TOWN OF PRINCETON, MASSACHUSETTS

Princeton Town Plan

Adopted by the Princeton Planning Board on September 19, 2007

Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Planning Consultants:

Community Opportunities Group, Inc.
Larry Koff & Associates
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PRINCETON MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

Alan Sentkowski, Co-Chair
Raymond Dennehy III, Co-Chair
Joyce Anderson
Leslie Fanger
Michael Howard
Michael Latka
Richard McCowan
Phillip Mighdoll
Joseph O'Brien
Dennis Rindone, Town Administrator

PLANNING CONSULTANTS

Community Opportunities Group, Inc.
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Prepared under the direction of the Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee and approved by the Planning Board in accordance with M.G.L. c. 41, s. 81D, on September 19, 2007.

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SPECIAL RECOGNITION

The following Princeton residents and town officials contributed to the development of this Master Plan:

Land Use Subcommittee
Michael Howard (Chair)
Mark Canfield
Jim Hillis
Rick McCowan
Mary Lou Murphy
Leslie Regh
Jeff Richards
Lou Trostel

Open Space & Natural Resources Subcommittee
Leslie Fanger (Chair)
Peter Brewer
Kelton Burbank
Deb Carey
Dominic Golding
Steve Kessler
Larry Pistrang
Susan Preist
Charlotte Stirewalt

Historic & Cultural Resources Subcommittee
Joyce Anderson (Chair)
Mary Cadwallader
Sheila Dubman
Nathaniel Gove
Katie Green
Alex Fiandaca
Betty Lawson
Phil Mighdoll
Wendy Pape
Lou Trostel

Housing Subcommittee
Rick McCowan (Chair)
Barbara Clark
Raymond A. Dennehy III
Jim LaChance
Michelle Sciabarrasi
Phil Stone
Mary Trostel

Economic Development Subcommittee
Phil Mighdoll (Chair)
Mary Cadwallader
Cliff Connell
Tom Daly
Bill Eicholzer
Jon Fudeman
Bill Gagnier
Tim Hammond
Bruce Jacobsen
Edith Morgan
Alan Sentkowski

Transportation Subcommittee
Michael Latka (Chair)
Larry Greene
Marylou Murphy
Leslie Regh
Steve Schray
Michael Splaine

Community Services & Facilities Subcommittee
Joe O'Brien (Chair)
Louise Dix
Raymond LaPorte
Edith Morgan
Stan Moss
Wendy Pape
Dennis Rindone
Charles Schmohl
Ken Whitney

Vision & Implementation Subcommittee
Phil Mighdoll (Chair)
Ed Carlson
Sheila Dubman
Joe Lotuff
Edith Morgan
Stan Moss
Jeff Richards

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PREFACE

With this Master Plan, we celebrate what is special about Princeton — the place and the people. We are grateful to those before us who had the foresight to shape change without losing that which we hold dear. It will guide our future as we honor our heritage.

It is little wonder that so many people describe Princeton as a town unblemished by growth. Through thoughtful leadership and creative management, Princeton remains not only a beautiful town, but also a well-run town.

Princeton is a civic-minded place. Even though our residents have diverse backgrounds, talents and beliefs, we share a common sense of fairness and we volunteer our knowledge and skills for the public good. Some of our families have been here for several generations, others have spent most of their lives here, and still others moved here recently. Yet we have the same appreciation for all that Princeton has to offer.

Princeton will continue to be an exemplary community, mindful of the challenges facing the world and dedicated to local action that may have a positive effect on the region around us. It is a place that each and every one of us is proud to call our home.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to write about Princeton without resorting to words that outsiders would dismiss as little more than a nostalgic description of a New England small town. The fact is that Princeton is peerlessly beautiful, and if it were possible to erect a wall at the town line of any community, Princeton ranks high on the list of places that people would want to keep just the way it is now. However, the Princeton we cherish today is not the same as it was 50 years ago, and the Princeton that residents cherish tomorrow will not be the same as it is today. The challenge for any master plan, and particularly this one, is to identify pathways for shaping change so that unmanaged growth does not destroy a community's heritage.

Historic Silas Fay Barn on Allen Hill Road, built ca. 1812. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.*)

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Princeton offers breathtaking vistas and magnificent open space, and as one resident said at a public meeting for this master plan, "plenty of elbow room." Many people attribute Princeton's beauty to the large tracts of undisturbed land that extend across much of the town. A member of the planning board also observed that it seems as though one could drive for miles in Princeton and never see a house. Indeed, the impression of Wachusett Mountain etched against the horizon and long, tree-lined roads lead some people to equate Princeton with a vacation getaway.

The view from Princeton's roads recalls a past that has been lost in countless Massachusetts communities. The vistas from Mountain Road, the agricultural fields that can be seen all over town, and winding, rural roadways that cross seamlessly through the forests all help to explain the sense that open space is Princeton's key character-defining asset.

Princeton has even more assets that distinguish it from other places and make it a home town for 3,700 people. Princeton would not be all that it is without the prevalence of historic residences and barns at every turn, or the civic and institutional buildings and the Town Common in Princeton Center. East Princeton's special character is influenced not only by the course of Keyes Brook, but also the historic development pattern that formed here because the land had access to flowing water.

Towns are places in which people live, work, celebrate their traditions, send their children to school, pay taxes and decide how to govern their affairs. Without homes, a town hall, a post office, a library, churches and schools, the requisite coffee shop or a small store, there would be no town at all. Sometimes it is hard for communities to

recognize that but for changes made at the hands of generations past – changes brought about by people who needed to work, make a living and support their families – today's residents would not have the historic homes they live in or the barns and stone walls they appreciate. The relationship between natural and cultural resources defines each town's character and sense of place, and this is plainly obvious in Princeton.

The David Rice House, 113 Old Colony Road. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

EARLIER PLANS

Princeton commissioned a master plan in 1970 and updated it three times between 1970 and the late 1980s. In the first plan, planner Carol Thomas characterized the town in terms that will sound familiar to residents today. She described Princeton as "a rural, scenic, residential community with an abundance of open space and almost unlimited potential for outdoor recreation...[and] prime territory for the city-weary who are searching for the solitude and beauty that abounds there." She cautioned town officials at the time that "...in-migration will not happen overnight; instead, it will be gradual utilization of the beautiful countryside." Accordingly, Thomas urged Princeton "to direct future growth before uncontrolled development takes place."[1] Growth and change *do* happen, often at the expense of what people value in their communities.

The vision of the first plan included some ideas that contemporary planners would think of as "smart growth" in the context of a small rural town. For example, Thomas suggested that Princeton devote some land to moderate-density housing and small businesses near villages or activity centers, and reduce the permissible density of development in outlying parts of town. She also said the town could do without so much industrially zoned land, for Princeton's location, topography and limited public utilities all suggested a low probability of future industrial development.

Moreover, she pointed out that Princeton had unwittingly zoned its business districts for strip commercial development due to the length and narrow width of the few areas zoned for business uses.

Several of the observations that Carol Thomas made nearly 40 years ago were echoed by the authors of subsequent master plan updates, and they remain true in 2007. It has been hard for Princeton to carry out the kind of planning and zoning initiatives that would help to preserve its beautiful countryside. Princeton still has lots of open space, much of it protected from development because the state and non-profit organizations have acquired large amounts of land here. In addition, some of the town's private landowners have agreed to place use restrictions on their property. Unfortunately, Princeton also has many acres of unprotected countryside and very few tools at its disposal to shape change in the future. The central objective of this Master Plan is to equip Princeton with the tools it needs to guide development to appropriate locations and safeguard the natural and historic built assets that make the town unique.

[1] Universal Engineering, Thomas Associates Division, *Princeton Town Plan 1970*, 10-11.

PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCETON

Residents think of Princeton as a safe, caring community with civic pride and respect for the past. While they appreciate being close to goods and services elsewhere in the Wachusett region, Princeton residents are not particularly interested in bringing commercial development into their own town. There is no question that residents love the town and appreciate all that it has to offer. They speak of it fondly, at times reverently. "Remarkable people," "talented population," "civility" and "cultural tolerance" exemplify the ways that residents speak of their neighbors. They hold their schools and town government in unusually high regard, and they value Princeton's social traditions, too. They cite occasions like the Memorial Day celebration, the Labor Day tennis tournament or concerts on the Town Common as important community-building events.

Princeton residents have access to outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the year and all over town. (*Upper photo supplied by Alan Sentkowski, lower photo by Gail Lever.*)

It would be wrong to say that Princeton residents agree on everything, though. Their seemingly unanimous desire to preserve Princeton's open space sometimes masks the issues that leave people conflicted about what they want for the future of their town. For example, some residents think Princeton should do more to provide affordable housing, but the prospect of comprehensive permits under Chapter 40B frightens just about everyone. The perception of Chapter 40B as a threat is conspicuously strong here. Princeton's concerns about comprehensive permits are noteworthy because the town has only one small elderly housing development. So far, it has not attracted the types of affordable housing that people seem to fear: large, awkward multi-family buildings surrounded by blacktop on land once treasured as open space. The degree of anxiety about Chapter 40B at the outset of the master plan process started to make sense when a resident attending one of the community meetings said Princeton is threatened by its own adversarial approach to land use change.

People also have different ideas about the public purposes that open space should serve. Today, undeveloped land in Princeton provides outdoor recreation opportunities, supports wildlife habitat and agriculture, and protects regional water supplies. While a large percentage of Princeton's open land is permanently protected from development, the same protected land is also heavily restricted land. As unrestricted vacant land continues to decline, traditional rural activities such as hunting, fishing, farming or horseback riding may begin to decline as well.

Princeton has very limited infrastructure, including few sidewalks, no public water or sewer

service, and lots of narrow, winding roads, some unpaved. These factors contribute to the town's rural image, but they also reduce Princeton's options to guide future growth and increase the risk that it will evolve into the low-density suburb foreseen in the first master plan. Residents worry about the impact of traffic on pedestrian safety and the quality of life in their town, and they are particularly concerned about through traffic. Still, Princeton made a conscious choice long ago to locate businesses on the outskirts of town, which means its own residents have no choice but to drive for convenience goods and services. What is "elbow room" to some people can be reinterpreted as "spread-out" by others.

Finally, there is a sense that Princeton's quality of life is threatened by forces outside the town's control. New growth in neighboring towns means more people vying for house lots in an area that is gradually becoming suburban, more cars vying for space on the region's rural roads, and more demands on the regional school district.

Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary off Goodnow Road. (*Photo by Community Opportunities Group, Inc.*)

When the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) began to publish community profiles in 1994, each city and town was asked to supply a brief summary of important facts, local history and unique characteristics. The narrative submitted by Princeton reads, in part:

> *The town is very small, a community which desires, at least on the part of many of its residents, to resist any urbanization and to maintain its rural character as much as possible. It is commonly said that new residents, once they have settled down, feel that Princeton should shut the town gates and restrict its population. It is difficult to categorize all the factors which bring about a sense of proprietorship in newcomers as well as in those who have lived in town all their lives, but residents affirm without fear of exaggeration that those who come seem to feel they have discovered the place.*

It is true that many Princeton residents do not want more growth. They are attracted to the town because it is small, beautiful, prestigious and relatively undeveloped, and like residents of any other community they want to keep what they have. Disdain for growth is hardly confined to Princeton, but compared to most towns in the Commonwealth, Princeton has a lot to lose.

To people opposed to growth, taking steps to manage it may seem contradictory to all that they hold dear. Managing growth means directing development toward some areas in order to protect other areas. It requires putting environmental protection and social fairness ahead of individual interests, and planning for growth according to the long-term resource needs of local and regional populations. Growth management means balance by design: balanced growth that saves land, builds

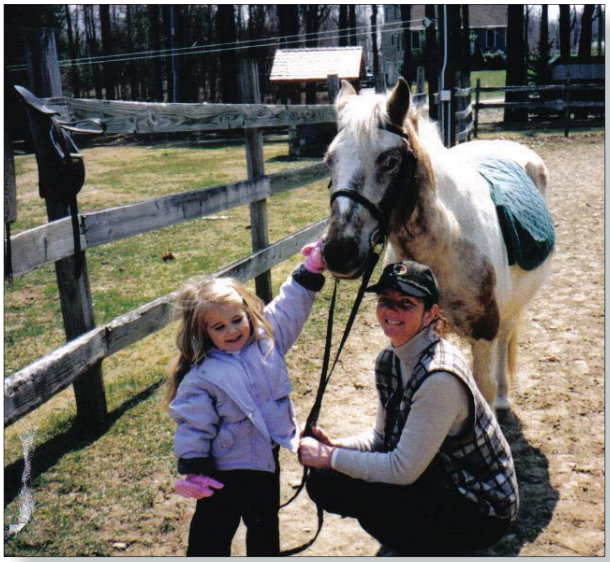
places to live and work, avoids the economic, fiscal and environmental costs of sprawl, and promotes socially inclusive communities. Princeton does have opportunities to provide for development and still protect the qualities that residents love about their town. The challenge is to seize those opportunities before they disappear.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Very few towns could assemble as many volunteers as Princeton recruited to work on this Master Plan. The nine-member Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) held 16 regular meetings and two implementation workshops, and sponsored three community meetings between July 2005 and May 2007. In addition, each MPSC member served on at least one subcommittee. The eight subcommittees participating in the Master Plan process attracted more than 50 members and held about 60 meetings. Throughout, one member of the MPSC maintained a website devoted to the Master Plan so that residents could stay informed as the process unfolded.

The subcommittees were remarkable. Some met on numerous occasions and consulted with a variety of people not directly involved with the master plan's development. Rather than rely on the MPSC to coordinate their work or resolve occasional disagreements, the subcommittees took the initiative to communicate on their own. They drafted, revised and perfected the goals for the master plan elements they were asked to oversee, and they gave countless hours to help the consulting team locate information.

Most participants in the community meetings recognized that Princeton has opportunities to gain control over its future. They cited open space-residential development and the Community Preservation Act (CPA) as preservation tools that Princeton could adopt, and some think the town should make better use its own natural resources for economic and tax base development. Concepts such as eco-tourism and agri-tourism



Princeton is special not only because of its beauty, but also because its residents care deeply about the town, each other, and the rural ways of life they want to preserve. (*Photos supplied by Master Plan Steering Committee.*)

came to mind, but Princeton residents also imagined harnessing the power of wind for electricity – thoughts inspired by the efforts of their own municipal light department.

Moreover, there was an implied recognition of the Master Plan process itself as an opportunity, for residents seem to agree that accomplishing good things for the town requires a plan – whether for saving open space, connecting trails or guiding commercial development. Viewed in their entirety, the opportunities perceived by Princeton residents suggest a sense of hope for the town's future.

MASTER PLAN GOALS AND POLICIES

The implementation element of the Master Plan is guided by the following community goals, which were developed and refined by the subcommittees and ratified by the MPSC.

Land Use

- **Countryside**. Maintain the country qualities of Princeton by preserving the trees, stone walls, agricultural fields, tree-lined roads, vistas and historic homes.

- **Villages**. Community planning efforts should promote village concepts that are consistent with Princeton's vision statement and recognizing that the areas of East Princeton, Post Office Place and the Town Center require special attention and zoning strategies tailored to unique local conditions.

- **Consistency**. Revise Princeton's zoning bylaw and other regulations to support and be consistent with Princeton's vision statement.

Open Space & Natural Resources

- **Visual**. From the roadways continue to view open fields, forests, stone walls, and shade-covered roads that open up to scenic vistas.

- **Physical**. Experience Princeton's natural beauty via a network of trails that connect to one another with minimum road use.

- **Ecologica**l. Continue to provide an environment that sustains wildlife.

- **Environmental Responsibility**. Strengthen Princeton's role as a leader in ecological and environmental concern.

Barn at 21 Greogry Hill Road. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

Housing

- **Town Character**. Create housing policies and procedures that will help to promote and protect Princeton's rural character and scenic views.

- **Housing Diversit**y. Create residential development regulations and policies that will allow a broader mix of housing choices.

- **Interconnected Neighborhood**s. Adopt zoning policies and planning board regulations that encourage interconnected neighborhoods and recreation lands.

- **Affordable Housing**. Adopt an effective strategy to assure that comprehensive permit developments are well designed, consistent with local needs, conscious of impacts on the town, and compatible with the goals of the Master Plan.

Economic Development

- **Business Districts**. Reduce the number of business zones to enhance the viability of desired commercial activity.

- **Town Center**. Maintain the Town Center as a predominately governmental & cultural area.

- **Economic Incentives to Preserve Land**. Take steps to encourage businesses that maintain Princeton's rural character.

- **Local Artists**. Promote the work of local artists and craftsmen.

- **At-Home Businesses**. Allow entrepreneurial activities that are compatible with residential neighborhoods.

- **Government-Business Partnerships**. Improve communication among local businesses, town government and potential developers.

Historic Preservation

- **Artifacts & Documents**. Preserve Princeton's historical artifacts and documents.

- **Public Education**. Continue to educate current and future generations about Princeton's history and its importance.

- **Preservation**. Maintain our legacy of historic buildings, sites and landmarks – public and privately owned.

Transportation

- **Roads Plan**. Implement the Roads Advisory Committee's Six-Year Plan for reconstructing roads in Princeton.

- **Route 140**. Improve the Route 140 corridor through East Princeton for vehicle and pedestrian safety.

The church and the Rev. Clark House in Princeton's historic town center. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

- **Trail Connections**. Enhance trail system connections and access coordination with the Open Space Committee.

- **Trail System Development**. Investigate the feasibility of developing bike paths and walking trails, utilizing public ways and the railroad right-of-way.

- **Scenic Roads**. Reach agreement about the criteria that are needed to maintain the rural character of Princeton roads.

Community Services & Facilities

- **Public Safety**. Preserve appropriate public safety standards through a long-term ambulance policy and maintaining the proficiency and competence of public safety personnel.

- **Asset Management**. Develop an asset management plan, including mechanisms for the acquisition and disposition of town-owned buildings, land, and public safety and public works equipment.

- **Infrastructure Improvements**. Maintain and improve essential infrastructure, including roads, technology and the wind farm.

- **Staffing and Space Needs**. Analyze and plan for staffing and space needs for municipal buildings, cultural facilities and a public safety complex.

- **Retention and Recruitment of Volunteers**. Provide technology, professional support, recognition programs and uniform policies to enhance the work of town boards, commissions and committees and to retain qualified volunteers.

- **Community Events**. Promote and support community events and festivals to connect townspeople, nurture community pride, and sustain Princeton's culture of outdoor recreation.

- **Financing Town Services.** Work toward self-sustainability of programs from potential fee-based services.

- **Regionalization of Services**. Support efforts to regionalize services with neighboring towns where beneficial.

Princeton public buildings needing priority attention: Mechanics Hall in East Princeton and the Public Safety Building in Princeton Center. (*Photos by Community Opportunities Group, Inc.*)

CHAPTER 2

LAND USE ELEMENT

The land use element of a master plan provides a policy framework for managing growth and change. A community's **land use pattern** is the physical arrangement and intensity of residential, commercial, industrial and institutional development, open land, natural resources and roadways. Land use is inseparable from zoning because ultimately, a master plan's future land use map ought to form the basis for a town's key zoning policies. In many communities today, however, zoning fosters outcomes that bear little relationship to the master plan or the kind of place residents say they want their towns to be in the future. Changing zoning can be difficult, and sometimes people want zoning to accomplish the impossible: to stop development altogether.

Historic agricultural outbuildings and scenic views define Princeton's rural beauty, such as the impression formed by this barn at 92 Mountain Road. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

Small towns often rely on other laws and regulations (mainly Title V), lack of public utilities, and difficult-to-develop soils to prevent growth. These factors no longer impede development as they did in the past, in part because technology has improved. In addition, the supply of readily developable land has declined. Today, developers will invest in sites they never would have considered before. Regardless of any other regulations or conditions that may affect development, communities should zone for land uses and use intensity that address valid planning objectives. They also need to apply their zoning requirements in ways that respect the rights of property owners, treat applicants fairly, and comply with state law. Otherwise, they may unwittingly invite inappropriate development and its associated negative impacts. At issue for Princeton is whether its land use policies and practices will be effective tools for guiding future growth.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Princeton is a rural-residential community northwest of Worcester, bounded by Leominster, Sterling, Holden, Rutland, Hubbardston and Westminster. Its 35.8 sq. mi. area is characterized by steeply sloped terrain, extensive forest cover, a radial frame of narrow, winding roads, and very low-density development. Princeton's development pattern has been indelibly influenced by the physical characteristics of its land and the types and extent of its water resources. The most visible landscape features include Wachusett Mountain, Little Wachusett Mountain and Pine Hill, but large hills cover much of southern Princeton and long ridges extend south from Route 31 as the road bends toward Princeton center from Route 140. Bedrock boulders and outcrops occur all over town, suggesting that much of Princeton's land is difficult to develop.

Against the backdrop of these features, rivers, small streams and brooks course throughout the community. The largest, Stillwater River, flows through the eastern end of Princeton, but there are many other streams, brooks and small tributaries. In addition, Princeton has four ponds that lie entirely within its borders – Paradise Pond, Snow Pond, Glutner Pond and the Onion Patch – while portions of Bickford Pond, Crow Hill Pond, the Quinapoxet Reservoir and Wachusett Lake extend into adjacent towns. Finally, less than 10% of Princeton's total land area is wetlands.[1] Small patches of wooded swamp and shrub swamp are present in many locations, notably West Princeton, and there is a significant wooded swamp around Governor's Brook on the Princeton-Holden town line. The only large band of relatively contiguous upland runs between Wachusett Mountain State Reservation and the Leominster State Forest.

Princeton's rolling landscape consists of interesting geologic features, notably Wachusett Mountain, and hillsides that offer striking views to Boston, New Hampshire and Western Massachusetts. The town is crossed by just over 100 miles of roads, from three major roadways that carry local and regional traffic – Routes 31, 62 and 140 – to gravel roads and very small private ways.[2] Not surprisingly, several of Princeton's back roads merge with minor streets in adjacent towns, such as Coalkiln Road, Houghton Road, Brooks Station Road and Westminster Road.

Wachusett Mountain Ski Lift. (*Photo supplied by Master Plan Steering Committee*).

Land Use Pattern

Very little of Princeton's land is developed today. Single-family homes can be seen on large lots along the roadside in most parts of town and a few small businesses operate inconspicuously along Route 140, the southern end of Route 31 and at the edge of the town center. For the most part, however, Princeton's land is vacant and forested (Map 2-1).

Open Space. Since Princeton is one of 26 communities in the watersheds of three reservoirs serving metropolitan Boston, the state controls a considerable amount of land here and in surrounding towns. Princeton also has substantial portions of two state parks within its borders: the Wachusett Mountain State Reservation and Leominster State Forest. Overall, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) owns approximately 5,800 acres in Princeton and holds conservation restrictions on another 1,000± acres.[3]

[1] Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS), "DEP Wetlands" (September 2005), as interpreted by DEP Wetlands Conservancy Program (WCP); Nashua and Chicopee watershed wetlands merged and calculated for Princeton by Community Opportunities Group, Inc. Data source: MassGIS at <http://www.mass.gov/mgis/>.

[2] Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Transportation, Office of Transportation Planning, 2005 Road Inventory Year-End Report (March 2006), <http://www.eot.state.ma.us/>.

[3] Unless otherwise noted, land use and parcel estimates in this report are derived from a parcel records database supplied by the Princeton assessor's

TABLE 2.1: LAND USES IN PRINCETON (ESTIMATED; 2005)

Land Use	Acres	Land Use	Acres
Residential Development		Vacant/Largely Undeveloped Land	
Single-family residential	5,288.1	Privately Owned	
Two-family residential	65.9	*Farm, Forest, Recreation*	4,937.1
Other residential	23.8	*Conservation*	1,936.9
Nonresidential Development		*Vacant Residential & Nonresidential Land*	2,731.1
Commercial	51.9	Publicly Owned	
Industrial	15.2	*Commonwealth of Massachusetts*	6,662.0
Religious uses	34.1	*Water Supply (Fitchburg & Worcester)*	711.3
Other institutional uses	13.1	*Town of Princeton*	253.5
		Total	22,723.8

Source: Princeton Assessor's Office, parcel records database (October 2005). The total acreage reported in Table 1 does not equal Princeton's total area (22,933.2 acres) because Table 1 excludes roads and some unclassified land. There are also some discrepancies between local and state data.

In addition, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, the Princeton Land Trust and the town own many acres of land, though not all of the town's property qualifies as *protected* open space. Available data suggest that about 9,000 acres, or 40% of the town, are subject to some form of restriction that prohibits or severely limits the potential for future development.[4]

Housing. At least three character-defining qualities can be seen in Princeton's pattern of residential development. First, while the town has 5,378 acres of land in residential use, it has very few housing units and as a result, Princeton's average residential density is an unusually low 4.20 acres per unit – excluding homes on Chapter 61, 61A or 61B land. The prevalence of large residential parcels is noteworthy: of all 1,195 parcels with a single-family home, 22% have more than five acres of land and 9%, more than 10 acres of land.

Second, detached single-family homes comprise 94% of all residences in Princeton. The town has only 25± properties with multi-family units, located mainly near the town center. Third, many of Princeton's residences are historically significant. Local records indicate that about 115 housing units in Princeton were built prior to 1850.[5] Aside from their contribution to the town's visual character, these homes shed light on the geography of growth in Princeton over time. In many cases, Princeton's older homes also relate to the street and to each other in ways that differ from new homes. They are more likely to define the view from the road, and often they exist in nodes or recognizable groupings, such as along Gregory Hill Road and Allen Road near the town center, Leominster Road in East Princeton, and the Gates Road/Thompson Road area. The collection of homes built shortly after Princeton's incorporation

office (October 2005).

[4] The estimate of 9,000 acres of use-restricted land is an approximation based on two sources: the assessor's parcel database and GIS data published by the state. Since the assessor's database does not report conservation restrictions, relying on local data alone will result in an underestimate of perpetually protected open space. If the assessor's acreage records contain errors, however, the database may overestimate the amount of land protected by fee ownership, e.g., land owned by the Princeton Conservation Commission or DCR. According to state GIS data, Princeton has 9,115 acres of protected land; comparable sites measured in the assessor's parcel database, including identifiable conservation restrictions, equal 8,920 acres. The difference appears to be attributable to one conservation restriction we have not been able to verify. For state GIS data, see MassGIS, "Protected and Recreational Open Space" (May 2005).

[5] Princeton Assessor's Office, Parcel Records Database (October 2005).

(1759) in the vicinity of Mirick, Beaman, Willson and Hobbs Roads offers evidence of Princeton's late-18th century development pattern.

For the most part, residential development in Princeton is spreading out more than filling in. Many homes built since 1985 are adjacent to areas that developed from 1970-1985. Land use changes have occurred in pockets in the east, south and western sections of town: along Route 140 in the vicinity of Rocky Pond Road and Beaman Road, along Bullard and Coalkiln Roads crossing Sterling Road (Route 62), the southernmost end of Route 31, and Bigelow and Wheeler Roads south of Hubbardston Road (Route 62). The prevalence of late 20th-century housing around Routes 140 and 62 and Bullard-Coalkiln Roads makes sense given the completion of Thomas Prince School in 1968 and the opening of I-190 in 1983.

In contrast, Princeton has experienced very little nonresidential growth. The expanded skiing facilities at Wachusett Mountain, recreation fields near the school and a pocket of commercial activity on Worcester Road are the only obvious nonresidential land use changes recorded in aerial photographs. Land that Princeton has zoned for business has attracted more residential than nonresidential investment. Since the business districts are oddly situated and for the most part too narrow to attract high-quality commercial projects, they will probably continue to evolve as residential areas with little if any business activity.

On a per capita basis, residential development consumed less land 30 years ago. In 1970, aggregate residential land use was about .51 acres per person; by 1999, the ratio had increased to .59 acres per person. The difference is modest and it probably reflects two conditions: the adoption of two-acre zoning in 1973 and the decline in household size. Since Princeton has zoned the entire town for two-acre building lots and there are no opportunities for compact development, it seems certain that future growth will cause per capita residential land consumption to rise over time.

East Princeton (Community Opportunities Group, Inc.)

Nonresidential Uses. Other land uses in Princeton include a few small businesses, churches and charitable organizations, public institutions, and a major regional recreation facility at Wachusett Mountain. Historically the town had small industries and prosperous farming, but there is almost no industrial activity today despite the presence of a large amount of industrially zoned land. Less than 55 acres are currently in use for commercial purposes.

Most of the commercial uses can be seen in an emerging low-density business district on the southern end of Worcester Road (Route 31) and in East Princeton, near the intersection of Route 140 and East Princeton Road. Princeton Center consists almost entirely of residential, institutional and open space uses. A municipal complex overlooking the common includes Bagg Hall (town hall), the library and the public safety building, and the Princeton Center Building, a former school now used for community functions and private office space, is on Boylston Road. Attest-

ing to Princeton's broadly distributed development pattern, however, the town operates a fire substation in East Princeton and its elementary school, the Thomas Prince School, is on Sterling Road (Route 62) in the southeastern end of town. Further, Princeton owns a handsome but rarely used historic building in East Princeton, Mechanics Hall.

Vacant Land

Although the state's vast holdings contribute to Princeton's rural image, the amount of privately owned, relatively unrestricted open land exceeds the inventory of protected open space. Princeton has about 4,900 acres under **Chapter 61, 61A or 61B** agreements, including 700 acres protected in perpetuity by conservation restrictions or Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR). Over half of the unrestricted land is in Chapter 61 status, which makes sense because the town is substantially forest-covered. Chapter 61 parcels exist throughout Princeton, yet the farm properties (Chapter 61A) tend to be situated west and south of the center of town. Before any of these parcels can be sold for development, the town has a statutory 120-day right of first refusal to acquire the land for open space.

Princeton's vacant land inventory includes nearly 6,000 acres without any deed restrictions or other legal limitations on development: 2,700 acres of vacant land, and 3,300 acres of "excess" land, or land in large parcels with an existing residence. Constraints such as extremely steep slopes, poor soil conditions, wetlands, and state and local regulations make some of this land undevelopable. Of the 10,300 acres of land not subject to deed or other legal restrictions, about 8,400 acres appear to have some development potential.

LOCAL & REGIONAL TRENDS

Worcester County has absorbed an increasingly large share of the state's housing growth since 1980, when residential building permits county-wide comprised only 10% of all permits issued in Massachusetts. In 1983, the pace of housing development began to accelerate throughout the Commonwealth; by 1986, more than 16% of the state's new homes were under construction in Worcester County.[6] The confluence of a robust real estate market, the opening of I-190 in 1983 and the recent completion of I-395 meant that Central Massachusetts communities were poised for new growth.

The effects of regional transportation improvements can be seen in building permit trends, for the number of new construction permits per year in Holden tripled from 1982-85 and Hubbardston witnessed a five-fold increase in the same period. While Princeton also experienced a higher rate of housing growth in the mid-1980s, the change was less dramatic because historic population statistics show that Princeton had been growing continuously since 1950.[7] Moreover, the recession (1989-92) did not affect Princeton to the same degree. Table 2.2 provides a summary of residential building permits issued in Princeton and surrounding communities from 1980-2004.

Unlike Princeton's low rate of development in the 1990s, other towns nearby absorbed significant growth. For example, Hubbardston ranked 9 out of 351 cities and towns in the state for housing and population growth from 1990-2000, and Rutland ranked 17. Princeton, Holden and Paxton hovered near the mid-point for the state as a whole, gaining homes at a rate just below

[6] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), New Residential Building Permits, 1980-2004, State of the Cities Data Systems (SOCDS) at <http://socds.huduser.org/index.html>.

[7] Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER), "Population Counts for Massachusetts Counties, Cities and Towns: Estimated and Actual, 1930-1998," Population Statistics at <http://www.umass.edu/miser/>; Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, Summary File 1 Table P1, generated from American Factfinder at <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

TABLE 2.2: NEW RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION PERMITS, 1980-2004

Area	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004
Massachusetts	100,741	176,595	78,948	89,096	95,233
Worcester County	11,132	27,203	12,885	14,906	16,284
Fitchburg	469	781	187	267	616
Gardner	257	572	199	220	205
Holden	255	533	258	291	413
Hubbardston	77	526	140	218	159
Leominster	355	902	732	859	361
Paxton	55	107	61	80	88
PRINCETON	130	161	75	74	69
Rutland	79	203	137	311	435
Sterling	201	383	178	296	203
Westminster	106	270	185	213	203
Worcester	2,507	2,415	1,685	1,073	2,289

Sources: Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

the non-urban average of 8.6%.[8] The westward migration of new housing development from Eastern Massachusetts across I-495 into Worcester County's small towns echoes trends recently identified by the Massachusetts Audubon Society ("Losing Ground," 2003). The burden of growth has shifted to small, largely undeveloped communities in Central Massachusetts, where substantial amounts of open, unprotected land and wildlife habitat lay vulnerable to large-lot zoning.

Compared to the fairly rapid growth that occurred in Princeton during the 1970s and early 1980s, the rate of new housing development has declined. This can be seen not only in historic land use statistics but also the federal census, which reports that Princeton's housing growth rate dropped sharply from 1990-2000. Still, Princeton's slower rate of housing development has not made new growth less intrusive or visible. Aerial photography reports produced by the University of Massachusetts Resource Mapping Project (RMP) show that from 1971-1985, most of the residential growth occurring in Princeton resulted in a loss of forest land. As shown in Table 2.3, about 741 acres of forest were converted to another use during this period, mainly to residential development.

After 1985, however, Princeton lost a considerable amount of agricultural land. While agricultural land accounted for only 3% of all land converted to another use from 1971-1985, it contributed more than 30% of all converted land from 1985-1999. Although Princeton's rate of growth has fallen since 1987 and remained relatively low throughout the 1990s, the visual impact of new housing construction was probably more obvious from the road.

Princeton is fairly large in total area and much of the land along its radial roadways remains vacant. The ease with which developers can convert vacant land on a public way to single-family house lots can be seen in the amount of "Approval Not Required" development that has occurred in Princeton since 1971. Some subdivision activity is evident in the town's land coverage history as well as its street map, such as Oak Circle off Worcester Road (Route 31) or Whittaker Lane off Coalkiln Road. However, most of Princeton's recent growth has been absorbed on or next to

[8] Census 2000, Summary File 1 Table H1; 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary File 1 Table H01. Growth rates and state rankings by Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

TABLE 2.3: LAND USE CHANGE, 1971-1999

	Acres in Use			Absolute Change			Percent Change		
Land Use Classification	**1999**	**1985**	**1971**	**1985-99**	**1971-85**	**1971-99**	**1985-99**	**1971-85**	**1971-99**
Agriculture									
Cropland	720.5	827.5	865.6	-107.0	-38.1	-145.2	-12.9%	-4.4%	-16.8%
Pasture	321.8	426.9	412.7	-105.1	14.2	-90.9	-24.6%	3.4%	-22.0%
Orchard, Nursery	6.9	19.2	19.2	-12.3	0.0	-12.3	-64.0%	0.0%	-64.0%
Forest Cover	18,652.2	19,134.5	19,875.3	-482.3	-740.8	-1,223.1	-2.5%	-3.7%	-6.2%
Residential Uses									
Multi-Family	2.2	2.2	0.0	0.0	2.2	2.2	0.0%		
Single-Family, Low-Density	12.8	12.8	12.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Single-Family, Very-Low-Density	1,961.4	1,467.8	850.6	493.5	617.3	1,110.8	33.6%	72.6%	130.6%
Non-Residential Uses									
Commercial	35.6	25.9	20.7	9.6	5.3	14.9	37.1%	25.5%	72.1%
Industrial	3.9	1.3	1.3	2.7	0.0	2.7	213.4%	0.0%	213.4%
Public Uses									
Parks, Building Grounds, Cemeteries, etc.	54.2	50.6	41.1	3.7	9.5	13.1	7.2%	23.1%	32.0%
Outdoor Recreation	150.7	143.8	26.8	6.9	117.0	123.9	4.8%	437.3%	463.0%
Open Water	421.1	319.5	316.6	101.6	2.9	104.6	31.8%	0.9%	33.0%
Non-Forested Wetlands	301.3	239.5	244.2	61.8	-4.7	57.1	25.8%	-1.9%	23.4%
Other									
Mining; Sand & Gravel	42.0	35.3	21.0	6.7	14.2	21.0	19.1%	67.6%	99.7%
Unvegetated Land; Power Lines	246.8	226.6	225.6	20.2	1.0	21.2	8.9%	0.4%	9.4%

Source: MassGIS, U-Mass Resource Mapping Project.

roads where the land is somewhat less constrained by very steep slopes. The same condition has also brought new growth close to wooded swamps and shrub swamps, notably along Bullard and Coalkiln Roads.

PAST PLANS, STUDIES & REPORTS

Princeton completed its first master plan in 1970 and prepared updates in 1975, 1980 and ca. 1987. The town also commissioned a land use plan in 1991. These reports trace the evolution of land use policy in Princeton during a period that generally coincides with Table 3. They also identify land use issues that remain problematic today.

Town Plan (1970)

The 1970 Town Plan is a federal 701 plan, funded by the former Housing and Home Finance Agency. Many towns and virtually all small cities financed master plans in the 1960s and early 1970s by tapping federal 701 grants. Since Congress originally authorized these funds as part of a larger focus on the nation's housing (1954), the so-called 701 plans examined issues that sometimes had limited relevance to rural, middle-class towns, such as overcrowded housing, concentrated population centers and areas with large numbers of substandard housing units. Nonetheless, the 701 program made it possible for countless small towns with little if any planning experience to prepare their first master plans or comprehensive plans, and this includes Princeton.

The 1970 Town Plan was developed by professional planners working with the Planning Board and a Citizens Advisory Committee.[9] It promoted five goals and several recommendations for land use, conservation, transportation, housing and economic development. The plan's authors noted that Princeton had an unusually large amount of land zoned for nonresidential development – so much that the industrial acreage alone was 4.5 times more than the number of acres needed to support Princeton's 20-year population forecast.

In addition, they questioned the location of Princeton's business districts and said Princeton should prohibit new homes in commercial and industrial zones in order to prevent land use conflicts. They

PRINCETON TOWN PLAN (1970)

Goals

- To provide for a comprehensive land use plan and zoning which will establish suitable areas of residential and business development.
- To provide the basis for adequate municipal services such as fire and police protection, schools, and water and sewerage facilities when needed.
- To provide for the wise use of sufficient open space, conservation and outdoor recreational areas conducive to healthy living.
- To coordinate new tourist facilities with the expansion of outdoor recreation at the Wachusett Mountain State Reservation.
- To preserve the rural, scenic quality of Princeton.

Land Use Recommendations

- Establish a small shopping and services zoning district on the south side of Boylston Avenue near Woodlawn Cemetery to provide adequate area for the local post office, limited retail and restaurants.
- Change the town's zoning to provide for low-density housing near the town center, East Princeton and Wachusett Mountain, and very-low-density housing in other parts of the town.
- Reduce the total amount of land zoned for commercial and industrial development.
- Establish small neighborhood business areas in East Princeton and a general commercial district on Route 31 in the southern part of town.
- Relocate the industrial zoning districts away from watershed and wildlife areas, compress the existing districts, and provide adequate frontage for industrial development along main roads.

[9] Universal Engineering Corporation, Thomas Associates Division, Princeton Town Plan 1970 (September 1970).

noted that by offering no land for services and retail in the town center, Princeton created a risk that the center's few remaining businesses would continue to operate in less-than-optimal locations in order to preserve their rights as non-conforming uses. Further, the plan's authors said that by zoning most of the town in one residential district, the cost to serve Princeton's future population would accelerate rapidly because over time, the town would begin to "sprawl." According to the 1970 plan, the resulting expenditures for road maintenance, public safety and school transportation would be higher than if the town adopted a policy of directing growth toward established areas such as the town center or East Princeton.

The 1970 plan also included an analysis of housing problems, consistent with federal requirements for 701-funded master plans. In Massachusetts, several state initiatives coincided with growth in federal spending on housing and changes in the federal government's approach to housing needs. These initiatives formed a backdrop for new master plans in many towns, including Princeton. For example, the legislature had recently enacted G.L. c.40B, ss. 20-23, the law that promotes a regional fair-share distribution of low- and moderate-income housing ("Chapter 40B"). The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency and the Department of Community Affairs (Department of Housing and Community Development) were only a few years old, and DCA had been charged with preparing a five-year plan to increase the supply of low-income and elderly housing.

The master plan team concluded that Princeton's land, limited infrastructure, rural character and zoning made higher-density housing development unlikely and inconsistent with other local planning objectives. The plan nonetheless recommended adoption of a local building code, a proposal obviated by the establishment of a uniform state building code five years later.

Finally, the 1970 plan stressed the importance of a capital improvements plan. In 1968-69, Princeton exceeded all towns nearby for debt service per capita and tax levy per capita. Although this was largely due to the new elementary school (1968), Princeton's consultants noted that one major capital project could have major fiscal consequences without advance capital planning. Accordingly, the new town plan proposed a five-year capital budget, including predictable appropriations for road maintenance and annual transfers to a reserve (stabilization) fund that could be tapped to help finance major equipment and other purchases in the future. The plan also called for a conservation fund to buy open space and a town buildings fund to maintain Princeton's public buildings.

Town Plan (1975)

Princeton's 1975 plan was prepared by the Town Plan Task Force, a nine-member committee charged with reviewing, correcting and updating the 1970 plan.[10] Although the first plan paid considerable attention to capital needs, the 1975 plan suggests that by the mid-1970s, Princeton had become concerned about the town's capacity to meet municipal service needs.

The Taxpayers Association of Princeton had two seats on the Task Force, and one of its members served as chair. Nearly all of the report's key proposals pertained to public facilities and services: building a fire station in East Princeton, acquiring land for conservation, recreation and water supply, hiring a full-time police chief, setting up a full-time police dispatch system, and initiating studies for future water supplies. Task Force members thought the first plan had exaggerated future school space needs, noting that while Princeton's population had increased significantly, its K-12 school enrollments remained fairly stable.

The Task Force offered many proposals for land and water conservation but few for land use policy. Its reluctance to say much about zoning

[10] Town of Princeton, Town Plan Task Force, Princeton Town Plan 1975 (April 1975).

may have reflected the committee's composition, but the 1975 Task Force also knew what had happened to the first master plan's zoning proposals. The 1970 plan had called for a total of five zoning districts, including two residential zones with different lot sizes to encourage village centers and protect outlying land, but Princeton voters rejected the five-district model in 1971, doubled the town-wide minimum lot size to 80,000 sq. ft., and increased the minimum frontage requirement to 225 feet, presumably to reduce growth.

In 1975, the Task Force endorsed earlier zoning recommendations such as reducing the amount of commercial and industrial land and moving toward a system of variable lot sizes. However, the Task Force thought density policies should be guided by a soon-to-be-published soil survey and "people-per-acre" standards to retain rural character. In addition, the Task Force recommended more emphasis on design and high-quality development. It also proposed establishing a community planning authority to advise the Select Board and Planning Board, and supported construction of elderly housing. By the time the Task Force issued its final report, concepts such as cluster and planned unit development had been discussed in Princeton because they were acknowledged and greeted with a lukewarm review in the 1975 plan.

Town Plan (1980)

Princeton established a new planning committee, the 1980 Town Plan Task Force, in April 1979.[11] The Task Force's report, Princeton Town Plan 1980-1985, explains that a key reason for updating the earlier plans was to assure Princeton's eligibility for federal and state grants. The opinions of the 1980 Task Force differed from the views of their predecessors, and while the 1980 Town Plan echoes many recommendations from the first master plan, the new Task Force's subcommittees imprinted the proposals with their own ideas.

PRINCETON TOWN PLAN 1980-1985

Land Use Recommendations

- Rezone all residentially developed land in the commercial and industrial districts to the Residential-Agricultural District.
- Prohibit new residential uses in the commercial and industrial districts.
- Reorganize and condense the commercial and industrial districts by:
- Changing the boundaries of the commercial district on Worcester Road (Route 31) by rezoning some portions of it to Residential-Agricultural and increasing the district's depth in other areas.
- Allowing limited business uses in the town center.
- Rezoning residential land west of Redemption Rock Trail-North for business development.
- Rezoning most of the industrial land on Hubbardston Road to Residential-Agricultural.
- Adopt cluster zoning.
- Increase the size of the planning board from five to seven members in order to increase the board's capacity to accomplish its work.
- Provide more meeting and office space for the planning board and building department.
- Investigate the feasibility and impacts of constructing connector roads to serve future growth.
- Develop housing for the elderly, following the model of the then-new Wachusett House Corporation.
- Establish a historic district in the town center, including the town common and surrounding homes and institutional buildings.
- Acquire land to create buffers around the seven historic cemeteries.
- Adopt a scenic roads bylaw.

Unlike the 1970 and 1975 town plans, the 1980 plan was a broad-based citizen participation effort, with many Princeton residents serving on subcommittees coordinated by a Task Force Steering Committee. The plan reflects this structure, for it is an unedited collection of subcommittee

[11] Town of Princeton, 1980 Town Plan Task Force, Princeton Town Plan 1980-1985 (May 1980).

issue papers and proposals. Steering Committee members acknowledged that the report contained many writing styles, but they wanted to preserve the voice and hard work of so many volunteers. Still, the "grass-roots" process that governed the 1980 plan did little to increase its success because most recommendations apparently were not implemented. Moreover, the plan indicates that two subcommittees – Economic Development and Conservation – raised irreconcilable issues. As a result, the plan omits their reports even though it includes their key recommendations.

The subcommittees that considered planning, building, historic and cultural affairs, and town management had much to say about Princeton's needs at the time. They spoke of the soon-to-be-completed regional highway, I-190, and its implications for development along Route 140. By April 1979, phrases such as "carrying capacity," "commercial strip" and "sprawl" had become embedded in Princeton's planning vocabulary. Moreover, the uniform State Building Code was four years old, and Princeton had hired its first building inspector/zoning enforcement officer.

Although the Task Force report noted that Princeton's rate of housing growth had recently declined, one subcommittee recognized that the building inspector's workload was affected by other issues, notably energy conservation. Indeed, during the Task Force's 13-month planning process, the second energy crisis of the 1970s had set in, spawning an increase in applications for wood stoves and heating system conversions.

Town Plan (ca. 1987)

Another town plan update was prepared in the late 1980s by a professional planner who lives in Princeton and a former chairman of the Planning Board.[12] The report reviews a variety of demographic, economic and growth data in order to show how Princeton had changed since the previous plan update. It also describes successful efforts to institute a land bank on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard (1984-1986) and encourages Princeton to consider creative approaches to protecting its remaining open space. Unfortunately, the late-1980s town plan had little influence over land use policy at the time, perhaps because it was an internal working document more than the product of a public planning process.

Despite the report's uncertain origin, it points to concerns that intensified in Princeton during the 1980s. Residential building permits tripled in 1983, marking the onset of another growth spurt. Not surprisingly, the report pays considerable attention to the operating and capital needs of town departments and the schools: by 1987, Massachusetts cities and towns were in their sixth year of coping with **Proposition 2 ½**. The plan also acknowledges the endurance of conflicts from previous plans: affordable housing, elderly housing, historic preservation, and what constitutes an "acceptable business." It challenged Princeton officials to consider whether they had adequate capacity to manage the town, from growth management to financial management. Ultimately, the plan made a single land use recommendation: Princeton should commission a study and revamp its zoning and subdivision regulations.

Land Use Development Plan (1991)

The Planning Board hired CMRPC to prepare a land use development plan in 1989.[13] Working with a Land Use Development Plan Committee and several subcommittees, CMRPC conducted a town-wide survey in September 1989, analyzed development trends, and supplied zoning and other recommendations to make development more consistent with local preferences. The questionnaire was designed to support general land use planning and address the state's public participa-

[12] Town of Princeton, Town Plan Report (undated publication), prepared by Michael Latka and Bruce Jacobsen.

[13] Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, Princeton Land Use Development Plan (June 1991).

LAND USE PLAN (1991)

Recommendations

- Limit land clearing and disturbance from new development by reducing the minimum right-of-way width and pavement requirements for roads and encouraging natural drainage design wherever possible.
- Adopt open space (cluster) zoning and provide a special permit option to reduce the minimum frontage requirement in exchange for a larger lot.
- Institute a minimum lot width requirement to control for lot shape and assure adequate ("meaningful") access.
- Adopt the provisions of G.L. c.40, s. 15C and designate scenic roads.
- Establish rules and regulations for earth removal permits so the Board of Appeals can impose performance standards and require a performance bond where appropriate.
- Increase the capacity of the Conservation Commission and Planning Board by adopting review fees and authorizing the boards to retain consultants.
- Reduce or eliminate the potential for use conflicts, particularly on Worcester Road, by rezoning portions of the Business District to Residential-Agricultural.
- On Route 140, eliminate the Industrial District and reduce the size of the Business-Industrial District.

Recommendations Tabled for Further Review

Some recommendations did not have full support from the Land Use Development Plan Committee or its subcommittees. The following recommendations were tabled for futher review by other town boards:

- Changes to the home occupation bylaw to prevent major alterations to homes or accessory buildings and to institute a zoning compliance certification procedure administered by the building inspector.
- Provisions for accessory apartments, limited to elderly family members.
- Amendments to the site plan review bylaw to make more uses subject to it, clarify the roles of the Board of Appeals and Planning Board when a use requires both site plan review and a special permit, establish authority to charge peer review fees and hire qualified consultants, extend the review period so the planning board would have enough time to review and act on a site plan submission, require more information from applicants, and clarify the relationship between site plan review and the building permit.
- New regulations governing development in the town center. The Land Use Development Plan Committee was disinclined to support new zoning but agreed that the center should be a local historic district under G.L. c.40, s. 40C.

tion requirements for an open space plan. It generated a response from 434 households. Some of the survey results echo comments made at master plan meetings in September-November 2005:

- Survey respondents said Princeton's most desirable qualities include its rural nature, small-town atmosphere, sense of privacy, lack of congestion, scenic views and open space. Its least desirable qualities: retail, town services and the schools.
- Most respondents said they were satisfied with the quality of Princeton's natural resources, yet half thought the quality of these resources was declining. Many thought Princeton should adopt strict wetlands protection and septic system requirements.
- Respondents were divided on the adequacy of Princeton's recreation facilities, but most thought the town should acquire more open space and recreation land.
- A clear majority objected to bringin more retail shops or services to Princeton. They said the town did not need businesses and they opposed zoning changes to encourage business development, especially industrial development. Still, they supported appearance controls (design standards) to make business properties more attractive and consistent with the rural-residential character of the town.
- The survey revealed little support for affordable housing. About one-third of the respondents said Princeton should create affordable housing; most respondents disagreed, and

nearly 20% said they were not sure. A slight majority favored incentives for elderly housing, yet a substantial majority opposed affordable family housing and they specifically said the Princeton Housing Partnership should not pursue state programs for mixed-income housing.

The survey did not produce a clear picture of community attitudes toward land use regulation, except that respondents strongly supported retaining Princeton's two-acre minimum lot size. They disagreed about the merits of other zoning requirements and the concept of cluster zoning, which drew opposition from a plurality of the respondents. Many thought Princeton should limit the number of housing units built each year. Also, most respondents expressed concern about the safety and condition of Princeton's roads. More than 75% favored imposing impact fees on new development if permitted by state law.

The 1991 plan includes a review of Princetom's then-recent development trends, which consisted mainly of "Approval Not Required" or ANR lots. During the 1980s, there were only a few standard subdivisions, each with less than 10 lots, and the building inspector had issued permits for an average of 32 new units per year.[14] The plan notes that from 1980-1989, Princeton's only commercial development included a new building on Worcester Road for the post office, retail and office uses.

In addition to new construction, some development occured as a result of single-family home conversions. When a large house was divided into five multi-family condominiums, however, Princeton voters changed the Zoning Bylaw by limiting conversions to a maximum of three units and on lots with a considerable amount of land.

[14] Note: the average is distorted by two years of fairly intensive growth during the mid-1980s, followed by a continual decline from 1987-1989.

Based on its review of Princeton's zoning and subdivision regulations, CMRPC proposed several changes to make the town's land use policies more responsive to interests identified in the opinion survey and the concerns of the Land Use Development Plan Committee. However, few if any of the proposals were implemented.

ISSUES, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Defining Princeton

Previous town plans and conditions in Princeton today suggest that residents have wrestled with basic growth management questions for a long time. Despite its efforts to plan, Princeton does not have a strong track record with implementation. Proposals to reduce the amount of business and industrial land, to change the boundaries of nonresidential districts, reduce the potential for use conflicts and provide for some business activity in the town center have failed to achieve consensus, and as a result the town's present zoning map is very similar to the zoning map critiqued by Princeton's planning consultants in 1969-70. Voters rejected the town plan's proposed zoning scheme in 1971, only to impose a blanket, two-acre zoning rule two years later, applying it town-wide regardless of each district's location or function, or the uses permitted within it.

Possibly the 1970 plan's population forecast alarmed Princeton residents: the authors predicted a "build-out" population of 17,871-29,100, depending on the minimum lot size used to control density. However, Princeton's first master plan highlights a significant problem with long-term population forecasts. The multiplier for average household size that is used to convert build-out dwelling units to build-out population may not reflect the future's households. In Princeton's case, if the same number of build-out house lots estimated in 1970 were used today to predict the town's future population, the result would be 30% less than the forecast published 35 years ago simply because household sizes have changed

dramatically in the intervening years. The image of a traditional family of four still endures in the United States, but it is an archaic statistic.[15]

Princeton has carried out some of the land use proposals contained in previous master plans, such as regulating lot width, making more uses subject to site plan review, and authorizing penalties and fines for zoning violations under the non-criminal disposition provisions of G.L. c.40, s. 21D. As for fundamental changes in land use policy, however, the town has had less success. This applies even to master plan updates that involved many citizen participants and extensive outreach, such as the 1991 plan's town-wide survey. While lack of consensus partially explains the gaps between proposals and implementation, it seems that inadequate local capacity was also a contributing factor.

"Rural character" is a recurring theme in Princeton's master plans. Surely it has meaning to everyone in Princeton, but it may not have a universal meaning. Suburbs near Boston often refer to their rural character, too, yet what is "rural" in that context is not at all like "rural" in Princeton. In many small towns, new and old residents have different ideas in mind when they use the term "rural" because they do not have a shared frame of reference. While newcomers form impressions of a town based on what they see around them, long-time residents have already seen considerable change.

Competing perceptions of a community's past and present can make it difficult for residents to define a common vision of the future. Princeton once had small, vital industries, yet it has virtually no industrial base now. Even though its town center is almost exclusively residential and institutional in 2006, the same area had a few small businesses as recently as 35 years ago and more at the turn of the century. Hospitality and tourism played an important role in Princeton's history, yet the presence of a major regional recreation site in the town's back yard is barely discernible in Princeton's economy today. It is important to recognize that very-low-density residential development is not synonymous with "rural." Moreover, it runs contrary to the principles of rural planning and the characteristics of rural development.

Future Growth

To the authors of Princeton's 1970 Town Plan, the potential for 4,830-7,865 new homes and 17,871-29,100 people on Princeton's vacant land mattered less than the 20-year (1990) population forecast of 2,828 and where most of the town's new growth would occur. Providing adequate facilities and services depends on the amount, type and location of future development, so near-term estimates play a critical role in the design of a land use plan. For example, a town that expects 550 more homes and 1,425 more people in the next 10 years may have adequate facilities if most of its new growth occurs near existing schools, recreation areas and public safety services. If the same amount of growth is scattered randomly throughout the town, existing facilities may not be sufficient and the cost to provide services will increase very quickly.

With these principles in mind, the 1970 Town Plan proposed two residential zoning districts, one to accommodate growth and the other to reduce it. The proposal was not designed to achieve a significant reduction in Princeton's 20-year housing and population estimates; its purpose was to designate areas to receive new development, and thereby control the rate of growth in community service costs and capital expenditures.

[15] The 1970 plan forecast assumed that at build-out, Princeton would have a total of 4,830-7,865 housing units, a range arrived at by dividing 11,236 acres of developable land into lots of 40,000 or 60,000 square feet, with build factors of .59-.60. For purposes of estimating Princeton's build-out population, the planning consultant used an average of 3.7 persons per household, or the national average reported by the Bureau of the Census and HUD. The nation's current (Census 2000) average household size is 2.59.

More recently (1999-2001), CMRPC participated in a program that produced build-out studies for every city and town in the Commonwealth. The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) distributed a Geographic Information System (GIS) model to regional planning agencies and private consultants working on the project in order to assure that everyone followed a consistent methodology. GIS was unavailable in 1970, so the Town Plan consultants used a different procedure: they allocated vacant acres identified in a physical conditions survey to various soil classes, used multipliers to adjust for development capacity in each soil class, and arrived at an estimate of build-out or "saturation" assuming all vacant land would eventually be developed.[16]

TABLE 2.4: FUTURE DEVELOPMENT ESTIMATES TOWN PLAN (1970) AND CMRPC (2000)

Condition	1970 Town Plan	CMRPC
Vacant Usable Land	11,236	10,329
Build Factor	.70	.25-1.0
Potential New Dwelling Units	7,865	2,975
Minimum Lot Area Assumption	40,000	87,120
Potential New Population	29,100	8,597
Average Household Size Assumption	3.70	2.89
Existing Dwelling Units	509	1,196

Sources: 1970 Town Plan; CMRPC, Princeton Summary Buildout Statistics (2002); Community Opportunities Group, Inc.

The new, more sophisticated GIS model relied on similar assumptions, but it had the advantages of speed and access to a large library of GIS data maintained by the state. Calculations performed by hand in 1970 could be done entirely on a computer in 2000.

Using the state's GIS model, CMRPC estimated Princeton's untapped development capacity at a maximum of 2,975 new single-family house lots and 841,673 sq. ft. of commercial or industrial space. These figures assumed that in 2000, Princeton had about 10,467 acres of usable, undeveloped land, but the actual development yield would be reduced by steep slopes, wetland buffers, and the additional buffers required under the Watershed Protection Act (WsPA). CMRPC's conclusion is similar to that reached in 1970, adjusted for the impact of Princeton's two-acre zoning change in 1973. Table 2.4 compares the two studies and the total amount of residential development that could exist in Princeton under saturation conditions, given applicable zoning requirements and the characteristics of each build-out model.[17]

Neither the 1970 Town Plan nor CMRPC's analysis was designed to control for a condition that holds enormous sway over a community's future growth: existing parcel boundaries and the potential for parcel assembly. In fact, both studies relied on a "land aggregation" approach, i.e., a straightforward sum of all available, usable acres not subject to legal restrictions, without regard to the location of the land or the size, shape or ownership of the actual parcels involved. As a result, the state build-out model often included fractions of back land in existing ANR or subdivision lots

[16] The physical conditions inventory was prepared by CMRPC in 1967, also as part of a statewide project involving the Commonwealth's then-new regional planning agencies. The Town Plan consultants updated CMRPC's inventory in 1969. Here, "vacant land" means all unbuilt land, including vacant parcels and parcels with an existing residence and surplus acreage.

[17] A direct comparison of the 1970 Town Plan-CMRPC study cannot be made for commercial and industrial growth. The Town Plan estimated the number of acres needed for commercial uses based on assumptions about Princeton's future population, but CMRPC estimated the amount of nonresidential development that could occur under existing zoning. The two studies were designed to answer a different question.

TABLE 2.5: MASTER PLAN ESTIMATE OF PRINCETON'S FUTURE DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

	Zoning Districts			
Condition	**Residential-Agricultural**	**Business**	**Business-Industrial**	**Total**
Total Area	22,455.0	89.7	388.5	22,933.2
Potentially Available Acres	8,301.8	19.1	104.9	8,425.8
Roads/Odd Lot Factor	0.85	0.90	0.90	2.7
Net Available Acres	7,056.5	17.2	94.4	7,168.1
Development Factor (Average)	0.63	0.90	0.50	
Number of Lots	2,223	8	24	2,254
Dwelling Units/Square Feet	2,223	126,359	462,656	
If Residential				
Development Factor (Average)		0.75	0.70	
Number of Lots	2,223	6	33	2,262

Source: Community Opportunities Group, Inc. Note: Potentially Available Acres" is the sum of vacant or partially developed acres not subject to legal restrictions against future development, minus absolute development constraints such as excessively steep slopes and wetlands. "Roads/odd lot factor" is an assumption multiplier used to discount land that will likely be used for roadways or meet lot width and shape requirements. "Development factor" is reported here as an average, but a series of development factors were used to control for the impacts of (a) steep slopes, (b) wetland, Rivers Protection Act and Title V buffers, (c) Watershed Protection Act requirements, and (d) the probability of parcel assembly.

and combined the acreage as though all of it could be assembled into one or more new house lots. This type of modeling feature will produce fewer distortions in undeveloped towns like Princeton than in mature suburbs, but it points to a significant issue in the GIS model and weaknesses in the data used for the build-out studies.[18]

Although Princeton's previous build-out studies seem reasonably consistent, the more recent one should have produced a lower estimate. The Wetlands Protection Act and Title V as they exist today and the Watershed Protection Act could not have been accounted for in a 1970 analysis. Moreover, Princeton's current zoning requires a minimum lot of 87,120 sq. ft. and a minimum of 43,560 sq. ft. of upland. This provision alone has a significant impact on whether any given two acres of land can meet the requirements for a buildable lot.

Master Plan Future Development Estimate

Table 2.5 presents the Master Plan 2007 build-out estimate, considering Princeton's current zoning, other regulations that affect development, and an analysis of potentially usable land in individual and contiguous parcels existing as of Fiscal Year 2005. For parcels with a residence or commercial building, "potentially available acres" includes parcels with five or more acres of land, i.e., a parcel that could be divided to create a second lot, subject to adequate frontage. The residential estimate anticipates 2,223-2,262 new lots, depending on the disposition of currently unused land in the Business and Business-Industrial Districts. This represents 712-752 fewer lots than the estimate generated by the state build-out model. The commercial and industrial development estimate anticipates a maximum of 589,016 square feet of building space, or a difference of -252,657 square feet compared to the state build-out estimate.

Just as the 1970 Town Plan's consultants and Citizen Advisory Committee grappled with where

[18] Since most communities did not have GIS parcel maps in 2000, the state GIS model relied on land coverage data generated by the U-Mass Resource Mapping Project.

Princeton's future growth should occur, the Master Plan Steering Committee faced a similar challenge today. Under current zoning, about 2,223 new lots could be created throughout the Residential-Agricultural District on land that is unrestricted, vacant or partially developed today. However, it is important to note that this estimate does not account for Princeton's legal obligations under Chapter 40B. The additional housing units that will come with comprehensive permits cannot be predicted because Chapter 40B supersedes local zoning requirements.

Zoning Regulations

Princeton's Zoning Bylaw divides the town into three districts (Map 2-2): Residential-Agricultural (22,455 acres), Business (89.7 acres), and Business-Industrial (388.5 acres). On one hand, the town's zoning is strikingly simple; on the other hand, it is disturbingly vague. In 20 pages, it establishes use and dimensional regulations, offers a modest description of the procedures for site plan review, covers administrative matters required by law, recaps the non-conformancy provisions of the state Zoning Act, and provides for special permits to construct wireless communication facilities. In length, the wireless communication facilities bylaw constitutes nearly half of the entire Zoning Bylaw. While straightforward land use codes can be advantageous to town boards and developers, the brevity of Princeton's zoning goes hand-in-hand with many omissions and ambiguities.

Flexible Development. Princeton has many large, privately owned tracts of land that contribute to its visual identity. The parcels vary in size, shape, use, setting and physical features. The absence of any open space-residential development provisions in the Zoning Bylaw expresses a policy statement that encourages the division of these parcels into two-acre lots, without regard for their unique characteristics. Princeton residents seem very concerned about the impact of new development on open space, yet their zoning does not provide any flexibility to protect open space by design.

Regulatory Sensitivity. By any standard, Princeton's landscape is strikingly beautiful and diverse. From low-lying areas in the town's southeastern quadrant to the peak of Wachusett Mountain (2,077 feet), Princeton is physically defined by steep terrain, rocky slopes, wooded swamps and numerous streams and brooks. Its renowned views of Boston and Mount Greylock make Princeton regionally unique.

These features have had an unmistakable influence over Princeton's development history, yet the Zoning Bylaw effectively ignores them. Instead of celebrating Princeton's physical characteristics and historic land use pattern, the Zoning Bylaw promotes homogenous "one-size-fits-all" development. For example, its dimensional regulations impose the same area, frontage, setback, lot coverage and lot width requirements on all three zoning districts – without regard to the uses permitted within them or their context.

The record of previous master plans indicates that Princeton has wrestled for many years with the appropriateness of a single residential zoning district. Consultants and town committees have suggested some alternatives that reflect sound planning advice, such as smaller lots in the town center and East Princeton. However, it appears that Princeton has been unable or unwilling to consider variety in uses, building placements and use intensity. In addition, the absence of viewshed regulations is noteworthy in Princeton given the prevalence of scenic resources in the central and northern sections of town.

Risk of Use Conflicts. Single-family homes are permitted as of right throughout Princeton, even in the Business and Business-Industrial Districts. Applied literally, the Zoning Bylaw enables the construction of a car dealership on land abutting a single-family residence in the Business District, or a manufacturing facility next to a single-family residence in the Business-Industrial District. Indeed, the Business-Industrial District serves as a "mother of all districts," for it allows all uses

permitted in the Residential-Agricultural and Business Districts in addition to "any manufacturing or industrial use," a remarkably broad use classification for a zoning bylaw that does not include any definitions. It seems to imagine that a metal fabricating plant, a dressmaker's shop and a private residence can peacefully coexist as abutters. Earlier master plans identified the same concern, yet much like the proposals to diversify Princeton's residential zoning, recommendations to preclude use conflicts, to reduce the amount of industrially zoned land and to relocate the business districts to more appropriate locations were apparently unpersuasive.

Location and Character of Business Districts. Princeton's first master plan mentions concerns about the location and shape of the business zones. Nonetheless, the current business districts appear to be in the same locations as those identified in the 1970 Town Plan, and their shape is very similar (despite some map amendments approved by subsequent town meetings).

Curiously, there is no business or mixed-use district in Princeton Center, which includes residential, institutional and open space uses. It would be appropriate to provide for some small businesses as well, yet Princeton never adopted this recommendation of the 1970 Town Plan. Today, residents yearn for a coffee shop, but the town's zoning prohibits it. In addition, the narrow, linear strip of Business-Industrial land along Route 140 is out of place and inconsistent with the town's image of itself. The district's shape and distance from major regional highways makes it unlikely that high-quality industries will locate here; in fact, the town seems to be inviting strip commercial development.

Since a portion of the Business District on Route 31 offers more depth, it could theoretically support a small, village-style commercial center. However, it also could attract a large, poorly designed retail establishment surrounded by pavement. Although this kind of development is unlikely due to Princeton's lack of public water or sewer service and extremely low population density, it is nonetheless allowed by right as long as the applicant assembles enough land for a large retail building that conforms to the 30% maximum coverage requirement. Finally, Princeton's decision to allow businesses only on the outskirts of town effectively encourages more traffic because residents of populated areas have no choice but to drive in order to obtain goods and services.

Single-Family Home Conversions. Princeton's approach to regulating two-family and three-family dwellings plainly discourages them. The Board of Appeals has authority to grant a special permit for conversion of a single-family home that existed when the Zoning Bylaw was originally adopted (1957). To qualify for a two-family conversion permit, however, the residence must occupy at least three acres of land and for a three-family conversion, five acres of land. Aside from the fact that Princeton's zoning effectively limits conversion options to about 400 single-family homes, the minimum land area requirement is a significant disincentive to locate small, attached dwelling units near established parts of town.[19]

While Princeton residents are concerned about the town's lack of housing options for seniors and young citizens, their current zoning regulations thwart opportunities for a balanced mix of homes. To succeed with any strategy for reducing the threat of large, unwanted comprehensive permits, Princeton needs to be open to a broader mix of housing, shared wastewater disposal systems, and zoning that allows more units per acre in appropriate locations. The technical challenge involves identifying areas that make sense for moderate-density development; the political challenge involves coming to terms with the difference between affordable housing by choice and affordable housing by chance.

[19] This is an estimate; according to the 1960 Census of Population and Housing, Princeton had a total of 449 housing units in 1959.

Other Housing Options. Princeton's past master plans shed light on the absence of affordable housing regulations in the Zoning Bylaw. For example, the 1970 Town Plan says that Princeton lacks the land and infrastructure needed to support low- and moderate-income housing. While the 1975, 1980 and late-1980s updates all suggest that Princeton should consider ways to create elderly housing, their position on affordable housing in general is reinforced by the household opinion survey in 1989, which indicates that a substantial majority of Princeton residents opposed affordable housing for families and a bare majority thought elderly housing should be explored.

Princeton may be unable to command enough support to zone for affordable housing, but accessory apartments offer a fairly innocuous tool for increasing housing choices and they usually rent at below-market rates. In-law apartments, a sub-set of accessory apartments, were recommended in several of Princeton's earlier master plans but to date, the Zoning Bylaw does not permit them.

Lot Frontage and Shared Driveways. Princeton's minimum lot frontage requirement of 225 feet is a prescription for sprawl. By making every lot have at least 225 feet of frontage on a way, the town encourages development to spread out along existing streets, and most of Princeton's new growth has followed this pattern. Over time, Princeton's rural roads will be punctuated by a succession of driveways and its roadside open space will become increasingly fragmented. For a landowner who lacks adequate frontage to create a few Approval Not Required lots but has enough back land to support several house lots, the only alternative in Princeton today is a conventional subdivision.

Some provision should be made for frontage waivers in exchange for more lot area and a shared driveway to serve adjacent reduced-frontage lots. This type of growth management strategy is very common in small towns. For Princeton, it could help to save open space along the road and retain the town's rural image. Princeton also could consider flexible, small-cluster zoning that would permit applicants with enough land for a few frontage lots to locate homes close together, with side and rear setback waivers allowed in exchange for a conservation restriction over roadside open space.

Off-Street Parking. Zoning bylaws usually set minimum off-street parking standards for various land uses. For example, parking requirements for businesses uses might be expressed as a minimum number of spaces per square foot of office or retail space, and some bylaws impose a cap on off-street parking in order to discourage large surface parking lots. Also, it is not uncommon for off-street parking regulations to allow permitting authorities to reduce the number of spaces required or to approve a site plan with areas designated as reserve parking.

Parking regulations often impose design, landscaping and lighting requirements on off-street parking lots, and it is rare to find zoning that omits basic elements such as minimum dimensions for a parking space. In contrast to the restrictive rules that apply in Princeton's zoning districts, the parking regulations are unusually permissive. Section VII.5 expresses all of the town's parking regulations in a single sentence: "No use of land for either residential or non-residential purposes in any type of district will be permitted which does not provide off-street parking adequate for its customary needs."

Protection of Princeton's Landscape. The Zoning Bylaw requires permission from the Board of Appeals to remove more than 25 cubic yards of topsoil from any parcel of land (Section VII.7). Presumably the bylaw requires a special permit, but it does not define the type of permit or establish performance standards for earth removal, nor does it state any decision criteria. Moreover, it applies only to the removal of topsoil for sale. Perhaps Princeton has never experienced a large land clearing, but uncontrolled clearing and grad-

ing can produce devastating environmental and visual impacts. The town's steep terrain and scenic resources should be reflected in a more sensitive, environmentally protective approach.

Site Plan Review. The Site Plan Review bylaw was most recently amended in 1999. In Princeton, Site Plan Review under Section XII applies to any "business use," which the town defines as any use "that is not a single-family dwelling, agricultural use or home occupation…" The applicability subsection of Princeton's site plan bylaw casts an unusually broad net. For example, most communities establish a size threshold in order to exempt small nonresidential building alterations or expansions from Site Plan Review, but as written, Princeton's bylaw would apply to any expansion regardless of size.

A particularly disturbing aspect of Princeton's site plan bylaw is its omission of standards and review criteria. Although Section XII.2 is titled "Criteria for Site Plan Review," it actually establishes the scope of the Planning Board's jurisdiction, i.e., matters that the Board is authorized to review. There are also no standards or development regulations to guide applicants and their design teams. For example, Section XII.2 empowers the Planning Board to review "landscaping," but the site plan bylaw provides no guidance on landscaping standards that must be met in order to obtain site plan approval. In light of the broad jurisdiction and the amount of discretion built into Princeton's site plan bylaw, it is questionable whether a denial would prevail in court if the Planning Board's decision effectively prohibited a use allowed by right.[20]

Open space defining the view from the road in Princeton (*Photo supplied by Master Plan Steering Committee.*)

Home Occupations. Princeton's home occupation bylaw seems unduly restrictive in light of the town's rural economy and development pattern and the employment characteristics of its labor force. For example, the bylaw allows only one non-resident to be employed on the premises. It is common for home occupation or at-home business regulations to limit the number of non-resident employees, but it is equally common to provide some flexibility by allowing the Board of Appeals to grant exceptions by special permit.

Some communities use an abbreviated site plan review process to regulate the impacts of at-home businesses on surrounding neighborhoods, particularly businesses that have several employees or are likely to generate traffic. Another approach would be to adopt home occupation categories, some being allowed by right and others by special permit, and to vary the mix of permitted-special permitted occupations by zoning district. Since Princeton has zoned so little land for business (and even less land that is suitable for business), the town has effectively adopted a policy preference for residential growth. Many small towns think of at-home employment as an economic asset, but Princeton seems to discourage it.

Section 3 (Exempt) Uses. Princeton's zoning raises some concern about the potential for

[20] There is considerable disagreement in the legal community about the status of site plan review when it is uncoupled from a special permit. While the courts have upheld site plan review as a legitimate exercise of zoning, it is much less clear that the courts would uphold the denial of a site plan for a use permitted as of right. The Planning Board can certainly impose conditions on an approved site plan, and it becomes the building inspector's job to enforce those conditions.

conflicts with the so-called Dover Amendment, enacted by the legislature in 1950 to prohibit zoning regulations that restrict religious and educational uses. Like Princeton, many communities in Massachusetts require site plan review for these uses prior to the issuance of a building permit. However, the courts have consistently held that communities may not require compliance with "unreasonable" dimensional rules, or rules that would interfere with the construction or expansion of church and school facilities. (See Zoning Bylaw Section III.1.C.)

The state Zoning Act's broad allowance for "reasonable regulation concerning the bulk and height of structures and determining yard sizes, lot area, setbacks, open space, parking and building coverage requirements" has been the subject of several Dover Amendment cases, most recently in Belmont. On a related note, Princeton allows "the keeping of poultry, pigs and other farm animals subject to the regulations of the Board of Health," but it is important to remember that in Massachusetts, agriculture on more than five acres of land is explicitly exempt from zoning. Simply stated, if the owner of a 10-acre farm violated some aspect of the town's health regulations, the Board of Health may have enforcement authority but the zoning enforcement officer would not.

In these and other respects, Princeton does not have effective zoning tools to protect its assets or address conditions that many residents see as threats, such as "bad" Chapter 40B projects or "franchise" commercial development. Many of the same zoning issues were identified in the 1970, 1980-85 and 1991 plans.

LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS

Open Space-Residential Design (OSRD)

Among the top priorities for this Master Plan is adoption of an OSRD bylaw. Many communities have adopted OSRD regulations, some as a "voluntary" option and others as a mandatory submission process. In a voluntary system, the developer is free to submit a conventional plan or apply for an OSRD special permit or site plan. Communities usually set basic eligibility requirements for voluntary OSRD applications, e.g., a minimum parcel size and a minimum percentage of the site as protected open space. Statewide, the percentages range from 30% to more than 50%, depending on the town, access to water and sewer, and characteristics of the available land supply.

Mandatory OSRD bylaws have become increasingly common in Massachusetts. Under a mandatory system, any developer proposing to create more than a certain number of new lots must apply for a special permit to develop the land according to OSRD design principles. During the review process, the Planning Board determines whether the site is more appropriate for OSRD or a conventional plan. Some towns have adopted a hybrid that requires developers to apply for an OSRD special permit but ultimately allows them (not the Planning Board) to decide whether to build an OSRD or a conventional subdivision.

Typically OSRD involves two tiers of permitting: first, a **concept plan**, and second, a definitive subdivision plan or site plan. The Planning Board has authority to modify normal dimensional requirements in order to achieve the most sensitive design. The **definitive plan** has to conform to the approved concept plan. While the approved concept plan sets an upper limit on the number of lots or dwelling units that can be proposed at the definitive plan stage, the developer still has to receive definitive plan approval from the Planning Board, septic system approval from the Board of Health, and often an Order of Conditions from the Conservation Commission before obtaining any building permits. The end result may be the same number of units shown on the approved concept plan, but it may also be fewer units.

For OSRD to succeed, it has to meet local objectives and satisfy the developer's interests in a viable project, reasonable requirements, and a fair, predictable permitting process. A culture of conser-

vancy needs to take primacy over "doing battle" with developers, or the bylaw will fail.

Views from the Road

Scenic Corridor District. Princeton's roadsides contribute to the rural character of the town. To preserve the view from the road in key areas and still accommodate future homes, Princeton should have a **protective overlay district** that extends 300 feet from the layout of designated streets. An overlay district is a zoning district that lies on top of all or a portion of an existing conventional district, in this case Residential-Agricultural. Within the overlay, regulations should call for a deeper setback from the street and site plan approval for any use or any site alteration. (Construction or alterations beyond the 300-foot limit would be exempt from the overlay district requirements.) The purpose is not to prevent new homes, but to regulate the location of driveways, minimize construction impacts on existing vegetation and stone walls, and review the placement of buildings.

Backlot Development. In Princeton, new development usually occurs on existing streets in the form of "Approval Not Required" lots. "Approval Not Required" means the Planning Board has no power to deny a plan if the proposed lots meet all of the town's basic dimensional requirements. However, the incremental creation of ANR lots and their associated driveways leads to fragmented open space and puts stone walls at risk. Princeton could offer some incentives to set homes back from the street, even in areas not designated as scenic corridors, and to reduce the number of driveway openings. Toward this end, the town should consider allowing flexible lot layouts and an additional house lot in exchange for a **common driveway** (one curb cut) serving three or more homes, a deep setback and a **conservation restriction** over open space along the road.

Reduced Lot Frontage

A provision for reduced lot frontage allows owners of large parcels with insufficient frontage to create a few lots where they otherwise would be prohibited from doing so. Although it may seem to promote more housing development, a frontage waiver can help to reduce the total amount of development that occurs on a site because it creates a fairly simple, less expensive alternative to subdividing back land. Communities that allow reduced lot frontage typically require larger lots as a condition of waiving their frontage regulations, along with a common driveway. In addition, they almost always place an upper limit on the total number of contiguous lots that can be created with reduced frontage.

Wachusett Mountain Vistas

Wachusett Mountain is a unique natural and scenic resource. Regulations to manage the impacts of future development above the 1,000 foot elevation, also through an **overlay district,** would make sense in Princeton. Several communities in Western Massachusetts have taken a comparable approach to protecting ridgelines, vistas and viewsheds. In Princeton, the Planning Board should work with CMRPC or a consulting planner or landscape architect to delineate the boundaries of a scenic overlay district for Wachusett Mountain, and develop relevant definitions, appropriate design standards and use regulations.

Business Districts

The Master Plan calls for several changes to Princeton's business regulations:

- Reduce the size of the Business-Industrial District on Hubbardston Road;
- Rezone the Business-Industrial District on Redemption Rock Trail North to Residential-Agricultural;
- Modify the boundaries of the Business

Districts in East Princeton and on Worcester Road;

- Revise the use and dimensional regulations for the Business and Business-Industrial Districts; and

- Update and strengthen the existing Site Plan Review bylaw, and adopt Off-Street Parking Regulations.

Changing the boundaries of the Business and Business-Industrial Districts has less to do with the amount of development that occurs in the furue than encouraging good design, improving public safety, reducing the potential for use conflicts, and protecting environmentally sensitive areas. A long, narrow commercial district invites strip development, and a narrow district coupled with a 50' front setback is a prescription for undersized buildings dwarfed by parking. Where some additional depth is possible, such as portions of Worcester Road, it makes sense to alter the district's boundaries because doing so will promote better building lots and better design. In exchange for additional depth, the length of a "strip" district should be reduced in order to manage the overall amount of development that occurs in a business area.

The existing Business District makes no distinction between East Princeton and Worcester Road, yet these areas are quite different and their qualities ought to be reflected in zoning. A schedule of use and dimensional regulations tailored to East Princeton and a separate schedule tailored to Worcester Road would help to relate future development to the established development pattern in each location. Furthermore, the regulations for each area should incorporate these principles:

- A maximum floor area for individual commercial uses by right, with allowances for larger uses by special permit. A commercial building could have several tenants, but not a single, large tenant without the additional review and permit conditions made possible by a special permit process.

- Regulations for building placement on a lot. Commercial districts are not the same as residential districts; businesses do not thrive on invisibility. If left to their own devices, they often gain visibility to the street in ways that detract from the character of a traditional New England village and intrude on adjacent neighborhoods. It is better to place well-designed commercial buildings closer to the road and locate parking to the side and rear than to "hardscape" the roadside with parking. Aside from the aesthetic benefits that good buildings bring to the public view, controlling the building setback scheme in a small business area is important for traffic safety because it signals a change in land use pattern and encourages drivers to slow down.

- A schedule of off-street parking for each class of use allowed in the Zoning Bylaw, including a minimum and maximum number of spaces; basic parking lot design, landscaping and buffer standards; provisions to reduce parking when two abutting commercial developments have an enforceable agreement for shared parking; bicycle parking; and regulations governing the location of parking areas on a lot.

- Regulations to control the number of access driveways on a lot, minimum-maximum dimensions for access drives, and an upper-limit on the percent of frontage that may be occupied by access drives.

- Basic site development regulations, such as walkway and landscaping standards, lighting regulations, controls on outdoor storage and trash receptacles, and specifications for landscaping in upland areas adjacent to a WsPA primary or secondary zone.

- Updated sign regulations, including size, il-

lumination, and basic design requirements for various types of signage.

- Basic building design standards: guidelines for exterior materials, massing and articulation, roof pitch, window areas and window treatments, and possibly some incentives for vertical design, e.g., reduced parking for buildings with upper-floor space.

Housing Choices

Throughout the Master Plan process, many residents said their adult children are unable to buy or rent in Princeton because the town's single-family homes are so expensive. Indeed, Princeton's existing housing stock is overwhelmingly comprised of detached single-family homes, and while some residents would like to see more options, other residents probably want to keep the town just as it is. Some degree of housing diversity exists even in the smallest towns, however. "Rural" does not mean "homogenous." In Princeton, these strategies could help to provide some housing options and still retain the town's predominantly single-family character:

- Allow accessory apartments in owner-occupied, detached single-family homes.

- Allow small multi-family dwellings (e.g., 4 to 6 units) in the Business Districts in East Princeton and on Worcester Road, or in Princeton Center. It makes sense to site multi-family dwellings near goods and services or generally in areas that serve as "activity nodes."

- Allow small multi-family dwellings in areas adjacent to the Business Districts, subject to design controls and possibly limited to conversions of existing buildings.

- Allow townhouses and multi-family units in an OSRD, mixed with single-family homes.

Town Center

Princeton residents have been fairly consistent in their views about the Town Center's future: they would like it to remain substantially as it is today, with residential, public and institutional uses and formal open space. However, they also have said they want a gathering spot, such as a coffee shop, and many residents have said they would like to encourage more cultural activities in the Town Center. An overlay district that allows a limited set of nonresidential uses by special permit could address these preferences and create ways for existing properties to evolve. For example, a Town Center Overlay District is a logical place for small offices, artist studio or gallery space, a coffee shop or sandwich shop, and limited mixed-use buildings with a dwelling unit and a business under one roof, or a few specialty retail establishments. It is also a logical place to permit single-family conversions, particularly since Princeton Center already has some multi-family units.

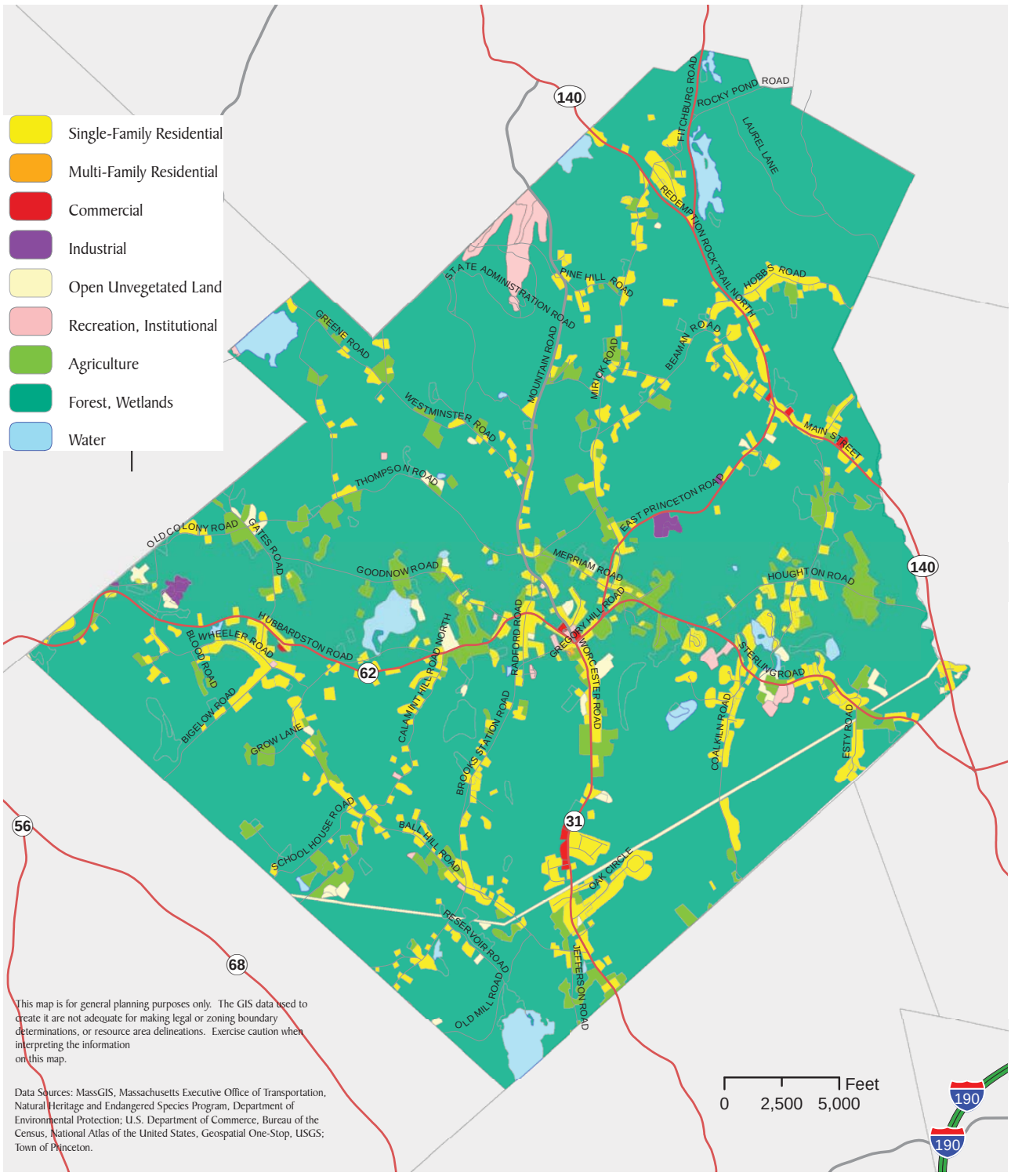
Zoning Recodification & Update

Princeton's zoning needs to be updated. Many sections of the bylaw suffer from lack of clarity or the omission of standards and guidelines. During the earliest phases of Master Plan implementation, these changes should be made to the Zoning Bylaw:

- A new section with **definitions** of all words and phrases used in the Zoning Bylaw.

- An updated, stronger **site plan review** bylaw that includes site development standards for business uses.

- Regulations to control the impacts of **land clearing and grading**.



Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

2.1 LAND USE PATTERN

April 2007

Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Consulting Team:

COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES GROUP, INC.
Larry Koff & Associates
Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, inc.

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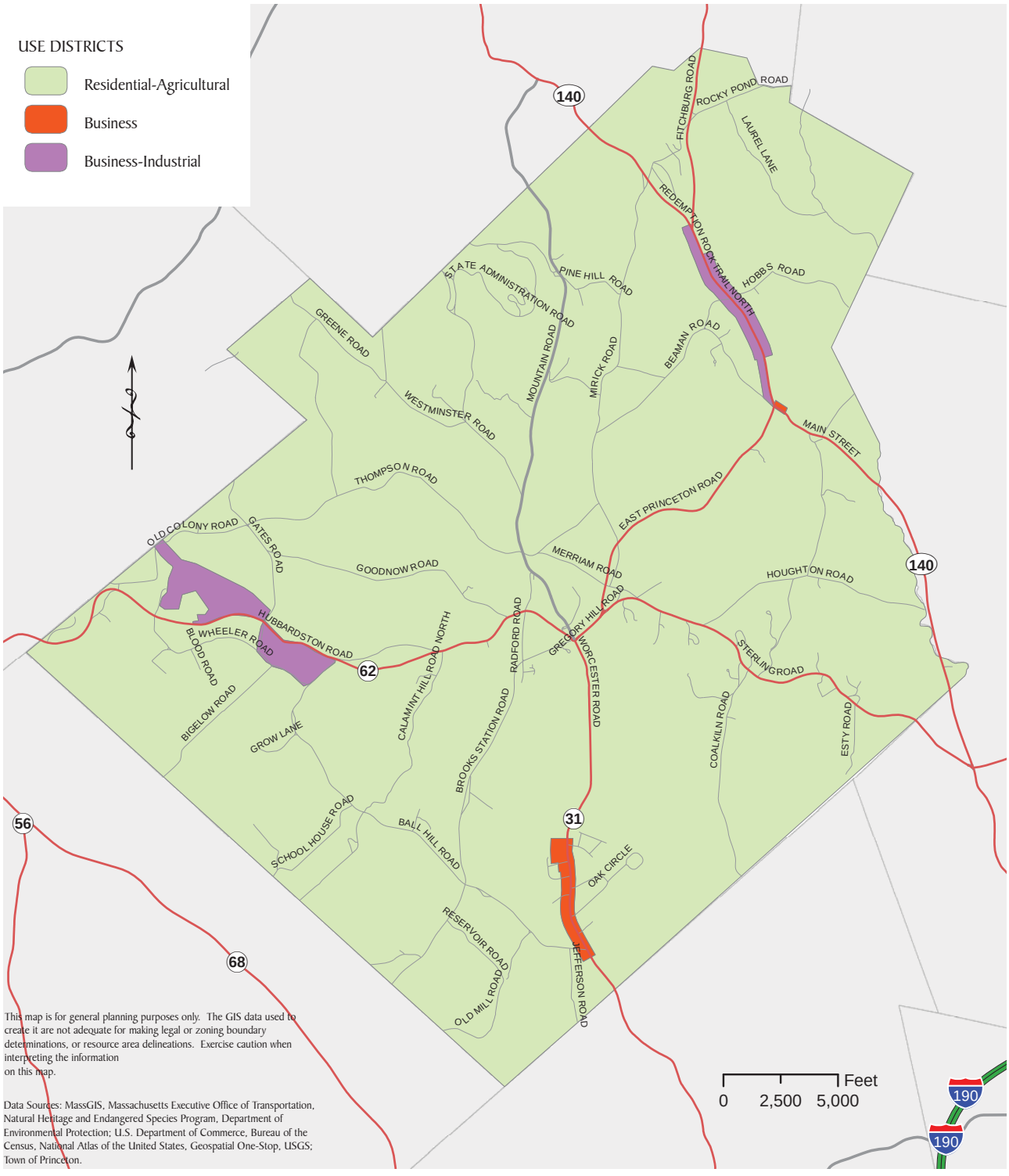

This map is for general planning purposes only. The GIS data used to create it are not adequate for making legal or zoning boundary determinations, or resource area delineations. Exercise caution when interpreting the information on this map.

Data Sources: MassGIS, Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, Department of Environmental Protection; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, National Atlas of the United States, Geospatial One-Stop, USGS; Town of Princeton.

Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

2.2 EXISTING ZONING

April 2007

Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Consulting Team:

COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES GROUP, INC.
Larry Koff & Associates
Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, inc.

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CHAPTER 3

OPEN SPACE & NATURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

When Princeton residents describe their town's most cherished qualities, they speak of its natural resources and open space. At a community meeting for this Master Plan, one resident said it best when he described Princeton as a place with "plenty of elbow room." There is no question that open space is Princeton's signature feature. For visitors, newcomers and long-time residents, Princeton's image is shaped by a peerless collection of working landscapes, open fields, dense forests, and the formal public spaces found in the Town Center. Each of these settings contributes to Princeton's visual character and provides important context for its historic buildings and structures.

Massachusetts Audubon Society, Wachusett Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary. (*Photo by Community Opportunities Group, Inc.*)

Wachusett Mountain, the Stillwater River, numerous brooks and ponds, meadows and vast woodlands define Princeton's beauty, but they also are part of an intricate network that provides endangered wildlife and plant habitat and supplies drinking water to more than 2.5 million people. However, an incipient pattern of suburban development has begun to threaten Princeton's rural character and abundant, largely unaltered natural resources. The same pattern has accelerated the loss of forests and farms and contributed to inefficient land use in countless small towns.

Despite the fondness that residents express for Princeton's natural beauty, the town has found it difficult to support and implement techniques to protect its natural resources. Princeton also seems to have struggled with a conflict that occurs in many towns: residents yearn to protect land from development and they expect local government to "do something" about growth, yet they do not want local officials to go "too far." For many residents, living in Princeton means more than owning a home. It also means owning land, whether for farming, forestry, asset wealth or estate purposes.

Princeton residents do not always agree about the public interests that open space should serve. For example, the town's undeveloped land provides scenic views and outdoor recreation opportunities, supports wildlife habitat, forestry and farming, and protects regional water supplies. A large percentage of Princeton's land is protected in perpetuity, yet the same protected land is often heavily restricted land. As unrestricted vacant land continues to decline, interests such as hunting, farming, horseback riding, or wood lots will become increasingly difficult to accommodate.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Geology, Soils and Topography

Impressions of Princeton's diverse landscape and forested hills (*Mary Pratt, local artist*).

Princeton's diverse topography was formed primarily during late Wisconsin glaciation, when the Laurentide Ice Sheet descended from Canada into New England about 25,000 years ago. The glacier shaped a variety of geologic features including **glacial erratics**, or bedrock boulders such as Balance Rock; **drumlins**, or the smaller egg-shaped hills found in southern Princeton; and **eskers**, such as the long ridges found south of the Highway Department on Route 31.

The receding of the ice sheet ca. 15,000 years ago resulted in the formation of a knob and kettle landscape in which melting boulders of ice formed **kettle holes** that are fed by fresh water springs. Crows Hill Pond and Paradise Pond are examples of kettle holes. **Roche moutonnee** (sheep rocks), or outcrops of bedrock with a gentle slope on the upstream side of the ice and a steep rough slope on the downstream side, include Redemption Rock and the southwest side of Little Wachusett Mountain. In Princeton, an obvious product of deglaciation is the presence of three **monadnocks** – Wachusett Mountain, Little Wachusett Mountain and Pine Hill – made of metamorphic gneiss that was more resistant to the scouring of the glacier. The monadnocks stand tall in the surrounding landscape; in fact, Wachusett Mountain is the state's tallest landscape feature (2,006 feet) east of the Berkshires.

As the glacier receded from New England, it left behind a deposit of **glacial till** that is not well suited for agriculture. Princeton's landscape and its underlying soil structure are composed of clays, sands, silts and gravel, all covering pre-glacial (Paleozoic Era) bedrock. Most of the town's surficial geology is glacial till and bedrock, with small sand and gravel deposits that follow the East Branch of the Ware River, South Wachusett Brook, East Wachusett Brook and Keyes Brook (Map 3-1).

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has identified thirty-four soil types or associations that include five primary soil series. These five soil groups comprise 61% of the soils in Princeton: Woodbridge-Paxton, Peru-Marlow, Montauk-Scituate-Canton, Ridgebury-Whitman and Bucksport-Wonsqueak. Woodbridge-Paxton is deep, well-drained stony soil and Peru-Marlow is a strong, moderately steep, moderately well-drained soil, both underlain by hardpan. Montauk-Scituate-Canton and Ridgebury-Whitman are rolling, steep, rocky soils. Ridgebury-Whitman is poorly drained, and Bucksport-Wonsqueak is a mucky, hydric soil. All have development limitations due to hardpan layers, rockiness, slope or drainage. More than 70% of the town consists of steep to very steep slopes which, along with hydric soils and hardpans, are not conducive to conventional on-site septic systems (Map 3-2).

In addition, the NRCS has classified the soils on about 4,000 acres in Princeton as highly suitable for agriculture, including 1,500 acres of prime farmland, 1,300 acres of farmland of statewide importance, and 1,200 acres of farmland of unique importance (Map 3-3). Together, these areas represent more than 17% of the town.[1]

Water Resources

Over 10% of Princeton's landscape consists of open water and wetlands (Map 3-4). Ponds, rivers

[1] Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), "Official Soil Series Descriptions" and "Soils Data Mart," <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>, and MassGIS, <http://www.mass.gov/mgis/>.

and wetlands contribute to the town's beauty and provide habitat for a rich array of plants and animals. Recreational activities are restricted on most of the state-owned reservoirs due to regulations affecting Princeton and other communities in the watersheds that supply drinking water to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA). There is no public water supply in Princeton, so residents rely on private wells for their drinking water.

Watersheds. A watershed is an area of land in which all surface and ground water drains to a common river, stream, pond, lake, or coastal water body. Since water flowing over land picks up dissolved materials, land use and development regulations within a watershed affect the quality of the water supply. Nearly all of Princeton (86%) lies within the Nashua River Watershed, which encompasses 538 square miles in 31 communities in north central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. The western corner of Princeton around the East Branch of the Ware River and the area around Bickford Pond and West Wachusett Brook lie in the Chicopee River Watershed, which covers 721 square miles in 32 cities and towns.

These watershed lands flow into four Class A public water supplies: the Quabbin Reservoir, the Wachusett Reservoir, the Quinapoxet Reservoir and the Fitchburg Reservoir. The Wachusett Reservoir is part of the storage system for the Quabbin Reservoir, which supplies water to more than 2.5 million people in the MWRA region. The Stillwater River and East Wachusett Brook drain the eastern half of Princeton and supply approximately 30% of the water in the Wachusett Reservoir. The Ware River drains a small portion of western Princeton to the Quabbin Reservoir. The rest of western Princeton drains to the Quinapoxet Reservoir, the water supply for the City of Worcester. The northern part of Princeton drains to the Fitchburg Reservoir.

Nearly all of Princeton is subject to the **Watershed Protection Act** (WsPA), which regulates land use and development in 22 towns located in the watersheds of the Quabbin Reservoir, Ware River and Wachusett Reservoir. Also known as the "Cohen Bill," the WsPA was passed in 1992 and is currently administered by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

The WsPA establishes two protection zones: the **Primary Protection Zone** and the **Secondary Protection Zone**. Within the Primary Protection Zone, or land within 400 feet of reservoirs and 200 feet of tributaries and surface waters, any land alteration and activities that result in the storage or production of pollutants are prohibited.[2] The Secondary Protection Zone includes land within 200 and 400 feet of tributaries and surface waters, land in flood plains and above certain aquifers, and bordering vegetated wetlands. Several types of activities are prohibited in the Secondary Zone: the storage, disposal or use of toxic, hazardous, and certain other materials; alteration of bordering vegetated wetlands; certain types of development; and other activities.

The WsPA exempts uses and structures existing as of July 1, 1992, the construction of a single-family dwelling on an existing vacant lot, and minor changes to an existing structure. Owners of property located wholly or partially in a WsPA protection zone received written notification of their status when the law went into effect. Today, property owners can check the location of their parcel relative to WsPA protection zones on maps available at Princeton Town Hall and DCR offices. DCR personnel provide technical assistance to landowners in order to ensure that projects comply with WsPA regulations. In addition, DCR monitors development by attending municipal board meetings, reviewing legal advertisements in local newspapers, and conducting periodic windshield surveys. When violations are identified, DCR notifies property owners and works with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

[2] "Alteration" includes a variety of activities, such as construction, excavation, grading, paving, and dumping.

to secure enforcement when necessary.

Keyes Brook in East Princeton. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.*)

Floodplains. Princeton's numerous rivers, streams, and brooks act as a constraint to development because of the flooding risks they pose. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) show that Princeton contains several Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA), or areas within the 100-year floodplain, defined as an area that would most likely be inundated by a flood having a 1% chance of occurring in any given year, or a "1-percent annual chance flood." The term "100-year flood" does not refer to a flood that will occur once every 100 years; in fact, it could occur more often. Statistically, a structure located within a mapped SFHA has a 26% chance of experiencing flood damage during the term of a 30-year mortgage. The National Flood Insurance Program uses the 100-year flood standard for floodplain management and for determining the need for flood insurance.[3]

In Princeton, SFHAs include land around the Stillwater River, Paradise Pond and its tributaries, the East Branch of the Ware River, Bickford Pond, the Quinapoxet Reservoir, and Keyes, Justice, Stream Hill, East Wachusett, West Wachusett, South Wachusett, Babcock, and Governor Brooks. Princeton also has areas within the 500-year floodplain, or areas having a 0.2% chance of flooding in any given year. Development may take place within a mapped SFHA provided that it complies with local floodplain management ordinances or bylaws, which in turn must meet minimum federal requirements.

Princeton does not have a zoning or genral bylaw to control development within an SFHA. When communities have a floodplain bylaw, landowners within an SFHA can obtain federally backed flood insurance. Flood insurance is required for insurable structures within the SFHA to protect federally funded investments and assistance in communities participating in the National Flood Insurance Program.

Surface Water. Paradise Pond, Snow Pond, Glutner Pond and the "Onion Patch" are the largest named ponds lying entirely within Princeton. The town also contains portions of Bickford Pond, Crow Hill Pond, the Quinapoxet Reservoir and Wachusett Lake, along with numerous small, unnamed ponds. In addition, rivers, small streams and brooks course through every part of Princeton. The largest of these is the Stillwater River in eastern Princeton. Other streams and brooks include the East Branch of the Ware River, Babcock Brook, Cobb Brook, Cold Brook, East Wachusett Brook, Governor Brook, Justice Brook, Keyes Brook, South Wachusett Brook, Steam Mill Brook, West Wachusett Brook and many more unnamed small tributaries.

Wetlands. Approximately 200 acres of Princeton's total land area is comprised of wetlands. "Wetlands" generally include marshes, wet meadows, bogs, and swamps: resource areas with vegetation and soil characteristics indicating the presence of water at or just below the surface of the ground.

[3] Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Frequently Asked Questions [online], <http://www.fema.gov/fhm/fq_term.shtm>.

Small patches of wooded swamp and shrub swamp can be seen throughout Princeton. West Princeton in particular has many small wetlands, and there is a significant wooded swamp around Governor's Brook on the town's border with Holden. In Princeton, the only large block of upland that is not punctuated by small wetlands runs between Wachusett Mountain State Reservation and the Leominster State Forest.

The Wetlands Protection Act, M.G.L. c.131, Section 40, gives local conservation commissions the authority to review and impose conditions on activities in or within 100 feet of wetlands adjacent to lakes and ponds, rivers, streams or coastal waters, or land under water bodies, waterways, coastal wetlands and the 100-year floodplain. In 1996, the Rivers Protection Act (RPA) added riverfront areas to the list of resources covered by the Wetlands Protection Act. A riverfront area is a 200-foot wide corridor on each side of a perennial river or stream. Conservation commissions are required to review proposed projects in a riverfront area for consistency with statutory requirements and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) regulations. Although the RPA does not prohibit development in the riverfront area and some projects are exempt, applicants must demonstrate that their plans have no practical alternatives and will have no significant adverse impacts on riverfront resources.

Many communities supplement these state laws with bylaws or ordinances that make wetlands permits subject to local regulation. In addition, local bylaws sometimes expand a conservation commission's purview to regulate resource areas that are not explicitly protected by state law, or to require a buffer zone exceeding 100 feet. Princeton does not have a local wetlands bylaw.

Vernal Pools. According to the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP), there are twelve certified vernal pools and approximately 75 potential vernal pools in Princeton.[45] A vernal pool is a contained, seasonal wetland that provides critical habitat for certain invertebrates and amphibians, such as the wood frog, fairy shrimp and mole salamander. Vernal pools range in size from a large mud puddle to an acre of swamp-land, and they may be very shallow or up to three feet deep. The same vernal pool can be the size of a mud puddle or dry out completely in summer and be swamp-sized in spring. It is easy to observe vernal pools along roadsides in many parts of Princeton.

Aquifers. Like many small towns, Princeton does not have a public water system. Instead, residents and businesses rely on private wells for drinking water. The current average daily demand for water is approximately 0.25 mgd. In a study of future development potential (buildout) released four years ago, the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) predicted that Princeton's average daily water demand could reach 0.96 mgd at full buildout. The mapped aquifers in this part of the state are generally low-yield and not favorable for public drinking water supplies. Aquifer data available from MassGIS indicate the presence of a small > 300gpm aquifer below Crow Hill Pond and a sliver of 100-300 gpm aquifer near Steam Mill Brook. A more recent EOEA Water Assets Study Community Report does not report any aquifers in the town.[5]

Vegetation

Woodlands. Princeton's visual character and rural image are inextricably linked to its forests. Forest cover is a critical component of watershed management and a defining feature of Princeton's open space and rural roads. In fact, 82% of the town is forested and approximately 14,680 acres (64%) of Princeton's total area is composed of

[4] MassGIS Statewide Vector Data, filename "CVP2003.dbf," updated July 2003 and "pvp.dbf," updated December 2000.

[5] Earth Tech, EOEA Water Assets Study: Community Report Town of Princeton (June 2004), 3, 5.

prime forest land (Map 3-5).[6] According to aerial photography interpreted in 1999 by the University of Massachusetts Resource Mapping Project (RMP), Princeton lost about 1,200 acres of forest to new development between 1971 and 1999.[7]

The forests in Princeton have all of the characteristics of the southern New England hardwood (or mixed deciduous) forest. Upland forests are predominantly hardwood – northern red oak, shagbark hickory, beech, red maple and birch – with small stands of softwood hemlock and white pine. Red and silver maple, speckled alder, white oaks, pin oaks, hemlock, sweet pepperbush, witch hazel and highbush blueberry are common in swampy, wet areas. In 1996, researchers at Harvard University documented the presence of four stands of old growth forest on Wachusett Mountain. The forest is comprised of red maples, sugar maples, yellow birch, beech, red oak and hemlock that are between 100-350 years old.[8] This old growth forest is part of a "Core Habitat" area in Princeton, described as a "Circumneutral Talus Forest" that develops below cliffs on boulder-strewn slopes.[9]

Plants. Wildflowers abound in Princeton. A local naturalist has kept a wildflower inventory of Wachusett Mountain and the surrounding towns since 1971. Wachusett Mountain State Reservation posts this historic inventory as part of its interpretive display, and reports the data to the Massachusetts Division of Conservation and Recreation. In addition, NHESP has documented nine species of endangered or threatened vascular plants in Princeton: Back's Sedge, Mountain Cranberry, Spiked False Oats and Wild Senna are listed as state-endangered species and Adder's-tongue Fern, Bartram's Shadbark, Great Laurel and Woodland Millet, threatened species.[10]

Iron Horse Farm, Gregory Road (*Photo supplied by Master Plan Steering Committee*).

Agriculture

Agricultural land is important for economic potential and aesthetic qualities. During the 19th century, much of the forested land in Princeton was converted to agricultural use. Historic photographs show that farming once played a major role in Princeton's economy and way of life. When agriculture declined after 1900, the town's farmland gradually reverted to forests and over time, Princeton became more residential. By 1999, agricultural lands comprised about five percent of the town's total area. Aerial photographs show that the total amount of agricultural land in Princeton has decreased by 18% since 1971, but nearly all of the loss occurred after 1985. Today, the seven dairy farms that once operated in Princeton no longer exist, and the town's remaining farmland is used mainly for raising crops such as hay, and the keeping of horses. Only 212 acres of agricultural

6 MassGIS, "Prime Forest," June 2007.

7 See Land Use Element, Table 2.3: Land Use Change, 1971-1999.

8 Charles Cogbill, et al. "Dynamics of Old-Growth Forests on Wachusett Mountain (Princeton, MA)" [online], <http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/data/p01/hf016/hf016.html>.

9 Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, BioMap and Living Waters: Core Habitats of Princeton (2004), 7.

10 Massachusetts Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program, "Rare Species Occurrence List by Town" [online] <http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/townp.htm>.

land in Princeton are protected in perpetuity by a conservation restriction or an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR).

Fisheries and Wildlife

Princeton's most recent Open Space and Recreation Plan (2000) identifies bass, pan fish, pickerel and trout as species that are tracked and fished locally, but it does not include an inventory of common reptiles, amphibians, mammals and birds. A comprehensive fisheries and wildlife inventory is invaluable for open space planning because it is important to preserve habitat for common as well as rare species. Further, consideration should be given to interactions between humans and other species both for safety and species welfare. Documenting habitat for the town's moose, bear, fisher, birds of prey, water birds, reptiles and amphibians will help to guide protection priorities and land use decisions.

There is an 11-mile trail network and a 200-acre beaver pond on Massachusetts Audubon Society's 1,200-acre Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary at the foot of Wachusett Mountain. Beavers, mink, otters, wood ducks, and herons have been observed at the beaver pond.[11] Deer, coyotes, bluebirds, and bobolinks also inhabit the preserve, and in late spring and early autumn, large numbers of hawks flock to the site. Princeton also has two recreational fish and gun clubs that manage a combined total of about 750 acres of land. The Nimrod League has recorded observations of several species including deer, turkey, fox, coyote, moose, bobcat, hare, grouse and pheasant.[12]

Birding is popular at Wachusett Mountain and Wachusett Meadow, and around the ponds. Numerous websites report bird sightings and bird counts in and around the town. Naturalists at the Massachusetts Audubon Society and Wachusett Mountain State Reservation keep annual inventories of birds seen and heard on their properties.

NHESP has documented 13 species that are endangered, threatened or of special concern in Princeton.[13] They include the endangered Henslow's Sparrow, Sedge Wren and Upland Sandpiper; Blanding's Turtle and Marbled Salamander, state threatened; and Bridle Shiner, Chain Dot Geometer, Common Loon, Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, Four-Toed Salamander, Spotted Turtle, Spring Salamander and Water Shrew, all species of special concern. The 2000 Open Space and Recreation Plan also lists the American Bittern (endangered), Marbled Salamander (state threatened), and Cooper's Hawk, Eastern Box Turtle, Ostrich Fern Borer, Rock Shrew, Sharp Shinned Hawk, Southern Bog Lemming and Wood Turtle (species of concern).

Biodiversity. According to a statewide biodiversity analysis developed by NHESP, Princeton has eight BioMap Core Habitat and Living Waters areas.[14] In Massachusetts, the 92 exemplary natural communities within Core Habitat areas support numerous rare species, including 246 vascular plants, 21 birds, 11 reptiles, 6 amphibians, 4 mammals, 52 moths and butterflies,

[11] Massachusetts Audubon Society, "Wachusett Meadow Preserve" [online], <http://www.massaudubon.org/Nature_Connection/Sanctuaries/Wachusett_Meadow/index.php>.

[12] Nimrod League [online], <http://www.nimrodleague.org>.

[13] Massachusetts Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program, "Rare Species Occurrence List by Town" [online], <http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/townp.htm>.

[14] According to NHESP, BioMap Core Habitats are the state's most critical sites for biodiversity conservation. They provide habitat for the state's most viable populations of rare plants and animals and include natural communities and aquatic habitats for protecting endangered and threatened species. These are areas most in need of conservation. For more information, see Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, BioMap and Living Waters: Core Habitats of Princeton (2004); MassGIS Statewide Vector Data, filename "Biocore.dbf," updated 2005; and The Conservation Fund, Green Infrastructure – Linking Lands for Nature and People (January 2006).

25 dragonflies and damselflies and 10 beetles. Approximately 60-65% of all land in Princeton qualifies as Core Habitat or Living Waters and Supporting Natural Landscape. Routes 62, 31 and 140 and adjacent lands are excluded because the open space is already fragmented by roads, but they are the only parts of Princeton not designated as significant natural habitat areas (Map 3-6).

Not surprisingly, Wachusett Mountain serves as a Core Habitat area. It hosts the old-growth forest, a hemlock ravine community and the endangered Back's Sedge plant. Wachusett Meadow, another Core Habitat, consists of a square mile of mixed forest, wooded swamp and two miles of riparian habitat for the headwaters of Wachusett Brook. Four-toed salamanders and the water shrew reside here. The Keyes Brook Core Habitat connects Keyes Brook and the Stillwater River to the Wachusett Reservoir. Rare turtles, the Dwarf Mistletoe and a unique Level Bog community are all present. Bickford Pond and its shoreline in Hubbardston and Princeton provide breeding habitat for Common Loons.

Three small, unique areas of Core Habitat lie just northeast of Wachusett Meadow. A rare example of mature Hickory-Hop-Hornbeam Forest is located within a 500-acre mixed-deciduous forest. Nearby, there is a large patch of Oak-Hickory Forest and a small habitat that supports a rare plant.[15] A small Core Habitat for another rare plant is located between the Wachusett Mountain and Keyes Brook. "Living Waters," or the riparian and aquatic equivalent of Core Habitat, support 23 aquatic vascular plants, 11 fish, 7 mussels and 23 aquatic invertebrates in Princeton.

NHESP also classifies a large portion of the land in Princeton as BioMap Supporting Natural Landscape. Composed of large, contiguous naturally vegetated areas, a Supporting Natural Landscape links Core Habitats, such as the connection of Keyes Brook to Bartlett Swamp, Wachusett Mountain, Leominster State Forest and Poutwater Wildlife Management Area, or Wachusett Meadow and Wachusett Mountain and land around the East Branch of the Ware River.

Open Space

Open space is vacant or largely undeveloped land of significant public interest because of its relationship to natural, recreational or scenic resources, its value as community space, or its customary use for farming or forest management. It may be classified on the basis of use, ownership, level of protection, degree of public access or other criteria, but for a master plan, ownership and level of protection are particularly important.

Publicly owned open space includes parcels owned by federal, state or local agencies, and privately owned open space includes parcels owned by individuals and non-profit conservation groups. Open space protected in perpetuity refers to land owned for conservation, wildlife habitat or watershed protection, usually by government agencies and non-profit land trusts, or privately owned land controlled by a conservation restriction (CR) or an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR). Some open space has temporary or limited protection due to a revocable restriction against a change in use or development. An example of "temporary" protection is a Chapter 61 or 61A agreement, while "limited" protection often includes public land used for purposes other than conservation, such as a school or playing fields. (Map 3-7)

Local and state records contain slightly different information about the amount of open space in Princeton, but there are approximately 9,668 acres of open space protected in perpetuity, including land owned by the Commonwealth, three units of local government (Princeton, Fitchburg and Worcester), the Trustees of Reservations, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, the Princeton Land

[15] NHESP does not always report the exact location and the name of rare plant or animal species because they are particularly sensitive or threatened by collectors.

Trust, and individual property owners whose land is subject to a conservation restriction.

Partially protected open space in Princeton includes land in Chapter 61 (forest), 61A (farm) or 61B (recreation) agreements. These three state laws provide incentives to property owners to preserve their land as open space. Eligible parcels are taxed at their use value instead of market value, but if the land is sold for development or converted to another use, the property owner must pay a form of penalty tax and give the town a 120-day right of first refusal to acquire the land as open space. The town may assign its right of first refusal to a land trust.[16] Princeton has about 2,661 acres of Chapter 61 land, concentrated somewhat in the eastern and central sections of town; 1,855 acres of Chapter 61A land, located mainly in the southwestern, southern and eastern sections of town; and 421 acres of Chapter 61B land, for a total of 4,937 acres. Many of these properties lie within BioMap Supporting Natural Landscape areas, yet only 286 acres of Chapter 61-61A land are protected in perpetuity.[17]

Outdoor Recreation

Many of Princeton's outdoor recreation areas are owned and maintained by state agencies or the town, private clubs, the Massachusetts Audubon Society or others. These organizations sponsor activities such as hiking, biking, skiing, canoeing, hunting, camping and fishing for the general public, visitors or club members. The Massachusetts Audubon Society also offers educational programs and the Wachusett Mountain Ski Area organizes seasonal festivals. These activities generate visitors and provide support for local restaurants, bed and breakfasts, farms, local craftsmen, the Johnny Appleseed Trail Association and the Midstate Trail Association. Together, the region's visitor attractions comprise a pattern of activities, ecological tourism or commonly known as **eco-tourism**, a sector of the tourism industry that capitalizes on access to open space and natural areas.

Wachusett Mountain. Princeton's largest and best-known recreational attraction is the Wachusett Mountain State Reservation, managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). In terms of natural resources and its role in the town's economic base, Wachusett Mountain represents one of Princeton's most significant assets. It occupies 1,350 acres in the northwest corner of Princeton and includes conservation areas, hiking trails, and the ski area. Wachusett Mountain offers views of Boston as well as the adjacent rural landscape. The park has some 15 miles of hiking trails and six miles of fire roads. In addition to skiing and snowboarding, the Wachusett Mountain State Reservation offers fishing, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, and picnicking, and education programs on natural resources and local history. The most developed part of the park includes the privately operated Wachusett Mountain Ski Area.

Wachusett Meadow. The Massachusetts Audubon Society owns and manages the Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary off Goodnow Road, just south of the Wachusett Mountain State Reservation. A 1,200-acre wildlife sanctuary and visitor's center support trails for hiking and nature viewing, and year-round educational programs for all ages.

Leominster State Forest. In addition to Wachusett Mountain, DCR owns and manages another

[16] Under Chapter 61, an eligible parcel consists of ten or more acres; under Chapters 61A and 61B, an eligible parcel consists of five or more acres. Other requirements must be met in order for forestry, farm or recreation properties to qualify for Chapter 61, 61A or 61B agreements.

[17] Princeton has a total of 10,800 acres of land without perpetual restrictions against development, but not all of the land is classified as open space. These 10,800± acres include 4,937 acres under Chapter 61, 61A or 61B agreements; town-owned recreational land (175 acres), the Thomas Prince School (60 acres), vacant residential land (2,700 acres) and residential parcels of more than five acres, i.e., parcels with additional development potential (3,300 acres).

3,000 acres of recreation land in Princeton. Among the largest is Leominster State Forest, a 4,300-acre expanse of woodlands in portions of Westminster, Princeton, Leominster, Fitchburg and Sterling. Princeton's section includes 1,380 acres in the northern part of town. Access to the Leominster State Forest is conveniently located off Route 2, making the park accessible to local and regional visitors. Leominster State Forest offers extensive trails that cross a wide variety of terrains, including the Midstate Trail. It also offers year-round recreational opportunities ranging from hiking, mountain biking, swimming, kayaking, and rock climbing in the summer to cross-country skiing and snowmobiling in the winter.

Midstate Trail. The Midstate Trail, a 95-mile long hiking trail extending from Rhode Island to New Hampshire, is maintained by the Midstate Trail Association with the cooperation of state agencies and private property owners. The trail passes through the Wachusett Mountain State Reservation and Leominster State Forest. Wachusett Greenways sponsors a variety of guided hikes and trail maintenance days.

In addition to these sites, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife owns the Savage Hill Wildlife Management Area, which crosses the Princeton-Rutland town line and includes 370± acres in Princeton. The Princeton Land Trust also owns 95 acres of open space and the town itself, 176 acres of recreation land. Land with membership-restricted access includes 447 owned by the Nimrod League and 301 acres owned by the Norco Sports Club.

LOCAL & REGIONAL TRENDS

Aerial photographs from 1971, 1985 and 1999 document a stable but fairly slow decline in the amount of agricultural and forest-covered land in Princeton. While the loss of agricultural land accelerated from 1985-1999, this was not the case for Princeton's forests, which lost 741 acres (3.6%) from 1971-1985 and 482 acres (2.5%) from 1985-1999. Compared to other parts of Worcester County, including some adjacent towns, Princeton absorbed a lower rate of housing growth during the 1990s and reversed several decades of sustained, moderate residential development. As market pressures continue to migrate westward from the I-495 corridor, Princeton will experience a renewed demand for homes because the town is desirable and it has large amounts of vacant land, albeit difficult to develop.

Over time, Princeton's growth has extended into outlying areas, spreading along roadways in the southern half of town. This type of growth pattern results in an inefficient, costly use of infrastructure and depletes the scenic and habitat value of open space. Princeton is not alone in this regard. Particularly in small towns, the propensity to lose roadside open space to frontage lots is common throughout the state. However, even in the state's cities, notably Leominster, policies favoring larger lots have led to higher rates of land consumption per dwelling unit.

Throughout Central Massachusetts, single family home development accounts for most of the decline in forests and agricultural land that occurred after 1985. The demand for housing is intense in many parts of Worcester County, including Princeton's area, but housing development does not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, while many people will accept long commutes to the Boston area, the demand for homes in small towns around Worcester has been attended by local and regional increases in the amount of land used for commercial and industrial development.

As a percentage of total land use, commercial and industrial development is fairly small, but from 1985-1999, Central Massachusetts absorbed 18-28% increases in acres of land used for business and industry. Princeton itself has seen very little change in commercial and industrial activity due to its location and zoning, but the amount of new business development in communities nearby, such as Sterling and Westminster, supplies rein-

TABLE 3.1: REGIONAL CHANGE IN PROPORTION OF OPEN LAND, 1971-1999[21]

Community	Open Land	Residential Uses	Commercial or Industrial Uses	Open Water	All Other Uses	Open Land % Total
1971 Conditions						
Fitchburg	12,552.0	3,216.1	859.5	253.6	1,117.6	69.7%
Gardner	10,967.5	1,864.7	407.8	569.4	922.0	74.4%
Holden	19,072.0	2,654.1	191.6	811.5	520.7	82.0%
Hubbardston	24,913.5	509.7	73.6	751.0	581.2	92.9%
Leominster	12,999.1	3,463.5	779.6	594.9	1,157.0	68.4%
Paxton	8,174.5	936.2	15.3	505.1	272.6	82.5%
PRINCETON	21,443.8	863.4	21.9	316.6	287.8	93.5%
Rutland	21,296.4	841.5	37.9	588.0	403.7	91.9%
Sterling	16,851.9	1,458.5	76.3	805.8	1,039.0	83.3%
Westminster	19,919.6	1,685.4	105.1	1,268.7	881.5	83.5%
Worcester	8,047.7	9,572.2	2,821.3	647.1	3,511.7	32.7%
Total	176,238.0	27,065.4	5,390.0	7,111.6	10,694.8	77.8%
1999 Conditions						
Fitchburg	11,659.9	3,704.0	1,132.1	262.7	1,240.2	64.8%
Gardner	9,848.9	2,421.4	604.5	579.2	1,277.4	66.9%
Holden	17,715.5	3,591.9	256.1	814.7	871.7	76.2%
Hubbardston	23,296.6	1,519.9	114.3	729.2	1,169.0	86.8%
Leominster	10,887.4	5,043.5	1,193.0	591.3	1,278.8	57.3%
Paxton	7,629.5	1,495.2	19.9	505.1	254.2	77.0%
PRINCETON	20,153.4	1,976.4	39.5	421.1	343.0	87.9%
Rutland	20,100.8	1,798.2	48.3	573.4	646.6	86.8%
Sterling	14,505.1	3,041.7	224.8	808.9	1,651.0	71.7%
Westminster	18,498.9	2,716.3	246.7	1,270.0	1,128.5	77.5%
Worcester	6,481.5	10,664.2	3,301.2	644.0	3,509.2	26.3%

Source: MassGIS. Photo interpretation by U-Mass Amherst Resource Mapping Project; statistics by author.

forcing evidence of the growth pressures affecting northern Worcester County.[18]

PAST PLANS & STUDIES

Princeton's first master plan was completed in 1970 and subsequently updated in 1975, 1980, and the late 1980s. All of the plans present goals and recommendations for open space and recreation, such as establishing a fund for purchasing conservation land, providing land for recreational use, and preserving open space. As early as 1980, Princeton's planning studies recommended cluster zoning and cluster development as a tool to save open space. In 1991, Princeton retained Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) for a Land Use Development Plan. The town's most recent Open Space and Recreation Plan was completed in 2000.

[18] Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), 2020 Growth Strategy for Central Massachusetts-Update 2004 (December 2004), 3-4, 6-8.

Land Use Plan (1991)

For the Land Use Development Plan (1991), Princeton commissioned a comprehensive analysis of development patterns under existing zoning. As part of this process, the town polled local residents about future growth and development. When asked what is desirable about living in Princeton, 86% of the survey respondents cited Princeton's rural nature, 66% cited scenic views, and 64% cited open space. The responses to questions about Princeton's zoning controls were particularly telling: only 27% thought the zoning bylaw, subdivision regulations, and Board of Health regulations were sufficient to manage growth, and nearly half favored stricter wetlands and septic system regulations than those in force at the state level.[19]

The 1991 plan recommended cluster zoning, a local wetlands bylaw, and a local scenic rivers bylaw to limit activity along tributaries of the Stillwater River in order to protect water quality and preserve wildlife corridors. It also recommended zoning within flood hazard areas in order to minimize flood damage. The State Building Code requires that the lowest floor of residential buildings be elevated to or above the 100-year floodplain, and that non-residential buildings be similarly elevated or flood-proofed up to the base flood level, with plans certified by a professional engineer or architect for compliance with accepted standards.

For basic floodplain regulations, the 1991 plan suggested that Princeton establish more restrictive elevation criteria and require a special permit for any development in the floodplain district. The plan also recommended that Princeton prohibit filling, dredging or dumping in the floodplain, and to prohibit land uses that would become hazardous if flooded. Finally it advised the town to adopt local standards for repairs to structures within a floodplain because the State Building Code does not require property owners to comply with floodplain construction standards unless the cost of repairs exceeds 50% of the market value of the structure.

These and other proposals have not been implemented.

Open Space and Recreation Plan (2000)

Princeton published its most recent Open Space and Recreation Plan in May 2000. Consistent with state requirements, the plan included an inventory of Princeton's natural resources, scenic, cultural and historic areas and conservation and recreational sites, and a public participation process. This information was used to analyze Princeton's resource protection, recreational and land management needs, prepare open space and recreational goals and objectives, and develop a Five-Year Action Plan to address as many needs as possible. A few of the Five-Year Action Plan steps have been implemented, notably the construction of Krashes Field and creation of a small community skating rink. The Open Space Committee is currently updating the 2000 plan for submission to the Division of Conservation Services (DCS).

ISSUES, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Local Capacity

Although residents invaribaly cite open space and scenic views as Princeton's greatest assets, the town does not have enough tools to protect these resources. A comprehensive resource protection strategy is crucial in small towns, for even the most affluent communities do not have the funds to buy all of the land they would like to save. Princeton's past ambivalence about growth management, open space and environmental regulatory proposals raises important questions about the town's perception of its role in guiding development. Possibly residents have found it difficult to envision a future in which many of their town's revered qualities have all but disappeared.

[19] CMPRC, Land Use Development Plan (1991), 4.

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN 2000 – HIGHLIGHTS

Resource Protection & Recreation Needs

- Preservation of rural character.
- Creation of trail connections.
- Identification and preservation of wildlife corridors.
- Protection and maintenance of hunting and fishing areas.
- Maintenance of quality of groundwater drinking supplies.
- Implementation and enforcement of Wetlands Protection Act and Rivers Protection Act.
- Maintenance of historic and cultural sites.
- Provision of additional playing fields for organized youth sports.

Goals and Objectives

- Protection and enhancement of the natural environment.
- Protection/preservation of scenic landscapes, open meadows, and agricultural fields.
- Preservation of existing open space areas and areas of outstanding natural beauty.
- Quality recreational facilities and adequate recreational opportunities for all Princeton residents.
- Maintenance of existing recreational fields as well as future facilities.
- Maintain and enhance fish and wildlife habitats.

Five-Year Action Plan

- Develop and maintain additional recreational fields for baseball/softball and soccer.
- Develop and maintain trails for a variety of users.
- Preserve open fields, meadows and agricultural lands, and preserve forested lands and encourage use of Chapter 61, 61A and 61B for wildlife habitat, biking, hunting, and fishing.
- Identify wildlife corridors and greenways and work with landowners to protect these areas.
- Establish new forms of community recreation, such as a community skating rink or perhaps a town pool.
- Organize and host public information sessions which reach out and provide landowners with options for conserving their land .
- Establish a permanent Open Space and Recreation Implementation Committee.

Arguably, Princeton could continue to evolve from a rural enclave to low-density suburb in ways unnoticed by current residents. Many towns east of Worcester also had trouble adopting and implementing strategies to protect open space and natural resources until they faced an urgent problem: the sale of a Chapter 61A farm, an application for a large comprehensive permit, the discovery of contaminated water supplies, or the arrival of big-box development. These challenges may seem remote to people in Princeton today, and since the town has so much protected land it is deceptively simple to think of Princeton's beauty as timeless. In fact, the threats to Princeton's character have far less to do with large projects than the incremental loss of open land, a condition that gradually reduces access to open space, creates traffic and circulation conflicts, and replaces wildlife habitat with low-density housing.

Another challenge for small towns is that often, major planning initiatives attract more newcomers than long-time residents. As a result, policy proposals appearing to have broad support may actually express the views of a small, cohesive group that does not represent the population as a whole. For open space and resource protection, the risk of narrow support can become very problematic if the proposals seem to threaten the interests of large land owners with historic ties to the town. Princeton's fairly slow growth during the 1990s masks the fact that in 2000, more than 30% of its households had moved into town since 1995.

Physical Features and Development Constraints

Princeton has severe development constraints and they contribute to a view that Princeton's risk of unwanted change is very low. For example, most of the soil types found in Princeton pose limitations for development due to hardpan layers, rockiness, excessively steep slopes or drainage. The town would benefit from a parcel-based inventory of land containing soils suitable for septic systems, a task that will be much easier to complete with GIS technology, an accurate, current digitized assessor's map, and digitized soil maps.

In addition, at least 10% of Princeton's total land area is comprised of wetlands. While federal and state laws help to protect these resources, local bylaws and regulations usually support a more comprehensive approach and provide additional (often more effective) means of enforcement. To date, Princeton has not established the basic environmental regulatory powers that come with a local wetlands bylaw or a floodplain bylaw to control development within the 100-year floodplain.

Most of Princeton falls under the jurisdiction of the Watershed Protection Act, which limits land uses and development around tributaries and surface waters. While the WsPA affects development in many parts of town, it does not preclude development on most of Princeton's vacant land. Since there is no public water supply in Princeton, townspeople rely on private wells for their drinking water, unlike residents of many Eastern Massachusetts communities that obtain their water from the MWRA, i.e., water transmitted from Princeton's region. From the town's point of view, the absence of a public drinking water system may seem advantageous for long-term growth control, but the same condition limits Princeton's flexibility to plan for future growth.

Open Space Use Conflicts

Despite Princeton's vast open space, not all residents think of "open space" the same way, and not everyone thinks the town should save open space for the same reasons. In public meetings and focus groups for this Master Plan, some residents noted that restrictions on the use of watershed and wildlife holdings limit public enjoyment of open land by "privileging" natural resource interests over outdoor recreation interests. A good example is the prohibition against dogs in a wildlife sanctuary; the restriction serves valid conservation interests, yet those who enjoy walking through woodlands and fields often like to take their dogs on the same excursion. Horseback riding is also restricted or prohibited on some types of open space, such as watershed lands.

People living in rural areas often enjoy hunting, in fact some would argue that hunting is essential to a rural way of life. For public safety reasons, however, hunting is often limited or simply banned in state parks and forests, water supply areas, and local conservation land. When allowed in wildlife management areas, hunting is usually subject to seasonal limits and other regulations, but today, newly acquired open space often comes with explicit prohibitions against hunting. The same applies to off-road or all-terrain vehicles, which are popular in some areas but incompatible with the interests of protecting wildlife habitat. Finally, while the general public appreciates working landscapes and many would support protecting farmland, farmers do not always benefit from agricultural restrictions because the prohibitions against future development are so broad.

Balancing open space conservation and recreation interests is difficult, but it is made even more difficult by constraints associated with acquisition financing and land ownership. For example, communities throughout Massachusetts rely heavily on the Self-Help Program, a grant source administered by the Division of Conservation Services (DCS). State regulations restrict property acquired with Self-Help funds to conservation and passive recreation uses. Similar requirements govern the Conservation Partnership Program, which helps small non-profit organizations protect

Competing demands for open space and recreation areas are not unique to Princeton. In the statewide conservation and recreation plan, **Massachusetts Outdoors 2000!**, one of the subcommittees that helped to develop the five-year plan had this to say:

> ...Because so many recreation activities occur within or depend upon natural areas, some of which are quite sensitive to human activity, the [subcommittee] report stressed the importance of striking a balance between resource protection and recreation use...
>
> Multiple uses of land and resources is a worthy goal and a common characteristic of many recreation areas. When multiple use places heavy demand on a resource, however, an action plan must be in place to mitigate adverse impacts to the resource and avoid user conflicts.
>
> The compatibility between recreation uses and the recreation carrying capacity of multiple use resources should be evaluated. This evaluation can be accomplished by determining the range of recreation uses for a site, the extent of demand for each use and compatibility between these uses. It is important to remember that although certain uses may be compatible with one another, their cumulative impacts may be unacceptable. [Massachusetts Outdoors 2000!, Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2001), 102.]

open space in their towns. In exchange for state funds, the non-profit must convey a conservation restriction to the community in which the land is located or an approved state agency. The impact of ownership on open space use is best illustrated by the different rules that apply on Massachusetts Audubon Society's Wachusett Meadows and wildlife management areas controlled by the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife (now MassWildlife).

Habitat Protection

A comprehensive fisheries and wildlife inventory improves the quality and effectiveness of an open space and recreation plan because it is important to preserve habitat both for common and rare species. Documenting the habitat for moose, bear, fisher, birds of prey, water birds, reptiles and amphibians would help to set land protection priorities and guide land use decisions.

Zoning Challenges

Princeton has three zoning districts, but the town has effectively zoned all of its land for single-family residential development. Even in the commercial and industrial districts, single-family homes are a permitted use and as a result, usable land zoned for business and industry has often been developed for housing. Moreover, the entire town is zoned for two-acre lots, which invites a suburban growth pattern. Existing policies do not promote resource protection by designating areas for compact development or supplying the Planning Board with regulations to encourage or require open space in new residential developments. Without these types of regulations, Princeton's rural ambience will gradually erode as multiple divisions of land produce fragmented open space and a rise in residential land consumption. "Rural" does not mean uniformly spread out development.

Agricultural, Forest and Recreation Land

Princeton has about 85 properties (including contiguous parcels under the same ownership) in Chapter 61, 61A and 61B status, representing a combined total of 4,937 acres of land. However, only 286 acres are protected from development through conservation or farmland restrictions held by public agencies or non-profit organizations.

In many cases, these properties are located in areas classified as Supporting Natural Landscape because they connect and buffer Core Habitat Areas. Since they have only temporary protection from a change in use, it is important to develop a strategy to protect the most significant parcels and guide the development of others with sensitive zoning

that saves open space by design. Unfortunately, small towns in the state's high-growth regions have found that when a strong housing market drives up the value of land, farm and forest landowners have little incentive to make permanent fixed investments that might increase the productivity of traditional rural land uses but add no market value for potential future development. For these and other reasons, Chapter 61 and 61A land is particularly vulnerable to development.

Recreation and Eco-Tourism

Efforts to protect the region's open space and recreational areas by promoting eco-tourism have been fairly successful, but eco-tourism is difficult to develop. Hospitality and recreation industry statistics show that overall, day trips to mountains, wildlife areas and agricultural lands rank fairly low among the recreational opportunities that exist across the state, and while visitors are likely to seek overnight accommodations near mountain resorts, open space such as wildlife areas, farms and trailways produce very few overnight stays.[20]

The challenge is to combine and promote activities that serve many interests and have the effect of protecting ecologically significant areas. For Princeton and neighboring towns, water-based recreation – the state's most popular attractions, whether coastal or inland waters – may always be limited by the constraints against swimming that come with strict watershed laws. Swimming, walking and sightseeing lead the list of most popular recreational activities in Central Massachusetts, followed by hiking, fishing, picnicking, playground visits, wildlife and nature study, and golf.[21] Under existing conditions, Princeton fits within this picture, though only in part.

Environmental Concerns

East Wachusett Brook provides high-quality habitat that has little disturbance, but according to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, the headwaters northeast of Little Wachusett Mountain are impaired due to high fecal coliform bacteria.[22] As a result, East Wachusett Brook is classified as "Category 5" water on the state's list of impaired waters, which means it requires a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or environmental remediation plan.

The TMDL is a provision of the U.S. Clean Water Act that requires pollution control plans for certain impaired waters. These plans establish pollutant reduction goals and set an enforceable maximum quantity of pollutants that a waterbody can receive and still meet basic water quality standards. Remediation is important because even though the Stillwater River itself is only a "Category 2" at present, degradation of the headwaters could lead to impairment further downstream. (Category 2 includes waters found to support the uses for which they were assessed, such as primary- or secondary-contact recreation, or aquatic life, but other uses have not been assessed.)

DEP has classified five of Princeton's ponds as "Category 2" waters: Bickford Pond, Lower Crow Hill Pond, the Quinapoxet Reservoir and Wachusett Lake.[23] Paradise Pond is classified as Category

[20] Massachusetts Outdoors 2000!, 21-37 passim.

[21] Ibid, 63-67.

[22] Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA), "5-Year Action Plan 2003-2007" [cited 15 August 2005], at <http://www.nashuariverwatershed.org/5yr_plan/subbasins/stillwater.htm>.

[23] Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), "Proposed Massachusetts Year 2004 Integrated List of Waters (CWA Sections 305b and 303d)" [cited 15 August 2005], at <http://www.state.ma.us/dep/brp/wm/tmdls.htm>. The Massachusetts Year 2004 Integrated List of Waters was developed to comply with reporting requirements of both Section 305(b) ("Water Quality Inventory") and Section 303(d) ("List of Impaired Waters") of the Clean Water Act (CWA). The integrated list format provides the status of all

3, which means attainable uses have not yet been assessed. Still, it is important to note that the sample data used to prepare water quality inventories and classify waters by degree of impairment do not always reflect average water quality conditions within a watershed or in a particular tributary. As a result, the state's classification of water bodies in Princeton may not be fully accurate.[24]

Land Protection Priorities

The town, state agencies, local land trusts and environmental organizations express strong support purchasing and protecting more open space, but there does not appear to be a shared set of priorities for land acquisitions or maintenance. Criteria to guide acquisition choices and other protection strategies would help to assure that limited resources will be used to meet the most important open space needs. The same criteria could support a framework for identifying areas that can accommodate development with limited or no adverse impacts on natural resources.

Open fields and woodlands that contribute to the town's rural image should be important preservation priorities in Princeton. (*Photo by Community Opportunities Group, Inc.*)

OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Matrix & Vision Plan

Princeton needs a comprehensive strategy to protect large tracts of land, but it is also important to assess the needs that open space should meet and to resolve use conflicts in advance. A system for ranking priority open space, an open space vision plan and a shared approach to use planning and land management would help the town, state agencies, land trusts and other organizations work together to protect Princeton's land and water resources. This effort needs to begin with establishing criteria to evaluate private land for its open space significance and suitability for various protection strategies. While acquisition is the most effective way to protect land, it is not the only way. Moreover, it is unrealistic to think that Princeton can buy all of the land that residents may want to protect from development.

assessed waters in a single multi-part list. Category 5 of the Integrated List constitutes the "Section 303(d) List" of waters that are impaired for one or more designated uses and require the development of total maximum daily loads (TMDL).

[24] Sampling stations are sometimes located in areas with known water quality issues, and results can be skewed by sampling methodology or factors that existed when the samples were drawn, such as storm flows. In addition, bacteria detected upstream of a drinking water reservoir can dissipate during travel time. For additional information, see Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Division of Water Supply Protection, Bureau of Watershed Management, Watershed Protection Plan Update, Wachusett Reservoir Watershed (2003), 4, 7, at <http://www.mass.gov/mdc/2003wachwpp.htm> and Water Quality Report 2004: Wachusett Reservoir and Watershed (March 2004), 9-25 passim, at <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/waterSupply/watershed/water.htm> select "Water Quality."

The Open Space Committee, Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Select Board should jointly lead a process to develop open space evaluation criteria. Joint leadership is important because each board has a role to play in shaping Princeton's open space future, and each board represents different interests. The process should include other local officials, private property owners and state agencies or non-profit land trusts that own land in Princeton, and residents interested in open space as well as other municipal needs. The criteria they agree to should be ranked, weighted, arranged in a matrix and field-tested on a selection of properties in order to determine whether the criteria make sense "on the ground." Once the criteria (or weights) have been adjusted and refined, the Open Space Committee could apply the criteria to other privately owned, unrestricted land with known or perceived conservation value. The result would be a list of potential candidates for land acquisition, grouped into categories of relative importance to the town as a whole.

An open space vision plan, guided by the land evaluation matrix, would help to promote coordinated planning and provide a framework for evaluating priority open space parcels. It also would help the Planning Board work with developers of sites that neither the town nor other organizations had the resources to acquire, and it would help developers design projects on land with known conservation or recreation value. Of course, developers will not be able to use the vision plan effectively unless Princeton adopts more flexible zoning.

Conservation Fund

Assets such as Wachusett Mountain and the Wachusett Reservoir have led to major open space investments by state agencies and non-profit conservation organizations. As a result, Princeton has an inventory of protected land that most communities in Massachusetts will never be able to assemble. However, the same condition means that in the past, Princeton did not have to work as hard as many other towns to save its open space.

Princeton's first master plan (1970) urged the town to establish a conservation fund so that resources would be available when owners decided to sell their land. A conservation fund is similar to a stabilization fund but with a restricted purpose: land acquisition. Towns with successful track records in open space protection almost always have a conservation fund that can be tapped for small-parcel purchases by the Conservation Commission or as a source to leverage grants from agencies such as the Division of Conservation Services. For example, communities applying for Self-Help grants have to obtain an appraisal of the land they intend to buy, and a conservation fund gives them a ready resource to pay for appraisal services, surveys and so forth. A conservation fund may also be used for land management.

Residents have said repeatedly that Princeton needs to become more pro-active about acquiring open space, yet the town does not have a clear plan to do so. Regular annual appropriations to a conservation fund – even in small amounts – would make open space a visible part of town government's agenda and help Princeton take a more disciplined approach to open space. In towns with a long-standing commitment to acquiring open space, appropriations to the conservation fund have become "housekeeping" measures at town meeting each year.

Princeton also could consider petitioning the legislature for authority to place "rollback" taxes from the sale of Chapter 61, 61A or 61B land into a conservation fund. By law, these receipts are General Fund revenue that may be appropriated for any municipal purpose. However, the legislature has already allowed at least one town to restrict the use of rollback taxes for open space.

Community Preservation Act

Princeton needs to consider adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA), M.G.L. c.44B, which the legislature enacted in September 2000 to address three statewide needs: open space, historic preservation and affordable housing. Currently 119 cities and towns have adopted CPA, and six others have scheduled referendum votes in the spring (2007). Neighboring Hubbardston just adopted CPA in November 2006, and three more north-central towns are on the list for spring ballot votes: West Boylston, Lunenburg and Phillipston. In contrast, Paxton recently rejected a proposal to adopt CPA.

Communities that adopt CPA have authority to impose a surcharge on their property tax bills. The surcharge is set locally, not to exceed 3%. Surcharge revenue may be used to address any of the statutory purposes of CPA as long as each purpose receives at least 10% of the revenue per year. In turn, the state provides matching funds from fees paid for transactions recorded at the registry of deeds. The actual amount of the state match depends on the community's own local effort (the surcharge percent) as well as the state trust fund's available balance. As more towns adopt CPA, the state's contribution will decline because monies in the trust fund will have to be divided among a larger pool of participating communities. Still, access to the state share means that a town could carry out more CPA-funded projects because the funds available for CPA activities are not limited to the local surcharge.

In very small towns like Princeton, CPA will not produce much revenue. Even if Princeton approved the maximum allowable surcharge of 3% without any of the exemptions allowed by law, the revenue generated locally (excluding state matching funds) would be about $183,000. Although this is not enough to pay for an important parcel of open space, it could be enough to support all or a large potion of the debt service on a bond issuance to buy open space.

Mature trees and stone walls define the roadside just about everywhere in Princeton. (*Photo supplied by Master Plan Steering Committee.*)

Trails Inventory

Princeton should have a town-wide plan for open space trails. Residents appreciate the trails that exist in Princeton today, and they are concerned about losing access to trails as new development occurs. There are active trail organizations in Princeton's area, notably Wachusett Greenways and the Mid-State Trail Association, and the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) has prepared several regional trails plans, including the North Suburban Inter-Community Trail Connection Feasibility Study (2002).

The first step in developing any trails plan is to document existing trails. The Open Space Committee or Planning Board could seek help from regional or local organizations to identify and map the approximate location of these trails, ideally wotking with existing data and a GPS unit. GPS data can be used in any GIS application, and

Princeton will soon have GIS capability at town hall or through a contract with CMRPC.

Scenic Roads

In Massachusets, local authority to protect trees is governed by two state laws: the **Scenic Roads Act**, M.G.L. c.40, Section 15C, and the **Shade Tree Act**, M.G.L. c.87. The Scenic Roads Act is voluntary on the part of cities and towns, but the Shade Tree Act imposes certain requirements on a community's tree warden. Also, the scope of the Scenic Roads Act includes stone walls, but the Shade Tree Act does not.

The image of rural living makes Princeton very attractive to local residents. It also could be used to lure visitors and make farming, land conservation and cultural activities vital elements of the local economy. (Master Plan Committee)

Princeton has found it very difficult to reach consensus about the merits of adopting the Scenic Roads Act. Although scenic road regulations were recommended in Princeton's 1991 Land Use Plan and more recently in a heritage landscape report funded by DCR, town officials remain concerned that adopting the Scenic Roads Act will make it impossible for the Highway Department to maintain Princeton's roads. This is not true.

At least 50 communities in Massachusetts have adopted the Scenic Roads Act. Most are small towns, like Princeton, that value their rural design characteristics. By adopting the Scenic Roads Act, they gained authority to classify roads or portions thereof as "scenic roads" and regulate tree or stone wall removal along designated ways. Scenic roads must be designated by town meeting, based on nominations made by the Planning Board, Historical Commission or Conservation Commission. The law exempts numbered routes unless the route is located entirely within the boundaries of the city or town and no part of it is owned by the state.

The Scenic Roads Act provides that "any repair, maintenance, reconstruction, or paving work… shall not involve or include the cutting or removal of trees, or the tearing down or destruction of stone walls, or portions thereof…" until the Planning Board has held a public hearing. Communities that have adopted the Scenic Roads Act also have a local bylaw and regulations to implement it; through the local bylaw, they may impose a fine for violating the state law. The regulations establish review criteria for proposals to remove trees or stone walls located within a public right of way way. Many bylaws also include procedures for emergency removal of trees posing an imminent public safety hazard.

The Shade Tree Act defines a public shade tree as any tree within the boundaries of a public right-of-way. Removal of a shade tree requires a public hearing and issuance of a permit by the Tree Warden. The law also provides that if anyone objects to cutting down or removal of a shade tree, the Tree Warden is prohibited from issuing a permit unless the Board of Selectmen approves the tree removal. Some types of activity are exempt, such as removing trees with a diameter of less than 1.5" one foot from the ground, or brush/shrubs, and the law explicitly exempts removal of trees that endanger the traveling public. When a shade tree also falls under the jurisdiction of the Planning Board via the Scenic Roads Act, the Planning

Board and Tree Warden conduct a joint public hearing.

Local Wetlands Bylaw

A local wetlands protection bylaw would help the Princeton Conservation Commission work as effectively as possible to assure that development does not harm the town's wetlands. More than half of the Commonwealth's communities have adopted a local wetlands bylaw and administrative regulations that supplement their authority under the state Wetlands Protection Act, M.G.L. c.131, Section 40. In fact, Princeton and Rutland are the only towns in the immediate area that have not adopted a local wetlands bylaw. By adopting a local counterpart to the state law, communities have expanded the purview of their Conservation Commissions and imposed more stringent standards than the requirements found in state law.

Eco-Tourism

Princeton could use its abundant resources to greater economic advantage by collaborating with businesses, institutions and state agencies with ties to eco-tourism. Aside from Wachusett Mountain, the Mid-State Trail or the Wachusett Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary – all resources with an established place in regional tourism – the town's Wind Farm is an intriguing resource of interest to environmental organizations across the country. It has received widespread attention in renewable energy circles and it is an unusual attraction in its own right.

Improved coordination of eco-tourism initiatives and joint planning, land conservation and resource management could create new ways to protect natural resources and rural landscapes. For example:

- Identify and protect land that offer opportunities for resource protection, open space and recreation activities.
- Establish local and regional multi-use recreational trail connections, map them, and make trail maps available at town hall or the library and through local businesses.
- Provide meaningful public access to all town parks, hiking trails, and ponds.
- Establish or strengthen local ties to regional organizations engaged in eco-tourism or agri-tourism planning and development.
- Encourage compatible activities in the local economy: artists and art festivals, cottage industries, shops for local crafts, farm stores, bed-and-breakfast establishments.
- Develop and implement land management strategies.

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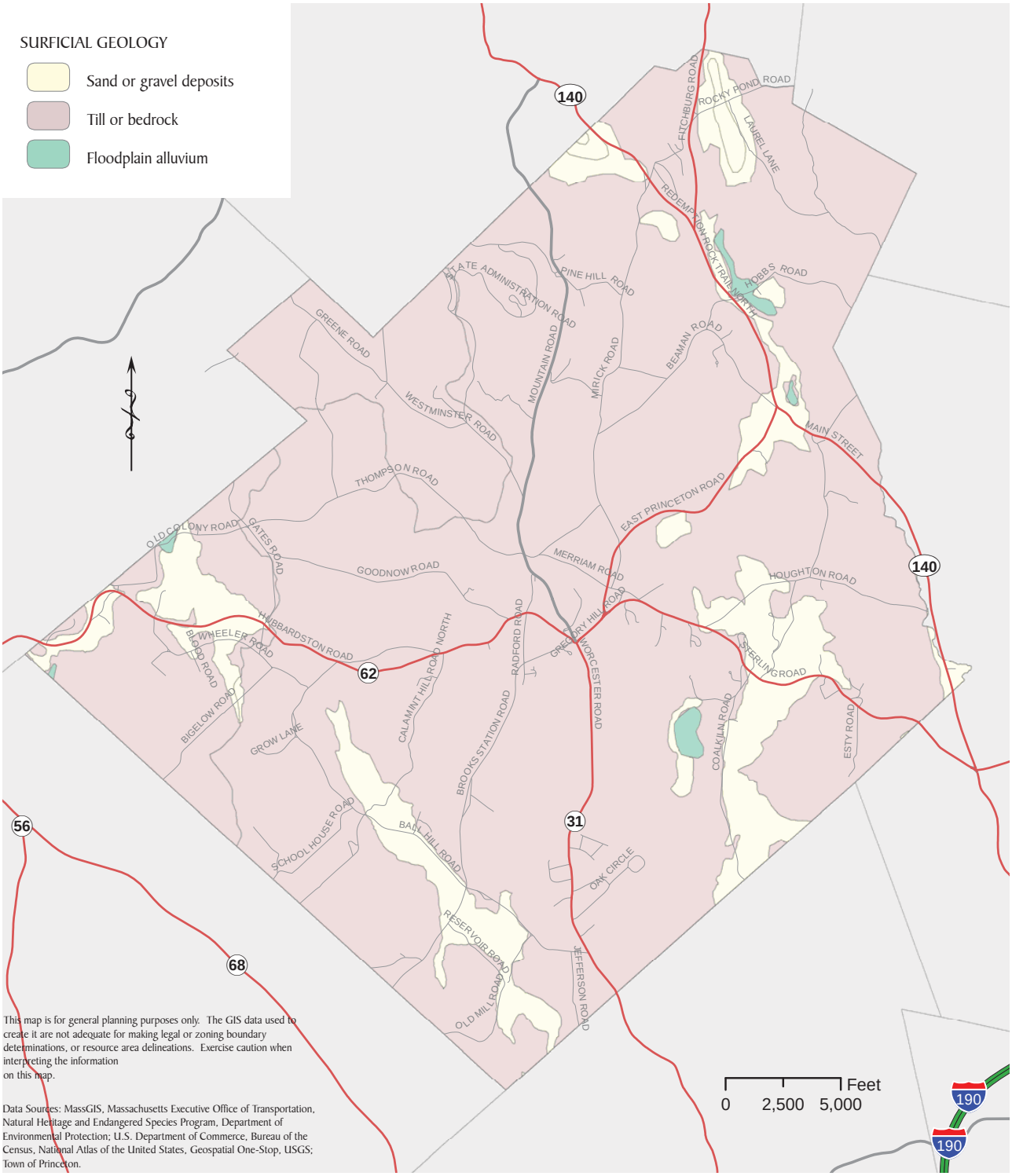

This map is for general planning purposes only. The GIS data used to create it are not adequate for making legal or zoning boundary determinations, or resource area delineations. Exercise caution when interpreting the information on this map.

Data Sources: MassGIS, Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, Department of Environmental Protection; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, National Atlas of the United States, Geospatial One-Stop, USGS; Town of Princeton.

Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

3.1 SURFICIAL GEOLOGY

April 2007

Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Consulting Team:

COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES GROUP, INC.
Larry Koff & Associates
Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, inc.

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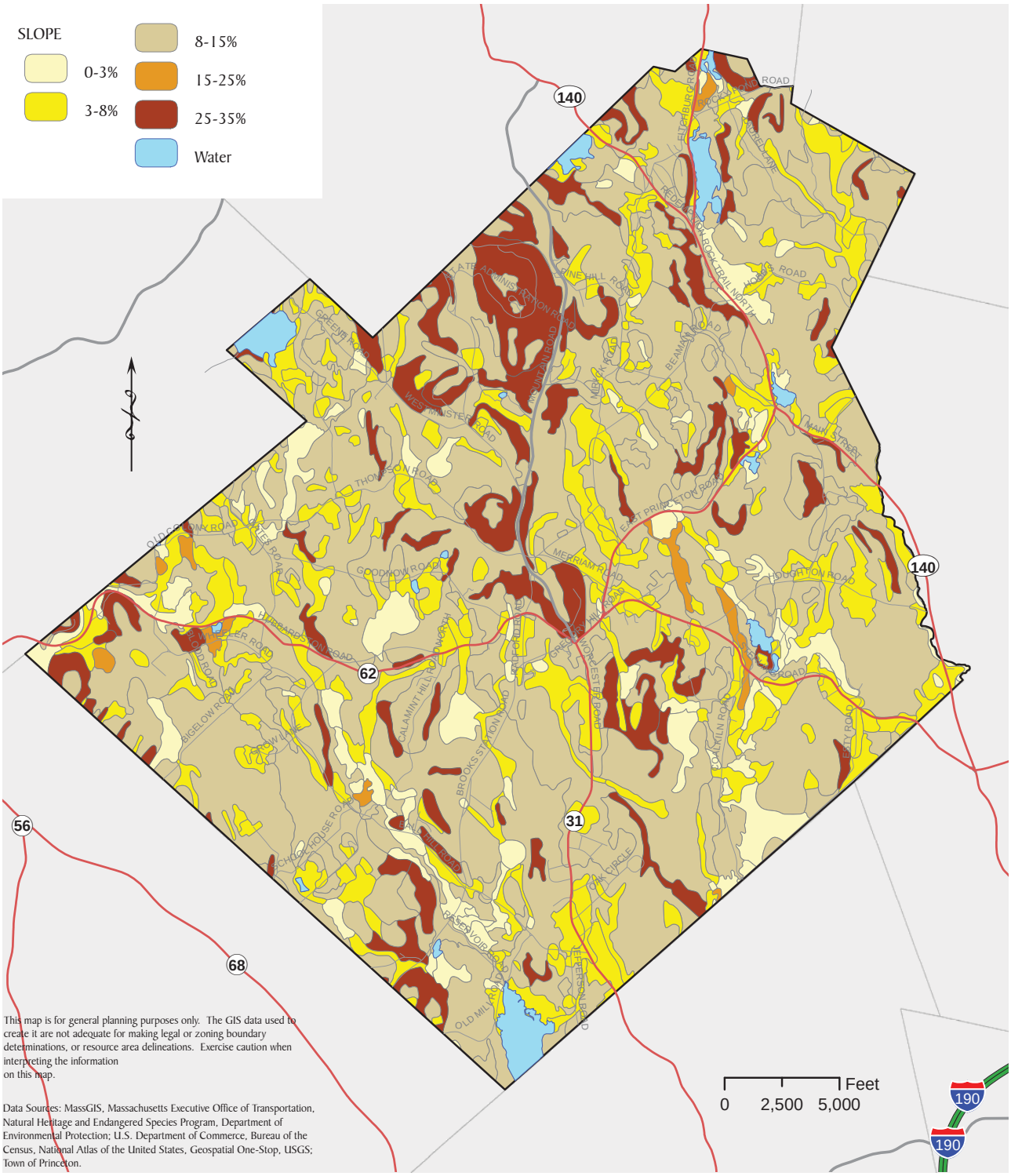

Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

3.2 SOILS

June 2007

Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Consulting Team:

COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES GROUP, INC.
Larry Koff & Associates
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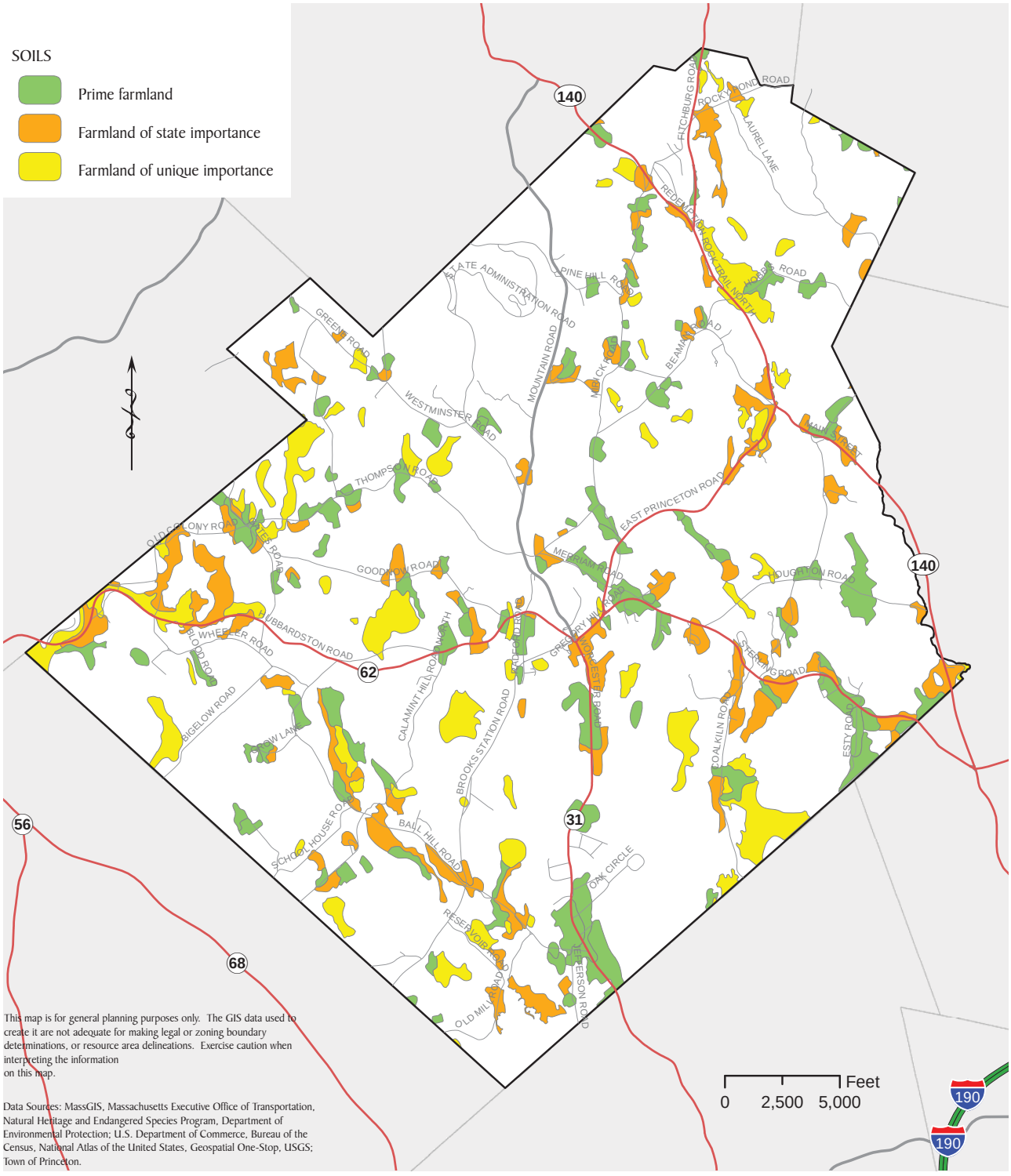

Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

3.3 FARMLAND SOILS

April 2007

Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Consulting Team:
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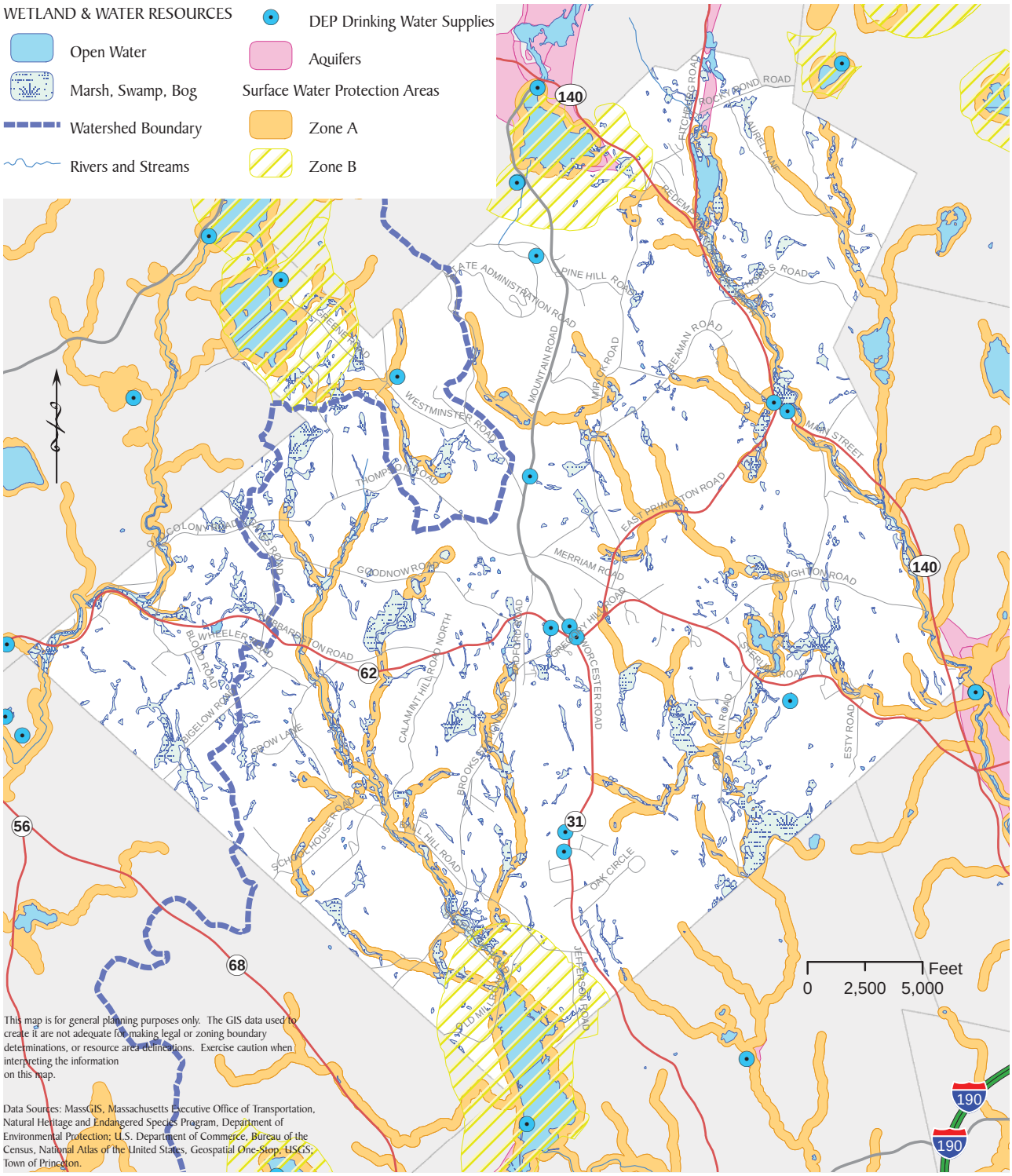

Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

3.4 WATER RESOURCES

April 2007

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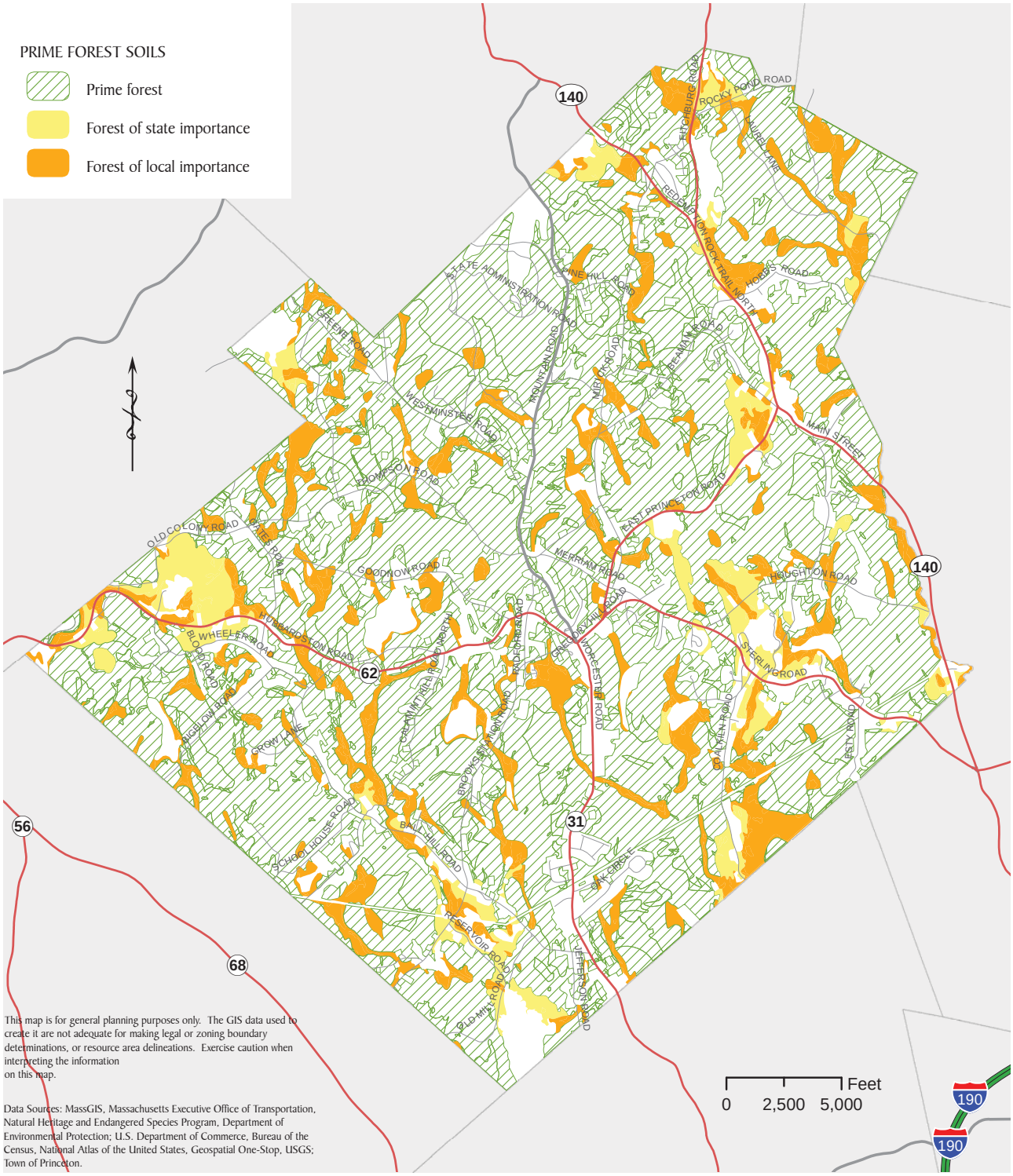

Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

3.5 PRIME FOREST

April 2007

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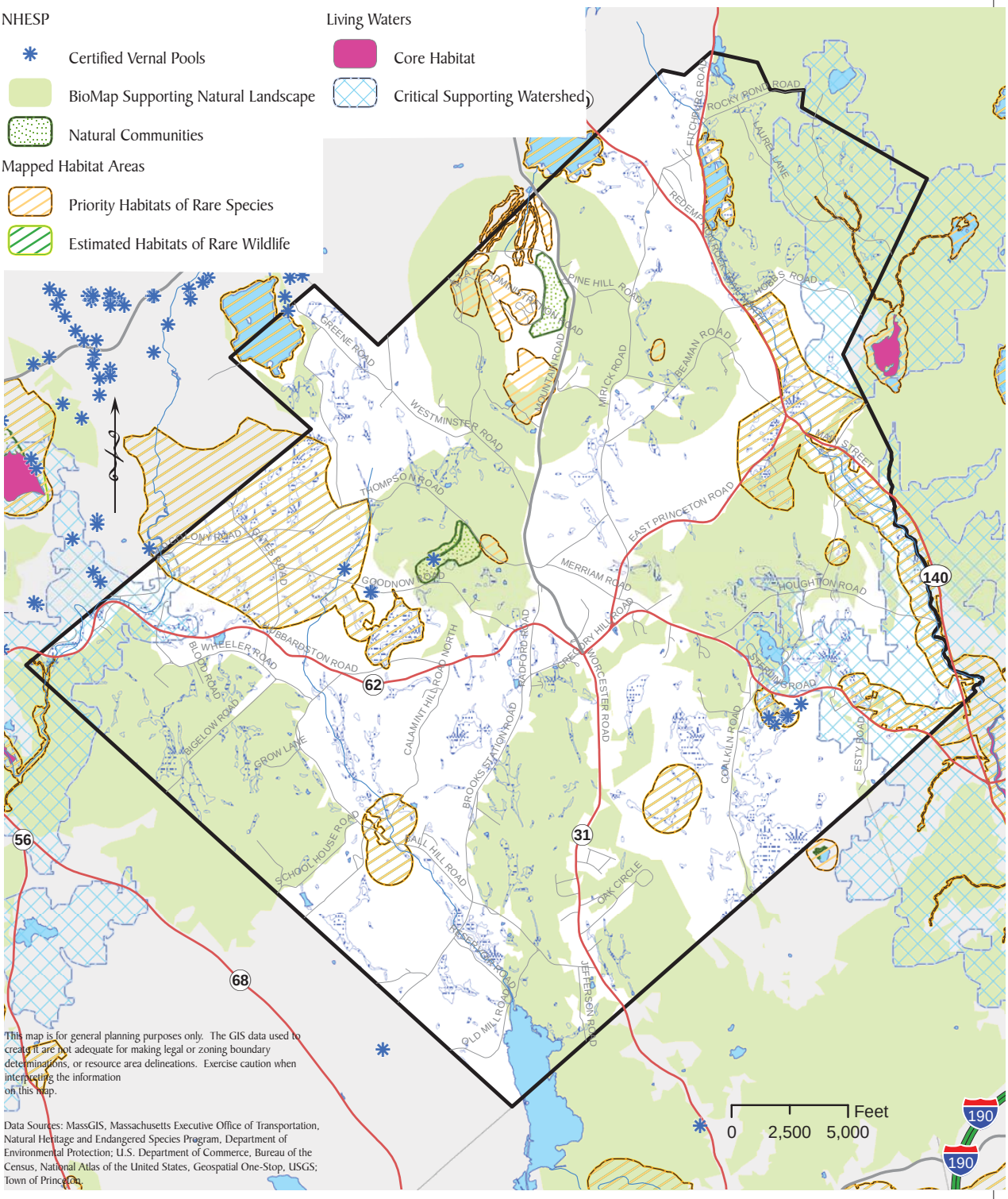

Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

3.6 WILDLIFE HABITAT

April 2007

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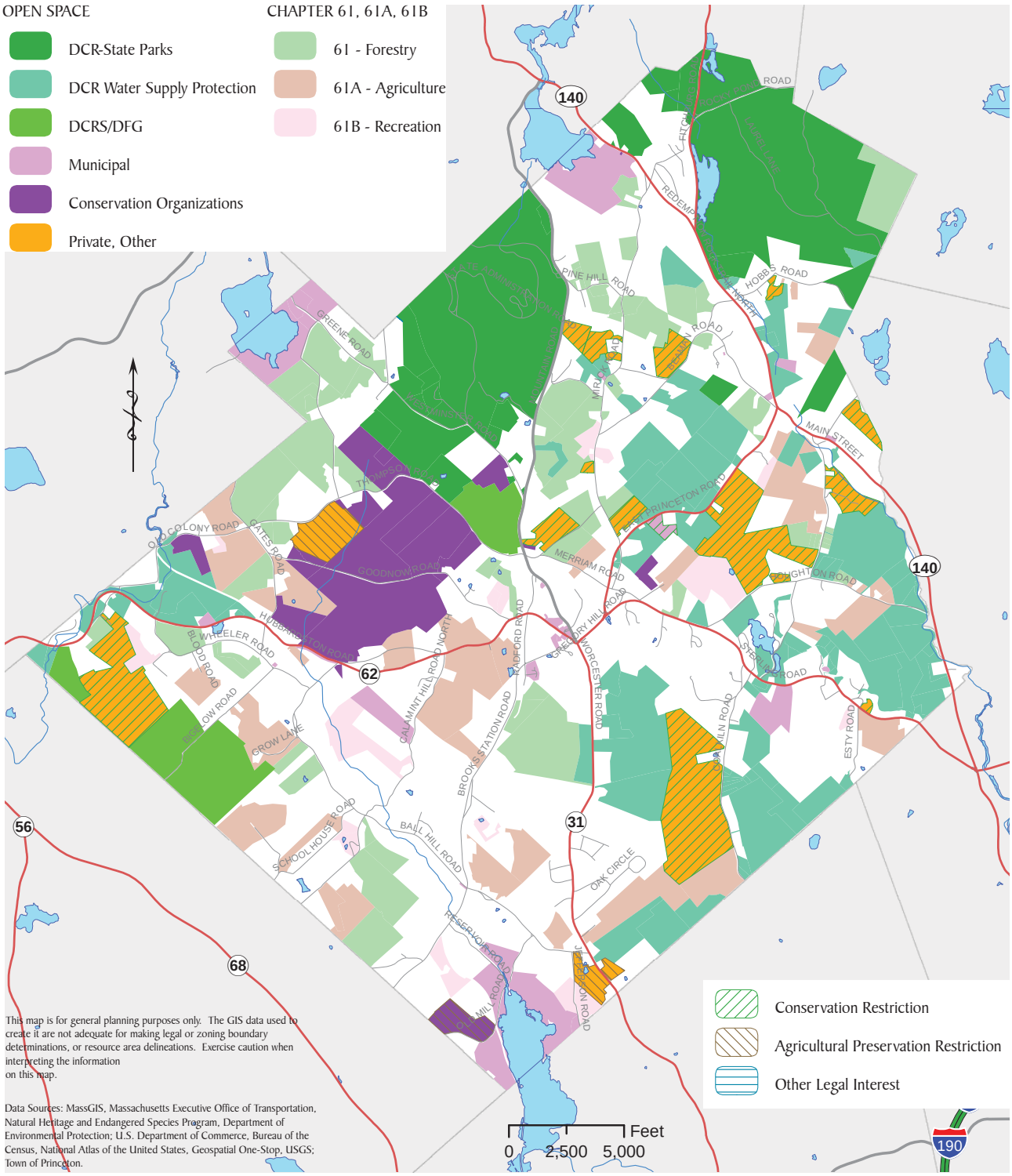

Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

3.7 OPEN SPACE

April 2007

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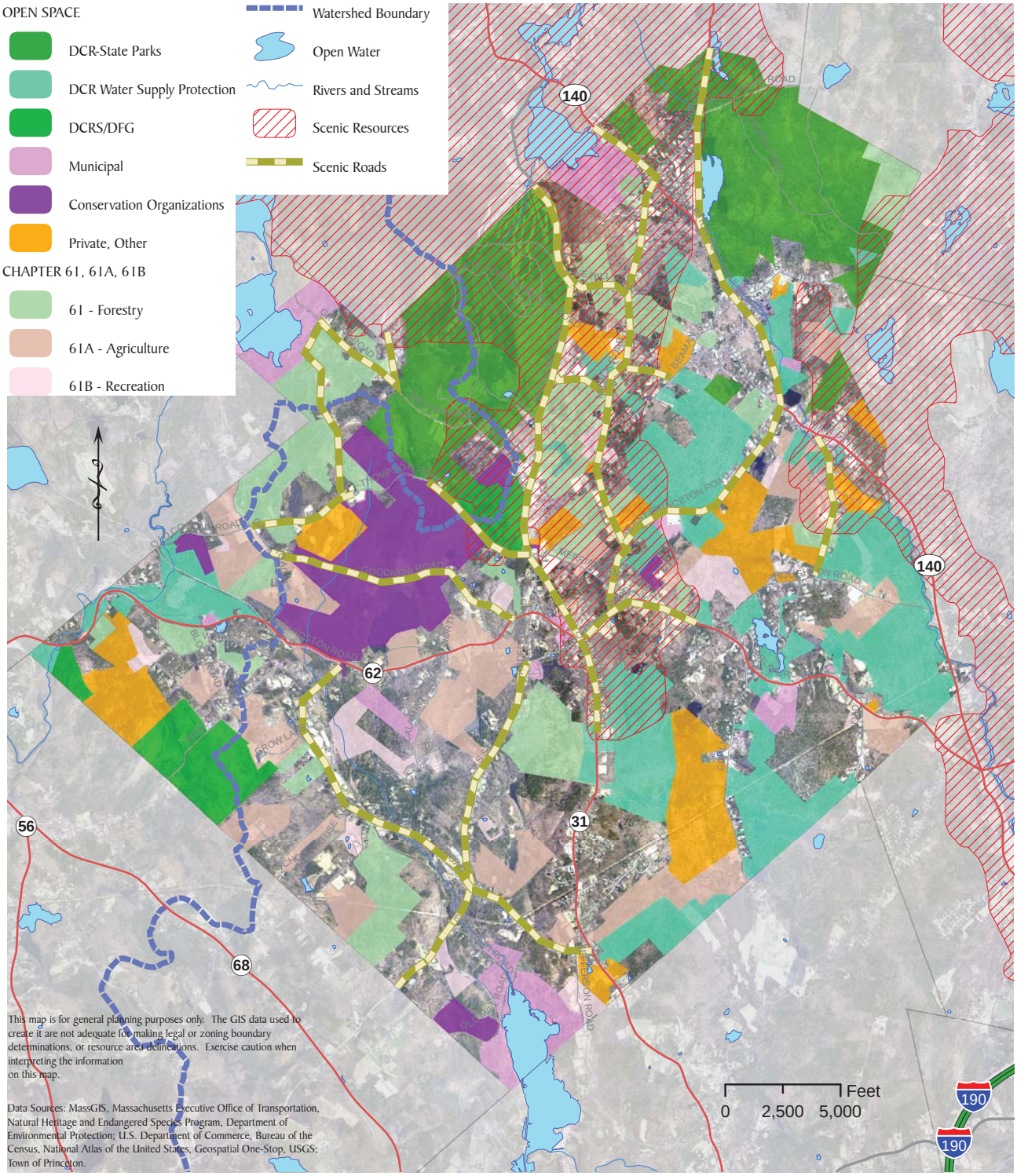

Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

3.8 RESOURCE OVERLAYS

April 2007

Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Consulting Team:

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CHAPTER 4

HISTORIC PRESERVATION ELEMENT

What makes Princeton special? What are the tangible resources that give Princeton its sense of place? These questions are irrevocably linked to Princeton's natural and built environments, which provide a visual link to the town's rural heritage. From its historic residences to the barns and stone walls of rural farmsteads, Princeton is fortunate to retain significant vestiges of its history. The town's cultural identity is enhanced by its arts community, local repositories of historic artifacts and active community groups, all of which contribute to the unique atmosphere of this rural town.

Recognizing the role of cultural resources in defining a community's sense of place is vital in any effort to maintain rural character. In a town as rich in cultural resources as Princeton, it is critical to inventory and document them in order to provide a framework for preservation. A master plan is not meant to serve as a comprehensive preservation plan for the community, however. Instead, it is a planning tool to begin a conversation about Princeton's resources and their role in defining the town's unique sense of place and rural heritage. The historic preservation element should review the town's previous efforts to address cultural resource protection and identify the significant role that Princeton's local organizations and residents have played in preserving historic buildings, landscapes and sites.

One of Princeton's many historic homes, this one at 16 Merriam Road. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

BRIEF HISTORY OF PRINCETON

Princeton's documented history spans more than four centuries. During the Native American period, the area that now comprises Princeton was visited seasonally by the Nipmuck tribe, primarily as a hunting area. Many of the town's earliest roads were originally Native American trails, including Brooks Station and Calamint Hill Roads. As European settlement increased during the 18th century, these native trails were improved as colonial highways, such as the northwest route from Lancaster (Hobbs Road-Redemption Rock Trail), the east-west route from Sterling to Hubbardston (Sterling Road-Merriam Road-Thompson Road) and the north-south route from Westminster to Worcester (Taylor Road-Westminster Road-Mountain Road-Worcester Road).

The major portion of what is now Princeton was originally part of the land grant of Rutland. Known as the East Wing, the area was divided in 1718 by the Rutland proprietors into 48 farms. However, the area was not settled until almost 25 years later when the first European settler, Joshua Wilder of Lancaster, arrived in 1742. He settled near what is now the intersection of Gleason and Houghton Roads. The delay in settlement was due in part to the area's rough terrain and heavy

timber, as well as a fear of the area's native population. In 1675, long before the town was settled, Mary Rowlandson of Lancaster was held captive for 12 weeks by native tribes and ransomed at the site of Princeton's "Redemption Rock" from the Indian Chief known as King Philip.

As settlers arrived in the area, most chose to locate in the southern section where the land was better suited for farming. The once heavily-timbered area was subsequently deforested for agriculture. In 1759, Rutland's East Wing and the adjoining area known as "The Watertown Farm" section were combined to establish an independent district. The name Prince Town was selected in honor of the Reverend Thomas Prince, Pastor of the Old South Church in Boston and one of the largest landholders within the district.

Much discussion began over the appropriate location for a meetinghouse, resulting in the selection of a site near the geographic center of the district at one of the community's major road intersections. By 1764, the first Meeting House was built at this location. While the creation of the new Prince Town district allowed residents to establish their own religious congregation and build a meeting house, it did not provide them with separate political representation.

In 1771, Prince Town was incorporated as the Town of Princeton, politically autonomous and separate from Rutland. During this period, a prosperous agricultural settlement flourished, with many notable Federal period residences dispersed throughout the town, including the country estate and gentleman's farm of Governor Moses Gill of Boston. In the early 19th century, Princeton's settlement continued to disperse and a number of high-style residences were built, most notably the Ward Boylston house (ca. 1822) on land near the original site of the Gill Estate on Worcester Road.

Princeton's most prestigious period would follow. By 1860, the town had begun to flourish as a summer resort because of its clean, cool country air, its relatively easy access from Boston, and the scenic presence of Wachusett Mountain, the highest mountain in Massachusetts east of the Berkshires. As many as seven summer hotels and several boarding houses were built between 1850 and 1890, including the Summit House atop Wachusett Mountain. Eight trains arrived each day from Boston and elsewhere, bringing hundreds of summer visitors and residents to Princeton. Most influential in bringing great numbers of people here were the writings of Henry David Thoreau, Helen Hunt Jackson, and John Greenleaf Whittier, who regularly visited and wrote about Wachusett Mountain and the town of Princeton.

Princeton's historic Fernside on Mountain Road, now owned and operated by McLean Hospital. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

Nineteenth century industrial development occurred primarily in the village of East Princeton along the Keyes Brook. Small-scale manufacturing was established early in the century – consisting of lumbering, burning of charcoal, making of potash, chair-making in several small shops, tanning, boot and shoemaking, and the home manufacturing of palm-leaf hats and straw braid by farmers' wives and daughters. In the 1840s, larger industrial development occurred along the Brook, where chair manufacturing companies were constructed and a linear factory village developed.

The arrival of the automobile in the early 20th century permanently altered the nation's vacation habits and effectively ended Princeton's popularity as a summer resort. During this period, the town's industries gradually disappeared and agriculture, once prominent in the economy, also began its decline. Princeton evolved into a quiet residential community, as it remains today.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Preservation Capacity

Princeton has two active local organizations dedicated to the preservation of Princeton's historic resources: the Princeton Historical Commission and the Princeton Historical Society. These groups participate in preservation planning projects, educational programs, materials conservation and community outreach. While neither organization has staff, both groups have committed members who donate countless volunteer hours to preservation activities. Each organization has a distinct mission, yet they have worked collaboratively in the past on various educational and community projects.

The Princeton Historical Commission is a governmental board appointed by the town to engage in preservation planning activities, including the identification of significant historic resources through cultural resource surveys and National Register of Historic Places nominations. These activities identify buildings, districts, sites, structures and objects that retain their integrity and reflect some significant aspect of local, state or national history. To date, the Princeton Historical Commission has completed cultural resource surveys in East Princeton Village, Russell Corner, Princeton Common and Princeton Center, resulting in the submission of 246 properties into the Massachusetts Historic Commission's Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth. The surveys culminated in the designation of National Register of Historic Places districts in these areas.

The Historical Commission recently completed survey work in the West Village section of Princeton in anticipation of a National Register Nomination for this area, and has nearly completed efforts to prepare a town-wide survey of Princeton's historic resources. Further, the Commission serves in an advisory role for reviewing development projects affecting historic buildings.

The Princeton Historical Society is a non-profit organization whose mission is to "preserve, promote and foster an understanding and appreciation of Princeton's rich heritage (past, present and future) and to be a resource for research and education." The Society maintains the town's repository of historic and cultural artifacts. It manages two spaces in town: the Anita C. Woodward research room in the historic Goodnow Memorial Building (commonly known as the Princeton Public Library), with historic ephemera such as books, genealogical records, house histories, personal and governmental documents, maps and photographs, and the Princeton Historical Society Museum on the second floor of the Princeton Center Building, which contains the Society's collection of historic artifacts such as furniture, paintings, and items from the town's agricultural and industrial past.

The Society also hosts lectures and community programs at the Museum, including local school tours. Its extensive website (www.princetonmahistory.org) includes historical information on a variety of town resources. The Society's publication, *Glimpses of Princeton Past*, is included in quarterly mailings of the Princeton Municipal Light Department (PMLD). Recognizing the importance of conservation, the Society has begun the process of scanning historic photographs and books to limit the use of these fragile resources, cataloging its inventory, and identifying archival needs. Future plans include working with local school children within the local history curriculum.

A special subcommittee was formed to assist with developing this chapter of the master plan. The subcommittee included members from both the

Historical Commission and the Historical Society, along with representatives from the Princeton Cultural Council, the Princeton Arts Society and the Princeton Public Library. Together, these organizations serve as the backbone for preservation planning, resource protection and community advocacy in Princeton. Through the master plan process, they have helped to draft cultural and historic resource goals and to identify, list and map Princeton's historic and cultural resources. Their list recognizes far more than the traditional "old house" and includes many types of resources: 18th century Hessian soldier artifacts, stone walls, scenic views, historic farms and scenic roads. The list is not intended to be a complete resource inventory, but rather a starting point for resource identification.

Historic Buildings

Princeton is blessed with an impressive, well-preserved collection of historic structures spanning more than 250 years, dating from its initial settlement in the mid-18th century through its period of popularity as a summer resort in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The buildings include historic houses, institutional and religious structures, and outbuildings such as barns and carriage houses. The town is fortunate to have a variety of architectural styles represented throughout the community: the Federal style, popular during the early- to mid- 19th century; the Greek Revival, Second Empire and Italianate styles that were fashionable in the mid-19th century; the Queen Anne and Shingle Styles popular during the late 19th century; and the Colonial Revival style of the early 20th century. These historic buildings contribute significantly to Princeton's visual character and provide visual documentation of its pattern of growth over time.

Without a completed resource inventory and accurate GIS maps, it is very difficult to document the number of historic structures in Princeton or their locations. Due to the town's early development history, however, a majority of its buildings

7 Hubbardston Road, Princeton Center. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

are presumed to be historically significant. Local assessor's records indicate that about 145 parcels in Princeton contain structures built prior to 1880, and according to the Historical Commission, approximately 475 houses were built before 1955-56. *The Princeton Story*, published for Princeton's 200th Anniversary in 1959, includes a map of 119 houses built prior to 1859, identifying each home's historic name and date of construction, where available.

While neither of these documents can be considered a complete inventory of historic buildings, they provide a clear indication of Princeton's wealth of older structures and the degree to which they are dispersed throughout town. Still, it is important to remember that more recently constructed buildings may also be historically significant. The National Park Service's criteria for historic significance include buildings that are 50 years old or older. Today, this means that any building constructed prior to 1956 may have historic significance.

Many post-war homes are not perceived as historic in contemporary opinion, yet they provide a glimpse of Princeton's development pattern through the mid-20th century. Three obvious examples of significant 20th century structures include the 1937 Auto Museum, an early 20th

century garage in East Princeton, Hubbard's Garage (ca. 1930) at 106 Main Street, and the recently relocated Blue Bell Diner.

Early in Princeton's development history, most buildings were modest in scale and served as farmsteads or small commercial establishments. Notable exceptions included the early estate of Moses Gill (no longer extant), and later examples such as Boylston Villa on Worcester Road, the Federal style home of Captain Benjamin Harrington (1835) and Fernside at 162 Mountain Road. During the 19th century, however, the town's success as a summer resort resulted in the construction of large summer homes in the popular Victorian styles of the time, along with a number of large inns and hotels.

The Dr. Charles Edwin Parker House and associated carriage house at 15 Worcester Road. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

After Princeton's popularity began to wane, most of these hospitality-related buildings burned and were not reconstructed, though several still exist. For example, the Mount Pleasant House (1868) on Goodnow Road, a grand Second Empire style inn, was purchased in the early 1900s and converted into private residences after a portion of the structure was moved eastward on Goodnow Road. Today, one of the Mount Pleasant House buildings remains a single-family home while the other has been redeveloped as five condominiums. Other remaining examples include earlier private residences that were converted into inns.

Fernside was enlarged for use as a summer boarding house for Harvard professors and students in 1871. Nearly 20 years later (1890), the house became an affordable summer vacation retreat for women working in the factories and shops in Boston. In 1921, the carriage barn was converted to a little theatre, where the women performed plays every Thursday evening. Fernside closed in 1989. The last remaining site to provide overnight accommodations in Princeton, Fernside was recently acquired by McLean Hospital. Other historically significant private buildings include the Harrington Farm and Goodnow Inn, which were converted from residences into inns to take advantage of the town's popularity to visitors during the 19th century. Harrington Farm now serves as a private event facility while Goodnow In is part of the Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary, owned by the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Throughout Princeton, the town's older homes define the views from its roadways. These homes are clustered in small hamlets and recognizable groupings that developed in response to both geographic limitations and historic roadway patterns. Each hamlet includes a diverse collection of architectural styles as the settlements evolved over time. It is in these areas (Map 4-1) that the Princeton Historical Commission has focused its inventory and National Register efforts, including the following:

- **The Village of East Princeton**: Developed during the 1800s along Keyes Brook, which provided water power for some of the town's early industry. While none of the area's industrial structures survive, the village's historic linear streetscape pattern remains with its well-preserved collection of Greek Revival style homes built for the area's mill owners, and more modest Greek Revival style workers' housing with distinctive gable-end facades

and classical details. Of particular note is Mechanic's Hall (1852), a Greek Revival style building now owned by the Town of Princeton, and the Stick Style Congregational Chapel (1885) at 81 Main Street, which is now a private dwelling.

- **Town Center**: This development at the junction of Mountain, Hubbardston and Worcester Roads and Boylston Avenue became the municipal center of Princeton when the Town's third Meeting House was built in 1838 (two previous meeting houses had been constructed to the north on a hilltop site). In the 1880s, the generosity and planning vision of Edward Goodnow created the town center of today. Goodnow provided the funding for construction of the Goodnow Memorial Building in 1883, and facilitated the relocation of the Congregational Church to its present site on the east side of the common on Mountain Road to allow for the construction of Bagg Hall (1885) on its original site. These two imposing municipal structures at the crest of the common provide commanding views over the town center. The common is also surrounded by 19th and early 20th century homes built in response to the community's heyday as a summer resort.

- **Russell Corner**: One of the town's earliest concentrations of Federal style homes around a four-acre green in the vicinity of Merriam and Sterling Roads.

Most of Princeton's historic structures are privately owned, but there are a few important structures in public and non-profit ownership. The Town of Princeton owns four buildings that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Three of the buildings are located in the Town Center area and are relatively well-preserved, and the fourth is in East Princeton:

- **Goodnow Memorial Building**: Constructed in 1883 in the Richardsonian style, in granite with brownstone trim. Designed by architect Stephen C. Earle and constructed by builders, Norcross Brothers.

Mechanics Hall, 104 Main Street in East Princeton. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

- **Bagg Hall**: Constructed in 1885, this Victorian Gothic/Romanesque Revival style building was designed by architect Stephen C. Earle.

- **Princeton Center Building**: Constructed in 1906 in the Shingle Style. The second floor was the town's high school, and the primary and intermediate grades occupied the first floor.

- **Mechanics Hall**: Built in 1852 by the Town of Princeton, Mechanics Hall is an impressive Greek Revival style structure at the entrance to East Princeton Village. From its beginnings as a school, Mechanics Hall has served many functions: space used the Mechanics Association and later, as meeting space for the East Princeton Improvement Society and a branch library. The East Princeton Improvement Society eventually vacated the building in the early 1970s.

  Mechanics Hall has been the subject of much local interest as Princeton struggles to find a reuse for it. The building has been inspected a few times in order to estimate renovation costs. Several issues need to be resolved,

including the site's ability to accommodate a septic system (there is currently no on-site wastewater disposal), limited parking and access barriers for people with disabilities. One study (ca. 1997) determined that the required renovations would cost about $350,000. Rising construction costs since then may place this estimate closer to $1M today.

About 10 years ago, the town installed a new roof in order to protect Mechanics Hall from further deterioration. In 2004, residents were polled for their opinions about the building's future. Most of the survey respondents said they wanted the town to retain ownership of Mechanics Hall and restore it for public use. An open house in September 2005 was well attended by local residents, many of whom had never been inside building. There has also been some private interest in the building, although no formal offers have been made.

In addition to these municipally-owned buildings, Princeton has several other historically significant properties under public and non-profit ownership:

- The Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased **Wachusett Mountain** in 1900 in order to preserve the mountain for public use. Many improvements were made to facilitate passive and active recreational use of the mountain, including several structures and landscape features constructed in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Today, the Reservation is operated by the Department of Conservation and Recreation and contains several historically significant structures and landscape features. Many of these features have been inventoried, but no formal historic designation has been completed.

- The **Mount Wachusett State Reservation Superintendent's House and Headquarters** was constructed in 1903-04 on Mountain Road at the base of Wachusett Mountain. The

State Reservation Superintendent's House on Mountain Road. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.*)

building is significant as the first dual-purpose building (residence and headquarters) erected for a state park system. Today, this transitional Shingle/Colonial Revival building is vacant.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is currently undertaking a multi-phase project to reuse the building for an Environmental Education and Research Center (EERC). Phase I has been completed, including renovation of the garage with an addition of a second-floor activity room, as well as installation of a well and septic system and an updated electrical supply. The yet-to-be-funded phases include renovation of the main house for meeting rooms, display areas, office space and researcher quarters.

This site is not listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places. An inventory form was completed for the building, recognizing its historic significance, but a determination of eligibility by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) was inconclusive because the agency needed more information.

- The Commonwealth also owns a second historic structure located within the Reservation, the **Olive Gates House** at 90 Westminster Road. Most recently, this ca. 1840 Greek Revival style house was leased for use as a

private residence, but it is currently vacant. The property has not been surveyed.

- The **Edward Goodnow Inn** at 113 Goodnow Road is owned by the non-profit Massachusetts Audubon Society as part of the Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary. The historic farmhouse was constructed in 1786 by Edward Goodnow Sr. and served as an inn for 21 years when the Boston-Barre stage line opened in 1823 in front of the house. The Goodnow family sold the farm in 1918 to Charles Crocker, who used it as a summer home and "gentleman's" farm. The farm also contains several other historically significant features, including an early 20th century gambrel roofed barn and stonewalls found throughout the property. The main house/ property has been surveyed and a historic structures report has been completed for the main house. An updated inventory form is being prepared and the Historical Commission hopes to pursue a National Register nomination for this property in the near future.

Princeton is fortunate that most of its privately-owned historic buildings are in a good state of preservation, with few inappropriate alterations evident on the exterior. To date, the town has not experienced many requests to demolish older structures for new construction. However, several vacant buildings need restoration, including the historic school building on School House Road, ca. 1799, which has been vacant for many years and exhibits signs of extreme deterioration. Its close proximity to wetlands limits expansion of this one-room building and ultimately limits the site's development potential.

Historic Farms

Early settlers developed farms primarily in the southern and western sections of Princeton, where soil conditions were more amenable to agricultural development. Forested land was cleared for farming, and fields were marked by stretches of stone walls. A ca. 1860 primitive painting of Brooks Farm from the Princeton Historical Society's collection provides a panoramic northeasterly view of Wachusett Mountain and the town center, showing its vast acreages of farmland and open space.

Goodnow Inn at Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary, 113 Goodnow Road. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

As agriculture grew less profitable and land became increasingly valuable during the 20th century, Princeton gradually lost its farming culture and the last two dairy farms closed within the past decade. There are still several farms in operation, but they are no longer livestock-related. New growth forests emerged as Princeton's expansive fields were left untilled, yet the agrarian past remains visible in the town's barns, outbuildings, stonewalls and historic farm houses that dot the landscape. Today, the remaining farms provide some of Princeton's most impressive scenic vistas and contribute to its rural character.

Several farms have limited or permanent protection through various means. However, while these designations help to preserve agricultural landscapes, the farm structures have no comparable level of protection. Two notable historic farms remaining in operation today include:

- **Goodnow Inn**: The Massachusetts Audubon Society has owned the Goodnow Inn since 1946, when the Crocker family donated its

1,100 acres for use as the Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary. The farm retains three outbuildings still in use for housing, a small livestock collection and farming equipment. The gambrel roofed barn dating from the Crocker family is particularly striking. The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities completed a historic structures report on the historic farmhouse. Some renovation work was completed on an ell of the farmhouse to comply with ADA standards and to provide laboratory and educational space. The Society plans to complete some interior cosmetic work on the historic portion of the building.

- **Stimson Farm**: Located on Thompson Road, this "Century Farm" has been in the same family since it was constructed in 1743. It still retains its original farmhouse and barn. The family sold the development rights to the farm in 1987, permanently protecting it for agricultural use through the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program.

Property at 66 Main Street, East Princeton, including the Stuart Barn. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

Historic farms are composed of more than their landscapes and farmhouses. The loss of agricultural outbuildings and stone walls will permanently alter the landscape and begin to eclipse the visual qualities of "place" that make Princeton special. Deferred maintenance and inactivity further contribute to the demise of these structures, as does their lack of flexibility in redevelopment. Furthermore, the lack of a comprehensive inventory makes it difficult to protect them.

Barns

Princeton's old barns are community landmarks that serve as a visual reminder of the town's agrarian past. While most of the town's historic farmhouses have been well-preserved, the same cannot be said for many of its remaining barns. For those barns still in use, the structures appear to be in relatively sound condition. However, many of the vacant or unused barns show evidence of serious deterioration. The nature of a barn's building construction, such as no foundation and sill on grade, contributes to its deterioration unless the barn is regularly maintained and repaired.

Princeton does not have a complete inventory of its historic barns and related agrarian outbuildings. To date, the town has not undertaken a concerted effort to encourage the preservation of these historic and cultural resources, but the Princeton Historical Commission has begun documenting the history of several older farms.

Princeton also has many mid- to late-19th century residential and industrial-related barns or carriage houses. Many are attached to their associated houses, as was a common building practice throughout New England during the 19th

century. Examples of these outbuildings can be seen adjoining houses in East Princeton and in the Town Center. A notable one is the Stuart Barn at 66 Main Street in East Princeton. This Gothic Style barn served as an overnight storage facility for chairs made at the Stuart chair factory and as a stable for horses.

Stone Walls

Stone walls supply physical evidence of a town's agrarian heritage. They delineate the historic development pattern of land ownership and agricultural use. In Princeton, stone walls exist throughout the town along and within now-forested land, along scenic roads and bordering the perimeter of the remaining farmland and open space. Deferred maintenance and natural erosion have caused many of these dry-laid stone walls to deteriorate. Princeton does not have an inventory of its stone walls, but some notable examples include:

- Stone wall along the perimeter of the Town Pound (1768) on Mountain Road
- Stone wall along Thompson Road
- Stone walls built by Hessian soldiers during the 18th century near the intersection of Routes 31 & 62 along Gregory Hill Road
- Stone wall across from Fernside
- Stone wall on Sam Cobb Lane
- Stone wall near 38 Radford Road

Zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations usually provide little protection for stone walls during development. In Massachusetts, many communities have adopted the provisions of M.G.L. c.40, s.15C, the Scenic Roads Act, to provide some degree of protection for stone walls and significant trees within the public right-of-way of roads designated as scenic. Several years ago, however, Princeton town meeting rejected a proposal to designate scenic roads.

Keyes Brook, viewed from Gleason Road, flowing under the stone arch bridge. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

Scenic Landscapes

Princeton's open spaces and scenic landscapes contribute as much to the town's culture and sense of place as its historic structures. The town has a wealth of existing landscapes that have retained their agricultural character and natural and scenic qualities. These sites have not been surveyed as part of a town-wide cultural resource inventory, and other than a partial listing in the 1990 Open Space and Recreation Plan, they have not been fully documented. In addition to sites with recognized natural and scenic qualities identified in the Open Space chapter, Princeton has other heritage landscapes with cultural significance:

- Redemption Rock on Route 140, north of the intersection with Route 31, is now owned by The Trustees of Reservations, which has erected a state highway historic marker to document the site where ransom was paid to Indians to release Mary Rowlandson in 1675.
- The waterfalls just off Route 140 on Gleason Road not only provide a scenic view of Keyes

Brook, but also provide views of the remnants of East Princeton's industrial mills and a historic stone arch bridge.

Heritage Trees

Many of Princeton's roadways are lined with some of the community's oldest trees, indicative of the town's agrarian heritage where land was often deforested except along roadways and property boundaries. A fine example is the majestic trees and stone walls at Bryn Coron Farm along the roadway edge of Route 62, as well as the old trees on the green at Russell Corner. Princeton's mature tree population is contending not only with the stresses associated with natural aging but also the environmental harm caused by road salt.

Scenic Roadways

One of the major features that contribute to Princeton's rural character is its scenic roadways. The town's 250 years of transportation patterns endure today. Lined with mature trees and stonewalls, many of these roadways retain their narrow width and winding routes. They also provide unmatched views to some of the town's most scenic rural vistas. Other features that contribute to a road's rural quality include details such as guard rail design. In Princeton, there are a variety of guard rails present, ranging from older cable-style rails, many of which are deteriorated and no longer meet safety standards, to more modern steel guardrails.

Cemeteries

Princeton has several town-owned cemeteries and one privately owned burial plot that is maintained by the town. The cemeteries include:

- South Cemetery
- West Cemetery

Views from the road in Princeton. Hall's Field, Gregory Hill Road (above), approaching the town center, and looking west along Hubbardston Road (below). (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

- Woodlawn Cemetery
- Meeting House Cemetery
- West Sterling Cemetery/Parker I
- Parker II/Beaman Road
- North Cemetery
- Boylston Burying Ground, a private burial plot of the Boylston family, owned by a private trust. Since the trust has limited funds, the town maintains the burial plot.

Only two of these cemeteries have been surveyed as part of the town's inventory: Boylston Burial Ground (1828-1893) and Meeting House Cemetery (1770-1897). The town is currently cataloging Woodlawn Cemetery into a town database system, using burial records kept in Bagg Hall. The remaining cemeteries will also be included. Other than the Boylston family burial ground, it is unclear whether other private family burial plots exist in Princeton. The Historical Commission has requested funds from town meeting this year to begin restoring monuments in Meeting House Cemetery. There has been no monument restoration work in Princeton since 1959.

Meeting House Cemetery on Mountain Road. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.*)

Archaeological Resources

With more than four centuries of Native American and European settlement, Princeton has a very high potential for archaeologically significant sites located throughout the community. According to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), Princeton has four documented ancient Native American sites of unknown dates and 14 documented historic archaeological sites. Historic sites include the remains of industrials sites in East Princeton, including an 18th century grist mill and a 19th century dam on Keyes Brook, as well as the stone foundation of one of the chair factory buildings and stone-lined waterway. Other archaeological resources identified in Princeton include the original sites of the Methodist Church, the Moses Gill Estate foundation on the site of Boylston Villa, and the foundation of the Joshua Wilder House on land now owned by Norco Rod and Gun Club.

PAST PLANS, STUDIES & REPORTS

Princeton has not completed a preservation plan that focuses on historic and cultural resources, but local plans prepared over the past 30 years have recognized, at least implicitly, the role that Princeton's heritage plays in defining its character as a rural, scenic community. Still, while past plans have identified historic preservation as an important goal for the community, their attention to historic resources is fairly uneven, with some including only a sentence or two and others listing preservation goals and objectives. For example, the Princeton Town Plan (1970 listed preservation of the town's rural, scenic quality as a master plan goal, yet the 1975 Town Plan makes only minimal reference to several historic sites, namely Redemption Rock and Fernside as they relate to conservation land. Other than a brief recognition of Princeton's historic resources, the 1986 Town Plan Report makes no mention of preservation-related goals. However, the Princeton Town Plan 1980-1985 made three specific recommendations for historic resource protection:

- Establish a local historic district (M.G.L. c.40C) in the Town Center, including the town common and surrounding homes and institutional buildings;
- Acquire land to create buffers around the town's historic cemeteries; and
- Adopt a scenic roads bylaw and regulations.

In 1991, the Land Use Development Plan also recommended that Princeton consider adopting a local historic district bylaw under M.G.L. c.40C to protect the historic character of the Town Cen-

ter. It also recommended a Scenic Roads Bylaw, which town meeting subsequently rejected.

Princeton's most recent Open Space and Recreation Plan (2000) provides the most in-depth discussion of historic resources and includes an inventory of some of the town's scenic, cultural and historic areas. The plan embraced several historic and cultural resource goals and objectives, as reflected in the following excerpts:

Protection and enhancement of the natural environment through:

- Land acquisitions that enhance current natural attributes (e.g. open fields, stone walls, farmlands, scenic views) which significantly define the rural character of Princeton.

Protection/preservation of scenic landscape, open meadows, and agricultural fields which preserve the community character through:

- Local awareness of Princeton's natural, geological and historic resources via inventories maintained by appropriate town-appointed boards/committees.

- Preservation and promotion of activities involving the development and exploration of historic sites, agricultural activities and geological features.

Preservation of existing open space areas and areas of outstanding beauty through:

- Permanent protection of documented historic sites listed in the town registry.

- Creation of an inventory of scenic roads, vistas and fields of public interest.

Despite the erratic attention to historic and cultural resource protection in Princeton's earlier plans, the town has pursued several preservation planning initiatives. Even without legislation in place to require protection of buildings, Princeton has preserved its historic resources through private and public action. After the automobile effectively dismantled the town's summer tourism industry, many large summer homes fell out of favor, including some of the earliest estates such as Boylston Villa and Fernside. Residents have undertaken private restoration efforts to return these homes to their original grandeur. Fernside's former owners spent 2 ½ years restoring the building before reopening it as the Fernside Inn in 1996. When the property was sold to McLean Hospital in 2006, the Historical Commission met with hospital representatives to discuss the continued preservation of this landmark.

The town has invested in preserving its own historic buildings, too. During the 1990s, Princeton received a Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) grant from MHC to repair the roof of Bagg Hall. Since MPPF is a matching grant, the town had to contribute 50% of the repair costs. As a condition of the grant, a preservation restriction was placed on the building, requiring MHC approval of any future work undertaken on Bagg Hall. While this project met a critical maintenance need, it did not include restoring the building's second-floor interior, where traces of original ornamental painting can be seen on the meeting room's ceiling as later layers of paint have peeled away.

In 2001, Princeton received a Preservation Award from MHC for renovations to the Princeton Public Library (1999-2001). The town obtained a matching grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners to pay for interior renovations and restoration work, which cost a total of $896,330.[1] In the past, Princeton had a mainte-

[1] Wendy Pape, Library Director, Princeton Public Library Long-Range Plan 2005-2010, 9.

The Smith Farm on Hubbardston Road, including the Federal-style Benjamin Cheever/George Mason House (ca. 1780) and dairy barn (top), and the Stimson Farm on Thompson Road (right), two examples of the agricultural resources identified by the Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program as "high importance" for preservation planning. (*Photos by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

nance fund to preserve the building's slate roof, but other capital needs and limited revenue have made it difficult for the town to continue this practice. Princeton also converted the Princeton Center Building into private office and community space when the former school was decommissioned in the 1990s. Today, the Princeton Historical Society, the Princeton Arts Society, the Council on Aging, a yoga facility and private studios occupy space in the building and provide some revenue for building maintenance. Finally, the town has begun the process of documenting Princeton's resources through historical surveys and National Register nominations.

Princeton's Historic Resource Inventory

According to MHC, Princeton has a partially complete inventory of its historic resources. The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) report for Princeton indicates that about 246 buildings, burial grounds, objects, structures and areas have been inventoried. The inventory forms are on file at the Princeton Public Library and MHC. While many of the building forms were recently completed and they include a resource's historic, architectural and contextual significance, the town recognized that it needed to look town-wide and include a composite of all types of historic resources, including stone walls, outbuildings, landscapes, cemeteries, bridges and area forms. The Historical Commission initiated this process with assistance from MHC and has nearly finished a town-wide survey.

National Register Historic Districts

Princeton currently has three National Register Districts and one National Register Individually Listed Property:[2]

- East Princeton Historic District: Listed on 3/18/2004, with 91 contributing properties.
- Princeton Center Historic District: Listed on 2/26/1999, with five contributing properties; expanded on March 10, 2006 to include an additional 103 properties.
- Russell Corner Historic District, which includes 32 buildings and one archaeological site.
- Fernside, Vacation Home for Working Girls: Listed on 6/27/2002 as an individual property.

The Historical Commission also has completed historic survey work to begin the process of a National Register Nomination for West Village. More recently, the Commission and a preservation consultant inventoried the Four Corners area, including 13 properties, and MHC has determined that it is eligible for listing on the National Register. In addition, it recently installed historic district signage at the entrances to East Princeton Village along Main Street. Several buildings within the district have individual National Register plaques.

Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

Princeton recently participated in a program offered by the Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) to identify and document heritage landscapes that are vital to the town's history, character and quality of life. The Heritage Landscape Inventory Program is designed to increase awareness about the many different types of heritage landscapes found throughout the Commonwealth and to help communities plan for their preservation. DCR worked closely with local officials and residents to identify Princeton's heritage landscapes and to determine appropriate preservation tools for several of the most critical areas. This work culminated in the *Princeton Reconnaissance Report* (2006), which the town can employ as a framework for future preservation activities related to heritage landscapes.

ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Like so many initiatives in Princeton, the preservation of historic resources has been accomplished mainly on a voluntary basis. Many residents say they cherish Princeton's historic buildings, stone walls and tree-lined roads, yet the town has been unsuccessful at instituting legislation to provide long-term or perpetual protection for these resources.

Princeton does not have a demolition delay bylaw or local historic districts under M.G.L. c.40C, which is unusual for a town with such a vast collection of cultural artifacts. In addition, the town has not accepted the Community Preservation Act (CPA), a law that provides funds for the preservation of historic resources and open space and the creation of affordable housing. To date, more than 120 cities and towns in the Commonwealth have adopted the CPA. A surcharge of up to 3.0% may be placed on local real estate tax levies, and some exemptions are allowed by local option. Currently, the state will match any funds raised by a community through its Community Preservation Trust Fund.

Princeton's 1980 and 1991 master plan updates recommended that the town accept the provisions of M.G.L. c.40, s.15C, and adopt a Scenic Roadway Bylaw to protect the rural, natural, historic and scenic qualities of roadways that contribute to Princeton's rural ambiance. The 1991 Land Use Development Plan included a proposed bylaw for

[2] Phil Bergin, National Register Program, Massachusetts Historical Commission

town meeting action and listed 42 specific roads or portions thereof for scenic roads designation, based on the recommendations of a subcommittee that worked on the project. The proposed bylaw would have regulated any "repair, maintenance, reconstruction, or paving work" that involved cutting or removing trees or altering stone walls by requiring the consent of the Planning Board, following a public hearing. If the road work did not involve cutting trees or tearing down stone walls, no public hearing would be required.

People do not agree that a scenic roads bylaw is appropriate for Princeton. Some residents think all of the town's roads should be classified as scenic because they exhibit important scenic characteristics, and others are concerned that a scenic roads bylaw could make it difficult for the Highway Department to take care of Princeton's streets. Communities throughout the state have enacted scenic roads bylaws, in some cases applying the regulations to all roadways and in others to a specific list of roads designated by town meeting.

By state law, only roads accepted by the town as public ways can be designated as scenic roads. State numbered routes are not eligible. However, any federally funded or permitted roadway work must be reviewed under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to determine its impacts on any resources listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Further, work involving cutting or trimming of trees not associated with road improvements (such as by a utility company) is covered by the Public Shade Tree Act, M.G.L. c.87. This law prohibits trimming or removing any tree touching on a public right-of-way without a hearing before the tree warden. Like all towns, Princeton receives state Chapter 90 funds for roadway improvements. When Chapter 90 funds were used to improve Mountain Road, the project included installation of guard rails with weathering steel and wood posts, which many consider to be more appropriate for rural communities than the traditional steel guardrails on highways. Currently, Princeton does not have a policy on design standards for guardrails.

Princeton is not alone in its struggle to preserve the historic and cultural resources that define its rural ambiance. Other communities throughout Massachusetts and the nation also find it difficult to save cultural artifacts such as stone walls, old barns, heritage landscapes and historic buildings. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Massachusetts and the Stone Wall Initiative (SWI) are just a few of the preservation groups that provide technical assistance and funds to help communities preserve their heritage. Many of these organizations have extensive websites that can assist local officials with preservation activities. Collaborating with regional preservation organizations can also assist Princeton in its historic and cultural endeavors.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Preservation Act

As recommended in the Open Space and Natural Resources chapter, Princeton needs to consider adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA). Throughout the master plan process, members of the master plan committee and other residents said many times that Princeton should have resources to acquire open space. However, it is also crucial to protect and preserve historic built assets.

The visual character of every town is defined not only by landscapes, but also by buildings, and Princeton is no exception. It often is easier to build support for saving land from development than for saving historic buildings from deterioration, disinvestment or outright demolition. Princeton has many historic preservation needs: renovating the second floor of Bagg Hall, resolving the fate of Mechanics Hall, and making repairs in historic cemeteries. These kinds of projects usu-

ally need a dedicated revenue stream even more than open space.

In addition, state laws permit communities to acquire land for open space and other public uses, but preserving privately owned buildings is generally not an allowable use of local revenue. However, communities can invest CPA funds in historic properties and may, in exchange, require a historic preservation deed restriction, depending on how the CPA revenue is spent. Finally, access to CPA funds would enable the Historical Commission to apply for matching grants from the state to conduct preservation planning studies and prepare National Register nominations.

Historic Bagg Hall needs interior renovations in order for the second-floor meeting hall to be used for public functions. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission*.)

Preservation Planning

The Princeton Historical Commission needs the town's support to compete for state grants that help communities carry out preservation planning and preservation projects. In Princeton, historic preservation has been a matter of stewardship by committed volunteers, but Princeton has preservation needs that go beyond what volunteers can do on their own. To qualify for preservation grants, a city or town has to provide local funds as a match. The grants are paid on a reimbursement basis, which means the community must spend local funds first. If Princeton voters decide that adopting CPA is not in their best interest, the town will need to consider other ways to fund preservation activities.

The second floor of historic Bagg Hall should be restored for public use, which means the facility must be made accessible to people with disabilities. The town's most at-risk historic building, Mechanics Hall, continues to deteriorate because Princeton has not had the funds to restore it. Even though the Princeton Public Library was recently renovated, it needs preventive maintenance and some modest repairs. A common problem in many towns is that following a major public building project, little if any funding is placed in reserve to maintain and protect the asset. Further, Princeton needs a suitable storage facility for historic artifacts and documents, and the town's historic burial grounds need restoration work as well. Some of these projects may seem like dispensable luxuries, but they will be lost opportunities if the town does not begin to address them very soon.

Preservation Tools

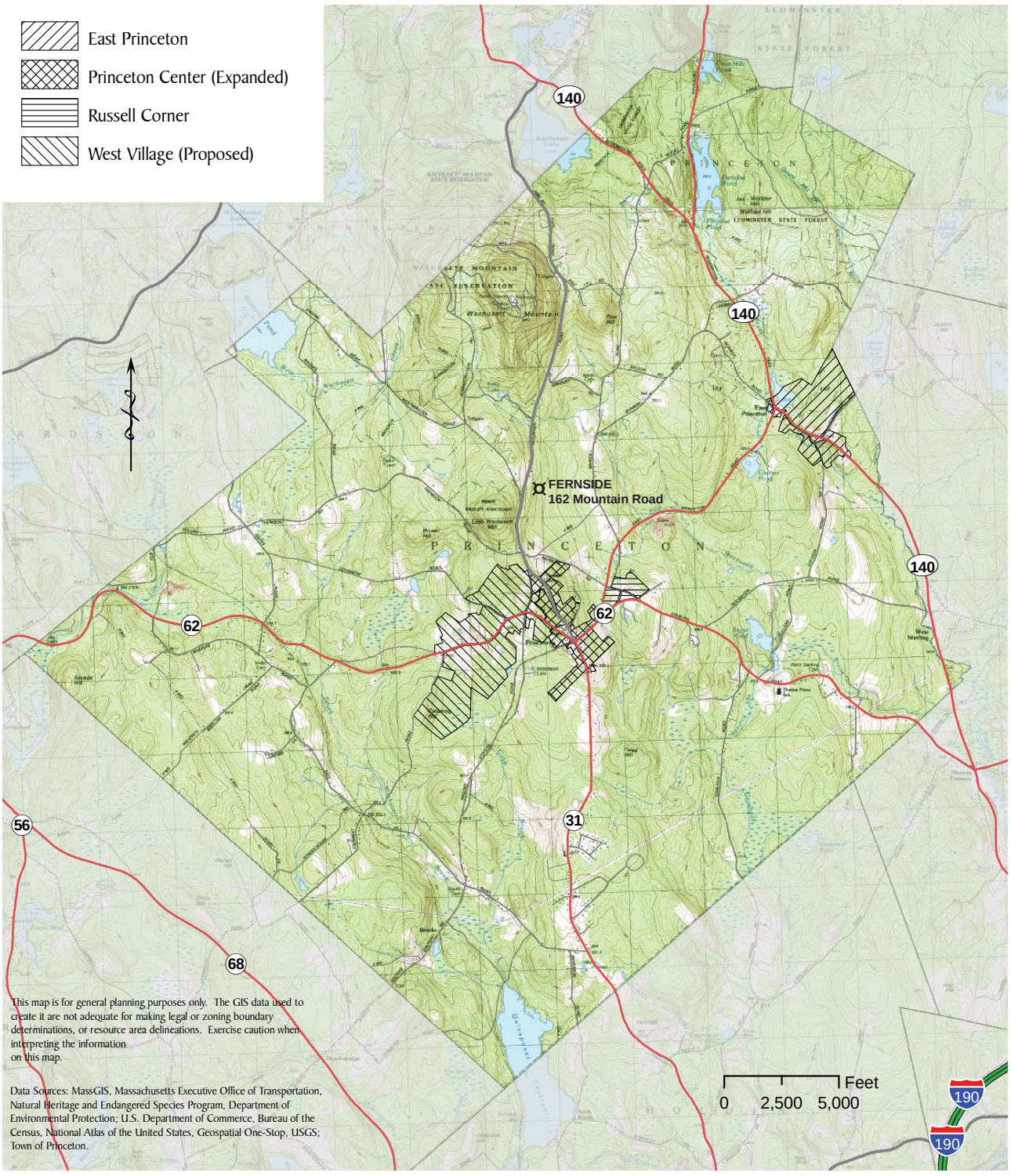
The town should study whether to designate Princeton Center and East Princeton as local historic districts under M.G.L. c.40C, or alternatively, neighborhood conservation districts. Local historic districts offer the most effective legal protection against destruction of or inappropriate alterations to historic buildings. In addition, Princeton should consider establishing a demolition delay bylaw that would apply to any building over 50 years of age, regardless of its location. Another way to approach demolition delay is to limit its applicability to a list of buildings already determined to be historically significant, based on a cultural resource survey or a preservation plan.

National Register Nominations for State Property

The Town of Princeton has taken many steps to identify and document historic buildings and seek historic district nominations to the National Register of Historic Places. For a small town that has no staff planner, Princeton has accomplished more with qualified, committed volunteers than many suburbs that have the financial and staff resources for preservation planning and preservation projects. Both the town and private homeowners have taken stewardship of Princeton's historic resources very seriously.

The Olive Gates House on Westminster Road, owned by the state, has no mechanisms in place to protect it from inappropriate alterations or demolition. (Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.)

The state owns two historically significant buildings in Princeton: the State Reservation Superintendent's House and Headquarters on Mountain Road and the Olive Gates House at 90 Westminster Road. Unfortunately, they are not listed on the National Register and there are no mechanisms in place to protect them. The town should work with its state legislators, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) to ensure that the Commonwealth follows through with National Register nominations for these buildings.



Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

4.1 NATIONAL REGISTER DISTRICTS

(Approximate Boundaries)

Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Consulting Team:

COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES GROUP, INC.
Larry Koff & Associates
Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, inc.

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CHAPTER 5

HOUSING ELEMENT

Housing is a controversial subject in most small towns. While they may want to provide affordable or senior housing, or housing that simply offers more options than conventional single-family homes, communities have found it very difficult to absorb the impacts of new development. Opinions about housing, taxes and open space often fuse during a master plan process and drive many land use policy decisions, sometimes at the expense of sound planning and social fairness. However, housing needs and limited housing choices go hand-in-hand because towns without many young, elderly, minority or low-income households also have fairly homogenous housing.

For Princeton and other small towns in the Wachusett region, an important policy question is whether local regulations facilitate or impede fair and affordable housing. Toward that end, the housing element of a master plan examines the impact of housing policy on the demographic characteristics of a community, market trends, development regulations, and housing needs that remain unmet by ordinary market forces. Like the suburbs and small towns near Boston or Springfield, Princeton and neighboring Westminster, Holden, Paxton, Rutland, Sterling and Hubbardston differ quite a bit from nearby cities – and from each other. The differences are systemic and they influence all aspects of a population profile, such as the age, racial and ethnic make-up of small-town populations or their household size and income characteristics. For the most part, housing costs perpetuate these differences. The types, sizes and value of a community's homes affect its population characteristics, and Princeton is no exception.

Historic home on Houghton Road. (*Photo supplied by Master Plan Steering Committee.*)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Population Growth

Princeton's population has more than doubled since 1970, when the town's official census tally included 1,681 people and its total housing inventory, 509 homes. During the 1990s, Princeton's population rose by only 5.1%, a rate roughly consistent with that of the state as a whole (5.5%). For Princeton, the past decade represented the first substantial decline in rate of population growth since the 1940s, when the number of people living in Princeton increased by 44.7%.

In contrast, Holden, Sterling and Leominster absorbed population growth rates of 8-12% from 1990-2000, and the populations of Hubbardston and Rutland increased by 39.8% and 28.7%. In fact, Hubbardston's population growth rate ranked ninth out of all 351 cities and towns in the Commonwealth. As a result, Princeton has replaced Hubbardston as the Wachusett region's

TABLE 5.1: POPULATION CHANGE, STATE & REGION, 1930-2000

Geography	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Massachusetts	4,248,326	4,316,721	4,690,514	5,148,578	5,689,377	5,737,037	6,016,425	6,349,097
Worcester County	490,737	504,470	546,401	583,228	638,114	646,352	709,705	750,963
Fitchburg	40,692	41,824	42,691	43,021	43,343	39,580	41,194	39,102
Gardner	19,399	20,206	19,581	19,038	19,748	17,900	20,125	20,770
Holden	3,871	3,924	5,975	10,117	12,564	13,336	14,628	15,621
Hubbardston	1,010	1,022	1,134	1,217	1,437	1,797	2,797	3,909
Leominster	21,810	22,226	24,075	27,929	32,939	34,508	38,145	41,303
Paxton	672	791	1,066	2,399	3,731	3,762	4,047	4,386
PRINCETON	717	713	1,032	1,360	1,681	2,425	3,189	3,353
Rutland	2,442	2,181	3,056	3,253	3,198	4,334	4,936	6,353
Sterling	1,502	1,713	2,166	3,193	4,247	5,440	6,481	7,257
Westminster	1,925	2,126	2,768	4,022	4,273	5,139	6,191	6,907
Worcester	195,311	193,694	203,486	186,587	176,572	161,799	169,759	172,648

Source: MISER, Bureau of the Census.

least densely populated town. Today, its population density is only 94.6 persons per sq. mi., which is comparable to many rural communities in Franklin and Berkshire Counties.

Population Age

Princeton differs somewhat from other Wachusett communities in the age make-up of its population. Children under 18 comprise a larger percentage of the population in Princeton than in all towns nearby except Hubbardston and Rutland, and the percentage of persons over 65 is disproportionately small. From 1990-2000, Princeton experienced a lower rate of school-age (5-17) population growth than the state as a whole and most towns nearby, and it also experienced a much larger percentage decrease in pre-school population. The most noteworthy age cohort growth occurred among persons 65-74, a sub-set of the senior population that increased by 35.4%. Princeton also absorbed considerable growth among persons 45-54 and 55-65, but this is true for most neighboring communities as well.

Finally, Princeton is the only town in the region that lost population among persons 25-34 during the 1990s. Although Princeton surpassed the entire region for decline among persons 18-24, the rate of change was not dramatically different from that of Worcester County overall or Leominster, Holden, Sterling.

Race, Ethnicity & National Origin

The total population in Princeton's region increased by only 3.2% from 1990-2000, but the number of minorities increased significantly. The low rate of population growth region-wide is partially attributable to a net decline in Fitchburg's total population (-2,092), yet Fitchburg gained more racial minorities (2,748) than it lost in total population. Worcester also absorbed dramatic growth among racial and Hispanic minorities – 7.6 minority persons for every one-person increase in total population – and to a lesser extent, so did Leominster and Gardner.[1]

Of the region's absolute minority population increase of 29,978 people, 97.5% live in Worcester, Fitchburg, Leominster and Gardner. In contrast, the 55% of the region's total population growth occurred outside the cities, mainly

[1] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Tables P7, P8; 1990 Census, Summary File 1, Table P006.

TABLE 5.2: PERSONS UNDER 18, OVER 65, AND CHANGE IN POPULATION PERCENT, 1990-2000

Geography	Census 2000 Population	Population % <18 Years	1990-2000 % Growth <18 Years	Population % 65+	1990-2000 % Growth 65+ Years
Massachusetts	6,349,097	23.6%	10.9%	13.5%	5.0%
Worcester County	750,963	25.6%	11.1%	13.0%	0.7%
Fitchburg	39,102	25.8%	0.9%	14.6%	-9.7%
Gardner	20,770	23.7%	8.2%	16.1%	-1.5%
Holden	15,621	27.0%	13.6%	14.2%	1.4%
Hubbardston	3,909	31.1%	42.6%	6.9%	36.2%
Leominster	41,303	25.5%	18.7%	13.6%	13.3%
Paxton	4,386	23.9%	10.4%	14.6%	19.2%
PRINCETON	3,353	28.9%	4.5%	8.5%	28.8%
Rutland	6,353	30.8%	32.1%	7.7%	6.1%
Sterling	7,257	27.5%	9.0%	9.0%	18.2%
Westminster	6,907	26.8%	12.8%	10.9%	11.6%
Worcester	172,648	23.6%	7.6%	14.1%	-10.6%

Source: Census 2000, Summary File 1, Table P12; 1990 Census, Summary File 1, Table P011.

in Hubbardston and Rutland. Today, the racial, ethnic and cultural characteristics of Princeton and neighboring small towns are very similar. Princeton residents are primarily white (96.7%) and of English, Irish, French, Italian, German and Polish descent. Hispanic-Latino persons comprise Princeton's largest minority population (1.5%) and they are primarily Mexican and Puerto Rican persons. Among racial minorities, Asian persons – primarily Korean and Chinese – make up 1.0% of the total population.[2]

Overall, Princeton, Paxton and Rutland have slightly more diverse populations than neighboring towns, but all of the small towns differ significantly from the region's cities, where minorities comprise 13-23% of the total population. According to the last federal census, approximately 5% of Princeton's population is foreign-born and a majority of its foreign-born persons are naturalized citizens. A few Princeton households speak a language other than English at home, but linguistic isolation is nearly non-existent in Princeton and other small towns in the Wachusett region. In contrast, 5-8% of the households in Fitchburg, Leominster and Worcester are linguistically isolated, primarily those speaking Spanish or other Indo-European languages at home.[3]

Households and Families

New housing development responds primarily to household formation rates and an expanding economy. A **household** consists of two or more people living in the same housing unit or a single person living alone, which means that in any given community, the number of households is the same as the number of occupied housing units. Many factors contribute to demand for housing and all relate to the nation's changing household characteristics: declining household sizes, delayed marriages, divorce rates, increasing numbers of non-traditional households, longer life spans, and significantly, the aging of Baby Boomers and the so-called "Echo Boom." In Massachusetts, these conditions coupled with the outward migration of jobs from the Boston area have pushed housing

[2] Ibid, Summary File 3, Tables PCT 16, PCT19.

[3] Census 2000, Summary File 3, Tables P19, P21, P22.

demand west toward Worcester, and the results can be seen throughout Princeton's region.

Princeton's 1,166 households are predominantly **families**, i.e., households of two or more persons related by blood, marriage or adoption. Compared to neighboring towns, Princeton has the largest percentage of family households and the third highest average number of children under 18 per family. Like other affluent communities, Princeton has a strikingly large percentage of married-couple families: 90.7%. Married couples represent 76% of all families statewide, and 85-89% in the small towns adjacent to Princeton. In contrast, less than 70% of all families in Worcester and Fitchburg are married-couple families, and 23-27% are families headed by single women. In addition, more than 97% of Princeton's families are white, non-Hispanic, and this is generally true in neighboring towns as well. Princeton also has the region's smallest percentage of households with subfamilies, such as parents, their adult children and grandchildren living in the same home.[4]

Since Princeton ranks highest in the region for percentage of family households, by definition it ranks lowest for percentage of **non-family households**. Non-family households include one-person households and households of two or more unrelated people, such as roommates and unmarried partners. Statewide and nationally, non-family households tend to share two characteristics: most are single people living alone, and seniors (over 65) often make up a larger percentage of non-family households than all households. These characteristics apply to Princeton, too, but it has a smaller percentage of one-person households than most of the region's towns. Non-family households in nearby cities are more likely to be young people (under 35), particularly in Worcester and Fitchburg, the only communities in the region that approximate the statewide average (25.7%).[5]

Of all 45,813 non-family households in Princeton's area, households of two or more unrelated people account for about 19%, which is somewhat lower than the national average. Unmarried partners comprise a fairly small percentage of all households – about 5.2% for the state as a whole – and in Princeton, they represent 4%.[6]

Household and Family Wealth

Princeton's 1999 median household income of $80,993 is the state's 38th highest and it significantly exceeds that of all surrounding towns except Paxton ($72,039). Since 1990, the median household income in Princeton has increased by 53.7%, higher than the average increase of 46.7% for the rural towns in the area (in current dollars).[7] Twenty years ago, Paxton led the region for household wealth with a median household income that ranked 25th for the state as a whole, while Princeton's state rank was 50. By Census 2000, the economic position of Princeton households had changed quite a bit, primarily due to the high wage and salary incomes of young and middle-age families that moved into the town during the 1990s.

About 5% of all Princeton households have annual incomes exceeding $200,000, and the sum of their incomes is more than 17% of the town's aggregate household income. However, not all Princeton households are well off. For example, its over-75 households have much lower incomes, and the gap between the median for over-75 households and households overall is much larger in Princeton than in any other community in the region. The households with the lowest incomes in Princeton are single women over 65: $13,056. Although Princeton has very few households with

[4] Census 2000, Summary File 1 Tables P24, P26, P31A-P31I; Summary File 3 Table PCT6.

[5] Census 2000, Summary File 1, Tables P21, P25, P26.

[6] Census 2000, Summary File 1, Table PCT114, PCT15.

[7] Census 2000, Summary File 3 Table P53; Massachusetts Department of Revenue, "Median Household Income: 1979-1999," Municipal Data Bank.

incomes below poverty, its households below poverty include comparatively large percentages of families and non-family households over 65.[8]

Low- and Moderate-Income Households

Most housing subsidy programs define "low and moderate income" as households with incomes at or below 80% of the area median income (AMI) for the metropolitan or non-metropolitan area in which they live. Today, a four-person family in Princeton with an annual income of $57,350 qualifies as a moderate-income household.[9] As of the most recent federal census, Princeton had the second smallest percentage of low- and moderate-income households in the region: 18.9%. Low- and moderate-income households in Princeton and other small towns in the Wachusett region share at least three characteristics:[10]

- Most are homeowners, not renters. In Princeton, low- and moderate-income homeowners outnumber renters by 5:1.

- They are more likely to be seniors. More than 46% of Princeton's lower-income households are seniors, yet the elderly comprise only 15% of all households in town.

- They are more likely to be moderate-income than low- or very-low-income. Statewide, about 37% of all low- and moderate-income households have incomes in the moderate range. In Princeton, they represent 46.4% of the town's low- and moderate-income households, and similar (or larger) percentages can be found in Paxton, Sterling and Westminster.

Housing Characteristics

Princeton's development pattern is characterized by very low-density housing, and 95% of its housing units are detached single-family homes. During the 1990s, Princeton's housing inventory increased by 8.4% and nearly all of the increase stems from single-family home construction.

Despite Princeton's high population growth rates from 1940-1990, its housing stock is fairly old. Princeton exceeds all of the surrounding small towns for percentage of homes built prior to 1940 (23.3%), the first year that detailed housing statistics were reported in the federal census. Princeton homes are also relatively large. Its average housing unit contains seven rooms, and more than one third of all homes have four or more bedrooms. Paxton is the only town with homes that exceed Princeton's in average size. In contrast, housing units in the region's four cities are much smaller, with an average of 5-5.4 rooms per unit and less than 14% with four or more bedrooms.

Property records maintained by the assessor reinforce the Census Bureau's housing data for Princeton. Table 5.3 shows that Princeton's newest and oldest homes are quite large, defined not only by their living area but also by their height. Moreover, although many of Princeton's houses occupy lots that approximate the minimum area required by zoning today (two acres), the average lot size for any given period of construction is distorted by the presence of some very large parcels. In fact, it is not uncommon for single-family homeowners in Princeton to own more than 10 acres of land. The median lot size also exceeds the current minimum lot area, except for homes built during the 1960s and the early 20th century.

Tenure

Homeowners. Given the prevalence of single-family homes in Princeton, it is not surprising to

[8] Census 2000, Summary File 3 Tables P52, P54, P56, P92, PCT42.

[9] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), "FY 2006 Income Limits," (8 March 2006), see Worcester, MA HUD Metro FMR Area (HMFA) at <http://www.huduser.org/datasets/il/il06/index.html.>

[10] HUD, Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) Data 2000, "Housing Problems" Series, State of the Cities Data System at <http://socds.huduser.org/index.html>.

TABLE 5.3: SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES BY AGE, LOT AREA, SIZE AND ASSESSED VALUE

		Average Characteristics by Age Cohort						
Year Built	Total Parcels	Lot Size (Acres)	Height (Stories)	Rooms	Bedrooms	Living Area	Building Value	Total Value
2000-2004	69	5.8	1.9	7.9	3.6	2,551	$336,201	$458,765
1995-1999	74	5.0	1.9	7.7	3.6	2,815	$360,774	$487,142
1990-1994	73	5.6	1.8	7.3	3.3	2,444	$312,041	$433,425
1980-1989	271	4.4	1.7	6.5	3.2	2,275	$272,972	$392,581
1970-1979	297	3.5	1.5	6.3	3.1	1,816	$200,358	$312,112
1960-1969	94	4.6	1.3	6.1	2.9	1,795	$184,835	$296,720
1950-1959	63	3.4	1.2	6.0	2.9	1,576	$148,114	$260,517
1940-1949	28	4.1	1.5	5.9	2.8	1,683	$126,111	$239,636
1920-1939	45	4.1	1.6	6.2	3.0	1,966	$170,660	$285,862
1900-1919	45	4.0	2.1	7.3	3.6	2,631	$287,200	$401,058
1850-1899	53	5.1	2.0	6.8	3.5	2,196	$183,957	$298,072
Pre-1850	83	6.0	2.0	7.2	3.6	2,658	$264,282	$383,140

Source: Princeton Assessor's Office (October 2005). Note: Table 5 does not include single-family homes on large farm or forestry parcels associated with Chapter 61, 61A or 61B agreements.

find that more than 91% of its households are homeowners. They, in turn, shape the demographic characteristics of the town as a whole and its position in the regional housing market. For example, the median household income of homeowners in Princeton is the region's highest, $83,355, and except for Princeton's seven condominium units, virtually all homeowners live in detached single-family homes (99%).[11] In addition, 84% of its homeowners are families and 95% of its family homeowners are married couples, more than half with children under 18. Furthermore, all minority households in Princeton are homeowners, as is the case in Holden, Hubbardston and Sterling.[12]

Princeton homeowners have fairly large households, which makes sense given that so many are families with children under 18. Homeowners in Hubbardston, Rutland and Sterling are somewhat larger, and this probably reflects the substantial amount of housing growth that occurred in these towns during the past decade. Still, half of Princeton's homeowners purchased the home they live in at some point after 1990, and nearly one-third after 1995. Although most relocated to Princeton from inside Worcester County, Princeton attracted more in-migration from outside the county than any other town in the region.[13] This correlates with Princeton's comparatively large percentage of residents commuting to work well beyond the Worcester area, not only to Boston and Cambridge but also to major employment centers on the North Shore. People seem willing to accept some inconveniences for the opportunity to own a home in Princeton.

Renters. Nearly half of Princeton's renter households (47%) live in single-family homes. The only other options for renters in Princeton include a very small inventory of multi-unit residences, and there are probably some apartments in single-family homes even though the town's zoning does not allow them. Today, Princeton has just 18 two-family homes, two three-family homes, a small

[11] Census 2000, Summary File 3, Tables H3, H4, HCT12.

[12] Census 2000, Summary File 3, Tables HCT1; Summary File 1, Table H14.

[13] Census 2000, Summary File 3, Tables H38, P24.

TABLE 5.4: OCCUPIED UNITS, HOUSEHOLD SIZE AND MEDIAN INCOME BY TENURE

	Occupied Housing Units			Average Household Size		Median Income	
Geography	Total	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter	Owner	Renter
Massachusetts	2,443,580	61.7%	38.3%	2.72	2.17	64,506	30,682
Worcester County	283,927	64.1%	35.9%	2.76	2.19	61,125	27,645
Fitchburg	14,943	51.6%	48.4%	2.64	2.35	51,145	24,751
Gardner	8,282	54.6%	45.4%	2.64	2.01	50,729	25,112
Holden	5,715	88.4%	11.6%	2.81	1.96	68,170	29,189
Hubbardston	1,308	91.4%	8.6%	3.04	2.30	63,534	29,375
Leominster	16,491	57.9%	42.1%	2.71	2.16	59,666	28,802
Paxton	1,428	94.8%	5.2%	2.81	2.45	75,638	33,203
PRINCETON	1,166	91.1%	8.9%	2.94	2.21	83,355	44,286
Rutland	2,253	79.6%	20.4%	2.99	1.89	71,143	31,571
Sterling	2,573	85.0%	15.0%	2.94	2.14	75,178	37,917
Westminster	2,529	85.8%	14.2%	2.84	2.08	60,000	45,042
Worcester	67,028	43.3%	56.7%	2.57	2.28	52,083	25,503

Source: Census 2000, Summary File 1 Tables H1, H3, H4, H12; Summary File 3 Table HCT12.

multi-family property and a few mixed-use buildings. For seniors, there is also Wachusett House, a small affordable housing development financed by the Rural Housing Administration.[14]

Like renters just about everywhere, Princeton's are less affluent than homeowners, and they are more likely to include a mix of family and non-family households and single persons living alone (mainly seniors). In addition, renters in Princeton live in fairly old homes, for more than 65% of all units occupied by renters were built prior to 1950. In fact, Princeton has the largest percentage of older renter-occupied units of all cities and towns in the Wachusett area. Only Fitchburg has a similar percentage of older rental units (64%).

Despite these differences, Princeton renters and homeowners have some qualities in common. For example, about 63% of the town's renters are families, and 76% have children under 18. The average household size of Princeton's renter households, 2.21 persons, is the second largest among small towns in the region. Including the cities, however, the largest renter households live in Fitchburg and Worcester (Table 5.4).

Housing Vacancies and Available Supply

Although the market has softened since 2004, vacancy rates from Census 2000 shed light on Princeton's desirability. In April 2000, Princeton had only 30 vacant housing units: one for rent, seven for sale, six already rented or sold but not yet occupied, eleven seasonal homes, and five "other vacant" units, which usually consists of units reserved for occupancy by caretakers. Measured by housing units that were both vacant and available, Princeton's homeownership vacancy rate was 0.7% and its rental vacancy rate, 1%. Similar conditions existed regionally, though urban rental vacancy rates were higher, e.g., 4-6%. There are currently about 18-20 homes for sale in Princeton, with asking prices from $275,000 to nearly $1 million, and no units listed publicly for rent.[15]

[14] Town of Princeton Assessor's Office, FY 2006 Parcel Database generated for Community Opportunities Group, Inc., October 2005; DOR, "Parcel Counts by Class and Usage Code," Municipal Data Bank.

[15] Census 2000, Summary File 1, Tables H3, H5. Homes for sale or rent (January-February 2006) surveyed informally through the Worcester Telegram & Gazette, The Landmark, and on-line realtor sources.

TABLE 5.5: CHANGE IN TOTAL HOUSING UNITS AND VACANT UNITS, 1990-2000

	Total Units			Vacant Units		
Geography	**1990**	**2000**	**% Change**	**1990**	**2000**	**% Change**
Massachusetts	2,472,711	2,621,989	6.0%	225,601	178,409	-20.9%
Worcester County	279,428	298,159	6.7%	19,275	14,232	-26.2%
Fitchburg	16,665	16,002	-4.0%	1,302	1,059	-18.7%
Gardner	8,654	8,838	2.1%	675	556	-17.6%
Holden	5,428	5,827	7.4%	147	112	-23.8%
Hubbardston	1,025	1,360	32.7%	71	52	-26.8%
Leominster	15,533	16,976	9.3%	699	485	-30.6%
Paxton	1,351	1,461	8.1%	41	33	-19.5%
PRINCETON	1,103	1,196	8.4%	42	30	-28.6%
Rutland	1,867	2,392	28.1%	190	139	-26.8%
Sterling	2,308	2,637	14.3%	110	64	-41.8%
Westminster	2,405	2,694	12.0%	230	165	-28.3%
Worcester	69,336	70,723	2.0%	5,452	3,695	-32.2%

Source: Census 2000, Summary File 1 Tables H1, H3; 1990 Census, Summary File 1 Table H01, H002.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL TRENDS

In 1990, Princeton's region had nearly 9,000 vacant housing units. The recession that officially began in July 1990 had already left its mark in several ways by the time the 1990 Census occurred in the spring, most notably in a very weak housing market that slowed production and stalled housing sales. As unemployment rose throughout 1991, foreclosure rates accelerated. Home values dropped so much that state authorities unveiled a "market opportunities" plan to acquire, renovate, and sell or rent vacant housing units as subsidized housing for low- and moderate-income families. Across New England, the average start-to-completion period for small-scale multi-family construction increased from 11 to 22 months.[16] Homes remained on the market for several months, especially condominiums, and many sellers began to rent out their homes until the economy recovered. In Princeton, housing sales dropped by 39% between 1988 and 1991, and no homes were sold in neighboring Hubbardston for nearly a year.[17]

The market's rebound eventually reversed these conditions and triggered two events: rising production on one hand, and market absorption of previously vacant housing stock on the other hand. By 2000, Princeton's region had gained 4,400 new homes and its vacant housing inventory had declined by 2,600 units (Table 5.5). As in 1990, 91% of all units vacant in 2000 were located in the region's four cities. During the same decade, however, the region's total housing inventory continued to shift toward small towns, for in 1990, 87.7% of all Wachusett-area housing units were located in the cities and in 2000, 86.5%.

Change in Rental Housing Conditions

Tenants were uniquely affected by the turn in housing conditions because what appeared to be a generous supply of rental housing in 1990 included many homes that were never intended to remain renter-occupied. The Wachusett region's

[16] Bureau of the Census, Manufacturing, Mining and Construction Division, "Length of Time From Authorization of Construction to Start For Private Residential Buildings," and "Length of Time From Start of Construction," Construction Statistics, at <ttp://www.census.gov/const/www/index.html> select "New Residential Construction."

[17] The Warren Group, "Town Stats Search," at <http://www.thewarrengroup.com/>.

total housing inventory increased by a modest 3.5% during the 1990s, but the total number of households increased by 6% and the number of renter households, by only 2.7%. For half of the region's communities, the renter-occupied housing inventory was smaller in 2000 than in 1990. Worcester, Leominster and Rutland absorbed nearly all of the rental housing growth that occurred from 1990-2000, with virtually no change in Princeton, Westminster and Paxton.[18]

As of 2000, the median rent in Princeton exceeded all communities in the region except Westminster. Not surprisingly, the median rent is lower in the cities, but it is also lower in Rutland and Hubbardston, where subsidized housing makes up a fairly large share of all renter-occupied units. Although gross rents paid by tenants in 2000 do not necessarily reflect rents paid today, they do reveal an individual community's place within a regional housing market. This is especially true when rents are computed as a percentage of renter household income – a statistic that indicates what tenants are accustomed to paying for housing costs. For Princeton, the median rent constitutes a smaller percentage of median renter household income than in any community nearby. Since Princeton renters have higher incomes than renters in all but one neighboring town, the town's higher-than-average rent is probably affordable for many of them.

Change in For-Sale Housing Conditions

Princeton housing sale prices also top the region. Its median single-family home sale price of $377,500 (2005) is substantially higher than that of any other community nearby. For most of the 1990s, Princeton and Sterling were nearly interchangeable leaders in the higher-end market north of Worcester. By last year, however, Princeton prices had risen significantly, followed by Sterling ($319,500) and Paxton ($316,500).

A noteworthy feature of the Wachusett-area market is that the highest 10-year rates of sale price growth have occurred at the extreme ends of the economic spectrum: in Princeton, the most affluent town, and Worcester and Gardner, cities with the lowest median household incomes in the region. In fact, the most dramatic sales price growth overall has occurred in these traditionally affordable communities, where homes are selling for 168-169% more than in 1996. For the cities, price acceleration has occurred mainly since 2001, while housing values in the smaller towns recovered faster after the recession and climbed exponentially in communities with higher rates of new housing development. The exception was Princeton, which did not have a high growth rate and absorbed demand from the highest-income homebuyers seeking rural housing in the area.

Housing Development

Not long ago, housing development around Princeton included a mix of housing units for homeowners as well as renters. The cities offered and continued to produce rental housing, while the smaller towns were predominantly if not exclusively suppliers of single-family homes, and sometimes two-family homes. Move-ups from urban to non-urban areas, or from one non-urban community to another, were facilitated by a continuum of housing types and prices, and the production pipeline remained geared toward a diversity of market needs. Although older federal census reports do not contain the same kinds of detailed housing statistics that are available today, historic changes in land use and residential building permits tell an important story about what has happened in Princeton and the surrounding communities.

Virtually all new units built in Princeton since 1980 have been detached single-family homes except the Wachusett House, a 16-unit elderly housing development approved prior to 1990. The town's history, zoning, development constraints and the market have converged to make Princeton a community of single-family homes,

[18] Census 2000, Summary File 1 Table H4; 1990 Census, Summary File 1 Table H004.

TABLE 5.6: RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PERMITS, 1980-2004, BY NUMBER OF UNITS PERMITTED

Geography	Detached Single-Family Homes			Two-Family & Multi-Family Units		
	Total 1980-2004	1990-1999 Only	2000-2004 Only	Total 1980-2004	1990-1999 Only	2000-2004 Only
Fitchburg	1,487	436	547	833	18	69
Gardner	1,298	414	205	155	5	0
Holden	1,469	547	324	281	2	89
Hubbardston	906	352	159	214	6	0
Leominster	2,518	950	355	2,190	641	6
Paxton	391	141	88	0	0	0
PRINCETON	493	149	69	16	0	0
Rutland	1,062	448	376	103	0	59
Sterling	1,247	466	203	14	8	0
Westminster	861	366	189	116	32	14
Worcester	8,161	2,272	1,815	5,481	486	474

Source: HUD, State of the Cities Data System.

and it seems unlikely that this will change in a substantive way. However, even in communities with the infrastructure and utilities to support some higher-density housing, new development has moved increasingly toward detached single-family homes.

Except for Rutland and Sterling, less than one-third of all multi-family units built in the region since 1980 were actually approved and constructed after 1990. When permit activity is converted to an average number of units per year over 25 years, it is very clear that even where market recovery triggered substantial new housing growth, single-family and multi-family production after 1990 occurred at a slower pace than during the 1980s. Land use statistics also show that post-1990 development consumed more land per unit for all types of housing. In Fitchburg, for example, more land has been converted to urban low-density single-family home development since 1985 than any other residential land use. While Leominster has attracted more condominium and rental investment than the region's other cities, the amount of land used to support these new projects was nearly twice the amount of land per acre for Leominster's older multi-family housing.[19]

Affordable Housing

In Massachusetts, when less than 10% of a community's housing units are affordable to low- and moderate-income people, M.G.L. c.40B, Sections 20-23 ("Chapter 40B") instructs local officials to grant a "comprehensive permit" to affordable housing developers. Chapter 40B overrides zoning and other local requirements that make it hard to build affordable housing. The law allows a board of appeals to approve, conditionally approve or deny a comprehensive permit, but in towns that do not meet the 10% minimum, a denied or conditionally approved permit can be appealed by the developer to the state Housing Appeals Committee (HAC). While many Princeton residents say the town needs some affordable housing, they also see Chapter 40B as a serious threat.

Ironically, Princeton has seen very little affordable housing development even though other communities in the region have attracted many comprehensive permit applications, notably Holden, Westminster, Sterling and Rutland. Less than a year after Chapter 40B went into effect, Princeton's first master plan (1970) suggested that the town was not suitable for affordable housing

[19] MassGIS, "Land Use," at <http://www.mass.gov/mgis/>.

development, presumably due to the density associated with low-income housing. At the time, the same could have been said for any small town in Massachusetts with difficult-to-develop land and no public water or sewer service. Today, however, neither steeply sloped terrain nor lack of public utilities prevents development. Permitting regulations and wastewater technology have changed considerably since 1969, and because land is so scarce, development occurs on land that few would have classified as buildable 35 years ago.

Princeton's region currently has 12 comprehensive permits in the pipeline, i.e., with initial approval from the state and either in permitting, recently permitted or under appeal. They include a total of 884 housing units on about 287 acres of land, or an average of three units per acre. Still, only 25% of the units are actually affordable, first because most projects have little if any subsidy and second, the state does not require more than 25% affordability in a comprehensive permit development. Moreover, nearly all of the applicants have proposed for-sale housing. For the small towns that stand to gain up to 764 new housing units (Holden, Rutland, Sterling and Westminster) only 194 will actually be credited toward their Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory.[20]

PAST PLANS, STUDIES & REPORTS

Records from earlier planning studies indicate that in the late 1980s, Princeton had a Housing Partnership committee, as many towns did at the time. In 1985, the state created the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP), a program originally housed inside state government and spun off as a separate organization prior to the gubernatorial election in 1990. MHP's main objective was to build support for affordable housing in the state's suburbs and small towns. Toward that end, the state paid for many housing needs studies and housing plans at the request of local officials throughout the Commonwealth. In a companion effort, the state adopted new Chapter 40B regulations in 1990 in order to encourage locally initiated comprehensive permits. These and other efforts served as a backdrop for the creation of a Housing Partnership in Princeton.

According to the 1991 Land Use Plan, a survey of Princeton residents revealed little support for affordable housing. Although the survey respondents were divided, most said Princeton should not pursue any affordable housing initiatives and they did not want the Housing Partnership to seek grants to plan for or finance new affordable units. The 1991 plan's recommendation for zoning to provide for accessory apartments was not adopted, and town meeting subsequently approved a zoning change to limit the number of units (3) that can be created in a single-family conversion.

Princeton's first master plan (1970) followed the passage of Chapter 40B by one year. The legislature had recently created regional planning districts and approved the formation of two state agencies with various responsibilities for housing development, and affordable housing in particular. Based on the topography of Princeton's land, soil surveys and general market conditions, the master plan consultants concluded that higher-density housing development was unlikely and incompatible with other local planning objectives.

A citizens committee updated the master plan in 1975. They advocated for "high-quality development" and density policies linked to constraints-based mapping. There is little evidence of interest in affordable housing in the 1975 plan, though committee members favored the production of elderly housing. By 1980 when the master plan was updated again, the Wachusett House Corporation had been formed and Princeton residents seemed somewhat more supportive of developing elderly housing. Still, local opposition to creating more affordable housing led the author of a late 1980s master plan update to recommend a comprehensive land use study and revised zoning regulations.

[20] Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, "Chapter 40B Pipeline," 30 December 2005.

ISSUES, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Measuring Housing Needs

Princeton's housing challenges have less to do with warding off unwanted growth than with providing housing choices at all. The difference between 10% of Princeton's housing units and the existing 20-unit Subsidized Housing Inventory is 99 units. While a 99-unit gap is not much for Chapter 40B, it represents 66% of all building permits issued in Princeton during the 1990s.[21]

TABLE 5.7: LOW- AND MODERATE-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

		Low- or Moderate-Income	
Geography	Total Households	Number	% Total Households
Massachusetts	2,443,580	984,700	40.3%
Worcester County	283,927	117,367	41.3%
Fitchburg	14,943	7,300	48.9%
Gardner	8,282	3,872	46.8%
Holden	5,715	1,525	26.7%
Hubbardston	1,308	233	17.8%
Leominster	16,491	6,533	39.6%
Paxton	1,428	298	20.9%
PRINCETON	1,166	220	18.9%
Rutland	2,253	717	31.8%
Sterling	2,573	638	24.8%
Westminster	2,529	593	23.4%
Worcester	67,028	36,822	54.9%

Source: HUD, CHAS 2000 Data.

Chapter 40B statistics are often used to estimate a community's affordable housing needs, but when Chapter 40B was enacted in 1969, the legislature actually established a regional planning standard, not a housing needs standard. The law's main purpose was to assure that cities did not shoulder a disproportionate share of low- and moderate-income housing. Meeting the 10% minimum merely indicates that a community has its regional "fair share" of affordable housing.

The difference between unmet needs for affordable housing and the 10% minimum under Chapter 40B can be seen in Princeton, which has 220 low- or moderate-income households (Table 5.7) or 18.9% of all households in the town. More than 80% are homeowners, and among them, nearly half are seniors and more than one-third are small families. Two special reports produced for HUD by the Census Bureau shed light on some of the housing affordability and housing quality needs that exist in Princeton:[22]

- Less than half of Princeton's low- or moderate-income renters (36 total households) are seniors living at Wachusett House. The others are small and large families, single-people living alone, and unrelated persons sharing a home. Four of the small families (families of two to four people), and four of the unrelated-person households are unaffordably housed, which means they pay more than 30% of their household income on rent and utilities.

- Small families with low or moderate incomes have more substantial housing cost problems than any other type of household in Princeton. Among homeowners in particular, 50 of Princeton's 62 low- or moderate-income small families are unaffordably housed. The percentage of housing cost burdened, lower-income small families is much larger than the percentage of lower-income elderly homeowners.

[21] According to DHCD (7 July 2005), Princeton's Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory includes the 16 senior apartments at Wachusett House and a four-person group home managed by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation.

[22] HUD, "Housing Problems" and "Affordability Mismatch" databases, CHAS 2000 Data, State of the Cities Data System. See also, Census 2000 Summary File 3, Tables H91, and H95.

- Large families – those with five or more family members – have more housing quality problems than housing affordability problems. The housing quality problems include homes that are substandard or too small, or units with lead paint hazards. In Princeton, there are 16 low- or moderate-income large-family households with some type of housing problem: 75% need affordable housing, but the other 25% need both suitable and affordable housing. These needs exist equally among renters and homeowners.

- The total need for affordable housing, measured as low- or moderate-income households with housing cost burdens, is 134 units. In addition, there are unmet needs for 4-8 affordable rental units of a size appropriate for larger families.

Princeton does have more affordable housing than the 20 units included on the Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory. As of Census 2000, the cost to live in 270 of Princeton's 1,180 occupied and vacant, available housing units was statistically affordable to low- or moderate-income people, primarily moderate-income people. However, only 29% of these units were actually occupied by households in the low- or moderate-income range. This contributes to Princeton's comparatively small percentage of household income devoted to housing costs, not only for renters but also for homeowners.

The median housing cost for homeowners with mortgage payments in Princeton is only 19.9% of the town's median homeowner income, a smaller percentage than the average for the state as a whole, Worcester County, and all communities nearby except Rutland. Aside from the high incomes of most Princeton homeowners, some of its homeowners live in housing units that would be affordable to moderate-income households. The absence of deed restrictions makes these units affordable but not available to people who need low-cost housing.

For more than half of the homes on the market in Princeton today, the asking prices significantly exceed current assessed values. In some cases, the high asking prices are actually an indicator of land value, not the value of buildings, particularly for homes constructed between 1920 and 1950.[23] In virtually all communities, housing sales in a tight market drive up purchase prices and eventually, property assessments. Furthermore, older, seemingly affordable homes in desirable towns like Princeton often attract families seeking buy-up opportunities. When families in a buy-up mode purchase houses that realtors classify as "starter homes" or "fixer-uppers," they typically invest in major capital improvements: additions, alterations and renovations, all of which increase the value of the house and consequently, its resale value. This pattern of buy-up/investment and value enhancement has contributed to the gradual decline in housing affordability throughout the state, particularly in communities with expensive house lots and very little developable land.

Princeton has opportunities to provide more housing options at all market levels and some affordable housing as well. Since the town is small and much of its land is severely constrained, many of the housing initiatives that have been successful in Eastern Massachusetts communities will not work in Princeton. If it were easy to develop affordable housing in Princeton, for-profit developers would have already secured sites and applied for comprehensive permits. While Princeton will eventually see some comprehensive permit activity, reaching the 10% statutory minimum will be a major challenge – and meeting housing needs that actually exist in Princeton and surrounding communities will be even harder.

[23] Based on comparison of homes listed for sale in Princeton and their corresponding physical and value characteristics, as reported in the assessor's parcel database.

HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS

Whether Princeton continues to develop slowly or experiences an occasional burst of growth such as that which occurred during the 1970s, the town is zoned to accommodate about 2,300 more homes than it has today. This does not include housing units that will be developed under Chapter 40B. Since Chapter 40B supersedes local zoning, it is impossible to predict the number of mixed-income housing units that may be built in a community. For very small towns without public water or sewer service, the risk of large comprehensive permit developments is low. However, the likelihood of *some* comprehensive permit activity is high. Planning that anticipates all types of housing is important for any master plan, even in small, rural towns like Princeton.

Housing and Land Use

By acquiring open space or working with property owners to protect large land holdings with conservation restrictions, Princeton could take steps to reduce the total amount of housing development that occurs over time. In addition, Princeton could change the minimum lot area in outlying parts of town, where most of the open and forested land remains and many of the roads are narrow, winding and scenic. Large-lot zoning comes with risks, however: legal challenges from the owners of large parcels, making existing house lots non-conforming, which may create more problems for homeowners than public benefits for the town, and a development pattern that accelerates the loss of forested land, the fragmentation of wildlife corridors, and growth in housing costs.

If Princeton's only response to housing development involved measures to stop growth, the town might address a few needs but never address its housing goals. Moreover, residents would think their planning efforts had failed because it is not possible to stop all development – and a master plan that encouraged such ideas would be disingenuous.

In fact, policies that promote the best possible fit between residential and open space land uses will be crucial for managing the effects of growth and change in Princeton. Accommodating new homes and simultaneously protecting open land and views from the road can be accomplished through strategies outlined in the Land Use and Open Space elements of this Master Plan. For example, a Scenic Corridors Overlay District would help to guide construction away from the street and still allow the creation of house lots. Similarly, an Open Space-Residential Design bylaw would facilitate creative site planning that protects land and also respects the rights of private property owners. OSRD also could help to diversify Princeton's housing stock in ways that are nearly invisible to a majority of the town's residents.

Housing Diversity

Some degree of housing diversity exists even in the smallest towns. Princeton should consider development techniques that could help to diversify its housing stock without sacrificing the town's rural character. From the outset of this Master Plan process, residents have said Princeton should offer more housing options and meet the needs of young adults who grew up in town and want to return to raise their own families. These interests can be addressed in harmony with other goals of the Master Plan, but like any other public policy choice, promoting housing diversity involves trade-offs.

OSRD and Housing Diversity. Allowing several types of housing could help to save open land, encourage population diversity and provide for a mix of housing prices. However, if other housing types will be permitted in Princeton, the town needs to recognize that unless the zoning bylaw offers realistic incentives, developers will choose the most lucrative option and the path of least resistance: they will build single-family homes.

Although many people think the construction cost savings in OSRD developments is enough to

lure developers to build an equivalent number of townhouses (without a density bonus), it rarely works out that way. Princeton should consider offering a modest density bonus to OSRD applicants in exchange for including some attached dwellings and protecting more open space in a proposed development. Through policies like this, a community says that it actually wants a mix of housing and cares deeply about open land.

Mixed-Use Zoning. From a growth management perspective, the preferred approach to housing diversity is to provide for mixed-use buildings and small multi-family dwellings in the business districts or Princeton Center, where multi-family units already exist. It makes sense to guide housing development toward goods and services or areas that generally serve as "activity nodes," and remove some of the pressure for growth from rural land. In these locations, mixed-use and multi-family proposals should be required to comply with appropriate architectural and site design standards because Princeton's business districts are also neighborhoods.

Senior Housing. Over-55 housing has been so popular in Eastern Massachusetts that today, the market is nearly saturated in many parts of the Boston area. Most of the new age-restricted developments offer expensive housing and they have not been an effective vehicle for creating affordable units, but not all housing needs revolve around affordability. Age-restricted developments do meet the needs of empty nesters and retirees seeking smaller homes in a managed residential development, and this is important.

Princeton has no options for older homeowners, including those with high incomes. The town should offer incentives to include some over-55 housing units in an OSRD, or allow single-family conversions as of right for units that will be restricted as senior residences. Ultimately, the market will determine whether Princeton can absorb over-55 housing and it may be that the town is too small to support this type of development.

Accessory Apartments. Accessory apartments are very common in small towns. Usually they are so inconspicuous that neighbors do not know they exist. Although often thought of as housing for elderly relatives ("in-law apartments"), accessory apartments meet a variety of needs: housing for adult children, accommodations for live-in child care providers or caretakers, or extra income for homeowners struggling to make ends meet. With the right design standards and use regulations, it is possible to create accessory apartments and preserve the appearance of a detached single-family dwelling.

One of the problems with accessory apartments is that when towns do not allow them, the illegal units – created without a building permit – often have code violations. Repairs as basic as installing a ground fault interrupter in a kitchen or bathroom present a real challenge to the homeowner because the work requires an electrical permit. Further, older units lose their status as lawful non-conforming uses if they remain unoccupied for a long time, and this makes it difficult for homeowners to bring an accessory apartment up to code if they decide to make the unit available for rent.

Princeton should allow accessory apartments, either by right or by special permit, to increase the number of options available to renters and to give elderly homeowners the choice to convert unused space in their homes into a source of income. The town has very few opportunities to create rental units because it has no public water or sewer service. The risk that accessory apartments will proliferate all over town is extremely low. Even in communities that have allowed accessory apartments for many years, few units have been constructed because in most cases, homeowners create accessory apartments for personal reasons, not because they want to be landlords.

Housing Affordability

When Princeton residents speak of housing affordability, they usually mention affordability for their adult children and seniors, and they mean modestly priced housing. For the most part, they do not use the word "affordable" to mean housing built under Chapter 40B for low- or moderate-income people. Princeton could encourage developers to create some small single-family homes, but not on house lots of two or more acres. A mix of residential uses such as multi-family dwellings or townhouses is the most realistic way to create housing in a price range attainable for young families. Except in niche markets, these kinds of units generally sell at lower prices than single-family homes and offer affordability even without deed restrictions.

Requiring low- or moderate-income housing in new developments has not worked well in Massachusetts except in communities that offer an attractive density bonus - communities that have the infrastructure and utilities for more intensive development than Princeton can support. If Princeton wants zoning tools that might create some housing units eligible for the Subsidized Housing Inventory (without a comprehensive permit), the town could require single-family conversions, mixed-use buildings or multi-family dwellings with three or more units to include at least one affordable unit, *or* allow the developer to contribute money to a local affordable housing trust fund.

Working with Comprehensive Permits

Regulations and Guidelines. Princeton should have basic administrative regulations and review guidelines for comprehensive permits. If the Board of Appeals ever receives a comprehensive permit application, it will be important to have written submission requirements and local review procedures, first as an aid to applicants and the Board, and second because the information could be very important during an appeal. The Massachusetts Housing Partnership offers technical assistance for comprehensive permit review, and the Board of Appeals may want to use this resource or ask the applicant to pay for an independent peer review consultant.

Policy Statement. One of the objections many communities have with Chapter 40B is that it puts local officials in an unequal position at the negotiating table with developers. However, comprehensive permit problems can be reduced with thoughtful advance planning, a pro-active local government and fair development guidelines. A policy statement created and agreed to by Princeton's elected and appointed officials might discourage poorly designed comprehensive permits and increase the probability of high-quality development proposals in Princeton. It should explain what the town wants a mixed-income housing development to look like, and the locations (areas) that would be most acceptable. Of course, the policy must be realistic or it will fail. One way to increase its success is to define a "most preferred" prototype for affordable housing and offer to accelerate or streamline the permitting timeline for projects that meet the town's preferences.

Local Initiative Program. Some communities have found that when developers seek comprehensive permits under the Local Initiative Program (LIP), the application, review and decision process is more constructive than for conventional comprehensive permits, which generally give local officials little or no access during a development's design stage. State government established LIP more than a decade ago to encourage towns and developers to work together to create affordable housing. To qualify for a LIP comprehensive permit, the developer must obtain local support before seeking a preliminary eligibility review ("site approval") from the state. This feature of the LIP process is unique because it expands the community's role from that of a permitting authority to a participant in planning an affordable housing development.

If Princeton wants to provide some affordable housing that counts on the Subsidized Housing

Inventory, the town should consider reaching out to developers with LIP comprehensive permit experience or offering a small town-owned lot for a LIP development. Non-profit developers often have an interest in working on so-called "friendly" comprehensive permits, and while "friendly" can also include a conventional comprehensive permit process, LIP virtually assures an amicable relationship between local officials and developers.

Chapter 40B Housing Plan. The state has introduced new regulations to encourage affordable housing development. Known as "Planned Production," the regulations allow communities with a state-approved housing plan to develop affordable housing at a somewhat relaxed pace. For Princeton, it means nine new low- or moderate-income units per year until the town reaches 10%. When a community reaches the state's annual target for annual Chapter 40B units, its housing plan becomes eligible for certification. At that point, the Board of Appeals may continue to approve comprehensive permits or deny them for up to a year without being overruled by the Housing Appeals Committee.[24]

Preparing a Chapter 40B housing plan has some advantages, and Princeton should consider it. However, pursuing a state-approved housing plan does not take priority over "basics" such as administrative regulations and guidelines for the Board of Appeals.

Community Preservation Act

Funds from the Community Preservation Act (CPA) can support many housing initiatives.

[24] DHCD, ".75% Threshold by Community," Planned Production. A town that creates new low- or moderate-income housing units equal to 1.5% in any given year, i.e., twice the minimum number required for housing plan certification, the flexibility to approve or deny comprehensive permits extends to two years. The annual planned production requirements for cities and towns will be updated in 2011-2012 after the next federal census is published.

CPA has the advantages of local control and flexibility, but making effective use of CPA funds requires local capacity and patience. Although many towns have approved CPA housing activities through appropriations at town meeting, the actual number of completed projects is small. Implementation problems with CPA housing activities seem to fall into two categories: a shortage of local capacity, and well-intended but unrealistic projects. The success stories exist mainly in communities with a professionally staffed planning department or planning consultants and active, experienced housing partnership committees.

If Princeton adopts the CPA in the future, its emphasis should be on historic preservation. However, the town will need to plan for housing activities because affordable housing is a statutory requirement. Some examples of ways that CPA funds can be used for affordable housing:

- Purchasing, upgrading and reselling older housing units to income-eligible homebuyers who agree to a long-term deed restriction.
- Investing in a small rental or homeownership development carried out by a regional housing authority or non-profit housing corporation.
- Acquiring land that can meet both conservation and affordable housing interests, and conveying a portion to a developer to create new affordable units. Land with an existing residence or nonresidential buildings would be ideal for this kind of endeavor.
- Offering CPA funds to commercial property owners who want to add apartments to their buildings, if they agree to make the apartments affordable to lower-income tenants.

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CHAPTER 6

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

Princeton is not a place that most people commute to for work, but rather a place that people call home. Residents tend to commute to jobs in nearby cities such as Worcester, Marlborough, Fitchburg and Leominster, and some travel as far as Boston and Cambridge every day. In fact, Princeton has a very small employment base, only a few businesses, and the smallest percentage of locally employed residents of any town in the immediate region.[1] For most people, living in Princeton means traveling to other communities for their livelihood, goods and services, health care and entertainment.

The absence of a noticeable commercial base reflects Princeton's location, land use policies and distance from major regional highways. Moreover, Princeton residents have historically opposed business growth. Out of concern that commercial development might change Princeton's appearance in unwanted ways, the town has not made it easy to establish and operate thriving businesses. Although Princeton has some business-zoned land, the districts are located in outlying areas and many of the parcels are severely constrained.

Princeton's economy does have more diversity than can be seen in standard employment and industry statistics. Farming and forestry make an important contribution to Princeton's economic base and the rural character of the town, yet for most communities in Massachusetts, including Princeton, commercial agriculture has declined significantly since the 1950s. Today, many residents work inconspicuously as professionals, artists, contractors or service providers in what is euphemistically known as zero-commute employment: an office or a business at home. Some say the town has made it hard for them to thrive, too. Recreation and the arts represent vital pieces of the local economy, but cultural activities do not have a recognizable home in Princeton and this makes it hard for the town to nurture or promote ways of work that are fairly common in rural areas. Since most government sources of economic data omit the self-employed worker, it is difficult to measure the number of people who depend on their own home or space in Princeton's few commercial buildings as their regular place of employment. However, self-employment in a wide variety of industries clearly matters to many households in Princeton.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Princeton lies along the northern boundary of two federally defined economic regions: the Worcester New England City and Town Area (NECTA) and the Worcester Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA). Like other statistical areas mapped by federal authorities, NECTA regions generally correspond to major transportation routes and urban employment centers. Communities in the Worcester NECTA function as a labor market area, or a geographic unit within which people live and work, supplying most of the available labor pool for a region's industries. Princeton and the surrounding towns share economic ties with each other and the City of Worcester because they have direct access to Interstates 290, 190, 495, and 90, or indirect access through State Routes 140, 122, and 146 and regional arterials such as Routes 68, 62 and 31.

[1] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Table P29, generated from American FactFinder at <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

Similar principles apply to the geography of the Worcester PMSA, which is slightly different from the NECTA due to the criteria used to define metropolitan regions. North of Princeton, the Leominster-Fitchburg-Gardner NECTA and the Fitchburg-Leominster PMSA each consist of small cities and adjacent towns with direct or secondary access to Route 2.

The presence of a regional highway network makes Princeton somewhat accessible for industries that depend on highway access. A few of Princeton's industries – mainly trade and manufacturing – fall into this category. However, Princeton is not an ideal setting for major industrial development because even though it is served by three state-numbered routes, they are largely rural, two-lane roads that wind through the town, traversing its steep hills. In addition, access to Princeton from any regional highway requires travel through other small towns such as Westminster, Sterling and Holden. Princeton's rural road system nonetheless offers advantages to the hospitality, tourism and recreation industries that capitalize on natural and scenic resources such as Wachusett Mountain, so it is not surprising to find that these industries dominate the town's employment base.

Labor Force and Unemployment

More than 75% of Princeton's over-16 population is in the labor force, making Princeton one of the region's leading communities for labor force participation rate. Its labor force includes 1,077 men (58%) and 788 women (42%). While men make up a greater share of the labor force here than in other communities nearby or the state overall, the 788 women in Princeton's labor force represent a larger percentage of women over 16 (64%) than is the case in a majority of the region's cities and towns.

For Princeton, construction, management, and professional occupations tend to be weighted more heavily toward men while women are more likely to hold education, library, and administrative support positions. These differences affect the earnings statistics for Princeton residents because the mean earnings of men with full-time jobs is 1.54 times greater than that of women with full-time jobs – an occupational wage gap exceeding that of all communities in the region except Sterling.[2]

Princeton's unemployment rate has hovered within 1% of the statewide unemployment rate since 1999. Like the surrounding region, the town experienced significant joblessness in 1990 when its unemployment rate reached 6.1%.[3] Changes in Princeton's unemployment rate coincide with fluctuations in the size of its labor force and regional economic conditions. In the mid-1990s, Princeton's unemployment rate began to fall as its labor force increased; in turn, these conditions were shaped by a rise in household formation rates and the emergence of economic recovery across the Commonwealth. Since Princeton offers very few job opportunities to its residents, the local economy has exerted less influence over unemployment trends than the economic well-being of Central Massachusetts and the state as a whole.

Journey to Work and Places of Employment

Princeton residents hold jobs in employment centers spread across four states. A very small percentage of the labor force (12%) is employed by local establishments. In contrast, 31% of all workers in the Commonwealth and 30% in Worcester County have jobs in their own communities. Nearly 30% of Princeton's labor force commutes to the City of Worcester, 5.2% to Marlborough, 3.5% to Fitchburg, 4.1% to Leominster, and 1.7% to Boston.

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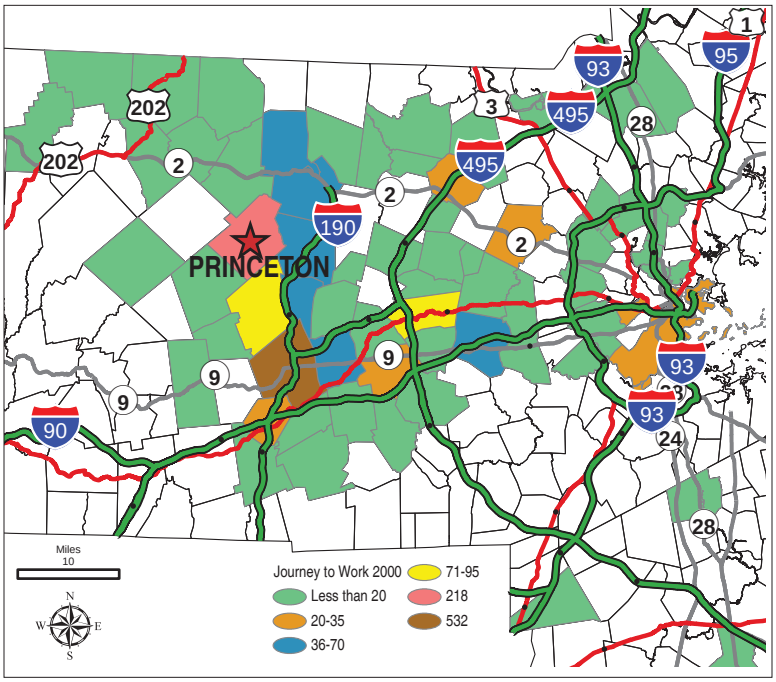
[2] Census 2000, Summary File 3, Tables QT-P24, DP-3, P49.

[3] Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Divisions of Career Services and Unemployment Assistance, "Labor Force and Unemployment Data," Economic Data, <http://www.detma.org>.



Destinations of Princeton commuters, 2000. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Journey to Work 2000.)

Interstate 290 provides access for a majority of Princeton commuters to jobs in Worcester, Shrewsbury, Marlborough, Auburn, and Hudson, while others commute along Route 2 to Concord, Littleton, Leominster, Maynard, Ayer, and Gardner. A total of 1,572 residents leave Princeton for jobs in other communities each day, and only 495 non-local people commute to jobs inside Princeton.[4] Local residents seem to value the town's attractiveness more than the availability of employment opportunities, as seen through their willingness to commute out of town for employment.

Employment and Wages

Princeton's employment base is extremely small and not very diverse. Its 72 employer establishments are mainly service-providing industries that provide jobs to about 664 wage or salary workers. Compared to the state or Worcester County, Princeton has a disproportionately large percentage of services employment: 80% of its establishments and more than 92% of its total employment consists of service-providing industries such as transportation, trade, public utilities, professional services, personal services, health care, education, and leisure and hospitality.[5] The latter plays a central role in Princeton's economy even though the industry accounts for only a fraction of the jobs held by local residents.

Wachusett Mountain offers a wide range of activities throughout the year, so it is not surprising to find that in 2004, the accommodations and food service industries comprised nearly 12% of Princeton's total employment.[66] The Wachusett Mountain Ski Area is a major regional skiing facility, but its hiking trails and music festivals also attract many visitors during the summer. In the fall, it sponsors events such as the Applefest and Autumn Wine Celebration, and many activities for children.[7]

The ski area is a significant contributor to Princeton's employment base. While annual employment in accommodations and food services fluctuated slightly over the past four years, it has remained just above 11.7% and continues to serve as the largest source of jobs in Princeton. Still, employment in these industries is vulnerable to seasonal change. This can be seen in Princeton, where employment during the winter generally

[4] Census 2000, "MCD/County to MCD/County Worker Flow Files," Special Tabulations Series, <http://www.census.gov/mp/www/spectab/specialtab.html>.

[5] Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Divisions of Career Services and Unemployment Assistance, "Employment and Wages by Industry and Area (ES-202)," Economic Data.

[6] Division of Career Services, "ES-202."

[7] Wachusett Mountain, <http://www.wachusett.com/festivals/> (23 September 2005).

TABLE 6.1: EMPLOYMENT LOCATION QUOTIENTS FOR PRINCETON AND WORCESTER COUNTY

			Comparison Areas Princeton Ratios	
Industry Class	**Local Employment**	**County-to-State Ratio**	**To State**	**To County**
Total, All Industries	664	1.00	1.00	1.00
Goods-Producing Industries	52	1.22	0.51	0.42
Construction	29	1.06	0.92	0.87
Manufacturing (Durable Goods)	22	1.30	0.32	0.25
Service-Providing Industries	612	0.96	1.09	1.13
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	46	1.03	0.36	0.35
Wholesale Trade	15	0.93	0.52	0.56
Retail Trade	16	1.07	0.21	0.20
Financial Activities	13	0.75	0.28	0.37
Professional and Business Services	29	0.82	0.31	0.38
Professional & Technical Services	17	0.61	0.36	0.59
Administrative & Waste Services	11	1.05	0.33	0.32
Education and Health Services	69	1.11	0.44	0.40
Accommodation and Food Services	78	0.97	1.52	1.58
Other Services	21	0.98	0.85	0.87

Source: Mass. Division of Career Services, ES-202, and COG. Data sets reflect 2004 employment conditions. Table 6.1 excludes industries not present in Princeton and should not be interpreted as a comprehensive profile of Worcester County's employment base.

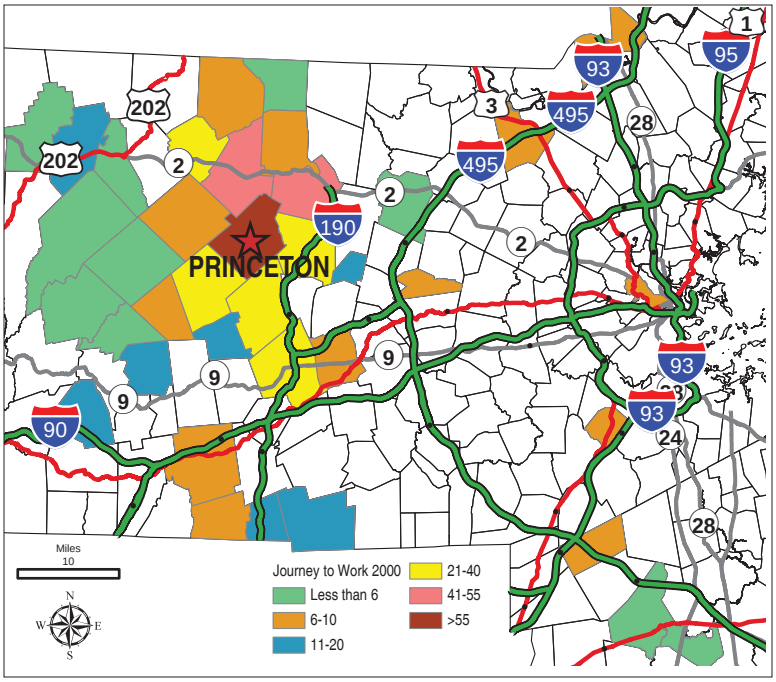
exceeds the year-round average monthly employment by 66-68%.[8]

Location quotients offer a useful way to compare a community's employment base to that of a larger region, such as a county, a labor market area or state. A location quotient is the ratio of an industry's percentage of total employment in a community to its percentage of total employment in the comparison area. In general, a location quotient of <0.95 represents a relatively small industry, while a location quotient of 0.95-1.05 depicts an industry that provides about the same percentage of employment in the local economy and the larger geographic comparison area. For example, in Princeton, the manufacturing location quotient of .32 suggests that the percentage of local employment in this industry is very small compared to the percentage statewide. While a location quotient of >1.00 generally means that an industry is stronger locally than in the comparison area, a very high location quotient, such as Princeton's 1.52 for accommodations and food services, suggests excessive reliance on a single industry.

Worcester County's employment base is unlike the state's in noteworthy ways, such as larger percentages of jobs in manufacturing, mining, public utilities and education services, so it would not be surprising to find similar employment base characteristics in a Worcester County community. The location quotients in Table 6-1 indicate that Princeton's economy is much different from that of the state and the county because a single industry – accommodations and food service – accounts for an unusually large share of all local employment.

Education, the construction trades and manufacturing generate a majority of Princeton's remaining employment, yet as a percentage of total employment, these industries are significantly underrepresented in Princeton relative to the region. Other industries with a presence in Princeton

[8] Division of Career Services, "ES-202."



Origin of workers with jobs in Princeton, 2000. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Journey to Work 2000.)

support so few jobs that often, their employment counts are withheld as "confidential."

Leominster, Westminster, Gardner, Worcester, Holden and Rutland serve as the largest sources of non-local labor for Princeton employers. A small number of workers also commute from Worcester.[9] Despite the high household incomes of Princeton residents, the average annual wage earned by people employed in Princeton is almost 50% lower than wages paid by the same industries elsewhere in the Commonwealth. As a result, Princeton's low-wage profile is not explained entirely by the composition of its employment base. Even though wages paid for accommodations and food services employment have increased somewhat in the past four years, the average wage lags considerably behind that of the state as a whole and last year, it represented the second lowest weekly wage of all industries in Princeton.

Furthermore, the overall average weekly wage in Princeton declined from 2001-2004 and most of the reduction occurred in two high-wage industries: finance and professional services. Princeton's highest paying industry, wholesale trade, provides an average weekly wage of $970 but employs only 15 people.[10] Princeton's regionally low wages and the seasonal fluctuations in its employment base make the town particularly dependent on labor from other communities.

Self-Employment

Although people often think that a local economy is defined by the number of businesses located in a town and the number of jobs they support, economic development involves more than commercial establishments. In rural areas, especially in towns with an affluent, well-educated population, it is fairly common to find many residents who work for themselves. This applies to Princeton, but it is hard to tell just how many residents are self-employed or where their businesses are located. Federal census data suggest that Princeton has a larger-than-average base of self-employment. Approximately 11% of Princeton's employed residents own a business and nearly 20% of its households receive self-employment income from one or more family members.[11]

Government agencies that track and report employment and wage data often overlook the self-employed because they obtain their information from employer payroll and unemployment insurance records. This means that for any given industry, the number of people working locally is often greater than it appears. Further, while

[9] Census 2000, "MCD/County to MCD/County Worker Flow Files."

[10] Division of Career Services, "ES-202."

[11] Census 2000, Summary File 3, Tables P51, P60.

businesses are supposed to be registered with the town clerk, self-employed individuals and locally owned small businesses are almost always under-represented in local records.

Arts and Recreation

Princeton's self-employed population includes many artists, and despite the town's small size it has an impressive arts community. A number of non-profit and private organizations promote the arts in Princeton and foster appreciation of the town's cultural history. Their efforts directly contribute to the local economy by supporting the work of persons employed in the fine or performing arts. For example, the Princeton Arts Society encourages and supports local artists, and provides programs and exhibitions for its membership and the community. The Society hosts monthly arts programs and small exhibitions at its space in the Princeton Center Building, including lectures, demonstrations, hands-on workshops, and a weekly portraiture workshop.

The Princeton Cultural Council oversees the distribution of Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) grants to various groups and individuals in order to fund activities that serve the community and improve cultural offerings for Princeton residents. The group is positioning itself to be a more proactive organization, identifying cultural resource needs and encouraging specific types of cultural programming. For example, the Council hopes to bring an outdoor Shakespeare theatre production to Princeton this summer. In addition, the First Congregational Church and Wachusett Mountain Resort host music and theatrical performances and community-based events. The town's local newspaper, The Princeton Outlook, provides a community calendar and highlights local events.

The arts and outdoor recreation facilities seem to go hand-in-hand in Princeton. Wachusett Mountain Ski Area, a privately owned ski resort that operates on Wachusett Mountain under a lease with the state, sponsors various seasonal festivals such as the multi-weekend AppleFest and KidsFest, a children's music and entertainment event. It also hosts musical events such as its annual BluesFest, a weekend festival with nationally-acclaimed bands, and periodic concerts in its restaurant lounge. In addition, the resort offers educational programs such as "Science on the Slopes" for school children.

At the Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary, the Massachusetts Audubon Society offers nature programs, programs relating to the human history of the farm, and homeschool programs on topics such as Princeton settlers and settlement patterns. In September 2006, the Sanctuary celebrated its 50th anniversary with community activities reminiscent of the popular Hay Day celebrations held years ago. Also, the Wachusett Mountain State Reservation offers educational programs on natural resources and local history in addition to providing regional recreation opportunities. Finally, the town has engaged in promoting the arts and small business activity by converting the Princeton Center Building on Boylston Avenue into private office and community space for organizations such as the Princeton Historical Society and Princeton Arts Society.

Household Income

Compared to the surrounding region and most communities in the Commonwealth, Princeton is a very affluent town. Its median household income of $80,993 significantly exceeds that of all communities nearby and is 1.6 times higher than the median household income for the state as a whole. Although Princeton's affluence is hardly new, its state rank for household income rose considerably from 1980-2000, displacing Paxton as the region's once-wealthiest community.[12]

[12] Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, "Median Household Income, 1979-1999," Municipal Data Bank.

TABLE 6.2: ASSESSED VALUATION AND PERCENT SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

	Assessed Valuation		Taxable Parcels		
Fiscal Year	Total	% Single-Family Homes	Total	Single-Family Parcels	% Single-Family Parcels
1997	$227,342,484	82.6%	1,632	1,071	65.6%
1998	$232,493,198	83.0%	1,617	1,085	67.1%
1999	$245,556,628	84.0%	1,619	1,104	68.2%
2000	$266,937,503	83.9%	1,613	1,113	69.0%
2001	$281,391,188	84.4%	1,615	1,125	69.7%
2002	$303,545,093	84.1%	1,621	1,137	70.1%
2003	$366,541,926	85.4%	1,616	1,155	71.5%
2004	$407,429,370	86.0%	1,618	1,170	72.3%
2005	$446,591,452	86.3%	1,623	1,180	72.7%
2006	$490,764,577	86.8%	1,630	1,192	73.1%
Change					
1997-2006	115.9%		-0.1%	11.3%	
2002-2006	61.7%		0.6%	4.8%	

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Municipal Data Bank.

Princeton households obtain most of their income from wage or salary employment (89.7%), but self-employment generates a larger share of household income in Princeton than in other communities nearby, with the exception of Paxton. A small percentage of Princeton households receive Social Security and retirement income and an even smaller percentage relies on some form of public assistance.[13]

Tax Base

Princeton's tax base has changed very little in the past ten years. A decade ago, residential taxes accounted for 95.9% of the town's total property tax levy while commercial taxes supplied a mere 2.7%. By FY 2006, residential taxes had increased to 97.5% and commercial taxes had declined to 1.7% of the total. The diminishing share of commercial property valuation in the tax base is largely due to the higher rate of growth in single-family home values relative to the value of commercial properties (Table 6.2).

Princeton's declining tax rate has gone hand-in-hand with an exponential rate of growth in assessed valuation, particularly residential valuation. Since Proposition 2 ½ restricts the amount of property tax revenue that cities and towns can raise each year, tax base growth does not automatically lead to equivalent revenue growth. Under Proposition 2 ½, municipalities are subject to a 2.5% cap on annual increases in the levy limit, plus a one-time base adjustment for the value of new growth that occurred during the previous fiscal year. The cap on levy limit growth applies unless voters approve a Proposition 2 ½ override.[14] Some communities – including Princeton – do not tax their residents at the maximum permit-

[13] Census 2000, Summary File 3, Tables P52, P60, P62, P65, P69.

[14] Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, "Assessed Values by Class" and "Tax Levy by Class." Princeton's last successful Proposition 2 ½ override occurred in FY 1989. The town approved successive annual overrides for FY 1983-1985 and later, for FY 1989. A small override for FY 1987 passed following defeat of a much larger one earlier in the year, as did proposed overrides for FY 1988 and 1990. According to the Department of Revenue, Princeton has not voted on an override since 1990. The town has approved debt exclusions for improvements to the Thomas Prince School and local roads.

ted by Proposition 2 ½, and they accrue what is known as "excess capacity." From time to time, Princeton's excess capacity has been tapped to cover growth in community service costs and the result has been a larger-than-usual increase in tax bills. For example, since 1997 the average tax bill has increased by $157 per year, but in FY 2001, homeowners absorbed a $371 tax bill increase at precisely the point that Princeton's excess levy capacity dropped sharply.

Princeton taxes residential, commercial and industrial property at a uniform tax rate. This makes sense because Princeton has so few businesses and all of them are small. Today, the town has nine commercial properties with an average assessed value of $702,480 and five industrial properties (three used as relay or transmission facilities by utility companies) with an average assessed value of $307,055.

Excluding the member-only outdoor recreation organizations whose land is classified as commercial property, Princeton has only five parcels with active businesses: an auto repair shop and a few small retailers and eating establishments. The parcels actually used for business purposes contain a combined total of about 45.7 acres, scattered across Main Street, Worcester Road, Westminster Road and Hubbardston Road.[15] It is clear from local records that Princeton also has a number of home-based businesses operating in residential areas, but since the businesses constitute an accessory use, the properties are assessed as a residential use, not a commercial use.

LOCAL & REGIONAL TRENDS

According to the Town Clerk, Princeton has 155 registered businesses. They include, in part, 30 professional offices (e.g., consultants, architects, financial advisors, etc.), 30 service businesses such as personal and domestic service, catering, repairs, lawn care, etc., 22 construction trade businesses, and nearly 20 retail or sales businesses, about one-third of which operate from storefront locations. In addition, Princeton's registered hospitality businesses include one inn and four restaurants, and about 10 farms and 10-12 artists also have registered businesses. There is not sufficient information to determine how many of Princeton's registered businesses operate from home or in dedicated business locations, or whether all 155 are currently active.[16]

Business Areas

Princeton Business Park. The Business District in Princeton runs about 300 feet deep along both sides of Worcester Road (Route 31), and extends about one quarter mile north of the Holden town line for approximately one mile to the Princeton Municipal Light Department (PMLD) and the Mountain Barn Restaurant.

Except for the Wachusett Mountain State Reservation, the Worcester Road business district contains Princeton's largest concentration of businesses. It currently includes the Business Park, the Post Office commercial building, the Mountain Barn Restaurant, PMLD, and a cell tower. The Business Park alone includes a collection of some 7-8 buildings with a combined total of 39,000± sq. ft. of space. They were built between 1938 and the late 1950s of brick, wood, metal, and more recently post and beam construction, and served as the locus of an antique auto museum.

Today, about nine businesses with more than 30 employees operate in the Business Park. One business, Photopanels of New England, employs eight people, including five residents of Princeton.[17] Other businesses include manufacturing,

[15] Princeton Assessor's Office, Parcel Records Database (October 2005).

[16] Princeton Town Clerk, Registered Businesses; data analysis by Larry Koff & Associates, December 2005

[17] Bruce Jacobson, President, Photopanels of New England, Inc., interviewed by Larry Koff & Associates.

warehouse, sales and flex space (manufacturing/sales). The other major commercial property is a three-story, 25,000 sq. ft. building that is occupied by the Post Office and a mix of service, retail and professional tenants: a builder, insurance agent, dentist, a package store, and a bank. The remainder of the district is occupied by residential uses, leaving little expansion space for commercial activity.

East Princeton. The Business-Industrial District applies to two areas in Princeton. One is in East Princeton. However, the Business-Industrial District designation is a misnomer because there are very few business enterprises and no industry. Local businesses include the Town Line Garage, a Quick Stop convenience, and a local restaurant. Although this area was once served by a post office, the building is now vacant. In fact, most of the land in East Princeton's Business-Industrial District has been developed for homes.

West Princeton. While zoned for industry and bisected by a freight line that runs from Worcester to Gardner, the Business-Industrial District off Hubbardston Road currently has no business-industrial uses. Ownership, environmental and regulatory constraints severely limit the district's potential for industrial development, and it contains no viable sites for locating a rail siding.

North of Gates Road, most of the industrially zoned land is owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the town. Princeton's town-owned property includes a former landfill (6.7 acres) and a few additional parcels totaling 9± acres, divided by a 72-acre parcel owned by DCR. South of Gates Road, the remainder of the district is bisected by a brook that leads to the Quinapoxet Reservoir on the Princeton/Holden town line. The potential for industrial uses in this location is severely limited by the Watershed Protection Act, which regulates activity adjacent to streams that flow into the Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs and the Ware River. Unless the town's former landfill can be developed as a site for a windmill or for generating biomass energy, it probably makes more sense to rezone this area for residential or open space uses.

Town Center. Princeton Center is not zoned for business today, but historically it included some small businesses. Since the center is residentially zoned, it has been very difficult to sustain or re-establish commercial and mixed use properties. A restaurant and retail space (a general store) consisting of about 4,300 sq. ft. in a single-story building is located at 23 Hubbardston Road, and a former gas station has been remediated and could be re-established for commercial uses.[18]

In keeping with a historic village center, there is a three-story, mixed-use building nearby at 2 Mountain Road, containing three upper-story apartments and 4,200 sq. ft. of currently vacant first-floor space. There is a second business site on Hubbardston Road with about 2,000 sq. ft. of space. These existing commercial spaces would be appropriate for small locally-oriented businesses such as restaurants, convenience food, or retail stores. However, since the uses are not allowed under current zoning, establishing them requires at least a special permit to change a non-conforming use, and possibly a variance. Princeton's zoning constrains viable uses of these properties.

Natural Resource-Based Industries

Agriculture. Land in Chapter 61, 61A and 61B agreements accounts for about 4,937 acres in Princeton: 54% (2,661 acres) under Chapter 61, 37.5% (1,855 acres) under Chapter 61A, and 8.5% (421 acres) under Chapter 61B. Most of the agricultural land is used for wood lots, forage crops and pasture, mainly for horses.

Princeton has not had a well-organized advocacy base for farming, although this is likely to change

[18] Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, "Waste Site Cleanup Notifications and Status," searchable database at <http://www.mass.gov/dep/cleanup/sites/sdown.htm>.

TABLE 6.3: MAJOR ECOTOURISM RESOURCES IN PRINCETON

Attractions/Organization	Description	Activity
Wachusett Mountain (DCR)	2,250 acres in Westminster and Princeton	Skiing, hiking, hunting, fishing, education/ research
Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary (Massachusetts Audubon Society)	1,200 acres	Hiking, wildlife viewing, visitor's center, education
Leominster State Forest (DCR)	4,300 acres in Westminster, Princeton, Leominster, Fitchburg and Sterling	Trails for hiking and mountain biking, swimming, kayaking, rock climbing, cross country skiing and snowmobiling
Mid-State Trail (Mid-State Trail Association, with cooperation of State Agencies and private property owners)	95 mile trail from Rhode Island to New Hampshire border	Hiking
Water resources (various owners)	Quinapoxet Reservoir, Wachusett Lake, and numerous other ponds in Princeton	Scenic attractions, offer hiking, fishing and bird watching
Agriculture (private owners)	(Acres in active use needs to be confirmed with the town)	Mostly wood lots, raising hay and crops, and keeping of animals, especially horses.

Compiled by Larry Koff and Associates (2006).

because the town has established an Agricultural Commission. Still, linkages between local farms and agricultural education, agri-tourism, or farm-based retail and "value-added" initiatives elsewhere in Central Massachusetts seem to be missing in Princeton. According to the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture, Sterling, Rutland, Holden and Hubbardston are among the Worcester County communities with agri-tourism farms. To date, this trend has not taken hold in Princeton.

Hospitality. Princeton's largest hospitality facility, the historic Fernside Inn on Mountain Road, has been purchased by McLean Hospital for use as a rehabilitation center. There is now only one registered bed and breakfast operating in Princeton, the Harrington Farm restaurant.

Ecotourism. Wachusett Mountain offers fabulous views of Boston as well as the adjacent rural landscape, which includes vast amounts of parkland, recreation areas owned by gun and outdoor clubs, the Massachusetts Audubon Society and the Mid-State Trail Association. These organizations sponsor a variety of outdoor activities including hiking, biking, skiing, canoeing, hunting, camping and fishing, for the enjoyment of tourists as well as local residents. In addition, they offer educational programs and seasonal festivals that attract many visitors to the region (Table 6-3).

The tourist attractions provide spin-off economic benefits for local restaurants, bed and breakfast establishments, farms, and local craftsmen. Together, the attractions and the supporting hospitality businesses form a pattern of activities – **ecotourism** – which fosters the protection of open space and the appreciation of a rural life style. A business network, the Johnny Appleseed Trail Association, markets and promotes eco-tourism throughout the region. Princeton's wind farm

could also provide another educational tourism attraction, demonstrating advanced potential for local generation of renewable energy.

PAST PLANS, STUDIES & REPORTS

Princeton's past master plan reports included several economic development recommendations, yet few have been implemented. In 1970, for example, Princeton's first master plan urged the town to consider eliminating the business-industrial district on Route 140 and designing a small, neighborhood-business oriented district in East Princeton. It also promoted preserving the town center as a traditional mixed-use area by rezoning land suitable for small business on Boylston Avenue. Similar proposals were made in 1975, 1980 and 1991.

The recurring theme in these studies continues today: should zoning policies reflect Princeton's past, current or future goals with respect to economic development? A comparison of current land uses to zoning districts indicates that the vast majority of land zoned for commercial or industrial development is occupied by residential uses or resources areas, primarily wetlands, which would prohibit these activities or create potential land use conflicts. While zoning does not permit commercial uses in the town center, which once supported a small collection of businesses, it is an appropriate location to continue some small-scale commercial activity. Moreover, residents seem to recognize the town center as Princeton's seat of social, cultural and civic activity because throughout this Master Plan process, many people have said they wish the town center had a coffee shop: an informal place that would encourage residents to gather and socialize. Ironically, Princeton's current zoning prohibits this.

ISSUES, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Economic Sustainability

Princeton's past experience with master plan implementation and the continued reluctance of residents to support economic development raise several planning concerns. Although it may seem that economic growth inherently conflicts with Princeton's interest in rural character, the reality is that Princeton – like countless communities in Central Massachusetts and the Berkshires – is gradually evolving as a small, affluent, low-density town with visual characteristics that resemble rural development. Princeton does not have a rural economy and most of its residents rely on suburban or urban areas for their livelihoods, goods and services, entertainment and culture, and health care. Contemporary rural communities typically have:

- Recognizable village nodes with a mix of residential, civic, institutional and commercial uses, with a different land use pattern than that found in outlying areas of the town;
- Natural assets – namely land and water resources – that once supported an agriculture-dependent economy, such as farming, forestry and fishing;
- An economy comprised of non-farm services and industries, often related to or inspired by agriculture-dependent land uses, such as recreation, tourism, value-added production, construction trades, educational institutions, and so forth; and
- A limited framework of roads that connect outlying areas to local villages and nearby population centers, i.e., the absence of cul-de-sac streets.

Princeton has some of these characteristics, yet the exclusion of a recognizable business base is

striking, particularly in light of the town's history. While residents of rural areas often travel to population centers for comparison goods, it is far less common for them to have few if any choices for convenience goods and basic services. Indeed, having to drive to an adjacent town to purchase food is indicative of non-sustainable development.

The roots of Princeton's skepticism about commercial development apparently run deep. In 1971, the town defeated proposals that would have made it possible to nurture a few small business areas and prevent business and industrial development on unsuitable land. In lieu of providing for a more organized pattern of commercial development, Princeton opted for policies that allow single-family homes in any location, even in industrial districts.

One consequence of this choice is that except for areas protected from development by ownership, perpetual restrictions or environmental regulations, Princeton has made all of its land developable for the most easily marketable, resource-consuming, and fiscally expensive land use: single-family homes. A second consequence is that Princeton's current growth pattern is almost exclusively auto-dependent. Third, by making it so difficult for people to live in and work in the same town, Princeton has fostered a nearly invisible community of entrepreneurs and small, locally owned businesses with no place to grow. Princeton has business districts, but for the most part the districts are either inappropriate for commercial uses or oriented externally, i.e., on the outskirts of town.

The alternative is an economic development policy that supports rural living and does not direct the impacts of one community's growth onto adjacent towns. It is possible to limit economic activity to a few appropriate locations where businesses can thrive, and to encourage small-scale businesses that provide meeting places or venues for local crafts/products. With the right design standards and development review procedures, high-value professional services and small-scale, light manufacturing/research and development businesses that provide living wages and local employment are compatible with rural planning. Further, Princeton has opportunities to enhance farming and forestry as elements of the local economy, and the town recognized this by establishing an Agricultural Commission. However, preserving quality agricultural land with growth management tools and providing funds for conservation would help Princeton to achieve balanced development. Regulations that provide flexibility for farm owners to carry out limited retail, hospitality, and home-based business activities to generate additional income will be essential to any strategy to save farm and forestry land.

Ecotourism and environment-based businesses also have potential in Princeton. It is not unrealistic for Princeton to consider an economic development strategy that emphasizes environmental education and research, joint marketing of hospitality and ecotourism-related businesses with Wachusett Mountain Ski Resort, Massachusetts Audubon Society and other organizations, or allowing new, environmentally sustainable natural resource-based businesses. Through the efforts of the Princeton Municipal Light Department, Princeton has continued to pursue infrastructure improvements that benefit residents, local businesses and home-based workers, such as high-speed internet service. However, Princeton may need to be open to shared septic systems or small package treatment plants in order to facilitate some business development. Instituting or revising a local small business network would also make sense.

Fiscal Stability

Princeton depends almost entirely on residential property tax revenue to finance local government services. Without a contributing commercial base, homeowners will continue to absorb a higher tax burden as undeveloped land converts to residential development. Today, Princeton's privately-owned open space provides a nominal subsidy for

community services used by residents. However, virtually all of the remaining developable land is zoned for residential development. In addition, the existing pockets of business-zoned land will most likely convert to homes in the future because they are poorly suited for commercial or industrial uses.

Although all land uses generate costs, new residential development places more demands on municipal services than new commercial development. Unlike residential subdivisions, commercial development will largely be supported by existing infrastructure and place no burdens on public schools. A strategy to provide for Princeton's long-term fiscal well-being should emphasize preserving privately-owned open space and fostering limited commercial activities that are compatible with the town's rural development interests. For example, agriculture and agricultural businesses, eco-tourism, and renewable energy production could reduce some of the pressures of residential growth by generating a higher ratio of revenue to service costs. Even if the total amount of revenue is low, the associated growth in service costs will be even lower. Measures to control the fiscal impact of new development should not be limited to generating revenue; reducing the rate of growth in service costs is also important.

Existing Zoning

There is an undeniable mismatch between Princeton's commercial districts, the location and mix of businesses, and the goals that many Princeton residents have in mind for their town's future. A review of commercial land uses in Princeton indicates that some areas, particularly the town center, contain non-conforming commercial uses while business-zoned areas offer few if any opportunities for commercial use or expansion. Adjusting the boundaries and some of the uses permitted within these districts make them more responsive to local needs for economic livelihood and protect Princeton's interest in rural character.

Princeton Business Park. There is already a concentration of retail, service, and light manufacturing businesses in this district, but little room for expansion within the current zoning boundaries. Several abutting vacant parcels to the rear of PMLD and Mountain Barn Restaurant seem to provide an optimum expansion area. Together, these properties provide about 40 acres of additional land with few if any environmental constraints. Furthermore, Princeton has very few areas that are as well located to provide opportunities for local business development.

East Princeton. Between Hobbs Road and East Princeton Road, vacant land that is relatively unconstrained provides another, albeit limited opportunity for mixed-use development. One four-acre parcel is currently for sale in this area. Increasing the depth of the business district on the west side of Route 140 would make it possible to develop a traditional blend of homes and small businesses. Under current zoning, however, the remainder of the business district in this location will most likely be developed for low density residential or strip commercial uses.

West Princeton. Ownership and environmental constraints severely limit the potential for land in the Business-Industrial District to be developed for industrial uses. There may be opportunities to reuse the former landfill or to convert town-owned land in this location to some economic use, but these are remote possibilities and they require a level of capacity and financial investment that Princeton is not poised to provide.

Town Center. This historically mixed-use area is zoned for very-low-density residential development, which constrains the viability of the few remaining businesses and precludes the re-establishment of commercial uses that are appropriate for a New England town center. Changing the zoning to reflect the existing arrangement of density and uses could promote a sustainable plan for the town center and provide a limited opportunity for commercial and residential expansion.

In addition, some infill of vacant sites and better utilization of existing public facilities might reinforce the town center as a mixed-use village. For example, the Princeton Center School on Boylston Avenue contains about 6,000 sq. ft. The town currently makes some of space available to community groups and leases other space to professional office tenants. Perhaps the town should consider a different approach to the space and explore a more economically valuable mix of uses.[19]

Bagg Hall has a vacant second floor that cannot be utilized because it is inaccessible to persons with disabilities and has no heat. If these issues were resolved, the second floor might be able to support governmental activities and provide performing arts that Princeton does not have today. At the intersection of Worcester and Boylston Avenue, there is a town-owned parcel (Dingman Park) with 1.84 acres of land. According to available sources, the site once supported a small hotel that was destroyed by fire ca. 1915. It could most likely accommodate a mixed-use building and open space today, and thereby reinforce the historic village quality of this location. In general, Princeton needs a more focused approach to town center development in order to ensure the vitality and economic use of its historic properties. Preserving them in the long run will require more flexibility to respond to changing market conditions.

Development Standards. In all of Princeton's zoning districts, a conforming lot requires 87,120 sq. ft. of land with at least 43,560 sq. ft. of upland. New buildings must conform to minimum setbacks of 50' in front and 30' to the side and rear, and may cover up to 30% of the lot. The only difference in dimensional regulations between Princeton's residential and nonresidential districts involves building height; in a residential area, a building may not exceed 35 feet and 2.5 stories, and in a business area, 35 feet and three stories. For a relatively unconstrained lot in the Business District, the zoning bylaw allows a maximum building footprint of up to 26,136 sq. ft. (30%) and a maximum gross floor area of 78,408 sq. ft. (footprint x three stories). Though very unlikely, this is what the zoning bylaw permits *as of right*. In addition, the current bylaw does not require any minimum percentage of open space on a lot, it establishes no upper limit on impervious surfaces, and it has no off-street parking or landscaping requirements. These omissions mean that if on-site wastewater disposal requirements can be met, it is possible to "maximize" the use of a two-acre lot with a large building separated from the road by a parking lot.

Off-street parking is typically determined by a schedule in the zoning bylaw. Since Princeton has no off-street parking standards today, the developer – not the zoning bylaw – determines the amount of off-street parking. Depending on the mix of uses, the parking could be excessive or completely inadequate. Under current zoning, the number of spaces in a commercial development has no regulatory basis. Instead, off-street parking is a function of land not covered by a building and the market expectations of prospective tenants.

A more likely scenario is that Princeton will never see commercial buildings with 78,408 sq. ft. of floor area. The existing coverage ratio applied to a two-acre lot enables a large enough footprint to accommodate several small businesses in a one-story building, which does not comport with Princeton's architectural traditions and may actually detract from the town's character. The contrast between what the zoning bylaw allows and what is plausible in a very small town with difficult-to-develop land is obvious, yet neither scenario is consistent with what Princeton residents have described as the place they cherish today or would like to see tomorrow.

[19] Bill Gagnier, Princeton property owner; interviewed by Larry Koff & Associates.

TABLE 6.4: HOME-BASED BUSINESS CLASSIFICATIONS AND SAMPLE ZONING CRITERIA	
Business Type	Zoning Considerations
Consultants & Professional Services	Consider number of part time/full time employees allows to work on the premises, and amount and location of parking for employees or clients.
Crafts/Agriculture	Consider how much space should be provided for on-site sales, e.g., permanent or seasonal, indoor or outdoor. Consider kinds of sales, e.g., whether a farm stand should be allowed to increase the percentage of non-local products above the minimum in the state zoning act, and/or arts and crafts, ice cream, coffee or prepared foods for consumption on or off site. Consider whether to allow mixed-use structures, such as a shop or barn attached to home. Establish parking limitations. Consider whether to allow expanded signage.
Contractors	Consider what vehicles/equipment can be stored, whether indoors or outdoors, and whether screening is required. Consider whether to permit mixed-use structures.
Hospitality	Consider whether to broaden the definition of bed-and-breakfast to permit a larger number of rooms and a range of eco-tourism facilities, some of which could be combined with agriculture. In addition to lodging, consider whether home-based hospitality establishments can serve food, provide on-site event catering, or other cultural attractions.

At-Home Businesses

In Princeton, home-based businesses form a small but important portion of the town's economic base. Growth in home businesses can benefit Princeton because they provide a source of livelihood for residents and have minimal if any impacts on traffic or community character. Of course, home businesses can be detrimental when the business activities become too large, conspicuous or disruptive for residential areas. However, Princeton's home occupation zoning is quite prescriptive and places significant limits on the scale of home business operations. For example, not more than one person other than a resident can be regularly employed, signage is limited, and regular parking of commercial vehicles is prohibited. Although these kinds of controls are intended to protect a neighborhood, performance standards provide a better way to accomplish that end without discouraging self-employment.

Local Utilities

Wind Power. The Princeton Municipal Light Department (PMLD) currently operates eight small windmills and plans to install two larger towers extending some 230 feet. The new towers are expected to generate approximately 40% of the town's electrical power, or about 9 million kw per year. PMLD hopes that making this investment will stabilize the cost of electricity for town residents and small businesses.

High-Speed Internet Service. The provision of high-speed internet access is another area in which PMLD has shown leadership to provide basic services for a modern rural lifestyle. High- speed internet access is extremely important for home-based businesses and residents, but until recently it was available to less than 30% of the town. In an effort to address this need, PMLD has pursued plans to design and build a distributed antennal system that would be owned and operated by the town. Residents will sign annual service contracts and pay a monthly rate for this service.

Other Infrastructure. Quality cell phone service and decentralized water and sewer service are also needed to facilitate the continued evolution of a modern rural life style in Princeton. These investments will need to be addressed by town officials working with wireless communication companies on one hand, and on the other hand, by town boards assuring that their regulations do not unduly restrict opportunities for shared septic systems and small package treatment facilities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Home Occupations and Home-Based Businesses

Princeton should consider a different approach to regulating home occupations and small-business activity conducted from a home office or shop. For example, the zoning bylaw could encourage particular types of home occupations by allowing them by right, control others by a special permit process, and establish clear standards to ensure that no home-based business has an adverse impact on the character, environment or traffic of the surrounding neighborhood.

The range of issues associated with home-based businesses in Princeton can be understood by considering the industries into which most of the businesses fall: consulting/service related businesses, construction/contracting businesses, hospitality/crafts, and agriculture (Table E-4). Through special permit review and approval criteria, Princeton could establish reasonable standards for these business categories, provide flexibility to at-home entrepreneurs and simultaneously ensure adequate controls. In addition to establishing a regulatory framework for home-based commercial activity, some form of technical assistance, networking, or joint marketing may also help to support home-based business owners. Additionally, consideration should be given to businesses that provide support services – such as, computer maintenance or copy/mailing services – to complement home-based businesses, or for restaurant or retail enterprises to provide meeting places or outlets for marketing locally made products.

Business District Zoning

The Land Use Element of this Master Plan contains several recommendations for reorganizing Princeton's existing business districts, including district boundary modifications, new use regulations and dimensional regulations that make sense for business or mixed-use parcels, and development standards to assure quality. Overall, the proposed changes would reduce the total amount of land zoned for business or industrial uses, reduce the risk of future land use conflicts, and promote small-scale businesses in existing or emerging commercial nodes: East Princeton, Worcester Road, and on a limited basis, the Town Center. It is clear that most residents participating in the Master Plan process do not want to encourage "commercialization" in Princeton, and the town is not well suited for some of the uses allowed under current zoning. At the same time, Princeton should continue to allow some business activity because its own residents need goods and services and they also need places to work.

Infrastructure

Princeton needs infrastructure improvements to serve residents and support local businesses. Wastewater disposal and water supply also have to be considered in providing a climate favorable for small businesses.

Agriculture

The loss of agricultural land changes a community's landscape and natural resource base; it also undermines fiscal stability and reduces the viability of remaining agricultural and eco-tourism enterprises. Promoting the economic success of farming will be critical to sustaining the economic value of undeveloped land. Toward this end, Princeton should support the work of its recently appointed Agricultural Commission.

A local agricultural commission can work with owners to promote land management and good farming practices, bring state and federal technical assistance and financial resources to Princeton farmers, and assist the Board of Health and farm animal owners to address public health and neighborhood impact issues. Also, local commissions often work with owners of large historic farm structures (agricultural outbuildings) to promote hospitality and eco-tourism.

Allowing limited expansion of non-agricultural commercial activities can provide alternatives for farms to diversify their income. State law provides for farm stands to sell non-local goods and products, and as long as farm owners comply with the law they can operate as exempt uses. To provide more viable opportunities, however, the town might consider allowing farm stands to exceed the state maximum (not more than 50% non-local goods) and possibly operate additional eco-tourism related businesses, such as an ice-cream stand, coffee house, restaurant, or retail shop. When farmers can diversify their merchandise and services, they have a much better shot at remaining open on a year-round basis and competing with non-farm retail establishments.

Ecotourism

Fostering ecotourism will serve to reinforce Princeton's rural character and facilitate the conservation of privately-owned open space. A challenge for Princeton is to take advantage of these resources and enhance cooperation between the town and the businesses, institutions, and state agencies that center on ecotourism. Increased coordination will help to ensure protection of the natural resources and rural landscapes on which ecotourism businesses rely – and which Princeton residents want to preserve. In addition, joint planning for programming, land conservation, and resource management should bring about enhanced benefits for everyone.

Promoting the Arts

While Princeton has an active arts community, it does not have a designated theater space or even adequate space within existing facilities to host large productions. Regional theaters such as Worcester's Foothills Theater and Calliope Theater in Boylston are some of the closest theaters in the region. Smaller productions are held at the Thomas Prince School and at the Wachusett Mountain Ski Resort, as well as musical programs at the Congregational Church. Although Bagg Hall has a stage on the second floor, this space is not accessible to persons with disabilities and it needs restoration work. The town should consider designing renovations for Bagg Hall to accommodate performance and exhibition space. It would not be difficult for Princeton to pursue linkages between agriculture, ecotourism, hospitality and the arts. These kinds of approaches to economic development would be very compatible with the town's image of itself and its goals for the future.

Organizational Capacity

Local business leaders should re-establish their organization and promote shared interests in matters such as reasonable zoning, adequate infrastructure, collaborative marketing and regional planning. Membership ought to include merchants, property and business owners, with representation from eco-tourism, farming, home occupations, service, non-profit organizations, and other businesses. Such efforts are usually most successful if the business association does not depend upon government support.

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CHAPTER 7

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

Transportation is more than just roads. Transportation means mobility, access, and connectivity for motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. Transportation needs often serve as the catalyst for other improvements in the public realm, including preservation and enhancement. Finally, transportation facilities can both scar landscapes as well as open up vistas, secluded areas, and passive and active recreation opportunities. As a result, transportation policies have a major impact on all aspects of a town plan.

Roads and highways are frequently defining elements in cities and towns. In Princeton, where there are relatively few roads, the roads and highways provide scenic backdrops as much as they provide access to land parcels and the regional highway system. Virtually no new roads have been built here since the first master plan was completed in 1970, which largely reflects the town's desires to minimize road construction and slow the pace of new development. Policies that promote development near existing roads minimize the need for new roads; however, other policies that promote compact development to help preserve open space elsewhere in town may require new roads or extensions for access. Compared to many communities, Princeton has a high ratio of road miles per capita and a low ratio of road miles per square mile of land.

Sidewalks are just about non-existent in Princeton, so most roads double as pedestrian ways and travel ways for large and small vehicles, bicycles and horses. In addition, the limited number of roads in town means that local traffic and regional traffic mix to a greater degree than in many other communities. If few new roads are built, the implication for the future is that regional or through traffic will find its way by using local streets instead of using the collectors or arterial roadways.

Princeton residents often enjoy non-vehicular modes of travel around their neighborhoods and through town. (*Photo supplied by Master Plan Steering Committee.*)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Roadways

Although people may not think of roads when they imagine scenic beauty, many of Princeton's roads are very pretty and they provide incredible vistas. Even Route 140, a relatively wide and well-traveled roadway, has scenic features. It also serves as the gateway for historic East Princeton. The town's gravel roads are typically low-volume, low-speed, dead-end roads that showcase farms or open space. Overall, Princeton's road network is composed of winding, rural byways that radiate from the center of town and make an indelible contribution to the community's visual character.

Functional Classification

For planning, design and maintenance purposes, roadways are typically classified according to the functions they serve. A classification system is important because rating streets helps to manage road improvement resources, guide traffic design and engineering decisions, and direct vehicular traffic to roads best equipped to support it. The standard functional classifications used in highway planning and design include arterial, collector and local roads. These designations refer to differences in the level of service, travel speeds and travel distances that roadways are designed to accommodate. In turn, each functional class is sub-classified by the surrounding land use pattern (urban or rural) and the type of access to a given roadway.

In the hierarchy of functional classifications, arterial roads provide the greatest degree of mobility: the highest level of service, the fastest travel speeds, and the longest travel distance with few if any interruptions. By design, the main purpose of **arterial roads** is to move through traffic, or traffic with a non-local destination. **Collector roads** provide a somewhat lower level of service, lower speeds and shorter travel distances. Their primary purpose is to connect local traffic with arterial roads. **Local roads** are intended to provide local access rather than to support through traffic.

The line between collector and arterial is not always obvious, and sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish collectors from local roads. Moreover, functional classifications have to be reassessed from time to time due to changes in traffic volumes and land use patterns. According to the Commonwealth's most recent statewide roads inventory (December 2005), more than 70% of the roads in Princeton qualify as local roads, 25% are collector roads, and 5% are arterials. The arterial and collector network serving Princeton includes three state-numbered routes – Routes 31, 62 and 140 – and portions of other non-numbered roadways (Map 7-1).

- **Route 140** is a rural minor arterial, extending northwest through Princeton from the Sterling town line (Redemption Rock Trail South) to Westminster (Redemption Rock Trail North). For about 1.7 miles north of East Princeton, Route 140 overlaps with Route 31 until the two routes diverge near Paradise Pond. Route 140 provides connections to Route 2 to the north and Interstate Route 190 to the south.

- **Route 31** is a rural major collector that runs 9.28 miles through Princeton, northeast from the Holden town border in the south (Worcester Road) to the Westminster town border in the north (Fitchburg Road).

- **Route 62** is a rural major collector that runs 8.27 miles (including a half-mile overlap with Route 31) in an east-west direction across the town, traveling from the Hubbardston town border in the west (Hubbardston Road) to the Sterling town border in the east (Sterling Road).

- **Mountain Road** is a rural major collector that extends from Princeton Center north to the Westminster town line, where it becomes Mile Hill Road and eventually terminates at Route 140. It provides some of Princeton's most scenic, open views, and serves traffic moving to and from the Wachusett Mountain Ski Area.

- **Boylston Avenue, Brooks Station Road** and **Hobbs Road** are classified as rural minor collectors, although the width, condition and general character of Hobbs Road east of Route 140 suggest that it is really a local road. Major and minor collectors differ by the amount of traffic they carry, and this is influenced by the number of streets with which they intersect.

TABLE 7.1: SUMMARY OF ROAD CENTERLINE MILES BY FUNCTIONAL CLASS AND OWNERSHIP			
Functional Class	**Miles**	**Jurisdiction**	**Miles**
Rural Arterial	4.29	MassHighway	0.02
Rural Collector (Major)	20.02	State Park (DCR)	2.25
Rural Collector (Minor)	4.77	Town of Princeton	80.23
Local	72.29	Unaccepted Ways	1.08
		Unclassified Jurisdiction	17.79
Total	101.37	Total	101.37
Source: Executive Office of Transportation, Office of Transportation Planning (2006).			

All other roads in Princeton fall into the category of "local." Of course, local roads often carry non-local traffic, but their location, adjacent land use patterns and traffic volumes mean that for the most part, they provide access to homes, businesses and institutions within the town. However, "local" is actually a catch-all term because it includes any road that does not meet the criteria for designation as an arterial or collector. A road classified as "local" by function is not necessarily a road that must be maintained by local government.

Jurisdiction

Characterizing the function of roads is not the same as describing ownership or jurisdiction. While collectors and arterials often bear a state route sign, they are not always owned or controlled by the state. The Commonwealth does not own any roads in Princeton, although MassHighway has jurisdiction over the bridges on Main Street and Hubbardston Road. Since the late 1970s, all three state-numbered roads in Princeton have been owned by the town and the town is responsible for maintaining them.

All told, Princeton has about 82 miles of publicly owned roads and slightly more than one mile of unaccepted ways, as shown in Table 7.1. In addition, there are approximately 18 miles of roads not classified as public or unaccepted ways, such as access roads serving commercial or institutional properties, limited or emergency access roads on state-owned land, and roads providing exclusive access to private property, not intended for public use.[1] For municipal planning purposes, the most important roads are those for which the town has legal and financial responsibility. Today, this includes a total of 80.23 road miles, which represent all town-accepted public ways and the state-numbered routes. Improvements to Routes 31, 62, and 140 and Boylston Avenue, Brooks Station Road, East Princeton Road, Mountain Road and Fitchburg Road are eligible for federal funding under the Surface Transportation Program.

Physical Characteristics and Condition of Roads

Although Princeton has more than 80 miles of roadways to maintain, the road network is fairly limited. Table 7.2 shows that compared with many communities, Princeton and other very-low-density towns have a low ratio of road miles to land area. At the same time, Princeton has a high ratio of road miles to total population; in fact

[1] Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Transportation, Office of Transportation Planning, 2005 Road Inventory Year-End Report (March 2006) and corresponding GIS database, downloadable at <http://www.eot.state.ma.us/>. Author's note: road miles with unclassified jurisdiction and other missing data elements were recently added to the statewide roads inventory.

TABLE 7.2: RATIO OF PUBLIC ROAD MILES TO LAND AREA AND POPULATION

Town	Land Area (Sq. Mi.)	Population (2000)	Centerline Miles: Town Roads	Land Area Ratio	Population Ratio	Total	% Local
Hopkinton	26.6	13,346	100.00	3.77	0.007	124.03	80.6%
Dover	15.3	5,558	57.32	3.74	0.010	60.78	94.3%
Grafton	22.7	14,894	80.12	3.52	0.005	99.2	80.8%
Lincoln	14.4	8,056	49.23	3.43	0.006	60.86	80.9%
Stow	17.6	5,902	60.31	3.42	0.010	60.31	100.0%
W. Newbury	13.5	4,149	45.89	3.39	0.011	51.96	88.3%
Holden	35.0	15,621	109.47	3.13	0.007	120.96	90.5%
Groton	32.8	9,547	101.35	3.09	0.011	110.99	91.3%
Charlton	42.5	11,263	119.41	2.81	0.011	150.78	79.2%
Sterling	30.5	7,257	85.08	2.79	0.012	106.81	79.7%
Paxton	14.7	4,386	37.85	2.57	0.009	44.94	84.2%
Harvard	26.4	5,981	64.95	2.46	0.011	77.35	84.0%
Westminster	35.5	6,907	84.93	2.39	0.012	109.35	77.7%
PRINCETON	**35.4**	**3,353**	**79.75**	**2.25**	**0.024**	**83.08**	**96.0%**
Barre	44.3	5,113	99.08	2.24	0.019	116.56	85.0%
Templeton	32.0	6,799	68.45	2.14	0.010	101.58	67.4%
Winchendon	43.3	9,611	91.22	2.11	0.009	115.11	79.2%
Rutland	35.3	6,353	71.85	2.04	0.011	99.49	72.2%
Ashburnham	38.7	5,546	74.47	1.93	0.013	97.84	76.1%
Petersham	54.2	1,180	62.29	1.15	0.053	79.05	78.8%

Sources: Census 2000, Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Community Opportunities Group, Inc. Centerline miles based on MassHighway Year-End 2004 Roads Inventory.

the number of road miles per capita in Princeton is second only to that of Petersham. Both ratios are indicators of Princeton's rural development pattern, with existing homes sparsely situated along old roads and long stretches of road frontage without any homes or businesses at all. Princeton's character reflects what many residents say they want for their town: a community that has large amounts of open land, a close-knit, small-town feel, and unobtrusive development. A noteworthy disadvantage of this arrangement is that Princeton has many miles of roads to maintain and very few taxpayers to share the cost.

The absence of a suburban road hierarchy, curbing and sidewalks is conspicuous in Princeton. Indeed, its rural development pattern can be read from the long, uninterrupted roads that extend outward from the town center, following the contours of the land and making few if any connections with other roads along the way. In many parts of Princeton, thick forests enclose the roads and create a sense of timelessness. Often, the roads are quite narrow and steep, which makes them charming on one hand and challenging for pedestrians on the other hand. Furthermore, many remain in poor condition despite the road

improvements that Princeton has completed since the mid-1990s.

Basic Design, Structural and Safety Features

It is not surprising to find that Princeton's most frequently used roads are also the widest. Of the state-numbered routes, Route 140 is relatively narrow, with an average paved width of about 22 feet. The paved width of Route 31 varies along its journey through Princeton, often widening or narrowing with changes in street name and corresponding changes in the surrounding land use pattern. Its widest portion is generally Gregory Hill Road (25-30 feet), with more narrow areas on Redemption Rock Road North and portions of Worcester Road (20-22 feet). On average, Route 62 is 24 feet wide through Princeton, including the area that serves the Thomas Prince School, but it widens considerably in the town center and narrows to 18-20 feet in other locations, such as the vicinity of Calamint Hill Road North.

The non-state numbered rural collectors also have an average paved width of 24 feet. Mountain Road, much like Hubbardston Road, is widest in the town center, gradually narrowing to 24 feet as at climbs and descends northward along the east side of Wachusett Mountain. Aside from these key roadways, most of the local roads in Princeton befit the rural development pattern around them, with paved widths of 18 feet or less in many areas and widths as narrow as 14 feet, or one travel lane, along some of the gravel roads and outlying surface-treated roads.[2] On Ball Hill Road, the paved width drops noticeably east of the intersection with Brooks Station Road, prompting residents to post a sign that cautions motorists to share the road with the surrounding neighborhood.

According to a report prepared for the town several years ago, about 65% of the roads under

Thompson Road, one of Princeton's many unpaved roadways, closed for the winter. (*Photo supplied by Master Plan Steering Committee.*)

Princeton's jurisdiction are surfaced with bituminous concrete and 20% are "surface-treated" roads, or roads with a thinly paved surface that helps to shed water and protect the underlying road base.[3] The remaining public ways are gravel or unpaved roads. Princeton also has several unimproved roads, i.e., minimally graded roads with a soil surface, but they are private ways or unaccepted streets.[4]

Nearly all of the road intersections in Princeton are controlled by signage, although flashing lights support the sign controls at major intersections such as Hubbardston Road (Route 62), Mountain Road, Worcester Road (Route 31), and Boylston Avenue in the town center and Route 31/Route 140 on the northern side of town. The arterial and collectors have centerline striping and typically sideline striping, but often the sidelines on local streets are not delineated. About 75% of the roads in Princeton have shoulders of one to two feet on one or both sides, and while the shoulders are fairly stable in most areas, some are unstable along

[2] 2005 Road Inventory Year-End Report (March 2006), GIS database query.

[3] Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), Town of Princeton Local Pavement Management Study: 10-Year Road Improvement Program (January 2000), 3.

[4] 2005 Road Inventory Year-End Report (March 2006), GIS database query.

TABLE 7.3: PRINCETON'S GRAVEL ROADS INVENTORY

Road Name	Approximate Length (Mi.)	Road Name	Approximate Length (Mi.)
Bigelow	1.31	Old Princeton Road	0.01
Calamint Hill North	1.19	Reservoir Road	0.70
Dowds Lane	0.44	Rhodes Road	0.82
Goodnow	0.87	Rocky Pond Road	1.42
Hobbs Road	0.21	Sam Cobb Lane	0.02
Houghton	1.16	School House Road	0.88
Laurel Lane*	0.51	State Administration Road*	1.20
Matthews Lane	0.16	Thompson Road	1.14
Old Brooks Station Road	0.23	Town Farm Road	0.06
Old Colony	0.79	Whittaker Lane	0.26
Old Colony Extension	0.34	TOTAL	15.91
Old Mill Road	1.36	Local Jurisdiction	13.38

*Source: Executive Office of Transportation, MassHighway, Road Inventory 2005. *According to the state road inventory, the gravel portion of Laurel Lane is not an accepted public way. State Administration Road is under DCR jurisdiction.*

portions of the state-numbered routes as well as small, local roads such as Merriam Road, Houghton Road or Thompson Road. Only a handful of Princeton's roads have curbs, including some of the newer subdivision roads, Common Drive and portions of Mountain Road.

Unpaved Streets

Like many rural communities in Central and Western Massachusetts, Princeton has unpaved roads. According to MassHighway's road inventory, all or portions of 23 roads with a combined total of nearly 16 road miles have a gravel or stone surface, sometimes interspersed with unimproved road segments. The gravel roads represent about 16% of Princeton's local roads, and the town generally maintains them.[5] Many of the gravel roads are rustic and beautiful, and they provide connections that would otherwise be made on local or collector roads.

Bridges

Bridges are an important element of local roadway networks. In Massachusetts, bridges typically come under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Highway Department (MassHighway). This applies to the Route 62 /Hubbardston Road Bridge and the Route 140 Redemption Rock Trail Bridge in Princeton, but the remaining bridges are owned by the town.

Princeton's transportation network includes seven bridge structures that are subject to National Bridge Inspection Standards (Table 7.4). The Route 62 Bridge on Hubbardston Road over

[5] The MassHighway Road Inventory (2005) differs somewhat from the local roads inventory in Princeton's Pavement Management Study (2000), which reports 11.5 miles of gravel roads. Some roads identified as gravel roads in the PMS are classified by MassHighway as surface-treated, while MassHighway identifies some roads as gravel surfaced that are classified in the PMS as surface-treated or unimproved. Further, the gravel road segment lengths reported by each agency do not always agree.

TABLE 7.4: PRINCETON BRIDGES

Name/Location	Year Built	Owner	Structure Type and Length	Functional Class	Average Daily Traffic 1999–2000
Ball Hill Road	1935	Town	Steel/7.6 m	Rural local	700
Bullard Road	1960	Town	Steel/9.4 m	Rural local	400
Houghton Road	1988	Town	Concrete/7 m	Rural local	130
Old Colony Road	1937	Town	Steel/11 m	Rural local	130
Town Farm Road	1919/ rebuilt 1992	Town	Steel/11 m	Rural local	100
Hubbardston Road	1933	State	Steel/9.8 m	Rural collector	900
Redemption Rock Tr. S	1937	State	Concrete/7.6 m	Rural collector	5,600

Source: MassRoads.com. Note: Table 7.4 includes bridge structures identified in the state's bridge inventory, which reports all bridges that are subject to national bridge inspection and safety standards. It does not include the many box culverts that exist throughout the town or any bridge span less than 6.1 meters.

the Ware River and the Ball Hill Road Bridge located on Ball Hill Road are both classified by MassHighway as structurally deficient. Representatives of Princeton's Fire Department report that fire trucks cannot travel over Calamint Hill Road. The Route 62 Bridge replacement project is currently listed in the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).[6] Funding for this project was targeted for 2006.

Road Improvements

In 1998, Princeton established a seven-member Road Advisory Committee (RAC) to oversee the maintenance and reconstruction of town-owned roadways and implementation of the town's road program. The RAC was appointed following completion of Princeton's first comprehensive Local Pavement Management Study, which was prepared in the mid-1990s by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) and updated in 2000. CMRPC's report provided a detailed, network-level analysis of all roadways under Princeton's jurisdiction, road improvement recommendations based on the severity of pavement conditions, roadway class and type of surface, and preliminary cost estimates.

The RAC's mission is to bring the town's roads up to good, safe driving condition so that only ongoing maintenance and occasional resurfacing will be needed. The road improvement program is designed to maintain Princeton's rural character, commit to a planned approach to spending on roads and avoid unpredictable tax increases, reduce the town's liability, and provide more access to trails and parkways. Each year, the RAC has worked with the Select Board to obtain state and federal funding commitments for the town. Table 7.5 reports funds secured for local projects over the last five years (FY 2002-FY2006).

Reconstructed Roads. Princeton has reconstructed over 36 miles of roadway in the last ten years. Completing this work cost a total of $7,248,867 and of this amount, the town invested $1,934,507 of its own funds. Princeton has done a remarkable job of obtaining outside funding sources and allocating its annual Chapter 90 funds from the state for a systematic, planned program of road improvements.

[6] Metropolitan planning organizations have responsibility for planning, programming and coordination of federal highway and transit investments.

Six-Year Plan. The RAC has developed a Six-Year Roads Plan that identifies additional roads requiring reconstruction. The starting point for the Six-Year Plan was CMRPC's update of the Local Pavement Management Study (2000). The roads proposed to be reconstructed under the Six-Year Road Plan are listed below. Together, the 23 reconstruction projects in the RAC's six-year plan include more than 19 miles of roadway. Excluding the reconstruction of Brooks

TABLE 7.5: PRINCETON ROAD RECONSTRUCTION FUNDING

Fiscal Year	Town Appropriated Funds	Chapter 90 Funds	Total Funds
2002	$142,000	$180,208	$322,208
2003	$175,000	$180,021	$355,021
2004	$0	$179,809	$179,809
2005	$42,507	$215,307	$257,814
2006	$0	$213,487	$213,487
Total	$359,507	$755,345	$1,328,339

Source: Princeton Road Advisory Committee.

Roads Reconstructed 1998-2006

Allen Hill Road	Gregory Hill Road	Radford Road
Ball Hill Road (4 miles)	Houghton Road	Rhodes Road
Beaman Road	Hubbardston Road	Rocky Pond Road
Blood Road	Jefferson Road	Route 140
Bullard Road	Laurel Lane	Sterling Road (2.5 miles)
Connor Road	Lyons Road	Thompson Road
East Princeton Road	Merriam Road	Town Farm Bridge
Esty Road	Mountain Road	Wheeler Road
Fitchburg Road	Merriam Road Extension	Whittaker Lane
Gleason Road	Mirick Road Extension	Worcester Road (1 mile)
Goodnow Road	Old Colony Road	
Gregory Road	Prospect Street	

Priority Road Reconstructon Projects: Six-Year Plan

Mirick/Osgood - 6,000 feet	Greene Road*	Hobbs Road – west**
Hobbs – east**	Willson Road*	Mirick Road – middle*
Brooks Station Road (federal funds)*	Calamint Hill Road North**	Bullock Lane*
	Redwood Drive	Leominster Road*
Worcester Road (one mile)*	Sharon Drive	Pine Hill Road*
Gates Road*	Havenwood Drive	Gregory Road*
Calamint Hill Road South*	Pinewood Drive	
Birchwood Drive	Mirick Road (Route 31 end)*	

Roads followed by an asterisk (*) have also been classified by MassHighway as being in only fair condition, and roads followed by two asterisks have been classified as structurally deficient.

Station Road, which is eligible for federal funding, the estimated cost of these projects is about $2.9 million (current dollars). The RAC has estimated that if Princeton does not continue to appropriate funds for road projects, the roads reconstructed with other available funds will most likely result in a 30% reduction in total miles of improvements and only eight out of 24 roads will be addressed.

In 2006, town meeting voted to appropriate $175,000 for road reconstruction in accordance with the Six-Year Plan. However, a Proposition 2 ½ override was required in order to increase the tax levy for this program, and the ballot question failed at a special town election in June 2006 and again in September 2006.

Traffic

Compared to a decade ago, Princeton residents probably see more vehicles on their roads today because of growth that has occurred locally and throughout northern Worcester County. However, traffic counts reported periodically by MassHighway indicate that traffic on Princeton's arterial and collector roads remains quite low: less than 7,000 vehicles per day (vpd). For example, Table 7.6 shows that traffic on Route 31/140 north of East Princeton Road has changed very little since 1998, with average daily traffic volumes ranging from 6,000 vpd to 6,700 vpd. Princeton is such a small town that the state does not collect traffic data often or in the same locations. The counts occur mainly to comply with federal Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) requirements. The absence of continuous traffic counts or more frequent traffic monitoring cycles makes it difficult to measure trends.

Critical Traffic Locations. Princeton's beauty tends to mask the presence of critical traffic locations, which include areas with a relatively high incidence of car accidents, areas with pedestrian-vehicular conflicts, and places that often attract a large number of vehicles, walkers or bicyclists. In small towns, the term "critical traffic locations" usually focuses on motor vehicle accidents because they are the only available data source that can be obtained and analyzed, and sometimes accident information can be mapped. The Princeton Police

TABLE 7.6: AVERAGE DAILY TRAFFIC (ADT), PRINCETON

Route/Street	Count Location	1998	2001	2002	2004
Ball Hill Road	South of Calamint Hill Road			770	
Ball Hill Road	West of Route 31				850
Brooks Station Road	South of Ball Hill Road			1,200	
Gates Road	North of Ralph Road			290	
Mountain Road	Westminster Town Line				600
Myrick Road	North of Route 31				260
Old Colony Road	South of Lamphere Road			20	
Route 31	North of Route 62	1,300			
Route 31	South of Route 62	1,800			
Routes 31 & 140	North of East Princeton Road	6,700	6,000		6,500
Routes 31 & 140	North of Route 31	5,300			
Routes 31 & 140	North of Route 31				5,700
Route 62	Sterling Town Line	2,800			
Route 62	West of Ralph Road			1,200	

Source: MassHighway, 2005.

TABLE 7.7: ROADWAYS WITH HIGHEST NUMBER OF REPORTED ACCIDENTS

	Number of Accidents by Year				
Accident Location	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**Total**
Ball Hill Road	6	7	4	1	18
Hubbardston Road	2	9	7	1	19
Main Street	9	5	3	1	18
Mountain Road	6	4	8	4	22
Redemption Rock Trail North	15	8	10	5	38
Sterling Road	6	5	2	5	18

Source: Princeton Police Department

Department supplied a list of accidents for the period from January 1, 2002 to August 2, 2005. The locally reported data are summarized in Table 7.7 for the top six roads with the most recorded accidents.

MassHighway also maintains a database of accidents reported throughout the Commonwealth, drawing upon data from the Registry of Motor Vehicles. The state's database expands on information supplied by the Princeton Police Department. According to MassHighway, a total of 190 accidents occurred in Princeton from January 1, 2002 and through December 31, 2004. The largest number reported in any single year, 80 accidents, occurred in 2000, with 22.5% involving non-fatal injuries and 78% involving no injuries.

The most frequently cited problem areas include intersections along Ball Hill Road, Main Street, Fitchburg Road and Redemption Rock Trail North, and other locations on these roadways as well as Mountain Road and Sterling Road. More than half of all accidents were single-vehicle crashes (62%), and 41% of the single-car accidents involved a collision with a tree, light pole, animals (mainly deer), guardrails or walls. In most cases, the accidents occurred during daylight hours when the weather was clear and dry, although 46% reportedly occurred when the road surfaces were affected by snow, ice or slush and a total of 61% were recorded during the winter months.

Princeton had a smaller number of accidents in 2003 (58), but a fatal car crash occurred on Fitchburg Road in August. Accidents involving injuries also made up a somewhat larger percentage of all accidents in 2003 (25.6%). Fewer intersection-related accidents occurred in 2003, but the same roadways appear on the list of streets with a relatively large number of accidents: Ball Hill Road, Main Street, Fitchburg Road, Redemption Rock Trail North, Mountain Road, Sterling Road, along with Hubbardston Road and Brooks Station Road. While single-vehicle crashes comprised slightly more than half of all accidents in 2003, MassHighway's records show that Princeton experienced a modest increase in head-on collisions, angle collisions and side-swipes by cars moving in the same or opposite direction. Just half of the accidents in 2003 took place during the winter.

The number of accidents declined again in 2004 (52), yet injuries were involved in nearly 29% of the accidents, up from 22.5% two years earlier. Intersections on Ball Hill Road, Mountain Road and Redemption Rock Trail North topped the list of problem spots; in fact, 23% of all accidents in 2004 were reported at locations along or immediately adjacent to Redemption Rock Trail North. Other accident-prone areas included Brooks Station Road, Hubbardston Road and Main Street. A significantly larger share of the accidents in 2004 were single-vehicle crashes (69.2%), and much like 2002, more than 60% of the accidents occurred during the winter even though a much

smaller percentage (31%) coincided with snow and other inclement weather conditions.

Data from the Princeton Police Department and MassHighway point to several similarities in the types of accidents experienced on Princeton's roads:

- Accidents in Princeton tend to involve only one vehicle. Cars colliding with one or more vehicles in traffic were responsible for about 24% of all accidents over the three years reported by MassHighway. The 190 accidents in MassHighway's database involved a total of 258 vehicles.

- Single-car accidents often involve tree collisions. Of the 118 single-vehicle accidents with an identified cause during 2002-2004, collisions with trees accounted for about 28%. While just over half of the tree-related accidents resulted in no injuries, the fatal accident on Fitchburg Road in August 2003 stemmed from a single-car collision with a tree on the northbound side of the road. In the past three years, most of the tree collisions in Princeton have occurred on the northbound side of Redemption Rock Trail North, the southbound side of Main Street, the southbound side of Worcester Road, and both sides of Brooks Station Road, Ball Hill Road and Sterling Road.

- The amount of ambient light does not seem to contribute heavily to the risk of accidents in Princeton, but the surface condition of the roads is a significant factor. The number of accidents increases during ski season, as does the overall proportion of accidents occurring on snow-covered or icy roads. Over the past three years, more than half of all car accidents in Princeton reportedly took place from December through March.

Public Transportation

Princeton is not directly served by public transportation because it is so small. Without a car, most people would have difficulty getting around the town easily or traveling to other communities. Paratransit services are available on a limited basis to the elderly and people with special needs. Still, Princeton is not remote from the region's major transportation facilities and alternatives to the car are available for those commuting to the Greater Boston area.

Rail Service. Princeton residents have access to MBTA commuter rail service to Boston on the Fitchburg/South Acton and Framingham/Worcester Lines. The Fitchburg/South Acton Line offers two stations not far from Princeton: North Leominster, located about 15 miles away, with 140 commuter parking spaces, and Fitchburg, also about 15 miles away, with 400 parking spaces. Trains run to Boston's North Station every 20 to 35 minutes during peak morning and evening periods. Travel time to Boston on the Fitchburg line runs between 60 minutes and 80 minutes.

Union Station in Worcester provides service to South Station, with trains running to Boston every 20 to 25 minutes during peak periods. Commuter parking is available in two city-owned parking lots on Shrewsbury Street and Grafton Street, with a combined total of 304 parking spaces. The travel time is somewhat longer on the Worcester Line, however, generally 75 to 90 minutes depending on the number of scheduled stops between Framingham and South Station.

Freight Rail. Providence and Worcester Railroad provides freight rail service to Princeton. The railroad tracks traverse the lower southwestern section of the town, with railroad crossings on the following roadways: Ball Hill Road, Brooks Station Road, Gates Road, Old Colony Route, and Route 62.

Bus Service. Princeton residents have access to two major inter-city bus services at the Worcester Bus Terminal: Peter Pan Bus Services and Greyhound Lines. Both bus companies provide daily service to New York, Hartford, Boston, and other major cities. In addition, Princeton belongs to the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA). WRTA providers offer paratransit services for elders and people with disabilities Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Residents must call 48 hours in advance to register and request service.

Trails, Sidewalks, and Bicycle Facilities

Although Princeton has a network of trails, some designated trails or paths and others informal, it is not easy to get around without an automobile. There are very few sidewalks, and the town's overall density works against establishing a comprehensive system of sidewalks. There are sidewalks in Princeton Center, but other locations where there is a relatively high degree of pedestrian activity, such as East Princeton and around the school, do not have sidewalks or adequate pedestrian accommodation.

Trails. Trails provide both transportation and recreation opportunities. At the state level, trails are under the jurisdiction of both the Executive Office of Transportation and the Department of Conservation and Recreation, an acknowledgement that some trails and paths are more suited for recreation while others provided transportation connections. The Commonwealth initiated an update of its Statewide Bicycle Plan in 2006, the focus of which will be to develop a prioritized plan of on- and off-rail improvements that will help establish a statewide bicycling network. An update of the Statewide Pedestrian Plan is also expected to be undertaken soon.

Princeton has an informal system of trails that connects to neighboring towns, provides intra-community connections, and serves as recreational nature trails for local residents. Local trails also provide access to open space and opportunities for Princeton to link open space areas to one another. Among the more developed are:

- **The Midstate Trail** transverses the very northern part of Princeton at its borders with Hubbardston and Westminster. This trail was first developed in the 1970s by the Worcester County Commissioners in hopes of creating a trail that stretched across the entire county. In 2005, the trail is maintained by both the Midstate Trail Committee and the Worcester Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club. Historic Redemption Rock in Princeton is one of the key landmarks located along the trail.

- **Wachusett Mountain State Reservation** and **Leominster State Park** both have internal trail systems that boast hiking trails, wildlife, and scenic views of the area. The Midstate Trail connects both of these sites.

- An unnamed trail starts at the end of Bigelow Road, crosses the Midstate Trail, and extends southeast to Dowd Lake and Ridge Road in Rutland before reaching the Quinapoxet Reservoir in Worcester.[7]

- Several smaller trail networks are located at Minns Wildlife Sanctuary at Little Wachusett Mountain and Thomas Prince School. Maps for these trails are available on-site during business hours.

In 2002, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) completed an *Inter-Community Trail Connection Feasibility Study for the CMRPC North Subregion.* The study examines a number of potential trails. Three of the six trails selected for further investigation cross through Princeton.

[7] CMRPC, North Subregion Inter-Community Trail Connection Feasibility Study, 2002.

- **Stillwater River Trail**. This proposed trail links the Mass Central Rail Trail, West Boylston, Sterling, Princeton, and Leominster State Park.

- **Wachusett Mountain/Stillwater River Trail** Link. This proposed trail links the Midstate Trail, Sterling, Princeton, and Westminster.

- **Poutwater Pond Trail Link.** This proposed trail links the Towns of Princeton and Holden.

In addition, the Providence and Worcester Railroad owns part of a five-mile right-of-way that transverses southern Princeton, running northwest from the Holden/Princeton town line to the Westminster/Princeton town line. The B & M Railroad also owns a portion of the right-of-way. Currently, the Providence and Worcester Railroad runs five to six freight trains per week from Worcester to Gardner. The right-of-way could become available in the future for a rail-with-trail facility; in fact, Providence and Worcester Railroad has participated in rail-with-trail projects in other areas in the past. This right of way holds the potential for providing access to a number of areas that are not easily accessible by car.

Sidewalks and Pedestrian Accommodations. Sidewalks are provided on portions of roads only in the area surrounding the town center. Shoulders on some roads such as Mountain Road provide pedestrians with a place off-road on which to walk, but many roads have no accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists. This is especially a concern in the vicinity of Thomas Prince School.

Bicycle Facilities and Accommodations. Princeton has no designated bicycle paths or bicycle lanes. However, several roads in Princeton are shown on commercial bicycle maps as suitable for cycling. The 1987 Massachusetts State Bicycle Map (the last state bicycle map produced) identifies Brook Station Road and Mountain Road as bicycle routes and Fitchburg Road and Routes 62 and 140 as "alternate routes."[8] Despite the lack of bicycle facilities, cyclists use public roads for recreation and utilitarian riding. For example, cycling clubs are often seen in Princeton, and Fitchburg's Longjo Classic bike race takes place on parts of Route 140, East Princeton Road and Mountain Road.

LOCAL & REGIONAL TRENDS

Planned Roadway and Bridge Projects

The Central Massachusetts Planning Commission (CMRPC) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) includes several roadway and bridge improvement projects for Princeton. The TIP includes projects consistent with regional and state transportation and air quality objectives. The following projects are listed on the federal 2006-2010 Transportation Improvement Plan for Princeton:

- Brooks Station Road, Reconstruction and Related Activities, 75% Design–2005

- Ball Hill Road Bridge, Replacement over Wachusett Brook–2007

- Route 62 Bridge, Replacement over Ware River–2006

Resident Travel Patterns

Princeton residents generally do not work in Princeton. In 2000, approximately 88% of the town's employed labor force worked outside of Princeton, which represents a 5% increase from 1990. This trend, coupled with household and population growth in surrounding communities, has led to increasing traffic volumes on local

[8] MassHighway, 2005.

roadways. The top commuting destinations for Princeton residents include Worcester, Marlborough, and Holden, as shown in Table 7.8. About 218 Princeton residents work in town.

The average commute time for Princeton workers, 31.2 minutes, is about 6 minutes longer than the regional average. Distance traveled is a key factor that influences commute times. The average commute times increased more than 4 minutes between 1990 and 2000. Table 7.9 shows the various means of transportation Princeton residents use for commuting to work and the change in proportion of persons using each mode over the past decade.

While a majority of Princeton residents drive to work alone, the number of people driving alone decreased 1% between 1990 and 2000. In contrast, the number of Princeton residents who worked at home increased in the same period. As of Census 2000, the percentage of employed Princeton people working at home was the same as the state average, 3%. The number of residents who use public transportation remained low over the last ten years, presumably due to the lack of public transportation services available in Princeton. The number of residents who walk also remains low due to the limited number of people who live within walking distance of their place of work, the lack of sidewalks connecting neighborhoods, and the very few employment opportunities that exist in Princeton's business districts.

TABLE 7.8: PRINCETON COMMUTER DATA

Commute Destination	Number of Princeton Workers
Worcester	532
Marlborough	93
Holden	82
Leominster	73

Source: Census 2000, Journey to Work (MCD/County to MCD/County Worker Flow Files).

ISSUES, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

The Master Plan represents a long-term time frame and focuses on broad goals and objectives. However, any analysis of transportation challenges and opportunities in Princeton must begin with a reaffirmation that adequate funding for road maintenance and reconstruction is a critical need and a basic responsibility of government. Identifying other challenges and opportunities is also important, for even if all of Princeton's roads were in excellent condition, the town would still have unmet transportation needs and transportation issues to resolve.

Princeton's 1970 master plan included several road improvement proposals that were intended to address public safety issues and support the general land use plan over time. However, transportation was not a top priority in subsequent master plan updates, in part because municipal responsibility for road maintenance changed by the late 1970s in response to changes in federal and state laws and funding policies. These changes, coupled with the unpredictability of state aid and the passage of Proposition 2 ½, converged to make it difficult for very small towns to take care of their roads. The prospect of building new

TABLE 7.9: MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION FOR PRINCETON COMMUTERS, 1990-2000

Means of Travel	1990	2000	Change
Drove alone	89%	88%	-1%
Carpooled	8%	6.5%	-1.5%
Used public transportation	.5%	1%	.5%
Walked	1%	1%	0%
Used other means	.5%	.5%	0%
Worked at home	1%	3%	2%

Source: Census 2000.

roads, extending existing streets or connecting dead-ends was beyond the means of many communities.

As Princeton continued to grow, local officials and residents turned their attention to other pressing growth management concerns and over time, the town's roads deteriorated. Today, residents report that not so long ago, the condition of Princeton roads was not only unsafe but also an eyesore. Many roads have been improved, but the task of reconstructing and maintaining Princeton's large road network will remain a daunting task for local taxpayers.

Financing Road Improvements

The Roads Advisory Committee (RAC) has enabled Princeton to use its Local Pavement Management Study to prioritize spending on roads throughout the town, thus helping to establish a structured program for funding the maintenance and reconstruction of its roads. Consequently, funding for road reconstruction became a priority in Princeton, and the RAC has helped secure over $6 million in federal funds for road reconstruction over the last several years.

In conjunction with the Board of Selectmen, the RAC has made a concerted effort to guide the use of Princeton's Chapter 90 funds, local appropriations, and federal aid to reconstruct 36 miles of roadways that were in a poor, deficient or intolerable state. Princeton taxpayers have been asked to contribute only one-fourth of the $7.2M expended to address problem road conditions. Voters recently declined to support a proposed Proposition 2 ½ override that local officials said was essential to a continued local investment in road improvements. However, maintaining the town's roads is not a luxury; it is among the most basic of asset management measures that a community can make to protect public safety and the general welfare of residents.

Rural Character and Public Safety

As Princeton grows, new roads and connector roads may be needed to support a changing land use pattern. The connection between land use and transportation is particularly relevant here, as directing the location of new development to places already serviced by the town's roadway system will help minimize the need for new roads. Maintaining a "rural" feel as new roads are built will require balancing safety and convenience factors with the desire for context-sensitive solutions.

Accommodations for Pedestrians and Bicyclists

There seems to be a desire in Princeton to improve conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists. Princeton's narrow roads, most of which have no shoulders or sidewalks, nevertheless attract many cyclists, walkers, and joggers. First, Princeton's development pattern means that its existing older roadways serve not only as conduits for local and through vehicular traffic, but also as neighborhood streets for the people who live along them. Second, Princeton is a regional recreation resource and portions of its road system support activities such as bicycle races and tours.

While there does not appear to be a strong desire in town to add sidewalks to most roads, interest has been expressed in selective tree cutting to provide a wider "shoulder" or edge of road for pedestrians and cyclists. The challenge is to accommodate a stated desire for better and safer roads while not destroying the scenic qualities so cherished by many residents.

Route 140

Route 140 is Princeton's only arterial. Carrying less than 7,000 vpd, Route 140 is a rural minor arterial, but one that provides an outlet for traffic on Route 190 seeking to avoid portions of Route 2. Route 140 passes through one of Princeton's villages, historic East Princeton, and the need for pedestrian improvements in East Princeton has

been identified as a Master Plan goal. However, Route 140 for its length through Princeton has been identified as needing other improvements and enhancements to make the corridor safe for drivers and pedestrians. Route 140 in Sterling and Westminster passes through scenic areas in some places in those towns, too. Developing a plan for Route 140 that will provide safe and convenient pedestrian access in East Princeton, provide shoulders or additional roadway width for cyclists, establishes guidelines for development and access management along the length of the corridor, and preserves the character of the road is a challenge.

Gravel Roads

Gravel roads in Princeton, also known as dirt and unpaved roads, contribute to the scenic character of the town while providing necessary linkages and access. Although relatively inexpensive to construct, gravel roads require a high annual investment and manpower for maintenance. Gravel roads are not eligible for state funding, and Chapter 90 money, state funds provided to each city and town in the Commonwealth through the State Transportation Bond for road repair and reconstruction, can be used for gravel roads with restrictions. Chapter 90 funds may be used on gravel roads only for full reconstruction or when projects involve substantial gravel replacement or the addition of culverts or drainage. In the past, the Commonwealth has had a program that provided small towns with funds through the State Transportation Bond for gravel roads. The Small Town Road Assistance Program (STRAP) has provided funding of up to $500,000 to towns of less than 3,500 residents for improvement projects.

While gravel roads are scenic and contribute to Princeton's character, they nevertheless are relatively expensive to maintain. A challenge for Princeton is to balance the desire to discontinue gravel roads due to their expensive upkeep requirements with the need to keep physical connections intact and in good condition.

Street Acceptances

Some residents think Princeton should discontinue public ways for maintenance where possible to reduce liability for road maintenance and focus the town's limited resources on critical streets. There is some concern that if the town owns but does not improve its roads, a developer with land on an unimproved public way could force Princeton to invest in a costly road project in order to provide access to new homes. However, the town needs to be careful about discontinuations because little-used and unpaved roads often support non-vehicular modes of travel, notably walking, hiking, and riding. While it is challenging for very-low-density communities to maintain a comprehensive street system, Princeton needs to balance the interests of motorists and non-motorists.

Scenic Roads

There is clearly disagreement in Princeton about the desirability of and need for a scenic roads bylaw, which requires the town to adopt M.G.L. c.40, Section 15C and designate certain streets as scenic. A proposed scenic roads bylaw failed at town meeting several years ago, and the issues surrounding that bylaw have never been resolved.

Proponents believe that Princeton needs regulations and a review process to protect rural byways from inappropriate tree cutting or damage to stone walls, but opponents argue that scenic roads regulation could be a barrier to adequate road maintenance and public safety. Many towns in Massachusetts have scenic roads bylaws and administer them successfully, with little controversy over essential tree removal. As with addressing pedestrian and bicycle safety needs, the challenge is to provide safe roads without sacrificing Princeton's scenic features. Its roads are an integral part of the town's rural fabric.

TRANSPORTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Funding for the Six-Year Roads Plan

Princeton's top transportation priority should be to complete the Roads Advisory Committee's (RAC) Six-Year Roads Plan, which is really an action plan to implement the remaining phases of a study prepared by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC).

The RAC's hard work has enabled Princeton residents to keep their own taxes down while $7.3 million in roads reconstruction spending was financed primarily with non-local sources. Eventually, most of the roads eligible for federal funds were rebuilt, and this meant that Princeton would need to finance the rest of the program with tax revenue and Chapter 90 funds. In 2006, the RAC sought $175,000 from the town to continue rebuilding roads under an extension of the original CMRPC Pavement Management Plan. Town meeting voted to appropriate the funds, but the appropriation depended on a Proposition 2 ½ override that failed in June and September 2006.

Princeton has some options, but it does not have many options to address the condition of its roads. By tradition, Princeton has left some of its tax levy authority in reserve, also known as "excess levy capacity." In FY 2006, the town's unused levy capacity of $311,000 would have been enough to fund the local portion of the RAC's roads program. However, the Board of Selectmen determined that adhering to the town's levy reserve policy was important for purposes of overall financial management, so the roads plan was made subject to a Proposition 2 ½ override.

People disagree about the factors that led voters to reject the proposed override. What is clear, however, is that Princeton taxpayers *will* have to pay more than they have in the past for road reconstruction if they want safe, passable roadways. The RAC has exhausted the other funding sources that could be leveraged to improve roads eligible for federal funds. Without a fundamental change in state or federal policies for road reconstruction and major maintenance, municipalities will remain responsible for taking care of most of the streets within their borders. The difficulty for very small towns is that they have so few taxpayers to share the cost; for small towns like Princeton, this problem is magnified by having many miles of roads. Realistically, Princeton has the following options:

- Modify the existing levy reserve policy in the interests of financing major capital projects. In effect, the town would reduce its excess levy capacity and appropriations for the roads plan would not be subject to an override of Proposition 2 ½.

- Finance the Six-Year Roads Plan with a general obligation bond and exclude the debt service from the levy limit under Proposition 2 ½ – a strategy that might address voter concerns about future uses of the additional revenue stream.

- Participate with other communities in a well-organized plan of action to press the state to increase and maintain its commitment to the Chapter 90 program. Still, Princeton has to recognize that road reconstruction and maintenance are primarily local government obligations. Chapter 90 is a state contribution, not a state substitute for local dollars.

- A final option, which is unpopular in most communities: finance some road improvements through betterments. While this approach is not feasible or practical along through streets that carry local and regional traffic, reconstruction of neighborhood-level streets (such as older dead-end subdivision roads) could be accomplished with betterment revenue.

In the long run, deferred spending on infrastructure always leads to greater public expense. Planning without a commitment to funding benefits no one. Instead, it leaves capital needs inadequately addressed, it contributes to the perception that plans "sit on the shelf," it discourages local government volunteers, and it runs the risk of transferring responsibility for current problems to future taxpayers. While Princeton has found it difficult to juggle growth in school costs and debt service with its own municipal needs, it is not the only small town in this position. By choosing to remain very small and to limit future growth, Princeton has also chosen to place a large financial burden on relatively few taxpayers - or forego the most basic public improvements.

One of many trails through the woods in Princeton - this one off Goodnow Road.

Existing Trails Inventory and Town-Wide Trails Plan

Princeton needs an inventory of its existing trails and a town-wide trails plan. The information assembled for these activities would be useful for future updates of the town's Open Space and Recreation Plan, to the Planning Board during its review of development proposals, and to local and regional organizations engaged in region-wide trails planning and development.

Princeton residents appreciate the trails that run through town. The trails are quite diverse, providing recreational opportunities for walkers or equestrians, access to open space and scenic vistas, and alternative ways of getting around the community. People are concerned that future development will preclude the use of trails that cross private land or reduce the number of available trails as land is gradually divided into house lots. These concerns are legitimate because in countless other Massachusetts communities, new development has curtailed trail access and reduced the number of outdoor recreation opportunities for local residents.

Princeton does not have a mapped inventory of existing trails, and it was difficult for residents to identify the approximate location of trails on a map for this master plan process. While the proposed Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) bylaw will require developers to identify trails on their proposed plans, collecting trails information this way means that Princeton will have only a partial a trails inventory. First, not all residential developments would be subject to the OSRD bylaw and second, since development proposals occur incrementally over time, relying on developers to provide trails information will result in a fragmented picture of the formal and informal trail relationships that currently exist.

Existing data and maps from active trail organizations such as Wachusett Greenways and the Mid-State Trail Association, from CMPRC's regional plan or from the statewide plan, *Commonwealth Connections* (2002), could help Princeton with its own trails planning. However, the town has numerous unmapped and undocumented trails, and the absence of this information means that many Princeton resources have not been accounted for in anyone's planning efforts. Before a trails plan can be produced, Princeton will need to create a usable inventory of existing trails. The trails need to be identified, their general condition and usability for various purposes should be assessed, and the public access trails should be prioritized for trail blazing, improvements and maintenance.

Toward these ends, the Open Space Committee should collaborate with local groups that have an interest in outdoor recreation, such as Boy Scout or Girl Scout troops, or to the regional schools to enlist high school students seeking a community service project. With a GPS unit and some training, any interested person can help to collect data points in the field. In turn, the data points can be converted in just about any GIS application. From time to time, the state also offers trails planning and mapping grants. Over time, these measures would help Princeton document the location, condition and ownership of existing trails on private land, and plan some simple projects such as blazing trails on public land.

Scenic Roads

Despite the consensus that seems to exist in Princeton about the importance of roadways to the beauty of the town, vocal opposition to scenic road regulations was a remarkable feature of this Master Plan process. Residents say they value Princeton's rural roadways, and nearly all of the participants in public meetings for the master plan identified the same roadways as having character-defining importance for the town. Many of the features they identified as memorable or significant about their own neighborhoods are located along these streets. Still, local officials and some of the town's staff remain opposed to scenic road controls, arguing that a scenic roads bylaw under M.G.L. c.15C would interfere with the highway department's job.

The recently completed *Princeton Reconnaissance Report* (DCR, 2006) stresses the importance of protecting the character of Princeton's rural roads. Princeton has many scenic roads, in fact most of the town's roads would qualify as "scenic" under any generally recognized definition of "rural character." Princeton's roads convey a mosaic of images that make the town a visually engaging place to live, work and visit. Princeton also has unpaved roads that contribute to its beauty.

Unfortunately, there is a considerable amount of misinformation in Princeton about the state Scenic Roads Act and its implementation. As a first step toward increasing public understanding of the Scenic Roads Act and the scope of authority it conveys to a planning board, the town should request technical assistance from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, which has a library of scenic road bylaws from communities throughout the Commonwealth and staff who may be able to assist the town in crafting a local bylaw that addresses some of the concerns. The DCR Department of Urban and Community Forestry, MassHighway, and EOEA's Community Preservation Program also have useful resources on protecting scenic roads under a Scenic Roads Bylaw.

The *Princeton Reconnaissance Report* outlines the most appropriate process for establishing policies and regulations to protect scenic roads: prepare an inventory and photo documentation of the roads that residents consider scenic, and use the information to create a bylaw tailored to conditions in Princeton. The Planning Board should hire a consulting planner or landscape architect to assist with drafting the bylaw, or seek assistance from state agencies that have experience working with local communities on scenic roads issues. By assembling an inventory of the character-defining attributes of each road, the Planning Board will be able to establish performance criteria for projects that fall under the scenic roads bylaw. Written criteria will help the Highway Department plan road improvement projects and also help the Planning Board with its review.

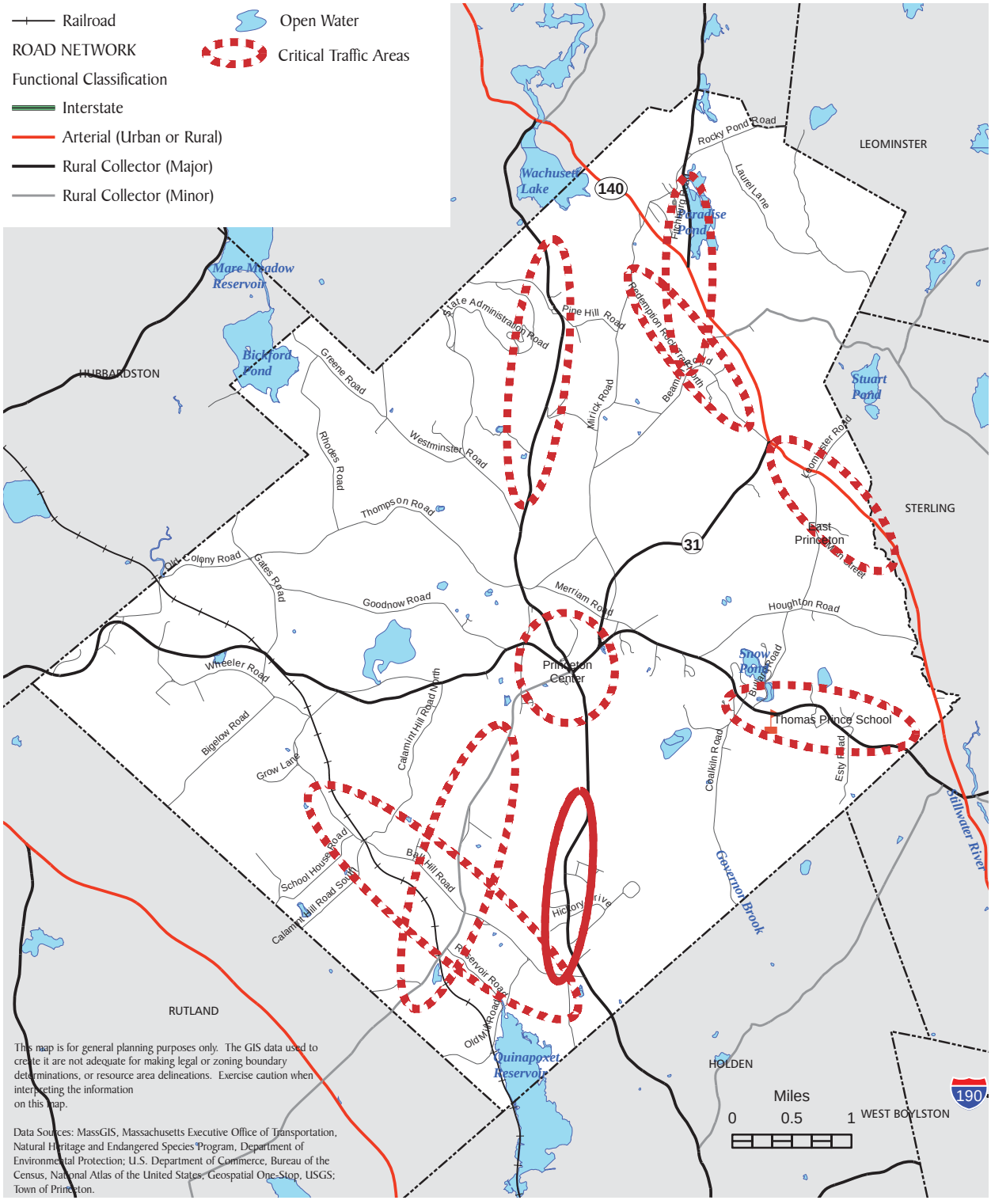
A second strategy for protecting Princeton's roads is a Scenic Corridor Overlay District, a zoning bylaw to regulate land clearing, driveways and building placement and along roads or portions of roads placed within the district. Although a zoning bylaw would serve somewhat different purposes than a general bylaw adopted under M.G.L. c.40, Section 15C, a Scenic Corridor Overlay District would give Princeton some tools to preserve the view from the road in high-priority areas.

Route 140 Corridor Study

Route 140 in Princeton is fairly hazardous to drivers and pedestrians alike. It has a comparatively large number of accidents each year, particularly during the winter. In public meetings held for this Master Plan, many people mentioned Route 140 as a major public safety concern. They said that residents of East Princeton find it dangerous to walk or bicycle in their own neighborhood because of traffic speeds, lack of sidewalks or dedicated bicycle lanes, and the general challenge of accommodating pedestrians and cars along the winding, sometimes narrow segments of Route 140 on its journey through Princeton.

Planning for improvements to Route 140 will be challenging because on one hand it is well-traveled, yet on the other hand it is scenic in several areas. Portions of the corridor also have significant environmental constraints due to Keyes Brook and its associated wetlands. One problem with Route 140 is that for a road that carries a noticeable amount of through traffic each day, it is surrounded by a strikingly homogenous land use pattern. Another problem is that some of the signage along Route 140 is masked by vegetation or simply in poor condition. In addition, the edge of the road is difficult to perceive in many areas due to a lack of sideline stripes or stripes that are worn and ineffective. To address these concerns, Princeton should work with CMRPC and officials from Westminster and Sterling to prepare a corridor study of Route 140, focusing on public safety issues and alternatives to address them.

It is important to note that allowing a modest increase in the amount of development in the East Princeton village area would help to slow the speed of traffic moving through that part of town. Changes in a land use pattern can help to control traffic speed because they create a heightened sense of risk for drivers. However, drivers need to be able to anticipate changes in land use and level of pedestrian activity before they reach the village. A series of modest traffic-calming measures ought to be explored, particularly on approach to the intersections of Route 140/East Princeton Road and Redemption Rock Trail North/Fitchburg Road.



Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

7.1 TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

April 2007

Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Consulting Team:
COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES GROUP, INC.
Larry Koff & Associates
Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, inc.

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CHAPTER 8

COMMUNITY SERVICES & FACILITIES ELEMENT

The community services and facilities element of a master plan should anticipate the buildings and other types of facilities a local government will need in order to meet future demands for municipal services. A **public facility** is any town property that has been developed for particular public purposes, such as a town hall, library or school. It also includes local utilities such as public water or municipal light service, along with parks, playgrounds, and cemeteries. Together, a town's buildings, land, infrastructure and equipment make it possible for municipal employees and volunteers to provide basic services. The adequacy of town facilities for the functions they serve depends on many factors: the form and size of local government, the community's land use pattern, and the expectations of residents. Further, providing adequate facilities and services depends on the amount of revenue that is available to support local government operations.

Princeton's beautiful public library, overlooking the town common in Princeton Center. (*Photo by Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.*)

Princeton has a very small population, but its local government is a complex organization that spends more than $10M each year on a variety of public services, capital projects and utilities.[1] About 65% of Princeton's $7M general fund operating budget pays for local children to attend public school in Princeton or at the regional high school in Holden, excluding debt service for school construction projects. Many town departments rely on funding sources other than general fund revenue to cover some or all of their operating costs. Princeton's small local government is extraordinary for the amount of revenue it obtains from grants, user fees and charges, permits, rental income, local fundraising and donations. However, it is also clear that some departments find it increasingly difficult to provide the services expected of them. Princeton takes pride in having so many dedicated, professional volunteers engaged in all aspects of civic life, yet the town has unmet needs for personnel, equipment, and property management that should be addressed soon regardless of population growth.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Form of Government

Princeton's form of government is similar to that of most small towns in Massachusetts. Incorporated in 1759, Princeton operates under the general laws of the Commonwealth, special acts of the legislature, and local bylaws. Its relatively decentralized government is led by a three-member Select Board, which has general responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of the town and shares executive-branch powers with other elected officials such as the Planning Board

[1] This includes revenue from the Princeton Municipal Light Department (PMLD) and approximately $6.8M appropriated for municipal operations.

and Board of Assessors. One elected board, the Electric Light Commission, is a semi-autonomous body that oversees a municipal enterprise, the Princeton Municipal Light Department (PMLD). Princeton has about 27 elected and appointed committees and individual office holders such as the Town Moderator, all performing a public service, and some functions have been professionalized, notably the Town Administrator. The town's legislative body is an open town meeting.

Princeton participates in a K-12 regional school system with neighboring Holden, Paxton, Rutland and Sterling. The Wachusett Regional School District (WRSD) is overseen by a 20-member School Committee, with representatives elected by the voters in each town. Princeton has no other formal inter-local agreements, but it works cooperatively on an as-needed basis with neighboring communities. For example, its public safety departments supply mutual aid to surrounding towns and participate in regional funding opportunities for public safety equipment. In addition, Princeton is one of 45 members of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), the regional planning agency serving Worcester-area cities and towns.

Public Buildings

Princeton owns and manages 11 buildings and some accessory structures in various locations throughout the town. The major facilities include:[2]

- **Bagg Hall**, built in 1885, is an impressive Richardsonian Romanesque building that serves as Princeton's town hall. Located on Town Hall Drive at the top of the Town Common, Bagg Hall houses nine municipal offices, including the Select Board, Town Administrator, the Town Clerk, the Board of Assessors, Board of Health, Town Accountant, Town Treasurer, Tax Collector, and the Building Inspector.

- The **Town Hall Annex**, a small, one-story building located behind Bagg Hall, is used primarily for meeting space and storage.

- The **Public Safety Building**, also located behind Bagg Hall, supports the Police Department, Fire Department, Dispatchers, and Emergency Medical Service (EMS) personnel. The building consists of an older fire station that was renovated and expanded approximately 20 years ago. The one-story portion holds Fire Department vehicles and the Fire Department's offices, and the expansion section is two stories, each with at-grade access. The Police Department and dispatch center occupy the upper floor and the lower floor is divided into two bays for fire, ambulance and police equipment.

- The **East Princeton Fire Station** (Fire Station #2) on Route 140/31 (Redemption Rock Trail), holds Fire Department vehicles and equipment, including one of two Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulances.

- The **Princeton Center Building** on Boylston Avenue once served as the town's primary and secondary school. A Shingle Style building constructed in 1906, it currently supports some town services such as recreation activities and the senior center, and other space is leased for private offices. The Princeton Center Management Committee oversees and maintains the building.

- **Princeton Public Library** (Goodnow Memorial Building), a Richardsonian Romanesque building also located on Town Hall Drive, was constructed in 1882-83. The present building originally served as both as a library and public school, but the library operation

[2] Sources: Community Facilities and Services Subcommittee, Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee; and Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission.

expanded to include the entire building after the Princeton Center School opened. The library was renovated in 2001 with local funds supplemented by a construction grant from the state Board of Library Commissioners. In addition to the collections and circulation area on the first floor, the library has upper-story and basement-level meeting space and a repository of local history records.

- The **Highway Department Garage** at Krashes Field on East Princeton Road. The same town-owned site includes the current highway garage (built in 2001), a salt storage facility, an older highway building now used to store public works and recreation equipment, and playing fields for youth sports.

- **Thomas Prince School** on Sterling Road (Route 62), built in 1967-68 and expanded in 1991, is owned by the town and operated by the Wachusett Regional School District. Princeton's only public school, the Thomas Prince School includes K-8 classrooms, core facilities and a gym/cafeteria that doubles as space for large meetings. This facility also has a fully equipped playground, playing fields and the "Snack Shack" concession stand.

- The **Princeton Municipal Light Department** at 168 Worcester Road serves as PMLD's headquarters and offers meeting space for general community use. PMLD renovated the property with financing from the State House Notes Program.

- **Mechanics Hall** on Main Street in East Princeton has been substantially vacant for about 60 years. A beautiful Greek Revival building constructed by the Mechanics Association in 1852, Mechanics Hall once served as a school in East Princeton. Its future is uncertain due to the cost of capital improvements required to comply with current codes.

Other Public Facilities

Princeton owns other facilities that serve the public. They include:[3]

- **Sawyer Field**: a recreational facility on Leominster Road that includes a partially equipped playground, an unlined soccer field and one Little League field.

- **Princeton Center Park**: located on Boylston Avenue behind the Princeton Center Building, including a playground, one Little League field, an unlined soccer practice field, and a walking track.

- **Princeton Park at Krashes Field**: a new community recreation center on East Princeton Road, offering hiking trails and three full-size soccer fields. This site will soon have a basketball court with lighting, along with a snack shack (concession stand). Princeton Park is a good example of local efforts to implement the town's most recent (2000) open space and recreation plan.

- **Thomas Prince Playing Fields**: a fully equipped playground and cross-country trails maintained by WRSD; and adjacent to the school, one softball field, two Little League fields and storage shed, five youth soccer fields, one basketball court, and a snack shack.

- **Public Parks**: Town Common, Goodnow Park, Boylston Park, and Dingman Park.

- **Public Cemeteries**: North Cemetery, South Cemetery, Parker 1 and Parker 2 Cemeteries, Woodlawn Cemetery, West Cemetery, and Meeting House Cemetery.

[3] Information based in part on an inventory of Princeton's recreation facilities from Marcia Sands, Princeton Town Clerk's Office, 7 September 2006; and Community Facilities and Services Subcommittee, Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee.

- **PMLD Assets**: 16-acre Wind Farm off Westminster Road, power lines and associated infrastructure.

Princeton does not have public water or sewer systems, so its population depends on private wells and on-site wastewater disposal.

Community Services

While public facilities provide physical space for local government services, actual service delivery depends on people: municipal workers and volunteers. The cost of constructing, maintaining, staffing and equipping public facilities falls almost entirely upon local governments, for other sources such as grants are difficult to obtain and not always available from state or federal programs.

Princeton's vibrant local government relies on a small group of municipal employees and the service of numerous volunteers. As a percentage of total expenditures, Princeton's very small payroll is comparable to that of other semi-rural, low-density towns across the state. About 104 people work on an intermittent or seasonal basis for the town, ranging from call firefighters and special police officers to election workers.[4] However, its mainstay workforce includes 26 full- and part-time regular employees. Many services such as planning, development review, recreation programs, and senior services rely heavily or exclusively on civic-minded volunteers. About 27 committees participate actively and regularly in governance of the town, and several others serve on an as-needed basis.

Administration & Finance. Less than 5% of Princeton's annual operating budget is allocated to the functions of administration and finance. The Town Administrator manages and coordinates Princeton's financial operations, assisted by the town accountant, treasurer, tax collector, and part-time assessor. Their work is supported or guided by several elected and appointed boards, including the Select Board, Advisory Board (also known as the Finance Committee in some towns), Board of Assessors, Insurance Advisory Committee, Trustees of Trust Funds, and the Personnel Board, which oversees the compensation schedule and conditions of employment for full- and part-time non-unionized municipal workers. Each of these committees has a specialized or statutorily prescribed role in financial and administrative policy. However, plans and special projects carried out by other town committees have a significant impact on operating and capital spending decisions, notably the Roads Advisory Committee.

FY 2006 GENERAL FUND OPERATING BUDGET (SUMMARY)		
Administration & Finance	$366,978	4.8%
Public Safety	$728,679	9.5%
Planning & Development	$18,917	0.2%
Public Works	$730,375	9.6%
Culture & Recreation	$177,258	2.3%
Human Services	$15,498	0.2%
Schools	$5,084,558	66.6%
Fixed Costs/Other	$511,814	6.7%
Total	$7,634,077	100.0%

Source: Dennis Rindone, Town Administrator. Amounts shown include debt service for applicable departments (schools, library and highway department).

Princeton has an appointed Town Clerk and a part-time Assistant Town Clerk. Under state law and local bylaw, the Town Clerk serves as the official keeper of record, with wide-ranging responsibilities such as maintaining the roster of registered voters, the jury list and the annual census, recording town meeting and election votes, organizing and overseeing the elections process, issuing a variety of licenses and certificates, maintaining and cataloguing records of all town property, serving as the repository of meeting and public hearing minutes of town boards and committees, and

[4] Dennis Rindone, Princeton Town Administrator, to Judi Barrett, Community Opportunities Group, Inc., 17 October 2005.

maintaining the official record of decisions by the Planning Board, Board of Appeals and others. In Princeton, the Town Clerk also maintains the town's official website and calendar.

Public Safety. In most communities, public safety involves a relatively large percentage of the operating budget, and Princeton is no exception. About 9.5% of the general fund operating budget pays for police, fire, dispatch and dog officer functions, and some public safety services are offset by (and dependent upon) other sources of funds. The Princeton Police Department employs a full-time police chief, five full-time officers and seven part-time (permanent intermittent) officers, along with full- and part-time dispatchers, a dog officer and part-time clerical support. In a typical week, the combined hours of deployed part-time police officers represent about 1.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) personnel.[5] Overall, the Police Department's budget accounts for about 79% of all public safety costs covered by Princeton's operating budget. The department also receives state and federal grants for various equipment and community policing programs.

Civilian dispatchers based at the Public Safety Building direct all incoming police, fire, emergency medical, animal control and PMLD calls. Over the past two years, the number of incidents responded to by the Police Department declined slightly, yet some types of calls increased. For example, motor vehicle accidents and reports of suspicious persons, vehicles and vandalism decreased, but arrests, mutual aid, support to the Fire Department and emergency medical response, and larceny calls were noticeably higher in 2005 than 2004.[6] Although long-term trends cannot be established from two years of incident data, growth in demands for mutual aid service seems inescapably linked to population growth throughout the region. Moreover, the Police Department's support on Fire Department calls, especially emergency medical calls, is indicative of growth in demands placed on the latter and gradual changes in the make-up of Princeton's population.

Princeton's Public Safety Building in the Town Center. (*Photo by Community Opportunities Group, Inc.*)

The Fire Department operates with call firefighters and emergency medical personnel. Fire suppression, mutual aid, inspections, investigations and enforcement functions are carried out by the chief and call firefighters, but more than half of the Fire Department's calls each year involve emergency medical services that require ambulance response. The department owns two ambulances, both equipped for Advanced Life Support (ALS) and operated by ALS personnel. From 2004-2005, ambulance calls in Princeton rose by 25% and a majority of the calls required ALS services. In order to maintain its state ALS certification, Princeton is required to provide 24-hour, year-round ALS service.[7] The town's ambulance service is a self-supporting operation, with expenditures and revenue of about $60,000 per year (FY 2006).

[5] Master Plan Community Services and Facilities (CF-S) Subcommittee, Meeting Minutes, 7 February 2006.

[6] Report of the Police Department, Incident Statistics, Annual Town Report, 2004, 2005.

[7] CF-S Subcommittee, Meeting Minutes, 24 January 2006, and Report of the Fire Department, Annual Town Report, 2004, 2005.

Princeton separates the responsibilities of dog officer from animal control officer. The former duties are handled by a part-time dog officer and assistant dog officer and the latter, by police officers and dispatchers. The dog officer's role, defined by statute and local bylaw, ranges from addressing dog complaints to sheltering loose, stray or "nuisance" dogs, and enforcing dog and kennel licensing requirements.[8] In contrast, an animal control officer responds to public safety and welfare complaints associated with other domesticated or undomesticated animals.

Many people think of the Building Inspector as a development permitting official, but inspectional services are mainly a public safety function. Princeton's Building Department consists of part-time building, plumbing, gas and electrical inspectors and part-time clerical support. The Building Inspector also serves as Zoning Enforcement Officer. From 2004-2005, the number of new residential construction permits in Princeton declined from 16 to 11, which is similar to region-wide trends and indicative of the economy. Additions and alterations, a key generator of "new growth" tax revenue in most towns, also declined modestly in Princeton, from 62 to 58 permits in the same period. Nonresidential alterations (commercial or industrial, institutional and public buildings) make up a small portion of the department's permitting activity, but not necessarily a small portion of its workload. Together, permit fees for new construction and alterations, and gas, electrical, plumbing and fire inspection service fees generate most of the revolving fund revenue that offsets Building Department expenditures.

Public Works. Responsibility for roads, parks, street lights, cemeteries, solid waste disposal, and public buildings and grounds lies with several departments because Princeton does not have a consolidated department of public works. As in most towns, however, Princeton's Highway Department provides more services than road maintenance and to some extent, it functions as a *de facto* public works department. In addition to resurfacing, reconstructing, plowing and sanding local streets and repairing associated drainage structures, the Highway Department mows and maintains all public parks and playing fields as well as the Town Common. It also assisted with construction of the new playing fields at Krashes Field. The Highway Department's services are supported by general fund operating revenue, highway grants and, as applicable, appropriations for park development, maintenance or other special projects. It works closely with the Roads Advisory Committee to secure local and non-local funds to maintain and improve the quality of Princeton's roads.[9]

The Princeton Board of Health oversees solid waste disposal service. Private contractors collect and transfer solid waste from Princeton households and businesses to the Wheelabrator Resource Recovery Facility in Millbury. Until Wheelabrator opened in 1987, Princeton operated its own municipal landfill on Hubbardston Road. The town closed and capped the landfill after entering into a waste disposal agreement with Wheelabrator in 1988, and the landfill continues to be monitored. A licensed municipal solid waste combustion facility that serves 35 communities in Central Massachusetts, Wheelabrator produces and sells electrical energy at wholesale to the New England Power Company. Under Princeton's disposal agreement, the town pays per-ton tipping fees from revenue generated by local solid waste charges. Princeton's entire annual outlay for solid waste disposal is offset by revenue accounted for separately from the general fund, i.e., without an impact on the tax rate.[10]

[8] See Princeton General Bylaws, Chapter XII.

[9] CF-S Subcommittee, Meeting Minutes, 7 December 2005; Report of the Highway Department, Roads Advisory Committee, Expenditure Report-General Fund and Expenditure Report-Other Funds, Annual Town Report, 2004-2005.

[10] Princeton Board of Health, Annual Report, and Town Accountant, FY 2005 Expenditure Report:

The Cemetery Department maintains Princeton's six public cemeteries and obtains revenue for that purpose from the general fund and other sources, notably the sale of burial lots and grave opening fees. It has a part-time Cemetery Superintendent and summer workers, and is overseen by an appointed Cemetery Commission. In a typical year, the Cemetery Department sells 5-6 burial plots and accommodates 7-10 burials. The Cemetery Commission estimates that town cemeteries have reserve capacity for about 260 burial spaces and many additional cremation spaces, but Princeton's burial plot documentation is incomplete because records were destroyed in a fire several years ago. The Town Clerk and Cemetery Commission have been working together to re-establish these records in a database.[11]

Electric Light Enterprise. Several town departments generate revenue to cover all or a substantial portion of their operating costs, but PMLD is Princeton's only municipal enterprise. Legally established as a non-profit public service corporation, PMLD acquires electricity from wholesale suppliers in New England and New York and provides service to residential, farm, business and public customers located within the town. PMLD owns the power lines that supply electricity throughout Princeton and co-owns the utility poles with Verizon. Moreover, it owns the oldest wind power facility in the Commonwealth and one of the oldest in the country.

In the late 1970s, Princeton town meeting adopted a resolution to oppose purchasing electricity from the Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant and promote the use of alternative energy sources. By 1984, PMLD had constructed several wind turbines off Westminster Road. The turbines generated power for nearly 20 years, but PMLD eventually decommissioned them due to high maintenance costs and declining productivity. Two state-of-the-art turbines are slated to be built in the same location. PMLD has estimated that the new turbines could supply up to 40% of the power consumed by Princeton property owners, or enough locally controlled electricity to stabilize customer rates.[12]

Planning and Development. Community planning, development review and permitting functions are carried out through a fairly traditional structure that includes the Planning Board, Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission, Board of Health and Historical Commission, and currently the Master Plan Steering Committee as well. In Princeton, the Planning Board is responsible not only for acting on proposed subdivisions and other lot plans, but also for approving site plans and issuing a limited number of special permits. Over the past few years, the Planning Board's workload has consisted primarily of endorsing "Approval Not Required" or "Form A" plans for lots with enough area and frontage to satisfy existing zoning requirements, but it has also approved two small subdivisions and reviewed several

Other Funds, Solid Waste, Annual Town Report, 2005; CF-S Subcommittee, Meeting Minutes, 5 December 2005; Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Waste Prevention, "Inactive or Closed Solid Waste Landfills," May 2005, and "Active Municipal Solid Waste Combustion Facilities," September 2005, at <http://www.mass.gov/dep/>; and Wheelabrator Technologies, Inc., "Wheelabrator Millbury," at <http://www.wheelabratortechnologies.com/index.asp>.

[11] CF-S Subcommittee, Meeting Minutes, 5 December 2005 Report of the Princeton Cemetery Commission, Annual Town Report, 2004, 2005.

[12] Princeton Municipal Light Department (PMLD), Annual Town Report, 2005; PMLD, Wind Farm History at <http://www.pmld.com/windfarm.asp>; P. Booth, "Fourth lawsuit filed against wind farm project," The Landmark 10 November 2005, at <http://www.thelandmark.com>; A. Paulson, "Going with the wind," Christian Science Monitor 19 December 2002, < http://www.csmonitor.com/>; S. Kirsner, "Wind power's new current," New York Times 28 August 2003 <http://www.nytimes.com/>; and Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources at <http://www.mass.gov/doer/home.htm>, select "Renewable Energy Programs," select "Windpower," select "Princeton."

nonresidential site plans, including PMLD's Wind Farm. Although the Planning Board has authority over preparation of a master plan, Princeton established a special master plan committee with representation from multiple town boards, like many communities throughout the state. The Board of Appeals serves as special permit granting authority for most special permits and exercises statutory jurisdiction over variances and comprehensive permits.[13]

The Conservation Commission administers the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, M.G.L. c.131 §40, and has broad responsibility for protecting natural resources. Its duties also include reviewing forest cutting plans that require approval from the Department of Conservation and Recreation. In some towns the Conservation Commission oversees open space planning and acquisitions, but Princeton has a permanent Open Space Committee that performs these functions.

Princeton does not have a public sewer system, so all homes and businesses rely on private, on-site wastewater disposal systems that require the Board of Health's approval under Title V of the Massachusetts Environmental Code. Properties with older septic systems are effectively "grandfathered" until the point of sale, at which time the septic systems must be inspected and brought into compliance with current standards. Since 2004, the workload of the Conservation Commission and Board of Health has measurably increased. For example, the Conservation Commission conducted 36 site visits and issued 3 enforcement orders in 2005, compared to 21 site visits and 5 informal enforcement orders in 2004; similarly, the Board of Health issued 25 septic system permits and supervised 39 Title V inspections in 2005, compared to 26 septic system permits and 24 inspections in 2004.[14]

The Princeton Historical Commission's planning work focuses on historic preservation, mainly by identifying buildings and areas eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and coordinating the nomination process. The town currently has three National Register Districts, East Princeton, Princeton Center and Russell Corner, and a fourth nomination is underway (West Village).[15] There are no local historic districts (i.e., areas within which certain improvements would require review by a local historic district commission) and Princeton does not have a town-wide cultural resources inventory, although a considerable amount of work has been done to catalog historic properties. Princeton's accomplishments in historic preservation planning and advocacy are amazing given that all of the work has been done by residents donating their time and expertise.

Culture and Recreation. Princeton's Public Library is among the town's most valuable assets. Aside from the building's beauty and commanding presence at the top of the Town Common, the library meets cultural, intellectual and social needs that no other single institution in a small town can address. Its patrons include persons of all ages, and they visit the library for many reasons beyond seeking access to its holdings. The library offers weekly story hours for pre-school children, book groups and knitting groups for adults and children, craft classes for children, and a summer reading program. People use the library for purposes ranging from chess games to cultural programs sponsored by the Friends of the Library or Princeton's Cultural Council.

Since the library is largely accessible to persons with mobility impairments, it is one of the few public places in Princeton that can accommodate any interested resident. A major renovation project in 2001 not only brought the building into

[13] Report of the Planning Board, Annual Town Report, 2004, 2005.

[14] Report of the Conservation Commission, Board of Health, Ibid.

[15] Report of the Princeton Historical Commission, Ibid.

substantial compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, but also modernized the entire building, achieved better space utilization and opened the basement to public use. The project was financed by the town and a grant from the state Board of Library Commissioners.

Like most town departments, Princeton's library is staffed primarily by part-time personnel and approximately 20 volunteers. Its only full-time employee is the library director. Unlike other departments, the library is overseen by a private, self-perpetuating board of directors. Its collection currently includes 18,820 materials, 72 subscriptions and a number of electronic databases, 1,655 video and DVD holdings, and 811 Books on Tape. In addition, the library has public computers with high-speed internet access, which until recently was unavailable in many parts of Princeton. Through the Central Massachusetts Regional Library System (CMRLS) and the Central/Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing Network (C/WMARS), Princeton offers its own residents access to materials and electronic resources in 150 libraries, including inter-library loan service. The library also maintains a web site that enables library card holders to download "e-books" from home.[16]

The Cultural Council administers grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Arts Council to support and promote the arts locally. From its small state grant allocation each year, the Council has paid for special programs offered at the Princeton Public Library, and a number of music performances. It has no staff and no designated space for meetings or cultural events.

The Princeton Center Building provides space for social, cultural and leisure-recreation activities. When the building was no longer needed for a school, Princeton instituted a plan to reuse it for other public purposes, generally to support education and the arts. The Princeton Center Building is a two-story structure with a basement-level gymnasium, and the site includes a small park with playground equipment and a playing field. The Council on Aging maintains an office and activity space on the first floor of the building, while the upper-story office space is leased by private tenants. Monthly rents and user fees pay for the facility's operating costs, but these sources do not provide enough revenue to support a capital reserve for extraordinary maintenance and repairs. The Princeton Center Building is partially accessible to people with disabilities.[17]

The Princeton Center Building on Boylston Avenue, a cultural, social and recreational asset for the entire community. (*Photo by Community Opportunities Group, Inc.*)

Most of Princeton's recreation programs serve young participants, which is common in small towns. Princeton does not have a staffed Recreation Department, so all of the activities depend

[16] Wendy F. Pape, Library Director, Princeton Public Library Long-Range Plan: 2005-2010 (September 2005), 9-10, 12, 14; CF-S Subcommittee, Meeting Minutes, 16 November 2005; Princeton Public Library, Annual Town Report, 2005.

[17] CF-S Subcommittee, Meeting Minutes, 16 November 2005; MMA Consulting Group, Town of Princeton Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance Report (December 1995), cited by Princeton Open Space Committee, Open Space and Recreation Plan, Appendix D, May 2000; Princeton Center Building Management Committee, Annual Town Report, 2005.

on coordination by dedicated volunteers. The Park and Recreation Committee sponsors a number of programs, coordinates playing field use with the Princeton Youth Soccer, Baseball/Softball and Basketball Associations, carries out fundraising drives, and enlists volunteers to assist with special projects. It played an instrumental role in obtaining funds to develop the new sports facilities at Krashes Field. The Committee also sponsors arts, crafts, and holiday events. Park and Recreation programs generate user fees that Princeton applies to operating costs through a revolving fund.

In addition, Princeton hosts several annual community events, including a popular Memorial Day Parade, summer band concerts in the bandstand on the town common, and the Annual Chandler Bullock Labor Day Tennis Tournament.

Human Services. "Human services" refers to public health and social services for a clientele with unique, age-based or other special needs. More than 100 years ago, local governments provided a wide range of social, financial and shelter services, but these responsibilities gradually shifted to state and federal agencies. Today, municipal human service delivery usually centers on programs for the elderly, public health services, veterans assistance and tax relief for populations protected by state law. Cities and large suburbs often provide a range of youth services as well, but the state's smallest towns rely on public schools, youth sports and other recreation activities to serve children and adolescents living within their borders.

The Council on Aging supplies or coordinates a majority of the services that directly assist senior citizens. As a small operation with very limited funding, the Council on Aging relies on many volunteers whose work is coordinated by a part-time director. Some of the activities offered locally include monthly or weekly social and leisure events, monthly blood pressure screening staffed by Fire Department volunteers, and a senior lunch sponsored monthly by one of the local churches. Many services are available only on a regional basis, however, such as senior transportation, at-home meal delivery, and assistance with medical, home heating and other needs. The town has one senior residence, Wachusett House, an affordable rental community for 24 income-eligible elderly households. Princeton also offers senior tax relief and an abatement program that allows interested, age-eligible homeowners to contribute public service hours in exchange for reduced property taxes. Through this program, elderly residents have assisted on special projects in the Princeton Public Library and the Town Hall.

Princeton's other human service offerings are quite limited. For example, the Board of Health sponsors some traditional public health services each year, such as flu and rabies immunization clinics. Massachusetts also requires cities and towns to provide certain types of financial assistance to veterans, the blind, surviving spouses and the elderly. The types and amounts of assistance vary by statute and program. Each community must appoint a Veterans Agent to help veterans and their dependents with financial, medical or burial benefits. The state reimburses 75% of eligible expenditures through the "cherry sheet," or the official notice of local aid payments to be made in the following fiscal year. Princeton has a Veterans Agent, but the absence of veterans aid reimbursements on Princeton's cherry sheet since FY 2002 indicates that the town has not received requests for veteran's assistance in a long time. However, it has approved property tax exemptions for seniors and others nearly every year, and received prorated reimbursements from the state. Most of the tax relief reimbursements have assisted Princeton's elderly homeowners.[18]

[18] Council on Aging, Board of Health, Annual Town Report, 2004, 2005; CF-S Subcommittee, Meeting Minutes, 5 December 2005; Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, Cherry Sheet Manual (2005), and "Cherry Sheets," Municipal Data Bank, at <http://www.dls.state.ma.us/mdm.htm>.

Public Schools

Princeton provides its children with K-12 public education through an agreement with the Wachusett Regional School District (WRSD). K-8 students from Princeton attend the Thomas Prince School on Sterling Road, and high school students travel to Wachusett Regional High School in Holden unless they opt for a vocational program at the Montachusett Vocational-Technical School in Fitchburg. WRSD also participates in a large regional special education collaborative based in Shirley (FFLAC).

The Thomas Prince School on Sterling Road. (*Photo by Community Opportunities Group, Inc.*)

Approximately 90% of all school-age children in the five-town area attend public school.[19] During the 2005-2006 school year, WRSD's K-12 enrollment, including all seven elementary schools and the regional high school, exceeded 7,000 students. A small percentage of the district's enrollment represents "School Choice" students, i.e., children from other towns attending WRSD schools on a non-local tuition basis. WRSD began to participate in the state's School Choice program in FY 2004. In the past few years, the district has sent more of its own students to other schools than the number of non-local students it received, but this trend seems to be changing. WRSD students also have the option of applying to one of the region's charter schools, such as the North Central Charter Essential School in Fitchburg and the Abby Kelley Charter School in Worcester.[20]

Since the mid-1990s, WRSD's K-12 enrollment has increased by about 1,000 students, or an average of 95 students per year. A change in the district's jurisdiction from a 9-12 to a K-12 program in FY 1995 coincided with accelerated rates of enrollment growth in Eastern and Central Massachusetts, including towns adjacent to Princeton. The same period produced a historic high in school construction projects: new schools, modernization and expansion projects, and school consolidations. Accordingly, Princeton expanded the Thomas Prince School and decommissioned the Princeton Center School, Holden replaced two aging elementary schools with a new, larger one and built a new middle school, Rutland built a new middle school, and a major expansion and modernization project at the regional high school is nearly complete.[21] These investments have affected each town's debt service commitments and the regional operating budget as a whole.

WRSD's average per-pupil expenditure for the region as a whole is relatively low. According to statistics reported by the Department of Education, WRSD traditionally spends less per student than other regional school districts in the Com-

[19] Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), Wachusett Regional School District, School District Profile Series, at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>.

[20] DOE, Trends in School Choice Pupils and Tuition, FY 1996-2005, and Massachusetts Charter School Office, School Finance, District/School Administration.

[21] Wachusett Regional School District (WRSD), Wachusett Regional High School Building Committee, Monthly Status Report: May 2006, at <http://www.wrsd.net/WRHSBC.htm>. See also, WRSD, District Schools, at <http://www.mec.edu/wachusett/schools.htm>.

TABLE 8.1: WRSD K-12 FOUNDATION ENROLLMENT TRENDS, 2000-2006

	Fiscal Year					
Community	**2000**	**2001**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**
Holden	2,745	2,753	2,803	2,820	2,893	2,885
Paxton	687	691	690	676	677	673
PRINCETON	652	654	659	633	614	598
Rutland	1,118	1,158	1,245	1,366	1,395	1,441
Sterling	1,240	1,247	1,273	1,268	1,307	1,316
Total	6,442	6,503	6,670	6,763	6,886	6,913
Princeton %	10.1%	10.1%	9.9%	9.4%	8.9%	8.7%

Source of Data: Massachusetts Department of Education, Chapter 70 Program. FY 2002 data unavailable.

Note: "Foundation enrollment" refers to the estimated number of K-12 students for which each community is financially responsible in any given year. It includes children in WRSD schools as well as out-of-district placements and charter schools, but omits non-resident children attending WRSD on a tuitioned-in basis. Foundation enrollments generally represent the total number of children enrolled on October 1 of the previous fiscal year, converted to full-time equivalent. Since foundation enrollment is a statistic used in determining the minimum amount a community should spend on public schools, the enrollment count does not match the average actual enrollment reported in Table 8.2.

monwealth.[22] Moreover, the difference between WRSD expenditures per student and per-pupil expenditures in other regional districts or the state overall has widened in the past nine years. For example, in 1997, WRSD's per-pupil expenditure was 94% of the average per-pupil expenditure for all 55 regional school districts in the state, and 90% of the statewide average. By 2005, it had fallen to 84% of the regional school district average and 78% of the state average. Still, WRSD's per-pupil spending trends do not necessarily mean that member towns appropriate less than they should to support the schools, and not everyone agrees that state comparison statistics are a useful or appropriate way to measure adequate school spending.

While school enrollment growth continues to occur elsewhere in the region, Princeton has begun to experience a declining school-age population. Its estimated K-12 enrollment for FY 2006 was 598 students, or 8.7% of WSRD's district-wide K-12 enrollment, the smallest percentage of all five towns. In 2000, Princeton generated 10.1% of the district's total enrollment.[23] Although its enrollment share was very small seven years ago, Princeton has experienced a noticeable decrease in K-12 students in the same period that enrollments have grown in most of the district's other towns, particularly Rutland. To some extent, the make-up and size of Princeton's school-age population today could be foreseen in the last federal census. In April 2000, a comparatively large percentage of Princeton's school-age population was comprised of middle-school and high-school age children – students who subsequently progressed through the secondary grades and graduated.[24] Due to the town's very low growth rate, low rate of housing turnover and high cost of housing, Princeton has not generated new enrollment growth at the same rate as other towns nearby.

Despite Princeton's enrollment trends, its state-mandated spending per student has increased significantly. From 2000-2006, Princeton's Net

[22] DOE, "Per Pupil Expenditure Report, FY 2005," February 2006, School Finance.

[23] WRSD, FY 2006 Appropriation, Appendix 1, Annual Report, <http://www.mec.edu/wachusett/>.

[24] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, Summary File 1 Tables P34, P36.

TABLE 8.2: COMPARISON EXPENDITURES PER PUPIL, 1997-2005

	Wachusett Regional Schools		Average Per Pupil Expenditure		
Fiscal Year	Total Education Spending†	Average # K-12 Students*	Wachusett Region	All Regional School Districts	State Average
1997	$34,713,956	6,407.0	$5,418	$5,764	$6,015
1998	$36,224,105	6,557.0	$5,525	$6,056	$6,361
1999	$38,473,759	6,456.2	$5,959	$6,329	$6,692
2000	$41,724,351	6,564.3	$6,356	$6,822	$7,149
2001	$43,607,574	6,619.0	$6,588	$7,239	$7,562
2002	$46,414,031	6,761.9	$6,864	$7,556	$8,005
2003	$47,620,250	6,841.5	$6,960	$7,835	$8,273
2004	$47,136,348	7,053.3	$6,683	$7,917	$8,584
2005	$48,962,386	7,014.8	$6,980	$8,363	$9,101

Source of Data: Massachusetts Department of Education.

†"Total Education Spending" includes most of the district's annual expenditures on schools, but not debt service, capital improvements, adult education programs, school choice or charter school tuitions, the school lunch program, or expenditures from state or federal grant revenue.

**"Average # K-12 Students" is the average number of students enrolled throughout the school year, expressed in full-time equivalent. It includes non-resident students enrolled in the regional schools, but does not include local children attending school outside the district.*

Minimum Contribution per student for children attending the regional schools rose by more than 40%, yet the region's other towns experienced much slower rates of mandated spending growth, as shown below.

Under the Chapter 70 aid formula, a community's ability to pay for public schools is based in part on local wealth. Each city and town in the state is assigned a minimum "foundation budget," though many communities exceed the foundation budget due to cumulative, prior-year school spending choices made by town meetings. In a regional school district, the foundation budget is proportionally assigned to each member community on the basis of enrollments, such that when converted to a foundation budget per student, parity is achieved throughout the region. However, the local wealth component of the state's aid formula means that some communities pay a larger per-

TABLE 8.3: NET MINIMUM CONTRIBUTION, WRSD MEMBER TOWNS, 2000-2006

	Fiscal Year						
Community	2000	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	Change
Holden	$4,284	$4,186	$4,531	$4,865	$5,070	$5,407	26.2%
Paxton	$4,107	$3,902	$4,409	$4,710	$5,008	$5,273	28.4%
PRINCETON	$4,073	$4,238	$4,601	$4,798	$5,233	$5,735	40.8%
Rutland	$2,746	$2,850	$2,928	$2,793	$2,861	$2,950	7.4%
Sterling	$4,404	$3,884	$4,481	$4,977	$5,167	$5,280	19.9%
Total	$4,000	$3,865	$4,217	$4,446	$4,649	$4,886	22.1%

Source of Data: Massachusetts Department of Education, Chapter 70 Program.

centage of their share of the foundation budget. Since Princeton's households tend to be somewhat wealthier than households elsewhere in the school district, the town pays more per student than the amount assessed to other participating towns. From 2001-2006, Princeton's total appropriations for schools, including debt service for the Thomas Prince School project, absorbed 67-68% of each year's operating budget.[25]

The district's five towns have K-8 facilities in different grade configurations, all managed and operated by WRSD. Princeton and Paxton, with the lowest enrollments in the district, each have a single K-8 school. Holden has three K-5 elementary schools and a middle school for grades 6-8; Rutland has two K-5 schools and a middle school for grades 6-8; and Sterling has one K-4 elementary school and a middle school serving grades 5-8.

LOCAL TRENDS

Operating Revenue

Like most small towns in Massachusetts, Princeton depends primarily on property taxes to pay for municipal and school services. Property taxes typically account for 85-87% of all general fund revenue in Princeton, i.e., revenue that supports the town's operating budget.[26] Over the past 20 years, single-family homes have generated an increasingly large share of the town's tax levy, from about 81% in the late 1980s to 87% in FY 2006. However, the average single-family tax bill in Princeton has not increased as rapidly as single-family tax bills elsewhere in the state. For example, Princeton's average single-family tax bill was 1.30 times the state average in FY 1990, yet by FY 2006, the local-state tax bill ratio had dropped to 1.13.[27]

Local aid from the state contributes a very small percentage of Princeton's operating revenue due to the town's residential development pattern, very low population density, low population growth rate, high property values, and high household wealth. Most local aid allocable to Princeton is paid to WRSD as a Chapter 70 supplement to the town's appropriation for public schools. A remarkable aspect of Princeton's revenue history is that in FY 2005, net local aid (minus state charges) barely exceeded the amount the town received ten years earlier, in nominal dollars, i.e., dollars valued in the year they were received or expended. Table 8.4 shows that in constant or inflation-adjusted dollars, however, local aid has declined. Moreover, growth in other revenue sources has lagged behind inflation since 2000.

Operating Budget and Expenditures

Budgeted revenue is not the same as actual expenditures. Growth in total revenue and change in the mix of revenues conveys only one part of a town's financial history. Since 1990, Princeton's operating expenditures – the amounts actually spent on public services – increased by a modest 23% in constant dollars (2005), but education expenditures rose by 30% and municipal expenditures, only 14%. However, the town's municipal spending declined slightly during the 1990s (adjusted for inflation) even though its population increased by about 5%.

Changes in Princeton's municipal spending partially reflect a gradual transfer of costs from the operating budget to other sources of revenue, i.e., "off-budget" expenditures. This can be seen even recently, for until a few years ago, the operating budget carried some of the funding associated with Building Department and Board of Health services. Over time, Princeton seems to have converted all or significant portions of some municipal services to special revenue or revolving fund operations that do not rely on the general operat-

[25] Town Administrator Dennis Rindone, "FY 2006 Budget Summary" [in Excel].

[26] DOR, "General Fund Revenue," 2000-2005, Municipal Data Bank.

[27] DOR, "Average Single-Family Tax Bills" and "Assessed Valuation," 1988-2006, Municipal Data Bank.

TABLE 8.4: LONG-TERM REVENUE TRENDS (2005 CONSTANT DOLLARS, ROUNDED)*

Fiscal Year	Tax Levy	†Local Aid	Local Receipts	Other Funds	Total
1985	$2,724,000	$910,200	$311,200	$144,700	$4,090,000
1990	$4,096,000	$804,000	$685,900	$801,000	$6,387,000
1995	$4,676,000	$919,800	$586,700	$236,400	$6,418,000
2000	$4,643,000	$963,100	$826,700	$742,500	$7,175,000
2005	$5,556,000	$807,800	$741,200	$738,500	$7,843,000
% Change					
1985-2005	104.0%	-11.3%	138.2%	410.4%	91.8%
1985-1995	71.7%	1.1%	88.5%	63.4%	56.9%
1995-2005	18.8%	-12.2%	26.3%	212.4%	22.2%

Sources: Community Opportunities Group, Inc.; DOR, Municipal Data Bank. Constant dollar conversions based on CPI, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Includes all sources of revenue, not only General Fund revenue.*

†Beginning in FY 2006, school construction reimbursements were no longer reported as cherry sheet aid. These payments are now made by the School Building Assistance Authority.

TABLE 8.5: GENERAL FUND EXPENDITURE TRENDS (2005 CONSTANT DOLLARS, ROUNDED)

Fiscal Year	†Population	Schools	*Municipal	Total
1990	2,900	$3,133,000	$2,739,000	$5,872,000
1995	3,331	$3,082,000	$2,645,000	$5,727,000
2000	3,364	$3,269,000	$2,689,000	$5,959,000
2005	3,549	$4,084,000	$3,122,000	$7,206,000
% Change				
1990-2005	9.7%	30.4%	14.0%	22.7%
1990-2000	5.1%	4.3%	-1.8%	1.5%
2000-2005	4.4%	24.9%	16.1%	20.9%

Sources: Community Opportunities Group, Inc.; DOR, Municipal Data Bank, and Town of Princeton FY 2005 Year-End Schedule A Report, and Claritas, Inc. Constant dollar conversions based on CPI, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Includes school construction debt service.*

†2005 Population estimate from Claritas, Inc. Note: as of 2004, Census Bureau population estimate for Princeton was 3,499.

ing budget for support, which also means that the revenue generated by these activities is restricted for their use. In turn, revenues committed to the operating budget – mainly property taxes, unrestricted local receipts such as excise tax revenue, and local aid – have been absorbed by growth in three areas: the school budget, public safety, and employee health insurance. These conditions are not unique to Princeton; communities throughout the state have wrestled with similar issues for many years. Furthermore, financing town services with fees and segregating departmental revenue from the general fund has become a way of life for Massachusetts municipalities since Proposition 2 ½ went into effect in 1981.[28]

[28] See David Tyler, "A Tale of Eight Cities & Towns: Prop 2 ½ Yields Different Results in Different Places," CommonWealth, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Summer 1996), at <http://www.massinc.org/>.

Growth in Princeton's local government expenditures seems to have had little do to with population growth because the town's population has not increased significantly since 1990. However, the town has experienced growth in households and housing units. These conditions have placed additional demands on local services, but they also have produced additional operating revenue. As residential development continues to spread into outlying parts of town, the cost to deliver basic services will change not only because of growth in total housing units, but also because of the *location* of those units. When service cost components change, such as the payroll impact of hiring additional police officers to patrol a larger geographic area, the result is known as a marginal cost increase. Efficient land use patterns hold greater promise for efficient use of local revenue because the cost of public services in a small area is generally much lower per capita than across a larger area. The trade-off for communities with large-lot zoning, with or without water or sewer service, is that the cost of community services accelerates more rapidly in response to new development.[29]

Debt Management and Reserves

Princeton has made some noteworthy investments in public facility improvements over the past decade, partially due to growth and partially to address long-standing needs. For example, the public library was renovated in 2001 with local funds matched dollar-for-dollar by a state library grant, and the recreation complex at Krashes Field was constructed, largely through fundraising, volunteer support and help from the town's highway department. The new highway garage also was financed through borrowing. The town appears to spend about as much as its operating budget can comfortably absorb for debt service, which has ranged from 9-12% of each year's general fund operating budget over the past five years. Princeton's debt service commitments currently include repayment of bonds for the Thomas Prince School, the library, and highway department equipment.[30] The debt service for Thomas Prince School is partially offset by reimbursements from the state School Building Assistance Authority.

For a small town with scarce opportunities to generate extra revenue from fees and user charges, Princeton does quite well at maintaining and managing its reserves. In the past five years, the sum of Princeton's "free cash" and stabilization fund balances has approximated 8-9% of the total operating budget. Princeton's conservatism is also evident in its approach to funding local services from the tax levy. In a typical year, Princeton has excess (unused) levy capacity of about 6%, which is roughly three times the statewide average. By maintaining excess levy capacity, the town essentially leaves some of its tax levy power in reserve. On average, the unused levy capacity equals about $325,000.[31]

PAST PLANS, STUDIES & REPORTS

Princeton does not have a master facilities plan or a municipal space needs analysis. Its planning for facilities and infrastructure improvements has largely been a function of periodic master plan updates and volunteer work by special study committees.

1970 Town Plan

Princeton's first master plan (1970) reflects the nation's post-war experience with suburban development and highway construction, both made pos-

[29] See, for example, Robert Burchell et al., The Cost of Sprawl 2000, Transportation Research Board (2002); and Metropolitan Area Planning Council, Toward a Sustainable Tax Policy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2001).

[30] Dennis Rindone, FY 2006 Operating Budget; and DOR, "General Fund Expenditures," 1987-2005, Municipal Data Bank.

[31] DOR, "New Growth Applied to the Levy Limit," "Free Cash and Stabilization Fund Balances," and "Excess and Override Capacity," 1992-2006, Municipal Data Bank.

sible by an economy and a culture transformed by the car. In some ways, the Princeton Town Plan 1970 imagined Princeton as a low-density suburb of the future. The town's school-age population was just over half that of the present decade, and Princeton had recently built the Thomas Prince School. According to 20-year forecasts contained in the 1970 Town Plan, Princeton would have a total population of 2,828 people, including 933 school-age children, by 1990.

To accommodate growth in the town's under-18 population, Princeton would need six acres of playgrounds, 20 acres of playing fields, and 21 elementary school classrooms for a projected enrollment of 520 children in grades K-6. In fact, the 1970 Plan anticipated that eventually, all children in grades 7-12 would transfer to regional schools. It also predicted needs for roadway extensions to support through-town traffic, an outdoor swimming area, land acquisitions for a public water system, and a number of seemingly routine improvements such as a storage shed for highway department equipment. In light of growth along the eastern side of town, the 1970 Plan called for a fire substation and playing fields in East Princeton. To finance these improvements, the plan urged Princeton to adopt a systematic approach to capital budgeting, including annual (and gradually increasing) set-asides in a stabilization fund.

1975 Town Plan

During a master plan update process in 1975, the master plan committee endorsed many of the capital improvement recommendations from the 1970 Town Plan. While committee members noted that Princeton's rate of school enrollment growth was not as high as the earlier plan had predicted, they questioned whether Princeton should maintain the Princeton Center School, expand the Thomas Prince School, or consider a regional alternative. The committee had other capital needs in mind, however, such as land for a skating rink, a new public safety building in the town center, and enough land to meet needs for three public drinking water wells and 1.7M gallons of water storage capacity. In addition, the authors of the Princeton Town Plan 1975 looked at local capacity to deliver services, i.e., the town's personnel and volunteers. Based on growth trends and the development of Wachusett Mountain as a year-round recreation area, the master plan committee predicted that Princeton would need a full-time police chief by 1978 as well as a full-time emergency dispatch system.

1980-1985 Town Plan

Changing ideas about local government can be seen in the Princeton Town Plan 1980-1985, which called for more centralized oversight by the Board of Selectmen and a part-time executive secretary to coordinate day-to-day operations. In keeping with the theme of centralization, the 1980-85 Plan proposed converting several elected offices to appointed positions, such as the Electric Light Commission, the Town Treasurer, Tax Collector and Assessors. The master plan committee that wrote the plan identified needs for more office space for several town departments and meeting space for town boards, and reinforced the previous plan's recommendations for a full-time police chief and sergeant (this time by 1982). They recommended that Princeton build a town pool on land next to the Thomas Prince School, and unlike their predecessors for the 1975 Plan, the 1980-85 Plan committee endorsed keeping middle school students in the Princeton Center School.

Other Plans

An updated plan authored ca. 1986 (Town Plan Report) echoed the same concerns about Princeton's lack of full-time police, but noted that the East Princeton fire substation had finally opened. As a sign of its own times – post-Proposition 2 ½ – the last master plan update predicted full K-12 regionalization and lamented Princeton's inability to build a municipal pool, a project that had been abandoned due to lack of funds. The same

plan urged Princeton to consider new ideas such as operating the ambulance as "a separate cost center," i.e., as a special revenue or revolving fund, in order to protect ambulance receipts and build a capital reserve to buy replacement ambulances and supplies, and to move as many school programs as possible "off budget." Indeed, the 1986 Plan foretold the consequences of development in outlying areas, in passages such as these: "When growth occurs in a town's farthest corners, [school bus] transportation costs can skyrocket," and "As the Town spreads out, more highway maintenance will result." On that note, it also urged Princeton to arrest the deterioration of local streets, noting that many had fallen into disrepair.

Princeton has implemented many of the public facility and service recommendations of previous master plans. Today, the town has a professional Town Administrator, full-time police officers, and a fire substation and a small recreation facility serving the eastern side of town. Athletic fields have been constructed at Princeton Park (Krashes Field), and the town has made some form-of-government changes to centralize its administrative and financial operations. The town also has a Capital Improvements Planning Committee, which reviews major equipment and vehicle requests, land acquisition proposals and other items eligible for debt financing, and makes recommendations to town meeting each year. Full K-12 regionalization has occurred, though not quite the way that drafters of earlier plans imagined. The Thomas Prince School was expanded not because K-6 enrollments reached 520 children by 1990, but rather because the Princeton Center School was decommissioned and eventually reinvented as a community center. What the prior plans omit is as interesting as the content they cover. For example, current issues such as the fate of Mechanics Hall or access to the second floor of Bagg Hall appear nowhere in these earlier reports.

ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

For local governments, public facility planning usually reflects assumptions about housing and population growth, the location of new development, demands caused by outside factors, and foreseeable revenue. Master plans prepared 40 years ago often focused on needs for new schools, parks and roadways, but today, town plans rarely promote new roads; instead, they emphasize the safety, condition, function and appearance of existing streets. Moreover, planning for public schools has changed significantly. In 1970, class sizes often exceeded the class size policies of today's school committees. Kindergarten and first-grade classrooms were staffed differently, and the inclusion of children with special needs was neither a matter of law nor a principle broadly endorsed by educators.

The conditions that cause communities to invest in public facility improvements today relate not only to overall population growth, but also demographic change. Even in towns with very low or stable growth rates, demand for public services responds to changes in household types, population age, household wealth and the expectations of residents. Further, new mandates have come into play since Princeton's previous master plans were written, notably the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, and more rigorous accessibility codes at the state level. When growth in demand and changes in need contribute to cost increases without commensurate revenue growth, communities find it very challenging to finance improvements and still maintain the quality of services that residents expect.

Princeton's small population, fairly large land area and broadly distributed development pattern present several challenges to providing adequate facilities and services. On one level, choosing to remain small implies a willingness to forego the convenience of having services that larger towns

TABLE 8.6: COST OF COMMUNITY SERVICES STUDY (FY 2005)

		Class of Land Use		
	Total	**Residential**	**Commercial**	**Open Space**
General Fund Expenditures				
Municipal	$2,545,381	$2,175,707	$87,606	$282,068
Schools	$4,660,558	$4,660,558	0	0
Total	$7,205,939	$6,836,265	$87,606	$282,068
General Fund Revenue	$7,218,522	$6,170,510	$188,120	$859,892
Surplus (Deficit)	$12,583	-$665,755	$100,514	$577,824
Cost-Revenue Ratio	1.00	1.11	0.47	0.33

Sources: Community Opportunities Group, Inc.; American Farmlands Trust Cost of Community Services Model, Department of Revenue Municipal Data Bank; Town of Princeton Assessor's Parcel Database, FY2005 Schedule A Report to DOR and FY06 Tax Recapitulation Sheet. Constant dollars adjusted by CPI, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

provide as a matter of course, yet choosing to remain a small, very-low-density town also involves a fairly high cost of services per household. As development continues along Princeton's rural roads, reaching those "farthest corners" alluded to in the 1986 plan, the cost of basic services will most likely accelerate. Table 8.6 shows that in Princeton today, residential development costs about $1.11 for municipal and school services for every $1.00 of property tax and other revenue it generates. The gap is filled by revenue from Princeton's tiny commercial base and large tracts of privately owned (taxable) open space.

The needs Princeton faces today are somewhat different from the needs identified in previous master plans. Though people yearn to keep Princeton "just as it is," the town has changed in ways that may not be obvious to newcomers or even to those with longer ties to the town, for some of the changes have occurred gradually, over a long period of time. Further, previous master plans identified needs that have not been addressed, either because the town decided to focus on more pressing issues or lacked the resources and consensus to proceed. Princeton's facility and service challenges are numerous and complex, and they will be inextricably affected by long-term land use policies.

- **Communications Technology**. High-speed internet access was not part of any local government's planning process in the mid-1980s, yet today, it is a fact of life and an essential business tool for small companies and people with at-home employment. Princeton may be ambivalent about the desirability of home occupations, but the reality is that many residents already work at home in professional "zero-commute" occupations.

- **Data Management and Analysis**. Basic planning and data management technology such as a Geographic Information System (GIS) was rarely of interest to those outside the nation's leading universities, the Census Bureau or the military in 1985, yet today, the absence of a usable GIS parcel map in Princeton complicated many aspects of the present master plan process.

- **Emergency Medical Services**. Princeton recently established a committee to study the town's emergency medical service staffing needs. Together, an aging population and residential development spread across a broader area mean that Princeton will experience an increase in medical emergencies and longer travel distances for ambulance staff.

At issue is whether Princeton has access to enough ALS- and EMT-certified personnel to assure a timely, appropriate response to emergency medical calls. Although the reimbursement rates for ALS service usually generate enough revenue to pay for salary, expense and equipment replacement costs, the town loses a significant share of the revenue whenever non-local providers act in place of the town's own ALS responders.

- **Emergency Response Planning**. The realm of emergency response has changed significantly since the mid-1980s and in particular, since September 11, 2001. Today, communities need not only appropriate plans and trained personnel to address hazardous materials incidents, but also to participate in a coordinated response to terrorism. Although Princeton participates in regional emergency response planning, the absence of career (paid) fire department personnel and health department staff make it very difficult for Princeton to train, test, evaluate and improve its emergency response capabilities.

- **Public Safety Building**. The existing public safety building is not adequate for modern police, fire and dispatch operations. It is cramped and too small to house new fire vehicles, it needs ventilation and mechanical system improvements, and it does not have appropriate facilities for officer training, booking and records storage. The town needs to determine whether the present site can accommodate major alterations and expansion for a new, suitably equipped public safety complex.

- **Storage of Highway Salt**. The salt shed at the Highway Garage is used to store salt, but salt mixed with sand is stored outside and exposed to the weather. Since the Highway Garage is adjacent to a water supply area, it is important for Princeton to provide and maintain an environmentally safe, adequately sized storage facility for road salt. An improved, more attractive facility also would be appropriate given the adjacent playing fields and the storage shed's visibility from Route 31.

- **Asset Management**. Princeton needs a policy framework for making choices about acquiring, improving, maintaining and disposing of town-owned property. If any town building illustrates the need for asset management policies, it is Mechanics Hall. Due to the estimated cost of renovations, it is very unlikely that Princeton will be able to pay for the improvements from existing revenue sources. Capital improvements are only part of the problem, however: even if the building is restored with public funds, the town will need to pay for ongoing operations and maintenance. Unless Princeton can find the means to take care of Mechanics Hall, it would be better to consider selling the building so that a private buyer can put it to new, economic uses. As currently zoned, however, the site's only economic use will probably lead to tear-down and rebuild without variances from the Board of Appeals.

- **Master Facilities Plan**. The Community Services and Facilities Subcommittee prepared an extensive inventory of Princeton's public buildings and toured all of the facilities for this master plan. Princeton has basic systems in place to budget for capital improvements and routine building and grounds maintenance. For the size and age of the public buildings that Princeton is trying to maintain, however, annual allocations for operations and maintenance are strikingly low. Princeton needs a master facilities plan that includes code analysis, an energy audit, a space needs plan and capital budget for all key town buildings, prepared by a registered architect experienced with public buildings and historic preservation. The town *also* needs revenue to implement the plan, and policies to guide

the allocation of available revenue. Princeton should consider establishing a standing Town Buildings Committee to advise other officials and town meeting on building improvement and maintenance priorities.

- **Land Acquisitions**. There is considerable interest in Princeton in acquiring and protecting open space. The town also needs land for municipal purposes, such as future cemetery space, and it may need a relocation site for the public safety building. As a general principle, communities should take care to purchase land that meets identified needs and avoid the tendency to buy land simply because it is available on the market. Princeton needs clear criteria to guide land acquisition choices: first, the town cannot acquire all of the vacant land that remains undeveloped; second, some types of development ought to be encouraged in order to provide a sustainable revenue base; and third, like any asset, land should be managed. Land management plans should be established as part of any land acquisition initiative.

- **Planning and Development Review**. Princeton would benefit from a town planner to support the work of its Planning Board, Board of Appeals and Historical Commission, and to coordinate development review with the Conservation Commission and Board of Health. In all communities, development has become a more complex process for applicants as well as local permitting officials. Although Princeton is a very small town, it has preservation, development design, environmental planning and technical assistance needs that cannot be met with existing staff resources. Princeton is remarkable for all that it accomplishes with volunteers and very few full- or part-time employees, but the town does not have a coordinated approach to planning and development review.

- **Public Schools**. When the town closed the Princeton Center School and expanded the Thomas Prince School, the school committee and Princeton voters made a policy decision that one facility is appropriate for K-8 use. This decision pre-dates the complete regionalization of the Wachusett Regional School District in 1995. Princeton's declining enrollments and growth occurring elsewhere in the region should be monitored with an eye toward considering other options for middle-school age children. It is very difficult (and not always cost-effective) for a school district to maintain parity for students entering high school from vastly different middle school experiences. The issue is not whether the Thomas Prince School is substandard; rather, it is that financing a diverse, competitive curriculum that enriches students at all levels requires more resources than a very small school can provide. Options such as middle school regionalization or an intra-district "school choice" program may need to be explored.

- **Regionalization and Inter-Local Agreements.** Due to the structure of state-local government in Massachusetts, the state does not have many successful models of regional service delivery. Some organized regional entities such as the Cape Cod Commission and Franklin Regional Council of Governments do exist, but inter-local agreements – formal pacts between two or more communities to share services and revenue – are atypical in Massachusetts except for the regional school districts. However, towns such as Hamilton and Wenham have entered into successful inter-local agreements for their public library and recreation programs. In light of Princeton's desire to remain a small, largely rural community, it should explore inter-local opportunities for services such as solid waste disposal, emergency response planning and senior citizen programs.

TABLE 8.7: LONG-TERM CHANGE IN TAX LEVY & GENERAL FUND EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA

		Per Capita (2005 Constant Dollars)			Levy %	Levy %
Fiscal Year	Population	Expenditures	Tax Levy	Income	Expenditures	Income
1990	3,189	$1,841.23	$1,187.43	$31,967	64.5%	3.7%
2000	3,353	$1,777.09	$1,384.63	$36,544	77.9%	3.8%
2005	3,549	$2,030.41	$1,565.40	$39,557	77.1%	4.0%

Sources: Community Opportunities Group, Inc.; Department of Revenue Municipal Data Bank, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, and Claritas, Inc. Constant dollars adjusted by CPI, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

From a facilities and services perspective, Princeton's most critical need is revenue from a sufficiently diverse mix of land uses that the costs triggered by very-low-density single-family residential development do not continue to dwarf the town's tax base. Lack of revenue has impeded the road improvements plan, achieving accessibility in Bagg Hall, acquiring open space, and providing adequate staff for municipal offices. Despite the town's relative affluence, or perhaps because of it, Princeton has experienced a gradual decline in the amount of non-tax revenue that supports general fund operations. In constant dollars (2005), the ratio of Princeton's tax levy per capita to general fund expenditures per capita has increased over time.

COMMUNITY SERVICES & FACILITIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Public Safety Building

A Public Safety Building Study Committee should be established to plan and oversee construction of a new public safety facility or renovations to the existing facility in the town center. While Princeton also needs to initiate work on a master facilities plan for its other public buildings, the existing public safety building is clearly inadequate for modern police, fire, emergency medical and dispatch operations. It lacks space for new fire vehicles, it needs ventilation and mechanical system improvements, and it does not have appropriate facilities for officer training, booking and records storage.

As part of the planning process for a new public safety complex, Princeton should determine whether the present location can accommodate a major alterations and expansion project. The town will need suitable, central space for an ALS ambulance and ALS personnel in the near future, and office space for a full-time fire chief or full-time training officer.

Ambulance Service & Staffing

The town recently established a special study committee to evaluate Princeton's staffing and equipment needs for emergency medical services. The issues range from hiring and retaining personnel with Advanced Life Support (ALS) certification to maintaining and replacing ALS-equipped ambulances – and obviously, how a small town like Princeton can afford to support ALS service in the long run. This study came out of deliberations by the Community Services & Facilities Subcommittee during its work on the master plan, and it represents one of several "recommendations in progress" that the town needs to implement.

Master Facilities Plan

Princeton should appropriate funds for a master facilities plan, retain a qualified architect, and establish a special committee to oversee the plan's development. The committee needs representatives from Princeton's major policy-setting, financial planning and advisory boards, staff with building management responsibilities, and constituents affected by Princeton's unmet or inadequately met space needs.

Although Princeton has basic procedures in place to budget for routine building and grounds maintenance and capital improvements, the annual appropriations are strikingly low considering the size and age of the buildings that Princeton is trying to maintain. The town needs to commission a code and building systems analysis, an energy audit and a review of the feasibility of utilizing renewable sources of energy, an analysis of municipal space needs, capital improvement recommendations and preliminary cost estimates, for its primary public facilities: Bagg Hall, Princeton Public Library, the Princeton Center Building, the Highway Department Garage and Salt Storage Shed, the Town Hall Annex, the East Princeton Fire Station, the Thomas Prince School.

In addition to the basic office, meeting and storage space requirements of any organization, Princeton needs storage facilities for historical artifacts and documents. It also has no space for fine and performing arts events except for small productions held in the library. A master facilities plan should consider the feasibility of providing special events space on the second floor of Bagg Hall.

Asset Management

The main purpose of a master facilities plan is to identify capital improvement needs in public buildings and establish a schedule for addressing them, considering existing and future space needs for the functions a building serves. However, municipalities are responsible for more types of facilities than public buildings, and sometimes they have more assets than they can manage. Just as a private-sector organization tracks the usefulness and market value of its assets and the associated costs and benefits of retaining them, governments need to look at their real estate holdings, infrastructure and equipment, and set some priorities.

In Princeton, Mechanics Hall is a good example of an asset threatened by deterioration due to lack of adequate maintenance and lack of use. By any standard, Mechanics Hall is a historically significant building. It needs major capital improvements – presumably more than Princeton can afford, because if the town had the resources to take care of Mechanics Hall, the property would be in much better condition.

Many residents say they want the town to retain ownership of Mechanics Hall, yet there is no plan for how the building will be restored and used if Princeton decides to keep it. The longer the building sits vacant and receives only emergency repairs, the more it will deteriorate. Princeton needs policies and standards to make tough choices about the disposition of property that it cannot afford to preserve or maintain. Absent a resource like Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds or voter willingness to authorize borrowing to pay for renovations, it may be better to sell Mechanics Hall, subject to a preservation restriction, and allow the building to be redeveloped for a "light" use, e.g., office space. The building probably could support limited public uses, too, such as a gallery or a small museum with an archive for Princeton artifacts and historical records. Still, the town would have to invest in a feasibility study in order to explore options for wastewater disposal, parking, operating costs and a capital reserve.

Volunteer Recruitment, Training & Retention

Many volunteer boards and officials share responsibility for making decisions and providing services in Princeton. For all of the advantages this form of government has to offer, it has the disadvantage of requiring many volunteers to share the workload. It also requires plenty of meeting space so that boards and committees can perform their duties, and it has the potential to create a significant liability for the town. Princeton is fortunate to have dedicated volunteers, but it needs ways to involve more residents so that existing volunteers do not "burn out" from too many hours of public service. Involving more residents also creates a vehicle for public education and consensus.

Non-profit organizations typically have staff responsible for recruiting and managing volunteers. They screen applicants for volunteer positions, assess each applicant's skills and availability, and try to align a volunteer's interests with the organization's needs. They also provide training, structure, support and periodic recognition programs to reward hard-working volunteers. Local governments could adopt a similar system, but in very small towns like Princeton, recruiting new volunteers requires outreach and mentoring by *existing* volunteers. Recognition programs also help, but they do not address some of the issues that keep people from volunteering: lack of time, lack of knowledge about local government, or fear of the criticism that often comes with public service. Some recruitment strategies to consider in a small town like Princeton:

- Continuing to post volunteer opportunities on the town's website, and distributing public service announcements through a "broadcast" email to all subscribers on PMLD's new high-speed internet system;
- Personal networking;
- Outreach through the schools;
- Approaching residents who frequently attend town meeting but are not currently serving on a town board or committee;
- Providing a "welcome" packet to prospective volunteers, with information about local government, opportunities to serve, current "hot topics" and community projects, and the names of three or four experienced local officials who serve as points of contact and mentors for new volunteers.

Building Staff Capacity

Princeton wants to remain a small, close-knit town with a resident-controlled government that depends on volunteers. It is an admirable goal, and since Princeton is an unusual town it may be able to continue functioning with a small, conservative, decentralized government that focuses on the basics. However, even if Princeton's population does not increase significantly in the future, the composition and size of its households and the age of its householders will change to a degree more or less consistent with national trends. Accordingly, Princeton needs to anticipate the possibility that over time, its residents will come to rely more on paid staff to provide services that have historically been handled by volunteers.

As fewer people work in their own towns or close by, it is becoming more difficult for communities to find not only unpaid volunteers, but also residents who can fill positions that offer a modest stipend or occasional pay, such as call firefighters and emergency medical personnel. Moreover, small towns often find it difficult to compete for qualified employees because they cannot provide the same levels of compensation found in larger or wealthier suburbs. Princeton has a good track record for retaining municipal employees, yet on occasion, even Princeton has lost workers to higher-paid positions in other cities and towns.

In some of the state's smallest towns, local government employees also serve as call firefighters, highway workers perform other traditional public works duties, and administrative and clerical employees are trained to move seamlessly from one department to another so they can respond to intermittent changes in workload. One of Princeton's master plan goals is to maximize opportunities for cross-training municipal workers. Toward that end, Princeton should examine its existing job descriptions and compensation schedules, and screen job applicants for their ability and interest to perform more than one function. Sometimes, the advantage of efficient use of personnel may be offset by the disadvantage of losing qualified applicants who do not wish to perform duties outside their particular area of expertise.

Maximizing Non-Tax Revenue Sources

Princeton should review all non-statutory fees charged for municipal services on a biennial basis, and perhaps annually for programs that serve many users, such as recreation activities. A methodology for setting and reviewing fees should be established jointly by the Town Administrator, Select Board and Advisory Board in order to assure consistency across municipal departments. Since Princeton is so small, it is unlikely that the town will ever generate much revenue from fees. Still, wherever costs can be recovered from user fees, the result is reduced pressure on the tax levy.

Every town in the Commonwealth struggles with setting fees for municipal services. Local officials do not want to impose unreasonable charges on residents, despite pressure to generate revenue from sources other than the tax levy. Many towns survey the fee schedules of nearby communities and set local fees within range of prevailing practices elsewhere. Unfortunately, this approach masks the possibility that fees in other towns may bear little relationship to the actual cost of service delivery.

Local governments need to approach fee setting with more precision than they do, particularly in Massachusetts where municipalities have such limited taxation power. Erring on the side of caution, however, towns often collect less revenue from user fees than they could. Setting fees that capture actual costs can be difficult unless communities have procedures in place to track all of the direct and indirect costs involved with delivering a service. Princeton could consider conducting an intensive study of one service at a time and gradually establish a consistent protocol across town departments.

Regional Service Delivery

Although regional services are common in other parts of the country, Massachusetts has very few successful models of regional cooperation. Here, the most common form of regionalization is a regional school district. Not surprisingly, the average cost of local government services per capita runs fairly high in Massachusetts. Small towns like Princeton should explore regional opportunities wherever possible. For example, Title V inspections, permitting, monitoring and enforcement could be provided through an inter-local agreement with neighboring towns. In addition, animal control, technology and conservation agent services have been mentioned in Princeton as potential candidates for a regional approach to service delivery.

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CHAPTER 9

IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENT

At the outset of the Master Plan process, residents said they hoped this plan would be more useful than a report that "sits on a shelf." Ultimately, the success of any plan depends on its feasibility and a town's ability to balance near-term interests with long-term needs. The role of an implementation element is to provide balance by bringing all of the key recommendations into focus and organizing them into a plan of action. The schedule can be altered if the town needs to respond to unforeseen opportunities, but the overall sequence of actions implies that some steps have a higher priority than others, and some steps need to occur sooner rather than later.

In Princeton's case, most of the major master plan proposals call for zoning amendments that can help local officials exert more control over the town's physical evolution. As Princeton works to improve upon its present zoning, some areas described in the Land Use Plan may need to be adjusted once the town's GIS parcel map is corrected and usable (2007).

Princeton will contend with a number of master plan implementation challenges because the town is so small. It has neither the staff nor financial resources to carry out multiple initiatives all at once. As a result, implementation will most likely require several years, patience, and periodic reassessments of the implementation schedule as local priorities change over time. In addition, Princeton found it difficult to implement past master plans, yet several of the earlier recommendations remain relevant today. Like other small towns, Princeton has a history of tension about how far local government should go to manage growth and change. Many residents would like the town to stay just as it is, yet Princeton has already changed in ways that are obvious from a review of historic maps, photographs and reports.

On one level, Princeton has so much going for it that public disdain for growth is easy to understand. On another level, Princeton has needs that have been deferred for financial, policy or other reasons. Princeton also has physical characteristics that contribute to its beauty and simultaneously constrain its choices. Finally, master plan implementation in Massachusetts is difficult because planning has such an ambiguous legal position. Here more than in most states, the propensity of master plans to "sit on a shelf" can be attributed, at least in part, to the limited, obsolete tools that local governments have to control their destiny.

Despite these challenges, Princeton has many resources to bring to the process of master plan implementation. Its winding, tree-lined roads, scenic vistas and fine historic buildings define the character of the entire community. Moreover, Princeton residents love their town, and this applies equally to long-time residents and newcomers. They value the services they receive from town government, and they appreciate the traditions that make Princeton an unusually pleasant place to live. The town also has talented officials and staff, so even though the small size of Princeton's local government limits how much can be done in any given year, the capacity for competent master plan implementation is very strong. In fact, Princeton's will to address issues identified during the master plan process could be seen long before the plan was completed, for some of the actions identified in this implementation plan are already underway. This bodes well for the master plan, and for Princeton's ability to achieve its goals.

GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

PHASE/ ACTION	DESCRIPTION	APPLICABLE MASTER PLAN ELEMENTS	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY
Phase I			
I-1	Establish Master Plan Implementation Committee.	All Elements	Select Board, Planning Board
I-2	Adopt an Open Space-Residential Design Bylaw.	Land Use, Open Space & Natural Resources, Housing	Planning Board
I-3	Adopt a Back-Lot Development Bylaw.	Land Use, Open Space & Natural Resources	Planning Board
I-4	Update and Strengthen the Site Plan Review Bylaw.	Land Use, Transportation	Planning Board
I-5	Adopt the Community Preservation Act.	Historic Preservation, Open Space & Natural Resources, Housing	Historical Commission, Open Space Committee, Select Board
I-6	Fund the Six-Year Roads Plan.	Transportation, Community Facilities & Services	Select Board, Roads Advisory Committee
I-7	Seek financial and technical assistance to support Princeton's historic preservation efforts.	Historic Preservation, Community Facilities & Services	Historical Commission
I-8	Establish criteria to guide the town's response to Chapter 61 or 61A notices and other open space opportunities, and set aside funds to acquire priority open space.	Open Space & Natural Resources, Land Use, Community Facilities & Services	Planning Board, Open Space Committee
Phase II			
II-1	Develop a master facilities plan to meet municipal, educational and cultural needs, and institute asset management policies for town-owned property.	Community Facilities & Services, Historic Preservation	Select Board, Advisory Board
II-2	Adopt regulations to facilitate home occupations and home-based employment.	Economic Development	Planning Board
II-3	Amend the Zoning Bylaw and Zoning Map by establishing an East Princeton Village District and a Worcester Road Village District.	Land Use, Economic Development, Housing, Transportation	Planning Board
II-4	Adopt Off-Street Parking Regulations.	Land Use, Transportation	Planning Board
II-5	Develop an inventory of existing trails and prepare a town-wide trails plan.	Open Space & Natural Resources, Land Use	Open Space Committee, Planning Board
II-6	Appoint a Public Safety Building Committee to oversee design and construction of a new Public Safety Building.	Community Facilities & Services	Select Board
II-7	Adopt a Scenic Corridors Overlay District.	Land Use, Open Space & Natural Resources	Planning Board

PHASE/ ACTION	DESCRIPTION	APPLICABLE MASTER PLAN ELEMENTS	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY
II-8	Provide professional staff support for the Planning Board and other boards with development review, permitting and planning responsibilities.	Community Facilities & Services, Land Use	Planning Board, Select Board
II-9	Establish a limited mixed-use overlay district in the Town Center.	Land Use, Economic Development, Housing	Planning Board
Phase III			
III-1	Adopt the Scenic Roads Act and a local scenic roads bylaw.	Open Space & Natural Resources, Transportation, Historic Preservation	Planning Board
III-2	Commission a study to determine the appropriate boundaries and regulations for a Wachusett Mountain Overlay District, and amend the Zoning Bylaw.	Open Space & Natural Resources, Land Use	Planning Board
III-3	Replace the existing Business-Industrial District on Hubbardston Road with a Rural Business District.	Land Use, Economic Development	Planning Board
III-4	Amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow conversions of older single-family homes to multi-family dwellings within ½ mile of the Village Districts and the Town Center.	Housing, Land Use	Planning Board
III-5	Amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow accessory apartments.	Housing	Planning Board
III-6	Prepare a corridor study of Route 140, in conjunction with Sterling and Westminster.	Transportation	Planning Board, Select Board, Roads Advisory Committee
III-7	Establish policies and guidelines for managing Chapter 40B comprehensive permits.	Housing	Planning Board, Select Board
Ongoing			
O-1	Identify and institute effective ways to recruit, train and keep volunteers to serve on town boards and committees.	Community Facilities & Services	
O-2	Wherever possible, hire and train municipal personnel to serve more than one function.	Community Facilities & Services	
O-3	Establish a systematic process for reviewing user fees and charges in order to generate revenue for municipal operations.	Community Facilities & Services	
O-4	Pursue regional service delivery wherever feasible and appropriate.	Community Facilities & Services	

LAND USE PLAN

The Land Use Plan is central to every master plan because it provides the foundation for all of the plan's major proposals. Princeton's Land Use Plan is comprised of five components, as shown on Map 9-1, the Land Use Map, and summarized in the table to the right. Together, they reflect several policies to guide the town's future development:

COMPONENT	PRIMARY USES
Open Space & Public Use	Open space, conservation areas, wildlife habitat, wetlands, outdoor recreation, agriculture and horticulture, trails; and municipal uses where appropriate.
Rural Residential	Single-family homes; average density of one unit per 2-2.5 acres, with accessory apartments by special permit. Regulatory flexibility for Open Space-Residential Design and Backlot Development.
Village Residential	Single-family homes; small-scale multi-family housing and senior housing by special permit; average density of one unit per 30,000 sq. ft. of land.
Village Centers	Mixed residential, commercial and institutional uses.
Rural Business	Offices, limited industrial, and space for construction trades, feed and lumber sales, other uses not suitable for a village center (but traditionally allowed in Princeton's zoning).

- Princeton will be a rural-residential community with large tracts of open land and low-density housing as the preferred form of development.

- In outlying parts of town, views from the road should be protected through land acquisition and regulatory techniques, with incentives to set homes back from the street and minimize the number of driveway openings.

- In areas that already have a mix of community facilities, businesses and housing, Princeton should encourage the evolution of these areas as small village centers that differ visually and operationally from rural-residential areas. "Rural" does not mean "homogenous." Moreover, the villages are quite different, and the qualities that make them unique should be recognized.

- Princeton wants to remain a rural town with a small population, so the villages will evolve very slowly. For the most part, they will attract small, locally owned shops, offices or service establishments. To encourage quality building designs, attractive landscaping and places that make residents proud of their village centers, Princeton needs to allow some mix of commercial and residential uses. Including housing units in small-scale commercial buildings encourages building heights comparable to traditional homes, increases property values, and gives business areas a more residential "feel."

- Wherever possible, rural-residential areas should be connected to villages by walking trails as well as roads. In a rural community without a complex road hierarchy, it is difficult for roads to meet the dual (and often conflicting) needs of drivers, pedestrians and equestrians. Strategies to preserve Princeton's existing trails, to keep them open for public use and to connect them will be very important as the town continues to grow and change.

- By choosing to remain small, Princeton also chooses to be a town with limited public services and a government that depends on

See Appendix for the text of most zoning amendments described in this Implementation Plan.

civic-minded volunteers. Controlling growth by favoring extensive uses such as farming, forestry and outdoor recreation, and low-density residential development, means that Princeton will most likely retain its rural character. The same policies mean that Princeton will have to make tough choices about the services and facilities that local government can provide – and that residents can afford. By concentrating development in and around the villages and protecting as much open space as possible in outlying areas, Princeton will be in an optimum position to manage the cost of growth by preventing the cost of sprawl.

PHASE I: 2007-2009

Action I-1: Establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC).

Discussion: The Select Board and Planning Board should jointly appoint a Master Plan Implementation Committee (7-9 members) to steer and coordinate the master plan implementation process. The MPIC's charge should include the following tasks:

- Provide technical support and public outreach for proposed implementation measures;
- Advocate for funds to carry out actions that require a financial commitment from the town;
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken to implement the plan; and
- Determine adjustments to the implementation schedule, based on available resources and the needs of the town.

SUMMARY: ACTION I-1	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: All	
Lead Responsibility:	Select Board, Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action I-2: Adopt an Open Space-Residential Design (OSRD) Bylaw.

Discussion: Adopting a mandatory Open Space-Residential Design bylaw is among the master plan's most important recommendations. OSRD zoning could help Princeton protect natural resources, preserve views from the road and maintain established trail networks. It accomplishes these objectives by engaging landowners and developers to plan for open space by design in new residential developments.

An OSRD bylaw typically provides for a two-step approval process that begins with a concept plan, followed by a definitive plan submission, which may be a subdivision or a detailed site plan (for projects not involving a subdivision). The concept plan allows developers to master plan a site and negotiate with town boards before incurring the expense of a definitive plan. It also encourages sensitive site planning because the concept plan process requires an analysis of each site's unique features and they, in turn, determine where construction will occur. The developer can still build what he could have built under a conventional plan, but in areas best suited for development.

Princeton should require a minimum amount of land to be protected as common open space. Many OSRD bylaws require 50% of a site while others set a somewhat smaller percentage and offer incentives (such as a modest density bonus) to save more land or to provide some additional public benefits, such as walking trails or senior housing. Also, a smaller percentage may be necessary to accommodate difficult-to-develop land. Finally, the allowable percentage of wetlands in common open space is usually based on the percentage of wetlands on the site as a whole,

PHASE I IMPLEMENTATION

- Establish implementation capacity: appoint a **Master Plan Implementation Committee.**
- Adopt an **Open Space-Residential Design** Bylaw and a **Back-Lot Development** Bylaw.
- Update and strengthen the **Site Plan Review** Bylaw.
- Adopt the **Community Preservation Act**.
- Make a consistent financial commitment to complete the **Six-Year Roads Plan**.
- Provide funding for **preservation planning** and **historic preservation projects**.
- Establish **land evaluation criteria** to guide the town's decisions about acquiring land for **public open space.**

but sometimes it makes good environmental sense to allow more wetlands in the open space. It is important to remember that the goal of an OSRD bylaw is to protect resources, not to stop development.

SUMMARY: ACTION I-2	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Land Use, Open Space & Natural Resources, Housing	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action I-3: Adopt a Back-Lot Development Bylaw.

Discussion: Back-Lot Development will be very important in Princeton because it works best with small projects and provides an alternative to Approval Not Required (ANR) lots. Together, OSRD and Back-Lot Development should serve as a "package" of regulatory mechanisms to preserve open space within the context of large and small sites.

In a Back-Lot Development, the applicant may create the same number of lots that could be established through the ANR process (and sometimes a few extra lots), but all of the lots are moved to the rear of the site and land along the road is protected by a perpetual conservation restriction. Since the lots have no frontage, back-lot zoning requires a special permit to waive frontage and other dimensional requirements so that

PRINCETON MASTER PLAN IN ACTION

Several actions that would have appeared in the Master Plan as implementation proposals were already underway when this plan was completed. For example:

COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES

- The Princeton Municipal Light Department (PMLD) is installing a wireless internet access network so that Princeton residents and businesses will finally have high-speed internet service. The new system requires several 80-foot utility poles to be stationed throughout town, including an antenna on the fire tower at Wachusett Mountain. The project will cost approximately $600,000.
- The Board of Selectmen has appointed an ALS Ambulance Services Study Committee to help develop a long-term ambulance policy for the town.
- The town has hired Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) to digitize the assessor's parcel map for use with Geographic Information System (GIS) technology. GIS will help with future planning and simplify the process of updating the assessor's maps.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- At the 2006 Annual Town Meeting, Princeton established an Agricultural Commission to promote farming, provide public education and serve as a resource to farms, town officials and the general public. The Commission is working on proposed manure regulations, which would require adoption by the Board of Health.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- The Princeton Historical Commission is completing a comprehensive town-wide survey to identify and document all of the town's historic resources.

homes can be clustered and served by a shared driveway. For Princeton, the proposed zoning regulations would bring any development with five or more lots under the purview of OSRD, and offer any development with fewer than five lots the option of pursuing a Back-Lot Development permit. The proposed back-lot bylaw also offers some incentives to make back-lot design preferable to ANR.

SUMMARY: ACTION I-3	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Land Use, Open Space & Natural Resources	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action I-4: Update and strengthen the Site Plan Review Bylaw.

Discussion: Princeton needs to strengthen and improve its Site Plan Review bylaw. Through Site Plan Review, the Planning Board could establish standards for vegetation removal, clearing and grading, landscaping and architectural design standards, and rural design principles that must be met in any development made subject to the bylaw.

Site Plan Review usually applies to non-residential development and some types of residential development, though single-family homes are exempt unless it is necessary to bring a single-family home development within the purview of Site Plan Review. For example, the success of OSRD often depends on an effective Site Plan Review process. In addition, Site Plan Review could be justified to review the placement and orientation of single-family homes along scenic roadways. Site Plan Review is not a tool for approving or disapproving land uses. Instead, its purpose is to assure that developments are operationally and functionally safe, attractive, and carried out in a manner that reduces or mitigates adverse impacts on natural resources.

SUMMARY: ACTION I-4	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Land Use, Transportation	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action I-5: Adopt the Community Preservation Act.

Discussion: Town officials need to work together to promote adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA), M.G.L. c.44B. Throughout the master plan process, members of the master plan committee and residents at large said many times that Princeton needs resources to acquire open space. The only mechanisms available to Princeton today rely in whole or in part on property tax revenue.

CPA provides a mechanism for cities and towns to fund projects that address three statewide needs:

- Open space and recreation
- Historic preservation
- Affordable housing

Since CPA is local option legislation. it applies only when a majority of the voters in a city or town agree to impose a surcharge on their property tax bills, the revenue from which is restricted to the statutory purposes of CPA. The law also allows communities to tailor their CPA program to local conditions, such as by setting an acceptable surcharge (up to 3%) or allowing exemptions for some taxpayers. In exchange for a self-imposed surcharge, communities receive matching funds from the state, which collects revenue for the statewide CPA trust fund through fees on real estate transfers. The amount of the match is tied to the surcharge percent, such that communities with higher surcharges receive a larger match.

Acquiring and protecting open space is an appropriate way to use CPA funds, but not all CPA revenue can be committed to open space. At least 30% must be dedicated to the three statutory purposes, i.e., 10% for open space, 10% for housing and 10% for historic preservation, with the remaining 70% available for any CPA purpose provided that the community preservation committee recommends it and town meeting appropriates the funds.

In fact, Princeton has significant historic preservation needs, such as renovating the second floor of Bagg Hall, resolving the fate of Mechanics Hall, and making repairs in the town's historic cemeteries. These kinds of projects often need a dedicated revenue stream even more than open space. Furthermore, Princeton's affordable housing inventory is limited to a small elderly rental development near the town center. The town could use CPA funds to acquire affordability restrictions on existing homes and increase its Subsidized Housing Inventory through means other than new construction and comprehensive permits.

SUMMARY: ACTION I-5	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Historic Preservation, Open Space & Natural Resources, Housing	
Lead Responsibility:	Historical Commission, Open Space Committee, Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	0.5-3.0% annual surcharge on property tax bills

Action I-6: Fund the Six-Year Roads Plan.

Discussion: Princeton needs to complete the Roads Advisory Committee's (RAC) Six-Year Roads Plan. For several years, Princeton carried out a major roads reconstruction program primarily with non-local funds. Owing to the RAC's leadership and hard work, Princeton paid slightly more than 25% of the $7.3 million cost to reconstruct 36 miles of roads, pursuant to a plan developed by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC). Eventually, most of the roads eligible for federal funds were

rebuilt, and this meant that Princeton would need to finance the remaining road projects with tax revenue and (state) Chapter 90 funds.

In 2006, the RAC sought $175,000 from the town to continue rebuilding roads under an extension of the original CMRPC Pavement Management Plan. Town meeting voted to appropriate the funds, but the appropriation depended on a Proposition 2 ½ override that failed in June 2006.

Deferred spending on infrastructure invariably leads to greater public expense in the long run. It has been hard for Princeton to juggle growth in school operating costs and debt service with its own municipal needs, but Princeton is not the only small town in this position. The town needs a long-range capital planning process that brings together all of the key town boards, including regional school committee representatives, to reach consensus about short- and longer-term improvement priorities well in advance of each town meeting.

However, planning without a commitment to funding does not benefit anyone. It leaves capital needs inadequately addressed, it contributes to the perception that plans "sit on the shelf," it discourages local government volunteers, and it runs the risk of transferring responsibility for current problems to future taxpayers. Princeton *does* have options. For example, the town traditionally leaves some of its tax levy authority in reserve. In FY 2006, the town's unused levy capacity of $311,000

would have been enough to fund the local portion of the Roads Program.

SUMMARY: ACTION I-6	
Master Plan Elements: Transportation, Community Facilities & Services	
Lead Responsibility:	Select Board, RAC
Estimated Cost:	$175,000-$350,000/year over six years

Action I-7: Seek financial and technical assistance to support Princeton's historic preservation efforts.

Discussion: Strengthening Princeton's ability to protect historic structures is a central objective of this Master Plan. State grants exist to help communities carry out preservation planning and "bricks-and-mortar" preservation projects. To qualify for preservation grants, however, communities must provide all or a substantial portion of the necessary funds from their own sources. The state's match constitutes a reimbursement, such that once the community has expended local funds, it becomes eligible for reimbursements ranging from 40-50% of the total project cost (usually subject to a maximum dollar amount).

In Princeton, historic preservation has been a matter of stewardship by devoted volunteers and private citizens. However, Princeton has preservation needs that extend beyond what volunteers and homeowners can accomplish on their own. For example, the second floor of historic Bagg Hall is inaccessible to people with disabilities and it needs rehabilitation work. Mechanics Hall in East Princeton, the town's most at-risk historic building, continues to deteriorate because Princeton has not had the resources to restore it. While the Princeton Public Library was recently renovated, it needs attention to preventive maintenance and some modest repairs. A common problem in many towns is that following a major public building project, little if any funding is placed in reserve to maintain and protect the asset (see Action II-1).

Princeton has National Register districts, but no local historic districts under M.G.L. c.40C or the less-prescriptive alternative known as neighborhood conservation districts. Local historic districts offer the most effective legal protection against destruction of or inappropriate alterations to historic buildings. Princeton also lacks basic preservation tools such as a demolition delay bylaw. Finally, Princeton's preservation planning capacity is challenged by a shortage of funds.

Hiring a qualified preservation planner to prepare inventories or National Register nominations requires financial support. Moreover, the Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program recently completed an analysis of Princeton's priority landscapes and made a number of important recommendations, but most of the follow-up work requires further investment by the town. To qualify for grants that can help to pay for additional planning, Princeton must commit some of its own funds to preservation planning.

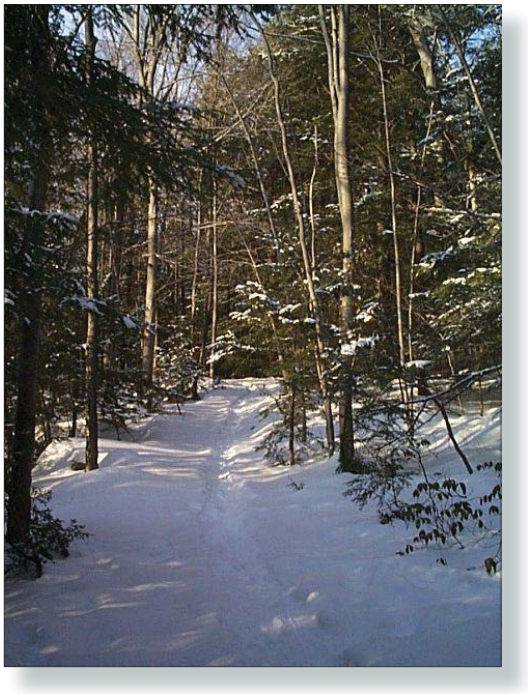
SUMMARY: ACTION I-7	
Master Plan Elements: Historic Preservation, Community Facilities & Services, Land Use	
Lead Responsibility:	Historical Commission
Estimated Cost:	$10,000-$15,000/year for preservation planning $40,000-$50,000 for Mechanics Hall feasibility study & disposition plan

Action I-8: Establish criteria to guide the town's response to Chapter 61 or 61A notices and other open space opportunities, and set aside funds to acquire priority open space.

Discussion: Princeton has established a new Land Preservation Study Committee to explore the town's options for protecting open space and to recommend evaluation criteria that may determine Princeton's response to future open space acquisition opportunities. Residents want to preserve as much open space as possible, yet it is difficult to imagine how Princeton could afford to buy all of the land that residents want to protect. Princeton has many needs, and open space is but one of them. Although the zoning amendments in this plan will help to preserve many of Princeton's open space features, zoning is not the best tool for protecting land that needs an absolute defense against development.

Saving open space through fee simple acquisition or purchasing a conservation restriction or an agricultural preservation restriction can be expensive, but no town should expect to save open space without investing public funds in preservation. Protecting the most important part of a site can sometimes be achieved through "limited development," a strategy that works best when conducted by a non-profit land trust. Still, even these projects often need public funding to close the gap between a site's acquisition cost and the proceeds from lot sales.

Partnerships with land trusts help because a community can assign its Chapter 61/61A right of first refusal to them. Regardless of whether Princeton adopts the CPA or finances open space with general revenue, however, the town needs to be selective. Properties such as those listed in Princeton's Heritage Landscapes Inventory or land with known habitat value for rare or endangered species may be obvious preservation priorities, but together, they constitute a large list of sites. If Princeton tries to respond to every open space offer, whether by purchasing the land on its own or enlisting help from a land trust, it may be impossible to act when a very significant parcel is threatened by development.



Princeton is not growing rapidly enough to appreciate what intense development pressure does to the supply and cost of land. The town should capitalize on its slow growth rate and conduct a neutral review of private land parcels, evaluating each site according to a set of agreed-upon criteria. A plan that justifies saying "no" to some acquisition opportunities in order to preserve funds for the highest-priority sites will help Princeton manage its limited resources and meet other master plan goals. Further, the discipline to make annual appropriations to a conservation fund (or CPA open space reserve) will help to assure that Princeton has resources available to acquire priority sites, pay for appraisals and grant applications, and manage public land.

SUMMARY: ACTION I-8	
Master Plan Elements: Open Space & Natural Resources, Land Use Community Facilities & Services	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board, Open Space Committee
Estimated Cost:	$100,000/year to a reserve fund for purchasing open space

PHASE II: 2010-2012

Action II-1: Develop a master facilities plan and institute asset management policies for town-owned property.

Discussion: The Select Board should appoint a committee to work with an architect on a master facilities plan for the town, building on work done by the Community Facilities & Services Subcommittee for this master plan. The committee should include representation from the Select Board, Advisory Board, Planning Board, Parks & Recreation Commission, Historical Commission and Cultural Council, and staff with building management responsibilities: the Town Administrator, police and fire chiefs, and library director.

Princeton has basic systems in place to budget for capital improvements and routine building and grounds maintenance. However, annual appropriations for operations and maintenance are strikingly low considering the size and age of the buildings that Princeton is trying to maintain. The town needs a master facilities plan that includes a code analysis, a review of municipal space needs, capital improvement recommendations and preliminary cost estimates, and asset management policies for its main public facilities: Bagg Hall, Princeton Public Library, the Princeton Center Building, the Highway Department Garage and Salt Storage Shed, the Town Hall Annex, the East Princeton Fire Station, the Thomas Prince School, and the Public Safety Building (See also, Action II-5.)

Asset management policies need to be in place to guide decisions about property acquisitions, improvements, maintenance, and disposition. Factors such as adequacy of existing office space to accommodate near-term personnel requirements should be explored and planned for, such as Princeton's inevitable need for professional support in the Planning Board and Conservation Commission offices. Princeton also needs appropriate storage space for historical artifacts and documents. During the master plan process, it was noted that Princeton has no space for fine and performing arts events except for small productions held in the library. The town is blessed with many artists, and cultural appreciation is important to Princeton residents. Indeed, Princeton could capitalize on its appeal to the arts and its rural ambiance if the town had suitable events space that could be used by a variety of local and regional organizations on a fee basis. The master facilities plan should give consideration to the feasibility of providing performance and events space, possibly as part of planned renovations to second floor of Bagg Hall.

PHASE II IMPLEMENTATION

- Develop a **Master Facilities Plan and Asset Management Policy.**
- Adopt zoning regulations to encourage **Home Occupations** and **Home-Based Businesses.**
- Revise the present business districts by adopting new village district regulations for **East Princeton** and **Worcester Road** and amending the zoning map to reduce the amount of land zoned for non-residential uses.
- Adopt **Off-Street Parking Regulations**.
- Update or replace the present **Public Safety Building**.
- Develop a comprehensive T**own-Wide Trails Inventory and Trails Plan.**
- Adopt a **Scenic Corridors Overlay District.**
- Hire a part-time **Planner or Land Use Coordinator** to assist the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Board of Health and Board of Appeals.
- Establish a limited mixed-use overlay district in the **Town Center.**

SUMMARY: ACTION II-1	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Community Facilities & Services	
Lead Responsibility:	Select Board, Advisory Board
Estimated Cost:	$75,000-$85,000

Action II-2: Adopt regulations to facilitate home occupations and home-based self-employment.

Discussion: Princeton's home occupation bylaw needs a comprehensive revision that removes undue barriers to the ability of self-employed people or tele-commuters to work at home. Working at home is a basic feature of any rural economy. Today, home occupations or "zero-commute" jobs are widely recognized as a key tool for sustainable economic development. At-home employment allows residents to be in town during normal daytime hours and usually has minimal impacts on the landscape, natural resources, town infrastructure and residential neighborhoods. Since Princeton does not want major commercial or industrial development, it needs to provide other ways for residents to work locally without disrupting the lives of their neighbors.

Arguably, some types of businesses could have unwanted impacts on nearby residents. However, a bylaw that regulates all work-at-home activity the same way, without regard for differences in the operational characteristics of businesses, makes it very difficult to encourage low-impact businesses. Homogenous home occupation rules can discourage inconspicuous businesses simply because they are regulated the same way as businesses many people would consider disruptive or offensive.

Princeton should regulate work-at-home activity by grouping occupations into use categories, establishing appropriate rules for each class, and allowing some home occupation uses by right while controlling others through a special permit process. Further, the rules could be different in various zoning districts. For a home located in a business zone, it makes little sense to require the same type of "invisibility" that may be desirable in a residential district.

Finally, Princeton should consider modifying some of its existing rules, such as restricting employment to not more than one person outside the resident family regardless of the type of business. The town could allow more than one non-resident employee by special permit, and there should be no restriction on employees working for a home-based business in a village or business district. Of course, a home-based business in a village zone should be subject to the same landscaping, parking and site design standards that apply to a business use.

SUMMARY: ACTION II-2	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Economic Development, Land Use	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action II-3: Amend the Zoning Bylaw and Zoning Map by establishing an East Princeton Village District and a Worcester Road Village District.

Discussion: Princeton should have mixed-use village districts in East Princeton and on Worcester Road. Today, Princeton has two nonresidential zones: the Business-Industrial District and the Business District. The Business-Industrial District includes a strip of land on both sides of Route 140 in the north end of town, and a second area on the west side of town, along both sides of Hubbardston Road. The Business District includes a very small area on Route 140 near East Princeton Road, and a longer strip on the lower end of Worcester Road. Today, the Business-Industrial District includes about 388 acres of land and the Business District, about 90 acres. In both cases, the existing use and dimensional regulations and the district boundaries are not conducive to small village nodes that relate well to their surrounding rural-residential context.

The proposed amendments would transfer much of the land currently zoned for business uses to the Residential-Agricultural District, provide more depth in the district along Worcester Road, and establish basic development standards for each district in order to encourage quality design. In traditional New England villages, buildings tend

to occupy space close to the road and the front of the building has features of interest from a pedestrian's point of view. Villages ought to be walkable, offering not only sidewalks but also pedestrian amenities that encourage people to linger and socialize. Walkable areas tend to be compact and relatively dense. For a rural community like Princeton, however, without water or sewer service and with many areas subject to the Watershed Protection Act ("Cohen Bill"), a walkable village district will be one that is quite small, ideally with a few small businesses, institutional uses and housing situated close together and near enough to the road to signal a change in the land use pattern.

Princeton's current zoning does not foster these objectives. It promotes very-low-density development town-wide and imposes the same dimensional requirements on business and residential lots. One consequence of this policy is that Princeton offers little incentive to improve older business uses, and a second is that new businesses must be pushed back from the road. As a result, Princeton's zoning all but prescribes strip commercial development, with the view from the road defined by asphalt, not buildings.

The proposed regulations for the East Princeton and Worcester Road Village Districts are not the same because these areas have distinctive qualities, and East Princeton is subject to many environmental constraints. The mix of uses and dimensional rules anticipate small commercial establishments and housing types that Princeton currently prohibits. In addition, the districts would require a special permit for some uses that Princeton currently allows by right, such as single-family homes, the purpose being to assure that areas zoned for business will be hospitable to goods and services establishments in the future. By reducing the total amount of business-zoned land (to about 230 acres) and creating districts with more logical boundaries, Princeton could have a few small, attractive business areas that meet the needs of Princeton residents and respect the rural-residential make-up of adjacent neighborhoods.

SUMMARY II-3:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Land Use, Economic Development	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action II-4: Adopt Off-Street Parking Regulations and Design Standards.

Discussion: Off-street parking regulations should be instituted as part of a package of zoning amendments that include the East Princeton and Worcester Road Village Districts. Off-street parking is typically guided by a schedule in the zoning bylaw, e.g., a certain number of parking spaces per 1,000 sq. ft. of building area, based on the class or type of use. Since Princeton does not have any off-street parking standards today, it is impossible to determine the amount of off-street parking that a project may require. Depending on the mix of uses, the parking proposed for a given development could be excessive or very inadequate.

Business activity in Princeton currently consists of small enterprises, and the proposed zoning amendments anticipate that this will continue. While it is difficult to imagine that any commercial development in Princeton would need much parking, it is not difficult to imagine parking areas that detract from the visual character of a neighborhood. Princeton has no minimum requirements for parking lot design, e.g., standards for landscaping, lighting, location of parking on a lot, buffers between parking areas and adjacent homes, or the amount of lot frontage that can be used for a driveway or an access road. These issues should be addressed even if the town does not create village districts because the omission of parking regulations from the existing bylaw could be very problematic in the future.

SUMMARY II-4:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Land Use, Transportation	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action II-5: Develop an inventory of existing trails and prepare a town-wide trails plan.

Discussion: A network of trails should be part of any plan for open space and circulation in Princeton. Toward that end, the Open Space Committee and Planning Board should develop an inventory of existing trails and prepare a town-wide trails plan. During public meetings for this master plan, many Princeton residents spoke fondly of the trails that run throughout the town. They worry that new development will prevent access to trails that cross private land. Unfortunately, it was difficult for residents to identify the approximate location of trails on a map, and there is no mapped inventory of the town's existing trails. The proposed OSRD bylaw would require applicants to identify on-site trails during the site analysis and planning phase for a new housing development. However, collecting trails information this way means that Princeton officials will have only a partial a trails inventory because not all residential developments would be subject to OSRD.

Princeton's region has active trail organizations such as Wachusett Greenways and the Mid-State Trail Association. In addition, CMPRC has prepared some regional trails plans, most recently the North Suburban Inter-Community Trail Connection Feasibility Study (2002). Existing data and maps from these organizations could help Princeton with its own plan, but the town has numerous unmapped and undocumented trails. The advent of GIS in Princeton means the town will have the technology to carry out some mapping on its own, or by contracting for additional GIS services from CMRPC.

Before a trails plan can be produced, Princeton needs a usable inventory of the existing trails. The Open Space Committee could reach out to other local groups with an interest in outdoor recreation, such as the Boy Scouts, or to the regional school district to identify high school students seeking a community service project. With a GPS unit and some training, anyone wishing to help develop a trails plan could collect data points in the field. The data can be converted in any GIS application. Over time, the town would be able to document the location, condition and ownership of existing trails on private land, and plan some "done-in-a-day" projects such as blazing trails on public land.

SUMMARY II-5:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Open Space & Natural Resources, Transportation	
Lead Responsibility:	Open Space Committee
Estimated Cost:	$4,500 (GIS Services)

Action II-6: Appoint a Public Safety Building Committee to oversee design and construction of a new Public Safety Building.

Discussion: The Select Board should appoint a Public Safety Building Study Committee to oversee construction of a new facility or renovations to the existing facility, depending on the recommendations of the Master Facilities Plan. The existing public safety building, located behind Bagg Hall and last renovated in the late 1980s, is not adequate for modern police, fire and dispatch operations. It lacks space for new fire vehicles, it needs ventilation and mechanical system improvements, and it does not have appropriate facilities for officer training, booking and records storage. Although it is premature to determine all of the Master Facilities Plan's recommendations and priorities, there is no question that Princeton needs to replace the existing public safety building.

During the Master Facilities Plan process, Princeton will need to determine whether the present site in the Town Center can accommodate a major alterations and expansion project. The town should anticipate the likelihood that it will need suitable space for an ALS ambulance and ALS personnel in the near future, and office space for a full-time fire chief or full-time training officer.

SUMMARY II-6:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Community Facilities & Services	
Lead Responsibility:	Select Board
Estimated Cost:	TBD-Master Facilities Plan

Action II-7: Adopt a Scenic Corridors Overlay District.

Discussion: A Scenic Corridors Overlay District would give Princeton a useful tool to protect views along roads that make a significant contribution to the town's rural character. Princeton residents seem to agree about the roads that qualify as scenic because in public meetings held at the beginning of this master plan process, nearly all of the participants identified the same roadways as having character-defining importance for the town. Moreover, many of the features they identified as memorable or significant about their own neighborhoods are located along these streets.

Unlike a Scenic Roads Bylaw under M.G.L. c.15C (Action III-1), a Scenic Corridor Overlay District is a zoning bylaw. In the overlay district, any construction within 300 feet of the street would require Site Plan Review by the Planning Board. The town needs to decide whether Site Plan Review is necessary for all of its scenic roadways, but consideration should be given to including as many as possible in the Overlay District. The regulations would encourage applicants to build homes more than 300 feet away from the road because if they do, they will be able to bypass Site Plan Review. Through administrative regulations, the Planning Board should institute a simplified application and review process for driveways leading to homes outside the overlay district.

SUMMARY II-7:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Land Use, Open Space & Natural Resources, Historic Preservation	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action II-8: Provide professional staff support for the Planning Board and other boards with development review authority.

Discussion: Princeton should establish a staff planner position and request funds to hire qualified personnel for 20 hours per week *at minimum*. Town officials with responsibility for planning, development review and permitting operate without any professional staff. In this regard, Princeton is like many of the Commonwealth's small towns. However, most towns do not have as much at stake as Princeton has, and no community should base personnel decisions on practices elsewhere. The fact is that even though Princeton has a small population, the town itself is fairly large. Continued growth in Princeton and evolving state regulations and policies suggest that in the very near future, Princeton will need to hire a professional planner to support the work of several town boards, but principally the Planning Board and Board of Appeals, and the Community Preservation Committee if Princeton adopts the CPA.

In addition, Princeton should anticipate needs for inspectional services, monitoring and enforcement assistance for the Conservation Commission and Board of Health. Often, the salaries of professionals supporting these boards are financed in whole or in part with fees paid by permit applicants. It may be possible to provide health agent services on a regional basis, such as the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health that serves 12 small towns in North-Central Massachusetts.

SUMMARY II-8:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Land Use, Community Facilities & Services	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board, Select Board
Estimated Cost:	$38,000-$44,000 for a part-time staff planner (including employee benefits)

Action II-9: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to establish a limited mixed-use overlay district in the town center.

Discussion: Without changing the Residential-Agricultural designation that currently applies to the town center, Princeton should establish an *overlay* district that creates some options for town center properties to include a mix of uses. Princeton Center presents an interesting planning challenge because many residents say they want the town center to be what it is today – a residential, civic and institutional area – yet they also want a coffee shop. People seem to yearn for a place to congregate, but they are reluctant to embrace change and they want as little new growth as possible. Unfortunately, a coffee shop will not survive without customers.

Perceptions of the town center are not entirely consistent with reality. The area already has a seamless mix of single-family homes and some multi-family units, municipal and institutional buildings, and until recently, a few business uses. Not so long ago, Princeton's town center had a few more small businesses, but the only way to establish a commercial activity there today is by obtaining a use variance from the Board of Appeals. Relying on variances as an alternative for allowing changes in use is problematic for a few reasons:

- By definition, granting use variances mean allowing uses that are prohibited in a zoning bylaw. Since zoning ought to reflect a community's master plan goals, it makes no sense to prohibit activities that are consistent with a plan. If residents really want to see a coffee shop in the center of town, both the master plan and the zoning bylaw should say so.

- The present statutory criteria for granting variances are obsolete, and they relate primarily to lots that fail to comply with a zoning bylaw's dimensional requirements. Unlike special permits, variances may not be regulated in a zoning bylaw. For example, a town's zoning is prohibited from setting rules or standards for the issuance of a variance. The Board of Appeals may impose conditions on a variance, but the Board's decision to grant or deny one must be based solely on criteria in the state Zoning Act.

- Variances were never intended to serve as an alternative to planning or as a means to avoid controversial zoning debates at town meeting, but many communities in Massachusetts have come to rely on variances to solve land use problems that could not be addressed legislatively.

An overlay district literally sits on top of and does not disturb the existing zoning (in this case, Residential-Agricultural). Its boundary may be the same as or different from the boundary of the underlying district. By establishing an overlay district that applies only to properties in and around the town center, Princeton could allow a limited number of small-scale business uses, such as a coffee shop or sandwich shop, offices, an art gallery, or multi-family units by special permit. This approach would give Princeton the tools to control the overall mix of uses in the town center and also to establish clear standards for the issuance of a special permit.

SUMMARY II-9:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Land Use, Economic Development, Housing, Historic Preservation	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

PHASE III: 2013-2016

Action III-1: Adopt a scenic roads bylaw.

Discussion: The recently completed Princeton Reconnaissance Report (2006) stresses the importance of protecting the character of Princeton's rural roads. Princeton has *many* scenic roads, in fact most of the town's roads would qualify as "scenic" under any generally understood definition of "rural character." Collectively, Princeton's roads convey an array of images that make the town a visually engaging place to live, work and visit: long views, open fields and farm buildings, deep forests, water, and nodes of historic housing. Princeton also has unpaved roads that contribute to its timeless beauty.

Today, Princeton does not have any regulations in place to protect scenic roads. A proposed scenic roads bylaw failed at town meeting several years ago, apparently out of fear that scenic road regulations would compromise public safety and make it too difficult for the Highway Department to maintain Princeton's streets. Unfortunately, local officials did not have enough information to address these concerns, and the bylaw was defeated.

The town should implement the process outlined in the Princeton Reconnaissance Report: prepare an inventory and photo documentation of the roads that residents consider scenic – at least those identified as candidates for the Scenic Corridors Overlay District – and use the information to create a bylaw tailored to conditions in Princeton. The Planning Board should hire a consulting planner or landscape architect to assist with drafting the bylaw, or seek technical assistance from the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Urban Forestry Program or the Massachusetts Historical Commission. By assembling an inventory of the character-defining attributes of each road, the Planning Board will be able to establish criteria for projects that fall under the scenic roads bylaw. Written criteria will help the Highway Department plan road improvement projects and also help the Planning Board with its review.

PHASE III IMPLEMENTATION

- Adopt a **scenic roads bylaw**.
- Establish a **Mount Wachusett Overlay District.**
- Rezone a portion of the existing Business-Industrial District on Hubbardston Road to Residential-Agricultural, and change the remaining business land to a **Rural Business District**.
- Adopt zoning regulations to allow for **mixed residential uses** within walking distance of the villages and town center.
- Adopt zoning regulations to allow **accessory apartments** in single-family homes.
- In conjunction with the regional planning commission, prepare a **corridor study** for Route 140**.**
- Adopt policies and guidelines **to manage comprehensive permits** under Chapter 40B.

Adopting a scenic roads bylaw requires local acceptance of M.G.L. c. 40, § 15C, the Scenic Roads Act. Scenic roads may be nominated by the Planning Board, Historical Commission or Conservation Commission, and they must be designated by town meeting. The law exempts numbered routes unless the route is located entirely within the boundaries of the city or town and no part of it is owned by the state. The Scenic Roads Act provides that "any repair, maintenance, reconstruction, or paving work… shall not involve or include the cutting or removal of trees, or the tearing down or destruction of stone walls, or portions thereof…" until the Planning Board has held a public hearing.

SUMMARY III-1:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Historic Preservation, Open Space & Natural Resources, Transportation	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	$10,000 (Consultant), if roads inventory and photo documentation tasks are conducted by local volunteers and/or town staff.

Action III-2: Commission an analysis to determine the boundaries and appropriate regulatory controls for a Wachusett Mountain Overlay District, and amend the Zoning Bylaw accordingly.

Discussion: Wachusett Mountain is a unique landscape and a major scenic and recreational resource for Princeton and the region. Managing the visual and environmental impacts of future development within the mountain's viewshed requires special strategies. A Wachusett Mountain Scenic Overlay District that applies to activity above the 1,000 foot elevation would help Princeton preserve the landscape and the town's rural character. Toward this end, the Planning Board should retain a consulting planner or landscape architect to delineate the boundaries of the overlay district and develop regulations for it. A steering committee or task force should be appointed to work with the consultant to refine the concept for this district and develop the proposed zoning.

SUMMARY III-2:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Open Space & Natural Resources, Historic Preservation, Land Use	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	$18,000-$25,000 (Consultant)

Action III-3: Replace the existing Business-Industrial District on Hubbardston Road with a Rural Business District.

Discussion: As part of a multi-year process for updating and improving Princeton's zoning, the town should reassess its existing regulations for the Business-Industrial District on Hubbardston Road. It makes sense to preserve a small business zone in this part of town, particularly since it already has a few business establishments. However, most of land north of Hubbardston Road and west of Gates Road is (or should be) protected open space. Princeton will continue to need areas for business uses that may not be appropriate for a village but are nonetheless important for a small agricultural community, e.g., sales and repair of farming equipment, feed and lumber stores, and so forth. Still, the existing Business-Industrial District regulations should be updated and strengthened so the town has tools in place to control visual impacts and assure adherence to reasonable site standards.

SUMMARY III-3:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Land Use, Economic Development, Open Space & Natural Resources	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action III-4: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow conversion of older single-family homes to multi-family dwellings within a ½-mile radius of the Town Center and each Village District.

Discussion: Just about everyone who participated in this master plan process said that Princeton should have more types of housing. Today, the town's zoning restricts residential development to single-family dwellings on large lots, except that an existing single-family home can be converted to a two-family or three-family dwelling if it occupies a very large parcel. It may not be appropriate to allow mixed residential uses anywhere in Princeton, but the town should ease restrictions on small-scale conversions for single-family homes located near the villages.

Concentrating housing in and adjacent to designated village areas expresses a policy preference for people to live near goods and services. It is a rural expression of "Smart Growth." Princeton could limit single-family conversions to buildings of a certain age, mainly to control the pace of conversion activity, and the town also could limit the number of multi-family units created in a single conversion development. The existing cap of three units is too low for larger homes, which often are the best candidates for a conversion development.

In addition, the town needs to reconsider its the minimum land area requirement (five acres for a three-unit conversion). Princeton may want to retain these requirements elsewhere in the Resi-

dential-Agricultural District, but it makes little sense to consume such a large amount of land for a single use so close to a village.

SUMMARY III-4:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Land Use, Housing	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action III-5: Amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow accessory apartments in owner-occupied single-family homes.

Discussion: Consistent with the theme of allowing more types of housing in Princeton, the town should have regulations to allow accessory apartments, by right or by special permit, in owner-occupied single-family homes. Accessory apartments offer a simple, low-impact way to provide housing diversity without new residential construction. Even in communities that have allowed accessory apartments by right for many years, the experience has been that homeowners create them for personal (family) reasons and there has been no proliferation of accessory apartments, townwide or in particular neighborhoods.

Princeton has some options for designing an accessory apartment bylaw. For example, the town could:

- Limit accessory units to the interior of a single-family home or allow them in a detached building on the same lot, such as a barn or garage.

- Establish minimum eligibility standards, such as the age of the existing residence. There are legal issues with limiting accessory apartments to homes that already exist today, but requiring homes to be at least 10 years old on the date of the accessory apartment permit application should be sufficient to address concerns about too many units being created in a short period of time.

- Impose an upper limit on the allowable floor area of an accessory apartment, such as 900 sq. ft. or 25% of the total gross floor area of the existing house.

Accessory apartments meet a number of housing needs: families who need living space for an elderly relative or an adult child, seniors seeking some rental income in order to remain in their home, or two working parents who need a live-in child care provider. In addition, accessory apartments provide housing for people who cannot afford market-rate rents in suburban or urban apartment developments. Under current state policy, however, it is extremely difficult to regulate accessory apartments in a way that makes them eligible for listing on the Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory. While the units do not "count" for Chapter 40B purposes, they nonetheless provide affordable housing. Many Princeton residents have said the town needs ways other than Chapter 40B comprehensive permits to create affordable housing, mainly for seniors and for young people who grew up in Princeton and cannot afford to buy a home in town.

SUMMARY III-5:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Housing	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board
Estimated Cost:	None

Action III-6: Prepare a corridor study of Route 140 in conjunction with the towns of Westminster and Sterling.

Discussion: Princeton should work with CMRPC and officials from Westminster and Sterling to prepare a corridor study of Route 140. In Princeton, Route 140 is fairly hazardous to drivers and pedestrians alike. Its has a comparatively large number of accidents each year, particularly during the winter. In public meetings held for this master plan, many people cited Route 140 as a major public safety concern. They noted that residents of East Princeton find it hazardous to walk or bicycle in their own neighborhood because

of traffic speeds, lack of sidewalks or dedicated bicycle lanes, and the general challenge of accommodating pedestrians and cars along the winding, sometimes narrow segments of Route 140 on its journey through Princeton.

Planning for improvements to Route 140 will be challenging because on one hand it is well-traveled, yet on the other hand it is scenic in several areas. Portions of the corridor also have significant environmental constraints due to Keyes Brook and its associated wetlands. One problem with Route 140 is that for a road that carries a noticeable amount of through traffic each day, the surrounding land use pattern is fairly homogenous. Another problem is that some of the signage along Route 140 is masked by vegetation or simply in poor condition. In addition, the edge of the road is difficult to perceive in many areas due to a lack of sideline stripes or stripes that are worn and ineffective.

Allowing a modest increase in the amount of development in the East Princeton village area would help to slow the speed of traffic moving through that part of town, but drivers need to be able to anticipate changes in land use and level of pedestrian activity before they reach the village. A series of modest traffic-calming measures ought to be explored, particularly on approach to the intersections of Route 140/East Princeton Road and Redemption Rock Trail North/Fitchburg Road.

SUMMARY III-6:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Transportation, Land Use, Economic Development	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board, Select Board, Roads Advisory Committee
Estimated Cost:	***

Action III-7: Establish policies and guidelines for managing Chapter 40B comprehensive permits.

Discussion: At the first public participation meeting for this master plan, residents said Princeton's top weakness is lack of affordable housing – and the most significant threat to Princeton's rural character is "the 'bad' 40B," or a large, unwanted comprehensive permit development.

Princeton has some immunity to the types of comprehensive permits that many people fear. It has no public water or sewer service, it has difficult-to-develop land in many parts of town, and relative to the location of goods, service and jobs, Princeton is somewhat remote. In the past few years, however, several comprehensive permits have been proposed and either approved or appealed in Rutland, Westminster, Sterling and Holden. Princeton differs from all of these towns in noteworthy ways, but it is a mistake to assume that Princeton will never see a comprehensive permit application. In fact, towns smaller than Princeton have had to respond to unexpected comprehensive permits.

Princeton needs to prepare for Chapter 40B so that local officials understand their roles and responsibilities before a developer arrives in town with a comprehensive permit proposal. Instead of taking a hostile approach, Princeton should be prepared to say what it wants from a comprehensive permit development, such as open space and building design considerations, and realistic ideas about density and scale. The town also could adopt a policy that makes it easier for small developments to proceed through the comprehensive permit process. The Select Board and Planning Board should lead a process to develop comprehensive permit policies and guidelines, and the Board of Appeals needs comprehensive permit regulations, which should be prepared by Town Counsel.

SUMMARY III-7:	
Addresses Master Plan Elements: Housing	
Lead Responsibility:	Planning Board, Select Board
Estimated Cost:	None

ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION NEEDS

Some aspects of implementing a master plan require ongoing attention. They are difficult to associate with any particular phase of the implementation process because they do not have discrete beginning and end points. In fact, classifying them by phase could be very misleading because in some respects, these types of implementation activities never really end. Instead, they are integral to the operation and management of local governments everywhere. Princeton has identified some needs in this category, mainly tasks that relate to governance, operations and finance.

RECURRING IMPLEMENTATION

- Recruitment, training and retention of **local government volunteers.**
- Hiring **employees who can perform more than one function**, where appropriate.
- Periodic **review of user fee schedules** to determine whether adjustments should be made to improve **cost recovery.**
- Regional approaches to service delivery.

Action O-1: Explore, identify and implement effective ways to recruit, train and keep volunteers to serve on town boards and committees.

Discussion: By choice, Princeton has a small, decentralized government in which many boards and officials share responsibility for making decisions and delivering municipal services. This form of government has a number of advantages: it offers multiple avenues for residents to participate in running their town, it provides for democratic decision-making, and it can be fairly inexpensive because qualified volunteers help to control growth in municipal service costs. A disadvantage is that it requires many residents to share the workload. It also can be expensive; if volunteers without adequate training or support make innocent mistakes that create a significant liability for the town, responsibility for the cost of legal services, damages and so forth falls on the municipality. Further, accommodating many volunteers requires enough meeting space for boards and committees to perform their duties.

Like most towns, Princeton has a small corps of dedicated people who provide many hours of volunteer service. The town needs ways to involve more residents so that other volunteers do not have to shoulder as much responsibility or devote as many hours to town government. Involving more residents in civic life also increases the probability that government decisions will be accepted by a wide range of people. It facilitates public education and consensus. However, the evolution of small towns from rural hamlets to bedroom communities has made it increasingly difficult to attract and keep local government volunteers just about everywhere.

Lack of time contributes to the problem of attracting volunteers, but it is not the only factor. Busy people with limited hours to spare will choose volunteer activities that interest them and provide a source of self-satisfaction. It is hard to convince local government volunteers to remain committed when town meeting rejects their recommendations or refuses to fund a proposed program or project, or when the resources simply do not exist to accomplish what needs to be done.

Non-profit organizations often have staff members whose responsibilities include recruiting and managing volunteers. They screen applicants for volunteer positions, assess each applicant's skills and time availability, and try to align a new volunteer's interests with the organization's needs. They also provide training, support, and periodic recognition programs to reward hard-working volunteers.

Local governments could benefit from instituting a similar system, but in very small towns with limited personnel, recruiting new volunteers requires constant outreach by *existing* volunteers. Often, residents who would never submit a "talent

bank" or public service application form at town hall will respond to a personal request to serve on a board or committee. Prospective volunteers may have no interest in working on a committee, but they have special expertise and are willing to serve individually on an as-needed basis.

Recognition programs could help Princeton retain some of its volunteers, but recognition programs alone are not enough to counter the conditions that keep many people from volunteering in the first place, e.g., lack of time, lack of knowledge about local government operations, or fear of the criticism that often comes with public service.

For a small community like Princeton, plausible recruitment strategies would include any of the following:

- Posting volunteer opportunities on the town's web site and public service announcements delivered through a "broadcast" email to all subscribers on PMLD's new high-speed internet system;
- Personal networking;
- Outreach through the schools, including occasional civics programs that encourage participation by children;
- Consulting town meeting attendance records to identify residents who frequently attend town meeting but are not currently serving on a town board or committee, and making personal contact with those individuals;
- A "welcome" packet that is ready to distribute to prospective volunteers, with information about local government, service opportunities, current "hot topics" and community projects, and the names of three or four experienced local officials who are willing to serve as points of contact and mentors for new volunteers.

In addition, Princeton should continue to see that local officials have access to adequate information to perform their volunteer duties. Some readily available training and information resources include:

- The **Citizen Planner Training Collaborative** (CPTC), U-Mass Extension, provides annual conferences for local officials and individualized, on-site training at the request of cities and towns. <www.umass.edu/masscptc>
- The **Massachusetts Housing Partnership** provides training upon request, publishes extensive technical assistance on Chapter 40B, and pays consultants to help a Zoning Board of Appeals with its review of comprehensive permits. <www.mhp.net>
- **"Townboard"** is a comprehensive schedule of state, regional and national training programs and conferences for local officials and staff, on topics ranging from environmental law to planning and municipal management. <www.townboard.org>

Action O-2: When considering growth in staff, hire and train people to perform more than one function, wherever feasible and appropriate.

Discussion: Some of the same factors that make it difficult for communities to attract and retain local government volunteers have begun to affect paid or stipend positions, notably call firefighters. As fewer people work in their own towns or close by, it becomes increasingly difficult to provide adequate capacity for public safety functions such as fire protection or emergency medical services.

Princeton is not immune to these conditions. In some of the state's smallest towns, local government employees double as firefighters, highway workers perform other traditional public works duties, and administrative and clerical employees are trained to move seamlessly from one department to another so they can respond to periodic

shifts in workload. If one of Princeton's master plan goals is to maximize opportunities for cross-training municipal workers, the town will need to examine (and possibly modify) its existing job descriptions, and screen applicants for their ability and interest to perform more than one job. Sometimes, the advantage of efficient use of personnel may be offset by the disadvantage of losing qualified applicants who do not wish to perform duties outside their particular area of expertise.

Action O-3: Establish a systematic process for reviewing user fees and charges in order to generate revenue for municipal operations.

Discussion: Some of Princeton's local government services are available to the public on a user-fee basis. For example, when residents need emergency medical care, their health insurance provider is billed for the cost of local ambulance response. In turn, Princeton retains the revenue from ambulance services to pay emergency medical personnel and build a reserve for vehicle maintenance and replacement. Other operations that charge fees for certain services include the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Board of Health, Building Department, Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Town Clerk. In some cases the fees they charge are set by statute, but for the most part, local government revenue from user fees is based on a fee schedule set by the Select Board or another independently elected body.

Every town in the Commonwealth struggles with fee setting because local officials do not want to impose unreasonable charges on residents, yet there is relentless pressure to generate revenue from sources other than the tax levy. A common practice in many towns is to survey the fee schedules of nearby communities and set local fees within range of prevailing practices elsewhere. However, this approach masks the possibility that fees in other towns may bear little relationship to the actual cost of service delivery.

Local governments should approach fee setting with more precision than they do, particularly in Massachusetts where municipalities have such limited taxation power. Here, the failure of a given user fee to meet the legal definition of a "fee" makes it a tax by default. Erring on the side of caution, towns often collect less revenue from user fees than they could, but the protocol for setting fees that capture actual full costs can be difficult and time-consuming unless communities have procedures in place to track all of the direct and indirect costs involved with delivering a service.

Princeton ought to review all non-statutory fees on a biennial basis at least, and perhaps annually for programs and services that serve many users, such as recreation activities. A methodology for setting and reviewing fees should be established jointly by the Town Administrator, Select Board and Advisory Board in order to assure consistency across municipal departments. The Department of Revenue has published a manual for this purpose, Costing Municipal Services (2005), which may be useful to Princeton in establishing its own fee setting protocol. In addition, the National Advisory Council on State and Local Budgeting and the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) have technical assistance resources on full cost recovery from user fees.

Since Princeton is so small and its local government is not a very complex organization, it is unlikely that the town will ever generate much revenue from fees. Still, wherever costs can be recovered from user fees, the result is reduced pressure on the tax levy.

Action O-4: Pursue regional service delivery wherever feasible and appropriate.

Discussion: Massachusetts does not have many successful models of regional service delivery or inter-local service agreements. The most common form of regionalization here is regional school districts, but in other parts of the country, regional service delivery is the norm. Its less common use in the Commonwealth means that the total cost of local government services runs fairly high on a per capita basis. For small towns like Princeton,

regional opportunities should be explored wherever possible. For example:

- Health agent services for Title V inspections, permitting, monitoring and enforcement could be provided through an inter-local agreement with neighboring towns. A good example of a regional health services consortium is the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health, which provides Title V support to local boards of health. It also performs restaurant and housing code inspections, and provides public health nurses to participating towns. The Franklin Regional Council of Governments offers similar services to several small towns in the northern Connecticut River Valley.

- The towns of Hamilton and Wenham have some unusual inter-local agreements, including the state's only two-town public library and a joint recreation department.

- Animal control, technology and conservation agent services are other examples of local government functions that have been mentioned in Princeton as potential candidates for regional service delivery.

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Town of Princeton, Massachusetts

MASTER PLAN

9.1 LAND USE PLAN

April 2007

Princeton Master Plan Steering Committee

Consulting Team:
COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES GROUP, INC.
Larry Koff & Associates
Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, inc.

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