COMMONWEALTH
OF MASSACHUSETTS

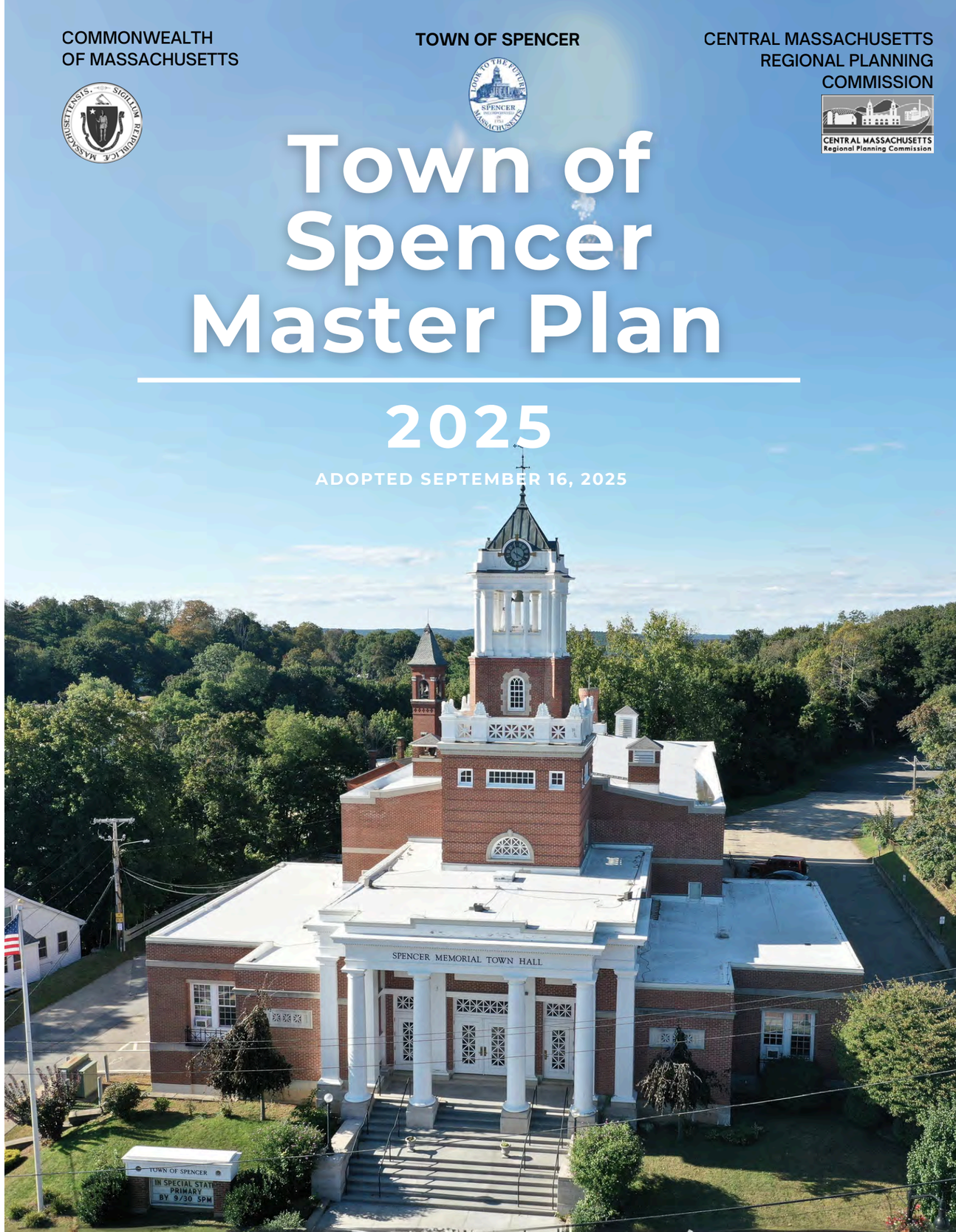
TOWN OF SPENCER

CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS
REGIONAL PLANNING
COMMISSION

Town of Spencer Master Plan

2025

ADOPTED SEPTEMBER 16, 2025



Town of Spencer

A comprehensive Master Plan prepared with technical assistance from the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), and funding from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development, the Town of Spencer, Massachusetts, and the CMRPC District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program.

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Spencer Fair.
Photo: Jackie Mushinsky,
Spencer Cable Access

Acknowledgments

A warm thank you to the Spencer stakeholders who volunteered their valuable expertise, time, and talents to this collaborative Master Plan, including Spencer Boards, Departments, & Staff, and all contributing residents.

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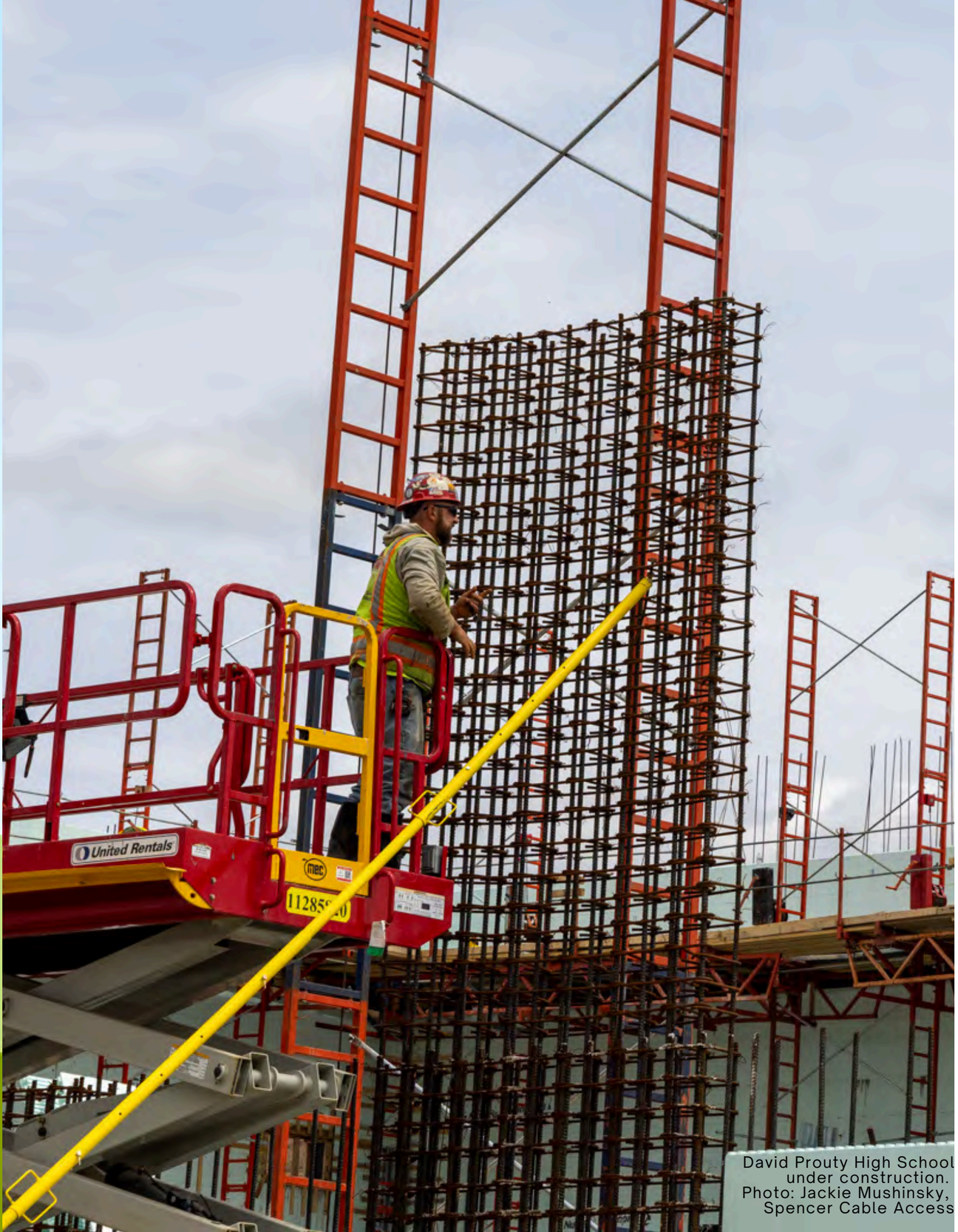
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David Prouty High School under construction. Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

Glossary

Policy

A statement of principles that underlies a plan's overall strategy and directs decision-making.[1]

Vision Statement

A statement that describes a community's long-term aspirations based on shared purpose and values. Expresses uniqueness and standards of excellence, focusing on people and quality of life. Provides a framework or hook upon which to hang ideas or information. The foundation that supports more specific goals and objectives.[2]

Goal

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

Objective

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

Action Item

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

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

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



Massasoit Hotel. Photo courtesy of Richard Sugden Library, Digital Commonwealth.

What is a Master Plan

Sometimes referred to as a "comprehensive plan," a[1] Master Plan is the foundational policy document for local governments. It establishes a framework to guide public and private decisions about future growth, preservation, and change within a municipality over ten to twenty years.

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

Massachusetts General Law 41, Section 81D requires[2] planning boards to prepare Master Plans for the communities they serve. Master Plans should be regularly updated to reflect community changes and priorities. The Town of Spencer undertook its master planning process in accordance with these provisions.

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

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

The benefits of having a Master Plan include:

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



Spencer Residents Have a Vision for the Future

Looking 20 years into the future, Spencer is committed to:

Downtown Revitalization

Creating an accessible, vibrant town center by improving its overall aesthetic while protecting and reusing its historic architecture.

Economic Development

Supporting and investing in local businesses, and creating vibrant business districts with services, amenities, resources, and work opportunities.

Community

Becoming a family-friendly environment where residents can safely access services, amenities, and resources within walking or biking distance.

Rural Character

Preserving its rural character by respecting and honoring its past while supporting the stewardship of its historic resources.

Natural Resources

Prioritizing the protection of its natural beauty and wildlife while creating access to open space.

Town Services

Being a town with an engaged citizenry that values public service and freedom, and works alongside a well-resourced and responsive government to improve the community.

Creating the Plan: Timeline






SURVEY & DATA ANALYSIS

- PROJECT KICKOFF
- DATA COLLECTION
- COMMUNITY SURVEY
- STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 1ST COMMUNITY WORKSHOP
- STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS
- 2ND COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

VISIONING & STRATEGY

- VISION STATEMENT
- GOALS & STRATEGIES
- STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

- CHAPTER DRAFTS
- FINAL DRAFT
- APPROVED BY THE MPAC
- ADOPTED BY THE PLANNING BOARD

Nov 2022 · Dec 2022 · Jan-Apr 2023 · May 2023 · June-Sep 2023 · Oct 2023 · Nov 2023 · Jan-Feb 2024 · March-May 2024 · June 2024 · __ 2024 · __ 2025

Goals and Strategies Snapshot

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Goal 1** Create a long-term, economic development strategy for retaining and attracting businesses that contributes to diversifying Spencer's tax base.
- **Goal 2** Create a more vibrant, sustainable, and livable town center that will foster economic and social opportunities.
- **Goal 3** Continue to encourage the creation of robust trade areas in Spencer's commercial districts to support services and retail opportunities.
- **Goal 4** Expand capacity to support and facilitate the creation of employment.

LAND USE

- **Goal 1** Update the town's bylaws to ensure that they align with the community's priorities on growth and preservation.
- **Goal 2** Encourage private investments by creating by-right development mechanisms for the type of development that aligns with the town's economic development priorities and master plan strategies.
- **Goal 3** Advance the implementation of prior town center revitalization planning efforts.
- **Goal 4** Encourage a mix of uses along the route 9 corridor.

HOUSING & POPULATION

- **Goal 1** Pursue policies and regional partnerships that encourage affordable housing production and work to meet the affordable housing thresholds established by M.G.L. Chapter 40B.
- **Goal 2** Enable housing development that prioritizes the preservation of open space.
- **Goal 3** Review zoning to promote the diversification of the town's housing stock while mitigating the impact on the community's services and infrastructure.
- **Goal 4** Encourage the development of senior housing to support aging in place.

TRANSPORTA-TION

- **Goal 1** Improve the safety of Spencer's transportation system for all users.
- **Goal 2** Improve the reliability and performance of Spencer's transportation system.
- **Goal 3** Improve connectivity in and access to the town center.
- **Goal 4** Enhance regional and cross-town connectivity while helping to preserve Spencer's rural character.

OPEN SPACE, RECREATION, & NATURAL RESOURCES

- **Goal 1** Protect valuable water resources from adverse impacts & degradation.
- **Goal 2** Enhance recreational opportunities for town residents and visitors.
- **Goal 3** Conserve Spencer's open spaces.
- **Goal 4** Build and enhance town capacity to facilitate and implement open space planning processes.

LAND HISTORICAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES

- **Goal 1** Preserve the town's historic resources.
- **Goal 2** Use regulatory and zoning tools to preserve the town's historic character.
- **Goal 3** Provide cultural opportunities for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities.
- **Goal 4** Balance growth with the preservation of spencer priority heritage landscapes.

TOWN SERVICES & FACILITIES

- **Goal 1** Ensure the town has the resources and staff to provide quality and cost-effective Town services for all Spencer residents, businesses, and visitors.
- **Goal 2** Ensure the optimal operation and functioning of all Town facilities and make improvements, where necessary.
- **Goal 3** Maintain, improve and explore options to strategically expand town infrastructure to eliminate barriers to economic development.
- **Goal 4** Improve Town communication with and public involvement in local government.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMEN-TAL RESILIENCY

- **Goal 1** Improve and expand municipal renewable energy utilization and generation.
- **Goal 2** Improve energy efficiency of residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial buildings.
- **Goal 3** Encourage and support local and regional transportation decarbonization efforts.
- **Goal 4** Increase access to alternative transportation options for residents.
- **Goal 5** Reduce and utilize waste generated.
- **Goal 6** Conserve and enhance natural land and woodlands.
- **Goal 7** Increase the resiliency and viability of agriculture operations.



Camp Marshall, Central Mass Horse Show. Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

01

Overview



OVERVIEW

Spencer has had to reinvent itself more than once throughout its 271-year history. From a major stop on the Old Boston Post Road, to an agricultural community, a booming industrial hub with 11 factories, a former mill town, and more recently, a commuter town rich in natural resources and recreational amenities, each phase of Spencer's history is evidence of its resilience.

In many ways, Spencer is still a major stop on the "Old Post Road," now known as Route 9. Its proximity to Worcester, Massachusetts' second largest city, and its convenient location at the intersection of Route 9 and 31, make it an important jumping-off point and an active hub for convenience retail. Walk along the Depot Rail Trail, or around the Howe State Park, and you will see why Spencer is a draw for those looking for affordable housing options in a scenic, rural setting, surrounded by open space and recreational opportunities. Home to landmarks such as St. Joseph's Abbey and scenic rural landscapes, Spencer still shows the signs of its significant role in the region's economic and cultural history.

Today, Spencer is a primarily residential community of over 11,000 people with a workforce focused on commuting to job opportunities. Since the 2003 Master Plan, Spencer has seen moderate, but steady growth in population and residential development. Across smaller communities in Worcester County, the movement of population priced out of dense employment centers has brought an increase in median rents and housing values. Spencer could capitalize on this population shift, especially as many people continue to work remotely and drive local demand for goods and services.

Spencer's population is projected to grow in the next two decades, thus, a key focus of this plan is to explore ways to balance this growth with the town's current infrastructure capacity. In response to resident's feedback, this plan also examines ways in which Spencer can accommodate growth while preserving Spencer's rural character. Spencer residents want to live in a community that is vibrant, safe, and attractive. Today, Spencer is in a regional competition to attract and retain talented workers. Restoring some of the architectural features of the town center and adopting placemaking strategies can give Spencer a competitive advantage in the race to attract and retain residents and businesses.

Multiple planning efforts have identified Spencer's challenges, particularly in its embattled town center, and identified ways to address them. From the Town Center Revitalization Plan (2009) to the Downtown Parking Study (2020), and the Open Space and Recreation Plan (2021), the Town has invested significant resources in both planning and infrastructure upgrades. But as residents have expressed in our community workshops, "it is time to get to work!" This call to action has guided this plan, with the ultimate goal of providing actionable insights for attracting and deploying funding to shovel-ready projects.

Spencer has put in a significant amount of work into developing multiple plans. As residents have expressed in our community workshops, "it is time to get to work!"



02

Community Input & Participation



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

70
Participants in the May 2023 Visioning Workshop

360
Responses to the 2023 Community Master Plan Survey

65
Participants in the October 2023 Community Workshop

COMMUNITY INPUT AND PARTICIPATION

Residents shaped every stage of this plan and their input served as a guiding framework.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The 2025 Spencer Master Plan brings together community input, local data, best planning practices, and state law to provide a custom blueprint for the next 10-20 years. It is the product of a robust community engagement process that ran for nearly two years. The Spencer Master Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC) met monthly during the planning process to workshop components of the Master Plan. These meetings were open to the public. The MPAC conducted a public survey, hosted two public workshops, and drew on the expertise of other boards, committees, and local subject matter. Using these inputs, the MPAC crafted a Vision Statement to guide the Master Plan. This plan's goals, objectives, and action items were similarly established to serve that vision.

Residents want a revitalized community while seeking to preserve their way of life and the town's rural character.

WEBSITE AND OTHER MEDIA

Community engagement activities occurred throughout the planning process. A Master Plan website served as a comprehensive hub for engagement and information. The team deployed social and traditional media to reach residents of varied backgrounds and perspectives. An array of tools, including articles in the Spencer New Leader, print fliers in public locations, electronic messaging boards, paid Facebook ads, and more, helped the team reach the broadest possible audience.



SURVEY

In March 2023, the project team launched a Community Survey. Open to Spencer residents and other stakeholders, the survey solicited input on key master plan themes. Through the survey, residents weighed in on topics such as Town Center, transportation, commercial growth, and public services. More than 350 Spencer stakeholders took the survey, which was available in English and Spanish.

VISIONING WORKSHOP

In May 2023, the MPAC convened the first of two Master Plan workshops. Held at the Spencer Fish and Game Club, the Visioning Workshop consisted of a "Science Fair" style session that allowed participants to come at will and move through stations and activities aligned with the master plan. Activities included identifying preferred housing types, mapping desired land uses, and other methods for defining community needs and resident preferences. Workshop facilitators engaged attendees in 1:1 and group discussions, which served as informal stakeholder interviews. Approximately 70 stakeholders were in attendance.

SECOND COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

MPAC hosted a second Master Plan workshop in October 2023. The event reconvened Spencer residents for a discussion on the Town Center. Residents helped create a vision for the Town Center, identified market conditions, and provided direction for development and policy. Approximately 65 residents and stakeholders attended the event.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS: *

"The town needs to communicate to the residents in a more inclusive way. I believe everybody has something to contribute and therefore the town has to invite/remind as many people as possible to do so."

(Community Survey, 2023)

*** Comments edited for clarity.**



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"We must get over the attitude that everything is too expensive therefore we sit on our hands and let the buildings and town property deteriorate, then complain when something needs to be fixed. We need a strong plan financially and for all services with action plans that are reviewed and updated every year."

(Community Survey, 2023)

INTERVIEWS

The project team conducted 1:1 interviews with local subject matter experts. Technical staff, board and committee members, and administrators were among those interviewed.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND BOARD REVIEWS

Following the MPAC's approval of the Draft Master Plan, the document was circulated to town boards, committees, and staff for additional comments. The draft was posted on the Town of Spencer municipal website and Master Plan website with instructions for submitting comments. Following a 60-day public comment period, inputs was shared with the MPAC and incorporated into a final draft of the Plan.

03

Key Priorities



Camp Marshall Halloween event.
Photo: Jackie Mushinsky
Spencer Cable Access



KEY PRIORITIES

A LONG-RANGE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY CAN HELP SPENCER IDENTIFY ITS VALUE PROPOSITION AND CHART A DIRECTION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Like other mill towns in the Greater Worcester area, Spencer knows that economic growth is temporary. Since the rapid industrialization and accelerated population growth of the 1800s, Spencer has experienced more than one boom and bust cycle. As its population declined following deindustrialization, Spencer went on to experience a slow recovery focused on services and light industry.

SPENCER'S "LOW-COST" COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

For decades, the Town's economic development efforts centered on "low-cost positioning" to attract development. Its main competitive advantage was low-cost real estate and labor, and a low tax environment intended to reduce the tax burden for individuals and businesses to encourage new growth and development.

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE REGION

Today, as Worcester grows in prominence as a biomanufacturing center, and the talent pool moves west, Spencer could become part of the suburban market that supports this growth. Spencer could accommodate this spillover though more affordable (relative to the region) workforce housing and development-ready, inexpensive land.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS: *

"Need downtown revitalization."

"I believe there is a need to bring in manufacturing or business that will provide a tax base and jobs for Spencer residents"

"Economic changes need to be adjusted to reflect today's current market/ climate."

"There is no affordable housing / rent in this town for a single working man or woman. You need at least 2 incomes just to survive"

"Maintain what we have and be open to new commercial opportunities."

"Keep the small rural character and lessen the growth."

(Community Survey,2023)

*** Comments edited for clarity.**

SPENCER'S VALUE PROPOSITION

To compete regionally, Spencer must look beyond its "low-cost" advantage approach to develop a vision and identify its value proposition. Today, fostering development requires tapping into the "new economy" and regional opportunities by focusing on targeted business recruitment rather than attracting "any" business. It also hinges on investments in education, particularly vocational training, to supply trained talent rather than cheap labor.

ROUTE 49 IS A UNIQUE ADVANTAGE

Investments in infrastructure that go beyond building roads are also critical. Spencer's value proposition might also emphasize its locational advantage. Route 49 is a direct path to the first state highway intersection after Worcester/Auburn and it is an attractive transportation asset for companies that need easy access to the state highway. Along with providing adequate infrastructure, this geographic advantage can create the virtuous cycle needed to attract a major employer, or a large-scale, transformative project.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"While I do love Spencer's small-town feel, I don't think that adhering to this vision should restrict necessary development that may be seen as antithetical to this."

(Community Survey, 2023)

INCREMENTAL PLANNING: SMALL PROJECTS CAN BRING BIG CHANGE.

Spencer's economic revitalization is not just about attracting a "magic bullet" company or single industry that will bolster the town. Creating economic opportunity can start with incremental progress and several small projects that act together to become catalysts for economic activity in the town center and beyond. It can also mean retaining and expanding Spencer's small and medium-size businesses. The majority of the 360 businesses that are registered as doing business in Spencer in 2024 are small businesses. These small businesses generate benefits that go well beyond employment, as profits go to owners that likely live in Spencer and spend locally. The Town can support small businesses by promoting them on the Town website, and helping them navigate permitting requirements, find available sites, and apply for loans and grants.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Spencer's value proposition might also include quality of life. As residents noted during community engagement, quality of life is driving their economic development priorities. Access to natural resources and recreational amenities could be a draw for families and remote workers. Including quality of life strategies into an economic development plan can chart a path for leveraging Spencer's historic and natural assets to attract new residents and visitors, as well as revenue-generating opportunities.

BUILD A STRATEGY AROUND EXISTING ASSETS

A viable economic development strategy requires understanding what would make Spencer competitive in the region, evaluating existing assets and programs, and pursuing public-private partnerships. Formulating this value proposition will help the Town identify and leverage its strengths. What would make a family decide to move to Spencer? Why would a business locate here? Why would a visitor come to town? When these questions are answered, Spencer will be better positioned to prioritize specific zoning changes and economic development initiatives.


Photo: Mary Braney

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Land Use and Open Space, Recreation and Natural Resources chapters make a case for building a land use plan around the protection of Spencer's assets and concentrating development along major corridors. They identify both protection strategies for the town's natural and historical assets, and improvements that would expand public access. The Economic Development chapter proposes using incentives alongside regulations to leverage the town's assets. While regulations protect the public, incentives and building public private partnerships offer Spencer options to encourage economic revitalization and attract a talented workforce.

DEMANDS TO KEEP TAX RATE LOW PUT PRESSURE ON SPENCER'S ABILITY TO BALANCE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND FISCAL STABILITY

A HISTORY OF UNDERINVESTMENT

Spencer has taken significant steps toward grappling with prior underinvestment in its infrastructure and school system. Construction is underway for a new high school building, and an extensive sewer plant upgrade has already freed up capacity for new connections. In an effort to fund the rehabilitation of historic and recreational amenities, the town has recently adopted an article that will put the adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) up for vote in the fall Town

360
businesses registered in Spencer

600+
industrial sector employees

50%
of residents identified the town center as a desirable place for commercial development

Leveraging natural and historic assets: Spencer could become an ecotourism destination.


Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

Meeting. These steps promise to help close the underinvestment gap in the long term. Yet, catching up with decades of deferred maintenance, deteriorating assets, and declining quality of life is a difficult balancing act, particularly post-pandemic as the Town of Spencer is charged with doing more with less.

FISCAL TRILEMMA

When making key decisions about managing municipal finances, towns have three possible options from which to choose: 1. Stay fiscally stable to be able to keep bond ratings high and borrow capital at good rates to finance infrastructure. 2. Keep tax rates and user fees low—there's a limit to how much a municipality can increase fees and taxes to recoup costs and fund services. 3. Invest in infrastructure and maintenance to encourage economic growth. Of these three interdependent, mutually exclusive choices, municipalities can only pick two.

Like many towns in Central Massachusetts, Spencer currently must navigate this type of "trilemma," where any intervention (or lack thereof) will achieve no more than two out of three objectives.

The two options Spencer has consistently chosen over the past few decades have been to keep its tax rate low and stay fiscally stable (to avoid an increase in its debt burden), while neglecting critical infrastructure maintenance and capital improvements. While keeping its liabilities low, this choice has limited the Town's ability to maintain a healthy level of service. This has resulted in the deferred maintenance and lower quality of life that the town has to grapple with today.

For example, the Town's $46 million Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade Project in 2023 comes after deferred upgrades of its aging equipment have led to seepage from the sewer system impacting water quality and infiltration impacting sewer processing.

OPPORTUNITIES

More importantly, these choices have limited the Town's ability to react to shifts in market conditions during economic downturns, such as the 2008 recession, or, conversely, to take advantage of economic opportunities, such as the ones offered to the town today. The town's 2020 moratorium on all new connections to the sewer system is a case in point. As Spencer's Sewer Commission chair noted, while town leadership is pushing for new growth and bringing business to Spencer, the town's overburdened treatment plant cannot increase flow to accommodate them. As a result, Spencer has had to turn away much-needed businesses and development. For example, in 2020, Spencer's sewer commissioners had to reject a proposal for a 32-unit senior housing development at the former Lake Street School because of lack of sewer capacity.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Grant money for sewer upgrades! This needs equal attention since it impacts everyone in town, not just the thousands of people hooked up to the sewer."

(Community Survey, 2023)

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"I agree we need to have quality education however we can't have the cost increasing every year beyond the 2 1/2% it is not sustainable."

"Need more public safety personnel and improvements to public safety buildings. possibly create a public safety complex. Also need to improve business plans in town to attract more businesses."

(Community Survey, 2023)

The Town has lifted its moratorium in 2024, but infrastructure limitations remain a significant barrier to growth and business attraction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many towns across the region have struggled with the upkeep of their infrastructure, as financial responsibility for maintenance or expansion has fallen fully on municipal governments and private entities. The Land Use and Economic Development chapters note how an effort to allocate resources toward maintenance, coupled with grant funding, can yield long term dividends for small communities such as Spencer.

More importantly, investing in infrastructure can help avoid a common rural decline cycle, where a decline in the level of service leads to a decline in quality of life, which in turn leads to population loss, and ultimately to less demand for services that results in a further decline in services.

SPENCER COULD BECOME A SERVICE AND RETAIL HUB FOR SURROUNDING RURAL COMMUNITIES, BUT LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY LIMITS COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

In the postindustrial era, Spencer joined the ranks of former mill towns seeking to pivot to the service industry to compensate for the waning of manufacturing jobs. But among its rural neighbors, Spencer has several unique advantages. Its location advantage has helped Spencer weather this structural shift by attracting and retaining a few significant industrial employers. Today, these same advantages can help the town pivot yet again by gaining prominence as a local service and retail hub.

AN ENDURING INDUSTRIAL BASE

Spencer is home to several commercial and light industrial establishments that form a manufacturing and service industry cluster along Route 9. The industrial park at the intersection of Route 9 with Spencer Road is the heart of Spencer's industrial base. Together, companies such as Flexcon, Dienes Corporation, East Brookfield Spencer Railroad, and Mercury Wire employ more than 600 people in their Spencer locations.

A DIVERSE RETAIL BASE THAT CAN BE A REGIONAL DRAW

Retailers such as Klem's, Whitco, Appleblossoms, two grocery stores, and popular restaurants such as Charlie's Diner, Black & White Grill, Connect, and others along the Route 9 position Spencer to serve as a rural service and retail hub for neighboring rural communities that lack easy access to services and goods.

CREATING AN EASILY ACCESSIBLE SERVICE HUB

This cluster of economic activity is supported by Spencer's



advantageous location along Route 9 and the benefit of a direct bus service linking the Town with the Worcester Union Station. In addition, Route 49 makes Spencer a straight shot to and from the Mass. Pike, while Route 31 links the town with Paxton and Oakham. This presents an opportunity to create a hub that transcends municipal boundaries and attracts convenience shoppers from underserved neighboring communities.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"It should intentionally be developed into a destination for those who live outside of Spencer as well. It can still be rural and community oriented while also developing a downtown that brings in otherswhich in turn would stimulate the economy of the town and hopefully reduce the tax burden."

(Community Survey, 2023)

DEMAND FOR CONVENIENCE SHOPPING FROM UNDERSERVED NEIGHBORING TOWNS

Many remote rural communities in the region struggle to support local commerce and services, from businesses and banks to post offices and healthcare facilities. Towns with small and dispersed rural populations have less demand for services, making many types of small businesses not commercially viable. As community engagement forums revealed, Spencer is a common shopping destination for residents in neighboring communities such as Brookfield, with grocery shopping being the most common activity. Service hubs such as Spencer, where multiple businesses and services are clustered along major roads, can reach the needed economies of scale to support commerce and fill gaps in access to goods and services.

LIMITED INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY

A significant barrier to growing and promoting commercial development Spencer is its limited wastewater treatment and sewer infrastructure capacity. The Town, along with private entities, is largely responsible for the construction of this infrastructure. Wastewater treatment and sewer infrastructure have long been a concern in Spencer, both because of the impact of effluent from the treatment plant on nearby water bodies, and because the lack of capacity for new connections constrains development.



WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"I do think downtown buildings should maintain some charm, but not at the expense of limiting how to best serve the community. also, I would love to see a coffee shop (locally owned, not a big chain), and flexible, community gathering space. I would also love for the buildings downtown to maintain their charm while welcoming new businesses"

"The Town needs to find better ways to communicate with residents (social media, email list, digital board, etc.)."

"This town doesn't put on any fun events."

(Community Survey, 2023)

RECOMMENDATIONS

To leverage its advantages, attract private investments, and develop Spencer into a rural service hub, the Town should continue efforts to align zoning with targeted incentives and infrastructure upgrades. As discussed in the Economic Development chapter, in 2018, the Spencer town center was designated as an Opportunity Zone, which promised to draw private investment in the downtown. No investments have been made to date, which suggests that more interventions, such as infrastructure upgrades, are needed to make Spencer's town center compatible with the marketplace. Additional tax and zoning incentives may be needed to cover the gap financing for redevelopment.

MAKE SPENCER'S TOWN CENTER INVESTMENT- READY

THE LINGERING IMPACT OF COVID-19

The economic impact of COVID-19 is still felt among Spencer's residents and business community. Filling vacancies in the town center commercial corridor continues to pose a challenge for property owners and Town government alike. At community engagement events, and in response to the Spencer Master Plan Survey, residents have voiced their concern with the deteriorating conditions of buildings in the town center. Recovery efforts put forth by the Town have been limited by the fact that control over leasing decisions, or housing development, rests primarily with the property owners. Yet, Spencer can incentivize investments through further interventions in the built environment, public realm, regulatory environment, and through business outreach efforts.

GROWING HOUSING DEMAND IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ATTRACT INVESTMENT IN UNDERUTILIZED COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

While Spencer's residential market has seen accelerated growth in demand and appreciation since the COVID-19 pandemic, the commercial real estate market has continued to struggle. This is a trend that goes beyond Central Massachusetts, to affect communities nation-wide. Commercial development within the town's main commercial corridor, particularly in the segment of Route 9 that runs through the town center, has been relatively stagnant. Many existing commercial buildings remain vacant or underutilized. Despite Spencer's many physical advantages, such as a dense population center, proximity to the Mass Pike, and diverse mix of uses, many residents lament that the town center continues to be a missed opportunity for development. The mismatch between the condition and vacancy rates of the existing building stock in the town center, and the growing housing demand and rising rents, offers opportunities for investors.

Most commercial properties in the town center are located along Route 9. The structures are predominantly 2-4 stories high and form a continuous street front, with commercial on the first level and residential units on the upper levels.

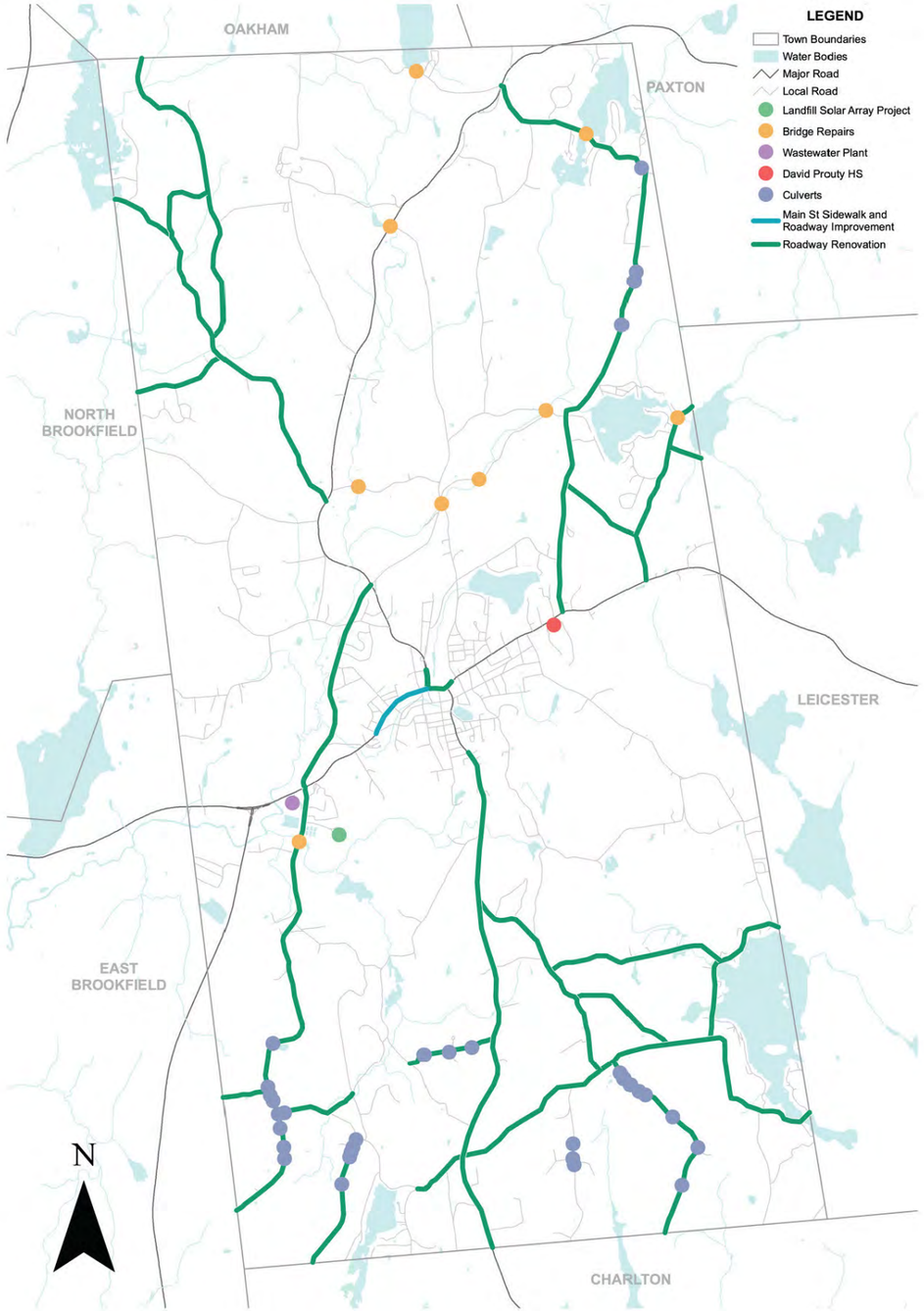


Figure 1: Town of Spencer completed and ongoing public works projects.





Photos: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



The Building Inspector's Vacant Properties Register lists 13 vacant mixed-use buildings in the town center as of 2024. A 2013 survey found that approximately a third of the properties in the town center were in poor or fair condition and many upper floors residential units are underutilized. Approximately 8% of the properties were tax delinquent as of 2013. After more than a decade of deferred maintenance, many of the buildings require significant and costly repairs, including ADA upgrades and elevators. These mounting capital needs, coupled with the challenge of engaging absentee landlords in a dialogue with the Town, have deterred investment in this building stock over the past decade.

A growing economy and housing demand present a unique opportunity to attract investment in Spencer's underutilized commercial and mixed-use properties. In the immediate vicinity of the town center, low vacancy rates and demand for housing are driving up rents. However, due to the poor condition of the buildings in the town center, a significant funding gap remains the main barrier to redevelopment. Financial assistance and incentives will be necessary to close the funding gap and motivate and incentivize reinvestment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One such incentive is the possibility of using grants to help fund adaptive reuse work. The Town has been awarded a Commercial Conversion Initiative grant for technical assistance that would examine the feasibility of turning underutilized commercial spaces into housing. Such studies will help unlock funding opportunities by enabling projects to compete for capital funding proposed under the Governor's Affordable Homes Act. In the last decade, 19 housing units were renovated though the CDBG Housing Rehabilitation program.

The Economic Development and Land Use chapters propose a business retention and startup attraction effort that seeks to incentivize investment in Spencer's downtown. Recommendations range from interventions in the built environment—such as public realm upgrades and placemaking— and the business environment through active business outreach and promotion efforts. A recurring demand voiced by residents at community workshops,

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"The buildings downtown are falling apart and make the town look awful. the downtown area should be kept up nicely and those landlords should have to maintain them so they look nice. Windows are missing […] business windows don't look inviting. We need downtown to be cleaned up a lot."

(Community Survey 2023)

"I just want these empty buildings to be used. What's going to happen to the current and future old CVS? What about the old Cumbies building?"

"Replace the condemned buildings and help owners downtown update their exterior."

(Community Survey, 2023)

19 units renovated through CDBG Housing Rehabilitation



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



was to work toward repurposing vacant and underutilized properties to ensure their highest and best use.

QUALITY OF LIFE CAN BE SPENCER'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN ATTRACTING REMOTE WORKERS

Community input underscored that quality of life and preserving the town's rural character are central priorities for residents. Spencer is rich in natural assets and residents would like to see them preserved. Master Plan survey respondents indicated strong support for allocating resources toward improving recreational facilities around the town's natural areas, maintaining public amenities in good condition, and improving the appearance of the town center. Residents also expressed enthusiastic support for cultural programming and events that bring the community together, with many respondents (67%) noting their high satisfaction with the services of the Richard Sugden Library.

Access to natural resources and recreation can help Spencer attract remote workers, who tend to look for properties with ample land and locations with recreational opportunities. Amenity-driven migration, which includes primarily remote workers, typically brings a higher-earning demographic to small towns that were previously bypassed by the knowledge economy. This can present an opportunity for Spencer to invest strategically in its broadband infrastructure and allocate resources toward improving quality of life or outdoor recreation assets.

To further capitalize on this trend, Spencer can leverage its numerous natural and cultural resources, to incorporate ecotourism in its economic development strategies. Ecotourism can enhance and protect the natural and historic assets that make Spencer unique.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Such an approach involves not only promoting nature-based tourism, but also developing the hospitality industry related to it that would generate revenue and employment. As outlined in the Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources chapter, this means promoting recreational amenities such as the Howe State Park, St. Joseph's Abbey, the Spencer State Forest, and Sibley Farm, while also actively marketing the hospitality establishments that encourage visitors to spend money and lengthen their stay. The Spencer Fair, Thibault's Country Store, or Rapscallion Brewery are just a few of the establishments that attract visitors from Worcester and beyond.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"If you want to bring the community together there need to be good events, good communication about events and a good place to have an event [...] Our good new high school will hopefully be a location. Wy isn't town hall used more."

"Please look into an option to add permitted or nonpermitted ATV offroad riding. It will allow taxpayers to enjoy more of the scenery Spencer has to offer and encourage them to spend more time and money in and around the town."

"Library needs to be restored. It is a beautiful, historic building and a great asset to the town."

"Leave untouched rural areas alone."

(Community Survey, 2023)



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



Photo: Taylor Wentworth

04

Economic Development

Main Street
Spencer MA



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

OVERVIEW

Across smaller communities in Worcester County, the movement of population priced out of dense employment centers has brought an increase in median rents and housing values. Spencer could capitalize on this population shift, especially as many people continue to work remotely. and spur local demand for goods and services.

At community engagement events, and in responses to the 2023 community survey, Spencer residents have expressed the need to reduce the tax burden on the homeowners, who make up 89% of the town's tax levy.[1] Thus, the focus of this chapter is on identifying ways to attract more businesses in order to diversify the town's commercial and industrial tax base, while preserving Spencer's small-town character. The Economic Development chapter examines economic activity and employment trends in Spencer. It outlines strategies aimed at boosting employment and attracting investment, while encouraging development that is in harmony with Spencer's historic character.

Residents would like the Town to address the longstanding issue of distressed and vacant buildings in the town center.

GLOSSARY

Assessed Value:
dollar amount assigned by a public tax assessor for taxation purposes. It determines the property taxes owed by the owner and is typically a percentage of the property's fair market value, which is its estimated selling price in the open market.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF):
a public financing method that captures future tax revenue increases from property value appreciation in a designated area. This "increment" funds infrastructure and development projects without raising taxes. TIF promotes economic growth and revitalizes underdeveloped areas.

Opportunity Zone:
a designated economically distressed area where investments receive preferential tax treatment. These zones aim to spur economic development and job creation by incentivizing long-term investments with benefits like deferred capital gains taxes.

Median Household Income
is the middle point of income distribution for households, where half of households earn more and half earn less. It reflects the typical income of a household in a given area and is used to gauge economic well-being and compare income levels.

Trade Area:
the geographic region from which a business or service draws its customers. It is defined by factors such as travel time, population density, and competition, and helps businesses understand their market reach and plan their marketing and location strategies.

Industry Cluster:
geographic concentration of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and associated institutions in a particular field. These clusters boost productivity, innovation, and competitiveness by facilitating close collaboration, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange among the participating entities.

360
businesses registered in Spencer in 2024

50%
Over 50% of residents identified the town center as a desirable place for commercial development

$7,258
Spending on healthcare per household

KEY FINDINGS/ PRIORITIES

BECOME A REGIONAL COMMERCIAL HUB BY ATTRACTING AND RETAINING BUSINESSES

The Town of Spencer is home to nearly 360 businesses. These include large industrial employers, such as Flexcon, Dienes Corporation, Mercury Wire, and many other small- to medium-sized businesses in the sectors of retail, food, accommodations, professional services, and more.[2] In fact, almost 300 businesses had filed Doing Business as Certificates with the Town Clerk's Office as of 2017, an indication of a sizeable small business community.[3] Spencer's Flexcon is one of the top 75 largest employers in Central Massachusetts.[4] Residents identified expanding and supporting small business activity as an economic development priority for the Downtown. The COVID-19 pandemic and high turnover have stymied small business growth, especially in the downtown area, but community engagement results have underscored the demand for services and goods. Residents emphasized opportunities for food and beverage establishments, entertainment venues, and fitness centers. Lowering regulatory barriers and promoting the conditions to attract and retain businesses is critical to the town's economy and residents' quality of life.

POTENTIAL INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT SITES ARE LIMITED, BUT ROUTE 49 IS A UNIQUE LOCATION ADVANTAGE

Residents and stakeholders signaled support for developing Spencer's industrial landscape and bringing more manufacturing jobs to the community.[5] Despite a limited supply of available industrial land, Spencer still has several areas suitable for industrial development, such as the industrial district bordering East Brookfield near Route 49. Given its easy access to the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90), this industrial land presents a promising opportunity for development. However, the land is privately owned and currently lacks access to municipal water and sewer services. Addressing development obstacles like these in Spencer's limited commercial- and industrial-zoned sites is crucial to maximizing business growth while preserving the town's small-town character.

NEED FOR CONTINUED EFFORTS TO REVITALIZE THE TOWN CENTER AND COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

The COVID-19 pandemic and the continued decline of retail have brought challenges to Spencer's commercial areas. Within the town's main commercial corridor that runs along Route 9 and through the town center, commercial development has been stagnant, and many

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:*

"Supporting local businesses and restaurants should be a priority over chain stores."

"Love the small-town character, but need businesses to keep people from going outside of town for everything."

"Entertainment spaces, theaters, or live event space."

"Employment opportunities, light industry, manufacturing on RT 49 South."

"Spencer must focus on 'light industry' locations and building our small office/commercial base of business that isn't just consumer retail. Any assembly firms with agricultural, electronic, medical, software products packaging and testing would help build our economic base without adding burdens on municipal services."

(Community Survey, 2023)

*** Comments edited for clarity.**

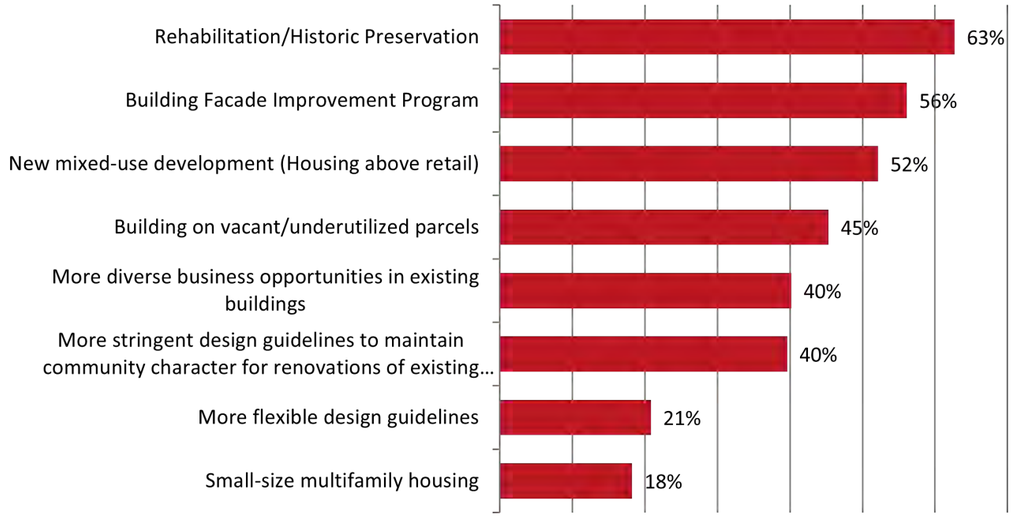


Figure 1: Spencer Master Plan Survey, Question 2: Which of the following options for future development would you support in the town center/Commercial areas? Source: Spencer Master Plan Survey, 2023.

Fiscal Year	Residential Levy	Commercial Levy	Industrial Levy	Personal Property Levy	Total Levy	RO as % of Total	CIP as % of Total
2014	10,606,510	803,284	542,922	331,048	12,283,763	86%	14%
2015	10,940,781	834,103	494,123	341,144	12,610,151	87%	13%
2016	11,284,397	872,902	524,540	360,803	13,042,643	87%	13%
2017	11,757,551	906,342	517,279	397,656	13,578,828	87%	13%
2018	12,022,822	876,669	549,011	680,287	14,128,789	85%	15%
2019	13,022,304	912,319	578,490	697,956	15,211,070	86%	14%
2020	13,976,036	920,654	591,151	666,134	16,153,975	87%	13%
2021	14,957,657	887,622	615,168	748,442	17,208,889	87%	13%
2022	15,573,944	815,923	576,956	783,778	17,750,602	88%	12%
2023	16,100,843	794,596	555,026	814,652	18,265,117	88%	12%
2024	16,996,793	826,906	556,786	714,554	19,095,038	89%	11%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Figure 2: Tax Levies by Class, 2014-2024. Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

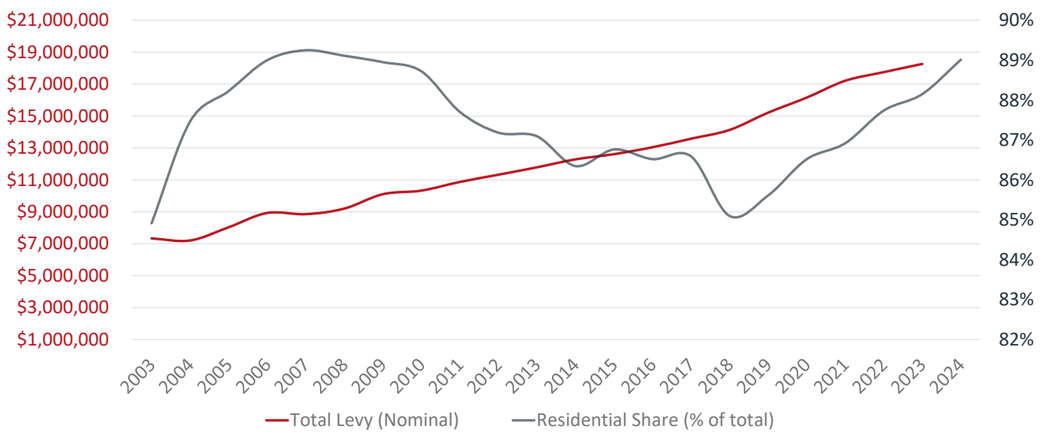


Figure 3: Total Tax Levy and Residential Levy Share. Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

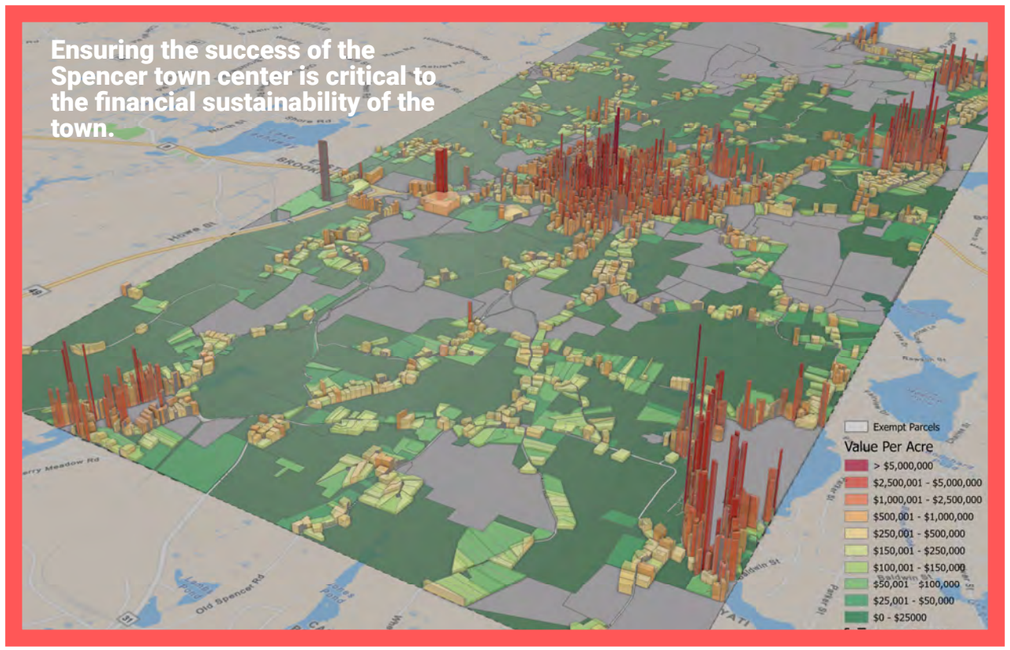


Figure 4:Assessed Value Per Acre Analysis. Source: CMRPC Calculations & MA Executive Office of Technology Services and Security.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"I would love to see a coffee shop (locally owned, not a big chain), and flexible, community gathering space."

"The Town must take control of look and feel on Main Street. Standards need to be raised."

(Community Survey, 2023)

existing buildings remain vacant or underutilized. Despite Spencer's many physical advantages, such as a dense population center, connected street grid, and diverse mix of uses, many residents lament that the town center continues to be a missed opportunity. Although the town center has been studied numerous times, implementation has been limited: distressed and vacant buildings remain, infrastructure outside of Main Street is in poor condition, and few new businesses have arrived. These elements have frustrated Spencer residents for many years, having been noted in the 2003 Master Plan, 2009 Town Center Revitalization Plan, 2013 Downtown Housing Study, and the 2015 Town Center Assessment and Re-Use Planning Project. Many residents are eager to see Town leadership take a proactive approach, addressing these issues with property owners and holding them more accountable for the impact their properties have on the vibrancy of the town center.

Many Spencer residents are ready to see changes, including new, appropriately scaled mixed-use/ live-work development in the town center, and rehabilitation and preservation of existing structures. Residents are clear that although the town center is an appropriate place for context-sensitive development, preservation of Spencer's small-town character is important.

Programs such as façade improvement grants and incentives are simple and effective first steps that the town can take to revitalize the town center. Improvements will require a combination of public and private actions. Public actions should include continued investment in streets, sidewalks, water and sewer infrastructure, wayfinding, beautification and landscaping, adjustments to zoning, regular public events, and relationship building with the town's business community. Private actions include investments by property owners and financial institutions.

DIVERSIFY SPENCER'S TAX BASE

A diverse tax base is an important piece of a fiscally and socially sustainable town. In Spencer, residential property taxes comprise 89% of local tax revenue.[6] The share of Spencer's tax levy made up of Commercial, Industrial, and Personal Property taxes has been trending downward over the past decade (Figures 2 & 3). This is consistent with similarly sized towns across the region and state but means that most of the property tax burden falls on residential property owners. Diversifying Spencer's tax base requires that the town work to attract new businesses, industry, and residents to the area. Although not directly connected to the interstate highway, Spencer's geographic location along Route

Much like we evaluate a vehicle's efficiency on a mile-per-gallon basis instead of a total mileage basis, land value per acre can help identify the most efficient and productive areas within a town. Higher value per acre implies that the property taxes generated from these places are more likely to cover the cost of the infrastructure that supports them. It also identifies the type of commercial, residential, and industrial development that will most efficiently raise revenue and diversify the tax base.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

9 and proximity to the Worcester Metropolitan Area means that it may be able to support a wider range of businesses, goods, and services. With over 12,000 vehicles traveling through the town each day, improvements to the town's commercial corridor could attract additional patrons and commuters to stop and shop.

The benefits of economic and tax base diversification are well documented. When a community's economic stability does not depend on a single industry or company, disruptive events like a recession have a smaller impact on the economy. When one industry takes a hit, others may remain well-positioned to maintain the tax base that supports schools, public safety, waste collection, and more. By diversifying local revenue sources and employment, Town leaders have more flexibility to invest in their community's prosperity without being forced to prioritize a particular employer or industry's retention. Although attracting large employers is an appealing option for small towns that have limited employment opportunities, reliance on these large employers can result in sudden economic shocks.

Property value is a critical component of Spencer's tax base. A fiscally strong town ensures that its land use is productive: that is, that the activity taking place on the town's land is creating enough wealth to support the infrastructure and services needed for that place to continue to exist and thrive. Although residents see the town center as a missed opportunity, it is providing a lot of economic value to the town, as shown in Figure 4. The characteristics that contribute to its productivity include smaller lot sizes with higher building coverage, as well as an overall mix of uses throughout the district—residential, commercial, and civic all within proximity. The analysis above indicates that there is a symbiosis between what is financially beneficial (the most productive) to the town and the types of commercial spaces and development/redevelopment that are most desired by town residents – smaller and medium-sized commercial spaces that cater to small local businesses. Given the density and form of the town center, investments there are likely to have the greatest impact and financial return.

Spencer must take a multifaceted approach to attract new businesses, industry, and residents. The Town must act to address the long-standing issue of distressed and vacant buildings, develop a robust network of business leaders, ensure permitting processes are simple and intuitive, and continue to invest in infrastructure along key commercial corridors, among many other strategies. No single action is likely to create change, but collectively, the goals and strategies outlined in this chapter will.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Spencer is a small town, but it needs to invite growth and economic development as well as invest in education.

(Community Survey, 2023)



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



Photo: Mark Shea,
Spencer Cable Access

GOALS AND STRATEGIES SUMMARY

GOAL 1

CREATE A LONG-TERM, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR RETAINING AND ATTRACTING BUSINESSES THAT CONTRIBUTES TO DIVERSIFYING SPENCER'S TAX BASE

OBJECTIVE: Mobilize the local business community to create a more active relationship between the Town and business-owners.

ACTION ITEM 1.1 ACTION ITEM 1.2 ACTION ITEM 1.3 ACTION ITEM 1.4 ACTION ITEM 1.5 ACTION ITEM 1.6

OBJECTIVE: Streamline local permitting and licensing process to decrease time and cost to applicants.

ACTION ITEM 1.7 ACTION ITEM 1.8 ACTION ITEM 1.9

OBJECTIVE: Take an active role in identifying distressed and vacant buildings and putting them back into productive use.

ACTION ITEM 1.10 ACTION ITEM1.11 ACTION ITEM1.12

GOAL 2

CREATE A MORE VIBRANT, SUSTAINABLE, AND LIVABLE TOWN CENTER THAT WILL FOSTER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES.

OBJECTIVE: Update the zoning bylaw to accommodate infill, adaptive reuse, and redevelopment in the town center.

ACTION ITEM 2.1 ACTION ITEM 2.2

OBJECTIVE: Reduce storefront vacancies by bringing business opportunities to existing commercial and mixed-use buildings.

ACTION ITEM 2.3 ACTION ITEM 2.4 ACTION ITEM 2.5 ACTION ITEM 2.6 ACTION ITEM 2.7

OBJECTIVE: Create public gathering areas by activating underutilized spaces around the town center

ACTION ITEM 2.8 ACTION ITEM 2.9

OBJECTIVE: Continue to implement physical improvements in the town's commercial areas.

ACTION ITEM 2.10 ACTION ITEM 2.11

GOAL 3

CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE THE CREATION OF ROBUST TRADE AREAS IN SPENCER'S COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS TO SUPPORT SERVICES AND RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES

OBJECTIVE: Increase commercial development in existing commercial areas such as the west and east ends of Route 9 and the town center area.

ACTION ITEM 3.1 ACTION ITEM 3.2

GOAL 4

EXPAND CAPACITY TO SUPPORT AND FACILITATE THE CREATION OF EMPLOYMENT.

OBJECTIVE: Identify sites that could support development for business and industry

ACTION ITEM 4.1 ACTION ITEM 4.2 ACTION ITEM 4.3

OBJECTIVE: Encourage the development of a strong Ecotourism industry

ACTION ITEM 4.4

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

GOAL 1

CREATE A LONG-TERM, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR RETAINING AND ATTRACTING BUSINESSES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO DIVERSIFYING SPENCER'S TAX BASE AND INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

Of Spencer's population of 10,102 persons over the age of sixteen, 6,614 are in the town's labor force,[7] representing a labor force participation rate of 65%, slightly below the state and Worcester County labor force participation rates of 67%.[8] Spencer's labor force participation is particularly low amongst the youngest age group (16–19-year-olds), at 34%, 10 percentage points lower than the Worcester County population. Labor force participation among 16–19-year-olds in Spencer has declined by 26 percentage points since 2012, when it was 60%. This may indicate limited and decreasing employment opportunities in industries that typically employ a younger age demographic, such as retail, and/or social shifts in employment expectations for younger workers.

Aligned with the state and county, Spencer's labor force participation is also higher among those with education beyond high school; labor force participation sits at 93% for those with some college education or an associate's degree and 94% for those with a bachelor's degree. Unemployment is lowest between the ages of 25 and 54, ranging from 5% to less than 1%. Among those with a bachelor's degree unemployment sits at 3%.

Jobs and Employment

Like many smaller towns in Central Massachusetts, many of Spencer's residents leave the town for work.[9] In fact, each day, over 5,700 of the town's residents commute outside of the town for work. In contrast, of the 2,800+ employees in Spencer, only 603 are residents of the town. This net-negative inflow-outflow of workers is common in towns with a limited range of employment options, but it also presents an opportunity for Spencer to leverage its robust labor force and attract additional employers.

Of the residents who leave Spencer for work, Worcester and Boston are the two largest destinations (1360 and 339 residents respectively). The towns surrounding Spencer comprise an equally large share of Spencer residents' employment locations. The residents leaving Spencer for work are also employed in a wider range of jobs than are available in Spencer. Specifically, residents in the health care; education; and professional services, science, and tech industries are more likely to commute outside of Spencer for work. Although it may be difficult for Spencer to attract employers in some of these industries, there could be opportunities to meet more resident's employment needs in other industries, including retail, finance and insurance, and construction.

OBJECTIVE:

Mobilize the local business community to create a more active relationship between the Town and business owners.

In Spencer, staff turnover and the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in a weakening of the relationship between local businesses and Town staff and boards. Strengthening these bonds should be a top economic development priority for the Town. A strong working relationship between local government and its business community is crucial to commercial success. By developing strong communication channels and responsive policymaking practices, Spencer can support business growth and development. Businesses, in turn, can deliver jobs, tax revenue, and quality of life to residents.

ACTION ITEM 1.1

Reactivate the Economic Development Committee.

An Economic Development Committee (EDC) is a non-regulatory body tasked with stimulating local economic activity. The Town of Spencer's EDC was last active in 2020. By providing business owners, local officials, and residents with a forum to interact,

	Spencer					Massachusetts		Worcester County	
Age	**Pop**	**Labor Force**	**Employed**	**Labor Force Participation**	**Unemployment Rate**	**Labor Force Participation**	**Unemployment Rate**	**Labor Force Participation**	**Unemployment Rate**
16 to 19 years	431	148	108	34%	27%	41%	15%	44%	14%
20 to 24 years	508	506	465	100%	8%	75%	9%	77%	11%
25 to 29 years	527	501	482	95%	4%	87%	6%	85%	6%
30 to 34 years	591	561	534	95%	5%	87%	4%	85%	5%
35 to 44 years	1,715	1645	1612	96%	2%	87%	4%	85%	5%
45 to 54 years	1,239	1092	1092	88%	0%	85%	4%	85%	4%
55 to 59 years	922	771	715	84%	7%	79%	4%	79%	4%
60 to 64 years	1,395	808	698	58%	14%	67%	4%	65%	4%
65 to 74 years	1,735	507	424	29%	16%	34%	5%	31%	5%
75 years and over	1,039	78	78	8%	0%	8%	4%	7%	5%
Education (Over 25 Years)	**Pop**	**Labor Force**	**Employed**	**Labor Force Participation**	**Unemployment Rate**	**Labor Force Participation**	**Unemployment Rate**	**Labor Force Participation**	**Unemployment Rate**
Less than high school graduate*	316	228	228	72%	0%	63%	10%	60%	10%
High school graduate (incl equivalency)	2,653	1,950	1,852	74%	5%	76%	6%	76%	7%
Some college or associate's degree	1,698	1,577	1,484	93%	6%	82%	5%	82%	5%
Bachelor's degree or higher	1,722	1,620	1,565	94%	3%	89%	3%	89%	3%

Figure 5: 2022 Labor Force Participation and Unemployment by Age Group and Education. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table S2301.
*** Total labor force with less than high school is a very small portion of the population in 2022 with a high margin of error – the increase in labor force between 2012-2022 is not statistically significant.**

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Incentives to new businesses has worked in other towns and should be explored especially to provide good local work."

(Community Survey, 2023)

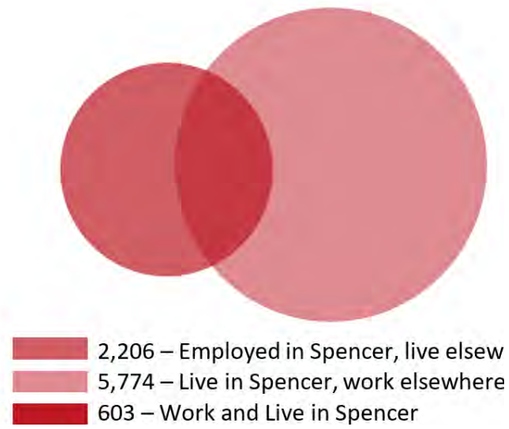
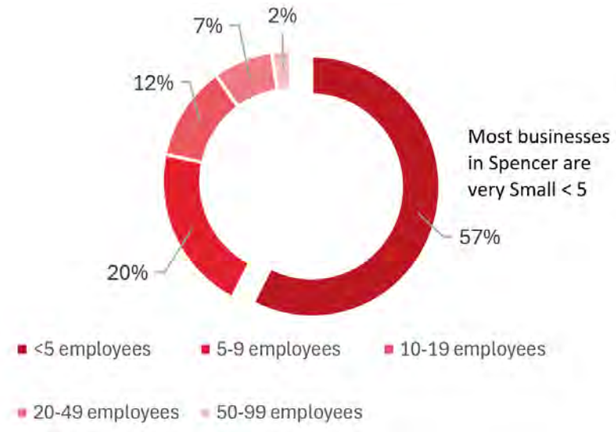


Figure 6: Spencer Employment Inflow-Outflow 2021. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics.



Figure 7: Total Jobs by NAICS Sector and Living/Working Location. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics.



Spencer is home to many small businesses that could benefit from involvement with a chamber of commerce or small business association.
Note: Employers with > 99 employees not included in chart.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 County Business Patterns.

Figure 8: Spencer Businesses Categorized by Number of Employees. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics.

a revitalized EDC would deliver meaningful benefits to Spencer. To begin, an EDC could steward the implementation of the Town's economic development goals. This could take the form of tracking goal progress and collaborating with local stakeholders to distribute responsibility and maximize resources. In Spencer, many studies have been conducted over the years with recommendations to revitalize the town center, but lack of consistency in implementation and staff turnover has meant that some recommendations have not been implemented, nor regularly tracked. The new Spencer EDC could review these studies alongside the master plan and chart a path for addressing unrealized goals. Another area where an EDC would prove valuable is outreach to businesses and developers. The EDC could conduct regular outreach to these groups on behalf of the Town to close communication and policy gaps, something critical to attracting new business interests to the community. EDC members could also offer to meet one-on-one with new business or property owners to help familiarize them with Town bylaws and zoning regulations. Finally, the EDC could take on an active role in marketing. The EDC could develop marketing materials, social media pages, and even events to promote Spencer's businesses.

ACTION ITEM 1.2

Engage with the Chamber of Commerce of Central Mass South to support business development and expansion.

While Spencer lacks its own dedicated business association, it is covered by the Central Mass South Chamber of Commerce ("The Chamber"). Based In Sturbridge,

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"I live in the town center area and very much appreciate the accessibility of the businesses in this area. I would love to see more activity-based businesses or spaces in town, such as theater/ music spaces, coffee shops, art studios, museums, or other indoor spaces that offer a destination."

(Community Survey, 2023)



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



the Chamber serves Spencer and several other neighboring municipalities. The Town of Spencer and the local business community should engage with the Chamber to better understand how each group can complement the other's efforts to support business development and expansion in Spencer. Such discussions could open the door for collaboration and innovation in the areas of events, grants, or other programs. A stronger working relationship with the Chamber would also help guide municipal policymaking. The Chamber could provide the Town with additional feedback from businesses and insights into what policies have worked in other municipalities.

"When thinking about Spencer and how it compares to other towns I visit, I found that what draws me to visit other towns is the recreation or activities offered there, even if it is as simple as visiting a coffee shop. I think encouraging these kinds of spaces would not only keep residents in town to support local businesses."

(Community Survey, 2023)

ACTION ITEM 1.3

Create a Business and Retail Recruitment marketing page geared toward developers, retail, and restaurant businesses.

Developers and business entrepreneurs weigh many factors when deciding where to locate their next projects. Considerations include the availability of commercial land, the quality of municipal infrastructure, proximity to major transportation routes, and much more. The Town of Spencer can better position itself to attract business interests in sectors like the restaurant and retail industries by promoting the assets that the town has to offer on a dedicated marketing website or webpage. The website could include valuable information designed to save prospective developers and businesses time and energy. For example, it could feature commercial properties for sale or lease, sewer and water maps, development limitations imposed by zoning, and economic data.

ACTION ITEM 1.4

Establish a small business association to facilitate connections and mutual support among local businesses.

Operating a small business is often challenging. To strengthen the fabric of Spencer's small business community, Spencer business owners should consider forming a small business association. An association would bring several benefits to the local business community and the Town alike. First, an association would provide a forum for business owners to learn from one another and provide mutual support. This could help resolve high turnover among local small businesses, something a downtown business owner observed.

A small business association would also offer businesses a stronger voice in local governance and community affairs. As Spencer strives to diversify its tax base and advance its economic goals, businesses will be a valuable source of feedback. Lastly, a small business association could play an active role in organizing events and other promotional campaigns. In this way, it could complement the important contributions that the Spencer Exchange Club already makes to the community, such as local events, fundraisers, and development projects such as parks and the basketball court near the former Congregational Church site. Survey respondents and workshop participants indicated a desire for more town events, with more than 60% of respondents indicating they felt neutral, somewhat dissatisfied, or dissatisfied toward town events.[10] A Spencer small business association could help fill this void.

ACTION ITEM 1.5

Provide incentives, such as local tax increment financing (TIF), to stimulate private investment and economic development.

Local TIF can increase commercial, industrial, and mixed-use development in Spencer. TIF programs in Massachusetts come in two forms. First, municipalities may grant property owners tax exemptions on property value increases resulting from incentivized development projects. TIF tax exemptions could provide a way for Spencer to attract new businesses or incentivize current businesses to expand their operations. For example, the nearby Town of Oxford awarded a TIF to IPG Photonics in 2011 to expand the company's headquarters there.[11] TIFs could also encourage existing property owners to improve their buildings. Specifically, the Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing Exemption (UCH-TIF) could be applied to incentivize the construction and/or renovation of housing and mixed-use developments in the downtown area. Another type of TIF, known as District Improvement Financing (DIF), could be used to help pay for public infrastructure improvements necessary to enable large-scale private development projects. For instance, Spencer could explore the feasibility of a DIF program to expand water and sewer access on Route 9 west, should a private business interest seek to develop industrial land there.

In 2018, the Spencer town center was designated as an Opportunity Zone.[12] No private investments have been made since the Opportunity Zone was established, suggesting that a broader package of tax incentives may be needed to cover the gap financing needed to draw private investment in the downtown.

"Lots of small businesses start up but few stay for long. Many unsuccessful owners seem to lack a thorough business plan and/or background in business."

(Community workshop, 2023, Observation from business owner in downtown Spencer)

For example, for middle-income or affordable housing, a combination of grant programs and incentives is likely needed to close the gap between the costs of development and the rents that would be affordable to low- to moderate-income households.

OBJECTIVE:

Streamline local permitting and licensing process to decrease time and cost to applicants.

Acquiring local permits and licenses can be time-consuming for applicants. This is especially true for small businesses and first-time property owners, who may not be familiar with permit processes. With competition among towns to attract and retain businesses, perceptions around local permitting and licensing practices can make a



WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Spencer needs to get light commercial/ industry and various assembly/ service segments established to counter inevitable cyclical retail slumps and offer economic stability and jobs to retain our population. beyond the housing."

(Community Survey, 2023)

significant difference. Developers and business owners are less likely to make investments in communities they perceive to have burdensome permitting procedures. Therefore, as Spencer aims to attract new businesses and encourage existing property owners to reinvest in the community, it should take steps to simplify and clarify its permitting and licensing processes.

ACTION ITEM 1.6

Conduct yearly permit process and fee comparison reviews.

Periodically evaluating permit processes and fees is important to improving the predictability, efficiency, and competitiveness of any town's regulatory environment. An annual review of permitting processes will help Spencer identify systemic inefficiencies impacting town government. To the credit of Spencer's municipal staff, the town departments already conduct annual permit and fee reviews. The Town should evaluate these processes to ensure they adequately consider stakeholder feedback and incorporate best practices that enhance applicants' experience. A range of best practices can be found in the "Best Practices Model to Streamlined Local Permitting," published by the Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA).[13] The Town should also ensure that it compares its permit, license, and inspection fees against those of neighboring towns and communities with similar demographic profiles to keep fees fair and competitive.

ACTION ITEM 1.7

Continue to implement the 8 modules of online permitting to streamline processes and workflows.

The Town of Spencer is currently in the process of developing a comprehensive e-permitting system. The system will consist of eight modules of online permitting, one for each of the following permitting categories: Building, Police, Conservation, Board of Health, Highway, Fire, and Zoning Board of Appeals. Once complete, the system will allow applicants to view a property's entire permit history and/or status across all eight modules on a single platform, thus saving applicants valuable time and energy. By using the system to check on the status of applicants' permits, Town staff will also be better able to direct them to the next steps in the process. As Spencer's e-permitting system is rolled out, staff should be prepared to address applicant questions and concerns. Consideration should be given to releasing a guide to online permitting to ensure that residents of all ages and digital literacy levels can access the system and enjoy its benefits.

ACTION ITEM 1.8

Create a Permitting Guidebook to clarify the permitting process for applicants.

Local permitting processes can be intimidating for new applicants. To familiarize applicants (and new Town staff) with the permitting process, the Town should create a guidebook to local permitting. The guidebook should contain practical information such as contact information for relevant Town boards and departments and fee schedules, step-by-step processes, and anticipated timeframes for each permit. Several communities near or adjacent to Spencer already have permitting guidebooks, including Charlton and Sturbridge. Developing a permitting guidebook would position Spencer to compete with these and other communities for development projects and new businesses.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

ACTION ITEM 1.9

Enforce the Town's vacant building registration bylaw to keep an up-to-date inventory of vacant commercial/ industrial properties.

In 2018, the Town of Spencer passed a vacant building registration bylaw that requires property owners to register a vacant building with the Town's Building Inspector. To date, few property owners have come forward to report vacancies and the Town has not widely enforced the bylaw. Enforcing the bylaw would provide the Town with a more extensive understanding of vacant commercial and industrial properties in the community. The Town could use this information to make more informed decisions about where to devote its limited time and resources. At present, a significant obstacle to the enforcement of the bylaw is staff capacity. The Spencer Building and Inspectional Services Departments currently consist of a full-time Building Inspector/ Zoning Officer, a Board of Health Agent, several part-time inspectors, and three clerks. At this staffing capacity, the department does not have time available to proactively identify and investigate properties for vacancy and other code violations. Hiring a part-time or full-time code enforcement officer could remedy this challenge. To do so, the Town should evaluate grant opportunities and entertain intermunicipal agreements with neighboring communities.

OBJECTIVE:

Take an active role in identifying distressed and vacant buildings and putting them back into productive use.

Spencer faces a particular challenge when it comes to vacant and distressed buildings. The Town's vacant building inventory currently lists 13 vacant buildings, but the real number is likely higher, according to Town staff and residents. Possible vacant buildings not on the inventory can be found on the east end of Route 9, Meadow Road, Valley Street, and Temple Street. Furthermore, the inventory does not include distressed or dilapidated buildings where tenants still reside. These buildings also pose an issue, as evidenced by the Town's 2015 Property Assessment and Re-Use Planning Project. The Assessment surveyed 50 key properties in the town center and found that 6 may require demolition and 14 need serious renovation. Workshop participants and survey respondents also echoed concerns about the condition of properties in the downtown area. Putting vacant and/or distressed properties back into productive use should be a top economic development priority for the Town.

ACTION ITEM 1.10

Proactively work with distressed property owners to either sell properties to productive users or renovate the properties so that they can be used.

According to Town staff, legal mechanisms to address vacant and distressed properties, such as tax title and receivership, can be prohibitively expensive. An alternative approach that Spencer can take to put properties back into productive is offering support and incentives to property owners.

This should begin with Town staff meeting one-on-one with owners to identify their needs and concerns. If a property owner is interested in selling, the Town can connect them with prospective buyers or real estate brokers. The Town could also conditionally waive fees or liens associated with building code violations and/or nuisance abatement actions for owners facing financial hardship. Similar incentives could be deployed to promote the rehabilitation of distressed and vacant properties. To lower the cost of construction for distressed property owners, the Town could elect to waive fees for construction-related permits.

Grant opportunities present another way to incentivize property owners to reinvest in their real estate assets. Since FY2012, 19 properties in Spencer have been rehabilitated using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.[14] The funds were awarded to the Town of Spencer by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the Town distributed them to local property owners in the form of interest-free loans. Distressed properties in downtown Spencer may also be a candidate for MassDevelopment's

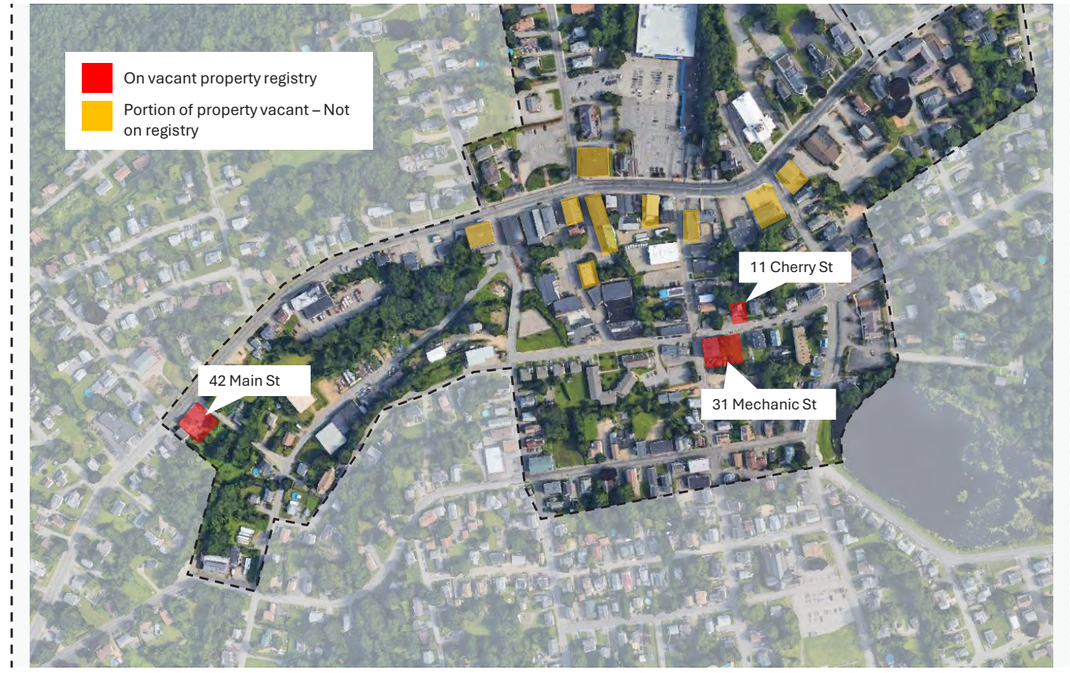


Figure 9: Vacant and underutilized properties. Source: Spencer Vacant property Register, Town of Spencer,

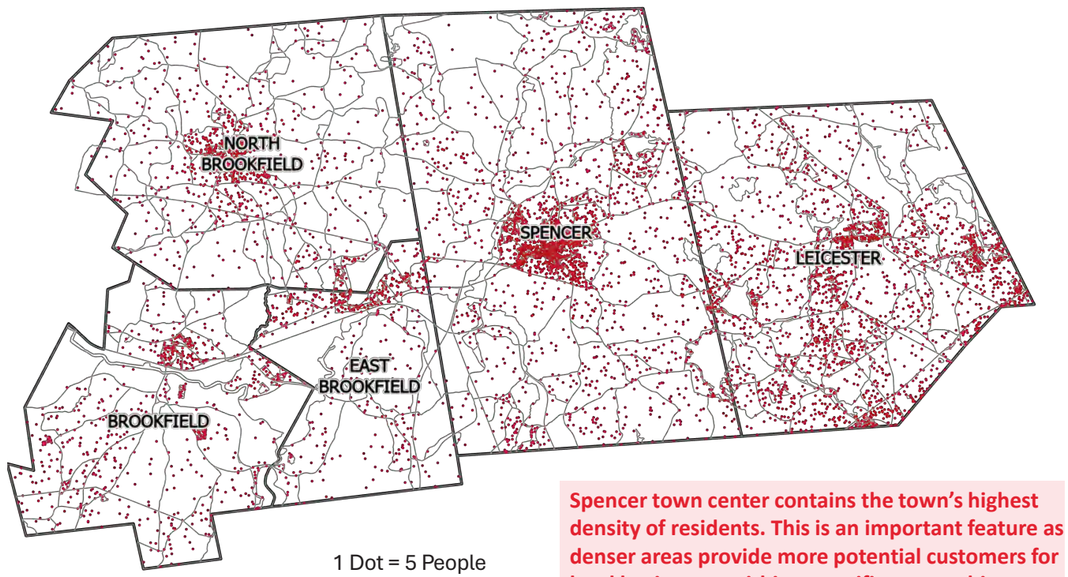


Figure 10: Population Density by Census Block Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census – Census Blocks.

Underutilized Properties Program. Some of the program's goals include "eliminating blight" and "supporting the economic vitality of downtowns and town centers." Spencer should continue to track grant opportunities like these to rehabilitate commercial and mixed-use properties in town.

ACTION ITEM 1.11

Coordinate with Building and Fire Departments to assess the condition and safety concerns of buildings and take action to protect the public by having them rehabilitated or demolished.

Several municipal departments and boards play a role in upholding the safety and code compliance of buildings in Spencer. The Building Department and the Fire Department are responsible for inspections and enforcement of the building code and fire code respectively. The Board of Selectmen and the Board of Health are also empowered to address public nuisances, such as burnt, dilapidated, or dangerous buildings. These departments should coordinate closely to monitor properties of concern and take appropriate action to address threats to public health and safety. Depending on the circumstance, this may entail boarding up, repairing, or demolishing unsafe buildings. A more extensive vacant property inventory would be a valuable resource as these departments and boards go about proactively identifying at-risk structures.

GOAL 2

CREATE A MORE VIBRANT, SUSTAINABLE, AND LIVABLE TOWN CENTER THAT WILL FOSTER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES.

Anatomy of a Strong Town Center

Town centers are essential to vibrant communities. The key elements needed for a town center are density, a mix of land uses, walkability, circulation, connectivity, and parking. Successful town centers leverage these elements to create harmony between buildings and open space, vehicles and pedestrians, work and leisure, and commercial and residential uses.

Spencer town center has the characteristics of a typical, traditional New England town. It has a mixed-use commercial core (Figure 14) that contains key civic structures as well as many of the shops and services required for everyday living. Located along Main Street and the connecting streets are a supermarket, a pharmacy, restaurants, banks, a variety of services, small offices, and the library. A large number of residents live within walking distance of the town center (Figure 10), which has housing that ranges from multistory apartment buildings to single-family homes. The town's street network is well-connected, providing multiple route choices and enabling pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles to easily navigate the town and access businesses and amenities.

Spencer has an opportunity to build on these assets and create a framework that elevates the pedestrian experience through better public spaces, improved infrastructure, well-designed

	Primary Town Center Zone	By-right Commercial Uses	Min Lot Size (Sq Ft)	Max Height	Max Lot Coverage	Front Setback	Side Setback	Rear Setback
Spencer	**TC**	**Many**	**None**	**40 ft**	**60%**	**None**	**10 ft**	**10 ft**
Leicester	CB	Very Few	15,000 +	35 ft	30%	10 ft	10 ft	25 ft
East Brookfield	C	Many	30,000	50 ft	50%	20 ft	20 ft	10 ft
Brookfield	BB, BA	Many	60,000/ 35,000	35 ft	n/a	75 ft	25/15 ft	25/15 ft
North Brookfield	BC	Many	None	40 ft	50%	None	10 ft	30 ft

Figure 12: Zoning Comparison Across Town Centers (Spencer & Neighbors). Source: Town of Spencer, Leicester, East Brookfield, Brookfield, and North Brookfield Note: Predominant Zoning category for each town center.

parking schemes, beautification, wayfinding strategies, and effective management plans.

OBJECTIVE:

Update the zoning bylaws to accommodate infill, adaptive reuse, and redevelopment in the town center.

ACTION ITEM 2.1

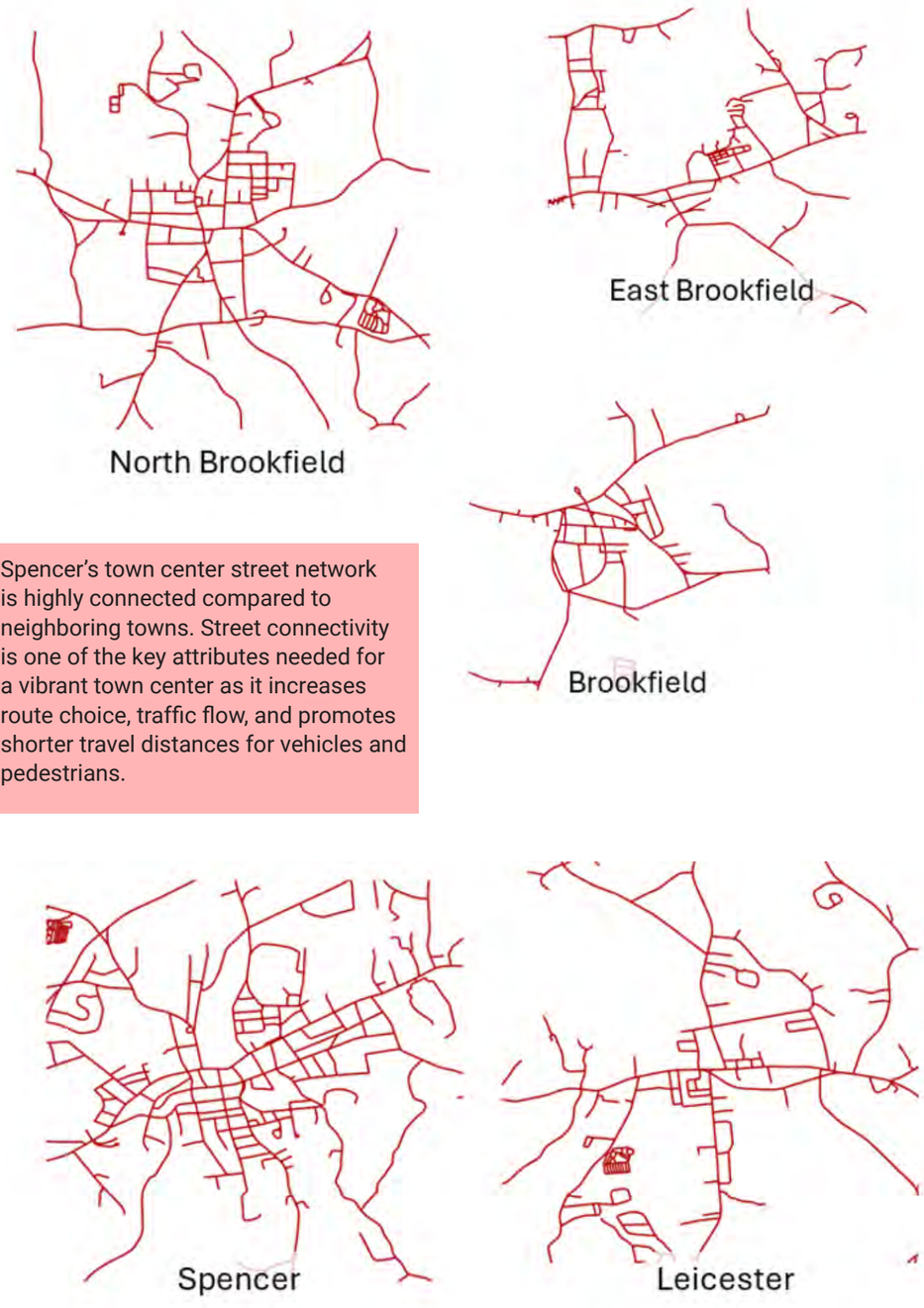
Amend the Town's zoning bylaws to increase simplicity and flexibility for desired small businesses and residential and infill development.

Zoning and other land use regulations are a critical factor in business location decisions. Unlike many other small towns in central Massachusetts, Spencer's zoning bylaws have remained conducive to higher density, walkable, mixed-use development– key attributes that support local businesses. Spencer's town center zoning district supports a wide range of compatible use "by right" (meaning no special permits are required), and its dimensional standards are less restrictive than those of neighboring towns. While Spencer's regulations have remained relatively flexible, the town's zoning is not without barriers to economic development. The Town should consider amending its regulations to ensure that the types of businesses and commercial and residential development that the town wants are easy to achieve.

Allowed uses: Use tables have the inherent challenge of reflecting predominant uses at a particular point in time. As industries and ways of life evolve, use tables can lag and create barriers to new compatible uses. For example, a small-scale manufacturer of 3-D printed components may be considered "manufacturing" under Spencer's zoning bylaw, requiring a special permit to operate in the town center even though the use is very different from the large, noxious production processes that the district intends to regulate. Spencer should review



Figure 11: Vacant storeforents on Main St. Source: CMRPC Visual Survey, 2023.



Spencer's town center street network is highly connected compared to neighboring towns. Street connectivity is one of the key attributes needed for a vibrant town center as it increases route choice, traffic flow, and promotes shorter travel distances for vehicles and pedestrians.

Figure 13: Town of Spencer and neighboring communities street network. Source: CMRPC.

the use table and amend it where appropriate to include new uses compatible with residents' vision for town center.

Special permit requirements: Obtaining a special permit can be time-consuming, financially burdensome, and act as a deterrent to developing or redeveloping property. Small businesses, in particular, can lack the money and expertise to perform the studies and generate the information required for special permit approval. There may be opportunities for Spencer to shorten and simplify the special permit process to encourage and enable more private investment in buildings in the town center. There may also be opportunities to release certain uses from the special permit process.

Parking requirements: Although parking is a critical component of successful businesses, Spencer's parking requirements may be overly burdensome and add costs to potential redevelopment in the town center. The Spencer 2020 parking study found that across various categories, the Town's parking requirements exceeded anticipated peak parking demand. The impact of such requirements can be seen in the town center where the vast majority of the Price Chopper property is taken up by underutilized parking (2020 parking study). Spencer can make redevelopment more financially viable through the reduction or elimination of parking requirements in the town center, and allowing for non-conforming properties to be redeveloped without the need to meet current parking requirements (it is currently a discretionary decision by the permitting authority).

Barriers to adaptive reuse: Adaptive reuse is the practice of taking an existing building and adapting it for a new use. Zoning bylaws often contain barriers to adaptive reuse, such as special permits, parking and loading requirements, setbacks, and other dimensional standards. Spencer should consider ways to promote and incentivize adaptive reuse through its zoning bylaw regulations. This could include creating a special overlay or regulations that enable owners to re-use or redevelop non-conforming properties or structures without the need to get a special permit or variance.

Through flexible zoning and good street connectivity, Spencer's town center has evolved into an active, mixed-use district. Although lack of public and private investment over the years has created a challenging environment for revitalization, the existing urban form is an asset and an opportunity that the town can leverage. Through investment, compatible zoning, marketing, and incentives, the town center can once again be the lifeblood of the community.

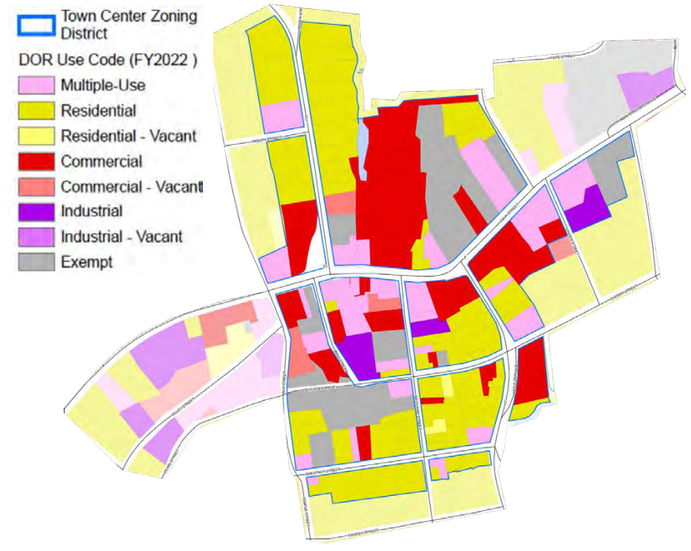


Figure 14: Town of Spencer, existing land use downtown. Source: CMRPC.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

With limited land for large-scale industry and employers, getting the Zoning right for small businesses in the town center is important. Although many elements of the Town's zoning bylaws are flexible, and Spencer previously amended the bylaw for greater flexibility, further audits may reveal barriers to small businesses, contributing to storefront vacancies. Spencer's town center zoning should continue to support multi-story, pedestrian-oriented development, a mix of small and large commercial spaces, and historic preservation. This type of varied building stock offers the best habitat for local businesses; research has found that areas with a range of building types and ages have more startups per square foot.

ACTION ITEM 2.2

Explore the use of incentives to promote active ground floor uses for tenant spaces along Main St, or within the town center.

Spencer residents value the traditional walkable form of the town center, characterized by mixed-use buildings with activity (often retail or services) on the ground floor. Ensuring that future development maintains this pattern may require the Town to provide incentives in the form of density bonuses or relaxed site design standards. For example, under current zoning, the maximum height in the TC zone is 40ft or 3 to 4 stories. A density bonus that allows for an additional story in exchange for commercial space on the ground floor, may make a project financially viable or lucrative for a developer.

OBJECTIVE:

Reduce storefront vacancies by bringing business opportunities to existing commercial and mixed-use buildings.

Spencer residents acknowledge that the town center suffers from vacant, unkempt, and underutilized buildings along Main St. This stretch of road represents the main commercial corridor in town, and many residents want to see new businesses and activity but fear that current conditions are insufficient to attract new tenants.[15] Storefront vacancies are a symptom of historically limited public and private investment and absentee property owners. They may also be a signal to potential businesses that Spencer is tough to do business in or lacks suitable usable space.

Spencer has commissioned studies and created inventories of vacant and Town-owned properties. Most recently, the 2015 Property Assessment and Re-Use Planning Project inventoried the current conditions of 50 key properties in the town center. The assessment found that 6 buildings may require demolition, 14 need serious renovation, 36 need minor improvements, and 9 need no action. Two of the examined properties were vacant lots available for redevelopment. Another 22 buildings were identified as needing façade improvements.

This type of information can be valuable to businesses and developers looking for properties and development opportunities. Making it readily available in an accessible format can save potential businesses and developers money in the search and inspection process. To reduce storefront vacancies, Spencer should update the 2015 inventory and make the information available within its GIS portal, associating the information with parcel property information. Although reports are useful to Town staff, businesses and developers are often less willing to sift through lengthy documents. Spencer should also ensure that it is marketing these efforts and networking with the local and regional business interests. One of the key opportunities here is to make information about properties in the town as easily accessible as possible.

ACTION ITEM 2.3

Continue to access and expand opportunities for grant funding for physical improvement

Investing in physical improvements is one of the best signals Spencer can send to potential businesses. By making the town center a desirable destination, the town can indicate that it is ready to support new businesses. Since its last Master Plan, Spencer has made substantial investments in the town center through Town and grant-funded projects, particularly the Main Street Sidewalk & Roadway Improvement Project.

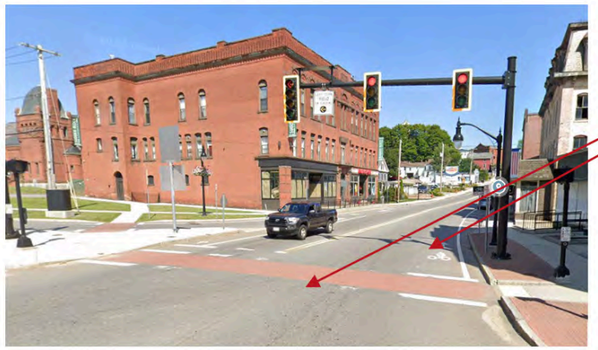
An often overlooked element of physical improvements is the need for maintenance. Although much of the infrastructure improvements



Example of traditional mixed-use building typology in Spencer with an active ground floor. This building type would be difficult if not impossible to build under Spencer's zoning



2018 – Shortly after completion
- Crisp lines
- Clearly delineated bike land



2023 – 5 Years after completion
- Lines faded
- Bike lane no longer identifiable

Source (Top and Bottom Images): Google Maps, All Rights Reserved.

Category	2023 Consumer Spending	2028 Forecasted Demand	Projected Spending Growth
Grocery (Food at home)	$33,460,958	$39,585,268	$6,124,310
Home (Maintenance and Remodeling)	$23,031,278	$27,245,929	$4,214,651
Entertainment & Recreation	$18,788,899	$22,227,491	$3,438,592
Food Away from Home	$17,834,600	$21,098,646	$3,264,046
Gasoline and Motor Oil	$11,997,634	$14,190,264	$2,192,630
Apparel and Services	$10,663,883	$12,616,368	$1,952,485
Vehicle Maintenance and Repairs	$6,390,221	$7,558,894	$1,168,673
Household Furnishings (Furniture, Rugs, Décor, Houesware)	$5,314,562	$6,287,030	$972,468
Housekeeping Supplies	$4,566,525	$5,401,993	$835,468
Lawn and Garden	$3,441,950	$4,071,899	$629,949
Alcoholic Beverages	$3,374,296	$3,992,425	$618,129
Health (OTC Drugs, Prescription Drugs, Eyewear)	$3,228,079	$3,817,893	$589,814
Household Appliances (small and large)	$2,948,389	$3,487,699	$539,310
Personal Care Products (18)	$2,676,295	$3,166,096	$489,801
Child Care	$2,631,165	$3,113,665	$482,500
Smoking Products	$2,132,901	$2,522,278	$389,377
Computer (Hardware, Software, Accessories)	$1,439,180	$1,702,774	$263,594
School Books and Supplies (19)	$627,009	$741,710	$114,701
Moving/Storage/Freight Express	$432,346	$511,483	$79,137

Figure 15: Consumer Spending and Forecast Spending by Retail Area. Source: ESRI Business Analyst, Consumer Spending Forecasts.

in the town center were recently completed, many of the street lines are already worn and faded, and some of the brick crosswalks are beginning to crack. Maintaining these features can be a low-cost but effective way to improve the town center's overall aesthetic.

Additional improvements to the town center infrastructure, including roadway and sidewalk improvements on Main Street, and stormwater, water and sewer upgrades, are planned or underway. Spencer should continue to seek funding to implement the projects outlined in the "Complete Streets Tier II Priorities and Sidewalk Betterment" and ADA Transition Plans.

Other physical improvements to the town center can include lower-cost items, such as planters, hanging baskets, wayfinding, gateway, and town-branded signage. These elements can add to the welcoming feel of a town center and encourage people to linger and explore the main street. The 2019 Spencer Gateway plan identifies six opportunities for improved gateway signage. Spencer should further develop wayfinding and beautification plans and project priorities for the town center that can be funded through future grant opportunities.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Spencer must focus on "light industry" locations and building our small office/ commercial base of business that isn't just consumer retail."

(Community Survey, 2023)

ACTION ITEM 2.4

Identify public art opportunities throughout the town center.

Enhancing the identity and character of Spencer through public art is another opportunity to support economic development in the town center. Public art can benefit businesses and commercial enterprises by making locations more attractive to patrons and workers. For example, a survey by America for the Arts identified that 70 percent of Americans believe that the "arts improve the image and identity" of their community. Cities Speak, a part of the National League of Cities, suggests that there are several additional ways that the arts can boost local economies. These include enhancing public safety and increasing foot traffic.

Public art can consist of many mediums, including murals, statues, monuments, sculptures, and interactive art. Spencer should identify key locations where public art could add vibrancy to the town center and work with local artists and property owners to bring projects to fruition. Another avenue could include working with local schools and art teachers to facilitate student-created artwork. The Spencer Cultural Council and the Massassoit Guild could be valuable partners in working with local artists and school classes to create public art.

ACTION ITEM 2.5

Attract a diverse retail mix by connecting property and business owners.

Within key retail sectors, consumer spending among Spencer residents is strong and anticipated to grow over the next five years. The challenge for the Town will be identifying the types of retail and business that can be sustained by local consumer demand. Online retail continues to limit local brick and mortar retail demand and may continue to create challenges as spencer works to attract new businesses to fill vacant properties. A retail gap analysis could help the Town identify the kinds of retail establishments that could meet excess or unmet local demand.

ACTION ITEM 2.6

Draw foot traffic to the town center by encouraging and organizing events in outdoor gathering areas.

A successful town center is one in which commerce, social interaction, and leisure time activities mix easily in an attractive, pedestrian-friendly environment. One of Spencer's challenges is the lack of a central gathering place or town common. This means that the types of events that could typically be organized



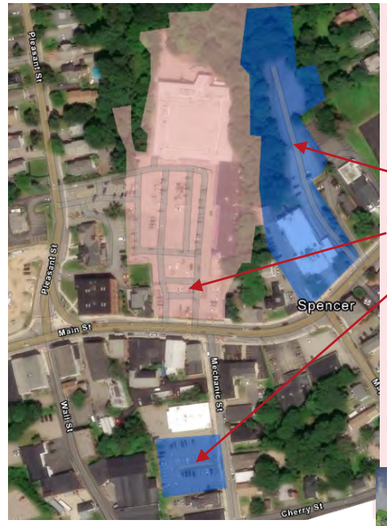
Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

and hosted by the Town may be resigned to areas outside the town center, limiting the impact of such events to support local businesses. There is an opportunity, however, for Spencer to work with private property owners in the town center to organize public events on underutilized property, parking areas, or public rights of way. This effort will require buy-in and creativity but could be a catalyst for new businesses, improving residents' associations with the town center and more permanent public space considerations. Some possible uses for these spaces include food trucks and farmers markets, pop up parks, craft fairs, concerts, fire/police department demonstrations, and others.

ACTION ITEM 2.7

Create a site finder service— a database of available sites and real estate information that can help businesses find the spaces they need.

An effective tool to attract businesses is creating and maintaining an inventory of available spaces for lease, that the Town can share with interested businesses. Spencer has made positive progress in making it easier for potential businesses to view properties with pertinent information, such as zoning, flood zones, and stormwater systems through the Town's online GIS platform. The system is easy to use and is a foundation that the Town can add additional information to. In particular, the site could support a layer that identifies commercial and industrial sites that are



Illustrative parking lot reuse site plan.

This reduced area could meet peak parking demand at the Shoppers village and enable the creation of a roughly 21,000 sq ft park/town common.

Potential Parking Lot Locations for Events

These three locations offer space for small/medium sized events and are within the town center core.

Spencer Town Hall Parking Lot - Town Owned

Spencer's Shoppers Village Parking Lot - Privately Owned

Mechanic St. Parking Lot - Town Owned

According to Spencer's 2020 parking study, both the Shopper Village and Town Hall Parking lots are underutilized (30% to 60% at peak demand period). Mechanic St. is well utilized but has been expanded since the study.



available for lease or purchase with accompanying detailed information about the site. Another approach could include a simple spreadsheet or database with options for user-entered search criteria, such as total square footage.

OBJECTIVE: Create public gathering areas by activating underutilized spaces around the town center.

One of Spencer's challenges is meeting the community's desire to come together for events and recreation within the town center. There is limited vacant land, and most existing recreational and open space sites are not within or walkable to the town core. This means that the town must pursue creative solutions to create gathering spaces on underutilized or privately held land or work to purchase additional property that can be turned into a town common or plaza.

ACTION ITEM 2.8

Explore opportunities to create a town common.

Centrally located town commons provide a space for town-sponsored and private events. Many communities in Central Massachusetts use them for concerts, festivals, tree lighting, New Year's Eve celebrations, and more. These types of events form community, foster interest and investment in local businesses, and build positive relationships between residents and their town center. One of the simplest options for Spencer to create a town common is repurposing land that is currently owned by the Town. Options are limited within the town center and, if desired in that area, would



Figure 16: Concept Illustration of Lake St. School as Potential Town Common. Source: CMRPC.

likely require the Town to purchase additional land. Just outside of the town center, the former Lake Street School property should be considered as a potential town common site. Given the distance of the property from the town core, careful consideration should be given to pedestrian infrastructure and connectivity between the site, the surrounding residential areas, and the town center.

ACTION ITEM 2.9

Reconfigure the Muzzy Meadow Pond Dam area to accommodate public use and recreational activities.

Muzzy Pond, located at the corner of Maple and Adams Streets, was once a lively recreational area. Today, it is infrequently used but possesses tremendous opportunity for more formalized recreation amenities close to the town center. Key improvements to the area should include seating, lighting, trash receptacles, parking, and repainting of existing crosswalks. Along Maple and Adams streets, the curb-to-curb width is roughly 30ft, which could accommodate compatible neighborhood street widths of 10ft plus street parking or a pedestrian walking path.

OBJECTIVE:
Continue to implement physical improvements in the town's commercial areas.

One of the primary levers that Spencer can use to spur growth and redevelopment in the town center is public investment. Towns around the United States have taken this approach and not only seen dramatic returns on their investments through increased property tax revenues, but have spurred economic growth beyond their initial investment, adding vibrancy, jobs, and life to their town centers.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"We need benches along Depot Trail, Muzzy Meadow or Main Street to rest."

(Community Survey, 2023)

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"We need a nice center town common with walking paths benches and lighting."

(Community Survey, 2023)



Figure 17: Concept Illustration of Recreation Improvements to Muzzy Pond. Source: CMRPC.

ACTION ITEM 2.10

Implement a Façade Improvement Program.

A façade improvement program would provide funding or incentives to property owners and businesses in the town center to make improvements to the public-facing elements of a building. This type of program can be constructed as a grant, loan, or incentive. Case studies have shown that even small investments in a property's exterior can positively impact a business's sales and ability to attract new customers. These benefits can be amplified when businesses simultaneously invest in exterior improvements, interior improvements, and marketing initiatives. Beyond returns to the individual business, facade and storefront improvements also create broader community benefits, generating increased sales and foot traffic at adjacent businesses and prompting additional interest in nearby vacant storefronts and commercial spaces. Gains in community pride and civic appreciation, as well as motivating neighboring property owners and tenants to undertake similar improvements, are two other commonly identified benefits.

Grant-based program: A grant-based program would provide funding to eligible applicants and is often accompanied by a matching requirement and an implementation timeframe. Typically, a grant-based program is funded as an annual budget item, and applications are overseen by a Town commission.

Loan-based program: A loan-based program differs from a grant in that the money provided must be repaid to the Town. Some programs structured this way offer the loans as low interest or interest-free, making them a more attractive option for property owners.

Incentive-based program: Although this type of program has the lowest upfront cost, it is also the hardest version of a facade program to construct effectively. Incentives need to be carefully developed so that they are both easily useable and provide a clear financial benefit to a property owner. If incentives are not closely connected to the costs of improvements or take too long to realize for a property owner, they are unlikely to be used.

ACTION ITEM 2.11

Improve streetscape design along Main Street, including wayfinding, sidewalks, landscaping, and street furniture.

One of the most effective ways Spencer can invest in its town center is through streetscape design, beautification, and wayfinding. This may involve installing street planters and furniture, and new signage that identifies town amenities such as parking and recreation.

Streetscape Design: Spencer has made progress on streetscape design through the implementation of its Town Center Revitalization and Complete Streets plans, including updated sidewalks, crosswalks, and street lighting – adorned with hanging baskets in the summer. Additional improvements, such as street furniture, greenery/ landscaping, and traffic-calming elements, could augment prior efforts and create an attractive and welcoming environment.

Wayfinding, Branding, and Parking Signage: Incorporating a signage and wayfinding system is an important revitalization strategy. The best wayfinding systems feature consistent standards that can be adapted and altered as required to locate existing destinations and are adaptable for future development. Developing an identity, a "brand," is essential for a successful wayfinding program. This is also an opportunity to involve the community and can make the wayfinding design process exciting for residents. Wayfinding combines marketing, consensus building, identity, planning, function, and design and, importantly, recognizes that users might employ several different modes of transportation. There are typically three stages when traveling into a town to reach a destination: 1) entering the town, 2) parking, and 3) arrival. Making the parking and walking experience positive heightens the appeal of the place and, in many cases, increases repeat visits.

GOAL 3

CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE THE CREATION OF ROBUST TRADE AREAS IN SPENCER'S COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS TO SUPPORT SERVICES AND RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES THAT MEET THE DAILY NEEDS OF SPENCER'S RESIDENTS.

Residents feel a strong attachment to Spencer's small-town character; almost 78 percent of survey respondents agreed that the town should strive to maintain this attractive feature.[16] At the same time, residents expressed a desire for more food and beverage establishments and a diverse retail mix. Balancing these priorities requires maximizing the potential of Spencer's existing commercial districts, namely those located along Route 9.

Two zoning districts, Commercial (C) and Town Center Mixed Use (TC) comprise most of the Route 9 corridor. The Commercial zoning district "provides for moderate- to high- intensity commercial development," and allows most business uses by right or special permit. Yet despite being the most business-friendly zoning district in Spencer, less than half of the Commercial district's parcels are occupied by commercial uses. This number is even lower when accounting for vacant land. Mixed uses account for another 9 percent of commercially zoned parcels. The Town Center Mixed Use district "encompasses downtown Spencer and includes a mixture of business, service, and residential uses." The district allows the second most business uses by right or special permit. Assessor's Office data shows that about a third of Town Center Mixed Use parcels are used for commercial or mixed-use purposes. Encouraging more business and mixed-use developments in these two zoning districts is essential to diversify Spencer's tax base while at the same time preserving its small-town character.

OBJECTIVE: Increase commercial development in existing commercial areas such as the west and east ends of Route 9 and the town center area.

Commercial development in Spencer is concentrated in three areas: the west end of Route 9, the town center area; and the east end of Route 9. Vacant commercial land in these areas is shown on the map in Figure 16. These sites represent undeveloped parcels that could accommodate new construction. Besides these vacant sites, there also appear to be several underutilized property parcels in Spencer's existing commercial areas, such as the Big Y Plaza and Klem's. The parking lots at these plazas may be oversized, making them candidates for future infill development. Parking studies at the plazas could determine the presence and extent of underutilization. Spencer should take the following actions to encourage further development in these vacant and underutilized sites.

ACTION ITEM 3.1

Support restaurant and retail establishments through permitting that encourage outdoor dining and displays; work with businesses to facilitate the setup of outdoor dining facilities.

Spencer can better support

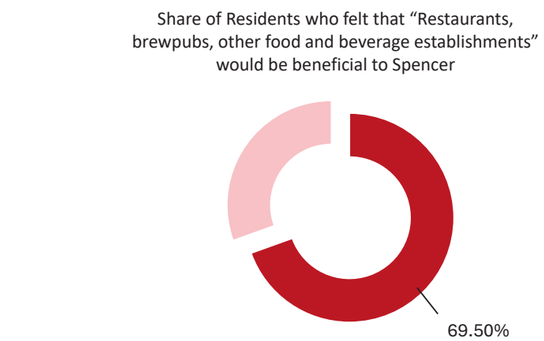


Figure 18: Share of Residents who felt that "Restaurants, brewpubs, other food and beverage establishments" would be beneficial to Spencer. Source: Spencer Master Plan Survey, 2023, Question 9.

and attract local restaurants by promoting outdoor dining and retail displays, especially in the downtown area. Studies suggest that outdoor dining increases foot traffic, enhances customer dining experiences, and yields greater revenue for restaurants.[17] The Black and White Grille, a popular destination in Spencer, already offers outdoor dining, and so too could other establishments located off the street. Implementing outdoor dining for restaurants in the town center or on side streets may require a more creative approach. Ideas to consider include repurposing on-street parking spaces into parklets or expanding sidewalks to accommodate new dining spaces. Such changes would have the added benefit of calming traffic on Route 9, something workshop participants noted as a high priority. Retail stores downtown could also take advantage of outdoor displays to boost the visibility of their products. Outdoor displays are more likely to garner the attention of pedestrians and passing cars on Route 9.

ACTION ITEM 3.2

Allow by right microbreweries, microdistilleries, and eating establishments specializing in serving alcoholic beverages in the Town Center Mixed Use zoning district.

Under Spencer's current zoning regulations, microbreweries and eating establishments specializing in serving alcoholic beverages are only allowed by special permit. Special permits are granted at the discretion of the Town's Zoning Board of Appeals. These restrictions may stem from a previous period when downtown Spencer was host to many alcohol-serving establishments, as recalled by workshop participants. As Spencer hopes to revitalize its town center, these restrictions are likely to discourage new food and beverage establishments from opening downtown. This is a high priority for Spencer residents, almost 70% of whom felt "restaurants, brewpubs, and other food and beverage establishments" would be beneficial to the town.

Residents also expressed an interest in more entertainment venues, such as theaters, live event spaces, and art studios. Such uses could be added to the base zoning or enabled through an arts and culture overlay district. Either way, desired cultural uses should be added to the zoning definitions, detailed in the use table, and governed by thoughtful use standards that both encourage the desired use and mitigate challenges that can arise when mixing area uses.

ACTION ITEM 3.3

Review market data to identify demand and opportunities for growth in Spencer's commercial areas. Use this information to tailor the Town's marketing efforts and outreach to prospective businesses and developers.

By leveraging market data, the Town of Spencer can better attract private development and business activity in its commercial areas. This should begin with the Town or a hired consultant analyzing local and regional market data to identify high-growth industries that align with the Town's economic development goals. The Town can then match these industries with local vacant, distressed, or for-sale properties that best suit each industry's needs. This information could be provided to prospective business owners and developers to pique their interest in investing in Spencer. It could also form the basis of marketing materials for high-priority sites. For instance, the Town of Rutland created a marketing brochure to highlight the value of an old industrial site known as Rutland Heights.

GOAL 4

FOSTER DEVELOPMENT AND SPUR JOB CREATION.

Spencer's employment landscape includes several large industrial employers, such as Flexcon and Mercury Wire. However, there is very little available and undeveloped industrially zoned land to attract new employers. The Town will have to carefully consider whether additional areas may be appropriate for industrial development.

OBJECTIVE: Identify potential sites that could support future commercial and industrial development.

The Town should identify areas most suited to new industrial or commercial development and work with the public to identify priority development sites that should be rezoned for such uses. Involving the public is essential in this process as not all sites ideal for commercial or industrial development will have public approval.

ACTION ITEM 4.1

Explore the feasibility of an Industrial Park on route 49 linked to a train service to Worcester, Boston, and beyond, using CSX rail service with a park and ride.

The CSX railroad passes through Spencer and presents an opportunity to attract industry that relies on rail for distribution. Such industries include intermodal shipping (containers), chemicals, food & agriculture, automotive, construction, pulp and paper, and raw energy materials (ethanol).[18] Vacant industrial land close to CSX rail is limited, consisting of several sites, one of which is currently used by Diversified Auto for car storage. Working with Diversified Auto may be an option to redevelop the site to include additional buildings and industry. Another possible option Spencer can take is to rezone a portion of land adjacent to the CSX rail (shown in red in Figure 21). Although this would likely be the most attractive option for potential industrial employers, the Town will have to work closely with the community to address concerns about proximity to residential areas, loss of open space, impact on environmental resources, and other trade-offs inherent in industrial development.

		Zoning	
		Commercial	Town Center Mixed Use
Land Use	Commercial	48%	16.6%
	Residential	27.5%	51.6%
	Mixed	8.8%	17.2%
	Industrial	6.9%	3.2%
	Exempt	8.8%	11.5%

Source: MassMapper

Figure 19: Land Use Breakdown by Zoning Category

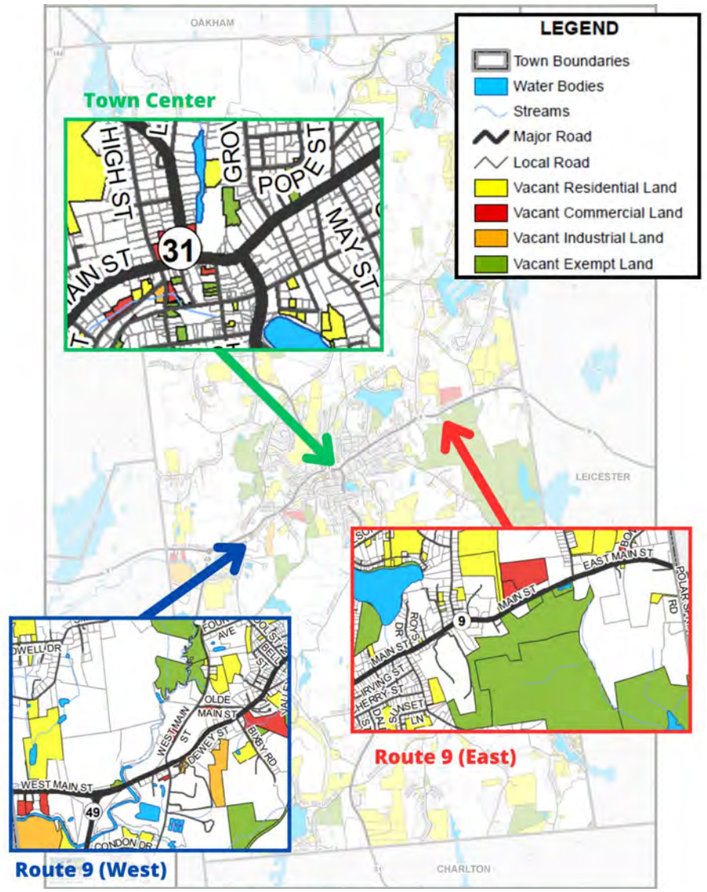


Figure 20: Vacant Land by Use Code Source: CMRPC, Creative Commons.

ACTION ITEM 4.2

Improve and extend municipal infrastructure to enable the town to attract new businesses.

Spencer provides both water and sewer to a limited area within the town – as shown on Figure 1 in the Town Services chapter. Expanding this infrastructure is expensive but may be a lucrative opportunity to attract new large industrial employers to the town. Any potential expansion should carefully evaluate the cost to build and maintain the expanded infrastructure against the anticipated revenue generation from the additional connections and property taxes.

ACTION ITEM 4.3

Strive to meet local demand for medical and urgent care facilities while creating opportunities for employment.

Healthcare and social assistance is the largest employment category for Spencer residents, with almost 1200 residents working in the industry.[19] However, less than a third of the residents that are employed in the health care industry work in Spencer. There may be an opportunity to align local health employment with services that residents would also like to see come to Spencer. In the Master Plan survey, over 60% of respondents stated that additional health/urgent care and medical facilities would be beneficial to Spencer. Some residents noted that consolidation and telehealth trends in the healthcare industry may mean that physical local health and medical facilities may be difficult to attract. The Town can improve opportunities for potential medical facilities by identifying potential sites, identifying potential medical providers that are well suited to the Spencer market, putting out RFPs, and providing incentives such as waving permit fees. Larger medical facilities may require the Town to also consider rezoning areas of town to accommodate development needs.

OBJECTIVE: Encourage the development of a strong Ecotourism industry

To capitalize on its numerous natural and cultural resources, Spencer can incorporate ecotourism in a comprehensive economic development strategy. Spencer should work through its reactivated Economic Development Committee to promote events, eco-tourism attractions, and hospitality businesses that would cater to this industry. Integrating ecotourism into its future economic development plans would help the Town align these strategies with the values of its community.

ACTION ITEM 4.4

Incorporate ecotourism strategies in the Town's economic development planning.

The Economic Development Committee can identify assets and attractions in Spencer and assess their potential value to ecotourism. The Commission and other Town boards should identify Spencer's businesses, nonprofits, and hospitality establishments engaged in agritourism and ecotourism, and actively promote them. Sites such as the Howe Park, St. Joseph's Abbey, Spencer State Forest, Sibley Farm, Thibault's Country Store, or Rapscallion Brewery present great opportunities for marketing the town as a destination for ecotourism and historic tourism. Encouraging overnight accommodations, farm stays, or camping sites could help turn Spencer into a weekend destination and encourage visitors to lengthen their stay. In addition, outreach to event organizers, such as mountain biking clubs or other athletic clubs, would help bring recreation activities into town.

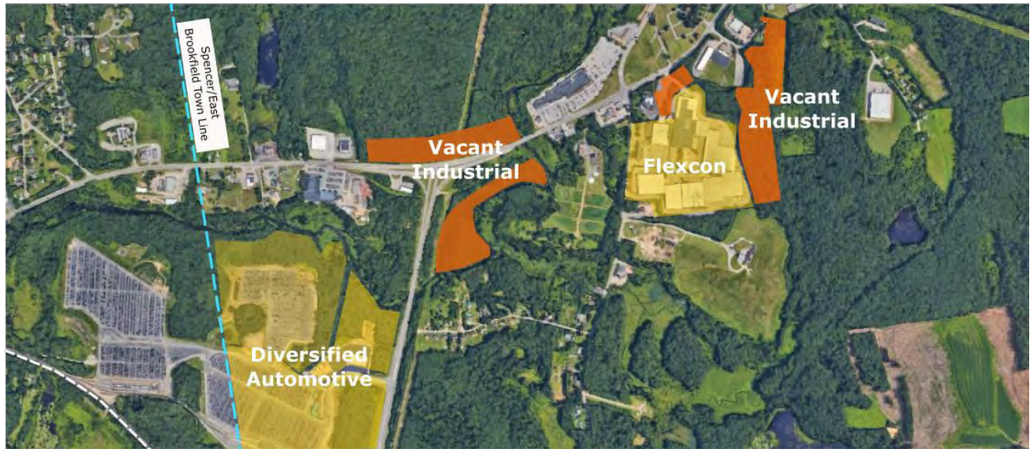


Figure 21: Vacant and existing industrial land located within close proximity to CSX Rail.

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05

Land Use

St. Joseph's Abbey
Spencer MA



Photo: Taylor Wentworth

OVERVIEW

Land use management can be a contentious process for small towns that do not have the resources for substantial planning and zoning initiatives. Zoning bylaws are designed to prevent undesirable uses and mitigate the nuisances inherent to certain land uses, though this regulatory tool is limited. Towns have limited opportunity to ensure that landowners, businesses, and developers make the investments or the changes that will have the greatest positive impact on economic growth.

Residents want a revitalized community while seeking to preserve their way of life and the town's rural character.

Seventy-eight percent of Spencer's land area is covered by water, wetlands, forests, or other natural landscapes. Half of the balance is farmland, either cultivated or used as pasture. The remaining eleven percent, approximately 2765 acres, provides the opportunity to attract transformative development projects, encourage sustainable housing production (housing occupies about six percent of the land), and foster economic development.

Spencer has introduced several initiatives in recent years that take an innovative approach to emerging land use issues. Solar bylaw amendments proposed in 2024

GLOSSARY

Special Permit:
an authorization granted by a local government allowing a property owner to use land in a way not typically permitted by existing zoning regulations. It requires a thorough review process, ensuring the proposed use aligns with community planning and safety standards.

Smart growth:
planning is a sustainable development approach that focuses on creating vibrant, walkable communities by emphasizing infill development, mixed-use zoning, and efficient public transportation. It aims to reduce sprawl, and improve quality of life while fostering economic growth.

Cluster development:
land use strategy that groups buildings together on a smaller portion of a site, preserving the remaining land for open space or natural features. This approach promotes efficient land use, and reduces infrastructure costs and loss of open space.

Overlay Zone:
is a planning tool that adds extra regulations or guidelines on top of existing zoning districts. It targets specific areas to address unique needs or goals, such as historical preservation or environmental protection, without altering the underlying zoning rules.

Infill Development:
involves constructing new buildings or redeveloping vacant or underused parcels within existing urban areas. It aims to make efficient use of available land, reduce urban sprawl, and enhance community density while improving infrastructure and local services.

Wayfinding Plan:
a strategy designed to guide people through a physical space or area using clear, intuitive signage and information. It involves designing and placing directional signs, maps, and other tools to help users navigate efficiently and comfortably.

3%
decline in Chapter 61A land in Spencer between 2015 and 2022

13
vacant buildings in the town center listed on the Building Inspector's Vacant Properties Register as of 2024

77%
of survey respondents agreed that Spencer should maintain its small town character

address the circumstances that have appeared with large-scale battery storage systems and the use of agrivoltaic (dual-use) solar projects to encourage the preservation of farmland.

Spencer is preparing to embark on a zoning review to align zoning with economic development goals. A comprehensive zoning update will ensure that current zoning does not inhibit economic growth and that the bylaws follow the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles and Massachusetts General Law.

Spencer would benefit from a comprehensive zoning reform that creates by-right pathways to respond to market changes and attract transformative developments. This will require using zoning to leverage Spencer's unique advantages, attract large-scale investments, and develop regional competitiveness.

Spencer is well positioned to capitalize on its proximity to Worcester, the rise of remote work, and its easy access to the Massachusetts Turnpike and Route 20. Regulatory changes are needed to help Spencer benefit from this geographic advantage. As the regional biomedical manufacturing industry grows and its associated labor pool migrates to the region, Worcester's suburban towns, including Spencer, must upgrade their housing and infrastructure to accommodate these economic shifts. Spencer's location on Route 49, the first off-ramp on the Massachusetts Turnpike after Worcester, and its proximity to the CSX rail presents a unique opportunity that has yet to be developed. Parcels near the intersection of Routes 9 and 49 could

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:*

"Spencer needs modernization with the small-town feel. I'm excited for the new CVS, I wish recreational and medical marijuana was a source of tax income for the Town."

(Community survey, 2023)

*** Comments edited for clarity.**



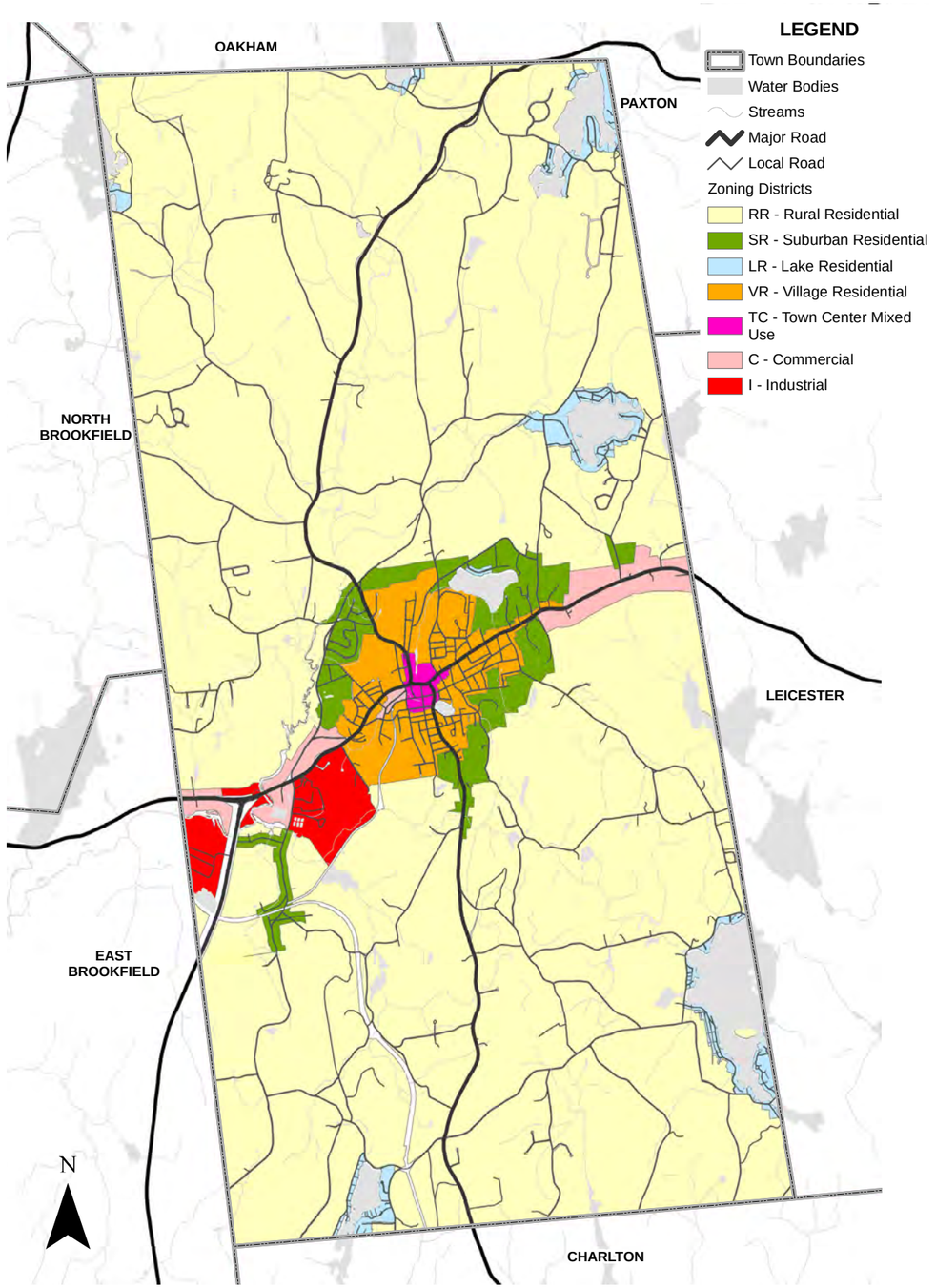
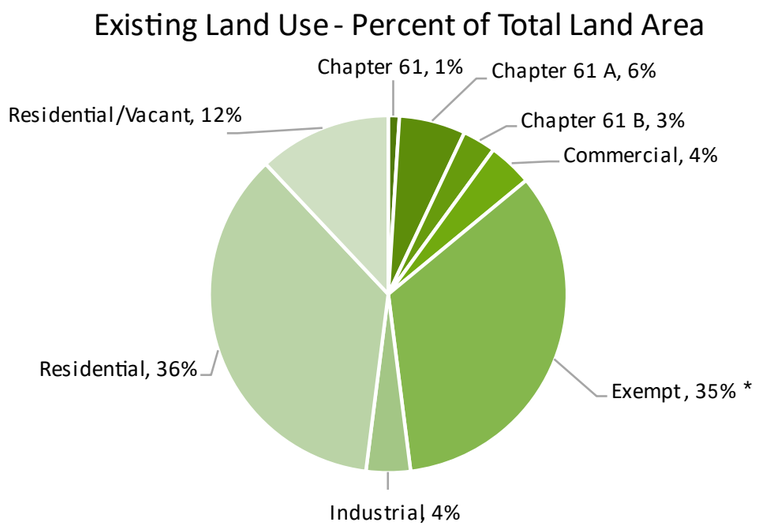


Figure 1: Town of Spencer zoning districts. Source: CMRPC



*"Exempt" land includes the following classifications: Exempt/Authorities, Exempt/Charitable, Exempt/Other, Exempt/Other Muni, Exempt/Religious Groups, Exempt/Spencer, Exempt/State.

	2015		2022	
Land Use Classification	**Acres**	**% of Total**	**Acres**	**% of Total**
Chapter 61	201	1%	205	1%
Chapter 61A	1904	9%	1415	6%
Chapter 61B	654	3%	641	3%
Commercial	871	4%	803	4%
Exempt	7356	34%	7760	35%
Industrial	568	3%	862	4%
Residential	7383	34%	8089	36%
Residential / Vacant	2965	14%	2710	12%
Total Area	**21903**		**22484 ***	

Figure 2: Land Use by Assessors Acreage, 2015 and 2022. Source: Town of Spencer. * Note: the number of Assessors records increased between 2015 and 2022.

be development sites. Zoning is one important lever the town can use to ensure site readiness and to allow uses that meet regional demand by-right. Regulatory changes and a streamlined review process would add predictability to the development process and help Spencer compete regionally.

Since the publication of the 2003 Master Plan, Spencer has undertaken targeted revitalization efforts in the Town Center using local, state, and federal resources. The Town has conducted multiple studies and has completed substantial improvements, such as an upgrade of Main Street, including water & sewer infrastructure, to improve the experience of cyclists and pedestrians. The persistent blight in Town Center is still a concern for Spencer residents. Properties along Route 9, Mechanic Street, and Maple Street remain underused and have fallen into disrepair. This chapter addresses these concerns by identifying areas where zoning and regulations could be updated to better serve community needs and guide future growth.

This Land Use chapter has not set out to identify or discuss every intervention in the land use patterns of Spencer. It has focused on the goals and objectives that have been identified by the Master Plan Committee and the Master Plan Team, based on the Community Survey and the Community Workshops. The Action Items that have been identified are in the capacity of municipal government.

KEY FINDINGS

THE ZONING BYLAWS NEED A COMPREHENSIVE REVISION TO ENCOURAGE AND ACCOMMODATE GROWTH

To reduce the tax burden on residents, to expand employment opportunities, and to ensure that a wide range of goods and services are available to residents and visitors, Spencer needs to attract new businesses and retain existing businesses. The current Zoning Bylaws would benefit from a diagnostic and reform to align local land use practices with the community's vision, enable economic development, and encourage housing production.

In 2023, Spencer received funding from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to review its Zoning Bylaws. The review could address current challenges by ensuring that the bylaws accommodate new and changing land uses and respond more flexibly to market changes. This effort could address commercial and housing development barriers, decide the most effective ways to achieve compatibility with Smart Growth principles and establish a fit-for-purpose regulatory framework.

Community input has found the need for targeted interventions in the Town Center Mixed Use district. The use table could be updated to be more supportive of economic activity, shopping, dining, and community events. Restaurants that serve alcohol currently require Special Permits and breweries are prohibited. There is also potential to update the Commercial districts to create an environment more conducive to development on Route 9.

The comments received from survey respondents underscored the need for upgrades to the Town Center area.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"I would love to see the center of town developed but historically preserved, reflecting values but bringing us into modern times. Retail and restaurants all on the ground level of the existing builds with housing or studio space on the floors above."

"Buildings are in poor shape and parking is insufficient for existing buildings."[1]

(Community Survey, 2023)

Parking requirements, an updated signage bylaw, a rethinking of the special permit requirements, and regulatory provisions that address blight are just a few of the potential updates to the bylaw to help address current challenges. The review will also determine whether zoning changes could encourage economic activity and housing development in the Commercial District. In the residential districts, the review will assess the possibility of reducing the uncertainties associated with development by reducing the number of uses for which Special Permits are needed.

COMPETING LAND USES PUT PRESSURE ON AVAILABLE COMMERCIAL LAND.

Throughout Central Massachusetts, competing land uses have reduced the amount of available commercial land. The impact of e-commerce has significantly altered the retail landscape and decreased commercial property values. At the same time, the demand for housing has grown dramatically and housing development has put pressure on commercial and industrial land in prime locations. Spencer is no exception, as commercial land use has declined from 835 acres in 2015 to 749 acres in 2022 (Figure 2). Furthermore, commercial development has been stagnant in Spencer's Commercial districts.

Land use patterns evolve as market cycles and ownership changes result in changes to land uses. In response to these shifting needs and market conditions, Spencer's Planning Board should consider rezoning the commercial district on the east side of Route 9 to allow residential uses.

Mixed-use development in the Commercial districts has the potential to increase economic activity. However, the Town should define the ratio of residential to commercial uses in the district to prevent an accelerated loss of commercial space. Growing housing demand trends are likely to continue in the coming years, and will put more pressure on commercial areas, especially in desirable locations. Retaining commercial land use, particularly for parcels with Route 9 frontage, will allow the Town to attract more businesses and remain flexible in upcoming market cycles.

STRONG AND DIVERSE RETAIL BASE, BUT LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE LIMITS DEVELOPMENT IN COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

Route 9 gives convenient retail options to Spencer residents and this strong retail base presents a unique advantage among surrounding towns. Retail establishments in the commercial districts along Route 9 are a regional draw, as residents from surrounding bedroom communities[2] travel to Spencer for access to basic goods and services. Big Y Plaza and Klem's are local destinations and the commercial district on the west side of Route 9 has grown into an economic activity cluster.

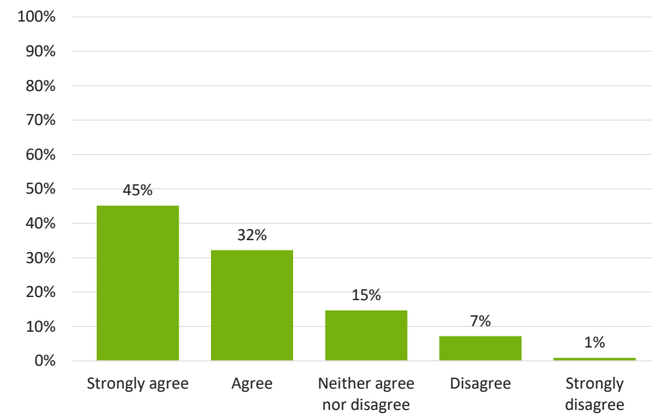


Figure 3: Survey results, Question 3. Spencer Master Plan Survey, 2023.

However, Route 9 is still underpopulated, and commercial development in Spencer has remained unchanged in the past decade. Commercial land use has diminished, and the use intensity in Spencer's commercial districts has not seen significant growth. Infrastructure limitations like the 2020 sewer moratorium have driven much of this stagnation. While Town leadership is pushing for new development and growth, the pressure that new businesses would put on infrastructure has made growth control necessary and has forced the Town to turn away interested developers.[3]

During community engagement, residents have voiced the need for more retail services. For instance, one survey respondent, in answer to a question about what business would be beneficial to Spencer said:

"We need something like Trader Joe's, Target, clothing stores, shoe stores, TJ Maxx, Marshalls. Things we don't have."

As noted in the goals in the following section, the Town could use various policy and zoning tools to incentivize development. Expedited permitting, updated regulations, zoning incentives, and density bonuses would help compensate for infrastructure limitations.

ENCOURAGE THE REDEVELOPMENT OF SPENCER'S VACANT AND UNDERUSED PROPERTIES.

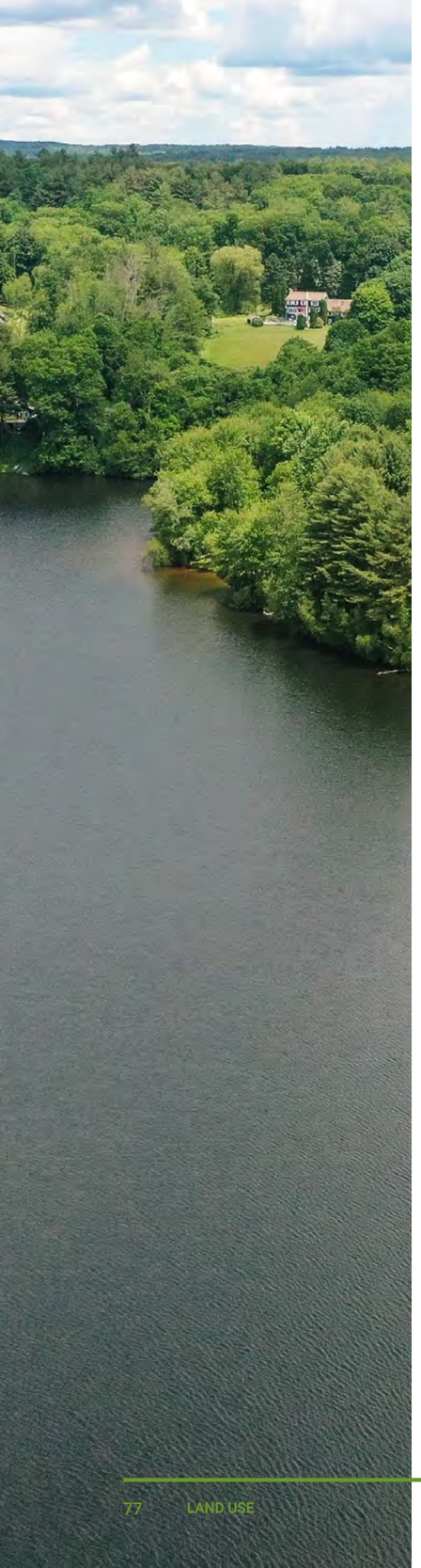
In the community survey, 44% of respondents supported redeveloping vacant properties. The Town should inventory vacant properties and encourage the resale and rehabilitation of properties with development potential to ensure their highest and best use.

Spencer would benefit from building on its Vacant Property Registration initiative and using a vacancy tax to protect the Town from the effects of blight caused by vacant and unmaintained properties. A registry would be a first step toward understanding the extent of vacancy more accurately and helping manage vacant properties until they are returned to productive use.

PROVIDE CONVENIENT ACCESS TO AN EXPANDED RANGE OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE TO MEET, GATHER, AND BE ENTERTAINED, INCLUDING CONVENIENT OPEN SPACE.

Community input through the survey and the community workshops provided a strong sign that people want more opportunities to meet and gather informally in comfortable public spaces with opportunities for entertainment and a variety of things to do. A central public open space for this purpose was high on many people's wish lists.





Public spaces should be upgraded and furnished where possible, and opportunities for markets or similar forms of informal occasional meetings should be encouraged.

PRESERVE THE RURAL CHARACTER OF THE TOWN

Seventy-seven percent of survey respondents agreed that Spencer should retain its small-town character. There is no question about the importance of the Town's rural and historic character as a small, historic settlement surrounded by farmlands and forests. Preservation of access to rural spaces and views of these spaces are both important to the community.

At the same time, most of the comments related to the character of the Town emphasized the importance of combining the maintenance of this character with the need for development.

The rural character of the Town should be preserved by supporting forms of development that do not threaten its rural character and are compatible with its aesthetic qualities. As well as revising the signage regulations, the review of the Zoning Bylaw should consider incorporating design guidelines. The establishment of a Local Historic District should also be considered (See Natural and Cultural Resources Chapter). These steps should be supported by increasing protective measures to conserve farmland and open space.

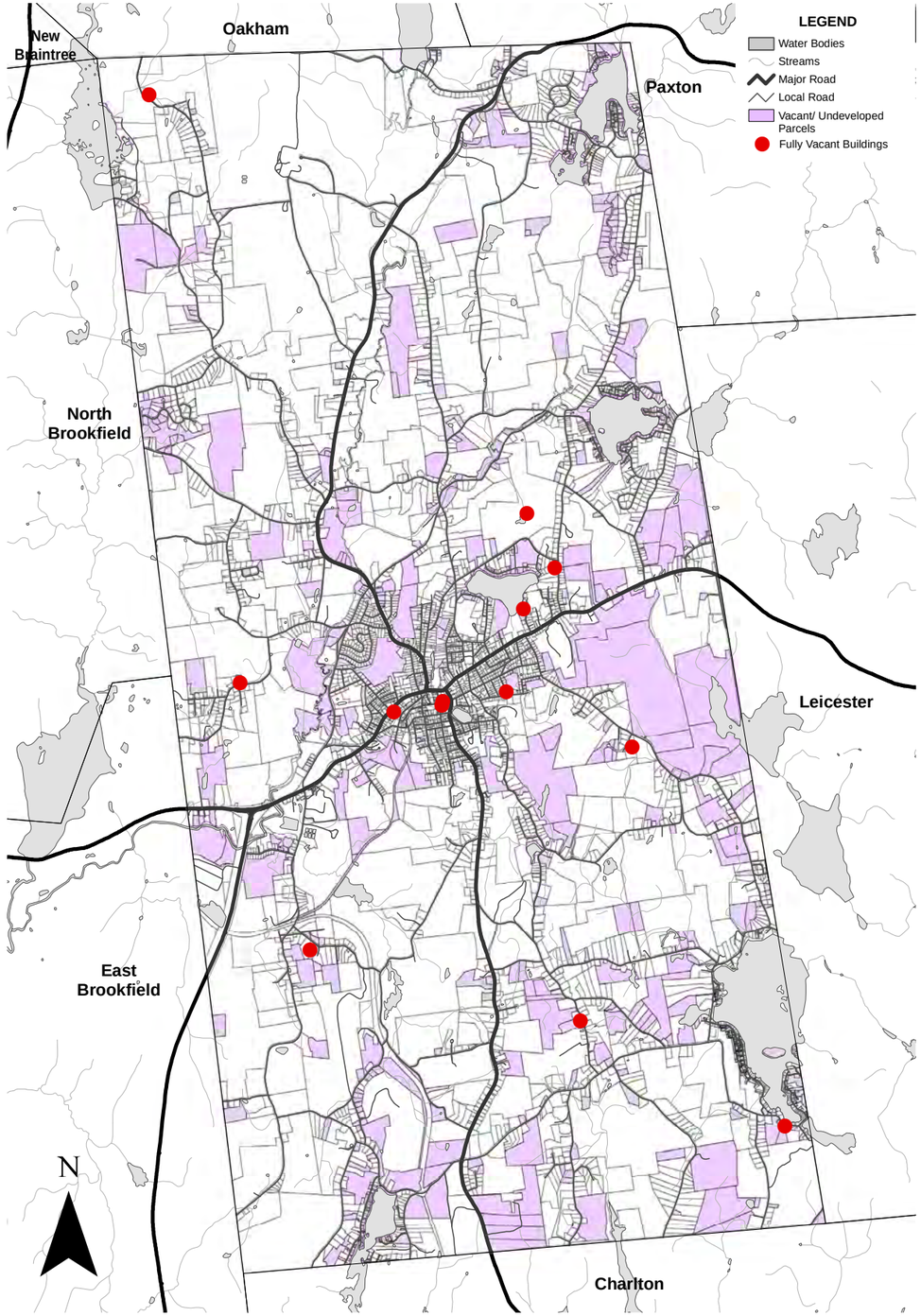


Figure 4: Properties on the Spencer Vacant Buildings Register, 2024. Source: Town of Spencer, CMRPC.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES SUMMARY

GOAL 1

UPDATE THE TOWN'S BYLAWS TO ENSURE THAT THEY ALIGN WITH THE COMMUNITY'S PRIORITIES ON GROWTH AND PRESERVATION.

OBJECTIVE: Review the Zoning Bylaw to identify changes that will help address and accommodate growth.

ACTION ITEM 1.1 ACTION ITEM 1.2 ACTION ITEM 1.3 ACTION ITEM 1.4 ACTION ITEM 1.5 ACTION ITEM 1.6

OBJECTIVE: Review Subdivision Regulations to identify changes that will help address and accommodate growth.

ACTION ITEM 1.7

OBJECTIVE: Encourage development that helps preserve the Town's rural and historic character.

ACTION ITEM 1.8 ACTION ITEM 1.9 ACTION ITEM 1.10

GOAL 2

ENCOURAGE PRIVATE INVESTMENTS BY CREATING BY-RIGHT DEVELOPMENT MECHANISMS FOR THE TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT THAT ALIGNS WITH THE TOWN'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES AND MASTER PLAN STRATEGIES.

OBJECTIVE: Increase predictability and lower costs for developers.

ACTION ITEM 2.1 ACTION ITEM 2.2 ACTION ITEM 2.3 ACTION ITEM 2.4 ACTION ITEM 2.5 ACTION ITEM 2.6

OBJECTIVE: Maximize the Benefits of Community Preservation Act Funds

GOAL 3

ADVANCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIOR TOWN CENTER REVITALIZATION PLANNING EFFORTS.

OBJECTIVE: Use regulatory tools and incentives to encourage the re-development of vacant properties.

ACTION ITEM 3.1 ACTION ITEM 3.2 ACTION ITEM 3.3

OBJECTIVE: Codify elements of the existing design guidelines into the Zoning Bylaw to create a vibrant physical environment and enhance the pedestrian experience.

ACTION ITEM 3.4 ACTION ITEM 3.5

OBJECTIVE: Implement the recommendations of the 2021 Parking Study.

ACTION ITEM 3.6 ACTION ITEM 3.7

GOAL 4

ENCOURAGE A MIX OF USES ALONG THE ROUTE 9 CORRIDOR.

OBJECTIVE: Align growth and development patterns with the community's vision.

ACTION ITEM 4.1 ACTION ITEM 4.2

GOALS & STRATEGIES

GOAL 1

UPDATE THE TOWN'S BYLAWS TO ENSURE THAT THEY ALIGN WITH THE COMMUNITY'S PRIORITIES ON GROWTH AND PRESERVATION.

Community workshops, as well as the survey undertaken in the preparation of the Master Plan, suggested a desire for balance between the preservation of the small-town character and the need for development.

One element of the 'small-town character' is the views of, and easy access to, the rural areas. The desire to stop the encroachment of urban sprawl onto the rural areas around the Town needs to be reconciled with the need to support development that will grow the Town's revenue and expand the business and employment opportunities as well as the range of goods, services, and experiences available there. Traditionally, development in rural towns has taken the form of medium to large single-family homes on substantial lots, but this type of housing is increasingly unaffordable (See Chapter 6 on Housing). It also leads to continuing encroachment onto agricultural land and open space.

It is not necessary to stop development. Urban sprawl can be managed by concentrating future development around existing

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"[We need] amusement or recreational businesses that center around activities or installations residents and visitors could return to, like movie theaters, arcades, or art studios."

"Activity/cultural based businesses, like theater, hobby store, coffee shop."

(Community Survey, 2023)

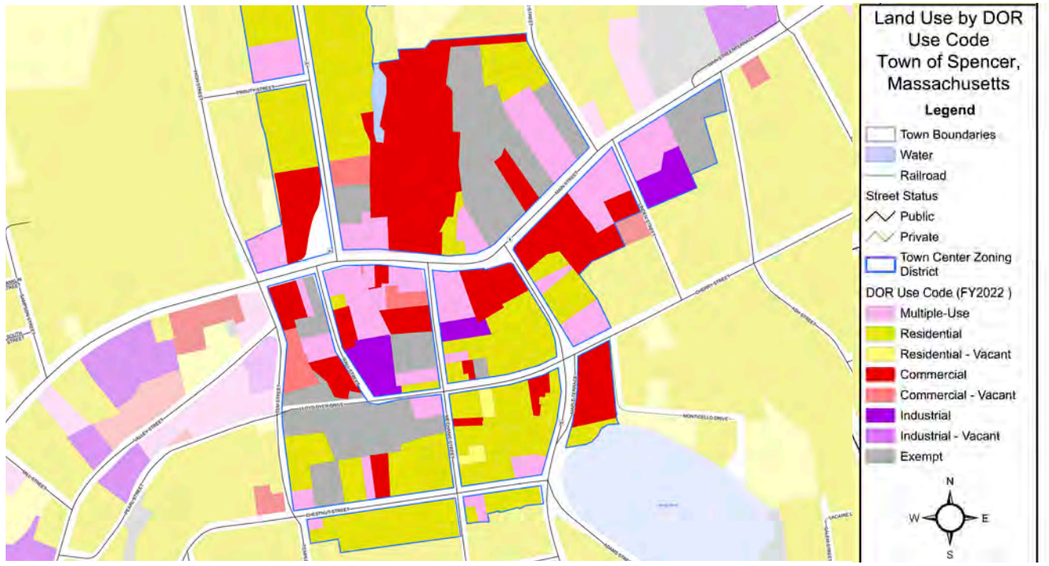


Figure 5: Land use by DOR code showing vacant properties in the Town Center. Source: CMRPC



infrastructure where development has already taken place.

The most effective mechanism that the Town has to influence the form and location of development is its Zoning Bylaw. This fact informs the first objective under Goal 1.

OBJECTIVE:
Review the Zoning Bylaw to identify changes that will help address and accommodate growth.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"[Spencer] can grow & modernize but still maintain 'small town character.'"

"Love the small town character, but need businesses to keep people from going outside of Town for everything."

"While I do love Spencer's small-town feel, I don't think that adhering to this vision should restrict necessary development that may be seen as antithetical to this."

(Community Survey, 2023)

Several aspects of the Zoning Bylaw could be changed to help achieve this goal and we have set each of them as an action item. Our understanding is that the Town is embarking on this exercise which will create the opportunity to achieve many of the objectives outlined below and align the Spencer bylaw with the Massachusetts Sustainable Development Principles.[4]

The amendment of the Zoning Bylaw must, as far as possible, make the bylaw easier to use and not make it more complicated. For instance, where the provisions that apply to a zoning district can be amended it is preferable to do that, rather than introducing an overlay zone. This is not always practical. This is discussed in some of the action items below.

ACTION ITEM 1.1

Update the use table for the Town Center Mixed Use District to ensure that it permits as much acceptable development as possible, by right, and that it is supportive of adaptive reuse and other revitalization measures.

The Town Center is an important space for Spencer. Route 9 passes right through it, making it highly visible to residents and visitors. The Town Hall and the Library are located there, as well as a variety of shops. A high proportion of the Town's population live close to the center. The management of the center is important to encourage development in the Town Center, eliminate blight, give the center a cared-for, busy feeling, expand the range of goods and services conveniently available to residents and visitors, and increase the Town's tax base.

The regulations of the Town Center Mixed Use District are designed to encourage economic activity and accommodate a diversity of services while minimizing nuisances. Because of the complexity of the area and the Town Center Mixed Use Zone, these regulations must be updated over time as trends change.

The use table prohibits the following business or commercial uses in the Town Center Mixed Use Area:

- Large-scale retail sales and service with outdoor storage
- Flea Markets
- Dog Kennels
- Camps
- Indoor swimming, tennis, or other recreational facilities
- Outdoor sports facilities for non-motorized sports such as golf courses, country clubs, or tennis clubs
- Mortuary undertakings or funeral establishments
- Adult-orientated establishments
- Registered marijuana dispensaries
- Manufacture of renewable energy components
- Renewable energy research and development.

While some of these uses are unsuited to the Town Center because of their size – such as golf courses - or their inherent nuisance – such as dog kennels - others might be permissible contingent on Special Permit approvals to ensure that they do not use too much land. Uses such as marijuana dispensaries may have been socially unacceptable in the past but may now be more palatable to residents. Flea markets represent a combination of commerce, entertainment, and informal meeting space which could be highly beneficial to the Town Center.

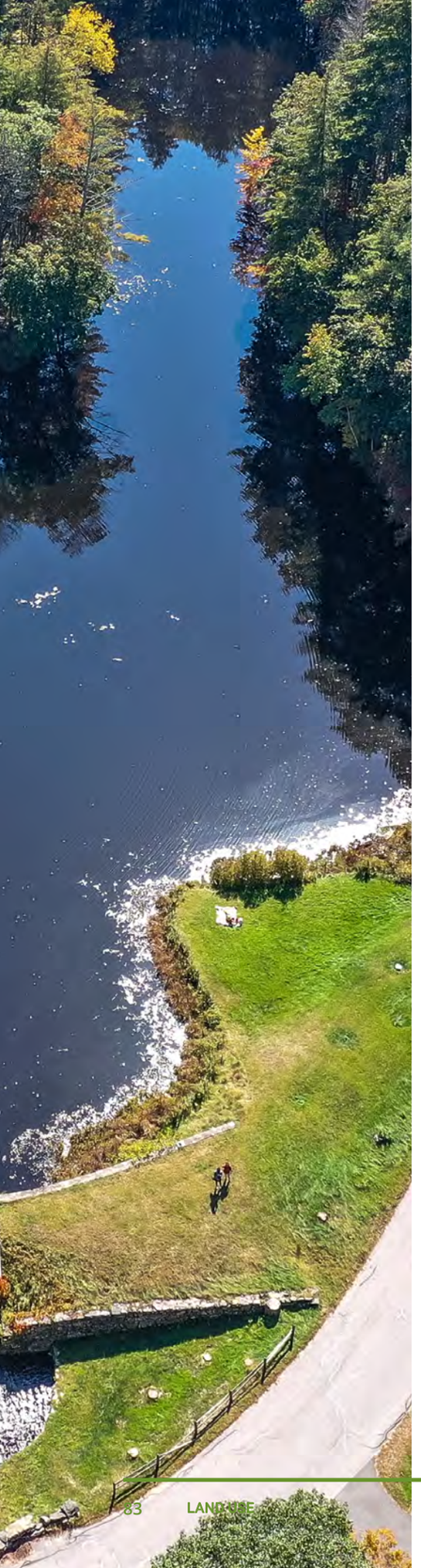
We recommend that the use table be reviewed to assess whether uses prohibited in the Town Center could be permitted by right or by Special Permit. Also, the definitions should be reviewed to ensure that the terms used are still current. For example, the term 'flea market' is not defined and its meaning may well have changed since the adoption of the Zoning Bylaw.

Creating the opportunity for these land uses is a first step, but changes to the Zoning Bylaw cannot make development happen. It can minimize barriers to development, and in certain circumstances, it can reduce the cost of development. In doing so, it can increase Spencer's competitiveness in comparison with other places in the region where investors might consider developing. One way to reduce barriers to development is to remove the requirement for Special Permits where appropriate. Special Permits often give towns a sense of comfort in the ability to prevent the establishment of unforeseen and undesirable land uses and they seem to residents like a minor challenge for a bona fide developer. An unintended consequence is that they create uncertainty and increase costs for developers. If a developer can do the same thing somewhere else without the requirement for a Special Permit, they are likely to choose the alternative location. That is not to say that every use should be permitted without a Special Permit, but the exercise needs to be done to see which uses that currently require Special Permits could be allowed by right.

In the Town Center Mixed Use Zone the following business uses require special permits:

- Sales of flowers, garden supplies, or agricultural products partly or wholly outdoors, which are not associated with agricultural use.
- Shopping centers
- Eating establishment, specializing in serving alcoholic beverages
- Dry cleaning, shoe repair, tailoring, or other similar uses
- Veterinary establishments or pet grooming establishments
- Hotels or motels
- Private membership clubs or lodges
- Indoor entertainment and recreational facilities, including bowling alleys, theatres, or sports arenas
- Tattoo parlors and body piercing studios
- Microbreweries

Some of these uses, such as restaurants that specialize in alcoholic beverages, microbreweries, and indoor entertainment facilities might be considered exactly the sort of uses that would enhance and strengthen the Town Center. Many of



WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Some of the buildings on Main St. between Mechanic and Mill St. are a major eye sores and something needs to be done about them."

"The buildings downtown are falling apart and make the Town look awful. The downtown area should be kept up nicely and those landlords should have to maintain them so they look nice. Windows are missing, smashed etc., business windows don't look inviting, we need downtown to be cleaned up a lot."

(Community Survey, 2023)

them could be adequately controlled by a stipulation in the land use table that they are permitted by right up to a certain size in square feet but require a Special Permit if they are to be bigger than the stipulated size. We recommend that the land use table be reviewed to see whether more uses can be permitted by right in the Town Center Mixed Use District.

ACTION ITEM 1.2

Explore the adoption of a Smart Development Overlay Zone.

Chapter 40 R of the Massachusetts General Law makes provision for the establishment of Smart Development Overlay Zones that are designed to serve many of the purposes discussed in the previous section and other recommendations below, including encouraging the development of suitable activities in the Town Center area, supporting adaptive reuse of buildings and generating additional housing for groups that are currently excluded from the housing market. The law is specific that this should be an overlay zone, and it would be impractical to try to apply the provisions to the whole Town Center Mixed Use Zone.

Chapter 40 R overlay zoning has substantial incentives attached to it, in terms of access to state capital funding and incentive payments associated with development approvals.

The requirements for the approval of a Chapter 40 R Smart Development Overlay Zone are specific and restrictive. For example, multi-family housing must be at least twenty units per acre, single-family housing at least eight units per acre, and two or three-family units at least twelve units per acre. For comparison, in the densest part of Spencer, between Pearl Street, Cherry Street, Maple Street, and Church Street, the average density is about 15.5 units per acre. But, except for the single residential units, all the other categories would meet the requirements. Also, twenty percent of the residential units must be reserved as affordable housing.

We cannot say with confidence, either that the Spencer Town Center area would qualify for this zoning, or that the details of the zoning would be appropriate for the Town or acceptable to Spencer residents.[5] However, in the process of crafting amendments to the Zoning Bylaw, this is certainly an opportunity that should be explored to adopt a Smart Development Overlay Zone as part of the amendment process if this is found to be suitable. Further details about this zone are included in an appendix to this chapter.

ACTION ITEM 1.3

Explore the revision of the Town Centre Mixed Use District to ensure that it is supportive of adaptive reuse and other revitalization measures.

Whether or not a Smart Zone is determined to be appropriate for Spencer, we recommend that consideration be given to how the Town Center Mixed Use Zone could facilitate adaptive reuse of existing buildings and other revitalization measures. There is a good deal of precedent for adaptive reuse zoning. Leicester has an Adaptive Reuse Overlay District and several towns (e.g., Great Barrington) have adopted adaptive reuse overlay zones specifically designed to promote the reuse of mill buildings. The principles underlying these overlay zones should be applied to the Spencer Town Center Mixed-Use Zone so that the reuse and rehabilitation of any reusable building can be supported. Without pre-empting the work that needs to be done on this, it is possible, for instance, that:

- a land use that requires a special permit might be permitted by right if it takes place in an existing building and rehabilitates the building for that purpose, or
- setbacks could be waived for existing buildings.
- the space in an existing building might be discounted by some percentage in the calculation of permitted coverage or the application of other control measures



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



if the building is included in a development that is architecturally sensitive to its historic period, or

- parking requirements might be relaxed for the space in an existing building that is rehabilitated.

In summary, Spencer should thoroughly review its Town Centre Mixed Use Zone to permit as much as possible by right and to be as supportive as possible of the reuse and rehabilitation of existing buildings and the revitalization of the area.

ACTION ITEM 1.4

Explore the adoption of zoning measures to support Farmland Preservation.

Facilitating and encouraging suitable development in the Town Center and other developed parts of Spencer will take pressure off the outward pressure from residential development. It is advisable to complement this action with regulations designed specifically to protect farmland.

Some towns in Massachusetts have introduced Farmland Preservation Overlay Zones. Amherst's Overlay Zone states that it aims to protect the practice of farming and support its economic viability by conserving the most productive land and allowing residential and other uses on the least viable portions. By protecting the economic viability of farming, it aims to secure access for farmers to ongoing support services and to preserve the value of the land and the culture and landscape of farming. It sets the conditions under which cluster residential development may take place and sets standards for development, including dimensional standards.

Hadley has a Farmland Preservation Bylaw that works on the system of the Transfer of Development Rights ('TDR'). All parcels of at least five acres in the Farmland Preservation District are eligible for TDR to Business or Industrial zones with frontage on designated major roadways in Spencer. The bylaw describes the process for certifying development rights and the special permit process for transferring those rights. It establishes dimensional and density regulations and design standards for TDR development. The bylaw also establishes an alternate cash contribution method for purchasing agricultural preservation restrictions.

As part of its comprehensive Zoning Bylaw review, we recommend that Spencer should investigate these approaches and consider, firstly whether such protections are suitable for all land zoned Rural Residential, in which case the Rural Residential Zoning could be amended to incorporate this sort of protection. If it is considered that there are different levels of importance applying to different parts of the Rural Residential District, the Zoning Bylaw Review could recommend either an overlay zone applicable to the most important areas or a set of criteria that could filter out the parcels that are considered most important to preserve.

ACTION ITEM 1.5

Explore the adoption of a Corridor Protection Overlay Zone (for Turkey Hill Brook and Wire Village Corridors).

Spencer has a great combination of rural beauty and historic interest. These two elements come together uniquely in the Turkey Hill Brook and Wire Village corridors. This is an area of historic interest on a much more than local scale. These beautiful assets need to be protected. They also need to be celebrated and be available for the enjoyment of the people of Spencer and the wider region. To achieve this balance, a particular set of protections may be necessary for this area.

One way to protect such an area is to adopt a specific Corridor Protection Overlay Zone. In this case, because of the specific nature of the required protections, an overlay zone is the best mechanism to achieve the objectives. This mechanism is successfully used by several towns and is frequently associated with rivers or streams. For example, it is being applied in a joint initiative between Maynard and Acton to a corridor along the Assabet River.
The overlay zone would regulate public access to the corridor's natural and historic features, as well as determine setbacks for development purposes and the types of use allowed in the area.

We recommend that as part of the Zoning Bylaw review, Spencer should investigate the use of a Corridor Protection Overlay Zone to manage the historic assets and natural beauty of the Turkey Hill Brook and Wire Village Corridors.

ACTION ITEM 1.6

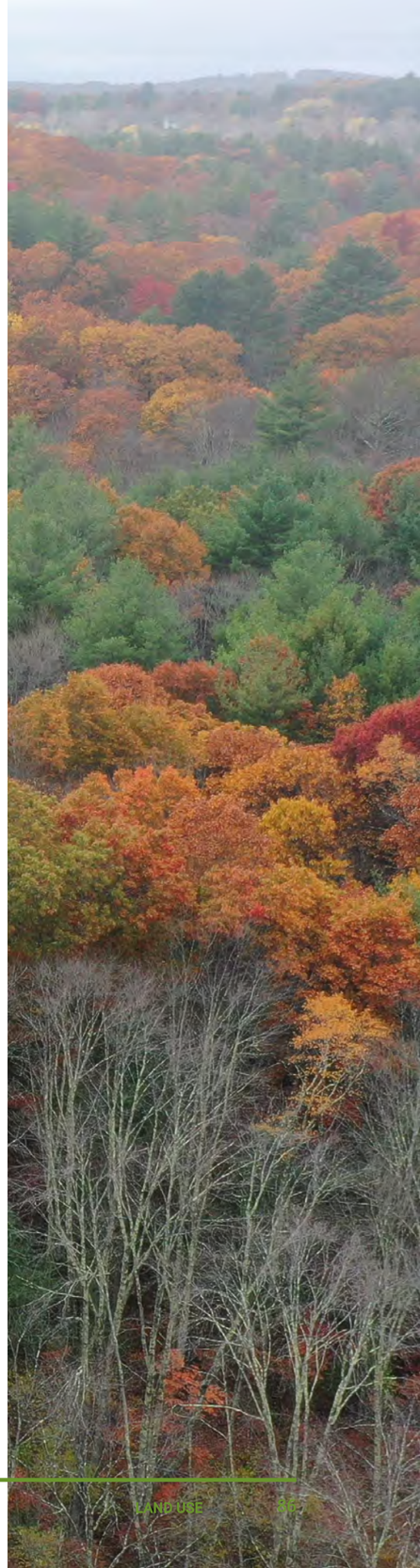
Explore the adoption of a Scenic District Overlay Zone or the designation of select roads as Scenic Roads.

The importance of the preservation of the productive potential of farmland and the enterprise associated with it has been covered in Action Item 1.4. In some ways, the people of Spencer are as concerned about the views of farmland and the beauty of the landscape as they are about the farming itself. Of 361 survey respondents, 211 took the time to list their favorite views in and around Spencer. A very wide range of views was selected, but some were mentioned by many of the respondents. Among the most frequently mentioned were St Joseph's Abbey, Howe Park, and Sibley Farms.

The Massachusetts General Law (Chapter 40 Section 15C) provides for the declaration of roads as Scenic Roads and imposes some limited restrictions on properties along Scenic Roads. In 1997 the following roads were declared Scenic Roads:

- Borkum Road (about 1.5 miles)
- Buteau Road (about 1 mile)
- Wm Casey Road (about 1.5 miles)
- East Charlton Road (about 1 mile)
- Cranberry Meadow Road (about 2.5 miles)

Along these roads (which total about 7.5 miles), no work in the right of



way may include cutting down trees or removing stone walls, except with the permission of the Planning Board. It is certainly worth exploring further use of this measure for Spencer, but its usefulness is limited by the fact that numbered routes (such as Routes 9, 31, and 49) are excluded from the provision and by the limited nature of the restrictions associated with it.

However, there is an alternative approach to this, which is to introduce a Scenic Overlay Zone. In this case, because the protections would apply only to some of the areas in the Rural Residential Zone and might also apply to areas in other zones, an overlay zone is necessary. As set out in the 2008 Reconnaissance Report[6], this can be combined with a Scenic Vista Protection Bylaw. Although this is also not often used in Massachusetts, an example where it is used is Topsfield.

Topsfield's scenic overlay zone provides, among other things, that construction should be located behind elevated pieces of land or natural vegetation, that it should be integrated, as much as possible, into the existing landscape, that all efforts should be made to preserve natural grading, vegetation, and other unique property features, and that architectural, site and landscape design techniques should be used to protect scenic views across, through or to a development site.

We recommend that, as part of its Zoning Bylaw review, Spencer should investigate the use of a Scenic Overlay Zone with a Scenic Vista Protection Bylaw and amend its Zoning Bylaw to give suitable protection to views of farmland, open space, and any other favorite views.

Photo: Taylor Wentworth



The areas that might be covered by this zone should be identified in the Zoning Bylaw Review. A good starting point, though, is the Priority Heritage Landscapes Map on Page 20 of the 2008 Reconnaissance Report. Spencer should also consider the declaration of some additional roads as Scenic Roads. The Reconnaissance Report recommended the declaration of Northwest Road.

OBJECTIVE:
Review Subdivision Regulations to identify changes that will help address and accommodate growth.

Land Use regulation is made up of Zoning Bylaws and Subdivision Regulations. Although the Zoning Bylaw is by far the more influential regulatory instrument, it is worth also considering the Subdivision regulations to ensure that they are compatible with any changes proposed to the Zoning Bylaw and are supportive of the goals that the changes to the Zoning Bylaw are designed to achieve.

The Subdivision Regulations serve the purpose of ensuring that all lots have access to the road system and to whatever utility services are available. They work together with the Zoning Bylaw to achieve the type of built environment that the Town aspires to.

Subdivision regulations can have unintended consequences for the Town.

- They can have a significant impact in determining the attractiveness of the Town for developers. If the regulations are unclear or leave a great deal to the discretion of the Planning Board or an appointed official, they can create uncertainty that is always a disincentive to developers.
- They can increase the costs of development by requiring wider roads built to higher standards, more expensive drainage systems, and more expensive utility infrastructure. This can also discourage developers and it can decrease the affordability of the end products.
- They can lead to higher long-term maintenance costs for the Town, either by increasing the amount that must be maintained or by permitting substandard construction.
- They can have a substantial impact on the environmental and aesthetic aspects of development. They can permit the complete removal of all natural features or require minimum disturbance. They can cause an unnecessary amount of water to be removed from the site, reducing ground-water recharge, and increasing downstream flooding hazards, or they can require maximum on-site infiltration.
- They can facilitate complete street programs and encourage non-motorized transport or make these more difficult.
- They can incentivize desirable objectives, such as the inclusion of fire sprinklers in one and two-family homes.
- They can facilitate the gradual, incremental expansion of the town's infrastructure.

ACTION ITEM 1.7

Review of the Town's Subdivision Regulations

A thorough review of the Planning Board's Subdivision Rules and Regulations should be undertaken with a particular focus on

- Low Impact Development[7]: maximizing the extent to which the infiltration of water into the ground remains the same after development as it was before development. This involves preferring local infiltration systems rather than curbs, catch pits, and pipes that remove the water from the site; minimizing impervious surfaces, by for example, reducing road widths to the acceptable minimum; minimizing clearance of vegetation, and prioritizing native plants in landscaping.
- Incentivizing the installation of Fire Sprinklers—fire protection requires standards concerning road widths, house placements, cul-de-sac lengths, turning circles, etc. If adequate water supply is



Photo: Taylor Wentworth

available and sprinklers can be installed, some of these standards can safely be reduced, allowing for higher densities and the development of a larger number of units.

- Incrementally expanding town infrastructure -the Subdivision Regulations currently say: "Where a subdivision is located adjacent to, or within a reasonable distance from the existing municipal water and/or sewer system, the Board may require connection thereto." We recommend that this should be amended to make it clear that this would be subject to confirmation from the Water and Sewer Commissioners that connection is possible and considered desirable by the Town. As set out in Action Item 1.5, developers should be informed as early as possible of the Town's views on this issue in the case they are considering.

OBJECTIVE:
Encourage development that helps preserve the Town's rural and historic character.

Much of the focus of Objective 1, dealing with the review of the Zoning Bylaw, was on zoning measures to encourage development that helps preserve the Town's rural and historic character. This character has to do with the patterns of landscape and buildings.

The rural character has to do with patterns of grazing lands, cultivated fields, woodlands and natural vegetation, walls and fences, barns, and homesteads. These were developed over decades in ways that reflected the technological, economic, and social arrangements that were in place as they developed. Those arrangements have changed over time, and they keep on changing, so the patterns that people find beautiful and comforting are not necessarily still practical or economical.

The historic character reflects the priority that public and communal buildings enjoyed in the past, when people were more willing to invest in Town buildings, churches, and similar communal buildings, and individuals or corporate entities placed more value on the aesthetic qualities of their buildings. The scale, proportions, and decoration of the buildings, as well as the grounds in which they were set and the relationship of the buildings to each other and the streets, reflected aesthetic and social values that exist now more in sentiment than in practical or financial commitment. Practical economics and individual and corporate investment decisions are no longer likely to result in the maintenance or sympathetic development of these elements of character. For them to survive the Town will need to take specific action to support them.

ACTION ITEM 1.8
Promote and encourage Agricultural Protection Restrictions to preserve the rural character of the Town.

Apart from the zoning interventions we have discussed, the most effective mechanism to help preserve rural character is the state's Agricultural Preservation Restrictions Program. "The Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program is a voluntary program which is intended to offer a non-development alternative to farmers and other owners of "prime" and "state important" agricultural land who are faced with a decision regarding future use of their farms. Towards this end, the program offers to pay farmland owners the difference between the "fair market value" and the "agricultural value" of their farmland in exchange for a permanent deed restriction which protects the farmland for future agricultural use".[8]

As well as a financial incentive to commit to retaining the land for agricultural or forestry use, this program offers a variety of grants to landowners and farmers to assist them with the upkeep and agricultural development of the land. Spencer should ensure that information on the APR Program is readily available and should encourage landowners, particularly those who own land in the proposed Scenic Overlay Zone, to participate in the program. The Town should reach out to the Department of Agriculture and to farmers' organizations to see how it can further encourage participation in the program.

ACTION ITEM 1.9
Incentivize the preservation of the historic character of the Town.

The Historic and Natural Resources chapter will discuss the benefits of declaring the Town Center a Local Historic Area under state law, in addition to its status as a Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places. The benefits relate to additional control over changes that can be made.

Ideally, Spencer should aim to achieve the objective of preserving the historic character of the town less through control, which runs the risk of reducing the willingness of property owners and investors to invest in important properties at all, and more through incentives.
There are federal tax credits available for historic buildings and the Town should ensure that property owners and potential purchasers of historic buildings are aware of these.

In Action Item 1.3 we discussed the use of the Zoning Bylaw to incentivize adaptive reuse and preservation of historic buildings in the town center. We reiterate the value and importance of that approach.

In addition, the Town should explore other opportunities to incentivize appropriate investment in the preservation, sympathetic adaptation, and reuse of historic buildings. This may range from straightforward measures such as waiving plan submission fees on building plans that satisfy established preservation criteria, to exploring the limits of tax incentives that the town may be able to institute for this purpose.

ACTION ITEM 1.10
Build on the recent solar bylaw amendments to continue to make solar and agricultural uses more compatible, such as using Smart Solar zoning options or encouraging developers to look at non-Rural Residential zoned sites.

Some activities are particularly difficult to guide through zoning regulations because the law limits what restrictions can be placed on them. One of these, particularly important in Spencer, is solar energy developments and battery fields. This is an issue of major concern to the residents of Spencer. In the responses to the community survey, the issue was repeatedly raised, in some cases in answer to almost unrelated questions. This was one of the comments in response to a request to identify favorite views: "Howe Park and all the beautiful country which is slowly being sold to solar fields."

The Massachusetts General Law

and court cases arising from it constrain the zoning control that towns can exercise on solar energy developments, but the Spencer Town staff have worked pro-actively to promote 'agrivoltaics' or the simultaneous use of areas of land for both solar panels and agriculture. They have incorporated these ideas into Town regulations in a way that will limit the wholesale conversion of agricultural land and its exclusion from Chapter lands to accommodate solar development.

The Master Plan must include the stated objective of constantly reviewing, amending, and adapting Town bylaws and regulations to achieve balance in respect of solar power generation. One side of the balance is its commitment to the State's policy of supporting the expansion of solar power generation as part of its strategy to reduce climate pollution. On the other side is the need to protect historic and natural landscapes, to avoid the contradiction of allowing trees that play a significant role in carbon sequestration to make way for solar generation, to protect residents' safety from unmanageable fires in battery fields, and to respect their concerns regarding the industry. This is an ongoing activity for the Town's staff and there should be no doubt that their activity in this regard is part of the implementation of the Master Plan.

It is also important to explore alternatives to ground-mounted solar systems in rural areas to be able to discuss all available options with developers and to be able to defend the Town's position on rural solar developments. The view of the Attorney General on this matter[9] is that the Town must be able to show that it actively supports the promotion of solar energy. If it can show that there are significant opportunities for solar development and that there is a welcoming and supportive attitude towards the industry, then regulation of the industry where it is likely to have negative impacts is more likely to be legally supported.

GOAL 2

ENCOURAGE PRIVATE INVESTMENTS BY CREATING BY-RIGHT DEVELOPMENT MECHANISMS FOR THE TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT THAT ALIGNS WITH THE TOWN'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES AND MASTER PLAN STRATEGIES.

While guiding development away from the sensitive rural areas in favor of the already developed areas is beneficial, it is also important to recognize that the Town needs significantly more development to increase its revenue base and reduce the burden on each current resident of the Town.

An important and central goal is to encourage private investment in the Town, not only through zoning controls but through all means at the Town's disposal.

One of the major impediments to development and one that is extremely difficult for the Town to eliminate is the limitation on water and sewer infrastructure. There is little doubt that the recently lifted moratorium on additional connections would have been a disincentive to new development, and the lifting of the moratorium is certainly a positive step.

The possibility of expanding networks is much more complex. Its theoretical merits are strong, but its cost in immediate financial terms and in terms of other opportunities that would have to be forgone are high. We concur with the Town Administration that it is not a realistic action item to include in the current plan, but it should be noted as a priority in future planning if and when it becomes financially feasible. There are several other objectives that we would recommend which would advance this goal.

OBJECTIVE:

Increase predictability and lower costs for developers.

A common theme through these goals, objectives, and action items is the importance of creating an optimal environment for investors and developers. In the current investment climate, with interest rates high and persistent inflation creating the expectation that interest rates will remain high, there is little demand for investment opportunities. This combines with a high supply of investment opportunities. Throughout Central Massachusetts towns are facing the same challenges. Expenditures are increasing faster than revenues and residential taxpayers are at risk of having to bear the costs in increased taxes. At the same time, most towns want to ensure that any development that comes to their areas will fit in with their unique character.

To attract development, and particularly desirable development it is essential to create a development environment that is favorable to developers so that they are encouraged to choose Spencer. Reducing costs to developers is an important part of this process. More important is reducing uncertainty. As mentioned above, if developers or investors must choose between a town where they know that their application will be approved and one where they might wait several months only to be rejected, there is little question that they will go where there is certainty. There are several ways that confidence can be improved, and costs can be lowered.

ACTION ITEM 2.1

Explore the Potential of Chapter 43D – Expedited Local Permitting.

If the Town is willing to commit to expedited permitting on priority development sites, it can apply for the designation of a site or sites under Section 43D of the Massachusetts General Law. The effect of this designation is that it:

- provides a transparent and efficient process for municipal permitting
- guarantees local permitting



decisions on priority development sites within 180 days
- Increases visibility of the community and the target development site(s)

There are several benefits of this designation, most notably priority consideration for MassWorks Infrastructure Program grants, brownfields remediation assistance, and other financing through quasi-public organizations. Also, the site itself and the Town's pro-business regulatory climate are advertised online, the Town benefits from improved efficiencies in the permitting process and the Town collects special fees for permit applications.

To qualify for the designation, sites must be zoned for commercial, industrial, residential, or mixed-use, must be able to accommodate a building of at least 50,000 square feet of gross floor area, must be approved by the Town and must be approved by the state Interagency Permitting Board. If a site is privately owned, the owner must agree.

The Town would have to have a single point of contact, to amend local rules, regulations, bylaws, etc. to comply with the 180-day permit timeline, determine the requirements and procedures for applying for permits, establish a procedure for determining the completeness of applications and abide by the 180-day time limit.

This procedure could be used to redevelop parcels of land in the Town Center, or it could be used to stimulate the development of industrial or commercial land along the Route 9 corridor.

There is currently only one parcel of vacant industrial-zoned land, but it is well located on Route 9, close to the intersection with Route 49. It is a fifteen-minute drive from the Turnpike, so potentially well-located for development. Several survey respondents commented on the need for industrial development, with several suggestions that light industry would be beneficial and some people proposing technology or pharmaceuticals. One respondent had this to say: "Spencer must focus on 'light industry' locations and building our small office/commercial base of business that isn't just consumer retail. Any assembly firms with agricultural/electronic/medical/software products packaging and testing would help build our economic base without adding burdens on municipal services."

While expedited local permitting may not be essential to attract this type of industry, it is worth exploring the possibility that it would work for the Town as an added drawcard.

ACTION ITEM 2.2

Re-evaluate requirements for Special Permits to eliminate those no longer considered necessary.

Just as it is necessary to review the Town Centre Zone to make it welcoming to increased investment and development, it is advisable to look at the Commercial Zone (this is dealt with under Goal 4), the Village Residential Zone, and the Suburban Residential Zone, and to go through the exercise of seeing whether there are uses that currently require a special permit or are not be permitted that could be permitted by right, to encourage these zones as more suitable than the Rural Residential Zone and to promote development.

The only residential use not permitted in either of these zones is Mixed Uses in a Single Building in the Suburban Residential Zone. We suggest there is an argument for allowing this with a Special Permit. The following uses require Special Permits in the Suburban Residential and Village Residential Zones:

Suburban Residential:
Two-family
Multi-Family
Conversion of an existing Single-family Dwelling to a Two-family
Single-family Attached
Accessory Apartment

Village Residential:
Multi-Family
Conversion of an existing Single-family Dwelling to a Two-family
Single-family Attached
Accessory Apartment
Mixed Uses in a Single Building

We recommend that the review of the Zoning Bylaw should carefully consider these requirements in terms of whether it is considered essential for the Town to have the ability to prohibit the use in any case, weighed against the possibility of additional housing opportunities, potentially more affordable housing opportunities and additional tax revenue arising from increased property values.

It is important to remember that an alternative option to the requirement for a Special Permit is the requirement for a Site Plan approval. While this does not give the Town the choice of prohibiting the use, it does give it a say on the configuration and the aesthetics of the development.

One use, in particular, merits additional comment. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) are more and more widely accepted throughout Massachusetts and the state government has published a model bylaw that aims to provide older homeowners with a means of obtaining rental income, companionship, security, and services, thereby enabling them to stay more comfortably in homes and neighborhoods they might otherwise be forced to leave. It is expected that this will add moderately priced rental units to the housing stock to meet the needs of smaller households at a variety of stages in their life cycles and will provide some housing units for persons with disabilities.[10]

As set out in the Housing Chapter these are all objectives of the Master Plan. Consequently, part of the review of the Zoning Bylaw should involve the exploration of an ADU Bylaw to make use of this opportunity for further suitable development inside

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Balance of housing and open space seems about right in Spencer. Use many vacant structures in downtown to help provide more housing."

(Community Survey, 2023)



the existing developed fabric of the Town.

ACTION ITEM 2.3

Re-evaluate application fees for Special permits.

Where a need for Special Permits remains, the negative impact associated with this should be reduced as much as possible, by re-evaluating the fees for Special Permit applications, to make sure that they are not a disincentive for businesses or developers to try to establish themselves or to develop property in Spencer.

ACTION ITEM 2.4

Simplify and clarify Site Development Plan procedures and requirements.

Another way to make the process of development in Spencer less complicated and therefore more attractive than it might be in other towns is to reduce the time required to comply with procedures and to simplify procedures as much as possible. One instance where this could be applicable is where Site Development Plans are required. The process of applying for Site Plan Review should be simplified as much as possible and the costs associated with the process reduced as much as possible. This is another essential element of the Zoning Bylaw review.

ACTION ITEM 2.5

Extend the Online Permitting Process to Conservation, Zoning, and other Planning applications.

The Town has already begun the process of establishing an online permitting process. This is a positive step. It makes it more convenient to submit applications and more efficient and easier to process them. It also sends a clear message that the Town is committed to keeping up with best practices as new systems and opportunities develop.

Spencer should maintain its commitment to, and investment in this process and add the relevant modules to introduce online permitting for Conservation, Zoning, and other Planning applications.
This will be addressed in more detail in other chapters.

ACTION ITEM 2.6

Establish a process of meeting early with interested developers, particularly concerning Infrastructure Extensions.

To help reduce risk and uncertainty for potential developers and to make them aware that Spencer is keen to assist and promote appropriate development, the Town should respond to early inquiries about potential development by arranging a meeting between the developer and all relevant sections of the Town, including the Town Planner, the Conservation Agent, the Building Inspector, the Health Agent, and the Water and Sewer Commissioners. Among other things, this meeting should establish:

- whether the property under consideration will be required, or be able to connect to Town water and sewer
- what the costs associated with a connection might be
- whether there is a possibility that the Town might be able to source grant funding to assist with this cost
- what the associated times would be.

OBJECTIVE: Maximize the Benefits of Community Preservation Act Funds

Spencer has just taken the highly positive step of adopting the Community Preservation Act under Chapter 44B of the Massachusetts General Law. The Town can now collect a surcharge of 1% of the tax levied against real property, after subtracting the first $100,000 in residential property value which is exempt.

The Town will receive an annual distribution from the Massachusetts Community Preservation Trust Fund to augment the funds collected.
These funds can be used for “the acquisition, creation and preservation of open space; for the acquisition, preservation, rehabilitation and restoration of historic resources; for the acquisition, creation, preservation, rehabilitation and restoration of land for recreational use; for the acquisition, creation, preservation and support of community housing; and for the rehabilitation or restoration of open space and community housing that is acquired or created as provided in this section”.[11]

The availability of funds to implement some of the action items listed in this plan will make a major difference to the Town’s potential

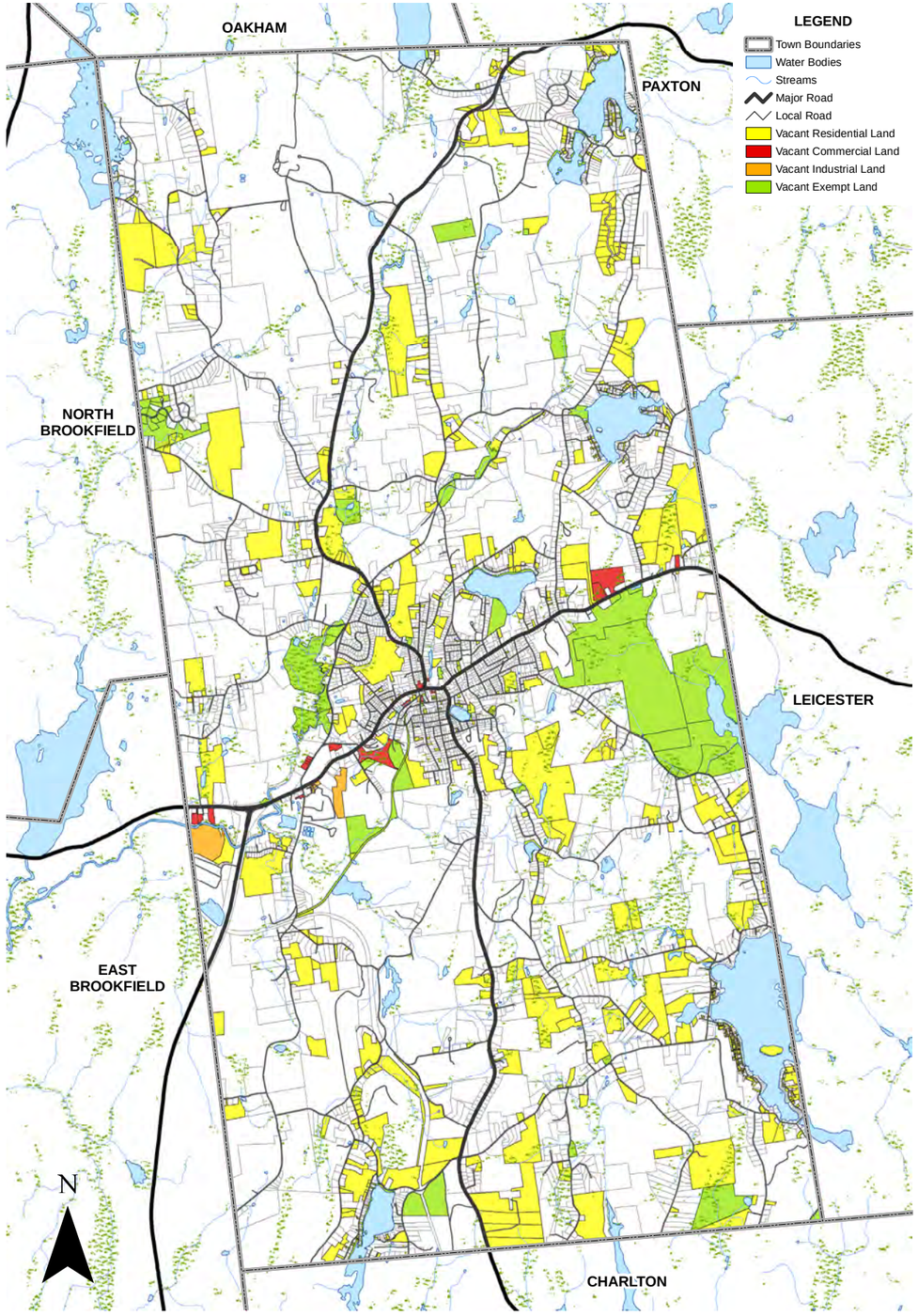


Figure 6: Vacant land. Source: CMRPC, Town of Spencer.

Total Residential Units: **363 Units**

Neighborhood Area: **25.12 Acres**

Neighborhood Density: **14.45 Units Per Acre**

Description	Residential Units	Parcel Acres	Avg. Parcel Density
Apartments with four to eight units	95	3.05	31.15
Three-family	63	3.27	19.24
Apartments over eight units	58	1.56	37.09
Two-family	54	422	12.81
Housing authority	42	2.04	20.61
Single-family	24	3.83	6.27
Mixed-use (Commercial with residential	14	0.91	15.45
Multiple houses on parcel	13	0.64	20.25

Source: Residensity (mhp.net)

Figure 7: Housing density in portions of the town center. Source: CMRPC, Town of Spencer.

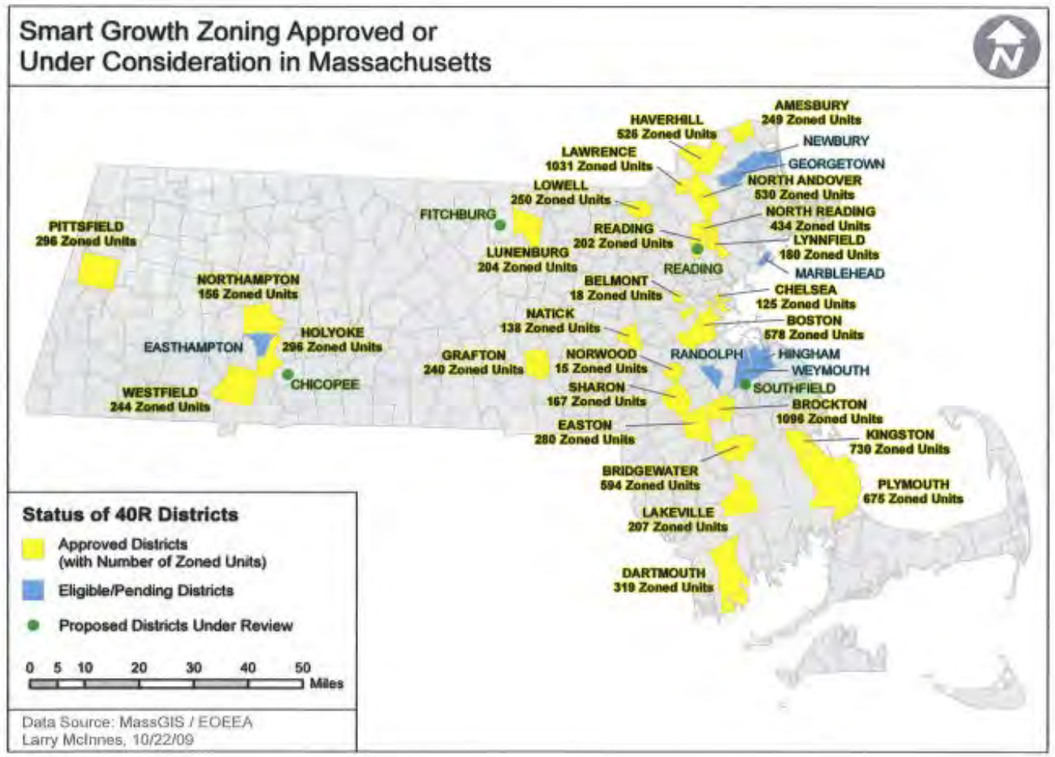


Figure 8: Smart Growth Zoning approved or under consideration in Massachusetts.

to move forward. The use of these funds needs to be carefully planned to make sure that the community receives the maximum benefit that can be derived from them.

GOAL 3

ADVANCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIOR TOWN CENTER REVITALIZATION PLANNING EFFORTS.

Changing the regulatory environment by revising the Zoning Bylaw and related regulations is essential to enable concrete actions in the Town Center and to promote development. The town center has potential for redevelopment that has yet to be realized. It also has the potential to offer residents and visitors a desirable range of social and economic opportunities. As the demand grows and the financial return on business upgrades increases, the center will increasingly become a reason people want to visit and live in Spencer.

There have been multiple studies over the years, and further studies in this regard are not currently needed. Building on existing studies, it is now possible to identify specific objectives and, related to them, programs for implementation.

OBJECTIVE: Use regulatory tools and incentives to encourage the re-development of vacant properties.

Mill towns that have experienced de-industrialization, such as Spencer, are particularly vulnerable to storefront vacancies and a decline in commercial activity. The action items below outline some of the measures that Spencer can take to work with vacant property owners or enforce compliance when absentee owners do not cooperate. There is an ongoing effort to rehabilitate older buildings in Spencer through adaptive reuse. These opportunities present benefits and challenges. Preserving the historic character of Spencer while growing the tax base requires strategic, long-term planning.

ACTION ITEM 3.1

Reassess the condition of buildings in the Town Center to identify safety issues and pursue code enforcement.

Most of the work required concerning the assessment of blighted and unsafe properties in town has already been done in the 2015 Property Assessment and Re-Use Planning Project. Since that work was completed, the condition of the sites identified for potential intervention has changed. Some of the properties have further deteriorated. In some cases, properties that were identified as being suitable for take-over by the Town are now in Town ownership. The next step at this stage is to implement the findings of the study. This needs to be followed by the allocation of responsibility to a committee or Town staff to identify funding sources and proceed with negotiations.

The process can start with an inspection by the Board of Health, the Building Inspector, and the Fire Department. Typical examples of Sanitary Code violations are the presence of mold, overgrowth, trash, debris, and structural damage. If significant violations are found, the Town can draft a formal agreement to correct the violations. If the owner is not cooperative, the Town can use the reports generated from a property inspection as the basis to start the receivership process, as outlined in Action Item 3.1. The action should be taken in terms of Sections 6 and 7 of Chapter 143 of the Massachusetts General Law, which give substantial powers and make clear the urgency of the matter.

The main constraint to this process is the lack of staff resources. The enforcement personnel are part-time staff. To implement the findings of the 2003 Master Plan, this Master Plan, and several studies in between, concerning this central concern of town residents it is essential that funds be allocated to increase the availability of enforcement staff.

ACTION ITEM 3.2

Use regulatory tools to prompt absentee owners to stabilize and maintain blighted properties.

Spencer has adopted a Registration of Vacant Buildings bylaw that stipulates that within thirty days of a building becoming vacant, building owners must register the building with the Town of Spencer's Building Inspector. Regulatory tools, such as a vacant properties registry and associated fees can motivate absentee owners to repair and relet their properties. Vacant property inventories are tools municipalities

use to track vacancies and help manage vacant properties to encourage owners to return them to productive use.

The Building Inspector's Vacant Properties Register lists thirteen vacant mixed-use buildings in the town center as of 2024. This is an improvement of two buildings since 2016 when the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission found that there were fifteen.[12] The same survey found that 40% of buildings (97) were in a state of physical deterioration or in "fair or poor condition." After another decade of deferred maintenance, many of the buildings require significant and costly repairs, including ADA upgrades and elevators. These mounting capital needs, coupled with the challenge of engaging absentee landlords in a dialogue with the Town, are a barrier to investment in this building stock.

Several municipalities in Massachusetts have adopted similar bylaws addressing abandoned properties. The Town of Plainville has mandated the registration and maintenance of vacant buildings. In addition to maintenance requirements, the bylaw stipulates that owners of vacant buildings must pay an annual registration fee.

However, these regulatory tools have limitations. As conversations with the Building Inspector's office have revealed, not all vacant buildings are recorded on the registry. Property owners do not come forward, and it is only when neighbors notify the Town that a building is recorded on the list.

A further limitation in addressing the problem is that the reasons for vacancy and blight buildings vary, and so do the options for enforcement. In some cases, the owners have passed away, the property is probate, and families have not kept up with taxes and repairs. Using the tax title process is possible in this case, and the Town has successfully used this option in recent years. In other cases, while the property taxes are up to date, and the buildings are not vacant, the properties are dilapidated and impacted by deferred maintenance. After decades of deferred maintenance, many of the buildings require significant and costly repairs and code compliance. While the units are occupied, the rents are low, and the landlords would not be able to offset the cost of capital expenses. Enforcement in this case is limited because it requires thousands in legal fees for which the Town does not currently budget.

Working with the property owners to incentivize redevelopment would be a more effective approach than enforcement and penalties. However, there is a significant funding gap that prevents redevelopment and a combination of financial assistance, tax breaks, and incentives would be needed to incentivize reinvestment.
To address the persistent issue of abandoned and blighted properties in the Town Center, Spencer would benefit from a comprehensive approach that builds on prior planning efforts and employs multiple tools. These tools range from code enforcement to working with the property owners and collaborating with housing trusts to reuse buildings for affordable housing.

As conversations with the Building Inspector's office and Town staff revealed, incentivizing property owners is currently the most feasible approach to encouraging redevelopment. One of the tools that is in the Town's capacity for implementation is the waiving of permit fees in exchange for repairs. While permit fees only account for a fraction of construction costs, when combined with other incentives—such as expedited review and tax breaks—fee waivers can help a deal pencil out and kick-start redevelopment.

If the owners are not responsive, the Town has several other tools at its disposal. One such tool is the AGO's Neighborhood Renewal Division (NRD). Towns in Massachusetts can work with the NRD to use the enforcement authority of the State Sanitary Code when other efforts, such as working with the owners, have failed. If the municipality chooses not to demolish or start the tax title process, the NRD offers an alternative approach to gain compliance by using receivership. If significant violations are identified, the Town may collaborate with the owner to obtain compliance. If the owner is not cooperative, the Town can file a court action and start a process that establishes steps to correct violations. The process culminates with the court appointment of a receiver, who completes the needed repairs and obtains authority from the court to foreclose. Dedham, New Bedford, and Attleboro are some of the municipalities that have successfully implemented this program.

The receiver can recover their lien either through reimbursement by the owner, or the sale of the property. This approach could be less costly for Spencer than demolition. Receivership is also advantageous compared to the tax title process, which can be time-consuming and puts the responsibility of ownership, liability, and maintenance on the Town. A recent incident with a property on Mechanic Street underscored the need for alternative solutions. The building deteriorated to the point that it posed a public safety threat, and the Select Board considered demolition, a process that would be costly for the Town.
It is important to note that while this program can be in theory less expensive than demolishing or taking over the property through the tax title, legal fees can escalate as the process unfolds in the courts. A lengthy court process can potentially cost thousands in legal fees, which would far exceed the Town's legal budget. Moreover, the outcome of the process is not guaranteed, as the courts can rule in favor of the building owner. Therefore, this is a solution of last resort, and incentives should be used as the first step to turn around blighted or distressed properties.



OBJECTIVE:

Codify elements of the existing design guidelines into the Zoning Bylaw to create a vibrant physical environment and enhance the pedestrian experience.

The Town has invested a considerable amount in Complete Streets projects and in improving crossings over main streets. However, there is a good deal more that can be accomplished with limited investment to upgrade the pavements, improve lighting, provide street furniture, and give the downtown area a cared-for look. This was also identified in the Parking study.

ACTION ITEM 3.4

Review the Signage Bylaw as part of the Zoning Bylaw review and allocate funds for enforcement staff.

Community engagement forums have underscored the need to improve perceptions of the Spencer Town Center. Residents have expressed concern with the number and nature of advertising signs displayed by businesses. People feel that the signs in the Town Center are "such an eye sore - I have lived in Spencer all my life, raised my family here went off to college served in the Navy, and love this Town, the downtown area is a mess" (Survey respondent).

The Signage Bylaw is comprehensive, with rules that differ for each zoning district. Without detailed analysis, there does not appear to be any reason it should not be adequate to manage the aesthetic aspects of the signage in the town. However, the detailed review of the Zoning Bylaw should consider the sections that deal with temporary signs and consider whether and how to reduce the number of temporary signs that are permitted. Temporary signs displayed on the inside of windows visible from the outside are currently not regulated, and their regulation could improve the situation. The review should also consider the rules regarding Sandwich Boards and whether tighter control of this form of signage could improve the overall situation.

The rules and regulations regarding signs can only be effective if they are systematically enforced, and as noted above, there is a serious lack of enforcement capacity. In this regard, the allocation of funds to increase enforcement staffing is a key priority.

ACTION ITEM 3.5

Make the Town Center work for the Town's people as a functionally and visually connected, walkable space that offers opportunities for gatherings, festivals, and entertainment.

- Update the Signage Bylaw to enhance the aesthetic qualities of the Town Center streets and sidewalks.
- Identify a site for a Town Center public space and prepare a fundable proposal for its acquisition and development.

Several respondents to the Master Plan survey and participants in the workshops expressed the need for a town common. For instance, a survey respondent noted that "[It] would be nice to have a decent town common." A town common could provide a focus for civic life, an attractive space for occasional markets, and a relaxed space where people could come together without the need to spend significant amounts of money. The closer to the center of the Town that such a space could be, and the more prominent its position, the more effective this space would be as a community anchor.

Because there is no single space that has developed naturally over time to play this role, it may be necessary to have several spaces that can play distinct roles and that, together, can serve that function.

At the October 2023 community forum, residents noted that the Muzzy Meadow Pond area is an underused open space asset near the Town Center, and some noted that they used to be able to host events and gatherings at Muzzy Pond. Given the significant community buy-in for this location, the Town should explore ways to activate this space and develop a conceptual design for the area.

Parking is a significant problem at Muzzy Pond, and if it is to be used as a gathering area it would be necessary to make sure that it is easily, safely, and conveniently accessible, on foot, from parking areas in the Town Center.

If the possibility of physically separate but functionally linked

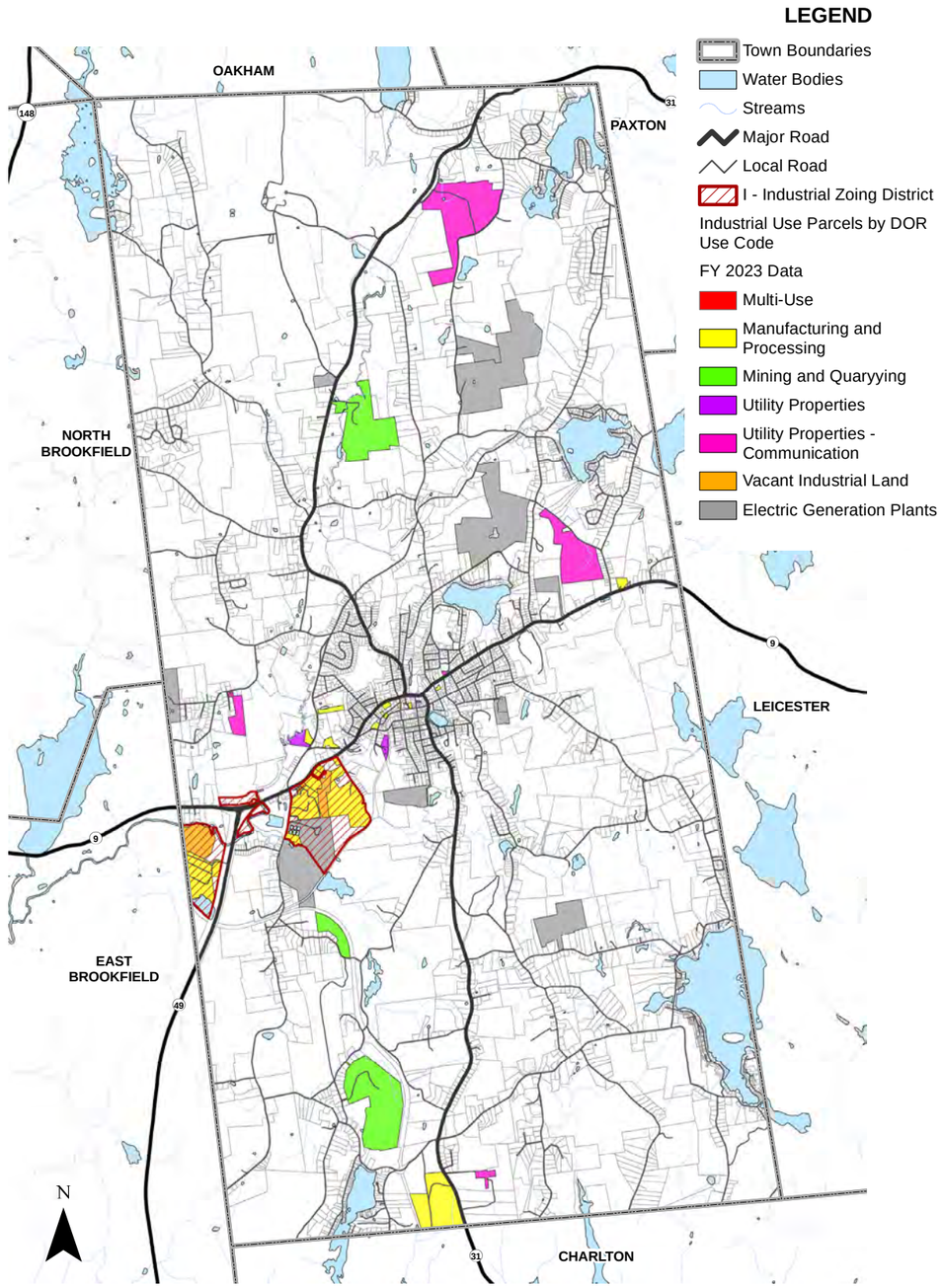


Figure 9: Industrial land. Source: CMRPC, Town of Spencer.

spaces (as with the parking and Muzzy Meadow Pond) is accepted, this opens the opportunity to think of the whole Town Center as a linked civic space where different events or distinct parts of the same event could happen in different spaces. There are several spaces that the Town should explore in this context. Among them are properties on Linden Street and even the Lake Street School site (though this is a fifteen-minute walk from the center.

For this concept to succeed the central area must be connected in ways that make it easy, safe, and pleasant for people to walk around it and that draw people to the places where civic events might happen throughout the year. The Town Center would have to work for people on foot more than for cars. This requires excellent sidewalks, sufficient planting to ensure adequate shade, attractive street furniture, and good signage. Also, the different spaces would have to be designed, adapted, and managed to facilitate the types of activities that the community wants to see happening.

To accomplish this will require the sourcing of funding for the detailed planning and implementation of a Town Center Civic Space project.

OBJECTIVE: Implement the recommendations of the 2021 Parking Study.

One of the most important requirements for the success of both the civic function and the commercial function of the Town Center is for residents and visitors to be able to find a convenient parking spot. It needs to be a spot that allows them to walk safely to wherever they want to go in the Town Center.

The preliminary work to identify needs and opportunities was done in the Town of Spencer, Downtown Spencer Parking Study of February 2020 (the Parking Study). Several action items arise from that parking study and the ongoing views of the people of Spencer expressed through the Master Plan survey and workshops. Like the amendments to the Zoning Bylaw, these could be tackled in a single exercise for which grant funding could be sourced.

ACTION ITEM 3.6

Prepare and implement a Wayfinding and signage plan to direct drivers to parking and other opportunities.

One of the key findings of the Parking study was that drivers, especially visitors to the area, need information about where to park and how to get to the places they may be looking for. A wayfinding plan with distinctive Town branding and signage would help residents and visitors find their way around and elevate the distinctive character of the Town. This is essential if the Town Center is to work as a group of linked civic spaces.

It is also important for other purposes, including helping people to find electric vehicle charging points and helping them to find bus stops. More detail on the need for bus stops is included in the Transportation Chapter.

ACTION ITEM 3.7

Improve parking experience by pursuing shared parking agreements and upgrades to parking facilities.

The Parking study identified several instances where parking convenience could be improved by pooling parking requirements or negotiating public access to private or exclusive-use parking spaces without prejudice to the current rights holders. By making publicly accessible parking spaces available at a variety of points around the Town, convenience would be increased.

According to the Parking study, there is not a pressing need for extra parking spaces, but more conveniently located spaces would be effective in the experience of shoppers. Since convenient parking is in the clear interest of property owners there is a good chance that they may cooperate in this process, particularly if grant funding can be located to construct the parking which will add value to their properties and businesses.

The study also recommends the creation of a shared car park behind Main Street and the negotiation of additional parking spaces on private land. It is also important to pursue additional parking spaces on public land and source funds to implement construction and, if necessary, land acquisition.

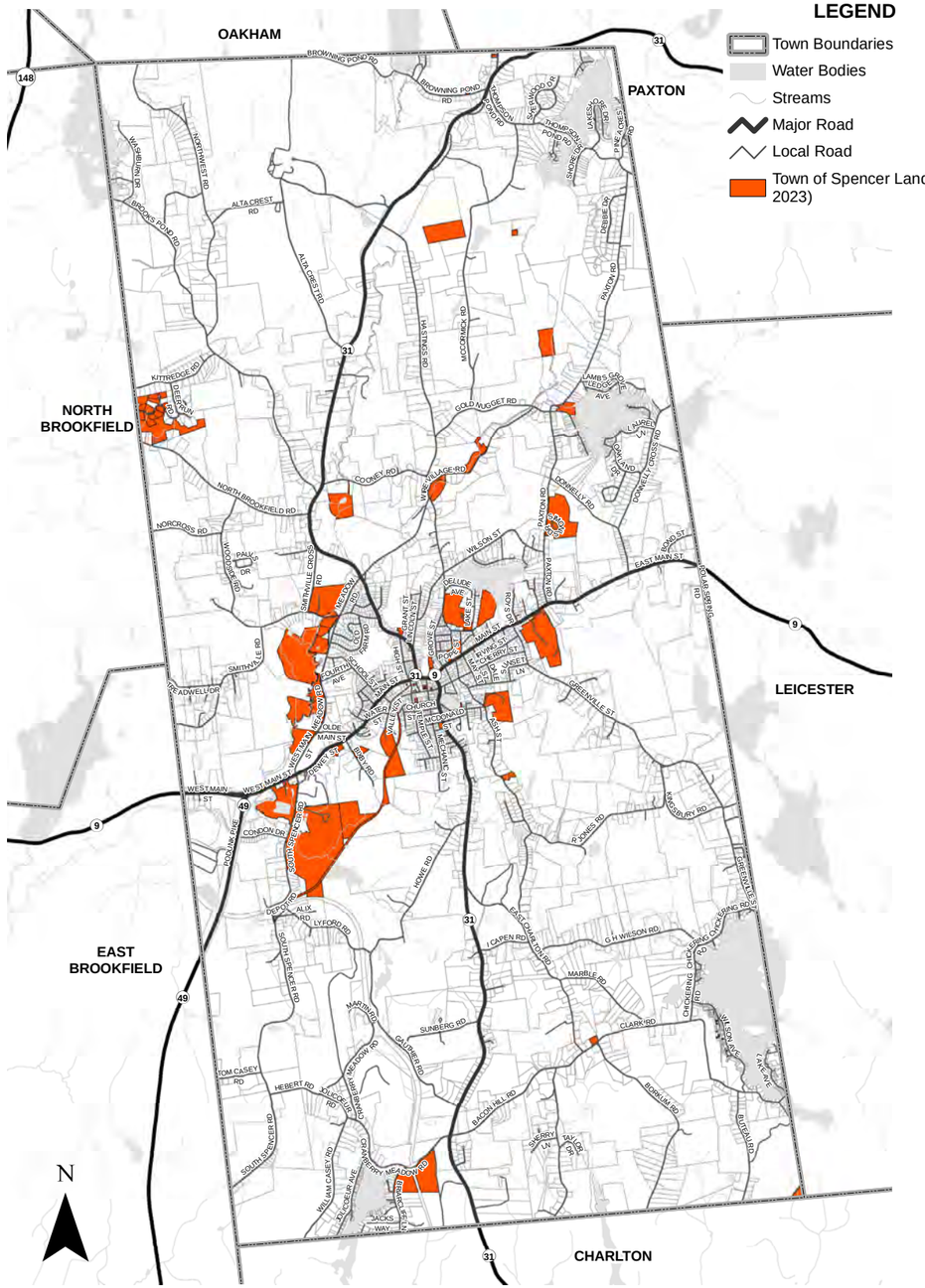


Figure 10: Town owned land. Source: CMRPC, Town of Spencer.

GOAL 4

ENCOURAGE A MIX OF USES ALONG THE ROUTE 9 CORRIDOR

Route 9 is Spencer's principal commercial corridor, and the location of its commercial districts along the corridor presents an advantage for local businesses that benefit from visibility and high traffic volume. However, much commercially zoned land along Route 9 remains underused, and commercial development in Spencer has been stagnant in the past decade.

OBJECTIVE: Align growth and development patterns with the community's vision.

To incentivize growth in commercial districts, the Town can use targeted incentives, such as density bonuses, reducing parking requirements, and reducing dimensional requirements. At the same time, it should work to retain current businesses by easing regulations. A case in point is the shortage of parking that is currently preventing Dairy Queen from effectively serving customers. This presents a safety issue for approaching cars on Route 9. Because of restrictive land use regulations, a solution for the expansion of the business's parking facilities has not been identified.

ACTION ITEM 4.1

Review the Commercial District regulations to encourage investments and economic activity.

As mentioned in the sections above, the upcoming zoning review will present an opportunity to rethink some of Spencer's commercial areas. The Commercial district located on the east side of the Town Center along Route 9 includes commercial uses that are larger and typically draw from wider regions, along with more intense uses than are permitted in the Local Business district. The Commercial district provides for moderate- to high-intensity commercial development, especially office and general retail development. Currently, no housing is allowed in this district, including multifamily. Existing housing in the district is grandfathered.

However, a comparison between the zoning and the land use land cover map of that area (Figure 11) shows that little actual commercial use is present among the parcels with Route 9 frontage.

Current experience is that the commercial parking requirements are a constraint to the land use changes that would result in greater use of this commercial potential. Although Section 6.1.4 of the Zoning Bylaw provides for the relaxation of parking requirements by Special Permit, as has been discussed above, the need for a Special Permit is a severe constraint on development applications. The Zoning Bylaw review should review the parking requirements for commercial buildings to increase flexibility either by reducing the standard requirements through encouraging sharing of parking or considering the possibility of payment in lieu of parking provision.

In addition, the Planning Board may weigh allowing multifamily residential uses and introducing mixed use in that district to increase the demand for convenience goods from local shoppers, as well as utilizing the land more effectively. This may unlock some of the district's development potential. Updating the zoning bylaw to respond to changing market needs is potentially beneficial, but there may be a risk of adding more pressure on available commercial land from competing land uses. To safeguard against the loss of commercial land, the Town could specify the ratio of residential to commercial uses in the district or proposed development.

ACTION ITEM 4.2

Explore the possibility of rezoning land near Route 49 to increase the amount of industrial land available.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Spencer's location on Route 49, the first off-ramp on the Mass Pike after Worcester, and its proximity to the CSX rail present a unique opportunity that has yet to be brought to fruition.

There are two land parcels on the east side of Route 49 zoned Rural Residential (Lot R21-1 and Lot R21-11). Between them, there are about fifty-six acres of unused land that is not wetland, nor in a floodplain. The land does not appear to be protected open space or to have any other notable constraints. This land is physically adjacent to Route 49, though direct access to the state-managed road would have to be negotiated. Although it is not currently served by water or sewer, it is near existing infrastructure.

There are also three or four parcels of potential interest to the north of Route 9, opposite the intersection with Route 49. Of these the biggest is R29-23. This is owned by the state. The portion along Route 9 is zoned industrial, but the bulk of it is Rural Residential. However, the whole parcel is currently protected open space, and it has large areas of potentially prime farmland. The properties next to it (R29-21, R29-21-1, and R29-19) are zoned Commercial along Route 9 and Rural Residential behind. Two of them have commercial buildings next to Route 9 and the third has a residence. They also have some prime agricultural land. They are served by water and sewer. These four properties altogether make a parcel of sixty-seven acres, but their conversion to industrial land would be much more complicated and problematic than the parcels on Route 49.

Either through the Zoning Bylaw update or through a separate exercise, the Town should investigate these land parcels in detail to decide the desirability and feasibility of up-zoning them to Industrial. If even one of these parcels were to be developed for high-value industrial use the additional tax revenue could make a substantial difference to the Town's revenue and therefore to its ability to follow through on other action items.

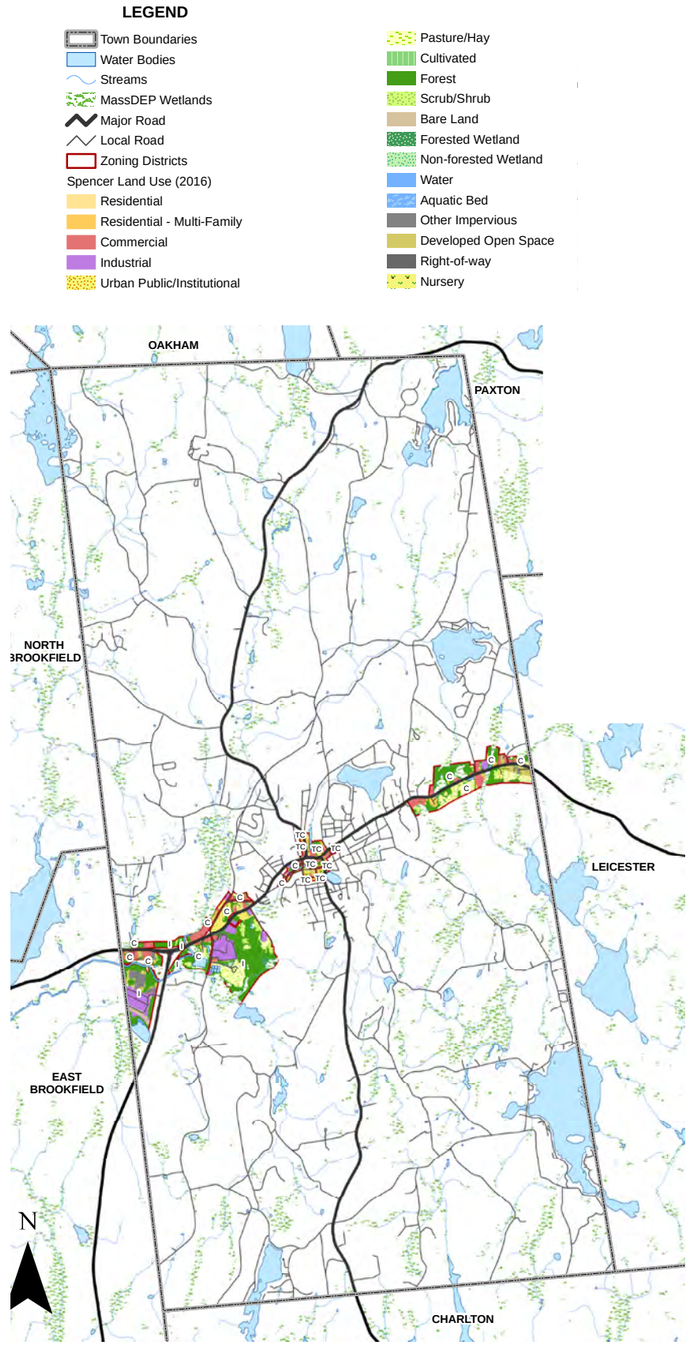


Figure 11: Commercial and Industrial land. Source: CMRPC, Town of Spencer.

REFERENCES

1. Comments edited for clarity.
2. A bedroom community is a residential area where large numbers of people live but do not work.
3. Telegram and Gazette, “Spencer halts new connections to town sewer,” 2020, accessed April 2024, https://www.telegram.com/story/news/2020/10/05/spencer-halts-new-connections-to-town-sewer/114221628/.
4. For more information on these, see https://www.mass.gov/doc/notice-of-funding-availability-commonwealths-sustainable-development-principles/download
5. For an overview of the Smart Development Overlay see Appendix
6. Department of Conservation and Recreation, Spencer Reconnaissance Report, 2008, p. 29
7. See the Massachusetts State Government’s position on LID here: https://www.mass.gov/low-impact-development
8. Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program | Mass.gov. This webpage offers detailed information about the APR program
9. Expressed by the senior responsible official at the 2024 conference of the Citizen Planning Training Collective
10. Smart Growth / Smart Energy Toolkit, ADU Model Bylaw, p1.
11. MGL Chapter 44B, Section 5(b)(2)
12. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Slum and Blight Inventory for Spencer, MA Town Center, 2016





Main Street
Spencer MA

06

Housing



OVERVIEW

The town of Spencer has many desirable residential neighborhoods, unique and historic homes, and a mix of housing opportunities. Residents strive to balance maintaining the town's rural-suburban character with meeting the housing needs of shifting population demographics. This chapter evaluates Spencer's population and household trends, existing housing stock conditions, current and anticipated future housing needs, and housing affordability. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other reliable sources has been synthesized with feedback from the community to inform the recommended Goals and Strategies.

The median sale price of a single-family home in Spencer was five times the town's median household income.

The housing circumstances in Spencer are influenced by a combination of historic development patterns, local decision-making, environmental factors, and housing market conditions. Massachusetts is known as one of the states in the nation with the highest housing costs. The state is experiencing a housing crisis decades in the making as it combats a shortage of rental homes, skyrocketing housing costs, a highly competitive real estate market, extensive waitlists for subsidized apartments, and residents relocating to other states in search of more affordable living conditions. This financial pressure on middle- and low-income families is reflected within the Spencer community. Residents have expressed clear concerns for the town's lack of affordable housing, lack of housing options for seniors, capacity of existing infrastructure to accommodate new development, and the presence of underutilized and abandoned properties throughout town.

GLOSSARY

Cohousing: a cooperative housing approach where residents engage in the planning and management of their communities. Typically, it features private residences for each household, grouped around communal areas like gardens & community spaces.

Subsidized housing: Subsidized housing refers to residential properties or units where the rent is lower than the market rate due to financial assistance provided by the government or a non-profit organization.

Affordable Housing Trust: a governmental or quasi-governmental entity established to address the need for affordable housing within a community.

Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH): housing units that are affordable to low- and moderate-income households without subsidies or special financing. These units typically exist within the private housing market and have rents that are lower than the prevailing market rates.

M.G.L. Chapter 40R refers to a Massachusetts General Law that encourages the creation of compact, mixed-use residential and commercial developments in locations served by existing infrastructure. It seeks to encourage municipalities to adopt zoning ordinances that promote housing production.

Area Median Income (AMI): represents the median (middle) income level for a specific geographic area. It is calculated annually based on household income data from the U.S. Census Bureau and used to determine income eligibility for affordable housing programs and initiatives.

63%
rate of homeownership in Spencer. This has remained unchanged since 2000.

5x
As of 2022, the median sale price of a single-family home in Spencer was five times the town's median household income.

38%
of survey respondents agreed that their biggest concern regarding housing in Spencer is the lack of affordable housing for seniors.

KEY FINDINGS & PRIORITIES

ANTICIPATED POPULATION GROWTH

There are 11,992 residents who call Spencer home according to the 2020 Decennial Census. Historically, Spencer experienced its most notable population growth in the postwar period, increasing from 7,027 residents in 1950 to 10,774 in 1980. The town's growth has slowed considerably since the 1990's, increasing by fewer than 400 residents in the past three decades. Population projections by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission anticipate more rapid population growth in future decades, however, with the town exceeding 13,000 residents in the next decade and reaching an estimated 13,819 residents by 2050.

CHANGING HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Spencer has 5,084 total households, of which 3,275 are considered family households.[1] As regional and national trends indicate, the number of people living in a family household has been declining while more people choose to live alone, delay having children, or have fewer or no children. Such trends can be observed in Spencer, where the number of family households with children under the age of 18 has decreased by nearly one-third over two decades, from 1,405 households in 2000 to 1,069 households in 2022. In comparison to Massachusetts,

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:*

"Alternative development concepts seem hamstrung by local policy - a community of tiny homes, for example."

"Only allow new development in clusters"

(Community survey, 2023)

*** Comments edited for clarity.**



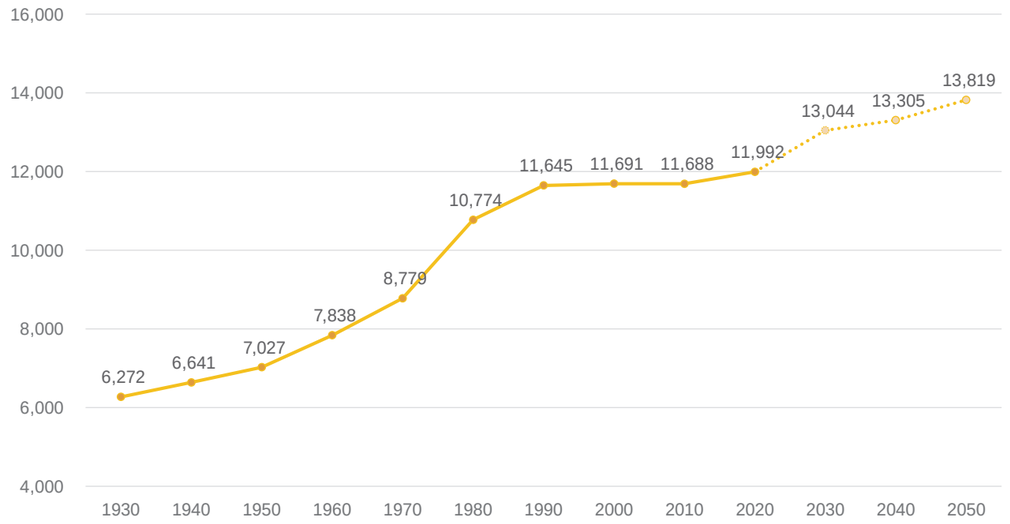


Figure 1: Historic Population Growth with Projections
Source: U.S. Decennial Census 1930-2020; CMRPC Population Projections

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"More people are moving west where there are more reasonable housing costs, yet they still want and expect the same resources and municipal services they are used to."

(Community Survey, 2023)

Spencer has a greater percentage of householders living alone (30% of all households) as well as elderly householders living alone (19% of all households). With only one income, single-person households require housing that meets their budget limitations. While smaller housing units such as apartments or condominiums are typically more appropriate for those living alone, Spencer's housing stock, dominated by single-family homes, has been built for families.

The changing demographics of household and family structures in the town call for a close examination of whether the existing housing stock is meeting the lifestyle needs of residents.

AGING POPULATION

Like most rural and suburban communities in Worcester County, Spencer's population is aging. Figure 3 shows how the town's median age has been increasing over four decades, from 31.1 in 1990 to 44.7 as of 2020. Spencer's population over the age of 55, which made up 22% of the town's population in 2000, now constitutes 36% of all residents.

Meanwhile, the proportion of younger age groups in Spencer is on the decline. Particularly, the age brackets that constitute school-age children (5-19 years) and parents of school-age children (35-54 years) have experienced significant loss in the past 20 years. Enrollment in Spencer's public school system has declined considerably, from 2,220

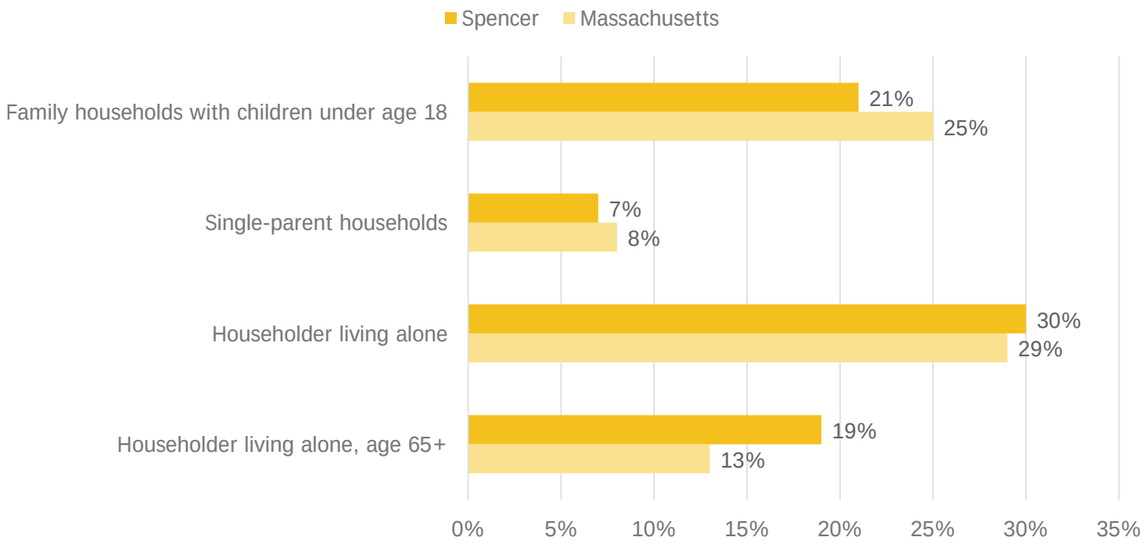


Figure 2: Household Types
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2022

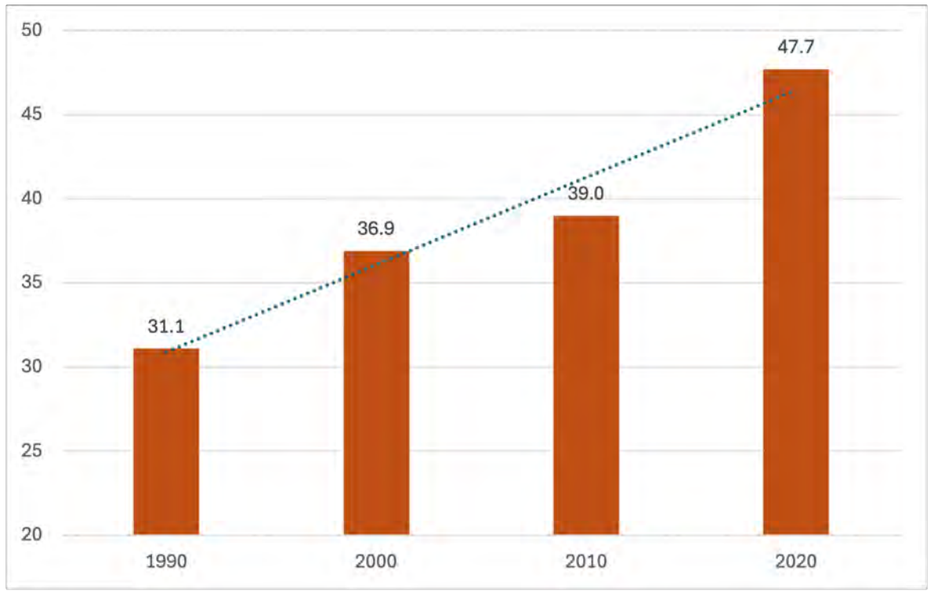


Figure 3: Spencer Median Age
Source: U.S. Decennial Census 1990-2020

students in 2002 to 1,418 in 2023. Housing availability and cost of living may be factors influencing the decline of families raising children in Spencer.

An aging population implies a need for appropriate housing options and supportive services such as single-level homes, affordable housing for those living on fixed incomes, housing with accessibility features such as ramps or handrails, accessory dwelling units for elderly parents to live independently, but near family, homes in walkable neighborhoods, assisted living, skilled nursing facilities, or other types of retirement communities. Currently, Spencer has modest availability of these housing types. There are limited senior housing options in town, making it a challenge for those who have established roots here to remain in the community.

VACANCY RATE AND UNOCCUPIED UNITS

The 2020 Decennial Census recorded a total of 5,515 housing units in Spencer, a 10% increase from 4,938 units in 2000. Of these total housing units, 5,120 units are occupied and 395 units, or 3.8%, are considered vacant. A housing unit occupied for less than 2 months is classified as vacant. A low vacancy rate suggests that demand is greatly outpacing supply and generally results in rising costs of housing. Alternatively, a high vacancy rate may indicate that homes are sitting empty, something that could lead to blight and a housing stock in disrepair. Residents have expressed concern for the vacant

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"We need flexible zoning to allow for both attached and detached accessory dwelling units. affordable housing"

"Allow accessory dwellings to encourage multi-generational living to make housing more affordable for all generations"

"Encourage more families to build, allowing multi-generational living within our town and supporting elders in in-law, accessory dwelling units."

(Community Survey, 2023)



buildings in Spencer's downtown corridor, which have the potential to be used for new businesses and housing.

Demand for Diverse Housing Options
A healthy and resilient community should maintain a variety of housing opportunities that cater to the evolving needs of its residents. Enhancing housing diversity can support the local workforce, first-time homebuyers, empty nesters, seniors, people with disabilities, families of various sizes, households of all income levels, and other members of the community who may be experiencing challenges with housing.

HOUSING STOCK BY TYPE

Two-thirds of Spencer's housing stock is single-family homes, a housing type that dominates the landscape of central Massachusetts. Meanwhile, 13% of the town's housing units are located in duplexes and the remaining 25% of homes are in structures of 3 or more units.

In terms of infrastructure needs and land use, single-family housing is the least efficient for supplying homes to current and future residents. However, Spencer's restrictive local regulations, environmental constraints, and challenges with water and sewer infrastructure act as barriers to creating new housing with greater amounts of density.

RENTAL VS. HOMEOWNERSHIP

A notable share of Spencer's housing stock (37% or 1,898 units) is renter-occupied. Three-quarters of Spencer's rental housing is occupied by single-person or two-person households. Rental housing benefits the community by providing financially realistic options for many families, young professionals, seniors on fixed incomes, and those who are not prepared for homeownership. However, rental units that are not deed-restricted as affordable leave householders vulnerable to rent hikes among competitive market conditions. Most recently the American Community Survey estimated the median gross rent for Spencer to be approximately $1,077, which is lower than the state and the county. Furthermore, older rental units may have structural deficiencies or need energy efficiency and safety upgrades.

The rate of homeownership in Spencer has remained unchanged since 2000 at 63% of occupied housing units. Market data[2] shows the majority of homeownership opportunities are in the single-family housing market, while there is a relatively low level of activity in Spencer's condominium market. An average of only 6 condominium sales per year since 2006, compared to a single-family home sale average of 110 per year, suggests that Spencer has a very low supply of condominiums and is not effectively attracting demand from a diverse range of households. Spencer Assessor's Office FY2023 data determines there are presently 104 condominium units in town.

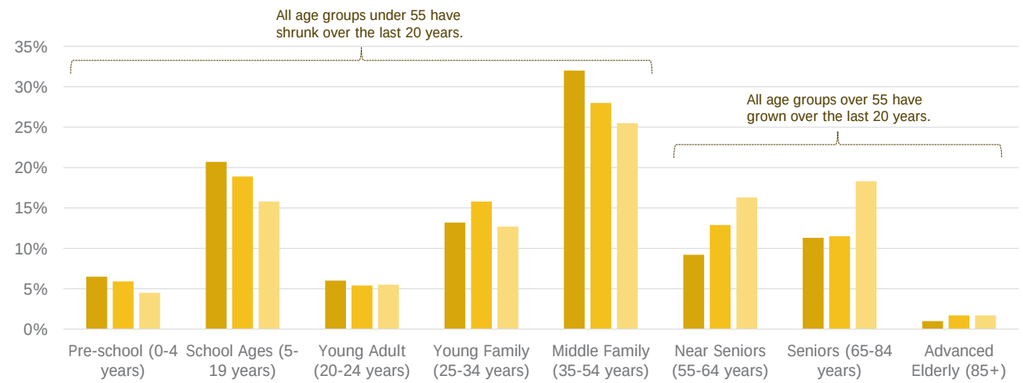


Figure 4: Spencer Age by Lifecycle Group
Source: U.S. Decennial Census 2000-2020

Condominiums are often regarded as a middle ground between apartment rental and single-family home ownership, plus occupancy in these units can indicate demand from households in transition, such as a young family purchasing a starter home or a senior who wishes to downsize.

HOUSING BY NUMBER OF BEDROOMS

It is important for communities to offer a variety of bedroom options within their housing stock in order to accommodate individuals and families of all sizes and budgets. The majority of housing options in Spencer, both ownership and rental units, have between two and three bedrooms. The town is lacking in one-bedroom housing for owner-occupancy, which often comes in the form of condominiums and apartments for sale. If families need housing with four or more bedrooms, the opportunities for renting are fairly slim in Spencer, and purchasing a home is the primary option.

INCOME RESTRICTED HOUSING

There are currently 311 units in Spencer that are restricted for occupancy by lower-income households. Spencer has a Housing Authority that manages public income-restricted housing for households earning less than 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI), specifically the units at Depot Village, Howe Village, 77 Maple Street, and Lloyd Dyer Drive. There is also private income-restricted housing owned and operated by non-profit owners who receive subsidies in exchange for renting to low- and moderate-income individuals and families.

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B is a state law that was enacted in 1969 to facilitate the construction of low- or moderate-income housing. Under Law Chapter 40B, cities and towns must work to ensure that at least 10% of their total housing stock qualifies as "affordable" to households earning at or below 80% of the area median income (AMI). For communities that have not achieved the 10% affordable housing requirement, developers can override local regulations by receiving a comprehensive permit from local ZBA's if they include affordable housing in their projects. With only 5.76% of its housing stock deed-restricted as affordable, Spencer currently falls below the State-mandated 10% affordable housing requirement. In 2023, the Town of Spencer completed a 5-year Housing Production Plan to proactively strategize ways to build the town's affordable housing stock and meet local needs.

BUILDING ACTIVITY AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Half of Spencer's housing stock was constructed between 1950 and 1990. Residential development trends in the United States during this time period are exemplified in many parts of Spencer's built landscape outside of its downtown. Suburban sprawl, characterized by low-density, owner-occupied, detached single-family home neighborhoods, was




Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

the common development pattern during this postwar period and was further enforced by zoning codes that divided land uses into separate districts while allowing single-family housing development as of right.

Spencer's affordable housing stock was primarily built in the 1970's and 1980's. The newest affordable housing complex in Spencer is Bixby Trail Estates, which opened in 2017. Since 2010, the town has added only a fraction of new homes to its housing stock compared to previous decades in Spencer's development history.

Building permit activity sourced from HUD shows that the vast majority of building permits issued in Spencer since 2006 have been for single-family homes. Sprawling development patterns and subdivisions have had direct implications on Spencer's jobs and workforce, mobility and transportation routes, historic resources, and open space and habitat preservation.

There are opportunities to repurpose underutilized and vacant commercial space into new, multifamily housing. The Town of Spencer was awarded technical assistance services under the MassHousing Commercial Conversion Initiative in 2024 to support the Town with redevelopment of underutilized commercial properties in the Town Center. The feasibility study will identify suitable properties for commercial-to-housing conversions and assist in reducing regulatory barriers to redevelopment and reuse.

COMPETITIVE MARKET CONDITIONS

Like other commodities, the value of a home is greatly influenced by supply and demand. While there are many factors at work in determining home value, high demand intersecting with constrained supply will inevitably result in higher prices.

Figure 5 shows the median sales price of single-family homes compared with condominiums between 2006 and 2023 in Spencer. Housing prices in the town declined considerably between 2006 and 2011, a phenomenon that can be attributed to the 2008 economic recession and housing crisis. Since a low of $149,000 in 2011, median single-family home prices have experienced consistent annual growth with prices skyrocketing following the COVID-19

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Spencer has too many apartments and too much priority on low-income housing."

"Poorly maintained rental properties are a concern."

(Community Survey, 2023)

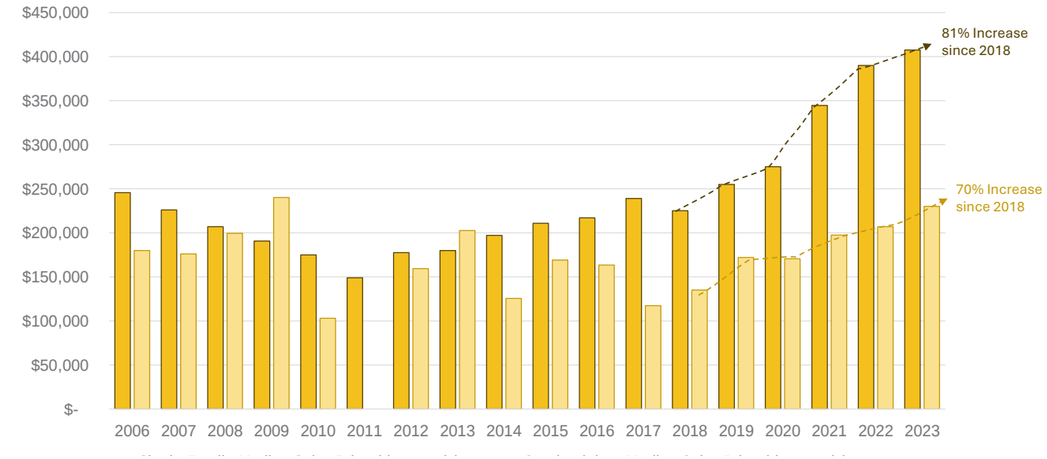


Figure 5: Median Sales Price of Single-Family Homes and Condominiums in Spencer. Source: The Warren Group; Massachusetts Association of Realtors.

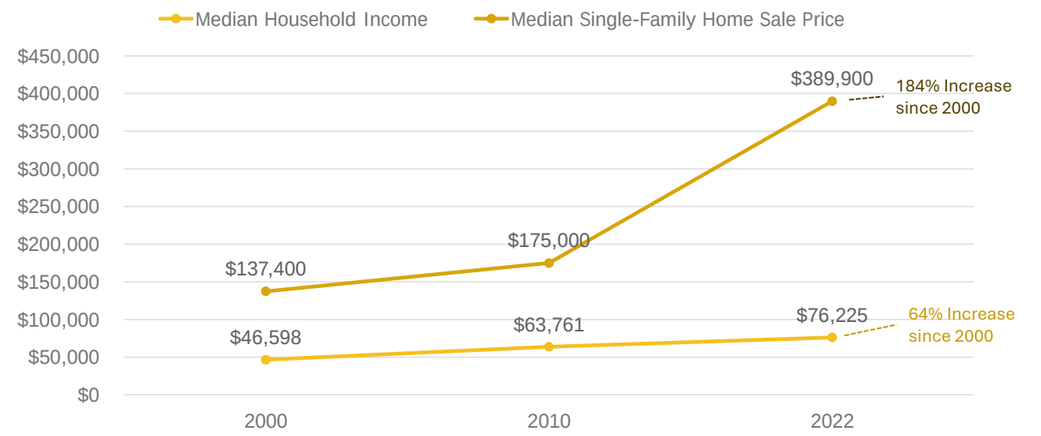


Figure 6: Spencer Median Household Income vs. Median Single-Family Home Sale Price
Source: U.S. Decennial Census 2000, 2010; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2021; The Warren Group

GOALS AND STRATEGIES SUMMARY

GOAL 1

PURSUE POLICIES AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS THAT ENCOURAGE AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRODUCTION AND WORK TO MEET THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING THRESHOLDS ESTABLISHED BY M.G.L. CHAPTER 40B.

OBJECTIVE: Use regulatory tools to expand the diversity of housing options.

ACTION ITEM 1.1 ACTION ITEM 1.2 ACTION ITEM 1.3 ACTION ITEM 1.4

GOAL 2

ENABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT THAT PRIORITIZES THE PRESERVATION OF OPEN SPACE.

OBJECTIVE: Use Smart Growth principles to ensure that new housing development design and location prioritizes the preservation of open space, particularly in North and South Spencer.

ACTION ITEM 2.1 ACTION ITEM 2.2 ACTION ITEM 2.3

GOAL 3

REVIEW ZONING TO PROMOTE THE DIVERSIFICATION OF THE TOWN'S HOUSING STOCK WHILE MITIGATING THE IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY'S SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE.

OBJECTIVE: Streamline the permitting process for home conversions, improvements, accessory dwelling units, and redevelopment on nonconforming lots.

ACTION ITEM 3.1

OBJECTIVE: Encourage the redevelopment of the Town's vacant or underutilized building stock.

ACTION ITEM 3.2 ACTION ITEM 3.3 ACTION ITEM 3.4 ACTION ITEM 3.5

GOAL 4

ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SENIOR HOUSING TO SUPPORT AGING IN PLACE.

OBJECTIVE: Enhance services dedicated for the senior population

ACTION ITEM 4.1 ACTION ITEM 4.2 ACTION ITEM 4.3 ACTION ITEM 4.4

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Too many rundown buildings in the downtown area that could be used for housing. "

"Balance of housing and open space seems about right in Spencer. Use many vacant structures in downtown to help provide more housing."

"I agree Spencer should maintain its small town character. The town center is looking better than it has in the past but some buildings on Main St. and some in the Mechanic/ Chestnut St. area could use a facelift or be repurposed. This town doesn't need more low-income housing projects."

(Community Survey, 2023)

pandemic. In 2023, the median sales price for a single-family home in Spencer was $407,500.

AFFORDABILITY MISMATCH

The income of households is directly related to the amount of money that individuals and families can allocate for housing. Housing that is affordable for lower-income households is significant for creating household stability and economic self-sufficiency. To build and retain a strong and talented workforce to improve the region and state's economic competitiveness, housing that is affordable to working-class and middle-class households must be readily available.

Traditionally, when purchasing a home, the costs should not exceed 2.5 times the buyer's annual household income. By this measure, a household earning $76,225[3] in Spencer could comfortably afford a house of approximately $190,562. However, as housing prices are rising faster than incomes, homeownership is increasingly unattainable. As shown in Figure 6, the gap between median household income and the median single-family home price has widened considerably in recent years. As of 2022, the median sale price of a single-family home in Spencer was five times the town's median household income.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

GOAL 1

PURSUE POLICIES AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS THAT ENCOURAGE AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRODUCTION AND WORK TO MEET THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING THRESHOLDS ESTABLISHED BY M.G.L. CHAPTER 40B.

OBJECTIVE: Use regulatory tools to expand the diversity of housing options.

Housing production is contingent not only on actual development projects but on the planning and regulatory tools that enable municipalities to make well-informed decisions to strategically invest limited public and private resources. New provisions and thoughtful planning practices should be used to capture more affordable units, direct development and growth to the most appropriate locations, and efficiently move projects forward to completion. An examination of the tools Spencer uses to encourage housing growth can help guide more diverse and appropriate residential development.

ACTION ITEM 1.1

Enhance the Town's capacity to plan for and implement housing strategies.

Spencer is a small town with limited staff capacity and a strong reliance



on its volunteers. To assume a more proactive role in promoting affordable housing and related strategies, its capacity to coordinate these activities should be enhanced. Added professional support and expertise could greatly benefit the town. The Town could hire a full-time or part-time housing coordinator, share a position with another community, secure a part-time consultant, hire an Assistant Town Planner, or participate in CMRPC's Regional Housing Coordinator Program. Implementation of the strategies in the Master Plan will require funding and technical assistance. There are a variety of avenues for funding and support that the Town can pursue to achieve its housing goals.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Prices are high and houses are in areas that do not have town sewer."

"Houses being built are not affordable, houses being bought, gutted, and flipped, often for rentals."

(Community Survey, 2023)

Organizations such as Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP), Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA), MassHousing, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance (CMHA), and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) offer a variety of resources and services.

ACTION ITEM 1.2

Create a developer outreach and attraction strategy and partner with local for- and non-profit developers.

Collaborative partnerships between the municipality and developers will result in housing that is best suited for the Spencer community. Town officials should make efforts to hold roundtable discussions with interested developers to determine paths for moving forward with residential developments. Determining appropriate sites for development, infrastructure requirements, regulatory barriers, funding opportunities, and other factors will help facilitate project implementation.

ACTION ITEM 1.3

Explore the adoption of a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

If Spencer is committed to assuming a more proactive role in implementing affordable housing objectives, it will require local subsidy funds dedicated to housing affordability, diversity, and sustainability. Adoption of a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund would enable Spencer to collect funds for housing, segregate them out of the general budget into an affordable housing trust fund, and subsequently use these funds without returning to Town Meeting for approval. Trusts can own and manage real estate, though most trusts choose to dispose of property through a sale or long-term lease to a developer to clearly differentiate any affordable housing development from a public construction project to be in compliance with Chapter 30B. Possible types of assistance through the affordable housing trust fund include:

- Deferred payment loans
- Low or no interest amortizing loans
- Down payment and closing cost assistance for first-time homebuyers
- Credit enhancements and mortgage insurance guarantees
- Matching funds for municipalities that sponsor affordable housing projects
- Section 8 Project Based Vouchers

There are numerous ways to capitalize the fund. Opportunities include inclusionary zoning fees or cash in lieu of affordable units, donated funding or property, special fundraisers, grants, allocation of CPA funds, and more.

ACTION ITEM 1.4

Create a program for landlords that would provide free legal assistance to establish restricted deeds for affordable rentals and reduce taxes by 1% on the deed restricted property for the duration of the restrictions.

While Spencer falls short of meeting its 10% subsidized housing goal set by the State under Chapter 40B, the town has a stock of naturally occurring affordable housing without deed restrictions. In order to capture these units on the Subsidized Housing Inventory, a program should be implemented to incentivize landlords to deed-restrict their units as affordable to low- to moderate-income households. The Town can offer tax reductions to qualifying landlords who take the steps to deed-restrict the units they operate.

GOAL 2

ENABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT THAT PRIORITIZES THE PRESERVATION OF OPEN SPACE

OBJECTIVE:

Use Smart Growth principles to ensure that new housing development design and location prioritizes the preservation of open space, particularly in North and South Spencer.

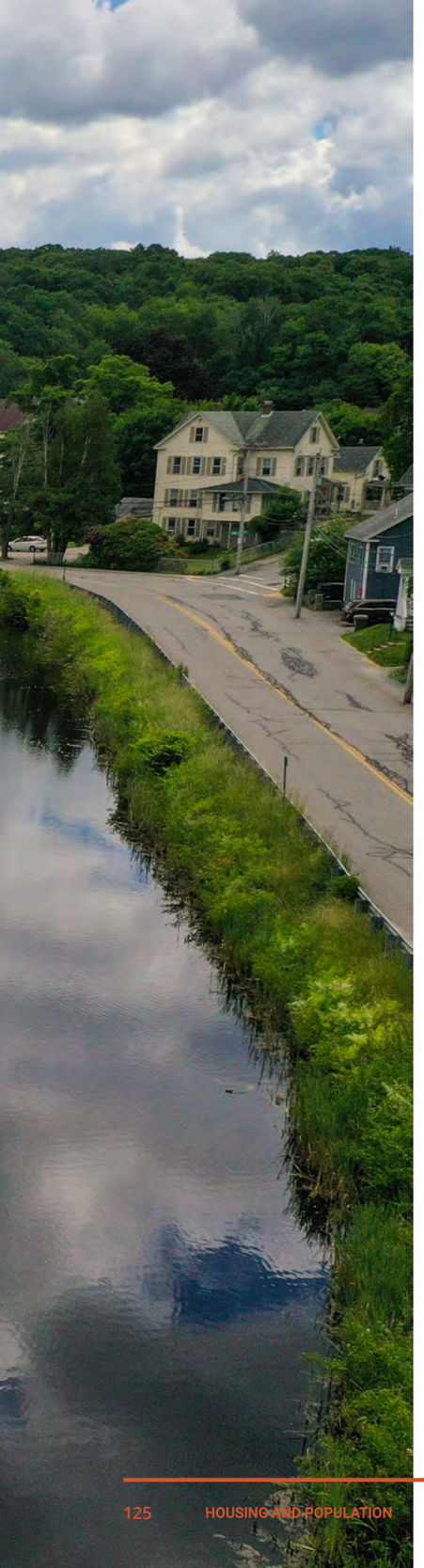
Smart Growth is an overall approach of development and conservation strategies that can help protect our health and the natural environment as well as make communities more attractive, economically stronger, socially diverse, and resilient to climate change. Residential development in the form of single-family housing threatens to destroy important open space and wildlife habitats. The Town should encourage any new development to further Smart Growth, in order to preserve natural lands, protect water and air quality, and enhance vibrant neighborhoods.

ACTION ITEM 2.1

Support cluster development where applicable.

To meet local housing demand, a range of housing types and building scales is needed in Spencer. Residential cluster developments are types of design that feature homes on smaller lots while protecting open space that would have been allocated to individual home sites. There are many advantages to cluster development as opposed to traditional subdivision design. The open space preserved as part of a cluster development can provide community members with common recreational areas while also offering habitat for wildlife and reducing stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces. These designs can benefit developers by reducing the cost of site development and increasing the market price of individual home sites.

The Town should implement strategies to permit cluster developments and attract developers willing to create this type of housing. Opportunities include a new cottage housing bylaw, revised Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw, and changes to the Town's dimensional regulations in the Zoning Bylaws. A Smart Development Overlay Zone under Chapter 40R is recommended to facilitate housing at greater densities, encourage the development of suitable activities for the Town Center area, and lead to



the creation of affordable housing. Future residential construction should incorporate smart growth and sustainable development principles in order to encourage equitable and efficient development.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Debilitated houses across town not being used, taken care of, or being forced to update."

"Housing is limited everywhere and is unaffordable in a lot of cases. This is not unique to Spencer though."

"Rural residential should be limited, i.e., larger individual lot sizes, or multi units. townhouses etc. concentrated in small area of a very large, restricted lot maintaining rural surroundings beyond the housing."

(Community Survey, 2023)

ACTION ITEM 2.2

Upzone[4] select neighborhoods by reducing density and height limitations while maintaining desired housing forms.

The town is encouraged to actively create affordable and diverse housing options in appropriate locations without compromising the small-town character and valuable open space that are defining aspects of Spencer. This can be achieved through zoning reform in select districts to allow increased residential density. Multi-family housing is only permitted with restrictions in limited districts, however, in order to achieve the town's housing goals, greater flexibility with allowed housing types and dimensions should be implemented. "Missing Middle Housing" types such as duplexes, fourplexes, townhouses, cottage housing communities, garden apartments, and other smaller-scale housing can blend with the single-family home character of existing neighborhoods while adding much-needed units to the housing stock.

ACTION ITEM 2.3

Reduce dimensional requirements for duplexes and other small-scale multi-family housing forms.

Regulations and ordinances set by local and state authorities in Massachusetts are often exclusionary and are designed to favor single-family homes. Duplexes and small-scale multi-family housing styles can blend seamlessly into single-family home neighborhoods, however the current dimensional requirements in the Zoning Bylaws are not conducive towards these types of developments. The current required minimum lot size, minimum lot frontage, minimum lot width, minimum setbacks, and minimum buffer should be reexamined to consider how they could be reduced to facilitate new multi-family housing in select districts in Spencer.

GOAL 3

REVIEW ZONING TO PROMOTE THE DIVERSIFICATION OF THE TOWN'S HOUSING STOCK WHILE MITIGATING THE IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY'S SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE.

To efficiently execute the Master Plan's recommended housing objectives, greater flexibility will be needed in Spencer's Zoning Bylaws. The Town of Spencer should consider the following planning, regulatory, and zoning-related strategies to encourage the creation of additional affordable units. These actions can be considered as tools in a toolbox that the community will have available to promote new housing opportunities, each applied to particular circumstances and providing a powerful group of resources when available in combination.

OBJECTIVE:

Streamline the permitting process for home conversions, improvements, accessory dwelling units, and redevelopment on nonconforming lots.

Currently, the permitting process for home conversions, structural improvements, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and housing development on nonconforming lots can be lengthy, challenging, and lacking clarity. These housing types can provide both new and rehabilitated units, improving Spencer's housing stock and addressing the needs of populations like seniors and first-time homebuyers. Local leaders should take the necessary steps to clarify and streamline the permitting process for such housing types. Additionally, the Town may wish to consider reducing the minimum lot size in certain districts to allow greater flexibility with housing development on lots appropriate for housing but non-conforming under current restrictions.

ACTION ITEM 3.1

Modify Spencer's Accessory Dwelling Unit bylaw to allow for more opportunities for small-scale housing development, including detached units.

The Town of Spencer's Zoning Bylaws allow accessory apartments by special permit in five of the town's zoning districts (RR, SR, LR, VR, TC). While the existing bylaw regulating ADUs is generally strong and meets

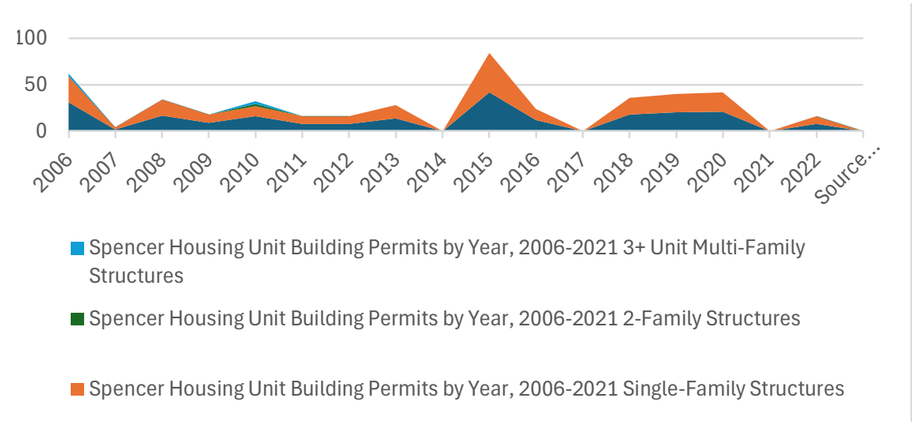


Figure 7: Spencer housing unit building permits by year. Source: Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development SOCDS Building Permits Database, 2022



some Smart Growth principles, there are some modifications that the Town should consider in order to allow this favorable type of housing to be constructed more easily. Currently, the Accessory Apartment zoning bylaw only allows for attached accessory apartments that cannot exceed 700 square feet, or one-third of the floor space of living area in residence. This should be amended to allow detached accessory apartments and an increased maximum size.

Additionally, applying for a special permit is often a barrier for homeowners who would like to create an accessory apartment on their property. The Town is encouraged to consider permitting this use to be allowed by-right in one or more residential zoning districts, provided they meet all necessary criteria. The Town should also consider waiving the parking requirement, as accessory dwelling units built for an elderly relative who no longer drives should be able to avoid this requirement without seeking a variance, particularly if options like the WRTA Paratransit service are available.

OBJECTIVE: Encourage the redevelopment of the Town's vacant or underutilized building stock.

A notable issue identified throughout the Master Plan's public outreach process is the town's vacant and underutilized building stock. These properties can negatively impact the character of the community and detract from residents' overall quality of life. While some locations may be more appropriate for commercial or industrial use, there are numerous buildings and lots that could be redeveloped for residential use or a mix of uses. There are a variety of regulatory changes, funding programs, and advocacy efforts that Town leaders should explore to consider the future of these areas.

ACTION ITEM 3.2

Create incentives for the revitalization of blighted housing.[5]

A Slum and Blight Inventory for Spencer's Town Center was conducted in 2016 to determine if the area qualified as "slum and blighted" under M.G.L. Ch. 121B. The study determined that of the 244 structures within the target area, 97 of those structures were considered to be in fair or poor condition. The results of the inventory showed that Spencer Town Center meets the definition and criteria to be considered a "slum and blighted" area. A more detailed summary of the inventory can be found in the Prior Planning section of this document.

The 2016 inventory showed that of the 146 residential structures in the Town Center, 61 structures (42%) were considered blighted. Following a lack of investment in residential properties in recent decades, the Town is encouraged to take steps to creatively incentivize and motivate property owners to make improvements. The Town can consider enacting a "blight ordinance" that will enable the Town to address the issue of blight or the lack of maintenance directly. Such an ordinance could constitute a tax incentive program to encourage property owners to remediate or redevelop blighted properties.

Furthermore, any development within the Town Center should adhere to the Town Center Mixed Use District Design Guidelines prepared by Harriman in 2019, which are intended to guide revitalization efforts through the design of attractive buildings and public spaces. The Planning Board should thoroughly review and evaluate proposed new development and redevelopment projects within the Town Center area to ensure they align with the criteria of the design guidelines.

ACTION ITEM 3.3

Assess opportunities to repurpose underutilized or vacant commercial spaces into new housing.

Properties that were originally designed for commercial uses may now be better suited as residences in order to sustain the vibrancy of Spencer's Town Center. There is considerable opportunity to provide diverse and mixed-income housing, preserve historic character, and enhance walkability in the area by transforming commercial spaces into new housing. Following the award of a MassHousing Commercial Conversion Initiative technical assistance grant in 2024, Spencer is prepared to partner with the State on identifying the best candidates for commercial-to-housing conversions and taking the necessary steps to facilitate redevelopment of these properties. By focusing on creating housing in the Town Center, it will reduce blight and allow for greater infill development that places less pressure on valuable open space remaining in the town.

ACTION ITEM 3.4

Create an open dialogue with downtown business and property owners.

Open communication between the Town and Spencer's business and property owners within the downtown district will help this area achieve its full potential. Hosting meetings in which property owners are invited to voice their concerns, collaborate with neighbors, and learn about opportunities could be instrumental in sustaining a thriving downtown. Semi-regular meetings would provide a space for property owners to discuss vacancies, funding opportunities, capital improvements, marketing and wayfinding, special events, and more.

ACTION ITEM 3.5

Participate in the Attorney General's Neighborhood Renewal Division.

To address blighted properties, the Town of Spencer is recommended to participate in the state Attorney General's Neighborhood Renewal Division, formerly the Abandoned Housing Initiative (AHI), which assists with bringing structures back to full occupancy and productive use. Using the enforcement powers of the State Sanitary Code, the Attorney General's Office (AGO) works closely with municipalities to encourage delinquent owners of abandoned





residential property to make the necessary repairs. If the owner refuses to undertake the required work, the AGO will petition the relevant court to appoint a capable receiver to bring the units up to code. The Town should maintain an inventory of vacant and abandoned properties and provide the relevant information to the AGO. The Town is encouraged to work in partnership with the AGO to help file petitions with the court and potentially identify receivers for court appointment.

GOAL 4

ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SENIOR HOUSING TO SUPPORT AGING IN PLACE.

Spencer's population is aging, while the existing housing stock does not adequately meet the complex needs of its older residents. Senior housing options such as assisted living, over-55 independent living communities, nursing homes, memory care facilities, accessory dwelling units, accessibility improvements, and more are desired by many Spencer residents whose current living accommodations are no longer suitable. New senior housing opportunities will help those who call Spencer home remain in their community.

OBJECTIVE:

Enhance services dedicated for the senior population.

Easy access to services like health care, nutrition, support groups, legal advice, exercise, or transportation is essential for people to thrive in their communities. Particularly for those over the age of 60, supportive services allow aging residents to maintain independent lifestyles while accessing supplemental programs and services to lead fulfilling lives. Spencer's Council on Aging is an essential resource for local seniors and should continue to receive support from the community. The Town can collaborate with the Council on Aging to determine if additional services, programs, or activities are needed. The Town may also want to consider working with the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) on increasing public transportation in town. Any new housing constructed for special populations should be built in proximity to services and transportation routes.

ACTION ITEM 4.1

Review and promote forward-thinking aging in place policies and facilities.

Spencer residents may be interested in pursuing creative living arrangements tailored to older adults so they can remain in the community as they age. Seniors are particularly vulnerable to isolation and loneliness, which can be detrimental to their health. A cohousing style of living allows individuals to share resources and facilities while maintaining their own residence, allowing an independent lifestyle while surrounded by a community. These residences are typically intergenerational, but they can be age specific. In the nearby town of Berlin, MA, the Sawyer Hill EcoVillage is comprised of two cohousing neighborhoods, Mosaic Commons and Camelot Cohousing, which feature small, clustered houses, pedestrian-only walkways, common areas, and shared meals. Home sharing is another arrangement gaining popularity, in which a person who has a home may invite a friend, family member, or tenant to move in and help with expenses and household chores. Scenarios could involve people of the same age living together or a younger person willing to provide some caregiving and transportation assistance in exchange for affordable or flexible housing.

ACTION ITEM 4.2

Promote the Home Modification Loan Program for accessibility upgrades.

The Home Modification Loan Program, offered by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, provides loans for home modifications, helping individuals with disabilities and older adults live more independently. The program covers various modifications such as ramps, bathroom adaptations, and additional living space. Loans range from $1,000 to $50,000 based on household size and income, secured by a promissory note and mortgage lien. Borrowers receive a 0% interest, deferred payment loan, with repayment upon property sale or title transfer.

The Town should encourage residents to use this program, such as offering flyers at Town Hall, providing details on the Town website, or hosting informational sessions at the Senior Center.

ACTION ITEM 4.3

Encourage the development of senior assisted living facilities.

Seniors are a growing part of the Spencer population and housing should reflect their needs. There are very limited senior housing options in town, making it a challenge for those who have established roots here to remain in the community. Elderly residents require a range of options for levels of care, as some can age in place while others are more dependent and need assistance with daily tasks. Input from the Master Plan's public outreach process called for increased assisted living facilities located in town. Town officials should take the necessary regulatory and advocacy steps to determine ways to work with developers on a future assisted living facility.

REFERENCES

1. Family households are defined as households maintained by a householder who is in a family group, and can include any unrelated people who may be residing there.
2. The Warren Group, 2006-2022
3. Spencer Median Household Income according to the American Community Survey Estimates 2022
4. Upzoning is a commonly used term in the planning field to describe an alteration to a community's zoning code to increase the amount of development allowed in the future. While the term rezoning indicates a change pertaining to the permitted land use, upzoning is synonymous with new density.
5. Under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 121B, a slum, blighted or decadent area is defined as "an area which is detrimental to safety, health, morals, welfare or sound growth of a community because of the existence of buildings which are out of repair, physically deteriorated, unfit for human habitation, or obsolete, or in need of major maintenance or repair."





Main Street, Spencer
Photo: Taylor Wentworth

07

Transportation



Photos: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

OVERVIEW

The transportation network is a multimillion-dollar taxpayer investment that directly impacts a community's economic well-being and quality of life. While the automobile is the predominant mode of transportation in Spencer and neighboring towns, modern transportation networks should be inclusive to everyone and provide connections via as many modes as possible with safety as the priority. Through community engagement events and responses to the 2023 community survey, residents have expressed the desire for better connections throughout Spencer, especially connections to and around the town center area with a preference toward improved pedestrian accommodations, traffic calming, and better parking wayfinding.

Residents want better connections throughout Spencer, especially to and around the town center

KEY FINDINGS

OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION ACCESS TO AND AROUND DOWNTOWN SPENCER

Spencer has clusters of residential areas scattered throughout town and most of its commercial

GLOSSARY

Vision Zero
is a multi-national road traffic safety project that aims to achieve a highway system with no fatalities or serious injuries involving road traffic. It prioritizes the protection of human life above all other planning and design considerations of the transportation system.

Traffic count
is a method used to measure the number of vehicles or pedestrians passing a certain point on a road or pathway over a specified period. Traffic counts provide the data necessary to create efficient, safe, and sustainable transportation systems.

Non-recurring congestion
refers to unexpected traffic delays that are not part of the usual daily traffic patterns. This type of congestion is typically caused by temporary disruptions or unusual events rather than regular high traffic volumes.

Complete Streets
is a transportation policy and design approach that aims to create streets that are safe, comfortable, and accessible for all users, regardless of their mode of transportation. This includes pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, public transport users, and people of all ages and abilities.

A wayfinding plan
is a system of signs, maps, symbols, and other visual cues to help people navigate and understand a space or environment. It is used in urban areas to ensure that users can easily find their way to their destinations.

Shared parking
is a strategy that optimizes the use of parking spaces by allowing multiple users or groups to share the same parking facilities. This approach maximizes efficiency and reduces the total number of parking spaces required, benefiting both property owners and users.

99.60
miles of roads in Spencer are owned and maintained by the town

30,000
rail carloads are delivered annually to the New England Automotive Gateway in Spencer

5,026
daily vehicle volume on Meadow Road

37.52
miles of roads in Spencer are owned and maintained by residents

4,052
rideshare trips originated in Spencer in 2022

3,871
daily vehicles volume on Charlton Road

businesses are focused in the more densely developed downtown area. The master plan survey showed that the majority of respondents viewed improving pedestrian and bicycle accommodations in this area of town favorably and highlighted the need to improve parking either by increasing capacity or by improving wayfinding to existing lots. Based on the findings of the 2020 Downtown Parking Study, there is ample parking in Spencer but utilizing shared parking agreements to allow people to park in private lots coupled with improved wayfinding would go a long way toward solving the needs. Downtown is also where Spencer's main transit stop is located, providing access to the City of Worcester and other destinations via the Worcester Regional Transit Authority. Improving pedestrian accommodations and connections to private property would help improve the ability of people to access businesses and residences in Downtown Spencer from already existing transportation access points.

IMPORTANCE OF THE ROAD NETWORK

Roadways are the primary piece of the transportation system that facilitates the movement of people and goods not only into and out of Spencer, but also around the community. The road network supports infrastructure for automobiles, pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit, and

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS: *

"More people would take the bus if there was an option to park their car somewhere besides a grocery store."

"Village Residential needs to be more walkable."

(Community Survey, 2023)

*** Comments edited for clarity.**

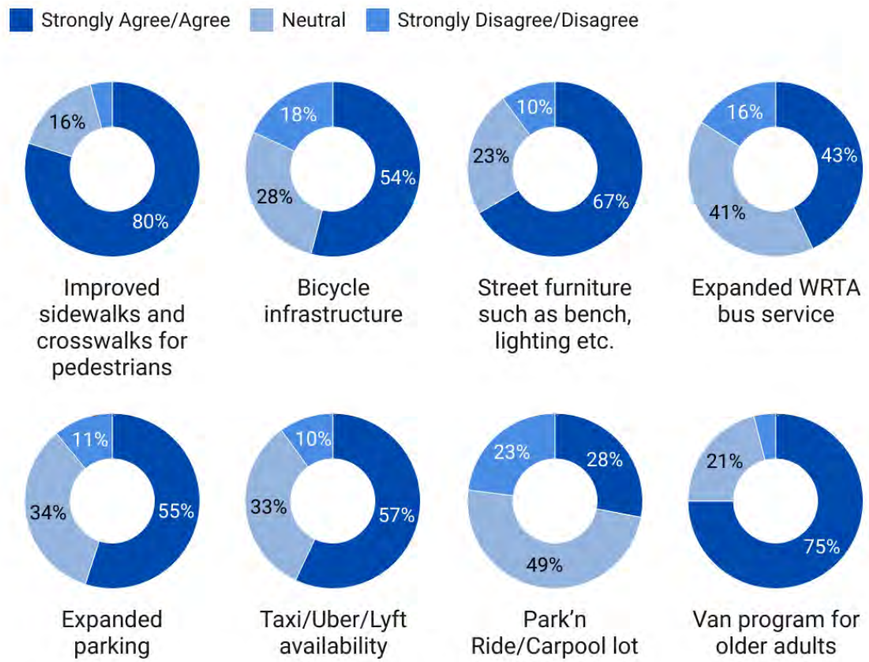


Figure 1. Resident preferences for transportation options in Spencer. Source: Spencer Master Plan Survey, 2023, Question 15: Which transportation options should be explored in specific areas of Spencer?

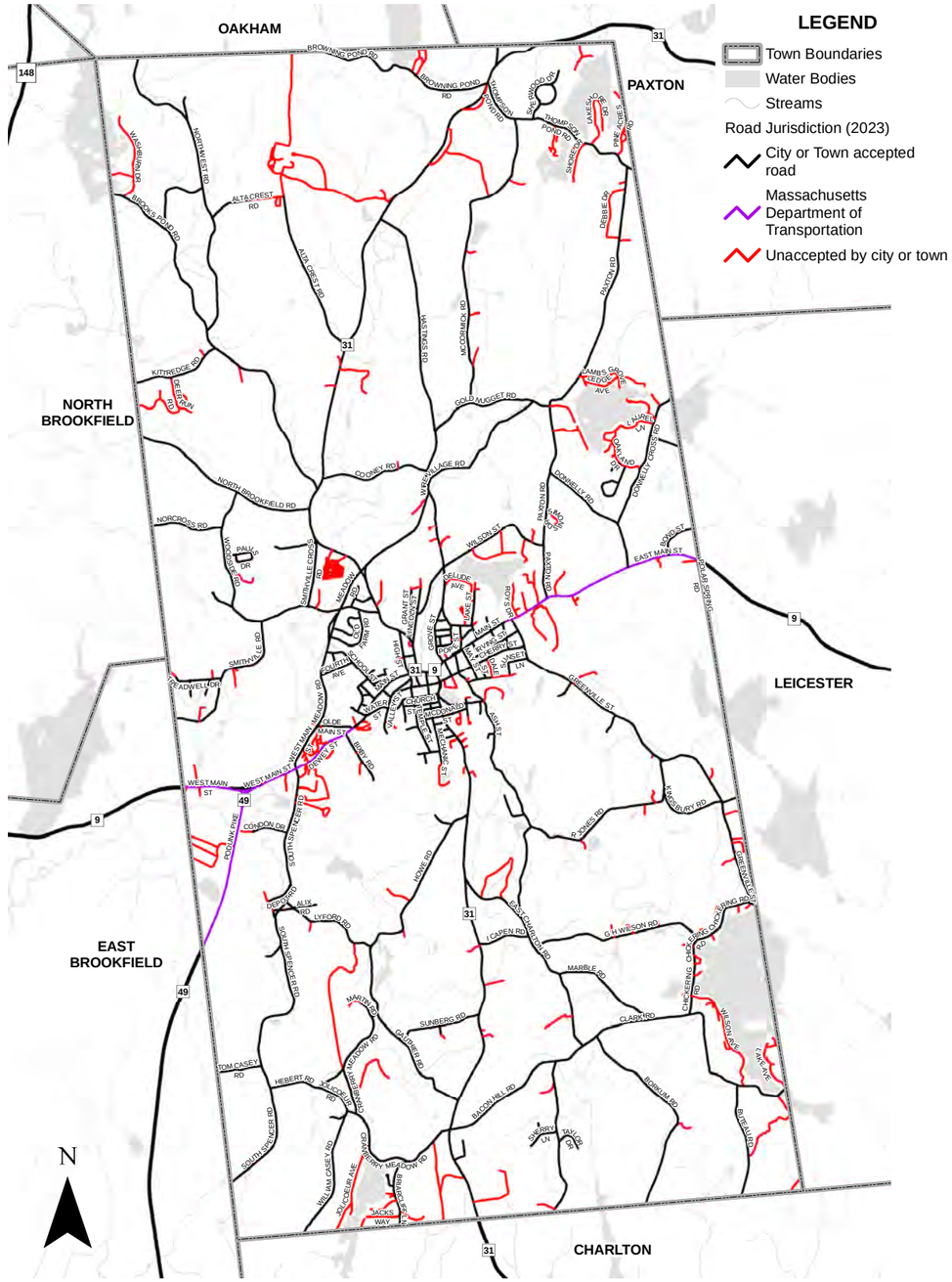


Figure 2: Town of Spencer roadway jurisdiction, 2024. Source: Town of Spencer, CMRPC, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts,

Date of Count	Street	Location	Daily Volume	Percent HV
9/27/2023	Maple Street (Rt 31)	South of Adams Street	4,025	15.90%
11/3/2022	South Spencer Road	South of West Main Street (Route 9)	2,106	17.70%
11/3/2022	North Brookfield Road	West of North Spencer Road (Rt 31)	2,230	13.30%
11/3/2022	North Brookfield Road	At North Brookfield Town Line	2,014	11.00%
11/3/2022	Greenville Street	South of South Kingsbury Road	2,454	19.40%
11/1/2022	Wire Village Road	East of Pleasant Street (Rt 31)	877	10.20%
11/1/2022	Wire Village Road	East of Hasting Road	499	13.40%
11/1/2022	Paxton Road	South of Thompson Pond Road	1,393	13.00%
11/1/2022	Paxton Road	North of Donnelly Road	1,554	17.70%
11/1/2022	Meadow Road	North of West Main Street (Rt 9)	5,026	22.60%
8/25/2022	Charlton Road (Rt 31)	North of Howe Road	3,871	16.6
8/25/2022	Chickering Road	South of Greenville Road	1,090	11.30%

Figure 3: Traffic counts in Spencer, 2024. Source: CMRPC and MassDOT.

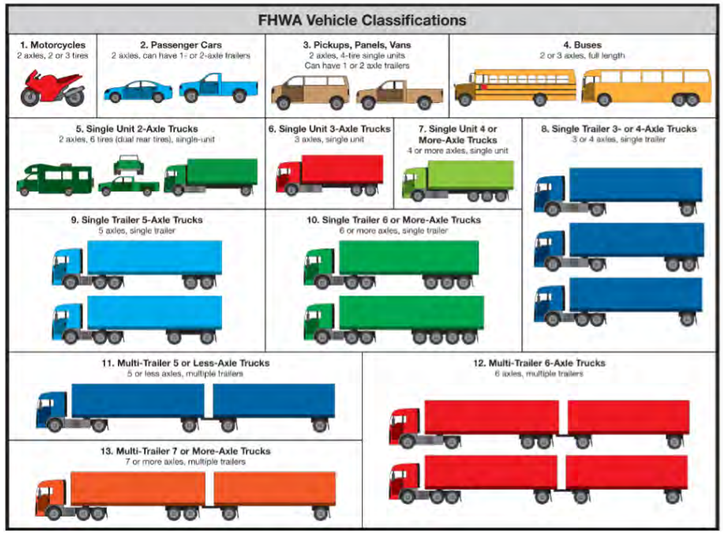


Figure 4: FHWA classification system. Source: Federal Highway Administration.

to an increasing extent "micro-mobility" (micro-mobility is short-distance transportation normally taken via shared vehicles such as bikes or scooters that are often electric). The majority of Spencer residents rely on private vehicles for transportation both around Spencer and to locations outside of town such as trips for work.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation maintains the state Road Inventory File (RIF) which is the authoritative source for information on roadways in Massachusetts. The RIF is a database that provides information on ownership and road classification among others.

The ownership, or jurisdiction, of a road is important to determine the maintenance responsibility for the roadway. Ownership information is used to help determine the local aid funding each town receives on an annual basis through the Massachusetts Chapter 90 as well as other local programs. According to the 2023 MassDOT Road Inventory File In Spencer, the majority of roads in Spencer (99.6 miles) are owned and maintained by the town while 37.52 miles are not accepted by Spencer and there for are owned and maintained by the residents who live on those roads. The Master plan survey showed that residents who live on private roads desired the assistance of the town in maintaining these roads.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"In a downpour a bus isn't fun to wait for especially in downpours and snow storms. We need additional shelters set up."

(Community Survey, 2023)

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAFFIC FLOWS AND HOW THEY INTERACT WITH THE CENTER OF TOWN.

Traffic counts are used to collect information on the current usage of the road network including collecting information on vehicle volumes, speed, and classification. CMRPC and MassDOT conduct comprehensive traffic counting programs covering most roads classified higher than a local road in Spencer. Figure 3 shows the most recently observed traffic volumes in Spencer. Vehicles are classified using a standard system developed by the FHWA based on the number of axles a vehicle has, the number of tires touching the ground, and the number of units that are part of the vehicle. Figure 4 illustrates the FHWA classification system. For the purposes of transportation planning, any vehicle class 6 (two axles six tires) is considered a heavy vehicle (HV).

Many comments in the Master plan outreach efforts focused on the amount and speed of traffic in Spencer, specifically on roads leading to downtown Spencer. The New England Auto Gateway is a significant generator of truck traffic in Spencer and the surrounding region.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"There are NO sidewalks on RT 9 eastbound from 240 Main Street to the high school, despite the new school being built. This is an area with a treacherous solar glare as students walk to Prouty HS or Knox Trail."

(Community Survey, 2023)

The New England Automotive Gateway receives deliveries of finished vehicles from CSX which the EB&S RR unloads and prepares for final "last mile" delivery by over-road trucks. About 30,000 rail carloads are delivered to the NEAG annually. All trucks exiting the NEAG do so onto Podunk Pike (MA – 49) connecting in the North to West Main Street (MA – 9) and in the South to US-20, I-90, and I-84.



GOALS AND STRATEGIES SUMMARY

GOAL 1

IMPROVE THE SAFETY OF SPENCER'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM FOR ALL USERS.

OBJECTIVE: Utilize the Safe Systems Approach to advance the zero deaths vision.

ACTION ITEM 1.1 ACTION ITEM 1.2 ACTION ITEM 1.3 ACTION ITEM 1.4

GOAL 2

IMPROVE THE RELIABILITY AND PERFORMANCE OF SPENCER'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM.

OBJECTIVE: Reduce congestion and delays at key intersections around Spencer.

ACTION ITEM 2.1 ACTION ITEM 2.2 ACTION ITEM 2.3

GOAL 3

IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY IN AND ACCESS TO THE TOWN CENTER.

OBJECTIVE: Enhance non-motorized infrastructure within and in proximity to downtown.

ACTION ITEM 3.1 ACTION ITEM 3.2

OBJECTIVE: Improve parking infrastructure and wayfinding within and in proximity to downtown.

ACTION ITEM 3.3 ACTION ITEM 3.4 ACTION ITEM 3.5

GOAL 4

ENHANCE REGIONAL AND CROSS-TOWN CONNECTIVITY WHILE HELPING TO PRESERVE SPENCER'S RURAL CHARACTER.PLANNING PROCESSES.

OBJECTIVE: Promote WRTA ridership through improved traveler training and information efforts.

ACTION ITEM 4.1 ACTION ITEM 4.2

OBJECTIVE: Explore and promote alternative transportation options.

ACTION ITEM 4.3 ACTION ITEM 4.4 ACTION ITEM 4.5

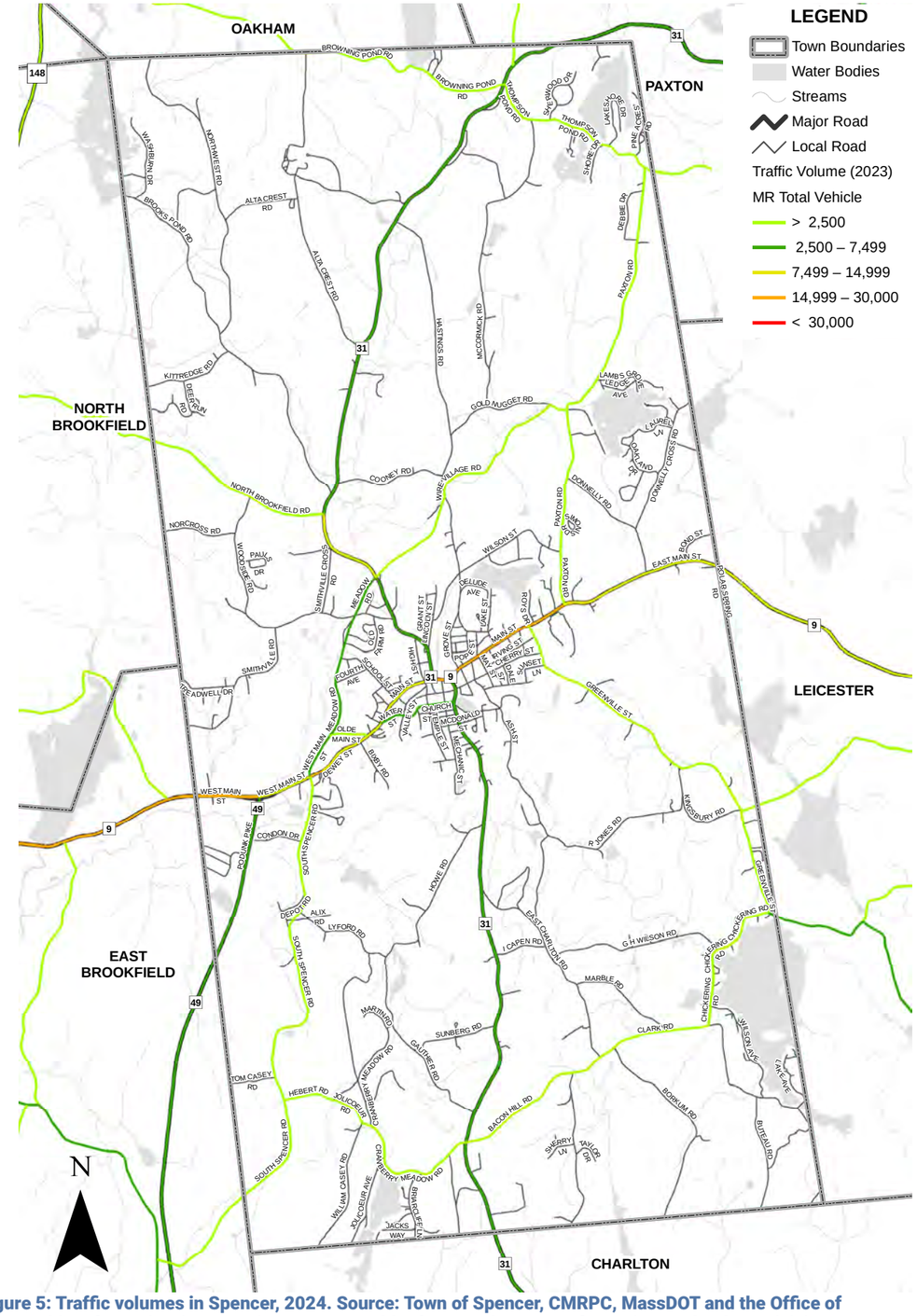


Figure 5: Traffic volumes in Spencer, 2024. Source: Town of Spencer, CMRPC, MassDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

GOAL 1

IMPROVE THE SAFETY OF SPENCER'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM FOR ALL USERS.

A safe transportation system is one where all users feel comfortable making trips using a variety of modes allowing them to select the option that best fits their individual needs, possibly benefiting the transportation system in other ways. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) developed the Impact Portal, which is a database and planning tool that reports crash data across Massachusetts reported to the Registry of Motor Vehicles and various police departments, including the State Police and the Spencer Police Department. Data is analyzed in three-year increments and only for years that are considered closed with the most recent years being 2018 - 2020. More recent data is available in the impact portal, but it is open and subject to change.

Based on data from the Impact Portal from 2018 – 2020, a total of 620 crashes were recorded with three resulting in fatalities and five resulting in serious injuries. To aid in the planning process, MassDOT uses the available information to create crash clusters that are made using a fixed search methodology that merges nearby crashes and clusters. Once generated, clusters are ranked by Equivalent Property Damage Only (EPDO) using a methodology from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that gives a weighting to injury-type crashes greater than property damage-only crashes. This system allows areas to be compared across geographies and to generate priorities. Clusters ranked in the top 5% for each Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) region have a special funding pool called the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) to help reduce crashes.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"The most difficult things encountered are drivers speeding on all roadways throughout town an excessive tailgating when any driver in front of them is obeying the speed limit.

"Both lights by Price Chopper. Traffic study should be conducted. Also the light by Flexcon."

(Community Survey, 2023)

Currently, in Spencer, there are no HSIP crash cluster locations. Two vehicle crash clusters have been identified in Spencer, both of which are centered downtown along Route 9. Main Street (Route 9) at Pleasant Street (Route 31) has an EPOD score of 93. Main Street (Route 9) and Maple Street (Route 31) have an EPOD score of 75. Additionally, one bicycle crash cluster has been identified in Spencer on Maple Street (Route 31) and Cherry Street with an EPOD of 2, and one pedestrian crash cluster was identified on Main Street (Route 9) and Pleasant Street (Route 31) with an EPOD of 213. The data presented in the Impact Portal is backed up by residents who identified downtown Spencer as a major safety concern in the master plan survey for vehicle speed and dangerous crossings.

The Impact Portal also provides information on the type of crash that occurred, noting key groupings of individuals. Of the 620 crashes recorded during the period 100 crashes involved a young driver (those age 16-25), 112 crashes involved older drivers (those age 75 and older), and 9 crashes involved pedestrians. While not closed, more recent data reflect similar trends to the current period.

OBJECTIVE:

Use the Safe Systems Approach to advance the goals of the Vision Zero Program Initiative.[3]

To help improve safety for all road users, Spencer should utilize the Safe Systems Approach and adopt

Vision Zero policies. Vision Zero is the idea that even one fatality or life-altering injury because of a crash on Spencer's roads is too many. The Safe Systems Approach is a framework for addressing roadway safety endorsed by USDOT that acknowledges humans will make mistakes on roadways and seeks to minimize the energy of impact on the human body.[4] The safe systems approach has been adopted across the United States to improve safety by changing the way work is done within an organization to make safety the goal. MassDOT has adopted the Safe Systems approach and has implemented is across its organization, most notably in its 2023 Strategic Highway Safety Plan.[5]

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"The traffic light at the intersection of Route 9 and south Spencer road needs a protected left turn."

"In the Downtown area, crosswalks are not acknowledged by drivers."

(Community Survey, 2023)

None of the aspects of the Safe Systems Approach can be advanced by Spencer alone but by implementing the principles of the program and working in collaboration with MassDOT and others, a safer transportation system can be achieved. Elements that Spencer can focus on to help improve safety are Safe Road Users, Safe Roads, and Safe Speeds.

ACTION ITEM 1.1

Review and implement speed management.

Respondents to the master plan survey highlighted speeding traffic as a major concern for safety, particularly in the center of town. To help reduce travel speeds and improve safety not only for those in a vehicle but also for pedestrians, bicyclists, and anyone else in the area, speed management practices, such as design changes, speed setting, and enforcement, should be considered. Spencer should review current state and local speed-setting regulations to determine opportunities to adjust roadway speeds using data currently available from state and regional sources. Additionally, Spencer should prioritize designs such as road diets, roundabouts, and streetscaping that will result in lower speeds.

ACTION ITEM 1.2

Design roads and other facilities to accommodate all road users and separate vulnerable road users.

A majority of survey respondents (79.33%) either agreed or strongly agreed that improved sidewalks and crosswalks for pedestrians should be explored while 53.79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that bicycle infrastructure should be considered. Additionally, many participants in the master plan workshops indicated feeling



Figure 6: The Safe System Approach. Source: Vision Zero Network.[6]



WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Rt. 9, between the plaza and gas stations. Traffic merging before Klems. Make 148 two lanes."

(Community Survey, 2023)

79.33%
survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that improved sidewalks and crosswalks for pedestrians are needed in Spencer

52.79%
of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that bicycle infrastructure should be considered in Spencer



unsafe traveling in Spencer while not in a vehicle, which is reflected in the available data for the Main Street (Route 9) and Pleasant Street pedestrian crash cluster. From 2011 to 2020, the period used to determine pedestrian crash clusters, there were 13 crashes involving pedestrians resulting in one fatality and nine injuries. During the same period, two bicycle crashes were reported at the Main Street (Route 31) and Cherry Street bicycle crash cluster. To prevent crashes and improve resident perceptions of safety in Spencer and particularly the town center area, efforts should be made to design roads and other facilities to accommodate all road users and physically separate vulnerable road users from vehicles through space or timing. Spencer has previously adopted a Complete Streets policy that should be used to help promote the addition of facilities for non-motorized road users and transit users either through dedicated facilities or improvements to existing facilities by implementing FHWAs Proven Safety Countermeasures in projects.[7]

ACTION ITEM 1.3

Implement Driver Outreach to young and older drivers.

A total of 34.2% of crashes in Spencer involved either a young driver or an older driver with each group accounting for about half of the incidents. Targeted outreach efforts made through local driver's ed programs, local schools, and the senior center to raise awareness of the existing risks to these groups may help reduce the number of crashes. The Town of Spencer through its police department and highway department should work to partner with local drivers ed schools such as Green Light Driving School based in Spencer to provide young drivers additional education..

ACTION ITEM 1.4

Continue to be an active participant in the MassDOT Safe Routes to School Program.

Safe Routes to School is a Federal Highway Administration program administered locally by MassDOT that provides support to schools and communities round the 6-E's of "Education, Encouragement, Engagement, Evaluation, Engineering, and Equity " in order to promote the safe access to schools via walking, biking and rolling.[8] With Spencer's schools located within proximity to downtown, there is an opportunity to promote walking and biking to and from school. However, with documented crashes and observations found in the master plan survey, parents may be hesitant to allow children to walk and bike to school. To increase safety and promote this activity, Spencer should continue to be an active participant in the MassDOT Safe Routes to School Program which aims to increase safe walking, biking, and rolling by elementary, middle, and high school-aged students. Program participants can apply for funding to improve the safety of facilities within a certain distance of participating schools. According to the MassDOT Safe Routes to School Dashboard[9] three schools are participating in the program.



The three partner schools are David Prouty High School (joined in 2023), Knox Trail Middle School (joined in 2011), and Wire Village School (joined in 2023). To date there have been no infrastructure projects associated with participation in the program completed in Spencer. Spencer should pursue funding for an infrastructure related project as well as implement the other tools and assessments available through MassDOT.[10]

GOAL 2

IMPROVE THE RELIABILITY AND PERFORMANCE OF SPENCER'S TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM.

A reliable transportation system allows users to travel safely and efficiently with predictable outcomes and travel times. The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), through its work as the planning staff to the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning OrganIzation (CMMPO), developed and maintains a Congestion Management Process (CMP)[11] for the planning region. A CMP is a systematic regional approach for improving the transportation systems' performance and reliability by reducing the adverse impacts of congestion on the movement of people and goods. To help develop the CMP, the CMRPC conducts a comprehensive data collection effort supplemented by State datasets and results from the regional Travel Demand Model.

829
ridesharing trips had Spencer as both an origin and a destination in 2022

Data collected by the CMRPC includes Turning Movement Counts (TMCs), Travel Time and Delay Studies, and Park and Ride utilization counts. TMCs are traffic counts conducted at an intersection during the morning and evening peak times of 7:00 am – 9:00 am and 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm. Once the TMC is complete, the data is used to obtain the Level-of-Service (LOS) results using the Highway Capacity Software (HCS) from McTrans at the University of Florida. A letter grade is given to each intersection based on the average seconds of calculated delay for the morning and evening peak periods. The range of delay parameters for these letter grades is different for signalized and unsignalized intersections. Figure 7 shows the difference.

Signalized		Unsignalized	
Delay in Seconds	LOS Grade	Delay in Seconds	LOS Grade
< 10	A	< 10	A
10 - 20	B	10 - 20	B
20 - 35	C	20 - 35	C
35 - 55	D	35 - 55	D
55 - 80	E	55 - 80	E
> 80	F	> 80	F

Figure 7: Level of service classification. Source: CMRPC.

Travel Time and Delay Studies are conducted during the AM and PM peak times of 7:00 am – 9:00 am and 4:00 pm – 6:00 pm utilizing an "average car" technique. In this procedure, a test vehicle travels according to the driver's judgment of the average speed of existing traffic flows. A Global Positioning System (GPS) device is used to collect travel time data. Once the data is collected, it is then downloaded into a software program called "TravTime", which was created by GeoStats. Congested time occurs when travel speeds are below 20 mph.

According to the most recent study conducted on Route 9 in 2019, the average congestion time in Spencer between the East Brookfield Town Line and the Leicester Town Line is less than two minutes. Additionally, congestion can occur as a result of traffic accidents and road work; this is referred to as non-recurring congestion and is difficult to track with current data collection methods.

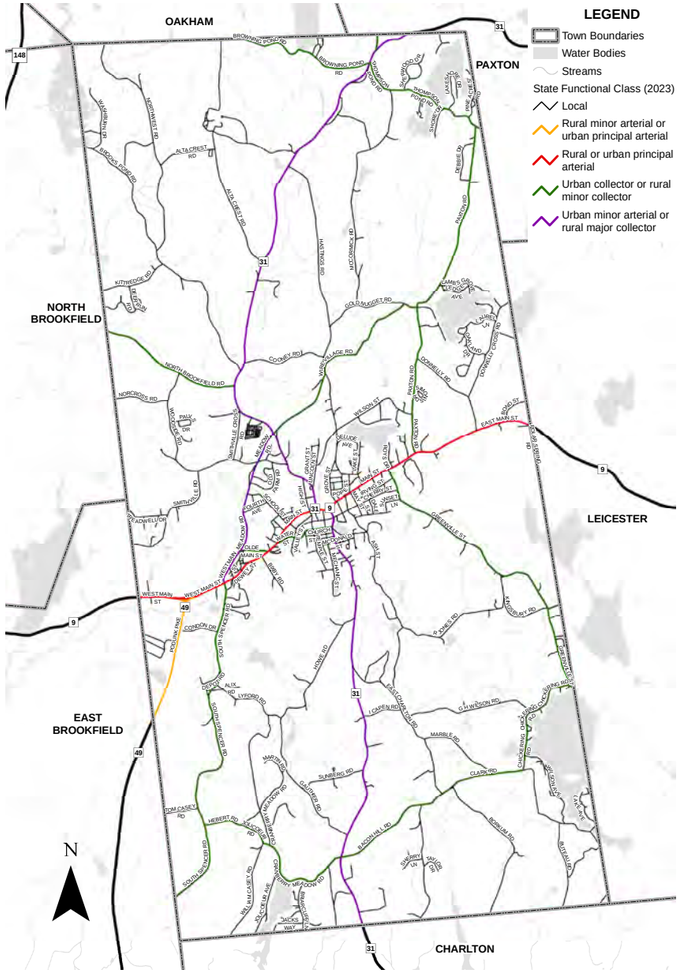


Figure 8: Road Functional Classification, 2024. Source: Town of Spencer, CMRPC, MassDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

There are currently no MassDOT-maintained park-and-ride lots in Spencer. The closest lot is in Auburn at Mid-State Drive adjacent to I-90 Exit 10 with a capacity of 146 vehicles.[12]

85%
of Spencer residents travel to work using private vehicles

1.8%
of Spencer residents use public transportation

OBJECTIVE:
Reduce congestion and delays at key intersections around Spencer.

To improve the reliability and performance of Spencer's transportation system, the town should work to reduce congestion and delays at key intersections around Spencer. Based on comments received at community meetings and from the data available, intersections and roadways in and around the Spencer town center experience more delay than those in other parts of town and should be monitored and prioritized for improvements. Based on data collected from the Impact Portal, non-recuring congestion from traffic accidents is likely to occur in the Spencer town center due to the concentration of accidents in the area.

ACTION ITEM 2.1
Develop a local road classification system and design standard

To improve how the local road

system performs and provide adequate accommodation for all road users the town should develop a local road classification system and design standard for all roads in Spencer. The development of such a classification system and design standard would allow for context sensitive designs of roads that would help to implement the adopted Complete Streets policy. Such a classification system would promote the inclusion of sidewalks and bicycle facilities and lower design speeds on urban downtown roads while allowing higher speeds on more rural roads.

ACTION ITEM 2.2

Implement strategies found in the CMMPO Congestion Management Process (CMP)

Based on the 2023 CMMPO CMP Progress Report,[13] the intersection of Route 9/ Route 31/ Wall Street is ranked as experiencing the 10th most encountered delay of those intersections monitored in the CMMPO region. Route 9/Route 31 (Maple Street) ranks 108th and Route 49/Route 9 ranks 120th for total encountered delay.

Figure 9 shows the year of the most recent data collection effort, the encountered delay in seconds, and the observed LOS for both the AM and PM peaks at each intersection.

Spencer should work to implement strategies found in the CMMPO CMP document to help alleviate congestion observed in intersections downtown and those adjacent to the Spencer town center. Recommended actions include signal retiming, promoting the use of public transportation, and the promotion of walking and biking.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Trying to get out of Prouty lot can be difficult. I think at certain days/ times, Rt 9/31 where the town hall is becomes congested. It's really not bad compared to larger cities."

(Community Survey, 2023)

CMRPC		Count	AM Peak Hour		PM Peak Hour	
Community	Turning Movement Count Locations	Year3	Delay1	LOS2	Delay	LOS
Spencer	Route 9/Route 49	2015	27.8	D	25.8	D
	Route 9/Route 31/Wall St	2021	111.3	F	161.6	F
	Route 9/Route 31 (Maple St)	2021	9.3	A	10.4	B

(1) Average delay in seconds.

(2) LOS calculated using HCS7 from McTrans. LOS is based on average intersection delay for signalized intersections. For unsignalized locations, it is based on delay time for the highest volume direction under "stop" sign control.

(3) If a location has been counted multiple times since 2015 then the most recent Delay and LOS is shown.

Figure 9: Intersection level of service, Town of Spencer, 2015, 2021. Source: CMRPC, MassDOT.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Depending on a person's walking/ driving ability and preferences for services, Spencer needs to offer options. Some folks like stores nearby with traffic bustling, while others hate the racket and noise of Main Street and would be miserable living there."

(Community Survey, 2023)

ACTION ITEM 2.3

Implement strategies to reduce the impact of non-recurring congestion.

Non-recuring congestion contributes to about half of all congestion according to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) but it can be unpredictable and difficult to mitigate. To help reduce delays and possible hazards caused by this type of congestion, including secondary accidents, departments in Spencer responsible for responding to this type of congestion should work together to develop and implement strategies to reduce the impact of non-recurring congestion. The strategies could include Incident Clearance Time (ICT) or the time between the first awareness of the incident and the time when the last responder leaves the scene and plans to reduce traffic caused by road work.

GOAL 3

IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY IN, AND ACCESS TO, THE TOWN CENTER.

According to public outreach results, the Spencer town center was identified as the center of economic and social activity in town and there was a strong desire to improve the connectivity within town center and the access to the town center. Data from the US Census shows that the majority of Spencer residents do not live the center of town and that they primarily rely on single-occupancy vehicles for transportation. Improving the ability of residents to access and get around the center of town can help strengthen the local economy and a sense of community. Providing various options for residents and non-residents to access the center of town and easily travel from place to place once they have arrived will help to serve many purposes, including reducing congestion, supporting economic vitality, and increasing safety.

OBJECTIVE: Enhance non-motorized infrastructure within and in proximity to downtown.

The Master Plan Survey showed





that 79.33% of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that "Improved sidewalks and crosswalks for pedestrians should be explored," while 53.79% of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that "Bicycle infrastructure should be explored".

The Town of Spencer has committed to providing pedestrian accommodations for all users with the adoption of a Complete Streets Policy in 2016, ensuring that all road projections completed in town would consider bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. In support of Spencer's Complete Street planning work, the CMRPC completed a full inventory of sidewalks in Spencer. As of 2024, there were a total of 17.2 miles of sidewalks and 301 identified curb ramp locations in Spencer. Sidewalk segments are given a ranking of 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Fair', or 'Poor'. Based on the most recently completed condition survey, there were 2.2 miles in excellent condition, 7.1 miles in good condition, 4.5 miles in fair condition, and 1.6 miles in poor condition.

ACTION ITEM 3.1

Improve Pedestrian infrastructure.

Improving pedestrian infrastructure in the Spencer town center will not only help to improve connectivity through the center of town but will also help to improve the safety of the area which is an identified high crash location for Spencer. In 2016, a project was funded through the CMMPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to reconstruct sections of Route 9 and realign the intersection of Route 9 and Route 31. As a result of this project, the majority of the pedestrian infrastructure in the downtown area was modernized to meet current ADA standards and enhance pedestrian safety. Currently, there are four main pedestrian crossings for people trying to cross Main Street/ Route 9. Two of the crossings at Main Street/ Maple Street and Main Street/ Pleasant Street are integrated into an existing traffic signal providing a separation of vehicles and pedestrians. The crossing of Main Street/ Mechanic Street has a pedestrian actuated Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) to help increase safety by alerting drivers that a pedestrian is intending to cross the street. On the Western edge of downtown Spencer is the final crossing at the intersection of Main Street (Route 9) and High Street which is not signalized and has no pedestrian warning signs to indicate to drivers that a crosswalk is present.

Several pedestrian crashes have been identified at the intersection of Main Street and Pleasant Street indicating that while the intersection is signalized, several crashes are still occurring in the area and there is a feeling of lack of safety as reflected in the Master Plan Survey. This is possible because the turning movement from Route 9 West onto Route 31 North is not controlled by the signal and is instead a yield sign as part of a "slip" lane. This type of lane is common in the design of modern intersections to separate turning traffic from the signal, but it can also be detrimental to pedestrians if they are not aware that the traffic is not controlled by the signal. To help improve safety at this location Spencer should consider working with MassDOT to review in detail crash data at this intersection and improve signage. Throughout downtown Spencer, additional signage should be considered to enhance pedestrian safety such as improving and increasing signage, implementing speed humps at crossings, and working with landowners to improve ADA accessibility between properties and sidewalks.

ACTION ITEM 3.2

Improve bicycle infrastructure.

Currently, Spencer has limited bicycle facilities consisting mainly of on-road accommodations largely as an "Advisory Bike Lane" type of accommodation where signage and markings encourage bicyclists to ride on the marked shoulder of a roadway. While this type of accommodation can be helpful to promote biking and provide a safer, separated facility for people to ride in, the majority of them do not comply with the Vulnerable Road Users law enacted in 2023 which requires drivers provide a safe passing distance of 4 feet when passing a vulnerable road user such as a bicyclist. Due to the need to provide adequate spacing for vehicles to pass a bicyclist, Spencer needs to continue to utilize its complete streets policy to provide adequate accommodations and spacing when re-constructing roads.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Turning left from Main St. onto South Spencer Rd. There should be a left turn light."

(Community Survey, 2023)

OBJECTIVE: Improve parking infrastructure and wayfinding within and in proximity to downtown.

Parking was identified as a major problem in both the community survey and the community meetings. There is very limited on-street parking in the town center, with the spaces that exist being limited to one hour. There are several private parking lots for downtown businesses and residences along Main Street and behind the buildings accessed by side streets. A parking study was conducted during the summer of 2019 and found that there is enough parking in the downtown area with some areas at or near capacity at some times of the day. The parking study found that parking regulations are unclear, downtown is not walkable, limiting people's desire to park and walk to destination, and shared parking is not promoted.



Photos: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

ACTION ITEM 3.3

Continue to monitor the parking areas identified in the 2020 Downtown Parking Study for changes and work to implement findings.

The downtown parking study[14] completed a comprehensive inventory of public and private parking areas available in downtown Spencer as well as providing data on utilization rates at certain times of the day. The town of Spencer should continue to monitor the identified parking areas, updating the inventory as developments happen to keep a current record of available parking spaces in downtown. Additionally, Spencer should monitor the utilization of public parking spaces to identify areas of need. The Town of Spencer should work to implement the recommendations listed in the parking study.

ACTION ITEM 3.4

Review and update parking regulations to accommodate current parking needs including but not limited to EV charging and shared parking.

As noted in the 2020 Downtown Parking study, a majority of the available parking spaces in downtown are privately owned and on-street parking areas have shorter time limits than could be conducive to uses that are permitted in the district like restaurants and hair salons. Additionally, according to the CMMPO Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations Dashboard, there are only three publicly available EV charging stations in Spencer. A review of parking regulations should be conducted to ensure that space is being used most efficiently and providing parking in high-demand areas. Working with private landowners like Price Chopper to develop shared parking agreements in which the public could use existing lots during off business hours for other purposes would help to increase the amount of publicly available parking in highly desired locations. To help plan for the future, as Spencer conducts work at its existing parking spaces and parking lots, consideration should be taken of emerging technologies such as electric vehicle charging stations.

ACTION ITEM 3.5

Improve downtown wayfinding for municipal buildings, public parking, and key destinations.

Both the 2020 Downtown Parking Study and the Master Plan Workshop sessions identified wayfinding in downtown as a major issue both for parking and for locating businesses and municipal facilities. Currently, in downtown Spencer, there are some wayfinding signs for public parking lots, but their placement may be confusing for those trying to find lots and is not inclusive of all the possible options. Implementing wayfinding enhancements for public parking lots and municipal buildings will help residents and visitors find parking spaces that they will feel comfortable parking in. Wayfinding around downtown will assist visitors in finding municipal buildings and key destinations by routing them with the best possible walking path. As alternative fuel types become more prevalent additional wayfinding signage should be provided to promote the presence of and location of electric vehicle charging locations.

GOAL 4

ENHANCE REGIONAL AND CROSS-TOWN CONNECTIVITY WHILE HELPING TO PRESERVE SPENCER'S RURAL CHARACTER.

Spencer is located at a crossroads in central Massachusetts, sitting at the border of the urbanized area of Worcester and the rural farming communities in Spencer and its neighboring towns, which presents several opportunities and challenges for providing context-sensitive transportation options. Currently, the only public transportation service in Spencer is from the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA), which provides public transit services for the greater Worcester area, consisting of 37 communities. Improving connections that already exist from the WRTA to better serve Spencer residents and adding desirable connections can help improve access for Spencer residents to opportunities in town and the larger region.

OBJECTIVE:

Explore opportunities for increasing and promoting travel on the WRTA system.



The WRTA provides fixed route service to Spencer via routes 33 and 19 from the WRTA hub in downtown Worcester. Route 33 provides weekday service from the WRTA hub to Spencer Center with stops at the Leicester Wal-Mart, Spencer Center, and limited runs extending to the East Brookfield Courthouse and Brookfield Center. Route 19 provides Saturday service from the WRTA hub to the Spencer DPW with stops at the Leicester Wal-Mart and Spencer Center. According to the WRTA, route 33 has 143,132 annual riders which ranks 10th out of 26, while route 19, which only serves Spencer on Saturdays, has 420,934 annual riders, and ranks first in the system; its most popular stops are in downtown Worcester. Promoting WRTA ridership on existing routes will help to ensure continued service and allow access to services provided in other communities for those who cannot or do not wish to drive. Additionally, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) operates a Worcester to Amherst intercity service on Route B79 with limited runs on weekdays and weekends. Route B79 only offers drop-off service in Spencer on its Worcester bound routes and pickup-only service in Spencer on its Amherst bound routes.

ACTION ITEM 4.1

Promote WRTA ridership through improved traveler training and information efforts.

Riding the WRTA or any bus system can be intimidating for those who are unfamiliar with how the system operates. The WRTA operates a fixed route system with limited signed stops outside of the City of Worcester with flag stops available at any point along a route in which a rider may raise their hand to "flag down" a bus to stop at the closest available safe stopping point. The WRTA offers free travel training services for anyone who is at least 13 years old. The Town of Spencer should coordinate with the WRTA to provide traveler training and information to potential riders via other town services.

ACTION ITEM 4.2

Explore implementing bus stop improvements.

In the Master Plan Survey, respondents made it clear that the bus stop in downtown Spencer lacks accommodations that would make riding the bus to and from this location more desirable. Based on the WRTA bus shelter inventory, this shelter is most likely owned by the Town of Spencer and is not

the responsibility of the WRTA. To make improvements recommended by the survey respondents such as improved seating, trash removal, and rider information, the Town of Spencer should verify ownership and then work with the WRTA or other relevant town departments to improve the existing shelter. Additionally, Spencer should work with the WRTA to improve existing bus stops by providing ridership information.

OBJECTIVE: Explore and promote alternative transportation options.

Based on the US census, it is found that around 85.6% of Spencer residents travel to work using private vehicles, while only 1.8% use public transportation, and less than one percent use other means of transportation. The survey data also revealed that there is a high dependence on personal vehicles, which was reflected in the need for increased parking resources in the master plan survey. However, by promoting and exploring alternative transportation options, the transportation system for Spencer can be made more efficient and resilient to disturbances.

ACTION ITEM 4.3

Explore opportunities to add additional train and park-and-ride options.

Currently, there are limited options for Spencer residents who wish to either commute to work or access services outside of Spencer using transportation besides a personal vehicle. Reducing the reliance on vehicles by providing various options can help to reduce congestion on the roadways and open new opportunities to all residents.

Park-and-ride facilities are a low-cost way to provide residents of Spencer with the ability to carpool together to a common destination either in Worcester, another nearby community, or even Boston. MassDOT operates several park-and-ride lots around the state to provide free parking so that users can carpool and sometimes offer features like commuter bus service or Logan Express service. Currently, there are no MassDOT-operated park-and-ride facilities in Spencer, with the closest being in Auburn. To help provide more carpooling and commuting opportunities for residents, Spencer should explore with MassDOT and the WRTA the possibility of implementing a park-and-ride lot in conjunction with the already existing service.

MBTA Commuter rail service to and from Boston via the Worcester/ Framingham Line is available at Union Station about 12 miles from Downtown Spencer. The service is accessible by WRTA fixed route service or by car with parking provided on site. CSX operates the Boston Subdivision, which is a railroad line running from Boston Back Bay Station to Wilbraham, where it connects to the Berkshire Subdivision Line. The Line owned by CSX is proposed by the MassDOT East-West Passenger Rail Study to carry passenger rail service from Boston to Pittsfield. There are no proposed stops in Spencer as of the available public documents. Spencer should work with MassDOT to advocate for a station in Spencer that could serve as a regional transportation destination in combination with the WRTA.

ACTION ITEM 4.4

Promote the use of Transportation Network Companies within Spencer

In Massachusetts, rideshare companies such as Uber and Lyft are referred to as Transportation Network Companies (TNCs). Generally, rideshare companies provide their service as a curb-to-curb on-demand ride service. Ride requests can be made using either a smartphone application or another mobile/online service, and the operator provides the trips in their privately owned vehicle. In 2022, the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities (DPU) released trip count data as reported by TNC providers statewide. A total of 4,052 trips originated in Spencer, and 5,656 trips featured Spencer as its destination. Additionally, 829 trips had Spencer as both an origin and a destination. Due to their nature, TNC vehicles can be difficult to identify and regulate beyond requirements in place at the state level; however, Spencer should work with major providers in the area to implement designated pick-up and drop-off locations, particularly in downtown Spencer. Designated pick-up and drop-off locations will help to provide a safe and efficient area for riders to wait for rides while also promoting the presence of the service to those who might not have known it was available.

ACTION ITEM 4.5

Expand and promote healthcare transportation services for veterans, seniors, and persons with disabilities.

ADA paratransit service is available to qualifying Spencer residents through the WRTA application process. Additionally, Spencer residents who are age 60+ and people with disabilities regardless of age are also served by WRTA paratransit service. This service is provided weekdays through SCM Elderbus, who is under contract with WRTA to provide service. In-town service is available on weekdays. Out-of-town medical transportation is available three days per week. Spencer should work with the WRTA and the Spencer Senior Center to increase awareness of their services and expand offerings to targeted groups such as veterans.

The WRTA Hub in Worcester is the focal point of its fixed route services and is located in downtown Worcester. This location is connected to Worcester's Union Station, where there are connections to the MBTA Commuter Rail, Amtrak intercity service, as well as taxicab and transportation network companies like Uber and Lyft.



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Spencer Fish & Game Club
Photo: Jackie Mushinsky
Spencer Cable Access

08

Open Space, Recreation, & Natural Resources



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

OVERVIEW

The Town of Spencer is rich in open space, natural resources, and recreational potential, offering amenities to residents and visitors from around the region. Once a small agricultural village turned into an exurban industrial hub, Spencer is home to nearly 22,000 acres of rolling hills, woodlands, and open fields. Both Spencer's cultural history and development patterns have influenced the open space and recreational resources available today, from housing clusters near its various manufactured ponds to the previously farmed pastures salvaged by local conservation partnerships. Major open space and recreational attractions in Town include the Spencer State Forest, Whittemore Pond, and the Sibley and Warner Farms, to name only a few.

Spencer has untapped recreation potential. Residents highlighted the need to increase recreation opportunities.

To protect Spencer's open space and recreational amenities, Town officials and residents recognize the need to increase communications, leverage partnerships, and creatively plan for improvements. This chapter draws on a broad array of requests developed by Spencer residents, from inclusive trail planning to assessing the feasibility

GLOSSARY

Open Space and Recreation Plan: a document that charts a community's future strategies for the conservation of open space and other natural and recreation resources. In Massachusetts, a community that has an approved OSRP is eligible for DCS grant programs for up to seven years.

Chapter 61 lands: Chapter 61 for forestlands, 61A for agriculture land and 61B for recreational land provide preferential tax treatment to landowners who preserve their property as open space for timber production, agriculture, or recreation.

Open Space: undeveloped or partially developed lands of conservation interest. This may include lands under conservation or preservation restrictions, municipal parks, State Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), national historic sites, and more.

Conservation Land: areas preserved and managed to protect natural resources and biodiversity. These lands sustain ecosystems, wildlife habitats, and water quality. Owned by individuals, non-profits, or governments, conservation lands often receive legal protections to limit development and harmful activities.

Priority Habitat: areas identified as crucial for the survival and health of particular species or ecological communities. These areas are often designated based on the presence of rare, threatened, or endangered species, and they receive special management and conservation measures.

Passive Recreation: leisure activities that involve minimal physical exertion and have a low impact on the environment. Examples include walking, bird watching, picnicking, nature observation and other activities in natural settings emphasizing relaxation and enjoyment of natural surroundings.

22,000 acres of rolling hills, woodlands, and open fields.

61.3% of the town's land is covered by forest

15% of Spencer is protected open space.

11.5% of Spencer is developed land

3.6% of Spencer is water

12.2% of Spencer's land is covered by wetlands

of a community recreation center. Using this Master Plan chapter as a blueprint, the Town may consider a variety of options for filling gaps in capacity to meet resident's requests, such as protecting Spencer's water resources, protecting open space, and enhancing recreational opportunities and quality of life.

KEY FINDINGS/ PRIORITIES

SPENCER OFFERS EXCEPTIONAL RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO THE REGION.

The Town of Spencer has various parks, open spaces, trails, and water bodies that offer recreational opportunities to residents and visitors alike. The Town's land cover is 61.30% forested and 3.60% water,[1] containing seven major town-owned lakes and ponds.[2] Lake Whittemore is the Town's only natural lake and offers public beach access through Luther Hill Park.[3] The remaining water bodies offer varying levels of access and have different recreational regulations, with some offering swimming, boating, and/or fishing.[4] There are also water bodies in the Town owned by State entities, such as Howe Pond, located within the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) Spencer State Forest, or Howe State Park. This State Park contains nearly 1,000 acres of forest and offers visitors opportunities for hiking, fishing, hunting, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, canoeing, and kayaking, horseback riding, and mountain biking.[5]

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"All existing agricultural land should not be developed in any way; maybe create a trust to preserve land for the benefit of food production for humans and animals."

(Community Survey, 2023)

*** Comments edited for clarity.**

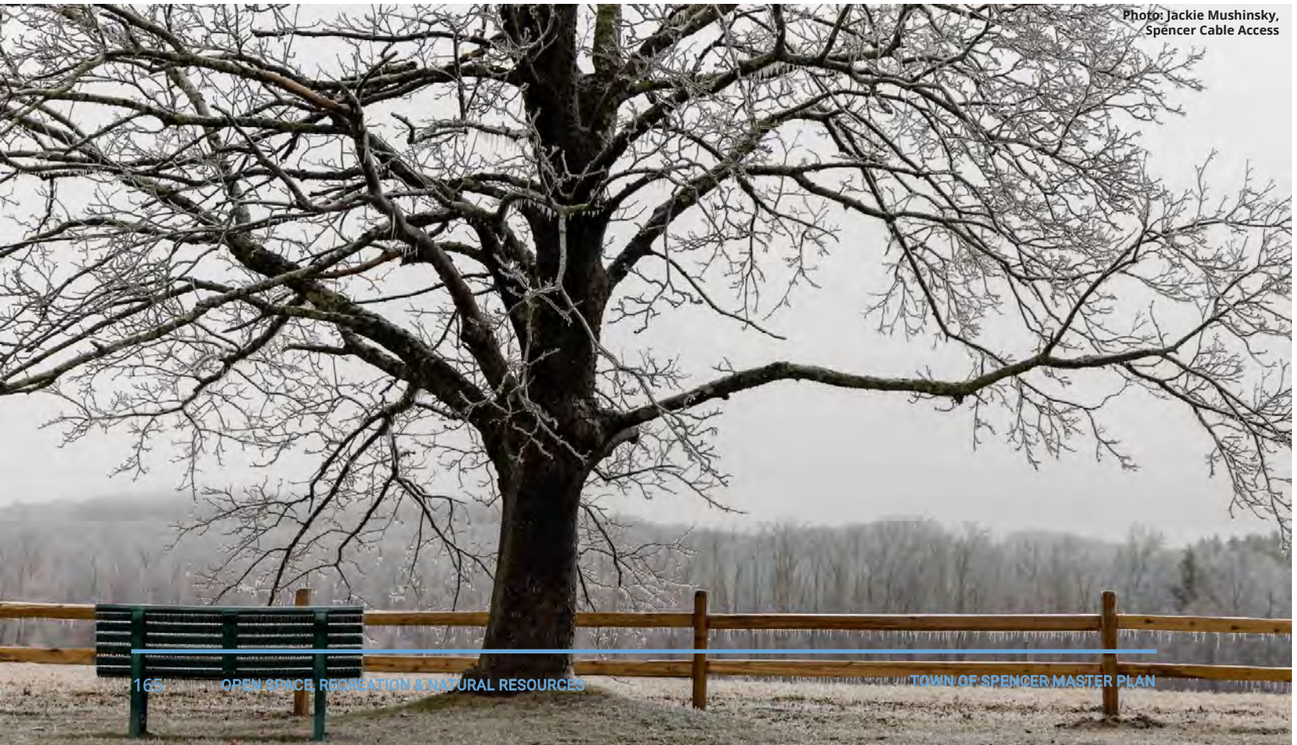


Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

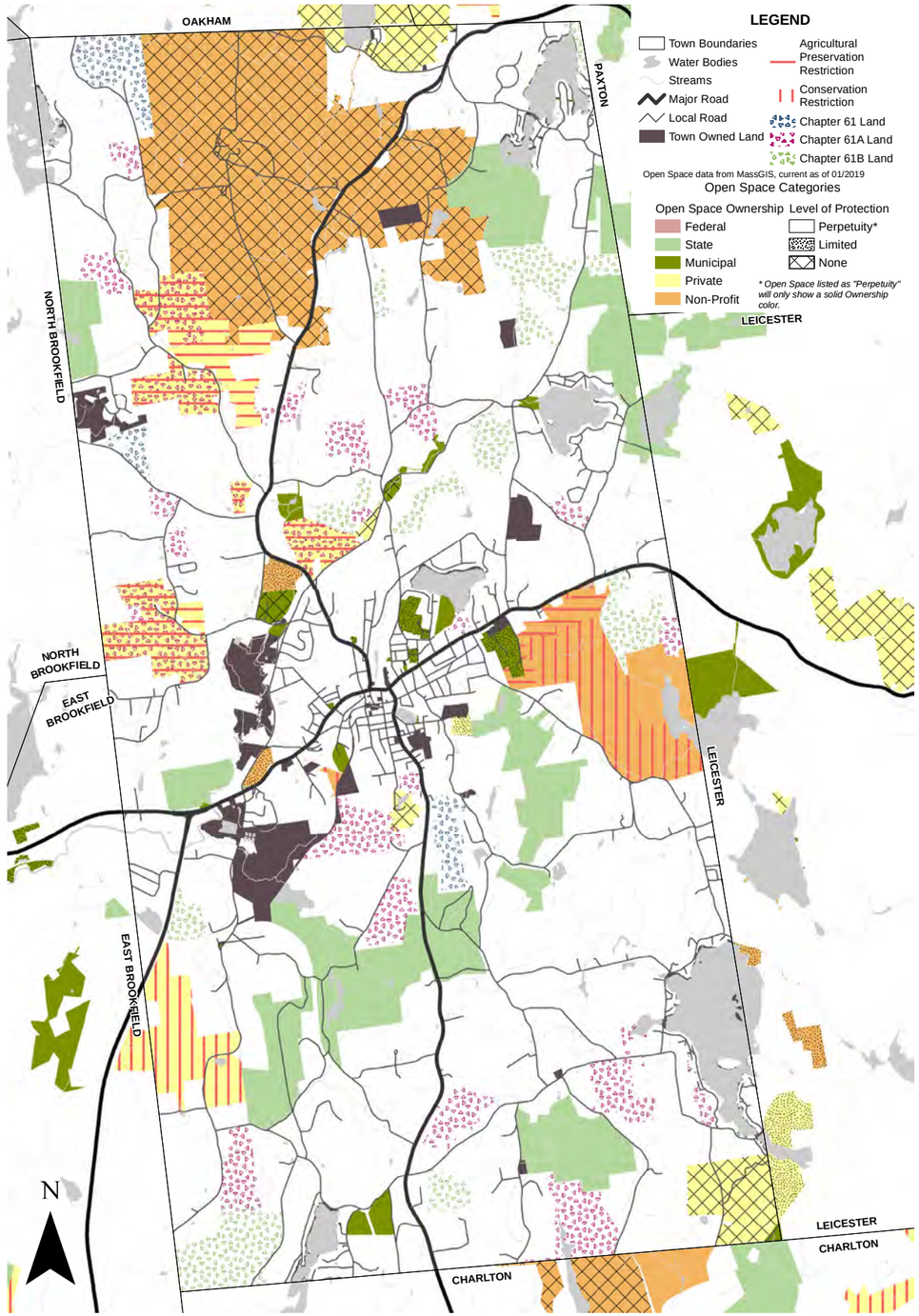


Figure 1: Town of Spencer open space, 2020. Source: CMRPC, Town of Spencer.

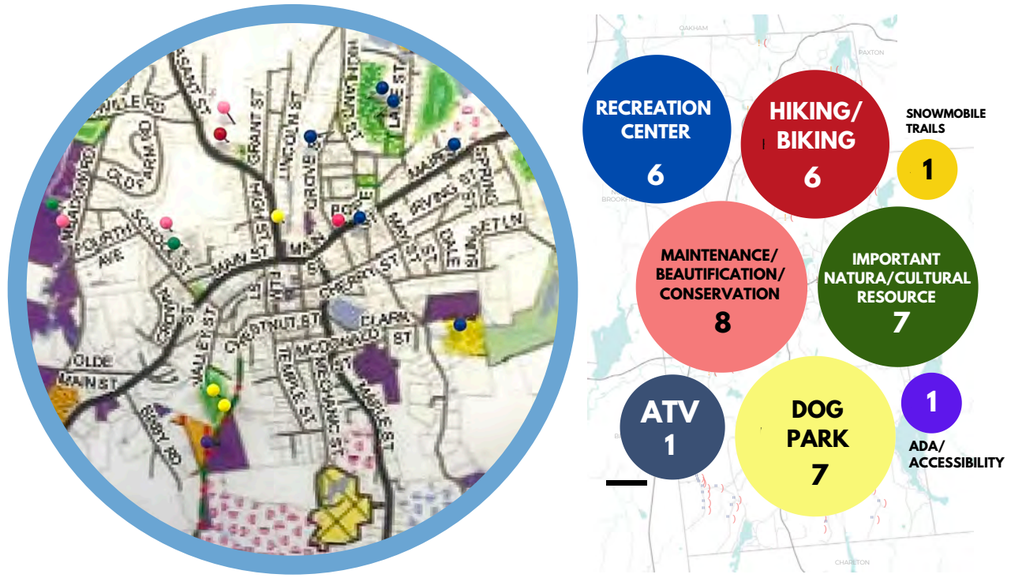


Figure 2: Open Space Inventory Map. Source: Spencer Master Plan Public Workshop. Participants are asked to use pins to mark up the location of specific recreation amenities they would like to see in Spencer.

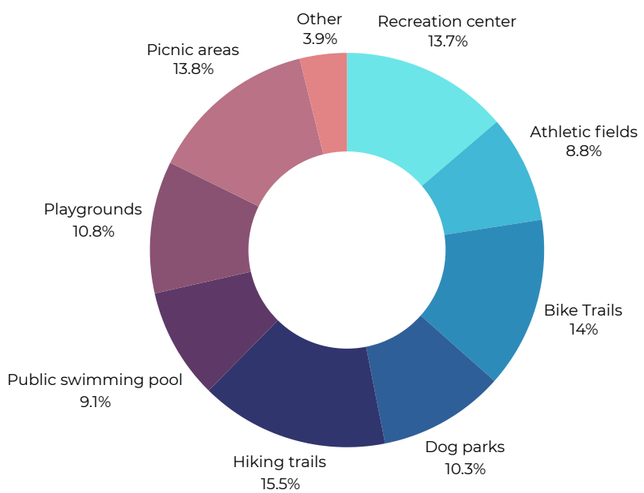


Figure 3: Which of the following recreational opportunities would you like to see more of in Spencer? Spencer Master Plan Survey, 2023.

There are three Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife (Mass Wildlife) properties within the Town, including two Wildlife Management Areas (WMA): Seven Mile River Access Point, Four Chimneys WMA, and Moose Hill WMA. All MassWildlife WMAs are open to fishing, hunting, trapping, and other recreational activities.[6] The Massachusetts Audubon Society, or Mass Audubon, owns and operates the Burncoat Pond Wildlife Sanctuary, which encompasses the west side of its namesake pond. This land connects users to the Mid-State Trail which, going north, also connects to Moose Hill WMA.[7] In addition to the State land, the Town has several parks and trails that are open to the public for scenic and recreational opportunities. Luther Hill Park borders the Town Center and Lake Whittemore, offering 14 acres of recreational area which includes a playground, skatepark, and disc golf course. Other major parks include Isaac Prouty Park, O'Gara Park, Ralph Warren Park, Powder Mill Park, and a couple of war memorials.[8] Spencer also contains Camp Marshall, a private, independent non-profit youth development program offering traditional summer camp opportunities and equestrian education. A portion of this camp is owned and operated by the Massachusetts DCR.[9]

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"We need to offer more recreation options to kids. Boys and girls club, after school, recreational camps."

(Community Survey, 2023)

Finally, Spencer boasts a diverse trail network, including the Mid-State Trail, the Depot Rail Trail, and the trails at Sibley and Warner Farms. The Mid-State Trail is a 92-mile footpath extending from the Douglas State Forest to Mount Watatic in Ashburnham. The trail enters Spencer from Oakham, west of Browning Pond, and exits to Charlton through the Four Chimneys WMA.[10] The Mid-State Trail is a valuable ecotourism asset for many communities in Central Massachusetts. The Depot Rail Trail is a two-mile walking trail along an abandoned railroad south of Route 9. Finally, Sibley and Warner Farms are permanently protected by a conservation partnership between the Town, the Common Ground Land Trust, the Greater Worcester Land Trust, the Mass Audubon, and several departments within the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA). These properties offer a few recreational trails in addition to scenic pastures, wetlands, and forests.[11]

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Please look into an option to add permitted or non-permitted ATV/off-road riding. It will allow tax payers to enjoy more of the scenery Spencer has to offer and encourage them to spend more time and money in and around the town."

(Community Survey, 2023)

Resident comments about recreation at the Spencer Master Plan Public Workshop centered around multi-use trails, the need for increased accessibility accommodations, and opportunities for increased communication between the Town and State entities. Conversations about multi-use trails revealed Spencer has untapped potential to expand allowed uses and enhance the quality and accessibility of recreational trails. Determining where permitted uses and accessibility may be expanded and enhanced would involve coordination among local trail groups, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and potentially local

land trusts, Mass Audubon, or State organizations like the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

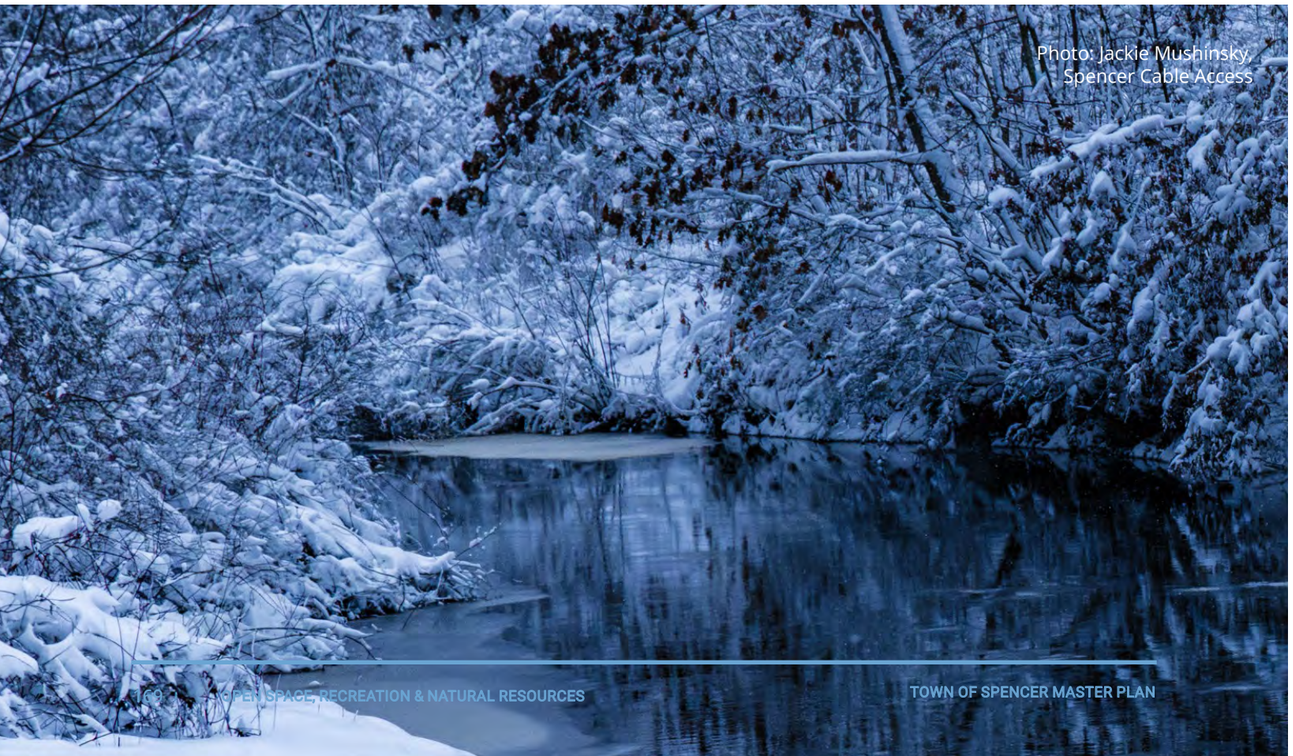
Additionally, several community members mentioned a desire for a new recreation center and/or dog park, potentially incorporating what already exists at Luther Hill Park or another Town-owned recreation site. Spencer's unused, abandoned, and condemned buildings and sites may represent an opportunity for an outdoor public gathering space for people of all ages and abilities, such as a recreation center or dog park. The Spencer Master Plan Public Survey results mirrored these sentiments, with most people ranking hiking and biking trails or a new recreation center as their top priority. Notably, many survey respondents also indicated they would like to see more picnic areas and a dog park in Town.

SPENCER CONTAINS VALUABLE NATURAL ASSETS THAT NEED PROTECTION.

Spencer's lands, waters, and wildlife are valuable regional natural assets. With nearly 22,000 acres of land, 15.50% of Spencer is protected open space. Spencer's lands are mostly forested (61.30%), with comparable land cover amounts of wetlands (12.20%), developed lands (11.50%), and agricultural lands (11.30%).[12] The majority of Spencer's recreational assets are also considered natural assets, representing a ripe opportunity for efficient management.

According to the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP), there are thirteen recognized and documented endangered species within the Town of Spencer.[13] To view the complete list of these thirteen species, please see Action Item 3.1 in this chapter. The majority of the priority habitat for these rare species is situated along the Seven Mile River and near the Big Meadow Area wetland complex. This priority habitat stretches from where West Main Street meets Brookfield up to Thibault's Country Store on North Spencer Road. Additional priority habitats are located north of the Sibley Farms property, by Burncoat Pond, and around the intersection of North Spencer and Hastings roads.[14]

Spencer's land also provides exceptional open space areas. Open spaces are undeveloped or partially developed lands of conservation interest. This may include lands under conservation or preservation restrictions, municipal parks, State Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), national historic sites, and more. Between Spencer's previous planning efforts, such as the development of the 2008 Spencer Reconnaissance Report or the 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), and throughout this Master Plan planning process, it is evident that Spencer residents value both their protected and unprotected open spaces. Using these efforts as tools for future planning and implementation efforts, the Town of Spencer may be able to increase the protection of its unprotected open spaces.


Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"[Preserve] Areas used for recreation, community gardens, areas capable of supporting or creating animal habitats, areas with old growth trees."

"Animal and plant habitats. Cut back on the amount of solar allowed in fields. Place it on roofs and over parking lots."

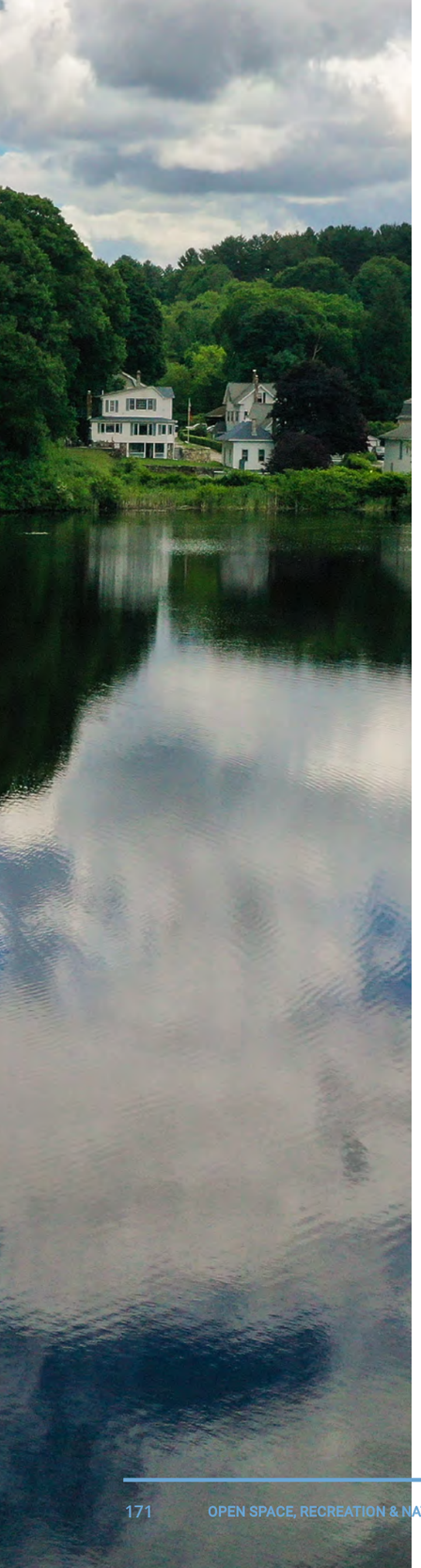
(Community Survey, 2023)

SPENCER'S OPEN SPACE IS AT RISK OF DEVELOPMENT.

Finding a balance between development and conservation is an ongoing learning process for municipalities throughout Central Massachusetts. In more recent years, rapid development of the Region's exurbs and rural communities has encroached on open space lands and natural resources. As the development of large warehouses, renewable energy generation, storage sites, and even homes continue, communities must work toward increasing protections on the lands they value. In tandem with protection efforts, municipalities should consider infill development. Infill development includes identifying sites they may prefer for development, such as turning abandoned properties into warehouses or homes or implementing solar panels on rooftops or over parking lots.

In Spencer, 1,125.27 acres of land were developed between 1971 and 2016.[15] This is similar to the amount of land developed in communities such as Douglas, Northbridge, and Sturbridge between that same period. Compared to the entire CMRPC region, these amounts of converted land are noticeably higher. More specifically, the Town has lost 467.27 acres of Chapter Lands between 2017 and 2024. The majority of this Chapter Land was lost to the construction of single-family homes. Historically, only three Chapter Land properties have


Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



been converted into solar facilities in Spencer. Eleven of twenty-three solar facilities are located on tax-exempt lands. As impending development continues to jeopardize open space, whether an open grassland or a productive forest, the Town of Spencer and its landowners may consider capitalizing on the Chapter 61 Program (including 61A and 61B), as well as similar incentives, such as Conservation Restriction and Agricultural Preservation Restrictions. Notably, owners of productive forest land who continually update their Forest Cutting Plan with the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) limit the developmental potential of the land for the five years following the harvest.[16]

Spencer is working toward increasing protections on several types of open spaces through bylaw amendments. For example, the Town developed several solar bylaw amendments that included agrivoltaic (dual-use) solar projects, and requirements for new solar projects and solar energy battery storage systems.[17] These bylaw amendments not only increase regulatory protections for the development of open space in Spencer, but also provide a model for nearby communities.

The Spencer Master Plan 2023 Survey asked respondents about what areas of the Town should be preserved for open space, and non-development. Many responses reference the need to conserve core wildlife habitat for rare plant and animal species, such as Spencer's dense woodlands. Some respondents also mentioned enhancing protections at, and maintenance of, specific locations, such as the Sibley and Warner properties, Luther Hill Park, the Buck Hill Dam and Conservation Center, and the Spencer State Forest.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Instead of developing in open land, renovate buildings in disrepair"

"The last remaining big tracts of farmland in South and North Spencer, along with the large forest that runs from Wire Village to Buck Hill and the 4-H camp"

(Community Survey, 2023)

THE TOWN WOULD BENEFIT FROM ENHANCED COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION STAKEHOLDERS.

With ample recreational and natural assets in Town, Spencer residents and municipal staff alike

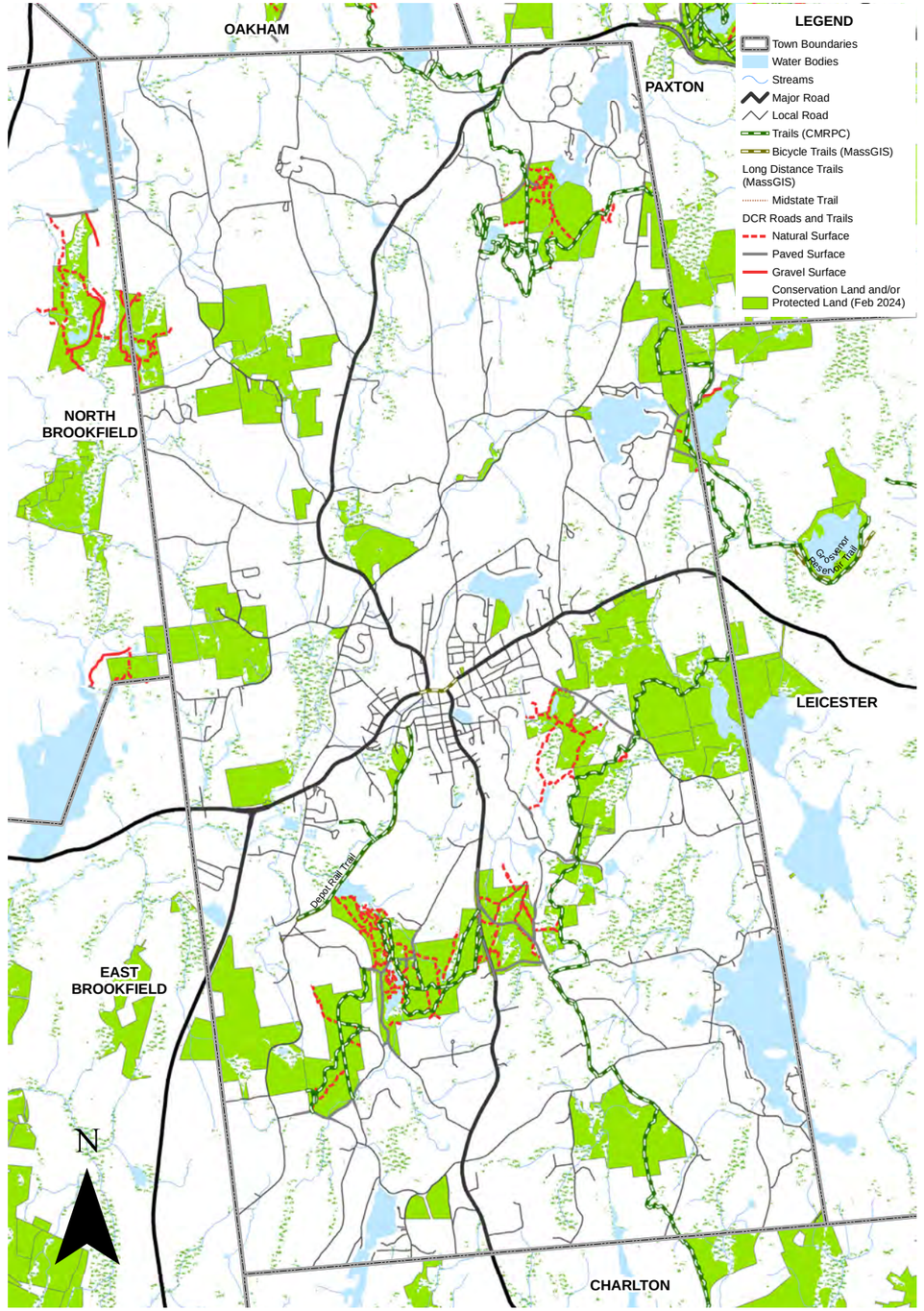


Figure 4: Trails and conservation land. Source: Town of Spencer, CMRPC, MassDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

Open Space Stakeholders:

- Spencer Office of Utilities and Facilities
- Spencer Conservation Commission
- Spencer Parks & Recreation Commission
- Spencer Historical Commission
- Spencer Board of Health
- Spencer Trailways
- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
- Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game
- Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
- Massachusetts Audubon Society
- Greater Worcester Land Trust
- Common Ground Land Trust
- St. Joseph's Abbey
- Boy & Girl Scouts of America
- Snowbirds Snowmobile Club
- Neighboring communities
- Camp Marshall

recognize the need for improved communications, enhanced maintenance, and inclusive and creative management between local, regional, and state entities. Overall, Spencer residents wish to maintain its status as a small exurban center, conserving its natural assets while improving existing recreational resources. Specific objectives and actions that resulted from this Master Plan planning process center around a need to build Town capacity for improved maintenance and management of recreational opportunities and facilities. This includes the capacity to facilitate the open space planning process, implement protection efforts, and effectively promote resources and opportunities to the public. In a nutshell, the open space and recreation potential of Spencer relies on effective communication between local, regional, and state entities and stakeholders, and resulting capacity building.

Currently, various local, regional, and state entities are effective stakeholders in open space and recreation matters in Spencer. Coordination between these stakeholders varies and, in some cases, there is no communication. Some of these stakeholders are listed below.

Moving forward, these stakeholders may consider the goals, objectives, and actions laid out in this Master Plan chapter to improve overall communication and successful collaboration, maintenance, and management of resources. Finally, as communication between these stakeholders improves, these entities should consider opportunities to enhance communication with the public and promote the town's resources.


Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS ARE A BARRIER TO THE MAINTENANCE OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION RESOURCES.

The 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) identified financial constraints as a major obstacle to the Town's ability to maintain its open space and recreational resources effectively. This Plan also noted the need to involve the Finance Committee and Capital Planning Committee in open space and recreation planning efforts. This may include the collaborative development of financial plans for both open space and recreation-related endeavors. This may also include allocating capital for additional full-time municipal staff. Although the Town Planner position is full-time, the Conservation Agent position is part-time, and there is no Recreation Director. To bridge this gap between the need for increased open space and recreation efforts and the lack of local expertise, the Town may also consider establishing a permanent Open Space Committee.

Throughout public outreach efforts for this Master Plan process, Spencer residents expressed a need for improved maintenance and for creative and inclusive management of recreational assets. Specifically, improved maintenance, accessibility, and beautification of open space and recreational resources were highlighted as a top priority, including the maintenance and beautification of abandoned or condemned sites with open space and recreational potential. Consistent maintenance of open spaces, trails, parks, water bodies, woodlands, and other outdoor gathering areas depends on inclusive, adaptive, and creative collective management. With so many open space and recreation stakeholders in Spencer, this management does not need to fall solely on the shoulders of the Town.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"If we plan to have a community that welcomes people in all stages of life, then why can't we offer a few benches to sit on along Depot Trail, Muzzy Meadow, or Main Street to rest and relax a moment?"

(Community Survey, 2023)





Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

GOALS AND STRATEGIES SUMMARY

GOAL 1

PROTECT VALUABLE WATER RESOURCES FROM ADVERSE IMPACTS & DEGRADATION.

OBJECTIVE: Protect the Town's water supply and promote watershed health.

ACTION ITEM 1.1 ACTION ITEM 1.2 ACTION ITEM 1.3

OBJECTIVE: Revitalize the Town beach.

ACTION ITEM 1.4

GOAL 2

ENHANCE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOWN RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

OBJECTIVE: Build Town capacity to support the maintenance and expansion of Town recreation opportunities and facilities.

ACTION ITEM 2.1 ACTION ITEM 2.2 ACTION ITEM 2.3 ACTION ITEM 2.4 ACTION ITEM 2.5

OBJECTIVE: Increase access to water-based recreation opportunities.

ACTION ITEM 2.6 ACTION ITEM 2.7

OBJECTIVE: Enhance the quality of Spencer's trail network.

ACTION ITEM 2.8 ACTION ITEM 2.9 ACTION ITEM 2.10 ACTION ITEM 2.11

GOAL 3

CONSERVE SPENCER'S OPEN SPACES.

OBJECTIVE: Protect Town lands that offer special environmental, economic, and/or recreational value.

ACTION ITEM 3.1 ACTION ITEM 3.2 ACTION ITEM 3.3 ACTION ITEM 3.4 ACTION ITEM 3.5 ACTION ITEM 3.6

OBJECTIVE: Work with Land Trusts (Common Ground and Greater Worcester Land Trust).

ACTION ITEM 3.6 ACTION ITEM 3.7

GOAL 4

BUILD AND ENHANCE TOWN CAPACITY TO FACILITATE AND IMPLEMENT OPEN SPACE PLANNING PROCESSES.

OBJECTIVE: Establish a continuous Open Space Planning Process.

ACTION ITEM 4.1 ACTION ITEM 4.2 ACTION ITEM 4.3



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

GOAL 1

PROTECT VALUABLE WATER RESOURCES FROM ADVERSE IMPACTS AND DEGRADATION.

The water bodies in Spencer are not just scenic features, but integral components of our Master Plan. With eleven lakes, ponds, and reservoirs, many of which are manufactured, they demonstrate Spencer's commitment to environmental conservation. Buck Hill Pond, Howe Pond, Lake Whittemore, Sugden Reservoir, and Thompson Pond are notable bodies of water as they are all entirely within Spencer's borders. These bodies of water are not just open spaces, but a fundamental resource for the community. They support wildlife habitats and corridors, interlink with floodplain soils, and serve as a vital component of the town's groundwater supply while also providing recreational opportunities for the public.

Goal 1 prioritizes protecting these valuable water resources from potential threats and degradation. It assesses the current state of Spencer's water resources and proposes strategies to enhance both water quality and accessibility for recreation. This goal aligns with Spencer's 2021 Open Space Recreational Plan (OSRP) seven-year action plan, emphasizing the importance of shielding valuable water sources within the town from adverse impacts by implementing the high-priority actions identified. This goal focuses on the protection and enhancement of Spencer's water resources, which is central to preserving the town's environmental integrity and promoting the well-being of its residents.

OBJECTIVE: Protect the Town's water supply and promote watershed health.

Spencer is primarily situated within the Chicopee River Watershed, with the remainder of the town within the French River Watershed, both designated as major river basins by the state. These watersheds receive drainage from Spencer, with smaller, subdivided watersheds branching off these major basins, connecting the town with neighboring communities. Groundwater, drawn from deposits near the local rivers, serves as Spencer's water supply, with primary wells located in the Big Meadow area and a secondary source near the Cranberry River.

The close relationship between Spencer's water supply and its surrounding watersheds emphasizes the significance of the objective outlined in goal 1 of the Master Plan. Protecting the town's water supply requires promoting practices that maintain the health of these watersheds. By maintaining these areas' integrity, Spencer can guarantee the longevity of its water resources and protect the welfare of its residents and the environment.

ACTION ITEM 1.1

Improve the quality of streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes while prioritizing water bodies that offer public access for recreation.

Valued open spaces and popular recreational sites within Spencer are primarily centered around the town's eleven lakes, ponds, and reservoirs. These natural amenities offer residents and tourists alike opportunities for outdoor enjoyment. Browning Pond, Sugden Reservoir, Howe Pond, Lake Whittemore, and Buck Hill Pond are among the favored destinations, providing a variety of recreational activities such as fishing, watercraft use, and swimming.

To sustain public access to these water bodies, it is imperative to prioritize the improvement and protection of water quality. Action item 1.1 emphasizes the need for the town to enhance public access points and amenities along these water bodies. By identifying existing or potential access areas for recreation—such as fishing spots, boating docks, and designated swimming areas—the town can enhance the recreational experience while ensuring environmental sustainability.

Multiple factors can impact the quality of Spencer's streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes. Residential developments surrounding larger ponds often lack nearby sewer services, contributing to water quality issues. Additionally, sediment

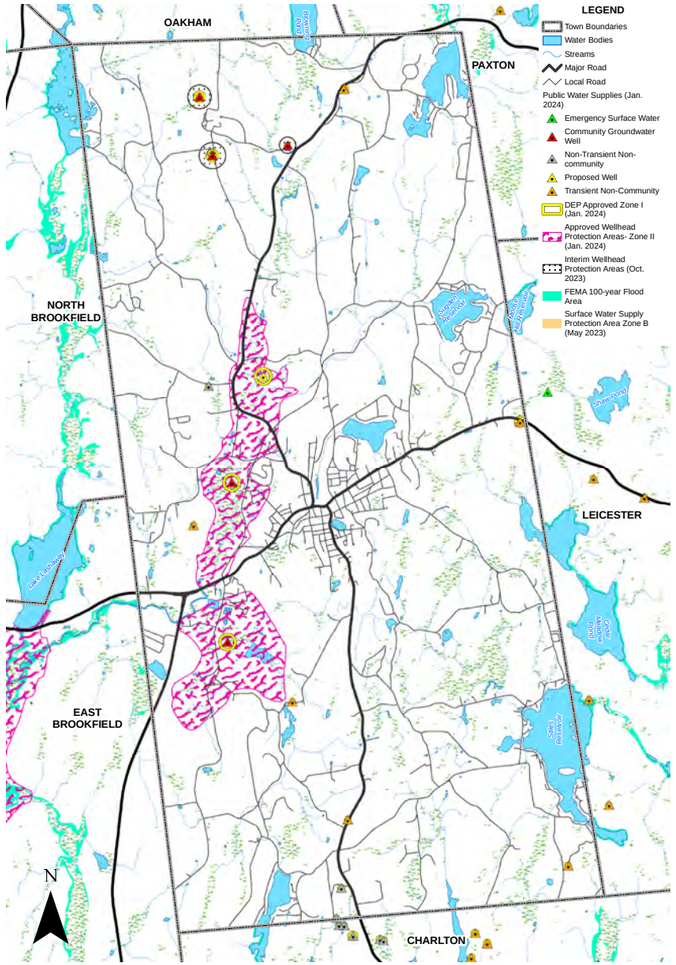


Figure 5: Water Resources. Source: Town of Spencer, CMRPC, MassDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

7
major town-owned lakes and ponds

465
acres of land conserved in Spencer between 2012-2017, including areas adjacent to water bodies

54th
Spencer's rank in the state for its rate of development from 2012 to 2017

from construction, unpaved private roads, and winter sanding can worsen these problems. The Spencer Open Space Recreational Plan offers recommendations for evaluating pond-side septic systems and managing nutrient inputs from lawn fertilizers and impervious surfaces.[19] Action item 1.1 aligns with the OSRP by supporting pollution prevention measures, including stormwater management, erosion control, and runoff regulations.

Invasive species of plants and animals pose another threat to the health of Spencer's water bodies, often imposing restrictions on recreational activities. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) identifies impaired water bodies through its "303d list." For instance, Lake Whittemore and Browning Pond were listed as impaired in the 2022 report, requiring restorative action plans such as Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or Alternative Restoration Plans. This action item places a high priority on the Town to continue utilizing DEP monitoring data, especially at popular locations like Lake Whittemore. That includes regular testing and identifying sources of contamination. In return, through the comprehensive assessment of water quality parameters, enforcement of local wetland and stormwater regulations can be established as developed strategies to restore impaired water bodies.

Residents can support the Town's efforts to improve the quality of water bodies through participating in community clean-up events. These events can play an important role in enhancing the aesthetic appeal and ecological health of water bodies, while fostering a deeper appreciation for these natural resources among residents.

ACTION ITEM 1.2

Conserve or permanently protect lands adjacent to streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes, where possible.

Action item 1.2 aligns with the overarching goal of safeguarding Spencer's water resources from adverse impacts, as outlined in the Master Plan and OSRP (2021). This action emphasizes the need to conserve or permanently protect lands adjacent to streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes, wherever feasible. Insights from the 2023 Master Plan Survey revealed a consensus among respondents regarding the importance of preserving open and undeveloped areas, particularly those bordering bodies of water.

Despite this recognition, recent data paints a concerning picture of increased development in Spencer over the past two decades. According to the 2020 edition of

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"[Protect] Large forested and field areas, areas where bodies of water/ streams, Audubon areas." "Areas around lakes and waterways."

(Community Survey, 2023)

Spencer Water Bodies on the "303d Integrated List" 2022

Waterbody	Size	Category	Source	Cause
Lake Whittemore	52 acres	5 - "Waters requiring a TMDL"	Turbidity	Source Unknown
Browning Pond	106 acres	5 - "Waters requiring a TMDL"	NON-NATIVE AQUATIC PLANTS, NUTRIENT/EUTROPHICATION BIOLOGICAL INDICATORS, MERCURY IN FISH TISSUE	INTRODUCTION OF NON-NATIVE ORGANISMS (ACCIDENTAL OR INTENTIONAL), ATMOSPHERIC DEPOSITION - TOXICS
Sugden Reservior	85 acres	4A - "TMDL is Completed"	NUTRIENT/EUTROPHICATION BIOLOGICAL INDICATORS	AGRICULTURE, DISCHARGES FROM MUNICIPAL SEPARATE STORM SEWER SYSTEMS (MS4), RURAL (RESIDENTIAL AREAS)
Jones Pond	30 acres	4A - "TMDL is Completed"	AQUATIC PLANTS (MACROPHYTES), NUTRIENT/EUTROPHICATION BIOLOGICAL INDICATORS	AGRICULTURE, DISCHARGES FROM MUNICIPAL SEPARATE STORM SEWER SYSTEMS (MS4), RURAL (RESIDENTIAL AREAS)
Brooks Pond	179 acres	4C - "TMDL: Impairment is not caused by a pollutant"	NON-NATIVE AQUATIC PLANTS	INTRODUCTION OF NON-NATIVE ORGANISMS (ACCIDENTAL OR INTENTIONAL)
Moose Hill Reservoir	52 acres	3 - "No Uses Assessed"	N/A	N/A
Thompsons Pond	116 acres	3 - "No Uses Assessed"	N/A	N/A
Watson Millpond	2 acres	3 - "No Uses Assessed"	N/A	N/A
Cranberry Meadow Pond	69 acres	3 - "No Uses Assessed"	N/A	N/A
Stiles Reservoir	309 acres	3 - "No Uses Assessed"	N/A	N/A
Burncoat Pond	115 acres	3 - "No Uses Assessed"	N/A	N/A
Source https://arcgisserver.digital.mass.gov/MassDEPWaterQuality/Home/Index				

Figure 6: Spencer water bodies on the 303d integrated list, 2022. Source: Mass DEP.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"I would not support putting restrictions on private property owners' right to use their land as they see fit [...]"

"[Preserve] areas around lakes and waterways."

"Areas around the lakes have had enough development [...]"

(Community Survey, 2023)

Massachusetts Audubon's "Losing Ground," the town has experienced significant development, ranking 54th in the state for its rate of development from 2012 to 2017.[20] Spencer has also made strides in land conservation during the increase of development, permanently protecting 465 acres of land, including areas adjacent to water bodies. Notable examples include the acquisition of approximately 60 acres near Burncoat Pond, now managed by Mass Audubon as a wildlife sanctuary.

Nevertheless, Spencer's total conserved land currently stands at only 15%, ranking the town 245th in the state. Similarly, a mere fraction of the protected acreage corresponds to BioMap2 Core Habitat or Critical Natural Landscape areas. This highlights the need for further conservation efforts to preserve biodiversity and ecological resilience.

An examination of residential patterns reveals a correlation between development and proximity to water bodies, particularly lakes and ponds. Historical trends of summer camps and seasonal homes along the shores have contributed to denser settlement around these areas. To manage growth and protect open spaces, Spencer has implemented zoning districts and land use bylaws. Privately owned parcels adjacent to lakes and ponds present challenges, particularly regarding stormwater pollution. Residents largely support preserving areas around water bodies, nonetheless, some residents expressed hesitations about imposing additional restrictions.

To address these challenges, action item 1.2 emphasizes the importance of educating landowners about the negative impacts of pollution on nearby water bodies. Spencer can leverage resources and expertise for land conservation initiatives by fostering partnerships with surrounding landowners. This collaborative approach is essential for promoting environmental stewardship and ensuring the long-term health of Spencer's water resources.

ACTION ITEM 1.3

Provide a boat washing station at Browning Pond and Sugden Reservoir to prevent the spread of invasives.

Many of Spencer's residents enjoy boating, both motorized and non-motorized, at the lakes and ponds in Town that allow boat access, such as Browning Pond and Sugden Reservoir. Although this is a favored outdoor recreational pastime, transferring boats between water bodies can contribute to the spread of aquatic invasive species and other contaminants that may reduce water quality. Several aquatic invasive species have been documented throughout Central Massachusetts, including Asian Clams, Water Chestnuts, Invasive Fanwort, Milfoil, Curry Leak Pondweed, and Phragmites. Invasive species not only consistently outcompete their native counterparts, disrupting local ecosystems, but they also pose a significant cost to mitigate and remove.

Boat washing would mitigate the spread of invasive species, and other contaminants that may deteriorate water quality, at a low cost for both individuals and the Town. Boat washing effectively cleans the outer surface of boats of any remnants or contaminants, ensuring nothing invasive is transferred to the next water body in which the boat is placed. To promote boat washing, the Town of Spencer's Conservation Commission may consider posting flyers online and at all water bodies in the Town that permit boat washing and encourage neighboring communities to do the same. Additionally, the Town of Spencer may also consider setting up a boat washing station or partnering with the local carwash.

OBJECTIVE:

Revitalize the Town beach.

The town of Spencer is a prime location that supplies a variety of open spaces. Lakes, ponds, and reservoirs lie within these open spaces, enhancing recreational opportunities and natural amenities for residents and visitors. Survey results overwhelmingly indicate that "Lake Views" are among Spencer's most cherished recreational features. Part of this objective includes revitalizing the town's beaches and ensuring safe and enjoyable access to waterfront areas. Below are descriptions of the lakes and ponds in Spencer, highlighting their features and recreational offerings:

Brooks Pond: Situated primarily in North Brookfield, Brooks Pond is a top spot for canoeists and kayakers. While the pond features a small public beach along Brooks Pond Road, it is important to note that lifeguards do not staff it.

Browning Pond: Created to power a nearby sawmill, provides opportunities for boating and fishing. Located off Route 31 on Browning Pond Road, it contributes to the town's waterfront offerings.

Cranberry Meadow Pond:
Serving as a historical site once used



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

to power local industries, Cranberry Meadow Pond allows for limited fishing from the shore. Its location on Cranberry Meadow Road adds to the town's diverse water resources.

Howe Pond: Situated within Howe State Park, was originally used for industrial purposes. While swimming may no longer be recommended, fishing remains a popular activity. Its accessibility from Howe Park Road off Route 31 enhances the park's recreational appeal.

Stiles Reservoir: Established to provide waterpower to nearby mills, offers limited fishing opportunities from the shore. Located on Chickering Road, it contributes to Spencer's waterfront landscape.

Sugden Reservoir: Created to serve industrial needs, Sugden Reservoir boasts private shoreline ownership with shore access near the dam. Additionally, small boats can be launched from a gravel ramp off Donnelly Cross Road, providing recreational opportunities for residents.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

Thompson Pond: Initially used for industrial purposes, Thompson Pond now offers limited fishing from the shore. Its location on Thompson Pond Road adds to the town's array of water bodies.

Lake Whittemore: As Spencer's only natural lake, Lake Whittemore borders Luther Hill Park, offering residents access to a town beach. While public boat access is unavailable, fishing along the shore is permitted, adding to recreational options for residents.

While these water bodies offer unique recreational experiences, residents have expressed concerns about the lack of maintenance and access to water recreation activities. Survey responses emphasize issues such as pollution and limited recreation. One survey respondent expressed frustration over not being able to access certain water bodies due to pollution concerns, stating they would like to see "A public beach that is not closed every other day due to pollution." Another respondent points out the need for more areas to provide water-based recreation, expressing they would like to see "Boating (kayaks, canoes) in places like Stiles."

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"The town needs a public beach that is not closed every other day due to pollution."

(Community Survey, 2023)

To address these concerns and achieve the objective of revitalizing the town beach, the Town must consider current conditions and address residents' feedback. This Master Plan, as well as the Town of Spencer OSRP, provides an outline for the Town to enhance and maintain Spencer's waterfront areas, ensuring they remain accessible and enjoyable for all residents and visitors.

ACTION ITEM 1.4

Increase maintenance of Town beach access points.

The OSRP has highlighted a significant challenge that demands attention: clarifying responsibility for the maintenance of bodies of water. Sustaining the resources and functionality of open spaces like Town beaches requires continual effort from staff, volunteers, and citizen users (OSRP, 2021, pg. 57). One such area that exemplifies this challenge is Brooks Pond, a popular beach in Spencer. Though privately owned, controlled, and managed, the towns of Spencer, North Brookfield, Oakham, and New Braintree border Brooks Pond. Historically open to public access, the beach now faces issues such as vandalism and the absence of lifeguards, posing management and liability concerns. Increasing maintenance efforts in areas like Brooks Pond is essential to address these challenges effectively.

Another example is Lake Whittemore, Spencer's only natural lake. This lake is the most popular body of water in Town and is accessed through Luther Hill Park. Increasing maintenance at this location would be highly beneficial on multiple levels. Maintenance can help lower the high pollution levels identified by the DEP. Another task would be to add boat access, as there are currently no designated access points for boats.

This action acknowledges the financial constraints faced by Spencer, which can make it challenging to boost maintenance efforts at access points to town beaches. Recognizing and leveraging various funding sources is crucial to addressing Spencer's open space and recreational needs. The Master Plan and the Open Space Implementation Committee should collaborate closely with Town staff to identify available funding resources. Through this collaboration, Spencer can enhance maintenance efforts at key access points to town beaches, optimizing resources, and ensuring that the beaches remain accessible.

GOAL 2

ENHANCE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOWN RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

Although there are plenty of exceptional recreational opportunities for Spencer residents and visitors, their availability and quality rely on continued and improved local effort. Spencer residents aspire to expand their recreational resources, from water to land, and provide new, high-quality opportunities that meet their recreational requests.

The community engagement process revealed opportunities for Spencer to engage with recreational stakeholders to build local capacity to improve recreation amenities. Specifically, trail planning efforts should include all relevant stakeholders, both as a method of capacity building and inclusive management. Residents have noted the need to dedicate capital to these endeavors and explore the possibility of new recreational facilities. Throughout the planning process, residents consistently voiced the need to increase accessibility on recreational trails. Overall, Goal 2 serves as a blueprint for the Town for meeting residents' recreational requests. These goals and their subsequent objectives and actions mirror the priorities reflected in the 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan's Seven-Year Action Plan.

OBJECTIVE:

Build Town capacity to support the maintenance and expansion of Town recreation opportunities and facilities.

Town funding and staffing capacity present as a persistent impediment toward improving the maintenance



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

and expansion of Spencer's recreational resources. Creative opportunities for capacity building emerged throughout this Master Plan planning process, from tapping into all relevant stakeholders' time and expertise to pursuing regional solutions to local requests. As evidenced in the key findings section of this chapter, various recreational stakeholders support the Town's efforts. Spencer must consider which local entity is responsible for engaging with these stakeholders and how collaboration may be leveraged to support the Town's recreational goals. More specifically, as requests for maintenance and improvements continue, the Town must consider how to thoughtfully plan its finances for recreational opportunities. Once relevant stakeholders are organized and financial plans are solidified, the Town may deliberately pursue its residents' recreational requests, including accessibility improvements and exploring the provision of both a dog park and a recreation center, both of which were prioritized by residents throughout this Master Plan planning process.

ACTION ITEM 2.1

Develop a financial plan to support the maintenance of recreational facilities.

Before considering residents' requests for the expansion of recreational opportunities, the Town of Spencer must continue to work toward addressing the maintenance needs of its existing recreational facilities. Throughout this Master Plan planning process, the maintenance of existing recreational facilities was underscored as a major theme, as well as a chronic symptom of capacity constraints. Specific maintenance requests from residents include regular trail maintenance, increased maintenance of State land, and improved maintenance of specialized recreation facilities, such as the disc golf course. To address these maintenance requests, the Town must designate which relevant stakeholders are responsible for working with the Spencer Finance Committee to develop a financial plan to support the maintenance of recreational facilities.

The development of a financial plan will allow the Town to determine which regular maintenance tasks are feasible within the Town budget and which tasks may be considered a lower priority and only be feasible if extra funds became available. This is especially important because although the Town has a relatively low debt per capita, its revenue per capita is also low.[21] Finally, this financial plan should consider which recreational facilities need immediate maintenance and which facilities are most available to vulnerable populations. This step may involve coordinating community outreach.

ACTION ITEM 2.2

Develop a financial plan to support the expansion of recreational opportunities.

The 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan recommends creating a financial plan for the expansion of recreational opportunities in town. The Town should convene stakeholders and the Spencer Financial Committee to develop a plan for the expansion of recreational opportunities. During community engagement, Spencer residents have expressed creative ideas for additional recreational facilities for the Town, including a dog park and a recreation center. Given that these ideas may require significant resources, this Plan must consider potential grant funding opportunities. This consideration must include the maximum amount of funding available, matching requirements, grant periods, and other relevant information. To prioritize projects, the Town should consider which recreational opportunities would benefit vulnerable populations in the Town. This step may include additional community outreach.

ACTION ITEM 2.3

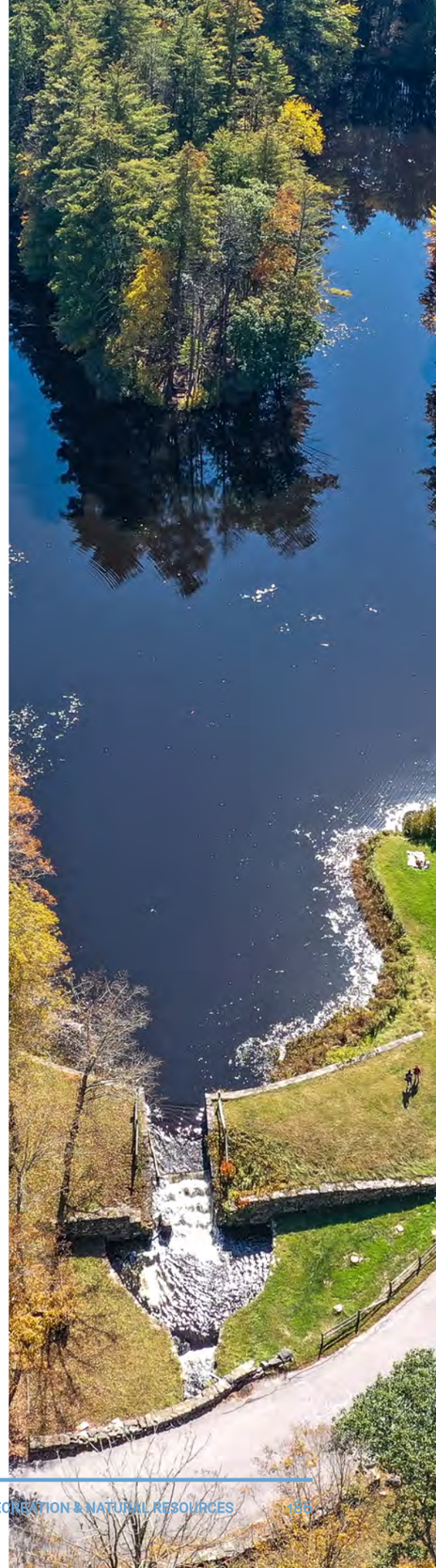
Use the ADA assessment from the 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan to assess the accessibility of recreational facilities and pursue improvements where possible.

The Town of Spencer has made the accessibility of its parks and recreation areas a high priority. As funds become available, the Town has made accessibility improvements to its open spaces, parks, and other recreational areas. Although the Town reevaluates the accessibility of its recreational resources regularly, the Town also completed the ADA Self-Evaluation report as part of the 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) planning process. The ADA self-assessment is a required component of MA Open Space and Recreation Plans (OSRP) that asks municipalities to analyze their open space and recreation properties through an accessibility lens.

This report includes four administrative requirements: the designation of a Town ADA coordinator, an adopted Grievance Procedure, public notification of non-discrimination, and the participation of individuals with disabilities, or organizations that represent people with disabilities, in accessibility planning processes.

For the 2021 Spencer OSRP ADA self-evaluation, the Spencer Town Planner, the Spencer Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Spencer Agricultural Association completed assessments of nine locations in the Town. The nine assessed locations include:

1. O'Gara Park
2. Luther Hill Park
3. Powder Mill Park
4. Ralph Warren Park
5. Depot Trail
6. Vietnam Memorial Park



7. Bemis Memorial Park
8. Isaac Prouty Park
9. Spencer Fairgrounds

Like other Massachusetts towns' OSRP ADA self-assessments, this evaluation included examining parking areas, ramps, entrances, paths of travel, restrooms, picnic areas, drinking fountains, and more, as applicable. This assessment is a valuable tool that may be used by the Town, committees, and other stakeholders, as a guide for accessibility improvements. Although funding and capacity restraints present persistent obstacles to achieving all the improvements laid out in this evaluation, the Town may consider the funding sources outlined in the 2021 Spencer OSRP Seven-Year action plan as well as potential partnerships.

ACTION ITEM 2.4

Explore the provision of a dog park.

When asked which recreational opportunities people would like to see more of in Spencer, survey responses show over 36% of respondents would like a dog park. Spencer residents have voiced an enthusiastic request for a dog park, from the 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) to this Master Plan's community engagement process. The 2021 OSRP identifies exploring the provision of a dog park at Ralph Warren Park. The 2021 OSRP details that prior municipal capital plans had also identified this as a priority. The OSRP also indicates that further investigation of the feasibility, design, and costs of this endeavor must be conducted and examined, as well as exploring other locations for a dog park. The Spencer Master Plan team has heard this request from residents, with multiple guests at the Master Plan workshop bringing up the topic. Given this public support, the Town should continue to consider the idea of a dog park, potential locations, and potential grant funding.

ACTION ITEM 2.5

Explore the provision of a community recreation center.

Throughout previous open space and recreation planning processes and this Master Plan planning process, Spencer residents have voiced the need for a community recreation center. The 2021 Spencer OSRP states that a community recreation center would directly benefit Spencer's youth population, particularly teenagers. Responses to the 2021 OSRP Public Survey include comments about increasing recreational opportunities for teenagers in Town. This recreation center could house additional recreational programming options.

Nearly 50% of survey respondents indicated they would like to see a recreation center in Town. Attendees at the Spencer Master Plan public workshop specifically reference Luther Hill Park as a potential location, with a few people also mentioning the old Lake Street School. Some residents also mentioned the potential to incorporate a new and improved skatepark at this community recreation center.

During community engagement, residents have expressed the need for spaces that bring the community together.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Spencer is in desperate need of a recreational center (look at Boys & Girls Club of Greater Nashua) with a pool and winter indoor activity rooms. Time may be allotted for numerous groups year-round. As many of our seniors age, they may enjoy the benefits of a nice swim in a solar-heated pool. The Parks and Recreation Department could host swimming lessons and events without issues related to inclement weather, bacterial contamination, or algal blooms. The community would have an opportunity to utilize the facility as community rooms for a truly year-round calendar of events."

(Community Survey, 2023)

To explore the feasibility of designing and constructing a community recreation center, the Spencer Parks and Recreation Commission may consider the other actions included in this Chapter, such as working with the Spencer Finance Committee to develop a financial plan for recreational maintenance and improvements.

OBJECTIVE:
Increase access to water-based recreation opportunities.

With several lakes and ponds in Town, Spencer has the potential to offer residents and visitors various opportunities for water-based recreation. Beyond improving the quality of these many water bodies (Goal 1), Goal 2 prioritizes increasing access to existing water-based recreational opportunities and implementing additional opportunities. Lake Whittemore is the Town's only natural lake and serves as the Town Beach, with public access through Luther Hill Park. Although there is no boat access on Lake Whittemore, people may fish from the shores.[23] Alternatively, although the majority of the Sugden Reservoir shoreline is privately owned, both boating and fishing are allowed.[24] The reservoir is a popular trout-fishing destination in the spring and a popular bass fishing destination in the summer. Yet, there is only one boat ramp around this reservoir, within the Moose Hill WMA off Donnelly Cross Road.[25]

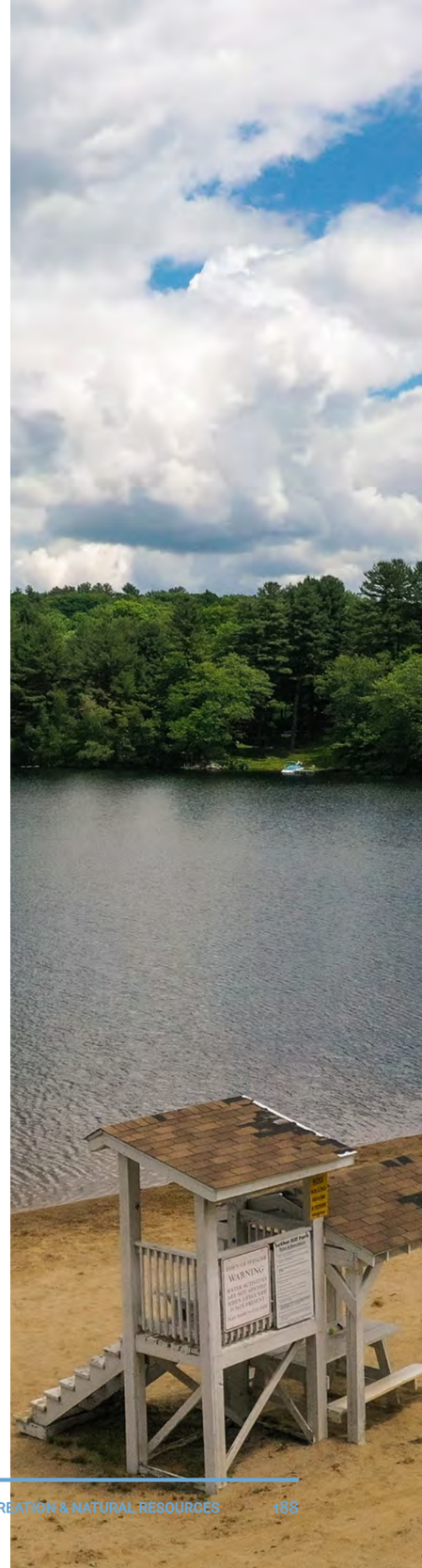
Spencer's various other manufactured ponds offer varying levels of boating and fishing access, including Brooks Pond which is a popular destination for canoers and kayakers. Brooks Pond has a small beach with public access, but it is not staffed with any lifeguards. Brooks Pond is mostly situated in North Brookfield, representing an opportunity for collaboration with nearby Towns to offer increased access to water-based recreation through resource and capacity sharing. Not only would increasing water-based recreation opportunities improve quality of life, but they would also serve as destinations where people may cool down during extreme heat events if swimming is permitted.

ACTION ITEM 2.6

Explore the provision of canoe/kayak launch(es).

One tried-and-true method of getting people out onto the water is improving or constructing accessible, non-motorized boat launches. These boat launches may accommodate canoes and kayaks as well as paddle boards, rowboats, and paddle crafts. Spencer residents and visitors already canoe and kayak on Town water bodies, including Brooks Pond, Browning Pond, the Sugden Reservoir, the Seven-Mile River, and even Turkey Hill Brook, during periods of high flow.[26]

Spencer residents have indicated throughout the Master Plan process that increased access to boat launches, through accessibility



improvements and promotion, may increase utilization. One respondent to the Spencer Master Plan Public Survey wrote that they would like to see "boating (canoes, kayaks) in places like Stiles." Although boating is not currently permitted on the Stiles Reservoir, this indicates a need to improve and promote the existing boat launches in Town.

Improvements may include implementing accessibility accommodations, such as handrails, guardrails, and/or traction pads. If accessibility improvements are pursued, the Town may consider the United States Access Board Guidelines for accessible boating.[27] Promoting boat launches where improvements have been made increases access to, and utilization of, these sites. Promotion may include adding a section about water-based recreation to any Town newspaper or newsletter, posting a flyer during the warmer months on the Town website or Facebook page, or acknowledging these opportunities at Town events.

The need for improved water-based recreation also presents an opportunity to collaborate with neighboring communities, as water bodies do not know political boundaries, and some of the water bodies in Town that residents use for boating cross over town lines. For example, Brooks Pond is not only the headwaters of the Five-Mile River, but it is also located primarily in North Brookfield. For these reasons, a regionally collaborative approach to improving access to water-based recreation on Brooks Pond would directly benefit both communities while also preserving the health of the watershed. The same may be said about Browning Pond, which is located primarily in Oakham. Throughout its efforts to increase access to non-motorized boating opportunities, Spencer should remind boaters to wash their boats between uses to prevent the spread of invasive species and other contaminants.

ACTION ITEM 2.7

Assess the quantity and quality of fishing spots in Town and make accessibility improvements where possible.

Spencer's residents and visitors enjoy fishing opportunities at the various water bodies in Town that welcome the activity. Fishing is permitted, to varying degrees, on Browing Pond, Cranberry Meadow Pond, Howe Pond, Stiles Reservoir, Sugden Reservoir, Thompson Pond, and Lake Whittemore.[28] Browning Pond, Seven Mile River, Turkey Hill Brook, Sugden Reservoir, and Howe Pond are stocked with trout by the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Brook trout can be found in some of the smaller streams. Sugden Reservoir has a particularly diverse fish population, supporting largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, chain pickerel, black crappie, yellow perch, white perch, bluegill, pumpkinseed, white sucker, and brown bullhead.[29]

Although fishing is permitted at many water bodies in Spencer, residents have indicated a need to assess the quantity and quality of shoreline fishing spots or access points. This priority is indicated in the Community Needs section of the 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan, detailing how the Town should plan for improved access to water resources in the face of increased developmental pressures.[30] Similar to non-motorized boat launches, fishing spots can be improved by implementing accessibility accommodations and by promoting the spots to residents.

OBJECTIVE:

Enhance the quality of Spencer's trail network.

Spencer's trail network is vast, welcoming various modes throughout Town. Major trail systems in Town include the Depot Rail Trail, the Midstate Trail, the trails at Sibley and Warner Farms, and the snowmobile trails. The various trail uses (wildlife-watching, walking, hiking, running, biking, snowmobiling, ATVing, and cross-country skiing) are enjoyed by a wide range of people from children to older adults. Many of them are free of charge or cost very little, making them more accessible to those with constrained finances.

Additionally, many trails in Spencer are open year-round, or at least through two to three seasons. Recreational trails, their availability and their quality are of high importance to Spencer's residents, as evidenced throughout this Master Plan planning process. For example, out of all the recreational opportunities listed in the Spencer Master Plan Public Survey, respondents indicated that they would like to see more hiking trails. Conversations at the Spencer Master Plan Public Workshop complemented this feedback, with several residents mentioning the topic of trails. Specifically, residents mentioned the need to assess the number of trails and trailheads, the quality of trails, and trail maintenance, as well as analyze the permitted and potential uses of all trails.

It is also worth considering that as development continues throughout the Town, trails now used by permission or, less formally, by user discretion, are being cut off, restricting recreational use. How Spencer meets the challenge of linking, improving, and expanding trails will have a strong influence on the recreational opportunities available locally, as trail interconnectivity also increases access to other recreational opportunities. The actions that support this objective align with all this feedback and the 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan's (OSRP) Seven-Year Action Plan.

Finally, enhanced communication among Spencer's recreational trail stakeholders and neighboring communities remains an important pillar of all subsequent actions and trail planning processes. Due to the limited capacity of the Spencer Parks and Recreation Commission, the Commission may consider partnering with the Conservation Commission, Department of Public Works, local land trusts, and other organizations (as possible) to explore and expand connections with its neighboring communities. Trail connectivity is not only recognized as a vital component of accessible outdoor recreation at the local level, but also at the regional and statewide levels. For these reasons, regional trail projects present more competitive grant applications to both state and federal programs.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Gathering space near the town center with shade and benches (Maybe even checkers/chess tables)"

(Community Survey, 2023)



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

For a map of existing recreational trails in Spencer, please reference Figure 4 in the Key Findings Section of this Chapter.

ACTION ITEM 2.8

Assess the accessibility of Town recreational trails and explore the feasibility of accessibility improvements where possible.

Assessing the accessibility of recreational trails would entail analyzing current trail systems and the extent to which they offer accessibility accommodations. Accessibility means the quality of being easily used, obtained, available, or understood by all people. There are various types of accessibility accommodations trail managers may provide, from trailhead parking lots, trailhead kiosks, and trailhead access routes, to ramps, bridges, and accessible trail tread.

The trail tread is an important aspect to consider when pursuing accessibility accommodations, as this is the resource all trail users need to enjoy the recreational trail opportunity. Trail tread includes the surface of a trail, which should be firm and stable, the slope of a trail, and the width of a trail. In addition to ensuring trails are of sufficient grade, slope, and width, trail managers should also consider providing resting intervals and turnaround points along trails. It is worth noting that not all trails have the capacity to become universally accessible. Where possible, the Town of Spencer may consider exploring the feasibility of implementing accessibility improvements, potentially in partnership with local land trusts and Mass Audubon. Once the Town's recreational trails have been assessed for their accessibility, the Town may consider using publicly available resources, such as the Forest Service Trails Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG) or the United States Access Board Accessibility Guidelines for Trails.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

ACTION ITEM 2.9

Assess the feasibility of allowing off-road biking, ATVing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and/or snowmobiling on Town recreational trails, as appropriate.

Spencer residents are enthusiastic about a variety of trail uses. From walking and hiking to snowmobiling and ATVing, Spencer's trails are a contentious topic among its outdoor recreation enthusiasts. The results from the Spencer Master Plan Public Survey indicate that residents want to see more recreational trails, but also other allowed uses on their trails. Attendees at the Spencer Master Plan Public Workshop

To achieve this goal of establishing a town-wide trail system that meets all residents' requests, enhanced communications, and coordination among local trail stakeholders, are essential. Spencer has two prominent municipal trail organizations in addition to the Parks & Recreation Commission: The Spencer Trailways and the Spencer Snowbirds. The Spencer Snowbirds focus on the maintenance, preservation, and expansion of snowmobiling trails, whereas the Spencer Trailways focus on recreational trails, in general. If the Town wishes to improve its trail systems, all trail stakeholders must work together and consider how they may collectively meet the residents' requests, including the requests listed in this survey.

ACTION ITEM 2.10

Explore the possibility of implementing phase two of the Depot Trail Restoration and Improvement Project.

The Depot Rail Trail is a 2-mile walking trail along an abandoned rail bed that once provided rail service to downtown Spencer, running from South Spencer Road to Chestnut Street. Currently, there is a designated parking area at the southwest trailhead on South Spencer Road. Additional parking is available at the downtown Elm Street parking lot, which is within two blocks of the northeast trailhead on Chestnut Street.

In 2016, the Town completed phase 1 of the Depot Rail Trail Restoration and Improvement Project. The restoration and improvement tasks included major drainage



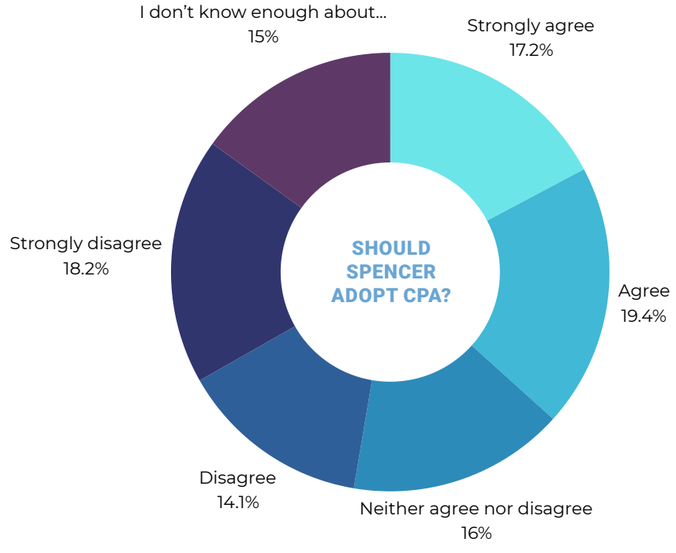
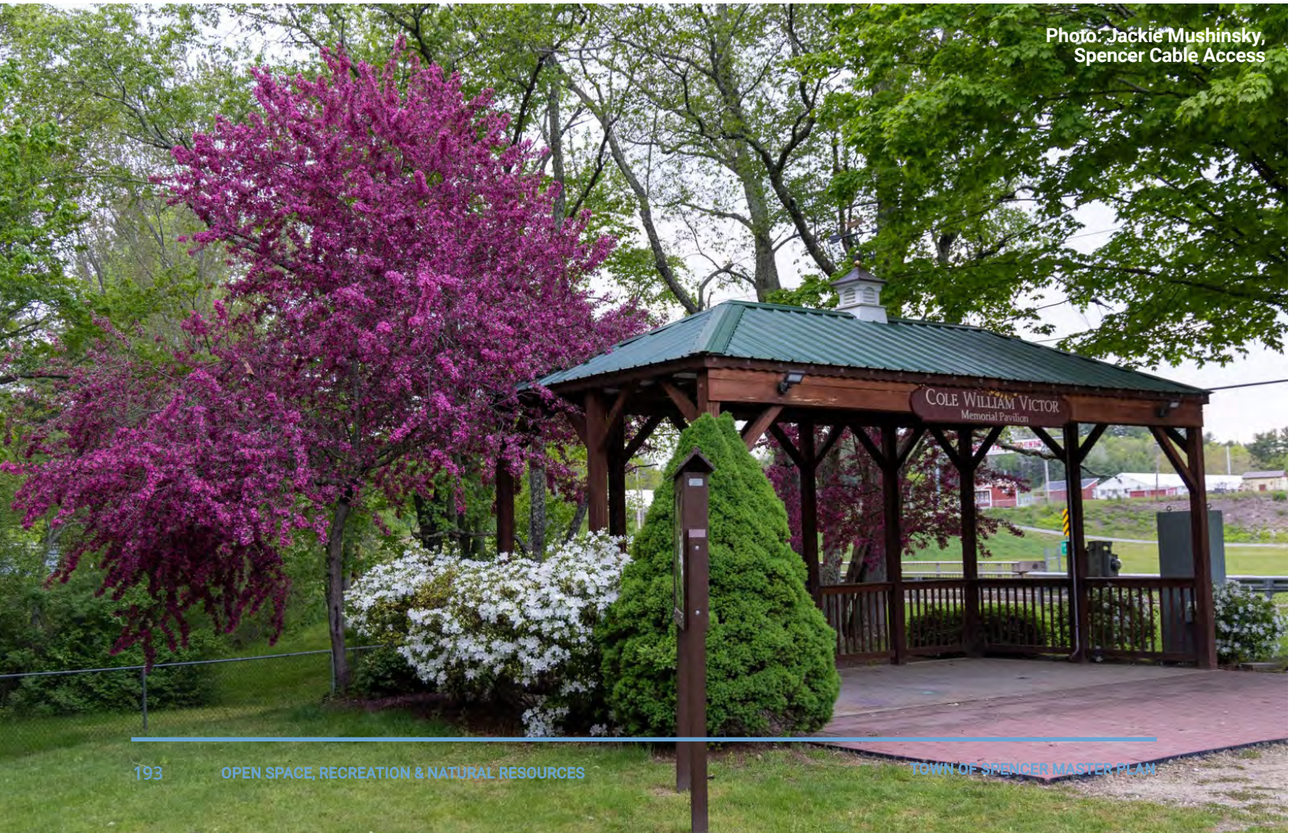


Figure 7: Results from the Spencer Master Plan Public Survey. Question 8 asked residents whether Spencer should adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA).



improvements, vegetation clearing, new trailhead gates, regrading, and reshaping of the trail, and much more. The second phase of this project would include accessibility enhancements. Both phases of this project were made possible by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Recreational Trails Program (RTP). Additional support came from dedicated Town Capital and many local volunteers, including Spencer Trailways, Spencer Snowbirds, Spencer Conservation Commission, Spencer Highway Department, and Thibault Excavation, Inc.

ACTION ITEM 2.11

Consider access to existing parks, historic sites, and conservation lands throughout all trail planning efforts.

Recreational trails represent an opportunity to build out local and regional trail networks to provide transportation alternatives, especially to local points of interest. Transportation alternatives refer to modes of transportation other than personal vehicles, from active transportation options to transit, which may be more affordable and leave a lower carbon footprint. Throughout all trail planning processes, the Town of Spencer should consider how these trails provide access to existing parks, historic sites, and conservation lands. Providing access to these sites through recreational trail networks increases residents' transportation alternatives and allows people to access other opportunities for outdoor recreation more readily. Increased access to outdoor recreation opportunities is proven to improve both physical and mental wellness. Physical wellness may be improved by exercise, fresh air, and avoiding sedentary lifestyles associated with driving or taking transit. Mental wellness may also be improved by these factors, as well as the opportunity to socialize affordably and connect with your community while also reducing stress.[31] Increasing access and in turn, increasing utilization, of parks, historic sites, and conservation lands may incentivize protection of these areas and attract visitors that boost the local economy and support small businesses.

GOAL 3

CONSERVE SPENCER'S OPEN SPACES.

Open space includes larger parcels of undeveloped or partially developed land, such as conservation land. Open space also includes all other public outdoor areas, such as recreation land, agricultural land, and even cemeteries. Open space areas are important, both generally and to the Town of Spencer, for a variety of reasons. The benefits of open spaces include improved air, water, and soil quality, and improved quality of life by providing access to green space, recreational opportunities, scenic views, and sustained wildlife habitat. The protection of lands that offer special environmental, economic, and/or recreational value is a shared priority among Spencer residents, and therefore a vital pillar of this Master Plan. The conservation of open spaces in Spencer is also the backbone of the 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), specifically the conservation of open space properties with limited protections. In fact, according to the 2021 Spencer OSRP, over 40% of open space in Town is completely unprotected.[32]

Level of Protection	GIS Acres of Open Space
Limited	127.35
None	2,351.14
Protected	3,337.01
Unknown	9.53
Total	**5,825.03**

Figure 8: Spencer Open Space Land by Level of Protection. Source: 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan

OBJECTIVE: Protect Town lands that offer special environmental, economic, and/or recreational value.

Spencer's open spaces provide special environmental, economic, and/or recreational value. To ensure the preservation of these spaces and the town's rural character, the Town must prioritize areas for protection, or increased protection. Going forward, Spencer should analyze previous local planning efforts, such as the 2008 Spencer Reconnaissance Report and the 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), while considering which open space areas should be pursued for conservation efforts.

Working with Spencer residents, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) developed a Reconnaissance Report in 2008 for the Town, which identifies various properties as high-priority heritage landscapes that may be considered for increased protection. Heritage landscapes are places "created by human interaction with the natural environment that helps define the character of a community and reflect its past."[33] These properties include:

1. The Green Farm Property and Schoolhouse
2. Sibley/Warner Farm
3. Wilson Farm
4. Wire Village Turkey Hill Brook
5. St. Joseph's Abbey

ACTION ITEM 3.1

Preserve open spaces for wildlife habitat.

Overall, there are nearly 820 acres of rare species core habitat and over 2,500 acres of general core habitat within Spencer's borders. These areas support the eleven species with Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA) status (as shown in Figure 9).[34] The majority of the priority habitat for these rare species is situated along the Seven Mile River and near the Big Meadow Area wetland complex. This priority habitat stretches from where West Main Street meets Brookfield up to Thibault's Country Store on North Spencer Road. Additional priority habitat is located north of the Sibley Farms property, by Burncoat Pond, and around the intersection of North Spencer and Hastings roads.[35] There are also seven MassWildlife National Heritage Endangered Species Program (NHESP) certified vernal pools within Spencer's borders, contributing to nearly 1,420 acres of vernal pool core habitat.[36] Vernal pools are small, shallow ponds that experience dry periods. Although they lack fish, many amphibians breed exclusively in vernal pools, and some organisms such as fairy shrimp spend their entire life cycle there.[37]

Preserving wetlands, vernal pools, and other identified core habitats means ensuring these areas remain unchanged, or as unchanged as possible, by humans. This preservation of wildlife habitat also supports local climate resiliency, as critical wildlife are more likely to survive and contribute to their respective ecosystem services. Although 11.7% of Spencer's land is covered by general core habitat, only 2.4% of Spencer's land is protected core habitat.[39] These areas must be prioritized for preservation efforts, not only for Spencer's rare species but for Spencer's local ecosystem and residents.

Wildlife conservation should also include plant life and protect native plant and tree species against the encroachment of invasive species and pests. Some examples of native vegetation residents and visitors of Spencer may encounter include winterberry, pussy willow, and jack-in-the-pulpit, just to name a few. Spencer mainly consists of second-growth forests and examples of native trees people may find in the area include eastern hemlock, red maple, and white pine. To promote these native species the Spencer Conservation Commission may consider developing an annual or semi-annual mailer to educate residents about protection measures against invasive species and pests. These materials could also be used to educate developers about the threat invasive species pose to land that is in the process of development, as areas where groundwork has recently been performed are prime habitats for invasives. Overall, Spencer residents must consider the conservation of native wildlife habitat throughout all local development efforts, which may include instituting Conservation Restrictions (as detailed below in Action 3.2) or similar program incentives. Other creative solutions to protecting native wildlife in the face of development could include a partnership between Spencer's Parks and Recreation Commission and Conservation Commission to host a community birdhouse construction day, where residents can work together to improve bird habitat.

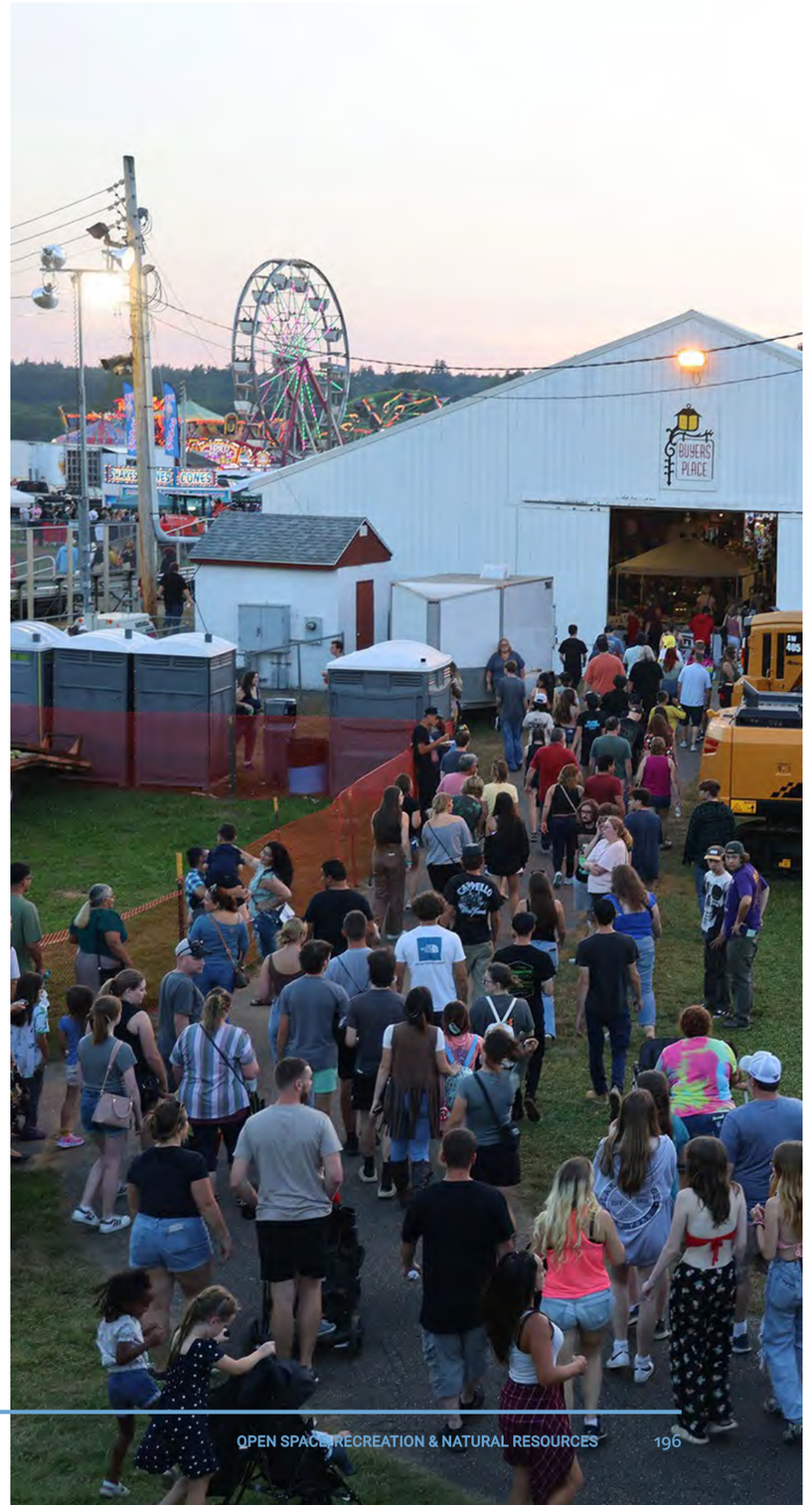
ACTION ITEM 3.2

Conserve forestlands.

Forestlands and woodlands (smaller forestlands) provide an abundance of ecosystem benefits. Some of the general ecosystem benefits that trees provide include critical wildlife habitat, stormwater mitigation that decreases erosion, as well as overall improved water, soil, and air quality. Trees, woodlands, and forestlands also shade people and homes, protecting human health and lowering energy consumption and costs during extreme heat events. Moreover, in addition to reducing air pollution, trees also store carbon, offsetting climate pollution. According to MassGIS 2016 Land Use data, more than half of Spencer's lands are forested. These lands are a vital component not only of Spencer's local ecosystem but of its character. As the threat of development for warehouses, homes, and renewable energy generation and storage increases, the Town must consider protecting its unprotected areas of woodlands and forests.

Forestland protections the Town may consider in the future for its unprotected woodlands and forestlands include Massachusetts Conservation Restrictions and Massachusetts Chapter 61 for forestlands. Massachusetts Conservation Restrictions are legally binding agreements by public or private landowners with qualified organizations, such as non-profit land trusts. These agreements include restrictions on the allowed land uses of the property held in the restriction.[40] Similarly, the Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 61 Program, also known as the Forest Tax Program, gives "preferential tax treatment to landowners who maintain their property as open space for timber production, agriculture or recreation."[41] In the future, the Spencer Conservation Commission may consider working together with other local forestland stakeholders to increase protections on its currently unprotected forestlands.

Photo: Spencer Fair, Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



ACTION ITEM 3.3

Protect farmland.

According to the Massachusetts Bureau of Geographic Information (MassGIS) 2016 land use data, the Town of Spencer is 11.30% agricultural land.[42] This is compared to the Central MA Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) regional average of 7.40% agricultural land. Nearby municipalities with similar percentages of agricultural land include Barre, Berlin, and West Brookfield. According to the 2017 Massachusetts Farmland Census, produced by the University of Massachusetts Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment, both the number of farms and the amount of land in farms in Massachusetts declined between 1997 and 2017.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"All existing agricultural land should not be developed in any way, maybe create a trust to preserve for the benefit of food production for humans and animals."

"Save the farms."

(Community Survey, 2023)

In 2017, the average farm size in Worcester County was roughly 60 acres, which is well above the average farm size in both Suffolk and Barnstable counties, slightly above the average in Bristol, Essex, and Middlesex, and slightly below the average in Dukes, Hampden, and Hampshire counties. Berkshire, Franklin, and Plymouth counties have the highest average farm sizes out of the State, with Berkshire County having an average farm size of over 120 acres.[43]

Although the county, region, and town of Spencer all have comparably average amounts of land in farms, both farmland and active farming of farmland are declining rapidly. Throughout this Master Plan planning process, Spencer residents voiced their opinions about this matter, with many residents volunteering that farmland needs to be prioritized for protection efforts. When asked what areas of Spencer should be preserved as open space/non-developed land, many survey respondents wrote about farmland.

Massachusetts offers abundant resources to agricultural landowners similar to forest protections and incentives. Two prime examples of these resources are the Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 61A Program for agricultural landowners and the Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR) Program. Specifically, the Commonwealth offers preferential tax treatment to landowners who maintain five or more contiguous acres of active agricultural or horticultural land. This preferential tax treatment includes being taxed for the land's agricultural use rather than developmental value.[45] The Massachusetts APR Program is a voluntary program that is intended to offer non-development alternatives to farmers and other owners of prime agricultural land who are faced with decisions regarding the future of their land.[46] In this case, the alternative includes offering landowners the difference in cost between the "fair market value" of their land and the "agricultural value" of their land. Programs such as the Chapter 61A Program and the APR Program should be considered as Spencer boosts its local and regional partnerships, expands its capacity, and strives to maintain its agricultural land.

ACTION ITEM 3.4

Protect and enhance lands available for hunting.

Hunting is a favored recreational activity and pastime of many Spencer residents. The Town has a Fish & Game Club that owns over 27 acres of land off Mechanic Street.[47] This property invites club members to partake in various activities in designated areas, such as the rifle-pistol range, the trapping range, and the archery range. The Club also offers hunters education courses, supported by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife).[48] Hunting and fishing are also allowed on the three Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) properties in Town: the Seven-Mile River Access Point, the Four Chimneys Wildlife Management Area, and the Moose

Common Name	Scientific Name	Taxonomic Group	MESA Status	Most Recent Obs.
Blue-spotted Salamander (complex)	Ambystoma laterale pop. 1	Amphibian	Special Concern	1991
American Bittern	Botaurus lentiginosus	Bird	Endangered	1996
Grasshopper Sparrow	Ammodramus savannarum	Bird	Threatened	2008
Pied-billed Grebe	Podilymbus podiceps	Bird	Endangered	2006
Bridle Shiner	Notropis bifrenatus	Fish	Special Concern	2007
Creeper	Strophitus undulatus	Mussel	Special Concern	2010
Blanding's Turtle	Emydoidea blandingii	Reptile	Threatened	1993
Eastern Box Turtle	Terrapene carolina	Reptile	Special Concern	1985
Wood Turtle	Glyptemys insculpta	Reptile	Special Concern	2014
Adder's Tongue Fern	Ophioglossum pusillum	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1890
Bristly Buttercup	Ranunculus pensylvanicus	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2006
Great Laurel	Rhododendron maximum	Vascular Plant	Threatened	2018
Vasey's Pondweed	Potamogeton vaseyi	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2015

Figure 9: Rare Species in Spencer Source: MassWildlife NHESP Rare Species (MESA) Viewer.[38]



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



Photo: Thibault's Country Store, Taylor Wentworth

Hill Wildlife Management Area. Specifically, Mass Wildlife's Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) offer an array of recreational opportunities to visitors, from hunting and fishing to trapping, boating, hiking, and nature observation. On the other hand, WMAs are protected by specific codes of Massachusetts Regulations (CMRs) and prohibit camping, campfires, and motorized vehicles. Mass Wildlife Access Areas are areas that primarily function as public access points to privately owned water bodies and conservation areas. Although there are ample lands available to Spencer residents for hunting, the Town should consider ways they may conserve, improve, and expand hunting lands. Specifically, the Town may pursue additional hunting lands to supplement the land available at the Spencer Fish & Game Club property. Incentives also exist for owners of recreational land. Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 61B Program for recreational land offers preferential tax treatment to landowners, allowing land to be taxed for its recreational value rather than its developmental value. The Town may also consider expanding the allowed uses of already conserved municipal land. Finally, Spencer should consider avenues for improving communications with the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife regarding their three properties in Town; this may include conversations about maintenance or ideas for other improvements.

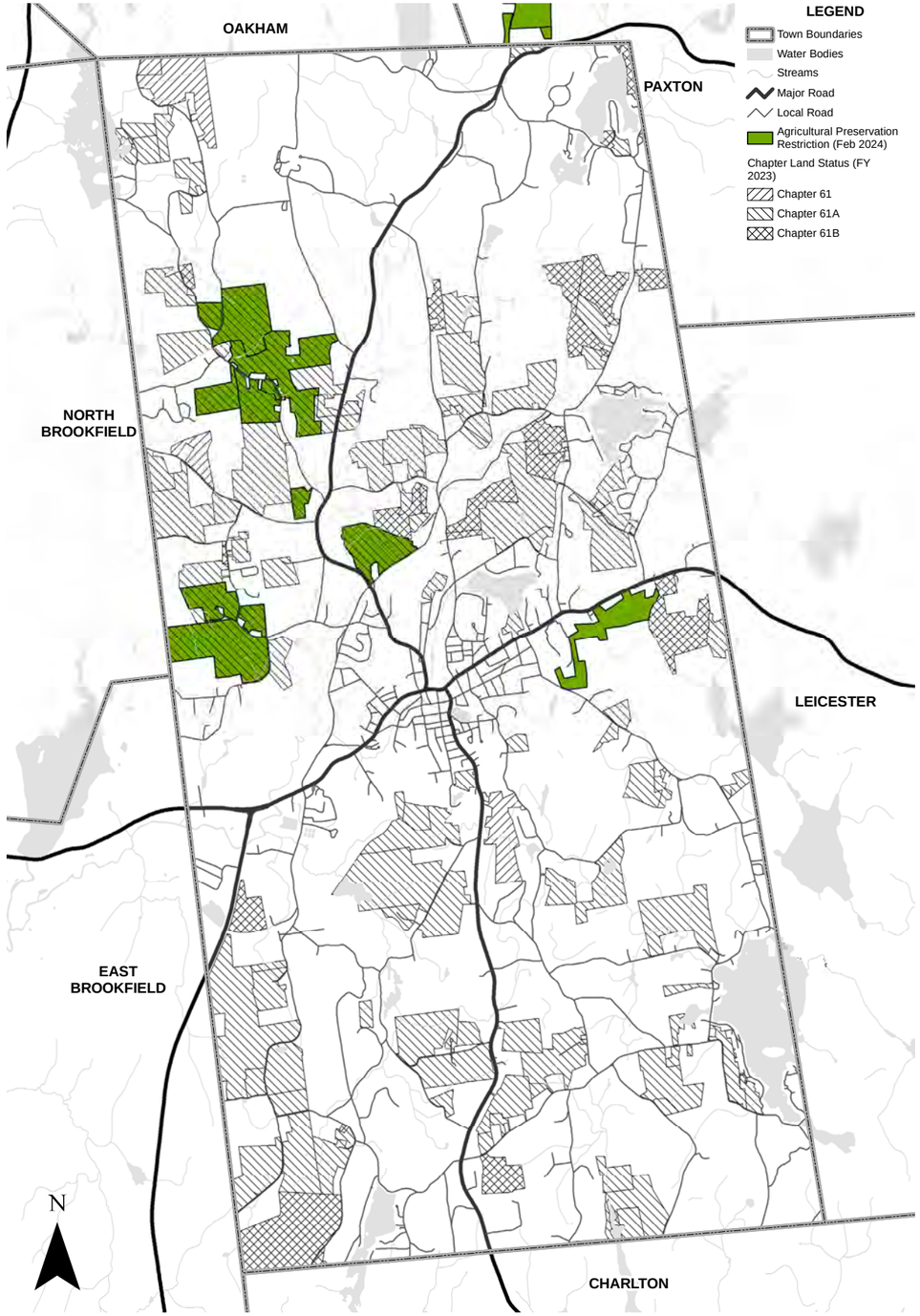


Figure 10: Agricultural land. Source: Town of Spencer, CMRPC, MassDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"The last remaining big tracts of farmland in South and North Spencer, along with the large forest that runs from Wire Village to Buck Hill and the 4-H camp [...]"

(Community Survey, 2023)

ACTION ITEM 3.5

Allow for additional passive recreation and/or nature/ wildlife viewing at Town open spaces, where possible.

Throughout the Spencer Master Plan public engagement efforts, residents referenced a request for high-quality, outdoor gathering spaces, where folks from all backgrounds and of all abilities may enjoy the outdoors. Specifically, many residents referenced a request for a Town Recreation Center, which may include benches and shorter recreational trails. As detailed in the key findings section of this chapter, Spencer residents have several recreational and natural assets at their disposal in terms of locations where they may enjoy passive outdoor recreation. Sufficient maintenance, and underlying capacity constraints, present as consistent obstacles between these resources and potential users. To expand access to areas for passive recreation, the Town may consider simpler, smaller-scale approaches to filling these gaps. For example, implementing accessible benches, as well as accessible entrances and walkways to benches, at parks and open spaces would open the door for more people of various backgrounds to enjoy outdoor spaces for passive recreation. Other simple approaches to inviting more people to enjoy passive recreation opportunities in Town may include improving informational signage at parks and open spaces that include details about allowed uses, wildlife viewing opportunities, and accessibility accommodations. Finally, the Town may consider reassessing the allowed uses of existing open spaces while also considering other conservation and preservation efforts to expand the availability of passive recreation opportunities.

ACTION ITEM 3.6

Continue to consider the local desire to leverage the Community Preservation Act (CPA).

In May 2024, the town voted to approve that a question be put on the election ballot asking voters whether Spencer should participate in the Community Preservation Act (CPA) program. If adopted, the funds may be used to enhance protection efforts, such as preserving wildlife habitat and conserving forestlands. Specifically, CPA funds will be raised through a 1% property tax surcharge and administered by a local Community Preservation Committee and may be used for open space acquisition and preservation. At the 1% property tax surcharge rate, Spencer may expect more than $100,000 to be deposited into its CPA fund annually, without including the State match. The Town's open space and recreational stakeholders must convene and determine which entities are responsible for collaborating on CPA efforts. This may include an Open Space Committee that works directly with stakeholders and Townspeople. The 2023 Spencer Master Plan public survey results indicated a nearly fifty-fifty split between people who strongly agree/agree and people who strongly disagree/disagree that Spencer should adopt the CPA. Slightly more people indicated they strongly agree/agree that Spencer should adopt a CPA, with some people remaining neutral and some people interested in learning more.

OBJECTIVE:

Work with Local Land Trusts

The State of Massachusetts is lucky to have many land trusts that work to conserve natural lands and open spaces. Two land trusts serve as effective open space stakeholders in the Town of Spencer: The Common Ground Land Trust and the Greater Worcester Land Trust. Both land trusts contribute to a conservation partnership with the Massachusetts Audubon Society (Mass Audubon) and the Town to protect and enhance the Sibley and Warner farms areas, as well as the nearby Burncoat Pond Wildlife Sanctuary and the Mid-State Trail. Together, these organizations offer an exceptional open space and recreational resource to Spencer residents and visitors, including "fields, upland forests, and a variety of wetlands with diverse, high-quality wildlife habitat; acres of rolling hayfields on prime agricultural soils; many opportunities for recreation; and scenic views from Route 9 and many of the interior trails." This successful conservation partnership serves as an example of the power of collaboration among open space and recreation stakeholders and may serve as both an example and a steppingstone towards increasing teamwork among these entities within other locations in Town.

ACTION ITEM 3.7

Charge a Town Board or Committee to meet regularly with local land trusts to discuss their properties.

The Town should meet with local land trusts regularly to discuss conservation partnerships. As previously indicated throughout this chapter, a few different Town boards and committees hold a special interest in open space and recreation matters in Spencer. Specifically, the Conservation Commission and the Parks & Recreation Commission are charged with handling open space and recreation matters in Town, respectively. Other boards and committees, such as the Board of Health, the Cultural Council, and the Historical Commission, may be concerned with open space and recreation matters, too. To improve communications with the local land trusts, as well as Mass Audubon and departments within the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), the Town must consider which board(s) and/or committee(s) must be charged with handling communications with land trusts and other relevant stakeholders. This may include establishing a new committee, such as an Open Space Committee or an Open Space Implementation Committee, or assigning this role directly to the Conservation Commission and/or the Parks & Recreation Commission.

ACTION ITEM 3.8

Enact protections over additional open space land in partnership with local land trusts.

Once a Town board or committee is charged with handling communications between the Town and the local land trusts, opportunities for open space conservation may become more available. For instance, land trusts may serve as third-party easement holders for conservation and preservation restrictions, alleviating localities of the sole responsibility as a land or easement manager. Conservation partnerships with land trusts also open the doors to additional networks of regional volunteers that may assist with fundraising for and maintenance and management of open spaces. Overall, not only may a Town's natural assets become more available for passive and active recreation purposes, but conservation partnerships with local land trusts allow protection efforts to become less burdensome for municipalities.


Photo: Royal Crest Farm, Taylor Wentworth

GOAL 4

BUILD AND ENHANCE TOWN CAPACITY TO FACILITATE AND IMPLEMENT OPEN SPACE PLANNING PROCESSES.

As Spencer looks to the future, ensuring the effective management and preservation of these open spaces becomes paramount. Goal 4 reflects Spencer's commitment to guiding its natural resources responsibly. With the rapid pace of development and increasing pressures on land use, the need to prioritize open space planning has never been more urgent. By building and enhancing the town's capacity in this area, Spencer aims to equip itself with the tools, knowledge, and expertise needed to navigate the complex challenges of land management and conservation effectively.

Goal 4 highlights Spencer's commitment to inclusive and transparent decision-making. The Open Space Master Plan recognizes the importance of engaging residents, stakeholders, and local organizations in the planning process. By enhancing the town's capacity to facilitate meaningful dialogue and collaboration, Spencer aims to ensure that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and valued. Goal 4 also aims to create a coherent understanding between town staff, committee and board members, and the residents of Spencer in shaping the future of its open spaces.

OBJECTIVE:

Establish a continuous Open Space Planning Process.

Feedback gathered from the Master Plan 2023 Survey features residents' strong desire to preserve numerous areas as open or undevelopable spaces. Comments highlight specific locations such as "historic sites," "rural zoning areas," and "habitats for wildlife and plants." Meeting these aspirations requires a structured framework aligned with both community needs and land objectives.

Establishing an Open Space planning process in Spencer serves as a tangible demonstration of the town's commitment to preserving open spaces for current and future generations. By implementing this process, Spencer can ensure that all goals outlined within the Open Space chapter are effectively addressed, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the planning procedures.

To achieve this objective, three actionable steps have been outlined to guide Spencer in implementing and addressing these concerns. These action items focus on establishing dedicated committees, allocating their respective roles, and identifying avenues for accessing funding opportunities. Through these strategic measures, Spencer can pave the way for a robust and sustainable Open Space planning process, reinforcing its dedication to preserving its natural landscapes for the benefit of all.

ACTION ITEM 4.1

Follow the recommendations of the OSRP and establish an Open Space Committee, distinct from the Conservation Commission and Parks & Recreation Commission and promote the opportunity to become a committee member to all residents.

The town of Spencer oversees various aspects of its development through many boards. While the Conservation Commission and Parks & Recreation Commission exist, there is currently no dedicated Open Space Committee.

The Conservation Commission, comprising six members, focuses on regulations and bylaws to protect wetlands, water resources, and buffer zones. They monitor activities, review permits, and collaborate with other departments to develop the Town's Open Space & Recreation Plan. Similarly, the Parks & Recreation Commission, which is comprised of six volunteer members, maintains parks, schedules facility usage, and oversees recreational programs.

There is a critical gap in addressing open space needs. Establishing a separate Open Space Committee can provide focused attention on open space planning and management. This committee would concentrate on preserving, acquiring, and enhancing open spaces to meet community needs and environmental goals.

The Open Space Committee will actively seek resident participation, empowering individuals to shape the future of their community. Recruiting members from the town ensures the representation of broader community interests and values and civic engagement in local decision-making processes.

ACTION ITEM 4.2

Follow the recommendations of the OSRP and charge the Open Space Committee with reviewing the OSRP action plan / Master Plan goals, objectives, and actions, and implementing these actions, as possible.

As previously noted, the Conservation Commission currently collaborates with other departments to develop Spencer's Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP). With the assumption that Spencer establishes an Open Space Committee, this action item proposes assigning the committee the responsibility of reviewing and maintaining the OSRP and Master Plan goals, objectives, and action plans.

Action item 4.2 consolidates the responsibility that was previously divided among departments, providing a clear point of contact for overseeing these plans. It directly aligns with the main objective of goal 4, establishing a framework that clarifies the roles of the Open Space Committee and eliminates uncertainties regarding responsibility. By entrusting the Open Space Committee with the oversight of plans such as the OSRP and Master Plan, the town can effectively advance toward its overarching vision for open spaces in Spencer. This empowers the committee to actively contribute to the realization of the community's goals for conservation, recreation, and environmental protection.

ACTION ITEM 4.3

Assess appropriate measures to ensure the Town can access grant funding and effectively spend any acquired funding.

To ensure that the town of Spencer can access crucial grant funding for its open space initiatives, this action item emphasizes the importance of updating the Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP) every seven years. By maintaining an approved and current OSRP, Spencer can effectively coordinate its efforts with state, regional, and local environmental agencies, making the town eligible for various grant programs. These programs include the Massachusetts Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) Grant Program, the Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Grant Program, and others administered by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and the Division of Conservation Services (DCS).

Maintaining eligibility for these grants centers on keeping the OSRP up to date. Failure to do so would result in missed funding opportunities. Recognizing the importance of financial resources for implementing open space action plans, Spencer can also explore the adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA). While the adoption of the CPA is recommended in Goal 3 of the Open Space chapter, action item 3.6 reveals Spencer residents' hesitancy regarding implementing a new tax. In response, this action item prioritizes maintaining grant funding eligibility by regularly updating the OSRP.

Recognizing potential resource constraints in applying for necessary grants, Spencer can explore partnerships with external entities like the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC). CMRPC offers valuable services to the town, including information on potential grants, grant writing assistance, and support in grant submission processes—all of which could be provided free of charge. Leveraging such resources can expand Spencer's access to funding opportunities, thus emphasizing the significance of action item 4.3.

By prioritizing the maintenance of the OSRP, Spencer can access grant funding without directly impacting residents. This strategy aligns with the community's desire to preserve open spaces and enhance recreational opportunities while addressing fiscal concerns. It emphasizes the town's commitment to responsible fiscal management and sustainable growth.



Photo: Spencer Fair, Mark Shea, Spencer Cable Access

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09

Historical & Cultural Resources

Richard Sugden Public Library
Photo: Jackie Mushinsky
Spencer Cable Access



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

OVERVIEW

Spencer has a rich and varied history that spans from the Colonial Period to the present and that illustrates changes in lifestyle and economic bases from which the community prospered and grew. Beginning with Early American history, to an agricultural society, to the development of a mill town during the Industrial Revolution, Spencer has evolved in many ways.[1] The once vibrant town center has waned in vitality in recent decades. However, Spencer is hopeful of a revitalization to come. With the backbone of wonderful architecture, although in need of some attention, the town center has the architectural foundation and potential to bring vibrancy back to the center of town.

Residents are concerned that buildings in the town center suffered too much deterioration to be salvageable

Spencer was originally part of the Town of Leicester but broke away from Leicester due to frustration with Leicester's refusal to build roads, a church, and schools (in 1753).[2] Today, Spencer is at a crossroads in that it seeks to reimagine itself economically and culturally while maintaining its historic character. The focus of this chapter is on identifying the historical and cultural resources that exist, and pathways to protect

GLOSSARY

National Register District:
an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places recognizing districts and buildings of national, state, or local historical significance. Listing on the National Register provides recognition and potential financial benefits with fewer regulatory constraints than a Local Historic District.

Local Historic District:
a designated area within a municipality that has historical, architectural, or cultural significance. The designation is made by the local government. Local historic districts offer more robust protection and regulation to maintain the historical integrity of an area.

Brownfields:
properties where the presence of hazardous substances or contaminants impedes the redevelopment, or reuse of the site. Cleanup and remediation can transform these challenges into opportunities and community revitalization.

Adaptive Reuse:
the process of rehabilitating historic buildings for new uses while retaining their historic or original features. This approach to development is an effective way to preserve cultural heritage, reduce environmental impact, and revitalize communities.

Heritage Landscape:
a geographical area that has been shaped by historical events, cultural practices, and natural processes. These landscapes are valued for their historical, cultural, ecological, and aesthetic significance and often include historic buildings, archaeological sites, and natural elements.

Ecotourism:
a form of sustainable travel that focuses on experiencing and preserving natural environments while promoting conservation and educating travelers. It emphasizes responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, respects local cultures, and promotes sustainable development.

1753
Spencer was incorporated as a town

50%
of survey respondents agree that historic resources are at risk of being "erased."

78%
of survey respondents agree and strongly agree that historic resources should be protected when new development takes place

them while promoting revitalization of the town center and preserving the Town's cultural heritage. This chapter seeks to balance historic and cultural resource preservation with revitalizing the town center and the town's economy.

Like other communities in Central Massachusetts, Spencer's cultural and historic resources face challenges due to population growth, new development, and absentee ownership. These resources play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for Spencer's residents, offering amenities that make the town a desirable place to live. Thus, Spencer's rich historical heritage is central not only to the town's character and identity, but also to its economic growth.

This chapter recommends that the Town integrates historic preservation with the Town's long-range planning and economic development strategies. This approach has a dual focus—identify preservation priorities and leverage historic assets for economic opportunities. Drawing on community engagement and stakeholder feedback, this chapter draws on the community's vision for the strategies, policies, and regulations needed to guide the stewardship of Spencer's historic resources in a manner that better aligns with the town's evolving needs.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"I like the historic buildings downtown and can picture how great they could look if the owners cared enough to bring them to their former glory."

(Community Survey, 2023.)

*** Comments edited for clarity.**



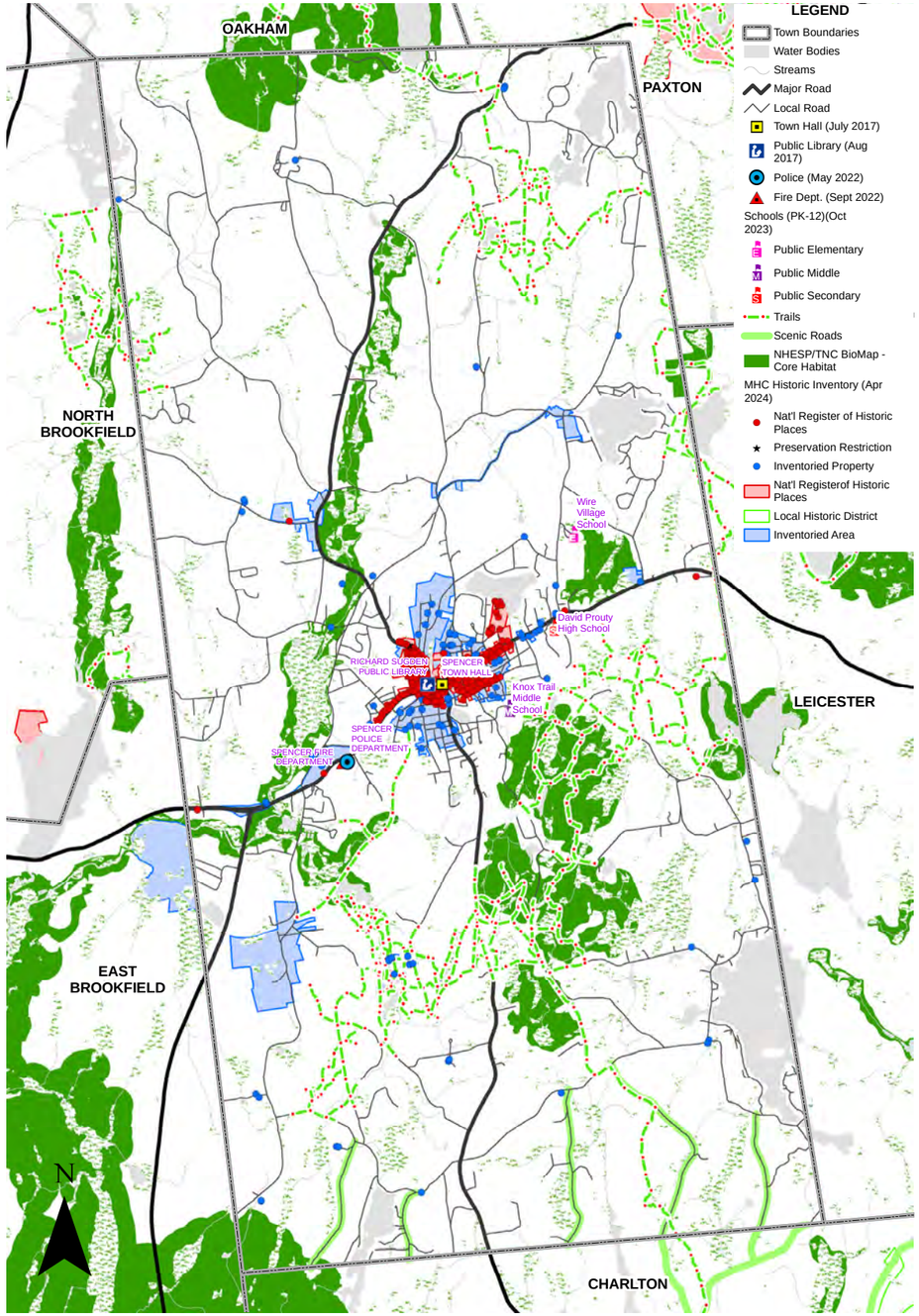


Figure 1: Town of Spencer, Trails and Conservation Land. Source: Town of Spencer, CMRPC, MassDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

KEY FINDINGS/ PRIORITIES

Spencer has seen many changes since it was first settled in 1717 and incorporated in 1753.

The town once had several impressive structures dating from the late 19th century to early in the 20th century including private mansions, a school, a church, and a theater. However, many historic resources have been lost due to fire and structural issues. Most recently, in June 2023, the historic First Congregational Church was lost to fire caused by a lightning strike. Ironically, Spencer's 1771 meetinghouse that stood on the same site burned in 1862.[3] Today, some historic resources are at risk of being lost due to neglect.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Celebrating and revitalizing the current historic places in Spencer would be a great way to preserve heritage while also making them useful and engaging. For instance, tours of historic cemetery sites or open houses/events at historic buildings."

(Community Survey, 2023)

RESIDENTS SUPPORT HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND THE ADAPTIVE REUSE OF UNDERUTILIZED HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Responses to the community survey indicate that residents are concerned about the condition of buildings, particularly in the downtown area. While 63 percent of survey respondents favored historic preservation and rehabilitation in the town center commercial area, others expressed concern that buildings may have already suffered too much deterioration to be salvageable, and that may be the case for a limited number of buildings. More than 50 percent of respondents agreed that historic resources are at risk of being "erased." Nearly 40 percent of respondents agree that historic resources should be protected when new development takes place or when historic buildings are being renovated, while nearly 38 percent strongly agree.

SPENCER'S HISTORIC ASSETS FACE CHALLENGES. ESTABLISHING REGULATORY CONTROLS CAN HELP PROTECT THEM.

While the lack of funding to save these buildings from erasure may be one cause for the condition of structures, other causes include the loss of industry, deferred maintenance by individual property owners, and storefront vacancies, due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic. Seeing that the town and its residents are in favor of protecting historic assets, strategies need to be identified and an action plan developed for doing so. These may include establishing regulatory controls to protect historic assets such as establishing a local historic district and adopting zoning regulations such as a demolition delay bylaw. While the delay bylaw will not stop demolition of a

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"I would love to see the center of town developed but historically preserved, reflecting values but bringing us into modern times. Retail and restaurants all on the ground level of the existing builds with housing or studio space on the floors above.

(Community Survey, 2023)

structure, it will create a pause, or delay of time, before an owner may move forward with the demolition. During this time of delay, the owner is tasked with finding alternatives to demolition. In some cases, historic structures may be relocated. For structures that are still viable, the Town might consider establishing a façade improvement program and identify a funding mechanism and design guidelines for maintaining some aspects of the structures and the site. If a historic structure cannot be saved, it should be carefully documented as part of the Town's history.

EXPLORE THE BENEFITS OF ESTABLISHING A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

Spencer would benefit from having Local Historic Districts (LHD) as they are the most effective tool for preserving and maintaining historic properties. The designation of LHD will provide more funding opportunities. It will also provide a mechanism for the Historical Commission to establish design and approval standards before changes or alterations can be made to structures in the district.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Tear down the old yellow factory that was home to Dr Mac [...] Spencer needs a town common. Remove those old abandoned, safety hazard buildings before there is a major fire".

(Community Survey, 2023)



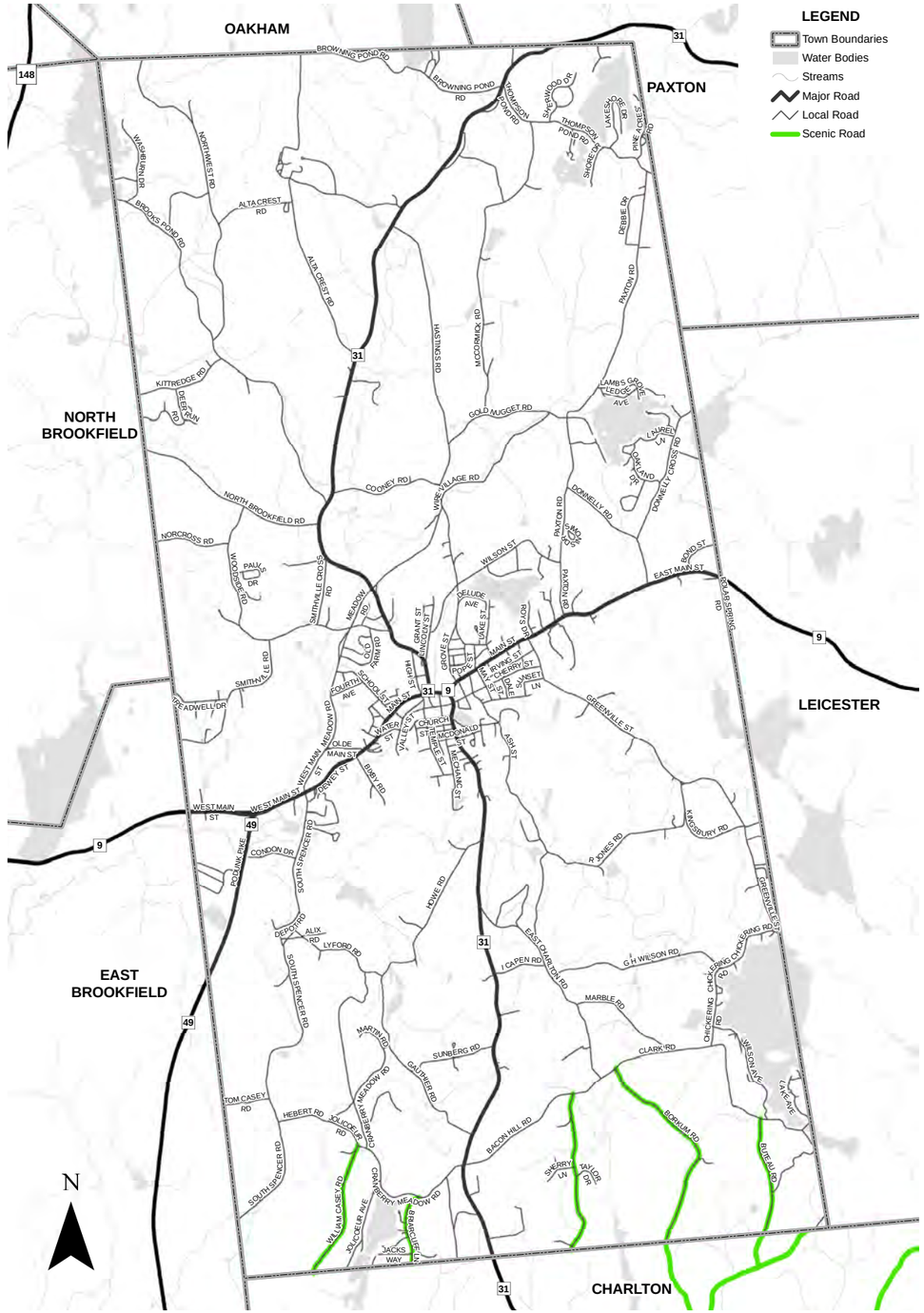


Figure 2: Town of Spencer, Scenic Roads. Source: Town of Spencer, CMRPC, MassDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

While much support was expressed for preserving the historic town center area, this same area also received the highest support for new housing along with mixed-use. Both can be achieved through adaptive reuse of the existing structures, and this should be encouraged, where appropriate. Repurposing these properties can aid in improving the town center's aesthetics and economy while providing additional housing and access to goods and services.

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

The Massachusetts Historical Commission manages an inventory of resources within Spencer as it does for other communities in the Commonwealth. The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) is one of the resources used to gather information about historic resources in Spencer and identifies various details about each resource including age, condition, and significance of the resource (whether architectural, an event in history, and others). This includes the National Register of Historic Places listings and those that are state listed. Using information in the available resources, the Town can update its Preservation Plan.

PRESERVATION PLAN

The previous inventories provide a good starting point for developing an updated Historic Preservation Plan; however, there are some gaps in the inventory that will need to be filled. A Preservation Plan will establish and document historic and cultural sites and inventory artifacts. It can also identify potential new uses for repurposing underutilized buildings and funding sources for restoring them. This is vital given the loss of some structures and the condition of yet others. While the Spencer Historical Society Museum has a collection of objects and artifacts, it does not have adequately space to properly store and exhibit them. It is vital to identify a new space for the History Museum that can securely store these items and that is accessible to the public. Furthermore, the Richard Sugden Library needs additional space. The building is an excellent example of Romanesque Revival architecture; however, it needs significant maintenance and a new septic system. Moving the History Museum to a different location will free up some space for the library.

Other programs that can greatly aid the town in restoring its heritage include the Community Preservation Act which can fund historic preservation and open space projects. Another option is to explore establishing a Main Street Program as these programs address Economic Development through Historic Preservation. Yet still, a façade improvement program and provide funding options for exterior restoration. A combination of strategies can help the town return to the vibrancy that Downtown Spencer once knew.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Library needs to be restored. It is a beautiful, historic building and a great asset to the town.

(Community Survey, 2023)

SPENCER'S EARLY HISTORY

As part of the Town of Leicester during the Contact Period (1500-1620), Spencer was primarily a subsistence settlement where people survived by hunting and fishing.[4] By the 18th and 19th centuries, and up until 1812, the primary industry in Spencer was farming which consisted largely of grains, hay and livestock. The variation of soils across the town accounts for some areas having stony loam that is fine for dairying and pasture use, but not for cultivation.[5] Other sections of the Town include finer loam soils identified as some of the best in Worcester County. The northwest and southwest areas of Spencer have better soil types for agriculture. By 1810, there was a woolen mill in Spencer, and by 1812, the industries of boot manufacturing and wire making began. The quick development that occurred with the growth of manufacturing put pressure on agricultural land.

SPENCER'S MILL HISTORY

While access to water was desired for sustenance, hygiene and general use, the use of waterpower became more desirable with the Industrial Revolution. Harnessing water to power mills provided a new way to produce larger quantities of goods than could be done with manual labor. Many rivers were dammed to create the water force needed to power the mills. The peak industrial era was the last quarter of the 19th century. With the development of manufacturing came a boom in population which led to a demand for more housing and businesses. As was typical in many New England communities, several villages arose along waterways and transportation routes within each town. Spencer is located along an early transportation route known as the Old Boston Post Road that connected Boston and Hartford. Historical markers are placed along this roadway from Boston to Springfield and are designated as historical resources (MACRIS). What is known today as a Massachusetts state highway Route 9 was originally a Native American trail. The Spencer villages included Spencer Village or Center Village, North Village, South Spencer, Spencer Depot, Upper Wire Village, Lower Wire Village, and Hillsville. The rise of manufacturing brought in increase in population including Irish and French Canadians who came to work in the mills.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Spencer fairgrounds should be used as an ecotourism base utilizing workampers and targeting an RV market that would build a strength for our service and historic business

The fairgrounds could be easily worked with the existing schedule of events and leverage that as well as other entertainment at Powder Mill Park."

(Community Survey, 2023)

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Recognizing Spencer's cultural impact is essential for preserving and maintaining the town's historic character. The Spencer Cultural Council serves as a crucial link between the town's history and its community. Comprised of five members, this local branch of the Massachusetts Cultural Council secures funding from the state to support a diverse array of activities for Spencer residents.[6] The Cultural Council significantly benefits the town by promoting access, education, and diversity in the arts, humanities, and interpretive sciences. Additionally, it enhances the quality of life for all Spencer residents and contributes to the economic vitality of our community.

In 2008, Spencer published the Reconnaissance Report,[7] which identified heritage landscapes that define the town's character and reflect its history. This report provides valuable information





Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

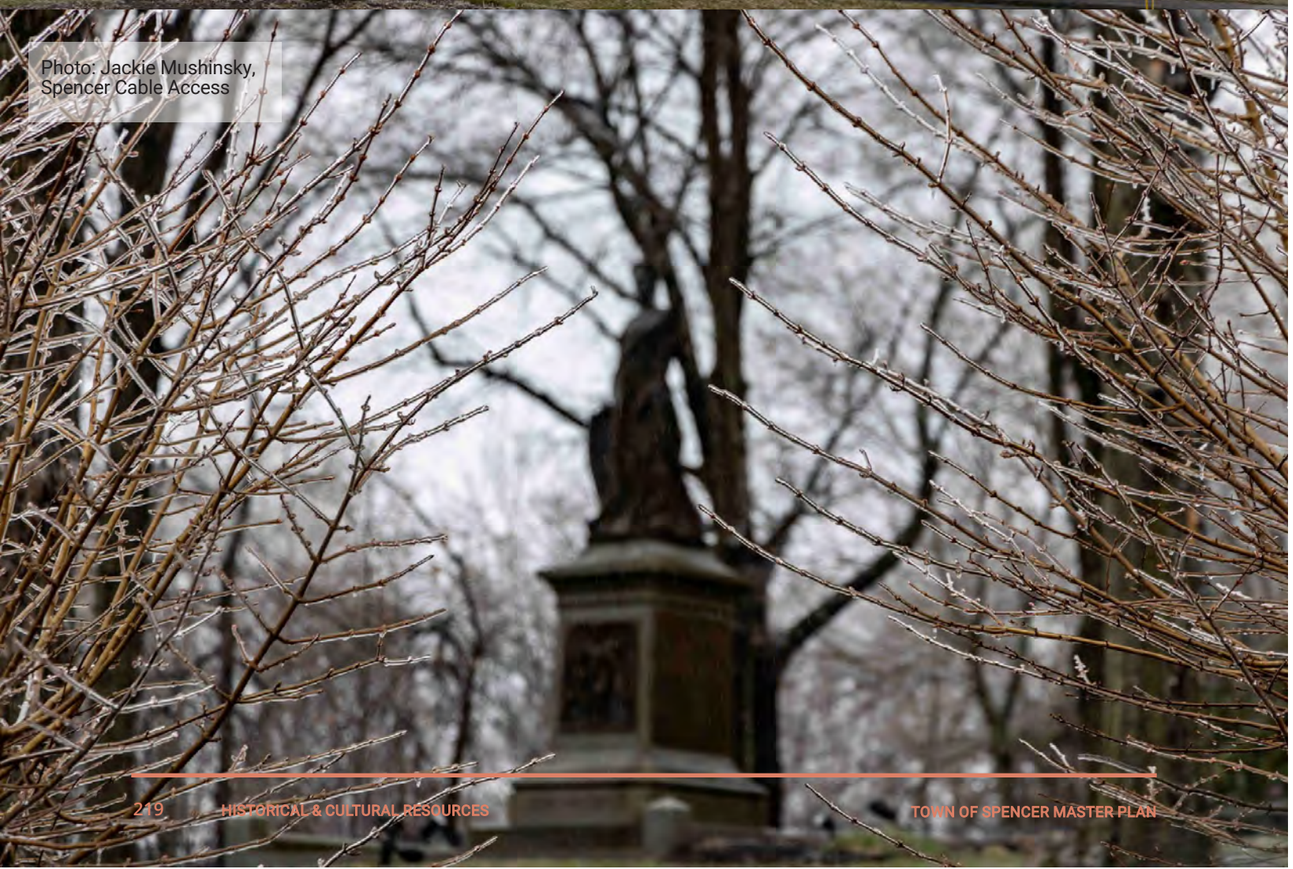


Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

that the Master Plan can build upon, ensuring strong coherence between the two documents. The Reconnaissance Report not only identified significant landscape resources, but also offered strategies for their preservation, focusing particularly on those that were unprotected and crucial for maintaining Spencer's heritage.

Primary Heritage Landscapes

1. Green Property and Schoolhouse #3
2. Sibley Farm/Wendy Warner Farm
3. Wilson Farm
4. Wire Village and Turkey Hill Brook
5. St. Joseph's Abbey

By building on the strategies outlined in the Reconnaissance Report, the Master Plan can ensure the continued preservation of these vital heritage landscapes, thereby safeguarding Spencer's historical and cultural legacy for future generations.

A TOWN COMMON WOULD ENABLE THE COMMUNITY TO COME TOGETHER.

In recent decades, communities have experienced economic and demographic changes due, in part, to the loss of manufacturing, advances in technology and the way we live our lives, and Spencer is no exception. Preservation is not only about buildings but about how people relate to the built environment and to each other. In times past, the post office was a meeting place for the community, but it is no longer a social gathering place. Today, communities need to be intentional about strengthening the sense of community and providing places and events for the community to come together. Part of this will involve educating the community about events and creating opportunities for people to gather. During discussions at the Master Plan Workshop in May 2023, and from survey responses, several residents expressed their desire for a town common. While a town common is not a part of Spencer history, it would be a welcome addition to the Town Center area and can provide a space for the community to gather.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Town common! We need a nice center town common with walking paths benches and lighting."

"Spencer needs to clean up the down town area. We have a new CVS, now tear down that old yellow factory across from it and put in a town common."

(Community Survey, 2023)

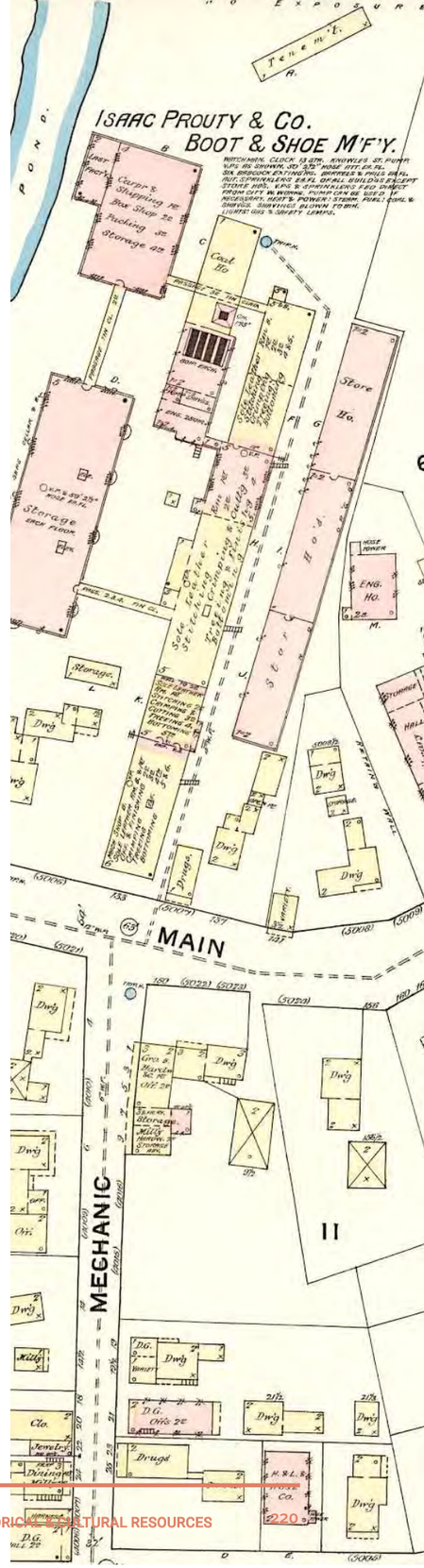




Photo: Jim Hennessy

GOALS AND STRATEGIES SUMMARY

GOAL 1

PRESERVE THE TOWN'S HISTORIC RESOURCES.

OBJECTIVE: Develop a comprehensive historic preservation plan.

ACTION ITEM 1.1 ACTION ITEM 1.2 ACTION ITEM 1.3 ACTION ITEM 1.4 ACTION ITEM 1.5

OBJECTIVE: Leverage historic assets for economic development using the Main Street America program's Four Points framework

ACTION ITEM 1.6 ACTION ITEM 1.7 ACTION ITEM 1.8

GOAL 2

USE REGULATORY AND ZONING TOOLS TO PRESERVE THE TOWN'S HISTORIC CHARACTER

OBJECTIVE: Develop strategies to protect and preserve historic and cultural resources.

ACTION ITEM 2.1 ACTION ITEM 2.2 ACTION ITEM 2.3 ACTION ITEM 2.4

GOAL 3

PROVIDE CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS OF ALL AGES AND ABILITIES.

OBJECTIVE: Support strong collaboration between Spencer's Cultural Council and the arts, culture, historic, and business communities through effective communication and coordination.

ACTION ITEM 3.1 ACTION ITEM 3.2 ACTION ITEM 3.3

GOAL 4

BALANCE GROWTH WITH THE PRESERVATION OF SPENCER PRIORITY HERITAGE LANDSCAPES.

OBJECTIVE: Implement the recommendations of the Reconnaissance Report

ACTION ITEM 4.1 ACTION ITEM 4.2

OBJECTIVE: Put brownfields and environmentally compromised sites in Town back into productive use.

ACTION ITEM 4.3 ACTION ITEM 4.4 ACTION ITEM 4.5



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

GOALS & STRATEGIES

GOAL 1

PRESERVE THE TOWN'S HISTORIC RESOURCES.

Spencer's historic architecture, open space and farmlands have brought character and identity to the community. The following objectives and action items identify strategies for preserving these resources.

OBJECTIVE:
Develop a comprehensive historic preservation plan.

While the Spencer Historical Commission has made great strides in documenting historic properties, there are still gaps in the inventory. Given that so many significant structures have been lost, it is vital to adequately document remaining structures should any others be lost. Developing a comprehensive historic preservation plan will fill the gaps in the current inventory.

A comprehensive historic preservation plan should draw on community input to develop a cohesive vision to position the town's historic sites as a destination in the region. The plan should tie together the Spencer Town Center Historic District, the town's historic buildings, heritage landscapes identified by the DCR Spencer Reconnaissance Report, and special events and cultural activities to offer recommendations for rehabilitation, preservation, and adaptive reuse strategies. The plan should seek a balance between preservation and needed physical transformations that ensure the continued use of historic structures and minimize vacancies. Some of the questions the plan should address include:

- What measures can Spencer take to stabilize some of its endangered historic properties?
- How can the town continue to preserve its historic character while accommodating growth and contemporary interventions?
- How can Spencer leverage its historic sites, landscapes, and amenities?
- Can Spencer become a cultural and recreational destination in Central Massachusetts?

ACTION ITEM 1.1

Create development and review criteria for the historic district.

Developing review criteria for proposals within the historic district will ensure that revitalization of existing properties and any new development will adhere to design standards that are respectful of and in harmony with the existing architecture. The Town has developed a set of design guidelines for the historic center, however, these guidelines are not codified in the Town Bylaw.

ACTION ITEM 1.2

Inventory and protect artifacts in Library storage.

Having adequate storage for historic artifacts is not only a matter of the amount of storage space available but the security of the space. This includes security from moisture, fire, and excessive light. The current Museum space in the Richard Sugden Library has been impacted by water infiltration and is currently closed to the public. Finding resources to complete the renovations would ensure not only public access, but the safety of these unique records and artefacts.

ACTION ITEM 1.3

Seek out a new location for the History Museum that is accessible to the public and has secure storage.

The current space available for the History Museum is limited and is not accessible to the public given its second-floor location at the library. Having additional dedicated space may open the door for an exhibit area that is accessible to the public and, hopefully has secure and adequate storage space.

ACTION ITEM 1.4

The Town should assess existing and recently acquired municipal properties.

The Town has real estate holdings that should be identified and evaluated for consideration for new uses. To provide an accurate accounting of its existing and newly acquired properties, the Town should assess all municipal facilities. Importantly, it is best practice that Town-owned buildings are assessed at market prices. An unintended consequence of artificially low



assessments is reaching the 30% threshold for fully disabled access under 521 CMR with even minor building renovation projects. This regulation ensures that significant renovations lead to improvements in accessibility, promoting inclusivity and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards and state regulations. If the cost of alterations to a building or facility exceeds 30% of the full and fair cash value of the building, then the entire building must be brought into compliance with accessibility standards.

ACTION ITEM 1.5

Identify funding sources for creating a vital records management program to preserve and digitize town records.

The Town of Spencer has valuable historic vital records that it currently keeps in the town vault. The Town plans to embark on an effort to digitize these records, however, it lacks the necessary funding for this task. Grant funding could support this effort. The Town should create a vital records management program and pursue funding. Grant opportunities for preservation and digitization from organizations such as the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, and other state and federal agencies, could help fund the preservation and digitization of the town's historical records.

OBJECTIVE: Leverage historic assets for economic development using the Main Street America program's Four Points framework.

The Main Street America Program, established in 1977, was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in an effort to curb the decay of downtowns in many communities of America that resulted from the development of shopping malls and big box stores that drew people to shop away from Main Street. The program began as a demonstration project to try out new strategies that aim to improve the physical and economic status of downtown areas with a key part being historic preservation. The Main Street Program believes that four strategies or "Points" are needed to transform a community's core. The "Four Points Approach" includes Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion and Organization.[8]

These are expanded upon in the following Action Items. With the success of the demonstration projects, the model was made available to communities across the nation.

ACTION ITEM 1.6

Economic vitality: educate property owners and new and existing businesses on the benefits of Tax Credits and other economic and financial tools.

The Main Street America Program has researched and refined the Four Point strategies with Economic Vitality being a core strategy. It seeks to build a diverse economic base while considering capital, incentives, and catalyst strategies for different sectors of the economy. Helping local business thrive and grow will help the other aspects of the community.[9] Bringing these strategies to local businesses will aid the businesses and the community as a whole.

ACTION ITEM 1.7

Design: continue work toward enhancing the physical and visual assets in Spencer's historic district.

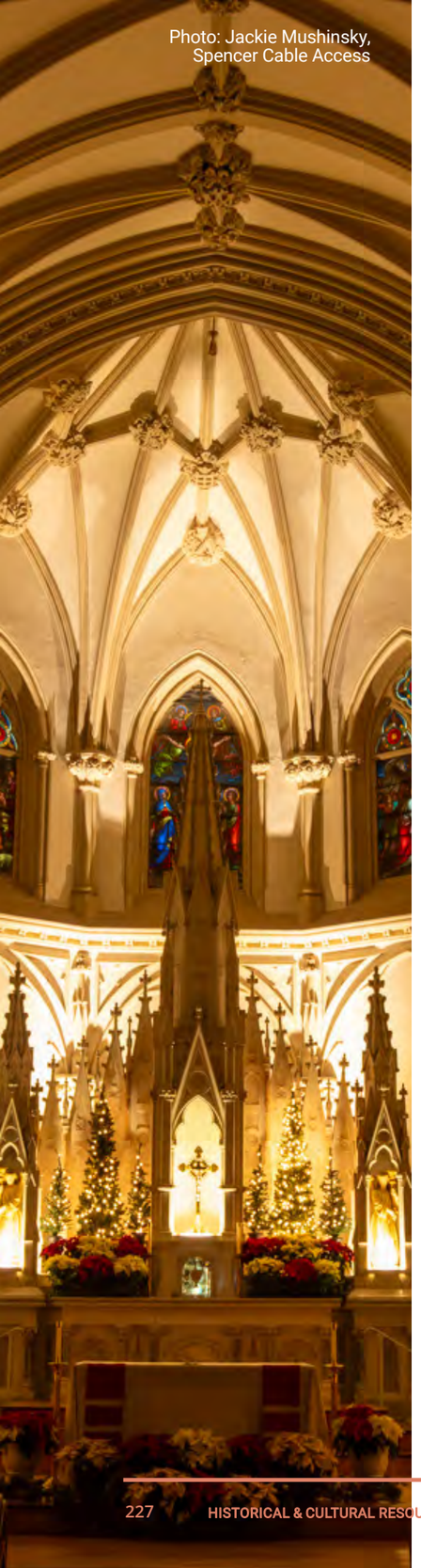
Establishing design standards for Spencer will provide guidance

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"While I agree with protecting historic resources, like the Cherry Street fire station or the main street buildings, it has to be economically viable. It's disheartening to see so many abandoned buildings. I'm open to compromise on preservation if it means buildings will be used."

(Community Survey, 2023)




Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

to property owners who are revitalizing their properties and for new development in the downtown area. Each community has its own character that sets it apart from other communities. Highlighting the architectural character is just one aspect to draw people to the area. Having a cohesive design strategy can ensure that the Town's character is preserved and will enhance the visual quality of the community.[10]

ACTION ITEM 1.8

Promotion & Organization: use promotional tools, creating a positive image that showcases the center of town as a civic and commercial hub.

The final two approaches with Main Street America are Promotion and Organization. Promotion involves creating an image that displays the unique character of the community while drawing people to businesses in the area. It can involve creating a destination or finding a niche in the community. The Organization aspect is multifaceted and can include managing the program, establishing a mission and clear goals, cultivating relationships to strengthen the program, engaging the community, and building resources to sustain the effort.[11] The combination of all four points is a recipe to help strengthen and grow the commercial area.

GOAL 2

USE REGULATORY AND ZONING TOOLS TO PRESERVE THE TOWN'S HISTORIC CHARACTER

Survey Respondents have expressed concern about the condition of historic buildings in the Town Center area and voiced support for developing strategies to restore and preserve the structures that can be saved.

OBJECTIVE: Develop strategies to protect and preserve historic and cultural resources.

Several regulatory approaches can be used to achieve this objective including the formulation of a Local Historic District, adopting a Demolition Delay Bylaw, adopting the Community Preservation Act, and educating property owners on the benefits of using Tax Credits for restoring historic properties.

ACTION ITEM 2.1

Establish a Local Historic District.

Establishing a Local Historic District (LHD) is the strongest form of protection of historic assets in a community and can be done so by adopting a local bylaw. In doing so, the Historic District Commission is given the authority to thoughtfully review and consider any plans to alter any exterior architectural features that are visible from the public way. Often times, a community will pursue LHD status as a result of the loss of significant historic structures in the community. Spencer can be proactive in establishing the LHD designation before any other structures are lost or altered. Preserving these structures and improving the aesthetic appearance of the community can also result in increased tourism and other facets of economic development.[12]

ACTION ITEM 2.2

Adopt a Demolition Delay Bylaw.

As noted previously, while a Demolition Delay Bylaw cannot prevent a property from being demolished, it will delay demolition for a time, such as six months to eighteen months, for example, while other alternatives are considered. This can include relocating a structure. Demolition Delay does not apply in Local Historic Districts as a Historic District Commission can delay demolition and can also deny a demolition request for properties within an LHD.[13]

ACTION ITEM 2.3

Pursue adoption of the Community Preservation Act.

With a Community Preservation Act (CPA) designation, communities can obtain funding for preserving open space and historic sites as well as for affordable housing and outdoor recreation facilities. Funds for the program are raised locally through a tax surcharge of not more than three percent (3%). As a CPA community, cities and towns are also eligible to receive funds in a Community Preservation Trust Fund. Having another potential revenue source for preserving open space and historic properties will benefit the Town of Spencer.[14]

ACTION ITEM 2.4

Educate property owners on the benefits of Tax Credits.

Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits are administered through the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), and the work completed must meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Federal Historic Tax Credits are administered through the National Park Service. Each of these programs has eligibility criteria and other requirements that must be met. If a particular property meets the requirements of both programs, they can potentially receive tax credits under both. Receiving tax credits is an incentive for rehabilitating historic properties.[15]

GOAL 3

PROVIDE CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS OF ALL AGES AND ABILITIES.

Implementing Goal 3 is essential for the Town of Spencer to foster public awareness and build community support for its cultural and natural resources. This goal encourages the town to develop opportunities that enable residents to learn about, celebrate, and care for places that symbolize Spencer's identity. The core of this goal is to educate the community about the town's values


Photo: Jim Hennessy



Emerson, Paesiello. "Congregational church" [ca. 1902–1927] Digital Commonwealth.

and history, fostering a connection among residents and encouraging their involvement in preserving Spencer's diverse cultural resources.

OBJECTIVE:
Support strong collaboration between Spencer's Cultural Council and the arts, culture, historical, and business communities through efficient communication and coordination.

The Spencer Master Plan Vision Statement emphasizes fostering a cohesive and vibrant community that encourages active participation in community life. This vision highlights the importance of collaboration and unity. Survey results show that 75% of respondents agree with this vision for their town,[16] underscoring widespread support for these values.

Although the town already benefits from the efforts of the Cultural Council,[17] truly embodying the

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

On June 2, 2023, a lightning strike caused a fire that destroyed the historic First Congregational Church. The blaze led to the collapse of the wooden church's steeple. No one was inside at the time. The congregation is considering rebuilding the church.

SPENCER'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE: WHAT WE'VE LOST



Massasoit Hotel, Destroyed by fire, January 1982.



First Congregational Church, Destroyed by fire, June 2003.



Prouty Mansion, Demolished 1970.





Pleasant St. School - District #8, Destroyed by fire, June 2003.





Sibley Mansion, demolished 1939.



St. Mary's Church, demolished 2012.



Park Theater destroyed by fire, November 1979/ 2003.







Vision Statement requires enhanced communication and coordination. This objective aims to strengthen existing relationships and forge new connections between the town and external resources. Doing so will bolster the impact of the Cultural Council and ensure that Spencer continues to thrive culturally, historically, and economically.

ACTION ITEM 3.1

Design cultural opportunities that educate Spencer's residents about the town's unique heritage and history.

Richard Sugden Library plays an invaluable role in educating the community about Spencer's history. In 2023, the Library introduced a program that offers Monday morning chats with Spencer historian and Historical Commission chair Mary Baker-Wood. Guided tours led by knowledgeable volunteers, such as local historians, teachers, and long-term residents passionate about Spencer's history are another way to educate residents about Spencer's heritage. For example, Mary Baker-Wood and the Library organized a tour to Howe Village and gave a presentation on Spencer native Elias Howe, inventor of the sewing machine. These types of tours can showcase significant historical sites and share the town's unique stories. To find volunteers, the Town or the library can reach out to these individuals and schedule tours at convenient times, potentially offering them monthly or bi-monthly.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"We need more stuff for our kids, all we have is a bowling alley. The drive in is closed."

"A Place for kids to have a fun safe place, like a pool, etc."

(Community Survey, 2023)



Photo: Spencer Day at Polar Park, Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

In addition to guided tours, Spencer can implement self-guided walking tours with informational digital resources accessible to residents and visitors. The town can seek grants to develop a mobile-friendly website or app providing maps, audio guides, and additional resources for self-guided tours.

Partnerships with local historical societies or educational institutions will ensure the accuracy and engagement of the tour content. Promotion of these tours can be done through the town's website, local media, community centers, schools, and social media. Seeking grants from cultural foundations, such as the Cultural Council, and sponsorships from local businesses can provide the necessary funding. Action Item 3.1 is a strategic initiative for Spencer to create enriching cultural opportunities that celebrate its heritage and history. By doing so, the town will foster a stronger sense of community and cultural pride.

ACTION ITEM 3.2

Encourage community involvement in events such as street festivals, history days, farmer's markets, concerts, community theater, etc. to attract visitors and build appreciation for local history and culture.

Stewards and advocates are essential for successful community events. These individuals embody Spencer's values and contribute to achieving the town's goals. A lack of involvement can significantly impact the community's ability to organize and sustain events, leading to various challenges. Action Item 3.2 aims to build upon current resources and encourage greater community involvement.

Currently, the town website lacks a dedicated form or information page for potential volunteers to sign up for community events. To increase community involvement, the town should create a "How to Get Involved" section on the website. This section will provide details about volunteer opportunities and contact information for interested community members.

The "How to Get Involved" section can serve as a central hub for advertising all events, including those organized by the Spencer Cultural Council, the Celebrations Committee, and town-approved privately run community events. The Spencer Cultural Council, for instance, funded 28 events in the Fiscal Year 2024. However, it is not the only organization hosting events in Spencer; other town boards, committees, and private entities also produce community events. Consolidating information about these events on a single site will benefit both viewers and the town by increasing visibility and encouraging more participation.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Would like to see a nice recreational area for the kids to have so they don't hang out on the streets. Just somewhere safe for them to have activities especially if from a lower-income family that can not afford the cost of sports for the kids. This will give them a chance to have fun and not have to worry about the family being able to afford the cost of signing up for sports."

(Community Survey, 2023)

Community events offer opportunities to strengthen community bonds through engagement, learning, and celebration. Action Item 3.2 emphasizes the importance of community involvement in building appreciation for Spencer's history and culture. By fostering greater participation, Spencer can create unique experiences that enhance community spirit and cultural pride.

ACTION ITEM 3.3

Encourage youth participation in cultural events.

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, approximately 16.8% of Spencer's population is under 18 years old. Engaging with this youth demographic should be a top priority for the town. Action Item 3.3 focuses on how Spencer can involve its young residents in meaningful activities that educate them about their rich heritage while cultivating a sense of belonging and community pride.

Respondents from the 2024 Master Plan survey highlighted the need for more youth activities, voicing concerns about the lack of investment in the younger generation. Comments pointed out the absence of safe places for kids to hang out and a shortage of engaging activities to keep them involved.

In response to these concerns and aligning with the priorities of Goal 3, Action Item 3.3 outlines strategies to successfully encourage greater youth participation in cultural events. One key recommendation is for the Town to partner with Spencer schools to host historical and cultural education programs specifically designed for young people. These programs can include activities such as:

- Field Trips: Organized visits to local historical sites to provide immersive learning experiences.
- Site Tours: Guided tours of significant cultural and historical landmarks in Spencer.
- Outdoor Exploration Activities: Nature walks and explorations that tie into the town's heritage.
- Library Events: Special events and workshops at the library focusing on Spencer's history and culture.

A successful example of this strategy was the Library's 2023 high school art exhibition that featured the works of David Prouty High School students. Organized by art teacher Annalisa Battles, the exhibit drew hundreds to the library to appreciate the students' art.

Involving youth in these activities can significantly enhance their participation in the town's cultural events. These hands-on learning experiences not only foster a sense of connection to their heritage but also make cultural education engaging and enjoyable. By implementing more of these initiatives, Spencer can ensure that its youth are actively involved in and appreciative of their community's culture.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"We need a gathering place for the community to hold events like a farmers market or craft fairs."

(Student Survey, 2023)

GOAL 4

BALANCE GROWTH WITH THE PRESERVATION OF SPENCER'S PRIORITY HERITAGE LANDSCAPES.

The 2008 Reconnaissance Report referenced in this section's key findings and priorities underscored the need for further development and planning of heritage landscapes from multiple perspectives. Goal 4 builds upon this initiative, emphasizing collaborative efforts to enhance and expand preservation strategies. The primary intent is to achieve a harmonious balance between growth and the preservation of Spencer's identified priority heritage landscapes as outlined in the 2008 report. This goal aims to ensure that as Spencer develops, its rich historical and cultural landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

OBJECTIVE: Implement the recommendations of the Reconnaissance Report.

The 2008 Reconnaissance Report offers a range of recommendations to protect Spencer's heritage landscapes. These recommendations are divided into two categories: those addressing the priority landscapes and those concerning heritage landscapes as a whole. Each recommendation in the report is valuable and should be reviewed and implemented to strengthen the foundation for heritage landscape preservation.

While the report provides extensive recommendations, the focus of is to prioritize the implementation of those that concern Spencer's priority landscapes. By concentrating on the five distinguished priority heritage landscapes, Spencer can lead the way in preservation strategies. This focused implementation will ensure that the town effectively protects its most significant heritage sites, fostering a robust preservation framework.

ACTION ITEM 4.1

Use regulatory tools to protect Spencer's heritage landscapes identified in the 2008 Reconnaissance Report.

As a result of the public identification meeting held for the 2008 Reconnaissance Report, participants identified five landscapes in Spencer that they defined as integral to the heritage of their community. The report details the unique values, opportunities, and challenges of these landscapes, along with a set of recommendations to ensure their preservation and protection.

Action Item 4.1 encourages the town to focus on these five priority landscapes and use the suggested recommendations as regulatory tools to ensure their protection. Some recommendations include:

- Establishing an Open Space Residential Development Zone: This zone would regulate development to preserve open spaces and maintain the character of the heritage landscapes.
- Registering with the National









Photos: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

and State Register of Historic Places: This registration would provide formal recognition and protection for these sites.

- Creating a Scenic Overlay District: This district would provide additional regulatory measures to protect the visual and historical integrity of the landscapes.

The report's recommendations serve as a monitoring tool that town officials can follow, aligning with the goals of Action Item 4.1. By implementing these regulatory tools, Spencer can effectively safeguard its heritage landscapes while leveraging the initiatives outlined in the 2008 Reconnaissance Report.

ACTION ITEM 4.2

Leverage historical and natural assets by incorporating the Town's historical and cultural background into ecotourism policies.

Integrating Spencer's rich historical and cultural background into ecotourism policies presents a unique opportunity to enhance local tourism while safeguarding and celebrating the town's heritage. Action Item 4.2 recommends leveraging the five priority heritage landscapes identified in the 2008 Reconnaissance Report to develop ecotourism policies. These policies can advance recommendations from the report, such as establishing historic trails and updating zoning laws to support ecotourism development while preserving historical and natural sites.

By effectively integrating its identified historical and natural assets into ecotourism policies, Spencer can establish a sustainable tourism model. This model will not only stimulate the local economy but also preserve cultural heritage and promote environmental stewardship. Ultimately, this approach aims to attract visitors, foster community pride, and enhance engagement among residents.

OBJECTIVE:

Put brownfields and environmentally compromised sites in Town back into productive use.

Brownfield sites are previously developed lands that are not currently in use and may be potentially contaminated with hazardous waste or pollution. These sites were often used for industrial or commercial purposes in the past and have since been abandoned or underused. As of 2018, there are eight documented brownfield sites, comprising around 20 acres of land within the Town of Spencer. Of these sites, five appear to still potentially be actively in need of remediation measures for contamination. Beyond brownfield sites, there are other locations in town where hazardous waste or oil releases may still require cleanup. Restoring these sites is not only important for addressing public health hazards and environmental protection, it can also improve property values, spur new development or redevelopment, and save the town and other responsible parties from potential legal action.

Redeveloping brownfield sites can be a significant component of a Spencer's economic development strategy. Spencer should aim to work closely with developers and owners of these sites to come to a consensus on what potential remediation and redevelopment could look like. The Town can also assist owners in finding eligible grants, loans, and tax incentives that could be used to fund redevelopment initiatives.

Figure 3 lists the brownfields in Spencer documented by the DEP in 2018. MCP Status refers to the compliance status of the site in accordance with the Massachusetts Contingency Plan, the collection of regulations in Massachusetts designed for the assessment and cleanup of releases of oil and hazardous materials. This column can offer an indication of where the site stands in the assessment and cleanup process. The abbreviations in this column and their meanings according to MassDEP are as follows:

- ROSTRM: Remedy Operation Status Terminated- A site which had previously had Remedy Operation Status (REMOPS) but where Remedy Operation Status has been terminated.
- TIER1: a site classified as Tier 1 meeting the criteria described at 310 CMR 40.0520(2)
- RAO: Response Action Outcome: A site/release where a Permanent or Temporary Solution Statement (formerly RAO Statement) was submitted. This statement asserts that response actions were sufficient to achieve a level of no significant risk (for Permanent Solutions) or at least ensure that all substantial hazards (for Temporary Solutions) were eliminated.
- REMOPS: Remedy Operation Status- A site where a remedial system which relies upon Active Operation and Maintenance is being operated for the purpose of eventually achieving a Permanent Solution.
- TIER1D: A site/release where the responsible party fails to provide a required submittal to DEP by a specified deadline.

The next column, COCs, refers to contaminants of concern. The section lists contaminants that have been allegedly detected at the site.

ACTION ITEM 4.3

Review and catalog brownfield sites and develop a long-term remediation plan for each identified site

Given the enormous potential of Brownfield sites to contribute to community revitalization, the Town of Spencer could develop a strategy and guidelines around the management of these sites to better ensure that the remediation process is a success. The Town can lay the foundation for this work by developing an inventory and collecting data on the condition and redevelopment potential for each of the above sites and any additional potential brownfield or compromised site deemed applicable, such as the old fire station on Cherry Street, or the structure at 1 Linden Street, both of which are historic buildings. The Town is actively seeking developers for the remediation and redevelopment of some of these sites. In 2024, the Town has posted a request for proposals with the intent of revitalizing the Cherry Street firehouse.

ACTION ITEM 4.4

Identify underutilized or distressed properties not included on the Department of Environmental Protection list.

While the properties in Figure 3 are identified as brownfields by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, there may be additional sites that are

Address	Site Name	MCP Status	COCs	Former Use
Elm Street	Mass Electric Co	ROSTRM	Oil and Hazardous material	Cogasplant, Former Industrial
Northwest Rd	Joes Junkyard	TIERI	PCBs	Junkyard, Wetlands
Main St	Eastside Service Station	RAO	VOCs	Gas station
Elm St	Mgp Former	REMOPS	Naphthalene, Phenanthrene, Pyrene	No Data Available
East Charlton Rd	Former Sweeneys Garage	RAO	Gasoline	Residential
East Charlton Road	Spencer Auto Salvage	TIER1D	EPH, Lead	Commercial
Main Street	Former Kay-Merk	RAO	Lead, Arsenic, VOCs	No Data Available
Valley Street	Vacant Property	No Data Available	No Data Available	No Data Available

Figure 3: Town of Spencer, brownfield sites.
Source: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

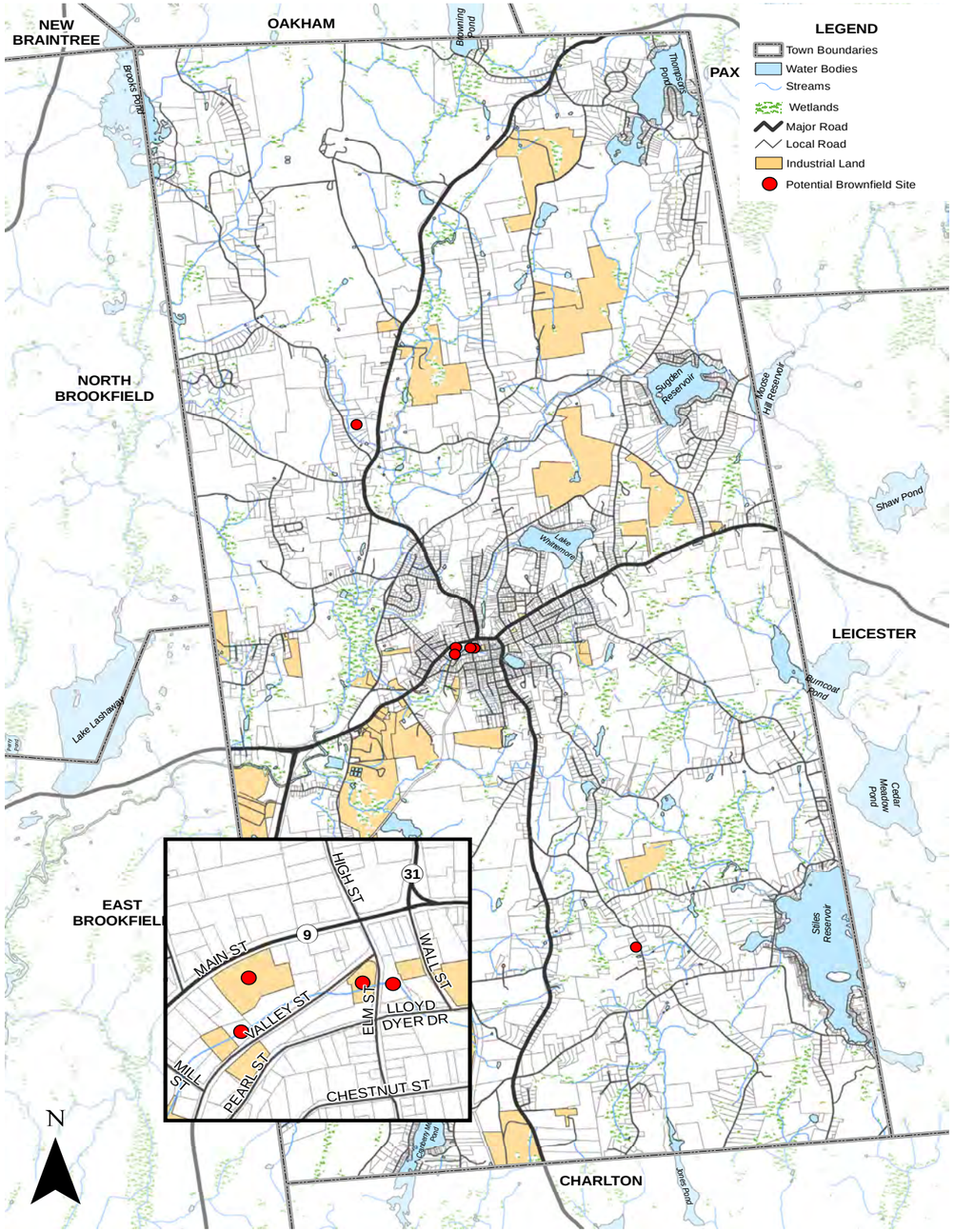


Figure 4: Town of Spencer, brownfield sites. Source: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

not yet included on the list. The Town should identify any other sites that are underutilized or distressed to determine if they warrant environmental testing or cleanup.

ACTION ITEM 4.5

Pursue grant funding for brownfield remediation.

Several funding opportunities are available to help with various aspects of brownfield remediation and redevelopment. These include state and local grants and incentives, such as MassDevelopment's Brownfields Redevelopment Fund and the Department of Revenue's Brownfields Tax Credit, as well as federal funding through the Community Development Block Grant or the EPA's Brownfields Program.

While these programs can significantly reduce project costs, it's also important to recognize that the project can also recoup its investment costs by stimulating the local economy, increasing property values, and overall contributing to community revitalization.

The Town received a $500K EPA Brownfields Cleanup grant for the 26-acre Lake Street School property. After the building is removed and the site cleaned up, the site will be available for another use. Potential uses proposed for the site during the master plan's development process included a community/ rec center, conservation land, a dog park, and a senior living facility.



Photos: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access





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Photos: Jackie Mushinsky
Spencer Cable Access



10

Town Services & Facilities



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

OVERVIEW

From voting to K-12 education, Spencer residents rely on the Town government to provide essential services. This chapter takes stock of Spencer's resources and priorities for the management of services, infrastructure, and facilities, and makes recommendations to help guide decisions for meeting the needs of the community for the next 10-20 years.

Like many towns in Central Massachusetts, Spencer has had to navigate a difficult balance between a capped tax rate due to Massachusetts Proposition 2 1/2 and maintaining adequate levels of service. The Spencer community is absorbing the increased costs of the debt service[1] on the $19,000,000 Road Paving Program and the $111,587,000 renovation to the David Prouty High School. Further, the taxpayers in the Sewer Service Area also face increased sewer fees to pay for the cost of the $46,000,000 improvement to the wastewater treatment plant. This increase in capital debt service places pressure on finding means to cover operational costs spiraling due to inflation and continued increases in state mandated costs. These pressures manifest themselves in reduced availability of resources for additional capital expenditures and for the preservation of existing town services.

Spencer has to navigate a balance between a capped tax rate and maintaining adequate levels of service.

GLOSSARY

Propostion 2 1/2

a Massachusetts law that limits the annual increases in property taxes that municipalities can levy. It was passed as a ballot initiative in 1980 and is officially known as Proposition 2 1/2: The Tax Limitation Amendment to the Massachusetts.

Town Meeting

in Massachusetts is a form of local government used primarily in smaller municipalities, allowing residents to participate directly in the decision-making process.

Facility

A town-owned asset that serves a public purpose and supports community services, such as school buildings or public safety facilities. Community facilities also encompass non-building assets like parks and playgrounds.

Maintenance Plan:

A detailed strategy outlining the regular and systematic maintenance activities required to ensure that assets, equipment, and infrastructure remain in good working condition and continue to perform effectively over their expected lifespan.

Capital Improvement Plan

A five-year strategic plan that outlines planned improvements and investments in a community's physical infrastructure. It serves as a roadmap for the maintenance, upgrade, and expansion of public assets.

Enterprise Fund:

is a type of government fund that operates similarly to a private business, accounting for services provided to the public where the costs of providing those services are recovered through user fees.

62%
share of the Town's revenue made by property taxes in 2023

54%
of the residential sewer users are low-income households

50%
of students in SEBRSD are economically disadvantaged, have English as a second language, or are students with disabilities

While working with limited resources, the Town has successfully leveraged state and federal grants for multiple projects. The Town has secured a $500,000 Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brownfields Cleanup Grant to help with remediation work at the site of the former Lake Street Elementary School. Several grants have funded planning assistance projects, such as the 2023 Spencer Housing Production Plan, the 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan, the 2016 Slum and Blight Inventory for Spencer, MA Town Center, and several other studies.

Private donations have also helped shore up Town's capacity to improve the quality of life of Spencer residents. In 2024, Cornerstone Bank donated $15,000 to the Exchange Club of Spencer for the rebuilding of a basketball court on the grounds of the former Spencer First Congregational Church.

Spencer has also used grant funding to expand programming and event hosting. The Annual Parade of Lights, the Veterans Day Parade, the Massasoit Art Guild Show, and the Summer Concert Series are all beloved events that bring the community together for shared experiences and learning. Programs organized in town by the Richard Sugden Public Library, the Spencer Cultural Council, the Senior Center, with the help of many volunteers engage the community regularly. As the Library leadership has noted, the mission driving these programs is to combat the loneliness epidemic that has not spared our region. Book groups for adults and children, story walks, ice cream socials at the Senior Center, and swimming lessons at Luther Hill Park are meaningful events that bring the residents together and foster a sense of community.

This chapter explores possible options to build the Town's resources and capacity to improve its facilities and services. It also considers options for regionalizing and creating partnerships to improve, expand and fill gaps in service delivery.

While working with limited resources, the Town has successfully leveraged state and federal grants for multiple projects.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:*

"We need more volunteer events!!! I love the town clean up day and would 100% participate regularly if there were more events such as trash pickup, invasive species removal, or volunteering at the library"

"The Town desperately needs additional tax revenue. Need to solicit some large businesses to build in Town. Towns such as Auburn and Leicester are continually adding new commercial, industrial, and warehouse companies."

(Community survey, 2023)

*** Comments edited for clarity.**



	1 ADULT				2 ADULTS (1 WORKING)				2 ADULTS (BOTH WORKING)			
Children	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**
Living Wage	**$23.84**	**$44.80**	**$58.14**	**$75.70**	**$31.79**	**$38.84**	**$43.80**	**$46.78**	**$15.89**	**$24.77**	**$31.54**	**$37.32**
No of Town Grades above rate at step 1	6	1	0	0	3	2	1	1	8	5	3	2
No of Town Grades above rate at step 4	6	2	0	0	3	2	2	1	8	6	3	3
No of Town Grades above rate at step 8	8	2	1	0	5	3	2	2	8	8	5	3

Figure 1: Hourly Wage Needed in Worcester County by Household Makeup and Number of Children
Source: Town of Spencer the MIT Living Wage Calculator

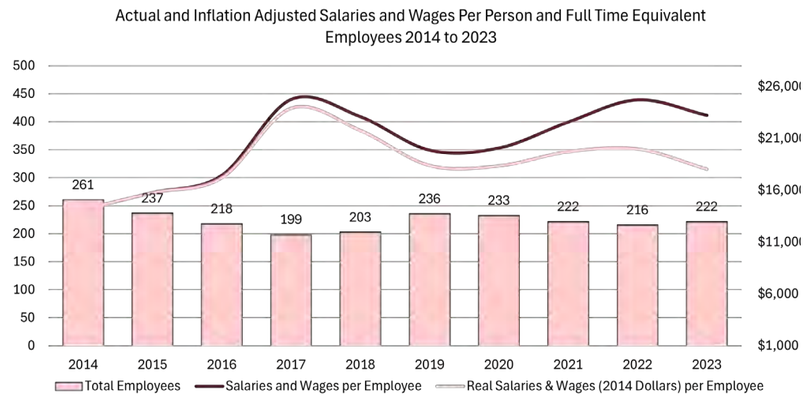


Figure 2: Total Employees, Actual and Inflation Adjusted Salaries & Wages per Employee 2014-2023.
Source: MA Division of Local Services, Personnel Expenditures
Note: Inflation adjusted income calculated using Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index

Age	2012	2022	Change
Under 5 years	719	450	-269
5 to 9 years	661	624	-37
10 to 14 years	788	731	-57
15 to 19 years	593	479	-114
20 to 24 years	707	508	-199
25 to 34 years	1,697	1,118	-579
35 to 44 years	1,501	1,715	214
45 to 54 years	1,886	1,239	-647
55 to 59 years	847	922	75
60 to 64 years	649	1,395	746
65 to 74 years	902	1,735	833
75 to 84 years	529	768	239
85 years and over	234	271	37
Median age (years)	**40.2**	**47.7**	**7.5**

Figure 3 Total Employees, Actual and Inflation Adjusted Salaries & Wages per Employee 2014-2023.
Source: 2018-2022 5-Year Estimates from the American Community Survey

KEY FINDINGS & PRIORITIES

EMPLOYEE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION IS NEEDED TO BUILD TOWN CAPACITY

Attracting and retaining high-quality employees is essential for meeting the immediate needs of Spencer residents and for building a strong foundation for long-term success, growth, and community well-being. Interviews with Town staff suggest that Spencer may be facing challenges in attracting and retaining employees due to the Town shifting to a 3.5 day workweek with low salaries and benefits package relative to other municipalities and private sector, an aging population, and limited recruitment efforts.

WAGES AND BENEFITS:

According to the MIT Living Wage calculator, a single adult with no children would need to earn $23.84 an hour to support themselves in Worcester County. Add a non-working spouse and one child to the mix and that number increases to $38.84 an hour. Many of Spencer's positions operate on a grade and step system, where a position has a certain grade classification (1-8) and pay rates are established across 8 steps. Figure 1 shows the number of grades that meet the corresponding livable wage at the first, fourth, and eighth step. The table demonstrates that life circumstances, such as whether a spouse works, has a big impact on whether town pay is commensurate with the county cost of living. This means that Town employment may be becoming less lucrative for mid-career or later professionals. The Town also has a higher employee health insurance contribution rate than many municipalities and private employers, at 40% of the premium.

Figure 2 shows the total number of Town employees, nominal and real (inflation adjusted) wages per employee between 2014 and 2023. It shows that since 2014, real wages per employee have increased by 27% from roughly $14,000 to $18,000. However, since 2017, real wages have lagged behind inflation, decreasing from almost $24,000 to $18,000 – a decreasing in purchasing power of 25%.

AGING POPULATION:

Between 2012 and 2022 the median age in Spencer increased from 40.2 to 47.7 years of age. Due to its aging population (Figure 3), Spencer may also find it increasingly difficult to recruit young professionals into vacant positions.

MARKETING:

Marketing for open positions in Spencer is limited in scope and primarily includes posting open positions to the town website as pdfs. Broader marketing through platforms such as Indeed, LinkedIn, and government specific job boards may help to broaden the applicant pool to more potential employees.
High turnover can be costly in terms of recruitment time, reputation, long-

SPENCER HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT:

"To meet the needs of the Town, it is important that the Town restore staffing to the Highway and other departments. It is just as important to fill much-needed modernized equipment purchases and finance necessary capital expenditures so that we can increase productivity and not struggle to get by with limited resources [...] We must also cover the cost of inflation and include capital expenditures for new equipment, refurbishments, and regular annual maintenance."

(Annual Report, 2023)

term planning stability and service execution. For example, it can be costly for a developer to spend the time conveying proposals to new staff. Similarly, implementing Town adopted plans is easier when there is continuity in the staff overseeing them. Given Spencer's limited budget, ensuring that the town is a desirable place to work may need to include a creative suite of benefits, such as more standard vacation days and flexible work arrangements.

LABOR MARKET TRENDS:

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, news outlets around the country have continuously reported on the nations 'tight labor market,' a term used to describe a market condition in which there are more positions available than unemployed workers willing and able to fill them. The Federal Reserve tracks labor market tightness and identifies the government sector as having the third tightest labor market in 2023. This has meant that local governments, such as Spencer, have had a harder time attracting employees than many employment sectors.

INFLATION AND BUDGET CONSTRAINTS ARE LIMITING THE TOWN'S ABILITY TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND PURSUE CAPITAL NEEDS

Ensuring that municipal budgets cover the cost of essential services is a critical function of local government. In recent years, however, high inflation has meant that many municipalities throughout both Massachusetts and the United States have found themselves needing to consider cuts to services and dialing back the scope of capital projects. Between 2020 and 2023, general inflation reached 15.6%, with an average annual rate of more than 5%. In real terms, high inflation and limited revenue generating capacity has meant that the average Massachusetts local government has endured a net loss of 4.5%[2] in municipal revenue capacity. Interviews with the Town revealed that staff feel stretched in their roles, often taking on responsibilities outside of their primary role, and feel constrained in their ability to use town funds for needed capital expenditures. For example, in the 2023 Spencer Annual Report, the Highway Department noted:

"To meet the needs of the Town, it is important that the Town restore staffing to the Highway and other departments. It is just as important to fill much-needed modernized equipment purchases and finance necessary capital expenditures so that we can increase productivity and not struggle to get by with limited resources […] We must also cover the cost of inflation and include capital expenditures for new equipment, refurbishments, and regular annual maintenance."

Spencer, like most municipalities, has been subject to the pressures of inflation and the limits imposed by Proposition 2 1/2. For fiscal year 2023, property taxes made up the largest share of the Town's revenue at 62%.[3] Figure 2 shows the town's nominal and inflation adjusted property tax levy over the last five years. The figure shows that since 2021, the town's purchasing power has declined by over 5%.

Spencer's tax levy is also high relative to the Town's levy limit, meaning that the town has limited administrative capacity to increase revenue through property taxes without a town voted override. As of FY 2023, the Town's excess levy is $47,262 (the amount that the levy can increase without an



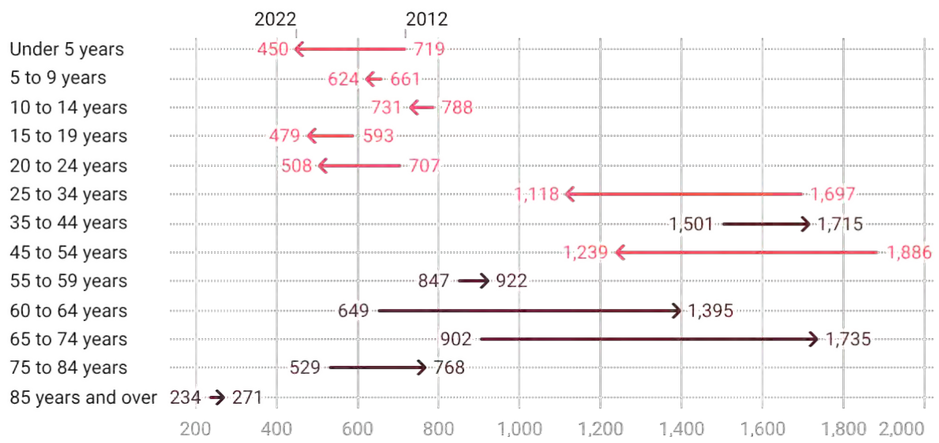


Figure 4. Spencer Age Composition Change 2012-2022
Source: 2018-2022 5-Year Estimates from the American Community Survey

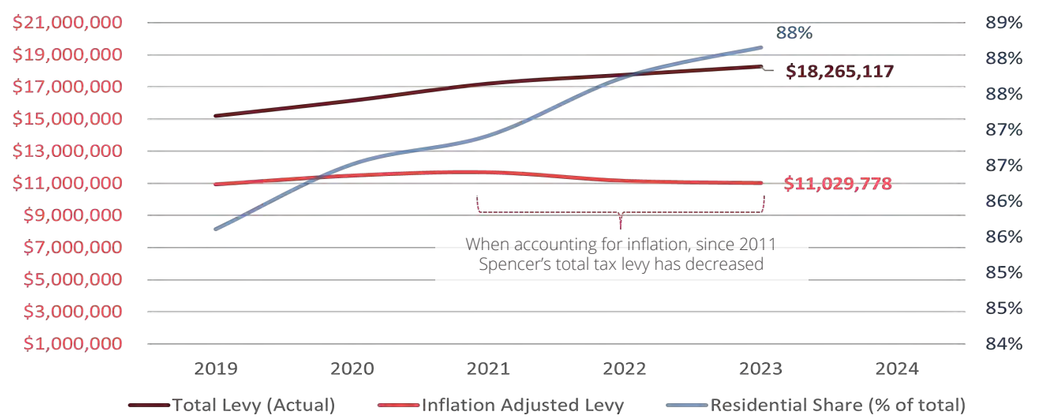


Figure 5. Actual and Inflation Adjusted Tax Levy and Residential Share of Total Levy.
Source: CMRPC, Town of Spencer.


Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

override). Although healthier than the prior four years, which ranged from $1,371 to $5,461, the levy limit indicates the challenges that Proposition 2 ½ imposes in a high inflation environment.

THE TOWN CONTINUES TO NEED SIGNIFICANT INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Spencer has a backlog of infrastructure and facility maintenance and capital needs. This has resulted in the Town continually needing major infrastructure projects that often negatively impact residents with road closures and noise. As the Town looks to tackle the backlog of maintenance it will be important to frequently and consistently communicate with the public about timeframes, progress, and any potential setbacks. This chapter contains several action items related to both the future planning of maintenance and infrastructure as well as strategies to improve communication with town residents.

THE SEWER DEPARTMENT IS WORKING TO CATCH UP WITH INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE AND UPGRADES, BUT USERS FACE INCREASED FEES

The wastewater system has been a primary concern for future development and quality of life for Spencer residents. The current treatment plant was built in the 1960s and much of the sewer collection infrastructure is more than a century old. The Town has struggled to cover the cost of maintenance and upgrades for the aging system which has led to seepage, overflow, and significant processing costs.

Despite the leakage issues of the collection system, Spencer's sewers never significantly violated nutrient loading limits. However, the eutrophication of Long Island Sound has caused the DEP and EPA to tighten up on nutrient loading with new permit requirements. To meet compliance with EPA and DEPs new National Pollutant Discharge and

Date	Increase	Relevant Tier
4/1/2006	25%	Base only
4/1/2012	35%	All tiers
4/1/2016	20%	All tiers
4/1/2020	38%	All tiers
4/1/2022	30%	All tiers
4/1/2023	25%	All tiers
4/1/2024	15%	Base – plus changed tier structure

Figure 6. Sewer rate increases. Source: Town of Spencer.

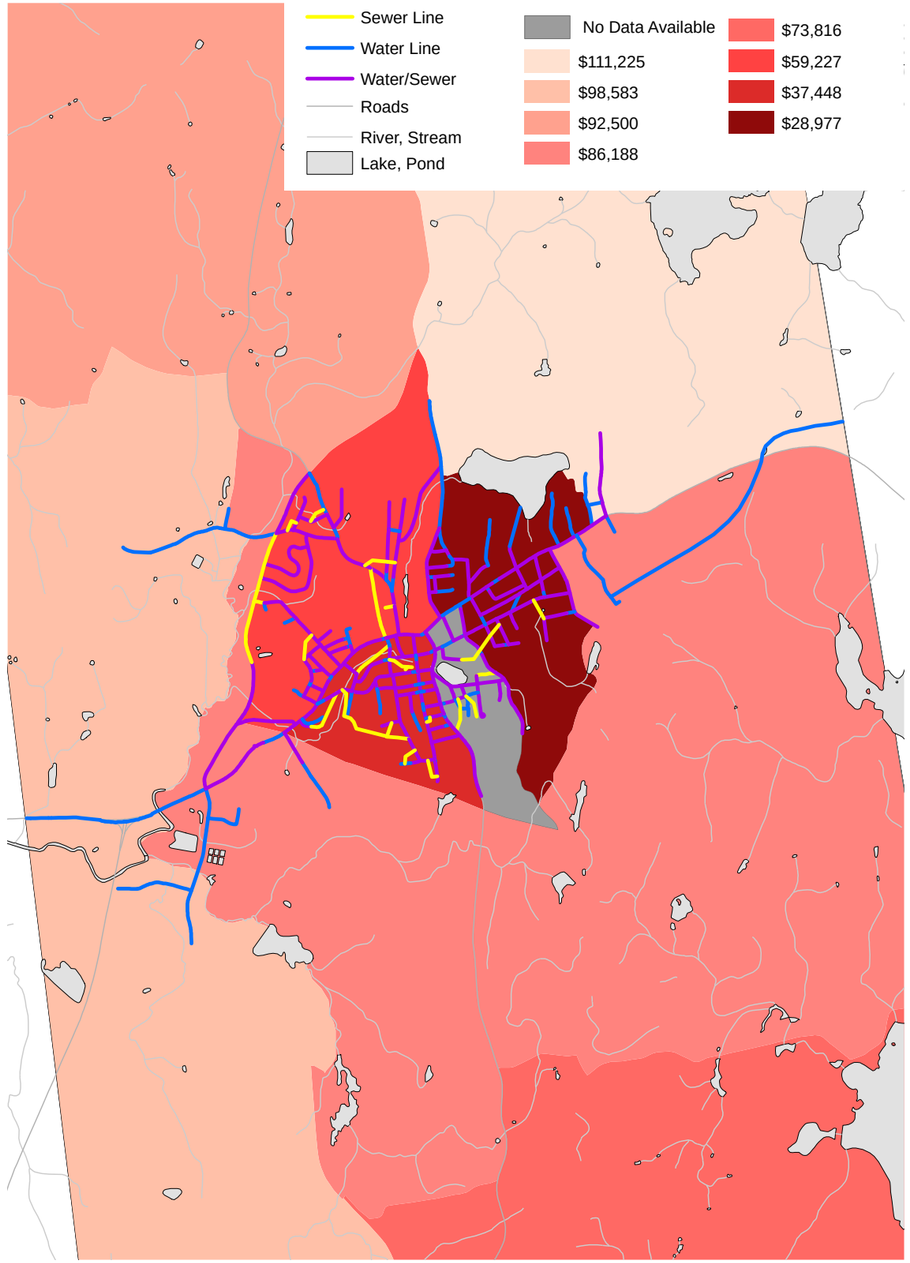


Figure 5: Map showing the geographic distribution of income in Spencer in relation to the sewer and water system. Source: CMRPC, Town of Spencer.

Elimination System Permit (NPDES), the Town needs to impose new limits on nutrient/contaminant levels and reduce inflow and infiltration (I&I) in the collection system.

Lacking funding for upgrades, the Sewer Commission instituted a connection moratorium in 2020 in preparation for the new limits. The moratorium prohibited any new connections that would have a design flow greater than 440 gallons per day, meaning no more than a four-bedroom home or a duplex with two bedrooms in each unit. However, the moratorium was deemed counterproductive as the Department needed new connections to bring in more revenue for collection system upgrades to lessen the annual average flow. The Town has recently received around $1.2 million in grant money from Senator Gobi, Congressman Neal, and federal funding to work on repairs. With this additional funding, the moratorium has since been lifted. The Town is now working with developers on four multifamily housing projects within the collection system that are currently in the permitting phase.

As an enterprise fund, the Spencer Sewer Department relies largely on user fees. The Town has set aside some additional funds in the last few years to help address some issues, however the department mostly funds capital expenses by increasing rates. To ensure funding is set aside for collection system upgrades, the Sewer Superintendent has suggested setting up a separate capital account for connection fees and ionide fees to be directly invested into the collection system. This way, the money is less likely to get lost in the annual wrap-up before closing out books for the fiscal year. A similar system exists in Sutton, where connection fees are used solely for infrastructure improvements.

The highest paying users are the industrial users like Flexcon, which is currently among the highest payers. However, there are not many industrial users in town, and Spencer cannot count on their continued help with offsetting some of the sewer costs. If some of these major industrial users leave, it could have a significant impact on sewer rates and the contributions to the department's revenue.

Growth Sentiment in Spencer

Spencer residents have differing opinions on whether they view growth as positive or negative, and many view it as dependent upon where that growth happens and what it looks like. When asked to identify where additional housing growth should occur, Spencer residents where split between rural, suburban, village center, and town center areas. Individual resident comments also offered insight in the different views that residents hold regarding growth and housing development.

More Compact Growth: *"Allow accessory dwellings to encourage multi-generational living."*

"Rural residential should be limited... townhouses etc. concentrated in small area of a large, restricted lot, maintainina rural surroundinas."

Depends: *"Depending on a person's walking/driving ability and preferences for services, Spencer needs to offer options."*

No Growth: *"This town should stop expanding."*

"None its overcrowded as it is."

Less Compact Growth: *"Single family homes in residential areas...not multi family."*

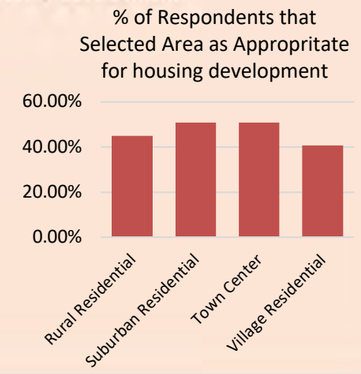


Figure 7. Growth sentiment in Spencer. Source: Community Survey 2023

FIFTY-FOUR PERCENT OF THE RESIDENTIAL SEWER USERS ARE LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

The sewer service area is concentrated in the Town Center where many residents are low-income. Median household income within the central town Census Tract, 7262—which generally aligns with the sewer and water service area—is $58,898 versus $103,160 outside of it (Figure 5). Because sewer and water services are funded mostly via user fees, residents' water and sewer bills have increased to enable repayment of loans and corresponding service upgrades. The Sewer Department has tried to offset some of these costs by bracketing ratepayers by usage and charging a lower rate for lower usage, assuming those using less are likely on fixed incomes, empty nesters, elderly, or other groups that may be less able to afford bill increases. However, the lowest-portion users comprise 54% of the user base, and they'll continue to see rate increases as the Sewer Department seeks to retain a sustainable revenue stream. In its current state, both the Town's water and sewer have excess capacity, and by enabling new connections within the existing system, the costs of service can be distributed across more people. Concentrating housing development or redevelopment of existing sites into slightly higher density around the Town Center will thus have the added benefit of lowering sewer rate increases.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Create a monthly or biweekly online newsletter to spread information. Last minute reverse 911 calls and e-mails do not allow for scheduling to listen or participate. Feature a relevant article from a department every month or two."

"Extensive wait times for permits and access to public records."

"There is little sharing of data between departments."

(Community Survey, 2023)



GOALS AND STRATEGIES SUMMARY

GOAL 1

ENSURE THE TOWN HAS THE RESOURCES AND STAFF TO PROVIDE QUALITY AND COST-EFFECTIVE TOWN SERVICES FOR ALL SPENCER RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, AND VISITORS.

OBJECTIVE: Increase Town capacity through smart and financially resilient growth strategies

ACTION ITEM 1.1 ACTION ITEM 1.2 ACTION ITEM 1.3 ACTION ITEM 1.4 ACTION ITEM 1.5

OBJECTVE: Continue to leverage external resources to build financial stability and improve service delivery.

ACTION ITEM 1.6 ACTION ITEM 1.7 ACTION ITEM 1.8

OBJECTVE: Improve Town service delivery and expand service offerings.

ACTION ITEM 1.9 ACTION ITEM 1.10 ACTION ITEM 1.11

GOAL 2

ENSURE THE OPTIMAL OPERATION AND FUNCTIONING OF ALL TOWN FACILITIES AND MAKE IMPROVEMENTS, WHERE NECESSARY.

OBJECTIVE: Improve the Town's Capital and Financial Planning Process to better account for needed facility maintenance and capital depreciation.

ACTION ITEM 2.1 ACTION ITEM 2.2 ACTION ITEM 2.3

OBJECTIVE: Work to improve educational quality and reputation in the town's schools.

ACTION ITEM 2.4 ACTION ITEM 2.5 ACTION ITEM 2.6 ACTION ITEM 2.7

GOAL 3

MAINTAIN, IMPROVE AND EXPLORE OPTIONS TO STRATEGICALLY EXPAND TOWN INFRASTRUCTURE TO ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

OBJECTIVE: Continue to Improve sewer and water infrastructure

ACTION ITEM 3.1 ACTION ITEM 3.2

GOAL 4

IMPROVE TOWN COMMUNICATION WITH AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

OBJECTIVE: Improve communication with residents about town projects, decisions, and opportunities to get involved.

ACTION ITEM 4.1 ACTION ITEM 4.2 ACTION ITEM 4.3 ACTION ITEM 4.4

OBJECTIVE: Identify opportunities for and communicate across the region about recreational, cultural, and commercial opportunities in the town.

ACTION ITEM 4.5 ACTION ITEM 4.6

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

GOAL 1

ENSURE THE TOWN HAS THE RESOURCES AND STAFF TO PROVIDE QUALITY AND COST-EFFECTIVE TOWN SERVICES FOR ALL SPENCER RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, AND VISITORS.

Spencer provides a range of services to residents, from water and sewer to emergency services. Town staff and residents acknowledge that a limited budget and high inflation has meant that the town's budget has become increasingly stretched in recent years, and many worry that provision of services may suffer in the near future. With limited appetite and ability to increase Town revenue without a property tax override, Spencer has several avenues to improve its financial position. Efforts such as regional partnerships, smart planning for growth, external funding, and policy can work in tandem to improve the cost efficiency and quality of Town services. Although the current environment for state grant funding in Massachusetts is strong, Spencer could benefit from building predictable, locally derived capacity so that it is not as reliant on outside funding sources should they become less prevalent in the future. Working toward building a strong financial base can also help Spencer to implement many of the goals and objectives outlined in this plan.

OBJECTIVE: Increase Town capacity through smart and financially resilient growth strategies

Spencer benefits from its proximity to the Worcester metro area and its location to key transportation corridors, Rt 9, 31, and 49. It also benefits from a historic growth pattern in the town core that includes good street connectivity and a dense mix of residential and commercial spaces. Growth often raises concerns for smaller towns and rural communities about loss of natural resources, community character, and costs. But taking a smart approach to growth can help improve Spencer's financial position while simultaneously protecting valuable open space and the town's historic character. This section should not be understood as widespread endorsement for more growth but should be viewed instead as an evaluation of the options for more financially resilient growth should it occur in Spencer.

ACTION ITEM 1.1

Explore opportunities to amend town bylaws, policies, and programs to facilitate financially resilient growth and development.

Adopting resilient growth and economic development strategies can help Spencer build on its existing assets and create a durable local economy, reduce public costs, and preserve the natural features that make Spencer special. Because smaller communities have limited financial resources, even modest efforts to reduce costs, or generate more revenue, by accommodating compact village growth patterns and promoting local economic development can make a significant difference. One of the best ways to reduce costs associated with growth is to distribute highly linear costs, such as road and water infrastructure/maintenance, across more households. This can be done in several ways, including:

- Making redevelopment of underutilized properties attractive for businesses and developers.
- Directing new growth to areas already supported by infrastructure.
- Supporting compact village or clustered development patterns.

For example, Spencer sewer staff noted that given the current improvements to the Town's sewer system are a fixed cost, adding new connections to the existing system would enable them to distribute those costs across more customers, limiting the need to raise individual rates. Similarly, because of the smaller lot sizes and density in the Spencer Town Center, the property tax generated from a higher assessed value per acre covers more of the cost of the road infrastructure needed to support it.

Compact design in a rural or small-town context does not mean forgoing small-town or rural character. In fact, within these contexts, it is best met through context sensitive building types, such as smaller lot single-family



Photo:
Jackie Mushinsky,
Spencer Cable Access

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Town leaders should speak up about the need for volunteers and the importance of civic responsibility that is important to our town government."

"Virtual meetings would allow more options for people who don't drive at night or don't drive."

"The Town needs to address the condition of downtown. The "old west facades" on many of the buildings need to be removed. The condition of the majority of downtown buildings is deplorable. The owners should be held accountable for fixing them."

(Community Survey, 2023)

homes, accessory dwelling units, duplexes, small multi-family, and live-work units. Many of these compact building types are quintessential of historic small and rural-town development in Massachusetts. However, modern zoning bylaws, including Spencer's, have made many of these challenging to build. For example, in Spencer's central Village Residential Zone (VR), ADUs and any home beyond a two-family requires a special permit. Similarly, large minimum lot size requirements (ex: 10,000 sq ft for 1-family), limit the ability of residents to build small, cottage style homes that are more financially viable on smaller parcels of land. As recommended in the Economic Development and Land Use chapters, Spencer has an opportunity to evaluate its zoning bylaws to better promote economic development, natural resource and open space protection, and financially resilient development—all three of which are supported by the same smart-growth interventions.

ACTION ITEM 1.2

Increase Spencer's status as an attractive place to live and do business.

Implementing bylaws and policies to facilitate financially resilient growth and development must be accompanied by strategies to encourage local entrepreneurs and businesses to locate in Spencer and attract new residents. Such strategies can include hiring an Economic Development coordinator and/or working with existing town committees to reach out to potential businesses and developers, implementing a Town marketing campaign, actively putting out RFPs for key development sites and town owned properties, among others. The key is to build up Spencer's regional reputation as a place that is easy to do business with and in.

OBJECTIVE:
Continue to leverage external resources to build financial stability and improve service delivery.

From state aid to competitive grants, external funding can provide much needed stability to local governments and enable them to improve service delivery as well as tackle deferred maintenance challenges. For example, in Spencer, a $500,000 Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) grant is enabling the Town to cleanup brownfields, while the Massachusetts Cultural Council is funding multiple programs and events. The Town does not typically fund employee salaries with grants, however in 2023, a $1 million federal grant allowed the Fire Department to hire four fire fighters for the next three years.

While local governments in Massachusetts have seen reduced purchasing power from high inflation, the State of Massachusetts tax revenues increased by 34% between fiscal years 2020 and 2023—equating to net growth of 18.4% when adjusted for inflation.[4] This will likely mean the continuation and possible expansion of competitive state grant programs.

ACTION ITEM 1.3

Work with regional partners to tap into grant and other funding opportunities for capital needs and plan implementation.

External funding continues to be an essential piece of Spencer's budget. Over the past 10+ years, Spencer has successfully partnered with several regional partners to obtain grant funding from a variety of sources to implement major infrastructure projects. External funds through the Community Development Block Grant program from the MA Department of Housing and Community Development, have been instrumental in improving and replacing outdated infrastructure, including drainage, water line replacement, and street resurfacing. Green Communities Grants through the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources has funded a range of projects from the installation of insulation and energy management systems to ventilation upgrades for municipal buildings resulting in significant savings in energy expenditures. As experts in writing and administering grant projects, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) is well positioned to partner with the

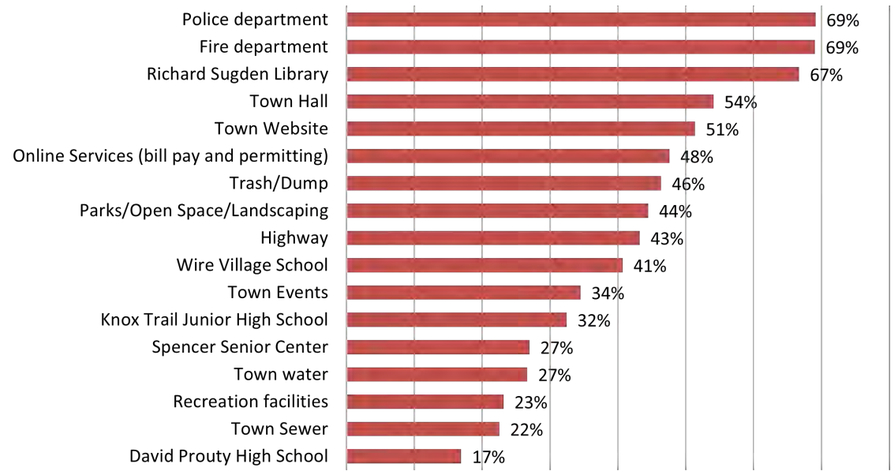


Figure 8: Resident satisfaction with Town services. Source: Spencer Master Plan Survey, 2023.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

Town of Spencer to help obtain future funding opportunities. Other regional partners that can assist the Town include Central Mass Grown, Masshire, and the Chamber of Central Mass South, among others.

ACTION ITEM 1.4

Explore regionalization, intermunicipal job shares and agreements as a way to expand service offerings and improve the cost-effectiveness of services.

Regionalization and intermunicipal job shares offer another avenue for service improvements and cost-sharing. Governments that share services can often benefit from lower per capita expenses, the ability to offer services that they couldn't afford on their own, and the ability to improve services. This effect is most pronounced in suburban and rural communities where the cost of providing services per person tends to be higher. The Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies produced a Shared Services Manual that outlines the steps towns should take to explore opportunities for regionalization or service sharing. The State of Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet also provides competitive grant funding through the Efficiency & Regionalization grant program to provide financial support for governmental entities interested in implementing regionalization and other efficiency initiatives that allow for long-term sustainability.

As communities look to reduce costs through regionalization, dispatch centers are some of the first services to be considered. Spencer has recently allocated funds toward upgrading its dispatch system with a computer-aided dispatch and records management software system that will help the Police and Fire Departments streamline the work of dispatchers during incidents. With the help of a Massachusetts State 911 Department grant, Spencer will assess the feasibility and cost-saving benefits of having one joint center and forming a partnership with neighboring communities such as Sturbridge, Charlton, and Southbridge.

Spencer recently started sharing its transfer station with Charlton, an arrangement that benefits both communities by increasing efficiencies and cost savings. A regional transfer station will potentially create grant opportunities that would not be available for a station that serves a single town. Spencer would benefit from looking for similar arrangements for other services, especially those that open up the possibility of leveraging grants.

OBJECTIVE: Improve Town service delivery and expand service offerings.

Through the Spencer Master Plan survey and visioning workshops, Spencer residents provided mixed responses to how satisfied they were with Town Services and Facilities. Generally, residents expressed being satisfied with the Police and Fire Department, the Library, and Town Hall. Few residents expressed being dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied with Town Services. Most of the services and facilities listed in the survey received a neutral response—not overly negative but not overly positive. These responses, along with workshop input tell the story of a Town that is doing a lot with limited staffing and budget, but one that, through the right interventions can improve and expand the services to enhance the quality of life for Spencer residents.

During the master plan visioning workshop, participants were asked to consider which town services they would like to see prioritized within Spencer's limited budget. Although residents identified that it was important to fund each of the services currently offered, there was a clear preference to prioritize economic development, education, transportation and road infrastructure, sewer, and elder services.

ACTION ITEM 1.5

Conduct a staffing analysis to identify staffing needs and priorities across Town departments.

Many Town departments recognize the need for additional staff to fully meet the needs of residents and the Town's service delivery standards. Although numerous personnel needs have already been identified, a town-wide staffing analysis or plan would systematically identify and prioritize needs across all town departments. Such a plan can outline where short-term and long-term staffing needs are, set priorities, identify trends in turnover, and improve succession planning. Some existing additional staffing needs have already been identified within the town, including the highway, police, and fire departments. Spencer also currently relies on the Town Planner to perform economic development functions and would benefit from hiring a dedicated Economic Development officer.

ACTION ITEM 1.6

Work to ensure that Town compensation is competitive.

Pay and benefits are two critical factors in employee attraction and retention. As noted in the key findings section, Town pay has recently lagged inflation and become less competitive in a tight labor market.[5] As Spencer looks to improve service delivery, a key factor will be retaining well-qualified and knowledgeable staff. Competitive pay and low-premium benefits are a costly but necessary component. To ensure that Town pay is competitive, Spencer should consider conducting a compensation study that evaluates how Town compensation for a range of positions compares to other municipalities, government agencies, and private sector positions.

ACTION ITEM 1.7

Use creative strategies to Improve employee recruitment and retention.

The importance of a reliable labor supply isn't news to Spencer, and the benefits of low turnover and retaining knowledgeable and familiar staff are well known. But, since the pandemic-fueled tightening of the labor market, Spencer must figure



out how to put its best foot forward. Although a major factor in attracting and retaining employees is pay, in the absence of budget capacity to closely align pay increases with inflation, Spencer should explore some of the following creative and low-cost options to build a resilient workplace.

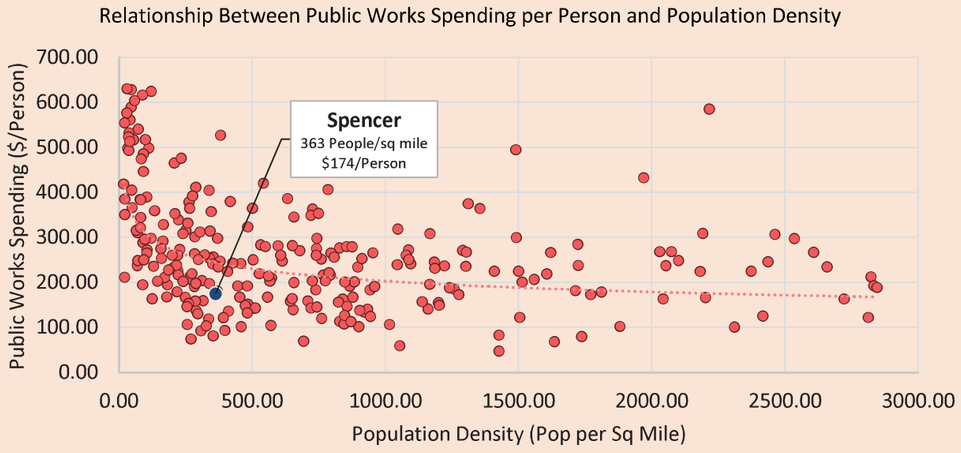
- Expand the platforms used to advertise job openings to reach a broader audience.
- Build local relationships with the school system to offer paid summer internships to eligible students and participate in career fairs around the region.
- Offer flexible working hours and location where possible.
- Explore opportunities to offer non-traditional employee benefits such as recreational passes to national/state parks and local ski areas and other lifestyle/culture benefits.
- Market the Town's culture of promoting from within and providing professional development resources that allow employees to build expertise in their current position and/or explore building expertise in other areas of government that interest them.

ACTION ITEM 1.8

Increase hours of opening and operation toward a five-day week.

As a cost-saving measure, Spencer town offices are currently open 3.5 days out of the week – Mon to Wed 7:30am to 4:30pm and Thurs 7:30am to 12:00pm. Most town positions are paid accordingly, which means that they are generally less attractive to potential employees looking for full-time work. Although a shorter workweek is an effective cost-saving measure, residents and town staff have noted that the town hall being open throughout the full workweek has advantages and positively impacts service delivery.

Research has shown that there is an inverse relationship between high population density/compact urban form and spending per person on public services and infrastructure.[1] This is because compact design reduces the costs of providing many types of public infrastructure and services by reducing the length of roads and utility lines, and travel distances needed to provide public services such as garbage collection, policing, emergency response, and school transport, and so reduces per capita costs of providing these services. To illustrate this, the graph below shows the relationship between public works spending per person and population density across all cities and towns in the state of Massachusetts. The analysis shows a clear negative relationship between the two variables.



Source: CMRPC - MA DLS Municipal DataBank.
Note: Graph illustrates subset of data (outliers beyond IQR removed for visual clarity) CMRPC Developed Logarithmic Regression model used all data and calculated model of Spending per Person = 1044 – 114.9 x ln(Pop Density), r^2=0.2349.

The model suggests that there is a significant negative relationship between population density and public works spending per person. As population density increases, public works spending per person tends to decrease. However, although the model is statistically significant, there are other factors that also impact public works spending.

Figure 9. Relationship between density/compact form and cost of services. Each circle represents a town/city in Massachusetts. Source: CMRPC- MA DLS Municipal DataBank

GOAL 2

ENSURE THE OPTIMAL OPERATION AND FUNCTIONING OF ALL TOWN FACILITIES AND MAKE IMPROVEMENTS, WHERE NECESSARY.

"Town Facilities" refers to the municipally owned physical structures, buildings, spaces that serve specific functions within the community. This includes municipal buildings like the Town Hall, Library, Police Station, and Fire Department, as well as Town-owned open facilities like parks, athletic fields, and conservation land. Well-functioning Town facilities are essential for operational efficiency, cost-efficient public service delivery, and ensuring that Spencer is a desirable place to live and do business. Many of Spencer's facilities are functional, but currently have significant maintenance needs that could result in more costly future repairs and rehabilitation, if left unaddressed. This section outlines the steps that Spencer can take to plan and carry out short and long-term facility improvements more effectively.

OBJECTIVE:

Improve the Town's Capital and Financial Planning Process to better account for needed facility maintenance and capital depreciation.

Infrastructure, buildings, parks and other facilities have a predictable life cycle. In new, or near new condition, building components are functioning well and may still be under warranty. Then they start to wear and show signs of decline. Over time, components start to fail to various degrees, finally followed by either a complete failure or a major reconstruction project that is generally financed through grants or debt.

Like many municipalities across the United States, Spencer struggles with a backlog of maintenance and repair needs—often referred to as "deferred maintenance." The departments that oversee major capital and infrastructure—Sewer, Water, and Highway—all operate on limited budgets with little capacity to tackle backlogged maintenance. As a result, they are often forced into a reactionary approach to maintenance. The practice of deferring maintenance typically happens when budget or staffing shortfalls make it impossible to carry out all the needed maintenance work, leading to a forced prioritization between maintenance tasks that must be done now and those that can be deferred to a future time. The risks of deferred maintenance include:

- Increased maintenance costs over time
- Safety hazards
- Reduced effectiveness and service quality
- Strained community trust and public dissatisfaction

Moving forward, the Town is making efforts to rethink both the long-term capital planning process and the Town's ongoing maintenance programming to better anticipate and plan for the Town's needs.

ACTION ITEM 2.1

Create a facilities maintenance plan that tackles both the Town's deferred maintenance and the predicted lifespan of new buildings and capital assets.

Spencer would benefit from a long-term plan for maintaining and staffing its public facilities in the next 10-20 years.

Regular maintenance of Town assets can prolong their lifespan and reduce overall costs. With a backlog of maintenance needs, including buildings and infrastructure, this will be a challenging task for Spencer. The Town could address this by developing a cyclical maintenance plan that outlines the procedures, schedules, and resources needed to maintain and manage the town's physical infrastructure effectively.[6]

These plans can range in scale and complexity and are resource intensive. A facilities maintenance plan would typically inventory the

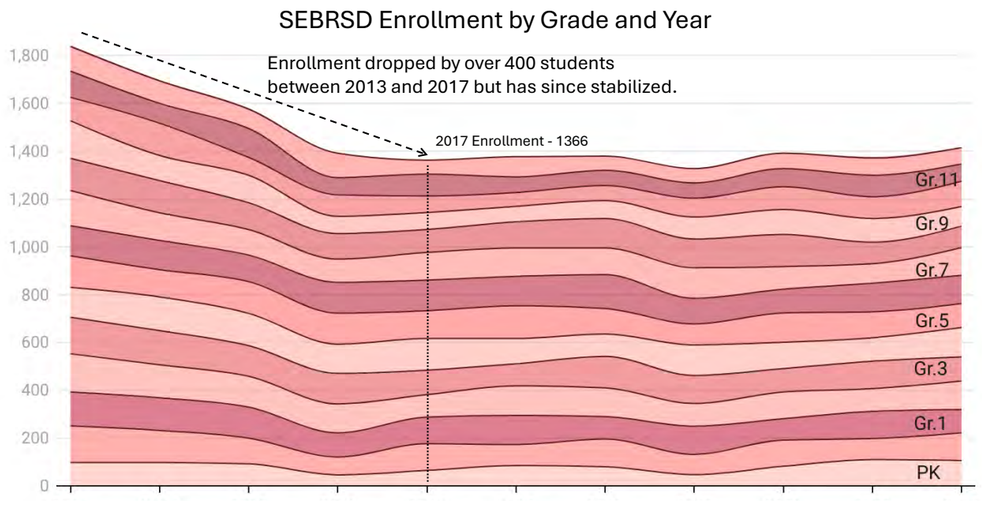


Figure 10: SEBRSD Enrollment by Grade and Year.
Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Town's assets, assess their condition, identify the scope of maintenance needs, prioritize projects, estimate costs, and plan for implementation. After establishing priorities and estimated costs, cities and towns can develop a long-term maintenance plan. This plan should outline the timeline for addressing deferred maintenance issues, allocating budgets, and identifying funding sources. The maintenance plan can be reviewed every one to five years as facilities' maintenance needs evolve.

Many of the open space facilities in Spencer face similar issues that could be addressed jointly. O'Gara Park, Luther Hill Park, and Powder Mill Park, for example, have a consistent vandalism issue and it has been recommended that a security camera system connected to the police department be set up to address these concerns. The 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan called for an annual sum to be set aside for each of these parks to be used for general repairs and maintenance. Many locations such as Muzzy Meadow Pond, Depot Trail, and other green spaces need more accessible seating areas. This might be addressed through a program for people to sponsor benches to commemorate friends and family.

In terms of Town buildings, an envelope study and a maintenance needs report has been completed in 2023 for the Richard Sugden Library. A review of the current conditions of the O'Gara Park grandstand structure was completed in 2019. The Town's Utilities & Facilities Departments have a general idea of what the needs are for each facility and respond to immediate needs. However, without a consistent preventive maintenance and inspection regimen, the Town facilities are at risk of having larger and more costly issues in the long term. A Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) software could help with organizing, planning, and scheduling maintenance activities efficiently. This software combines a database for tracking and monitoring assets; a system for creating assigning and tracking work orders; and tools for generating detailed reports and analytics on maintenance activities and asset performance.

ACTION ITEM 2.2

Regularly update the Capital Improvement Plan to provide guidance for the allocation of resources toward capital assets.

Numerous town facilities need upgrades and expansion. The Town should conduct an analysis to assess priorities, with special attention to public safety facilities. Spencer should work with its Capital Improvement Planning Committee (CIPC) to update the Capital Improvement Plan and create guidelines and expectations for all Town departments in planning for, and requesting, capital projects. A cost benefit analysis should be developed in conversation with Town departments to assess whether public facilities are adequate and whether their condition affects service delivery, response times to public safety incidents, ISO ratings, and more.

Capital planning is critical to water, sewer, transportation, and other essential public services. It is also an important component of a successful economic development strategy in Spencer. A multi-year and long-range capital plan that identifies current and future capital needs, funding options, and operating budget can help Spencer address the current and future needs of residents and businesses. Town Staff in the Highway, Water, and Sewer departments all recognize the need for better planning when it comes to both major capital projects and ongoing maintenance needs. At its core, a CIP is a prioritized list of anticipated capital and maintenance expenses and funding mechanisms. The plan should be informed by in-depth discussions with relevant departments, assessing needs and whether their facilities are adequate.

The Massachusetts Municipal Association has produced a Capital Improvement Planning Guide to assist municipalities in developing a capital improvement program.[7] Spencer could use the guide as a basis for updating its own program. A CIP also works in tandem with the use of a cyclical maintenance plan. For example, when reviewing maintenance needs, it might be determined that it's more cost-effective in the long term to expedite a planned capital project rather than repeatedly addressing minor repairs. The Town identified several critical capital improvements needs:

- **Salt Shed for the Spencer Highway Department:** A proposed new salt shed project for the Spencer Highway Department has been in pre-development since 2017. The scope consists of the replacement of the existing shed that stores salt for ice control operations. The Town has appropriated a total of $528,244.37 toward design and construction, but additional funds are needed and the project has not yet broken ground. The estimated cost of this structure is $910,098.27.
- **Improvements to the Spencer Sewer Department's Sewer Collection System:** The Spencer Sewer Collection System urgently needs line replacement and rehabilitation. The aging mains are plagued by significant inflow and infiltration, compromising both treatment and expansion capacity. The Town is actively seeking grant funding to support the replacement or repair of the sewer mains.
- **Spencer Water Department Water Filtration Tanks:** The Spencer Water Department operates six water filtration tanks that treat raw water before it enters the distribution system. These tanks are outdated and require replacement. A report detailing their condition estimated cost for this replacement is $2,222,000.
- **O'Gara Park Ball Field Lighting Project:** O'Gara Park is a historic athletic facility that has twelve light poles. These poles are deteriorated and outdated and must be replaced for safety and efficiency. As of April 2024, the field remains unused due to a collapsed light pole. The estimated replacement cost ranges from $500,000 to $750,000
- **O'Gara Park Grandstand Renovation Project:** The O'Gara Park Grandstand was originally built in 1931 and is in need in significant structural repairs and other improvements. A structural study was conducted in 2019.
- **The Sewer Department plans to build a 2-3 bay garage.**

Other facilities with significant capital needs are discussed below.

Richard Sugden Public Library

The Richard Sugden Public Library was renovated in 1999, but new capital needs have emerged since then. Today, the structure needs roof and envelope repairs, maintenance and upgrades, including a HVAC

system. Recently, the Town and LiRo Corporation have undertaken a Library Building Envelope Evaluation and Capital Assessment study. The Town is currently seeking grants to implement the recommendations of the study and move forward with repairs. During the fall of 2023, the library had some exterior masonry work completed.

One of the most urgent priorities identified in the 2023 envelope assessment study is stopping water infiltration. Roof, flashing, and gutter repairs were identified as the first steps needed to prevent further damage. Failure to fund necessary improvements will result in damage to the collection as well as limit users' access to the library's programs and services.

Public Safety Facilities

Interviews with Fire Department staff underscored the need to update the current fire station. The current facility was built in 1973 and the needs of the department have far outpaced the capacity of the building. The department operates with 43 staff, 9 of which are career fire fighters. In 2024, the Spencer Fire Department became staffed 24 hours a day and seven days a week for the first time, thanks to a $1 million federal grant. The current facilities cannot accommodate this staff and the equipment they use. The building is also not ADA compliant. The old dormitory had to be divided, and a new bathroom built to accommodate female staff. An additional facility was built in 2012 to house the administrative offices and an additional apparatus bay. While Spencer's EMS is operated by a non-profit organization in a separate facility adjacent to the Fire Station, the Department has noted the need for new facilities that can accommodate EMS under the same roof and allow for the possibility that the Town may operate this service in the future.

Also of note is the fact that the current West Main Street site is not optimally located to allow for adequate response times. A new facility located in the center of town would reduce response times and would limit the need to rely on mutual aid for incidents in the northern side of Spencer. It is likely that the fire facility located at St. Joseph's Abbey will close, leaving the northern side of Spencer more vulnerable. This may directly impact the ISO rating of the Fire Department and as a result, resident's homeowner's insurance premiums.[8]

Similarly, interviews with the Police Department have shown the need to expand both staffing levels and the existing facility. Built in the 1980s, the current police station cannot accommodate existing needs for the 18 full time personnel and administrative office. The department has acquired a computer-aided dispatch and records management software system that will streamline operations and allow officers to communicate. The system with be used by both Fire and Police Departments. The Police Department is currently considering a feasibility study funded by a state grant that will explore the possibility of regionalizing the dispatch service in partnership with Charlton, Sturbridge, Southbridge.

ACTION ITEM 2.3

Explore opportunities to open underutilized public facilities as shared-use or additional uses such as town-sponsored activities and events.

Like many communities in Massachusetts, Spencer has a surplus of existing spaces that are underutilized by the community. Many of these spaces could be redeveloped for a more effective use, and some could be repurposed through adaptive reuse without the need for costly, new construction. Town-owned buildings are especially good candidates for shared use agreements. Also called joint use, or community use, these agreements allow for spaces or facilities to be used as a resource for activities beyond their original intended use, often for a rental or use fee. For example, school kitchens that normally sit idly on weekends or during summer months could be used as community kitchens or for cooking demonstrations. Spencer has recently leased the second floor of its Senior Center building to the Western Worcester District Court while its East Brookfield facilities underwent renovation. These types of agreements can open new revenue streams for the Town.

OBJECTIVE:

Work to improve educational quality and reputation in the town's schools.

The Spencer-East Brookfield Regional School District (SEBRSD) has experienced a series of cascading financial issues, which have negatively impacted both the District and the Town of Spencer. A FY13 school budget deficit led to two failed overrides in both towns. A district-wide meeting was held in 2013 to create an amended amount which failed to get passed by the school committee. The State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) had to step in and set the budget, which was $120,000 over the budget approved at the district-wide meeting, leading to budget cuts for other town services to avoid a prop 2 ½ override. In 2015, Lake Street School was closed due to continued budget constraints and major improvements needed for the building. Students from the school were transferred to other schools in the district. The Lake Street School property has yet to be redeveloped. The financial issues faced by the school district have made it harder for SEBRSD to compete with surrounding districts. Enrollment steadily declined throughout the 2010s and stabilized in the 2020s.

This in turn has led to even less funding. SEBRSD continuously improves at marketing to families the unique opportunities their schools have to offer and the school should keep this up, as well as explore new offerings to draw in students.

Despite lower enrollment, the district has seen an increase in economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and students



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

with English as a second language throughout the 2010s. The proportion of these student populations in SEBRSD was 50.1% in FY20, higher than the average in nearby K-12 regions. To address these changing demographics, SEBRSD must continue developing programs and course offerings that cater to the evolving needs and interests of its students. Teachers and staff should continue to receive professional development to enhance their ability to support these groups, which may have unique needs. The district should also seek opportunities to expand access to additional support programs for these students and their families.

ACTION ITEM 2.4

Work with the SEBRSD to develop a districtwide school maintenance plan.

SEBRSD schools have been praised for how well-maintained they are despite their age. However, with declining funding, SEBRSD will face increasing challenges in maintaining the quality of its school facilities. The lack of funding makes it difficult to perform necessary upkeep, which can lead to a cycle of deferred maintenance that results in greater expenses over time. As a result, the overall condition of the school facilities deteriorates, impacting the learning environment and potentially jeopardizing the health and safety of students and staff. Additionally, the facilities are dated, with Knox Trail and Wire Village around 30 years old and David Prouty High School nearly 60 years old. The aging of the facilities will continue to ramp up the need for maintenance and repairs.

Fortunately, in response to the concerns over aging infrastructure, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) awarded the district in 2022 with a substantial grant of $44.7 million to address these issues through renovations and additions to the high school. This project aims to ensure that the facility meets current educational and safety standards. The project is currently under construction and is expected to be completed in 2025.

Like the Town, the school district should develop a long-term preventive maintenance plan and deferred maintenance schedule to proactively address upcoming challenges and facility needs. Maintenance staff should conduct regular audits of all school facilities to identify and prioritize maintenance needs. A monitoring and evaluation system could be set up to track not only maintenance needs but also the effectiveness of maintenance activities. These strategies can be put in place at little to no cost and can save the district a significant amount of money in the long run.

ACTION ITEM 2.5

Continue to offer programming relevant to the interests of students.

In the past few years, SEBRSD has received approval from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for Chapter 74 Career Technical Programs in Marketing, Criminal Justice, Environmental Science, and Early Education and Childcare. These new course offerings and other updates to the curriculum can help market the school to new prospective students. Similarly, the district has also partnered with Worcester State on an Early College program to allow high school students to get a head start on their higher education and reduce the overall cost of college. The district can remain sustainable by continuing to explore programmatic approaches to drawing in students, especially niche offerings that other districts may not offer. This could involve taking on new AP courses, project-based learning programs, language immersion programs, development of a makerspace, among others.

ACTION ITEM 2.6

Implement the strategies of the 2021 to 2024 strategic plan.

SEBRSD's Leadership Team, comprising the Superintendent, principals, vice principals, and directors of various departments, created a new strategic plan in 2021 aimed at setting a clear direction and making impactful changes within the district. The process for creating the plan involved a needs assessment through local data reviews, surveys, and a SWOT analysis, using knowledge and data from stakeholders to create a vision for the schools. The process resulted in a series of recommendations for the next five years, organized into three strategic objectives:

Following through with the strategies presented in this plan will benefit both the students and their educators and will help ensure SEBRSD remains proficient and competitive.

ACTION ITEM 2.7

Create a new strategic plan for 2025- 2028

The school district's previous strategic plan will expire this year. SEBRSD should ensure it is on track to develop a new plan for the next four years. SEBRSD has seen a slight uptick in enrollment over the last few years, likely in no small part due to the clear actionable initiatives offered in the previous strategic plan. Recent achievements in the district, such as the recent partnership with Worcester State for Early College learning opportunities, an enhanced educator evaluation system, and expanded course offerings, are all recommendations of the previous plan. These plans can play a big role in the success of a district by providing a clear vision and direction for the next few years, prioritizing resource allocation and district efforts effectively.



Photo:
Jackie Mushinsky,
Spencer Cable Access

GOAL 3

MAINTAIN, IMPROVE, AND EXPLORE OPTIONS TO STRATEGICALLY EXPAND TOWN INFRASTRUCTURE TO ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

Industry, businesses, and developers all consider a wide range of factors when deciding to site a new facility or housing development. One is whether the Town or City provides services such as sewer, water, and public transit. Another is the quality of the services and infrastructure that are provided. A recent (2024) report from the Urban Institute suggests that without investment and collaboration to build and maintain quality drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, and efforts to improve systems' readiness for new business needs, rural areas will miss out on economic development opportunities.[9]

OBJECTIVE:
Continue to Improve sewer and water infrastructure.

The Spencer Sewer Department is staffed by the Superintendent and three operators. They have been looking to hire new staff with or without experience but have had difficulty finding cadidates. In the last decade, the Sewer Department has conducted studies and performed various upgrades to address sewer system needs. They have conducted manhole inspections, GIS mapping, a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP), Infiltration & Inflow studies, a Sewer System Evaluation Study, and a Sewer Rate study.

In 2023, the town carried out collection system repairs and replacements in two locations. The Town kicked off the initial phase of a two-year $46 million Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade Project in 2023 with the second phase expected to be complete in 2024. At the May 2023 Town Meeting, the Town adopted a new bylaw, Article 19, to establish "flow neutral regulations," which allowed them to qualify for 0% financing from the State Clean Water Trust for $46 million dollars to implement the upgrades. The new bylaw set a cap on flow for expansions within the current sewer service area and prohibited expansion beyond the service area.

The Sewer System Evaluation Study (SSES) is the Sewer Departments primary guide for prioritizing future projects. The study, finalized in December 2022, built upon the work of the Town's 2018 Infiltration and Inflow (I/I) Control Plan, which identified areas of high I/I. The SSES would expand on the I/I study to find the sources of I/I and propose improvements. The SSES split its recommendations into three categories: Immediate Corrective Action, Priority 1 Improvements, and Priority 2 Improvements. The Immediate Corrective Action items required immediate attention and were actively being addressed before the study was published. The Priority 1 and Priority 2 Improvements were to be completed within the next 3-5 years.

The planning and growth in the last decade has also helped the Sewer Department grow and meet various capital needs. The Department now has a video inspection trailer, four trucks, and they're soon getting a trailer jetter. The Superintendent expects a new lease on another vehicle may be needed within five years, however the department generally keeps the existing vehicles well-maintained. The department currently has no concerns regarding availability of equipment, however they are holding off on getting a trailer jetter until there is storage available for it. The jetter's tank will be kept filled so that it is ready for immediate use and will need indoor storage during the winter so that it doesn't freeze up. The current treatment plant upgrade project will free up some space for equipment but the department eventually plans to build a 2-3 bay garage to house landscaping equipment, trucks, the trailer jetter, and a front end loader used to move nonliquid refuse into a dumpster at the facility.

The Water Department in Spencer has had less concerns over aging infrastructure, compliance, or rate increases. Customer tap boasts rates of $0.01 per gallon as of 2023 and the department is primarily focused on maintenance of the existing system and any upgrades needed for roadway or development projects. The Department has used a Capital Efficiency Plan (CEP) to prioritize



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

infrastructure improvements.

The Water Department began an annual system wide leak detection program in the 2010s to lower costs associated with annual unaccounted for water. The program has saved thousands of dollars each year it is performed. Leakage has also been greatly reduced in subsequent years due to the program.

ACTION ITEM 3.1

Raise resident awareness about septic issues through informational campaigns

Sixty percent of Spencer residents rely upon onsite septic systems. The 2019 CWMP included a needs assessment of non-sewered areas in Spencer to evaluate whether they could safely be supported by on-site septic throughout the next 20-years. If sites were suitable, septic could be an environmentally safe and cost-effective solution for wastewater treatment and disposal. Unfortunately, many sites where septic is currently already in use were deemed unsuitable by the survey and the Sewer Department is not currently planning to expand sewer. Expansion would be too costly for the Department and the community, which cannot withstand further rate increases. The least expensive of the highlighted areas would require $7 million in initial capital costs as of 2019. Other sites reached up to $30 million in initial capital costs.

Many of the lake areas in Town are severely in need of replacing septic systems or switching off septic entirely. Old septic systems from housing around pond areas are leaching contaminants into the pond water. Lake Whittimore would likely be the most feasible to expand the Town's collection system in a belt around the pond because of its proximity to the existing system. If the Sewer Department does eventually take on the work, it would likely be funded partially through rate increases and partially through a betterment levied on affected properties. The other lakes would likely not be feasible and other solutions would need to be sought out for those septic systems.

The Town should develop a strategy to raise awareness about septic issues. Septic replacements can be a very costly process. Public outreach to alert residents of the dangers of vulnerable septic systems can save both the Town and residents much time, money, and effort in the long term. An informational campaign with brochures, social media postings, online resources on the Town website, and public workshops can help get vital information across to residents in vulnerable locations.

ACTION ITEM 3.2

Explore the viability of strategic expansions to town water and sewer.

Businesses and developers consider many factors when deciding to locate to smaller towns and rural areas, including water and wastewater infrastructure capacity.[10] In some cases, stable water and sewer can be a deal breaker or maker, however, research on the topic has yielded mixed results and there is no guarantee that expansion will generate development interest. Therefore, it is important for Spencer to understand the long-term financial implications of expanding water and sewer service.

The new Article 19 of the Spencer general by-laws prohibits expanding the sewer system beyond the current sewer service area. This bylaw was adopted to maintain compliance with new water quality standards and enable the Town to qualify for the 0% financing from the State Clean Water Trust for the sewer treatment plant upgrade project. If the town does decide to expand, the bylaw will need to be amended and will need approval from MassDEP.

Within a smaller town context, major service expansions can impose long term maintenance and capital replacement costs that are hard to meet unless a project spurs additional development and connections into the system. It may be advantageous to strategically plan out where service expansion is most likely to spur the type of growth and development that would cover the ongoing costs of service. If expansion is considered to support an interested party locating in the town, the same analysis should be followed.

GOAL 4

IMPROVE TOWN COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

Community involvement is a critical component of successful small-town governance. By promoting opportunities to involve residents, Spencer can create a cohesive community culture and a shared vision for the town's future, which is essential for sustainable development and the well-being of all community members. Transparency and enhanced engagement with residents can also lead to Town processes and decisions that are more responsive to the Spencer community priorities. This can foster a sense of ownership and partnership among Town residents. It can also help the Town avoid unforeseen consequences by incorporating diverse local insights and buy-in into decision-making. Similarly, better communication with Spencer residents can strengthen accountability and build trust between the town government and its citizens.

OBJECTIVE:

Improve communication with residents about town projects, decisions, and opportunities to get involved.

ACTION ITEM 4.1

Develop a Town social media presence on a range of platforms.

Social media offers Spencer an effective way to engage and inform residents, community visitors and businesses about Town decisions, projects, volunteer opportunities, and events. But, to fully take advantage of this platform, Spencer would benefit from assigning social media management duties to a staff person or to volunteers to build a consistent brand and posting strategy. Currently, the Town of Spencer Cable Access Television, Parks and Recreation, Police, and Fire departments use Facebook, each adopting their own approach, strategy, and brand. Moving forward, Spencer should work to understand the platforms most used by residents and build a cohesive presence across selected platforms.

To optimize Spencer's online presence, putting a staff member in charge of communications and social media is crucial. This person would streamline social media activities, manage content creation, maintain a consistent town brand across platforms, and engage with residents effectively. Spencer should unify its social media under one official account per platform to ensure consistent messaging and simplify resident interaction. Encouraging two-way communication through polls, questions, and feedback solicitations fosters community engagement. Prompt and respectful responses to both positive and negative feedback demonstrate openness and dedication to resident satisfaction. Establishing protocols for managing potentially harmful content is also essential, leveraging platform safeguards and proactive monitoring. Moreover, prioritizing visually appealing, concise content enhances engagement. Utilizing modern design tools can aid in creating aesthetically pleasing posts that resonate with residents. By implementing these strategies, Spencer can cultivate a robust online presence that strengthens community bonds and enhances public perception.

ACTION ITEM 4.2

Continue to look for creative ways to expand and encourage volunteerism on Town boards and committees.

In Spencer, the Town relies on volunteers to staff 19 boards and commissions that work to ensure that new developments conform with town zoning, that the Town properly administers the wetlands protection act, that the Town develop recreational programing, and much more. Filling all of these positions with volunteers continues to be a challenge for the Town. Currently, the Town posts position needs and application instructions to the local newspaper, Spencer Cable Access, and some social media platforms. The Town has also implemented a one-page application to keep the process simple. Moving forward, the Town may benefit from expanding their approach to include:

Targeted Invitations/Recruitment: Identify potential volunteers through community events and personal networks, then extend personalized invitations to encourage participation. Encourage current board and commission members to reach out to their networks and recommend suitable candidates. Actively seek to diversify membership by reaching out to underrepresented groups in the community. Collaborate with local nonprofits, civic groups, and businesses to identify potential volunteers.

Publicly Recognize Volunteers and Impact: In 2023, the Spencer Cultural Council organized the Spencer Volunteer Appreciation Day, an event that recognized the efforts

RESEARCH ON VOLUNTEERISM

Research in the Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs indicates that personal engagement and recognition are critical in retaining volunteers. Providing training and clear role definitions significantly increases volunteer satisfaction and retention. The findings also suggest that making volunteers from diverse backgrounds feel welcome and included can improve retention. Organizational support, very likely, also plays a role, in that interactions with paid staff and experience with the organization are positive predictors as well.



of numerous volunteers that serve on boards and committees. Service recognition is an easy way to show volunteers how much the Town appreciates their service. Regularly acknowledging the contributions of volunteers through public recognition at town meetings, on social media, or local media, helps show the tangible impacts of volunteer efforts on the community.

ACTION ITEM 4.3

Increase awareness of the Town's municipal emergency alert system.

Developing a more robust online presence will enable Spencer to provide critical information to residents quickly and easily. One such set of information is the Town's emergency alert system. Using social media, local news, and the Town website, Spencer can increase residents' awareness of the system and how to obtain critical and timely alerts about emergency situations.

ACTION ITEM 4.4

Create a community issue reporting system

Issue reporting systems are designed to enable community members to quickly and easily report issues to a town or city, such as graffiti, out streetlights, blocked culverts, parking enforcement, blocked rights of way, and much more. Effective reporting systems consist of an easy-to-use phone and website application, often paired with the ability to call a phone number to report an issue. On the back end, the incoming issues are disseminated to the appropriate department via a dedicated Town staff person. Spencer currently relies on community members calling or emailing the town to report issues. Although many residents are already active and vigilant in reporting issues, a dedicated reporting system removes barriers such as knowing which department to call, enabling residents to report issues to a single place and be assured that it will be directed to the correct department.

Spencer Cable Access Television (SCATV) is a valuable asset to the town that should be continually supported and used to communicate with residents. SCATV has amplified its community cable television services through a pivot to social media. The Spencer Cable Access has built a sizable audience on Facebook, and has created the affiliated Spencer Journal that posts articles on social mediato update the community on local events and town meetings. The town should look into leveraging SCATV's services to help shore up the town's capacity to build a social media presence.

OBJECTIVE:

Identify opportunities for and communicate across the region about recreational, cultural, and commercial opportunities in the town.

Spencer boasts numerous outdoor recreational opportunities such as the Spencer State Forest, Burncoat Pond Wildlife Sanctuary, and Howe State Park, as well as many other cultural and commercial amenities. The Town has an updated Open Space and Recreation Plan and has added several resources to its website that outline information about trails, parks, and waterbodies that people can visit in town. To ensure that the Town's recreational and commercial amenities support economic growth and development, Spencer should proactively advertise and highlight all that the Town has to offer, and build partnerships with local businesses, historical and cultural organizations.

ACTION ITEM 4.5

Build partnerships with local businesses and cultural organizations to co-sponsor events. Create sponsorship opportunities that allow businesses to contribute financially or in-kind (e.g., providing goods or services) in exchange for promotional benefits.

A great way to showcase Spencer's recreational amenities, businesses and cultural organizations is to host events, such as craft fairs, festivals, farmers markets, concerts, sports events, and other community events. During the Spencer Community



Photo: Mark Shea, Spencer Ckble Access

Workshop, participants noted a desire to see more of these types of events in town. Strategic partnerships and corporate sponsorships can provide financial support, reduce event costs, and foster a sense of community. Businesses gain exposure and goodwill, while the town benefits from enhanced event offerings and community participation.

Real-World Example: The town of Amherst, MA, partners with local businesses and the University of Massachusetts Amherst to sponsor events like the Amherst Block Party and the Amherst Arts Night Plus. These partnerships provide the necessary resources and support to host successful events while promoting local businesses.

ACTION ITEM 4.6

Use existing and new Town communication channels to advertise both Town sponsored and private events and create a townwide community calendar.

As Spencer builds new and improved communication channels it has an opportunity to use these channels to promote local businesses, organizations, and events. Spencer should create a centralized online community calendar and a robust marketing plan to promote events. Utilize social media, local newspapers, town websites, and newsletters to increase visibility and participation.

Real-World Example: Burlington, VT, has an effective community calendar managed independently through the Hello Burlington division of the Lake Champlain Chamber, which lists all local events including farmers markets, festivals, and cultural events. Their marketing strategy leverages social media, email campaigns, and partnerships with local media to reach a broad audience. Spencer can work with local organizations like the regional chamber of commerce or Discover Central Mass to create and manage an active community calendar and make Spencer events a more prominent regional feature.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

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Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



11

Energy & Environmental Resiliency



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

OVERVIEW

The Town of Spencer has already made strides toward increasing its energy efficiency and environmental resiliency. Notably, the Town was designated a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) community by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) in 2018. As part of the MVP process, the Town conducted a Community Resilience Building (CRB) workshop and procured the development of a Summary of Findings Report. This Report identifies the Town's top hazards and vulnerable areas as well as key climate adaptation strategies. The Town also began to update its 2019 Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) in the Fall of 2024 to identify measures that may reduce or prevent damage caused by natural hazards. The Town is also a Massachusetts designated Green Community, which opens doors to funding opportunities to implement energy efficiency measures. Additionally, the Town's General Bylaws and Zoning Bylaws contain special use regulations regarding open space development and renewable energy generation.[1] Evidently, the Town is performing its due diligence to enact energy and environmental resiliency measures. These efforts

Spencer has made progress toward planning for, and increasing its energy efficiency and environmental resiliency. This has made the Town eligible for State and Federal grant funding for implementation.

GLOSSARY

Resiliency:
the ability to recover quickly from adversity, challenges, or setbacks. It also involves adapting positively in the face of difficult circumstances, maintaining strength and flexibility over time

Emissions:
the release of gases typically as a by-product of human activities such as burning fossil fuels, industrial processes, or transportation. Greenhouse gas emissions include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxide, and sulfur dioxide which contribute to climate change and ozone depletion

Net Zero:
achieving a balance between the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere and the amount sequestered or offset. Net Zero can be achieved through use of clean energy, energy efficiency, reforestation, and carbon capture

Weatherization:
the process of improving a building's energy efficiency by enhancing insulation, sealing gaps, and upgrading systems to protect against harsh weather in order to reduce energy consumption, lower heating and cooling costs, improve comfort, and minimize environmental impacts

Renewable Energy:
energy derived from sunlight, wind, water, geothermal heat, and biomass. These sources do not deplete over time, making them renewable and and sustainable as they produce little to no green house gas emission. This form of energy is key to reducing envionmental impact

Decarbonization:
the process of reducing or eliminating carbon dioxide emissions from various sectors (energy, transportation, industry, agriculture, etc.) to combat climate change

48%
of survey respondents support the use and generation of renewable energy

30,971
metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalent - total residential building emissions in Spencer

31,468
metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalent - total commercial, institutional, & manufacturing buildings emissions

29,046
tons of carbon - Spencer's Carbon Sequestration Capacity

7.7%
estimated increase in total precipitation in Spencer by 2050

18-22
estimated days above 90 degrees Fahrenheit annually in Spencer by 2050



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

are a notable component of the Town's municipal operations and overall character that must be duly reflected in this Master Plan.

Resiliency is defined as the capacity to withstand and recover from difficulties. As global climate change continues to impact natural ecosystems, infrastructure, and human health and safety, communities' economies and policies are changing. Oftentimes, these changes include energy and environmental resiliency measures that are necessary to prevent, withstand, and recover from difficulties presented by global climate change.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:*

"More Solar Panels on roofs is fine, but cutting down trees to put up more is counterproductive to conserving the environment."

"Put solar over commercial parking lots."

"Green grants would be a good way to upgrade existing municipal buildings."

"[Prioritize] energy cost savings."

(Resilience Survey, 2024)**

***Comments edited for clarity.**
****Spencer Energy and Environmental Resiliency Survey**

For the purpose of this Chapter, the Town of Spencer's major greenhouse gas (GHG) sources have been grouped into the following four categories: transportation, energy and usage (residential, commercial, and industrial buildings), waste management, and agricultural and natural lands.[2] On the national, statewide, regional, and local levels, the transportation sector is the top source of GHG emissions. Emissions stemming from the transportation sector, however, are closely followed by emissions from the electric power sector. Notably, the commercial and residential buildings sector is the nation's top electricity user, making it the top source of indirect GHG emissions by electricity end-use.[3] According to a GHG emissions inventory conducted by Weston and Sampson for the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission's (CMRPC) Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan (GWPCAP), the Town of Spencer's usage of gasoline and diesel to power personal, commercial, and government vehicles is estimated to have resulted in 47,245.17 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (MT CO2e) in 2017. The usage of electricity to power residential, commercial, and industrial buildings in Spencer is estimated to have resulted in 17,854 MT CO2e in 2017.

Although these emissions contribute to global GHG emissions, the impacts are observed on a local level. For example, some difficulties presented by the amplification of the greenhouse effect which may have an increasing impact on Spencer include how changing weather patterns affect agricultural practices, how the rapid spread of invasive species may alter local ecosystems and decrease water and soil quality, and how instances of extreme heat or heavy rainfall may pose public health and safety concerns.

KEY FINDINGS/ PRIORITIES

THE TOWN OF SPENCER SHOULD CAPITALIZE ON OPPORTUNITIES TO MAINTAIN AND INCREASE ITS CAPAITY TO IMPROVE ITS ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCY.

Throughout the research for and the development of this Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter, one major key finding rose to the surface: the Town of Spencer is already planning for a more resilient future and should capitalize on opportunities to maintain and increase its capacity to implement change. As previously mentioned, the Town has undertaken various planning processes that highlight

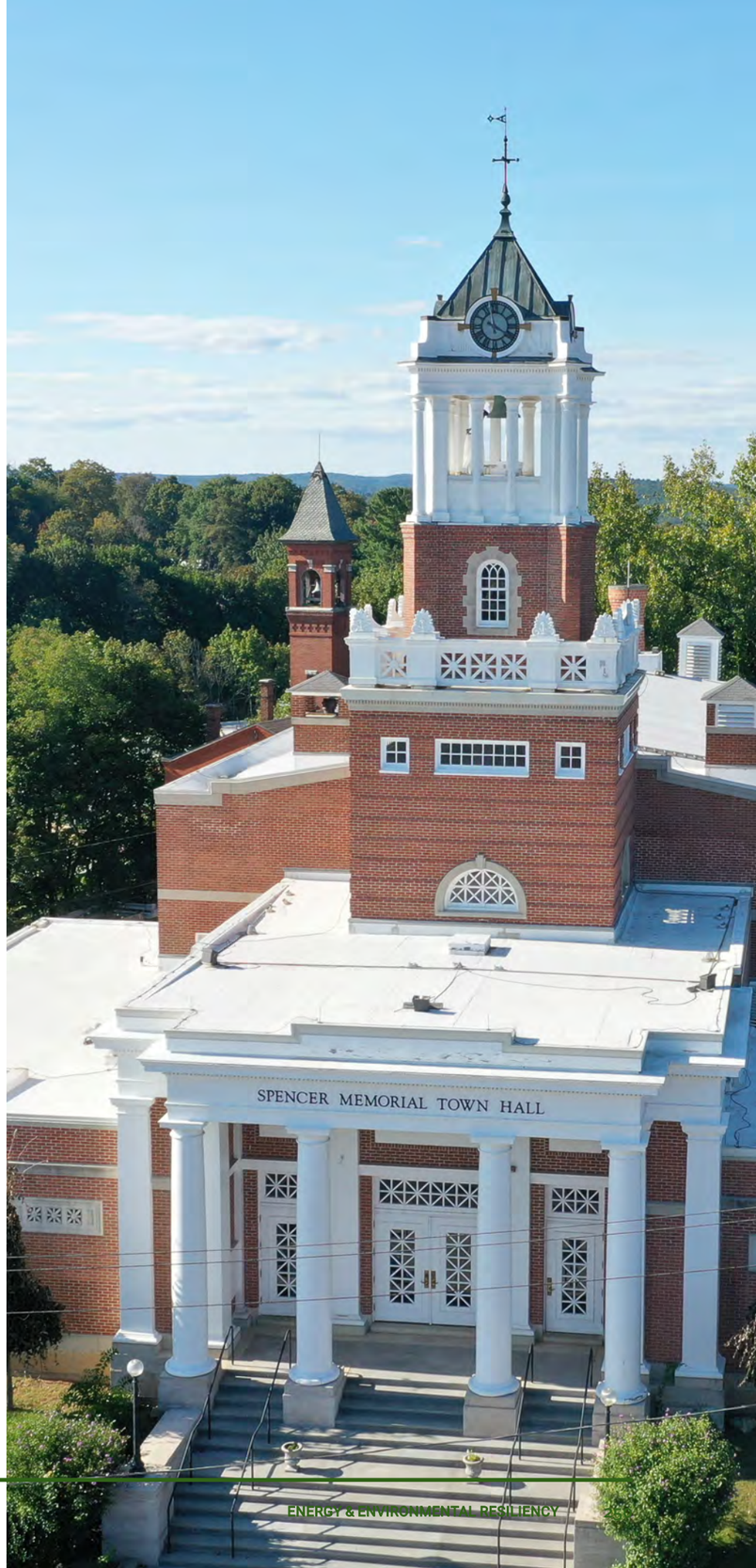




Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

areas of vulnerability and potential pathways towards efficiency, adaptation, and mitigation. Once completed and updated (as needed), these planning processes unlock the Town's eligibility for certain State and Federal grant funding, so that the implementation of efficiency, adaptation, and mitigation measures may be more accessible.

Spencer achieved Massachusetts Green Communities designation in February 2020, which makes it eligible for annual funding opportunities from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER). To achieve this designation, each municipality must implement five criterions, including passing zoning in designated locations for as-of-right siting of renewable or alternative energy facilities.[4] With its designation, Spencer received a designation grant of $162,800 to install infrared heating, lighting, mechanical insulation, idle right technology, and weatherization retrofits in municipal buildings such as the Town Hall, Fire Station, and Water Department. Since the designation grant, Spencer received a Green Communities competitive grant award in January 2023 to fund additional infrared heaters and weatherization retrofits in municipal buildings such as the Police Station, Fire Department, and Library.[5] Not only do these energy conservation measures reduce the Town's GHG emissions, but they save the Town a significant amount of money. To maintain its status as a Green Community, the Town must work with CMRPC to submit Annual Reports, which catalogues delivered fuel data (oil, propane, gasoline, diesel, natural gas), building stock changes, vehicle fleet changes, any zoning or permitting updates, and more. Spencer's participation in this Program is a key example of how the Town must continue to perform its due diligence to tap into opportunities that increase its energy and environmental resiliency.

Although the Town must maintain these planning documents to sustain access to funding opportunities, the Town should more so regard these plans as living documents that may be referenced throughout municipal planning efforts, from capital improvements to bylaw amendments. To truly capitalize on opportunities to increase local capacity for the implementation of energy and environmental resiliency measures, the Town should enhance its communication among local and regional stakeholders. For example, various communities within the Chicopee River Watershed's Ware River Subbasin may have uncovered similar vulnerabilities throughout their Community Resilience Building (CRB) workshop as part of the MVP planning process. Rather than compete against one another to implement priority adaptation strategies within their geopolitical boundaries, capacity may be pooled for regional planning and implementation efforts. The base of successful regional projects is rooted in meaningful communication and collaboration.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Accessible renewable energy that keeps us relatively independent of most major companies"

"STOP ground based solar farms."

(Resilience Survey, 2024)

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Rooftops and parking lots are logical locations for solar arrays, not open agricultural land and cleared forests."

(Resilience Survey, 2024)

EMISSIONS AT A GLANCE

Sector: Energy – Electricity & Usage

(Buildings: residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial)

Table 1: Community-wide Emissions Summary: Energy – Buildings & Electricity
Source: CMRPC Inventory (2022)

Table 2: Residential Buildings
Source: CMRPC Inventory (2022)

Table 3: Commercial, Institutional, and Manufacturing Buildings
Source: CMRPC Inventory (2022)

Table 4: Municipal Operations Emission Summary: Energy – Buildings & Electricity
Source: CMRPC Inventory (2022)

Table 5: Natural Gas
Source: Weston & Sampson, CMRPC GWPCAP (2024)

Table 6: Residential Fuel Oil Emissions
Source: Weston & Sampson, CMRPC GWPCAP (2024)

Table 7: Residential Electricity: Consumption & Transport & Delivery Emissions
Source: Weston & Sampson, CMRPC GWPCAP (2024)

Table 8: Commercial and Industrial Electricity: Consumption & Transport & Delivery Emissions
Source: Weston & Sampson, CMRPC GWPCAP (2024)

Community-wide Emissions Summary	Total Emissions (MT CO2e) (2017)
Residential Buildings	30,971
Commercial, Institutional, & Manufacturing Buildings	31,468
Construction	155,322
Total Stationary Energy Emissions	**269,728**

Residential Buildings	Total Emissions (MT CO2e) (2017)
Electricity	8,685
Electricity T & D Losses	445
Fuel Oil	15,366
Natural Gas	5,094
Natural Gas Distribution Losses	1,381
Total Residential Building Emissions	**30,971**

Commercial, Institutional, and Manufacturing Buildings	Total Emissions (MT CO2e) (2017)
Electricity	8,394
Electricity T & D Losses	430
Fuel Oil	453
Natural Gas	14,335
Natural Fas Distribution Losses	3,886
Off-Road (Various Fuels)	3,970
Total Commercial, Institutional, and Manufacturing Buildings Emissions	**31,468**

Municipal Operations Emission Summary	Total Emissions (MT CO2e) (2017)
Stationary Energy	843

Residential Fuel Oil Emissions	Total Emissions (MT CO2) (2017)
Single-Family Detached	11,728.47
Single-Family Attached	201.06
Multi-Family (2-4 Units)	2,556.02
Multi-Family (5+ Units)	755.40
Mobile Homes	30.58
Total Residential Fuel Oil Emissions	**15,271.53**

Residential Electricity: Consumption & Transport & Delivery Emissions	Total (2017)
Residential Electricity Consumption	39,208,000 kWh
Residential Electricity Grid Loss	2,010,132.96 kWh
Residential Electricity Consumption Emissions	8,636.94 MT CO2
Residential Electricity Transport & Delivery Emissions	442.80 MT CO2
Total Residential Electricity Emissions	**9,079.74 MT CO2**

Commercial and Industrial Electricity: Consumption & Transport & Delivery Emissions	Total Emissions (2017)
C & I Electricity Consumption	37,893,000 kWh
C & I Electricity Grid Loss	1,942,714.96 kWh
C & I Electricity Consumption Emissions	8,347.27 MT CO2
C & I Electricity Transport & Delivery Emissions	427.95 MT CO2
Total Commercial and Industrial Electricity Emissions	**8,775.22 MT CO2**

Sector: Transportation

Table 9: Passenger Vehicle Emissions
Source: Weston & Sampson, CMRPC GWPCAP (2024)

Table 10: Commercial Vehicle Emissions
Source: Weston & Sampson, CMRPC GWPCAP (2024)

Table 11: Government Vehicle Emissions
Source: Weston & Sampson, CMRPC GWPCAP (2024)

Sector: Waste

Table 12: Waste & Materials Management Total Emissions
Source: CMRPC Inventory (2022)

Sector: Agricultural & Natural Lands

Table 13: Carbon Sequestration Capacity
Source: Weston & Sampson, CMRPC GWPCAP (2024)

Passenger Vehicle Emissions	Total Emissions (MT CO2e) (2017)
Gasoline Emissions	41,527
FLEXFUEL Emissions	3,193
Hybrid Emissions	758
Plug-In Hybrid Emissions	0.30
Electric Emissions	15
Diesel Emissions	836.38
Total Passenger Vehicle Emissions	**46,329.68**

Commercial Vehicle Emissions	Total Emissions (MT CO2e) (2017)
Gasoline Emissions	3,023
FLEXFUEL Emissions	403
Hybrid Emissions	13
Plug-In Hybrid Emissions	N/A
Electric Emissions	N/A
Diesel Emissions	1,631.24
Total Commercial Vehicle Emissions	**5,070.24**

Government Vehicle Emissions	Total Emissions (MT CO2e) (2017)
Gasoline Emissions	165
FLEXFUEL Emissions	24
Hybrid Emissions	N/A
Plug-In Hybrid Emissions	N/A
Electric Emissions	N/A
Diesel Emissions	62.55
Total Government Vehicle Emissions	**251.55**

Spencer's Waste & Materials Management Total Emissions (2017)	1,946 MT CO2e

Spencer's Carbon Sequestration Capacity (2017)	29,046 tons of carbon

Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access





CLIMATE CHANGE PROJECTIONS IN SPENCER

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) maintains a Climate Change Projections Dashboard for all municipalities within the Commonwealth. These projections include extreme temperature and precipitation projections out to the years 2030, 2050, 2070, and 2090 on a watershed or municipal level. These projections are correlated to these specific areas of interest under a future warming scenario developed by Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 8.5, a comparatively high greenhouse gas emissions scenario, which is a standard scenario accepted by the climate modeling community and has informed the United States National Climate Assessments (NCAs).[6]

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Plant Trees to replace the ones you allowed to clear cut for housing development or Solar installations."

"Mini turbines in the median of 49."

Joining in a pool of municipal to get lower rates. Many towns already do this. If you want to make your tax base happy this should be a priority."

(Resilience Survey, 2024)

Similarly, the EEA also maintains the Resilient Mass Climate and Hazards Viewer which offers users the same climate change projections through a map viewer. This tool offers projections for precipitation, temperature, sea level rise, and stream temperature and thermal habitat. The Resilient Mass Viewer also offers data layers related to coastal flood hazards, historic flood hazards, and demographics.

EXTREME TEMPERATURES

The EEA Climate Change Projections Dashboard estimates that by the year 2050, the Town of Spencer will experience eighteen (18) to twenty-two (22) days above 90 degrees Fahrenheit annually. Additionally, by 2050 the Town of Spencer will experience four (4) to six (6) days above 95 degrees Fahrenheit. The Resilient Mass Viewer depicts that by the year 2050, the Town will experience an up to 6.30% increase in both annual maximum temperatures and annual average temperatures. In terms of extreme cold temperatures, the dashboard indicates that by 2050 Spencer will experience an average minimum temperature of 6.30 degrees Fahrenheit. However, the viewer



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

indicates that by the year 2050, the Town of Spencer is not likely to experience any significant cold waves.[7]

PRECIPITATION, FLOODING, & STREAM TEMPERATURES

As shown on the Dashboard and the Resilient Mass Viewer, the EEA estimates that by the year 2050, the Town will experience a 7.7% increase in total precipitation and a 17.30% increase in the maximum precipitation. Additionally, by 2050 Spencer is projected to experience a 12.20% increase in storm rainfall that falls within the 99th percentile. The Resilient Mass Viewer also displays various historic flood zones in Spencer. Specifically, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has documented various 1.0% annual chance of flooding zones throughout the Town, such as nearby Turkey Hill Brook and Stiles Reservoir. The Turkey Hill Brook is also estimated to experience significant increases in temperature by the year 2050, placing it in the "warm" thermal class.[8]

These climate projections and associated hazards align with the projections for the Central Massachusetts Region included in the 2022 Massachusetts Climate Assessment, which indicates that Central Massachusetts is particularly vulnerable to increasing temperatures and extreme precipitation, including associated drought and flooding. As the assessment discusses, "an understanding of the current and future impacts of climate change allows community decision-makers to best tailor adaptation plans to meet the specific challenges faced in this Region." For example, this is compared to the Boston Harbor Region, North and South Shore Region, and the Eastern Inland Region which are more prone to coastal flooding as a result of sea-level rise. These areas may also be more vulnerable to tropical cyclones, which could increase in frequency by 2050 and result in catastrophic damages from high wind, heavy rainfall, and intense storm surges. Although the Central Region isn't specifically faced with these challenges, coastal flooding and tropical cyclones may lead to residential displacement, leading to east to west climate migration.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"The current state of our infrastructure is in dire need of urgent attention and maintenance. The utilization of liquid salt on roadways during winter months has proven to be highly detrimental."

(Resilience Survey, 2024)

Regional Climate Outlook

2030	2050	2070	2090
NEAR TERM The summer mean temperature could increase by 3.6°F from the historical period (1950-2013), worsening stress on electric transmission and utility distribution infrastructure.	**MID-CENTURY** The 1 percent annual chance river flood could be two times more likely to occur, increasing Blackstone River and other river flood risk.	**MID-LATE CENTURY** There could be 38 more days above 90°F, contributing to extreme heat health impacts.	**END OF CENTURY** The historical 10 percent annual chance daily rainfall event (2.8 to 4 inches) could occur five times more frequently.

Figure 1: Central MA Regional Outlook, MA Climate Assessment
Source: 2022 Massachusetts Climate Change Assessment: Regional Summaries, P. RS30



Photo: Town of Spencer, Spencer Cable Access

GOALS AND STRATEGIES SUMMARY

GOAL 1

IMPROVE AND EXPAND MUNICIPAL RENEWABLE ENERGY UTILIZATION AND GENERATION

OBJECTIVE: Explore opportunities for renewable energy utilization and generation

ACTION ITEM 1.1 ACTION ITEM 1.2

GOAL 2

IMPROVE ENERGY EFFICIENCY OF RESIDENTIAL, MUNICIPAL, COMMERCIAL, AND INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS

OBJECTIVE: Promote and implement energy efficiency measures

ACTION ITEM 2.1 ACTION ITEM 2.2 ACTION ITEM 2.3

GOAL 3

ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT LOCAL AND REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION DECARBONIZATION EFFORTS

OBJECTIVE: Promote the transition to hybrid and electric vehicles

ACTION ITEM 3.1

GOAL 4

INCREASE ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS FOR RESIDENTS

OBJECTIVE: Increase access and utilization of transit options

ACTION ITEM 4.1 ACTION ITEM 4.2

OBJECTIVE: Increase access and utilization of active transportation options

ACTION ITEM 4.3

OBJECTIVE: Leverage existing mapping efforts to promote connections between active transportation and transit networks

ACTION ITEM 4.4

GOAL 5

REDUCE AND UTILIZE WASTE GENERATED

OBJECTIVE: Reduce and utilize organic waste

ACTION ITEM 5.1 ACTION ITEM 5.2

OBJECTIVE: Increase lifecycle of material produced, used, and disposed of

ACTION ITEM 5.3 ACTION ITEM 5.4

GOAL 6

CONSERVE AND ENHANCE NATURAL LAND AND WOODLANDS

OBJECTIVE: Promote the resiliency benefits of natural lands and woodlands

ACTION ITEM 6.1

GOAL 7

INCREASE THE RESILIENCY AND VIABILITY OF AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS

OBJECTIVE: Improve on-farm soil and livestock management

ACTION ITEM 7.1 ACTION ITEM 7.2

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

GOAL 1

IMPROVE AND EXPAND MUNICIPAL RENEWABLE ENERGY UTILIZATION AND GENERATION

Rural communities in Central Massachusetts are targeted for renewable energy generation sites due to the relatively level topography, vast amounts of undeveloped land, and comparably cheaper real estate costs. In the Town of Spencer alone, there are 23 solar energy sites, comprising 350 acres of Spencer's nearly 22,000 acres of land. Notably, three properties in Spencer that previously participated in the Massachusetts Chapter 61 Program have been developed into solar facilities and eleven of Spencer's 23 solar facilities are situated on tax-exempt land.[10] Evidently, the Town of Spencer offers a prime location to solar development companies, and although this offers economic and environmental benefits to the municipality and its residents, the Town must also prioritize sustainable and efficient land use.

By installing renewable energy systems, such as solar, wind, water, and geothermal, local governments can achieve substantial environmental, economic, and social benefits. Utilizing and generating renewable energy supports the overall climate by substituting conventional, greenhouse gas (GHG) emitting sources of energy. According to a GHG emissions inventory conducted by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) in 2022, the energy used to support the Town of Spencer's municipal operations contributed roughly 843 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (MT CO2e) in 2017. Not only are renewable energy sources non-emitters of GHGs, but they are also generally non-emitters of air pollutants, such as particulate matter, sulfur oxide, and nitrogen oxide. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), "fossil fuel combustion for electricity generation accounts for 67 percent of the nation's sulfur oxide (SOx) emissions [and] 23 percent of the nation's nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions..." So, in addition to contributing to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, the combustion of fossil fuels for electricity can lead to smog, acid rain, and health disparities, such as asthma.[11] In addition to reducing factors that may lead to health issues, the substitution of conventional energy sources with renewables allows for a more dependable, local energy supply to meet a community's demand. As generation increases, so do local clean energy jobs and the opportunity to sell excess energy for profit.

Despite the multitude of benefits, renewable energy generation also poses a formidable land use challenge as the installation of such systems increases municipal impervious surface coverage and disrupts local ecosystems. Specifically, impervious surfaces are materials that do not allow the passage of water, such as pavement or buildings. According to the EPA, "as impervious surfaces increase, stormwater runoff increases in quantity, speed, temperature, and pollutant load." This stormwater runoff eventually reaches surface water or soil, then dispersing into groundwater. Spencer residents fully acknowledge the land use and environmental challenges that renewable energy systems pose; according to the Spencer Master Plan's Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter's public survey results, although nearly 50% of respondents prioritize improving and expanding municipal renewable energy utilization and generation, many respondents also commented that they do not want to see anymore solar development on prime open spaces and farmland in Town. To strike a balance between energy efficiency and sustainable

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"[Use] green grants to upgrade existing municipal buildings."

(Resilience Survey, 2024)





Figure 2: Solar Fields at Spencer Transfer Station. Source: MassMapper GIS

land use, the Town of Spencer may consider exploring opportunities for creative renewable energy utilization and generation.

OBJECTIVE:

Explore opportunities for creative renewable energy utilization and generation while prioritizing sustainable and efficient land use.

Utilizing renewable energy does not necessarily mean the energy source must be within Town boundaries. Purchasing green power, such as renewable energy certificates (RECs), allows energy consumers to effectively own and utilize a renewable energy source without dealing with implementation or management. Alternatively, renewable energy generation opportunities exist that prioritize sustainable and efficient land use, such as pairing solar fields with agricultural operations or developing solar systems over parking lots, capped landfills, and brownfield sites.

Notably, the Town of Spencer already capitalizes on unique methods of promoting and generating renewable energy. The Town rents one Town-owned property to a renewable energy company and purchases renewable energy from a facility in Palmer. The property that the Town rents for renewable energy production is the municipal transfer station, a portion of which has been developed into solar fields. In addition to the earnings from rent, the Town also receives payment through a payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreement based upon a factor of the megawatts produced at the facility. Additionally, the Town purchases 25% of the energy generated at a facility in Palmer and receives 25% of the energy credits in return.[12] These credits typically cover more than the cost of the municipal utility bill, which is noteworthy to consider if the Town chooses to pursue additional energy credits and green energy generally. In fact, facilities such as the Spencer Senior Center are completely covered by this agreement; meanwhile, facilities such as the wastewater treatment plant necessitate much more energy, especially considering active construction projects. Finally, although it is not Town-owned, it is worth noting that the Town of Spencer is home to one of two of Jordan Dairy Farm's anaerobic digestors. This digestor takes in manure and organic food waste to produce renewable electricity.[13] These techniques serve as examples of innovative approaches to municipal energy resiliency.

ACTION ITEM 1.1

Consider municipal purchasing of green power, such as through renewable energy certificates (RECs)

The majority of green power supply options involve utilizing renewable energy certificates (RECs). RECs allow electricity consumers to support renewable energy generation without purchasing and installing their own equipment. Each REC represents a specific amount of electricity that is produced and delivered to the power grid by a renewable resource, such as wind or solar. Once purchased, RECs cannot be sold but only "retired" which prevents someone else from claiming it. So, RECs are effectively the currency of the renewable energy market.[14]

With RECs on hand, various green-power supply options become available. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there is a broad range of supply options, each with unique characteristics that must be weighed by the consumer to determine which meet their financial and environmental needs.[15] Municipalities can work directly with "utilities, local businesses, non-profit groups, residents, state agencies and green power marketers and brokers to purchase green power directly or through Renewable Energy Certificates." The EPA offers local governments resources to aid in determining which green power supply options may be most effective for their community. Specifically, the EPA's Local Government Climate and Energy Strategy Series exists to give "a straightforward overview of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions strategies that local governments can use to achieve economic, environmental, social, and human health benefits." The series contains a guide for local green power procurement, which provides readers with an overview of green power products, the steps involved in developing procurement programs, and strategies for funding green power purchases. Moreover, the guide also provides local governments with policy mechanisms that may be leveraged

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Use renewable energy over polluting fossil fuels."

"Require solar whenever feasible and all solar projects as an accessory use should be encouraged"

(Resilience Survey, 2024)

Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access





to support green power purchases and case studies of local governments that have implemented comprehensive green power procurement programs.[16]

For example, the City of Bellingham, Washington put forth a city council resolution in 2006 that committed the city to purchasing 100% green power in 2007. This resolution also endorsed the Bellingham Green Power Community Challenge and authorized participation in the EPA's Green Power Partnership. In addition to purchasing 100% green power for municipal operations, 14.50% of the community's local businesses and residents are also purchasing green power. Overall, Bellingham purchases 76 million kWh of green power annually, which reduces carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions by 12,000 metric tons a year.[17]

ACTION ITEM 1.2

Explore opportunities to develop municipal renewable energy generation sites, such as through solar canopies over parking lots

In May 2024, the Town of Spencer approved a solar bylaw amendment to make allowable both agrivoltaic solar, the co-location of agricultural operations beneath or between rows of solar panels, and solar canopies, or solar over parking lots.[18] Similar to ground-mounted solar systems, solar canopies are built over parking lots at a height that allows cars to park underneath them. Solar canopies take advantage of spaces where there is already impervious land cover and little to no shade from nearby trees to avoid implementing additional impervious surface coverage or cutting trees.

According to land use data from the Massachusetts Geographical Information Systems Bureau (MassGIS), the Town of Spencer's land area is 11.50% developed, 4.72% impervious, and 61.30% forested. In addition to avoiding additional development, impervious surface coverage, and tree cutting, there are many other notable benefits of implementing solar over parking lots. Studies have found that many people prefer parking their cars underneath solar canopies since they also protect their vehicles from heat, rain, and snow.[19] In the future, Spencer may consider opportunities to implement solar canopies on municipal properties, such as the Water Department or Highway Department, while supporting efforts by private property owners, such as commercial or industrial businesses, to implement solar canopies.

Other opportunities for renewable energy generation that consider sustainable and efficient land use include solar over capped landfills and brownfield sites. Both capped landfills and brownfield sites are cheaper than completely undeveloped lands as they are generally less desirable or equipped for other types of development or uses. However, environmental remediation and engineering costs can lead to higher implementation costs.[20] As the Town of Spencer considers implementing solar canopies and solar panel systems over capped landfills and brownfield sites, the Town should pursue funding programs and other financial incentives. For example, the Massachusetts Solar Loan program to partners state and local governments with local banks, credit unions, solar installers, and other stakeholders to offer reduced costs of ownership and expanded access to loan products.[21]

GOAL 2

IMPROVE ENERGY EFFICIENCY OF RESIDENTIAL, MUNICIPAL, COMMERCIAL, AND INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS IN SPENCER

Energy, specifically electricity, is an integral component of every modern, functioning community. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), when examining greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produced by the generation of electricity from the standpoint of end-use sectors, industrial, commercial, and residential buildings and operations utilize the most electricity and therefore contribute the most GHG emissions from the electricity sector. Notably, electricity usage by the transportation sector is on the rise due to electric vehicles but is still relatively low compared to other end-use sectors.[22]

Emission inventories for the Town of Spencer from CMRPC and Weston & Sampson (2024) mirror this sentiment from the EPA and demonstrate that stationary energy usage in Spencer generates more GHG emissions than hybrid, plug-in hybrid, and electric vehicles. Specifically, according to Weston and Sampson's estimates from the Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan (GWPCAP), electricity consumption from the Town of Spencer's residential, commercial, and industrial buildings generated 9,064.89 MT CO2 in 2017; meanwhile, hybrid, plug-in hybrid, and electric passenger, commercial, and government vehicles in Spencer contributed 786.30 MT CO2e that same year.

Notably, according to CMRPC's 2022 GHG inventory for the Region, natural gas and fuel oil consumption by Spencer's residential, commercial, and industrial buildings contributed an estimated 40,515 MT CO2e in 2017. These emissions indicate an immense opportunity for buildings in Spencer to improve their efficiency and then pivot away from non-renewable energy sources. It is worth noting that according to Weston and Sampson's inventory, natural gas usage by Spencer's residential, commercial, and industrial buildings contributed an estimated 19,430.80 MT CO2e in 2017 while residential fuel oil consumption contributed an estimated 15,271.53 MT CO2e that same year. The Weston and Sampson inventory did not include emissions estimated for Town-level



commercial and industrial fuel oil consumption.

According to the Spencer Master Plan's Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter's public survey results, nearly 70% of respondents indicated that they support improving the efficiency of residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial buildings in Spencer. Additionally, some respondents commented that they would prefer to see the Town of Spencer invest in improving the efficiency of the buildings that already exist, therefore decreasing the local energy demand, before constructing new infrastructure or renewable energy generation sites. Energy efficiency measures may include weatherization measures such as sealing air leaks, updating insulation, or installing more efficient windows and doors. Other energy efficiency measures may include the buildings' heating and cooling systems, which typically utilize the most energy out of any building operation. Overall, the United States Department of Energy estimates that out of the $2,000 the average American spends paying for energy annually, an estimated $200 to $400 could be going to waste from drafts, air leaks, and outdated heating and cooling systems.[23]

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Install heat pumps in public buildings. This will be a good example for residents to follow suit. Lead by example and show support for protecting the environment and being energy efficient. Also focus on renewable energy over polluting fossil fuels."

(Resilience Survey, 2024)

OBJECTIVE: Promote and implement (as possible) residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial energy efficiency measures, such as weatherization

According to Weston and Sampson's greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory conducted for CMRPC's Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan (GWPCAP), Spencer's residential, commercial, and industrial buildings consumed 42,997,300 kWh of electricity in 2017. This electricity consumption led to 3,952,847.92 kWh of grid loss from its transport and delivery and a total of 17,079.12 MT CO2e emissions in 2017.[24] Overall, these staggering values represent an opportunity for improved energy efficiency so as to decrease electricity demand and associated grid loss and GHG emissions.

Beyond the environmental impact, energy efficiency measures can have an immense economic impact. The EPA's Local Government Climate and Energy Strategy Series contains a guide related to "Energy Efficiency in Local Government Operations."

End Use	% of Whole
Space Heating	42
Lighting	15
Cooling	11
Ventilation	10
Water Heating	8
Miscellaneous	7
Refrigeration	3
Computers	3
Office Equipment	1
Cooking	1
Total	**100**

Figure 3: Energy Consumption in Local Government Buildings. Source: EPA's Local Government Climate and Energy Strategy Series, Energy Efficiency in Local Government Operations.

This guide describes the benefits of energy efficiency measures for local government operations, approaches, policy mechanisms, financing opportunities and funding programs, and case studies. Among the benefits of energy efficiency measures described in this guide, the EPA notes that energy can account for as much as 10% of local government's annual operating budget. To maximize cost savings, energy efficiency measures should be focused on buildings' HVAC and lighting, which typically demand more electricity than other uses, such as office equipment, cooking, and computers. The table below shows the percentage of the total amount of average energy used annually by local government-owned commercial buildings. Although this table was developed based on municipal operations, it may also be used to inform conceptions regarding energy usage in residential, commercial, and industrial buildings.

ACTION ITEM 2.1

Develop or collect and then distribute educational materials about incentives and benefits for weatherization

One major avenue for increasing the energy efficiency of buildings is implementing weatherization retrofits. Weatherization refers to protecting buildings' interiors from outdoor, weather-related elements, such as moisture, wind, and extreme temperatures. Massachusetts residents and municipalities have multiple weatherization retrofit funding assistance programs available to them, such as the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) and the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) Green Communities Program.

The WAP provides eligible low-income households with full-scale residential weatherization services. This program is funded by an annual grant from the United States Department of Energy and is administered by local agencies.[25] For the Town of Spencer, the WAP is administered by the Worcester Community Action Council (WCAC). Each applicant could work with the WCAC to set up an in-depth inspection by a certified energy auditor to assess the home's energy conservation needs and the safety



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

and efficiency of the primary heating system. To promote this opportunity to residents, the Town may consider working with the WCAC to develop informational mailers or digital infographics.[26]

The Green Communities Division helps Massachusetts municipalities reduce long-term energy costs and strengthen their local economies. The Town of Spencer is a designated Green Community and has already taken advantage of the resulting opportunities. Spencer has received over $160,000 to fund the weatherization, infrared heaters, lighting, mechanical insulation, and idle right technology in municipal facilities such as the Town Hall, Fire Station, and Water Department. As Spencer remains a Green Community, so do opportunities for funding assistance for additional weatherization measures.[27]

ACTION ITEM 2.2

Pursue municipal decarbonization efforts through infrastructural improvements that consider and incorporate resiliency measures

The Town of Spencer's advancement to its energy and environmental resiliency is demonstrated by the support for renewable energy, use of the Massachusetts Green Communities program, and its municipal planning efforts, such as the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program. As part of the MVP planning process, the Town conducted a Community Resilience Building (CRB) workshop and developed a Summary of Findings Report. This Report identifies the Town's top vulnerabilities and potential climate adaptation strategies. These strategies may be leveraged whenever the Town is considering infrastructural improvements, expansions, or additions to ensure the Town is investing in resilient infrastructure. The categories of infrastructure that are examined in the MVP Report include bridges and culverts, drinking water infrastructure, and wastewater infrastructure. To increase the resilience of these categories of infrastructure, the Report recommends taking inventory of the Town bridges and culverts, performing a risk assessment at the wastewater treatment facility, and assessing opportunities for green infrastructure. To pursue the implementation of more resilient infrastructure, the Town of Spencer may consider the annual MVP Action Grant opportunity, which the Town is eligible for as a result of completing the MVP planning process.[28]

The Town also updated its Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) in 2019, which identifies measures that may reduce or prevent damage caused by natural hazards. Although as of Fall 2024 the Town is pursuing an update to this planning document so it may remain active and up-to-date, the 2019 Spencer HMP serves as building block to identifying how natural hazards have and may pose a threat to the communities' critical infrastructure and vulnerable populations. The categories of infrastructure that are examined in the HMP include emergency response facilities, non-emergency response facilities (utilities, water supply, town facilities), dams, and facilities in need of protection, such as facilities for vulnerable populations (elderly, youth, Massachusetts-designated Environmental Justice areas) and new developments. As a result of this planning process, the Town of Spencer has, and will continue to have, a matrix of priority mitigation strategies at their disposal that directly considers resilient infrastructure.

ACTION ITEM 2.3

Explore implementing geothermal heat pumps at Town buildings

Geothermal heat pump systems use the earth as a heat source and sink, drawing heat from the earth during colder weather and storing heat belowground during warmer weather. Optimizing geothermal heat pumps within municipal buildings would effectively slash its energy demand and consumption, decreasing associated costs and emissions. Therefore, a building that supports a geothermal heat pump system is already significantly more efficient than a building with a conventional HVAC system. Geothermal heat pump systems can be used in both rural and urban environments for single homes or businesses, or for an entire community. Community and district scale geothermal heating and cooling systems may involve many continuous pipes that contribute to a larger network of underground heat collectors. However, it is critical to consider potential geographic and geological factors that may cause maintenance issues, such as the persistence of rust. Nonetheless, not only would implementing these systems on a larger scale decrease electricity demand and associated GHG emissions, but they are also more reliable during peak demand than traditional HVAC systems.[29]



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

GOAL 3

ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT LOCAL AND REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION DECARBONIZATION EFFORTS

According to Weston and Sampson's greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory from CMRPC's Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan (GWPCAP), the Town of Spencer's transportation sector emitted an estimated 51,651.50 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (MT CO2e) in 2017. This includes emissions from the use of personal vehicles, commercial vehicles, and municipal vehicles, and aligns with CMRPC in-house estimates for that same year. The GWPCAP inventory delineates that most of the GHG emissions from Spencer's transportation sector stem from personal vehicle usage. Specifically, nearly 90% of Spencer's transportation sector's GHG emissions stem from personal vehicles, while nearly 10% stem from commercial vehicles, and only 0.50% stem from municipal vehicles. On a local, regional, statewide, and national level, personal vehicles are the lead emitter of GHG emissions.[30]

For these reasons, the objectives and actions included under this goal of this chapter support transportation decarbonization efforts through fuel-switching. However, this section acknowledges that a priority climate action strategy for the region, state, and country should be the prioritization of public transit systems. The predominance of car-centric communities and cultures perpetuates anthropogenic climate and air pollution and negates the needs of transportation disadvantaged populations. So, the transportation section of this Chapter also highlights the need to invest in alternative transportation options while supporting fuel-switching efforts. According to the Spencer Master Plan's Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter's public survey results, it may be assumed that Spencer residents would prefer to see more investments concentrated towards improving and expanding transportation alternatives, such as transit, than fuel-switching efforts. Specifically, just under 45% of survey respondents support the goal of encouraging and supporting local and regional decarbonization efforts, while over 24% remained neutral. Nonetheless, the transportation sector's decarbonization is a critical component of climate pollution mitigation.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"The free use of buses to and from Worcester is wonderful and access information should be much more freely available."

"We need extensive walking trails or alternative trails for other modes of transportation other than cars."

(Resilience Survey, 2024)

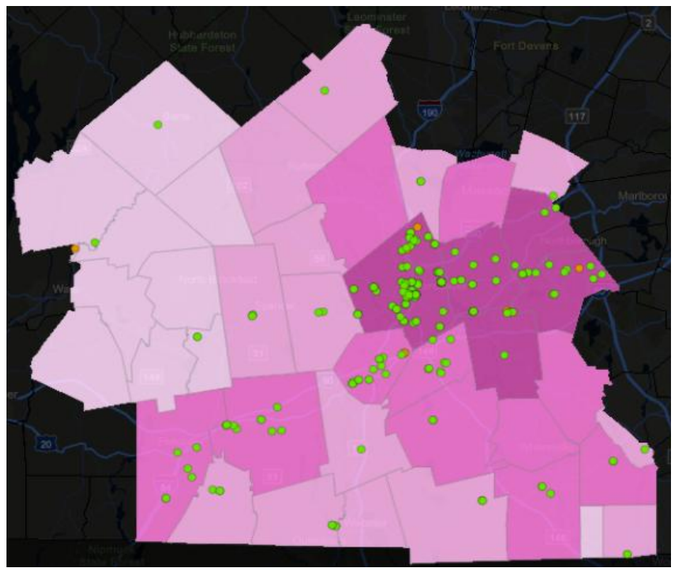


Figure 4: Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization Region EV Charging Stations. Source: CMMPO EV Charging Station Dashboard

For more information about goals related to transportation in Spencer, please refer to the Transportation Chapter of this Master Plan; for more information about transportation in the south/central Massachusetts, please refer to the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization's (CMMPO) 2024 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), 2050 Connections; and, for more information about transportation-related climate action strategies, please refer to the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission's (CMRPC) Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan (GWPCAP). Overall, the goals, objectives, and actions included in this section of the Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter support this Master Plan's Transportation Chapter's goals, the CMMPO's 2050 Connections' goals, and the transportation sector goals included in the GWPCAP.

OBJECTIVE: Prioritize supporting the transition to hybrid and electric vehicles.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts supports the transition to hybrid and electric vehicles on the personal, commercial, and municipal levels. The CMRPC Region alone has nearly 250 electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, most of which are concentrated within and around Worcester and within CMRPC's northeast and southeast sub-regions (notably, the towns of Shrewsbury, Northborough, Westborough, and Grafton). As shown on the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization's (CMMPO) EV Charging Station Dashboard, there are noticeably fewer charging stations within CMRPC's western sub-region.[31] Although this may reflect smaller populations, distributing additional charging infrastructure in this area would support rural equity. State funding opportunities are available to increase the installation of EV charging infrastructure, such as the Massachusetts Electric Vehicle Incentives Program's (MassEVIP) incentives for workplace and fleet charging.[32] Other methods to support personal and commercial fuel-switching efforts may include promoting incentives for the purchase of hybrid and electric vehicles. For example, the Massachusetts Offers Rebates for Electric Vehicles (MOR-EV) Program aims to reduce GHG emissions and air pollution by offering rebates to consumers who register their on-road zero emission vehicles.[33]

ACTION ITEM 3.1

Assess the conditions and utilization of existing EV chargers in Spencer and consider the efficacy of implementing additional charging infrastructure

The populations of Worcester County and the Town of Spencer are rising, and according to population projections from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and CMRPC, are projected to continue to increase. As populations rise, so do vehicle miles traveled (VMT), or "the amount of travel for all vehicles in a geographic region over a given period of time, typically a one-year period." According to data from MassDOT, despite a drop in travel due to COVID-19, the Region's VMT is at an all-time high. To mitigate the emissions from this influx in single-use vehicle ridership, the Town of Spencer, along with the region and the State, may consider supporting shifts to hybrid and electric vehicles by increasing access to charging stations in Town.

Hybrid and electric vehicles, and their related charging infrastructure, are critical assets in rural communities like Spencer, which are home to 20% of Americans and nearly 70% of America's road miles. Rural residents drive more than urban residents, as their destinations are further apart, and they often have limited access to transit services. For example, according to the GHG emissions inventory conducted for the Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan (GWPCAP), the Town of Spencer's gasoline miles traveled for 2017 were 99,478,036 miles, while the City of Worcester's gasoline miles traveled for 2017 were 1,020,739,216 miles.[35] Dividing these miles by 2020 population counts from the United States

Census, each Spencer resident traveled 8,295.36 miles while each Worcester resident traveled 4,942.61 miles in 2017.[36] Evidently, rural residents incur higher fuel and maintenance costs on their personal vehicles. So, fuel switching through the promotion and acquisition of hybrid and electric vehicles provides a means to reduce transportation-related expenses while also reducing environmental impact.[37]

The Town of Spencer has three electric vehicle charging stations: one in the parking lot of the Town Hall and two in the parking lot of the Post Office. Each is open to the public 24 hours a day, which is key to maximizing usage.[38] Testing the chargers to ensure they are functioning is important for safety and the effectiveness of charging different EV models. The Town may also consider tracking the utilization of these chargers to determine if promoting their availability would be beneficial. Promotion could include sharing a link to the CMMPO EV Charging Dashboard on their town website and social media pages. If utilization increases or is already high, the Town may consider assessing whether other types of chargers may be beneficial to residents and visitors. In determining the number and types of chargers needed, the Town may consider working with CMRPC or local stakeholders to pursue funding or technical assistance for the implementation of additional charging stations. Technical assistance may include referencing technical guidance documents such as the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Project Planning Checklist for EV infrastructure in rural areas.[39] In terms of potential locations, a charging station along Route 31 may be beneficial as this is a north-south state highway running from Dudley, through Spencer, to the New Hampshire border. For example, both the Spencer Senior Center and the Richard Sugden Public Library are located along Route 31 and would provide 24-hour public access to future charging stations.



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

GOAL 4

INCREASE ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS FOR SPENCER RESIDENTS

According to the Spencer Master Plan's Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter's public survey results, nearly 60% of respondents support the goal of increasing access to alternative transportation options, such as transit and active transportation. Notably, over 25% of respondents remained neutral. In response to this goal, multiple respondents commented with specific references to transit, such as the need for increased access to transit, especially for older adults. Comments from respondents also indicated a general concern for the condition of roadways and vehicle infrastructure over pedestrian and bicyclist accommodations. These respondents generally acknowledged that in a more rural community such as Spencer, residents' destinations are often far apart, and most residents have access to a personal vehicle. As discussed in the Transportation Chapter of this Master Plan, improved pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure should be considered in downtown Spencer so as to increase access to in-town destinations and encourage utilization of transit options. Particularly, downtown Spencer is at the intersection of two major routes, Route 9 and Route 31, and is an area of clustered residential settlement. Therefore, increasing access to transit through improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in the downtown area would impact a larger population than if similar improvements were invested elsewhere in Town, where roadway improvements may be prioritized.

OBJECTIVE: Increase access to and utilization of transit options in Spencer.

Expanded transit access is widely recognized for its effectiveness as a climate pollution reduction strategy. Considering the steep emissions contributed by the use of personal vehicles, improved transit operations have the potential to slash vehicle miles traveled and associated emissions within a given community. Despite access to WRTA Route 33, Spencer residents have limited access to transit services within and beyond town borders. Unfortunately, a recurring obstacle to expanded bus services, within south central Massachusetts and throughout other areas of the State, is a lack of bus drivers. The WRTA repeatedly experiences driver shortages, which results in a decreased sense of dependability for riders, who then may turn to other options that involve passenger vehicles, including Uber and Lyft.[40] During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many public-bus and school-bus drivers shifted their careers to delivery driver positions. As the at-home delivery of goods has remained high since the height of the pandemic, wages and benefits offered by delivery companies have improved, and more bus drivers have remained in or switched to the delivery industry. This obstacle is critical to consider as regional and state entities across the country strive to expand access to transit and mitigate climate pollution.[41]

While investments on the federal and state level must be made to fully realize the climate pollution reduction potential of transit, increasing access to public transit remains a priority strategy on regional and local levels. Increasing access to transit not only considers enhancing accessibility accommodations on buses and at bus shelters, but also to bus shelters, otherwise known as last-mile connections. Access to transit services should also consider the promotion of all available services, and ensuring all residents are aware of their public transit options.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Some incentives for conservation on a personal level Charging stations that use solar sources to fuel vehicles

(Resilience Survey, 2024)

ACTION ITEM 4.1

Work with WRTA to increase accessibility of, and to transit stops in Spencer.

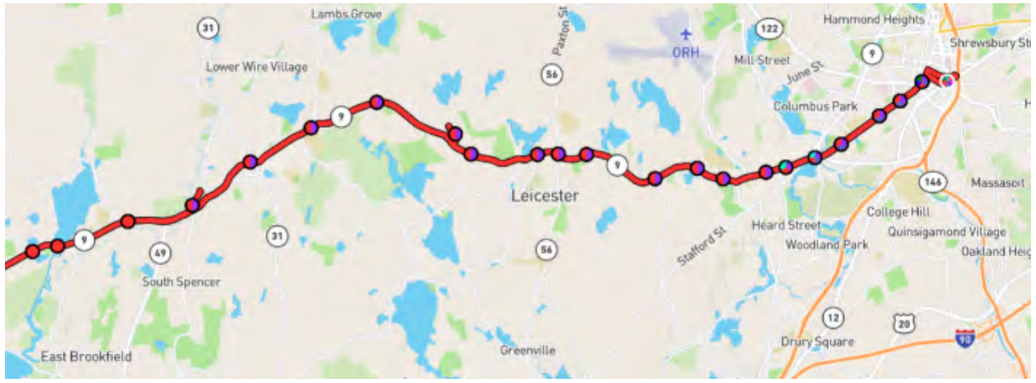


Figure 5: WRTA Bus Route 33. Source: WRTA

The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) has five fixed-route bus stops in Spencer: three on Main Street and two on West Main Street.[42] The WRTA also provides on-demand, door-to-door transportation services to older adults and people with disabilities in Spencer through the Southern Central Massachusetts (SCM) ElderBus Program. Additionally, the WRTA provides Spencer residents with ReadyBus services, a door-to-door service for any resident of Spencer, Southbridge, Sturbridge, and Webster, supported by a nominal fee.[43]

In order to ensure access to the WRTA fixed-route bus services and other services, the WRTA and its communities must continue to work together to understand residents' issues with last mile connections. Last-mile connections refer to the final segment of a person's journey between their transportation system and their destination. As demonstrated in the Transportation Chapter of this Master Plan, 80% of the Spencer Master Plan's public survey respondents indicated they prioritize improved sidewalks, crosswalks, and other pedestrian infrastructure that contributes to last-mile connections.

To equitably improve last mile connections in Spencer, the Town must consider ADA guidelines for pedestrian infrastructure throughout all transportation planning projects. Minimum ADA guidelines for sidewalks and crosswalks require a firm, stable surface, such as concrete, and wide and level paths of travel. Improvements to last mile connections in Spencer may also include increased wayfinding signage along Main and West Main streets to WRTA bus stops. As noted in the Transportation Chapter of this Master Plan, the Spencer Master Plan's public survey respondents recognize the need for improved bus shelter accommodations in Spencer, which may include improved seating, trash removal, and rider information. To implement these improvements, the Town and the WRTA must coordinate to determine ownership and management status before proceeding with any next steps. Notably, ADA accommodations for bus stops depend on adjacent land use, intersection geometry, parking, pedestrian access, presence of trees, poles, driveways, and other roadside constraints, traffic control signal timing, and the bus route path.

ACTION ITEM 4.2

Promote WRTA services to residents

Overall, this action aligns with this Master Plan's transportation chapter's goal to enhance regional and cross-town connectivity while helping to preserve Spencer's rural character. Specifically, that goal supports an objective to explore opportunities for increasing and promoting travel on the WRTA system. Various resources exist to promote and increase WRTA ridership, such as WRTA's "How to Ride" webpage, which offers tips and best practices to new users.[45] Additionally, representatives from the WRTA host informational sessions and workshops about the benefits of public transportation and WRTA services. Riders can opt to connect with a WRTA travel trainer through their Travel Training Program. Travel trainers provide either general training for the entire system or destination-specific training, all for no cost to the rider.[46] The Town of Spencer may choose to promote the fare-free WRTA services, the "How to Ride" webpage, and the WRTA Travel Trainer Program by posting flyers within municipal buildings, sending out mailers, or sharing information on social media or the town website. The benefits of promoting these programs extend beyond GHG emissions reduction to correlated co-benefits, such as cost savings for residents and reduced roadway congestion.

OBJECTIVE: Increase access to, and utilization of, active transportation options in Spencer

Improving access to existing public transit systems and expanding public transit services is one of the most effective climate pollution reduction strategies related to transportation alternatives. However, notable greenhouse gas emissions reductions may also be attributed to improving and expanding pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure. For example, CMRPC explored the effectiveness of implementing protected bike lanes and shared-use paths as a climate action strategy in the Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan (GWPCAP). According to the GWPCAP, the implementation of 30-miles of protected bike lanes and shared-use paths would yield an estimated reduction of 299 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (CO_2) per year.

As mentioned, several respondents to this Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter's public survey indicated a need for increased transit access over increased bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. However, as the Town of Spencer strives to increase use of transit, pedestrian and bicycle options that connect residents to transit options must be improved. This includes accessibility improvements, so people of all abilities may have access to alternative transportation.

ACTION ITEM 4.3

Work with neighboring communities as well as regional and state entities to improve sections of the Mid-State Trail in Spencer, including ADA accessibility improvements

The Midstate Trail runs 92 miles from Mount Watatic on the Massachusetts-New Hampshire border south through Worcester County, ending in the Douglas State Forest at the tri-state intersection of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. In Spencer, the Midstate travels longitudinally on the eastern half of Town, passing through the various portions of the Spencer State Forest, the Moose Hill Wildlife Management Area (WMA), and the Sibley/Warner Farm area.[47]



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

Please reference the Town of Spencer Open Space map in the Open Space and Recreation Chapter of this Master Plan for a visualization of how the Midstate travels through Town. The Midstate Trail currently deals with encroachment issues along the trail's corridor, with miles of the trail having been pushed onto paved roadways. The trail also experiences chronic misuse and a backlog of routine maintenance and infrastructure improvements, highlighting the importance of collaboration to increase capacity to direct investments towards its stewardship.[48]

As explored in the Open Space and Recreation Chapter of this Master Plan, the Town of Spencer would benefit from enhanced communication among open space and trail/recreation stakeholders. The Town may leverage these many stakeholders to communicate with the Midstate Trail Committee to determine the feasibility of improving specific sections of the Midstate in Spencer. Improvements could include pursuing funding opportunities, such as the DCR's MassTrails Grant, or working with local stakeholders and scouts to improve signage to the Midstate. As time and money are invested into the improvement of the Midstate in Spencer, it may become a more viable method of travel for residents who live along its corridor, connecting them to main routes that lead to downtown Spencer, commercial destinations, and transit options.

Future Midstate Trail improvement projects should all consider accessibility; ensuring that the trails and outdoor spaces are accessible to people of all abilities is crucial to increasing their utilization. As part of the 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) update, the Town conducted an ADA self-evaluation of open space and recreation facilities managed by the Spencer Conservation Commission or the Spencer Parks and Recreation Commission. Similar to this process, the Town of Spencer may consider pursuing funding or technical assistance to assess the accessibility of its recreational trails, including the Midstate, leveraging existing efforts such as CMRPC's Inclusive Trails Access Toolkit, which includes a sample trail-audit checklist. Specifically, the MassTrails Grant Program provides funding for the maintenance and improvement of trails, including accessibility improvements that align with the Forest Service Trails Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG).[49]

In April 2024, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) published an Inclusive Trails Access Toolkit which examines how trail managers may go above and beyond ADA accessibility guidelines to increase trail access for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. This resource is available for trail managers throughout the United States, including municipalities, land trusts, watershed coalitions, state entities, and more.[50]

OBJECTIVE: Leverage mapping efforts to promote connections between active transportation and transit networks in Spencer

Transit and trail mapping provides users with critical contextual and locational information related to alternative transportation options. Community based transit and trail mapping promotes access to sustainable, affordable, and equitable transportation alternatives, allowing for increased awareness of available options without exacerbating the transportation sector's contribution to climate pollution. Oftentimes, mapping efforts are siloed by specific regional transit authorities or trail managers, avoiding collaboration and disregarding opportunities for enhanced access to all alternative options. Collaboration among relevant stakeholders may lead to bridging this gap between siloed mapping efforts to create more inclusive community resources.

ACTION ITEM 4.4

Work with local and regional stakeholders to improve existing mapping efforts of Spencer's active transportation and transit assets, and then promote resources to residents

The Town of Spencer has an online geographical information system (GIS) that includes aerial footage, land use data, and other information such as flood and wetland data. This online GIS has the potential to include both transit and active transportation accommodations available in Town. Implementing transit and active transportation layers would increase awareness of and access to affordable transportation options and may encourage residents to use alternative options rather than personal vehicles. The implementation of these layers may involve collaboration with local and regional stakeholders and volunteers as well as the utilization of existing mapping efforts. For example, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) is developing a public Central Massachusetts Trails Hub, which includes trails in Spencer. The Town may consider using this map, as well as local maps of on-road active transportation accommodations and the Worcester Regional Transit Authority's (WRTA) public maps, to update its GIS.

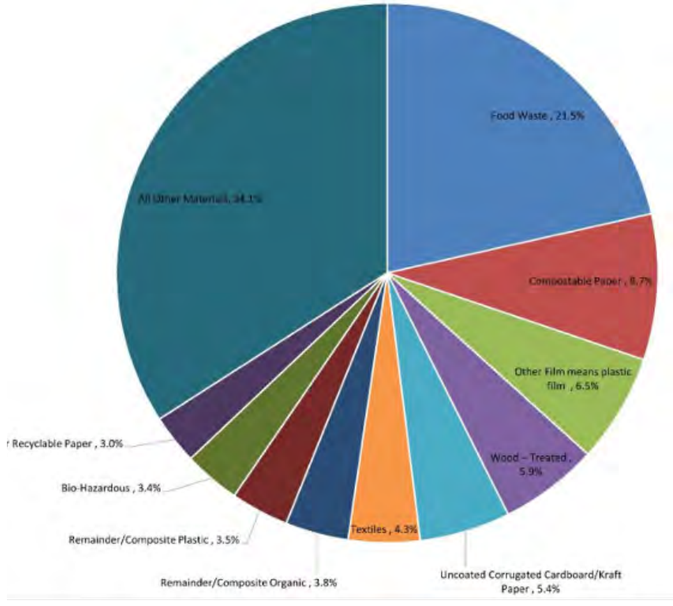


Figure 6: Top Ten Materials in Trash (2019)
Source: MassDEP 2030 Solid Waste Master Plan, P.6

GOAL 5

REDUCE AND UTILIZE WASTE GENERATED IN SPENCER

According to a GHG inventory conducted by CMRPC, the Town of Spencer's Waste Sector emitted 1,946 MT CO2e in 2017. Although these emission numbers are low compared to the Energy Sector and the Transportation Sector, the Waste Sector emits greenhouse gasses throughout all stages of the waste management process, representing an immense opportunity for increased resiliency. Specifically, GHG emissions and the other environmental impacts associated with the Waste Sector may be reduced through efforts to reduce consumption, repair and reuse materials, and through improved waste management strategies, such as through the management of organic waste. According to the Spencer Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter's public survey results, nearly 70% of respondents indicated that reducing and utilizing waste generated in Spencer is a priority, while over 22% remained neutral. When asked what respondents' specific priorities are related to this Sector, over 20% mentioned recycling and over 15% mentioned composting. According to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's (MassDEP) Solid Waste Master Plan and as shown in Figure 6, around 62.50% of the materials found in the trash in Massachusetts in 2019 were recyclable, compostable, or otherwise ripe for reuse.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) waste management hierarchy, recycling and composting are the second most effective waste management strategies after source reduction and reuse.[52] In Massachusetts, the management of recyclables and organic waste often occurs at the municipal level. To assess the effectiveness of municipal recycling and composting programs, municipalities may consider calculating the local waste diversion



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

rate. A waste diversion rate refers to the percentage of materials that are deflected from a landfill. Measurement involves first conducting a waste audit, a method of analyzing the municipality's waste stream. Collecting the data from the audit, the municipality can then calculate the diversion rate and set diversion rate targets.

OBJECTIVE:

Reduce and use organic waste

Organic waste refers to any biodegradable waste that comes from plants or animals, including food and yard scraps. According to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's (MassDEP) Solid Waste Master Plan, food waste represented 21.50% of the solid waste found in Massachusetts' trash in 2019.[54] Organic waste not only takes up significant space in landfills, but it also releases methane and carbon dioxide, two major greenhouse gases (GHG), into the atmosphere. Although these gases are naturally released throughout the decomposition process, methane can be harnessed for energy production, reducing overall GHG emissions from the waste management sector.

As previously mentioned, the Town of Spencer is home to one of two of the Jordan Dairy Farms' anaerobic digestors. Jordan Dairy Farms' location in Rutland was the first farm in New England to host an anaerobic digestor back in 2011.

This digestor has a 660,000-gallon capacity and will co-digest 4,400 tons of manure and 38,300 tons of organics annually. Overall, this digestor produces 8,000 megawatt hours of renewable energy each year, offsetting 1,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions.[55] Due to the digestion process, the farm is also left with tons of organic fertilizer. The utilization of organic waste at Jordan Dairy Farms serves as a regional example, not only to farms and other major producers of organic waste, but municipalities, as well. Similarly, the EPA offers a guide to technologies and strategies for recovering and using landfill gas as an energy source for local governments. The guide also describes cost and financing opportunities.[56]

> "With the addition of the Spencer location, the Jordan's now become the first New England farm family to host two [Vanguard Renewables] Farm Powered Anaerobic Digestors."
>
> (Jordan Dairy Farm)

ACTION ITEM 5.1

Promote educational materials about organic waste

Creative management and use of organic waste can include massively innovative endeavors like anaerobic digestion, but also more simple, implementable measures such as municipal composting programs. The Town of Spencer's transfer

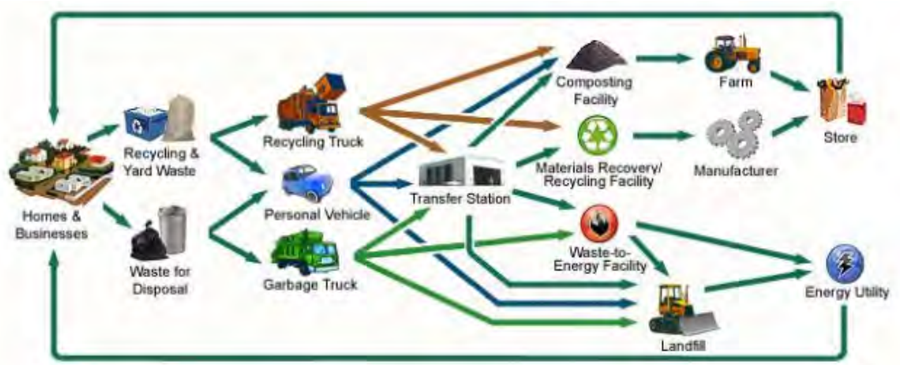


Figure 7: Waste Flow in MA. Source: MassDEP.

station has one compost area for permit-carrying residents. This compost area is open at select hours and allows leaves, grass clippings, and previously composted materials. Upon arriving at the compost area, permit-holders must notify an attendant of their intent to compost so that the attendent may inspect their material load before dumping.[57]

To increase the utilization of this municipal compost area, the Town may consider regularly promoting educational materials about organic waste to its residents. These materials could define what organic waste is and the benefits of composting it, while also advertising the municipal compost area, how to obtain a permit, and the allowable materials. This educational program may take the form of mailers to all residents, a website and social media campaign, or offering materials at regularly scheduled town meetings and events. The development of these materials could be a collaborative effort among various town boards and committees, such as the Planning Board or Board of Health. However, the Town could also select materials that have already been developed by other local, regional, state, or federal agencies. For example, the United State Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offers a variety of resources, materials, and infographics about organic waste for communities and individuals.

ACTION ITEM 5.2

Assess the feasibility of diverting additional local organic waste and scaling-up municipal composting

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) prepares and updates lists and maps of solid waste management facilities throughout the State. Within Central Massachusetts, there are composting facilities, animal feed processing facilities, anerobic digestion facilities, and other organic processers. In addition to the two Vanguard Renewables anerobic digestors at the Jordan Dairy Farms in Rutland and Spencer,

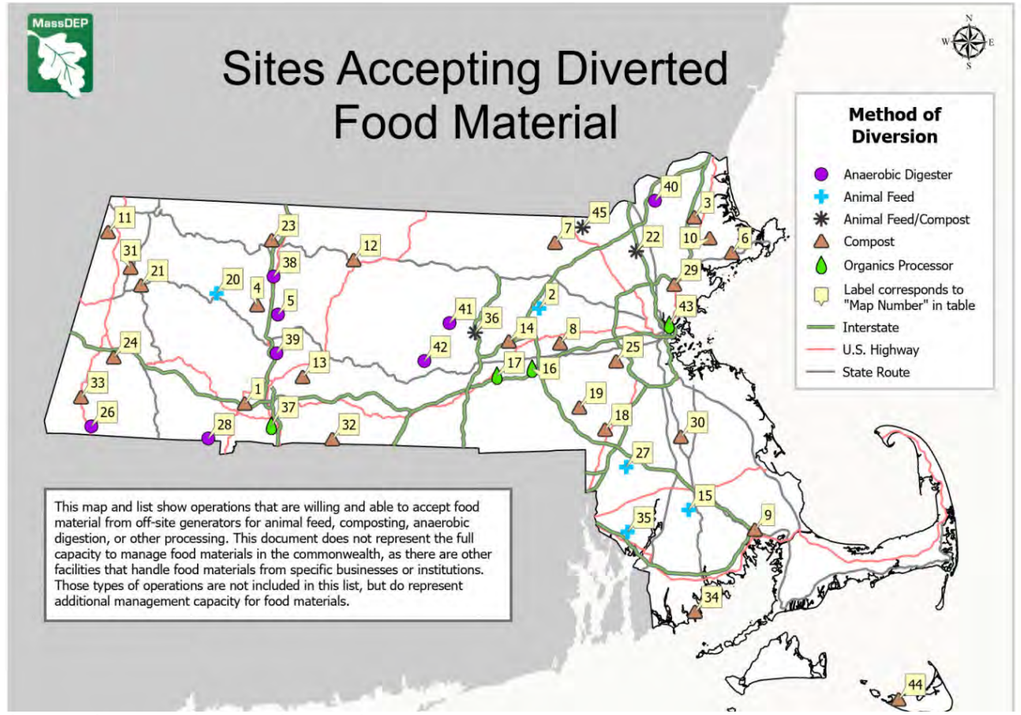


Figure 8: Sites Accepting Organic Waste in MA. Source: MassDEP

there are organic waste processers in Westborough and North Grafton, a composting facility in Northborough, and a composting/ animal feed processing facility in Holden.

Although the Town of Spencer already has a municipal composting area, its capacity is limited, and Spencer's residential food waste and other natural yard waste must be disposed of with all other solid waste. It is widely recognized that local, regional, and statewide capacity for organics diversion is limited, and investments must be made in additional infrastructure. On the local level, infrastructural investments geared towards increasing composting capacity must consider water and sewer infrastructure, as composting can involve high volumes of water that may have implications on local sewer systems, as well. As additional organic waste processes facilities become available, the Town may consider establishing local and regional partnerships to allow for the collection and diversion of residential food waste to these facilities.

Black Earth Compost has been helping municipalities in the northeast divert their food waste and mitigate the social, economic, and environmental impact of waste management since 2011. Black Earth Compost works directly with municipalities to institute municipal compost collection systems, including pilot programs, subsidized collections bins, low-cost private collection, and drop-off locations. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) also offers grant assistance through the Sustainable Materials Recovery Program (SMRP) to help municipalities pay for the cost of compost bins and associated programs. Once collected, Black Earth utilizes the organic waste to support customer's gardens or other local gardens.[59]

Overall, while considering ways to scale-up Spencer's existing organic waste management systems, there are three main models to consider: curbside pick-up, local drop-off, and at-home composting. Black Earth institutes the curbside model, while Spencer's current system is the drop-off model. Either of these models may be expanded to include additional types of organic waste, such as yard and food waste. The voluntary, at-home composting system would involve the distribution of compost bins and extensive resident education, to ensure that diverted residential food waste stays diverted. As discussed below, MassDEP annually offers the Reduce, Reuse, Repair Microgrant, which provides awards of up to $10,000 for organizations and municipalities engaged in short-term waste reduction projects.[60] Recipients of this microgrant can include educational institutions, offering a prime opportunity to invest in organic waste education while facilitating investigative work that may lead to innovative improvements.

OBJECTIVE: Increase the lifecycle of materials produced, used, and disposed of in Spencer

While composting considers organic waste, increasing the lifecycle of materials considers all other waste. As previously mentioned, the United States EPA ranks source reduction as the most effective waste reduction strategy. However, reducing the demand for and consumption of goods and materials would involve regulatory changes. On the municipal level, this could involve material bans, such as prohibiting the commercial use of straws, plastic bags, or other single-use plastics. In terms of reuse, the Town of Spencer may consider opportunities to divert recyclables from the transfer station, or even from local commercial and industrial businesses to educational institutions or other manufacturing industries for repair and reuse. To implement these actions, the Town may consider annual funding opportunities, such as the MassDEP Reduce, Reuse, Repair Microgrant.

ACTION ITEM 5.3

Analyze the local recycling stream and identify areas for improvement

Recycling is the process of collecting and processing materials for reuse that cannot be immediately reused. Recycling diverts waste from landfills, slows the depletion of nonrenewable resources, and reduces potential risks to the environment. Generally, the recycling process is made up of three steps: collection and



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

processing, manufacturing, and the purchase of products made from recycled materials. Each municipality's recycling system is different and may include either drop-off recycling stations or curbside pick-up systems. According to the EPA, some of the most recycled materials in the country include cardboard, paper, food boxes, mail, and beverage cans. To determine which materials should be a priority for recycling in a given community, it may be worthwhile to assess the local recycling rate, in addition to the municipal diversion rate. The calculation of both a municipal recycling rate and diversion rate would involve extensive auditing to develop a comprehensive inventory but would serve as a major component of an analysis of a municipal recycling stream, which may lead to improvements in efficiency.

The standard equation for calculating the recycling rate is below, where total MSW generated is calculated by the sum of total MSW recycled and the total MSW disposed of.[61]

$$\frac{Total\ MSW\ Recycled}{Total\ MSW\ Generated} \times 100 = MSW\ Recycling\ Rate\ (\%)$$

Once the local recycling stream has been analyzed and the recycling rate has been calculated, the Town would be in the position to implement informed changes, such as instituting a materials ban. Another action the Town may consider based off of an analysis of the recycling stream is identifying materials that may not currently accept at the transfer station but should consider their options for accepting due to volumes and targets.

ACTION ITEM 5.4

Consider collecting recyclable materials to donate to local educational institutions and industries for repair and reuse

Although recycling provides various environmental benefits, some recyclable materials are not accepted at all transfer stations or waste haulers, often due to the cost associated with processing them for commercial reuse. As previously mentioned, each municipal recycling system is different, with efficiency dependent on local, regional, and statewide capacity for processing and manufacturing recyclables. However, some recyclable materials may also be leveraged for immediate reuse. Items such as electronics, scrap metal, treated paper, glassware, and cables may be collected and donated to nearby educational institutions or manufacturing companies for reuse. For example, local vocational schools may use materials to practice their trade, and local primary schools may use materials for interpretive art projects. Instead of recycling materials, manufacturing industries may opt to communicate among one another and trade. Overall, diverting these materials for repair and reuse promotes a circular economy, lightens burdens on local recycling streams, and increases the life cycle of materials.

Past recipients of the MassDEP Reduce, Reuse, Repair Microgrant include a furniture collection company that redistributed second-hand furniture to communities at no cost to residents, a computer repair store that refurbished electronics otherwise destined for landfills, and a family-owned brewery that implemented a reusable wrap program. The Lexington Public Schools received a MassDEP microgrant in 2020 to eliminate single-use cellophane bags and wrappers, using grant funds to purchase plastic-free, reusable alternatives. The Spencer Public Schools may also consider this funding program as an opportunity to reduce waste, investigate its recycling system, and educate students. Overall, all these projects have helped divert hard-to-recycle materials from transfer stations, recycling warehouses, and landfills, while promoting the reuse of products to extend their lifecycle.[62]

GOAL 6

CONSERVE AND ENHANCE NATURAL LANDS AND WOODLANDS

According to 2016 Land Cover data from the Massachusetts Bureau of Geographic Information Systems (MassGIS), 61.30% of land in Spencer is forested (not including forested wetlands). These lands are highly prioritized by Spencer residents, and out of all the goals listed in this Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter, this goal received the most public support from respondents of the public survey. Specifically, 91.10% of respondents indicated that they would support conserving and enhancing natural lands and woodlands in Spencer, while 6.28% remained neutral.

Woodlands and other natural lands play an entirely different role than agricultural lands in the context of climate pollution. The 2021 Massachusetts Climate Law defines natural and working lands as "lands within the Commonwealth that: (i) are actively used by an agricultural owner or operator for an agricultural operation that includes, but is not limited to, active engagement in farming or ranching; (ii) produce forest products; (iii) consist of forests, grasslands, freshwater and riparian systems, wetlands, coastal and estuarine areas, watersheds, wildlands or wildlife habitats; or (iv) are used for recreational purposes, including parks, urban and community forests, trails or other similar open space land." This section of the Spencer Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter focuses on all these land types, with this goal focusing on the land types described in parts 'ii' through 'iv' in the definition, or woodlands and other natural lands, and the proceeding goal focusing on land types described in part 'i' of the definition, or agricultural lands.

The conservation of woodlands and other natural lands not only helps to mitigate anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, but also supports healthy ecosystems that foster resilient environments. Conservation efforts refer to purchasing or permanently protecting woodlands and other natural lands to protect ecosystems, manage invasive species, and avoid tree-mortality or other losses. According to 2023 data from the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) Town BioMap Reports, the Town of Spencer has 3,374.10 acres of protected open space. This is slightly lower than the 3,337.01 acres of protected open space reported in the 2021 Spencer

Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), which may indicate a slight loss in protected open space between 2021 and 2023. Thus, prioritizing the conservation of natural lands is of crucial importance to Spencer's residents and its local ecosystems.

OBJECTIVE: Promote the resiliency benefits of natural lands and woodlands

According to the greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory included in the Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan (GWPCAP), Spencer's woodlands and other natural lands store an estimated 26,350 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (MT co2e). Woodlands' and other natural lands' ability to capture and store carbon is referred to as biological carbon sequestration, or biosequestration. In addition to the 61.30% of woodland cover, 25.56% of Spencer's land may be considered natural lands, as shown in Figure 9.[63]

Spencer: Cover Type	% of Total Acreage
Bare Land	0.49%
Cultivated	1.56%
Deciduous Forest	42.29%
Developed Open Space	6.78%
Evergreen Forest	19.06%
Grassland	2.96%
Impervious	4.72%
Palustrine Aquatic Bed	0.54%
Palustrine Emergent Wetland	3.91%
Palustrine Forested Wetland	6.17%
Pasture/Hay	6.32%
Scrub/Shrub	1.62%
Water	3.58%

Figure 9: Spencer Land Cover. Source: MassGIS, 2016 Land Cover Data.

The first step towards increasing the amount of protected natural lands and implementing nature-based enhancements is to promote these efforts as resiliency measures. For example, although it may be widely known that trees contribute to biosequestration, it may not be well-known that as trees grow and age, their carbon sequestration capacity increases. According to the Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan (CECP), while existing forestlands sequester 4.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (MMT CO2e) annually, new forestlands from afforestation and reforestation sequester only 0.6 MMT CO2e annually.[64] Similarly, it may not be widely known that wetlands disproportionately contribute to biosequestration; however, their functionality is dependent on its vegetation and the surrounding geomorphology (topographic and bathymetric features). Wetland alteration and disturbances can result in the release of methane, a greenhouse gas more potent than carbon dioxide, turning wetlands from a carbon sink to a carbon source.[65]

Finally, although this goal does not consider bare land, impervious land, or otherwise developed areas of settlement, this goal does include developed open space. Developed open space refers to lawns, gardens, and other natural landscapes found in residential areas, as well as recreational areas such as golf courses, parks, and campuses. According to the Massachusetts CECP, the net carbon sequestration of the Commonwealth's settlement lands was approximately 1.3 MMT CO2e in 2019. The CECP recognizes the significant opportunity to improve the resiliency benefits of developed open space, such as implementing tree planting efforts on the 0.40 million acres of developed open space in Massachusetts that currently lack canopy cover. Interestingly, tree planting efforts in urban areas have a higher potential to provide effective resiliency benefits due to lower competition for nutrients and sunlight compared to tree planting efforts in suburban and rural areas. Moreover, tree planting in urban areas helps to reduce urban heat islands and lower energy consumption and related costs.[66]

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Support recycling. Outlaw alcohol nips. More enforcement and penalties for littering/illegal dumping."

"Could we have a hazardous waste event like other towns do? This would be something I would pay to participate in!"

(Resilience Survey, 2024)

ACTION ITEM 6.1

Convene local natural lands stakeholders to discuss opportunities to conserve and enhance woodlands and other natural lands in Spencer

Although the conservation of woodlands and other natural lands is a high priority among communities across Central Massachusetts, local capacity (staff time, expertise, and funding) often limits a municipality's ability to act on this priority. For example, a municipalities right-of-first refusal to acquire Chapter Lands is triggered when a landowner chooses to convert enrolled land (while maintaining ownership or selling) into another, non-chapter use. Specifically, if any land under the Chapter 61, 61A, or 61B Program is intended to be converted to a non-chapter use while still enrolled or within one fiscal year of being removed from the Program, the municipality has the option to match a bona fide offer to purchase the property. The municipality only has 120 days to act on this right, and once the right has been acted upon, only 90 days to effectively acquire the property.[67] This presents a major obstacle to municipalities for acquiring prime natural lands, as many municipalities do not have a designated fund for the acquisition of lands, and even then, often must go to Town Meeting to approve the use of such funds. However, landowners may grant extensions to municipalities, and municipalities may extend their rights to local conservation organizations or land trusts. For these reasons, regular communication among local land trusts and other conservation organizations and municipalities is crucial to integrity and enactment of the right-of-first refusal and similar opportunities.

As explored in the Open Space and Recreation Chapter of this Master Plan and the 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), local stakeholders such as the Spencer Conservation Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission, the Greater Worcester Land Trust, the Common Ground Land Trust, and the Massachusetts Audubon Society may be leveraged to enact on opportunities such as the right-of-first refusal for Chapter Lands, grant programs, and other protection options. The benefits of tapping into these stakeholders include resource sharing (tools, volunteer time, technical assistance) and even conservation partnerships (jointly owning land to offset cost and management burden). To effectively leverage these stakeholders, regular communication must be assumed.

WE ASKED SPENCER RESIDENTS:

"Pollinator habitats [...] More land conservation efforts and protecting what we have left from over development. Encouraging and supporting the few farmers we have left in the area to use sustainable and regenerative methods."

(Resilience Survey, 2024)

The group may use resources such as this Master Plan or the OSRP to develop a list of properties and areas of conservation interest. Specifically, the 2021 Spencer OSRP contains an inventory of lands of conservation and recreation interest that includes properties enrolled in the Chapter 61 Program and lands under private ownership. To prepare for acquisition opportunities, the

group may research annual grant programs, such as the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Land Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND) Grant Program and the EEA's Forest Reserves Grant Program. These efforts may allow the town to develop a plan of action if land of conservation interest becomes available. Otherwise, the group may work with permanent Town Committees to distribute resources related to the resiliency benefits of woodlands and natural lands among residents, both as a method of recruiting volunteers and informing the public in anticipation of asking for their support on acquisition efforts.

GOAL 7

INCREASE THE RESILIENCY AND VIABILITY OF SPENCER'S AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS

According to the Spencer Master Plan's Energy and Environmental Resiliency Chapter's public survey results, under 50% of respondents support achieving net-zero emissions from Spencer's agricultural operations. According to 2016 Land Cover data from the Massachusetts Bureau of Geographic Information Systems (MassGIS), roughly 2,460 acres of land in Spencer is used for agriculture, or 11.30% of the Town's total land. However, it was also widely recognized by survey respondents that much of this farmland is not actively used. Rather than presenting additional hurdles to the remaining active farms in Town, this section aims to discuss sources of greenhouse gas emissions from the Agriculture Sector and potential methods for decreasing these emissions so as to promote a path towards emissions reductions. However, more importantly, this section aims to uplift the importance of implementing environmental resiliency measures within agricultural operations as a means of maintaining economic viability, since climate hazards pose a serious threat to farmers everywhere.

Although emissions from the Agriculture Sector are insignificant compared to the Energy Sector and the Transportation Sector, the Agriculture Sector emits greenhouse gases through various common practices. Common land, soil, manure, crop, and livestock management practices can all lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions. The following objective and actions discuss common practices that lead to GHG emissions within the Region, and ways local farmers may mitigate these emissions, since overall emissions reductions would lead to the deceleration of the anthropogenic amplification of the greenhouse effect, which leads to more frequent and severe hazardous events. Since analyzing and improving these practices on a local level would require financial and technical assistance, it is also critical to point out the various opportunities that exist in Massachusetts.

OBJECTIVE:
Improve on-farm soil and livestock management



Photo: Taylor Wentworth, Spencer Cable Access

Program	Purpose
Ag. Composting Improvement Program (ACIP) [68]	Funds equipment and materials needed to improve composting management practices
Climate Smart Agriculture Program (CSAP) [69]	This includes the Agricultural Climate Resiliency & Efficiencies (ACRE) Program, the Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program (AEEP), and the Agricultural Energy Grant Program (ENER)
Ag. Food Safety Improvement Program (AFSIP) [70]	A reimbursement grant that supports produce and aquaculture operations looking to improve their food safety practices while increasing market access
Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP) [71]	Provides business planning, technical assistance, and grants to commercial farms to support stewardship
APR Improvement Program [72]	Provides business planning, technical assistance, and grants to commercial farms with APR-protected land to help sustain active commercial farming
Matching Enterprise Grants Program (MEGA) [73]	Assists farmers to raise agricultural products and develop their farms into commercially viable operations
Urban Agriculture Program [74]	Supports commercial projects designed to increase the production, processing, and marketing of produce grown and sold in urban centers
Stewardship Assistance and Restoration on APRs (SARA) [75]	Helps resolve stewardship issues caused by a prior owner to restore active commercial farming on land that has already been protected through APRs
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) [76]	NRCS works with producers to create conservation plans that will lead to cleaner water, air, soil, and provide healthier habitats for wildlife
Agricultural Preservation Restrictions [77]	Offers a non-development alternative to farmers and other owners of "prime" and "state important" agricultural land who are faced with land-use decision
MGL Chapter 61A [78]	Encourages the preservation of the Commonwealth's farmland by offering significant local tax benefits

Figure 10: Financial and Technical Assistance Programs for the Agriculture Sector. Source: See end notes in

In the Greater Worcester Region, soil management practices are a noteworthy source of GHG emissions, having contributed nearly 130 metric tons of nitrous oxide emissions (MT N2O) in 2017, equal to over 34,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (MT CO2e). Specifically, "the application of organic and synthetic fertilizers can lead to the increased availability of nitrogen in soils and result in emissions of nitrous oxide (N2O)". Other common soil management activities that may increase nitrous oxide emissions include growing nitrogen fixing crops, draining organic soils, or other irrigation practices. In Massachusetts, agricultural soil management accounted for just under half of the Agriculture Sector's emissions in 2022. Liming, the process of applying calcium and/or magnesium rich materials to soils, accounted for nearly 10% of the state's Agriculture Sector's emissions that same year.[79] On the other hand, livestock produce methane as part of their normal digestive processes. This process, called enteric fermentation, represented over 33% of Massachusetts agricultural emissions in 2022. The way in which manure from livestock is managed, such as treatment and storage methods, represented nearly 7% of Massachusetts' Agriculture Sector's emissions in 2022.[80]

In Spencer, there are notably fewer farms that manage livestock than just crops. However, when considering actions that may limit GHG emissions from the Town's Agriculture Sector, it is important to collect and analyze data holistically. For example, improved manure management practices may lead to improved soil management practices, not to mention the potential to decrease emissions from both the Agriculture and Waste sectors.

ACTION ITEM 7.1
Collect and analyze data from local agricultural operations regarding soil and livestock management practices to determine areas for improvement

According to data from the 2022

USDA Massachusetts Census of Agriculture, there were 7,083 farms in Massachusetts, accounting for 464,451 acres of land. Of these farms, 78% are individually/family owned, 12% are corporate owned, and 7% are partnerships. Interestingly, nearly 60% of farms in Massachusetts are managed by new farmers, 55% have a primary occupation other than farming, and the average age of a Massachusetts farmer is 58.7. Overall, the Commonwealth earns over three-times as much from crops than livestock, with the top commodities being cranberries, other fruits and vegetables, and greenhouse/nursery goods.[81]

The Massachusetts Census of Agriculture provides useful snapshot data that may be leveraged for municipal planning processes. Although this is Statewide data from 2022, it may be assumed that these findings relatively reflect the Agriculture Sector in Spencer. As most survey respondents indicated, the majority of farms in and around Spencer are locally-owned and operated by the region's residents. To determine how these farms are managing their soils and crops, the Town may consider partnering with other towns in the region as well as regional and statewide entities, such as CMRPC or the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture, to conduct more detailed surveys about agricultural practices. This survey could ask respondents about their specific soil, crop, livestock, and manure management practices to support broader planning efforts. For example, these regional efforts could support the implementation of the Massachusetts Healthy Soils Action Plan or the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan.[82]



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

ACTION ITEM 7.2

Develop and distribute educational materials related to specific actions that may reduce Spencer's agricultural operations emissions through soil and livestock management

Various educational materials related to agricultural operations exist that local and regional entities may distribute among Massachusetts' farms and farmers. Main contributors to the Commonwealth's library of resources include the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), and the Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment at UMass Amherst. More local to the Town of Spencer are the Regional Environmental Council (REC), which focuses on urban agriculture, and Central Mass Grown, a collective of farms and farmers within Worcester County.

Notably, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) worked with various entities to develop the 2022 Healthy Soils Action Plan. Among the various best management practices examined in this Plan, conservation agriculture and silvopasture both have a high potential to sequester carbon compared to practices such as managed grazing, intercropping, and implementing shelterbelts and riparian buffers. Conservation agriculture refers to annual cropping systems that combine cover crops, reduced tillage, and crop rotation. Conservation agriculture is practiced on an estimated 26% of Massachusetts' cropland. The increased implementation of conservation agriculture may be supported by a variety of statewide and federal incentives, such as NRCS practice classes and MDAR's ACRE Grant Program. Silvopasture refers to an agroforestry practice that involves integrating trees into pastureland. This practice allows for both the sequestration of soil organic carbon (SOC) and aboveground woody biomass. While NRCS provides funding assistance to farms that are implementing trees into pastureland, it does not supply funding for forest-thinning for silvopasture.[83]

The Massachusetts Department of Agriculture Resources (MDAR) worked with various entities to develop the 2023 to 2050 Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan. The purpose of this plan is not only to highlight the economic, cultural, and environmental importance of Massachusetts' farms, but to create a set of actions that the State may work to implement over the next twenty-five years to ensure farms and farmers are supported and protected. These actions not only support conserving agricultural land, but also enhancing the viability of farms. The viability of farms considers fostering resilient farms and encouraging sustainable farming practices. To accomplish this goal, the Plan prioritizes providing support to farmers around crop- and livestock-specific climate adaptation strategies and recommends including climate change adaptation strategies as eligible practices under USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).[85]

To support the implementation of the Healthy Soils Action Plan and the Farmland Action Plan, the Town may consider distributing education materials to its farms and farmers. These materials may include resources from the USDA, MDAR, the UMass Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment, as well as more local entities such as the Regional Environmental Council (REC) and Central Mass Grown. For example, the Town may consider sharing materials contributed through the MDAR's social media accounts. Educational materials could include mailers, materials provided at town meetings, or online via email or social media blasts.[86]

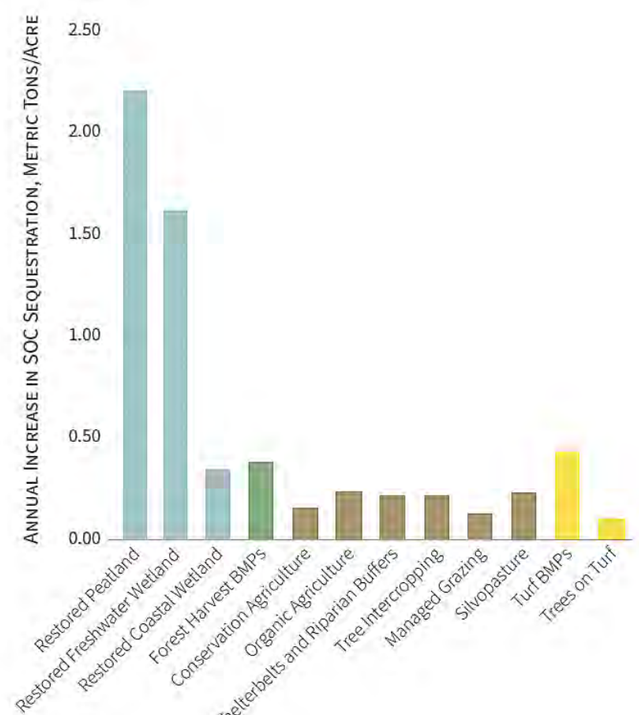


Figure 11: Massachusetts Healthy Soils Action Plan: Best Management Practices, Source: Massachusetts EEA Healthy Soils Action Plan P.23

Note about CMRPC GHG Inventory:
* While completing the inventories for all member communities, CMRPC staff found several issues with the inventory tool and the available data. Much of the data was only available for 2017 or earlier. Also, a small but important issue we encountered during the data gathering stage of the project was whether the data from 2017 correlated to the 2017 calendar year of the 2017 fiscal year.

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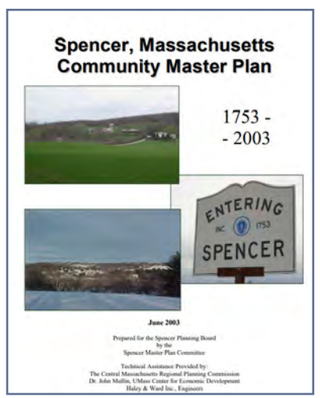
12

Prior Planning Efforts



Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

OVERVIEW



SPENCER COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN 2003

Several planning efforts have identified ways in which Spencer can expand its economy, protect its open space, and serve its people

Spencer's Community Master Plan is a document setting forth the community's goals while providing information, data, and analysis for development strategies to guide the community. The 2003 Master Plan included it's own community vision statement:

"Spencer to be a cohesive and vibrant community in which people can enjoy living and working together throughout all stages of their lives. Spencer will achieve this vision by providing quality education and municipal services, and by creating an environment that encourages participation in community life while maintaining its rural character."

Each of the core Master Plan chapters was given a single goal and a list of objectives. Below is a summary of the goals for each chapter:

1. Community Facilities & Services: Ensure infrastructure and services are efficient, effecti e, sustainable, and enhance quality of life for Spencer residents.
2. Transportation: Roadways are well maintained and efficient.
3. Economic Development: Maintain stability and manage growth to expand opportunities for employment and commerce.
4. Housing: Ensure housing opportunities and housing growth consistent with the Town's rural character.
5. Land use: Revitalize and beautify downtown Spencer and preserve rural character in north and south Spencer.



SPENCER RECONNAISSANCE REPORT 2008

The Heritage Inventory Program was initiated by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation to help communities identify important historical, cultural, and natural locations in their communities. The program helped communities protect such landscapes and address land use planning issues, offering recommendations for preservation.

Priority Heritage future Landscapes identified in pencer include the Green Property and Schoolhouse #3, Sibley Farm/Wendy Warner Farm, Wilson Farm, Wire Village & Turkey Hill Brook, and St. Joseph's Abbey. The report offered a description along with opportunities, challenges and several recommendations for each site. The project team also identified three priorit recommendations for the Town:

1. Adopt the Community Preservation Act
2. Adopt a Demolition Delay Bylaw
3. Purchase Conservation Restrictions on the Schoolhouse #3 parcel and the vacant parcel behind it.



SPENCER TOWN REVITALIZATION 2009

The Town Center Revitalization Project was a comprehensive process to begin planning and implementation strategies to improve the Town Center, resulting in a 97-page report published in 2009.

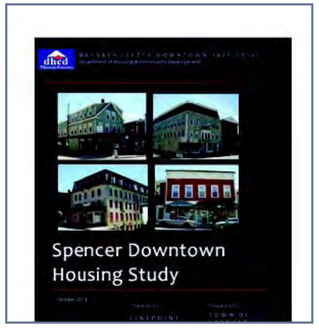
Principal Recommendations:
A comprehensive vision for downtown revitalization is outlined through a series of strategic

Since the 2003 Master Plan, Spencer has put in a significant amount of resources to develop multiple plans that identify the town's challenges and opportunities.

recommendations aimed at fostering economic growth, enhancing infrastructure, and promoting community engagement. Among the recommendations are focusing on a core area of the Town Center (both sides of Main St) to make streetscape and facade improvements, maximize parking availability, and promote reinvestment in Sugden Block and the redevelopment of underutilized buildings and the envisioned miniindustrial park along Pearl St, Wall St, Elm St, and Mechanic St. Central to this plan is the concept of maintaining "market critical mass", which involves discouraging development outside of the Town Center to concentrate business activities and maximize economic synergy. The plan also recommends the realignment of Pleasant Street to better connect with Main Street and Wall Street. This realignment, coupled with roadway enhancements and improed traffic signals, aims to optimi e traffic f low and accessibilit between Mechanic Street and Pleasant Street. This initiative not only improes transportation efficienc but also supports the creation of a cohesive town green and plaza area,

enhancing pedestrian connectivity and creating inviting public spaces. This roadway project was completed in 2018.

Municipal Parking enhancements were also proposed alongside the realignment of Pleasant Street, offering new parking facilities across from the Sugden Block/ Library. These parking spaces were considered necessary for supporting local businesses and accommodating visitors' needs, thus bolstering economic activity in the downtown area.



SPENCER DOWNTOWN HOUSING STUDY 2013

The Spencer Downtown Housing Study explored housing conditions in downtown Spencer. The study found approximately 10% of the rental housing units were vacant, significantl higher than both Worcester County and Massachusetts overall. About 65% of households were homeowners and 35% renters. Notably, an estimated 47% of households renting apartments in Spencer were considered costburdened. The study included a housing market demand and supply analysis, an affordability analysis, a discussion of issues impacting housing development, and an overview of strategies to address housing issues. Potential strategies identified in the plan include creating a supportive environment for development, reducing regulatory hurdles, and improving perceptions among developers and property owners. Additionally, the study recommended evaluating downtown conditions and outlining development priorities.

Collaborations with nonprofits likeSMOC and emphasis on enabling mixed-income housing options would also further the Town's housing goals. Other considerations outlined in the housing study include developing local programs offering f inancial incenti es, renoating existing housing units, activating underused upper floors, and targeting financing and marketing efforts to the Main St focus area for maximum impact.

Reinvestment efforts downtown can support the goal of making downtown a place where residents want to live. Strategies to support this aim include creating opportunities for mixed-use "live/ work" units, improving accessibility, and managing parking availability by potentially providing parking for additional residential units and utili ing wafinding signage to existing parking spaces.


CMRPC

Town of Spencer:
Spencer Town Center PDA (#280-3)

Purpose of Analysis

The Spencer Town Center was identified as a Priority Development Area in the Central Thirteen Prioritization Project completed in 2013. The Spencer Town Center (ID # 240-3) was identified both as a local and regionally significant Priority Development Area (PDA). In 2014, Spencer Town Center was identified by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a State-identified PDA. Map 1 on page 2 shows the location of the Spencer Town Center PDA.

Priority Development Areas (PDAs) are areas within a municipality that have been identified as capable of supporting additional development or as candidates for redevelopment. These are areas on which a town is focusing its energy to promote thoughtful economic development that is closely tied to the community's goals.

PDA assistance projects are intended as a "next step" following the completion of a prioritization project. Planning funds from the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program support the effort and up to 25 hours of technical assistance may be provided to each interested community. Specifically, the objective of this project is to provide participating communities with a packet of information for a PDA that can be used to guide them in identifying possible zoning changes, development of a Chapter 43D application or other grant applications (MassWorks, EHED's Downtown Technical Assistance), promotion to developers, as a template for future analysis of additional PDAs, etc. CMRPC staff worked with each participating community to ensure that the technical assistance provided was tailored to the town's specific needs.

Study Area Selection

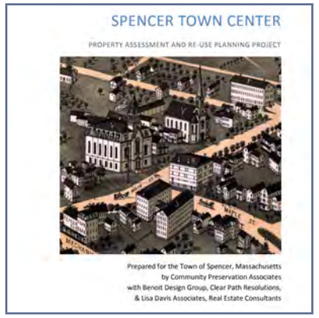
The Town of Spencer's DLTA request for the Spencer Town Center PDA analysis was submitted by the Town of Spencer on the behalf of Michelle R. Buck, the Spencer Town Planner. The Town of Spencer PDA Project for 2014 was designed to "Provide a more targeted analysis of the Sugden Block Building in particular and the closely-related issue of parking availability in Spencer Center." Based on a meeting that CMRPC's Principal Planner, Eric R. Smith, AICP, attended on April 17th at Spencer Town Hall with the Spencer Town Planner and the Town Administrator, Adam Gaudette, a Project Scope was developed that directed CMRPC Staff to focus the DLTA technical assistance time on a review of available parking in the Spencer Town Center (including within the vicinity of the Sugden Block Building), provide an assessment of opportunities for additional shared and common parking areas (including Town-owned properties), and provide recommendations and next steps related to wayfinding, parking and the gateway into Spencer Town Center.

CMRPC SPENCER TOWN CENTER PDA ANALYSIS 2014

The Spencer Town Center was first identified as a Priorit eelopment Area (PDA) in the Central Thirteen Prioritization Project completed in 2013. PDAs are areas recognized as suitable for additional development or redevelopment. This 2014 "PDA assistance project" by CMRPC provided provided a detailed analysis focusing on the Sugden Block Building and parking availability in Spencer Center. The project scope included reviewing available parking, assessing opportunities for additional shared and common parking areas, recommendations and providing related to wafinding, parking, and gateway improvements.

Recommendations included:

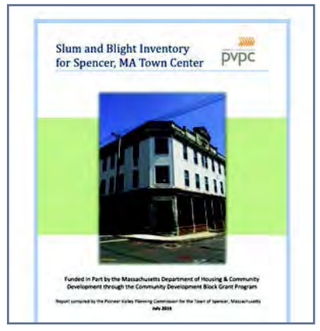
- Zoning Improvements: Develop shared parking provisions, allow farmers' markets by right, and require special permits for drivethru restaurants.
- Parking Solutions: Promote existing parking areas, develop new ones, and formalize shared parking arrangements.
- Streetscape and Open Space Enhancements: Improve streetscape elements, create childfriendly spaces, and develop pocket parks and gateways.



DOWNTOWN SPENCER PROPERTY ASSESSMENT AND RE-USE PLANNING PROJECT 2015

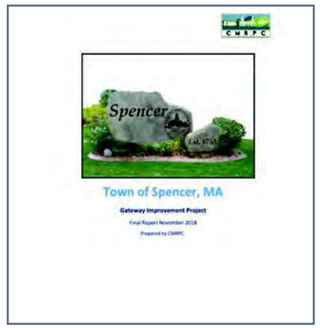
The Downtown Spencer Property Assessment and Re-use Planning Project (PARP) sought to identify strategies to revitalize Spencer Town Center enhancing its role as the economic and cultural hub of the community through strategic public and private initiatives. The project assessed 50-60 distressed sites and buildings in Spencer's downtown area. Distressed properties and sites are defined as those being vacant, blighted, abandoned, and/ or foreclosed structures. The plan offered descriptions of these different properties including their condition and needs. It also emphasized the potential for these sites to be redeveloped and discussed how the high traffic volumes on Main Street and the presence of numerous historic and architecturall significant structures make Spencer's downtown an ideal location economic development. However, to achieve this, the Town would need to address challenges such as the weak real estate market, negative perceptions towards the existing town center, circulation issues, and environmental constraints.

Key objectives from the plan include creating an information package for property owners, marketing townowned properties for adaptive reuse, and implementing a façade and sign improvement program. The plan also recommends establishing an economic delopment officer to coordinate and lead redevelopment activities. To overcome challenges such as the weak real estate market and negative perceptions, the plan encourages the use of tax incentives, zoning updates, and leveraging historic assets. The goal is to attract private sector investment, improve infrastructure, and enhance the town center's role as Spencer's economic and cultural hub.



SLUM AND BLIGHT INVENTORY REPORT 2016

The Slum and Blight Inventory Report was completed in 2016 to determine if the Spencer Town Center meets the US Department of Housing and Urban Development criteria to be considered a "slum and blighted" area. The study found that more than 25% of the properties within the town center experienced physical deterioration of buildings and abnormally low property values in addition to more than 25% of the public infrastructure categorized as in poor or fair condition. The Spencer Town Center was found to meet the criteria for the proposed slum and blight target area. The assessment completed by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission found that of the 244 structures within the target area of the Town Center, 97 were considered fair or poor.



GATEWAY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT 2018

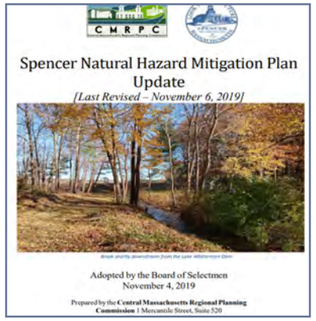
The Town of Spencer collaborated with CMRPC to investigate the different ways the six gateway points into Spencer could be enhanced or updated. Gateways are entry points into the town. Beautification of these areas can set the tone for those traveling to and from Spencer.

Recommendations for the gateways include landscaping, installing signs and banners, planting flowers, and seasonal decorations. Other recommendations included managing costs by holding fundraisers or engaging small business groups, civic organizations, and possibly incarcerated workers for help with clean-up and maintenance. The project also recommended creating a Beautification Steering Committee or Downtown Art Committee to lead efforts and involving residents in the process to ensure transparency and build community support.



MUNICIPAL VULNERABILITY PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM: COMMUNITY RESILIENCE BUILDING WORKSHOP 2018

With the support of a $16,000 Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness planning grant, the Town of Spencer partnered with Fuss & O'Neill to complete a comprehensive baseline climate change and natural hazard vulnerability assessment and develop priority actions for the Town. The process included a day-long Community Resilience Building workshop in April 2018, engaging stakeholders in group discussions about the strengths and vulnerabilities of the town. Top haards identified in the workshop were ice and snow, severe storm events/wind, excessive precipitation or drought, and extreme temperatures. Primary concerns identified include the management of water, flood mitigation and providing services to residents (particularly vulnerable populations) during hazard events. The team developed a prioritized list of action items based on the identified issues and hazards. Completion of the report enabled the Town to qualify for MVP Action grant funding for implementation.



SPENCER HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN 2019

As established by the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, requiring communities to update Hazard Mitigation plans eer fie ears to remain eligible for future disaster mitigation grants, Spencer's Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan was updated by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission and adopted in 2019. The plan identifies natural haards facing the Town of Spencer, assesses the vulnerabilities of the area's critical facilities, infrastructure, residents, and businesses, and includes recommendations on how to mitigate negative effects of t pical natural haards. ignificant haards identified in the plan that have or could affect Spencer include dam failure, drought, earthquakes, e treme temperatures, flooding, hurricanes, severe snow/ice storms/ Nor'easters, severe thunderstorms/ tornadoeswind, wildfirebrushfire, and other hazards. Flooding is among the most widespread and fre uentl identified natural haards in Spencer.

With the overall goal of facilitating activity within the Town of Spencer that reduces the loss, and risk of loss, to persons and property, mitigation strategies are categorized by four strategy types (1) structure and infrastructure strategies; (2) preparedness, corridination & response action strategies; (3) education and awareness strategies; and (4) local planning and regulatory strategies. Implementation of the plan is overseen by the Hazard Mitigation Team.

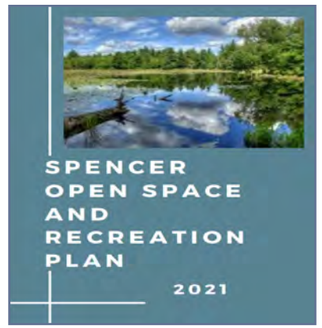


DOWNTOWN SPENCER PARKING STUDY 2020

In 2020 Spencer completed a Downtown Parking Study to capitalize on ongoing revitalization efforts in Downtown Spencer by addressing parking access and management. The goals of the study were to record the existing parking supply and daily demand, improve parking for residents, visitors, customers, and employees, and identify opportunities to improve parking. eeloping fle ible parking guidelines, and coordination among local businesses as well.

Recommendations include epanding signage and wafinding to improve clarity and guide visitors to designated parking areas and local attractions. Encouraging a "park once" environment by increasing on-street parking limits and leveraging underutilized private lots for shared parking agreements are recommended to enhance convenience for shoppers and diners. Clear and concise parking maps can also be utilized to help visitors easily locate public parking options, including digital maps for greater accessibility. Additionally, upgrading public parking lots with improved infrastructure, signage, and amenities at locations such as Mechanic Street and Wall Street would enhance pedestrian safety and usability.

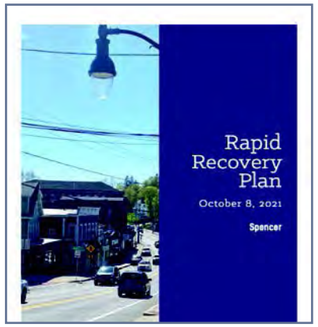
Recommended investments in multimodal infrastructure include sharrows, bike lanes, improved pedestrian crossings better lighting, paving, and landscaping. Another key strategy to encourage usage of the Town Center is to extend the on-street parking time limits from 1 hour to 2-3 hours.



OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN 2021

The Open Space and Recreation Plan was developed to aid in preserving Spencer's small-town character, elevate the attractiveness of the community, and support growth for the future. The plan also aids in coordinating best practices to protect, improve, and manage open space and recreation efforts and resources. The OSRP helps to guide townwide efforts to manage growth and protect the natural and built resources that shape the community.

The goals outlined in the OSRP focus on safeguarding water resources, maintaining Spencer's rural small-town character, enhancing recreation opportunities, and preserving open space. Key objectives include protecting the town's water supply and preserving watersheds, preserving and enhancing the town center and gateways. It also recommends tools to manage growth while preserving and promoting historic landmarks, agricultural, forest land, biodiversity, and outdoor recreation. A continuous open space planning process to ensure ongoing protection and management of Spencer's natural resources and community assets is Collectively, also these recommended. goals and objectives form a comprehensive strategy to sustainably manage growth, protect the environment, promote recreational opportunities, preserve Spencer's rural character, and ensure long-term quality of life for its residents.



2021 LOCAL RAPID RECOVERY PLAN

The Spencer Rapid Recovery Plan was completed in 2021. The Rapid Recovery Plan Program provided municipalities with actionable, project-based recovery plans tailored to economic challenges associated with COVID-19 and related impacts

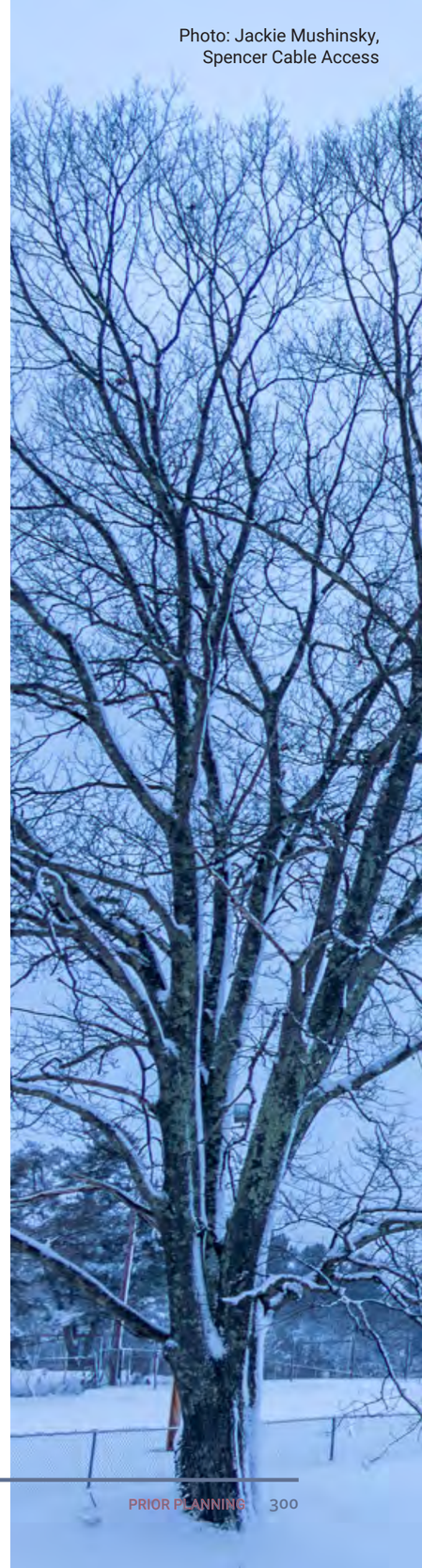
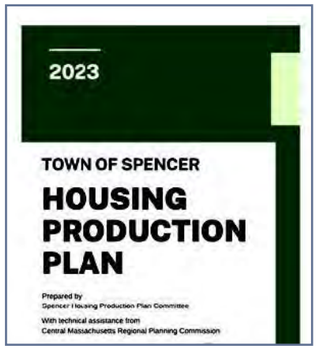


Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

to town centers and commercial areas. The plan includes detailed recommendations for design guidelines and improvements to the built environment and outlines municipal strategies to provide support for small businesses. The plan also includes an inventory of downtown businesses, and assessments of pedestrian infrastructure, lighting, signage, windows, buildings, street trees and furniture, public space, and traffic and road use.

Findings of the report indicate that facade conditions are a “mixed bag”, with 112 historic buildings in the study area inventoried by the Massachusetts Historical Commission or listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and are described as well-kept, while many other buildings along Main St and adjacent streets need cosmetic and structural improvement. Additionally, Spencer’s most common industries, including manufacturing, construction, real estate, transportation and warehousing are experiencing industry-wide change due to automation. The report suggests that diversifying the business community and locating services like hairdressers, insurance companies, and restaurants that increase foot traffic closer to downtown can support economic development, and there may be opportunities for modernized manufacturing including green automotive or light industrial advanced manufacturing in many old mill structures along Main St.



HOUSING PRODUCTION PLAN 2023

The Town of Spencer was awarded an FY21 Planning Assistance Grant to develop a Housing Production Plan (HPP). The goal of creating an HPP is to provide the town with a tool for implementing affordable and alternative housing options to meet the Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B regulations.

Chapter 40B requires that cities and towns in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts move towards ensuring that a minimum of 10% of the total housing stock ualifies as affordable to households earning at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

Strategies were identified for the following sections: Housing Development, Zoning and Policy, and Capacity Building. Meetings with the Spencer HPP Committee, the Housing Needs Community Survey, public input from community workshops, and input from housing stakeholders helped inform the following strategies. Strategies identified will help the Town obtain its affordable housing goals and create diverse housing options to meet the changing needs of the community.

Capacity Building Strategies Community outreach and education are prioritized to inform residents about housing issues and activities, aiming to build understanding and support for affordable housing initiatives. Capacity building strategies include participating in regional collaborations and attending trainings focused on addressing housing development and affordability. The plan also recommends hiring an Affordable Housing Coordinator to centralize efforts and enhance coordination in implementing the Housing Production Plan (HPP) Action Plan. Resource development recommendations include establishing a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund and exploring the adoption of the Community Preservation Act. Zoning and policy strategies focus on impro ing fle ibilit and promoting cluster development and multifamily housing where appropriate. A comprehensive zoning bylaw re-write and amendments to the Accessory Apartment bylaw and Open Space Residential Development bylaw can encourage small-scale development and the production of affordable units. To incentivize affordable housing production, the town should consider adopting Inclusionary or Incentive Zoning Bylaws. Housing development strategies include developing an inventory of town-owned land suitable for housing, repurposing underutilized properties, and advocating for accessible housing units in new developments. The Town could engage in collaborations with deelopers, both forprofit and non profit, to help epand the affordable housing inventory, monitor local housing data, and identif specific development sites.





David Prouty High School under construction. Photo: Jackie Mushinsky, Spencer Cable Access

13

Implementation

Establish clear roles, priorities, and timelines to measure progress toward achieving the intended results.

PURPOSE AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Implementation plans are tools for taking goals and concepts and putting them into action. They help ensure that planning processes culminate in tangible changes and that plans do more than 'just sit on a shelf.' Elements commonly included in implementation plans include strate ies identified in t e body of the plan, timelines for completion of each strategy, priority levels, magnitudes of cost, responsible parties, and relevant resources.

It is crucial to acknowledge that even the most well-crafted plans cannot implement themselves. It is possible for communities to identify meaningful and actionable strategies, create detailed plans for implementation, and then watch their master plans gather dust. In such cases, the missing element is often human capital. Dedicated volunteers and staff, who recognize the importance of the master plan, are the ones who determine whether and how it is used. They are the 'pixie dust' that brings a plan's strategies to life.

Establishment of a Master Plan Implementation Committee is a vital first step in implementation of Spencer Master Plan. The Committee will supply the human capital necessary to drive the plan by monitoring, coordinating, and updating implementation elements. As it proceeds with these tasks, it is important to bear in mind the purpose and intention of the Master Plan: this plan was designed to facilitate informed decision-making; it is a roadmap not a definitive blueprint for development. How the plan's strategies are implemented will need to evolve with changing conditions and realities, and the road taken may be different than t e one specified in t e plan. e successful implementation of this plan does not depend on the completion of every task listed, in the exact manner suggested. Rather, any progress that furthers the Master Plan's policies, vision, or objectives should be viewed as a success.

IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

A Master Plan Implementation Committee will enable the town to more quickly and effectively make progress executing the Master Plan recommendations. This Committee should include a dedicated group of volunteers and staff charged with the following tasks:

- Develop clear metrics, benchmarks, and objectives for implementation.
- Monitor and evaluate progress toward metrics.
- Regularly update the Implementation Plan. Identify a process for adjusting metrics based on evaluation outcomes so that the plan continues to align with real conditions and priorities.
- Communicate the status of implementation to officials and the community.
- Ensure that new and existing staff are cognizant of the Implementation Plan so that it can help Inform departmental decision-making.
- Continue to explore funding sources for implementation. New funding programs roll out daily.
- Share updates and current focuses with regional groups and partners so that they are aware of funding needs and can provide assistance tapping into resources.
- Ensure that those involved in drafting budgets and capital plans are well-versed with the Master Plan's implementation plan. Align the capital plan and budget with the master plan.
- Conduct annual report-out to the community and municipal leaders. These strategies will enable the Implementation Committee to effectively drive Implementation and ensure that future decisions are consistent with the Master Plan's recommendations.

INTERPRETING THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This Implementation Plan rates strategies according to various subjective criteria. Some of the factors that Informed the plan include:

TIME REQUIRED FOR COMPLETION

Projects that are faster to implement, either due to short work duration, current or near-term availability of funds, and/or ease of permitting or other regulatory procedures, are given higher priority.

POLITICAL AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

Strategies that have demonstrated political and/or public support through positive involvement by the public or prioritization in previous regional and local plans and initiatives that were locally initiated or adopted are given higher priority.

ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

Strategies that are realistically within the administrative capacity of the town and its available support network (CMRPC, etc.) are prioritized. Considerations include grant application requirements, grant administrative requirements (including audit requirements), procurement, and staff time to oversee projects.



IMPLEMENTATION

Town Planner= TP; DIS= Office of Development and Inspectional Services; PB= Planning Board; BoS= Board of Selectmen; Con Com= Conservation Commisssion; HC= Historical Commission; ZBA= Zoning Board of Appeals; EDC= Economic Development Committee; FD= Fire Department; HD= Highway Department; CC= Cultural Council, Parks & Rec= Parks and Recreation Commission; Financial Management Planning Committee= FMPC; Finance Committee= FC; CIPC= Capital Improvement Planning Committee, U&F= Office of Utilities & Facilities; SC= SEBRSD School Committee; CoA= Council on Aging

Economic Development		Priority (L, M, H)	Time to Completion	Magnitude of cost: Very Low- 0-50k Low- 50-100k Med- 100-250k High: 250k- 500k Major capital item: 500k+	Responsible Parties	Resources/ funding sources	Progress
Goal 1: Create a long-term, economic development strategy for retaining and attracting businesses that contribute to diversifying Spencer's tax base and increasing employment opportunities.							
Objective	Mobilize the local business community to create a more active relationship between the Town and business-owners.						
Action Item 1.1	Reactivate the Economic Development Committee				BoS, TA	Town Staff, Town Meeting	
Action Item 1.2	Engage with the Chamber of Commerce of Central Mass South to support business development and expansion.				EDC, TA	Town Staff, Chamber of Commerce of Central Mass South, CMRPC	
Action Item 1.3	Create a Business and Retail Recruitment marketing page geared toward developers, retail, & restaurant businesses.				EDC, TA	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 1.4	Establish a small business association to facilitate connections and mutual support among local businesses.				EDC, TA	Town Staff, Chambers of Commerce, CMRPC technical assistance	
Action Item 1.5	Provide incentives, such as local tax increment financing (TIF), to stimulate private investment and economic development.				EDC, TA	Town Staff	
Objective	Streamline local permitting and licensing process to decrease time and cost to applicants.						
Action Item 1.6	Conduct yearly permit process and fee comparison reviews.				All departments involved in permit review	Town Staff	
Action Item 1.7	Continue to implement the 8 modules of online permitting to streamline processes and workflows				All departments involved in permit review	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 1.8	Create a Permitting Guidebook to clarify the permitting process for applicants				All departments involved in permit review	Town Staff	
Action Item 1.9	Enforce the Town's vacant building registration bylaw to keep an up-to-date inventory of vacant commercial/industrial properties.				TP, EDC, TA	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Objective	Take an active role in identifying distressed and vacant buildings and putting them back into productive use.						
Action Item 1.10	Proactively work with distressed property owners to either sell the property to a productive user or renovate the property so that it can be used.				TP, EDC, TA, DIS	Town Staff, CDBG	
Action Item 1.11	Coordinate with Building and Fire Departments to assess the condition and safety concerns of buildings and take action to protect the public by having them rehabilitated or demolished.				TP, TA, EDC, DIS, FD	Town Staff	
Goal 2: Create a more vibrant, sustainable, and livable town center that will foster economic and social opportunities.							
Objective	Update the zoning bylaw to accommodate infill, adaptive reuse, and redevelopment in the town center.						
Action Item 2.1	Amend the town's zoning bylaws to increase simplicity and flexibility for desired small businesses, residential and infill development.				TP, PB, EDC, BoS	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 2.2	Explore the use of incentives to promote active ground floor uses for tenant spaces along Main St, or within the Town Center.				TP, PB, EDC	Town Staff	
Objective	Reduce storefront vacancies by bringing business opportunities to existing commercial and mixed-use buildings.						

Action Item 2.3	Continue to access and expand opportunities for grant funding for physical improvements.				TP, TA, EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Mass Cultural Council	
Action Item 2.4	Identify public art opportunities throughout the town center.				EDC, TA, CC	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Mass Cultural Council	
Action Item 2.5	Attract a diverse retail mix by connecting property and business owners.				EDC, TA	Town Staff, Chamber of Commerce of Central Mass South, CMRPC	
Action Item 2.6	Draw foot traffic to the town center by encouraging and organizing events in outdoor gathering areas.				EDC, TA, CC, Celebrations Committee, Parks & Rec	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Mass Cultural Council	
Action Item 2.7	Create a site finder service—a database of available sites and real estate information that can help businesses find the spaces they need.				EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Objective	Create public gathering areas by activating underutilized spaces around the town center						
Action Item 2.8	Explore opportunities to create a town common.				TP, TA, EDC, PB, HD	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Community One Stop, EEA PAG	
Action Item 2.9	Reconfigure the Muzzy Meadow Pond Dam area to accommodate more public use and recreational activities.				TP, TA, EDC, PB, HD	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Community One Stop, EEA PAG	
Objective	Continue to implement physical improvements in the town's commercial areas.						
Action Item 2.10	Implement a Façade Improvement Program				TP, EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 2.11	Improve streetscape design along Main Street, including wayfinding, sidewalks, landscaping, and street furniture.				TP, TA, EDC, PB, HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Goal 3: Continue to encourage the creation of robust trade areas in Spencer's commercial districts to support services and retail opportunities that meet the daily needs of Spencer's residents.							
Objective	Increase commercial development in existing commercial areas such as the Big Y Plaza and Klem's area, Town Center area, and east end of Route 9.						
Action Item 3.1	Support restaurant and retail establishments through permitting that encourages outdoor dining and displays; work with businesses to facilitate the setup of outdoor dining facilities.				TP, TA, EDC, HD	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 3.2	Allow by right microbreweries, microdistilleries, and eating establishments specializing in serving alcoholic beverages in the Town Center Mixed Use zoning district.				TP, EDC, DIS, TA	CMRPC technical assistance, Town staff	
Action item 3.3	Review market data to identify demand and opportunities for growth in Spencer's commercial areas. Use this information to tailor the Town's marketing efforts and outreach to prospective businesses and developers.				EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Chambers of Commerce	
Goal 4: Expand capacity to support and facilitate the creation of employment in Spencer.							
Objective	Identify potential sites that could support future commercial and industrial development.						
Action item 4.1	Explore the feasibility of an Industrial Park on route 49 linked to a train service to Worcester, Boston, and beyond, using CSX rail service with a park and ride.				TP, PB, EDC	CSX, MassDOT, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Town Staff	
Action item 4.2	Improve and extend municipal infrastructure to enable the town to attract new businesses.				EDC, Water & Sewer Depts., FMPC, FC	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance , Community One Stop, EEA PAG	
Action item 4.3	Strive to meet local demand for medical and urgent care facilities while creating opportunities for employment.				EDC, TP; PB	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Objective	Encourage the development of a strong Ecotourism industry						
Action item 4.4	Incorporate ecotourism strategies in the Town's economic development planning.				EDC, Con Com, Parks & Rec, CC, HC	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	

Land Use		Priority (L, M, H)	Time to Completion	Magnitude of cost: Very Low- 0-50k Low- 50-100k Med- 100-250k High: 250k- 500k Major capital item: 500k+	Responsible Parties	Resources/ funding sources	Progress
Goal 1: Update the Town's bylaws to ensure that they align with the community's priorities on growth and preservation.							
Objective	Review the Zoning Bylaw to identify changes that will help address and accommodate growth						
Action Item 1.1	Update the use table for the Town Center Mixed Use District to ensure that it permits as much acceptable development as possible, by right, and that it is supportive of adaptive reuse and other revitalization measures.				PB, TP, BoS	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 1.2	Explore the adoption of a Smart Development Overlay Zone.				PB, TP, BoS	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 1.3	Explore the revision of the Town Center Mixed Use District to ensure that it is supportive of adaptive reuse and other revitalization measures.				PB, TP, DIS, BoS	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 1.4	Explore the adoption of zoning measures to support Farmland Preservation.				PB, TP, BoS	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 1.5	Explore the adoption of a Corridor Protection Overlay Zone (for Turkey Hill Brook and Wire Villages Corridors).				PB, TP, Con Com, BoS	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 1.6	Explore the adoption of a Scenic District Overlay Zone or the designation of select roads as Scenic Roads.				PB, TP, Con Com, BoS	Town Staff, Consultant	
Objective	Review Subdivision Regulations to identify changes that will help address and accommodate growth						
Action Item 1.7	Review of the Town's Subdivision Regulations				PB, TP	Town Staff, Consultant	
Objective	Encourage development that helps preserve the Town's rural and historic character						
Action Item 1.8	Promote and encourage Agricultural Protection Restrictions to preserve the rural character of the Town.				PB, TP, Con Com	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Central Mass Grown	
Action Item 1.9	Incentivize the preservation of the historic character of the Town.				PB, TP, HC, EDC, BoS	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Preservation Massachusetts, Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund	
Action Item 1.10	Build on the recent solar bylaw amendments to continue to make solar and agricultural uses more compatible, such as using Smart Solar zoning options or encouraging developers to look at non-Rural Residential zoned sites.				PB, TP, BoS	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, UMass Clean Energy Extension, Green Communities	
Goal 2: Encourage private investments by creating by-right development mechanisms for the type of development that aligns with the Town's economic development priorities and Master Plan strategies.							
Objective	Increase predictability and lower costs for developers						
Action Item 2.1	Explore the potential of Chapter 43D – Expedited Local Permitting.				PB, TP	Community One Stop for Growth, Town Staff, CMRPC	
Action Item 2.2	Reevaluate requirements for Special Permits to eliminate those no longer considered necessary.				PB, TP, BoS	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 2.3	Re-evaluate application fees for Special permits.				PB, TP, BoS	Town Staff	
Action Item 2.4	Simplify and clarify Site Development Plan procedures and requirements.				PB, ZBA, TP, BoS	Town Staff, CMRPC	

Action Item 2.5	Extend the Online Permitting Process to Conservation, Zoning, and other Planning applications.				All departments involved in permit review	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Action Item 2.6	Establish a process of meeting early with interested developers, particularly concerning Infrastructure Extensions.				All departments involved in permit review	Town Staff	
Objective	Maximize the Benefits of Community Preservation Act Funds						
Goal 3: Advance the implementation of prior Town Center revitalization planning efforts.							
Objective	Use regulatory tools and incentives to encourage the re-development of vacant properties.						
Action Item 3.1	Reassess the condition of buildings in the Town Center to identify safety issues and pursue code enforcement.				DIS, Board of Health, FD	Town Staff, MVP Action Grant, Community One Stop for Growth, EEA PAG Grant	
Action Item 3.2	Use regulatory tools to prompt absentee owners to stabilize and maintain blighted properties.				TP, EDC, DIS, TA	CMRPC technical assistance, Town Staff	
Action Item 3.3	Assess the potential benefits of incentives and where appropriate, partner with the AGO to use receivership or demolition to address distressed or blighted properties.				TP, EDC, DIS, TA	AGO, CMRPC technical assistance, Town Staff	
Objective	Codify elements of the existing design guidelines into the Zoning Bylaw to create a vibrant physical environment and enhance the pedestrian experience.						
Action Item 3.4	Review the Signage Bylaw as part of the Zoning Bylaw review and allocate funds for enforcement staff.				PB, TP, BoS	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 3.5	Make the Town Center work for the Town's people as a functionally and visually connected, walkable space that offers opportunities for gatherings, festivals, and entertainment.				PB, TP, BoS	PARC grant; LAND Grant; Community Forest grant program; Community One Stop for Growth; CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Objective	Implement the recommendations of the 2021 Parking Study.						
Action Item 3.6	Prepare and implement a Wayfinding and signage plan to direct drivers to parking and other opportunities.				PB, TP	Town Staff, MassDOT, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 3.7	Improve parking experience by pursuing shared parking agreements and upgrades to parking facilities.				PB, TP, HD	Town Staff, MassDOT, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Goal 4: Encourage a mix of uses along the Route 9 Corridor							
Objective	Align growth and development patterns with the community's vision						
Action Item 4.1	Review the Commercial District regulations to encourage investments and economic activity.				PB, TP, TA, EDC	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 4.2	Explore the possibility of rezoning land near Route 49 to increase the amount of industrial land available.				PB, TP, BoS	Town Staff, Consultant	
Housing and Population		**Priority (L, M, H)**	**Time to Completion**	**Magnitude of cost: Very Low- 0-50k Low- 50-100k Med- 100-250k High: 250k- 500k Major capital item: 500k+**	**Responsible Parties**	**Resources/ funding sources**	**Progress**
Goal 1: Pursue policies and partnerships that encourage affordable housing production and work to meet the affordable housing thresholds established by M.G.L. Chapter 40B.							
Objective	Use regulatory tools to expand the diversity of housing options.						

Action Item 1.1	Enhance the Town's capacity to plan for and implement housing strategies.				TA, EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, EEA PAG Grant, Community One Stop	
Action Item 1.2	Create a developer outreach and attraction strategy and partner with for- and non-profit developers.				TP, EDC	Town Staff	
Action Item 1.3	Explore the adoption of a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund.				TP, EDC, FC, BoS	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, EEA PAG Grant, Community One Stop	
Action Item 1.4	Create a program for landlords that would provide free legal assistance to establish restricted deeds for affordable rentals and reduce taxes by 1% on the deed restricted property for the duration of the restrictions.				TP, EDC		
Goal 2: Enable housing development that prioritizes the preservation of open space.							
Objective	Use Smart Growth principles to ensure that new housing development design and location prioritizes the preservation of open space, particularly in North and South Spencer.						
Action Item 2.1	Support cluster development where applicable.				TP, PB	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 2.2	Up-zone select neighborhoods by reducing density and height limitations while maintaining desired housing forms.				TP, PB	Town Staff, Consultant	
Action Item 2.3	Reduce dimensional requirements for duplexes and other small-scale multi-family housing forms.				TP, PB	Town Staff, Consultant	
Goal 3: Review zoning to promote the diversification of the Town's housing stock while mitigating the impact on the community's services and infrastructure.							
Objective	Streamline the permitting process for home conversions, improvements, accessory dwelling units, and redevelopment on nonconforming lots.						
Action Item 3.1	Modify Spencer's Accessory Dwelling Unit bylaw to allow for more opportunities for small-scale housing development, including detached units.				TP, PB	Town Staff, Consultant	
Objective	Encourage the redevelopment of the Town's vacant or underutilized building stock.						
Action Item 3.2	Create incentives for the revitalization of blighted housing.				TP, EDC, BoS	Town Staff	
Action Item 3.3	Create an open dialogue with downtown business and property owners.				EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC technical assistance	
Action Item 3.4	Participate in the Attorney General's Neighborhood Renewal Division.				TP, TA, DIS	Town Staff	
Goal 4: Encourage the development of senior housing to support aging in place.							
Objective	Enhance services dedicated for the senior population						
Action Item 4.1	Review and promote forward-thinking aging in place policies and facilities.				CoA, TA, TP	Town Staff; MA Healthy Aging Collaborative; AARP; MA Councils on Aging; CMRPC	
Action Item 4.2	Promote the Home Modification Loan Program for accessibility upgrades.				CoA, TA, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC technical assistance	
Action Item 4.3	Encourage the development of senior assisted living facilities.				CoA, TA, TP	Town Staff; MA Healthy Aging Collaborative; AARP; MA Councils on Aging; CMRPC	

Transportation		**Priority (L, M, H)**	**Time to Completion**	**Magnitude of cost: Very Low- 0-50k Low- 50-100k Med- 100-250k High: 250k- 500k Major capital item: 500k+**	**Responsible Parties**	**Resources/ funding sources**	**Progress**
Goal 1: Improve the safety of Spencer's transportation system for all users.							

Objective	Utilize the Safe Systems Approach to advance the zero deaths vision.						
Action Item 1.1	Review and implement speed management.				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Action Item 1.2	Design roads and other facilities to accommodate all road users and separate vulnerable road users.				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Action Item 1.3	Implement Driver Outreach to young and older drivers.				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Action Item 1.4	Continue to be an active participant in the MassDOT Safe Routes to School Program				HD	CMRPC; Safe Routes to School Program	
Goal 2: Improve the reliability and performance of Spencer's transportation system.							
Objective	Reduce congestion and delays at key intersections around Spencer.						
Action Item 2.1	Develop a local road classification system and design standard				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; Safe Routes to School Program	
Action Item 2.2	Implement strategies found in the CMMPO Congestion Management Process (CMP)				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Action Item 2.3	Implement strategies to reduce the impact of non-recurring congestion.				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Goal 3: Improve connectivity in and access to the town center. Improve the reliability and performance of Spencer's transportation system.							
Objective	Enhance non-motorized infrastructure within and in proximity to downtown.						
Action Item 3.1	Improve Pedestrian infrastructure.				HD, TP, PB	MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces; Town Meeting	
Action Item 3.2	Improve bicycle infrastructure.				HD, TP, PB	MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces; Town Meeting	
Objective	Improve parking infrastructure and wayfinding within and in proximity to downtown.						
Action Item 3.3	Continue to monitor the parking areas identified in the 2020 Downtown Parking Study for changes and work to implement findings.				HD, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC, MassDOT	
Action Item 3.4	Review and update parking regulations to accommodate current parking needs including but not limited to EV charging and shared parking.				HD, TP	DOER Green Communities, MDEP, MassEVIP Grant Program, MassEVIP Public Access charging Initiatives, MassEVIP Fleet Charging Program	
Action Item 3.5	Improve downtown wayfinding for municipal buildings, public parking, and key destinations.				HD, TP, PB	Town Staff, MassDOT, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Goal 4: Enhance regional and cross-town connectivity while helping to preserve Spencer's rural character.							
Objective	Explore opportunities for increasing and promoting travel on the WRTA system.						
Action Item 4.1	Promote WRTA ridership through improved traveler training and information efforts.				HD	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassDOT, WRTA	

Action Item 4.2	Explore implementing bus stop improvements.				HD	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassDOT, WRTA	
Objective	Explore and promote alternative transportation options.						
Action Item 4.3	Explore opportunities to add additional train and park-and-ride options.				HD, TP, EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassDOT, WRTA	
Action Item 4.4	Promote the use of Transportation Network Companies within Spencer				HD, TP, EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Action Item 4.5	Expand and promote healthcare transportation services for veterans, seniors, and persons with disabilities.				HD, TP, EDC, Board of Health, CoA	WRTA	
Open Space,Recreation, and Natural Resources		**Priority (L, M, H)**	**Time to Completion**	**Magnitude of cost: Very Low- 0-50k Low- 50-100k Med- 100-250k High: 250k- 500k Major capital item: 500k+**	**Responsible Parties**	**Resources/ funding sources**	**Progress**
Goal 1: Protect valuable water resources from adverse impacts and degradation.							
Objective	Protect the Town's water supply and promote watershed health.						
Action Item 1.1	Improve quality of streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes while prioritizing water bodies that offer public access for recreation.				Con Com, Parks & Rec	604b Program, CPA	
Action Item 1.2	Conserve, or permanently protect, lands adjacent to streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes, where possible.				Con Com, TP	PARC grant, LAND grant	
Action Item 1.3	Encourage boat washing and provide a boat washing station at Browning Pond and Sudgen Reservoir to prevent the spread of invasives.				Con Com, Parks & Rec	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Objective	Revitalize the Town beach.						
Action Item 1.4	Increase maintenance of Town beach access points.				Parks & Rec	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Goal 2: Enhance recreational opportunities for Town residents and visitors.							
Objective	Build Town capacity to support the maintenance and expansion of Town recreation opportunities and facilities.						
Action Item 2.1	Develop a financial plan to support the maintenance of recreational facilities.				FC, Parks & Rec, U&F	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 2.2	Develop a financial plan to support the expansion of recreational opportunities.				FC, Parks & Rec, U&F, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 2.3	Utilize the ADA-assessment from the 2021 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) to assess the accessibility of Town recreational facilities and pursue improvements where possible.				Parks & Rec, U&F, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 2.4	Explore the provision of a dog park.				Parks & Rec, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 2.5	Explore the provision of a recreation center, potentially alongside a dog park.				Parks & Rec, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Objective	Increase access to water-based recreation opportunities.						
Action Item 2.6	Explore the provision of (a) canoe/kayak launch(es).				Parks & Rec, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 2.7	Assess the quantity and quality of fishing spots in Town and make accessibility improvements where possible.				Parks & Rec, U&F, Con Com, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Objective	Enhance the quality of Spencer's trail network.						
Action Item 2.8	Assess the accessibility of Town recreational trails and explore the feasibility of accessibility improvements where possible.				Parks & Rec, U&F, Con Com, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassTrails	
Action Item 2.9	Assess feasibility of allowing off-road biking, ATVing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and/or snowmobiling on Town recreational trails, as appropriate.				Parks & Rec, U&F, Con Com, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassTrails	
Action Item 2.10	Implement phase two (2) of the Depot Trail Restoration and Improvement Project.er				Parks & Rec, U&F, Con Com, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassTrails	

Action Item 2.11	Consider access to existing parks, historic sites, and conservation lands throughout all trail planning efforts.				Parks & Rec, U&F, Con Com, TP, HC	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassTrails	
Goal 3: Conserve Spencer's open spaces.							
Objective	Protect Town lands that offer special environmental, economic, and/or recreational value.						
Action Item 3.1	Preserve open spaces for wildlife habitat.				Con Com, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Land Trusts, PARC Grant, LAND Grant	
Action Item 3.2	Conserve forestlands.				Con Com, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Land Trusts, PARC Grant, LAND Grant	
Action Item 3.3	Protect farmland.				Con Com, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Land Trusts, MDAR, Central Mass Grown	
Action Item 3.4	Protect and enhance lands available for hunting.				Con Com, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Land Trusts	
Action Item 3.5	Allow for additional passive recreation and/or nature/wildlife viewing at Town open spaces, where possible.				Con Com, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, Land Trusts, PARC Grant, LAND Grant	
Action Item 3.6	Continue to consider local desire to adopt Community Preservation Act (CPA).						
Objective	Work with Land Trusts (Common Ground and Greater Worcester Land Trust).						
Action Item 3.7	Charge a Town Board or Committee with meeting regularly with local land trusts to discuss their properties.				TA, Con Com	Town Staff	
Action Item 3.8	Enact protections over additional open space land in partnership with local land trusts.				Con Com	Town Staff, Land Trusts	
Goal 4: Build and enhance Town capacity to facilitate and implement Open Space Planning processes.							
Objective	Establish a continuous Open Space Planning Process.						
Action Item 4.1	Establish an Open Space Committee, distinct from the Conservation Commission and Parks & Recreation Commission and promote the opportunity to become a committee member to all residents.				TA, BoS	Town Staff, Town Meeting	
Action Item 4.2	Charge Open Space Committee with reviewing the OSRP action plan/Master Plan goals, objectives, and actions, and implementing these actions, as possible.				TA, BoS	Town Staff, Town Meeting	
Action Item 4.3	Assess appropriate measures to ensure the Town can access grant funding and effectively spend any acquired funding.				TA, BoS, Con Com, Parks & Rec, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Historical and Cultrual Resources		**Priority (L, M, H)**	**Time to Completion**	**Magnitude of cost: Very Low- 0-50k Low- 50-100k Med- 100-250k High: 250k- 500k Major capital item: 500k+**	**Responsible Parties**	**Resources/ funding sources**	**Progress**
Goal 1: Preserve the town's historic resources.							
Objective	Develop a comprehensive historic preservation plan.						
Action Item 1.1	Create development and review criteria for the historic district.				HC	Town Staff, Massachusetts Historical Commission, CMRPC, Preservation Massachusetts	

Action Item 1.2	Inventory and protect artifacts in Library storage.				HC	Town Staff	
Action Item 1.3	Seek out a new location for the History Museum that is accessible to the public and has sufficient and secure storage.				HC,TP	Town Staff	
Action Item 1.4	The Town should assess its own properties and recently acquired properties.						
Action Item 1.5	Identify a funding source for creating a vital records management program to preserve and digitize town records.					Town Staff, CMRPC	
Objective	Leverage historic assets for economic development using the Main Street America program's Four Points framework						
Action Item 1.6	Economic vitality - educate property owners, and new, and existing businesses on the benefits of Tax Credits and other economic and financial tools.				HC, TP	Town Staff, Massachusetts Historical Commission, CMRPC	
Action Item 1.7	Design – continue to work toward enhancing the physical and visual assets in Spencer's historic district.				HC, TP, HD, EDC	Town Staff, Massachusetts Historical Commission, CMRPC, Preservation Massachusetts, Community One Stop, CPA, EEA PAG	
Action Item 1.8	Promotion & Organization: use promotional tools creating a positive image that showcases the center of town as a civic and commercial hub.				HC, TP, HD, EDC, CC, TA	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Goal 2: Use Regulatory and Zoning tools to Preserve the Town's Historic Character							
Objective	Develop strategies to protect and preserve historic and cultural resources.						
Action Item 2.1	Establish a Local Historic District.				HC	Town Staff, Massachusetts Historical Commission, CMRPC, Preservation Massachusetts	
Action Item 2.2	Adopt a Demolition Delay Bylaw.				HC, TP, BoS	Town Staff, Massachusetts Historical Commission, CMRPC, Preservation Massachusetts	
Action Item 2.3	Pursue adoption of the Community Preservation Act.				HC	Town Staff, Massachusetts Historical Commission, CMRPC, Preservation Massachusetts, Community Preservation Coalition	
Action Item 2.4	Educate property owners on the benefits of Tax Credits.				HC	Town Staff, Massachusetts Historical Commission, CMRPC	
Goal 3: Provide cultural opportunities for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities.							
Objective	Support strong collaboration between Spencer's Cultural Council and the arts, culture, historic, and business communities through effective communication and coordination. communities through effective communication and						
Action Item 3.1	Design cultural opportunities that educate Spencer's residents about the town's unique heritage and history.				HC, CC, EDC, Parks & Rec	SEBRSD, Town Staff, Mass Cultural Council, CMRPC	
Action Item 3.2	Encourage community involvement in events such as street festivals, history days, farmer's markets, concerts, community theater, etc. to attract visitors and build appreciation for local history and culture.				HC, CC, EDC, Parks & Rec	SEBRSD, Town Staff, Mass Cultural Council	
Action Item 3.3	Encourage youth participation in cultural events				HC, CC, EDC, SC, Parks & Rec	SEBRSD, Town Staff, Mass Cultural Council	
Goal 4: Balance growth with the preservation of Spencer priority heritage landscapes.							
Objective	Implement the recommendations of the Reconnaissance Report						
Action Item 4.1	Use regulatory tools to protect Spencer's heritage landscapes identified in the 2008 Reconnaissance Report				HC, Con Com, TP, PB, ZBA	Town Staff, CMRPC	

Action Item 4.2	Leverage historical and natural assets by incorporate Town's historic and cultural background into ecotourism policies.				HC, Con Com, TP, PB, ZBA, CC, EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Objective	Put brownfields and environmentally compromised sites in Town back into productive use.						
Action Item 4.3	Review and catalog brownfield sites and develop a long-term remediation plan for each identified site				TP, Board of Health, EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC, MassDEP	
Action Item 4.4	Identify underutilized or distressed properties that are not included on the Department of Environmental Protection list.						
Action Item 4.5	Pursue grant funding for brownfield remediation.				TP, Board of Health, EDC	Town Staff, CMRPC, MassDEP, MassDevelopment Brownfields Redevelopment Fund, DOR Brownfields Tax Credit, CDBG, EPA Brownfields Program	
Town Services and Facilities		**Priority (L, M, H)**	**Time to Completion**	**Magnitude of cost: Very Low- 0-50k Low- 50-100k Med- 100-250k High: 250k- 500k Major capital item: 500k+**	**Responsible Parties**	**Resources/ funding sources**	**Progress**
Goal 1: Ensure the Town has the resources and staff to provide quality and cost-effective Town services for all Spencer residents, businesses, and visitors.							
Objective	Increase Town capacity through smart and financially resilient growth strategies						
Action Item 1.1	Explore opportunities to amend town bylaws, policies, and programs to facilitate financially resilient growth and development.				All departments, boards, committees, etc.	Town Staff, Town Meeting	
Action Item 1.2	Increase Spencer's status as an attractive place to live and do business.				All departments, boards, committees, etc.	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Objective	Continue to leverage external resources to build financial stability and improve service delivery.						
Action Item 1.3	Work with regional partners to tap into grant and other funding opportunities for capital needs and plan implementation.				All departments, boards, committees, etc.	Town Staff, CMRPC, Chambers of Commerce, Land Trusts, Community Foundations	
Action Item 1.4	Explore regionalization, intermunicipal job shares and agreements as a way to expand service offerings and improve the cost-effectiveness of services.				All departments, boards, committees, etc.	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Objective	Improve Town service delivery and expand service offerings.						
Action Item 1.5	Conduct a staffing analysis to identify staffing needs and priorities across Town departments.				TA, FC, FMPC, HR	Town Staff	
Action Item 1.6	Work to ensure that Town compensation is competitive.				TA, FC, FMPC, HR	Town Staff	
Action Item 1.7	Use creative strategies to Improve employee recruitment and retention.				TA, FC, FMPC, HR	Town Staff	
Action Item 1.8	Return hours of opening and operation toward a five-day week.				TA, FC, FMPC, HR	Town Staff	

Goal 2: Ensure the optimal operation and functioning of all town facilities and make improvements, where necessary.							
Objective	Improve the Town's Capital and Financial Planning Process to better account for needed facility maintenance and capital depreciation.						
Action Item 2.1	Create facilities maintenance plan that tackles both the Town's deferred maintenance and the predicted lifespan of new buildings and capital assets.				U&F	Town Staff, CMRPC , Community One Stop	
Action Item 2.2	Explore the allocation of resources toward the renovation and expansion of municipal facilities through the creation and maintenance of a Capital Improvement Plan/Program.				U&F, CIPC	Town Staff, CMRPC , Community One Stop	
Action Item 2.3	Explore opportunities to open underutilized public facilities as shared-use or additional uses such as town-sponsored activities and events.				TA, TP, U&F, SC	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Objective	Work to improve educational quality and reputation in the town's schools.						
Action Item 2.4	Work with the SEBRSD to develop a districtwide school maintenance plan.				SC	SEBRSD, Town Staff, MSBA	
Action Item 2.5	Continue to offer programming relevant to the interests of students.				SC	SEBRSD, DESE, MASC	
Action Item 2.6	Implement the strategies of the 2021 to 2024 strategic plan				SC	SEBRSD, DESE, MASC	
Action Item 2.7	Create a new strategic plan for 2025- 2028				SC	SEBRSD, DESE, MASC	
Goal 3: Maintain, improve and strategically expand town infrastructure to eliminate barriers to economic development.							
Objective	Continue to Improve sewer and water infrastructure						
Action Item 3.1	Raise resident awareness about private septic issues through informational campaigns, especially around lakes and water bodies				Sewer Dept.	Town Staff, CMRPC, EPA, Massachusetts Environmental Trust	
Action Item 3.2	Explore strategic expansions to town water and sewer				Sewer Dept.	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Goal 4: Improve Town communication with and public involvement in local government							
Objective	Improve communication with residents about town projects, decisions, and opportunities to get involved.						
Action Item 4.1	Develop a Town social media presence on a range of platforms.				TA	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Action Item 4.2	Continue to look for creative ways to expand and encourage volunteerism on Town boards and committees.				All departments, boards, committees, etc.	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Action Item 4.3	Increase awareness of the Town's municipal emergency alert system.				TA	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Action Item 4.4	Create a community issue reporting system.				HD	Town Staff, CMRPC	
Objective	Identify opportunities for and communicate across the region about recreational, cultural, and commercial opportunities in the town.						
Action Item 4.5	Build partnerships with local businesses and cultural organizations to co-sponsor events. Create sponsorship opportunities that allow businesses to contribute financially or in-kind (e.g., providing goods or services) in exchange for promotional benefits.				EDC, CC, HC	Town Staff, CMRPC, Mass Cultural Council	
Action Item 4.6	Use existing and new Town communication channels to advertise both Town sponsored and private events and create a townwide community calendar.				Communications Manager, EDC, CC	Town Staff, CMRPC	

Energy and Environmental Resiliency		**Priority (L, M, H)**	**Time to Completion**	**Magnitude of cost: Very Low- 0-50k Low- 50-100k Med- 100-250k High: 250k- 500k Major capital item: 500k+**	**Responsible Parties**	**Resources/ funding sources**	**Progress**

Goal 1: Improve and expand municipal renewable energy utilization and generation.							
Objective	Explore opportunities for renewable energy utilization and generation						
Action Item 1.1	Consider municipal purchasing of green power, such as through renewable energy certificates (RECs)				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Action Item 1.2	Explore opportunities to develop municipal renewable energy generation sites, such as through solar canopies over parking lots				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Goal 2: Improve energy efficiency of residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial buildings.							
Objective	Promote and implement energy efficiency measures.						
Action Item 2.1	Develop or collect and then distribute educational materials about incentives and benefits for weatherization				HD	CMRPC; Technical Assistance	
Action Item 2.2	Pursue municipal decarbonization efforts through infrastructural improvements that consider and incorporate resiliency measures				HD	CMRPC; Technical Assistance	
Action Item 2.3	Explore implementing geothermal heat pumps at Town buildings				HD	CMRPC; Technical Assistance	
Goal 3: Encourage and support local and regional transportation decarbonization efforts							
Objective	Promote the transition to hybrid and electric vehicles.						
Action Item 3.1	Assess the conditions and utilization of existing EV chargers in Spencer and consider the efficacy of implementing additional charging infrastructure				HD, TP, PB	MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces; Town Meeting	
Goal 4: Increase access to alternative transportation options for residents.							
Objective	Increase access and utilization of transit options.						
Action Item 4.1	Work with WRTA to increase accessibility of transit stops in Spencer.				HD	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassDOT, WRTA	
Action Item 4.2	Promote WRTA services to residents.				HD	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassDOT, WRTA	
Objective	Increase access and utilization of active transportation options.						
Action Item 4.3	Work with neighboring communities as well as regional and state entities to improve sections of the Mid-State Trail in Spencer, including ADA accessibility improvements				HD, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassDOT, WRTA	
Objective	Leverage existing mapping efforts to promote conections between active transportation and transit networks.						
Action Item 4.4	Work with local and regional stakeholders to improve existing mapping efforts of Spencer's active transportation and transit assets, and then promote resources to residents.				HD, TP	Town Staff, CMRPC Technical Assistance, MassDOT, WRTA	
Goal 5: Reduce and utilize waste generated.							
Objective	Reduce and utilize organic waste						
Action Item 5.1	Promote educational materials about organic waste.				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; Safe Routes to School Program	
Action Item 5.2	Assess the feasibility of diverting additional local organic waste and scaling-up municipal composting.				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Objective	Increase lifecycle of material produced, used, and disposed of.						
Action Item 5.3	Analyze the local recycling stream and identify areas for improvement.				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	

Action Item 5.4	Consider collecting recyclable materials to donate to local educational institutions and industries for repair and reuse.				HD	CMRPC; MassDOT; MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces	
Goal 6: Conserve and enhance natural land and woodlands.							
Objective	Promote the resiliency benefits of natural lands and woodlands.						
Action Item 6.1	Convene local natural lands stakeholders to discuss opportunities to conserve and enhance woodlands and other natural lands in Spencer				TP, Con Com	MassDOT Complete Streets; MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces; Town Meeting	
Goal 7: Increase the resiliency and viability of agriculture operations.							
Objective	Improve on-farm soil and livestock management						
Action Item 7.1	Collect and analyze data from local agricultural operations regarding soil and livestock management practices to determine areas for improvement				TP, Con Com	Town Staff, Land Trust, CMRPC Technical Assistance	
Action Item 7.2	Develop and distribute educational materials related to specific actions that may reduce Spencer's agricultural operations emissions through soil and livestock management.				TP, Con Com	Town Staff, Land Trust, CMRPC Technical Assistance	



Spencer Fair
Photo: Mark Shea
Spencer Cable Access

14

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

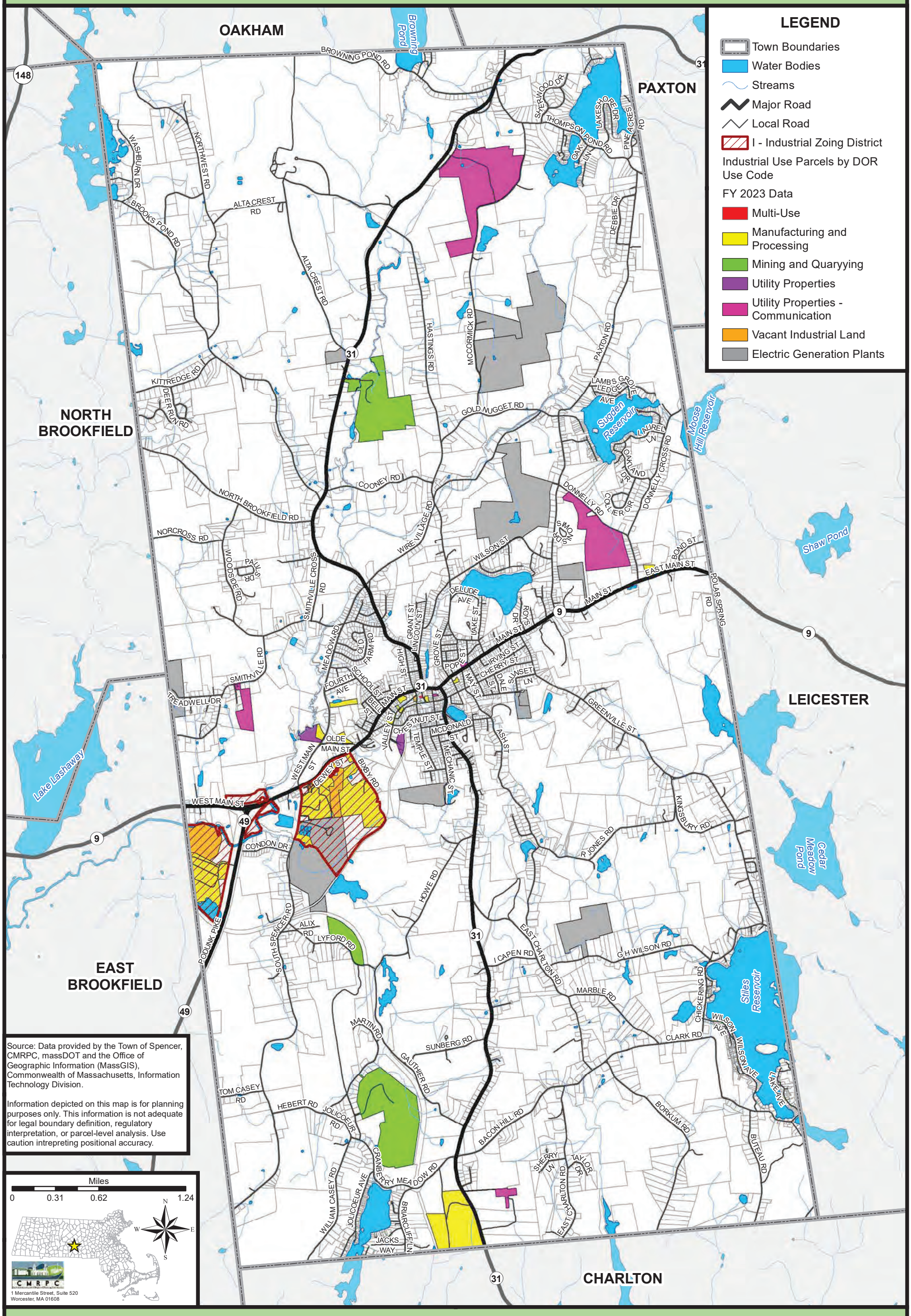
APPENDIX A: MAPS

APPENDIX B: DATA FINDINGS

APPENDIX C: SURVEYS

Appendix

INDUSTRIAL LAND



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road
- I - Industrial Zoing District

Industrial Use Parcels by DOR Use Code

FY 2023 Data

- Multi-Use
- Manufacturing and Processing
- Mining and Quaryying
- Utility Properties
- Utility Properties - Communication
- Vacant Industrial Land
- Electric Generation Plants

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

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 intrepreting positional accuracy.

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Town of Spencer, Massachusetts

Date: 2/28/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_misc_2024\m280_Industrial_Land_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan

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LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road
- NRCS HUC Subbasin Boundary
- NRCS HUC Watershed Boundary

Aquifers
- High Yield (> 300 gpm)
- Medium Yield (100-300 gpm

NRCS HUC Subwatersheds
- Quinebaug River-Cady Brook to West Dudley Pond
- Quaboag River-headwaters to Muddy Brook
- Little River
- East Brookfield River-headwaters to Sevenmile River
- Upper French River
- Sevenmile River

OAKHAM
PAXTON
NORTH BROOKFIELD
EAST BROOKFIELD
LEICESTER
CHARLTON

QUABOAG RIVER WATERSHED
East Brookfield River-headwaters to Sevenmile River Subwatershed
Sevenmile River Subwatershed
FRENCH RIVER WATERSHED
Upper French River Subwatershed
Little River Subwatershed
UPPER QUINEBAUG RIVER WATERSHED

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

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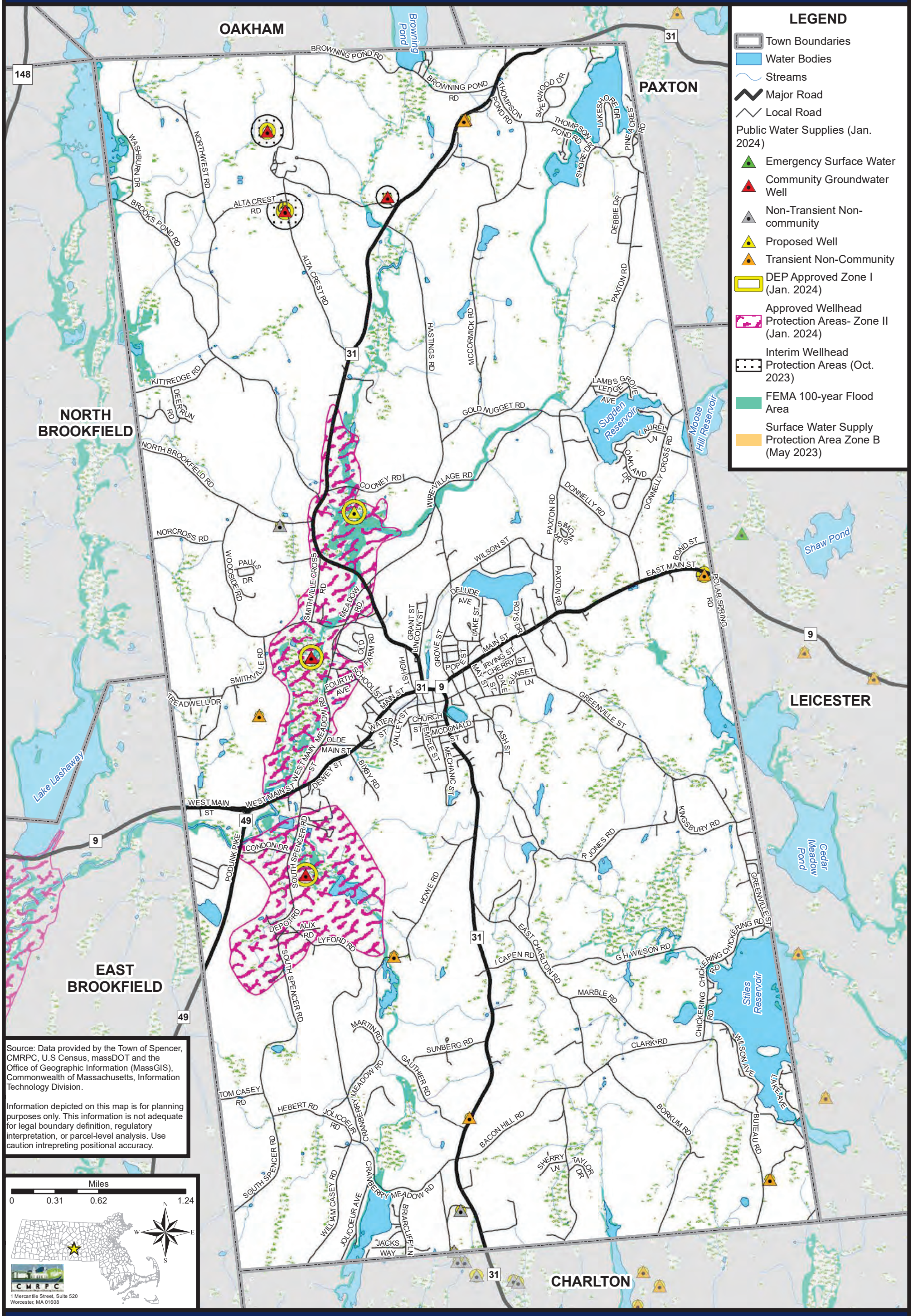
Nashua Subbasin
Chicopee Subbasin
Blackstone Subbasin
Quinebaug Subbasin

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Map 5 Water Resources 1

Date: 4/19/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_05_WaterResources1_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road

Public Water Supplies (Jan. 2024)

- Emergency Surface Water
- Community Groundwater Well
- Non-Transient Non-community
- Proposed Well
- Transient Non-Community
- DEP Approved Zone I (Jan. 2024)
- Approved Wellhead Protection Areas- Zone II (Jan. 2024)
- Interim Wellhead Protection Areas (Oct. 2023)
- FEMA 100-year Flood Area
- Surface Water Supply Protection Area Zone B (May 2023)

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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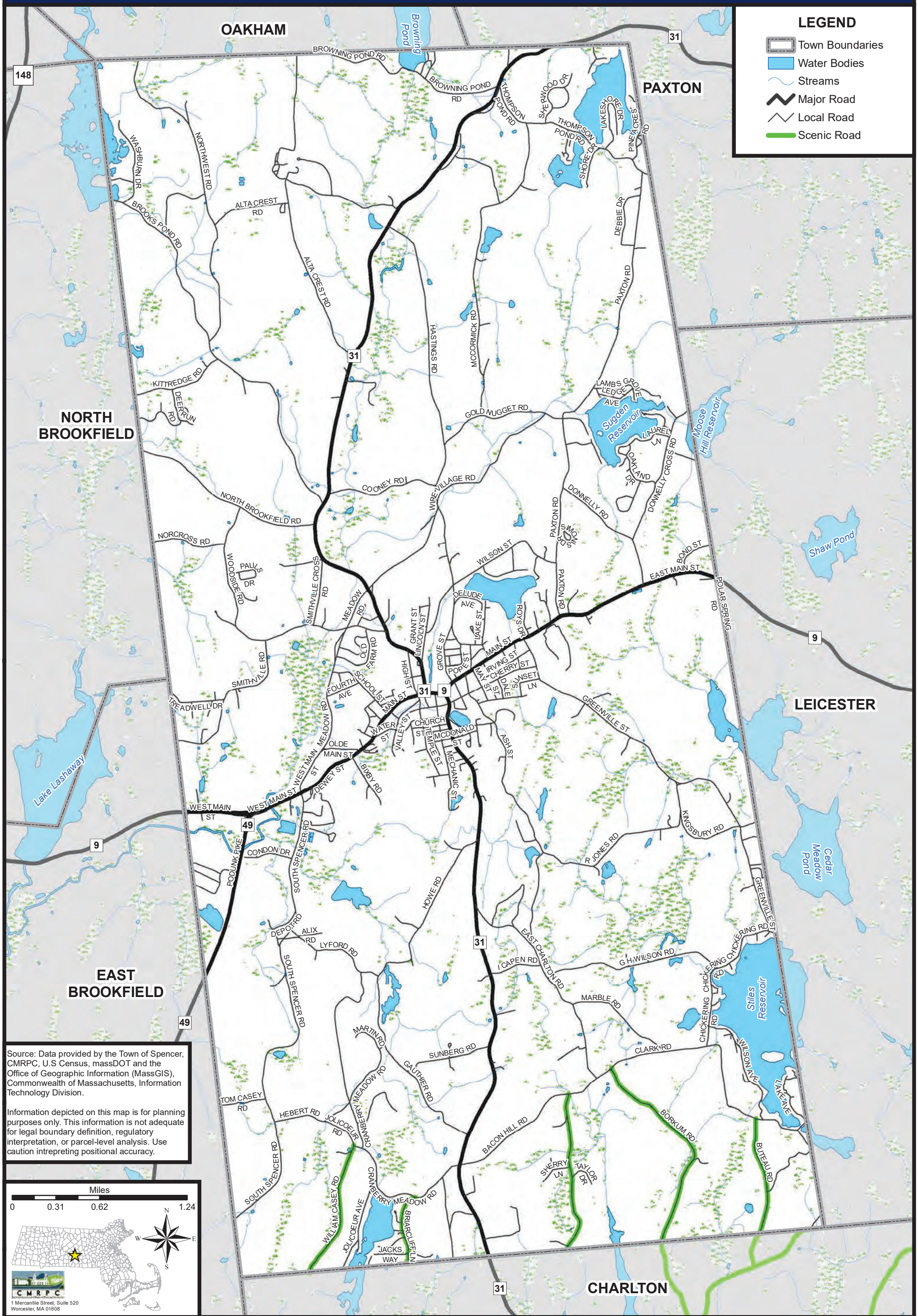
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Map 6 Water Resources Map 2

Date: 4/22/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_06_WaterResources2_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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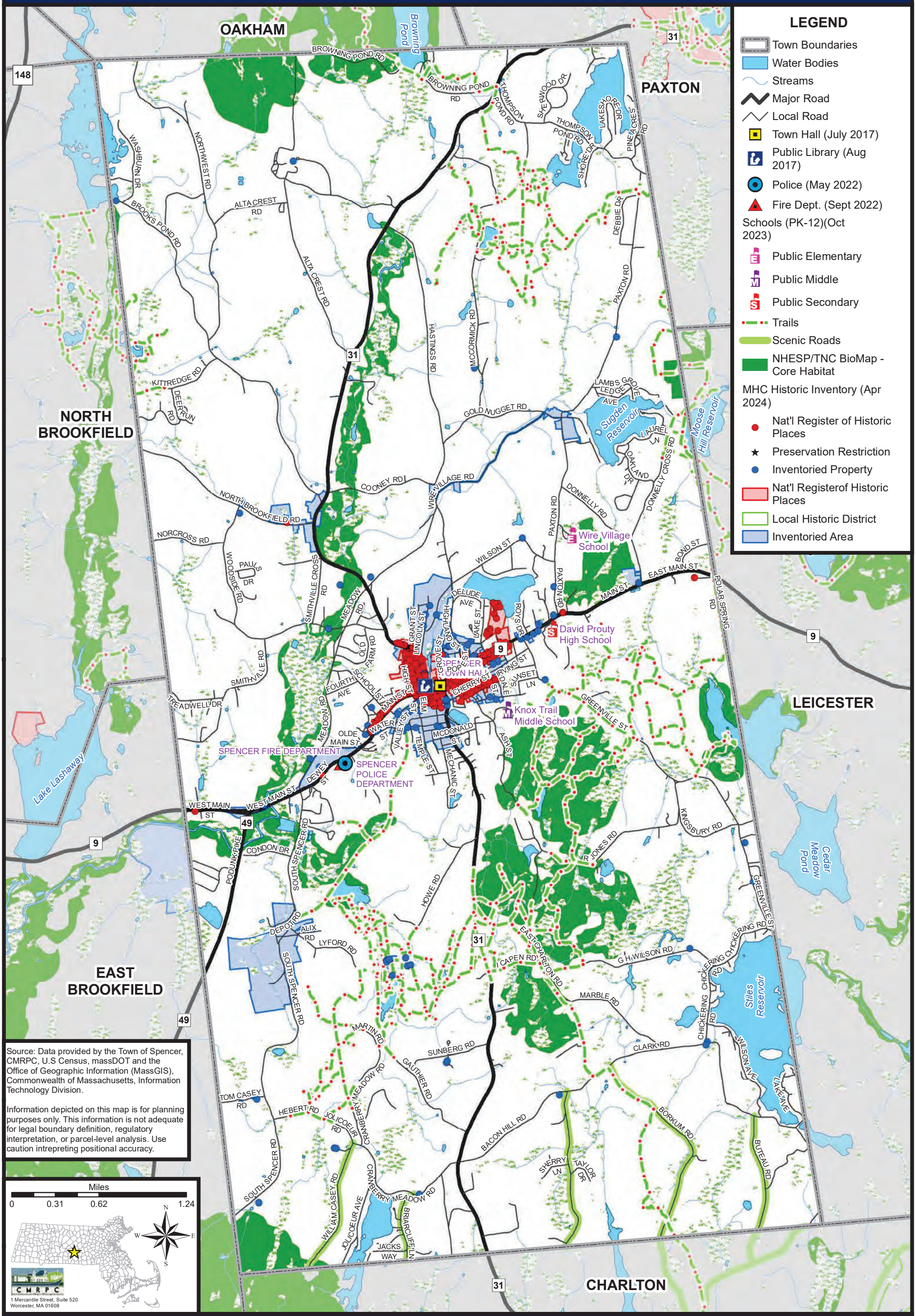
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Map 8 Scenic Roads

Date: 4/22/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_08_Scenic_Roads_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road
- Town Hall (July 2017)
- Public Library (Aug 2017)
- Police (May 2022)
- Fire Dept. (Sept 2022)

Schools (PK-12)(Oct 2023)

- Public Elementary
- Public Middle
- Public Secondary
- Trails
- Scenic Roads
- NHESP/TNC BioMap - Core Habitat

MHC Historic Inventory (Apr 2024)

- Nat'l Register of Historic Places
- Preservation Restriction
- Inventoried Property
- Nat'l Registerof Historic Places
- Local Historic District
- Inventoried Area

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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 intrepreting positional accuracy.

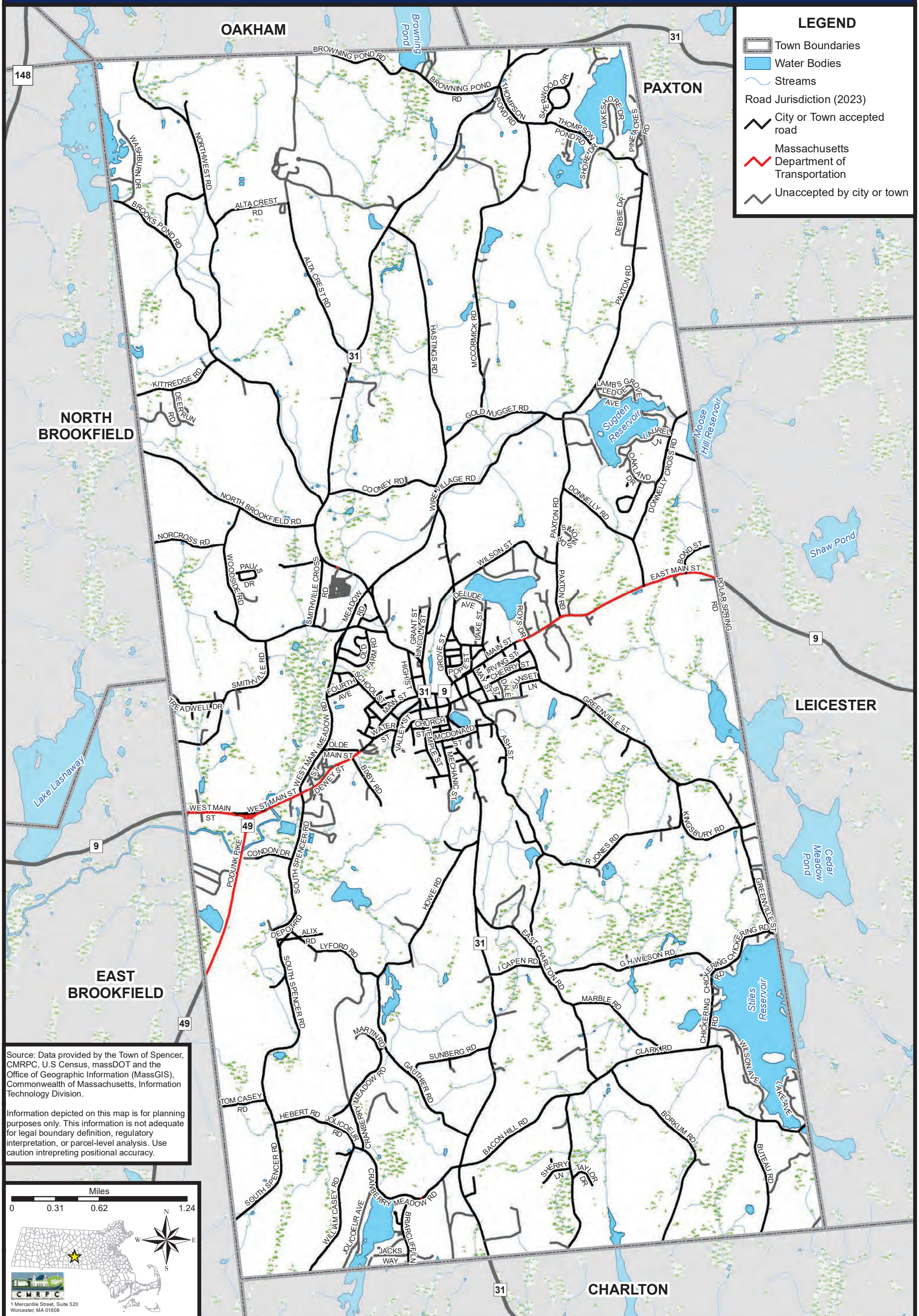
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Map 9 Historic & Cultural Resources

Date: 4/22/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_09_Historic_Cultural_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams

Road Jurisdiction (2023)

- City or Town accepted road
- Massachusetts Department of Transportation
- Unaccepted by city or town

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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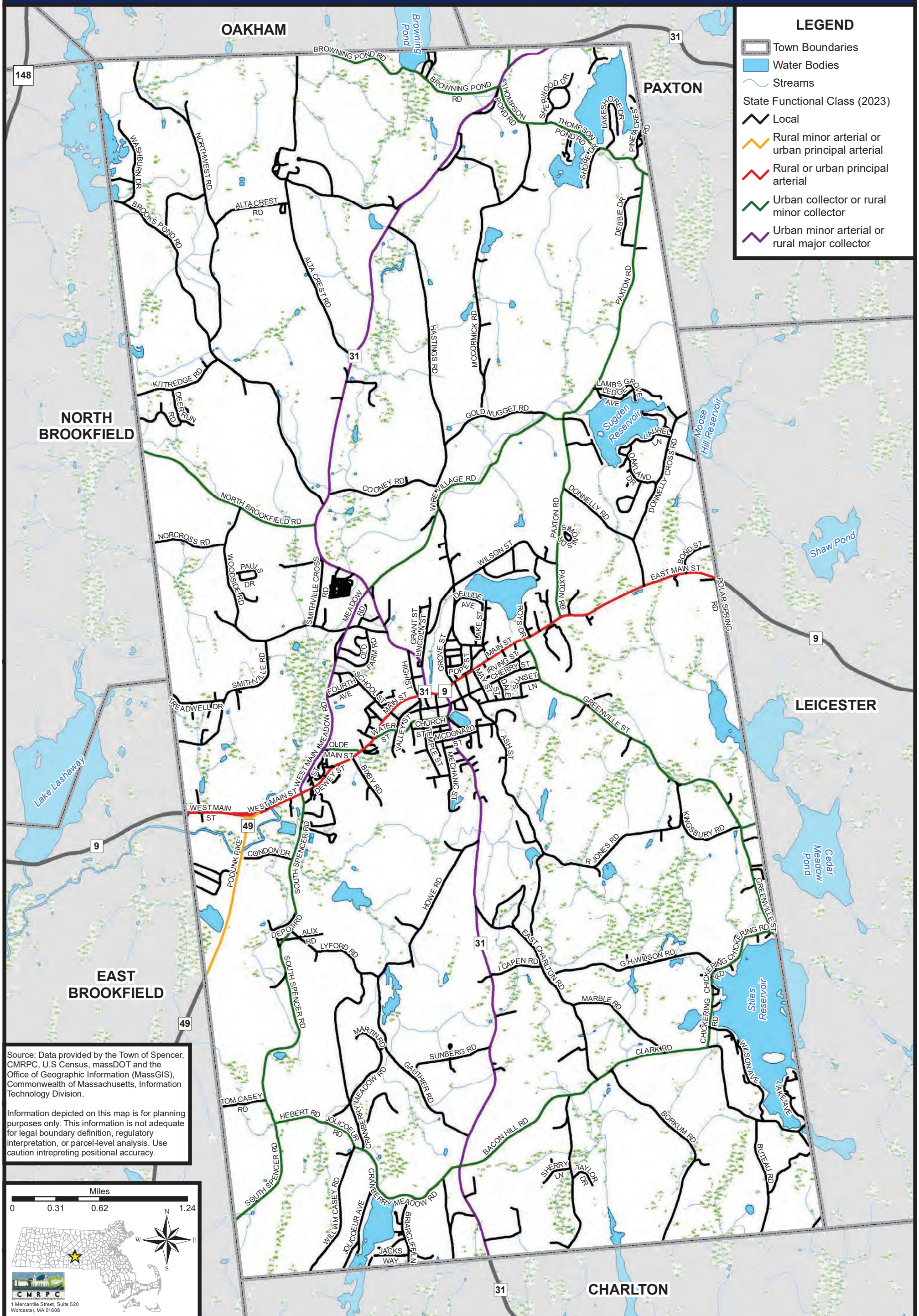
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Map 13 Roadway Jurisdiction

Date: 4/22/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_13_Rd_Jurisdiction_11x17.mxd

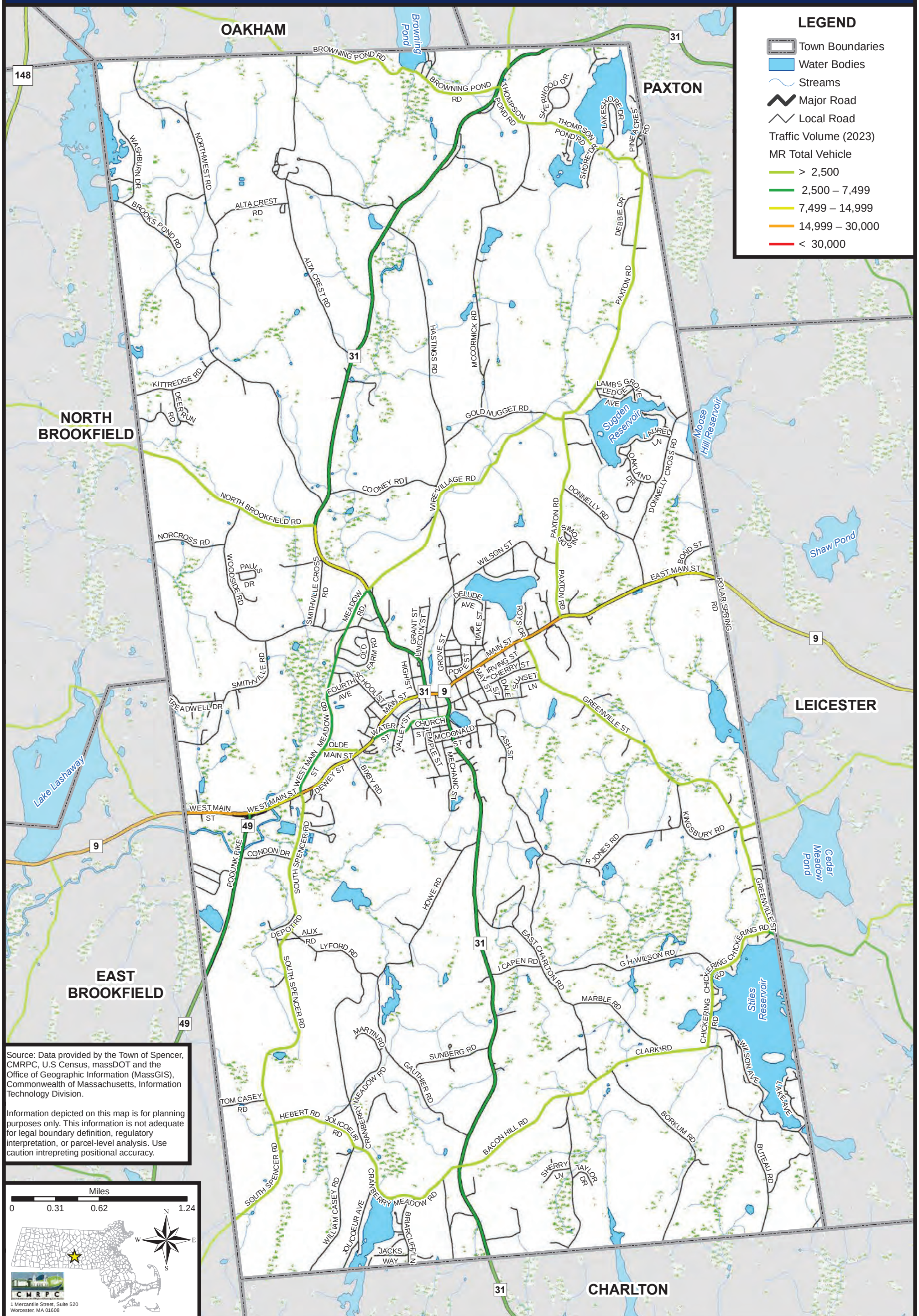
Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Map 14 Road Functional Classification

Date: 4/22/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_14_Rd_FunctionalClass_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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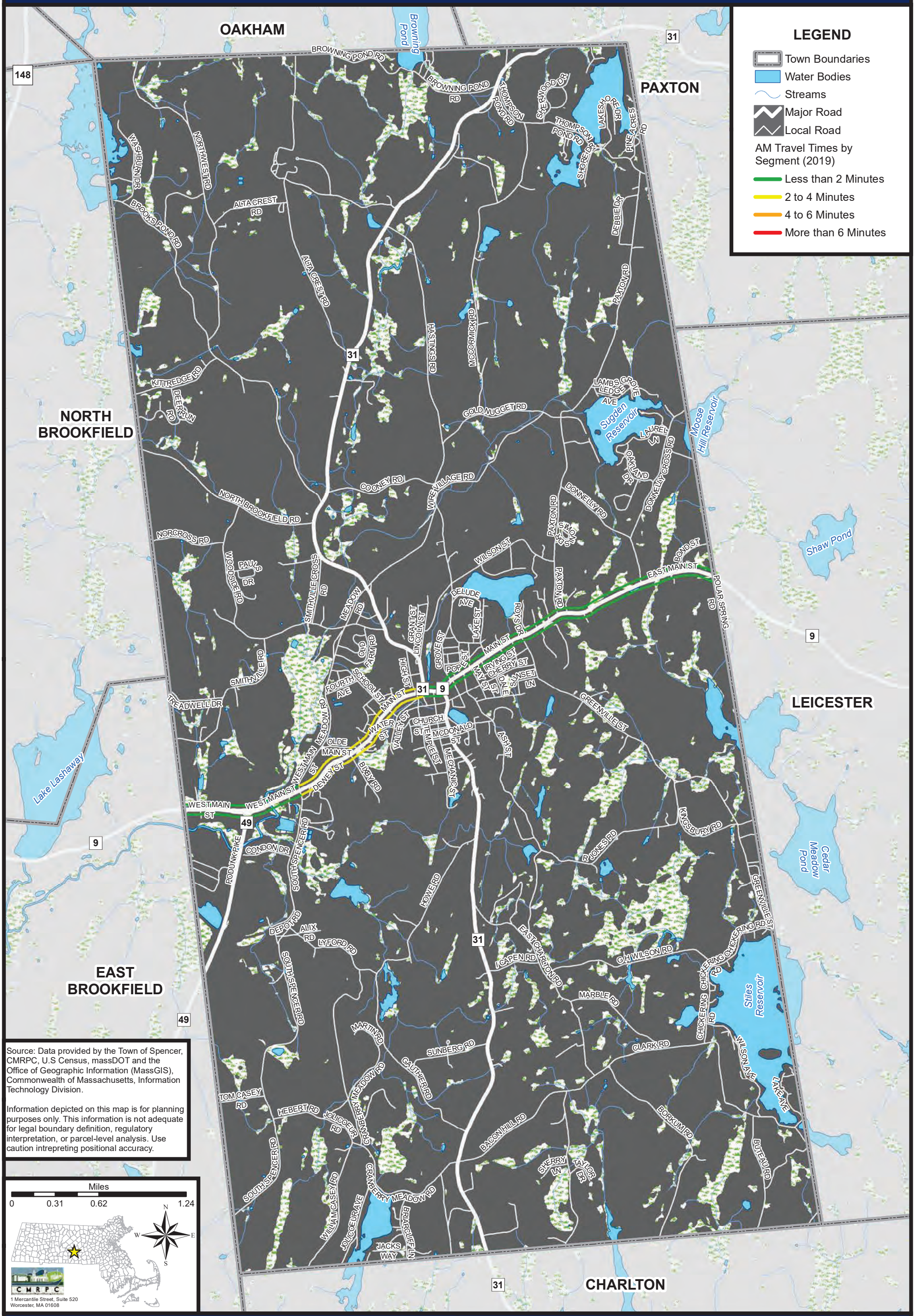
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Map 15 Traffic Volumes

Date: 4/24/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_15_TrafficVolumes_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road

AM Travel Times by Segment (2019)

- Less than 2 Minutes
- 2 to 4 Minutes
- 4 to 6 Minutes
- More than 6 Minutes

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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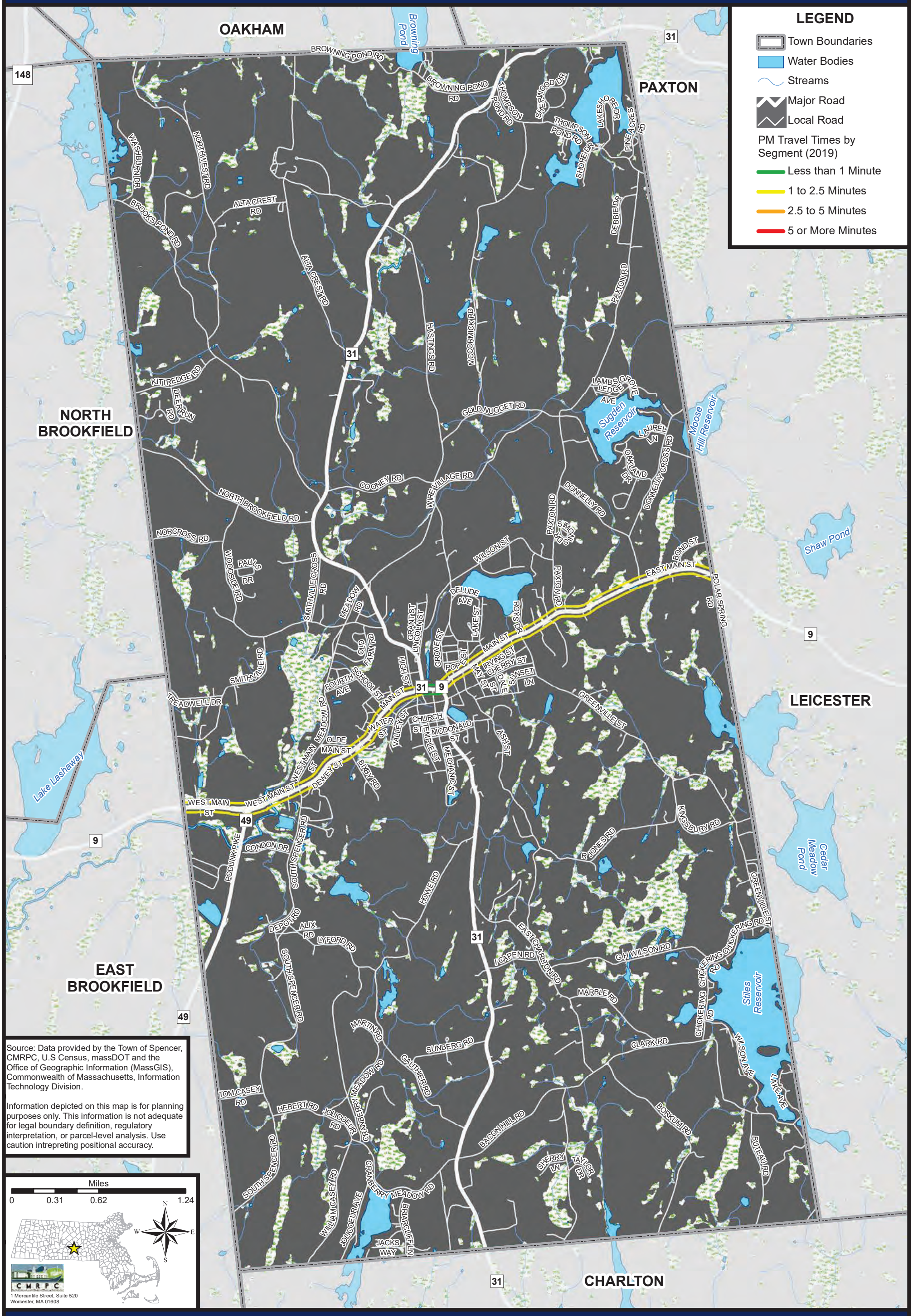
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Map 16 AM Travel Times

Date: 4/24/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_16_AMTravelTimes_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road

PM Travel Times by Segment (2019)

- Less than 1 Minute
- 1 to 2.5 Minutes
- 2.5 to 5 Minutes
- 5 or More Minutes

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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 intrepreting positional accuracy.

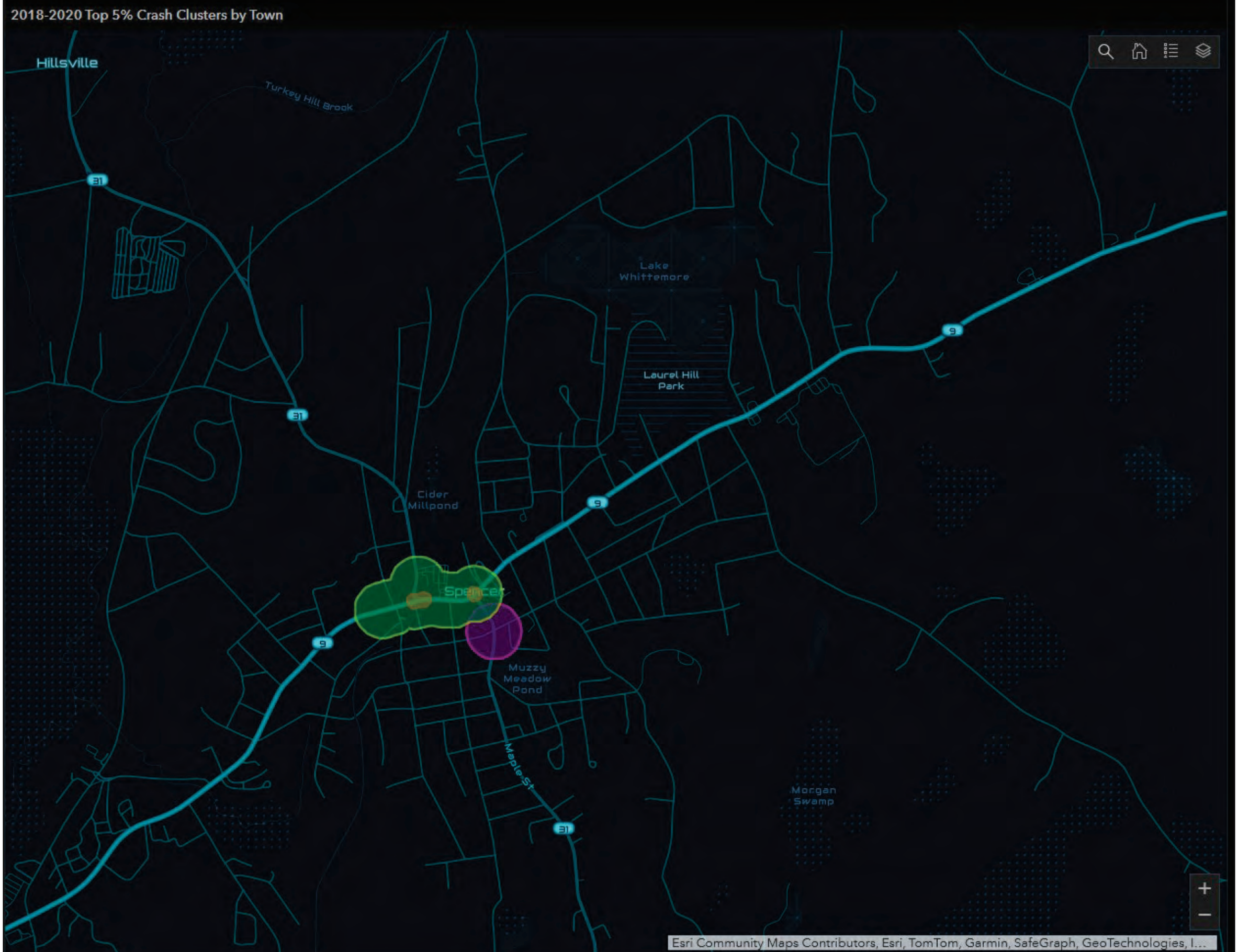
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Map 17 PM Travel Times

Date: 4/24/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_17_PMTravelTimes_11x17.mxd

2018-2020 Top 5% Crash Clusters by Town



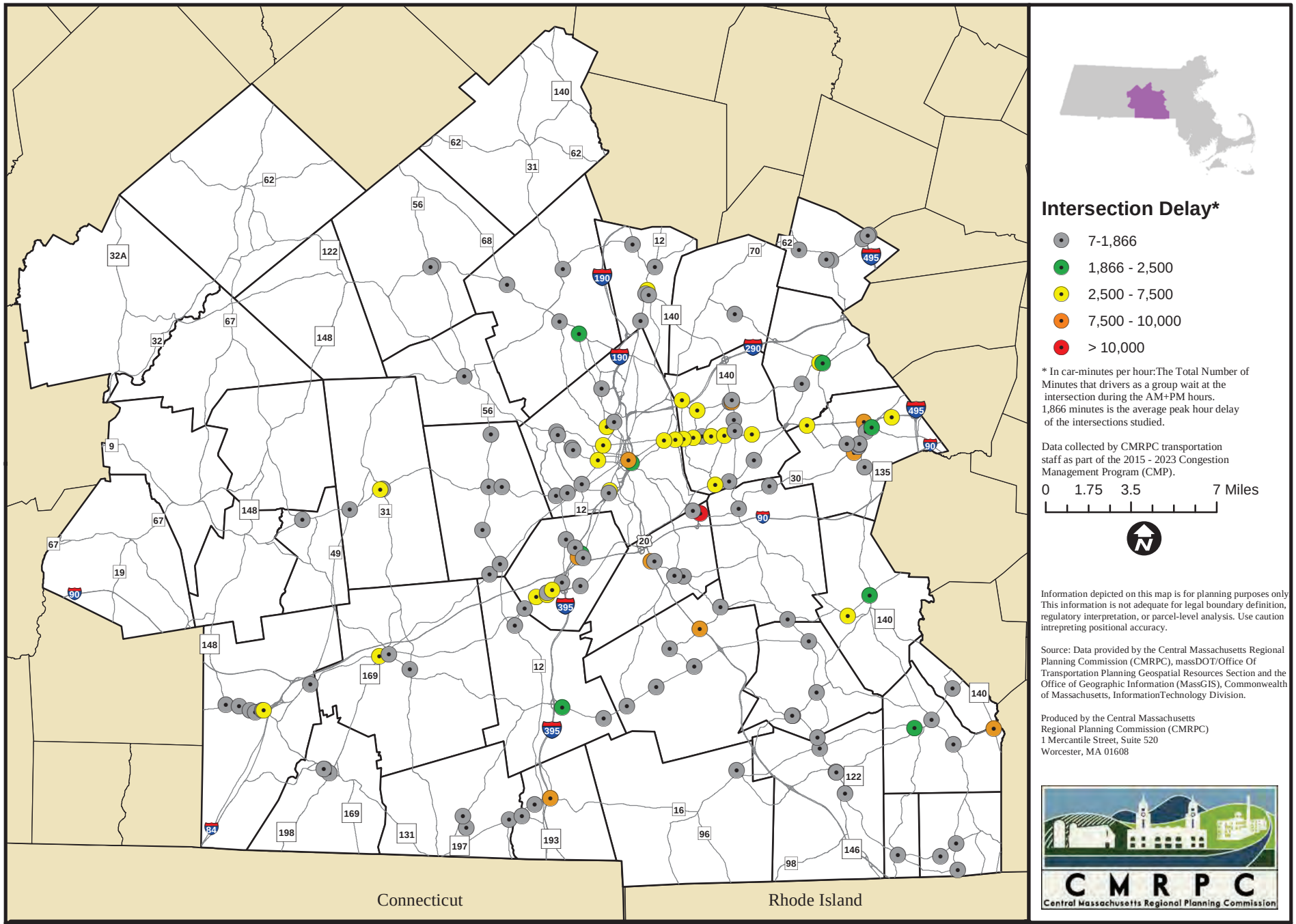
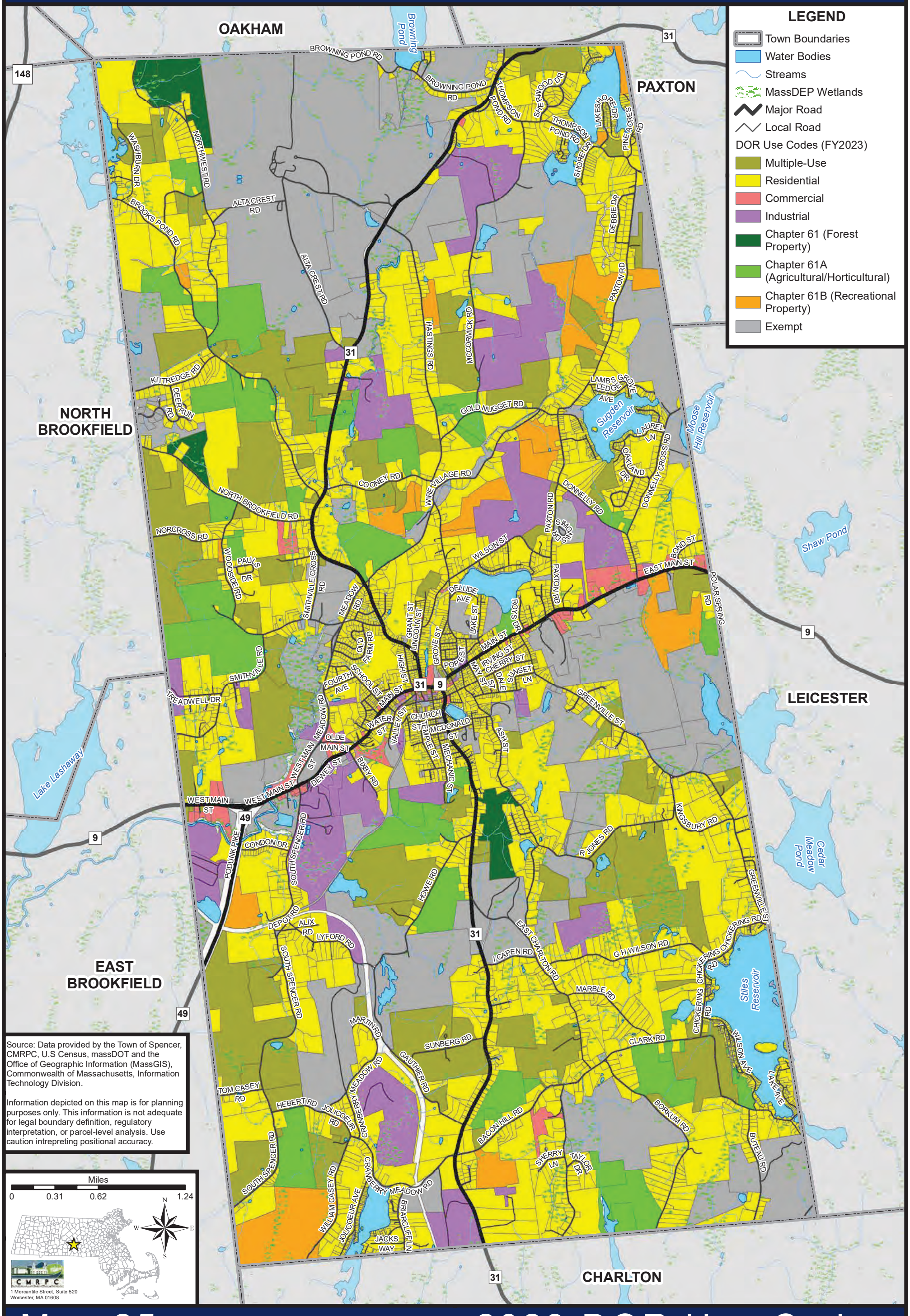


Figure 5 - Encountered Peak Hour Delay at Critical Intersections (2015 - 2023)

Date: 12/28/2023

Document Path: K:\2.2 Congestion Management Process Data Collection & Analysis\2023 Program\CMP Document\Figures\Figure 5_Encountered Delay TMC Map_2015_2023.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- MassDEP Wetlands
- Major Road
- Local Road

DOR Use Codes (FY2023)

- Multiple-Use
- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Chapter 61 (Forest Property)
- Chapter 61A (Agricultural/Horticultural)
- Chapter 61B (Recreational Property)
- Exempt

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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 intrepreting positional accuracy.

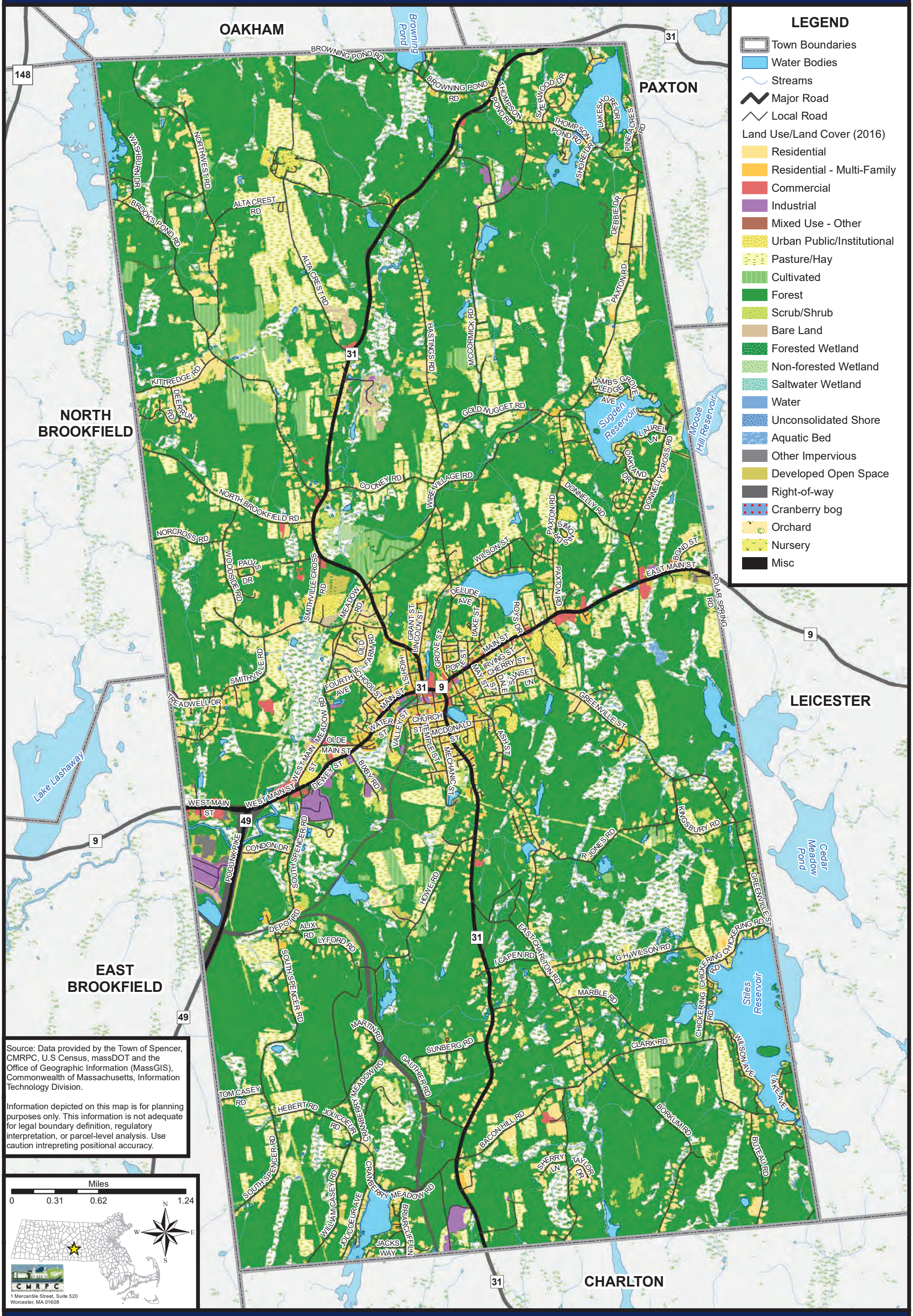
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Map 25 2023 DOR Use Codes

Date: 5/3/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_25_DORUseCodes_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road

Land Use/Land Cover (2016)

- Residential
- Residential - Multi-Family
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Mixed Use - Other
- Urban Public/Institutional
- Pasture/Hay
- Cultivated
- Forest
- Scrub/Shrub
- Bare Land
- Forested Wetland
- Non-forested Wetland
- Saltwater Wetland
- Water
- Unconsolidated Shore
- Aquatic Bed
- Other Impervious
- Developed Open Space
- Right-of-way
- Cranberry bog
- Orchard
- Nursery
- Misc

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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 intrepreting positional accuracy.

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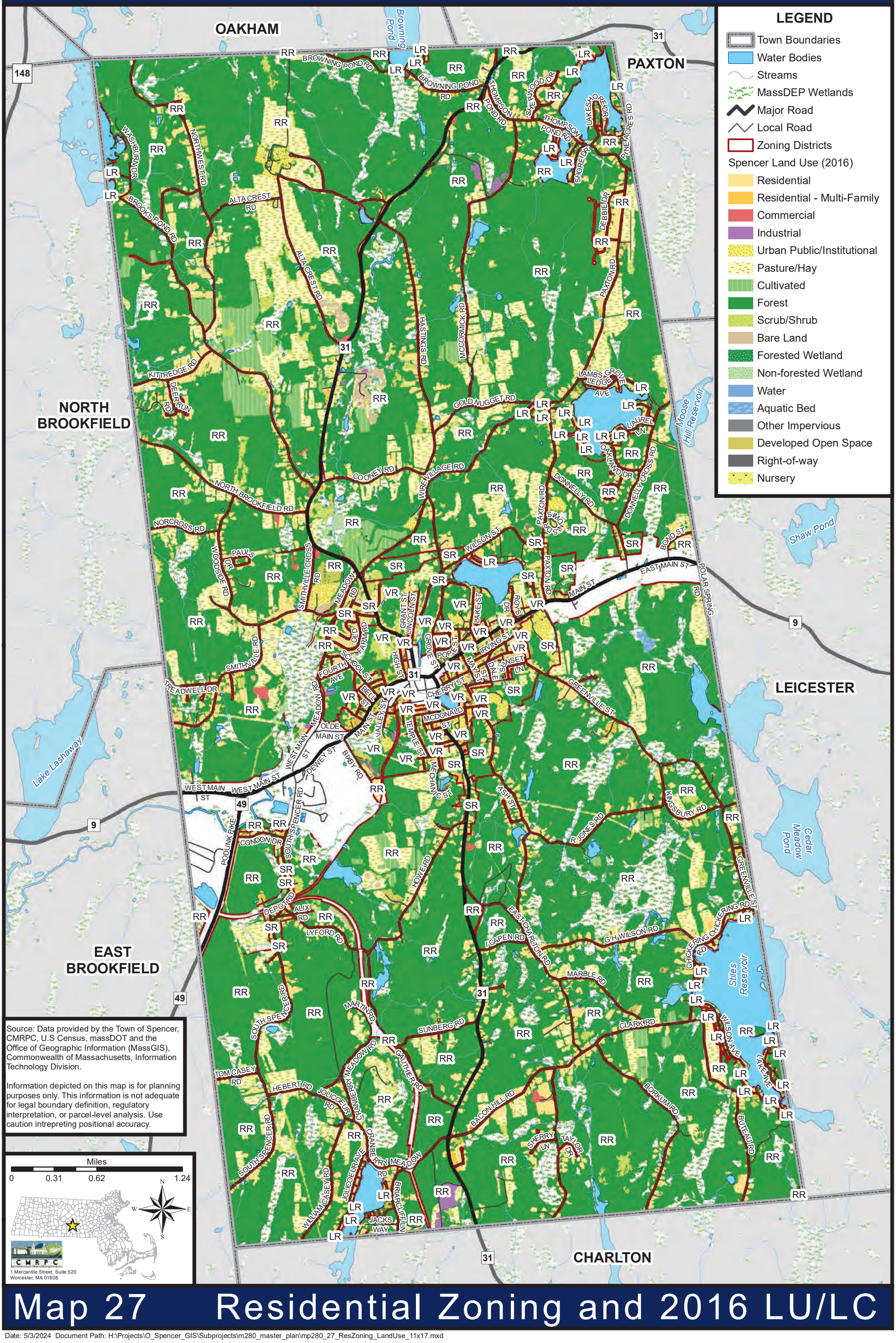
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Map 26 2016 Land Use/Land Cover

Date: 4/19/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_26_2016_LULC_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- MassDEP Wetlands
- Major Road
- Local Road
- Zoning Districts

Spencer Land Use (2016)

- Residential
- Residential - Multi-Family
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Urban Public/Institutional
- Pasture/Hay
- Cultivated
- Forest
- Scrub/Shrub
- Bare Land
- Forested Wetland
- Non-forested Wetland
- Water
- Aquatic Bed
- Other Impervious
- Developed Open Space
- Right-of-way
- Nursery

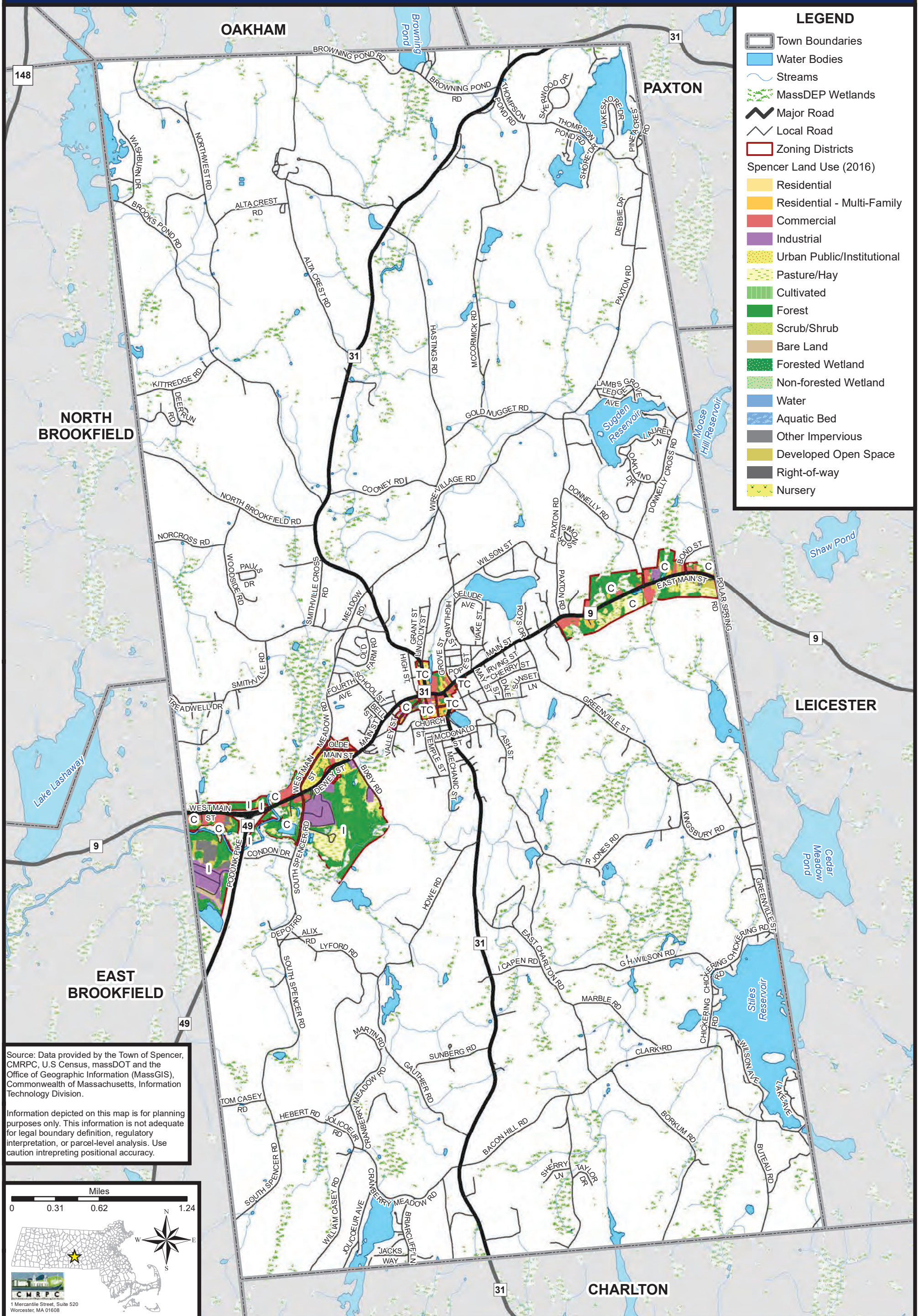
Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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Map 27 Residential Zoning and 2016 LU/LC

Date: 5/3/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_27_ResZoning_LandUse_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- MassDEP Wetlands
- Major Road
- Local Road
- Zoning Districts

Spencer Land Use (2016)

- Residential
- Residential - Multi-Family
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Urban Public/Institutional
- Pasture/Hay
- Cultivated
- Forest
- Scrub/Shrub
- Bare Land
- Forested Wetland
- Non-forested Wetland
- Water
- Aquatic Bed
- Other Impervious
- Developed Open Space
- Right-of-way
- Nursery

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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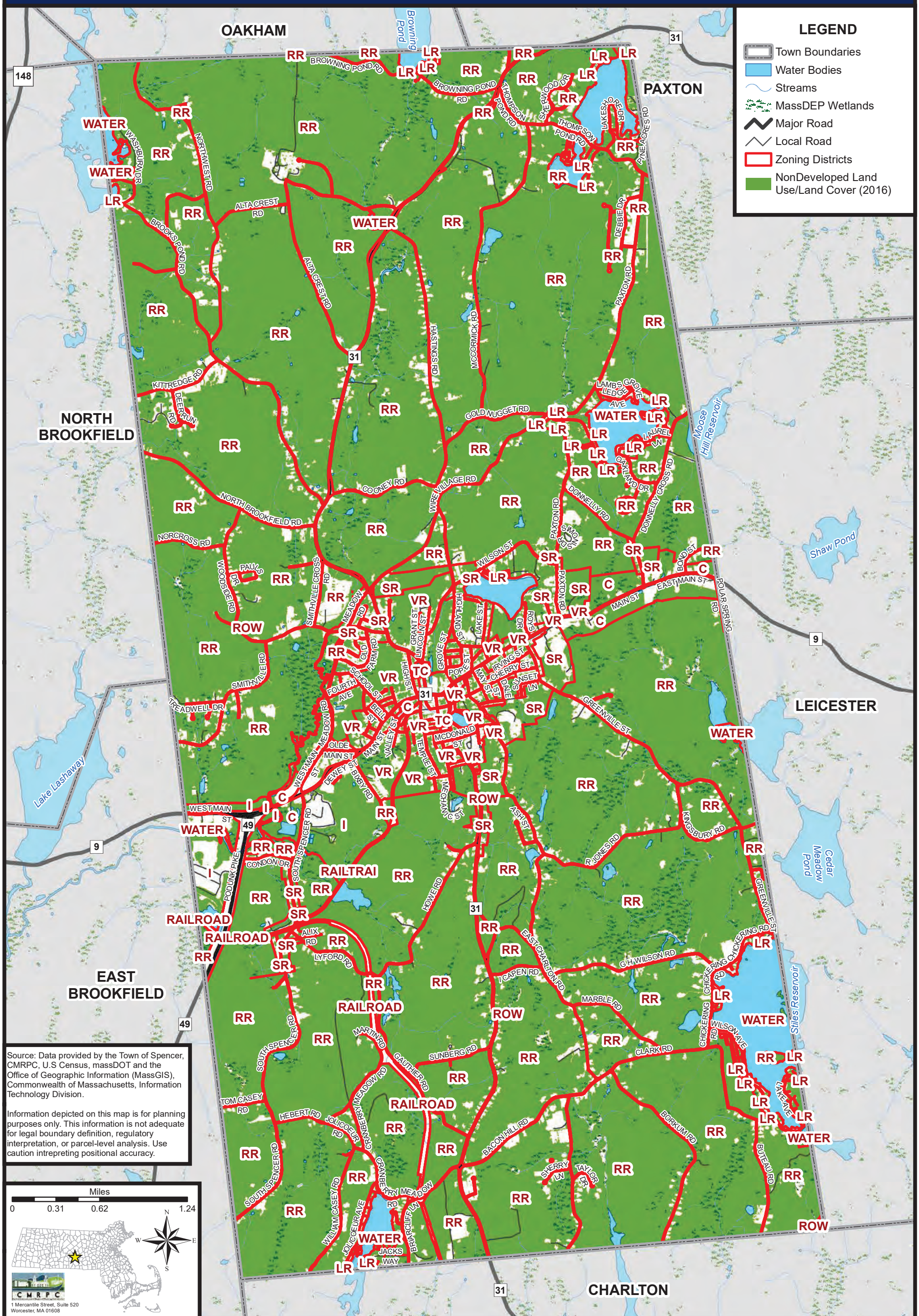
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Map 28 Commercial/Industrial Zoning and 2016 LU/LC

Date: 5/3/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_28_CommIndus_LandUse_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- MassDEP Wetlands
- Major Road
- Local Road
- Zoning Districts
- NonDeveloped Land Use/Land Cover (2016)

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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 intrepreting positional accuracy.

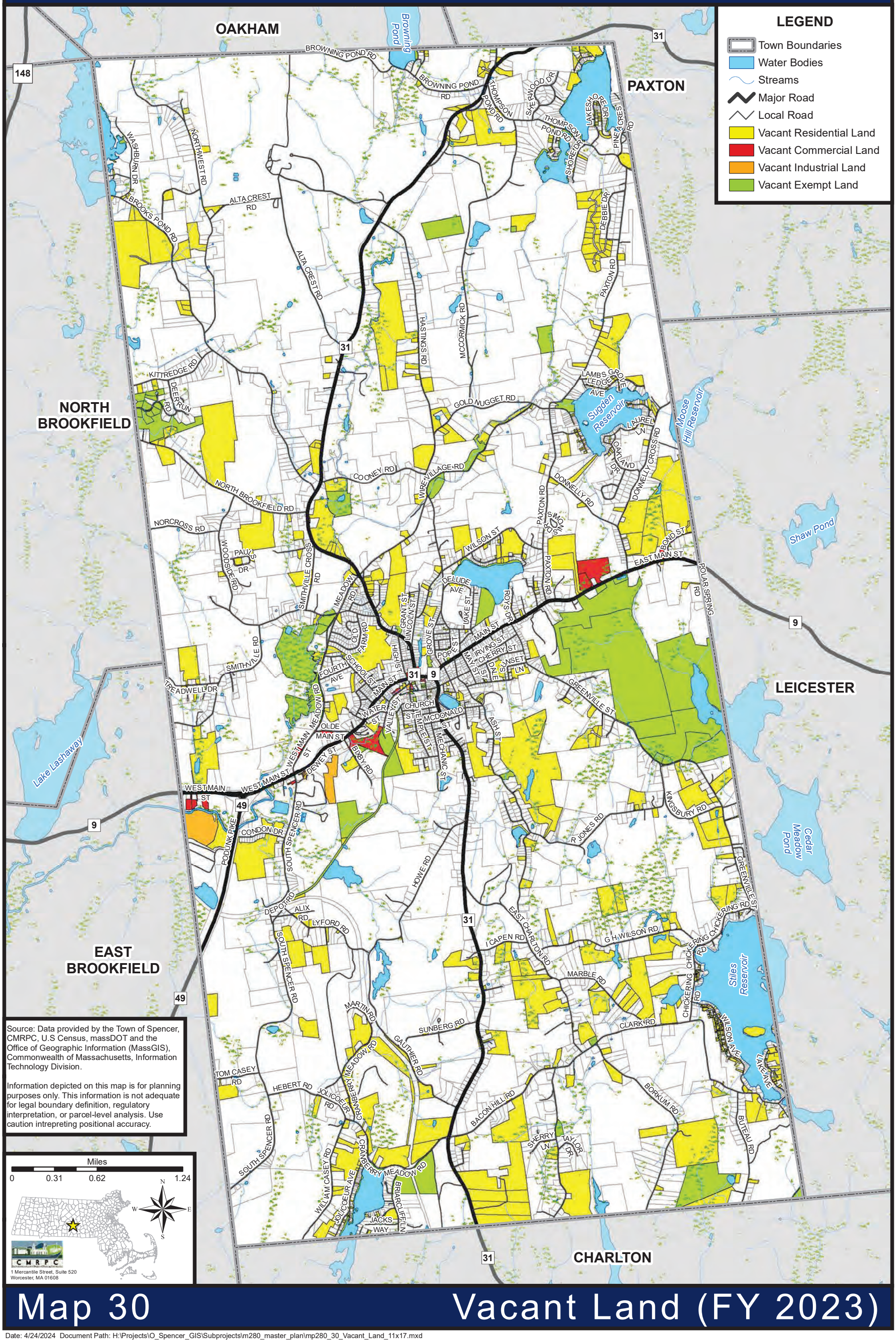
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Map 29 Zoning vs Non-Developed Land

Date: 5/3/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_29_Zoning_NonDevLand_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road
- Vacant Residential Land
- Vacant Commercial Land
- Vacant Industrial Land
- Vacant Exempt Land

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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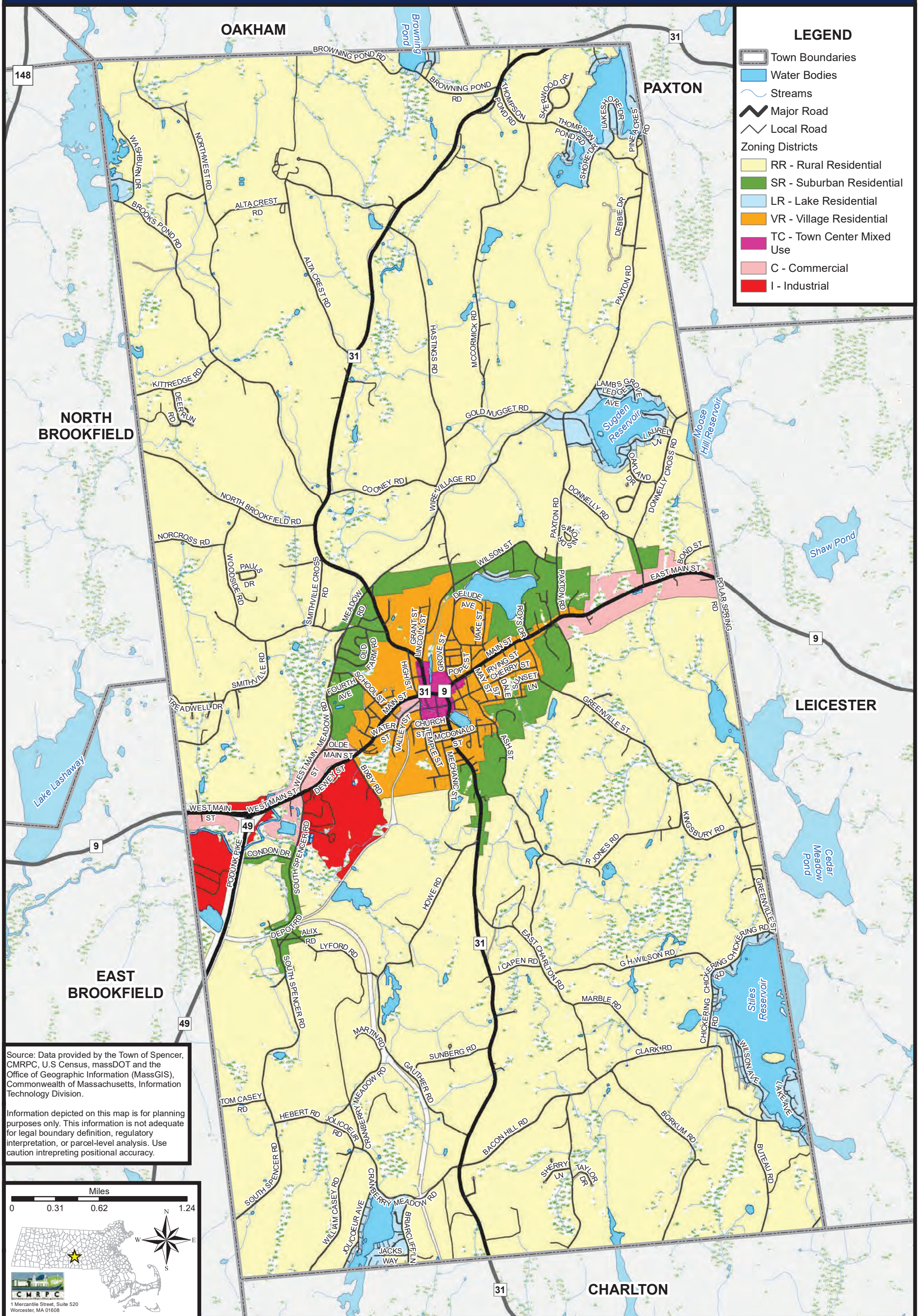
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Worcester, MA 01608

Map 30 Vacant Land (FY 2023)

Date: 4/24/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_30_Vacant_Land_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road

Zoning Districts

- RR - Rural Residential
- SR - Suburban Residential
- LR - Lake Residential
- VR - Village Residential
- TC - Town Center Mixed Use
- C - Commercial
- I - Industrial

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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 intrepreting positional accuracy.

Miles

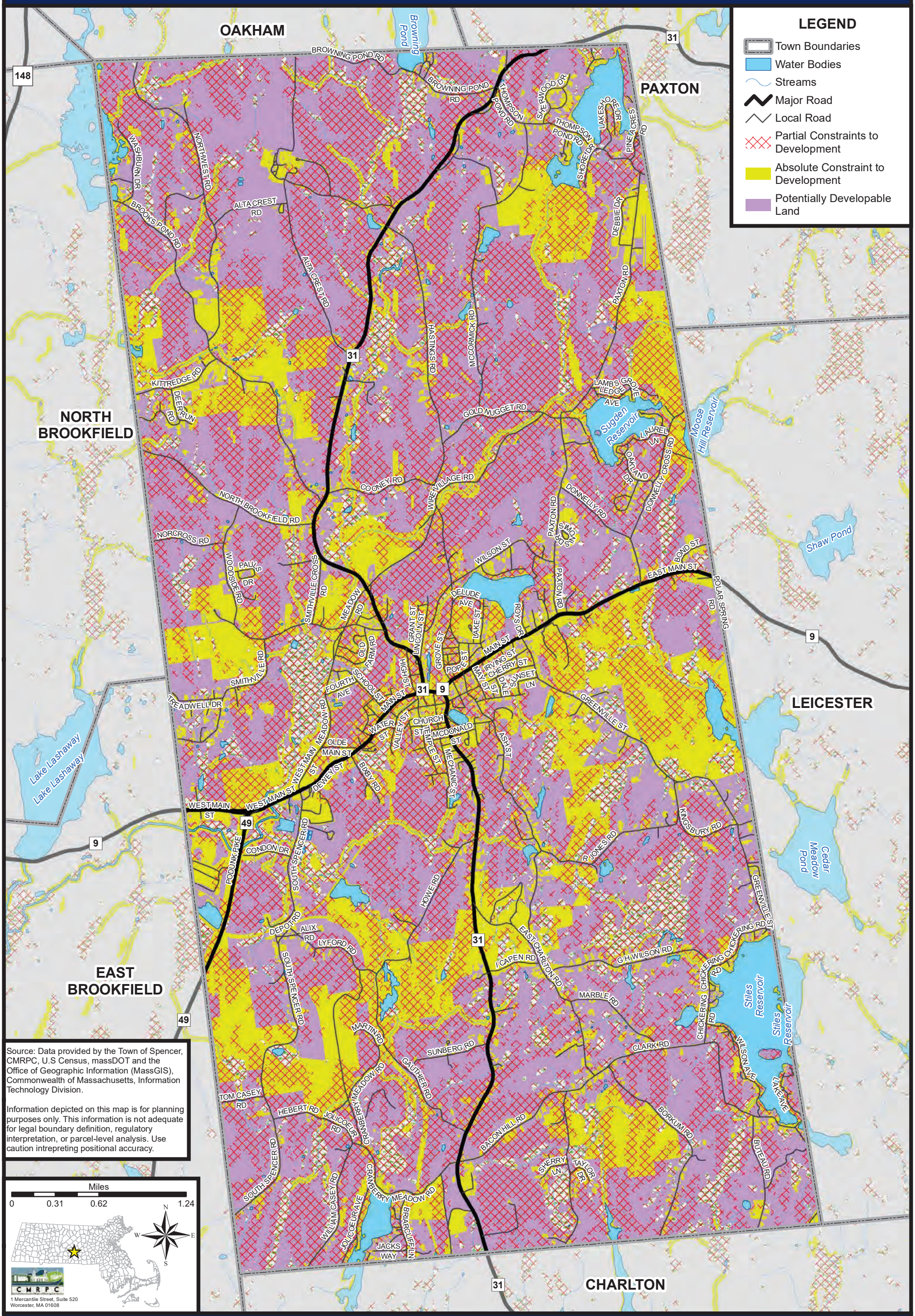
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Map 32 Zoning Districts

Date: 4/19/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_32_Zoning_Districts_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



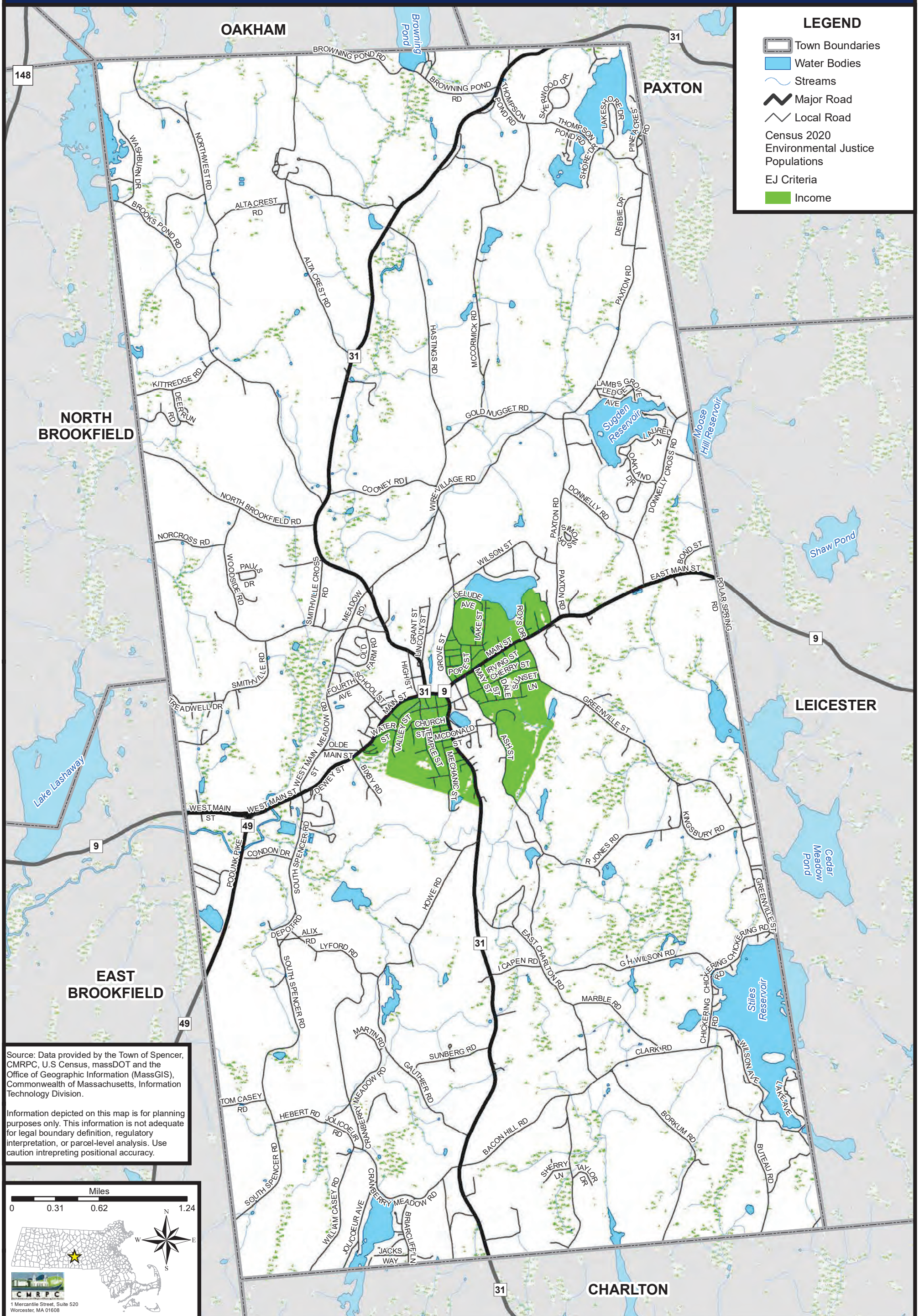
Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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Map 35 Buildout Composite Map

Date: 5/3/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_35_CompositeBO_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road

Census 2020 Environmental Justice Populations

EJ Criteria

- Income

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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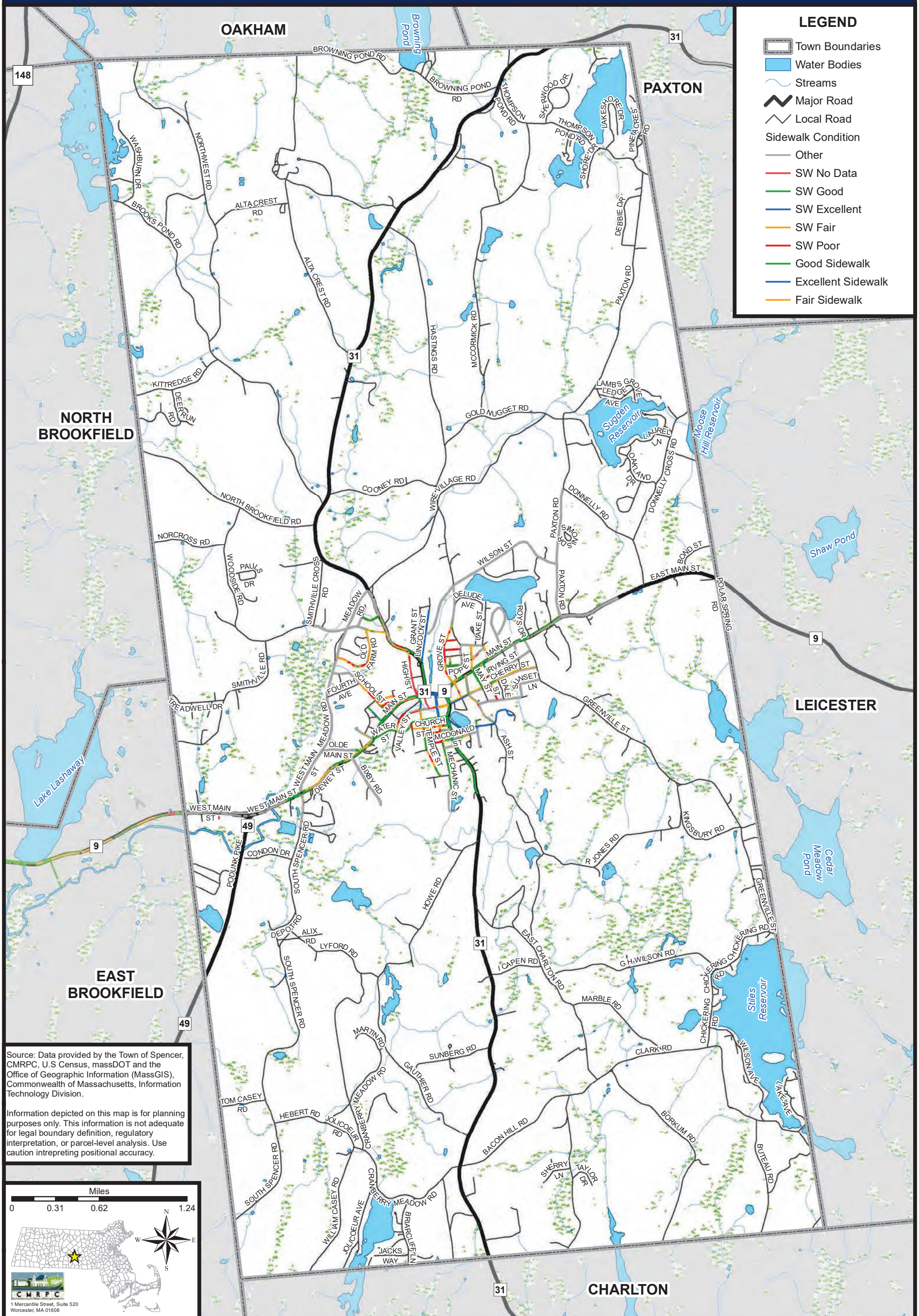
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Map 36 Environmental Justice (2020)

Date: 5/3/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_36_EJ_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road

Sidewalk Condition

- Other
- SW No Data
- SW Good
- SW Excellent
- SW Fair
- SW Poor
- Good Sidewalk
- Excellent Sidewalk
- Fair Sidewalk

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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 intrepreting positional accuracy.

Miles

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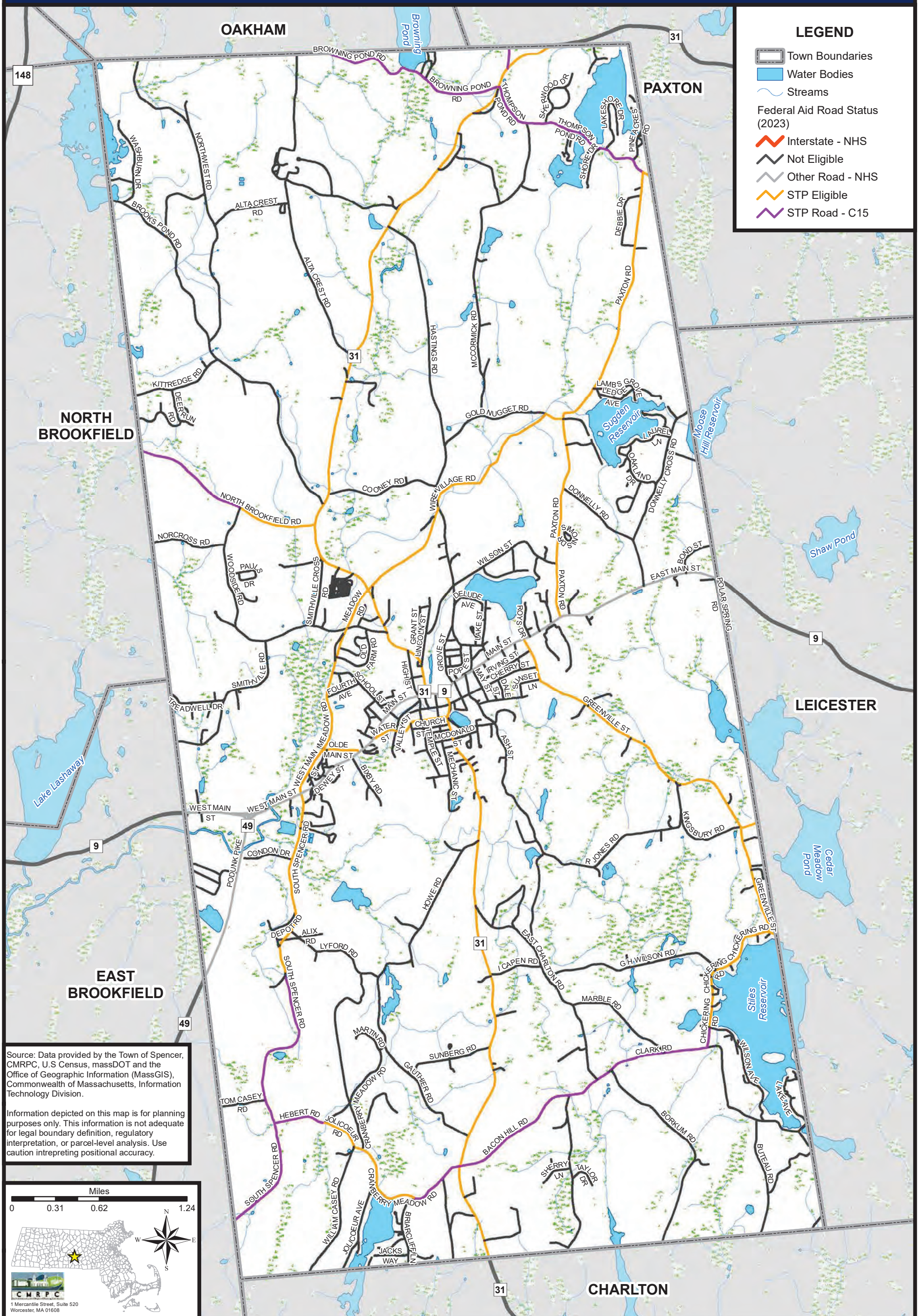
N W E S

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Map 37 Federal Aid Sidewalk Conditions

Date: 4/24/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_37_FedAid_Sidewalks_Cond_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams

Federal Aid Road Status (2023)

- Interstate - NHS
- Not Eligible
- Other Road - NHS
- STP Eligible
- STP Road - C15

Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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Miles

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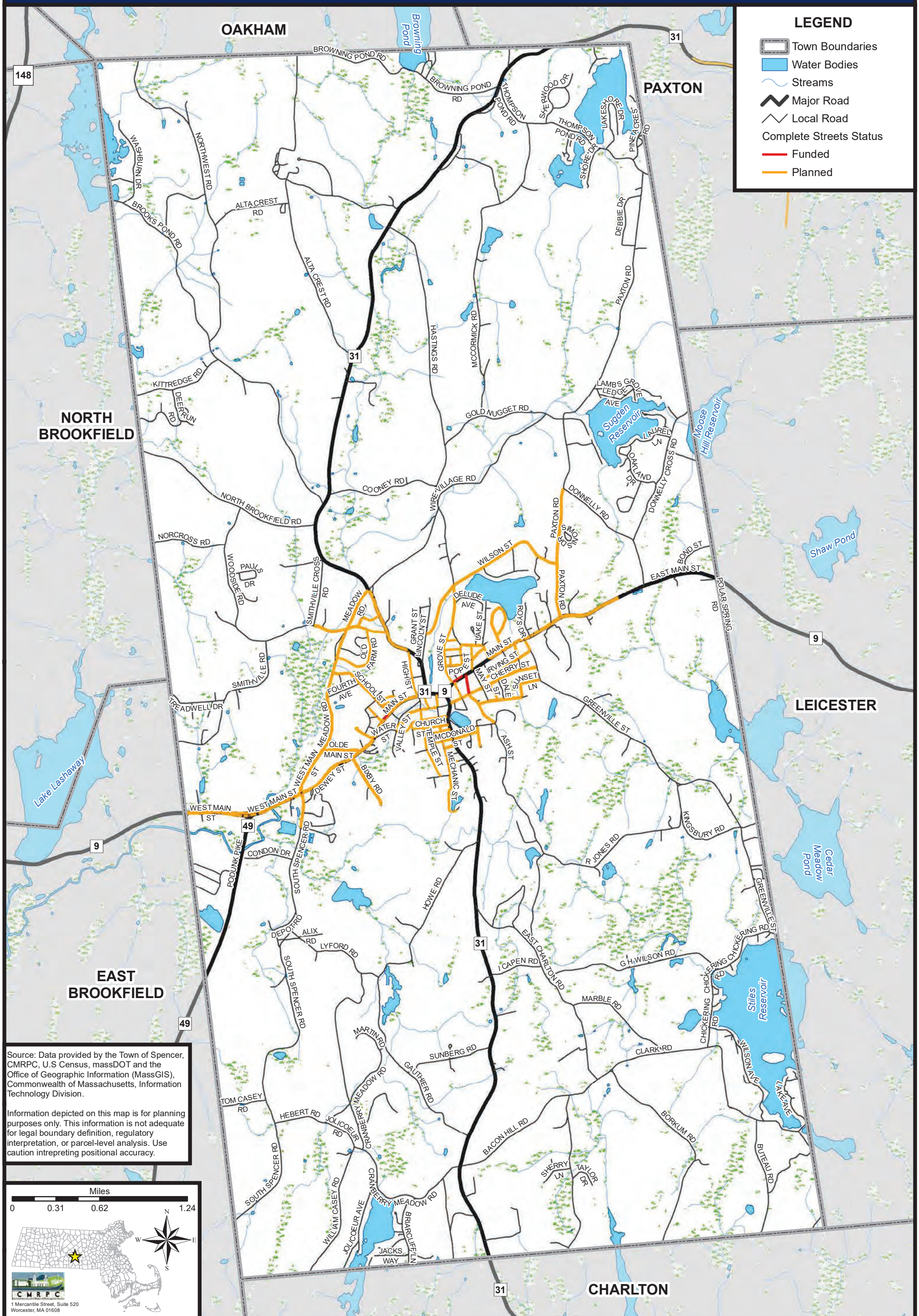
N W E S

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Map 39 Federal Aid Eligible Roads

Date: 4/24/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_39_FedAidRoads_11x17.mxd

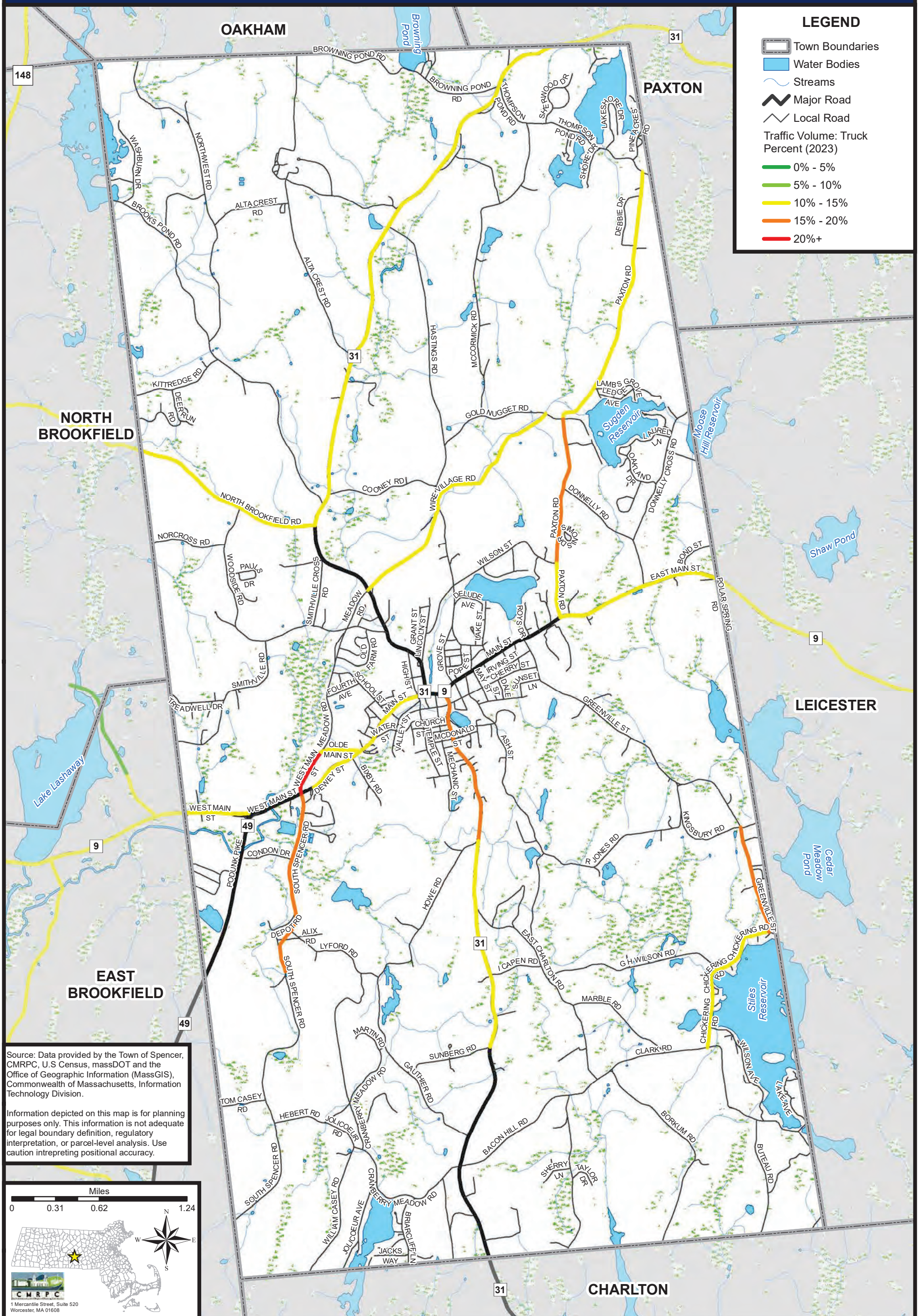
Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Map 41 Bike/Ped Priority Areas

Date: 4/24/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_41_Bike_Ped_Areas_11x17.mxd

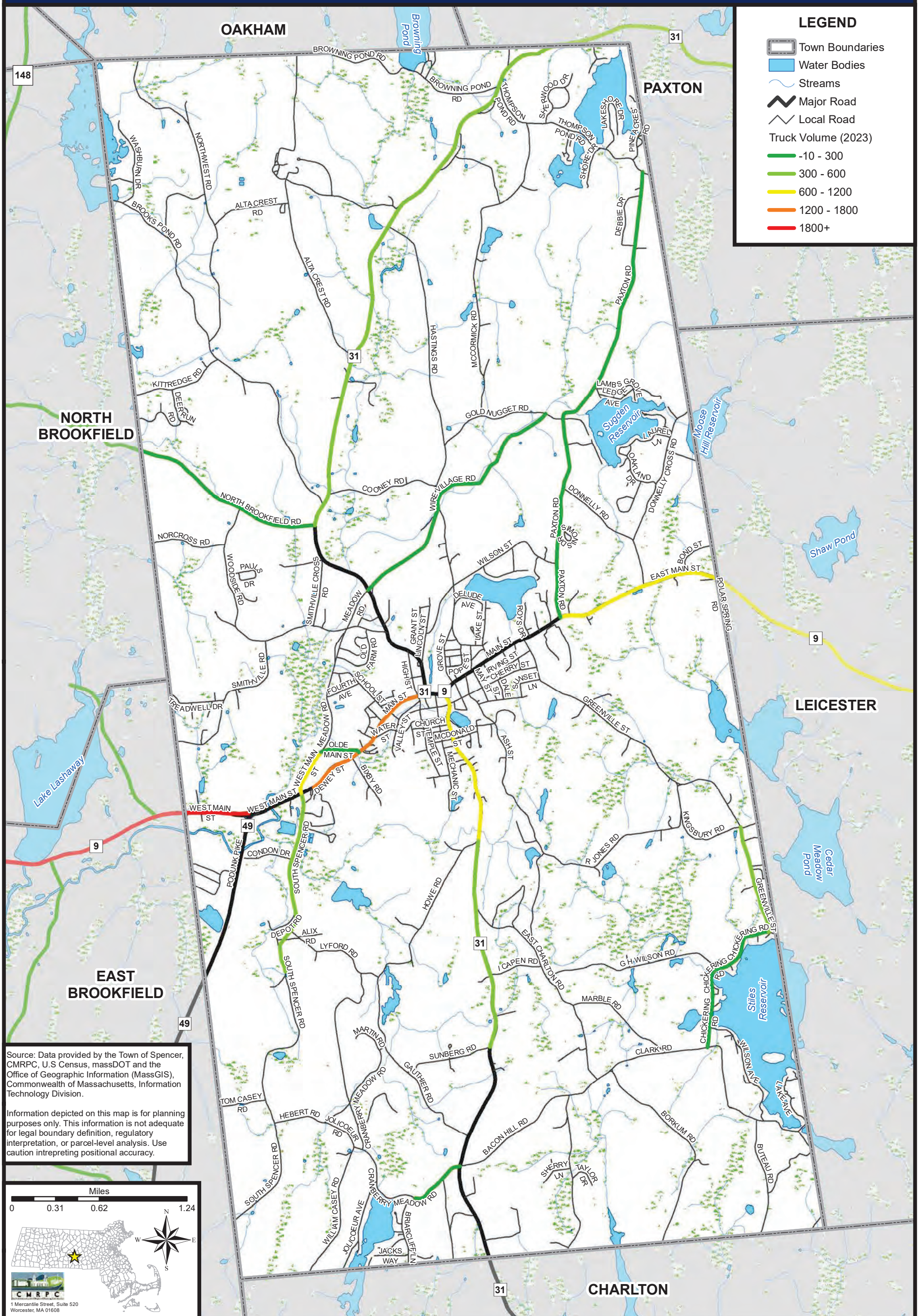
Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Map 42 Traffic Flow: Truck Percent

Date: 4/24/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_42_TrafficFlow_TruckPerc_11x17.mxd

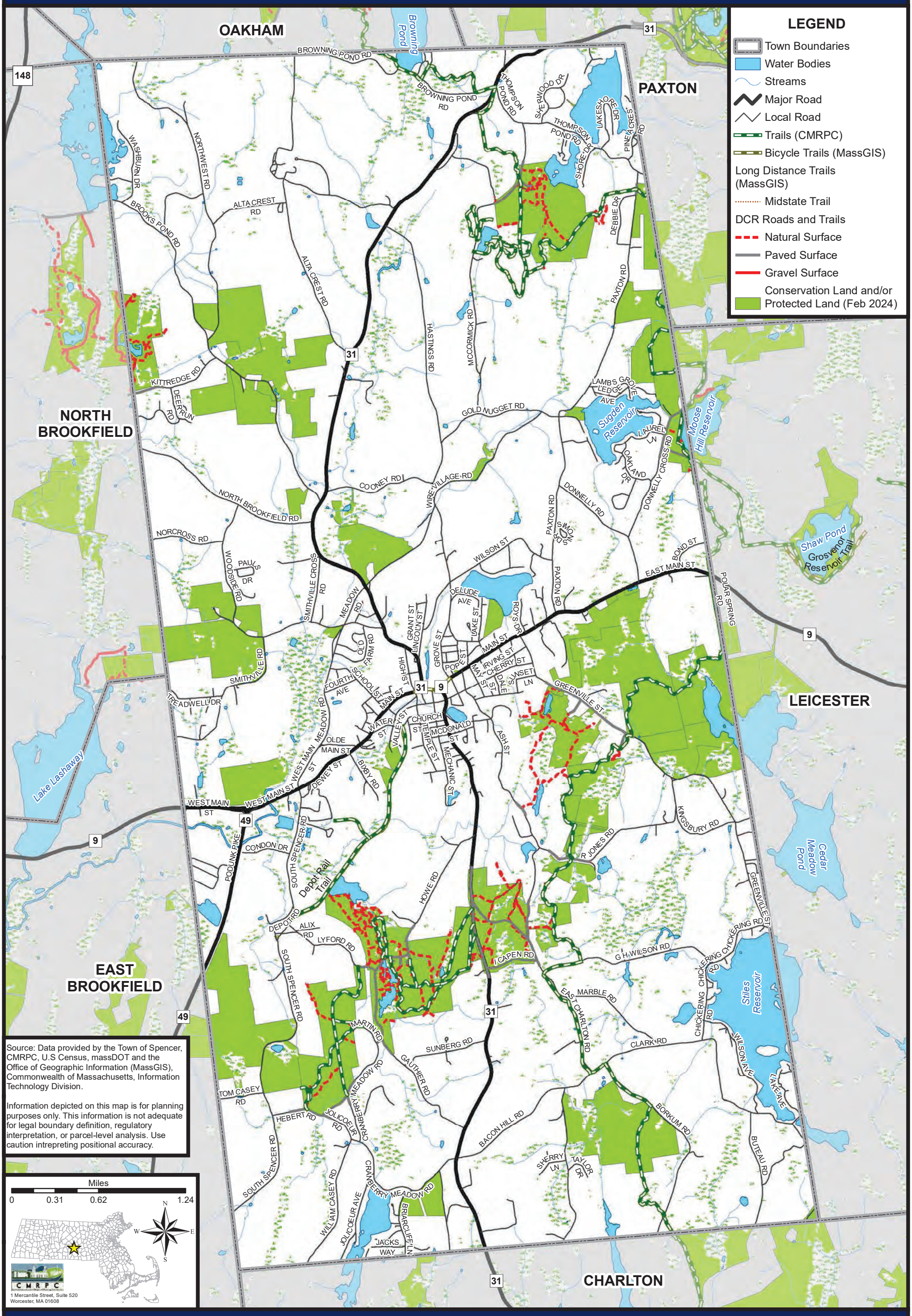
Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Map 43 Traffic Flow: Truck Volume

Date: 4/24/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_43_TrafficFlow_TruckVolume_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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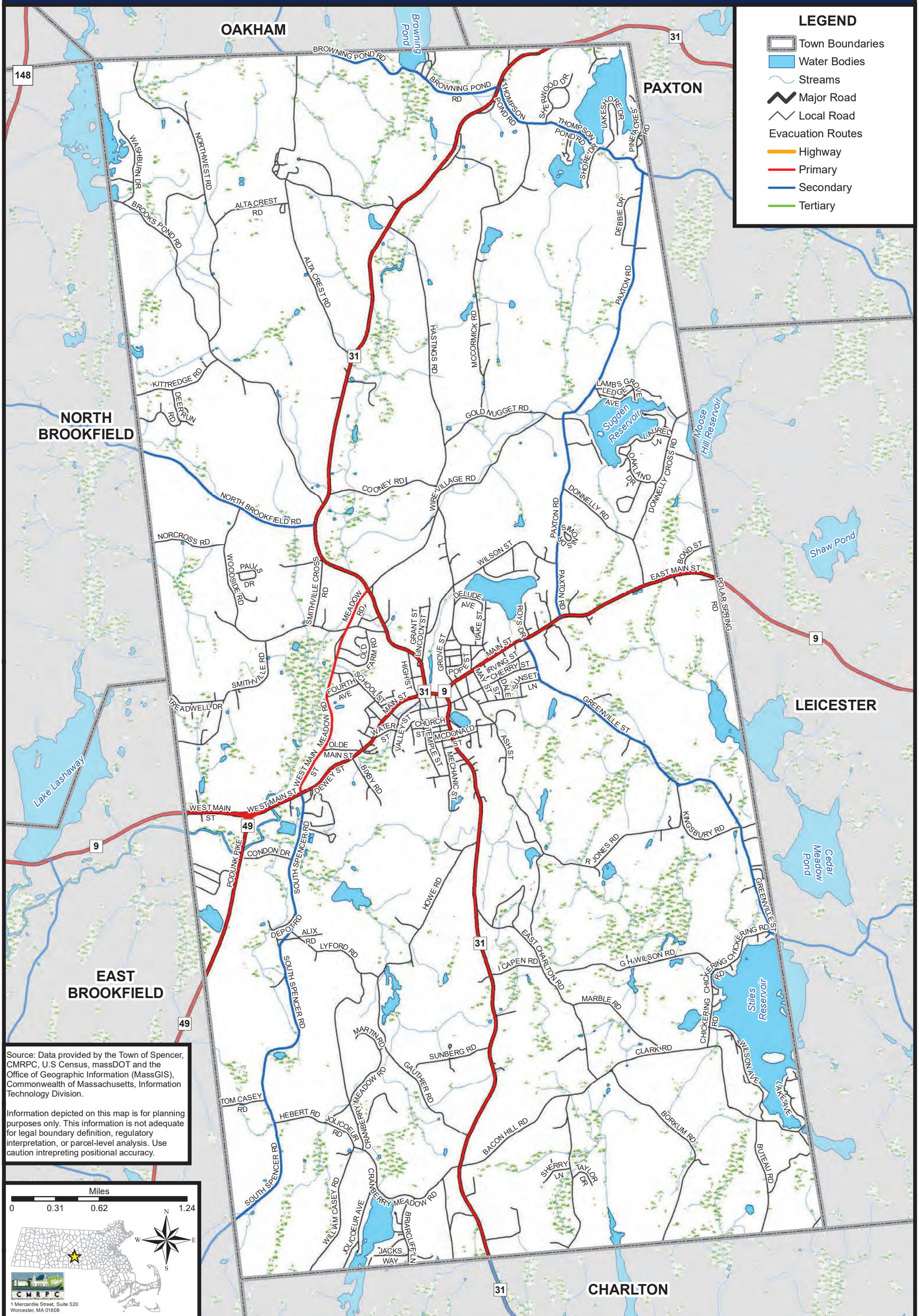
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Map 44 Trails and Conservation Land

Date: 5/3/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_44_Trails_ConsvLand_11x17.mxd

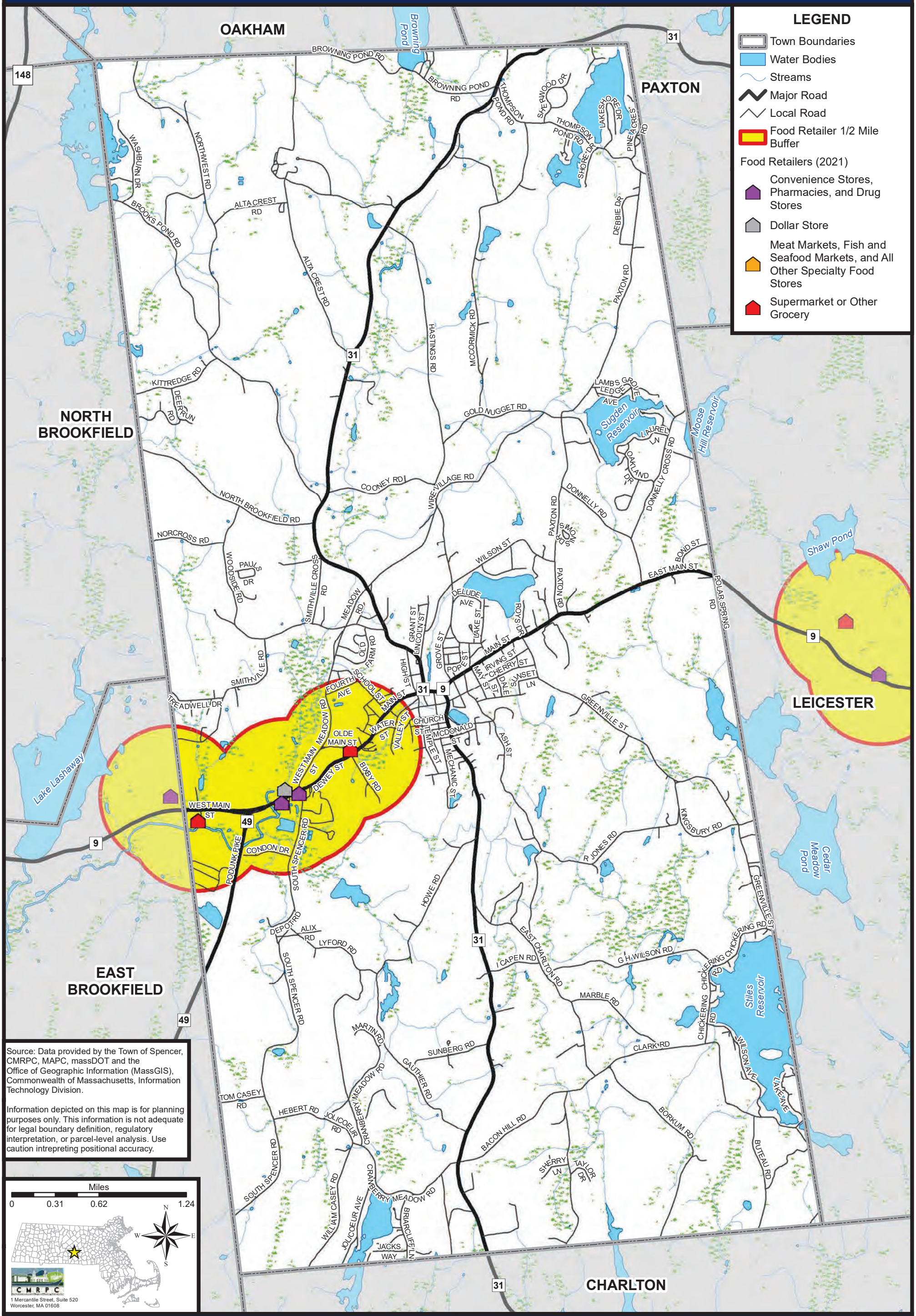
Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Map 46 Evacuation Routes

Date: 5/3/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_46_Evacuation_Routes_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road
- Food Retailer 1/2 Mile Buffer

Food Retailers (2021)

- Convenience Stores, Pharmacies, and Drug Stores
- Dollar Store
- Meat Markets, Fish and Seafood Markets, and All Other Specialty Food Stores
- Supermarket or Other Grocery

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

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Miles
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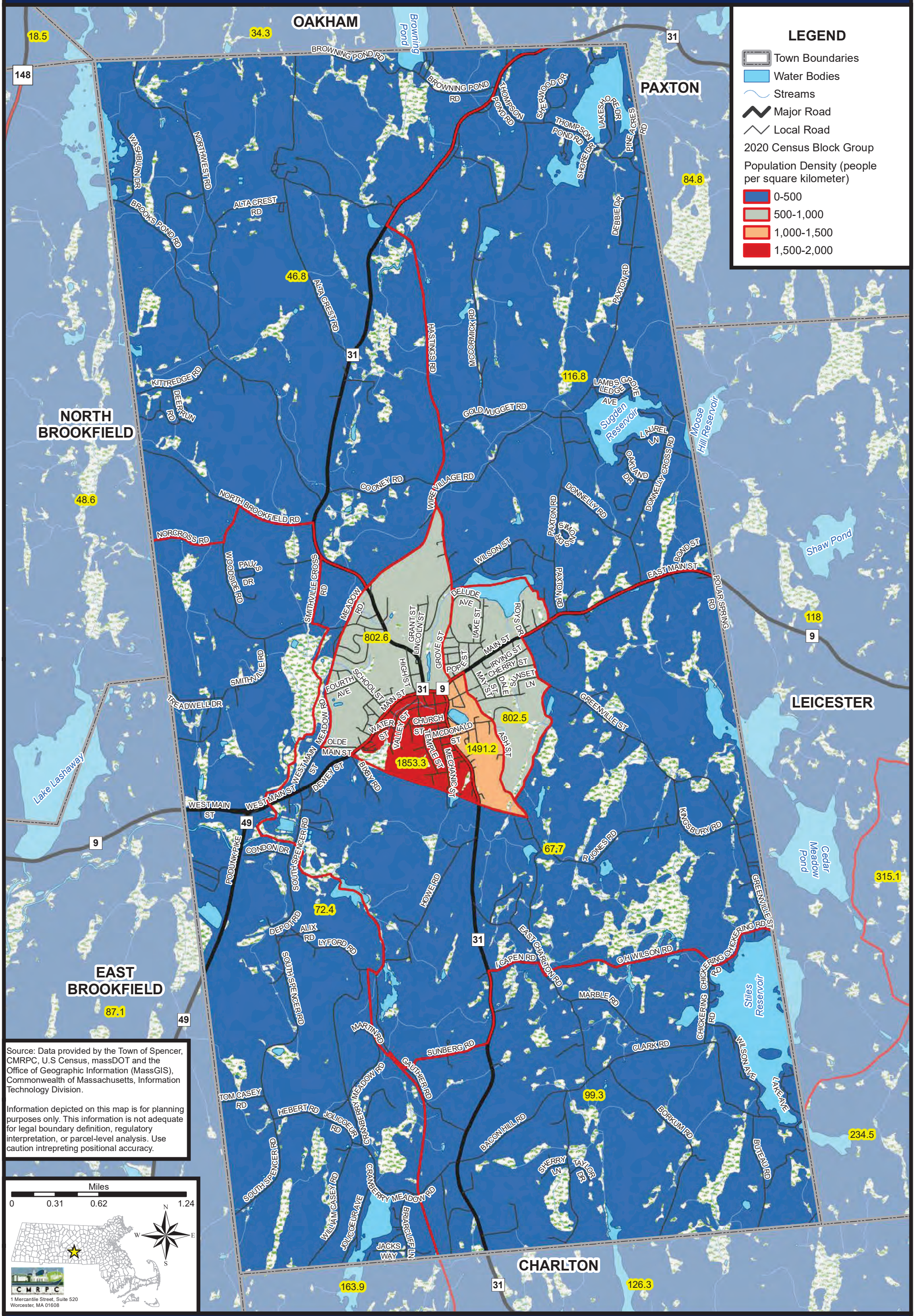
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Map 48 Food Access

Date: 5/17/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_48_Food_Access_11x17.mxd

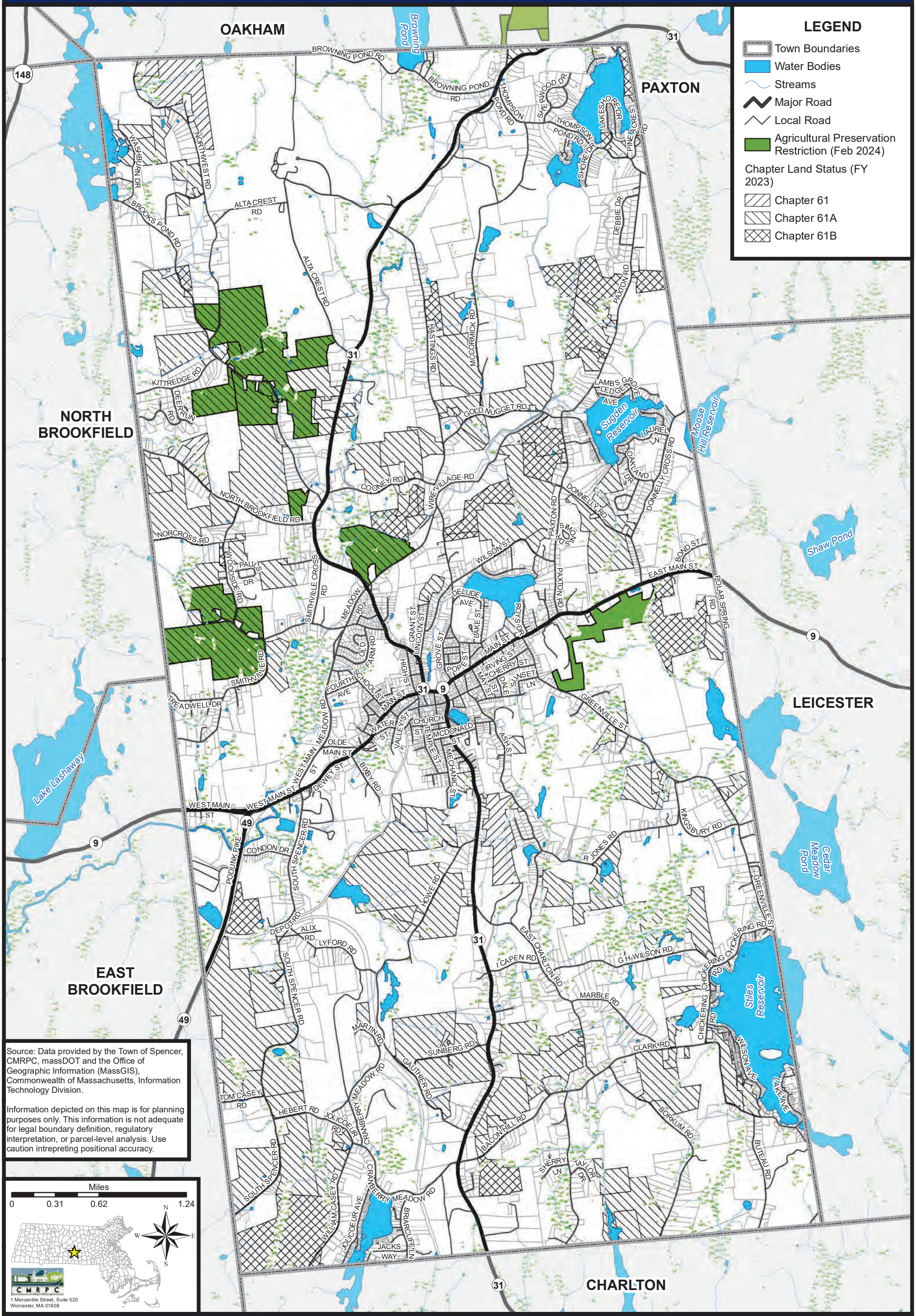
Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Map 50 Population Density

Date: 4/19/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_50_Population_Density_11x17.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



LEGEND

- Town Boundaries
- Water Bodies
- Streams
- Major Road
- Local Road
- Agricultural Preservation Restriction (Feb 2024)

Chapter Land Status (FY 2023)

- Chapter 61
- Chapter 61A
- Chapter 61B

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

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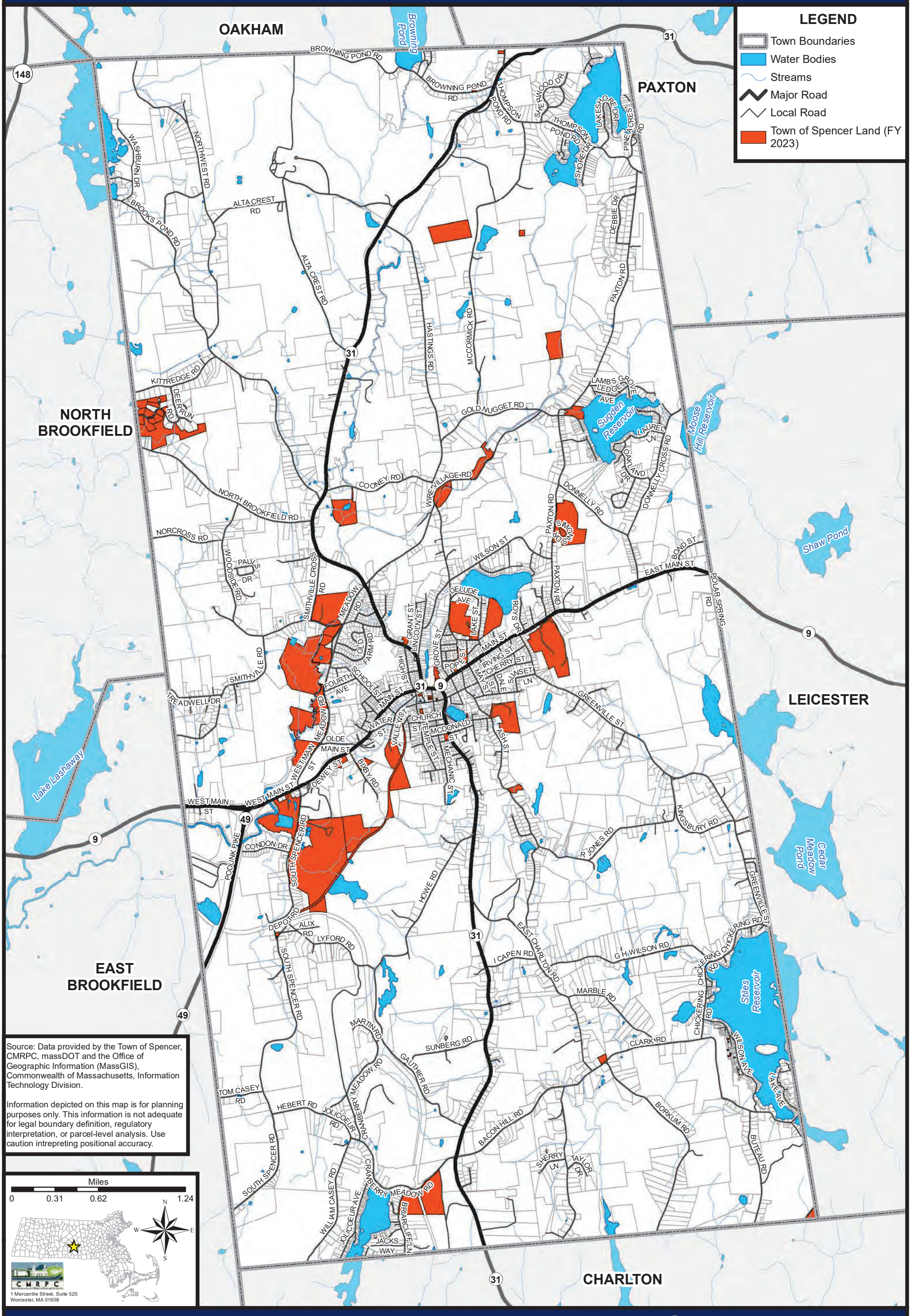
Miles
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Map 51 Agricultural

Date: 4/16/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_51_Agricultural_11x17.mxd

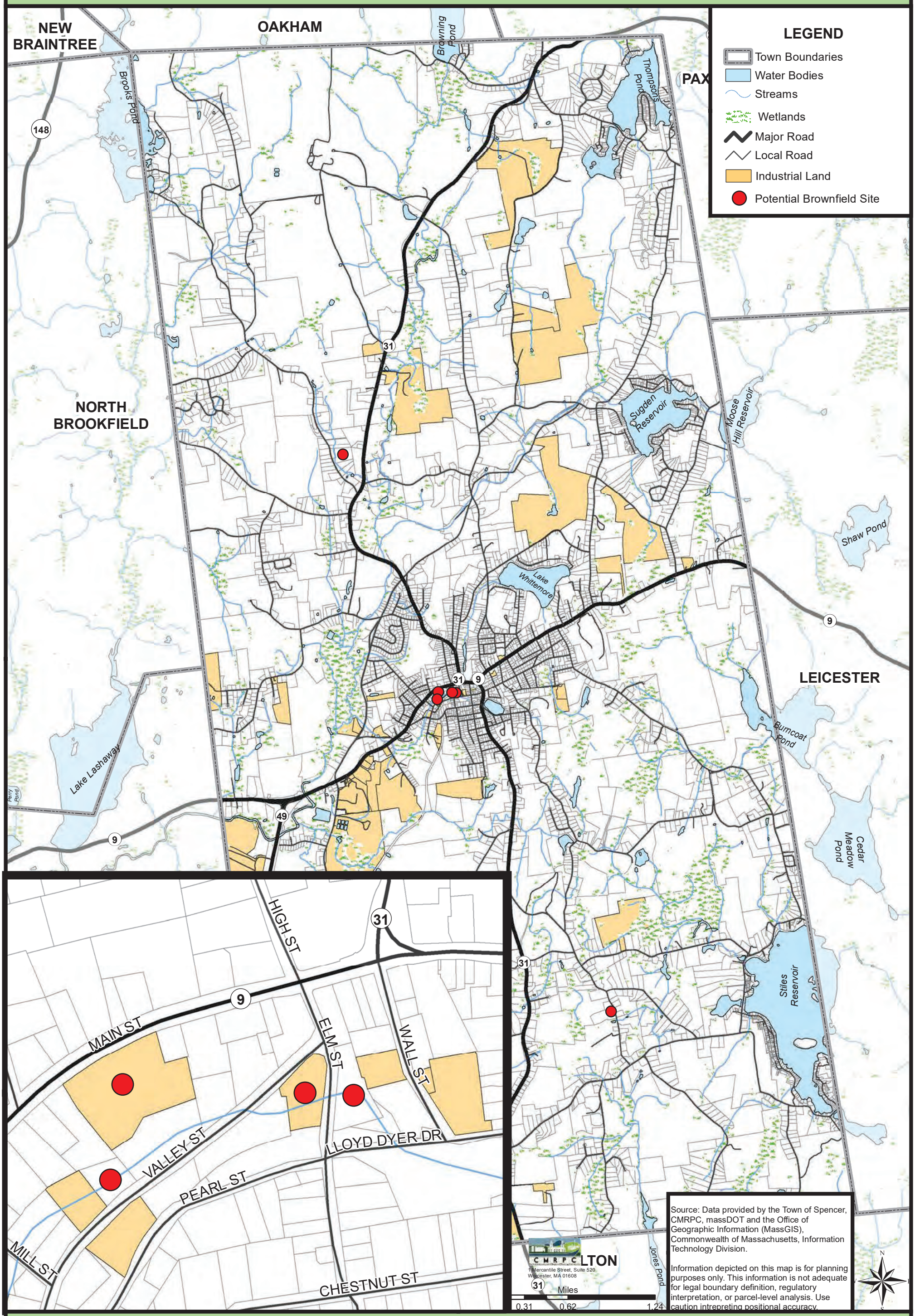
Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Map 53 Town Owned Land

Date: 4/16/2024 Document Path: H:\Projects\O_Spencer_GIS\Subprojects\m280_master_plan\mp280_53_TownOwnedLand_11x17.mxd

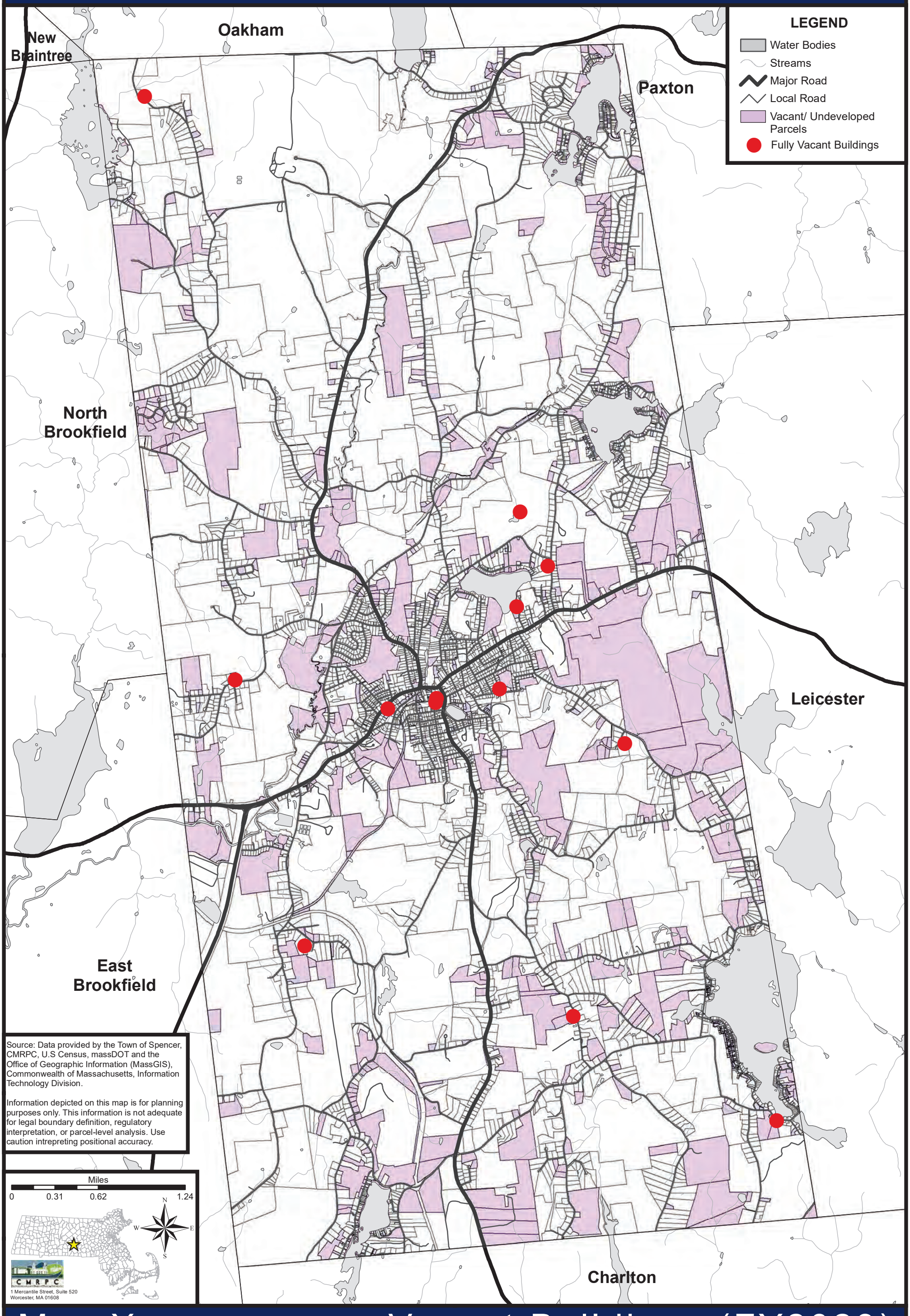
Brownfield Sites: Town of Spencer



Town of Spencer, Massachusetts

Date: 6/27/2024 Document Path: C:\Users\sam_c\Downloads\brownfields.mxd

Town of Spencer, Massachusetts
Master Plan



Source: Data provided by the Town of Spencer, CMRPC, U.S Census, massDOT and the Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Information Technology Division.

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Miles
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Map X Vacant Buildings (FY2023)

Date: 6/27/2024 Document Path: C:\Users\sam_c\Downloads\mp280_30_Vacant_buildings2_11x17.mxd

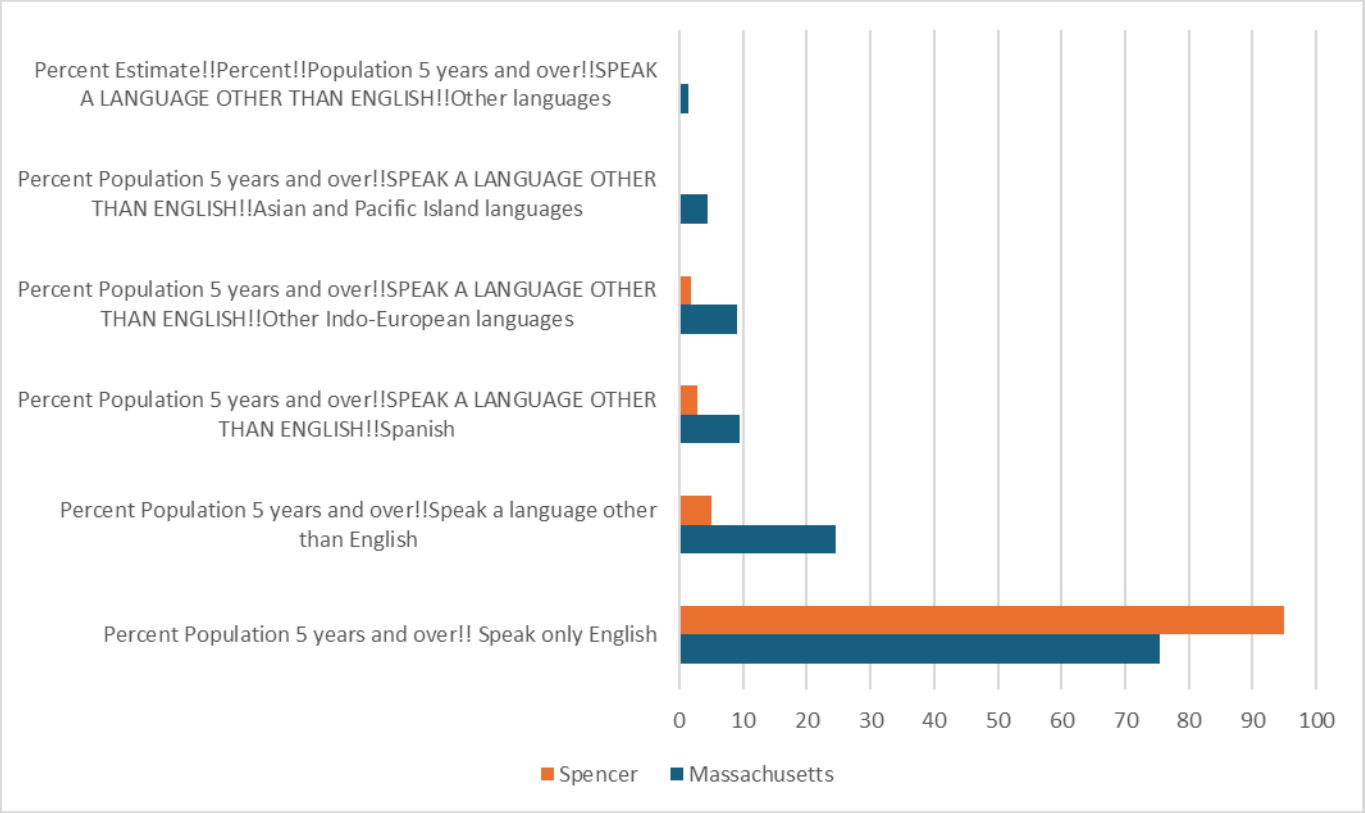


Figure A.1: Language Spoken at Home
Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S1601

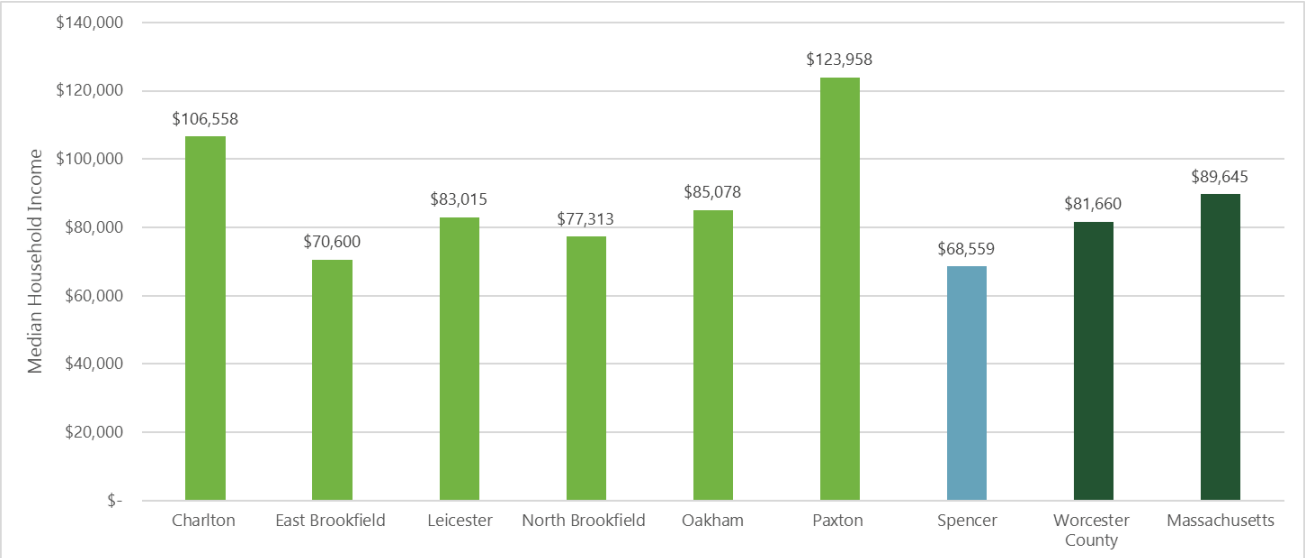
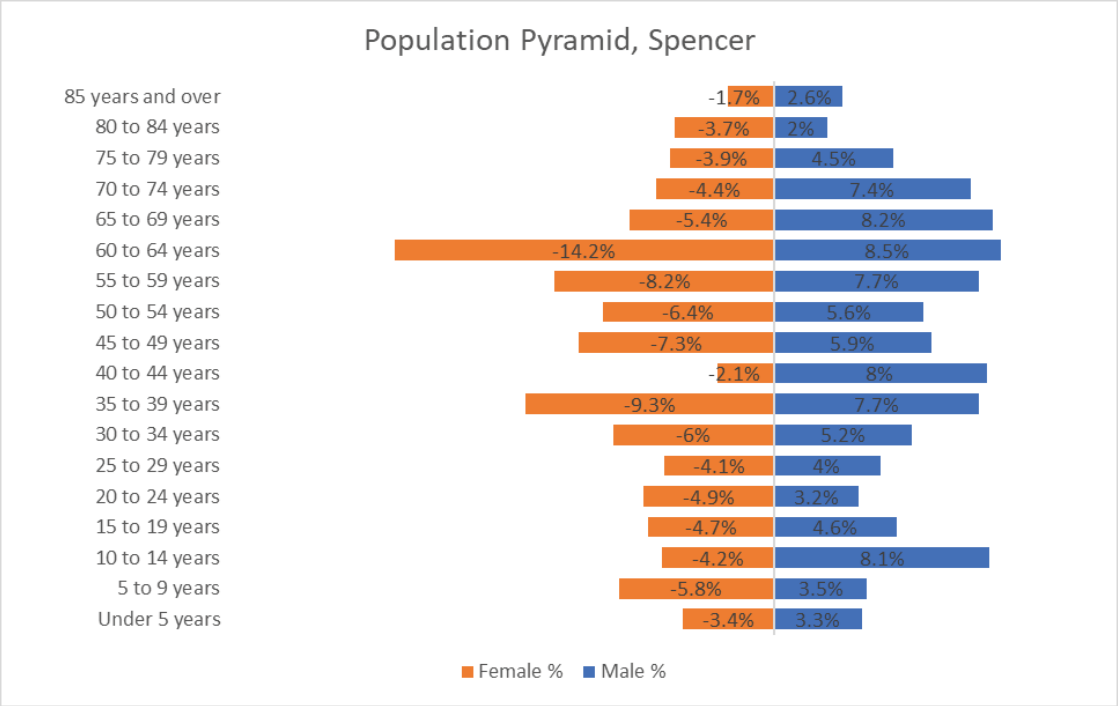


Figure A.2: Median Household Income by Community
Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S1903



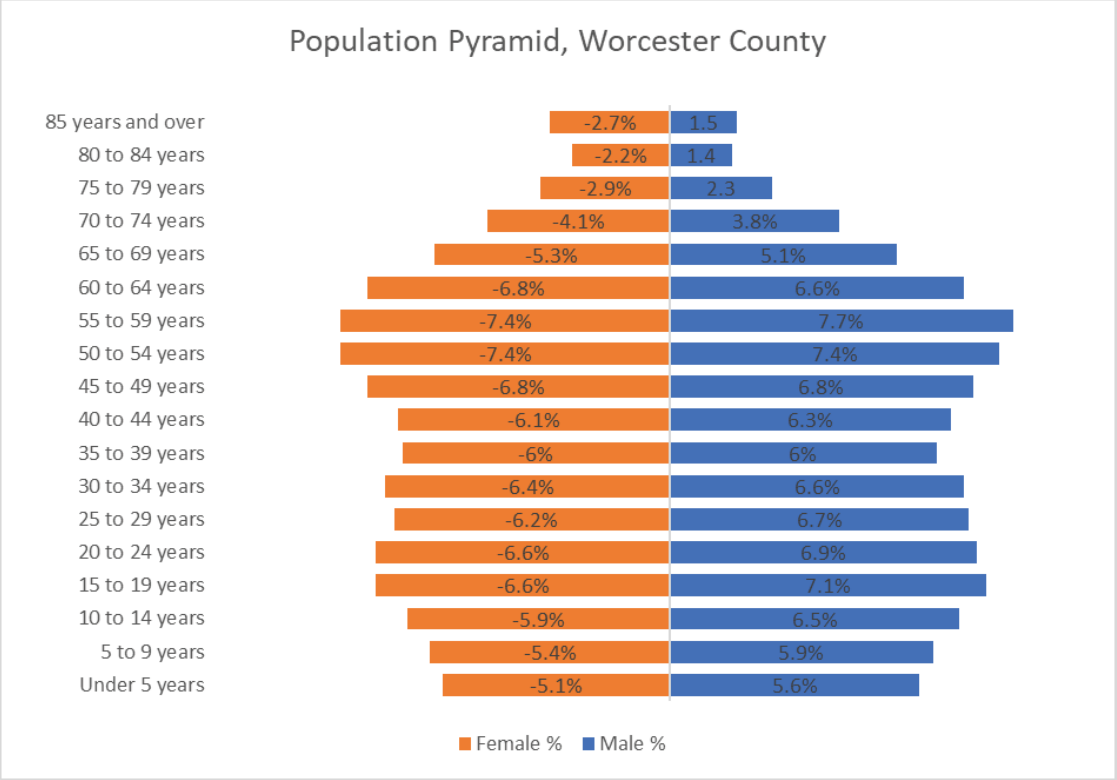
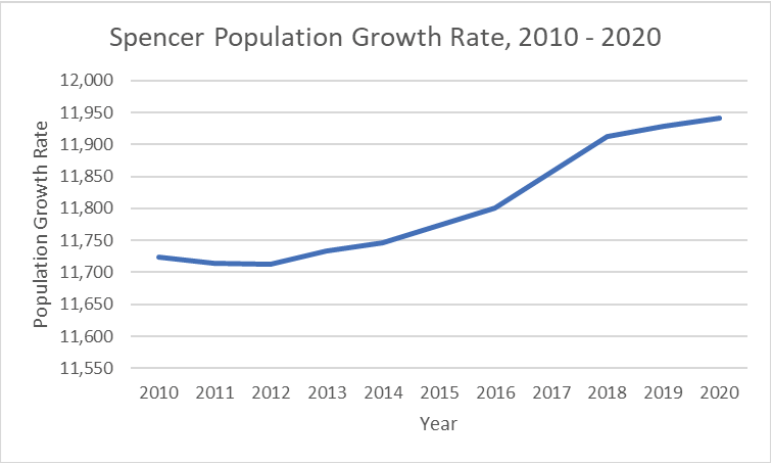


Figure A.3: Population Pyramids, Spencer & Worcester County

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S0101



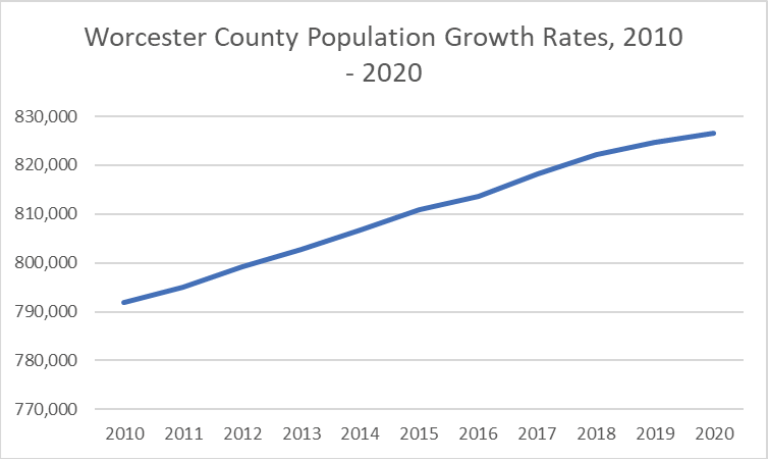


Figure A.4: Population Growth Rates, Spencer & Worcester County

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: Decennial Census, ACS 5-year estimates, and CMRPC Population Projection data

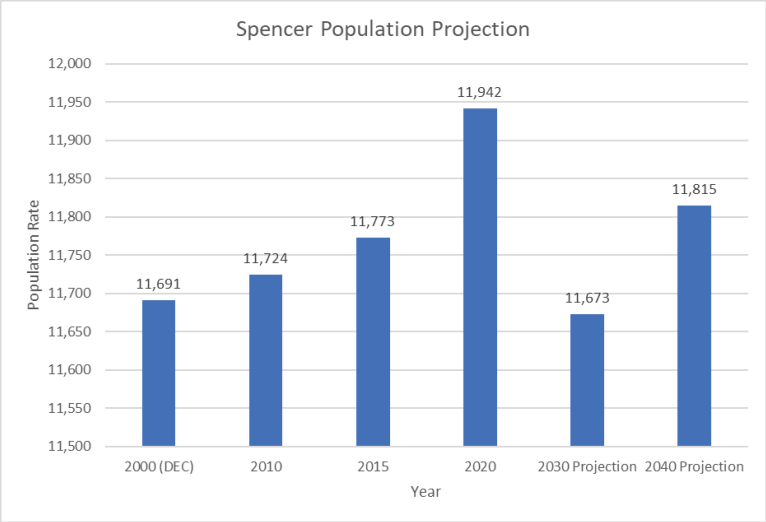


Figure A.5: Spencer Population Projection

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: Decennial Census, ACS 5-year estimates, and CMRPC Population Projection data

Company name	Address	City	State	Number of employees	NAICS Code
Flexcon Co Inc	S Spencer Rd	Spencer	MA	500-999	3261
Big Y	W Main St	Spencer	MA	100-249	4451
Price Chopper	Main St # 5	Spencer	MA	100-249	4451
David Prouty High School	Main St	Spencer	MA	50-99	6111
East Brookfield-Spencer Rlrd	Podunk Pike	Spencer	MA	50-99	4821
Klem's	W Main St	Spencer	MA	50-99	4551
Mc Donald's	W Main St	Spencer	MA	50-99	7225
Mercury Wire Products Inc	Mercury Dr	Spencer	MA	50-99	3359
St Joseph's Abbey Monastery	N Spencer Rd	Spencer	MA	50-99	8131
Wire Village School	Paxton Rd	Spencer	MA	50-99	6111
Worcester County 4-H	Mccormick Rd	Spencer	MA	50-99	7212
Dienes USA	W Main St	Spencer	MA	20-49	3322
DQ Grill & Chill	Main St	Spencer	MA	20-49	7225
Dunkin'	W Main St # 2	Spencer	MA	20-49	7225
ERA Real Estate Key Realty Svc	Main St	Spencer	MA	20-49	5312
Jyl Transportation Inc	N Spencer Rd # A	Spencer	MA	20-49	4885
Knox Trail Junior High School	Ash St	Spencer	MA	20-49	6111
Lake Street School	Paxton Rd	Spencer	MA	20-49	6111
Northeast Vehicle Svc LLC	Podunk Pike	Spencer	MA	20-49	8111
Republic Services		Spencer	MA	20-49	5621
Spencer Country Inn	Main St	Spencer	MA	20-49	7225
Spencer Fire Dept	W Main St	Spencer	MA	20-49	9221
Spencer Police Dept	W Main St	Spencer	MA	20-49	9221
Todd Vitkos Plastering Inc	Bacon Hill Rd	Spencer	MA	20-49	2383
USPS	Mechanic St	Spencer	MA	20-49	4911

Table A.1: Spencer’s Largest Employers

Source: MA Department of Revenue

Where Massachusetts Residents Work		
Worked in state of residence	96.4	0.1
Worked in county of residence	68.3	0.2
Worked outside county of residence	28.2	0.2
Worked outside state of residence	3.6	0.1
Living in a place	71.4	0.2
Worked in place of residence	27.3	0.2
Worked outside place of residence	44.1	0.2
Not living in a place	28.6	0.2
Living in 12 selected states	100	0.1
Worked in minor civil division of residence	35.6	0.3
Worked outside minor civil division of residence	64.4	0.3
Not living in 12 selected states	0	0.1
Workers 16 years and over who did not work from home	3164395	10659

Where Spencer Residents Work		
Worked in state of residence	96.5	0.1
Worked in county of residence	73.6	0.1
Worked outside county of residence	23	0.1
Worked outside state of residence	3.5	0.1
Living in a place	76.1	0.1
Worked in place of residence	33.5	0.1
Worked outside place of residence	42.7	0.1
Not living in a place	23.9	0.1
Living in 12 selected states	24.6	0.1
Worked in minor civil division of residence	8.4	0.1
Worked outside minor civil division of residence	16.2	0.1
Not living in 12 selected states	75.4	0.1
Workers 16 years and over who did not work from home	140223271	174953

Table A.2: Where Residents Work/ Live

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S0801

Place	2021		2011	
	Count	Share	Count	Share
Worcester city, MA	1,360	21.30%	1,299	21.50%
Boston city, MA	339	5.30%	310	5.10%
Spencer CDP, MA	176	2.80%	228	3.80%
Marlborough city, MA	145	2.30%	82	1.40%
Southbridge Town city, MA	107	1.70%	111	1.80%
Waltham city, MA	97	1.50%	76	1.30%
Framingham city, MA	74	1.20%	92	1.50%
Cambridge city, MA	73	1.10%	57	0.90%
Springfield city, MA	67	1.10%	55	0.90%
Leominster city, MA	63	1.00%	50	0.80%
All Other Locations	3,876	60.80%	3,687	61.00%

Table A.3: Job Counts by Places (Cities, CDPs, etc.) Where Workers are Employed - All Jobs

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: 2021-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Place	2021		2011	
	Count	Share	Count	Share
Spencer CDP, MA	239	8.50%	370	12.20%
Worcester city, MA	237	8.40%	292	9.70%
Southbridge Town city, MA	85	3.00%	66	2.20%
North Brookfield CDP, MA	73	2.60%	83	2.70%
East Brookfield CDP, MA	64	2.30%	56	1.90%
Ware CDP, MA	41	1.50%	28	0.90%
Webster CDP, MA	30	1.10%	36	1.20%
Palmer Town city, MA	27	1.00%	16	0.50%
West Brookfield CDP, MA	27	1.00%	29	1.00%
Brookfield CDP, MA	26	0.90%	13	0.40%
All Other Locations	1,960	69.80%	2,034	67.30%

Table A.4: Job Counts by Places (Cities, CDPs, etc.) Where Workers Live - All Jobs

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: 2021-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

GROSS RENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (GRAPI) IN SPENCER	Occupied Units Paying Rent	Percentage
Total occupied units paying rent (excluding units where GRAPI cannot be computed)	1598	1598
Less than 15.0 percent	337	21.1
15.0 to 19.9 percent	119	7.4
20.0 to 24.9 percent	270	16.9
25.0 to 29.9 percent	172	10.8
30.0 to 34.9 percent	192	12
35.0 percent or more	508	31.8
Not computed	184	(X)

GROSS RENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (GRAPI) IN WORCESTER COUNTY	Occupied Units Paying Rent	Percentage
Total occupied units paying rent (excluding units where GRAPI cannot be computed)	106204	106204
Less than 15.0 percent	13944	13.1
15.0 to 19.9 percent	13662	12.9
20.0 to 24.9 percent	13828	13
25.0 to 29.9 percent	12948	12.2
30.0 to 34.9 percent	10708	10.1
35.0 percent or more	41114	38.7
Not computed	6302	(X)

GROSS RENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (GRAPI) IN MASSACHUSETTS	Occupied Units Paying Rent	Percentage
Total occupied units paying rent (excluding units where GRAPI cannot be computed)	972491	972491
Less than 15.0 percent	125449	12.9
15.0 to 19.9 percent	117356	12.1
20.0 to 24.9 percent	122027	12.5
25.0 to 29.9 percent	119244	12.3
30.0 to 34.9 percent	95500	9.8
35.0 percent or more	392915	40.4
Not computed	57163	(X)

Table A.5: Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in Spencer, Worcester County, and Massachusetts

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP04.

SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (SMOCAPI) IN SPENCER	Units	Percentage
Housing units with a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)	2025	2025
Less than 20.0 percent	805	39.8
20.0 to 24.9 percent	432	21.3
25.0 to 29.9 percent	328	16.2
30.0 to 34.9 percent	106	5.2
35.0 percent or more	354	17.5
Not computed	0	(X)
Total housing units without a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)	1277	1277
Less than 10.0 percent	409	32
10.0 to 14.9 percent	296	23.2
15.0 to 19.9 percent	348	27.3
20.0 to 24.9 percent	123	9.6
25.0 to 29.9 percent	46	3.6
30.0 to 34.9 percent	44	3.4
35.0 percent or more	11	0.9
Not computed	0	(X)

SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (SMOCAPI) IN WORCESTER COUNTY	Units	Percentage
Housing units with a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)	150469	150469
Less than 20.0 percent	69165	46
20.0 to 24.9 percent	25372	16.9
25.0 to 29.9 percent	15937	10.6
30.0 to 34.9 percent	10416	6.9
35.0 percent or more	29579	19.7
Not computed	486	(X)
Total housing units without a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)	66414	66414
Less than 10.0 percent	24045	36.2
10.0 to 14.9 percent	12996	19.6
15.0 to 19.9 percent	7776	11.7
20.0 to 24.9 percent	5539	8.3
25.0 to 29.9 percent	3526	5.3
30.0 to 34.9 percent	2559	3.9
35.0 percent or more	9973	15
Not computed	444	(X)

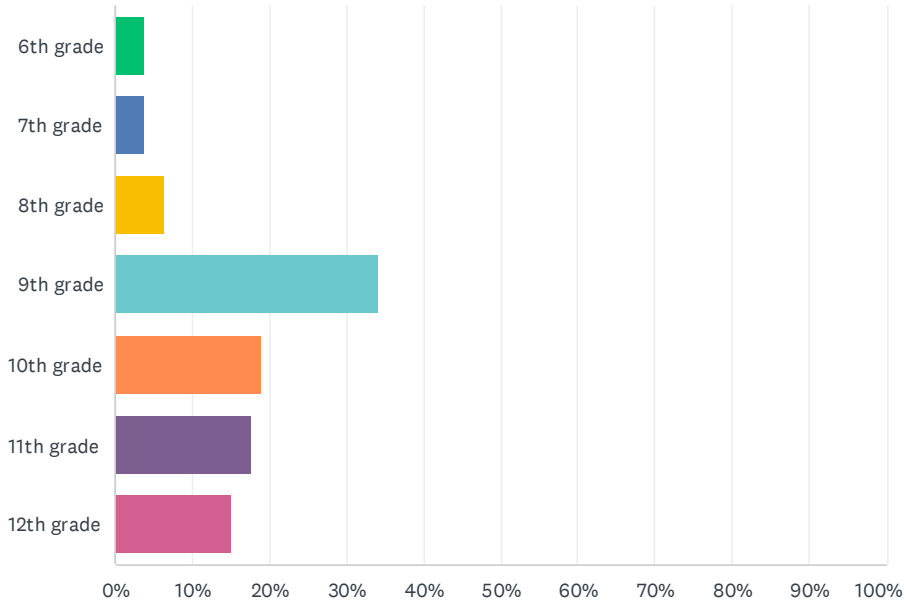
SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (SMOCAPI) IN MASSACHUSETTS	Units	Percentage
Total housing units with a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)	1149080	1149080
Less than 20.0 percent	498370	43.4
20.0 to 24.9 percent	184004	16
25.0 to 29.9 percent	124111	10.8
30.0 to 34.9 percent	82558	7.2
35.0 percent or more	260037	22.6
Not computed	3728	(X)
Total housing units without a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)	553155	553155
Less than 10.0 percent	201706	36.5
10.0 to 14.9 percent	106210	19.2
15.0 to 19.9 percent	67265	12.2
20.0 to 24.9 percent	44477	8
25.0 to 29.9 percent	28113	5.1
30.0 to 34.9 percent	19806	3.6
35.0 percent or more	85578	15.5
Not computed	5378	(X)

Table A.6: Selected Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income (SMOCAPI) in Spencer, Worcester County, and Massachusetts

Source: 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP04

Q1 Please check off your current grade

Answered: 79 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
6th grade	3.80%	3
7th grade	3.80%	3
8th grade	6.33%	5
9th grade	34.18%	27
10th grade	18.99%	15
11th grade	17.72%	14
12th grade	15.19%	12
TOTAL		79

Q2 What town do you live in?

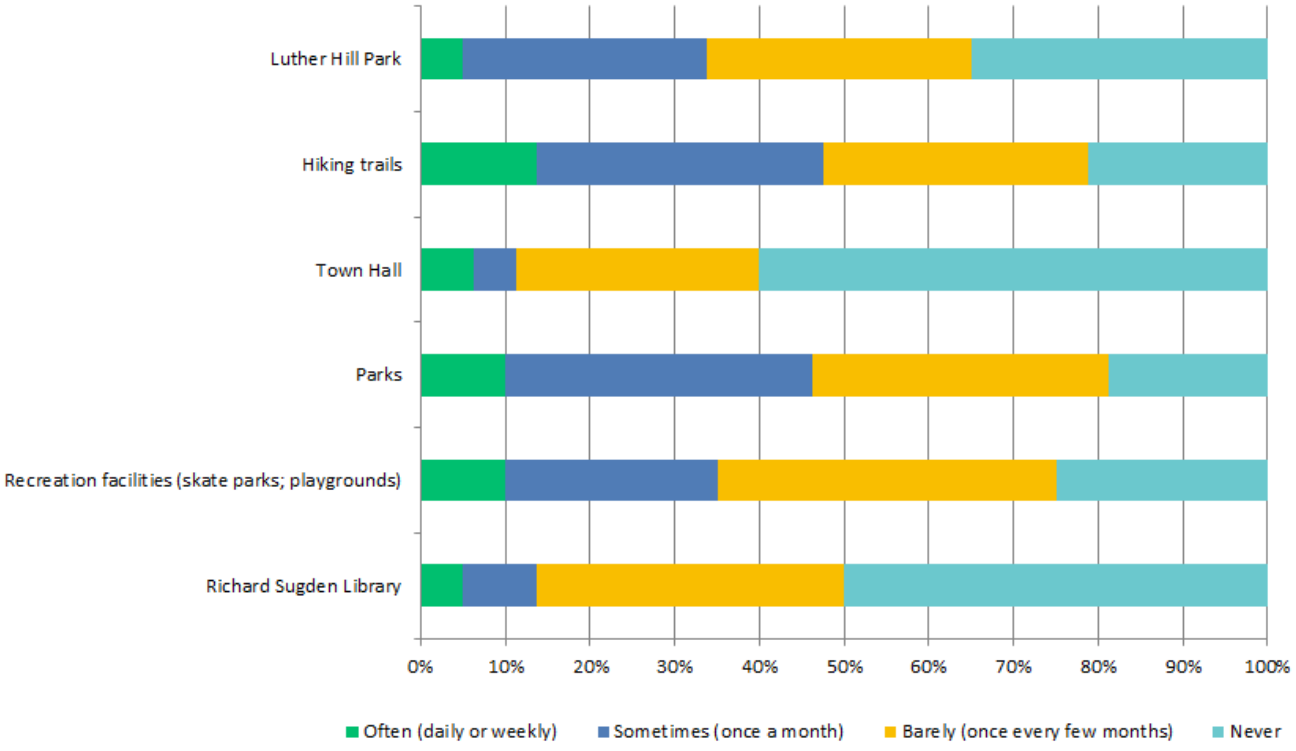
Answered: 77 Skipped: 3

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Spencer	9/24/2023 8:59 PM
2	Spencer duh	7/18/2023 7:25 PM
3	worcester	5/5/2023 9:38 AM
4	Spencer, MA	4/28/2023 1:56 PM
5	Spencer	4/28/2023 1:06 PM
6	Spencer	4/28/2023 1:05 PM
7	Spencer, MA	4/28/2023 12:58 PM
8	East Brookfield	4/28/2023 12:56 PM
9	spencer	4/28/2023 12:55 PM
10	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
11	spencer MA	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
12	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:52 PM
13	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:51 PM
14	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:50 PM
15	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:49 PM
16	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
17	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
18	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:44 PM
19	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
20	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
21	east brookfield	4/28/2023 12:04 PM
22	Spencer	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
23	Paxton Ma	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
24	East brookfield	4/28/2023 9:49 AM
25	spencer	4/27/2023 7:12 PM
26	Spencer	4/27/2023 12:01 PM
27	Spencer,MA	4/27/2023 11:51 AM
28	Spencer	4/27/2023 10:59 AM
29	Worcester	4/27/2023 10:58 AM
30	spencer	4/27/2023 10:54 AM
31	Spencer	4/27/2023 10:52 AM
32	Spencer	4/27/2023 10:52 AM
33	Spencer	4/27/2023 10:51 AM
34	spencer	4/27/2023 10:50 AM
35	East Brookfield	4/27/2023 10:48 AM
36	Spencer	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
37	Spencer	4/27/2023 10:47 AM

38	Spencer	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
39	East Brookfield	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
40	Spencer	4/27/2023 10:45 AM
41	East Brookfield	4/27/2023 10:44 AM
42	Spencer	4/27/2023 10:07 AM
43	spencer east brookfield	4/27/2023 10:04 AM
44	Spencer	4/27/2023 9:55 AM
45	Spencer	4/27/2023 9:54 AM
46	Spencer mass	4/27/2023 9:53 AM
47	Spencer	4/27/2023 9:52 AM
48	spencer	4/27/2023 9:50 AM
49	Spencer	4/27/2023 9:50 AM
50	Spencer	4/27/2023 9:49 AM
51	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:40 AM
52	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:31 AM
53	Spencer Massachusetts	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
54	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
55	East brookfield	4/27/2023 8:29 AM
56	Spencer, MA	4/27/2023 8:28 AM
57	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:27 AM
58	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:26 AM
59	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:26 AM
60	Spencer Massachusetts	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
61	spencer	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
62	East Brookfield MA	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
63	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
64	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
65	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
66	spencer	4/27/2023 8:23 AM
67	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:23 AM
68	Spencer massachusetts	4/27/2023 8:22 AM
69	Spencer	4/27/2023 8:21 AM
70	Spencer	4/26/2023 10:38 PM
71	East Brookfield, past Spencer resident	4/26/2023 10:28 PM
72	Spencer	4/26/2023 8:06 PM
73	Spencer	4/26/2023 7:24 PM
74	spencer	4/4/2023 7:21 PM
75	Spencer	4/4/2023 7:18 PM
76	Spencer	3/29/2023 11:53 AM
77	Spencer	3/22/2023 6:56 AM

Q3 How often do you use/visit these places in town? Please refer to the Town of Spencer Open Space and Recreation plan for more information on recreation facilities (https://www.spencerma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif1246/f/uploads/open_space_plan.p

Answered: 80 Skipped: 0



	OFTEN (DAILY OR WEEKLY)	SOMETIMES (ONCE A MONTH)	BARELY (ONCE EVERY FEW MONTHS)	NEVER	TOTAL
Richard Sugden Library	5.00% 4	8.75% 7	36.25% 29	50.00% 40	80
Recreation facilities (skate parks; playgrounds)	10.00% 8	25.00% 20	40.00% 32	25.00% 20	80
Parks	10.00% 8	36.25% 29	35.00% 28	18.75% 15	80
Town Hall	6.25% 5	5.00% 4	28.75% 23	60.00% 48	80
Hiking trails	13.75% 11	33.75% 27	31.25% 25	21.25% 17	80
Luther Hill Park	5.00% 4	28.75% 23	31.25% 25	35.00% 28	80

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Spencer doesn't have much for us. I heard it was very hard to get a skate park and the kids from years ago built the one there. Can barely ever swim. Drugs in the streets. Not much to do Played basketball up at the Old Junior High but that's gone	7/18/2023 7:25 PM
2	American legion every monday and wednesday	5/5/2023 9:38 AM
3	I go pretty much every where I can walk	4/28/2023 12:58 PM

4	Lake Lashaway	4/28/2023 12:56 PM
5	Nothing ain’t nothing good out here	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
6	Saint Joseph’s Abbey	4/28/2023 12:45 PM
7	Use of schools sports fields and tennis courts, very often	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
8	ogara park	4/27/2023 10:04 AM
9	Mussys	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
10	Wire Village soccer field	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
11	Brooks pond	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
12	McDonald’s near big Y	4/27/2023 8:23 AM

Q4 What areas or buildings in Spencer are important to you?

Answered: 77 Skipped: 3

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Price Chopper	9/24/2023 8:59 PM
2	None	7/18/2023 7:25 PM
3	none	5/5/2023 9:38 AM
4	The library (which I should take my niece out to more often), hiking trails, and Lake Sugden.	4/28/2023 1:56 PM
5	Recreational buildings/activities Basketball courts Ball fields Etc	4/28/2023 1:06 PM
6	The school	4/28/2023 1:05 PM
7	Areas around town hall and schools. Especially Luther Hill Park. Absolutely love that place.	4/28/2023 12:58 PM
8	David Prouty High School	4/28/2023 12:56 PM
9	Bowling alley	4/28/2023 12:55 PM
10	The town hall and the park	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
11	wire village basketball court	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
12	Dairy Queen, the buildings on cherry street.	4/28/2023 12:52 PM
13	Price chopper	4/28/2023 12:51 PM
14	Mcdonalds	4/28/2023 12:50 PM
15	Dairy Queen, Woodys auto body car wash, laneys gas station	4/28/2023 12:49 PM
16	The high school	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
17	Dq	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
18	Saint Joseph's Abbey, David Prouty High School	4/28/2023 12:45 PM
19	DQ, McDonalds, David Prouty	4/28/2023 12:44 PM
20	Nothing	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
21	The high school and its recreational areas such as the track and tennis courts	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
22	Mr Haley	4/28/2023 12:07 PM
23	school	4/28/2023 12:04 PM
24	Wire Village	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
25	David prouty High School	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
26	knox trail middle school	4/27/2023 7:12 PM
27	School home stores basketball court	4/27/2023 12:01 PM
28	the main buildin	4/27/2023 11:51 AM
29	David Prouty High School, and Luther Hill Park	4/27/2023 10:59 AM
30	The track in Brookfield for dirtbikes	4/27/2023 10:58 AM
31	my house	4/27/2023 10:54 AM
32	Dairy Queen	4/27/2023 10:52 AM
33	The gym, Luther hill park and my house	4/27/2023 10:52 AM
34	Schools, grocery stores, church, Dunkin' Donuts, the bank.	4/27/2023 10:51 AM
35	klems because i work there. big y. yahmato	4/27/2023 10:50 AM
36	David Prouty	4/27/2023 10:48 AM
37	my house	4/27/2023 10:47 AM

38	Down town	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
39	Dq	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
40	Big Y plaza, McDonald’s, David Prouty.	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
41	Cornerstone Bank David Prouty	4/27/2023 10:45 AM
42	David Prouty High School Sibley Farms	4/27/2023 10:44 AM
43	My house, the School, my friends houses and the lake on Clark street.	4/27/2023 10:07 AM
44	ogara park and luther hill park	4/27/2023 10:04 AM
45	David Prouty High School	4/27/2023 9:55 AM
46	Price chopper	4/27/2023 9:54 AM
47	Klems, price chopper,Walmart other markets where you get food or pet stuff	4/27/2023 9:53 AM
48	The rail trail and some of the parks.	4/27/2023 9:52 AM
49	none	4/27/2023 9:50 AM
50	My house	4/27/2023 9:50 AM
51	Church basketball court	4/27/2023 9:49 AM
52	Citgo gas station	4/27/2023 8:40 AM
53	None are important to me	4/27/2023 8:31 AM
54	Friends houses, McDonald	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
55	My house	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
56	David prouty high school, Dairy Queen	4/27/2023 8:29 AM
57	Some areas that are important to me in Spencer is McDonald’s, Grocery stores.	4/27/2023 8:28 AM
58	Schools, Fast food restaurants, Grocery stores	4/27/2023 8:27 AM
59	School, grocery stores	4/27/2023 8:26 AM
60	My house.	4/27/2023 8:26 AM
61	David Prouty High School	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
62	dairy queen	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
63	Skate park	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
64	Klems McDonald’s big y	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
65	Price chopper	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
66	School,	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
67	my house,mcdonald’s,yamatos,citgo,and dairy queen	4/27/2023 8:23 AM
68	My house	4/27/2023 8:23 AM
69	CVS	4/27/2023 8:22 AM
70	David prouty high school	4/27/2023 8:21 AM
71	Library	4/26/2023 10:38 PM
72	I do not go to the library much anymore but it was an important part of my childhood and I hope it is available for the next generation of kids.	4/26/2023 10:28 PM
73	Soccer fields	4/26/2023 8:06 PM
74	Price chopper	4/26/2023 7:24 PM
75	School, softball felid	4/4/2023 7:21 PM
76	Mcdonalds, Lakes	4/4/2023 7:18 PM
77	David Prouty high school, price chopper, town hall, big y	3/22/2023 6:56 AM

Q5 What do you feel the town needs, but does not currently have?

Answered: 77 Skipped: 3

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Daycare	9/24/2023 8:59 PM
2	Everything	7/18/2023 7:25 PM
3	i dunno	5/5/2023 9:38 AM
4	I believe that safety improvements on Greenville Road would help better connect Spencer, and make it more attractive	4/28/2023 1:56 PM
5	More things for the youth to keep them occupied	4/28/2023 1:06 PM
6	A hangout spot for kids A cafe	4/28/2023 1:05 PM
7	Better sidewalks and maintenence for more distant parts of town.	4/28/2023 12:58 PM
8	Panera Bread, Movie Theater	4/28/2023 12:56 PM
9	More things to do for teenagers to hang out	4/28/2023 12:55 PM
10	More fast food places and good eats	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
11	more recreational spots	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
12	A music store	4/28/2023 12:52 PM
13	a good gas station	4/28/2023 12:51 PM
14	Trampoline park	4/28/2023 12:50 PM
15	entertainment	4/28/2023 12:49 PM
16	More entertainment/ Food places	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
17	More entertainment like the movies and stuff like that	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
18	Better restaurants, more entertainment.	4/28/2023 12:45 PM
19	A chic fil a	4/28/2023 12:44 PM
20	Mr Haley statue, and the david prouty high-school needs to be fix asap	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
21	More new and updated tennis courts outside of just the high school, for example at Luther hill park or other parks	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
22	Mr Haley statue	4/28/2023 12:07 PM
23	more mexican/ hispanic markets	4/28/2023 12:04 PM
24	Chic fil a	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
25	chick fil a	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
26	A gathering place for the community to hold events like a farmers market or craft fairs.	4/28/2023 9:49 AM
27	the town currently needs more areas for kids (like parks, daycares, ect.), needs to put more money into recreational buildings like the library, and needs to put more money into the schools.	4/27/2023 7:12 PM
28	Places to ride bike not skate park	4/27/2023 12:01 PM
29	gamestop, wendys	4/27/2023 11:51 AM
30	I believe that the town needs more places for people to just be outside, for example Luther Hill is a nice place to get some fresh air with a beautiful view. I think we could build more state parks for people to enjoy.	4/27/2023 10:59 AM
31	A water park	4/27/2023 10:58 AM
32	a mall, chick fil a	4/27/2023 10:54 AM
33	Better fast food places	4/27/2023 10:52 AM

34	Better restaurants, a new school,	4/27/2023 10:52 AM
35	Chick-fil-A Starbucks More attraction places , it would benefit the town more, people would stay living here.	4/27/2023 10:51 AM
36	starbucks, better roads, nicer people, less old people	4/27/2023 10:50 AM
37	Public transportation	4/27/2023 10:48 AM
38	more food	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
39	Chick fil a	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
40	No school	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
41	Chick fil a	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
42	Public transportation	4/27/2023 10:45 AM
43	Skate parks, better security, a minute clinic and a target.	4/27/2023 10:07 AM
44	wild life areas/woodland	4/27/2023 10:04 AM
45	I don’t know	4/27/2023 9:55 AM
46	chick flia	4/27/2023 9:54 AM
47	Nothing that I can think of really	4/27/2023 9:53 AM
48	The center of town is nothing to be proud of. Its hard to feel pride for your town when it looks like crap.	4/27/2023 9:52 AM
49	More public areas	4/27/2023 9:50 AM
50	A better basketball court	4/27/2023 9:49 AM
51	More activities	4/27/2023 8:40 AM
52	Idk	4/27/2023 8:31 AM
53	some roads need to be better	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
54	Burger King	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
55	I never leave my house.	4/27/2023 8:29 AM
56	More entertainment.	4/27/2023 8:28 AM
57	More entertainment/events	4/27/2023 8:27 AM
58	More entertainment	4/27/2023 8:26 AM
59	I do not know much about spencer and do not know what it lacks, but no obvious needs come to mind.	4/27/2023 8:26 AM
60	A better school	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
61	stores	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
62	New roads or more skate parks	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
63	Redone buildings	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
64	I would say a new high school. I know they are in the process of building a new one but we won’t have it for another 3+ years	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
65	More food places, activities	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
66	more parks,and a mall	4/27/2023 8:23 AM
67	Wendy’s	4/27/2023 8:23 AM
68	A better school and boxing	4/27/2023 8:22 AM
69	better restaurants and flat space	4/27/2023 8:21 AM
70	More entertainment for kids…arcade, trampoline park etc	4/26/2023 10:38 PM
71	I feel the town needs better recreational places. The limited areas we have are dirty and rundown, we can lead to people getting in with the wrong crowd hanging out in the more “dangerous” areas of town.	4/26/2023 10:28 PM
72	More local businesses on Main Street not pizza places	4/26/2023 8:06 PM

73	Hockey rink	4/26/2023 7:24 PM
74	A smoothie shop	4/4/2023 7:21 PM
75	A sky zone or something more to do in the town so we don't have to travel an hour away to do anything	4/4/2023 7:18 PM
76	Sporting areas	3/29/2023 11:53 AM
77	I feel Spencer needs more stores that sell daily things or appliances and the only real restaurants are fast food.	3/22/2023 6:56 AM

Q6 What do you feel is missing from Spencer schools?

Answered: 78 Skipped: 2

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	The good food	9/24/2023 8:59 PM
2	Everything	7/18/2023 7:25 PM
3	Good food	5/5/2023 9:38 AM
4	1. Digital infrastructure. Most of it is from the mid 00s or earlier. 2. Places like study halls: became very apparent during the late pandemic, where we had to use the cafeteria (No computers) when teachers called out.	4/28/2023 1:56 PM
5	Necessary equipment for our students and facility members to succeed in learning/teaching	4/28/2023 1:06 PM
6	teachers Sports Ex. Vollyball,field hockey, lacrosse	4/28/2023 1:05 PM
7	Any sense of fun. It's boring and there is next to no outside activities during school hours.	4/28/2023 12:58 PM
8	Better athletic facilities	4/28/2023 12:56 PM
9	High schoolers being able to leave during lunch	4/28/2023 12:55 PM
10	A nice school	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
11	academic opportunities	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
12	More support	4/28/2023 12:52 PM
13	good teachers	4/28/2023 12:51 PM
14	Freedom	4/28/2023 12:50 PM
15	vocational programs	4/28/2023 12:49 PM
16	What’s missing is modernization.	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
17	More bathrooms	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
18	Nothing really, just needs to be renovated.	4/28/2023 12:45 PM
19	More students	4/28/2023 12:44 PM
20	Good school food	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
21	updated parking lots, updated courts/track.	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
22	Mr Haley	4/28/2023 12:07 PM
23	diversity	4/28/2023 12:04 PM
24	Happiness	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
25	Spirit and happiness	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
26	PTOs and summer school options	4/28/2023 9:49 AM
27	Anti bully acts, a playground (all we need is a swing set or a set of monkey bars, small stuff like this make all the difference), and tutors.	4/27/2023 7:12 PM
28	Good teachers and principal	4/27/2023 12:01 PM
29	a bigger gym	4/27/2023 11:51 AM
30	I believe that our public school are missing some resources that other schools have, or even programs that are given to other towns because they have the funds. Like dance, and other trade classes. & I believe some resources that our school could have is a larger outdoor space for eating lunches, and or breakfast.	4/27/2023 10:59 AM
31	a Nice functional school and teachers that know what they are doing	4/27/2023 10:58 AM
32	trades	4/27/2023 10:54 AM
33	ATMs Comfy couches like Barnett	4/27/2023 10:52 AM

34	A choice in what classes you take	4/27/2023 10:52 AM
35	More trades to attract students to come to prouty, rather than branching out to Leicester or bay path.	4/27/2023 10:51 AM
36	air conditioning. a place to study	4/27/2023 10:50 AM
37	Teachers	4/27/2023 10:48 AM
38	home economics class, we learn useless stuff that won't help us after we walk across that stage	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
39	Ac	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
40	Ac	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
41	Heat in all classrooms.	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
42	Teachers	4/27/2023 10:45 AM
43	Aquaculture	4/27/2023 10:44 AM
44	Locked bathroom stalls, air conditioning, more space and more strict punishments for when kids do things they aren't supposed to.	4/27/2023 10:07 AM
45	stuck inside. The schools need a way to be able to work outside.	4/27/2023 10:04 AM
46	I know it's not perfect, but I can't list what's missing.	4/27/2023 9:55 AM
47	field trips	4/27/2023 9:54 AM
48	Safety and fairness some people in school don't get treated the same as others and I also feel unsafe a lot when I'm in school.	4/27/2023 9:53 AM
49	There is a lack of students, and a lack of vocational opportunities. I don't like most of the VOC programs.	4/27/2023 9:52 AM
50	diversity and logical staff. a better system.	4/27/2023 9:50 AM
51	Fair teachers, more outdoor things	4/27/2023 9:50 AM
52	Good basketball program	4/27/2023 9:49 AM
53	budget	4/27/2023 8:40 AM
54	Better food	4/27/2023 8:31 AM
55	better bathroom regulations, vapes and having 10 people in the bathroom is an issue	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
56	Heat and a/c	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
57	Good teachers.	4/27/2023 8:29 AM
58	I'm not sure.	4/27/2023 8:28 AM
59	Events/Better teachers	4/27/2023 8:27 AM
60	Not sure	4/27/2023 8:26 AM
61	Timely responses.	4/27/2023 8:26 AM
62	Sports equipment	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
63	i don't know	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
64	I don't know	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
65	I don't know	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
66	Normal people	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
67	Sports stuff	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
68	everything	4/27/2023 8:23 AM
69	Sports stuff	4/27/2023 8:23 AM
70	A better facility	4/27/2023 8:22 AM
71	Lack of teachers	4/26/2023 10:38 PM
72	I feel the resources that we have available are outdated and we need to adapt more to students needs, especially students in the minority mentally. Students part of any of the pace	4/26/2023 10:28 PM

	programs and students with different mental disabilities cannot really get the help they need.	
73	Outdoor track	4/26/2023 8:06 PM
74	No bullying help	4/26/2023 7:24 PM
75	I’m not sure	4/4/2023 7:21 PM
76	The safety of children and that they care more about what a child is wearing than what they are teaching or the students safety	4/4/2023 7:18 PM
77	More sports Better food More clubs Bullying classes	3/29/2023 11:53 AM
78	nothing	3/22/2023 6:56 AM

Q7 Are there any places in Spencer that feel unsafe when you are walking? For example, because they are too dark or there is no crosswalk? Please list all examples

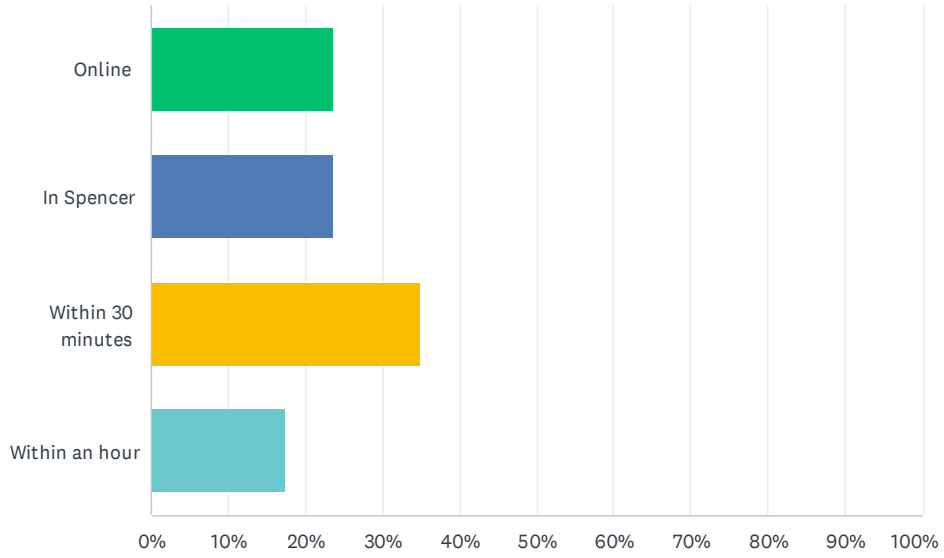
Answered: 71 Skipped: 9

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Yeah the whole Mechanic Street, Main Street, Chestnut Street area. Afraid to step on a needle	7/18/2023 7:25 PM
2	Pearl st	5/5/2023 9:38 AM
3	Pretty much anywhere on route 9 east of Maple and west of Cormier Jewelers. There aren't a lot of crosswalks, (none at Paxton Road) and the ones that are there are rarely signalized, and drivers don't usually take them seriously.	4/28/2023 1:56 PM
4	Summit street because the the electrical wires are very low and are at risk of getting pulled down by a tall truck	4/28/2023 1:06 PM
5	I don’t feel unsafe only if it were night and walking around in town. Some creepy old men in Spencer.	4/28/2023 1:05 PM
6	Not really but whenever I go to Rich lane near my mom's house It feels like there is bears everywhere around me. I have even heard one. This was while I was biking btw.	4/28/2023 12:58 PM
7	Price Chopper/CVS	4/28/2023 12:56 PM
8	Price Chopper	4/28/2023 12:55 PM
9	Everywhere in Spencer need more lights on the streets	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
10	The rain trail at night 49 when driving	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
11	Price chopper plaza at night, bottom of mechanic street area	4/28/2023 12:52 PM
12	school	4/28/2023 12:51 PM
13	No	4/28/2023 12:50 PM
14	none	4/28/2023 12:49 PM
15	For the most part no. But there are some creepy/scary alleys between buildings at night.	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
16	No i am beast	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
17	None	4/28/2023 12:45 PM
18	Price Chopper Parking Lot	4/28/2023 12:44 PM
19	None	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
20	no	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
21	David Prouty	4/28/2023 12:07 PM
22	idk	4/28/2023 12:04 PM
23	Pulling out of the David Prouty high school	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
24	Pulling out of the david prouty high school	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
25	Near bayberry bowling center	4/28/2023 9:49 AM
26	I never go anywhere except stores, restaurants, and other places outside of spencer so I cannot answer this question for you.	4/27/2023 7:12 PM
27	None.	4/27/2023 10:59 AM
28	Mechanic street because lots of people do drugs there	4/27/2023 10:58 AM
29	The back roads	4/27/2023 10:54 AM
30	Mechanic st that’s the hood	4/27/2023 10:52 AM
31	The hill that is near lake street and David prouty high	4/27/2023 10:52 AM

32	like around mechanic street, or any park	4/27/2023 10:50 AM
33	South side of main street, no sidewalks or crosswalks	4/27/2023 10:48 AM
34	main street from dpi to the big y	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
35	School	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
36	School	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
37	There is no where that I can think of	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
38	South Spencer	4/27/2023 10:45 AM
39	Mills	4/27/2023 10:44 AM
40	No not really.	4/27/2023 10:07 AM
41	the middle of spencer	4/27/2023 10:04 AM
42	I don’t know	4/27/2023 9:55 AM
43	In the streets where there’s barley lights	4/27/2023 9:54 AM
44	I mean I’m scared of the dark so when it’s dark out it scares me anyways so other then that not really	4/27/2023 9:53 AM
45	Around most of the buildings in town, some streets dont have sidewalks.	4/27/2023 9:52 AM
46	Hood of Spencer	4/27/2023 9:50 AM
47	Church basketball court	4/27/2023 9:49 AM
48	mechanic street	4/27/2023 8:40 AM
49	No not at all really	4/27/2023 8:31 AM
50	The rail trail, but I have flash light	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
51	Nah	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
52	I do not leave my house, so I wouldn’t know	4/27/2023 8:29 AM
53	I don’t know.	4/27/2023 8:28 AM
54	Not sure	4/27/2023 8:27 AM
55	None	4/27/2023 8:26 AM
56	No.	4/27/2023 8:26 AM
57	Middle of Spencer	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
58	around price chopper mechanic street	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
59	A place near Knox trial where all the buildings are destroyed	4/27/2023 8:25 AM
60	I don’t know	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
61	I don’t know	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
62	Not really	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
63	price chopper and cvs	4/27/2023 8:23 AM
64	None	4/27/2023 8:22 AM
65	before old persons home on route 31 doesn’t have side walks on right side	4/27/2023 8:21 AM
66	There are a few places like around Knox Trail and near mechanic street. The majority of people who live in this area are typically on the poorer side (this isn’t a bad thing whatsoever but it sets a certain feel) or I hear a lot of involvement with smoking or other things. I know most people don’t but I feel although that is a common stigma with that area of Spencer.	4/26/2023 10:28 PM
67	No	4/26/2023 8:06 PM
68	High school other side	4/26/2023 7:24 PM
69	no	4/4/2023 7:21 PM
70	No	4/4/2023 7:18 PM
71	After the old person home and after the fishing game there isn’t a side walk and on the left side of route nine if your leaving DPHS ther isn’t a side walk	3/22/2023 6:56 AM

Q8 Where do you do most of your shopping?

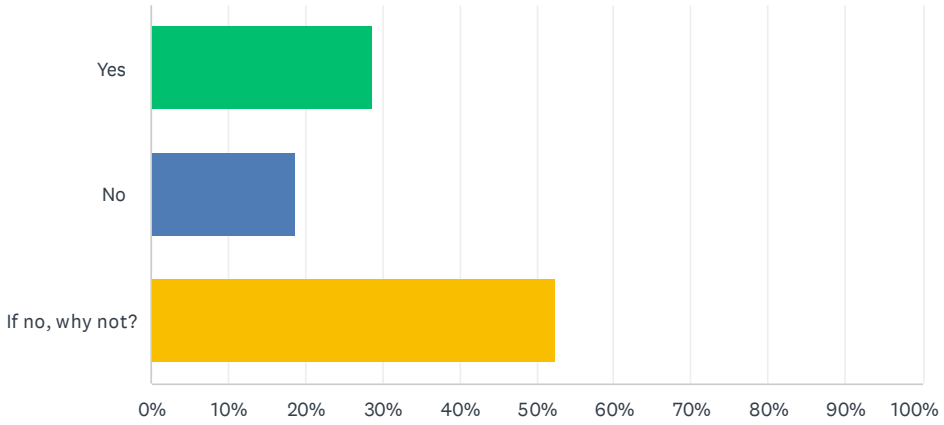
Answered: 80 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Online	23.75%	19
In Spencer	23.75%	19
Within 30 minutes	35.00%	28
Within an hour	17.50%	14
TOTAL		80

Q9 Do you plan to stay in Spencer as you get older?

Answered: 80 Skipped: 0



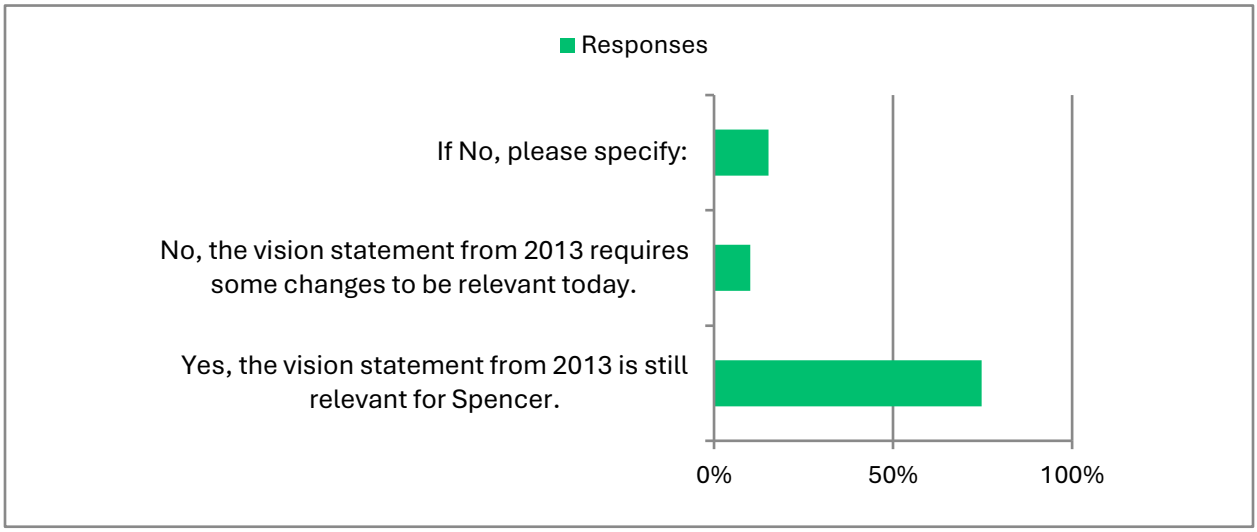
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	28.75%	23
No	18.75%	15
If no, why not?	52.50%	42
TOTAL		80

#	IF NO, WHY NOT?	DATE
1	My dream is to go back to PR	9/24/2023 8:59 PM
2	Place is turning into a ghetto. Less white people	7/18/2023 7:25 PM
3	We have a property outside that is cheaper and less vulnerable to power outages.	4/28/2023 1:56 PM
4	It doesn’t seem like a place I would raise my kids.	4/28/2023 12:56 PM
5	I want to move somewhere warm	4/28/2023 12:55 PM
6	Have better work opportunities out of spencer	4/28/2023 12:53 PM
7	I would like to experience more of America	4/28/2023 12:52 PM
8	Theres nothing here	4/28/2023 12:50 PM
9	Need new scenery once you grow up	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
10	Becasue i wanna	4/28/2023 12:46 PM
11	i want to move out of spencer	4/28/2023 12:44 PM
12	I want to go to other towns in mass	4/28/2023 12:14 PM
13	😱	4/28/2023 12:07 PM
14	It’s to small	4/28/2023 12:02 PM
15	Nothing is close by	4/28/2023 9:49 AM
16	I have had many bad memories involving spencer so I would prefer to leave as soon as possible to try and forget these memories	4/27/2023 7:12 PM
17	I plan to travel when I am financially independent.	4/27/2023 10:59 AM
18	i wanna be in a new scenery	4/27/2023 10:54 AM
19	There’s not a lot to do here and I want to see different places	4/27/2023 10:52 AM

20	Everything that the majority of people need requires me to travel atleast 30 minutes - 1 hour, moving would be more beneficial.	4/27/2023 10:51 AM
21	i'm moving	4/27/2023 10:50 AM
22	Know Trail has drug problems along with other things so i dont want my kids going there	4/27/2023 10:48 AM
23	weather	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
24	It's so dry	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
25	Its bad	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
26	I live in East Brookfield	4/27/2023 10:47 AM
27	Too small	4/27/2023 10:44 AM
28	I'm planning to move to cali with a couple of my friends in a couple of years.	4/27/2023 10:07 AM
29	I want to explore the world	4/27/2023 9:55 AM
30	There's barley anything here just hours and trees	4/27/2023 9:54 AM
31	I hate the community.	4/27/2023 9:52 AM
32	I'd rather be near the ocean	4/27/2023 9:49 AM
33	better places to live	4/27/2023 8:40 AM
34	I don't feel like this place is for me	4/27/2023 8:31 AM
35	I wanna move to a different state	4/27/2023 8:30 AM
36	Small town	4/27/2023 8:24 AM
37	This place is lame and boring	4/27/2023 8:21 AM
38	I don't have a particular reason, I just want to explore a life outside of what I have always known and I can picture myself starting a family somewhere else, I didn't have a problem growing up in Spencer but I feel like it also could have been better.	4/26/2023 10:28 PM
39	Because it lame	4/26/2023 8:06 PM
40	Hockey	4/26/2023 7:24 PM
41	I want to move an grow up on my own	4/4/2023 7:18 PM
42	I don't like Spencer because I live way up on charlton road and everything is far from my house	3/22/2023 6:56 AM

Q1: Spencer Master Plan - Vision Statement: We envision Spencer to be a cohesive and vibrant community in which people can enjoy living and working together throughout all the stages of their lives. Spencer will achieve this vision by providing quality educational and municipal services, and by creating an environment that encourages participation in community life, while maintaining its rural character. Is the 2013 vision statement relevant and consistent with your vision for Spencer?

Answered 356, Skipped 7



IF NO, PLEASE SPECIFY:

The statement should be updated
The town doesn't encourage engagement in community life of your viewpoint is different.
I think the only piece that may not be super relevant is the last bit about "maintaining its rural character"
The statement is good in theory, and with the school plans underway, the educational part is more relevant, but municipal services are severely lacking. There is not much encouragement for participation in community life. The downtown does not represent a thriving town with rural character.
The definition of rural character is not agreed upon by residents. Let's see if we can be more specific in this vision.
The Main Street area does not need to maintain its rural character in order for the town to do so. Please look at towns like Holden for inspiration. The Main Street area boast various shops and restaurants while maintaining rural areas in residential areas.
The 2013 vision did not happen. spencer does not stick together or work together, The "townies" insult people who move into town and disagree with their views. the educational system is terrible and a disgrace.
The only thing that is relevant to spencer today is the rural part. Spencer is not a welcoming town to people that did not grow up here. the education needs a lot of updates. and municipal services are not very readily available. participation in community life is hard, mostly because if you didn't grow up here, you are ignored.
Spencer does not welcome people with liberal views and only recently started accommodating people with working hours at the library. But there are still not programs that are available for working parents. And the schools do not understand a working parent's life.
The Spencer groups fail to act in a cohesive collegial manner even after a decade of people urging each to do so. There is little sharing of data between departments which results in fiefdoms rather than

partnerships. Help is sought as long as no one pushes change. For instance, if we plan to have all a community that welsome people in all stages of life, than why can't we offer a few benches to sit on along Depot Trail, Muzzy Meadow or Main Street to rest and relax a moment? Why are there no recreational activities developed for winter for all ages. The Parks Department is supposed to have year round events. While we do have the Massasoit Art Show we still have months without any events.

Spencer needs major changes, there is nothing to go downtown for, promote business.

We have 3 state officials, 2 reps, and 1 senator. They do little as possible for the town of Spencer. Especially the 2 reps.

High school renovation out of relative budget.

As much as I care about green space, I also think this should be a town for all classes and colors, not just the white middle class.

No more solar farms!

Look at what is allowed to flourish downtown. Pass some signage bylaws that get enforced. We can’t plant trees on main st…but grills are ok? There are a few merchants that take pride in ownership. To the rest….it’s blightsville!

Preserving its natural beauty...

Also looking to beautify the crumbling center.

Should include safety and environmental protection

It's a good vision, but not followed by the town

The vision statement from 2013 says nothing about how the town should grow. Does Spencer want to be an open, welcoming town in which businesses and families can thrive? Or, does it want to be a closed-off, self-serving community without any aspirations for growth?

Some sort of growth statement is needed. The idea of maintaining without an eye on change and growth seems to miss the mark.

We need to cut our budget in half and get rid of our affordable housing. We are losing our character!

I believe it was massive corruption that bankrupted the school system thus we are no longer doing anything towards better education and have don't nothing to fix this

It would be great to update this to include language around supporting and fostering diversity in our community.

Meaningless fluffy words

There is no affordable housing / rent in this town for a single working man or woman . You need at least 2 incomes just to survive

Wasn’t a resident in 2013

it would be a good idea for Spencer to figure how to serve the residents while attracting new ones, preferably young people with children to secure a tax base for the future. We have to observe how the smaller picture, meaning our own lives interacts with the bigger picture. For instance it is not good to have widening potholes for the purpose of maintaining our vehicles - and in the bigger picture we risk the safety of our police/fire/ambulance services (and the people in them). So taking inventory on a regular basis and doing maintenance (securing grands) are important first steps in moving forward to a better future.

It should intentionally be developed into destination for those who live outside of Spencer as well. It can still be rural and community oriented while also developing a downtown that brings in others- which in turn would stimulate the economy of the town and hopefully reduce the tax burden.

I’m uncertain that the Spencer community is cohesive. It requires more diversity and openness to differences.

Since agriculture is one of the main reasons that Spencer can have a “rural character”, it would seem worth a mention. It’s certainly as significant as educational services.

Everything is relevant but it should also include the idea of promoting industrial and commercial development in a responsible manner.

Too many low income people in the downtown area

The statement is very vague and comes across as PC and not very inspiring. "quality educational and municipal services" how about attracting more private and charter schools to Spencer, that is what parents want - that would be great - more focus on protecting our kids at school would be nice and protecting parent's rights. Municipal services seem to be working fine, we don't need more government. The town should be focused on protecting its infra-structure (electric, water ect) - Spencer should also be focused on bring solid business growth and solicit solid business to build and create jobs right here in Spencer.

To vague

I think that the vision statement should be refreshed. The idea can remain similar but I think we need to send the message that we have looked at and reflected on it, not just rolled it over.

The quality education had kids in college prep classes with faded, photocopied pages of books to be read. A new school is coming. Roads are rough, downtown buildings are worn, Price Chopper plaza is a dump.

it should include encouraging business growth

N/A

Our local government needs to be held accountable for their lack of follow thru and lack of transparency with residents.

I don't trust the board of selectmen to manage funds correctly

The phrase “quality education and municipal services” is too subjective to interpretation. Unless the term “quality” is further characterized somewhere else, this phrase should be reconsidered. For instance, I do not find extensive wait times for permits and access to public records to be reflective of quality service.

Add

....social and economical development that promotes fiscally responsible services that maintain an active vibrant community.

...promotes businesses and economical growth for long term sustainability.

I believe this is outdated. Please consider adding a commitment to keeping the town clean, and encompassing more outdoor activities / improving what is in place.

Promising to "maintain rural character" should be eliminated

unrealistic goal

I don’t think “rural character” is necessary

Please add "recreational" to educational and municipal.

Economic changes need to be adjusted to reflect todays current market/climate.

Spencer volunteer boards are full of people who don't know enough to have a seat on it. Builders no longer want to build here. Buildings on Main street need renovation.

vibrant?

quality education?

What is a cohesive and vibrant community and how do quality educational and municipal services make that happen?

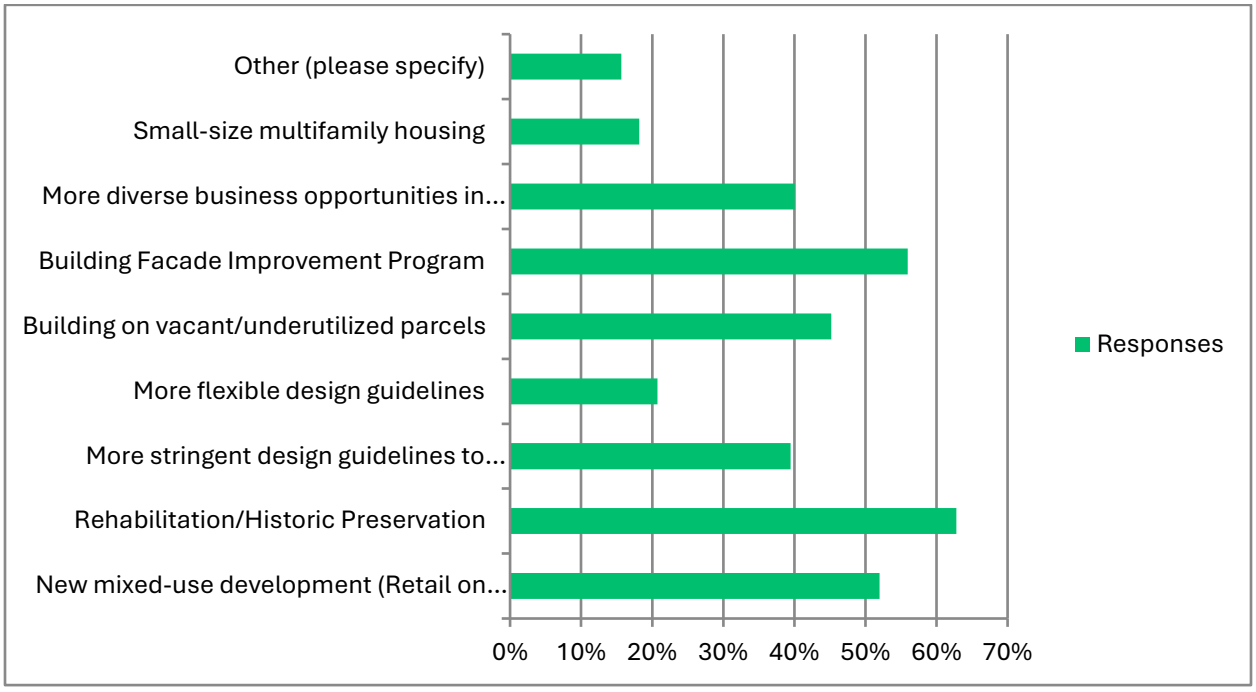
Makes me say - what?

I don't feel the vision has been met the last 10 yrs. School enrollment way down because quality of education is poor, the downtown area in uninviting with the crime and no one in town participates because there is no communication with residents. Not everyone has facebook. Its a wonderful vision but dont see it happening in the next 10 yrs.

Needs to include infrastructure updating and maitenance

It's a goal, I'm not sure it's going in the right direction to make sure we're doing enough to make sure those in all phases of their life will be able to enjoy it, the young, and the elderly are being financially pinched from all directions, it's not a Spencer problem, it's everywhere, but we have to keep out young and elderly in mind when we raise taxes, or cut/change services, how does it impact those on fixed incomes.

Q2: Which of the following options for future development would you support in the Town Center/commercial areas? (Select all that apply) Answered 352, Skipped 11

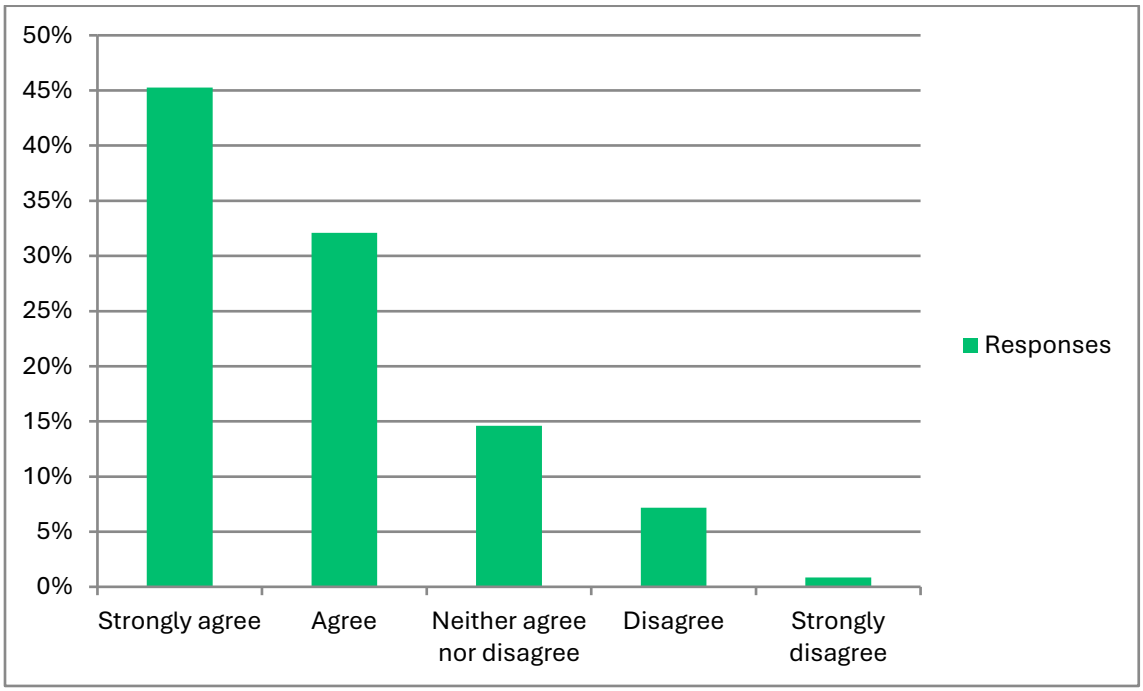


OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
Community space- pickle ball, tennis courts, basketball courts
smaller scale mixed use and a landscape improvement plan with open space parks and walkways
Building Facade Improvement Programs are not solving the root of the problem-they just disguise run down buildings. The town needs to create (if nothing is in place) and enforce what businesses can look like downtown. It can't be left open to interpretation or varying discretion.
Most of the buildings on the south side of the street should be demolished From Whitco on down thru the Dr. Maklins bldg. Macklkin bldg. These are a
What about the fact that the Eckleberry family owns the worse properties in Spencer. They need to be held accountable and Whitco with their army of lawyers. Townspeople know the deal
Upkeep on the current store fronts on Main Street which are falling down
Spencer needs to get light commercial/industry and various assembly/service segments established to counter inevitable cyclical retail slumps and offer economic stability and jobs to retain our population.
less apartment housing downtown
More stringent facade on buildings i.e. Whitco facade is unacceptable.
Demolish condemned buildings to make public parks
Promote the right type of business. Spencer's existing properties have businesses occupying space that can be used for businesses that Spencer actually needs and wants.
Remove all buildings that are empty.
Attempt to keep low-income housing in town center in effort to demolish or refurbish abandoned properties and help neglected areas.
Qualified new businesses
Spencer needs more green downtown
Removal of empty buildings in disrepair. Refacing properties in the center of town. Some of the building fronts are eye sores and don't help with improving the look of Spencer center.

Spencer NEEDS to mandate that anyone living on Main Street to cut their lawns,
The town must take control of look and feel on main street. Standards need to be raised.
Public gathering space/park with picnic tables, landscaping, etc.
Schools, youth programs, something not geared toward businesses and instead the actual future of this town
Tear down the old yellow factory, that was home to Dr Mac. The old abandon Flexcon brick factory behind it, and at the Same time tear down the old Buildning that was a jewelry store and put in a town common there. I voted for Vin. Because that what he was running on Spencer needs a town common and removing those old abandon (safe Hazards) buildings I'm sure there could be money available for that project before there is a major fire and some one getting hurt.
Clean up Whtco signage and no appliance on the street
It depends on each case. Generalizations mean nothing
Updating of center of town
Less solar fields
Keep the small Rural and lessen the growth.
curtail solar panel farms
Do not support large businesses to inhabit town center land parcels.
Diversity? America is the melting-pot -- How about using common sense solutions and fiscal responsibility to drive growth in Spencer. Bring in strong businesses to drive growth, opportunity and prosperity
More industry for better tax base
Some of the buildings on main st between mechanic and mill Street are a major eye sores and something needs to be done about them
Senior housing
I believe there is a need to bring in manufacturing or business that will provide a tax base and jobs for spencer residents
Fix the dam roads
The center is a dump
Offer flexibility to developers to maintain a downtown feel. (That Cvs complex should have been built close to main st and the parking in back. Housing above the store)
Fix and update our schools sports fields
A Place for kids to have a fun safe place liek for pool and etc cant think or correct name
Support for the current small business and agricultural community.
i hust want these empty buildings to be used, whats gonna happen to the current and future old cvs, what about the old cumbies building?
limit development to "clusters"
Enhance outdoor community spaces
Tear down or improve the abandoned buildings just wasting away hi
Replace the condemned buildings and help owners downtown update their exterior
More recreational opportunites, specifically a dog park and pickleball courts.
The buildings downtown are falling apart and make the town look awful. The downtown area should be kept up nicely and those landlords should have to maintain them so they look nice. Windows are missing, smashed etc, business windows don't look inviting, we need downtown to be cleaned up a lot.
I do think downtown buildings should maintain some charm, but not at the expense of limiting how to best serve the community. Also, I would love to see a coffee shop (locally owned, not a big chain), and flexible, community gathering space. I would also love for the buildings downtown to maintain their charm while welcoming new businesses
Start with the downtown area it truly looks like a dump !
leave untouched rural areas alone

Main Street is an embarrassment
Need to clean up and restore any building not in use. Also do not need more SMOC
Hold current building owners accountable for building conditions. Some buildings downtown are not safe
Recreational facilities. All great towns have them.
Updating eyesore properties-mandating they be torn down or updated
Making buildings eco-conscious, i.e. renewable energy, bird strikes solutions, etc.

Q3: Indicate whether you agree with the following statement: The Town of Spencer should maintain its existing small-town character. Answered 349, Skipped 14



(PLEASE SHARE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS BELOW)

small town character and management of such is important to me. Keeping within the budget for a small town.
Small town character is fine, but the downtown is a mess.
We can’t agree on what small town character means. It seems to mean doing nothing to progress.
It is apparent that some Main Street landlords don't maintain their buildings as evidenced by the number of broken windows on the most visible parcels with crumpled cardboard and falling building vinyl siding making negative impressions upon anyone stopping along our RT 31 / Main Street intersections. We needn't look far to see wehat would be turn-offs for stopping on Main Street. That needs a frank conversation and remediation since I believe it is also a building code violation when rain can easily build up inside such facilities causing health issues.
the small town character leads to small mindedness
While allowing for creative growth opportunities.
More down town new structures would generate more tax revenue
Spencer lost that with SMOC housing. What once had charm now has poverty, drugs, homelessness, run down and unsafe buildings
The small minded mentality of a good percentage of the people living here who usually don’t want to spend any money to improve downtown is why we remain stuck in the 50’s.
Spencer has proven itself as a desirable place to live. Now the question is whether or not folks know it. Why do other towns (Rutland/Hardwick) have ball fields with sponsors from Spencer, yet we don't have local sponsors on any of our ballfields? Where is the town pride on display? Where is the invitation offered to businesses to show it? How do we have an attractive town for families to move into and enjoy when our town park's disc golf course looks like a briar-patch? And, our beach isn't inviting? We do have the assets. The question is are they being properly championed and managed?
it doesn't have much existing small town character with a few exceptions

It's small-town character has been compromised by the new CVS and Cornerstone Bank's purchase of adjacent property on Main Street.

Keep a historical look!

Too vague. Some small town characteristics are good some are not good.

'Small-town' character not defined. Yes to easily walkable areas and community gathering opportunities, nature preserves.

Buildings are in poor shape and insufficient parking for existing buildings.

Not to the extent of leaving small town ugly things and not moving into the future.

it's preventing growth for the town

Spencer is a small town, but it needs to invite growth and economic development as well as invest in education.

Growth and change will happen regardless. Encouraging smart growth is important vs keep small town feel.

Preserve the rural residential zoning spirit. No solar! Maintain lot standards that ensure rural character, not just cleared lots back to back

We need to stop new development and investment.

Spencer needs to cleanup the down town area we have a new CVS now tear down that old yellow factory across from it a put in a town common.

The "existing" character can be improved by restoring/replacing the abandoned and underutilized properties on/around main street

While I do love Spencer’s small-town feel, I don’t think that adhering to this vision should restrict necessary development that may be seen as antithetical to this

Spencer needs modernization with the small town feel. I’m excited for the new cvs, I wish recreational and medical marijuana was a source of tax income for the town.

Would be nice to have a decent town common

It can grow & modernize but still maintain “small town character”.

We need to do what we need to do to thrive and attract residents

Medium town character

We need more businesses downtown but with that it can still maintain a small town feel. As an example shelburne falls, ma

Spencer needs to evolve into a mini city in order to thrive.

The word ‘cohesive’ was used earlier. In many ways that goes along with “small-town character. I have been in Spencer a long time. But I haven’t felt a true sense of community for well over a decade. The downtown area has made strides, but has far to go. In talking with business people it seems that the Town is far more focused on telling businesses what they can not do, rather than guiding them towards what they can.

So not support large businesses to inhabit large town center land parcels.

I agree Spencer should maintain its small town character. The town center is looking better than it has in the past but some buildings on main st and some in the mechanic/chestnut st area could use a facelift or be repurposed. This town doesn’t need more low income housing projects.

Unfortunately, when driving into Spencer, the initial impression is not great, town looks run down, junky. Compare the initial impression of, say, West Brookfield. A beautiful common, the houses/buildings facing the common look great. Spencer - especially the heart of downtown - looks bad, not welcoming, and nothing to make Spencer appear attractive.

Small town character can be good as long as its not dumpy such as the Whitco buildings not to mention inside them is a major fire hazard you can barely walk around in there!

Small town is nice but ut had to stay modern and relevant as well

Do not turn this town into another strip mall!

I think Spencer should look to always improve the town and grow.

CVS? Really..

Look across from town hall at the broken/missing windows and ugly cardboard in the windows. Start with fixing that to develop "town character"!

as rural as possible

Preserve existing historical sites. Allow and encourage new growth / development to community

I think we should preserve the existing historical buildings and sites, but allow and encourage development of residential and commercial areas outside of historic area

with a population of over 11,000 it is not considered a "small town"

That’s already been stopped with the new cvs being built.

Small down character l, in many cases, means economically depressed

Is there any way to get the vacant buildings downtown either demolished or repaired?

Supporting local businesses and restaurants should be a priority over chain stores

Love the small town character, but need businesses to keep people from going outside of town for everything.

I do think downtown businesses should be locally owned, and not big chains and corporations. And I think the architecture should maintain some charm. The trend of new buildings being square, flat, Andy boxy is not it. What small towns sometimes lack, however, is diversity of residents. We might consider how we're welcoming a more diverse population of people, including the types of businesses and events we have and who they welcome and serve best.

The blogs downtown are run down and it looks horrible .

Too many eyesore buildings that are beyond rehabilitation, unfortunately... if they could be restored I’d agree Spencer should keep its character. But I don’t think that’s possible, and something needs to be done...

It is a small town; don’t try to make it something that it isn’t and won’t be. Build on what it is.

What exactly do you mean by small town character? Please be more specific!

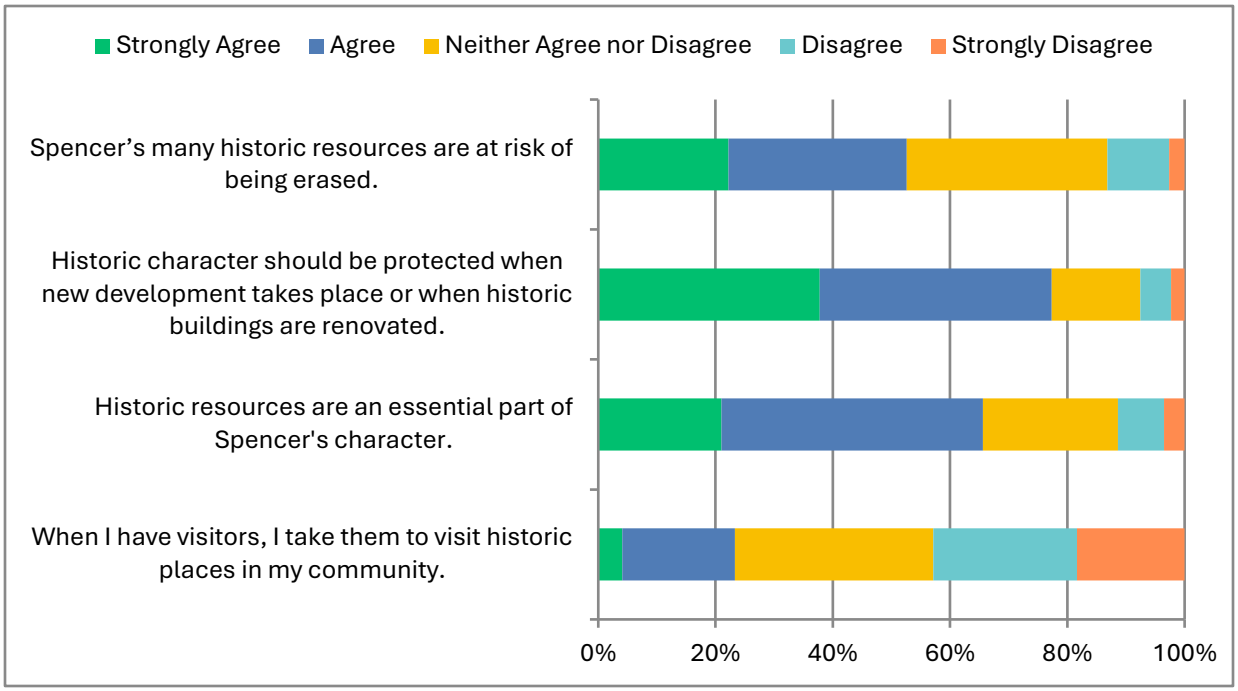
To have a truly first class town with limited Market requires high tax rates

If “small town” results in few businesses (having to go to other towns for goods and services), that is a big negative.

We need to open it up for additional businesses and revenues

The buildings on Main Street from Mechanic Street up to the Citgo station are Disgusting. This is the image of Spencer. Until these can be Demolished or facade facelifted, it will be our beautiful town "Center".

Q4: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
Answered 346, Skipped 17



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
When I have visitors, I take them to visit historic places in my community.	4%	19%	34%	24%	18%
Historic resources are an essential part of Spencer's character.	21%	45%	23%	8%	4%
Historic character should be protected when new development takes place or when historic buildings are renovated.	38%	40%	15%	5%	2%
Spencer's many historic resources are at risk of being erased.	22%	30%	34%	11%	3%

WHAT ARE SOME HISTORIC RESOURCES IN SPENCER THAT NEED TO BE PROTECTED?

All. They are literally falling apart.
The mile markers , our part in the wars from before we incorporated to the present
There is never any mention of the many ways Depot Trail played a part in regional educators development of people that made international impacts. There isn't any history shown of the many firsts found in Spencer nor how these play a part in our everyday life. Why not? Seems folks don't ever hear about it in the schools out of ignorance from those tasked with teaching it.
Sugden block
where is there historical value? spencer is crumbling
Older buildings, Howe Park, cemeteries

Richard Sugden Library + Block

Do not know and could care less not important. Where is the George Washington sign where did it go? In the back of CVS

restore building facades of historical dwellings

which historic resources? the church burned down, what is left?

Howe Park and all the beautiful country which is slowly being sold to Solar fields

Few people know our historic locations or the extensive contributions Spencerites have made in arts, engineering, natural sciences and commercial leather and woodworking. We have nothing on display Even less is known about how these folks were self-educated scientists, educators and entrepreneurs. Now as the new downtown site is being developed instead of looking like a historical structure like Sturbridge has, Spencer's CVS is looking more like the ugly Charlton and Webster Square store that is an eyesore rather than fitting in within the historic district. It was to be akin to Sturbridge's design as built

Library, town hall, farm land

library...Crowley building.. site of the old Massasoit... now about to be a gigantic CVS, buildings on Main- across the street are shabby.

Farmland is being destroyed by solar farms, with no discernable benefit. Old mill sites should have signage to describe their past function.

Mainly the look and feel of the center. There is absolutely no historical charm to the town.

George Washington Memorial Highway Marker needs sidewalk for viewing.

First National Bank, Lamoureux Building, all of Main St, Old Fire Station, Broom Factory.

There are older building in town and NOTHING is being done to rehab them.

Library and Pine Grove Cemetery

Land lords that strip all historic character from their buildings

Library

Pine Grove Cemetery - the bridges on Wire Village Rd & Gold Nugget Rd

The building on the corner of Main St. and Maple St.

Pine Grove Cemetary

Downtown, parks

Town Hall, Library, Abbey, parks, cemeteries

Mary Baker-Wood does a great job of preserving Spencer's history. I am not sure how all of her work is being preserved, but she is a walking encyclopedia of this town. I think history is important, but let's not let nostalgia get in the way of progress.

Active farming, historic buildings

The old buildings. Things need to stay the way they are.

There really isn't. There may be historic sites but historic sites are not historic resources

How village, library, sugden block, town hall, please have Whitco cleanup there front stores and remove all signage it such an eye sore I have lived in Spencer all my life, raised my family here went off to college served in the Navy and love this town, the down town area is a mess.

The library , the town hall . They should behave never taken down Elias Howe house

downtown, cemeteries, historic buildings

Would love to see something done to save the old fire stations. What a sham me how they are

Old firehouses, Luther hill park. Most other historic places are gone or complete disrepair.

While I agree with protecting historic resources, like the cherry street fire station or the main street buildings, it has to be economically viable. It's disheartening to see so many abandoned buildings. I'm open to comprimise on preservation if it means buildings will be used.

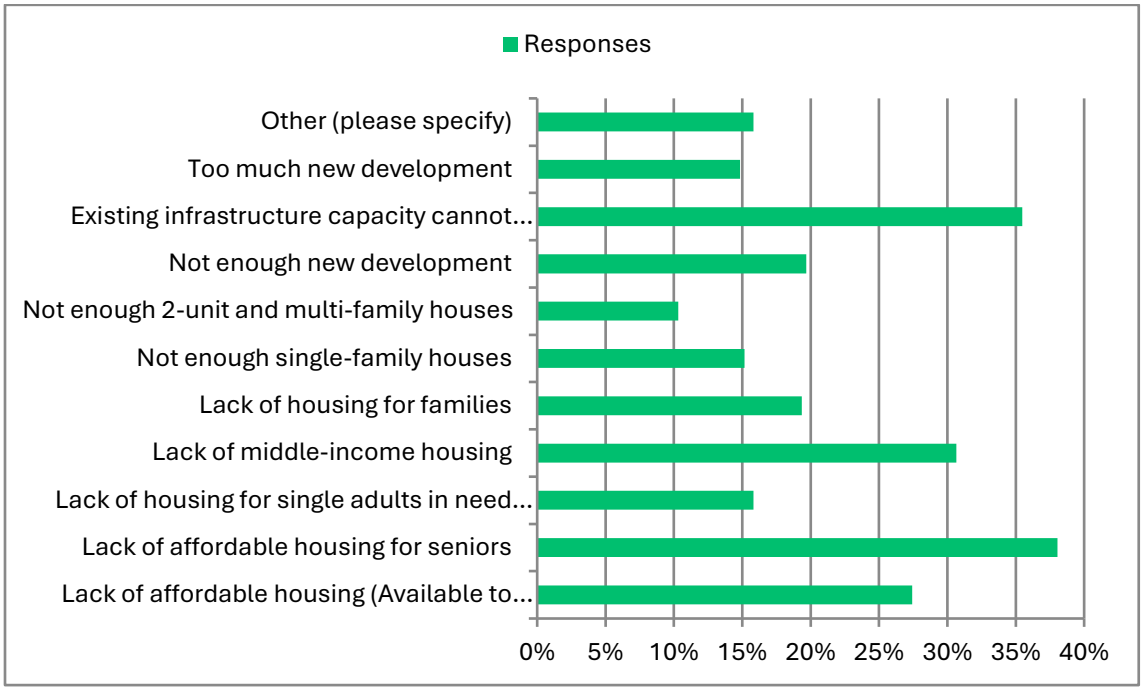
I don’t know - but I would like to! I think that celebrating and revitalizing the current historic places in Spencer would be a great way to preserve heritage while also making them useful and engaging. For instance, tours of historic cemetery sites or open houses/events at historic buildings.

the library, the parks and ponds, siblies farm
Library
“MEXICALI” is doing a good job with his bhilding. Other similar buildings could be saved as well.
The natural country side, open space free of solar fields
Unsure of the historic resources in town
Howe Park, O’Gara Park
N/A
History is just that, history. And it is incredibly important! But physical history that is standing in the way of progressive development, should always take a back seat. The people who created Spencer's history, my family being among them, wanted the town to succeed and flourish. For example, a very long time ago Richard Sugden foresaw a need for library funding. He did what was appropriate at that time, and gifted the town an income producing asset. He was a very bright man, and I strongly suspect if he came back to visit today, and knew of the decades the town spent trying to make the Sugden block useful, he would likely say “Dear God man! Hath you got manure for brains? This foolishness is exactly what I was trying to prevent. This isn’t the 1890s anymore, get with the program!”
Howe State Park, Elias Howe property, Sibley land.
The Town Hall? The library?
Historical homes should not be torn down
Some of the beautiful but vacant buildings on main st. Some really need to be renovated and restored to their former glory.
There is very little signage or anything indicating what is historical or why. Any structures built before 1900 or so. Especially downtown, but only if extensive facelifts take place.
Any and all historical landmarks ie plaques, churches, monuments (Washington near new CVS), war memorials, parks and buildings. History should never be erased whether good or bad.
Richard Sugden Library, Saint Joseph's Abbey
Th Richard Sugden Library
Old buildings that can be repurposed should be, but we should not cling to old buildings that are no longer viable either.
Mile markers are all I care about
I don't know much about historic resources in Spencer
library, historic houses, pine grove cemetery, turkey hill brook, sevenmile river, old farms
None
Pine Grove Cemetery, Sugden Library, Old Cemetery, Town Hall,
Parks & green areas
There is never any mention of the many ways Depot Trail played a part in regional educators development of people that ade international impacts. There isn't any history shown of the many firsts found in Spencer nor how these play a part in our everyday life. Why not? Seems folks don't ever hear about it in the schools out of ignorance from those tasked with teaching it.
Town hall, library, churches and Sugden block.
howepark, buildings in the center of the town that have been there before most of our town residents
The Richard Sugden Libray
The Library building, O'Gara Park
The beautiful brick buildings along Main Street. Big trees. Lake resources.
I think the mill buildings contain huge potential to be developed into something that does not make our town look like an abandoned ghost town
The library, churches, historic homes.
Library and Town Hall.
Richard Sugden Library

The buildings, parks, landmarks
Town Hall Rotunda
Old Cemetery, Pine Grove Cemetery
Library budget should be improved
Pine Grove Cemetery
I have lived here for 5 years and couldn’t tell you what they are
Resources?? Luther Hill Park, Farms, Main Street buildings. We’ve already lost Massasoit, churches. Look at any old picture of Main Street at turn of the century and there were trees and beautiful homes. Now we have dirty aluminum siding and rotting down town buildings.
The entire downtown area. Cvs taking away the only property that could have been a town common to generate community participation
Some of the old, historical buildings on main street look like they need lots of work or should be torn down. The unique Victorian house in town should be saved when possible, some of them also look like they're in terrible disrepair.
Already gone
Ogara park
There is nothing of any real significance or architectural beauty. Out with the old and in with the new.
Architectural features of old buildings (residential and commercial)
Agricultural and old mill industries, stone walls, historic homes eg Wilson Farmhouse on Wilson St
Library, Town Hall, all churches.

What is your biggest concern regarding housing in Spencer? (Select all that apply.)

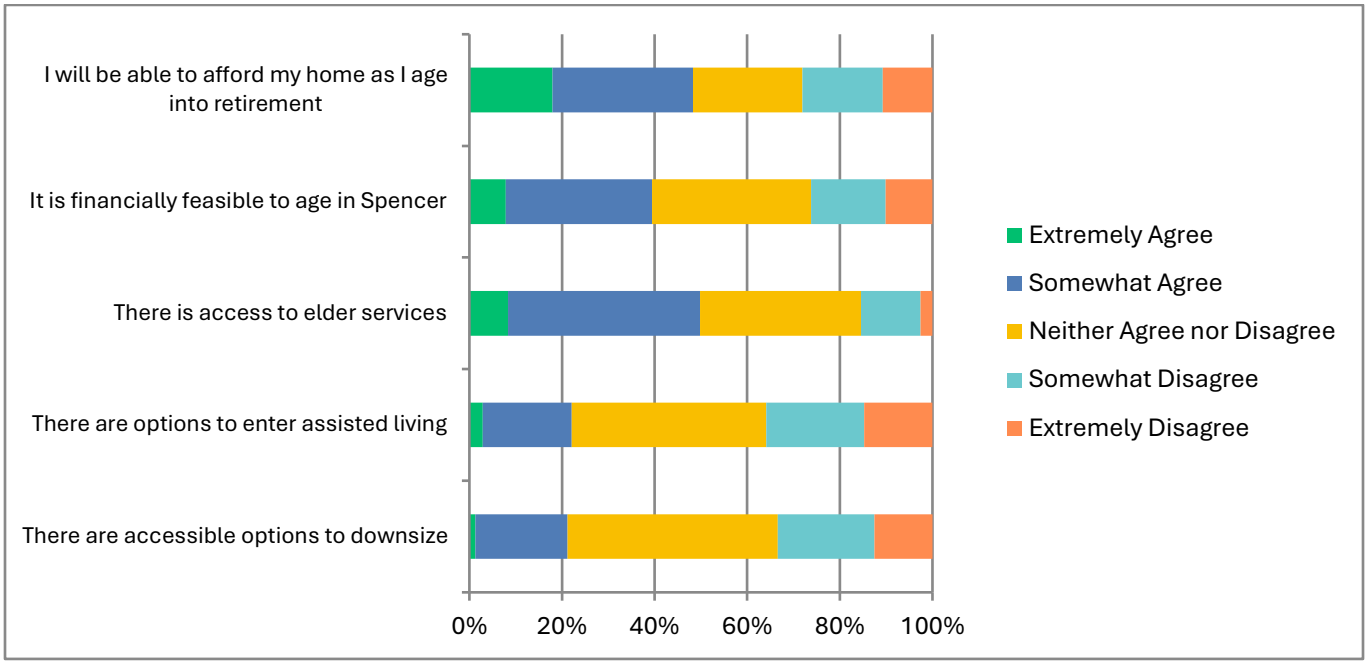
Answered 310, Skipped 53



OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
Too much low income, cheapens the overall town, lack of up keep and pride in property
Lack of town development to increase property values of current residential housing. To build a better town, we need to plan to cater to the "clientele" we want to attract. To make the town nicer, we need more people with more disposable income.
The real estate assessments and taxes in town have risen but the service levels have not. The highway vote hasn't done much for the community to notice, especially when drivers navigate streets and find newly paved roads with eroding edges like GH Wilson, or along RT 31. Add in erosion at intersections that goes unchecked. Adding to that frustration is the manner that UT7F employees will fill some potholes and leave deeper holes untouched that're literally less than a shovel's length away from where they've patched. It gives many a pause to question motivation or the lack of attention to detail
the spencer housing is a disgrace and overrun by people who do not respect it
Alternative development concepts seem hamstrung by local policy - a community of tiny homes, for example.
Too many solar farms , wish there was an over 55 community
prices are high and houses are in areas that do not have town sewer.
Again, Spencer is notorious for its slum lords! Do something about this
Spencer has too many apartments and too much priority on low income housing
That you have to bring in low income housing
No help for the residents offered by the town
The town does not have enough land around downtown
Poorly maintained rental properties
Balance of housing and open space seems about right in Spencer. Use many vacant structures in downtown to help provide more housing.
Many residents are already low-income and not on any lists

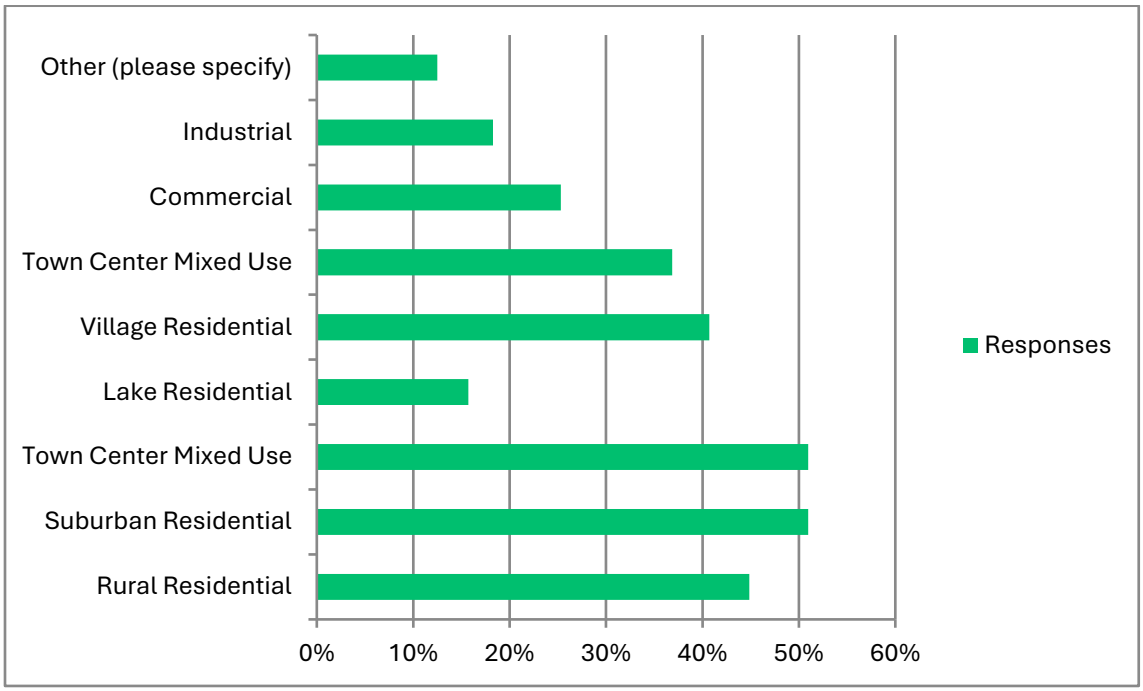
Too much low income housing
To much affordable housing and change. This town is being taken over!
Real estate taxes
I dont know enough to answer most of the housing issues.
Too many solar fields
To much Sec 8 housing
Tax burden for homeowners/potential homeowners
Not informed enough to say for sure
Improvements needed to existing properties
No low income apartments
Housing is limited everywhere and is unaffordable in a lot of cases. This is not unique to Spencer though.
Not enough industrial tax base
houses being built are not affordable, houses being bought, gutted, and flipped, often for rentals.
Too many rundown buildings in the downtown area that could be used for housing.
Not aware of anything lacking
No concerns
Sewer plant
Apartments too expensive
Roads, sewers, wifi, infrastructure all need work first.
Downtown building owners not have any motivation to even fix a broken window at both north and south intersections of Rt 31 shows the ugliness of building meglect. Why isn't that remedied?
No more SMOC
only allow new development in "clusters"
There are too many low income individuals moving from Worcester and degrading the town. We need to REDUCE low income housing and encourage more families to build / buy houses
Too many low income individuals moving to the town and decreasing the value of our town. Encourage more families to build, allowing multi-generational living within our town and supporting elders in in-law, accessory dwelling units.
we need flexible zoning to allow for both attached and detached accessory dwelling units. Refer to the Healy Administration that supports this mission.
Too much slumlord housing
Fix downtown to encourage new businesses
I own my home this is not an issue for me...
I am not familiar enough with available housing. My neighbourhood is a mix of single and multi-family homes with owners, renters, single people, and young families.
Too much low incoming house.
Too much low income housing
Destruction of open space and wild lands. No restrictions or guidelines (that I’m aware of) on what can be built.
Need more housing and less SMOC housing as it hurts town resources.
Debilitated houses across town not being used, taken care of, or being forced to update

Q6: What is your experience and/or other resident's experience aging in Spencer?
Answered 319, Skipped 44



	Extremely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Extremely Disagree
There are accessible options to downsize	1%	20%	45%	21%	13%
There are options to enter assisted living	3%	19%	42%	21%	15%
There is access to elder services	8%	41%	35%	13%	3%
It is financially feasible to age in Spencer	8%	32%	34%	16%	10%
I will be able to afford my home as I age into retirement	18%	30%	24%	17%	11%

Q7: Where should additional housing development happen? Select all Zoning Districts that apply. Answered 312, Skipped 51



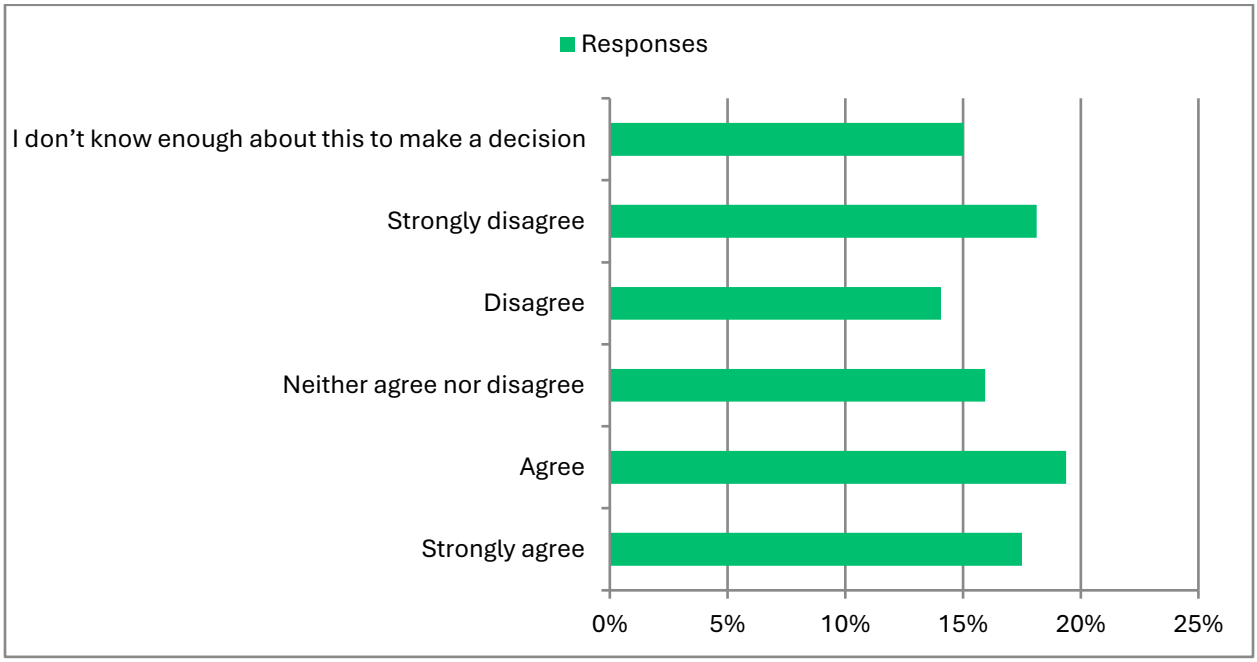
OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
NOT IN RURAL AREAS, not accessible to town w/o a car
There is no single answer because some people prefer clustered living while others see it as hellacious and yearn for a rural setting away from the noisy ruckus of motorcycles or truck jake brakes alongMain Street. We need options for differering perspectives of quality of life.
Rural residential should be limited, ie larger individual lot sizes, or multi units. townhouses etc concentrated in small area of a very large restricted lot maintaining rural surroundings beyond the housing
nothing left on the lakes that the normal person could afford
Maybe the Eckleberry family can help?
Depending on a person's walking/driving ability and preferences for services, Spencer needs to offer options. Some folks like stores nearby with traffic bustling, while others hate the racket and noise of Main Streetand would be miserable living there.
No where.
Downtown too expensive and no businesses for residents. Many do not like the layout of the town.
Good luck downtown, tear half of downtown down and rebuild.
The state is attempting to force population shift to suburbs. Should not let this happen.
none
Instead of new development fix what needs to be fixed. Make the center of Spencer inviting for patrons and other small businesses.
no section 8 in the rural areas
I don't understand this question. How can you put housing in non-housing-zoned areas?
None. This town should stop expanding. The wrong type of people are taking over!
But make the center more adaptable for seniors

None
single family homes in residential areas...multi family not
Very few subdivisions. They increase the number of houses available. Very few apartment complexes.
Building single family homes is key in moving Spencer in positive direction. Do not put multifarious housing the the RR or SR areas.
None its over crowded as it is
Make it easier for people to add accessory apartments at their primary residence.
Leave the housing development as is. Just add senior housing. Too many low income houses downtown.
None
Do we need more people?
it would be nice to have commercial developments converted into modernized condos, to attract young single or newly married population.
None
No more SMOC. Brings criminals into our town. They don’t keep their property looking very good.
Allow more home based businesses
Small business
Allow accessory dwellings to encourage multi-generational living to make housing more affordable for all generations
Allow accessory dwellings to encourage multi generational living
No more low income housing
New to town so unsure
None
Remember you need services
Where people can get to services, and where we aren’t destroying open space. We are already pushing wildlife into peoples property. But honestly do you think the average resident has adequate information to answer this question
Balance. Don't rule out opportunities without presenting for vote
How would the average citizen know?

Q8: Spencer should adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA).(CPA is a state law that enables Massachusetts communities to add a property tax surcharge through a referendum, and access matching funds from the statewide Community Preservation Trust Fund.Local funds are raised through a voter-authorized surcharge on local property tax bills of up to 3%. Municipalities that adopt CPA also benefit from funds from a yearly distribution from the statewide CPA Trust Fund.Towns can use this fund to preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities.)

More information on the CPA can be found here: (https://www.mass.gov/lists/community-preservation-act) and (https://www.communitypreservation.org/).

Answered 320, Skipped 43



(PLEASE SHARE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS BELOW)

I disagree because everytime an override for one thing runs out, they just tack on newer ones, and there is never any relief
Do it without raising property taxes.
I pay almost $8,ooo.00 in taxes now no more I will have to sell no way
Spencer never saw a tax it doesn't want to inflict on residents. The fact is town administrations consistently, solely, look at taxes rather than pursuing a wider tax base with office, light industry, commercial offices and multitudes of available grants. The survy's question of being able to age in our home as we retire is ironic. Especially since most of the town's votes on schools and other administration decisions erode the option to do so. Our future "aging in home" is being foresaken by officials - in exchange for gentrification of the town. Why didn't we look at a regional school approach rather than a self-aggrandizing ediface? Regional youth populations are declining and we ended up sharing a band just to have one musical entity between towns, but egos and idiocy ruled out the option to enter into any discussions that would've saved both Leicester /Spencerites residents thousands on taxes and freed up millions for each town's operations /services.
more taxes bullshit

Leicester's possibly homeless community in once Becker College's frat houses? No thanks.

I would accept a surcharge on homeowners netting over $50,000 a year.

Fixed income taxes constantly being raised

The cities seem to use and receive more funding than struggling blue collar towns.

no our taxes are already going to go up due to new school

can't afford with higher sewer/other bills

I'd want to learn how much money this would mean for the town. I know people in Spencer do not want to spend any money at all, so getting anything like this passed would be challenging.

I am against taxes. This town has a boatload of money, and they don't need more!

Let’s get that town common project promised by the newly elected selectman going.

I am SICK TO DEATH of Spencer homeowners having to foot the bill for everything! Especially that IDIOTICALLY SUPER EXPENSIVE SCHOOL. When are RENTERS going to have to pay for the services they use also??? When are more houses going to be put on the fucking sewer system, so more than the current TINY number of families being FORCED to pay OUTRAGEOUS water bills, can get some FUCKING RELIEF?!

See this as another way to add tax revenue. Water, sewer, new high school and general property taxes have become a burden.

I'm hesitant overall with increasing tax rates with recent cost to improve water treatment plant and school

I would like to understand potential uses in Spencer

& by affordable housing they mean Sec 8 Thank you NO!!

walking/hiking areas

Generally not in favor of tax increases but need more info to weigh the long term risk/benefit

I shudder when I hear ‘surcharge’ used by any government entity. It’s generally simply an end run around something.

Taxes are already to high

I agree with this but only for historical preservation, open space preservation, or for outdoor Rec Facilites.

We’re already paying pretty bight taxes in this town with the new school. We need a break for a while.

I have lived in towns with this. It can get out if control and the money is often used for wasteful things. It would be great if it went towards affordable housing, but it usually isn't

We are being overtaxed already

I would want to see a detailed plan for fund usage

More taxes? This is the towns issue

As a senior, you are already taxing me out of my lifelong home

With the added burden of the SEBRSD school building and new taxes it strains seniors on fixed income to their limit. Even with modest lifestyles Spencer's failing to attract toursism that could leverage or meal tax to the town's benefit instead of just taxing residential property owners.

i would agree if i felt state gov provided funding in an unbiased way

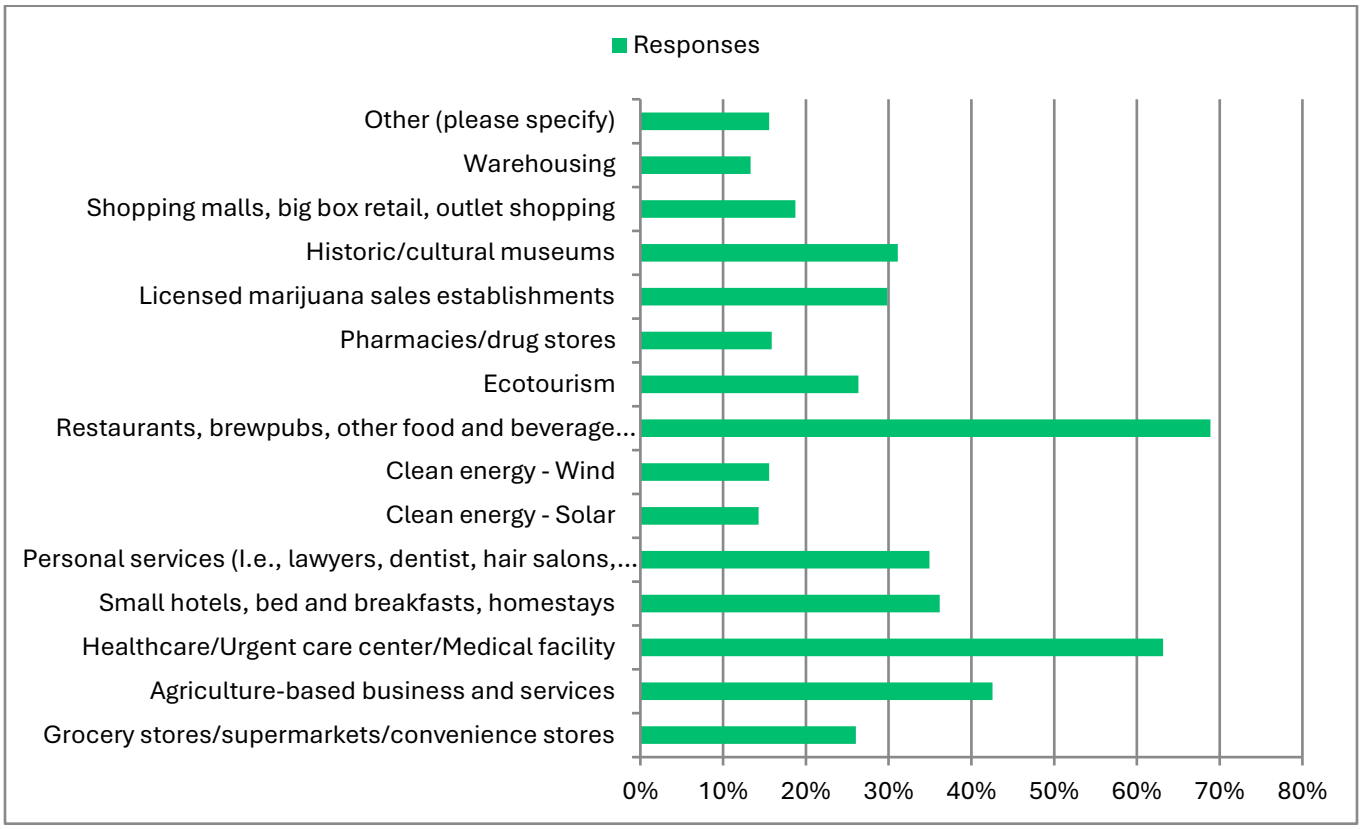
This would seriously increase my chances of staying and purchasing a home in Spencer

Outdoor open space will preserve one of the only free options for community recreation other than the library.

We have enough taxes living in MA dumb question.

While the tax increase would suck, there are a lot of great benefits that will save tax dollars in the long run.

Q10: Which of the following types of businesses do you feel would be beneficial to Spencer? (Select all that apply.) Answered 315, Skipped 48



OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
local transportation services. more elder busses or vans and more bus runs to Worcester and also Sturbridge and Springfield
Retail business is evolving to click and order with brick and mortar. Services require good buildings rather than flawed infrastructure. Our medical facilities have left due to medical industry trends as UMass has dominated regional facilities and shuttered systems. Spencer needs to have a balance of many services as well as light industry to support both quality wages for local workers (i.e. assembly of biomed devices like W.Boylston, Hopedale, Milford and Hopkinton have) as town sustainable business community. Add to that affordable small office space for numerous entrepreneurial service providers and start-ups that'll utilize the close proximity between work space and home. Presently, most surveys indicate office workers are employed in Metrowest as business' moved from downtown Worcester and found free employee parking and Class A offices in Marlborough, Northborough, Westborough. Spencer could use good office space for attacting service vendors /small startups wishing to avoid the troublesome hour-long commute drivers face in daily commutes. (That same commute turns into 3-4 hours in snowy commutes.)
I've noticed properties on airbnb in Spencer that are basically running like minimotels without any type on in-house management/on-site oversight - that don't seem to be permitted or regulated
No more solar we have enough they kill trees, they damage adjacent peoples land destroy water tables and who pays for the clean up in 20 years.
Big Y is way too expensive and Price Chopper is a dump, that whole plaza is. The community is fed up with Pizza Joints, liquor stores and dumpy houses/faceades

West Boylston/ Hopedale do well with light medical components assembly and specialty foods. Spencer has continually refused to reach out and get RFPs on parcels to attract business interests despite repeated requests to do so..

small businesses

Community arts center to exhibit local art and host classes

The town should have put in a town common rather than oversized CVS building.

Fitness Centers

Millbury Blackstone shops with mom and pop shops

Good luck (no more farming)

Employment opportunities, light industry, manufacturing on RT 49 south.

Small industrial and office space.

The local craft stores should toot their horns a little louder.

Market Basket!

no more smoke/marijauana shops, they're everywhere! we need more stuff for our kids, all we have is a bowling alley. drive in even closed

We need more republican men to fight for their rights and to fight for Jesus.

Small business

Amusement or recreational businesses that center around activities or installations residents and visitors could return to, like movie theaters, arcades, or art studios

Activity/cultral based businesses, like theater, hobby store, coffee shop

Some others might be beneficial but I do not know locations.

A cafe

Artisan shops and other small retail businesses

Manufacturing Businesses

Edu extension or trades training for adults

Small retail outlet shopping

Industrial use/manufacturing

The only big stores I wouldn’t be opposed to would be Target or Wegmans. I wouldn’t be opposed to an outlet like Blackstone in Millbury. Indoor shopping malls are dead.

Spencer should find solid technology companies to build roots here in Spencer

would prefer small businesses, not large chain stores, small manufacturing

Entertainment spaces theaters or live event space

Spencer must focus on "light industry" locations and building our small office/commercial base of business that isn't just consumer reatail. Any assemebly firms with agricultural/electronic/medical/software products packaging and testing would help build our economic base without adding burdens on municipal services.

Small industrial

solar on existing structures/brownfields only

WE DO NOT ANY MORE PIZZA SHOPS. Encourage more diverse dining.

Coffee shop!!! Dog park!! Dog daycare. NO MORE PIZZA SHOPS SHOULD OPEN. WE NEED HEALTHY, QUICK, AFFORDABLE FOODS!!!! There should also be special attention paid to the fact

Artist studio space, and contractor storage spaces

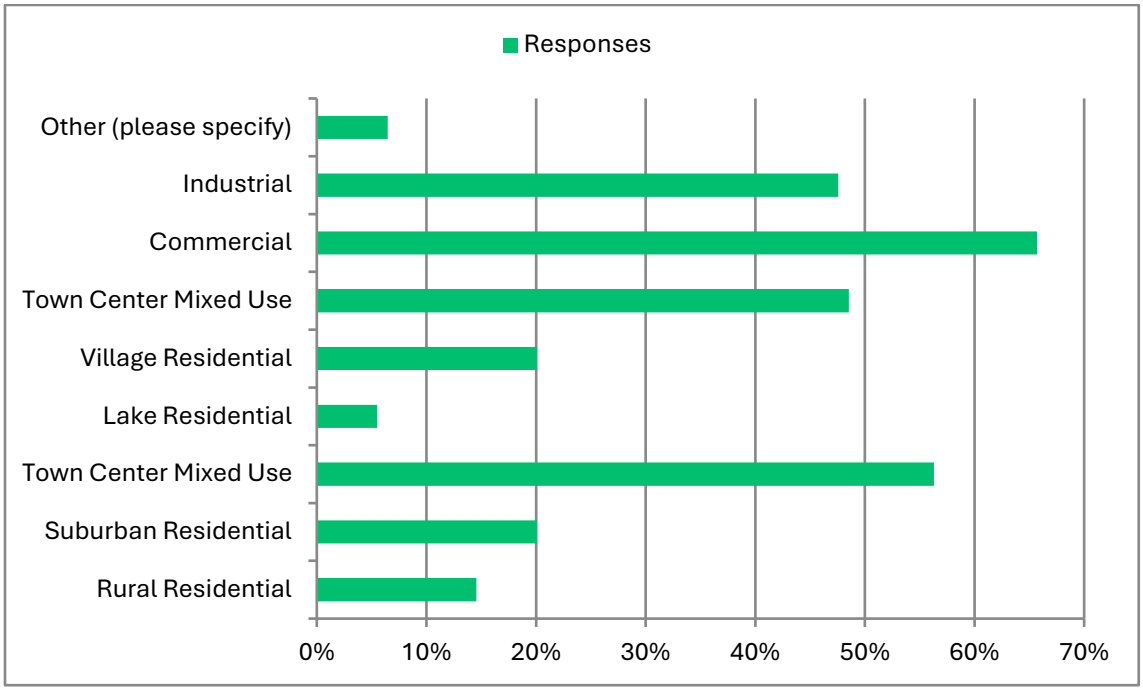
Arts /entertainment, family activities

Small business retail (eg non chain clothing stores, craft supply stores, etc)

community gathering space and community education. A space where groups can gather for events and meetings, and where workshops and classes are offered to the community such as art, cooking, financial literacy, sustainable farming etc.

Home Depot,low’s
Gym/fitness/yoga
Something like Trader Joe’s, Target, clothing stores, shoe stores. TJ Maxx, Marshalls. Things we don’t have.
Aldi or Trader Joe’s for lower priced groceries
Manufacturing, pharmaceutical,
Make use of the amount of horses in the area and possibly look at horse trails and make use of a natural resource here. Mike Toomey is a big advocate of this.
Gym / YMCA
The town desperately needs additional tax revenue. Need to solicit some large businesses to build in town. Towns such as Auburn and Leicester are continually adding new commercial, industrial and warehouse companies.

Q10: Where should additional commercial development happen? Select all Zoning Districts that apply. Answered 309, Skipped 54



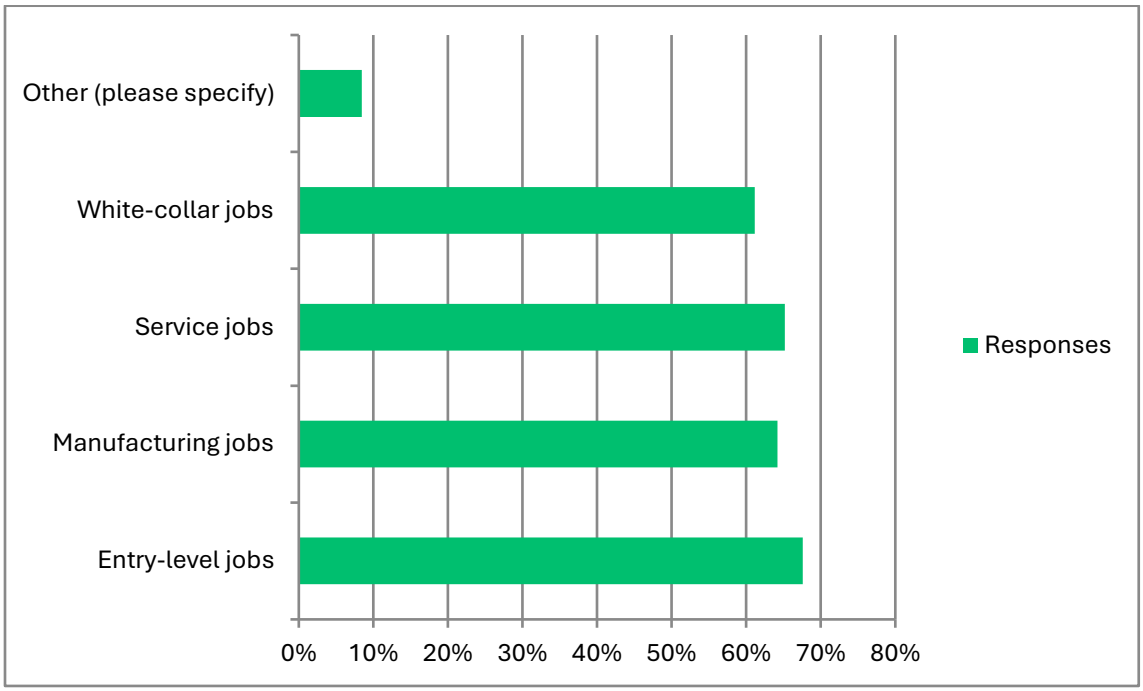
OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
See the PARP list we already have.
Any zoning district whose character can be maintained while allowing for the creative development of the land & existing buildings.
Businesses should comply and be responsible for attractive facades.
Stop realtors from accepting the wrong types of businesses. People drive out of Spencer to shop and do not spend time downtown.
I see no problem with quiet, home-based cottage businesses.
commercial parks keep industry and manufacturing in a contained area lessening blight.
I
We don't need more investment. We need to stop ruining this town!
As close to route 49 as possible
Location depends on type of business
Preserving open space is important to maintain low taxes. Residents already burdened with educational improvement costs.
Commercial zone should be expanded/modified
Route 49
Along Route 9
All as more industry is needed for growth
Spencer fairgrounds should be used as an ecotourism base utilizing workampers and targeting an RV market that would build a strength for our service and historic business https://www.workamper.com. The fairgrounds could be easily worked with the existing schedule of events and leverage that as well as other entertainment at Powder Mill Park.
Route 9

We really don’t have a lot of places to develop commercial spaces and why this should not be a cookie cutter form.

make distinct villages outside the town center to develop. We have a large town utilize the areas to make villages.

No comment

Q11: What type of jobs are needed in Spencer? (Select all that apply)
Answered 296, Skipped 67



OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
Better teachers
perhaps afterschool programs for entry level teachers, art and music
Spencer's largest industry started out in a garage on Maple Street with used washing machine parts. Now look at it. We need the opportunity to offer startups Class A office space between 300-700 SqFt at an affordable rate, as well as commercial light assembly options in small sectionals. Retail is trending online, however small corporate teams need places for collaborating. And, entrepreneurial teams and business incubators are growing and starting new businesses at record paces. They need locations that they can meet with clients and do business. The medical facilities aren't very realistic since the region has seen 3 facilities closed in the past 4 years and mergers have resulted in less options. What is needed is mobility enabling technologies and home office services.
Spencer's largest industry started out in a garage on Maple Street with used washing machine parts. Now look at it. We need the opportunity to offer startups Class A office space between 300-700 SqFt at an affordable rate, as well as commercial light assembly options in small sectionals. Retail is trending online, however small corporate teams need places for collaborating. And, entrepreneurial teams and business incubators are growing and starting new businesses at record paces. THey need locations that they can meet with clients and do business. The medical facilities aren't very realistic since the reion has seen 3 facilities closed in the past 4 years and mergers have resulted in less options. What is needed is mobility enabling technologies and home office services.
Arts-related jobs
Trades
Well-paying jobs
Medical

I’m
We need more jobs for strong men. We should lower taxes.
in town transportation (mainly for disabled and old people)
Community based services like a ymca
Town center needs to become attractive to small business.
Agribusiness and technology jobs
jobs should pay a living wage
No idea
No business wants to be in spencer
TRade jobs
Healthcare for our seniors.
Healthcare
not looking for a job
nonprofit and community support
Jobs that pay a living wage
Agricultural
No comment

Q12: What is your favorite scenic view in Spencer (If you have several, please rank them in order.) Answered 211, Skipped 152

RESPONSES
Howe state park
My back yard
ABBY
As I drive in on 31 north from Charlton the town hall and surrounding buildings are beautiful. And the sun setting in the John's Pizza plaza looking out behind the buildings.
Buch Hill midstate trail, St Josephs Abby, Howe Park, Brooks Pond, Browning Pond
Buck Hill mid state trail
1)Browning Pond, 2)Howe Park, 3)the view from Main and Lake Streets looking west, 4)Depot Trail, 5)Mid-state trail, 6)Moose Hill/ Sugden Reservoir, 7)Four Chimneys WMA.
howe state park sibley farm
Too soon to tell.
Sibley Farm in the fall; Rte 31 North; Howe Park
The Hills at St. Joseph's Abbey away from solar.
1. Rt 9 heading west in front of the Congregation Church 2. The view from Zukas Hilltop Barn 3. The view approaching the church at St. Joseph's Abbey
moose hill
howe state park dam
None
Rather not say
Moose hill, Howe park
Howe state park
Browning Pond, Brooks Pond, Howe Park, Buck Hill, Four Chimneys, Moose Hill, Luther Hill, Lake Whittemore, Prouty Fields, Sevenmile River
View of fairground from Grant Street
Rural farms on northwest road Gaucher farm on Norcross road Depot trail
Moose Hill, the Abbey, Lake Wittimore, Stiles Lake
The overlook behind the Ahearn
Abbey
View from Prouty Field
Grant Street, Mechanic Street
The abbey
A top the high school where the water tower is.
Top of Main St - from town hall, Abbey, Top of Maple St. from Church.
The hill behind P.P.H.S, St. Joseph Abbey
Sibley Farm
South Spencer Rail Trail, Audubon + nature reserve on Greenville Rd, Farmland on Pleasant St.
Trapest Facility, Howe Pond
Spencer Country Inn

St. Joseph Abbey

The view up the hill from 12 Lincoln Street.

Smithville Road

The lakes, monastery ,open fields.

Lake whittemore

N Brookfield Road

South from the Abby church

There aren’t many left due to housing developments

1.Howe park.
2. Luther hill park
3. St. Joseph’s Abbey
4. Muzzy Meadow at sunrise.

View of the west from the top of Main Street
View of Stiles Lake at the end of G.H. Wilson Road
View of Sibley Farm land from Route 9
Views from the Monastery
Views at Howe Park

Lambs grove overlooking Sugdan Lake however it’s overgrown now

Lake views!

Sibley farms trails, Zukas farm, Spencer country inn

Rail trail

Rt. 9 west, overlooking downtown with the hills in the background.
Same rolling hills seen from the trail off of McCormick rd.
View of hills from Hastings road looking west

Lake views

Lake Whittemore
Moose Hill Dam
Luther Hill
Howe Park

The Abby

View of lakes.
Sunset.
Trappist
Driving on 31

Howe Park

The paint peeling off the town hall

View from Spencer Abbey - top of hill.

Abbey church, Top of Hasting's Road looking northwest, Thompson Pond, parts of Rail Trail

sibley farm

St Joseph's Abbey/Howe Park

Spencer isn't very scenic. Sibley is beautiful. The 7-mile river is a gem if you own a canoe.

Siblings

Top of the hill coming into town, Burncoat Sibley Farm, Stiles Reservoir

We should get rid of Howe Park to sell the lumber. We can invest the money to get rid of taxes.

Zukas farm
Howe Park

Top of Main Street heading west from DQ.
Styles res.
Howe Park
Spencer country Inn
Ogara Park
The hill behind DP
Top of Maple Street The old Church steeple.
Town Hall.

Howe Park

Howe park, ash st & r Joanne's rd corner. Driving north on 31 towards center seeing the town hall (near church)

Howe State Park

St Joseph's Abby, Greenville St land trust hiking area

Coming down the hill on Rt 9 going west into town.

Howe park
Walking train on south Spencer rd

Luther Hill park

Howe State Park
Burncoat Pond Wildlife Sanctuary

Howe Park

Looking west from high st and grant st

* Rte 31 North, Thompson and Browning Pond areas
* Howe Park area

Open water wetland off the Depot Rail Trail

1. Lake at Spencer State Forest
2. Farmland on Northern section of 31

Fairgrounds

Zukas

a) Charron St - overlooking the valley - also: Mechanic St
b) Spencer Abbey
c) Sibley´s Farm

Coming down route 9 at sunset.

Driving through the town center and seeing the town hall from up the hill.

Abby

The Abby, howe park

Lake views

View of the hills as you drive down main st towards the center. Also the rolling hills off Hastings Rd

St. Joseph abbey

Zuca farms and the view coming over the hill on rt9 next to lake st

Any hilltop

Lots of beautiful lake views in town
Enjoy views from multiple hiking trails

Abbey; Clark Rd

The Abby

On top of the hill behind David Prouty High School, Howe Park, Saint Joseph's Abbey

By the monastery

Rail trail. It would be nice to expand this. Maybe make a large loop?

St Joseph's Abbey church.

Howe State Park, Sibley trails, top of High and Lincoln St., field at bottom of Peasant St., top of hill Main and Lake St., St. Joseph's Abbey, Stiles Reservoir.

Moose Hill Reservoir, Sibley Farms, St. Joseph's Abbey, Howe State Park

1. The view from McCormick & Mechanic, looking down toward town center
2. The view from Lake St & Main, facing west
3. Most lake views

Trappist brewery

Top of starr st looking west

St. Joseph's Abbey, DPHS Soccer Field

St Joseph's Abbey
David Prouty Soccer Field
Camp Marshall beach and trails (top of hill, near lean-to)
Browning Pond
Sibley
Waterfall at Howe Park
Luther Hill Park beach

Abby

Howe park and the abbey

Stiles
Top of hill Watson Farm
not a particular one, but partial to beautiful views of farmland especially in north Spencer

St Joseph’s Abbey, everywhere.
Rte 9 west, at the highest point approaching the traffic light.
Northwest Rd near the commercial farm area.

.

It was the hill at the abbey but the solar project killed it

Thompson pond

Abby made house

My home on n Brookfield Road

The magnificent Saint Josephs Abbey

Howe Park, The Abbey

Zinkus hill top farm, St.Josephs Abby

DPHS Football field

Views from St. Joseph's Abbey

Howe Park

We have scenic views

Rail Trail

The Abby

From top of St Joseph Abbey hill

Howe Park

1. St Joseph’s abbey
2. DPHS sports field on top the hill
3. Howe Park

Stiles reservoir, spencer fair grounds

My farm, St. Joseph’s Abby, Howe Park

Top of Grant Street overlooking the fairgrounds. Top of School Street overlooking the fair grounds. Top of Prouty Soccer Field overlooking Luther Hill Park.

Lake Whittemore

From my porch

Top of David prouty

The monastery and grounds.
The marked trails from Rutland to my backyard!

From the top soccer field behind the high school.

St. Joseph Abbey

The Abby
Prouty hill
Hastings road

Rail trail

Abbey

The abbey area

Howe Park

Browning Pond, Sugden Reservoir, Moose Hill, Camp Marshall, Howe Park, Spencer WMA lands, DPHS Fields, MidStae Trail.

Heading west on Main...view is great as you go downhill into town

Town beach.

View of Thompson Pond dam and 4H

Sibley Farm

Howe park

Hill behind the high school and the Abby

stiles resevoir
the center of town at night looking out 3rd floor windows the lights the churches just are beautiful gorgeous

Abby

Abby

Sugden Reservior, St. Joseph Abbey and David Prouty football field

gold nugget rd
many of the lakes and ponds

prouty top hill, howe park, greenville st

Looking down Kittredge Rd into N. Brookfield

Top of the hill at prouty
Woodside road overviewing Norcross road

1. Sibley/Warner property off Greenville St.
2. Rail Trail (behind O'Gara Park)
3. Luther Hill Park

Howe Park, Sibley hill crest, Audubon vie of Burncoat Pond

Main St. heading east into town from Leicester captures historic Main St.
Greenville Road heading south to Chickering Road captures Stiles Reservoir.
Rt. 31 heading north captures the farm land along 31.
The Abby, Zuka's Farm
The parcel west of Ahearn's heading west on Rt. 9, that is town owned.
Ogara Park a historic ballfield that the town has not maintained and is run down. You can see it from the rail trail.
Luther Hill Park looking over the water.

Monastery hill
The dam on Howard Hurley
Rte 31
The spires heading up Main Street
The trail system leading to burncoat (maple st I think?)
Sugres
Mid state trail (not terribly well marked)
The rail trail
Howe park

The Abbey
Farmers hill on Clark road
View from intersection of main st and lake st

The Abbey

The Abbey

GWLT land at Sibley Farm #1. Mid State Trail behind camp Marshall #2. Luther Hill park lake #3. Rail Trail #4

The Abbey

Top of Grant st, looking over fair grounds/zukas, Howe park,

St Josephs Abbey

Howe state park

Howe park. Old beautiful buildings on main.

I like the historic buildings downtown and can picture how great they could look if the owners cared enough to bring them to their former glory.

My own yard.

Woodside road overlooking Norcross rd

Howe pond

Howe park

Howe Park

Zukas and Jordan’s farm fields along with gold nugget

The abbey

1. View from the Abbey
2. Howe Park

Coming down Main Street top of hill down from Lake St you can see forever...
Route 31 North across the valley from Terkanin Dr out to Wire Village Road..
Sunset view on (drawing a blank on road used to be Green Laundry Road.... just beyond the turnoff to Karen Thunberg's Barn Sale place ....
any spot at St Joseph's Abbey
Howe Park

Sibley farm, the state forest,

When traveling west on route 9 at the top of the hill near the light in town. The sunset and vista is beautiful

The hill near the Town Hall
Howe Park

-The view of lake Whittemore from Luther Hill Park
-Howe State Park
-The old Spencer cemetery with the church and senior housing building behind it

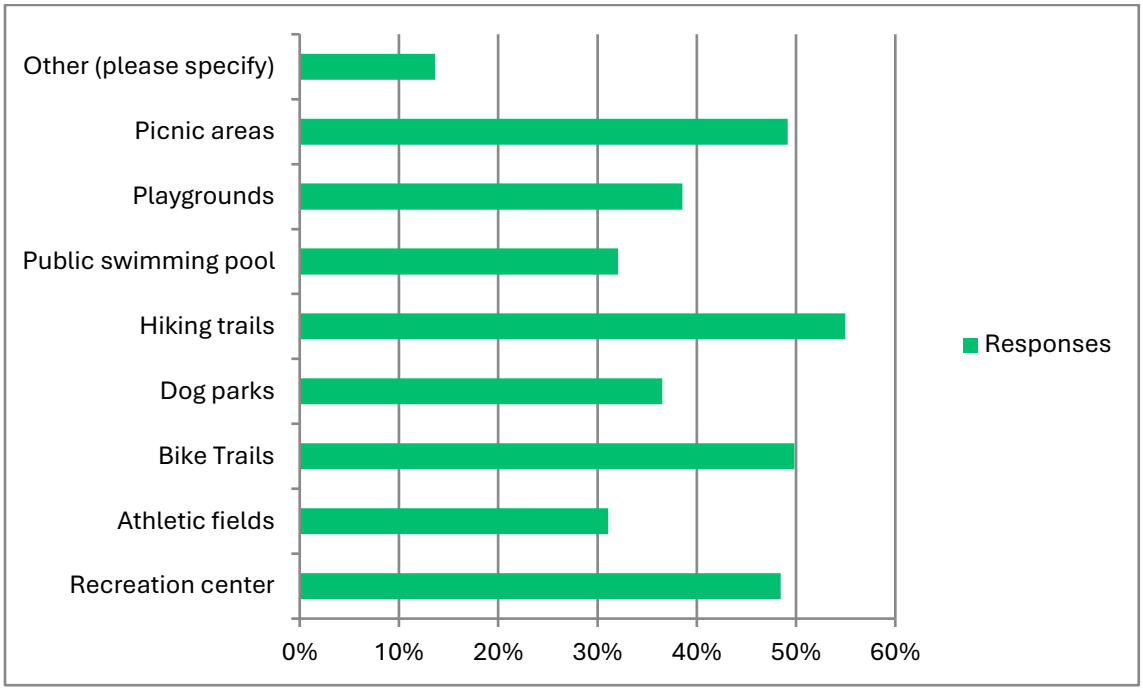
St Joseph’s Abbey

Out of Spencer. Whomever is running this town has run it into the ground !

Moose Hill

Abbey
The abbey All along rte 31 north
rt 9 at the top of the hill by the dentist(corner of lake st) seasonal views at Smalls farm on Rt 31
The hill at the Abby, the view up Grant St looking over the fairgrounds, driving along Stiles on Chickering Rd
Abbey, lakes, farmlands
Near the abbey, love all the trees that line the road
Howe park
Lake Whittemore
Abby
high school field
Fields, trees, wooded areas. Ponds and wildlife
Howe park
1. Spencer Abby 2. Howe Park 3. Spencer Country Inn
My house view
Hill behind high school Luther hill park Howe park
Top of prouty hill, Abbey, howe park, Thompson pond
Sibley Farm.
St. Joseph's Abbey
The Abbey
The Abbey and Howe Park. Very popular for family photo sessions.
Luther Hill, Howe Park
Browning Pond, Lake Whittemore, from top hill of Main Street
Saint Joseph’s Abbey Moose Hill Reservoir Sibley Farm Mass Audubon Burncoat Pond Wildlife Sanctuary Wetland - Depot Rail Trail Howe State Park Thompson Pond Prouty Football Field / Top Field
Small’s Farm looking north from Rte 31 Also view from St Joseph’s Abbey Also view from top of Gold Nugget Farm and Atgalanis Farm hayfields (now a solar farm)
Abbey area. High School athletic fields.
The sunsets from my kitchen/living room window
Howe Park

Q13: Which of the following recreational opportunities would you like to see more of in Spencer? (Select all that apply.) Answered 293, Skipped 70



OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
Athletic Fields for the public
Spencer is in desperate need of a recreational center (look at Boys & Girls Club of Greater Nashua) with a pool and winter indoor activity rooms. Time is allotted for numerous groups year round. As many of our seniors age they'd enjoy the benefits of a nice swim in a solar heated pool. The Parks and recreation department would be able to host swimming lessons and events without inclement weather, bacterial contamination or algal blooms hinderance they've been plagued with. The community would have an opportunity to utilze the facility as community rooms for a truly year round calendar of events.
Gathering space near the town center with shade and benches (Maybe even checkers/chess tables) ; public tennis/pickleball, basketball. bocceball courts
tennis court, putting range, pickle ball court, lighted walking trails
This will never happen as the ones we do have aren't maintained. Joke
As Spencer residents age they need infrastructure for limited mobility. Benches on Depot Trail and at Muzzy Meadow allow folks that have limited mobility/stamina and still like being outdoors to enjoy the locations by being able to rest and walk in segments. At present it is lacking.
Sidewalks. I don't care where but we need them desperately.
Spaces for residents who do not drive, but have kids and animals
A public beach that is not closed every other day due to pollution.
community garden space
We have enough.
A centrally located CSA garden.
I feel the Agricultural grounds are under utilized
Skateboard park

Atv/ off road trail
Improve the skate park
Town common. We need a nice center town common with walking paths benches and lighting
Trail for atvs
Develop lake street school land to this. Make a gazbo and large grassy area for concerts and events on the front lawn at the school.
Boating (kayaks, canoes) in places like Stiles
Continue maintenance on playgrounds. Existing town athletic fields should be maintained and updated accordingly.
None
Luther Hill Park could be better utilized
Outdoor workout area/gym
Horse trails
Town Common
A place for our kids to go instead of just hanging around.
Multi use trail around town like the snowmobile trail. Could be improved to be used by all groups,like in Maine. ATV/snowmobile,CC skiing,dog walking bike riding,horseback riding. Everybody shares,volunteers to help with upkeep. Works in Maine,why not here?
Spencer should focus on a building a year round pool facility and recreation center that ALL ages could utilize. The health benefits of a swim provides low impact healthy stretching and relaxation in inclement weather.
recreation area for kids to enjoy things without getting into trouble so they dont hang on streets not that they do but so they wont like in worcester
Art resource center
Town Common
Pickle ball/cornhole
Public access to outdoor school tracks and courts
More sidewalks in the rural residential areas
Pickleball courts.
An active community center for all ages (see the Oxford Community center)
A common area for outdoor concerts, tree lighting. Powder mill is awful for that. Veterans park? Next to Congo church has too much traffic noise. Better courts for any use.
The items we currently have maintained better and improve senior activities and areas
A town common for special events, music in the park, picnics, and open space.

Q14: What areas of Spencer should be preserved as open/non-developed land? (For example, areas used for recreation, areas supporting animal and plant habitats.)
Answered 151, Skipped 212

RESPONSES
Howe state park
Lake street school
Any eco habitats like the parks and waterways. The areas that need to be renovated are downtown and other crumbling buildings.
all existing agricultural land should not be developed in any way, maybe create a trust to preserve for the benefit of food production for humans and animals
We should keep our parks and work for stronger coordination with DCR DEM and DFW to assure better habitat protection. Spencer has repeatedly failed to leverage opportunities to build better infrastructure simply because they failed to act when opportunity was handed directly to them.
Areas used for recreation, community gardens, areas capable of supporting or creating animal habitats, areas with old growth trees.
Land around/adjacent to the existing State Forest lands both north and south
Forest habitats.
Recreational and vista views.
ash street east Charlton road
Green’s open field…clearing trees to view Whitemore.
areas protecting and supporting animal and plant habitats
Don't mess with the woods. Tear down the old dumpy eyesores and start there
Animal and plant habitats. Cut back on the amount of solar allowed in fields. Place it on roofs and over parking lots.
Spencer needs to coordinate between all the DCR/WMA and Spencer lands and hasn't done so. The issue has been mentioned before as well as infrastructure improvements that were offered. The problem of fiefdoms blocking progress reared up and blocked actions from happening that would've saved taxpayers thousands and rebuilt major public access boat ramps infrastructure by leveraging grants. All the town had to do was agree to maintain it. Citizens lost out to the fiefdoms once again.
Farms, woodlands, areas supporting animal and plant habitats
Areas supporting habitats for all species (plants, animals, insects, reptiles, etc.)
Parks
As much as possible
Sibley Farm, Howe Park, Depot Trail, Buck Hill
All parks, more recreational areas
Recreation area, forested areas
Farmland, parkland, 7 mile river bottom land
Some of the larger farms
Howe Park, Spencer State Forest
Areas supporting animal and health habitats, preserving farmland
Large forested and field areas, areas where body of water/streams, Audubon areas
Farms
Any town owned property should be looked at as a possible micro green space instead of more development.
Instead of developing in open land, renovate buildings in disrepair, make building owners abide by town laws and keep property in good condition.
Any area now that doesn’t have a permit to build

Buck Hill

the way it is now

1. Howe Park
2. Ogara Park

Behind Crestview Apartments
Along Rt. 31
Areas that support animal and plant habitats

Many are protected via State regulation. The more the better.

Spencer Country Inn, Zukas Farms

All fields, wooded area and farm land.

All land should be preserved unless being used to build housing, businesses or recreational areas.

Sibley Farm near Ahearn

Howe State park

Wilson St farm land
Moose hill
East Charlton Rd

Outside of the commercial area

recreation

None

forest land, parks, trails, areas supporting animal and plant habitats

snowmobile trails. would be neat if we could open those trails up to ATV's for a couple specific days per year to give it more use and give communities more options

areas for hunting

Sibley, Howe Park (woods surrounding it).

All rural residential zones. The various ponds, lakes, and rivers. The areas surrounding existing conserved spaces

Historic areas.

Howe Park Ave any other parks

Areas supporting animal and plant habitats should be left alone

Greenville at land trust hiking area

Areas supporting animal and plant habitat, rec areas near lakes

Reserve areas for old growth forests.

All of the current areas that are already reserved for conservation and recreation. Any large parcels of farmland that become available for purchase.

Woodlands

We have plenty of earmarked land already. The Audubon land on Greenville, Spencer state forest , rail trail and buck hill to name a the big ones.

* Rte 31 North, Thompson and Browning Pond areas
* Howe Park area

Areas around perennial or intermittent streams, and critical areas in local watersheds

Howe Park

Suburban areas, recreation areas

both: areas used for recreation, areas supporting animal and plant habitats
also: areas that allow for mindful farming (mindful of pollution and sustainability)

Howe Park

The Parks we already have.

all existing designated wildlife preservation areas & wetlands

All areas that are not developed should be protected. No more solar fields

As much as possible

Not sure what your asking

Animal habitats

Unsure

Undeveloped land between Ash Street and Greenville Street that supports many animals and plant habitats.

Recreation

The Town needs to work with, instead of against, agricultural business. These farms keep open space open at absolutely no cost to the Town. (Reduced taxation is far more than made up for by decreased service demands.) I would like to see that the town understood that. It seems completely lost on most of past Selectboards and Administrators. (I'm not bringing the present folks into that group. This wasn't intended as any sort of political statement, merely an observation by a very long-time resident.)

State forest, park, Luther Hill Park, Sibley hiking area, areas near lakes and ponds, wetlands.

This question isn't clear?

woodlands and lakes

Save the farms

Areas used for recreation. Open space in the RR areas and SR areas should be used for single family housing only. No multi-family homes or solar farms.

Howe State Park

areas used for recreation

Land along the Seven Mile River
Land along Turkey Hill Brook
St. Joseph's Abbey all land and waterways
Camp Marshall and all field/woods/waterways around it

Areas that are naturally sensitive i.e. wetlands and adjacent areas. Areas that are already next to protected land like near Howe Park for example.
Clustered zoning helps keep more open space as well.

Old farms and large tracks of land that are up for development

plant and wildlife habitat, with attention to making sure wildlife corridors are preserved/created to avoid large animal/human conflicts

Everything outside of downtown.

.

Howe Park

Buck Hill
Howe Park

All natural land in town should remain natural. I would rather see empty abandoned sites be repurposed instead.

outside of downtowon

Areas that house endangered species and rookeries.

NO MORE SOLAR FARMS

All green space

Where Elias Howes house stood

All currently established land should be kept as such. Hay fields are becoming more scarce which are driving the cost to feed local ruminants too high to afford. Farms are closing their businesses in high numbers.

Sibley Farm

farm land, rail trail,

Route 31 by the monastery up hastings and camp marshal area

Howe park

The old Sibley/Warner farm land. Spencer should fix roads first before spending more money on preserving land we don’t have the money to buy in the first place.

Recreation

Farms and parks

Most areas we have preserved are known although not all (i.e. Railroad Park) are even recognized let alone taken care of. And, our public boat ramps and hiking trails next to them have been missed when the opportunity for having ADA compliant ramps built in with state funds. That same DFW grant would've also put in an ADA ramp and beach site at Luther Hill Park along with concrete ramp for car top boats /canoe/kayaks to enjoy. Once again, it was never acted upon due to unknown reasons. That would've freed up over $50,000 -$70,000+ for other projects like trails etc. But it wasn't followed up. We need to ask why first beforehand to get better results with any of the new Master Plan endeavors.

Buck Hill, Camp Marshall, Abby, Audubon, Spencer Fairgrounds,

Areas around the lakes have had enough development.
Keep forests.
More solar in unused agriculture

Forested parcels 20 acres or more.

Howe park area

Rt 31 north

Ag land

areas for agriculture and habitat especially those pieces of land that provide corridors for animals to roam

Woodlands supporting plant and animal habitats

Areas around lakes and waterwsys

As many areas in the rural parts of town that we are able to preserve.

do not develop new land

We have 250 acres owned by the town along Rt. 9 and Greenfield road for this. Also, DCR owns a couple hundred acres under sanctuary preservation.

All the things I listed above....
Rte 31
Can more rail trail be created?
Mid state trail markers....

Assess animal populations and protect wildlife at all costs while enhancing the beauty and character of this town

All parks and hiking trails.

Rai Trail. Surrounding Camp Marshall. Luther Hill Park.

New to town, not knowledgeable enough to say

Rural

Current parks and trails.

All the above plus aquifers and farm land.

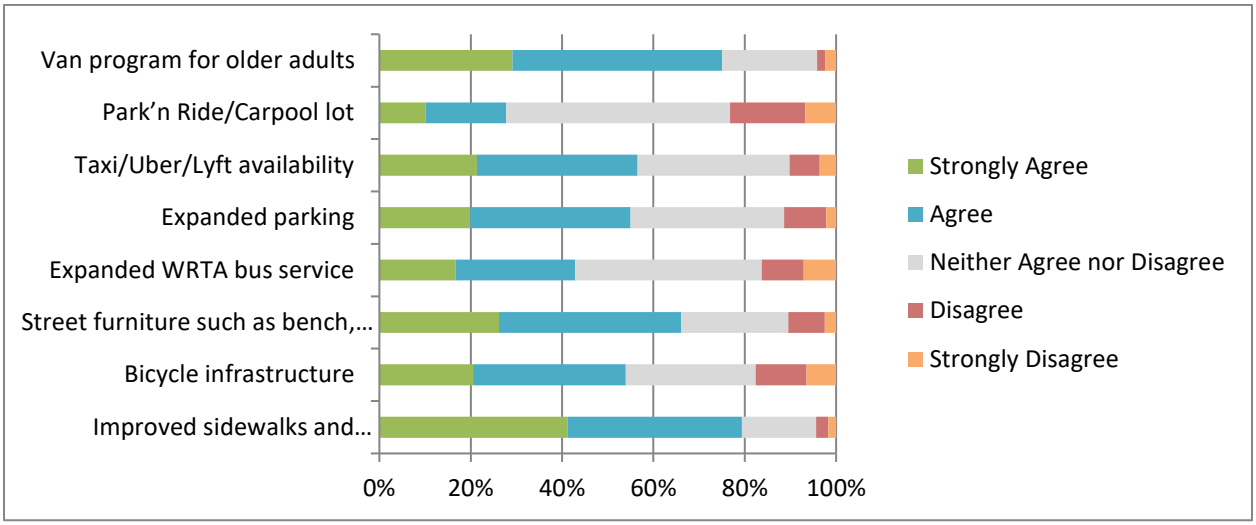
Lands around Howe State Park and Spencer State Forrest

All

All rural residential that is currently undeveloped.

I would not support putting restrictions on private property owners right to use their land as they see fit.... In North Spencer Bemis Farms own a large parcel of land that abutts or close to farm land on Northwest Road which abbuts St Joseph's Abbey land which abutts large parcel owned by Ed Thibault which abutts Cameron's Smith's all in all a good chunk of Spencer which affords Deer, Bear and other wildlife to enjoy open space .... all without GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE....
Animal and plant habitat
RR
Areas supporting animal and plant habitats Areas protecting watersheds Areas used for recreation, and parks
Recreational areas and forests
Anywhere away from the dilapidated downtown.
North side of spencer
Less development in rural areas. We should maintain habitats for wildlife.
Sibley Farm
lakes and woodlands
As many as possible. Once they are gone, they are gone forever.
Areas supporting animals and plants
Howe Park.
Any area holding endangered species and current wetlands.
State owned land
Lake street school- fantastic place for recreational facilities. Plus access to town beach area
That has already happened.
Open space fields, forests
North Spencer
Luther Hill Park and Lake Street School should be public space for recreation. We should expand and connect existing trails to vacant land and preserve habitat.
Areas supporting animals and plant habitats; especially areas in close proximity of MassWildlife Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program Habitats
The last remaining big tracts of farm land in south and North Spencer, along with the large forest that runs from Wire Village to Buck Hill and the 4-H camp. Also, the Abbey land which provides important habitat connectivity north to Treasure Valley and Rutland State Forest.
We have too much open land now. We are choking out the population that would like to live here but not having the land to build on. Too much solar taking up areas.
Landowners should be allowed to do what they want with their land and tax money should not be spent to preserve land aka remove it from the tax roll
Luther Hill

Q15: Which transportation options should be explored in specific areas of Spencer? (Select all that apply. Please share additional comments below.) Answered 306, Skipped 57



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Improved sidewalks and crosswalks for pedestrians	41%	38%	16%	3%	2%
Bicycle infrastructure	21%	33%	28%	11%	6%
Street furniture such as bench, lighting etc.	26%	40%	23%	8%	2%
Expanded WRTA bus service	17%	26%	41%	9%	7%
Expanded parking	20%	35%	34%	9%	2%
Taxi/Uber/Lyft availability	21%	35%	33%	7%	4%
Park'n Ride/Carpool lot	10%	18%	49%	16%	7%
Van program for older adults	29%	46%	21%	2%	2%

OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)

Lighting yes. Benches no.
There are NO sidewalks on RT 9 eastbound from 240 Main Street to the high school, despite the new school being built. This is an area with a treacherous solar glare as students walk to Prouty HS or Knox Trail in the breakdown lane at the crest of the hill and vehicles accelerating uphill fly by. This should be a top priority
Let's start with the sidewalks first
We tried the bus once and got so wet waiting that the driver wouldn't kae the bill. Any parent with daycare deadlines for pickup can't use a bus due to reliability issues and weather.
N/A
Village residential needs to be more walkable
not crosswalks, but side street sidewalks need attention

We don't need bussing for the mentally ill criminals into this town
Electric car chargers, left turn arrow from Rt 9 eastbound onto rt 31 southbound
I feel that overall parking and sidewalks meet the town's current needs
communication networks should continue to be improved and hardened
More people would take the bus if there was an option to park their car somewhere besides a grocery store.
Fix the roads
Fix the roads
In a downpour a bus isn't fun to wait for especially in downpours and snow storms. We need additional shelters set up. Meanwhile, Spencer needs to make all our State legislators and our CMRPC delegates keenly focused on ultizing the existing Commowealth land parcel labeled R21-42 in Spencer GIS and bringing East West Rail stop service to our region at the Gateway intersection.
some businesses have lots far larger than needed and should allow other uses to avoid tearing up new ground
More people are moving west were there are more reasonable housing costs, yet they still want and expect the same resources and municipal services they are used to.
Tesla charger station
How about fixing the roads.... Pleasant St is a disgrace..... Meadow road maybe next year.... route 9 from old main to meadow is beyond belief... I know it is a state highway there but talk to the state...2027 is not soon enough fix it now
Don’t know what is needed!! We don’t need to decorate streets in front of ugly falling apart buildings.
Clear snow from current sidewalk before freezing to ice so people do not walk in a slippery busy road

Q16: What specific improvements to service would increase your WRTA ridership?
Answered 113, Skipped 250

RESPONSES
Easier on and off. The bus takes up the whole road when stopping which can cause traffic, need a bus lane
Don't understand what time I can get some where and where it stops so I don't use it
N/a
more scheduled runs to Worcester and Sturbridge and Springfield
It is impossible to use the WRTA due to the distance needed to travel to Metro West work spaces, let alone drop off and pick up children at child care.
More availability of the senior WRTA rides. Timeframes seem quite rigid, sometime makes scheduling difficult.
Run on Sundays.
Rural pick up most people cannot get down town easy
Need to install covered bus stops
It isn't feasible because the majority of workers have to traverse Worcester to get to the Metrowest areas like Westborough, Marlboro or Northboro. We need tech industry employer segments similar to how they've developed over the past 30 years. Once they were just greenhouse farms, speedway, supermarket and car lots.
N/A
N/A
N/a
Better bus stop coverage for winter and benches to sit on while you wait. More frequent buses
None
Increase frequency especially on weekends
Better signage and timing.
Time/service
Loop down Pleasant St., Meadow and back up to Main St
I don't use WRTA
Improved availability to schedule
A real shelter at the Spencer bus stop with a clock.
More public awareness.
na
None
More busses
I’m rural so potentially impractical
None - I would not use it
None
Most residents have vehicles.
N/a at this time.
none
Extending it to the outskirts of town. To use it now I must drive from North Spencer to Main Street. It's just as efficient to drive to the final destination.
no thanks
nothing
WRTA is purposely ferrying Biden's minorites into Spencer. It should be cancelled.

More stops
None it is very good now
I’ve never used the bus. I’m not sure I’d be able to say
Safety officers
None
More than one bus an hour on one route
Increased frequency of service to and from Spencer.
Schedule
This service is not viable option for me in 2023.
None
more buses during the daytime
I'll never Ride
Unsure as I don’t use WRTA but know that Spencer residence use it frequently
Widely available busy stops to more areas
NA
None
N/A
Cost, availability, free nearby parking
Expand hours of operation.
None
Early hours
-
Nothing
More frequent pickups, from more places
None
I don’t utilize the WRTA
Its a waste and just brings trouble to the town
None
n/a
We drive
Understanding times to get on bus and where I can go. It's so confusing that I call uber
.
Rt 31 South and North also rt 49
covered wait areas with benches.
More times for busses coming and going
nothing
More available times
N/A
None
Not applicable to me
None
N/A
No chance I’m taking the bus.
More buses and pick up times

The WRTA service is fine if folks are students, couples or senior. However, if parents are trying to utilize the schedule and balance daycare pickups along with affordable housing options - it doesn't work. We need day care and other options that work at facilitating a typical worker's schedule and commute times along with easy pickups and walks home.
none, cannot reach it
none
None.
links to airport and train station
A direct bus to the airports from Union Station in Worcester to Logan or Providence.
Parking near a convenient stop and direct to polar park / kelly square / Hanover with advertising for events
You wouldn’t get me on a public bus with a gun to my head.
I will never participate in public transit
None
Nothing . Yuck.
Don’t use. But if I did, then cost, destination, and frequency of daily trip schedules
Adding more stops
Don't use. Work from home.
None.
More frequency, reliably on time
If the bus went from Rt9 right on Meadow to Rt31 right on Rt31 to Rt9
None
Off route 9 routes
none
Easier to use
The crosswalk still has lights that the drivers cannot see , hence the pedestrian never has the right of way !!!
Better scheduling and routs other than just rt 9
N/A
N/a
More frequent stops
Keep it free
Not a damn thing
None would, we are too far.
None
None
I would not use the WRTA
None

Q17: What are the most difficult (i.e., hazardous, congested, or hard to navigate) areas or intersections you encounter in Spencer? Answered 199, Skipped 164

RESPONSES
By the library that intersection is so dangerous! Coming out of Paxton rd and turning onto Paxton rd. Any side streets that allow on street parking that blocks one lane of the street.
The cross walk at main and pleasant someone's gonna get killed
The light right infront of the town hall.
Downtown Spencer by City Hall - that intersection can get really congested during peak times
route 9 intersecting with route 49
Everything downtown.
Main St/ Rt 31 Pleasant St with pedestrians and odd light system.
the 2 way streets that allow parking on both sides- wall st, chestnut st and the new lights by the library. the walk sign is not IN sync with the stop lights.
West main coming out near the old Spencer Furniture store; Greenville to Main; Newer 4-ways on Cherry are a nuisance
Meadow St. / Rt. 31 Intersection
Pulling out of Pleasant St. and taking a left onto Main.
pleasant - main
the intersection by the library - such a hazard if you are a pedestrarian! side roads that are two way that allow for parking on either side. this blocks the view of the driver and is such a hazard. streets like this should be one way - wall street is the biggest example.
Side roads, pearl st, water st and valley st
Donnelly rd onto rte. 9
Crosswalk in front of price chopper
maple and main people are always running the red light
Rt 9 at DPHS traffic goes from 45 to failing to do 30 or 20. It's alarming there's no sidewalk on DPHS' side of Rt 9 from Lake street eastward to DPHS. Its especially troubling when students are forced into the roadway in inclement weather and solar blindness in morning sun could lead to a fatality. There is a general lack of enforcement for both speeding and tailgating. If any responsible drivers obey the speed limit on either Greenville, GH Wilson or Rt 31, other drivers act out by tailgating dangerously until they pass. THis has happened 4-5 times on backroads (GH Wilson/Greenville) and the double lined sections of RT 31. These reckless drivers ignor all roadway speed markings..
Greenville and main by dipping donuts
N/A
In the neighborhoods since there are no sidewalks
Down town area
Turning onto rt 31 from the center
Downtown area, crosswalks not acknowledged by drivers
Main St
Paxton Rd to Rt.9
Rt.9
Rt 9/49, South Spencer Rd - Rt.9 strip in front of Big Y need an in/out light.
Intersection of 9 and 31 at town hall
downtown
town center

Main Street at the Big Y Plaza. The walk signals don't always work, and it's a game of chicken.

Rt 31 N&S intersections....Fair Plaza area.

Intersection of route 49 and route 9.

maple st and main st

Center of town

None

Chestnut street

Pulling out of Big Y onto Rt. 9, Pulling out from the end of Ash Street, End of Ash St, and E. Charlton Rd (very dangerous)

Main st. taking left onto Maple, no left arrow on light.

Main Street and at intersection with So Spencer Road

Hastings road starting at #96 heading North. Multiple car accidents due to uneven, narrow roads with an overwhelming amount of potholes that force drivers to navigate around them into potential oncoming traffic.

Wilson St intersection at Grove St.; lower Mechanic St; and Rt 49 intersection at Rt. 9

Downtown.

Meadow Road at Pleasant Street

Luckily cannot think of one...hope that lasts!

main and rt 31

Main and Pleasant; Donnelly Cross and Main, Paxton Road and Main

no issues come to mind

Chestnut St

Trying to get out of Prouty lot can be difficult. I think at certain days/times, Rt 9/31 where the town hall is becomes congested. It's really not bad compared to larger cities.

Greenville and Main

Intersection of chestnut, maple, and Adams st downtown

None.

Paxton rd into rt9 and lake st into rt 9

Pulling out to Route 9 East from Grove, Highland and Lake Streets.

Spencer Center, street by post office (way to Narrow) poor planing on recent renovations

Turning left from main st. onto South Spencer Rd. There should be a left turn light.

Rt 9 turning left onto 31 s, should be a dedicated green arrow

Any left turns onto Route 9 are difficult

Route 9 at Big Y and Route 49 entrance

Route 9/bond street

Intersection of rt 9 and 31 South.

RT 9 and 31

Price Chopper entrances and exits especially on route 9 is difficult. Also rt 9 by big Y plaza is dangerous

The intersection of the Big Y shopping center and Route 9. It’s usually difficult to turn left out of that intersection, and traffic sometimes gets congested when driving east on Route 9 and someone is trying to turn left into the shopping center. The road here is just big enough for others cars behind them to pass while they wait to turn, but sometimes the car does not pull up far enough or the vehicle trying to pass is large and there is a traffic stoppage

Chestnut street, where it's typically single way due to parked cars and vehicles often rev their engines and speed down the hill. The entrance to the Big Y shopping center on route 9 also has congestion issues, where someone trying to turn in may block traffic.

Big Y area, two lanes going West.

None
crossing route 9 near Whitco
Greenville route 9
The traffic light at the intersection of Route 9 and south Spencer road needs a protected left turn.
maple st onto route 9
Exiting any business onto rt 9 in the town center
Main street
The side roads off of main st
None
Exiting Donnelly rd onto rt9 passing DQ during a rush
Route 9 and 49 intersection
Meadow Road and Rt 31..Rt 9 at Big Y and Rte 9 to Podunk you need traffic lights there
The Bond St. and Main st,intersection, and trying to leave Dairy Queen and Dippin Donuts.
Downtown
Left out of Big Y plaza
49 & 9; Greenville & Main
Mechanic Street, Chestnut Street, Wall Street
By the Black and White
Main st and 31. The turn arrow is needed.
Meadow Road at Route 31
Taking rt turn at Main and Maple. Visibility is poor. Exiting Big Y Plaza.
Paxton road at Main Street
Pleasant St/Main St/Wall St intersection, the area south of Main St and west of Maple St
Rt 9 - center of town, and around the Big Y plaza
Town center gets busy but it’s no bad. Nicer sidewalks and adequate lighting in certain areas is all that is needed.
none
Center of town turning left onto RT 31 WB
Rt 31 Spencer/Charlton since it was repaved is a speedway, speed limited posted is 40 mph - people speed daily on this road even with kids exiting school buses. There needs to be a greater police presence on this road. Secondly I always see people drive through red lights at the town center inter-section.
n/a
Areas where the roads are falling apart
Main st
Downtown
Main St in front of Price Chopper
only turning left onto Main St at busy times, I realize that can't be fixed
Anything within a 1/2 mile radius of the Fairgrounds during the Spencer Fair. McDonalds/BigY area can get pretty congested. Downtown traffic as well.
.
Greenville and main
Road conditions
the center of town
Main Street to rt 49
Pleasant St. & Main St, Grove St & Main St.

Turning left off Greenville St onto Rte 9. The cars/trucked parked on the side of the road just after the lights on rte 9 make it very narrow and a bit scary to nagivate.

Maple st onto main st and coming out of Greenville St.

Meadow at Pleasant, Rt.9 at 49, Main at Greenville

center of town

Maple St. and Route 9, the right turn was made worse. East Charlton Rd to Route 31, that was made worse. Meadow Rd and Route 31. Around Klems and Salvation Army.

Main st and south Spencer rd. Route 49 and main

Route 9

Center of town

Meadow Road/Route 31; Route 49 intersection

RT 9 at klems/salvation army

RTE 9 AT Pleasant st, Rte 9 South Spencer, Rte 49 and 9

Rt 9 center of town during peak times

DPHS parking lot, super narrow spots , that crossing guard is going to get killed at the HS. It needs a light

Elm street, ash street, chesnut street

Dairy Queen area

Outside of DQ and Dippin's during the summer and the sharp turn on Howe Rd.

Main St. and Pleasant St. intersection. Main St. and Maple St. intersection.

Downtown

Hastings road! Terrible street conditions

Valley st and Mill st intersection. No stop sign

Hastings road, Wire village rd by the baseball field,McKormick rd,Cherry street by Greenville st., Lower pleasant street. Ect,ect.

Rt. 31/Old Meadow Rd. Intersection

Pleasant and main sets and in front of big y

Paxton road and rt 9

Main and Pleasant Streets

The most difficult things encountered are drivers speeding on all roadways throughout town an excessive tailgating when any driver in front of them is obeying the speed limit. Greenville Street is a double solid line as is GH Wilson Road, yet each road has numerous complaints of drivers passing those obeying the speed limits. We need ramped up enforcement. How do we have so many folks literally flipping cars over in 20 MPH zones and having 3-6 fatalities as well -- if they are doing the posted speed limit? facts show enforcement is missing.

New levels get at center, a lot of confusion at that intersection

none

Route 9 area near Big Y.

Entrance angles not at 90 degrees

None really

i dont have any issues in town i love it here

Corner of Route 31 and 9 is too narrow for tractor trailers to make the turn.

there are many blind left turns and the roads need work

right near dalvation army and klems

Intersection of Rt 31 and Meadow St. would benefit from a blinking yellow light.

Area between Flexcon and Klems

The section on Route 9 West from Cornerstone Bank to Kelms should be a max speed of 40 mph. So many accidents and near misses.

Both lights by Price Chopper. Traffic study should be conducted. Also the light by the Flexcon.

town center

Intersection roads to Rt. Route 9. The intersection of Rt. 9 and Rt 49 South is dangerous.

Donnelly / Main Street intersection, and if it's snowing or icy the hill by town hall is treacherous and several rural roads get difficult to navigate.

All areas around the center of town. Pedestrians randomly crossing the road, drug addicts making people uncomfortable. We need a consistent police presence in the center of town

Main Street ... is horrible. There are people crossing the roads at random locations, hanging around on street corners, and dwelling around lower income spots like price chopper. It is so uncomfortable to visit this part of town and so I try my best to get in and out ASAP

Turning left to off cherry street onto Greenville Street. Residential fence creates a blind spot.

could use a crosswalk between DQ and Dippins... High School kids cross here often with no light or crosswalk

Wall st / mechanic / rt 9 / big y

Center of Spencer

Mechanic st/wall st corner, chestnut/mechanic st intersection, town hall

The road around the Spencer fire department is horrendous with cracks and potholes from the bottom of the hill until the intersection next to Meadow Rd.

Maple & Main

From the intersection of S Spencer to rd and w main going west on 9 until you drive past timberyard brewing company

Main Street/rt 9 really needs to be repaved

None

Better crosswalk markings on all of Main St

Area around lake Street School. Stop and/or yield signs needed.

Town center section of Rt 9

Town center

Downtown

31 south - turning right into it from route 9 at the old Cumberland farms

Downtown

Meadow Rd each end.... could someone paint the right turn only arrow on the pavement at the lights at route 9 even though there is a sign saying right turn only I have had several near misses as I am in other lane and going into South Spencer Road only to find I have a cowboy on the right going the same way...

Crossing maple st

Main St

The sidewalk ends in front of the First Congregational church so you have to cross the street without a crosswalk or walk up the church's steep driveway.

Main Street is rough and has many potholes

Downtown where drivers almost hit people on a daily basis !!

Town hall intersection and DQ

donnelly road/paxton rd to Rt 9

The rt 49/rt 9 interchange, pulling in/out of Big Y plaza

Main, Pleasant and Wall; Mechanic at Chestnut (cars not stopping at stop signs)

Corner of cherry and maple street is VERY dangerous for pedestrians. There is a crosswalk, but it on a big blind spot of the road. It should have a crosswalk light

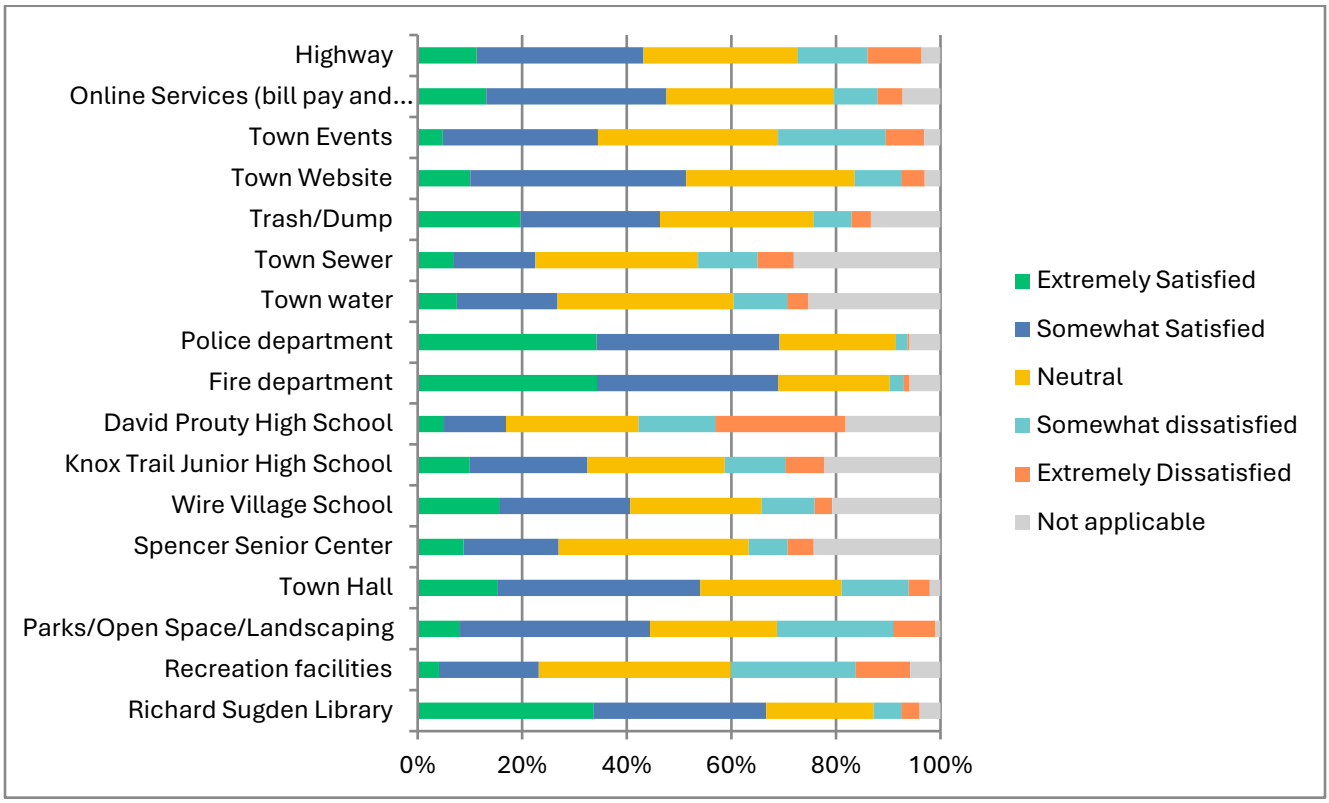
Chestnut st - North st - Mechanic st

For pedestrians: the intersection of Main and 31N

Bridge on Hastings Road.

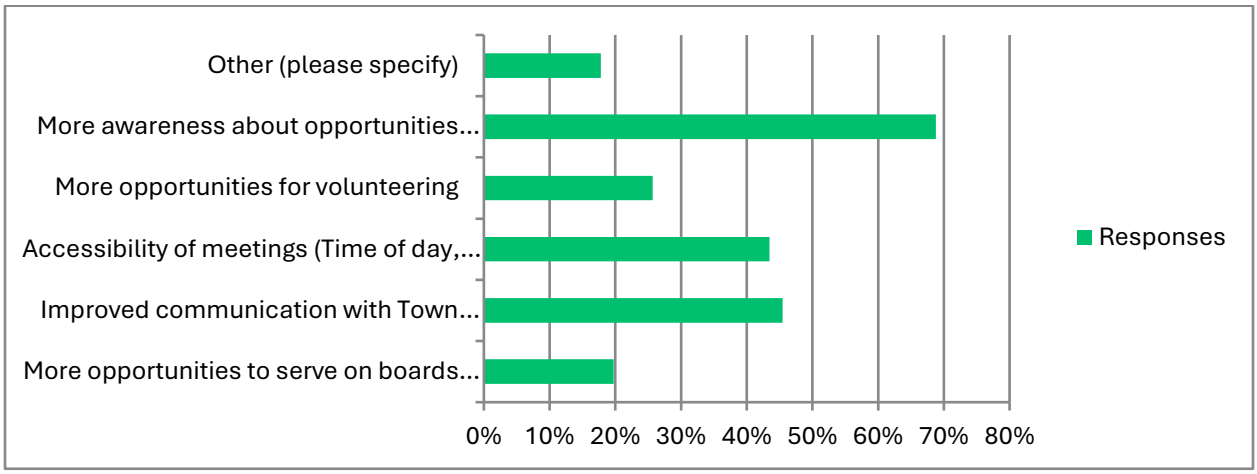
Greenville Street at Route 9. Route 9 in the late afternoon/evening. Route 49 at route 9.
the intersection right in front of the town hall. It is hard to see over the hill when trying to turn left down 31, it should provide a green arrow to turn left. It's very dangerous at busy times
Town town area. Pleasant Main Street area
Maple, mechanic, paxton
Greenville and Main Street . Paxton rd and Main Street
Intersection of route 49 and route 9. There needs to be a roundabout here.
Mechanic St. Dairy Queen/Dippins area, pulling out of Paxton Rd. Onto Rt 9
Dairy Queen on Rt. 9.
Rt 9, between the plaza and gas stations. Traffic merging before Klems. Make 148 two lanes and put up medians!
Hastings Road!
Center of Town, intersection near Big Y
Klem's across from the Salvation Army. Scary intersection!
Main/Maple, Main/Paxton Rd. Maple/Cherry
Ash at cherry (hedges block view) Macdonald st at maple (fence blocks view)
Exiting Big Y parking lot

Q18: How satisfied are you with following public buildings, infrastructure, and amenities?
Answered 302, Skipped 61



	Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied	Not applicable
Richard Sugden Library	34%	33%	21%	5%	3%	4%
Recreation facilities	4%	19%	37%	24%	11%	6%
Parks/Open Space/Landscaping	8%	36%	24%	22%	8%	1%
Town Hall	15%	39%	27%	13%	4%	2%
Spencer Senior Center	9%	18%	36%	7%	5%	24%
Wire Village School	16%	25%	25%	10%	3%	21%
Knox Trail Junior High School	10%	23%	26%	12%	8%	22%
David Prouty High School	5%	12%	25%	15%	25%	18%
Fire department	34%	35%	21%	3%	1%	6%
Police department	34%	35%	22%	2%	0%	6%
Town water	8%	19%	34%	10%	4%	25%
Town Sewer	7%	16%	31%	11%	7%	28%
Trash/Dump	20%	27%	29%	7%	4%	13%
Town Website	10%	41%	32%	9%	4%	3%
Town Events	5%	30%	34%	20%	8%	3%
Online Services (bill pay and permitting)	13%	34%	32%	8%	5%	7%
Highway	11%	32%	30%	13%	10%	4%

What would increase your involvement in local government? (Select all that apply.)
Answered 253, Skipped 110

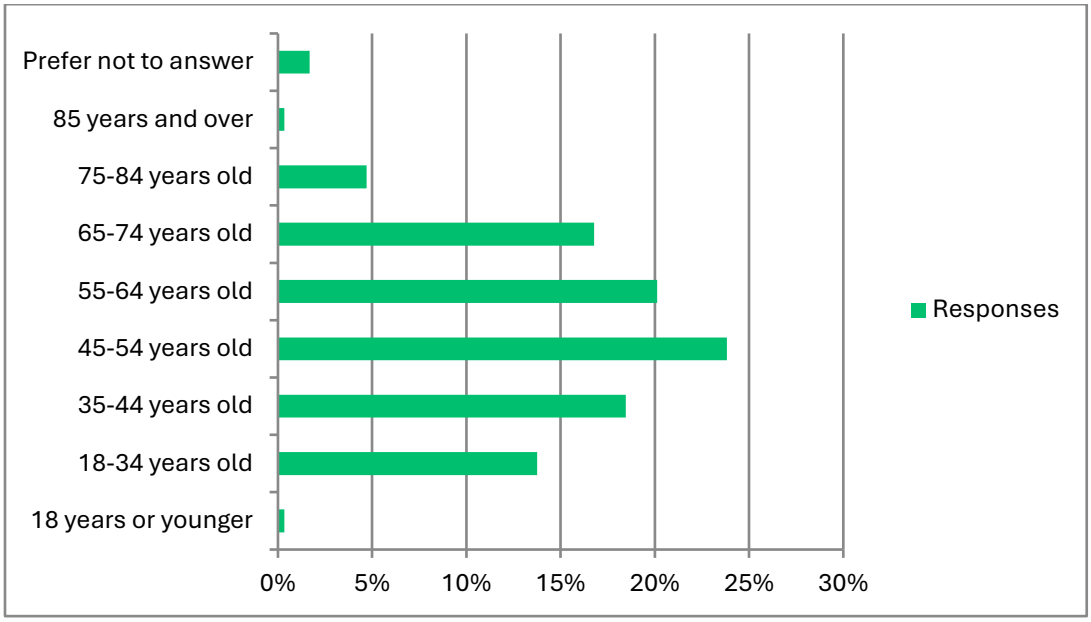


OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)

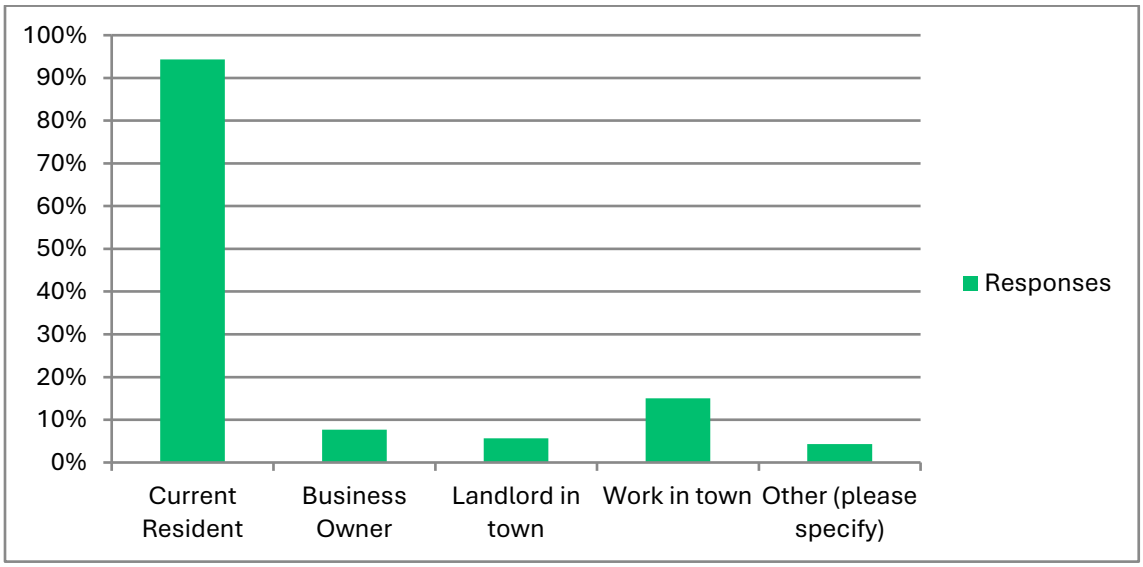
If i lived in town
the zoom meeting availability is good I appreciate the efforts to organize that
RESULTS!
Involvement starts and grows by getting results when suggestions are made and situations/ solutions reviewed or acted on. People want to know they're making positive improvements and not wasting their time. This is crucial when asking someone to give up both their own and family time. There have been times when administration members in nicely paid positions displayed little incentive to change or listen to volunteers. That factors has discouraged willing participation.
More surveys like this
New electronic screen
Post in New Leader
more people who care about helping the town and less people who just want credit for what they did or want to cause drama
Virtual and remote meeting options and better times. Awareness that they're happening
Stopping Mexican gang rapings by closing Mexicali Grill
Transparency! SICK OF BACKDOOR DEALS, MISUSE OF POWER, SELF SERVING BOS
Create a monthly or biweekly online newsletter to spread information. Last minute reverse 911 calls and e-mails do not allow for scheduling to listen or participate. Feature a relevant article from a department every month or two.
More volunteer events!!! I love the town clean up day and would 100% participate regularly if there were more events such as trash pickup, invasive species removal, or volunteering at the library
More frequent events like the town clean-up day
Nothing just don't have the time
Probably nothing. We are older folks (almost 90) but we do talk to folks and appreciate the work the town officers and employees do.
Meeting should be on Saturdays not work days
Better leadership
Town politics suck/Need a new Selectboard
Limited terms for board members.

N/A
Back to question 18 you are mis-leading people. i want more hours at the library so i would have to mark that i am not satisfied with the services.
Nothing could get me to step into politics od Spencer
More clear expectations of the public as well those holding positions in the town gvt.
Honesty within our town leadership.
Better roads so I can get to Town hall in one piece.
Some of our Committees are little else that fiefdoms where anyone suggesting new ideas gets trashed or doe-eyed stares. The desire for public participation is missing in large part because of failure to provide active outreach in multiple organizations and media channels. And, those attempting tohelp spread the word of events risk being chastised for trying to do outreach.
Communication
spent 21 years on ZBA all done
mass emails, social media etc. beyond town site
bring in the younger generations, stop listening to these people who are about to age out and start focusing on the future of our town. Because i guarantee most of the young adults in spencer would do anything to leave this republican mess of a town. people wanna feel seen and accepted.
more personal time
Town leaders should speak up about the need for volunteers and the importance of civic responsibility that is important to our town government
The town dump needs to increase their hours. It should be open a minimum of 3 days a week. I would happily pay more more trash bags or the yearly dump sticker to accommodate this.
Better dump hours needed
Virtual meetings would allow more options for people who don't drive at night or don't drive
Ore communication and less dishonest people on the boards
I am 4 months into living here in Spencer. I am finding it really hard to find information on candidates/ and issues in town that will be voted on. It took me two months to find the local newspaper
I would love to get involved, but I don't know how.
Better communication of school events. Town announcement sign? Facebook page? Info on s hook plays, concerts, church suppers, Xmas charity events, clean up day. If you don’t have a kid in school you miss a lot.
If I felt it would make a difference
I think in general that all boards and departments should be truthful and fully transparent even if it makes them look bad.
Interesting considering volunteering in this town means that have to like you and not what you bring to the table.
No thanks
I already volunteer

Q20: What is your age? Answered 298, Skipped 65



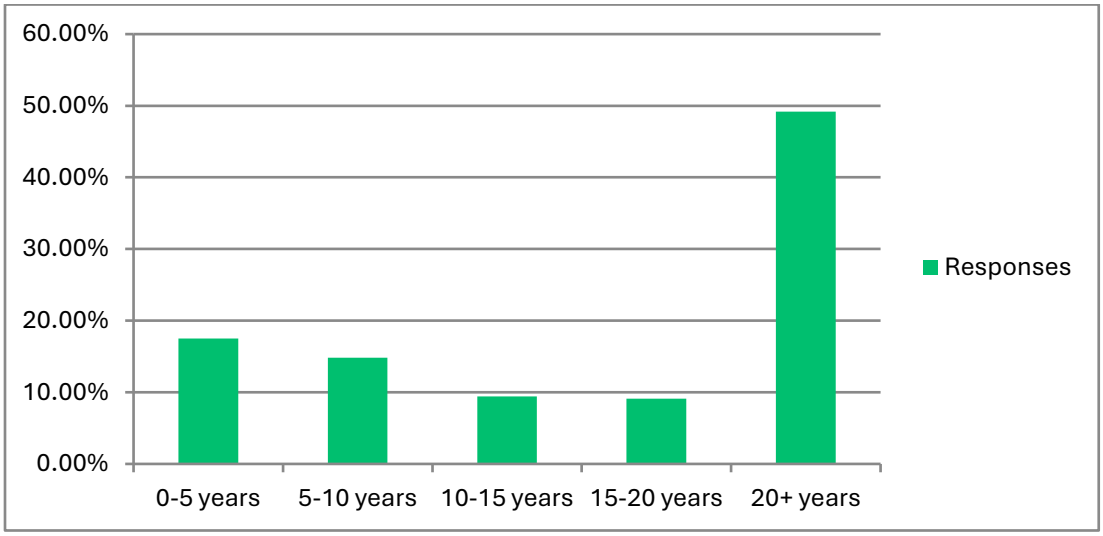
Q21: What is your connection with Spencer? (Select all that apply)
Answered 299, Skipped 64



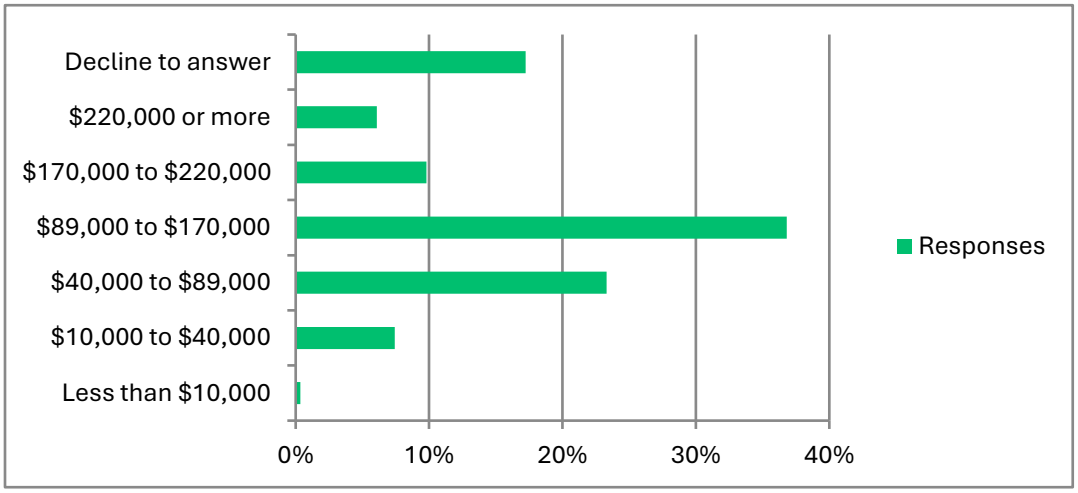
OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
Non-resident land owner
Lived here all of my life
Very involved in town, grew up there. Still consider it home.
Republican strong man who has always had a JOB
Life long Spencer Resident
Family moved here is 1763

home owner
Property owner. Former and future resident
Born and raised
family
Part time resident
Grew up in Spencer
No comment

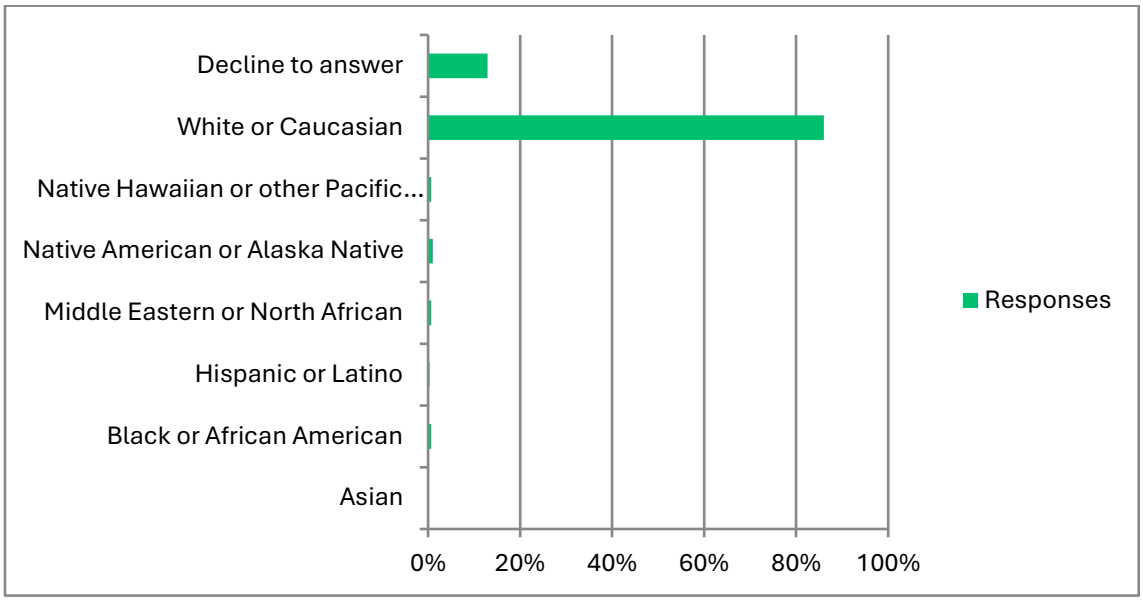
Q22: How many years have you lived in the town of Spencer? Answered 297, Skipped 66



Q23: What is your estimated household income? Answered 296, Skipped 67



Q24: Race/ethnicity. (Select all that apply.) Answered 294, Skipped 69



Q25: Please tell us about anything we did not cover in this survey or any additional comments you have. (Optional) Answered 97, Skipped 266

RESPONSES
Wire village allows their teachers to tell children not to bother the teacher unless they are sick, bleeding or there is a fire. And students know to watch out for Mrs ether if she is in a bad mood. This is scary to hear as a parent.
There should be a option to setup auto payment for town bills.
The dissatisfaction to the water and sewer are due to the outrageous minimum rates they charge to folks who barely use any water. Why have meters if they are going to charge whatever they want?
Would love to see 1 or more community gardens available to residents
We purchased a home in Spencer 12 years ago which we have been lovingly updating. Recently we were told the town will not issue any additional permits to build a bathroom because the infrastructure of the town could not support it. This is probably the reason there are so many run down houses in town. If people can access permits how are they supposed to update their homes ?
Make Spencer more beautiful. It has a lot of charm and hope that could be lifted. Follow said guidelines as shown in the city planning manual PDF. Get rid of Whitco and make downtown a proper main street while also ENFORCING looks of buildings with businesses. Even Price Chopper looks like trash and the plaza stands to fall further once CVS moves to new spot. KEEP ON CVS TO MAINTAIN NEW SPOT...landscaping included. Having worked for this company I know how fast they fall away and don't keep up!!! Color codes and better sinage on businesses (i.e. WHITCO. This looks awful for a downtown...reference Northampton, Westfield, Salem, or Plymouth doentowns for beautiful looks!
the only school in the district that seems to be doing well is east brookfield elementary. all other schools need serious leadership changes. as well as special education changes in leadership. Take a cue from the east brookfield elementary school staff and their compassion, understanding, scheduling of events and team work. the whole town should look to this school as an example on how the town should be run. they care about each other. spencer does not care for anyone not born and raised here.

All residents should be able to participate in hazardous paint/chemical days - should be open to anyone with a legal address in town, not just people with a transfer station sticker.
All residents should be able to recycle at the transfer station without a sticker.
The sewer and water bill increases are never ending and prohibitive.

we need a professional grant writer to get every nickel we can

Downtown is an embarrassment...except for a few business people that have a pride in ownership. Police are not doing their job enforcing speed and illegal noise (mufflers) laws. maintenance downtown...railing in front of Sugden is loose and leaning,etc.

The educational services are not up to par. when a friend who is a teacher refuses to send her children to wire village because it is rated so poorly, that tells me all I need to know about how terrible the schools are. the schools need a revamp on staff.

Ralph Hicks and all the selectman need to go
Smoc housing needs to go
Mechanic Street and Chestnut street need to be leveled
Eckleberrys and Whitco Need to be fined and the other slumlords in town
Less solar fields
Police Patrols as theirs drug addicts and hoodlums around
Tear down the Letendre's eyesore and the old Fire Extinguisher building

Condition of downtown. The “old west facades” on many of the buildings need to be removed. The condition of the majority of downtown buildings is deplorable. The owners should be held accountable for fixing them. Who wants to come to a town and establish a business where thereafter so many empty storefronts and decrepit buildings. We don’t need any more nail salons. How about a full service hardware store like we used to have or even an Ace hardware or Aubusson. Go to Gardner or Hudson and see what is available there. The choices for dining out are mediocre at best. Without the downtown getting cleaned up and parking made available it is hard to see how anything will ever change.

The education of children
Special Education needs
How awful the department is
It needs an outside evaluation
The staff needs to be trained
The curriculum needs a review

The TA/Planner and Select Board need to remember that decisions they make have lasting impacts on the residents long after administrators move on or elections change Board members. We saw how some previous SB members turned Reps didn't ever think RT 31 would get paved--until they and previous administrator were embarrassed enough so it got done. Then the illegal blockage and taking of public access to a Great Pond was proven illegal and that organization's action wasted taxpayers funds and haven't been recouped or seen the town reimbursed for expenses. Browning Pond ramp/roadway is still illegally marked. Citizens have a legal ROW (right of way) around the entire undeveloped great pond as the law states with a 6 foot wide pathway. One Representative has lied by stating Browning wasn't a great pond when he knew in fact, it is. Residents will not forget to reward the proper stewardship of our town... or lack of it.

Spencer's downtown is ugly and unwelcoming. It's functional and offers many services, but it's not a pleasant place to visit. The addition of small shops, an arts and crafts center, and community center might help.

Keeping the small town feel.

Asking residents about town layout, forming a business association, and more activities in Spencer.

Would like to see more maintanence work done on side streets - some are in terrible condition.

The town does not own a lot of land unless they buy some of Rt.49 or Rt-31 south on East Charlton Rd.

Community Garden Space

Is CRT and transgender issues a part of Spencer education? Hope not.

More advance notice in Spencer Leader

Downtown is an EYESORE. The buildings should be fixed up or removed and replaced.

Traffic management needs to be looked into. Speeding, unlawful, obvious, noise violations....motorcycles,cars,trucks. The average police stops per wk. according to police reports in the New Leader average 8-12. Thats 24-7 ?...police need to be enforcing traffic laws. Sitting on the side of the road in an area where there's likely to be no infractions is not doing their job. Selectmen need to tell the police chief to correct this.

I would like the town to stop any solar farms in town as they are destroying our open land and not good for wildlife. I would like to see the appropriate town boards to make business owners abide by safety laws in their buildings. Particularly Whitco which needs refacing and improvements in aisles for patrons. The store is a fire trap.

People using sidewalks for their personal parking.

Do a better job maintaining our roads--the pot holes in some areas are terrible!

Please look into an option to add permitted or non permitted atv/ off-road riding. It will allow tax payers to enjoy more of the scenery Spencer has to offer and encourage them to spend more time and money in and around the town.

Don't build more solar farms. Use the land for more housing, recreation or leave for wildlife to enjoy. Solar farms aren't going to be giving back any tax income to the town in the next century. Growing the community would be better for the town because more tax dollars would come into the town. Solar farms aren't going to do anything except bring liability, fires and forgotten arrays.

We must get over the attitude that everything is too expensive therefore we sit on our hands and let the buildings and town property deteriorate, then complain when something needs to be fixed. We need a strong plan financially and for all services with annual action plans that ARE REVIEWED AND UPDATED EVERY YEAR...It is critical that this Master Plan be a living document, not just an activity checked off as competed and put on the shelf for another decade or two.

Spencer is a nice town. I think there are people who want it to be a right-wing cesspool and others who just want to eliminate any tax increases, but still have services. The senior population needs to be taken care of without over-taxing them. I think there are some problems that cannot be overcome, such as location relative to highways. Spencer is not easy to get to and it's not easy to get to other places. That can be detrimental to economic development.

The solar and residential developers are out of control and need to be stopped. Preserve the rural residential nature of the town. Enhance our conservation and recreation spaces. Encourage residents to spend time downtown with better parking, more sit down restaurant options.

The town should stop employing people who prey on children by encouraging mental illness.

Seems there has been a lot of paving in north Spencer area, time to pay attention to south Spencer, Lyford Rd., Howe Park to Rt. 9, South Spencer rd., etc.

Rural residential area is very important to the town's overall character and should not be subject to exceptions that allow development to creep in.

I would NEVER have moved to this town, if I knew the water & sewer bills are as OUTRAGEOUSLY HIGH as they are. I am paying for water I don't use, late fees are OUTRAGEOUSLY HIGH....Also...the RIDICULOUSLY HIGH SERVICE FEES for paying town bills are DISGUSTING RIP OFFS!

Town should enforce codes on buildings in center. It's disgraceful.

The library basement needs a remodel for the younger kids. And family's to use. Was in there and bathrooms smell of mildew. And was all in all in bad shape.

My biggest concern is maintaining the rural integrity of our town. I hope the new CVS will reflect the town's culture and not be an eyesore.

I live in the town center area of Spencer and very much appreciate the accessibility of the businesses in this area. What I would love to see is more activity-based businesses or spaces in town, such as theater/music spaces, coffee shops, art studios, museums, or other indoor spaces that offer a destination. When thinking about Spencer and how it compares to other towns I visit, I found that what draws me to visit other towns is the recreation or activities offered there, even if it is as simple as visiting a coffee shop. I think encouraging these kinds of spaces would not only keep residents in town to support

local businesses, but also draw in visitors who would make an event out of visiting one of these places and then feel more inclined to patronize local stores and restaurants and make an event out of visiting the area.

the town needs to communicate to the residents in a more inclusive way. I believe everybody has something to contribute and therefore the town has to invite/remind as many people as possible to do so. Everybody has a lot to juggle, so it might be a challenge.

I would love to see the center of town developed but historically preserved, reflecting values but bringing us into modern times. Retail and restaurants all on the ground level of the existing builds with housing or studio space on the floors above.

Town Hall needs to be open 24/7
Fire dept needs to be Staffed 24/7
Library needs to be open 7 days a week
Town run curbside pick up of trash
Better Maintenace of all town buildings and parks, infrastructure volunteers won't cut it
The elected positions of Treasurer, Town clerk, Sewer, and Water need to be appointed by Town administrator.

We need to pave more roads. I understand the high costs, but road such as Hastings Rd are in rough shape.

Cleaning up the local parks to provide better walking/hiking experiences. Or to create a better more scenic spot in town for outdoor activities. Add something to do there other then just walking. Maybe a DiscGolf course, basketball court or dog park

Need affordable single family homes.

Explore the Town’s ability to expand the headroom at the Sewer Treatment Plant, so more homes and businesses can connect.

As I stated earlier, Spencer is not an attractive town. No common, crowded and ugly downtown with many run down or boarded up buildings. Nothing to attract visitors, or make visitors feel like stopping in Spencer.

You forgot to mention how lovely Whitco's store is downtown. The town needs a ugly store award!

Continue to improve infrastructure and schools. Prouty is on its way to receive a well deserved update. Knox Train is nice but needs to be repaved and properly maintained. Continue to maintain wire village. Maintenance is key!

Downtown area needs to be cleaned up and crime is on the rise in that area as well. I will not even go into that price chopper parking lot anymore. We use to be a rural community now we are just a dumping ground for worcester's low income families that got priced out of the city

Roads could be fixed

Knox Trail Middle School is literally falling apart and is not being maintained. This is going to be a big expense for the town in the future.

Rents are out of hand

.

Re looking at private roads to make public roads

would be great to see the town hall open at least one evening.

Certain streets up town should be repaved like Prospect Street, McDonald Street and Charron Street.

You should force the current landlords to clean up their properties and bring them to code if need be. If they don't clean up their properties fine them. Also look into the Director of the Spencer senior center she is telling people that they cannot join for many reasons. This should not be tolerated.

The water/sewer station issue should be fully paid for before more town projects start. Spencer used to be a great place in my opinion. This low income attraction needs to stop. They pay nothing while you hurt the ones who actually pay. I’m about ready to start selling my properties and move my business elsewhere.

Did I mention the roads. Should be number one priority, after the sewer plant.

Spencer is now becoming the next boom town in Wocester county. Yet we fail to see that. Look at how Rutland Parks and Rec gets underwritten by sponsors ads at their ball fields. Where's ours? We have no

posted history exhibit of one of the oldest ball parks in America, O'Gara Field. Again, there's nothing mentioned nor taught to local students about it nor the Depot Trail and its significance. Nor do we have any benches for folks to sit along Depot TRail. Muzzy Meadow had a bench which a former town employee admitted to destroying with town snow operations. RT 31 work was supposed to see it replaced but it never happened. We have 50+ DCR WMA and DFW lands with over 1,900 acres in town plus the MidStae Trail. But we have little town hall to no involvement of parks and recreation coordinating with the State about it.And, they've flatly refused any attempts to get engaged with the State. We also have an airport. Where is tht for bring new business or flying clubs to town? Look to Woodstock or other fields in North Adams or Hopedale Airport's Light Industry airport which boasts numerous "clean light industry" tenants and restaurants: http://hopedaleindustrialpark.com/Tenants.html

Why isn't that option ever considered. We have the opportunity to work in developing much needed student pilots that is missed.

Seems there is no maintenance on town properties- Lake St School, sewer capabilities should have had a better plan

Large scale commercial Solar development in Spencer needs to stop because it is destroying our rural character and is misaligned with our vision statement.

I'm not happy with some things that have happened the roads in town and the cover up of the road surface testing. It needs to be talked about. Also, there seems to have been some shady things going on with the Finance committee. There needs to be more accountability. Our town manager, Mr Bridges, needs to be a bit more open. It seems it's his way or the highway. Interactions I've witnessed show him to not be open to discussion.

would like to see a nice recreactional area for the kids to have so they dont hang out on the streets. just somewhere safe for them to have activities especially if from a lower income family that can not afford the cost of sports for the kids. this will give them a chance to have fun and not have to worry about the family being able to afford the cost of signing up for sports.

In reality the budget controls most actions taken. Incentives to new businesses has worked in other towns and should be explored especially to provide good local work

how to bring in the tyounger generations, the future of our town

The library has excellent services for all ages. We need to take care of the building, and fix the heating system.

Need a Town Common

nmore options for race/ethnicity

Questions about fiscal responsibility of the town to maintain parks, our library building and town hall building. Maintenance is part of a budget.

While it’s very clear the current Cvs is undersized, I was sorry to see the trees and old house coming down to create Cvs on main corner.

The refurbishment of the sugden building is the right approach —- would be awesome if some of the other very run down yet beautiful brick buildings could be similarly refurbished. Main Street is not inviting, compelling. It could be so much more attractive.

Please stop making residents jump through hoops to build or improve their homes.

Stop encouraging low income housing. This makes the town unpleasant to visit / live in. I don’t feel comfortable walking on Main Street thanks to the plethora of drug addicts, and sketchy individuals.

I love the town of spencer but I see it going downhill. If changes are not made by the time I purchase a home I will exclude spencer from my search.

Library needs to be restored. It is a beautiful, historic building and a great asset to the town.

Grant money for sewer upgrades! This needs equal attention since it impacts everyone in town, now just the thousands of people hooked up to the sewer.

Stop putting in so much section 8 housing!

This town needs better fiscal management, not more taxes. We throw money out the window then wonder why we don't want to pay for new buildings

Make downtown safe fun and walkable. Think of Northampton. Or west Hartford Ct. where people can walk, get a cup of coffee and sit, visit.

Make the downtown pretty safe and inviting.

Rural roads are narrow, trees right on the edge of the road, potholes, NO stopsigns out in the outlying areas. Sometimes no stop lines either. Most one way RR bridge underpasses have NO stop signs and people just go flying through. Very unsafe and scary. Put stop sign and stop lines please.

I'd like to see more sidewalks in the rural areas of town

I think we need to offer more to kids. Boys and girls club, after school, recreational camps

Town should take a stance of support regarding inclusivity for immigrant and LGBTQ residents and businesses

I agree we need to have quality education however we can't have the cost increasing every year beyond the 2 1/2% it is not sustainable.

Winter storm travel is hazardous, especially nights and weekends, or weekdays when school is cancelled. It is my only complaint about this town - street plowing and sanding is never often enough or done well enough. My street is often untouched until *after* someone is hurt in an accident.

More events in town

Thank you!

I remember when Spencer was thriving 😉 Whomever took over this town has done a very poor job of sustainability. Just look around !!

Private ways/roads should be assisted with town upkeep. We are paying same tax rates yet get no assistance.

If you want to bring the community together there needs to be good events, good communication about events and a good place to have an event. More pot fests are probably not it though I don't object to them.

Our good new high school will hopefully be a location. Why isn't town hall used more?

There were a lot of questions I felt were not specific enough to get you meaningful answers. People have a lot of opinions based on how they feel at the moment but not because they have information to make informed decisions. I frequently felt you weren't asking the questions I wanted to answer. I appreciate your efforts though.

Need more public safety personal and improvement to public safety buildings. Possibly create a public safety complex. Also need to improve business plans in town to attract more businesses

Maintain what we have and be open to new commercial opportunities

How come there is a lack of business owners on this committee?

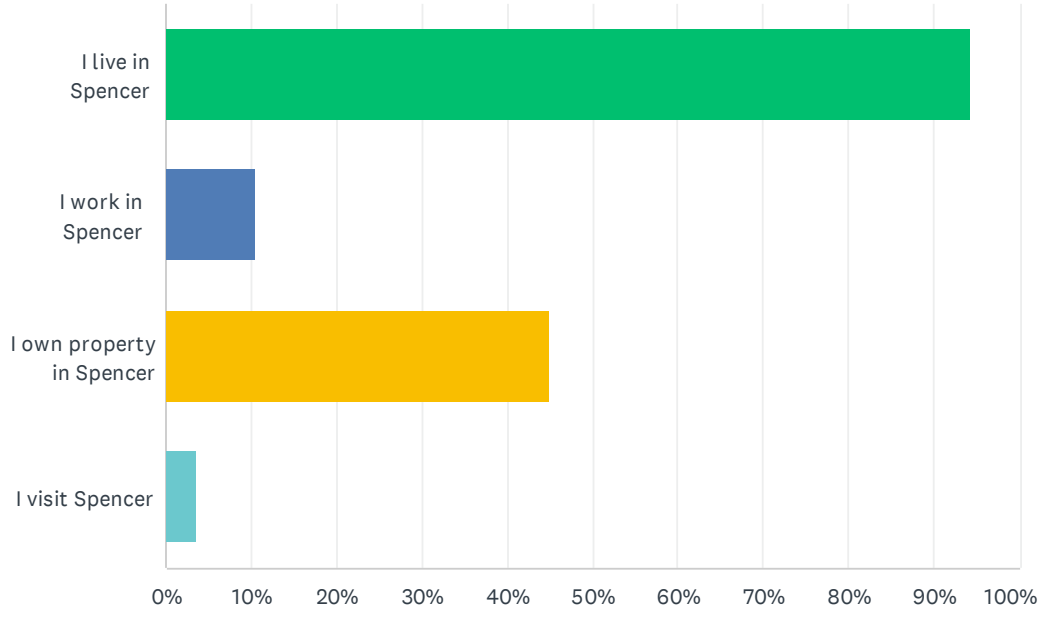
Solar farms are destroying the rural character of Spencer. Solar development should be stopped in Spencer.

The Town needs to find better ways to communicate with residents (social media, email list, digital board, etc). This town doesn't put on any fun events like neighboring towns. Why do I need to go to another town to do something fun?

No additional comments

Q1 What is your connection to Spencer? Please choose all that apply.

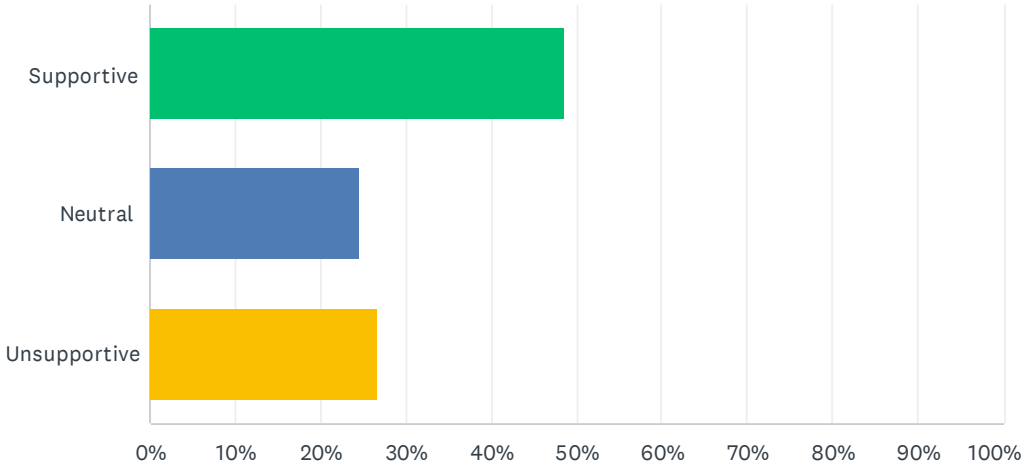
Answered: 191 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I live in Spencer	94.24%	180
I work in Spencer	10.47%	20
I own property in Spencer	45.03%	86
I visit Spencer	3.66%	7
Total Respondents: 191		

Q2 Please indicate your level of support for the following energy sector (electricity and usage) goal: Improve and expand municipal renewable energy utilization and generation.

Answered: 187 Skipped: 6



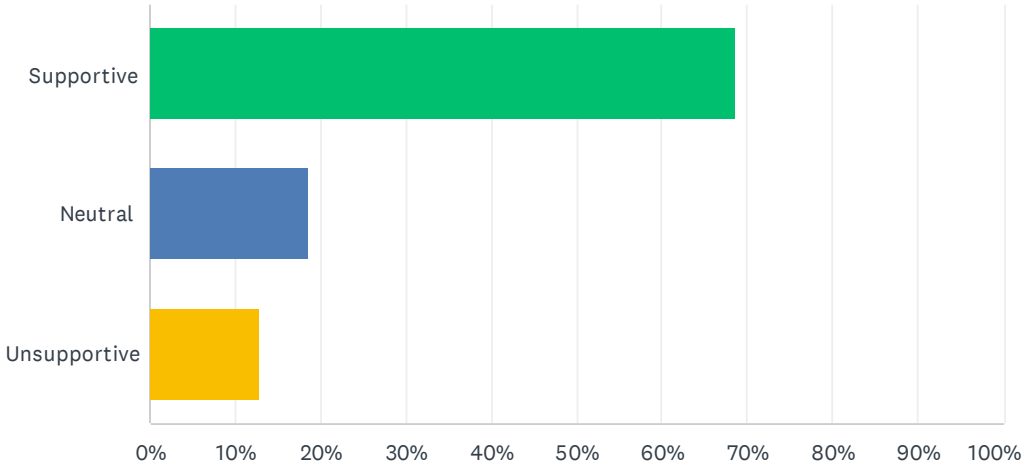
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Supportive	48.66%	91
Neutral	24.60%	46
Unsupportive	26.74%	50
TOTAL		187

#	OTHER/COMMENTS:	DATE
1	stop stop stop solar panels they just make money for your pockets only!! haven't seen any improvement on town electric bills! what the point of solar panels destroying lawns and endangering animals	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
2	No more solar farms.	8/16/2024 10:24 AM
3	Who is going to pay for all this? Our taxes are through the roof already, additionally, if buildings were maintaned the way they are supposed to be this really wouldn't be an issue.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
4	How many more solar fields do we need in town? It was explained to me by solar solicitors that many of the fees on my electricity bill are due to the solar fields, yet I recieve no discount at all for what they put out. My minimum bill is $250, without using any electricity. Who recieves the benefit of these panels??? Surely not anyone I know, or the environment they're placed on.	8/13/2024 9:16 AM
5	More Solar Panels on roofs is fine, but cutting down trees to put up more is counterproductive to conserving the environment	8/12/2024 9:13 PM
6	we need more onfo on how you will do this and how much it will cost us.	8/12/2024 6:27 PM
7	Solar fields turn good open spaces into a virtual desert and in my opinion are an abomination.	8/12/2024 8:34 AM
8	We have enough commercial solar farms	8/11/2024 6:21 PM
9	There is no reason for it and will just be used as a way to increase taxes and then I doubt funds would be allocated correctly.	8/11/2024 2:56 PM

10	Solar is not the answer	8/10/2024 7:30 AM
11	I want it but with out solar farms or giant windmills	8/10/2024 5:26 AM
12	Commercial solar sucks! Clear cutting acres of land is Stupid. Driving all the wildlife out with no placed to for them to live. This is all democrat Ideology. Vote out the democrats!	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
13	very vague-so misleading	8/9/2024 8:52 PM
14	The technology is not yet advanced enough to promote this any further. Solar, wind, and electroc cars have high costs that are not supported enough for the general public to afford or save on. The solar panels cannot currently be recycled, the wind turbines work occasionally, the electric cars are much to expensive, difficult to keep charged, and car fires require extensive man hours and expense to extinguish.	8/9/2024 2:46 PM
15	The current way of clear cutting for solar is totally unacceptable. Solar should be on commercial roofs and over commercial parking lots.	8/8/2024 11:10 AM
16	Renewable energy is under dependable	8/7/2024 11:28 PM
17	What does that even mean?	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
18	No more solar!!	8/7/2024 4:30 PM
19	If considering solar energy, prioritize utilizing existing buildings and parking lots rather than undeveloped land to minimize environmental impact.	8/7/2024 1:01 PM
20	As long as the cost of the renewable energy projects are compared to the projected savings to show true value	8/7/2024 10:41 AM
21	Bring costs down!!!	8/7/2024 9:49 AM
22	No more solar or wind generation. No Green New Deal!	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
23	Not in favor of expanding right now. We have way too many solar farms.	8/5/2024 7:31 PM
24	Not supportive if it's more of the green new scam power & money grab like the government is fleecing us for.	8/5/2024 12:52 AM
25	Only if we can preserve our forests and maintain our beautiful landscape. Solar on existing roof tops are fine	8/4/2024 7:05 PM
26	Not sure of details but would appreciate any relief from the extreme electric costs here	8/4/2024 3:44 PM
27	Save our landscape,from greed	8/4/2024 5:14 AM
28	Fix the roads first	8/4/2024 12:55 AM
29	No more solar panels	8/3/2024 8:08 AM
30	Not through privatized/for profit companies	8/3/2024 6:32 AM
31	No more solar farms in Spencer!	8/3/2024 2:38 AM

Q3 Please indicate your level of support for the following energy sector (electricity and usage) goal: Improve energy efficiency of residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial buildings in Spencer.

Answered: 188 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Supportive	68.62%	129
Neutral	18.62%	35
Unsupportive	12.77%	24
TOTAL		188

#	OTHER/COMMENTS:	DATE
1	stop corruption in town hall	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
2	I think the residents that lived in The town for years should get it fixed	8/13/2024 8:41 PM
3	Spencer has a number of fields with solar farms and more being built, yet our electricty bills keep going up. Who is actually benifiting from all this? It appears that it is all for show and only certain people are making out on this.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
4	Who is going to pay for my 1950's house to be more "energy efficient"? Who's going to pay for all the town's buildings to be energy efficient? At a time when folks are having issues buying groceries, who can even dream up extra money to be retrofitting our homes into "green" spaces? I won't even consider solar for my roof, as it was built to specs. far before solar was even implemented. Even if it was "free" who's going to pay for damage to roof, should it happen? Leaks create mold, mold is dangerous and not covered by insurance. I don't think so!	8/13/2024 9:16 AM
5	DO whatever you want with municipal buildings but leave residential, commercial and industrial alone.	8/12/2024 4:39 PM
6	Solar is not the answer	8/10/2024 7:30 AM
7	Improve what we have not always build new	8/10/2024 5:26 AM
8	Putting insulation in buildings is a no brainer. Making everyone pay for it in fees associated with electric bills is crazy.....and our bills keep going up.....this needs to stop. The democrats	8/10/2024 4:52 AM

	are pushing all these mandates.....STOP IT NOW!!!	
9	very vague-how?	8/9/2024 8:52 PM
10	See above	8/9/2024 2:46 PM
11	MA building code already handles this when works being done. Green grants would be another way to upgrade existing municipal buildings.	8/8/2024 11:10 AM
12	How much will it cost the taxpayers?	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
13	As long as it creates a true benefit to government, citizens and businesses	8/7/2024 10:41 AM
14	Mandatory monthly maintenance on buildings and equipment Hire competent maintenance people and a proven professional manager	8/7/2024 9:49 AM
15	Not enough information! You want to get rid of gas appliances! No Green New Deals!	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
16	Not sure what this means or how it would affect taxes. Not in favor in anything that would increase taxes. Killing single senior citizens savings.	8/5/2024 7:31 PM
17	Depends on the money!	8/5/2024 12:52 AM
18	No more solar farms!!!!	8/4/2024 9:08 PM
19	Put solar panels on buildings and parking lots to generate our own electricity for the town	8/4/2024 12:37 PM
20	Fix what we pay for now. Instead of looking for more revenue for other ventures that are to expensive	8/4/2024 12:55 AM

Q4 Are there any other goals related to the energy sector that YOU think the Town of Spencer should prioritize?

Answered: 72 Skipped: 121

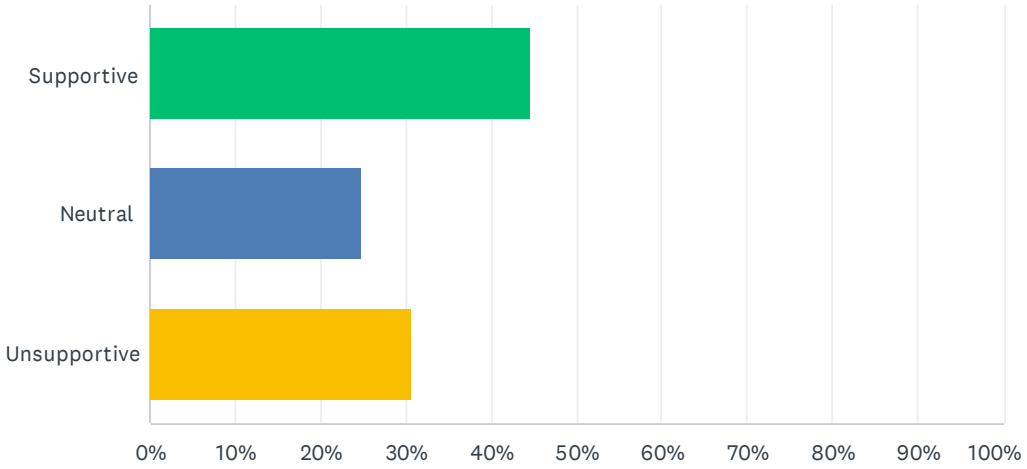
#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Energy cost savings	11/1/2024 1:50 PM
2	Energy cost savings	9/4/2024 6:12 PM
3	No	9/4/2024 5:58 PM
4	Limit solar farms, maybe find places to put raised solar panels to make carports (Lamoureux Ford has an example of this)	9/4/2024 5:56 PM
5	take light fixtures out of the middle of sidewalks, so people in scoots can get by	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
6	There are not enough public electric vehicle chargers in the town of Spencer.	8/21/2024 12:41 AM
7	Conservative use of current systems....	8/16/2024 10:24 AM
8	Leverage available incentives. Put on an RFP.explore ESIP	8/15/2024 9:53 PM
9	No	8/15/2024 7:13 PM
10	No more solar fields	8/14/2024 5:46 PM
11	Natural gas and propane are the best	8/14/2024 2:14 PM
12	None we’re already the solar capital of Massachusetts	8/14/2024 7:25 AM
13	Promote solar development on rooftops and parking lots versus wooded areas and fields.	8/13/2024 11:41 PM
14	Don't increase solar because solar fields decimate wooded areas that are important to the town's wildlife and attractiveness of for future residents.	8/13/2024 9:49 PM
15	Residents that lived in the town for years	8/13/2024 8:41 PM
16	I think the town of Spencer needs to be more accountable for things along with understanding how to maintain what is already here. It appears that the only way the people running this town know how to "improve" things is to build new, then let sit and get destroyed, then 20 years later build new again.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
17	Yes, stop adding more weight to the shoulders of residents with more costs!	8/13/2024 9:16 AM
18	Accessible renewable energy that keeps us relatively independent of most major companies	8/12/2024 9:13 PM
19	STOP ground based solar farms. NO MORE SOLAR.	8/12/2024 4:39 PM
20	Rooftops and parking lots are logical locations for solar arrays, not open agricultural land and cleared forests.	8/12/2024 8:34 AM
21	Stay away from solar and leave the woods undeveloped!	8/12/2024 6:05 AM
22	Yes. Plant Trees to replace the ones you allowed to clear cut for housing development or Solar installations. Trees provide the most valuable energy resources for our planet	8/11/2024 8:27 PM
23	Battery Storage for solar	8/11/2024 6:48 PM
24	Capping commercial solar farms. Forbidding deforestation for commercial solar farms. Requiring existing solar farms to contribute to support of Spencer Fire Department.	8/11/2024 6:21 PM
25	Anything that doesn't add ridiculous costs to our bills.	8/11/2024 2:56 PM
26	Maybe those mini turbines in the median of 49. Or solar over parking lots not fields	8/10/2024 5:26 AM
27	Clean energy is too expensive. Everyone i know is burning wood. Biden drove the price of oil	8/10/2024 4:52 AM

	up. I see chimneys on my street pushing out pollution everyday burning wood or coal. The States plan is not working.	
28	No	8/9/2024 2:46 PM
29	Clean up main street, crappy buildings look terrible	8/8/2024 7:54 AM
30	No more solar panels	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
31	Not that I know about	8/7/2024 8:58 PM
32	No more solar!!	8/7/2024 4:30 PM
33	Keeping National grid in check stop price hikes and make energy renewable and AFFORDABLE!	8/7/2024 1:01 PM
34	Build a nuclear power plant	8/7/2024 11:06 AM
35	Turn waste into energy	8/7/2024 9:49 AM
36	No more solar projects	8/7/2024 9:05 AM
37	Decrease solar farms	8/7/2024 7:29 AM
38	No	8/6/2024 9:42 PM
39	Affordability	8/6/2024 5:57 PM
40	You should give examples of what you plan to take away from our rights.	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
41	Stopping future solar farm development.	8/6/2024 2:53 PM
42	Conservation	8/6/2024 2:48 PM
43	Do not waste tax dollars by changing to battery operated vehicles	8/6/2024 9:39 AM
44	With all the solar farms taking our land, why aren't the residents offered a significant discount for using their services. The solar should benefit residents.	8/6/2024 5:54 AM
45	No	8/6/2024 2:50 AM
46	Support electric infrastructure upgrades and expansion to increase reliability for the increased demand due to fuel switching.	8/5/2024 10:08 PM
47	Yes. Joining in a pool of municipal to get lower rates. Many towns already do this. If you want to make your tax base happy this shoukd be a priority	8/5/2024 7:31 PM
48	Roi	8/5/2024 4:06 PM
49	I used to support solar farms. We have enough and need no more	8/5/2024 7:41 AM
50	Lower prices on everything	8/5/2024 4:41 AM
51	Yeah.....ENOUGH with this solar panel bullshit.....stop allowing natural land to be turned into boondoggle eyesores!	8/5/2024 12:52 AM
52	Move away from fossil fuels as soon as possible	8/4/2024 8:46 PM
53	Preserving our natural landscape and keeping trees	8/4/2024 7:05 PM
54	Cheapest form of energy taxes are high enough	8/4/2024 5:54 PM
55	Lowering electric bills of your residents	8/4/2024 5:08 PM
56	Some how negotiate better rates that aren’t determined by the state’s clean energy requirements which have driven prices up	8/4/2024 3:44 PM
57	please update pole for electric. I have 16 plus acres and would love to do solar or windmills . This could help power the town and cheaper.	8/4/2024 7:21 AM
58	Not another solar farm please	8/4/2024 5:41 AM
59	Save natural habitat,from solar eyesore takeover	8/4/2024 5:14 AM
60	How about cutting the amount of cops we have on road crews and cut the amount of people to	8/4/2024 12:55 AM

	fill potholes. All over done and unnecessary costs. We have no painted divider lines, potholes beyond belief. The roads are unsafe. Where is all the money going?	
61	I think this is very vague	8/3/2024 8:11 PM
62	No more solar farms!	8/3/2024 7:39 PM
63	Help keep costs low	8/3/2024 6:48 PM
64	Encourage utility companies to complete work in a more timely manner. The National Grid work on Maple St was supposed to be completed June 25th. It’s August now.	8/3/2024 6:25 PM
65	Limit the acreage dedicated to sacrificing open land for solar panels, instead put them over parking lots at Big Y plaza, Flexcon, Price Chopper.	8/3/2024 4:48 PM
66	Keep the solar off uncleared / wooded land. Spencer is one of the last places in the state with old growth forest.	8/3/2024 10:07 AM
67	Any town siting green energy initiatives should be rewarded for doing so through taxes paid or benefits to it's public	8/3/2024 7:08 AM
68	Multi-use solar fields (e.g. both solar panels and agricultural grazing land)	8/3/2024 6:32 AM
69	Stop the solar farms! Too many now	8/3/2024 2:38 AM
70	Solar for use at some stop signs and/or remote intersections?	8/3/2024 12:54 AM
71	Solar energy	8/2/2024 10:47 PM
72	No suggestions.	8/2/2024 7:31 PM

Q5 Please indicate your level of support for the following transportation sector goal: Encourage and support local and regional transportation decarbonization (fuel-switching) efforts.

Answered: 186 Skipped: 7



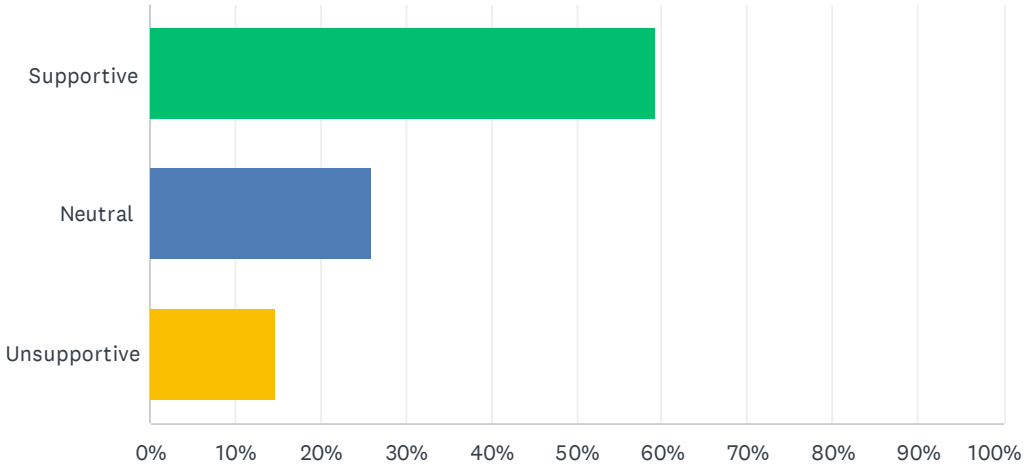
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Supportive	44.62%	83
Neutral	24.73%	46
Unsupportive	30.65%	57
TOTAL		186

#	OTHER/COMMENTS:	DATE
1	I don't see an electric car in my future	9/4/2024 6:07 PM
2	Electric vehicles are not viable at this time. More research and development are needed.	8/16/2024 10:24 AM
3	Fuel-Switching efforts? The electrical grid can't handle what's here already, you actually think adding more is going to be better? Additionally, where is the eletricity coming from? Unless you do solar and 100% solar for the vehicles (which I have no idea where you would put that), it's just a check box on the form to make people feel better.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
4	Do the leaders in this town realize many of us have trucks? We are a rural town filled with farms and blue collar workers. Our gasoline powered trucks already cost a pretty penny. Only those who have a ton of money and/or don't use their trucks for their daily work, would likely be willing to switch to electric. I'm not against electric vehicles... my family owned a hybrid when my spouse commuted to Boston, but they are not suitable for everyone or every walk of life.	8/13/2024 9:16 AM
5	switching to electric is pointless as it only increases production at power plants. shifting is not improving	8/12/2024 4:39 PM
6	I believe this refers to electric vehicle usage which has a very limited practical application in geographical areas that have very high and low seasonal temperatures. Hydrogen fueling seems to be far more practical inapplication.	8/12/2024 8:34 AM
7	I support fossil fuel	8/11/2024 8:27 PM

8	There is no reason for it. The answer is what electric vehicles. One of those batteries commits far more pollution in its creation than any gas vehicles.	8/11/2024 2:56 PM
9	Solar is not the answer	8/10/2024 7:30 AM
10	Better cheaper public transportation. It was cheaper to take 3 cars to Boston and park in 2 garages each than to take 14 people on the T.	8/10/2024 5:26 AM
11	Who can afford a EV. Majority of people i know don't like them. But i am sure the Democrats in this State will find away to force it down our throats, because that is what they do best.	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
12	What does this mean-all electric?	8/9/2024 8:52 PM
13	I'll buy gas thank you	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
14	No more battery powered anything	8/7/2024 4:30 PM
15	The procurement of hybrid police vehicles solely for the purpose of demonstrating their possession lacks strategic foresight. Prior to implementing such a decision, thorough evaluations of cost-effectiveness and reliability must be conducted.	8/7/2024 1:01 PM
16	I’m assuming this means programs like the CleanEnergy Connect Programs with Maine and Hydro Quebec	8/7/2024 10:41 AM
17	Cost and efficiency are major factors to be considered. Decarbonization is important but not with an unlimited price tag.	8/6/2024 5:57 PM
18	Electric vehicles are probably fine in the cities but the town of Spencer is not a big city. Electric vehicles use Lithium batteries which is bad for our environment as well.	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
19	Too soon and way too expensive right noe	8/5/2024 7:31 PM
20	WE DO NOT HAVE THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THIS ELECTRIC EVERYTHING BULLSHIT!	8/5/2024 12:52 AM
21	Not cost effective	8/4/2024 5:54 PM
22	Not sure what this is. If it raises costs then I would not support it	8/4/2024 3:44 PM
23	We need to have a place for batteries to get recyled. for the electric cars because in 5 yers this is going to be a nightmare	8/4/2024 7:21 AM
24	Not sure. Would have to think about this one.	8/4/2024 1:25 AM
25	Fix what we pay for now. No need for added costs to taxpayers. We are broke. Enough projects.	8/4/2024 12:55 AM
26	Unclear about what this is referring to	8/3/2024 9:34 PM

Q6 Please indicate your level of support for the following transportation sector goal: Increase access to alternative transportation options (transit & shared-use paths) for Spencer residents.

Answered: 189 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Supportive	59.26%	112
Neutral	25.93%	49
Unsupportive	14.81%	28
TOTAL		189

#	OTHER/COMMENTS:	DATE
1	put bus stop structure more sensible place	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
2	Seriously, we are a rural town, what a new "walking path" to get to the Black and White is going to make things better? You can't have walking paths in a rural town, things are too far away from each other.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
3	I have a vehicle, so this doesn't effect me, but I'm not opposed to others who need or want this.	8/13/2024 9:16 AM
4	MORE PUBLIC TRANSIT PLEASE	8/12/2024 9:13 PM
5	Please explain what you mean. These are VAGUE questions	8/11/2024 8:27 PM
6	There is already plenty of alternate transportation.	8/11/2024 2:56 PM
7	Keep the migrants out of Spencer. Take that crap and send it elsewhere, NOT IN SPENCER!	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
8	We already have rt 9 bus route and uber, etc... Most of Spencer requires a vehicle to get around. Provide rides for seniors or anyone else that needs medical care and can't get there.	8/8/2024 11:10 AM
9	For seniors yes!	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
10	The reduction of vehicle lanes to accommodate bike lanes is not a desirable solution. Instead, the addition of bike lanes should be achieved without compromising the existing vehicle lanes. Given the increasing number of vehicles on the road, it is imperative to prioritize the allocation	8/7/2024 1:01 PM

	of space for vehicles. Furthermore, it is essential to collaborate with state and federal government entities to extend Route 49 North to Route 2, thereby diverting truck traffic away from Route 31 and other rural roads. This measure would not only mitigate the deterioration of infrastructure but also alleviate traffic congestion and noise pollution.	
11	I think this question needs to be clarified somewhat. I'm answering assuming it means things like creating bike paths etc	8/7/2024 10:41 AM
12	As long as this doesn't mean redoing streets like they did to Mill Street Worcester I'm supportive.	8/7/2024 8:01 AM
13	Too many back roads to cover	8/7/2024 7:29 AM
14	Need more information	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
15	Very supportive	8/6/2024 2:48 PM
16	Exception would be town electric buses and other vehicles	8/5/2024 7:31 PM
17	I don't see much demand for this in specner	8/5/2024 4:06 PM
18	Making already small roads smaller to make bike lanes is ASININE	8/5/2024 12:52 AM
19	No, the roads are trash.	8/4/2024 12:55 AM
20	Unclear about what this is referring to	8/3/2024 9:34 PM

Q7 Are there any other goals related to the transportation sector that YOU think the Town of Spencer should prioritize?

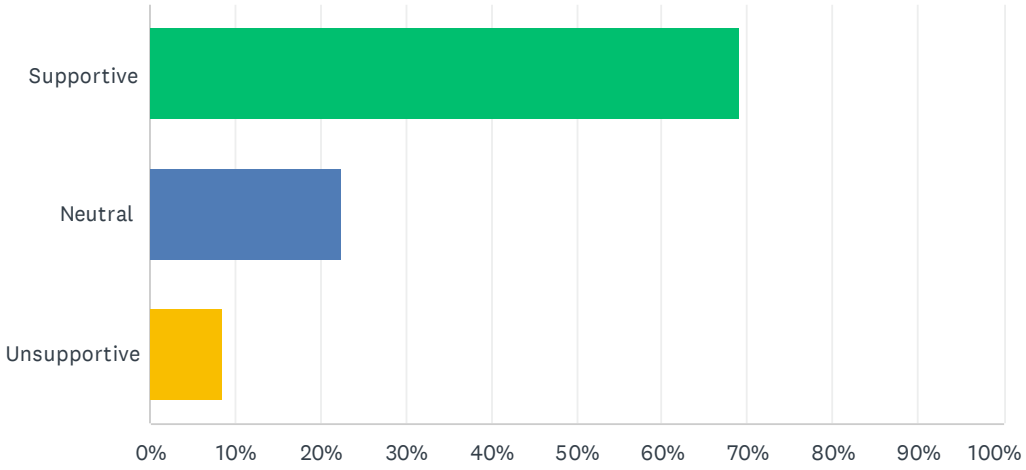
Answered: 46 Skipped: 147

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Fix and repair all roads	9/4/2024 6:08 PM
2	Repair and pave all roads!!	9/4/2024 6:02 PM
3	No	9/4/2024 5:58 PM
4	stop favoring ecclebberry family make them fix up property to be safe for the public	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
5	There are not enough public electric vehicle chargers in the town of Spencer.	8/21/2024 12:41 AM
6	No	8/15/2024 7:13 PM
7	Taxi Uber Lift	8/14/2024 5:46 PM
8	No	8/14/2024 7:25 AM
9	Bike lanes	8/13/2024 9:26 AM
10	Yes, fix the damn roads properly.. Without letting the people running the town pocket the money and then giving the town crappy roads.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
11	More buses passing through would be so helpful	8/12/2024 9:13 PM
12	NO	8/12/2024 4:39 PM
13	The free use of buses to and from Worcester is wonderful and access information should be much more freely available.	8/12/2024 8:34 AM
14	Well, coming from Europe, Scandinavia, or towns in other parts of USA, I see a need for extensive walking trails or alternative trails for other modes of transportation other than cars.	8/11/2024 8:27 PM
15	Transportation services for Senior citizens.	8/11/2024 6:21 PM
16	Repave some more roads. However get a new designer, the couple of newly paved intersections make no sense.	8/11/2024 2:56 PM
17	Increase downtown parking	8/10/2024 4:23 PM
18	We have public transpotation. We don't need the state to shove mandates down our throats….but this is where this is going. Vote republican!	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
19	More bike paths please.	8/9/2024 11:32 PM
20	No	8/9/2024 2:46 PM
21	Fix our roads	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
22	Cycling	8/7/2024 8:48 PM
23	The current state of our infrastructure is in dire need of urgent attention and maintenance. The utilization of liquid salt on roadways during winter months has proven to be highly detrimental, resulting in significant damage to our valuable vehicles estimated $3billion in northeast each year. It is imperative that we explore alternative methods for road maintenance and replacement that prioritize the preservation of our assets and minimize environmental impact.	8/7/2024 1:01 PM
24	I would like to see the downtown area feel more walkable. And encourage residents to move daily thru town center.	8/7/2024 8:01 AM
25	Pave roads or at least fill the craters in the road (potholes)	8/7/2024 7:29 AM
26	No	8/6/2024 9:42 PM

27	If roads are part of this then many roads are in bad shape.	8/6/2024 5:22 PM
28	Town bicycle options, ease of walkable ways	8/6/2024 2:48 PM
29	Fix the roads!! Every year funds should be used to fix roads, not using road money for other budget items and then asking for over rides to fix the roads. It should be a top priority, not last	8/6/2024 12:54 PM
30	Remain with gas and deseil operated vehicles	8/6/2024 9:39 AM
31	No	8/6/2024 2:50 AM
32	No	8/5/2024 7:31 PM
33	Roadways	8/5/2024 4:06 PM
34	Sidewalks & bike paths.	8/5/2024 2:54 PM
35	Rail public trans to Worcester and Boston	8/5/2024 2:51 PM
36	Senior/disabled transportation 7 days/week, and available for more hour in the day	8/5/2024 12:52 AM
37	Public vehicles should be electric or at least hybrid.	8/4/2024 8:46 PM
38	Please make more effort to fix the streets in Spencer. So many of the streets are in horrible condition. I sure it impacts car owners in repairs	8/4/2024 3:44 PM
39	spencer has a lot of one lane bridges, and this is a problem.	8/4/2024 7:21 AM
40	The roads. The town needs to be audited because we are spending money on unnecessary means to protect multimillion dollar insurance companies from liabilities. All the while we drive on dangerous roads.	8/4/2024 12:55 AM
41	Help elderly more	8/3/2024 6:48 PM
42	Some incentives for conservation on a personal level Charging stations that use solar sources to fuel vehicles	8/3/2024 7:08 AM
43	Larger/better paved bike lanes	8/3/2024 6:32 AM
44	Fix the roads!	8/3/2024 2:38 AM
45	It would be nice to have a t line to get to Worcester or Boston. Side walks!!!	8/2/2024 10:47 PM
46	Expanded rail line service.	8/2/2024 7:31 PM

Q8 Please indicate your level of support for the following waste sector goal: Reduce and utilize waste generated in Spencer.

Answered: 188 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Supportive	69.15%	130
Neutral	22.34%	42
Unsupportive	8.51%	16
TOTAL		188

#	OTHER/COMMENTS:	DATE
1	Don't understand how that would work??	9/4/2024 6:07 PM
2	I think the recycling at the transfer station does an excellent job!	9/4/2024 5:56 PM
3	be more sensible on pricing, stop being so greedy	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
4	Reduction in waste requires re education about packaging of purchased products.	8/16/2024 10:24 AM
5	Provide composting bins and education on how to use	8/14/2024 7:25 AM
6	Like what are you going tell people, they can't throw things out? Reduce waste, 90% of things that are to be recycled aren't simply because they just go in the recycle bin, then at the trash place get put into the bins with everything else and burned. What exactly are the plans, you can't put a question like this that simply a general statement.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
7	I'm all for reducing garbage and reusing items worthy to be salavaged....I'm not all for making it cost a fortune for folks to get rid of things they can no longer use. The state's law changes with textile "recycling" is enough to deal with, I'm not for adding town mandates and extra fees for someone needing to get rid of items like mattresses. This is just an incentive for people to dump their trash, while the rest of us pay the fees!	8/13/2024 9:16 AM
8	WHAT KIND OF WASTE Are we talking about the new oversized Waste Treatment Plant ? that cant take disposable wipes ? wipes	8/12/2024 6:27 PM
9	I pay privately	8/11/2024 8:27 PM
10	The transfer station has been broken for months still throwing things in dumpsters	8/10/2024 7:30 AM

11	Make nips redeemable so they’re less litter. Stop color bags for dump that makes twice as much plastic for each bag. We already pay for sticker	8/10/2024 5:26 AM
12	Our recycling center works fine. Nothing to change here!	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
13	Depends how	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
14	Let our transfer station take all residents and business trash	8/7/2024 4:30 PM
15	Have the Department of Public Works actually sweep the streets to clean up litter, start enforcing littering fines, and use inmate work crews to pick up trash!	8/7/2024 1:01 PM
16	To get support I think most citiezens need to be educated about possible ways to use waste	8/7/2024 10:41 AM
17	Town compost?	8/6/2024 8:50 PM
18	Not enough information. We already recycle	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
19	What does this mean? How could I support an idea with no plan indicated?	8/6/2024 12:54 PM
20	Not sure. You dont include what these things really are or what they mean. If it means passing laws to ban this and ban that , then no	8/5/2024 7:31 PM
21	Think the transfer station does a good job better than most	8/5/2024 4:06 PM
22	Depends on the money	8/5/2024 12:52 AM
23	How?	8/3/2024 8:11 PM
24	How will we utilize our waste? That needs to be stated prior to answering this question	8/3/2024 8:08 AM

Q9 Are there any other goals related to the waste sector that YOU think the Town of Spencer should prioritize?

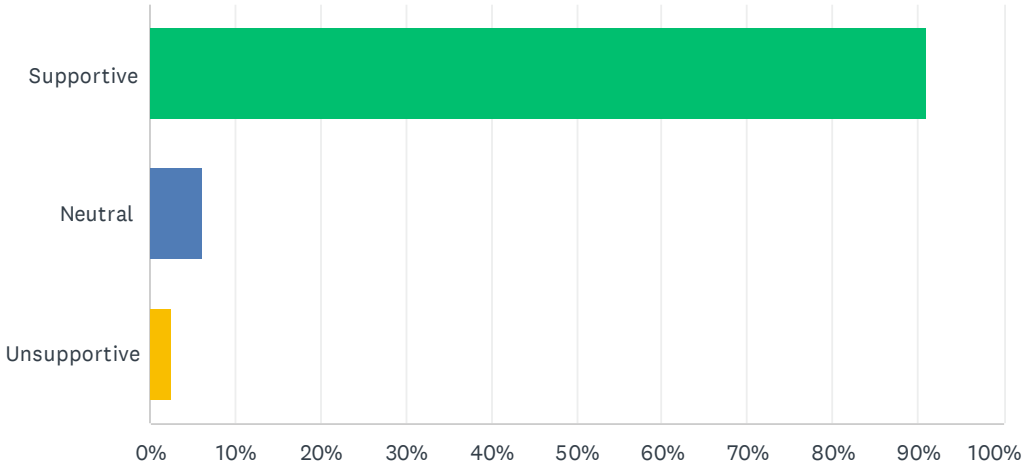
Answered: 49 Skipped: 144

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	have a well	9/4/2024 6:07 PM
2	No	9/4/2024 5:58 PM
3	lower the cost on town bags and transfer station stop the greed!! :(	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
4	There are no compost services available with the waste management companies. This should change to reduce waste.	8/21/2024 12:41 AM
5	Town waste pick up from residences rather than drop off	8/15/2024 7:13 PM
6	Transfer station open more often	8/14/2024 5:46 PM
7	Help residents start their own vegetable gardens at home and compost. Provide rain catching bins	8/14/2024 7:25 AM
8	Town wide trash pickup services.	8/13/2024 9:49 PM
9	Start composting	8/13/2024 8:51 PM
10	I think if you want to recycle, then actually recycle.. Otherwise, what is the point? A plan is needed to actually do something like this, asking a stupid general question achieves nothing.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
11	Could we have a hazardous waste event like other towns do? This would be something I would pay to participate in!	8/13/2024 9:16 AM
12	Transfer station	8/13/2024 6:43 AM
13	nothing that will cost residents money	8/12/2024 4:39 PM
14	The waste brought in from other cities or towns for disposal would be charged accordingly too balance the dump fees and bills.	8/11/2024 10:58 PM
15	Support recycling. Outlaw alcohol nips. More enforcement and penalties for littering/illegal dumping.	8/11/2024 6:21 PM
16	No	8/11/2024 2:56 PM
17	Battery, paint, and other hazardous material refuse.	8/10/2024 4:23 PM
18	Open more days, also if a holiday falls on the day that the transfer stations open or I should say closed open the following day	8/10/2024 7:30 AM
19	The state really screwed us over on the new sewer plant. Sewer bills are through the roof. We need to blow up the plant and make it go away.	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
20	Having it part of taxes	8/9/2024 10:15 PM
21	The side of roadways are covered with trash. Re-post signage for fines for littering, investigate ways in which highway department might also promote and assist with cleanup. and consider	8/9/2024 2:46 PM
22	Municipal composting	8/8/2024 8:59 PM
23	I like the free market and freedom of choice, but it would be more efficient to have 1 trash company in town. I see 10 different trash trucks on my road every day of the week when it could be just one.	8/8/2024 11:10 AM
24	Don't share dump when it's paid for by taxpayers, minus the small amount from selling bags	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
25	Reduce waste and cut costs; create incentives for people to reduce, reuse, and recycle.	8/7/2024 1:01 PM

26	No	8/6/2024 9:42 PM
27	Lower cost of waste removal for older citizens on fixed incomes.	8/6/2024 5:22 PM
28	None, they have a good recycling effort.	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
29	Continue recycling center.	8/6/2024 2:53 PM
30	Higher level of recycling	8/6/2024 2:48 PM
31	Restore transfer station and eliminate outside bins	8/6/2024 9:39 AM
32	No	8/6/2024 2:50 AM
33	No	8/5/2024 7:31 PM
34	Town should look into a trash company like Other towns gave examples Monson,Grafton and Rutland	8/5/2024 3:28 PM
35	Water treatment. Green waste, composting	8/5/2024 2:54 PM
36	Don't allow other towns to use our recycling center!	8/4/2024 9:08 PM
37	Limit the use of single use plastic	8/4/2024 8:46 PM
38	Recycling, plastic bag ban,	8/4/2024 7:57 PM
39	Recycling and encouraging composting of fall leaves and yard waste	8/4/2024 12:37 PM
40	Keep the transfer station up to date and running well	8/4/2024 9:45 AM
41	electric car batteries	8/4/2024 7:21 AM
42	Maybe work on trash pickup for the town first. This is the only town I've been to in recent years that doesn't have town wide pickup.	8/4/2024 5:41 AM
43	Recycling	8/4/2024 5:14 AM
44	Better equipment to support the town dump.	8/3/2024 9:34 PM
45	Any resident should be able to utilize the recycling at the transfer station without buying a permit.	8/3/2024 7:39 PM
46	Reduce the waist costs to help the elderly	8/3/2024 6:48 PM
47	Maximize efforts to separate storm water from waste water sent to the treatment plant.	8/3/2024 7:08 AM
48	Stop single use plastic bags.	8/3/2024 6:42 AM
49	Compost program	8/2/2024 10:47 PM

Q10 Please indicate your level of support for the following agricultural & natural lands sector goal: Conserve and enhance natural lands and woodlands.

Answered: 191 Skipped: 2



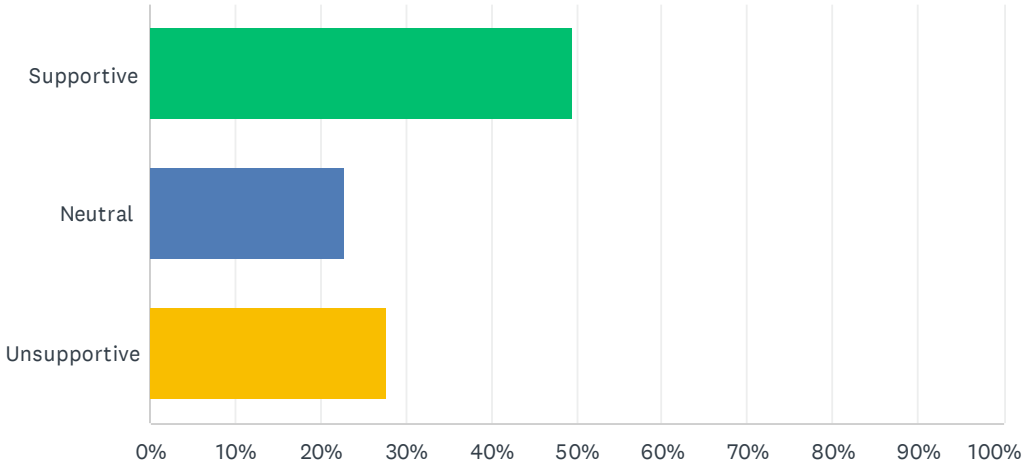
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Supportive	91.10%	174
Neutral	6.28%	12
Unsupportive	2.62%	5
TOTAL		191

#	OTHER/COMMENTS:	DATE
1	If we lose natural lands and woodland we'll never get them back	9/4/2024 5:56 PM
2	stop the useless solar panels destroying lands, killing off wildlife just so the town offices can make money! shame	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
3	No more solar farms. No overdevelopment.	8/16/2024 10:24 AM
4	Our forests have been ripped apart for solar already displacing all the animals	8/14/2024 7:25 AM
5	Yea.. I would be supportive if Spencer actually did something with the WMA area's.. Spencer states they have WMA, but it's trash, nothing is done with them, no Timber Stand Improvement, No prescribed burning, no field clearing, no anything on any of the lands that are WMA or deemed for Conservation. I honestly don't think Spencer knows what conservation or WMA lands actually means. Again it's just another check box.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
6	We need farmland, we need natural lands and woodlands... I don't see much in the way of land management for wildlife in town, or even in the area. We allow areas to overgrow, which does create issues for animal like deer. People like to complain that housing developments take away wildlife's homes, but so does just leaving land to sit, without managing invasive plant life and an overgrowth of trees. What good are woodlands if the animals can't get through it?	8/13/2024 9:16 AM
7	Definitely would want to see local parks better attended to	8/12/2024 9:13 PM
8	Again, we need more onfo on how you will do this and how much it will cost us.	8/12/2024 6:27 PM

9	No more development - fix the disgusting, decrepit areas of town if you want to improve it.	8/12/2024 6:05 AM
10	What the Town of Spencer has done is heinous , reprehensible and should be treated as criminal.	8/11/2024 8:27 PM
11	Conserve yes. Enhance? Well then it's not natural anymore!	8/11/2024 2:56 PM
12	What agricultural land sector goal? The State Maura Healey wants to cover all our farms with solar panels. That is her goal.....she needs to go!	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
13	Stop cutting trees down for solar	8/8/2024 10:20 PM
14	This should be one of the towns highest priorities.	8/8/2024 11:10 AM
15	100 percent	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
16	Leave our current woods and farmers alone	8/7/2024 4:30 PM
17	Halt the disruption of our rural community caused by excessive solar and housing developments. Instead, prioritize the preservation and maintenance of our rural community's unique character and way of life.	8/7/2024 1:01 PM
18	I think that again people need more education. We can’t just conserve so much land bu people grabbing it because it’s a good deal and leaving little land for commercial development. I think conservation alist thinkers need to work with developers to utilize the land parcels to the towns best interest. Some parcels could be conserved in one area and developed in another.	8/7/2024 10:41 AM
19	Stop solar farms which are detrimental to wildlife	8/7/2024 7:29 AM
20	When I lived in Maryland they came to my property and flagged off areas where I was not allowed to build on. IT IS MY Property!	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
21	As long as taxes are raised on a % basis to do so. This is punitive to homeowner that take care of their property.	8/6/2024 12:54 PM
22	Very supportive. No more solar farms please	8/5/2024 7:31 PM
23	Best forests in mass but the conservation committee can be out of line unreasonable at times they need to be checked	8/5/2024 4:06 PM
24	Create and support hiking & biking trails on natural lands and woodlands	8/5/2024 3:26 PM
25	No more solar fields	8/5/2024 2:13 PM
26	Preventing large scale solar fields	8/4/2024 7:05 PM
27	As long as it can be used by all .hunting allowed	8/4/2024 5:54 PM
28	Consider using some land for a large park for families and local sports	8/4/2024 3:44 PM
29	Did McDonald's think of the town allowed them to build on a swamp land?	8/4/2024 12:55 AM

Q11 Please indicate your level of support for the following agricultural & natural lands sector goal: Achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions from Spencer's agricultural operations (through improved soil and livestock management AND natural lands conservation)

Answered: 188 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Supportive	49.47%	93
Neutral	22.87%	43
Unsupportive	27.66%	52
TOTAL		188

#	OTHER/COMMENTS:	DATE
1	what would the expense be for these individuals is it affordable	9/4/2024 6:07 PM
2	stop the greed!!	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
3	Involve the farmers in any livestock management including trying to achieve zero greenhouse gas emissions.	8/16/2024 10:24 AM
4	Support organic farmers!!	8/14/2024 7:25 AM
5	Umm.. Is this a serious question? What big commerical business are in Spencer that deal with this.. We don't have livestock in any large capacity in Spencer. I don't think anyone in Spencer knows how to improve the soil as the WMA's would benfit from it and it's not done there, so why would it change for this. I think Spencer and MA as a whole, would learn quite a bit from hunters down South who actually implement TSI and Prescribed Fire.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
6	Do we have commercial farm situations in Spencer? No.. there are no big, industrial type farms that I know of. A few cows in a field isn't hurting the environment. I'm all for soil preservation and education in that department, with crop and grazing roations, and using the "right" fertlizers if needed and less pesticides that damage the soil. I'm not for the town depleting town's people's livihoods in the process, nor am I in favor of the average "homesteading" family no longer being able to provide their own food in a rural/agricultural town!	8/13/2024 9:16 AM

7	As long as it’s a gradual process that doesn’t force hardship on average people	8/12/2024 9:13 PM
8	we need more onfo on how you will do this and how much it will cost us. If you are talking about Government taking over control of foor sources, no.	8/12/2024 6:27 PM
9	extra costs for local operations with minimal effect on air quality	8/12/2024 4:39 PM
10	Agricultural operations are for-profit businesses and therefore operated to produce maximum remunerations. Unless there is an actual blatant ecological damage being perpetrated, operators should be encouraged in their pursuits and not hindered by regulations propagated by those who are not educated in the realities of this work.	8/12/2024 8:34 AM
11	Nobody here wants scam, net-zero, green-energy bullshit! We are pissed this crap is in our town!	8/12/2024 6:05 AM
12	Give me a break. That’s insane to make this even an issue.	8/11/2024 8:27 PM
13	That is such a laughable subject. It's a total myth anything is needed anywhere.	8/11/2024 2:56 PM
14	And put another burden on the farmers I don't think so	8/10/2024 7:30 AM
15	As long as it doesn’t make farming harder like too many impossible restrictions	8/10/2024 5:26 AM
16	Net zero will never happen. This is made up by the Democrats. Just keep clear cutting and adding solar panels to our farm land.....Democrats are Jerks!	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
17	Not enough information for a citizen to make a comment on. How will this be done? At what expense to the farmer?	8/9/2024 8:52 PM
18	I think that is something to strive for, but would not support mandating it. I am not a farmer, but they have it hard enough already. Maybe a financial reward for achieving net 0, but not mandatory compliance for small farms.	8/8/2024 11:10 AM
19	How?	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
20	I’m supportive but I think we need junk to fully understand how efforts like these will impact the farmers in our community so that we don’t create laws that will put them out of business. We should work with to increase their knowledge of new markets where planting different crops would give higher profits	8/7/2024 10:41 AM
21	Agriculture is Agriculture. It's needed so don't put MORE restrictions on the farmers.	8/7/2024 9:05 AM
22	Don't bankrupt the few farmers left in town. Work with them; listen to them; respect their expertise.	8/6/2024 5:57 PM
23	Not enough information. Sounds like another Green New Deal agenda	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
24	Need more info. At what cost? Who's cost?	8/6/2024 12:54 PM
25	As long as it doest impact local farmers negative	8/5/2024 4:06 PM
26	No more solar fields	8/5/2024 2:13 PM
27	More green new scam bullshit	8/5/2024 12:52 AM
28	Leave the farmers alone hard enough for them to earn a living	8/4/2024 5:54 PM
29	If it’s not a burden for farmers	8/4/2024 3:44 PM
30	Leave farmers alone,no farms no food	8/4/2024 5:14 AM
31	One town, state, or country isn't going to change a thing. It just makes more revenue for the town, state governments. Unless it's mandatory for all 50 states. It's nonsense and wasting our money. We are broke. Enough	8/4/2024 12:55 AM
32	Most of this idea is political. Supporting farms is not about carbon net neutral	8/3/2024 7:39 PM
33	Are you talking about methane emitted from livestock?	8/3/2024 8:08 AM
34	Expand net-zero goals to ALL businesses.	8/3/2024 6:42 AM

Q12 Are there any other goals related to the agricultural & natural lands sector that YOU think the Town of Spencer should prioritize?

Answered: 53 Skipped: 140

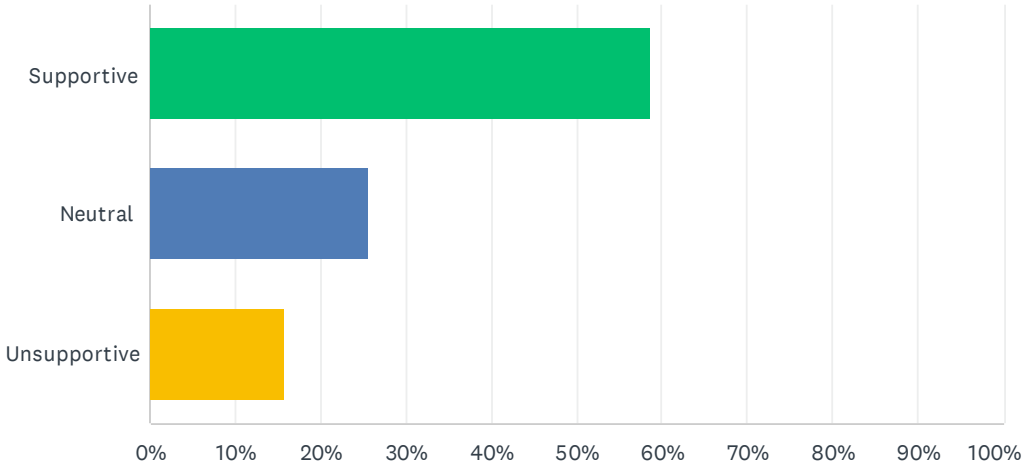
#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	No	9/4/2024 5:58 PM
2	get grants for conservation land	9/4/2024 5:56 PM
3	Stop solar panels they are not helping anything	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
4	Farmers need to be involved in any changes suggested.	8/16/2024 10:24 AM
5	No	8/15/2024 7:13 PM
6	More support for farms and homesteading	8/14/2024 5:46 PM
7	Leave it the way it should is.	8/14/2024 2:14 PM
8	Enough of the solar panels in this small town	8/14/2024 7:25 AM
9	Yea.. I would be supportive if Spencer actually did something with the WMA area's.. Spencer states they have WMA, but it's trash, nothing is done with them, no Timber Stand Improvement, No prescribed burning, no field clearing, no anything on any of the lands that are WMA or deemed for Conservation. I honestly don't think Spencer knows what conservation or WMA lands actually means. Again it's just another check box.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
10	Proper land management and education in this matter, so long as those teaching know what they're talking about!	8/13/2024 9:16 AM
11	Fruit trees and public gardens	8/12/2024 9:13 PM
12	NO	8/12/2024 4:39 PM
13	Great Britain got a drastic education as to the importance of agricultural land during World War Two when they couldn't get the food imports they relied on. Agricultural and forest land should be preserved and protected whenever possible. Not every piece of land needs a building on it.	8/12/2024 8:34 AM
14	Prioritize keeping the lands agricultural and natural!	8/12/2024 6:05 AM
15	Yes. Preserve as much open land as remains; even putting moratoriums on building or implementing a requirement for building permits to fall within a 5 acre area or more. Other towns do this. What is wrong with the town planning that they did not foresee a problem in future 20 years ago?	8/11/2024 8:27 PM
16	Preserve land and agriculture	8/11/2024 6:48 PM
17	Tax breaks for these	8/11/2024 6:21 PM
18	No	8/11/2024 2:56 PM
19	Get rid of all the Beaver dams	8/10/2024 7:30 AM
20	Encourage more. Use for school lunch supply	8/10/2024 5:26 AM
21	Get the STATE out of our lives. STOP COMMERCIAl SOLAR!!!!	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
22	De-regulate and help farmers	8/8/2024 10:20 PM
23	the town should support our local farmers to the fullest extent that's reasonable. They provide goods and open space to our town as well as many other benefits and history.	8/8/2024 11:10 AM
24	Help the 4-h camp	8/8/2024 7:54 AM
25	Keep our land, forests, and farms	8/7/2024 9:27 PM

26	Release wolves into Spencer	8/7/2024 11:06 AM
27	Agriculture has been going on for centuries and is definitely needed to sustain life. Young people should consider farming as a way of life. Make it profitable to entice workers into farming	8/7/2024 9:49 AM
28	No	8/6/2024 9:42 PM
29	Get more funding from the Commonwealth for state owned lands. The state pays too little to support maintenance and conservation.	8/6/2024 5:57 PM
30	Leave the cows alone and let them fart! I Do NOt Support The Green New Deal!	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
31	I am a supporter of Common Ground Land Trust and their efforts.	8/6/2024 12:54 PM
32	Land Conservation	8/6/2024 7:18 AM
33	No	8/6/2024 2:50 AM
34	No	8/5/2024 7:31 PM
35	We Need more farms less solar farms the Abby solar farm is a disaster ruined a beautiful land	8/5/2024 4:06 PM
36	Pollinator habitats (on the medians/ hell strips). Focused efforts on policy and regulations on invasive management and control including proper herbicide/pesticide use. ie. Mosquito sprays and their negative effect on land/ aquatic habitats. Negative effect of herbicide runoff into aquatic habitats. Oversight on lawn care within the watersheds. ie. nitrogen runoff and algae blooms in the ponds. A community garden. More land conservation efforts and protecting what we have left from over development. Encouraging and supporting the few farmers we have left in the area to use sustainable and regenerative methods.	8/5/2024 2:54 PM
37	Farms and aggriculture good	8/5/2024 2:13 PM
38	STOP DRIVING UP THE COST OF LIVING IN SPENCER! THE WATER/SEWER BILL IS OUTRAGEOUS!!!!! WHY DO ILLEGALS GET EVERYTHING FREE, BUT IF ME, A DISABLED PERSON, CAN'T PAY THE WATER/SEWER BILL, SOMEONE IS RIGHT THERE, RIGHT AWAY TO SHUT IT OFF ON A 90° DAY! STOP SPENDING MONEY WE DON'T HAVE!!!	8/5/2024 12:52 AM
39	Leave the livestock alone	8/4/2024 9:08 PM
40	Preserve farm land and natural spaces. Be smart with new construction	8/4/2024 8:46 PM
41	Public vegetable garden	8/4/2024 7:57 PM
42	Preventing large scale solar fields	8/4/2024 7:05 PM
43	Protecting the last farms in Spencer to prevent them from being turned into solar farms! Also stopping our woods from being clear-cut in order to build solar farms! Solar arrays belong on rooftops and parking lots, not on old forests!	8/4/2024 12:37 PM
44	the town should have more places for vets to live	8/4/2024 7:21 AM
45	These are ridiculous “goals” when downtown looks like trash. Clean up downtown before you worry about this stuff	8/4/2024 5:41 AM
46	More farms, land to grow food, animals to graze, Spencer is loosing its landscape to ugly solar take over	8/4/2024 5:14 AM
47	Defund the government. They're out of control. All of them Town, State, and Federal.	8/4/2024 12:55 AM
48	Preserve lands	8/3/2024 6:48 PM
49	Conservation of open spaces and natural areas. Stop the solar fields!!!	8/3/2024 5:42 PM
50	The town should look at taking over the ownership of Howe pond ,	8/3/2024 4:26 PM
51	agrivoltaic and ease of siting any solar projects that reduce the use of grid power and a simple way to put excess generation into the system	8/3/2024 7:08 AM
52	Pursue opportunities for multi-use land (e.g. solar panels and grazing fields on the land), reduce use of pesticides (e.g. anti mosquito lawn treatments), incentives for natural/native	8/3/2024 6:32 AM

	lawn alternatives to grass	
53	Preserve as much agricultural and natural lands.	8/2/2024 7:31 PM

Q13 Please indicate your level of support for the following general goal: Increase and maintain Spencer's capacity to plan for energy and environmental resiliency.

Answered: 184 Skipped: 9



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Supportive	58.70%	108
Neutral	25.54%	47
Unsupportive	15.76%	29
TOTAL		184

#	OTHER/COMMENTS:	DATE
1	we need to limit and put strict laws on solar farms	9/4/2024 5:56 PM
2	pay for town park employee instead of relying on volunteers	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
3	Need more detail on exactly what that statement means.	8/16/2024 10:24 AM
4	Depends on what it is	8/14/2024 5:46 PM
5	LOL.. Spencer can't maintain building for their kids to go to school in, doubt they can maintain something of this magnatude.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
6	We do have issues with the electrical grid... I do believe our town needs updates, especially in some areas. We need proper land management for our wildlife.	8/13/2024 9:16 AM
7	This town can't plan a road and clearly needs responsible leadership.	8/12/2024 6:05 AM
8	This is vague. I do not understand what the issue is here. Energy (?) Environmental " resilience " is not an option when you have allowed a town to destroy its natural resources.	8/11/2024 8:27 PM
9	Stop pretending to care about our environment. You are a joke in this town	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
10	This is a poorly written question. How do you increase the "capacity to plan?" Provide more pencils and paper?	8/9/2024 11:32 PM
11	Many folks in Spencer have wood stoves and generators. Solar on commercial properties	8/8/2024 11:10 AM

	makes sense as well.	
12	What does that mean	8/7/2024 9:27 PM
13	Hopefully plan using common sense and proven methods	8/7/2024 9:49 AM
14	Plan being the operative word. Create a plan with an annual action plan, review and revise every year openly and honestly. Don't just say there's no money so we're going to ignore it.	8/6/2024 5:57 PM
15	Not enough information!	8/6/2024 4:17 PM
16	Again, what does this mean? All these ideas are being asked about in a very general way that of coarse the idea sounds great, but how do you propose to do so?	8/6/2024 12:54 PM
17	Do it economically based no solar or wind farms	8/5/2024 2:13 PM
18	Not at the expense of deforestation	8/4/2024 7:05 PM
19	Very vague statement	8/3/2024 8:11 PM
20	No more solar farms	8/3/2024 7:39 PM
21	If this involves electric battery storage areas it's a NO	8/3/2024 8:08 AM

Q14 Any other comments or suggestions related to energy & environmental resiliency in Spencer?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 164

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Spencer can't do the things they need to do now.	9/4/2024 5:58 PM
2	stop being greedy!! have some common sense would nice to know how all those stupid solar panels are helping? What good they do, and explain how it benefits the wildlife, it just forces animals on our properties looking for something to eat, increase road kill, we need the trees and brush for birds to migrate and keep the bug/mosquito population down, you are killing them off just so you can line your pockets with money! shame on you all	9/4/2024 5:52 PM
3	A lot more detail on ideas that are being shared in this survey.	8/16/2024 10:24 AM
4	No	8/15/2024 7:13 PM
5	No more solar	8/14/2024 5:46 PM
6	This is critically important in light of more extreme weather.	8/14/2024 1:13 PM
7	Support the community to do things like plant gardens to lower the demand for goods. Support composting efforts to lower the demand on the dump.	8/14/2024 7:25 AM
8	I think Spencer needs to understand what the words Maintain means.. There are buildings that are 100's of years old in MA that work properly, but most public buildings in Spencer that are 50 years old or older are falling down or not properly maintained.	8/13/2024 9:24 AM
9	NO	8/12/2024 4:39 PM
10	Energy producing solar panels should get strong support on all new constructions and be retrofitted to existing locations whenever possible.	8/12/2024 8:34 AM
11	It would be irresponsible to allow the further development of solar projects in Spencer. They damage the natural beauty of the land and they aren’t wanted by anybody.	8/12/2024 6:05 AM
12	No. I’ve written my comments already.	8/11/2024 8:27 PM
13	Like you really care about our environment sticking all those Solar panels in our town.	8/10/2024 4:52 AM
14	No	8/6/2024 9:42 PM
15	Get the selectmen on board. Hold their feet to the fire and make sure each one says clearly whether he is for or against the initiative.	8/6/2024 5:57 PM
16	It would be great if the town had its own electricity production so we didn’t have to rely on National Grid.	8/6/2024 5:22 PM
17	My biggest concern is destruction of agricultural and forested land in Spencer from large scale solar development. Energy resiliency can be achieved by siting solar on parking lots, roads, and municipal buildings.	8/6/2024 4:48 PM
18	Encourage green building with tax based incentives. E courage small business so rt. 9 doesn't keep developing burger kings.	8/5/2024 4:06 PM
19	LOWER THE COSTS! STOP BEING SHADY! THIS TOWN GOVERNMENT IS SHADY AF AND EVERYONE KNOWS IT!	8/5/2024 12:52 AM
20	Our road is a rural road in a residential neighborhood. It's being used by the solar companies running back and forth causing our road to break down.	8/4/2024 9:08 PM
21	Install heat pumps in public buildings. This will be a good example for residents to follow suit. Lead by example and show support for protecting the environment and being energy efficient. Also focus on renewable energy over polluting fossil fuels.	8/4/2024 8:46 PM

22	There’s already enough regulations and laws let the people live like they want	8/4/2024 5:54 PM
23	No more solar farms	8/4/2024 5:41 AM
24	No more solar farms	8/3/2024 7:39 PM
25	I just want to help and support Spencer as a town with a great history and great future	8/3/2024 6:48 PM
26	This survey speaks in generality's. You need to be more specific with your ideas.	8/3/2024 8:08 AM
27	local building codes, especially commercial, should require solar whenever feasible and all solar projects as an accessory use should be encouraged	8/3/2024 7:08 AM
28	reduce use of pesticides (e.g. anti mosquito lawn treatments), incentives for natural/native lawn alternatives to grass	8/3/2024 6:32 AM
29	No suggestions.	8/2/2024 7:31 PM