



LEICESTER MASSACHUSETTS MASTER PLAN

Acknowledgments

Town of Leicester Massachusetts Master Plan 2025
Adopted on September 16th 2025

A comprehensive Master Plan in compliance with Massachusetts
General Law Chapter 41, Section 81D

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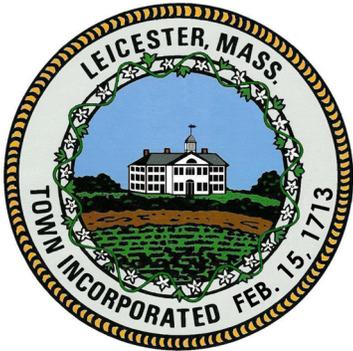


TABLE OF CONTENTS



1 Introduction | p.01

What is a Master Plan?
Master Planning in Leicester
The Structure of this Master Plan

2 Community Engagement | p.09

The Master Plan Steering Committee
Community Survey
Community Workshops
Key Stakeholder Interviews

3 Population and Housing | p.14

Key Findings and Priorities
Future Development Patterns
Goals and Action Items

4 Economic Development | p.31

Overview
Key Findings
Future Vision
Goals and Action Items

5 Natural and Cultural Resources | p.51

Overview
Key Findings
Future Natural and Cultural Patterns
Goals and Action Items

6 Open Space and Recreation | p.71

Overview
Key Findings
Goals and Action Items

7 Transportation | p.87

Key Findings and Priorities
Goals and Action Items

8 Town Services | p.100

Key Findings
Goals and Action Items

9 Land Use | p.123

Overview
Zoning Bylaws
Key Findings
Future Development Patterns
Goals and Action Items

10 Implementation | p.145

Overview

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

WHAT IS A MASTER PLAN?

The Town of Leicester, Massachusetts, is home to approximately 11,000 people.

Living in Leicester has an influence on many aspects of residents' lives. If they settled here recently, it had a bearing on how easy it was to find a place to live and how much they paid for it, or how much they pay in mortgage payments or rent. If they have been here many years, it has an influence on whether they are likely to be able to grow old in a place that is familiar to them, among friends and on whether their children are likely to be able to establish their own homes nearby. It has a bearing on what they pay in local taxes, on how easily they can get services and what they pay for them. It has an influence on whether they can find work, or the things they want to buy, close to home, or whether they must travel long distances; on what recreational activities are available to them and whether they have convenient access to natural areas. It plays a big role in what sort of education their children can aspire to and it influences how aware they are of natural and cultural history. These are factors that are important to the quality of people's lives and to the way they think and feel about the place that they call "home".

Many of these factors are intrinsic to Leicester itself, irrespective of how it is managed.



VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“

I've lived in towns and cities in 5 states. Leicester is the best, but it could be even better. Take your time, and get it right for all our sakes.

“

Leicester has good bones. We need to straighten out remaining infrastructure issues, get the school finalized and bring restaurants, grocery stores and brew pubs into the town to increase popularity. That will make people want to drive to and not through Leicester.

“

I like the town as it is. Please do not raise our taxes. All your ideas will. I have to work as is!!

“

There are 2 major challenges - expanding the non-residential tax base and affordable housing for singles/young couples and Seniors looking to down-size.

Others are strongly influenced by government at state or national levels. But a significant number are influenced by the actions and decisions of the town government which is elected by the people of Leicester. While limited by finances, laws and regulations and by what is practically possible, local government still plays a major role in managing aspects of daily life that matter most to residents.

The purpose of a master plan is to guide the town government and to help ensure the actions it takes and the decisions it makes better serve its residents, improving their quality of life and their sense of pride

and satisfaction in the town. To do this, it is essential that the master plan must be drafted with as much input as is practically possible from the people of the town. Chapter 2, Community Engagement, describes how that input was gathered for this plan.

With community input, the master plan defines a vision statement for the town for the next ten to fifteen years. The vision statement should serve as a constant guide and provide a consistent point of reference for future decisions.

VISION STATEMENT

Leicester is a charming small-town community that balances historical significance with natural beauty, offering a welcoming place to live, visit, work, and play. The town is committed to fostering business development and repurposing spaces to enhance economic growth and community appeal. Leicester values diversity and is dedicated to improving public services, education, recreation and ensuring a resilient and vibrant future for all residents.



Informed by the vision statement, the master plan adopts goals in each functional area in which the town works. To arrive at these goals, the master plan team relies on direct input from the community, as well as applying professional best practice methods to information established through research. This ensures that goals are both locally relevant and realistically achievable. They serve as a framework when evaluating applications, setting priorities or making budget allocations. By ensuring that their decisions align with the goals, they know that they are moving towards the realization of the community's vision. The goals can also strengthen the submission of grant applications as they demonstrate the importance that the community places on the issues that the goals address. Each goal is supported by action items. This is a proactive "To Do List" that sets the agenda for town departments to direct time, energy and resources toward Implementation of the vision.

It is important to remember that the master plan is advisory, not mandatory. It is a large-scale document that does not and cannot gather sufficiently detailed or accurate data to enable sound decisions at the level of individual sites or of detailed regulations.

All this is provided for in the Massachusetts General Law Chapter 41, Section 81D, which requires the Planning Board to make a master plan and extend or renew it as necessary, and outlines the chapters that must be included.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



Bring in business, more fields. Stand behind our schools.



The town needs more tax revenue from new businesses.

MASTER PLANNING IN LEICESTER

The Town of Leicester has been diligent in carrying out the requirements of the Massachusetts General Law regarding the preparation of master plans. The first master plan for Leicester was adopted in March 1971¹. It was a strongly technocratic exercise, with little community input. Driven by the suburbanization trend that followed World War II, the town had grown by 34% between 1950 and 1970². The focus of the master plan was on accommodating growth by providing for higher density housing around the town center and by providing for commercial development in the neighborhood centers of Rochdale, Cherry Valley and the center of town. The plan also included provision for industrial parks near major roads and rail services.

The next thirty years saw a continuation of growth, though at a much lower rate. By 2000, residents were increasingly concerned that the continuing growth of their town would erode their rural character and undermine the reasons that many of them had moved there in the first place.

This concern drove the creation of a new master plan. The 2000 Master Plan was clearly focused on the preservation of the character of Leicester and on slowing further growth. Among the most notable recommendations was the dramatic increase in minimum lot sizes which was implemented by the Planning Board in 2002.

A third master plan followed in 2009 with a similar emphasis on conservation and preservation³.

Combined with the impact of the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent Covid-19 pandemic, the measures implemented had the dramatically reduced the town's rate of development. This reduction in the rate of development also had unintended consequences: slower tax revenue growth, and limited housing availability for the elderly and young adults.

¹ Bruce Campbell and Associates Inc, [Master Plan Town of Leicester Massachusetts March, 1991](#)

² See the Housing and Population Chapter of this master Plan.

³ For further details see the Land Use chapter of this master plan.

The context for the development of this master plan is quite different from the context of previous master plans because development pressure has all but disappeared. While people's appreciation for the rural character of Leicester is undiminished, there is now a very strong concern about the financial viability of the town, its ability to deliver the standard of services that residents expect and to provide the types of housing that people need.

The financial constraints that resulted from the energetic and good faith implementation of earlier plans resulted in mounting pressures on under-resourced town departments. Despite these challenges, there is currently an extremely dedicated core of professional staff ready, willing and able to implement a new master plan.

The main focus of this plan is the need to grow the town's fiscal base at the same time as protecting its heritage and the rural character that is so important to its people. There is every reason to expect that just as the implementation of the 2000 Master Plan succeeded in slowing growth, the implementation of this plan will succeed in growing the town's fiscal base and creating the conditions for economic sustainability to satisfy meet the evolving needs and aspirations of the people who live and work there.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS MASTER PLAN

As noted above, this introduction is followed by a chapter on community engagement which summarizes of the process involving residents in shaping the plan.

Subsequent chapters correspond to topics listed as a requirement in the Massachusetts General Law. Each of these chapters presents background, an assessment of the current situation, and key findings regarding the most important aspects of the subject matter. In each chapter the goals for the town are set out, and for each goal the key action items are listed. It is intended that, as well as being read as part of the master plan as a whole, each chapter can be read as a stand-alone document, so those interested in specific issues can find what they need without reading the full document. . As a result, minor repetition across chapters is intentional.

Some goals and action items are relevant on multiple topics. In some cases, rather than repeating a goal or action item, cross-references are provided rather than duplicating content.

The final chapter of the master plan focuses on the implementation of the plan and includes a comprehensive matrix of all the action items. Each action item is assigned a priority level, urgency level, responsible party and potential funding sources, providing a clear roadmap for moving from vision to action.





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The purpose of a master plan is to guide a town towards a more desirable future for the people who live there. For this reason, the wisdom, experience and aspirations of the residents are the most important element in the production of a master plan that will achieve the purpose for which it is intended. A critical component in the production of the master plan, therefore, is the effort to engage with community members.

Four methods were used to engage residents and stakeholders in the planning process. These methods were selected, designed, and implemented based on best practices that have evolved within the professional planning community over decades, informed by both research and practical experience. They have proven highly effective, generating a wealth of insights that underpin the entirety of the master plan.

It is essential to acknowledge that, like town governance, participation in a planning exercise relies heavily on volunteer involvement. There is no requirement for individuals to engage with the process. Therefore, the opinions gathered through the community engagement process represent the perspectives of those who chose to express their opinions and exercise their right to influence the town's future.

THE MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

The first form of engagement with the Leicester community is the Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC). This committee was established by the Town of Leicester at the start of the master plan process. The town called for volunteers to serve on the MPSC and advertised the call on its web page, on Facebook, through notices in the town hall and by word of mouth. Six people volunteered to serve on the committee and all six were appointed.

This committee makes no claim to be representative of the people of Leicester, but it has the benefit of very many years of residence and of extremely broad and deeply established networks throughout the town. It also has the benefit of people with substantial experience in the running of organizations and the management of town business. Notably, two members of this committee were on the 2000 Master Plan Committee and three were on the 2009 Master Plan Committee, bringing continuity and institutional knowledge to the process.

Committee members range in age from thirty-six to eighty. The most recent arrival in Leicester has lived here for five years and the most established has lived here for seventy years. Between them they have two hundred and ten years of residence in the town. Four out of six

serve on other town boards or committees. Five out of six are actively involved in other faith-based, social, cultural, sporting or special interest organizations in the community (an average of more than three organizations each) and four serve on the boards or committees of these organizations. Two have children or grandchildren in the Leicester school system, with the youngest student in grade Pre-K and the oldest in grade 11.

The MPSC, the Leicester Town Planner and the CMRPC project team met every month during the preparation of the plan. It formulated the first draft of the Vision Statement that was ultimately adopted after the first community workshop. It contributed to and approved the content of the community survey and helped to publicize it. Members agreed on the formats, helped to publicize and participated in both community workshops. The key findings in each subject area, and subsequently, the full chapters were presented to the MPSC by the chapter authors. MPSC members read and provided feedback on key findings, goals and action items and complete chapters.

The committee steered every part of the preparation process and, as far as possible, ensured that the perspectives of the broader community underpinned the final plan.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“*Hope something is actually done with this feedback (a lot of which I know you all already know). The town is ripe for change. We can be better than this. Someone needs to take charge and make something happen for once.*”

“*Really enjoyed being able to share feedback here, thank you!*”

Leicester Master Plan

A ROAD MAP FOR THE TOWN'S FUTURE

What is a Master Plan?
A Master Plan is a long-range strategic plan for a community. It captures the vision of where the community wants to be at a point in the future and identifies strategies to advance that vision.

Leicester's last Master Plan, completed in 2009, provided valuable guidance at the time, but much has changed since then! A new Master Plan will help ensure that the town is equipped to navigate and capitalize on both the opportunities and challenges of the next 20 years.

LAND USE
TRANSPORTATION & CIRCULATION
POPULATION & HOUSING
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
CULTURAL & HISTORIC RESOURCES
OPEN SPACE, RECREATION & NATURAL RESOURCES
TOWN SERVICES & FACILITIES

Leicester Master Plan

A ROAD MAP FOR THE TOWN'S FUTURE

How will this help Leicester?
A Master Plan will provide guidance for public policy, helping local leaders make decisions that align with the community's needs. It can help Leicester protect environmental resources, set capital improvement priorities, provide guidance to landowners, manage growth and change, and much more!

How can I contribute?
We want to hear from you! A community survey is open, which asks residents for feedback on living and working in Leicester. Go on our website or scan this QR Code to take the survey.

How do I stay updated?
Follow *Leicester Master Plan* on Facebook or www.LeicesterMasterPlan.com for updates and more information.

A community workshop is scheduled for Thursday, October 3rd, giving the community a chance to participate in visioning and discussion activities.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

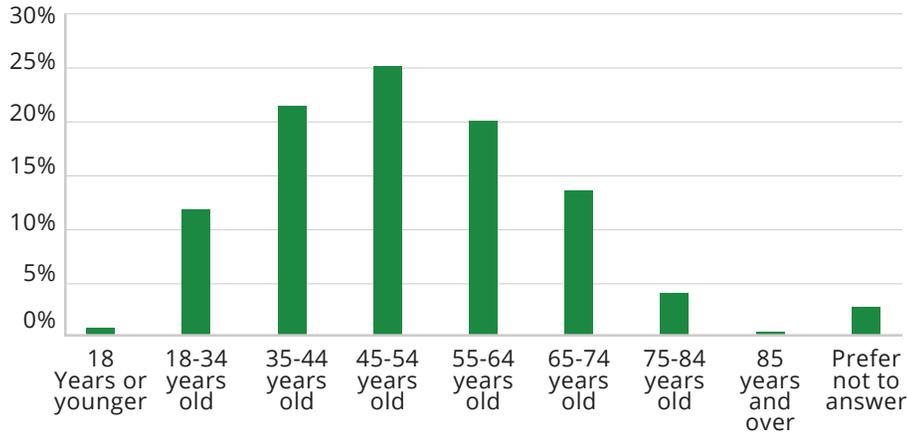
A community survey was devised by CMRPC with input from the MPSC and the Town Planner, and was open for input throughout July, August and September 2024. The survey was advertised on the town website and Facebook page and on the CMRPC website and through social media posts and advertisements. Flyers advertising the survey, as well as paper copies of the survey for people who preferred not to submit their responses electronically, were made available at the Town Hall, the Senior Center and the Leicester Library. Flyers were also distributed and displayed at many commercial establishments throughout the town.

Additionally, an information table was set up at the Leicester Harvest Fair on Saturday, September 21, 2024 to publicize the master plan as a whole, the community survey and the first community workshop.

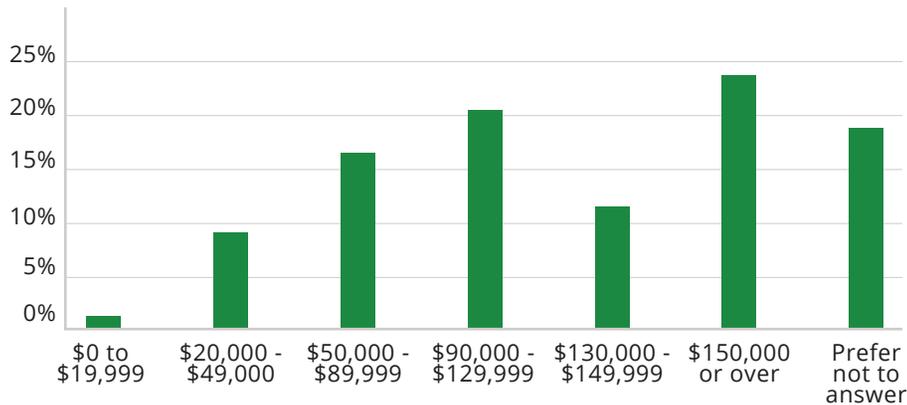
There were 402 responses to the survey from a broad cross section of community members.

The survey was designed to gather information for a Town Center Plan as well as the Master Plan. It consisted of thirty questions that sought to understand the public's attitude towards a variety of development related issues relevant to all sections of the master plan. Where quantitative analysis was practical, charts and graphs were produced and these are used throughout the document to inform the analysis. In many cases there was also an opportunity for respondents to leave comments, and these comments, as well as responses to several open-ended questions have been an important informant to the process. Many of them are reflected in the quotation boxes in this report.

What is your age?



What is your total household income?



402
SURVEY
RESPONSES



100+
WORKSHOP
ATTENDEES

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Two community workshops were held to gather further public input.

The first was held on October 3, 2024, at the Castle Cantina. It was promoted in the same way as the community survey, through Facebook advertisements, postings on social media, notices and flyers at municipal buildings and word of mouth.

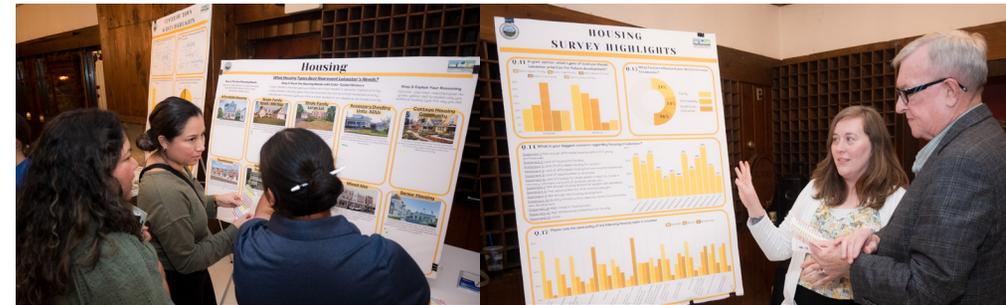
Its purpose was to share research findings and responses to the community survey. These were presented in poster format, arranged by chapter subject. MPSC members, as well as CMRPC staff, and the Leicester Town Planner were there to discuss findings and gather feedback. Community input was also recorded using several interactive methods including comment forms, “Leicester Bucks” to allocate hypothetical funding among municipal services, Map pins to indicate preferred areas for business or housing development, Colored dots on posters to indicate the favorability of alternatives, and “Post-it” notes to post comments in a SWAT analysis.

Approximately 65 community members attended. Feedback was very positive and the workshop provided a great deal of useful information.

A second workshop was held on April 9, 2025 at the Knights of Columbus Social Club in Leicester and promotion was conducted in the same manner as the first event. This workshop focused on presenting and testing the draft goals and action items for public feedback.

The format was slightly different in that there was a brief introductory presentation, as well as a poster display. All proposed action items were listed on posters and participants were invited to use colored dots to indicate their responses to the action items: green dots indicating support, yellow dots indicating neutrality or red dots indicating opposition. Members of the MPSC and CMRPC staff were available to discuss all chapter subject matter with attendees and recorded detailed notes.

While the attendance at this workshop was slightly lower than at the first, the feedback was very positive. The input from the workshop is noted in all sections dealing with action items.



Workshop #1

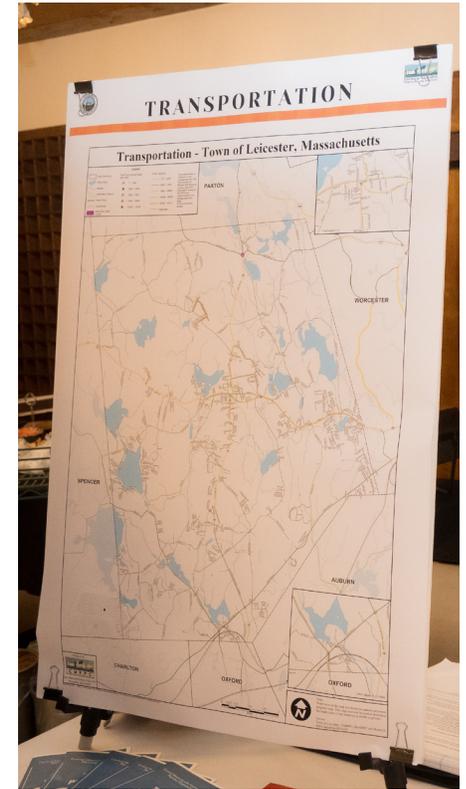
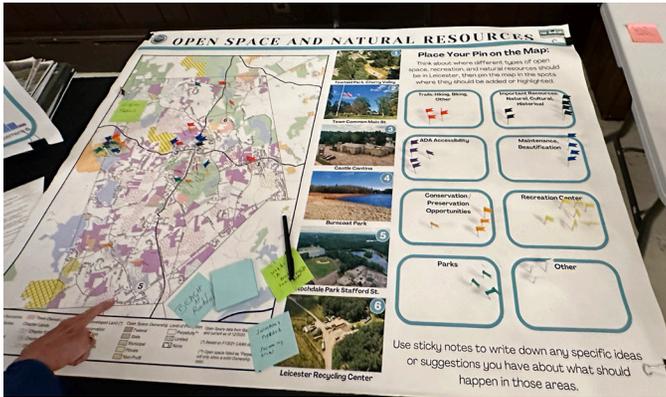


Workshop #2

KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

In all subject areas additional input was gathered through engagement with key stakeholders. These included all senior town staff, many members of town boards, members of water and sewer district boards, business representatives and others. These interviews were invaluable in obtaining information and in gaining a range of perspectives on the subject matter of each chapter.

While the CMRPC project team facilitated the planning process, contributed research, best practices, and insights into experience in other towns,, the plan’s direction, priorities, vision, goals and action items are owned by the people of Leicester.



VOICES FROM THE WORKSHOPS

“*The Town needs continuous open space for multi-use walkways. If we can find enough volunteers, by all means, we should establish a trails committee. This is the biggest reason I am participating in the master planning process.*

“*Everyone wants the Town to do more and more. The Town is stretched to the max with volunteers and town employees... who is going to complete these draft open space action items?*

POPULATION AND HOUSING

OVERVIEW

Leicester was first settled as a farming community, with the earliest house built in 1713 and significant settlement beginning around 1724. The town's proximity to the city of Worcester has been instrumental in its development, fueling investment in Leicester's industries in the early years and later attracting those seeking a peaceful rural setting to build countryside homes. By the mid-1800's, Leicester featured several villages with their own mills, playing a key role in the American Industrial Revolution. Although these industries eventually declined, the town's population continued to grow driven by rapid suburban residential development and increased lakeside summer cottage construction. In more recent decades, the implementation of policies that limit residential growth has resulted in slower population increases. However, Leicester remains a desirable community with deep historical roots and a strong small-town identity.

This chapter evaluates Leicester's housing needs and issues through an examination of population and household trends, housing stock conditions, and affordability patterns. Quantitative data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and other sources has been complemented by 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 the town, Leicester can position itself to implement policies and strategies to address local concerns effectively.



KEY FINDINGS AND PRIORITIES

Key Finding #1 A Slowdown in Population Growth

Leicester is home to 11,087 residents according to the 2020 Decennial Census. With a land area of 23.4 square miles, the town has a population density of 474 people per square mile. The town's most significant period of growth occurred between 1950 and 1970, when the population grew by 34%, or 3,111 residents, due to intensified suburbanization. However, growth has slowed in recent decades. Between 2010 and 2020, the town gained only 117 residents.

Population projections are optimistic with an anticipated 12,542 total residents by 2050. However, Leicester's historical trends suggest caution. The 2009 Master Plan overestimated that by 2020 there would be a population of 11,300, a benchmark that has yet to be met.

Key Finding: #2 Population Demographic Shifting to Greater Racial/Ethnic Diversity, Smaller Households, and Aging Population

U.S. Census data for Leicester shows a population that is growing older and more racially and ethnically diverse. Between 1990 and 2020, the town's percentage of non-White residents increased from only 2% to 18%. By 2020, about 7% of Leicester residents identify as Hispanic or Latino of any race. Another 7% of Leicester residents identify as two or more races, while 3% identify as Black or African American, 2% identify as Asian, and 1% identify as another race. A small fraction of Leicester's residents identified as American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander.

Figure 1: Historic Population Growth with Projections

Source: U.S. Decennial Census 1930-2020; CMRPC Population Projections

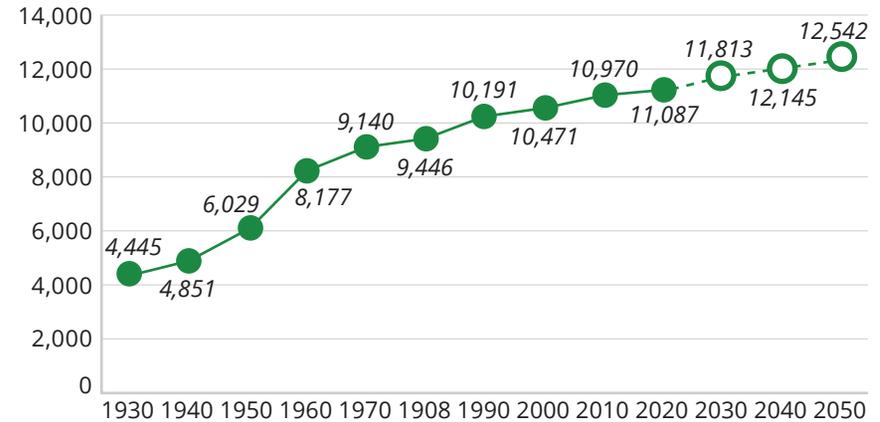


Figure 2: White vs. Non-White Population in Leicester

Source: U.S. Decennial Census 1990-2020

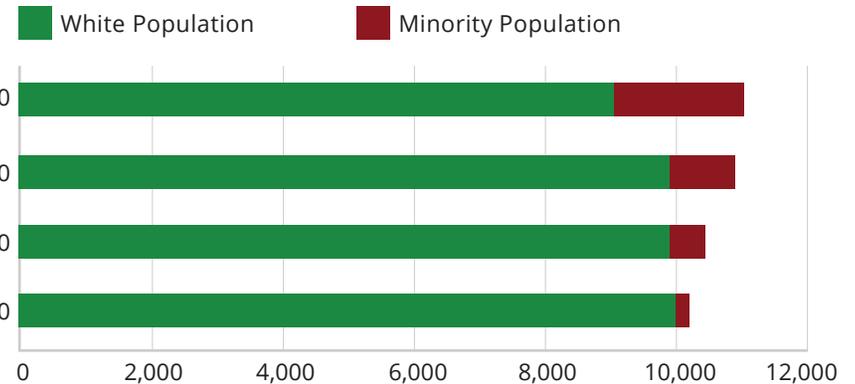
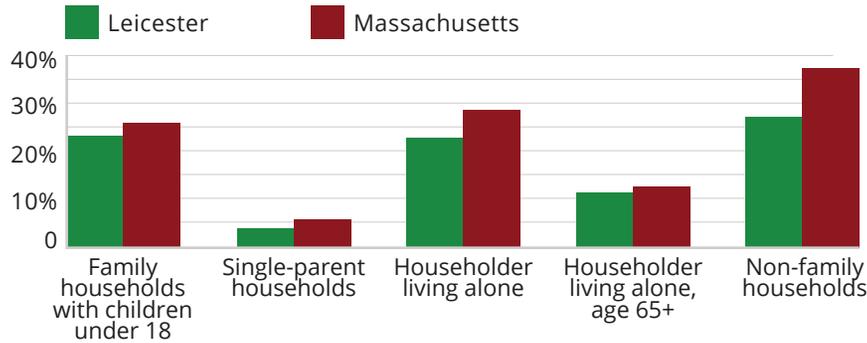


Figure 3: Household Types

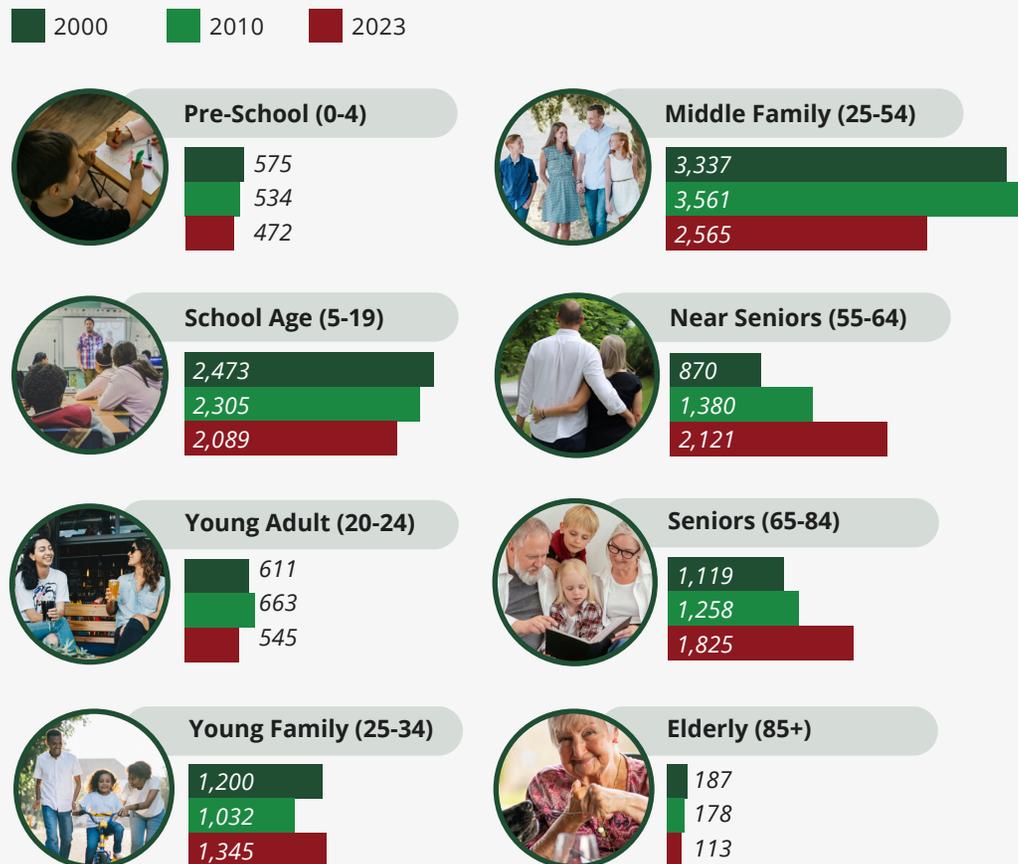
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2023



Household composition has also evolved. The town has 4,371 households, of which 2,986 are classified as families. Historically, Leicester has had a relatively high proportion of non-family households due to the Becker College student population, however since the closure of the school in 2021 these statistics are expected to change. The average household size in Leicester is 2.64 people while the average family size is 3.07 people. Both averages have experienced a decline since 2000. At the same time, the proportion of family households with children in Leicester has decreased notably, from 36% in 2000 to 23% in 2023. The household types in Leicester in 2023, compared with the same figures across Massachusetts are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 4: Leicester Lifecycle Groups

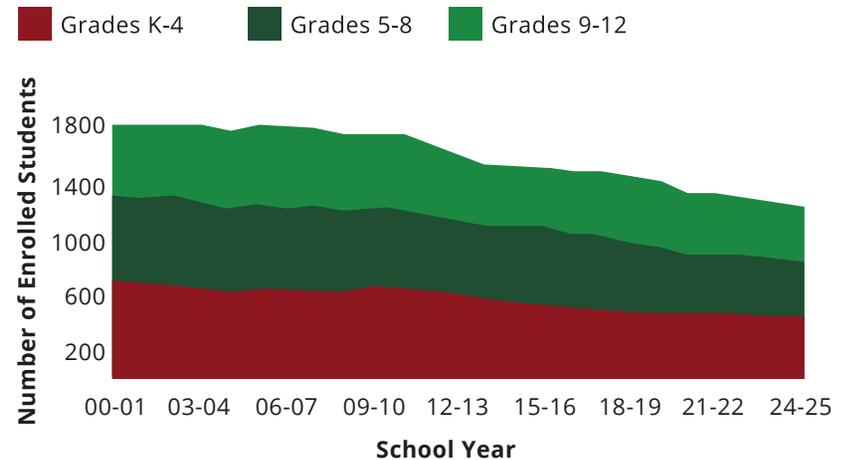
Source: U.S. Decennial Census 2000, 2010; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2023



The age composition of Leicester has gradually been transitioning towards an older population with fewer children. As shown in Figure 4, since 2000, the town's population under age 24 has decreased by 553 residents, meanwhile the population between ages 55 and 84 has gained 1,957 residents. The 35 to 54 age cohort, which typically constitutes the parents of children, has declined by 772 people over the same period. This change is also shown in Figure 5 which indicates a consistent loss of students enrolled in the public school system.

Figure 5: Leicester Public School Enrollment 2000-2024

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

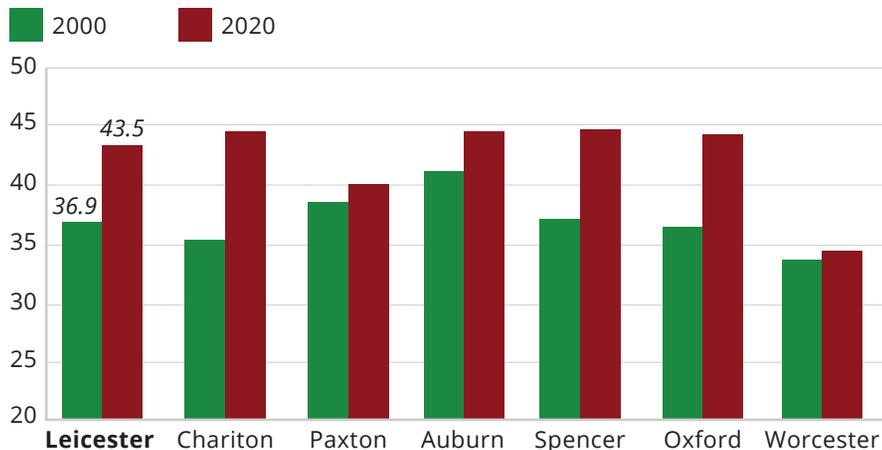


Leicester's age profile reflects national trends of lower fertility rates and people living longer. The town may also be losing young professionals and families to more metropolitan areas due to attributes such as housing availability, job opportunities, school quality, or cultural preferences. As Figure 6 shows, the city of Worcester's median age has remained largely consistent, while smaller surrounding towns are aging at a much faster pace.

Shifting population and household demographics indicate a need to reevaluate whether the existing housing stock is meeting the needs of the community. An increasing number of seniors implies a need for appropriate housing options coupled with supportive services. Options may 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, assisted living, or skilled nursing facilities. Seniors may also benefit from homes in walkable neighborhoods or retirement communities that offer supportive services. At the same time, the growing number of smaller households, many of which do not include children, raises the question about whether the current housing stock which is dominated by single-family homes, is meeting the needs of residents. Currently, Leicester has modest availability of housing types that support diverse populations.

Figure 6: Median Age

Source: U.S. Decennial Census 2000; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2023



Source: @massisbeautiful

Key Finding #3 Demand for More Diverse Housing Types to Support Changing Demographics

As shown in Figure 7, Leicester’s current housing stock is primarily composed of owner-occupied single-family detached homes). Only 7% of the town’s housing stock falls into the category of smaller-scale multi-family buildings with 2-4 units and another 7% of residences are categorized as larger-scale multi-family buildings with 5 or more units. In recent years, a handful of duplexes have been built but, a multi-family building with more than two units has not been constructed in Leicester since senior housing units were built between 2005 and 2006. Single-family home construction has dominated residential development trends in Leicester over recent decades, with 594 building permits issued since 2000. This traditional form of housing still enjoys some support among the Leicester community as can be seen from comments made in the community survey.

Meanwhile, with very few new apartments being added to Leicester’s housing stock, the rental housing market is becoming more competitive. Currently, 79% of homes are owner-occupied while 21% of homes are rentals – a small increase in owner-occupancy since 2000 (Figure 8). Rental housing typically offers affordable options for families, young professionals, seniors on fixed incomes, and those who are not ready for homeownership. Nearly three-quarters of Leicester’s rental housing is occupied by single-person or two-person households, which aligns with the town’s evolving demographics, trending to smaller household sizes. More diverse housing options are needed, as the limits of the existing housing stock can prove difficult to navigate for people with different needs or budgets to find suitable housing.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“
I like that Leicester has a lot of single family homes.
”

“
Signal families only.
”

Figure 7: Leicester Housing by Units in Structure

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2023

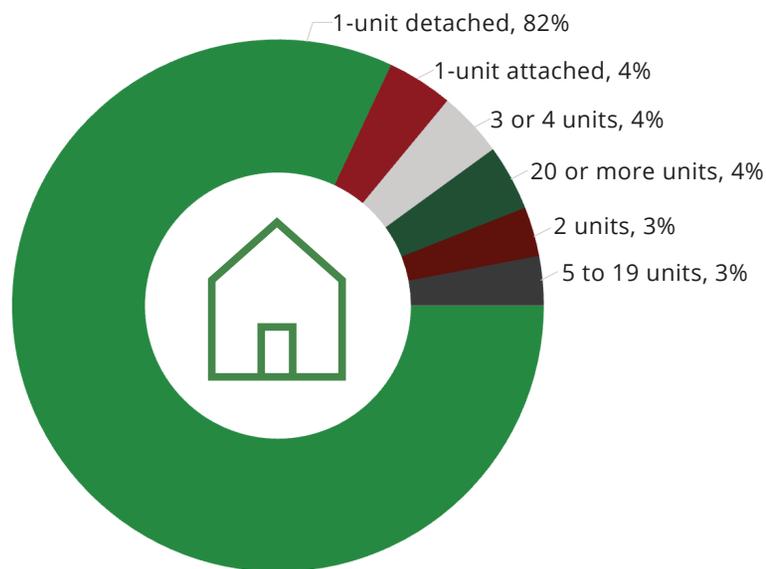
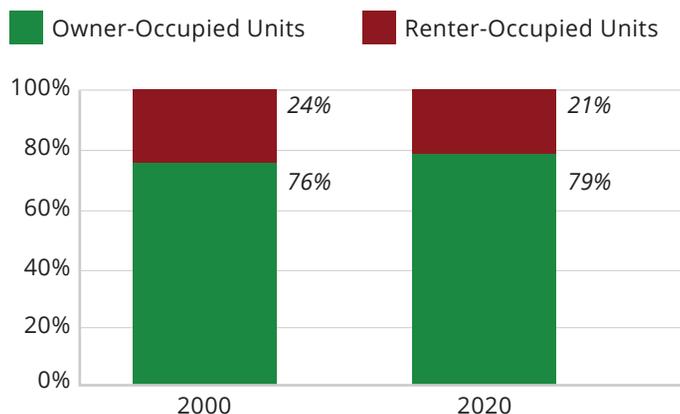


Figure 8: Leicester Housing Units by Tenure

Source: U.S. Decennial Census 2000, 2020



Key Finding #4 **Affordability Gap between Housing Costs and Household Income is Expanding**

Housing affordability is an increasing concern for Leicester residents. Long-term residents may be experiencing difficulties paying their taxes, insurance, utility bills, maintaining upkeep of their homes, or affording market-rate rentals. To maintain a robust economy and healthy community, housing that is affordable for working class and middle-class households should be readily available.

In the past few decades, only a fraction of newly constructed housing units has been designated for low-to moderate-income households. According to the 2020 Decennial Census there are 4,338 year-round housing units in Leicester. Only 176 units, or 4.1% of the housing stock, are deed-restricted as affordable and eligible for inclusion on the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), a statewide comprehensive list of units that comply with state affordability requirements under M.G.L. Chapter 40B.

A traditional guideline for homeownership considers that costs should not exceed 2.5 times the buyer’s annual household income. While Leicester has historically been an affordable place for families to purchase a home in Worcester County, Figure 9 shows that

housing sale prices are rising faster than household incomes. This trend makes homeownership much less attainable, particularly for first-time home buyers. In 2023, the median sale price for a single-family home in Leicester was \$400,000, over 4 times higher than the median household income of \$95,776.

The rental market has simultaneously seen a significant rise in costs since 2000 when the median rent was \$537 per month. The 2023 American Community Survey estimates that the median monthly rent in Leicester is now \$1,211 per month. It is important to note that rental values tend to be underestimated by Census and ACS data while actual market rents are typically even higher. As rent costs outpace income gains, renters may be unable to save funds and be forced to cut back on essentials such as groceries and health care. The resulting financial strain can also negatively impact mental health and overall well-being.

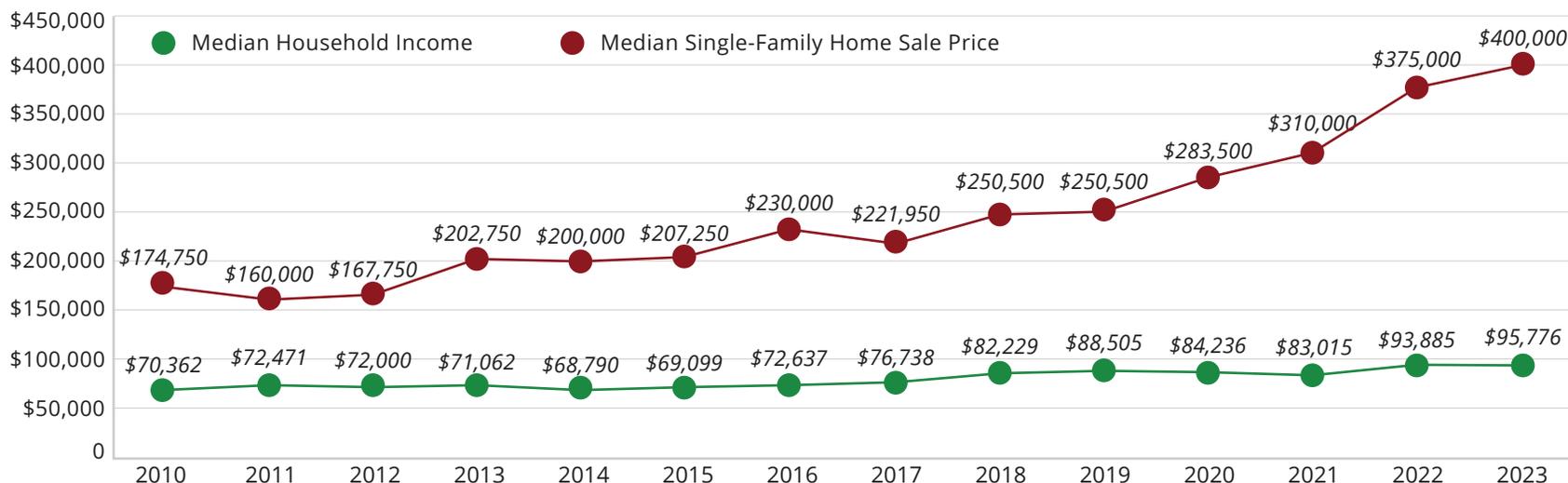
VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“*Can't find anything in my budget.*”

“*Need more affordable apartments.*”

Figure 9: Median Household Income vs. Median Single-Family Home Sale Price

Source: The Warren Group; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2023



Key Finding #5 Regulatory Barriers Constrain New Development

Past planning efforts in Leicester have deliberately limited growth in order to preserve the small-town community character and manage municipal service provision. Regulations, zoning bylaws, and policies set by the town have had a variety of unanticipated effects that should be addressed.

In 2002, the dimensional requirements of multiple zoning districts were amended to curb development and population growth. To construct a single-family home (that is not part of an Open Space Residential Development) in the Suburban Agricultural District, a minimum lot size of 80,000 square feet is required while the Residential 1 District maintains a 50,000 square foot minimum lot size. While larger lot sizes reduce the number of buildable lots, these requirements may also necessitate longer roads to access the land, simultaneously increasing the cost of housing as land availability for new housing is reduced. Larger lots also lead to greater suburban sprawl, impacting infrastructure costs and disruption of wildlife habitat.

With 28% of homes constructed prior to 1950, many of which are located in Cherry Valley and Rochdale, several units are likely in need of safety and energy efficiency upgrades. Residents have expressed support for greater investment in the existing housing stock, citing that regulatory and financial barriers complicate desired property improvements. Additionally, accessibility modifications and construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) were identified as a priorities to ensure long-time residents can “age in place”.

With narrow residential growth and a lackluster climate for business and investment, Leicester faces reduced methods of generating local tax revenue. Greater flexibility with regulations on housing types and locations, plus an emphasis on mixed-use commercial and residential development, should help strengthen the town’s local revenue and support a more sustainable Leicester.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“Need more options and more freedom within the bylaws.”

“Many of the building codes seem too old fashion, and too many limiting factors on updating homes.”

“Cost rebates or interest-free loans for home improvements that benefit the town housing stock, such as decreased water use, power generation, improved aquifer, geothermal, resilient framing and building envelope, etc.”

“Mixed use is the future. If you want more commercial businesses AND more residents, create more mixed-use buildings.”



Key Finding #6 Community Preferences Prioritize Senior Housing and Modest Density

The results of an extensive Master Plan public outreach process suggest a range of community perspectives on the housing needs of current and future residents. When asked about their biggest concerns regarding housing in Leicester, the most popular responses by residents were “High rental or housing costs” followed by “Lack of affordable housing for seniors.”

In the community survey and workshops residents reflected that more housing directed towards seniors is highly needed. At the same time, as Figure 10 indicates, concern for first time home buyers was nearly as common as concern for senior housing - trailing by just one percentage point. This was echoed in the comments submitted to the community survey. In the second community workshop, in particular, concern was expressed by some members of the community that there was too much focus on the housing needs of seniors relative to the housing needs of younger people.

Figure 10: Leicester Community Housing Concerns

Source: Community Survey 2024



- 21% - Not enough new housing development
- 19% - Lack of housing for single adults in need
- 16% - Not enough housing options for people with disabilities
- 15% - Lack of opportunities to downsize
- 15% - Other

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



There is dire need for senior housing.



Need for older adult living communities.



There are too many elderly and low income housing options currently.



More housing to welcome young families into the community at affordable prices.



We should be prioritizing families that will contribute to the vibrance of the community.



I don't think Leicester needs to put in any large scale housing developments.

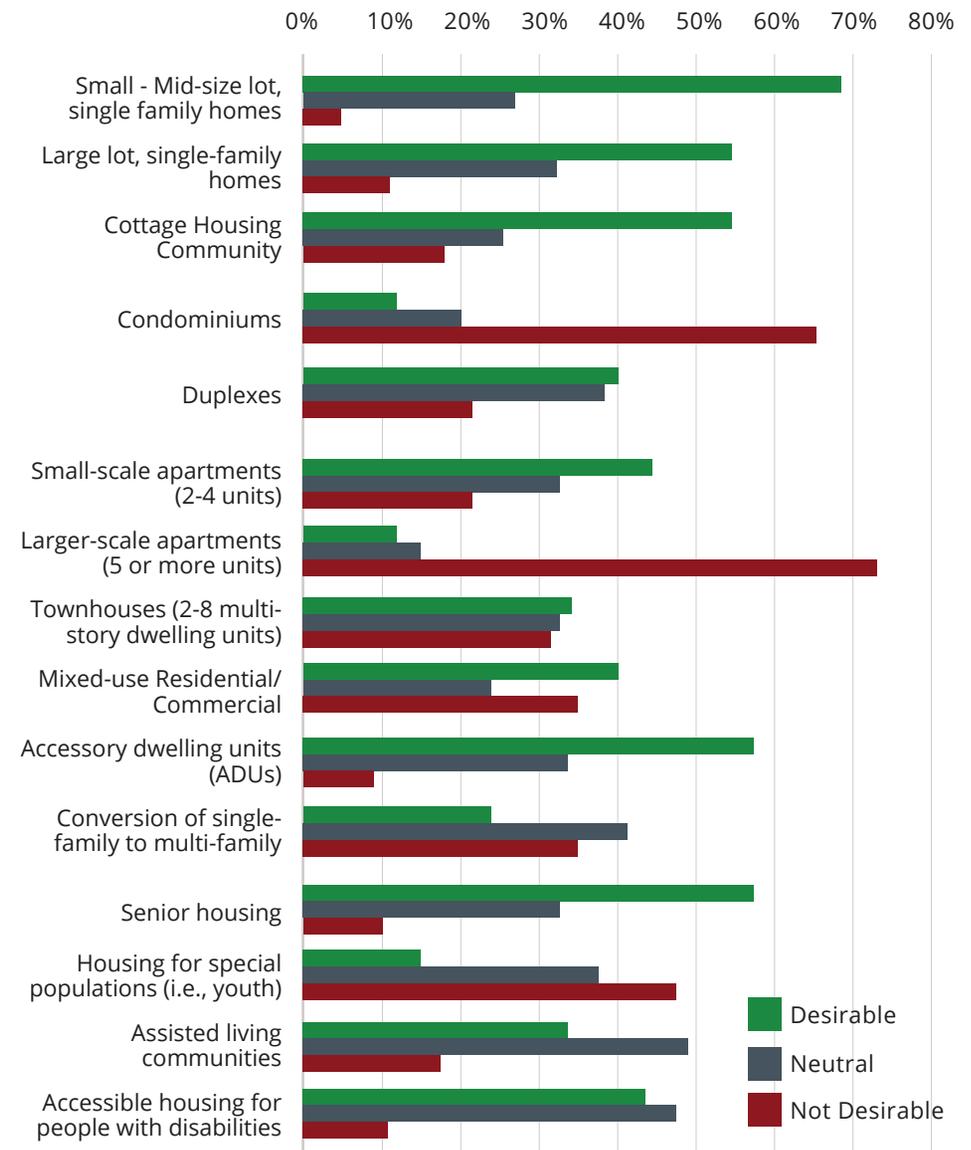


No high rises or large complexes larger than 4 per lot.

Considering housing types that could be constructed in the future, most of those who attended the public workshop or completed the community survey were not in favor of large-scale apartment buildings. There was greater consensus among residents regarding the prospect of small-scale development types such as accessory dwelling units, cottage house communities, mixed-use, and single-family homes on smaller lots.

Figure 11: Leicester Community Housing Style Desirability

Source: Community Survey 2024



FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Over the past 25 years, Leicester had a strategy of slow, manageable growth through a variety of policies and regulations that limit the types and locations of construction. Looking ahead, Leicester must continue to prioritize thoughtful development that recognizes community preferences, local needs, and environmental preservation. Given the shifting population demographics and economic challenges, the town needs to reevaluate its housing needs as well as the development opportunities and regulatory tools available to support the town.

To align with Smart Growth Principles, new development is encouraged in areas with existing infrastructure and capacity for new homes while protecting natural resources. Residential development should be directed to existing villages including Cherry Valley, Rochdale, and the Town Center. By supplementing these neighborhoods with additional housing, new residents will be supported with amenities such as transportation networks, recreational areas, businesses, municipal services, and other elements that enhance community life. Additionally, adaptive reuse of existing buildings into housing is an exciting opportunity to retain the historical character of the town while adding housing. Zoning changes may need to be pursued to allow more diverse housing types in these areas that are compatible with the existing village character.

Balancing housing growth with economic development will also be critical. Opportunities to add both homes and businesses or services, such as horizontal mixed-use development, may be appropriate in certain areas of town. The Route 9 Corridor west of the center of town has been identified as an area that could support mixed-use development or multi-family residences. Route 56 South Corridor (Huntoon Memorial Highway), a popular route of travel with access to Route 20, has also been discussed as a potential fit for new office or light industrial uses as well as housing with moderate density. Residents have expressed general support for mixed-use development combining commercial and residential uses. General areas that should be targeted for housing with increased density, mixed-use development, or adaptive reuse opportunities include Route 9 East and Stafford Street, extending to Rochdale.

The town should also continue to explore opportunities for new housing with supportive services for elderly residents and those with disabilities. The Senior Village Development bylaw encourages developments that offer various housing styles at higher densities for those ages 55 or older. While this bylaw has been utilized sporadically in past years, there is an opportunity to push for more senior housing throughout town, particularly with affordability restrictions to accommodate low-income seniors. Furthermore, community feedback has highlighted the need for improvements to existing senior housing, including units managed by the Leicester Housing Authority.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



Please keep it like a small town. There isn't many town in our state that have that feeling to it and Leicester is still one that feels like you live in a small town where you feel safe and everyone knows everyone.



Keep it quaint looking like we actually care about our town.



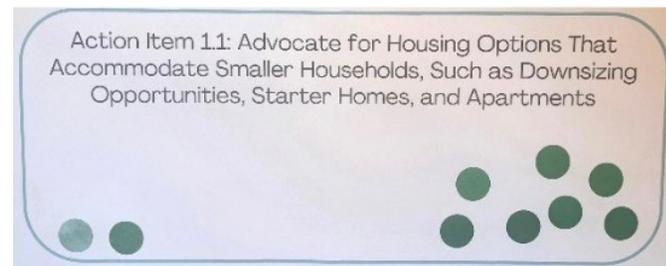
GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

The following goals and action items were developed in response to the key findings set out above and the input received from the community survey and the first community workshop. They also take into account the resource constraints facing the town. They were informed by experience elsewhere and best practice in the field of comprehensive planning.

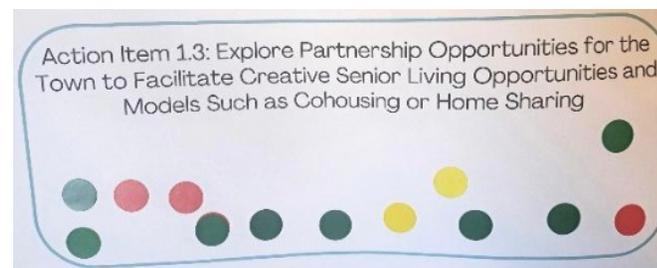
The goals are broad statements of policy. While several action items have been proposed for each goal, the goals themselves should not be seen as being limited to specific action items.

The goals and action items were discussed with the MPSC and then put to the attendees of the second community workshop. At that workshop, each goal was displayed on a poster, together with its associated action items. A space was provided for workshop participants to record their responses to each action item. The responses of the workshop attendees have been captured below for context. To save space, the responses have been converted into pie charts. The size of the pie chart indicates the relative amount of interest shown in the action item according to the total number of dots placed. The larger the chart, the more interest participants expressed. The colors of the portions of the pie charts reflect the colors of the dots. Green indicates support for the action, Red indicates opposition and yellow indicates a neutral response.

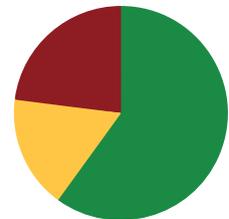
For Example:



is represented as



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GOAL 1

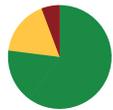
Maintain and Encourage a Diverse Housing Stock that Provides for a Range of Ages, Abilities, and Economic Means

The key findings indicated that there is a great need for housing for the elderly and for young families. Many residents, including those in these two categories, currently struggle with the affordability of housing. Expanding the diversity of the town's housing stock to better reflect the needs of the population is therefore a top priority.



Action Item 1.1: Options for Smaller Households.

Adopt a policy of support for housing options that accommodate smaller households, such as downsizing opportunities, starter homes, and apartments. In practice this would mean ensuring that the town adopts changes to bylaws and regulations, approves applications and supports initiatives that have the objective of, or are likely to lead to increasing numbers of small and affordable housing units.



Action Item 1.2: Establish working relationships with Developers of Senior Housing

Establish working relationships with private developers that have experience in creating senior living facilities. The development of senior housing is a specialized field that requires specific technical and financial know-how. By collaborating with experienced developers, Leicester can more effectively identify development opportunities and ensure that senior housing projects are feasible, well-designed and aligned with community goals.



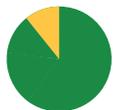
Action Item 1.3: Creative Senior Living Opportunities

Adopt policies that support innovative senior living arrangements such as cohousing or home sharing. Cohousing involves multiple households, living in a shared or clustered arrangement, often with shared amenities and mutual support networks. Home sharing is an arrangement in which people share a home. It typically requires substantial organizational support to ensure the compatibility and security of participants.



Action Item 1.4: Encourage Universal Design Principles

Encourage Universal Design principles in new housing development. Universal design ensures that housing is accessible and usable by individuals of all ages and physical abilities, minimizing the need for future renovations. This can be encouraged through discussions with developers, pre-permitted designs, or other approaches.



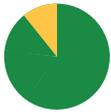
Action Item 1.5: Promote Accessory Dwelling Units

Promote Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as a housing opportunity throughout the community and particularly for aging residents or their caretakers. The state of Massachusetts has recently mandated that all towns must permit accessory dwelling units as a "by right" use wherever single residential units are permitted. Leicester has embraced this requirement and amended its bylaws accordingly. ADUs serve the need for small affordable housing units at both ends of the age spectrum, as starter homes for young people and as down-sizing opportunities for the elderly. This action item involves continuing to inform residents of their rights in this respect and facilitating the process of permitting ADUs.

GOAL 2

Balance Housing Growth with Municipal Services, Infrastructure, Environmental Resources, and Energy Supply

While Leicester acknowledges the need for residential and commercial development to increase the tax base and provide the town with the resources they need, there remains concern about the preservation of the rural character of the town. The most effective way to balance these goals is to make sure that development relates to infrastructure, in terms of location as well as capacity, to environmental resources and to energy supply.



Action Item 2.1: Pursue Infrastructure Funding Opportunities

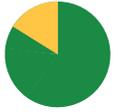
Pursue funding opportunities for infrastructure, transportation networks, and site improvements that will complement the impacts of new housing developments and enhance existing neighborhoods. When a private development offers potential benefits to the community, including financial benefits, it may be worthwhile for the town to invest in public infrastructure to facilitate the development. This can also ensure that the project integrates into and enhances the area. Apart from using a portion of the town's future revenues from the development for this purpose, in some cases there are grants that may be obtained.



Action Item 2.2: Consider Additional Funding Mechanisms

Consider funding mechanisms to effectively address housing needs, such as the Community Preservation Act or a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The sticker box from the second community workshop suggests that there is not significant opposition to the suggestion that the town should consider the Community Preservation Act as a mechanism to fund much-needed housing interventions. "The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is a smart growth tool that helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities. CPA also helps strengthen the state and local economies by expanding housing opportunities and construction jobs for the Commonwealth's workforce, and by supporting the tourism industry through preservation of the Commonwealth's historic and natural resources."¹ Because the surcharge on the local government taxes (no more than 3%) is often considered a tax, it is not universally supported in Central Massachusetts. It is, however, a highly effective way to fund housing provision. An affordable Housing Trust would also be effective. Community support for these measures is important in the light of its support for the action items under Goal 4 that would benefit from this type of funding.

¹ Community Preservation Coalition. [CPA An Overview](#)



Action Item 2.3: Utilize Local Initiative Program

Utilize the Local Initiative Program or “Friendly 40B” process to strategically produce mixed-income development. Under Chapter 40B of MGL, if a town’s subsidized housing inventory (SHI) is less than 10% of its year-round occupied housing units, a developer may apply to override some of the provisions of the zoning bylaws provided that it is providing at least 20% to 25% deed-restricted affordable units. If the town agrees with a developer on the parameters of development on a particular site that will be beneficial to the town as a whole and will increase the availability of affordable housing this can be an effective mechanism to encourage development. It is notable that this action item received substantially fewer green dots than some of the others. This may be because it was less widely understood, or it may be because of a concern about the potential for the town to lose control of this process. This unenthusiastic response should be noted, and the implementation of this action item should be managed with great care.



Action Item 2.4: Match Development to Infrastructure

Through policy and Zoning Bylaw amendments, direct new housing to areas of town with existing infrastructure and capacity for additional development. While the capacity now exists to provide water and sewer for new developments, residents want to ensure that the open space in Leicester is preserved. A practical way to achieve this is to limit development to areas to which service infrastructure can practically and economically be extended and not to permit development into remote areas out of reach of the infrastructure. Appropriate areas are the old village centers (the Town Center, Cherry valley and Rochdale) and the movement corridors (Route 9, Route 56 South and Stafford Street).



GOAL 3

Remove Barriers to the Production of a Variety of Housing Types in Appropriate Locations, including Mixed-Use Development, Adaptive Reuse, and Multi-Family Housing

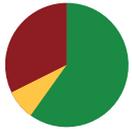


To encourage increased development without encroaching on open space, one of the most effective approaches is to allow and encourage different forms of housing.



Action Item 3.1: Permit Multi-Family Housing by Right in More Areas

Permit multi-family housing by right or with Site Plan Review in one or more areas of town. Leicester is in the process of complying with MGL Chapter 40A Section 3A (The MBTA Communities Act) which requires it to identify areas in which multi-family housing is permitted by right. There is potential, however, to expand this principle during the comprehensive review of the town's zoning bylaws recommended in the Land use chapter.



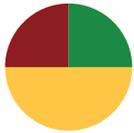
Action Item 3.2: Permit Pocket Neighborhoods

Pursue zoning amendments that permit pocket neighborhoods of smaller-scale housing such as cottage housing or tiny home communities. While there was considerable opposition to the idea of large-scale apartment blocks, there was strong support in the first workshop and the community survey for the idea of cottage housing. This support appeared to be somewhat countered in the second workshop, with four red dots on this action item. Notes from the workshop indicate that this was related to concerns that Tiny Homes, if not done right, could become a trailer park. The view was expressed that it would be better to concentrate multi-unit housing in the center of town. This concern should be taken into account in the implementation of this action item, with carefully formulated regulations and strict adherence to them. However, these views also need to be contrasted with the following comment from the community survey: "Lack of developments and neighborhoods. Drive in neighboring towns and you pass through cute neighborhoods that you can envision living in." All of this information should be taken in the context that more than 50% of survey respondents saw cottage housing as positive and at the first workshop there were no red dots placed on the cottage housing block. There were seven green dots and eight yellow (neutral) dots.



Action Item 3.3: Explore Policies to Increase Affordable Housing

Explore policies that incentivize developers to deed-restrict a portion of new units as affordable to low-income households. There are various approaches that could be adopted for this action item. Among them are an inclusionary zoning bylaw which could be considered when the zoning bylaws are reviewed. It is critically important that any approach be calibrated to ensure that it does not have the unintended consequence of preventing or substantially reducing new housing development. It is significant that the response to this action item at the community workshop was neutral with an equal number of red and green dots, and more yellow dots than either green or red. It is important to remember that “low-income households” in this context could be up to 80% of the area median income (though it might also be lower). Most of the people who teach in the schools and work for the town fall into this category. Also, until at least 10% of the town’s year-round occupied units are deed restricted for households in this category, the town remains vulnerable to “hostile 40B” developments that could deliver outcomes would not be acceptable to either the town government or the people.



Action Item 3.4: Reduce Dimensional Requirements

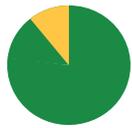
Reduce dimensional requirements in the zoning bylaws to facilitate better use of the town’s land. This would involve reducing the minimum lot size in several zoning districts, particularly the Suburban-Agricultural (SA) Zoning District. These minimum lot sizes were dramatically increased in 2002, with the specific intention of reducing the pace of development. The resulting development pattern led to increased suburban sprawl. With the need to calibrate that impact it is logical to review lot sizes at this stage. It is noteworthy that the response to this action item was strongly positive with two thirds of people supporting it and only one person opposed to it.



GOAL 4

Preserve and Invest in the Existing Housing Stock to Maintain Desirable and Healthy Neighborhoods

The people of Leicester generally like the housing in the town and want to see it maintained. They also believe that it is important to assist people who are already there as well as encourage new development.



Action Item 4.1: Improve Public Housing

Invest in improvements to Leicester’s public housing units managed by the Leicester Housing Authority. Despite a cautious approach to action items requiring funding, it is notable that this self-explanatory action item received overwhelming support at the community workshop. This aligns with the following comments made in the community survey: “Leicester housing for the elderly is so outdated compared to many other places” and “housing for the elderly needs to be fixed or most of the elderly will leave.”



Action Item 4.2: Leverage Funding to Help with Home Repairs

Leverage funding and grant opportunities to help residents finance needed home repairs and retrofits to support aging in place. This extremely popular action item is already in progress through Community Based Development Grants. The town should continue with that program and look for any additional similar opportunities.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

OVERVIEW

The Economic Development Chapter focuses on how Leicester can grow its commercial tax base and encourage local business activity. Zoning regulations, an integral component of economic development strategy, are covered in the Land Use Chapter.

Leicester’s economic story dates back to the 18th century when the town began as a farming community.¹ Farms were soon complemented by early forms of industry such as gristmills, sawmills, and blacksmith forges. In the early 19th century, carding and wire mills emerged and would come to dominate the local economy for the next hundred years. Even after the closure and/or decline in prominence of these mills, the villages that once thrived around them continued to be hubs of economic activity today.

Currently, Leicester can best be described as a “bedroom community.” What this means is that most residents commute outside of the community for work.² This results in a smaller “daytime population” relative to Leicester’s total population. The most numerous types of business in Leicester are construction, retail trade, and healthcare and social assistance.³ The industries with the largest number of employees are retail trade, construction, and educational services. Like many bedroom communities, Leicester’s commercial, industrial, and personal property tax base makes up only a small share of the revenue that the town collects from property taxes.

¹ Pitzen, Dale, and Mary Kennedy. *Where the Wild Strawberries Grow*. Mary Kennedy, 1997.

² U.S. Census Bureau. “2022 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics.”

³ Data Axle via Esri Business Analyst. Vintage 2024 Data.

Leicester's location next to Worcester and along Route 9 presents the opportunity for responsibly managed growth along the town's key corridors and village centers. But at present, growth appears to be adversely impacted by land use regulations and permitting processes, existing development patterns, underutilized or vacant properties, and lack of promotion / support for the local business community. To address these challenges, Leicester should invest in the vibrancy of its physical spaces, streamline permitting processes, and take additional steps to sustain and attract business activity.

KEY FINDINGS

Key Finding #1 Leicester's Commercial Centers Offer Diverse Opportunities

Leicester has several distinct commercial areas, each with its own unique characteristics.



Cherry Valley



Center of Town



Rt. 9 West

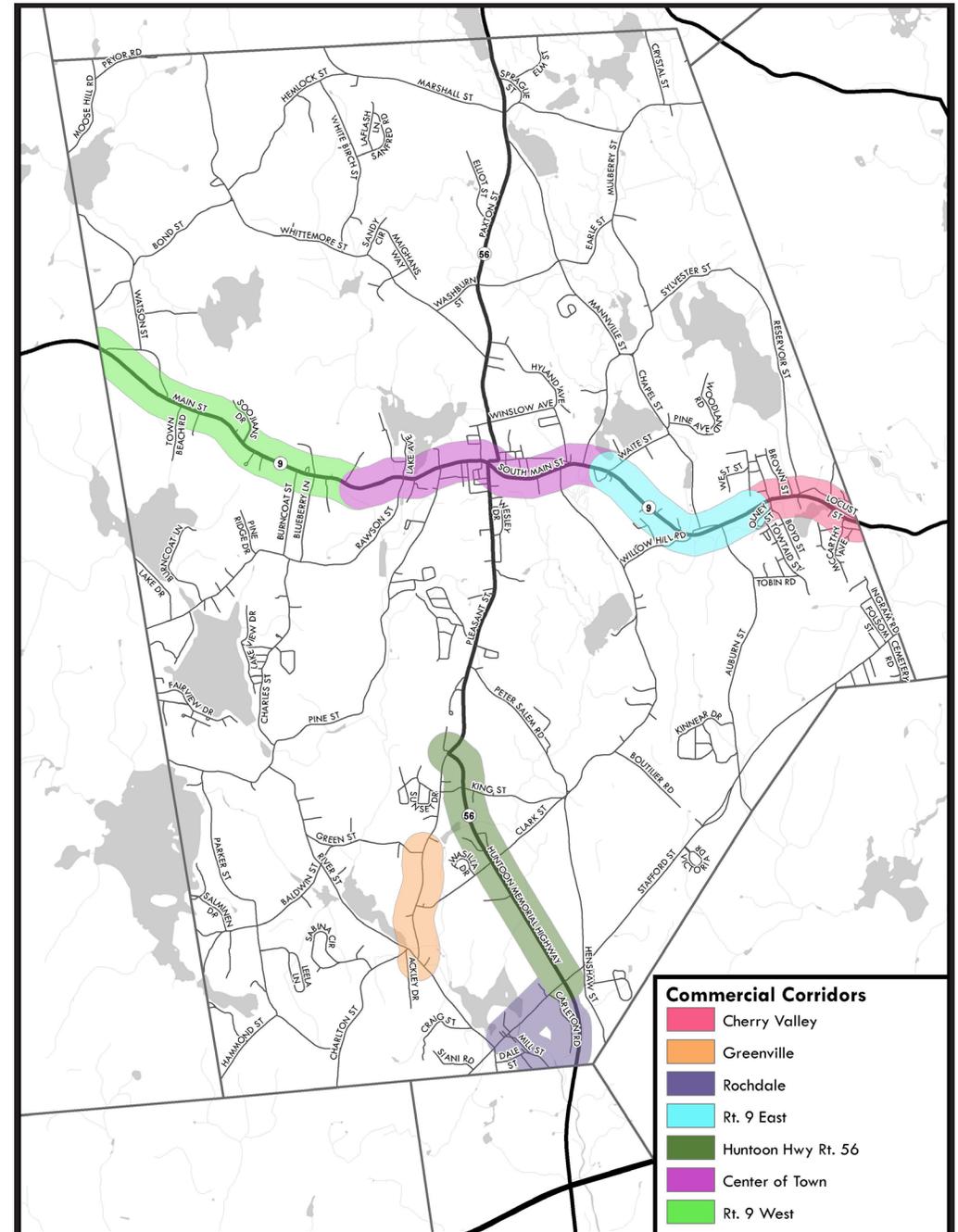


Huntoon Hwy Rt. 56



Rochdale

Map 1: Leicester's Commercial Corridors



Cherry Valley

Cherry Valley is a historic mill village located on the east end of Route 9 / Main Street in Leicester. The village is currently a center of small business activity interspersed with residential properties, mainly those of the multi-family or small-scale apartment variety. The east end of Route 9 is zoned "Business," which allows for most retail, service, and office uses by right or special permit. Two- and multi-family residential and mixed-use development uses are also allowed by special permit. Dimensional requirements, small property parcels, parking standards, and lack of sewer in the district limit the scale of possible development.

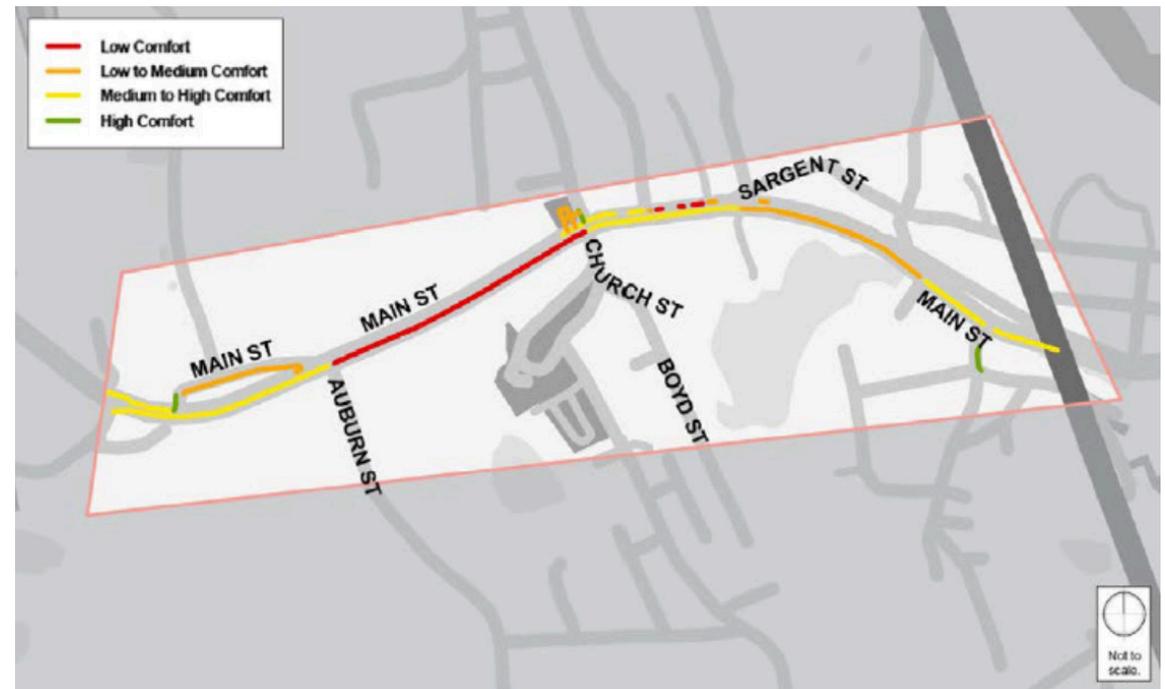
Survey respondents saw revitalization and redevelopment of Route 9 as a key economic development priority. "Route 9" was the number one answer when respondents were asked to identify specific areas

or vacant properties that could benefit from redevelopment or revitalization.⁴

Cherry Valley features an automobile-centric development pattern, with low scoring pedestrian and bicycle comfort levels according to the town's 2018 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan. Towtaid Park, a small neighborhood park, is located only a short distance from Main Street, but the lack of a sidewalk connection and signage obscures this fact. The topography along parts of Main Street poses challenges to the creation of a cohesive street front and walkable commercial area. Building facades and landscaping along the corridor also lack aesthetic appeal. The area could benefit from increased investment in these elements along with zoning amendments to promote a more walkable, livable, and inviting mixed-use area.

Map 2: Pedestrian Level of Comfort of Existing Sidewalks in Cherry Valley

Source: Howard Stein Hudson, 2018 Leicester Complete Streets Prioritization Plan



⁴ Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 4.

The Center of Town

The Center of Town is another historic village located at the intersection of Routes 9 and 56. The area is home to many small businesses and is near Leicester's Town Common, Town Hall, and recently, the Leicester High School (formally home to Becker College). The area is zoned "Business" (see Cherry Valley for details) and "Central Business," the latter allowing for retail, service, and office uses but only by special permit. Two- and multi-family residential and mixed-use development uses are also allowed by special permit. The intention of the Central Business District is to preserve the area's pedestrian-oriented characteristics, mixed uses, and existing structures of historical significance. But dimensional requirements and parking standards place some of these priorities at odds.

The Center of Town has been the subject of many previous plans and studies. The 2009 Master Plan included as a goal, encouraging "mixed-use development with a variety of small-scale retail businesses in a more pedestrian friendly town center." Since then, the 2014 Town Center Study, the 2021 Local Rapid Recovery Plan, and the 2024 Downtown Parking Plan have recommended zoning changes, placemaking strategies, and improvements to wayfinding and pedestrian and parking infrastructure.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



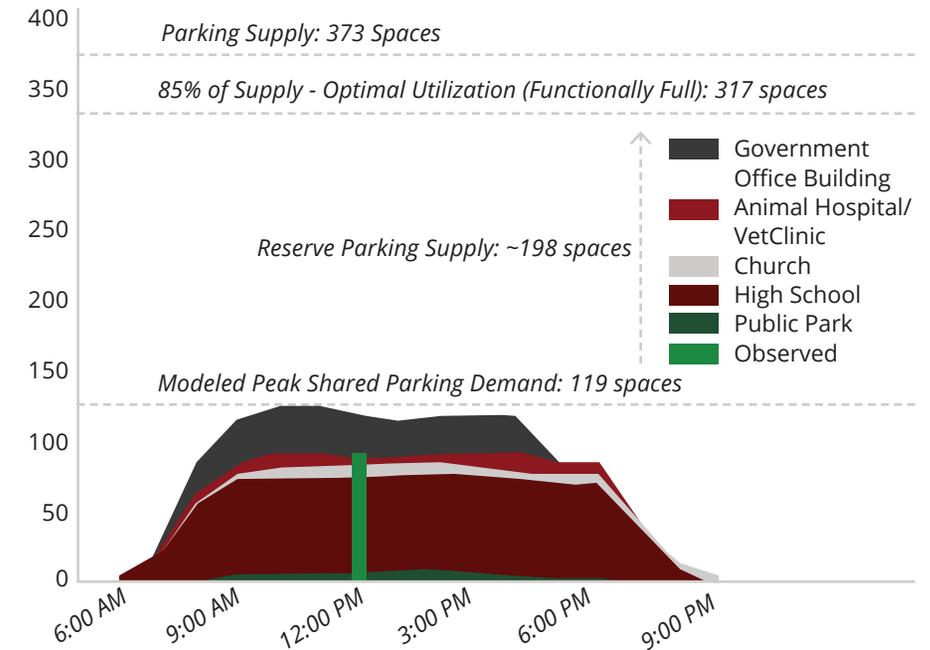
You wouldn't know it's the center of town. Nothing draws people in.



Walkable main Street. More store fronts, restaurants. We need fewer storage facilities and more reasons for people to come to Leicester.

Figure 12: The 2024 Downtown Parking Plan by Stantec identified a large excess of off-street parking supply around Leicester's Town Center but inadequate wayfinding to direct drivers to available spaces.

Source: Stantec



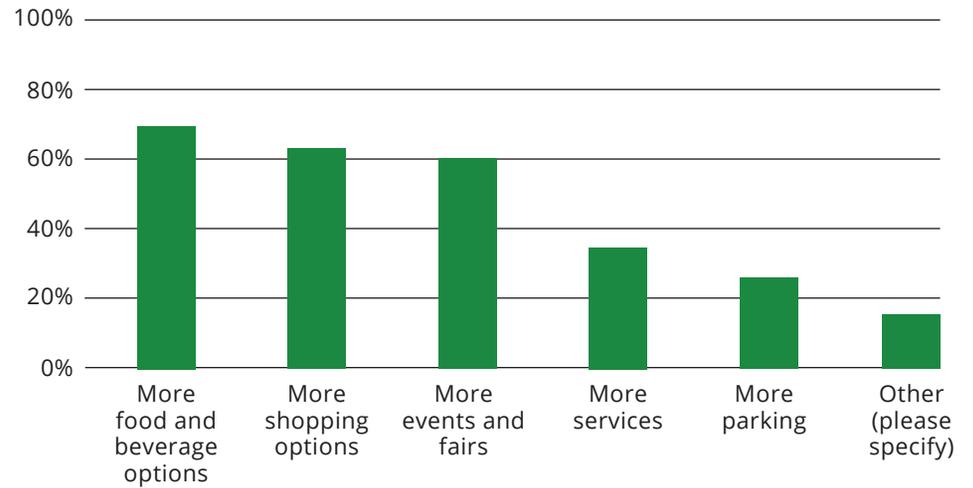
Survey Respondents indicated general disappointment with the current condition of the Center of Town. The most common one-word answer to describe the area was “boring.”⁵ But residents did indicate interest in seeing revitalization. The number one answer was “vibrant” when respondents were asked to describe the Center of Town as it should be.⁶ More food and beverage options; more shopping options; and more events and fairs were identified by respondents as priorities to get more people to visit the Center of Town.⁸ The highest priorities for physical improvements were infrastructure, green infrastructure (street trees, parks, etc.), landscaping / beautification, and façade improvements.⁸ Participants in the 2024 workshop noted that the main reason they visit the Common area and Town Center was for town events. Allocating more resources toward organizing community events could further activate the area.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“*Leicester is uniquely situated to attract lots of business but we are not reaching our full potential. We should be trying to attract more higher end restaurants and retailers.*”

Figure 13: What activities and amenities would increase your visits to the Center of Town area? (Select all that apply)

Source: Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 8



⁵ Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 5.

⁶ Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 6.

⁷ Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 8.

⁸ Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 9.

West End of Route 9

Most of the area from the Center of Town to the Leicester-Spencer town line is zoned as “Highway Business-Industrial District 1(HB-1).” This district allows for a mix of “commercial, office, research, and light industrial activities” at a large scale; the minimum lot size for the district is nearly one and a half acres. New mixed-use zoning provisions were passed for the district in 2024.

A Walmart Supercenter, the largest private employer in Leicester, anchors the West End of Route 9.⁹ In recent years, the area has seen considerable development interest, and several properties in and around Walmart are under construction. However, significant parcels of vacant/underutilized land remain in this part of town. There is also abundant space for what is known as “infill development”¹⁰ around the Walmart parking lot.

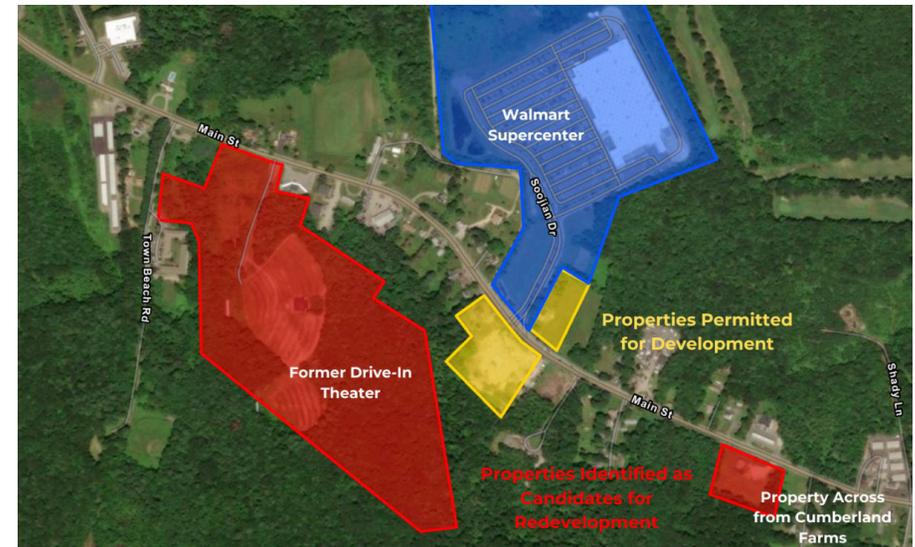
Survey responses indicated that the West End of Route 9 is a top economic development priority for community members. When respondents were prompted to name areas or properties that could benefit from redevelopment or revitalization, some of the top answers referenced properties in this part of town, such as the former drive-in movie theater, the parcel across from Cumberland Farms, and generally, land around Walmart.¹¹

The West End of Route 9 was also ranked second for where additional commercial development could be appropriately located in town.¹²

There is an opportunity to complement commercial development along Route 9 with new residential units. “Route 9 West to the Spencer border” was the second most popular survey answer for where new multi-family housing could be located in Leicester.¹³ The town’s recent amendment of its Zoning Bylaw to allow mixed-use development in the HB-1 district is an important step to facilitate housing development in this part of town. Pairing residential and commercial uses has many potential benefits including multiple revenue streams for property owners, increased foot traffic for businesses, and convenience/quality of life for residential tenants.

Map 3: Properties located near Walmart on Route 9 in Leicester

Source: Town of Leicester MuniMapper (MassGIS Data Hub & CAI Technologies)



⁹ Data Axle via Esri Business Analyst. Vintage Feb. 2024 Data.

¹⁰ Infill development refers to the construction of buildings or other facilities on previously unused or underutilized land located within an otherwise developed-area.

¹¹ Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 4.

¹² Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 13.

¹³ Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 12.

Huntoon Memorial Highway

Huntoon Memorial Highway is located along Route 56 between Pleasant Street and the Leicester-Oxford town line. Most of the land abutting the highway is either zoned “Highway Business-Industrial District 2 (HB-2)” or “Residential Industrial Business (RIB)”. The HB-2 district allows the same uses as the HB-1 district (see West End of Route 9 above), albeit on slightly smaller lot sizes. The RIB district allows the same commercial and industrial uses as the HB-1 district, but only by special permit, as well as denser residential development. Existing property uses along the highway include a collection of manufacturing, retail, and storage businesses and multi-family residential buildings. There is considerable vacant land available in the HB-2 and RIB zoning districts, but some of this land faces development constraints from wetlands.

Map 4: Ten-minute drive time of the Central Gateway Warehouse on Huntoon Memorial Highway

Source: Esri Business Analyst

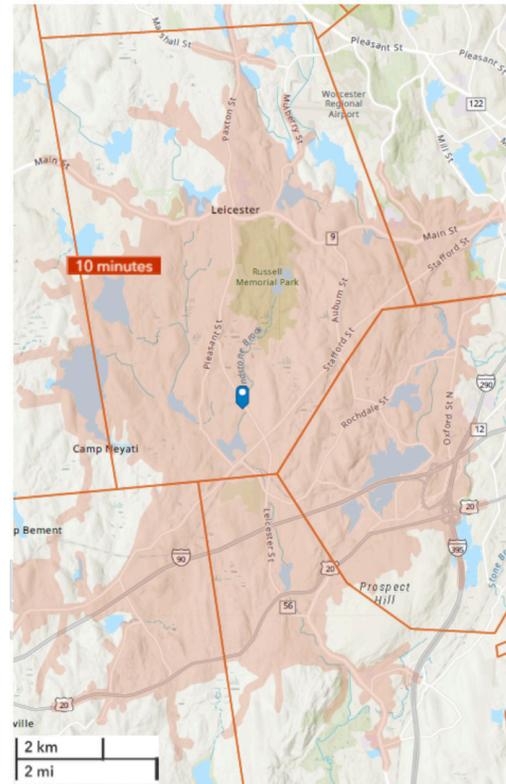
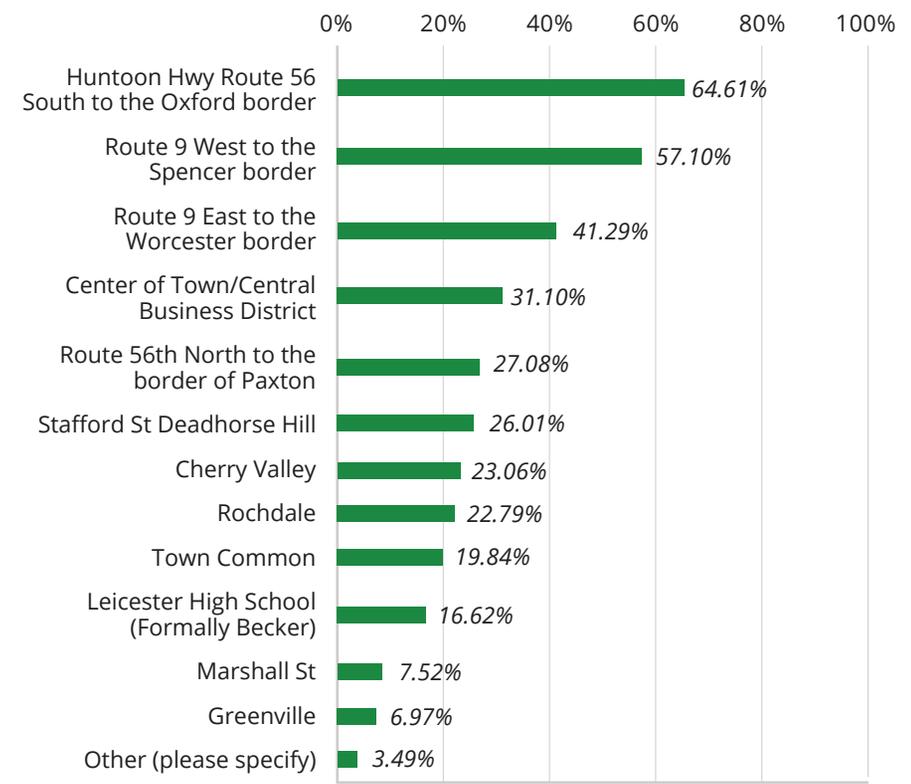


Figure 14: Are there any areas within Leicester where you believe additional commercial development could be appropriately located? (Select all that apply)

Source: Leicester Master Plan Question 13



Huntoon Highway offers an advantageous location for many commercial and industrial activities. The Highway is located within ten minutes of major transportation corridors such as Route 20, Interstate 90, Interstate 290, and Interstate 395. However, the absence of a direct connection between Route 56 and Interstate 90 precludes an even quicker drive time. This may pose a deal breaker for some industries that highly value efficiency, such as warehousing and distribution.

Survey respondents highlighted Huntoon Highway as a top economic development priority. Huntoon Highway / Route 56 was selected as the top area within Leicester for additional commercial development and the second most common answer for specific areas or vacant properties that could benefit from redevelopment or revitalization.¹⁴

¹⁴ Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 13; Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 4.

Rochdale

Rochdale, located in south Leicester along Stafford Street and Pleasant Street, is another historic mill village. Most of the area is zoned “Business,” which allows for most retail, service, and office uses by right or special permit. Two- and multi-family residential and mixed-use development uses are also allowed by special permit. Rochdale is currently home to a collection of small businesses mixed in with residential properties, including single-family homes. Properties in Rochdale benefit from both sewer and water infrastructure, but dimensional requirements and parking standards prevent the type of development that would create more of a village center feel.

Rochdale also lacks adequate pedestrian infrastructure to connect nearby businesses and residential properties. In the town’s 2018 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, most of the sidewalks in Rochdale were graded to be uncomfortable for pedestrians.

While Rochdale did not receive as much attention from survey respondents as other commercial areas in Leicester, many comments were made concerning the vacant Carleton Mill on Stafford Street next to Rochdale Pond. This property was identified as one that would benefit from redevelopment or revitalization.¹⁵

Map 5: Pedestrian Level of Comfort of Existing Sidewalks in Rochdale

Source: Howard Stein Hudson, 2018 Leicester Complete Streets Prioritization Plan.



¹⁵ Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 4.

Key Finding #2 Limited Commercial Tax Contributions Challenge Leicester’s Revenue Growth

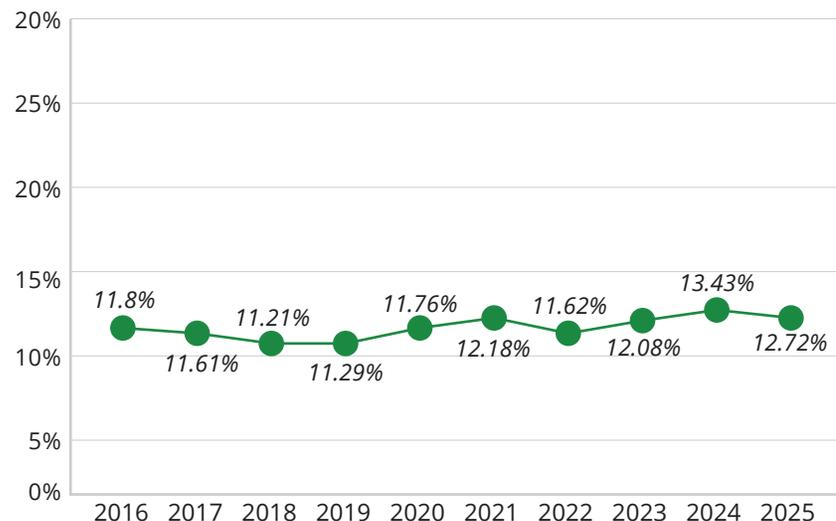
Taxes from commercial, industrial, and personal property (CIP) cover only a small percentage of Leicester’s tax levy. Also, compared to other municipalities in Massachusetts, Leicester has a small property tax base.

The tax levy is the overall amount of revenue a city or town raises through property taxes. The tax levy typically makes up a majority of a municipality’s revenue. In Fiscal Year 2025, Leicester’s tax levy was projected to make up about forty-seven percent (47%) of the town’s total receipts.¹⁶ Taxes raised from CIP property in Leicester only contribute a small percentage of the town’s tax levy, as shown in Figure 6.¹⁷ In FY2024, Leicester’s CIP share of the tax levy placed it in the 53rd percentile compared to other Massachusetts municipalities, meaning slightly more than half of other towns and cities in the state have a lower CIP share of their tax levy.

Leicester also must contend with a small property tax base relative to other Massachusetts municipalities. Equalized valuation (EQV) is the fair cash value of all property in a city or town subject to local taxation (i.e., not including tax-exempt properties). Leicester’s EQV per capita (i.e., EQV divided by the town’s population) is only \$118,673, placing it in the 13th percentile compared to other Massachusetts municipalities.¹⁸ This means that the town has a limited tax base to draw from to fund public services. State aid formulas are designed to take into consideration EQV and other income metrics to balance this unfair playing field, but state aid has not kept pace with growth in local tax levies in recent years.¹⁹ This is also the case in Leicester, where relative state aid levels have decreased over the past decade. It should be noted that state aid is relatively small outside of education funding.

These circumstances result in residential property owners carrying most of the burden of funding town services. In fact, many Master Plan survey respondents identified higher taxes and infrastructure/utility costs as factors that could cause them to leave Leicester.²⁰ Furthermore, with a small tax base, the town has limited resources to cover public services. Respondents identified insufficient investments in local infrastructure and schools as a concern. Encouraging business activity and property development that contributes to the local tax base could help address these worries.

Figure 15: CIP Levy as a % of Total Tax Levy



Survey Question 16 (Is there anything that would make you want to move out of Leicester? [Open-ended]) Sample Responses:

- “TAXES paying a lot with very, very little in return...”
- “Lack of funding for schools”
- “High taxes, few services, fighting amongst town departments, the idea that town-owned buildings do not require upkeep as they appear to be believed to be disposable after about 20 or 30 years...”

¹⁶ Massachusetts Department of Revenue. “Revenue by Source.” Accessed Dec. 10, 2024; Total receipts include Enterprise and CPA funds.

¹⁷ Massachusetts Department of Revenue. “Tax Levies by Class.” Accessed Dec. 8, 2024.

¹⁸ Massachusetts Department of Revenue. “DOR Income and EQV Per Capita.” Accessed Dec. 8, 2024.

¹⁹ Commonwealth of Massachusetts Office of the State Auditor. “Fulfilling the Promise of Local Aid by Strengthening State-Local Partnerships.” October 13, 2022.

²⁰ Leicester Master Plan Survey Question 16

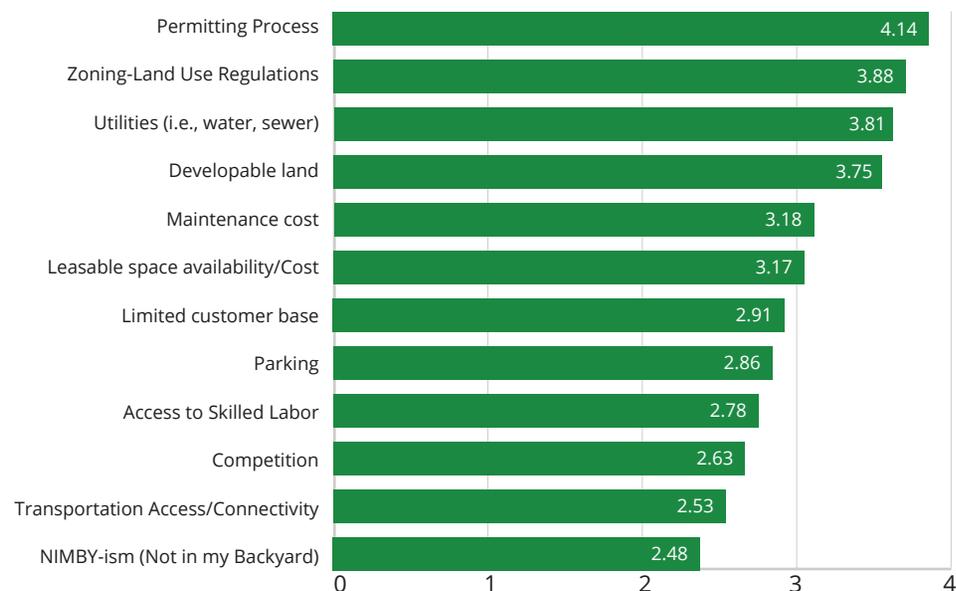
Key Finding #3 Perceived Challenges in Permitting Impact Development in Leicester

Interviews with town staff indicate that Leicester has very little new commercial and business development. This perspective is also reflected in community survey results. Respondents to the Master Plan Survey ranked “Business development retention and expansion” as their top economic development priority for the Center of town.

Trouble attracting business activity appears to be partly a consequence of problematic land use regulations and difficult permitting processes, or, at least the perception that the permitting processes are difficult. Survey respondents identified the “permitting process” and “zoning-land use regulations” as the two biggest challenges facing Leicester businesses. A 2021 survey of local business owners also identified zoning as the top regulatory obstacle to business operations. When it comes to the permitting process, many business and property owners feel that the process is too slow, and that town staff are inflexible in their decisions. This may be a result of onerous zoning regulations, something that town staff acknowledged. Zoning regulations in the Central Business District, which regulates the Center of Town, require nearly every business type to obtain a Special Permit. Special permits insert uncertainty and additional cost into the process of opening a business because they are approved only at the discretion of the Planning Board and typically necessitate the hiring of consultants to aid the applicant. Town staff also noted that strong local opposition to proposed development projects poses an obstacle to their completion.

Figure 16: What do you think are the biggest challenges facing Leicester businesses?

Source: Master Plan Survey Question 3. Scores represent the average ranking among respondents (scale: 5 points = major challenge, 1 point = minor challenge).



Key Finding #4 Underutilized Properties Offer Potential to be Unlocked

There are many undeveloped, vacant, and/or underutilized private properties in the town's commercial areas. These include:

- Carleton Mill on Stafford St. (Rochdale)
- M.K.M. Mill St. (Rochdale)
- The Worcester Tool & Stamping Mill on Hankey Street in Greenville
- Undeveloped parcels on Huntoon Highway
- Former Drive-In Theater (West End of Route 9)
- Vacant property across the street from Cumberland Farms (West End of Route 9)
- Empty lot across from Giguere's Dance (Cherry Valley)

These properties represent opportunities for adaptive reuse or new development. Given their prominent location in key villages and corridors, the return or conversion of these sites to productive use would make a meaningful contribution to the economic vibrancy of Leicester.

The Town of Leicester also owns several public buildings that are vacant and in need of future reuse for redevelopment. Among these the most prominent are the Memorial School on Lehigh Road off Pleasant Street and several buildings on the High School campus.

Finally, many of the properties in Leicester's villages and corridors feature land use patterns that do not maximize available space. This stems from conventional development practices from the 20th century and earlier and zoning regulations like minimum lot size, maximum lot coverage, setbacks, height limits, and parking requirements.

For example, zoning in Cherry Valley prescribes a minimum lot size of 15,000 square feet and a maximum building coverage of 30%. This means that the building footprint can only occupy 4,500 square feet of the site. Regulations like these reinforce development characterized by the dominance of the automobile and so-called "suburban sprawl." This results in lower property values per acre and places more strain on infrastructure, such as roads and utilities, compared to more compact development. It is also less conducive to positioning village centers to compete economically in the age of big box stores. Denser development allows for a higher concentration of commercial and residential uses in village centers, which is a critical combination to generate economic activity in the local market. Compact, walkable commercial areas encourage foot traffic and create a neighborhood feel that is more appealing to consumers and businesses. With denser development, these economic development goals can be achieved at the same time as preserving the community's open space and natural resources.



Carleton Mill on Stafford St. (Rochdale)

Key Finding #5 Strengthening Support and Promotion for Leicester's Business Community

Residents and business owners would like the town to play a more active role in marketing and supporting the local business community. Master Plan Survey respondents ranked "Business development retention and expansion" as the top planning priority for the Center of Town, one of Leicester's hubs of small business activity.

In Leicester's 2021 Rapid Recovery Plan survey of business owners, fifty percent (50%) or more of respondents ranked the following approaches to attraction and retention of customers and business activity as either important or very important:

- More Cultural Events/Activities to Bring People into the District
- More Opportunities for Outdoor Dining and Selling
- Implementing Marketing Strategies for the Commercial District
- Recruitment Programs to Attract Additional Businesses
- Creation of a District Management Entity (Business Improvement District or other organization)

These strategies should be explored by the town's Economic Development Committee (EDC), which recently started meeting again after a brief hiatus, and the Leicester Business Association (LBA), a local nonprofit focused on organizing and supporting the business community.

When it comes to marketing, it has been noted that Leicester's village centers have a lack of cohesive branding and that many commuters are unaware of the town's offerings beyond what is visible to drivers on Route 9. Businesses have expressed interest in collaborating with the town of Leicester to create shared marketing and advertising and business recruitment and retention strategies.²¹ The Leicester EDC has a Facebook page and dedicated website, but there is little activity on these platforms. The LBA has a Facebook page too where it regularly promotes local businesses. But with Leicester having no affiliation with regional chambers of commerce, there may be a lack of promotion at the regional level of what Leicester businesses have to offer.

Similarly, there could be more events and activities to draw attention to businesses in the community. As mentioned above, many survey respondents described the Town Center as "Boring." However, this is one of the few locations in town with a gathering area and annual events like the Harvest Fair. The town should explore activating the Town Common and other public spaces, such as Towtaid Park and Rochdale Park, with cultural events that draw people to the area. Commercial areas could also benefit from attractions like art and culture installations, interpretive signage, and self-guided walking tours.

Finally, financial incentives, can be used to attract new businesses to come to Leicester, but the benefits of incentives are not guaranteed. Firms typically base their decisions on where to locate operations in a community based on proximity to markets and materials, energy and transportation costs, and labor availability and costs. Thus, Leicester should consider whether incentives could be better spent on improving public services and amenities that make the town a more attractive location for all businesses, whether new or existing. For example, Master Plan Survey respondents ranked green infrastructure (street trees, parks, etc.) and beautification and landscaping as top priorities for physical improvements to the Center of Town. If startup grants or loans are offered, they could be tailored to small businesses, which may have fewer options on where to locate due to where they live or their available resources.



²¹ 2021 Leicester Rapid Recovery Plan.

FUTURE VISION

Looking forward, economic development in Leicester should advance four objectives: 1) contribute to the local tax base; 2) strengthen the small business community; 3) offer employment opportunities for residents; and 4) provide for quality of life for residents.

These objectives should be pursued while respecting the town's history and small-town character and balancing the preservation of open space and natural resources. Just like the health of its local economy, Leicester should steward these assets as detailed in the Natural Cultural Resources and Open Space and Recreation Chapters.

The objectives are also contingent on resources and services covered in other chapters in this Master Plan, such as housing, transportation, essential infrastructure, education, public safety, and more.

Leicester can best achieve its overarching economic development objectives by fostering a healthy business environment and leveraging its strengths.

A healthy business environment begins with town regulations and permitting processes that responsibly balance the long-term interests of the community against the short-term interests of individual businesses and property owners and vice versa. By drawing on community feedback and consultant recommendations, the town should regularly assess whether it is living up to this obligation. The other element of a healthy business environment is promotion. This goes two ways. Promotion involves not only showcasing what the town has to offer prospective businesses but also highlighting what local businesses can offer to consumers. Promotion can be advanced through events, social media campaigns, and more.

Finally, the town should draw on its strengths to realize economic development. One such strength is Leicester's location on Route 9 next to the City of Worcester. This exposes the town to traffic to and from the city. As Worcester continues to grow as an employment and hospitality center, there is an opportunity for Leicester to realize growth along the Route 9 Corridor. Leicester should also invest in the future of its historical village centers. Home to many of Leicester's small businesses, these villages should be transformed into walkable, livable hubs of mixed-use activity.





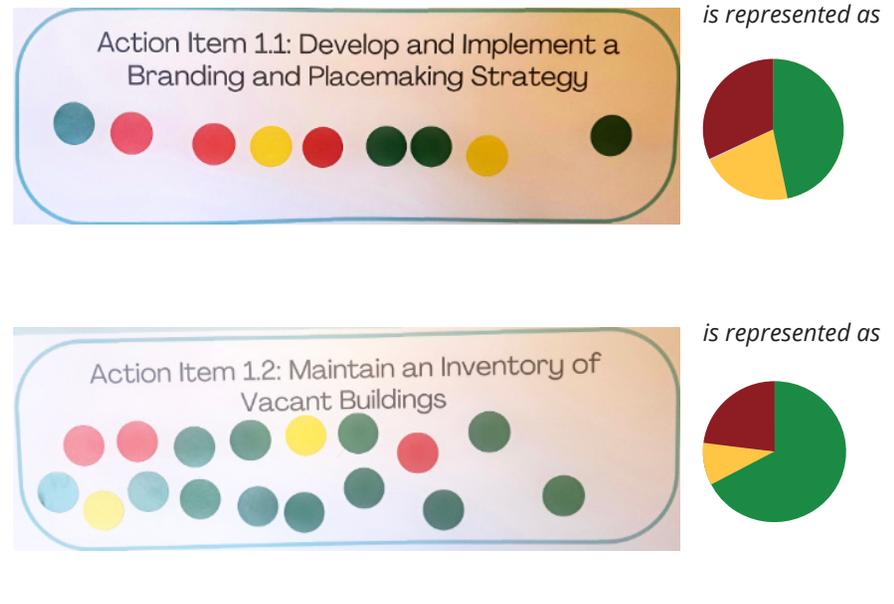
GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

Based on the key findings set out above and the input received from the community survey and the first community workshop, and taking into account the resource constraints facing the town, the following goals and action items were proposed. They were informed also by experience elsewhere and best practice in the field of comprehensive planning.

The goals are broad statements of policy. While several action items have been proposed for each goal, the goals themselves should not be seen as being limited to specific action items.

The goals and action items were discussed with the MPSC and agreed by them and were then put to the second community workshop. It that workshop, each goal was displayed on a poster or posters, together with its associated action items. A space was provided for workshop participants to record their responses to the action items. In order to reflect the responses of the people who attended the workshop, they have been captured each action item below. In order to save space the responses have been converted into pie charts. The size of the pie chart indicates the amount of interest shown in the action item by increasing or decreasing according to the total number of dots placed, and the color of the portions of the pie charts reflect the colors of the dots. Green indicates support for the action, Red indicates opposition and yellow indicates a neutral response.

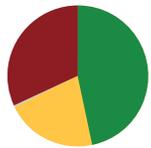
For Example:



GOAL 1

Invest in Physical Spaces to Strengthen Economic Vitality

Leicester has a rich history and distinct character shaped by its industrial heritage, agricultural past, and small-town atmosphere. However, many of these assets are currently underutilized or under emphasized. For instance, the town lacks a strong, unified brand to showcase its identity and civic pride throughout physical spaces in the community. By strengthening the connection between Leicester's cultural assets and its community spaces, the town can cultivate a sense of place that supports local businesses and promotes civic engagement. Vacant properties, many occupying prominent locations in Leicester's commercial corridors and village centers, also require attention. The reuse or redevelopment of these properties is important to the economic future of Leicester.



Action Item 1.1: Develop And Implement a Branding and Placemaking Strategy

Branding is the intentional crafting of a place's identity to shape how it is perceived by residents, businesses, and visitors. It involves:

- Visual Identity: logos, color schemes, typography, and design elements
- Messaging & Storytelling: slogans, taglines, and narratives
- Marketing And Promotion: promotional campaigns, social media, and events

Placemaking focuses on the physical design of locations, such as streetscapes, parks, and gathering spaces to make them attractive and functional for community members and visitors alike.

The two ideas are inter-connected but also notably different. Branding can be implemented quickly, whereas placemaking efforts may take years to complete. Having a unified branding and placemaking strategy will create a cohesive sense of place, shaping how Leicester is perceived both internally and externally and ensuring that the two efforts reinforce each other.

The process might look like this:

1. Establish a vision for the town's identity through research and community engagement. Some of this work has been initiated with the development of a preliminary wayfinding report for Washburn Square by CMRPC in 2024. Additional surveys, focus groups, and public meetings can help identify the key characteristics that define Leicester and what makes it unique.
2. Develop the vision into a brand, including logos, taglines, and visual elements to promote across town
3. Physically assess spaces in Leicester, such as gateways, public gathering areas, and commercial corridors, to determine gaps and opportunities for placemaking improvements.
4. Develop a written strategy that outlines how Leicester's brand will be integrated into physical spaces and promotional efforts. This should include guidelines for rolling out branding elements, identifying priority placemaking projects, and detailing how branding can be woven into improvements such as signage, public spaces, and commercial areas. The strategy should also include an implementation plan with timelines and key partners to ensure a cohesive and effective approach.

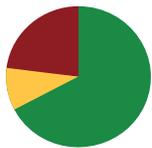
A case study of a branding and placemaking plan complete with cost estimates for implementation can be found in the Town of Dudley's 2024 Gateway Revitalization Plan.

Leicester has a rich history that it can leverage, from its role in the Revolutionary War to its transition from a rural agricultural economy to an industrial hub with grist mills, textile tool production, and boot/shoe making. Key culturally significant locations identified in the Natural & Cultural Resources Chapter like Swan Tavern, the May House, Rochdale Village, and Coopers Hilltop Farm can assist in shaping the town's brand.

Some examples of placemaking elements might be:

- Public space enhancements like gardens, green infrastructure, benches, better lighting, and facade improvements to enhance the vibrancy of community gathering areas.
- Interpretive signage and walking tours of historic sites highlighting Leicester's industrial and agricultural history
- Creating heritage trails connecting Leicester's historic sites. This can be included in the broader trail connectivity effort discussed in Goal 5 of the Open Space and Recreation (OSR) Chapter.

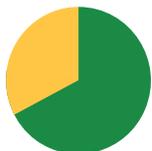
The OSR Chapter also discusses recommendations for expanding programming and event offerings in town. Hosting more events at culturally and historically significant locations can enhance their visibility, fostering a stronger sense of community identity and connection.



Action Item 1.2: Maintain an Inventory of Vacant Buildings

Maintain a database of vacant buildings in the community. This should be a joint effort between town departments that enforce code violations and make regular field visits, such as the Assessor's Department, the Building Department, the Health Department, the Fire Department, etc. In addition to basic details such as the address and owner contact, the database should note field visit dates and possible code violations to follow up on.

A vacant building inventory would allow the town to better address health and safety risks emanating from vacant structures. It would also position the town better to strategically prioritize seizure of tax delinquent properties or abandoned properties via legal avenues provided by Massachusetts General Law. Seizure of private property should be a last resort, but when conditions merit it, it may be the most effective way to return property to productive private use.



Action Item 1.3: Pursue National Register Designation for Mill Properties

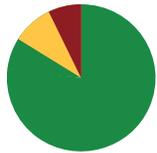
Pursue National Register of Historic Places Designation for Mill Properties to Leverage Rehabilitation Tax Credits. Leicester is home to a collection of nineteenth-century mills, including the MKM Mill (built 1854), the Carleton Mill (built 1856), and the Smith Mill (built 1878).²² Leicester should pursue the designation of these mills on the National Register of Historic Places. Several other Central Massachusetts mills from the same era enjoy National Register status. Buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places are eligible for rehabilitation tax credits from the federal government and state government for up to 20% of the cost of the project each. Such tax credits have been instrumental in making other mill rehabilitation projects feasible and could do the same for underutilized properties like the MKM Mill and the Carleton Mill, both in Rochdale. The town should educate property owners about the benefits of National Register of Historic Places designation and work with the Historical Commission and other volunteers to put forth competitive applications.

²² Pitzen, Dale, and Mary Kennedy. *Where the Wild Strawberries Grow*. Mary Kennedy, 1997.

GOAL 2

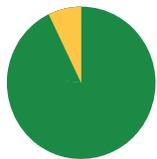
Implement Best Practices to Streamline the Local Permitting Process

An efficient, transparent, and user-friendly permitting process is critical to facilitating economic development. If investors and business owners feel that permitting processes are fair, efficient, as quick as can be expected and generally supported by town staff and boards, they are more likely to choose Leicester as a good option for development. Leicester should take the following steps to streamline its local permitting process.



Action Item 2.1: Create a Permitting Guide

Key finding 3 suggests that there is great frustration in Leicester concerning the local permitting process. This may be the result of a lack of understanding on the part of applicants, particularly in the context of regulations that require more time consuming permitting processes than may be required elsewhere. To enhance communication between town staff and permitting applicants, the town should create a local permitting guide. The permitting guide should introduce readers to the chronological steps they need to take to open a business or develop a property. Each step should include detailed information about all necessary permits, including permits required from water and sewer districts. They should detail who has to be consulted, how and where the permit applications have to be submitted and what information they must contain, relevant regulations, and timelines. In addition to serving as a resource for applicants, the guide could be a useful tool to help onboard administrative staff that will be involved with permitting. It is important that all town staff and water and sewer district staff who deal with the public have a healthy understanding of the permitting process so that they can responsibly refer residents to the right departments and so that they do not cause confusion or provide inaccurate information. For inspiration for its permitting guide, Leicester can look to the Town of Charlton's recently completed permitting guide.



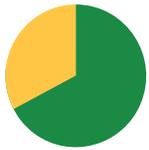
Action Item 2.2: Implement Online Permitting

Streamline the permitting process by implementing the online permitting system that has already been adopted, or, if the technical challenges posed by that system cannot be cost-effectively resolved, adopt a different one. Ensure that the system includes permitting requirements of the sewer and water districts. Online systems present several advantages over conventional processes. First, online permitting offers applicants greater convenience through features such as digital payment, remote form submission, and direct messaging with staff. Second, Online systems make the work of town staff easier by ensuring applicants fill out all information fields and allowing staff to track the status of projects across all town departments.

GOAL 3

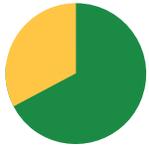
Sustain and Attract Business Activity

Towns play a meaningful role in supporting local businesses through a variety of tools. These include marketing and promotion, networking, and financial incentives. But town staff cannot successfully do this work alone. A successful business recruitment and retention policy requires collaboration between municipal staff, municipal boards and committees, nonprofits, and business and property owners. Leicester should leverage the insights and experience of each of these groups to grow local business activity.



Action Item 3.1: Reactivate the Economic Development Committee

The Leicester Economic Development Committee (EDC) strives to promote economic activity in town and “serve as a bridge between the business community and local government.” Leicester has had an active EDC for many years, but in the summer of 2024, the EDC stopped holding regular meetings. As the EDC starts again in 2025, it should re-engage with the local business community to identify committee goals. Among these goals may be responding to the high demand for recruitment programs to attract additional businesses. An important step in this direction would be re-establishing the EDC’s online presence. The EDC already boasts a Facebook page and website, but these platforms could benefit from increased activity and updates. The platforms should be venues for local success stories – like new business openings, town government news, and background information about Leicester. An example of an EDC with a strong online presence is that of Westborough, MA.



Action Item 3.2: Host Regular Business Forums

Maintaining open dialogue is a critical way for town officials and the business community to build mutual trust and familiarity. To this end, the Town of Leicester should consider holding regular business forums to listen and respond to feedback from business and property owners. Business forums would also provide a venue for town staff to update the business community on municipal news and events, such as upcoming infrastructure projects, important board meetings, and more. For example, the Town of Oxford hosted a business forum in June 2024 that included a presentation from town staff followed by an open question and answer period. Town staff could partner with the Leicester Economic Development Commission and the Leicester Business Alliance to arrange and promote the Business Forum.

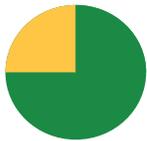


Action Item 3.3: Enhance Collaboration with Business Organizations

Enhance collaboration with local and regional business organizations. For decades, the Leicester Business Association (LBA) has supported and advocated for the interests of the local business community in town. The LBA recently restarted after a period of inactivity during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Since its reactivation, the LBA has hosted business networking events, established a social media presence, conducted outreach to businesses through door-to-door canvassing, and hired high school student interns to assist in its work.

The Town of Leicester, especially town staff and the Economic Development Committee (EDC), should collaborate with the LBA to align and promote their mutual goals of improving Leicester’s business environment. The LBA can help the town spread awareness of municipal proceedings relevant to the business community, such as zoning amendments and budget votes. As a private entity, the LBA can also expand its activities into areas where the State laws constrain the town, such technical assistance and grant awards to individual businesses. Finally, a strong working relationship between the town and the LBA would facilitate dialogue around the needs and concerns of local businesses and ensure that these viewpoints are considered in policymaking decisions.

The LBA and the Leicester EDC should also look to establish relations with regional economic development organizations. Currently, the LBA does not have affiliate status with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce (WRCC). Organizations with affiliate status to the WRCC obtain free standard membership to the WRCC for all their members. Leicester is also not served by a regional chamber of commerce with affiliate status to the WRCC. This represents a missed opportunity to take advantage of the many events and resources that the WRCC and its affiliate regional chambers offer.



Action Item 3.4: Business Incubator Space and Student Businesses

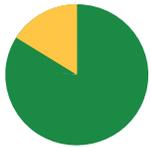
Explore the Feasibility of Hosting a Business Incubator Space and Student-Run Public Services at Leicester High School. With Leicester High School poised to expand its vocational course offerings and enrollment, there is an opportunity to introduce new program ideas that promote local economic development. One idea is hosting a space for business incubator activities. A business incubator or accelerator is a program designed to provide advice, space, or resources to help new businesses start up. There are many incubators active in the Worcester area. Leicester High School could partner with these organizations and dedicate space after-hours to host workshops and mentorship sessions open to local businesses, entrepreneurs, and students. Industry partners to the High School’s Business and Finance Career Pathway could contribute to this effort too. The business incubator space could also incorporate facilities where business owners and entrepreneurs can access useful technology and applications like Adobe programs or plotters. A model for this concept can found in the Webster public library’s “Nest,” which hosts workshops, co-working space, and technology for small businesses to utilize.

Another way that Leicester High School can contribute to economic vibrancy is by introducing “student-run services businesses.” What this means is business services provided by Leicester High School students enrolled in career and technical education (CTE) programs. Minuteman High School, a regional CTE high school in Lexington, MA, already offers student-led businesses including a flower shop, salon, restaurant, auto repair shop, and pre-school. Adopting this model at Leicester High School would not only provide students with valuable practical experience but also encourage their family and friends to visit the High School campus. This would include visitors from the towns of Clinton and Shrewsbury, MA, once students from those communities begin attending Leicester High School’s CTE program.



Action Item 3.5: Stimulate Development by Offering Tax Exemptions

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. The town should also consider establishing a committee to review prospective TIF projects. Many communities in Massachusetts already have committees for this purpose. TIF committees are typically composed of representatives from the Select Board, Board of Assessors, and other relevant parties. They are tasked with negotiating TIF agreements on behalf of the town, analyzing the agreements, and making recommendations to the Select Board and Town Meeting for approval.



Action Item 3.6: Facilitate Business Assistance Grants

Encourage new business startups by offering business assistance grants. Generally, town funds cannot be spent on directly supporting private businesses. That said, federal and state programs offer more flexibility when it comes to providing financial assistance. At the state level, municipalities may apply through the Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program (MVSP) for up to \$50,000 worth of refundable tax credits to be used to incentivize businesses to occupy vacant storefronts within the community's downtown and/or commercial areas. In addition to the state tax credits, municipalities may also commit matching funds to increase the incentives for businesses. Several of Leicester's neighbors, including Oxford and Worcester, have already participated in the previous iteration of the MSVP. Properties that could be potential candidates for the program can be found along Route 9, in the Center of Town, and in Rochdale.

Leicester should also seize available opportunities to allocate eligible federal dollars to business grants. Revolving loan funds can be an especially meaningful way to prolong the impact of one-off federal stimulus programs. For example, the Town of Southbridge used American Rescue Plan Act funds to create a zero interest, \$100,000 Commercial Loan Revolving Fund.

Finally, the town should strive to educate local businesses about other loan and grant opportunities offered by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development, Team Massachusetts agencies, the federal Small Business Association, regional chambers of commerce, and more. The Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development and Team Massachusetts recently launched a centralized hub, "the Business Front Door," where businesses can explore and apply for financial assistance and resources.



NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

OVERVIEW

This chapter highlights the rich natural, historical, and cultural resources and sites in Leicester. Guided by prior planning efforts, survey responses, community workshops and interviews with local stakeholders, this chapter sets out goals and action items to preserve and enhance these resources.

While there are inevitable overlaps between all the chapters in the Master Plan, the required inclusion of two chapters, one dealing with Natural and Cultural Resources and one dealing with Open Space and Recreation leads to substantial potential overlap and repetition regarding open space. In this Master Plan, as far as possible, the Open Space and Recreation Chapter deals with the use of open space by the community, while this chapter deals with the protection and conservation of the environment within which the use happens.

KEY FINDINGS AND PRIORITIES

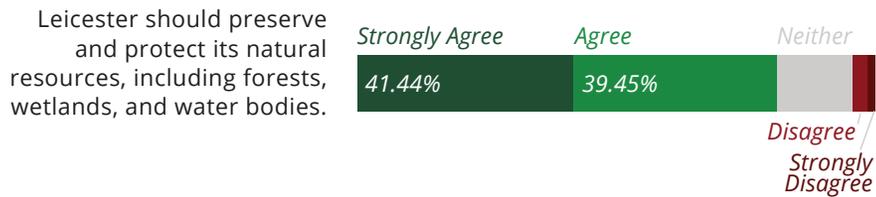
Key Finding #1 A Large Portion of Land in Leicester is Preserved

The use and enjoyment of open space by people is an important reason for preserving land. However, conserving natural resources, including water and precious ecosystems, is just as crucial. Master Plan Community Survey respondents agreed with this importance, with 81% of respondents answering, “strongly agree” or “agree” to the statement “Leicester should preserve and protect natural resources, including forests, wetlands, and water bodies” (Figure 17).

An area of 2,138 acres, or 14% of Leicester’s land is permanently protected open space, including public and private lands protected for conservation or recreation. This does not include Chapter lands or restrictions in current zoning regulations. Due to surface water, ground water, and wellhead protection, large areas in Leicester also enjoy a degree of protection specifically designed to protect the water resources, including restrictions or limitations on development.

Figure 17: Attitudes Towards Preservation of Natural and Cultural Resources

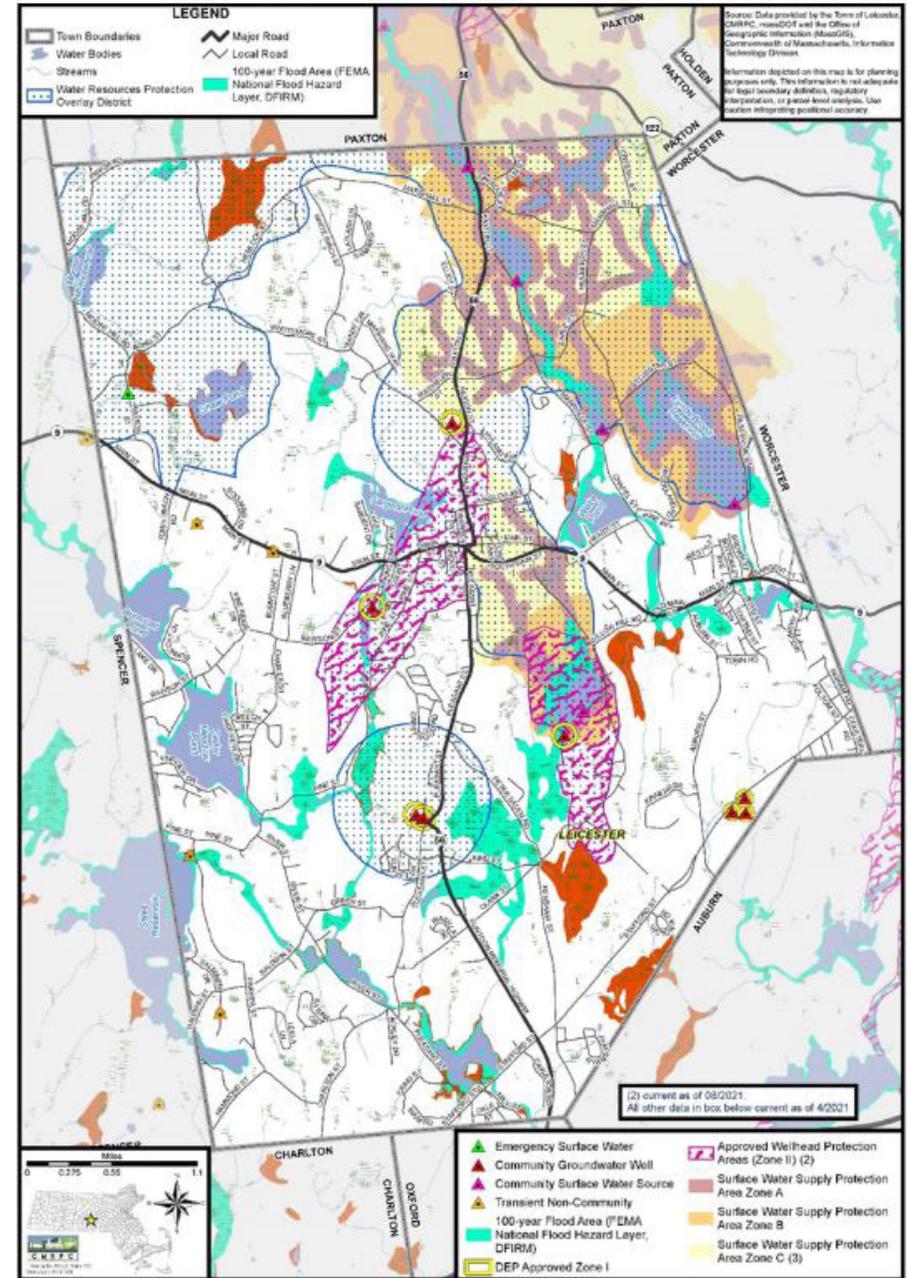
“To what extent do you agree with the following statements about natural and cultural resources?”



VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“[The priority should be] not developing but preserving farmland and conservation/open space.”

Map 6: Areas Cover by Water Resource Protections



Key Finding #2 Preserving Agriculture is a Local and Regional Value

Agriculture remains a cherished land use in Leicester, providing local food options and an important link to the town's history. A question in the Master Plan survey asked respondents to rank the most important land use for the future of the town. Although agriculture attracted the fewest responses as the most important of the five land use alternatives offered, a quarter of respondents ranked it second most important. Overall, 39% of master plan survey respondents chose agricultural use as a first or second priority for future development (Figure 18).

Map 7 displays the location of “prime farmland soils,” and “farmland soils of statewide importance.” Prime farmland soils are state designated for having “the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for economically producing sustained high yields of food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.” Farmland of Statewide Importance refers to soils, “of statewide importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oil seed crops, as determined by the appropriate state agency or agencies. Generally, these include lands that are nearly prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.”

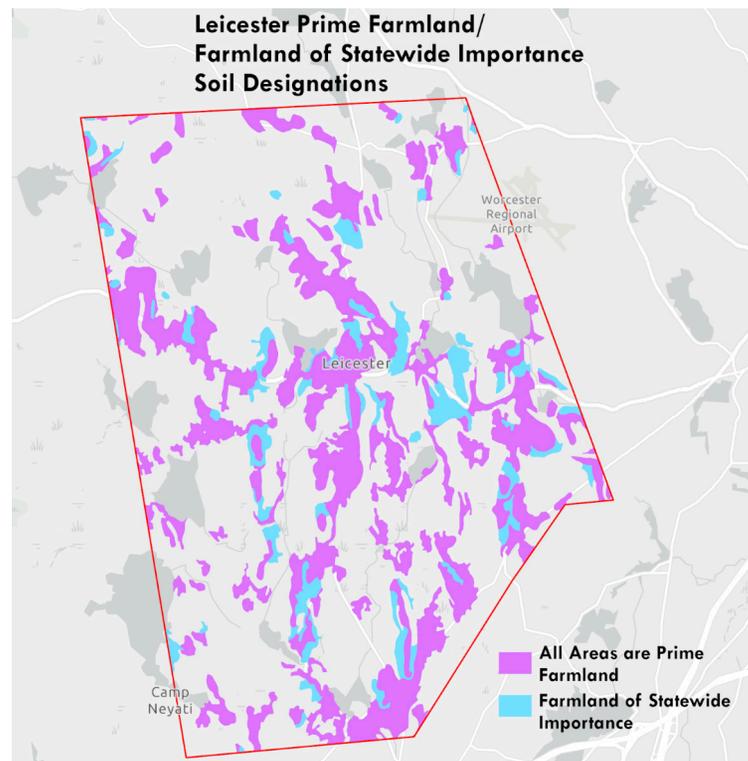
The data was collected over various time periods and development has occurred on important farmland soils in some areas, rendering the land no longer available for agriculture. The map shows that there is an abundance of fertile soil throughout town (nearly 1/3rd of the total land area) that, should some suitable undeveloped land be identified, could be converted into agricultural use - be it a farming operation or simply a community garden.

Figure 18: In your opinion, what types of land should Leicester prioritize for future development? (Rank 1 = highest)

	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Residential	16.41%	19.53%	34.64%	15.10%	14.32%
Commercial	39.38%	30.57%	20.98%	3.63%	5.44%
Industrial	14.84%	19.27%	23.96%	18.23%	23.70%
Mixed-use (combining residential, commercial, and/or recreational)	35.10%	27.78%	23.48%	5.81%	7.83%
Agricultural	13.66%	25.00%	34.02%	14.69%	12.63%
Conservation/Open Space	19.27%	26.30%	27.86%	13.02%	13.54%

Answered: 400

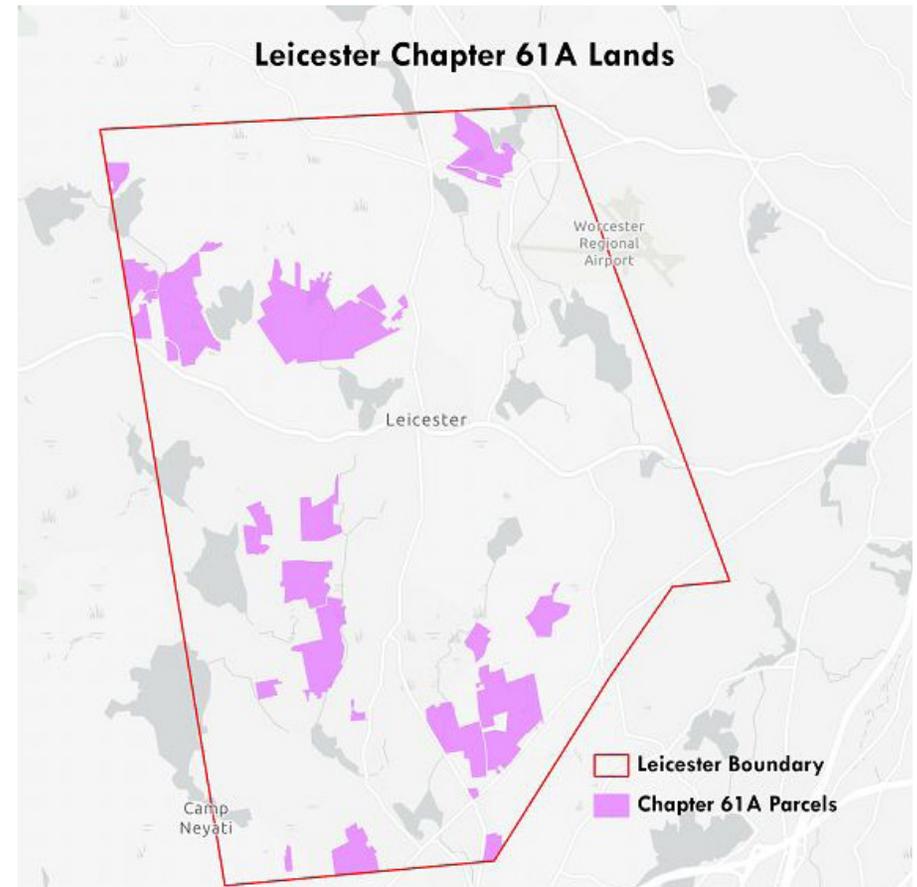
Map 7: Prime Farmland Soils and Farmland Soils of Statewide



Because of the presence of high-quality soils - including Sutton, Charlton, and Paxton Loams - throughout town, Leicester's lands were widely farmed by the Nipmuc peoples in the region long before European Colonization. Following Colonization, English colonists established dispersed farmsteads throughout town rather than dense village centers, a pattern that persisted through the 19th century. Leicester remained an agrarian economy throughout this time, with primarily subsistence-based farming that also supplied nearby Worcester with food products. While industry grew during the Federal Period (1775-1830), and for some time afterwards, with a number of small villages forming around the site of mills, agriculture remained essential, with hilltop farms producing hay and dairy products for both local use and urban market. Land use shifted over time as industries expanded, and in the 20th century, particularly during the period of suburbanization after World War 2, the proliferation of residential development and further economic pressures significantly reduced the agricultural presence. Today, some of the last remaining farms include Cooper's Hilltop Farm, Maple Hill Farm (which transitioned to Christmas Tree Farming), Johnson Farm, Cotelydon Farm, Little Bit Farm and Apiary, and Stony Knoll Farm. Almost all remaining active farmland in town benefits from limited protection through the Chapter 61A program. Chapter 61A protects about 1,600 acres in town, over 10% of Leicester's 15,900 acres. 516 acres of Chapter 61A land are on the state-designated prime farmland soils/ farmland soils of statewide importance, about 12% of the designated soils' total land coverage in town. No farmland in Leicester is permanently protected by an Agricultural Preservation Restriction.

The recent farming resurgence and rise of agri-tourism in Central and Western Massachusetts has supported Leicester farms. As the financial sustainability of small farms continues to be precarious, it is important that the Town should continue to support traditional farming activity and modern adaptations, such as farmstands and attached breweries or restaurants.

Map 8: Chapter 61A Lands



Key Finding #3 Leicester is Home to Treasured Historic Structures

Leicester is home to a rich variety of historic and cultural resources that tell the story of development in Central Massachusetts. The urban settlement originated as several small villages established around mills from which the town slowly grew together as the population increased, resulting in a wide variety of historic resources. Preserving these resources can maintain cultural heritage, promote local pride, and protect unique local identities and roots.

The Town is home to several historic and cultural areas and structures, including a variety of religious institutions, historic homes, and industrial buildings. Some of these are listed below.

The Leicester Common/Washburn Square Historic District

This area encompasses the historic civic center of the town. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the district includes the town hall, two churches, two commercial buildings, and several residential buildings. Of particular importance in this area are:

- **Leicester Unitarian Church**
Founded in 1833, the Leicester Unitarian Church remains located on the Town Common. The first minister of the church was Reverend Samuel May Junior, a dedicated abolitionist and the founder of the Leicester Anti-Slavery Society.
- **The Reverend Samuel May Junior House:**
The Reverend Samuel May Junior House was the home of the May family for 126 years before being sold to Leicester Junior College, which was later bought by Becker College. Becker College used the building as a dormitory. The House is now an education and community center, with a focus on highlighting the house's historic significance, the life and abolitionist views of Samuel May Junior, and the history of the Underground Railroad as well as encouraging Becker Alumni involvement.
- **Becker College Complex**
While Becker College no longer exists as an educational institute, the site of the school remains important to Leicester's history. Previously the Leicester Academy, the school became the first nonsectarian academy in New England to accept female students. As Leicester Academy, the school educated several well-known individuals, including Eli Whitney, the creator of the cotton gin.

- **The Leicester Academy Pump House**

Located on the northeast corner of Washburn Square, this small town-owned building provides a unique look into Leicester's architectural history. Built in the Georgian style of architecture, this building contained a chain pump and sits on the property line between Leicester Academy and the Winslow Estate. This structure is notable, as while there were five wells located in this area, the one in the Leicester Academy Pump House was the only one to have a chain pump and to be housed in such an extravagant way.



Leicester Public Library

In 1861, the Town of Leicester unanimously voted to establish a free public library. Completed in 1896, the Leicester Public Library is designed in the Classical Revival style and is known for its masonry. In 2019, an addition was added to the building.

Mills

Leicester is home to several mills, including, in Cherry Valley, Smith’s Mill on Main Street and the Corner Mill (generally now referred to as its current name Woodart) on the corner of Chapel Street and Old Main Street. In Rochdale the Carleton Woolen Mill on Stafford Street and the MKM Mill on Mill Street are still standing. In Greenville there is the former Worcester Tool & Stamping on Hankey Street. The town was a hub for textile manufacturing, and at one point was a top producer of fiber carding materials.

Swan Tavern/Town Museum

Swan Tavern is home to the Leicester Historical Museum. The Swan Tavern was previously used as a tavern for travelers, before becoming a part of Leicester Junior College and then Becker College. The Swan Tavern is now home to a variety of historical artifacts from Leicester’s past and hosts educational events for the community.

The Greenville Fire Station / Copeland Library

Constructed in 1884, the Greenville Fire Station became the Copeland Memorial Library in 1901. The building was used by residents to pick up books from the main branch and as a reading room. The branch closed in the 1960s, and has experienced several restoration projects since, including the restoration of the building’s original colorway, green and red. Located on River Street, the building is historically important and requires a long-term plan for use and maintenance.

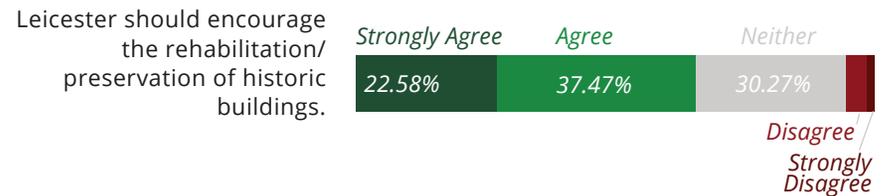
Other Churches

Including Christ Church the Episcopal Church in Rochdale, the United Methodist Church in Cherry Valley, the Greenville Baptist Church and the First Congregational Church.



Figure 19: Attitudes Towards Rehabilitation and Preservation of Historic Buildings

“To what extent do you agree with the following statements about natural and cultural resources?”



60% of survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that rehabilitation and preservation of historic buildings should be encouraged (Figure 19). Notably, Master Plan Workshop participants identified the Town Common as the top priority for preservation, together with the May House, the Public Library and the Swan Tavern.

SUMMARY OF FUTURE NATURAL AND CULTURAL PATTERNS

The Town's vision for future natural and cultural land use patterns calls for continuing support for the protection of drinking water and the use of additional water bodies for recreation. It places great importance on the historical nature of Leicester's town common and highly values the current efforts of the Leicester Historical Commission and other organizations in educating the public about the town's history, and it looks for an appropriate balance between necessary residential and commercial development and preservation of open land and historic assets.

Northwest and northeast Leicester are crucial preservation areas to protect surface and ground water resources. Development cannot be promoted near wellhead protection zones, neighborhood groundwater locations, and surface water areas. Because of the region's reliance on Leicester for drinking water, land conservation efforts will reflect those areas as a top priority.

Forest fragmentation caused by residential sprawl was identified as a concern second only to water source protection. To avoid loss of forested land, concentrating future development in traditional village areas, most notably along Route 9, the Town Common area, and Rochdale, will ensure existing ecosystems and natural resources are respected. Supporting green infrastructure in village centers, including pocket parks, and gardens, will offset ecological harm from development.

The recent loss of Becker College left many historical buildings around the Town Common area available for redevelopment. These buildings shape the nature of the area and are beloved by the community. Redevelopment and ongoing maintenance bring a high cost for private organizations. The Town can support infill of the Town Common to return foot and car traffic to the area, inviting developers to invest in historical buildings.

Traditional mill activity left quaint neighborhoods, such as the Greenville area, and large structures with potential residential, commercial, and industrial reuse opportunity. Creative redevelopment of standing mill structures will preserve the cultural importance of the mills while supporting economic development goals.

Emphasis on agricultural preservation will support local food system resiliency and combat food insecurity. Modernization through supporting farm stands, events, and commercial endeavors on farmland will help local farmers continue to remain financially viable.





GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

Based on the key findings set out above and the input received from the community survey and the first community workshop, and considering the resource constraints facing the town, the following goals and action items were proposed. They were informed also by experience elsewhere and best practice in the field of comprehensive planning.

The goals are broad statements of policy. While several action items have been proposed for each goal, the goals themselves should not be seen as being limited to specific action items.

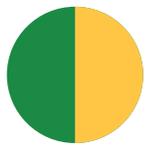
The goals and action items were discussed with the MPSC and then put to the attendees of the second community workshop. At that workshop, each goal was displayed on a poster, together with its associated action items. A space was provided for workshop participants to record their responses to each action item. The responses of the workshop attendees have been captured below for context. To save space, the responses have been converted into pie charts. The size of the pie chart indicates the relative amount of interest shown in the action item according to the total number of dots placed. The larger the chart, the more interest participants expressed. The color of the portions of the pie charts reflect the colors of the dots. Green indicates support for the action, Red indicates opposition and yellow indicates a neutral response.

For Example:

Action Item 1.2: Carry Out a Low Impact Development (LID) Evaluation of Bylaws and Amend Them to Achieve Optimum LID.

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Action Item 3.3: Transition the Town Vehicle Fleet to Low Emission Vehicles.

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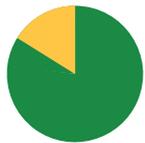
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GOAL 1

Protect Water Resources

Leicester's early growth and development can be traced back to abundant water resources. The Town's Water Resource Protection Overlay District, as well as Surface Water Supply Protection Areas and Wellhead Protection Areas, are important tools for protecting future drinking water supply for Leicester and Worcester, which sources its water from Leicester. Glacial retreat left large sediment hills and soil characteristics vulnerable to non-point source groundwater pollution²³, especially in the Paxton-Woodbridge-Ridgebury floodplains.



Action Item 1.1: Consider a Stormwater Enterprise Fee

Assess the Possibility of Implementing a Stormwater Enterprise Fee to fund the implementation of the Leicester Stormwater Management Program.

Leicester is committed to the implementation of a Stormwater Management Program (SWMP) to meet the conditions of the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System Permit (MS4). MS4 is a federal permit for cities and towns in Massachusetts to operate publicly owned or operated municipal stormwater systems.

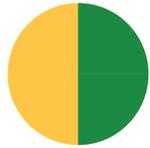
The SWMP includes public education, public participation and comment opportunities, a program to find and eliminate illicit discharges and control construction site and development project water, and a program to ensure that municipal pollution sources are minimized.

To fund the SWMP, and expand it if appropriate, and to fund the everyday management and maintenance of the Stormwater System, the town should establish a project to assess the implementation of a Stormwater Enterprise or Stormwater Fee. Stormwater Enterprise Fees are charged to property owners to cover the cost of stormwater management and infrastructure. They can be calculated in various ways, ranging from flat fees to a charge based on the area of impervious surface on a property. Impervious surfaces contribute to stormwater runoff and increase the demand on the drainage system.

The fee can be used to incentivize property owners to comply with stormwater requirements and choose "green" strategies that reduce runoff, such as utilizing rain barrels or rain harvesting systems, building rain gardens, and minimizing impervious surface on the property.

The assessment project should examine the alternative ways of calculating the Enterprise Fee, the total income that it could generate, the best way to implement it and its acceptability to the public.

²³ Non-point source groundwater pollution refers to any type of pollution that comes from many diffuse sources, instead of a single, identifiable source.



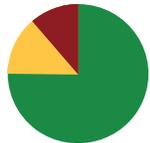
Action Item 1.2: Promote Low Impact Development (LID)

Promote LID and Nature Based Solutions that result in rainfall and snowmelt soaking into the earth rather than being collected in drains and pipes and flowing into water bodies, collecting pollution along the way. Swales, permeable paving, green parking lots, stormwater planters, bioretention bump-outs, and rain gardens are all examples of balancing needed development with stormwater runoff prevention. In addition to the systematic review of zoning bylaws, recommended in the Land Use Chapter, Leicester should carry out a LID evaluation of all its bylaws and regulations, using the Bylaw Review Toolkit developed by Mass Audubon²⁴ to ensure that appropriate LID measures are included in Stormwater Bylaws, Zoning Bylaws and Subdivision Regulations.



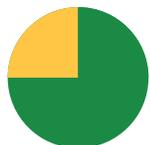
Action Item 1.3.: Explore LID Incentivization

Explore options for incentivizing low-impact development and stormwater management best practices such as green roofs on buildings, using porous pavement and pavers, creating rain gardens, and utilizing bioswales (shallow channels covered with vegetation) to reduce runoff. The incentives could take the form of reduced stormwater enterprise fees (if these are introduced), tax rebates, or land-use-regulation-based incentives such as density bonuses. This exercise would need to estimate the financial and other costs of the proposed incentives, their potential benefits and their acceptability to the community.



Action Item 1.4.: Identify and Assess Green Infrastructure Projects

Identify and assess potential sites for green infrastructure projects to improve stormwater infiltration. Green infrastructure such as rain gardens, bioswales, and constructed wetlands can be cost effective strategies for reducing stormwater runoff, while providing several co-benefits, such as reducing the heat island effect, and increasing wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, recreational opportunities, and beautification. In addition to incentivizing private landowners to invest in green infrastructure, the Town can implement stormwater runoff reduction strategies on town owned land. The Town can contract with regional partners like CMRPC to identify, assess, and develop designs for potential green infrastructure sites in town. Such an analysis was conducted in Northampton following their Municipal Vulnerability Plan (MVP) process in 2018. The City applied for and was awarded an MVP Action Grant for Northampton Designs with Nature. With this funding the City contracted with a consultant to identify ten sites and potential nature-based solutions through a community engagement process, and then contracted with an engineering firm, GZA Geoenvironmental Inc, to prioritize and develop designs for a selection of the sites.



Action Item 1.5: Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring

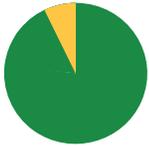
Create a volunteer water- quality monitoring group to monitor long-term trends in areas not monitored by the town or state. While the DPW plays an important role in maintaining water infrastructure and ensuring compliance with regulatory standards, capacity to conduct ongoing monitoring across all water bodies is limited. A volunteer base can supplement these efforts by collecting data on water quality trends in the lakes and rivers they live around in areas not already monitored by local authorities or the state. This additional data can help identify emerging issues before they become serious environmental or public health concerns. The Blackstone River Coalition is an example of such a volunteer program, training residents to collect samples and fill out data sheets. The town can work with regional partners in any of the town's three watersheds for support and to ensure consistency with data collection.

²⁴ <https://www.massaudubon.org/our-work/climate-change/local-climate-resilient-communities/land-use-rules>

GOAL 2

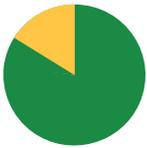
Promote Environmental Protection and Sustainability.

Ecosystem protection is a holistic goal that requires buy-in from all municipal stakeholders, including departments, boards, commissions, and residents. Invasive species management, endangered species protection, and preventing harmful chemical pollution are top priorities.



Action Item 2.1: Secure Funding to Eliminate Greenville Pond Invasives

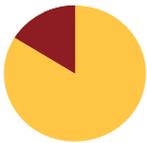
Secure Funding for Eliminating Invasive Species at Greenville Pond. In 2020, the land bordering Greenville Pond and River Street was transferred from the town to the Common Ground Land Trust (CGLT), a non-profit organization that seeks to protect the open spaces of Leicester and Spencer. The mission of the CGLT is to “acquire and conserve open space in our communities for a healthy and enjoyable environment.” CGLT intends to maintain the space as an area for public use, including the following uses: picnicking, small boat launching, ice skating, and fishing. There is a serious issue with the proliferation of water chestnut, an invasive plant covering much of the pond. While Greenville Pond is the most urgent problem of this sort, it is not the only one, as suggested by the fact that “weed control in lakes and ponds” was identified by one respondent to the community survey as the most pressing issue facing the town.



Action Item 2.2: Citizen Science Projects

Utilize citizen science projects to monitor invasive species and environmental change. Citizen science is the collection and analysis of data from the natural world by members of the public. Typical projects include wildlife and plant observation, water quality monitoring, and collection of weather data. One possible form this could take is that of a BioBlitz, possibly in collaboration with a local natural history museum like the Ecotarium in Worcester. These are events that bring together scientists and community volunteers to find and document as many species as possible over a short period, usually 24 hours. The goal would be to collect a snapshot of biodiversity in Leicester to help with conservation efforts.

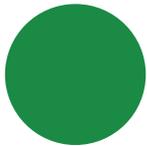
Apps such as Project Noah and iNaturalist provide residents with the ability to identify species and provide local scientists and municipal authorities with reliable data on where and when they see them. Devices like Chronolog photo stations can also provide reliable data connected to changes in local environments by encouraging passersby to consistently photograph the same location. While there is an upfront cost to this form of management, it could be a low maintenance way to track changes to a commonly used area. This could be a potential route for managing invasive and endangered species in select areas.



Action Item 2.3: Minimize Impacts of Infrastructure Maintenance Work

Continue to minimize the impacts of infrastructure maintenance work on the local environment. Although it plays a critical role for the town, roadway upkeep and other infrastructure maintenance can cause significant environmental harm. The use of salts can contribute to soil degradation, water contamination, and harm to local ecosystems. The Department of Public works is aware of this risk and should continue to work to mitigate it.

The town does not use herbicides for management of roadside vegetation and should continue with this policy, except for the control of Japanese Knotweed, for which mowing is ineffective and chemical control should be adopted. Routine mowing and brush clearing of roadside vegetation can also disrupt ecosystems, and in the case of Knotweed, exacerbate the problem. The Town should consider implementing selective mowing and the planting of native vegetation to reduce environmental impact. Additionally, the DPW should continue to monitor the work of utilities in respect of directional boring and vegetation management to mitigate disturbances to natural areas.



Action Item 2.4: Expand Dark Sky Provisions

Control the impact of light pollution by expanding requirements for International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) Dark-Sky Compliance. Light pollution is an increasingly recognized environmental concern, as it disrupts natural wildlife behaviors and physiological processes like migration, sleep cycles, population size, and genetic diversity due to lights acting as barriers to population movement. Leicester can address this by expanding its zoning requirements for IDA compliance. Currently only the HB-1 Mixed Use district has this compliance as a requirement. Expanding this requirement to other districts would not only support the local environment but also provide long-term cost savings by reducing unnecessary energy consumption.



Action Item 2.5: Adopt Pollinator Protection Policy

Adopt a policy which prioritizes the protection and flourishing of pollinators, native plants, and other natural resources that promote biodiversity and ecosystem health. Pollinators are crucial not only for agriculture but for general ecosystem health by maintaining diverse plant life, which then supports wildlife habitat and food supply, soil conditions, air quality, and water protection.

Many factors like habitat loss, climate change, pesticides and chemicals, parasites and diseases, and competition from non-native species are intersecting to cause a decline in bee populations. Other pollinators are similarly threatened. A common misconception is that the honeybee is the most at risk, when in reality a wide array of native bee populations are more threatened and at risk of extinction. Native bees, which are often better pollinators, are not domesticated and managed, meaning they can't rely as much on human intervention to boost their populations. The American bumblebee, for example, has lost nearly 90% of its historic population size²⁵. This is an issue for the ecosystem as a whole, as native plants often rely on specific native pollinators and vice versa.

The town can take steps to support pollinators by adopting a pollinator-friendly landscaping policy to reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides and by adopting native plant landscaping in public parks, roadsides, and municipal spaces. The town should work to produce connected pollinator corridors, including nesting sites like bare-ground for ground-nesting bees and wood crevices and hollow plant stems for solitary bees. The corridor should have a diversity of native plants that bloom at different times of the year to ensure a continuous nectar and pollen source. Leicester could also extend these corridors by offering guidance to support meadows or pollinator habitats in residential zones.

Along with support for pollinators and native plants, Leicester can adopt additional policies and practices to support native biodiversity. The town can assess where there may be excessive landscape clearing of leaves, fallen branches, and logs in green spaces. Instead, organic material could be kept in place to provide habitat and recycle nutrients through decomposition. Rodenticides and other pesticides can also disrupt entire food chains, and the town should adopt an integrated pest management (IPM) strategy to reduce their usage²⁶.

The town can also protect green space in developed areas with a no-net loss policy for any trees, shrubs, or other green infrastructure removed during construction. If replanting is not feasible, a mitigation fee could be required to fund tree planting in other areas of town.

²⁵ <https://www.fws.gov/species/american-bumble-bee-bombus-pensylvanicus>

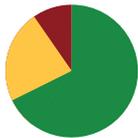
²⁶ https://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/integrated-pest-management-ipm-principles?utm_source=chatgpt.com

GOAL 3

Achieve Net Carbon Neutrality

The Town of Leicester has opportunities to align with state sustainability goals and move towards carbon neutrality. In 2022, The Commonwealth of Massachusetts issued the Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050 (2050 CECP). This plan contains a comprehensive set of strategies, policies, and actions to reduce statewide greenhouse gas emissions and achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Net Zero is a balance between the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced and the amount removed from the atmosphere²⁷.

Several policies in the state plan could be implemented in the Town of Leicester, particularly those related to green design, renewable energy, and sustainable transportation. Recommendations in line with 2050 CECP are discussed in other chapters of this Master Plan. Specific initiatives relevant to natural resources are discussed in the following action items.



Action Item 3.1: Adopt Green Design Policy

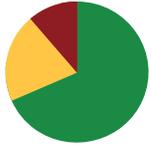
Adopt a policy to use green design wherever feasible for new Town buildings or building alterations and maintenance. Green design prioritizes sustainability of resources for several generations, with practices that include reduced energy consumption and waste creation.

Relevant elements of green design would include:

- Weatherization, including air sealing buildings, adding insulation to walls, pipes, and water heaters to improve efficiency, and repairing windows, doors, roofs, and walls.
- Green roofing on municipal buildings. Green roofs are partially or completely covered with vegetation, with a waterproof surface below. Green roofs can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and can improve the drainage of stormwater.
- Use of heat pumps instead of traditional heating or air conditioning systems. Traditional fossil fuel-based heating systems, such as oil and gas furnaces, contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. Natural gas pipelines are also notorious for leaking, which creates additional environmental and public health issues, as well as service interruptions. Air-source and ground-source heat pumps provide significant energy savings by extracting heat from the air or ground rather than burning fuel to generate warmth. According to the US Department of Energy, air-source heat pumps can be 2-4 times more efficient than conventional heating methods²⁸.

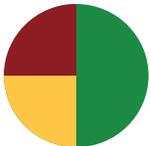
²⁷ What is net zero? | National Grid Group

²⁸ https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/air-source-heat-pumps?utm_source=chatgpt.com



Action Item 3.2: Explore Solar Panels on Town Buildings and Parking

Explore the feasibility of installing solar panels on any town owned buildings with suitable roofs and of erecting solar panels as shade structures and shelters over parking lots owned by the Town. This process could earn the town revenue as well as contributing to reduction of net emissions and making it clear that the town supports solar generation where it does not have negative environmental side effects.



Action Item 3.3: Change Town Vehicle Fleet to Low Emission Vehicles

Pursue municipal decarbonization by adopting low emission vehicles for the town fleet. Throughout their lifetime, hybrid and battery-electric vehicles produce fewer carbon emissions than gasoline-burning cars. Gasoline cars emit 350 grams of CO₂ per mile driven over their lifetime, while plug-in hybrid vehicles produce around 260 grams per mile and fully battery-electric vehicles produce 200 grams²⁹.

While electric vehicles are not emissions free, they produce much lower emissions. Lower vehicle emissions will bring the Town closer to meeting state net zero goals and bring other benefits, such as cleaner air, to Leicester in the process. Switching to an electric vehicle fleet would require the Town to implement infrastructure changes, including the construction of electric charging stations.

The Town can apply for state funding to finance any infrastructure improvements needed to support the switch to electric vehicles, including charging stations. Potential funding sources include the MassEVIP Fleets Incentive and Workplace and Fleet Charging incentives, rolling grant programs that aim to make electric vehicles more accessible to public entities in Massachusetts. The town could also apply for funding through the Green Communities Grants to reduce municipal energy use and costs through clean energy projects in municipal buildings, facilities, and schools.

²⁹ Are electric vehicles definitely better for the climate than gas-powered cars? | MIT Climate Portal

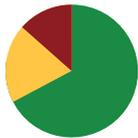
GOAL 4

Preserve Leicester's historic and cultural resources

Continuing strong relationships with local and regional historic/cultural partners is key to preserving Leicester's history and connecting current residents with the past. Leicester is a member of the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, a great partner for preserving assets from the mill-era Blackstone River Valley.

Leicester's Historical Commission is an important resource for preservation. It deals with demolition delay procedures and is a crucial repository of knowledge about historic properties in the town, although work on the production of a formal and up-to-date inventory of historic properties has not been funded since 2003. Further work on this inventory would be highly desirable, as would work to further amplify historic artifacts (now held at the library and the museum at the Swan Tavern) and the significance of historic areas.

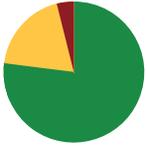
Continued education concerning historically significant buildings such as the interpretation and education work done by the Leicester Historical Commission through walking tours and similar activities can prevent future demolition and create buy-in from the community for restoration costs or reuse projects. Historical markers, online materials, and tied cultural events can provide additional support for the Historical Commission.



Action Item 4.1: Encourage Local Involvement in Local History

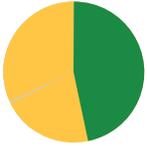
Encourage local involvement and enthusiasm for local history through new forms of engagement and marketing. There has been great engagement on the Leicester Historical Museum Facebook page, with over one thousand members in the group. This momentum can be capitalized on through more consistent posting. For example, posting a photo of one of the artifacts with a description each week, continuing the photo contest, and updating the page with events can keep the page updated and busy.

Social media can also be used to promote tours, volunteer opportunities, and provide access to digital versions of brochures. The creation of volunteer or internship opportunities for youth may create increased enthusiasm amongst younger residents in town. An internship could provide a way for younger residents to become involved in historic preservation and promote the preservation of the town's history to a new generation. Consistent and recognizable marketing could further bolster engagement. By utilizing consistent fonts, colors, and imagery on signs, flyers, posts, and other materials, the Historical Commission can make a brand that allows for easy recognition.



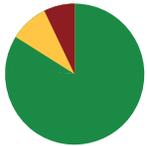
Action Item 4.2: Update the Swan Tavern

The Swan Tavern Historic Museum is an excellent resource for learning local history, especially due to its proximity to the local historic district and collection of local historic artifacts. To further draw visitors, the Town can fund a sign for the museum and can consider adding an internet connection to the building. The addition of a sign could help promote events, display visiting hours to visitors, and advertise what display is currently being shown. Providing publicly accessible Wi-Fi could draw in visitors and expand the potential uses of the space. For example, an internet connection could allow visitors to complete a self-guided tour through the use of QR codes or a webpage.



Action Item 4.3: Implement the Architectural Conservation District Bylaw

Leicester has an architectural Conservation District Bylaw, with a set of procedures, a map defining the area, and an appointed Board to oversee the implementation of the Architectural Conservation District. However, the bylaw is not currently being actively implemented. The Architectural Conservation District contains some of the most historically significant structures in Leicester and implementation of this bylaw would be a significant step towards historical preservation.



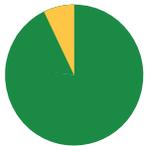
Action Item 4.4: Continue Efforts to Preserve the May House

Continue efforts to preserve the May House, which was built in the 1830s by Samuel May, the first minister of the Leicester Unitarian Church. The May Family remained in possession of the home for 126 years before it was sold and became, eventually, part of the Becker College campus. It is now an educational and community center. Reverend May was not only cousin to beloved author Louisa May Alcott, but also a passionate abolitionist who was willing to resign from his position as a display of that commitment. As shown by the very strong interest in this action item, the people of Leicester are inspired by the unique history of the May House and its preservation is highly significant to the community.

GOAL 5

Support and Preserve Leicester's Agricultural Heritage and Working Farms

Ensuring the long-term viability of agriculture in Leicester requires a comprehensive approach involving increasing access to farmland, supporting and enhancing the viability of farms, and expanding permanent farmland protection and stewardship.

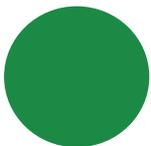


Action Item 5.1: Identify and address Regulatory Barriers and Opportunities

Identify and address regulatory barriers and opportunities for farmland access and preservation. Leicester's zoning over the 20th century was not conducive to maintaining small-scale agriculture. Save for the Suburban Agricultural (SA), and Highway Business Industrial (HB-1 and HB-2) districts, commercial agriculture, aquaculture, silviculture, horticulture, floriculture, and viticulture are only permitted by right on parcels over 5 acres (or 2 acres if the activity generates at least \$1,000 per acre per year). Livestock and greenhouses have even stricter limitations. Switching from outright banning these uses or requiring special permits to a site plan review process or allowing some agrarian uses by right in certain districts can encourage smaller-scale farming initiatives.

Additionally, the bylaws do not explicitly address farm related businesses, and especially agri-tourism businesses. This could lead to unintended restrictions and overburden their approval process. Farm stands could be permitted by right in all zones that allow agriculture, and mobile farm stands or pop-up sales could be encouraged. Small farm-to-table restaurants could be explicitly allowed as an accessory use on farms in certain areas, as well as value-added processing like cideries, bakeries, cheese-making, and commercial kitchens.

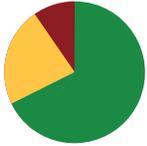
The town should also consider allowing farmers to diversify their revenue streams by permitting dual-use solar & agricultural projects in certain areas. Leicester does have a right-to-farm bylaw which effectively protects farmers against nuisance complaints by explicitly recognizing farming as a valuable and protected activity and ensuring that traditional farming practices cannot be considered a nuisance simply because they inconvenience neighbors. This includes protection for agritourism operations.



Action Item 5.2: Prioritize Areas for Farmland Preservation

As mentioned in the key findings section, Leicester has a large amount of land area in active farming, and this land is under significant threat from development pressure. There are also around 4,380 acres of either state designated prime farmland soil or farmland soil of statewide importance. This represents nearly 1/3rd of the total land area of the town. Much of this land is privately owned and the owners may not even be aware of the value of their soil.

The Open Space and Recreation Chapter includes an action item recommending an exercise to prioritize land for acquisition by the town for recreation and open space preservation. That prioritization process should include land that is of particular value for current and future farmland preservation based on soil quality, current agricultural or other use, and potential long term agricultural viability.



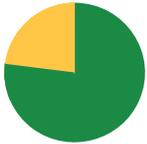
Action 5.3: Advocate for Farmland Preservation Strategies

There are a few key programs the town should discuss with landowners to protect their farmland. Agriculture Preservation Restrictions (APRs) are administered as a voluntary program by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR). The state purchases the development rights at fair market value, compensating landowners for the difference between the value of the land for agriculture and its higher value for potential development. Once land is enrolled in the APR program, it must remain farmland permanently. The farmer in an APR program benefits from grants and support through MDAR.

Another option for the permanent preservation of farmland is a Conservation Restriction (CR), which is discussed further in the Open Space and Recreation Chapter. This option may be more suitable for farmers that require protection for a greater diversity of land uses on their property, including wildlife conservation land and trails.

Transfer of Development Rights could also be a significant tool for farmland preservation in the community. This is discussed in detail in the Land Use chapter.

Many landowners may not be familiar with the complexities of these land use policies. The town should have easy-to-read materials (flyers, FAQs, videos) on the town website or other platforms explaining the available programs in layman's terms. The town website should have a clear and well-maintained section on farmland preservation with links to the programs. The information compiled can support the broader community engagement strategy outlined in the Town Services chapter. The town should also work with Central Mass Grown and other nonprofit partners on outreach strategies for these programs.



Action Item 5.4: Adopt a Chapter 61A Policy

The Chapter 61A program is a state property tax classification program that provides a tax incentive for landowners to keep their land in agricultural use. Landowners who actively farm the property can receive a lower tax assessment based on the land's agricultural value rather than its fair market value for development. The program runs for ten years at a time. At the end of each ten-year period the landowner can decide whether to register the property for a further ten years. The landowner will be subjected to fees and back taxes if the land is converted to a non-agricultural use during the ten-year period or within one year of the end of it.

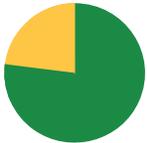
If the landowner decides to sell the land for non-agricultural purposes, the town has 120 days to exercise the right of first refusal to purchase the land at the price offered to the landowner. Otherwise, the landowner is free to sell the land to the original bidder. The right of first refusal can be assigned to a conservation organization or another entity willing to purchase and preserve the land.

While the town may be unwilling or unable to buy the land in question it is important that this should be a deliberate decision. The Chapter 61 Policy should set out clear responsibilities and timelines to ensure that information about the opportunity is circulated to all relevant people, together with any relevant information from the Open Space Package Prioritization process, and that a formal process is followed to take a decision within a specified time. At the same time the policy should require that the Common Ground Land Trust and any other qualifying organizations chosen by the town should be notified in time to do their research and that a decision by the town not to purchase the property should be taken in time to give the other organizations the time to take a decision of their own.



Action Item 5.5: Carry Out a Community Food Assessment

Carry out a community food assessment (CFA) to guide municipal policies and practices, identifying gaps and opportunities in the local food system and amplifying the existing ongoing efforts to improve food system equity and resiliency. This project should take a comprehensive look at the food system of the community bringing together town officials, businesses, schools, non-profits, and residents to address food security & nutrition, farmland, and food businesses. This will assist municipal and community-based efforts in identifying where to target resources and it can better position the town with future funding opportunities for food and agriculture initiatives. For example, CFAs can inform zoning, food waste management, school and institutional food programs, and business incentives. Additionally, the community engagement process can be the impetus for the start of other community-based food security initiatives.

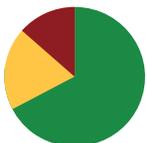


Action Item 5.6: Farmer Education and Training

Work with regional partners to provide educational and training opportunities to farmers, including transition planning assistance. Current and prospective farmers in Leicester will need all the resources they can get to ensure the viability of their farms. The town should work with Central Mass Grown and CMRPC to ensure that farmers are connected and updated with funding and technical assistance opportunities, as well as farming best practices.

One of the primary concerns for farming in the region is the lack of younger farmers to take over farming operations, leading many farms to be underutilized or sold off. The town should be able to connect retiring farmers who want to keep their land in farming with organizations dedicated to helping farmers with succession planning and farm transitions, such as Land for Good. The town can also host its own sessions to connect “at-risk” farm owners with farmers seeking land.

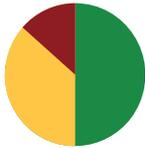
There may also be private landowners in town identified through the evaluation process of Action Item 5.2, with land highly suitable for agriculture, that are unsure where to begin to lease their land to farmers or have other barriers that the town could assist them with overcoming. The town may be able to work with Central Mass Grown to host informational workshops with these landowners.



Action Item 5.7: Foster Agricultural Knowledge and Awareness

Leicester’s community is generally supportive of agriculture, as evidenced by the Master Plan Survey data showing strong support for the farming community, and the adoption of the Right to Farm Bylaw. However, as Leicester works to expand the viability of farming in the community, the town will benefit from fostering a greater knowledge of agriculture. This could include awareness of who the farmers are in town, how to support them, and why local farming is important.

This culture shift can be brought on through opportunities for experiential learning, such as the development of community gardens where people can learn to grow food while helping to mitigate local food insecurity. The town can support the installation of food gardens at schools, and daycare centers, to cultivate interest in agriculture at a young age. The schools can adopt more programs that expose students to local food, including field trips to farms and in-school taste testing. As an example, in 2024, Mashpee Middle-High School received funding through the MA FRESH grant and support from regional partners Barnstable County Cooperative Extension Office of Nutrition Education and Food Safety, Master Gardeners of Cape Cod, and Health Ministry to open a new educational farm. The farm serves as an edible outdoor classroom, providing hands-on learning opportunities with produce from the on-site farm being served in the school cafeteria.



Action Item 5.8: Support Agritourism

Agritourism could be a strong cultural and economic asset for Leicester that would help sustain its farming community. Agritourism is a form of tourism that connects visitors with agricultural experiences, blending farming, education, and recreation. The industry has grown significantly over the years, driven by increasing consumer interest in local food, outdoor experiences, and sustainable tourism. Many types of activities can fall under the umbrella of agritourism, including farm tours, petting zoos, apple picking, farm stays & lodging, workshops (growing crops, cheese-making, beekeeping), farm-to-table dinners, corn mazes, historical farm demonstrations, or agricultural fairs. The diversity of experiences can increase the financial resilience of farms and boost Leicester's economy and branding. It can also connect people to the local history of the community and foster a sense of place.

One of the primary hurdles for expanding agritourism in town, as discussed in Action Item 5.1, is regulatory restrictions for various accessory uses on farm properties that agritourism might entail. The town can also identify opportunities to assist with improving signage, parking, and marketing, as well as connect farms to training opportunities via Central Mass Grown, MDAR, or other resources.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

OVERVIEW

The Open Space and Recreation Chapter guides how Leicester should invest in its recreational land, facilities, and programming, ensuring these resources can be enjoyed by community members. This is distinct from the Natural & Cultural Resources Chapter in that it focuses more on the human use and management of open space and recreational resources, rather than open space protection measures and environmental stewardship.

Public input has emphasized strong community interest in improving water-based recreation, expanding trails, and increasing the variety of recreational facilities to serve different age groups. Residents have voiced a particular desire for enhanced playgrounds, teen gathering spaces, and expanded trail networks. However, capacity and funding constraints remain significant challenges, limiting the Town's ability to maintain and improve existing recreational assets. The Town's commitment to community engagement, creative partnerships, and phased implementation will be key to expanding and enhancing recreational opportunities over time.



KEY FINDINGS AND PRIORITIES

Key Finding #1 Residents Want More Water Recreation

Residents were overwhelmingly vocal at the workshop about the need for more water-based recreation in town. Burncoat Park, which was previously used for water recreation, has closed and much of the land has developed into a thriving wildlife habitat, which has received natural heritage and endangered species program designation. Future designs for parkland at this site need to account for the land now protected under this designation. Other ponds in town have become overgrown with invasive species, which, along with other water quality impairments, have hindered efforts to establish beaches and water-based recreation facilities. Even with improvements in water quality, the Town either does not own the water or lacks sufficient shoreline to create a new beach.

Key Finding: #2 Recreation for All Ages

Leicester currently only has two small playgrounds, which are usable by young children. One is part of the elementary school and has limited public access. The other is at Towtaid Park and has limited equipment. There is no handicapped accessible playground equipment in town. There are also no recreational areas for teenagers aside from sports fields and basketball courts.

The town needs a greater variety of recreational facilities that cater to different age groups, particularly young children and teenagers. Public input emphasized the lack of sufficient playgrounds, gathering spaces for teens, and well-maintained sports fields, as well as the need for more indoor recreation opportunities that allow for year-round activities.

Additionally, many existing recreational spaces require ADA accessibility improvements to ensure that all residents, including those with disabilities, can fully enjoy Leicester's parks and facilities.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“
It would be great to open up one of the ponds in town for public access— swimming, kayaking, fishing, etc. Too much privately owned waterfront.”

“
Leicester should have a lakefront Beach, PLEASE. The other towns have them only for THEIR residents.”

“
I think making some sort of water space more accessible to the public, whether it's a beach, or boat launch or docks for fishing. We have a lot of water around town and not a lot of ability to use it.”

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“
We'd like to see a place for teens to gather after school and on weekends in the town common area.”

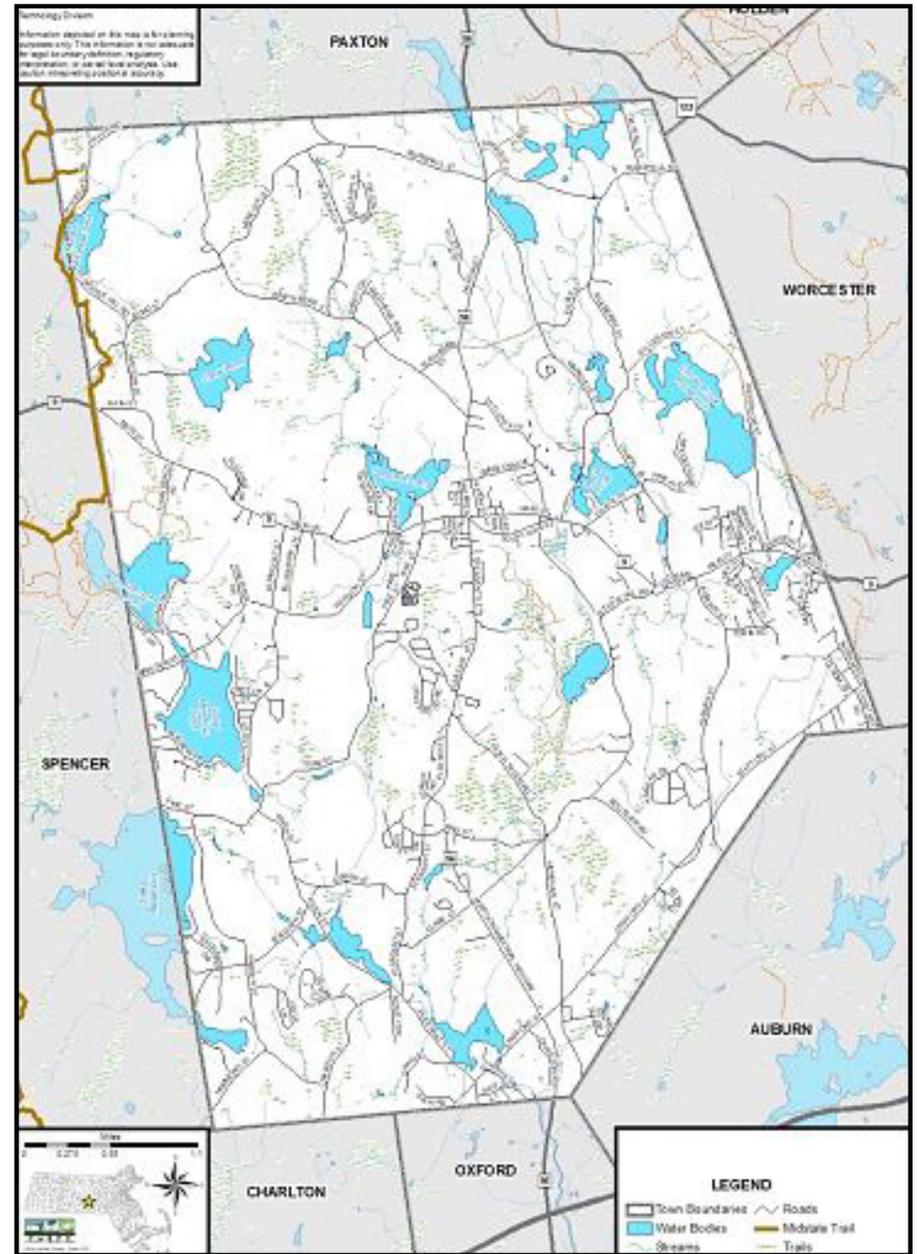
“
Activities for youth. Assistance for any troubled youth.”

Key Finding: #3 Leicester has the Potential to Expand its Town-wide Trail System

In the master plan survey, 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Leicester should build and expand connections for walking and biking trails as well as sidewalks. Many workshop and survey participants stated they value Leicester for its access to the amenities of the city while still having vibrant green spaces to enjoy. However, residents find that Leicester is lacking in trails compared to other similarly sized communities. Residents would especially like to see trails connecting different parts of the community, like dense pockets of residential or commercial development connecting to the Town Center. According to the 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan update, much of the work done to maintain the trails has been done by the Snowmobile club, which has had declining membership in recent years. The Leicester Historical Commission carried out a good deal of work in 2009 to assess potential future connections between town-owned and non-town-owned trails and develop a plan for their implementation, but budget constraints stopped the project before they could complete the assessment.

During the Leicester Master Plan Workshop, residents expressed strong support for expanding the Town’s trail network, particularly with a focus on creating safe, accessible connections to the town center. These residents include cyclists, families with young children, and outdoor enthusiasts. They highlighted a need for well-designed multi-use paths that accommodate both recreation and everyday travel. A multi-use path would provide a safe and convenient corridor for walking, biking, and other non-motorized travel options, reducing dependence on cars while improving overall mobility. Expanding the trail network would also contribute to healthier, more sustainable lifestyles by encouraging outdoor activity and alternative transportation modes. Additionally, improved trail access would enhance Leicester’s reputation as a community-oriented, family-friendly town, attracting visitors and supporting local businesses.

Map 8: Leicester Trail Network



Currently, Leicester's primary trail asset is the Midstate Trail, which runs along the northwestern border of town. While this is a valuable recreational resource, it does not provide direct access to key destinations such as schools, parks, and the town center. Developing arterial trail connections and an expanded network of multi-use paths would significantly improve both internal connectivity within Leicester and external linkages to surrounding communities. These efforts could be coordinated with regional trail planning initiatives to enhance access across Central Massachusetts.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“
The Town should look into creating a biking and multi-use trail on Pleasant St. that connects to the town center.

“
Add trails. Let people enjoy nature. Stop closing trails. Remove the liability and keep the trails open.

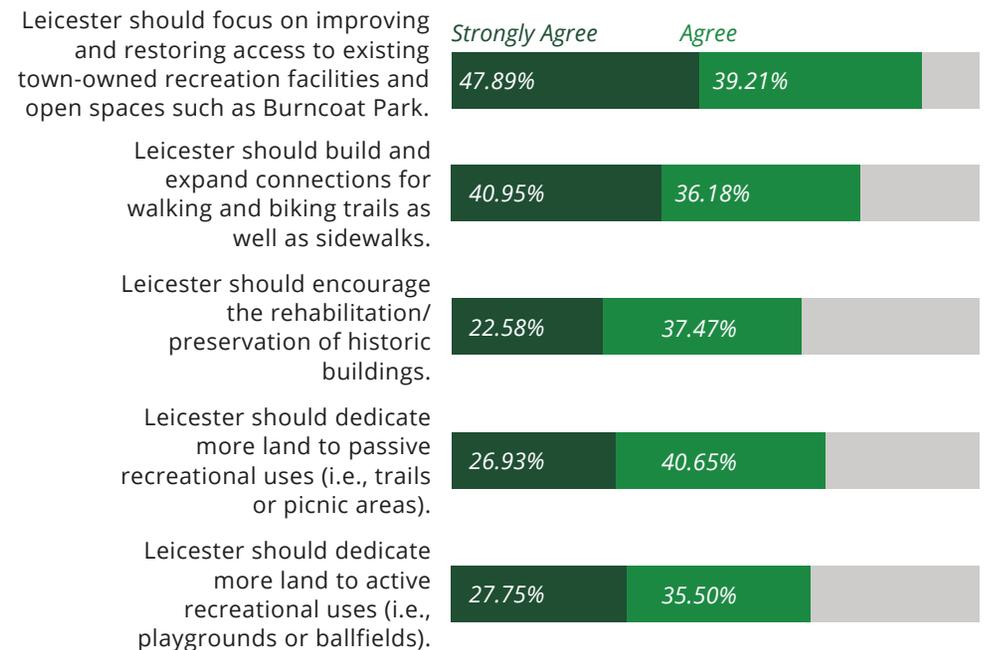
“
Hillcrest Golf Course and the land near it should have walking and biking trails that are sufficiently distant from golfers to be safe.

“
Henshaw pond and the trails around it should be developed into an official recreational park.

Key Finding: #4 Capacity and Funding are significantly limited

The Town has only limited capacity to address all of the issues it currently faces. It has an all-volunteer Parks and Recreation Committee to manage, program, and improve town-owned parks. The Highway Department, which maintains some of the facilities, also currently has strained capacity. Residents agreed in the survey, as seen in the table below, that the Town should focus on improving the existing resources before making further investments.

Figure 20: Attitudes Towards Town Priorities





GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

The following section lays out the recommended goals and action items. These are informed by the key findings set out above and the input received from the community survey and the first community workshop, as well as consideration of the resource constraints facing the Town, . They were informed also by experience elsewhere and best practice in the field of comprehensive planning.

The goals are broad statements of policy. While several action items have been proposed for each goal, the goals themselves should not be seen as being limited to specific action items. Many of the action items are probably aspirational due to the funding and staffing limitations of the Town. However, this is a long-range plan, and the financial status of the Town is expected to change significantly over the next 10-20 years. The Town can position itself to achieve its more aspirational goals by factoring them into decision-making processes while implementing the more feasible short-term actions. Additionally, other chapters of the Master Plan- namely Economic Development and Town Services chapters- will explore strategies to increase financial capacity to make the others achievable well within the time horizon of the Master Plan.

The goals and action items were discussed with the MPSC and then put to the attendees of the second community workshop. At that workshop, each goal was displayed on a poster, together with its

associated action items. A space was provided for workshop participants to record their responses to each action item. The responses of the workshop attendees have been captured below for context. To save space, the responses have been converted into pie charts. The size of the pie chart indicates the relative amount of interest shown in the action item according to the total number of dots placed. The larger the chart, the more interest participants expressed. The color of the portions of the pie charts reflect the colors of the dots. Green indicates support for the action, Red indicates opposition, and yellow indicates a neutral response.

For Example:



GOAL 1

Improve Maintenance and Management of Existing Recreational Facilities

Well-maintained recreational facilities are essential for ensuring that Leicester's parks and open spaces remain safe, accessible, and enjoyable for all residents. Like many communities, Leicester struggles to maintain its recreational assets due to financial and staffing constraints. As described above, the securing of long-term funding for sustained maintenance will require a broader townwide approach to economic development, which will be addressed in other chapters of this plan. In the meantime, the Town can take meaningful steps by securing targeted funding for the DPW to establish a structured maintenance plan and by engaging volunteers to help supplement municipal efforts. The following action items outline steps to improve the management and upkeep of Leicester's recreational spaces, ensuring their long-term sustainability and continued use.

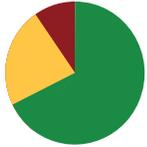


Action Item 1.1: Develop a Comprehensive Park Maintenance Plan

Develop and regularly update a comprehensive park maintenance plan for all parks as recommended in the 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan. Consolidating the effort into a single plan will save time and resources. The Town can apply for a grant to hire a consultant to complete the project without having to significantly cut into town staff time. The Park Status Reports identifying existing facilities, programs and conditions (also recommended in the 2021 OSRP) could be included as a section of this plan.

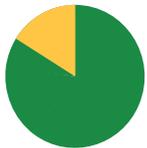
While this plan would not directly fund physical improvements, it would help address concerns that basic maintenance of some parks is being neglected. By using a cyclical maintenance plan to categorize and schedule repairs based on urgency and importance, deferred maintenance items can be addressed systematically rather than reactively, reducing costlier fixes and safety risks down the road. A structured plan also helps the Town spread out maintenance costs over multiple years, instead of having to deal with unexpected large expenditures (e.g. culvert failure, roof collapse).

The DPW also recently put together a work order system that has the capability to log preventative maintenance and alert staff when routine maintenance is required. This system can serve as the operational backbone of the plan. The maintenance plan should establish clear priorities and schedules for each park and then leverage the work order system to ensure the corresponding tasks are logged, tracked, and completed efficiently.



Action Item 1.2: Ensure Long Term Funding for High School Turf Field

Ensure there is long-term funding in place for the maintenance of the High School turf field. Following the Town's acquisition of the former Becker College campus, the DPW has become responsible for the proper maintenance of their turf field, which is being used year-round to host high school and youth sports activities. Turf fields have unique and costly maintenance needs. The Town will need to pay special attention to how it will fund and manage this field going forward. This could be a matter of budgeting, or it could involve some form of sponsorship or advertising, admission charges to some events, charges to outside organizations for the use of the field or fundraising of some other sort.



Action Item 1.3: Formalize Volunteer Park Committees

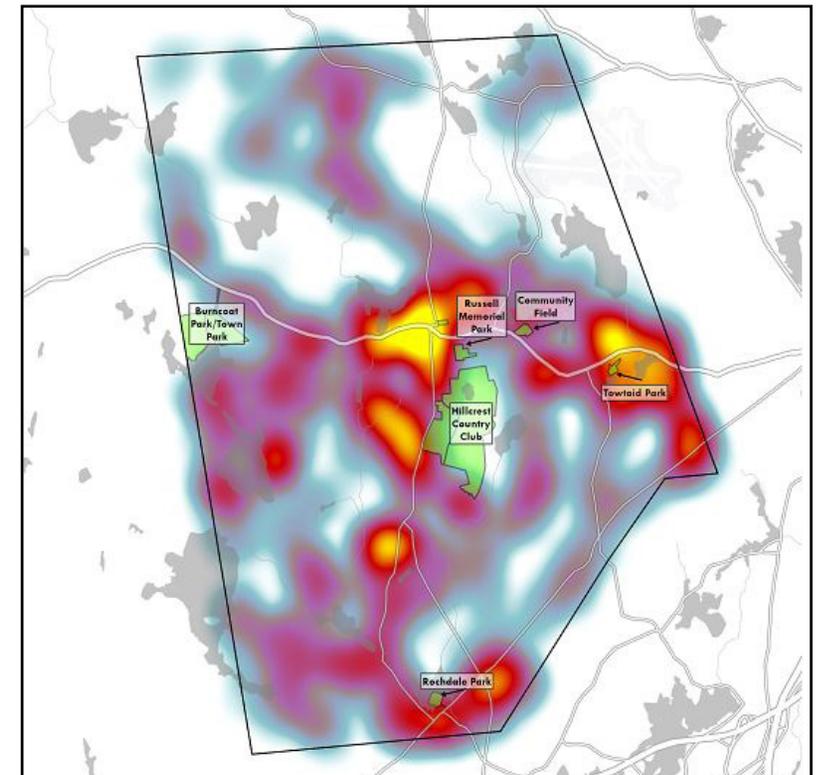
Formalize volunteer committees for Town parks, ideally recruited from among the residents in each park's respective neighborhoods. The DPW could benefit from volunteer groups willing to take on some of the responsibility of maintaining the parks. It was noted during the stakeholder interview process that many residents are vocal about the upkeep of the parks that they live near, as these are the locations they're more likely to spend time at. Encouraging residents from these neighborhoods to take on volunteer roles could foster a sense of personal ownership and ensure the continued maintenance and upkeep of these important assets. Tasks that residents could take on might include:

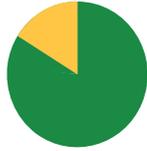
- Trash clean-up
- Planting flowers, weeding, and other landscaping and gardening work
- Inspecting playgrounds, benches, signage, and other equipment for damage
- Trail and path maintenance (clearing debris, minor repairs)

Volunteer maintenance has also been shown to be effective at reducing vandalism. Insufficient maintenance including overgrown vegetation, deteriorated broken down equipment, and/or inadequate lighting could signal neglect, making parks more susceptible to misuse. Volunteers dedicated to the space will be able to ensure it is more regularly maintained, and they can spend more time in the area, reducing opportunities for misuse.

The map below shows the density of structures across town. The areas that appear as hot spots have a greater density of developed properties and, by implication, residents. The map is paired with the major recreational open space lands in town to demonstrate the density of populations living and/or working around specific parklands.

Map 9: Density of Structures in Leicester

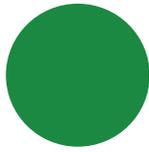




Action Item 1.4: Americans with Disabilities Act Transition Plan

Update and continue to implement Leicester's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan. A significant issue across Leicester's parks and recreational spaces is ADA accessibility. Many facilities lack proper pathways, adaptive equipment, and other necessary modifications to serve residents with disabilities. The Town's last ADA Transition Plan dates back to 2011, with the most recent self-evaluation occurring in the 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Moving forward, Leicester should:

- Update and implement its ADA Transition Plan
- Ensure that new and existing trails, playgrounds, sports fields, and community spaces incorporate universal design principles.



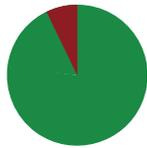
Action Item 1.5: Develop a High School Internship Program

Develop an internship program for Leicester high school students to assist the DPW in park maintenance. The Town could consider many different options for involving high school students in town government functions. One option is to have an internship program to assist the DPW with park or building maintenance. Given Leicester's funding and capacity constraints, this would allow the DPW to supplement its workforce without a significant increase in the Town's budget. Other towns in Massachusetts, such as the Town of Medfield, have successfully implemented similar programs. Students can specialize in a single department, specific project, or provide general assistance as needed. The program can provide a valuable learning experience for teens, a youth voice in municipal planning and decision-making, and a significant boost to town staff capacity.

GOAL 2

Expand Upon and Diversify Recreational Facilities for All Ages and User Groups

A diverse and well-maintained recreation system is essential for a healthy, active, and connected community. Leicester residents have expressed the need for expanded and more inclusive amenities that cater to all ages and interests. Many facilities are limited in size, accessibility, or geographic distribution, leaving certain groups—such as young children, teenagers, and older adults—with fewer options for recreation. By expanding and diversifying recreational facilities in strategic locations, Leicester can create new community gathering places that support active lifestyles, social engagement, and town pride. The following action items contribute to strategies for improving and adding new recreational assets throughout the Town.



Action Item 2.1: Plan and Design New Playgrounds

Conduct a needs assessment and seek funding for a concept design and feasibility study for new playgrounds designed for children of different ages.

Survey respondents frequently called for bigger and more accessible playgrounds for children at different age levels. Southern Leicester has no playground facilities. The Town should consider working with the Parks and Recreation Committee to install playground facilities at Rochdale Park. The Town may also consider a more centrally located playground near other active recreation areas to support residents throughout the community and develop more of a central community gathering space for intergenerational interaction.

The Town should conduct a needs assessment identifying potential locations and holding public input sessions to gather preferences on location, equipment, and accessibility concerns. The Town should then pursue funding for a concept design and feasibility study at selected sites.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



The playground behind the police station is very dilapidated and needs repair. [We need] more kids activities in town.



There's nothing here to entertain families with young kids. The playgrounds are small and not in a main area.



Too many recreational fields and not enough playgrounds or swimming options.



"[The town center] doesn't look inviting and lacks a beautiful center, playgrounds and inviting areas to become a community.

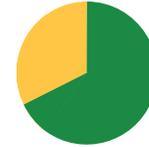


Action Item 2.2: Recreation Facilities for Teens

Conduct outreach to teens to determine priorities for recreation and begin concept development and preliminary design. There is a lack of recreational options for teenagers, but no specific ideas of what appropriate spaces should look like. Without designated spaces for teens to gather, socialize, and engage in recreation, they may resort to less ideal gathering areas or disengage from the Town altogether. Some possible options for recreational amenities for teens might include:

- A skatepark or pump track
- An outdoor social plaza with seating, fire pits, and hammocks.
- An outdoor adventure park with climbing walls or obstacle courses.

Engaging directly with teens through outreach efforts—such as surveys, school-based discussions, and student focus groups—will help the Town identify the most desired recreation options. This process will serve as a first step in refining options and ensuring that investments align with teen preferences and community needs.



Action Item 2.3: Study Demand for and Feasibility of a New Community Recreation Center

Study the demand for and feasibility of a new community recreation center. The community center would provide an indoor space for year-round recreation, including sports, fitness programs, and after-school activities. Locating it near the outdoor facilities would allow for seamless indoor-outdoor activity transitions, making it ideal for events and tournaments.

To determine the feasibility of this project, a study should be conducted to assess demand, potential costs based on concept designs, funding opportunities, site suitability, and timelines. This study should include a community needs assessment through surveys and public engagement to identify the specific programs and amenities that residents desire. Additionally, an analysis of comparable facilities in neighboring communities could provide insights into best practices, potential revenue models, and operational challenges. The study should also evaluate potential funding sources, such as grants, partnerships, or public-private collaborations, to offset construction and maintenance costs.

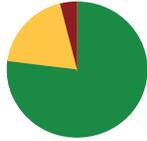
VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



Need more activities, especially in summer, for young people, including teenagers.



[The town needs] A place for teens to gather after school & weekends in the town common area.



Action Item 2.4: Revitalize Burncoat Park

Burncoat Park was used as a Town Beach from its purchase in 1968 until 1990, when the beach was closed due to a lack of funding for upkeep and supervision. The beach has since become overgrown and turned into a sensitive wildlife habitat protected by the state. The park currently features a softball field and hiking trails, but these require significant maintenance. Active recreation is allowed on 20 acres of the park, while the remaining contiguous land is designated as passive. The parking lot, located at the end of Town Beach Road, is also in a deteriorated state and is currently gated off, forcing users to park along the road.

The Burncoat Park Sports Planning Committee is leading efforts to rehabilitate the park and secure funding for improvements. They've received funding to restore the parking lot which is scheduled to reopen in summer 2025. However, additional recommendations from past planning efforts remain unfunded, including:

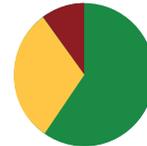
- Developing new sports fields and playgrounds
- Constructing a viewing platform overlooking the pond
- Creating an accessible pathway
- Restoring a connection to the Midstate Trail

The Town currently lacks funding to implement these additional recommendations but should continue to explore grants and community-driven initiatives like Park Cleanup & Trail Maintenance days to restore the park. Despite ongoing issues with parking and drainage, the site presents an opportunity to become a key venue for events like a beer & food truck festival or community sports tournaments.



Action Item 2.5: Install Security Equipment Where Appropriate

Invest in security equipment to reduce vandalism in secluded park areas. Vandalism at several town parks was cited as an ongoing issue in the community. This was also a finding in previous plans. Burncoat Park was



Action Item 2.6: Develop an Open Space Parcel Prioritization Plan

An Open Space Parcel Prioritization Plan (OSPPP) would help the Town make strategic, data-driven decisions about which currently unprotected parcels should be preserved for environmental stewardship or recreation.

The OSPPP would involve the development of evaluation criteria and ranking systems. A separate ranking system would be created for conservation priority areas and recreation priority areas. Data for the evaluation criteria could then be collected and used to score individual properties.

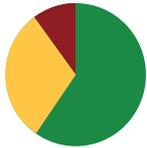
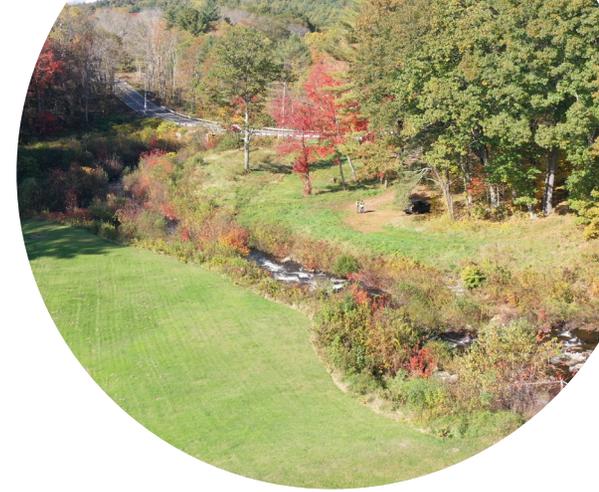
Not all forested parcels provide the same conservation value and identifying high-impact parcels ensures that limited funds are spent wisely. The analysis of these areas could include criteria such as how well the site contributes to contiguous open space or whether it contains sensitive habitats. For active recreation parcels, criteria could include topography & other environmental constraints, proximity to population centers, and pedestrian & bicycle access. A prioritization plan will also make it easier to secure grant funding, as agencies will favor projects backed by data-driven, long-term planning.

A key recreation need that may warrant an entirely separate prioritization system is land for a new town beach. The Town or local land trusts will need to explore funding opportunities for acquiring new property or establishing agreements with private landowners for the beach, as no current publicly owned land is viable for this purpose.

GOAL 3

Improve Access to and Awareness of the Town's Recreational Facilities

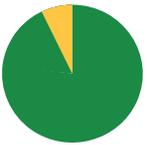
Many of Leicester's recreational facilities, open spaces, and trail systems remain underutilized due to a lack of awareness and limited access to information. Visitors and new residents may not know where parks and trails are located, what amenities they offer, or how to find out about programmed recreational activities. To maximize the benefits of these spaces, the Town can improve signage, expand public outreach, and provide informational resources that encourage greater participation. The following action items focus on making Leicester's recreational opportunities more visible and user-friendly for all.



Action Item 3.1: Improve Signage and Wayfinding

Improve signage and other wayfinding, identifying the location and access points for all conservation lands that are open to the public. Leicester has a wealth of conservation lands and recreational assets, but limited signage and wayfinding currently make it difficult for residents and visitors to easily locate and access these spaces. Improving signage at key access points, installing directional markers along major roadways, and developing cohesive branding for Leicester's outdoor offerings can help increase awareness and encourage greater use of these natural areas.

As the Town is situated along Route 9, a major statewide commercial corridor, there is significant untapped potential to attract visitors who may be passing through and unfamiliar with Leicester's outdoor offerings. A comprehensive wayfinding strategy should assess the visibility of existing outdoor spaces, identify key locations for new signage, and explore digital tools such as interactive maps or QR codes to enhance accessibility.



Action Item 3.2: Promote Recreational Facilities

Use paper and digital resources (including social media) to promote the Town's recreation facilities, public open spaces, trail systems, and other resources to new residents and visitors. The Town currently lacks a trail map or any brochures outlining the recreational opportunities available in town. There is also no dedicated webpage for showcasing these amenities. These resources can increase awareness of the Town's recreational facilities and promote their active use and stewardship. Social media should also be used to post updates, event announcements, and features of specific parks and trails.

The Leicester Parks and Recreation Committee has created a new page on the Leicester Website for people to sign up and pay for the different activities that they offer. They also have volunteers that are now going to help book all their events. The page will soon be active on the Town website, and visible from the home page. Pages promoting specific facilities should also link to this page and vice versa to ensure a consistent flow of information about recreational opportunities in the community. This site should also include a "Suggest an Activity" form to gather community input on desired programs and a Community Recreation Calendar for viewing all the scheduled events in one place. Parks and Recreation is also working on a monthly newsletter that will promote events and programs.

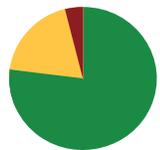
GOAL 4

Develop and Expand Recreational Programming for Residents of All Ages

The Town's recreational offerings are one of the primary ways the residents can come together from across different age groups and backgrounds, to build and strengthen Leicester's sense of community. Events like festivals, sports leagues, and park activities create traditions that contribute to a shared sense of place and pride in the Town and can encourage people to get involved and take ownership of community initiatives that reduce some of the strained capacity of town staff.

The Parks and Recreation Committee is responsible for much of the recreation programming in town. Like many communities, Leicester experienced a reduction in recreational programming during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past few years, the committee has worked hard to restore and expand recreational offerings, such as basketball games, a food truck festival and family fun nights. These and other events were used to spotlight the different parks in town and the recreational activities they offer.

While progress has been made, the opportunity remains to broaden offerings to better serve all users and foster more community engagement. The Committee currently has only seven members and there is significant potential to expand capacity and funding to sustain the existing initiatives and continue to grow. To address these issues, the following action items focus on building partnerships, increasing volunteer engagement, and establishing a strategic framework for long-term program development.



Action Item 4.1: Stakeholder Analysis to Identify Partners

Conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify potential partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, and civic groups to bring new programs to Leicester's parks and trails. The Parks and Recreation Committee is actively exploring ways to enhance capacity through community partnerships. They have already been considering opportunities to have businesses or civic groups host events and educational nights in town. To structure these efforts, the committee could conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify potential partners, their interests, available resources, and potential roles. This analysis will not only uncover new programming opportunities but also help tailor engagement strategies to address stakeholders' specific interests and concerns.

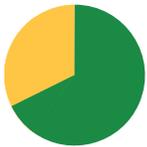


Action Item 4.2: Promote Volunteer Opportunities

Boost capacity for recreation programming through creative promotion of volunteer opportunities. The Parks and Recreation committee has been exploring new pathways for the promotion of volunteer opportunities. One proposal is to partner with Town schools to host events. The Committee could sponsor a Government Day where town boards and committees set up tables in school to give students the opportunity to learn about what the Town does. The Town could also explore volunteer or internship opportunities for students.

The Parks and Recreation Committee has also proposed to host events for adults at businesses or natural gathering places. These events would provide food and drinks while attendees move between tables, engaging different boards and groups to learn about volunteer opportunities and town needs.

These efforts would help the Town connect with residents who may be unaware of the current need for volunteers. Hosting informational events in a relaxed setting with food and drinks can boost attendance and engage new civic groups that might not be drawn to formal committee meetings.



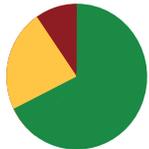
Action Item 4.3: Programming Strategic Plan

Develop and regularly update a programming strategic plan for sports facilities and recreational spaces. In addition to the maintenance and capital improvement plans for recreational facilities, the Parks and Recreation Committee, as it continues to grow and develop, will want to develop a dynamic roadmap for expanding and diversifying recreational programming. The committee has already been very active and forward-looking with many plans for future projects and a programming strategic plan will formalize the process and ensure that the momentum is sustained and adaptable. The plan should outline short- and long-term programming goals, a framework for regular public feedback, performance metrics, and funding strategies to support program expansion. This will also support the Town's grant writing efforts as many potential funding sources will favor applicants with evidence of structured planning and long-term vision.

GOAL 5

Expand and Better Maintain Leicester's trail system, including Connecting Trails and Opening up Access to the Town Center

Leicester's trail system is an underutilized asset that has the potential to significantly enhance recreation, connectivity, and alternative transportation options in town. While Leicester has a variety of trails, many exist in isolation, lacking connections to key destinations such as parks, schools, town facilities, and commercial areas. In addition to connectivity challenges, the Town's trails suffer from maintenance issues, unclear signage, and limited awareness among residents. By taking a strategic, long-term approach, Leicester can create a more cohesive, well-maintained, and accessible trail system that benefits both residents and visitors, providing greater access to outdoor recreation, supporting healthier lifestyles, and creating safe walking and biking routes that reduce reliance on cars.

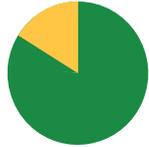


Action Item 5.1: Establish a Trail Committee

Although Leicester has an abundance of open space, conservation land, and recreational assets, its trail network lacks a dedicated entity to oversee planning, maintenance, and expansion efforts. Currently, trail-related work is split between different boards and volunteers, often leaving gaps in coordination, maintenance, and long-term planning.

- A dedicated Trail Committee could:
- Ensure that Leicester's trails are well-maintained, safe, and accessible to all users.
- Support the planning and expansion of a connected, town-wide multi-use trail network.
- Identify funding opportunities and apply for state and federal grants to improve trails.
- Engage volunteers and community members in trail stewardship efforts, such as volunteer-led clean-ups, repair initiatives, and invasive species removal.

This committee could help the Town pursue funding and resources for the development of the trail inventory and master plan recommended below, collaborating with regional partners or hiring consultants for the project development. The formation of the committee can begin with targeted public outreach, particularly through upcoming volunteer engagement events organized by the Parks and Recreation Committee (as noted in Action Item 4.2). These events present an opportunity to gauge interest and recruit residents passionate about outdoor recreation and conservation. The Town should also promote the initiative through newsletters, social media, and local events to attract a diverse group of volunteers.



Action Item 5.2: Trail Inventory

Conduct an inventory of existing trails, working with local and regional partners to identify gaps, underutilized trails, and areas with potential for new connections. Many trails in town are underutilized, fragmented, or lack clear signage and maintenance, limiting their accessibility and impact. Conducting a comprehensive inventory of the Town's trails similar to the assessment partially completed by the Leicester Historical Commission (LHC) in 2009 will provide essential data to improve existing routes, enhance connectivity, and identify priority areas for expansion. To improve clarity on the publicly available trails, the Town can create a GIS-based database, including those managed by the Town, local land trusts, and regional organizations. The trail inventory and GIS analysis can identify:

Where connections are missing to key destinations such as parks, schools, and commercial areas,

- Underutilized trails that could benefit from better maintenance, signage, or accessibility features,
- Areas where new trails could be developed,
- Areas where new access points are needed, and
- Where environmental sensitivity may warrant restrictions on trail usage to avoid soil degradation and erosion.

The Town should collaborate with local and regional groups to share data and ensure the alignment of priorities. Any future work on this project should incorporate input from the LHC, given their previous work on a similar effort and their general knowledge of the locations.

A public facing trail dashboard could be developed from the database to provide updates on trail conditions, length, difficulty, permitted uses (e.g., horseback riding, mountain biking, snowshoeing), volume of foot traffic, etc. This dashboard should be accessible from and linked to

Part of this inventory should deal specifically with multi-use trails that provide Leicester residents with safe, accessible routes for walking, biking, and other recreational activities, while also serving as an alternative transportation network that links key areas of town. Currently, Leicester's densely developed areas lack safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to parks, schools, town facilities, and commercial centers.

The multi-use trail plan could involve a detailed pedestrian pathway assessment incorporating sidewalks, mapping conditions, gaps, and safety concerns. Public meetings, surveys, and stakeholder workshops can assist with gathering input on priority connections. The plan can also establish trail design and implementation guidelines, including trail wayfinding and educational signage standards and best practices for maintenance and safety. Lastly, the plan can explore funding opportunities and establish a phased implementation plan, prioritizing projects based on feasibility, cost, and impact.



TRANSPORTATION

OVERVIEW

Located adjacent to the City of Worcester and approximately 54 miles from downtown Boston, the Town of Leicester depends heavily on its transportation system to connect residents and businesses to these and other regional economic hubs. However, transportation systems do more than facilitate commuting; they enable residents to access essential local amenities such as schools, healthcare facilities, shopping centers, parks, and other community resources.

A well-designed transportation system extends beyond mobility and accessibility. By promoting alternatives to driving, such as walking, biking, and public transit, communities can encourage active lifestyles and minimize environmental impacts. Improved circulation reduces congestion, enhances safety, and reduces stress while mitigating noise and air pollution.

Transportation also shapes how communities grow and evolve. Decisions about the location of housing, businesses, and land uses must account for accessibility and the capacity of existing infrastructure to support anticipated travel needs.

In summary, transportation is more than a tool for connecting people to destinations; it influences health, lifestyle, and the framework for future growth. For Leicester, addressing transportation is essential to planning a sustainable and prosperous future.

This chapter provides a strategic framework for improving Leicester's transportation infrastructure and accessibility. While this chapter primarily addresses transportation-related priorities, the broader interconnections with Economic Development, Land Use, Housing, Open Space and Recreation, Natural and Cultural Resources, and Municipal Services are critical and will be addressed in their respective chapters. The following goals and action items reflect the Town's priorities in expanding mobility, improving safety, and fostering sustainable transportation choices for all Leicester residents.

KEY FINDINGS AND PRIORITIES

Key Finding #1 There is a Lack of On-Demand / Microtransit Transportation Options in Town

Leicester’s transportation network is primarily designed to accommodate car users. Cars provide their owners with great convenience; trips can be made to unlimited destinations with little to no preparation or advanced notice. In communities with limited regularly scheduled public transportation services (e.g., Worcester Regional Transit Authority—WRTA--bus service) such as Leicester, on-demand or micro-transit transportation options offer the closest substitute for cars. “On-demand” transit refers to any transit service that transports individuals without fixed routes or fixed schedules. Microtransit represents an evolution of traditional on-demand models.

Microtransit systems use algorithms to dynamically generate local routes based on passenger demand³⁰. However, these non-fixed route transportation options are in low supply in Leicester, creating significant accessibility barriers for residents who do not drive due to age, ability, or financial constraints. The WRTA does offer curb-to-curb transit service for residents of Leicester who are aged 60 and over and for people with disabilities of all ages. This is a shared-ride service that makes stops to pick up and drop off other passengers while the rider is on the way to their destination. On-demand transit options for other Leicester residents are limited to private rideshare services, like Uber and Lyft. Master Plan Survey respondents expressed general disapproval with the quality of rideshare service in town. This was also conveyed through individual comments from the survey and public workshop.

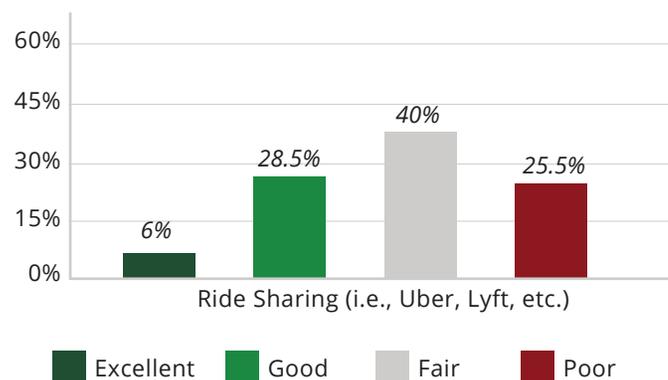
³⁰ The National Center for Applied Transit Technology. “On Demand Transit and Microtransit: Where and Why.” October 31, 2023.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“Really Lacking” (comment concerning weaknesses for on-demand transportation; public workshop).

“I moved here with no car and Leicester has the worst public transit I have ever experienced, and I have lived all over the country. It’s also impossible to get an Uber without ordering like an hour ahead.”

Figure 21: How would you rate the overall transportation infrastructure in Leicester? (Results for Ride Sharing - e.g., Uber, Lyft, etc.)



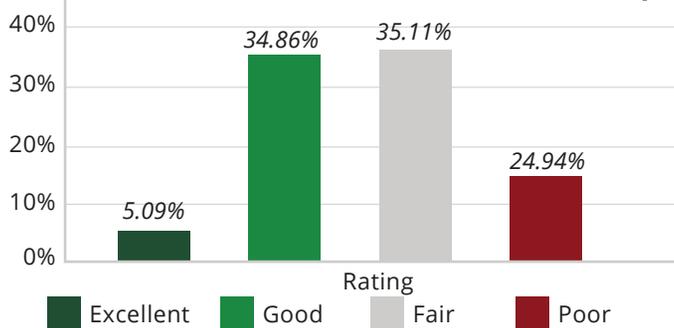
Key Finding #2 Improvements are Desired to WRTA Fixed Route Transportation Service

Community feedback has consistently highlighted the need for improved public transportation options in Leicester, particularly the establishment of formal Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) bus stops with essential amenities such as shelters, seating, and trash receptacles.

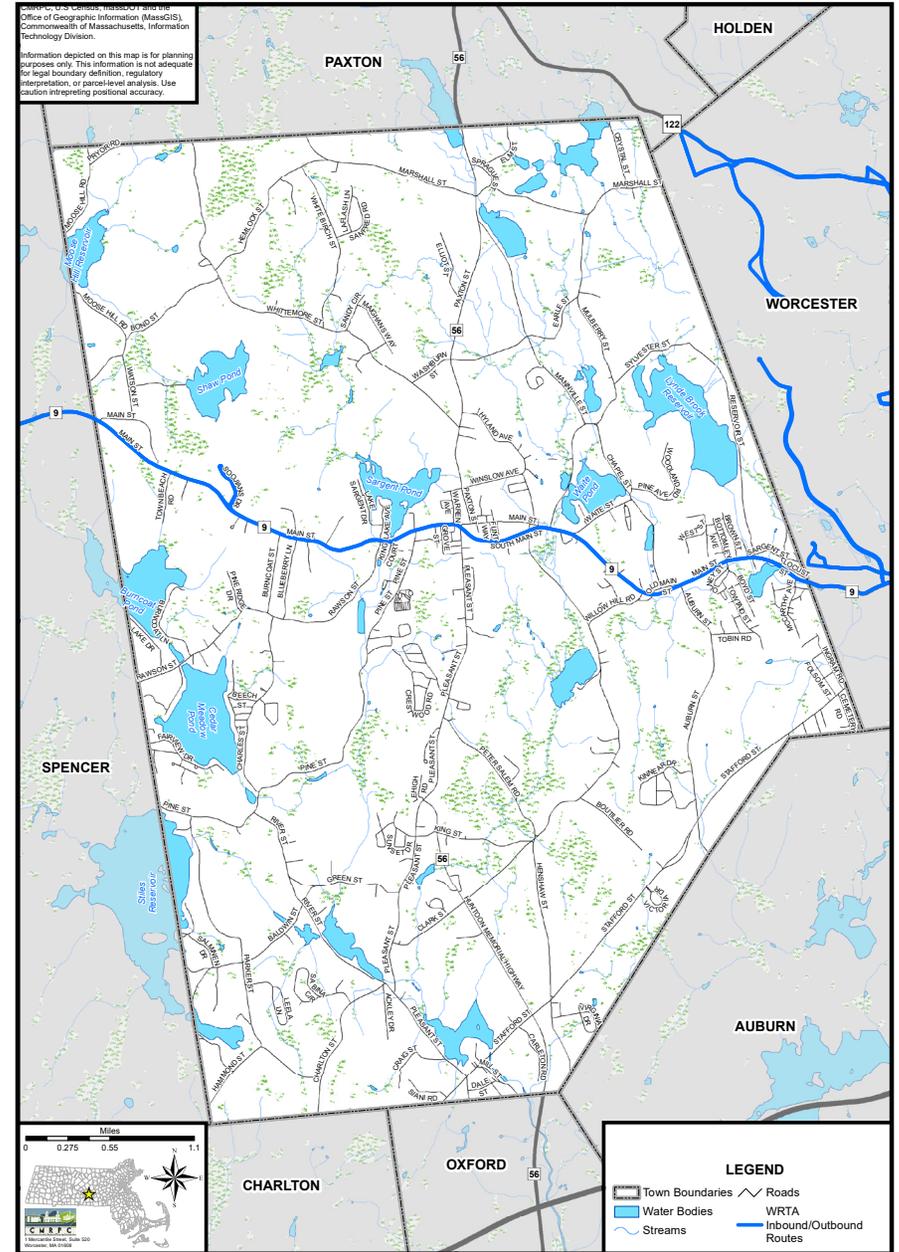
Currently, WRTA operates two designated bus routes in Leicester: Route 33, which runs along Main Street (Route 9) at 35- to 60-minute intervals throughout the week, and Route 19, which provides limited weekend service to the Leicester Housing Authority and Walmart. Figure 1 shows current WRTA routes in Leicester. However, outside Worcester, WRTA primarily operates on a flag-stop basis, meaning buses stop wherever passengers signal. This informal system leads to inconsistencies in scheduling and reliability, creating barriers for residents who depend on transit for daily commuting.

Leicester’s proximity to Worcester, combined with evolving federal and state funding opportunities, strengthens the feasibility of implementing a more structured transit system. Union Station in Worcester, just seven miles east of Leicester Center, serves as a major regional transportation hub, offering access to the MBTA Framingham/Worcester commuter rail line, Amtrak’s Lake Shore Limited, and intercity bus services like greyhound and Peter Pan. With 28 weekday inbound commuter rail trains and connections to destinations such as Framingham, Newton, and Boston’s South Station, Union Station represents a key transit link for Leicester residents seeking expanded mobility options. As WRTA undergoes service restructuring and efficiency improvements, Leicester has an opportunity to advocate for enhanced transit options.

Figure 22: How would you rate the overall transportation infrastructure in Leicester (Results for Public Transportation)



Map 10: Bus Routes in Leicester



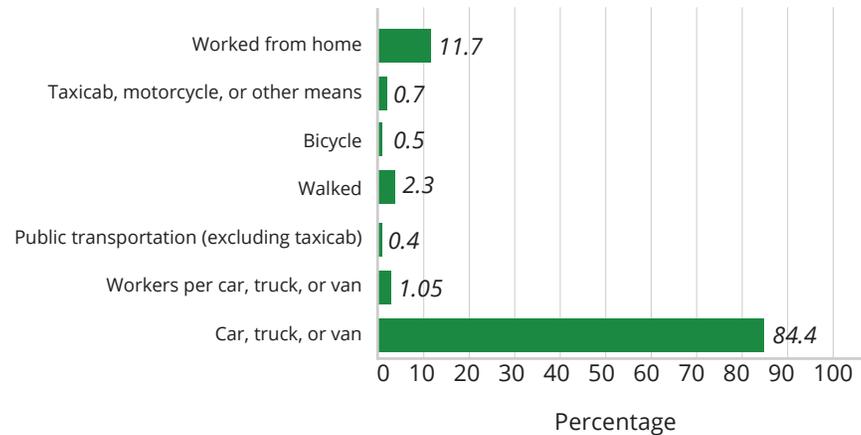
By collaborating with WRTA and regional transit agencies, Leicester can take meaningful steps toward a more accessible, reliable, and sustainable transportation network. Investing in improvements will not only expand mobility options for residents but also strengthen economic opportunities and regional connectivity.

Residents at the first community workshop expressed a desire for a commuter rail service, as well as additional bus options.

Figure 23 shows the means of transportation to work for Leicester residents. Of the 84.4 percent of car commuters, 77.1 percent drove alone.

Figure 23: Means of Transportation to Work

Source: US Census American Community Survey 5-year Estimates



VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



An express bus leaving the center of Town passing through Rochdale and then going on to the Grafton train station would be a terrific thing for Boston bound commuters.



There could be a parking lot near Route 56 where people could leave their cars and board the bus.



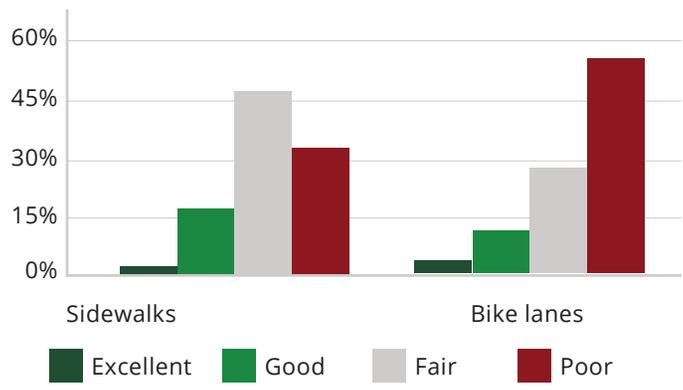
Adding a train from Rochdale into Worcester would be wonderful.

Key Finding #3 Residents are Disappointed with the Town's Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure

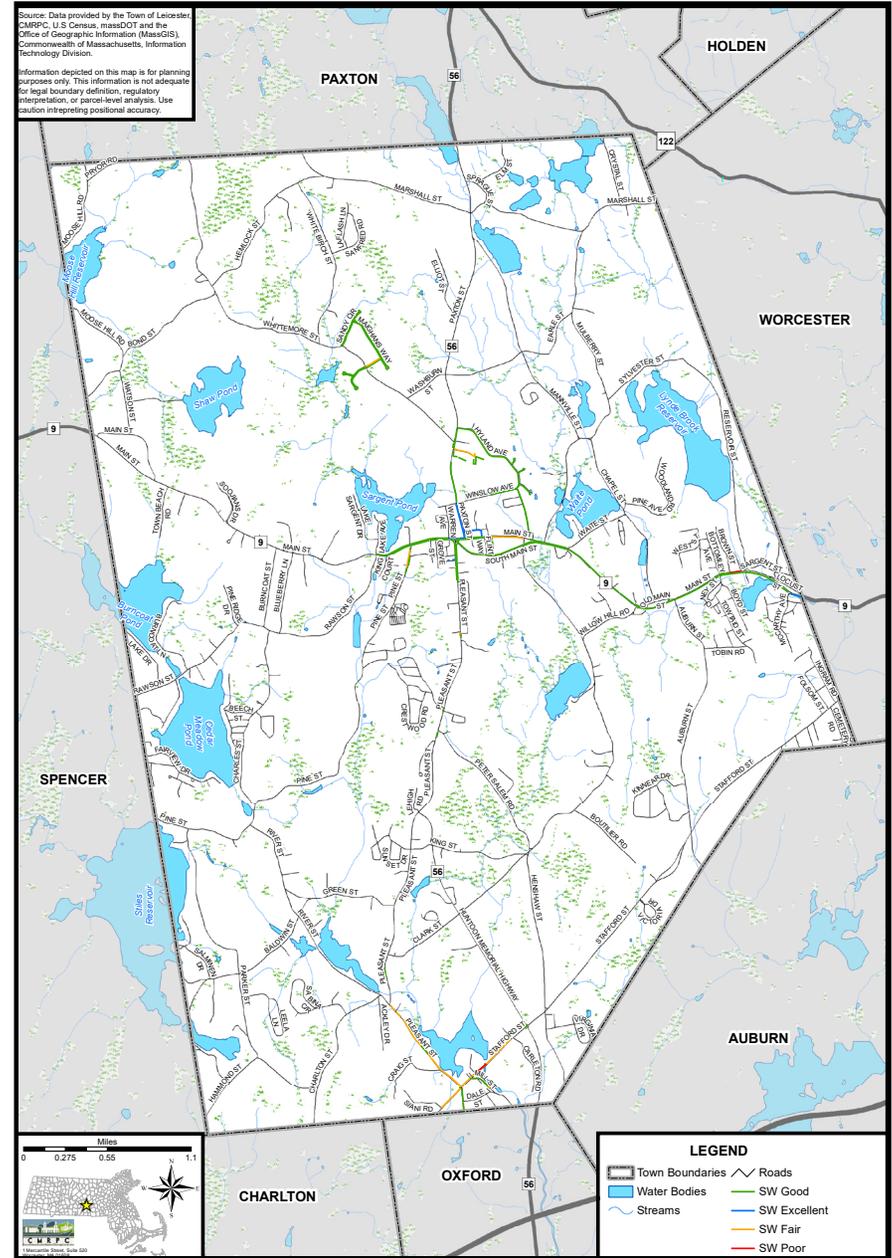
The Master Plan Community Survey results show that respondents are generally disappointed with the Town's sidewalk and bike lane infrastructure. However, in a ranking of transportation investment priorities, sidewalks were ranked third and bike lanes were ranked fifth out of seven categories. The first and second ranked investment priorities concerned resurfacing roads and road infrastructure respectively.

The Master Plan Survey identified several key corridors—Pleasant Street, Paxton Street/Route 56, the Center of Town, and Main Street/Route 9—as top priorities for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements. Community outreach efforts have reinforced the need to enhance safe access to key destinations, particularly schools and recreational areas. Additional priority areas may be identified in the Open Space and Recreation chapter, particularly regarding trail networks and their integration with the broader transportation system. The need for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements was also captured in Leicester's 2018 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan and the 2024 Town Center Parking Study. Several places in town that were observed to be priorities for pedestrian and/or bicycle infrastructure improvements by the 2018 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan have yet to be fully addressed, including the Leicester Elementary School and Middle School and the Town Common. Many other areas such as Rochdale require improvements but are not scheduled to receive them until beyond 2030 in some cases.

Figure 24: How would you rate the overall transportation infrastructure in Leicester? (Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor)



Map 11: Sidewalk Condition



VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



Sidewalks in old neighborhoods are non-existent. Planning needs to keep making sure new developments have sidewalks. Bike lanes would be nice, but our roads are too narrow and to widen would encroach too much on people's front lawns and/or eliminate the sidewalks.



Pleasant street needs a sidewalk from the center to at least Hillcrest. People are constantly walking, running and biking in a time narrow [sic] breakdown lane within a high traffic area.



Having continuous sidewalks would make a world of difference in people spending more time downtown. It must be safe to walk before people will walk.



Sidewalks need to be improved. Walking down Main St near towards the center is unpleasant. I have a baby and use a stroller and there is always some debris and unmanaged bushes growing into the sidewalk.



Not a walkable town. Not enough sidewalks. Not attractive.

Leicester's transportation network is characterized by narrow roads, many of which lack sidewalks or dedicated bicycle infrastructure. While sidewalks exist in some low-to-medium-density residential developments and along portions of Main Street/Route 9 and Paxton Street/Route 56, the overall network is incomplete. Gaps in the sidewalk system discourage pedestrian activity, limiting connectivity between neighborhoods, schools, and commercial areas.

For cyclists, Leicester currently has no designated bike lanes or formal bicycle infrastructure. Some roads with wider shoulders offer limited protection, but most cycling occurs in mixed traffic, requiring riders to share lanes with vehicles traveling at various speeds. Community feedback has highlighted safety concerns along Route 56 and Marshall Street, where deteriorating road surfaces, narrow shoulders, and poor visibility—especially around curves—force cyclists into the main roadway, increasing the risk of accidents. Expanding pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure aligns with Leicester's ADA Transition Plan, which calls for improvements to sidewalk accessibility, curb ramps, and connections to key destinations such as parks, schools, and community spaces. Investing in complete streets, safer crossings, and multimodal connectivity will improve public safety while enhancing Leicester's overall mobility and quality of life.

Traffic congestion is a growing issue throughout the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO) region, impacting communities of all sizes. Increased congestion leads to longer commutes, higher transportation costs, and rising pollution levels. Promoting walking and cycling for short trips can help alleviate these issues. Studies show that:

- 50% of trips in metropolitan areas are less than three miles, with 28% being one mile or less.
- Even in rural areas, around 30% of trips are two miles or less, making them feasible for biking or walking if safe infrastructure is available.

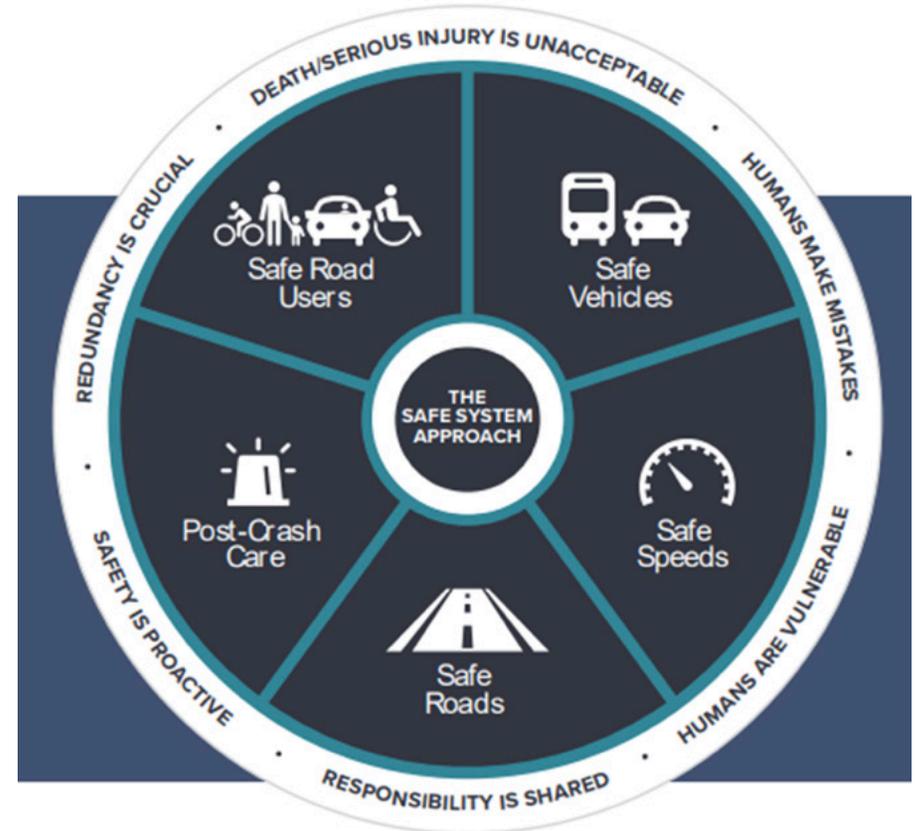
By expanding safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, Leicester can support more sustainable transportation choices, reduce reliance on cars, reduce congestion, increase parking availability, and work towards its Net Zero goals.

Investing in complete streets and multimodal connectivity will not only improve public safety but also enhance Leicester’s overall quality of life, making it a more walkable, bike-friendly, and environmentally sustainable community.

Across the Commonwealth, communities are committing to Vision Zero, a new standard for safety in our transportation networks. The principal goal of Vision Zero is to ensure the basic right of safety for all people as they move about their communities by achieving zero roadway deaths. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) promotes the Safe Systems Approach as a framework for achieving Vision Zero. The Safe Systems Approach is based on six guiding principles: death and serious injuries are unacceptable, humans make mistakes, humans are vulnerable, responsibility is shared, safety is proactive, and redundancy is crucial. Making the commitment to zero roadway fatalities means addressing every aspect of crash risks through the following elements of the Safe Systems Approach:

- Safe Road Users
- Safe Vehicles
- Safe Speeds
- Safe Roads
- Post-Crash Care

Vision Zero brings together planners, engineers, policymakers, public health officials, and additional stakeholders to address the complex problem of roadway safety. The following graphic shows the multifaceted Safe Systems Approach.

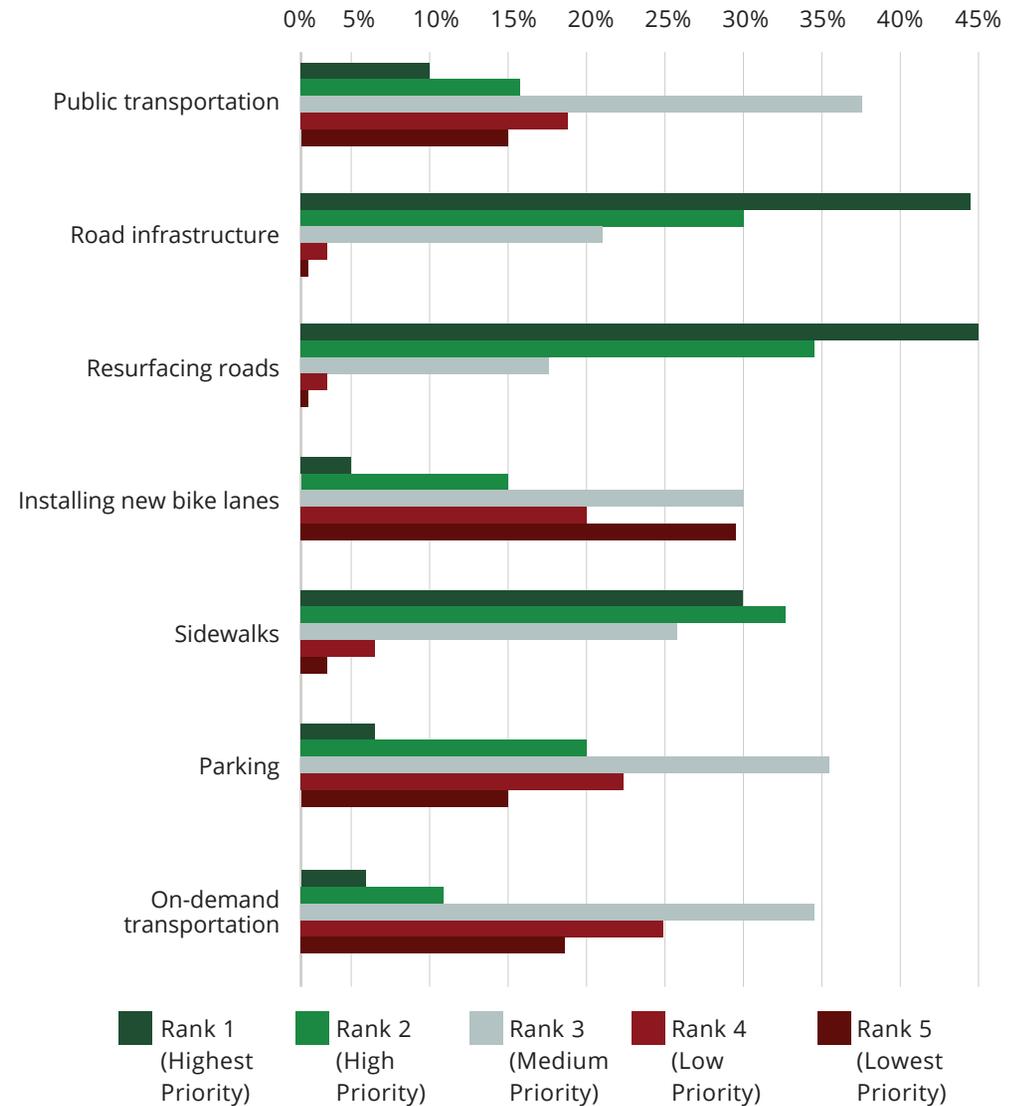


Key Finding #4 Roadway Improvements

Leicester’s road infrastructure received mixed ratings in the town-wide survey, with most responses categorizing conditions as either good or fair. However, road resurfacing and infrastructure improvements were among the highest priorities for residents. With approximately 100 miles of roadway, Leicester’s Road network consists of a mix of local streets and major corridors that provide regional connectivity. Route 9 serves as a key east-west commercial corridor, while Route 56 runs north-south through the town, linking it to Paxton and Interstate 90. Other significant roadways include River/Pleasant Street, Stafford Street, Marshall Street, and Mulberry Street. Although Route 9 is state-owned and ineligible for Complete Streets funding, other local roads may qualify for improvement programs.

Traffic safety is a major concern, with 1,646 total crashes recorded in Leicester since 2018, including 7 fatal and 39 serious injury crashes. The most hazardous locations include Route 9 near Warren Ave and Pleasant St, as well as Stafford Street at Route 56 in Rochdale, both of which experience high traffic volumes and congestion. Despite these safety challenges, Leicester currently has no active Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) projects, meaning there are no dedicated state or federal funds for roadway upgrades. However, the Town is included in the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), which could provide future opportunities for investment in critical infrastructure.

Figure 25: What transportation investments do you think Leicester should prioritize?





GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

Based on the key findings set out above and the input received from the community survey and the first community workshop, and taking into account the resource constraints facing the Town, the following goals and action items were proposed. They were informed also by experience elsewhere and best practice in the field of comprehensive planning.

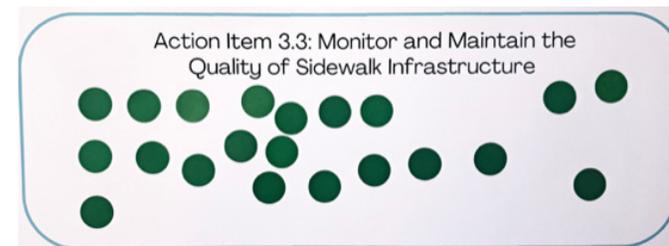
The goals are broad statements of policy. While several action items have been proposed for each goal, the goals themselves should not be seen as being limited to specific action items.

The goals and action items were discussed with the MPSC and then put to the attendees of the second community workshop. At that workshop, each goal was displayed on a poster, together with its associated action items. A space was provided for workshop participants to record their responses to each action item. The responses of the workshop attendees have been captured below for context. To save space, the responses have been converted into pie charts. The size of the pie chart indicates the relative amount of interest shown in the action item according to the total number of dots placed. The larger the chart, the more interest participants expressed. The color of the portions of the pie charts reflects the colors of the dots. Green indicates support for the action, Red indicates opposition, and yellow indicates a neutral response.

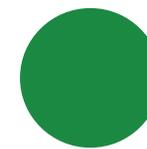
For Example:



is represented as



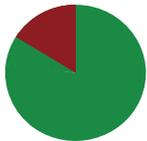
is represented as



GOAL 1

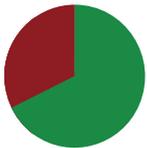
Improve On-Demand/Microtransit Service for Non-Drivers

Ensuring equitable access to transportation is essential for Leicester's most vulnerable populations, including but not limited to seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income residents who may not have reliable access to a personal vehicle. Many of these individuals rely on alternative transportation options such as rideshare services, regional transit, and community shuttles. However, these services remain limited and inconsistent in Leicester. Expanding mobility options for non-drivers will enhance their ability to access healthcare, employment, shopping, and social activities, improving overall quality of life.



Action Item 1.1: Conduct a Microtransit Needs Assessment

Conduct a needs assessment to address non-fixed route transportation options. This would include an analysis of the level of need for on-demand or microtransit services such as on-demand shuttle services that provide flexible, door-to-door transportation for residents, gaps in existing service offerings, and potential solutions. Community input could be collected through a survey, focus groups, or public workshops. Inspiration for such a study can be found in the 2023 Quabbin Region Rural Transit Study. To the west of Leicester, the Quaboag Connector also offers an example of a regional on-demand transportation service. By offering operational and cost-efficiencies, regional solutions can address local transportation problems.



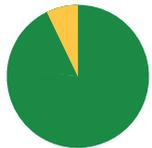
Action Item 1.2: On-Demand Service Model Pilot

Pending the completion of a needs assessment, Leicester should consider piloting new on-demand service models. Possibilities include volunteer programs for long distance trips or subsidized rideshare service programs. For example, the Town of Sudbury launched a subsidized rideshare service for senior citizens. Sudbury partnered with the private rideshare company Uber to offer the program.

GOAL 2

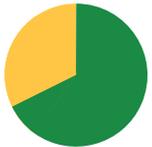
Establish and Enhance Public Transit Options

Leicester's current public transit system is limited, creating challenges for residents who rely on alternatives to driving. Expanding and improving public transportation options will enhance access to employment centers, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and essential services while reducing traffic congestion and vehicle dependency. A well-connected transit network can also support economic growth by attracting businesses and residents who value reliable, commuter-friendly communities.



Action Item 2.1: Expand Fixed-Route Bus Service

Collaborate with the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) to assess the feasibility of and facilitate additional fixed bus routes serving high-demand areas, such as the town center, Route 56, and Rochdale.



Action Item 2.2: Improve Bus Stop Infrastructure

Identify strategic locations for formalized WRTA bus stops, prioritizing key transit corridors, such as Route 9. Ensure stops include essential amenities such as shelters, seating, lighting, and trash receptacles to enhance rider comfort and accessibility.



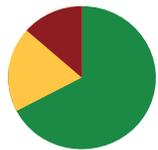
Action Item 2.3: Secure Federal and State Funding

Actively pursue state and federal transportation grants to secure funding for transit infrastructure improvements, service expansion, and sustainable mobility programs. Partnering with regional planning agencies will also increase the Town's eligibility for transportation funding opportunities.

GOAL 3

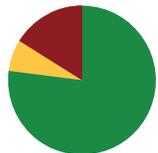
Enhance Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure

Leicester’s growing interest in cycling and walking as viable transportation options has been evident in community outreach efforts and the master plan workshop. However, existing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure remains fragmented, with incomplete sidewalks, unsafe road conditions, and a lack of dedicated bike lanes. Improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure will not only enhance safety and accessibility but also encourage more residents to choose active transportation for short trips, reducing congestion and promoting healthier lifestyles.



Action Item 3.1 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan Implementation

Continue to prioritize pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure improvements in key areas identified by the 2018 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan. These consist of Pleasant Street, Paxton Street/Route 56, Main Street/Route 9, the Center of Town, and more. Features to be addressed vary widely and include curb ramps, sidewalk grade, crosswalks, warning signs, and rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs). In addition to future scheduled improvements, the Town should address improvement recommendations that were not acted upon by the date suggested in the plan.



Action Item 3.2: Enhance Pedestrian Experience

Enhance the Experience of Pedestrians in the Center of Town through Safety and Wayfinding Improvements. Home to the Town Common, the Town Hall, the Leicester High School, the Swan Tavern historical museum, and many local businesses, the Center of Town is a hub of significant activity. The area has the potential to be a more attractive destination by offering a more pleasant pedestrian experience. This can be advanced through installing improved warning signage and crosswalks and adjusting the timing of pedestrian crossing signals, as identified by the 2024 Town Center Parking Study. Wayfinding signage, especially signs denoting public parking around Town Hall, would also invite pedestrians to travel between the Town Common area and the intersection of Routes 9 and 56 with more frequency. The Town should review the recently completed Washburn Square Wayfinding and Gateway Plan and take the necessary steps to design and fund wayfinding signage for the area.



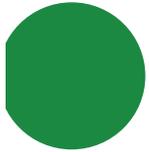
Action Item 3.3: Maintain Sidewalk Infrastructure

Maintain and monitor the quality of sidewalks which, with adequate safety and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant features, are critical to pedestrian connectivity. Components of sidewalk infrastructure, such as striping and curb ramps, can quickly deteriorate, leaving pedestrian safety compromised.

GOAL 4

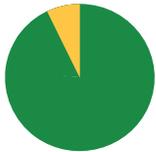
Invest in Road Infrastructure

To address Leicester's roadway challenges and improve transportation safety, the Town must take proactive steps to secure funding, implement strategic improvements, and enhance overall mobility. By prioritizing high-crash locations, advocating for state-supported projects, and ensuring that local roads receive necessary maintenance, Leicester can create a safer and more efficient transportation network. The following goals and action items outline key steps to achieve these objectives:



Action Item 4.1: Secure Sustainable Infrastructure Funding

Pursue diverse state and federal funding opportunities to support Leicester's roadway infrastructure. This would involve strategies such as collaborating with regional planning agencies to apply for Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) funding, advocating for increased Chapter 90 funds, and exploring grants such as Complete Streets, Municipal Small Bridge Program, and Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A). In addition, engage with state and federal representatives to highlight Leicester's transportation needs and develop a long-term funding strategy to ensure sustainable investment in road maintenance and improvements.



Action Item 4.2: Improve Traffic Safety

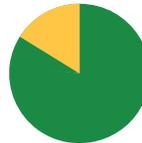
Conduct traffic safety audits to assess critical intersections and identify necessary safety improvements. This could include establishing a safety committee of experts and community members to analyze crash data, determine root causes of crashes, and develop actionable solutions to reduce crash frequency. Arising from this analysis a comprehensive safety report with findings and recommendations should be produced for presentation to key stakeholders such as the Select Board, DPW, and MassDOT who could assist in advocating for safety enhancements at high-crash locations and other hazardous locations.



Action Item 4.3: Create a Pavement Management System

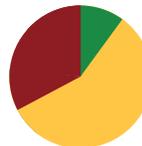
Develop a data-driven pavement management system to guide road resurfacing and pothole repair efforts. This would involve implementing a tracking system based on regular inspections, community feedback and crash data to assess road conditions and monitor road deterioration. It would then

establish a prioritized resurfacing plan based on roadway usage, pavement condition, and safety concerns. This would assist in leveraging funding sources such as Chapter 90, TIP grants, Complete Streets, and Safe Streets for All to support ongoing improvements.



Action Item 4.3: Demonstration Project policy

Adopt a policy of carrying out demonstration projects based on the use of "Tactical Urbanism" strategies for proposed street improvements. This would involve testing and refining roadway and public space improvements, using low-cost, flexible materials such as bollards, planters, cones, and signage, before committing to long-term infrastructure investments. Collaborate with residents, businesses, and advocacy groups to ensure projects align with local needs and encourage public engagement in street design.



Action Item 4.4: Optimize Street Parking

Enhance parking efficiency, including, where appropriate, on-street parking to support local businesses and residents, while preserving buildable land. This strategy would include using underutilized street space for potential parking improvements. It would also involve implementing smart parking strategies, including time-limited parking zones, shared parking agreements, and improved signage to maximize existing capacity. As in action item 4.3 "Tactical Urbanism" approaches should be used to test parking solutions before permanent implementation and collaboration with local businesses, residents, and planning officials should ensure that parking policies align with community needs while maintaining a pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

TOWN SERVICES

OVERVIEW

The Massachusetts General Law says that a Master Plan must have a chapter on services and facilities “which identifies and analyzes existing and forecasted needs for facilities and services used by the public”³¹. This is not an institutional plan that would look in detail at funding and resource requirements. It is more an assessment of the impact of town services and facilities on the broader development of the Town, and a consideration of what changes to the provision of town services and facilities would be necessary or supportive to the other changes that are proposed by the Master Plan.

This chapter relies heavily on input received from the community through the community survey and the community workshops, as well as detailed stakeholder interviews. As such it reflects, to an extent, the bias that is reflected in the opinions of the more vocal and outspoken members of the public and in the opinions of the people who provide public services in Leicester. Wherever possible, attempts have been made to ensure that the opinions which are reflected in this chapter have been tested against opposing views and against whatever concrete statistical information is available.

³¹ Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 41, Section 81D.



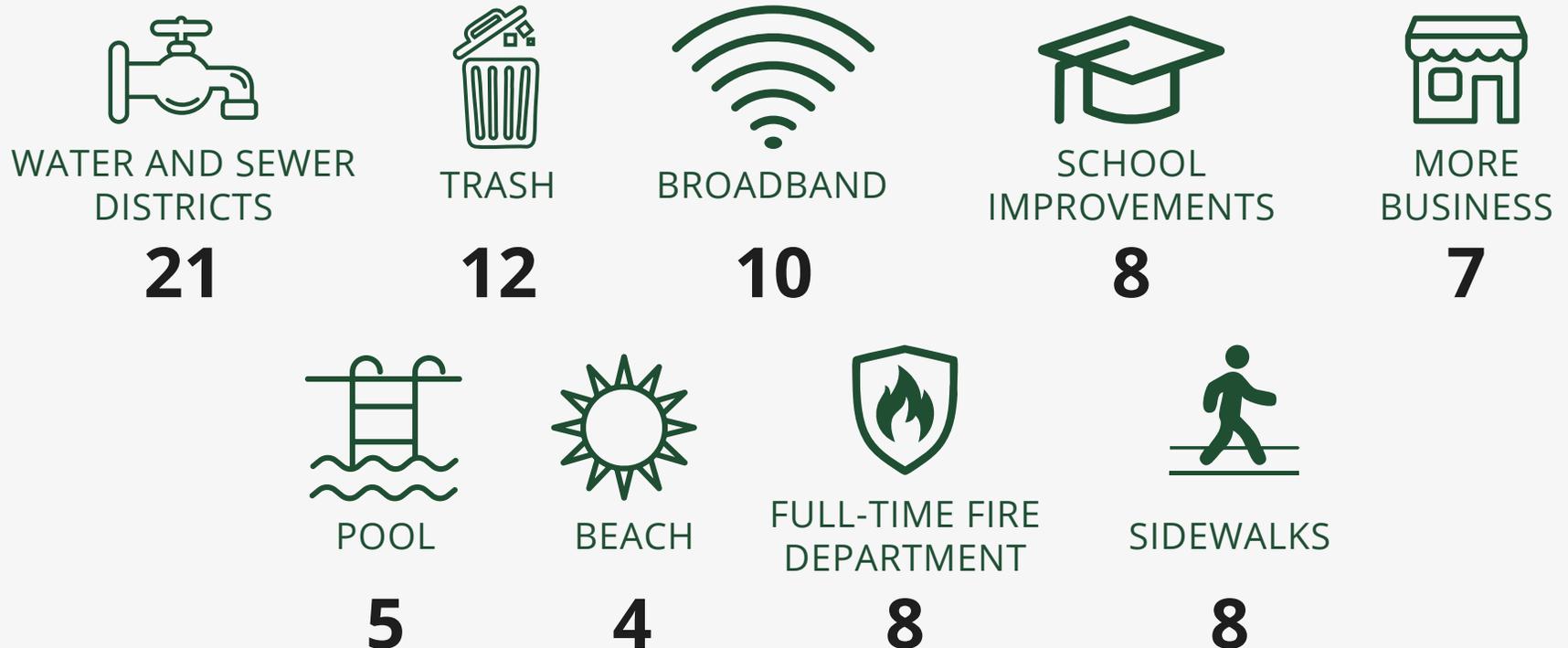
The community survey contained the following open-ended question: "What new services or service improvements would make a difference for the Leicester Community?"

Most respondents (274) skipped this question, which may suggest respondents were either satisfied with the current services and facilities or felt unable to identify specific service gaps or issues. The issues raised by the 139 residents who did respond are loosely reflected in Figure 26, the Leicester Community Survey Services "Word Cloud."

The figure illustrates the importance, to many of the Leicester community, of the water and sewer districts. This is explored in the key findings below. There are two other areas of service that are frequently raised, trash collection and broadband services. These, and some of the less frequently mentioned suggestions will also be discussed below. There is strong support for the establishment of more businesses in the Town (see the Economic Development chapter). There is also support for, and a desire to extend improvements to, the schools, which will also be discussed below.

Figure 26: Leicester Community Survey Services "Word Cloud"

Each displays the number of occurrences a phrase was used.

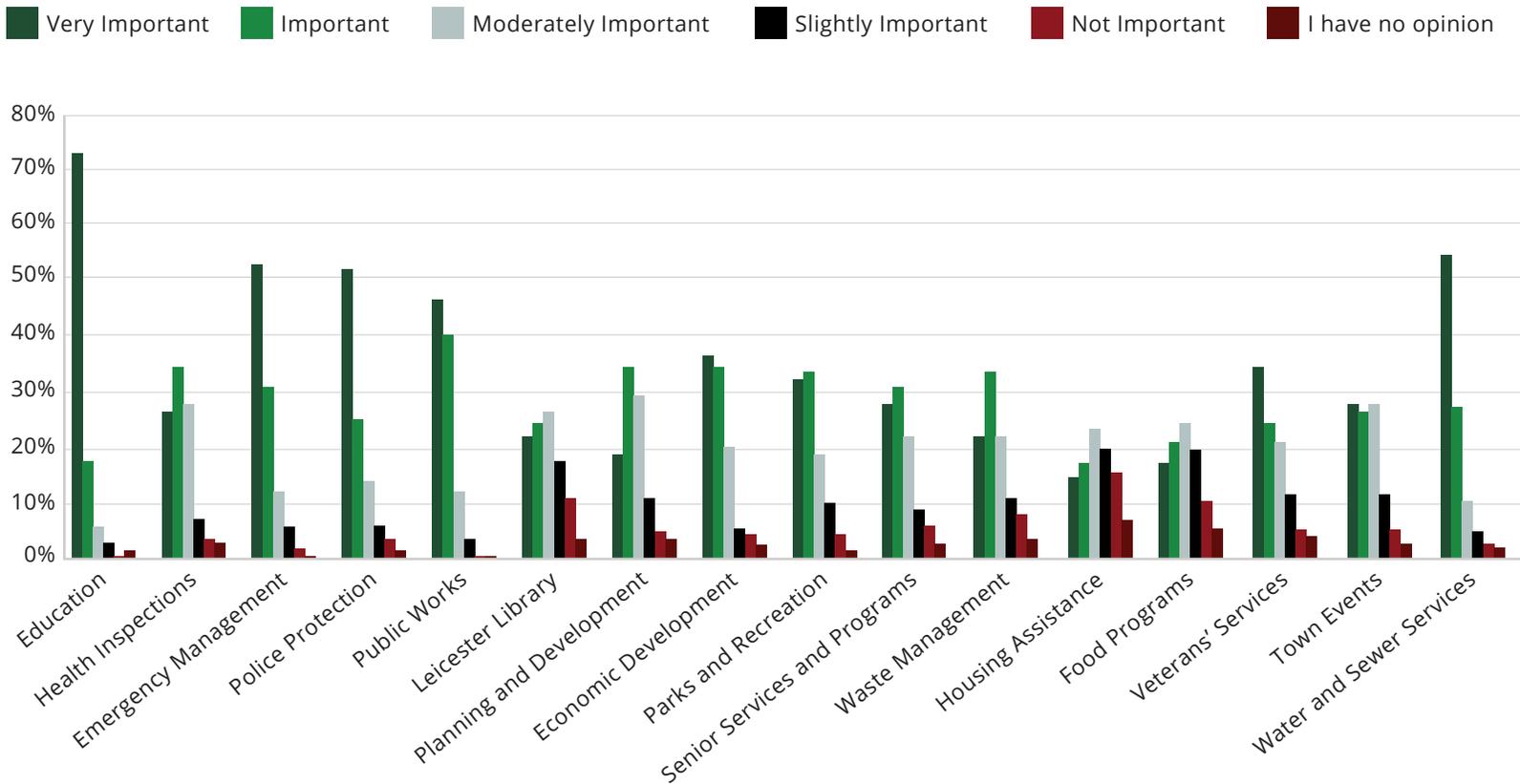


The community survey also explored respondents' attitudes towards town services and facilities issues by asking respondents to rank the importance of town services on a scale ranging from "very important" to "not important". This question was answered by 408 respondents and only 4 skipped it. The results are shown in Figure 27.

This chart shows that education was the service ranked highest, with more than 70% of respondents ranking it as "very important". This is followed by emergency management, police protection and water and sewer services, each of which was ranked "very important" by just over 50% of respondents.



Figure 25: Community Ranking of the Importance of Various Town Services



To show how the other rankings influence the picture, Figure 26 shows the weighted ranking of all the responses. The weights were calculated as follows: the number of people saying “very important” was multiplied by 3, the number saying “important” multiplied by 2, the number saying “moderately important” multiplied by 1.5 and the number saying “not important” was multiplied by -3, with the results added together. Using this weighting changes the order in which services are ranked very little. It still shows that education is seen as the most important service. However, the weighted results do show that the other services are closer in importance to education than the unweighted chart suggests. It shifts public works into second place and somewhat increases the importance of economic development and parks and recreation.

The Community Workshop further tested these results by giving each participant a sum of money in “Leicester bucks” and inviting them to allocate it to the services that they felt had the greatest call on town funding. This exercise confirmed education as the front runner, but suggested different priorities among the other services, with economic development clearly in second position, followed by parks and recreation. There was little to choose between the other services.

Figure 26: Weighted Results of Community Ranking of Service Importance

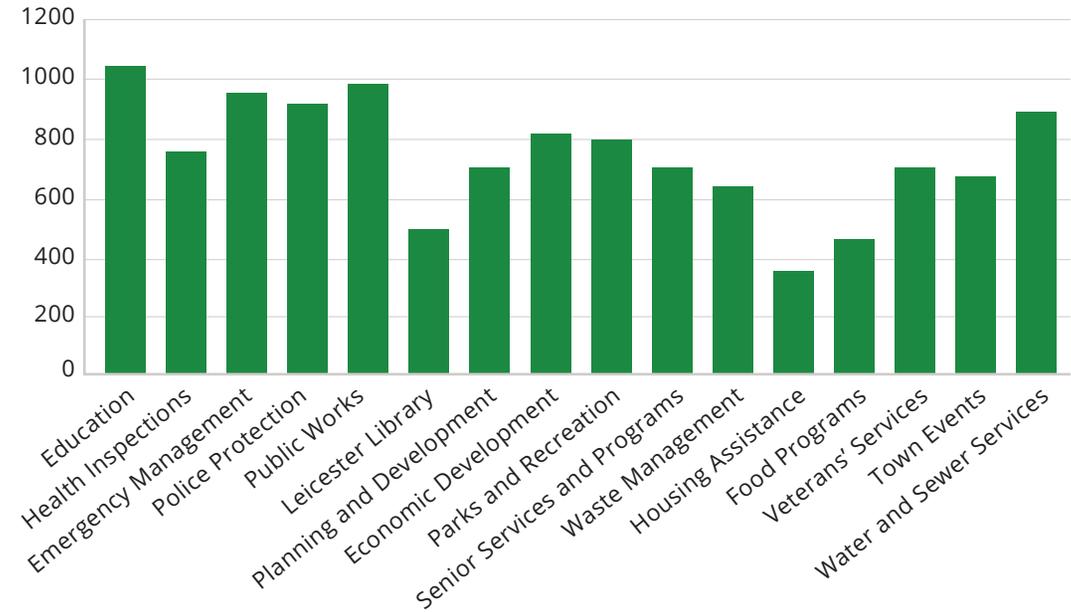
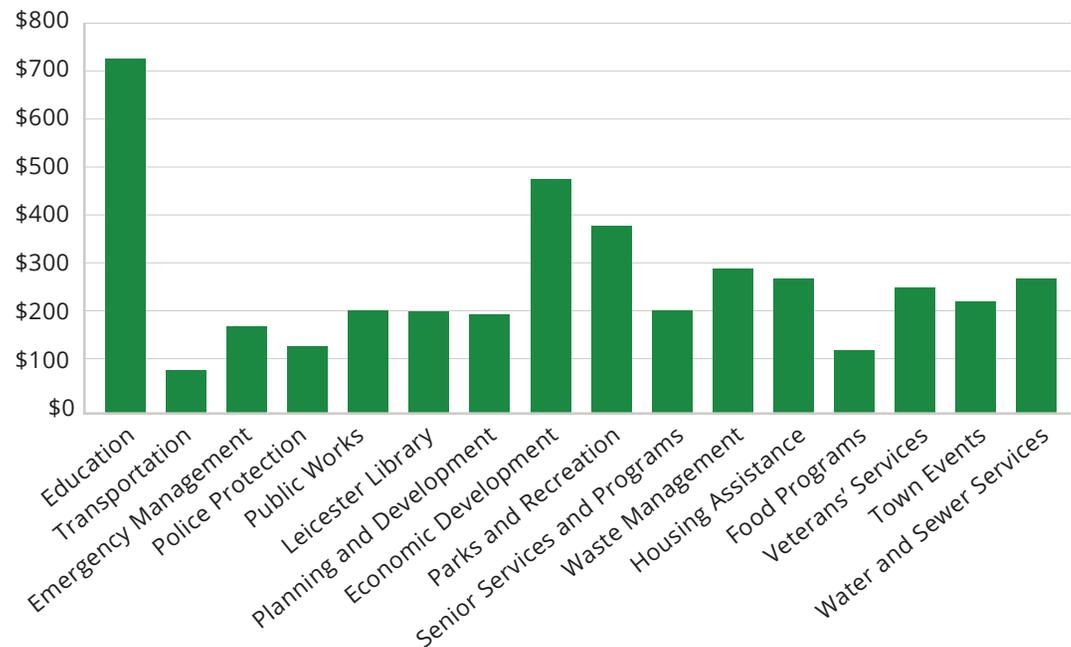


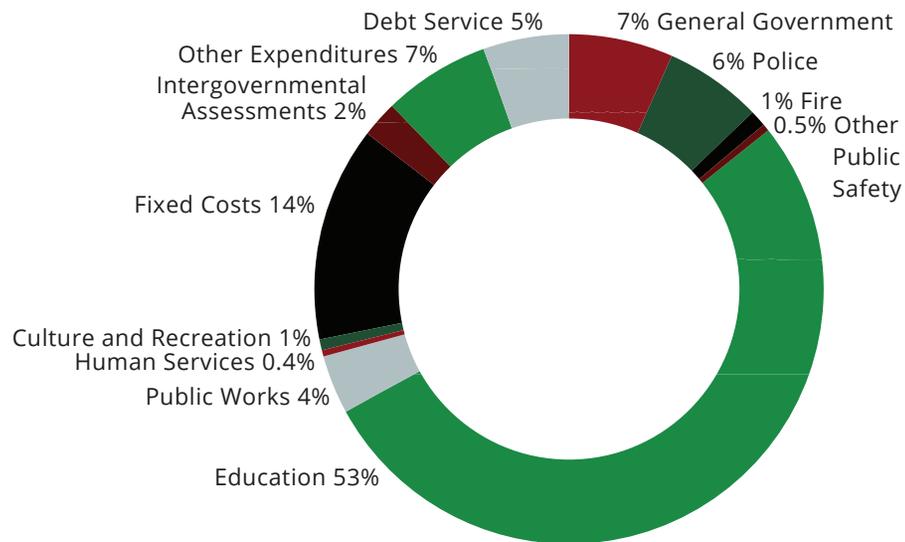
Figure 27: Community Workshop Town Services Activity Results



Having established what the priorities of the community appear to be, it is instructive to see how the Town currently allocates its resources. Figure 28 shows the allocation of the General Fund in 2024. In some respects, the categorization of the accounts in the General Fund makes it difficult to see what the money is actually spent on, with substantial amounts spent on Other Expenditures and General Government. However, the greatest area of expenditure is education, which aligns with both the survey results and the workshop outcomes. The police services, emergency management and public works department, which enjoyed the highest priority in the survey are shown as individual cost centers. Also, the water and sewer districts are not part of the Town's responsibility. A great deal of expenditure is non-discretionary, in that it goes to fixed costs and debt services.

Recognizing which services, the community wishes to see prioritized is an important step in preparing a Master Plan. However, it is important also to understand the resources available to address the community's needs and desires to ensure that the Master Plan is an implementable plan that will deliver results, and not merely a wish list.

Figure 28: General Fund Expenditure, 2024



Figures 29, 30, and 31 provide a snapshot of Leicester’s finances over the past five years. They indicate that the only area in which income has been consistently higher than expenditure is trust funds, which makes up a very small portion of the Town’s finances. In the general fund, expenditures have equaled or exceeded income every year up to 2024. For 2021, the most recent year in which comparisons are available, the General Fund expenditure was \$2,780 for every resident of Leicester. It is interesting to note that, in examining municipal per capita expenditures across Massachusetts (ranging from a low of \$1,602 per capita, in Warren, to \$17,306 per capita in Gosnold), 83% of towns spent more per capita out of their general funds than Leicester³².

The capital fund shows the largest single expenditure in 2022 was on the purchase of the campus of Becker College. The rental paid by the Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance for the use, as housing, of some of the buildings formerly used as dormitories is responsible for the slightly improved balance in the general fund in 2024.

Overall, the implication of these charts is that, at the current levels of income, the Town has virtually no surplus funds available to improve or increase the services that it delivers.

Figure 29: Income and Expenditure - General Fund, 2020-2024

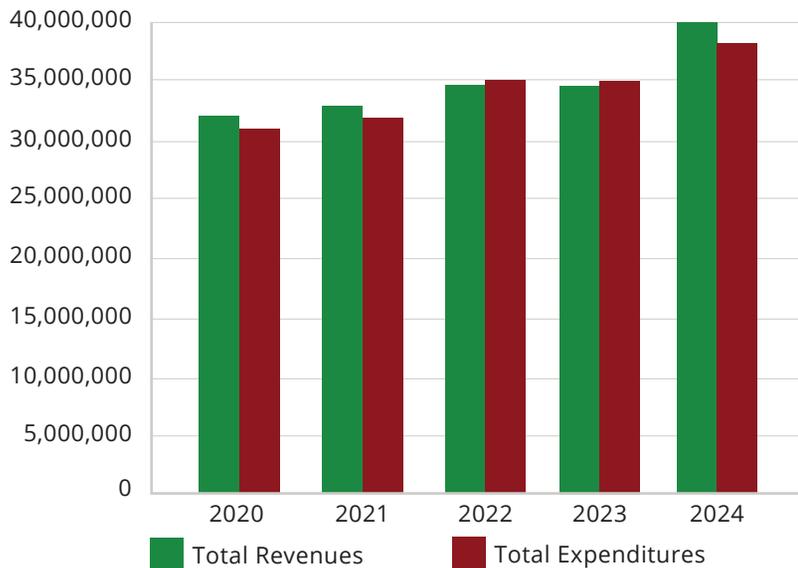
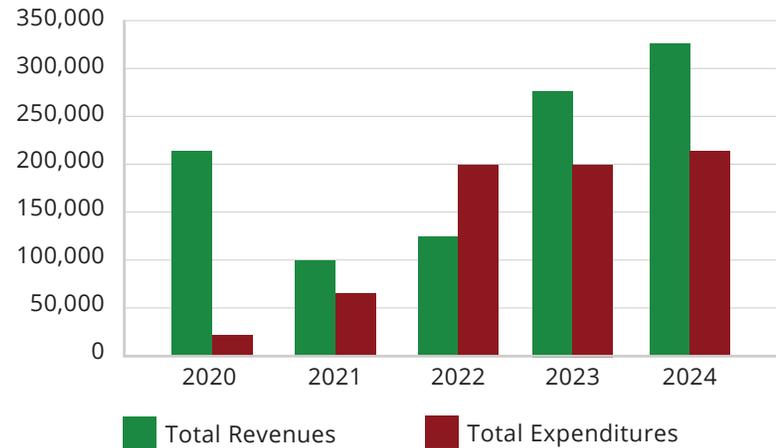


Figure 30: Income and Expenditure - Capital Fund, 2020-2024



Figure 31: Income and Expenditure - Capital Fund, 2020-2024



³² <https://dls.gateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=351GenFunperCapita>

In general, the only way that a town can increase its income is to increase revenue raised through property taxes, although Leicester's purchase of the Becker College campus and the income it has been able to generate is a notable exception.. This involves either increasing the tax rate or increasing the value of property that is taxed.

Increasing the tax rate would not be impossible. Proposition 2½³³ places restrictions on the taxes that can be levied by a town. There are two types of restrictions, the Levy Limit and the Levy Ceiling. The Levy Limit is a restriction on the amount that the tax levy may be increased from year to year. It is based on the previous year's limit and the amount of new growth during the previous year. The Levy Ceiling is an amount above which the Levy Limit is not permitted to go. It is a percentage (2.5%) of the total asset value in the Town. In 2025 Leicester's tax levy of \$20,741,841 is only \$12,045 or 0.06% below the Levy Limit, so the Town has pushed the amount levied to the maximum permissible without an override. An override would have to be within the Levy Ceiling, which is \$44,056,587. That is more than double the Tax Levy. In fact, the override capacity of the Town is 57% of the Levy Ceiling. Whereas the Town is permitted to levy 2.5% of the total assessed value of assets the Town, it is only levying 1.18%. In the range across Massachusetts from 0.26% in Edgartown to 2.2% in Holyoke, 68.5% of towns in Massachusetts levy a higher percentage of assessed value than Leicester does.³⁴

The implication of this is clear. It would be legally possible for Leicester to implement overrides to very substantially increase its revenue, which would enable it to provide a higher level of service

and implement a higher proportion of the action items proposed in this Master Plan. To do so would bring it more in line with other towns in Massachusetts, not less in line.

The reality, however, is that an override would require a two thirds majority vote at Town Meeting and the sentiment in that regard appears to be questionable. Although high taxes were not frequently raised in the Community Survey, there were several indications of resistance to increases.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



I like the town as it is. Please do not raise our taxes. All your ideas will. I have to work as is!!



Higher taxes, my taxes have increased substantially since moving here with nothing to show for it personally. (In answer the question "Is there anything that would make you want to move out of Leicester")



Yes high taxes and not enough commercial property being developed to bring in more business to help lower property taxes. (In answer the question "Is there anything that would make you want to move out of Leicester")



High, tax rate and few services. (In answer the question "Is there anything that would make you want to move out of Leicester")

³³ For details about Proposition 2½, see Proposition 2½ and Tax Rate Process | Mass.gov

³⁴ https://dls.gateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=Prop2.5.ExcessLevyCapandOverride_10_pres

If the Town is unable to pass an override, it must rely instead on increasing the value of property. The recent growth in the value of the assets on which the Town receives taxes is shown in Figure 32.

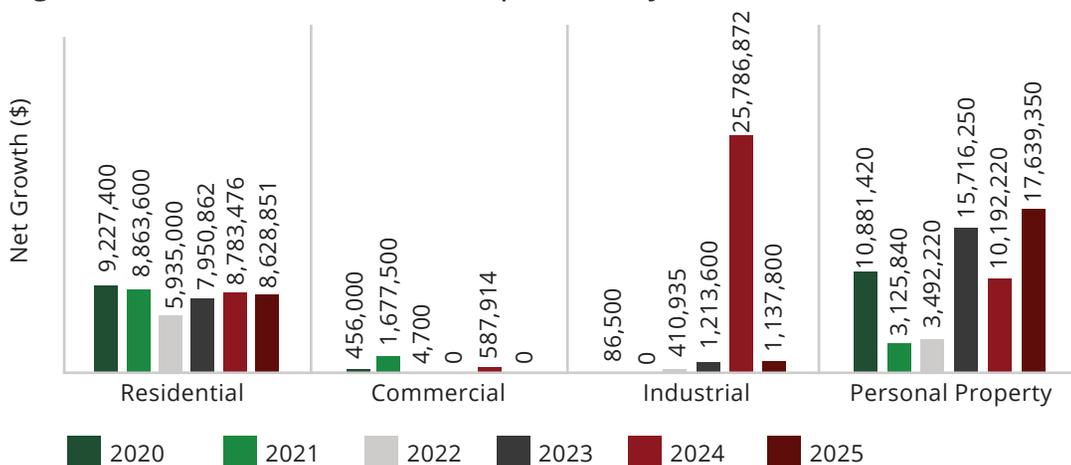
This chart shows that there is no sign of an upward trend in asset values. In fact, with the exception of a major industrial project in 2024, the values are flat lining. They represent an average growth of 1.59%, with a range between .7% and 2.88%. In the context of the inflationary environment that the Town has faced over the last five years, it has had to make do with tax income from an asset base that is effectively declining in value in real terms.

Survey respondents and stakeholders frequently cited financial constraints as a major concern. One resident remarked, *“There’s no way to get where we need to go financially without either raising taxes or growing the tax base.”*

The Town Administrator acknowledged, *“The budget pressures are immense, especially with education taking such a large portion. Without new growth, it’s hard to sustain services at current levels.”*

Against this background of the community’s needs and views and the existing financial situation, this chapter will set out key findings from which Goals and Action Items will be developed.

Figure 32: Leicester Taxable Assets | Growth by Class 2020-2025



KEY FINDINGS

Key Finding #1 Education is a Cornerstone of the Community and a Key Facilitator of Growth

Leicester has a long history as a minor center of education. The Leicester Academy was founded as a private and public educational institution in 1784. When it was established, there was insufficient funding, despite private donations and a lottery held to sell land in Maine to raise money. The Town entered into an agreement to partially fund the school and in return, Leicester public school students were allowed to attend it. Ever since that time there has been a significant educational institution in the Town. Leicester Junior College was established in 1946 and merged with Becker College in 1977. The college played an important role in the Town's identity and its economy until its sudden closure in May 2021. This closure was potentially a major setback for the Town, but the decision by the Town to buy the college campus created an extraordinary opportunity.

As seen from the introduction to this chapter, education is the most important service that a town offers its residents. In general, even those people who do not have children in school accept the need to provide good education and recognize that the quality of the education offered to the Town's children is important in determining the children's opportunities in life. People prefer to live in towns with excellent schools and sometimes move to a town or away from a town based on the quality of the schools.

³⁵ Mass Department of Elementary and Secondary Education & Census Building Permits Survey <https://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/per-pupil-exp.html>

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



If you have a quality school system, you will attract people to the community.



Education needs to be emphasized. Better schools translate to having younger people and families, which Leicester certainly lacks.



Our schools can drive economic growth for the town.

But the provision of excellent education is a highly complex and expensive process. Leicester provides a good standard of education at a lower-than-average cost per pupil. The cost per pupil in 2022 was \$15,189 for children attending school in the Leicester School District, whereas the state average was \$16,699. The total cost per pupil, including the cost for children attending schools outside the district (because of school choice or vocational education) was \$16,408, compared with a state average of \$20,272³⁵. Of this amount the state contributed approximately \$7,088, channeled through the Town's general funds.

One of the features of education finance is that very little of the cost of education is truly variable expenditure in the traditional sense. School buildings, grounds and equipment must be maintained irrespective of the exact number of children enrolled. Administrative staff are required to run schools. Even teachers must be there for smaller as well as larger classes, within the limits of what is considered an acceptable class size. So, the marginal saving on every student fewer, or the marginal cost of every extra student is very different from the aggregate cost per student.

Most schools in Massachusetts have been dealing with declining student numbers since roughly the turn of the century. Figure 33 shows a steady decline in enrolment in Leicester schools from a high of 1,950 in 2005 to 1,322 in 2023. This decline in enrolment typically means that schools have to make do with decreasing income while trying to cope with increasing costs, and it makes it very difficult for them to maintain the quality and variety of educational offerings that communities expect.

In this context the need for major building maintenance or for new school buildings is a major problem. Leicester was facing exactly that problem until the Town bought the Becker College campus. That not only made available purpose-made buildings for the high school, it also created the opportunity for the school to play a pivotal role in shaping the Town's future, both as a community asset and as a driver of economic growth. The available buildings provided space to expand the high school's vocational education offerings. This helped to reduce the expenses associated with sending students who wanted vocational education to an out of district school. At the same time it generated income by offering places to students from other towns unable to access vocational training in their home districts.

The school district has responded energetically to this opportunity by offering new courses in building and property maintenance, early education and care, health assistance and culinary arts. They are also planning to introduce courses in electricity, advanced manufacturing and business technology in the near future. Courses in plumbing, HVAC-, cosmetology and veterinary science are also in the early planning stages. All these classes and others can be accommodated in the available buildings and facilities. To ensure that these classes

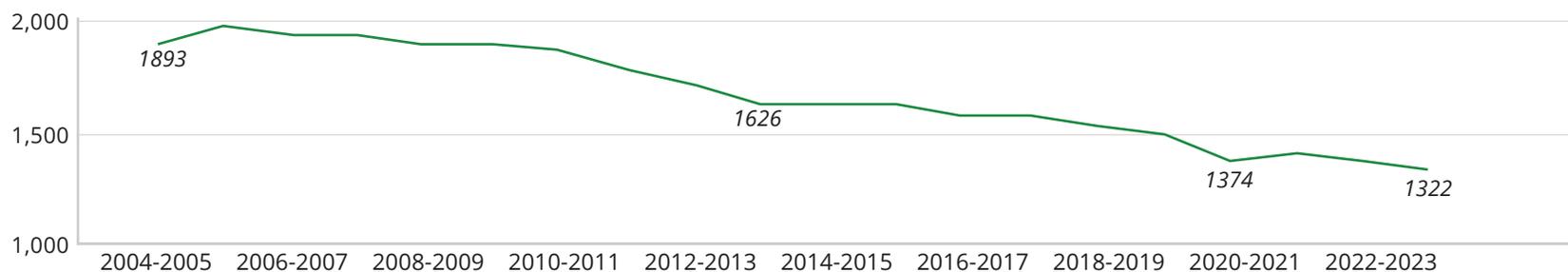
are adequately subscribed to the school has begun discussions with other school districts. They have already entered into a three-year agreement with the Shrewsbury school district. This program has started in a small way in 2024-2025, and is already over-subscribed for the 2025-2026 school year. A second town is in discussion with the school with a view to entering into a similar agreement.

Financially these changes will mean that the Town does not have to pay for children to go to other districts for vocational education and that the school will receive a substantial contribution (currently \$13,784 per student) for every student from outside Leicester. This will ensure that the schools have sufficient funds to improve their educational offerings, and that there will be a reduction in the amount that the Town must contribute to the schools each year, freeing up funds for other purposes.

It will also bring the school community into closer contact with businesses and employers in the Town. Business partners will be involved in program advisory councils, and it will help align education with workforce demands to position Leicester as a leader in innovative programming. The Superintendent sees the schools as economic drivers. He commented: *"Schools can attract families and businesses—when we invest in education, we invest in our community's future."*

In addition to these educational benefits, the reinvigoration of the school's campus will breathe new life into the area around the town common and draw parents and customers (in the case of courses like veterinary science and cosmetology) into the area (see the Economic Development Chapter).

Figure 33: Leicester Public Schools Enrolment 2004-2024

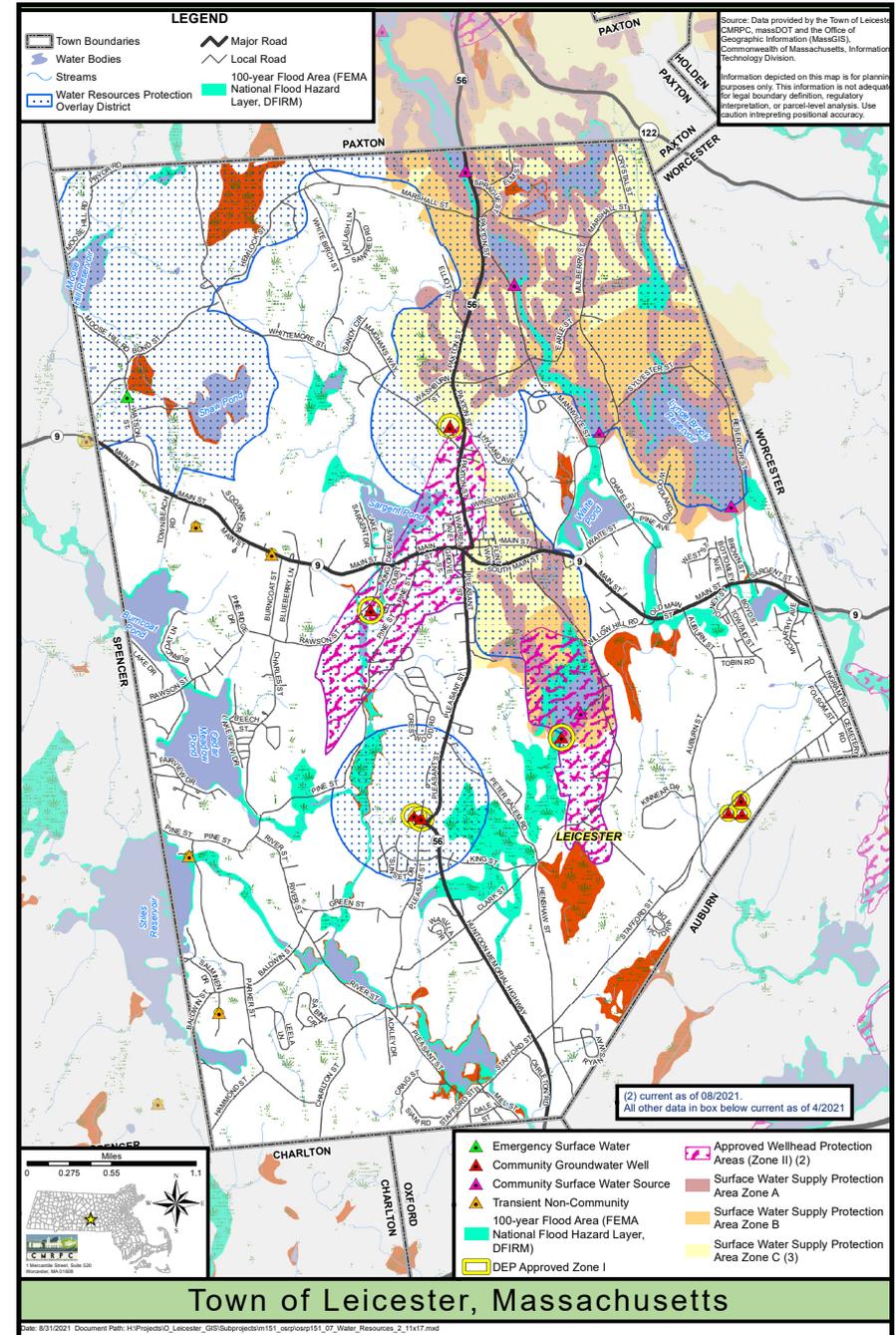


Key Finding #2 Complex and Fragmented Water and Sewer Districts Pose Challenges

Leicester has a highly complex and fragmented water and sewer system. This is a product of the historical development of the Town as a group of distinct villages. There are three “districts” that provide water within the boundaries of the Town of Leicester, the Leicester Water Supply District, the Cherry Valley-Rochdale Water District and the Hillcrest Water District. These districts are independent organizations, each established by its own act of the Massachusetts Legislature. They are effectively a form of independent local government, with elected boards, clerks and treasurers, with the power and duty to enact bylaws and adopt rules and regulations. They are responsible for sourcing water, making sure that it meets standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency, and delivering it to their customers. When they buy their water, each district is responsible for negotiating the price. Also, each district determines its own budget and its own pricing structure. The districts are geographically defined, with borders that are not the same as the Town’s borders.

In addition, there is a Moose Hill Water Commission established by the Town of Leicester with a view to supplying water from the Moose Hill Reservoir. This is the subject of ongoing research and is not likely to happen within the time span of this Master Plan.

Map 12: Water System



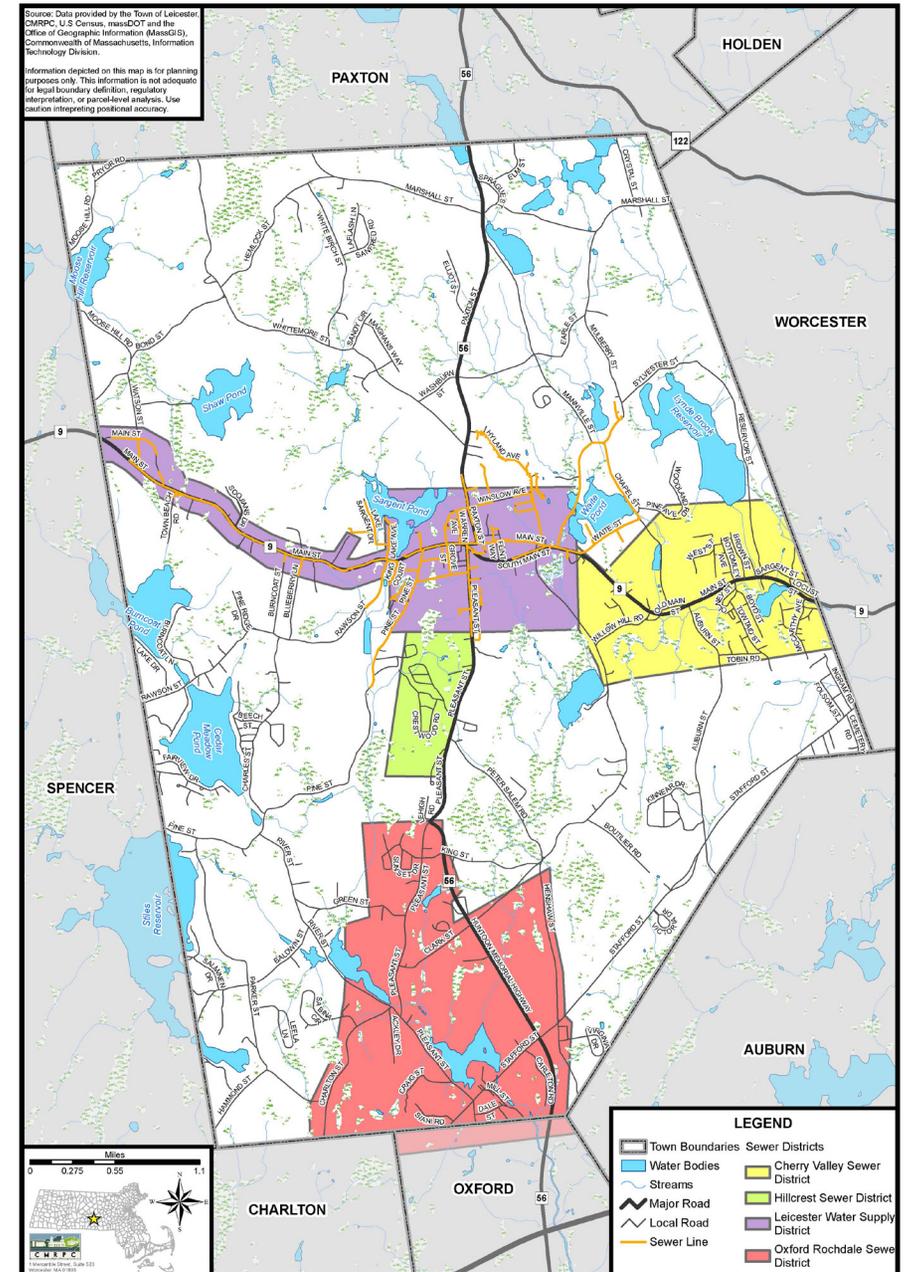
There are also four sewer districts, the Leicester Water Supply District-Sewer District, the Cherry Valley Sewer District, the Hillcrest Sewer District, and the Oxford-Rochdale Sewer District. Like the water districts, these are independent bodies with their own boards that make their own bylaws, rules and regulations and formulate their own budgets and pricing structures.

This high degree of complexity is somewhat alleviated by the fact that, at the operational level, the water and sewer districts are effectively managed by two organizations. The Leicester Water Supply District and the Leicester Water Supply District – Sewer District are managed by one operational organization. It also manages the two Hillcrest districts and the Oxford-Rochdale Sewer District. The Cherry Valley Water District and the Cherry Valley Sewer District are run by a second operational unit.

There are several significant benefits associated with the fact that the districts are independent of the Town of Leicester, and also with the fact that there is not only one independent district serving the whole town. Among these are the following:

- The historic nature of the arrangements, with the oldest of them, the establishment of the Leicester Water Supply District in 1888, means that some of the rights that the districts hold both for sourcing water and for discharging effluent may be more beneficial than the equivalent rights that they might be able to secure in negotiating new permits now.
- The fact that there are several different districts means that each of them serves fewer than 10,000 people. This puts them into a different category from districts or towns that have populations of more than 10,000 people, which is where the Town of Leicester would be categorized. The smaller districts qualify for more grant finance than bigger ones and they can access loans at better interest rates.
- Some of the districts' customers are outside the borders of Leicester Town. These people would lose their electoral rights if the current boards were replaced by the Leicester Town governance system.
- The fact that the organizations are small and focused may account for a very high degree of stability in the staffing of the districts, which ensures that there are seemingly good levels of efficiency, high productivity and very substantial institutional knowledge.

Map 13: Sewer System



Notwithstanding these benefits, the results of the community survey and key stakeholder interviews suggest a negative perception of the existing situation among some town residents. It is not possible, based on the results of the community survey, to say whether it is a majority of residents who have this perception, or whether it is a more active and vocal minority, but there were many residents who expressed frustration during the survey and interviews.

While it is intuitively understandable that residents should be shocked by the number of districts serving the Town, it is not clear to what extent this multiplicity of institutions actually has a negative impact on service delivery.

It is clear that over very many years there have been difficulties in the relationships between the districts and the Town. In particular, there has been distrust and even animosity between some board members of districts and the Town. At the operational level, there have in the past been communication difficulties, possibly affected by high turnover of town staff, which made it difficult to establish working relationships. It seems that this problem is in the process of being addressed and has reduced considerably over the past year.

The difficulties in communication and the negative perceptions of the districts have contributed to various attempts over the years to address the issue of institutional complexity. The most recent was the *December 2021 Leicester Water & Sewer District Infrastructure Study*³⁶ which provided insights into the current state of the districts and explored various options for amalgamation of districts, incorporation of districts into the Town and transfer of districts to a private utility company.

This exercise and follow-up actions arising out of it established clearly that:

- At least in the short term, some of the districts are highly resistant to incorporation into the Town,
- Without a great deal of flexibility from the districts, at minimum, the incorporation of the districts into the Town is not financially viable, and
- The Town's taxpayers are strongly opposed to taking over the districts if tax-based funding is involved, since their view of such an arrangement is that people who have their own wells and septic systems would be paying the same as those on town water and sewer.

Whether or not the last of these points is valid and leaving aside the option of funding a town water and sewer department on an enterprise basis³⁷, it is clear that in the immediate term the absorption of the districts by the Town would be difficult to achieve.

In the short term, or for as long as the current institutional arrangements remain in place, there are three areas of concern that need to be addressed: the availability of water and sewer to residents and developers, the price of the services, and the procedures for facilitating development.

³⁶ Weston and Sampson, Revised Draft Task 1 Report, Comprehensive Analysis of Current Conditions of Six Water & Sewer Districts, Leicester, Massachusetts, 2021

³⁷ In this model, while water and sewer would be provided by the town, the responsible department would be funded entirely (including salaries and benefits) from the income generated by the provision of water and sewer services to paying customers.

AVAILABILITY OF WATER AND SEWER

Each of the water supply districts has several options available to source water. In some cases, the water sources are currently in use, in others they are not. What matters for the purposes of the Master Plan is that there should be no water supply availability limits that might constrain future development. Since both the Cherry Valley – Rochdale District and the Leicester Water Supply District, which can supply the Hillcrest District, now have interconnections with the Worcester supply system and both have agreements with Worcester to buy water, there is no significant limitation on the availability of water to new developments in the parts of town where development is prioritized.

Similarly, there are currently no technical barriers to the provision of sewer services. Cherry Valley sewage is currently transferred to the Worcester system. There are treatment plants in Leicester, Hillcrest and Rochdale that have the capacity to connect new developments. The Leicester plant is at approximately 60% capacity. It needs modernization, but it is not currently capacity constrained. There is also a possibility to transfer sewage from the Leicester District to Worcester.

Contrary to public perception, there are currently no water or sewer capacity constraints to development.



THE PRICE OF SERVICES

The price of services is a more problematic issue.

The prices charged for water, based on a monthly consumption of 5,000 gallons in 2024, were as follows:

Figure 34: 2024 Water Prices Per 5,000 Gallons

Source: Environmental Finance Center at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2025

Cherry Valley - Rochdale	Leicester Water Supply	Hillcrest	Massachusetts Mean
96.12	71.81	Not reported	42.15

The prices charged for sewer, based on a monthly consumption of 5,000 gallons of water, in 2024 were as follows:

Figure 35: 2024 Sewer Prices Per 5,000 Gallons

Source: Environmental Finance Center at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2025

Cherry Valley	Leicester Sewer	Hillcrest	Oxford Rochdale	Massachusetts Mean
165.92	63.47	53.33	45.00	61.90

While the availability of water and sewer is not a constraint to development, the prices, at 2.28 times the Massachusetts mean for water in Cherry Valley – Rochdale and 1.7 times the mean in Leicester Water Supply District, as well as 2.68 times the mean for sewer in Cherry Valley, are certainly not an attraction. Whether the prices for these services play a sufficiently important role, in the context of all the other factors influencing development decisions, to be a significant constraint on development, is difficult to say.

What is certain, however, is that the substantial variation in prices between the different parts of Leicester is a cause for concern. It can be a cause of resentment among those who have to pay more. It can also create anxiety among those who currently pay less, as any changes that take place may involve their having to pay for costs that others have incurred.

It is likely, according to the districts, that over a period of years these price discrepancies will even out because the high prices result from prices having been kept too low for too long. Also, the need to modernize the sewage treatment plant in the Leicester Sewer District is likely to lead to increased prices for their customers in the near future.

Finding a way to even out prices and ensure that they are as competitive as possible will be crucial to any long-term planning.

PROCEDURES TO FACILITATE DEVELOPMENT

The multiplicity of water and sewer districts contributes to a sense of confusion among the public about who the responsible parties should be. This is not helped by a lack of clear information about who people should contact if they need information or have problems. It also fosters competing narratives about where obstacles to development originate. This is probably the most destructive issue, but also the easiest to resolve, and its resolution is the necessary prelude to successfully addressing the others. Creating systems and procedures and accurate information, as set out under the goals and action items, is absolutely necessary to continue the good work that has already been done in this area by the operational staff on all sides.



Key Finding #3 Municipal Staffing and Resource Shortages

The introduction to this chapter provided the context in which to understand the difficulties that have faced the Town over the past decade, at least. In the context of declining real revenues, it has not been possible for Leicester to set its staffing levels so that they are sufficient to meet current service demands. This has placed strain on critical departments like Public Works, Police, and the Emergency Services. Many departments have operated with minimal staff, leading to inefficiencies and backlogs. For example, the Public Works Department had only four employees in 2022. Even though this has since expanded to nine, the workload still far exceeds the capacity of the employees. This may account for the fact that several respondents to the community survey raised issues about sidewalk maintenance and road maintenance and the Department of Public Works in general.

Staff shortages and budget restrictions have also led to deferred maintenance, which, as the Director of Public Works pointed out, is very expensive in the long term, especially because the Town is operating out of aging buildings. Many Town buildings were constructed between the 1950s and 1970s. These buildings have exceeded their useful life and require extensive maintenance, creating a significant financial burden. The survey and workshop results highlighted widespread concern about the state of public facilities, with participants calling for upgrades to aging structures.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



We can't keep patching up these buildings; we need a long-term solution.



Modernize the buildings, but not just for appearance - they need to be functional and safe.

The current financial strain also means the salaries and benefits the Town offers are not competitive. This has led to a problematic rate of staff turnover. High staff turnover makes it difficult to develop and maintain working relationships of trust and mutual reliance. Consequently, communication between departments was frequently mentioned as a constraint to effective operations.

The workshop and interviews highlighted the need for improved staffing. One senior manager noted that *“changing the work culture and improving inter-departmental collaboration are priorities”* but acknowledged that staff shortages make progress difficult. The Town Administrator acknowledged that almost all town departments are understaffed. Residents also expressed concerns.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



The town barely limps along with the bare minimum, while surrounding towns have better schools, services, and amenities.



Very Important: Recycling Center. (In response to the question “How important do you think it is for the town to allocate resources for the following services and facilities?”)



Need new compactor at the recycling center.



Lack of concern for the recycling center. It is mostly volunteer based and we have broken down equipment that should have been replaced years ago. It seems like no town officials use this service so don't care about this wonderful program. Volunteers get criticized for equipment not working or the awful stop gap measures they are forced to work with.

Leicester has a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), and an active Capital Improvement Planning Committee to systematically prioritize and address the maintenance and upgrade needs of municipal equipment and facilities. However, over the past many years the reality is that the budget has not been available to implement the CIP in a systematic way.

As set out in the introduction to this chapter, Leicester's fiscal challenges stem from limited tax revenue, declining state aid relative to needs, and increasing service demands. Education alone currently consumes over 50% of the General Fund, leaving minimal resources for other essential services. Additionally, state aid, while increasing in absolute terms, has not kept pace with inflation or service demands.

Balancing these fiscal pressures and meeting resident expectations requires innovative solutions. Two key solutions are dealt with elsewhere. One is the reduction of the required town funding of the school as discussed elsewhere in this chapter, the other is the expansion of the tax base as discussed in the Land Use and Economic Development chapters. A third, shorter term option is the monetization of assets that are no longer required by the Town and could be sold to contribute to the potential development in the Town.

In advance of improving the Town's financial position, survey respondents did identify as high priority two areas of service delivery that the Town could address with the allocation of relatively small amount of staff time and possibly some outside assistance:

- Trash Removal was frequently mentioned as an issue for residents. This might be addressed by negotiating a rate with a single service provider who would provide the service to anyone in town who opted in to have the service provided through the Town. It is important to acknowledge that this apparent concern with the expense of trash collection was somewhat contrasted by high levels of support for and satisfaction with the Recycling center, as well as suggestions for specific interventions to further improve the service that it offers.
- Availability of broadband was another area of concern for residents.

Key Finding #4 Improved Communication and Transparency

A recurring theme in the survey, workshop, and interviews was the need for better communication and more transparency. The Town has a website that has recently been updated and almost all the information that residents could want is available on the website. Anything that is not on the website can be easily found elsewhere on the internet or by addressing questions to the relevant town officials.

The reality, however, is that in 2025 most people do not expect to have to look for information. They also do not expect to spend time interpreting complex information like tables of income and expenditure. They expect, rather, to have substantial amounts of easily accessible and simplified information constantly flowing into social media feeds.

In the absence of this kind of information supply, residents expressed significant dissatisfaction with how the Town communicates information about services, fees, decisions and projects.

The other side of this picture is that information that is delivered by other people on social media is likely to be accepted as the truth. Community members are not likely to do research to find or check the facts themselves. As a result, there appears to be a good deal of misinformation circulated in the Town, some of which is represented in the comments found in the community survey.

The reality is that if Leicester regards communication with the public as a priority it will need to engage in active and proactive communication. It will need to deliver information packaged in easily and quickly consumed parcels through the systems that people use regularly. It may not be sufficient to do everything that can be expected of the Town unless the attention of the public is regularly drawn to the good things that the Town is doing.

Stronger public engagement that creates a sense of comfort about what the Town is doing is likely also to lead to a higher level of constructive interest among community members in volunteering to serve on boards and commissions.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“
The town never really explains where our money goes.

“
Yes, canceling another town meeting. TRANSPARENCY. And unilateral decisions made by Select Board that many residents were unaware of until a year later.

“
Communication with residents is poor. We need updates on projects and clearer information on fees.

“
Lack of open communication to the public, lack of public involvement.



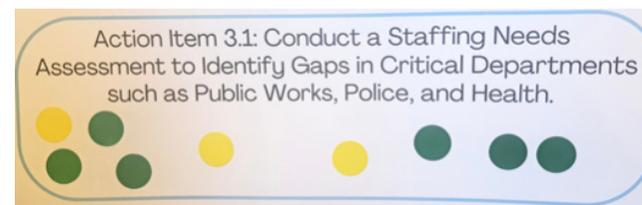
GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

Based on the key findings set out above and the input received from the community survey and the first community workshop, and taking into account the resource constraints facing the Town, the following goals and action items were proposed. They were informed also by experience elsewhere and best practice in the field of comprehensive planning.

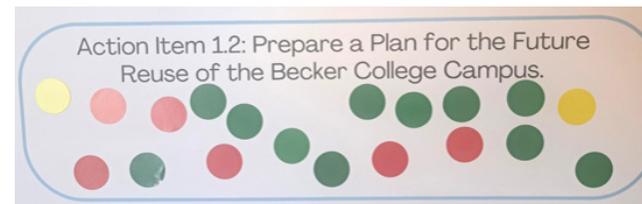
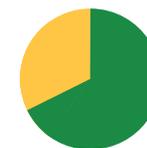
The goals are broad statements of policy. While several action items have been proposed for each goal, the goals themselves should not be seen as being limited to specific action items.

The goals and action items were discussed with the MPSC and then put to the attendees of the second community workshop. At that workshop, each goal was displayed on a poster, together with its associated action items. A space was provided for workshop participants to record their responses to each action item. The responses of the workshop attendees have been captured below for context. To save space, the responses have been converted into pie charts. The size of the pie chart indicates the relative amount of interest shown in the action item according to the total number of dots placed. The larger the chart, the more interest participants expressed. The color of the portions of the pie charts reflect the colors of the dots. Green indicates support for the action, Red indicates opposition and yellow indicates a neutral response.

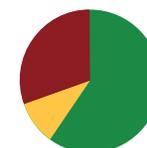
For Example:



is represented as



is represented as



GOAL 1

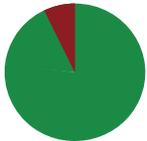
Build on the Vision of Leicester as an Education Leader and Enhance Educational Opportunities and Facilities

Education is a cornerstone of Leicester’s community identity and economic growth. Expanding programming and maintaining facilities will attract families and businesses while preparing students for future workforce demands.



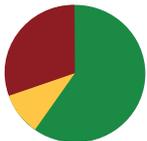
Action Item 1.1: Continue Support for Vocational Programs

Continue to provide as much support as possible in the form of finance, logistical support and communications support for the growth of the “Section 74” vocational programs in the high school.



Action Item 1.2: High School Campus Plan

Find funding for and prepare a plan for the future reuse or redevelopment of the present Leicester High School Campus as a leading-edge high school with both academic and vocational programs. Indicate the buildings that will be used for this purpose, how they will be used and how they will be integrated with the rest of the school and with the Town Common and Center of Town areas. Include financial estimates that show how the process will benefit both the school and the Town. In the same exercise, plan for the buildings that are not planned for use by the school to see what uses they might accommodate without creating a nuisance or security concerns for the school and to chart a path forward for the planned uses or, if necessary, the demolition of the buildings.



Action Item 1.3: Market Leicester’s Education System

Prepare a communication strategy to promote current achievements and the Action Items above, for social media, and for print media. Plan for distribution to realtors, and others to market Leicester’s education system as a key community asset to attract families and businesses.

GOAL 2

Ensure that Access to Well-Managed Infrastructure at a Competitive Price is Available to Leicester Residents, Property Owners, Investors and Developers Wishing to Increase the Asset Base in the Town



For water and sewer services in Leicester to fully achieve this goal in the long term, some form of streamlined institutional arrangement, either in a single water and sewer district or as a department of Leicester Town, will likely be required. There are two principles that need to inform progress in that direction, however:

- The desire to realize the institutional arrangements that might work best in the long run should not be allowed to get in the way of short-term progress towards achievement of the goal, and
- The principle of “user pays,” should be firmly adopted to ensure that residents and property owners who have wells and septic systems and will not benefit directly or in the short term from the provision of water and sewer services do not feel compelled to oppose the improvement of the system.

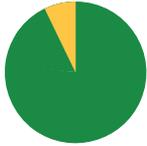
There are several action items that can be put on the agenda immediately to establish progress towards this goal.



Action Item 2.1: Inter-Municipal Coordination Body

Establish an inter-municipal coordination body at the operational level with regularly scheduled meetings at least every two months between the District Superintendents, the Town Planner and the Director of Public Works. The chair of this body should rotate and the Town should provide secretarial services. The reason for the committee is to ensure regular and effective communication and to explore options for increased collaboration. Items to be included on the agenda should include:

- Impending or ongoing works that may require coordination or mutual assistance of some kind,
- Development projects in the pipeline at any stage from rumor, through application to implementation,
- Priorities for funding for each individual organization and for the Town as a whole and any opportunities to collaborate on raising necessary finances,
- Capital expenditure plans (for information),
- Pricing changes (for information),
- Communication strategies.



Action Item 2.2: Public Education Campaign

Develop a public education campaign to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each district and the area that it covers and provide clear instructions on navigating water and sewer services. Ensure that the information is available on the Town website and that it is available in a user-friendly pamphlet that is readily accessible in the municipal offices. Also ensure that all staff in the Town Administrator's Office, Land use, Building/Code Enforcement and Public Works Departments are fully versed in the information and ready to provide it to anyone who contacts the Town to inquire about it.



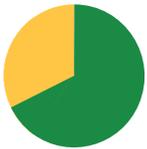
GOAL 3

Address Municipal Resource Shortages to Improve Service Delivery



Understaffed departments, high staff turnover, aging buildings and equipment in need of maintenance, and insufficient funds to remedy any of these problems limit Leicester's ability to provide essential services effectively. The solutions to these issues are all well known, but they are not possible without increased funds. Unless the Town is prepared to increase the annual tax levy through an override, the Town will need to pursue other strategies to raise revenue. Those strategies are listed under Goal 1 above and in the goals under the Land Use and Economic Development chapters. Essentially, they involve increasing revenues to the school and increasing the taxable asset base in the Town.

Action Items 3.1 and 3.2 are long-term actions that only become appropriate as the financial position of the Town changes to make their implementation possible. Action Items 3.3 and 3.4 are actions that could assist, to some extent, in the short term. Action items 3.5 and 3.6 are worth pursuing in the short term because their cost to the Town should be small.



Action Item 3.1: Staffing Needs Assessment

Conduct a comprehensive staffing needs assessment to identify gaps in critical departments such as Public Works, Police, and Health.



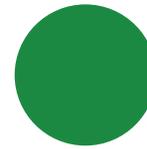
Action Item 3.2: Recruitment and Retention Plan

Develop a recruitment and retention plan that includes competitive salaries, professional development opportunities, and employee support programs.



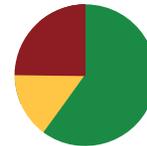
Action Item 3.3: Reuse or Redevelopment of Town Properties

Seek grant funding for a planning exercise to evaluate how Leicester's municipal assets could be monetized. This could include options such as selling or leasing underutilized buildings for reuse or redevelopment, installing solar panels or other renewable energy systems, and repurposing vacant properties for revenue generation.



Action Item 3.4: Grants for Renovations and Upgrades

Pursue state and federal grants to fund priority renovations, energy upgrades, and system improvements.



Action Item 3.5: Trash Collection

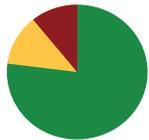
Find funding or allocate resources to study the viability of negotiating with a commercial trash removal service to provide a service to residents paid through the Town. This could deal with trash only, or it could include a recycling service, provided that the recycling service is up to the standard of the Town's current arrangement. If this can result in a substantial saving to residents without excessively onerous demands on the Town, consider putting this option to Town Meeting.

GOAL 4

Strengthen Communication with Residents and Stakeholders

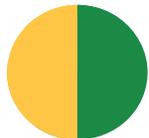
Leicester Town will need the support of the community to implement many of the action items contained in the Master Plan. To ensure public support, encourage community members to serve in voluntary positions, and attract families and businesses to move into Leicester and invest there, it is essential that residents are aware of the actions being taken to improve the Town. Residents need to know how resources are being allocated, understand particular constraints and feel that their concerns are being addressed.

Therefore, the goal of strengthening communication is an important one, although this may require allocating scarce resources in the short to medium-term. Communication issues related to the water and sewer districts are addressed under Goal 2 above. In addition, the following action items should be implemented.



Action Item 4.1: Develop a Central Communication System

Raise funding for the planning of a centralized communication system, including the establishment of accounts on all social media platforms actively used by the people of Leicester. The plan should specify the information that is to be communicated, frequency of communication, criteria for posts and approval procedures, as well as analysis of whether it is more cost effective to contract out this service or to employ a staff member to do it, as well as criteria for appointment. On approval of the plan, implement the system.



Action Item 4.2: Develop Civic Participation Guide

Develop a civic participation guide that lists and describes the ways in which residents in the Town can get involved in maintaining and improving the quality of life for town residents, businesspeople and visitors. This should list formal volunteering opportunities on town boards and committees, opportunities for involvement in ways such as serving on local parks management committees, helping with park maintenance, becoming involved in sports or other recreational organization, getting involved in civic events and so on. It should give guidance on channels of communication and how and where to find information and to communicate problems and needs. This should be available in printed form, and also on the Town website.



Action Item 4.2: Community Resource Guide

Develop a community resource guide that sets out information about all the resources that are available for residents of Leicester from town communication channels to town services such as the recycling center. It should contain information about public transportation options, bus routes and how to contact micro-transit operators. It should also tell people where and how to find information on Town events and how to contact and join town organizations and what sort of services they can access at the library, the senior center and any other town service provider. This should be available in printed form, and also on the Town website.



LAND USE

OVERVIEW

The Land Use chapter is intended to serve two purposes:

- It brings together the land use goals of all the other chapters and sets out the preferred land use pattern of the town over the next twenty years, and
- It explores the ways in which land use regulations, found in Zoning Bylaws, or elsewhere, can be used to help to achieve the community's land use goals.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the provisions of the town's Zoning Bylaws to provide the context for land use management interventions. It then sets out key findings that have been drawn from:

- The Leicester Master Plan and Leicester Town Center Plan Survey,
- The workshop held on October 3rd, 2024,
- Key stakeholder interviews with town staff, representatives of the Water and Sewer Districts and other knowledgeable and influential people,
- The 2000 and 2009 Master Plans,
- The 2007, 2015 and 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plans
- The 2018 Housing Study, and
- Several other planning documents completed during the past fifteen years.

The chapter then discusses land use patterns within the Town of Leicester.

Based on the existing Zoning Bylaw provisions, the Key Findings, and the understanding of spatial patterns, the chapter sets out several goals that capture the town’s intentions for the management of Land Use over the next twenty years, as well as a set of action items that it intends to implement to achieve these goals.

The context in which this Master Plan is being produced is very different from that of the 2000 Master Plan. Leicester, like the rest of the region, was in a phase of rapid growth in 2000 and the concern that underpinned the 2000 Master Plan was anxiety about excessive, uncontrolled growth that might threaten the small-town, rural nature of Leicester and turn the town into a noisy, congested, overdeveloped, place where none of the 2001 residents would feel comfortable. This concern had already prompted the adoption of an Annual Phased Growth Bylaw in 1997. That bylaw limited the number of building permits that could be issued during a rolling 24-month period to 100 and required developers to phase projects, with only a percentage allowed each year.³⁸

That the anxiety remained in the minds of the 2000 Master Planners was spelled out very clearly in a visioning exercise in which the “best case” and “worst case” scenarios for the town in 2015 were imagined.³⁹ The “worst case” scenario involved the over development of housing and multi-family housing, in particular, and very dramatic commercial and industrial growth in response to rapid expansion of activities at the Worcester Airport. The “best case” scenario was premised on limiting development largely to single family housing on large lots.

The 2000 Master Plan gave no indication of any resource constraints facing the town or of any sense of a need for increased revenues.

In the spirit of the 2000 Master Plan, Leicester took action to prevent the perceived worst-case scenario. Among the relevant actions were:

- Within the Suburban Agriculture District, the minimum lot size was increased from 50,000 square feet to 80,000 square feet.
- The minimum lot size in the Residential A District was increased from 20,000 square feet to 50,000 square feet, except where both public water and sewer were available, in which case the minimum lot size was changed to 40,000 square feet.

These changes were intended to reduce the total potential number of residential lots, and, by implication, the total future population of the town, assuming all possible lots were developed, by 43%.

Although the 2000 Master Plan was intended to be valid until 2020, it was updated in 2009. It is not clear why this early update was undertaken, but it is certain that by 2009 the context had already changed significantly, with the 2008 financial crisis bringing development to a halt.

According to the 2009 Master Plan, 383 permits were issued for new housing units between 2000 and 2007, (an average of nearly 50 new units per year) with permit activity slowing dramatically after 2005. Of these 383 new units, 14% were senior housing units. The 2009 Master Plan remains very strongly focused on the protection of natural and cultural resources. The top five priorities for the plan are listed, in order of priority, as:

1. Protect Natural Resources
2. Improve Transportation Systems
3. Expand/Improve Recreational Facilities
4. Protect Cultural and Historical Resources
5. Promote Increased Commercial Development.⁴¹

However, the beginning of a change in attitudes was visible in responses to questions related to economic development in the survey conducted for the 2009 Master Plan. The survey found that “More respondents want the amount and types of businesses to remain unchanged than want decreased business activity”. Also “Sixty-five percent (65%) respondents felt that more tax revenues was the major potential benefit of additional commercial development.”⁴²

The change in context between 2009 and the today is most clearly shown by a review of building permit activity in the period since the 2009 Master Plan was produced.

³⁸ Leicester Master Plan 2009, p 3-8

³⁹ Leicester Master Plan 2000, pp 12 & 13.

⁴⁰ Leicester Master Plan 2009, p8-3.

⁴¹ Leicester Master Plan 2009, p 8-14.

⁴² Leicester Master Plan 2009, p 4-8.

Figure 36: Town of Leicester Building Permits Issued

Source: Leicester Inspections Department, Annual Reports

Year	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Single Family	18	11	8	12	12	11	7	9	8							
Single & 2 Family										9						
1 or 2 family (In-law/modular/mobile)											15	11	15	10	13	12
Over 55 2 Unit	2															
Senior Housing Duplex				1												
Duplex					1		4	5								

The total annual housing units permitted dropped from an average of 50 new units between 2000 and 2008 to an average of 12 units per year between 2008 and 2023. This is a 75% reduction. Permits for new housing units reserved for seniors also dropped during this period, from 15% of all permits issued to 1.5%.

To what extent the measures promoted in the 2000 Master Plan and supported, albeit in a less emphatic way in the 2009 Master Plan played a part in this dramatic reduction is impossible to say. Certainly, the financial crisis and the Covid pandemic have also played their part. The reality, however, is that the widespread anxiety about extremely rapid development has not been realized. Instead, the town has lived through fifteen years in which the capital asset base has more or less stagnated, strongly constraining the growth of the town's income in the context of high inflation and increasing demand for services.



ZONING BYLAWS

ZONING DISTRICTS

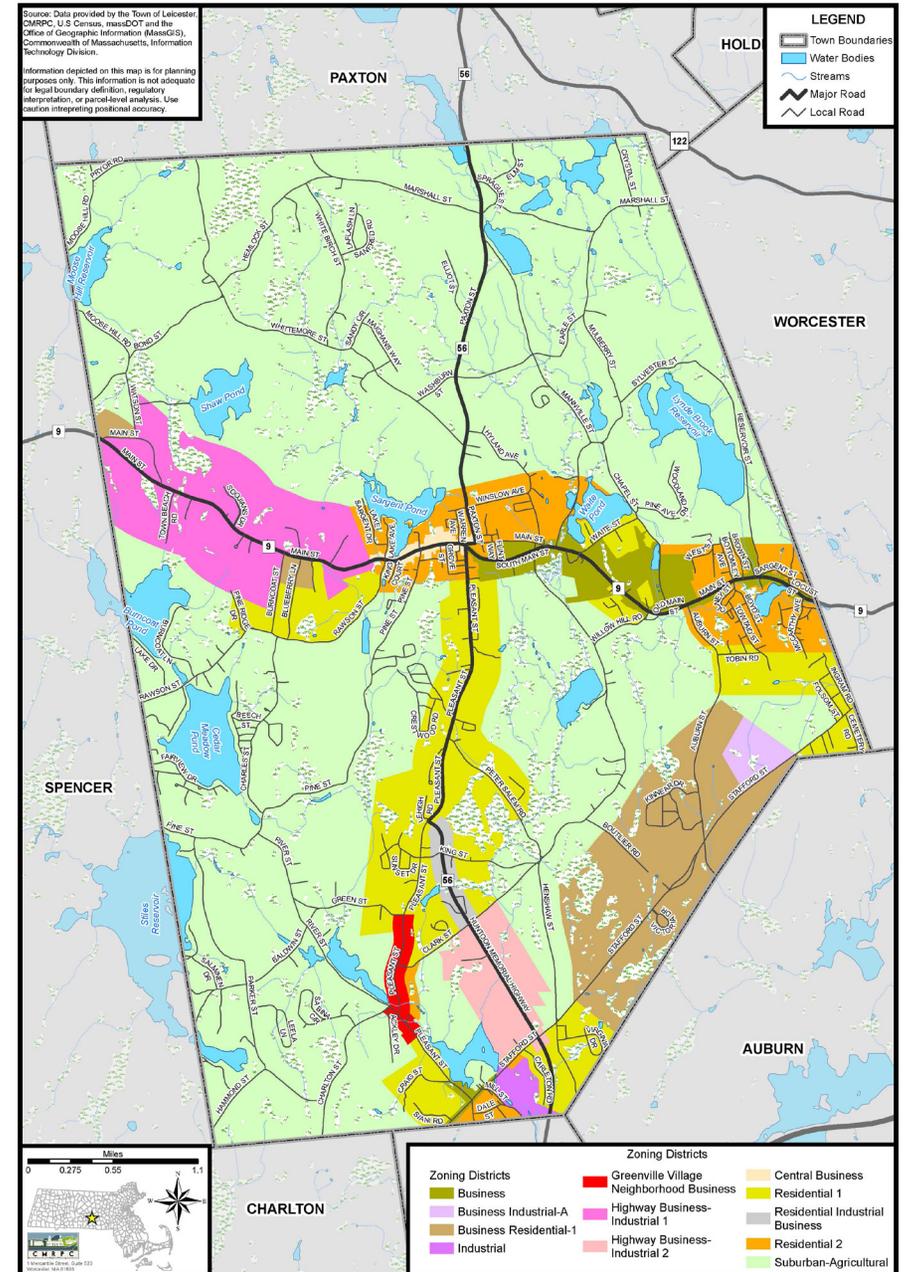
There are 12 different base zoning districts in Leicester:

Residential 1	R1
Residential 2	R2
Suburban-Agricultural	SA
Business	B
Industrial	I
Business-Industrial-A	BI-A
Business Residential-1	BR-1
Residential Industrial Business	RIB
Highway Business-Industrial District 1	HB-1
Highway Business-Industrial District 2	HB-2
Greenville Village Neighborhood Business District	NB
Central Business	CB

RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

The Suburban-Agricultural District makes up most of the town not along major routes, covering the northern half of town above Route 9, and two major portions in the southern half of town east and west of Pleasant Street. This district has a minimum lot size of 80,000 square feet or just under 2 acres. This district only allows single family homes, and certain commercial uses, many of which require a special permit. This is the only district in town that allows the raising of “swine and fur-bearing animals”, by special permit, and one of only three districts which allows the construction of a greenhouse, also by special permit, and one of only two districts which allow the operation of a farm, by-right.

Map 14: Zoning Districts



There are two primary residential districts - Residential 1 is located mainly along Pleasant Street south of Route 9, with pockets along Main Street/Route 9. Residential 1 is low density, with a minimum lot area of 50,000 square feet, or just over an acre. Residential 2 is located mainly along Main Street/Route 9, with small pockets in Greenville and Rochdale in the southern part of Leicester. Residential 2 is denser, with a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet, or just under half an acre.

Residential 1 only allows the construction of single family homes, while Residential 2 allows the construction of two-family homes by special permit. Apart from that, the two districts share the same use regulations, with most businesses not permitted or requiring a special permit.

BUSINESS DISTRICTS

There are two primary zoning districts for business. The first, the Business District is located mainly along Main Street/Route 9 to the east of the intersection with Pleasant Street, with a small pocket in the south of town at the intersection of Stafford Street and Pleasant Street in Rochdale. The Business District has a minimum lot size of 15,000 square feet, or about a third of an acre. The second zoning district for business, the Central Business District is located in the center of town, along Main Street/Route 9 between the intersection with Paxton Street and the intersection with Lake Avenue. The Central Business District also has a minimum lot size of 15,000 square feet.

Neither district allows detached single-family dwellings, but both allow the construction of two family or multifamily homes by special permit. Both districts allow many of the same commercial uses, though the Business District is more permissive, while the Central Business District, sitting in a denser part of Leicester, requires special permits in most cases and disallows certain larger business uses such as Car Washes and Contractor's Yards. Unlike almost any other district in Leicester, both districts allow mixed use development.

INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS

There are two primary industrial districts. The base Industrial District is in the Rochdale neighborhood in the south of town, southeast of Stafford Street. There are two different minimum lot sizes, with a minimum lot size of 40,000 square feet or just under an acre, for a single-family home. All other uses require a minimum lot size of 10,000 square feet, or under a quarter of an acre.

The Business Industrial A District is in the east of town, northwest of Stafford Street and south of Cherry Valley, next to the Auburn town line. There are two different minimum lot sizes in this district also, with the same minimum lot size of 40,000 square feet for a single-family home. All other uses require a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet, or under half an acre.

Neither industrial district allows two-family or multifamily homes, while Business-Industrial A allows the construction of a Senior Village Development by special permit. Both districts allow a variety of commercial uses and allow various industrial uses by right or special permit.

There are two Highway Business Industrial Districts. Highway Business Industrial 1 is located along Main Street/Route 9 west of the Central Business District. Highway Business Industrial 2 is in the south of town, along Huntoon Memorial Highway, north of Stafford Street and south of Clark Street. These districts differ in their minimum lot size.

Highway Business Industrial 1 requires a minimum lot size of 60,000 square feet and Highway Business Industrial 2 requires a minimum lot size of 45,000 square feet. Both districts differ from the other industrial districts in allowing agricultural use but not allowing any housing use. Each district allows similar uses to the other Industrial districts, but they are in general more permissive. Certain uses, such as movie theaters and veterinary hospitals, are allowed by special permit.

DISTRICTS NOT GOVERNED BY THE USE TABLE

A few districts are not governed by the Schedule of Use Table, including Business Residential-1, Residential Industrial Business, and the Greenville Village Neighborhood Business District. Their permitted uses are governed by other sections of the Zoning Bylaws.

There are two sections of Business Residential-1, with the vast majority found along Stafford Street on the Auburn town line, and a small portion north of Main Street/Route 9 on the border with Spencer. This is another district with different minimum lot sizes for single family homes, which require 50,000 square feet while any other use requires 20,000 square feet. Single family housing is allowed in this district by right. Numerous commercial, retail, and dining uses are allowed by right, while uses such as light manufacturing, vehicle sales, self-storage, and Senior Village Developments are allowed with a special permit.

Residential Industrial Business is located along Huntoon Memorial Highway/Route 56 south of Pleasant Street and north of Clark Street. This district has a complex set of dimensional regulations, with separate dimensional requirements for single family homes, two family homes, and multi-family homes, with additional acreage requirements for additional units in multi-family buildings. Business users have the same dimensional requirements as BR-1, a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet. Single family homes are allowed by right, while other residential uses require a special permit. Light manufacturing, Senior Village Developments, and other commercial and retail uses are allowed by special permit.

The Greenville Village Neighborhood Business District is located along Pleasant Street in the Greenville neighborhood in the south of Leicester. This district has a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet, or just under half an acre. All uses allowed in Residential 1 are allowed unless specified in the Village Neighborhood district bylaw. All non-residential projects require a minimum site plan review. Numerous small-scale retail, commercial, and dining uses are allowed. Special permits are required for drive-through facilities, take-out restaurants, and any business over 3,000 square feet. Vehicle sales, self-storage, and marijuana establishments are prohibited. This district also has unique site development standards.

OVERLAY DISTRICTS

There are two overlay districts in Leicester. The Recreational Development Overlay is located south of Leicester Center, primarily between Henshaw Street & Henshaw Pond and Pleasant Street, with a small portion along the west side of Pleasant Street south of Fox Run Lane. This district allows for special recreational developments maintained and preserved for active or passive recreation, including parks, sports facilities, and swimming pools. This overlay specifies special environmental design criteria for a development.

The Water Resources Protection overlay is large, covering large swathes of rural Leicester, including much of the north of town, portions of the center of town, and stretches along Pine Street, Pleasant Street, and Henshaw Street south of Leicester Center and north of Greenville and Rochdale. Special permits are required in this district under certain conditions, including the increase in impervious area, the application of certain pesticides and fertilizers, and any use involving toxic or hazardous materials. Various industrial and other uses involving toxic and hazardous materials are expressly prohibited.

CONCLUSIONS ON THE ZONING BYLAWS

As is shown above, the Zoning Bylaws contain many similar zones which apply to the same sorts of land use and impose slightly different requirements in different parts of the town. While there are certainly good reasons for some of these differences, this results in a considerable amount of complexity and potential confusion. This is increased by the fact that the relevant information for some zoning districts is in a table, while for other districts it is not. There are many instances in which Special Permits are required, creating potential uncertainty for people considering development in Leicester, and it is not clear that all the provisions are constructive in supporting the outcomes that the town would like to achieve through the land use management process.

KEY FINDINGS

Key Finding #1 There is a Need to Support and Encourage Development in Leicester to Grow to the Town's Tax Base

In interviews with town staff, it became apparent that there is a mismatch between the town's needs or ambitions, as well as the community's desires or demands, and the funding available to the town. This is addressed in detail in the Town Services chapter. There are two ways in which Leicester can increase the funding available to provide a higher level of service. With the backing of two thirds of the people present at a Town Meeting it can override the Levy Limit and increase taxes. Alternatively, it can seek to increase the assessed value of assets in town so that the same level of taxation will generate a higher level of revenue. It is the latter option that can be influenced by changes to land use regulations. While there was some pushback against this idea in the community survey, there were far more people who made comments that were supportive of it.



VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



Stop trying to add to a town you can't even currently maintain because your towns people are cheap.



No! Stop trying to add to the town when you can't even maintain what we currently have.



The town is becoming way to overpopulated and over developed.



Businesses need to be brought in to extend tax base and allow for services to be better funded.



Make it easier for business to come in.



Not enough businesses to help with lowering taxes.



We need more business in town.



Make it easier for new businesses to come to town.



Lack of tax revenue.



Streamlining the planning approval to permitting process.

Key Finding #2 **Water, Sewer, and to a Lesser Extent Other Infrastructure are a Significant Barrier to Development**

Discussions with town officials identified the existence of multiple independent water and sewer districts as a significant constraint to development because of additional complications and uncertainty in the permitting process. While this sort of issue would normally be raised by officials who deal with development related issues in a town and by developers, the extent to which this issue is a concern for survey respondents is noteworthy.

As the quotes from the community survey show, this is a highly emotive issue with sometimes passionate views being expressed. This issue is dealt with in detail in the Town Services chapter. The conclusion reached in that chapter is that there is adequate water and sewer capacity to accommodate substantial further development as well as plans to expand this capacity to whatever extent is required. While higher than average prices are indeed a problem, there is no evidence that the prices are such that, when taken in the context of all other issues influencing development, they can be considered a major barrier to development.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



Simplify water and sewer.



Not until there is a unified town or regional water and sewer system in place, instead of multiple small water and sewer companies. That should be the Town's number ONE priority before anything else gets done.



While not necessarily related to developing Leicester, something that I think will potentially prevent business from coming here, especially to Cherry Valley, are the water & sewer rates. As part of the long-term plan for development there needs to be additional avenues explored for getting increased funds for the districts.



Water/sewer is killing parts of the town. Can't believe a town this size has as many water/sewer districts.



Water & Sewer needs to be forcibly taken over by the town.



Cherry Valley is ready to fall off a cliff with the water/sewer issue that no one from the town dares touch! It holds the town back.

Key Finding #3 **Increased Tax Revenue would Result from Any Form of Development, but Community Members See Commercial Development as a Priority**

Because the town has a single tax rate, the extent of increased tax revenue generated by development is determined by the value of the assets created rather than by the type of land use. In Massachusetts at present there is a much higher demand for residential development than for business development. There is certainly scope to make Leicester more attractive to businesses, (see the Economic Development chapter). Increased commercial development has the potential to create a wider variety of opportunities for residents and of new local employment opportunities. Nevertheless, given existing market conditions, it is more likely that the assessed asset base of the town can be increased through residential development than that it can through business development.

39% of survey respondents identified commercial development as the highest priority, and a further 35% identified mixed use, including commercial as the highest priority. Therefore, nearly three quarters of respondents see some form of commercial development as the highest development priority for the town. Further, 31% of respondents and 28% of respondents, respectively, ranked commercial development and mixed use as their second priorities.

These survey results suggest that there is strong support for further commercial development, though it should also be acknowledged that there is some passionate opposition, e.g.

The comments indicate differing attitudes to the type of commerce that people are likely to support. There are some who want to limit further “big box” developments because they see them as detrimental to locally owned businesses:

However, this was not a universally held view.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

“*No more commercial development!!*”

“*Need Independent business - Owner occupied 3 deckers / businesses as opposed to big corporations. You should be allowed to live and work at the same property.*”

“*Maintain the town's small-town character by supporting locally owned businesses and farms not encouraging big box stores and large corporations that do not have local commitments.*”

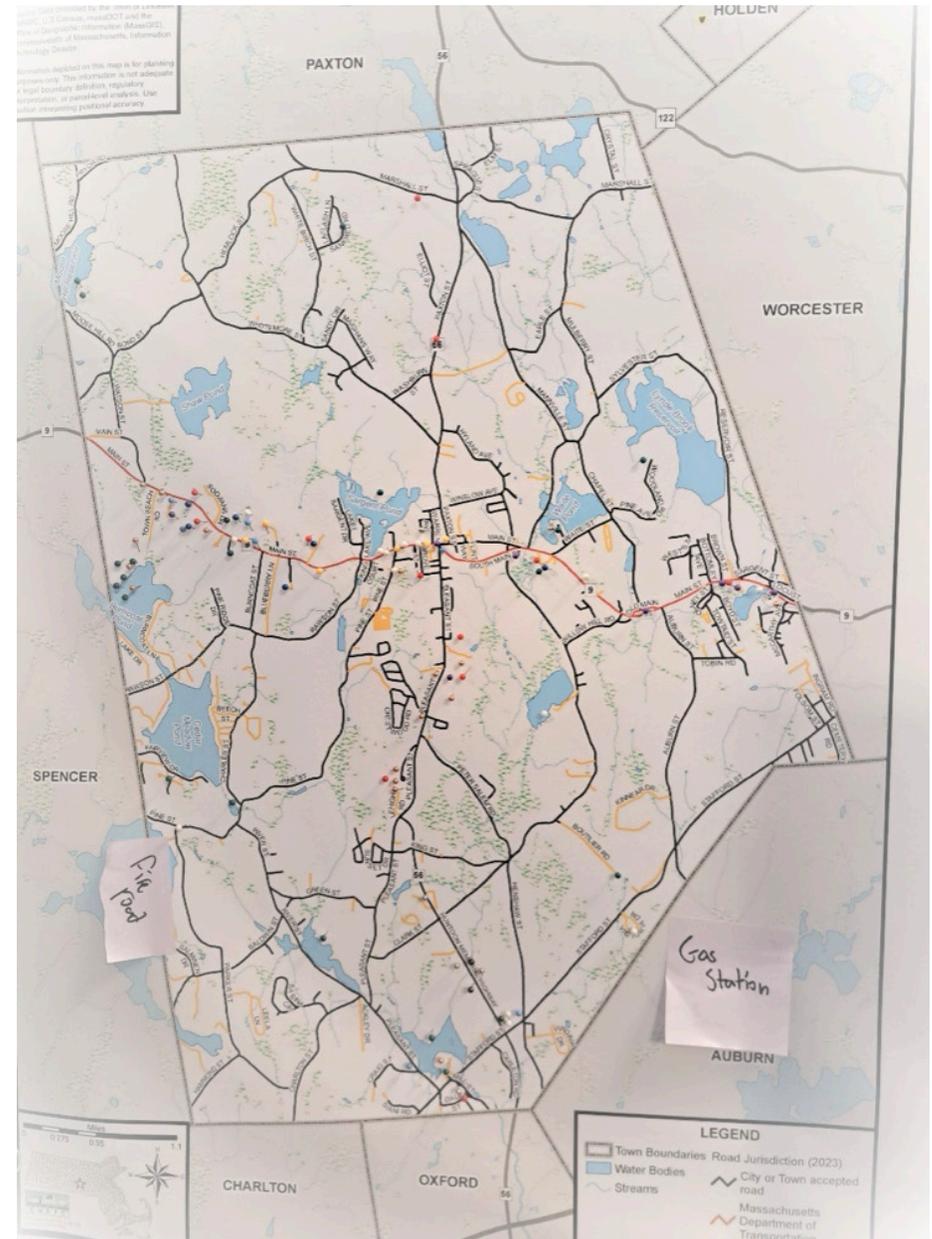
“*Please for the love of God no more big box/name brand stores. It pushes out small business.*”

“*We need more business in town. Lowes, CVS, Marketbasket, restaurants.*”

At the public workshop, held on September 3, 2024], six pins were placed in the land use map suggesting locations for big box stores: five of them in Route 9 west area and one in Route 9 east. Altogether 28 pins were placed for specialty stores, convenience stores and restaurants. Eight pins were placed for mixed use. Most of the pins were placed along Route 9, with restaurants all along the route but especially in the center, specialty stores in the center and west and mixed use in the east. Restaurants and convenience stores were also proposed for Rochdale.

Although the only commerce-related pins placed in the map along Route 56 were a suggestion of mixed use on Pleasant Street and two restaurant pins and one convenience store pin in Rochdale, 65% of survey respondents selected Huntoon Highway / Route 56 South as an appropriate location for further commercial development. This was the most selected area. Route 9 was also strongly favored with 56% of respondents selecting Route 9 West, 42% Route 9 East and 30% the Center of Town. Other areas selected by more than 20% of respondents were Route 56 North (27%), Stafford Street / Deadhorse Hill (26%), Cherry Valley (24%), and Rochdale (23%).

Figure 37: Leicester Workshop Land Use Plan



Key Finding #4 Additional Housing (Except for Housing as a Part of Mixed Use) is Not a High Priority for Survey Respondents

Detailed considerations regarding housing and proposals for housing are made in the Housing Chapter. From a land use perspective, it is notable that only 20% of survey respondents ranked housing as the highest priority for further development. Overall, 36% of respondents placed housing as first or second priority, 35% placed it third and 29% placed it fourth or fifth.

In response to the survey question about where multi-family housing could be appropriately located there were 39 comments suggesting that there should be no multi-family housing at all. While this is a high number of comments indicating opposition to this concept, and cannot be disregarded, there were 324 suggestions for appropriate locations.

The areas suggested are very similar to the areas suggested for commercial development. 46% suggested Huntoon Highway / Route 56 South, 44% Route 9 West, 34% Stafford Street / Deadhorse Hill, and 30% Route 9 East. Other areas that were identified by more than 20% of respondents were Route 56 North (27%), Cherry Valley (26%), and Rochdale (24%).

At the workshop on September 3, 2024, 12 pins were placed on the land-use map indicating suitable places for multi-family housing. They follow a pattern similar to the survey results except that there is not a pin on Stafford Street / Deadhorse Hill. Three people identified disused school buildings as suitable places for multi-family housing.

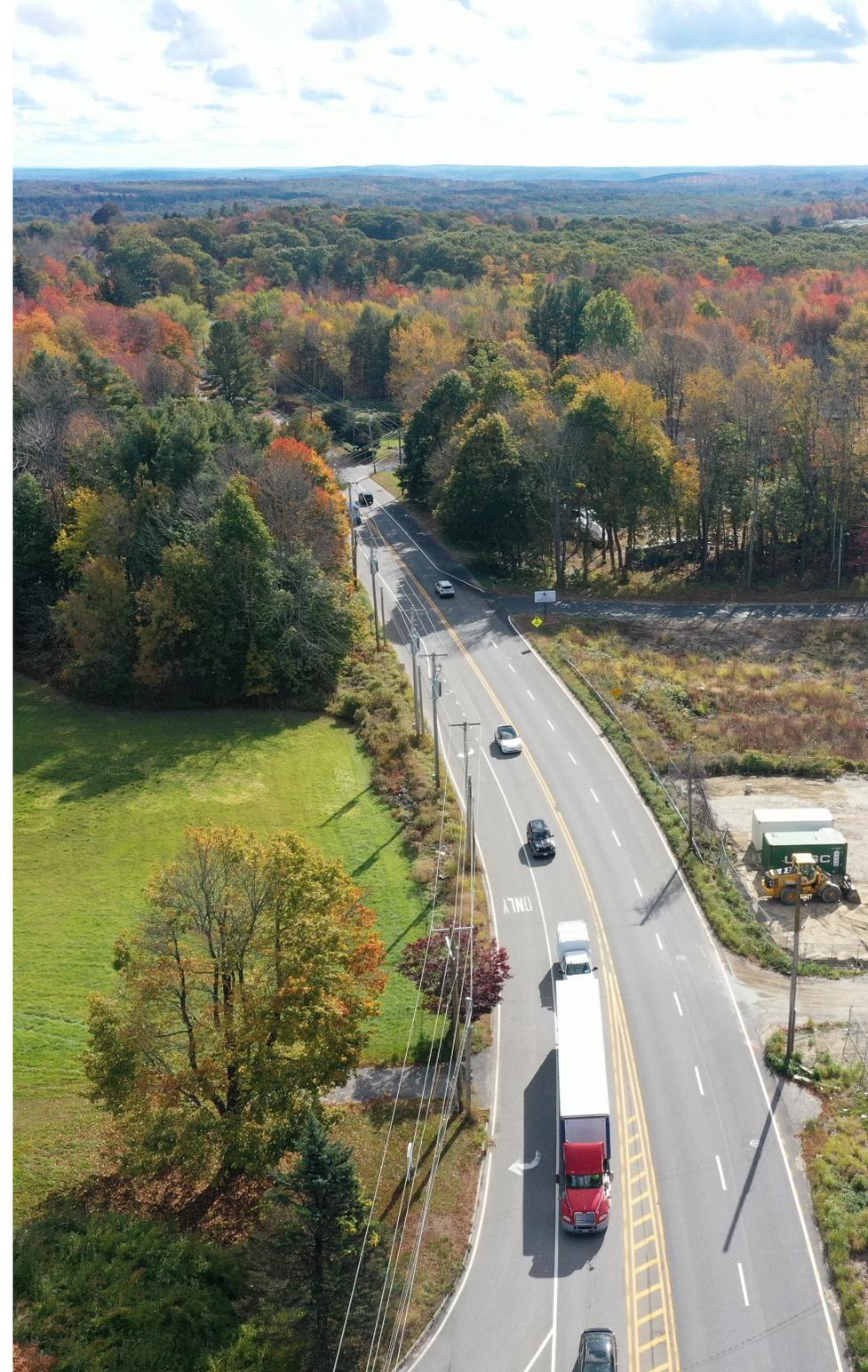


Key Finding #5 Conservation/Open Space is a Higher Priority for Survey Respondents than Housing

Conservation and open space will be dealt with in detail in other chapters. It is worth noting here that 46% of survey respondents ranked it as their first or second priority and only 27% ranked it fourth or fifth.

Fifteen pins were placed in the land use map at the workshop identifying areas for passive recreation. These were mainly associated with water bodies, and especially Burncoat Pond and Moose Hill Reservoir. Sixteen pins were placed suggesting locations for active recreation. Half of these were placed on Pleasant Street.

From a land use perspective, it is notable that while there is a recreational development overlay district, open space preservation is not addressed, except in the Water Resources Protection Overlay. The Leicester Historical Commission has suggested that there is a need for regulatory protection for areas such as the open space on Whittemore Street that was identified in both the 2000 Master Plan and the 2009 Master Plan. They also suggested that a land use designation such as “Heritage Landscape” should be considered. This will be addressed in the action items.



Key Finding #6 **Much has been Done to Implement the 2009 Leicester Master Plan and there is a Need for Continuity and Consistency, but there is also Need for a Significant Change in Emphasis**

The Land use Goal in the 2009 Master plan was:

“Leicester’s land use goal is to use planning and regulatory techniques to preserve the quality of life for Leicester residents and provide for a balance of commercial and residential growth that uses resources and energy wisely, encourages redevelopment of already developed land over development of new land, and protects the natural resources of the Town of Leicester”

The goal was heavily centered on preservation and limiting growth. The fourteen identified land use objectives were also focused on the management of growth in an orderly way. However, current conditions seem to call for a different approach. Without compromising the preservation of the rural character of the town, or its significant architectural, historical and cultural landmarks (see the Cultural and Natural Resources chapter), current conditions make it necessary to ensure that Leicester is competitive in attracting development that can meet the town’s needs and provide for the future.

While it is important to be mindful of the preference of most survey respondents for commercial development over residential development, it is also necessary to remember that respondents generally favored selective commercial development that does not emphasize high volume, low value “big box” commercial establishments. This factor favors a combination of residential and commercial development.

To achieve the development that seems financially necessary for the town and, at the same time to preserve the open space and the rural atmosphere, it will be necessary to channel development away from low density single residential development on large lots, which almost inevitably encroach further into open space, towards, high quality, higher density development in the town and village centers and along the movement corridors. These areas are already developed to an extent and their further development will not have a detrimental impact on existing open spaces. If they are sensitively developed, they have the potential to create the necessary capital growth in Leicester without compromising what needs to be conserved.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

BACKGROUND

The position of the center of Leicester town or the Town Center Village of Leicester was probably determined by choosing an attractive, elevated position on the main route between New York and Boston (later known as the Boston Post Road), a suitable distance from the city of Worcester and within a tract of land that had been bought by speculators. The other land use patterns were largely predicated on the location of the plentiful water resources in the area, which were utilized for driving mills. The initial sawmills and grist mills, established where the rivers could be conveniently dammed, were replaced during the last quarter of the 18th century by textile mills as Leicester played a leading role in the industrial development of the country.

The mills became the centers of villages which lasted beyond the time when waterpower was replaced by other forms of energy, and eventually beyond the useful lives of the mills. There were six villages within the area of Leicester Town: Leicester Center, Mannville, Lakeside, Greenville, Cherry Valley and Rochdale. Mannville and Lakeside disappeared as a consequence of the construction of the Kettle Brook Reservoir system to supply water to Worcester from the 1880s on, and subsequently the expansion of Worcester Airport in 1959, but the other four remain.

The development of the places where people historically lived and worked has been reinforced by patterns of movement. The most notable of these is the old Boston Post Road, now Route 9. This route is no longer a major inter-state highway. That role is played by the Massachusetts Turnpike, the I-90, which bypasses Leicester. However, Route 9 is a major sub-regional route providing the quickest route between the City of Worcester and several towns as far away as Ware. This means that it carries significant amounts of traffic. Unlike traffic traveling on a limited access highway, people using Route 9 can stop relatively conveniently along the route. The route thus gives the town access to the purchasing power of a regional population. This has already led to the establishment of Walmart on the western part of the Route 9 Corridor, and it has potential to support further development.

The other state route is Route 56. Route 56 was planned by the state to connect Route 20 with Route 122. This was in part to alleviate increasing traffic problems, but also to address issues with trailer truck traffic going under the railroad bridge on Mill Street and at the intersection of Stafford & Pleasant Street. The original plan for what became Huntoon Highway was supposed to go north behind Hillcrest Country Club and through the former village of Mannville. However, the city of Worcester did not want a new highway going through their watershed and the new road moved, ending on Pleasant Street in its current configuration.⁴³ To the east, Stafford Street provided a more direct link between Rochdale and Worcester or Cherry Valley. These linkages have created their own locational dynamics.

To the north the development of Worcester Regional Airport used a good deal of land and effectively eliminated a considerable amount more for development because of the noise associated with an active airport. The potential for the airport to generate business opportunities, associated particularly with freight handling, led to significant concerns about congestion and overdevelopment in the area. However, to date these opportunities have not materialized.

⁴³ Leicester Historical Commission, Personal Communication.

ROUTE 9 CORRIDOR

The Route 9 corridor is the part of Leicester which has by far the greatest exposure to the significant number of commuters who pass through the town daily. If Leicester is to attract businesses that rely on selling goods in person to greater market area, this is the best part of town for them to locate. There are two types of business that fall into this category. One is businesses that need to sell to a larger number of people than they can access in any one town because their business model is based on low prices and high turnover. A good example is Walmart. Businesses of this sort attracted some concern from survey respondents because of their potential to undermine the viability of local businesses. In general, they need large properties.

The second type of business that needs regional thresholds is a specialist business selling things that people tend to buy infrequently and are willing to travel to for the experience of shopping or for the importance of making the right choice. This can range from a farmers' market to a specialized equipment store, a high-end bakery or restaurant, to a jeweler or a store that sells musical instruments.

At the same time, Route 9 also offers residents the most convenient access to Worcester, so it is an excellent location to promote the development of housing for people who are likely to want to commute to Worcester.

The expectation is that, in general along Route 9 land use will intensify with opportunities for regionally focused businesses, mainly of the specialty type, being maximized and with a substantial increase in opportunities for higher density residential development.

THE CENTER OF TOWN

Within the Route 9 Corridor, the Center of Town is a special case. Because of the intersection with Route 56 there is additional through-traffic, so it is more likely to attract customers from the wider regional market. In addition, the Town Common and the historic buildings around it offer the opportunity to strengthen the identity and the brand recognition of Leicester.

A change to the zoning restrictions on the historic buildings that would allow them to come into commercial use, combined with careful, design-based increase in use in the area could attract businesses that would benefit from the location. Combined with an active program of events on the common, this could attract a larger number of people from outside the town and stimulate interest in further development.

The relationship between the Town Common and the Center of Town needs to be carefully thought through. There is some sense of history in the Center of Town, but whether this is sufficient to guide the future development of the Center needs to be decided. The land use, movement and parking patterns in the Center of Town need to be reviewed in zoning reviews and design guidelines.

To reinforce the demand for the services offered by businesses in the Center of Town an increase in housing density in the area within easy walking distance of the center should be facilitated so that the Center of Town can become a vibrant, busy area with lots of local people and outsiders supporting a range of businesses and activities.

To co-ordinate the efforts associated with these changes, a Village Plan is needed for the Center of Town. This should address zoning changes, design guidelines, infrastructure requirements, signage and place making.

CHERRY VALLEY

Cherry Valley has the potential to benefit from the regional market provided by Route 9, as well as its proximity to Worcester. It was the area most often mentioned by residents as being suitable for mixed use development. Currently it does not give the impression of being rural, but it is also not easily accessible from the main road, partly because the topography is challenging. Its current low-density built form does not make it attractive for businesses or convenient for residents.

There is the potential for significant development along the main road, creating a vibrant mixed-use area that offers specialized goods to the regional market and convenience goods to a substantial local market. This would take time to achieve and involve a good deal of redevelopment. It would involve upgrading the infrastructure, changing the zoning and applying design guidelines to make sure that the activities along the road are interesting and inviting to passing traffic, that access to the commercial activities is easy, without impacting the flow of traffic along the road, and that the area is comfortable and usable for pedestrians.

Here again, there is a need for a Village Plan.

The development of Cherry Valley potentially offers the greatest increase in property values and therefore tax revenues for the town.

ROUTE 9 CORRIDOR WEST

The section of the Route 9 Corridor to the west of the Center of Town is seen by many residents as the most suitable part of the town for both commercial and residential development. There is a substantial amount of land in that area, some of which is available for development and much of which could become available. The establishment of Walmart in the area has already shown that it can work for big box stores that rely on high turnover and relatively low prices.

Single businesses with large footprints do not necessarily provide the optimum rate of tax revenue for the town. As indicated in the responses to the community survey quoted above, they also cause some concern about their impact on other local businesses.

While this area is not likely to develop into a high intensity mixed use area with a strong relationship between the activities and the main road, as is envisaged for Cherry Valley, it has the potential to support a variety of different types and styles of development, if they are not potentially offensive to neighbors. The zoning of the area should facilitate commercial or residential development at medium to high density in either single-use or mixed-use properties.

This is an area where “horizontal mixed-use developments” of the sort found at Shrewsbury Crossing could work as well as big box stores or multi-family residential developments.

ROUTE 56 SOUTH CORRIDOR

Huntoon Memorial Highway and the northern section of Pleasant Street benefit from increased traffic because of vehicles traveling to the south. This might be significantly increased if there were an interchange providing access to the Massachusetts Turnpike, and there have been suggestions that such a link should be established. In reality, however, it seems very unlikely that an interchange will be constructed within the time frame of this Master Plan. There is no indication that the amount of through-traffic currently using Route 56 generates sufficient passing trade to have a significant impact on the ability of properties along the route to access regional markets. However, the route does offer potentially advantageous positions for businesses that want to be located with easy access for employees or customers to Route 20 or to areas further south.

It can be anticipated that there might be some modest increase in office, logistics or light industrial activity along this route and some demand for additional medium density housing. Zoning of the area should be reviewed to accommodate these possibilities.

ROCHDALE

Rochdale does not have the proximity to Worcester enjoyed by Cherry Valley, nor the passing trade offered by Route 9. It has two old mills that could potentially be developed into housing if they are not redeveloped for other productive uses. It also has Rochdale Pond, and some other old buildings.

Like Cherry Valley, Rochdale's built form is not sufficiently dense to create an area that is both convenient and conducive to shopping. If existing buildings and infrastructure can be adaptively reused and sufficient housing can be developed in the area to create an adequate threshold for convenience goods stores and personal services outlets, the area could redevelop into a vibrant village community situated in a beautiful and reasonably convenient location.

This would require a review of the zoning and consideration of design guidelines and incentives for the adaptive reuse of the buildings. It would also require zoning that allows for the development of compatible buildings to complement the legacy structures, as well as upgrading the public space to make the area attractive to present and potential residents.

This again requires the development of a Village Plan.

GREENVILLE

Greenville retains a good deal of its historic charm and could benefit from design guidelines to reinforce its feeling of a relatively low-density traditional village. It is unlikely to be the location of major development initiatives, and the zoning should be reviewed to encourage village-scale single residential uses and rural commercial uses.

STAFFORD STREET

Stafford Street retains a largely green rural feel along most of its length, even though much of the area has become home to solar farms and similar, light industrial or transport orientated activities. It is necessary for the town to have an area of this sort to accommodate these activities and with suitable setbacks and good management the area seems to work well.

RURAL AREAS

There has been some suggestion, in the survey responses and in the community workshop, that the area north of the Route 9 corridor would be suitable for further housing development and for commercial development. If the intention were to encourage further low density, single residential development this would make sense, since there is a substantial amount of space there. However, the strong preference expressed by most town respondents is to preserve open space and rural parts of the town. Combined with the fact that there is very little infrastructure in the area and that some of the area is affected by aircraft noise, it seems preferable to retain the rural nature of the whole of the so-far-undeveloped area north of the Route 9 Corridor.

Similarly, the rural areas to the west of the town and the area round Henshaw Pond are most suitable for preservation and should remain as little developed as possible. To protect these areas several mechanisms are proposed in the section dealing with goals and action items.



GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

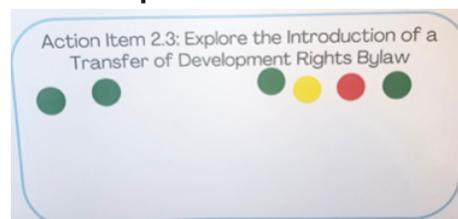
Based on the key findings set out above and the input received from the community survey and the first community workshop, and taking into account the resource constraints facing the town, the following goals and action items were proposed. They were informed also by experience elsewhere and best practice in the field of comprehensive planning.

Unless a town has substantial resources and is able to make major investments itself, there are limited alternatives open to towns to influence land use. These fall into the following categories:

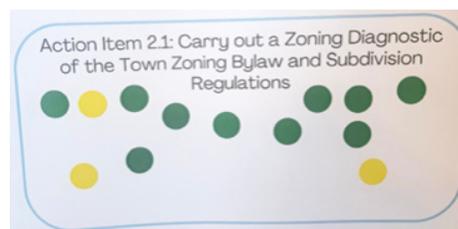
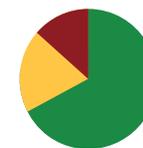
- Detailed planning of specific parts of the town to formulate a clear vision for the development of the local area and to put in place specific measures to achieve that vision.
- Investment in infrastructure to make development possible.
- Changes to Land Use Regulations. The regulations contained in the Zoning Bylaws and associated regulations, such as subdivision regulations and storm water regulations, have a significant impact on what can and what cannot be done in the town. They also have a major impact on how easily developments can be undertaken and what degree of uncertainty potential developers must deal with.

The goals and action items were discussed with the MPSC and agreed by them and were then put to the second community workshop. In that workshop, each goal was displayed on a poster or posters, together with its associated action items. A space was provided for workshop participants to record their responses to the action items. In order to reflect the responses of the people who attended the workshop, they have been captured with each action item below. In order to save space the responses have been converted into pie charts. The size of the pie chart indicates the amount of interest shown in the action item by increasing or decreasing according to the total number of dots placed, and the color of the portions of the pie charts reflect the colors of the dots. For example:

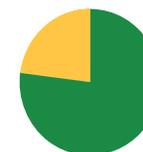
For Example:



is represented as



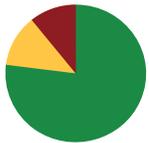
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GOAL 1

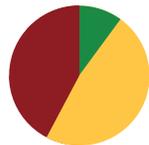
Develop and Implement Detailed Village Plans for Strategically Important Parts of the Town

The section dealing with future land use patterns has identified several parts of Leicester that could play a role in achieving the overall vision for the town. These areas have different characteristics and require specific interventions for them to play the role that they should play in the future of the town. Although an action item is set out for each one, they need not take place simultaneously, and the experience gained in each one should inform the subsequent ones. All four should take place during the time frame of the Master Plan.



Action Item 1.1: Complete and Implement the Town Center Plan

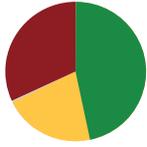
Complete the Town Center Plan that is currently in progress and implement changes to zoning, design guidelines, parking provisions, infrastructure, and, if appropriate, layout.



Action Item 1.2: Develop a Village Plan for Cherry Valley

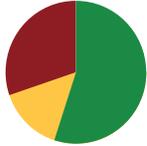
Formulate a detailed scope of work, find funding for, and undertake a local area plan for Cherry Valley. This plan should:

- Define the borders of the area,
- Make detailed realistic, implementable proposals for required infrastructure improvements, including roads and sidewalks,
- Make any necessary and desirable proposals for changes in road layout,
- Identify regulatory changes such as special zones or changes to existing zoning regulations,
- Set out urban form and architectural guidelines detailing desired relationships between buildings, shop fronts, parking, sidewalks and other public spaces,
- Plan for signage, street furniture and planting,
- Set out implementation mechanisms and responsibilities, as well as timelines, rough budgets and funding sources.



Action Item 1.3: Develop a Village Plan for Rochdale

Formulate a detailed brief, find funding for, and undertake a village plan for Rochdale with the same range of sub-actions as set out for Cherry Valley.



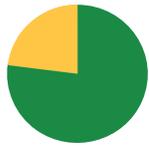
Action Item 1.4: Develop a Neighborhood Plan for Route 9 West

Formulate a detailed brief, find funding for, and undertake a neighborhood plan for the Route 9 Corridor West with the same range of sub-actions as set out for Cherry Valley.

GOAL 2

Ensure that the Zoning Bylaws Facilitate and Do Not Impede Implementation of the Master Plan

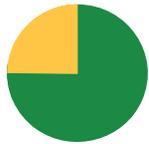
This goal directly addresses what Leicester can control in respect of the bylaws and regulations that permit some types of development and prohibit others.



Action Item 2.1: Review the Zoning Bylaws and Regulations

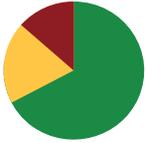
Carry out the currently planned diagnostic exercise on the Zoning Bylaws and Subdivision Regulations and use the outcome of the exercise to source funding for a full Bylaw revision to ensure that the Bylaws are easy to understand and easy to use, that they do not contain contradictions, repetitions or redundant information, that they conform to all current best practices and that they support the goals set out in the Master Plan chapters.

As discussed in the section above, on the Zoning Bylaw, the current bylaw is complex and confusing, with many different zones that differ only slightly from each other. There is much potential to streamline the Bylaw. In addition, experience of working on the Town Center Plan that is currently in production has shown that some aspects of the current Zoning Bylaw are a significant impediment to development in the area. There is also the potential to incorporate the outputs of several of the following action items into the Bylaw.



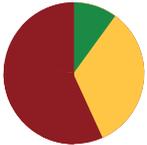
Action Item 2.2: Reduce Reliance on Special Permits

In the process of exploring the Zoning Bylaws, identify all instances in which a Special Permit is required where it might be acceptable either to change the requirement to a Site Plan, or to make the use exercisable by right. The reason for this is that Special Permits are issued at the discretion of the issuing authority (for example, the Planning Board). While this frequently seems to people outside the development world a small requirement to ensure the acceptability of proposed developments, it is a serious impediment to development. The cost of bringing a development application, including undertaking the necessary studies, preparing the plans and going through the application process is substantial. If a developer feels uncertain about whether the town will approve the plan, they are more likely to look for an opportunity in a different town where there is less uncertainty.



Action Item 2.3: Explore Transfer of Development Rights Bylaw

Find funding to explore the use of Transfer of Development Rights Bylaw to make it possible to protect open space and agricultural land from development through the transfer of the development rights associated with those parcels to parcels of land where it is considered desirable to encourage development. This has the significant advantage that no landowner is asked or required to accept a reduction in the value of their property rights, but at the same time the natural, cultural and social values that the community wants to preserve can be secured.



Action Item 2.4: Independent Review of Recent Permitting Applications

Find funding for and carry out an independent review of development applications submitted or completed over the past 24 months and any other applications that are in process, including consultation with applicants and a sample of objectors or interested parties, as well as the town employees or representatives involved, to determine whether there are systemic problems, bottlenecks or other ways in which the processing of applications or the system of permitting could be streamlined or improved. Although there was no specific evidence of such issues in Leicester identified by this study, there was considerable feedback in the community survey suggesting that this has been a problem in the past and may still be a problem. To ensure that Leicester is a highly attractive place for the kind of development envisioned in this Master Plan, it is worth ensuring that any possible inhibiting factors are identified and dealt with as quickly as possible.



IMPLEMENTATION

OVERVIEW

This Master Plan contains a set of suggestions about how the Town of Leicester can best meet the needs and aspirations of the people who live here. It is based on the best understanding that can be derived from an analysis of what has happened and been proposed in the past and what the members of the community who have chosen to engage in the process have identified as their current concerns, desires and priorities.

Until at least some of the suggestions are acted on, the Master Plan remains an academic exercise of little use to the Leicester Community. At the same time, the only people who can take action on the suggestions are extremely busy doing all the other things that they have to do. As with all plans, there is a risk that this one will remain at the level of ideas and suggestions and will “gather dust on a shelf”.

To ensure that this does not happen the first and most important step that Leicester needs to take is to create a Master Plan Implementation Committee that is charged with the responsibility of taking the plan forward.

That committee will need to decide which of the action items to implement when, and in what order. It will have to determine what the town’s priorities are and how they can be balanced against the town’s resources in terms of staff and volunteer time and funds. It will have to decide who is best placed to implement an item, allocate responsibility and ensure that it gets regular reports on progress.

Not everything can be done at once. There is a pipeline of grant funding that can be tapped into, but only so much funding will be available each year and staff and committees have only so much capacity, so some action items will have to wait while others are tackled. While this happens, the context will change. Events in Leicester, in the region and in the nation will change the circumstances in the town. Some action items may become more urgent and important, while others may become irrelevant. The responsibility of the Master Plan Implementation Committee will be not to implement every action item as it is spelled out in this document, but to keep the Master Plan current, to add to it and subtract from it as necessary, to change priorities or reallocate responsibilities, to adapt and amend action items, but to ensure that the Vision Statement and the goals remain constantly in sight.

The committee should meet at least once a quarter and should report its progress annually to the town. It should ensure that any new senior staff are fully aware of the Master Plan and the status of its implementation, as well as making sure that the Master Plan is front of mind in budgeting processes and in decision making structures.

To assist this committee in the initiation of this process a table has been put together listing for each chapter the goals and action items. A priority has been assigned to each action item (1, 2 or 3), based on the charts that appear beside each action item in each chapter indicating the interest shown and the positions taken at the second community workshop, as well as the ease and cost of implementation and an assessment of the impact of implementation on the achievement of the goals.

A suggestion has been made as to the very rough time frame within which the town might begin implementation, and as to who might be the lead actor in taking responsibility for the action item. Some very rough and preliminary, indicative cost estimates have been included, and it has been noted which items are likely to be eligible for grant funding. As with everything else, this is likely to change, especially in the current fluid funding environment.

A space has been included for comments to provide a reminder of what the community workshop response to each action item was and to provide some explanation where the proposed priority seems not to be related to this response.

Finally, a column is provided for the Master Plan Implementation Committee to note its comments, keep track of changes and record the implementation status of each action item.

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
HOUSING AND POPULATION							
GOAL 1: Maintain and encourage a diverse housing stock that provides for a range of ages, abilities, and economic means.							
Action Item H.1.1: Options for Smaller Households.	1	Immediate and Ongoing	Planning Board and Town Planner	No Funds Required	N/A	Despite the low level of interest, there was no opposition to this action. It requires no funding. So, it is a "quick win"	
Action Item H.1.2: Establish working relationships with Developers of Senior Housing	1	Immediate and Ongoing	Town Planner, Town Administrator	No Funds Required	N/A	High level of interest and strong support. Senior housing is recognized as a priority, and this does not mitigate against other housing. No cost but significant time required.	
Action Item H.1.3: Creative Senior Living Opportunities	1	Immediate and Ongoing	Town Planner, Senior Center	No Funds Required	N/A	High level of interest but some opposition. Substantial staff time required.	
Action Item H.1.4: Encourage Universal Design Principles	1	Immediate and Ongoing	Town Planner	No Funds Required	N/A	Low level of interest, relatively minor impact. Significant staff time.	
Action Item H.1.5: Promote Accessory Dwelling Units	1	Immediate and Ongoing	Town Planner, Town	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium interest and no opposition. No cost and high potential impact.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
HOUSING AND POPULATION							
GOAL 2: Balance housing growth with municipal services, infrastructure, environmental resources, and energy supply.							
Action Item H.2.1: Pursue Infrastructure Funding Opportunities	3	As and when	Town Planner, Director of Public Works, Town Administrator	No Funds Required	N/A	High level of interest and no opposition, but specific to particular housing projects. Requires a high level of staff time and commitment. Potentially controversial in some cases	
Action Item H.2.2: Consider Additional Funding Mechanisms	1	Before Town Meeting 2026	Town Administrator	No Funds Required	N/A	Low level of interest but no opposition. This is a highly consequential action item that would have a major impact if it succeeded.	
Action Item H.2.3: Utilize Local Initiative Program	3	2 to 5 years	Town Planner and Town Administrator	No Funds Required	N/A	Low interest but very little opposition. This action item may become redundant as current possible projects materialize. If not, the priority should be reviewed.	
Action Item H.2.4: Match Development to Infrastructure	1	Year 1 and ongoing	Town Planner and Planning Board	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium level of interest and no opposition. This policy has been strongly supported in the Community Survey and Workshop 1 and is essential to the future direction of the town.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
HOUSING AND POPULATION							
GOAL 3: Remove barriers to the production of a variety of housing types in appropriate locations, including mixed-use development, adaptive reuse, and multi-family housing.							
Action Item H.3.1: Permit Multi-Family Housing by Right in More Areas	1	Year 1	Town Planner and Planning Board	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium interest and no opposition. This is an important part of the Zoning Bylaw Review. No cost involved	
Action Item H.3.2: Permit Pocket Neighborhoods	2	Year 1	Town Planner and Planning Board	No Funds Required	N/A	High interest and some opposition, possibly because concept was not clearly explained. Concept should be re-examined in Zoning Bylaw review.	
Action Item H 3.3: Explore Policies to Increase Affordable Housing	1	Year 1	Town Planner and Planning Board	No Funds Required	N/A	High level of interest and equivocal response. It is important to support housing for seniors and young families and to avoid hostile 40B developments.	
Action Item H.3.4: Reduce Dimensional Requirements	1	Year 1	Town Planner and Planning Board	No Funds Required	N/A	Strong interest and strong support. This is important to facilitate appropriate housing development and retain the town's character.	
GOAL 4: Preserve and invest in the existing housing stock to maintain desirable and healthy neighborhoods							
Action Item H.4.1: Improve Public Housing	1	Immediate and ongoing	Immediate and ongoing	Variable depending on capacity and funds	CPA or Housing Trust Fund	Very high interest and no opposition.	
Action Item H.4.2: Leverage Funding to Help with Home Repairs	1	Immediate and ongoing	Immediate and ongoing	Variable depending on capacity and funds	CBDG	High Interest and full support.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES							
Goal 1: Protect Water Resources							
Action Item NCR.1.1: Consider a Stormwater Enterprise Fee	2	Year 1	DPW, Town Administrator, Conservation Commission	No Funds Required	N/A	Low interest and no opposition but possibly the item was not clearly understood. Requires significant staff time and further community input.	
Action Item NCR.1.2: Promote Low Impact Development (LID)	1	Year 1	Town Planner, DPW, Conservation Commission, Planning Board	\$5,000 - \$10,000	Grant	Medium interest and no opposition. Bulk of the work can be done as part of Zoning Bylaw review.	
Action Item NCR.1.3.: Explore LID Incentivization	1	Year 2 to 3	Town Planner, DPW, Conservation Commission, Planning Board	\$15,000	Grant	Medium interest and no opposition. It would require research and consultation.	
Action Item NCR.1.4: Identify and Assess Green Infrastructure Projects	3	Year 3 to 5	DPW, Conservation Commission	\$30,000 - \$50,000	Grant	Low interest but little opposition. Limited local impact.	
Action Item NCR.1.3.4: Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring	3	Year 1 to 10	Conservation Commission	No Funds Required	N/A	Very low interest, no opposition. No cost.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES							
Goal 2: Promote Environmental Protection and Sustainability							
Action Item NCR.2.1: Secure Funding to Eliminate Greenville Pond Invasives	1	Year 1 to 2	DPW, Conservation Commission, Common Ground Land Trust	\$80,000 - \$120,000	Grant	Medium interest and no opposition. Urgent requirement to address the problem	
Action Item NCR.2.2: Citizen Science Projects	3	Year 1 and ongoing	Conservation Commission	No Funds Required	N/A	Low interest and no opposition.	
Action Item NCR.2.3: Minimize Impacts of Infrastructure Maintenance Work	3	Immediate and Ongoing	DPW	No Funds Required	N/A	Very low interest and low support. This work is largely being done already. Retained as reminder of principle.	
Action Item NCR.2.4: Expand Dark Sky Provisions	3	Year 1	Town Planner, Planning Board	No Funds Required	N/A	Low interest, no opposition. Public views should be canvassed again in Zoning Bylaw review.	
Action Item NCR.2.5: Adopt Pollinator Protection Policy	3	Year 1 and ongoing	DPW, Conservation Commission	No Funds Required	N/A	Low interest, no opposition. Beneficial but not urgent.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES							
Goal 3: Achieve Net Carbon Neutrality							
Action Item NCR.3.1: Adopt Green Design Policy	3	Year 1 and ongoing	DPW, Town Administrator,	Varied by project	Grants	Medium interest, low level of opposition. Capital costs of projects may increase but ongoing costs will reduce, and positive impacts should be substantial	
Action Item NCR.3.2: Explore Solar Panels on Town Buildings and Parking	2	Year 1 to 3	DPW, Town Administrator, Select Board	Project should pay for itself	N/A	High interest and strong support. Significant staff time required but financial and policy benefits to the town	
Action Item NCR.3.3: Change Town Vehicle Fleet to Low Emission Vehicles	2	Year 1 to 5	Town Administrator, Select Board	Variable across fleet	Grants & Incentives	Medium interest and support. Likely some initial costs but long-term savings on efficiency.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES							
Goal 4: Preserve Leicester's Historic and Cultural Resources							
Action Item NCR.4.1: Encourage Local Involvement in Local History	2	Year 1 and ongoing	Town Administrator, Leicester Historical Society, Library	No Funds Required	N/A	High interest and strong support. Significant staff and volunteer time required.	
Action Item NCR.4.2: Update the Swan Tavern	2	Year 1	Town Administrator, Leicester Historical Society	\$5,000 - \$10,000	Grant	Very high interest and strong support. Staff and volunteer time required and low-level grant funding.	
Action Item NCR.4.3: Implement the Architectural Conservation District Bylaw	2	Year 1	Town Planner, Leicester Historical Commission, Planning Board	No Funds Required	N/A	Although this item has low interest and equivocal support this may be because it is poorly understood. The bylaw is in place and implementing it is straightforward.	
Action Item NCR.4.4: Continue Efforts to Preserve the May House	1	Immediate and ongoing	May House Committee, Town Administrator, Select Board	>\$1million	Grant	Very high interest and strong support. This is an expensive item that will likely require multiple grants.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES							
Goal 5: Support and Preserve Leicester's Agricultural Heritage and Working Farms							
Action Item NCR.5.1: Identify and address Regulatory Barriers and Opportunities	1	Year 1	Town Planner, Planning Board, Agricultural Commission	No Additional Funds Required	N/A	Very high level of interest and support. Can be included in the Zoning Bylaw review.	
Action Item NCR.5.2: Prioritize areas for farmland preservation	1	Year 1 - 2	Town Planner, Town Administrator, Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission	No Additional Funds Required	N/A	High level of interest and support. Can be included in the Open Space Parcel Prioritization Project.	
Action NCR.5.3: Advocate for farmland preservation strategies	2	Year 2 and ongoing	Town Planner, Agricultural Commission, Town	\$10,000 - \$15,000	Grant	Medium interest and good support. A project would need to be funded to put information together and significant staff time would be needed to make sure it is well used.	
Action Item NCR.5.4: Adopt a Chapter 61A Policy	2	Year 1 - 2	Town Administrator, Agricultural Commission, Select Board, Common Ground Land Trust	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium to low interest but good support. Staff time required to compose and negotiate policy	
Action Item NCR.5.5: Carry Out a Community Food Assessment	3	Year 2 - 5	Agricultural Commission, Town Planner	\$30,000 - \$50,000	Grant	Medium to low interest but good support.	
Action Item NCR.5.6: Farmer Education and Training	3	Year 2 - 5	Agricultural Commission	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium to high interest and good support. Requires volunteer organization and input but probably not funds	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
Action Item 5.7: Foster Agricultural Knowledge and Awareness	3	Year 2 and ongoing	Agricultural Commission, School District, Town	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium to high interest and good support. Likely to be more effective once Town Communications function is well established.	
Action Item 5.8: Support Agritourism	2	Year 1	Town Planner, Planning Board, Agricultural Commission	No Additional Funds Required	N/A	Medium interest and support. Can be addressed through Zoning Bylaw review.	

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

Goal 1: Improve Maintenance and Management of Existing Recreational Facilities

Action Item OSR.1.1: Develop a Comprehensive Park Maintenance Plan	1	Year 1	DPW, Parks & Recreation Committee	\$15,000 - \$20,000	Grant	Very high level of interest and complete support. Low cost to the town and savings on resources. Quick win.	
Action Item OSR.1.2: Ensure Long Term Funding for High School Turf Field	2	Year 1 and ongoing	DPW, Town Administrator, Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee, Finance Committee, School District, Parks & Recreation Committee	No funding for action item. Funding requirement for field unknown	N/A	Medium level of commitment and strong support. This item needs to be actioned quickly to avoid degradation of the asset,	
Action Item OSR.1.3: Formalize Volunteer Park Committees	2	Year 1	Parks & Recreation Committee	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium to high level of interest and strong support. Significant time input from committee members required	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION							
Action Item OSR.1.4: Americans with Disabilities Act Transition Plan	2	Year 2	Parks & Recreation Committee, DPW	\$30,000 - \$50,000	Grant	Medium interest and good support	
Action Item OSR.1.5: Develop a High School Internship Program	1	Year 1	DPW, School District	No Funds Required	N/A	Very high interest and very strong support, with little or no cost to the town	
Goal 2: Expand Upon and Diversify Recreational Facilities for All Ages and User Groups							
Action Item OSR.2.1: Plan and Design New Playgrounds	2	Year 3 – 5	Parks & Recreation Committee	>\$75,000	Grant	Medium level of interest with strong support. Accessible playgrounds are high budget items, but grants are available	
Action Item OSR.2.2: Recreation Facilities for Teens.	2	Year 3 – 5	Parks & Recreation Committee	>\$75,000	Grant	Medium level of interest with strong support. Intensive engagement required.	
Action Item OSR.2.3: Study Demand for and Feasibility of Community Recreation Center	2	Year 2 - 4	Parks & Recreation Committee	>\$150,000	Grant	High level of interest with strong support. It is unlikely that a Community Recreation Center could be constructed without a Debt Exclusion.	
Action Item OSR.2.4: Revitalize Burncoat Park	1	Year 1 - 2	Burncoat Park Sports Planning Committee, Parks & Recreation Committee Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee, DPW	>\$100,000	Grant	This item includes implementation as well as planning. There is a high level of interest and support, and it could be a relatively quick win.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION							
Action Item OSR.2.5: Install Security Equipment Where Appropriate	3	Year 2 and ongoing	Parks & Recreation Committee, DPW, Police Department	Depending on System	Grant/ Town Funds	Medium interest and strong support. There are good reasons this has not been done in the past, but it could play a valuable role in future.	
Action Item OSR.2.6: Develop an Open Space Parcel Prioritization Plan	3	Year 4-5	Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee, Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission, Town Planner	\$20,000 - \$40,000	Grant	Medium to low interest and equivocal support, but this is an important planning tool for the future.	
Goal 3: Improve Access to and Awareness of the Town's Recreational Facilities							
Action Item OSR.3.1: Improve Signage and Wayfinding	3	Year 4 - 5	Parks & Recreation Committee, DPW	\$20,000 - \$30,000	Grant	Low interest and equivocal support	
Action Item 3.2: Promote Recreational Facilities	2	Year 2 and ongoing	Parks & Recreation Committee, Town	Initial Materials and web site \$19,000 - \$20,000	Grant	High level of interest and strong support. Ongoing communication needs Town Communication Department.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION							
Goal 4: Develop and Expand Recreational Programming for Residents of All Ages							
Action Item OSR.4.1: Stakeholder Analysis to Identify Partners	1	Year 1	Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee	\$5,000 - \$10,000	Grant	High level of interest and strong support. This activity could be a catalyst for several others.	
Action Item OSR.4.2: Promote Volunteer Opportunities	2	Year 1 - 2	Parks & Recreation Committee	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium to low level of interest, but strong support.	
Action Item OSR.4.3: Programming Strategic Plan	2	Year 1	Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee, Parks & Recreation Committee	\$10,000 - \$20,000	Grant	Medium to low level of interest, but medium strong support.	
Goal 5: Expand and Better Maintain Leicester's trail system, including Connecting Trails and Opening up Access to the Town Center							
Action Item OSR.5.1: Establish a Trail Committee	1	Year 1 - 3	Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee, Select Board	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium interest and strong support. Necessary for Action Item OSR.5.2	
Action Item 5.2: Trail Inventory	1	Year 1 - 3	Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee, Trail Committee, Parks & Recreation Committee	\$30,000 - \$50,000	Grant	High level of interest and support. According to community engagement, trails are important to the people of Leicester.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
TRANSPORTATION							
Goal 1: Improve On-Demand / Microtransit Service for Non-Drivers							
Action Item T.1.1: Conduct a Microtransit Needs Assessment	2	Year 1-3	DPW, Town Administrator	\$20,000 - \$30,000	Grant	Medium to low interest but strong support	
Action Item T.1.2: On-Demand Service Model Pilot	3	Year 1 - 3	DPW, Town Administrator	No Funds Required	N/A	Very low level of interest but good support. This would require a significant amount of staff time.	
Goal 2: Establish and Enhance Public Transit Options							
Action Item T.2.1: Expand Fixed-Route Bus Service	2	Year 1 and ongoing	DPW, Town Administrator	No Funds Required	N/A	Very low level of interest but good support. Possibly because people at the workshop were not reliant on public transport. A significant amount of staff time required.	
Action Item T.2.2: Improve Bus Stop Infrastructure	1	Year 1	DPW, Town Administrator	< \$100,000	Grant / WRTA	Low level of interest but strong support. In the Community Survey and Workshop 1 this was identified as a pressing issue. It would require significant staff time, but CMRPC might be able to assist.	
Action Item T.2.3: Secure Federal and State Funding	3	Ongoing	DPW, Town Administrator	No Funds Required	N/A	Very low level of interest.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
TRANSPORTATION							
Goal 3: Enhance Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure							
Action Item T.3.1 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan Implementation	2	Ongoing	DPW, Town Administrator	Funding as stated in Complete Streets Plan	Grant	Medium interest and good support.	
Action Item T.3.2: Enhance Pedestrian Experience	3	Year 3 – 4	DPW, Town Administrator	To be determined	Town funds	Medium interest and good support, not likely to be grant funded.	
Action Item T.3.3: Maintain Sidewalk Infrastructure	1	Immediate and ongoing	DPW	To be determined	Town funds	High level of interest and complete support. This is a “hot button” item that can help the town management although it is not grant fundable.	
Goal 4: Invest In Road Infrastructure							
Action Item T.4.1: Secure Sustainable Infrastructure Funding	1	Immediate and ongoing	DPW, Town Administrator	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium level of interest with complete support. Significant staff time involved.	
Action Item T.4.2: Improve Traffic Safety	3	Year 3 - 5	DPW, Police Department	To be determined	Town funds	Medium high level of interest and strong support. Town funds required, but different methods could reduce funding requirements	
Action Item T.4.3: Create a Pavement Management System	1	Year 2	DPW	>100,000	Grant	Medium to low level of interest, but strong support for this technical item. Low interest is possibly because people do not understand it. It is of high importance to the DPW	
Action Item T.4.3: Demonstration Project policy	3	Year 3 and ongoing	DPW	No Funds Required	N/A	Very little interest, but good support.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
TRANSPORTATION							
Action Item 4.4: Optimize Street Parking	2	Year 2 and ongoing	DPW	No Additional Funds Required	N/A	This action item enjoys low levels of interest and met with strong opposition. It is acknowledged that on street parking is not popular. However, it can serve important economic development goals and sometimes the actual use of the on street parking is less unpopular than the idea. Further engagement would be necessary before a decision to implement.	
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT							
Goal 1: Invest in Physical Spaces to Strengthen Economic Vitality							
Action Item ED.1.1: Develop And Implement a Branding and Placemaking Strategy	2	Year 2	Town Planner, Economic Development Committee	\$60,000 – 80,000	Grant	Medium level of interest and support.	
Action Item ED.1.2: Maintain an Inventory of Vacant Buildings	1	Year 1 and ongoing	Town Administrator, Assessor's Department, Building Department, Health Department, Fire Department	No Funds Required	N/A	High level of interest and support. No additional funding required, but some staff time.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT							
Action Item ED.1.3 Pursue National Register Designation for Mill Properties	2	Year 2 and ongoing	Economic Development Committee, Historical Commission	No Funds Required	N/A	High level of interest and strong support. Will rely on private property owners to buy into the idea.	
Goal 2: Implement Best Practices to Streamline the Local Permitting Process							
Action Item ED.2.1: Create a Permitting Guide	1	Year 1	Town Planner, Planning Board, Economic Development Committee	\$25,000 - \$30,000	Grant	High level of interest and support. Permitting is a "hot button" issue. This is a potential quick win.	
Action Item ED.2.2: Implement Online Permitting	1	Immediate	Town Administrator, Select Board	Extent of additional funding requires unknown	Possible Grant	Very high level of interest and support. Another quick win.	
Goal 3: Sustain and Attract Business Activity							
Action Item ED.3.1: Reactivate the Economic Development Committee	1	Immediate	Town Administrator, Select Board, Economic Development Committee	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium to high level of interest and support. Necessary for the implementation of several other action items.	
Action Item ED.3.2: Host Regular Business Forums	2	Year 1 and ongoing	Economic Development Committee	No Funds Required	N/A	High level of interest and support.	
Action Item ED.3.3: Enhance Collaboration with Business Organizations	2	Year 1 and ongoing	Economic Development Committee, Leicester Business Association	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium to high level of interest and support.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT							
Action Item ED.3.4: Business Incubator Space and Student Businesses	1	Year 2 and ongoing	School District, Town Planner, Planning Board, Economic Development Committee	Funding to be determined	Possible Grant	Very high level of interest and support. This action item will have multiple benefits for relatively low investment.	
Action Item ED.3.5: Stimulate Development by Offering Tax Exemptions	3	Year 3 - 5	Select Board, Town Administrator, Finance Committee Economic Development Committee	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium level of interest and equivocal support. Should be re-evaluated as the plan is implemented.	
Action Item ED.3.6: Facilitate Business Assistance Grants	1	Year 1 and ongoing	Town Administrator, Town Planner, Economic Development Committee	No Funds Required	N/A	High level of interest and support. Very significant staff time involved in identifying, applying for and administering grants.	
TOWN SERVICES AND FACILITIES							
Goal 1: Build on the Vision of Leicester as an Education Leader and Enhance Educational Opportunities and Facilities							
Action Item TS.1.1: Continue Support for Vocational Programs	1	Ongoing	School District, Select Board, Town Administrator	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium to high interest and support.	
Action Item TS.1.2: High School Campus Plan	2	Year 2	School District, Planning Board, Town Planner	> \$100,000	Grant	High level of interest and medium support	
Action Item TS.1.3: Market Leicester's Education System	2	Year 1 and Ongoing	School District, Town	\$40,000 - \$60,000	Possible grant	Medium to low interest but good support.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
TOWN SERVICES AND FACILITIES							
Goal 2: Ensure that access to well-managed infrastructure at a competitive price is available to Leicester residents, property owners, investors and developers wishing to increase the asset base in the town.							
Action Item TS.2.1: Inter-Municipal Coordination Body	1	Immediate and ongoing	Town Planner, Planning Board, Water and Sewer Districts	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium to low level of interest but full support. This is the critical first step to resolving community concerns about water and sewer districts.	
Action Item TS.2.2: Public Education Campaign	1	Immediate	Town Planner, Water and Sewer Districts, Planning Board	\$15,000 - \$30,000	Grant	Medium to low level of interest but strong support. This is also a critical step to resolve this issue.	
Goal 3: Address Municipal Resource Shortages to Improve Service Delivery							
Action Item TS.3.1: Staffing Needs Assessment	3	Year 3 - 5	Town Administrator	Currently unknown	Town funds	Medium interest and support. Only worthwhile once town revenues make implementation possible	
Action Item TS.3.2: Recruitment and Retention Plan	3	Year 3 - 5	Town Administrator, Select Board	Currently unknown	Town funds	Dependent on TS.3.1.	
Action Item TS.3.3: Reuse or Redevelopment of Town Properties	2	Year 2 - 4	Town Administrator, Select Board	> \$100,000	Grant	Medium to high level of interest and support.	
Action Item TS.3.4: Grants for Renovations and Upgrades	2	Year 2 and ongoing	Town Administrator, DPW	No Funds Required	N/A	Medium level of interest but strong support. This would require a significant amount of staff time in identifying and scoping projects and applying for grants	
Action Item TS.3.5: Trash Collection	2	Year 2	Town Administrator, DPW, Conservation Commission	< \$50,000	Grant	Medium level of interest, majority support. This item is in direct response to community concern.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
TOWN SERVICES AND FACILITIES							
Goal 4: Strengthen Communication with Residents and Stakeholders							
Action Item TS.4.1: Develop a Central Communication System	1	Year 1 and ongoing	Town Administrator, Select Board	\$15,000 - \$30,000	Grant	Medium to high level of interest and strong support.	
Action Item TS.4.2: Develop Civic Participation Guide	3	Year 3 - 4	Town Administrator, Town Boards, Town	\$15,000 - \$30,000	Grant	Medium level of interest and equivocal support.	
Action Item TS.4.2: Community Resource Guide	2	Year 3 - 4	Town Administrator, Town Boards, Town	\$15,000 - \$30,000	Grant	Medium level of interest but complete support.	
LAND USE							
Goal 1: Develop and Implement Detailed Village Plans for Strategically Important Parts of the Town.							
Action Item LU.1.1: Complete and Implement the Town Center Plan	1	Immediate and ongoing	Town Planner, Economic Development Committee, Planning Board	Plan provided for. Implementation may require additional funds	N/A	Medium level of interest and strong support	
Action Item LU.1.2: Develop a Village Plan for Cherry Valley	3	Year 3 - 5	Town Planner, Economic Development Committee, Planning Board	> \$100,000	Grant	Medium to low level of interest and very little support. This action item has great potential to transform Cherry Valley and significantly increase assessed property value, thereby contributing to town revenue.	

Action Item	Priority	Timeline	Responsibility	Estimated Cost	Funding	Comment	Implementation Status
LAND USE							
Action Item LU.1.3: Develop a Village Plan for Rochdale	3	Year 3 - 5	Town Planner, Economic Development Committee, Planning Board	> \$100,000	Grant	Medium interest, low support.	
Action Item LU.1.4: Develop a Neighborhood Plan for Route 9 West	2	Year 2 - 4	Town Planner, Economic Development Committee, Planning Board	> \$100,000	Grant	Medium interest, majority support.	
Goal 2: Ensure that the Zoning Bylaws facilitate and do not impede implementation of the Master Plan.							
Action Item LU.2.1: Review the Zoning Bylaws and Regulations	1	Immediate	Town Planner, Planning Board	\$80,000	Grant	Medium to high level of interest and strong support. This action item, already being addressed is the key to many parts of the master plan,	
Action Item LU.2.2: Reduce Reliance on Special Permits	1	Immediate	Town Planner, Planning Board	Included in LU.2.1	Grant	Medium to low level of interest but strong support.	
Action Item LU.2.3: Explore Transfer of Development Rights Bylaw	3	Year 2 - 4	Town Planner, Planning Board	\$25,000 - \$35,000	Grant	Low level of interest but majority support.	
Action Item LU.2.4: Independent Review of Recent Permitting Applications	3	Year 1	Town Planner, Planning Board	\$15,000 - \$20,000	Grant	Low level of interest and very little support.	