

# Monson Master Plan

Final Report  
January 2004



*“In 1701 Monson, originally named Brimfield, was included in the area laid out. It was made a district with local self-government on April 25, 1760. On August 23, 1775 Monson became a town with representation in the legislature.”*

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# Monson Master Plan

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## Executive Order 418

This Master Plan was developed/held in conjunction with Massachusetts Executive Order 418 and an Interagency Work Group including the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction, the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Department of Economic Development and paid for with public funding. This Master Plan was developed in conjunction with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.



# Monson Master Plan

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# Chapter 1

## Inventory and Analysis



**Monson Master Plan**

*Final Report – January 2004*

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Introduction and History

Monson is a rapidly-growing semi-rural community located in Hampden County in south-central Massachusetts. Monson’s historic downtown—a local center for business, government, and civic life—is nestled in the valley of Chicopee Brook and surrounded by steep and rugged hills covered by forest and farms. The Town’s total land area is approximately 28,800 acres, or 45 square miles, making it one of the larger towns in Massachusetts.

Monson was originally a part of Brimfield until 1775, when it was incorporated as a separate town. The Town began as a farming and lumbering community, but evolved into an industrial town early in the 18th century, when water power from Chicopee Brook and a transportation system based on the railroad, fueled a thriving textile industry. In the past few decades, the Town’s industrial base has declined, and farming and lumbering have become more limited. At the same time, Monson has become a desirable location for new residences, especially for commuters, and portions of the Town have become more suburban in character as new development has spread out along existing public roads.

Monson is bordered by Palmer to the north, Brimfield and Wales to the east, Wilbraham and Hampden to the west and Stafford, Connecticut, to the south. Monson is 17 miles east of Springfield, 40 miles west of Worcester, 77 miles southwest of Boston and about 157 miles from New York City. The Town is within close proximity to the Massachusetts Turnpike and I-84, which offer quick and convenient access to Springfield, Hartford, and eastern Massachusetts. The New England Central Railroad runs in a north-south direction through the Town, connecting New Haven, Connecticut to Burlington, Vermont. Amtrak service is provided on this rail line, but there is no passenger service to Monson.

Since 1980, Monson’s population has grown at an average rate of about 7% per decade, which translates on average to about 60 new persons per year (see **Table 1-1**). Over the past several years, an average of about 35-45 new single-family houses have been constructed each year.

**Table 1-1  
Historical Population Growth in Monson, 1960-2000**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Change from Previous</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1960	6,712	-	-
1970	7,355	643	9.5%
1980	7,315	-40	-0.5%
1990	7,776	461	6.3%
2000	8,359	583	7.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1960 – 2000.

The recent upsurge in population and residential development carries with it several challenges for Monson. First, new development is beginning to alter Monson’s vanishing rural character, reduce the amount of farmland and un-fragmented forest within the Town, and affect the Town’s natural resources.



Most of the new residential development is so-called “Approval-Not-Required” (M.G.L. Ch. 41 §81P) development of single houses along existing roadsides, which the Town has very limited authority to regulate. Second, the recent population growth and dispersed development pattern have increased demand for public services and facilities such as schools and road maintenance. These demands may require the Town to seek new revenue sources. Finally, most of the newly developed housing consists of relatively expensive single-family homes. The Town’s socio-economic profile is therefore becoming more stratified, while housing opportunities for low and moderate-income families, as well as those seeking smaller housing units, remain limited.

## 1.2 Demographic Information

The following demographic information comes from the most recent and accurate local, regional, state and federal data sources. U.S. Census data for all of the topics discussed in this section are from the year 2000, except for the Journey-to-Work information, which is from 1990. Although the focus is on Monson, data on adjacent communities and the region are included for comparative purposes so that a sense of Monson’s role in the region may present a more comprehensive picture. Monson is a part of Pioneer Valley region, which also includes Agawam, Amherst, Belchertown, Blandford, Brimfield, Chester, Chesterfield, Chicopee, Cummington, East Longmeadow, Easthampton, Goshen, Granby, Granville, Hadley, Hampden, Hatfield, Holland, Holyoke, Huntington, Longmeadow, Ludlow, Middlefield, Montgomery, Northampton, Palmer, Pelham, Plainfield, Russell, South Hadley, Southampton, Southwick, Springfield, Tolland, Wales, Ware, West Springfield, Westfield, Westhampton, Wilbraham, Williamsburg, and Worthington.

### 1.2.1 Population

As shown in **Table 1-2**, Monson’s population in 2000 was 8,359 people, an increase of 583 persons, or 7.5%, from 1990. This growth rate is much higher than the increases in Hampden County, the Pioneer Valley region or the Commonwealth. The U.S. Census population figures for Monson include residents of the Monson Developmental Center located on Upper Palmer Road. This facility housed 517 residents in 1990 but only 228 residents in 2002.

**Table 1-2**  
**1990 – 2000 Population Change**

	1990	2000	% Change
<b>Monson</b>	7,776	8,359	7.5%
<b>Hampden County</b>	456,310	456,228	0%
<b>Pioneer Valley Region</b>	602,878	608,479	0.9%
<b>Massachusetts</b>	6,016,425	6,349,097	5.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000.

### 1.2.2 Households

**Table 1-3** compares Monson’s household characteristics to those of the region and the state as a whole. The number of households in Monson increased from 2,642 in 1990 to 3,095 in 2000, an increase of 17%. This rate of growth is much greater than that for Hampden County (3%), the Pioneer Valley region (5%) or the state (8.7%). In addition, the number of households grew much faster than the overall population,

indicating that Monson is following state and national trends of shrinking household size. This trend is generally attributed to more elderly households, more divorced or separated families, and more single people living alone.

**Table 1-3  
Household Characteristics, 1990-2000**

	<b>Monson</b>	<b>Hampden County</b>	<b>Massachusetts</b>
<b>1990</b>			
<b>Number of Households</b>	2,642	169,906	2,247,110
<b>% Family Households</b>	75.9%	69.9%	67.4%
<b>% Non-Family Households</b>	24.1%	30.1%	32.6%
<b>Average Household Size</b>	2.75	2.60	2.58
<b>2000</b>			
<b>Number of Households</b>	3,095	175,288	2,443,580
<b>% Family Households</b>	71.2%	66.0%	64.5%
<b>% Non-Family Households</b>	28.8%	34.0%	35.5%
<b>Average Household Size</b>	2.63	2.52	2.51

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000.

In both 1990 and 2000, Monson had a much higher proportion of family households than the region or the Commonwealth, although this proportion dropped from 75.9% in 1990 to 71.2% in 2000. Of the family households in 2000, 1,793 or 57.9% of total households were married-couple families. Of Monson's 891 non-family households (28.8% of households) in 2000, the majority (705) consisted of single-person households. Of the single-person households, 283 households, or 9.1% of the total, consisted of single persons 65 years or older living alone.

### **1.2.3 Income Distribution and Level of Poverty**

Monson's household income distribution in 2000 was generally comparable to state averages, although Monson had a larger middle class and fewer extremes of rich or poor than the Commonwealth as a whole. The median household income in Monson in 2000 was \$52,030, while the Commonwealth's median was \$50,502 (see **Table 1-4**).

**Table 1-4  
Household Income Distribution, 2000**

	<b>Households</b>	<b>Monson %</b>	<b>Massachusetts %</b>
<b>Less than \$10,000</b>	164	5.3%	8.8%
<b>\$10,000 - \$24,999</b>	424	13.7%	15.8%
<b>\$25,000 - \$49,999</b>	847	27.3%	24.9%
<b>\$50,000 - \$74,999</b>	747	24.1%	20.1%
<b>\$75,000 - \$99,999</b>	510	16.5%	12.8%
<b>\$100,000 or more</b>	407	13.1%	17.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

Of the persons for whom poverty status was determined,<sup>1</sup> the number of persons in Monson in 1999 whose household income was below the poverty level was 450, or 5.6%. This figure is considerably lower than the comparable figure for Massachusetts (9.3%) or Hampden County (14.7%).

#### 1.2.4 Level of Educational Attainment

**Table 1-5** compares the educational attainment of Monson residents to that of Hampden County and Massachusetts residents. Overall, Monson’s residents have completed more higher education than the Hampden County average, but less than the Massachusetts average.

**Table 1-5  
Educational Attainment, 2000**

	<b>Persons 25 years and over</b>	<b>% Completed High School</b>	<b>% Completed Some College</b>	<b>% Completed 4 Years College</b>	<b>% Completed &gt;4 Years College</b>
<b>Monson</b>	<b>5,689</b>	<b>83.3</b>	<b>50.6</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>7.6</b>
Hampden County	295,837	79.2	46.6	20.5	7.7
Massachusetts	4,273,275	84.8	57.5	33.2	13.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

#### 1.2.5 Other Demographic Characteristics

##### Age Characteristics

**Table 1-6** compares Monson’s age distribution for the years 1990 and 2000. During this time, the Town’s age distribution remained relatively constant, with the exception of a proportional decrease in the 20-24 and 25-44 age groups and a proportional increase in the 45-64 age group. During this period, the 45-64 age group grew by 588 persons (a 37.4% increase), while the 20-24 age group decreased by 82 persons (an 18.5% decrease).

**Table 1-6  
Monson Age Distribution, 1990 and 2000**

	<b>1990</b>		<b>2000</b>		<b>1990-2000 Change</b>	
	<b>Persons</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Persons</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Persons</b>	<b>%</b>
Under 5	488	6.3	522	6.2	34	7.0
5-19	1,603	20.6	1,792	21.4	189	11.8
20-24	435	5.6	353	4.2	-82	-18.9
25-44	2,763	35.5	2,617	31.3	-146	-5.3
45-64	1,572	20.2	2,160	25.8	588	37.4
65 & over	915	11.8	915	10.9	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,776</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>8,359</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>7.5%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000.

<sup>1</sup> Poverty status is determined for all persons except institutionalized persons, persons in military group quarters, persons in college dormitories and unrelated individuals under 15 years old.

In the future, Monson’s age distribution is likely to change from decade to decade as generations age. However, the overall trend in Monson, as is the case nationwide, is toward an older population. Age cohort projections in **Table 1-7** prepared by the Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER) reflect this trend. Based on the MISER projects, one may infer that Monson’s older age groups will continue to increase while the school age population may not grow or grow as rapidly as the other age cohorts.

**Table 1-7  
Projected Age Distribution, 2010**

<b>Age Cohort Years</b>	<b>2000 % in Age Cohort</b>	<b>2010 % in Age Cohort</b>
Under 5	6.2	5.3
5-19	21.4	18.5
20-24	4.2	5.5
25-44	31.3	26.4
45-64	25.8	32.6
65 & over	10.9	11.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research.

**Race Characteristics**

Monson’s population has historically been relatively racially homogenous, and has remained so in 2000, when 97.7 % of the total population was white (see **Table 1-8**).

**Table 1-8  
Monson Race Distribution, 2000**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
White	8,166	97.7
Black or African American	56	0.7
American Indian and Alaska Native	19	0.2
Asian	26	0.3
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	1	0
Other race	19	0.2
Two or more races	72	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,359</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

**1.2.6 Commuting Patterns and Travel Modes**

**Table 1-9** identifies the residence locations of those working in Monson and the workplace destinations of Monson residents in 1990, the most recent date for which such information is available at the time of this writing. **Table 1-10** identifies the transportation modes used by Monson residents commuting to work.

## Residence Locations and Workplace Destinations

**Monson Workers** - In 1990, individuals employed in Monson came primarily from within Monson (48.6%) or from one of its neighboring communities including Palmer (20.6%), Springfield (5.3%), Ware (3.1%), Ludlow (2.8%), Wilbraham (2.6%) and Brimfield (2.4%). Employees from other Massachusetts communities contributed another 12.4% to the Town's employment base, while a small number (2.2%) commuted in from Connecticut.

**Monson Residents** - Of the Town's resident labor force in 1990, the greatest number worked in Monson (26.1%) while 17.5% worked in Springfield and another 14.4% worked in Palmer. Many Monson residents worked in nearby communities, including East Longmeadow (5.3%), Wilbraham (3.3%), Chicopee (2.7%) and West Springfield (2.4%). Very few residents commuted to Worcester. Approximately 17.5% of Monson residents commuted to other Massachusetts communities for work. Of the 10.8% of the population that did not work in Massachusetts, 9.4% worked in Connecticut, while 1.4% worked in other states (New York, California, Florida, and Mississippi).

**Table 1-9  
Top Destinations of Persons Traveling To or From Monson for Work, 1990**

<b>Place of Residence of Monson Employees</b>	<b># of Persons</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Workplace of Monson Residents</b>	<b># of Persons</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Monson</b>	<b>931</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>Monson</b>	<b>931</b>	<b>26.1</b>
Palmer	394	20.6	Springfield	627	17.5
Springfield	101	5.3	Palmer	516	14.4
Ware	60	3.1	East Longmeadow	188	5.3
Ludlow	53	2.8	Wilbraham	118	3.3
Wilbraham	49	2.6	Chicopee	96	2.7
Brimfield	45	2.4	West Springfield	87	2.4
Other MA communities	238	12.4	Other MA communities	626	17.5
Connecticut	43	2.2	Connecticut	335	9.4
Other States	0	0.0	Other States	49	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,914</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,573</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990.

## Journey-to-Work Mode of Travel

In 1990, 84.2% of all employed Monson residents drove alone to their workplace, 8.7% of workers traveled to work via carpool, and 5.9% either walked to work or worked at home. Of the remaining 1.2%, 0.6% took public transportation while 0.6% traveled to work via "other means." As shown in **Table 1-10**, Monson residents relied more heavily on single-occupancy vehicles than residents of Hampden County or the Commonwealth as a whole.

**Table 1-10**  
**Journey-to-Work Mode of Travel for Monson Residents, 1990**

<b>Mode of Travel</b>	<b>Monson</b>		<b>Hampden</b>	<b>Massachusetts</b>
	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>County %</b>	<b>%</b>
Drive Alone	3,080	84.2	79.4	72.1
Carpool	318	8.7	11.5	10.7
Public Transit	23	0.6	2.5	8.3
Other Means	21	0.6	0.8	1.0
Walked/Worked at Home	214	5.9	5.7	7.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,573</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990.

## 2. Land Use

Land use refers to the pattern of residential, commercial, industrial and public development, as well as agriculture, forest and other open lands within a community. Land use forms the basis for comprehensive planning and largely determines the need for environmental protection measures, public facilities, and transportation infrastructure. This section provides an overview Monson’s existing land use, as well as an assessment of how land use is likely to change in the future under the Town’s current regulatory framework.

### 2.1 Existing Land Use

The following land use information is derived from several sources. MassGIS, the state agency responsible for producing and distributing geographic data, determined land use for Monson based on 1985 aerial photographs of the Town. In 1999, this information was updated based on 1999 aerial photographs as part of the “buildout analysis” conducted by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (see **Section 2.3**). Existing land use is shown in **Map 2-1** and summarized in **Table 2-1**

**Table 2-1**  
**Monson Land Use, 1985 and 1999**

Land Use <sup>a</sup>	1985		1999	
	Acres	%	Acres	%
Agriculture	2,581	9.0	2,493	8.7
Forest	22,201	77.0	21,800	75.6
Wetlands <sup>b</sup>	166	0.6	166	0.6
Recreation	163	0.6	163	0.6
High-Density Residential <sup>c</sup>	100	0.3	100	0.3
Low-Density Residential <sup>c</sup>	2,209	7.7	2,698	9.4
Commercial	51	0.2	51	0.2
Industrial	87	0.3	87	0.3
Open and Urban Open	726	2.5	726	2.5
Water	179	0.6	179	0.6
Other	352	1.2	352	1.2
<b>Total Area</b>	<b>28,815</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>28,815</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<sup>a</sup> MassGIS classifies land use in Massachusetts using a 21-category classification system. This system has been simplified to 11 categories in this table, and is based on aggregation of the following Land Use Codes (LUCs): Agriculture = LUCs 1, 2, 21; Forest = LUC 3; Wetlands = LUC 4; Recreation = LUCs 7, 8, 9; High-Density Residential = LUCs 10, 11; Low-Density Residential = LUCs 12, 13; Commercial = LUC 15; Industrial = LUC 16; Open and Urban Open Land = LUC 6, 17; Water = LUC 20; Other = LUC 5 (mining), 18 (transportation), 19 (waste disposal).

<sup>b</sup> This category includes unforested wetlands only. Forested wetlands are included in the “forest” land use.

<sup>c</sup> High-density residential includes multi-family housing as well as single-family houses on ¼-acre or smaller lots. Low-density residential is defined as houses on lots larger than ¼-acre.

Sources: MassGIS (1985) and PVPC buildout study (1999).

### 2.1.1 Land Use Patterns

Each of the major land uses in Monson is described and analyzed below:

#### Developed Land Uses

- € **Residential:** Monson has experienced significant residential growth in recent years. Residential land use has increased 21% from 2,309 acres in 1985 to 2,798 acres in 1999, reflecting the construction of about 600 new residential units during this period. Most of these newly developed residential areas consist of low-density Approval-Not-Required (ANR)<sup>1</sup> development along public roads, and this type of development is expected to continue in the future. There are very few subdivisions in the Town because of the availability of land for ANR development.
- € **Commercial:** Commercial land uses occupy only 0.2% of Monson’s land area. Most of these commercial uses exist in the downtown and along Route 32 and Route 20.
- € **Industrial:** Industrial land occupies only 0.3 % of Monson’s land area. Most of the industrial uses are located along Route 32 near the downtown. In recent years, several companies have closed their operations or moved out of the Town, leaving vacant industrial buildings in several locations.

#### Undeveloped Land Uses

- € **Agriculture:** This category includes cropland, pasture, orchards, and nurseries. Most of the land identified as agriculture is enrolled in the state’s Chapter 61A tax abatement program, which means that they are actively being farmed.<sup>2</sup> Major crops and products from Monson’s farms include dairy products, hay, and some row crops. See **Section 4.4** for more information on agriculture in Monson.
- € **Forest:** Forest covers almost 76% of the Town’s land area. Approximately 38 privately owned parcels totaling approximately 3,000 acres are enrolled in the Chapter 61 tax abatement program, which means that they are actively managed for forestry.
- € **Wetlands:** The 166 acres of wetlands identified in **Table 2-1** includes only unforested wetlands bordering streams and ponds and occupying isolated pockets of land throughout the Town. An additional 800 or so acres of forested wetlands are included in the “forest” land use category.
- € **Recreation:** This category includes playgrounds, golf courses, and other similar facilities, but excludes parks, which are included in the following category. See **Section 4.2** for a detailed description of the Town’s recreation facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Under Massachusetts State Law (M.G.L. Ch. 41 §81P), a lot with frontage on a public road can be developed without Planning Board review, so long as it has the minimum area and frontage required by zoning and meets other basic health and safety standards. This so-called “Approval-Not-Required” (ANR) or “Form A” development constitutes most of the new residential development in Monson. ANR development can rapidly alter the character of a community by developing rural roadsides—that part of a community that is most visible to residents or visitors driving through the Town. The other main type of residential development (besides ANR development) is “subdivision” development. Under this development method, a developer must seek Planning Board review and approval to create a new roadway to access the interior of a lot that does not have frontage on an existing public street.

<sup>2</sup> More land in Monson is enrolled in the Chapter 61A program (Table 4-1) than is shown as “agriculture” in the land use table (Table 2-1) because Chapter 61A land can include the nonproductive portions of farms, such as forests and wetlands.



- € **Open and Urban Open:** This category includes utility corridors, cemeteries, parks, and other unforested, undeveloped lands. Both public and private lands are included in this category.
- € **Other:** This miscellaneous category includes land used for mining activities (including gravel pits), waste disposal, and transportation.

### 2.1.2 Land Use Trends Since 1985

As development spreads outward from the Springfield, Worcester, and Boston Metropolitan areas, the Central Massachusetts region will be faced with continued growth pressures. A closer examination of this growth reveals several trends that are important to note when planning for future growth. Specifically:

- € **Low-density residential development along roadsides is the predominant form of new development.** Consistent with the Town’s 60,000 square foot minimum lot size for single-family homes in the Rural Residential District, almost all new residential development in Monson is low density. In 1985, each Monson resident occupied an average of 0.31 acres of land.<sup>3</sup> However, since 1985, each new resident has occupied an average of 0.44 acres of land.<sup>4</sup> There are very few residential subdivisions in the Town; rather, almost all new growth is from single-family “Approval-Not-Required” development along existing public roads.
- € **Agricultural lands and forests are being lost.** Since 1985, the Town has lost about 401 acres of forest and 88 acres of agricultural land. These rates may not seem significant for now; however, the development pattern along public roads, especially in scenic areas, has already significantly affected the Town’s visual character. In addition, new development has fragmented many farm and forest areas, making them less useful or viable for agricultural production, wildlife habitat, or other uses that require large, contiguous areas of undeveloped land.
- € **Other land uses are relatively stable.** Recreation, commercial and industrial land uses have remained relatively constant over the last 15 years.

## 2.2 Existing Land Use Laws

Zoning and other land use laws constitute a town’s “blueprint” for its future. Monson’s leaders and residents should expect that the Town’s existing land use will continue to look more and more like its zoning map over time. As part of this process, existing developed areas may also be redeveloped in a way that is more in conformance with the Town’s zoning. While Monson’s ultimate “buildout” may be several decades away, one important purpose of planning is to ensure that the Town is headed in a direction that is consistent with its vision for the future. This requires a careful examination of Monson’s existing Zoning Bylaw and its implications for future growth.

Monson’s existing land use laws are described below. The buildout analysis presented in **Section 2.3** discusses the implications of development according to these laws. Monson has seven base zoning districts and three overlay districts. The base districts define the allowed uses and dimensional requirements in all parts of the Town, while the overlay districts provide for additional restrictions in

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<sup>3</sup> Acres per resident is defined as the number of residents in the Town divided by the number of acres developed for residential use, and is used as an index to determine the overall residential density.

<sup>4</sup> Density for the new residents is defined as the net increase of new residents divided by the net increase in newly developed residential area since 1985.

certain areas. The Zoning Bylaw also defines areas for cemeteries and schools separately from these districts. These districts are described below, and are shown in **Map 2-2**.

**Table 2-2  
Monson Zoning Districts**

<b>District</b>	<b>Intended Uses</b>	<b>Area (Acres)</b>	<b>% of Town</b>
Residential Village	Higher-density residential	1,747	6.1
Rural Residential	Rural uses, lower-density residential	23,445	81.9
Central Commercial	Consumer goods/services, offices	78	0.3
General Commercial	Consumer goods/services, offices	228	0.8
Commercial Recreation	Commercial fishing, ski area, trailer/camping ground	161	0.6
Industrial	Research labs, light industry, wholesale, storage	793	2.8
Reserved Land	Conservation land	2,083	7.3
<i>Other Area: Cemetery</i>	<i>Cemetery</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>0.2</i>
<i>Other Area: School</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>0.2</i>
<b>Total Area</b>		<b>28,637<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Town of Monson zoning map.

### **2.2.1 Base Zoning Districts**

Table 1 in the Monson Zoning Bylaw defines the allowed and conditional uses in each zoning district, while Table 2 defines the dimensional requirements. In addition to the allowed uses noted below and per state law that exempts these uses from most local zoning controls public or non-profit educational institutions and places of worship are allowed in all districts. Conservation land is also allowed in all districts.

#### **Residential Village District**

This district contains land near downtown and off of Upper Palmer Road, Wales Road, and Brimfield Road, heading away from downtown. Allowed uses include single-family dwellings, community centers, facilities for the elderly, agriculture, tree farms, recreation areas, fire or police stations, cemeteries, and home occupations.<sup>6</sup> Single-family dwellings may be converted into dwellings for up to four families by Special Permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). Multi-family dwellings are permitted only after Town Meeting approval and upon issuance of a Special Permit with Site Plan Approval from the ZBA.

<sup>5</sup> The difference in the total land area from that presented in **Table 2-1** is due to rounding errors and minor discrepancies in the geographic data available for the Town.

<sup>6</sup> Home occupations in Monson include a wide range of enterprises, including professional services; teaching; arts and crafts; real estate, insurance, or travel agent; barber or beauty shop; and activities related to building, trades (carpenter, etc.), landscaping and similar uses. These activities must be secondary to the use of the premises for residential purposes, provide no outward evidence of non-residential activities except for an accessory sign, and employ no more than two persons who do not live in the residence.

### Rural Residential District

This district encompasses more than 23,400 acres (82% of the Town), of which 18,098 acres are developable (approximately 92% of the Town's developable land). Allowed uses in the district include single-family houses, trailers, room rentals, fire and police stations, recreation areas, cemeteries, and home occupations. Multi-family dwellings, estate lots, housing for the elderly or handicapped, open space communities (see **Section 2.2.3**, below) and certain other uses are allowed by special permit; multi-family housing also requires Town Meeting approval.

### Central Commercial/General Commercial District

The Central Commercial District is located in the downtown area along Main Street. General Commercial Districts are located along Route 32 just outside of the downtown area and along Route 20 on the border with Palmer. Permitted uses in both districts are virtually identical, and include retail stores, banks, various office and service uses, restaurants, auto sales/repair shops, radio/electric repair shops, funeral establishments, bowling alleys, theaters except drive-in theaters, printers, medical or dental centers or laboratories, motels, wholesale trade and storage warehouses, cleaning laundry services, and home occupations. Agriculture, room rentals, municipal uses, community clubs, and cemeteries are also permitted. Fast food restaurants are prohibited in both districts.

### Commercial Recreation District

This district includes 161 acres of land located in two areas near the Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary and Brimfield State Forest. Permitted uses include wood harvesting, tree farms, commercial fishing, ski grounds, residential uses only when accessory to another permitted use, private membership clubs, and cemeteries. Most of the business uses permitted in the Central or General Commercial Districts are not allowed in this district with the exception of retail stores and bowling alleys. Theaters are permitted by special permit.

### Industrial District

This district covers 793 acres (2.8% of the Town), mostly located along the railroad north and south of downtown, with two small additional areas located off of Hovey Road and Lower Hampden Road. Permitted uses include assembly and distribution facilities, printing, research or development laboratories, lumber yards, wholesale trade and storage warehouses, commercial landing strips and heliports, and office buildings. Manufacturing, processing, fabrication, assembly and storage of materials, mechanical products or equipment as well as certain business uses are allowed by special permit from the ZBA.

### Reserved Land District

The Reserved Land District covers approximately 2,080 acres, or about 7% of the Town. This district is intended to conserve lands in public or semi-public ownership, and to limit the location and use of land and buildings under private ownership for trade, industry, agriculture, and residential purposes. Only wood harvesting, tree farming, and religious or educational facilities are permitted in this district.

## **2.2.2 Overlay Districts**

Monson's overlay districts are intended to protect natural and scenic resources by providing an additional level of protection beyond that of the underlying zoning.

### Floodplain District

The Floodplain District is defined as all lands designated as Zone A or Zone A1-30 on the Town of Monson Flood Insurance Rate Maps and the floodway boundaries delineated on the Monson Flood Boundary and Floodway Map. The district is intended to maintain the water table, protect water recharge areas, and protect against flooding by limiting uses in flood-prone areas to conservation; outdoor recreation; wildlife management areas; foot, bicycle, and horse paths; grazing and farming; forestry; nurseries; lawful pre-existing dwellings; and temporary non-residential structures. Certain uses are permitted in this district by Special Permit if appropriate flood proofing measures are taken.

### Water Supply Protection District

The Water Supply Protection District is intended to protect lands within the primary recharge area of groundwater aquifers and the watershed areas of reservoirs which now or may in the future provide public water supply. To protect surface and groundwater resources, the overlay district prohibits many noxious uses such as solid waste disposal facilities, disposal of liquid or leachable wastes, and storage of petroleum products. Commercial or industrial uses that are allowed in the underlying district may be allowed by Special Permit.

### Scenic District

The Scenic District is intended to preserve and enhance areas considered to be of natural scenic beauty such as wooded canyons, ridges and fine vistas or viewsheds. Although the Town has adopted the Scenic District Bylaw, it has not adopted a Scenic District map. Therefore, the Scenic District does not have any effect at this time. If, in the future, a map is adopted, the following uses will be prohibited within the Scenic District: surface mining, above-ground pipelines, power plants, refineries or above ground oil/gas tanks, auto sales or storage, solid waster disposal and wrecking yards.

Any new construction or establishment of any dwelling, sign or other facility that requires a building permit within the Scenic District will be subject to review by the Scenic District Review Board if any such action affects exterior appearance. These regulations provide broad discretion for the Town to review the siting and design of new development—even single-family homes—in the Scenic District. A proposal submitted under the Scenic District Review process must demonstrate that the buildings and landscaping blend into the natural terrain. Retaining walls, parking lots, and significant re-grading must be screened from view. Business uses must be conducted within structures. Variable setbacks, multiple building orientations, and other site planning techniques are also encouraged.

## **2.2.3 Other Provisions**

### Site Plan Approval

Site plan approval is intended to ensure that new development is consistent with the Town's visual and environmental character, protects property values, and provides adequate drainage and access. The review process is required for construction or exterior alteration of commercial or industrial structures, residential developments requiring approval under the Subdivision Control Law (M.G.L. Chapter 41), and the development of certain other uses noted in the Use Regulations Table of the Zoning Bylaw. Criteria for site plan approval include conformance with the Zoning Bylaw; compatible design and architectural style; adequate water supply and wastewater disposal systems; convenient and safe vehicular and

pedestrian access; protection of natural and cultural resources; appropriate screening from the public view; and minimization of burden to the Town's services and infrastructure.

### Wireless Communications Facilities Regulations

Wireless Communications Facilities Regulations were added to the Zoning Bylaw in May 2000. The bylaw establishes siting criteria and standards for wireless communication facilities. The purpose of the bylaw is to minimize the adverse impact of such facilities on adjacent properties, scenic views and the Town's character, and limit the number of such facilities by promoting shared use of existing facilities.

### Open Space Communities Bylaw

Open space residential development is a development technique whereby homes are grouped on one or more portions of a lot that are most suitable for development, in order to protect the rest of the site as common open space. Monson's Open Space Communities (OSC) Bylaw allows the development of an open space community in the Rural Residential District by Special Permit from the Planning Board. In an Open Space Community, individual house lots are smaller than the ordinary minimum zoning requirement, but no more lots are allowed than would be allowed in a conventional subdivision. The land that is preserved by the use of smaller lot sizes is dedicated as common open space to be protected from development in perpetuity. For example, if the minimum lot size ordinarily required by zoning is 60,000 square feet, but the lot size is reduced to 30,000 square feet in an Open Space Community, at least 50% of the Open Space Community tract must be set aside as open space.

Open space communities can be an effective means to permanently protect open space and maintain a town's rural character while at the same time allowing for housing growth. However, OSC design can only be applied to residential subdivisions where several homes are being developed at once. As noted above, most of Monson's residential development is in the form of single-lot, Approval-Not-Required development, which is not conducive to OSC design. Mainly for this reason, Monson's OSC Bylaw has never been used. Typically, as a community develops, substantial amounts of subdivision development will not occur until most of the ANR development opportunities have already been exhausted. Therefore, while the OSC bylaw is a good tool for Monson to keep for future growth management, it is unlikely to be utilized in the immediate future.

## **2.3 Buildout Analysis**

One of the purposes of the buildout analysis is to answer the question:

*What will Monson look like if all the buildable land is developed in accordance with the current zoning?*

Answering this question is important for several reasons. First, the buildout analysis determines how much of Monson's land area is already developed, how much is legally or environmentally constrained, and how much is available for new development. Second, the buildout provides a clear picture of where Monson is headed, and can help its citizens evaluate whether the Town is headed in the right direction. If the buildout scenario is undesirable, the Town will know that it should modify its zoning to more closely resemble its desired future character. Finally, the buildout estimates the possible impact of new development in terms of its demand on municipal services, environmental resources, and transportation

infrastructure. This information can help in the fiscal and physical planning of new facilities to accommodate future development.

It should also be noted that the buildout analysis provides a picture of the ultimate (final) developed state of a town; it does not attempt to determine the rate of future development, or how quickly buildout will be reached. Because development in Monson is closely tied to regional and national market conditions, it is difficult to predict how rapidly the Town will grow. Historical rates of development, as documented above, may provide a reasonable proxy for future development rates, at least in the near term.

### 2.3.1 Buildout Methodology and Results

The buildout analysis was funded by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) and conducted by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). The buildout analysis consisted of four steps:

1. Determine the amount of developable land in Monson. This number is calculated by subtracting from the Town’s total land area all lands that are already developed or are unavailable for development for a variety of reasons.

Total Monson land area	28,815 acres
less developed & constrained land <sup>7</sup>	<u>-9,116 acres</u>
<b>= Total developable land</b>	<b>19,699 acres</b>

2. Determine the amount of developable land in each zoning district.

**Table 2-3  
Developable Land by Zoning District**

Developable land in the Residential Village District	900 acres
Developable land in the Rural Residential District	18,098 acres
Developable land in the Central Commercial District	12 acres
Developable land in the General Commercial District	90 acres
Developable land in the Commercial Recreation District	0 acres
Developable land in the Industrial District	599 acres
Developable land in the Reserved Land District <sup>8</sup>	0 acres
Developable land in the School and Cemetery Zones	0 acres
<b>Total Developable Land</b>	<b>19,699 acres</b>

3. Determine the intensity of development allowed in each zoning district under current zoning regulations. Multiply these “intensity formulas” by the total amount of buildable land in each district

<sup>7</sup> Constrained land includes protected open space, utility corridors, the Reserved Land zoning district, School and Cemetery zones, and certain lands where environmental regulations prohibit development, such as floodplains. Lands with partial environmental constraints are included in the “total developable land” figure (see **Table 2-4**).

<sup>8</sup> This district includes the State Hospital, which is not included in the buildout analysis. However, in the future, the State Hospital could be sold and developed, thus increasing the Town’s potential residential and/or commercial buildout.

to arrive at the overall residential, commercial and industrial buildout. The results of this analysis are provided in **Tables 2-4** and **2-5** and depicted graphically in **Map 2-3**.

**Table 2-4**  
**Residential Buildout Calculations**

<b>District</b>	<b>Development Constraints</b>	<b>Acreage</b>	<b>Intensity Formula (dwelling units/acre)</b>	<b>Total Buildout (dwelling units)</b>
Residential Village	No constraints	603	1.88	1,136
	Steep Slope <sup>9</sup>	207	0.94	195
	River zone <sup>10</sup>	67	0.19	13
	Wetlands <sup>11</sup>	23	0.47	11
Rural Residential	No constraints	12,915	0.60	7,726
	Steep Slope	4,141	0.30	1,239
	River zone	735	0.06	44
	Wetlands	306	0.15	46
<b>Total Residential</b>		<b>18,997</b>		<b>10,409 d.u.</b>

Source: PVPC Buildout Analysis.

<sup>9</sup> For all areas with slope greater than 15%, a “constraint factor” of 50% is applied. This means that development could only be half as intense in very hilly areas, due to environmental constraints.

<sup>10</sup> For all areas within 200 feet of a perennial river or stream, the state Rivers Protection Act applies, and a constraint factor of 90% is applied. The areas of Rivers Protection Act ("RPA") buffer zone in the above table accounted for only in the area of developable land. RPA buffer zones in the area with absolute development constraints such as protected open space and already developed land are not included in this calculation. Also within the RPA buffer, 0-100 feet buffer from the River is considered as undevelopable and 101-200 feet as developable land with constraints. Therefore, 0-100 feet RPA buffer zone is not included in this calculation.

<sup>11</sup> For all wetland areas, a constraint factor of 75% is applied. Even though wetlands themselves cannot be developed, wetlands can count toward the minimum lot size required for new development. Therefore, 25% of wetland area is shown as “developable” for the purpose of the buildout.

**Table 2-5  
Commercial and Industrial Buildout Calculations**

<b>District</b>	<b>Development Constraints</b>	<b>Developable Acres</b>	<b>Effective FAR<sup>12</sup></b>	<b>Gross Square Feet at Buildout</b>
Commercial Recreation	N/A	0	0.00	0
Central Commercial	No constraints	9.4	0.58	237,000
	Steep slope <sup>8</sup>	0.8	0.29	10,000
	River zone <sup>9</sup>	2.5	0.06	6,000
General Commercial	No constraints	66.2	0.58	1,663,000
	Steep slope	5.4	0.29	68,000
	River zone	18.7	0.06	47,000
Industrial	No constraints	315.1	0.32	4,428,000
	Steep slope	238.8	0.16	1,678,000
	River zone	32.5	0.03	46,000
	Wetlands <sup>10</sup>	13.1	0.08	45,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>702.5</b>		<b>8,228,000</b>

Source: PVPC Buildout Analysis.

- Estimate the potential impact of the buildout on public services, environmental resources, and transportation infrastructure by using pre-determined formulas.

**Table 2-6  
Summary of Potential Impacts of Buildout Development**

<b>Potential Impact Area</b>	<b>Total Impact</b>
Additional Developable Land Area (acres)	19,699
Total Additional Residential Units	10,409
Total Additional Residents	28,625
Additional Commercial/Industrial Buildout (s.f. of floor area)	8,228,000
Additional School Age Children	5,205
Total Additional Water Demand (gallons per day)	2,764,000
<i>Residential Water Consumption</i>	2,147,000
<i>Commercial and Industrial Water Consumption</i>	617,000
Additional Solid Waste (tons per year)	14,700
<i>Additional Non-Recyclable Solid Waste</i>	10,500
<i>Additional Recyclable Solid Waste</i>	4,200
Additional Roadway at Buildout (miles)	225

Source: PVPC Buildout Analysis.

<sup>12</sup> FAR (Floor-Area Ratio) is defined as the total gross square feet of building space on a lot divided by the lot area. For example, if a 10,000 square foot building is constructed on a 20,000 square foot lot, the FAR would be 0.5.



### **2.3.2 Discussion of Buildout Results**

The buildout analysis was prepared using a standard buildout methodology developed by EOE. However, determining the development capacity of a town is a somewhat inexact science, given the large number of variables involved. For example, assumptions about the ability of hilly or otherwise constrained land to be developed depends, in large part, on site-specific conditions such as whether or not the site can be accessed from a public road. Also, the buildout analysis does not consider the fact that some of Monson's already-developed land may be redeveloped in a more intensive way, particularly in the commercial and industrial districts. In addition, the State Hospital site is excluded from the buildout calculations. Development of this site could potentially create several hundred new dwelling units or other forms of development.

The buildout scenario for Monson presents several challenges and implications for future planning in the Town. Specifically:

- € The Town's buildout capacity is significantly greater than its existing population. Buildout of the Town would result in more than a fourfold increase in population, with commensurate increases in the demand for water and sewage disposal, schools and other public services, and solid waste disposal. On the other hand, Monson has grown at a rate of approximately 35-45 single-family houses per year over the past decade or so. At this rate, Monson can expect to grow by approximately 1,000 residents a decade. However, this rate of growth can change due to housing demand and economic conditions.
- € Although Monson is nowhere close to reaching its buildout, the Town's rural character will change long before it approaches buildout. In terms of community character, the development of rural roadsides often creates the most dramatic change.
- € Presently, the Town has an ample supply of vacant land for new development – almost 20,000 acres of buildable land. This means the Town will not be able to protect its open space and maintain its rural character by relying solely upon the purchase of undeveloped land for conservation purposes. Instead, land purchases must be coupled with regulatory and design tools to maintain the character of unprotected lands, some of which will, inevitably, be developed.
- € The Town has a modest amount of buildable commercial land in the Central Commercial District, which comprises much of the town center. However, there is a substantial amount of buildable land in the General Commercial District. The total commercial buildout of about 2 million square feet is enough to accommodate several large shopping areas (for example, a typical modern supermarket might be 40,000-70,000 square feet in size).
- € The Industrial District has significant amounts of unconstrained buildable land—enough to accommodate well over 4 million square feet of new industrial development.

## **2.4 Previous Studies**

The following section provides a brief summary of the various plans and studies prepared by the Town over the past several years. These studies have been adopted by the Town and should be reflected in the Town's Master Plan efforts. Many of the findings and recommendations from these studies have been incorporated into the Master Plan.

### **2.4.1 1989 Monson Growth Management Master Plan**

The Town's previous Master Plan, completed in 1989 with assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, viewed Monson as a community in transition from a rural industrial town to a suburb with a rural residential character. In the late 1980s, Monson was growing at a modest rate, and the Master Plan predicted a continuation of this trend given the Town's relatively poor highway access and the unsuitability of much of Monson's land for development (steep slopes and poor soils).

The 1989 plan identified several goals to guide the Town's future growth, many of which may still be applicable. Key goals included preserving Monson's rural character and quality of life, providing flexible development options to encourage a diversity of housing types, stabilizing existing businesses and attracting suitable new business development, and protecting Monson's scenic and natural resources. The plan suggested several new policies to achieve those goals:

- € implementing a Fair Housing Plan;
- € rehabilitating existing vacant buildings;
- € enforcing existing environmental regulations, developing new local natural resources protection bylaw(s), and cooperating with neighboring towns to develop environmental protection strategies;
- € improving mobility by expanding public transportation services and providing additional off-street parking in key areas; and
- € creating a Commercial Area Revitalization District in the Central Commercial District.

Since the adoption of the 1989 plan, the Town has designated the Central Business District as a Commercial Area Revitalization District. The Planning Board has also unsuccessfully attempted to revise several sections of the Zoning Bylaw based on the recommendations of this plan.

### **2.4.2 1999 Downtown Technical Assistance Report**

The Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI), part of the Department of Housing and Community Development, provides technical assistance to communities focusing on downtown revitalization. In 1999, 11 communities including Monson were chosen to receive technical assistance from MDI. The MDI report identified five key downtown needs, which it suggested should be integrated into a strategic downtown plan for Monson:

- € building broad based community support for the downtown revitalization effort;
- € fostering a healthy business environment;
- € developing and initiating coordinated downtown marketing, recruitment and promotion efforts;
- € preparing appropriate design guidelines and streetscape planning; and
- € improving traffic management and circulation in the area.

The report recommended that the Town assess current downtown stakeholders, partnerships and staffing; identify necessary changes; and conduct a "visioning process" to increase public awareness. Next, according to the report, the Town should prepare an overall economic profile of the area and hire a professional firm to conduct a market analysis and develop a business recruitment strategy. The report

also suggested that the Town develop a “toolbox” of funding and other programs to encourage business and property owners to invest in the downtown.

As a result of this report the Town created the Local Partnership for Economic Development. This volunteer committee continues to meet on a regular basis to review economic development options for the Town.

### **2.4.3 1999 Open Space and Recreational Plan**

The 1999 Open Space and Recreation Plan was prepared by the Town’s Open Space and Recreation Committee with assistance from the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The plan recognized the community’s desire to protect sensitive natural resources, preserve the rural character of the Town, provide recreational opportunities, develop responsibly, and make necessary capital improvements. The data, findings and recommendations of the report have been included within this Master Plan. Some of the plan’s key recommendations include:

- € adopting a scenic district map and appointing a scenic district committee in order to set a higher standard for new residential development in scenic areas;
- € providing better coordination and protection of Monson’s recreational resources, which the plan identified as excellent;
- € preparing a Master Plan to guide development into appropriate areas and away from sensitive or potentially hazardous areas;
- € conducting a groundwater protection study; and
- € developing a priority list of areas that the Town would like to acquire to preserve open space and scenic areas.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan is discussed in more detail in **Section 4.3**.

## **3. Natural and Historic Resources**

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Monson's existing natural and historic resources play a major role in defining the community's identity. The Town's forests, streams, valleys, and wildlife define its rural, natural setting, while historic buildings in the downtown and elsewhere impart a timeless charm on the community. This section describes Monson's natural and historic resources and evaluates the status of their protection based on information from previous studies, MassGIS, the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, and the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

### **3.1 Soils and Topography**

#### **3.1.1 Topography and Landscape Character**

Monson consists of a north/south oriented Y-shaped valley nestled between two prominent ridge lines. The western ridge and hills are granite intrusions that were formed several hundred million years ago by a bubble of molten rock that pushed its way to the surface but did not break through. As these igneous intrusions cooled, they formed the granitic hills that separate Monson from Wilbraham. Monson's highest peaks, such as Peaked Mountain (1,278 feet), West Hill (900 feet), and Chicopee Mountain (800 feet) are found along the western ridgeline. At the base of these formations, Monson Granite was quarried for use in many of the Town's now historic buildings. The east ridgeline, in contrast, was formed from glacial deposits composed of granite, sandstone, feldspar, and quartz. These formations were created when the glaciers retreated several thousand years ago and dropped debris gathered from distant landscapes.

Monson's valley contains smaller changes in topography such as drumlins and eskers. These features were also created by glacial deposits. For example, a drumlin, or rounded hill of glacial debris, can be found on the west side of Bethany Road; an esker, formed by a large piece of glacier breaking off and depositing its sediment load in glacial meltwater channels, can be found on the site of the Monson Sand and Gravel Company on Stafford Road.

#### **3.1.2 Soils**

Monson's historical development pattern has been affected by its geological and soil characteristics. The eastern ridge was settled first in part because of its loose stone glacial deposits. This loose subsurface made it easier to develop, drill wells, and to till the land. Vegetation was also much more abundant on this eastern ridge because of the loose composition of the soil. Small, family-owned farms still exist on the ridge along East Hill Road to the north, and on Moulton Hill Road to the south. In contrast, the western ridge was more suitable for lumbering and less suitable for farming, due to steep slopes. Development of this ridge is much more recent, and has in some instances occurred along unpaved lumber roads.

Monson's physical environment also affects recreation in an indirect way. Historically, Monson's hilly terrain has helped to discourage development. Large tracts of unbroken forest and undeveloped land still exist today. Many residents take advantage of undeveloped areas and unpaved roads and trails for numerous sports, including hunting, hiking, mountain-biking, all terrain-vehicle riding, and horseback riding.

Monson's soils relate directly to the geologic forms and slope of the landscape. The composition of the lowland and eastern ridge soils are characteristic of the glacial deposits that were left in the outwash plain of the Monson valley. The western upland soils represent glacial deposits and erosion of igneous landforms.

The valley floor is made up of different deposits of Hinkley-Merrimack-Windsor soils found in a variety of locations from nearly level terrain to steep slopes. The Hinkley-Merrimack Windsor soils are excessively well-drained, having formed in sandy and gravelly outwash plains, and often overlie aquifers. Development on top of these soils can be problematic since there is a diminished ability to filter pollution, which may drain directly into the aquifer. Monson's uplands are comprised of Scituate-Montauk-Charlton soils. These soils are found on level to very steep slopes and are well-to-moderately drained. They occur in areas of loamy and sandy glacial till, subject to a seasonal high water table after prolonged rains in the winter and spring.

## **3.2 Water Resources**

### **3.2.1 Surface Water**

#### **Ponds, Streams and Watersheds**

Monson lies within portions of three watersheds. The largest of these watershed areas is the Chicopee River watershed, which occupies approximately 77% (21,940 acres) of the Town. The Chicopee River watershed includes most of the Town's significant ponds, wetlands, and aquifers. The other watershed areas within Monson include the Connecticut River watershed (3,980 acres in Monson), and Quinebaug watershed (2,715 acres in Monson). These two watershed areas are located mainly in the southern part of the Town near the Connecticut state line.

Chicopee Brook is Monson's largest stream, and flows north to the Quaboag River. In the past, Chicopee Brook powered many of Monson's mills. The Quaboag River forms the northern boundary between Monson and Palmer. The quality of the Quaboag River has improved since the 1960s and 1970s, largely because of the abandonment of the industries and factories along the river. Compared to present standards, however, the water quality of the Quaboag is still a concern.

Monson has approximately 133 acres of surface water. The Town's surface water includes many small ponds and lakes such as Pulpit Rock Lake and Paradise Lake, in addition to an intricate network of small streams that meander through the forests to the valley.

#### **Wetlands**

There are approximately 960 acres of forested and unforested wetlands in the Town.<sup>1</sup> Wetlands are located throughout Monson's landscape in areas of poorly-drained glacial till soils that are a heterogeneous mixture of clay, silt, sand and gravel deposited by glacial ice. This unsorted layer of glacial deposits has low water permeability and therefore retains moisture. The number of streams and brooks that flow into these poorly-drained areas is also a factor in the formation of wetlands. The Cedar Swamp in Monson's southeast corner represents a unique wetland landscape feature. Cedar Swamp is owned by the Monson Conservation Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> Monson Open Space and Recreation Plan, November 1999

### **3.2.2 Groundwater Resources**

Groundwater can exist in aquifers as well as the pores within rock formations. An aquifer is a geologic formation capable of yielding significant quantities of water. Aquifers are generally found in sand and gravel deposits where pores in the soil allow water to collect. Groundwater enters the aquifer through sand and gravel soils, wetlands, and surface water bodies, and slowly percolates through the ground in a down-gradient direction.

Monson's aquifers are located primarily along Chicopee Brook area as shown in **Map 3-1**. Aquifers designated as "medium yield" and "high yield" on **Map 3-1** are based on delineations by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Medium yield aquifers are typically capable of sustaining a safe pumping rate of 100 to 300 gallons per minute (gpm), while high yield aquifers can sustain a safe pumping rate of over 300 gpm. The main aquifer recharge area in Monson lies underneath the central valley and the Hickley-Merrimack-Windsor soils.

Approximately 56 percent of the Town's residents obtain their drinking water from individual private wells. The remaining 44 percent receive water through the Town's municipal water system, which relies on three groundwater wells (see **Section 6.1**).

As required by the Department of Environmental Protection, the Town has hired a water consultant (Tighe & Bond) to delineate the Zone II aquifer recharge areas for the Town's municipal wells based on hydrogeological studies. The newly delineated Zone II areas will be added to the Town's Water Supply Protection District and submitted to Town Meeting for approval.

### **3.2.3 Water Quality Threats**

As a result of state and federal environmental laws, most "point sources" of pollution (i.e., pollution from a single discharge point) were identified and remediated over the past 10 – 20 years. Currently, the primary threat to water quality in Monson is "nonpoint source pollution," or polluted runoff. Nonpoint source pollution derives from many small, individual sources, including roads, farms, lawns and gardens, septic systems, parking lots, and other developed land uses. Nonpoint source pollution can adversely affect lakes, streams, and aquifers. Specific nonpoint source pollutants that are of concern in Monson include the following:

- € **Sediment:** Sedimentation occurs when particles of silt, soil and sand are washed from exposed construction sites, gravel operations, farms, landscaped areas, roads, and other altered areas. Sedimentation tends to increase the turbidity of lakes and streams, thus reducing its habitat and recreational value. In addition, sedimentation clogs wetlands and riparian zones, and reduces their flood storage capacity.
- € **Phosphorous and Nitrogen:** Phosphorus and nitrogen are major constituents of wastewater effluent (human wastes, detergents, etc.) as well as chemical fertilizers. Because phosphorous and nitrogen are both critical plant nutrients, increasing the amount of these chemicals in the environment can cause algae blooms, reduced levels of dissolved oxygen, and changes in aquatic and terrestrial species composition. Nitrate (a form of nitrogen commonly found in groundwater that can contaminate drinking water supplies) is also a suspected carcinogen.

- € **Metals:** Various metals are commonly found in runoff from developed land. Many metals are toxic to plants, wildlife and humans, and may also increase water treatment costs for public water supplies.
- € **Pesticides and Herbicides:** Agricultural and horticultural chemicals derive not just from farms, but from lawns, gardens, and golf courses, which may use as much or more of these compounds per acre than farms. Many pesticides and herbicides are toxic to plants and animals (including humans) other than those that they are specifically intended to kill. Some pesticides and herbicides are very persistent in the environment and tend to “bioaccumulate” in the food chain (i.e., concentrations of the toxins are magnified in carnivores, such as birds of prey).
- € **Pathogens – Bacteria and Viruses:** Biological contaminants derive from farms, urban runoff, septic systems, and improper waste disposal. These organisms can cause a host of public health problems, necessitate additional treatment for water supplies, and impair recreational resources such as swimming beaches. In addition, biological contaminants in runoff are a primary cause of closed fisheries.
- € **Salts:** Salts are used to de-ice roads and parking lots, but can have serious ecological consequences if used improperly or excessively. Often, the presence of salt will kill certain plant species, while favoring other, salt-tolerant invasive species, such as the Phragmites reed. Salts can also reduce the quality of drinking water sources.

### **3.2.4 Existing Protection for Water Resources**

Several federal, state and local environmental regulations protect freshwater resources against filling, inappropriate development, and other forms of alteration. The following are some of the most important environmental regulations that apply within Monson.

#### Wetlands Protection

Wetlands have both human and ecological importance for pollution control, flood control, storm damage protection, wildlife habitat, fisheries and groundwater supply. Wetlands in Massachusetts are regulated under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (310 CMR 10.00).

The Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act applies to activity within 100 feet of bordering wetlands (wetlands bordering ponds, streams, the ocean, and other water features) and within certain isolated wetlands. The Conservation Commission administers this law, and considers applications for activities in wetlands and buffer zones. Generally wetland alteration is allowed only in small areas when there are no feasible alternatives, and is subject to the condition that an equivalent amount of wetland must be replicated elsewhere. In wetland buffer zones, work is often allowed subject to an Order of Conditions from the Conservation Commission. Although the Conservation Commission has some discretion in deciding how much development to allow in wetlands and buffer zones, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection has the authority to override any Conservation Commission decision. The Wetlands Protection Act does *not* provide protection for many small isolated wetlands, or for vernal pools.

Many Massachusetts communities have adopted local wetlands protection bylaws to supplement the state act. The purpose of these regulations is to provide additional protection for isolated wetlands not included

in the state act, to allow greater control over proposed projects in the buffer zone, and to give greater review authority to the local Conservation Commission. Monson has not adopted a local wetlands protection bylaw.

### Rivers Protection Act

According to recent studies in the scientific literature, the area within 200 feet of the riverbank can play an important ecological role by serving as the recharge area for rivers, by providing a complementary habitat for riparian species requiring upland resources, and by allowing riparian corridors to serve as effective migration corridors for species requiring larger habitat areas.

The Massachusetts Rivers Protection Act, incorporated into the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act in 1996, regulates development within 200 feet of perennial rivers and streams (defined provisionally as those streams which appear as solid blue lines on USGS topographic maps). The act is administered by the Conservation Commission. Typically development is allowed within 100 feet of rivers only under extraordinary circumstances, but certain types of development are sometimes allowed between 100 feet and 200 feet of rivers and streams.

### Water Supply Protection District

Monson's Water Supply Protection District is an overlay district that includes all lands in Monson lying within the primary recharge area of groundwater aquifers and the watershed area for reservoirs which now or may in the future provide public water supply. In the District, certain uses that can contaminate the surface water or groundwater are prohibited or restricted.

Water supply protection areas in Monson include a Zone I—a 400 foot radius around each water supply—as well as a larger Zone II that recharges water to the well site. Maps delineating the Zone II were prepared by Tighe & Bond, the Town's water consultant, and are on file in Town Hall. In the Zone I area, virtually all land uses except conservation land are prohibited, and the Town is required to have ownership or control of these areas. Within the Zone II areas, the overlay district prohibits many noxious uses such as solid waste disposal facilities, disposal of liquid or leachable wastes, and storage of petroleum products. Commercial or industrial uses that are allowed in the underlying district may be allowed by special permit.

### On-Site Wastewater Disposal Regulations

Approximately 60 percent of the Town utilizes individual on-site wastewater disposal systems—mostly septic systems but also some older systems such as cesspools. On-site wastewater disposal systems are located mainly in the outlying rural areas of the Town. Monson does not have local regulations governing on-site systems, but the Town's Board of Health administers Title 5 of the State Environmental Code, which regulates the siting, construction, upgrade and expansion of on-site sewage treatment and disposal systems. Title 5 includes provisions for the siting of systems; standards for the design, construction and repair of conventional systems, systems with advanced treatment, and shared systems; requirements for the maintenance and inspection of systems; procedures for seeking variances; regulations related to the transport and disposal of septage; and enforcement procedures. Title 5 represents a significant limitation on where and how development may occur because it limits the construction of on-site systems to areas with permeable soils and adequate separation from the groundwater, among other criteria.



### **3.3 Habitats and Ecosystems**

#### **3.3.1 Vegetation and Habitats**

Monson's landscape is typical of the region, with large uninterrupted patches of mature second growth forests, agricultural areas consisting of crop and pasture lands, forested wetlands, and tree and shrub canopies that are fragmented from residential development. This diverse vegetation matrix is one of the Town's most valuable resources. **Map 3-2** identifies areas of forest, forested wetland, and unforested wetland habitats in Monson.

Vegetation not only provides aesthetically pleasing views and landscape diversity, but is also a critical natural resource that forms the basis for habitats and ecosystems that support natural and human communities. In addition, vegetation helps to stabilize soils and prevent erosion, contributes to groundwater infiltration, serves as a visual and noise buffer between land uses, and improves local air quality.

Approximately 21,800 acres, or 76% of Monson's total land area, is classified as forest according to 1999 land use data. This represents a 400-acre decrease from 1985 figures. The forests in the Town are diverse both horizontally and vertically, and vary from early successional to mature forests. This is primarily a result of historical land management practices such as timber harvesting and the abandonment of agricultural fields. Vertical diversity provides for many types of habitats including ground, shrub, understory, and canopy layers. Thus, a wide variety of species can be supported. Horizontally, the forests also form a diverse mosaic, which, for simplicity, can be grouped into three main categories: hardwoods such as maple, ash, oak, beech, and birch; softwoods including pine and hemlock; and mixed hardwood/softwood patches. This mosaic is another key determinant of the habitat and wildlife variety within Monson.

Pasture and agricultural lands are also important vegetated areas in Monson. These patches of grasses and crops are less important for specialized interior animal species, but they do accommodate the majority of game species, both in the fields and along their edges. Pastures also provide important habitat for many bird and insect species. These values underscore the many benefits of keeping existing farmland in production and maintaining pasture lands. Meadowlands and pastures in Monson that are not periodically cut or grazed will quickly return to forest.

In addition to their ecological values, the Monson's forests are an important visual component of the Town's scenic rural quality and its connection to the New England landscape. Walking on Monson's back roads and hiking through its forests are very enjoyable recreational experiences. The hillside roads that wind through the Town's forests offer scenic vistas and pleasant settings for excursions of any kind, whether by foot, bicycle, or car.

#### **3.3.2 Rare and Endangered Species and Habitats**

The Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) provides an inventory of rare and endangered species and their habitats throughout the Commonwealth. This program seeks to identify the habitat of plant and wildlife species that are becoming increasingly rare and are in danger of extinction.

NHESP-designated habitat areas are shown on **Map 3-2**. This map includes the following classifications:

- € **Estimated Habitat for Rare Wildlife:** These areas consist of wetland and adjacent upland habitats used by state-listed rare animal species, and are regulated under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act. Anyone proposing a project within an Estimated Habitat must undergo project review by NHESP. Fourteen separate areas in Monson are listed as Estimated Habitats for Rare Wildlife in the *1999-2001 Natural Heritage Atlas*.
- € **Priority Habitat for State-Listed Rare Species:** These areas indicate the most important habitats for *all* state-listed rare species, including both upland and wetland species, and both plant and animal species. These designations are intended for land planning purposes, and their status does not confer any protection under state law. Monson contains fifteen separate Priority Habitats, all but one of which correspond to the Estimated Habitats.
- € **Certified Vernal Pools:** Among Monson's important habitat features are vernal pools, an increasingly rare type of isolated wetland inhabited by many wildlife species, some of which are totally dependent on vernal pools for their survival. Vernal pools are small, seasonal water bodies occurring in isolated basins, which are usually wet during the spring and early summer and dry up during the later summer months. Vernal pools typically lack fish populations, making them excellent breeding habitat for many amphibian species and larval and adult habitat for many insect species, as well as other wildlife. The wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*) and all species of mole salamanders (genus *Ambystoma*) that occur in Massachusetts breed exclusively in vernal pools. Areas in the immediate vicinity of the pool also provide these species with important non-breeding habitat functions, such as feeding, shelter and overwintering sites.

Certified Vernal Pools have been inventoried by local volunteers and certified under NHESP's certification process. Potential Vernal Pools (likely vernal pool habitats) have been identified by NHESP biologists based on aerial photographs, and have been neither field-verified nor certified. Certified Vernal Pools that are located within Areas Subject to Flooding (as defined by the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act) are protected under the Wetlands Protection Act for their wildlife habitat value. However, neither state nor local law protects Certified Vernal Pools outside of Areas Subject to Flooding. Uncertified vernal pools (including Potential Vernal Pools) are also unprotected. Because vernal pools are temporary and seasonal, they can easily be destroyed through development unless they have been certified with the NHESP and have protection under the Wetlands Protection Act.

The protection of vernal pool habitat is essential for the continued survival of wildlife species that depend upon this unique type of wetland. Destruction or alteration of vernal pools is likely to have a highly adverse impact on the local (and world-wide) amphibian populations, because few if any of them will be able to find alternative breeding sites. Monson has twenty certified vernal pools located all over the Town (see **Map 3-2**).

### 3.4 Environmental Issues

Monson's 1999 Open Space and Recreation Plan identified the following environmental problems in the Town.

#### Hazardous Waste Sites

Monson has six registered contaminated sites (Brownfields), listed below in **Table 3-1**. The Town also has four hazardous waste sites, which are contaminated by abandoned hazardous materials or various chemical leaks. Some of these sites have already been cleaned up by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The 1998 Brownfields Act provides funding and other tools to clean up and revitalize contaminated properties. The main goals of the program are to foster redevelopment, capitalize on economic and environmental opportunities, and coordinate a broad array of state and local resources for reclaiming abandoned or underused contaminated properties.

**Table 3-1  
Monson Brownfield and Hazardous Waste Sites**

<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Address</b>
<b>Registered Brownfield Sites</b>	
Getty Facility	27 Palmer Road
Getty Petroleum Corporation	27 Palmer Road (Route 32)
Main Street Property	92-96 Main Street
Monson Development Center	State Avenue
Tobey Road	Tobey Road
<b>Hazardous Waste Sites</b>	
185 Moulton Hill Road	185 Moulton Hill Road
M&M Chemical	Cushman Street
Omega Chemical	21 Bliss Street
Wesson Arms	South Main Street

#### Landfills

A capped municipal landfill exists on Margaret Street. The MA Department of Environmental Quality Engineering (the predecessor to DEP) as well as the Strategic Planning for Monson Study both determined that Monson has no more acceptable sites for a landfill operation. Any potential sites would be located in the Quaboag River Watershed and in the floodplain, but the cost of the necessary liner as well as the likelihood of flooding makes these sites infeasible for landfills.

#### Erosion

The Town has areas of steep slopes located along the eastern and western ridgelines. Many of the slopes in these areas exceed 25%. Currently, because of low-density development on slopes, erosion is not a major problem. However, minor erosion occurs when steep sloping driveways under construction are washed out after a storm. In the future, increased development in steep areas could pose a major threat of erosion if the forests are removed.

Some riverbanks along portions of the Quaboag River are not adequately vegetated. Erosion is becoming a concern along sections of the river bank located off Fenton Road.

### Chronic Flooding

The Town of Monson has taken steps to protect against flood hazard by joining the National Flood Insurance Program, and by the building of the Army Corps of Engineers dam and reservoir at Conant Brook. The Town has also adopted regulations in its Zoning Bylaws regarding new development within floodplains see **Map 2-2**.

### Sedimentation

Sedimentation occurs in all of Monson's surface water bodies. During periods of heavy rain and melting, streams wash sediment into wetlands, ponds, and lakes. Over time, these water bodies will fill in with sediment, resulting in a shallower pool. Some sedimentation is already apparent at Deans Pond, located in Brimfield State Forest, making the pond less appealing for swimming.

### Development Impact

The current development trend in Monson is the construction of detached single-family housing built in a linear fashion along road frontages. This trend leads to increasing resident demand for road maintenance, in addition to changing the character of Monson visually. The impact of building more homes in the upland and steep areas will be the potential for increased runoff and erosion, due to vegetation removal, as well as the destruction and fragmentation of plant communities. Increased development may potentially threaten groundwater quality since septic systems will be built at a greater density. Drinking water in many of the upland areas comes from private wells.

## **3.5 Historic Resources**

### **3.5.1 Town History**

The hills that dominate Monson were a barrier to early agriculture and settlement. Monson was included in the Plantation of 1701 and the District of Brimfield in 1714; however, no major development occurred until the Town was established. Fifty-nine years later, the district of Monson was founded when the citizens of West Brimfield complained to the Massachusetts Bay Colony court about the difficulties of attending public worship due to the remoteness of the meeting house. On August 23, 1775, Monson was incorporated into the Massachusetts Bay Colony and was given funds to construct a Protestant Church and hire a minister. Early settlement occurred on the eastern ridge, where soil was the most suitable for agriculture. During this period, subsistence agriculture, dairy farming, and lumbering were widely practiced.

In late 18th century, Monson developed quickly due in large part to Chicopee Brook, which provided waterpower for various industries. During this time, the textile industry and granite mining were major industries in the Town. The building of the Boston/Albany railroad in 1839 and the New London Railroad in 1850 spurred further industrial development in Monson. These industries attracted new residents including Irish, Polish, and Italian immigrants seeking employment. The booming economy also attracted and created several millionaires.

The Town of Monson maintained a strong commitment to education and social services. The Monson Academy, founded in 1804, gained renown as a private preparatory school. The school merged with Wilbraham Academy in the late 1970s and moved to the Wilbraham campus.

The period of economic prosperity in the 19th century helped define the visual character of the Town center. A larger and more diverse population resulted in the construction of new houses, churches, mills, civic buildings, and commercial structures. Many of these structures still exist today. Also, an affluent resident contributed a 148 acre park near Monson's town center in 1883. The Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary donated by Arthur Norcross was established during the 1930s and still exists in the southeastern corner of the Town.

Monson is still home to a few specialty industries; however, many manufacturing companies closed during the early 20th century. Today, its rural atmosphere and scenic landscape attracts new residents and housing development and the Town has become more suburban in character with low-density single-family housing development, scattered throughout.

### **3.5.2 Historic Sites & Areas**

The Town has many distinctive historic structures, many of which have been identified and registered with the local Monson Historical Society. These structures, in addition to the local landscape, provide a rich cultural heritage for the Town. Many of the structures were built of Monson granite, quarried by the Flynt family at the turn of the century. The following sections describe several of the Town's historic buildings and districts.

#### Historic Buildings

- € **Hillside Cemetery Arch:** This large arch is located on the corner of Main and Mills Street and hewn of Monson granite. The arch was presented to the Town in 1897 as a gift from Mrs. Harlan Page in remembrance of her family.
- € **Monson Free Library:** The library, located at 2 High Street, is a stout structure constructed of intricately carved Monson granite. The library was presented in 1880 as a gift of Mrs. Carrie Lyon in memory of her father. The building is in the Gothic style popular at the time.
- € **Universalist Unitarian Church:** This church, located at 177 Main Street, was carved of local Monson granite in the Romanesque Gothic style. The building was built in 1835 by Mr. Horace Moulton and has had several additions since the original construction.
- € **Memorial Hall:** Memorial Hall is located at 198 Main Street and was built of Monson granite in the Gothic style. The hall was constructed by Mr. Rice M. Reynolds in the early 1880s to commemorate the veterans of the Civil War, and served as the town hall for many years. It is still used for a number of community events.
- € **Silver Street Chapel:** This chapel is located on Silver Street and also referred to as the Third Congregational Church. This structure was constructed in 1898. It is an elaborate wood frame building in the Romanesque Revival style.

- € **The Monson Academy Buildings:** These buildings are located at the corner of Main Street and Ely Road, and were used by Monson & Wilbraham Academy (known then as Monson Academy) until the 1960s. Now abandoned, several buildings from the original Monson Academy still remain, including the Holmes Gymnasium, a very fine brick and terra-cotta Queen Anne building (1900), and Cushman Hall, a three-story Georgian Revival brick building laid in Flemish bond with tar-dipped headers (1911).
- € **William Norcross Tavern:** This building is located at 14 Cushman Street and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This two-story clapboard structure is in the Colonial style and currently used as an apartment building.
- € **Ellis, Cushman and American Fay Mills:** These turn of the century mill buildings are located along Chicopee Brook.
- € **South Monson School:** The South Monson School building was built in 1916. This red brick, two-story building has Beaux Arts classical details. Previously, the building was occupied by a gun finishing business. A number of environmental issues exist on the site. The Town now has control of the property and has investigated the environmental issues. Monson's Local Partnership for Economic Development is actively exploring redevelopment options for this site.
- € **Monson Developmental Center:** The Monson Developmental Center property is located at 200 State Avenue and listed as a National Register Multiple Property Submission. The center is still used as a state hospital serving developmentally disabled clients. The property contains approximately 40 buildings built between the late 19th century and mid 20th century and other structures and features such as sheds, a recreation pavilion, a cemetery, and a bridge.
- € **Saint Patrick's Church** – Saint Patrick's Catholic Church is located on Green Street. The church was built in 1863 of Monson Granite and is of Gothic architecture. It was first a mission of Ware, then of Palmer, and in 1878 became a separate parish.

### Historic District

The Monson Center Historic District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This district is a linear district containing nine buildings, one structure, and two associated objects along a one-block section of Main Street. The buildings range in date of construction from the 1800s to 1910s, but most date from Monson's heyday from 1865 to 1915. The buildings are generally of two-story, wood frame construction sided with clap boards or shingles. Dominant buildings include the Universalist Unitarian Church, Memorial Hall, and Noble Block, which is the best preserved example of a wood-frame commercial building in Monson.

### **3.5.3 Existing Historic/Cultural Resource Protections**

The Monson Historical Commission and local volunteers have been and continue to be committed to protecting the Town's unique historic heritage. The Commission continues to identify historic properties, oversees Memorial Hall, and serves as a historic resource to the community.

Listing on the State Register of Historic Places or on a local historic inventory provides some amount of protection for historic resources. Projects that affect listed historic properties may be required to undergo review by the Massachusetts Historical Commission and/or the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act

(MEPA). However, despite this review most privately-owned historic structures are not ultimately protected from demolition or alteration.

The Monson Historical Commission maintains a registry of over 200 other structures of historical note in the Town; however, the Town does not have any local regulations to protect these historic resources.

## 4. Open Space, Agriculture, and Recreation

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Monson is defined in large part by its open space – dairy and vegetable farms, hills and forests, and streams and ponds. Open space refers to undeveloped land use for farming, forestry, recreation, or other uses. Open space can be permanently protected, meaning that it is legally protected from being developed in perpetuity, or it can be temporarily protected or unprotected, meaning it could be developed in the future. This section provides an overview of Monson’s existing open spaces, recreational lands, and agriculture industry. In addition, this section discusses the actions and initiatives that the Town has conducted and considered with regard to open space and recreation.

### 4.1 Open Space Inventory

Although most of Monson’s landscape consists of open space including agricultural, forest and recreation land, very little of this open space is permanently protected. The following subsections summarize public and private open space lands in Monson (see **Table 4-1** and **Map 4-1**).

#### 4.1.1 Public Land

The Town of Monson owns 859 acres of open space, including 196 acres of conservation land, 230 acres of recreation land and 433 acres of other unprotected open space. (The Town owns additional property that is not included in the open space inventory because it is developed with municipal facilities.) Of this land, only the 196 acres of conservation land is considered permanently protected, while the remaining 663 acres could be developed in the future if Town Meeting so decided.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns approximately 917 acres in Monson, including 267 acres of protected open space and 650 acres of unprotected land. The protected open space consists of land in the Brimfield State Forest, which stretches into Brimfield and Wales. The Monson Developmental Center comprises the 650 acres of state-owned unprotected open space. This land offers some outdoor recreational opportunities, such as hiking and cross-country skiing, but is underutilized by the residents of Monson. Although a portion of the property is still being used for state hospital purposes, it is possible that this property could be sold and developed for other purposes in the future.

The Town recently acquired 62 acres of conservation land (included in **Table 4-1**), which was purchased with matching funds from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services. These recent acquisitions include:

- € **Cedar Swamp Road (23 acres):** This parcel lies on the southerly property line of Cedar Swamp Conservation Area. Whereas access to the Conservation Area was previously limited, this property provides access to the swamp via a carriage road and a parking area suitable for 4 to 6 vehicles.
- € **Silver Street (39 acres):** This parcel is located in the northwest section of Town just south and west of Twelve Mile Brook. The property was previously divided into two large (15 and 24 acre) residential house lots but was never developed. The property contains a pond and wetlands.



**Table 4-1  
Protected and Unprotected Open Space in Monson**

<b>Owner/Manager</b>	<b>Number of Parcels</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>% of Town</b>	<b>% of Open Space</b>
<b>Permanently Protected Open Space</b>				
Town of Monson	15	196.4	0.7	1.0
State of Massachusetts	6	267.3	1.0	1.4
Private Protected Land <sup>a</sup>	36	1,997.9	7.2	10.6
<b>Permanently Protected Open Space Subtotal</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>2,461.6</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>13.0</b>
<b>Temporarily Protected Open Space</b>				
Chapter 61 (Forestry) Land	39	1,654.8	6.0	8.8
Chapter 61A (Agriculture) Land	48	2,994.8	10.8	15.8
Chapter 61B (Recreation) Land	33	1,459.8	5.3	7.7
<b>Temporarily Protected Open Space Subtotal</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>6,109.4</b>	<b>22.1</b>	<b>32.3</b>
<b>Unprotected Open Space</b>				
Town of Monson Recreation Land	6	230.1	0.8	1.2
Town of Monson – Other Lands	65	433.8	1.6	2.3
State of Massachusetts (State Hospital)	1	650.1	2.4	3.4
Unprotected Private Parcels >20 Acres <sup>b</sup>	200	9,016.6	32.6	47.7
<b>Unprotected Open Space Subtotal</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>10,330.3</b>	<b>37.4</b>	<b>54.7</b>
<b>Total Open Space</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>18,901.3</b>	<b>68.5%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Sources: MassGIS, Monson Assessors Office.

<sup>a</sup> Includes parcels protected under the Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Restriction program.

<sup>b</sup> Excludes parcels that are included in any of the other open space categories.

#### **4.1.2 Private Land in Active Use**

Land in “active use” refers to property that is being used for agricultural, horticultural, or forestry production, or is managed to provide specific recreational opportunities. Chapters 61, 61A and 61B of the Massachusetts General Laws provide tax credits to landowners who rather than selling or developing this land, retain their land in forestry, agricultural or recreational uses. More than 6,100 acres, or 22% of Monson’s land area, are enrolled in one of the Chapter 61 programs. This land includes active farms, managed forests, golf courses, riding stables, and similar uses.

Chapter 61 is designed to keep forested land under productive forest management. Owners with more than 10 acres of forest are eligible for enrollment. The Department of Environmental Management (DEM) must approve a forest management plan and issue a management certificate to the Town assessor for a new tax classification to begin. The normal tax assessment of land classified under Chapter 61 is reduced by approximately 95%. The loss of taxes to the Town is partially offset by a yield tax that the owner pays on the value of wood harvested from the land annually. The Town also places a lien on the property in the Registry of Deeds, which is a notice to all purchasers that the property is subject to the provisions of Chapter 61. Chapter 61 classifications run for ten-year periods.

Chapter 61A is most commonly applied to agricultural or horticultural land but can be used for the forested portions of a farm, provided a forest management plan is approved by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the agency that has replaced DEM. To qualify for Chapter 61A, a farm owner must have five or more contiguous acres being used for agricultural or horticultural purposes. In addition, an annual total of not less than \$500 in gross sales is required within a normal product development period. Property under Chapter 61A is assessed at rates that vary for different agricultural uses. Generally, classification will result in approximately 80% reduction in assessed value. Monson currently has 2,994 acres of land classified under Chapter 61A.

Chapter 61B is similar to 61A, but applies to lands designated for recreational use and containing at least five contiguous acres. The land must be retained in a natural state to preserve wildlife and natural resources, must be devoted primarily to recreational use, and must provide a public benefit. Recreational uses include golf, hiking, camping, nature study, shooting/target practice, hunting, and skiing. The assessed valuation of Chapter 61B land is reduced by approximately 75%. Monson currently has 1,459 acres of land classified under Chapter 61B.

There are penalties associated with removing land from classification under Chapter 61, 61A, or 61B that include paying back taxes plus interest. If Chapter land is placed on the market, the Town has the “right of first refusal” for purchase of the land for 120 days. This right may be assigned to a non-profit conservation organization such as a land trust. In reality, towns often have trouble taking advantage of the right of first refusal because they must have available a large cash reserve to buy the land as well as a political structure that can quickly approve the purchase. For practical purposes, Chapter lands are protected only tenuously and temporarily.

#### **4.1.3 Private Protected Land**

Private protected land includes land owned by non-profit conservation groups, as well as other private land that is permanently protected from development by a deed restriction such as a Conservation Restriction (CR) or an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR). Monson has four agricultural properties that are protected under the Massachusetts APR program: the Murphy dairy farm, Echo Hill Orchards, Keep Homestead, and the Koran farm. The Massachusetts APR program is a state program that funds the preservation of active farms statewide.

Three private non-profit conservation organizations own approximately 1,700 acres of land in Monson: the Norcross Wildlife Foundation, Wilbraham Conservation Trust, and Trustees of Reservations. Unlike municipalities, non-profit groups are often able to act quickly when opportunities to purchase open space arise.

#### **4.1.4 Other Private Land**

Privately owned open space exists throughout Monson, and includes undeveloped forests, fields, and wetlands. These lands range from large undeveloped parcels to small tracts of woodland adjacent to residential areas. Of the Town’s privately-owned open space, about 1,997 acres is protected from development. However, the vast majority of private open space is not protected from development, and is gradually being developed.

Of the private unprotected open space, large parcels are generally the most important ones to consider in open space planning since they can provide substantial areas for habitat, recreation, or other purposes. Monson contains more than 9,000 acres of private unprotected open space in parcels 20 acres or larger.

#### **4.1.5 Provisions for Open Space Protection**

Local and state environmental regulations offer some protection for certain open space areas. State regulations prohibit most development on and/or near wetlands, streams, and ponds. The Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act applies to all lands within 100 feet of bordering vegetated wetlands, while the Massachusetts Rivers Protection Act applies to all lands within 200 feet of perennial streams. However, state regulations allow for some development in these resource areas under certain conditions, especially in the buffer area (between 0 and 100 feet from wetlands and between 100 and 200 feet from perennial streams). In addition, the state regulations do not apply to certain isolated wetlands or to vernal pools.

In sections of Monson that do not have public sewer service, Title 5 regulations pertaining to septic systems may provide some limitation on development by restricting new or expanded septic systems to areas with suitable soils, sufficient land area, and minimum separation from the water table. However, Title 5 should never be relied upon as a growth management or open space protection mechanism.

Local regulations restrict development in flood plains, and provide some limitations to development in the Water Supply Protection District. Although numerous environmental regulations apply in Monson, these regulations provide limited protection for open space since environmental laws are limited in their geographical coverage, subject to change, and may be circumvented in certain circumstances.

The Town's Open Space Communities Bylaw allows for greater flexibility and creativity in the design of residential subdivisions, while at the same time encouraging the permanent preservation of open space, agricultural lands and other natural resources. However, as discussed in **Section 2.2.3**, this bylaw is unlikely to be utilized as long as Monson has ample road frontage for single-lot development, which is generally easier and less expensive than subdivision development.

## **4.2 Recreational Opportunities**

The Town has a variety of recreational parks and areas. The following inventory includes the major private and public recreation areas in Monson.

### **4.2.1 Outdoor Recreation Open to the Public**

- € **Brimfield State Forest and Dean Pond Recreation Area:** This area is located partly in Monson and partly in Brimfield and Wales. The area offers picnicking, swimming, fishing, hunting, hiking, biking and horseback riding to the general public. The woodlands are managed by the Commonwealth for hunting and woodland management.
- € **Conant Brook Dam:** This approximately 300-acre parcel of land is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for flood control purposes. The area includes a rare kettle pond. The floodplain is currently dry with only a small shallow silt pool. The area overall is suitable for hiking and horseback riding.

- € **Cedar Swamp:** A 50-acre white cedar swamp is located off Cedar Swamp Road. The vegetation in the swamp includes maple, birch, azaleas, mountain laurel, fern, fringed gentian, and skunk cabbage. The area is suitable for nature study, and is open to the general public under the auspices of the Monson Conservation Commission. The western section of the swamp is suitable for wildlife habitat preservation and management for deer and hare. The wooded roads along the northwest side of the swamp are suitable for hiking and provide access to the woods for hunting and woodland management.
- € **Monson-Brimfield-Wales (MBW) Trail:** This 14.5-mile bike route was established in 1998 by a group of local volunteers. In addition to the circular route, there are two spurs: a 2.6 mile spur to Brimfield State Forest and a three quarter mile spur to Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary.
- € **Keep Homestead Museum:** The Keep property was willed to the Town of Monson in 1988 when Myra Keep Moulton died. About half of the 75 acre parcel is open meadow and wetlands, while the remaining half is woodland. There are three trails with a combined length of less than two miles, which are open year round for hiking and cross-country skiing. There were once several granite quarries on the original Keep property, but only one remains on the present acreage.
- € **Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary:** Located on Wales-Monson Road, the sanctuary includes approximately four thousand acres of wooded hills, lakes and streams. Only a portion of this land (approximately 1,440 acres) is located in Monson, off of Child's Road, while the majority is located in Wales. Norcross offers three miles of marked footpaths through a variety of habitats, as well as picnic areas and two natural history museums. The land is managed by the Norcross Wildlife Foundation, Inc., for the purpose of wildlife conservation, research, and education. The Norcross Wildlife Foundation was established in 1965 by Arthur D. Norcross, a Monson native and founder of the Norcross Greeting Card Company.
- € **Peaked Mountain:** Monson's highest peak offers a panoramic 180-degree view to the north and the east, providing a view of Mt. Wachusett and Mt. Monadnock on the distant horizon. The majority of Peaked Mountain is protected by the Norcross Wildlife Foundation. In the last few years, the Trustees of Reservations have acquired additional property northwest of the original Peaked Mountain Reserve. A "greenbelt" of protected and semi-protected lands now stretches from the Connecticut border through Peaked Mountain up to Temple Brook and Lower Hampden Road. Miles of logging roads provide access to the top of the mountain through almost 200 acres on the west side of the mountain.

#### **4.2.2 Outdoor Recreation for Members or Guests**

- € **Springfield Sportsman Club:** This 120 acre parcel is located off of Wood Hill Road. The Club is open to members only, and offers trap shooting, a rifle range, target practice, archery, and picnicking. The woodlands are suitable for hunting and forest management, while the roads in the area are suitable for hiking and snowmobiling. The steep slopes are used for sledding and beginner skiing. Riding south along Wood Hill Road offers an excellent view of mountains and open land.

- € **Sunsetview Campground:** This privately-owned, two hundred acre, campground located on Town Farm Road offers tent and RV camping from April through October. The campground offers a wide variety of recreational activities, including hiking, swimming, field sports, and special events.
- € **Quaboag Country Club:** Located on Palmer Road, this semi-private course offers golfing to the general public.
- € **Paradise Lake:** This 17 acre lake located off Paradise Lake Road has an average depth of 15 feet. The lake area is open to residents only, and offers swimming, fishing, boating, ice-skating, camping, picnicking, and field sports such as tennis. The woodlands are suitable for forest management and hiking.
- € **Quaboag Riders Club:** This privately-owned, 26 acre, parcel near the downtown is used by ATV owners for hill climbs and trail riding. A spectacular view of the western range is visible from Cat Rock, where the club is located.
- € **Partridge Hollow Campground:** This privately-owned, eighty-three acre, campground located on Sutcliffe Road offers tent and RV camping from April through October. The campground offers large wooded sites, open fields for larger groups, pool facilities, volleyball, basketball, horseshoes, arcade/game room, pavilion, and weekend entertainment/activities.
- € **Miller Park:** A recreational/picnic area that is privately owned and publicly available for a fee.
- € **Pulpit Rock Lake:** This is privately owned and has a large section of its shores devoted to permanent homes, as well as some camps located near the junction of Silver Street and Maxwell Road. The historic Pulpit Rock has an opening that was once used in the early 1900s by a local preacher as his pulpit. The congregation sat in the open field to hear him preach.

#### **4.2.3 Parks and Playing Fields**

- € **Flynt Park:** This 148 acre area just west of the town center has opportunities for hiking, snowmobiling and contains panoramic views. The park contains trails, wooded areas, and vernal pools. At present there are two soccer fields on the site (also referred to as Rogers Fields) with portable bleachers for viewing games.
- € **Cushman Field:** Under the jurisdiction of the Monson Parks and Recreation Commission, the eight-acre Cushman Field is used for a variety of recreational programs including baseball, softball and soccer playing fields. The property is bounded by Chicopee Brook on the east, Washington Street on the west, and a large undeveloped area on the north.
- € **Quarry Hill Community School:** This 20 acre site contains baseball and softball fields, three playgrounds, and a basketball court area. On the edge of the two fields in the back is a spectacular view of the valley in Monson. Camp Serendipity built a nature trail on the grounds.
- € **Veterans Fields and Tennis Courts:** Located on Main and State Streets, this facility includes three diamonds for softball and baseball, a batting cage and two smaller soccer fields. Directly across State Street is a fenced tennis area with two tennis courts.

### 4.3 Status of Open Space and Recreation Activities

In 1999, the Monson Open Space and Recreation Steering Committee developed the Town’s Open Space and Recreation Plan with assistance from students at University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Residents who attended the public meetings identified five primary goals related to open space and recreation:

- ∅ Expand and manage recreational open space opportunities. Address the known, existing deficiencies and plan for anticipated needs.
- ∅ Preserve the rural character of the townscape. Identify open space areas of special interest, target their protection, and offer guidelines for sensitive development.
- ∅ Avoid development in areas of potential hazard and target appropriate areas to receive growth.
- ∅ Protect water resources.
- ∅ Preserve open space, scenic areas, and rare plant and animal habitats.

The plan identified objectives to reach these goals and outlined a five-year action plan to implement the objectives. The following table summarizes progress made toward Monson’s open space and recreation related goals since the completion of the 1999 Open Space and Recreation Plan. While the Town has made some progress over the past three years, much remains to be done. This Master Plan integrates the Town’s previous open space and recreation goals into a comprehensive land use plan for Monson.

**Table 4-2  
Status of Open Space and Recreation Activities in Monson**

Open Space/Recreation Objective	Status
<b>Goal 1: Expand and manage recreational opportunities</b>	
Responsible Group: Parks and Recreation Commission/Department	
Establish a town-wide trail system including downtown sites	Not established
Improve access and parking at existing athletic fields	Under Study
Increase number of playgrounds	With the completion of the new high school, the Town has the following new recreational facilities: 2 softball fields, 1 baseball field, 3 soccer fields, and a track facility.
Create maintenance funds to allow better support of existing facilities	On-going
Create more public areas for swimming	Not accomplished
Revitalize Flynt Park	Not accomplished

<b>Goal 2: Preserve Monson’s rural character</b>	
Responsible Groups: Planning Board and Conservation Commission	
Designate land for scenic district	Not started
Encourage landowners to enroll in Chapter 61 programs or seek an APR	Limited outreach has been conducted through the Assessors Office.
Encourage use of Open Space Communities bylaw	Not likely to be used very much as long as Monson has ample road frontage for single lot development.
Establish a local land trust	Ongoing
<b>Goal 3: Avoid development in areas of potential hazard; target growth to appropriate areas</b>	
Responsible Group: Planning Board	
Identify areas that are inappropriate for development	On-going through the Master Plan
Develop a revised Master Plan	In progress
<b>Goal 4: Protect sensitive natural resources from adverse impacts</b>	
Responsible Group: Water and Sewer Commission/Department	
Conduct groundwater protection study to determine need for additional regulation or land protection	Zone IIs for the Town’s wells have been identified. These areas should be added to the Zoning Map.
<b>Goal 5: Preserve open space, scenic areas, and rare plant habitats</b>	
Responsible Group: Conservation Commission	
Expand and connect existing protected wildlife habitats	The Town has acquired 62 acres of land (39 acres off Silver Street and 23 acres off Cedar Swamp Road).
Work with neighboring communities to create ecological linkages	Not started
Work with landowners to protect high priority parcels	Not initiated
Prepare management plans for existing conservation lands	Created and ongoing

#### 4.4 Agriculture

Although agriculture makes up a relatively small portion of Monson’s economic base, it is very important in terms of maintaining Monson’s rural character and protecting open space. According to the 1997 U.S. Agricultural Census, Monson had 32 farms in 1997, of which 17 were greater than 50 acres and 15 were less than 50 acres. Although the Agricultural Census identified a total of 32 farms, only a handful of these are large operations. Twenty-six of Monson’s farms had sales of less than \$10,000 per year; three had sales between \$10,000 and \$100,000; and the remaining three had sales more than \$100,000.

Monson currently has one significant dairy operation, which has approximately 80 head of cattle. Several other farms provide hay for the dairy operations. Koran’s Farm is the largest produce farm in the Town, and grows fruits, vegetables and Christmas trees. Koran’s farm operates a farmstand on the property. Westview Farm and Echo Hill have a significant “agri-tourism” component that offers farm-related activities and products to visitors. Westview, in addition to having a creamery and on site sales of farm products, the farm also grows corn, pumpkins, and other crops. Echo Hill is an orchard with retail sales.

Agricultural trends in Hampden County and Massachusetts reveal some interesting challenges and opportunities for Monson's farmers:

- € Hampden County's total agricultural output increased from \$18,947,000 in 1992 to \$29,107,000 in 1997 a 54% increase. During this time, nursery and greenhouse crops grew substantially, while sales from livestock, poultry, and their products declined by about 20%.
- € During the 1990s, Hampden County has observed a downward shift in the dairy industry, which represents significant portion of Monson's agricultural output.
- € In Hampden County the average farmer's age is 56.7 years old and has operated his or her farm for 22.6 years. This statistic implies that the rise of a new generation of younger farmers will be essential to the survival of agriculture in the area; in families where there is no heir to continue farming, the survival of the farm is often in jeopardy.
- € Hampden County ranks 66th among all U.S. counties for direct sales of farm products to consumers, with annual sales of approximately \$1.4 million. The sale of farm products, value-added products, and "agri-tourist" activities and services is potentially a major component of income for farms located near urban areas.
- € Many farms in the region are operating at very low profit margins: in 1997, the average revenue per farm in Hampden County was \$69,333, while the average cost of expenses was \$51,519. Thus, the average profit per farm was less than \$18,000. Given this statistic, many farmers must supplement their farm income with off-farm income.

Over time, in regions where farming is no longer a mainstay of the economy, support services necessary for agriculture have become more difficult to obtain. Monson no longer has agricultural support services such as machinery services or repair, or sales of seed, feed, or agricultural chemicals.



## **5. Town Center and Economic Development**

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### **5.1 Town Center**

Monson's town center is located along Main Street, with the northern section beginning in the vicinity of Mill Street and extending south to State Street and the Town Hall. The southern section begins at the Town Hall and extends south along Main Street ending in the vicinity of Park Avenue. In the southern section of the town center, the railroad right-of-way located to the west of Main Street creates a physical barrier between the center and nearby residential neighborhoods. In some places, the right-of-way is located directly behind buildings on Main Street and is fifteen to twenty feet above the elevation of Main Street.

Monson's town center serves as the community's center for commerce and civic life. Historically, the town center provided significant job opportunities associated with factories, mills and other manufacturing enterprises. In recent years, however, manufacturing jobs have decreased, and Monson's town center has become more of a "convenience center" for local residents. This section describes the existing town center, as well as opportunities and challenges for revitalizing this area.

#### **5.1.1 Land Use**

Monson's town center contains a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, public, and open space land uses. The town center area contains 353 single-family houses, 66 two-family structures (132 dwelling units), 11 three-family structures (33 dwelling units), and 33 units of multi-family housing, which includes the 13-unit Colonial Village development owned by the Monson Housing Authority. Some of the residential units are located above first-floor commercial space.

Commercial land uses are located primarily along Main Street (Route 32), while industrial uses are located primarily on Route 32 at the northern and southern periphery of the town center. The town center contains diverse mix of businesses catering primarily to the needs of local residents. These include a supermarket, drug store, two gas stations, several take-out and sit-down restaurants, bank, liquor store, and other small shops and services.

In addition, Monson's town center contains several public, civic and religious institutions, as well as parks and playgrounds. A few vacant buildings also exist in the town center.

#### **5.1.2 Community Facilities**

Virtually all of Monson's community buildings, with the exception of schools, are located in the town center. These include the Town Hall, Monson Free Library, Police Department, Fire Department, Public Works Department, Water and Sewer Department, Monson Home for Aged People, Monson Historical Society, and Memorial Hall. The town center also contains several churches and three parks: Flynt Park, Cushman Field, and Veterans Fields. These facilities act as an important "magnet" to attract Town residents downtown.

A park and gazebo are located adjacent to Green Street, and a small municipal parking lot with approximately 18 spaces is located behind the gazebo.

### **5.1.3 Design and Character**

The town center is defined by an eclectic mix of building styles including several historic brick and stone buildings as well as numerous newer structures made of wood, glass, and metal. Many of the commercial buildings along Main Street are either one or two stories; the taller structures generally have residences or offices on the upper floor.

Buildings in the town center located along Main Street have varying setbacks. Building setbacks are an important aspect of the appearance and character of the town center; for example, buildings with minimal setbacks establish a street line that enhances the downtown environment. Landscaped front yards create a more residential and rural appearance. Front yards used for parking create gaps in the street line and those with limited landscaping often present a visually displeasing environment.

Generally, Monson's town center building setbacks fall into three categories. The first category is residential in character with front setbacks in excess of 25 feet. Most of these properties are residentially zoned and generally located in the northern section of the town center. The front yards have lawns, trees and other landscape features. The second category is commercial in character with setbacks in excess of 25 feet. Most of these properties are located in the central section of the town center. The front yards of these properties are used for parking and site access. In some cases landscaping and fencing is provided. The third category includes commercial and residential properties with front yard setbacks of less than ten feet. These buildings are located along the southern section of Main Street. Typically, these structures directly abut the sidewalk, include a mix of uses, and contain large glass storefront windows, all of which convey a "friendly" impression to pedestrians.

In the town center, Monson's Zoning Bylaw requires all new development to be set back at least 20 feet from the edge of the right-of-way (typically the edge of the sidewalk). The first twenty feet must be landscaped and cannot include parking areas, but parking is allowed beyond the minimum 20-foot front setback. Because of these laws, new development is essentially prohibited from following the traditional downtown development pattern characterized by small setbacks and buildings abutting the sidewalk. If the current Zoning Bylaws remain in place, over time Monson can expect a gradual change from the traditional downtown development pattern found in the southern part of the center to a development pattern that reflects the Town's zoning with increased building setbacks.

Public infrastructure in the town center is an important backdrop to the local businesses and other facilities. The town center has relatively well maintained sidewalks. Park benches are located in various locations in the town center such as in front of the Senior Center and Town Hall. Several green 55-gallon drums are located throughout the center and serve as trash receptacles. Overhead utility lines tend to detract from town center's overall appearance.

### **5.1.4 Circulation and Parking**

Main Street (Route 32) is the Town's main north-south corridor and connects Monson to Palmer in the north and Connecticut in the south. Heavy through-traffic volumes exist during morning and afternoon rush hours. Both sides of the street have free on-street parking, which is utilized by customers of the retail establishments in the town center. Approximately 115 on-street parking spaces exist on Main Street between Town Hall and Park Avenue. In addition, the Post Office, Captain's Tavern, Armata's Plaza, and Monson Saving Bank properties have large private parking lots with over 300 total spaces. Several

gravel parking lots of varying size and in various conditions also exist in the downtown. Municipal parking areas are located adjacent to Town Hall, the Senior Center, the gazebo, and in the Memorial Hall/Public Works/Fire Department complex. To assure adequate access for emergency vehicles, parking adjacent to the Fire Department is restricted. The three churches fronting on Main Street do not have off-street parking facilities for their parishioners.

The existing on-street parking is adequate during most times in a typical week. However, during church events, holidays, and community events such as Summer Fest parking shortages exist. During Summer Fest, shuttle buses are needed to transport visitors from school parking lots to the town center.

### **5.1.5 Signage**

Business signs occur in a variety of conditions, shapes and sizes throughout the center. Individual signage helps to identify businesses as unique. However, encouraging certain styles or themes could help unify the business district and identify a business as a Monson business. In addition, uniform directional or informational signs in the center could help make the area more “user-friendly” to tourists and visitors.

## **5.2 Monson’s Economic Profile**

The following section provides a profile of Monson’s economic characteristics, including the labor force, employers, and types of businesses in the Town.

### **5.2.1 Labor Force and Unemployment**

**Table 5-1** compares the unemployment rate for Monson to the Commonwealth as a whole between 1986 and 2000. In 2000, there were 3,794 people in Monson’s labor force. Between 1997 and 2000, Monson’s unemployment rate was slightly higher than the unemployment rate for Massachusetts. Historically, the unemployment rate peaked between 1991 and 1993 coinciding with the recession of the early 1990s. Between 1995 and 2000, the unemployment rate declined. Since 2000, however, the unemployment rate may have increased due to the nationwide economic downturn. This information was not available at the time of this writing.

**Table 5-1**  
**Average Annual Labor Force and Unemployment, 1986-2000**

Year	-----Monson-----		-----State-----
	Labor Force	Unemployment Rate (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)
1986	3,341	3.9	3.9
1987	3,442	3.1	3.8
1988	3,760	3.0	3.2
1989	3,764	3.4	3.3
1990	3,870	6.0	4.0
1991	3,832	8.5	6.9
1992	3,899	8.1	8.6
1993	4,021	8.5	6.9
1994	3,972	7.3	6.0
1995	3,777	6.6	5.4
1996	3,728	4.2	4.3
1997	3,854	4.2	4.0
1998	3,859	3.4	3.3
1999	3,878	3.6	3.2
2000	3,794	3.0	2.6

Source: Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training. Local Area Unemployment Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

### **5.2.2 Local Employment Trends.**

As noted in **Table 5-2**, in the year 2000 a total of 164 business establishments operated in Monson employing 1,375 persons. The average annual wage for employees working in Monson in 2000 was \$28,589. As shown in **Figure 5-1**, the largest industries in Monson are government (28%), manufacturing (21%), services (16%) and wholesale and retail trade (13%). While the number of business establishments has increased by 63% since 1985, total employment has only increased by 24%. The number of employees in the construction, transportation, communication and utilities, and service sectors has increased significantly while the number of employees in the manufacturing sector has decreased by approximately 40% since 1985.

The economy in Monson has remained relatively steady throughout the past decade. The number of business establishments and total employment decreased slightly during the recession of the early 1990s, but rebounded quickly and has continued to increase in recent years. During the past 15 years, Town businesses have employed only about one-third of the number of total workers in Monson (3,794), meaning that most Monson workers were required to find work in other communities. This gap has closed slightly during the past 15 years, however, with the total number of jobs increasing by 24% (from 1,105 to 1,375) while the total labor force grew by only 12% (from 3,392 to 3,794).

**Table 5-2  
Employment by Industry in Monson, 1985 - 2000**

	Average Annual Wage	Number of Establish- ments	Total Employ -ment	Agri., Forest, Fishing	Gov	Const.	Manu- facturing	Transpor Comm. Utilities	Wholes. & Retail Trade	Finance Insurance Real Estate	Service
1985	\$15,295	104	1,105	11	283	42	481	48	159	22	59
1986	\$16,673	126	1,187	12	277	55	514	46	192	25	66
1987	\$20,664	133	1,253	7	82	75	527	69	185	37	73
1988	\$18,443	145	1,239	5	263	85	483	56	216	51	82
1989	\$19,099	145	1,245	5	273	71	471	30	238	50	107
1990	\$19,074	138	1,227	9	288	60	444	47	231	45	103
1991	\$20,460	131	1,148	9	243	48	456	59	217	44	72
1992	\$22,021	136	1,168	14	276	61	418	69	210	39	83
1993	\$21,815	141	1,171	15	294	63	383	82	212	39	83
1994	\$23,369	144	1,081	18	74	67	281	86	212	41	102
1995	\$24,253	146	1,070	19	270	85	274	81	199	42	100
1996	\$24,779	145	1,087	22	286	92	283	85	176	42	99
1997	\$27,008	142	1,151	27	333	93	309	83	162	42	102
1998	\$27,949	149	1,183	24	326	104	315	89	175	41	109
1999	\$28,114	153	1,237	36	349	130	289	89	175	37	132
2000	\$28,589	164	1,375	46	372	129	283	103	182	38	222

Source: Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training (covered employees only). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics Survey.

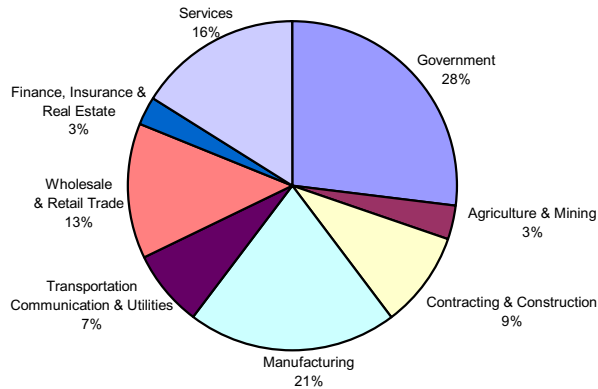
### **5.2.3 Monson Businesses**

The two largest employers in the Town are both government affiliated: the Monson Developmental Center, which is operated by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation, and the Town of Monson, which includes both municipal and public school employees. Other large employers include Lamcotec, Inc. and Mass Electric, Inc. Several manufacturing companies recently ceased operations in Monson, which explains Monson’s sharp decline in manufacturing sector employment.

### **5.2.4 Business Resources**

Monson businesses may choose to join the Quaboag Valley Chamber of Commerce. Located in Palmer, the Chamber serves the towns of Belchertown, Brimfield, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Holland, Monson, North Brookfield, Palmer, Wales, Ware, Warren, and West Brookfield. The Chamber’s mission statement is “To be the leading advocate for business and community development in the Quaboag Valley by providing members with a voice in political, social and economic issues.” The Chamber provides participating members with business resources, marketing, and seminars.

**Figure 5-1  
Distribution of Employment in Monson, 2000**



The Town also has a six member Local Partnership for Economic Development Committee. The committee was created as a result of the Downtown Technical Assistance Report, prepared for the Town by the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, Department of Housing and Community Development in August 1999. The committee meets on a monthly basis and works closely with the Monson Tourism Committee and the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation. The Tourism Committee is currently developing a brochure to encourage tourism in the Quaboag Hills region. The brochure will be made available throughout the region. The Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation provides economic development and education assistance for small businesses in the region. The Local Partnership for Economic Development Committee is also exploring options for the re-use or sale of the South Main Street School.

The Monson Free Library has established a Business Resource Center in the library. The center offers business owners business support information through a variety of printed and electronic medians.

### **5.3 Business Zoning**

The Town of Monson has four business zoning districts: Central Commercial, General Commercial, Commercial Recreation and Industrial. Most of the business districts are located along major roadways in the Town including Route 32 and Route 20.

#### Central Commercial District

The Central Commercial District is located in the downtown area along Main Street. The businesses in this area include a pharmacy, savings bank, grocery store, several restaurants, two gas stations and a dozen or more other retail, convenience and service businesses. There is a relatively low commercial vacancy rate in the Central Commercial District. This district is enhanced by a number of historic resources including Memorial Hall, several churches and the Monson Center Historic District (listed on the National Register of Historic Places).

### General Commercial Districts

The General Commercial Districts are located along Route 32 adjacent to the downtown area and along Route 20 near the Palmer town border. Existing businesses along Route 32 include several auto service and sales shops, gas stations, a bowling alley, liquor stores, restaurants and other service operations. Along Route 20, existing businesses include a health club, auto shops, and trailer retail sales. The businesses are scattered along these corridors and therefore tend to cater to automobile oriented customers and discourage walk-in customers. The lack of municipal water and sewerage along Route 20 may limit the future expansion of business uses in this area.

### Industrial Districts

The Industrial Districts cover 790 acres or approximately 2.7% of the Town's land area. Industrial-zoned land is located mostly along the railroad corridor north and south of downtown. The largest industrial-zoned area, located along Cedar Swamp Road, is currently the site of a gravel mining operation. Since the larger manufacturing companies ended operations in Monson, there are several vacant buildings in the Town's industrial areas, particularly along Route 32 south of downtown.

## **5.4 Tax Base**

The tax base in Monson is primarily residential, with homeowners providing approximately 87% of the tax revenues. Industrial and commercial properties combined make up approximately 8% of Monson's taxable property (see **Table 5-3**).

**Table 5-3**  
**Total Property Values in Monson by Land Use Category, Fiscal Year 2001**

	Assessed Property Value	%
Residential	\$344,876,040	87.4
Commercial	\$19,208,070	4.9
Industrial	\$11,004,500	2.8
Personal Property	\$19,369,680	4.9
<b>Total (taxable only)</b>	<b>\$394,458,290</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Massachusetts Division of Local Services, Municipal Data Bank

**Table 5-4** compares Monson's tax base with that of neighboring communities. Massachusetts requires its municipalities to conduct regular property re-valuations, so the figures presented below are all based on recent valuation data. The average residential property tax bill in Monson is lower than the state average. According to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, in Fiscal Year 1999 Monson ranked 226 out of the 340 reporting communities in terms of average tax bill (a ranking of 1 has the highest tax bill). The average tax bill in Monson is lower than the average bill in Hampden and Wilbraham but higher than the average bill in Brimfield, Palmer, Springfield, and Wales.

**Table 5-4  
Comparison of Tax Base - Neighboring Communities, Fiscal Year 2001**

	% of Total Assessed Valuation			Tax Rate <sup>1</sup>	Avg. Res. Assessed Value	Avg. Res. Tax Bill
	Residential	Commercial	Industrial			
Brimfield	87.3	7.9	1.6	16.53	\$125,213	\$2,070
Hampden	90.4	4.9	0.4	18.87	\$151,382	\$2,857
<b>Monson</b>	<b>87.4</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>18.69</b>	<b>\$121,474</b>	<b>\$2,270</b>
Palmer	77.6	9.4	6.6	18.93	\$102,996	\$1,950
Springfield	72.5	17.6	4.5	20.35	\$86,606	\$1,762
Wales	90.4	1.8	0.5	19.14	\$95,494	\$1,828
Wilbraham	89.0	6.7	2.2	17.44	\$185,026	\$3,227
State Average	79.2	13.4	4.2	13.93	\$206,789	\$2,880

Source: Mass. Data Bank, Mass. Department of Revenue.

## 5.5 Economic Development Issues and Opportunities

### General Economic Issues

In terms of economic development, Monson faces some challenges, but also has several opportunities for attracting desired development. Key issues include:

- ∅ Regulations related to commercial and industrial development within the Town may be inconsistent with the Town’s vision for the future. For example, parking requirements can be restrictive for businesses.
- ∅ Industrial zoned properties in Town are located in areas of environmental concern such as wetlands, steep slopes, and aquifer protection areas.
- ∅ In recent years, large manufacturing companies have terminated their operations in Town, leaving behind vacant buildings. A detailed strategy to reuse vacant or underutilized industrial buildings may be needed.
- ∅ Improvements to the Town’s infrastructure in the industrial and business districts could attract additional business to the Town. For example, water and sewer service could attract new businesses to the areas along Route 20.

### Town Center Issues

Monson’s town center also faces several key issues that will affect its future development:

- ∅ The downtown area has four key vacant properties: the Cushman Street Mill, the Ellis Woolen Mills building, the Zero Corporation building, and the South Main Street School. The Town has an opportunity to attract new housing or employers to the town center by redeveloping these properties; however, each property has several challenges, such as site contamination, antiquated building designs, and/or restrictive zoning.

<sup>1</sup> Dollars per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.



- € Several key downtown establishments currently function as “anchors” that attract residents downtown. These anchor businesses help support other downtown businesses. Some of these anchors, such as the churches and the Town Hall, are unlikely to relocate. Retaining businesses such as the supermarket and drugstore can be important to the long-term success of the downtown.

## 6. Municipal Services and Infrastructure

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This section provides a brief summary of Monson's public services and infrastructure and how they relate to overall growth and development trends in the Town. The purpose of the Master Plan is not to provide detailed recommendations for each of these services and infrastructure facilities, but rather to ensure that future public investments are consistent with how the Town wishes to grow and change. For example, the decision of whether or not to extend a water or sewer line can have a significant effect on whether and how the affected area(s) will develop in the future.

### 6.1 Water Supply

The Town's water supply currently consists of three groundwater wells: the Bunyan Road, the Palmer Road, and the Bethany Road wells (See **Map 3-1**). These three sources are located along Chicopee Brook. The water system has one water storage tank with a capacity of 1,000,000 gallons and the distribution system consists of about 36 miles of pipe. The majority of the distribution system consists of unlined cast iron pipe that is 100 years old in some places. According to the Water Supply, Distribution and Storage Study prepared in 1998 by the Board of Water Commissioners with Tighe & Bond, the Town provides water to about 44% of the population. The remaining residents obtain their water from individual on-site wells.

The Bunyan Road well is the primary water supply source for the Town. The well has a safe yield of 800 gallons per minute (gpm). The pump in this well originally had a capacity of 900 gpm, but there has been a considerable decrease in the production of the well over the years due to the accumulation of mineral solids. In 1998, the well was producing about 510 gpm. Due to the natural acidic nature of the groundwater, a corrosion control system has been installed at the Bunyan Road well. The Palmer Road well and the Bethany Road well are used on a limited basis due to the absence of a corrosion control system and to minimize utility demand and power costs.

Between 1992 and 2001, the Bunyan Road well has supplied, on average, 97% of the total water supplied to the system, the Palmer Road well has accounted for an average of 2.75% and the Bethany Road well has made up the remaining 0.25%. From 2002 to the present, the Bunyan Road well is supplying 0%, Palmer Road 98%, and Bethany 2%.

As shown in **Table 6-1**, the maximum daily water demand in 2000 was estimated to be approximately 1.15 million gallons per day (mgd). The projected maximum daily demand is expected to increase to 1.37 mgd by the year 2020; however, it should be noted that future projections are difficult to make because a single large industrial water user could account for at least as much new demand as all new residential development over the next 20 years.

Residential water usage from Monson's public water supply has actually dropped in recent years, most likely the result of a decrease in water usage at the Monson Developmental Center. The current available municipal supply sources have sufficient safe yield to meet the current and projected maximum day demands, assuming that all well sources are functional. Typical water works practice for supply planning is to analyze the system with one major supply off-line. If the Bunyan Road well is off-line for maintenance purposes, the Town must use the Palmer Road well and the Bethany Road well. The

combined yields from these two wells can comfortably meet the 2020 maximum day demand of 1.27 mgd. However, because neither of these sources is equipped with treatment systems for corrosion control, the Town could potentially be in violation of the Lead and Copper Rule of the Safe Drinking Water Act if the Bunyan Road well is off-line for extended periods.

Issues to consider as recommendations are developed include the following:

- ∅ Due to the existing condition of the Bunyan road well, a new ground water source at a different location in town is necessary and may be a three to five year project.
- ∅ Consideration should be give to the installation of a backup power supply, and a direct telemetry system, for the Bunyan road well.
- ∅ Consideration should be give to the installation of a chemical feed system for corrosion control at the Palmer Road well.
- ∅ Consideration should be give to the installation of a flow meter, capabilities for automatic operation, and a chemical feed system for corrosion control, for the Bethany Road well.
- ∅ Consideration should be given for the installation of a 1.1 million-gallon storage tank on Brimfield Road.

**Table 6-1  
Monson’s Municipal Water Supply, 2000 – 2020**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population Serviced by Water System</b>	<b>Average Daily Consumption (gpd)</b>	<b>Maximum Daily Consumption (gpd)</b>	<b>Existing Supply Capacity (gpd safe yield)</b>
2000	3,567	586,000	1,146,000	1,922,400
2010	3,869	637,000	1,173,000	1,922,400
2020	4,171	687,000	1,273,000	1,922,400

Source: Water Supply, Distribution, and Storage Study, Tighe & Bond, December, 1998.

### Water Storage Facilities

Water storage facilities provide additional water supply to meet peak demands during well shutdowns, drought conditions, or fire emergencies. The Town has a single one million gallon storage tank located on Ely Road. According to the 1998 Tighe & Bond report, the existing storage tank does not have sufficient water storage capacity to meet the Town’s current needs. An additional 1.1 million gallons of storage capacity will be needed to meet the Town’s projected 2020 water storage needs. Specifically, consideration should be give to the installation of a 1.1 million-gallon storage tank on Brimfield Road and the installation of a 0.5 million-gallon storage tank on Bald Peak Road, which would provide system flexibility by facilitating a future connection to the Palmer water system.

### Distribution System

The Monson water delivery system consists of pipes ranging in size from 2 inches to 16 inches in diameter. The majority of the pipes in the system are unlined cast iron pipes. Generally, the distribution system is adequate to meet the daily needs of the community. However, the Tighe & Bond report

recommends several upgrades to provide adequate water flows for fire suppression. Consideration should be given to primary distribution system improvements in the following areas:

- € Thompson and Margaret Streets to Quarry Hill School
- € Upper Palmer Road and Margaret Street from Hospital Road to Thompson Street
- € Bethany Road from Chestnut Street to State Street
- € On State and Gates Street from Main to Cushman Streets
- € On Stafford Road from Wales to the end of the existing main
- € Install a booster pump system with hydropneumatic tanks at the chlorinator building on Wales Road to increase water pressure in the area

In addition, consideration should be given to conducting a leak detection survey on the entire distribution system and implementing a water meter installation replacement program to completely meter the entire system.

### Issues

The Zone II aquifer recharge areas for Monson's municipal wells have been identified by the Town's water consultant, Tighe & Bond. As required by the State's Wellhead Protection Program, these areas should be added to the Water Supply Protection District Overlay Map.

## **6.2 Sewer System**

The Town's sewer system is approximately 20 years old. The sewer system generally follows the location of the municipal water system with the exception of the Paradise Lake area, which has public sewerage but not public water. The system includes one pump station located on Hospital Road. The Town's wastewater is not treated in Monson but is transferred to the Palmer wastewater system for treatment and disposal. The Town is currently not considering any significant sewer system expansions. However, a revenue review study should be implemented to recognize the impact of decreasing water demand, free water supplied to municipal and school buildings and the future capital improvements that will be required. This should include a review of the water and sewer rate structure.

## **6.3 Town Infrastructure**

### **6.3.1 Roads and Sidewalks**

Monson has approximately 106 miles of Town maintained ways including 93 miles of paved roads and 13 miles of gravel roads. In addition, approximately four miles of private ways exist in the Town. Most of the private ways were constructed prior to the adoption of Monson's Subdivision Regulations. Overlook Drive is the only private way constructed under subdivision control.

All of Route 20 and portions of Route 32 are maintained by the state through the Massachusetts Highway Department. A 1.6 mile portion of Main Street (Route 32) located in the town center is Town maintained.

The majority of maintenance work conducted on public ways is funded through federal and state programs. The Massachusetts Legislature appropriates funds known as Chapter 90 funds to communities on a yearly basis for the repair and maintenance of public ways. The level of funding is derived from a

formula based on the number of miles of public ways, employment figures, and town population. The level of funding through this program has decreased steadily over the past few years. In Monson, these funds are the primary source of funding for road maintenance and repair work. The Town has also utilized Community Development Block Grant funds for road and sidewalk improvements in the town center.

Approximately 13 miles of sidewalks exist in Monson (mainly in the town center). Few sidewalks exist in the rural residential areas of Town. These sidewalks are in fair to poor condition. The Town allocates \$2,000 per year for sidewalk improvements. In addition, if the Town reconstructs a road or conducts major road repairs, the sidewalks are repaired at the same time.

### **6.3.2 Other Infrastructure**

The Town has numerous culverts and bridges. Limited repair and maintenance work is conducted on these structures, which are only replaced when they fail.<sup>1</sup> The state inspects all bridges and issues a field inspection report documenting their condition. Monson's bridges will need attention in the future.

There are areas within the downtown with undersized stormwater drainage lines. As development continues and the amount of impervious (paved and building) surface increases, improvements to these systems will be needed. In addition, there are 1,100 catch basins located throughout the Town. The Department of Public Work uses an outside contractor to clean approximately 200 basins a year. Due to location and siltation rates, many of the same basins are cleaned each year but some catch basins are not cleaned for years. Lack of maintenance can lead to flooding, environmental problems, and the need for expensive repairs.

## **6.4 Monson Housing Authority**

The Town operates 78 one bedroom units of senior and handicapped housing at Colonial Village at 50 State Street. All of the units are one-bedroom dwellings. Rents for the units are based on income and are set at 30 percent of the person's or family's net income. The Housing Authority also provides housing through Chapter 705, state-aided housing. This program accommodates 17 families in a mix of two, three, and four -bedroom apartments on five sites scattered throughout the Town. In addition, housing is provided for 20 residents through the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program.

Currently, there is a waiting list of approximately 20 people for the senior housing at Colonial Village. However, the Authority has to advertise to fill the non-senior housing units. At this time the Housing Authority has no plans expand its housing stock.

There are no assisted living facilities or nursing homes in the Town. Residents or family members of residents in need of assisted housing must find alternatives in other communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Monson Highway Department

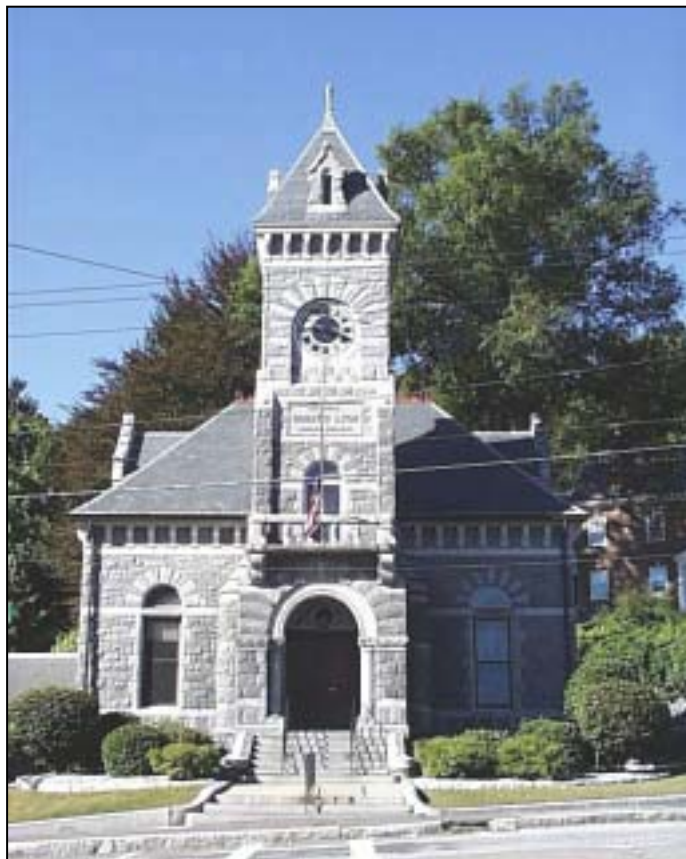
## **6.5 Monson Schools**

Monson's school system has prepared for and planned for the future growth of the community. The new High School and the renovated Granite Valley Middle School recently opened. According to the School Department's projections, adequate building space exists for the next 15 to 20 years.

In addition, the Town belongs to the Pathfinder Regional Vocational High School District located in Palmer. In 2000, 87 students from Monson attended this school.

# Chapter 2

## Planning Framework



**Monson Master Plan**

***Final Report – January 2004***

## 7. Monson's Vision and Goals

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The vision statement and goals represent the type of community that Monson hopes to be in the near and more distant future. The vision statement highlights the major themes for Monson's future. The goals provide the framework within which specific planning proposals and implementation strategies are developed.

The vision statement and goals were developed based on community guidance from several sources. First, the Master Plan and Zoning Bylaw Committee was created to lead the process. This 15 member committee was created by the Board of Selectmen and includes representatives for various boards and committees as well as business owners and residents. Town boards and departments provided input at several meetings and through interviews and written comments. Public meetings held at Monson High School on January 28, 2002, May 20, 2002, and September 23, 2002 provided an opportunity for Monson's citizens to provide input on issues of residential growth, rural character, economic development, the town center, and other topics. The first meeting was attended by over 200 people, while the second meeting attracted at least 75, and the third meeting was attended by 60 individuals. Finally, Town residents and other interested parties have been able to provide written feedback to the consultants via mail, e-mail and an Internet feedback form.

### 7.1 Public Input

At the January 2002 public meeting, the attendees were first asked to mark on a map their place of residence or their place of business. A review of the map shows that residents from almost every section of Town were in attendance. The meeting began with the committee asking the entire audience the question: what aspects of Monson's character are particularly important to townspeople and what aspects of Monson's future do we want the Master Plan to address? A number of responses were recorded. The 200 or so attendees were then randomly divided into seventeen discussion groups, and each group was given a list of questions to discuss. The questions were designed to encourage participants to reflect upon the Town's qualities and elicit qualitative evaluations on certain aspects of living or working in Monson. The questions were based on the premise that residents think of Monson as a small, rural town, but that changes will come in the future. Questions included:

#### 1. Monson has a vital town center that is the hub of community activities.

- € What do you think works well in our town center now?
- € What changes do you think would be good, because they would add to the vitality at the heart of our community?

#### 2. Business activity is one part of town life.

- € Currently, what do you think Monson gains by having businesses in town?
- € Looking ahead, what would make new businesses good neighbors?



**3. The great majority of new development in Monson will be for housing. Most of that housing construction will occur on land that is currently undeveloped “open space”.**

€ How do you think the Town of Monson should deal with this?

All discussion groups received the same questions. Highlights and common points of agreement from the discussion groups were documented and served as the basis for the creation of Monson’s Vision for the Future and the Master Plan Goals.

At the May 20, 2002 meeting, participants learned about several different alternative strategies that Monson could pursue for meeting its goals with regard to open space and resource protection, preservation of downtown character, and economic development. For each topic, participants were asked

**The Master Plan - Looking Ahead and Future Choices**

*Passive*

*Open Space and Natural Resources Protection*     *Downtown Character*     *Economic Development*

*Proactive*

**Open Space and Natural Resources Protection**

- Continue as we are.
- Educate the public and encourage private land protection measures.
- Permanently protect undeveloped land through Town acquisition.
- Adopt new zoning and other regulations to protect undeveloped lands and scenic views.

*Passive*

*Proactive*

**Downtown Character**

- Continue as we are.
- Provide suggestions on building and site appearance.
- Invest Town funds in landscaping, public facilities, and other amenities.
- Limit through zoning and town regulations the size and type of future development downtown. Require new development to be consistent with the historic character of the downtown.

*Passive*

*Proactive*

**Economic Development**

- Continue as we are.
- Give more support to existing businesses and economic development efforts.
- Use incentives, zoning and Town funds to promote the redevelopment of existing sites and vacant buildings.
- Increase the amount of high value industrial and commercial development in Monson, thereby generating more tax revenue.

*Passive*

*Proactive*

whether Monson should pursue a passive strategy, a proactive strategy, or somewhere in the middle. Discussion groups provided input on the following range of options:

In general, participants recommended a “middle road” with regard to each of the three topics. The meeting emphasized the tradeoffs inherent in any potential strategy. For example, many participants were in favor of protecting additional open space, but not at the cost of limiting individual property rights. Similarly, many residents were interested in investing some Town funds and/or effort in promoting

business development and the downtown, but were concerned about the tax consequences of additional Town expenditures.

At the September 23, 2002 meeting, an overview of the proposed Master Plan recommendations were presented.

## **7.2 Monson's Vision for the Future**

The Vision Statement is a broad set of themes identifying what type of community Monson would like to be in the future. This statement is intended to be general, and to capture the overall consensus of the majority of Monson's residents.

### *Monson's Vision for the Future*

*In the future, Monson remains a quiet, friendly, family-oriented community with great natural and scenic beauty. The Town continues to maintain its historic, rural feel and appearance as well as its sense of tradition and small town character. Residents support and participate in a variety of community events and activities.*

*A large percentage of the community remains undeveloped woodlands. The Town continues to preserve scenic vistas overlooking Monson's farmland, valleys, and hills. Monson also continues to protect open space, farmland, and forests through a variety of measures. Local farms are important open space features of the community. The new residential development occurring in Town blends into Monson's rural environment and provides housing opportunities that meet the needs of local residents.*

*Monson strives to attract commercial and industrial development that is environmentally sensitive and of appropriate scale. New businesses add to the tax base and provide employment opportunities for the residents of Monson. The downtown is an active and vibrant center for commercial and civic activities, and residents of the Town support downtown businesses.*

## **7.3 Goals Statement**

The Goals Statement builds on the Vision, providing more specificity about how Monson would like to grow, change, and/or remain the same in the future. The Goals Statement is a critical part of the Master Plan in that it serves as the basis for the Master Plan policies and action steps. As the Master Plan is implemented in upcoming years, the Goals Statement will provide a "yardstick" to measure whether the Town is pursuing policies that are consistent with its residents' desires.

The Goals Statement consists of 16 broad goals, each of which has more specific sub-goals. Overlaps between different goals and different Master Plan elements exist, but to simplify this section the goals are separated by element. The numbering of the goals is for identification purposes only, and is not meant to establish ranking or priority.

## Land Use and Growth Management Goals

### **Goal 1: Promote land use patterns that are consistent with the Town's landscape and natural environment.**

- 1a. Limit development in areas least appropriate for development such as steep sloping land, land adjacent to water resources, and critical habitat areas.
- 1b. Revise Monson's Zoning Bylaw and map to ensure compatibility between different uses and with the Town's physical and natural environment.
- 1c. In rural areas, encourage development patterns that include open space and protect natural features.

### **Goal 2: Promote commercial and industrial development in appropriate locations and at a scale appropriate for a rural community.**

- 2a. Ensure that the size and scale of commercial and industrial development is sensitive to Monson's historic and natural resources.
- 2b. Discourage the establishment of fast food and franchise businesses in the community.
- 2c. Ensure that home occupations are conducted in a manner and scale that is compatible with adjacent residential uses.

### **Goal 3: Maintain Monson's rural appearance.**

- 3a. Develop a Scenic Overlay District Map and other tools and incentives that protect the scenic vistas, areas, and roads of the Town.
- 3b. Ensure that the design of road reconstruction projects as well as the creation of new ways is consistent with the appearance of existing roads and streets in Monson.

## Open Space, Recreation and Natural Resource Goals

### **Goal 4: Permanently protect priority undeveloped land throughout the Town.**

- 4a. Identify critical forestland, farmland, and wildlife habitat that the Town would like to protect for environmental and aesthetic qualities.
- 4b. Create networks or corridors of protected land to allow wildlife movement.
- 4c. Develop strategies to protect the Town's remaining open space including funding sources and partnerships with conservation groups.

### **Goal 5: Protect Monson's water resources.**

- 5a. Ensure that regulations adequately protect Monson's water resources.
- 5b. Identify and protect drinking water resources for future generations.

**Goal 6: Provide additional recreational opportunities for all of Monson’s residents.**

- 6a. Expand recreational opportunities for all age groups.
- 6b. Maximize the use of existing Town facilities and land to provide additional recreational opportunities for all of Monson’s residents.
- 6c. Acquire additional land to meet future recreational needs.

**Agriculture Goals**

**Goal 7: Protect Monson’s remaining farmland and agricultural uses.**

- 7a. Encourage the use of existing tax incentive programs such as Chapter 61, 61A and 61B.
- 7b. Purchase the development rights to farms to prohibit development while allowing farming to continue.

**Goal 8: Support Monson’s agricultural businesses.**

- 8a. Ensure that regulations do not cause undue hardships for farmers.

**Historic Preservation Goals**

**Goal 9: Protect and reuse older structures in a manner that respects the historic value of these buildings.**

- 9a. Develop design guidelines to suggest appropriate standards for renovations and additions to existing historic structures.
- 9b. Maintain Monson’s existing publicly owned historic structures such as the Monson Free Library and Memorial Hall.

**Goal 10: Protect the historic character the Monson Center Historic District.**

- 10a. Ensure compatibility of uses in and abutting the district.
- 10b. Encourage the adaptive reuse of existing historic structures.
- 10c. Establish a Local Historic District and historic preservation regulations.

**Economic Development and Downtown Revitalization and Preservation Goals**

**Goal 11: Encourage appropriate economic development.**

- 11a. Encourage the retention of existing businesses and ensure that regulations do not create undo hardships.
- 11b. Encourage development of new commercial and industrial uses in locations with appropriate services, access, and that are environmentally suited for development.
- 11c. Promote Monson as a tourist destination.

**Goal 12: Encourage the re-use of vacant and underutilized structures.**

- 12a. Develop policies and incentives that encourage the re-use of vacant and underutilized buildings.
- 12b. Develop policies to allow for economic development alternatives for the Monson Development Center.
- 12c. Take advantage of federal and state programs such as the “Brownfields” programs to assist in the redevelopment of contaminated properties.

**Goal 13: Maintain the existing scale and character of the downtown.**

- 13a. Limit the size and scale of new downtown development so that it blends in with existing structures.
- 13b. Encourage the exterior design of new structures to be compatible with the architecture of adjacent structures, including landscaping, setbacks, etc.

**Goal 14: Create a pedestrian friendly environment town-wide.**

- 14a. Whenever feasible, include pedestrian sidewalks, pathways, trails and walkways as part of public construction projects.
- 14b. Continue to maintain and improve the existing network of sidewalks located downtown.
- 14c. Seek to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians in the rural outlying sections of the Town.

**Goal 15: Encourage civic participation.**

- 15a. Develop partnerships with business groups and organizations to promote and beautify the downtown.
- 15b. Encourage and support community events such as SummerFest.

**Goal 16: Strive to minimize the tax burden on townspeople and business.**

- 16a. Be sensitive to and consider the tax repercussions of by-law changes.
- 16b. Act to broaden the tax base in an effort to mitigate individual and business taxes.

# Chapter 3

## A Plan for the Future



**Monson Master Plan**

***Final Report – January 2004***

## 8. Land Use and Growth Management

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Monson’s overall vision for the future is to remain a quiet, friendly, family-oriented, community with great natural and scenic beauty. Residents would also like the Town to maintain its historic, rural feel and appearance as well as its sense of tradition and small town character. Finally, residents and business people alike hope to build on the existing strengths of the downtown, adding additional employment opportunities, aesthetic charm, and overall vitality. The following Plan for the Future represents a set of recommendations and policies designed to help the community to achieve this vision.

Monson’s Plan for the Future includes recommendations for each of the five Master Plan elements:

- € Land Use and Growth Management
- € Natural and Historic Resources
- € Open Space, Agriculture, and Recreation
- € Economic Development
- € Municipal Services and Infrastructure

It should be recognized that the Master Plan, by itself, does not change the Town’s zoning or other local policies. In order to put the Master Plan into action, the Town, through Town Meeting and its various boards and commissions, will need to make the policy changes recommended in the Master Plan over the upcoming months and years. A suggested timeline for doing so is detailed in the Implementation Chapter (**Section 13**). Most of Monson’s Plan for the Future can be implemented immediately. However, the Plan also includes several recommendations that are worthy of the Town’s consideration but are recognized in the short term (1-5 years) as impractical for a variety of reasons. These recommendations are noted as “Suggested for Future Consideration”.

### 8.1 Land Use Guide Plan

The Land Use Guide Plan (**Figure 8-1**) illustrates the recommended future land use patterns for the Town of Monson. This Guide Plan is based on Monson’s Vision for Future and on the Master Plan Goals Statement. The Guide Plan is the centerpiece of the Master Plan recommendations, and is supported by the various other Master Plan elements.

The Land Use Guide Plan should serve not only as the basis for revising the Town’s zoning regulations, but also as a blueprint for future development and conservation actions. Town officials, residents, and developers can consult the Plan as follows:

- € **The Town of Monson** can use the Guide Plan to help steer new development projects and conservation efforts into the most suitable areas of the Town. In addition, the Guide Plan will help the Town evaluate whether any particular project that comes before it for review is consistent with its overall long-term goals. The Guide Plan can also help Town officials make decisions regarding capital improvements and allocation of resources. Having such a long-term plan significantly strengthens the Town’s position should it encounter legal or political challenges in relation to land use issues, such as the enforcement of Zoning Bylaws.

- € **Residents and Landowners** can use the Guide Plan to identify the intended future plan for land located in their immediate vicinity, and to gain a level of certainty about how the land around them and throughout Town will be used, developed, or conserved in the future.
- € **Business Owners and Developers** can use the Guide Plan to identify what type of development the Town would like to see in each area, if any. The Guide Plan is also an indicator to developers of the approximate density and design/appearance of development that the Town wishes to encourage or discourage.

Monson’s current zoning map consists of nine different base zoning districts and three overlay districts. The process that created the current zoning map occurred, for the most part, several decades ago, and this map is not completely consistent with the Town’s current wishes as expressed in the Vision for the Future and the Master Plan goals. In addition, there are several places where the zoning is in conflict or inconsistent with established land use patterns, which could result in future problems if left unchanged. For example, several portions of existing residential neighborhoods in the town center are zoned for commercial or industrial use. The Land Use Guide Plan includes recommendations to minimize or eliminate these inconsistencies.

In addition to addressing existing problems, the Guide Plan designates sufficient amounts of well-located land for future economic development and includes growth management measures (see **Box 8-1**) to help the Town retain its scenic rural character.

**Box 8-1: “Growth Management” and Property Rights**

“Growth Management” does not mean stopping growth; it means guiding growth in a way that is consistent with a community’s desires. As such, the growth management measures included in the Master Plan do not deny the rights of property owners to build on their land. These rights are protected by the U.S. Constitution and a long history of Court decisions. Instead, the growth management policies in the Master Plan do three things:

- € First, they make sure that the right land use occurs in the right place. Every piece of property in Town would be designated for at least one major land use (i.e., residential, commercial or industrial).
- € Second, they help define *how* new development is created and designed—for example, how it is sited on a lot or how it is accessed via streets and driveways.
- € Finally, they identify environmentally sensitive areas where the Town, State, or non-profit conservation groups may want to focus their efforts to protect conservation land. Such protection would occur as the result of a mutual agreement between the landowner and the party seeking to protect the land—for example, through an Agricultural Preservation Restriction or Conservation Restriction.

Monson’s scenic rural character is one of its prime assets. Managing growth now to preserve this rural beauty will help protect property values town-wide for the future.

**8.2 Land Use Guide Plan Categories**

The Land Use Guide Plan divides the Town into seven different land use categories and one overlay areas, as summarized in **Table 8-1**.



**Table 8-1  
Summary of Land Use Guide Plan Categories**

<b>Type of Use</b>	<b>Existing Zoning</b>		<b>Land Use Guide Plan</b>	
	<b>Acres</b>	<b>% of Town</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>% of Town</b>
Rural Residential	23,428	81.9	23,552	82.2%
Residential Village	1,747	6.1	1,904	6.6%
Central Commercial	78	0.3	114	0.4%
General Commercial	228	0.8	119	0.4%
Commercial Recreation	161	0.6	161	0.6%
Industrial	793	2.8	704	2.5%
Reserved Land	2,083	7.3	2,083	7.3%
School + Cemetery	102	0.4	--	--
Planned Development	--	--	--	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>28,637</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>28,637</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Priority for Open Space	--	--	6,294	22.0

The following sections identify the issues and recommended future planning and zoning objectives for each Guide Plan Area.

### **8.2.1 Rural Residential Areas**

**Issue** – Throughout the master planning process, the community stressed that new development should be consistent with the Town’s scenic rural character. This is especially critical in the outlying sections of the Town where most of the open space, farmland, and scenic views are located.

**Recommendation** – The Rural Residential Area (RRA) is intended for low-density residential uses, home occupations, agriculture, and conservation use, and includes generally the same area as the existing Rural Residential District. However, the proposed RRA also includes land that was formerly zoned School, or Cemetery, as these zoning designations should be eliminated (see **Section 8.3.1**). The zoning designations will not be eliminated until all modifications to the zoning map have been completed. In addition, several small areas that are currently zoned Industrial but surrounded by land zoned Rural Residential have been included in the Rural Residential Area. The current “Industrial” zoning classification on these lands invites conflicts with surrounding uses and is inconsistent with good land use planning practices. Existing industrial uses in these areas would be able to remain indefinitely under the state provision regarding non-conforming legally existing uses at the time of the adoption of the zoning by-law.

Within the Rural Residential Area, no changes are recommended to the existing allowed density of development—one unit per 60,000 square feet of land. This density of development minimizes demands for public services and can be serviced by on-site wells and septic systems. In order to protect the character of the Rural Residential Area, additional policies are recommended to reduce the visual and environmental impacts of new development on the Town’s landscape. These policies are discussed in **Sections 8.3.3 through 8.3.6**, below.

### **8.2.2 Residential Village Areas**

**Issue** – Portions of several downtown residential neighborhoods are currently zoned Central Commercial or Industrial, which means that retail, commercial or even industrial uses could locate adjacent to existing homes with little opportunity for review by the Town or abutters.

**Recommendation** – To protect existing downtown neighborhoods, portions of the existing Central Commercial zoning district located in the vicinity of Washington Street, Margaret Street, Cushman Street, and Green Street as well as the Industrial District on State Street have been included in the Residential Village Area. This designation is more in keeping with the current residential land uses in these neighborhoods. In addition, the proposed Residential Village Area also includes land that was formerly zoned School, or Cemetery, as these zoning designations should be eliminated (see **Section 8.3.1**). Aside from these changes, the proposed Residential Village Area is the same as the existing Residential Village zoning district.

### **8.2.3 Central Commercial Areas**

**Issue** – The community wishes to maintain the current look and feel of the downtown. During the public workshops, residents proudly noted that Monson does not have a need for traffic lights. However, this could change if the more than 240,000 square feet of new retail and office space that is currently allowed in the town center is actually built. Additional development of this magnitude coupled with the potential for additional retail and commercial development in the General Commercial District would significantly alter the character of the downtown.

In addition, as discussed above, much of this new commercial and retail development could occur in several established downtown residential neighborhoods that are currently zoned Central Commercial. The character of these neighborhoods as well as the property values of adjacent residences could be adversely affected if homes are demolished or altered for business uses.

**Recommendation** – To address these concerns, portions of the existing Central Commercial District located in the vicinity of Washington Street, Margaret Street, Cushman Street, and Green Street have been re-designated as Residential Village, which is more in keeping with the current residential land uses in these neighborhoods (Squier Avenue is not included in the rezoning recommendation).

The Town can address concerns about the potential impacts of large commercial developments within downtown by limiting the size of new developments and/or establishing additional review procedures for large projects. See **Section 8.3.2** for further discussion of this recommendation. Reducing the size of the Central Commercial District coupled with policies to limit the size of individual developments in the district will help maintain the current look and feel of the downtown and eliminate the potential for major traffic generators to locate there.

Even with these changes there will still be ample land in the Central Commercial District for development and redevelopment. In fact, with the re-designation of land near the town center now zoned General Commercial to Central Commercial (see **Section 8.2.4**), the Land Use Guide Plan designates 114 acres of land as Central Commercial, compared to 78 acres under current zoning regulations.

#### **8.2.4 General Commercial Areas**

**Issue** – The Town encourages larger commercial and retail uses to locate in the General Commercial District. Land zoned General Commercial is located on Route 32 at the northern and southern ends of the town center, which serve as visual and symbolic “gateways” to downtown. The General Commercial designation in these areas appears to be inconsistent with the Town’s expressed desire protect the character of the downtown and minimize land uses that cause traffic congestion on Route 32.

**Recommendation** – To minimize the possibility of large commercial or retail traffic generators locating along Main Street, the two areas north and south of downtown that are currently zoned General Commercial have been re-designated as Central Commercial. Retail and business uses are still encouraged in these areas, but at more appropriate village densities. The General Commercial designation continues to apply along Route 20 adjacent to the Town of Palmer. With this change, the amount of General Commercial land will decrease from 228 acres to 119 acres, although the amount of Central Commercial land will increase.

As in the Central Commercial District, the Town may wish to adopt special review procedures for large commercial projects (e.g., over 40,000 square feet) in the General Commercial District. Such procedures, discussed further in **Section 8.3.2**, offer the Town additional control over the design of large projects and allow the Town to require off-site improvements (such as a turning lane) if necessary.

### **8.2.5 Commercial Recreation Areas**

Currently, there are approximately 178 acres of land on Munn Road and Town Farm Road that are zoned Commercial Recreation. Two commercial recreation businesses currently occupy this land. No changes to these areas are recommended.

### **8.2.6 Industrial Areas**

**Issue** – Under current zoning, four small Industrial districts exist in areas that are surrounded by residential zoning and/or residential land uses (one on State Street, two on Maxwell Road, and one on Lower Hampden Road). These districts were apparently created to include pre-existing industrial uses or to provide additional development options to certain individual landowners. However, because they are surrounded by residential land uses, there is the potential for conflict should an industrial use be constructed in or near a residential area.

**Recommendation** – To reduce the potential for land use conflicts, these small Industrial districts should be re-designated for residential uses. Existing industrial uses in these areas would be “grandfathered” under state law and could operate indefinitely. These uses could also alter and expand if they received a special permit from the Town to do so. Eliminating these Industrial areas will reduce the amount of Industrial-zoned land in the Town by only about 11%—from 793 acres currently to 704 acres under the Land Use Guide Plan.

**Issue** – As expressed during the master planning process, the Town would like to expand its commercial and industrial tax base by encouraging business development in appropriate locations with adequate access.

**Recommendation** – The recommended Industrial Area has been expanded to include additional land in the vicinity of Route 32 and Bethany Road. This land abuts existing industrially zoned land and has easy access to Route 32, thereby offering an opportunity for the Town to expand industrial activity in an appropriate location.

### **8.2.7 Planned Development Area**

**Issue** – The Monson Developmental Center is a residential facility operated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Mental Retardation. The facility is located on Upper Palmer Road and consists of approximately 40 buildings on 682 acres of land. The residential population has been decreasing, from 517 residents in 1990, to 228 residents in 2000, to 199 residents in 2002. The Center employs 580 people. The state recently completed extensive building and infrastructure renovations on the property, and the buildings are generally considered to be in excellent condition. Approximately one third of the buildings are vacant.

At this time, it is not anticipated that the Department of Mental Retardation will change the use of the property or sell it. However, in the future, the state could redevelop some of this property or make it available for private use or development. The property is currently zoned Reserved Land and is surrounded by land zoned Rural Residential. Allowed uses in the Reserved Land District are limited to uses that are permitted in the charter of the owner provided that any industrial or residential uses are used exclusively by the owner. This language may limit the use or re-use of the property for any non-state

purposes, which may in turn impact reuse feasibility should the property be transferred to municipal or private ownership for redevelopment.

**Recommendation** – During the Master Plan process, residents expressed a strong interest in encouraging economic development. The Monson Developmental Center should be a focus for such activity because of its close proximity to Route 20 and the Massachusetts Turnpike as well as the availability of adequate water and sewer infrastructure. In order to promote economic development on the Monson Developmental Center property if it is made available for redevelopment in the future, the Town should create a Planned Development Overlay District that would allow by special permit a mix of certain business, office, residential and industrial uses on the site. The creation of a special permit process for planned developments would allow the Town to promote the adaptive reuse of the property while at the same time protecting open space, regulating building design, and encouraging a mix of uses that will generate new tax revenue. The base zoning on the site should be changed from Reserved Land to Rural Residential in order to eliminate any potential legal challenges in case the land is transferred out of state ownership.

In addition to re-zoning the site, the Town should maintain communication with the Department of Mental Retardation and be aware of any potential changes in the use or ownership of this land.

These proposed changes are not reflected in the Land Use Guide Plan or in **Table 8-1**.

### **8.2.8 Scenic Protections**

**Issue** – Monson’s rural character is closely tied to its prominent hills and ridgelines such as Bald Peak, Peaked Mountain, Peck Hill, and Moon Mountain. Throughout the planning process the community has stressed the importance of maintaining the rural appearance of the Town. Over time, however, Monson will begin to lose some of its rural character and scenic beauty if these areas are developed in accordance with the Town’s current zoning and subdivision regulations. To protect the Town’s scenic assets, these areas need to be identified and regulations need to be revised to encourage development that is more in keeping with the Town’s landscape and natural environment.

**Recommendation** – The Town already has a Scenic District Bylaw but no map to define areas where this bylaw applies. The Town should consider creating a Scenic District Map, which would include:

- € **Steep Slopes:** Sheer faces of steep hillsides (exceeding 25% slope) are very visible. People’s attention is often drawn to areas with dramatic changes in elevation, making these locations particularly important to Monson’s scenic character.

See **Section 8.3.3** for other scenic protection strategies.

### **8.2.9 Priority Open Space Overlay Areas**

**Issue** – Approximately 18,000 acres of developable land exists in the Rural Residential areas of Town. Many of these lands are environmentally sensitive and provide the opportunity to link existing conservation areas while protecting critical water resources, wildlife habitat and scenic areas. However, given limited funding for open space protection, it is not possible for the Town, State, or non-profit conservation groups to acquire all of these lands. Therefore, priorities need to be established in order to help these groups make the best use of available resources.

**Recommendation** – The Priority Areas for Open Space Protection shown on **Figure 8-1** identify the most important lands for future conservation efforts. These include areas that: 1) are adjacent to existing conservation areas; 2) have been identified as important habitat for rare species; and/or 3) include prominent ridgelines and hilltops or steep slopes that are highly visible and could cause serious erosion problems if developed.

It should be noted that the designation of “Priority Area for Open Space Protection” is not intended to affect underlying zoning regulations and therefore does not affect property rights or the development potential of land. However, if the Town, State, or a conservation group identifies a piece of land in the Priority Area as very important for conservation purposes, the group may work with the landowner to try to conserve the property through purchase, conservation restriction, donation or some other mechanism.

### **8.3 Other Land Use Policies**

This section provides additional information on some of the recommendations for land use and development practices within the Town.

#### **8.3.1 School, Cemetery, and Reserved Land Districts**

**Issue** – The Reserved Land District designation severely limits possible land use and in the future could be subject to court challenges. In particular, state land that is now part of the Monson Developmental Center could be transferred to another party for redevelopment. In this case, the party seeking to redevelop the land would face an ambiguous zoning designation, which could result in a lawsuit against the Town or development that is not consistent with the Town’s desires. A similar situation exists in the School and Cemetery districts, where use and dimensional standards are not properly defined. If some of this land were found to be privately owned, or if the Town wishes to sell or lease buildings or land in these districts in the future, the limitations of this district could be problematic.

**Recommendation** – To eliminate the potential for future problems, these three districts should be eliminated and incorporated into other zoning districts, as discussed above. The Land Use Guide Plan and **Table 8-1** reflects this recommendation for the School and Cemetery districts. It does not, however, reflect the recommended changes to the Reserved Land District.

#### **8.3.2 Intensity of Business Uses**

While the Town would like to promote appropriate economic development, residents also wish to protect the downtown against inappropriate and excessively large business uses. The following provisions should help the Town strike a balance between these two goals.

##### Central Commercial District

**Issue** – Currently, numerous retail and business uses are allowed in the Central Commercial District without any opportunity for the Town to review the project or negotiate for off-site improvements. In addition, there are no limits on the maximum building size allowed. For example, under current regulations a big box retailer could locate downtown without any review by the Town.

**Recommendation** – The general consensus of the community is to preserve the current look and feel of the downtown area, which consists mainly of smaller buildings. To meet this goal, the Town should limit the maximum size of business uses allowed in the Central Commercial District. Businesses up to 5,000 sq. ft. should meet the specific criteria as outlined in the existing by-laws. Uses greater than 5,000 to 40,000 sq. ft. should be required to meet the specific criteria set for uses less than 5,000 sq. ft., plus additional criteria specific to this larger scale use. Uses greater than 40,000 sq. ft. to 150,000 sq. ft. should be required to meet the criteria set for uses less than 40,000 sq. ft. plus additional criteria specific to this large scale.

The review of large business uses in the Central Commercial District will reduce the possibility that large-scale buildings will change the character of the downtown or that major traffic generators will locate here. The special permit process will allow the Town to review the appropriateness of mid-size projects, review site design issues (landscaping, curb cuts, sidewalks, etc), negotiate for necessary infrastructure improvements, and, if necessary, deny the project.

### General Commercial District

**Issue** – Monson’s residents generally view the portion of the General Commercial District along Route 20 as an appropriate location to encourage commercial and retail activity. However, the Town may want to review larger development proposals here to ensure that safe access and adequate infrastructure are provided and that the business is attractively designed.

**Recommendation** – The Town should require a special permit review process for buildings in the General Commercial District that exceed 40,000 square feet. Buildings up to 40,000 square feet in size would continue to be allowed subject to site plan review.

### Industrial District

**Issue** – Currently, large industrial facilities are allowed with only site plan review. A special permit process for large industrial projects would give the Town the ability to review proposals and, if necessary, negotiate for off-site improvements.

**Recommendation** – The Town should require a special permit for any industrial use larger than 150,000 square feet in size. The high threshold of 150,000 square feet is recommended in order to continue to encourage small to mid-size businesses to locate in Monson. Projects under 150,000 square feet would be allowed subject to the Town’s site plan review process. This policy provides a level of certainty for small and mid-size businesses considering locating in the Town.

## **8.3.3 Residential Development Alternatives**

### Rural Character/Scenic Protections

**Issue** – During the planning process, many residents expressed concern about the effect on private property rights of any efforts to control development or conserve scenic or environmentally sensitive areas. These concerns suggest that new policies should not prohibit development nor substantially reduce the amount of development that could occur—but rather guide *how* development may occur.

A combination of incentives, and development reviews are suggested in order to create new development that blends naturally into the Town’s landscape. These policies can be incorporated into the Town’s existing Scenic District Bylaw. In terms of incentives, landowners and developers should be given additional options for increased setbacks, and shared (‘common’) driveways. (see **Section 8.3.5**). In addition, the Town should review new development in order to minimize its visual impact. For example, if an old farm field is being developed, new houses that are recessed into the treeline at the edge of the field will be much less visually obtrusive than houses positioned in the middle of the field.

**Recommendation** In addition to the Scenic District Bylaw, the Town of Monson should offer town wide incentives to encourage larger setbacks and the creation of vegetative buffers on all town roads in the “rural residential” district. See **Box 8-2**.

### **Box 8-2: Incentives**

While the standard frontage requirement would remain at 200 feet, the Town of Monson would offer the following incentives and guidelines to encourage larger residential setbacks and the creation of vegetated buffers:

- A. 50-foot setback would require the full two hundred (200) feet of frontage.
- B. If a 250 foot setback with a 200 foot vegetated buffer is proposed, then only 175 feet of frontage would be required.
- C. If a 350 foot setback with a 300 foot vegetated buffer is proposed, then only 150 feet of frontage would be required.
- D. In addition, to encourage the use of common driveways there would be a modified version of the 150-foot setback option. The modification would be applicable if a builder has multiple building lots each with 150 feet of frontage and a common driveway to be shared by the lots is proposed. In this case, the initial vertical driveway from the road, would be 150 feet long. This driveway would connect to a horizontal driveway. Individual vertical 50 foot driveways would be constructed for each structure, resulting in a building setback of 230 feet.
- E. The minimum 60,000 square foot lot size would remain regardless of frontage.

### Open Space Communities

**Issue** – With more than 18,000 acres of developable land in the Rural Residential District, it may not financially feasible for the Town to purchase more than a small portion of this land for open space. Therefore, other techniques must be implemented if the Town hopes to protect a significant portion of its open space. The Open Space Communities Bylaw allows for greater flexibility in the design and layout of residential developments and also creates protected open space. However, this bylaw, as currently written, may not offer developers enough incentive to build an Open Space Community instead of a conventional subdivision, especially since an Open Space Community involves the added cost and uncertainty of needing to obtain a special permit.

**Recommendation** – As existing frontage lots for Approval Not Required development become scarce, developers will begin to develop through the subdivision process. When this happens, the Town should encourage developers to use the Open Space Communities Bylaw as an alternative to conventional subdivision development. The following changes to the bylaw are suggested in order to encourage its use.



### **Box 8-3: Recommended Changes to the Open Space Communities Bylaw**

1. Reduce the minimum lot size in an Open Space Community from 30,000 square feet to 10,000 square feet for properties with water and sewer service. Maintain the 30,000 square foot requirement for properties with either water or sewer service but not both. Increase the minimum lot size to 40,000 square feet for properties with no water and no sewer service.
2. Reduce the minimum frontage requirement for lots in the Open Space Community from 100 feet to 50 feet.
3. Offer a density bonus for Open Space Communities so that the overall density is increased 20% from 1 dwelling per 60,000 square feet to 1 dwelling per 50,000 square feet.
4. For subdivisions that will include 10 or more dwelling units or involve a plot of land 15 acres or larger, require the submission of an Open Space Community Plan for Planning Board review. The developer may also submit a conventional subdivision plan if he or she chooses. This policy means that no more time or effort is required for an applicant to obtain an Open Space Community special permit than to undergo ordinary subdivision review.
5. Include guidelines for what types of land are preferred as open space.

### Density of Development Bylaw

**Issue** – The Open Space Communities Bylaw requires an applicant to provide considerably more information than is required for the filing of a conventional subdivision. Many developers are unwilling to expend the time and money required for such a filing.

**Recommendation** – A Density of Development Bylaw provides another alternative to conventional subdivisions and Open Space Communities. When using this provision, the density of development remains the same as a conventional subdivision, but the developer has additional flexibility to relax the standard lot area and dimensional requirements of the Zoning Bylaw (see sample bylaw in **Appendix B-1**). This flexibility benefits the developer and the Town by allowing for the creation of open space, varying lot widths, better road designs, and better siting of homes. A special permit process is required, but it is simpler than the process to obtain an Open Space Community special permit. The Density of Development Bylaw does not require that open space be set aside but does preclude further subdivision or development of the land.

If the Town adopts the recommended changes to the Open Space Communities Bylaw (**Box 8-3**), then there will be sufficient incentive to use this bylaw, and a Density of Development Bylaw is probably not needed. However, if the recommended changes are not adopted, the Density of Development Bylaw would be a good complement to the Open Space Communities Bylaw.

### **8.3.4 Other Zoning Bylaw Provisions**

#### Business Parking Requirements (Suggested for Future Consideration)

**Issue** – The Zoning Bylaw currently defines the parking requirement for office, retail and similar uses as 1 space per 200 square feet of floor area on the ground floor plus 1 space per 400 square feet of floor area on upper floors. One space per 200 square feet is within the generally accepted range of parking standards but is on the high side of the range.

**Recommendation** – The Town should consider reducing the parking requirement to 1 space per 250 or 300 square feet on first floors. By reducing the number of required parking spaces, the Town encourages either additional open space or additional business development on the site, both of which benefit the

Town. In addition, the Town should consider encouraging business establishments to locate parking behind existing structures rather than locating parking on the street side.

### Upland Building Envelope

**Issue** – The Town currently has limited ability to regulate development on lots with significant wetland constraints. Although construction is generally prohibited in wetlands themselves, houses can theoretically be built on lots that are 70%, 80% or even 90% wetlands.

**Recommendation** – The Town should amend its Zoning Bylaw so that within the Rural Residential District, the minimum lot area would remain at 60,000 sq. ft.. Within the building lot must be a minimum of 40,000 sq. ft. of contiguous upland that contains within it a “Building Envelope” of at least 25,000 square feet that is not subject to the Wetlands Protection Act. The “Building Envelope” would consist of the Dwelling, Garage, Septic System, Well, and Access Way.

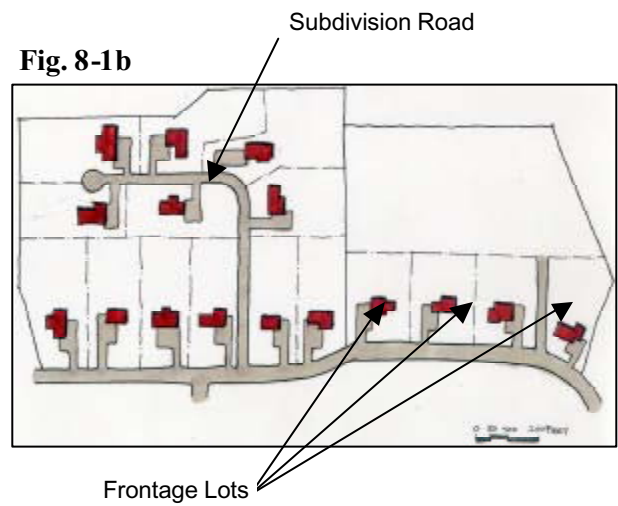
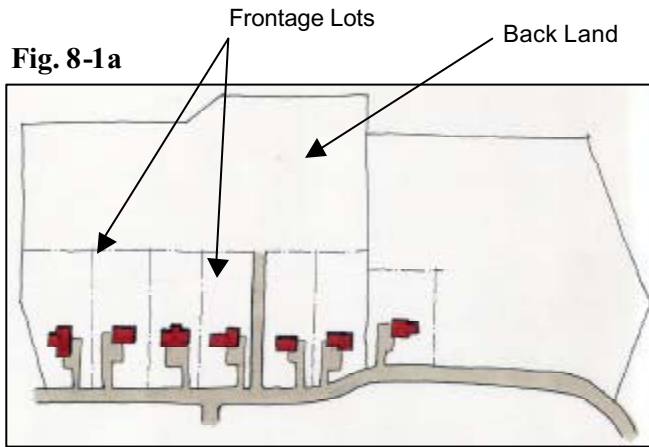
### **8.3.5 Driveways and Curb Cuts**

#### Estate Lots

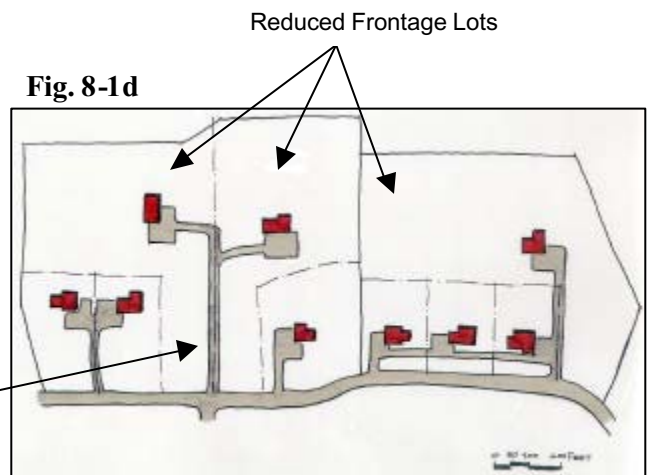
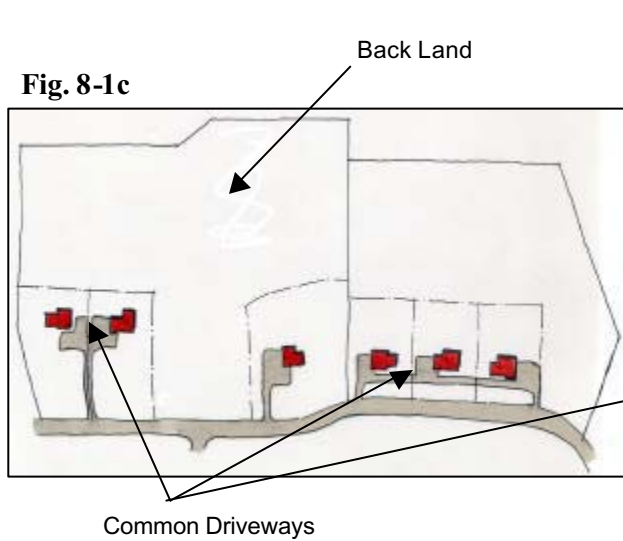
**Issue** – The majority of development in Monson is occurring along existing roadsides as Approval Not Required (ANR) development. Because there is still ample opportunity for ANR development, Monson has not experienced a significant amount of subdivision activity (i.e., the creation of lots by constructing new roads). However, subdivision activity could increase in the future.

**Recommendation** – To provide an alternative to new subdivision roads, the Town should consider amending its Estate Lot provisions. Estate Lots, otherwise known as “flag lots” or “pork chop lots,” can help maintain the rural appearance of Monson’s roads. Monson’s current Estate Lot provisions require the issuance of a special permit and a minimum of 10 acres per dwelling unit and are allowed only in the Residential Rural District. Even with these rigorous requirements, the use of Estate Lot provisions has been used for many lots in Monson. To accommodate property owners, Residential Village Districts Estate Lots should be allowed. In Residential Village Districts, water and sewer is available therefore the Estate Lot size should be reduced to 180,000 square feet. During the Special Permit process many issues relating to the lot itself and to abutting property owners have been resolved, therefore the special permit requirement for Estate Lots should not be eliminated.

**Figure 8-1**  
**Reduced Frontage Lots and Common Driveways**



**Conventional Development Scenario:** First, the frontage of a lot is carved off and developed as “Approval-Not-Required” frontage lots. Later, a subdivision road is built to access the backland for development. This development method lines the roadway with houses and therefore has a significant visual impact.



**Creative Development with Reduced Frontage Lots and Common Driveways:** In this scenario, common driveways are utilized to reduce the visual and traffic safety impacts of roadside development. Reduced frontage lots are used to access the backland. The property owner benefits from the expedited development review process associated with this method, while the Town benefits from lower-density development set further back from the road with fewer visual impacts.

**Figure 8-1** shows how Estate Lots can provide a lower density alternative to conventional subdivisions. In a conventional development scenario, a developer first creates as many Approval Not Required lots as possible along existing roads (**Figure 8-1a**). The back land is then developed by constructing a subdivision road (**Figure 8-1b**). Subdivision roads typically cost between \$150 and \$200 per linear foot to construct and require regrading and the removal of significant amounts of vegetation. By using the Estate Lots provision, landowners can access their back land to build a limited number of homes in a private setting without constructing new subdivision roads (**Figures 8-1c** and **8-1d**). The resulting development may allow for development of back land not otherwise economically viable for development.

#### **Box 8-4: Sample Reduced Frontage ANR Requirements (“Estate Lots”)**

Single-family dwellings on estate lots shall be permitted in RR and RV districts only upon the issuance of a Special Permit from the Planning Board as specified in the By-Law, and in accordance with the additional requirements specified herein.

- A. The lot area if in RR district is a minimum of 10 acres or if in RV district is a minimum of 180,000 square feet, the minimum area shall include the access strip, estate lots shall not be allowed in any other district and any portion of the estate lot in another district shall not be considered for the calculation of the estate lot area; and
- B. The lot frontage shall not be reduced to not less than forty (40) feet with the driveway width of at least fifteen feet (15 ft.) and meeting all other requirements of this by-law for driveways; and
- C. No part of the lot is less than forty (40) feet in any dimension; and
- D. The set back distance for any building on the estate lot to any property line shall be a minimum of three times the set back for the district; and
- E. The Planning Board determined that:
  - a. Existing drainage patterns will not be disrupted by the construction of a driveway on the reduced width portion of the lot;
  - b. The grade of the reduced width portion is less than 10%;
  - c. Cut and fill on the portion with reduced width will not exceed five (5) feet vertically;
  - d. The sight distance at the intersection with the street exceeds one hundred fifty (150) feet in both directions;
  - e. 300% of the lot area required for the residential zoning district is located behind the nearest parallel line to the street which first meets the minimum full lot frontage requirements;
  - f. The submission of a plan that shows the proposed location, construction, and profile of the driveway to provide access to the building area of the lot. Said driveway shall be designed and constructed for the full length to the following minimum standards: a) the access drive shall be constructed to a width of 15 feet with 6 inches of compacted gravel; and b) the grade of the access drive shall not exceed 5%, where the driveway grade is greater than 5% the driveway shall be paved; and
- F. When, in the opinion of the Planning Board, site conditions such as topography, slope or shape warrant, a drainage analysis prepared by a registered professional engineer shall be submitted and approved by the engineer appointed for and by Planning Board prior to the endorsement of the plan by the Planning Board and Conservation Commission; and
- G. A recommendation of approval is issued by the highway and fire departments; and
- H. No parking areas or structures shall be allowed in the access strip; and
- I. There shall be maintained or kept a naturally occurring or a planned vegetated buffer zone between any estate lot(s) and any front lot sufficient to provide privacy between the two lots; and
- J. The plan submitted shall include the statement “Lots(s) is an estate lot; building is permitted only in accordance with the special permit estate lot provision of these by-laws” and said plan shows the entire parcel of property from which the estate lot(s) was (were) created; and
- K. The Building Inspector shall require the access drive to be constructed prior to the issuance of a building permit.

## Common Driveways

**Issue** – As existing roadsides are developed, the series of individual driveways along a rural roadside can greatly affect the road’s visual character and also cause traffic safety problems.

**Recommendation** – Common driveways can reduce the number of curb cuts resulting from new development and also limit the visual and traffic impacts associated with a series of individual driveways along a road. **Figures 8-1c** and **8-1d** show how common driveways can be incorporated into roadside development and estate lot development. Common driveways can also be used for subdivision development. Currently, the Zoning Bylaw does not specifically allow or prohibit the use of common driveways. The Town should include a common driveways provision in the Zoning Bylaw that specifies standards for common driveways as well as the maximum number of lots that may be served by a common driveway. When reviewing projects, the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals should encourage the use of common driveways in all development.

### **8.3.6 Subdivision Rules and Regulations**

**Issue** – In recent years, Monson has not seen significant amounts of subdivision activity resulting in the creation of new roadways. However, the Town can expect that some of Monson’s future development will occur through the subdivision process. The Town’s subdivision road standards are not consistent with the design and appearance of existing roadways in Town. For example, the Subdivision Rules and Regulations require the construction of a 24 to 30 foot wide road and two sidewalks within a 50-foot right-of-way.

**Recommendation** – The Planning Board should promote subdivision designs that are more in keeping with the Town’s existing roads and with the rural character that it would like to maintain throughout the Town. Roads with meandering pathways would be more in keeping with the appearance of Monson’s rural roads.

## 9. Natural and Historic Resources

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Throughout the planning process, Monson's residents stressed the importance of protecting the Town's natural and historic resources. As additional growth and change occurs in Monson, the Town will need to consider a variety of measures to protect these resources. Some of these measures rely on new regulations or incentives; others depend on the stewardship, vigilance and cooperation of the Town's residents and businesses.

### 9.1 Water Resources

The major water resource threat in Monson is from nonpoint source pollution including leachate from septic systems, agricultural runoff, stormwater runoff, road salt, improper disposal of hazardous materials, erosion and sedimentation from development sites, and polluted runoff from paved surfaces. Protecting local water resources from these threats is especially important in a town such as Monson that relies entirely on local groundwater sources for its potable water supply.

#### 9.1.1 Water Supply Protection District

**Issue** – The MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) requires towns to delineate the recharge areas for their public water supplies and protect these areas with a water supply protection district. Although the Town's water consultants (Tighe and Bond) have completed a delineation of the Zone II aquifer recharge areas for the Town's municipal water supply, these areas have not been added to the Town's Water Supply Protection District Map.

**Recommendation** – In order to meet DEP requirements and protect its drinking water supply, the Town should modify the Water Supply Protection District Map to include the Zone II areas as delineated by Tighe and Bond.

**Issue** – The current Water Supply Protection District bylaw requires a minimum lot size of 60,000 square feet for any residential use in the district, even if the home is attached to the municipal sewer system. While this larger lot area is needed in unsewered areas to minimize the impact of septic systems on the aquifer, it is not needed in areas served by municipal sewer.

**Recommendation** – An exemption to the 60,000 square foot lot area currently required in the Water Supply Protection District is recommended for dwellings connected to the municipal sewer system. The exact language and specifications should be explored and researched further.

#### 9.1.2 Surface Water

**Issue** – The greatest threat to Monson's surface water resources is from nonpoint source pollution (or polluted runoff), which derives from a range of sources including runoff from paved surfaces, pesticides and herbicides, farm and animal wastes, and human wastes.

**Recommendation** – Nonpoint source pollution is diffuse, derives from numerous sources, and is often the accumulated result of many small actions whose origins may be difficult to trace. For this reason, an effective program to control nonpoint source pollution typically requires several strategies in combination, and must include the participation of individual property owners. The selection of these strategies often needs to occur on a case-by-case basis, and requires weighing the cost or burden of a given strategy against its likely environmental benefit. Recommended strategies for Monson include:

- € **Adopt Townwide Stormwater Management Standards:** The DEP’s Stormwater Management Policy is a good model that Monson should adopt locally as a general bylaw. Most of DEP’s standards are “performance standards” that allow the engineer to select the most cost-effective technique to achieve the given standard. Appropriate documentation requirements and review procedures should be included as part of such a bylaw.
- € **Promote Better Design:** Monson’s Subdivision Rules and Regulations and Open Space Communities Bylaw should promote site layouts that minimize impervious surfaces such as roadways and driveways. These regulations should also promote the retention of natural vegetation, since lawns generate a significantly higher runoff rate and pollutant load than undisturbed forests.
- € **Work with Large Landowners:** Farms and golf courses have traditionally been major sources of nonpoint source pollution due to their use of agricultural and horticultural chemicals, as well as farm wastes. However, in recent years many farms and golf courses have become models for low-impact, environmentally responsible management of turf, crop, and pasture land. The Town should help landowners build on these past successes by working with farm and golf course landowners to help them develop effective alternatives to using large amounts of toxic chemicals.
- € **Environmentally-Responsible Town Activities:** Maintenance and management of roads and other paved surfaces have a significant effect on local water quality. The MassHighway, the Water Department, Sewer Department and Highway Department in conjunction with the Conservation Commission should assess the Town’s current programs for road de-icing and identify any opportunities to reduce the impact of road management activities on water quality.
- € **Public Education:** Because nonpoint source pollution is primarily the result of small, individual actions, public education is an essential strategy for addressing the problem. The Town should help increase its residents’ knowledge of local water resources and the steps they can take to protect them. One effective way to do this is to distribute informational brochures on topics such as recycling; the proper use and maintenance of septic systems; low-impact lawn and garden care (proper use of lawn/garden chemicals, as well as organic and non-chemical alternatives); and information for homeowners who abut wetlands about how to protect these areas. Such information could be developed jointly by the Conservation Commission and the Board of Health and distributed at low cost in the Town’s tax bill mailings and on the Internet.
- € **Natural Buffers Around Water Bodies:** Natural vegetated buffers around surface water bodies are an effective barrier against pollutants that might otherwise enter water bodies through surface runoff or groundwater discharge. The Massachusetts Rivers Protection Act restricts development within 200 feet of any perennial river or stream, and, if properly enforced by the Monson Conservation Commission, will ensure adequate buffering around perennial streams in the Town. For water bodies that are not protected by the Rivers Protection Act, such as ponds and intermittent streams, the Town should attempt to establish buffers of natural land around these bodies. This is particularly important for seasonal drainage channels that fill with water during



major storms, when sediment and pollutant loads are large. The Planning Board can encourage the protection of buffer lands as part of their review of proposed subdivisions and Open Space Communities.

### **9.1.3 Local Wetlands Protection**

**Issue** – State wetland regulations do not protect certain types of wetlands such as isolated wetlands nor historic and archaeological resources associated with wetland and waterbodies.

**Recommendation** – While the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (MAWPA) provides significant protections for wetlands, many communities have chosen to supplement MAWPA with local wetlands regulations in order to provide additional protection as well as greater local control over the review of projects proposed in or near wetlands. Monson should adopt a local wetlands protection bylaw. This bylaw should complement the protections in the state Act by including the following provisions:

- ∅ **Isolated Wetlands:** The local bylaw should apply to all wetlands, even isolated wetlands that are not covered under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act.
- ∅ **Buffer Zones:** Some communities have chosen to adopt a no-build buffer zone of 50' around the edge of wetlands. This is stricter than MAWPA, which ordinarily allows activities within the wetland buffer zone subject to an Order of Conditions.
- ∅ **Vernal Pools:** Vernal pools are a particular type of isolated wetland that provide the only breeding habitat for several rare amphibian species, as well as habitat for other animals. Ideally, a 50' no-build buffer should be provided around vernal pools, since the amphibians that breed in these pools also require adjacent upland habitat in order to complete their life cycle.
- ∅ **Historic and Archaeological Resources:** Some communities have adopted provisions specifically to protect the historic and archaeological resources that are sometimes found adjacent to water bodies.
- ∅ **Filing and Review Fees:** Establishing a local bylaw allows the Conservation Commission to charge additional application fees in order to help defray the cost of reviewing projects that fall under the bylaw's jurisdiction. Local homeowners are often waived from this additional cost if their projects are not large in nature. In addition, the bylaw can require the applicant to pay for the reasonable cost of a technical expert (consultant) to review the applicant's wetland flagging and/or project plans.

A local Wetlands Protection Bylaw is typically adopted as a general bylaw. Under such a bylaw, wetlands are delineated based on field studies conducted on individual sites. This is preferable to creating a town-wide wetlands map, which would be expensive to create and not completely accurate since wetland boundaries can shift over time.

### **9.1.4 Erosion Control**

**Issue** – If not properly controlled, silt and soil runoff from construction sites and developments can kill vegetation, cause drainage systems to fail, and damage the property of abutting landowners.

**Recommendation** – To address these potential problems, the Town should add temporary and permanent erosion control measures to its Zoning Bylaw and the Planning Board's Subdivision Rules and

Regulations. The following provisions (**Box 9-1**) will minimize the potential for erosion both during construction and after the development has been completed.

### **Box 9-1: Recommended Erosion Control Categories**

**Minimize Site Disturbance Through Site Planning and Layout**

**Temporary Stabilization During Construction**

**Temporary Sediment Control for Drainage During Construction**

**Permanent Stabilization of Soils and Slopes**

**Permanent Stormwater Best Management Practices**

**Responsibility and Maintenance**

## **9.2 Habitats and Ecosystems**

Functioning habitats and ecosystems depend on large contiguous areas of undeveloped land. Ideally, these undeveloped areas should represent the full variety of natural habitats occurring within a town, and should be connected via corridors of undeveloped land. The Land Use Guide Plan attempts to meet these objectives by designating the areas of the Town that are most important for plant and wildlife habitat as Priority Areas for Open Space Protection. Although some development is expected to occur in these areas, they should be the focus of local and state conservation efforts in Monson.

### **9.2.1 Land Management**

**Issue** – Simply protecting land from development will not ensure that the land functions as quality habitat for native plant and wildlife species. For example, as a result of pollution as well as soil and hydrological disturbance, the species composition in many Massachusetts wetlands has been altered so that invasive species such as *Phragmites* reeds and Purple Loosestrife have crowded out native species. Another example is an old farm field that, if not actively managed, will revert to an early successional forest, thus eliminating habitat for field-dwelling insect and bird species.

**Recommendation** – The Town, through the Conservation Commission, should promote ecologically-sound land management through the following steps:

- € Develop and implement land management plans for existing Town-owned conservation properties so as to maximize their value for native plant and wildlife species.
- € Work with volunteers to monitor invasive species on conservation lands in Monson, and develop eradication plans if necessary.
- € Preserve existing wildlife corridors by minimizing fencing in conservation areas, particularly where open space parcels abut one another.
- € Encourage land owners with large open fields or meadows to maintain them through the following two options: 1) once or twice a year mowing; and 2) a prescribed burn through assistance from the Monson Fire Department.

## 9.3 Historic Preservation

The Town has already taken several steps to protect its historic resources, such as establishing the Monson Center Historic District. However, additional review processes are recommended to prevent future development from radically changing the appearance of many of Monson's historic buildings. In addition, the Town should adequately fund the maintenance of Town-owned historic structures.

### 9.3.1 Historic Resource Inventory

**Issue** – The Historical Commission has a registry of over 200 buildings and sites of historical interest. However, other sites and buildings remain undocumented.

**Recommendation** – The Commission should continue its efforts toward identifying and protecting Monson's historic resources through existing state and federal programs. The State Historic Commission provides 50% match Survey and Planning Grants to assist communities in surveying properties for inclusion on the Register.

### 9.3.2 Creation of Design Review Guidelines and Board

**Issue** – During the master planning process, residents expressed a desire to improve the aesthetic appearance of residential, commercial, retail, and industrial development, especially in and near the town center. Improved aesthetics can not only make the Town's business areas more inviting places to work and shop, but can also help boost property values in the entire area. At the same time, any new regulations intended to improve appearance must be flexible enough so as not to unduly burden existing or prospective businesses from building in Monson.

**Recommendation** – The Town should establish a Design Review Board and Design Review Guidelines to guide the design of all new developments and all remodeling projects, or projects that require a building permit on structures built before 1940 along the entire length of Main Street. The Design Review Board<sup>1</sup> reviews the building design, building material, and landscape treatments of proposed projects with reference to a published Design Guidelines. The Board then provides a non-binding advisory report to the actual permit granting authority (Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Building Inspector, etc.). In practice, developers are often willing to revise their building and site plans based on the Design Review Board's suggestions. It is recommended that the Board be appointed by the Board of Selectmen.

The Design Review Guidelines is a written document that spells out what types of building designs, building materials, and landscape treatments are preferred in the Town. In Monson's case, preferred designs would probably be consistent with the Town's traditional development patterns and historic structures. The Design Review Guidelines give developers an up-front idea of what the Town is looking for and ensures that the Design Review process is as objective as possible. It should be noted that the Design Review process is a complement to the existing Site Plan Approval process, not a replacement.

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<sup>1</sup> A Design Review Board typically consists of five members appointed by the Selectmen. Members of the Design Review Board should include individuals familiar with design, construction, and real estate, such as architects, landscape architects, lawyers, Realtors, and contractors. The Board should include a nominee of the Planning Board and a nominee of the Historical Commission.

Site Plan Approval addresses technical criteria such as conformance with zoning, proper drainage, and safe access while Design Review focuses on aesthetic criteria.

### **9.3.3 Demolition Delay Bylaw**

**Issue** – Monson’s rural and historic flavor is closely tied to its historic buildings and homes. If some of these buildings are demolished, the Town will begin to lose some of its character and charm. However, there is no procedure currently for the Town to review demolition requests and encourage alternatives to demolishing historic buildings.

**Recommendation** – The Town should adopt a Demolition Delay Bylaw to allow a period of time (6-9 months) to review requests to demolish historic structures. Specifically, the Demolition Delay should apply to all structures anywhere in the town that were constructed before 1940. A Historic Review Commission, appointed by the Selectmen, should review each building proposed for demolition in order to determine its historical significance. During the demolition delay period, the Town can work with the property owner to identify alternatives to demolition. If the owner submits a proposal that either addresses the Town’s concerns or is determined to be acceptable, the delay can be waived. If an acceptable alternative cannot be reached, the owner may demolish the structure after the delay period expires. A sample Demolition Delay Bylaw is provided as **Appendix B-3**.

### **9.3.4 Community Preservation Act**

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is described in greater detail in **Section 10.2**. If Monson adopts the CPA, the funds may be used to purchase, restore and rehabilitate historic structures and landscapes that the Town has determined to be significant in the history, archeology, architecture or culture of the Town, or that are listed or eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places.

## 10. Open Space, Agriculture, and Recreation

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During the planning process, residents identified the protection of Monson’s distinctive open spaces—farmland, woods, and scenic landscapes—as a goal of the highest priority. This section outlines several strategies that the Town can use to protect these open spaces future generations. In addition, this section includes recommendations related to active and passive recreation.

### 10.1 Previous Open Space and Recreation Efforts

In 1999, the Town prepared and adopted an Open Space and Recreation Plan. The Town has implemented several significant recommendations of the Plan. Most notably, the Town has purchased 23 acres of land on Cedar Swamp Road and 39 acres on Silver Street for conservation purposes. The Town was able to secure a grant through the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs to help pay for these acquisitions. In addition, the Town has constructed two new softball fields, one baseball field, three soccer fields, and a track facility in conjunction with the new High School.

As the Town seeks to expand upon its past conservation and recreation successes, it has several advantages working to its benefit. For example, the Norcross Wildlife Foundation continues to play a major role in the protection and maintenance of open space in the Town.

### 10.2 Land Conservation Strategies

The first step in developing a successful land conservation strategy is to decide what types of land in Monson are most important to conserve. Priorities for open space protection should focus on Monson’s most unique and irreplaceable resources, as well those areas that are not already protected by state and local environmental laws. Furthermore, at least some of these lands should be accessible and offer a variety of recreational activities to all residents. Based on these factors as well as guidance from the Open Space and Recreation Plan and the master planning process, the following criteria for open space conservation were identified (**Box 10-1**). The Land Use Guide Plan identifies several areas in Town that meet these criteria as “Priority Areas for Open Space Protection.”

#### **Box 10-1: Land Conservation Priorities**

The highest-priority areas for open space protection in Monson should include:

- € Land that provides public access to Monson’s lakes and ponds
- € Ridgelines and other areas affording scenic views
- € Farmland
- € Land identified as critical wildlife habitat
- € Land adjacent to existing conservation areas or that would create corridors of protected land
- € Land adjacent to existing and potential drinking water supplies
- € Land suitable for developing future active recreational facilities

Once the Town has identified areas of land that it would like to protect, it should take advantage of a range of different land conservation tools such as those shown in **Box 10-2**. Each situation may require a different tool or combination of tools depending on the funding available and on the needs and wishes of

the landowner. Of the several techniques discussed below, the most economically desirable ones are those that do not require funding from the Town. The most politically feasible are those that would not reduce the density or range of uses allowed to be developed on privately owned land. The best strategy for the Town as a whole will involve some combination of these tools.

## **Box 10-2: Tools for Land Conservation**

### **A. Outright Acquisition**

Outright acquisition provides the highest amount of protection for a piece of property. In addition, the group that purchases the property is able to control how it is used or managed. However, outright acquisition is usually the most expensive technique, as well. Funding mechanisms for outright acquisition include:

1. Town funding from a one-time appropriation, an annual contribution to a land protection fund, or the Community Preservation Act (see below).
2. Grant funding: for example, the Town recently used the state's Self-Help program administered through the Division of Conservation Services to help purchase two open space parcels.
3. Private conservation organization such as the Trustees of Reservations, the Opacum Land Trust, or the Norcross Foundation.
4. Donations or "bargain sales" from landowners seeking to conserve their land or gain income tax benefits.

### **B. Restrictions and Easements**

Restrictions and easements limit the future use of land by restricting or prohibiting development. However, the land continues to be owned and operated by a private owner. If the restriction on development is in perpetuity, this mechanism provides as much protection for land as outright acquisition. In addition, it can cost less than outright acquisition and offers more flexibility to meet the needs of the landowner. For example, a restriction could be negotiated that allows a landowner to continue to farm or log the land, live on the land, or even build another house on the property.

Funding can come from the same mechanisms as for outright acquisition. In addition, grant funding is available from various state programs including the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program, which purchases easements from farmers to restrict future development (see below).

### **C. Temporary Protections**

The state's Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B programs offer tax incentives for landowners to keep their property in active forestry, agricultural, and recreation use, respectively. However, these programs offer no long-term protection for land. See **Section 4.1.2** for additional discussion of these programs.

### **D. Other Tools**

Other land conservation tools take advantage of the economics of land development to protect open space as part of new development projects (usually residential). As long as the open space is protected with a suitable conservation restriction, this form of open space protection is as good as outright acquisition. These tools include:

1. **Open Space Communities:** See **Section 8.3.3** for recommendations on improving Monson's Open Space Communities Bylaw so that developers will be more inclined to use it.
2. **Other Zoning Tools:** Estate Lot provisions (**Section 8.3.5**), and a Density of Development Bylaw (**Section 8.3.3**) are other zoning policies to increase the amount of open space in new developments, even if the overall development density remains the same.
3. **Limited Development:** In a limited development project, a conservation group (usually a nonprofit but sometimes a government body) first purchases a piece of land they would like to conserve as open space. Then, a portion of the site that is least important for conservation purposes is carved off and sold as high-end real estate such as a "country estate." The proceeds from this sale, which can sometimes equal 50% of the purchase price or more, are used to repay money borrowed for the land purchase or used to fund future conservation efforts.

The following sub-sections provide additional explanation of some of the land conservation tools identified above.

## Publicly Funded Acquisition or Protection

**Issue** – Public land acquisition is an effective mechanism for preserving specific high-priority land parcels.

**Recommendation** – Although it may appear to be financially and politically difficult to allocate Town funds for open space protection, the Town should consider the multiple benefits of land conservation. For example, by purchasing vacant parcels that would otherwise be available for residential development, the Town ensures that those parcels will not be developed for residential uses. In many cases, the public purchase of open space is actually more cost-effective than allowing land to be developed, which would require additional public service expenditures.

In general, the Town should only work with willing property owners to protect open space. Eminent domain takings should be avoided except in very rare circumstances where the public good outweighs the risk and potential extra legal costs.

## Grants

In addition to Town-funded acquisition, state and federal dollars are available for purchasing open space. Having completed an Open Space and Recreation Plan within the last five years (in 1999), the Town is eligible for several open space-related grants administered by the Division of Conservation Services. The Town recently used these programs to acquire 62 acres of conservation land. The Town should pursue these and other grants for land protection.

## Community Preservation Act

Community Preservation Act (M.G.L. Ch. 44B) provides Massachusetts cities and towns with a mechanism to protect open space, preserve historic buildings and sites, and create affordable housing. Towns may establish by local referendum a property tax surcharge of up to 3% to help fund these activities. Funds raised locally through the Community Preservation Act (CPA) will be supplemented by state matching funds. At least 10% of CPA funds must be spent on each of the following three activities: open space protection, historic preservation and affordable housing. The remaining 70% may be used for any one or more of these three purposes in accordance with the community's priorities.

Monson should consider adopting the CPA to provide a steady source of income for open space protection, historic preservation and affordable housing activities. There are two methods available to Monson to adopt the CPA. First, Town Meeting can vote to place the question of adopting the CPA before the voters as a referendum. Second, if Town Meeting does not adopt the CPA language at least 90 days before a regular town election or 120 days before a state election, then a petition signed by 5% of the registered voters in Monson can be filed to place the question on the ballot. The CPA will be adopted if the referendum passes by a majority vote.

If Monson adopts the CPA, the Town may choose to exempt \$100,000 of value for each taxable parcel and/or the full value of residential property owned by low income persons or low and moderate income senior citizens. In addition, the CPA does not affect any other real estate tax exemptions or abatements authorized under M.G.L. Ch. 59 or any other state law.

Upon adoption of the CPA, a community must appoint a Community Preservation Committee consisting of between five and nine members, including one member from each of the following: Conservation Commission, Historic Commission, Planning Board, Board of Park Commissioners, and Housing Authority. The Committee makes recommendations to Town Meeting for the use of money in the local Community Preservation Fund. In addition, communities may issue bonds in anticipation of Community Preservation Fund receipts. These funds may be used for:

- € **Open Space:** Community Preservation funds may be used to purchase land, easements or restrictions to protect existing and future water supply areas, agricultural and forest land, coastal lands, frontage to inland water bodies, wildlife habitat, nature preserves, and scenic vistas. If the community is only spending 10% of its funds on open space, the open space cannot be purchased for recreational use.
- € **Recreation:** Land can also be purchased for active and passive recreational uses including land for community gardens, trails, non-commercial youth and adult sports, and parks, playgrounds or athletic fields.
- € **Historic Preservation:** Funds may be used to purchase, restore and rehabilitate historic structures and landscapes that have been determined by the local historical commission to be significant in the history, archeology, architecture or culture of a city or town, or that are listed or eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places.
- € **Affordable Housing:** Funds may be used to create and preserve housing for low and moderate income individuals and families, including low and moderate income senior housing. The Act requires the Committee to recommend, wherever possible, the adaptive reuse of existing buildings or construction of new buildings on previously developed sites.

### Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program

Through the APR program, the state buys the development rights of farmland from willing owners, thus restricting the land to agricultural use. A local 10% match is required to cover the cost of purchasing the development rights. If adopted by the Town, funds from the CPA could be used for the match.

The Town, through the Open Space Steering Committee and the Conservation Commission, should work with local farmers interested in protecting their lands through this program.

### Conservation Restrictions

A conservation restriction (CR) is a legally binding agreement between a landowner and a holder (usually a public agency or a private conservation group) whereby the grantor agrees to limit the use of his/her property for the purpose of protecting certain conservation values. In almost all cases, the CR is in perpetuity. CRs are sometimes offered as gifts but may also be purchased using public funds. The CR benefits the property owner by reducing his or her property taxes and by providing numerous estate planning benefits. In addition, if the CR was donated, the property owner will receive a one-time income tax deduction for the fair market value of the donation. Again, the Town, through the Open Space Steering Committee and the Conservation Commission, should identify and work with property owners that are interested in donating or selling CRs.



## Private Involvement

In addition to pursuing grants and local funding sources, the Town should work with willing property owners and nonprofit organizations to protect open space. The Norcross Wildlife Foundation, Trustees of Reservations, and the Wilbraham Conservation Trust, and the Opacum Land Trust all own land in Monson. However, with some initiative on the part of the Town, nonprofit land trusts and conservation organizations could play an even larger role.

Another option is to partner with regional organizations on specific projects. Land conservation organizations regularly collaborate with landowners, municipal officials, and local volunteers to protect key parcels of open space. Such efforts might combine several funding sources to purchase the land or its development rights. In time-critical situations, a nonprofit will sometimes “front” the money to buy a piece of land until the Town is able to appropriate enough money to reimburse the nonprofit.

### **10.3 Supporting Agriculture**

**Issue** – Despite the numerous challenges facing farm operations in Monson, several farms have developed successful strategies to stay in business. The remaining farms and fields convey a rural feeling that Monson’s residents value highly. Efforts are needed to preserve these important economic and scenic resources.

**Recommendation** – To support its agricultural businesses, Monson should pursue the strategies contained in **Box 10-3** that have been most successful in other Massachusetts and New England communities.

### **10.4 Active Recreation**

**Issue** – During the master planning process, residents identified the need for additional active recreational facilities in the Town. Demand for new facilities is generated partly by population growth, partly by the increase in privately sponsored sports programs, and partly by more active school intramural and interscholastic sports programs. Although the greatest demand for recreational facilities is generated by children and youth programs, there is also demand for recreational and exercise facilities for adults and seniors. Land exists for additional fields and courts at the Flynt Park recreation area and the High School.

**Recommendation** – The Town should support the Recreation Department’s current plans and potential options for developing active recreation facilities, including:

- € Determining the use of the new field at Flynt Park; and
- € Constructing additional fields at Flynt Park.

## **Box 10-3: Supporting Agriculture**

### **What the Town Can Do**

- € Adopt “right-to-farm” policies that protect farmers from people who move into farming areas and then complain about noise, dust, odor, or other realities of working farms. Ensure that new bylaws do not impose undue hardships on agricultural businesses.
- € Through the Conservation Commission, adopt provisions for streamlined review of small farming-related projects that are subject to the Wetlands Protection Act.
- € If there is interest from local farmers, make space available for a weekly farmers market, perhaps in the parking lot of Town Hall or another municipal building. A farmers market can provide an opportunity to sell not just farm products but other locally produced goods as well.
- € Allow small-scale agricultural processing operations as an accessory use subject to size and impact limitations.
- € Allow by special permit farm stands where more than 50% of the products were raised on the premises.
- € Raise local funds through annual appropriations, the Community Preservation Act, or other measures to purchase agricultural preservation restrictions (APRs) from willing sellers. Alternatively, if the farmer no longer wants to farm the land, the Town can purchase the farm and lease it to another farmer. In this case, the Town should lease to a farmer with a promising farm business plan.

### **What Farmers Can Do**

Many of Monson’s most successful farms are already using one or more of these strategies to increase farm revenues:

- € Produce and/or sell value-added products such as ice cream, cheese, jam, pies, and other products.
- € Sell retail farm products directly to the customer: for example, at a farm stand or a farmers market. Many of the most successful farm stands also sell products that were produced elsewhere.
- € Utilize greenhouses to grow crops year-round, such as vegetables and flowers.
- € Grow high-value or niche crops such as organic produce, herbs, exotic mushrooms, or special varieties.
- € Increase on-farm sales by adding an agri-tourist component to the business. For example, farms may operate “U-pick” orchards for apples, peaches or berries; offer hay rides; provide animal rides or a petting zoo; or have an on-farm bed and breakfast.
- € Take advantage of state programs that support small farms, such as the Massachusetts APR program; the Farm Viability Enhancement Program, which provides grants of up to \$40,000 to upgrade farm operations; and the “Tourist-Oriented Directional Signs” program, which provides signs that direct motorists to farms.

# 11. Downtown and Economic Development

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Monson enjoys a relatively diverse economic base but has been affected in recent years by the closing of several manufacturing operations. Based on public input received during the master planning process, the community would like to encourage economic development by capitalizing on Monson's location and maximizing the use of existing commercial and industrial sites. In addition, maintaining a vibrant downtown is important both for the Town's economy and for its identity.

## 11.1 Downtown

### 11.1.1 Downtown Initiatives

**Issue** – The Monson Downtown Technical Assistance Report, dated August 1999 and prepared by the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, outlines a number of worthwhile recommendations. However, due to staffing limitations, lack of funding, and limited participation by local businesses, many of the recommendations have not been implemented.

**Recommendation** – The Town should renew its efforts to implement the key recommendations of this report without placing undue hardship on existing businesses. The Partnership may want to begin with the following initiatives:

- € Contact downtown business owners and assess the level of interest in participating in collaborative efforts to market and improve the downtown.
- € Work with interested business owners on small-scale improvements such as facades and signage in order to create a more consistent and appealing look to the downtown. Various small grant and loan programs are available to support this effort.
- € Begin a business retention and expansion initiative as outlined in the Technical Assistance Report.
- € Organize additional events that bring people downtown so they can become more familiar with the products and services offered by Monson's downtown businesses.

In addition, the Town should consider contributing to downtown improvement efforts through the following projects:

- € Adopting design review and additional protections for historic resources, as outlined in **Section 9.3**.
- € Undertaking cost-effective improvements to the public streetscape such as replacing the green painted trash barrels with attractive trash receptacles, installing benches and other amenities for pedestrians, and creating a historic-looking signage "template" for any future downtown signs.
- € Consider applying for a Public Works Economic Development (PWED) grant from the Executive Officer of Transportation and Construction. These grants of up to \$1 million can be used for improvements to local roads, streetscapes, bridges, curbing, sidewalks, lighting systems, traffic control and service facilities, drainage systems and culverts associated with a municipal economic development effort.

**11.1.2 Front Yard Setbacks in the Central Commercial District**

**Issue** – Many buildings in the southern section of the Central Commercial District are located directly adjacent to the sidewalk, creating a well-defined building line. This building line contributes to the character of the downtown area and creates a sense of scale to the street. However, the current Zoning Bylaw requires a minimum building setback of 20 feet in the Central Commercial District, and even greater setbacks can be created at the developer’s discretion. In many cases, this setback area is used for parking, which further separates the building from the street and undermines the area’s traditional character.

**Recommendation** – The Town should adopt a prevailing front yard setback provision (0-10 feet) for the Central Commercial District to direct and encourage development consistent with historical development patterns downtown. The Town should also establish a maximum front yard setback (15-20 feet) and require parking lots to be located to the side or rear of downtown buildings. See **Box 11-1**.

<p><b>Box 11-1: Suggested Front Yard Setback Provisions in the Central Commercial District</b></p> <p><b>Prevailing Front Yard Setback:</b> The Prevailing Front Yard Setback is defined as setback distance of the nearest structure to the street along the same side of the street within 200 feet of the site. Any structure hereafter erected may extend to the Prevailing Front Yard Setback.</p> <p><b>Maximum Front Yard Setbacks:</b> The maximum front setback shall be 20 feet greater than the Prevailing Front Yard Setback or 40 feet, whichever is less. The Planning Board may waive this requirement due to unusual circumstances of the site.</p> <p><b>Parking:</b> The required front yard setback shall not be used for parking.</p>
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**11.2 Bed and Breakfast Establishments**

**Issue** – Currently, the only lodging uses specified in the Zoning Bylaw are “motels” and “motor hotels,” both of which are allowed only in the Central Commercial and General Commercial Districts. Bed and breakfast establishments can be an effective way to encourage additional tourism.

**Recommendation** – The Town should allow bed and breakfast establishments in the Central Commercial and General Commercial districts. Bed and breakfast establishments should also be allowed by special permit in the Residential Village and Rural Residential districts. The size of these establishments can be regulated based on number of rooms or percent of building use. See **Box 11-2**.

### Box 11-2: Bed and Breakfast Establishments

**Bed and Breakfast:** A private owner-occupied residence with one to four guestrooms. The bed and breakfast is subordinate and incidental to the main residential use of the building. Individual guests are prohibited from staying at any particular bed and breakfast establishment for more than twenty-one (21) days in any one-year period.

**Signs in Residential Districts:** For each bed and breakfast, one small unlighted announcement sign not exceeding three square feet in area may be attached to and parallel with the front porch or wall of the building.

**Parking Requirements:** Bed and breakfasts shall provide one parking space per guestroom plus two spaces for the residence. Spaces shall be located to the side or rear of the building and shall be screened from adjacent properties by a four-foot high wood or masonry fence or by sight-obscuring vegetation of the same height.

**Bed and Breakfast Establishment Regulations:** Bed and breakfast operations shall be subject to the following regulations:

- a. Meals shall only be served to guests taking lodging in the facility.
- b. Rooms used for sleeping shall be part of the primary residential structure and shall not have been specifically constructed for rental purposes.
- c. No exterior alterations are allowed other than those required by law to ensure the safety of the structure.
- d. The bed and breakfast operation shall not use more than fifty percent (50%) of the floor area of the principal residence. Common areas such as kitchens are not included in this calculation.

## 11.3 Flea Markets

**Issue** – Currently “flea markets” are not defined in the Zoning Bylaw. Regulations outlining permitting procedures, acceptable locations, hours of operation and other critical operating guidelines are recommended for the Town of Monson.

**Recommendation** – The Town should permit flea market in districts zoned for business or industrial uses. Please see **Box 11-3** for recommended definition and regulations.

### Box 11-3: Flea Markets

**Flea Market Definition:** A market, indoors or out of doors, where new or used items are sold from individual locations, with each location being operated independently from other locations. Items sold include, but are not limited to, household items, antiques, rare items, decorations, used books, and used magazines.

**License Required:** No person, firm or corporation shall operate the business of renting space or allocating space to flea market sellers without first obtaining a license from the Board of Selectmen.

**Flea Market Regulations:** Flea market operations shall be subject to the following regulations:

- a. No person shall sell or offer for sale at any flea market any goods known to such person to be stolen.
- b. No flea market seller shall purchase any used household item, antique or used article whatsoever from any person under the age of eighteen (18) years, unless such person is accompanied by the person's parent or guardian.
- c. Flea markets may remain open for business between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., for a maximum of three (3) days, unless otherwise specified on the license by the Board at time of issuance.
- d. Flea markets are not permitted in any zoning district except for business or industrial zoned districts. Written owners permission of the property location must be on file with the Town Administrator prior to the date(s) of the event. Flea Markets may be held a maximum of two (2) occurrences per year in the town and maximum of one(1) event per location annually, unless otherwise approved.

## **11.4 Economic Development**

### **11.4.1 Reuse of Existing Mill Buildings and Other Structures**

**Issue** – Three vacant older mill buildings exist in the Town: two in the Industrial district (Zero Corporation on Main Street and the Ellis Woolen Mills on Bliss Street) and one in the Central Commercial district (Cushman Street Mill). These buildings are proud symbols of a by-gone era. However, if they are not renovated and reused, their condition will deteriorate to the point where it will become cost prohibitive to renovate them.

**Recommendation** – The Town should establish a Mill Conversion Overlay District in order to permit the conversion of historic mill structures that are zoned for industrial or commercial uses, but are unlikely to be used for those purposes. The bylaw should enable these structures, which are currently vacant or underutilized, to be returned to active use through their conversion into a mixed-used complex, featuring a variety of uses including residential, commercial, institutional, and recreational uses. The bylaw should be structured to provide the following incentives for redevelopment:

- € **Zoning Flexibility:** The Town should adopt a zoning provision that provides greater flexibility with regard to uses and dimensional requirements for properties with the Mill Conversion Overlay District. Within these buildings, use regulations should be relaxed to allow a mix of uses including residential, commercial, and light industrial uses. For example, restaurants, retail operations, and banks, which are currently special permit uses in the Industrial District, should be allowed by right in the mill buildings. In addition, Senior Housing and other forms of housing should be permitted within the refurbished mill buildings. Dimensional regulations could also be relaxed to allow a waiver of the typical setback requirements by special permit.
- € **Funding:** Numerous grant, loan, and technical assistance programs could potentially be used to encourage redevelopment of Monson’s vacant buildings and sites. The Town, through the Town Administrator’s office, should take an active role in pursuing these funding sources.

### **11.4.2 Local Partnership for Economic Development**

**Issue** – Monson has a Local Partnership for Economic Development. For the Partnership to be successful, it is critical that business owners participate and contribute resources.

**Recommendation** – Monson’s Local Partnership for Economic Development should work actively with business leaders, elected officials and Town staff to encourage continued investments in Monson’s commercial and industrial areas. In addition, the Town should consider providing funding to support the Partnership’s economic development efforts.

## **Box 11-4: Initiatives for Monson’s Local Partnership for Economic Development**

The Local Partnership for Economic Development should initiate the following activities:

- € Identify and pursue appropriate public and private funding sources for economic development and redevelopment.
- € Prepare informational/marketing brochures on the advantages of locating a business in Monson.
- € Serve as a liaison to various state agencies and other groups interested in economic development.
- € Serve as a liaison to business owners considering locating their business in Monson.
- € Advertise business opportunities and sites in regional business journals.
- € Seek Town appropriations for technical support.
- € Eventually, consider hiring professional staff to conduct the preceding activities.

The following agencies and resources are particularly relevant to the circumstances in Monson and should be used by the Partnership to encourage additional economic development.

### MassDevelopment

MassDevelopment offers a range of tools to support economic development statewide. In particular, the Brownfields Redevelopment Fund could be used to conduct initial investigations and cleanup of the mill sites. This fund offers up to \$50,000 per site to perform environmental assessments when contamination is suspected, and up to \$500,000 per site for environmental cleanup.

### Brownfield Redevelopment Initiative

The Brownfield Redevelopment Initiative administered through MassDevelopment could also be used to encourage the re-use of any vacant mill buildings in Monson that are located on contaminated properties. The 1998 Brownfields Act provides tools to clean up and revitalize contaminated properties. This legislation encourages banks to lend money to support redevelopment projects, creates insurance pools for unanticipated clean up costs, creates state tax credits for redevelopment, and grants some liability relief for owners who did not cause the original pollution problem. Monson’s Local Partnership for Economic Development should work with MassDevelopment and interested property owners to utilize the resources of the Brownfield Redevelopment Initiative.

### Economic Development Incentive Programs

To stimulate business growth and foster job creation, the state has created the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP), designed to attract and retain businesses in specific “economic target areas” or ETAs. Monson has been designated as an ETA. Businesses that expand, relocate, or build new facilities within an ETA receive state tax incentives, including a 5% investment tax credit for qualifying tangible, depreciable assets. There also is a 10% abandoned building tax deduction for costs associated with the renovation of an abandoned building. In addition, such businesses can qualify for municipal tax incentives, including:

- € Special tax assessments that phase in the assessed value of the project property over time; and
- € Tax Increment Financing, a 5- to 20-year property tax exemption based on the increased value of the project property due to new construction or significant improvements. In addition, with Tax Increment Financing, all personal property taxes are exempt.

The Economic Development Incentive Program consists of three components:

- € An Economic Target Area (ETA) is defined as three or more contiguous census tracts in one or more municipalities, meeting one of nine statutory criteria for economic need.
- € An Economic Opportunity Area (EOA) is an area or several areas within a designated ETA of particular need and priority for economic development. These areas are selected by the individual communities and must meet one of four criteria for designation.
- € A Certified Project is a business that is expanding its existing operations, relocating its operations or building new facilities and creating permanent new jobs within an EOA. Prospective candidates submit an application to the community project liaison for consideration.

Monson has the ability through the ETA program to attract businesses to the community. The Partnership should utilize these programs to attract new business to the Town.



## 12. Municipal Facilities and Services

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### 12.1 Capital Improvements Program

**Issue** – The Town has established a Long Range Capital Planning Committee and the beginnings of a long range capital planning process. Approximately \$100,000 is appropriated every year for capital items and \$250,000 is borrowed every five years for additional capital improvement projects. However, currently the individual departments and the entire Town do not examine and rank the projected long range needs for capital items. Furthermore, major capital investments such as new buildings and facilities are not included in the process.

**Recommendation** –The Town should build on its existing capital planning process by establishing a prioritized 5-year plan to identify future capital needs and plan for the expenditures required for financing these needs. Each department should first develop an individual 5-year plan for the capital improvements that the department requires (including land acquisition necessary to accommodate future public facilities). The Long Range Capital Planning Committee should then review and prioritize all such requests and develop an overall projection of future capital needs for the Town. The Committee should also review each individual proposal to determine whether it is consistent with the Master Plan.

Once all the individual departments' projects have been tabulated and ranked, the Committee should prepare a Long Range Capital Plan to identify recommended capital projects, estimate the cost of each project, and identify the departments responsible for implementation. A timetable for funding and implementation can then be aligned with the Town's fiscal capacity to bond or otherwise fund these projects over time. Once the Long Range Capital Plan has been adopted, the Committee must review and update it every year so that the Plan always looks five years into the future.

### 12.2 Roadway Infrastructure Management Program

**Issue** – The cost to repair and maintain road and bridge infrastructure increases almost exponentially as their condition deteriorates. In the long term, an aggressive maintenance schedule is a cost effective approach to roadway infrastructure maintenance.

**Recommendation** – The Town should conduct a comprehensive review of the condition of all local roads, sidewalks, bridges, and culverts. A repair and maintenance schedule for these items should then be established.

### 12.3 Land Acquisition for Future Well Sites and Storage Facilities

**Issue** – As noted in **Section 6.1**, the Town has an adequate water supply to meet projected demand up to and beyond the year 2020. However, given the relatively small amount of land in Monson that has access to high-yield aquifers, it is prudent for the Town to continue to identify and protect potential water sources for future generations.

**Recommendation** – The Water Department, Board of Selectmen, and Open Space Steering Committee should identify and acquire additional land for potential well sites and storage facility sites.

# Chapter 4

## Implementation



**Monson Master Plan**

***Final Report – January 2004***

## 13. Implementation Plan

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The Implementation Plan is a step-by-step guide for Monson to follow over the next several years to ensure that the Master Plan recommendations are put into action. Implementing the Master Plan will require a concerted and ongoing effort on the part of the Town's elected and appointed officials. However, the Master Plan is too important for the Town not to carry through with its recommendations. The actions that the Town takes now will have a lasting legacy that affects future generations. Implementing the Master Plan is the best way to ensure that Monson will continue to be a desirable community in which to live, work, and play five, ten, twenty, and even fifty years into the future.

It should be noted that planning is an iterative process whereby a community should continually evaluate and respond to new external and internal circumstances and challenges as well as changes in the goals and desires of its residents. This Master Plan has a planning horizon of approximately 20 years: that is, planning needs are evaluated over the next two decades and recommendations are made based on their projected benefit over the same timeframe. However, the Implementation Plan only has a six-year timeframe in the sense that most of the Master Plan recommendations are targeted to be implemented (or least commenced) within six years. After about five years (around 2008), Monson should revisit the Master Plan to determine whether its goals and general strategies are still appropriate to the Town. A full re-write of the Master Plan will not be necessary at this time, but the Town should facilitate a public review of the document, modify the goals and strategies as necessary, and prepare a new Implementation Plan for the subsequent six years. The Town should consider preparing a new Master Plan after 15-20 years (around 2020), at which time conditions in the Town will probably have changed substantially and a new plan will be needed to address the challenges that these conditions present.

The Implementation Action Plan summarizes all of the Master Plan recommendations in a matrix format that identifies the approximate priority level for implementing each one. The recommendations are divided into the same headings that have been used throughout this document (Land Use and Growth Management; Natural and Historic Resources; Open Space, Agriculture, and Recreation; Downtown and Economic Development; and Municipal Services and Facilities). In the "Year/Priority Level" column of the Action Plan matrices, actions are classified by either 'Low', 'Medium', 'High', or 'Critical' priority. A handful of actions are 'ongoing' meaning that the action item has already been started or will take several years to implement.

The Master Plan Committee voted to recommend that the Board of Selectmen hire a part-time Town Planner, at a cost of approximately \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year. Based on that decision the lead responsibility for each recommendation would rest with the Town Planner. The Master Plan Committee also felt that rather than establish specific timetables for each recommendation, it would like to allow the Town Planner and the Planning Board relative flexibility. This flexibility will be achieved by assigning priorities to each of the recommendations, and allowing the Town Planner to select specific recommendations and/or group certain recommendations for implementation, based on those priorities.

### 13.1 Land Use and Growth Management Recommendations

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Year/ Priority Level</b>
<b>8.2.1 Amend Rural residential Areas</b>	Planning Board	Low
<b>8.2.2 Amend Residential Village Areas</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.2.3 Amend Central Commercial District</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.2.4 Remove General Commercial From Downtown</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.2.5 Eliminate Small Industrial Districts</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.2.6 Expand Industrial Area to Route 32 and Bethany Rd.</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.2.7 Create a Planned Development Overlay District</b>	Planning Board	Medium
<b>8.2.8 Implement Scenic Incentives</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.3.1 Eliminate School and Cemetery Zoning Districts</b>	Planning Board	Low
<b>8.3.2 Limit Maximize Size of Businesses in Central Commercial District</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.3.2 Restrict Large Buildings (Over 40,000 sq. ft.) in General Commercial District</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.3.2 Regulate Very Large Buildings (over 150,000 sq. ft.) in the Industrial District</b>	Planning Board	Low
<b>8.3.3 Amend Open Space Communities Bylaw</b>	Planning Board	Medium
<b>8.3.4 Reduce Business Parking Requirements</b>	Planning Board	Low
<b>8.3.4 Implement Upland Building Envelope in Rural Residential District</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.3.4 Amend Estate Lot Provisions</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.3.4 Implement Common Driveway Provisions</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>8.3.6 Amend Subdivisions Rules and Regulations</b>	Planning Board	High

## 13.2 Natural and Historic Resources Recommendations

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Year/ Priority Level</b>
<b>9.1.1 Update Water Supply Protection District Map</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>9.1.1 Explore Revisions to the Minimum Lot Size Within the Water Supply Protection District</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>9.1.2 Enact Stormwater Protection Measures</b>	Planning Board/Conservation Commission/DPW	High
<b>9.1.3 Enact Local Wetlands Bylaw</b>	Conservation Commission	Medium
<b>9.1.4 Add Erosion Control Measures to Land Use Regulations</b>	Planning Board	Medium
<b>9.2.1 Pursue and Advocate Ecologically Sound Land Management</b>	Conservation Commission	Low
<b>9.3.1 Continue to Utilize Government Programs to Preserve Historic Resources</b>	Historic Commission	Medium
<b>9.3.2 Create Design Review Guidelines and Board</b>	Planning Board/Board of Selectmen (BOS)	Medium
<b>9.3.3 Adopt Demolition Delay Bylaw</b>	Planning Board/Historic Commission	Medium
<b>9.3.4 Consider Community Preservation Act</b>	BOS	Medium

### 13.3 Open Space, Agriculture, and Recreation Recommendations

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Year/ Priority Level</b>
<b>10.2 Prioritize Open Space for Protection</b>	Open Space Steering Committee (OSSC)	Medium
<b>10.2 Vigorously Pursue Open Space Acquisition Funding</b>	OSSC/BOS	High
<b>10.2 Utilize Agriculture Preservation Program</b>	OSSC/Conservation Commission	Medium
<b>10.2 Utilize Conservation Restrictions</b>	OSSC/Conservation Commission	Medium
<b>10.2 Form Partnerships with Local Land Preservation Organizations</b>	OSSC	Low
<b>10.3 Adopt “Right to Farm” Policies</b>	BOS	Low
<b>10.3 Streamline Agriculture-Related Permitting</b>	Conservation Commission	Medium
<b>10.3 Organize Local Farmer’s Market</b>	BOS/Local Farmers	Low
<b>10.3 Permit Local Farm Stands</b>	Planning Board	Low
<b>10.4 Determine Use of Flynt Park’s Newest Field</b>	Recreation Department	Low
<b>10.4 Construct Additional Fields at Flynt Park</b>	Recreation Department/BOS	Low
<b>10.4 Expand Flynt Park Trail System by Acquiring Adjacent Land</b>	Recreation Department/BOS	Low

### 13.4 Downtown and Economic Development Recommendations

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Year/ Priority Level</b>
<b>11.1.1 Enhance and Expand Downtown Business Participation in Local Partnership for Economic Development (LPED)</b>	LPED	Medium
<b>11.1.1 Pursue Small Scale Business Improvements</b>	LPED/DPW	Medium
<b>11.1.1 Commence Business Retention Program</b>	LPED	Medium
<b>11.1.1 Organize Special Events for Downtown</b>	LPED	Low
<b>11.1.1 Undertake Improvements to Streetscape</b>	DPW/BOS/Planning Department	Low
<b>11.1.1 Pursue PWED Grant for Major Improvements to Infrastructure and Streetscape</b>	Planning Department/BOS	Medium
<b>11.1.2 Revise Front Yard Setback Provisions Within Central Commercial District</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>11.2 Amend Zoning to Permit Bed and Breakfasts</b>	Planning Board	Low
<b>11.3 Define and Regulate Flea Markets</b>	Planning Board/BOS	Low
<b>11.4.1 Create a Mill Conversion Overlay District</b>	Planning Board	High
<b>11.4.1 Pursue Funding and Assistance for Mill Building Reuse</b>	BOS	High
<b>11.4.2 Produce Informational/Marketing Brochures</b>	LPED	Low
<b>11.4.2 Hire Professional Staff</b>	LPED	Medium
<b>11.4.2 Advertise Business Opportunities and Sites in Regional Business Journals</b>	LPED	Low
<b>11.4.2 Pursue MassDevelopment and Brownfield Redevelopment Initiative Assistance and Funding</b>	LPED/BOS	High
<b>11.4.2 Utilize ETA Opportunities</b>	LPED, BOS	High

### 13.5 Municipal Services and Facilities Recommendations

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Year/ Priority Level</b>
<b>12.1 Upgrade Capital Improvements Program</b>	Long Range Capital Planning Committee	Medium
<b>12.2 Roadway Infrastructure Management Program</b>	DPW	Medium
<b>12.3 Land Acquisition for Future Well Sites and Storage Facilities</b>	The Water Department, BOS, and OSSC	Medium



## **Appendix A**

### **Background on Chapter 40B**

#### **Introduction**

The most critical housing needs in the Commonwealth are for lower income families and people with special needs. The high cost of land and building construction as well as local, state and federal regulations and other restrictions often create unintended barriers to affordable housing. To address the need for affordable housing, the Comprehensive Permit Law, Chapter 40B of the General Laws, was enacted as Chapter 774 of the Acts of 1969. The law, also known as the Anti-Snob Zoning Law, waives local zoning restrictions in many cases to help facilitate the construction or substantial rehabilitation of low and moderate income subsidized housing.

Chapter 40B allows private developers to construct housing projects with an affordable component through the Comprehensive Permit (CP) process, which supercedes local land use regulations. The statute defines low or moderate income housing as any housing subsidized by the federal or state government under any program to assist in the construction of low or moderate income housing. The subsidy may consist of financial assistance and/or in-kind services.

It should be noted that as of the time of this writing, the Massachusetts State Legislature is considering numerous amendments to Chapter 40B. The analysis that follows may be made obsolete by these potential changes.

#### **Chapter 40B Affordable Housing Definition**

The affordability of housing is defined both by the cost of the housing unit and by the income of the person or family inhabiting it. The criterion set forth in Chapter 40B is that no more than 30% of family income should be used for housing costs, including rent, mortgage payments, taxes, and insurance. Thus, moderate income housing is defined as housing that is affordable to a family earning no more than 80% of the area median income. Low income housing is defined as housing that is affordable to families earning no more than 50% of the area median income.

The following types of units qualify as affordable housing under Chapter 40B and count toward a community's affordable housing requirements:

- 1) Housing subsidized by the federal or state government under any program to assist in the construction of low or moderate income housing.
- 2) Housing created cooperatively with local government under the Local Initiative Program ("LIP").
- 3) All the units (including market-rate units) in a rental development where at least 25% of the development consists of affordable units as defined by Chapter 40B.
- 4) Any affordable ownership unit created through the Comprehensive Permit process (but not any market-rate units).

#### **Comprehensive Permit Application and Review Process**

The CP application process begins by obtaining a Project Eligibility Letter (Site Approval Letter) for the proposed project. This letter, normally issued by the state or federal housing agency, indicates that the proposed project is eligible under a particular housing subsidy program and is, thus, likely to be approved. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) both issue project eligibility letters for most of the Commonwealth's housing subsidy programs.<sup>1</sup> After review by one of these agencies, an approval or a conditional approval letter allows the developer to submit the CP application to the city or town where the project is proposed.

The CP process allows developers to submit a single application to the local ZBA in lieu of individual applications to each local board that would ordinarily be responsible for permitting. Local boards, such as the Planning Board, Board of Health, and Conservation Commission, are invited to submit recommendations on the proposal and, within thirty days of the application's receipt at the ZBA, a public hearing will be held to review the proposed project. While the ZBA is free to make approval conditional on specific requirements, such as those related to the proposed project's height, site plan, size, shape, or building materials, the ZBA may only disapprove the application if "local concerns" about the project outweigh the community's need for affordable housing.

If the ZBA disapproves a CP application or imposes any conditions or requirements that the developer contends makes the development economically infeasible, the developer may appeal the decision to DHCD's Housing Appeals Committee (HAC). In ruling on the appeal, the HAC will balance the community's "local concerns" with its need for affordable housing. If less than ten percent of the community's total year-round housing units and less than 1.5% of the community's buildable land are devoted to Chapter 40B qualifying affordable housing, there is a presumption that the community has a substantial affordable housing need, which outweighs any local concerns except those associated with health and safety. If at least ten percent of the community's total year-round housing units or at least 1.5% of the community's buildable land are devoted to Chapter 40B qualifying affordable housing, the HAC appeal will be dismissed.

When the ZBA has denied a CP application, it will have the burden of proving on appeal to the HAC that the project will have a serious adverse affect on the health or safety of the occupants of the project or town residents, that the design of the site or the housing is seriously deficient, or that the development would substantially impair legitimate local concerns in some other way. The inadequacy of municipal infrastructure is not considered a valid reason for denying a CP application except in cases where unusual topographic, environmental, or physical circumstances make it infeasible to install the necessary services. Thus, in practice, the HAC has commonly overturned CP denials in communities lacking the required amount of affordable housing.

When a community that lacks the required amount of affordable housing is faced with a CP application, it is generally advisable to work collaboratively with the developer to institute a mutually agreeable set of conditions under which the project may move forward. If the ZBA denies the CP application and the HAC overturns this denial, the community may be forced to accept the development without the

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<sup>1</sup> Site approval letters may also be issued by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Housing Service, and the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston through its member banks. In addition, DHCD issues project eligibility letters for state programs for public housing.

opportunity to impose appropriate mitigating conditions. If the ZBA approves the CP with conditions that the developer contends makes the project uneconomic, the ZBA will generally be in a stronger position if the ruling is appealed because the burden of proof is shifted to the applicant in this case.

It should be noted that a CP does not exempt the developer from obtaining approvals required under state laws, such as the Wetlands Protection Act, state Title 5 septic regulations, and the State Building Code. The developer must secure all required state approvals before construction.

### **Requirements for Comprehensive Permit Projects**

Comprehensive Permit projects must meet the following requirements:

- 1) They must be approved by the state or federal government under a program to provide housing that is affordable to people or families with incomes no higher than 80% of the median income for the area (i.e., they must have a Project Eligibility or Site Approval Letter).
- 2) They must be developed by a public agency, a non-profit organization, or a “limited dividend organization.” Generally, a limited dividend organization is required to limit its profits to no more than 20% of total development costs.
- 3) At least 25% of the units in the development must be Chapter 40B qualifying low and moderate income units (affordable to families earning up to 80% of the area median income) or at least 20% of the units must be qualifying low-income units (affordable to families earning up to 50% of the area median income).
- 4) The affordable units in the development must be subject to use restrictions or re-sale controls to preserve their affordability as follows:
  - a. For 30 years or longer from the date of subsidy approval or construction (for new construction). (New units occupied before October 1, 2001 can have a 15-year deed restriction to qualify for the inventory.)
  - b. For 15 years or longer from the date of subsidy approval or completion for substantial rehabilitation. (Rehabilitated units occupied before October 1, 2001 can have a 5-year deed restriction to qualify for the inventory.)
- 5) The developer must execute a Regulatory Agreement that restricts occupancy of the affordable units to qualifying low and moderate income families. A mechanism for monitoring and enforcement must also be provided.
- 5) The developer or owners of the project must implement an Affirmative Fair Marketing Plan in a form approved by DHCD.

### **Other Types of Chapter 40B Qualifying Housing**

Since Chapter 40B defines low and moderate income housing as “any housing subsidized by the federal or state government under any program to assist the construction of low or moderate income housing,” local boards of appeals and the HAC have long construed this to mean *financial subsidies only*. As a result, many communities in the past would not accept housing proposals that did not include direct state or federal financial assistance, but that were consistent with the intent of the statute in other respects.

This changed in April 1989 when the Report of the Special (Legislative) Commission Relative to the Implementation of Low and Moderate Income Housing Provisions recommended that programs providing for subsidies be considered subsidies within the intent of Chapter 40B. Because of this broadened definition of “subsidies,” several non-traditional subsidy programs came into wide use during the 1990s. These include the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston Affordable Housing Program, the New England Fund and DHCD’s Local Initiative Program.

### Affordable Housing Program and the New England Fund

Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston Affordable Housing Program, and the New England Fund projects do not require Town support but the ZBA has increased authority over design, programmatic issues, financing and monitoring.

### Local Initiative Program

The purpose of the Local Initiative Program (LIP), 760 CMR 45.00, is to implement locally supported housing initiatives within the CP process. The primary difference between these projects and traditional CP projects is that, for a proposed project to receive a project eligibility letter from state officials, an application must be submitted to the state by the *chief elected official (CEO) of the municipality*. Projects subsidized through LIP require cooperation between the developer and the community from the beginning of the project’s development process. State officials and the CEO jointly review the project, including its financial aspects and its long-term monitoring.

To qualify as Chapter 40B affordable housing units, the LIP units must meet the following requirements:

- 1) The units must be low and moderate income units.
- 2) The units must be developed with a Comprehensive Permit.
- 3) The units must be subject to Use Restrictions that restrict their occupancy to qualifying low and moderate income families for a period of time no less than 15 years for units developed by rehabilitation after September 30, 2001 or no less than 30 years for units developed by new construction after September 30, 2001.
- 4) The owner(s) of the units must agree to be subject to equal housing opportunity guidelines established by DHCD.

DHCD may decide not to count LIP units as affordable if:

- 1) DHCD deems in writing that the proposed housing is unresponsive to local and regional housing needs; or,
- 2) The proposal includes elderly housing that would result in more than 5% of the city or town’s current year-round housing stock consisting of subsidized elderly housing.

DHCD may waive the minimum percentage of low and moderate income units upon finding that a lesser percentage (but not less than 15%) is necessary to allow the project to serve lower income households, to make development in that city or town economically feasible, or to otherwise advance a legitimate public purpose. Waivers of the minimum period of Use Restrictions may be made only upon finding that a lesser

period (but not less than 15 years) is necessary to advance a legitimate public purpose and that adequate measures are in place to prevent the displacement of low or moderate income occupants upon the expiration of such restrictions.

Communities can take advantage of LIP to expand their Chapter 40B affordable housing inventory to include units that would not otherwise qualify under Chapter 40B. For example, many communities have “inclusionary housing” bylaws that encourage or require the creation of affordable units as part of private development projects. These units can count toward a community’s Chapter 40B housing inventory if they are created with municipal support through the LIP process.

### **Comprehensive Permit Exemptions**

If a community has not met its Chapter 40B affordable housing quota, it may nevertheless legally deny a CP application under certain other limited circumstances. These are described below.

#### **Recent Projects**

If the number of subsidized low and moderate income housing units created during the previous 12 months is equal to or greater than 2% of the community’s total number of housing units, a community can be deemed to have made “Recent Progress” toward the housing unit minimum (760 CMR 31.07(1)(d)). The “Recent Progress” provision allows the ZBA a certain amount of additional discretion in denying a CP or granting it with conditions.

#### **Large Scale Projects**

The “Large-Scale Project” provision (760 CMR 31.07(1)(g)) applies to CP applications filed on or after September 1, 2001. This provision gives the ZBA the authority to deny an application that seeks approval for a development regarded as “too large” for the community. Projects deemed “too large” are characterized as follows:

- 1) for a community with 7,500 or more housing units, any development with more than 300 units;
- 2) for a community with between 5,000 and 7,500 housing units, any development with more than 250 housing units;
- 3) for a community with between 2,500 and 5,000 total housing units, any development with more than 200 housing units; and
- 4) for a community with less than 2,500 housing units, any development with more 150 housing units.

Additionally, a community that approves a CP application that contains units at the cap for “Large-Scale Projects” may invoke the “Recent Progress” provision and may deny CP applications for one year. In addition, a community may formulate an agreement with a developer to “phase in” a larger scale project (even one that exceeds the cap established in the regulation) over a period of years. This regulation establishes an affirmative defense to large-scale comprehensive permit projects that could threaten a community’s resources when built in a short period.

The following administrative guidelines pertain to both of the above provisions (“Recent Projects” and “Large-Scale Projects”). Once a CP has been approved, the proposed development’s units are counted towards the community’s subsidized housing inventory. If a building permit is not issued for an approved project within a year of the approval, the development’s units are then removed from the inventory. Alternatively, if a building permit is issued within a year of the approval, but the building permit expires without the developer actually building the units, then the units are removed from the subsidized housing inventory. If these non-materializing units placed a community over the 10% threshold, the ZBA may deny subsequent CP applications until the units are removed from the inventory. Or, if the units authorized by the CP would increase the community’s affordable housing stock by a number of units equal to 2% of the total housing stock pursuant to 760 CMR 31.07 (1) (d), the ZBA could invoke the “Recent Progress” provision and deny subsequent CP applications for one year until the units are removed from the subsidized housing inventory.

### Previous Development Proposals

The “Related Applications” provision holds that the ZBA, for any CP application submitted on or after September 1, 2001, may deny the application or grant it with conditions if 12 months have not elapsed between the date of the CP application and:

- 2) the date of filing of a prior application for a variance, special permit, subdivision, or other approval related to construction on the same land if that application included no low or moderate income housing;
- 3) any date during which such an application was pending before a local permit granting authority;
- 4) the date of disposition of such an application; or
- 5) the date of withdrawal of such an application.

### The Balancing Provision

The “Balancing” provision allows communities to rebut the presumption that there is a substantial regional housing need that outweighs local concerns. This provision ensures that the CP will be reviewed in a manner that considers the following:

- 1) the weight of the housing need will be commensurate with the proportion of the community’s population that consists of low income persons; if few or no low income persons reside in the community, the strength of housing need will consist of regional need alone;
- 2) the weight of the local concern will be commensurate with the degree to which
  - a. the health and safety of occupants or town residents is imperiled;
  - b. the natural environment is endangered;
  - c. the design of the site and proposed housing is seriously deficient;
  - d. additional open spaces are critically needed in the community;
  - e. the local requirements and regulations bear a direct and substantial relationship to the protection of such local concerns; and

- 3) a stronger showing shall be required on the local concern side of the balance where the housing need is relatively great than where the housing need is not as great.

### General Land Area Minimum Threshold

The “General Land Area Minimum” allows that, for the purposes of calculating whether low and moderate income housing exists in the city or town on sites comprising more than 1.5% of the total buildable land area, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 40B, §20, the following should be taken into consideration:

- 1) Total land area includes all districts in which any residential, commercial, or industrial use is permitted, regardless of how the district is designated by name in the city or town’s zoning by law;
- 2) Total land area includes all unzoned land in which any residential, commercial, or industrial use is permitted;
- 3) Total land area does not include any publicly-owned land, including land owned by the United States, the Commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof, the Metropolitan District Commission or any state public authority;
- 4) Total land area does not include any land area where all residential, commercial, and industrial development has been prohibited by restrictive order of the Department of Environmental Protection pursuant to M.G.L. c. 131, §40A. No other swamps, marshes, or other wetlands shall be excluded;
- 5) Total land area does not include any water bodies; and
- 6) Total land area does not include any flood plain, conservation, or open space district if the district (or zone) completely prohibits residential, commercial and industrial use, or any similar zone where residential, commercial or industrial uses are completely prohibited.

Only sites of low and moderate income housing units inventoried by DHCD or established according to 760 CMR 31.04(1)(a) as occupied, available for occupancy, or under permit as of the date of the applicant’s initial submission to the Board, shall be included toward the 1.5% minimum.

Because no communities in the Commonwealth have successfully denied a CP application based on the General Land Area Minimum provision as of this writing, it is not entirely clear how this provision is administered. DHCD is currently developing an official policy for the administration of the General Land Area Minimum provision. Once this policy is published, it may become easier for communities to deny CP applications based on the 1.5% calculation.

### Annual Land Area Minimum

To determine if the Town complies with Chapter 40B under the “Annual Land Area Minimum” provisions, the Town must calculate whether the application before the ZBA would result in the commencement in any one calendar year of construction of low and moderate income housing on sites comprising more than 0.3% of the city or town’s land area or ten acres pursuant to M.G.L. c.40B, § 20. To use this provision the following should be taken into consideration:

- 1) Total land area of the municipality and the land area occupied by low or moderate income housing must be calculated in the manner provided in 760 CMR 31.04(2)(the previous section);

- 2) If 0.3% of total land area is less than ten acres, the minimum for sites occupied by low and moderate income housing must be ten acres;
- 3) The relevant calendar year shall be the calendar year period of January 1 through December 31 that includes the applicant's projected date for initiation of construction;
- 4) Ordinarily any low or moderate income housing for which construction is expected to commence within the calendar year, other than that proposed by the applicant, must have received a firm funding commitment by the subsidizing agency prior to the date of the applicant's initial submission to the Board, in order to be included towards the 0.3% or ten acres; and
- 5) Development and construction work in connection with low or moderate income housing must be proceeding in good faith to completion insofar as is reasonably practicable, in order for such housing to be included towards the 0.3% or ten acres minimum.

### **Summary and Implications for Monson**

Because of Chapter 40B, a substantial amount of affordable housing has been constructed throughout Massachusetts in recent years. However, the potential ability to circumvent local planning and zoning controls through a Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit has often resulted in the construction of housing in areas that lack the infrastructure or environmental resources to support it.

A community can take a number of pro-active steps to respond positively to Comprehensive Permit applications. These include:

- €# establishing a Local Housing Partnership or other local body to address affordable housing issues;
- €# preparing a housing needs study;
- €# preparing, updating, and implementing a comprehensive plan that addresses affordable housing needs; and
- €# undertaking local affordable housing development initiatives including the adoption of zoning that encourages the development of affordable housing in appropriate locations.

Whenever possible, a community should try to anticipate the filing of any Comprehensive Permit application and work with the developer from the beginning. The combination of flexible rules and a right of appeal has meant that most Chapter 40B proposals are negotiated at the local level and approved by the local ZBA. Issues such as density, buffer zones, conservation areas, and infrastructure improvements are typical items for negotiation. For proposals that do advance to the HAC, the record has generally favored allowing "reasonable" projects to move forward.

While the achievement of a 10% affordable allocation is the goal of the regulation, evidence of efforts taken to reach the goal have been deemed sufficient in some cases to substantiate the disapproval of a CP application. As of this writing, no Massachusetts community has used the 1.5% buildable land area measure, as it is often more difficult to achieve than the 10% figure.

Currently 209 of Monson's 3,184 housing units qualify as affordable. An additional 100 units of affordable housing would have to be constructed for Monson to meet the minimum requirements of



Chapter 40B. Given this situation, the Town should consider taking advantage of several of the policies and provisions discussed in this appendix, including the Local Initiative Program as well as the various Comprehensive Permit exemptions.

## **Appendix B**

### **Sample Bylaw Language**

- B-1: Sample Density of Development Zoning Bylaw**
- B-2: Sample Demolition Delay General Bylaw**
- B-3: Sample Appearance Code Zoning Bylaw**
- B-4: Sample Stormwater Management General Bylaw**