

LAND USE & ZONING

The Land Use chapter of this Master Plan is a blueprint for development. It offers a balanced approach to land use that preserves rural character while allowing desired and necessary growth. Barre residents value small-town charm but want to see more resource and business development and are concerned about affordability and sprawl. While these desires may seem in conflict, smart land use and zoning policies can ensure that Barre grows without losing what makes it special.

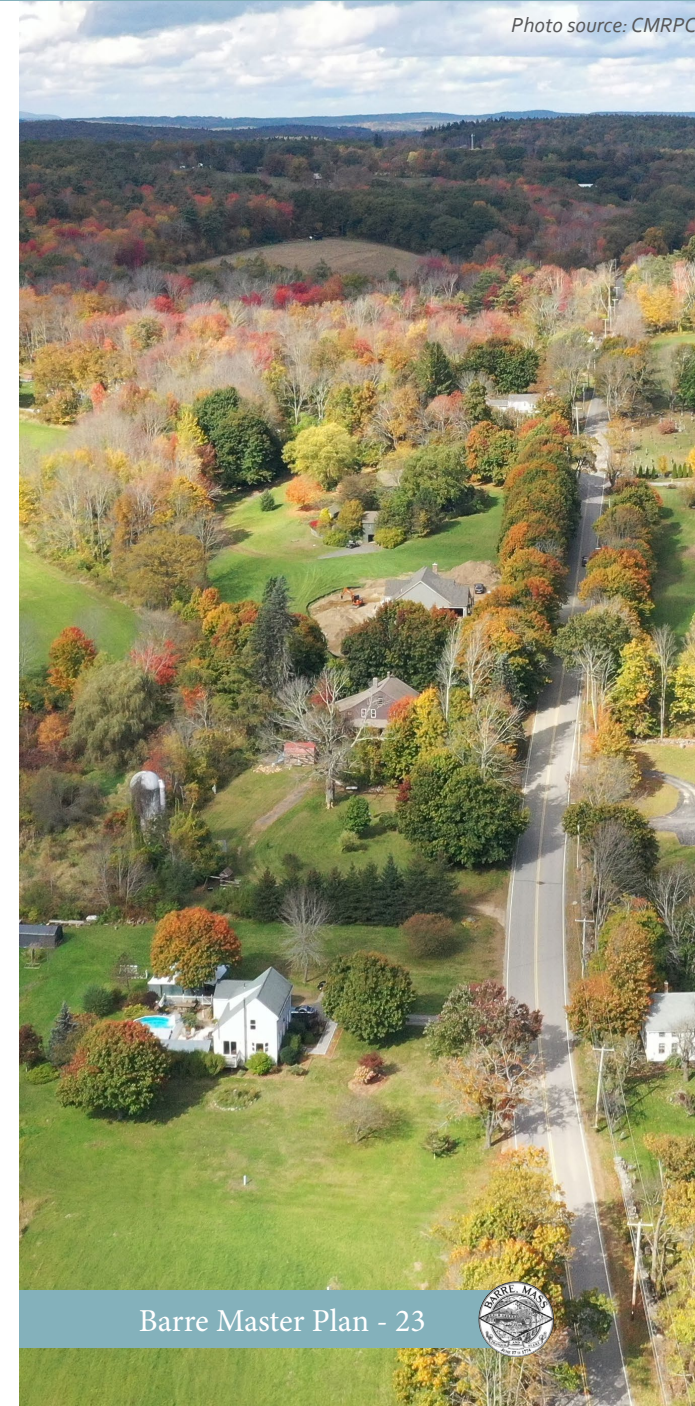
The Town of Barre is well positioned for a re-evaluation of its land use and zoning policies. Many of the needs

and desires of its residents can be furthered by changes to zoning that can help spur commercial and residential development while maintaining its small-town rural character.

Through the incorporation of Smart Growth development principles, mixed-use residential and commercial development, and low-impact regulations to protect water, Barre can concentrate development in the Town Center, South Barre, and Barre Plains in a way that increases access to services and improves walkability, while protecting open spaces and natural resources.

THEMES

- Rural small-town character.
- Small business development.
- Senior citizens and youth
- Focus development
- Small-scale mixed-use
- Higher-density single-family housing.



LAND USE & ZONING DEFINITIONS

Mixed-Use

As noted in the Economic Development definitions, mixed-use is a form of development that allows for or encourages multiple uses in the same building or neighborhood. The typical form this would take in Central Massachusetts involves ground floor retail and office space, with one or two floors of housing built above.

Small-scale mixed-use development allows for an increase in housing stock in retail areas. Mixed-use development contributes to a more walkable community by allowing residents to live closer to where they work and shop, reducing the sprawl of development into natural areas.

Low-Impact Development

According to the United States Environmental Agency, low-impact development (LID) is “an approach and set of practices that can reduce runoff and pollutant loadings by managing runoff as close to its source as possible.”¹⁷ LID can include site design principles and stormwater management practices that promote natural water infiltration and the harvesting of rainwater. At the municipal levels, LID is typically incorporated into subdivision regulations, road and street design, and open space design.

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EPA <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-09/documents/bbfszterms.pdf>

Zoning and Overlay Districts

A zoning district is a geographically defined part of a municipality that allows and restricts uses, building and parcel dimensions, and defines the intended purpose of that area. Overlay districts are specialty zoning districts that overlap with underlying zoning districts and can be used for various policy purposes, including flood and water management, economic and housing development, and environmental protection.

Photo source: CMRPC



LAND USE & ZONING CONDITIONS

ZONING BYLAWS

Residence Districts

There are three Residence districts in Barre, each with similar uses, intended primarily for single-family zoning. Each Residence district is named for the minimum lot size in thousands of square feet.

R-80 Rural Residence district allows for a minimum lot size of 80,000 square feet or approximately 1.83 acres, with a minimum frontage of two hundred feet. The R-80 district makes up most of the land area in Barre, with all other districts found along major roads or towards the denser central and southern parts of Barre.

The R-20 Open Residence district allows for a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet or approximately 0.45 acres, with a minimum frontage of 120 feet. R-20 districts are the second most common zoning district in Barre, found throughout the central and southern parts of Barre.

The R-15 General Residence district allows for a minimum lot of size of

15,000 square feet or approximately 0.34 acres, with a minimum frontage of 110 feet. R-15 districts are the least common residential districts, with their higher density found in Barre Center, South Barre, and Barre Plains.

Permitted uses by right in Residence districts include:

- Single detached one-family dwellings
- Agriculture, with dimensional regulations on barns and stables.
- Limited accommodations for tourists, limited in similar ways to a Bedand Breakfast.
- Livestock and poultry for non-commercial uses with certain quantity and dimensional restrictions.

Several uses require a special permit in Residence districts:

- Conversion of a one-family dwelling, existing at the time of the bylaw's adoption, into a two-family dwelling.
- Small specialty retail businesses or retail sale of products of home occupation.
- Mobile homes under special circumstances.
- Livestock and poultry more than the

by-right restrictions.

- Wind-powered generators.
- Several uses are only allowed in the R-80 Rural Residence district, such as new construction duplexes, cemeteries, golf courses, riding stables, commercial boat rental, camps, dog kennels and veterinary hospitals, commercial slaughterhouses and commercial raising of swine, goats, or fur-bearing animals, commercial dirt and rock removal, and sawmills. Apartment houses with "adequate off-street parking" are allowed by special permits in all residence districts except R-80 Rural Residence.

Business Districts

The B-L Limited Business district allows for a minimum lot size of 30,000 square feet or approximately 0.68 acres, with a minimum frontage of 130 feet. There are only two Limited Business districts, found in South Barre and Barre Plains, on properties abutting the north side of Main Street.

Limited Business districts allow for any use as the Residence districts, except for commercial slaughterhouses and commercial raising of swine, goats, or





fur-bearing animals, commercial dirt and gravel removal, duplex conversions, and mobile homes.

Several uses are allowed by right, including professional and medical offices, retail and personal services, repair and service work that does not include vehicles and large farm equipment, hotels, and restaurants. There is several signage regulations included in the bylaws.

Several uses require a special permit, including gas stations, service or sales of vehicles or farm equipment, contractor's yards, sale or storage of feed, fuel, lumber and building supplies, place of amusement or assembly or club conducted for profit, trucking depots, dog kennels, veterinary hospitals, and wind-powered generators.

B-C Business and Commercial

The B-C Business and Commercial district is the only district with no minimum lot size and a minimum frontage of one hundred feet. This is the most common business district, found abutting Barre Common, in a large district around the intersection of Route 32 and Route 122, several districts throughout South Barre and Barre Plains, and along a few major roads.

Business and Commercial district zoning allows for almost all the same uses as the Limited Business district, with the addition of duplex conversion. Several other uses are allowed by right, including certain industrial uses, office uses, wholesale establishments, and car washes. Unique allowed by special permit uses include scientific research, development or related production, certain light manufacturing, screened storage of unregistered vehicles, and storage unit rentals.

Industrial Districts

There are several Industrial districts throughout Barre. Most are located around South Barre, encompassing former mill buildings. There are three Industrial districts east of Barre Common along Valley Road and Nourse Lane.

The Industrial Districts allow for similar uses as Business and Commercial Districts. The two uses unique to these districts are industrial uses where

Most of Barre's industrial-zoned areas are in South Barre, encompassing former mill buildings.



the product or process constitutes an explosion or fire hazard of sufficient magnitude to be subject to regulation, and where the product or process constitutes a chemical poison hazard of sufficient magnitude to be subject to regulation in Massachusetts.

Overlay Districts

The two overlay districts in Barre serve very practical purposes; they do not promote more specific planning and zoning policies.

Floodplain District

The Floodplain District is based on one-hundred-year floodplains from the Flood Insurance Rate Map. Development in this district requires various modifications to prevent damage and loss in a flood.

Wellhead Protection District

The purpose of the Wellhead Protection District is to protect drinking water sources in Barre. There are two different zones, each shown on the map with some overlap. Zone I encompasses a 400-foot protective radius around a public water supply or wellfield. There are three along Route 32 and near Barre Plains.

Zone II identifies the extent of an aquifer that contributes water to a well under severe pumping and recharge and is found along Route 32 and Route 122, and to the east of Barre Common.

Specific uses are prohibited in this overlay, including landfills, junkyards, most types of hazardous waste storage or disposal, and earth removal outside certain limits. A significant increase in impervious surfaces or any uses related to the handling of hazardous materials requires a special permit.

Dimensional Regulations

Dimensional regulations in Barre are typical for a small rural town. In many towns in Central Massachusetts, most of the land is zoned for single-family houses on large lots. As discussed above, denser districts, such as R-15 General Residence, R-20 Open Residence, and B-L Limited Business, are centered around major roads and commercial and civic centers.

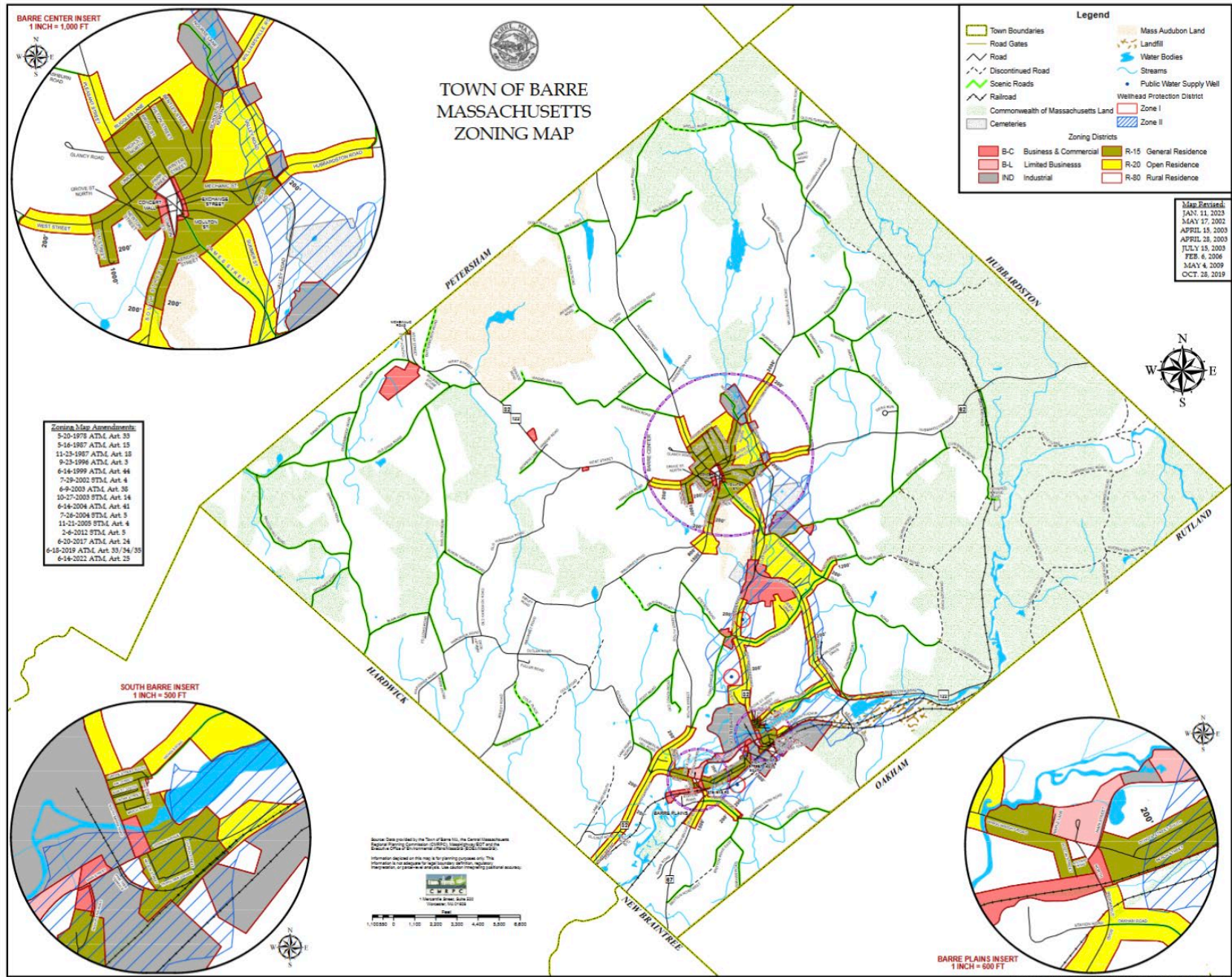
Subdivision Regulations

Barre’s Planning Board Regulations include a bylaw that governs the subdivision of land. Included are design standards, which apply to streets, easements, open space, protection

of natural features, sediment control, street drainage, curbing, utilities and municipal services, pedestrian and bicycle circulation services, pedestrian and bicycle circulation systems, and compliance. The bylaw also covers required improvements for an approved subdivision, including streets and roadways, sidewalks and grass plots, utilities, and monuments. The subdivision regulations are thorough and include numerous standards for developers.

	R-80	R-20	R-15	B-L	B-C	IND
Lot Area	80,000 sq. ft.	20,000 sq. ft.	15,000 sq. ft.	30,000 sq. ft.	n/a	40,000 sq. ft.
Frontage	200 ft.	120 ft.	110 ft.	130 ft.	100 ft.	130 ft.
Front & Rear	35 ft.	30 ft.	25 ft.	50 ft.	40 ft.	50 ft.
Side Yard	25 ft.	20 ft.	15 ft.	30 ft.	20 ft.	30 ft.
Stories	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	3	3
Height	35 ft.	35 ft.	35 ft.	35 ft.	40 ft.	50 ft.
Max. Coverage	15%	20%	25%	30%	35%	30%





LAND USE & ZONING PRIORITIES

Preserve Rural Character

There is a strong desire in Barre to preserve rural small-town character. This is typical of many towns in the region, and smart land use planning can facilitate this. Crafting zoning bylaws that allow for moderate levels of specific types of development in existing developed areas can help control how the town will look in the future.

Small Business Development

There is strong local support for small business development. Eighty percent of survey respondents wanted more family-owned businesses. Due to the existing land use patterns, population density, and available parcels in Barre, small business development is much more likely than national chains.

Amenities For Youth and Elderly

There is a strong desire for more activities for senior citizens and young people. Many rural communities lack amenities for these age cohorts. These groups may lack the disposable income or access to transportation that typical rural commercial development caters to, leading to commercial leakage

and difficulty maintaining populations as they age into adulthood or out of independent living.

Concentrate Development to Preserve Open Space

Residents would prefer that development concentrates on existing infrastructure and specific underutilized parcels. This is a key element of maintaining small-town rural communities while encouraging commercial development. Allowing for increased commercial and residential density in existing developed areas while continuing land preservation efforts can provide space for future generations while maintaining natural and agricultural assets that define a community.

Small-scale Mixed-use Development and Higher-density Single-family Housing

The aforementioned can be synthesized into a clear policy prescription. Small-scale retail lends itself to bringing the small, local businesses that residents desire. The mixed-use development would allow for a much-needed

increase in rental housing stock. Higher-density single-family housing would allow for more compact development that preserves open space while increasing the housing stock. It would also allow more sensible pedestrian and transportation planning to be synthesized into actionable strategies.

Crafting zoning bylaws that allow for moderate levels of specific types of development in existing developed areas can help control how the town will look in the future.



LAND USE & ZONING FINDINGS

Expand Commercial Zoning

Barre has six zoning districts, including three residential, two commercial, and an industrial district. These districts are spread around town, with an emphasis on higher density uses in Barre Center, South Barre, and Barre Plains. There is strong potential for the expansion of commercial and residential development. Focusing the expansion of appropriate commercial and residential zoning districts along major roads such as Route 122 and Route 67, and in existing commercial areas, can expand the availability of parcels for development while preserving the rural character of Barre.

Conversations with stakeholders identified several key areas for development. These include major roads, such as Route 67, Route 32, Route



Keep new construction to the 'town centers' and keep as much land for agriculture, recreation and preservation as possible.

(2023 Community Survey)

122, Barre Town Center, Quabbin Plaza at the intersection of Routes 32 and 122, and South Barre Village, where an underdeveloped secondary town center exists with a classic New England town center layout.

Several types of desired development were identified by residents in workshops and surveys. They include mixed-use developments, small-scale retail, restaurants and dining, and a fitness center or gym. These types of developments are inter-compatible and are uniquely in line with some of the constraints of a small town like Barre. In a meeting with stakeholders, the following locations were identified for their compatibility with these uses:

- Mixed Use: South Barre
- Small-scale retail: Main Street, South Barre, Episcopalian Church site
- Restaurants and Dining: Main Street, South Barre
- Fitness center or gym: Barre Plains fire station, School Street

In conversations with community members, a lack of available commercial land was identified as the primary barrier to development.



Keep Barre [a] small town and invest on growing what we have now.

(2023 Community Survey)

Several areas in Barre could benefit from additional commercial zoning, including Route 67 south of South Barre, various parcels along Route 122 west of Barre Common, and a parcel of land adjacent to the Barre Plains common.

Implement Innovative Housing Options

Most of the land in Barre is oriented around large lot single-family zoning. While this is a common approach in rural Central Massachusetts, this imposes limitations that interfere with the needs of residents and planning best practices. Such large lots limit the number of homes that can be produced, and trend towards subdivisions with large, expensive houses with limited walkability. This can lead to the acquisition of historic farmland or open space by developers





for the construction of unaffordable, unwalkable subdivisions.

Allowing denser housing options in areas with existing residential and commercial development can allow the town to shape housing development to preserve open space and natural beauty while allowing more affordable options. This could look like the construction of small-scale, two to three-story mixed-use buildings in Barre Center and South Barre, in addition to cottage housing options in new housing subdivisions and infill construction, and accessory dwelling units in existing residential neighborhoods.

Massachusetts faces a housing crisis, and that crisis affects rural Worcester County as well. There are several reasons to encourage housing development in Barre, but there is always a concern that new housing construction will alter the character of

the town. Denser housing can reflect historic housing forms while allowing land to be set aside for preservation and preventing sprawl and the loss of historic agricultural land.

Modernize Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

The process of implementing various zoning policies should come alongside improvements to the usability of the zoning bylaws and their documentation. Modernizing the structure and format of these bylaws will make them easier for residents and developers to use and will allow public officials and voters to more effectively articulate limitations and possible improvements. These fixes should involve definitions, use regulations, use table formatting, and dimensional regulations. This will ensure that the expansion of zoning districts and changes to zoning policies are well understood and implemented holistically.

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We need zoning regulations for businesses that surround the commons that protect the beauty of the commons.

(2023 Community Survey)

Notably, Barre’s use regulations are not organized in a table format, which makes it difficult for residents and developers to navigate. Any revision to Barre’s zoning should include reformatting the use of regulations into a more usable format. Distinctions between the different zoning districts

and the allowed uses require navigating citations from prior sections, rather than being displayed in a straightforward table.

Definitions are a typical area of improvement for a municipality's zoning bylaws. The definitions in the Barre zoning bylaws are straightforward and cover the basics, though it is likely that a zoning diagnostic would identify areas for improvement. One notable deviation from best practices is the inclusion of various definitions and restrictions on specific uses in the Use Regulations section, rather than in the Definitions section. Including all the definitions in one section would make the document easier to navigate and would allow the Use Regulations to focus on uses.

Dimensional regulations in Barre are typical for a small rural town. As discussed above, denser districts, such as R-15 General Residence, R-20 Open Residence, and B-L Limited Business, are centered around major roads and commercial and civic centers. Frontage and setback requirements are reasonable for a town like Barre, though some of the values seem arbitrary and could be assessed for more consistency at the neighborhood level. The subdivision regulations were first adopted in 1987 and have not

been subject to major revisions in the intervening years. Reevaluation of the subdivision regulations to ensure they align with modern standards of smart growth and low-impact development should be part of a broader zoning diagnostic and rewrite process.

Preserve Open Space

Alongside the desire for increased development potential and reduced barriers to entry, open space, agricultural land, recreational opportunities, and natural beauty must be preserved in the coming decades. The efforts of bodies such as the Agricultural Commission and the Conservation Commission can be used to promote various land preservation schemes, including Chapter 61 programs, and an assessment of the Conservation Commission's bylaws can be used to establish new best practices. Concentrating new density in existing commercial and residential areas and preventing subdivision sprawl will help preserve open space.



GOAL 1: BALANCE PRESERVATION WITH DESIRED AND NECESSARY GROWTH.

Concentrating moderate density in existing commercial zones in Barre Town Center, South Barre, and Barre Plains will help promote development without encroaching open space and natural resources.



Photo source: CMRPC

FINAL DRAFT

STRATEGY 1.1. ENCOURAGE COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT THAT IS IN HARMONY WITH BARRE'S SMALL-TOWN RURAL CHARACTER.

There are several strategies that will help ensure that new development does not come at the expense of Barre's history and charm. Maintaining this character helps to ensure Barre is a destination for visitors and continues to be desirable for residents.

- 1.1.1. Complete a comprehensive review of Barre's zoning bylaws.
- 1.1.2. Assess current uses and dimensional requirements for all commercial zones to ensure consistency with Smart Growth Principles.
- 1.1.3. Concentrate new development around existing infrastructure and vacant or underused parcels, in

areas such as Barre Common, South Barre, Barre Plains, and along major roads such as Route 122, Route 67, and Route 32.

- 1.1.4. Expand the boundaries of commercial zoning in/to Barre Common, South Barre, Barre Plains, and along major roads such as Route 122, Route 67, and Route 32 as appropriate.
- 1.1.5. Encourage the development of small businesses, especially in South Barre and Barre Plains, by streamlining zoning and permitting approval processes (e.g., desirable uses permitted by right).
- 1.1.6. Undertake Complete Streets and other bike/ pedestrian-friendly improvements to develop a more vibrant and walkable town center with connectivity to surrounding residential neighborhoods.
- 1.1.7. Enact village zoning in the Town Center that increases the



- potential for commercial and mixed-use by right onto streets abutting the Common, including School Street, Newton Street, Mechanic Street, and Barre Road.
- 1.1.8. Enact village zoning in South Barre to increase the potential for mixed-use and commercial activity on Main Street and Vernon Ave., with special consideration for parcels abutting Ware River.
 - 1.1.9. Enact village zoning in Barre Plains Village to incentivize more dense commercial strips.
 - 1.1.10. Streamline comprehensive permitting processes for new developments.
 - 1.1.11. Assess the site plan review process and criteria for tone (degree of business-friendliness) and clarity of expectations/ predictability.

**STRATEGY 1.2.
ENCOURAGE RESIDENTIAL
DEVELOPMENT THAT IS IN
HARMONY WITH BARRE'S
SMALL-TOWN RURAL
CHARACTER.**

- 1.2.1. Modernize the zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations to allow for small-scale mixed-use development, higher density single-family zoning in identified development

areas, and open space development for subdivisions.

- 1.2.2. Enable housing development to include new higher-density single-family housing and senior housing in and adjacent to developed parts of town.
- 1.2.3. Allow for smaller scale higher density single-family zoning that incorporates open space development policies.
- 1.2.4. Allow for accessory apartment/accessory dwelling unit development in existing residential neighborhoods to allow seniors to age in place and provide a more affordable housing option that aligns with single-family aesthetics.
- 1.2.5. Create a municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund to readily access funds for new housing opportunities.
- 1.2.6. Consider creating a buy-down program for market-rate homes and deed restricting them as affordable for income-qualified first-time homebuyers at below-market prices.



Cluster zoning near the three town “centers.

(2023 Community Survey)



GOAL 2: KEEP BARRE BEAUTIFUL.

Alongside smart zoning bylaw and land use policy changes, efforts should be made to further protect open spaces, promote the agricultural economy, and develop recreational resources.



STRATEGY 2.1. PRESERVE FARMS AND ENCOURAGE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY.

The agricultural character of Central Massachusetts should not be understated. Farmland throughout the region faces risks from development, and efforts should be made if this historic aspect of life in Barre is to be preserved.

- 2.1.1. Enact policies that preserve agricultural lands such as the purchase of development rights and open space residential development bylaws.
- 2.1.2. Help existing agricultural operations thrive through a strengthening of civic avenues for the agricultural community, such as the agricultural commission.
- 2.1.3. Encourage new and expanded agricultural enterprises through the

expanded availability of commercial land along major roads and incorporation of agricultural needs through the zoning review process.

- 2.1.4. Assess zoning to ensure flexibility for agrotourism and ecotourism ventures.
- 2.1.5. Assess existing lots with potential for future agrotourism and ecotourism ventures.

STRATEGY 2.2. PRESERVE OPEN SPACE AND ENCOURAGE ITS USE FOR ACTIVE AND PASSIVE RECREATIONAL PURPOSES.

Barre's proximity to the Mass Central Rail Trail and Rutland State Park puts it in a unique location. Outdoor recreation and preserved open space can be a valuable economic development tool.

- 2.2.1. Develop a program to educate landowners about land pres-



- ervation efforts to promote private land conservation in coordination with the Agricultural Commission and Conservation Commission.
- 2.2.2. Continue to strengthen collaborative efforts with regional land trusts and other groups to preserve open space and conservation of land.
- 2.2.3. Develop an Open Space Residential Development bylaw to encourage open space preservation in subdivisions.
- 2.2.4. Identify parcels for acquisition for recreational development and preservation.
- 2.2.5. Explore opportunities to continue bicycle paths on nearby roads to encourage riders into commercial corridors.

STRATEGY 2.3.
PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES.

- 2.3.1. Review the Conservation Commission bylaws and modify if necessary to encourage more robust protection of natural resources and alignment with best practices.
- 2.3.2 Review and update the subdivision regulations to account for modern best practices and implement Low Impact Development standards.
- 2.3.3. Consider adopting scenic

- roads bylaw to restrict certain activities that could alter the appearance or character of specified roadways in town. Similarly, explore the adoption of a scenic vista protection bylaw.
- 2.3.4. Assess the available or suitable land for green energy, with care taken to avoid detracting from the rural character of the town. Consider updating zoning regulations where appropriate.
- 2.3.5. Identify funding sources to hire a conservation agent to aid the conservation commission.
- 2.3.6. Ensure that development in proximity to natural resources does not infringe on areas in need of protection.
- 2.3.7. Prioritize development in existing commercial and residential areas.

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I think agriculture land preservation, bio habitat preservation and forest management are **HIGHLY** important.

(2023 Community Survey)

