



Town of Warren 2025 Master Plan



2025 Town of Warren Massachusetts Master Plan

A comprehensive Master Plan prepared with technical assistance from the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) and funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts One Stop for Growth program and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Agency

Trish Settles
Dominique Dutremble
Mike Maughan-Brown
Elena Ion
Sarah O'Brien, Lead
Jane Wyrick
Kerrie Salwa
Robert Raymond
Adam Wriggins
Joe Sziabowski
Eric Gemperline
Gloria Agossou
Jordan Hollinger
Greer Jarvis
Victoria Chavez
Sherrie Haber



Town of Warren

Jim Ferrera, Town Administrator

Community Development Advisory Committee

Jeremy Olson, Chair
Richard Eichacker
Steve Cristol
Jim McKeon
Dan Thibodeau



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Warren, Massachusetts

The Town of Warren, located between Worcester and Springfield, hugs the western boundary of Worcester County. The town's development pattern of agriculture, mills, and residential use was shaped by the Quaboag River, which runs through West Warren Village and Warren Village (known in this document as the Town Common Area).

4,975 people live in 2,197 housing units that are generally located in proximity to the two villages. The median household income is \$66,587, significantly lower than Worcester County's \$94,099. However, only 9.1% of people in Warren are 'in poverty', very similar to Worcester County's 11%. This suggests Warren is home to a blue-collar community with over two-thirds of its residents not holding a bachelor's degree.

Warren is no longer a hub for employment. The closure of mills and decline of small business in the villages have led to an average commute time of 38 minutes for residents. Remaining jobs in town are in management and business, sales and office occupations, and service occupations.

Due to this economic shift, the Town relies heavily on state and federal grant programs for planning capacity and infrastructure support. Current residents experience a rural, low-capacity structure of local government, reliant on volunteer capacity. Residents are appre-

hensive to local investments with potential to raise the residential tax rate, which currently sits at \$14.81 per thousand.

Through community engagement, it was expressed that Warren residents enjoy the current rural development pattern of Warren and seek to preserve current farms and large swaths of forest. The natural beauty of waterways and trees attracts residents and visitors to the town.

Opportunity to shift the Town's economics lies in a balance of optimizing strong infrastructure left over from the industrial boom and boosting ecotourism from the Quaboag River and trails. The location of Warren can be an asset due to its proximity to I-90 and metropolitan areas to the east, and as a gateway to Western Massachusetts for suburban and urban tourists.

**All data sourced from the 2023 American Community Survey*

What is a Master Plan?

A Master Plan is an ambitious communication of a town's unique vision. Compiled data of existing conditions, resident feedback, and land use best practices create a uniform direction for future development, economy, and society.

Massachusetts General Law 41, Section 81D requires planning boards to prepare master plans for their communities with regular updates to reflect community changes.

It is important to note that in Massachusetts, master plans do not create, mandate, or implement anything. This plan is a roadmap to advise decisions based on conditions during the time of publication. It is expected that the needs of Warren will evolve over the lifespan of this plan, and actions will change accordingly.

External forces of state and federal government regulations and incentives, private developer projects, and fluctuating macro-economic conditions all steer everyday decisions by Warren leaders.

The value of a master plan is combining factors that are typically siloed into one discussion. For instance, how do residential land use patterns affect the tax levy, therefore affecting funding available for municipal building upkeep?

This Master Plan both articulates Warren's special conditions that conflict with blanket assumptions, as well as regional similarities that lend themselves to adhering to best practices and sparking collaboration.

Post-industrial New England town governing is inherently difficult. A lack of commercial or industrial tax base, paired with sprawling single-family development and out-of-town commuting is a recipe for budget deficit. A good portion of local investments are completed through state or federal programs, typically with additional grant reporting and requirements. This document provides recommendations for continuing grant programs while boosting local independence through a strong commercial and industrial tax base.



Timeline



- Plan Kick-Off** January 2024
- Committee Kick-Off** February 2024
- Community Survey Launch** March 2024
- Community Workshop** May 2024
- Vision Statement Development** June 2024
- Chapter Strategy Discussions** July 2024-January 2025
- Draft Chapter Edits** November 2024-June 2025
- Full Plan Review** July 2025
- Public Comment Period** August 2025
- Final Plan Edits** September 2025
- Planning Board Approval** November 2025

Prior Planning

Referenced Local Plans:

Warren Master Plan, 2006

The 2006 Master Plan was developed in partnership with the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The plan compiles a basic economic, demographic, and geographic inventory of the town as well as the Quaboag Valley region, a community profile through interviews and meetings with residents as well as public officials, observing and documenting town landscape features, and tabulating and analyzing general survey data.

Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) & Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan (MVP), 2023

The Town of Warren received funding from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to develop a Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) and a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan (MVP). In 2022, CMRPC worked with the Town to create one combined report for both Hazard Mitigation and Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness. This report details mitigation strategies that were broken into four categories to facilitate local implementation discussions, especially regarding budget considerations and roles/responsibilities.

Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2022

In 2022, Warren's Open Space and Recreation Committee along with CMRPC updated the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan. This update included four goals with objectives for each goal.

Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan

The Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) establishes the framework for the integration and coordination of emergency management and response activities and to facilitate a coordinated response to any event requiring a multi-agency response or support. The Massachusetts Civil Defense Act requires that every town in the Commonwealth establish a local emergency management program and appoint an official to oversee the program. Through accomplishing the goals in the CEMP, the Town can address all phases of emergency management, including prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Referenced Regional Plans:

- **The Southern Worcester County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2023-2028**
- **2050 Connections: The Long-Range Transportation Plan**
- **Central Massachusetts Age Friendly Plan, 2023**

Vision for the Future

The following vision statement was crafted by Warren residents through the Master Plan Community Survey and Workshop. Residents were asked to provide key words and values to create the following statement. The vision statement was approved by the Community Development Advisory Committee in July of 2024.

This vision statement is an aspirational guide for all recommendations in this Master Plan.

“Warren, a traditional New England mill town, blends its rich history with modern opportunities.

Our town's natural landscapes and scenic roads invite adventure and exploration, creating an environment ripe for new business ventures.

Our historic homes welcome residents from all walks of life, while our commitment to high-quality education, diverse recreational activities, and responsive government ensures a thriving and inclusive community.

Strategically located "halfway to everywhere", Warren is poised to grow while maintaining its unique charm and character.”

Community Engagement

Master Plan Community Survey

A community survey was distributed to Warren residents in Spring of 2024. The survey was distributed digitally through Facebook, email, and the Town website. Paper copies were available at the Municipal Center, the two libraries, and the Senior Center. 171 online surveys and 15 paper surveys were collected for a total of 186 responses.

The survey results visualized throughout the chapters do not constitute a statistical sample of the Town. Demographics of survey respondents were collected to assess which demographics were overrepresented or underrepresented. Compared to Census Data from 2020, the survey respondents overrepresent residents earning more than \$50,000 in

household income, white residents, and residents between 45 and 64 years. Residents earning less than \$25,000 a year and residents under 44 years old were underrepresented. A large margin of “decline to answer” for demographic questions leaves a high level of uncertainty.

Stakeholder Interviews

To expand on themes discovered through the community survey, CMRPC interviewed 30 stakeholders with experiences working, volunteering, and living in Warren. The results of the stakeholder interviews guided the direction of recommendations and feasibility.



Master Plan Community Workshop

A community workshop was held on May 29, 2024 at the Warren Senior Center. Feedback for the Master Plan, including potential priority projects, a vision for the future, and neighborhood contexts were collected through a “science fair style” workshop format. Tables with existing condition information and interactive activities for each topic of the Master Plan invited residents to share personal experiences and have in-depth discussions with staff. The quantitative and qualitative results from the workshop are visualized throughout the chapters of this plan.



WARREN MASTER PLAN

READY TO SHAPE WARREN'S FUTURE TOGETHER?

Warren is updating its Master Plan, and we need YOU!

This plan will guide our town's growth and development.

Make a difference by sharing your thoughts, ideas, and concerns.

Take the survey now and be a part of shaping Warren's tomorrow!

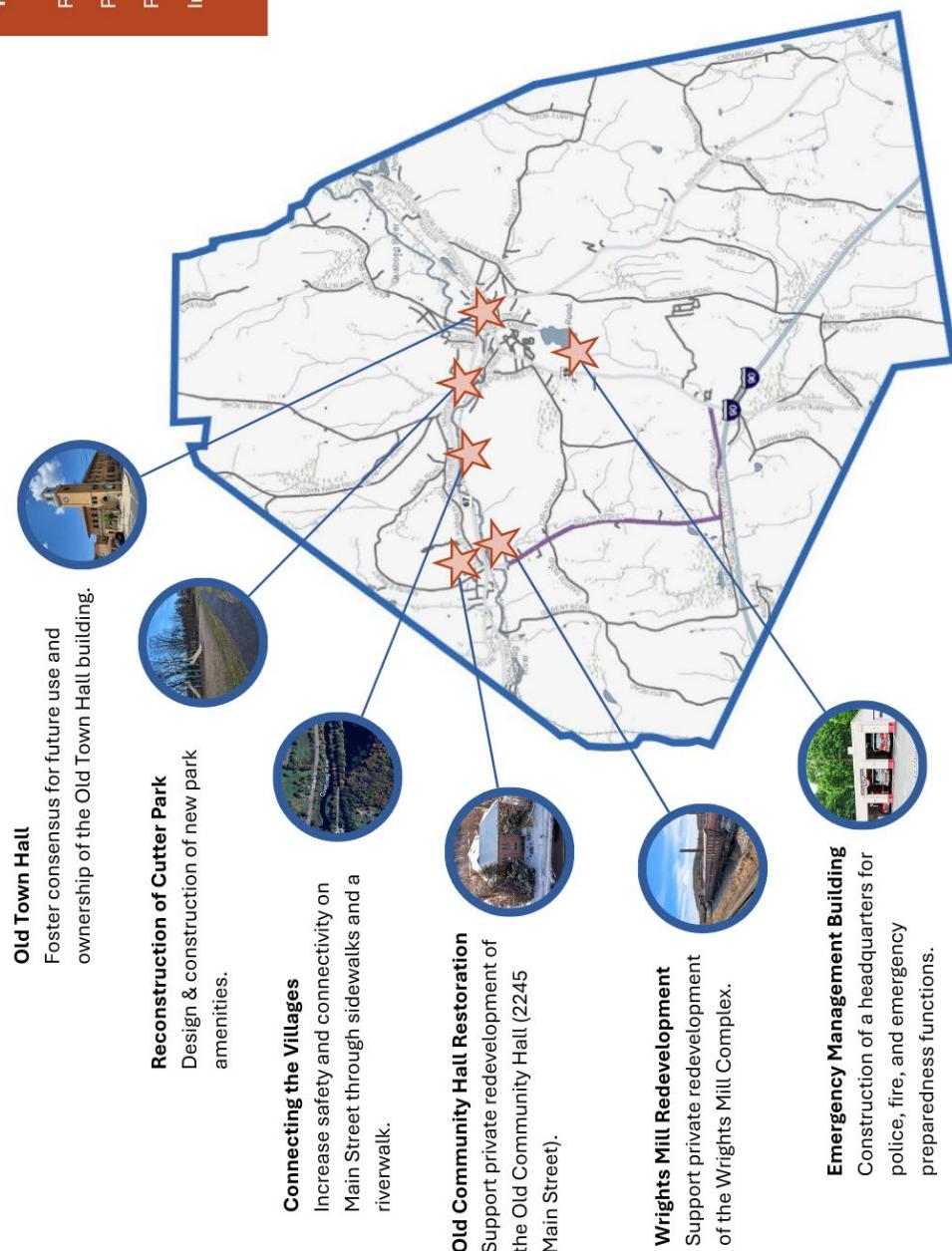
Your input matters!
TAKE THE 15 MIN SURVEY AT
www.WarrenMasterPlan.com

CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS Regional Planning Commission



Executive Summary

Priority Projects



Housing

The Housing Chapter provides action items for housing availability, affordability, and policy. Recommendations are based on public desires for different types of housing and the balance this plan suggests for land development and preservation.

The Town of Warren has a long and interesting history, which is visible in the unique architecture of homes in the area. However, despite having a wealth of housing available, much of it is out of reach of residents due to cost, state of being, and design. To become a place where residents can remain throughout life changes, the Town of Warren needs to prioritize housing rehabilitation, taking an active role in maintaining housing affordability, and creating more diversity in housing options available. Focusing on these priorities can meet the current and future needs of residents without the costly impacts of building new housing.

Goal 1: Encourage the rehabilitation and preservation of existing affordable housing.

Strategy 1.1: Develop and implement a housing rehabilitation and preservation program that provides financial incentives, technical assistance, and deed buy-downs to ensure that housing remains affordable.

Strategy 1.2: Explore opportunities to amend zoning and other town requirements that can make rehabilitation more affordable and/or feasible.

Goal 2: Ensure that housing in Warren remains affordable.

Strategy 2.1: Strategically leverage state incentives for affordable housing.

Strategy 2.2: Evaluate the Town's Zoning Bylaw for barriers to desired housing production and affordability.

Strategy 2.3: Create and implement a program for redeveloping priority properties, collaborating with property owners, partners, and developers.

Strategy 2.4: Evaluate options to incentivize housing production and affordable housing through tax mechanisms.

Goal 3: Ensure that a variety of housing types are available to meet the needs of Warren's most vulnerable residents.

Strategy 3.1: Support housing development that meets the needs of Warren's older residents.

Strategy 3.2: Evaluate the Town's barriers and opportunities to support diverse housing development.

Economic Development

The Economic Development Chapter of this Master Plan guides Warren's economic growth, focusing on a diversified strategy that taps into the town's existing strengths while addressing its current needs.

Warren is a place that contains great foundations for economic growth. The beautiful landscapes, unique small-town character, and other local resources can be utilized to create new opportunities for residents. By prioritizing business diversification, leveraging niche markets and agritourism, and the revitalization of key commercial corridors, the Town of Warren can experience balanced and sustainable growth while maintaining its character.

Goal 1: Leverage key niches and diversify business offerings.

Strategy 1.1: Leverage key niches to boost tourism.

Strategy 1.2: Increase support for new businesses.

Goal 2: Revitalize key commercial corridors and strategically plan for industrial growth.

Strategy 2.1: Prioritize redevelopment in prime commercial areas.

Strategy 2.2: Proactively plan for industrial development in Southwest Warren.

Goal 3: Support diverse business opportunities through the zoning bylaw.

Strategy 3.1: Update zoning regulations to support strategic industrial and development opportunities in Southwest Warren.

Strategy 3.2: Update zoning regulations to support vibrant village centers.

Transportation & Circulation

The Transportation and Circulation Chapter assesses the function of Warren's road network in safety, speed, and connectivity for residential and commercial use.

This chapter addresses necessary infrastructure upgrades to roads, sidewalks, and trails to promote safety and mitigate flooding.

Supporting alternatives to cars, including public and active transportation, is suggested to allow mobility for Warren's youth and aging population, as well as to connect the road network to trails and recreation.

Goal 1: Prepare infrastructure for private investment and development of key parcels.

Strategy 1.1: Prepare engineering studies and cost assessments for infrastructure improvements around the Wrights Mill Complex and West Warren.

Strategy 1.2: Explore potential private/public partnerships for an I-90 highway exit in Warren.

Goal 2: Prevent flooding on the road network.

Strategy 2.1: Address stormwater drainage issues and proactively incorporate resilience to extreme precipitation.

Strategy 2.2: Continue monitoring and addressing beaver dams.

Goal 3: Expand transportation mode options.

Strategy 3.1: Prepare for potential public transportation.

Strategy 3.2: Invest in pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure.

Goal 4: Maintain state of good repair and prioritize safety.

Strategy 4.1: Reconstruct or resurface priority roads and intersections.

Strategy 4.2: Address unsafe areas of the road network.

Strategy 4.3: Manage trucking routes.

Town Services & Facilities

The Town Services and Facilities Chapter accounts for the recommendations of the Housing and Economic Development chapters to understand capital and infrastructure improvements needed to support a change in land use patterns and changing demographics.

Capital needs, such as a new public safety complex, now fall on residential taxpayers. Services, including the police department, ambulance services, two libraries, parks, veteran resources, a Council on Aging, highways, and regional schools are paid through the taxes of a small pool of rural residents.

This gap creates a heavy dependence on volunteers, a vulnerability for reliable services, and long-term planning. Alongside state and federal trends, Warren's population is projected to grow and age as life expectancy increases.

Preparing for acute climate disruptions will be a top priority for protecting residents and infrastructure in the future. Resources for hazard preparedness, as well as investments toward green energy, will ensure Warren is resilient.

Goal 1: Maintain a State of Good Repair for All Municipal Facilities and Infrastructure.

Strategy 1.1: Support Strong Municipal Facilities.

Strategy 1.2: Maintain Strong Water and Sewer Systems.

Goal 2: Stabilize Personnel and Volunteer Capacity.

Strategy 2.1: Increase Communication to Increase Volunteer Capacity.

Strategy 2.2: Balance Fiscal Trade-Offs.

Goal 3: Build an Accessible Warren and Support an Aging Population.

Strategy 3.1: Ensure Physical Accessibility of Municipal Facilities.

Strategy 3.2: Implement Age-Friendly Solutions.

Goal 4: Prepare and React to Acute Climate Disruptions.

Strategy 4.1: Encourage the Production and Integration of Renewable Energy.

Strategy 4.2: Prepare for Acute Climate Disruptions.

Open Space & Recreation

The Open Space and Recreation Chapter guides how Warren should invest in its recreational land facilities, and programming, ensuring these resources can be enjoyed by community members.

The Town of Warren owns several parks that serve as venues for daily active and passive recreation as well as occasional Town-sponsored events. Improvements to equipment, amenities, and parking would enable these parks to better realize their full potential.

While Warren boasts an abundance of natural land, most of it is privately owned. Besides Lucy Stone Park, the only trails in town are informal. To expand its recreational opportunities, the Town could work with private landowners to gain access to their property, explore options for purchasing land, and formalize existing trails.

Goal 1: Improve existing open space and recreational facilities.

Strategy 1.1: Improve accessibility of existing recreational spaces.

Strategy 1.2: Redesign cutter park.

Strategy 1.3: Enhance amenities town-wide.

Goal 2: Increase the quantity of outdoor recreation spaces.

Strategy 2.1: Grow the town's inventory of property parcels that provide recreation access for the general public.

Strategy 2.2: Expand and formalize the trail network.

Goal 3: Strengthen the park and recreation department's capacity.

Strategy 3.1: Sustain and expand town programming.

Strategy 3.2: Add administrative and communication capacity to the parks and recreation department.

Natural & Cultural Resources

The strategies in the Natural and Cultural Resources Chapter recognize the Town's constraints and focus on facilitating the protection of natural and cultural resources with minimal financial demands on the Town and minimal additional regulation.

Warren's defining features are its extraordinary natural beauty and its charming sense of history, both of which have endured despite decades of sometimes fast-changing growth and, more recently, post-industrial decline.

The Town's natural resources are important for the protection of its water supply, its biodiversity, and its long tradition of farming, which has kept the town's people closely linked to the land. It is also important for the preservation of its scenic beauty and the opportunity for people to enjoy outdoor recreation.

Additionally, the history of the town, the buildings, monuments, and other structures that people recognize as making the town unique are also explored.

Goal 1: Preserve historical assets in the village centers.

Strategy 1.1: Create a holistic strategy for the Town Common area.

Strategy 1.2: Create a holistic strategy for the West Warren Village area.

Goal 2: Protect and preserve agricultural land and open space.

Strategy 2.1: Avoid development on farmlands through formalized protections.

Strategy 2.2: Incentivize modern farming by aiding economic feasibility.

Goal 3: Prioritize environmental and ecosystem protection.

Strategy 3.1: Mitigate stormwater pollution run-off.

Strategy 3.2: Achieve net carbon neutrality.

Strategy 3.3: Control invasive alien plants.

Land Use

The Land Use Chapter further addresses the balance of needs for all other Master Plan elements for policy changes, most notably development needs and preservation priorities.

While residents express concern about the impact of development on the rural landscape, targeted growth in the Town Common and West Warren offer a path forward. These village centers have several vacant properties and undeveloped lots that could allow for infill development with strategic zoning changes. Much of the demand for housing units and commercial spaces could be achieved through renovation of existing structures and infill development.

The area bordering I-90 in South Warren may provide a prime area for industrial, commercial, or office development, situated away from conservation land or residential areas. Taking advantage of development opportunities in areas with existing infrastructure can ease concerns about development in more rural areas.

Goal 1: Increase zoning and permitting capacity.

Strategy 1.1: Modernize the zoning by-laws.

Strategy 1.2: Provide training for planning and zoning board members.

Goal 2: Balance development needs.

Strategy 2.1: Promote development in priority development areas.

Strategy 2.2: Assess priority preservation areas for expanded conservation.

Strategy 2.3: Optimize development options in the major development overlay district.

Goal 3: Strategically plan for reuse and redevelopment of former brownfields, vacant buildings, and underused sites.

Strategy 3.1: Continue to prioritize the redevelopment and reuse of Wrights Mill.

Strategy 3.2: Encourage redevelopment of vacant buildings in the village centers.

Implementation

The Action Plan serves as a practical tool for implementation of the recommendations and strategies within this plan.

Master Plans, due to their size and scope, are often criticized for feeling overwhelming and infeasible. The implementation section organizes every action item by year of completion and priority alongside a recommended lead, partners, and resources such as non-profits and grant opportunities.

The hope is that future leaders of Warren can use the implementation section for inspiration, leaning on the wisdom of current leaders to guide a future pattern of investments and land use.

This plan contains recommendations for plans, policy changes, projects, and values.

Plans

Plans are typically areas to explore deeper than the Master Plan allows into specific neighborhood needs or topics (such as an Open Space and Recreation Plan). The plans recommended often lead to grant opportunities only available after planning processes, such as the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Action Grant. They also present opportunity for further communication with residents, leading to more fruitful partnership and collaboration.

Policies

Policy shifts, such as new zoning bylaws and permitting processes, are recommended to incentivize progress that

leads the town towards the direction of the vision statement. Policy shifts are the best tool a local government has for influencing the use of private land to ensure the welfare of residents (more traditionally, steering industrial smoke away from residential areas). The purpose of policy shifts is not to increase the role of government, but to ensure the government is not interrupting good change.

Projects

Recommended projects are usually one-off initiatives that result in tangible benefits, such as new park benches or sidewalks. Projects will require an inspired lead to guide stakeholder communication, funding, and implementation. In some cases, the lead will be the Select Board or Town Administrator. However, Warren has seen great success in resident-led initiatives, such as Lucy Stone Park. The implementation committee's role should include supporting passionate leaders to take on certain projects, in and out of formal board positions.

Values

Value-oriented action items are more vague, ongoing, and spontaneous than projects. Value action items should be considered during unexpected decision-making processes. For example, 'support new farming ventures' cannot be kick-started by an email from a desk during Year 3 of implementation. However, it can be considered during Planning Board approval processes, consideration of new grant opportunities, and engagement with partners. The value action items also serve to guide developers

and investors towards the type of projects Warren is likely to support.

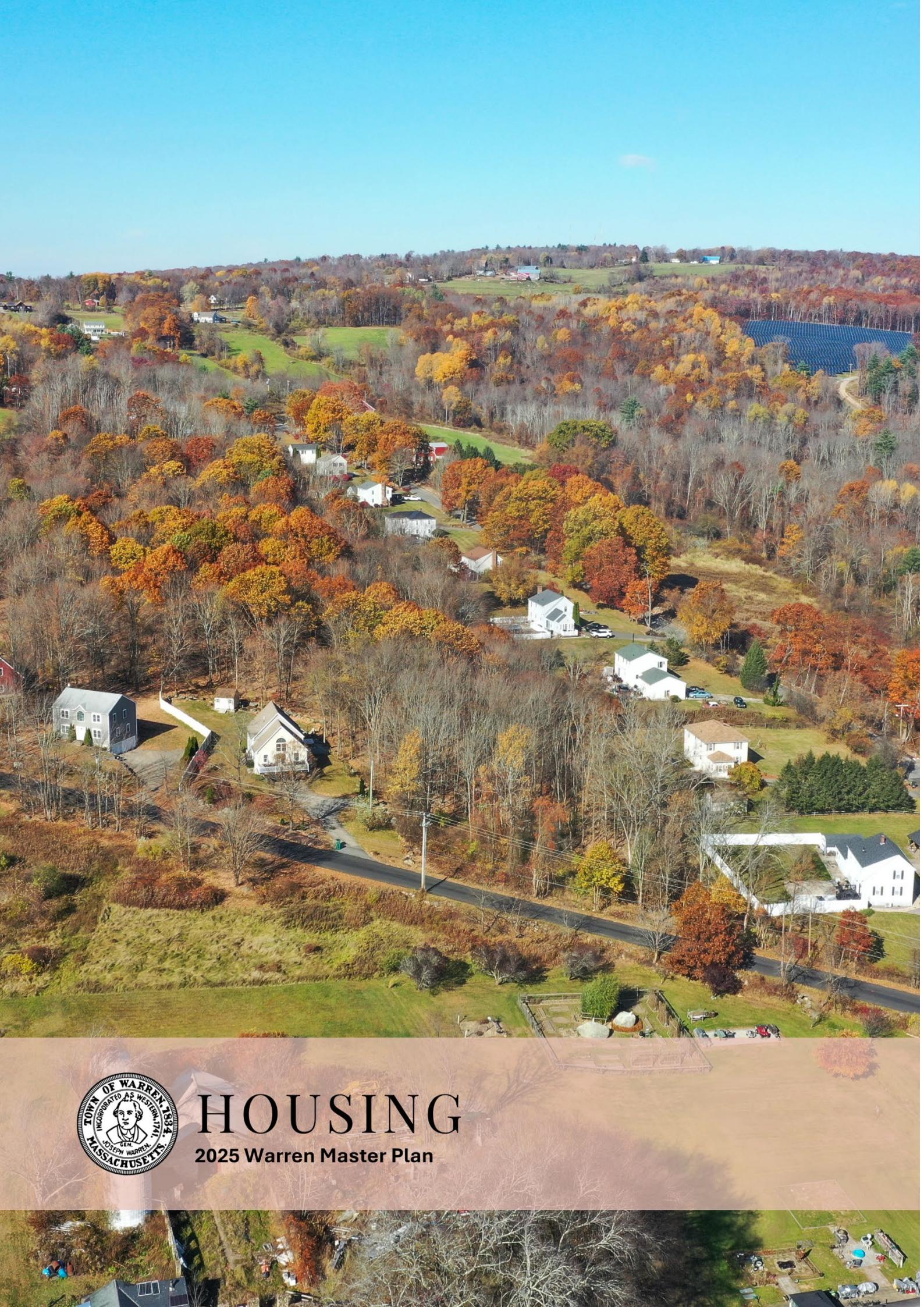
Resources

The Town of Warren cannot afford to implement this Master Plan through the Town budget. The recommendations assume most new initiatives will be funded through grants and loans. The action plan includes potential funding sources and external partners that can be used to aid implementation. The list, as is true for the full plan, is a moment in time and is subject to change as state and federal priorities shift over twenty years.

Some action items that lack a current funding source may become a priority in future years, which would make this Master Plan advantageous for competitive opportunities.

Implementation Committee

The key to ongoing implementation of any plan is a trusted committee whose goal is to delegate tasks and monitor progress. The committee can play a role in budget discussions, capital improvement plans, and grant writing. The committee can also add flexibility to the plan by tweaking outdated recommendations and shifting priorit to align with future needs.



HOUSING

2025 Warren Master Plan

Introduction

Rehabilitation of existing residential units is the top housing priority in Warren. The Town's early development as a mill town with agricultural history created natural diversity of housing sizes and types. Optimizing these units will sustain Warren's relatively low-cost housing stock while accommodating all ages and family types.

Infill development in West Warren Village has the potential to enliven an area once bustling with mill workers as a modern, walkable village with restaurants, housing options, and services (such as the Council on Aging and West Warren Library). The former Wrights Mill complex presents an opportunity to increase the housing stock alongside commercial or light industrial uses.

Warren's second village around the Town Common can benefit from rehabilitation of existing residential structures. Creative solutions for building upkeep and infilling land around the rotary can meet the needs of families and individuals seeking smaller, more affordable options.

Focusing housing development in village centers and rehabilitating existing housing will preserve Warren's invaluable undeveloped land as open space, farmland, and ecosystems.

Finally, Warren can protect existing affordable and public housing for low-income and senior populations, ensuring residents can remain in Warren through life changes.



Key Findings and Priorities

Key Finding 1: There is a Significant Need for Housing Rehabilitation, Especially in the Village Centers.

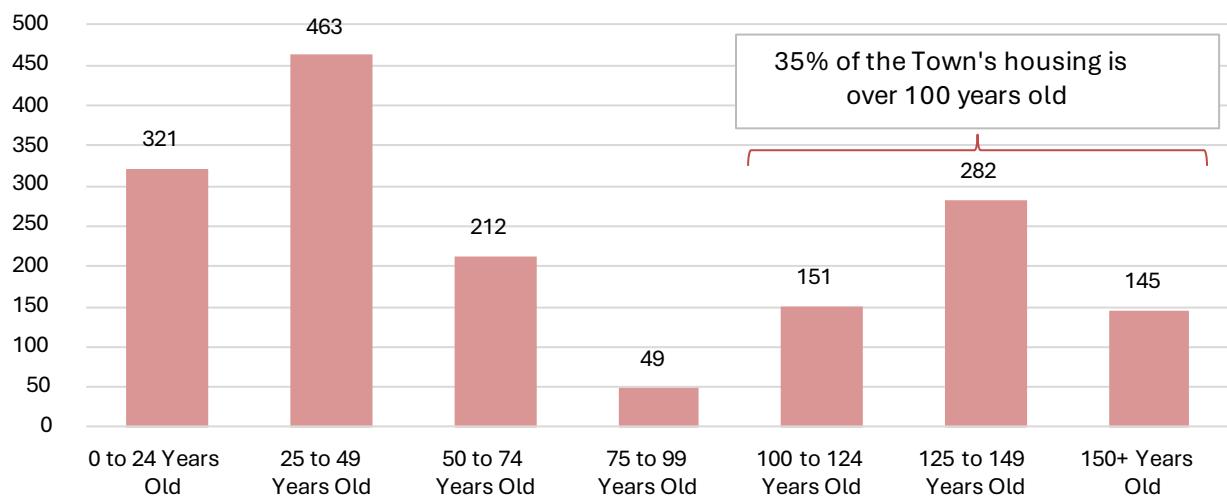
Like many towns in Massachusetts, much of Warren's housing stock is quite old. According to the Town's FY 2024 assessment data, over 35% of Warren housing units are over 100 years old (Figure H1). Over 50% are more than 50 years old. This older housing stock is concentrated in the Warren and West Warren Village centers (Figure H2).

During the Master Plan survey and workshop, residents expressed concerns that many old homes and buildings in the Town are in disrepair, presenting aesthetic and structural challenges. In the Master Plan survey, when asked about opportunities for additional housing in Town, 14% of respondents indicated a need to rehabilitate existing housing or to repurpose key sites, such as the Wrights Mill.

Communities with aging housing stock face challenges that can impact residents and the overall vitality of the area. Older homes were built using older construction methods, which often included hazardous materials, such as lead and asbestos. They often require significant maintenance and repairs, which can be costly and burdensome, especially for low- or fixed-income residents. These homes may also lack modern amenities, energy efficiency, and accessibility features, making them less suitable for aging residents or those with disabilities. Additionally, deteriorating housing can negatively affect property values, deter new investment, and contribute to neighborhood decline. In recent years, a key challenge to successful building rehabilitation has been the sharp rise in the cost of construction materials (Figure H8).

Addressing these issues requires targeted strategies to rehabilitate and modernize aging homes, ensuring they remain safe, livable, and valuable assets within the community that can meet current and future housing needs. To spur rehabilitation efforts, the Town can leverage grant funding to provide rehabilitation incentives, reduce regulatory

Figure H1 Age of Housing Units in Warren

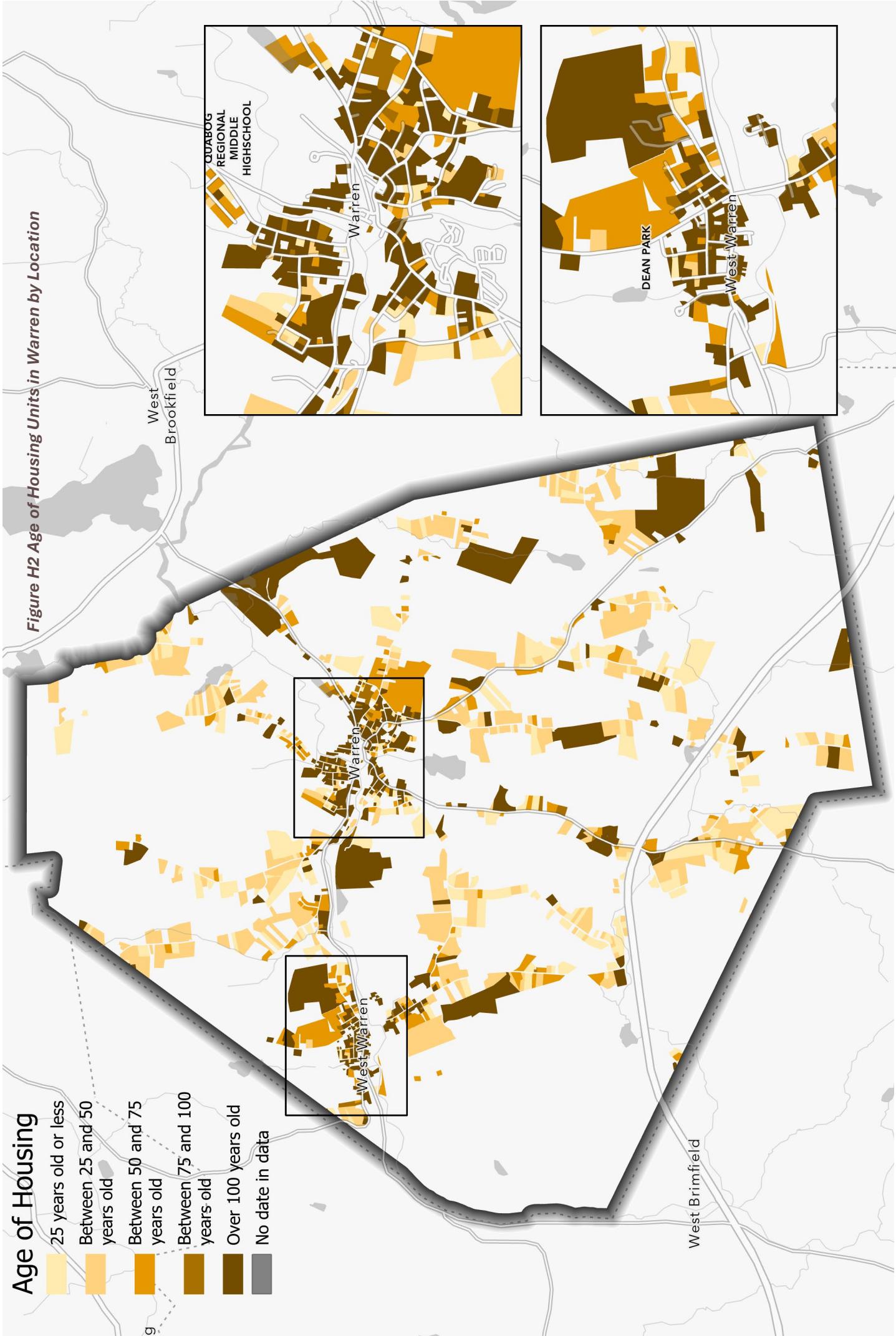


hurdles for property owners that want to rehabilitate their properties, and provide additional bonuses or incentives — such as the allowance of additional units — to make rehabilitation more financially viable.

From the Master Plan Survey

“We have way too many condemned and dilapidated buildings just occupying space... that’s a good place to start.”

Figure H2 Age of Housing Units in Warren by Location



Source: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS.

Key Finding 2: For Warren to Stay Affordable, the Town Needs to Take an Active Role.

By 2050, Warren is projected to add between 800 and 1,400 new residents, growing to a population of between 5,800 and 6,400 (Figure H4). Given the Town's average household size of 2.48 personsⁱⁱⁱ, that growth could result in the demand for 300 to 560 additional housing units.

Although Warren's population has grown over the last 20 years, housing has remained relatively affordable compared to Worcester County and the State. The median home value in 2022 in Warren was \$303,000, just 63% of the state median of \$483,000. However, since Warren's household income is lower than the state median, the Town's home value to income ratio is similar to that of the state — 4.7 versus 5.0 (Figure H3).

During the Master Plan Workshop and Survey, Warren residents highlighted the relatively low cost of living as an asset and indicated a desire to see Warren remain affordable for current and future residents. However, some residents expressed concern about new housing development noting that much of the town's existing housing stock requires rehabilitation. Other residents suggested not interfering and tackling housing needs by allowing by-right zoning to run its course.

The nationwide housing crisis has revealed the necessity for proactive intervention to maintain affordable housing. Years of low housing production not aligned with demographic needs resulted in a severe housing shortage, driving competition and raising prices. In most places, housing prices are increasing much faster than salaries: in 2022,

the national median sale price for a single-family home in the US was 5.6 times higher than the median household income, higher than at any point on record dating back to the early 1970s. Renters are particularly vulnerable to these price fluctuations.

From the Master Plan Survey

“I would like to see housing remain affordable and the small town feel to remain”

This trend has also played out in Warren, with median household income rising 51% between 2013 and 2022 while median home values increased by 54%. Like much of the state, home sale prices in Warren over the last 4 – 5 years have increased much faster, reaching 50% between 2018 and 2023.

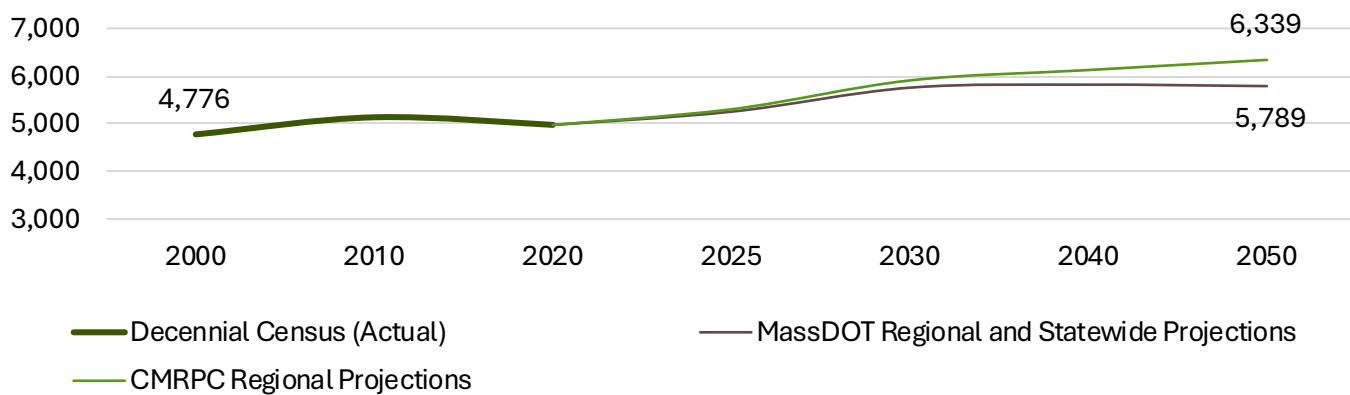
This is especially challenging for residents with lower or fixed incomes. Maintaining affordability requires a multi-faceted approach that includes zoning reform, inclusionary incentives for developers, programs to preserve and rehabilitate existing or potential affordable units, means-tested tax abatements, housing and land trusts, and grant programs.

Figure H3 Median Household Income, Home Value and Value to Income

Geography	Median Household Income	Median Home Value	Home Value to Income Ratio	Home Value as Percent of State Median
Warren	\$64,085	\$303,800	4.7	63%
Worcester County	\$88,524	\$363,200	4.1	75%
Massachusetts	\$96,505	\$483,900	5.0	N/A

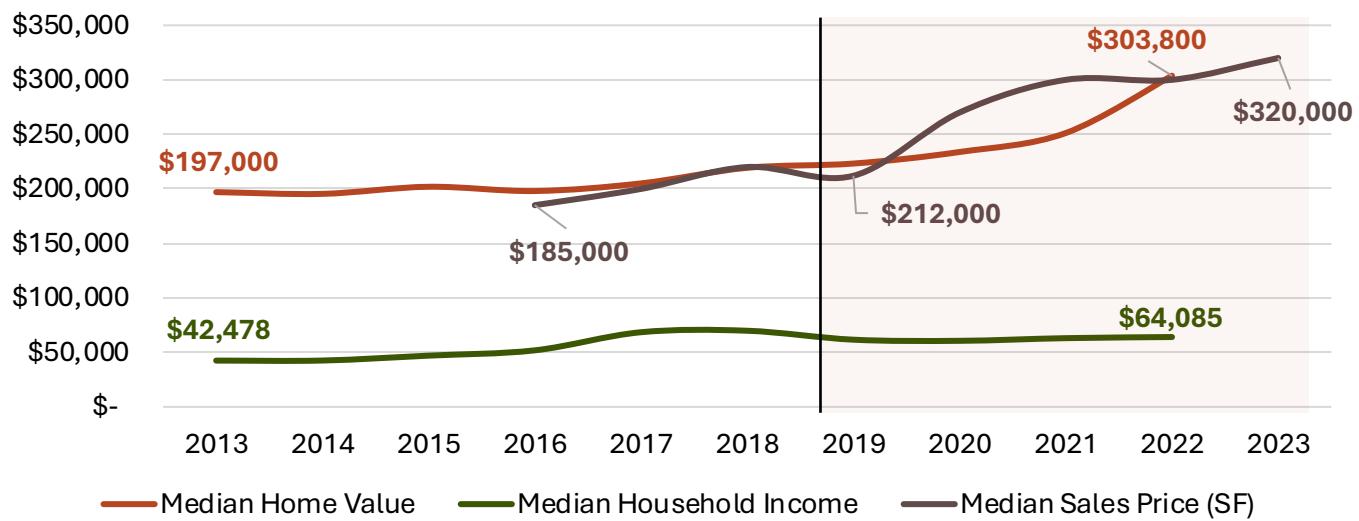
Source: 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Figure H4: Warren Population 2000 - 2020 and Population Projections 2020 - 2050



Source: Decennial Census, CMRPC, MassDOT

Figure H5 Median Home Value, Sales Price and Household Income 2012-2022



Source: Decennial Census, CMRPC, MassDOT

Key Finding 3: More Diverse Housing Options Would Benefit Residents, Particularly Seniors.

An area of particular concern for residents is the need for affordable and right-sized housing for seniors enabling them to remain in the town as they age (Figure H6). Many residents expressed a need for a wider range of housing options — particularly housing that would enable seniors to downsize and remain in the town, and opportunities to locate that housing closer to Town amenities and services.

Aging populations often face changing housing needs, including the desire or necessity to downsize or move into assisted living. Downsizing to a smaller, more manageable home can reduce maintenance burdens, reduce living costs, and free up resources for other essential needs or retirement. It also allows older adults to stay within their community, maintaining social connections and access to familiar services.

Within Warren, the Village zone offers the most flexibility in terms of allowed housing

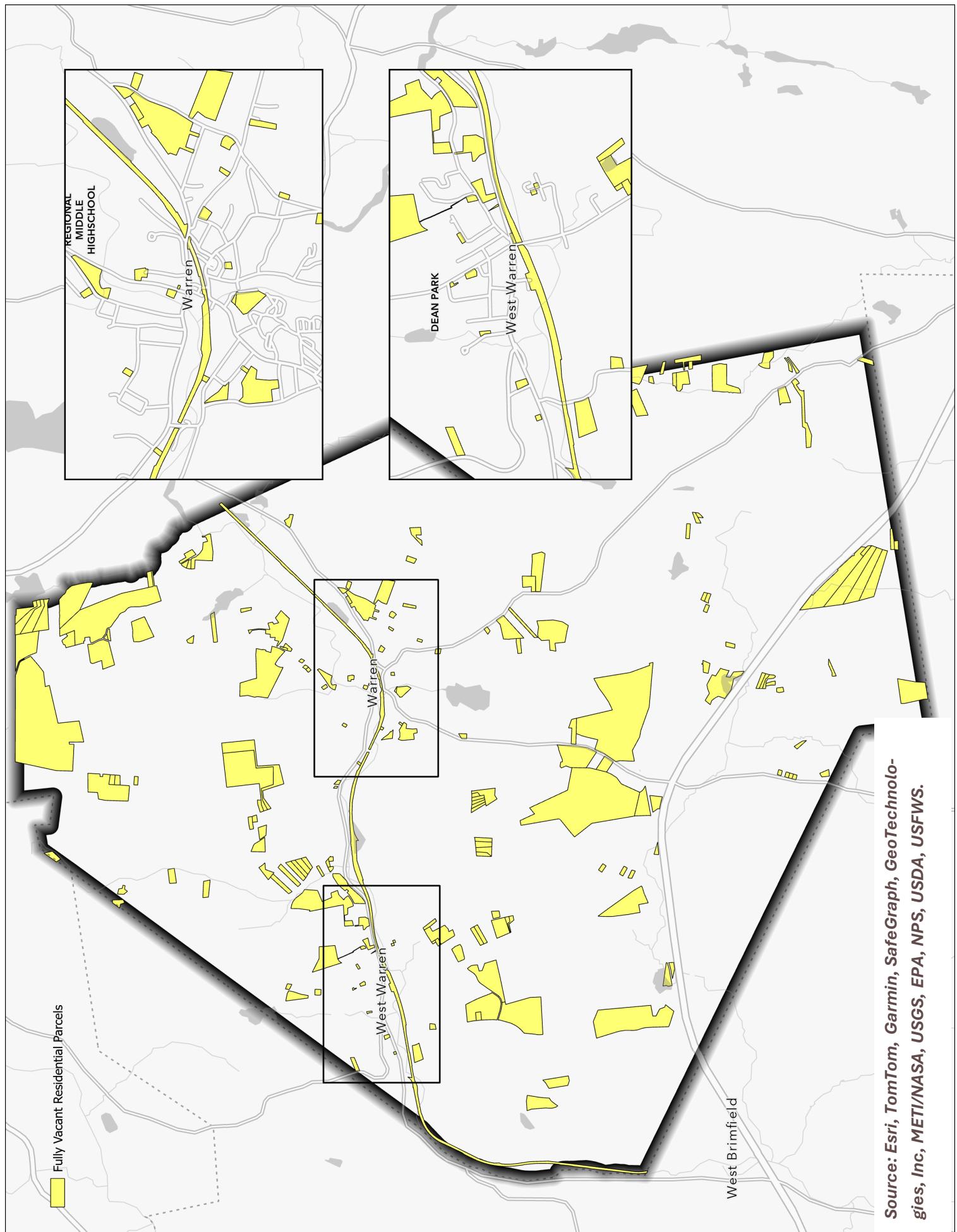
types. The Village zone allows single-family, two-family, and multi-family (up to 12 units) by right. The Town's dimensional standards also permit those building types with smaller land area requirements than the Rural and Residential zones (although they are still fairly stringent). This means that within the Village zone, a wider range of housing options is technically feasible, aligning with the Town residents' desire to ensure that older residents can age in place, especially with close access to town amenities.

In practice, however, there is diminishing available land within the Village areas that could accommodate additional housing. Figure H7 illustrates the fully vacant, potentially developable parcels in Warren. Within the two village centers, most of the land has some development, and remaining undeveloped parcels are mostly small. To ensure a diverse range of housing options are both technically and economically feasible, Warren may need to explore opportunities to encourage small infill housing opportunities, such as accessory units, through zoning changes, incentives for affordable senior housing, and opportunities to leverage grant funds to support aging in place initiatives.

Figure H6 Warren Master Plan Survey Results, Housing Experience and Aging Experience

What has been your experience with housing in Warren?	Strongly or Somewhat Agree	Strongly or Somewhat Disagree
I find the cost of housing affordable	54.30%	27.50%
I or someone I know faces difficulties remaining in Warren	47.60%	14.30%
Warren is accessible to new families	49.70%	25.10%
Warren is accessible to young adults moving out of their childhood home	30.20%	40.30%
Warren is accessible to elderly residents	37.00%	36.30%
Warren needs growth management	69.10%	7.90%
What is your experience and/or other residents' experience aging in Warren?	Strongly or Somewhat Agree	Strongly or Somewhat Disagree
There are accessible options to downsize	17.40%	46.50%
There are options to enter assisted living	15.10%	51.30%

Source: Warren Master Plan Survey





Goals

Goal 1: Encourage the Rehabilitation and Preservation of Existing Affordable Housing.

One of the primary challenges for property owners in Warren is the cost of rehabilitating homes. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that since the COVID-19 pandemic, construction material prices have increased by roughly 37% (Figure H8). This has outpaced income growth over the same period, with median household income in Warren estimated to have declined between 2017 and 2022 from \$68,490 to \$64,085.ⁱⁱⁱ The changing value proposition of rehabilitating homes has significant implications for the community.

Inflation Has Made Rehabilitation Less Lucrative for Builders

Stakeholder interviews with local Warren builders revealed that many are finding it increasingly difficult to provide affordable housing options given the increasing cost of construction materials.

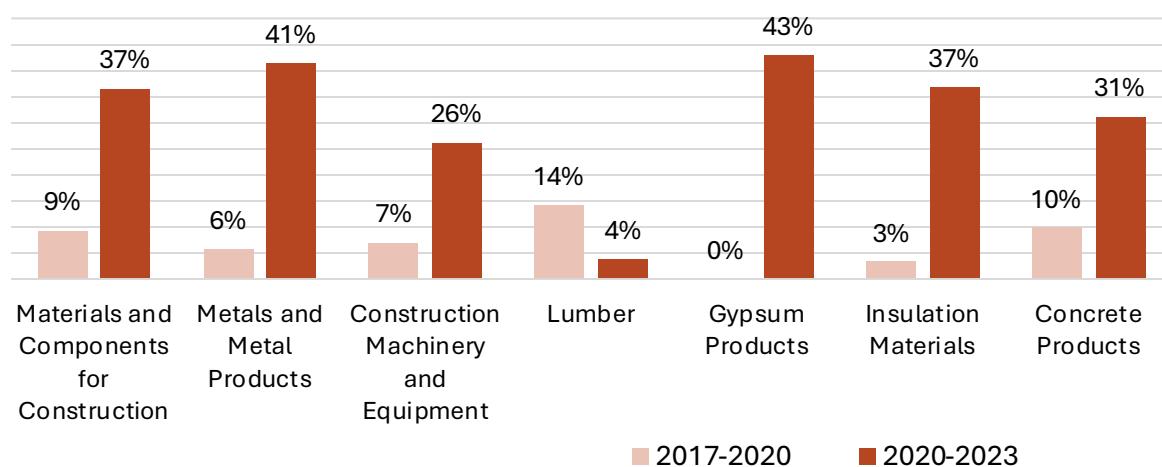
When asked about the impact of rising costs on rehabilitation projects, builders noted that, in many cases, rehabilitation can incur added costs when compared to new construction.

From a Warren Builder

“I would like to see housing remain affordable and the small town feel to remain. Rehabilitation can include the removal of old construction materials, many of which are toxic, such as lead and asbestos. Removing those materials is costly and requires special procedures.”

One local builder noted that the sale price of homes they have built has increased three-fold in the last 20 years; their profit margin has declined by as much as 30 to 40%. This

Figure H8 4-Year Producer Price Index Change for Selected Categories



Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data

means builders must be increasingly selective about the projects they pursue, favoring those that are simpler, more predictable, and require less specialized approvals or procedures that are easier to bid and manage. Rehabilitation projects, which can bring unforeseen costs, have become even less lucrative over the last 5 years.

For Warren to realize its vision of extensive rehabilitation, the Town must work to ensure that rehabilitation and reuse projects are financially viable by providing direct financial support, incentives, and public-private partnerships for key redevelopment sites.

Strategy 1.1: Develop and Implement a Housing Rehabilitation and Preservation Program that Provides Financial Incentives, Technical Assistance, and Deed Buy-Downs to Ensure that Housing Remains Affordable.

The most direct way that Warren can encourage the redevelopment, rehabilitation, and preservation of sites for housing is through financial assistance. Across Massachusetts, towns and cities have utilized various funding mechanisms from in-lieu fees and general fund line items to federal grant funds to create programs to reduce the financial burden of building rehabilitation and incentivize property owners to keep costs low for tenants.

For Warren, the most feasible way to provide financial incentives is through a grant-funded housing rehabilitation and preservation program for buildings owned or occupied by low-to-moderate-income residents.

Identify Funding Sources that Can be Used to Create a Housing Rehabilitation Program

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG): Many smaller communities across central and western Massachusetts have leveraged CDBG funds to support housing rehabilitation programs. The Massachusetts CDBG program is a federally funded, competitive grant program designed to help small cities and towns meet a range of community development needs in housing, infrastructure, revitalization, economic development, and public social services. Housing rehabilitation is an eligible activity under CDBG and participants must meet income

limits set by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Community Preservation Act (CPA): Enacted in 2000, CPA allows Massachusetts communities to conduct a referendum to add a small surcharge on local property taxes. When combined with matching funds from the statewide Community Preservation Trust Fund, this dedicated revenue can be used to support local affordable housing development, among other activities.

Affordable Housing Trust Fund: A local housing trust allows municipalities to collect funds for affordable housing, segregate them from the general municipal budget into a trust fund, and use them for local initiatives to create and preserve affordable housing. Examples of what a local affordable housing trust can do include:

- Directly support the construction of affordable housing
- Rehabilitate existing homes and buildings to convert to affordable housing
- Preserve properties faced with expiring affordability restrictions
- Provide down payment assistance to homebuyers in exchange for new affordability restrictions
- Support rent assistance for low- to moderate income households.

Capitalizing trust funds is the responsibility of a municipality. Although a variety of funding sources can be used, Community Preservation Act funds are the most common source. In some cases, communities have used additional sources to increase the trust's capital. For example:

- Andover, MA: Designated its housing trust as the recipient of the town's HOME Investment Partnership Program (federal HOME funds) allocation.

CDBG Housing Rehab Case Studies

Adams, MA

The Adams Housing Rehabilitation Program (HRP) aids low- and moderate-income homeowners and investor-owners with low/moderate-income tenants. The program covers a variety of repairs, including roofing, foundation repair, energy-efficient installations, plumbing, electrical work, and lead paint removal. The maximum award is typically \$30,000, but it can be increased to \$35,000 for extensive projects. This program is administered by the Town's Community Development Department and is primarily funded through CDBG grants.

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, MA

Four towns— Dalton, Becket, Stockbridge, and Sheffield— partnered through the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) to create a Housing Rehabilitation Program. The program was funded through CDBG and is managed by the BRPC. The program aimed to bring deteriorated residential units into compliance with all applicable Federal, State, and Local codes. A structure or portion of a structure had to be residential and contain one or more code violations to be eligible. The types of work covered include septic system repairs, roof repairs, and energy efficiency improvements.

Some Common Program Elements:

- Deferred Payment Loans (No monthly bill – loan repayment due upon sale of home)
- Income restrictions (low to moderate income)
- Supports rehab to improve a wide range of construction, livability, and code violation issues
- Rehabbed units have affordability requirements if the property is sold

- Lincoln, MA: Received a bequest from a local landowner to be used for affordable housing.
- Medfield, MA: Bonded \$1 million to fund their new trust.

Other sources of funding that have been used include:

- Inclusionary zoning/in lieu payments by developers
- Developer fees
- General fund
- Payments from special bylaws/ordinances
- Private donation

It is helpful to identify likely funding sources in advance and test the political appetite for using those sources to capitalize a housing trust.

Partner with Local or Regional Banks, Credit Unions, or Non-Profits to Offer Low Interest Loans or Other Funding Products

Another way that Warren can facilitate financial assistance is through partnerships with local or regional banks, credit unions or non-profit institutions focused on affordable housing or community development. Often, local banks and credit unions focus on local economic growth and personalized services, setting themselves apart from larger banks. This allows them the freedom to create locally needed programs and services. Although Warren's sole local bank closed in 2022, other credit unions and local banks in the region may be willing to discuss community needs and how they can help with financial products.

Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI)

The U.S. Treasury's CDFI Fund supports the growth of financial institutions that serve low-income communities, aiming to expand economic opportunities by increasing access to capital and financial services for underserved populations. Several of the fund's programs provide financial assistance to institutions working to develop, preserve, or rehabilitate affordable housing. In Massachusetts, 31 CDFI's provide a wide range of assistance, from small business loans to affordable housing grants.

Warren may have a higher level of success in seeking out partnerships with CDFIs that have already committed to providing financial products that support community development in underserved and lower-income communities. A full list of Massachusetts CDFIs can be found online.

Identify Community Needs and Priorities and Create Informational Materials

Although the community's need for rehabilitation is well-known, Warren must develop a clear and specific scope of need to get the full benefit of newly created programs. This may include creating an inventory of distressed properties, neighborhood-specific challenges, and what is needed to address the varying rehabilitation needs. The Town must prepare residents to utilize new programs through extensive public engagement and the development of informational materials.

Strategy 1.1 Action Items

Action Item 1.1.1 - Identify and apply for state and federal grants to fund the creation of a housing rehabilitation and preservation program and purchase deed restrictions on expiring or potentially affordable units.

Action Item 1.1.2 - Explore partnerships with local banks, credit unions, and non-profits to offer low-interest loans for home improvements.

Action Item 1.1.3 – Explore partnerships with Community Land Trusts or other housing nonprofits to rehabilitate or redevelop tax title, distressed, and abandoned homes.

Action Item 1.1.4 - Develop a priority list for housing rehabilitation projects, focusing on the most critical needs first. Include public housing, owner-occupied low and moderate-income homes, and rental properties serving low and moderate-income residents.

Action Item 1.1.5 - Create a community outreach program to inform residents about available rehabilitation resources and incentives.

Strategy 1.2: Explore Opportunities to Amend Zoning and Other Town Requirements that Can Make Rehabilitation More Affordable and/or Feasible.

Warren has the potential to incentivize rehabilitation or redevelopment without direct financial assistance through zoning and permitting. The main goal of this strategy is to identify existing or potential barriers to rehabilitation in the Town's existing zoning bylaw and identify opportunities for amendments that could make rehabilitation more feasible or financially viable.

Ensure that Rehabilitation is Feasible Even in Challenging Situations

In many communities, modern zoning bylaws have rendered traditional development patterns nonconforming. This is also the case in Warren—particularly in the areas zoned ‘village’—where dimensional standards such as setbacks and minimum lot sizes put existing buildings at odds with zoning. Figure H9 visualizes parcels in the village zone that may have at least one nonconforming setback.^{iv} The Warren Zoning Bylaw contains provisions for nonconforming parcels and structures and states that extensions or alterations are not allowed except when the planning board grants a special permit. The conditions for granting a special permit are ambiguous, simply stating that the “*extension or alteration shall not be substantially more detrimental than the existing nonconforming use or structure to the neighborhood.*”

Nonconforming properties and structures can be challenging for property owners to deal with, even when a town has a process for granting special permits or variances. These provisions represent a hurdle that

many choose to forgo, simply because it can take time, energy, and money to seek a special permit or variance with no guarantee of success. To reduce these barriers and encourage rehabilitation of existing structures, the Town could amend its nonconforming provisions to enable administrative approval of alterations to nonconforming structures.

Explore Offering Expedited or Simplified Permitting for Rehabilitation Projects

Another tool that Warren can leverage is the Town's permitting process. Although there are often valid reasons for extended permitting timeframes, procedural inefficiencies are common statewide and add costs and delays to projects. When developers are presented with an option of a simple new build versus a complex rehabilitation project, they often decide based on the one that is most predictable and unlikely to experience delays due to complex permitting or review requirements.

For projects that directly meet the community's desire and vision for rehabilitation, the goal should be a process where a contractor can walk into Town Hall first thing in the morning and start construction that afternoon. This may not be feasible in every situation, but it is an ideal that clearly articulates the town's vision.

Consider Zoning Incentives to Make Rehabilitation Projects More Lucrative

Rehabilitation projects often yield a lower return on investment compared to new construction projects. Zoning incentives are a powerful way to make these projects more lucrative. The following are some incentive examples that the Town could explore:

Density Bonuses: Allow builders to exceed the existing density limits (lot size per unit) in

exchange for rehabilitating or preserving older buildings. Warren could permit an extra unit beyond the maximum density restrictions on a property if the builder commits to rehabilitating an existing structure. This could be paired with another goal, such as creating affordable housing.

Flexible Setback and Lot Coverage

Requirements: Adjust zoning requirements for setbacks or lot coverage to allow for easier rehabilitation of older structures that may not conform to current zoning regulations. Relaxing setbacks or height restrictions could make it easier to add new units to an older, non-conforming building, enabling developers to make the project financially feasible.

Reduced Parking Requirements: Reducing or waiving parking requirements for rehabilitation projects can lower development costs, particularly in the denser village centers where parking may not be needed to the same extent as more car-dependent areas of town.

Adaptive Reuse Zoning: Create special zoning districts or provisions that allow for

the conversion of existing, underutilized structures (e.g., old commercial or industrial sites) into residential units with fewer regulatory hurdles.

Strategy 1.2 Action Items

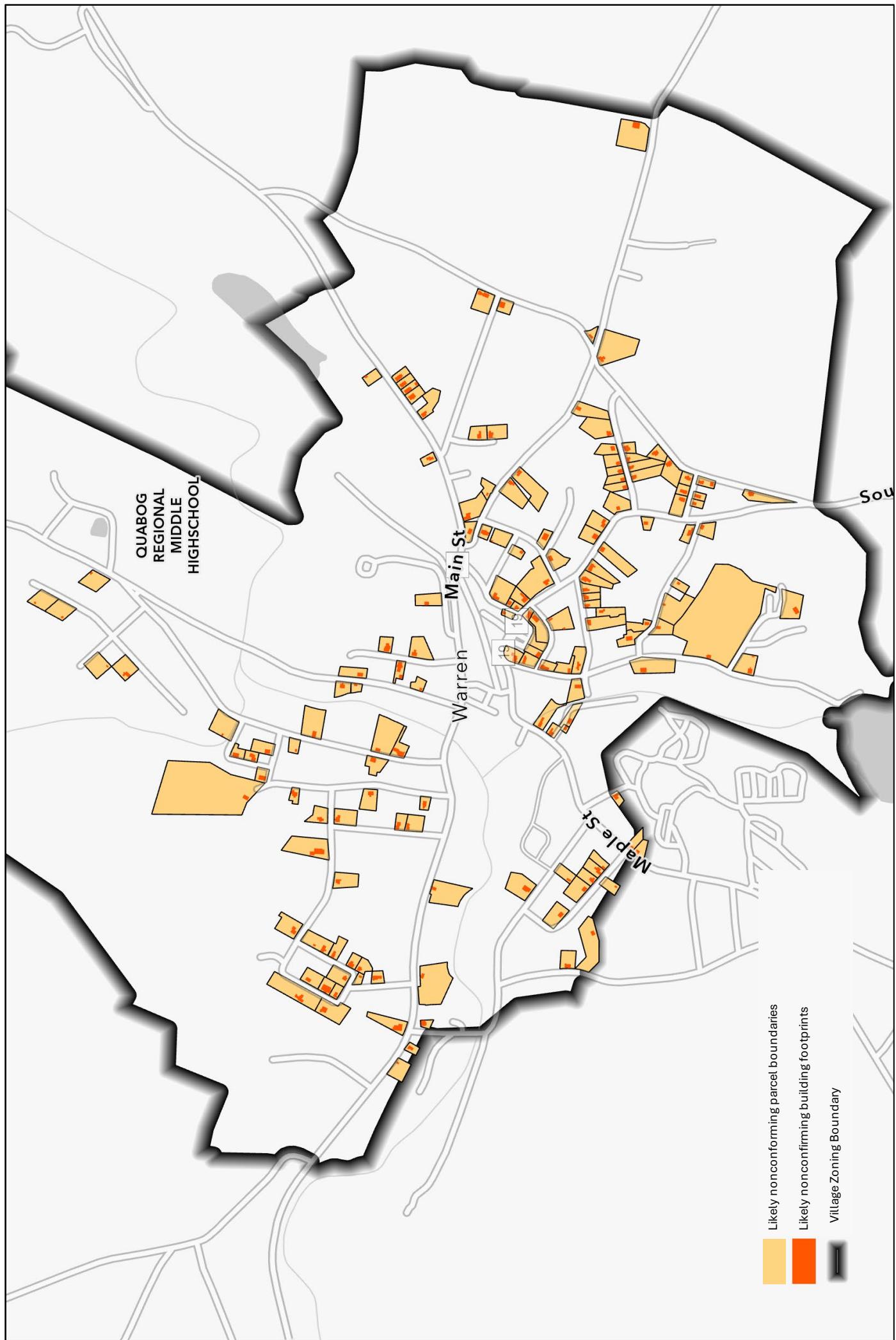
Action Item 1.2.1- Evaluate the Town's zoning bylaw to identify areas that make rehabilitation challenging.

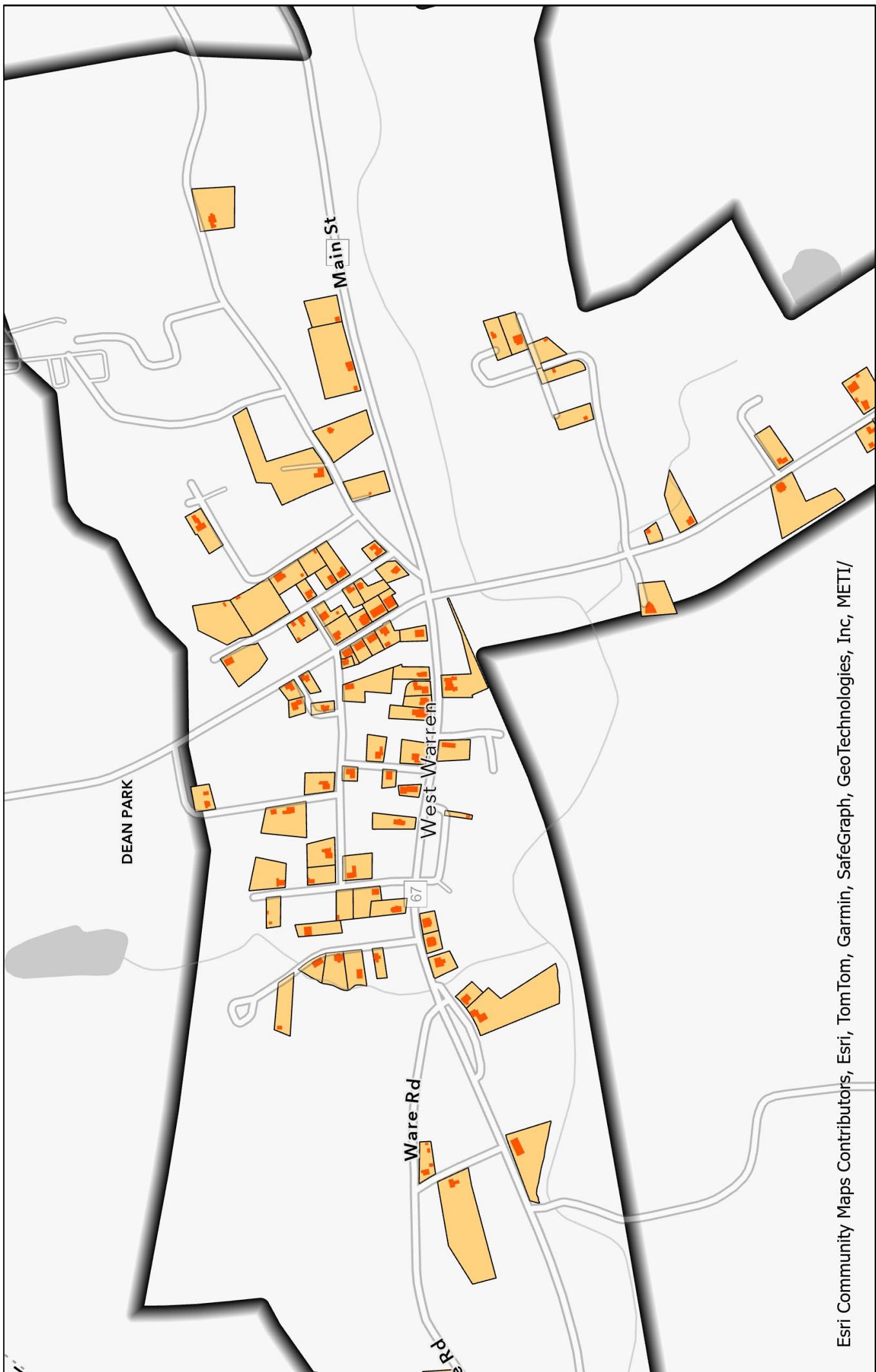
Action Item 1.2.2- Explore opportunities to streamline permitting for rehabilitation projects.

Action Item 1.2.3- Identify potential zoning incentives to encourage and/or make rehabilitation more lucrative.

Action Item: 1.2.4- Identify opportunities to convert underutilized commercial or other property types to housing and explore local policy options to facilitate such adaptive reuses.

Figure H9: Village Zone Parcels with potentially nonconforming setbacks





Goal 2: Ensure that Housing in Warren Remains Affordable.

Maintaining and promoting a relatively affordable housing stock in Warren is essential for fostering a vibrant, inclusive community. Affordable housing ensures that long-time residents, young families, older residents, and individuals on fixed incomes can continue to live and thrive in the town they call home. It provides stability, allowing residents to invest in their community, build lasting relationships, and contribute to the local economy. By taking an active role in preserving affordability, the Town of Warren can sustain its unique character, support diversity, and ensure that all residents have access to live in a safe and supportive environment.

However, not all residents and property owners will necessarily agree with or individually benefit by the Town taking a proactive approach to ensuring broad affordability. Over the last century, housing has increasingly been treated as a financial investment, contributing to a system that prioritizes long-term stable price increases. This perspective is directly at odds with the idea of housing and shelter remaining broadly attainable.

‘Big A’ and ‘Little a’ Affordable Housing

When using the term ‘Affordable Housing’, many people think of regulated housing for those who are below a certain income threshold. However, for the purposes of the Master Plan we must distinguish between two types: ‘big A’ Affordable and ‘little a’ affordable. “Big A” Affordable Housing refers to housing that is officially subsidized and regulated to ensure affordability for low-in-

come households, often through government programs or non-profit organizations. “Little a” affordable housing, on the other hand, describes housing that is naturally affordable due to market conditions, typically without subsidies, making it accessible to middle-income or working-class individuals and families without formal assistance. Both types are important for maintaining a diverse and inclusive community.

In Massachusetts, M.G.L. Chapter 40B mandates all communities in Massachusetts have a minimum of 10 percent of their housing stock be affordable to middle- and lower-income households. Municipalities with less than 10% of their housing eligible for inclusion on the Subsidized Housing Inventory may be subject to development proposals that can circumvent local zoning if 20-25% of the units include affordability restrictions. The MA Office of Housing and Livable Communities maintains a subsidized housing inventory. As of June 2023, Warren’s subsidized housing inventory included 74 units—3.38% of its total housing stock.

Housing Supply and Demand

The supply and demand of housing are fundamental factors that directly affect prices within a community. When the demand for housing exceeds the available supply, competition among buyers and renters intensifies, driving up prices and making it more challenging to find affordable housing. On the other hand, if the supply of housing meets or exceeds demand, prices tend to stabilize or decrease, as there are more options available, and sellers or landlords may lower prices to attract occupants. Achieving a well-balanced supply that meets the community’s demand is essential for keeping housing prices manageable and ensuring that all residents have access to affordable living options.

Types of Housing and Construction Costs

Warren's housing stock is diverse and offers an array of housing options for residents of varying means. This is characteristic of many historic mill towns, where smaller, naturally affordable housing was essential for the resident workforce. Over the last century, towns, including Warren, increasingly encouraged detached single-family homes as the predominant form of housing. Although a key component of Warren's housing needs and character, overreliance on large-lot single family homes can make it challenging for households at different life stages to find suitable living arrangements.

Smart Planning for Growth, Stability, or Decline

Growth is often seen as something that cities plan for—not small towns. In Warren, many residents even express concern and opposition to the idea of growth.

Growth is a challenging word that many smaller communities wrestle with. While growth can help stimulate the local economy, attract new businesses, and increase and diversify the tax base, it can also raise concerns about preserving the town's character, managing infrastructure demands, and ensuring that development is sustainable. Small towns, like Warren, can also experience the growing pains of moving from operating with limited resources to the demands of a larger population, such as increased traffic, school enrollment, and public service needs. Additionally, residents may fear that rapid changes could erode the close-knit, community-oriented atmosphere they value. Balancing the benefits of growth with the desire to maintain the town's unique identity and quality of life is a delicate task for smaller communities.

However, ignoring the possibility of growth and failing to plan for it can lead to a range of negative consequences. Without proactive planning, growth can occur in a haphazard manner, straining infrastructure, overburdening public services, and resulting in inadequate housing. Additionally, without planning, the Town may miss opportunities to guide growth in ways that benefit residents, such as by promoting affordable housing (both subsidized and naturally occurring), protecting green spaces, and fostering economic development. All of these are issues that Warren recognizes as important considerations. When asked about whether they perceive growth management as important in Warren, 69% of respondents agreed. It is essential that Warren supports and promotes the type of housing growth that the community wants rather than react to sudden pressures.

Strategy 2.1: Strategically Leverage State Incentives for Affordable Housing.

Over the past decade, the Commonwealth has launched several programs to incentivize and enable affordable housing development at the local level. The key strategies identified in this chapter align with the State's housing initiatives, offering opportunities for funding.

The following section outlines several of the State's housing-related programs and incentives. As Warren looks to broaden its housing stock and work to ensure the town remains affordable, these programs may provide opportunities to obtain additional funds from the state.

Housing Choice Initiative

Goal: To encourage municipalities to increase housing production by rewarding them with financial incentives and grants.

Mechanism: Municipalities can achieve a "Housing Choice" designation by meeting certain housing production targets (5% new units over 5 years or 500 new units) or adopting housing-friendly zoning measures, reducing parking minimums, or permitting multifamily housing by-right.

Incentives: Communities with Housing Choice designation gain access to preferential consideration for state grants (e.g., MassWorks) and exclusive funding through the Housing Choice Capital Grant Program.

Chapter 40R: Smart Growth Zoning

Goal: To incentivize municipalities to adopt zoning districts that allow smaller starter homes on starter home-sized lots, including affordable housing, near transit stations,

city or town centers, or other suitable locations.

Mechanism: Communities that adopt a 40R district receive state payments based on the number of new housing units allowed under the new zoning, and additional bonuses when affordable units are built. The requirements include 8 units/acre for single family homes, 12 units/acre for townhouses, and 20 units/acre for condominiums and apartments. The zoning must require that 20% of the district be affordable homes, and it should allow "mixed use"—the combination of residential, office and retail within close proximity.

Incentives: Municipalities receive direct financial incentives for each new unit of housing permitted and developed, as well as bonuses for affordable units. State funding ranges from \$10,000 to \$600,000, plus an additional \$3,000 for every new home created. 40R districts can also make applications to programs such as MassWorks Infrastructure and Community One Stop grants more competitive.

Community Preservation Act (CPA)

Goal: To support affordable housing, open space preservation, and historic preservation through a local property tax surcharge with matching funds from the State.

Mechanism: Communities can adopt the CPA by local referendum, which enables them to levy a surcharge on property taxes and receive state matching funds through the Community Preservation Trust Fund.

Incentives: CPA communities receive matching funds from the state, which can be used to fund affordable housing projects, including the creation of new housing or the preservation of existing affordable units.

Affordable Homes Act

Goal: To address the rising housing costs caused by high demand and limited supply, the Affordable Homes Act (2024) authorized \$5.16 billion in spending over the next five years along with nearly 50 policy initiatives.

Incentives and Programs: The wide-reaching legislation sets aside funding for numerous grant programs, local policy development assistance, affordable housing construction, infrastructure, among many other areas. The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities [Fact Sheet](#) outlines all the initiatives receiving funding under the act. Each of these initiatives provides funding to support several strategies outlined in this chapter. Warren should strategically leverage them when applicable, collaborating with regional partners, such as the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, to stay up to date on the wide-ranging state housing initiatives and pursue those that meet the town's community vision and goals.

Attorney General's Abandoned Housing Initiative

Goal: To facilitate the redevelopment of distressed and abandoned properties.

Mechanism: Through the Attorney General's (AG) Abandoned Housing Initiative municipalities can place properties into receivership, then petition the state AG to sell the property below market value to a housing nonprofit or low-moderate income homebuyers. This initiative also allows for the use of the AG's Revolving Fund to provide loans or grants to the new property owners.

Incentives: Attorney General's revolving fund grants are available to assist with redevelopment of abandoned properties.

Strategy 2.1 Action Items

Action Item 2.1.1 – Stay up to date on State housing incentive programs and identify where they align with the Town's goals and existing efforts.

Action Item 2.1.2 – Strategically adopt State programs when they meet Town housing goals and align with the Town's existing efforts.

Strategy 2.2: Evaluate the Town's Zoning Bylaw for Barriers to Desired Housing Production and Affordability.

Again, zoning is one of the main tools that Warren has at its disposal to encourage the type of housing development the community wants and needs. In their current form, the Town's zoning bylaw offers a level of flexibility beyond that of many neighboring towns, especially in the village zones, but opportunities remain to better align with the community's long-term vision.

The Community's Perspective on Housing

In the Master Plan survey, respondents identified areas that they felt were preferable for new housing. Figure H10 shows the top five areas that were identified. At the master plan workshop, residents were asked which housing types were appropriate for each area. Figure H11 summarizes participants' perspectives on different housing types and their preferred location. Single family houses were the most universally supported, but residents indicated that a range of housing types would likely be needed to support future residents with varying needs.

Figure H10 Top Five Locations Identified for New Housing in the Master Plan Survey

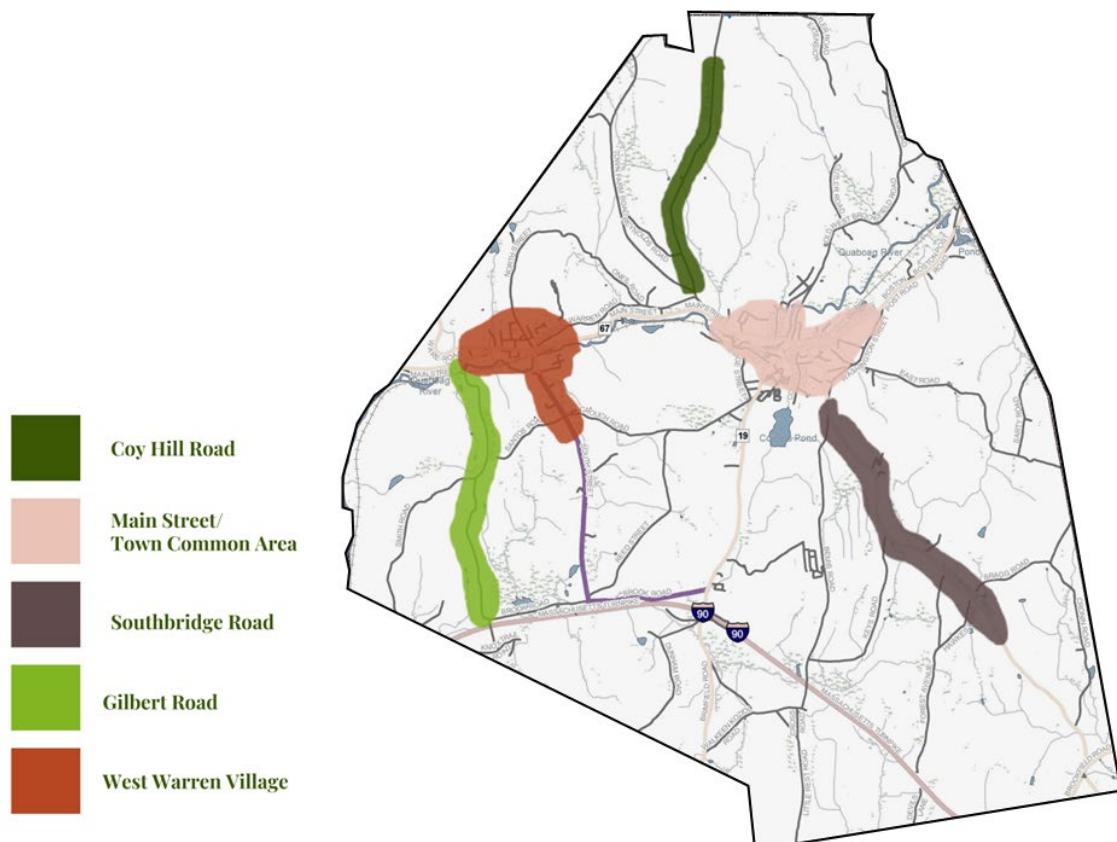


Figure H11 Level of Support for the Housing Types in the Respective Locations

	Coy Hill Road	Main Street/Town Common Area	South-bridge Road	Gilbert Road	West Warren Village
Senior Housing	3	2		1	4
Single Family	1	1	4	5	2
Mixed Use	1	5			3
Duplex	3	1	2		3
Small Scale Apartment (3-8 Units)	4		4		2
Large Scale Apartment					6

Total Participants: 25 Source: Warren Master Plan Community Workshop

Importantly, not all residents agreed on where each of the housing types would be appropriate or the type of development they wanted to see in town. Numerous residents articulated a resistance to any change that would make housing and population growth more feasible, while others articulated the opposite with a preference for more housing options. As the Town considers amendments to the zoning bylaw, it should be paired with ongoing public engagement that seeks to understand the spectrum of community concerns and aspirations.

Figure H12 Desired New Housing

What would you like to see more of in Warren?	% of Respondents
Mixed-use development (commercial first floor, housing on upper floors)	35%
More housing opportunities within existing buildings (ADUs)	32%
New small-scale apartment/townhouse buildings (2 to 4 families)	26%
Single family homes	26%
New large-scale apartment buildings (5 or more families)	12%

Source: Warren Master Plan Survey

Local Builder Observations

During interviews with local builders, one stakeholder noted that due to changing household demographics and increasing financial pressures, they are seeing a demand for smaller, more compact homes, such as two-families and smaller single-family homes. They suggested reducing minimum lot sizes as a way homeowners could cut down on overall project costs – limiting the land cost associated with a new build project. Opportunities for these types of homes are limited because of the Town's dimensional standards, but modest zoning adjustments can create new opportunities for infill housing development.

Current Zoning

The current Warren Zoning Bylaw was originally adopted in 1984. Although it has been amended many times, it reflects the paradigm of the time, including an emphasis on low density and auto-centric development. In Warren's zoning bylaw, this can be seen in the allowed uses and dimensional standards, where denser housing options are the most geographically restricted. For example, anything beyond a two-family home is only allowed in the village zone, which is also the

town's smallest zone and most limited in terms of available land. Similarly, although minimum lot sizes are smallest in the village zone, they are still quite large and effectively limit the ability to build denser housing. In contrast, single-family homes are permitted in each zone with a minimum lot size requirement of between 10,000 and 45,000 sq ft depending on the zone.

Undertake a Comprehensive Zoning Review with Robust Community Engagement

In Warren, a comprehensive review of the zoning bylaw is necessary to identify existing barriers to housing production and to ensure that the zoning code aligns with the Town's goals for affordable, diverse, and sustainable housing development. Zoning can often include restrictive provisions—such as minimum lot sizes, excessive parking requirements, and density limitations—that hinder housing development, raise construction costs, or limit the variety of housing types. By conducting a thorough evaluation, Warren can pinpoint outdated or overly prescriptive regulations and propose amendments that foster housing production while still preserving community character and addressing environmental concerns like open space preservation.

Warren residents and Town staff articulate a desire to retain some level of discretionary control over major development in the town. Concerns include sudden, large impacts to Town resources and services, the potential for projects to change the community in a negative way, and general resistance to development that differs to what currently exists in the town. Given the cost trade-offs between a process that is simple and streamlined versus one that has more discretionary review built into it, Warren must carefully discern where the optimal point is. The

Town's challenge is to balance the benefits of flexibility and ease of development with the costs that go along with more discretionary control.

Strategy 2.2 Action Item

Action Item 2.2.1 - Conduct a comprehensive zoning review to identify regulatory barriers to the Town's housing production goals and for alignment with state regulatory changes.

Strategy 2.3: Create and Implement a Program for Redeveloping Priority Properties, Collaborating with Property Owners, Partners, and Developers.

Since the last master plan, Warren has experienced significant changes in the built environment. Regulatory changes at the state level have also changed what can be built, where. With the completion of the master plan, the Town can undertake more granular discussions about specific opportunities for housing development, from Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to tax title properties. By inventorying and prioritizing specific sites, the Town will be positioned to develop a comprehensive strategy by property type and leverage state resources. A local policy package designed to proactively address multiple types of redevelopment barriers (from lack of resident awareness to regulatory challenges) should include residents, developers, technical assistance providers, and lenders. Building these relationships can significantly benefit Warren because the Town can actively encourage targeted and strategic development at key sites where there is community buy-in.

To foster these relationships, the Town should start by working with property owners and residents to identify key locations for housing. Warren can use GIS or other methods to identify distressed, abandoned, or tax title properties; surplus municipal, housing authority, and state-owned properties; brownfields and vacant or underutilized sites; properties rendered newly suitable for accessory dwelling units under the Affordable Homes Act; and double lots rendered buildable through changes to the Merger Doctrine.

Once identified, the Town should work with property owners to articulate a vision and formalize the development proposal by putting out requests for proposals or similar requests for development ideas. Collaborating with property owners to reach out to developers and investors creates a proactive environment, where the Town, property owners, and developers can work together to bring mutually beneficial projects to life, spurring economic growth while addressing local housing needs.

Strategy 2.3 Action Items

Action Item 2.3.1—Identify strategic sites for housing development or redevelopment.

Action Item 2.3.2—Create a local policy package that targets housing development or redevelopment from multiple angles including owner awareness and engagement, developers and partners, regulatory and procedural adjustments, technical assistance, and financial resources.

Action Item 2.3.3—Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships and relationship building with developers.

Strategy 2.4: Evaluate Options to Incentivize Housing Production and Affordable Housing Through Tax Mechanisms.

Property taxes are another tool that Warren can use to influence development. Tax incentives, such as abatements and increment financing are common mechanisms that can spur housing production.

Tax Abatements for housing development are incentives provided by local governments to reduce or eliminate property taxes on a piece of real estate for a certain period. The goal is to encourage developers to invest in housing projects that they might otherwise consider financially unfeasible.

Research has generally shown that tax abatements are most effective when they address the root causes of low residential investment. In particular, incentives to rehabilitate abandoned properties have shown to often be the most effective. However, tax incentives are often overused and subsidize projects that would have been built without the incentives. In situations where Warren is considering the use of tax abatements, it is important to look at both the benefits and the resulting long-term costs and whether the project is likely to occur with or without the abatement.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a public financing method used to subsidize redevelopment, infrastructure, and other community improvement projects by capturing future tax revenue increases resulting from the development and directing the funds back to the project area.

Similar to tax abatements, research is mixed on the effectiveness of TIFs. Some research suggests that TIFs can be effective at revitalizing investment-deprived areas, whereas

other research suggests that TIFs often capture funds that would have been available without the initial development.

Strategy 2.4 Action Item

Action Item 2.4.1 - Strategically use tax abatements and/or TIF to incentivize redevelopment or reuse of properties in investment-deprived areas or areas with challenges that dissuade developers.

Goal 3: Ensure that a Variety of Housing Types Are Available to Meet the Needs of Warren's Most Vulnerable Residents.

Over the last century, Warren has seen housing development shift predominantly toward single-family homes (Figure H14). Historically, single family homes made up 65 to 70 percent of the Town's housing development; in recent years, over 95 percent of new housing has been single family. For the past five decades, these homes have also trended larger (Figure H13). Larger single-family homes are an important housing type for communities, but demographic shifts in Massachusetts, including an aging population and smaller average household sizes means that many residents and households are seeking a greater variety of housing options – many of which are rarely built. Additionally, single-family homes are often more expensive to build per unit, meaning

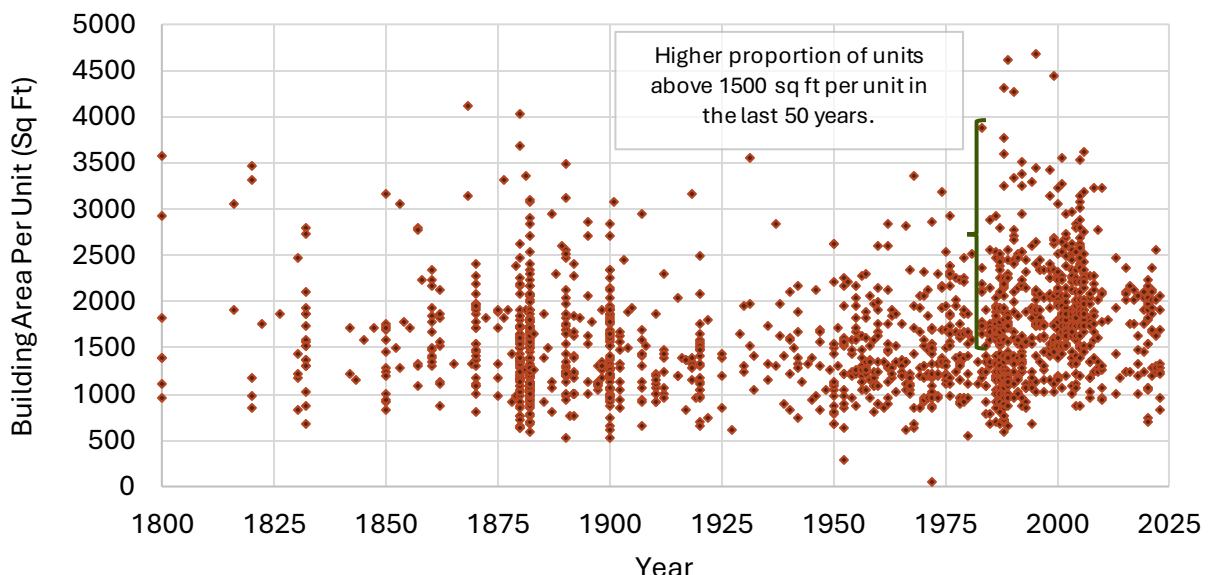
that they have increasingly priced out entry level households from homeownership.

For the purposes of this goal, vulnerable residents are those who are most likely to be priced out of Warren due to high housing costs, lack of diverse housing type options, and changes in housing needs.

Individuals and Families in Different Life Stages Need a Variety of Housing Types

Different households have different housing preferences and needs at different stages of life. A housing lifecycle represents the range of housing options available within a community, spanning from emergency shelters and affordable rental units to homeownership opportunities and specialized housing for seniors or individuals with disabilities. Whereas a large single-family home can serve as an important housing type for some, others may seek out smaller and more affordable single-family or multi-family units. For example, mid-career professionals with children may seek out a large single-family home with some land, young professionals

Figure H13 Residential Building Size Over Time



Source: MassGIS - Town of Warren Assessor Data, vintage 2024

may look for smaller and more affordable apartments, older residents/retirees may look for smaller housing types with minimal maintenance requirements such as condominiums.

Not every household will want every housing type throughout their life, but community preferences and needs vary. Planning for a range of housing needs is an important consideration for Warren to ensure that residents of all ages, income levels, and life

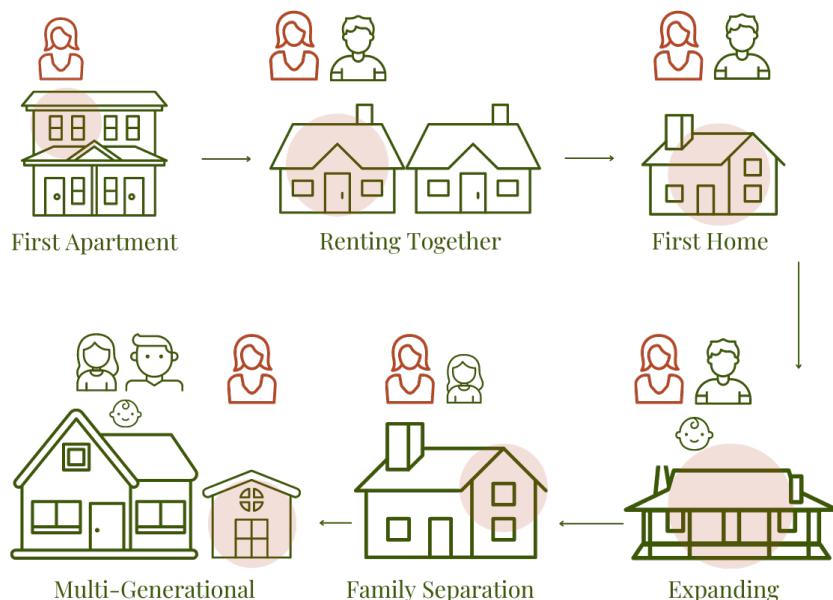
stages have access to safe, affordable, and appropriate housing options. As the Town evolves, diverse housing choices will help maintain a balanced and inclusive community, support economic growth, and accommodate changing demographics. By addressing the full spectrum of housing needs—from starter homes to senior living—Warren can create a resilient and adaptable environment that fosters long-term stability and quality of life for all its residents.

Figure H14 Types of Residential Over Time

Residential Type	0 - 25 Years Old	26 - 50 Years Old	51 - 75 Years Old	76 - 100 Years Old	101 - 125 Years Old	Greater than 125 Years Old
Single Family	96.48%	84.30%	91.09%	87.50%	65.10%	72.53%
Two-Family	0.59%	5.16%	0.99%	10.42%	26.85%	19.04%
Three-Family	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	3.36%	2.89%
4 - 8 Units	0.29%	0.67%	0.00%	0.00%	4.03%	4.10%
Condominium	2.05%	6.73%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Mobile Home	0.59%	1.57%	6.44%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
More than 8 Units	0.00%	0.45%	0.99%	2.08%	0.00%	0.00%
Multi-Unit Parcels	0.00%	1.12%	0.50%	0.00%	0.67%	1.45%

Source: MassGIS - Town of Warren Assessor Data, vintage 2024

Figure H15 Housing Lifecycle



Strategy 3.1: Support Housing Development that Meets the Needs of Warren's Older Residents.

Affordable, accessible, and well-located housing is crucial to quality of life for people of all ages, but especially for older adults. As they age, accessibility is of particular importance to their health and safety. Proximity of housing to stores, health care, services, and transportation can ensure that older residents remain active and engaged and independent members of the community, meet their basic needs, and maintain social connections. For those with cognitive and physical decline, accessibility is even more critical. As the largest monthly expense for many households, housing costs directly affect day-to-day financial security. In Warren, roughly 13% of residents 65 and older live below the federal poverty line, 21% of renter households where the householder is 65 or older are housing cost burdened, and 31% of owner-occupied households are cost burdened.

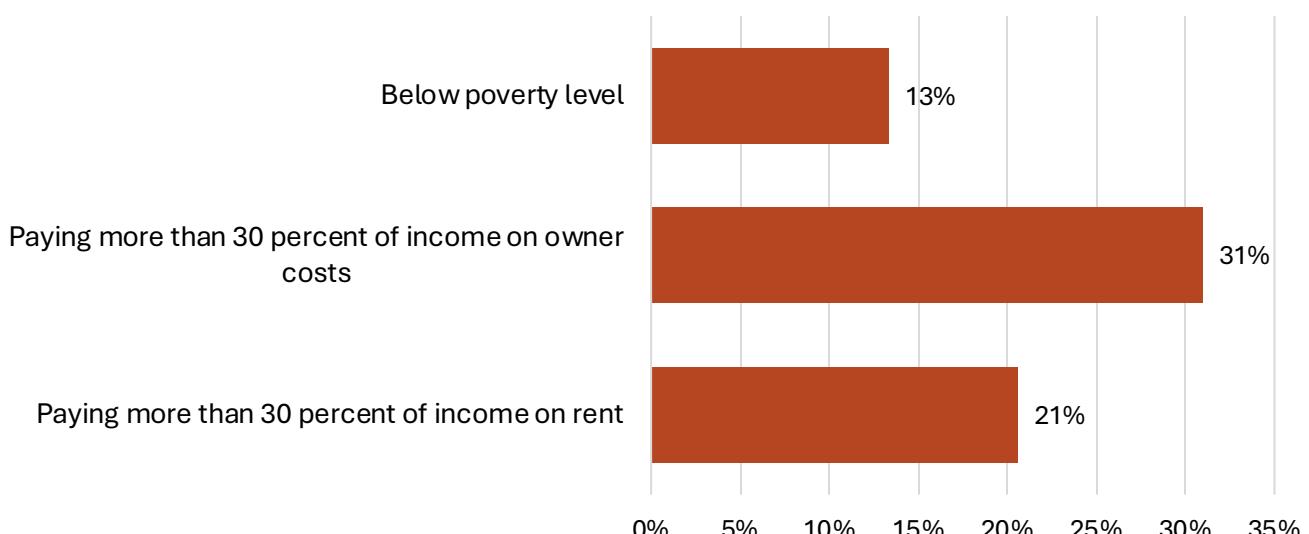
The existing housing stock in Warren is not adequate to meet the increasing demand for

age-friendly housing. As shown in Figure H14, most new housing in Warren is larger single-family. Although these newer homes are more likely to have physical accessibility features, they are not typically designed for older adults who may need more affordable, easy to maintain options. In the Warren Master Plan survey and during the Master Plan workshop, many residents expressed a desire to see Warren become a town where it is easier for residents to age (Figure H11). This means ensuring that housing options beyond traditional single-family homes are feasible to build and available to residents. Older residents in Warren would benefit from a wider range of housing options, including both market rate and subsidized affordable housing options.

How Can We Support Senior Housing Development?

Ensuring that Warren has the housing types to meet its aging residents' needs requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes touching on market rate housing and subsidized housing production, opportunities to

Figure H16 Warren Residents 65 or Older Poverty Status and Housing Costs



Source: 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates

leverage grant funds, housing cost relief, and public private partnerships.

Zoning

Zoning is the primary tool that Warren has at its disposal to influence market rate housing production that meets older residents' needs. The Town should conduct a comprehensive review of its current zoning bylaws to identify any provisions that might hinder the development of housing tailored to older residents. This review could involve assessing lot size requirements, density limits, and restrictions on multi-family or accessory dwelling units (ADUs) that could be modified to allow more flexibility for senior housing. The Town might also explore creating specific zoning districts or overlay zones that encourage age-restricted or senior-friendly housing developments. Engaging with the community and seeking input from older residents, local developers, and housing experts during this evaluation process will ensure that the changes are both effective and aligned with local needs.

Incentives for Affordable Senior Housing

The Town should consider adopting or modifying bylaws to provide incentives for developers to create affordable senior housing. Incentives could include offering density bonuses, allowing reduced parking requirements, or providing tax incentives for projects that include a certain percentage of affordable units for seniors. Additionally, the Town could establish programs that offer financial assistance or technical support to developers who are willing to build affordable senior housing. Streamlining the approval process for senior housing projects would also help reduce development costs and encourage more developers to invest in this type of housing.

Example Code Analysis

Under current zoning, Warren allows Accessory Apartments (a key housing type for seniors) with a special permit on any parcel with a single-family home but requires a minimum lot size of 15,000 square feet. The village residential zone – with the best access to town amenities and services only requires 10,000 square feet for a single-family home. Under the 15,000sqft requirement, roughly 50% of existing single-family parcels in the Village zone are too small. In the Residential and Rural zones, almost all of the parcels comply with the requirement. Therefore, the impact of this requirement may unintentionally push accessory unit development out of the village centers, making them more dispersed and isolated. Similarly, although multi-family is allowed in the village zone, the requirement of 6,000 sq ft per unit significantly increases the amount of land needed to support senior-oriented housing, such as cottage courts, courtyard apartments, and other clustered housing types.

State and Federal Funding

Like many smaller towns, Warren has limited financial resources to directly assist with housing costs. Therefore, the Town should actively research, identify and pursue state and federal funding opportunities that could be leveraged to support the development of senior housing.

Working with Private Partners and Developers

Many towns find themselves in a position of reacting to large housing development proposals. Although this typical process can lead to positive outcomes, it can often be a lengthy negotiation. To ensure the mutually beneficial development of senior housing, Warren should proactively seek out and foster relationships with private developers, non-profit organizations, and financial institutions that have an interest in creating affordable senior housing. These partnerships can bring together public resources, private capital, and specialized expertise to create housing solutions that meet the needs of older residents.

The Town could facilitate these partnerships by hosting forums, creating working groups, or issuing requests for proposals (RFPs) for senior housing projects. Additionally, the Town might consider offering town-owned land or act as an intermediary between property owners that want to use their land to benefit the Town and developers. Another public incentive could be to provide infrastructure support as part of the partnership, making the projects more feasible and attractive to private partners. These collaborations can lead to innovative and sustainable housing developments that might not be possible through public or private efforts alone.

Strategy 3.1 Action Items

Action Item 3.1.1 – Evaluate the Town’s zoning bylaw to identify barriers to and opportunities to encourage housing development that meets the needs of older residents.

Action Item 3.1.2 – Explore opportunities to adopt bylaws and programs that incentivize Affordable senior housing development.

Action Item 3.1.3 – Identify state and federal funding sources that support senior housing development.

Action Item 3.1.4 – Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships to co-create affordable senior housing.

Strategy 3.2: Evaluate the Town's Barriers and Opportunities to Support Diverse Housing Development.

Diverse housing options are an important foundation in any town. Too much of any single housing type can unintentionally limit opportunities for homeownership or make it difficult for certain people to live in a town. As shown in Figure H14, housing in Warren has trended toward single family in recent years. Although important for many of the Town's families, those larger lot single family homes may not be meeting the needs of the younger and older residents.

Missing Housing Typologies

Over the last decade, towns and cities across the US have started to recognize that too much housing is falling into two very narrow buckets – single family and mid-sized/large apartments. Coined “the missing middle,” housing types such as clustered single-family homes, duplexes, three-family, cottage courts, and townhomes are rarely built. These types of housing offer

more affordable and flexible living options, particularly for young families, seniors looking to downsize, and individuals who may not need or want a large home. They also offer denser housing options that are more in line with the character of many small towns. In Warren, several of these housing types were common in the village centers a century ago, however, in recent years they have become rare. In fact, 96% of all new housing in Warren over the last twenty-five years has been single family.

How Can We Increase Housing Options?

During the Warren Master Plan workshop, residents expressed a desire to see a broader mix of housing options in various parts of town (Figure H11). In particular, numerous residents indicated that a mix of housing from starter single family homes to smaller apartment buildings would be beneficial in the Coy Hill Rd, Main St/Town Common, Southbridge Rd, and West Warren Village areas. Small scale mixed-use development was seen as desirable in the Main St, Coy Hill, and West Warren areas. Overall,

Figure H17 Housing Diversity



Duplex



Co-Op



Mixed-Use



Studio



Single-Family



Condo

residents recognized a general need for affordable options that meet the needs of people at different stages of life.

Zoning

The primary reason that many of the missing middle housing types are no longer built is that zoning bylaws have both intentionally and unintentionally made them infeasible to build through dimensional standards and use restrictions. For example, in Warren, anything beyond a two-family house is considered multi-family and only allowed in the village zone. Although enabling denser housing in the village centers follows smart growth planning, the Town's dimensional standards, such as requiring 6000 sq ft per unit, make most development beyond a two-family very difficult to build on existing parcels, many of which are under 18,000 sq ft (minimum for three units). Amending the bylaws to more explicitly allow the types of housing listed above and amending dimensional standards to better reflect on-the-ground parcel conditions will help in delivering greater variation in housing types.

Permitting Process

Stakeholder interviews with several local builders in Warren indicated that the Town has limited staff and processing of applications or obtaining information can take time and result in project delays. The additional costs that developers realize as a result of the time it takes to go through a process are, in part, passed on to eventual homeowners or renters. There is a trade-off for Warren between maintaining more discretionary control of buildings in the town and streamlining the permit process for the development of affordable units. Town staff and residents articulated a concern that relinquishing

much of their control in favor of quicker projects leaves them exposed to undesired projects hitting the ground.

Going through a comprehensive zoning review and update has the potential to alleviate some of the concerns about projects that do not align with the Town's vision. Ideally, a bylaw review and rewrite would align allowed uses with the Town's vision for future housing development. This may present an opportunity to look for ways to streamline the building and permitting process and reduce the associated costs in housing construction.

Strategy 3.2 Action Items

Action Item 3.2.1 – Analyze the Town's zoning bylaw to determine where it poses barriers to the types of housing that would benefit the town or opportunities to better encourage those housing types.

Action Item 3.2.2 – Streamline the Town's permitting processes.

Action Item 3.2.3 – Identify environmental and other constraints to housing development.

ⁱⁱ American Community Survey, 2018-2022.

ⁱⁱⁱ American Community Survey, 2018-2022.

^{iv} Methodology: Property tax parcel polygons were filtered by use code and only residential (single family to 4-8 unit) were selected. There parcels were split into line segments and those lines most likely to represent the front of the property were selected. The closest distance from structures to the selected property lines was then calculated using the 'Near' tool. Structures where the minimum distance was less than the minimum setback of 15 ft (side and rear) were coded as potentially non-conforming. Fifteen ft was used because in some cases the side property lines were captured. Therefore, some properties where the front setback may be less than the required 20 – 25 ft are not identified in Figure H9.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Town of Warren 2025 Master Plan

Introduction

The purpose of the Economic Development chapter is to guide Warren's economic growth, focusing on a diversified strategy that taps into the Town's existing strengths while addressing its current needs.

The primary goal of this chapter is to empower Warren's public, private, and civic sectors to leverage local resources—such as business, labor, and capital—to achieve shared priorities. These include promoting well-paying jobs, reducing poverty, and generating municipal revenue. By tapping into existing assets and addressing challenges like vacant properties and underemployment, the Town can create new opportunities for residents and improve the overall quality of life in Warren.

Village infill development will focus on revitalizing underutilized spaces in the town center, encouraging new housing, retail, and community businesses. Expanding the commercial and industrial sectors in south and West Warren will create space for new businesses, generating jobs and strengthening the local economy.

Additionally, agritourism has the potential to draw visitors, highlight Warren's rural heritage, and promote local farms, making it a key focus area. By investing in rural tourism, local business growth, and targeted industrial expansion, Warren can ensure balanced, sustainable economic growth while maintaining its character.



Population and Education

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Warren's population decreased by 3% from 5,135 in 2010ⁱ to 4,975 in 2020ⁱⁱ. Despite this decline, projections suggest that by 2030, the population will rise to 5,756ⁱⁱⁱ, reflecting a 14% increase. This projected growth will likely cause an increased demand for services, such as healthcare facilities, personal care providers like barbers and hairdressers, and other essential amenities. Developing additional retail and commercial establishments would not only meet the anticipated needs but could also attract a wider variety of businesses and services to the area. From an economic perspective, Warren is likely to benefit from preparing for this growth, as meeting the needs of a larger population can drive both job creation and investment.

Education also plays a vital role in shaping economic development. According to the 2020 American Community Survey^{iv}, 94% of Warren residents over the age of 25 have a high school diploma or equivalent, while 33.4% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Compared to bordering communities, Warren has the second highest percent of residents with a bachelor's degree. Educational attainment is crucial for driving economic

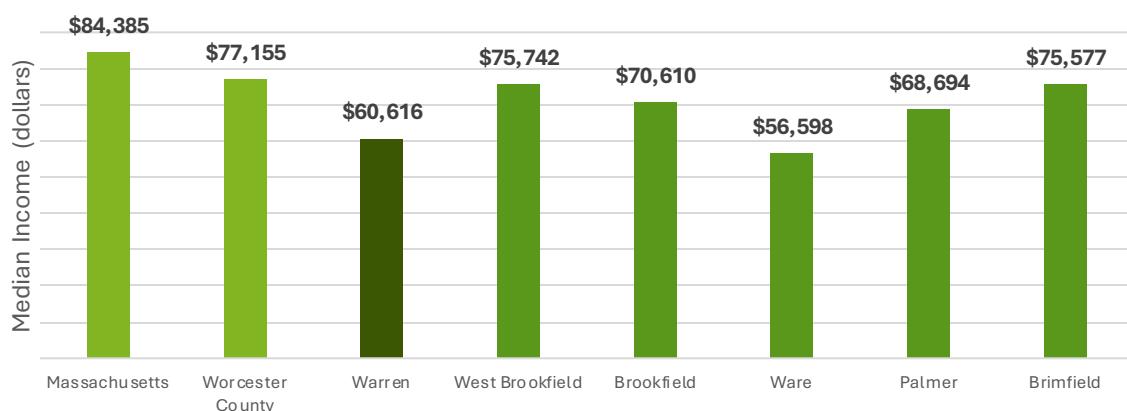
growth, as a more educated workforce contributes to greater prosperity and resilience within the community.

Income, Employment, and Unemployment

A town's median household income provides insight into local purchasing power, consumer spending patterns, housing needs, and the potential to attract businesses. In Warren, the 2020 median household income was \$60,616, with 37% of households earning less than \$50,000^v (Figure ED2). Compared to bordering towns, the county, and the state, Warren has the second-lowest median income, underscoring the need for targeted economic strategies to address local income disparities (Figure ED1).

Warren has seen a steady increase in the labor force, growing from 59% of the population in 2010 to 69% in 2020.^{vi} The labor force comprises all employed civilian residents aged 16 and older. It's important to note that this data reflects residents' employment status rather than job location; thus, the increase in labor force participation represents resident employment levels rather than a proportional increase in local job opportunities.

Figure ED1: Median Household Income Comparison, 2020



Source: 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Warren's employment is divided into three categories: 52% white-collar, 23% blue-collar, and 26% service-oriented positions. White-collar jobs typically involve office-based, professional, or administrative tasks and are often salaried positions, including roles in management, finance, education, and healthcare. Blue-collar jobs refer to manual labor or skilled trades, such as construction, manufacturing, and maintenance. Service-oriented jobs focus on providing services to individuals or businesses, including retail, hospitality, and healthcare services.

These employment patterns offer valuable insight into the stability and structure of Warren's economy. A high percentage of white-collar workers suggests a strong educational background and expertise among residents, which can attract businesses that require skilled professionals. This presents a significant opportunity for Warren to develop local employment options that align with residents' qualifications, reducing the need for them to seek work outside the town. The town's growing labor force also points to a demand for more local job creation to meet the needs of its residents.

Despite having a strong labor force, commuting data reveals that 21% of residents travel 45-59 minutes to work, and 39% work outside the county^{vii}. This indicates that many residents seek employment opportunities beyond Warren. These commuting patterns highlight the regional economic pull and underscore Warren's challenge in retaining its workforce locally and further emphasize the importance of developing more local job opportunities.

Figure ED2: Warren Median Household Income

Under \$50k	37%
\$50k - \$100k	32%
\$100k - \$200k	25%
Over \$200k	6%

Source: 2020 U.S. Census Bureau

Responses from the Warren Master Plan Survey further emphasize this issue. While 22% of respondents identified efficient commuting options as a top priority, many comments reflect frustration with the local job market.

From the Master Plan Survey

"My family and I have not found stable or high-paying jobs in Warren. We all commute over an hour for better-paying opportunities. I'm not even sure where in town there are any job training options."

This sentiment was echoed throughout the survey, with a prevailing concern about the lack of local employment and career development opportunities. Addressing these

Vocational Programs

The Quaboag Regional School District offers vocational training in firefighting and nursing, equipping students with practical, in-demand skills that enhance job prospects, particularly in fields with labor shortages.

Firefighting Program

Launched in 2019, the firefighting program is a yearlong, hands-on course that introduces students to the fire service. Students gain essential skills, including CPR and first responder certification, and use donated gear for realistic simulations in a classroom designed like a fire station. Participants can apply for a \$1,200 scholarship toward EMT certification, and many are inspired to pursue careers with local fire departments.

Nursing Program

Introduced in 2020, the certified nursing assistant (CNA) program provides students with the training and certification needed for CNA roles, especially valuable for nearby nursing and geriatric facilities. This program enables students to enter the workforce immediately upon completion, filling essential healthcare roles.

Pathfinder Vocational School offers advanced manufacturing, automotive technology, business technology, CAD (pre-engineering), carpentry, collision repair and refinishing, cosmetology, culinary arts, electrical, electronic technology, health assisting, horticulture, hospitality management, HVAC/R programming, web development, and plumbing.

These vocational programs offer career-oriented learning experiences, broadening student opportunities while addressing community workforce needs.

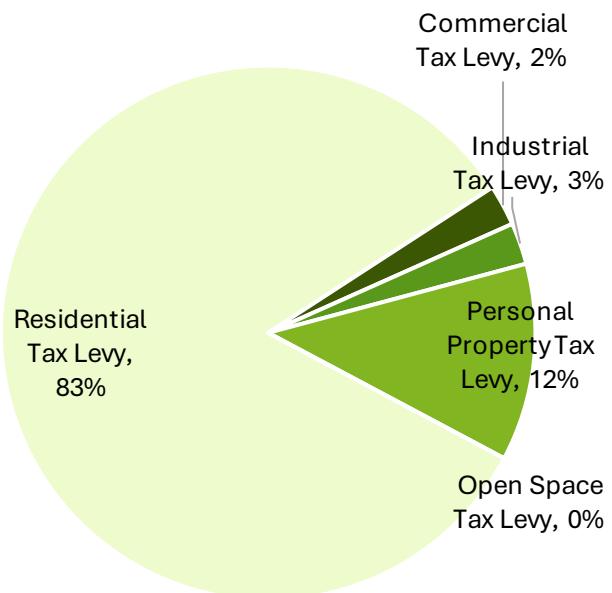
concerns is critical for strengthening the town's economic future and retaining its workforce.

While Warren's unemployment rate has steadily declined, from 5.4% in 2010 to 1.6% in 2020, a closer look at the data shows that unemployment is highest among residents aged 20-24, at 10.7%. This age group typically fills positions in industries such as retail, food service, and other entry-level roles. To further reduce unemployment, Warren could focus on attracting businesses in these sectors, which would directly benefit young adults and provide more job opportunities for this demographic.

Tax Levy Comparison

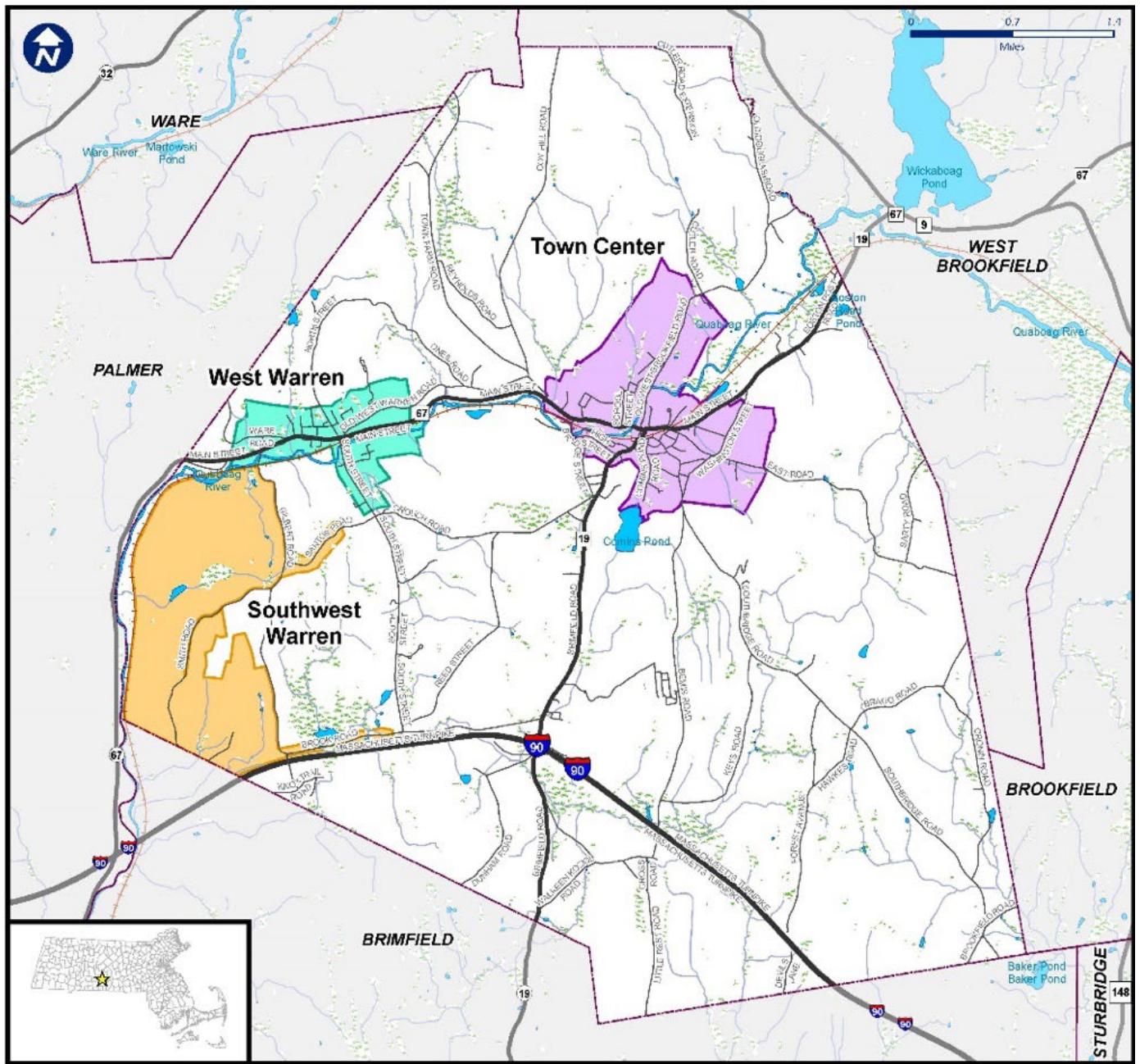
The Town's tax base is heavily reliant on residential properties. In 2022, 83% of the total tax levy was obtained from residential tax bills, compared to 2% of the levy originating from commercial tax bills (Figure ED3). This places a significant financial burden on Warren residents and limits the Town's ability to invest in essential services and infrastruc-

Figure ED3: Warren Tax Levy Comparison by Class, 2022



ture. By strategically increasing the commercial tax levy, Warren can generate additional revenue to fund critical projects, reduce the tax burden on homeowners, and promote a more balanced and sustainable fiscal approach.

Figure ED4: Village Center Boundaries



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Figure ED5: Businesses in Warren, MA

Business	Address	Hours of Operation	Business Category
Town Center			
Glenda's Pub	948 Main St.	Mon - Thu: 11:00 am - 11:00 pm Fri: 11:00 am - 2:00 am Sat: 11:00 am - 1:00 pm Sun: 12:00 am - 11:00 pm	Bar
Diva Dance School	954 Main St.	Not Provided	Dance School
Warren Package Inc.	942 Main St.	Mon - Fri: 5:00 pm - 9:00 pm Sat - Sun: 7:00 am - 9:00 pm	Grocery Store / Liquor Store
Citgo	931 Main St.	Mon - Sat: 6:30 am - 7:00 pm	Gas Station
Masons Grille	14 Milton O Fountain Way	Wed - Fri: 7:00 am - 2:00 pm Sat - Sun: 7:00 am - 1:00 pm	Eating Establishment
George's Pizza	991 Main St.	Mon - Sun: 11:00 am - 10:00 pm	Eating Establishment
Russell Electric Co. Inc.	15 Winthrop Terrace	Not Provided	Electric Company
Warren Coin-A-Matic Laundry	20 Milton O Fountain Way	Mon - Sun: 9:00 am - 9:45 pm	Laundromat
Businesses Outside of Village Centers			
George's Tire Place	386 Boston Post Rd	Mon: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm Wed: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm Fri: 9:00 am - 6:00 pm Sat: 10:00 am - 3:00 pm	Auto
Lizak Bus Service Inc.	1301 Main St	Mon - Fri: 8:30 am - 5:00 pm	Commercial Auto
Sherman Oil	62 Comins Pond Rd.	Mon - Fri: 8:00 am - 5:00 pm Sat: 8:00 am - 12:00 pm	Home Heat and Oil Service
Warren Truck & Auto Repair	550 Main St.	Mon - Fri: 8:30 am - 5:00 pm Sat: 9:00 am - 1:00 pm	Auto
Karen Moore Cakes	47 Hillside Ave	Not Provided	Home Business: Cakes
Warren Cash Mkt	942 Main St.	Mon - Fri: 5:00 am - 9:00 pm Sat: 7:00 am - 9:00 pm Sun: 7:00 am - 11:00 pm	Grocery / Convenience
Alltown / Mobil	1300 Main St.	Mon - Sun: Open 24 Hours	Convenience store
CIRCOR Naval Solutions	82 Bridge Ave	Not Provided	Pump Manufacturing
Secure Storage MA	70 Boston Post Rd.	Mon - Fri: 8:00 am - 5:00 pm Sat-Sun: 8:00 am - 12:00 pm	Storage
Spera Landscaping	732 Brimfield Rd.	Mon - Sun: Open 24 Hours	Landscaping
Fijols Junk Yard Inc	366 Boston Post Rd.	Mon - Fri: 9:30 am - 4:30 pm	Junk Dealers
Intercity Lines Inc	552 Old West Brookfield Rd.	Not Provided	Automobile Transporters
Therrien Quality Home Improvements	432 Bemis Rd.	Mon - Sat: 7:00 am - 7:00 pm	Contractors
501 Disc Golf	501 Old West Brookfield Rd.	Mon - Sun: 7:00 am - 8:00 pm	Entertainment
Mikes Automotive Inc	434 Boston Post Rd.	Mon - Fri: 8:00 am - 5:00 pm Sat: 8:00 am - 12:00 pm Sun: 7:00 am - 11:00 am	Auto
Moe's Auto Detail	111 Boston Post Rd.	Mon - Sat: 7:00 am - 5:00 pm	Auto
Rocky Acres Farm	690 Coy Hill Rd.	Mon - Sun: 11:00 am - 10:00 pm	Dairy Farm
Dunn's German Shepherds	1210 Main Street	Not Provided	Home Business: Pet Breeders

Quaboag Sportsman's Club Inc	451 Dunham Rd.	Mon - Sun: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm	Sports Club
Dream Vacations	229 Reed St.	Mon - Sat: 9:00 am - 7:00 pm	Travel Agency
Breezelands Orchards	1791 Southbridge Rd.	Mon - Sun: 10:00 am - 5:00 pm	Orchard
Lilly's Restoration	83 Comins Pond Rd.	Mon - Sun: 12:00 am - 12:00 pm	Contractors
Fountain Insurance	946 Main St.	Mon - Fri: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm	Insurance
Dimond Tax Service	30 Lombard St.	Mon - Fri: 8:00 am - 5:00 pm	Financial Services
Samek Properties	275 Brimfield Rd.	Mon - Fri: 7:00 am - 5:00 pm Sat: 8:00 am - 4:00 pm	Sand & Gravel
Pat Realty Co	233 Maple St.	Not Provided	Home Business: Real Estate Agent
Quaboag Regional High School	284 Old West Brookfield Rd.	Mon - Fri: 7:00 am - 4:00 pm	Public School
Rybak Engineering Inc.	132 Forest Ave	Mon - Fri: 7:00 am - 5:00 pm	Engineers
Dave's Woodworking Plus	350 Boston Post Rd.	Mon - Fri: 8:30 am - 5:30 pm	Carpenters
AV Custom Woodworking	61 Mechanic St.	Mon - Fri: 8:00 am - 5:00 pm Sat: 8:00 am - 1:00 pm	Woodworking
Al & son's LLC	60 Coy Hill Rd.	Mon - Fri: 7:00 am - 6:00 pm	Solar Energy Installers

West Warren

Tropical Vibes	2162 Main St.	Tue. - Sun: 11:00 am - 9:00 pm	Eating Establishment
Village Market and Deli	2240 Main St.	Mon - Sat: 11:00 am - 7:00 pm	Grocery Store
Dippin' Donuts	2730 Main St.	Mon - Sun: 5:00 am - 7:00 pm	Coffee Shop
AWL Associates	2345 Main St.	Not Provided	Engineers
Warren Roofers Tiles Replacement	69 Ware Rd.	Not Provided	Contractors
Korzec Insurance	2400 Main St.	Mon - Fri: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm	Insurance
Copart	600 Old West Warren Rd.	Mon - Fri: 5:00 am - 5:00 pm	Auto
Warren Sanitary Transfer Station	581 South St.	Tue: 8:00 am - 4:00 pm Sat: 8:00 am - 4:00 pm	Garbage Dump
Cash For Cars	600 Old West Warren Rd.	Mon - Fri: 7:00 am - 7:00 pm	Auto
Whiskey Hill Liquors	2370 Main St.	Sun - Thur: 10:00 am - 8:00 pm Fri - Sat: 10:00 am - 9:00 pm	Liquor Store
Hair Studio and Day Spa	2370 Main Street	Tue - Thur: 9:00 am - 7:00 pm Fri: 10:00 am - 6:00 pm Sat: 9:00 am - 4:00 pm	Beauty Services
Mirage	2282 Main Street	Mon, Wed, Fri: 10:00 am - 6:00 pm Tue, Thur: 11:00 am - 7:00 pm Sat: 11:00 am - 2:00 pm	Beauty Services
NextGEN Parts Place	764 Main Street	Mon - Fri: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm Sat: 9:00 am - 1:00 pm	Auto
Hole in the Wall Studio Music Publishing	107 Chapel St.	Not Provided	Recording Studio

Source: Yellow Pages, Warren, MA Businesses, accessed September 19, 2024, <https://www.yellowpages.com/warren-ma>

Key Findings and Priorities

Key Finding 1: A Strong Desire for Diverse Business Offerings in Warren

Warren's economy has evolved over time. In the 18th century the Town was shaped by dispersed agricultural activity, which transitioned into a thriving mill industry that fueled the Town's growth. During the 19th century, Warren emerged as a hub for industrial development, benefiting from its access to the Western Railroad and the waterpower provided by the Quaboag River. Mills produced gunpowder, cotton, wool, shoes, and boots, marking a period of prosperity and vibrant commercial growth that led to the construction of several significant buildings, some of which still stand today.

However, in recent years, Warren has faced significant economic challenges. Many residents must commute outside of town for employment, and the Town struggles to both attract businesses and retain businesses. The closure of key businesses, such as Cornerstone Bank in 2022, has further strained the local economy, forcing residents to travel to neighboring towns for essential services.

Warren's Town Common area, which functions as the downtown, offers only a limited number of businesses such as Mason's Grille, George's Pizza, and Glenda's Pub. West Warren Village has its own establishments, including Tropical Vibes and the Village Market and Deli. While these businesses provide important services, residents have expressed concerns about the lack of variety, limited business hours, and the need for more diverse offerings.

A recurring theme from the Master Plan Survey and the Community Workshop is a strong desire for a wider array of businesses in town. Residents consistently voiced interest in seeing more small retail shops, personal services (e.g., hair salons, dentists, lawyers), healthcare facilities, and local mom-and-pop stores. There is a clear preference for unique, locally owned businesses over large chain stores, with many requesting more dining and entertainment options, such as restaurants, coffee shops, and breweries that stay open later to foster a more vibrant village atmosphere.

Overcoming Challenges and Strategic Opportunities

Warren residents express a strong desire for diverse businesses, yet the Town faces significant obstacles in achieving this goal. The first step is to address the shortage of businesses and enhance support for existing ones. Key strategies for promoting economic diversification include backing local enterprises, investing in workforce development, and improving infrastructure. Creative and adaptable economic development initiatives will be crucial for attracting and nurturing a wider array of businesses, ultimately bolstering the local economy and enhancing the quality of life for residents. This key finding underscores the necessity of diversifying Warren's economic base to meet community needs and foster sustainable growth.

From the Master Plan Survey

“Would love to have more of a downtown life. Places open a little later and some type of nightlife. Would love to have dinner downtown and then walk to a coffee shop or shop at a small store.”

Diversification Through Neighborhood Profiles

Esri creates "Tapestry Segmentation" data by analyzing consumer preferences and life-style patterns based on a combination of demographic and psychographic factors. This data includes insights on household characteristics, income levels, purchasing behaviors, and lifestyle choices to classify communities into distinct market segments. Esri gathers this data from sources such as the U.S. Census, private surveys, and proprietary data models, and applies statistical techniques to identify patterns within populations.

Esri's Tapestry methodology segments populations into 67 distinct types within 14 "LifeMode" groups, categorizing neighborhoods based on common behaviors and preferences. Each segment reflects unique characteristics, enabling businesses and planners to better understand and target community needs or consumer markets effectively. For instance, Tapestry data can reveal spending habits, media consumption, or leisure preferences, supporting targeted marketing and regional planning efforts by offering insights into specific local demographics.

Analyzing the Esri Tapestry Segmentation data for Warren highlights distinct demographic groups and it can help identify potential business opportunities by aligning with these groups' needs. For Warren, four key demographic segments provide insight into potential business opportunities.

Outdoor and DIY-Centric Businesses

The Salt of the Earth group (31.9%) values outdoor activities like fishing, hunting, and camping. These residents also tend to own trucks, maintain their own gardens, and tackle home improvement projects. Businesses that cater to their lifestyle—such as

outdoor gear retailers, hardware stores, and garden centers—could thrive in Warren. Additionally, this group's preference for in-person transactions suggests that locally owned shops and specialty stores that emphasize customer service and personal interaction could succeed.

Family-Friendly and Budget-Conscious Options

The Parks and Rec group (27.6%) prioritizes practicality and budget-friendly options. They enjoy family-style dining, home-based entertainment, and outdoor recreational activities. Warren could meet the needs of this segment by developing affordable family restaurants, community recreational centers, and discount retail outlets that offer convenience and value. Additionally, local parks and outdoor facilities could be enhanced to further attract this group, positioning Warren as a destination for regional outdoor recreation.

Discount Retail and Entertainment

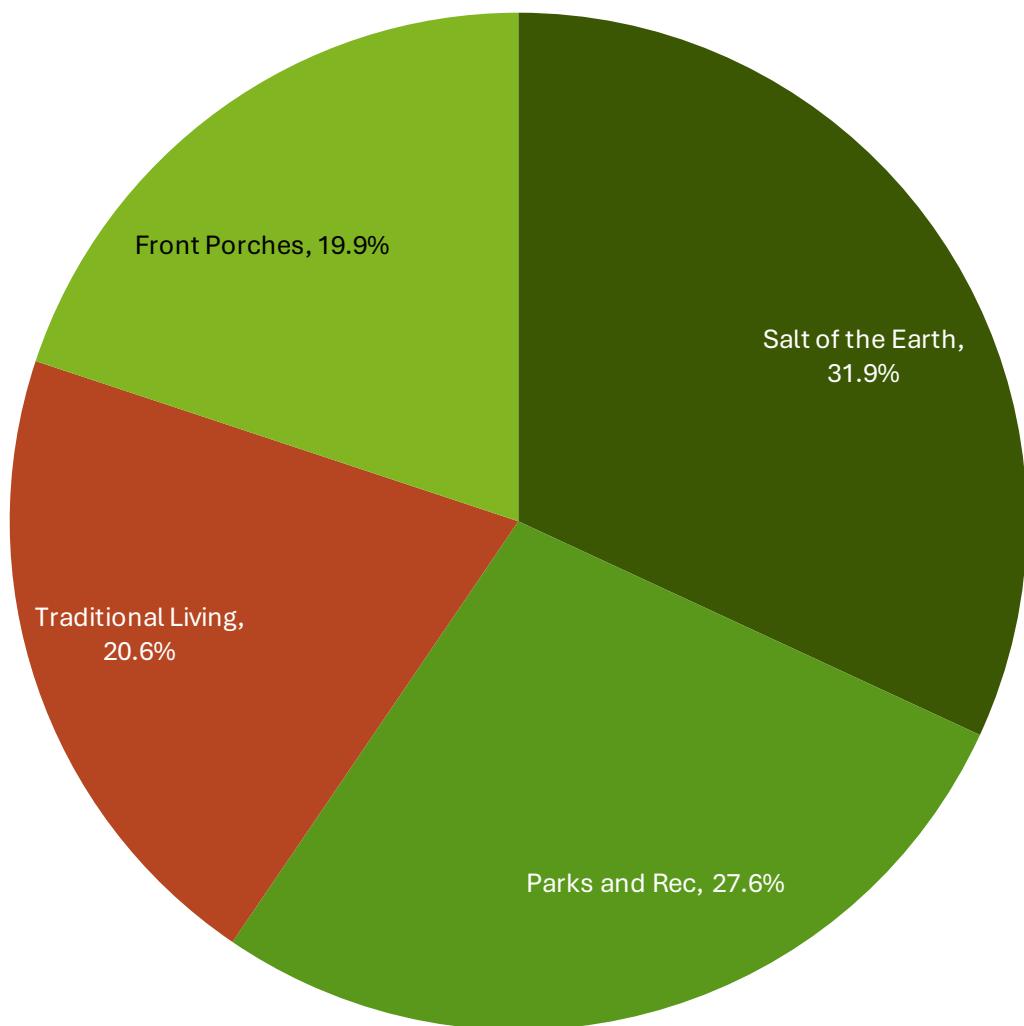
The Traditional Living segment (20.6%) is cost-conscious, often shopping at discount stores and enjoying casual dining at fast-food restaurants. Expanding discount grocery stores, fast-food chains, and entertainment venues such as movie theaters or family-friendly activities would align with their consumer behavior. This group's love of outdoor activities like fishing also suggests opportunities for outdoor-focused businesses that cater to their recreational preferences.

Tech and Leisure-Focused Businesses

The Front Porches segment (19.9%) represents a younger, tech-savvy demographic that enjoys online entertainment, gaming and social media. To cater to their preferences, Warren could develop tech-oriented businesses such as internet cafes, gaming lounges, and mobile device repair shops.

These types of businesses would not only serve this growing segment but also attract younger residents and visitors interested in tech and leisure activities.

Figure ED6: Warren Consumer Preferences, 2024



Key Finding 2: Opportunity to Leverage Niche Markets and Agritourism

Tourism and Niche Market Opportunities

Warren's rural charm and outdoor recreation options create unique prospects for tourism-related businesses. The Salt of the Earth and Parks and Rec groups, who enjoy outdoor sports and activities, position Warren as an ideal location for eco-tourism and adventure tourism. Establishing attractions such as campgrounds, adventure parks, or

outdoor adventure tours could appeal to both residents and tourists.

Warren is home to five family-owned farms, some of which have been in operation for decades. These farms produce a diverse array of products, including maple syrup, dairy, beef, apples, cider, and even serve as animal sanctuaries. Notably, Warren's Zoning Bylaw permits farm stands—small retail spaces for selling products—across all zoning districts, yet this flexibility may not be widely known among residents. By promoting this allowance, Warren can support smaller agricultural enterprises, diversify

Figure ED7: Farms in Warren, MA

Farm Name	Address	Contact	About
Deer Meadow Farm	60 Reed St	413-321-9763	A small family-owned farm that produces maple syrup.
Rogers Farm	2301 Southbridge Rd	413-544-5408	Local Dairy Farm that sells beef, wood (pick-up only), compost, hay, corn stalks, pumpkins, and gourds.
Rocky Acres Farm	690 Coy Hill Rd	413-436-5806	A family-owned farm that has been in existence for hundreds of years- in fact the farmhouse is the oldest house in Warren! The farm is known to breed and develop herds of dairy cattle to produce high quality milk, selling raw milk off the farm.
Liberty Farms	60 Bay Path Rd	413-436-8133	A certified nonprofit animal sanctuary and horse rescue.
Breezelands Orchards Inc	1791 Southbridge Rd	413-436-7122	A family-owned farm operated by the family since 1896 producing on 100 acres for apple orchards.

the economy, and provide more direct sales opportunities for farmers and local artisans.

One key business in Warren, Laurel Ridge Bed and Breakfast, significantly enhances the local economy by providing both accommodation and event services. Located on 60 acres of scenic New England woodland, it offers a unique getaway with eco-friendly features, including solar arrays and wind turbines, making it one of the “greenest B&Bs in New England.” In addition to lodging, Laurel Ridge also hosts weddings, with an outdoor event space for up to 100 guests. Its proximity to popular attractions such as Salem Cross Inn, Palmer Motorsports Park, and Old Sturbridge Village further boosts Warren's appeal as a destination for travelers and wedding parties seeking a picturesque, countryside setting. Leveraging such venues

could expand Warren's reach in the tourism and events market.

By focusing on Warren's natural assets and aligning business development with the preferences of its demographic groups, the town can effectively diversify its business landscape while also exploring tourism and niche market opportunities. This approach not only addresses the immediate needs and preferences of Warren residents but also positions the town as a hub for outdoor recreation, family-friendly services, and unique event destinations, attracting both locals and visitors alike.



Liberty Farms Instagram Picture, posted on June 13, '24 Accessed on Nov. 12, '24



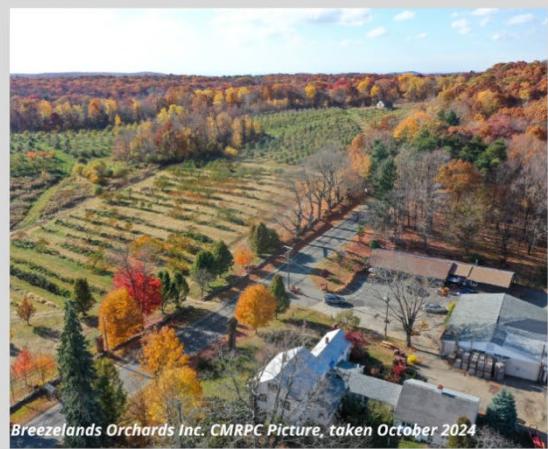
Rogers Farm Facebook Picture, posted on April 21, '24 Accessed on Nov. 12, '24



Rogers Farm Website Picture, Accessed on Nov. 12, '24



Deer Meadow Farm Facebook Picture, posted on June 19, '24 Accessed on Nov. 12, '24



Breezelands Orchards Inc. CMRPC Picture, taken October 2024

Key Finding 3: Need to Revitalize Key Commercial Corridors.

The Town of Warren is defined by the key commercial corridors - Warren Center and West Warren Village. These areas, once hubs of prosperity, are still well-known to residents and occupy prime locations. However, as noted in Key Finding 1, these corridors have suffered a significant decline, with few businesses operating and many historic commercial buildings vacant or in disrepair. The once-thriving mills and commercial complexes from the 19th century that contributed to Warren's economic growth now stand as reminders of a more vibrant past, plagued by neglect and lack of investment.

Economic shifts, such as the rise of e-commerce, reduced entrepreneurship, and the dominance of big-box retailers, have compounded these issues and led to uneven growth and high vacancy rates. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these struggles, leaving Warren's downtown and commercial corridors increasingly empty and underutilized.

Community Support for Revitalization

Local stakeholders have expressed strong support for revitalizing these key areas to restore them as active centers of commerce and community life. This highlights the urgent need for strategic interventions, such as addressing vacant storefronts, improving building facades, and enhancing the streetscape to attract businesses and residents back to these corridors.

Fundamental Needs for a Successful Commercial Corridor

The decline of Warren's mills and commercial corridors, particularly in the town center and West Warren, is evident through several key indicators:

- 1. High Vacancy Rates:** The town centers are marked by a significant number of vacant properties. This not only suggests diminished demand for commercial space but also raises concerns about the area's attractiveness to potential businesses. The closure or relocation of businesses is often indicative of underlying issues such as insufficient consumer traffic or economic instability in the region.
- 2. Deteriorating Infrastructure:** Many buildings in the town center are showing signs of neglect and decay. This deterioration can deter potential tenants and customers, further exacerbating vacancy issues. The age of the buildings, combined with visible signs of disrepair, highlights the need for intervention to revitalize the area.
- 3. Obsolete Buildings:** The presence of obsolete structures, particularly in the Wrights Mill complex, poses significant challenges for revitalization. These buildings may not meet current market demands due to their outdated designs or configurations, making them less appealing for new businesses. This issue signals a need for redevelopment strategies that align with contemporary commercial needs.
- 4. Blighted Areas:** The West Warren Community Hall is identified as a

site of blight, characterized by boarded windows, a deteriorating roof, and unkempt grounds. Beyond aesthetic concerns, this also poses potential health and safety risks. Identifying buildings that qualify as blighted according to local, regional, or state definitions is crucial for accessing public funding for redevelopment efforts.

5. **Potential Contamination:** Given the historical industrial use of the Wrights Mill complex, there are concerns about potential contamination that may exist on the site. This issue necessitates further study to assess environmental risks, as contamination could hinder redevelopment efforts and deter investment in the area. Similarly, reuse of the former dry cleaners location on Old West Brookfield Road poses potential contamination concerns due to proximity to the Quaboag River.

The indicators showcase how the Town of Warren is grappling with its commercial corridor decline, including high vacancy rates, deteriorating infrastructure, obsolete buildings, blighted areas, and potential contamination. Targeted intervention strategies will be essential to revitalize the commercial corridors and foster economic growth in the community. Efforts should not only focus on sites like Wrights Mill but also extend to other key areas, including buildings in the town center and within West Warren, to promote a comprehensive economic renewal.

Lack of Economic Development Committee

The Town of Warren currently lacks an Economic Development Committee, which

poses a significant disadvantage. Local governments typically rely on such committees to develop strategies that attract new businesses, retain existing ones, create jobs, and enhance the tax base, ultimately improving residents' quality of life. The absence of this committee further emphasizes the need for revitalizing Warren's commercial corridors, highlighting a critical area for focused action.

From the Master Plan Survey

“So many properties are not maintained, in disrepair.”

Goal 1: Leverage Key Niches and Diversify Business Offerings

Warren's experience with economic instability following the closure of the Wrights Mill highlights the vulnerability of relying on a single major employer. This closure has had lasting impacts, leading to higher residential local tax needs, strained public resources, and a limited job market. As outlined in the key findings, Warren has a narrow business landscape, which restricts both employment opportunities and access to services for residents. Goal 1 addresses this gap by proposing a deliberate strategy to broaden economic growth through niche markets and business diversification.

Expanding business diversity will require steps like supporting local enterprises, investing in workforce development, and enhancing infrastructure. By fostering niche industries and welcoming new types of businesses, Warren can stabilize and grow its economy, ultimately improving residents' quality of life and reducing reliance on limited revenue sources.

Strategy 1.1: Leverage Key Niches to Boost Tourism

This strategy encourages the Town to collaborate with local businesses like local farms and bed and breakfasts. Supporting programs for tourism-related businesses can empower local entrepreneurs, providing grants, training, and resources to help them grow and diversify their offerings.

Organizing events such as farm tours, historical site visits, outdoor festivals, and wedding showcases will bring additional focus to Warren's assets, drawing attention to local businesses and enhancing community engagement. These events provide immersive experiences that align with identified tourism niches, allowing visitors to connect personally with Warren's offerings.

This strategy also highlights how wayfinding and branding initiatives play a vital role in making tourism attractions easily accessible and recognizable. Clear signage and thoughtful branding through maps, brochures, and digital content guide tourists to Warren's attractions, enhancing the visitor experience and encouraging exploration. Collaborating with local businesses will amplify these efforts, enabling joint marketing strategies that spotlight the unique offerings Warren provides. By promoting packages or special deals, the Town can create a cohesive experience that benefits both businesses and visitors.

Strategy 1.1 focuses on tapping into Warren's unique assets to create a sustainable tourism economy, attract visitors, and support local businesses. By promoting key tourism niches such as eco-tourism, historical tourism, and agritourism, Warren can utilize its natural beauty, historical landmarks, and agricultural heritage to attract

targeted audiences. Developing marketing materials highlighting the charm of local farms, bed and breakfasts, outdoor recreation, and wedding services will build visibility and establish Warren as a destination for niche tourism experiences.

Ecotourism

Warren's natural beauty and rural charm make it an ideal location for ecotourism, which focuses on traveling to natural areas while conserving the environment and supporting local communities. Warren could promote its natural habitats, such as trails and watersheds, for activities like hiking, birdwatching, canoeing, and nature tours, capitalizing on the growing interest in sustainable travel. This could lead to economic benefits such as job creation, business development, and increased tax revenue.

Historical Tourism

Warren's rich industrial past offers a valuable opportunity for historical tourism. Wright's Mill stands as a testament to Warren's industrial peak and showcases the potential for revitalizing industrial landmarks to celebrate local history.

The town library, prominently located in the town center, holds historical significance and could serve as a focal point for cultural and community activities. Its central location makes it ideal for events or exhibitions that highlight Warren's heritage.

In West Warren, the array of older historic homes presents a unique opportunity to revitalize and integrate these properties into a broader historical tourism strategy. These homes could become part of a walking tour or interpretive program to showcase the area's architectural history and way of life during its industrial zenith.

While the train depot is not currently a priority for purchase, it remains a symbol of Warren's rail-driven prosperity in the past. In the future, it could be transformed into a museum or cultural center, offering insights into the town's transportation and industrial history. Additionally, the town could consider hosting themed festivals, historical reenactments, or guided tours to create engaging experiences that celebrate its past while stimulating the local economy.

Agritourism

Agritourism presents a strong opportunity for economic growth in Warren by drawing visitors to local farms and agricultural activities. The five farms operating in town open the door to the potential to expand tourism by offering experiences like crop harvesting, farm tours, and sustainable farming demonstrations.

Warren's allowance of farm stands town-wide can support both farmers and local artisans by providing outlets for direct sales. The availability of farm stands and agritourism are closely intertwined, as farm stands provide the physical space to sell locally produced goods, while agritourism draws visitors to experience and purchase those goods directly. By encouraging both, Warren can capitalize on its agricultural heritage, creating a more vibrant local economy. This synergy enhances the visitor experience, strengthens local connections, and fosters a community-driven approach to economic development.

Promoting Wedding Tourism

An emerging niche market that Warren can consider is wedding-related tourism. Weddings are significant economic events that can stimulate local economies through spending on services such as florists, caterers, photographers, and venues.^{viii}

By leveraging venues like Laurel Ridge Bed and Breakfast, the town can position itself as an attractive destination for weddings. Whether through its scenic rural charm, historical venues, or unique local character, the town can generate substantial revenue for local businesses. Wedding-related services can contribute to diversifying the local economy by creating demand for event spaces, accommodations, restaurants, and local artisans.

Strategy 1.1 Action Items

Action Item 1.1.1 – Identify and prioritize tourism niches such as eco-tourism, historical tourism, and agritourism.

Action Item 1.1.2 – Create and implement wayfinding signage and branding strategies to enhance the visibility of tourist attractions.

Action Item 1.1.3 – Collaborate with local businesses to develop joint marketing strategies and packages promoting Warren's tourism assets.

Action Item 1.1.4 – Organize and host tourism-related events.

Action Item 1.1.5 - Conduct market research to assess demand for types of tourism.

Action Item 1.1.6 – Create support programs for tourism-related businesses.

Strategy 1.2: Increase Support for New Businesses

Residents have expressed a strong desire for a wider variety of unique, locally owned businesses that provide essential services like dining, entertainment, health and personal services. This strategy promotes actions that focus on supporting business owners, making Warren a more attractive location for new ventures, and fostering a diverse and resilient economy.

Business Incentives

Business incentives are tools that local governments or organizations offer to attract and support companies and can include grants, tax breaks, or financing to reduce startup costs, improve infrastructure, or support hiring. Though Warren's website currently highlights resources such as the Massachusetts Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP), expanding these offerings could enhance the town's appeal to a wider variety of businesses.

This strategy aims to position the Town Center as a thriving commercial and social hub, promoting factors like retail sales, property values, shopper patronage, and diversity of businesses. Incentives designed specifically to attract mixed-use development in areas like the Town Center and West Warren are crucial for achieving this vision. Drawing from best practices, such as the Main Street America Program, incentives can help "create a place that locals love, and visitors will love it too."^{ix}

The types of incentives recommended include both "hard" and "soft" incentives, each offering targeted support to developers and business owners:

Hard Incentives

- Historic Tax Credits
- New Markets Tax Credits
- Property Tax Abatement
- Opportunity Zone
- Façade Grant
- Low Interest Loans

Soft Incentives

- Reduced Tap Fees^x
- Reduced Impact Fees
- Easy and Transparent Entitlement Process
- Grant and/or Loan Application Assistance

However, implementing business incentives can come with potential challenges, such as increased government spending and the potential need for higher taxes or service cuts. While these incentives can stimulate economic growth and job creation, the associated costs must be carefully managed.

Strategy 1.2 recognizes these challenges and advocates that Warren apply for federal and state grants to help offset these impacts. This balanced approach ensures that while Warren actively encourages new businesses, it also safeguards its financial health and community services.

To further assist in this effort, a detailed breakdown of available business incentives at the federal, state, and local levels should be maintained, serving as a valuable resource for both potential new businesses and the town.

Workforce Development

Expanding vocational programs in Warren can significantly address local workforce needs. In addition to programs offered by Quaboag Regional and Pathfinder Tech, the Town could consider programs in fields like

renewable energy and biomanufacturing. Each of these areas has a growing demand for skilled labor, and vocational training can equip residents with the skills necessary for well-paying jobs while attracting businesses in these sectors. By creating a pipeline of talent, Warren can enhance its appeal to prospective employers and encourage businesses to invest in the town.

Attracting New Industries and Services

Strategy 1.2 places a strong emphasis on attracting healthcare and personal services, recognizing the critical need for these establishments within the community. Many residents have voiced their frustrations during community workshops, indicating that they often travel outside of Warren for basic healthcare, such as medical clinics, dental offices, and wellness centers. By promoting tax incentives and collaborating with local healthcare programs Warren can create a supportive environment for medical and wellness services, ensuring residents can access the care they need within the town. A well-established healthcare system not only meets the immediate needs of the community but also enhances the overall quality of life, making the area more appealing to prospective businesses and their employees.

Exploring the Beauty Industry

The beauty industry presents another opportunity for diversifying Warren's local economy, offering new avenues for entrepreneurship and small business development. The beauty sector has a proven track record of transforming smaller towns by fostering a sense of community and promoting economic success ^{xi}. For Warren, investing in beauty-related services such as salons, wellness centers, and esthetician practices

could provide local residents with opportunities to both start their own businesses and spend locally on self-care.

The industry is particularly resilient because beauty services are seen as essential by many, creating consistent demand. Establishing training programs or incentivizing beauty businesses can lead to homegrown talent setting up shop, thus reducing the need for residents to seek such services outside of Warren. Additionally, beauty businesses tend to encourage cross-sector growth, as they rely on nearby cafes, boutiques, and other complementary establishments, creating a dynamic, interconnected community.

The key demographic profiles of Warren, such as the *Salt of the Earth* and *Parks and Rec* residents may appreciate budget friendly or nature-inspired treatments. The tech-savvy *Front Porches* group could benefit from new beauty practices that incorporate social media marketing, by aligning beauty industry offerings with local lifestyle preferences, Warren can attract a broad customer base and strengthen its business diversity.

Strategy 1.2 represents the primary objective of diversifying Warren's economy by implementing targeted actions that attract new businesses and enhance local offerings. By balancing the advantages of business incentives with strategic grant applications, the town can create a robust economic environment that meets community needs. Each suggested action item aligns with Goal 1 to gain economic resilience, ultimately ensuring that Warren remains a desirable destination for both residents and businesses.

Strategy 1.2 Action Items

Action Item 1.2.1 – Explore potential business incentives like tax breaks or reduced permit fees.

Action Item 1.2.2 – Apply for state and federal business development grants.

Action Item 1.2.3 – Leverage and expand local vocational programs.

Action Item 1.2.4 – Attract healthcare and personal services.

Action Item 1.2.5 – Develop beauty industry opportunities.

Goal 2: Revitalize Key Commercial Corridors and Strategically Plan for Industrial Growth.

Goal 2 focuses on bolstering Warren's key commercial corridors—Town Center and West Warren Village as hubs of business and community life. Emphasis is placed on revitalizing these areas to enhance community character, drive foot traffic, and attract new business opportunities. By addressing vacant retail spaces and prioritizing strategic support, Warren can foster thriving commercial areas that encourage local spending and job creation. The strategies introduced support this goal by focusing on revitalizing prime commercial spaces. Additionally, Goal 2 focuses on planning for industrial growth in the area abutting Interstate 90 as a preferred area for a new industrial corridor. Highlighting the importance of proactive planning for industrial growth in Southwest Warren, by establishing the area as an economic anchor that attracts industry and provides employment opportunities will further support Warren's economic development and resilience.

Together, these strategies not only align with Goal 2's vision of a prosperous town but also provide a balanced approach to growth—enhancing existing commercial spaces and planning for new industrial opportunities.

Strategy 2.1: Prioritize Redevelopment in Prime Commercial Areas

This strategy focuses on revitalizing key commercial areas including the Town Center and West Warren Village, where indicators of decline show significant challenges. Both villages offer unique characteristics that, when leveraged effectively, can enhance Warren's economic vitality. Developing tailored redevelopment plans for these areas, supported by tools like tax increment financing, grants, and bonds, will guide improvements and attract investment. Additionally, the local government will ensure the redevelopment plan is actively maintained and aligned with the broader Master Plan through regular updates and amendments to ensure sustained growth.

Town Center

Strategy 2.1 proposes enhancing the Town Center's appeal by focusing on its strengths—its history, walkability, and community spaces—rather than simply adding new commercial options. The Town Center, already home to a mix of businesses, housing, and municipal facilities, has untapped potential as a historic and walkable destination. While diverse uses exist, it struggles to attract consistent foot traffic. The historic Town Hall, the train depot, and storefronts along Main Street, with their inviting display windows, all reflect the area's charm and history.

Placemaking techniques, such as wayfinding signage, improved sidewalks, pedestrian-scale lighting, and landscaping, can create a more welcoming environment. Interactive window displays and events on the Town Common could serve as focal points to draw locals and visitors alike. By focusing

on accessibility and historical charm, the Town Center could become a hub for community life and tourism, and local spending.

West Warren

West Warren offers a different opportunity with potential for transforming into a vibrant commercial corridor. According to survey data, 19% of respondents supported future development focused on commercial and shopping options in this area.

West Warren's redevelopment should concentrate on strengthening its identity as a pedestrian-friendly retail corridor, providing a variety of businesses such as small and midsized retail stores, restaurants, and specialized services.

Figure ED8: “What future development in West Warren would you support?”

Option	#	%
Commercial/Shopping	31	19%
Recreation	27	16%
Housing	23	14%
Preserved/No Development	21	13%
Unsure	18	11%
Misc	14	9%
Industrial	8	5%
Grocery	7	4%
Restaurant	6	4%
“Anything”	4	2%
Mixed Use	3	2%
Agricultural	3	2%
Total	165	

Key attractions could include:

- **Arts and Entertainment:** gallery spaces or a theater company
- **Health and Wellness:** dance studios, yoga studios, or gyms
- **Dining:** restaurants, bars, or casual eateries
- **Essential Services:** a grocery store or specialty shops

Figure ED9: Key Responsibilities for Economic Manager

Key Strategy	Actions
Data-Driven Analysis	Conduct market studies to assess strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.
	Analyze demographics, consumer trends, traffic patterns, and competition.
Stakeholder Engagement	Engage with local businesses, property owners, residents, and community organizations.
	Facilitate collaborative planning for a shared revitalization vision.
Infrastructure Improvements	Advocate for better street lighting, pedestrian walkways, and parking.
	Work with transportation agencies to improve public transit to commercial areas.
Business Development Initiatives	Provide technical assistance and business counseling for operational improvements.
	Develop programs to attract new businesses, including offering incentives.
Placemaking Strategies	Implement beautification projects like landscaping, public art, and façade improvements.
	Encourage community events to create a vibrant atmosphere and draw visitors.
Partnership Building	Collaborate with chambers of commerce, non-profits, and government agencies.
	Seek state and federal grants for revitalization efforts.
Marketing and Promotion	Develop campaigns to promote the corridors and highlight unique offerings.
	Utilize digital platforms and social media for wider reach.
<p>West Warren's potential lies in its ability to diversify offerings and support local businesses while attracting new ventures that align with the community's vision. Through deliberate planning and investment, this</p>	<p>area could thrive as a retail and entertainment destination, fostering economic growth and community engagement.</p>
	<p>For Warren's commercial corridors to thrive, certain characteristics are essential: a high</p>

density and variety of stores, convenient parking, and a vibrant, well-maintained physical environment. However, the Town currently lacks designated leadership or management to oversee and promote these corridors effectively. This is where a dedicated economic manager, commonly known as a commercial corridor leader, would play a key role. Economic managers conduct market analysis, engage with stakeholders, advocate for infrastructure improvements, and develop business initiatives to revitalize these areas.

While Warren currently lacks an Economic Development Committee (EDC) and resources for a full-time economic manager, a practical, short-term solution would be to launch a targeted revitalization initiative with clear goals, and funding for a set period. Partnering with regional organizations like the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), MassDevelopment, or the Chamber of Commerce could provide the expertise and support without overextending local resources. A two-year program, for instance, could focus on storefront improvements, streetscape enhancements, and business attraction, with a partner agency assisting in management and oversight. Following this period, Warren could evaluate progress and establish a permanent EDC to sustain long-term economic growth. This committee could comprise local business owners, residents, and town officials, working together to support economic initiatives, review ongoing projects, and set new goals. Forming an EDC and hiring an economic manager would enable Warren to focus strategically on economic goals and ensure continuous review and support for future development.

To encourage the redevelopment of vacant commercial spaces, Strategy 2.1 also recommends the Town engage commercial real estate brokers to market vacant sites in the Town Center and West Warren Village. Targeting small businesses, entrepreneurs, and service providers can breathe new life into these empty spaces. Warren should explore state and federal resources, such as loans, grants, and tax incentives, to attract businesses and developers.

Additionally, for rundown vacant structures like the old bank building, applying for brownfield grants can facilitate the redevelopment into mixed use, commercial or residential developments. Issuing Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for specific properties would invite developers to transform these spaces in alignment with the Town's vision. Offering incentives such as zoning flexibility or tax abatements can further entice developers to invest in Warren's revitalization efforts.

Strategy 2.1 Action Items

Action Item 2.1.1 – Develop a phased Redevelopment Plan for the Town Center and West Warren Village.

Action Item 2.1.2 – Explore options to build an economic development team (an economic development committee or part-time economic advisor).

Action Item 2.1.3 - Create a business recruitment program.

Figure ED9: Key Responsibilities for Economic Manager

Key Strategy	Actions
Data-Driven Analysis	Conduct market studies to assess strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.
	Analyze demographics, consumer trends, traffic patterns, and competition.
Stakeholder Engagement	Engage with local businesses, property owners, residents, and community organizations.
	Facilitate collaborative planning for a shared revitalization vision.
Infrastructure Improvements	Advocate for better street lighting, pedestrian walkways, and parking.
	Work with transportation agencies to improve public transit to commercial areas.
Business Development Initiatives	Provide technical assistance and business counseling for operational improvements.
	Develop programs to attract new businesses, including offering incentives.
Placemaking Strategies	Implement beautification projects like landscaping, public art, and façade improvements.
	Encourage community events to create a vibrant atmosphere and draw visitors.
Partnership Building	Collaborate with chambers of commerce, non-profits, and government agencies.
	Seek state and federal grants for revitalization efforts.
Marketing and Promotion	Develop campaigns to promote the corridors and highlight unique offerings.
	Utilize digital platforms and social media for wider reach.

Strategy 2.2: Proactively Plan for Industrial Development Southwest Warren

Implementing Strategy 2.2, which focuses on proactive planning for industrial development in Southwest Warren, is fundamental to the town's growth and revitalization efforts. This strategy aims to establish a dedicated industrial district in the area with space dedicated for manufacturing, warehousing, and industrial activities.

This approach emphasizes not just traditional heavy industry but aligns with Warren's vision of fostering innovative, future-focused sectors. Potential industries include bio-manufacturing (such as the production of biological products like vaccines and therapeutics), climate technology (such as renewable energy solutions and environmental sustainability), and light industrial manufacturing (such as the production of electronics, specialized equipment, or custom goods).

The recently signed Massachusetts climate law^{xii} emphasizes the importance of fostering renewable energy industries, reducing costs, and creating green jobs and provides an additional incentive for this approach. Southwest Warren's industrial strategy positions the town to attract businesses in clean energy and climate technology sectors, such as solar manufacturing, battery storage solutions, and energy efficiency technologies. This approach supports Warren's long-term sustainability while creating high-quality jobs, diversifying its economic base, and improving residents' quality of life.

The suggested action items under this strategy serve as concrete steps toward realizing this vision. Conducting a feasibility study is the first critical step, enabling the town to

assess infrastructure needs for industrial development around Gilbert Road. This assessment will include evaluating traffic impacts, identifying necessary road improvements, and considering environmental factors, ensuring that any future development is sustainable and beneficial for the community.

Collaboration with private landowners and developers is another key aspect of this strategy. Engaging these stakeholders will help identify potential development projects that align with Warren's industrial growth objectives. This partnership not only fosters investment in the area but also helps to ensure that the developments meet community needs and aspirations, benefiting both the community and the developers.

Building community support is essential for the success of industrial development initiatives. The Town can conduct outreach efforts to educate residents about the benefits of industrial growth and the accompanying infrastructure improvements. By highlighting how these developments can enhance economic opportunities and overall quality of life, the town can foster a supportive environment for the changes ahead.

Through a comprehensive approach that includes strategic planning, collaboration, and community engagement, Warren can successfully implement Strategy 2.2. This will not only reinforce Southwest Warren as a key area but also set the stage for sustainable growth, making Goal 1 a reality. The focus for developing Southwest Warren will transform it into a vibrant hub for economic activity, benefiting all residents and contributing to a prosperous future for the town.

Strategy 2.2 Action Items

Action Item 2.2.1 – Assess infrastructure needs and feasibility for industrial development around Gilbert Road.

Action Item 2.2.2 – Collaborate with private landowners and developers.

Action Item 2.2.3 – Conduct community engagement to discuss desire for industrial growth.

Goal 3: Support Diverse Business Opportunities through the Zoning Bylaw

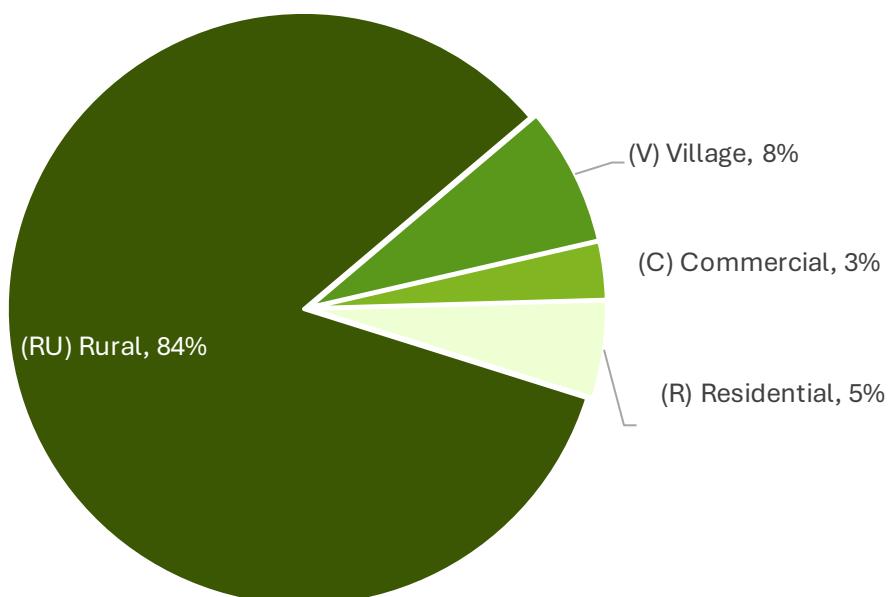
Warren's current zoning bylaw has laid a solid foundation for economic growth, particularly with initiatives like the Mill Conversion Overlay District and the Major Development Overlay. These zoning measures provide focused opportunities to redevelop key areas, such as the vacant mill properties and West Warren, aiming to enhance the town's appeal and functionality. However, while these strides are important, there are opportunities for further refinement.

A zoning rewrite began in 2024 to identify areas for improvement. One of the key focuses is updating Warren's zoning bylaws to support diverse business opportunities townwide. This includes revisiting commercial zoning regulations and updating them to promote a broader range of businesses

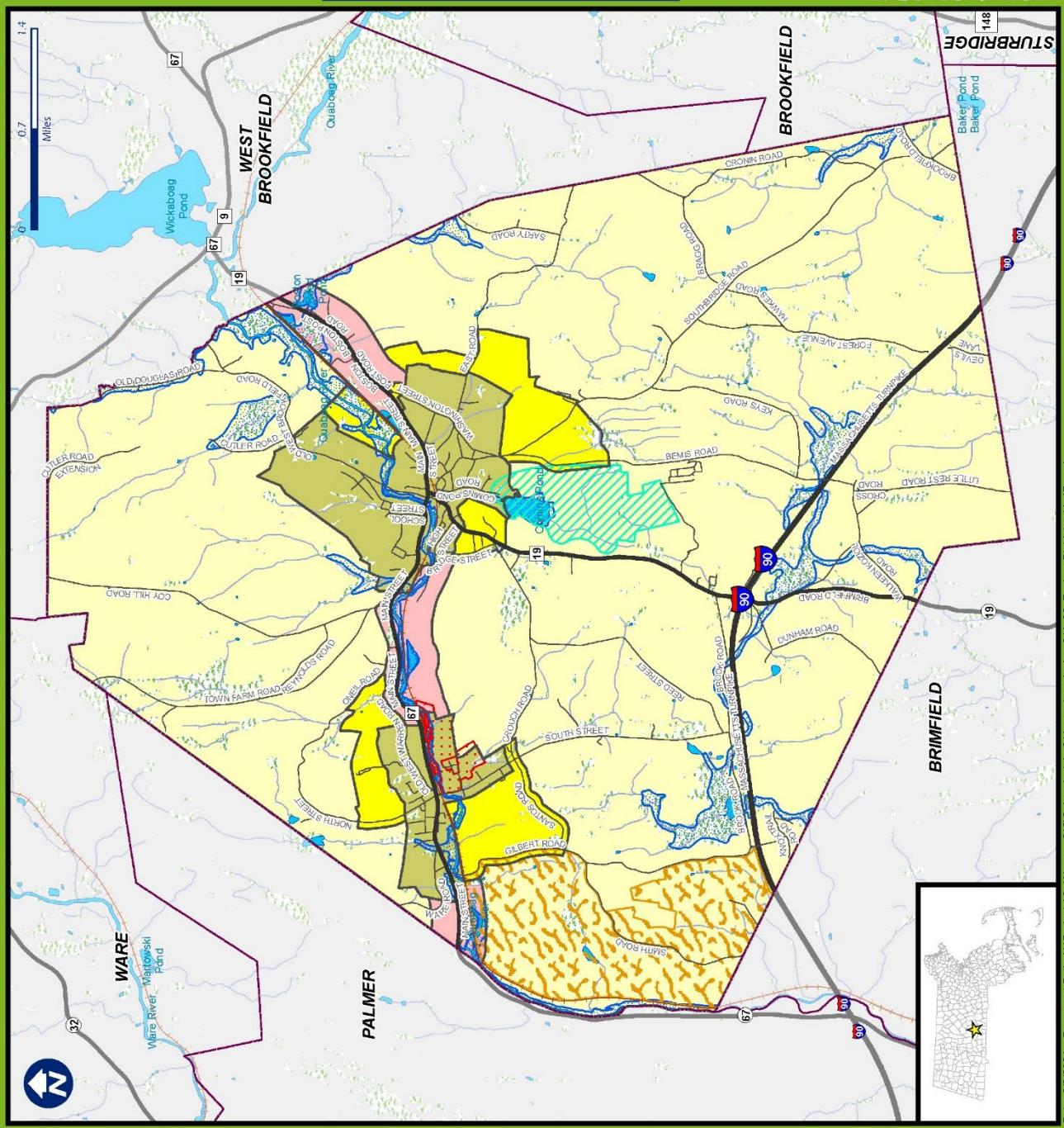
while ensuring vibrant village centers. A review of the zoning district map reveals that 84% of the town is zoned as Rural District (RU), whereas Commercial (C) districts occupy only 3% of the land. This imbalance highlights significant potential to rezone or expand commercial and industrial areas, particularly since much of the vacant land falls within the RU district, where commercial development is limited.

This updated approach would not only allow for more flexible, mixed-use developments, but also open up new opportunities for businesses to thrive across the town. By diversifying land use options and modernizing zoning regulations, Warren can attract a broader range of enterprises, from small businesses to larger commercial ventures, thereby fostering a more robust local economy.

Figure ED10: Percent of Acres by Zoning Type in Warren, MA 2024



Town of Warren, Massachusetts 2025 Master Plan



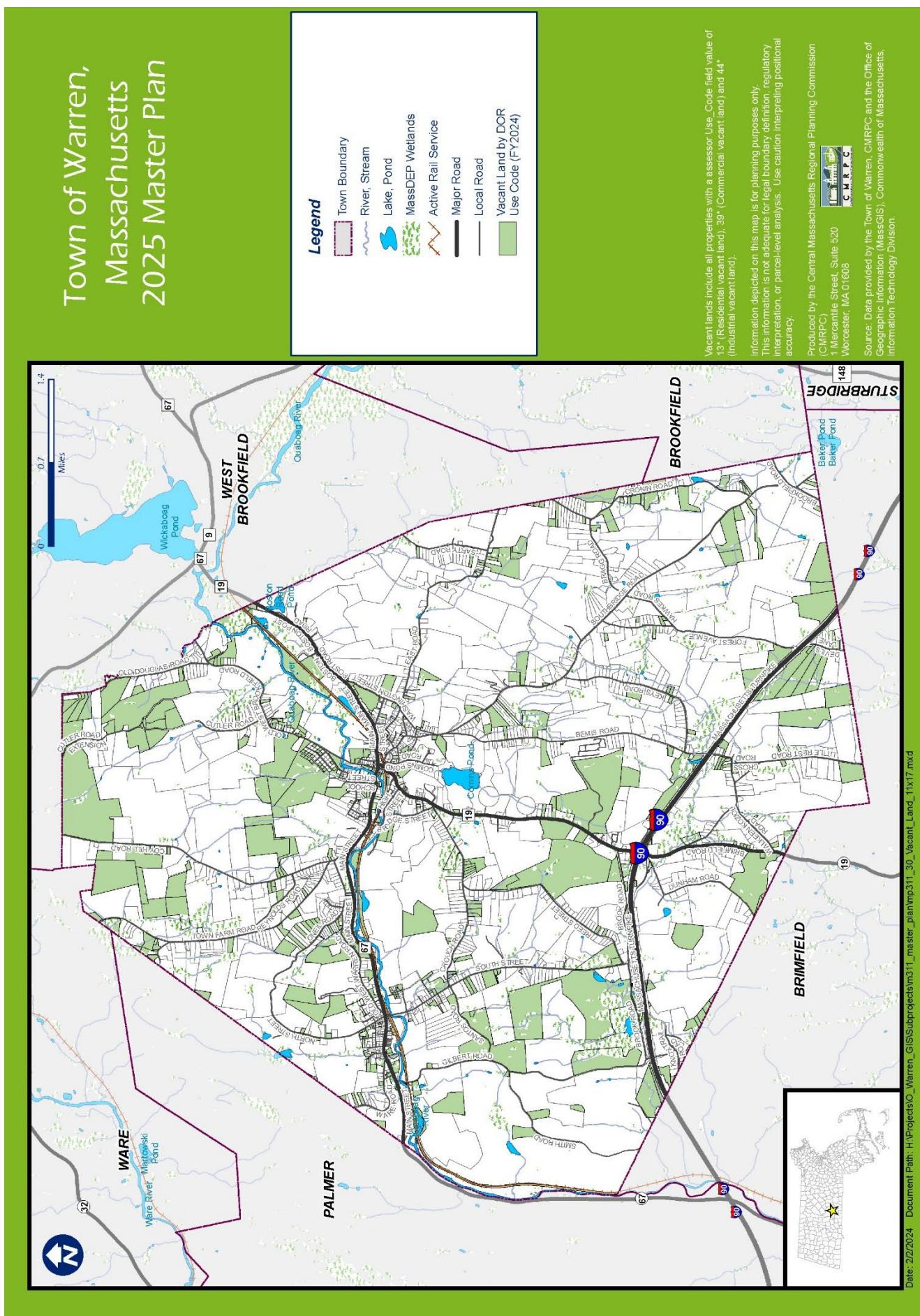
Information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis. Use caution interpreting positional accuracy.

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

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

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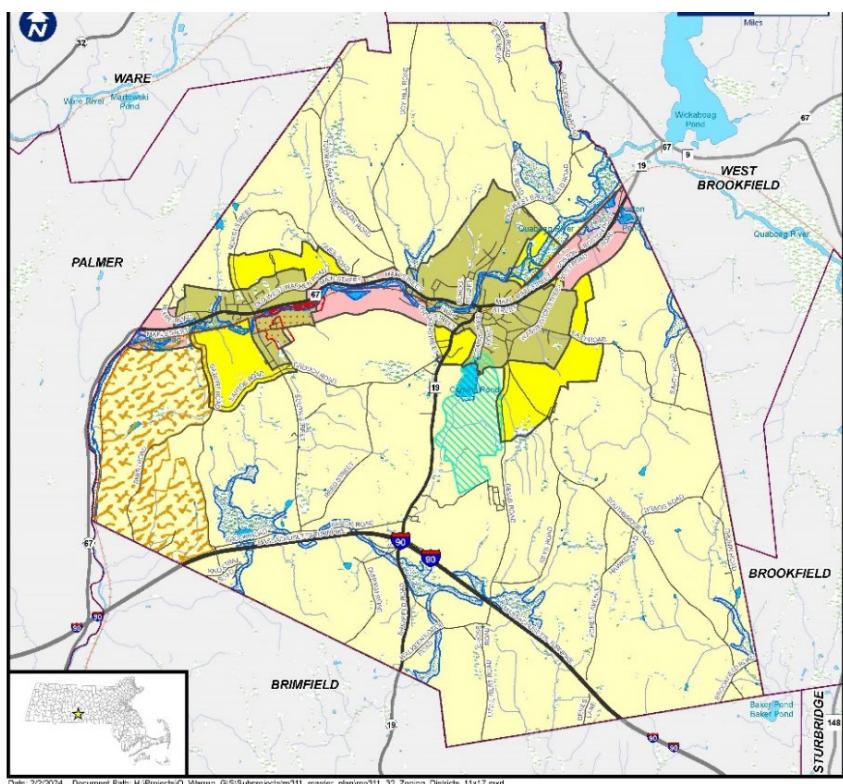
Figure ED12: Vacant Land



Strategy 3.1: Update Zoning Regulations to Support Strategic Industrial and Development Opportunities in Southwest Warren

To enhance Warren's economy through its zoning bylaws, Strategy 3.1 emphasizes updating commercial zoning regulations to support diverse developments in Southwest Warren focusing on industrial opportunities. This strategy prioritizes industrial development in parcels near the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) and Gilbert Road, leveraging their proximity to major transportation routes. These highway-abutting parcels present an unparalleled opportunity for large-scale industrial enterprises to establish operations, positioning them as a keystone for Warren's future economic strategy.

Figure ED13: Approximate District Boundaries, Gilbert Road Industrial Area



Designating the Gilbert Road area as an industrial corridor is central to this plan. This initiative will help attract large-scale industrial businesses, such as logistics centers, advanced manufacturing facilities, or technology-driven enterprises, that thrive on highway accessibility. Such a designation not only opens doors to job creation and investment but also aligns with broader infrastructure development goals. For example, fostering industrial activity in this area could catalyze discussions with state officials about a future I-90 exit, further unlocking the economic potential of the region.

At present, much of the existing commercial zoning is in close proximity to the Quaboag River, limiting allowed use. Expanding areas for development in the southwest corner will open more opportunity for the desired commercial and industrial tax base.

Warren can refine its zoning to better accommodate emerging business opportunities, tailoring regulations to support modern business models. By clarifying and simplifying the zoning bylaw, the Town can prioritize growth in thriving industries. Examples of how removing regulatory barriers could attract new businesses include^{xiii}:

- Modernizing regulations for life sciences to support innovative companies
- Simplifying regulations for amusement venues (such as arcades, laser tag, swimming pools, etc.)

- Simplifying regulations for green data centers and distribution centers
- Permitting dancing and live entertainment establishments

Community feedback from the workshop and survey indicates strong support for zoning that encourages recreational enterprises in Warren. The Esri Tapestry Segmentation for Warren further supports this direction, showing demand for amenities that align with the community's characteristics and lifestyle interests. By offering incentives for recreational businesses, Warren can strategically enhance the economic profile of Southwest Warren.

A key component of this strategy is encouraging the Town to consider establishing zoning regulations for warehouse and distribution center uses in areas within Southwest Warren. As demand for logistics and distribution facilities grows, particularly those related to e-commerce and regional supply chains, warehouses and distribution centers represent a significant opportunity for economic growth. The town can look to define specific areas where such uses are appropriate, ensuring that they do not conflict with other land uses and are well-served by necessary infrastructure. The demand for these facilities, given their reliance on proximity to highways like I-90, aligns with the Town's long-term development goals.

Additionally, the strategy encourages Warren to consider if zoning map changes are warranted, particularly in areas near I-90, to better accommodate industrial and commercial development. The land surrounding I-90, including parcels along Gilbert Road, is naturally suited to attract industries that require extensive space and logistical connectivity. Revising zoning maps in these loca-

tions can further strengthen the town's ability to attract businesses that will drive local employment, tax revenue, and overall economic vitality.

Through these actions, this strategy seeks to build a strategic framework that attracts businesses in logistics, manufacturing, and recreational sectors while maintaining thoughtful planning for future growth. It ensures Southwest Warren becomes a thriving, economically diverse hub, driving long-term prosperity for the town.

Strategy 3.1 Action Items

Action Item 3.1.1 - Establish Gilbert Road as a designated business corridor.

Action Item 3.1.2 - Review and update zoning regulations in the Gilbert Road area.

Action Item 3.1.3 - Develop economic incentives for recreational and commercial uses.

Action Item 3.1.4 - Develop Zoning Regulations for Warehouse and Distribution Centers.

Action Item 3.1.5 - Evaluate zoning map changes near Interstate 90.

Strategy 3.2: Update Zoning Regulations to Support Vibrant Village Centers

This strategy focuses on updating zoning regulations to address barriers hindering the revitalization and development of Warren's village centers: Town Center and West Warren Village. These areas, with their unique zoning designations, present opportunities for enhanced economic growth but also face challenges related to nonconforming uses, outdated dimensional regulations, and restrictive zoning.

By officially designating the Town Center and West Warren as Priority Development Areas (PDAs), this strategy aligns with the state's planning framework, which encourages growth in areas deemed appropriate for development. This designation will help target investments in these key locations, ensuring that growth is directed to places where infrastructure and community support systems already exist. By aligning with PDAs, Warren can reduce land-use conflicts, avoid sprawl, and create more efficient, sustainable development patterns that enhance the local economy.

The main focus of this strategy is to remove barriers that currently limit the potential of the village centers. This includes addressing dimensional regulations, which often hinder new development or redevelopment efforts. Outdated zoning laws often prevent property owners from pursuing revitalization projects, including residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments. A comprehensive review of the Village District's dimensional regulations is necessary to identify obstacles to redevelopment. Proposed amendments should aim to reduce nonconformities, support adaptive reuse of existing

buildings, and promote revitalization, ultimately attracting new businesses and enhancing the vibrancy and walkability of the area. By modernizing zoning bylaws, the town can foster a more business-friendly environment and attract diverse investment opportunities.

Strategy 3.2 Action Items

Action Item 3.2.1 – Develop PDA designations in the Town Center and West Warren.

Action Item 3.2.2 – Evaluate and amend dimensional regulations in the Village District.

ⁱ United States Census Bureau, *2010 Population of Warren*.

ⁱⁱ United States Census Bureau, *2020 Population of Warren*.

ⁱⁱⁱ United States Census Bureau, *Decennial Census and American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, *Regional Socio-Economic Projections* (2024).

^{iv} United States Census Bureau, *2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*, Education Attainment for the Town of Warren, Massachusetts.

^v United States Census Bureau, *2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*, Median Household Income for Warren, Worcester County, Massachusetts.

^{vi} United States Census Bureau. *American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP03*, 2020.

^{vii} United States Census Bureau, *2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*, Travel Time to Work for Warren, Worcester County, Massachusetts.

^{viii} Nancy Barkley, "The Economic Impact of Weddings on Local Businesses," *LinkedIn*, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/economic-impact-weddings-local-businesses-nancy-barkley-nancy-barkley-spd1c/>.

^{ix} Mississippi Municipal League, *Advanced Community Development Training*, 'Create a place that locals love, and visitors will love it too,' 2024.

^x Tap fees are charges imposed by municipalities or utility companies to cover the cost of connecting a property to the public water or sewer system. A 'reduced tap fee' is a discounted rate on this charge, often used as an incentive to attract development by lowering the initial costs of establishing utilities.

^{xi} National League of Cities. "The Power of Community Beauty: Transforming Small Cities for Success." *National League of Cities*, June 9, 2023. <https://www.nlc.org/article/2023/06/09/the-power-of-community-beauty-transforming-small-cities-for-success/>

^{xii} Governor Healey Signs Climate Law to Advance Clean Energy Transition, Create Jobs, and Lower Costs," *Massachusetts Government News*. <https://www.mass.gov/news/governor-healey-signs-climate-law-to-advance-clean-energy-transition-create-jobs-and-lower-costs>

^{xiii} Examples of removing regulatory barriers to attract new businesses come from New York City's *City of Yes for Economic Opportunity*, adopted by the City Council on June 6, 2024.



ONE LANE
BRIDGE



CIRCULATION

Town of Warren 2025 Master Plan

Introduction

The Town of Warren is located equidistant between the cities of Worcester and Springfield and relies on its transportation network to connect to these cities and other regional economic hubs. A well-functioning transportation network is vital not only for connecting employers and employees, but also for accessing local amenities, from schools and healthcare providers to recreational spaces, shopping centers, and more.

A robust transportation system can go beyond the function of providing mobility and access by offering opportunities to positively impact health, lifestyle, and sustainability. By providing the right opportunities, communities can help residents convert automobile trips into walking, biking, or transit trips. A transportation system can provide a framework for how communities evolve with respect to efficient circulation of goods and people, biking and walking, and reducing unnecessary environmental impacts. Decisions pertaining to housing, business, and land use must consider how people will access destinations, and if the

current transportation network can handle these trips.

Transportation is essential to consider in all aspects of planning. Not only does a transportation system serve the purpose of connecting people to destinations, but it also can impact health and lifestyle and provide a mobility framework for the future.



Key Findings and Priorities

Key Finding 1: There is Need for Improvements to Warren's Aging Infrastructure

At the Master Plan workshop, numerous residents stressed the need for repaving efforts, particularly for Gilbert Road, Santos Road, Coy Hill Road and South Street. One resident referred to Gilbert Road as a “lunar landscape.” At present, Chapter 90 funding and the town budget for repaving roadways is insufficient to meet the rapidly rising construction costs.

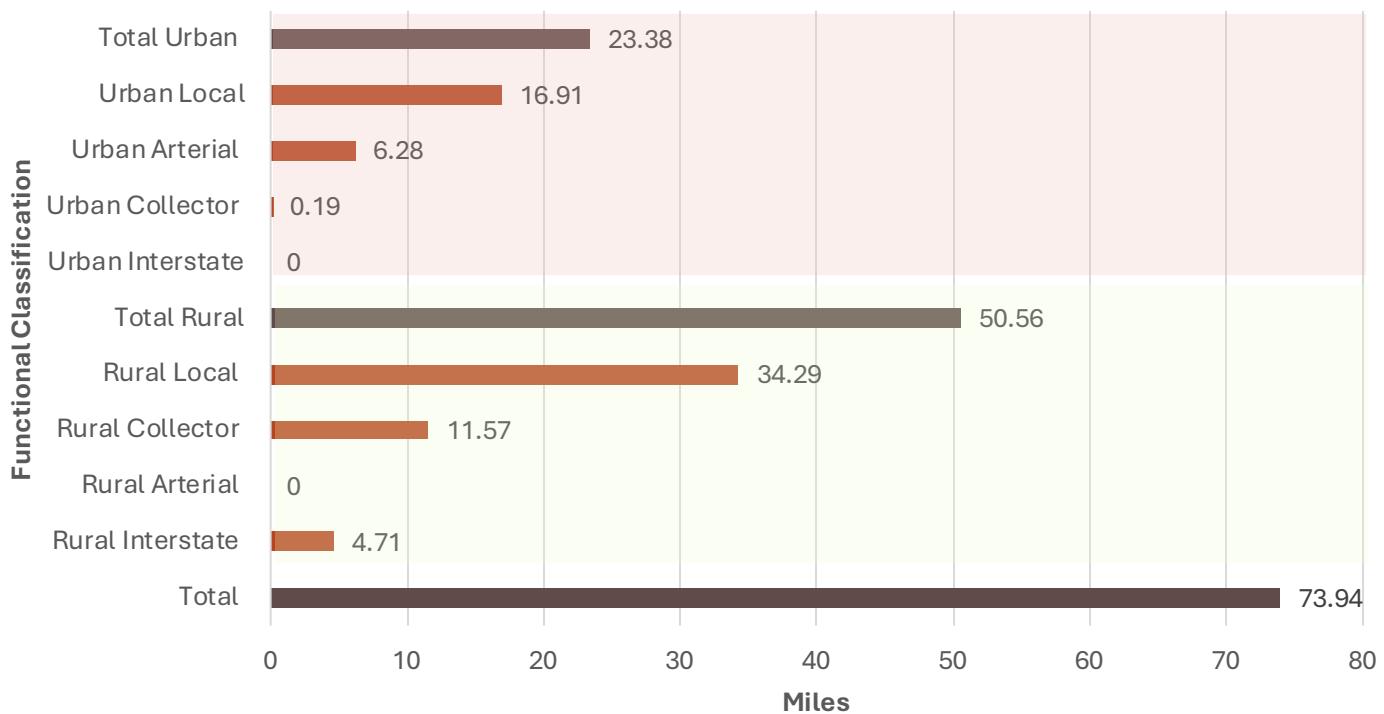
Roadway Network

According to the latest MassGIS Road Inventory File (RIF), there are 73.94 centerline miles of roadway in Warren. Of these, approximately 4.71 centerline miles of national highway system roadway (interstate), and approximately 8.8 centerline miles of State Route roadway (Routes 19 & 67). With 19.73 centerline miles of roadway eligible for federal aid, Warren is left with 54.21 centerline miles of roadway that relies on State and local aid dollars.

Commuting Statistics

According to 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates, there was a total of 2,532 workers aged 16 years old or older residing in the town of Warren. Of these workers, 2,169 drove alone to work and 179 workers carpooled. Increased investments in the active transportation network (sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, trails, shared-use paths, etc.) could help reduce the

Figure T1 Roadway Functional Classification (2022)



Source: MassDOT Road Inventory Year End Metrics

number of people driving to work, however, the mean commute time for Warren residents was 37.3 minutes making walking or biking impractical for many. Increased public transportation options could help reduce solo driving.

Bridges

According to the MassDOT Open Data Portal, there are 27 bridges in Warren with 14 owned by the Town and 13 owned by MassDOT. The average age of bridges in Warren is 77 years old, slightly older than the statewide average of 71 years old. At the time of most recent assessment, only 3 bridges were deemed to be in “good” condition, 19 were in “fair” condition, 2 were in “poor” condition, and 3 do not have condition data. Both of the bridges in “poor” condition are on South Street and Pulaski Street immediately adjacent to the Wrights Mill Complex and are owned by the Town.

Stormwater & Flooding

The Town has experienced significant infrastructure damage over the past decade due to high amounts of stormwater and flooding, exacerbated by Warren’s hilly terrain, outdated culverts, beaver activity and increased rainfall. In Warren’s Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) & Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan (MVP), an extensive list of mitigation strategies is included, outlining action items, priority, estimated cost, and timelines for a multitude of HMP/MVP objectives. Also included is a comprehensive list of fundings sources regarding hazard mitigation and municipal vulnerability preparedness.

Town of Warren, Massachusetts 2025 Master Plan

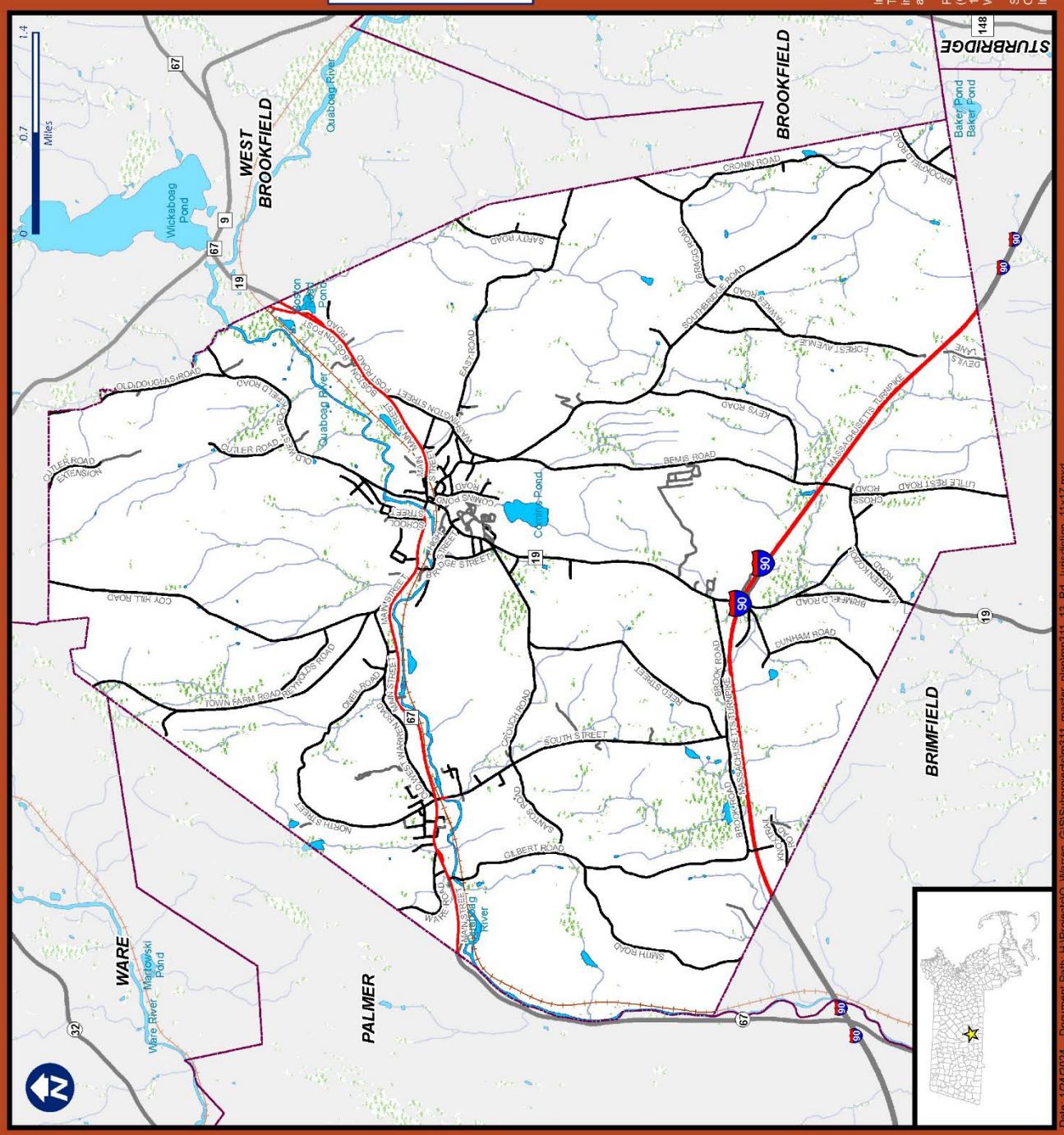


Figure T2 Roadway Jurisdiction

Key Finding 2: There is Opportunity to Improve Mobility by Aligning the Transportation Network with Net Zero

What is Net Zero?

In 2022, the Secretary of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) adopted a statewide greenhouse gas emissions limit and sector-specific sublimits for 2050. The statewide emissions limit was set at Net Zero, defined as “A level of statewide greenhouse gas emissions that is equal in quantity to the amount of carbon dioxide or its equivalent that is removed from the atmosphere and stored annually by, or attributable to, the Commonwealth; provided, however, that in no event shall the level of emissions be greater than a level that is 85 percent below the 1990 level.”ⁱ The sector specific sublimits add up to a reduction limit that is slightly above the required 85% reduction target.

As noted in CMRPC’s Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Massachusetts released the Massachusetts 2050 Decarbonization Roadmapⁱⁱ in 2020, outlining pathways and strategies to meet emission reduction targets. This “roadmap” flows from a study commissioned by the EEA to provide the Commonwealth with an understanding of the necessary strategies and transitions that are needed to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050.

Congestion and Parking

Warren residents must currently access the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) through the ramps in Palmer or Sturbridge. This can lead

to congestion and bottlenecking on Turnpike access roadways.

Congestion represents stop-and-go driving at low speeds and is correlated with high greenhouse gas emission rates per mile.ⁱⁱⁱ Respondents to the Warren Master Plan survey also indicated that parking downtown was limited. The current parking options in downtown Warren are also potentially unsafe and inefficient, causing an imbalance of mobility and access.

Public Transportation

Reliable transportation is critical to accessing employment, healthcare, and numerous other social services. Not only is public transportation critical to access within a community and region, it also provides an opportunity for aligning a community’s transportation network with Net Zero. Warren lacks adequate public transit options.

Though the Town is technically within the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) boundary (Figure T7), Warren is not served by neighboring routes. The WRTA runs Route 33, which starts at the Brookfield Common and connects to Spencer, Leicester, and Worcester. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) operates the Palmer Village Bus on weekdays with local stops and a connection to Ware, as well as Route B79 which runs through Amherst, Belchertown, Ware, West Brookfield, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Spencer, Leicester, and Worcester. There is opportunity to connect Warren to one or both Regional Transit Authorities to provide fixed-route bus service.

To help provide an affordable public transit option, the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QVCDC) and the Town of Ware launched The Quaboag Connector in 2017, a demand-response shuttle service that covers ten towns in the

Quaboag Valley area, including Warren. According to their website, in 2023, the Connector averaged over 1,000 trips per month and served 443 unique riders. The Connector is committed to advancing equity; approximately 40% of their riders are seniors (aged 60+), and 27% of their riders are people with disabilities. The popularity of the Quaboag Connector has risen since its inception, indicating demand for the service. Since the Connector is still relatively young, increasing community awareness may increase the usage of this service.

Railroad

CSX has plans to build an additional line on the existing right of way to accommodate the West-East rail. It is unlikely that this additional public transportation option will have a stop in Warren. Residents will likely need to access this train in Palmer.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure

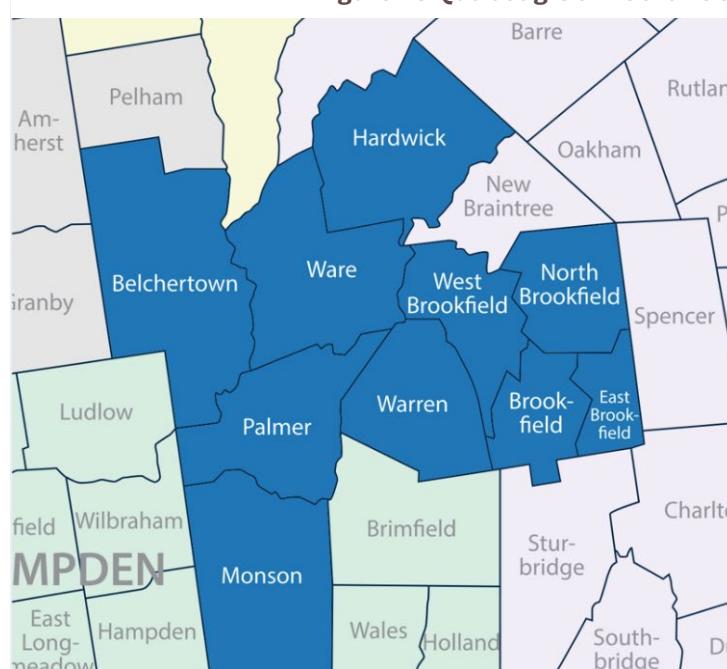
Congestion is a growing concern throughout the CMMPO region and is not limited to urban areas; cities and towns of all sizes have

recently experienced increased congestion, leading to wasted time, resources, and increased pollution. Shifting some daily trips from automobile to bicycle or walking trips could help reduce congestion and pollution. According to Smart Growth America, approximately 50% of trips in metropolitan areas are less than 3 miles, with approximately 28% of trips one mile or less. In rural areas, approximately 30% of trips are two miles or less.^{iv} Encouraging mode shift by providing accessible, safe, and convenient bicycle infrastructure could help Warren to align its transportation network with Net Zero.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure

The Town of Warren currently has no infrastructure to support electric vehicle charging. Village Point Plaza in West Warren is a potential location for a public EV charger, as there is ample parking. Another feasible location would be the Downtown area. This location is in close proximity to many businesses and town services, including the Warren Public Library.

Figure T3 Quaboag Connector Coverage Map



Source: Quaboag Connector



AT A GLANCE

- Monday – Friday with limited hours on Saturday (no service on Sunday)**
- \$2** **Cost is \$0-\$2 per ride (and no request is denied based on ability to pay)**
- Covers 10 towns in the Quaboag Valley of Western MA**
- 66,000+ trips to date and 650+ unique riders to date**

Figure T4 Crash Locations

Town of Warren, Massachusetts 2025 Master Plan

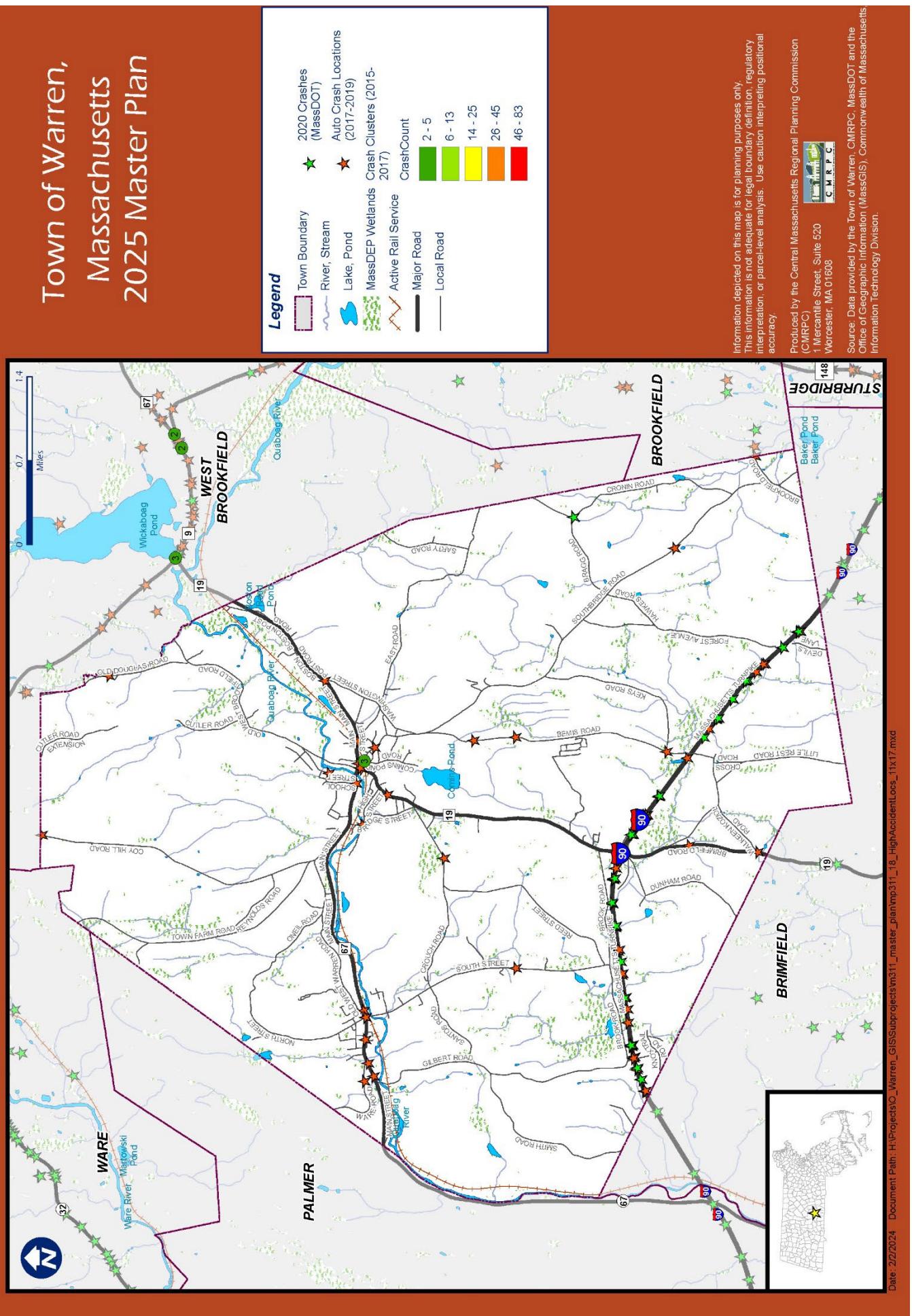
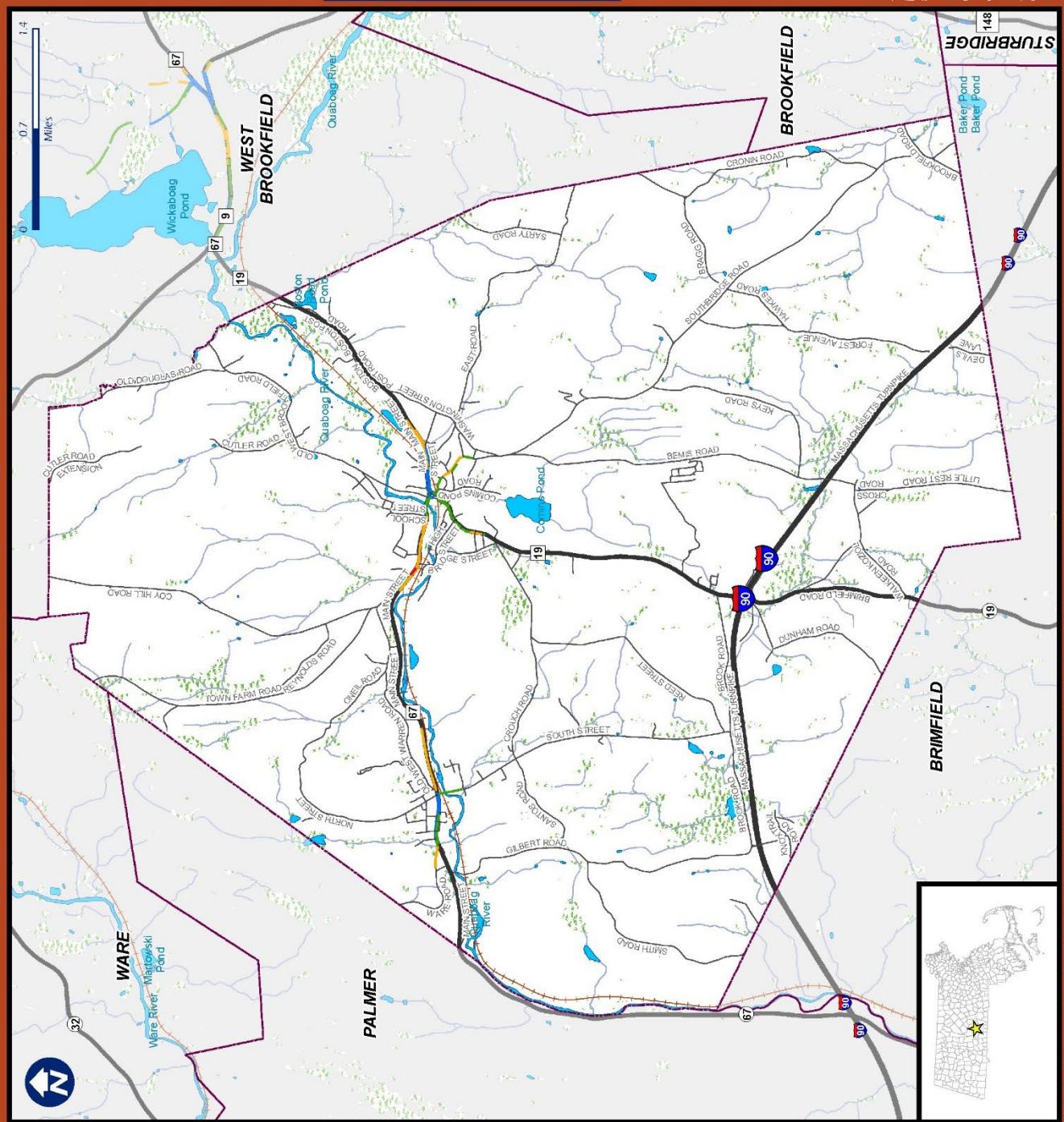


Figure T5 Sidewalk Condition

Town of Warren, Massachusetts 2025 Master Plan



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

Produced by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRBC)



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

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Key Finding 3: There is Opportunity to Improve Safety by Aligning the Transportation Network with Vision Zero

A well-functioning transportation system not only provides access and mobility to residents but also prioritizes the safety of all users. As noted in the previous Master Plan, there are several key intersections and areas of Warren that present safety issues. Notably, angled parking in front of businesses in the downtown area can create sightline issues for motorists attempting to exit access drives in the area. Motorists turning off Old West Brookfield Road may experience sightline issues due to vehicles parked in these angled parking spaces. The intersection of East Road and Washington Street was identified as a potentially unsafe intersection for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians due to limited sightlines and confusing intersection geometry. Washington Street is often used as a shortcut from Southbridge Road to MA-67. Figure TS4 shows locations of automobile crashes in Warren from 2017-2019.

Active Transportation

According to the CMRPC sidewalk database, there are approximately 4.7 miles of sidewalk in Warren. In 2020, CMRPC staff inventoried Warren sidewalks and collected data pertaining to sidewalk condition, width, and cross slope. As of 2020, there were 0.1 miles of sidewalk in poor condition, 2.1 miles of sidewalk in fair condition, 1.5 miles of sidewalk in good condition, and 1 mile of sidewalk in excellent condition. Figure TS5 shows sidewalks in Warren by condition. At the Master Plan Workshop and in the Master Plan survey, respondents expressed interest

in a sidewalk along South Street. Notably, Warren Community Elementary School is located along South Street. It is currently difficult and potentially unsafe to access this school without using a car.

According to the Master Plan survey results, Route 67/Main Street was by far the most desired area to be prioritized for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, with 37 responses indicating interest. The downtown area and Southbridge Street were the second and third most popular locations for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, with 17 and 10 responses respectively. There were also several comments and suggestions received at the Master Plan Workshop indicating interest in improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure along Route 67 to connect the downtown area with West Warren Village.

In 2018, CMRPC staff created a Bicycle Compatibility Index (BCI) to supplement the Regional Bicycle Plan. Roadway segments were graded from A to F using a variety of factors to indicate how compatible a roadway segment was to bicycle infrastructure. The grading system also reflects the level of comfort a rider may experience on a particular roadway based on characteristics such as traffic volume, speed, or lane width. Class A road segments are characterized as those with low traffic volumes and speeds and have a width to support vehicle and bicycle movement and may even have bicycle accommodations already. Almost all of Route 67 between the downtown area and West Warren received an A grade, reflecting the wide shoulder along this route and supporting the case for bicycle facilities along this corridor. The investment and infrastructure needed to support bicycle accommodations on a class A or B roadway segment is relatively low. According to the CMMPO's 2018 Regional Bicycle Plan, three roadway

segments with a potential of 8.85 miles of bicycle facilities, were identified as a major priority for the Town of Warren:

- 1) MA-19 from MA-67 to Brimfield Town Line
- 2) MA-67 from MA-19 to Palmer Town Line
- 3) MA-67 from West Brookfield Town Line to MA-19.

Crash Prevention

Between 2017-2019, there were 124 total crashes in Warren, with 96 on I-90 and 28 crashes throughout the town. There is only one small crash cluster in Warren located at the intersection of Southbridge Road and Comins Pond Road consisting of three motor vehicle crashes. This cluster is not within the top 5% most dangerous intersections in the CMMPO region and thus does not qualify for Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funding. One crash during the 2017-2019 data window resulted in a fatality. According to MassDOT's Impact Data Portal, there were 63 vehicle crashes in 2020 and 2021; 45 of these were no injury crashes, and one crash resulted in a fatality. During the 2020-2021 window, there was a small crash cluster at the intersection of South Street and Main Street. While vehicle crash occurrence decreased initially during the pandemic, vehicle crashes seem to be rising. The data reporting period is still open for 2022-2024, however, according to MassDOT's Impact Portal, there were 85 crashes in 2023—more than 2020 and 2021 combined. Notably, there are no HSIP pedestrian or bicycle crash clusters in Warren.

What is Vision Zero?

Roadway deaths in Massachusetts reached a 14-year high in 2021, increasing year-over-year from 2019. Across the Commonwealth and beyond, communities are committing to VisionZero, a new standard for safety in our

transportation networks. The principal goal of Vision Zero is to ensure the basic right of safety for all people as they move about their communities by achieving zero traffic related deaths.

VisionZero flows from the federally adopted Safe Systems approach, which shifts the focus of transportation policies and projects away from speed and conventional wisdom regarding safety and toward a comprehensive and holistic approach. The Safe Systems approach is based on six guiding principles: death and serious injuries are unacceptable, humans make mistakes, humans are vulnerable, responsibility is shared, safety is proactive, and redundancy is crucial.

Making the commitment to zero fatalities means addressing every aspect of crash risks through the following elements of the Safe Systems approach:

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

VisionZero brings together local transportation planners, engineers, policymakers, public health officials, and other stakeholders to address the complex problem of roadway safety.

According to the 2023 Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP), Massachusetts has adopted the Safe Systems approach and prioritizes equity and collaboration in all actionable efforts flowing from the SHSP. The SHSP outlines six initiatives for coordinated implementation:

1. Implement speed management to realize safer speeds,

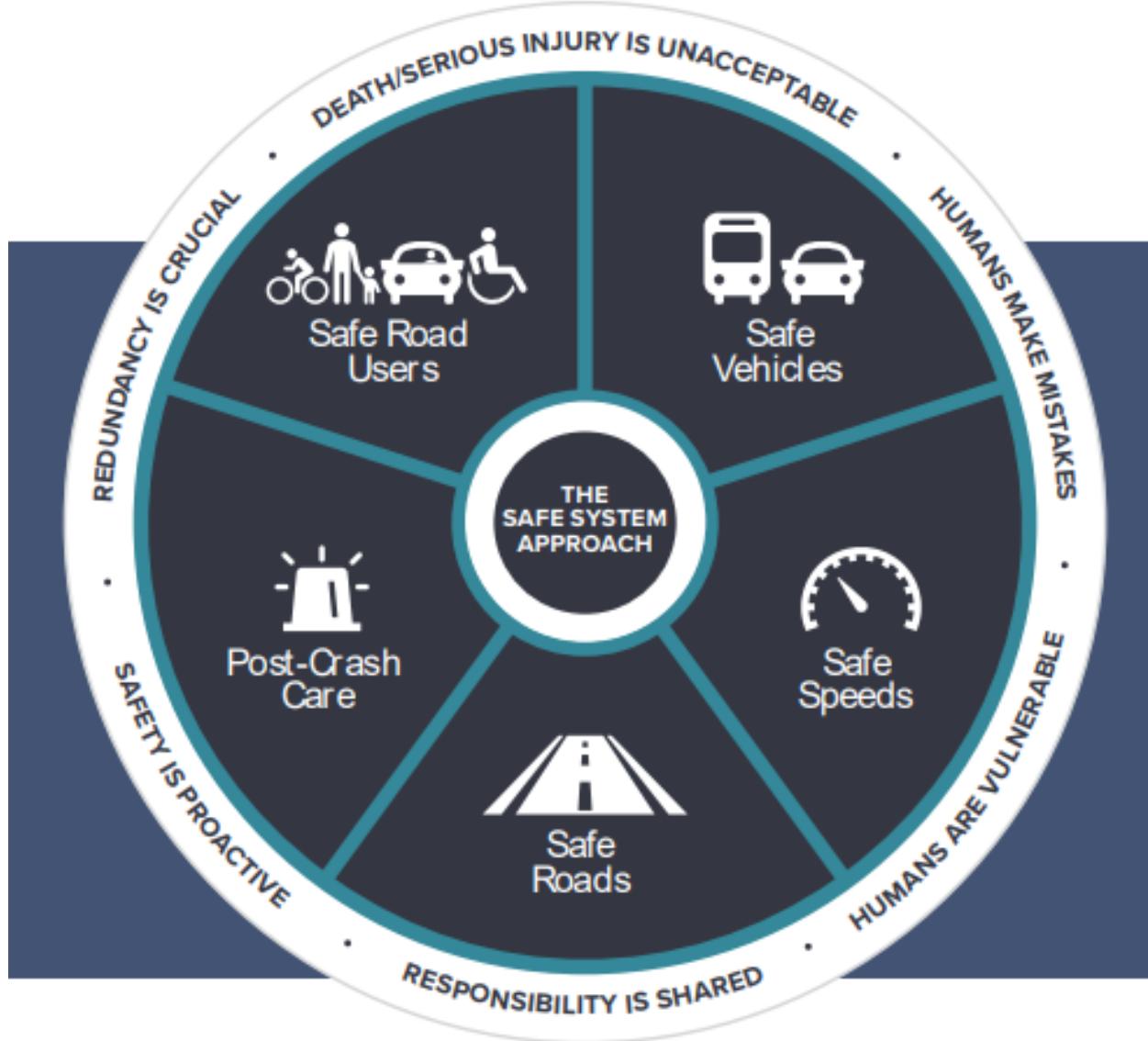
2. Address top-risk locations and populations,
3. Take an active role to affect change in vehicle design, features, and use,
4. Accelerate research and adoption of technology,
5. Double down on what works, and
6. Implement new approaches to public education and awareness.

According to the Master Plan Survey, respondents indicated that Southbridge Road was the most dangerous roadway encountered on a regular basis, with 29 respondents. The underpass near downtown was

second most dangerous, with 23 respondents indicating that they consider this intersection dangerous.

The Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization encourages communities to embrace the Safe Systems approach in all transportation projects, from the early stages of planning and design to the end of construction/implementation.

Figure T6 The Safe Systems Approach



Goal 1: Prepare Infrastructure for Private Investment & Development of Key Parcels

Potential development of open space in West Warren and redevelopment of the Wrights Mill Complex will require investments to the road and bridge network. Preparing studies and partnering with private investors can prepare the Town for desired improvements.

Strategy 1.1: Prepare Engineering Studies and Cost Assessments for Infrastructure Improvements Around the Wrights Mill Complex and West Warren

Redeveloping the Wrights Mill Complex will require upgrades to the South Street Bridge and Pulaski Street Bridge river crossings to accommodate truck traffic. Development of open space in West Warren will require upgrades to Gilbert Road, Santos Road, New Reed Street, and Knox Trail Road. The Town can prepare for future private/public partnerships by preparing studies for necessary improvements. Proactively pursuing these partnerships while necessary infrastructure plans and studies are created can ensure the Town is ready for future development.

Strategy 1.1 Action Items

Action Item 1.1.1 - Prepare studies and plans necessary to determine investments needed in bridge and roadway network.

Action Item 1.1.2 - Pursue public and private partnerships for development of open space and redevelopment of the Wrights Mill Complex.

Strategy 1.2: Explore Potential Private/Public Partnerships for an I-90 Highway Exit in Warren

It is unlikely that MassDOT would be able to fund a new off-ramp in Warren, as MassDOT is only allowed to use toll collections and not tax dollars to fund highway projects. However, there is precedent for a private investor to partner with a municipality and the State to create a new exit. To prepare for this potential, Warren should continue communications with MassDOT district representatives and prepare impact studies for a potential exit, including a neighborhood study and a trucking demand study.

Strategy 1.2 Action Items

Action Item 1.2.1 - Prepare impact studies for a potential highway on/off ramp.

Action Item 1.2.2 - Coordinate highway exit planning with economic development planning and open space planning.

Goal 2: Prevent Flooding on the Road Network

Warren's most recent Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan (2023) identified flooding as a top vulnerability. Factors include beaver activity, expected increase in rainfall, outdated culverts and bridges, and stormwater infrastructure. Improving aging infrastructure will help to increase mobility and access while also aligning the transportation network with Net Zero.

Priority Areas from the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan:

- O'Neil Road
- Old West Brookfield Road
- Lower Reed Street
- Comins Pond Area
- Coy Hill Road

Strategy 2.1 Action Items

Action Item 2.1.1 - Develop a comprehensive plan to prioritize stormwater improvements, including latest best practices.

Action Item 2.1.2 - Maintain and improve flood mitigation infrastructure.

Strategy 2.1: Address Storm Water Drainage Issues and Proactively Incorporate Resilience to Extreme Precipitation

Warren can develop a town-wide plan to prioritize stormwater improvements and incorporate new stormwater best practices, including decreasing the percentage of impermeable surfaces, adding catch basins, and implementing green parking lots. Reducing the amount of run-off is especially important in Warren due to hilly and rocky terrain. Using MVP action grants and state funding sources, the Town can complete culvert reconstruction projects that reduce flood risks and enhance the stormwater drainage infrastructure's ability to handle extreme precipitation. This will help the Town align with Net Zero and help maintain functional infrastructure during severe weather, improving mobility and access throughout the community.

Strategy 2.2: Continue Monitoring and Addressing Beaver Dams

Beaver dams have become an issue for multiple Warren roads, including the Gilbert Road/Santos Road swampland area. Beaver activity exacerbates culvert issues by blocking culverts or releasing large quantities of water when beaver dams fail. Known dam sites require everyday monitoring in the fall/winter season to prevent flooding and to remove downed trees. The Town should continue to provide resources to address damming. State legislation can make addressing beaver dams difficult, as there are protections in place that limit who can touch beaver dams and lodges. The CMMPO recommends consulting with the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) for guidance and procedures regarding beaver related conflicts.

Strategy 2.2 Action Items

Action Item 2.2.1 - Continue monitoring beaver activity and address roadway blockages.

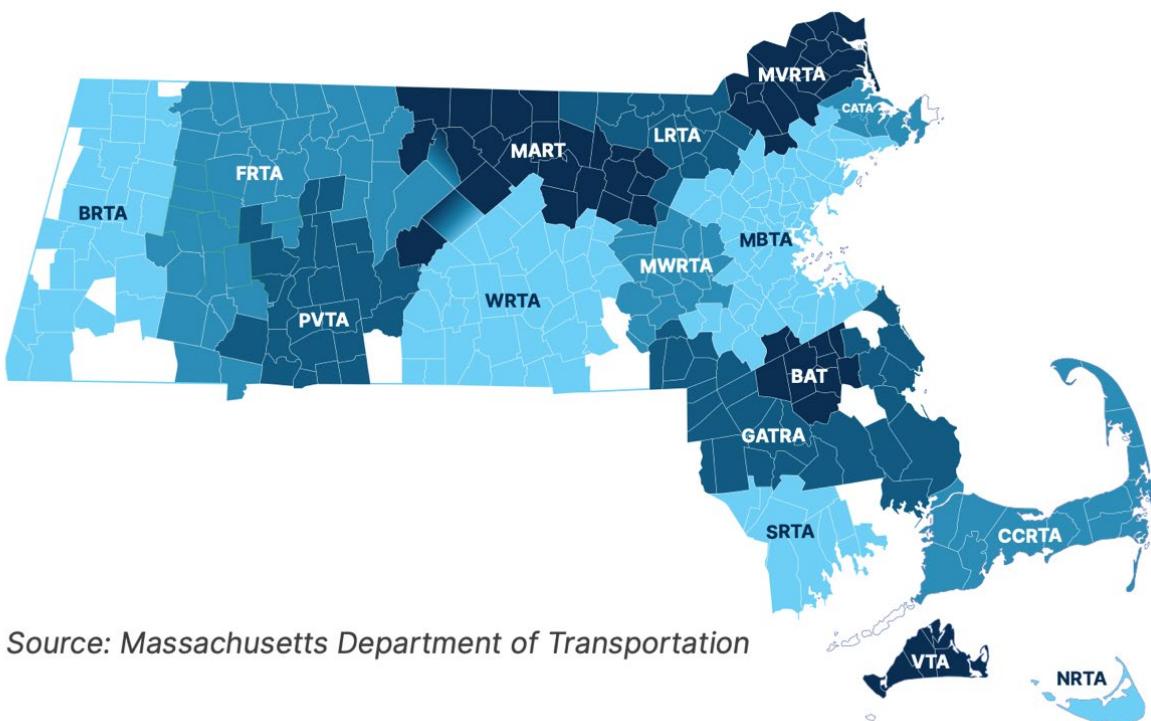
Action Item 2.2.2 – Consult the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) for guidance and procedures for addressing beaver related conflicts.

Goal 3: Expand Transportation Mode Options

Warren's current transportation network only provides consistent infrastructure for residents with access to a car. Limited bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, non-existent public transportation, and thin rideshare opportunities present major mobility issues for residents who are not allowed or able to operate a car (under 16, elderly, mentally and physically disabled) or residents facing financial constraints. According to 2022 American Community Survey Census Data, 145 out of 2,010 total households in Warren (approximately 7.2%) had no vehicle available. Approximately 87% of households with no vehicle available in Warren are single person households. Residents without a vehicle may rely on other modes of transportation to access employment and other destinations.

Expanding transportation mode options to include improved facilities for bicyclists, pedestrians, and users of micro-mobility vehicles could help advance equitable access to destinations, such as libraries, schools, healthcare, and village centers.

Figure T7: Regional Transit Authority Boundaries



Strategy 3.1: Prepare for Potential Public Transportation.

Due to Warren's small population size, a fixed route bus system is unlikely. However, fast-moving federal priorities and funding sources may open the potential for on demand service or limited routes in the future. The Town can continue communications with the WRTA and the PVTA for long-range planning and conduct plans on community interest, potential high-demand routes, and feasibility. Considerations should be made to connecting the village centers by bus and connecting Warren to a potential Palmer West-East Rail station. In the meantime, the Town can promote use of the Quaboag Connector and encourage the Connector to increase its service by providing rides on Sundays.

Strategy 3.1 Action Items

Action Item 3.1.1 – Continue communication with regional transit authorities (WRTA and PVTA) and CSX to evaluate the feasibility for increased service and/or explore transit options that leverage new technologies or modes of travel.

Action Item 3.1.2 – Improve community awareness of the Quaboag Connector demand response service and encourage the Quaboag Connector to expand/increase its service.

Action item 3.1.3 – Proactively prepare to connect public transportation to potential passenger rail service in Palmer.

Strategy 3.2: Invest in Pedestrian and Bicyclist Infrastructure.

According to the Master Plan Community Survey, respondents noted Route 67 (Main Street), the Town Center, Southbridge Street, and South Street as top priorities for bike and pedestrian infrastructure. Specifically, connecting the two village centers and expanding access from schools were recurring themes during outreach. This strategy coincides with the ongoing Town Common Design project. Improving existing sidewalks, signage, and bike racks around the Common can incentivize nearby residents to walk or bike to the Common, opening limited parking to others. In addition, the 2018 CMMPO Regional Bicycle Plan categorizes MA-67 and MA-19 as major priorities, meaning that adding bicycle infrastructure to these roadway segments reflects an opportunity to improve connectivity between local centers of activity.

Strategy 3.2 Action Items

Action Item 3.2.1 - Prepare corridor plans for MA-67 and MA-19 to identify options for active transportation improvements.

Action Item 3.2.2 – Identify pedestrian and bicycle improvements to facilitate the connection between Downtown Warren and West Warren.

Action Item 3.2.3 – Identify and coordinate funding opportunities and future investment.

Goal 4: Maintain State of Good Repair & Prioritize Safety

Current Chapter 90 funding and town budget limitations pose challenges for necessary road resurfacing and restructuring needs. Pairing a small population size with a sprawled rural road network creates a gap between local funding opportunities and network needs. Additionally, the cost of construction has been increasing at a fast pace and budgetary increases are not able to keep up. Despite rising costs, it is essential to maintain a state of good repair for everyday roadway usage, including trucking and freight operations. Specialized funding sources exist for roadway projects that prioritize safety.

Strategy 4.1: Reconstruct or Resurface Priority Roads and Intersections

Warren is not slated to receive funding from the CMMPO's Transportation Improvement Program from 2020-2029 which limits the potential for large projects. If a specific dangerous intersection is eligible, MassDOT can conduct a Road Safety Audit (RSA). An RSA can lead to a myriad of suggested and potential intersection improvements, ranging from short-term and affordable to larger, longer-term potential improvements. The following projects are examples of upcoming needs:

- South Street reconstruction with sidewalk
- Route 19
- Southbridge Road reconstruction
- Old West Brookfield Road
- Brimfield Road reconstruction

Strategy 4.1 Action Items

Action Item 4.1.1 – Create a priority list for roadway network improvements to maintain a state of good repair.

Action Item 4.1.2 – Secure funding for roadway improvements.

Strategy 4.2: Address Unsafe Areas of the Road Network

According to the Master Plan Community Survey, respondents noted Southbridge Road, the Underpass, and the Town Common as the most dangerous roads and intersections encountered on a regular basis. The top crash sites (ignoring I-90) are the intersection between South Street and Main Street, and the intersection between Southbridge Road and Comins Pond Road. The intersection of Southbridge Road and Comins Pond Road is directly adjacent to the underpass, which is difficult to safely navigate for people who are not familiar with the intersection. A Road Safety Audit (RSA) can be a valuable tool to gain an understanding for how a potentially dangerous intersection can be improved, with improvements ranging from low-cost and short-term to high-cost and long-term.

The Town of Warren can address current safety concerns by conducting post-crash analysis to uncover road design and condition failures that cause crashes. Temporary traffic control devices, such as cones and paint, can allow Warren to respond quickly to dangerous road conditions. The following countermeasures are more permanent solutions recommended by the Federal Highway Administration.

Warren can also continue to promote and maintain up-to-date postings of evacuation

routes, with sensitivity towards roadways that are prone to flooding. Chosen evacuation routes should be prioritized for road improvement projects and coordinated with Warren's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT).

Strategy 4.2 Action Items

Action Item 4.2.1 – Utilize roadway and intersection crash data, undertake safety studies at critical locations, such as a Road Safety Audit (RSA) to inform decisions about future efforts to resolve.

Action Item 4.2.2 – Secure funding for safety improvements.

Action Item 4.2.3 – Maintain and promote emergency evacuation routes.

Strategy 4.3: Manage Trucking Routes.

Continuous trucking operations on local roads can stress older bridges, culverts, and roads with low weight limits. GPS systems do not differentiate between local roads and trucking routes resulting in trucks using inappropriate roads. To manage this issue, the Town can designate and post recommended trucking routes and communicate the information with regional trucking hubs.

Strategy 4.3 Action Items

Action Item 4.3.1 – Prepare corridor plans for MA-67 and MA-19 to identify options for trucking improvements and alternative routes to avoid downtown.

Action Item 4.3.2 – Work with federal and state agencies, as well as local businesses, to identify options for trucking routes.

Figure T8: Proven Safety Countermeasures

Proven Safety Countermeasures		
SPEED MANAGEMENT		
 Speed Safety Cameras	 Variable Speed Limits	 Appropriate Speed Limits for All Road Users
ROADWAY DEPARTURE		
 Wider Edge Lines	 Enhanced Delineation for Horizontal Curves	 Longitudinal Rumble Strips and Stripes on Two-Lane Roads
 SafetyEdge SM	 Roadside Design Improvements at Curves	 Median Barriers
INTERSECTIONS		
 Backplates with Retroreflective Borders	 Corridor Access Management	 Dedicated Left- and Right-Turn Lanes at Intersections
 Reduced Left-Turn Conflict Intersections	 Roundabouts	 Systemic Application of Multiple Low-Cost Countermeasures at Stop-Controlled Intersections
 Yellow Change Intervals		
PEDESTRIANS/BICYCLES		
 Crosswalk Visibility Enhancements	 Bicycle Lanes	 Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB)
 Leading Pedestrian Interval	 Medians and Pedestrian Refuge Islands in Urban and Suburban Areas	 Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons
 Road Diets (Roadway Reconfiguration)	 Walkways	
CROSSCUTTING		
 Pavement Friction Management	 Lighting	 Local Road Safety Plans
 Road Safety Audit		

FHWA-SA-21-082

Source: Federal Highway Administration

Figure T9: Pavement Condition

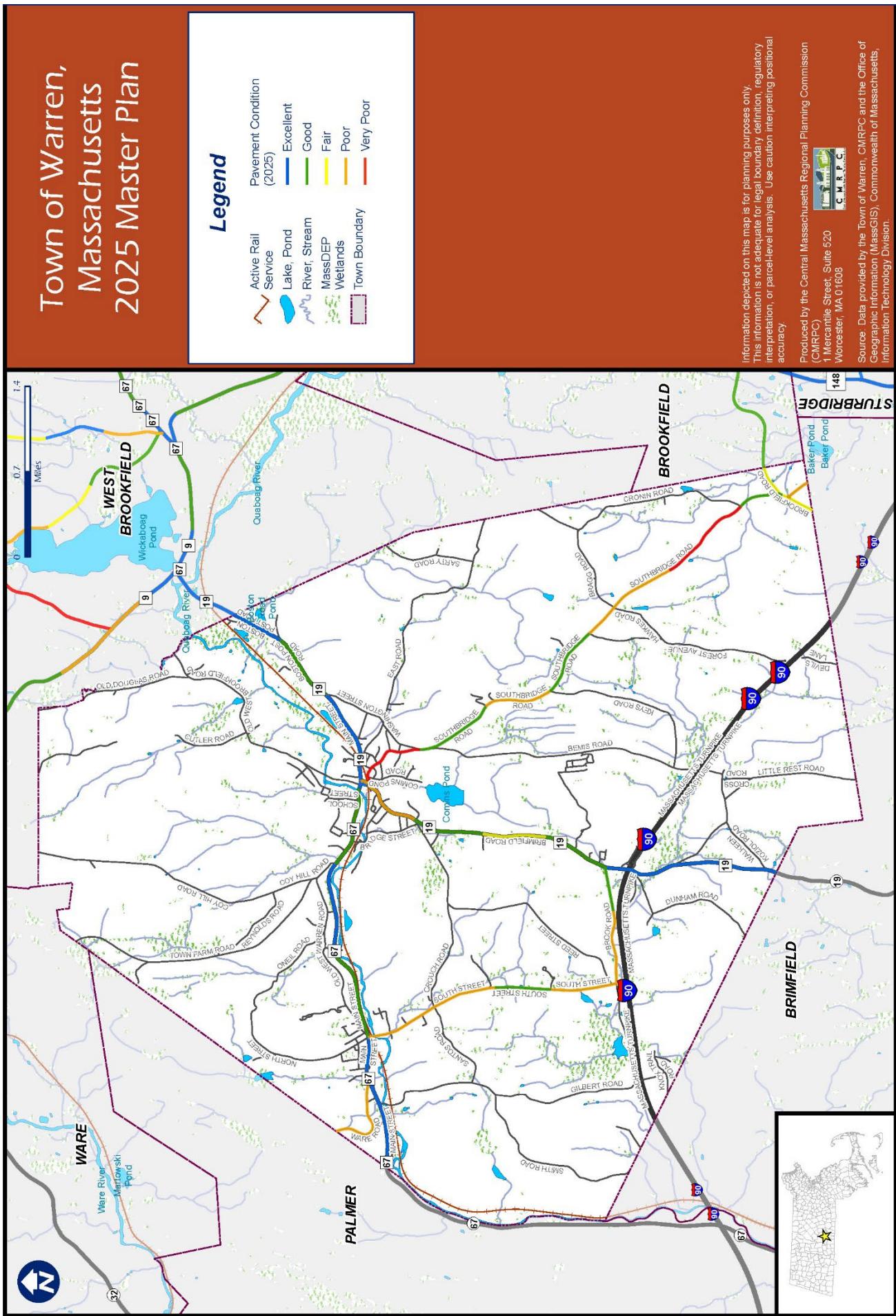
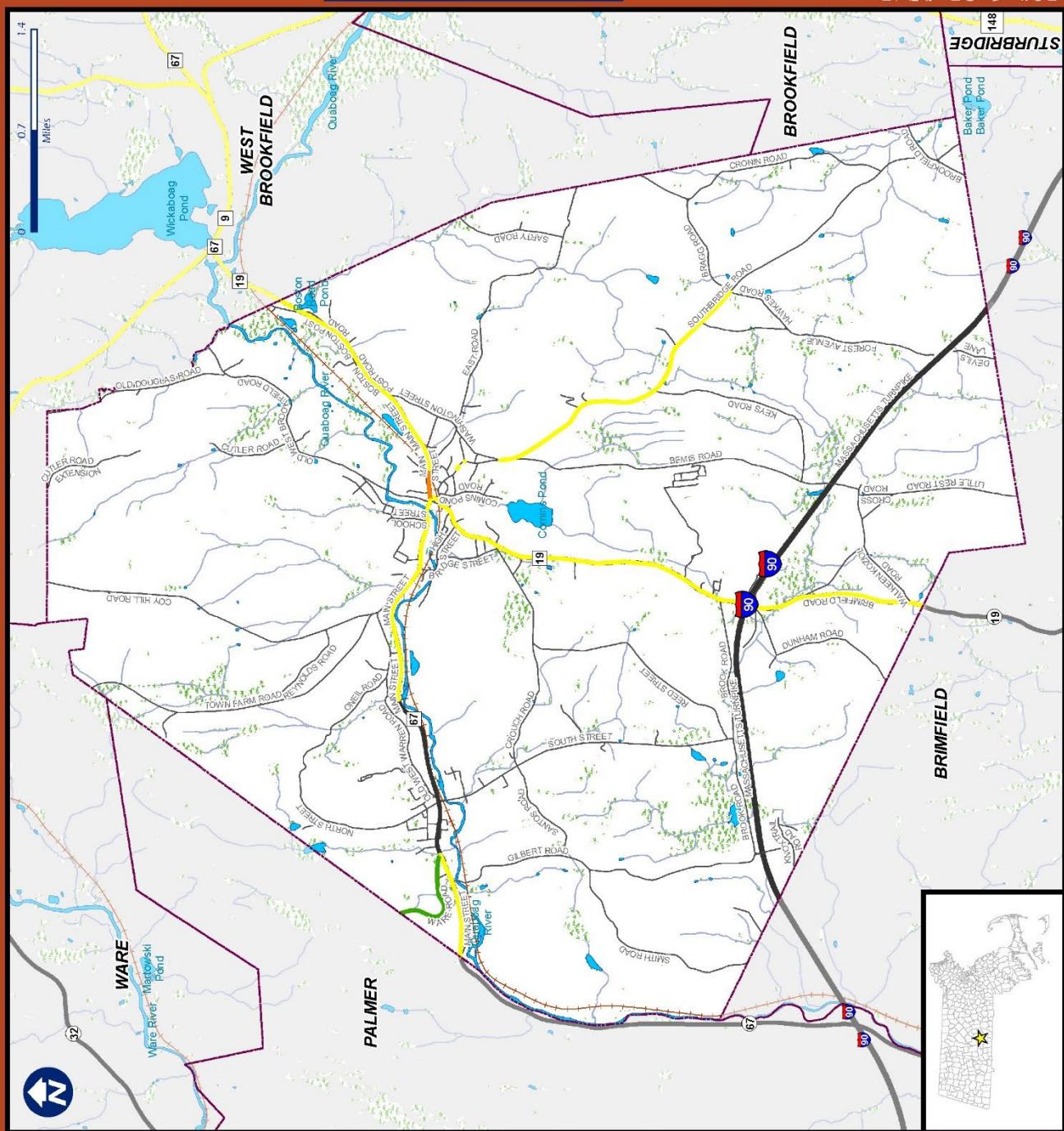


Figure T10: Truck Percentage

Town of Warren, Massachusetts 2025 Master Plan



ⁱ Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, “Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050.” 2022. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-clean-energy-and-climate-plan-for-2050>

ⁱⁱ Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, “Massachusetts 2050 Decarbonization Roadmap”. December 2020. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/ma-2050-decarbonization-roadmap/download>

ⁱⁱⁱ Transportation Research Procedia, “Impact of Traffic Congestion on Greenhouse Gas Emissions for Road Transport in Mumbai Metropolitan Region.” 2017. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352146517305896>

^{iv} Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, “2018 Regional Bicycle Plan.” 2018. <https://cmrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2018-CMMPO-Regional-Bicycle-Plan.pdf>

^v More information on this method (“Crash Analysis Studio”) can be found at strongtowns.org.



SERVICES & FACILITIES

Town of Warren 2025 Master Plan

Introduction

The Town of Warren's infrastructure base was established during a period of high activity at Wrights Mill. The cost of maintaining public water and sewer, municipal buildings, and schools is no longer sustained by industrial tax revenue.

Capital needs, such as a new public safety complex, now fall on residential taxpayers. Services, including the police department, ambulance services, two libraries, parks, veteran resources, a Council on Aging, highways, and regional schoolsⁱ are paid through a small pool of rural residents.

This gap creates a heavy dependence on volunteers, a vulnerability for reliable services, and long-term planning. Alongside state and federal trends, Warren's population is projected to grow and age as life expectancy increases.

Preparing for acute climate disruptions will be a top priority for protecting residents and infrastructure in the future. Resources for hazard preparedness, as well as investments toward green energy, will ensure Warren is resilient.



Key Findings and Priorities

Key Finding 1: Population Pyramid Changes are Projected to Shift Demand for Public Services and Facilities

Enrollment in the Quaboag Regional School District has slightly declined over the past decade (Figure TS1) in tandem with the overall population. However, CMRPC and MassDOT projections both predict population increases over the next twenty-five years (Figure TS2).

Regional, state, and national trends all point to a decline in school-age children and a major increase in older adults. If Warren's population projections are realized, the population growth would be due to an ever-increasing life expectancy.

The Central Massachusetts Regional Age Friendly Plan predicts between 30-35% of Warren's population will be over 60 years old in 2040, compared to 20-24% in 2019 (Figure TS3).

Found in the Age Friendly Plan (see Strategy TS 3.2), top regional concerns for seniors include transportation options, ADA-compliant municipal buildings, and health resources.

Additional services will be required for an aging population, including an increase in Council on Aging offerings, senior housing, and financial assistance. Municipal staffing and volunteer levels should be evaluated for their ability to support a growing and aging population.

Warren allocates a total of \$4,781,758 for school-related expenses and \$134,448 for senior services. With 906 school-age children (18.2% of the population) and 737 senior citizens (14.8%), the per capita spending amounts to \$5,277 per student and only \$182 per senior. The school budget is 35.5 times larger than the senior services budget—which requires consideration about whether senior funding adequately meets community needs. As the town ages, evaluating the sustainability of education funding while increasing support for senior services would balance resources more equitably.

Figure TS1 Quaboag Regional School District Enrollment

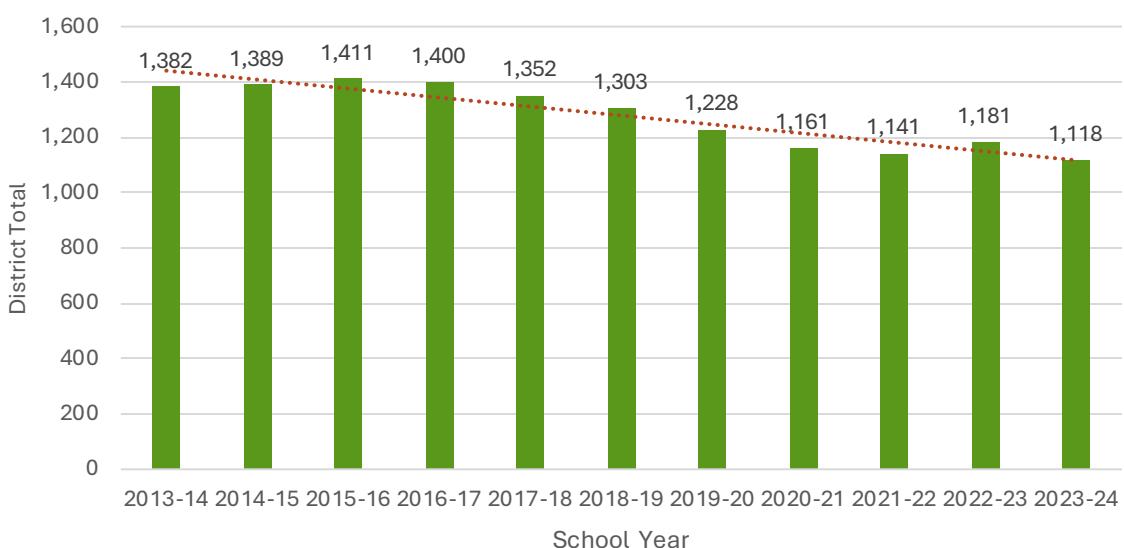


Figure TS2 Warren Population 2000 - 2020 and Population Projections 2020 - 2050

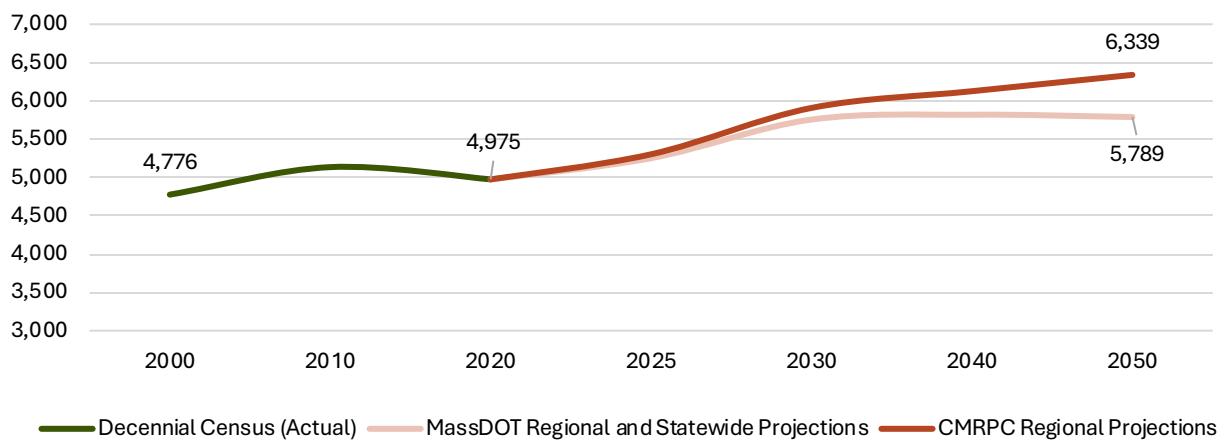
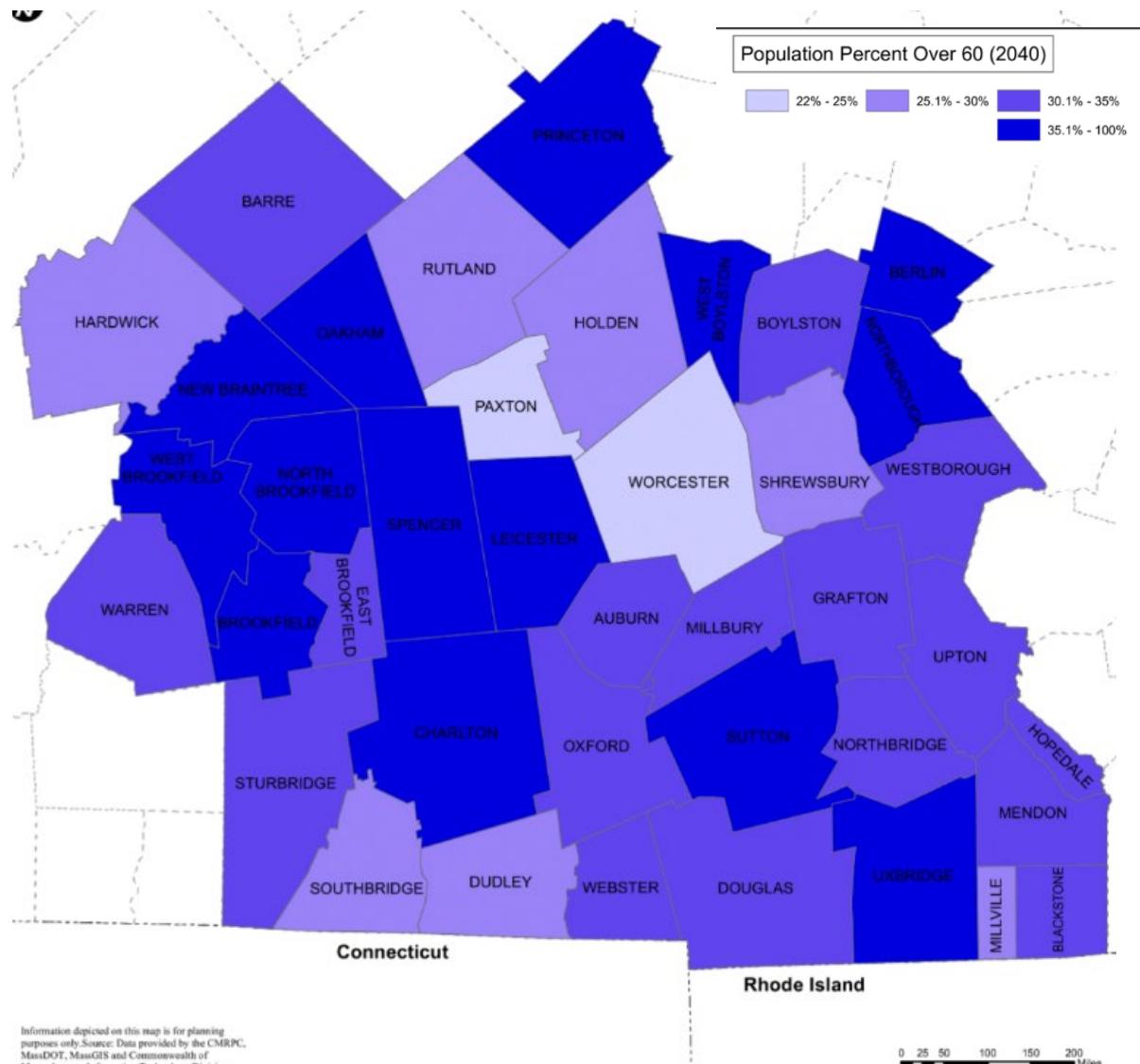


Figure TS3 Projected Regional Percent Population of Adults Age 60 in 2040



Key Finding 2: A Lack of Adequate Emergency Management Facilities Hinders the Effectiveness of Police & Fire Departments

Warren's police and fire departments operate out of outdated and inadequate buildings. The police station, located in the old town hall, suffers from water damage, mold, and a lack of accessibility. Limited usable space constricts activity. The fire stations are undersized, outdated, and ill-equipped to handle modern apparatus.

Due to poor building conditions and layout, it would be more cost-effective in the long term to build a new police station. Officers and staff are disincentivized by current working conditions, affecting staff tenure. Warren Master Plan Survey respondents agreed that the current police department is not satisfactory (Figure TS4).

Warren's two fire stations, both constructed in the 1950s, are at the end of their life expectancy. Both stations do not have a de-contamination room, and the kitchens are

located near the vehicle bays, presenting Hazmat issues.

Five full-time firefighters man the Main Street Headquarters, which lacks a training area. Twenty Albany Street Station is unmanned. A new emergency management facility is necessary to support police and fire departments. The future budget demands of both departments in the future will be important considerations for the Town.

The Town conducted a Feasibility Study to identify three potential locations for a new public safety complex. The most attractive locations were ranked as 87 & 0 Brimfield Road (adjacent to the highway), 48 High Street & 100 Maple Avenue, and 0 Old West Warren.ⁱⁱ The feasibility study provides potential floorplans, concept designs, and layouts. A new building would come at a high upfront cost to the Town. However, dedicating much-needed quality space to workers and volunteers is a high priority for the Town, as told in the Warren Master Plan Survey.

Figure TS4 "How satisfied are you with the following public buildings?"

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Not Applicable
Warren Library	32%	32%	21%	9%	4%	3%
West Warren Library	29%	21%	31%	6%	6%	6%
Warren Common / Gazebo	29%	32%	23%	10%	6%	1%
Shepard Municipal Building	16%	33%	28%	14%	9%	1%
Historic Town Hall	7%	15%	26%	20%	28%	4%
Senior Center	16%	27%	36%	10%	5%	6%
Fire Station 1	25%	29%	33%	4%	8%	3%
Fire Station 2	19%	21%	35%	9%	10%	7%
Police Station	7%	19%	19%	21%	30%	6%

Answers: 163; Source: Warren Master Plan Survey

Key Finding 3: Town Services Rely Heavily on Volunteers

Rural towns routinely rely on volunteer capacity for the delivery of town services instead of higher tax rates or service cuts. Traditionally, deep values of community and mutual aid were effective incentives for strong resident engagement. Many factors, including the rising cost of living and social media, have contributed to a recent decline in volunteerism.

A dependence on volunteers leaves Warren vulnerable to gaps in responsibilities and responsiveness, burnout, and lack of institutional knowledge.

Warren's ability to react to disruptions is guided by primarily volunteer efforts. The Fire Department has employed creative recruitment measures, including a high school training program. However, recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel remains a major concern.

Ongoing tax base limits stifle the ability to hire paid positions for municipal roles and emergency management in the short term. Therefore, assessing current volunteer vulnerabilities and opportunities for outreach is appropriate.

When asked, "How do you engage with the community in Warren?" the top answer to the write-in question was "I Don't," a curious answer from the selective group of residents who took the Master Plan Survey (Figure TS5). There is great potential to optimize existing talents and time to unburden current volunteers and stretch the imagination of what the Town of Warren could be in twenty years.

Figure TS5 "How do you engage with the community in Warren?"

Top answers	Count
I Don't	28
Schools	18
Town events	14
Town meeting	13

Answers: 139; Source: Warren Master Plan Survey

**Figure TS6 Warren Boards and
Commissions**

Board of Assessors
Board of Health
Board of Selectmen
Board of Sewer Commissioners
Capital Planning Committee
Cemetery Commission
Community Development Advisory Committee
Conservation Commission
Council on Aging
Cultural Council
Finance Committee
Historical Commission
Housing Authority
Library Needs Committee
Parks and Recreation Commission
Planning Board
Sewers Commissioners
Zoning Board of Appeals

Goal 1: Maintain a State of Good Repair for All Municipal Facilities and Infrastructure

Regular maintenance and reliable upkeep ensure Warren's treasured buildings can remain in use for decades to come without straining the budget.

The Old Town Hall building, once the center of activity in the Common, suffers from disinvestment and deferred maintenance. To avoid piling maintenance costs for municipal facilities, strong and annual building assessment, and capital planning should be prioritized.

The base of Warren's infrastructure was planned during the era of Wrights' Mill. Assuming redevelopment of the Mill Complex will not necessitate industrial levels of water supply, there is a great opportunity to add commercial and residential water users.

Very few neighboring municipalities have excess water flow limits, creating a competitive advantage for Warren to optimize regional opportunities for development.

In the short term, low users of both private water districts present a challenge to rising costs of water treatment and system maintenance.



Main Fire Headquarters, Source: ADA Transition Plan



Fire Station #2, Source: ADA Transition Plan

Strategy 1.1: Support Strong Municipal Facilities

Warren's stock of municipal facilities reflects the needs of a bustling mill town. Two fire stations for a primarily volunteer operation, the old town hall building, two libraries, a Senior Center, and the Shepard Municipal building are all public facing, most of which are historically built. Additional buildings, including the highway department and transfer station, also require regular maintenance and occasional capital costs.

These facilities all serve necessary functions for Warren residents and require regular assessment and capital planning.

New Public Safety Complex

The current fire and police stations are unfit for continued use. A feasibility study proposes three potential sites for a new public safety complex with estimated costs ranging from \$25 to \$30 million to combine fire and police stations in one new development.

Construction of a new public safety complex will come at a cost to Warren taxpayers. Grant opportunities such as the Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet or FEMA's Assistance to Firefighters Grant could support the cost of building a new public safety facility. Phased construction and budget allocation can also ease financial burdens.

Capital Planning

The Warren and West Warren Libraries, Council on Aging, Highway Building, and Shepard Municipal Building all require annual repairs that should be prioritized in annual budgets. Consistent maintenance of municipal buildings will stretch their life expectancy and avoid additional costly rebuilds.

Capital planning is an effective tool to maintain and extend the utilization of municipal

buildings and facilities. It allocates resources and funding by identifying different factors such as cost, risk, and community usage. Taking these into consideration, it provides financial reassurance due to the reduced chance of repairs and replacements.

Strategy 1.1 Action Items:

Action Item 1.1.1 - Explore options for funding a new public safety complex.

Action Item 1.1.2 - Continue capital planning to upkeep all municipal buildings.



Strategy 1.2: Maintain Strong Water and Sewer Systems

For the Town of Warren, public water and sewer infrastructure is a strength and an opportunity. Warren has significant excess capacity in its water and sewer systems due to the closure of Wrights Mill, allowing for potential growth and development.

Warren benefits from an abundant supply of water, with two independent water districts, the Warren Water District and the West Warren Water District, serving the town. Both districts have sufficient capacity to accommodate future growth. Recent improvements include a new water treatment center at Comins Pond and upgrades to water lines on Otis Street and near Pulaski Street. However, some areas still require significant updates to water pipes and certain private wells have been contaminated.

The town's sewer system is run by a treatment plant built in the 1970s with a permit to discharge 1.5 million gallons per day. Due to the closure of Wrights Mill, which was once its largest user, the system has excess capacity for additional flow. This capacity offers opportunities for future development.

Infrastructure Assessment

Warren can create a comprehensive assessment of the existing water and sewer infrastructure to identify high-priority areas for upgrades. A long-term maintenance and replacement plan will ensure systematic improvements over time, optimizing the use of available funds.

Ever-evolving state mandates for water treatment and public perception of water contamination further strain a water system with insufficient payers. In addition to encouraging new development on public lines, the Town can assess potential non-payers located on public lines and regularly

reassess bylaws to enforce connections to public water and sewer, as appropriate.

Increasing users on the water and sewer systems will generate revenue for the independent districts and aligns with this Master Plan's recommendations to focus on mixed-use development in the village centers.

Water and Sewer Expansions

The economic development chapter calls for the expansion of commercial and light industrial developments in Southwest Warren. There is potential to partner with private investors to expand the current water and sewer system to meet the demand for new developments.

A regional lack of water supply is an opportunity for Warren to leverage the current water surplus to attract new developers. Mandates to connect new development to existing lines, if feasible, can be explored.

Strategy 1.2 Action Items:

Action Item 1.2.1 - Conduct a detailed infrastructure assessment and long-term maintenance plan for water and sewer infrastructure.

Action Item 1.2.2 - Evaluate feasibility of water and sewer expansions.

Figure TS7 Warren Water System, Source: Warren, MA Gov

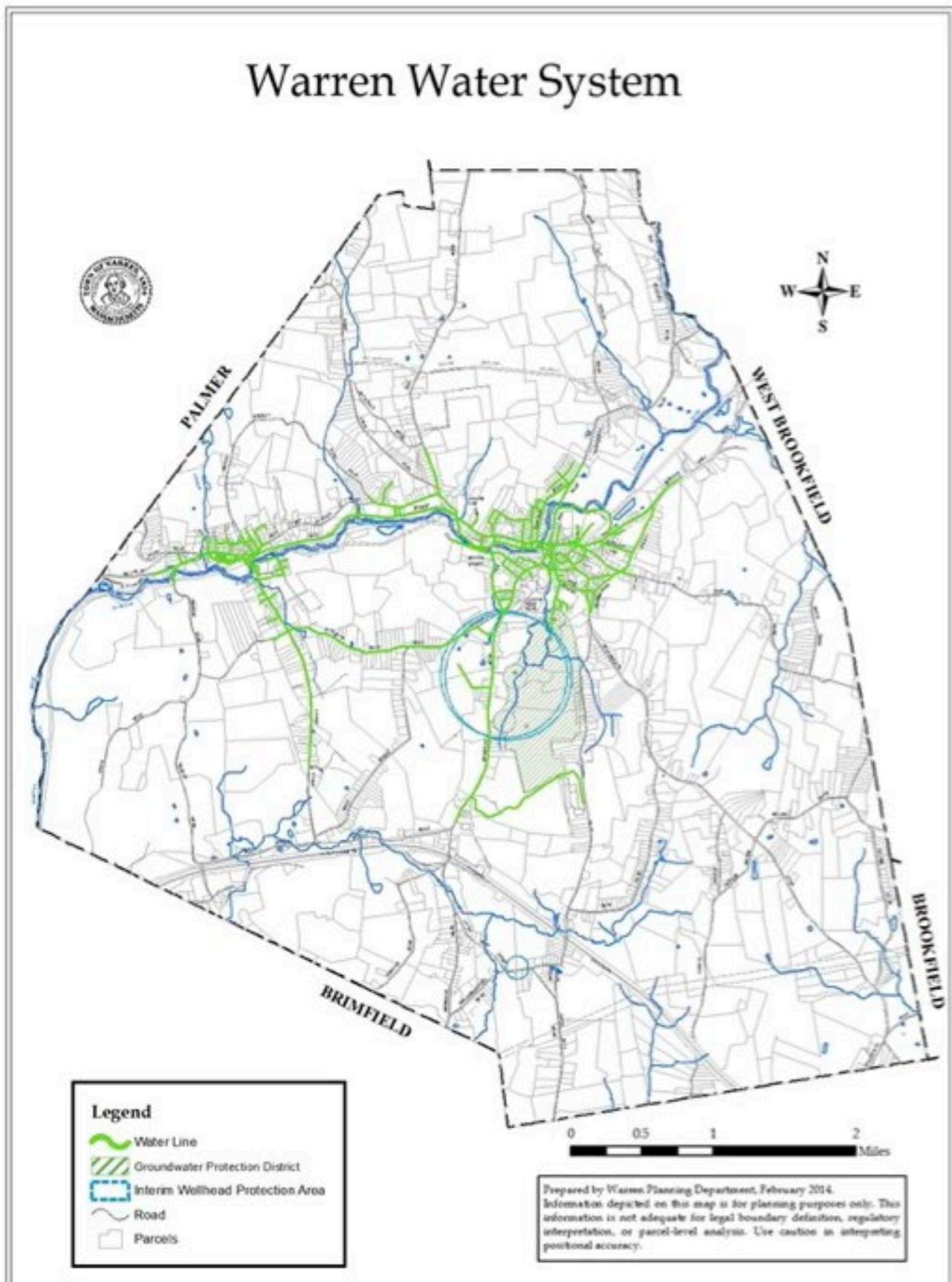
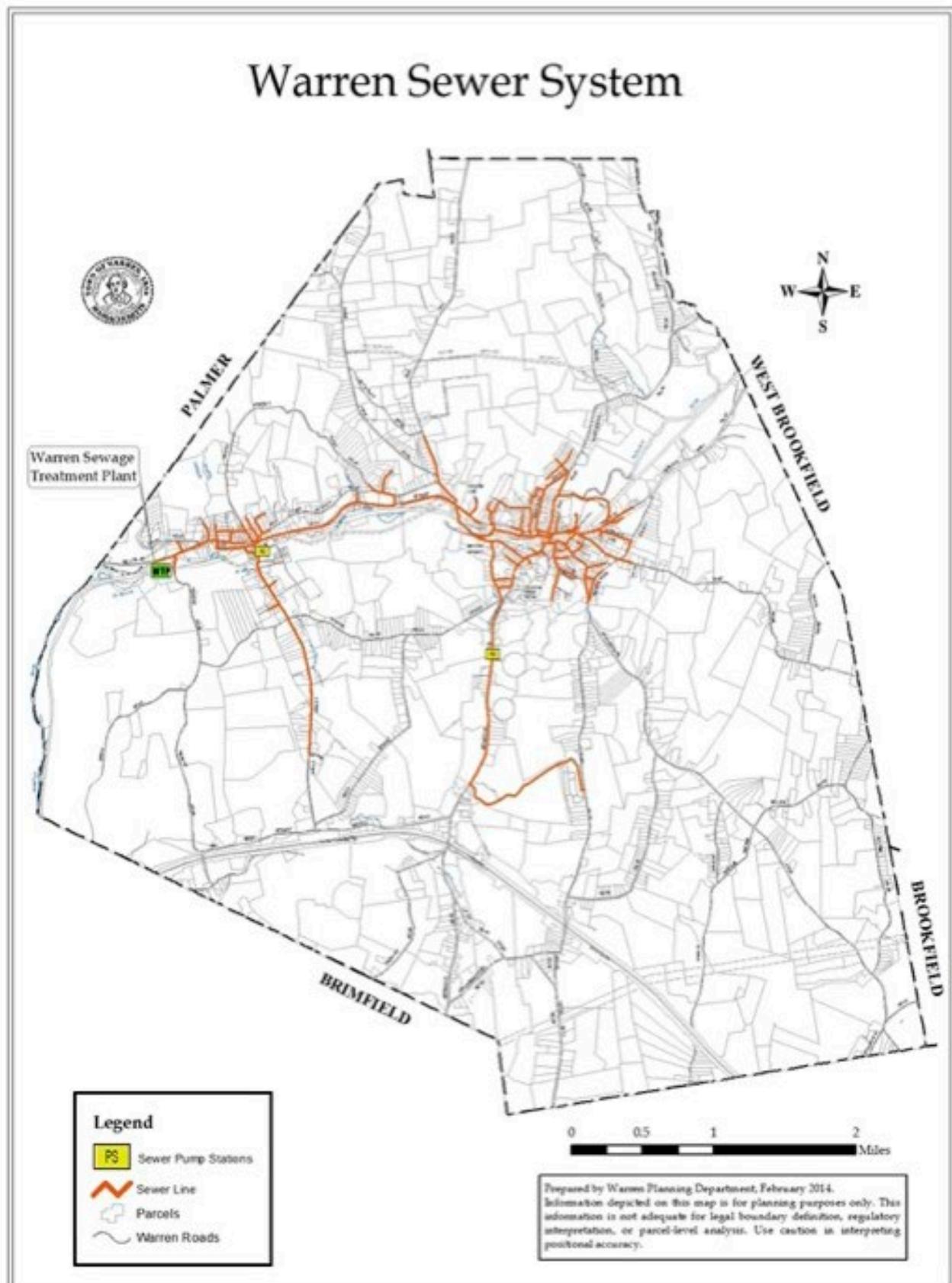


Figure TS8 Warren Sewer System, Source: Warren, MA Gov



Goal 2: Stabilize Personnel and Volunteer Capacity

Warren has an active volunteer base that plays a vital role in the town. Volunteers are active in boards, commissions, committees, emergency response teams, town events, and much more.

Volunteering for town functions is a traditional lever for rural towns to provide services without straining taxpayers. In addition to direct benefits, volunteering also serves as a tie to the community, offering social connection and neighborhood pride.

During stakeholder engagement, many expressed frustrations about the lack of volunteers, leading to burnout and service vulnerability.

To deepen the volunteer base, communication between the Town and residents can be increased. Because of the important role volunteers have in the community, the Town can also make a more dedicated effort to invest in volunteers and celebrate the work that they do.

Due to Warren's limited tax base, increasing the number of paid staff members is not always feasible. To a degree, volunteers will always be required to fill gaps in services in rural areas with low density. As modeled in education and dispatch services, Warren can continue to partner with neighboring communities to minimize strain.

Strategy 2.1: Increase Communication to Increase Volunteer Capacity

Communication

Many factors influence engagement, including a lack of awareness and communication. Bridging the divide between local government and residents is a necessary step the Town can take to foster public participation. The Master Plan Survey responses noted interest in understanding local opportunities for participation and volunteering (Figure TS9).

Figure TS9 “What would increase your involvement in local government?”

More public awareness about opportunities for public participation	59%
Accessibility of meetings (time of day, location, inclusivity)	34%
Improved communication with Town departments	34%
More opportunities for volunteering	23%
More opportunities to serve on boards and committees	14%

Answers: 146; Source: Warren Master Plan Survey

Increasing communication between the Town and residents can increase awareness of volunteer openings and local processes. Increased use of social media, email blasts, text messaging, and written press can increase trust between residents and encourage engagement. Using all forms of communication ensures all residents are aware of the opportunities to volunteer.

Continuing town-organized events, public information meetings, and interactions with local staff can welcome residents to share their talents and time on boards, committees, or in appointed positions.

To ensure that involvement opportunities reach all members of the community, it is

beneficial to have forms of communication in different languages. In addition to English, 10.5% of households speak Spanish, Indo-European, and Asian & Pacific Islander languages at home.ⁱⁱⁱ Extending outreach in these languages ensures access for all residents to engage with and benefit from community initiatives. This can be done by translating materials, posting signage in multiple languages, and using interpreters in town meetings.

Community Engagement

Partnering with public spaces (such as religious institutions and restaurants) to host community events can offer a sense of familiarity, encouraging informal community interactions with town staff and volunteers that encourage new residents to get involved.

Increasing volunteerism can also be done by creating programs that uplift volunteers and their actions. This could include a social media post, a story in a newsletter, or creating incentives for volunteers to earn. Since they play a pivotal role in Warren, it is important to highlight the work they do and the dedication that comes with it.

To further increase volunteerism, the Town can host workshops that display the different forms of work that they do. Workshops can be held alongside local businesses in the area to further expand the network of support.

Partner with Schools

Partnering with young people in Warren is an important opportunity to not only gather more volunteers but also to educate local youth on municipal processes and inspire future public servants. An example of this would be a high school internship program with the Warren Community Access Television to learn broadcasting technology while gaining exposure to Robert's Rules.

Board Member Training

When relying on volunteer capacity for town functions, Warren can encourage new voices and empower current leaders through regular open meeting law training. The Massachusetts Municipal Association provides training through Citizens Academy, and the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative hosts annual workshops on municipal processes.

Strategy 2.1 Action Items

Action Item 2.1.1 – Increase communication between local government and residents.

Action Item 2.1.2 - Explore community engagement to increase volunteerism.

Action Item 2.1.3 – Collaborate with Quaboag Regional School District to engage local youth in municipal processes.

Action Item 2.1.4 – Host regular training for current and prospective volunteer board members.

Strategy 2.2: Balance Fiscal Trade-Offs

Trade-Offs

Warren's position as a historical mill town turned bedroom community creates pressure for municipal staff to provide stable services and low taxes while maintaining low density- a nearly impossible balance (Figure TS10).

Low-density sprawl causes strain on municipal services, adding road miles, pipe miles, emergency management expansion, and ecosystem disruption with limited tax revenue per acre. Denser developments, such as homes on River Street, are delivered town services more efficiently and provide more taxes per acre than single-family lots.

If low density and low taxes are desired, service cuts are inevitable. Stable services with less density are possible at the cost of high residential taxes.

This Master Plan calls for encouraging development in the village centers to re-imagine the previous generation's level of mixed-use density in the Town Center and West Warren. This solution is proposed to avoid high taxes and service cuts.

However, the Town can choose to raise taxes to continue existing services and a more sprawled low density.

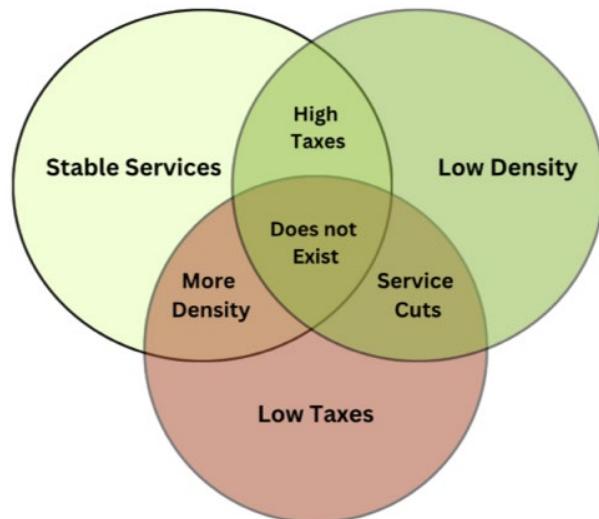
In the meantime, to ease costs for the existing population, the Town can continue to take advantage of regionalization with surrounding communities and state and federal grant funding, such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).

Regionalization

Warren's limited budget and challenges in maintaining sufficient personnel highlight the need for regionalized services in areas like emergency management, accounting, inspectional services, and planning. Sharing

part-time staff members with neighboring towns can increase the available pool of workers seeking full-time positions.

Figure TS10 Municipal Fiscal Trilemma



Warren uses regional dispatch services and is considering regionalization of EMS services. Regional collaboration has also proven beneficial in securing grants for infrastructure improvements.

Warren can conduct analyses to identify which services would benefit most from regionalization. Regionalization can be beneficial for sharing part-time needs. Further assessment for particular roles to understand long-term viability, logistical challenges, and cost will evaluate feasibility.

Recruitment and Retention for Volunteer Fire Fighters

The fire department depends on on-call volunteers for emergency management. In recent years, volunteer enrollment has been in decline, creating a vulnerability for future service provisions and response times.

The Quaboag Regional High School Fire and EMT program was formed to support the pipeline of firefighters in Warren and the greater region. Students can earn a first

responder certification, as well as support for police or fire exams and paramedic qualifications. Many participants turn the experience into a paid position. This is the sixth year for the popular Fire program and the first year for the EMT program.^{iv}

Offering creative training programs can support the continuation of volunteer firefighting. A formalized recruitment program targeting younger residents, retirees and civic-minded individuals can offer training, certifications, and incentives such as tax credits or stipends to encourage participation.

Strategy 2.2 Action Items:

Action Item 2.2.1- Identify potential services for regionalization.

Action Item 2.2.2 - Develop a recruitment and retention program for volunteer firefighters.

Goal 3: Build an Accessible Warren and Support an Aging Population

The town is projected to experience an increase in median age. A rise in senior residents, alongside ongoing long-term and short-term disabled residents, calls for a prioritization of physical accessibility and programming.

Warren conducted an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self Evaluation and Transition Plan in 2024 to identify areas in town that raise accessibility concerns. The Town should strive to improve these areas by following the ADA plan recommendations.

In addition to physical limitations, many types of disabilities should be considered during construction, renovations, and general maintenance of publicly owned land and facilities.

Accessibility should include integrating various forms of technology into current systems. Implementing new forms of technology should be a priority as it continues to advance.



Warren Public Library Front Entrance, Source: ADA Transition Plan



Transfer Station bins are only accessible by stairs, Source: ADA Transition Plan

Strategy 3.1: Ensure Physical Accessibility of Municipal Facilities

Accessibility is an important consideration for communities across the country for all ages. Thirty percent of adults from the ages of 35-65 will experience a disability for longer than 90 days.^v A disability can happen to anyone, underlining the need for accessible features across the Town of Warren.

ADA Transition Plan

Identified in the Town of Warren ADA Plan were many areas of non-compliance. A key example is the police station located in the Old Town Hall on the first floor, which lacks stair railings, “van accessible” parking, and has abrupt surface changes.

Many other municipal buildings are not ADA-compliant, such as the Fire Station, Warren Transfer Station, and the Water Pollution Control Center (also known as the wastewater treatment plant).

Accessibility considerations must include all disabilities. This can include physical, sensory, mental health, mobility, and others. Designs and renovations can incorporate different features such as clear signage, auditory aids, level entrances/exits, communication enhancements, assistive devices, and widened doors.

Accessibility through Technology

As municipalities continue to host information on digital platforms, technology should be considered when discussing accessibility. This includes town websites, planning documents, meetings, and agendas. The website should be designed to display the color and font settings of the visitor's browser, and images should have “alt” tags or descriptions.^{vi} When publishing meeting notices, accessibility accommodations should be included. During public meetings, auxiliary aids can assist with

Americans with Disabilities Act Self Evaluation and Transition Plan

Case law has shown that having an ADA Plan in place protects a municipality against legal liability for accessibility issues so long as the municipality is making good-faith efforts toward implementing its plan.

Local ADA plans are typically developed in two phases. First, each municipality performs a Self-Evaluation of local policies, communications (including websites and public meetings), procedures, programs, practices, and services to determine compliance with the ADA. This phase typically includes a survey or meeting of local department heads and any boards and commissions that deal directly with the public to catalog existing compliance status. This phase should identify non-compliance issues and specify remedial actions to modify local services, policies, etc., to avoid discrimination against disabled persons.

Following the self-evaluation process, the municipality completes a Transition Plan that focuses on physical barriers to access. This phase must:

- Identify structural obstacles to facilities access by individuals with disabilities.
- Describe any improvements needed to make facilities accessible
- Incorporate a schedule and prioritization scheme for making the needed improvements, and
- Identify the officials responsible for the implementation of the Transition Plan.

While ADA plans do not formally expire, the Massachusetts Office on Disability recommends that local plans be updated every ten years or whenever substantial changes are made to local services or facilities.

electronic and large print documents. These are all steps that the Town can take to ensure that meetings and technology are accessible to all residents.

Strategy 3.1 Action Items:

Action 3.1.1 - Implement the ADA Transition Plan.

Action Item 3.1.2 - Update the ADA Transition Plan as necessary.

Action Item 3.1.3 – Regularly update accessibility features for web and public meetings.



Strategy 3.2: Implement Age-Friendly Solutions

The Age Friendly Action Plan addresses the shifting age demographic in Central Massachusetts by identifying the current and future needs of an older population. The plan explores adapting infrastructure, improving essential services, and regionalizing efforts. These are all steps that Warren can follow to ensure older residents can engage with the community.

Council on Aging

Increasing the capacity and services of the Council on Aging (COA) will prepare the Town for an influx of older residents. Specifically, van services, healthcare services, and social programming can all be expanded. Warren's COA provides meal sites, recreation, senior clubs, volunteer opportunities, and distribution sites.

Senior Services

Regionalizing efforts beyond the scope of the COA can provide varied programming, reliable transportation, expanded outreach, and stronger senior services. Working collaboratively with neighboring towns, organizations, and other COAs is a step that the Town can take to respond to the increased aging population.

Senior Financial Assistance

Services traditionally housed under the COA, including reduced-cost meals and fuel assistance programs, can be expanded to anticipate an aging population.

Beyond the work of the COA, the Town can use other funding sources for senior financial assistance. The Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) offers a grant to fund COA programs for residents

Central Massachusetts Age Friendly Plan

The 2023 Age Friendly Plan was produced through CMRPC, Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative, and the Age Friendly Central Mass Action Team.

The planning team facilitated public engagement and outreach to solicit feedback on existing programming and infrastructure for older adults. The following take-aways shaped plan recommendations:

- A. Many older adults do not take advantage of public transportation opportunities due to the lack of information and communication, convenience, accessibility, and timeliness of these services.
- B. Many older adults drive but do not feel comfortable driving. Alternatively, many older adults walk as an alternative means of transportation, yet poor sidewalk conditions and ADA compliance issues make walking more difficult.
- C. Many older adults find that public buildings are not accessible to all people regardless of age and ability.
- D. There is a lack of affordable and accessible housing options for older adults as well as a lack of safety and maintenance of housing units.
- E. Many older adults would like to stay in their communities as long as possible. Still, the need for currently limited or unavailable aging in place assistance, policies, and programs makes staying difficult.
- F. There needs to be a centralized location for information about healthy aging within the region.
- G. There is a need for more affordable home healthcare providers, telehealth services, and mental health resources for older adults.
- H. There is a need for more home care services, such as housekeeping and personal care service options.

above 60 years of age.^{vii} The Massachusetts Council of Aging is another resource to secure additional financial assistance. Grants are offered under three categories: Capacity Building, Innovation, and Improving Access and Inclusion. There are approved projects under each category that the Town can implement and receive funding for.

Strategy 3.2 Action Items:

Action 3.2.1 - Increase capacity and services within the Council on Aging.

Action 3.2.2 - Support senior services through regional collaboration.

Action Item 3.2.3 - Consider providing additional senior financial assistance.

Goal 4: Prepare and React to Acute Climate Disruptions

Massachusetts has called for a statewide transition to cleaner and greener energy. The state's Net Zero plan contains climate action recommendations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030. Many of the plan's action items can be referenced by municipalities to identify potential actions on a local level.

Implementing clean energy and efficiency programs is a local responsibility to contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, in turn lowering the risk of acute climate disruptions magnified by climate change.

In addition to preventative measures, Warren can continue to prepare to react to acute climate disruptions by implementing local response plans, preparing local infrastructure, and opening lines of communication with vulnerable populations.

Strategy 4.1: Encourage the Production and Integration of Renewable Energy

In response to the changing climate, the Town of Warren should remain open to exploring new and innovative sources of renewable energy, even if they are unfamiliar.

The clean energy industry will continue to rapidly expand, resulting in new forms of technology that further drive sustainability. This creates an opportunity for Warren to transition to new solutions that are beneficial for the environment and community.

Green Committee

A Green Committee, modeled in many communities across Massachusetts, is charged with coordinating efforts to meet resiliency goals. The value of an effective Green Committee is in the diversity of agendas. Grouping environmental scientists, land conservationists, entrepreneurs, grant writers, and planners can implement solutions that save the Town money through cost-effective energy use and up-to-date technology.

A committee will add capacity for creative solutions for energy transition in alignment with state priorities alongside boards and departments. For example, transitioning streetlight bulbs, a bike share program, educational workshops, and grant writing.

Reimagine Solar

Solar energy has increasingly become a dependent source of renewable energy that takes many forms. However, in Warren, solar arrays and farms have caused forest clear-cutting and displacement of stormwater, leading to off-site erosion.

There are approaches to implementing solar development in cost-effective ways that do not harm the environment and are beneficial to the community. For example, solar panels on the roofs of municipal buildings, residential homes, and parking lots. The Town can

work alongside solar energy companies to incentivize solar energy that is more in line with the needs of Warren than historical solar developments.

Partner with Electric Companies to Prepare the Grid

To integrate different forms of renewable energy, the electric grid must have enough capacity and compatible infrastructure to meet the demand. To ease the transition and support local renewable energy integration, the Town can proactively work with utility providers to prepare and modernize the grid. The Town can take steps such as upgrading current infrastructure, promoting smart grid technology, and using time-of-use pricing.

Getting Creative

Partnering with electric companies can assist in using local renewable energy sources, such as hydropower from the Wrights Mill dam. Located on the Quaboag River, the dam has potential for hydroelectric power generation. Massachusetts Clean Energy Center provides grant funding for feasibility studies and construction projects. Working with electric companies and securing funding for hydropower is a homegrown avenue to transition to green energy.

Transitioning to Electric Transportation and EV Charging

Electric vehicles (EVs) are a key component of transitioning to green energy. The State of Massachusetts has been investing in electric vehicle infrastructure for residents and municipalities through rebates and grants to encourage the transition from gas to electric vehicles. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) developed the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program Deployment Plan, which outlines the state's approach and funding to create an EV network. The Town can reference this plan to take similar actions towards electric vehicles.

Green Communities

The Town of Warren is a beneficiary of the Green Communities Designation and Grant Program. This state program offers financial and technical assistance to enhance municipal energy initiatives. As a designated Green Community, Warren has been awarded over \$700,000 in funding.^{viii}, including funds for hybrid police cruisers, EMS support, and administrative assistance at Warren Elementary School.

Strategy 4.1 Action Items:

Action Item 4.1.1 – Establish a Green Committee for the Town of Warren.

Action Item 4.1.2 – Install solar panels on municipal buildings, where appropriate.

Action Item 4.1.3 – Continue to partner with electric providers for renewable energy integration.

Action Item 4.1.4 – Partner with electric providers to prepare the grid for residential electric vehicle charging.

Action Item 4.1.5 – Transition the Town vehicle fleet to low emission vehicles

Action item 4.1.6 – Continue to use the Green Communities Program.

Strategy 4.2: Prepare for Acute Climate Disruptions

Implement the Emergency Management Plan and Hazard Mitigation Plan

The Town of Warren has developed a Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) to ensure a coordinated and proactive approach to disasters. The plan includes information about the Emergency Management Organization (EMO), outlines actions for hazard preparedness, mitigation, and response initiatives, as well as recovery steps after a disaster. It defines the framework for what should be done in times of emergencies to respond adequately and effectively. In the case of disaster, the Warren CEMP should be carefully followed.

The Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) and Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan (MVP) are other resources the Town can reference to identify vulnerable areas and populations (Figure TS11), reference mitigation efforts, and respond to acute disruptions.

Continue Training Exercises and Improve Emergency Infrastructure

The Emergency Management Program practices different exercises, plans, and procedures, guaranteeing that all response agencies successfully perform emergency roles. Maintaining these training courses and ensuring engaged participation is important for efficient responses.

A key component of the CEMP is the Warren Fire Station's role as the Emergency Operations Center. The alternate location is the West Warren Fire Station. It is recommended if a public safety complex is constructed, the design includes integration of a new Emergency Operations Center.

Identify Vulnerabilities

To ensure preparedness for climate disruptions in Warren, it is necessary to identify and assist more vulnerable areas, populations, and the primary hazards. At-risk areas of town are identified in Figure TS11. These areas are at risk of flooding, extreme temperatures, and severe weather events. Dedicated time and attention to these areas before,

Figure TS11 Identified Hazard Vulnerabilities

Location in Warren	Hazard Impacts
Reed Street	Flooding
Southbridge Road	Flooding, Erosion, Downed Trees
Brook Road	Flooding, Erosion
Bemis Road	Flooding, Erosion
O'Neil Road	Flooding, Erosion
Main Street	Flooding, Power Outages
Coy Hill Road	Flooding, Erosion
Washington St	Flooding
Little Rest / Walkeen Kozial Road	Flooding
Old West Brookfield Road	Flooding
Cutler Road	Power Outages
Old Douglas Road	Downed Trees, Beaver Dam Failure
Town Farm Road	Outages

Source: Town of Warren 2022 Hazard Mitigation Plan

during, and after a disaster is necessary for access to shelters and evacuation routes.

Warren's senior population has a higher likelihood of experiencing harm from climate change and disasters. This is explored in the HMP/MVP, as seniors are more vulnerable to extreme temperatures and weather events and cannot adapt their living conditions to withstand climate disruptions. Awareness of seniors' vulnerability is important due to the rise in the aging demographic, as explored earlier in the chapter.

Communication

The CEMP defines the process of analyzing and disseminating information to the community. Public messaging can be done through press releases, press conferences, website updates, social media updates, reverse 911 systems, notification systems, and radio/televised announcements. A strength of the Town is Reverse 911 and My Town Alerts, which effectively notify residents of emergencies.^{ix} The Town should continue to advertise the Reverse 911 system to ensure communication reaches everyone.

In line with the CEMP and the HMP, community workshops, educational programming, and informational materials can raise awareness of hazards and disaster risks before they occur. Creating opportunities for residents to learn more about climate change can establish community efforts used in times of despair. Educational awareness will continue to become increasingly more important as climate change progresses.

Strategy 4.2 Action items:

Action Item 4.2.1 – Implement and update, as appropriate, Warren's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan, Hazard Mitigation Plan, and Emergency Management Plan.

Action Item 4.2.2 – Prioritize infrastructure updates for identified vulnerable locations from the 2022 Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Action Item 4.2.3 – Continue to improve Reverse 911 and create educational opportunities for residents about climate change.

ⁱ Warren Annual Report. 2021.

ⁱⁱ Warren Public Safety Complex Feasibility Study, Tecton Architects

ⁱⁱⁱ United States Census Bureau. "Language Spoken at Home." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1601

^{iv} Quaboag Regional School Committee, Regular Meeting Minutes of October 21, 2024

^v ALPA National Disability Insurance, <https://www.alpa.org/~/media/ALPA/Files/pdfs/resources-section/DisabilityBrochure-Web.pdf>

^{vi} Town of Warren ADA Transition Plan

^{vii} Hybrid Programming for Councils on Aging Grant Mass Gov

^{viii} Green Communities Division, Department of Energy Resources Mass Gov

^{ix} Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, Town of Warren



OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

Town of Warren 2025 Master Plan

Introduction

The Open Space and Recreation Chapter guides how Warren should invest in its recreational land, facilities, and programming, ensuring these resources can be enjoyed by community members.

The Town of Warren owns several parks that serve as venues for daily active and passive recreation as well as occasional Town-sponsored events. Improvements to equipment, amenities, and parking would enable these parks to better realize their full potential.

While Warren boasts an abundance of natural land, most of it is privately owned. Besides Lucy Stone Park, the only trails in town are informal. To expand its recreational opportunities, the Town could work with private landowners to gain access to their property, explore options for purchasing land, and formalize existing trails.

Finally, the Town can expand its recreational programming by supplementing the capacity of the Parks and Recreation Department. Considering the size of its team, the Parks and Recreation Department does an admirable job. Hiring more part-time or seasonal staff

would allow the Department to diversify its programming. Increasing online resources would also help raise awareness of Town events and activities.



Key Findings and Priorities

Key Finding 1: Residents Place a High Priority on Active and Passive Recreation Land

Survey responses from Warren's 2022 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) indicate that residents place significant value on active and passive recreation land (Figure OS1). This sentiment was also reflected in several comments from Warren Master Plan Survey respondents.

Many needs related to passive and active recreation were identified through the community engagement process.

The expansion of recreational and/or hiking trails was by far the top priority conveyed in the OSRP and Master Plan Survey feedback. Currently, the only Town-owned trail is at Lucy Stone Park, although informal trails exist at other locations in town.

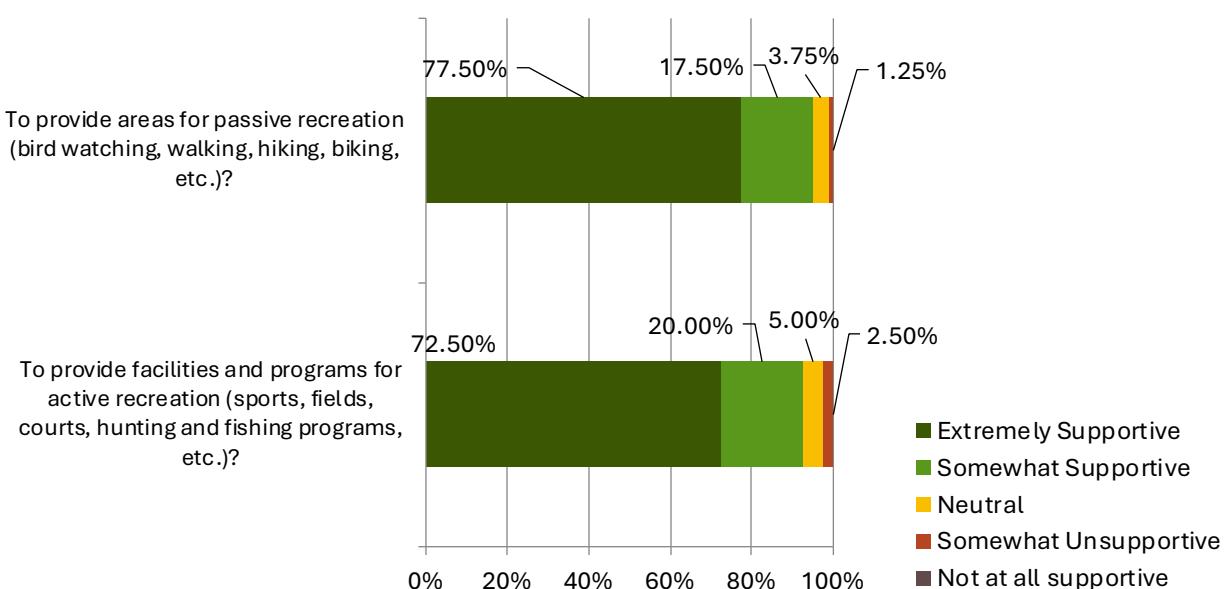
Community members also expressed a desire for more amenities at Town parks—such as picnic tables, playground equipment, and restroom facilities—and improvements to athletic fields. This aligns with the findings of the 2006 Warren Master Plan, indicating that more work remains to be done in these areas.

Additionally, the OSRP underscored the importance of accessibility upgrades to recreation assets. The survey also noted a desire for more ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant trails, benches, and other age friendly resources to ensure all residents can fully participate in recreational opportunities.

From the Master Plan Survey:

"I love this town. We have some great areas for bird / nature watching."

Figure OS1: "How strongly do you support Warren protecting, acquiring, and/or improving Town-owned land for the following reasons?"



Source: 2022 Warren Open Space and Recreation Plan Survey. Survey results were collected from June - July, 2022. 90 respondents participated in the survey.

Key Finding 2: There is an Opportunity to Leverage the Town's Open Space and Recreation Assets to Attract Eco-Tourism

Warren residents strongly value preserving the town's rural character and sense of place. At the same time, residents are supportive of more economic development to improve quality of life and lower the residential property taxes. These priorities can be simultaneously advanced through eco-tourism, as identified by several survey respondents.

Warren's 2006 Master Plan also identified open space and recreation, specifically the town's historic and scenic amenities, as an opportunity. The plan noted that: "Among Warren's notable physical attributes are its hills, which provide scenic views of the rolling rural landscape, and the Quaboag River, which runs through its center."

Employing eco-tourism is a joint strategy between the Economic Development and Open Space and Recreation Chapters. By investing in its recreational assets, Warren can brand itself as a destination for activities such as sightseeing and outdoor recreation, alongside hospitality offerings like farm-to-table establishments. Eco-tourism can also include educational experiences, as such as the nature walk at Lucy Stone Park.

From the Master Plan Survey

"We should promote eco-tourism, historical tourism, agritourism; outdoor recreation and wedding-related businesses. "

Key Finding 3: The Parks and Recreation Department Could Benefit from Increased Capacity

Warren is fortunate to boast an active Parks and Recreation Department, which plays a vital role in maintaining Town parks and hosting recreational activities for residents to enjoy. The department hosts a series of seasonal events, such as the bi-annual Haunted House at the Shepard Municipal Building and the Tree Lighting event on the Town Common. Summer activities consist of a children's recreation program, swimming lessons, tennis lessons, and Friday night concerts. These efforts have been delivered by a team of three elected commissioners and one part-time staff member.

Community perceptions toward recreational programs and opportunities in town were mixed with different results in the survey and public workshop. Just over half of Master Plan Survey respondents replied that they were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with open space and recreation services. These stakeholders also highlighted the popularity of the summer concerts hosted at Dean Park. On the other hand, most respondents to the 2022 OSRP Survey conveyed neutrality or dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of recreational programs and opportunities. Additionally, feedback from the Master Plan public workshop emphasized that there is a need for better promotion of existing offerings, such as the Friday night concerts.

Anecdotal comments from community members expand on some of these sentiments.

Addressing some community members' desire for more recreational offerings will likely require increasing the capacity of the Parks and Recreation Department.

From the Master Plan Workshop

"In general, increased capacity within and coordination between Town entities is needed to move forward with parks and recreation projects and to promote amenities online and at municipal buildings and events."

Goal 1: Improve Existing Open Space and Recreational Facilities

Warren's open space and recreational facilities are an invaluable asset to the local community. However, to realize their full potential, improvements in amenities and maintenance are necessary. To ensure residents of all abilities can enjoy what Town open space and recreational facilities have to offer, the Town of Warren should take the following steps.



Strategy 1: Improve Accessibility of Existing Recreational Spaces

Parking

The 2022 Warren Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) highlighted the need for more parking at several of Warren's open space assets. This is crucial to encourage public visitation, especially during events. Survey results indicate that cars are the most common means of transportation to these destinations.

The OSRP noted that both Cutter Park and the Town Common require additional parking locations. Currently, parking at Cutter Park is limited to a private lot adjacent to the park. The OSRP also recommended that the Town partner with the Warren Water District to preserve parking at Comins Pond.

Parking Study

To address these issues, the Town should consider conducting a parking study of open space and recreational facilities. This study would track the number of cars parked in lots at different times, helping to assess the supply of parking versus demand. It could also assess the physical condition of parking facilities and any accessibility limitations for disabled or mobility impaired individuals. The study should include white cane and wheelchair walk audits. With this information compiled, the study could outline future steps to address any identified issues.

Accessibility

In 2024, the Warren completed an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan ("ADA Plan"). The ADA is a federal law that ensures that public spaces are accessible to individuals with disabilities. There are also regulations at the state level to promote accessibility, such as 521 CMR, which requires that all public

buildings and facilities need to be accessible to, functional for, and safe for use by persons with disabilities.

The ADA Plan includes an assessment of the current accessibility of public spaces, as well as improvement recommendations and model policies. The plan notes that the following open space and recreational areas could be improved to increase accessibility: Shepard Park, the Warren Senior Center, the Town Common, McWhirter Park, Lucy Stone Park, Cutter Park, and Dean Park.

Improvements recommended by the ADA Plan include adding signage in parking lots, designating van accessible parking, and creating 8-foot access aisles for people who use mobility devices to get in and out of their cars. Creating and maintaining accessible walking paths, trails, and sidewalks in these spaces should also be a priority to provide for routes of travel for disabled or otherwise mobility-impaired persons. The Town should further consider updating amenities such as playground equipment, picnic tables, benches, concession areas, and bathrooms to meet accessibility requirements.

Strategy 1.1 Action Items:

Action Item 1.1.1 - Complete a parking study for Town recreation properties

Action Item 1.1.2 - Implement recommendations from the Town's ADA self-evaluation and transition plan for recreation facilities

Strategy 2: Redesign Cutter Park

Cutter Park, constructed in 1926,ⁱ originally featured a baseball field, tennis court, croquet ground, wading pool, swings, and a sand pile. There was also a multi-use building which may have housed restrooms and changing rooms. It was a popular location due to its proximity to the elementary school, but usage declined after the school moved in the early 1990s. At present, the park's playground equipment is old and poses a safety concern, and much of the park is not in compliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board.ⁱⁱ The park also lacks many amenities, such as lights, that would make it more welcoming.

Design Phase

Warren received a Fiscal Year 2024 grant award from the Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program to fund the redesign of Cutter Park. The design project will result in bid ready plans and specifications for physical improvements to Cutter Park. The design will cover the following concepts:

- Landscape improvements and visual upgrades
- Vehicular parking, circulation, and access
- Pedestrian and bicycle access
- Splash pad or similar water feature
- Playground
- Site amenities (trash receptacles, benches, lighting, etc.)
- Removal of existing baseball field
- Utilities (water, electric, sanitary)
- ADA Compliance
- Lighting

The design is anticipated to be completed within the 2025 calendar year. The Town should work closely with the local planning agency, which will handle project oversight,

and the hired civil engineer and/or landscape architect to ensure the project involves robust public engagement and timely completion.

Construction Phase

Once the design is finalized, Warren should explore funding opportunities to cover the cost of physical improvements to Cutter Park which can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Potential funding sources include State grant programs such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program and the Parkland Acquisition and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Grant Program and federal programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

In 2007, Warren used a CDBG award to fund similar improvements to Dean Park which included the building of a concession stand and restrooms, the installation of a playground, the construction of an outdoor basketball court, and a redesign of the softball field. With its limited staff capacity, the Town should consult with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission on potential assistance with any such grant applications.

Strategy 1.2 Action Items:

Action Item 1.2.1 - Complete design plans for physical improvements to Cutter Park

Action Item 1.2.2 - Fund physical improvements to Cutter Park

Strategy 3: Enhance Amenities Town-Wide

Additional Equipment

Parks become more attractive when they include amenities that engage the community. Warren residents and stakeholders identified several missing elements at Town parks that could make these spaces more inviting destinations for active and passive recreation.

Dean Park could be improved through the addition of a walking path, more picnic tables, a slide and swings for the playground, and possibly a skate park. The Town Common was also observed to lack enough picnic tables and benches. There is also an opportunity to activate Shepard Park, located next to the Shepard Municipal Building, by adding a walking loop and seating. Routinely maintained and adjacent to nearby parking, the field is currently an underutilized asset.

Wi-Fi

Installing Wi-Fi service in open spaces through the use of wireless access points or a wireless mesh network would expand the potential use of the parks. Wireless access points can be attached to existing outdoor infrastructure like telephone poles and lamp posts

Providing Wi-Fi service could allow market vendors to utilize cash-free payment systems such as mobile card readers and Apple/Google Pay. As increasing numbers of people work from home or on a hybrid schedule, Wi-Fi access would allow them to enjoy the outdoors while simultaneously staying connected with work. In locations with poor cellphone coverage, Wi-Fi could provide a communication lifeline, enhancing safety by enabling emergency calls to be made more easily.

Beautification

Landscaping and aesthetic features are essential elements to making parks more inviting and functional. Feedback from the OSRP Survey and Master Plan public workshop indicates that community members believe several Town parks could benefit from more investment in this area. In particular, there were many residents that voiced interest in creating a dedicated walking path at Dean Park. Another idea could be gardens, like those at Lucy Stone Park.

The installation of signage was also noted as an opportunity. Warren's parks could benefit from highly visible signage identifying the presence of park facilities. For instance, the Town Common currently lacks a sign denoting the park. Informational kiosks or plaques would be another attractive addition. Such plaques could describe each park's ecological or historical background. In the case of Dean Park, which was constructed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1936, this could include a history of the WPA and the story of the park's creation. Any signage installed at parks should display consistent branding. Through consistent colors, fonts, and imagery, signs can build a sense of place and familiarity.

Strategy 1.3 Action Items:

Action Item 1.3.1 - Add additional equipment to Town parks for passive and active recreation.

Action Item 1.3.2 – Install and maintain public electricity outlets at Dean Park and the Town Common.

Action Item 1.3.3 - Provide Wi-Fi access at open spaces.

Action Item 1.3.4 - Beautify Town parks with landscaping and signage.

Goal 2: Increase the Quantity of Outdoor Recreation Spaces

Warren has extensive natural beauty and open space, but much of this land is privately owned and off-limits to the public. Additionally, private land that is accessible is often poorly advertised. As a result, the 2022 Warren Open Space and Recreation Plan found that there is a lack of formalized hiking and ATV areas in town. Community engagement for the Master Plan process agreed that more public hiking and open space is desired. Warren should take the following steps to address this gap.

Strategy 1: Grow the Town’s Inventory of Property Parcels that Provide Recreation Access for the General Public

Potential Riverwalk

As noted in the Transportation Chapter, the block of Route 67 (Main Street) between West Warren Village and the Town Common area is routinely trafficked by pedestrians but lacks a sidewalk between Cross Street and Coy Hill Road. In addition to an on-road sidewalk, there is strong potential for a riverwalk south of Route 67.

Nearly all of the land is either included in the existing right of way or owned by the Massachusetts Department of Wildlife (Figure OS2, Green). Developing a trail to connect Warren’s village centers and increase public access to the river and would offer substantial benefits to all residents.

Opportunity through Chapter Lands

Chapter 61 programs offer landowners the opportunity to receive significant property tax reductions in exchange for restricting land development. Chapter 61B pertains to recreational land and uses. Recreational land is defined as land “retained in substantially a natural, wild, or open condition or in

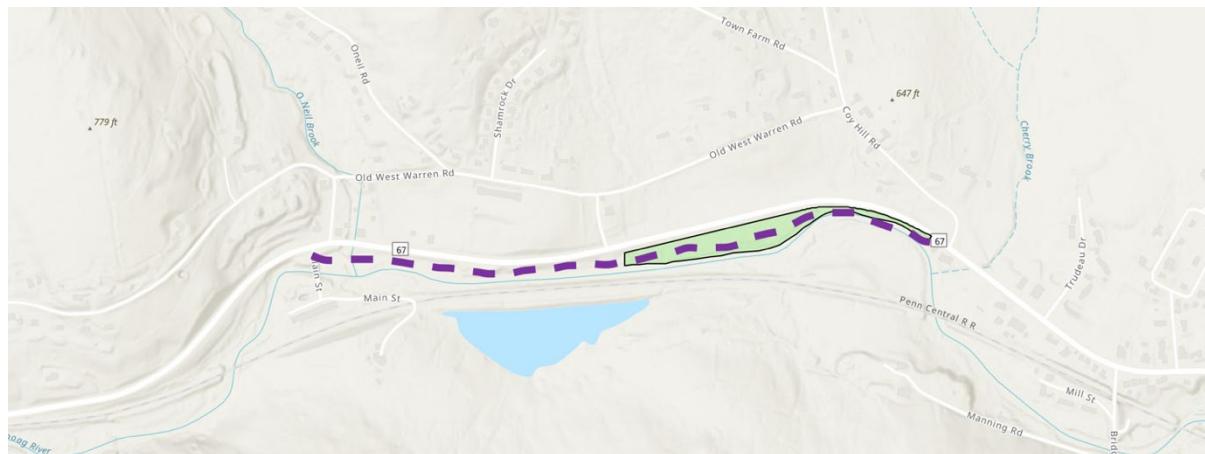
a landscaped or pasture condition or in a managed forest condition under a certified forest management plan.” Chapter 61B land must be open to either the public or members of a nonprofit organization.

To be eligible for participation in the Chapter 61B program, properties must be a minimum of five acres in size. Unlike other Chapter 61 programs, Chapter 61B does not require that the land in question be managed, which makes it a better fit for landowners who prefer to take a passive approach to their land.ⁱⁱⁱ Owners have the option to withdraw from Chapter 61 programs, but tax penalties may apply depending on the method and timeline of the withdrawal.

Warren already boasts 1,429 acres of Chapter 61B land^{iv} accounting for 8.5% of the Town’s land acreage. Most of this land is used for nature study or observation. Other uses include hiking and golfing. There is significantly more land in town that may be eligible for the Chapter 61B program.

There are currently 1,669 acres of vacant developable land in Warren’s residential zoning districts over five acres in size, and another 1,356 acres coded as single family residential. Land with residential dwellings is still eligible for participation in Chapter 61B, but the portion of land occupied by the dwelling is assessed at its full and fair cash value like all other normally taxed properties.

Figure OS2: Potential Riverwalk



To expand the town's inventory of recreation land, Warren can educate property owners about the Chapter 61B program and the injury liability protections under MGL Chapter 21 Section 17C. One potential outreach method could include the distribution of informational flyers along with the Town's quarterly property tax bills.

Conservation Restrictions

While Chapter 61 programs provide temporary protection for privately held open space, conservation restrictions are legal agreements that extinguish development rights on a property and ensure its perpetual use as open space. Conservation restrictions are granted to or purchased by units of government or nonprofit organizations that monitor the property for compliance with the conservation restriction. The property owner retains ownership of the land and may sell or bequeath the preserved land with all restrictions in place. Rights to public access can be written into conservation restrictions. Landowners who donate or sell a conservation restriction may be eligible to benefit from several state and federal tax deductions or credits.

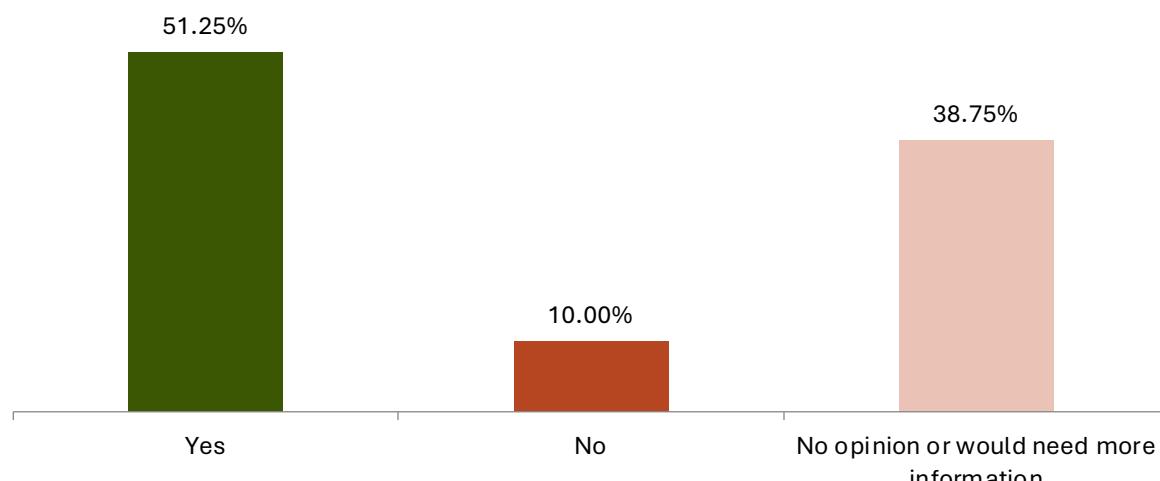
There are currently no conservation restrictions in Warren, but this can be changed by partnering with conservation organizations such as the East Quabbin Land Trust and Warren Rural Improvement. These organizations educate property owners on the conservation restriction model, which can be particularly appealing during estate planning. Conservation restrictions can be a meaningful way for individuals to contribute to the long-term preservation of their community's natural environment.

Purchasing Available Land

Another way the Town of Warren can increase the quantity of recreation spaces in town is by purchasing land for recreational use. Survey responses collected as part of the 2022 OSRP suggest that Warren residents are receptive to the idea of allocating Town funds to acquire or conserve open space (Figure OS3). The Town of Warren purchasing property for recreation purposes carries the added benefit of strong future protection for that property.

Under Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution and MGL Chapter 3 Section 5A, towns cannot change the use or dispose of

Figure OS3: "In order to preserve open spaces in Warren, would you be willing to vote to allocate town funds to acquire or otherwise conserve open space?"



land dedicated to open space and other related purposes without a two-thirds vote of the State legislature. And even if this were to occur, towns must identify replacement land not already subject to Article 97. Therefore, Warren residents can feel assured that their tax dollars are being spent on enhancing the community's recreational assets into perpetuity.

There is an abundance of properties in town that present potential purchasing opportunities. Analysis of local assessor data indicates that there are currently 1,924 acres of developable or partially developable land in Warren's residential zoning districts.⁵ This land is currently unprotected from development and likely off limits to the public. Moreover, Chapter 61 land makes up 43% of Warren's total acreage. Under MGL Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B, municipalities may exercise a right of first refusal (i.e., to purchase property for its sale price or fair market value) when landowners sell land for a use other than its designated Chapter 61 use or withdraw from the program and change the use of the land within 12 months. This right of first refusal can be also transferred to a land trust.

Open Space Prioritization Plan

To be strategic in its efforts to acquire land for recreational use, and to be prepared when opportunities present themselves, Warren should create an Open Space Prioritization Plan. This plan would rank selected parcels based on criteria such as proximity to existing open space parcels, the presence of wildlife habitat, and proximity to drinking water sources. Parcel scores are purely advisory and do not involve a commitment by the Town to pursue acquisition or protection of any studied parcels. Parcel scores should also not be the sole factor in Warren's decision to acquire any land.

Strategy 2.1 Action Items:

Action Item 2.1.1 - Create a riverwalk to connect the village centers along Route 67.

Action Item 2.1.2 - Engage with property owners to expand access to privately held open space land under Chapter 61B.

Action Item 2.1.3 - Prepare a fund to purchase land for public use.

Action Item 2.1.4 - Commission an Open Space Prioritization Plan to identify parcels of high conservation or recreation value.

Strategy 2: Expand and Formalize the Trail Network

Formalizing Trails

Community feedback identified the presence of informal trails around Comins Pond and Dean Park. The Town can work cooperatively with the Water District and private property owners respectively to explore formalizing access to these and other trails. This could be achieved through trail easements, which grant the right to use private land for trail purposes. An easement may outline the trail's location, width and the rights and responsibilities of the property owner and the Town. For example, The Warren Conservation Commission has an easement with property owners that abut the Quaboag River for the Lucy Stone Park Trail.

Trail Committee

To build capacity to maintain and expand trails, Warren should consider establishing a trail committee. Trail committees typically assume a variety of functions including developing a vision for the local trail network, educating the community about local trails, maintaining the local trail network, encouraging partnerships between municipal and private stakeholders, and organizing trail events.

A trail committee in Warren could coordinate the efforts of local volunteers such as students and scout groups and nonprofits such as the East Quabbin Land Trust, the Norcross Wildlife Foundation, and Warren Rural Improvement. The successful creation of a forest trail at Lucy Stone Park by volunteers is a testament to the strong volunteer spirit of the Warren community and demonstrates the potential for similar initiatives on other sites.

Relationship Building

The Town of Warren and community members should also strive to build stronger relationships with regional nonprofits focused on land conservation, such as the East Quabbin Land Trust, the Norcross Wildlife Foundation, and Warren Rural Improvement. These organizations may have expertise and volunteer bases that the Town could tap into to help maintain and expand its trail network.

While conservation nonprofits often work cooperatively with local governments, their nonprofit status allows them to operate with more flexibility and creativity. For instance, nonprofits can work with individual land-owners to create plans for their land, maintain private trails, and offer grant awards.

The 2006 Warren Master Plan raised the prospect of building out a collection of historical trails in the region. As the plan described,

“Several historical paths traversing the region have potential for linking several towns within the county. Among them are the Old Baypath Indian Trail, which could eventually link the Towns of Warren, West Brookfield and New Braintree. Sixteen miles in length, this trail would begin at the Winimusset Wildlife Management Area parking facility on Hardwick Road in New Braintree and would conclude south to the parking area near the Boston Post Road sign in Warren. The start of the trail would link with the Central Ware River Valley Rail Trail, currently under development. Similarly, the Quaboag River Water Trail has potential to link Warren to several surrounding communities. Roughly 12.3 miles in length, the trail could eventually link Warren with West Brookfield, Brookfield and East Brookfield. The trail would begin near the East Brookfield Town Barn, follow the Quaboag River and would conclude along Route 67 in Warren.”



Opening of the new trail through the woods at Lucy Stone Park. Source: Lucy Stone Park Facebook Page

the only way to realize this vision is through coordination with regional nonprofits and neighboring municipalities.

Trail Mapping

Maps are simple yet effective ways to raise awareness of local trails. While some trail heads may be visible from main thoroughfares, others may be more hidden or only known to hiking enthusiasts or long-time residents, but not other members of the community. By clearly delineating routes, maps can increase safety and lessen the chance of misunderstandings between trail users and private landowners.

To formalize and promote existing trails, the Parks and Recreation Department and the Conservation Commission should collaborate with trail users, private landowners, and relevant nonprofits to compile the information necessary to map trails that are open to the public in Warren. These maps could be made available as PDFs on the Town website or on a variety of mapping programs and apps like Google Maps, OpenStreetMap, or Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Additionally, maps could be uploaded to crowdsourced trail databases and maps such as Trailforks, AllTrails, FarOut, and RideWithGPS. Posting physical maps at trailheads or on kiosks would further increase visibility and access.

Trail Signage

Trail signage plays a complementary role to maps and carries many of the same benefits. Signage comes in many shapes and forms from kiosks marking trail heads to directional signs signaling the routes of trails. Ideally, signage should be uniform across Town-owned properties to promote consistency and create a sense of place. To ensure this the case, the Town may consider developing a trail sign manual. This could be one of the first tasks assumed by the new Trails Committee. Warren could take inspi-

ration from the Town of Bolton's Conservation Trails Sign Manual, which was jointly authored by the town's Conservation Commission, Trails Committee, and local land trust.

Strategy 2.2 Action Items:

Action Item 2.2.1 - Formalize existing trail access.

Action Item 2.2.2 - Establish a Trail Committee.

Action Item 2.2.3 - Partner with regional nonprofits to maintain & expand trails.

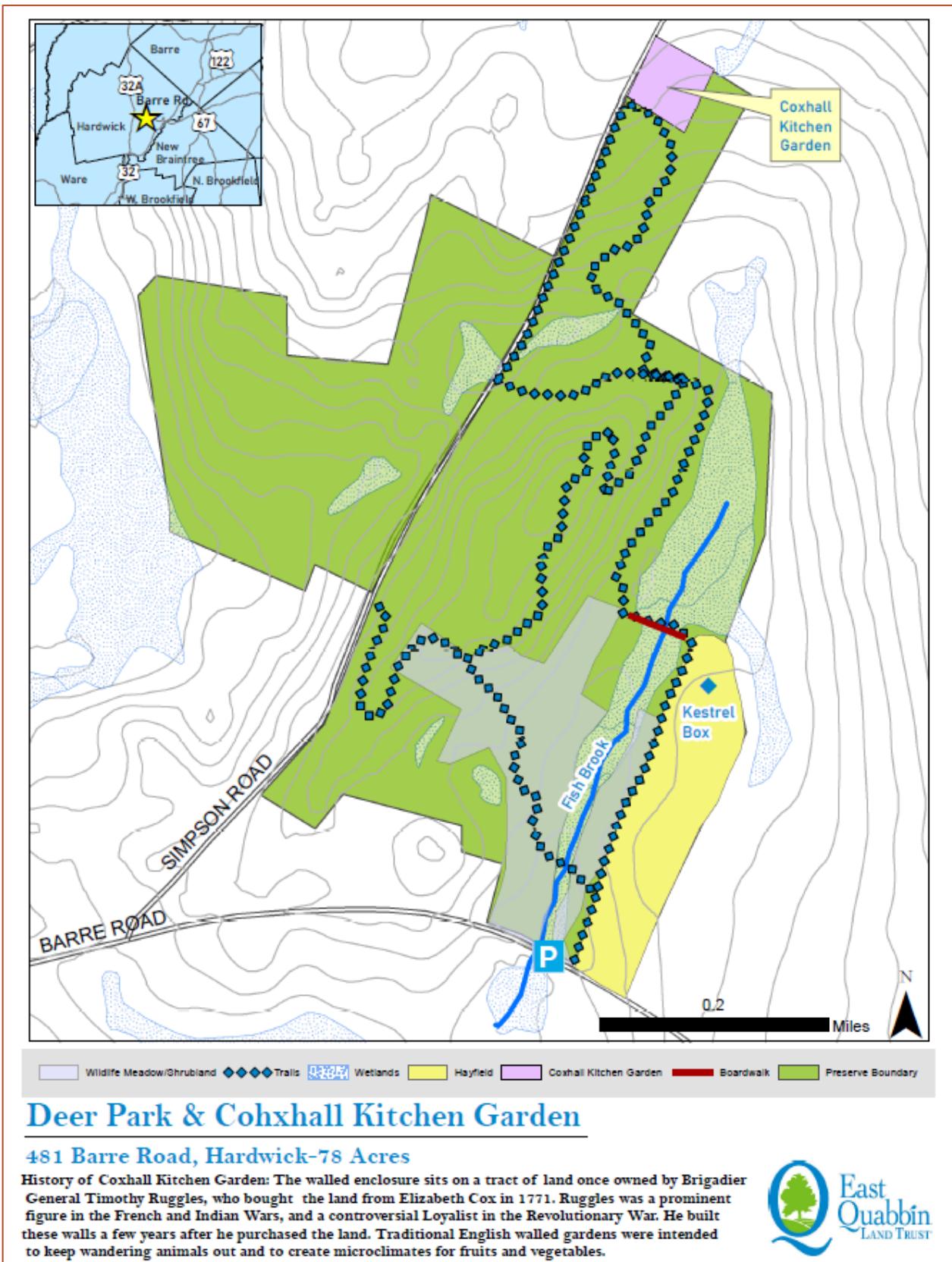
Action Item 2.2.4 - Create trail maps

Action Item 2.2.5 - Develop a trail signage policy and install trail signs

From the Master Plan Workshop:

“In general, increased capacity within and coordination between Town entities is needed to move forward with parks and recreation projects and to promote amenities online and at municipal buildings and events.”

Figure OS4: Trail Map Example



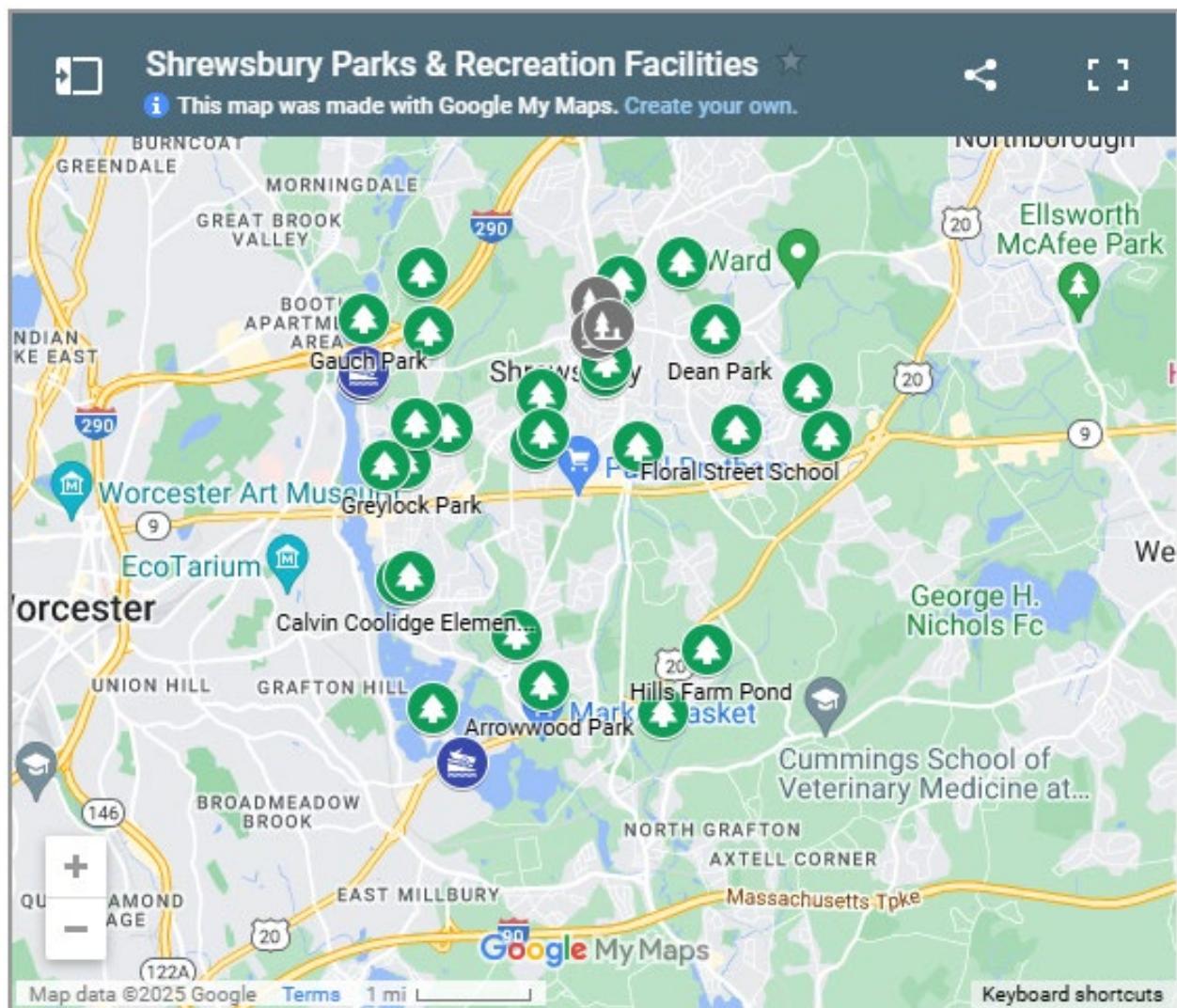
Goal 3: Strengthen the Park and Recreation Department's Capacity

For a small community, Warren residents are fortunate to enjoy access to several indoor and outdoor recreational facilities and a robust catalog of recreational programming. However, to raise awareness of existing opportunities and introduce new ones, the Town must expand its staffing capacity

to supplement the Park and Recreation Department's team of commissioners and part-time staff.

The Park and Recreation Department and Commission play a crucial role in this Master Plan's priority to promote ecotourism. Through ongoing programming, maintenance, and outreach, the department will attract both residents and visitors alike, fostering community involvement and supporting local businesses.

Figure OS5: Interactive Trail Map Example



Google My Maps map available on the Shrewsbury Recreation Department's webpage.

Strategy 1: Sustain and Expand Town Programming

Recreational programming is central in creating a sense of community, promoting active lifestyles, and celebrating culture and arts. The Warren Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for organizing Town events and activities throughout the year. Although the Department hosts an impressive activities lineup, there remain opportunities to expand these offerings to better serve the community.

Events and Activities

One example of the department's innovative programming is the Adult-Child Valentines Dance, which was held for the first time in 2025 for children ages pre-kindergarten to third grade and parents or caretakers. The Park and Recreation Department should continue to introduce new creative events like this to its annual offerings.

Several other opportunities for recreational programming that were identified include kayaking events on the Quaboag River, a fall farmers market, additional movie nights, and food truck events.

Maintaining Facilities

The full enjoyment of recreational activities is dependent on well-maintained facilities. Community feedback indicates that greater maintenance is needed at some recreational and open space assets including Comins Pond. Concerns about algae and invasive plant growth inhibit swimming at Comins Pond.

While the Warren Water District owns the pond, and chemical treatment is not an option due to its role as water source, the Town should collaborate with the Water District and other local and state partners to address this challenge.

Other facilities that could benefit from better maintenance include Town athletic fields and the boat launch at Lucy Stone Park. Although the Warren Highway Department is responsible for basic maintenance of parks and fields, limited staff and funding and other responsibilities restrict its ability to do more advanced maintenance.

From the OSRP Survey:

Dean Park has a growing community around it. It would be wonderful to see its vast un-used space built upon for public enjoyment. ”

To address this gap in capacity, the Town should consider partnering with neighboring communities through inter-municipal agreements. The Town can potentially benefit from efficiencies in the areas of the staff and equipment needed to upkeep Town properties.

Strategy 3.1 Action Items:

Action Item 3.1.1 - Continue to improve the Department's events catalog

Action Item 3.1.2 - Maintain facilities that support recreation programming

Strategy 2: Add Administrative and Communications Capacity to the Parks and Recreation Department

Digital Communications

In today's digital age, online platforms are often the primary way that people consume news and information about their local community. This is reflected in survey results from Warren's 2022 OSRP. Respondents identified Facebook and the Town website as their first and second preferences respectively for receiving information about open space and recreation opportunities and events in Warren. To more effectively communicate with the public, the Parks and Recreation Department should strive to enhance its online presence, making it more user friendly and informative.

Although the current Parks and Recreation Department webpage displays a photo collage and event itinerary, it could benefit from improved organization, with more prominent and easily accessible information, such as an inventory and interactive map of recreational spaces.

For inspiration, the Shrewsbury Recreation Department webpage features a Google map of the Town's parks and recreation facilities. When visitors click on a location, they have the option to instantly receive directions to that destination. If these features cannot be supported on the Town of Warren's website, the Department should consider creating a separate website to better advertise and promote its facilities, programs, and activities. This was included as a community need in the 2022 Warren OSRP. The Warren Public Library already operates a separate website from the Town website.

Furthermore, the Department's strong social media presence on Facebook is an un-

derutilized resource. The Department regularly posts about upcoming events and shares photos and videos of events upon their completion. However, the Department's Facebook page should be better integrated into the website, providing easy access to posts and event updates. It is not linked or promoted on the Department's webpage. This represents a missed opportunity to raise awareness of the Facebook page.

The Parks and Recreation Department may also consider expanding its presence to other social media platforms such as Instagram. This may increase the Department's exposure to teenagers, younger adults, and other demographic groups that prefer different social media platforms. The Westborough Recreation Department webpage serves as a good model as it includes embedded portals to the Department's Facebook and Instagram pages, showcasing the most recent posts on these pages, which is more likely to pique their interest in visiting.

From the Master Plan Workshop:

“Rural Glam is in, and we should capitalize on it. Tourism could be our ticket out of economic depression.”

In addition to expanding social media, the Parks and Recreation Department should coordinate with other Town departments to cross-market events and programs when appropriate. The Warren Senior Center, Fire

Department, Police Department, Public Library, and other departments maintain social media accounts that could occasionally be used to promote Parks and Recreation Department programs. Sharing posts to local community groups can be another effective way to tap into a large audience.

Staffing Capacity

With only three elected commissioners and the recent addition of one part-time staff member, the Parks and Recreation Department has limited capacity to carry out its responsibilities. Meeting resident demand for more recreation events and programs will require supplementing the Department's staffing capacity.

The Town should explore the feasibility of hiring additional part-time seasonal staff or partnering with neighboring communities to hire shared staff. Greater staff capacity could also be achieved through employing volunteers and collaborating with other Town departments and boards and commissions.

Additionally, the current "Friends of the Parks" group which consists of volunteers could be expanded. Increased awareness of volunteer opportunities can help build a stronger volunteer base, which would further supplement staffing efforts. In fact, 59% percent of Master Plan Survey respondents said that more awareness about opportunities for public participation would increase their involvement in local government.

Strategy 3.2 Action Items:

Action Item 3.2.1 - Enhance the Parks and Recreation Department's online presence

Action Item 3.2.2 - Grow the staffing capacity of the Parks and Recreation Department.

ⁱ Warren Town Historian Sylvia Buck.

ⁱⁱ The Massachusetts Architectural Access Board enforces 521 CMR, which governs accessibility of public facilities for disabled persons.

ⁱⁱⁱ University of Massachusetts Extension, and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. “Chapter 61 Programs.” Accessed March 3, 2025.

^{iv} MassGIS Property Tax Parcel Data (Level 3), Fiscal Year 2024.

^v MassGIS Property Tax Parcel Data (Level 3), Fiscal Year 2024.



NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Town of Warren 2025 Master Plan

Introduction

Warren's defining features are its extraordinary natural beauty and its charming sense of history, both of which have endured despite decades of sometimes fast-changing growth and, more recently, post-industrial decline.

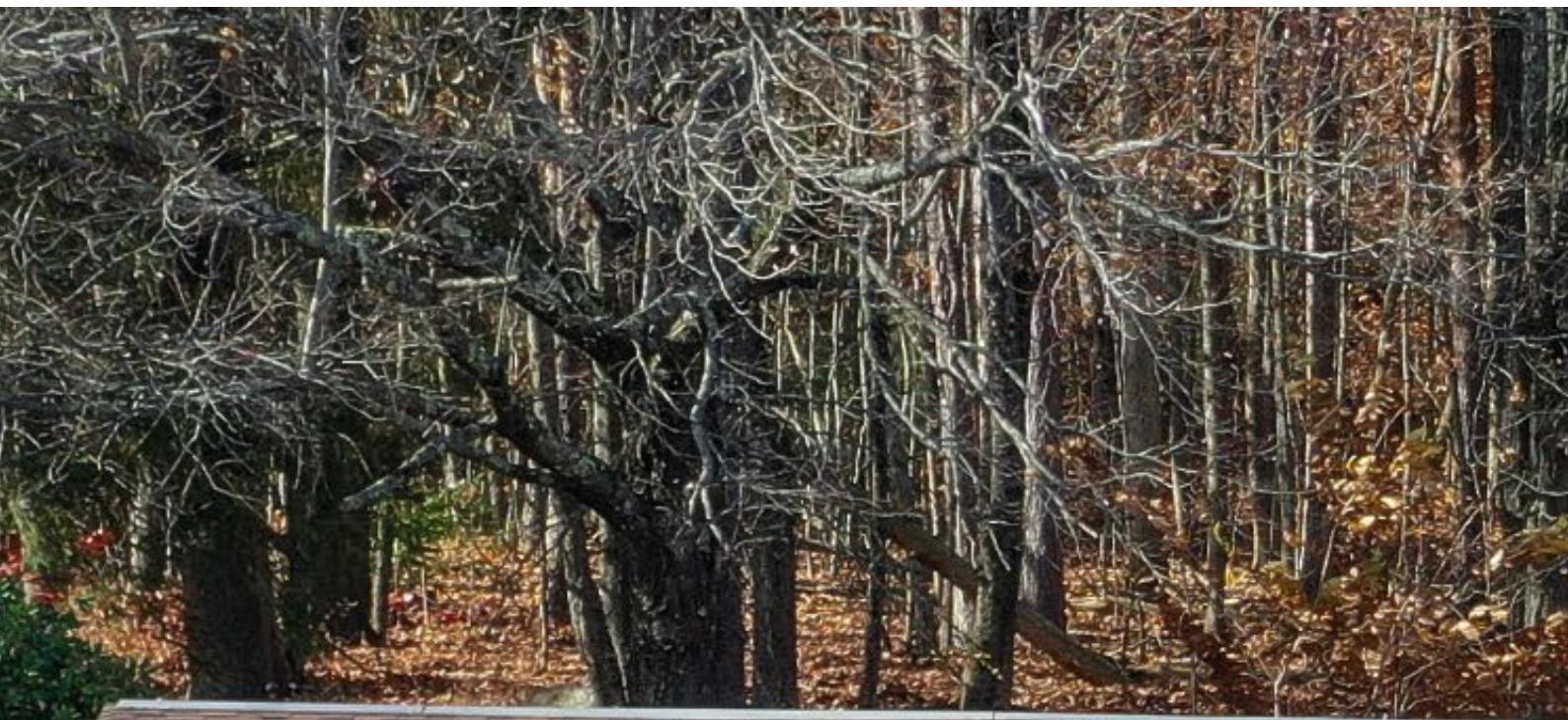
The town's beauty and character are a tribute to the ability and determination of its people to hold onto what is important to them and make do with what they have. These qualities go hand in hand with skepticism about regulations and the capacity of government at any level to do better than they can do themselves.

The town's natural resources are important for the protection of its water supply, its biodiversity, and its long tradition of farming, which has kept the town's people closely linked to the land. It is also important for the preservation of its scenic beauty and the opportunity for people to enjoy outdoor recreation. These themes are explored in this chapter.

Additionally, the history of the town, the buildings, monuments, and other structures that people

recognize as making the town unique are also explored.

The strategies in this chapter recognize the Town's constraints and focus on facilitating the protection of natural and cultural resources with minimal financial demands on the Town and minimal additional regulation. With limited demand for development at present, there is limited opportunity to either increase the fiscal base, or to leverage development rights in the town to achieve other desired results. As such, action items need to be achievable through grant funding or to be, in some way, self-funded.



The History of Warren

Warren, originally named "Western," was initially part of the Quaboag Plantation, a land grant from 1660 that also included the towns of Brookfield, East Brookfield, West Brookfield, North Brookfield, and New Braintree. In 1742, Warren separated from the plantation due to the long distance to the meetinghouse, which was located in what is now West Brookfield. The town's development was fueled by the Quaboag River's waterpower and fertile agricultural land, allowing Warren to grow rapidly in the 18th and 19th centuries. The river's strong flow helped establish a thriving mill industry starting in the early 18th century, with sawmills and grist mills situated between what we now call Warren Center and West Warren. The first recorded settlement in Warren occurred in 1730, and by 1742, settlers constructed a meetinghouse near Comey Hill. Boston Post Road, which passed by the meeting house, started being used in the 1740's. By the 1770s, the village of Warren Center began to see significant settlement. During the 18th century, agriculture played a major role in the town's economy, but eventually, the mill industry took the lead.

Between 1800 and the 1830s, Warren Center saw the establishment of ironworks, as well as powder, cotton, and woolen mills along the Quaboag River. Shoe and boot manufacturing started in 1832, and in the 1830s, William Howe began producing Howe truss bridges in Warren Center on Wigwam Brook. Gunpowder production also took place near Wigwam Brook.

In 1839, the Western Railroad came through town and established a depot at the southwest corner of the Common in Center Village (now more widely known as the Town Common area). The combination of the railroad

and the strong water flow from the Quaboag River spurred further industrial growth, which continued into the early 20th century. The mid-19th century marked the arrival of the West Warren Cotton Mills, transforming the area with new dams and buildings.

As industry thrived, the demand for housing for workers increased, leading to the construction of tenements and cottages. Tenements were built in West Warren near the mill complex, while cottages appeared along Main Street, Furnace Hill, and Quaboag Streets in Center Village. By 1864, the Warren Cotton Mills owned over 34 tenement homes in West Warren, and by 1883, four distinct mills had been established along the river.

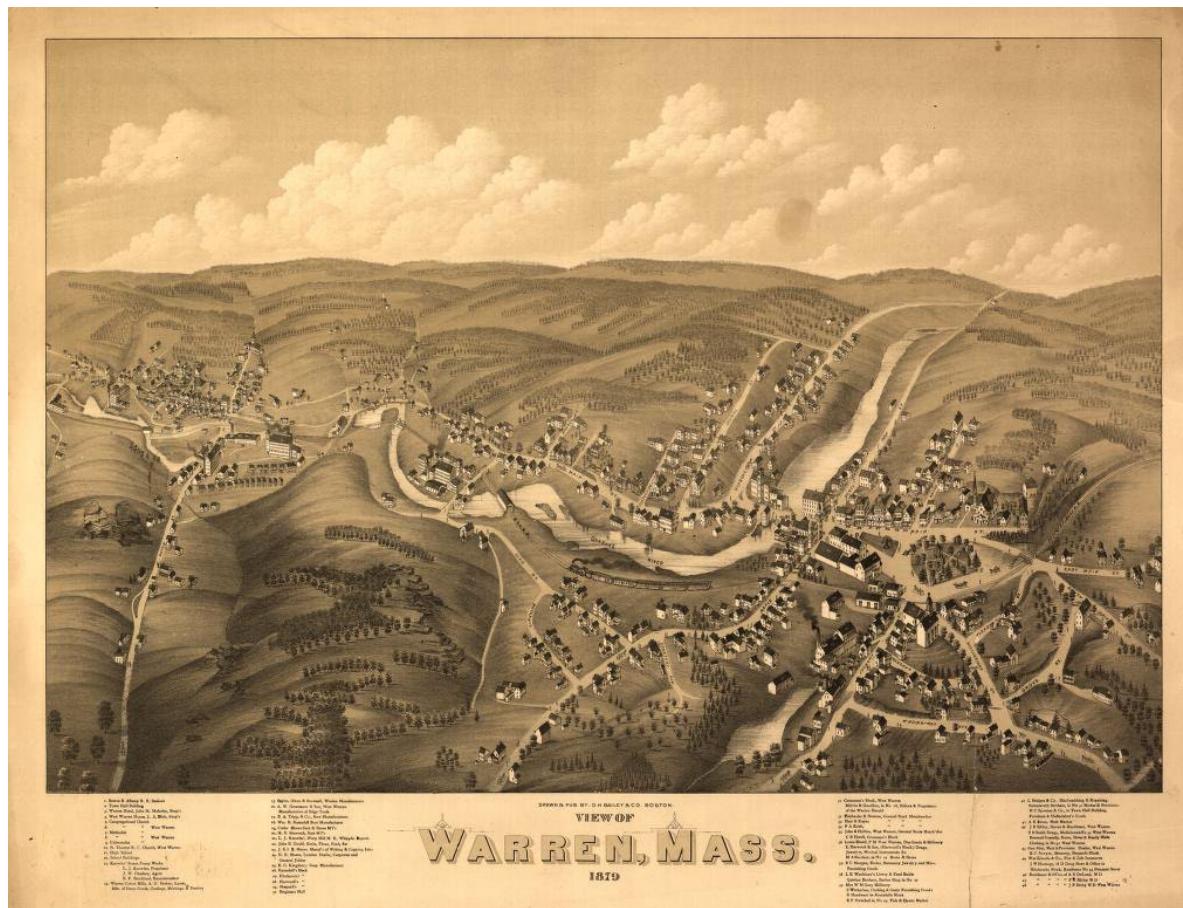
The Knowles Steam Pump Works and the Warren Steam Pump Company also played significant roles in the town's industrial history. In the late 19th century, Center Village experienced a boom, leading to the construction of several large commercial buildings, including the Harwood, Fairbank, and Hitchcock buildings, which still stand today. That was to be the pinnacle of the town's success.

The late 1800s saw a peak in rail travel, manufacturing jobs, and town growth. Many of the people who came to work in Warren were immigrants and the town was culturally diverse with a variety of churches, and social clubs contributing to a vibrant culture. However, in the 20th century, the rise of cars and trucks, along with the development of paved roads like Route 9 and I-90, led to a decrease in rail use (particularly for passengers), manufacturing jobs, and population – a common trend in industrial New England.

Despite the economic decline of the town, Warren maintains its identity as a historical hub of manufacturing and innovation in central-western Massachusetts.

While manufacturing declined overall in New England, some Warren companies successfully adapted. The William E. Wright Co. and Hardwick Knitted Fabrics weathered economic challenges throughout the 20th century and continued in operation until 2006, and Warren Pumps is still in business.

This historical identity is important to the town and to its people, in particular to the people who have lived in the town for many years.



Bird's Eye view of Warren, 1879, by the O.H. Bailey & Co.

Key Findings and Priorities

Key Finding 1: Warren has a Rich and Interesting History that has Left the Town with a Wealth of Historic Artifacts

There is a great deal of information available on the history of Warren. While it is not a place that is known for major historic events or being home to renowned figures, Warren's significance lies in the everyday experiences of generations of ordinary people who have lived, worked and cared for the Town. As was noted by a participant at the Warren Master Plan workshop, respect for the ordinary artifacts that have formed the backdrop to everyday life for generations is important for the recognition of the dignity and importance of all the human individuals who have lived there, and by implication, those who live there now and will live there in the future.

The preservation of this history does not rely on formal planning or regulations, but on an attitude of respect by decision makers, both public and private, when making decisions that have an impact on the natural and built environments. The effects of good decisions are visible everywhere in Warren, from old houses that have been maintained to buildings like the one in which the Village Market and Deli in West Warren is located, or the red brick building on the Corner of Main and North Streets. These buildings are used and appreciated every day, and they give the town its unique charm.

Many of the buildings are listed in the inventory of the Massachusetts Historical Commission (Figure NC1).

“According to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Warren’s inventory documents over 250 cultural resources from the late 18th century to the 20th century ranging from individual buildings to farms, factories, mills, mill worker housing, and village centers. Of the heritage landscapes identified by the community as priority resources, Warren Town Center, the South Warren and Pine Grove Cemeteries, and many buildings associated with the Warren Cotton Mills are listed with Massachusetts Historic Commission.

Warren also has twenty-two documented archaeological sites recorded with Massachusetts Historical Commission. Eighteen of these are prehistoric and four are historic. These resources reflect the Native American settlement of the region as well as the early industrial development of the modern era.”ⁱ

Four of the individual buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.ⁱⁱ

With so many significant historic buildings and places, the history of Warren is ever-present in the daily lives of the people. This is evident from the fact that 35% of the occupied houses in the town are more than a hundred years old. It is an understandable priority that this history should be protected.

WEST WARREN, MA.
Became Precinct B, July 10, 1890

This viewing area, until 1897, was the location of the South Street Grade Crossing and was referred to as the "West Warren Common."¹³

The Triple Arch Stone Bridge was used to cross the railroad tracks and the Quaboag River.

The tracks were lowered in 2008 allowing higher railroad cars to pass under the bridge.

Repairing the damage from the 1955 flood, the river was widened from 60' to 100'

In 1962, the Triple Arch Bridge was removed.

MILL COMPLEX

1800 - 1810 - 1st mill built by Ben Richardson for Scythe production.

Sold - 1850 - To Warren Cotton Mills

Sold - 1898 - To Thorndike Cotton Mills

Sold - 1929 - To West Warren Industries

Sold - 1934 - To William E. Wright & Sons Co.

BUSINESS PRODUCTION DURING WW II

Wrights - Over 14 million pounds of parachutes

Davan's Dyeing & Finishing Corp.

Rubber decoy tanks & half tracks

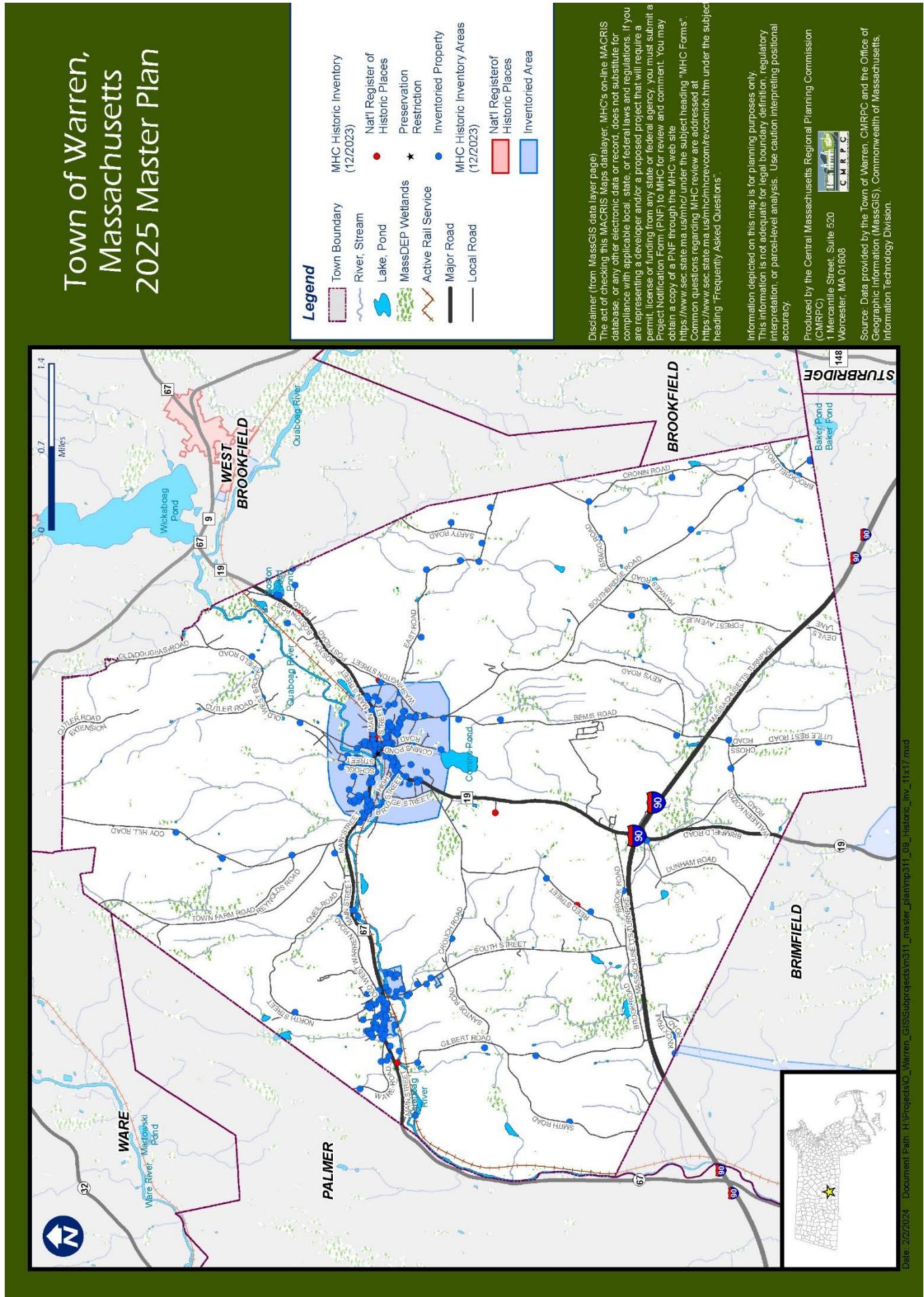
for the Ghost Army

**Warren Fabrics - Hardwick Knitted Fabrics
Woolen Blankets**

Trudi Jacobson



Figure NC1: Historic Inventory



Key Finding 2: The Open Spaces in Warren Contain Key Ecosystems that Need to be Protected

The open spaces and farmlands in Warren are extremely important for preserving natural resources, serving as habitats for native plants and wildlife, including several endangered species (Figure NC2).

These areas play a crucial role in the hydrology of the town, forming the watersheds of the Quaboag and Chicopee Rivers, channeling and abating floods through their wetlands and absorbing and storing water in their aquifers (Figure NC4).

As in most towns, the natural areas are threatened not only by changes in land use, but by the spread of invasive plants. While there is no detailed survey of invasives in the area, the spread of invasives resulting from activities is likely no worse than it is in other small towns. However, aquatic, riverbank and riparian habitat are particularly vulnerable to invasives. In addition to the Quaboag River, Warren has more wetland areas, ponds, streams and high perched water tables than most towns in Massachusetts. Furthermore, the town also has a population of highly invasive Asian Jumping Worms which are detrimental to the ecosystem.

Despite the apparent objective importance of the natural spaces, there is not overwhelming support for their preservation. According to responses from the Master Plan survey, a higher number of people either opposed preservation efforts or gave non-committal or facetious responses (38) compared to those advocating for preserving as much land as possible (23), though this represents only 29% of the sample. Responses regarding specific areas that people feel strongly

about preserving were mixed, indicating diverse opinions on the matter. In response to areas that people feel strongly about or want to be preserved:

“All of our water areas. I love bird watching.”

“Waterfront access areas fishing areas wildlife management areas”

“The rural landscape”

“The remaining woods around town and not be cut down for houses or solar”

“Yes, we have pushed the animals out enough”

On the other hand, the following views were also expressed:

“No, we need more developed land that balances out open land”

“Don't need anymore, already have way too many that cost town to much money to upkeep”

Figure NC2: Rare Species in Warren

Common Name	Scientific Name	Taxonomic Group	MESA Status	Most Recent Observation
American Bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	Bird	Endangered	1999
Autumn Coral-root	<i>Corallorrhiza odontorhiza</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2001
Bristly Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus pensylvanicus</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2008
Creeper	<i>Strophitus undulatus</i>	Mussel	Special Concern	2010
Culver's-root	<i>Veronicastrum virginicum</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1927
Eastern Hog-nosed Snake	<i>Heterodon platirhinos</i>	Reptile	Special Concern	1996
New England Northern Reed Grass	<i>Calamagrostis stricta</i> ssp. <i>inexpansa</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2017
Orange Sallow Moth	<i>Pyrrhia aurantiago</i>	Butterfly/ Moth	Special Concern	2011
Purple Clematis	<i>Clematis occidentalis</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	Historic
Spine-crowned Clubtail	<i>Hylogomphus abbreviatus</i>	Dragonfly/ Damselfly	Special Concern	2004
Wood Turtle	<i>Glyptemys insculpta</i>	Reptile	Special Concern	1996

Source: MassWildlife's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program

Figure NC3: Habitat Features

Town of Warren, Massachusetts 2025 Master Plan

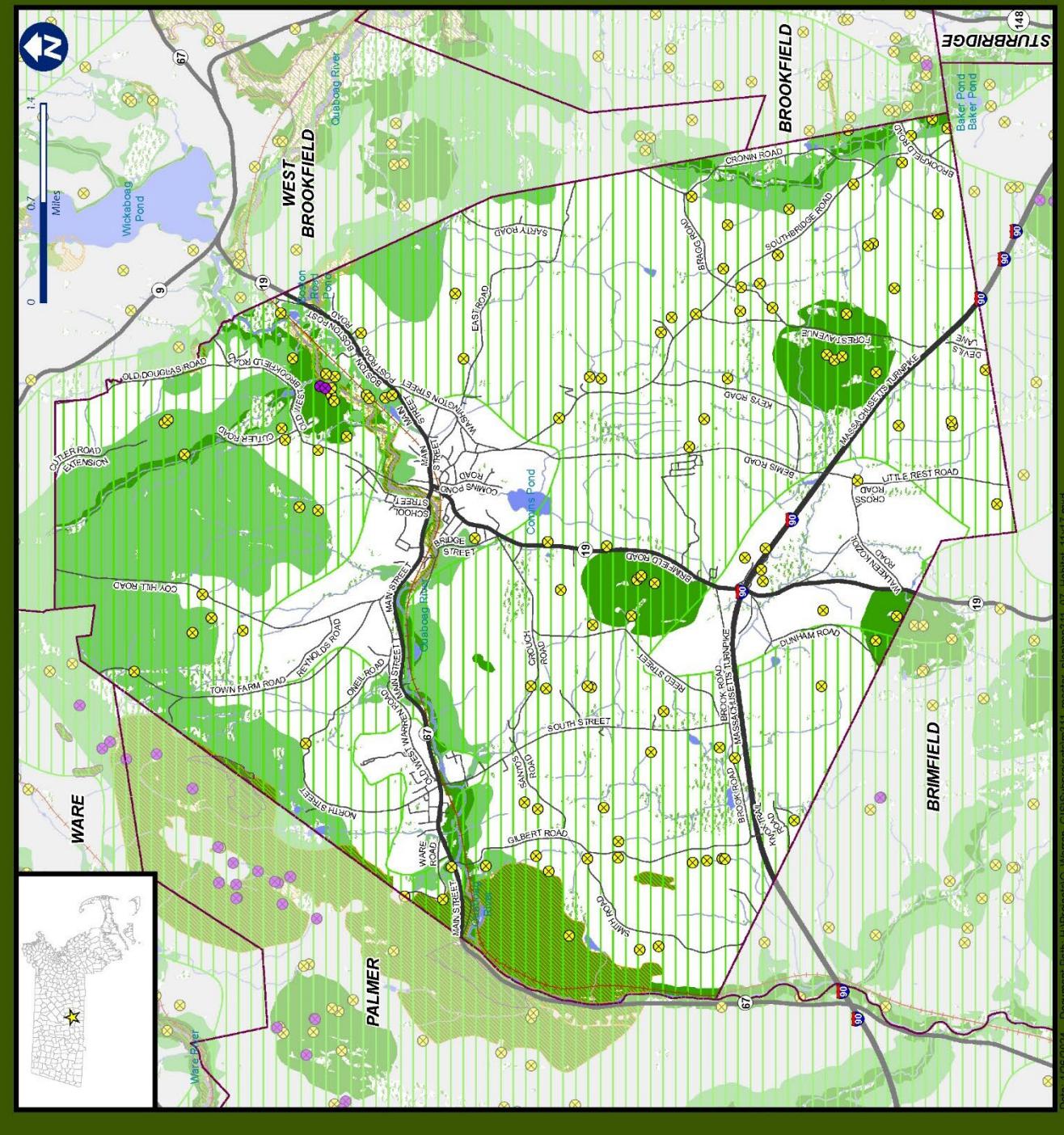
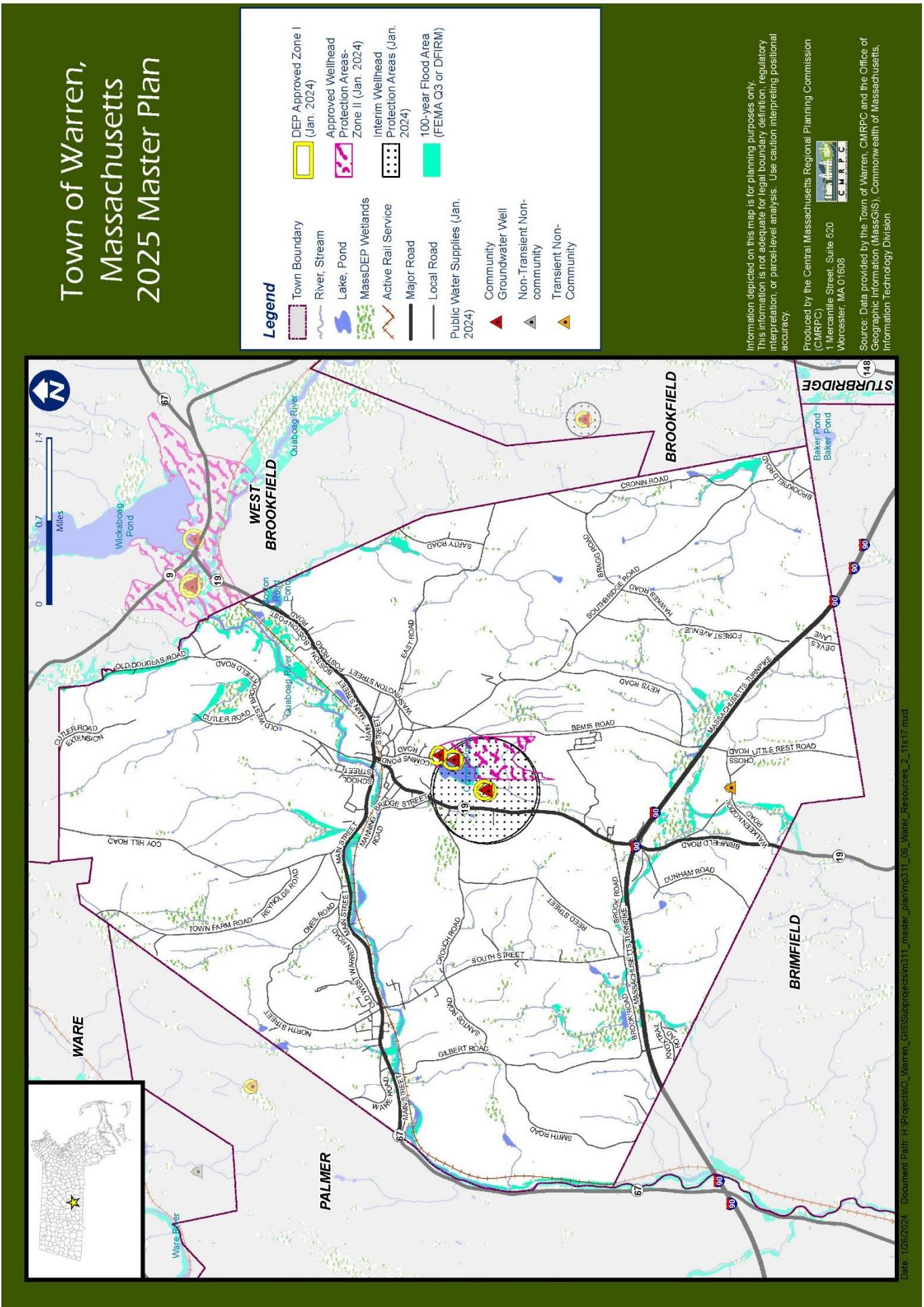


Figure NC4: Water Resources

Town of Warren, Massachusetts 2025 Master Plan



Key Finding 3: The Number, Age, Condition and Cost of Maintenance of Historic Artifacts is a Serious Challenge

Preserving Warren's historic buildings and artifacts poses a daunting challenge, if not an overwhelming one. With time and technological advancement, the cost of maintaining historic structures has grown significantly, and the number of such sites places a heavy burden on a Town with limited financial resources.

It is difficult to assess to what extent the private houses are being maintained, though the number still in use after 100 years suggests a good level of preservation. Stakeholders can identify individual buildings that are visibly dilapidated, some due to fire damage, and the number appears to be relatively low.

The problem is considerably greater when it comes to publicly and commercially owned historic buildings.

The best example is the Town Hall, constructed in 1900 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001. It was placed under a Preservation Restriction order in 1999. Among the buildings mentioned in the survey as having sentimental value, the Town Hall received the most mentions, with 33 of 175 mentions from 184 respondents – each of whom could mention more than one building. It was also the most mentioned by residents at the Master Plan Workshop.

Despite the symbolic importance, the site is said to have drainage issuesⁱⁱⁱ, the building has serious structural problems, inadequate parking and it is not ADA compliant. To

provide ADA compliant access to the second floor would be expensive, and to deal with the other structural and technical issues even more so. Even if all these issues could be resolved, the limited parking would prevent it from functioning effectively as a public gathering space.

Currently, the Town uses the building only as a police station, and there is concern about its safety for that purpose. Irrespective of the safety issue, the intention is that the Town will erect a new purpose-built building to provide a base for the Police and Fire Departments.

This raises a question for the community: Is it worth the significant investment required to preserve the Town Hall, or should the Town accept the inevitable either by demolishing it or letting it continue to deteriorate in the heart of Warren?

Comments from the survey are mixed:

“The Town Hall has sentimental value (it could be a great building)”

“I’ve been in town 17 years. I’d like to see the old town hall building demolished and the Common revitalized.”

“No buildings have sentimental value. However, if possible, we need to do something with the police station and mill”

These mixed responses mirror broader community sentiment. While 18% of respondents expressed sentimental attachment to the Town Hall, the highest of any building, nearly half (45%) indicated no sentimental attachment to any building in town at all. Notably, 29 did not answer the question about

buildings with sentimental value and 54 said “none” or gave dismissive answers. This data shows that even the most cherished historic site does not have broad community support.

In the context of a survey that represents only a small sample of the people in Warren, but a sample that might be expected to be interested in historic preservation in the Town, this suggests a low appetite for allocating scarce resources to cultural or historic preservation.

The other structures on the National Register of Historic Places present fewer problems. The Warren Public Library also has an issue with ADA accessibility to the second floor, and has a parking challenge, but the building is in better condition. It received 26 favorable mentions in the survey - the second highest after the Town Hall. The other two structures are the Warren First Congregational Church and the Crossman Bridge, where Gilbert Road crosses the Quaboag River. This has recently been refurbished.

One building that is not on the National Register attracted a great deal of comment at the community workshop. That is the old community hall at 2245 Main Street in West Warren, across the street from the Warren Senior Center. Once home to a performance

theatre and a bowling alley, it holds fond memories for many residents. Though currently for sale, there is hope that a future owner will return it to something like its former use.

Finally, the Wrights Mill complex emerged as a focal point of discussion. Many hope its reuse will preserve a major part of Warren’s history while contributing to economic revitalization.



Key Finding 4: Warren's Open Areas (Open Space and Active Farmland) Are an Important Natural and Cultural Resource

The 2022 Open Space and Recreation Plan highlights the unique character of Warren's natural environment:

"Among Warren's notable physical attributes are its hills, which provide scenic views of the rolling rural landscape, and the Quaboag River, which runs through its center. There are historically and culturally significant landscapes (such as buildings and monuments), mixed farm fields and woodlots in many parts of town. The lowland areas provide views of the hillsides, Scenic views from the Quaboag Regional Middle/High School, the Warren Community Elementary School and the Colonel's Mountain Wildlife importance."^{iv}

These views are formally recognized and protected in part by the designation of 15 roads as Scenic Roads, which help preserve the town's rural character by protecting trees, stone walls and the historic integrity of these roadways. Scenic road designation also prevents unnecessary widening or alteration of these traditional corridors. The Town of Warren has designated the following as scenic roads:

- Brook Road Warren
- Coy Hill Road
- Dunham Road
- East Road
- Gilbert Road
- Knox Trail Road
- North Street
- Old Douglas Road
- Old West Brookfield Road

- Old West Warren Road
- O'Neil Road
- Reed Street
- Sarty Road
- Southbridge Road
- Town Farm Road

While the scenic beauty of the landscape is of importance, there is particular value in the way that rural communities access their food and maintain agricultural traditions.

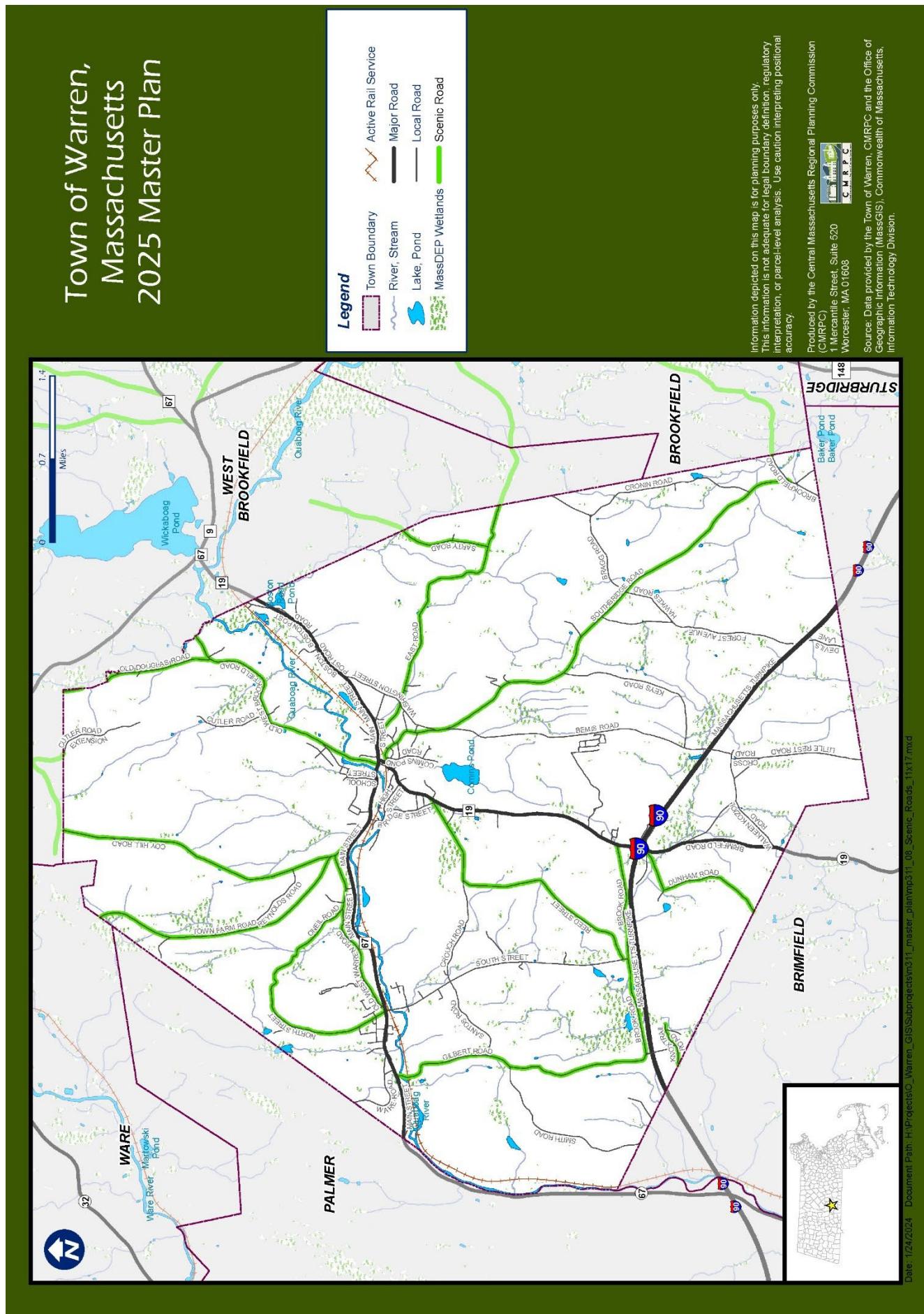
According to the Rural 11 Prioritization project (in which Warren was one of the eleven towns studied), "The USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture Data not[ed] that Worcester County rank[ed] fourth among all counties in the US for the value of direct sales of agricultural products to consumers, at nearly \$5 million, or 25% of the state's total".^v The same study found that the economic importance of the working landscapes was far higher than the reported 5% of employment in the region suggested, because of the number of people who worked in agriculture on a part time or informal basis and whose participation in the sector was not counted.

There are only four commercial farms still operating in Warren. Two of them are dairies, one is a fruit farm, and one produces maple syrup. All sell directly to the public at their farms, as well as through other channels.

There are various ways in which the future of open space and farmlands can be secured. Some are more robust than others.

There is a relatively large amount of land registered under Chapter 61 of MGL. Known as

Figure NC5: Scenic Roads



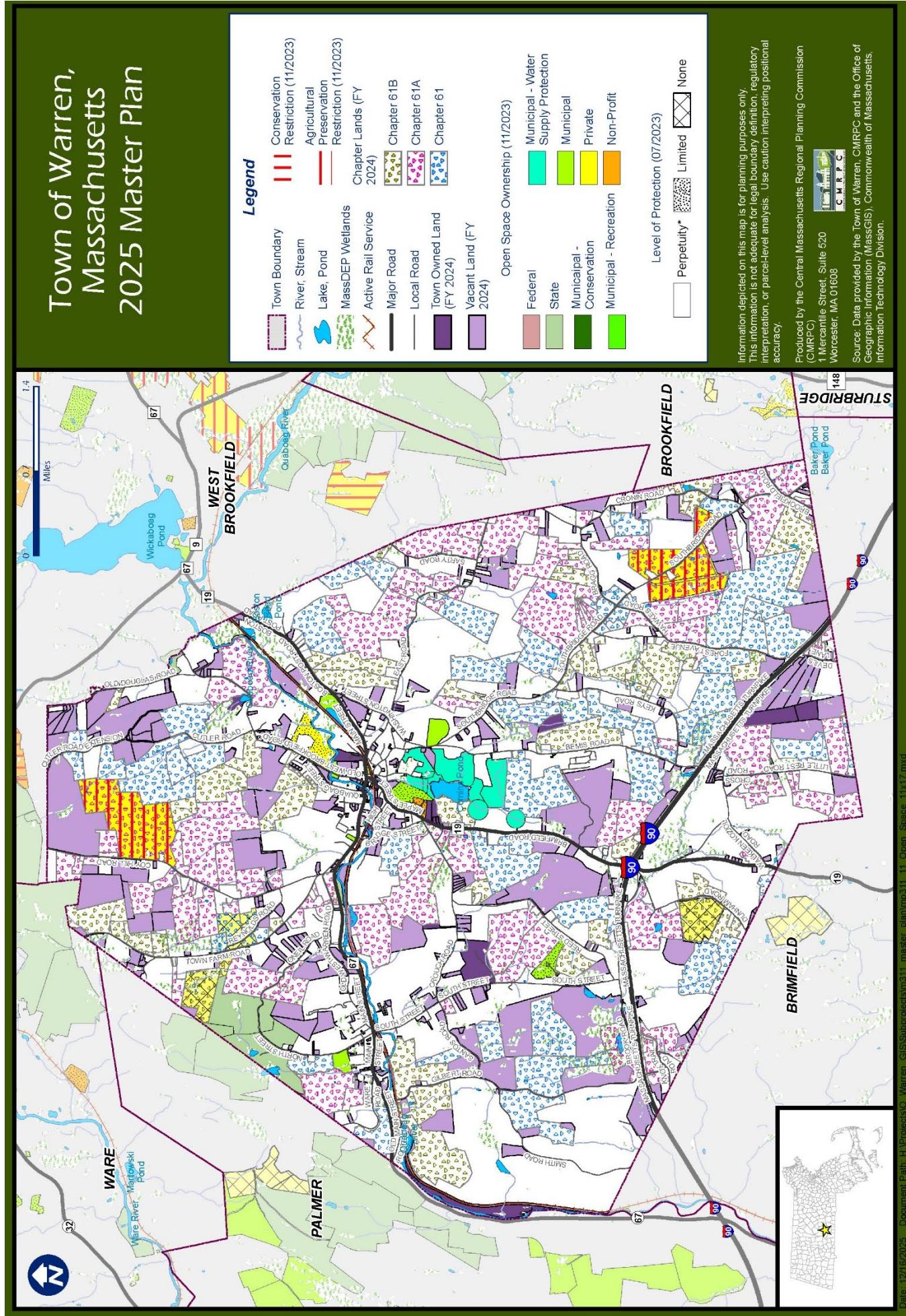
“Chapter Lands” include three categories: forest land, farm or horticultural land, and recreational open space lands. The total acreage of Chapter Lands in Warren is 7094.24 acres. While these lands are often referred to as being protected, their protection is minimal. This system reduces the taxes for landowners more than it protects the land. The assessed value of Chapter Lands is reduced by between 75% and 95%, depending on the category of land and requires that the land not be developed while it is part of the program. However, participation is voluntary and it runs for set periods, usually 10 years. Owners can withdraw their land from the program at the end of a period or even during it, by paying a roll-back tax, recovering the tax saving of the previous five years. The Town has the right of first refusal to purchase the land if a landowner withdraws their land during the agreed period or for a year after the period ends. This creates an opportunity that is addressed in the goals below.

A much smaller area (372.64 acres in two parcels) is protected under a very much more robust system of Agricultural Protection Restriction (APR). In these cases, the landowner or a previous owner has accepted a payment of the difference between agricultural value and fair market value at a particular date and the land is covered by a permanent deed restriction restricting its use to agriculture. Even though the potential development value of the land is paid out at the time of the agreement, some farmers are reluctant to enter the program, feeling it restricts freedom to make choices in the future.

Beyond these programs, the federal and state governments own 221.51 acres of protected land, and the Town owns 201.42 acres of permanently protected land along with 25.57 acres with limited protection.

In the current housing market, there is minimal pressure to develop unprotected land for single-family homes. Anecdotes from the Community Workshop suggest that the main reason people to move to Warren is to gain access to much larger than average pieces of land on which they can pursue a rural lifestyle. As land values closer to employment centers increase, Warren could see more development interest. A more immediate concern has been the potential for land conservation to be threatened by solar energy generation, but the Town has a robust solar bylaw in place to control this.

Figure NC6: Open Space Inventory



Goal 1: Preserve Historical Assets in the Village Centers

Warren's village centers serve as the heart of the community - places where residents go to shop, do business, and participate in social, religious or civic functions. The town centers are places that have the most meaning for residents and also shape how visitors perceive the town. Photos of the buildings, monuments or street scenes from these areas are often used to represent Warren on web pages, in articles or on book covers. The centers are in some ways representative of the town as a whole and it is important to celebrate and preserve them.



Strategy 1.1: Create a Holistic Strategy for the Town Common Area

Most of the cultural places of importance in the town are clustered round the Town Common including the Common itself and its pavilion, the train depot, the Town Hall, the library and several other buildings that were mentioned as important cultural assets. In at least three cases (the Town Hall, the library and the Town Common) the use of these assets is constrained by the availability of parking. However, there is a substantial amount of vacant land between Old West Brookfield Road and the Quaboag River that could potentially be acquired and turned into a public parking area with a park and river walk along the edge of it.

If the elements of this area, the Common, the public buildings and the private buildings are dealt with in isolation, it seems unlikely that any of them will be rehabilitated. If instead they are viewed together as a historical and cultural district, the Town can make a stronger case for the area to become an economic generator that would make their collective preservation possible.

Town Common Neighborhood Plan

The potential for the Town Common area to be rehabilitated most likely relies on common purpose among the landowners in the area. The first step should be to bring together the people who own property in a narrowly defined area to form a committee to steer a neighborhood plan. The Town should actively support this effort, both financially and through participation.

The underlying goal of this neighborhood plan should be twofold: to improve functionality and usability of each property, and to reduce costs while increasing potential

returns for landowners. At its core, the plan should prioritize the preservation of the area's cultural resources. Any regulations emerging from of the plan, such as the designation of a historic district, should be based on the understanding of the benefits that it would bring to all landowners and the broader community related to cultural preservation. The Town should commit to the implementation of other outcomes of the neighborhood plan. These might include focusing community events on the Town Common, as well as publicizing the town center area to the greatest extent possible.

The Old Town Hall

The old town hall, as the best-known building in town, requires special attention. There are three workable options. It could be restored and used by the Town. This seems unlikely as the Town has other facilities that meet operational needs. It could be demolished, which would be difficult due to the preservation order and likely community opposition. The most feasible and least contentious option would be to sell the building to a private party for restoration and reuse. This option hinges on the successful implementation of Action Item 1.1.1, particularly the creation of adequate parking and the potential that could support a commercial use for the building. It would no doubt also depend on substantial support from the Town to make the deal attractive.

Strategy 1.1 Action Items:

Action Item 1.1.1 - Prepare a town common neighborhood plan.

Action Item 1.1.2 - Implement the town common neighborhood plan.

Action Item 1.1.3 - Assess potential options for the old town hall building.

Strategy 1.2: Create a Holistic Strategy for the West Warren Village Area

Milltown Caucus

Wright's Mill, once a pillar of Warren's economy, stands as a powerful symbol – both of the Town's industrial heritage and the opportunity that exists in its reuse. Many people at the Community Workshop expressed the view that the redevelopment of the site is essential for the town, and it is certainly a major potential opportunity. To find a path forward, the Town can consider joining the Milltown Caucus. The Milltown Caucus is a group coordinated by CMRPC to discuss mill redevelopment successes and advocate for mill reuse funding. Joining the Milltown Caucus could be beneficial in planning for the future of these unique historic buildings. There are several funding sources available at the state level for mill reuse and development, including Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, the MassDevelopment Brownfields Redevelopment Funds, and the Underutilized Properties Program.

West Warren Community Hall

Located on Main Street, the West Warren Community Hall is a building that is much loved by the community. Although it is currently on the market and its future rests in the hands of a potential buyer, the Town can still play a role. In the Village Zoning District, a commercial entertainment or function venue would be allowed with a Special Permit. The Town should make clear that it would welcome such use in that building and approach a Special Permit application with as much flexibility as possible.

Main Street Mixed Use Corridor

While the majority of historically notable buildings and public spaces are in the Town Common area, West Warren's Main Street plays an equally important role. The substantial population in West Warren and the important functional buildings, such as the Senior Center, make this a vital local hub. Functioning as a classic mixed-use strip, the street has an unpretentious, relaxed and functional character.

To preserve and celebrate this area, the Town should consider a modest design study focusing on maximizing pedestrian comfort. It should consider pavement surfaces, tree planting and street furniture. In addition, the Town could explore ways to support small-scale improvements for both businesses and residents, including assistance for storefront upgrades and residential fencing and yard improvements.

Strategy 1.2 Action Items:

Action Item 1.2.1 - Partner with the Central Massachusetts Milltown Caucus.

Action Item 1.2.2 – Facilitate re-use of West Warren community hall.

Action Item 1.2.3 – Carry out a design study of the West Warren Main Street mixed-use area.

Goal 2: Protect and Preserve Agricultural Land and Open space

Given the Town's limited resources and general reluctance to make changes to regulations and restrictions, there is a need to educate the public on the importance of the preservation of open space and agricultural land. The benefits of relinquishing development rights, usually but not always through selling or exchanging those rights, should be explained to landowners. Another possibility is acquiring land for purposes of protection, whether the Town does it itself or another organization does it. There is also the possibility of making the continued agricultural use or conservation of the land more profitable or more attractive.

Strategy 2.1: Avoid Development on Farmlands through Formalized Protections

Chapter 61 Right of First Refusal

As discussed in the Key Findings above, if a landowner with property registered in a Chapter 61 program decides to sell the land or take it out of the program, the town has 120 days to exercise the right of first refusal to purchase the land at the price offered to the landowner. The right of first refusal can be assigned to a conservation organization or another entity willing to purchase and preserve the land.

While the town may be unwilling or unable to buy the land it is important that this should be a deliberate decision. A Chapter 61 Policy should set out clear responsibilities and timelines to ensure that information about the opportunity is circulated to all relevant parties, and that a formal process is followed to take a decision within a specified time. At the same time the policy should require that local organizations such as the East Quabbin Land Trust and the Opacum Land Trust, be notified promptly, giving them adequate time to assess the opportunity if the town opts not to proceed. The process should ensure that no opportunity for land conservation is missed due to delays or lack of communication.

Agricultural Preservation Restrictions

There are two parcels of land in Warren that are already protected by Agriculture Preservation Restrictions (APRs). These are part of a voluntary program administered by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR). The state purchases the development rights at fair market value,

compensating landowners for the difference between the value of the land for agriculture and its higher value for potential development. Once land is enrolled in the APR program, it must remain farmland permanently. Farmers in an APR program gain additional access to grants and support through MDAR.

Conservation Restrictions

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

It is important that full information on these options is available to all owners of open space and farmland and that the Town should be supportive of their use.

Transfer of Development Rights

Transfer of Development Rights is a strategy explored more in depth in the Land Use Chapter. To support preservation, properties with open space or active agricultural use could be designated as areas where development rights may be sold, allowing landowners to maintain their land while still gaining financial value from its development potential.

Additionally, Transfer of Development Rights can support historic preservation. Properties with inventoried buildings could be identified as having the right to sell unused rights if they restore or maintain the historic buildings. As an incentive to invest in historic buildings they could potentially be allocated additional rights that might be sold.

Similarly, rights transferred to village areas could be designated as areas in which rights could be exercised to encourage higher

density development. This could also be tailored to encourage the adaptive reuse of old mill buildings. For this to be effective there must be sufficient demand to sustain a functioning market.

Strategy 2.1 Action Items:

Action Item 2.1.1 - Adopt a policy in respect of Chapter 61 right-of-first refusal.

Action Item 2.1.2 - Advocate for and educate landowners on agricultural preservation restrictions and conservation restrictions.

Action Item 2.1.3 - Explore the possibility of transfer of development rights to preserve agricultural land and historic buildings.



Strategy 2.2: Incentivize Modern Farming by Aiding Economic Feasibility

Support Farming Operations

The most likely reason for the loss of agricultural land is the decreasing profitability of farming. The Town should actively support efforts that connect farmers with local and regional markets. It should identify and organize activities such as seasonal festivals and farmers' markets, that can create opportunities for local farmers and producers as well as attracting visitors to the area.

Agritourism

The active use of open space is discussed in the Open Space and Recreation Chapter, but it is important to note its relevance to the protection of the Natural Resources involved as well. The Town should maximize recreational public access to the river and the open space systems by expanding the work done at Lucy Stone Park. This can include increasing the length of available trails and access to the river as well as considering the development of natural assets for other purposes such as ice skating. The Town should also explore events that showcase the scenic beauty of the rural parts of the town such as an annual fun runs or cycling events along the scenic roads or canoeing events along the river.

Right to Farm

Commercial farmers and other landowners who want to engage in small scale agricultural activities face potential legal liability. This includes such things as the use and movement of farm equipment, the noises and smells associated with farming and the possibility of people being injured by animals or farm equipment such as electric

fences. To encourage the continuance of the farming and mark the Town's recognition of its importance, Warren should adopt a "Right to Farm" bylaw. These bylaws minimize the potential legal liability and are used by many towns in Massachusetts.

Regulatory Barriers

Warren's zoning bylaw permits agricultural and horticultural activities, including roadside stands and greenhouses by right in all districts. The viability and attractiveness of farming might be increased by permitting by right additional activities that would increase the opportunities for business and especially tourism related to farming. The Town should consider permitting, by right, some of the following activities in the rural district:

- retail stores
- riding stables
- restaurants (excluding drive in or fast-food establishments)
- hotel or inn (with some limitations)
- craft studios for teaching and selling to the public

Strategy 2.2 Action Items:

Action Item 2.2.1 - Maximize support for continuation of current farming.

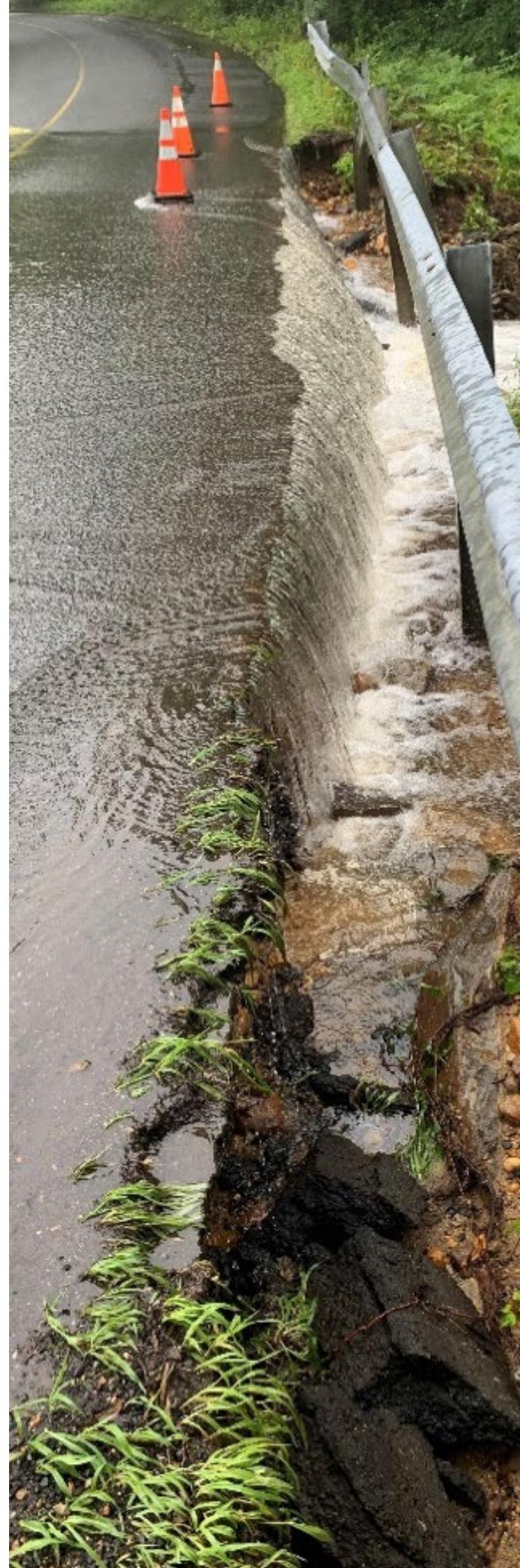
Action Item 2.2.2 - Build support for agriculture by hosting Town events linked to agritourism.

Action Item 2.2.3 - Adopt a Right to Farm bylaw.

Action Item 2.2.4 - Modify regulatory barriers to permit modern farming and agritourism ventures.

Goal 3: Prioritize Environmental and Ecosystem Protection

In the day-to-day activities that take place in any town, from the design and approval of subdivisions and the design of buildings, to the way that activities are regulated and managed, can have impacts on the environment and on specific ecosystems. This goal aims to ensure that negative impacts are minimized whenever possible.



Strategy 3.1: Mitigate Stormwater Pollution Run-off

One of the most important natural resources for any town is water.

Warren's drinking water is drawn from Comins Pond, and it is particularly important that the source of that water is protected. While the zoning bylaw includes a ground-water protection overlay district over the Zone 2 wellhead protection area, broader efforts are needed. To ensure the protection of natural resources it is also important to manage water that goes into groundwater or into the river from the town.

Promoting Low Impact Development

Low Impact Development helps manage stormwater by encouraging rainfall and snowmelt to be absorbed into the earth rather than being collected by drains or roads and flowing into water bodies, collecting pollution along the way. Swales, permeable paving, green parking lots, stormwater planters, bioretention bump-outs, and rain gardens are all examples of features that help balance needed development with stormwater runoff prevention. Warren should carry out a Low Impact Development evaluation of all its bylaws and regulations, using the Bylaw Review Toolkit developed by Mass Audubon^{vi} to ensure that appropriate Low Impact Development measures are included in the Zoning Bylaws and Subdivision Regulations.

The Town can incentivize Low-Impact Development and stormwater management best practices such as green roofs on buildings, using porous pavement and pavers, creating rain gardens, and utilizing bioswales (shallow channels covered with vegetation) to reduce runoff. The incentives could include

tax rebates or land use regulation-based incentives such as density bonuses. Before implementation the Town would need to estimate the financial and other cost of the proposed incentives, their potential benefits and their acceptability to the community.

Strategy 3.1 Action Items:

Action Item 3.1.1 – Audit the bylaws and regulations to ensure that low impact development best practices are maximized.

Action Item 3.1.2 - Consider incentivizing low impact development.

Strategy 3.2: Achieve Net Carbon Neutrality

In alignment with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050 (2050 CECP), Warren can play a local role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Net Zero refers to a balance between the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced and the amount removed from the atmosphere.^{vii}

Several policies in the state plan could be implemented in Warren, particularly those related to green design, renewable energy, and sustainable transportation.

Green Design

Green design prioritizes sustainability of resources for several generations, with practices that include reduced energy consumption and waste creation. Relevant elements of green design include:

- Weatherization: sealing air leaks, adding insulation to walls, pipes, and water heaters to improve efficiency, and repairing windows, doors, roofs, and walls.
- Green roofing on municipal buildings: Green roofs are partially or completely covered with vegetation, with a waterproof surface below. Green roofs can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and improve the drainage of stormwater
- Heat pumps instead of traditional heating or air conditioning systems: According to the US Department of Energy, air-source heat pumps can be 2-4 times more efficient than conventional heating methods.^{viii}

Sustainable Design Opportunities

The Town should encourage landowners to adopt sustainable cost-saving strategies including heat pumps, solar panels, proper insulation & sealing, rainwater harvesting, and recycling & composting by offering resources and guidance on the Town website. It should contain a clear and well-maintained section on sustainable solutions with links to programs and resources.

Strategy 3.2 Action Items:

Action Item 3.2.1 - Adopt a policy to use green design wherever feasible for new Town buildings or building alterations or maintenance.

Action Item 3.2.2 - Educate residents about sustainable design opportunities.

Strategy 3.3: Control Invasive Alien Plants

While the prevalence of invasive alien plants in Warren is currently not at crisis point, it is a serious issue and has potential to threaten the existence of rare native species, clog up drinking water sources, undermine the natural beauty of the area and diminish the use of its trails and water bodies for recreation.

Invasive Species Management

The first step in understanding the problem is to carry out a survey to document the extent of the issue and the areas worst affected. With that a detailed plan can be formulated to ensure that limited resources can be directed to where they have the greatest impact. Based on the outcomes of the survey and the effectiveness of the response, a survey of this sort could be repeated at regular intervals.

Invasives can be managed by volunteer programs or by commercial eradication contracts.

Strategy 3.3 Action Items:

Action Item 3.3.1 – Carry out a detailed invasive vegetation survey.

Action Item 3.3.2 – Create a staffing and volunteer plan for invasive species control.

ⁱ Massachusetts DCR, Warren Reconnaissance Report, 2008, p. 27

ⁱⁱ See the relevant page of the NRHP website; [NPGallery NRHP Archive Search Results](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ This is anecdotal information from a person attending the Workshop

^{iv} Town of Warren, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2022, P. 24

^v Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission. Rural 11 Prioritization Project, 2013, P93

^{vi} Massachusetts Audubon. Land Use Rules. <https://www.massaudubon.org/our-work/climate-change/local-climate-resilient-communities/land-use-rules>

^{vii} National Grid Group. What is Net Zero? 2023. <https://www.nationalgrid.com/stories/energy-explained/what-is-net-zero>

^{viii} United States Department of Energy. "Air Source Heat Pumps".



LAND USE

Town of Warren 2025 Master Plan

Introduction

Warren is a rural, agricultural town with an industrial past. The nearest interchange for the Massachusetts Turnpike is in neighboring Palmer, and Warren's proximity to the highway presents the potential for a new highway access point that could expand connectivity and growth. Additionally, Warren has access to a local water supply with existing capacity making it unique among neighboring communities, providing another avenue for growth. These opportunities present unique land use and zoning challenges.

While residents express concern about the impact of development on the rural landscape, targeted growth in the Town Common and West Warren offer a path forward. These village centers have several vacant properties and undeveloped lots that could allow for infill development with strategic zoning changes. Much of the demand for housing units and commercial spaces could be achieved through renovation of existing structures and infill development.

Should a new highway exit be constructed in Warren, the surrounding area may provide a prime area for industrial, commercial, or office development, situated away from conservation land or residential areas. Taking advantage of development opportunities in areas with existing infrastructure can ease concerns about development in more rural areas. Bringing residents into these areas can help create a business climate primed for new opportunities. Warren should assess the Priority Preservation Areas in town and identify new PPAs if necessary. This will help guide conservation efforts and manage development in a sustainable, community-supported way.



Key Findings

Key Finding 1: The Town is Expected to Experience Development Pressures

With nearly 75% of its land covered by forest and only 3% developed (Figure LU1), Warren remains largely undeveloped. Much of the open space is privately owned, limiting the Town's opportunities for preservation. For some residents, this means that the Town should work to protect open space areas and restrict development, while for others they see an opportunity to direct development to areas with infrastructure and development through incentives and zoning. The latter approach is in line with current best practices in land use, encouraging compact, walkable areas.

Warren sits in a unique location that gives it the opportunity to prepare for impending development pressures from eastern Massachusetts. As housing costs increase throughout the state and residents move

from Boston to cities like Framingham and Worcester, towns further west will see an increased demand for housing and jobs. Warren's excess water permitting capacity and untapped development potential positions it well to accommodate growth while using land use and zoning policy to guide development and investment as residents see fit without encroaching on open space.

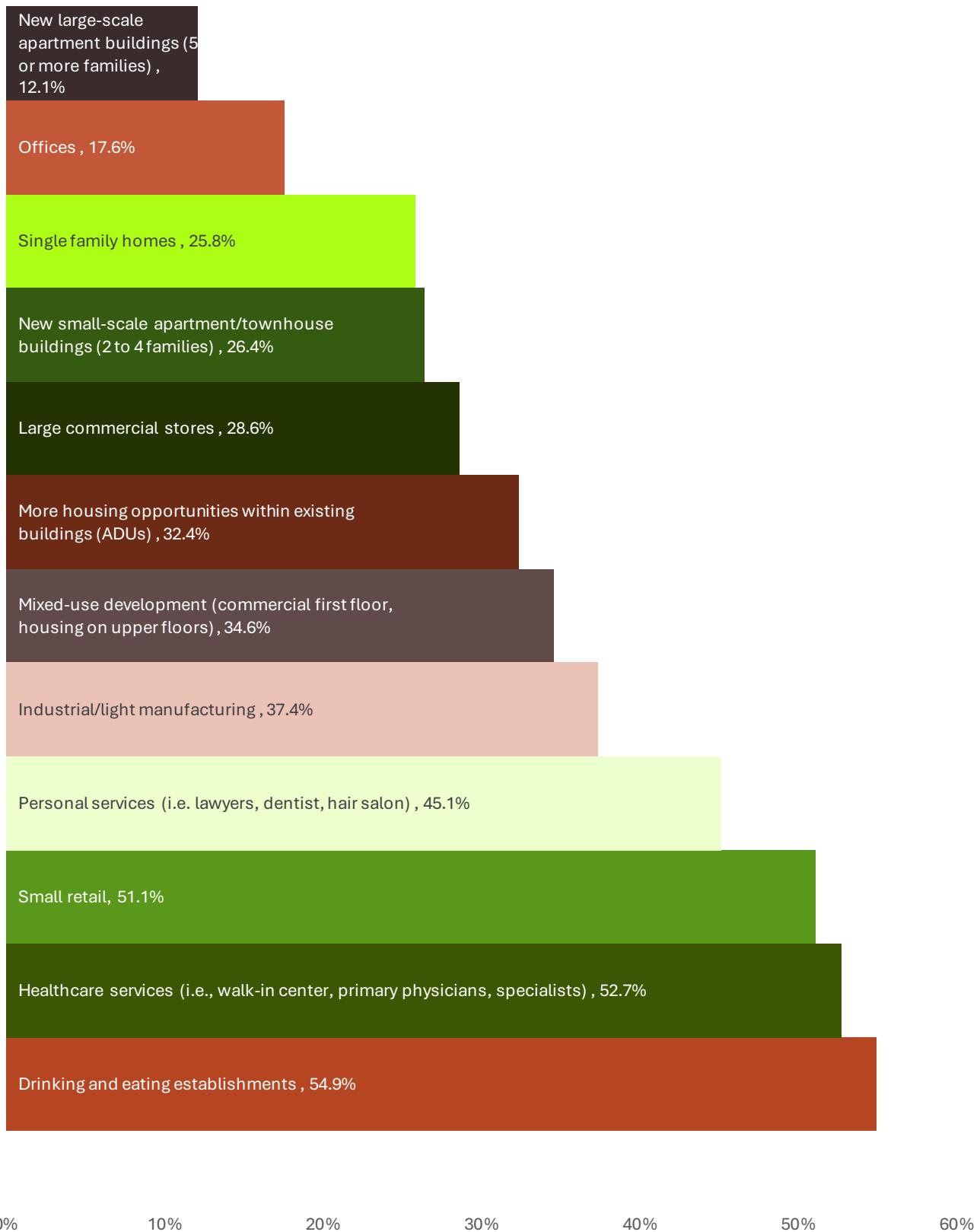
More than half of survey respondents expressed an interest in more bars and restaurants, healthcare services, and small retail stores. More than a third of respondents would like to see more personal services such as legal offices and hair salons, as well as light manufacturing, mixed-use development, and housing opportunities including accessory dwelling units (Figure LU2).

Figure LU1, Land Cover

Land cover	Land Cover - Acres	Percentage
Deciduous Forest	10,581.51	59.83%
Evergreen Forest	2,741.87	15.50%
Developed Open Space	822.20	4.65%
Pasture/Hay	612.52	3.46%
Impervious	537.23	3.04%
Palustrine Emergent Wetland	524.53	2.97%
Grassland	476.65	2.70%
Scrub/Shrub	471.60	2.67%
Palustrine Forested Wetland	373.61	2.11%
Water	205.70	1.16%
Cultivated	186.15	1.05%
Palustrine Aquatic Bed	85.36	0.48%
Bare Land	66.58	0.38%
Total	17,685.51	100.00%

Source: CMRPC Land Cover/Land Use GIS Data from MassGIS, FY 2016

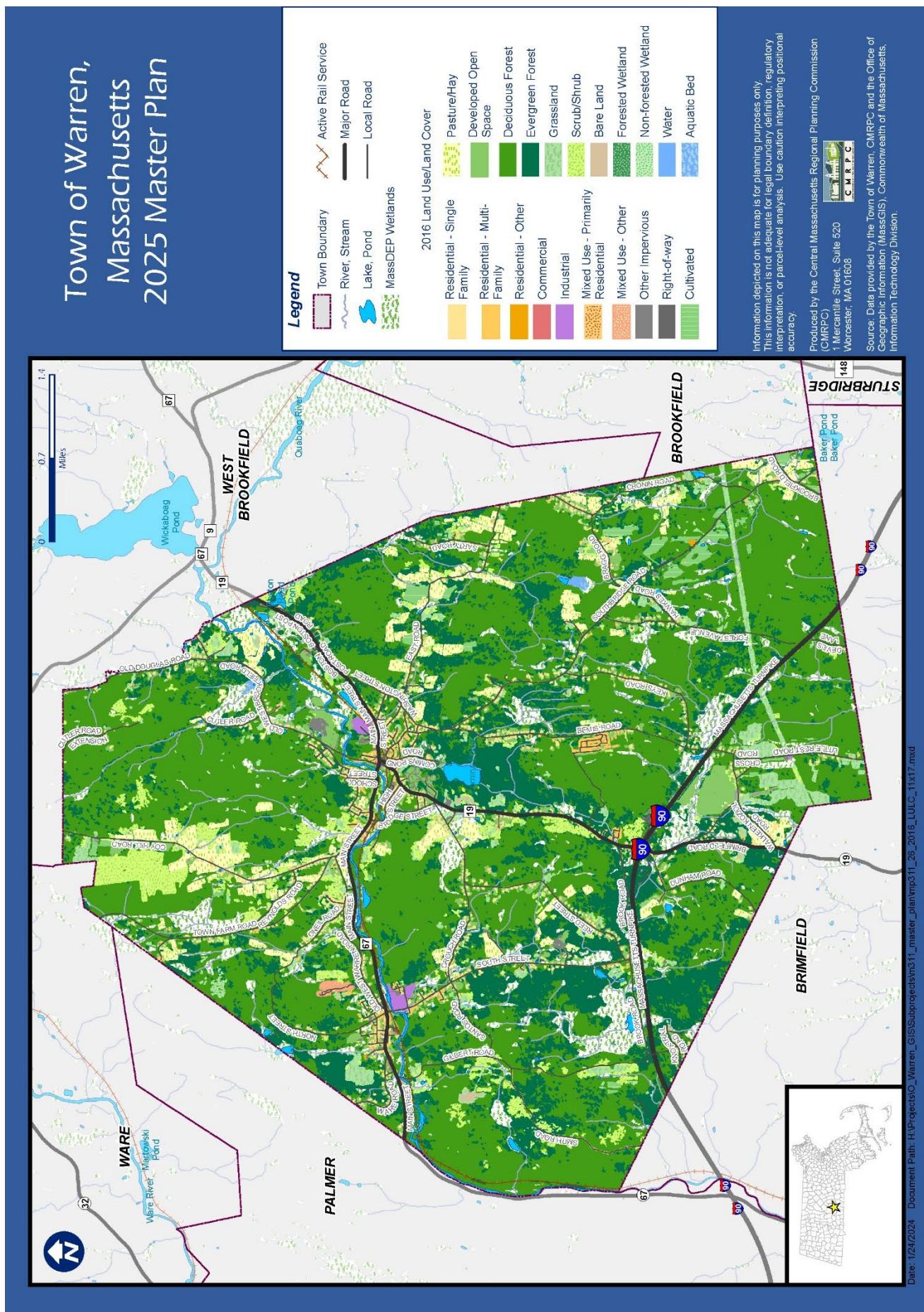
Figure LU2: "What would you like to see more of in Warren?"



0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%

Source: Master Plan Community Survey

Figure LU3: Land Use/Land Cover



Key Finding 2: Vacant and Underutilized Properties Present Redevelopment Opportunities

A common theme in Warren is the desire to see vacant, underused, and former industrial sites repurposed. This is an area where the Town often has some opportunities for intervention, particularly in situations where the property may be delinquent on taxes or cause a broader nuisance. In these types of situations, the Town could proactively work with property owners to explore opportunities for rehabilitation and/or reuse.

Transforming these neglected properties can contribute significantly to the vitality of surrounding neighborhoods. Redeveloping existing buildings and sites leverages existing infrastructure, minimizing the need for

new public investments. This approach also has the co-benefit of increasing the property tax levy on properties that may have previously contributed little to the Town's revenue, thereby enhancing Warren's financial stability without expanding its geographic footprint.



Key Finding 3: Existing Large-Lot Dimensional Requirements Drive Open Space Consumption and Infrastructure Costs

Current Zoning Regulations

Warren's Zoning Bylaw, adopted in 1984 and recently updated in 2023, establishes the framework for local land use. Zoning influences everything from housing and economic development to public health and safety. The bylaw guides the use of land through zoning districts, guiding where residential, commercial, industrial, and other development can occur and regulate aspects such as building setbacks, height limits, parking requirements, and signage. By shaping how land can be used, zoning either preserves or shapes the aesthetic and functional progression of the town. A well-designed zoning bylaw can attract new businesses, support existing ones, and promote orderly, sustainable growth, benefiting the Town's economy while protecting its residential, agricultural, and open space areas.

Figure LU4: Zoning Districts

Zoning District	GIS Acres	% of GIS Acres
(C) Commercial	558.64	3.16%
(R) Residential	937.77	5.30%
(RU) Rural	14,851.34	83.98%
(V) Village	1,337.42	7.56%
Total	17,685.17	100%

CMRPC Zoning Data, from the Town of Warren, 2024

Most of the land in Warren is zoned Rural and requires a minimum lot size for all uses of 45,000 square feet, or about one acre.

This is considered a large minimum acreage but is not excessive for a rural district in Central Massachusetts. The Residential and Village districts offer more dense development options and comprise five and seven percent of land area. The Residential district requires a minimum of 30,000 square feet for most uses, while the Village district requires between 10,000 and 15,000 square feet for baseline residential and commercial uses.

As in many small towns, residents are concerned about the impact of new development on diminishing open spaces and natural resources. How can we ensure that everyone has a place to live while protecting our open spaces?

At its core, this is a conversation about the trade-offs between development density and land consumption. Clustered development uses less land per unit and per resident but can create concerns about a loss of community character. Many residents prefer low density, large lot development because it affords higher levels of privacy and a more rural or suburban living environment, but it increases land consumption and requires more road and infrastructure per housing unit or commercial or industrial tenant.

Expanding the use of Village zoning and assessing the viability of the current lot minimums and permitting requirements for multi-family housing in those districts could promote more diverse residential development.

Figure LU5: Schedule of Dimensional Requirements

Use	Min Lot Size (Square feet)	Min Lot Frontage (Feet)	Max Height (Feet)	Front Set-back (Feet)	Side & Rear Setback (Feet)
Rural (RU)					
Single Family Dwelling	45,000	150	35	30	15
Wireless Towers	45,000	75	(2)	(2)	(2)
All Other	45,000	150	35	NA	NA
Residential (R)					
Single-Family Dwelling	30,000	100	35	30	15
Two Family Dwelling	40,000	150	35	50	50
Wireless Towers	40,000	75	(2)	(2)	(2)
All Other	30,000	100	35	NA	NA
Commercial (C)					
Single Family Dwelling	30,000	100	40	30	15
Commercial Uses In § 3.23	20,000	80	40	20	10 ⁽¹⁾
Wireless Towers	40,000	75	(2)	(2)	(2)
All Other	40,000	150	40	20	20
Village (V)					
Single Family Dwelling	10,000	75	40	20	15
2-4 Family Dwelling	6,000 / unit	75	40	20	15
Multi-Family Dwelling (5 or more units)	6,000 / unit	100	40	25	15
Wireless Towers	40,000	75	(2)	(2)	(2)
All Other	15,000	100	40	NA	NA

Footnotes:

1. In the Commercial district, the setback shall be increased to fifty feet (50') when abutting a Residential or Rural district or an existing dwelling.
2. Wireless communications towers shall comply with the requirements of Section 7, Siting of Wireless Communications Facilities.

Growth Strategy Considerations

During the Master Plan workshop, participants were asked to select a strategy for how the Town should accommodate growth while considering housing density, housing costs, and open space preservation. Out of four distinct growth strategies, the strategy “Infill and Rural Development Mix” was most popular. It is important to note that participation was limited. The different strategies are shown below.

In this preferred growth strategy, development is split between rural areas, the two village centers, and the Main Street Commercial corridor. Though this strategy parallels the existing zoning, it directs more development to the developed parts of town by expanding the types of housing allowed in the village centers, commercial, and residential areas. It also makes compact and walkable housing more viable in village centers by re-

ducing dimensional standards such as minimum lot sizes, frontage, and setback requirements. In more rural areas, housing options are expanded to include cluster and cottage developments, helping preserve larger portion of undeveloped land while keeping housing costs moderate. Overall, this approach would result in slightly higher housing density than today.

What Does This Mean?

Participants indicated they would accept more compact housing types, such as townhomes, cottage courts, accessory units, and small apartments, if it meant that more open space would be preserved. They were careful to articulate a balance between compact growth and rural character.

Communities have seen their median age rise as older generations make up a larger portion of residents. Rural communities tend to have limited options for independent senior housing or assisted living facilities for

Figure LU6: Chosen Potential Building Types from Workshop Activity

Potential Building Types



seniors looking to downsize, and Warren is no exception. Complicating matters, the same types of small entry-level housing that suit older adults are also in demand among younger residents entering the housing market. The zoning bylaws in Warren require large lots that do not meet the needs of younger and older generations. To meet the modest housing needs of both younger and older generations, Warren can allow smaller lots in village centers and cluster developments.



Goals

Goal 1: Increase Zoning and Permitting Capacity

Most village centers in New England were developed decades before zoning was enacted and as the community grew, village centers spread outward. Development was centered around walkable distances and transportation modes such as horses, wagons, and eventually trains – well before the advent of cars. As a result, buildings were constructed close together and parking was not a consideration.

Today, zoning bylaws in many communities do not match what is built on the ground in village centers, resulting in pre-existing, non-conforming uses, structures, and lots. This is problematic when property or business owners seek to revitalize their homes or change the use of a commercial site, as current zoning requirements cannot be met. This can lead to frustration and may deter some owners from pursuing any improvements. The permitting process can be difficult to understand and onerous to complete. Amending the zoning to be consistent with existing village center development and streamlining the permitting process to encourage improvements will aid in bringing about a revitalization of the area.

Encouraging redevelopment and infill will increase the population, support local businesses and result in vibrant village centers. The area will be enhanced visually, tax revenue will increase, additional goods and services will be available for residents and visitors, resulting in improved quality of life. The following strategies and action items provide guidance on how the Town can achieve this goal.

Strategy 1.1: Modernize the Zoning Bylaws

The current zoning creates barriers to infill in the village centers where many existing properties are non-conforming to the current bylaws. The existing requirement for a Special Permit is another barrier that discourages both residential property owners and business owners from moving forward with development plans. Amending the zoning bylaws to allow for smaller lots with narrower setbacks and eliminating the requirement for a Special Permit for residential development should encourage growth in the village center and surrounding neighborhoods.

The existing parking requirement is also a hindrance to development. Amending zoning requirements would allow for a wider range of development types. Rather than viewing these changes as “upzoning,” the focus should be on making development more attractive and financially viable by creatively planning for redevelopment and revitalization. The Housing chapter includes information on parcels in the village centers with potentially non-conforming setbacks and has exhibits showing locations of these parcels.

Comprehensive Zoning Update

A comprehensive zoning update will assess that current regulations are clear, consistent and accessible, and that regulated development aligns with the vision for the Town. Informational materials to convey regulations can encourage property owners and developers to seek out legal permits and authorities for smaller projects, such as accessory dwelling units and home renovations. A user-friendly website, with an interactive parcel map and searchable bylaws

will allow digital ease in understanding regulations. Clear instructions on the Town website and in print in the Town Hall allow transparency in Town processes. Regular zoning updates ensure regulations align with M.G.L., state priorities and long-range planning.

Strategy 1.1 Action Items

Action Item 1.1.1 – Complete a comprehensive zoning update.

Action Item 1.1.2 – Regularly review zoning bylaws.

Action Item 1.1.3 – Review and modernize Village Zoning.

Strategy 1.2: Provide Training for Planning and Zoning Board Members

Ongoing education is essential for effective land use planning. As communities grapple with addressing needs during a housing shortage, board members must stay informed about best practices, and updates to M.G.L. The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association (MA APA) offers free memberships to Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals members. Members receive discounts on events such as conferences, and some training courses are free. It is recommended that Warren's board members take advantage of this free membership.

Additionally, the Citizens Planning and Training Collaborative (CPTC) offers low-cost training on various aspects of land use, zoning, and the Subdivision Control Law, among others. This organization is sure to develop new training programs as there are changes to M.G.L. keeping land use practitioners and board members across the Commonwealth up to date on the changes. Providing these opportunities for volunteer board members not only improves the quality of local decision making but may attract new residents to get involved, in line with strategies outlined in the Services and Facilities chapter.

Strategy 1.2 Action Items

Action Item 1.2.1 – Encourage membership in the American Planning Association.

Action Item 1.2.2 – Encourage attendance at Citizen Planner Training Collaborative and Massachusetts Municipal Association events.

Goal 2: Balance Development Needs

As in many small towns, Warren residents are concerned about the potential for new housing development to diminish the town's open spaces and natural resources. This raises the question: How can we ensure that everyone has a place to live while protecting our open spaces?

Trade-offs between housing density and land consumption need to be considered. Many residents like low density, large lot development because it affords higher levels of privacy and a rural or suburban living environment, but it increases land consumption and necessitates more road and infrastructure miles per housing unit. In contrast, denser housing uses less land per unit and person but can raise concerns about loss of community character.

Given the housing shortage and the need for increased commercial tax revenue, communities need to align these concerns with the preservation of open space. Warren can embrace land use strategies that allow for more compact development while preserving more open space.



Strategy 2.1: Promote Development in Priority Development Areas

The 2013 Rural 11 Prioritization Plan identified Priority Development Areas (PDAs), Priority Preservation Areas (PPAs), and Significant Infrastructure Investments (SII). These sites should be evaluated to determine which items have been accomplished or which ones may need zoning amendments to implement. The Town should consider whether any other areas are potentially viable as PDAs and, if so, amend zoning accordingly.

Directing new housing development toward areas with existing infrastructure and development has two benefits. Making greater use of existing infrastructure distributes those infrastructure costs across more people and increases the property tax revenue generated across it, making its maintenance more efficient. Developing these areas also reduces green-field development.

Transferring Development Rights

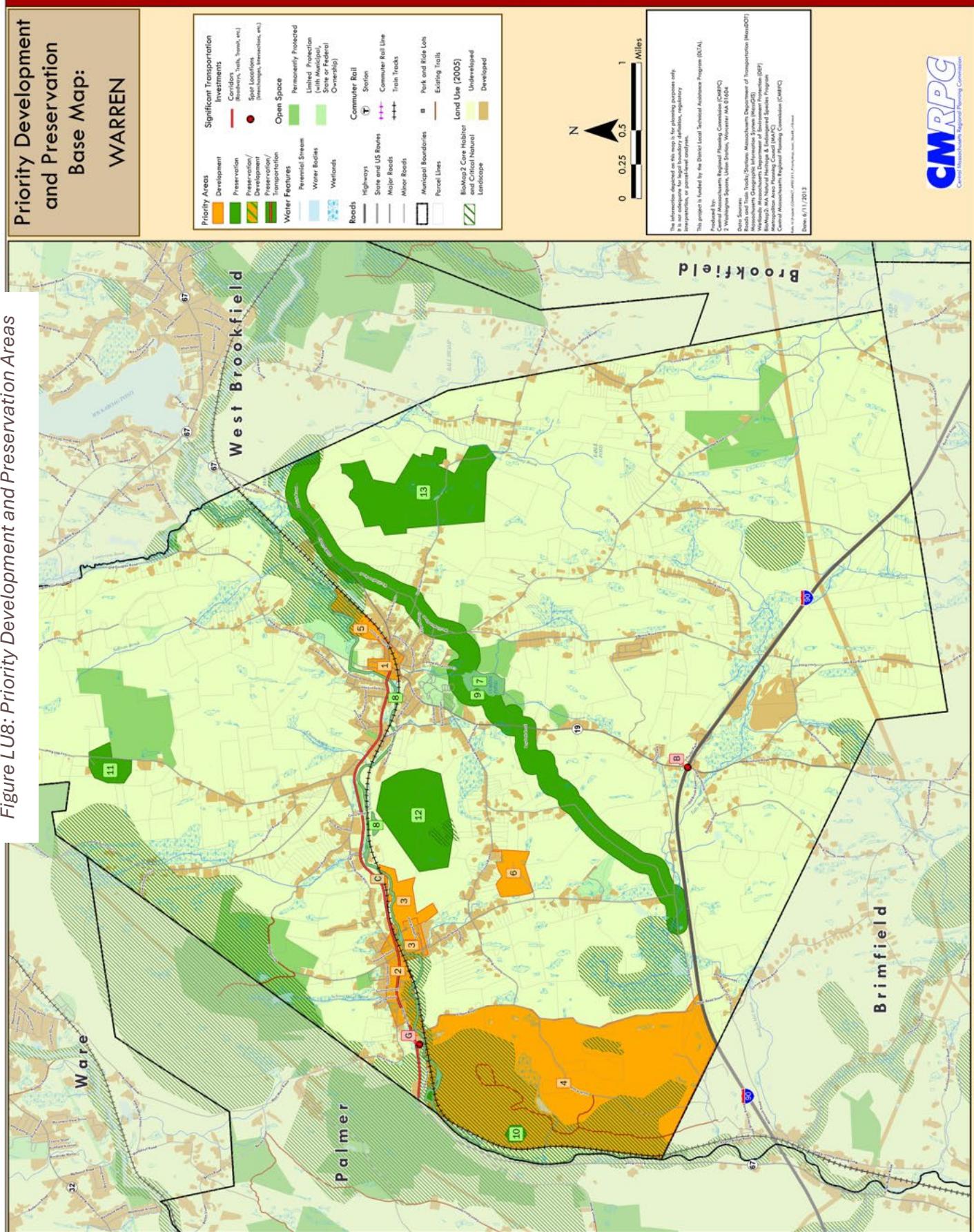
Another innovative option that several municipalities in Massachusetts have used to accomplish this is through a Transfer of Development Rights bylaw (TDR).

Figure LU7: Warren Priority Development Areas, Priority Preservation Areas, and recommended areas for Significant Infrastructure Improvements.

ID No.	Title	Type
311-1	Warren Center Village	Development
311-2	West Warren Village	Development
311-3	Wrights Mill Area	Development
311-4	Land near Mass Turnpike in the West Warren/Gilbert Road Area	Development
311-5	Warren Pumps	Development
311-6	Transfer Station	Development
311-7	Former Town Hall in Center Village	Development
311-8	Comins Pond	Preservation
311-9	Quaboag River and Water Trail (including Quaboag River Mill Sites and Dams) and Lucy Stone Park	Preservation
311-10	Old Bay Path Indian Trail	Preservation
311-11	Devil's Peak (privately owned)	Preservation
311-12	Coy Hill	Preservation
311-13	Mark's Mountain	Preservation
311-14	Shepard's Farm (privately owned)	Preservation
311-15	Lucy Stone Park	Preservation
311-A	Mass Turnpike Interchange	Infrastructure (Transportation)
311-B	Route 67	Infrastructure (Transportation)
311-C	Sewer Treatment Plant Upgrade	Infrastructure
311-D	Aging water distribution system/pipes/ water mains	Infrastructure
311-E	Stormwater requirements	Infrastructure
311-F	Information Technology infrastructure	Infrastructure
311-G	Public Transit	Infrastructure (Transportation)

RURAL ELEVEN PRIORITYIZATION PROJECT

Priority Development and Preservation Base Map: WARREN



A major challenge when trying to preserve privately-owned land is that the land has development potential and therefore financial value. To remove those development rights, property owners would need to be compensated. A TDR bylaw provides a mechanism through which private parties can purchase those development rights and use them in another area. Here is how it works:

- **Sending Areas:** These are designated areas where preservation is desired, such as farmland, open space, or environmentally sensitive land. Property owners in these areas can sell or transfer their development rights while still retaining ownership of the land, which is typically protected by a conservation easement or similar mechanism.
- **Receiving Areas:** These are areas where development is encouraged, such as town centers or places near infrastructure. Developers in receiving areas can purchase development rights from property owners in the sending areas, allowing them to build at higher densities or intensities than would otherwise be permitted by the base zoning.

With these mechanisms, a TDR bylaw allows for the preservation of important land in one area while promoting growth in another by redistributing the development rights between these zones. It encourages smart growth and environmental protection without reducing property values for landowners in the sending areas.

Voluntary Easements and Property Restrictions

Voluntary easements and other development restrictions are tools that help landowners preserve valuable land, such as agricultural areas, open spaces, or ecologi-

cally sensitive environments, without transferring ownership. One of the most used mechanisms is a conservation easement. Landowners voluntarily enter into an agreement to limit the type and amount of development on their property. The land remains privately owned, but its use is restricted, often to agriculture, recreation, or habitat preservation. These agreements are legally binding and typically last in perpetuity, ensuring long-term preservation. The Town can play a role in marketing the potential for voluntary easements to protect valuable undeveloped land.

Village Zoning District Modifications

Infill development refers to the re-use of vacant or underdeveloped parcels in more densely developed areas to create new development. Modifying the Village zoning bylaws to encourage infill development provides new avenues for economic growth without subdividing open space in rural areas and contributing to sprawl. Parcels in the Village zoning district should be assessed, and minimum lot sizes should be compared to pre-existing parcel size and reduced to align with parcels targeted for development. Minimum lot sizes for non-residential uses should be aligned with the smallest lot requirements for single family dwellings, and the land requirements for multi-family dwellings should be reassessed. Frontage should be aligned with the smallest frontage on pre-existing lots, and dimensional requirements like setbacks and building height should be reassessed to determine their relationship with development viability for their respective uses.

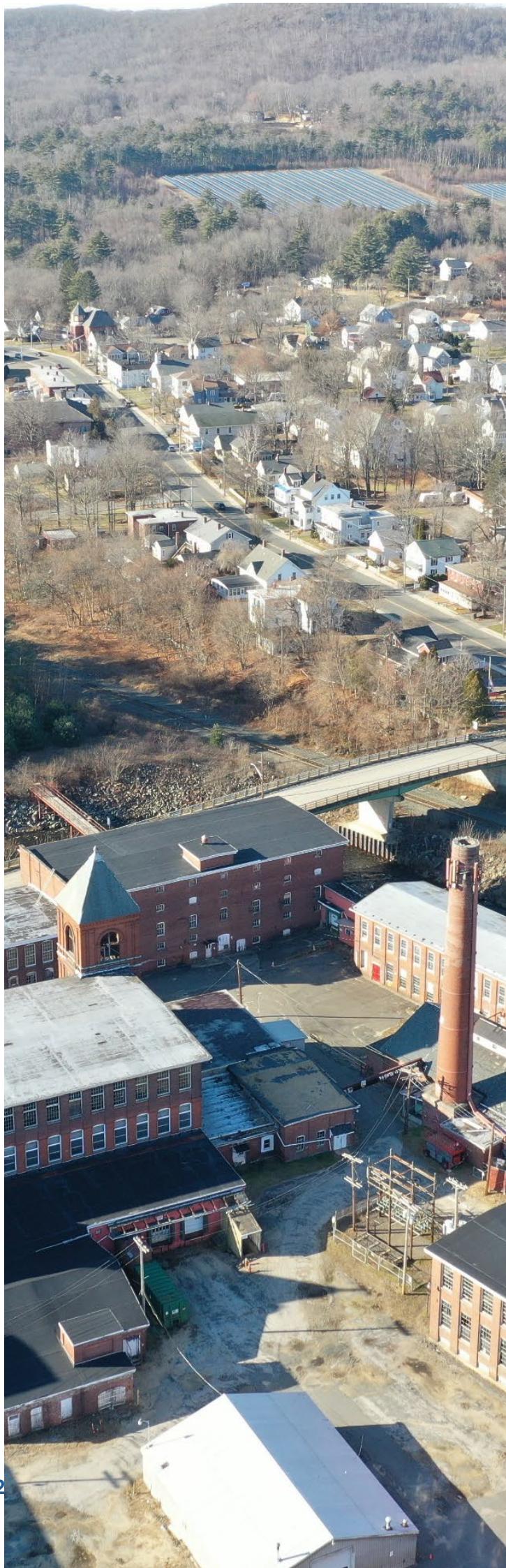
Strategy 2.1 Action Items

Action Item 2.1.1 – Encourage sustainable infill development in established areas.

Action Item 2.1.2 – Develop a Transfer of Development Rights bylaw.

Action Item 2.1.3 – Encourage the use of easements and chapter land restrictions to conserve open space, agricultural, and recreational land.

Action Item 2.1.4 – Amend the Village zoning to encourage infill development.



Strategy 2.2: Assess Priority Preservation Areas for Expanded Conservation

The Rural 11 Prioritization Plan identified areas where development should be focused, areas that should be preserved, and areas where infrastructure improvements are warranted. For open space preservation to be meaningful, it should be contiguous to prevent the fragmentation of wildlife corridors and critical habitats.

Natural Features

The 2022 joint Hazard Mitigation Plan and Municipal Vulnerability Plan provided an action plan to address environmental vulnerabilities in Warren including flooding in Warren Town Center. The Town is now eligible to apply for hazard mitigation funding through the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the MVP Action Grant Program. Some key recommendations of the HMP and MVP that may be addressed through zoning amendments include:

- Address stormwater drainage issues and incorporate resilience to extreme precipitation.
- Study solutions to prevent new developments from making stormwater runoff worse.
- Protect the natural environment and ecosystem services.
- Support public quality of life.
- Build community resilience to climate change and natural hazards.

These recommendations, which were echoed by a member of the Conservation Commission regarding development on steep slopes, can be addressed with Stormwater and Steep Slope bylaws. To ensure safe and sustainable development, we must address these vulnerabilities through regulatory avenues before they become emergent threats.

Right To Farm

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides municipalities with the option to adopt a Right to Farm bylaw. This bylaw encourages the pursuit of agriculture, promotes agricultural economic development, and can help to protect farmland. The function of the bylaw is to allow agricultural uses and related activities with limited conflict with abutters or municipal regulations. Adoption of a Right to Farm Bylaw in Warren would encourage the development and preservation of farmland and small-scale agriculture even as the Town faces development pressures from Eastern Massachusetts.

Strategy 2.2 Action Items

Action Item 2.2.1 – Address natural features (such as steep slopes and rock outcroppings) that present challenges for development.

Action Item 2.2.2 – Develop a Right to Farm bylaw.

The Major Development Overlay District Allowed Uses:

- Business and professional offices
- Research and development in technology, biotechnology, and engineering fields
- Light manufacturing, warehousing, and retail services
- Hotels, inns, conference centers, and commercial recreation facilities
- Renewable energy research facilities
- Nursing homes, hospitals, and assisted living facilities

Strategy 2.3 Optimize Development Options in the Major Development Overlay District

While preserving open space is a priority in Warren, some areas have been identified as areas of potential development. The Major Development Overlay District (MDOD) is closer to interstate access in Palmer compared to other areas of the town, making it a preferable area for development. The Town may want to reevaluate uses that may be appropriate in the MDOD. The existing Schedule of Use Regulations (Section 3.2) in the Zoning Bylaws includes limited uses that are allowed or conditionally allowed in this district.

One of the Priority Development Areas (PDA) identified in the Rural 11 Prioritization Plan is the area to the north of Interstate 90 near the MassDOT Maintenance Facility at Brimfield Road (State Route 19). While this area has development potential due to its proximity to transportation infrastructure, steep slopes in the northwest require the completion of a site analysis to determine the land suitable for development.

Potential land uses include a mixed-use innovation district, highway commercial, or warehouse, among others. Located between Worcester and Springfield, an innovation district could partner with a university for research and development in the biosciences or life sciences.

Warren has significant amounts of privately owned, undeveloped land, with potential for extensive development. The zoning bylaw dictates that any residential development outside of the Village zone requires 30,000 or 45,000 square feet per single family unit. Though this level of density can be desirable, it results in significant amounts of land being

used up by each home and requires greater land consumption for roads and parking.

To address these challenges, clustered housing groups homes closer together on smaller lots while preserving significant portions of open space within the same development area. Homes are clustered together around cul-de-sacs or courtyards, providing shared amenities. This approach is often used in rural settings to balance housing needs with land conservation. Smaller lots reduce the overall development footprint. Large amounts of land are left undeveloped as shared open space, conserving natural landscapes and providing the potential for agricultural or recreational uses.

Strategy 2.3 Action Items

Action Item 2.3.1 – Reevaluate uses that are allowed or conditionally allowed with a special permit in the Major Development Overlay District to identify potentially appropriate uses for consideration.

Action Item 2.3.2 – Research and analyze potential land uses for land to the north of Interstate 90 near Brimfield Road.

Action Item 2.3.3 – Consider adding village center areas to the list of Priority Development Areas.

Action Item 2.3.4 – Encourage clustered housing in greenfield development.

Goal 3: Strategically Plan for Reuse and Redevelopment of Former Brownfields, Vacant Buildings, and Underused Sites

Like many rural towns, Warren is faced with a need for housing, services for residents, and increasing the commercial tax base while protecting the small-town charm. This goal focuses on turning these challenges into opportunities.

A key step in this process is seeking funding to assess and clean-up former brownfield sites to prepare them for redevelopment. Opportunities abound for the Wrights Mill Complex, and the community should play an active role in discussions about reuse of this site.

Aside from the mill site, there are numerous vacant housing units in the village centers in deteriorating condition. The Town has a limited ability to address this issue as these are privately owned properties. While revitalization of these properties is desirable, there can be an unintended consequence of increased sale prices and rents which could displace long-time residents. It will be vital to find a balance between improving the community and housing affordability.

There may be enough vacant and underused structures in the Town Common and West Warren areas to meet the housing needs, but a study is needed to accurately identify and inventory vacant and undeveloped sites to determine potential dwelling units. Incentives should be offered to encourage owners to renovate existing units, and zoning should be amended to remove barriers to development on infill lots. The following strategies

and action items provide guidance on how the town can achieve this goal.

The Mill Conversion Overlay District

Allowed Uses:

- Multi-family residential, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, senior housing, and bed and breakfast establishments
- Commercial uses such as retail sales, banks, convenience stores, theaters, health/fitness clubs, and medical services
- Restaurants, taverns, bakeries, and other food services
- Personal service establishments like salons, dry cleaners, and tailors
- Hotels, inns, conference centers, and artist studios
- Light industry, research & development, and warehousing
- Museums, educational institutions, and charitable organizations
- Hydroelectric generating units

Strategy 3.1: Continue to Prioritize the Redevelopment and Reuse of Wrights Mill

The Wrights Mill in West Warren has consistently been identified as a priority site for adaptive reuse and redevelopment. The Town has been proactive in collaborating with owners and potential developers and the creation of a Mill Conversion Overlay district. Continued partnership and planning will be needed to ensure that the mill site is brought back into productive use.

Work with the Property Owners to Create an RFP for Site Reuse

Significant work has been done on the part of the Town and property owner to explore opportunities for Wrights Mill. Warren should collaborate on a more detailed Request for Proposals (RFP) that reflects how the Town and community want to see the site reused.

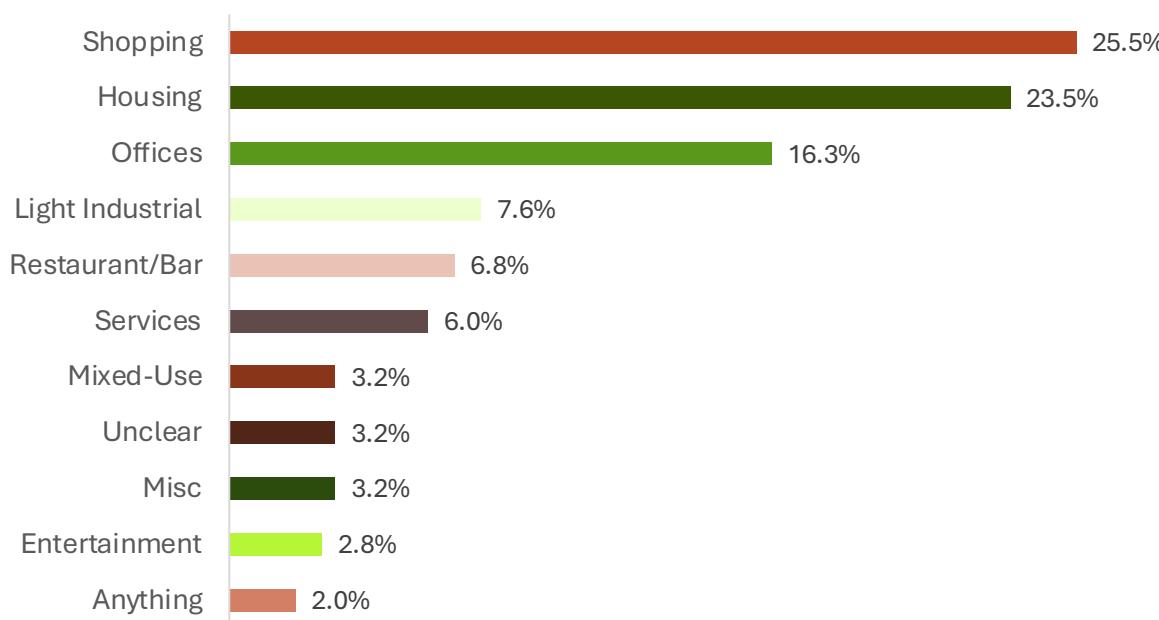
Engage West Warren-Community in Planning for Mill Redevelopment.

Redevelopment or reuse projects, like the potential reuse of Wrights Mill, can have unintended consequences, such as displacement of current residents and businesses due to rising property values and rents. The transformation of historic or industrial sites into residential or commercial spaces may increase the overall desirability of an area, inadvertently making it unaffordable for the original community, a process often referred to as gentrification.

Warren can adopt several proactive measures to ensure that redevelopment projects do not disproportionately harm vulnerable residents:

- **Inclusionary Zoning:** Require a portion of new housing units to be affordable, ensuring that low- and moderate-income families have access to new developments.
- **Affordable Housing Trust:** Use local funds to preserve or create affordable housing units in conjunction with redevelopment.

Figure LU9: What future development would you support in Wrights Mill?



- **Tenant Protections:** Implement policies such as rent control, tenant relocation assistance, or "right of first refusal" laws to give current residents more stability.
- **Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs):** Require developers to enter agreements with the Town that ensure projects provide community benefits, such as affordable housing, job creation, or local business support.
- **Phased Development:** Gradually implement redevelopment plans to avoid sudden shifts in housing costs and to provide time to mitigate the impacts.

By using a combination of zoning tools, public-private partnerships, and tenant protections, Warren can encourage redevelopment while minimizing the risk of displacing long-term residents. These strategies can help balance economic growth with community preservation.

It may be beneficial and worthwhile to evaluate other mill redevelopment projects and consider the factors that brought about success. Some examples in Massachusetts include Hudson Landing in Hudson; Jefferson Mills in Holden; Mill 180 in Easthampton; Stevens Linen Mill in Dudley; Whitin Mill in Northbridge and in Rhode Island, Hope Artiste Village in Pawtucket. These case studies represent mills in village, suburban and urban settings. Except for Jefferson Mills, these mill re-use projects include a mix of uses.

In reviewing survey questions, about a quarter of respondents identified shopping or housing as a desired use for Wrights Mill with sixteen percent supporting office use.

Key Factors Contributing to Displacement:

- **Increased Property Values:** As areas are revitalized, property values rise, leading to higher rents and property taxes, which can drive out lower-income residents.
- **Change in Housing Supply:** Redevelopment projects often create luxury or market-rate housing, which may not be affordable for existing residents.
- **Speculation:** Investors may buy up property in anticipation of rising values, driving up costs and displacing long-term residents or businesses.

Explore the Costs and Benefits of Providing Tax-Based Financial Incentives

Local tax incentives could increase the financial viability of reusing Wrights Mill. One of the most used tax mechanisms for redevelopment or reuse projects is Tax Increment Financing (TIF). TIF programs in Massachusetts come in two forms:

Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing: The UCH-TIF program is designed to promote housing development, particularly in urban centers or areas targeted for revitalization. It allows municipalities to offer tax incentives to encourage the development or redevelopment of properties for housing, including affordable housing and mixed-use projects. Given resident interest in including housing in the redevelopment of Wrights Mill, UCH-TIF could be a valuable tool. The site's redevelopment could qualify if the Town designates the area as suitable

for urban center housing development. Offering a UCH-TIF agreement could attract developers by reducing property tax burdens on the increased value from new housing or mixed-use construction.

District Improvement Financing: DIF is a broader financing mechanism that allows municipalities to designate a development district and use the incremental property tax revenues from that district to fund public infrastructure improvements. If Warren anticipates broader development in the area around Wrights Mill, the Town could create a DIF district to fund infrastructure improvements that benefit the entire district. This could make the area more attractive to developers by addressing infrastructure needs – such as repaving roads, water/sewer upgrades (and realigning those lines from under the mill to public rights of way), and other infrastructure needs that benefit redevelopment.

Careful consideration of both the potential benefits and pitfalls of TIF programs is important. TIFs can offer benefits of increased tax revenue from the development to fund improvements that support the project. They can also reduce town-wide tax impacts and strengthen public-private partnerships. However, potential pitfalls include the diversion of funds from other taxing entities (such as schools), reduced transparency, and mixed economic outcomes depending on how the TIF is structured.

Seek Funding to Support Infrastructure Improvements

Many factors need to be considered for the redevelopment of Wrights Mill to come to fruition. Some factors are on site, and some are in the surrounding area and include needed infrastructure improvements. The Town of Warren received a grant through the

Community One Stop for Growth, Rural Development Fund, for improvements to Pulaski Street that serves as an access point to the mill complex.

Potential Steps to Support Reuse through Environmental Remediation

Step 1 - Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment:

Assessment: The goal of a Phase 1 ESA is to identify potential or existing environmental contamination liabilities. This is done by reviewing the property's history, records, and nearby uses, and conducting a site visit to observe any signs of contamination (e.g., hazardous materials or storage tanks).

Step 2 – Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessment:

Assessment: If the Phase 1 ESA identifies potential contamination concerns, a Phase 2 ESA is conducted. This phase involves physical testing of soil, groundwater, and building materials to confirm the presence and extent of contaminants.

Step 3 – Cleanup: Using the information collected during the ESAs, a cleanup plan can be developed and executed.

Each of these activities can be funded through EPA grants.

Evaluate the Potential for Environmental Contamination at the Site

As a former textile mill, the Wrights Mill site may still contain contaminants which present a challenge to redevelopment. The Town can help provide clarity and information about potential contaminants and needed cleanup steps by conducting phase 1 and 2 environmental site assessments, cleanup assessments, and reuse planning.

These tools will critically identify any contaminants that are likely to be at the site and the necessary steps needed to remedy them.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency provides annual funding opportunities for environmental site assessments (ESA), reuse planning, and cleanup activities through its competitive brownfields grant program. The program weighs numerous criteria in its evaluation, such as demographic indicators, incidence of acute illnesses, and experience with grant administration. Warren has the potential to be a strong applicant for these grant opportunities.

Pursuing ESAs and cleanup planning activities can benefit the goal of redeveloping the mill through:

Increased Investor Confidence: Both Phase 1 and Phase 2 assessments provide developers and investors with clarity on environmental risks, which can help attract funding or grants for redevelopment, particularly if contamination can be addressed.

Liability Protection: Conducting these assessments could protect owners or developers from legal and financial liabilities associated with undisclosed contamination.

Access to Funding: With confirmed environmental data, the Town may be able to access additional state and federal EPA funding for brownfield cleanup and redevelopment, making the site more attractive for housing or commercial reuse.

Path to Redevelopment: Understanding the environmental condition is key for assessing the site's feasibility for housing or mixed-use development. Cleanup strategies could be developed based on the findings, ensuring the site meets regulatory standards for safe use.

Strategy 3.1 Action Items

Action Item 3.1.1 – Coordinate with the site owner to create an RFP for site reuse.

Action Item 3.1.2 – Carefully evaluate case studies of other mill reuse projects.

Action Item 3.1.3 – Work with the surrounding community to identify how the reuse of the mill can support community priorities.

Action Item 3.1.4 – Explore the potential for the Town to provide financial incentives for site reuse, such as tax abatements and Tax Increment Financing.

Action Item 3.1.5 – Seek funding to support infrastructure improvements in and around the Wrights Mill Complex.

Action Item 3.1.6 – Seek funding to complete phase 1 and 2 environmental site assessments, and site cleanup as needed.

Strategy 3.2: Encourage Redevelopment of Vacant Buildings in the Village Centers

There are several vacant and underused buildings and undeveloped lots in the village centers. Renovating these buildings will improve the aesthetics of the area while increasing the availability of housing units and commercial space. With a more than adequate water supply, this will not create an impact on the water system but will add more customers to it. The exact number of units has not yet been quantified and it is recommended that an inventory of vacant and underused buildings be undertaken. With this information, the Town can then develop a plan to encourage property owners to move forward with improvements.

This plan could include seeking potential funding for a home improvement program. The Housing chapter considers this and other options for encouraging renovation of existing units. At a time when housing is an important state and national concern, the opportunity to bring a sizable number of units back online may be eligible for funding. The age and condition of the existing housing stock is also discussed in greater detail in the Housing chapter.

Many of the structures in the village centers are considered pre-existing non-conforming as they pre-date the existing zoning bylaws that favor large-lot single-family zoning. Some property owners have been met with challenges when trying to build on or improve their properties due to current zoning that requires larger lots, lot frontage, and sizable setbacks. A special permit would be required to build in the village centers. This process is challenging and can be costly, discouraging many owners from pursuing redevelopment.

From a commercial perspective, the current zoning bylaws require on-site parking that most properties in a historic village center cannot provide. This scenario is typical for such village centers as many were developed either prior to the invention of the automobile or at a time when they were uncommon. People walked, there was no need for parking, and therefore, buildings were built closer together.

The challenge of trying to meet current requirements has led to frustration and is part of the reason commercial storefronts stand vacant. It is recommended that village center zoning be amended, either as a base zoning district or as an overlay district, which takes the existing conditions into consideration and creatively amends zoning for these areas. This would not only make it easier to renovate or build in this area but to encourage it.

There are undeveloped lots along Old West Brookfield Road that could potentially provide parking for Warren Center. Located along the Quaboag River, this area could also include a short riverwalk, becoming a pleasant public space for strolling, relaxing and taking in the views. Interpretive panels in this area could educate residents and visitors about the importance of the river and adjoining habitat.

Strategy 3.2 Action Items

Action Item 3.2.1 – Develop an inventory of vacant residential and commercial units in the village centers.

Action Item 3.2.2 – Evaluate and amend dimensional regulations in the Village District to encourage infill development.

Action Item 3.2.3 – Explore opportunities for development of public parking in the

village centers to alleviate the need for each business to provide on-site parking.

Action Item 3.2.4—Explore the potential for additional gathering spaces in the village centers.

ⁱ Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission. Rural-11 Prioritization Plan. 2013.
https://cmrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/R11_Final_Report_02_05_14_reduced.pdf

WARREN MASTER PLAN DRAFT IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Goals Strategies	Action Items	Type	Timeline	Priority	Lead	Team	Potential Funding and External Partners	
							8-11	Medium
H 1 Encourage the Rehabilitation and Preservation of Existing and Affordable Housing	H 1.1 Develop and implement a housing rehabilitation and preservation program that provides financial incentives, technical assistance, and deed buy-downs to ensure that housing remains affordable	Project	4-7	Low	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator, Housing Authority	Local and Regional Banks/Credit Units, Non-Profits, Housing Stability Inclusion and Leadership Mini-Grants	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.1.1 Identify and apply for state and federal grants to fund the creation of a housing rehabilitation and preservation program and purchase deed restrictions on expiring or potentially affordable units	Project	1-3	Low	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator, Housing Authority	Local and Regional Banks/Credit Units, Non-Profits, Housing Stability Inclusion and Leadership Mini-Grants	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.1.2 Explore partnerships with local banks, credit unions, and non-profits to offer low-interest loans for home improvements	Project	1-3	Low	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator, Housing Authority	Local and Regional Banks/Credit Units, Non-Profits, Housing Stability Inclusion and Leadership Mini-Grants	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.1.3 Explore partnerships with Community Land Trusts or other housing nonprofits to rehabilitate or redevelop tax title, distressed, and abandoned homes	Project	1-3	High	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Board of Health	Community One Stop for Growth	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.1.4 Develop a priority list for housing rehabilitation projects, focusing on the most critical needs first. Include public housing, owner-occupied low and moderate-income homes, and rental properties serving low and moderate-income residents	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board	Board of Health, Building Department, Town Administrator	MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program, Community One Stop for Growth	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.1.5 Create a community outreach program to inform residents about available rehabilitation resources and incentives	Project	8-11	High	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Fire Department, Historical Commission	MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program, Community One Stop for Growth	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.2 Explore opportunities to amend zoning and other town requirements that can make rehabilitation more affordable and/or feasible	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Fire Department, Historical Commission	MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program, Community One Stop for Growth	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.2.1 Evaluate the Town's zoning bylaw to identify areas that make rehabilitation challenging	Plan	1-3	Low	Planning Board	Zoning Board of Appeals, Building Department, Board of Health, Fire Department, Water and Sewer, Conservation Commission	Community One Stop for Growth	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.2.2 Explore opportunities to streamline permitting for rehabilitation projects	Plan	1-3	Low	Planning Board	Zoning Board of Appeals, Building Department, Board of Health, Fire Department, Water and Sewer, Conservation Commission	Community One Stop for Growth	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.2.3 Identify potential zoning incentives to encourage and/or make rehabilitation more lucrative	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board	Zoning Board of Appeals	Community One Stop for Growth	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.2.4 Identify opportunities to convert underutilized commercial or other property types to housing and explore local policy options to facilitate such adaptive reuses	Plan	4-7	Low	Planning Board	Zoning Board of Appeals	Community One Stop for Growth	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
	H 1.2.5 Explore Potential Business Incentives like tax breaks or reduced permit fees	Project	4-7	Low	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen	Community One Stop for Growth	Opacum Land Trust, East Quabbin Land Trust, Commonwealth Land Trust, Valley Community Land Trust, Berkshire Community Land Trust, MassHousing, MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program
H 2 Ensure that Housing in Warren Remains Affordable								
	H 2.1 Strategically leverage state incentives for affordable housing	H 2.1.1 Stay up to date on State housing incentive programs and identify where they align with the Town's goals and existing efforts	Value	Ongoing	High	Town Administrator	Planning Board, Board of Selectmen	Community One Stop for Growth
		H 2.1.2 Strategically adopt State programs when they meet Town housing goals and align with the Town's existing efforts	Value	Ongoing	High	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator	Community One Stop for Growth
	H 2.2 Evaluate the Town's Zoning Bylaw for barriers to desired housing production and affordability	H 2.2.1 Conduct a comprehensive zoning review to identify regulatory barriers to the town's housing production goals and for alignment with state regulatory changes	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen	Community One Stop for Growth

H 2.3 Create and implement a program for redeveloping priority properties, collaborating with property owners, partners, and developers	H 2.3.1 Identify strategic sites for housing development or redevelopment	Plan	4-7	Medium	Planning & Board	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator	Housing Opportunity on Public Land Program (MHP), Community One Stop for Growth
	H 2.3.2 Create a local policy package that targets housing development or redevelopment from multiple angles including owner awareness and engagement, developers and partners, regulatory and procedural adjustments, technical assistance, and financial resources	Project	12-15	Medium	Town Administrator	Board of Selectmen, Planning Board	Mass Housing Stability Grants, Community One Stop for Growth
	H 2.3.3 Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships and relationship building with developers	Project	1-3	Low	Town Administrator	Board of Selectmen	Housing Opportunity on Public Land Program (MHP)
H 2.4 Evaluate options to incentivize housing production and affordable housing through tax mechanisms	H 2.4.1 Strategically use tax abatements and/or TIF to incentivize redevelopment or reuse of properties in investment-deprived areas or areas with challenges that dissuade developers	Project	8-11	Low	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator	Housing Opportunity on Public Land Program (MHP)
H 3 Ensure that a variety of housing	H 3.1 Evaluate the Town's zoning bylaw to identify barriers to and opportunities to encourage housing development that meets the needs of older residents	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board		Community One Stop for Growth
	H 3.1.1 Evaluate the Town's zoning bylaw to identify barriers to and opportunities to encourage housing development that meets the needs of older residents	Plan	1-3	Medium	Planning Board		Community One Stop for Growth
	H 3.1.2 Explore opportunities to adopt bylaws and programs that incentivize affordable senior housing development	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board	Town Administrator, Housing Authority	Housing Opportunity on Public Land Program (MHP)
	H 3.1.3 Identify state and federal funding sources that support senior housing development	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen, Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth
	H 3.1.4 Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships to co-create affordable senior housing	Project	4-7	Low	Town Administrator	Board of Selectmen, Planning Board	Housing Opportunity on Public Land Program (MHP)
	H 3.2 Evaluate the Town's barriers and opportunities to support diverse housing development	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board		Community One Stop for Growth
	H 3.2.1 Analyze the Town's zoning bylaw to determine where it poses barriers to the types of housing that would benefit the town or opportunities to better encourage those housing types	Project	4-7	High	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Board of Health, Fire Department, Water and Sewer, Conservation Commission	Community One Stop for Growth
	H 3.2.2 Streamline the Town's permitting processes	Project	4-7	High	Planning Board		Community One Stop for Growth
	H 3.2.3 Identify environmental and other constraints to housing development	Plan	1-3	Low	Planning Board	Conservation Commission	Community One Stop for Growth
E 1 Leverage Key Niches and Diversify							
E 1.1 Leverage Key Niches to Boost Tourism	ED 1.1.1 Identify and prioritize tourism niches such as ecotourism, historical tourism, and agitourism	Project	Ongoing	High	Community Development Advisory Committee	Planning Board, Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator	EDA, SBA, Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce
	ED 1.1.2 Create and implement wayfinding signage and branding strategies to enhance the visibility of tourist attractions	Project	1-3	Medium	Community Development Advisory Committee	Trails Committee (to be created), Historical Commission, Town Administrator	Community One Stop for Growth, Community Compact, Massachusetts Downtown Initiative
	ED 1.1.3 Collaborate with local businesses to develop joint marketing strategies and packages promoting Warren's tourism assets	Project	1-3	Low	Community Development Advisory Committee	Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen	Rural Business Investment Program (USDA), SBA, Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce, Massachusetts Downtown Initiative
	ED 1.1.4 Organize and host tourism-related events	Project	Ongoing	Medium	Parks and Recreation Commission	Library, Historical Commission	Massachusetts Cultural Council, Discover Central MA, Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation, Mass Trails, Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce, Massachusetts Downtown Initiative
	ED 1.1.5 Conduct market research to assess demand for types of tourism	Plan	4-7	Low	Board of Selectmen	Community Development Advisory Committee	EDPA
	ED 1.1.6 Create support programs for tourism-related businesses	Project	4-7	Low	Board of Selectmen	Community Development Advisory Committee	Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce, Massachusetts Downtown Initiative
E 1.2 Increase Support for New Businesses	ED 1.2.1 Explore Potential Business Incentives like tax breaks or reduced permit fees	Plan	8-11	Low	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator	

O	P	M	E	N	T	ED 2 Revitalize Key Commercial Corridors and Strategically Plan for Industrial Growth	ED 2.1 Prioritize Redevelopment in Prime Commercial Areas	ED 2.1.1 Develop a Phased Redevelopment Plan for the Town Center and West Warren Village	Project	Ongoing	High	Town Administrator	Board of Selectmen	Community One Stop for Growth, EDA, Massachusetts Downtown Initiative	
							ED 2.1.2 Explore Options to Build an Economic Development Team (An Economic Development Committee or Part-Time Economic Advisor)	Project	8-1	Low	Board of Selectmen	Quaboag Regional School District			
							ED 2.1.3 Create a Business Recruitment Program	Project	1-3	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator, Planning Board	Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce		
							ED 2.2.1 Assess Infrastructure Needs and Feasibility for Industrial Development around Gilbert Road	Plan	4-7	Low	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator, Community Development Advisory Board	Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce, Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, MassDevelopment		
							ED 2.2.2 Collaborate with Private Landowners and Developers	Plan	1-3	Medium	Planning Board	Town Administrator	ED, Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce		
							ED 2.2.3 Conduct Community Engagement to Discuss Desire for Industrial Growth	Plan	1-3	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Highway Department, Sewer and Water, Town Administrator, Fire Department	Community One Stop for Growth, MassWorks, EDA, MassDevelopment Site Readiness		
							ED 3 Support diverse business opportunities through the zoning bylaw	Project	1-3	High	Planning Board	Town Administrator	Community One Stop for Growth		
							ED 3.1 Update Zoning Regulations to Support Strategic Industrial and Development Opportunities in Southwest Warren	ED 3.1.1 Establish Gilbert Road as a Designated Business Corridor	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board		Community One Stop for Growth	
								ED 3.1.2 Review and Update Zoning Regulations in the Gilbert Road Area	Plan	1-3	Medium	Planning Board		Community One Stop for Growth	
								ED 3.1.3 Develop Economic Incentives for Recreational and Commercial Uses	Plan	4-7	Low	Board of Selectmen	Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth	
								ED 3.1.4 Develop Zoning Regulations for Warehouse and Distribution Centers	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board		Community One Stop for Growth	
								ED 3.1.5 Evaluate Zoning Map Changes Near Interstate 90	Plan	1-3	Medium	Planning Board		Community One Stop for Growth	
								ED 3.2.1 Develop PDA Designations in the Town Center and West Warren	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board		Community One Stop for Growth	
								ED 3.2.2 Evaluate and Amend Dimensional Regulations in the Village District	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board		Community One Stop for Growth	
							T 1 Prepare infrastructure for private investment & development of key parcels.								
A	N	S	P	O	R		T 1.1 Prepare engineering studies and cost assessments for infrastructure improvements around the Wrights Mill Complex and West Warren.	T 1.1.1 Prepare studies and plans necessary to determine investments needed in bridge and roadway network	Plan	Ongoing	High	Planning Board	Highway Department	Community One Stop for Growth, Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant, MassDOT, CDBG, EDA, MassWorks	
								T 1.1.2 Pursue public and private partnerships for development of open space and redevelopment of the Wrights Mill Complex.	Project	Ongoing	High	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator, Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth, Community Compact	

A	T 1.2 Explore potential private/public partnerships for an I-90 highway exit in Warren	T 1.2.1 Prepare impact studies for a potential highway on/off ramp	Plan	12-15	Low	Board of Selectmen	Highway Department	Community One Stop for Growth, MassDOT
T	T 1.2.2 Coordinate highway exit planning with economic development planning and open space planning	Plan	12-15	Low	Board of Selectmen	Highway Department, Town Administrator, Parks and Recreation Commission	Community One Stop for Growth, MassDOT, EEA Planning Assistance Grants	Community One Stop for Growth, MassDOT, EEA Planning Assistance Grants
O	T 2 Prevent flooding on the road network	T 2.1 Address stormwater drainage issues and proactively incorporate resilience to extreme precipitation	T 2.1.1 Develop a comprehensive plan to prioritize stormwater improvements, including latest best practices.	Plan	4-7	High	Highway Department	Board of Selectmen
N			T 2.1.2 Maintain and improve flood mitigation infrastructure	Project	Ongoing	High	Highway Department	Board of Selectmen
			T 2.2 Continue monitoring and addressing beaver dams	Value	Ongoing	High	Highway Department	Board of Selectmen
			T 2.2.1 Continue monitoring beaver activity and address roadway blockages	Project	4-7	Medium	Highway Department	Board of Selectmen
			T 2.2.2 Collaborate with Private Landowners and Developers (to coordinate actions to control beaver populations)	Project	Ongoing	Medium	Highway Department	Board of Selectmen
			T 2.2.3 Consult the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) for guidance and procedures for addressing beaver related conflicts	Plan	Ongoing	Medium	Highway Department	Board of Selectmen
		T 3 Expand Transportation Mode Options						
		T 3.1 Prepare for potential public transportation	T 3.1.1 Continue communication with regional transit authorities (WRTA and PVTA) and CSX to evaluate the feasibility for increased service and/or explore transit options that leverage new technologies or modes of travel	Plan	8-11	Medium	Board of Selectmen	WRTA, PVTA, CMMPO, CSX, Transportation Alternatives Program
			T 3.1.2 Improve community awareness of the Quaboag Connector demand response service and encourage the Quaboag Connector to expand/increase its service	Project	Ongoing	High	Board of Selectmen	WRTA, PVTA, CMMPO, Community Transit Grant Program
			T 3.1.3 Proactively prepare to connect public transportation to potential passenger rail service in Palmer	Plan	8-11	Low	Board of Selectmen	WRTA, PVTA
		T 3.2 Invest in pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure	T 3.2.1 Prepare corridor plans for MA-67 and MA-19 to identify options for active transportation improvements.	Plan	8-11	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Highway Department
			T 3.2.2 Identify pedestrian and bicycle improvements to facilitate the connection between Downtown Warren and West Warren	Plan	8-11	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Highway Department
			T 3.2.3 Identify and coordinate funding opportunities and future investment.	Project	12-15	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Highway Department
		T 4 Maintain State of Good Repair & Prioritize Safety						
		T 4.1 Reconstruct or resurface priority roads and intersections	T 4.1.1 Create a priority list for roadway network improvements to maintain a state of good repair	Plan	1-3	High	Highway Department	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator
			T 4.1.2 Secure funding for roadway improvement	Project	Ongoing	High	Highway Department	Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator
								Chapter 90, Municipal Pavement Program, Shared Streets and Spaces Grant
								Chapter 90, Shared Streets and Spaces Grant, Complete Streets, Community Compact Best Practices Program, Safe Routes to School, CMMPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

<p>T 4.2 Address unsafe areas of the road network.</p> <p>T 4.2.2 Secure funding for safety improvements</p>	<p>T 4.2.1 Utilize roadway and intersection crash data, undertake safety studies at critical locations, such as a Road Safety Audit (RSA) to inform decisions about future efforts to resolve.</p> <p>T 4.2.3 Maintain and promote emergency evacuation routes</p>	<p>Plan 8-11 Medium Police Department Highway Department, Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen</p> <p>Project Ongoing High Highway Department</p>	<p>Emergency Management, Police Department, Fire Department</p> <p>Plan 4-7 Medium Board of Selectmen</p> <p>Plan 4-7 Low Board of Selectmen</p>	<p>Road Safety Audit (FHWA), MassDOT, Strong Towns Crash Studio https://www.strongtowns.org/crashstudio</p> <p>Chapter 90, Community Compact Best Practices Program, Complete Streets, Shared Streets and Spaces, CDG, CMPO</p> <p>Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)</p> <p>Chapter 90, Hazard Mitigation Assistance, MassDOT, MEPA</p> <p>Community One Stop for Growth, MassDOT, CMPO</p> <p>Community One Stop for Growth, CMPO, MassDOT</p> <p>Community Facilities Loan and Grant Program (USDA)</p> <p>Technical Assistance for Adoption of Building Energy Codes Assistance</p> <p>Lead Service Line Replacement Program (MassWater Trust), EDa Public Works</p> <p>EDa Public Works Program, EDa Economic Adjustment Assistance, Community One Stop for Growth</p>
<p>T 4.3 Manage Trucking Routes</p>	<p>T 4.3.1 Prepare corridor plans for MA-67 and MA-19 to identify options for trucking improvements and alternative routes to avoid downtown</p> <p>T 4.3.2 Work with federal and state agencies, as well as local businesses, to identify options for trucking routes</p>			
<p>T 5.1 Maintain a State of Good Repair for All Municipal Facilities and Infrastructure</p>	<p>TS 1.1.1 Explore options for funding a new public safety complex</p> <p>TS 1.1.2 Continue capital planning to upkeep all municipal buildings.</p> <p>TS 1.2.1 Conduct a detailed infrastructure assessment and long-term maintenance plan for water and sewer infrastructure</p> <p>TS 1.2.2 Evaluate feasibility of water and sewer expansions</p>	<p>Project 1-3 High Town Administrator</p> <p>Value Ongoing High Capital Planning Committee</p> <p>Plan 4-7 Medium Warren Water District</p> <p>Plan 8-11 Low Warren Water District</p>	<p>Board of Selectmen, Police Department, Fire Department, Emergency Management</p> <p>Finance Committee, Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen</p> <p>Sewer Commissioners</p> <p>Sewer Commissioners</p>	<p>Community Facilities Loan and Grant Program (USDA)</p> <p>Technical Assistance for Adoption of Building Energy Codes Assistance</p> <p>Lead Service Line Replacement Program (MassWater Trust), EDa Public Works</p> <p>EDa Public Works Program, EDa Economic Adjustment Assistance, Community One Stop for Growth</p>
<p>S 5.2 Stabilize Personnel and Volunteer Capacity</p>	<p>TS 2.1.1 Increase Communication to Increase Volunteer Capacity</p> <p>TS 2.1.2 Explore community engagement to increase volunteerism</p>	<p>Project 1-3 High Town Administrator</p> <p>Project 1-3 High Town Administrator</p>	<p>Board of Health, Police Department, Fire Department, Warren Water District, Sewer Commissioners, Highway Department, WCAT, Board of Health, Police Department, Fire Department, Warren Water District, Sewer Commissioners, Highway Department, WCAT, Council on Aging, Libraries, Parks and Recreation Commission</p>	<p>Community Compact</p> <p>Community Compact</p>
<p>A 5.3 Build an Accessible Warren and Support an Aging Population</p>	<p>TS 2.1.3 Collaborate with Quaboag Regional School District to engage local youth in municipal processes</p> <p>TS 2.1.4 Host regular training for current and prospective volunteer board members</p> <p>TS 2.2.1 Identify potential services for regionalization</p> <p>TS 2.2.2 Develop a recruitment and retention program for volunteer fire fighters</p>	<p>Project 1-3 Low Ongoing Medium</p> <p>Project 1-3 Low Ongoing Medium</p> <p>Plan 4-7 Medium Town Administrator</p> <p>Project 8-11 Low Fire Department</p>	<p>Board of Selectmen</p> <p>Board of Selectmen</p> <p>Board of Selectmen</p> <p>Board of Selectmen</p>	<p>Quaboag Regional School District, WCAT, Parks and Recreation Commission</p> <p>Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Capital Improvement, Finance Committee, Zoning Board of Appeals</p> <p>Board of Selectmen</p> <p>Board of Selectmen</p>
<p>E 5.4 Implement Age-Friendly Solutions</p>	<p>TS 3.1.1 Implement the ADA Transition Plan</p> <p>TS 3.1.2 Update the ADA Transition Plan as necessary</p> <p>TS 3.1.2 Regularly update accessibility features for web and public meetings</p> <p>TS 3.2.1 Increase capacity and services within the Council on Aging</p> <p>TS 3.2.2 Support senior services through regional collaboration</p>	<p>Project 1-3 Medium Town Administrator</p> <p>Project 4-7 Medium Board of Selectmen</p> <p>Project 4-7 Medium Town Administrator</p> <p>Project 8-11 Low Council on Aging</p>	<p>Board of Selectmen, Capital Planning Committee, Finance Committee</p> <p>Board of Selectmen</p> <p>Board of Selectmen</p> <p>Council on Aging, Board of Selectmen</p>	<p>Municipal ADA Improvement Grant Program, AARP Community Challenge Grants</p> <p>Municipal ADA Improvement Grant Program</p> <p>CivicPlus, Community Compact (IT Grants)</p>

R	E	OS 2.1.3 Prepare a Fund to Purchase Land for Public Use	Project	8-11	Medium	Board of Selectmen		Local Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND), Drinking Water Supply Protection Program, Landscape Partnership Grant Program, East Quabbin Land Trust
A	T	OS 2.1.4 Commission an Open Space Prioritization Plan to Identify Parcels of High Conservation or Recreation Value	Project	4-7	High	Board of Selectmen	Conservation Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission	Community One Stop for Growth, EEA Planning Assistance Grant, Department of Conservation and Recreation
I	O	OS 2 Increase the Quantity of Outdoor Recreation Spaces						
N	N	OS 2.2 Expand and Formalize the Trail Network	OS 2.2.1 Formalize Existing Trail Access	Project	1-3	High	Town Administrator	Trails Committee (to be created), Parks and Recreation Commission
OS 2.2.2 Establish a Trail Committee		OS 2.2.2 Project	Project	1-3	High	Board of Selectmen	Trails Committee (to be created)	EEA Planning Assistance Grant, MassTrails, Department of Conservation and Recreation
OS 2.2.3 Partner with Regional Nonprofits to Maintain & Expand Trails		OS 2.2.3 Project	Project	4-7	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Trails Committee (to be created)	Mass Trails
OS 2.2.4 Create Trail Maps		OS 2.2.4 Project	Project	4-7	Medium	Parks and Recreation Commission	Trails Committee (to be created)	EEA Planning Assistance Grant, MassTrails, Department of Conservation and Recreation
OS 2.2.5 Develop a Trail Signage Policy and Install Trail Signs		OS 2.2.5 Project	Project	4-7	Medium	Parks and Recreation Commission	Trails Committee (to be created)	EEA Planning Assistance Grant, MassTrails, Department of Conservation and Recreation
OS 3 Strengthen the Park and Recreation Department's Capacity								
OS 3.1 Sustain and Expand Town Programming		OS 3.1.1 Continue to Improve the Department's Events Catalog	Project	1-3	Low	Parks and Recreation Commission		
OS 3.1.2 Maintain Facilities that Support Recreation Programming		OS 3.1.2 Project	Project	1-3	Medium	Parks and Recreation Commission		
OS 3.2 Add Administrative and Communications Capacity to the Parks and Recreation Department		OS 3.2.1 Enhance the Parks and Recreation Department's Online Presence	Project	1-3	Medium	Parks and Recreation Commission		
OS 3.2.2 Grow the Staffing Capacity of the Parks and Recreation Department		OS 3.2.2 Project	Project	4-7	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Parks and Recreation Commission	
N NC 1 Preserve Historical Assets in the Village Centers								
T	U	NC 1.1 Create a Holistic Strategy for the Town Common Area	NC 1.1.1 Prepare a Town Common Neighborhood Plan	Plan	4-7	Medium	Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth
R	A	NC 1.1.2 Implement the Town Common Neighborhood Plan	Project	8-11	High	Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth	
A	L	NC 1.1.3 Assess Potential Options for the Old Town Hall Building	Plan	1-3	High	Town Administrator	Library, Historical Commission, Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Community Development Advisory Commission	
A	A	NC 1.2.1 Partner with the Central Massachusetts Milltown Caucus	Project	1-3	Low	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen, Historical Commission	DLTA, LPA
N	N	NC 1.2.2 Facilitate Re-use of West Warren Community Hall	Value	1-3	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator	
D	D	NC 1.2.3 Carry out a Design Study of the West Warren Main Street Mixed-Use Area	Plan	4-7	Medium	Planning Board	Town Administrator	Community One Stop for Growth
C	C	NC 2 Protect and Preserve Agricultural Land and Open Space						
L	T	NC 2.1 Avoid Development on Farmlands through Formalized Protections	NC 2.1.1 Adopt a Policy in Respect of Chapter 61 Right-of-First Refusal	Policy	1-3	High	Town Administrator	Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Finance Committee
U	R	NC 2.1.2 Advocate for and Educate Landowners on Agricultural Preservation Restrictions and Conservation Requirements.	Project	Ongoing	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator, Planning Board	EEA Planning Assistance Grant
A	L	NC 2.1.3 Explore the Possibility of Transfer of Development Rights to Preserve Agricultural Land and Historic Buildings	Policy	8-11	Low	Planning Board		EEA Planning Assistance Grant
R	R	NC 2.2.1 Maximize Support for Continuation of Current Farming	Value	Ongoing	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator, Highway Department, Finance Committee, Capital Planning Committee, Police Department, Fire Department, Emergency Management	On-Farm Labor Housing Loans (USDA)
E	E	NC 2.2.2 Incentivize Modern Farming by Aiding Economic Feasibility						

S O	NC 2.2 Build Support for Agriculture by Hosting Town Events Linked to Agriculture and Tourism	Project	Ongoing	Medium	Parks and Recreation Commission	Board of Selectmen	Community One Stop for Growth
U R	NC 2.3 Adopt a Right to Farm By-law	Policy	1-3	Low	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator	Community One Stop for Growth
C E	NC 2.4 Modify Regulatory Barriers to Permit Modern Farming and Agri-Tourism Ventures	Policy	1-3	High	Planning Board	Board of Selectmen, Zoning Board of Appeals	EEA Planning Assistance Grant
S E	NC 3 Prioritize Environmental and Ecosystem Protection						
N C	NC 3.1 Mitigate Stormwater Pollution Run-off	NC 3.1.1 Audit Bylaws and Regulations to Ensure that Low Impact Development Best Practices are Maximized	Plan	1-3	High	Board of Selectmen	Highway Department, Sewer and Water, Planning Board
D R	NC 3.2 Achieve Net Carbon Neutrality	NC 3.1.2 Consider Incentivizing Low Impact Development	Project	4-7	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Town Administrator, Conservation Commission
U C	NC 3.3 Control Invasive Alien Plants	NC 3.2.1 Adopt a Policy to Use Green Design Wherever Feasible for New Town Buildings or Building Alternatives or Maintenance	Policy	1-3	Low	Town Administrator	Board of Selectmen, Planning Board
S E	NC 3.3.1 Carry out a Detailed Invasive Vegetation Survey	NC 3.2.2 Educate Residents about Sustainable Design Opportunities	Value	4-7	Low	Planning Board	LSPA Environmental Justice Grant Program, Technical Assistance for Adoption of Building Energy Codes, Assistance
N S	NC 3.3.2 Create a Staffing and Volunteer Plan for Invasive Species Control.	NC 3.3.3 Carry out a Detailed Invasive Vegetation Survey	Project	8-11	Medium	Board of Selectmen	EEA Planning Assistance Grant
D S	NC 3.3.4 Encourage Clustering of Housing in Greenfield Development Areas	NC 3.3.5 Encourage Clustering of Housing in Greenfield Development Areas	Plan	8-11	Medium	Town Administrator	EEA Planning Assistance Grant
U S	LU 1 Increase Zoning and Permitting Capacity						
N D	LU 1.1 Modernize the zoning bylaws	LU 1.1.1 Complete a comprehensive zoning update	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth
S D	LU 1.2 Provide Training for Planning and Zoning Board Members	LU 1.1.2 Regularly review zoning bylaws	Plan	Ongoing	High	Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth
S U	LU 1.3 Encourage attendance at Citizen Planner Training Collaborative and Massachusetts Municipal Association events	LU 1.1.3 Review and modernize Village Zoning	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth
E U	LU 2 Balance Development Needs	LU 1.2.1 Encourage membership in the American Planning Association	Value	Ongoing	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals
E S	LU 2.1 Promote development in Priority Development Areas	LU 2.1.1 Encourage sustainable infill development in established areas	Policy	Ongoing	Medium	Planning Board	MassDevelopment
E E	LU 2.2 Assess Priority Preservation Areas for expanded conservation	LU 2.1.2 Develop a Transfer of Development Rights bylaw	Policy	4-7	Low	Planning Board	EEA Planning Assistance Grant, Community One Stop for Growth
E U	LU 2.3 Optimize development options in the Major Development Overlay District	LU 2.1.3 Encourage the use of easements and chapter land restrictions to conserve open space, agricultural, and recreational land	Policy	Ongoing	High	Planning Board	EEA Planning Assistance Grant
E R	LU 2.3.1 Reevaluate uses that are allowed or conditionally allowed with a Special Permit in the Major Development Overlay District to identify potentially appropriate uses for consideration	LU 2.1.4 Amend the Village zoning to encourage infill development.	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth
E C	LU 2.3.2 Research and analyze potential land uses for land to the north of Interstate 90 near Brimfield Road	LU 2.2.1 Address natural features (such as steep slopes and rock outcroppings) that present challenges for development.	Plan	1-3	Medium	Board of Selectmen	Community One Stop for Growth
E C	LU 2.3.3 Consider adding village center areas to the list of Priority Development Areas	LU 2.2.2 Develop a Right to Farm bylaw	Plan	1-3	High	Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth
E C	LU 2.3.4 Encourage clustered housing in greenfield development..	LU 2.3.5 Encourage clustering of housing in greenfield development..	Policy	4-7	Low	Planning Board	Community One Stop for Growth

<p>LU 3 Strategically plan for reuse and redevelopment of former brownfields, vacant buildings, and under used sites.</p>	<p>LU 3.1 Continue to prioritize the redevelopment and reuse of Wrights Mill</p>	<p>LU 3.1.1 Coordinate with the site owner to create an RFP for site reuse</p> <p>LU 3.1.2 Carefully evaluate case studies of other mill reuse projects.</p> <p>LU 3.1.3 Work with the surrounding community to identify how the reuse of the mill can support community priorities</p> <p>LU 3.1.4 Explore the potential for the Town to provide financial incentives for site reuse, such as tax abatements and tax increment financing</p> <p>LU 3.1.5 Seek funding to support infrastructure improvements in and around Wrights Mill Complex</p> <p>LU 3.1.6. Seek funding to complete phase 1 and 2 environmental site assessments, and site cleanup as needed</p>	<p>Project</p>	<p>1-3</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Planning Board</p>	<p>Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen</p>	<p>MassDevelopment Site Readiness Program, MassWorks</p>