates these credits based on selection criteria which prioritize projects which will result in the greatest public benefit. Each year, there are three application rounds for the credits on January 15th, April 30th, and August 31st.⁴⁸ Applicants must request a letter of support for their application from the Preservation Massachusetts non-profit at least two weeks prior to application deadlines. Application information is available on the MHC's website.⁴⁹ This program was recently extended by Massachusetts' Fiscal Year 2022 budget and is currently set to expire at the end of 2027.⁵⁰

Objective 2.5: Increase the public's access to historic resources and information.

Grafton should ensure that town residents and visitors to the Town have opportunities to learn about the Town's historical and cultural resources. These opportunities should be accessible to people of a variety of cultural backgrounds and to people of differing abilities.

Action 2.5.1: Review and update Grafton's historical data in the Massachusetts Historical Commission database.

An inventory of historic resources in Grafton is available online using the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), a research website managed by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. A copy of the historic resource inventory, listing the historic structures, monuments, statues, objects, burial grounds, and historical buildings, is included with the accompanying data file.⁵¹

Members of the Grafton Historical Commission and Grafton Historic District Commission should review the historical data included in the MACRIS database to make sure that it is accurate

and updated. If any updates to this database are needed, commission members should work with Massachusetts Historical Commission so that these updates can be made.

The Grafton Historical Commission and Grafton Historic District Commission should create summary files describing the different historic properties and areas listed on MACRIS for, respectively, the Grafton Common Historic District and the Town. They should then post these files on their webpages and on the Town's social media pages so town residents can have easier access to this information.

Action 2.5.2: Develop wayfinding elements to promote awareness of and access to Grafton's historic and cultural resources.

Wayfinding enhances the experience of navigating Grafton by making transportation more intuitive and accessible. It helps people find local attractions, historical sites, public facilities, and businesses with ease, thereby promoting tourism and local economic growth. Many of the Town's resources are disconnected and hard to find, lowering their potential to benefit the community.

The Town was awarded \$25,000 from the EO-ED's MA Downtown Initiative program in September 2023 to develop a town-wide wayfinding and branding plan. The scope of services for the project is extensive, including a review of existing conditions, a review of case studies, an ideation workshop to begin developing new branding, creation of new designs, the creation of a placement map, a specifications package, and a final plan.

Action 2.5.3: Hold more community events at the Grafton Community Barn.

The Grafton Community Barn, known as the Brigham Hill Community Barn, is located at 37 Wheeler Road in North Grafton. The barn is owned by the Community Harvest Project nonprofit and has limited availability during the growing season due to its use in an active farm setting. The barn is made available to local nonprofits and governmental groups, including the Town of Grafton. The barn serves as a hub for community events, volunteer activities, and educational workshops.

The Community Harvest Project strongly advocates the use of the barn to support farming and education around agriculture, food security, and land conservation. To assist in this, the Town is encouraged to hold more workshops and demonstrations, interactive and volunteer activities, guided tours of the farm and surrounding conserved lands, and youth educational programs. The picturesque farm setting and involvement of the Community Harvest Project as host could enhance these initiatives' effectiveness.

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LAND USE



Overview

This chapter outlines a path for land use across the Town of Grafton over the next twenty years. The location and characteristics of a parcel of land greatly influence how it is used and the effects of the land use. This applies to the municipal, neighborhood, and building lot scale.

Grafton's location gives businesses and residents access to key markets and employment centers. The town borders the City of Worcester and is less than an hour from Boston with excellent connections to the Massachusetts Turnpike and Framingham/Worcester line of the MBTA Commuter Rail. If more commuters move to town, Grafton could emerge as a desirable location for consumer businesses looking for a larger customer base. The attractiveness of the location is reinforced by other characteristics including its natural beauty, its historical character, well-rated schools, and its notable small-town atmosphere.

The typical pattern of growth in these circumstances can be self-limiting. As businesses establish themselves in a neighborhood, they contribute to traffic congestion and gradually change in the character of the area. Over time,

the neighborhood may become part of a larger commercial and industrial hub. A strong housing market can further accelerate this change, turning what was once a small-town area into a suburban environment, with open space converted into parks or subdivisions. Meanwhile, historical villages may be replaced or reduced to decorative facades that have a limited connection to the function of those buildings that remain.

Through the community engagement process, Grafton residents have expressed that they do not want this type of change. This sentiment was clear when the last Comprehensive Plan was written in 2001, and it remains a priority today.

The challenge of land use management is to use the tools available to the town, tools that can only influence local development, not regional trends, to preserve the characteristics that are most valued by its residents. The challenge is made more difficult by the need and desire to maintain affordability for its younger and aging residents, or for a broad cross-section of the people of Massachusetts.

It is this significant challenge that this chapter will seek to address.



Key Findings

Public Perceptions and Preferences: Residents Continue to Prioritize the Preservation of Grafton's Small-Town Character.

The core aim of a Master Plan is to ensure that the final plan accurately represents the views and desires of the people who will be most affected by the plan.

The 2001 Comprehensive Plan stated the following:

"Forty percent (40%) of the residents responding to the Community Survey in 1999 said it was the small-town character of Grafton that attracted them to the town. The recent substantial increase in the pace of residential development, and the prospect of an even greater increase in the future, has given residents the sense that growth and sprawl are out of control. Seventy percent (70%) said that the town is growing too fast. Residents made it clear that they fear loss of Grafton's small-town character. Many perceive that rapid growth is also diminishing the town's sense of community."

A quarter of a century later, seventy-one percent of respondents to the survey conducted for this Master Plan agreed that the town needs a managed rate of growth. Growth management is desired to protect the qualities that residents love about Grafton. When asked "What do you love about Grafton?" the top responses were "the people/community," "small town feel," and "open space/landscape." This aligns with the

results of the 1999 survey showing consistency in the values of the residents.

Two findings can be drawn from this. First, whatever actions the town has taken to control growth since the previous Comprehensive Plan report, it has not instilled confidence that the processes of development will preserve the characteristics that are of the most valued by the residents. Second, despite this, the development that has taken place since the last Comprehensive Plan report has not yet spoiled those characteristics.

2001 Comprehensive Plan Recommendations

The Land Use chapter of the 2001 Comprehensive Plan relied on a Buildout Analysis conducted by CMRPC in 1999. The analysis estimated that Grafton could accommodate up to 10,632 dwelling units based on the amount of land available, natural, and physical constraints to development and zoning regulations. That is nearly double the 5,500 units used as a baseline.

The comprehensive plan saw this rate of growth as the background to resident concerns about Grafton's future and as a result it set a target of a twenty percent reduction in the total buildout, reducing the potential buildout in agriculture and R40 districts. The plan recommended the following interventions:

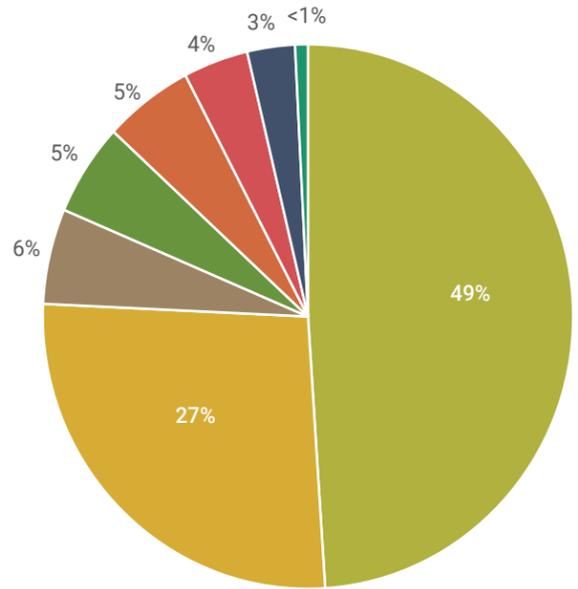
- Place additional land under Chapter 61 protection in the Agriculture District
- Purchase additional land in the Agriculture District
- Adopt mandatory flexible development in un-sewered areas in the Agriculture District
- Define lot area based on buildable land in all residential districts
- Limit expansion of water and sewer service



to un-sewered areas in the Agriculture District

- Increase setbacks in the R40 District
- Increase minimum lot sizes in selected areas in the R40 district
- Adopt “phased growth,” based on the growth rate of previous years

The plan also recommended increased infill development in the R20 district to encourage a shift of development from lower-density areas to higher-density areas.



Residential	49%
Exempt Property	27%
Industrial	6%
Agricultural/Horticultural - Chapter 61A	5%
Multiple-Use	5%
Commercial	4%
Recreational Property - Chapter 61B	3%
Forest Property - Chapter 61	<1%

Figure 1. Land Use by Assessor Acreage

The comprehensive plan also recommended that the town should:

- Adopt neighborhood development guidelines
- Adopt overlay districts for each neighborhood, which would incorporate guidelines to preserve neighborhood character
- Maximize open space throughout the Town
- Concentrate commercial development in existing business areas
- Develop institutional and high technology areas along Route 30, east of the North Grafton neighborhood
- Protect watersheds

The extent to which these recommendations have been implemented, and their impacts will be discussed in the following sections.

The Town Has Made Considerable Progress Toward the Implementation of the 2001 Comprehensive Plan.

A large amount of planning work has been done to implement the 2001 Comprehensive Plan, and it is regularly acknowledged as the guiding framework for the plans that have been produced. The emphasis has been on the implementation of measures to strengthen the villages and commercial areas rather than the measures aimed at reducing buildout in the agriculture and low-density residential zones.

One of the challenges in implementing the recommendation to place land under Chapter 61 protection was that it is a landowner driven process. However, the town can facilitate the process in a way that encourages landowners to exercise this option. As of 2021, over 1,200 acres, approximately nine percent of Grafton’s total land area, were under Chapter 61 protection (Figure 1).



While Chapter 61 protection is a weak form of protection, with ineffective incentives for landowners, the town has pursued a stronger form of protection by purchasing land. Immediately following the adoption of the comprehensive plan, the town embarked on a land acquisition program, as illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 2. Most of the land was acquired between 2001 and 2009 and was conservation land or undeveloped open space that lacked protection as conservation or recreation land. Flexible development, which promotes more efficient land use while maintaining open space, has not been required anywhere in Grafton. However, it is strongly supported by the town and has been utilized more often than in many other towns where it is an available option. Since flexible development was instituted in 1991, of

the thirty-four subdivisions subject to flexible development, sixteen chose the flexible option, accounting for over ninety percent of the open space preserved in all subdivisions. While it has been successful in preserving open space, it was used for just under half of the subdivisions subject to it.¹

Changes to the definition of lot sizes, to minimum required lot sizes, or setbacks have not been instituted. Nor has a phased growth policy been added to the bylaws. The recommendation to prevent the expansion of water and sewer infrastructure into the R40 and Agriculture Districts was not acted on.

A large amount of work has been done on the recommendations related to the traditional vil-

Table 1. Land Acquisition by the Town of Grafton 2001-2023.³

Land Acquisition by the Town of Grafton 2001 – 2023						
Municipal Use	2001 - 2023			2001 - 2009		
	No. of Parcels	Acreage	Cost	No. of Parcels	Acreage	Cost
Conservation	35	700.4	3,400,000	21	594.8	2,555,000
Conservation (28.8 acres), open space	11	45.5	995,000	11	45.5	995,000
Library, open space	2	10.5	837,875			
Municipal	1	0.2	0			
Municipal (DPW), open space	4	93.7	1,100,000	2	93.1	1,100,000
Open space	10	66.8	150,000	6	34.9	
Public safety (Fire HQ)	1	3.4	527,500	1	3.4	527,500
Recreation	1	17.0	0			
Totals	65	937.5	7,010,375	41	771.7	5,177,500

Source: MassGIS tax parcel and assessor layers, updated as of FY23



Figure 2. Grafton Town Land Acquisition and Cost 2001-2023.⁴

lage neighborhoods and the commercial areas. Among many studies and planning initiatives, the following stand out:

South Grafton Villages Master Plan (2006)

This is a comprehensive document that proposes plans to realize the following vision: "Preserve and promote the cultural heritage and economic viability of the Saundersville, Fisherville, and Farnumville villages through the interpretation and enhancement of their significant natural features, historical fabric, and recreational opportunities."

The document includes attractive concept plans for the area, but its recommendations for implementation are general. The most important involves changes to zoning and development

regulations which were taken up in the establishment of the Smart Growth Overlay Zone and the Village Mixed Use Zone detailed below.

Fisherville Smart Growth Overlay District (2007)

This is a smart growth overlay zoning measure adopted under Chapter 40R of the Massachusetts General Law. It specifies detailed land use regulations and separate design guidelines over a fourteen-acre section of South Grafton. For a homeownership development, twenty percent of the units must be affordable and for rental development, twenty-five percent of the units must be affordable.

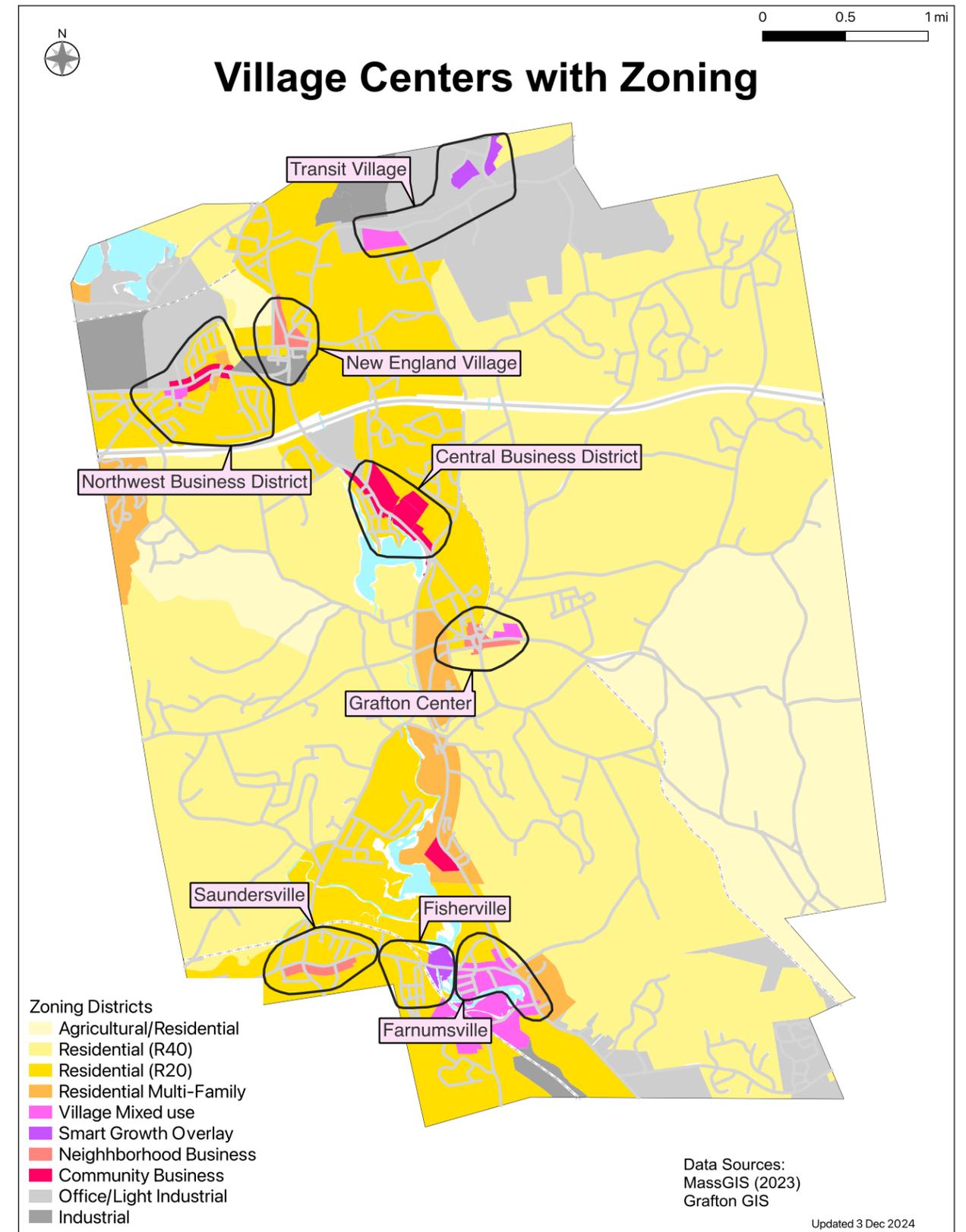


Figure 3. Village Center Zoning



Chapter 43D Priority Development Overlay District (2008), amended in 2019

The Chapter 43D Priority Development Overlay Zone applies to several areas in the north of Grafton, outside the village of North Grafton. It aims to encourage development by expediting the approval process.

Village Mixed Use District (2012) amended to Village and Neighborhood Mixed Use District 2019

The purpose of the establishment of the Village Mixed Use District (VMU) was to "Promote development in South Grafton that encourages a mixed-use environment that is less automobile dependent and more pedestrian friendly."

This was amended in 2019 to replace "South Grafton" with "Grafton's village and neighborhood centers". Small districts were also added at the Worcester Street Neighborhood Center (VMU-WS) and close to the MBTA station on Westboro Road – the Transit Village Neighborhood Center (VMU-TV). In 2020 another small district was added on Upton Street, near Grafton Center (VMU-GW).

The VMU districts have detailed land use regulations and design guidelines. The 2019 modifications introduced innovative, graphically illustrated regulations and design guidelines that aim to promote high-density mixed-use development, keeping with the aesthetics of traditional New England villages. The update introduced development options such as "cottage courts" and "pocket neighborhoods." These regulations and guidelines provide a high level of detail to developers.

The VMU Districts require ten percent to twenty-five percent affordability.

Route 30/Westboro Road Corridor Study (2013)

This study examined the potential of the corridor along Route 30 between North Grafton and the Grafton border in the east to identify the potential for further development. It showed large development potential for the area and it recommended zoning changes and improvements to the accessibility of sewer lines. In part, this study led to the creation of the VMU-TV.



Grafton Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2016)

The Grafton Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan identified "Bike-Ped Priority Development Areas," priority pedestrian locations and regional bike routes. It recommended the implementation of the Complete Streets Program and Policy, and other initiatives to promote pedestrian accessibility and bicycle use.

North Grafton Transit Village Overlay District (2017)

This district is a smart growth overlay zoning measure applicable to a part of the old Grafton State Hospital Site, adopted under Chapter 40R of the Massachusetts General Law. The district has detailed land use regulations and separate design guidelines along with affordability restrictions to promote pedestrian oriented, mixed-use development close to the MBTA commuter station. The town recently amended the overlay district to include a Section B for multi-family housing on 5 Millenium Drive, adjacent to the Grafton MBTA station.

Rapid Recovery Plan (2021)

The Rapid Recovery Plan focused on North Grafton Village, also known as New England Village or Perry Hill, and the home of Washington Mills, one of the town's largest employers. The study made several recommendations, including a review of the industrial zone restrictions to accommodate a wider variety of businesses in the area.

MBTA Communities Multi-Family Overlay District

Grafton elected to use areas previously zoned for multi-family housing by right, with necessary adjustments to meet affordability requirements in compliance with Chapter 40A of the Massachusetts General Laws. This approach was accepted by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities and the Grafton MBTA overlay has been fully approved.

The Cumulative Impact of Planning Interventions in Terms of Zoning

Over the past twenty years, zoning regulation





changes have focused development into village center districts, as shown in Figure 3. The town has placed considerable emphasis on improving local mobility, particularly through pedestrian and bicycle planning and has completely reworked its Subdivision Regulations. Changes have been made to the Zoning Bylaws almost every year. However, the implementation of recommendations aimed at reducing the potential buildout in the lower-density parts of Grafton has seen lower priority.

Development Since the 2001 Comprehensive Plan: A Continued Focus on Compact Development Will Address Grafton’s Growing Housing Needs, While Preserving its Character.

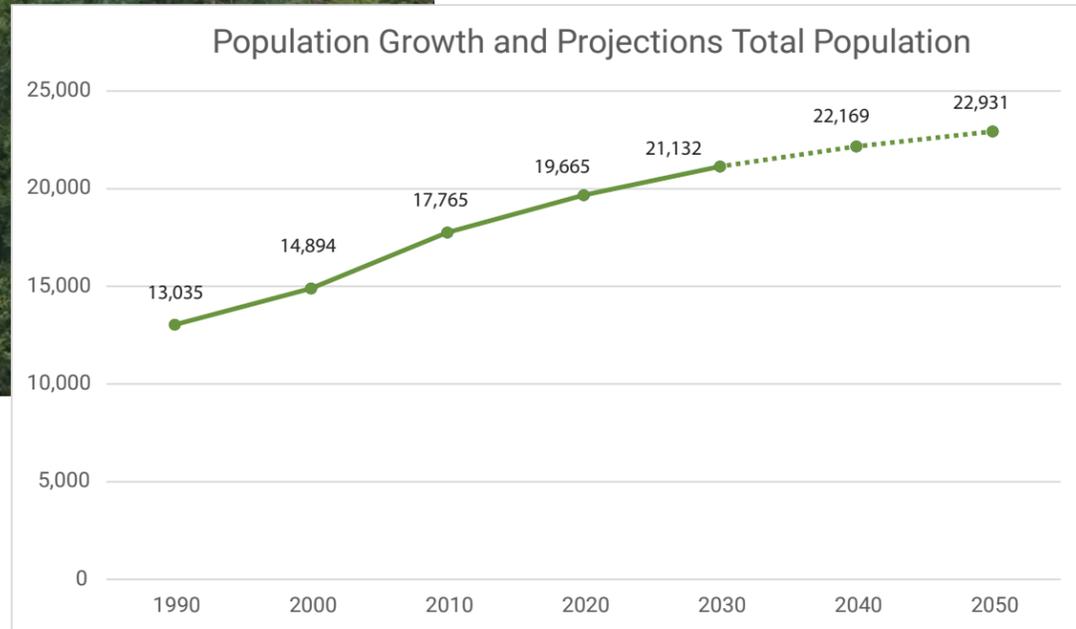


Figure 4. Population Growth and Projections.⁵

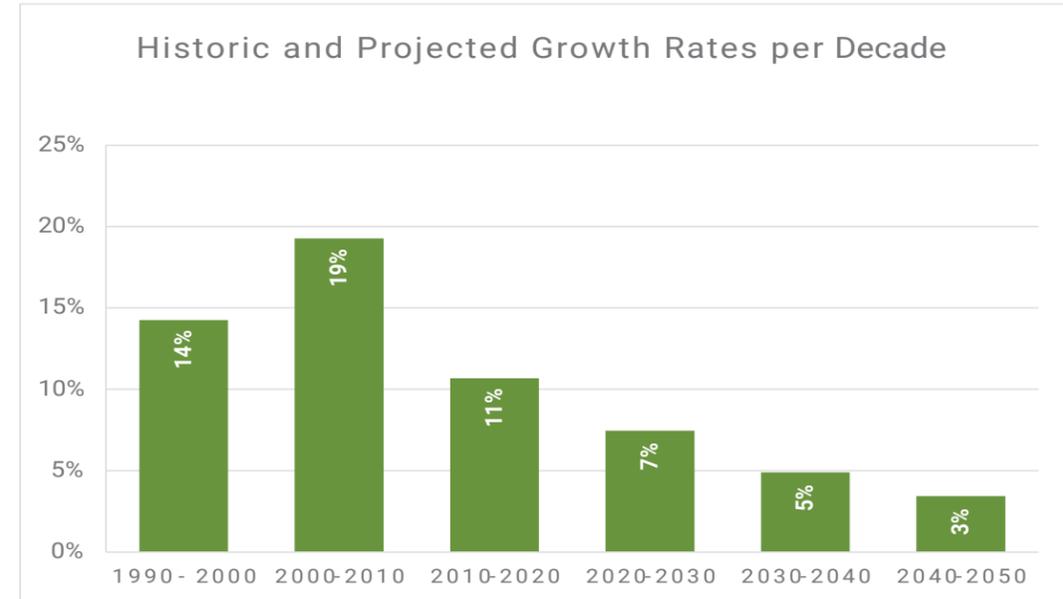


Figure 5. Historic and Projected Growth Rates per Decade.⁶

The recommendations from the 2001 Comprehensive Plan and their implementation form the foundation for analyzing land use patterns and trends in Grafton. A key focus remains on preserving the rural and small-town character of the community.

Population growth and housing development trends are discussed in detail in the Housing chapter. For land use planning, the figures are important to determine whether past interventions had an impact, as well as to identify trends that may require reinforcement or disruption. Figure 4 and Figure 5 illustrate the historical and projected population growth from 1990 to 2050.

Between 1990 to 2000, Grafton experienced a period of high population growth, followed by a continued, but slower increase from 2000 to 2010. However, from 2010 to 2020 the growth rate sharply declined. This trend and population projections (Figure 5) indicate there will be a steady decline in population growth, which suggests the population pressure on the



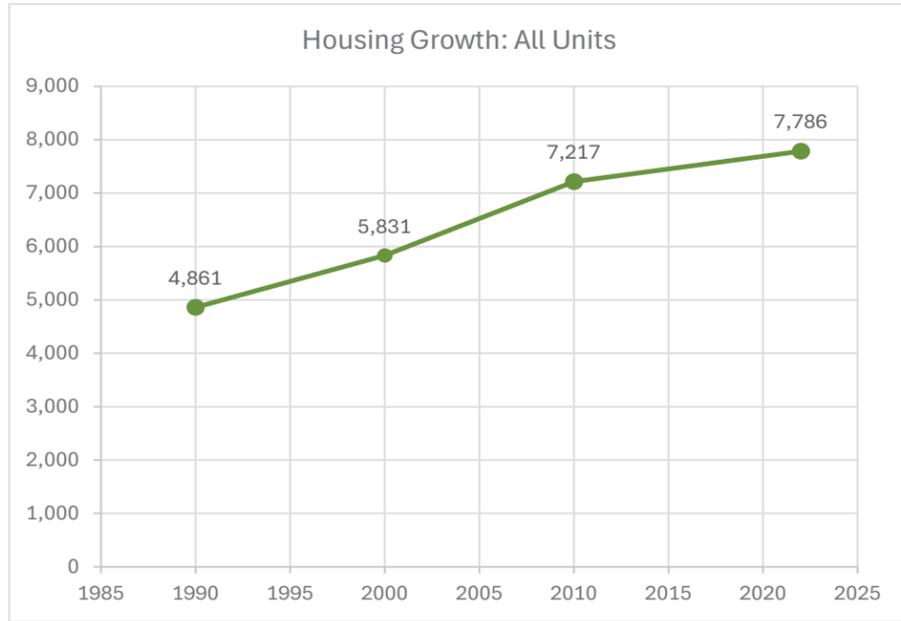


Figure 6. Housing Growth, All Housing.⁷

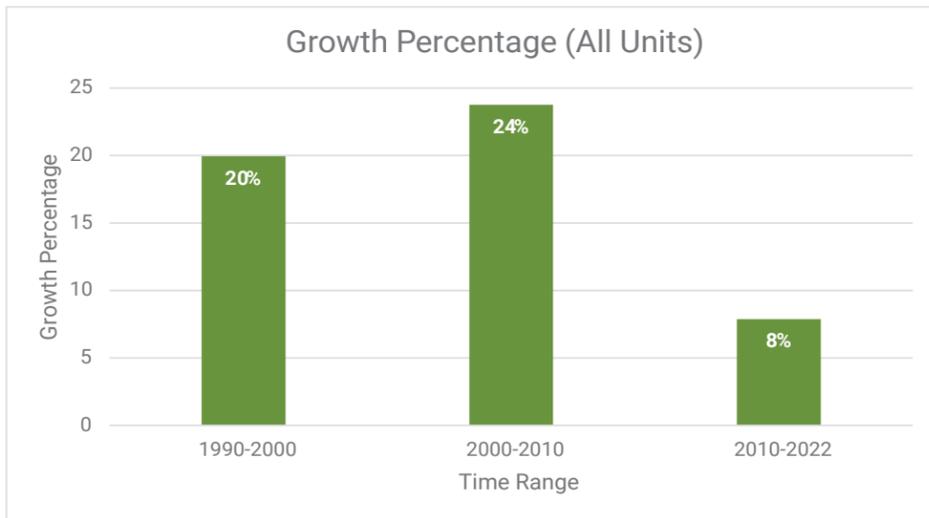


Figure 7. Housing Growth Rate per Decade.⁸

spatial patterns in Grafton has started to decline and should diminish steadily until 2050.

In contrast, housing growth has not followed the same trajectory. As shown in Figure 6 and 7, the rate of housing growth, which, at twenty percent was slightly higher than the population growth rate in the 1990s, increased in tandem between 2000 and 2010. Both population and

housing growth rate dropped between 2010 - 2022.

The interventions proposed in the 2001 Comprehensive Plan aimed to shift some of the housing growth from single-family dwelling units to attached or multi-family developments. While this shift is not obvious from looking at the figures since single-family detached houses

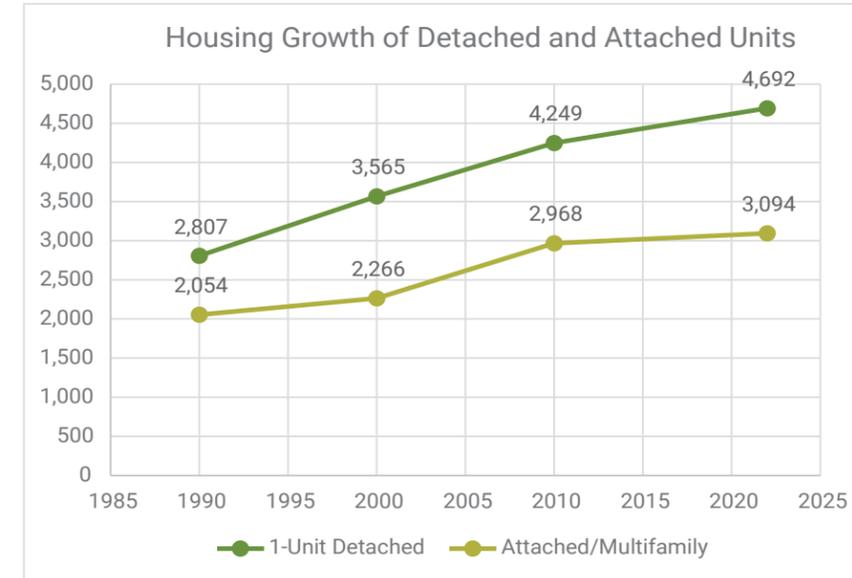


Figure 8. Housing Growth of Detached and Attached Units.⁹

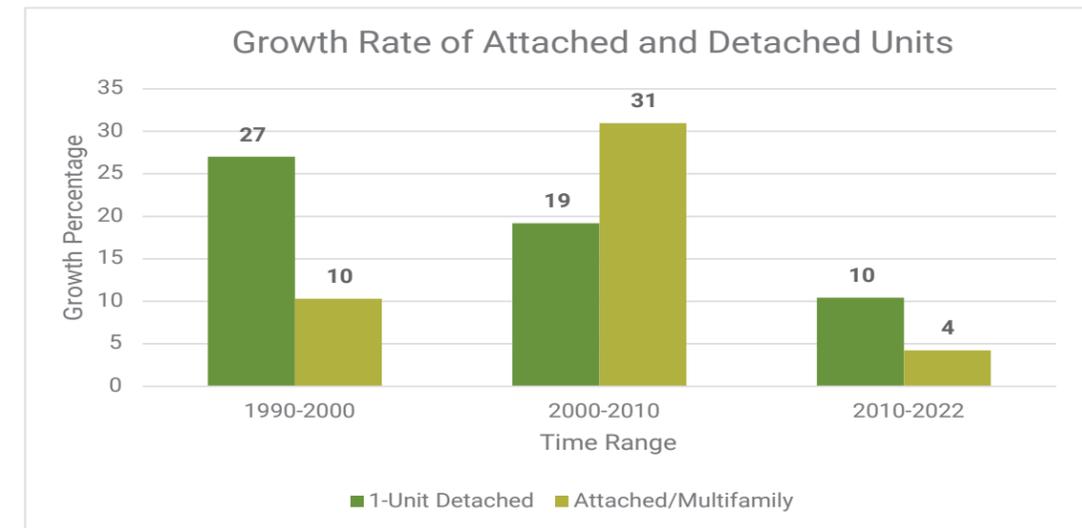


Figure 9. Growth Rate of Detached and Attached Units.¹⁰

remain the dominant form, with more of them being built than any attached or multi-family units, closer examination of the data shows a changing trend. Figure 8 and 9 illustrate that in the 1990s the growth rate for single-family units was much higher than for other housing types. Between 2000 and 2010, multi-family development grew significantly, followed by a sharp decline between 2010-2022 of all housing types.

The previous Comprehensive Plan aimed for a shift in development momentum from single family dwelling units on large lots to a more compact form of development with increased emphasis on attached units and multi-family housing. Examining the breakdown of the housing built between 2010 and 2022 highlights a 19% growth rate in 10+ units between 2010-2022 due to one 40-unit development (Figure 10). Multi-family housing from 1990-2022 primarily occurred in the Residential Multi-

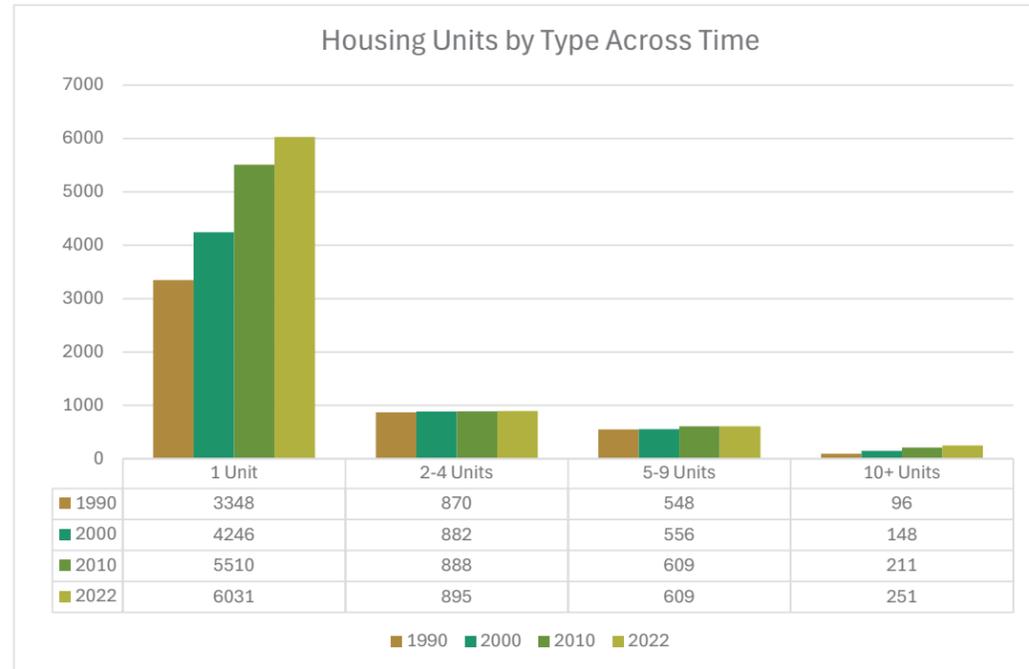


Figure 10. Housing units by type across time.¹¹

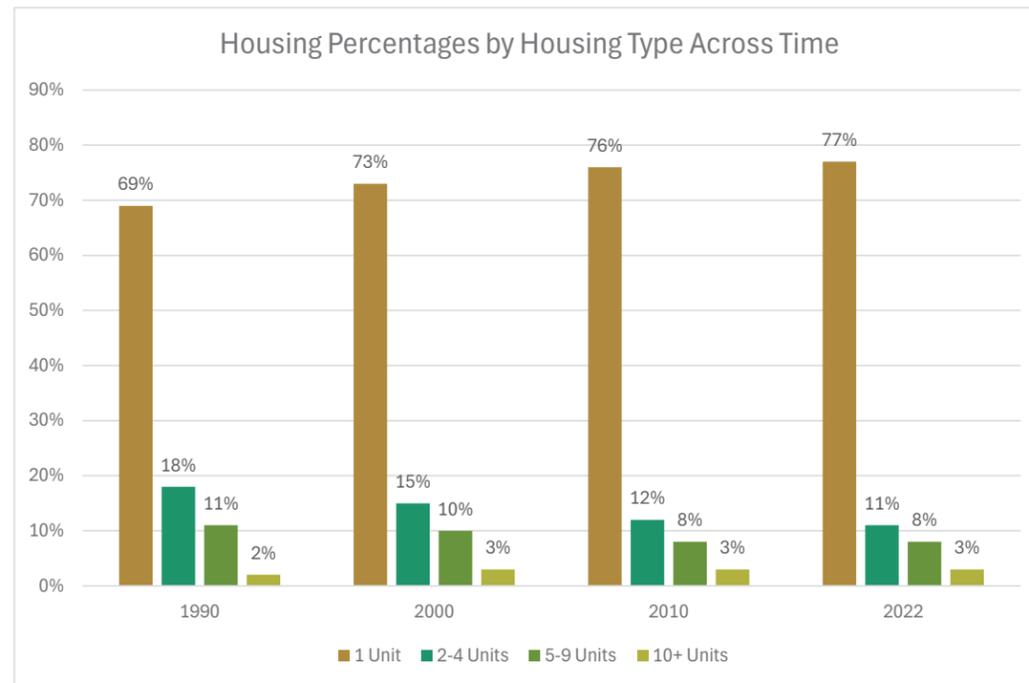


Figure 11. Housing percentages by housing type across time.¹¹



Family, Office/Light Industrial, and Residential 20 Zones. In the same time period, detached single-family homes were built in Residential 20, Residential 40, and Agriculture/Residential Zones. Very little housing development occurred in the Village Mixed Use and Neighborhood Business Zones.

The buildout analysis conducted in 1999 estimated the amount of completely unconstrained

land available for development in each zoning district. CMRPC is conducting a similar build-out analysis for 2024, which will allow for comparison to the 1999 figures. This comparison is limited to the areas completely without constraints and the main residential zoned districts because changes in zoning and methodology make wider comparisons difficult.

The R20 District saw a reduction of 243 acres

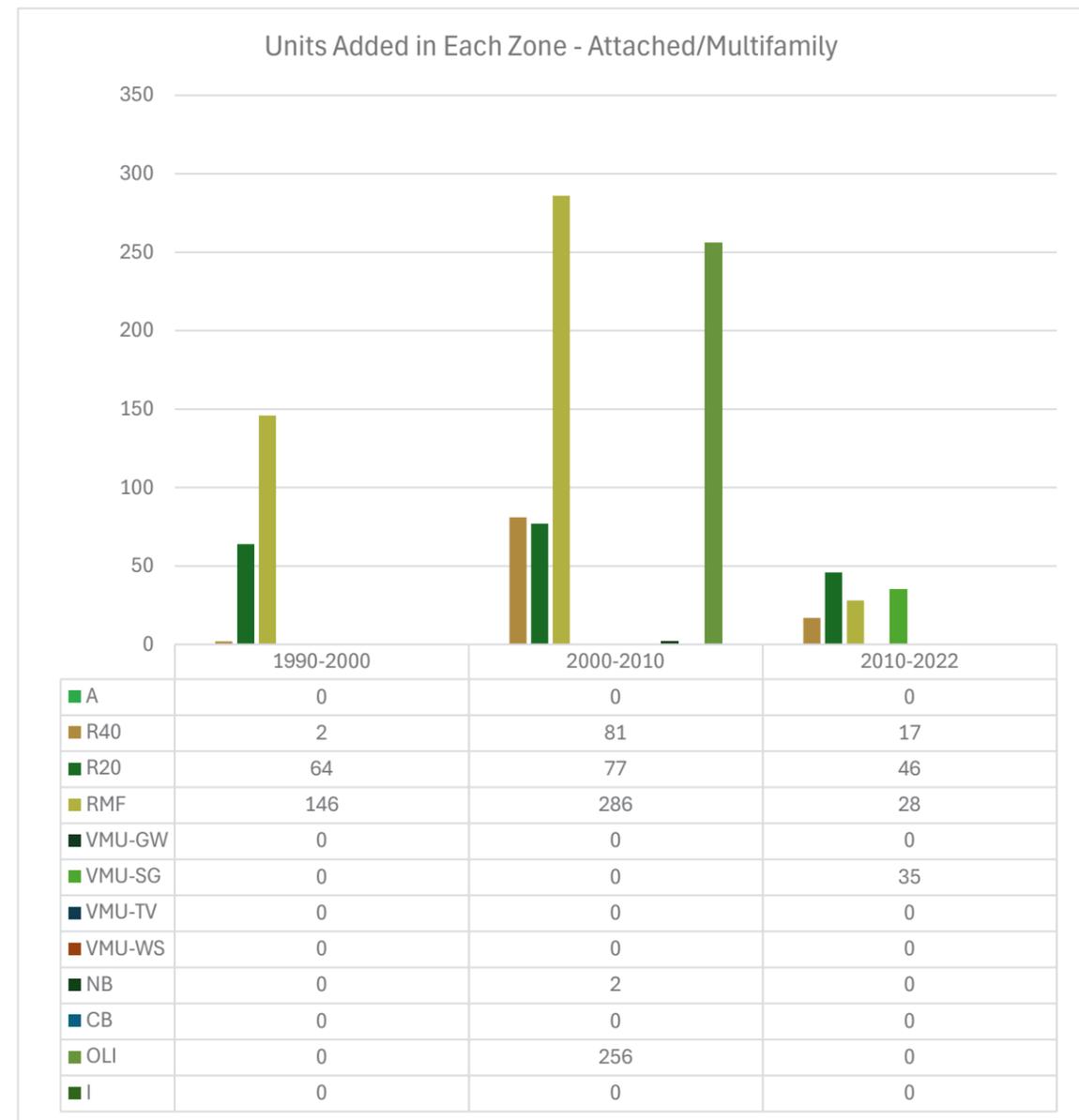


Figure 12 a. Multifamily/ Attached Units added in each zone.

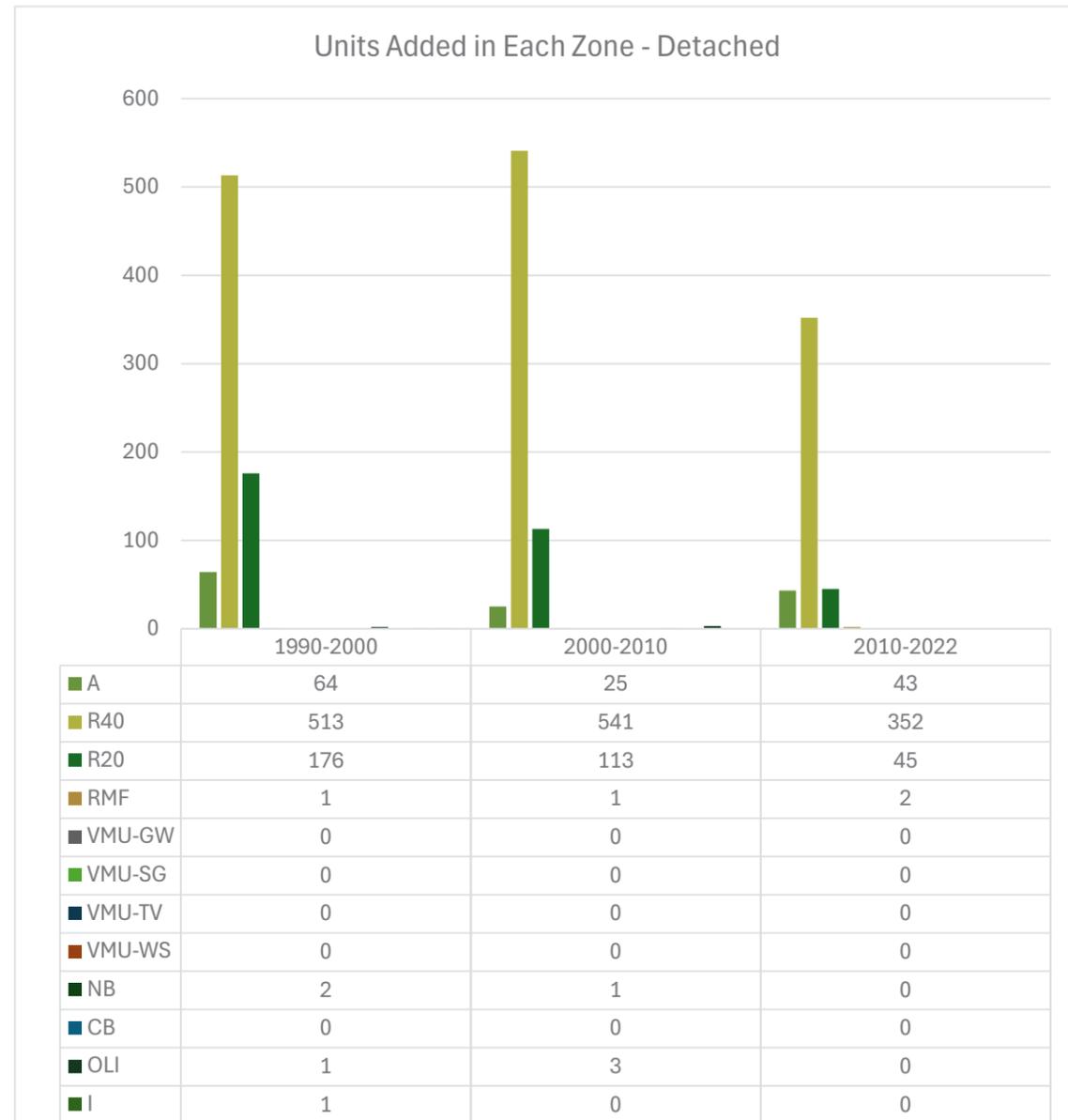


Figure 12 b. Uattached Units added in each zone.

in available land, which was more than the 231-acre reduction in the Agricultural District. However, the R20 District started with less land to begin with. By comparison, the R40 District saw a reduction of 541 acres, but its larger area meant that the reduction was less significant.

While the amount of unconstrained development land in the residential districts has declined by 26% overall, the uptake of land in the R20 district has been much stronger, with

almost half available land having been developed.

The three maps prepared by Planning Board member David Robbins give an illustrative picture of the overall land consumption trend. In the 21 years between 1985 and 2006, housing development grew at a rate of 139 units per year, with most of those units being single-family units built on previously undeveloped land. This pattern is suggestive of the rapid

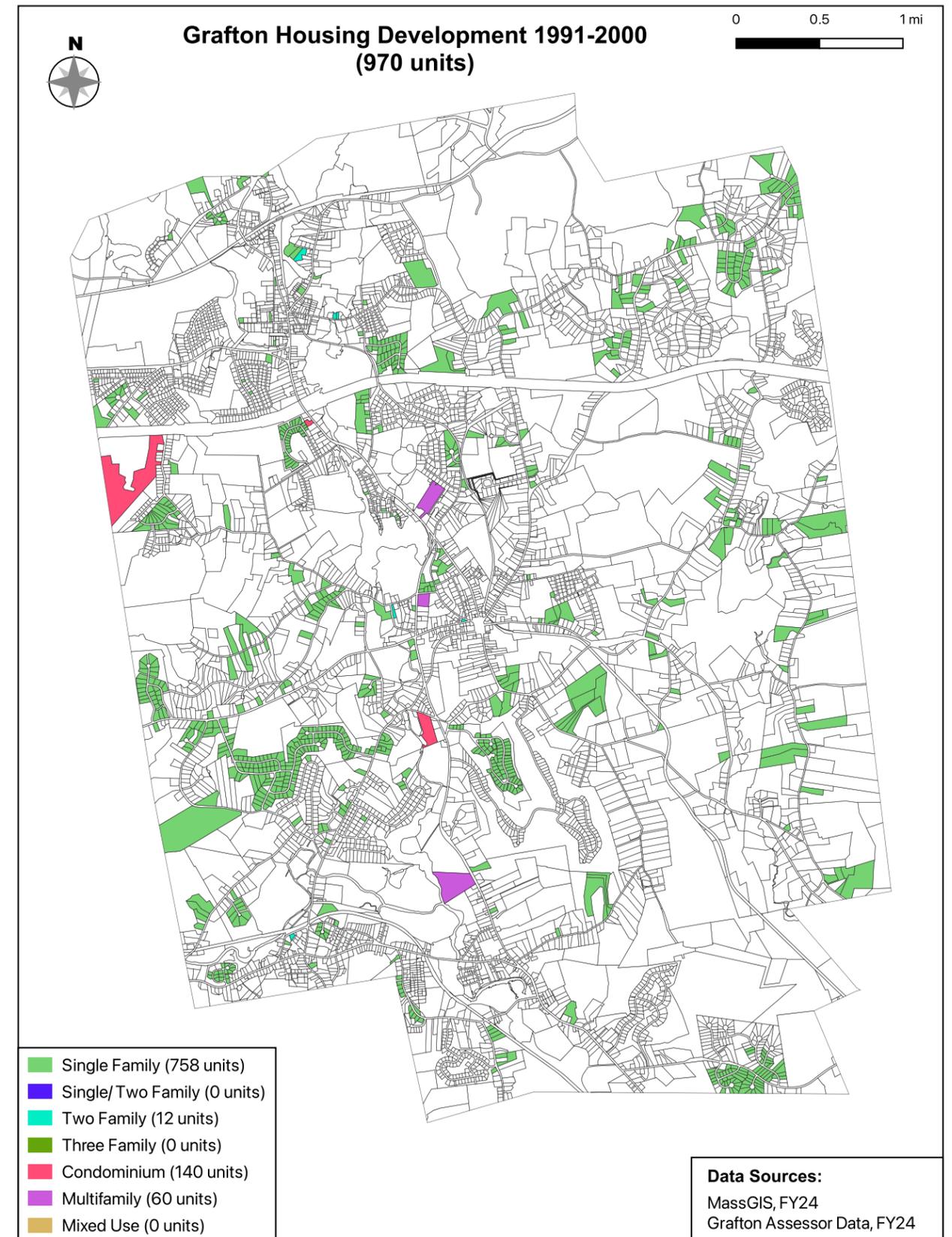


Figure 13a. Grafton Housing Development Trends 1991-2000

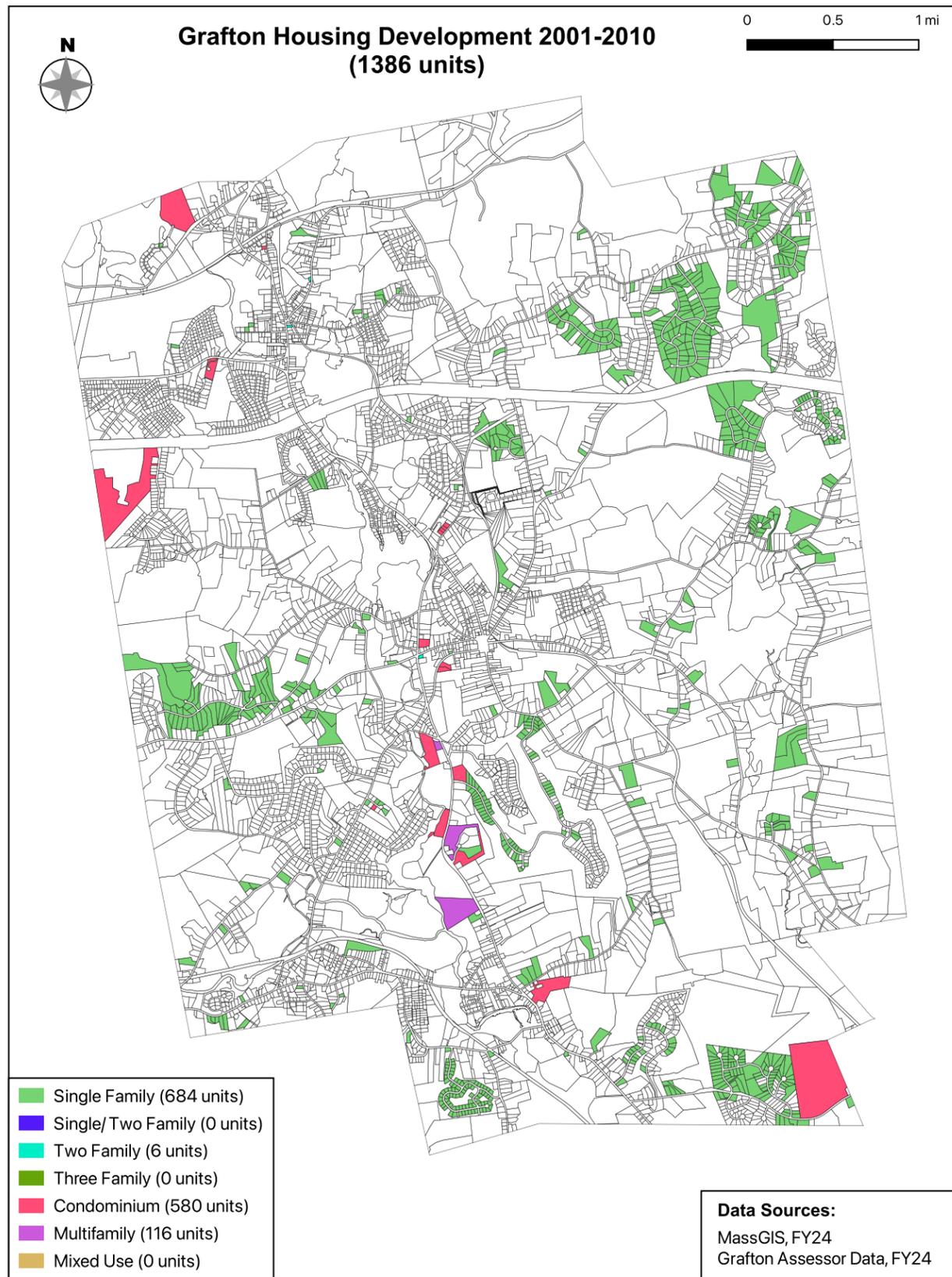


Figure 13b. Grafton Housing Development Trends 2001-2010

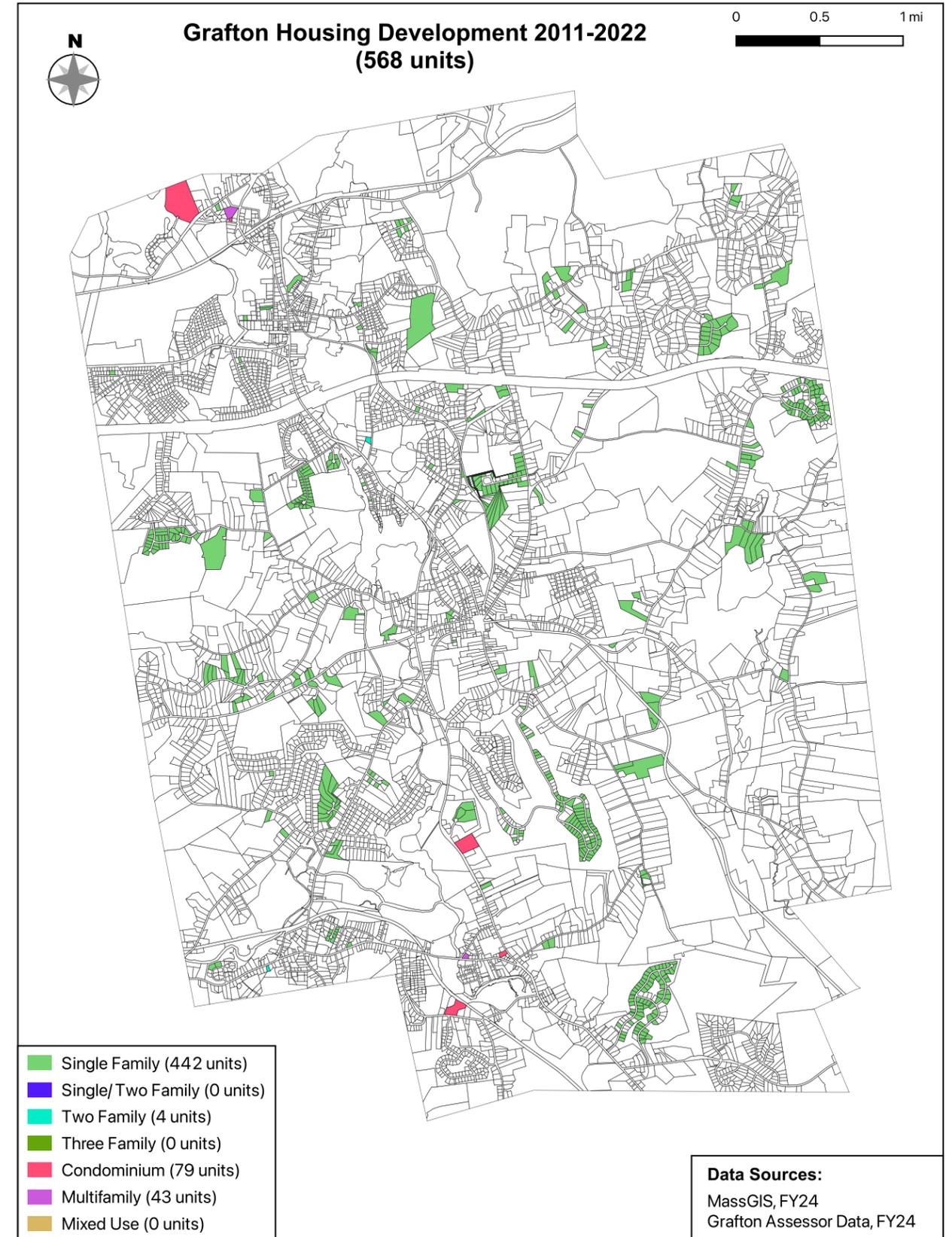


Figure 13c. Grafton Housing Development Trends 2011-2022

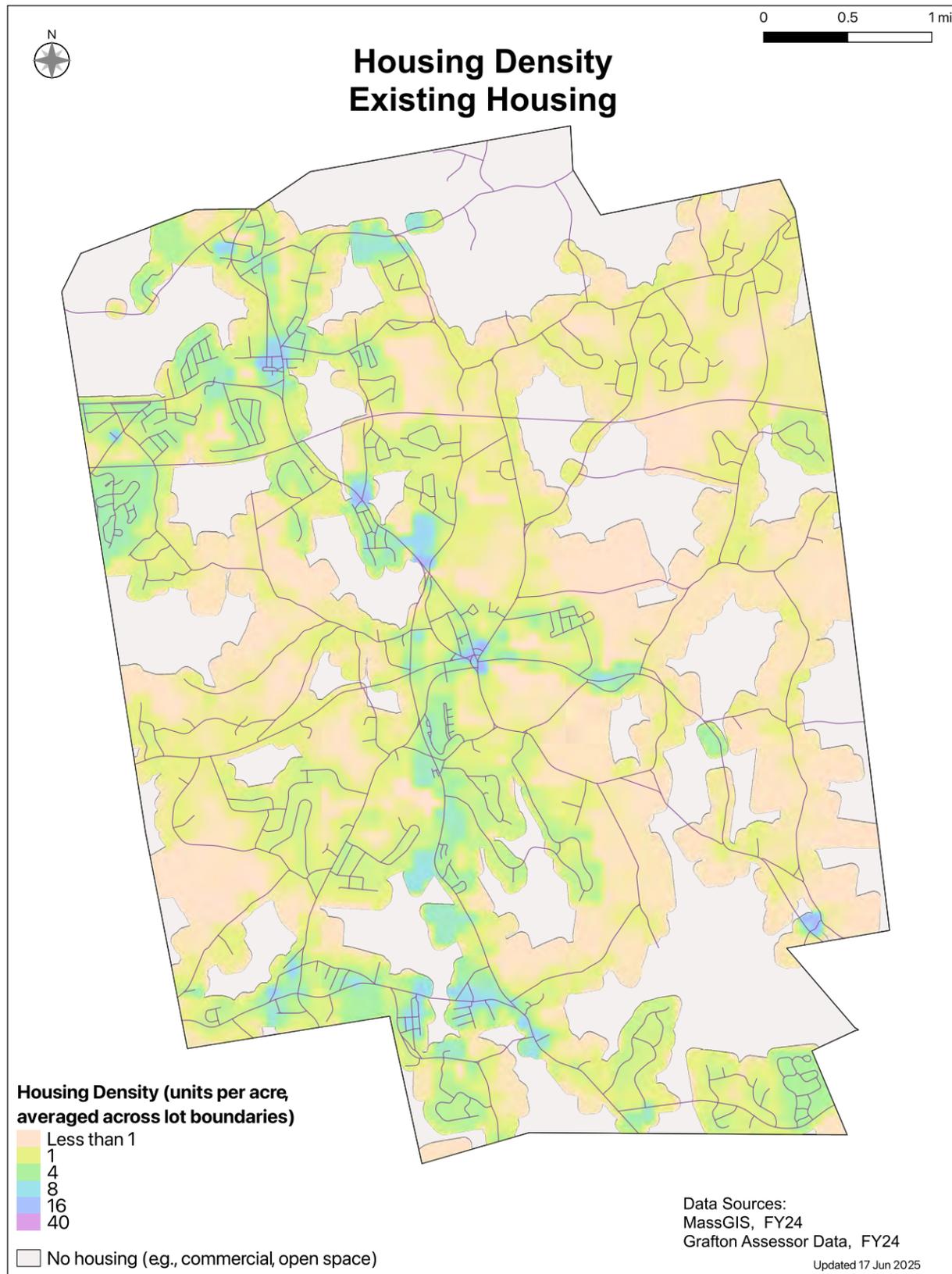


Figure 14.a. Current Housing Density

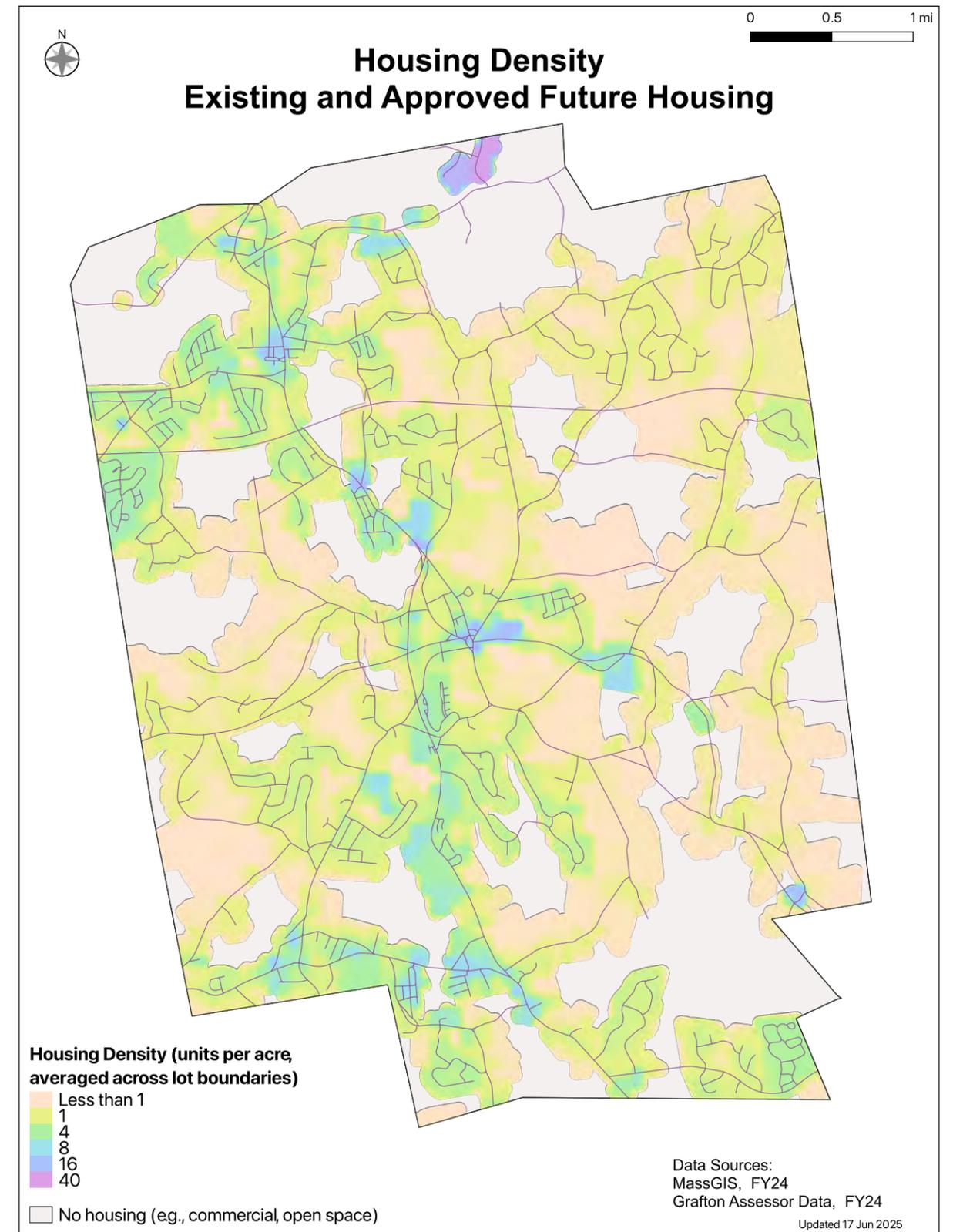


Figure 14.b. Housing Density: Current and Future



conversion of Grafton's treasured rural spaces. From 2007 to 2021, development slowed to 47 units per year, with an increasing proportion of multi-family housing. This change is much less visually striking. If the policies proposed by the Comprehensive Plan and adopted in this plan continue to have the desired effect, the housing development rate could increase towards levels seen in the past, but with a development pattern that avoids the large-scale loss of rural space.

Another way of visualizing this development pattern is a density map, with areas of different density represented in different colors (Figure 14 a and b). The maps provided by David Robbins do this.

Over time the green or blue areas can be expected to trend towards dark blue, but the uncolored, orange, or yellow areas should stay

mostly unchanged. As Figure 15 shows, in 2016 only about ten percent of the land area of Grafton was covered with any form of building or impervious surface, and more than half of Grafton's area was still forested.

One of the key takeaways from the community survey is the residents' desire to protect the "rural," "small town" and "friendly community" aspects of Grafton, which mirrors the findings of the 1999 survey. This suggests that despite rate of development over the years, these aspects of the community have not been significantly affected. This is further supported by the examination of the development patterns, which show the rate of land consumption for housing has declined dramatically. If population growth drives future demand as it is forecast, it could be expected this trend would continue and the concern about this issue would be unjustified.

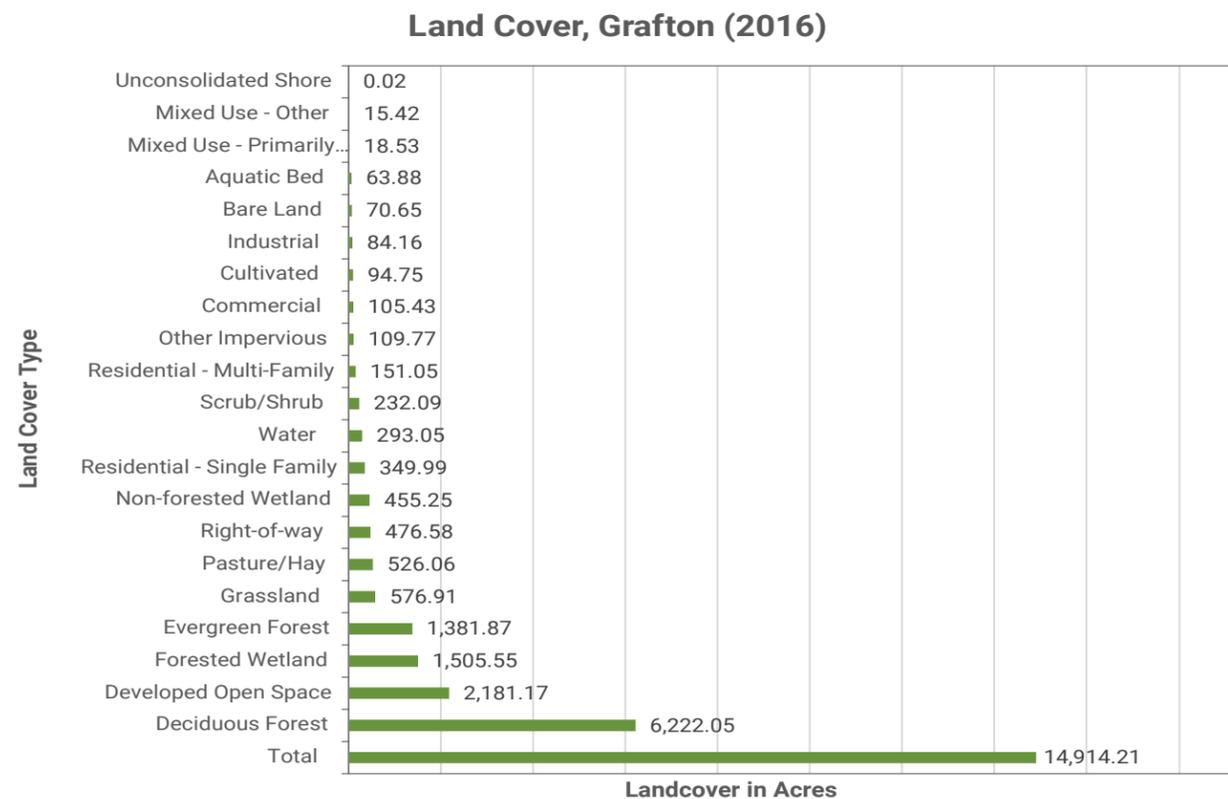


Figure 15. Land Cover

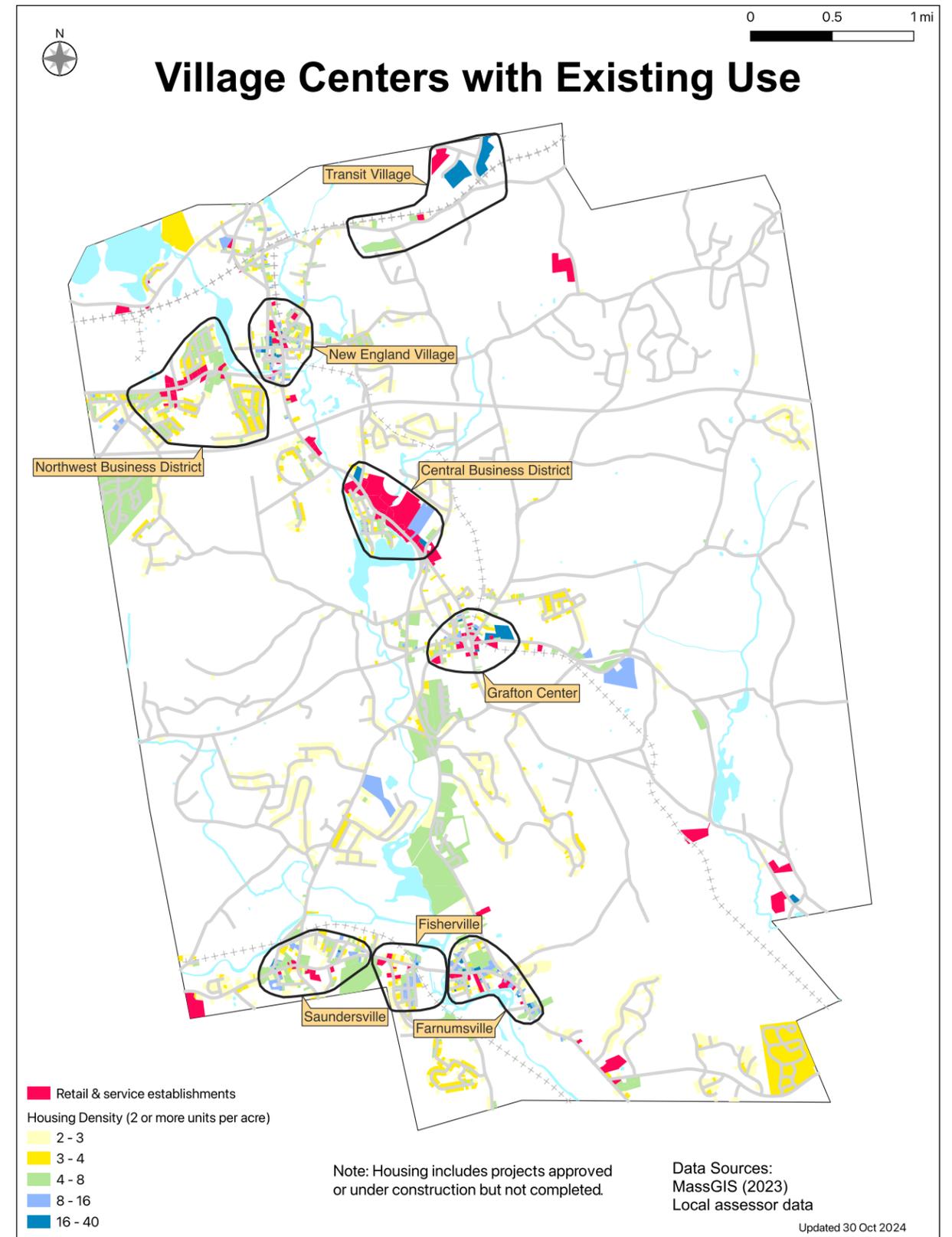


Figure 16. Existing Use of Village Centers



Development patterns over the last fifteen years have been impacted by the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a widely recognized and acute housing shortage, and if the economy remains strong and interest rates begin to fall, as expected, the pressure to develop new housing could upset local population projections. Given the importance to the community, CMRPC recommends identifying more feasible measures to address it than those proposed in 2001.

Grafton should focus development in the Villages and Commercial Areas.

Over the past twenty-five years, the intention of many planning actions in Grafton's villages and commercial areas can be simply summarized:

- To transform the traditional village areas in South Grafton, the Grafton Center, and North Grafton into vibrant, attractive, human-scale towns offering a variety of urban amenities and economic opportunities, while retaining the look and feel of traditional New England villages
- To establish an economic hub based on the Tufts Veterinary College campus and the nearby industrial areas, anchored by a vibrant, human scale Grafton Center near the train station.

South Grafton feels overlooked. It has unused space, some derelict and shabby buildings, facades in need of restoration, and a lack of vibrancy. There is development in the pipeline including a large development approved and under construction at 188 Providence Road and a 40B development under construction at Fisherville Terrace.

The Center, with its historic charm and the town common, is a point of pride for the community. It feels vibrant when there is an activity or event in progress on the common, but on a weekday morning, activity is sparse and may not support the few local businesses. More activity will arise from the planned development on Upton Street.

North Grafton feels busier than South Grafton or the Center, to the point of congestion at times. It does not have a comfortable pedestrian scale feel and, there are reports of significant conflicts between industrial traffic and commuter traffic, between rail and road traffic, and between industrial and transport uses and residential uses. Residents are particularly anxious about the rail transport and storage of propane.



The vision of an economic hub around the MBTA station remains somewhat unclear as the station remains an isolated facility in an area of sparse development. There is a large amount of development underway or planned, including 8 Pine Street, 5 Millenium Drive, and "Afonso Village" at 100 Westboro Road. Industrial and commercial development is also planned for the area.

Development is still largely in the planning stage due to several factors limiting development since 2008. There is a sense that Grafton is on the cusp of exciting developments, particularly in the Transit Village Overlay Zone and in other parts of the economic hub on Westboro Road. The impression of these areas is supported by Figure 16 which shows the ex-

isting use, including development projects that are underway but not completed.

Although a great deal of effort has been directed at planning for the development of the villages and the Westboro Road economic hub, there has been minimal implementation. This is poised to change, with several large project plans approved or in the final stages of approval and primed for development soon.

Future Development Patterns: Opportunities for Increased Residential Density along Grafton's Main Corridors.

To effectively formulate land use goals that bring about desired results in Grafton, it is worth considering how the town as a whole works and what different forces influence various areas.

Low-Density Rural Areas

The low-density rural areas, in the east of Grafton, and to a limited extent in the west are characterized by farming and single-family housing. Because of their peaceful and scenic nature, they may have a strong residential appeal. Despite this, they offer low levels of access to any communal or commercial activity as they are not directly connected to areas outside Grafton.

These areas are important to the people of Grafton because of their natural beauty, their historical importance, and their contribution to Grafton's identity as a small rural town. There is a consensus that these areas should be maintained with limited development.



South Grafton

Located where the Blackstone and Quinsigamond rivers meet, and Providence Road and Main Street intersect, South Grafton is a village with rich history rooted in its mill origins. The mills have long gone, leaving the workers' housing and other old buildings behind. Some of the buildings are of historic merit and significance, though many are in disrepair and in need of preservation.

Some visitors are attracted to South Grafton because of the recreational amenities along the Blackstone River, but there is limited appeal to outsiders. Businesses in the area rely on residents as their market and residents are dependent on cars to do anything they need to do.

For South Grafton to thrive, the area needs to attract more businesses to locate there and provide jobs. Development should focus on filling in unused spaces and reusing dilapidated but handsome older buildings. As the area becomes denser and busier it should be more vibrant and offer its residents more amenities. This is a process that requires support with an increase in residential development, small-scale commercial and mixed-use development. Improvements to pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure will encourage visitors and residents to walk or ride to local amenities rather than drive outside the neighborhood. This thinking has underpinned previous planning that supports the proposed and approved developments in the area

It is unlikely this area will become a location for heavy industry, for employers attracting workers from outside the area, or for commercial development beyond small stores needed to serve residents. There are not likely to be significant transportation conflicts or land use incompatibilities.



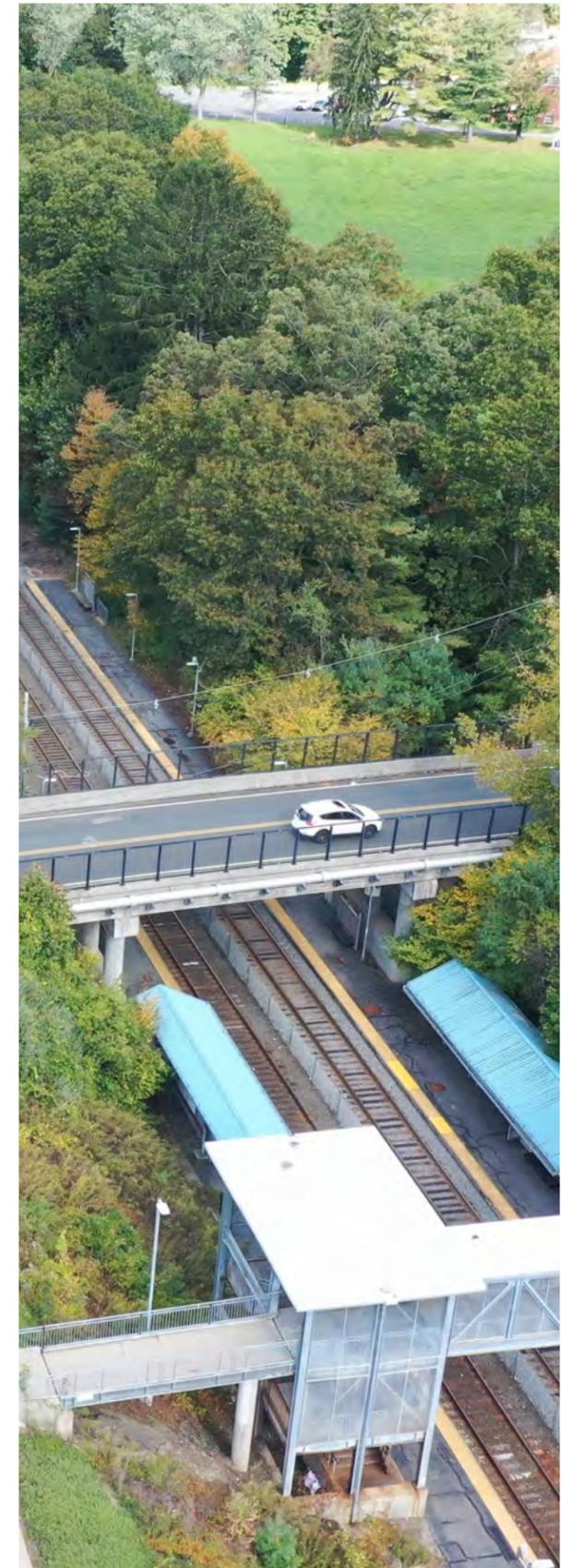
The South-To-North Corridor

The South-to-North Corridor links South Grafton and areas to the south to the rest of Grafton, as well as Worcester, Shrewsbury, and Westborough. It channels the movement into and out of the low-density rural areas and is a corridor of more intense development. The main road channeling the movement of cars, and occasional buses, through this corridor is Providence Road. It links to Worcester Street, which then separates into three different roads in North Grafton. Pleasant Street on the west, and South Street and Carroll Road on the east, further funnel traffic through this main corridor. This development corridor distributes access through the center of Grafton. It creates opportunities for increased residential density in an area that will not threaten the quality of the rural areas and will also not be as intense and busy as the villages. This growth supports commercial development in the villages and provides convenient access to other services such as town offices.

This is an area in which moderate increases in density can be supported and encouraged, but they are not essential for the success of the revitalization of the villages.

Grafton Center

The well-preserved Grafton Center brings an elegance and charm that is central to the character of Grafton. The common, with its capacity to host activities that attract people from outside the village, reduces the reliance on the local market. Grafton Center benefits from the patronage of all Grafton residents and will gain an economic boost from higher density housing in the Village Mixed Use and MBTA district on Upton Street. It could also benefit from densification in adjacent areas. Any development in Grafton Center must be sensitive to the historic





development patterns and the aesthetics of the area.

This area is dependent on people coming in from outside by car so the issue of parking is important to solve. There is also a need to maintain historic spaces and patterns. To a small extent, this can be mitigated by improving conditions for walking and bicycling so people can get to Grafton Center without driving. This will not be enough though, and the parking issue will need to be addressed.

The East-West Corridor

The primary area of change in Grafton lies along the east-west corridor that runs along Worcester Street (Route 122), North Main Street (Route 140), and Westboro Road (Route 30), all anchored by the MBTA station. As the area closest to Worcester and Shrewsbury, this is the busiest part of Grafton. Business owners have identified congestion along a small section of Route 140 that requires widening. According to CMRPC's traffic demand model, parts of Route 122 and Route 30 are also considered congested.

Key traffic generators include Washington Mills, Wyman Gordon and Tufts University veterinary campus. These institutions bring people from both inside and outside Grafton. These economic activities have changed the nature of the northwest section of Worcester Street, with the larger economic thresholds creating something like a strip mall along this section of road.

Large industrial and residential development expected to take place along Westboro Road will result in increased activity which will generate a new economic dynamic along this corridor. This will create the potential to consider specialty stores and a wider diversity of economic activity, a welcome boost to Grafton.



The Rapid Recovery Study suggested amending industrial zoning to allow more mixed-use developments to fill in the empty spaces.

The increase in activity is likely to lead to an increase in congestion, parking issues and associated problems. These challenges must be addressed as this corridor is critical to the non-residential tax base of Grafton. Supporting existing businesses while creating opportunities for new ones will be crucial.

New England Village Center

At the intersection of the north-south corridor and the east-west corridor is the village of North Grafton, a traditional mill village, with the unique feature of an active mill. The juxtaposition of traditional industrial uses, including the mill and the Grafton Upton Railroad and associated propane storage and transport present problems. There is congestion caused by road traffic and by the conflict between road and rail traffic. Residents have concerns about the impact of industrial activities on residential property values due to risks of damage to property and injury to people.

Amid these issues are the small number of traditional workers' houses and the question of how to maintain their character and their affordability in a rapidly changing environment.

Goals

Based on the Key Findings and the analysis above, the following goals are proposed for the Land Use section of the master plan:



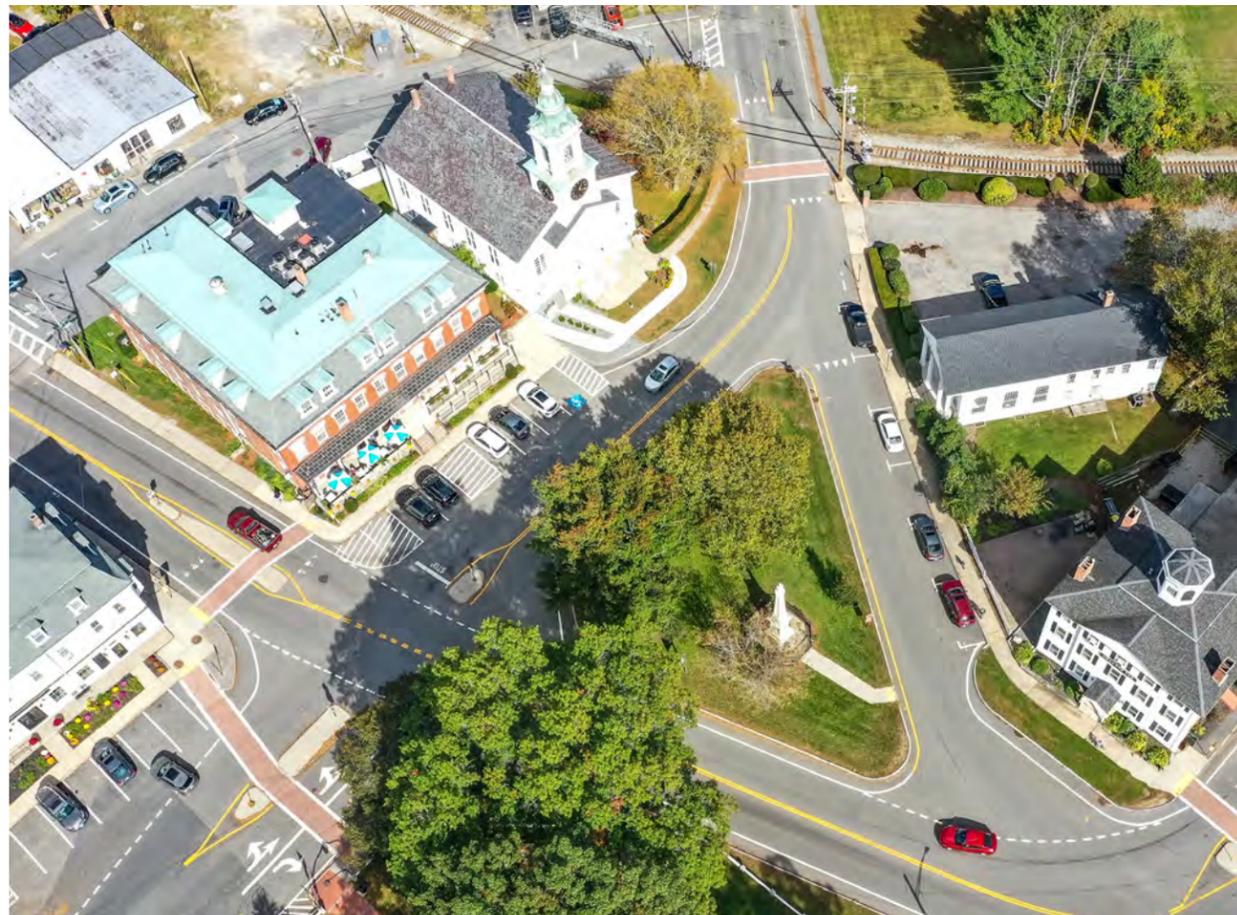
Goal 1: Maintain the balance between the preservation of open space and the accommodation of new growth.

Growth management remains a key issue for Grafton residents as reflected in the community survey. Although in the time since the previous Comprehensive Plan, the threat of Grafton losing its rural character because of the loss of rural space seems to have been reduced, this may have been the result of external market conditions. The need to find a way to control this process remains relevant, and we must consider a different approach given that previous mechanisms have proven difficult to implement.

Objective 1.1: Shift development pressure from the rural, open areas (R40 and Agriculture Districts) to the areas where development is desirable.

The most significant impediment to the reduction of development pressure in rural areas is that the subdivision of land is a closely held right. Efforts like downzoning, such as changing to the way lot sizes are defined, increasing minimum lot sizes and setbacks, or imposing new restrictions are unpopular and difficult to implement.²

Property owners are more attracted to the potential benefits of subdivision than they are to



the right to subdivide alone. To address this, it may be possible to transfer the right to a different property, through the sale of the right. This process, known as the "Transfer of Development Rights" would allow the rights to be moved to locations more suitable for growth. This was briefly mentioned in the 2001 Comprehensive Plan, but it was not addressed in the implementation of the plan.

The process requires the identification of specific areas from which the rights should be transferred, from the Agriculture and R40 Districts. It likewise requires the identification of specific areas to which the rights should be transferred. In general, this would be the villages and the corridors linking them.

This has been successfully applied in various towns in Massachusetts. Transfer of Development Rights has the potential to be a powerful tool to reduce pressure on rural areas and to increase opportunities in more urban areas. CMRPC recommends conducting a detailed study of the policy.

Action Item 1.1.1: Explore the Feasibility of Transfer of Development Rights.

Prepare a proposal, raise grant funding to fund the proposal, and conduct a detailed exercise to put in place mechanisms to facilitate the Transfer of Development Rights. This would involve identifying each area from which rights may be transferred and a procedure for determining the value of the rights. It would involve identifying each area to which rights may be transferred and specifying what the rights may be used for, such as flexibility in permitted uses, increased height or coverage, or reduced parking requirements, depending on what would be most attractive to investors and most beneficial to the receiving area. It would require the

creation of a procedure for the exchange of rights. Finally, it would require the preparation of a bylaw for consideration by the town.

Objective 1.2: Protect town lands that have environmental and/or recreational value.

Some parcels of land are worth bringing into public ownership for conservation purposes due to their intrinsic character or their proximity to conserved land or water bodies. With the assistance of CMRPC, Grafton has completed an Open Space Parcel Prioritization Project, which has systematically prioritized parcels, based on thirteen criteria.

Action Item 1.2.1: Partner with developers to enter into conservation and recreation restrictions or agricultural preservation restrictions, as appropriate

Conservation restrictions and agricultural preservation restrictions are legal agreements that prevent the development of land that holds natural or cultural resources. The owner of the property retains ownership of the land, and the restriction remains in place through future transitions of ownership.

Conservation restrictions can protect biodiversity, maintain water quality, and conserve natural resources. Agricultural restrictions support food production by maintaining land to be used for agricultural purposes, ensuring farmland can exist alongside residential areas. Though the decision to enter into a preservation restriction is a private matter, the Town can provide assistance and information for those interested.



Goal 2: Encourage new development in the areas zoned to accommodate a diverse range of housing opportunities, compact and infill development, and a variety of transportation options.

While a great deal of work has been done since the 2001 Comprehensive Plan to promote new development in the village areas of Grafton, the results are mixed. While South Grafton faces barriers to the implementation of the plans, development in the Transit Village appears to be gaining momentum. Without duplicating efforts, there are opportunities to determine effective implementation of the ideas that have proven successful.

Objective 2.1: Align zoning with the economic development and housing goals that support a variety of land use development in Grafton’s mixed-use village districts.

As discussed, a great deal of work has been done, both on overall planning to promote the development of the mixed-use village districts and to align the zoning regulations with the relevant economic development and housing goals. What remains to be done in this respect is a matter of fine-tuning and troubleshooting to achieve the conditions required for development to take off and to ensure that the outcomes of the development are what is desired.



Action Item 2.1.1: Conduct a Procedures Audit.

Conduct a targeted consultation study with developers, Town officers & officials to identify any factors that contributed to the failure, withdrawal, rejection, or slow processing of any application, or which have led to the stalling of implementation of any approved development in any of the village districts, but particularly in South Grafton.

The object of this exercise would be to establish whether there are zoning or other regulatory adjustments that could be made that would make a significant difference in achieving project approval and implementation without compromising the principles that the town and the community wish to uphold.

Action Item 2.1.2: Produce a Grafton Center Neighborhood Plan.

Design, find funding for, and conduct a local area planning exercise for the Center of Grafton to ensure pedestrian, bicycle, bus, and car access to the common and the current and potential business areas in the Center are optimized and that the issues related to parking are resolved. Investigate appropriate areas and forms to increase local residential opportunities to further support the thresholds of businesses in the Center that serve local people. Alongside these goals, ensure that the character and atmosphere of the area are preserved.

Action Item 2.1.3: Update the North Grafton Neighborhood Plan.

Design, find funding for, and conduct a local planning exercise for North Grafton and the portion of the East West Corridor along Route 122 to the west of North Grafton. The object of this exercise is to ensure that the transportation infrastructure is suitable to carry the expected loads and that the interface between the land uses and the increasing traffic volumes is managed in such a way as to conserve the character of the area, support additional economic development, encourage mixed-use and higher density and affordable housing. It is also essential that the plan provides for the support of existing industries to ensure that they continue to thrive and that their economic and fiscal contribution to Grafton are safeguarded.

Action Item 2.1.4: Monitor the Need for Upzoning.

Contingent on the outcome of the Action Item 2.1.1 to 2.1.3, and on the outcomes of developments implemented under the new Design Guidelines incorporated into the Village Mixed Use Zone, monitor the possible need to upzone, or increase allowed density, Grafton’s village and neighborhood centers while maintaining while maintaining the sort of housing forms required by the Village Mixed Use zones that align with the community’s small-town character.

Action Item 2.1.5: Modify Village Mixed Use Bylaw.

Informed by Action Items 2.1.1 to 2.1.3, modify the Village Mixed Use Bylaw to make it more flexible and to introduce incentives, density bonuses, transfer of development rights mechanisms identified by and established as part of Action Item 1.1.1, and other adjustments to



encourage compact and infill development as well as adaptive reuse in Grafton's village and neighborhood centers. The modification of the Village Mixed Use bylaw is also proposed in the Housing and Population chapter under Action Item 1.1.2

Action Item 2.1.6: Allow Residential Above Non-Residential Uses.

Amend zoning regulations to permit residential units to be placed above non-residential uses in Community Business (CB) and Neighborhood Business (NB) zoning districts. This action is also listed in the Housing and Population chapter under Action Item 1.1.2.

Action Item 2.1.7: Incorporate Massachusetts Historical Commission Best Practices.

In any modification of regulations that establish design guidelines or requirements, ensure that up-to-date best practices as advised by the Massachusetts Historical Commission are incorporated.

Objective 2.2: Concentrate new development around existing traffic infrastructure to improve walkability, connectivity, and public health.

A second element of the choice that can be offered to potential customers for multi-family developments is access to things like convenience stores, coffee shops, and gyms. Even if people must use a car to reach their places of employment, do their monthly shopping,

or buy specialized items, they may prefer to be able to have access to everyday conveniences either on foot or on a bicycle. The key to achieving this is to provide for higher density and mixed-use as Grafton has been doing since 2001.

Action Item 2.2.1: Implement Complete Streets.

In the past streets were typically designed with a major focus on the efficient movement of cars. It is necessary to move the priority from efficiency to safety and to include accommodation of all modes. Implement a complete streets program and policy to make streets in the villages and the high-density areas safe and comfortable for cyclists and pedestrians.

Action Item 2.2.2: Improve Sidewalks and Trails.

In addition to the complete streets program there is scope to improve sidewalks and to provide alternative routes for people on foot or on bikes. Complete a comprehensive sidewalk, bike, and trail inventory specifically for the villages and high-density areas and allocate funding or raise grant funding for sidewalk improvements where necessary.

Objective 2.3: Ensure that water and wastewater are available in every part of the MBTA overlay districts, the Smart Growth/40R districts, and the Mixed-Use Zones.

With a full understanding of the benefits of every potential development project in the denser areas of Grafton, it is essential that if



all the other pieces of the puzzle fall in place a development should not be held back because of lack of water or wastewater infrastructure.

Action Item 2.3.1: Update Priority Infrastructure.

Although the infrastructure network in Grafton is good, as set out in the Town Services Chapter there is always scope for improvement. Work with state entities to expand water and wastewater capacity to accommodate new and diverse development in the denser parts of Grafton (excluding R40 and Agriculture Districts), and especially in priority development parcels identified under Action Item 2.5.1 below.

Objective 2.4: Evaluate potential development sites in terms of their suitability for housing, municipal, and recreational uses.

Encouragement, promotion, and incentivization of development through regulations are the key mechanisms available to a town to achieve the outcomes that its communities want to see. To expedite the process or set a trend in progress it may also be possible for the Town to use land that it already owns or to acquire land specifically to develop the land or have it developed as a model development, or simply to contribute to and reinforce the desired development pattern.

Action Item 2.4.1: Prepare a Development Parcel Prioritization.

Prepare a Development Parcel Prioritization, similar in concept the Grafton's Open Space Land Parcel Prioritization Project. Identify targeted parcels and assess the potential for development by documenting zoning, size, physiographic characteristics, vegetation, ecological condition, access, infrastructure, land use, building-to-land value ratio, building age, own-



ership, abutting uses, abutting ownership, and any other characteristics that might affect the potential of the parcel for development. Apply a prioritization system to the parcels that ranks their readiness for development and their cost/benefit potential. Identify issues that could be addressed to improve a parcel's ranking. For instance, regarding Action Item 2.1.3 above, if a parcel ranks well in all respects except that it lacks a waste-water connection it could be prioritized for funding for that purpose.

Action Item 2.4.2: Allocate funding for site and building assessments at town meeting for repurposing properties and land for development.

Site and building assessments evaluate the conditions of a site or building to determine potential structural or environmental hazards that impact the functionality of a space. These assessments are beneficial when considering repurposing properties for development to uncover underlying issues or costs, which can result in improved accuracy of cost estimates for developers. Further, site and building assessments can uncover any legal compliance issues before a project begins, such as ADA or fire protection requirements. Assistance from the Town to complete assessments can streamline redevelopment of priority areas. This action is also listed in the Housing and Population chapter under Action Item 1.1.2.

Goal 3: Ensure that Grafton's bylaws remain fit for purpose.

Grafton has been exceptionally active in ensuring that its land use regulations are constantly updated and in introducing innovative features into its regulations. Ensuring that its regula-

tions align with community needs is largely a matter of continuing with the ongoing process of monitoring and updating regulations and bylaws. As shown in Table 2, the Zoning Bylaw contains several different, closely related use zones that add to the complexity of land use applications and land use management.

Objective 3.1: Update land use regulations to ensure that they align with the community's changing needs for the next 10-20 years.

Reconsideration of the zones listed in Table 2 to combine some of them or dispense with redundant ones could make for greater clarity and ease of use.

Action Item 3.1.1: Conduct a Zoning Diagnostic.

Conduct a comprehensive zoning diagnostic and update to ensure the Zoning Bylaws are current and in compliance with Massachusetts General Law (MGL), that each of the various zones has a clearly defined and necessary purpose, and that all the elements of the zones such as dimensional requirements and parking requirements are fit for the specific purpose that they are intended to serve in Grafton. During this process, consider:

- The Industrial District zoning and whether it should be upgraded to accommodate a mix of uses to encourage investments and economic activity in underutilized areas. This should be informed by the planning study of North Grafton and the Western section of the East West Corridor.
- The Village Mixed Use District bylaw and whether the extensive and innovative



amendments recently made to it require any further review.

- The possible requirement to establish regulations for large-scale battery energy storage microgrid systems.
- Incentivization of low-impact development (LID) and best management practices in new development and redevelopment opportunities.
- The possible expansion of the areas included in Neighborhood Business (NB) and Community Business (CB) districts and adaptations to these zones, such as that proposed in in Action Item 2.1.1 above to make them more flexible.

Action Item 3.1.2: Implement a Flexible Development Incentivization.

Given the major contribution that flexible development subdivisions have made to the conservation of open space in Grafton, source funding to conduct a study of what incentives have been successfully used in other towns

across the region, and to workshop what the most effective incentives for Grafton would be. Based on this exercise, draft amendments to the Subdivision Regulations, and, if appropriate, the Zoning Bylaws to put in place the strongest feasible incentives for flexible development.

Action Item 3.1.3: Regularly Update Subdivision Regulations.

Although the Town has just completed a thorough review of its Subdivision Rules and Regulations, this is an action item that should be kept permanently in view because of the need to constantly monitor the Rules and Regulations to achieve the goals of the Master Plan. Among other things, the following issues should be addressed in this process:

- Ensuring that Subdivision Regulations are consistent with Storm Water Regulations and that they are focused on the requirement for Low Impact Development.

Table 2. Zoning Types.¹²

Zoning Types		
Zone Name	Sum of GIS Acres	Percentage of GIS Acres
Agriculture/Residential	2107.7	15.08%
Community Business	99.53	0.71%
Industrial	181.32	1.30%
Neighborhood Business	52.63	0.38%
Office/Light Industrial	1208.38	8.64%
Residential (R20)	2605.38	18.64%
Residential (R40)	7178.38	51.35%
Residential multi-family	389.76	2.79%
Village Mixed Use	156.6	1.12%
Total	13979.68	100.00%



- Providing wildlife corridors on properties adjacent to or between open spaces.

Goal 4: Ensure that the Planning Department is adequately resourced to oversee the work outlined in this Master Plan at the same time as ensuring that development processes are streamlined.

The agenda proposed in this Master Plan is wide ranging and comprehensive. The coordination and oversight of the action items will demand a great deal of staff time. At the same time many of the proposed action items would be undermined if there were not the capacity to manage development applications in a streamlined, responsive and effective way. An important goal for the Master Plan is to ensure that the Resourcing of the Planning Department remains fit for purpose.

Objective 4.1: Increase staffing and technological resources of the Planning Department to facilitate implementation of the Master Plan and ongoing streamlined development processes.

Action Item 4.1.1: Assess Staffing Resources for Master Plan Implementation.

Estimate the additional resource requirements associated with the management of the Mas-



ter Plan implementation process, as well as the additional development likely to result from the implementation of the Master Plan and amend staffing structure as appropriate. A Master Plan Implementation Committee may be created to manage implementation of the Master Plan.

References

1. Data provided by Mr. David Robbins.
2. For a discussion of this issue, see A Quick Look at Downzoning - PlannersWeb
3. MassGIS tax parcel and assessor layers, updated as of FY23 (supplied by Mr. David Robbins)
4. Ibid.
5. 2020 U.S. Decennial Census and CMRPC
6. Ibid.

7. MassGIS tax parcel and assessor layers, updated as of FY23 (supplied by Mr. David Robbins)
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. CMRPC Zoning Data, from the Town of Grafton, 2022 . 2020 U.S. Decennial Census and CMRPC



QUALITY OF LIFE



Overview

The Town of Grafton's greatest strength will always be its residents. Those who take pride in the community and seek to improve the quality of life will always be the best resource when dealing with future unpredictability. A strong working relationship between the Town and its residents is a key component to the success of this Master Plan.

This chapter focuses on topics not typically covered in a municipal Master Plan, but that are crucial to the successful implementation of all other chapters.

Communication between the Town of Grafton and Grafton residents emerged as a main theme at the community workshops. Whether it is announcements in emergency situations, welcoming residents to events, programming, or promoting opportunities to get involved,

increased lines of communication strengthen transparency of democratic processes. It also encourages volunteerism and civic engagement.

Increasing civic engagement through community involvement and recruitment opens the town to new ideas, creativity, and capacity. Many of the action items in this plan rely on volunteer boards, committees, and commissions for implementation. Focusing on filling vacancies and inviting new voices to the table will ensure this plan can be implemented by inspired groups of people with a passion for the future of Grafton.

Building a strong community also supports humanitarian efforts for those facing emergency situations. Grafton can develop a robust local support network to address housing and food insecurity experienced by its residents, while also preparing for future refugee populations.



Key Findings

Volunteerism is the key to increasing Town capacity and advancing the goals outlined in this Master Plan.

At community engagement forums, residents underscored their commitment to the town and deep passion for its future success. To mobilize this energy among community members, it is important to assess barriers to volunteerism and civic engagement. Small investments in accessibility measures—such as translation and interpretation services—can help broaden participation and lead to new ideas and resources by making engagement more inclusive.

The Town will need more support by boards, committees, and commissions to implement this master plan. In turn, residents can widen their support networks and feel a sense of pride in municipal projects.

Grafton residents desire increased levels of communication between residents and the Town through a communications director position.

A communications director for the Town of Grafton can support every department, board, commission, and committee in promoting events, programming, opportunities, and news to residents. By developing trusted communication channels, such as the Town's Facebook page, Grafton can not only keep residents informed but can also be prepared for clear and efficient communication during emergencies.





Goals

Goal 1: Advance Communication Between the Town of Grafton and Grafton Residents.

During community engagement, residents voiced the desire for stronger communication between the Town of Grafton and community members.

Objective 1.1: Strengthen messaging between boards, committees, departments, and residential groups.

Residents can assist Town staff in communicating messages through strengthening information streams from the Town through boards and commission chairs and department heads. For example, the Library, Council on Aging, and the Recreation Department all have email lists based on trusted relationships that can be leveraged for general messages and updates.

Action Item 1.1.1: Strengthen the role of communications director and encourage the use of more modern techniques.

A communications director can manage messaging from Town departments, boards, and committees. This position can also lead the action items under this goal to increase communications. This role can manage public relations, increase awareness of Town programs and services, and create engaging content for media channels, including the Town's website

and social media platforms.

Action Item 1.1.2: Explore additional methods to promote Town events and news (such as social media, ambassadors, signs)

A comprehensive communication plan "meets people where they're at" by including non-traditional communication methods. An exploration into who is reached by currently used methods can ensure a more equitable and effective communication strategy. The Town may consider increasing language translation services to reach more people, involving community leaders to build trust and engaging the teen population through platforms such as TikTok.

Action Item 1.1.3: Continuously update and promote one-sheet "how-tos" for popular Town processes to serve as reference for residents.

With an increase of online use of Town services, it is important to have clear, concise instructions for common processes such as requesting permits, paying fees, and filing requests or complaints with appropriate parties.

Action Item 1.1.4: Create "Welcome to Grafton" pamphlets for new residents.

To welcome new residents, the Town can mail introductory packets including information on voting, waste disposal, town services, and opportunities for involvement. Department process one-sheets can be included.



Action Item 1.1.5: Create a comprehensive communications plan to bolster the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and Business Continuity Disaster Recovery Plan.

Effective communication during unplanned natural or caused emergencies is critical. The Town should develop a plan that includes methods for disseminating important safety information through multiple channels such as Reverse 911, Code Red, phone, social media, and in-person methods. Town staff, communication heads, and emergency response teams can run mock-exercises to prepare for potential scenarios.

Objective 1.2: Increase Communication of Local Government Processes.

Many residents noted an interest in becoming more involved in Town processes, while others requested more communication from the Town. The action items below outline the different media through which the Town can reach wider audiences.

Action Item 1.2.1: Increase number of "Ask Me Anything" sessions and continue supporting "Municipals" podcast for residents to meet Town employees and be introduced to Town processes.



In an effort to provide transparency and accessibility, the Town of Grafton can continue to host “Ask Me Anything” informational sessions for residents to interact with Town employees and ask questions about Town processes. Opportunities for Grafton residents to interact with Town departments in positive and introductory manners will aid all parties when future issues arise. Continuing to support the “Municipals” podcast can provide an accessible platform for discussing Town policies, budgets and other important topics, encouraging greater community involvement.

Action Item 1.2.2: Assess public meeting processes to determine measures to increase accessibility.

Highly visible public meetings can be intimidating for residents not familiar with official procedures and terminology. Breaking

down inaccessible aspects of town government will allow new voices to engage in a meaningful way. This could include simplifying language, offering explanations and providing materials in advance for better understanding.

Action Item 1.2.3: Assess procedures to update the Town website and areas of improvement.

The Town can further support communication by designating a point person (or the future communications director) to be responsible for updates to the Town website and social media pages.

Action Item 1.2.4: Assess inventory of current information and documents on the Town website.

The point person for the website and social

media should also lead an inventory of current information on the Town’s website to assess inadvertent gaps. This should include agendas and minutes of all boards and commissions, planning board and select board documents, and planning projects.

Action Item 1.2.5: Increase social media presence of the Town of Grafton.

The Town of Grafton could expand its social media presence, drawing inspiration from neighboring communities that have successfully used Facebook and Instagram to support local businesses, share events, and provide news. Some municipalities have similar pages to spread educational campaigns on local initiatives and emergency notifications. The Town’s Facebook page “Town of Grafton, MA”, which already has over five thousand followers, is viewed as a trustworthy news

outlet for residents. Increasing engagement with the page can further connect the Town with its residents and keep them informed.

Action Item 1.2.6: Support local journalism.

Revitalizing local journalism is essential for fostering a well-informed community. The Town should support local news outlets – whether through traditional methods or more modern blog posts—such as Patch.com or DiscoverCentralMA.com—encouraging the sharing of positive news and updates. Grafton Community Television (GCTV) is a valuable asset to the town that should be continually supported and scaled. Grafton could look to neighboring communities that have amplified their community cable television services through a pivot to social media. The Spencer Cable Access has built a sizeable audience on





Facebook and created the affiliated Spencer Journal that posts articles on social media to update the community.

Goal 2: Increase Volunteerism & Civic Capacity

As in most communities of Grafton's size, many vital town functions are performed by volunteers. By making small changes to make volunteering more welcoming and inviting, responsibilities can be shared more equitably between volunteers and allow the Town to bolster its capacity to provide services.

Objective 2.1: Strengthen volunteerism

At the 2023 Master Plan Community Workshop hosted at Grafton High School, residents were asked "Where do you find community in Grafton" and "Who are the people that make Grafton special?" This exercise's purpose was to identify what social support networks are prevalent in Grafton and who might be at risk for loneliness or social isolation.

The most common answers to places to find community included taking advantage of Grafton's natural landscape, including Silver Lake and local trails, churches, the food bank, neighbors, and the library.

Our results found a significant need for additional recreational and social activities. However, many participants had difficulty answering the prompt. This data points to community building as an opportunity for improvement.

Encouraging involvement in Town boards and committees is a great way to build a sense



of belonging and community among Grafton residents while increasing the Town's civic capacity. Currently over two hundred positions are available on dozens of boards, committees, and commissions.

Action Item 2.1.1: Consider new ways to advertise vacancies on boards and commissions.

As noted in Goal 1, creative communication can reach residents that are traditionally not reached by classic means of communication. Experimenting with new modes, such as visits with community groups and leaders, can inspire leaders to step into leadership roles and fill volunteer positions.



feel more accessible and welcoming. Optional exit surveys after meetings can help gather feedback on barriers and how to encourage more participation.

Action Item 2.1.3: Continue to partner with the local school system to teach Grafton students about civic engagement and town processes.

An interest in local government, both through volunteerism and as a career, can be sparked through interactions with the Grafton Public Schools. Connecting with young students through events like meeting Town officials, mock planning activities, and tours of municipal facilities are great ways to invest in the future of Grafton's community.

Objective 2.2: Continue to organize Town-hosted events

Action Item 2.2.1: Increase Town-wide events for community engagement.

The Town could work with the Grafton Cultural Council to obtain resources for hosting town-sponsored community events, attracting residents not typically involved in Grafton local politics, to have positive first introductions that can lead to more involvement in future initiatives. Such activities may include hiking on local trails, recreational activities and dinners. Increased visibility of town positions can make residents more comfortable when working with local boards, committees, and departments.

Action Item 2.1.2: Assess current barriers to volunteerism and make appropriate changes.

As boards and committees become more diverse, town leaders must ensure the people in volunteer positions are equally protected. Best practices include live interpretation services, ADA compatibility of meeting rooms, and inclusive language. The Town can also explore options to provide stipends, reduce the amount or length of meetings, and term limits. Accommodations for working families will increase participation. Smaller adjustments, such as avoiding the use of acronyms or inaccessible jargon, can make volunteering



Action Item 2.2.2: Continue to use community spaces for local gatherings.

In addition to town functions, organizations, nonprofits, advocacy groups, and associations are imperative to enhancing quality of life and volunteerism. The Grafton Town Common, Library, Senior Center, and Community House hold significant potential for hosting gatherings that strengthen community connections.

Goal 3: Create and sustain strong support networks to keep people in Grafton housed and fed.

More than 1,300 people in Grafton live below the poverty line.^{1*} These residents likely rely on government support for basic needs and require additional support from local government to bridge gaps for homelessness, food insecurity, and health. According to the most recent 2021 American Community

Table 1. Poverty Based on Work Experience

Poverty based on Work Experience		
Population over 16	Total Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty
Full Time	52	<1%
Part Time	395	10%
No Work	854	21%

Source: 2020, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables

Survey table, 6% of Grafton Households (446 families), receive SNAP/Food Stamp benefits.² These issues require a localized approach unique to Grafton's community to ensure current residents facing poverty are cared for.

Fifteen percent of Grafton residents aged 65 and older are living in poverty, underscoring the need for targeted support for vulnerable groups.

Objective 3.1: Strengthen the food network.

Only 43% of households under the poverty line receive food stamps/SNAP benefits.³ SNAP benefits (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) can be difficult to apply for, and individuals may face barriers with transportation, language, citizenship status, and institutional trust. Those who are enrolled in SNAP may still have difficulty covering costs for families, forcing households to make less expensive but less nutritious purchases.⁴

The Town of Grafton can continue to partner with local food pantries to fill gaps in the current distribution of locally grown and supermarket food options. The Grafton Food Bank, a partner of the Town, has 200 families registered to receive assistance of which approximately 140 to 150 families receive food every month. The Food Bank, which operates out of two rooms in the Municipal Center, is open two days a month and is run by a volunteer Board of Directors. Additional food support through St. Jude's Church is available. Continuing to support and expand food security options will create

Table 2. Poverty Based on Education Attainment Over 25 Years of Age

Poverty based on Education Attainment, over 25		
Population over 25	Total below Poverty	Percent below Poverty
Less than high school	84	14%
High school graduate	333	11%
Associate's degree	120	4%
Bachelor's degree	324	5%

a network that is readily available to address emergency situations.

Action Item 3.1.1: Partner with local food suppliers to sustain the Farmers' Market and additional pop-up food opportunities.

The Grafton Farmers' Market is a great asset that can be utilized to bring more local food to Grafton residents. Grafton can support similar pop-up food markets. A great example can be found in Salem where a mobile food pantry truck is available to anyone, with no income or residence restrictions. This program is supported by an effective outreach campaign that includes a website, schedule, and registration portal.⁵

Action Item 3.1.2: Strengthen the network and messaging of local food organizations.

An organized task force of local food security resources can strengthen messaging of programs and options for those facing hunger. Partners such as the Grafton Food Bank, Community Harvest, local churches, organizations, and the Council on Aging can work together to ensure clear messaging, specifically to the South Grafton community and local schools.

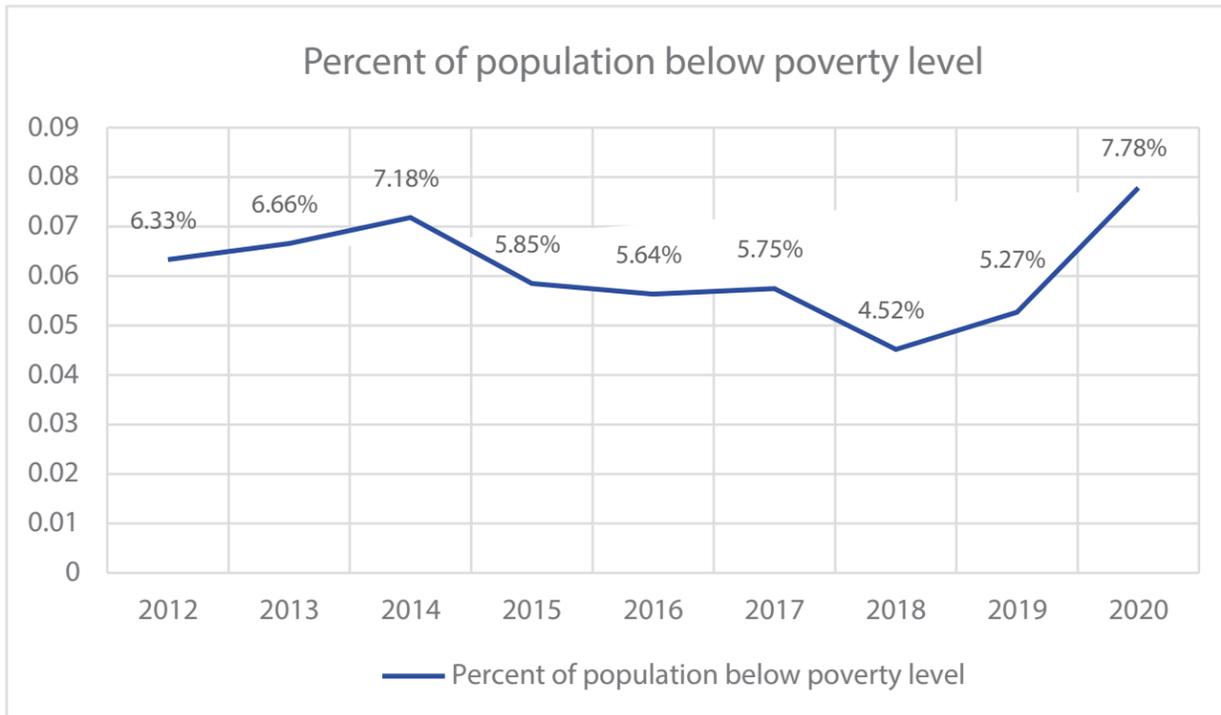


Figure 1. Percent of Population Below Poverty Level

Action Item 3.1.3: Assess zoning and regulations for new food retail in areas lacking food access, especially in South Grafton.

Although the majority of Grafton residents have access to a car, 5%, or nearly 900 people, do not.⁶ This statistic measures households, and does not consider age groups lacking direct access to a car, including teenagers, young adults, and elderly residents.

There is only one major supermarket in Grafton, located on Worcester Street. Figure 2 depicts walking distances to food access, including smaller convenience stores and specialty food stores. The Town can reference residential areas not within walking distance of food access when assessing zoning and permitting for future food retail.

Objective 3.2: Strengthen emergency and affordable housing options.

To supplement the efforts outlined in the housing chapter, social supports can provide temporary relief for Grafton residents facing hard times through local systems. Community Facebook pages offering mutual aid are a great example of the power of local support. This compassion can snowball, inspiring future initiatives.

Action Item 3.2.1: Create a point person and task force to support homelessness.

Designating a point person for emergency homelessness situations and creating a task force to monitor and support at-risk residents can prevent homelessness before it occurs. Grafton's value of community strength can



be capitalized to provide systematic support networks.

Action Item 3.2.2: Build a strong network of town resources and local support organizations.

The Town can partner with local nonprofits, organizations, and religious institutions to strengthen support for residents facing poverty or homelessness. Partnering with organizations such as the Worcester-based Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance can enable the Town to enhance its continuum of care services. Additional support should be focused to the South Grafton neighborhood. Campaigns to spread awareness of local and regional services will ensure residents in emergency situations can find support.

Action Item 3.2.3: Seek additional funding for emergency food and shelter support.

Designating a community member to seek funding for emergency food and shelter can bring a variety of support options for Grafton to foster a more robust safety net for those in emergency need. The Town can also support development of nonprofit and organizational food security and homelessness prevention programming. These organizations can apply for more sources of funding than municipal entities.

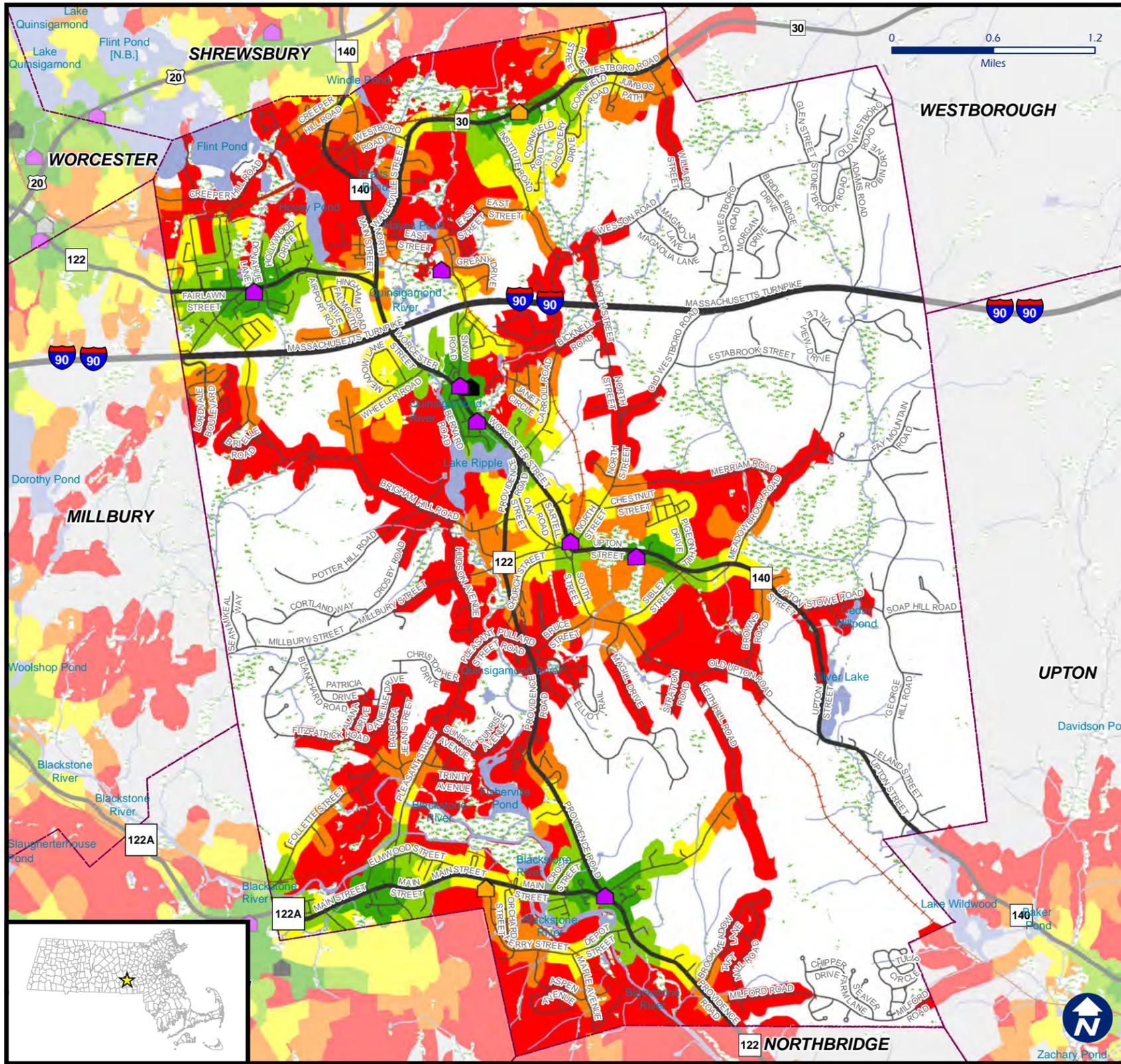
Objective 3.3: Prepare for future potential of refugee and immigrant populations.

Current international migration and climate change trends suggest that the future will require anticipation of refugee populations, typically with little to no notice. Strengthening refugee service networks in advance will ensure the Town can respond to the unexpected. Wrap-around services including transportation, short term and long-term housing options, food, community, education, and healthcare should all be included in plans.

Table 3. Places of Worship in Grafton

Grafton Places of Worship	
Place of Worship Name	Address
St. James Parish	89 Main Street
St. Mary & St. Philip Parishes	17 Waterville Street
Simple United Methodist Church	82 Potter Hill Road
Congregational Church of Grafton, UCC	30 Grafton Common
St. Philip	12 West Street
Mount Zion Church	53 North Main Street
Boston Buddhist Vihara	162 Old Upton Road
Union Congregational Church	88 Main Street
Baptist Church of Grafton	1 South Street
UU Society of Grafton & Upton	3 Grafton Common

Source: MassGIS Data: Places of Worship, July 2022



Town of Grafton 2022 Master Plan

Legend

- Town Boundary
 - River, Stream
 - Lake, Pond
 - MassDEP Wetlands
 - Active Rail Service
 - Major Road
 - Local Road
- Food Retailer (2021)**
- Convenience Stores, Pharmacies, and Drug Stores
 - Meat Markets, Fish and Seafood Markets, and All Other Specialty Food Stores
 - Dollar Store
 - Supermarket or Other Grocery
 - Fruit and Vegetable Markets
 - Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters
- Walk Times To Food Retailers**
- 5 Minutes
 - 10 Minutes
 - 15 Minutes
 - 20 Minutes
 - 30 Minutes

Information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis. Use caution interpreting positional accuracy.

Produced by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC)
 1 Mercantile Street, Suite 520
 Worcester, MA 01608



Source: Data provided by the Town of Grafton, CMRPC, MAPC and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

Figure 2. Food Access



Table 4. Town of Grafton Community Partners

Town of Grafton Community Partners
The Grafton Library
Grafton Cultural Council
The Grafton Food Bank
The Community Barn
The Grafton Farmer's Market
Apple Tree Arts
The Council on Aging
The Nipmuc Tribe
The Local VFW
The Lions Club
South Grafton Community House
Grafton Public Schools

Action Item 3.3.1: Strengthen partnerships with state and regional immigrant and refugee service centers.

The Town can continue to strengthen relationships with the existing immigrant and refugee support network in Central Massachusetts. Grafton is a member of the Central MA Regional Public Health Alliance (CMRPHA), a public health district including Grafton, Shrewsbury, West Boylston, and Worcester.

"The mission of the CMRPHA is to improve, promote, and protect the health and safety of residents in participating Massachusetts municipalities through the formation of strong community and academic partnerships, data-driven decision-making, and delivery of high-



quality public health services."⁷

The Town can also work with regional service providers such as the Friendly House and the Worcester Community Connections Coalition. These organizations already serve vulnerable populations with services as indicated in this objective and can provide expertise and resources in preparing for future migration.

Action Item 3.3.2: Create a localized plan for potential immigrant and refugee migration.

Working together with local organizations, Grafton has the tools to create a strong plan for potential immigrant and refugee populations with adequate resources for emergency housing, food services, health care, transportation, community, and interpreters. This plan should be shared with town stakeholders to ensure a coordinated response.

Action Item 3.3.3: Strengthen network of available translators and interpreters.

The Town should have a network of available translations of crucial documents and interpretation services for Town Hall services.

References

1. U.S. Census Bureau. 2021. Poverty Thresholds for 2020 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years. *Measured as a single person earning less than \$13,171 per year, two person household earning less than \$16,733 per year, or a family of three with one child earning less than \$20,832. For more information on poverty thresholds,

visit [Census.gov](https://www.census.gov).

2. American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2021.
3. U.S. Census Bureau. 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables.
4. "Barriers to SNAP" Project Bread. 2021. <https://projectbread.org/research/barriers-to-snap>
5. Salem Pantry accessed May 2024, <https://thesalempantry.org/mobile-markets/>.
6. American Community Survey 2022 5-Year Estimates.
7. City of Worcester. Regional Public Health Alliance. <https://www.worcesterma.gov/public-health/regional-public-health>