

NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Barre's rich collection of forests, farmlands, waterways, and historic and cultural assets define its rural identity and quality of life. Residents have expressed strong support for preserving these resources while ensuring sustainable access and visibility for future generations. Over 60% of respondents to the 2023 Community Survey rated natural resources as extremely important, and more than half identified Barre's history and cultural identity as central to community character.

THEMES

- Green space protection
- Historic heritage preservation
- Sustainable and environmentally conscious growth
- Natural resource management

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Photo source: Melissa Bonefant



NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES DEFINITIONS

Agricultural Preservation Restriction

A permanent legal agreement that prevents non-agricultural development on farmland while allowing continued farming and ensuring the land remains in agricultural use.

Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)

A type of energy storage system that

uses batteries to store electrical energy. Often sited alongside renewable energy production facilities (e.g., wind, solar).

Chapter Lands / MGL Chapter 61, 61a, and 61b

Three current use tax programs that reduce taxes on forested, agricultural, and open space/recreational lands. These programs allow landowners of contiguous acres of forested/agricultural/open lands the opportunity

to reduce their taxes by committing to keeping the land undeveloped for a specified period of time.

Community Preservation Act (CPA)

A smart growth tool that helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities. Towns create Community Preservation Funds that come from a

Photo source: Lisa Ouimette





surcharge of up to 3% of the tax levy against real property. These funds are matched from the statewide Community Preservation Trust.

Conservation Restriction

A legal right, granted either permanently or for a fixed amount of time, that is used to preserve land or water areas in their natural, scenic, open, agricultural, farming, or forested conditions. It may also allow for public recreational use.

Ecosystem Services

The direct and indirect contributions of an ecosystem to human life. Usually categorized in four types: provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services. Provisioning services are products and resources that ecosystems provide to humans, like food, water, timber, and fiber. Regulating services represents vital functions provided by ecosystems that help maintain stability in the environment and support human well-being, such as pollination and climate regulation. Non-material benefits that people derive from ecosystems, like aesthetic enjoyment, recreation, spiritual enrichment, and educational opportunities, are classified as cultural services, and supporting

services represent the natural processes that sustain and maintain the health and functionality of ecosystems, like nutrient cycling and soil formation.

Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC)

The systems that regulate temperature, humidity, and air quality of indoor spaces. A variety of components are used, such as furnaces, air conditioners, heat pumps, and ductwork to improve indoor comfort and air quality.

Preservation Restriction

A legal right that protects historically significant structures and limits any restoration or alteration of the property that does not align with its historic use or image.

Resilience

The ability of a community to recover from a disturbance and thrive in a world of uncertainty. Resiliency planning aims to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate catastrophic events and hazards. This can include generator upgrades in town buildings, developing emergency response plans, and investing in green, environmentally friendly infrastructure.



NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES PRIORITIES

Preserve Historic and Cultural Heritage

There is strong local support for preserving Barre's historic buildings, districts, and landscapes. Protecting these resources helps maintain the town's identity and sense of place.

Conserve Natural Resources and Enhance Resilience

Safeguarding forests, wetlands, and water resources is essential to Barre's environmental health. The town can continue to protect these areas through land conservation and Low-Impact Development (LID) (defined in the Land Use and Economic Development chapters). Managing forestlands and wildlife corridors can support biodiversity and help the community adapt to climate change impacts.

Integrate Sustainability into Future Growth

Directing growth toward already developed or disturbed areas can protect scenic, cultural, and environmental resources. Encouraging green building design and renewable energy that complements the landscape will help maintain Barre's small-town character as it plans for the future.

Photo source: CMRPC



NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES FINDINGS

Preservation of Woods and Green Spaces

In Barre, approximately 73% of the total land is forested, and preservation of the town’s natural character has been identified as a top priority in surveys and workshop-related communications. The amount of open space protected in Barre is about 11,500 acres, or 40% of the total area of the town, among a variety of conservation and preservation programs.¹⁸

Some programs, primarily Chapter 61 programs, serve as tax incentives for landowners rather than permanent conservation tools but do offer

landowners the opportunity to create steward management plans. The Land Use chapter describes Barre’s unique proximity to beautiful natural areas as an economic development benefit, whereas this chapter plans for green space preservation under a lens that focuses on ecosystem services.

Preservation and Protection of Historic and Cultural Assets

In the Community Survey, 52% of the respondents strongly agreed that Barre’s history defines its character. Barre has a vast inventory of historic buildings and areas, many of which are inventoried on the National Register of



Development without destruction of the environment or rural character of the town. Protection of forest and agricultural lands.

(2023 Community Survey)

Historic Places. Three sites, Barre Town Hall, Barre District #4 Schoolhouse, and the Barre Congregational Church, are under Preservation Restriction.¹⁹

Like many towns in this region, Barre’s industrial past was characterized by mill buildings and worker housing, all of which can still be found in Barre Plains and South Barre. Barre’s historical sites embody chapters of the town’s history whose influence still resonates today; the most notable being the

¹⁸ Barre at a Glance. BioMap Town Report, Mass.gov, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/biomap-town-report-barre>
¹⁹ Barre. Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System. Massachusetts Historical Commission. <https://mhc-macris.net/>

Program	Requirements	Acreage in Barre
Chapter 61	At least 10 contiguous acres of forestland	1,381
Chapter 61a	At least 5 contiguous acres of agricultural or horticultural land	3,490
Chapter 61b	At least 5 contiguous acres of recreation land	750
Agricultural Preservation Restriction	At least 5 contiguous acres of land that has been actively devoted to agriculture for two tax years and produces at least \$500 per year for the first five acres, plus \$5 for each additional acre.	925
Conservation Restriction	Public or private land , permanent restrictions (with some permits) that require approval from the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs.	At least 800 (Hawes Hill Conservation Corridor)

Figure NCR1: Preserved Lands in Barre





Photo source: Angela Finne

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Prince Walker Burial Site, located just outside of the Ware River Watershed off Gilbert and Hubbardston Roads. Prince was the younger brother of Quock Walker, who in 1781 sued his enslavers for his freedom and won – a landmark case that was instrumental in the emancipation of enslaved peoples in Massachusetts. Prince’s life is well documented, as a man who was born enslaved, escaped slavery, and became a landowner and registered voter in Barre.²⁰

Barre is also the ancestral home of the Nipmuc people. The 2008 Barre Reconnaissance Report identified 35 archaeological sites that have provided Barre with significant archaeological potential both for Native American activity and early industrial history of the community. The report also identified five priority heritage landscapes, which are categorized as places where natural and cultural history intersect to define the town’s

“ **Don’t ruin our small town with loss of historical buildings and big retail etc.**

(2023 Community Survey)

“ **Barre Common is on the National Register of Historic Places and its character must be maintained.**

(2023 Community Survey)

character. These sites are the Barre Common, the South Barre Mill Village, the South Street Corridor, Felton Field, and the Prince River Corridor.

The adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) is supported by 63% of survey respondents. The CPA is a smart growth tool that helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities. The community preservation fund comes from a surcharge of between 1% and 3% of the tax levy against real property, and once adopted, the town may create a Community Preservation Committee (CPC) to administer the program. These funds are matched from the statewide Community Preservation Trust Fund.

²⁰ Email correspondence with Lucy Allen, Town Historian



NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Invasives Management

Like many other towns in the region, Barre's natural ecosystems have been affected by a variety of invasive plant, animal, insect, and aquatic species. The predominant invasives in Barre aggressively outcompete native flora, degrade wildlife habitat, and alter soil chemistry which makes it difficult for native ecosystems, such as forests and wetlands to survive and recover, thereby increasing wildfire and flood risks. They also may impact public health through increasing the number of disease-carrying pests (e.g., ticks and mosquitoes). Efforts to manage invasives are largely volunteer-driven with no formal town-wide strategy in place.

Water Resource Management

Water management emerged as a critical issue in Barre in terms of both infrastructure, recreation, and environmental health. Nearly half (47%) of Community Survey respondents considered the availability of public water to be extremely important, and 46% selected water quality and conservation as a top sustainability

priority. Town water comes from three groundwater gravel-packed wells, two at South Barre Road and one off Oakham Road.²¹ The town has a Wellhead Protection District bylaw in place that protects and promotes the health and quality of Barre's water supply through prohibitions on development within two zones. The first is a 400-foot radius around a public water supply, and the second is the area of an aquifer which contributes water to a well. This bylaw prohibits landfills, junkyards, storage and processing of hazardous waste, deicing chemicals, and any unsanitary works or treatment sites within the Wellhead Protection District.²²

A growing concern expressed by some Barre residents is the siting of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) in town. These systems have been sited and permitted in nearby towns and have garnered pushback from residents and environmental groups concerned about the negative effect the systems may have on water resource health. As reliance on renewable energy sources increases across the region, careful assessments of the potential impacts and site considerations of BESS are going to be crucial for environmental health and community safety.

“

I also wish there was more swimming access to natural bodies of water.

(2023 Community Survey)

Barre is located near the Quabbin Reservoir and houses a portion of the Quabbin Aqueduct which carries water from the Quabbin Reservoir to the Wachusett Reservoir. Additionally, the Ware River Watershed, which runs through the Eastern corner of Barre and covers neighboring Templeton, Hubbardston, Princeton, and Rutland, was identified as a vital natural resource to residents.

Miller's Beach, located on Powder Mill Pond, has been closed for years due to contamination from a nearby dump and transfer station. Responses to the Community Survey have pointed out that the beach is a place of missed recreation, and the closest nearby natural swimming area is over the town border in Rutland. Concern has also been raised across outreach efforts

21 Barre DPW Water Division. <https://www.townofbarre.com/water>

22 Town of Barre, MA Bylaws, Art V, § 140-13.



about stormwater runoff and erosion, particularly on town roads and areas with inadequate drainage. Undersized culverts are commonly identified as the cause of these flooding events, and flooding has been identified throughout Barre, particularly on Stetson Road due to poor stormwater drainage.²³

Agriculture

Agriculture and farms are of extreme importance to Barre as noted by 61% of Community Survey respondents. Barre’s history of farming extends deep into the past and has roots long before its

incorporation as a town. The hills and streams were well suited for an early agricultural base, and farming remains important to the local economy and sense of place. With nearly one hundred farms in the area, Barre adopted a Right-To-Farm bylaw in 2008 that encourages the pursuit of agricultural activities in town. The bylaw allows that whatever impact farming has on abutters through the normal practice of agriculture is offset by its benefit to the community. The town is also home to the Barre Farmers Market, which brings in over 30 local craft and produce vendors from May through October,

and 43% of respondents said that Barre needs more agriculture-based businesses and services. Agritourism and the promotion of agricultural activity are laid out in the Economic Development and Land Use chapters, respectively.

23 Barre Hazard Mitigation Plan Update. Revised 2019. <https://cmrhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Barre-HMP-Final.pdf>

Photo source: Lisa Ouimette



GOAL 1: MAINTAIN BARRE'S HISTORIC CHARACTER.

Barre's historic and cultural assets are central to community identity. More than half (52%) of survey respondents strongly agreed, and 30% somewhat agreed, that Barre's history is an important part of its character.

STRATEGY 1.1. PRESERVE AND PROTECT BARRE'S HISTORIC BUILDING STOCK

Historic buildings in Barre add to the charm and character of the town, though many of them may require extensive care. The town should make efforts to fund preservation enhancements, so these structures do not run further risk of deterioration and disrepair.

- 1.1.1. Work with the Historical Commission to produce a conditions report to identify critical buildings and sites at risk of deterioration and in need of remediation.
- 1.1.2. Apply for a Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey & Planning Grant to create a community-wide historic preservation plan for Barre.
- 1.1.3. Consider adopting the Community Preservation Act, which

would allow the town to create a community preservation fund.

- 1.1.4. Consider expanding Preservation Restrictions on historic resources.
- 1.1.5. Develop an educational program in coordination with the Historical Commission and Historical Society for property owners of identified historic buildings on the significance of their properties and best practices for maintaining older buildings.

STRATEGY 1.2: IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE BARRE'S SIGNIFICANT HISTORIC AND CULTURAL SITES.

Not only does Barre boast an impressive stock of historic buildings and physical structures but also has a deep historical narrative and cultural artifacts that are worthy of protection and resident awareness.

- 1.2.1. Place the Prince Walker Burial Ground under a Preservation Restriction and transfer ownership to the Department of Conservation and Recreation.
- 1.2.2. Assist the Historical Commission in its work to register the Prince Walker Burial Ground under the National Register of Historic Places.
- 1.2.3: Create historical wayfinding signage throughout Barre and work with the Historical Society and Historical Commission to highlight Barre's past to contribute to a sense of town identity.
- 1.2.4. Identify funding sources to manage and care for veteran memorial sites in disrepair.
- 1.2.5. Adopt a scenic overlay district to protect the scenic vistas and stunning views on the identified scenic roads in town. See Strategy 2.3.7 in Economic Development.



GOAL 2: PRESERVE GREEN SPACES IN TOWN.

Protecting open undeveloped land in Barre will help ensure both residents and visitors enjoy the benefits of being in and around green space and will help to make Barre more resilient in the face of increasing weather events.



STRATEGY 2.1: MAINTAIN AND PROTECT OPEN SPACE

- 2.1.1. Create open space prioritization criteria to identify and evaluate current land parcels with the Open Space Committee.
- 2.1.2. Assess whether conservation restrictions or DCR interventions are necessary for preservation purposes on identified priority areas.
- 2.1.3. Hire a town Conservation Agent. See strategy 2.3.5 in the Land Use chapter.
- 2.1.4. Host information sessions in coordination with Barre's DCR Service Forestry District representative to discuss the process of enrolling in the Chapter 61 tax program.
- 2.1.5. Work with community partners, like the East Quabbin Alliance for a Healthy Community, to publish walking trail guides for public use

and enjoyment of green space.

- 2.1.6. Find available funding to create a feasibility study on the impact of pollutants in the water at Powder Mill Pond.
- 2.1.7. If proven feasible, create and act on a plan for remediating Powder Mill Pond, opening Miller's Beach for public use and water recreation, and creating boat access for recreation and emergencies.
- 2.1.8. If pollutant remediation at Powder Mill Pond is not feasible, create beach area prioritization criteria to identify sites within Barre for future water recreation.



GOAL 3: PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABILITY IN TOWN

In the face of a changing climate and increased intensity of weather events, the town can take the following steps to ensure it has undertaken necessary planning to weather future storms and hazards.

STRATEGY 3.1: ADDRESS WILDLIFE AND INVASIVE SPECIES CONCERNS

- 3.1.1. Conduct a town-wide invasive species survey to identify priority areas that need continued management and observation.
- 3.1.2: Develop a comprehensive invasive species management program, providing education and resources to landowners for invasives removal and management. Partner with state agencies such as the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Mass Audubon, and/or the East Quabbin Land Trust for coordinated eradication efforts.
- 3.1.3. Work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District to manage invasive vegetation outbreaks at the Barre Falls Dam.
- 3.1.4. Explore creating a pollinator-friendly policy or bylaw that can

limit or reduce dangerous pesticides that negatively impact bees or other pollinators.

STRATEGY 3.2: MOVE TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE AND GREEN ENERGY

- 3.2.1. Encourage energy efficiency for town-owned buildings; work with CMRPC liaisons for the Green Communities program to apply for grant funding for retrofits and HVAC optimization if necessary.
- 3.2.2. Conduct a feasibility assessment to evaluate energy impacts of installing rooftop and canopy solar panels on town buildings or over paved spaces, like parking lots.
- 3.2.3. Explore opportunities to advance Low Impact Development features, such as bioswales, permeable pavement, and rain gardens,

to areas that have been identified as flood-prone, particularly around the South Barre neighborhood and residences along Route 32 which is situated near existing wetlands. See strategy 2.3.2 in the Land Use chapter.

- 3.2.4. Keep informed about evolving policies and legislation related to Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and take timely, practical steps to minimize and mitigate any risks these developments may pose to the town.
- 3.2.5. Revisit the 2019 Barre Hazard Mitigation Plan and assess the status of proposed projects to boost environmental resilience.
- 3.2.6. Revisit the 2019 Hazard Mitigation Plan to ensure high priority action items are completed.
- 3.2.7. Revisit the 2020 Municipal Vulnerability Plan (MVP) to ensure high priority action items are completed.

