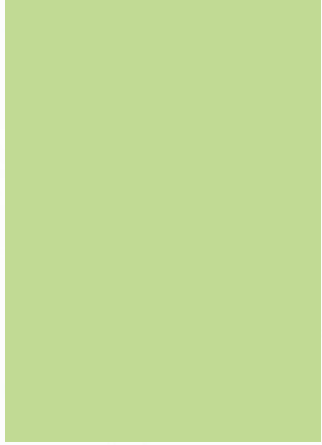


ECOTOURISM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

PEOPLE
ECONOMY
ENVIRONMENT



TOWN OF PRINCETON, MA

2024

Project Background

The Princeton Ecotourism Steering Committee was established in 2023 to develop the Town of Princeton's first Ecotourism Economic Development Plan, which recommends strategies that conserve the environment, support the local economy, and celebrate Princeton's heritage and rural character in a manner consistent with the Massachusetts Sustainable Development Principles. The Committee served under the direction of the Princeton Selectboard and worked in consultation with the Town Administrator and Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC). Several concerns prompted the creation of this Committee, including the fiscal impact of emergency rescues at Wachusett Mountain, which cost the Town tens of thousands of dollars. Additionally, increased visitation to Wachusett Mountain and other outdoor areas in the region has had implications on parking capacity and other quality-of-life issues. One of the primary goals of the Committee is to identify revenue streams that can offset the financial impact of ecotourism on Princeton. The Committee struggled with the challenge of increasing revenue from existing ecotourism without increasing the number of visitors to town – which would have a negative impact on environmental assets.

The committee included five voting members appointed by the Selectboard plus non-voting members consisting of the Town Administrator, a member of the Selectboard, and a member of the Environmental Action Committee. The governance of the committee is by an elected Chair and meeting minutes were taken by an elected Clerk. Occasional progress updates to the Selectboard were provided as requested.

The Committee met with CMRPC staff on a regular basis between December 2023 and July 2024, for a total of 10 meetings, in a hybrid in-person/remote format at the Princeton Town Hall Annex. Meetings were open to the public, in accordance with Open Meeting Law, and meeting minutes are publicly available. CMRPC staff collaborated with the committee to understand local economic conditions, seek input from the community and business owners, and articulate strategies that will guide Town officials in creating related projects, evaluating funding requests, and prioritizing initiatives. CMRPC provided any guidance and technical assistance needed to achieve the deliverables of the Plan.

A survey was used as a tool for gathering public input on who is using the town's outdoor recreational resources, whether they are visiting other Princeton destinations after recreating, and if additional lodging opportunities are needed in town. The 12-question survey was available online for one month, between March 11, 2024, and April 15, 2024. In total, 109 surveys were completed by a mix of residents, visitors, business owners, and employees in the town of Princeton. The complete survey, survey results, and the promotional flyer can be viewed in the Appendix.

Interviews with a variety of local businesses and organizations were conducted to further understand the impacts of ecotourism. An interview script was developed and approved by the Committee, and CMRPC staff scheduled, conducted, and summarized the interviews. The interview script can be viewed in the Appendix.

The Plan was presented to the Princeton Selectboard for approval on October 16, 2024.

Ecotourism and Revenue Generation for Princeton

Ecotourism can be defined as a “special form of nature-based tourism that maintains the well-being of the local community while protecting the environment and provides tourists with a satisfying nature experience and enjoyment”¹. Three parts make up ecotourism: 1) Conservation of the environment; 2) Support of the local economy; and 3) Celebration of local heritage and culture.

In Princeton, ecotourism is derived from the community’s wealth of natural amenities and scenic landscapes. Rolling hills, small valleys, meadows, wild forests, bodies of water, working farms, and beautiful vistas all make Princeton the serene community that locals take pride in. The town has an intricate network of public and privately owned trails. Respected conservation organizations such as Mass Audubon and the Trustees of Reservations manage properties in the town, drawing in visitors looking for educational opportunities and valuable outdoor experiences. The anchor of the town’s environmental and recreational attractions is the highest peak in central Massachusetts: Wachusett Mountain. The 3,000-acre Wachusett Mountain State Reservation offers 17 miles of hiking trails during the warmer months and skiing in the winter. Cyclists are permitted to use roads in the reservation to summit Wachusett Mountain. Cars can even drive to the summit to capture a stunning view of the region. Wachusett Mountain Ski Area offers 27 downhill skiing trails, attracting many thousands of visitors each season. Princeton’s proximity to Worcester, Boston, Springfield, and other communities positions the town as a convenient destination to spend time outdoors without a long drive.

Revenue generation and the protection of natural resources are sometimes viewed as mutually exclusive. In fact, both are critical and must be balanced for long-term municipal sustainability. This is precisely the purpose of an Ecotourism Economic Development Plan – to identify strategies that will help the Town balance revenue growth with preservation. This plan provides an asset-based approach to revenue generation that uses Princeton’s existing resources to fuel sustainable economic development. The final Action Plan recommends a variety of strategies that leverage and protect the natural and rural assets that make Princeton so unique.



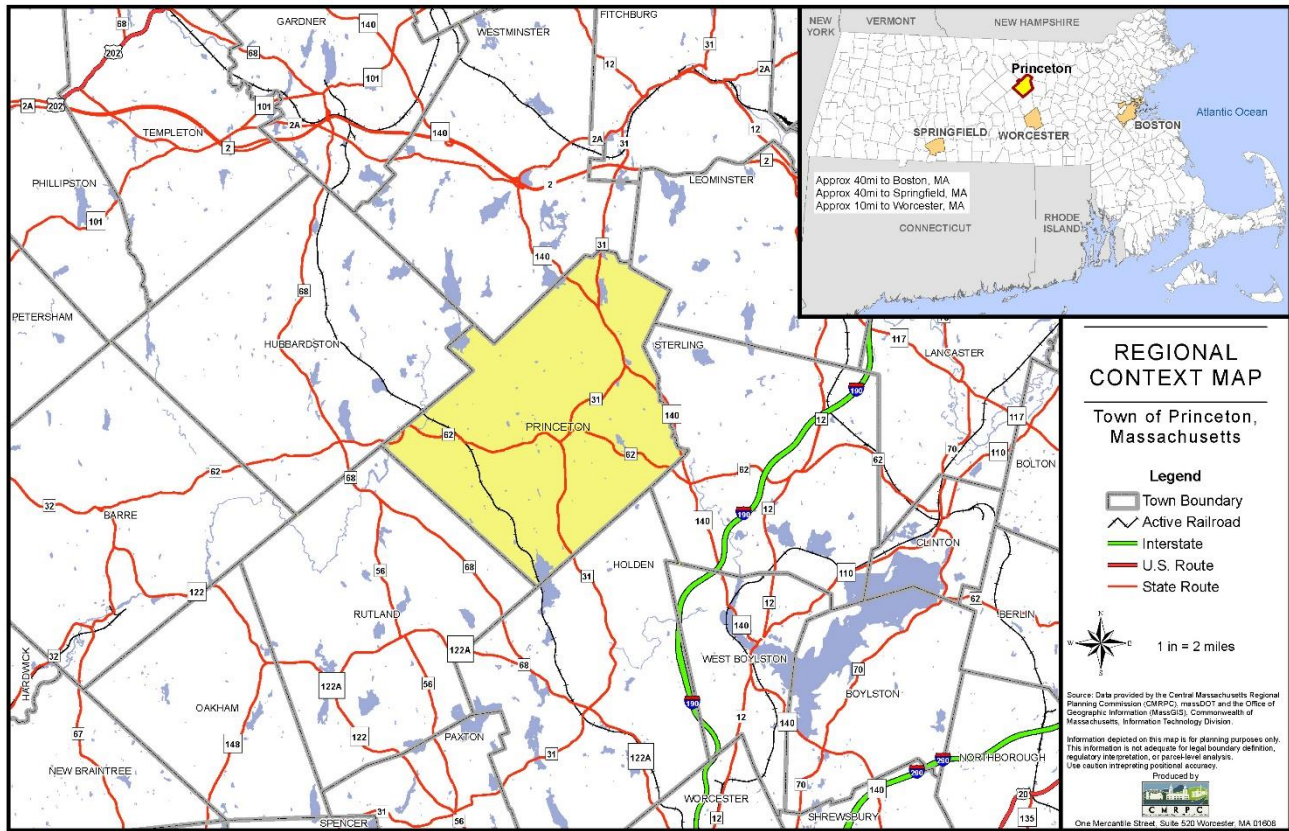
A hiker begins their journey at Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary.

¹ [Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: A Scientometric Review Of Global Research Trends. 2022.](#)

Now Entering: Princeton, Massachusetts

Introduction

Princeton, MA is a small, rural community of about 3,500 residents, or 98 residents per square mile. Those who call Princeton home value the town's scenic vistas, extensive trail systems, working farms, and peaceful countryside setting. Worcester, MA, the second-largest city in New England is located approximately 17 miles, or a 30-minute drive, from Princeton while Boston, MA is 60 miles, or a 1+ hour drive, east of the town. The primary routes of travel through the town include Routes 62, 31, and 140. Commuter rail stations serve the nearby communities of Westminster, Leominster, and Fitchburg. During winter months, a free shuttle is offered from the Wachusett station in Fitchburg to Wachusett Mountain Ski Area, bringing skiers from metropolitan Boston to the mountain.



A Regional Context Map showing Princeton's location in relation to the state, major cities, and neighboring communities, plus primary routes of travel through the town.

Existing Conditions

The Town is governed by an Open Town Meeting form of government and is led by an elected three-member Selectboard that establishes town policies and procedures on many issues, among other areas of authority. The Town Administrator is appointed by the Selectboard and is responsible for administering and overseeing the day-to-day functions and services provided by the Town Government.

The Thomas Prince School is the only school in town, serving K-8 students, and Princeton is part of the five-town Wachusett Regional School District. In the 2023-2024 school year, 353 students were enrolled at the Thomas Prince School. The school is additionally the largest employer in Princeton.

In 2019, Princeton completed a transition from a poor internet infrastructure to a high-speed fiber internet network, an infrastructure component that has become essential for successful economic development. Many employed residents commute to economic centers such as Worcester, Leominster, and Fitchburg, work remotely, or operate home businesses.

Princeton's businesses are located throughout town with a concentration along Worcester Road. Businesses in Princeton range from farm and agriculture-based operations, restaurants and eateries, retail stores, and fitness studios, in addition to a variety of home-based businesses that are anchored in town. There are no major chain stores in town and all operations are run by local business owners. Less than 2% of Princeton's tax base is derived from commercial businesses, indicating a growth area for revenue.

The town maintains a rural and residential character featuring unique geographical features and open space that offers an abundance of scenic and recreational opportunities. Princeton's unique natural resources and ease of access have made it a top destination in the region. Wachusett Mountain is the primary attraction in Princeton and Westminster, drawing thousands of visitors each year to hike and ski. Redemption Rock, managed by the Trustees of Reservations, is an impressive geographic feature with a unique history from King Philip's War. Mass Audubon's Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary is a former farmstead with a nature center and trails that hosts a variety of programs and activities for all ages. Leominster State Forest, much of which is located within northeast Princeton, offers dozens of trails and unique natural features that attract visitors looking to hike, bike, cross-country ski, swim, and rock climb.



Princeton residents and visitors enjoy the range of outdoor recreation opportunities during any season.

Challenges and Opportunities

Wachusett Mountain has always been a popular destination in central Massachusetts, that gradually attracted more visitors over the years. Particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which urged social distancing and spending time outdoors, the number of visitors to Princeton has grown significantly. This rapid increase in hikers, dog walkers, skiers, cyclists, and other outdoor recreation enthusiasts has exacerbated a variety of challenges for the Town related to management, public safety, sustainability, and finances.

While the town of Princeton takes pride in Wachusett Mountain, its location creates a fiscal problem that should be overcome to advance town finances. The Wachusett Mountain State Reservation straddles the border of Westminster and Princeton. The ski lodge, where skiers and snowboarders purchase passes and food, is located solely in Westminster, **leaving the Town of Princeton unable to generate revenue from this business.** The remainder of the mountain, including the summit, is managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, and is located within Princeton's borders.

This division of the mountain as a recreational resource between multiple communities and organizations has created a dilemma. When hikers or skiers are injured or become lost on Wachusett Mountain, the Town of Princeton bears much of the responsibility to provide emergency services. It is estimated that it costs Princeton roughly \$60,000 to \$80,000 per year to pay for these rescue services. Without the tax revenue from the ski lodge, and no revenue source directly related to the mountain within Princeton's borders, this makes the presence of Wachusett Mountain as a popular recreational destination a direct financial burden to the Town of Princeton.

The influx of visitors to the town impacts the local transportation and parking infrastructure. During weekends, holidays, and special events the parking lots are often full, and drivers will park along major routes, leading to safety and congestion issues as well as wear and tear on the road shoulder.

In the fall of 2023, CMRPC performed a parking study to understand which lots in town reach capacity around Wachusett Mountain. The observations and recorded use of lots and overflow onto streets during the weekends of September 9, 2023, October 28, 2023, and November 4, 2023 led to a few conclusions. Parking is shown to be significantly higher on the east side of Wachusett Mountain. Additionally, many visitors park along Westminster Road, along with other roads, due to a lack of formal parking.

Concerns about parking and congestion were illustrated in the results of the community survey. One survey respondent stated: *"Parking needs to be improved along Westminster Rd where the Administration Rd begins. This area becomes extremely congested during the weekends..."*

The full summary and data from the traffic and parking studies are included in the Appendix.

October 28, 2023 (Wachusett Boo Fest)

Lot Number	Lot Name	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	Spaces in Lot
1	Echo Lake Road	35	50	55	45	15*
2	Mountain House Trail Parking	21	40	60	69	15*
3	Information Center	31	31	39	39	28
4	Ski Area Lot	1/5 Full	3/5 Full	Full	Full	500
5	Bolton Road Parking	36	54	63	75	18*
6	North Road Parking	4	7	7	7	4*
7	West Side Trail Parking	7	12	13	16	6*
8	West Road Parking	3	7	6	3	4*
9	Harrington Trail Parking	8	11	11	9	0*
10	Westminster Road Parking	37	61	72	59	15*

**Estimated based on parking area
Note: Lot numbers 4 through 7 are located in Westminster*

November 4, 2023 (Wachusett Fall Food Truck Festival)

Lot Number	Lot Name	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	12:00 PM	1:00 PM	2:00 PM	Spaces in Lot
1	Echo Lake Road	16	15	7	5	8	15*
2	Mountain House Trail Parking	13	24	30	25	24	15*
3	Information Center	21	20	27	31	33	28
4	Ski Area Lot	1/4 Full	1/2 Full	3/4 Full	Full	Full	500
5	Bolton Road Parking	8	9	9	13	15	18*
6	North Road Parking	3	5	5	6	7	4*
7	West Side Trail Parking	0	7	7	5	6	6*
8	West Road Parking	5	2	1	2	3	4*
9	Harrington Trail Parking	15	16	20	10	8	0*
10	Westminster Road Parking	26	26	23	24	26	15*

**Estimated based on parking area
Note: Lot numbers 4 through 7 are located in Westminster*

Asset Inventory & Map

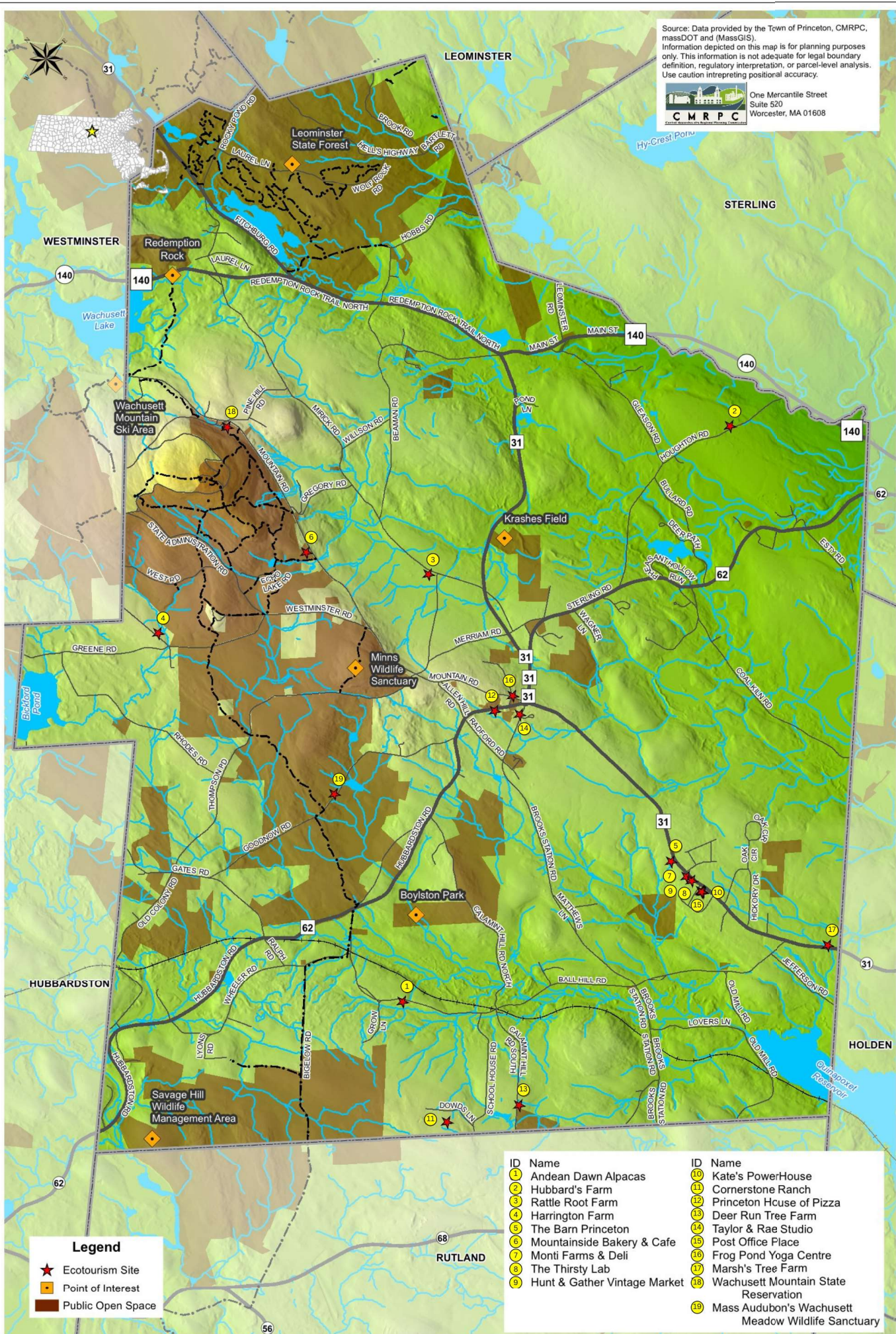
An asset inventory is a useful strategy to document the positive attributes and destinations of a community. By listing and mapping these places, it can enhance the perception of the community and boost local pride. An exercise was conducted during a Princeton Ecotourism Committee meeting in the early stages of the planning process in which committee members and CMRPC staff discussed Princeton’s physical and economic assets. A map of the town was used as a basis to identify existing businesses, organizations, and natural resources in Princeton that contribute to its ecotourism economy.

A study of the map reveals that the major access roads – Route 140 and Route 31 - into Princeton from the major arteries of Route 2 and Route 190 bypass many of the businesses. Users of the ski area and the hiking trails may be unaware of many of the Town’s retail businesses and restaurants.

Below, a list and map show the variety of assets that make Princeton a unique and flourishing community. The list and map are not intended to be complete inventories of what is available in Princeton, but rather to highlight the environmental, economic, and organizational resources related to local ecotourism.

Natural & Recreational Resources	Businesses	Organizations	Agriculture
Wachusett Mountain State Reservation	Andean Dawn Alpacas	Mass Audubon	Deer Run Tree Farm
Wachusett Mountain Ski Area	Harrington Farm	Princeton Land Trust	Rattle Root Farm
Leominster State Forest	The Barn	Princeton Hikes!	Hubbard’s Farm
Redemption Rock	Mountainside Bakery & Café	New England Mountain Bike Association	Marsh’s Tree Farm
Minns Wildlife Sanctuary	Monti Farms & Deli	Department of Conservation & Recreation	Cornerstone Ranch
Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary	The Thirsty Lab	Wachusett Mountain Advisory Council	
Savage Hill Wildlife Management Area	Hunt & Gather Vintage Market	Princeton Environmental Action Committee	
Boylston Park	Princeton House of Pizza	Princeton Open Space Committee	
Krashes Field Complex	Taylor & Rae Studio	Princeton Agricultural Commission	
Sawyer Field	Elzire’s Acre Goat Milk Soap	Princeton Conservation Commission	
Goodnow Park	Kwik Stop Convenience		
Calamint Hill Conservation Area	Kate’s PowerHouse		
Four Corners Conservation Area	Frog Pond Yoga		
Networks of trails & bodies of water			

Source: Data provided by the Town of Princeton, CMRPC, MassDOT and (MassGIS). Information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis. Use caution interpreting positional accuracy.



Legend

- ★ Ecotourism Site
- Point of Interest
- Public Open Space

ID	Name	ID	Name
1	Andean Dawn Alpacas	16	Kate's PowerHouse
2	Hubbard's Farm	17	Cornerstone Ranch
3	Rattle Root Farm	18	Princeton House of Pizza
4	Harrington Farm	19	Deer Run Tree Farm
5	The Barn Princeton	20	Taylor & Rae Studio
6	Mountainside Bakery & Cafe	21	Post Office Place
7	Monti Farms & Deli	22	Frog Pond Yoga Centre
8	The Thirsty Lab	23	Marsh's Tree Farm
9	Hunt & Gather Vintage Market	24	Wachusett Mountain State Reservation
		25	Mass Audubon's Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary

Princeton MA Ecotourism Assets



SWOT Analysis

A SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning technique used to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats related to an organization or project. The Princeton Ecotourism Committee, guided by CMRPC, conducted a SWOT analysis in the early stages of the planning process to set the stage for what is valued and working well in the town versus what needs improvement.

A SWOT Analysis is a useful exercise that allows participants to categorize the varying positive and negative factors facing a place or project. This categorization can lead to the development of more effective and coherent solutions and strategies.

Strengths are considered positive internal factors. In the context of Princeton, this would include a variety of physical assets along with existing policies and social factors. These include the existing trail and recreational infrastructure, and active town boards, commissions, and recreational groups.

Weaknesses are considered negative internal factors. In Princeton, these include various existing difficulties, including a lack of municipal revenue, limited commercial infrastructure, and physical barriers to effective ecotourism such as trail and parking lot maintenance as well as a lack of pedestrian and cyclist connectivity.

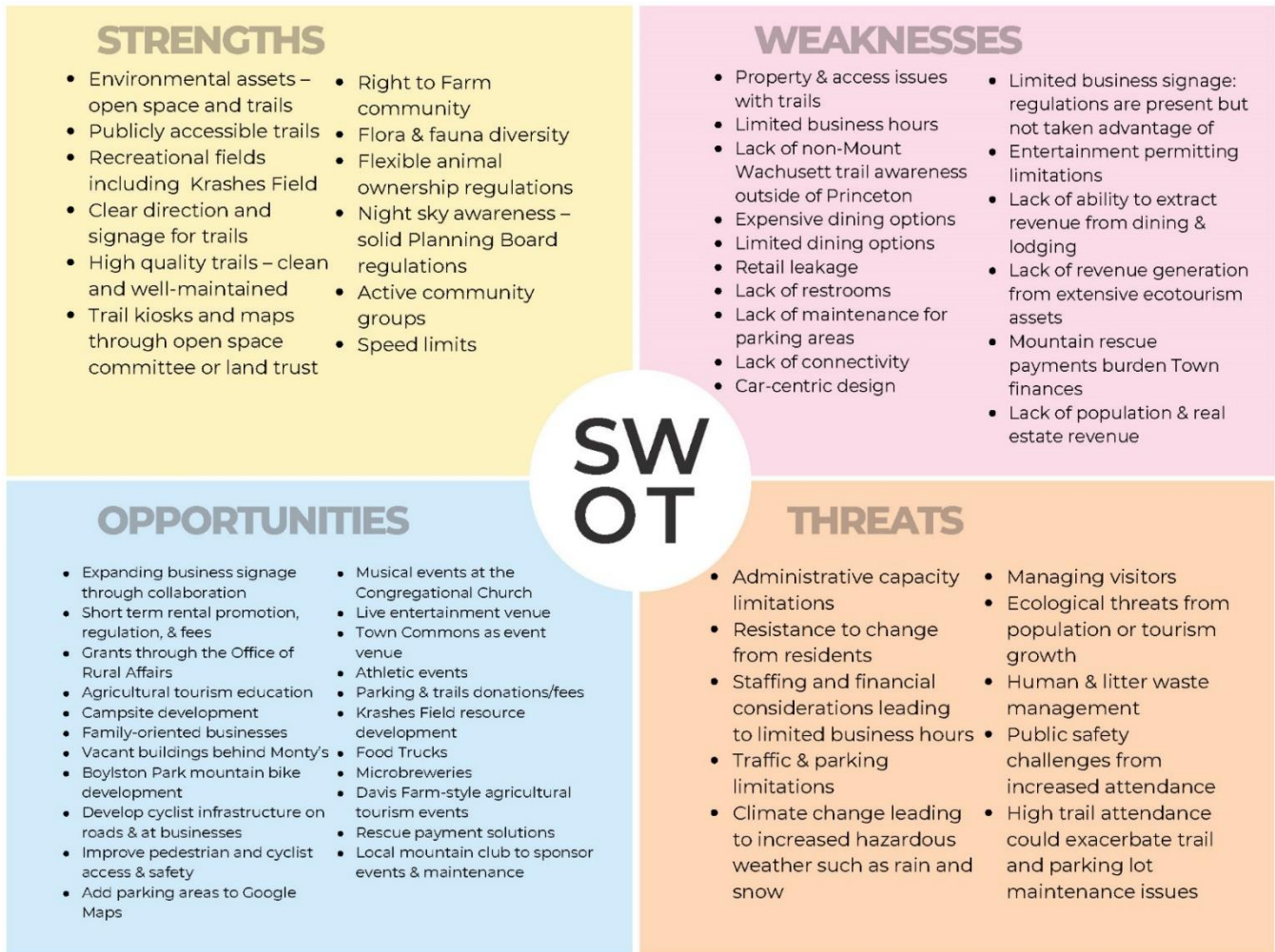
Opportunities are considered positive external factors. In Princeton, some several potential policies and initiatives could significantly augment ecotourism in town. These include redevelopment of vacant buildings, expansion of business signage and wayfinding tools, implementation of various fees to increase revenue, and development of recreation assets through events and infrastructure.

Threats are considered negative external factors. Several potential negative factors could hamper ecotourism and economic development in Princeton. These include limited administrative capacity, preventing the effective implementation of policies, external staffing and financial considerations limiting business development, public safety, and trash challenges from increased tourism, as well as ecological and infrastructure threats from climate change.



Sheep cross the road at Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary Visitor's Center.

The following graphic summarizes the results of a SWOT Analysis that was conducted by the Committee and CMRPC in 2024.



Summarized results of the SWOT Analysis conducted by the Princeton Ecotourism Committee and CMRPC in 2024.

Local Voices

This planning process sought to hear from residents, business owners, visitors, and other stakeholders on their interpretations of how Princeton can better accommodate ecotourism, support the local business community, and reduce harm to the environment. Ten regularly scheduled meetings of the Princeton Ecotourism Committee were held in a hybrid remote/in-person format and open to the public, with agendas and meeting minutes posted on the Town website accordingly. These committee meetings were initiated in December 2023 and continued monthly through July 2024.

A community survey targeting users of Princeton's trails and other recreational resources was developed and released in March 2024. The 12-question survey was open for over a month and generated 109 responses. In general, the survey attempted to capture a sense of how frequently Princeton's outdoor resources are being used, which outdoor areas are most popular, the extent to which visitors are patronizing shops and eateries after spending time outdoors in Princeton, and how experiences at businesses and outdoor recreation areas in Princeton can be improved. The full results of the community survey are included in the Appendix.



A flyer was used to promote the survey in 2024.

Comments from the Survey

"Beautiful town! We live in a bordering town and visit regularly for hiking and often enjoy stopping for food in Princeton after."

"Wedding goers need a place to stay locally in Princeton."

"[Short-term rental] Regulations makes it impossible."

"We would like to maintain the peaceful, uncrowded nature of outdoor recreational areas and avoid/keep commercialization at a minimal."

"Signage with business names and directional arrows at some junctions in town may be helpful because many local people and outside travelers do not know these businesses exist."

"Maybe events like bike racing? Orienteering?"

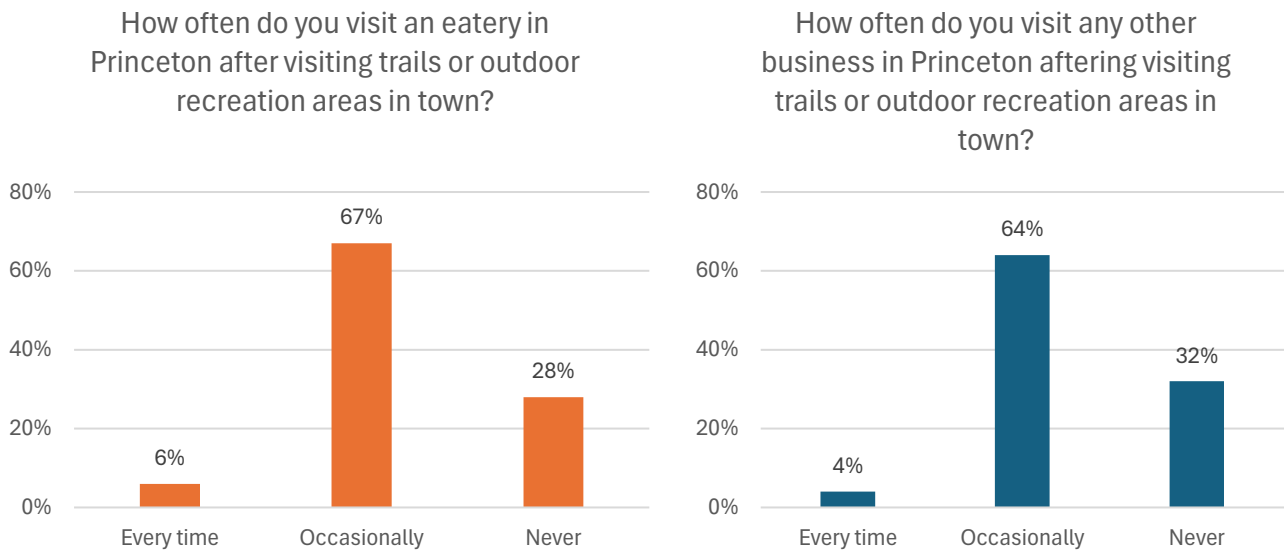
"Parking needs to be improved along Westminster Rd where the Administration Rd begins. This area becomes extremely congested during the weekends..."

"I appreciate the effort and expense it takes to create and maintain trails. I'd be happy to pay a usage fee."

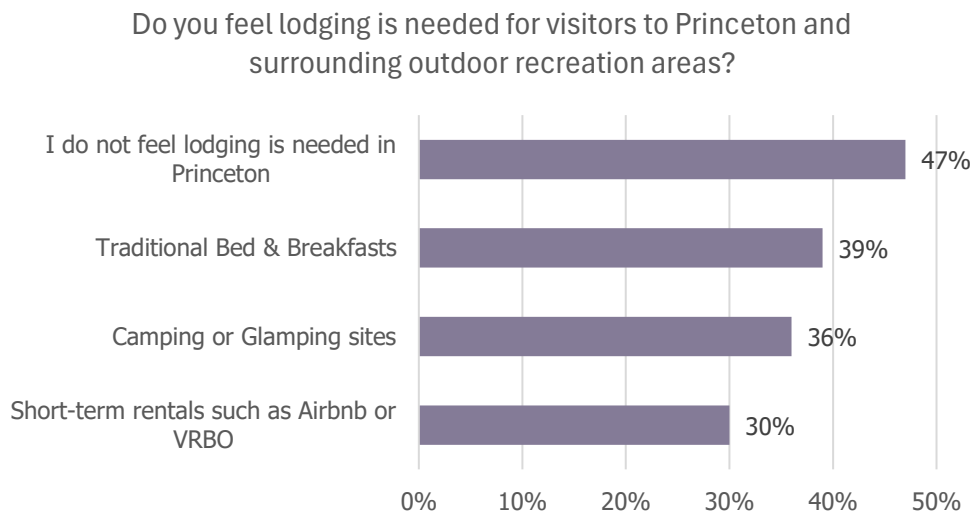
"Would like to see bicycle friendly trails expanded and improved upon."

"Town needs to loosen its Airbnb policies to encourage weekenders from Boston; all overnight business goes to other towns."

Most respondents to the survey shared that they occasionally visit an eatery or other business located in Princeton after spending time outdoors at a trail or other recreational destination. Those who stated that they never visit an eatery or other Princeton business after visiting the town’s trails or recreation areas attributed this to a variety of reasons. These reasons included that they are unaware of the options, they bring their own food or eat at home, there are limited options, the options are too expensive, hours of operation are limited, or they visit local establishments at other times but not after using trails.



Survey respondents were asked for their input on future lodging opportunities in Princeton. While almost half of the respondents stated that they do not feel that lodging is needed in Princeton, there was still considerable interest in the other options. Traditional bed and breakfasts were the most favored option, with 39% of respondents stating that the town could benefit from this type of lodging. Although camping is restricted land use in Princeton, 36% of respondents approved of this type of lodging. Short-term rentals received support from 30% of survey respondents. Furthermore, 13% of respondents agreed that they would be interested in hosting a short-term rental (i.e., Airbnb) at their property in the future.



Following outreach to 15 local organizations, interviews with seven ecotourism stakeholders were conducted during the planning process to discuss the elements of operating a business or organization in Princeton. These included two farms, three conservation & recreation organizations, and two dining establishments. The stakeholders were identified by the Committee and CMRPC staff and included a group of local business owners, farmers, and leaders of organizations. A list of questions was developed to formalize the interview process, and CMRPC staff scheduled and conducted the interviews.

The interview results were insightful, providing a deeper understanding of the issues, challenges, and strengths of working in Princeton. While the interviewees wished to not have specific quotes attributed to them, a summary of some notable input from the discussions is listed below.

- ❖ Visitors are drawn to Princeton's natural beauty, fresh air, and unique geographic features. As a rural community within an easy drive to urban areas such as Worcester and Boston, it is well-positioned to attract many visitors looking for a day trip outside the city.
- ❖ New businesses that could complement existing businesses or ecotourism activities include a gourmet pizza shop, additional restaurants, and small independent businesses similar to the ones currently here.
- ❖ Challenges have been faced with the permitting process as well as certain restrictions under the building code and zoning regulations. These regulatory barriers, particularly the delayed pace and lack of clarity on certain elements are preventing certain businesses from achieving their full potential. Additionally, by holding unreasonable standards for a town of Princeton's size on topics such as liquor licensing and outdoor dining, the Town makes it difficult for groups to host events.
- ❖ There are limited authorized bike trails in Princeton which prevent regional connectivity. There is a desire from the cycling community to collaborate with landowners, the Town, and organizations to enhance the flexibility of allowing bikes on trails.
- ❖ It is challenging for businesses to hire dependable workers in the region who are not teenagers.
- ❖ Other than social media and Redemption Rock News, there is uncertainty about where to advertise and how to reach potential patrons. Greater support from the Town or Wachusett Mountain is desired.
- ❖ Increased guidance on what is permitted for business signage is desired.
- ❖ Businesses need to make decisions that are best for their financial success and the well-being of workers, which can be attributed to some businesses closing on certain days or not participating in events such as farmer's markets.
- ❖ While many businesses are not members of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce, partly attributed to its high annual dues, there is a general interest in forming a local group of Princeton business owners to provide a greater support system within the community.

Case Studies

Case studies of successful projects in comparable rural communities can help give Princeton leaders an idea of what is feasible. The following examples highlight strategies concerning marketing, balancing conservation with recreation and tourism, and short-term rental regulations.

Marketing Tools

There are several successful marketing strategies at play in central Massachusetts that could be adapted to meet the goals of Princeton and neighboring communities in developing ecotourism infrastructure.

Discovery Map is a private company which develops local tourism maps for a given town, city, or region, hosting these maps online and in print. A resource used by several communities in Massachusetts, these maps use a friendly, cartoon style to show various businesses, restaurants, and tourism attractions around their given region, and the printed maps feature ads from local businesses around the border.

Discovery Map works on a franchise model, and these maps are affiliated with local private businesses who manage the ads and oversee map development. Several locations in New England use these maps, including the Pioneer Valley and the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts, six locations in Cape Cod, three locations each in Connecticut and Rhode Island, seven locations in Maine, five locations in New Hampshire, and nine locations in Vermont.

The development of this type of map may be suitable for the broader region of Central Massachusetts, or a cohort of towns near Princeton with subregional branding. Many communities in the Central Massachusetts region strive to further develop their own ecotourism economies and are pursuing ecotourism studies and initiatives. Local governments are encouraged to collaborate with a chamber of commerce or similar regional business association to manage such a map, providing a proven and straightforward method to put a small town and its attractions and amenities “on the map.” Providing advertising to businesses would provide a clear revenue source to fund such a venture.

Visit North Central Massachusetts is a Fitchburg-based tourism organization sponsored by the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce and the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation. The organization maintains a robust website highlighting activities, food, and lodging options for visitors to the area, as well as an events calendar and blog. The organization also publishes a 54-page Visitors Guide on a biannual basis featuring seasonal activities and advertisements from local businesses.



Discovery Map for Pioneer Valley highlighting destinations and businesses in the region.

Visit North Central Massachusetts has leveraged the history of Northern Worcester County to brand the region as Johnny Appleseed Country. John Chapman, famously known as Johnny Appleseed, was born in Leominster and is renowned for introducing apple trees to large parts of the American Midwest and Ontario. Using a theme of Johnny Appleseed, the website (www.visitnorthcentral.com) showcases featured attractions in the region, shopping, entertainment, outdoor activities, places to stay, culinary experiences, events, and contact information. The Johnny Appleseed Visitor’s Center, located on Route 2 in Lancaster, is a welcoming destination that has been open for nearly 30 years and features a large apple sculpture, a bronze sculpture of Johnny Appleseed, and various historical artifacts from the region.

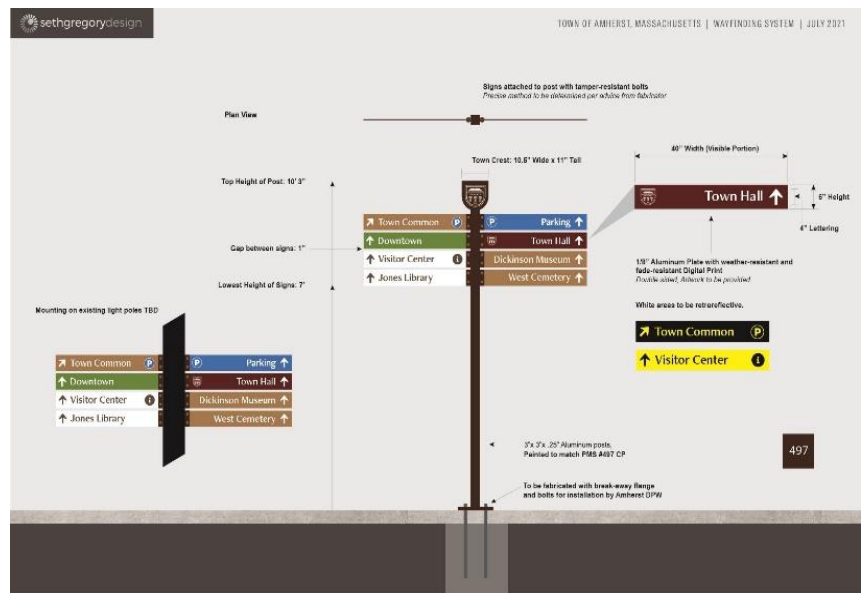
Wayfinding, Placemaking, and Signage

Wayfinding techniques incorporate signs, colors, and other design elements to help people navigate an area. There is limited wayfinding and public realm signage directing visitors towards Princeton destinations or relaying other important information. Many small communities have successfully incorporated attractive, branded signage that encourages exploration and safe navigation of the area.

Signage can support revenue, providing an advertising avenue for local businesses. Signs can also be part of a broader placemaking strategy. Placemaking is an important aspect of local planning and design. Placemaking “brands” a town for visitors and residents, creating a visual and aesthetic identity that colors the perception of visitors and can lend itself to a stronger local identity.

Amherst, Massachusetts has operated an effective wayfinding signage program for several years. The goals of this project relate to economic development and recovery, placemaking, navigation, and brand identification.

There are two primary forms of signage that a town can use. The first is directional signage, as seen in the image (right) from the Town of Amherst. Consisting of a set of smaller, rectangular signs on a post, these can be placed in any node of a town, directing visitors to important destinations. In the case of Princeton, some of these signs could be used to draw in visitors to locations such as the Town Common and Post Office Place, while others could feature local attractions, either permanently or on a rotating basis, based on an advertising plan.



Directional signage regulations from Amherst, MA.

Another important type of signage is gateway signage. As seen in the images below, gateway signage is strategically placed at the entryway(s) of a community, featuring a unique town design, and may optionally include advertisements from local businesses or organizations. Several towns in Central Massachusetts feature this unique gateway signage, including the Town of Ware, which has signs that feature the local motto: "The Town That Can't Be Licked" as well as a more tourism-oriented motto: "Somewhere Worth Seeing."



Gateway signage at the entryways of Ware, MA and West Boylston, MA.

Gateway signs provide several benefits to a community. Branding from gateway signs can be incorporated into a broader economic development strategy, aligning with branding from local or regional tourism guides and the Town website and social media, creating a positive and consistent image for a town that can draw attention to the town and bring back repeat visitors.

Gateway signs in towns such as West Boylston include a slot for sponsorship opportunities (see image above). This strategy can be a source of direct revenue for the town and can direct visitors to businesses which generate tax revenue for the Town. West Boylston operates a Gateway Sign Adoption Program, in which gateway signs are sponsored by area businesses or community groups at a cost of \$500 per year for the front of the sign and \$300 per year to advertise on the back of the sign. It is important that the Town establish policies to ensure sponsorship and aesthetics are aligned with local values, and sponsorships should require approval from the Selectboard or other appropriate municipal board or commission.

As demonstrated in Amherst, implementation of wayfinding signage will require a robust local process to ensure that the signage speaks to the local identity of a community and correctly achieves the goals of such signage. The implementation process in Amherst took several years, beginning with a state grant in 2015 and culminating in approval by the Town Council in 2021. Identification of funding opportunities to finance a wayfinding and placemaking program is the first step to bringing this valuable tool to Princeton.

Ecotourism and Municipal Revenue

While Princeton has the potential to evolve its status as a regional ecotourism destination, it is critical that any growth in that sector be balanced with adequate municipal revenue and protection of the Town's ecological assets from degradation due to wear and tear. Overall, tourism benefits local businesses, however it tangentially creates negative externalities that may place pressure on the capacity of the municipal government in the realms of public safety and infrastructure. The development of revenue generation that aligns with the ecotourism sector is needed.

Tourism tax: While implementation of a direct "tourism tax" is unlikely under Massachusetts General Law, the implementation of meals and lodging taxes are easily implemented through state revenue bureaucracy and are identifiable sectors that would directly benefit from an increase in awareness of ecotourism and tourism. The Town of Princeton can leverage this benefit to increase municipal revenue.

A white paper titled "Tourism Taxes by Design" produced by the tourism and urban development consulting firm Group NAO and the Global Destination Sustainability Movement identifies seven essential design criteria for a "tourism tax:"

1. Earmark and ring-fence: Revenues from a tourism tax should be directed towards paying for the negative externalities of tourism. This could include mountain rescues or relevant infrastructure improvements and modifications.
2. Local governance adds collaborative capability: Local and democratic oversight of revenue generation from tourism is critical for developing political support for such initiatives.
3. High visibility and transparency: Tourism taxes are well received by visitors if they are identified to benefit the community and mitigate negative impacts of tourism.
4. Public engagement and consultation: Local governance has a limited benefit if the public is not brought into the process and given the opportunity to provide feedback at every step of implementation.
5. Specify how to comply: In the case of a lodging tax which could fall on Airbnb and other short term rental owners with limited business background, making the process of complying with a local tax may require some assistance from the local administration. Accommodating these taxpayers is important to prevent illegal rentals and other enforcement problems.
6. Monitor and evaluate impact: Upon implementation, reevaluating the impact of a tax on tourism is important to ensure that it is not harming the competitiveness of the local ecotourism sector.
7. Consider benefits and burdens: Tourism is frequently presented as a net positive for a community, but it is important when evaluating the local tourism sector to identify any "invisible burdens" to the economic and social life of a town. Carefully crafted local policy can help to mitigate those problems.

Ferry service impact fee: An amendment to Section 11 of Chapter 55 of the Acts of 2003 allowed any city or town within the counties of Barnstable, Nantucket, Bristol, and the county of Dukes County to impose a ferry service embarkation fee. This fee constitutes fifty cents (\$0.50) per passenger per departing trip on all passenger ferry trips. The fees are collected then disbursed back to the port towns

according to a statutory formula. The port towns are required to use the collected funds on projects related to the local impacts of ferry operations.

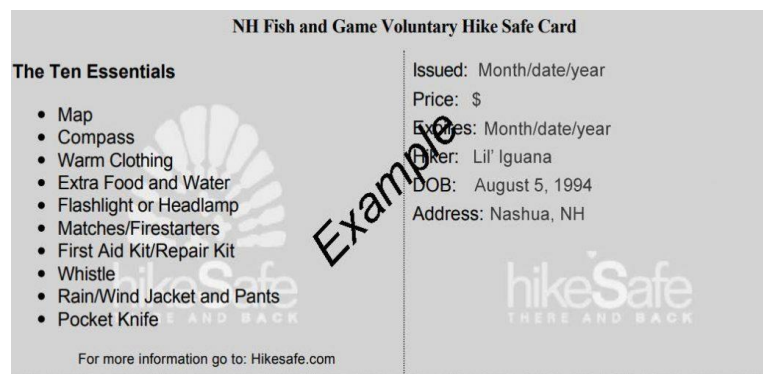
While these ferry services are unique to Cape Cod and the Islands, Princeton may wish to consider a creative solution similar to the structure of the embarkation fees. Discussions with owners of Wachusett Mountain Ski Area and representatives from the Department of Conservation and Recreation are recommended to determine if there is any opportunity to incorporate an impact fee into ski pass purchases, for example. Such a collaboration could result in projects that facilitate safe and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities in Princeton.

Rescue Payments for Lost and Injured Hikers

In New Hampshire, the White Mountains are a highly popular tourist destination, attracting thousands of hikers from all corners of New England and the country, including Appalachian Trail through-hikers. Though scenic and majestic, these mountains are fraught with dangerous conditions that leave some unprepared hikers in need of emergency rescues. When such rescues occur, they are paid for by a mix of sources.

In some cases, hikers who are determined to be negligent are sent the bill for rescue services. However, New Hampshire Fish and Game uses two sources to fund rescue efforts. The first includes Fish and Game registration fees, which are sourced from hunting and fishing licenses in the state, while the second is the Hike Safe Card program. Hikers who pay for this card and have it on-hand during a rescue effort are not required to pay for their rescue. This provides an easy insurance method for hikers which will rarely be used but can contribute to the resources necessary to fund rescues. New Hampshire is one of the few states to fine negligent hikers, and only five-to-ten percent of hikers are deemed negligent annually. The hikers who purchase these cards tend to be more responsible hikers who will avoid issues, however an article from the Concord Monitor cites a 71-year-old hiker who was prepared, but nevertheless faced a dangerous situation requiring rescue.

Implementation of such a program would require a regional or statewide effort, involving lobbying and coordination with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to manage and implement such a rescue fund. Shifting the cost for rescue payments onto negligent hikers could require changes to state law or policy that will also require statewide coordination. The Town of Princeton could choose to implement a local rescue fund, soliciting donations from residents and trail users to offset the cost of mountain rescues. While this may not prove completely financially effective, this could set an example for the rest of Massachusetts and demonstrate that there is an appetite for an improved rescue payment system among hikers and other trail users.



Example of a New Hampshire Fish and Game Voluntary Hike Safe Card.

Regulating Short-Term Rental Housing

Lenox, Massachusetts is a town in Berkshire County with a population of approximately 5,000 year-round residents that more than doubles during the summer. A popular destination in western Massachusetts, Lenox is home to Shakespeare & Company, a theater company which attracts over 75,000 patrons annually, and Tanglewood, the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. As a small community managing an influx of visitors to popular seasonal cultural attractions each year, their approach to regulating short-term rental housing may provide some insight as to how Princeton can implement appropriate regulations.

Lenox has experienced rapid growth in the short-term rental market associated with the rise of platforms such as Airbnb and Vrbo. Over 50 short-term rental units were listed at the beginning of 2023, in a town with a housing stock of about 3,000 total units. The Town is primarily under single-family 1-acre zoning, with a couple mixed-use village neighborhoods, highway retail corridor, and small industrial area. Residents generally have a favorable attitude towards the short-term rental industry in their town, as renting out individual rooms and full homes permits them to earn an adequate income so they can remain in their homes or finance their retirement costs. In 2018, residents rejected proposed health and safety regulations and inspections for short term-rentals at Town Meeting, further signaling strong support for short-term rentals.

Subsequently in 2019, a second Town Meeting vote was passed, allowing short-term rentals for a period of up to 75 days per year by-right, with an option for an additional 35 days more by special permit. Registration with the Town Clerk is required, but there is no inspection requirement in the Town bylaws due to an interpretation of state guidelines. This has frustrated some residents, who have faced eviction as their long-term rental units are converted to short-term rentals.

Mindful Ecotourism

The Recreate Responsibly Coalition and Campaign evolved following the COVID-19 “shelter-in-place” mandates of 2020 that left people craving outdoor experiences. With increased visitation to natural spaces, representatives from the outdoor industry, conservation, and land management experts convened to address concerns and opportunities. The coalition has convened thousands of partners, including government agencies, businesses, and non-profits, into one national coalition and numerous state coalitions unified by a common goal of supporting responsible recreation practices.

<input type="checkbox"/> Rental of Rooms <input type="checkbox"/> Entire Dwelling Unit	<input type="checkbox"/> Accessory Dwelling Unit	OFFICE USE ONLY Registration Number: _____
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Town of Lenox
Short Term Rental Registration Application

Rental Property Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Property Owner Name: _____

Property Owner Mailing Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Property Owner Telephone Number: (____) ____-____

Property Owner Email Address: _____

MA Department of Revenue Certificate Number: _____

Please fill out the following if the property owner does not reside within Berkshire County, Massachusetts.

Local Contact Name: _____

Local Contact Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Local Contact Primary Telephone number: (____) ____-____

Local Contact Secondary Telephone Number: (____) ____-____

Local Contact Email Address: _____

Is "Local" contact the primary contact:

Owner Signature: _____ Date: _____

Property owner attests and affirms that they are familiar with their obligation to comply with the State Sanitary Code, Federal, State and Local housing regulations, and all other regulations applicable to residential dwellings, and that they intend to comply with said regulations.

Please return completed form to Lenox Town Clerk, ksullivan@townoflenox.com or mail to 6 Walker Street, Lenox MA 01240.

Town of Lenox Short Term Rental Registration Application

A set of Recreate Responsibly guidelines was developed to help visitors to the outdoors enjoy these spaces with mindful behaviors:

1. *Know Before You Go*: Check the status of the place you want to visit for closures, fire restrictions, and weather.
2. *Plan and Prepare*: Reservations and permits may be required. Make sure you have the gear you need and a back-up plan.
3. *Build an Inclusive Outdoors*: Be an active part of making the outdoors safe and welcoming for all identities and abilities.
4. *Respect Others*: There is space for everyone and countless outdoor activities. Be kind to all who use the outdoors and nature differently.
5. *Leave No Trace*: Respect the land, water, wildlife, and Native communities. Follow the seven Leave No Trace principles.
6. *Make It Better*: We all have a responsibility to sustain the places we love. Volunteer, donate, and advocate for the outdoors.

Organizations such as the National Park Service, New Hampshire Fish & Game, and others have shared the guidelines and the #RecreateResponsibly hashtag to raise awareness. The coalition shares information on topics such as camping, skiing, and water safety that can readily be distributed and promoted.

Trails are Common Ground is a “coalition of people, businesses, and advocacy groups working together to create a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for anyone who steps, rides or rolls onto any trail, anywhere.” The coalition launched a public awareness campaign following amplified trail use and increased conflict in the summer months of 2020. The initiative provides resources to all types of trail users, land managers, agencies, businesses, or other organizations looking for guidance. Tips on trail etiquette, dealing with bias and harassment on trails, rights of way on multi-use trails, hiking with dogs, and more are available.

These are just a few examples of national outdoor ethics campaigns that Princeton can use to easily spread awareness on responsible and respectful conduct in shared outdoor spaces. These resources can help build a culture of safe, inclusive, and prepared use of the town’s natural and recreational resources.

Action Plan

Marketing Strategies

1. Create a user-friendly map of restaurants and businesses in Princeton.

Presently, there are no marketing materials specifically targeting businesses in Princeton. While some Princeton businesses belong to the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce that offers advertising opportunities, not all local organizations and businesses are chamber members. The Chamber sponsors a Visitor's Guide; however, the costs are prohibitive for many Princeton business owners to add an advertisement. Several respondents to the survey, when asked if they go to a local eatery after visiting trails or outdoor recreation areas in town, described that they were unaware of the options in Princeton, indicating a demand for more marketing and informational resources.

The Town should collaborate with business owners to establish a user-friendly, interactive online map that shows places of interest in Princeton including farms, shops, restaurants and eateries, and other attractions. Information such as parking instructions, hours of operation, phone numbers and email addresses, links to social media accounts, brief descriptions of the businesses, and other elements should be included. A paper version of the map should be made available as well to be distributed and available at popular ecotourism locations in Princeton or nearby towns.

Local business owners have noted the difficulty in finding ways to promote their businesses to build their customer base. Additionally, some businesses are not located on primary routes of travel or have other barriers making it challenging to attract new customers. A central location for information on places to shop, eat, and explore in Princeton will be an effective way to foster local economic development.

2. Create a directory of local businesses that can be shared publicly.

Local business owners and municipal leaders have expressed a desire to collaborate and support other Princeton businesses and organizations. A business directory that lists, categorizes, and provides website links to all local businesses is an excellent opportunity to build awareness of these places. Despite Princeton's small size, the town has a variety of attractions and services that accommodate both visitors and residents. A shareable central list showing all businesses, organizations, and services in Princeton would help encourage "buy local" campaigns and raise awareness of what is available in town. A link to this directory could be shared publicly by existing businesses and made available on the Town's website. This action can help reduce *retail leakage*, in which consumers leave their community to make purchases in another community.

3. Increase wayfinding and signage within Princeton and the region to better direct visitors to key areas of ecotourism, restaurants, businesses, and village centers.

The breathtaking vistas and outdoor recreational resources of Princeton attract many first-time visitors who may be unfamiliar with the town and its local business community. Signs welcoming travelers to Princeton and directing them to points of interest can be incredibly useful tools in increasing visitation to small businesses by those who are already on a day trip. Other aesthetic

improvements to complement new signage, such as self-watering planters or hanging baskets, can be low-cost ways to make the town more inviting.

While Princeton has traditionally desired to maintain elements of a small rural community, wayfinding and signage can be conducted in a manner that does not sacrifice these values. Business owners have expressed a desire to erect signage at their addresses and in other appropriate locations in Princeton. However, there has been considerable confusion on the existing regulations regarding signage for businesses.

The Town Zoning Bylaws indicate that directional signs for businesses and places of interest on Town property and public rights of way must be metal, rectangular, and have plain white lettering no more than 6" high on a blue background. These regulations should be promoted to new and existing businesses to clarify what is permitted in town.

4. Use social media to promote Princeton's businesses and destinations.

Social media and other online platforms are powerful, cost-effective tools to engage customers. Instagram offers engagement opportunities through posts, stories, reels, ads, and direct messages. A popular feature among businesses on Facebook is its targeted ads in which posts can be refined to a target audience by categories such as age, location, education, and industry. TikTok has become a popular application among young people and enables users to sell products directly on the platform.

There are endless opportunities to use social media to strategically build Princeton's local business community. Examples include:

- Spotlighting local business owners or employees to help readers know their community members better.
- Sharing stories of the properties or buildings where businesses are housed to create historic connections.
- Hosting gift card or prize giveaways in exchange for following pages, tagging other users, and liking posts.
- Reminding readers about upcoming local events, festivals, and activities.
- Encouraging visitors to share their experiences online and use hashtags to categorize content and spark conversation. For example, the Town could promote the hashtags #PlayinPrinceton for visitors who are shopping, eating, or visiting outdoor destinations and #StayinPrinceton for those who are staying overnight in lodging accommodations.
- Offering "social media takeovers" in which an individual temporarily takes control of a business's social media account to create and share content on behalf of the business, which can generate excitement and encourage engagement.
- Encouraging visitors and patrons to leave positive reviews on Yelp, Google Reviews, or any other online spaces for reviews.

Capacity and Network Building Strategies

1. Establish a local business or merchants association for Princeton business owners to collaborate and network.

While a regional chamber of commerce operates and supports businesses in northern Worcester County, most businesses in Princeton are not currently members. Some business owners cite barriers due to high membership fees. However, a collaborative group of members with collective interests could be immensely helpful in building a resilient local economy that supports new and existing businesses and organizations.

There is growing interest in launching a type of association that could help sustain Princeton's local business community and increase communication between business owners. Having a place for open communication can be instrumental in encouraging business owners to share helpful information, problem-solve, and strategize creative ways to strengthen Princeton's local economy. Even beginning as an informal group that meets monthly would help establish a support system among the town's business leaders.

2. Strengthen the Town's relationship with regional recreation organizations to explore ways to enhance recreational opportunities in Princeton.

Central Massachusetts maintains a strong outdoor recreational community; however, Princeton is a notable gap in the region's network of mountain biking and equestrian trails. There is a common discourse around the impact of cyclists, equestrians, hikers, and other trail users on trail erosion, soils, vegetation, and wildlife. Landowners with access to hiking trails have historically been cautious and more restrictive regarding mountain biking and equestrians on trails. Regional advocacy groups are interested in building stronger relationships with the Town of Princeton, landowners, and conservation organizations to have constructive dialogues on ways that recreational opportunities can be enhanced in the town for trail and road users.

3. Collaborate with Wachusett Mountain Ski Area on ways to support local businesses and organizations through promotional materials, events, and more.

Wachusett Mountain is the anchoring destination for ecotourists in Princeton. As Wachusett Mountain Ski Area operates a successful ski mountain during the winter months along with hosting events, festivals, and weddings throughout the year, there is an opportunity for this organization to support other local businesses in the area.

Many visitors to the mountain may be unfamiliar with the region and what other attractions are here. Having promotional materials posted or readily available directing visitors to local restaurants and eateries, breweries, shops, gas stations, farms, or other sites in Princeton can be an effective way to raise awareness of the town's business community. By targeting marketing materials towards the visitors who are already traveling through Princeton to the mountain, this practice can be an efficient way to capture local spending without further adding vehicle traffic that impacts the town's transportation infrastructure and small-town character. Furthermore, this can enhance the experiences of new visitors and encourage them to return in the future.

The Town and local businesses are encouraged to hold conversations with those operating Wachusett Mountain Ski Area and members of the Wachusett Mountain Advisory Council to collaborate on future initiatives.

4. Actively seek out and apply for funding opportunities to improve transportation infrastructure to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists.

Princeton's existing network of sidewalks and bike lanes is quite limited, further encouraging driving as the primary form of travel in the town. There is much opportunity to connect the town's outdoor recreation facilities and resources with businesses and residences. The Town received grant funding through the MassDOT Complete Streets Program to implement new sidewalks, crosswalks, signage, and drainage improvements to the section of Worcester Road between the northern entrance to Post Office Place and the Princeton Municipal Light Department driveway. While the Town applied for a MassWorks grant to fund the entire project, it was not awarded due to the lack of new residential or commercial development in the project area.

The Town should continue to prioritize infrastructure projects that accommodate pedestrians and cyclists to create safer streets and encourage more sustainable modes of travel to reduce harm to the environment. Funding opportunities through programs such as the Complete Streets Program, Safe Routes to School Program, MassDOT Shared Streets & Spaces Program, State Transportation Improvement Program, MassTrails, Community Compact, and AARP Community Challenge Grants are funding sources that the Town should investigate and actively consider.

The Town should also explore creative ways to encourage more sustainable forms of travel. There are funding opportunities for installing electric vehicle (EV) charging stations at municipal buildings and private businesses. Providing bike racks or bike repair stations at trailheads, stores, and restaurants are opportune ways to entice more cycling in the community.

5. Research the possibility of hiring a full-time employee to manage the Princeton Parks and Recreation Department.

The Princeton Parks and Recreation Department is severely understaffed and relies heavily on a part-time director who works 10 hours a week and unpaid volunteers. While the support of Princeton's local volunteer base is highly valued, the director position should be reevaluated and the town should consider shifting it to a full-time role to adequately manage all aspects of organized team programs, field and facility maintenance, improvement projects, social media and email updates, volunteer management, and more. Ideally, the full-time coordinator should be an individual with education and experience in coordination of programs and activities, development and implementation of capital improvement projects, leadership of volunteers, administrative duties, as well as budgeting and financial record keeping.

Alternatively, if staffing a full-time coordinator is not feasible, the Town should explore expansion of the role of the Parks and Recreation Committee. This could include expanding the size of the board, more actively recruiting board members, and pushing for a more equitable distribution of responsibilities. If fees are collected more diligently at Krashes Field Complex, these funds could potentially cover the compensation of workers, field maintenance, and improvement projects. Additionally, the department can more actively rent out the snack shack at Krashes Field Complex to raise funds.

6. Continue convening the Ecotourism Steering Committee.

The Ecotourism Steering Committee was formed to support the development of this Ecotourism Economic Development Plan but was not intended to be a permanent standing committee. To ensure the implementation of this Action Plan, it is recommended that the Town of Princeton continue to convene the Ecotourism Steering Committee. A dedicated committee with

representation from relevant Town boards, committees, and staff will help oversee plan implementation by seeking out funding and technical assistance opportunities, meeting with the local business community, encouraging local policy changes, and monitoring the impacts of ecotourism. The committee charter should be amended to reflect any changes to the committee.

7. Consider adopting a permitting guidebook to serve as a clear and consistent path to Princeton's permitting process.

A permitting process review and guidebook is a way to assist residents and developers through the often confusing or complicated permitting process. Such a document can map out the permitting process of a municipality utilizing a flow chart and descriptive text, instituting an easy-to-follow guide. It can help bridge communication gaps between municipal departments and streamline the process to prevent delays. A permitting guidebook can bring desired businesses into town, support existing businesses, promote municipal financial health, facilitate job opportunities, and improve local accessibility of goods and services. The Town is encouraged to partner with an agency that can conduct such an initiative as a means of facilitating local economic development and growth.

Policy Strategies

1. Establish local regulations for short-term rental housing.

Short-term rental housing has grown in popularity with the rise of platforms such as Airbnb and Vrbo, allowing homeowners greater freedom to rent out their entire homes or individual rooms to guests for a select period. For a small community without any overnight lodging establishments like hotels or motels, allowing short-term rentals can be an effective way to generate supplemental income for homeowners, increase the town's tax base, and strengthen the local tourism industry. However, communities with an influx of short-term rentals have encountered various issues related to noise, safety codes, impacts on the neighborhood, and contributions to unaffordability and scarcity of long-term rental housing.

As of this writing, Princeton does not have any regulations in its zoning or general bylaws on permitting short-term rental housing. There are regulations for traditional Bed & Breakfasts, but none that concern the boom of app-based services such as Airbnb and Vrbo. It is highly recommended that the Town pursue the development of regulations to monitor short-term rentals in Princeton to clarify what is and is not permitted. In devising such regulations, the Town should consider elements such as the definition of short-term rental housing, zoning locations, conditional or by-right permitting, safety features, registration and inspection requirements, enforcement, length of stay, parking, noise levels, and signage. CMRPC has a model general bylaw and model zoning bylaw on short-term rentals that can be modified to meet Princeton's desired conditions.

Short-term rentals provide a low-impact option for the development of lodging for visitors and tourists, but they must be developed alongside smart growth regulations to prevent negative impacts on a limited rental market or impacts on neighboring parcels. The Town should consider the following strategies when developing regulations:

- Develop clear accessory dwelling unit regulations and consider limiting short-term rentals to accessory dwelling units.
- Limit short-term rentals to one (1) per parcel.

- Require annual or biennial permitting and inspections.
- Annual short-term rental permit caps to be determined as a percentage of housing stock.
- Lodging tax and violation fines to provide an income stream for the Town.

2. Facilitate lodging opportunities such as bed and breakfasts or short-term rentals (i.e., Airbnb, Vrbo).

Having lodging establishments within the town’s boundaries supports the local tax base. Currently, the state’s room occupancy excise tax rate is 5.7% and municipalities are permitted to charge a local room occupancy excise tax up to 6%. As of 2019, for short-term rentals only, municipalities are permitted to charge an additional community impact fee up to 3%. Princeton has not adopted a local room occupancy excise tax nor a community impact fee.

There are many large homes in Princeton, and renting out rooms on Airbnb or establishing a lodging house could be a way to help locals earn sufficient income as the cost of living rises. However, the current conditions to open and operate a lodging establishment such as a traditional bed and breakfast or short-term rental in Princeton are challenging.

	Status of short-term rental regulation
Holden	No specific regulations
Leominster	No specific regulations
Rutland	No specific regulations: short-term rentals are prohibited in accessory dwelling units under the ADU bylaw
Sterling	No specific regulations
Westminster	Specific short-term rental bylaw permits use in residential areas, but prohibits in accessory dwelling units

The table shows that among Princeton’s neighboring communities, only Westminster has a specific bylaw addressing short-term rental lodging.

3. Explore the development and implementation of a local rescue fee system.

States such as New Hampshire have implemented programs that use fees collected from fishing and hunting licenses, as well as hiking safety insurance cards, to mitigate the costs of wilderness rescues for subscribers and the state. While development of such a system in Massachusetts would require statewide mobilization, there are steps that can be taken in Princeton to explore similar infrastructure to offset local ecotourism costs. Such a program could take the form of a donation card that solicits voluntary contributions from residents and trail users, offering additional benefits in return such as discounts to participating businesses or other incentives. This strategy could also be a useful educational program for frequent trail users and could be implemented alongside trail signage which advertises the program and educates all trail users.

4. Explore the prospect of imposing a local option meals excise tax on sales of restaurant meals sourced within Princeton.

Imposing a local option meals excise tax can be an effective way to generate tax revenue for the Town. Additional revenue for Princeton could help offset the negative impacts of ecotourism, particularly related to parking and emergency rescue issues, or allow the Town to lower the property tax rate. However, business owners have concerns that an additional tax on meals could hurt them. Of the surrounding communities, Rutland is the only town that has imposed a local option meals excise tax. Town officials should converse with business owners and local officials in Rutland, or similar communities with a local option meals excise tax, to become informed on the benefits and drawbacks of implementing such a tax.

	Room Tax	Meals Tax
Barre	0%	0%
Holden	0%	0%
Oakham	0%	0%
Paxton	0%	0.75%
Princeton	0%	0%
Rutland	0%	0.75%
Sterling	0%	0.75%
West Boylston	6%	0.75%
Westminster	0%	0.75%

This table shows the status of Room and Meals Taxes in the 8 communities surrounding Princeton. 55% of these communities have a meals tax, while only one, West Boylston, has a room tax.

Education Strategies

1. Provide educational opportunities for visitors to learn about and positively contribute to the conservation of natural land and resources.

Encouraging visitors to learn about the land they are using and ways to respect the environment can be instrumental in achieving conservation goals. There is a strong base of local volunteers committed to environmental conservation that could support such educational initiatives. Groups such as Princeton Hikes!, Norco Sportsman’s Club, and even the local Scouts troops could be tapped into for various projects such as signage at trailheads, trail cleanup days, interactive classes on topics such as invasive species, erosion, and wetlands, or information on the indigenous people who were original inhabitants of the land.

A successful initiative in another region that could also be considered includes the “Ride with Gratitude Pledge” at Kingdom Trails in Vermont. The pledge, which consists of four statements for mountain bikers, is an exemplary way that the mountain biking community has agreed to respect the natural resources and privately owned land that they are using. It is promoted using signage at trailheads and education campaigns.

2. Educate trail users on emergency preparedness.

A costly issue for the Town of Princeton is the emergency calls received by hikers who are injured or lost on trails in the town. To prevent circumstances such as these from happening, the Town is encouraged to promote the safe use of the trails and preparedness before entering these areas. Signage at trailheads or online information on Town sites should be implemented that warns visitors of the risks and encourages them to arrive prepared. Use of the Town's website, social media, or other online resources can be effective in reaching people with reminders about how to prepare for dangerous weather and trail conditions, and what to do if there is an emergency.

Resources and Funding Opportunities

The following list of local, state, and federal resources and funding opportunities may provide support for Princeton to implement the Action Plan.

Opportunities for Municipalities

Program	Purpose	Agency	Approx. Max. Funding/ Assistance Available	Program Description
MassTrails	Improvement	MA DCR	\$60k for local projects; \$500k for regional and statewide projects	Reimbursement grant to plan, design, create, and maintain the diverse network of trails, trail systems, and trails experiences. Grants are awarded annually, and proponents must provide a minimum of a 20% match for the total project cost.
Shared Streets and Spaces	Improvement	MassDOT	\$50k to \$100k	Funding for quick launch improvements to public spaces that support public health and safe mobility. This includes sidewalks, shared use and multi-use paths, and other active transportation facilities.
MVP Action Grant	Improvement	MA EEA	Varies widely from \$20k to \$3m	Funding to advance priority climate adaptation actions to address climate change impacts resulting from extreme weather, sea level rise, inland and coastal flooding, severe heat, and other climate impacts.
Planning Assistance Grant	Improvement	EEA	\$50k	Funding to plan, regulate, and act to conserve and develop land consistent with MA Sustainable Development Principles.
Destination Development Capital Grant	Improvement	MOTT	Varies depending on project	Funding to improve facilities and destinations visited by in state and out-of-state travelers, with the goal of increasing visitation and the associated economic benefits. This is a 1:1 matching grant.

Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC)	Improvement	FEMA	Varies widely depending on project type	Funding for capability- and capacity-building to identify mitigation strategies and implement projects that reduce risks posed by natural hazards while encouraging innovation and promoting partnerships.
PARC	Improvement/ Acquisition	MA DCS	\$100k for local projects and \$500k for regional and statewide projects	Funding to acquire parkland, build a new park, or to renovate an existing park. This is a reimbursement program where the EEA can only reimburse on the total amount spent as evidenced; the reimbursement rate is 52% to 70% of the total project cost.
LAND	Improvement/ Acquisition	MA DCS	\$100k for local projects and \$500k for regional and statewide projects	Funding to acquire land for conservation and passive recreation purposes. The grants reimburse cities and towns for the acquisition of land in fee or for a conservation restriction at a rate of 52% to 70% of the total project cost.
Landscape Partnership Program	Improvement/ Acquisition	MA DCS	\$1.25m	Reimbursement grant funding to acquire and protect large swaths of conservation land, with minimum acreage requirement based on County. Successful applicants are reimbursed 50% of the project cost.
Land and Water Conservation Program	Improvement/ Acquisition	MA DCS	Varies depending on project	Funding for the acquisition, development, and renovation of parks, trails, and walking areas.

Opportunities for Private and Public Landowners

Program	Purpose	Agency	Approx. Max. Funding/ Assistance Available	Program Description
Climate Smart Agriculture Program	Improvement	MDAR	\$30k	Combined program for the Agriculture Environmental Enhancement Program (AEEP), the Agriculture Climate Resiliency & Efficiencies Program (ACRE), and the Agriculture Energy Program (ENER). This application is split into two parts and applicants can apply to one or both parts. Part one, environmental projects, combines applications from the ACRE and AEEP programs. Part two, Energy Efficiency & Renewable Projects, is used for candidates seeking funding through the ENER grant.
Agricultural Innovation Center Program	Improvement/ Acquisition	USDA	Up to \$1m	The purpose of this program is to establish and operate Agriculture Innovation Centers that provide technical and business development assistance to agricultural producers seeking to engage in developing and marketing value-added agricultural products. This program requires matching funds of at least one-third of the total budget.
Farm Viability Enhancement Program	Improvement/ Technical Assistance	MDAR	\$75k to \$200k	Provides business, planning, technical assistance, and grants to commercial farms to support farm viability and to preserve agricultural resources. Eligible uses of funds include capital projects, such as building or renovating barns, farmstands, and wash pack facilities; purchasing farm equipment; improving resources such as wells or fences.

Community Feedback

A draft of this report was developed and presented to the Princeton Selectboard on July 24, 2024. Subsequently, the draft was made available for one month to members of the public to review and submit feedback to the Committee. A summary of the comments from the Princeton community is illustrated as follows:

- ❖ **Comment:** More than 10-15 paid hours per week is essential for the Parks and Recreation Director to have a substantial impact. The current part-time position and committee experiences much turnover due to overload of work paired with lack of resources and support.
- ❖ **Comment:** The Parks and Recreation Director should be made full-time given the number of properties that need to be managed, the number of events that could be hosted that residents have shown a history of attending when offered, the number of new events that have been suggested or requested, and the number and size of basic maintenance and capital improvement projects and opportunities.
- ❖ **Comment:** Concern about a meals tax as it may only generate several thousands of dollars, most of which would be coming from locals, and add extra time, effort, and aggravation for the town.
- ❖ **Comment:** Comfort with exploring the possibility of a meals tax, however there is concern that a low number of residents and visitors to eateries would mean that a tax would be strategically risky for the businesses. The few businesses in town should be supported and provide their blessing before moving forward with the implementation of a meals tax.
- ❖ **Comment:** More public involvement and input is requested in order to implement a successful ecotourism economy. The survey results only reflect a portion of the voices in town.
- ❖ **Comment:** Opposition to accessory dwelling unit regulations, citing a potentially negative impact to the current process in place for homeowners that is relatively uncomplicated. Concern that regulations will result in fewer homeowners renting out living spaces in town for short-term lodging.
- ❖ **Comment:** Emphasis on implementing a “Discovery Map” based on positive experiences in other communities.
- ❖ **Comment:** A modest meals tax and room tax are likely the best ways to generate revenue.
- ❖ **Comment:** Suggestion that a ski pass fee for Princeton would not be viable as the ski area is located in Westminster.
- ❖ **Comment:** Recommendation that the Committee determine whether local businesses support the proposed taxes.

- ❖ **Comment:** Suggestion that with regard to Town expenditures for Wachusett Mountain rescues, another strategy to consider may be to analyze and identify the location distribution of lost or injured hikers on Wachusett Mountain to determine if there are specific high-risk areas that could use additional signage and markings.
- ❖ **Comment:** Support for the Plan's Education Strategies.
- ❖ **Comment:** Support for strengthening regional partnerships, improving pedestrian and cycling transportation infrastructure, and development of a local rescue fee system and/or impact fee payments with Wachusett Mountain Ski Area or Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.
- ❖ **Comment:** Concern with the Plan's identified marketing strategies and capacity and network building strategies that would ultimately attract a further increase in visitors to our town with potential negative impacts on environmental resources, Town resources, the town's rural character, and residents' quality of life. Strategies of concern include the Town using social media to attract visitors to town and presenting promotional materials to the thousands of Wachusett Mountain skiers and festival attendees.
- ❖ **Comment:** Concern with the identified strategy of enhancing recreational opportunities in town. It is critical that any enhanced activities do not negatively impact ecosystems, the town's rural character, or residents' quality of life. The Town's efforts should prioritize and focus on environmental and generational stewardship, ecological sustainability, and climate resiliency.

Appendix

- I. Charter of the Princeton Ecotourism Steering Committee
- II. Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton
- III. Promotional flyer for the survey
- IV. Summarized results of the survey
- V. Stakeholder interview script
- VI. Presentation handout from the July 26, 2023 Selectboard meeting
- VII. 2022 Princeton traffic counting summary by CMRPC

Princeton Ecotourism Steering Committee

Princeton Ecotourism Steering Committee will serve at the direction of the Selectboard and will work with the Town Administrator using the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) as a consultant to develop an ecotourism economic development strategy that respects and protects Princeton's ecological assets while enhancing the economic opportunities offered by Princeton's natural rural character. This plan will act as a resource for Town officials in creating related projects, evaluating funding requests and prioritizing initiatives. The plan will develop strategies to increase tax and other possible ecotourism-related revenue sources for the Town without increasing wear and tear on Princeton's natural assets.

Members

This committee will consist of five (5) voting members appointed by the Selectboard.

- One member of the Planning Board
- One member from the Business Community
- One Representative from Trails Around Princeton
- Two members at large (Perhaps one of the Sportsmen Clubs and or Mass Audubon)

Non-voting members will include the Town Administrator, a member of the Environmental Action Committee, and the Advisory Committee.

Charge

The Committee will utilize CMRPC as a consultant to assist with the development of an Ecotourism Economic Development Plan that will focus on strategies that increase revenues (tax or otherwise) to the Town while protecting and preserving the current status of Princeton's environmental assets and celebrating its heritage and rural character. Development of the plan is expected to include the following project tasks:

- Project Management
- Orientation and Research
- Asset Mapping
- Identification and development of revenue generating opportunities for the Town
 - Defining the target revenue sources
 - Determine strategies and tactics for increasing revenue to Town coffers from those sources
- Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT analysis)
- Strategy Articulation
- Community Engagement and Events
- Identification of Issues, Opportunities and Recommendations
- Development and publication of an Implementation Plan

Resident Inclusion

The Committee will be responsible for resident inclusion throughout this project, including but not limited to, actively engaging and informing residents through all appropriate media channels, and encouraging attendance and input at Committee meetings.

Reporting

The Committee will report progress to the Selectboard as requested. In addition, the Committee's webpage will be updated to keep residents informed. The final plan will be submitted to the Selectboard for approval and, if so approved, the Planning Board for adoption as needed.



Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

Thank you for taking this survey!

Princeton's stunning outdoor recreation resources are utilized by hundreds of thousands of residents and visitors each year.

The Town of Princeton, in coordination with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, is creating an ecotourism economic development strategic plan that respects, protects, and leverages the economic opportunities offered by Princeton's natural rural character.

"Ecotourism" consists of 1) conserving the environment, 2) supporting the local economy, and 3) celebrating the local heritage and culture. Successful ecotourism leverages natural resources and outdoor recreation areas to attract existing visitors to the local economy thereby increasing revenue for the Town of Princeton in a manner that does not harm those natural resources.

Through this survey, the Town seeks to better understand who is using the outdoor recreational areas here, particularly the town's trail systems. Your input will help us craft a plan with a clear vision and strategies that will act as a resource for Town officials.

If you hike, bike, ski, ride, paddle, bird watch, or enjoy Princeton's natural resources in other ways, we would like to hear about your experiences through this brief survey!

If you have further questions on this initiative, please email Emily Glaubitz, CMRPC: eglaubitz@cmrpc.org



Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

1. What is your relationship to the town of Princeton? (Select all that apply)

- I am a resident
- I work in town
- I occasionally visit the town
- I own a business in town
- Other (please specify)

2. How often do you use trails or other outdoor recreation areas in Princeton?

- Daily
- At least once per week
- A few times per month
- Once per month
- Less than once per month
- Once per year
- Never

3. When do you typically use trails or other outdoor recreation areas in Princeton?

- Weekdays
- Weekends
- Both weekdays and weekends
- I do not use trails or outdoor recreation areas in Princeton

4. Which activities do you use trails or other recreation areas in Princeton for? (Select all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking/walking | <input type="checkbox"/> Downhill skiing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mountain biking | <input type="checkbox"/> Cross-country skiing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Road or gravel cycling | <input type="checkbox"/> Snowshoeing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jogging/running | <input type="checkbox"/> Horseback riding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dog walking | <input type="checkbox"/> Bird watching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

5. Which areas in Princeton do you typically visit when you use trails or outdoor recreation areas?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wachusett Mountain | <input type="checkbox"/> Midstate Trail |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leominster State Forest | <input type="checkbox"/> Little Wachusett |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mass Audubon Wachusett Meadow | <input type="checkbox"/> Calamint Hill |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Princeton Land Trust properties | <input type="checkbox"/> Poutwater Pond Wildlife Management Area |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Central Princeton | <input type="checkbox"/> Crow Hill Ledges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Redemption Rock | <input type="checkbox"/> Krashes Field |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Savage Hill Wildlife Management Area | |

Other (please specify)

6. Please select any items that you feel would enhance your experience using trails or other outdoor recreation areas in Princeton:

- Trail maps available at trailheads or online
- Additional trail markers or directional signage along trails
- Bike racks at trailheads
- Increased parking at trailheads
- Increased trail maintenance
- Greater connectivity between trail systems in Princeton and surrounding towns
- Greater clarity and enforcement of rules and permitted uses on trails
- Signage or advertising materials directing visitors towards local restaurants or businesses
- Increased biking opportunities such as bike lanes, mountain biking trails, or a pump track
- Increased sidewalks for pedestrians to access trails and outdoor recreation areas
- Other (please specify)

7. How often do you visit an eatery in Princeton after visiting trails or outdoor recreation areas in town?

- Every time
- Occasionally
- Never (please describe why)

8. How often do you visit any other businesses in Princeton after visiting trails or outdoor recreation areas in town?

- Every time
- Occasionally
- Never (please describe why)

9. Which elements would make you more likely to dine in Princeton?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expanded hours | <input type="checkbox"/> Bike racks or E-bike charging stations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dog-friendly environment | <input type="checkbox"/> EV charging stations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian, vegan, and allergy-friendly options | <input type="checkbox"/> Expanded parking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Budget-friendly options | <input type="checkbox"/> Takeout or to-go options |

Other (please specify)

10. Do you feel lodging is needed for visitors to Princeton and surrounding outdoor recreation areas? If so, please select which options you would like to see.

- Short-term rentals such as Airbnb or VRBO
- Traditional Bed & Breakfasts
- Camping or Glamping sites
- Other (please specify)

- I do not feel lodging is needed in Princeton

11. If you are a Princeton resident, would you be interested in hosting a short term rental (such as Airbnb) at your property in the future? If not, why?

- Yes
- No
- n/a

If not, why?

12. If you have any other comments on trails, outdoor recreation resources, or ecotourism in Princeton, please describe your thoughts here:

SURVEY OPEN!

Help inform Princeton's Ecotourism
Economic Development Plan.

SCAN ME



Do you hike, bike, ski, ride, paddle,
bird watch, or enjoy Princeton's
natural resources in other ways?

We want to hear about
your experiences!

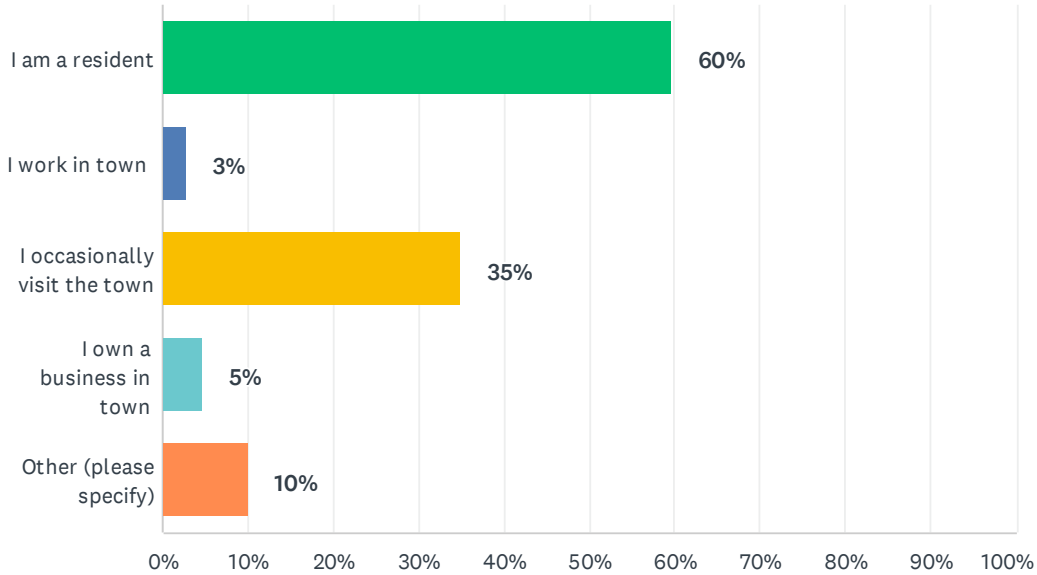
www.surveymonkey.com/r/PrincetonTrails



Survey closes April 15th!

Q1 What is your relationship to the town of Princeton? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0

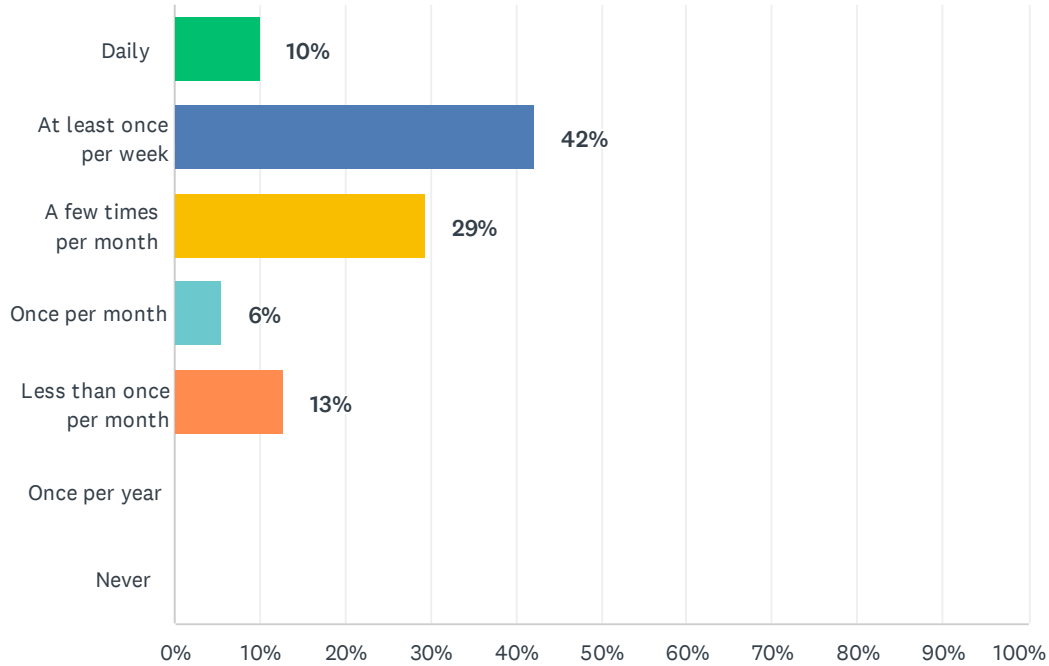


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
I am a resident	60% 65
I work in town	3% 3
I occasionally visit the town	35% 38
I own a business in town	5% 5
Other (please specify)	10% 11
Total Respondents: 109	

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Visit weekly	4/2/2024 9:12 AM
2	Resident since 2021 but visited frequently for previous 20 years	4/1/2024 1:11 AM
3	Sterling resident, kids attend school in Princeton	3/30/2024 9:49 AM
4	I visit regularly	3/29/2024 7:37 PM
5	Hike	3/29/2024 5:25 PM
6	We hike and bike in town often	3/21/2024 10:08 AM
7	I live one town over	3/14/2024 8:48 PM
8	I am an avid hiker at Wachusett mtb	3/14/2024 9:55 AM
9	Adjoining town. visit often.	3/14/2024 9:34 AM
10	Live next door in Westminster.	3/13/2024 9:45 AM

Q2 How often do you use trails or other outdoor recreation areas in Princeton?

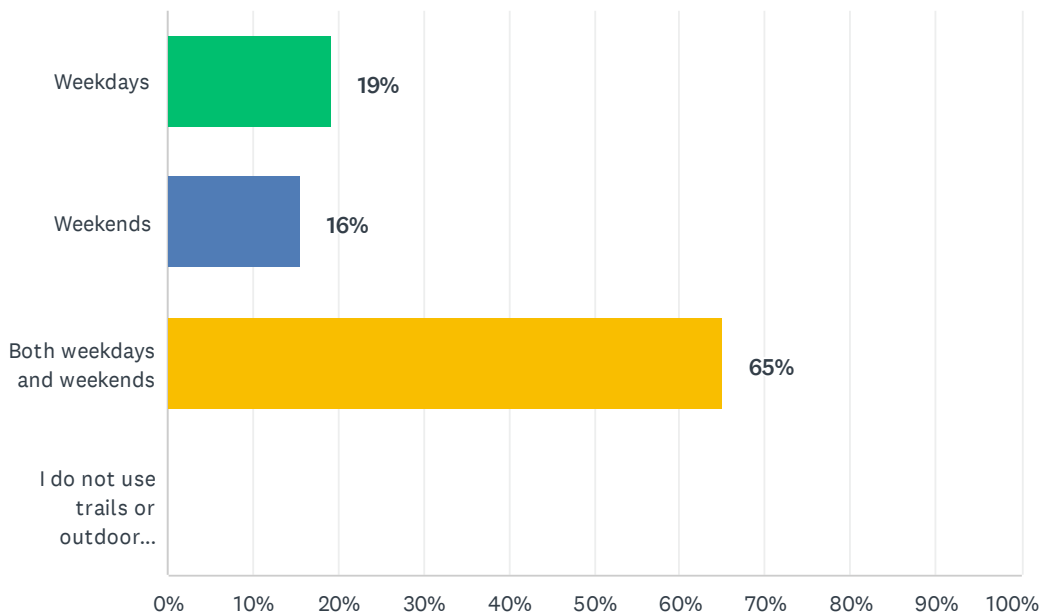
Answered: 109 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Daily	10%	11
At least once per week	42%	46
A few times per month	29%	32
Once per month	6%	6
Less than once per month	13%	14
Once per year	0%	0
Never	0%	0
TOTAL		109

Q3 When do you typically use trails or other outdoor recreation areas in Princeton?

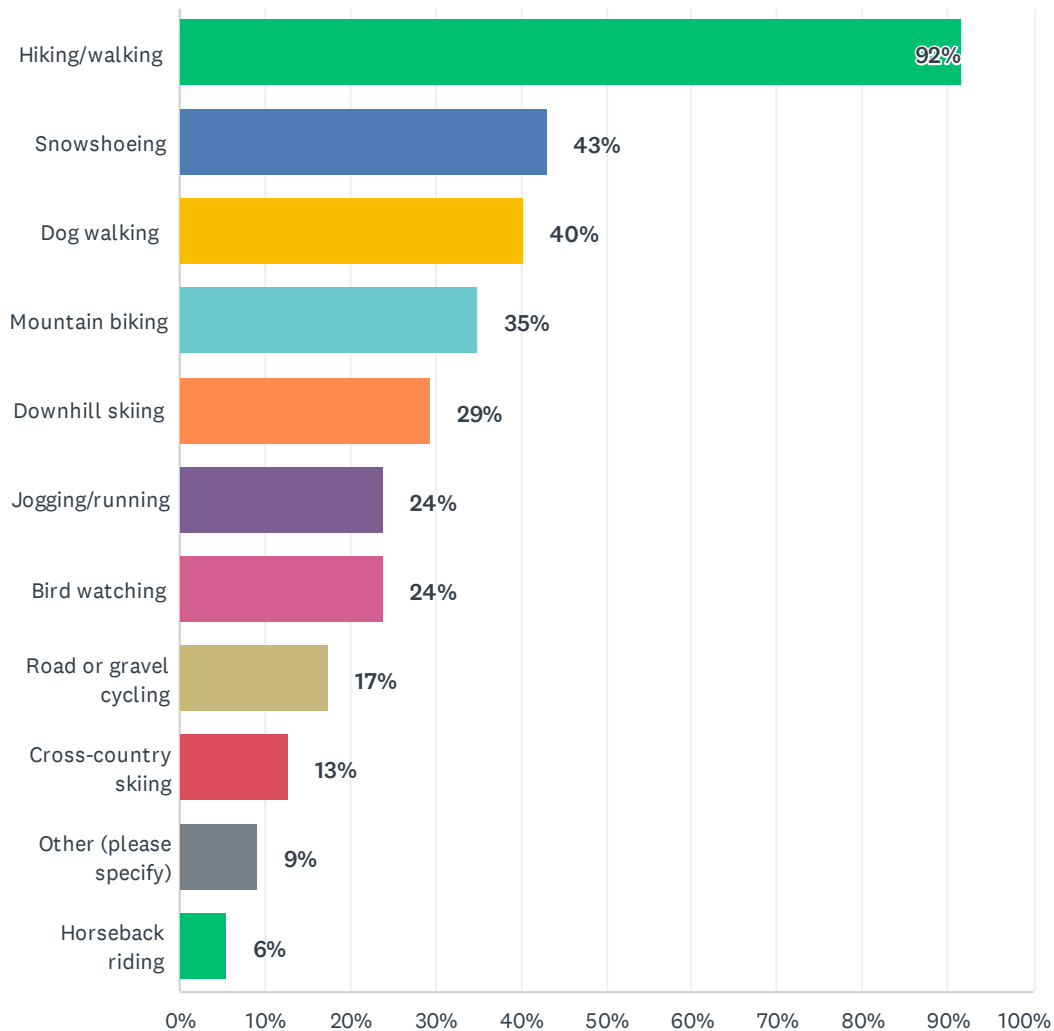
Answered: 109 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Weekdays	19%	21
Weekends	16%	17
Both weekdays and weekends	65%	71
I do not use trails or outdoor recreation areas in Princeton	0%	0
TOTAL		109

Q4 Which activities do you use trails or other recreation areas in Princeton for? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0



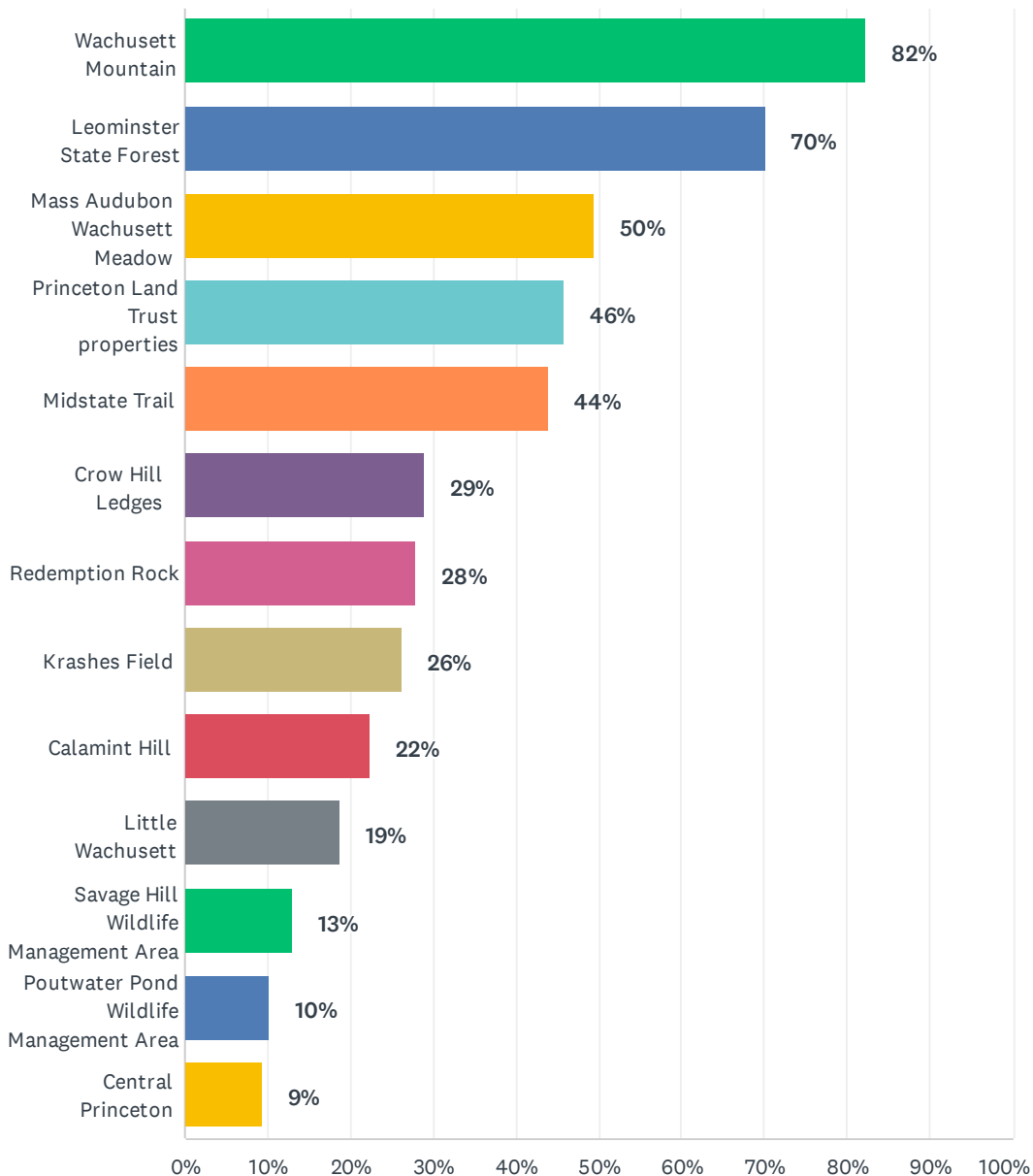
Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Hiking/walking	92%	100
Snowshoeing	43%	47
Dog walking	40%	44
Mountain biking	35%	38
Downhill skiing	29%	32
Jogging/running	24%	26
Bird watching	24%	26
Road or gravel cycling	17%	19
Cross-country skiing	13%	14
Other (please specify)	9%	10
Horseback riding	6%	6
Total Respondents: 109		

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Chop wood from downed tree. Also use a low power 4x4 for elderly owners.	4/2/2024 8:12 PM
2	canoeing fishing	3/30/2024 8:32 AM
3	Hunting	3/29/2024 8:51 PM
4	Road biking	3/28/2024 6:56 AM
5	working farm, hay, crops, wood other tasks as needed	3/18/2024 5:27 PM
6	Paddleboarding, kayaking	3/15/2024 9:26 AM
7	Snowboarding	3/12/2024 7:32 PM
8	Rock Climbing	3/12/2024 7:20 PM
9	hunting, fishing, wildlife observation beyond birds	3/12/2024 2:11 PM
10	Hunting	3/11/2024 8:17 PM

Q5 Which areas in Princeton do you typically visit when you use trails or outdoor recreation areas?

Answered: 107 Skipped: 2



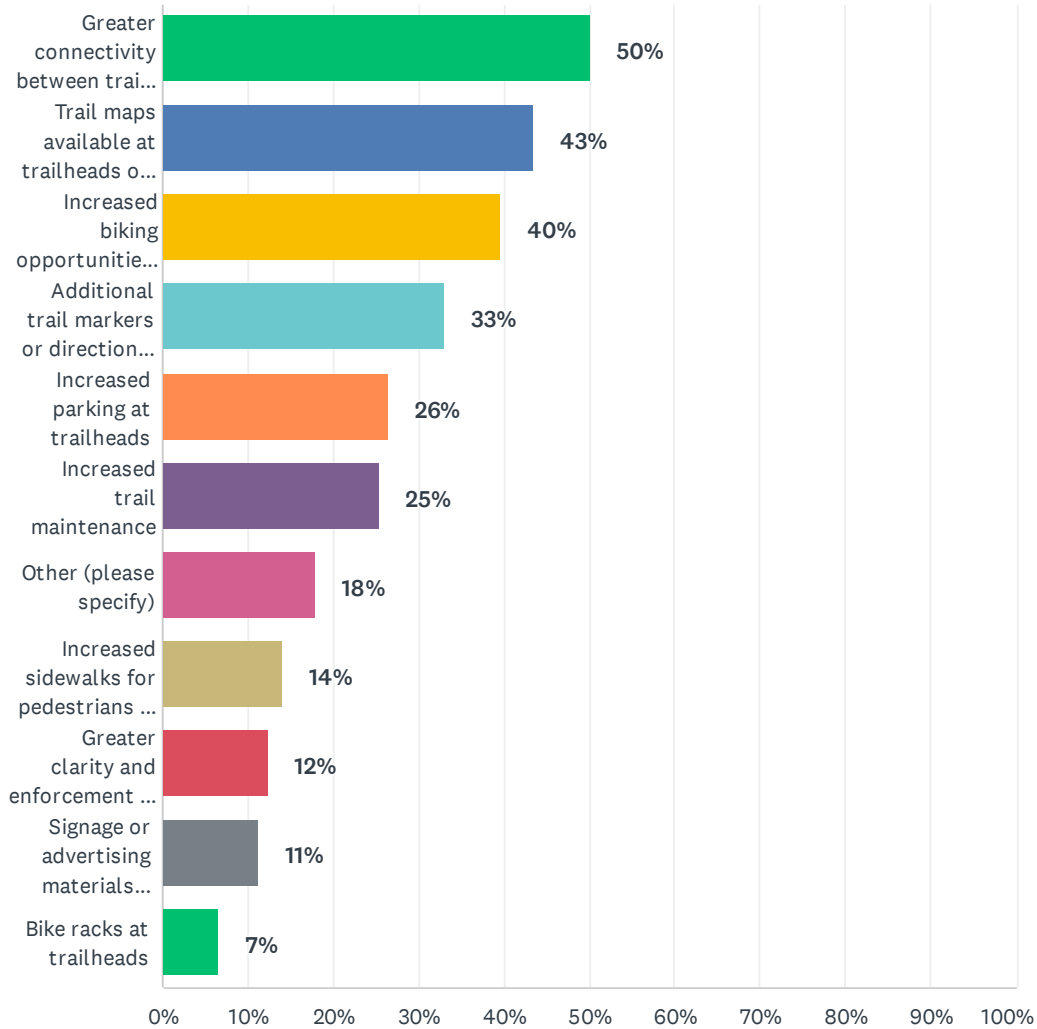
Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Wachusett Mountain	82%	88
Leominster State Forest	70%	75
Mass Audubon Wachusett Meadow	50%	53
Princeton Land Trust properties	46%	49
Midstate Trail	44%	47
Crow Hill Ledges	29%	31
Redemption Rock	28%	30
Krashes Field	26%	28
Calamint Hill	22%	24
Little Wachusett	19%	20
Savage Hill Wildlife Management Area	13%	14
Poutwater Pond Wildlife Management Area	10%	11
Central Princeton	9%	10
Total Respondents: 107		

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Discontinued roads, private kand	4/2/2024 8:12 PM
2	dirt road which is unmaintained by the town at the intersection of Rhodes Rd and Westminster Rd.	4/2/2024 7:56 AM
3	Paradise Pond	3/30/2024 8:32 AM
4	Cornerstone Ranch	3/30/2024 7:48 AM
5	Sawyer Playground	3/28/2024 10:22 AM
6	4 corners	3/27/2024 10:06 PM
7	Own propety	3/18/2024 5:27 PM
8	DCR Land , Norco, Nimrod, Bickford pond area, private land	3/12/2024 2:11 PM

Q6 Please select any items that you feel would enhance your experience using trails or other outdoor recreation areas in Princeton:

Answered: 106 Skipped: 3



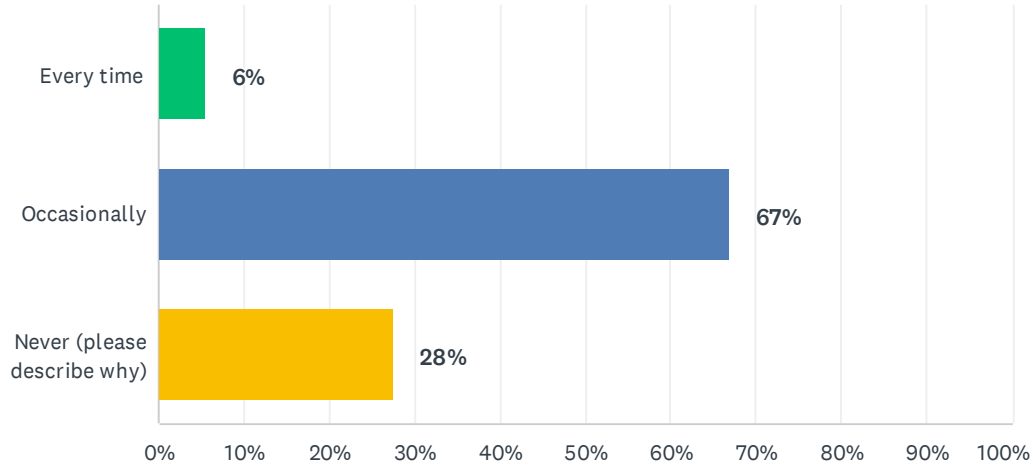
Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Greater connectivity between trail systems in Princeton and surrounding towns	50%	53
Trail maps available at trailheads or online	43%	46
Increased biking opportunities such as bike lanes, mountain biking trails, or a pump track	40%	42
Additional trail markers or directional signage along trails	33%	35
Increased parking at trailheads	26%	28
Increased trail maintenance	25%	27
Other (please specify)	18%	19
Increased sidewalks for pedestrians to access trails and outdoor recreation areas	14%	15
Greater clarity and enforcement of rules and permitted uses on trails	12%	13
Signage or advertising materials directing visitors towards local restaurants or businesses	11%	12
Bike racks at trailheads	7%	7
Total Respondents: 106		

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	porta potty at trailheads	4/7/2024 7:24 PM
2	If DCR co-owned s public safety center, I'd feel safer. How do aging seniors retain access?	4/2/2024 8:12 PM
3	Parking needs to be improved along Westminster Rd where the Administration Rd begins. A very good option would be where the building was recently torn down. This area becomes extremely congested during the weekends, and I've been quite concerned on several occasions if emergency vehicles would be able to get by as people ignore the no parking signs and park on both sides of the road. This is particularly dangerous in the wintertime when there is snow and ice.	4/2/2024 7:56 AM
4	I work in ADA compliance and am interested in accessible trail markers, but first we need some trails to have some sort of markings at all	4/1/2024 1:11 AM
5	Bike lanes on major roads	3/29/2024 5:47 PM
6	If I saw an ad, I'd leave. Please do not do this.	3/29/2024 5:25 PM
7	P	3/28/2024 11:06 PM
8	None of the above - It's fine the way it is	3/28/2024 12:41 PM
9	Nothing	3/28/2024 6:05 AM
10	No loose dogs	3/27/2024 10:06 PM
11	Sidewalks in the commercial district, removal of the rusty chain-link fence there, and wider shoulders and/or sidewalks to make walking or biking on roads (sometimes to trails!) safer	3/18/2024 7:29 PM
12	Since Covid crowds there is no longer a feeling of safety on the mountain	3/18/2024 5:27 PM
13	People leave plastic bags with dog poop on trails.	3/15/2024 3:19 PM
14	Nothing	3/15/2024 11:55 AM
15	Decrease in new trail builds as this will promote true conservation and enhance wildlife	3/14/2024 8:48 PM
16	Pump track or mountain bike trials will make a huge difference	3/12/2024 8:07 PM
17	Better listing of trails on apps such as alltrails and trailforks	3/12/2024 6:49 PM
18	better maps and trails info online, more dog-off-leash areas	3/12/2024 2:11 PM

Q7 How often do you visit an eatery in Princeton after visiting trails or outdoor recreation areas in town?

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Every time	6% 6
Occasionally	67% 73
Never (please describe why)	28% 30
TOTAL	109

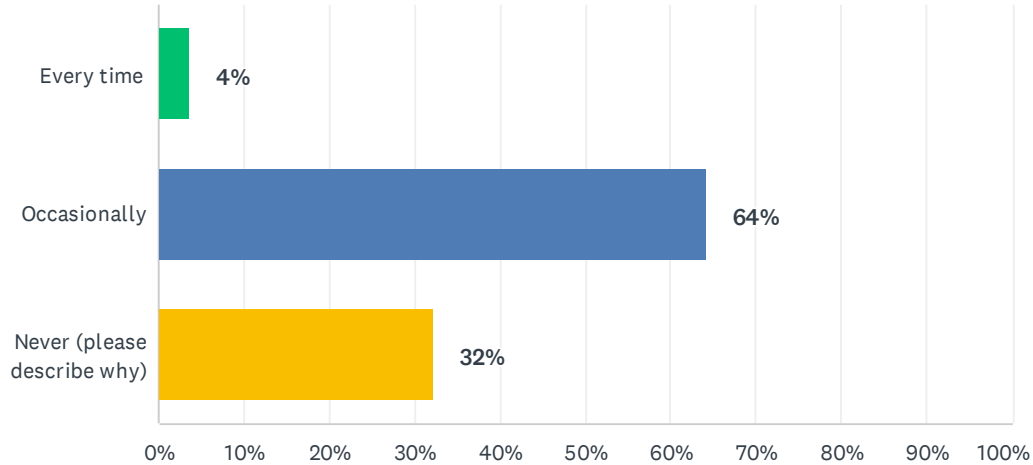
#	NEVER (PLEASE DESCRIBE WHY)	DATE
1	not on the way home	4/7/2024 7:24 PM
2	Not aware of options	4/2/2024 9:12 AM
3	I just am eager to return home .	4/2/2024 7:56 AM
4	I live close by so eat at home	3/30/2024 9:11 AM
5	Easier and less expensive to prepare and bring food.	3/30/2024 7:48 AM
6	I live 5 minutes away in Westminster	3/29/2024 7:10 PM
7	I eat at home	3/29/2024 6:15 PM
8	I don't know of any	3/29/2024 5:25 PM
9	I live here	3/29/2024 2:42 PM
10	Live in town	3/28/2024 12:14 PM
11	Expensive options. I live here, I'll go home to eat. And Mountainside is never open when I'm done on the mountain trails	3/28/2024 10:22 AM
12	I live in Princeton and access trails from my home.	3/28/2024 9:28 AM
13	We usually go home	3/28/2024 7:21 AM
14	Too expensive	3/28/2024 6:05 AM

Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

15	Not many choices	3/28/2024 5:21 AM
16	Mtnside mkt hours are bad for my use.	3/28/2024 12:37 AM
17	Just don't	3/27/2024 10:06 PM
18	Usually week eight and finish activity when places are closed	3/21/2024 10:12 PM
19	We frequent eateries in town, but not after hiking (if lived elsewhere, probably a different answer though). Mountainside is perfectly situated, but hours are dismal - closed half the week and on Sunday, closed by early afternoon when open. They received a grant and recently liquor license expanded; something should be done about hours to the extent possible. Monti and Barn are strategically located near trails. The entry to that trail needs to be clearer, better defined, and that rusted chain-link fence removed. Right now it's foreboding. With the sidewalks in the commercial district and some sprucing up, this will work for ecotourism. Town center - no eatery other than PHOP, which is not that appealing. If a zoning change in the center is needed, it should be done. See comments below re: water/septic.	3/18/2024 7:29 PM
20	No need for offsite recreation or food	3/18/2024 5:27 PM
21	Seldom. I leave here, so I'm more likely to go home to eat.	3/15/2024 3:19 PM
22	Too expensive	3/15/2024 11:55 AM
23	I love here, and visit the minimal options enough as is.	3/15/2024 11:34 AM
24	I live in town. I usually return home after outdoor recreation. My visits to local eateries are usually at separate times.	3/14/2024 7:13 AM
25	Not my type of choices	3/13/2024 11:55 AM
26	No options	3/13/2024 5:46 AM
27	I eat at home	3/12/2024 7:36 PM
28	live in town, food is so-so/overated and over-priced.	3/12/2024 2:11 PM
29	Typically eat at home	3/12/2024 12:41 PM
30	Kk	3/11/2024 8:17 PM

Q8 How often do you visit any other businesses in Princeton after visiting trails or outdoor recreation areas in town?

Answered: 109 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Every time	4%	4
Occasionally	64%	70
Never (please describe why)	32%	35
TOTAL		109

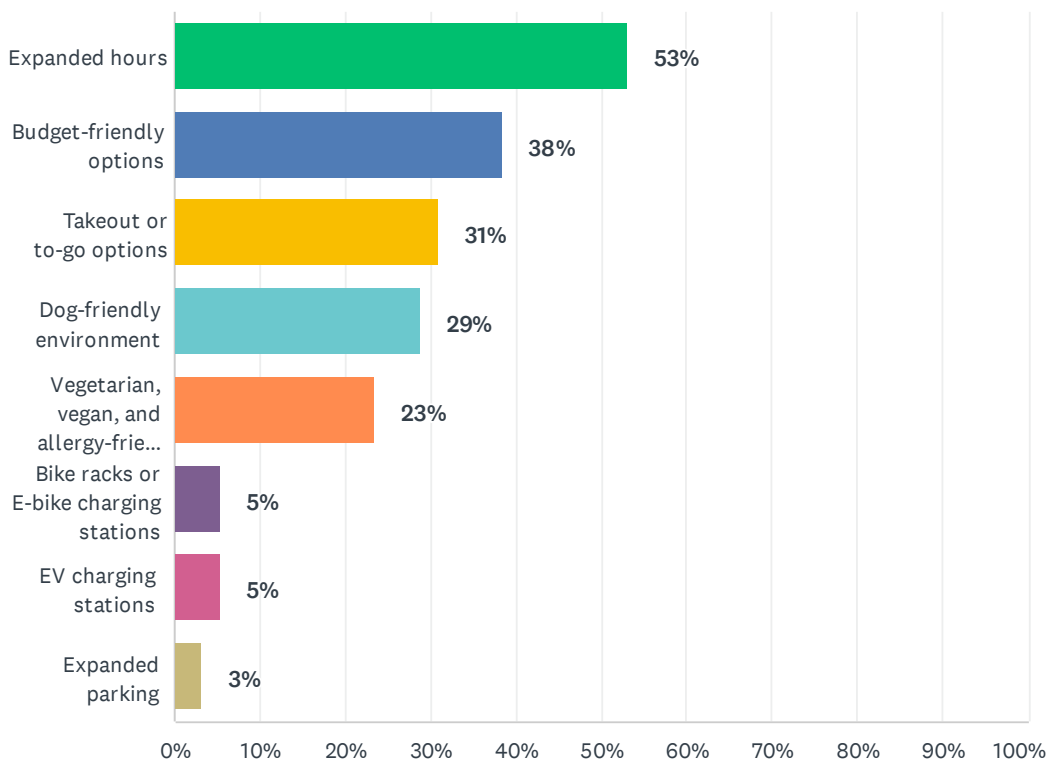
#	NEVER (PLEASE DESCRIBE WHY)	DATE
1	not on the way home	4/7/2024 7:24 PM
2	Unaware of options	4/2/2024 9:12 AM
3	Eager to return home after exercise	4/2/2024 7:56 AM
4	Live near trails	3/31/2024 12:36 PM
5	Not aware of any businesses that would interest us.	3/31/2024 10:33 AM
6	Not interested	3/30/2024 9:49 AM
7	I live close by	3/30/2024 9:11 AM
8	Not that many.	3/30/2024 7:52 AM
9	There just are not any places to visit other than PO to collect mail.	3/30/2024 7:48 AM
10	I live in town, trails are exercise, then usually head home	3/29/2024 7:53 PM
11	No need, I guess	3/29/2024 7:10 PM
12	I visit when I need to do errands	3/29/2024 6:15 PM
13	I don't think there are any relevant to me	3/29/2024 5:25 PM
14	I live here	3/29/2024 2:42 PM

Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

15	Heading home	3/28/2024 12:14 PM
16	I live in town. No need to tie the two together.	3/28/2024 10:29 AM
17	Same as above	3/28/2024 10:22 AM
18	I live in Princeton and access trails from my home.	3/28/2024 9:28 AM
19	No need to we were enjoying the outdoors	3/28/2024 7:21 AM
20	I live here. I can access businesses at any time, not just after recreation.	3/28/2024 6:56 AM
21	Too expensive	3/28/2024 6:05 AM
22	I just go home	3/28/2024 5:21 AM
23	Just don't	3/27/2024 10:06 PM
24	See above. If there were businesses to go to on the weekends, we would. Instead, we drive to other towns. Not sure if it is a zoning issue, or a water issue, but with thousands of people coming through all year for the mountain, would think some businesses could thrive. Question - where? Perhaps more development encouraged in the existing commercial zone? A used car lot on 140 - a highly visible touchpoint for people coming and going from the mountain (and one that is unlikely to create a positive perception of the town) isn't the answer.	3/18/2024 7:29 PM
25	Live here	3/18/2024 5:27 PM
26	No need.	3/15/2024 3:19 PM
27	Resident, I just go home	3/15/2024 11:55 AM
28	I live here.	3/15/2024 11:34 AM
29	I usually hike first thing in the morning before getting ready for the day.	3/15/2024 7:56 AM
30	No need	3/14/2024 9:45 AM
31	I live in town. I usually return home after outdoor recreation. I visit businesses in town on separate occasions.	3/14/2024 7:13 AM
32	Not many to choose from	3/13/2024 11:55 AM
33	No options	3/13/2024 5:46 AM
34	I shop at home	3/12/2024 7:36 PM
35	Kk	3/11/2024 8:17 PM

Q9 Which elements would make you more likely to dine in Princeton?

Answered: 94 Skipped: 15



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Expanded hours	53%	50
Budget-friendly options	38%	36
Takeout or to-go options	31%	29
Dog-friendly environment	29%	27
Vegetarian, vegan, and allergy-friendly options	23%	22
Bike racks or E-bike charging stations	5%	5
EV charging stations	5%	5
Expanded parking	3%	3
Total Respondents: 94		

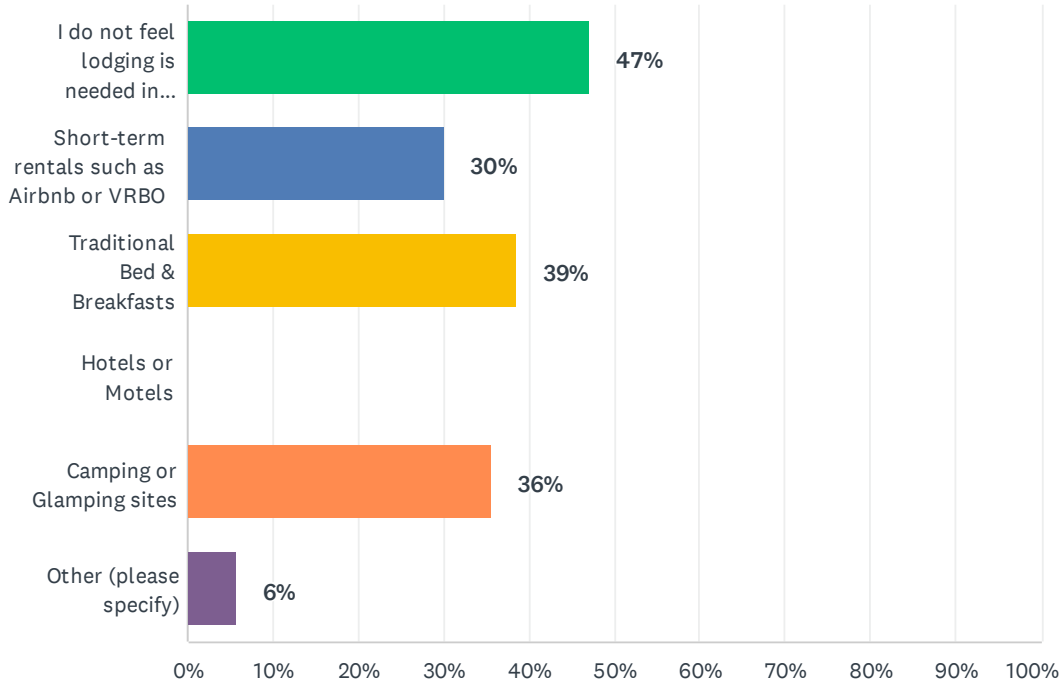
#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Better pizza, mtinside quality is improving now.	4/2/2024 8:12 PM
2	We love Mountainside Cafe but the hours are much too limited for us.	4/2/2024 7:56 AM
3	More options, bakery is never open and I can only eat so much pizza	4/1/2024 1:11 AM
4	More options to eat	3/31/2024 12:36 PM

Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

5	None—we are close enough to go home first and clean up before eating out. We don't typically eat lunch or dinner out, especially after hiking or snowshoeing.	3/31/2024 10:33 AM
6	I used to visit the cafe at the old superintendent's house but gave up b/c the food was not that good and it never improved.	3/30/2024 8:05 PM
7	I live in Sterling, and don't usually eat right when I'm done hiking	3/30/2024 9:11 AM
8	Not sure if any options would have any bearing on this but the two selected would tend to be the most important.	3/30/2024 7:48 AM
9	Mtnside hours	3/30/2024 7:04 AM
10	More options. There are very few in Princeton for how many visitors we get.	3/29/2024 8:45 PM
11	Better food choices	3/29/2024 7:53 PM
12	More options - I don't know of any	3/29/2024 5:25 PM
13	Specifically mountainside market	3/28/2024 9:55 AM
14	More restaurant options.	3/28/2024 6:56 AM
15	Nothing	3/28/2024 6:05 AM
16	More restaurants	3/27/2024 10:06 PM
17	In addition to some new options, which water/septic is probably the biggest impediment - the businesses we do have (looking at you, Mountainside - closed Sundays with the mountain crawling with hikers? Believe the town recently expanded liquor license; being open should have been a condition) need to be open when people are in town. Bike racks - not really much of an issue since biking is so dangerous without lanes or at least an expanded shoulder, which should be addressed. Back to the water - that commercial district could be thriving with a proper solution to the septic issue (as I understand it). Any resources the town can marshal to help remedy that in order to attract business should be examined.	3/18/2024 7:29 PM
18	None	3/18/2024 5:27 PM
19	Bike friendly trails and parking at food venues	3/18/2024 10:49 AM
20	A good local lunch or snack place open 7 days a week	3/16/2024 8:34 AM
21	We dine in Princeton at least 1-2x/week and would love to see more options	3/15/2024 9:26 AM
22	More options	3/13/2024 11:55 AM
23	more choices / restaurants	3/13/2024 9:45 AM
24	More options or knowledge of offerings	3/12/2024 7:42 PM
25	Good quality food	3/12/2024 6:58 PM
26	Being more welcoming to mountain bikers in general. The whole town feels anti mountain bike. Even the gravel roads around the mountain don't feel welcoming with other users.e	3/12/2024 6:49 PM
27	Not much to choose from at the moment	3/12/2024 7:59 AM

Q10 Do you feel lodging is needed for visitors to Princeton and surrounding outdoor recreation areas? If so, please select which options you would like to see.

Answered: 70 Skipped: 39



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I do not feel lodging is needed in Princeton	47%	33
Short-term rentals such as Airbnb or VRBO	30%	21
Traditional Bed & Breakfasts	39%	27
Hotels or Motels	0%	0
Camping or Glamping sites	36%	25
Other (please specify)	6%	4
Total Respondents: 70		

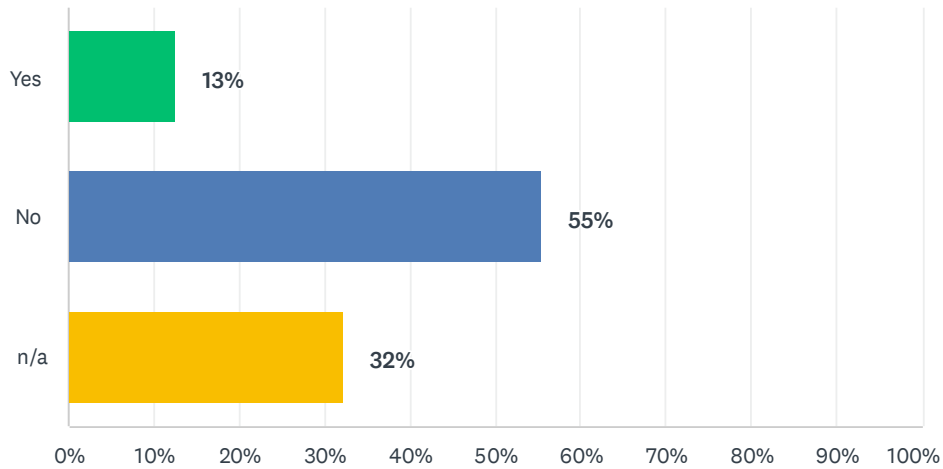
#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	RV park on town common? Tent city at Heritage Bible?	4/2/2024 8:12 PM
2	More info from the town on r&r w/AirBnB and VRBO	4/1/2024 1:11 AM
3	Wedding goers need a place to stay locally in Princeton	3/28/2024 12:41 PM
4	A lot of cars with RI & CT plates at Wachusett in winter. Surely those people might like to stay overnight - get dinner, go to bed, maybe even ski the next day - rather than 2 hour drive here, then pack it up and go home wet and sweaty. Ditto for the late-night bar crowd (who's driving	3/18/2024 7:29 PM

Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

home? shuttle preferred...). Retail and restaurants are tough, but places to stay - that's low-hanging fruit (and the restaurants and retail would emanate from that).

Q11 If you are a Princeton resident, would you be interested in hosting a short term rental (such as Airbnb) at your property in the future? If not, why?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 53



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	13% 7
No	55% 31
n/a	32% 18
TOTAL	56

#	IF NOT, WHY?	DATE
1	Bed & Breakfast, maybe, but not STR	4/12/2024 9:45 PM
2	not a resident	4/7/2024 7:24 PM
3	Renters are a pia.	4/2/2024 8:12 PM
4	Never. Not interested in sharing my home with strangers	4/2/2024 7:56 AM
5	Not interested & house too small	3/31/2024 11:06 PM
6	I don't like the idea of having non-resident stay and the town having to regulate how long and all the other things it would go into regulating. Not worth it	3/30/2024 4:24 PM
7	N/a	3/30/2024 9:49 AM
8	No	3/30/2024 9:11 AM
9	I would need to create a separate building for it (detached), which my property is not zoned for I don't think.	3/29/2024 8:45 PM
10	House is not large enough	3/29/2024 8:15 PM
11	I do not want strangers in my home. My neighbors would not appreciate it either.	3/29/2024 5:26 PM
12	I'm too ornery	3/29/2024 4:20 PM

Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

13	Regulation makes it impossible	3/29/2024 2:42 PM
14	I value my privacy	3/29/2024 12:47 PM
15	I don't have the appropriate space	3/29/2024 10:31 AM
16	Space	3/28/2024 11:06 PM
17	Not equipped for it	3/28/2024 12:41 PM
18	Not big enough house	3/28/2024 11:23 AM
19	Not interested.	3/28/2024 10:29 AM
20	My antique home is too quirky to have random guests	3/28/2024 10:22 AM
21	Insurance needed plus security and privacy issues.	3/28/2024 9:28 AM
22	I'm a clean freak	3/28/2024 7:21 AM
23	Why?	3/28/2024 6:56 AM
24	I live full time in princeton	3/28/2024 6:05 AM
25	Impact on rents, housing costs	3/25/2024 6:58 PM

Q12 If you have any other comments on trails, outdoor recreation resources, or ecotourism in Princeton, please describe your thoughts here:

Answered: 45 Skipped: 64

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Just found a canoe launch at old colony. Any guide or guidance for that? Other canoe or kayak guides?	4/2/2024 8:12 PM
2	Love your trails	4/2/2024 9:12 AM
3	I'd love to see some further expansion and Krashes' fields. Perhaps a pickle ball court or an up to date play ground.	4/2/2024 7:56 AM
4	We would like to maintain the peaceful, uncrowded nature of outdoor recreational areas and avoid/keep commercialization at a minimal.	3/31/2024 10:33 AM
5	Don't bring more people to the trails or the locals won't want to go there. We want to enjoy nature, not crowds of people	3/30/2024 9:11 AM
6	Signage with business names and directional arrows at some junctions in town may be helpful because many local people and outside travelers do not know these businesses exist.	3/30/2024 7:48 AM
7	Bike pumptrack	3/30/2024 7:04 AM
8	Encourage private landowners to allow open access and discuss the benefits of hunting	3/29/2024 8:51 PM
9	Food trucks? Events on the common? Farmer's markets?	3/29/2024 8:45 PM
10	It would be nice if the town had one or 2 public tennis courts	3/29/2024 7:53 PM
11	Beautiful town! We live in a bordering town and visit regularly for hiking and often enjoy stopping for food in Princeton after.	3/29/2024 7:37 PM
12	Push the history of Princeton more and tie it into the hiking/land point of interest. Create a whole outdoor experience vibe with camping options.	3/29/2024 5:25 PM
13	We want to be careful about over using the smaller private trails in town.	3/29/2024 4:02 PM
14	A comprehensive brochure of all the offerings in town would be helpful. You might want to review the ecotourism plan for Hardwick. It is very comprehensive but I do not think that much of the plan was ever implemented.	3/29/2024 2:42 PM
15	Princeton's natural beauty is one of our greatest assets that should be protected	3/29/2024 12:47 PM
16	Any tax dollars allocated for more trails is unneeded. Princeton has too much it needs to pay for and we need to figure out where to cut costs	3/28/2024 6:05 AM
17	Maybe events like bike racing? Orienteering?	3/28/2024 12:37 AM
18	I walk Princeton's back roads and trails almost daily. I appreciate the effort and expense it takes to create and maintain trails. I'd be happy to pay a usage fee.	3/24/2024 9:45 PM
19	Princeton has two successful wedding venues and many empty bedrooms. Making it easier to have a bed-and-breakfast for those wedding venues and then taxing the rent would add revenue to Princeton tax base.	3/19/2024 1:08 PM
20	Ecotourism is already the reason most people come to Princeton. Cars lining up at the trailheads. Skiing in the winter and fall events at Wachusett Ski area. Kids events at Wachusett meadow. Checking out the view from the top of the mountain. Leaf peeping / Sunday driving. Leveraging that to drive tax revenue (sales, hotel, payroll) and support local businesses is a great idea. As I see it, two key issues are infrastructure and zoning. Without town water/sewer, at least in certain zones - restaurants are tough with new builds prohibitively expensive. Is it possible to provide or at least support the necessary infrastructure in commercial zones? Then there's walkability. When you go somewhere, you want to get out and	3/18/2024 7:29 PM

Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

walk around. Shop, get a bite, take a stroll. The new sidewalks in the commercial district will help with that, but there's got to be a concentration of places to actually go. Then there's the roads - if we can't afford sidewalks along main thoroughfares, at least widening the shoulders with clearly defined painted markers would be helpful. Right now it is a death-defying walk to go from town center to the post office plaza (I know; I've tried). It's a little better from town center up to Mountainside/Echo Lake trail, but still could be improved (e.g., cut back the brush/poison ivy). Nip bottles should be banned - no question - the roads and shoulders are covered in them. It's gross, and clearly encourages drinking WHILE driving. The Kwik Mart and Thirsty folks might lose some revenue, but the aesthetics and safety issues override this (yes, sales tax, but there's got to be a line). As far as places to stay - people come for pretty big weddings at Harrington (I did, before living here) but with Fernside now tragically a non-profit health facility, where do they stay?? [to the survey question above about paying for access - that would be a death knell, folks will just go elsewhere like the free rail trails or access via Westminster]

21	If ecotourism evolves into the same mindset as hunting on posted land (I can do what I want where I want) then I do not support it in any way. We have already experienced years of trespass with motorized vehicles and general disregard for property rights by abutters and their visitors. Enough is enough.	3/18/2024 5:27 PM
22	Mountain biking events at Wachusett	3/18/2024 10:49 AM
23	I love and appreciate all of the work that is done on the trails and areas of Princeton.	3/16/2024 3:46 PM
24	More mountain bike access and infrastructure at Wachusett Mountain	3/16/2024 10:15 AM
25	Promote trails at state parks but not at smaller private area. Keep the trails relatively quiet!	3/16/2024 8:34 AM
26	We have great outdoor resources in Princeton. It's hard to see how the Town can make any significant amount of money from ecotourism without negatively impacting life for residents.	3/15/2024 3:19 PM
27	Princeton doesn't need to invest more tax money into creating more trails. There's plenty	3/15/2024 11:55 AM
28	Increase parking around Wachusett mountain and give parking passes to town residents. Non locals should pay for parking. We have enough state land for hiking, don't ruin the rest of our woods in town with expanded trail systems, more parking and more traffic through our community.	3/15/2024 11:34 AM
29	My family loves the outdoor resources around town - they're a major part of why we moved to Princeton. Please feel free to reach out if you need volunteers with any future work: jhchase1@gmail.com	3/15/2024 9:26 AM
30	Just want to say thank you for all these wonderful trails! I am moving out of town but plan on coming back to hike here with my dog. So I'll be one of those ecotourists!	3/15/2024 7:56 AM
31	Please stop the destruction of our forests by the creation of bike trails. These trails cut through wildlife habitat and are destroying what used to be beautiful forest into a maze of paths. It's not right and it's not fair to the wildlife that used to use the land for bedding. Imagine if someone cleared a bike path right through your bedroom. It is going to start to affect wildlife numbers as well. Please conserve some of the last old growth forests in the state. These wildernesses are some of the last of the New England untouched eco system.	3/14/2024 8:48 PM
32	Would like Princeton to work with Wachusett NEMBA to develop eco-friendly mtn bike trails on and around Wachusett mtn. Better sleeping opportunities along Midstate Trail	3/14/2024 9:55 AM
33	Would like to see bicycle friendly trails expanded and improved upon.	3/14/2024 9:34 AM
34	While I appreciate the idea of a fee for trail maintenance, I am using trails many times each week and paying a fee each time would be burdensome. I already support trail maintenance through donation to the PLT and through state and local taxes and through my vote on the budget at the annual town meeting.	3/14/2024 7:13 AM
35	If we had better mtb trails. I would stay in Princeton as much as possible.	3/13/2024 7:00 PM
36	I would visit Princeton more if there was more bike trails.	3/13/2024 12:00 PM
37	I would visit Princeton way more if they had more mountain biking trails	3/13/2024 11:55 AM
38	Princeton is very behind when it comes to mountain bike trails. If you look at some smaller towns within New England, a mountain bike trail network has really increased ecotourism	3/13/2024 11:48 AM

Survey on Outdoor Recreation in Princeton

opportunities. Boylston park for example is very much under utilized and has the perfect landscape for a small town run bike park. As far as I'm concerned, if Princeton is serious about ecotourism, mountain biking trail networks is a must.

39	I think that it's a great idea. I live nearby in Westminster and enjoy bringing friends and family to Princeton's outdoor resources because it's a beautiful town. I'd also be interested in golf and tennis opportunities.	3/13/2024 9:45 AM
40	There are no mountain bike trails in Princeton other than the small area in Leominster state park. I'd love to see more options in town.	3/13/2024 5:46 AM
41	Look at the great trails and new pump track at Diamond Hill in RI. Also look at the amazing trails and multiple pump tracks at Kingdom Trails in VT. We travel to those destinations more frequently than Princeton and we live 10 minutes from Princeton because those spots are so great for mountain biking, BMX, and hiking.	3/13/2024 3:08 AM
42	Getting people outdoors is important. Creating an environment to get people outside is just as important. A skills park for young mountain bikers would be the best way for this.	3/12/2024 8:07 PM
43	The arbitrary and capricious banning of mountain bikes on key connections within the town create a sense that mountain bikes aren't welcome anywhere in the town. Even on the town's dirt roads other user groups go out of their way to make sure mountain bikers or gravel bikers don't feel welcome. The lack of public restrooms in key locations is also an impediment to all user groups.	3/12/2024 6:49 PM
44	town needs to loosen its air bnb policies to encourage weekenders from Boston; all overnight business goes to other towns. town center or PO area needs redeveloped. Look at Petersborough NH or Milford NH, park and walk, many businesses/shops/food/coffee, connected town parks/common areas. Town is fragmented with its businesses in 3 clustered areas.	3/12/2024 2:11 PM
45	Since Covid trails have been saturated with non-locals that park all over, litter, play loud music on the trails, and speed through town. I am not in favor of Princeton ecotourism. Princeton residents should not have to pay to use our trails.	3/11/2024 8:17 PM

Stakeholder Interview Script

- Who is typically patronizing your business? (Princeton residents, out of towners, mix of both?)
- What aspects do you think draw people to Princeton? What are the town's strengths?
- Are there types of businesses that are not in Princeton or the region that could complement existing businesses/activities? I.e. bike/ski shop
- What can be done to help direct visitors towards the town's businesses while they are here?
- What are some challenges you face doing business in Princeton?
- How could the Town better support and promote the local business community?
- Would you have interest in participating/forming a local Chamber of Commerce?
- What is preventing businesses from expanding their hours?
- How do you think ecotourism in Princeton impacts your business or organization?
- Are there opportunities for your business/organization to participate in or support local ecotourism, preservation, sustainability, or other nature-based efforts?
- Would you be interested in having your business added to a promotional brochure and map?
- Would you be interested in having increased signage in town, or neighboring towns, directing visitors to your business?

PRINCETON ECOTOURISM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN: PROJECT KICK-OFF

CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Presented to the Princeton Select Board on July 26, 2023

OVERVIEW



The purpose of this project is to create a plan for ecotourism in Princeton that leverages the available natural resources as an economic development strategy.

An Ecotourism Economic Development Plan assures a balance between economic development and protecting the community's natural and cultural resources. The plan will outline the community's vision for an ecotourism economic development strategy and create goals and actions designed to achieve that strategy. The plan will act as a resource for Town officials in creating related projects, evaluating funding requests, and prioritizing initiatives.

Staff at CMRPC will work with staff and volunteers at the Town of Princeton between now and June 2024 to develop this plan. The agency will work to develop a wide-ranging strategy to inform community leaders and Princeton residents of the progress of the planning process and about opportunities to participate in plan development. The initiative will involve local stakeholders and the community in all phases of planning, development, and implementation.

WHAT IS AN ECOTOURISM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN?



Ecotourism is made up of three parts: 1) Conserving the environment; 2) Supporting the local economy; and 3) Celebrating local heritage and culture.

Economic development and the protection of natural resources are sometimes viewed as mutually exclusive. In fact, both are critical and must be balanced for long-term municipal sustainability. This is precisely the purpose of an Ecotourism Economic Development Plan – to identify strategies that will

help the Town balance development with preservation. The planning process will develop strategies that leverage and protect the natural and rural assets that make Princeton so unique. The resulting plan will provide an asset-based approach to economic development that uses Princeton's existing resources to generate economic activity and fuel sustainable economic development.

Project Benefits



The benefits of undertaking this ecotourism planning effort include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The process, in and of itself, encourages a dialogue about a community's strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats specific to both its economic development and natural resources and rural character.
- The process engages a wide variety of community stakeholders in developing a vision, a set of aspirational goals, and objectives for the ecotourism component of its economy.
- An Ecotourism Economic Development Plan assures that development is organized and balances economic development with protecting the community's natural and cultural resources.
- The process encourages a community to align its goals for ecotourism with its value of a community, such as maintaining a rural character or honoring agricultural history.
- The plan can serve as a reference for boards, committees, and residents to make clear, fair, and consistent decisions in matters relating to ecotourism and economic development in Princeton.
- An Ecotourism Economic Development Plan will develop strategies designed to help local businesses and residents gain additional or new revenue or jobs.

RESOURCES



In 2022, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, on behalf of the Town of Princeton, was awarded a Planning Assistance Grant from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) to complete an Ecotourism Economic Development Plan.

CMRPC, on behalf of the Town of Princeton, submitted an application to EOEEA's FY2023 Planning Assistance Grant Program and was awarded \$33,425 to complete an Ecotourism Economic Development Plan. To satisfy the 25% match requirement as part of this grant, the Town of Princeton has committed to providing a \$5,031 cash match and \$2,306 of in-kind services. CMRPC will provide a \$1,020 match using Local Planning Assistance.

These Planning Assistance Grants are part of a statewide effort to encourage municipalities to implement land use regulations that are consistent with the Administration's land conservation and development objectives including reduction of land, energy, and natural resource consumption, provision of sufficient and diverse housing, and mitigation of/preparation for climate change. In FY2023, a total of \$1,217,619 was awarded to 26 applicants.

PROJECT ELEMENTS



CMRPC will assist the Town with the development of an Ecotourism Economic Development Plan providing the following elements and deliverables. The principles of asset-based planning will be used, focusing on Princeton's existing strengths.

Project Element	Timeline	Deliverables
1.0 Project Management	Project duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly Committee & Project Team meetings • Quarterly status reports
2.0 Research & Data Collection	July – Oct. 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review identifying best practices in ecotourism • Visits to Princeton's ecotourism assets • Context and Background chapter of the Plan
3.0 Asset Mapping	Oct. – Nov. 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory & maps of ecotourism assets
4.0 Strengths/Weakness/ Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) Analysis	Nov. 2023 – Jan. 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder outreach • SWOT list and analysis
5.0 Identification of Issues, Opportunities, & Recommendations	Nov. 2023 – Jan. 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed narrative of issues, opportunities, and recommendations that focus on strengthening, connecting, and promoting existing assets
6.0 Community Engagement & Events	Project duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community workshop • Outreach materials • Opportunities for community input
7.0 Strategy Articulation	Dec. 2023 – Feb. 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of Goals, Objectives, Action Items
8.0 Development of an Implementation Plan	Dec. 2023 – Feb. 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation Matrix
9.0 Plan Development & Publication	Feb. – May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Princeton Ecotourism Economic Development Plan

PRIOR PLANNING EFFORTS



The following plans will be reviewed in order to support the development of the Ecotourism Economic Development Plan:

- Princeton Master Plan (2023) and Princeton Town Plan (2007)
- Princeton Housing Production Plan (2023)
- Princeton Open Space and Recreation Plan (2020)
- Princeton Environmental Action Plan (2020)
- Princeton Local Rapid Recovery Plan (2021)
- Princeton Reconnaissance Report (2006)
- Rural-11 Prioritization Project (2013)
- Complete Streets Policy (2021)
- Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (2016)
- Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan (2021)
- Worcester Road Village District Visioning (2012)

CONTACTS



The following CMRPC staff members will be leading this project. Please reach out if you have any questions.

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Summary of CMRPC Traffic Counting Efforts in the Town of Princeton, MA in 2022

In 2022, the CMRPC data collection team performed traffic counts along three different corridors in the town of Princeton, MA: Route 62, Route 140, and Mountain Road. Along each corridor, the team performed counts at multiple locations, totaling to ten different locations in town.

The team observed five different locations along Route 62: at the Sterling town line, at the Hubbardston town line, east of Gates Road, east of Route 31, and west of Boylston Avenue. All five of these counts were performed from the afternoon of August 1st, 2022, through the morning of August 5th, 2022, except for the Sterling town line location count, which was performed from afternoon of Monday, August 1st, 2022, through the morning of Wednesday, August 5th, 2022. With that in mind, the Sterling town line location saw the highest traffic volume, with an average of 1,816.5 cars per day going westbound and an average of 1,717.5 cars per day going eastbound, totaling to an average of **3,534** cars per day for the duration of the count. The peak morning hours of this location were recorded at 7:00am, 7:45am, and 10:45am. The peak afternoon hours of this location were recorded at 1:30pm, 4:00pm, and 4:45pm.

For the other locations along the Route 62 corridor, west of Boylston Avenue saw a weekly average of **2,852.3** cars per day. The location east of Route 31 had a recorded weekly average of **2,863.9** cars per day. The location at the Hubbardston town line had a recorded weekly average of **1,800.3** cars per day. Finally, the location east of Gates Road had a recorded weekly average of **1,807.1** cars per day.

Along the Route 140 corridor, traffic counts were performed at various times and for various durations at the Westminster town line, the Sterling town line, west of Route 31, and south of Route 31. The count at the south of Route 31 location was recorded for the longest duration, from the afternoon of Monday, August 1st, 2022, through the morning of Friday, August 5th, 2022. For the three full days of this count (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday), this location recorded an average of **7,357.7** cars per day, with an average of **7,266** for the entire duration of the count.

For the Route 140 location West of Route 31, the count was performed from the morning of Wednesday, August 3rd, 2022, through the morning of Friday, August 5th, 2022. On Thursday, August 4th, this location saw a total of **5,271** cars, with an average of **5,234.5** cars per day for the duration of the count. The count at the Sterling town line location was also performed from the morning of Wednesday, August 3rd, 2022, through the morning of Friday, August 5th, 2022. On Thursday, August 4th, this location saw a total of

6,495 cars, with an average of **6,391** cars per day for the duration of the count. At the Westminster town line, the count was performed from the afternoon of Monday, August 1st, 2022, through the morning of Wednesday, August 3rd, 2022. On Tuesday, August 2nd, 2022, this location saw a total of **5,268** cars, with an average of **5,288** cars per day for the duration of the count.

Finally, the data collection team performed two counts along Mountain Road that ascends Wachusett Mountain: one at Pole 11 and one at Pole 45. These counts lasted from the late morning of Monday, September 26th, 2022, through the morning of Friday, September 30th, 2022. This Mountain is a major tourist attraction in the town of Princeton, and many people drive up to the summit during the Fall to enjoy the foliage. So, the Pole 45 location, which is South of Prospect Street, saw a weekly average of **1,518.3** cars per day and the Pole 11 location saw a weekly average of **199.2** cars per day.

In summary, although all of these traffic counts were performed at different times and for varying durations, it is clear that Route 140 experiences the highest traffic volumes. Specifically, the location south of Route 31 saw the highest traffic volumes out of the four locations observed along Route 140 in Princeton. Since this corridor does not travel through the center of town and veers to the eastern border of Princeton, it is possible that many of these travelers may be commuting between surrounding towns. Implementing ecotourism opportunities and establishing local businesses along this corridor may have positive impacts on the town's economy.