

# **BLANDFORD**

RESILIENT  
MASTER PLAN 2021

JUNE 2021



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**BLANDFORD**

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**RESILIENT  
MASTER PLAN  
2021**









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# Introduction

A master plan is a snap-shot of a community at a point in time and a roadmap to a desired future. A successful Master Plan accurately reflects the community's concerns, involved the community in development and is used to guide growth and development.

Here in Blandford we were inspired to develop a Resilient Master Plan because we understand the need to adapt to the climate crisis. We hope readers of this plan will agree that it communicates the sense of place we all feel about our lovely community, that it tells our story and that it inspires you to get involved!

This master plan was developed to serve several functions:

- 1) Provide detailed historic and current information about land use, housing, natural resources, open space, economic development and other topics that are currently important to Blandford.
- 2) Articulate the vision and goals for future development and preservation expressed by residents throughout the master planning process.
- 3) Clearly state Blandford's priorities and strategies for moving forward to achieve those goals.

This resilient master plan is a statement of policy and aspirations expressed by the community to help manage growth and change, and to foster more predictable development. It also tells the story of Blandford's present—with lots of technical details, maps, data, and charts, included in the Appendix Technical Papers.

This plan is a tool that should be used over time to inform actions to achieve Blandford's vision.

This resilient master plan is the result of outreach and participation by residents and businesses of Blandford, as well as detailed information and support supplied by town department staff, elected boards and volunteer committees. The Town engaged the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to facilitate development of this plan and the process

was overseen by the members of the Resilient Master Plan Committee and involved more than 175 residents through a community survey, committee meetings, focus groups, and our community-wide visioning session and implementation workshop.

The process was open and transparent with multiple planning documents and communications of the committee, including recordings of meetings and draft chapters of the plan, posted publicly online at [blandfordmasterplan.pvpc.org](http://blandfordmasterplan.pvpc.org) throughout the resilient master planning process. The committee carefully considered and incorporated the community's contributions throughout the development of the resilient master plan. The plan was adopted by the Planning Board in 2021.

## Components of a Master Plan

In Massachusetts Master Plan is structured in conformance with the state requirements outlined in Chapter 41, Section 81D which describes a Master Plan as “a statement through text, maps, illustrations, or other forms of communication that is designed to provide a basis for decision-making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality...” and is comprised of seven elements:

- Land Use
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Open Space and Natural Resources
- Public Services and Facilities
- Transportation

The statute requires goals and policies to convey the community's visions and an implementation program that covers each of the topic areas listed above.

This resilient master plan includes an additional element to address:

- Climate Adaptation and Sustainability

Given the time and effort required to prepare a Master Plan, it is easy to think of completing and officially adopting a plan as an end in itself. But preparing a plan is not an end in itself. The main reason for having a plan is to use it as a guide to decision-making and to help your community be what you want it to be. The worst fate a plan can suffer is to sit on a shelf and never be used! Please look at the implementation chart of all the strategies to see how you can get involved.



The resilient Master Plan Committee would like readers of this plan to know it was developed during the COVID 19 pandemic, an unprecedented 16 month period, March 2020 to June 2021 in United States and indeed world history, when much of the world shut down almost completely and then slowly re-emerged with over a year of social distancing, mask wearing and the inability to hold public meetings in person. As of June 2021, over 600,000 people in the United States have died including more than 18,000 people who live in Massachusetts. We mourn those we lost and celebrate the fortitude of our community as we have persevered in this important work.

## Plan Vision

Blandford's 2030 Resilient Master Plan continues to honor Blandford's historical roots, small-town charm, and rural beauty while welcoming opportunities for positive change, sustainable growth, and climate change resilience.

## Plan Mission

We embrace the unique strengths that set Blandford apart, including our sense of community, open space resources, recreational opportunities, level of civic engagement, and dedicated Town staff and volunteers. Through the implementation of this Resilient Master Plan, we will balance planning for the manageable evolution of the Town with protecting all that we treasure about our community and reducing vulnerability of our community to extreme weather events. We will achieve this vision through open dialogue, local and regional partnerships, responsible fiscal management, and the democratic process.

## Plan Objectives

We are a small town with big plans for our future.  
To achieve our vision, we will:

- Fortify our infrastructure and provide reliable services to all residents.
- Increase cultural, agricultural, commercial, and entertainment options.
- Preserve and promote our Town's rich historic resources.
- Make sustainable land use and preservation decisions.
- Conserve our flora and fauna.
- Enhance and promote our Town's sense of place.
- Prioritize services for our seniors.
- Support our schools and expand youth programming.
- Remove barriers for our disabled community members.
- Plan for climate change resilience.
- Ensure that our community is welcoming, accessible, and inclusive to all.



# Blandford in CONTEXT

## Growth

The resilient Master Plan process provided the opportunity for residents to present comments and concerns about growth in Blandford and the 170 survey respondents, combined with committee members and focus group participants, have affirmed the importance of the Town's "rural character." A majority of the survey-takers (71%) believe that preserving Blandford's rural character is very important.

## Large-scale Developments

Blandford is blessed with large tracts of open land and natural resources. As the Commonwealth incentives solar development to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions that are causing the climate crisis, solar developers are seeking locations to site large scale developments consuming 20-30 acres of land per parcel. In the past few years, five solar developers have received permits to construct solar arrays in Blandford. This plan, combined with the updated Open Space and Recreation Plan shows where residents think land should be preserved for forests and farming. With limited financial resources, the Town will be strategic about which parcels provide the most benefit as protected open space and which areas could be developed.

## Town Center

Sixty-two percent of survey respondents like the way the town center has been developed and recognize that the town center also provides opportunities for walkability and access to services like the post office, town offices, and the general store.

Plan participants would like a town center that attracts small businesses to support and grow the local economy and that offers the possibility for the types of structures and character the town seeks. The resilient master plan process explored many of the amenities that are within the established town center and researched how enhancing the walkability of the town center and its nearby cultural and recreational amenities can catalyze a sustainable and economically healthy town.

## Senior Citizens

With seniors over the age of 65 making up 25 percent of Blandford's population, building community is very important to the health and progress of the town. Providing opportunities to age in place in an appropriate home, ensuring ways to get around, and socialize with others – both young and older – have been identified as a opportunities for Blandford. There are ways to ensure seniors are able to downsize and remain in Blandford in an appropriate dwelling while maintaining access to the activities and socialization afforded to other residents. Facilitating intergenerational activities including identifying and supporting locations for the activities in town is an important stepping stone to build on the civic pride that prevails in Blandford.

## Community Resilience

In the community survey when asked "If the Town should prioritize energy efficiency, reducing emissions, and responding to the impacts of climate change", 61 percent of respondents answered strongly agree or agree. 24% were neutral and only 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Community resilience means the ability to "bounce back" from disasters, large and small; it means utilizing available resources to withstand and recover from adverse situations. The town has identified how important it is to be mindful and responsive to the impacts of climate change by achieving both Green Community and Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) certification, making the town eligible for millions of dollars of funding for resilience and climate action.

For additional detail on the current state of Blandford, please see the Technical Papers in the Appendix.







# Plan Framework

The strategies in this plan have been organized to highlight and lift up the goals and desires that Blandford residents have for their community today and into the future.

## CORE THEMES

Five core themes emerged through this community planning process reflecting the values and priority issues for Blandford.

1. Community Pride and Rural Community Competitiveness
2. Living with Wildlife and Nature
3. Balanced and Sustainable Growth
4. Hidden Stories and Rich History
5. Community Interconnections and Roots

## STATUTORY ELEMENTS REQUIRED UNDER MGL

Per Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 41, Section 81D, community master plans require seven statutory elements. Given what the Town learned in our MVP Planning work and our commitment to climate resilience, we included an eighth chapter on climate adaptation and sustainability. This Master Plan is organized by the themes identified during the community engagement process. All required elements are included in the plan and we have included these icons to indicate where each required element is addressed.



## STRATEGIES

Strategies are the ways the town will work to achieve the stated goals in this plan. They are actionable and may require funding from the Town and/or outside sources, changes to local regulations, development of new programs, and use of town resources – including town staff and volunteer time. Strategies are classified as either Short Term (indicating action within 12-24 months), Medium Term (indicating action within 2-5 years), or Long Term (indicating action within 5+ years). Some of the strategies are ongoing, indicating action that should be continually implemented and expanded as necessary.



**CORE THEMES**

**STATUTORY  
ELEMENTS**

**STRATEGIES**

**Community Pride and  
Rural Community  
Competitiveness**



**16**  
**STRATEGIES**

**Living with Wildlife and  
Nature**



**8**  
**STRATEGIES**

**Balanced and  
Sustainable Growth**



**26**  
**STRATEGIES**

**Hidden Stories and  
Rich History**



**9**  
**STRATEGIES**

**Community  
Interconnections and  
Roots**



**15**  
**STRATEGIES**



## A. COMMUNITY PRIDE AND RURAL COMMUNITY COMPETITIVENESS

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary
A-1	Continue to support service and capital improvements for operations like the Blandford Porter Memorial Library and Town Hall.	Select Board
A-2	Pursue noise abatement through MassDOT to alleviate noise from the Turnpike.	Town Administrator
A-3	Consider prohibiting use of jake brakes near residential areas.	Select Board
A-4	Continue to engage and coordinate planning efforts with Springfield Water and Sewer Commission around Cobble Mountain Reservoir and Long Pond Reservoir watershed lands and continue to collaborate and increase access. Pursue legal review of contract if necessary.	Conservation Commission
A-5	Continue to advance work with nearby communities that bring like-businesses and economic development strategies together for the benefit of all, including members of the Gateway Hilltowns Collaborative.	Town Administrator
A-6	Provide a series of mini grants through recovery funding to enable local businesses to employ new strategies that activate and enliven the use of outdoor spaces in the town center (use of outdoor spaces provide a more attractive option given continuing Covid-19 concerns). Also look into grants and incentives that may be available through the Massachusetts Office of Business Development, particularly the Economic Development Incentive Program.	Select Board
A-7	Advance drinking water upgrades to ensure continued integrity of homes, institutions, and businesses in the town center.	Water Department
A-8	Create a visitor readiness plan for the town center that includes good wayfinding systems to nearby attractions, pedestrian friendly amenities, bathroom facilities, and helpful printed information.	Conservation Commission
A-9	Analyze permanent and temporary street-side signage to understand what would be most effective for attracting passersby to town center businesses, as well as events held by town center institutions and share results with local businesses and institutions. This work could also aim to develop an aesthetic for town center signs and achieve new zoning standards, which currently allow for only one sign per business, and do not allow a business to have a sign on their building and also a separate standing sign near the street.	Planning Board
A-10	Promote shared technical skills to enable all town center businesses and institutions to maximize traditional media as well as social media exposure.	Town Administrator
A-11	Explore and identify possible trail linkages, thinking expansively about the use of the dirt road network, existing off-road trails, and potential opportunities on existing publicly accessible lands, and working with willing landowners to create new trail linkages where needed.	Conservation Commission



Others	Priority	Funding	Resources
Town Administrator	Ongoing	Capital budget, MA State Rural & Small Town grants	PVPC's LTA program for research and grant writing
Highway Superintendent	Long-Term	MassDOT Noise Abatement program	MassDOT, Volunteers, PVPC's LTA program
Town Administrator, Highway Superintendent	Long-Term	Town funds	Local signage
Town Administrator	Ongoing	Town funds	Volunteers
TAs, SBs, Ec Dev comms - Gateway Hilltowns	Ongoing	Capital budget, MA State Rural & Small Town grants	Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee
Town Administrator, Finance Committee	Short-Term	American Rescue Plan (ARPA)	Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee
Town Administrator	Ongoing	Capital budget, MA State Rural & Small Town grants, MVP Action grant	PVPC's LTA program for research and grant writing
Recreation Committee	Medium-Term	Healthy Hampshire, DLTA, MA Community One Stop for Growth	Gateway Hilltowns, Hilltown CDC, Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee
Zoning Board of Appeals	Medium-Term	MA Community One Stop for Growth, DLTA, Town funds	Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee
Select Board	Medium-Term	Local	Gateway Hilltowns, Hilltown CDC Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee
Recreation Committee	Long-Term	DCR Trails fund, CPA	Scouts, Volunteers

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary
A-12	Develop trail wayfinding resources, including a recognizable directional sign that heightens the identity of Blandford trails.	Conservation Commission
A-13	Evaluate parking, signage, and access to bathroom facilities along the trail network. Authors of the Gateway Hilltowns Economic Development Strategy note that channeling visitors to a centralized parking location adjacent to complementary attractions could result in increased spending. Collaborating on a system of parking lots, bathrooms, and possibly a parking shuttle is an option.	Conservation Commission, Recreation Committee
A-14	Meet with trail advocates in other towns to begin identifying how connections could be made for longer walking journeys.	Conservation Commission
A-15	Initiate a more robust conversation with the owners of Ski Blandford to understand whether and how the Town might help to support exploration of a mountain biking park.	Town Administrator
A-16	Work with local mountain bikers and perhaps local Northeast Mountain Biker Association members to gauge interest in furthering mountain biking resources in and around Blandford.	Town Administrator

## B. LIVING WITH WILDLIFE AND NATURE

Strategy	Primary	
B-1	Maintain seven-year updates to the Open Space and Recreation Plan that considers priorities for acquisition or protection of open space.	Conservation Commission
B-2	Protect Blandford's Scenic Vistas by adopting a new local regulation.	Planning Board
B-3	Investigate protection of scenic roads and roadway trees through passage of the Scenic Roads Act.	Planning Board
B-4	Explore and consider promoting Tread Lightly and Leave No Trace educational campaigns for residents.	Conservation Commission
B-5	Prepare and implement a comprehensive strategy for protecting surface water and groundwater and the watersheds that feed them.	Conservation Commission
B-6	Review subdivision regulations and evaluate addition of performance standards for sensitive natural areas.	Planning Board
B-7	Require adequate vegetated buffers next to wetlands, streams and rivers to filter stormwater runoff and to allow room for river migration and expansion during heavy storms.	Planning Board
B-8	Evaluate the potential for a performance-based stormwater management bylaw.	Planning Board



Others	Priority	Funding	Resources
Recreation Committee	Medium-Term	DCR Trails fund, CPA	Scouts, Volunteers
Gateway Hilltowns, Hilltown CDC	Long-Term	DCR Trails fund, CPA	Scouts, Volunteers
Recreation Committee	Long-Term	DCR Trails fund, CPA	Scouts, Volunteers
Conservation Commission	Short-Term	Local	Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee
Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	Local	Volunteers

Others	Priority	Funding	Resources
Planning Board	Ongoing	District Local Technical Assistance; EOEEA Conservation Assistance for Small Communities Grant	Volunteers, competitive procurement for Consultant serves as needed, PVPC
Conservation Commission	Long-Term	DLTA, PBA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning
Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission	Long-Term	DLTA, PBA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning
Recreation Commission	Long-Term	Local	Scouts, Volunteers
Highway Superintendent, Town Administrator	Short-term	MA DEP	Volunteer time, Consultant
Conservation Commission	Ongoing	MVP Action grant, PBA	PVPC, Consultants
Conservation Commission	Ongoing	Local, PBA, DLTA	MACC, Volunteers, PVPC, Consultants
Conservation Commission, Highway Superintendent	Ongoing	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteers, PVPC, Consultants

## C. BALANCED AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary
C-1	Explore a Site Plan Review Bylaw and coordinate it with Design Guidelines that ensure that development and redevelopment are consistent with the size, scale and character that the Town is trying to achieve with its buildings.	Planning Board
C-2	Proactively work with developers to develop projects that are a visual asset to the community and promote Blandford's small-town New England rural character.	Planning Board
C-3	Explore an open space residential development/cluster housing bylaw to promote permanently preserved open spaces, agricultural lands, forest lands, and other natural resources.	Planning Board
C-4	Adopt a Town Center Overlay District to create incentives for mixed use development, including business, retail, residential, and civic uses and including other requirements to assure consistency with the existing look and feel of the Town.	Planning Board
C-5	Adopt Low Impact Development standards for all new residential developments.	Planning Board
C-6	Explore the benefits of adopting an Accessory Apartment (In-law) Zoning Bylaw.	Planning Board
C-7	Expand the types of residential uses allowed in town, including zoning changes to allow three or four unit homes.	Planning Board
C-8	Plan for Affordable Housing by developing a Housing Production Plan.	Planning Board
C-9	Plan for and implement building and maintenance improvements by developing and implementing a Capital Improvement budget and plan outlining opportunities for possible funding through Community Development Block Grant.	Select Board
C-10	Complete feasibility study for new, accessible Highway Department building utilizing site with salt shed.	Select Board
C-11	Move Fire Department operations to current Highway Department building to accommodate better operational capacity for both firefighters and firetrucks.	Select Board
C-12	Pursue adoption of a local Complete Streets Policy and develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan to become eligible for funding from the Massachusetts Complete Streets Program.	Town Administrator, Select Board



Others	Priority	Funding	Resources
Zoning Board of Appeals	Ongoing	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning
Zoning Board of Appeals	Ongoing	Local, PBA	Volunteers
Conservation Commission	Short-Term	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning and Subdivision Regulations
Possible Ec Dev Committee	Medium-Term	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning
Conservation Commission	Ongoing	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning
Council on Aging, Select Board	Medium-Term	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning
Council on Aging, Select Board	Long-Term	District Local Technical Assistance	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning and Subdivision Regulations
Council on Aging, Select Board	Short-Term	District Local Technical Assistance, Community Preservation Committee Funding	Volunteer time, PVPC
Town Administrator, Finance Committee	Ongoing	CDBG via PVPC	Volunteer time, PVPC
Town Administrator, Finance Committee, Highway Department	Ongoing	Community One Stop for Growth	Consultants, PVPC
Town Administrator, Finance Committee, Fire Department	Ongoing	Community One Stop for Growth	Consultants, PVPC
Highway Department	Long-Term	DLTA, MassDOT Complete Streets	Consultants, PVPC

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary
C-13	Continue to monitor pavement condition in the Town of Blandford and advance pavement maintenance and improvement projects based on the results of the 2020 Local Pavement Management Study.	Highway Department
C-14	Perform regular traffic data collection to assess existing travel speeds and volumes at key locations in the Town.	Highway Department
C-15	Consider an in-depth safety study for the curved section of Otis Stage Road as identified in this chapter.	Highway Department
C-16	Work with MassDOT to identify opportunities to replace the existing deficient structure on Otis Stage Road.	Highway Department
C-17	Continue to monitor the state of bridges and culverts in town through the MassDOT municipal data dashboard. Conduct a town-wide inventory and condition assessment of culverts and map of hot spot flooding in public rights-of-way, and prioritize maintenance, repair, and replacement for future investment.	Highway Dept, Town Administrator
C-18	Continue to study the feasibility for the regionalization of some municipal services, like a Conservation Agent or Town Planner. Explore regionalized social services delivery.	Town Administrator
C-19	Advocate for PILOT payment revenue so that it adequately compensates Blandford for the full value of protected open space.	Town Administrator
C-20	Continue to seek out assistance and useful tools for permitting solar and marijuana development projects and ensuring that payments (either PILOT, tax, or host community profit share agreement) are of net benefit to the Town of Blandford.	Town Administrator
C-21	Review and consider adopting the proposed Green Infrastructure and Climate Resiliency Policy.	Select Board
C-22	Continue to apply for competitive grants to make municipal buildings and vehicles as energy efficient as possible saving the town money and reducing GHG emissions, including working to integrate the Gateway Regional School District (GRSD) into the Town's Energy Reduction Plan (ERP).	Town Administrator
C-23	Work with PVPC through the current Green Communities funding to develop a net zero action plan for residents and businesses.	Town Administrator



Others	Priority	Funding	Resources	
Town Administrator	Ongoing	PVPC LTA, MassDOT Rail & Transit Div	Blandford 2020 Pavement Management Report	
Town Administrator	Ongoing	PVPC LTA	PVPC Traffic Counting System	<a href="http://www.pvpc.org/projects/traffic-counting-system">http://www.pvpc.org/projects/traffic-counting-system</a>
Town Administrator	Short-Term	MassDOT Roadway Safety funds	PVPC Safety Planning, MassDOT Road Safety Audits	<a href="http://www.pvpc.org/content/safety-planning">http://www.pvpc.org/content/safety-planning</a> ; <a href="https://www.mass.gov/service-details/road-safety-audits">https://www.mass.gov/service-details/road-safety-audits</a>
Town Administrator, Select Board	Short-Term	MassDOT, PVPC	MassDOT Municipal Transportation Dashboard	<a href="https://gis.massdot.state.ma.us/DataViewers/MunicipalDashboard/">https://gis.massdot.state.ma.us/DataViewers/MunicipalDashboard/</a>
Select Board, Town Clerk	Short-Term	FEMA/MEMA BRIC, MVP from EOEEA	Volunteer time	
Select Board, Finance Committee	Ongoing	District Local Technical Assistance	PVPC	
Select Board	Ongoing	PBA, DLTA	possible Ec Dev committee	
Select Board	Ongoing	PBA	UMASS Clean Energy Extension, PVPC	
Town Administrator, Planning Board	Short-Term	Local, DLTA, PBA	Volunteers	Call out: Policy
Building Inspector, Select Board	Ongoing	DOER funded Technical Assistance via PVPC	Volunteer time, MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER), W MA staff-person,	
Resilient Master Plan Committee members	Short-Term	DOER funded Technical Assistance via PVPC	Volunteer time	

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary
C-24	Educate applicators of roadway snow/ice management products about alternative products to minimize environmental impact, their use, and the equipment associated with their use.	Highway Dept
C-25	Improve the resilience of and modernize the operations of the public water treatment and distribution systems to meet DEP compliance standards.	Town Administrator
C-26	Develop and implement a method of tracking hazardous materials transported on I-90 and MA Rt-23; train Fire Department, and others as appropriate on how to respond to spills of different types of chemicals, how to recognize and interpret Tier II symbols, etc.	EMD

## D. HIDDEN STORIES AND RICH HISTORY

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary
D-1	Develop a Blandford Preservation Plan to identify significant cultural resources and to prioritize documentation and projects to include all aspects of Blandford's history.	Historical Commission
D-2	Develop emergency response plans for significant built cultural resources and collections including long-term maintenance plans for significant public and private resources. Utilize existing resources like the Blandford Country Store and Café, Porter Memorial Library, and Blandford Fair Grounds as Disaster Response Locations.	Porter Memorial Library Director and Board
D-3	Consider new outreach techniques such as story mapping, historic building signs, and wayfinding and interpretive signs to help tell the story of Blandford.	Historical Commission
D-4	Formally investigate Feasible Reuse of Shepard Farm by applying to the Rural and Small Town Fund for a feasibility study for the best use of the town-owned Shepard Farm Area on Otis Stage Road.	Town of Blandford
D-5	Consider adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA) as this locally sourced and state matched funding could help to allow residents to control and support many of the current initiatives, challenges, and opportunities present in Blandford.	Form a CPA Committee



Others	Priority	Funding	Resources
Town Administrator	Ongoing	DEM, EPA, MVP from EOEAA	Volunteer time
Conservation Commission	Long-Term	MVP from EOEAA	Consultants, PVPC
Highway Dept, Town Administrator	Long-Term	FEMA/MEMA BRIC, MVP from EOEAA	Volunteer time

Others	Priority	Funding	Resources
Historical Society, Porter Memorial Library, Other Town Agencies, Volunteers	Short-Term	Local	PVPC, MHC, P reservation MA, and other preservation plans and programs for reference Seek training and develop an outline by the end of 2021
Town Administrator, Historical Society, Historical Commission, Blandford Country Store and Café, Blandford Fair Grounds, local emergency response groups	Short-Term	Preservation Grants for Veterans' Collections, Sites and Memorials; Regrant Program; Roving Archivist Program; Conserving & Digitizing Historical Resources LSTA grant	COSTEP MA, MHC, Preservation MA, Massachusetts State Historical Records Advisory Board, Massachusetts Libraries Board of Library Commissioners MA Cultural Council, Simmons West Mt. Holyoke; CPA Prepare list of priority properties and collections by the end of 2021
Historical Society, Porter Memorial Library, Planning Board	Short-Term	MA Historic Preservation	Volunteer time, PVPC, MHC, Preservation MA, and other preservation plans and programs for reference Seek training and develop an outline by the end of 2021
Historical Commission, Historical Society, Conservation Commission, Recreation Committee, Friends of Shepard Farm	Ongoing	OneStop for Growth (Rural and Small Town Fund), EEA, Preservation Massachusetts	Volunteer time, PVPC Expression of Interest due April 2021
Town of Blandford, Community Preservation Coalition, PVPC	Short-Term	PVPC LTA	Community Preservation Coalition, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, talk to reps from other Western MA towns that have this program in place

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary
D-6	Pursue Cultural District Designation for the Main Street Area between the General Store and Cafe to the Blandford Country Club to include Watson Park. Planning should include consideration for the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) compliance to make Blandford’s historic and cultural resources available to anyone who would like to enjoy them.	Cultural Council
D-7	Establish meetings, at least on a quarterly basis, with representatives from key groups (like the past “All Boards” meetings) and add to public information on related websites to keep stakeholders and residents informed and outline goals through 2030 to foster local, regional, and national partnerships to strengthen Blandford’s existing historic and cultural resources.	Historical Society
D-8	Consider the adoption of a statement affirming celebration of Native American history.	Historical Commission
D-9	Explore national standards for historic preservation and consider their applicability for Blandford.	Historical Commission

## E. COMMUNITY INTERCONNECTIONS AND ROOTS

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary
E-1	<p>Establish mechanisms and policies linking the Resilient Master Plan to staff, board and commission work plans, budgets, and capital projects.</p> <p>a. Sunset the Resilient Master Plan Committee charged with this Master Plan development, replace with Resilient Master Plan Implementation Committee reporting to the Select Board.</p> <p>b. Use the Resilient Master Plan recommendations and implementation table as a guide of decision making.</p> <p>c. Convene an annual all Town Boards, Committees and Commissions Meeting to share progress on implementing the Resilient Master Plan and discussing change of priorities and plans.</p>	Resilient Master Plan Implementation Committee
E-2	Work with residents to promote home occupations and cottage industries within their residential buildings, and provide adequate protections for neighbors as the zoning bylaw allows.	Planning Board
E-3	Explore senior housing development and programs that allow for aging in place, such as an accessory apartment bylaw or other regulatory and non-regulatory tools.	Planning Board
E-4	Support services for seniors, disadvantaged residents, and veterans.	Town Administrator



Others	Priority	Funding	Resources
Blandford Historical Society, Porter Memorial Library, Blandford Fair Committee, Blandford General Store and Café, Blandford Country Club, Recreation Committee	Short-Term	MA Cultural Council funding	Hilltown Mobile Market, Healthy Hampshire (Blandford Walks), Mass Humanities, Mass Cultural Council, look to other Western MA towns that have adopted cultural districts
Historical Commission, Cultural Council, Conservation Commission, Porter Memorial Library Board, Fair Committee	Short-term	Mass Humanities "Revolution Happened Here"	Mass Cultural Council, Revolution 250, Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, Community Foundation of Western MA
Select Board	Ongoing	Local	Volunteers
Historical Society	Ongoing	Local	Volunteers

Others	Priority	Funding	Resources
Select Board, Town Administrator, Planning Board	Ongoing	Local, PBA	Volunteer time, Consultant
Zoning Board of Appeals	Medium-Term	Local, PBA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning
Council on Aging	Medium-Term	Community Development Block Grants; Home Modification Loan Program	Hilltown CDC; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; State and federal
Select Board, Council on Aging	Ongoing	Massachusetts Council on Aging	Volunteers

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary
E-5	Strengthen the programs at the Council on Aging to include continued outreach services, health, nutrition and recreation programs.	Council on Aging
E-6	Provide intergenerational opportunities and space (i.e., a community center) for engagement with school-aged residents and seniors, exploring programming through the school district and other opportunities.	Town Administrator
E-7	Explore opportunities with the FRTA to improve the reliability of existing services and to expand existing Senior Van service in the future.	Town Administrator
E-8	Apply to the Massachusetts Community Transit Grant Program to help support existing volunteer senior and disabled ride services provided in town.	Council on Aging
E-9	Work with surrounding communities and special interest groups to identify opportunities to provide additional senior and disabled ride services in the future.	Council on Aging
E-10	Utilize the results of WalkBoston’s Walk Audit to advance improvements to pedestrian safety and encourage more pedestrian activity.	Town Administrator, Highway Superintendent
E-11	Expand the existing map of walking routes for use by local residents.	Town Administrator
E-12	Improve town outreach and communication to residents for purposes of civic engagement and emergency response preparedness, increasing awareness of Blackboard Connect and other tools.	Town Administrator, Select Board
E-13	Form a local collective that brings together all the institutions of the town center for collaborative problem solving and planning.	Select Board
E-14	Meet MEMA and DPH standards and requirements to make Gateway Regional School and Blandford Town Hall active emergency shelters, including securing backup power. Explore the option of solar generation and battery storage for backup power.	Emergency Management Director, Town Administrator
E-15	Continue to facilitate the installation of Town-wide broadband.	Municipal Light Board



Others	Priority	Funding	Resources	
Select Board, Town Administrator	Ongoing	Massachusetts Council on Aging	Volunteers	
Select Board, Council on Aging	Ongoing	Massachusetts Council on Aging	Gateway Regional High School, Volunteers	
Council on Aging	Medium-Term	Massachusetts Council on Aging, Massachusetts Community Transit Grant Program	FRTA, PVPC, Volunteers	<a href="http://frta.org/#">http://frta.org/#</a>
Town Administrator	Medium-Term	Massachusetts Community Transit Grant Program	MassDOT Rail and Transit Division, Volunteers	<a href="https://www.mass.gov/community-transit-grant-program">https://www.mass.gov/community-transit-grant-program</a>
Town Administrator	Long-Term	Local	Hilltown CDC, Surrounding Communities Councils on Aging	<a href="https://www.ride-connector.org/">https://www.ride-connector.org/</a>
Council on Aging	Ongoing	MassDOT Complete Streets funding	Hilltown CDC, Healthy Hampshire	
Council on Aging	Long-Term	PVPC LTA, DLTA	Hilltown CDC, Healthy Hampshire	
Emergency Management Director	Ongoing	Local, Homeland Security funding	W Region Homeland Security Advisory Council	
Town Administrator	Ongoing	Local Community One Stop for Growth	Gateway Hilltowns, Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee	
Select Board	Short-Term	FEMA/MEMA BRIC, MVP from EOEEA	Volunteer time, American Red Cross	
Town Administrator, Select Board	Ongoing	MA Broadband Initiative	Volunteers	





# Blandford Speaks

## Introduction

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), consultant Barrett Planning Group, and the Resilient Master Plan Committee (RMPC) developed a comprehensive public participation and engagement strategy to encourage ongoing community involvement and participation in the development of the Blandford Resilient Master Plan from October 2020 through June 2021, the period of the COVID-19 pandemic that necessitated virtual engagement. These efforts shaped a plan based on resident input through developing a unifying vision for the future, establishing goals, and prioritizing plan strategies.

Public participation involved a variety of events and outreach methods, including social media updates, the project website, a Town-wide community survey, interviews with interested residents, stakeholder focus groups, meetings of the RMPC, a community-wide visioning session, and an implementation workshop. Chapter authors also participated in other ongoing projects to gather additional input and

ensure that the master plan supported these efforts. Namely, the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) public forum and Walk Audit, both described further in this section, occurred during the development of the Resilient Master Plan and provided opportunities for additional community involvement.

The focus groups, RMPC meetings, and all community-wide meetings/forums were held remotely via Zoom, as the timing of the master planning process was framed within the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Final engagement was conducted via the master plan's Story Map. The Story Map allowed for expanded communication, knowledge sharing, and feedback opportunities. On the website, users could see Town demographics, the Vision Statement, issues and opportunities, and ways to stay in touch. Users could also interact electronically with the site to provide feedback on proposed goal statements and strategies.



*Blandford Resilient Master Plan  
Story Map*



## Opportunities for Engagement

Below is a summary of community engagement by activity as part of the Blandford Resilient Master Plan.

### COMMUNITY SURVEY

An electronic community survey was developed and posted on Survey Gizmo.

The survey was available from mid-January through mid-February 2021.

Paper copies of the survey were mailed to 650 households in Blandford.

A notice with the survey link was posted to the project website, on the Town's website, and through various social media platforms such as Facebook.

Reminders to complete the community survey were communicated through short TikTok videos and posted on the project website.

Presenters reminded the audience to participate in the survey during the Visioning Session by presenting the survey link and QR Code.

### Who responded?

Of 170 total respondents:

- 67% have lived in Blandford more than 20 years
- 52% are working, of those working 52% worked in the area
- 96% own their homes
- 62% of respondents have identified their household as a couple



### Top 3 Reasons for Living in Blandford

1. Small-Town Atmosphere (78%)
2. Open Space (75%)
3. Low Crime Rate (44%)

### Support for Strategies to Address Future Growth

- Adopt zoning to protect agricultural lands (81%)
- Continue to educate landowners about options for permanently protecting land and preserve Blandford's open spaces in perpetuity (74%)
- Create new active recreational resources such as horseback riding trails, etc. (70%)

### Land Use

#### Top 5 land uses that residents view as important

1. Forest and wildlife (92%)
2. Working farms/farm stands (80%)
3. Water quality and resources (65%)
4. Open space for scenic value (63%)
5. Spaces for recreational use (61%)

### Housing

#### Top 5 Preferred Types of Residential Growth

1. Single Family Homes (81%)
  2. Senior Housing (independent or assisted living) (42%)
  3. Accessory Apartments (25%)
  4. Housing that is accessible for people with disabilities (22%)
  5. Duplex Homes (10%)
- 59 percent of respondents do not believe there is enough housing for seniors of varying incomes and abilities.
  - 33 percent of respondents strongly support/support planned affordable housing.

### Desired Change Over Next Ten Years



### Economic Development

#### Top 5 Things that residents want to see more of

1. Recreation (50%)
2. Musical events (49%)
3. Restaurants (46%)
4. Neighborhood stores/boutiques (41%)
5. Art in public spaces (31%)

### Open Space, Recreation

#### Top 5 Activities that residents participate in and enjoy in Town

1. Bird/nature watching (64%)
2. Walking (on roads) (61%)
3. Snowshoeing (58%)
4. Dog walking (56%)
5. Hunting (52%)

#### Top 5 Activities that residents participate in and enjoy elsewhere

1. Swimming (75%)
2. Motorized boating (68%)
3. Non-motorized boating (67%)
4. Ice skating (54%)
5. Playing team sports (51%)





## Community Survey Analysis

- Residents are not inclined to support multi-unit housing styles, which can address housing availability for younger families, singles, and seniors.
- Opportunities should be provided for small businesses to land in the Blandford Town center.
- Residents really want to see more community events, utilizing venues like the Town Hall Gym or White Church.
- Land owned by Springfield Water and Sewer Commission has limited access to Cobble Mountain Reservoir for Blandford residents – an amenity that was enjoyed prior to September 11, 2001.
- Nature and a low population have drawn people to Blandford to live.

## COMMUNITY VISIONING SESSION

**February 4, 2021**  
**6:00 – 8:00 PM**  
**Virtual Zoom Visioning Session**  
**Attendance: 22 people**

This February 4, 2021 virtual visioning session was advertised as follows:

- A Notice of the Virtual Zoom Visioning Session was posted on the project website homepage, on the Town's website, and on various social media platforms;
- Posters and flyers were placed throughout Town, at the Town Hall (not open to the public), transfer station, post office, and other meeting places;
- Reminders to participate in the Visioning Session were communicated through short, fun TikTok videos;
- Email reminders were sent to RMPC members to advertise the event; and
- An article and press release were written and published in The Reminder.

PVPC, Barrett Planning Group, and the RMPC facilitated a visioning session that drew twenty-two participants at the height of the meeting. A short presentation was provided at the beginning to introduce the team, describe the Master Plan process, discuss the importance of visioning, and outline how the process and implementation phases will be conducted. Additional context regarding prior planning efforts was presented to attendees, noting their findings and their importance to informing the current Resilient Master Plan. An initial polling exercise allowed for interactive input prior to breaking into smaller group sessions to do a deeper dive on. The polling summary is on the next page.



Screenshot of Participants from February 4, 2021  
Virtual Zoom Visioning Session



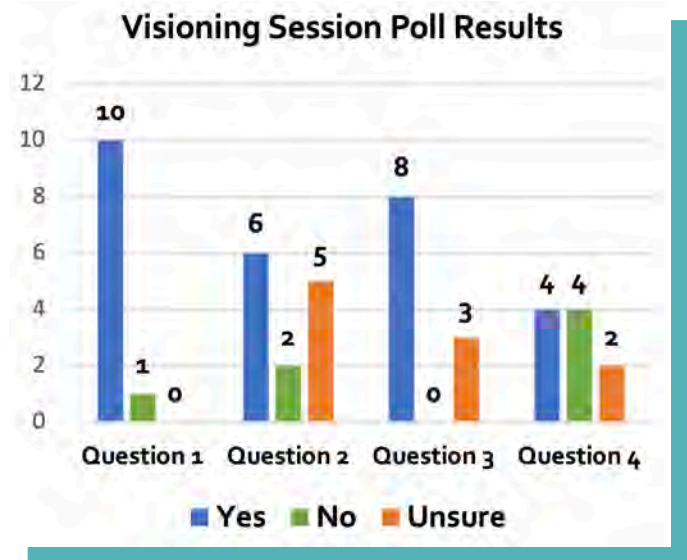
Following the initial presentation, participants were assigned to two breakout group sessions with eleven people per group, including a group discussion leader and group note-taker who facilitated a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis via Padlet. Discussion leaders then took 15 minutes upon reconvening to review what their breakout groups discussed and address any outstanding questions or comments. General breakout comments shared similarities to those shared in the community survey and other committee meetings. Some examples of such comments include, “The library is a great strength,” “The Turnpike can be both an opportunity and a threat,” “The potential of the fairgrounds is a great opportunity,” and “Broadband expansion and access are important for the future of Blandford.” A complete Visioning Summary can be found in the Appendix.

**Question 1:** Create low-cost and preventative mitigation measures against natural hazards that are likely to increase in intensity as the effects of climate change grow.

**Question 2:** Make Blandford a more inclusive and viable location to live while retaining the rural quality of the Town.

**Question 3:** Preserve and protect watersheds, establish scenic roads, and continue communication with Springfield Water & Sewer.

**Question 4:** Create a Mixed-Use Development Bylaw (try again), prepare an Affordable Housing Zoning Bylaw, and promote Blandford for vacations, retirement, and recreation.



## FOCUS GROUPS

Virtual focus groups were conducted over a span of three days via Zoom, from March 2-4, 2021. The focus groups were conducted to invite stakeholders, interested residents, and Town staff to comment on and respond to questions related to required Master Plan element. They were completed in four sessions:

1. Cultural, Historic, Natural, Open Space Resources on March 2, 2021
2. Transportation and Public Facilities & Services on March 3, 2021
3. Housing and Economic Development on March 4, 2021
4. Climate Change Resilience and Clean Energy on March 4, 2021

Additional comments can be found in the Appendix section of this Plan.

### *Climate Change and Clean Energy*

Some highlights presented in this focus group include:

- Remote lifestyles have resulted in challenges.
- Climate-related issues:
  - o Power outages and Eversource has a poor response time
  - o Slower response times with tornadoes

## ***Cultural, Historic, Natural, Open Space Resources***

Some highlights presented in this focus group include:

- Residents want White Church, fairgrounds, open space and rural character preserved.
- Blandford Walks map is well-received as a resource for recreation activity.
- Springfield Water and Sewer Commission land is highly contentious. The Town should work to reclaim public spaces it was once afforded prior to 9/11.
- Turnpike exit remains contentious, and it will continue to be an issue but possibly an opportunity.
- More communication between boards is critical.
- Library and Historical Society's resources are strong and remain an asset.
- The Town doesn't want to compete with other regional draws but also doesn't want to be a "cultural wasteland."
- Many different potential reasons to be drawn to Blandford depending on interest – genealogical interests, views, open space, interest in Native American history, etc.
- The most remarkable thing about the Town is the amount of open space and undeveloped land.

## ***Transportation and Public Facilities & Services***

Some highlights presented in this focus group include:

- If one wanted to do a tour of Blandford that only allowed one leg by car, parking at the post office and walking from there makes sense – a lot to see between Watson Park, general store, White Church, library, etc.
- Complaints people hear:
  - Springfield Water and Sewer Commission land cut off from walking
  - Length of time it takes to get to any major store (But! "It's a trade-off people choose" when they move to Blandford.)
  - Rt 23 – sightline issues for cyclists
- COA vehicle donation is a strength for a Town that can be celebrated for its seniors.
- Expansion of the passenger rail west/east in Chester would be great.
- Heavy reliance on the Town Administrator, we don't want him to get stretched too thin; the Town needs a Chief Financial Officer and more Capital Planning.
- Reliance on volunteers is both a strength and a weakness. (Fire Department only has one paid person, and people are not volunteering as much as they used to)
- Town record keeping and archiving are essential.
- Improvements could be made to the parking area to increase walkability.

## ***Housing and Economic Development***

Some highlights presented in this focus group include:

- Seniors want to stay here but cannot downsize and it is hard to maintain large lots – perhaps this needs a review.
- Possibilities discussed include a smaller connected community for senior homes, including maintenance or condos.
- Drainage, setup, lack of infrastructure, and environmental constraints are ongoing issues.
- Demand for businesses is dwindling and impacting prices and availability.
- Business models for agriculture:
  - Ripley's blueberry farm
  - Maple Corner Farm
  - Jelly operation by Mennonites
  - Other opportunities: mountain bike park, transform ski areas in the summer
- Blandford needs to build on what it has, but if it's not generating a profit, it's not worth it.

- In the event of an emergency, the community comes together, and the senior needs are prioritized – a strong sense of comradery and mobilization in an emergency situation.
- An emergency management strategy would include having a checklist in place with neighboring towns.
- Maintenance of the water system and water lines takes priority.
- An emergency management strategy would be restarting and having a checklist in place with neighboring Towns.
  - Need a professional staff member to help with emergency management.
- We have a “take care of it attitude”
- Trimming trees is an “ongoing/losing battle;” they are growing higher than the tree line.
- The Master Plan effort has a climate change twist, and Blandford needs to utilize diverse resources to mitigate these issues:
  - Need to incorporate “cool” strategies into this plan
  - Natural resources need to be tied into the plan
  - Need to have a positive twist
  - Blandford needs to make conscious decisions
  - Capacity needs to be managed in combination with other efforts

## IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOP

**May 8, 2021**  
**10:00 – 12:00 PM**  
**Virtual Zoom Visioning Session**  
**Attendance: 15 people**

This May 8, 2021 virtual visioning session was advertised as follows:

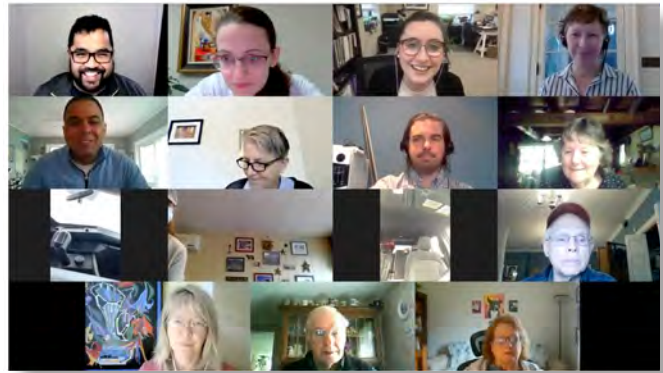
- A Notice of the Virtual Zoom Implementation Workshop was posted on the project website homepage, on the Town’s website, and on various social media platforms;
- Posters and flyers were placed throughout Town, and at the Town Hall (not open to the public);
- Flyers were distributed during the Walk Audit;
- Reminders were made to attendees of the OSRP Community Meeting;
- Reminders to participate in the Workshop were communicated through TikTok videos; and
- Multiple email blasts were sent to RMPC members and Town staff.
- Additionally, residents were encouraged to participate with an offer for a free breakfast from the Blandford Country Store and with a photo contest opportunity.
- An option was also to invite seniors and those residents who did not have computer and internet access to have a remote setup at the Town Offices. No one responded to that offer.





The Implementation Workshop was also facilitated by PVPC, Barrett Planning Group, and the RMPC. A presentation by the meeting host thanked the attendees for coming, gave an overview of the Master Plan's progress thus far, and invited participants to engage in a Word Cloud exercise where they shared their top wishes for Plan's outcomes.

Following the Word Cloud, attendees were assigned to two breakout rooms to review proposed plan recommendations and strategies for each chapter element. The breakout groups were approximately 75 minutes long and proved to be a great opportunity to discuss any final comments and questions before the finalization of the implementation phase. There were two breakout group sessions with roughly 11 people per group, including consultants and staff. As was the case for the Visioning Session, each breakout group included a discussion leader and a note-taker. Upon reconvening as a larger group, a polling exercise was launched to determine the top 3 recommendations for each topic. The results of the polling exercise are shown below, although it is important to note that each question only had 11-12 responses.



Screenshot of Participants from May 8, 2021  
Virtual Zoom Implementation Workshop

**WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THIS PLAN?**



Plan Element	Top Recommendations by Participant Support
Historic & Cultural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate reuse of Shepard Farm - applying to Rural and Small-Town Fund. <b>(100%)</b></li> <li>• Consider adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA). <b>(73%)</b></li> <li>• Pursue a Center Cultural District Designation for Main Street. <b>(64%)</b></li> </ul>
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate a more robust conversation with Ski Blandford owners to understand how the Town might support a mountain biking park. <b>(64%)</b></li> <li>• Meet with trail advocates in other towns to begin identifying how connections could be made for longer walking journeys. <b>(55%)</b></li> <li>• Advocate for PILOT payment revenue that adequately compensates for the full value of protected open space. <b>(45%)</b></li> </ul>
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore opportunities to provide additional rides for seniors and disabled residents in addition to the Town's volunteer service. <b>(75%)</b></li> <li>• Monitor pavement conditions and advance maintenance and improvement projects based on the 2020 Pavement Management Study. <b>(67%)</b></li> <li>• Adopt a Complete Streets Policy and developing a Prioritization Plan. <b>(58%)</b></li> </ul>
Facilities & Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move Fire Dept. operations to the current Highway Dept. building. <b>(45%)</b></li> <li>• Complete a feasibility study for a new Highway Dept. building and salt shed. <b>(45%)</b></li> <li>• Support service and capital improvements for operations. <b>(36%)</b></li> </ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore senior housing development and programs to allow aging in place. <b>(100%)</b></li> <li>• Adopt Low Impact Development standards for new residential development. <b>(64%)</b></li> <li>• Explore the benefits of adopting an Accessory Apartment (in-law) Zoning Bylaw. <b>(45%)</b></li> </ul>
Open Space & Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate planning with Springfield around Cobble Mountain Reservoir and Long Pond Reservoir to increase access and build trust. <b>(100%)</b></li> <li>• Implement a comprehensive strategy for protecting watersheds. <b>(42%)</b></li> <li>• Maintain 7-year updates to the OSRP. <b>(33%)</b></li> <li>• Review subdivision regulations and evaluating performance for sensitive natural areas. <b>(33%)</b></li> </ul>
Sustainability & Climate Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet MEMA and DPH standards to make the Gateway Regional School and Town Hall emergency shelters. <b>(64%)</b></li> <li>• Conduct a culvert inventory, mapping flooding, and prioritizing maintenance. <b>(55%)</b></li> <li>• Adopt the Green Infrastructure and Climate Resiliency Policy. <b>(36%)</b></li> <li>• Work with PVPC on Green Communities funding to develop a net-zero action plan. <b>(36%)</b></li> <li>• Apply for grants to make municipal buildings/vehicles energy efficient. <b>(36%)</b></li> </ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt a Town Center Overlay District to create incentives for mixed-use that are in character with the Town's existing look and feel. <b>(67%)</b></li> <li>• Strengthen the Site Plan Review Bylaw to include design guidelines. <b>(42%)</b></li> <li>• Explore open space residential development/cluster housing bylaw. <b>(42%)</b></li> <li>• Promote home occupations and cottage industries. <b>(42%)</b></li> </ul>

Presenters then showcased the Story Map website and explained how to interact with the site before displaying the winner of the photo contest. The Implementation Workshop produced a turnout of 15 public attendees in total. Comments were used to further refine recommendations following the Implementation Workshop.





98  
The Blandford Country Store

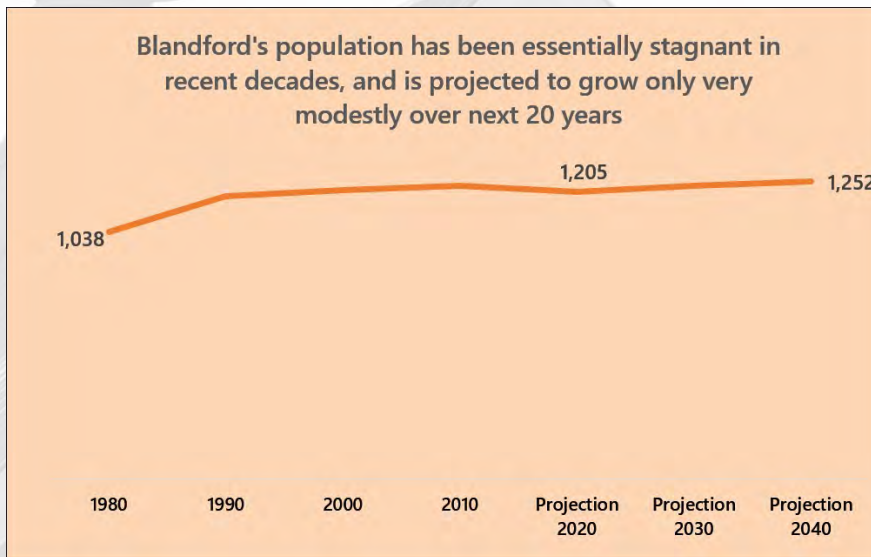
OPEN

Coffee

Call in Orders  
413-848-2800

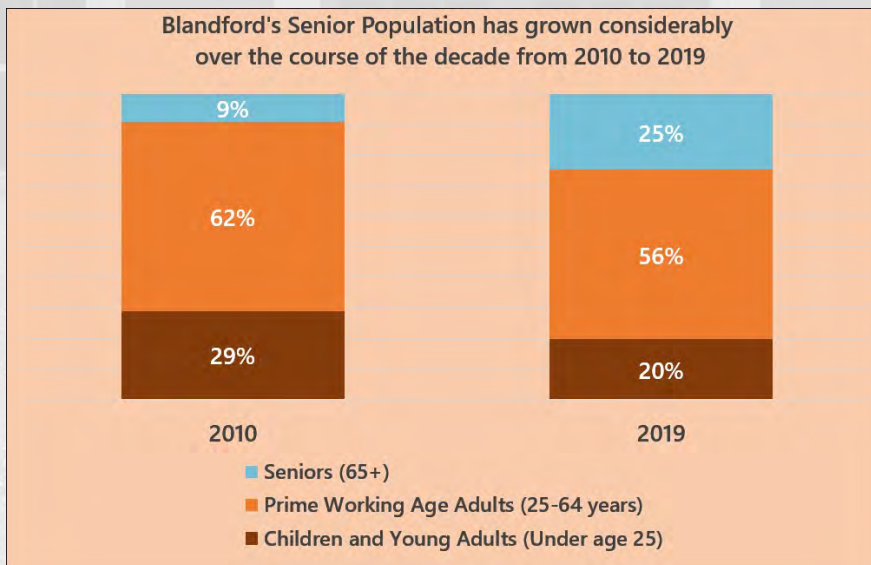


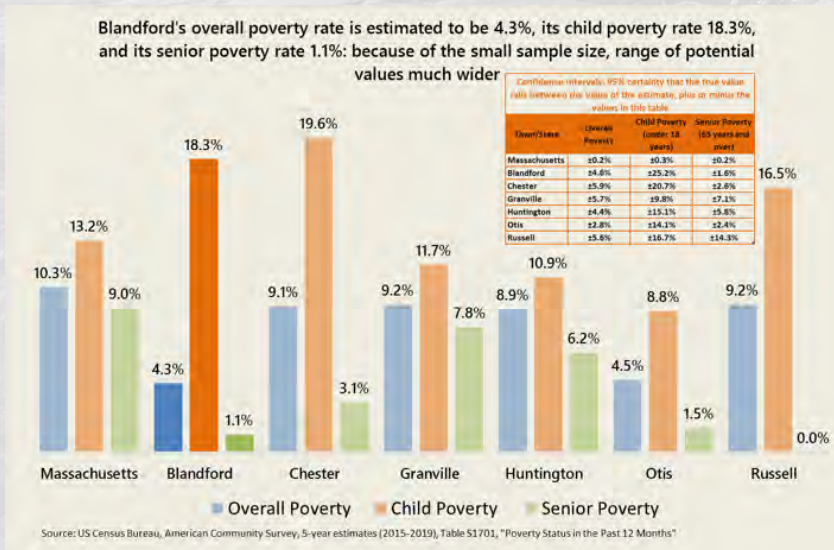
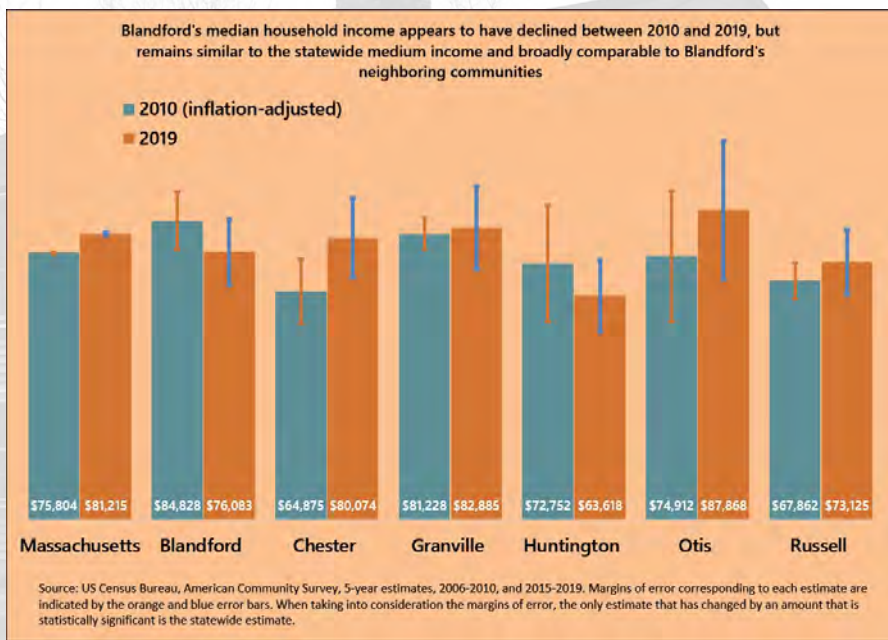
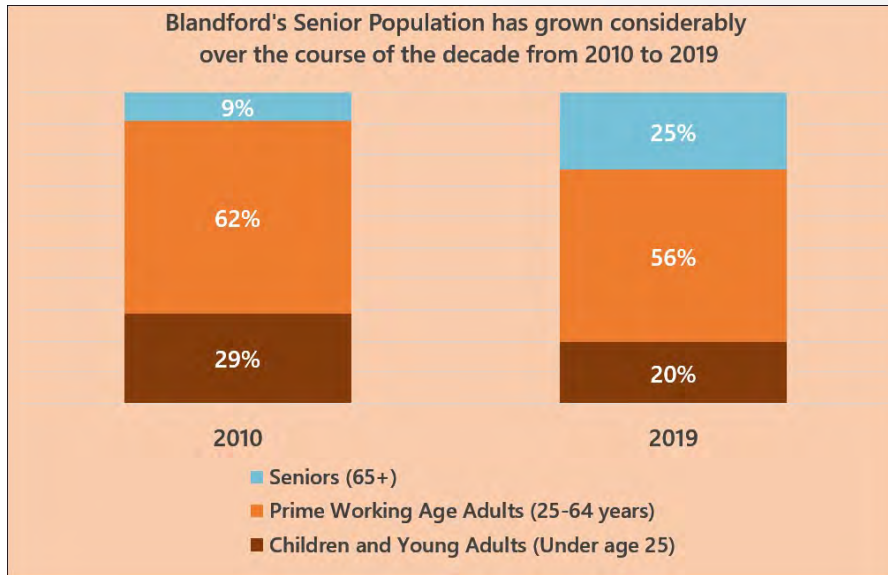
# Baseline Data



**Blandford's population is stagnant (at best) and remains almost entirely White, Non-Hispanic**

	Blandford 2010 (#)	Blandford 2010 (%)	Blandford 2019 (#)	Blandford 2019 (%)
Total	1184	100%	1105	100%
White, Not Hispanic (NH)	1155	98%	1074	97%
Black or African American (NH)	0	0%	0	0%
Asian (NH)	13	1%	0	0%
Hispanic or Latino	13	1%	18	2%
Other, Including American Indian and Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and two or more races (NH)	3	0%	13	1%





### 2021 FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES

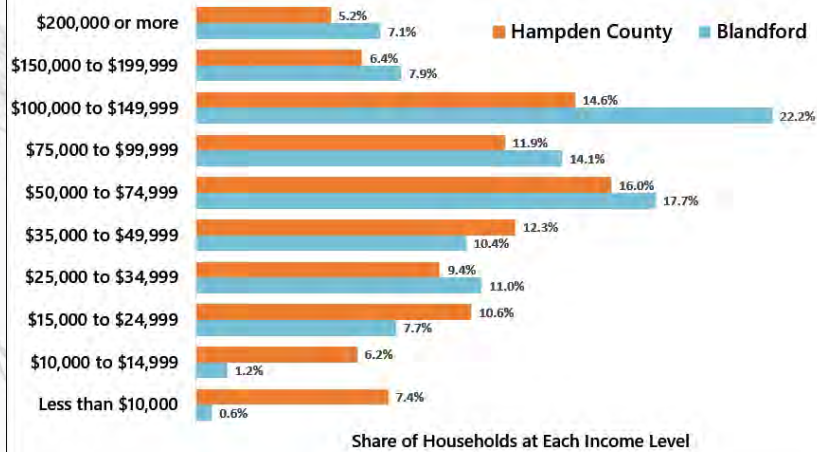
PERSONS IN FAMILY/HOUSEHOLD	POVERTY GUIDELINE
1	\$12,880
2	\$17,420
3	\$21,960
4	\$26,500
5	\$31,040
6	\$35,580

Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>

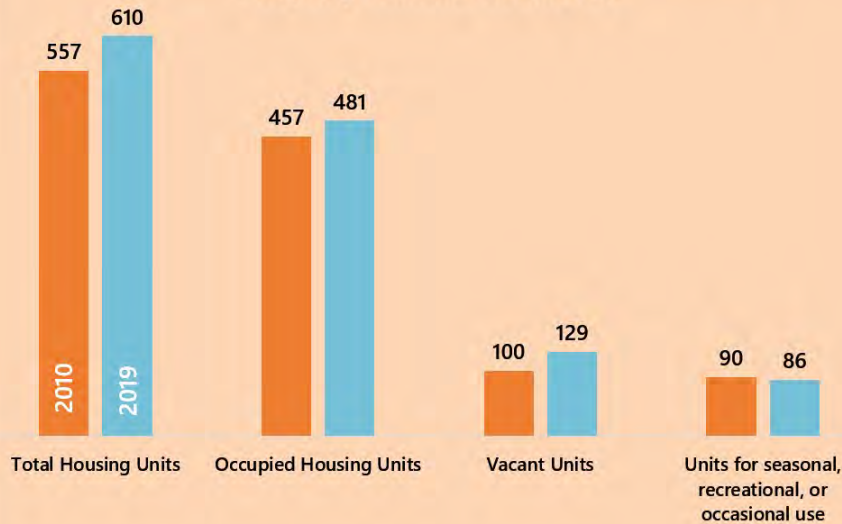
Individuals (and children) in poverty include all people living in households with incomes below the federal poverty level.



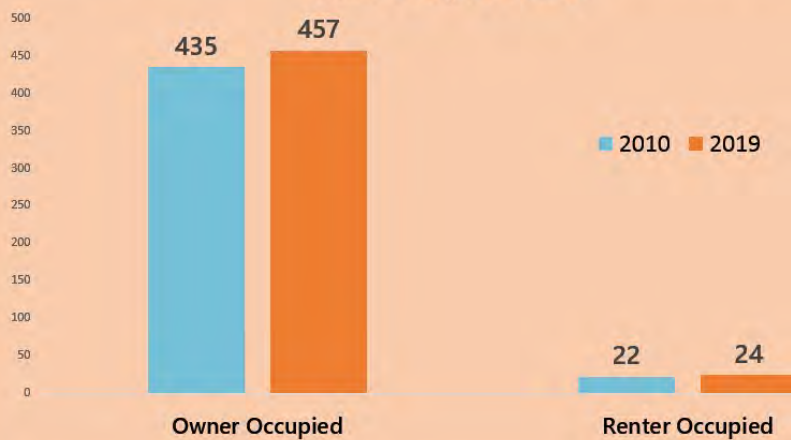
Nearly Four in Ten (37.2%) Blandford Households have incomes of \$100,000 or more, compared to 26.2% of all households in Hampden County



Blandford adds housing units and maintains similar patterns of occupancy between 2010 and 2019

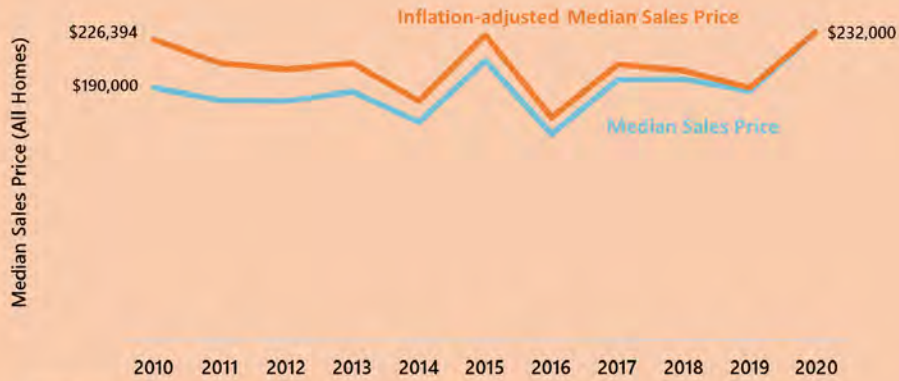


Blandford's housing stock continues to consist predominantly of owner-occupied homes





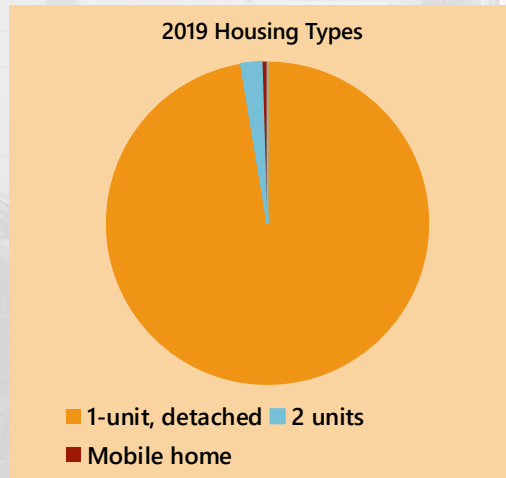
The small number of annual home sales in Blandford can result in substantial fluctuations from one year to the next; 24% increase in median single family home sales price in 2020 compared with 2019



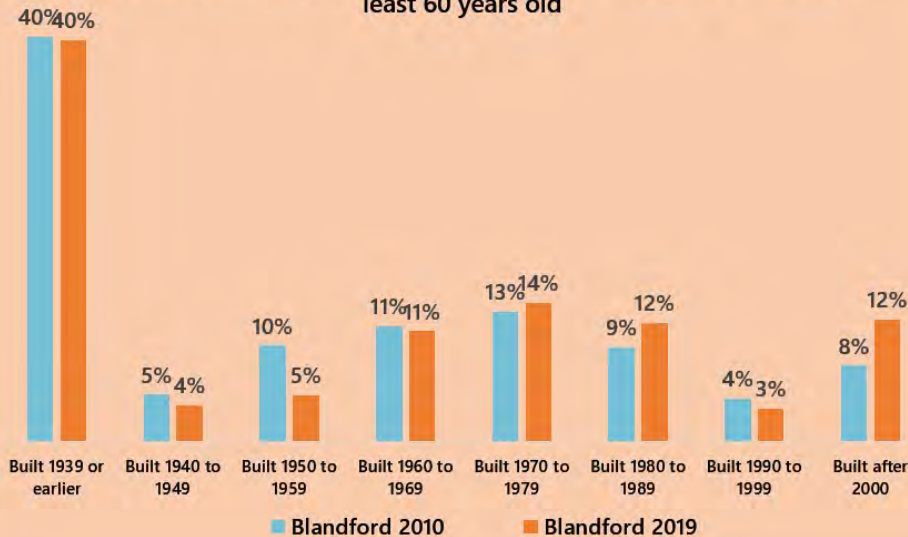
Source: The Warren Group, 2021. Data downloaded from [www.pioneervalleydata.org](http://www.pioneervalleydata.org)

### Single unit detached homes continue to account for the vast majority of Blandford's housing (97.4%)

Units in Blandford Housing Structures: 2010 & 2019	2010	2019
Total housing units	557	610
1-unit, detached	520	594
1-unit, attached	11	0
2 units	13	13
3 or 4 units	3	0
5 to 9 units	6	0
10 to 19 units	0	0
20 or more units	0	0
Mobile home	4	3
Boat, RV, van, etc.	0	0



### Blandford's housing stock continues to age: nearly half (48%) is at least 60 years old





**Blandford's Labor Force had been growing slowly until COVID19 hit hard in April 2020**



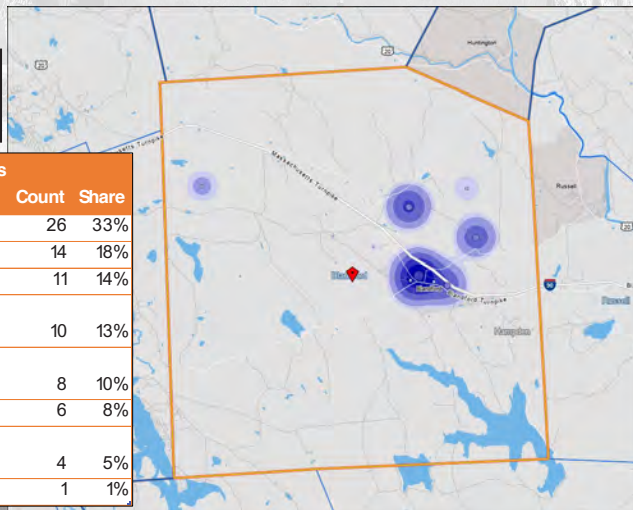
**Blandford's unemployment rate had been trending generally downward until COVID19 hit hard in April, 2020; 7.0% unemployment rate in February 2021 signals lingering effects of the COVID recession**



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS).

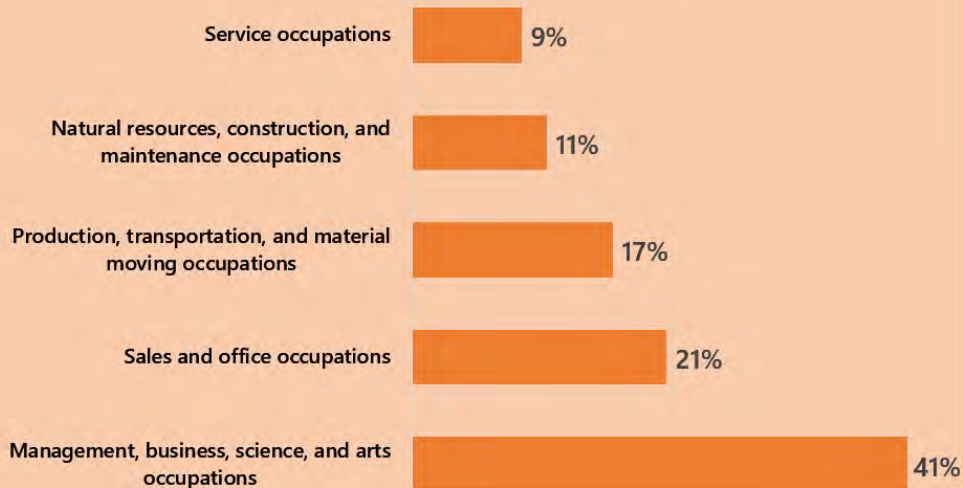
**What do we know about Blandford Jobs?**

Industry Sectors Employing Workers in Blandford	Count	Share
Public Administration	26	33%
Retail Trade	14	18%
Construction	11	14%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	10	13%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	8	10%
Health Care and Social Assistance	6	8%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	4	5%
Wholesale Trade	1	1%





### Four in ten Blandford residents are employed in management, business, science, and arts occupations



### One in four Blandford residents are employed in the educational services, health care and social assistance sectors; one in five in manufacturing



### What do we know about Blandford Jobs? Blandford workers commute elsewhere; Blandford jobs filled by workers from elsewhere



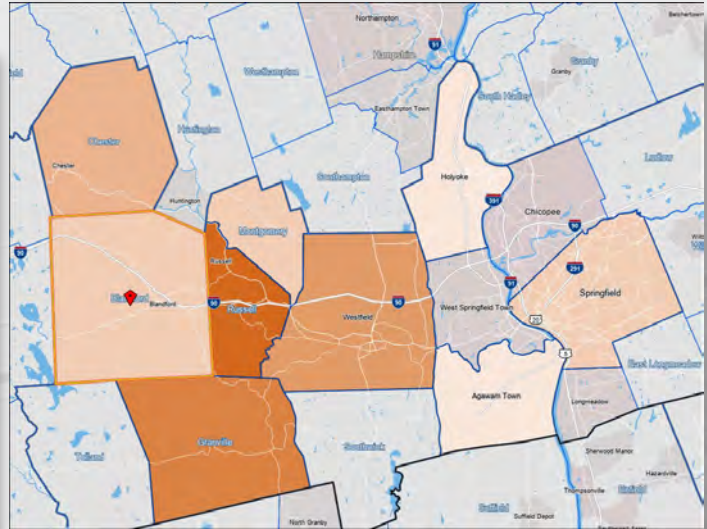
	#	Share
<b>Blandford Based Jobs</b>		
Workers Employed in Blandford	80	100%
Workers employed in Blandford but living outside Blandford	77	96.2%
Workers living and working in Blandford	3	3.8%
<b>Jobs of Blandford Residents</b>		
Workers living in Blandford	661	100%
Blandford residents working outside Blandford	658	99.5%
Blandford residents working in Blandford	3	0.5%



## Where do Blandford workers live?

### Jobs Counts by County Subdivisions Where Workers Live - All Jobs

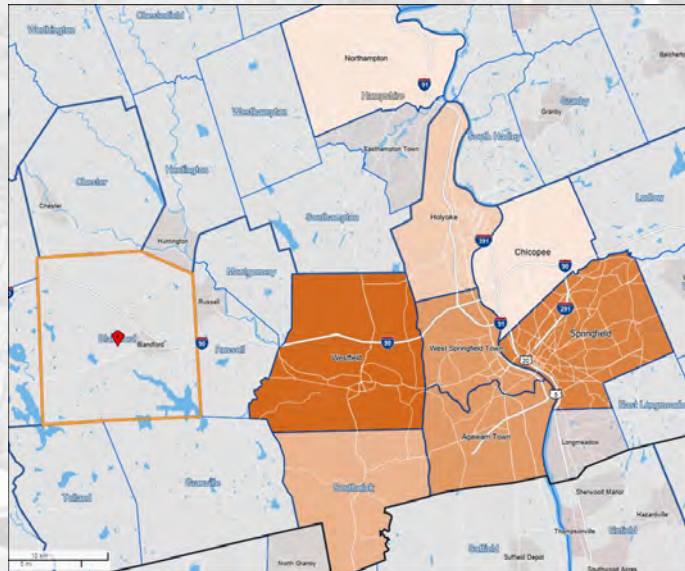
	2018	
	Count	Share
All County Subdivisions	80	100.0%
Russell town (Hampden, MA)	11	13.8%
Granville town (Hampden, MA)	10	12.5%
Westfield city (Hampden, MA)	7	8.8%
Chester town (Hampden, MA)	6	7.5%
Blandford town (Hampden, MA)	3	3.8%
Montgomery town (Hampden, MA)	3	3.8%
Springfield city (Hampden, MA)	3	3.8%
Vernon town (Tolland, CT)	2	2.5%
Agawam Town city (Hampden, MA)	2	2.5%
Holyoke city (Hampden, MA)	2	2.5%
All Other Locations	31	38.8%



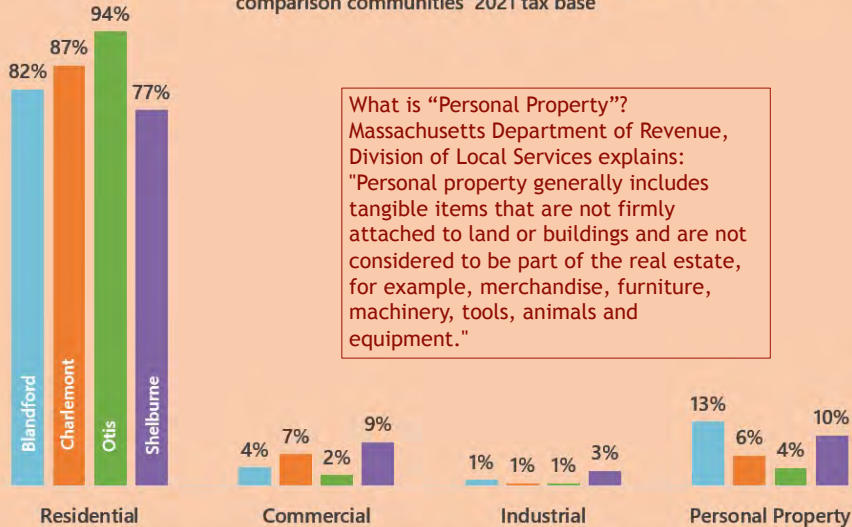
## Where do Blandford residents work?

### Jobs Counts by County Subdivisions Where Workers are Employed - All Jobs

	2018	
	Count	Share
All County Subdivisions	661	100.0%
Westfield city (Hampden, MA)	94	14.2%
Springfield city (Hampden, MA)	56	8.5%
Agawam Town city (Hampden, MA)	24	3.6%
West Springfield Town city (Hampden, MA)	24	3.6%
Southwick town (Hampden, MA)	22	3.3%
Holyoke city (Hampden, MA)	21	3.2%
Chicopee city (Hampden, MA)	16	2.4%
Northampton city (Hampshire, MA)	16	2.4%
Boston city (Suffolk, MA)	16	2.4%
Worcester city (Worcester, MA)	16	2.4%
All Other Locations	356	53.9%



### Assessed value of residential property comprises majority of Blandford's and its comparison communities' 2021 tax base

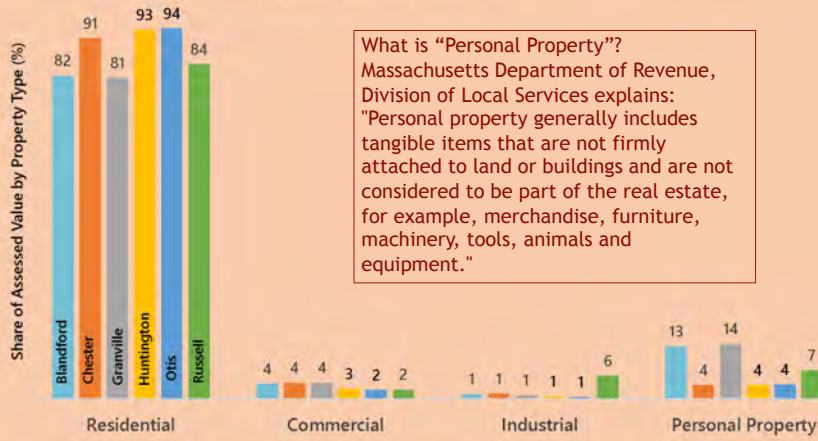


What is "Personal Property"?  
 Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services explains:  
 "Personal property generally includes tangible items that are not firmly attached to land or buildings and are not considered to be part of the real estate, for example, merchandise, furniture, machinery, tools, animals and equipment."

Neither Blandford nor its comparison communities have any Open Space land assessed as taxable property.



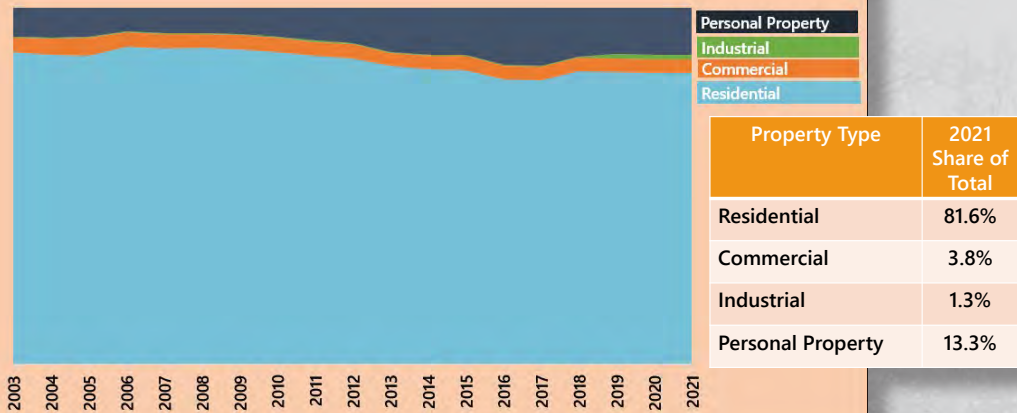
Assessed value of residential property comprises majority of Blandford's and its neighboring communities' 2021 tax base



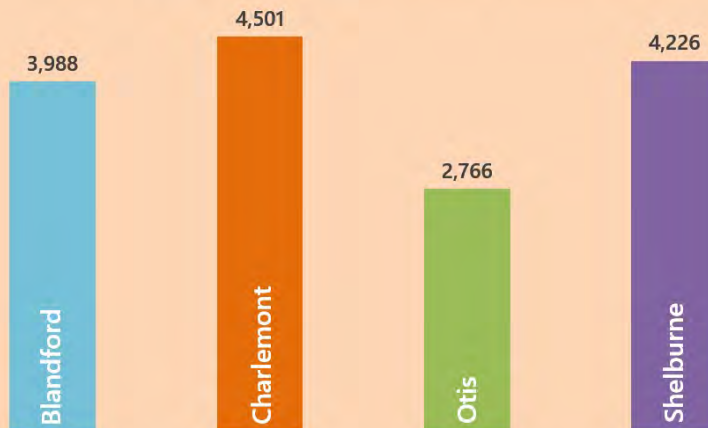
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 for example, merchandise, furniture,  
 machinery, tools, animals and  
 equipment."

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Service, Data Analytics and Resources Bureau,  
<https://dls.gateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=PropertyTaxInformation.AssessedValuesbyClass.assessedvaluesbyclass&rdScrollX=0&rdScrollY=0>

Since 2003, Personal Property's Share of Assessed Land in Blandford has increased

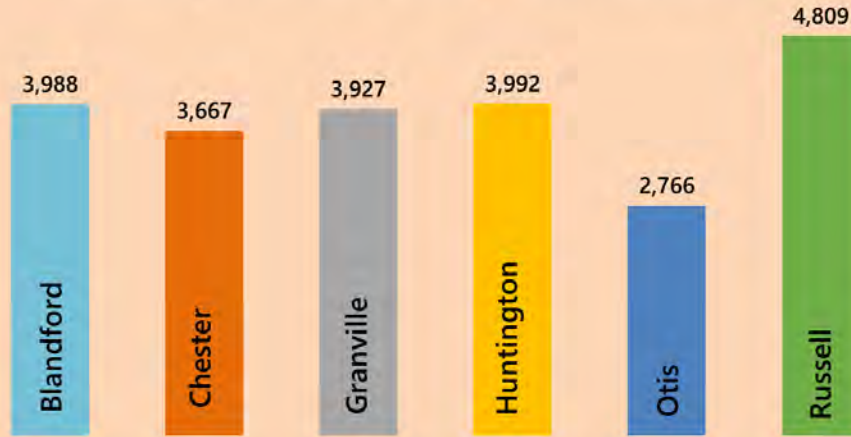


Blandford's 2021 average single family tax bill compares favorably with most of its comparison communities



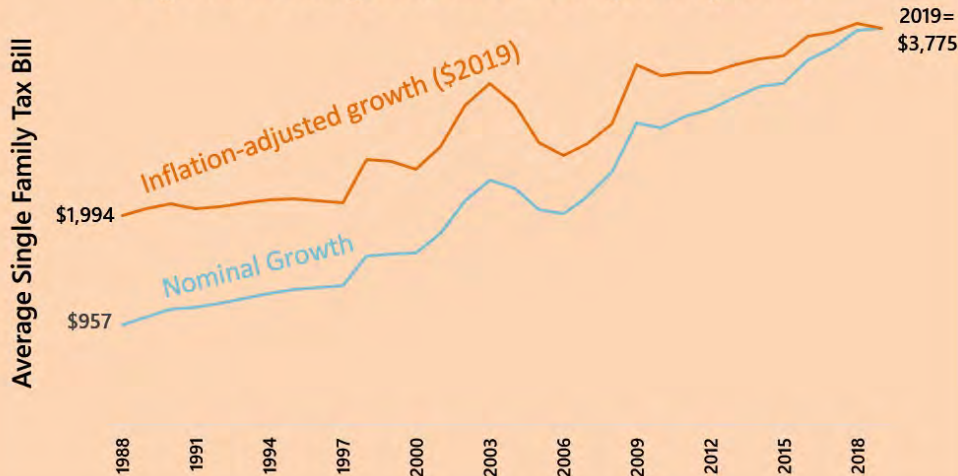


**Blandford's 2021 average single family tax bill compares favorably with most of its comparison communities**



Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Service, Data Analytics and Resources Bureau, [https://dls.gateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=AverageSingleTaxBill.SingleFamTaxBill\\_wRange](https://dls.gateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=AverageSingleTaxBill.SingleFamTaxBill_wRange)

**Even when adjusted for inflation, Blandford has been expanding its tax revenues over the course of the past 30+ years, as reflected in growth in average local tax bill for single family homes**



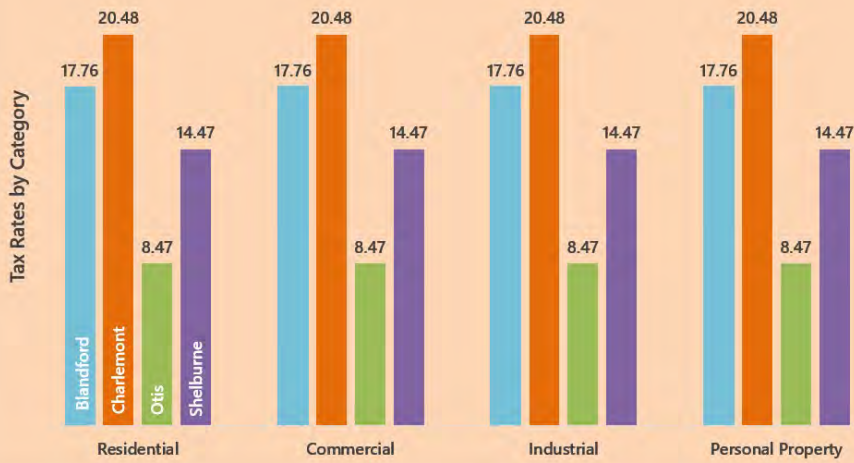
**After peaking in 2010, revenues lost to tax-exempt lands has declined**



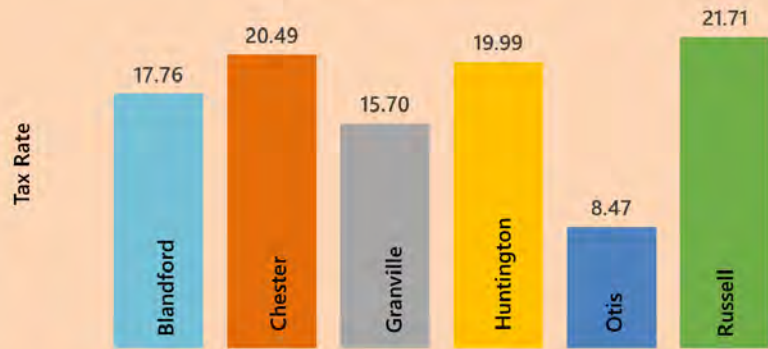
Fiscal Year	Nominal Value of Exempt Land
2004	8,276,900
2005	10,396,900
2006	33,519,500
2007	27,938,000
2008	28,591,900
2009	28,122,300
2010	38,181,300
2011	36,804,500
2012	36,893,100
2013	33,438,900
2014	32,614,200
2015	32,941,300
2016	32,514,600
2017	32,849,900
2018	32,849,900
2019	29,913,200
2020	29,982,900
2021	30,411,400



Blandford's 2021 tax rates are lower than those in Charlemont, but higher than in Otis and Shelburne



Compared to its neighboring communities, Blandford's 2021 tax rates fall in the bottom half, lower than those in Chester, Huntington, and Russell, and higher than those in Granville and Otis



Unlike some Massachusetts communities, Blandford and its neighboring towns have the same tax rate for all property types.  
 Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Service, Data Analytics and Resources Bureau,  
<https://dls.gateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=PropertyTaxInformation.AssessedValuesByClass.assessedvaluesbyclass&rdScrollX=0&rdScrollY=0>

Blandford's mill rate in 2021 (17.76, or 1.776%) is the highest level it has been (since at least 2003), climbing steadily from the low of 10.00 in 2006



Blandford has consistently had the same tax rate for all classes of property.



# Acknowledgements

The Town of Blandford is very grateful to the Resilient Master Plan Committee for their work overseeing the development of Blandford's first Resilient Master Plan.

## Resilient Master Plan Committee

Chair - Mary Kronholm, Trustee, Library & Assistant Town Clerk

Vice Chair - Joann Martin, Town Administrator Assistant, Recreation Committee

Chips Norcross, Historical Society

Bob Kidd, Historical Society

David Hopson, School Superintendent, Town Moderator

Peter Langmore, Municipal Light Board

Pat Daviau, Council on Aging

Doug Emo, Maintenance of Wason Memorial Park, Veteran

Edna Wilander, Planning Board Vice Chair

Paul Martin, Treasurer, Planning Board

Margit Milkuski, Director Council on Aging

Linda Barnard, Historic Society & Commission

Cara Letendre, Selectboard Chair

Davod Mottor, Fire Chief

Judith Mackinnon, Council on Aging Chair

Nicole Daviau, Library Director

TJ Cousineau, Cemetery Commission

Sonja Hutchins, Zoning Board of Appeals

Jen Girard, Board of Health

Rene Senecal, Highway Superintendent

Gordon Avery, Water Superintendent

Joshua Garcia, Town Administrator

The Resilient Master Plan committee thanks the many residents who participated in the plan development process, completing surveys, attending focus groups, and attending the Visioning and Implementation workshops.

Thanks to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant program for funding assistance to support the development of Blandford's Resilient Master Plan. Thanks also to the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and the Barrett Planning Group for their assistance facilitating development of this important plan.





photo credits

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AGRICULTURAL  
HALL 1869

Peter Langmore  
Chips Norcross  
Deborah Lundgren  
Joshua Garcia  
Shelia Reynolds  
Todd Zukowski  
Blandford Historical Society

# Appendix







## LAND USE ELEMENT TECHNICAL PAPER

Land use is the hub of a master plan, with the other elements acting as critical spokes. The land use element of a master plan provides a framework for growth management and an understanding of the kinds of development the community wants balanced with the existing physical and regulatory environment. 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. All are important, and land use is the element that ties them all together.

Additionally, land use is often equated with zoning because a master plan's future land use map forms the basis for the town's key zoning policies. Land is divided into zones for specific uses and is managed and administered by the municipal land use regulations, policies and procedures.

### *Defining Blandford's Landscape*

Blandford is a rural community of 53.5 square miles located in the Berkshire Hills of western Hampden County. Made up of rolling hills, elevations throughout town range widely as it overlooks the Connecticut River Valley. The town is bordered by Chester and Huntington to the north, Tolland and Granville to the south, Russell to the east, and Beckett and Otis, of Berkshire County, to the west. There are three zoning districts, Agricultural, Residential and Business Districts, which govern the development throughout the town. Additionally, there are two overlay districts, known as the Floodplain and Long Pond Watershed Protection Overlay Districts, which encompasses floodplain areas within the town designated as Zone A or AE on the Hampden County Flood Insurance Rate Map, and lands lying adjacent to Long Pond, respectively. The town has recently approved at least six solar projects as many communities in Western Massachusetts have had to contend with solar development; however, other growth pressure is minimal due to the hardships of development on land in Blandford. It is important to Blandford to explore ways and regulations to protect the rural character of the community from inappropriate development.

Route 23 is the spine of Blandford, but also provides the node where the town center is established. The town center envelops a cluster of well-preserved and refined examples of historic architectural styles, including colonial structures and a notable Greek Revivalist church. The newer development is primarily suburban-style homes, which have peppered the landscape, providing the juxtaposition for a town navigating new development. However, outside of the business and residential zoning districts, the land is sparsely settled, with agricultural operations and undisturbed, forested open space creating a traditional rural New England environment. The town's agricultural industry, tourism and recreational assets are well-defined throughout the town.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an inventory of existing land use patterns, an analysis of zoning, regulations, as well as a summary of projected and future development trends; it will draw on other plan elements and identify opportunities to address growth and preservation. The conclusion of this section lays out recommendations for zoning changes, conservation efforts, management tools and other implementation techniques designed to assist Blandford in implementing its vision for future land use.

## INVENTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

Figure 1 is the most recent data for land use type prepared by MassGIS and mapped in Map 1 represented by the Property Type Classification Code associated with “use codes” from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, along with custom use codes that the Assessors’ Office includes in their parcel data when submitted to the state. It is important to note from this data will continue to be collected and presented in this way to determine land use.

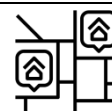
According to Figure 2-1, and making the determination that residential development, commercial and industrial land make up of 5,083.64 total acres, with an additional 2,564.76 acres under *Mixed Use, primarily residential*, along with acreage from right-of-way to cover roadways and the interstate, suggest that the remaining lands are made up of the forest, recreational, agricultural, water lands – the lands that the town prizes and wants to preserve. These remaining lands are equivalent to three-quarters of Blandford that provides the town with opportunities to preserve and maximize for purposes of natural and recreational enjoyment.

While the town maintains a quiet, rural atmosphere, there has been lost acreage to development over time, such as solar development. With Blandford’s population being essentially stagnant over the past few decades, from 1,038 people in 1980 to the 2020 projection of 1,205 residents and with a projection out to 2040 of 1,252 residents, it will be important for Blandford to utilize its regulatory tools and efforts to acquire private land to preserve the land for the functioning farmland and forests.

**Figure 1 Blandford Land Use**

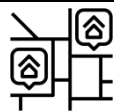
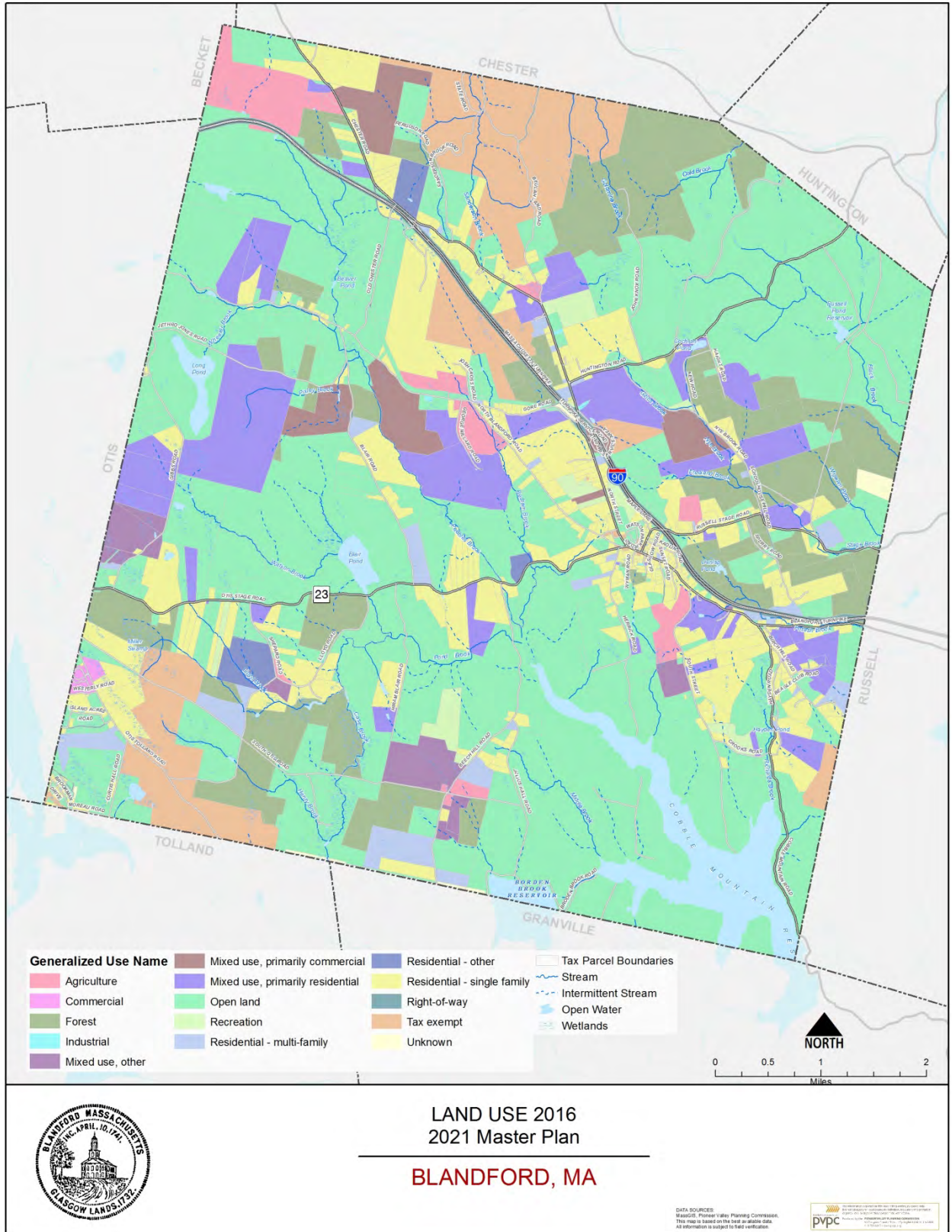
Land Use Type	Acres	Percent of Total (%)
Agriculture	696.28	2.04
Commercial	46.95	0.14
Forest	4,013.41	11.73
Industrial	9.00	0.03
Mixed use (other, primarily commercial + residential)	3,761.38	10.92
Open land	17,044.51	49.83
Recreation	308.55	0.90
Residential (other, multi-family + single family)	5,027.69	14.70
Right-of-way	771.88	2.26
Tax exempt	2,459.61	7.19
Unknown	64.91	0.19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34,204.15</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Mass GIS





# Map 1 Blandford Land Use Map



The patterns of land use formation, as well as how they are interrelated, are a record of centuries of human activity laid over the natural resources and landscape of the town. In 1735, Blandford was purchased by Scotch-Irish settlers from Hopkinton and divided into lots known as the New Glasgow plantation, with the community beginning as an agricultural and grazing-based economy. Route 23 which traverses east-west through Blandford was known as the General Knox – Otis Stage Road, where General Knox and his troops on their journey from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston to deliver cannons to General Washington. Houses and taverns were built along this road, and today, this road sees a great amount of home building.

Any future land use change is limited to what is prescribed by the town zoning bylaw, as there is no state requirement for a comprehensive plan requiring a future land use map. By understanding the current conditions and future development trends, the town will be in a better position to plan for future land use changes and can work to shape what it wants preserved and what can be developed to enhance the opportunities for residents and business owners alike.

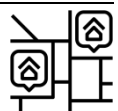
### *Zoning*

Zoning regulations and other land use laws constitute a town’s “blueprint” for its future. Land use patterns over time will continue to look more and more like the town’s zoning map until the town is “built out” – that is, there is no more developable land left. In looking forward, it is important that the town focus not on the current use and physical build-out of today, but on its potential future uses, on appropriate land for development, and build-out allowed under the town’s zoning map and bylaws. Zoning regulations and districts are the primary land use tools that are used to manage development and direct growth to suitable and desired areas while also protecting critical resources and ensuring that development is in keeping with the town’s character.

Blandford’s current zoning bylaw was first adopted in 1962, with amendments listed through 2021 to bring alignment with best practices and numberings, most recently. For the purposes of the Master Plan, the zoning assessment addresses pertinent zoning regulations and permitting procedures as they may relate to potential obstacles to achieving goals as outlined throughout this Master Plan. The zoning code can affect development and redevelopment potential based on where the town allows housing types and commercial and industrial activities throughout town. Blandford has three zoning use districts and two overlay districts. The use districts are Agricultural, Business and Residential Districts. The town currently has approximately 484 acres of residentially-zone land and five acres of land used for commercial and industrial purposes, with the rest of the land being agriculture, open space, waterbodies, or highway. See Map 2 for Blandford’s current zoning map.

#### The Agricultural District

The district principally provides for as-of-right development of agricultural, single family dwellings, and some municipal uses and places of worship. A minimum of two acres is required to develop any use with minimal 30 foot requirements from the right of way and 15 feet from abutting properties. Some uses are allowed by Special Permit from the Planning Board such as more intense facilities like convalescent homes, solar or marijuana establishments. All solar development is relegated to this zone and may be allowed with a Special Permit by the Planning Board.



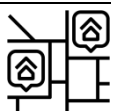


## The Residential District

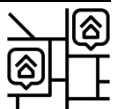
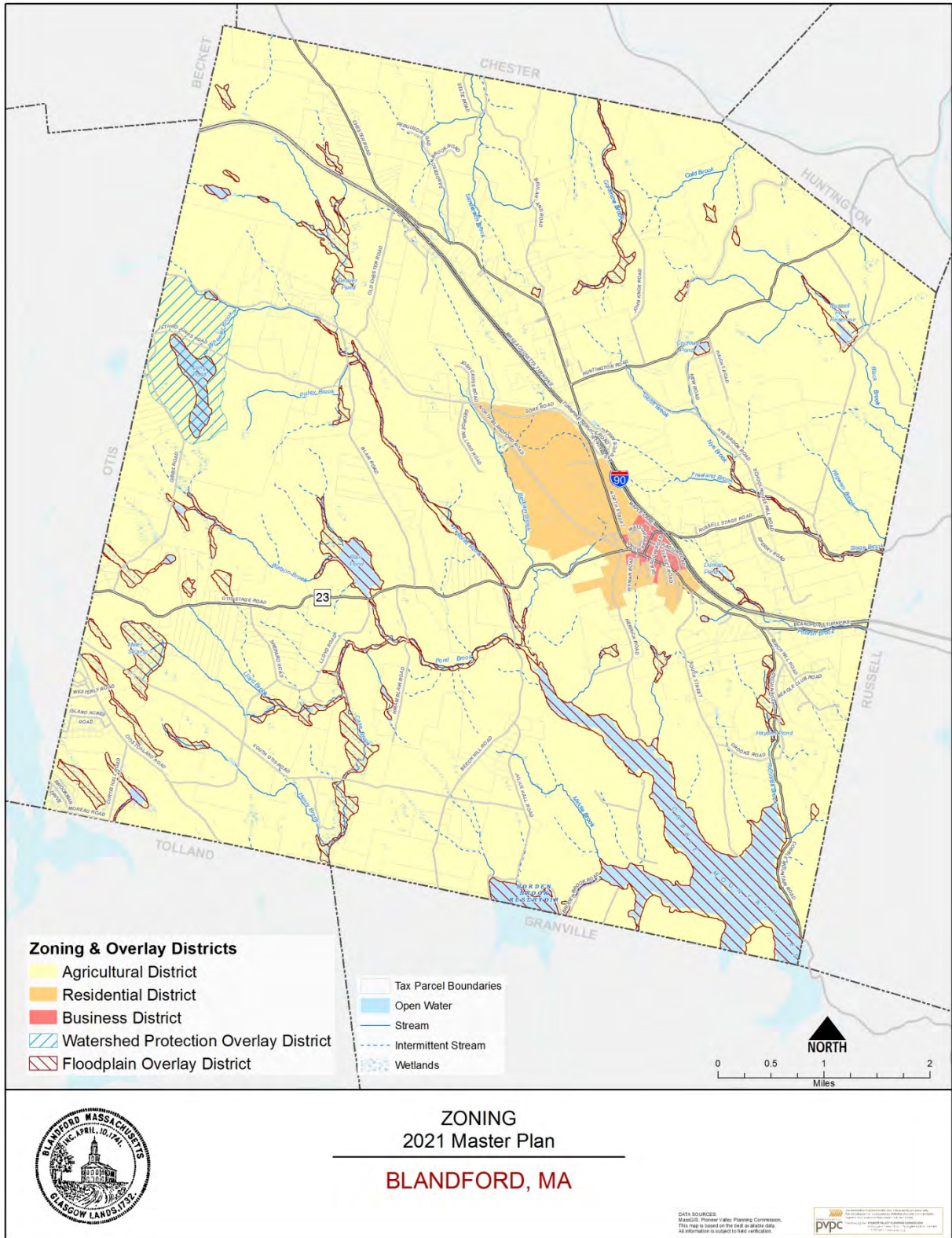
This district provides for and is currently made of mostly single-family residences, however, there are some additional uses that are permitted like home occupations with a Special Permit, recreational facilities, municipal uses and places of worship. A minimum of 30,000 square feet with a frontage of 150 contiguous feet is necessary for development, with similar setbacks of 30 feet to the front and 15 on the side and rear.

## The Business District

The business district allows uses that are permitted in the residential district, but also uses pertaining to offices, retail, entertainment and industry are permissible. Special permits are required for some uses like marijuana establishments, or as suggested in the bylaw, “any additional use, which is not specifically prohibited or already requires a Special Permit from another Board” (Section 4.2.1.9, Blandford Zoning Bylaw). Physical dimensional requirements that govern the district include a minimum frontage of 100 feet and a minimum setback of 30 feet, or aligned with adjacent properties if they are setback further.



## Map 2 Blandford Zoning Map





## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Master Plan process has provided the opportunity for residents to present comment and concerns about growth in Blandford and the 170 survey respondents, along with committee members and focus group members, have affirmed the importance of the Town’s “rural character.” A majority of the survey takers (71%) found that preserving Blandford’s rural character was very important to them. Comments from the public also affirm this perspective. The intention of this plan is to help Blandford achieve its vision which has been articulated as balancing planning for manageable evolution of the town with protecting all that is treasured about the community. This requires supporting maximizing opportunities to preserve open space, where appropriate, and addressing development thoughtfully. The town could maintain the potential benefits of this balance by becoming more proactive in planning for growth and conservation, exploring targeted plans for key nodes and corridors, and subsequently implementing the recommended policies and regulations.

As with many other rural towns where there are large tracts of open land, solar developers are seeking to site large scale developments taking 20-30 acres of land per parcel, and that is no different in Blandford, where within the past few years, six solar developers have received permits to construct solar arrays. In creating consistency with the Open Space and Recreation Plan, the town’s documents will show where land should be preserved, like farmland and forestland. With limited financial resources, the Town must be strategic about which parcels provide the most benefit as protected open space and area of where the town can develop. The town can be more proactive about supporting the other economic development opportunities and its viabilities.

### *Encouraging Redevelopment*

Sixty-two percent of survey respondents like the way the town center has been developed. However, the town center also provides the opportunities for walkability and access to services like the post office, town offices and the general store.

A Town Center can attract small businesses to support the local economy and offer a continuation of the types of structures and character the town seeks. A Town Center bylaw could help the town advance the maintenance of appropriate development in the center. The bylaw can offer standards of which future development could be allowed, such as requiring any new or redeveloped buildings needing to demonstrate similar architectural features as the surrounding buildings, with an allowance for a smaller setback or frontage requirement, etc, where appropriate within a boundary. The developer would need to demonstrate that the development can fit within the context of the neighborhood it is in. The town can even explore identifying more than one area where they could foresee this type of development.

### *Rural Features*

From an economic perspective, being “rural” means places where people use land to make their living farming or producing timber, etc. These resources are grown (or extracted), processed, stored, and shipped to places where buyers and users need them. One can determine the routes that these types of businesses relied on by the existing roads, both private and public, which in the past have played an important role in the economic activities of the town.

To some extent we can maintain the remnants of Blandford’s past by preserving roads, overarching



trees, barns and other artifacts of the earlier times, as the town still has its visual character of a New England town. More significant, however, could be the opportunity to revitalize the type of rural economic activities that help support even a more town-adopted value-based rural character:

- Preserving and supporting the expansion of the remaining working farms, including on public land, if appropriate;
- Providing an opportunity for those to assist with taking care of roadside trees, and planning new ones to replace those that have died;
- Centralizing activity with working greenbelts of gardens, farms and forest;
- Building more support for the strong values of recreation in town.

The approach to rural economic development requires new demands and innovations, ending a “one-size-fits-all” approach. However, as this landscape continues to change and evolve, the town can take control and have its character preserved with a similar sense of predictability and beauty.

### *Restrictions on (Re)Development*

Exploring any future development or redevelopment of the town center for small businesses, like general retail or restaurants, could prove difficult without additional discussion of wastewater infrastructure. The lack of public water or sanitary sewer would need to be addressed if additional density and intensity of development is to be imagined. Exploring a mixed-use bylaw to establish the town center district with additional density and intensity in that area could be the opportunity to redevelop in a more structured way. A housing component could help support those future commercial uses.

### *Affordable Housing*

Blandford could support additional affordable housing in town by way of a senior housing development zoning bylaw, as the town through its visioning session and survey suggested that the town explore this type of development. As described, new housing constructed under this zoning provision limits who can reside in these units – those ages 55 and above. If the Town wants to expand affordable housing to non-seniors, other tools are available.

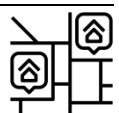
Many towns strive to achieve a 10 percent subsidized housing inventory (SHI) threshold so they are not subject to development regulated under the State’s Chapter 40B laws. A Comprehensive Permit proceeding, as governed by Chapter 40B, bypasses many local review processes. As of September 2017, the State’s records show the town’s SHI at 0.4 percent, making the Town subject to Chapter 40B and housing development being permitted through the Zoning Board of Appeals.

### *Community Resilience*

The Town’s ability to utilize its available resources (communication, transportation for seniors, food, etc.) to withstand and recover from adverse situations is known as its community resilience. Blandford’s resilience will rely on a proactive and planned approach to protect its resources and direct where development and redevelopment can occur.

The recommendations of the land use element meet these objectives in a number of ways including:

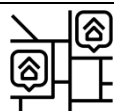
- Promoting the development of a town center that facilitates walkability and the efficient use of existing buildings and infrastructure. It also facilitates community building by formalizing

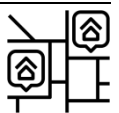




a civic space and community programming, utilizing the town offices, the library, or Watson Park.

- Working to expand affordable housing opportunities would provide housing for those who want to remain in town and contribute to the success of Blandford, while also offering opportunities for new residents who can contribute to the growth of Blandford.
- Preserving the Town's rural character will help protect some of the natural resources and open spaces, which is a benefit to the existing ecosystem.







# TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT TECHNICAL PAPER

This chapter includes a brief review of the existing transportation network in the Town of Blandford. Major routes were identified in order to identify travel patterns throughout the Town. All sidewalks in Town were inventoried to identify gaps in the existing pedestrian system. This chapter also provides an outlook of the existing safety concerns and takes into consideration public input provided during the master plan survey process, Visioning Session and Focus Groups to shape goals and strategies that improve future transportation conditions in the Town of Blandford.

## OVERVIEW

Blandford's transportation system is consistent with that of other rural communities in Western Massachusetts in that Blandford residents rely on automobiles for almost all activities. Blandford's rolling terrain and elevation (approximately 1,450 feet) creates an opportunity for the user to experience scenic beauty while traversing the transportation system. These same features can also create difficulties for those trying to navigate the transportation system using other modes of transportation such as bicycles. The few non-automobile related amenities in Blandford are found in the town center due to its higher density of development.

The Town by itself does not have any major trip generators but traffic volumes are comparatively higher on some major roads because of commuter traffic patterns which use the local roadway network to access Route 23, North Street and Russell Stage Road. Most local trips are destined for the Town Center at the convergence Otis Stage Road, North Road, Russell Stage Road and Woronoco Road. Destinations in this area include the Post Office, Town Offices, Porter Memorial Library, and Blandford Country Store. This section of Blandford has the highest density of residential dwellings. In the transportation visioning session during the master plan development process, residents expressed concerns related the lack of pedestrian amenities in the Town Center.

## Major Roads

Otis Stage Road (Route 23) – Otis Stage Road is classified as a rural major collector, the roadway falls under the maintenance jurisdiction of the MassDOT Highway Division 1. Otis Stage Road provides access to the southwestern section of Blandford from the center of town as well as to towns west of Blandford eventually intersecting with Route 8 in Otis. Otis Stage Road is characterized by its winding and rolling terrain, consistent lane width and rural characteristics.

Woronoco Road (Route 23) – Woronoco Road is classified as a rural major collector roadway under the maintenance jurisdiction of the MassDOT Highway District 1. Oriented in an east/west direction, Route 23 intersects with Route 20 and ultimately Routes 10/202 as well as the MassTurnpike in Westfield. This section of Route 23 was observed to have a sidewalk on the northern side of the road with paved shoulders in the vicinity of the town center. Terrain on Woronoco Road can be classified as hilly with many curves.

North Street / Chester Road – North Street and Chester Road are classified as rural major collectors. North Street falls under the maintenance jurisdiction of the MassDOT Highway District 1 while Chester Road falls under the jurisdiction of the town. The North Street / Chester Road corridor



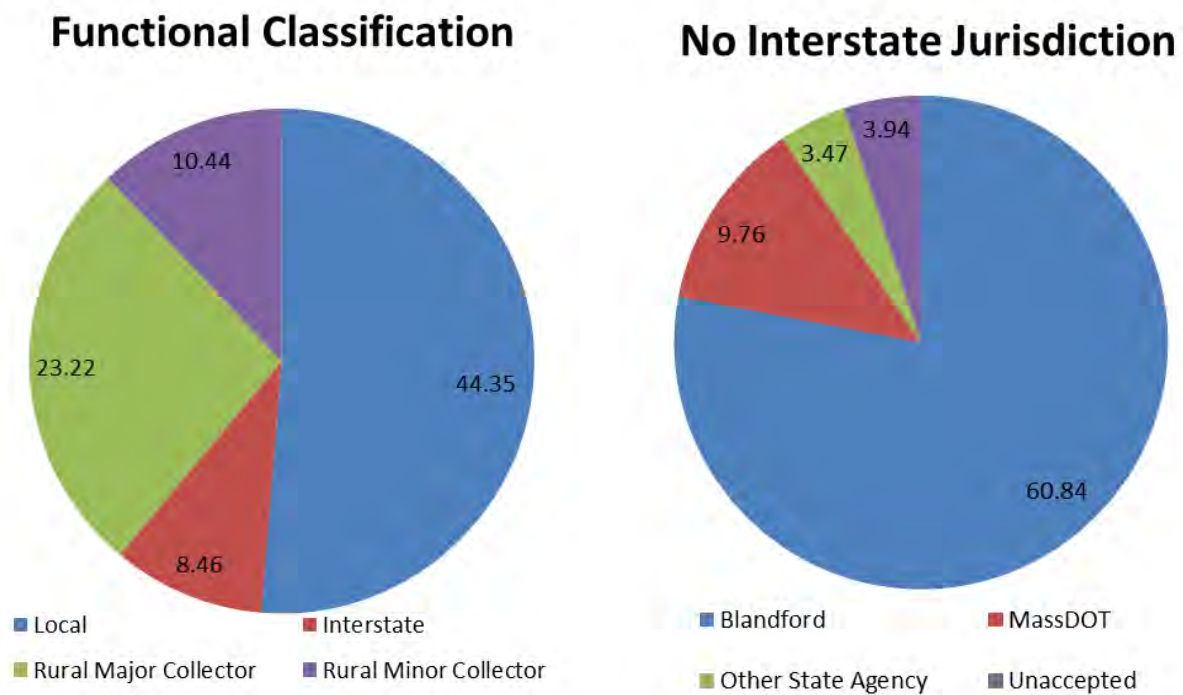
provides access to the northwestern part of Blandford and to Route 20 in Chester. North Street can be described as a residential road with narrow travel lanes that provides employee access to Massachusetts Turnpike Service Areas. Chester Road can be characterized as a rural road primarily used by residents.

Russell Stage Road – Russell Stage Road is classified as a rural major collector roadway under local jurisdiction. Russell Stage Road provides access to Russell to the northeast, intersecting with Route 20 and eventually Route 112 in Huntington. Principally a residential road, particularly near the town center, it becomes hillier with more curves as you travel northeast towards Russell.

### Roadway Miles and Ownership

Blandford is a rural community with a roadway network of approximately 86.47 centerline miles. Nearly 71% (60.84 miles) of all roadway miles are locally maintained by the Blandford Highway Department. The MassDOT Highway Division maintains 18.22 miles of roadway in Blandford, including Interstate 90(8.5 miles), Route 23, and North Street. Approximately 31.68 miles are eligible for federal aid including Interstate 90. Over 50% (44 miles) of roads are categorized as non-paved surfaces according to the MassDOT Roadway Inventory File.

**Figure 1 Roadway Functional Classification and Jurisdiction**



### Non Motorist Infrastructure

In 2019 MassDOT released [The Statewide Bicycle Plan](#) and [The Statewide Pedestrian Plan](#). These plans include guides introducing Cities and Towns to core concepts as well as providing additional resources to improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The objective of these plans is to improve safety, reduce fatalities, and increase the use of non-motorized modes of transportation for short trips.



### *Sidewalks*

Sidewalks are present on the north side Route 23 from North Street east to South Street. This section of sidewalk was observed to be in good condition and has been upgraded to meet current MassDOT ADA standards. It was noted during the Walk Audit that several of the crosswalks locations should be moved to improve visibility of the crosswalks by drivers, additionally sidewalk ramps and detectable pads at several locations were observed to be out of compliance with current MassDOT Walks and Wheelchair Ramp standards. A short section of sidewalk was observed on the west side of Russell Stage Road from Route 23 to the Town Offices. This section of sidewalk was observed to be in poor condition and does not meet current ADA standards.

### *Bike lanes*

Blandford does not have any designated bike amenities. Woronoco Road was observed to have adequate paved shoulders to support on road bike lanes. The majority of the roadway network in town lacks paved shoulders and pavement markings that could accommodate bike lanes.

### *Shared Use Paths and Trails*

Currently Blandford does not have any official off-road, shared use paths. Residents expressed concerns over the lack of locations with smooth surfaces in town that would be safe to walk on. There are several locations in town ideal for hiking including the Blandford/Chester State Forest and Knittel Conservation Area Trails. During the Implementation Workshop, participants expressed interest in exploring opportunities to develop a Rail Trail on the old “Huckleberry” Trolley line between Blandford and Huntington.

### *Complete Streets*

The Town of Blandford is currently not part of the [MassDOT Complete Streets program](#). A Complete Street is one that provides safe and accessible options for all travel modes – walking, biking, transit, and motorized vehicles – for people of all ages and abilities. Designing streets with these principles contribute toward the safety, health, economic viability, and quality of life in a community by improving the pedestrian and vehicular environments and providing safer, more accessible and comfortable means of travel between home, school, work, recreation, and retail destinations. More broadly, embedding Complete Streets principles in policy and practice help promote more livable communities.

In addition, the creation of Complete Streets encourages an active transportation lifestyle and is supported by the United States Centers for Disease Control and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to decrease obesity and reduce risk for chronic diseases (heart disease, arthritis, diabetes, etc.). Also inherent in the development of a Complete Street is meeting the most current accessibility guidelines.

Complete Streets improvements may be large scale, such as corridor-wide improvements that include a separated bicycle lane or new crosswalks. Other Complete Street project examples include improved streetlighting, a median refuge island. The design of a Complete Street should be context sensitive and incorporate improvements or treatments that fit with the need and within the character of a community.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) recognizes the importance of supporting projects that provide context-sensitive, multimodal transportation options on appropriate roadways. In 2013 MassDOT issued its own Healthy Transportation Policy Directive to



ensure that all MassDOT projects are designed and implemented in a way that all our customers have access to safe and comfortable healthy transportation options at all MassDOT facilities and in all the services we provide.

MassDOT also recognizes the importance of supporting Complete Streets on local roads for the benefits they provide, and to assist in closing critical gaps in transportation networks. MassDOT initiated the Complete Streets Funding Program to further the development of Complete Streets on local roads across the Commonwealth. MassDOT provides Complete Streets Funding Program Guidance document describes the full requirements of the program, including guidance on best practices in Complete Streets Policy development and implementation.

Briefly, the reward for municipalities that choose to participate is:

1. Funding for technical assistance to analyze their community needs and develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, and
2. Funding for construction of Complete Streets infrastructure projects.

To be eligible for technical assistance a municipality must attend training and pass a Complete Streets Policy. Once these steps are completed, a municipality must complete a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, which is a targeted investment strategy to be eligible for project funding.

#### *Walk Audit*

A walking audit was held on April 30, 2021 in the Town of Blandford. This audit will be conducted by WalkBoston in collaboration with the Hilltown CDC. The audit identified areas where there are opportunities to advance improvements to facilitate more pedestrian activity. As part of the Walk Audit the intersection of Otis Stage Road (Route 23) at North Street was discussed as a potential to be reconfigured to accommodate a crosswalk to improve access to the Historical Society. Additionally the Town Administrator expressed interest in reconfiguring the Otis Stage Road (Route 23) at North Blandford Road intersection into a traditional “T” intersection. This would result in the town connecting the Veterans Memorial with Town Common. The walking audit can be found [here](#).

#### **Senior Van Service**

Currently there are two options for Senior Van Service available to the residents of Blandford. Blandford is a member of the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA), FRTA provides two day per week Demand Response service for residence 60 years of age and older, residents of nursing homes, and veterans with a disability rating of 70% or greater. Demand Response fares range from \$1.25 for an in town one-way trip to \$2.25 for one-way trip to non-adjacent towns within FRTA’s service area. Eligible riders are required to call the Huntington Council on Aging (COA) by 6PM the prior day to schedule the service. Residents that participated in the Transportation Focus Group expressed their concern about the consistency and future viability of this service.

The second option for seniors is Blandford’s free van service. This service is operated by volunteers and uses a vehicle donated to the town. The service relies on donations for the upkeep of the vehicle but the Town of Blandford currently provides funding for fuel to operate the service. Seniors in town prefer to use this service over the FRTA due to the expanded availability of this service however this vehicle is not equipped with a wheelchair lift like the FRTA service.





Participants in the Transportation Focus Group expressed interest in improving the viability of this service.

## Traffic Volume

Traffic volumes can be used to evaluate the current performance characteristics of existing roadways, identify the need for additional transportation facilities to reduce existing congestion, and as a gauge of the effectiveness of new businesses that rely on pass by traffic (i.e. convenience stores, gas stations, and retail establishments)

### *Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT)*

AADT is the calculated traffic volume that represents the average for a typical day of the year. A limited amount of historic data is available for the Town of Blandford. Unfortunately new traffic volume data was not collected as part of this Master Plan as a result of lower traffic volumes and different travel patterns experienced during the COVID 19 Pandemic. Table 1 shows the historic count data available for the Town. The most recent counts were completed in 2019 as part of MassDOT's I-90 Interchange study that was completed in 2020. As can be seen in the Table, the highest volume of traffic is located south of Russell Stage Road. Traffic is dispersed between Russel Stage Road, North Street and Otis Stage Road (second highest AADT).

**Table 1 Traffic Count Locations -AADT**

Roadway	Location	AADT
Blandford Road (Route 23)	South of Cobble Mountain Road	2930
Otis Stage Road (Route 23)	Between North Street and North Blandford Road	2477
Woronoco Road (Route 23)	South of North Street	1845
North Street	North of Woronoco Road (Route 23)	845

Source: MassDOT 2019

## Safety

PVPC utilized crash data downloaded from the Impact Crash Data Portal (<https://apps.impact.dot.state.ma.us/cdv/>) developed by MassDOT. PVPC used the most recent three years of final data available (2015-2017) to identify the number of crashes that occurred in Blandford. It was determined the crashes that occurred on Interstate 90 in Blandford should be removed from this analysis as only 54 of the 197 crashes recorded between 2015 and 2017 for the town were located on the non-interstate system. The breakdown of those 54 crashes can be seen in the table below.

**Table 2 Crash Summary 2015 - 2017**

Type of Crash	Total 2015 - 2017
Fatal injury	1
Non-fatal injury	17
Not Reported	3
Property damage only (none injured)	33
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>54</b>

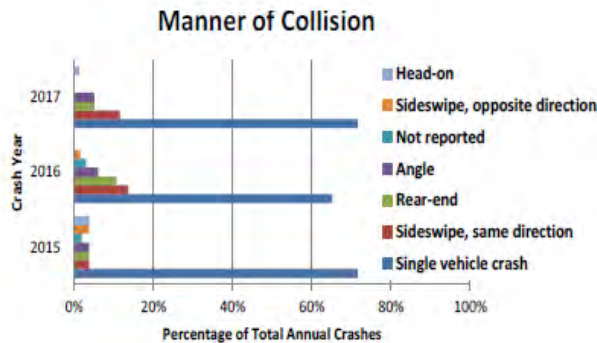
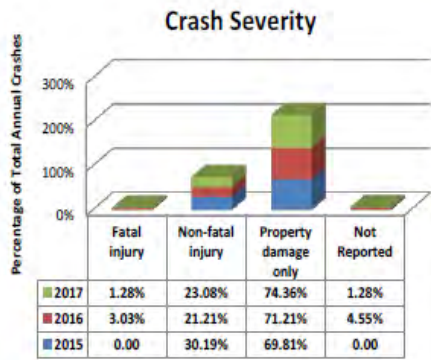
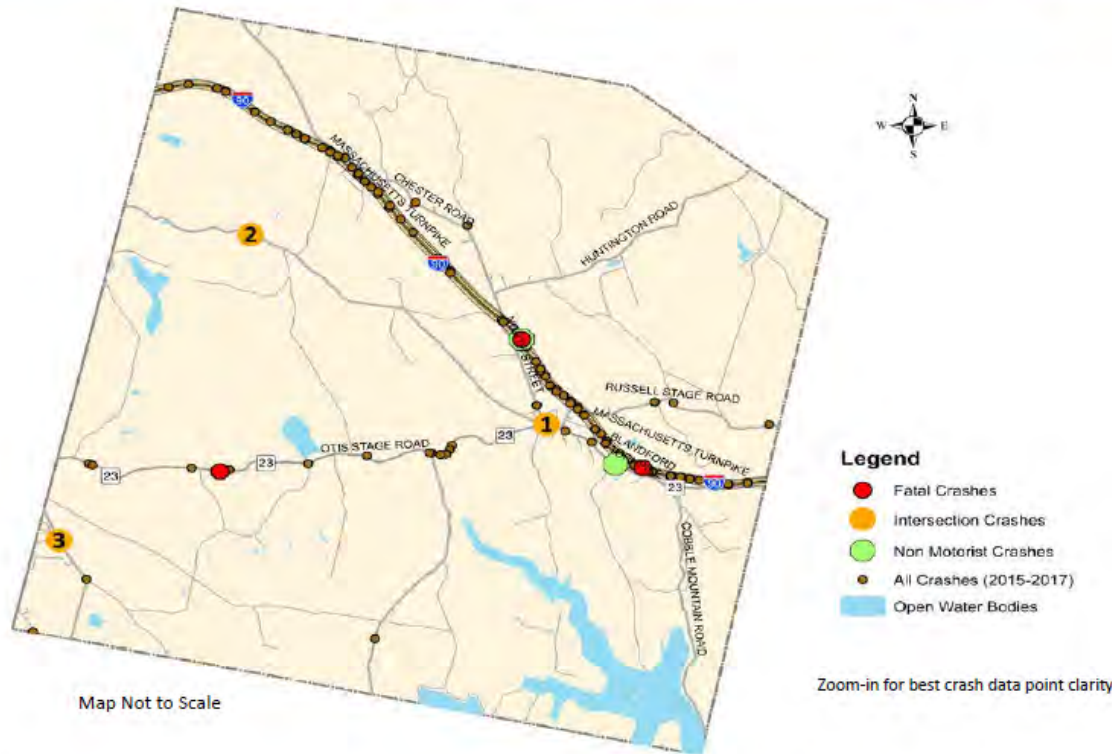


As can be seen in the table, 2 crash resulted in a fatality while 17 resulted in an injury to at least 1 person involved in the crash. The fatal crash occurred on Otis Stage Road just east of Shepard Road and involved a pedestrian. Of the 54 crashes, 44 (82%) were listed as single vehicle crashes, this could indicate that factors such as driver inattention, speeding and inclement weather may have been contributing factors to the crash.

A total of five crashes were identified to have occurred on a curved section of Otis Stage Road (Route 23) just east of Beach Hill Road. All five crashes involved a single vehicle lane departure crash, one of the crashes resulted in a second vehicle being side swiped. It is recommended that a more in depth study be considered for this section of Otis Stage Road to identify potential contributing factors to single vehicle crashes in this area.

Participants in the Transportation Visioning Session identified Beach Hill Road as an area of concern due to both higher travel speeds and limitations to site distance. While the historic crash data reviewed for this Master Plan does not currently show crashes in this area, it is recommended that safety data be monitored for Beach Hill Road to determine if these problems begin to contribute to crashes in the future.





ANNUAL CRASHES

2015 – 53  
 2016 – 66  
 2017 – 78

ANNUAL CRASHES PER 1000 POPULATION  
 (Census 2019) 52.44

TOTAL FATAL CRASHES - 3

TOTAL NON- MOTORIST CRASHES - 2

INTERSECTION CRASHES

Four intersection crashes were reported in Blandford (all property damage only) within the analysis period. Three of those crashes were geocoded. The locations of those crashes are depicted in the map and listed below:

- Otis Stage Road (Route 23 ) and North Street
- North Blandford Road and a Private Driveway
- Otis Tollard Road and Westerly Road
- (Not Geocoded Location) At an unknown Y-intersection along Otis Tollard Road

\*EPDO – Equivalent Property Damage Only (Fatal and Injury Crashes = 21, Property Damage Crashes = 1)





## KEY FINDINGS

- The total number of reported crashes in Blandford has increased each year within the three year analysis period.
- A total of 2 non-motorist crashes were recorded in Blandford between 2015 and 2017, one of which resulted in the fatality of a pedestrian.
- The other two fatal crashes occurred when drivers exceeded the authorized speed limit along Interstate I-90.
- Almost 80% of all collisions were single vehicle crashes.
- Almost all the reported crashes (190) were non intersection crashes, the majority of which (144) occurred along Interstate I-90.  
(Y- intersection – 2, driveway and T-intersection – 1 each)

## FIRST HARMFUL EVENT SUMMARY

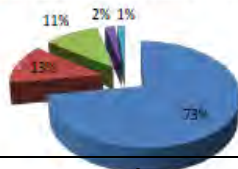
Collision with guardrail or median barrier	65
Collision with motor vehicle in traffic	51
Collision with animal	23
Collision with tree	14
Collision with ditch	8
Collision with other	8
Overturn/rollover	8
Collision with embankment	4
Collision with other light pole or other post/support	4
Collision with parked motor vehicle	4
Collision with other movable object	2
Jackknife	2
Collision with bridge overhead structure	1
Collision with curb	1
Collision with pedestrian	1
Other non-collision	1

## DRIVER CONTRIBUTION CODES FOR ALL DRIVERS

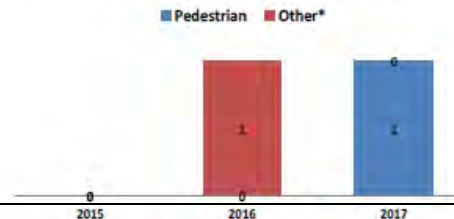
No improper driving	121
Driving too fast for conditions	33
Unknown	16
Other improper action	15
Failure to keep in proper lane or running off road	14
Inattention	10
Over-correcting/over-steering	10
Exceeded authorized speed limit	6
Fatigued/asleep	6
Operating vehicle in erratic, careless, negligent or aggressive manner	5
Operating defective equipment	3
Visibility obstructed	3
Distracted	2
Followed too closely	2

## Roadway Classification

- Interstate
- Not Reported
- Urban minor arterial or rural major collector
- Local
- Urban collector or rural minor collector



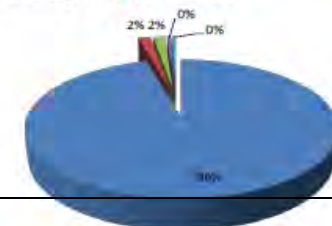
## Non-motorist Crashes by Type and Year



\* Skater, wheelchair, unicycle, tricycle, etc.

## Location of Crashes

- Not at junction
- Not reported
- Y-intersection
- Driveway
- T-intersection



## Transportation Resiliency

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) defines resiliency as the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and adapt to changing conditions and withstand, respond to, and recover rapidly from disruptions. <sup>1</sup> In the case of the Blandford this means identifying those transportation features that need to be protected from manmade and natural disasters. PVPC identified pavement condition, bridges, culverts and non-paved roadways as the biggest threats for transportation resiliency.

### *Bridge and Culverts*

MassDOT maintains the majority of bridges in Massachusetts, including the 24 structures located in Blandford. According to the [MassDOT municipal data dashboard](#) Blandford has three structures in town evaluated as poor indicating the bridges are considered structurally deficient. During the development of this document the Town Administrator of Blandford indicated the two of the three structures had been replaced as part of [DER's Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant Program](#). Based on this information Blandford should work with MassDOT to get the third structure located on Otis Stage Road (Route 23) replaced. Also of concern are the nine structures identified as being in fair condition. Although these structures are not considered to be in danger of failing, natural or other types of disasters could accelerate the rate of deterioration resulting in failure.

Severe weather events can have negative impacts on structures such as culverts and bridge. In 2011, Tropical Storm Irene caused more than \$25 million of roadway damage in the Pioneer Valley region, including many culvert wash outs. Culverts are usually built to carry a road, rail line or path over a small body of water. The PVPC mapped the location of all regional culverts as part of the update to the 2020 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The top 5% of culverts deemed most ecologically vulnerable or sensitive to extreme weather and heavy rain were prioritized in the RTP. A total of 74 culverts) were identified in Blandford as part of the RTP Update. Ten of these culverts were included as part of this vulnerability ranking.

### *Local Pavement Management*

The Blandford Highway Department utilizes the principles of pavement management for all paved roadways. The PVPC prepared a complete pavement management report for the Town in November 2020 in cooperation with the DPW. This report provides a tool to the Town for prioritizing future local roadway improvement projects based on projected available funds. The Town of Blandford should continue to identify opportunities to advance its pavement management program and update the pavement condition inventory on a regular basis in order to advance improvement projects that both repair roads in poor condition while maintaining the roads in good condition.

Pavement inventory and distress data was collected for all paved roadways in Blandford in the summer 2020 and analyzed using the Cartegraph software. The data was used to calculate the Overall Condition Index (OCI) which measures the serviceability of the road on a scale from 0 – 100. An OCI value approaching 100 indicates excellent pavement conditions where no improvements are warranted. A value in the range of 68 to 88 indicates good pavement conditions that may only require preventive maintenance treatments such as crack sealing. A “fair” pavement condition is

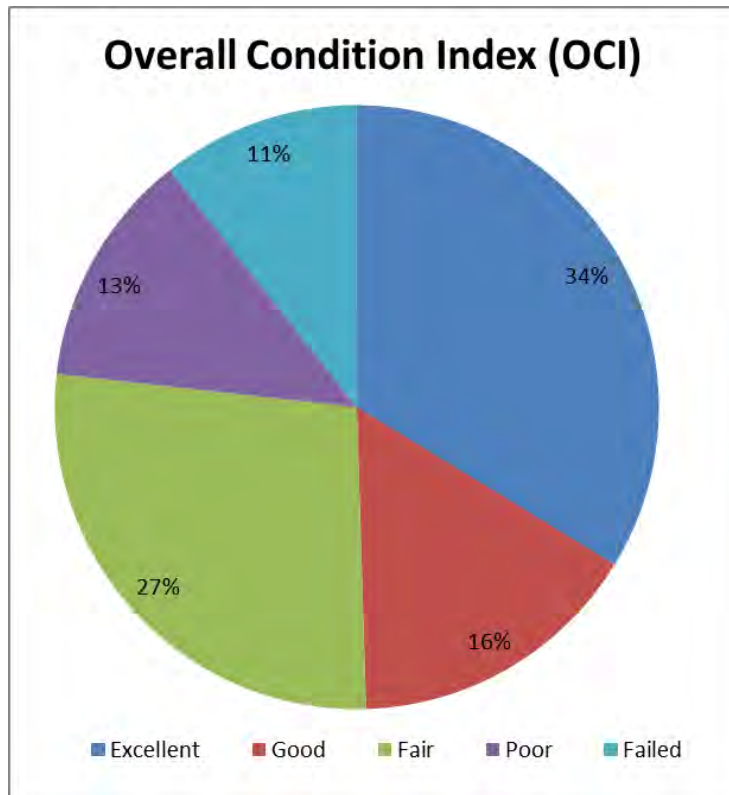
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<https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/fhwahop15025/index.htm><sup>1</sup>



indicated by an OCI with a value between 25 and 68. Roadways in this range begin to require more substantial improvements such as resurfacing to improve the roadway. An OCI below 25 indicates “failed” pavement conditions that will likely require the complete reconstruction of the roadway.

Figure 2 Overall Condition Index (OCI) of Road ways



The PVPC staff surveyed 34 miles of improved roadways which constitutes 43 roadway segments. The average OCI as of November 2020 was rated at 80, which indicates that a majority of the roadway network is considered to be in good condition. The surveyed roadway segments are broken down as follows: 34% of the roadways are rated excellent, 16% are good, 27% are fair, 13% are poor and 11% are rated as failed. The PVPC surveyed 7 miles of arterial roads, 13 miles of collector roads, 10 miles of residential (local) roads and 4 miles of no outlet (local) roads.

#### *Non-paved Roadways*

At the time of completion of the Pavement Management Report Blandford was estimated to have over 40 miles of non-paved roadways. Non-paved roadways not only cost more to maintain on a yearly basis but also lack storm water management infrastructure. This makes non-paved roadways more vulnerable to weather related impacts.

#### Local Evacuation Routes

The [Western Massachusetts Regional Evacuation Plan](#) completed in 2013 identifies Route 23, Chester Road, North Street and Russell Stage Road as evacuation routes out of town. The Massachusetts Highway Department and Massachusetts State Police would be responsible for the use of the Massachusetts Turnpike (Interstate 90) in the event of a large scale evacuation.





During the transportation visioning session residents expressed their concerns with traffic being detoured off Interstate 90 due to an unanticipated closure of the Interstate. Residents stated that when MassDOT is forced to detour traffic off Interstate 90 due to unforeseen circumstances, many of those drivers travel through Blandford to access the next exit. Many of these drivers are not familiar with the roads and area which adds to the potential for additional incidents.

## Previous Studies

### *MassDOT – I-90 Interchange Study*

MassDOT was commissioned to study the feasibility of a new interchange along the 30 mile section of interstate 90 between Exit 2 (Now Exit 10) and Exit 3 (Now Exit 41). The complete study can be found ([Here](#)). The primary goal of the study was to improve access to Interstate 90 at or near the midpoint and to mitigate traffic accessing I-90 at Exit 2 and Exit 3.

The study involved significant outreach, data analysis, and modeling and developed a number of concepts to add access to Interstate 90 in the study area. Three Alternatives were advanced for more in-depth study for a new Interstate 90 interchange:

1. Algeria Road in Otis
2. Blandford Maintenance Facility on Chester Road
3. Blandford Service Plaza on North Road

The Algeria Road option officially removed from further consideration during the public participation process. This was determined based on travel time impacts, environmental impacts, cost of construction, and strong public opposition.

In order for one of the remaining alternatives to advance to the project development phase, local and regional shareholders would need to actively work together with elected officials to initiate a project and secure funding for the both the design and construction of the project. The Town of Blandford voted down the proposed addition of one of these proposed interchanges at town meeting, indicating the project does not have local support at this time. Similarly no funding has been identified at this time by MassDOT for either the design or construction of this project. The project would also need to be included as part of the Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan in order to be eligible for federal funding in the future.





# HOUSING ELEMENT TECHNICAL PAPER

## OVERVIEW

The *Housing* element of the Blandford Master Plan provides an overview of housing conditions and issues facing the Town of Blandford and its residents.

With this chapter being part of the Town's first Master Plan, and incorporating its commonalities to other Town goals and policies found in this plan and the 2013 Blandford Housing Needs Assessment & Action Plan, successful housing policies and outcomes can:

- Consider pattern of residential development in determining what types of housing stock is needed and where it might best be constructed and concentrated in the future;
- Assess the local and regional area to determine how future market forces may influence the development and affordability of housing in the community.
- Consider the needs of current housing stock in order to maintain a community's character and allow current and future residents to live in safe and affordable homes.

## INVENTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Town of Blandford is a rural town covering 53 square miles with a population of 1,105, with a population density of 21 persons per square miles. Located at the western edge of Hampden County, the town sits at the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains. Route 23 is the main east-west route, connecting Blandford with more urban centers to the east like the City of Westfield, and the Berkshire communities to the west. The Massachusetts Turnpike (Route 90), also cuts through the town. It is bordered by the small towns of Russell to the east, Granville to the south, Otis to the west and Huntington and Chester to the north.

The Town of Blandford has maintained its rural character since it was originally settled in 1735. While known for several popular recreational attractions, its rural location and rugged terrain has limited any significant development activity. Blandford's population has remained level over the past 20 years and is expected to only grow slightly over the next 20 years. The Town's senior population (65+) has grown over the past 10 years from 9% of the total population to 25%. There is now a greater percentage of seniors in Blandford than children and young adults (under age 25) which makes up 20% of the Town's population.

Like many rural communities in Massachusetts, Blandford has an aging population with limited to no housing development. The supply and cost of housing play a major role in who gets to live in town. Communities like Blandford, through their policies, can influence

and also play a role on who lives in town. Zoning can limit the development of housing for a variety of different housing types, likely resulting in a homogeneous population. Residents have indicated they want to keep the current small town nature and feel of the town while expanding certain types of housing, like senior housing and expanding resources for residents to age in place.

## HOUSING STOCK

The housing stock in Blandford has remained fairly consistent over the past 20 years with only 84 units developed during that time. The percentage of vacant units has increased by over 6%. The number of units for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use has stayed fairly consistent since 2010. The available data before 2010 is unreliable.

**Figure 1 Housing Stock**

	2000		2010		2019	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Total Units	526	100%	557	100%	610	100%
Occupied Units	456	85.7%	457	82.0%	481	78.9%
Vacant Units	70	14.3%	100	18.0%	129	21.1%
<i>Units for seasonal, recreational or occasional use</i>	***	***	90	16.2%	86	14.1%

Source: ACS 2013-2017, "Vacancy Status," B25004 & "Selected Housing Characteristics," DP04.

## AGE OF HOUSING

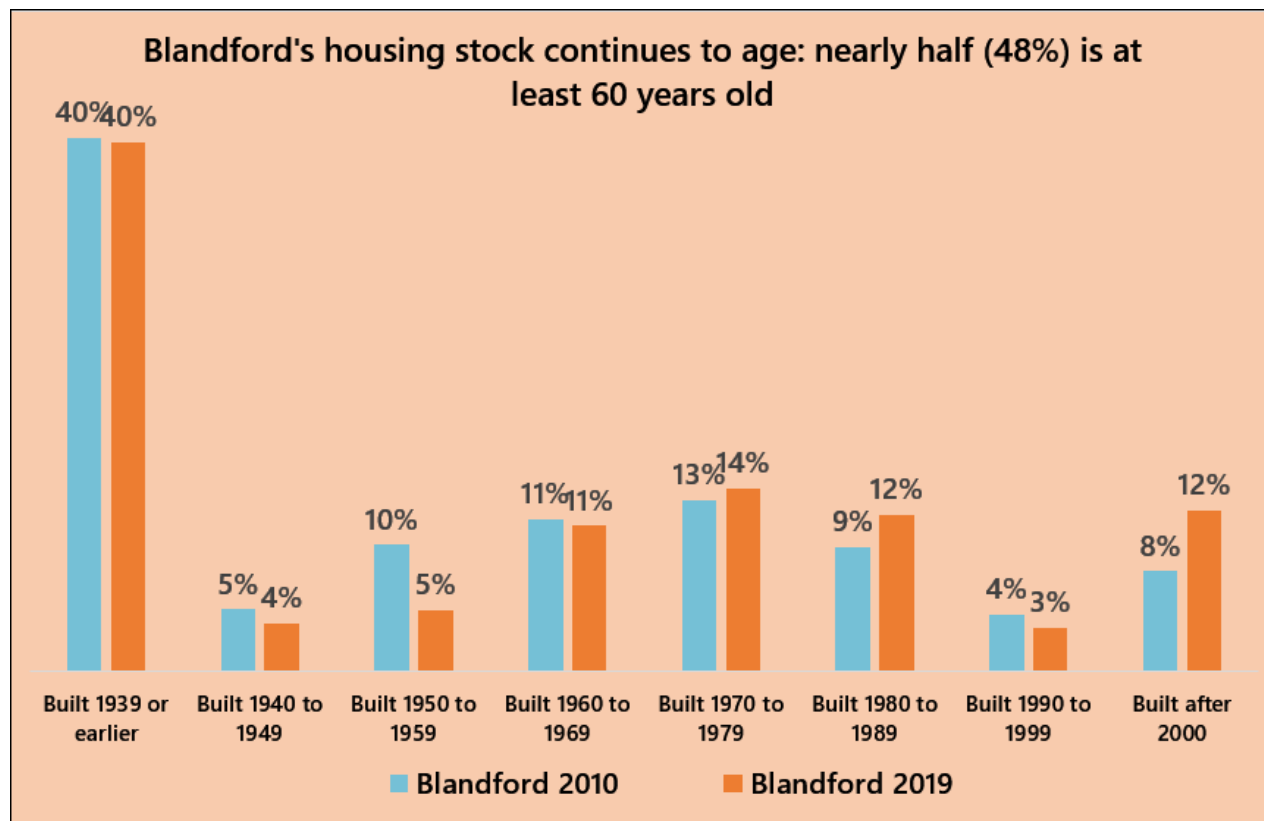
In Blandford, the housing stock continues to age with little new housing being developed. 40% of housing units are in buildings built before 1939, while almost three-quarters of the housing units (74%) were built before 1979. Construction since 2000 accounts for just 12% of units. This data suggests that housing supply is growing slowly, which may lead to increased housing costs if demand continues to stay the same or increases, as the number of new housing units may not match demand.

The age of housing stock is also an indicator of the type and quality of homes. Although it should not be interpreted as "good" or "bad", and well-maintained older homes are an important element of a town's local character, older housing can also present many





challenges. There is an increased need for maintenance and repair, including roofing, water heaters and plumbing. Older housing is built to outdated and obsolete code, which can present numerous problems for anyone with limited mobility. This is particularly important for an aging community to address. Older homes often have outdated energy and insulation systems. This is relevant when addressing resiliency in the community and in the home. Finally, outdated materials and products in older homes can lead to health risks such as lead paint and pipes, and asbestos.



## **BUILDING PERMITS**

Building permits are filed by owners or builders when they initiate any type of major construction or demolition in Blandford. Permits for activities such as new construction, renovations, and demolitions are one indicator of the housing market in Blandford. The number of permits over the past 5 years has been very consistent, in line with data indicating little to no housing development over this time period.

Year	All Building Permits*
2020	57
2019	54
2018	46
2017	52
2016	51

\*According to the Blandford Building Inspector, the town only has single family homes in town (not multi-units or mixed use, etc.) The numbers in this table include some commercial projects including large scale solar and cell. The Building Inspector was able to confirm there were 3 commercial building permits in 2020 and 4 in 2019. The data for previous years is unavailable, although the Building Inspector noted the number of permits in previous years was almost certainly less than in 2019 and 2020.

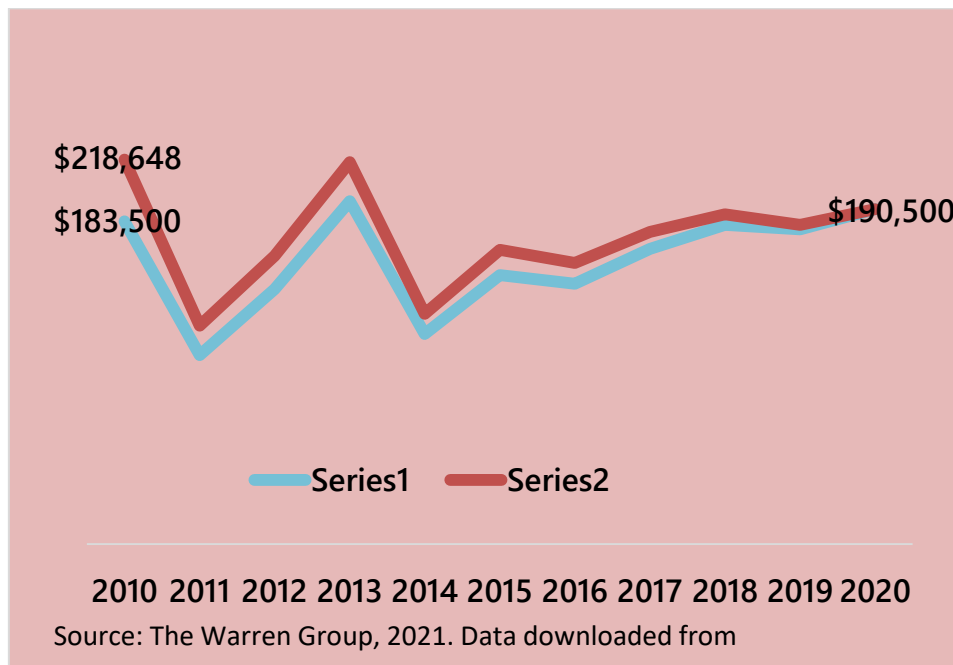
## **HOUSING TENURE**

According to estimates from the 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 95% of the occupied housing units in Blandford are ownership units, while 5% are rental units. This is equal to about 457 ownership units, and 24 rental units. There has been almost no increase in renter-occupied units since 2010 (22 or 4.8%) and modest increase in owner occupied units (435 or 95.2% in 2010).



## HOUSING SALES

Median home sales price has remained steady over the past 10 years from \$218,648 to \$190,500 in 2020. However, the small number of annual home sales in Blandford can result in substantial fluctuations from one year to the next based on the sale prices of a small number of specific homes. Number of sales has increased modestly over the past year from 29 to 32.



## HOME VALUES AND RENTS

There is currently no reliable data regarding median rent in Blandford.

## SUBSIDIZED HOUSING INVENTORY

As of March 2021, there are no subsidized housing units in Blandford listed on the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). The SHI is maintained by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and is the state's official list for tracking a municipality's percentage of affordable housing under M.G.L. Chapter 40. It is one of 43 communities with 0 (zero) units of subsidized housing.

## HOUSING COST BURDEN





**A household is defined as “housing cost burden” if the household expends more than 30% of their income on housing costs.** This is derived from the “30 percent Rule” that argues a household should spend no more than 30 percent of its income on housing costs ([https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr\\_edge\\_featd\\_article\\_092214.html](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr_edge_featd_article_092214.html)). There is currently no reliable data to determine housing cost burden for Blandford. This is one of the few towns in the Pioneer Valley region where this data is unavailable.

## **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### ***Population and Household Growth***

The population in Blandford is aging. The percentage of seniors 65+ more than doubled from 9% of the population in 2010 to 25% of the population in 2019. The overall population has been stagnant and there is little indication of future growth. The major decline has occurred with children and young adults (under the age of 25) from 29% of the population in 2010 to 20% of the population.

The number of housing units has risen slightly suggesting there is very little development occurring within the town..

Based on the projected population and household stagnation, along with decline in families and younger residents, proactive planning is needed to accommodate an aging population within the town. This ongoing change in demographics will also likely impact transportation needs, public infrastructure, housing and economic development. Without a school in town (Blandford is part of the Gateway Regional School District and no longer has a school located within the town) and limited economic development opportunities, planning for a sustainable housing future must focus on the growing senior population while continuing to keep an eye on attracting younger residents and families.

The Town needs to plan for the changing demographics and the shifts in age groups to continue to provide a high quality of life for its residents. Like many other communities, seniors are likely to present challenges to the town of Blandford. Seniors have unique needs and often require increased service provisions. Transportation services, grocery delivery, and programming to maintain social interconnectedness are all important pieces in maintaining the general health and well-being of seniors.

Blandford needs to carefully consider options to attract new families with children and working residents, as well as supporting the current aging population and other seniors who move to the town in retirement.



## ***Housing Affordability***

Chapter 40B authorizes a housing agency or developer to obtain a single comprehensive permit for the construction of subsidized low or moderate-income housing if less than 10% of its total year-round housing in the community is subsidized low or moderate-income housing. Because Blandford is below this threshold, it is *vulnerable* to a Comprehensive Permit application. A Comprehensive Permit puts local permitting in the hands of the Zoning Board of Appeal.

One of the primary purposes of M.G.L Chapter 40B is to assure that no city or town shouldered a disproportionate amount of low- and moderate-income housing in any region of the state. To this end, a 10% statutory minimum was established as an indicator that suburbs and small towns were providing their “fair share” of affordable housing. Blandford does not currently meet this statutory minimum, and a need for more affordable housing choices can further be seen in the increased share of household incomes going toward housing costs. This is important in a town like Blandford with an aging population. Household income has also declined in the past decade while housing prices have stayed fairly consistent.

A growing issue in Blandford related to housing affordability, is the cost of maintenance and upkeep. With little new housing development and a reliance on older housing, costs of maintaining a house and the property play an outsized role in town. Older housing can have numerous challenges including energy inefficiency, design impediments for households with limited mobility, and outdated materials and products. This issue of maintaining older homes was raised by participants in the planning process. Related to housing affordability is the issues senior housing, whether that refers to specific residences that only house seniors, aging in place programs, or a combination of these and other options. Residents are well aware of the needs of their seniors, including appropriate housing.

## ***Housing Choice Types***

Housing can be a controversial subject in most towns. It has been shared that there have been challenges in trying to get policies passed through Town Meeting in the past. Currently Blandford is one of the few communities in the region that does not allow residences with three or more units (also known as multifamily housing). The number of housing units has increased by 9.5% over the past 10 years while the population has declined by almost 7%. There was an uptick in vacant units. Renter occupied units remained stagnant. This to suggest there is little to no housing choice available in



Blandford besides single-family, owner occupied units. Blandford currently lacks a variety of housing types in terms of rental options, 2-4 family homes, elderly housing, accessible housing, and subsidized housing.

### ***Coronavirus Pandemic***

Like all communities in the region (and in the country), Blandford is in a different place in 2021 than it was in 2020. Virtual learning was commonplace the last quarter of the 2019-2020 School Year and throughout the 2020-2021 school year. Without reliable high speed internet, this directly impacted the students and families in Blandford. It also became a cost burden for the school to purchase and provide hotspots so students could attend school virtually. While this has extremely been disruptive, the town is in the midst of addressing their internet issues. In a more positive note, many service-based businesses have acclimated to telecommuting or a hybrid work environment, drawing attention to whether many of these-service based businesses may still need to keep their office spaces. Reliable high-speed internet service would allow employees who might normally need to be in the office five days a week, the opportunity to work remotely more often and choose to live in a town like Blandford, away from more urbanized areas. Providing high-speed internet service along with adequate housing may make the town of Blandford a more attractive place to live for young professionals and families.

### ***Inclusionary Housing***

Inclusionary housing programs are local policies that tap the economic gains from rising real estate values to create affordable housing for lower income families. An inclusionary housing program might require developers to sell or rent 10 to 30 percent of new residential units to lower-income residents (<https://inclusionaryhousing.org/inclusionary-housing-explained/what-is-inclusionary-housing/>). The town currently has no Inclusionary Housing policy. A town-wide inclusionary housing zoning bylaw can be explored.

### ***Community Resilience***

A resilient community, not only one that bounces back after a hardship or disaster, is one that also is able to provide a wide range of housing types that accommodate all stages in a person's lifecycle. This is an ongoing conversation around housing that should continue to be explored, particularly with a variety of housing types that are built sustainably and in the context of climate risk. New home building and design can be strategic and cost-effective policies that will lead to more energy efficient homes. A greater focus on providing





housing options for seniors who are currently living in town or plan to retire in Blandford, along with exploring options to attract younger professionals and families, will go a long way in Blandford's path to greater resiliency.







# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TECHNICAL PAPER

## OVERVIEW

Though life may seem to move slowly in a place like Blandford, rarely does anything remain static. A long period of economic decline (common to so many rural areas across the nation) could now be shifting. For Blandford, a multiplicity of factors is emerging to possibly reshape the local economy. Open spaces, once used for farming and forestry, are now attractive for new natural resource-based businesses, including solar power developers and marijuana grow operations. In the past three years, the Town has had five solar development proposals, three of which are currently operational and occupy a total of 173 acres, generating an estimated total of 16 megawatts per day. In addition, two marijuana grow proposals have been put forward, one of which has been permitted to date, operating on a total of 36.5 acres of land.

At the same time, there are other trends that may bring change to Blandford, including the ability now for people to work remotely with the installation of broadband, and greater attractiveness of living in rural locations compared to heavily urbanized areas given pandemic associated risks in crowds and urban heat impacts during increasingly hotter summers due to climate change. The possibility of a new east-west rail stop in Chester adds to the mix of forces that could bring change. Going forward, it is worth keeping an eye on some of the possible indicators, including population, number of home sales, median home sale prices, number of building permits issued for new homes, and number of people making their second homes permanent places of residence.

More important than ever, Blandford's residents and local businesses need to work together to help realize the vision they have articulated within this document. With Blandford's small-town atmosphere being such an important value for those who responded to the Master Plan Survey, economic development ought to be scaled and appropriate to be protective of this quality. One of the most important places to start is to ensure that existing assets, including Blandford's central village area, the resources and facilities at Ski Blandford, and expansive tracts of forestlands across Town retain integrity over the long term.

This chapter reviews some of the important data to consider and then explores how the Town might build on these existing key assets.

## INVENTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

### *Municipal Expenses and Revenues*

Overall, the Town of Blandford is on good financial footing. While deferred maintenance, especially on the public drinking water system and other municipal facilities is evident, the Town's budget should provide enough of a foundation that enables reasonable borrowing to attend to



needs. Town Administrator Josh Garcia notes that several elements must come together to support this work, including understanding the Town's debt capacity, defining clear priorities and timetable, and good forecasting. Staff from the UMass Collins Center for Public Management and Eric Kinsharf CPA are providing technical assistance that will help set this course for the Town.<sup>1</sup>

The "out-sourcing" of these important financial roles for the Town is part of an ongoing recovery effort from a tough period in history when money had not been managed properly. This July, the Town begins the 4<sup>th</sup> year of its 5-year reorganization plan that is putting Blandford in a far stronger position. By fiscal year 2023, the Town aims to hire a full-time treasurer and collector. Staying the course and keeping to MA Department of Revenue best practices is paramount to the Town's financial health.

Looking back over an arc of 30 years, expenses for the Town have increased 130%, from \$2.0 million in 1990 adjusted for inflation dollars to \$4.6 million in 2020. Categories with the highest increases include: General Government with a 8.56% increase and Public Safety with a 4.34% increase. The category with the largest decrease was Education at 15.77%. The increase in the General Government category has to do with a change in staffing from largely part-time to now 8 full-time municipal staff.

Revenues have increased 121.82% from \$2.2 million in 1990 adjusted for inflation dollars to \$4.8 million in 2020. Proportionally, revenue from property taxes has remained relatively stable, but state aid has been in steady decline over the 30-year period from a high of providing 13.14% of all revenue to the Town in 1990 to 4.47% in 2020.<sup>2</sup> Local Receipts also declined from 19.27% in 1990 to 11.85% in 2020, but other sources (defined as all other) increased from 2.79% in 1990 to 20.11 in 2020. See Figures 1 and 2 below.

While Blandford continues to rely heavily on local property taxes for revenue (shown as "tax levy" in Figures 1 and 2 below), the tax rate compares favorably with surrounding towns (Chester, Granville, Huntington, Otis, and Russell) with only Otis and Granville having lower tax rates. See Figure 3 below. Blandford has other sources of income coming on-line from marijuana where the host community agreement includes 3% of gross revenue.

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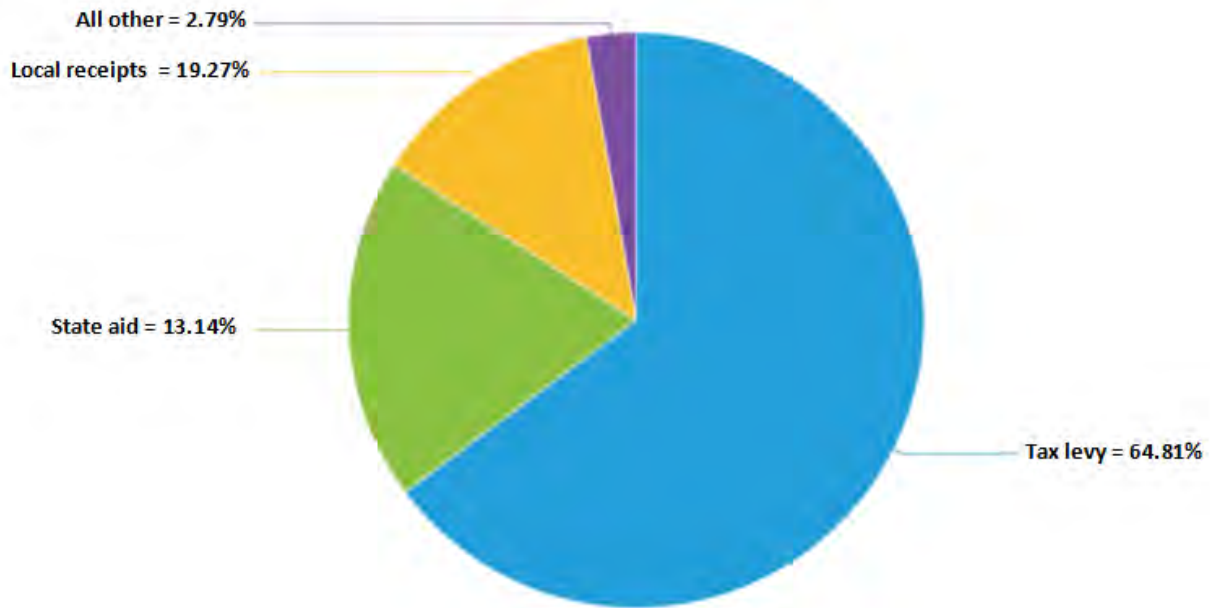
<sup>1</sup> The Collins Center is preparing a capital improvement plan and Kinsharf CPA is doing financial forecasting for the Town.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the proportionality here for 2020 does not account for Community Preservation Act revenues since CPA did not exist in 1990.

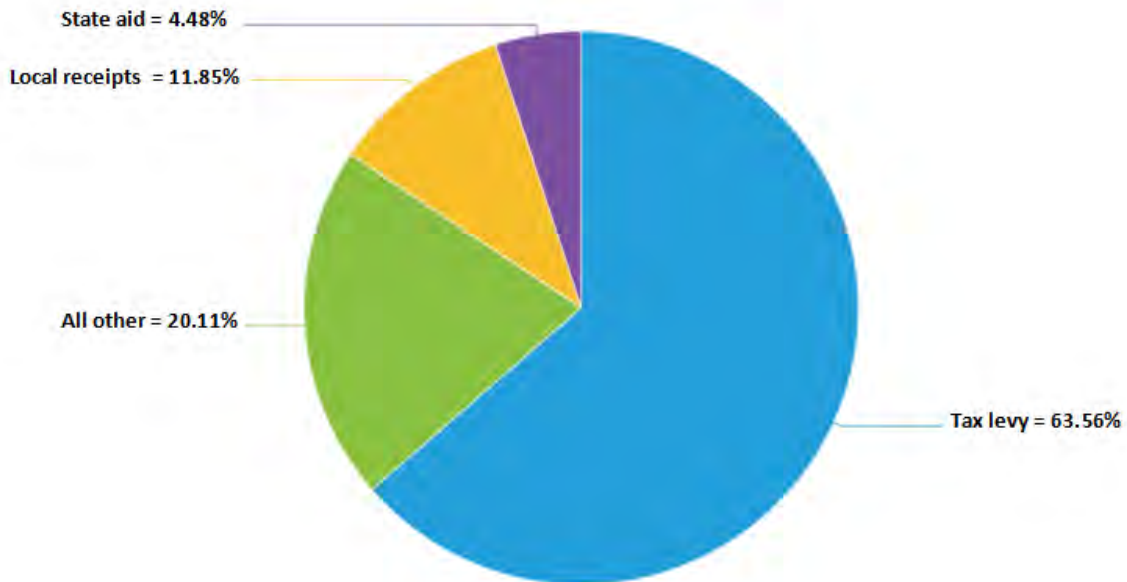


## Figures 1 and 2: Revenues FY1990 and FY2020

### Revenues by Source — FY 1990



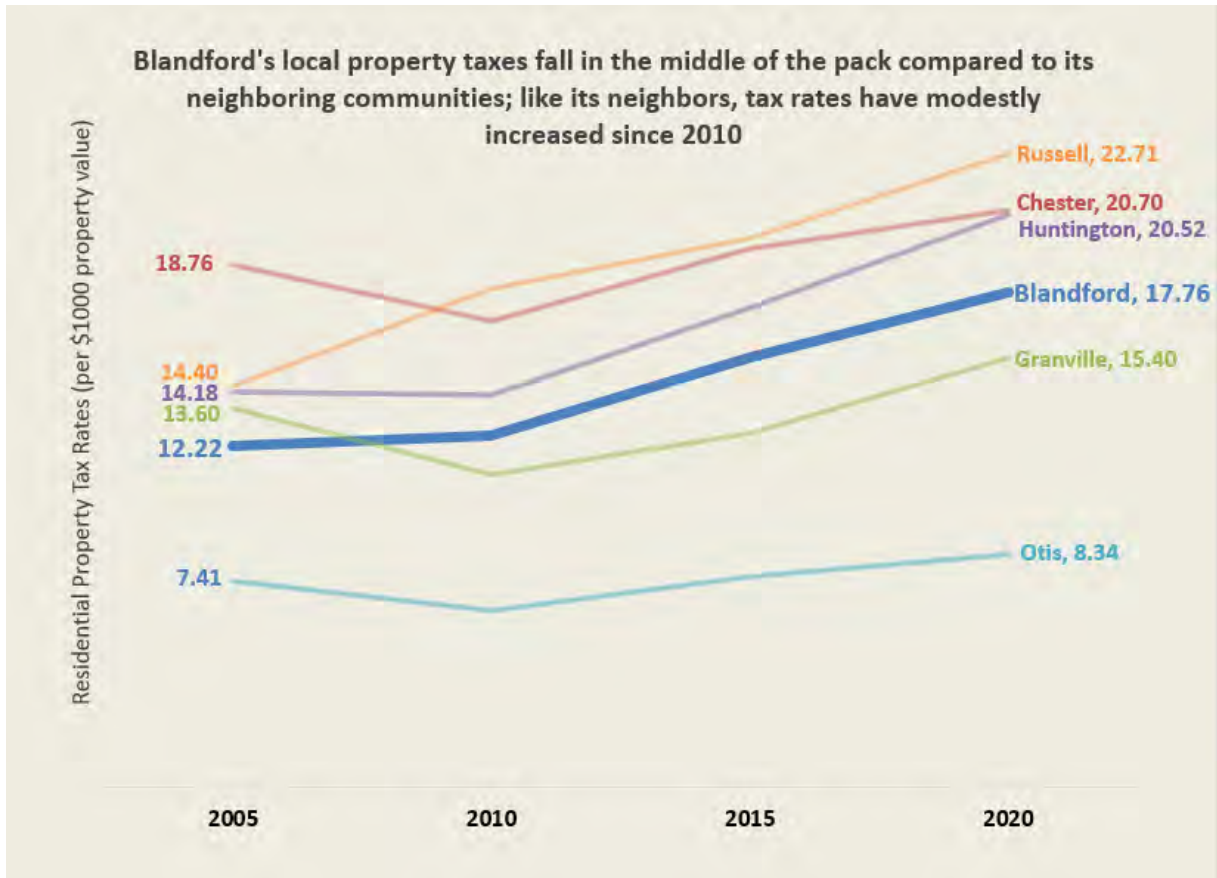
### Revenues by Source — FY 2020



Source: MA Department of Revenue



**Figure 3: Tax Rates in Blandford and Surrounding Towns**



Source: MA Department of Revenue





## Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT)

Conserved land owned by nonprofit organizations and government agencies is typically property tax exempt and as a result can impact municipal fiscal health. Payment in lieu of taxes, whereby such landowners annually provide some form of payment to a municipality to mitigate for property tax losses, is common practice in Massachusetts.

PILOT payments accounted for approximately 6% of Blandford's revenue in 2020. These are inclusive of amounts paid by Springfield Water & Sewer and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for state owned lands. While not a significant part of income for the Town, there may be some important adjustments coming with state PILOT payments in the coming years that could lead to increases for Blandford.

And with so much protected land in Blandford, understanding the nature of these payments seems important.

The amount of permanently protected land in Blandford has increased from 15,100 acres in 2004 to approximately 21,484 acres or 50.6% of the Town in 2020. The 21,484 acres with permanent protection include land owned by Springfield Water & Sewer Commission, state agencies (Mass DCR and Mass Fish & Game), the Towns of Blandford and Russell, private landowners, and nonprofit organizations as show in Figure 5 below. Lands in private hands are under Conservation Restrictions.<sup>3</sup>

The largest landowner in this group is the Springfield Water & Sewer Commission, which operates both the Borden Brook and Cobble Mountain Reservoirs to provide drinking water supply to several communities in the region. Land protection in the watersheds of these reservoirs is an important strategy for water supply protection. Blandford Town officials have been working with Springfield Water & Sewer Commission to ensure that acreages are accurate and that the formula for PILOT payments is applied appropriately. In FY 2020, the PILOT payment from Springfield Water & Sewer Commission was \$247,674.28, approximately \$24.12 per acre.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 4: Payments in Lieu of Taxes to Town of Blandford**

Fiscal Year	Actual Amount
2020.	\$284,103
2015.	\$205,161
2010.	\$180,624
2005.	\$242,015

Source: Division of Local Services  
MA Department of Revenue

<sup>3</sup> A Conservation Restriction (CR) is a legally binding agreement between a landowner and the CR holder, usually a public agency or a private land trust, whereby the landowner agrees not to develop the land in order to protect certain conservation values. The CR is recorded at the Registry of Deeds, and the land is considered permanently protected if the CR runs in perpetuity.

<sup>4</sup> Blandford Board of Assessors, City of Springfield Watershed Holdings and Valuation Summary, February 13, 2020. RDG Associates provided revised acreage, from 10,264 to 10,270, April 2021.



The State of Massachusetts is the second largest landowner in this category. In FY20, Blandford saw a total of \$20,571 in PILOT payments for state owned lands (SOL), approximately \$7.85 per acre.<sup>5</sup> The amounts provided by these state PILOT payments may change. In December 2020, State Auditor Suzanne M. Bump’s office completed an analysis that identifies certain inequities in the state PILOT formula. The executive summary for the report notes:

PILOT reimbursements for SOL are reliant on a legislative appropriation, yet the formula provides larger reimbursements to municipalities with high and fast-growing property values at the expense of other communities. Voices from communities and the Legislature have called for a reexamination of the SOL program in order to alter arrangements that disadvantage rural communities.<sup>6</sup>

For the active solar operations in Blandford, estimated payments in lieu of taxes are \$247,459.<sup>7</sup>

The State Auditor’s report also looked at these types of payments as well and the confusion for municipalities in the current approach. The report observes:

Power generation facilities provide another important source of tax revenue for municipalities. Small-scale, residential installations of solar panels have been exempted from taxation for decades. Decisions by the Appellate Tax Board (ATB) interpreting this law have extended tax exemptions for solar equipment to commercial entities. This change has resulted in varied reactions from communities, such as taxing solar facilities, negotiating PILOTs, and granting exemptions for varying rates and terms. Legislative action to clarify the law has advanced in recent years but has not yet resulted in enacted legislation.

As solar development seems to have slowed slightly for now given general program caps with utility companies, it seems an important time to revisit the topic of how the Town might best manage and locate such developments. A potentially significant source of new revenue, generating roughly \$2,000 in annual tax revenue per acre, solar ought to be done in such a way as to least impact rural character.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Note that the state also has a separate PILOT program for water supply protection lands, which is separate from the program under which Blandford’s state-owned lands fall. Under the state water supply PILOT, the formula yielded \$186.27 per acre for the Town of Belchertown and \$314.57 for the Town of Pelham in 2021. These PILOTs were provided for state-owned land associated with the Quabbin Reservoir.

<sup>6</sup> *The Impact of the State-Owned Land PILOT and Solar Taxation Policies on Municipalities*, Local Financial Impact Review, December 10, 2020, Commonwealth of Massachusetts Office of the State Auditor, Suzanne M. Bump. See: associated webpage: <https://www.mass.gov/report/the-impact-of-the-state-owned-land-pilot-and-solar-taxation-policies-on-municipalities>.

<sup>7</sup> Blandford Board of Assessors Fiscal Year 2021 Revaluation Summary of Solar Properties and PILOTs, October 5, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Rough estimate on annual tax revenue is from Harald Scheid of RDG Associates.



**Figure 5: Ownership of Permanently Protected Land within Blandford 2020**

<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Property</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>% of total protected land acreage</b>
Springfield Water & Sewer Commission	Various watershed lands throughout Blandford	10,270	48%
State Agencies		2,958	14%
MA DCR	Chester-Blandford SF	1,796	
MA DCR	Tolland SF	1,012	
MA DF&G	Stage Brook WMA	150	
Town of Russell	Russell Water Supply Land	2,952	14%
Town of Blandford	Various properties, including Long Pond and Herrick-Knittel Conservation Areas, Blandford Water Supply Land, and the General Knox Trail Historical Area	1,014	4.5%
Nonprofit organizations	Arms Acres Memorial Forest and Gibbs Road Conservation Area	127	.5%
Private	Various with Conservation Restrictions	4,169	19%
<b>Total</b>		<b>21,484</b>	

*Chapter 60 Lands*

It is also important to acknowledge that 4,880 acres of land in Blandford are enrolled wholly in the Chapter 61 program. Also, there are parcels totaling 4,323 in acres where a portion of the acreage is enrolled in the program. The Chapter 61 program provides tax relief to qualifying landowners who continue use of their land for forestry, agriculture, and recreation. For point of comparison, the 2004 Community Development Plan reports there were a total of 4,248 acres of land in Blandford enrolled in the Chapter 61 program.

*Gateway Hilltowns Collaborative*

Blandford has been part of the Gateway Hilltowns Collaborative since its inception in 2016. The group of six hilltown communities (Blandford, Chester, Huntington, Middlefield, Montgomery, and Russell) collaborated in hiring an economic development director and focusing on several projects, including marketing and promotion of the area, shared services arrangements, small business support, among other activities.





Most importantly, the group worked with Elan Planning, Design, and Landscape Architecture PLLC to develop a multi-town economic development strategy focused on increasing tourism. Called Gateway Hilltowns Economic Development Strategy (2017), the document includes a number of strategies that capitalize on the region’s wealth of cultural attractions and outdoor recreation opportunities.

*Local Businesses*

There are some 47 businesses operating in Blandford currently, from the trades, such as plumbing, electrical, flooring, excavating and construction, to farms, lumber and stone related. Both Hull Forest Products and New England Forestry Foundation have lands in Blandford. The largest employers located in Blandford include the McDonald’s on the east and west-bound plazas of the Massachusetts Turnpike and the Blandford Country Club. Ski Blandford had been a top employer before its closure in 2020. The Town is also an important local employer. Most people employed in Blandford travel from other communities, including Russell, Granville, and Westfield among others.

**Figure 6: Categories of Several Businesses**

13	=	trades related (plumbing, electrical, flooring, excavating, construction)
6	=	farm related
6	=	food related
4	=	recreation related
4	=	lumber or stone related
3	=	trucking related



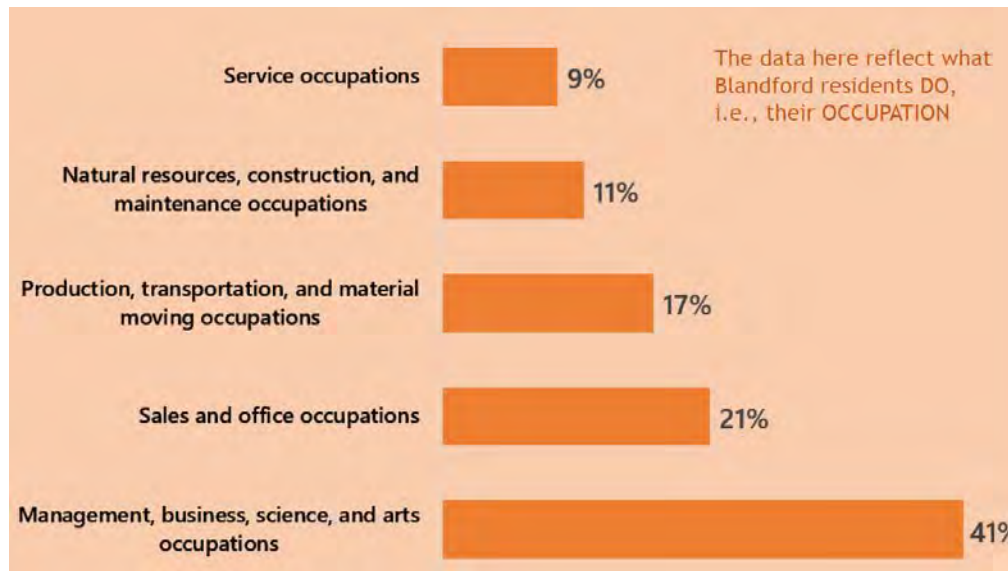
## Workforce and Employment

Among Blandford's residents who work, four in ten are employed in management, business, science, and arts occupations. This reflects what people do for work. See Figure 7 at right.

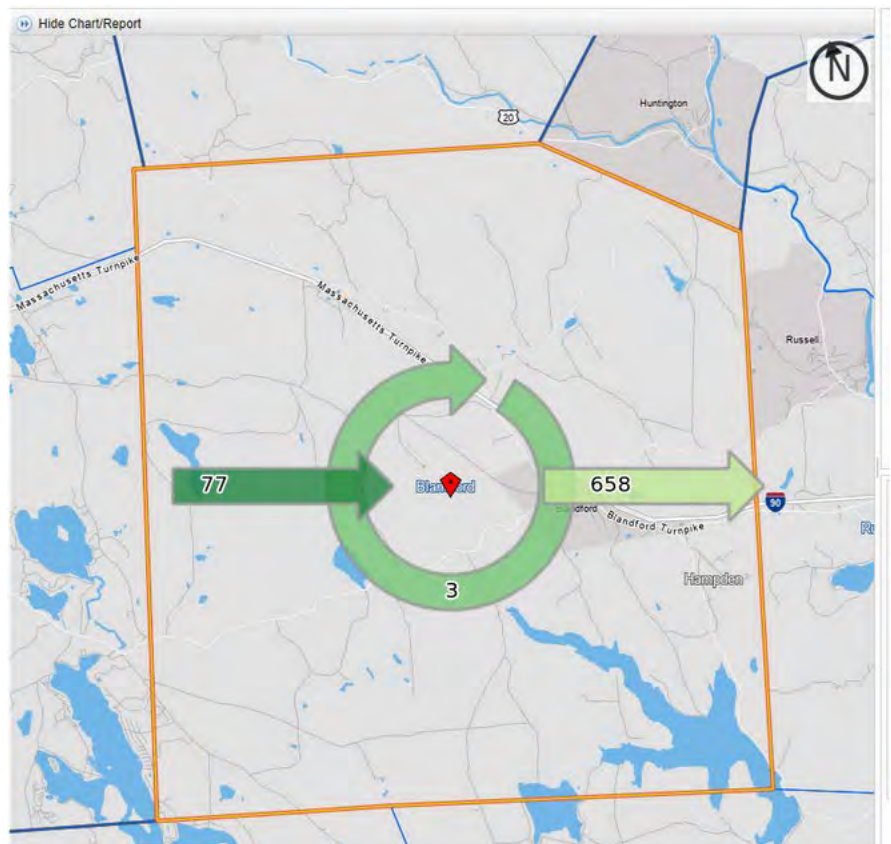
Blandford residents have employment largely to the east, including Westfield (94 people), Springfield (56 people), Agawam (24 people), and West Springfield (24 people), but several also travel much further to work in

Worcester (16 people) and Boston (16 people). Figure 8 draws from 2018 data to show that Blandford provided employment to about 80 people with 77 of those people coming from outside town to work. Meanwhile, most Blandford residents travel out of town for employment.

### Figure 7: Employment Among Blandford Residents

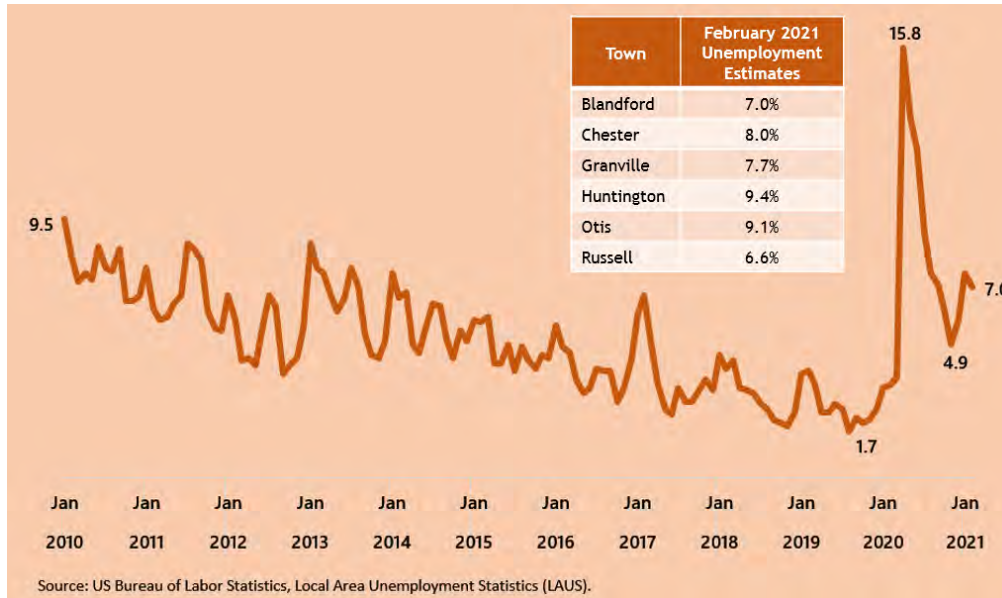


### Figure 8: Inflow - Outflow of People for Employment



Unemployment among Blandford residents had been trending generally downward. As in many places, however, the Covid-19 pandemic produced a spike in unemployment. During the pandemic, Blandford had an estimated peak unemployment rate of 15.8% in April 2020. By November 2020, there had been some important recovery to reflect 4.9% unemployment, though the unemployment rate among Blandford residents has risen slightly to 7.0% in February 2021. This February unemployment figure is comparable to surrounding communities. See Figure 9 at right.

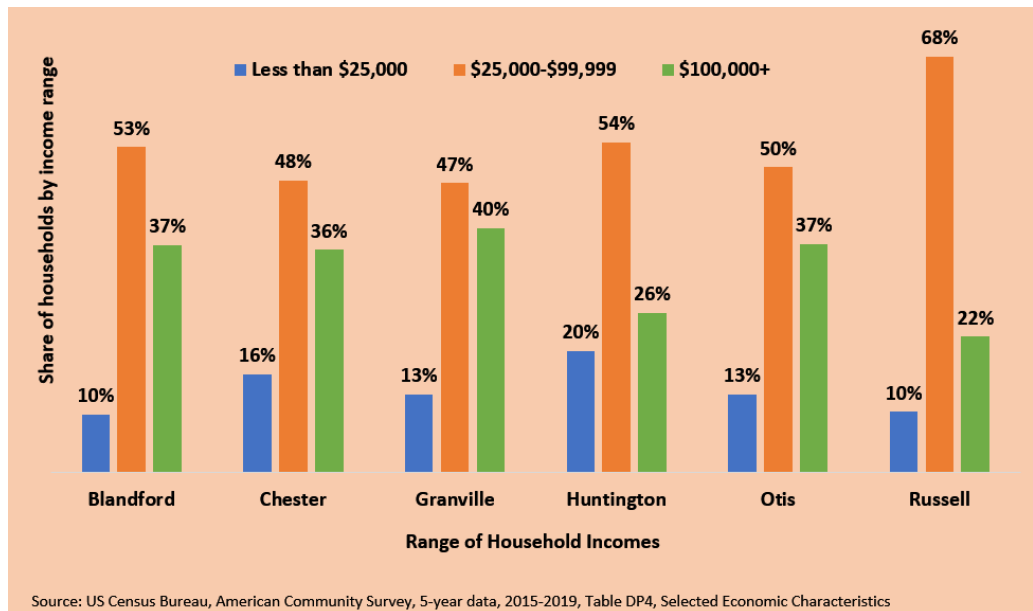
**Figure 9: Unemployment Among Blandford Residents**



*Household Income*

Compared to neighboring communities, Blandford generally has a smaller share of lower-income households, with 10% earning less than \$25,000 per year, and a larger share of higher-income households, with 37% earning more than \$100,000 per year. Blandford’s profile of household incomes seems closest to that of Otis. See figure 10 at right.

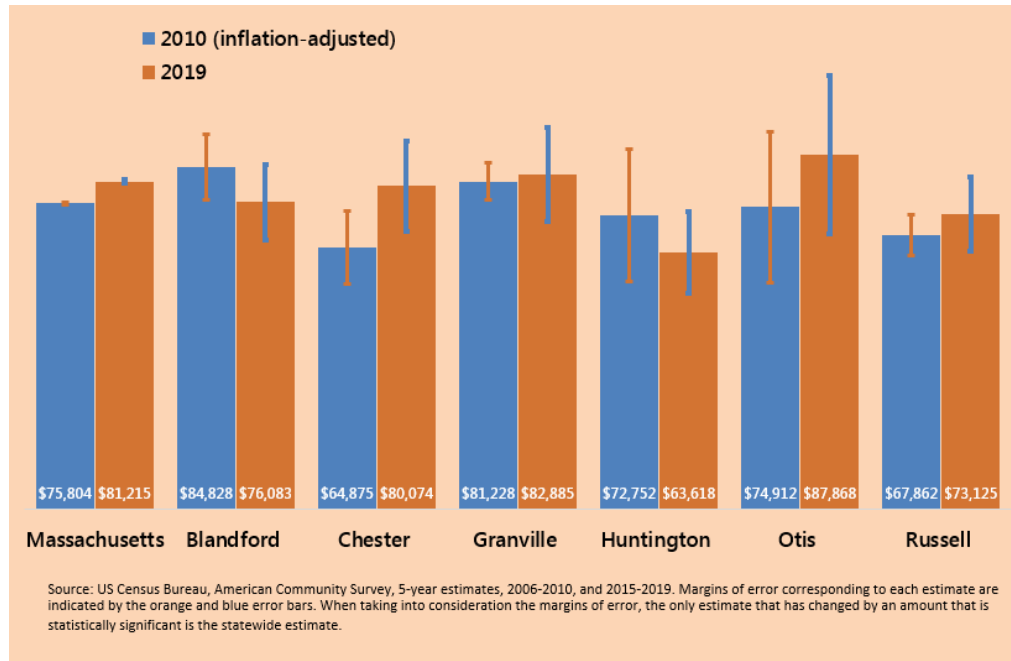
**Figure 10: Range of Household Incomes**





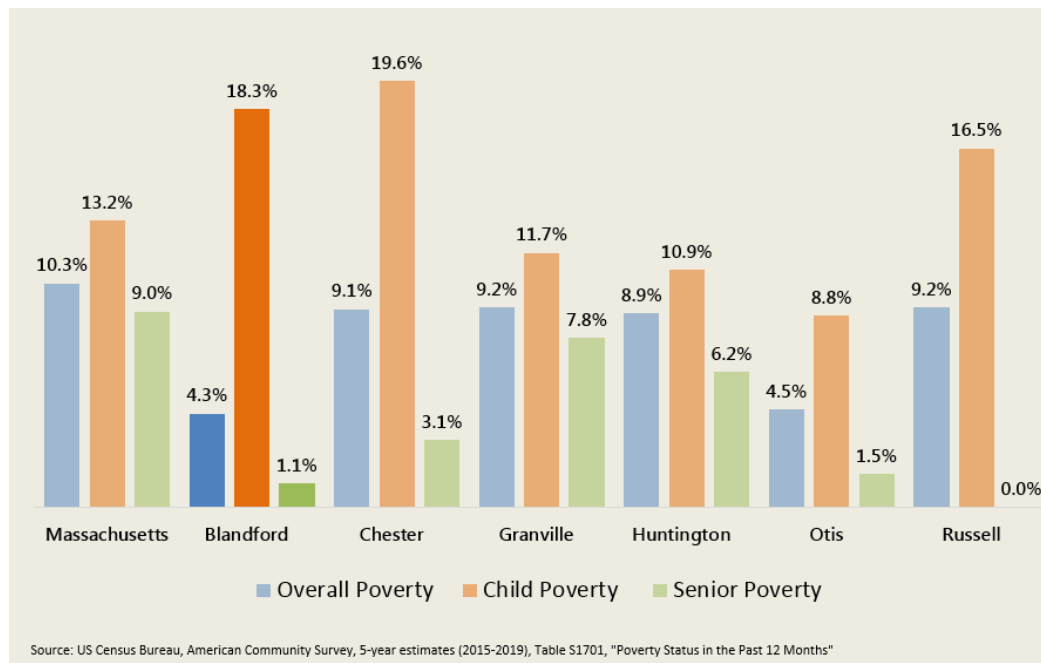
Blandford's median household income compares favorably to neighboring communities and to the state-wide numbers. While Blandford's median household income appears to have declined from \$84,828 in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars to \$76,083 in 2019, the margins of error on this data are fairly large. See Figure 11 at right. Margins of error are indicated by lines at the top of each stack.

**Figure 11: Median Household Incomes**



Gauging poverty rates in Blandford has large margins of error given the small sample size. Nonetheless, the data shows an estimated 2019 child poverty rate in Blandford of 18.3%. This is higher than the overall poverty rate of 4.3% and the senior poverty rate of 1.1%. The range of potential values is much wider however. Figure 12a, at right, shows the poverty rates and Figure

**Figure 12a: Poverty Rates**



12b shows that the true value of these poverty rates fall between the value of the estimate in 12a, plus or minus certain values shown.

**Figure 12b: Confidence Intervals for Poverty Rates**

Town/State	Overall Poverty	Child Poverty (under 18 years)	Senior Poverty (65 years and over)
Massachusetts	±0.2%	±0.3%	±0.2%
Blandford	±4.6%	±25.2%	±1.6%
Chester	±5.9%	±20.7%	±2.6%
Granville	±5.7%	±9.8%	±7.1%
Huntington	±4.4%	±15.1%	±5.8%
Otis	±2.8%	±14.1%	±2.4%
Russell	±5.6%	±16.7%	±14.3%

*Indicators of Change*

While there is discussion in some quarters about change in the Hilltowns due to what people are experiencing, including a “hot housing market,” an unusual pace of new development, and generally more people visiting or staying in the area from urban locations, the data for Blandford is not yet providing any clear indication. Going forward, it seems important to keep an eye on some of the possible indicators of change, including population, number of home sales, median sale prices, number of building permits for new homes, and number of second homes becoming permanent places of residence. While sources for some of these numbers are easily obtained, it will be important to track other numbers, particularly number of building permits issued for construction of new homes. Current numbers are shown in Figure 13 below to help provide a baseline understanding.



**Figure 13: Blandford Numbers to Watch Going Forward**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Population</b> <i>(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 5-year estimates; and UMass Donahue Institute, population projections for 2020)</i>	1,144	1,164	1,259	1,177	1,105	1,205
<b>Number of single-family home sales</b> <i>(Source: Warren Group)</i>	12	20	22	18	18	20
<b>Median home sale price for single family home – inflation adjusted to 2020</b> <i>(Source: Warren Group)</i>	\$229,785	\$167,443	\$207,277	\$202,603	\$190,074	\$232,000
<b>Number of building permits for new single-family homes</b> <i>(Source: Building Inspector)</i>	Currently not tracked separately.					
<b>Number of building permits for improvements to single family homes</b> <i>(Source: Building Inspector)</i>	Currently not tracked separately.					
<b>Number of people making second homes permanent places of residence</b> <i>Best current indicator that can find is number of housing units indicated for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use versus total number of housing units</i> <i>(Source: US Census Bureau, 5-year data, 2010-2019, Tables B25004 and DP04)</i>	34 / 582 6%	50 / 635 8%	61 / 663 9%	66 / 623 11%	86 / 610 14%	NA





## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

There are important opportunities in shaping a future that will help retain what Blandford residents hold most dear: the small-town atmosphere. Economic development need not run contrary to that aim. In fact, the five elements that residents indicate they most want to see more of in Town—recreation, musical events, restaurants, neighborhood stores/boutiques, and art in public spaces—integrate well with a small-scale rural economic development program.

With a focus on enhancing and supporting existing resources, Blandford can work with the excellent building blocks it has in place already. The discussion here involves what seem the most important of these building blocks toward a more robust rural economy with an acknowledgement of current challenges: Blandford’s town center and the abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities.

### *Town Center*

At the heart of Blandford are a stand of beloved historic and cultural resources in the Town Center and Town Common area. See Figure 12 below. These include the Country Club, Fairgrounds, White Church, and Watson Memorial Park along North Street, and the Historical Society, Congregational Church, Post Office/Old Town Hall building, the Library, and the Country Store and Café along Main Street.

The White Church, Watson Memorial Park, Historical Society, Congregational Church, and Porter Memorial Library

Described more fully in the Cultural Resources Chapter of this Master Plan, these institutions include facilities and programming within Blandford that are critical to the town’s cultural life. Programs include a robust series of events by both the Porter Memorial Library and Historical Society and the Bel Canto Opera at the White Church during summer months. The Bel Canto

### **Civic Tourism**

The word “tourism” carries with it the weight of what we may have witnessed in other places overrun by crowds of people seeking a popular destination. The rural fabric of the Western Massachusetts Hilltowns, however, makes possible the idea of a tourism that is based on an attractive combination of experiences spread over an extensive geography, from cultural adventures in quaint New England village centers to recreational adventures in the expanses of nearby forested hillsides.

One idea to explore in revitalizing local economy is “civic tourism,” a phrase coined by Dan Shilling in his book, *Civic Tourism: The Poetry and Politics of Place*. This concept aims to reframe tourism’s purpose from an end to a means, from an economic goal to a tool that can help people enhance what they love about the place where they live. Out of this concept come strategies for deciding if, how, and for what purpose the ingredients of place (cultural, built, natural) can be integrated to create a dynamic, distinctive, and prosperous community.

*Summary of civic tourism in paragraph above adapted from: [www.civictourism.org](http://www.civictourism.org)*



Opera is indicated as an attraction of state-wide significance in the *Gateway Hilltowns Economic Development Strategy*. At Watson Memorial Park, the Town maintains a network of walking paths that lead to scenic views of the Connecticut and Westfield River valleys. The park also includes picnic facilities with barbecue grills, a playground, little league ball field, and two historic barns.

### Blandford Country Club

Originally established in 1909 with the purchase of the 1822 summer home of Josephine Porter, the Blandford Country Club had been struggling with declining membership and mounting debt over the past 20 years or so. The facility had been planned for closure when a core group of members who feared that the property's 56 acres would be converted into a housing subdivision, joined forces to purchase the Club in 2019. Among the new owners is Mark Amanti, owner of the Knox Trail Inn in Otis. The new owners have been working to reinvigorate the club at a time when the sport of golf itself is undergoing a reimagining. According to an April 2019, *Republican* news article, the new owners envision making golf more fun, less expensive, and less exclusive. The club is now open to the public and they offer facilities to play tennis and pickle ball, as well as a restaurant to promote the club as a gathering place for family and friends. It is not clear what the impacts of Covid-19 have been on the club and its prospects.



*New owners of the Blandford Country Club are working to reinvigorate the club, making golf less expensive and less exclusive, and adding other activities and amenities.*

### Fair Grounds

For the annual Labor Day celebration, the all-volunteer staff of the Blandford Fair Grounds have been in the process of transition. Originally an opportunity for area farmers to showcase their animals and abundance of their harvests, the cost of transporting farm animals to Blandford has increased and fair attendance has been on the decline. The fall fair now features



food booths and entertainment, such as a horse show, an art show, and fiddler’s contest as the main attractions. To boost Fair Grounds activity, organizers are developing a companion fair planned to occur the last Saturday in June and to include a horse show, a flea market and craft show, and a “touch a truck” feature for youth. One of the major challenges for the Fairgrounds is that existing buildings often do not meet current standards for fire code, accessibility, and utilities, especially water.

### Old Town Hall

Currently occupied by the Fire Department and the U.S. Post Office, the Town is considering what may be the best use of this building going forward. By appearances the building is essentially a duplex commercial storefront. The plan is for the Fire Department to move to new quarters at the Highway Garage in fiscal year 2023-2024, but the Post Office, which pays rent to the Town for its use of the space will remain. Should the Town retain ownership of the building and seek a new commercial tenant for the vacant space or rather sell the building to better attract and enable a new business owner (given the rental income from the Post Office) within the town center? Another idea that emerged in the course of Master Plan development is to create in the vacated part of the building a community professional center where local home-based businesses might have office space and share meeting space and certain resources, such as photocopy and fax machines.



*Owned by the Town of Blandford, Old Town Hall currently houses the local U.S. Post Office on one side and the fire department on the other side of the building. As the fire department will be moving soon to new quarters at the Highway Garage, there is*





*important conversation to be had around the building's future and what use might best contribute to economic development in the Town overall.*

### Blandford Country Store and Café

Jen Girard and her husband Greg purchased the Country Store property in 2018 with the intention of creating a friendly community store suited to Blandford's small-town atmosphere. They encountered several barriers over the past few years that have made success difficult. These include loss of typical foot traffic to the store due to the newspaper distribution company determining that Blandford is 20 minutes too far for deliveries, repeated breakdowns in the antiquated refrigeration system, and the inability to compete with pricing and supply of big box grocery retailers (Stop & Shop and Big Y) on the path home from work for many Blandford residents. More recently with Covid-19, the lack of foot traffic from the church before and after services has produced additional impact.

Girard is in the process of making several improvements to help position the store for success. One of the lessons learned is that they need to pivot away from total reliance on retail sales. Though she will continue the store at a smaller scale, Girard and her husband are making investments to convert more fully to a restaurant, along with an ice cream and confection business. She noted that locally people are more interested in meals and eating out than a nearby shop that can provide staples. Investments to date include creating more indoor space for dining and remodeling to commercial kitchen standards.



*Owners of the Blandford Country Store and Café are making several changes to better serve the community and remain economically viable in a rural setting.*

All of these institutions described above have faced certain challenges through recent years, even more so with the Covid-19 pandemic in the past year. The pathway to recovery though seems to be evolving through creative problem solving and great heart from those who care so deeply. Continued investments of energy and funding remain paramount to ensuring a thriving center at the heart of Blandford. As recovery and infrastructure monies may become available, it will be important to invest in these places to the greatest extent possible.

To support the Town Center, the Town is working toward much needed drinking water infrastructure upgrades to support local institutions, businesses, and residences. The Town also recently expanded the business district in early 2021. Uses permitted in the business district include: any purpose authorized in the Residential District; offices, banks, and places of assembly; retail stores, salesrooms, shops for custom work; or the making of articles to be sold at retail on the premises; restaurants excluding drive-ins or businesses using curb service; theaters, halls, and clubs; public or semipublic buildings; places of business of a barber and similar public service, baker blacksmith, builder, carpenter, caterer, clothes cleaner, confectioner, decorator dressmaker, dyer, electrician, florists, furrier, laundry, laundromat, lumber, mail-order business, milliner, motor vehicle salesroom, milk bottling and distributing, news dealers, optician, painter, paper hanger, pastry shop, photographer, plumber, printer, publisher, radio broadcasting studio, shoemaker, shoe repair, tailor, telegraph office, tinsmith, undertaker, upholsterer, and other similar uses; gasoline and oil stations and garages for storage and repair; registered marijuana dispensary (requires a Special Permit and Site Plan Review issued by the Planning Board); and any additional use, which is not specifically prohibited or already requires a Special Permit from another Board, for which the Zoning Board of Appeals may grant permission.



**Figure 12: The Institutions and Businesses of Blandford's Town Center and Town Common**





## *Outdoor Recreational Opportunities*

Blandford has long been a place where people from the surrounding area and afar have sought respite during summer months. Participants in the economic development focus group, held as part of the master planning process, talked about how second homeowners in the 1950s through 1970s came to Blandford in the summers for the rural atmosphere, cooler fresh air, walks in the woods, and enjoyment of recreational activities, particularly golf. At the same time, Blandford has long been an important destination during winter months for families throughout the region seeking a day out on the slopes of the Blandford ski area.

Recreational opportunities in and around Blandford remain abundant and include: the facilities of Ski Blandford and the Blandford Country Club, the 11-acre Watson Memorial Park in the center of town, miles of local hiking trails and dirt roads (including at the 300-acre Long Pond Conservation Area, and 254-acre Knittel Conservation Area), possible connection to the Highlands Footpath, overnight accommodations at Laurel Ridge Camping Area, and proximity to the 2,490 acres of Chester-Blandford State Forest, 2,378 acres of Granville State Forest, 6,878 acres of Tolland State Forest, and the 1,085-acre Otis Reservoir.

By enhancing these resources and elevating the mix of opportunities available for outdoor enjoyment, Blandford could produce a robust local recreational economy. Such a focus would be in keeping with many of the values articulated by residents in the master planning process. Collaboration with nearby neighboring towns, particularly Chester, Otis, and Granville seems essential in this work.

### Trail linkages

While Blandford does not have an extensive formal network of trails, possibilities to make connections to large tracts of public open space and the Highlands Footpath abound. These connections could for the time being, make use of dirt roads and off-road trails where possible. Currently, the Highlands Footpath has a segment from the center of Chester through Chester-Blandford State Forest to Observation Hill. Blandford could explore with the membership of Highlands Footpath, Inc., and Mass DCR a segment that would connect Observation Hill through the southeastern area of Blandford State Forest along Mica Mine Road to Blandford Town Center. This could begin to expand the options for a local walking journey. The former Commissioner of DCR had indicated to members of Highlands Footpath, Inc. that though camping will not be restored at Chester-Blandford State Forest (due to the cost of overcoming drinking water and sanitary issues), his agency would be open to the idea of installing several lean-to facilities for long distance hikers within the boundaries of the State Forest.



## Ski Blandford

The oldest club-owned ski area, Ski Blandford has been struggling financially for years. Sold in 2017 to hopeful investors, the area closed permanently in 2020. Ski area manager Ron Crozier has indicated that they are unable to commit to opening the ski area any time soon and there are no plans for the ski area's future. The owners had investigated the possibility of a snow tube operation but were unable to come up with a business model that would even approach the break-even point. They also showed the facility to a couple of potential buyers, though there was nothing more than the initial viewing, according to Crozier.

One idea posed to Mr. Crozier has been development of a mountain biking park. With proximity to Chester-Blandford State Forest (4.4 miles via Nye Brook Road and John Knox Road), and other vast tracts of protected open space, and the volume of informal biking activity in the area already, a downhill bike park at Ski Blandford could be well timed and placed.



*Ski Blandford closed permanently in 2020.*



Compared to ski operations, investments for mountain biking appear to be providing healthy returns. The nearest example of this success is Berkshire East, where it has been reported the owners are now earning more in the summer from mountain biking than what they earn in the winter with skiing. Mr. Crozier indicated that there have been only brief internal discussions about mountain biking and that one of the issues they have is that Ski Blandford has older style chair lifts that would not adequately provide uphill lift transport with bikes.

Additional conversation with Ski Blandford owners on this topic seems important. Mountain biking has helped to create strong new local economies in several regions of the northeast, most notably Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, and Mount Ascutney in West Windsor, Vermont. Mountain bikers will travel in order to ride and when they travel, they also spend money, giving rise to such businesses as craft breweries, wood-fired pizza joints, and overnight accommodations. Oftentimes, mountain bikers also decide to settle in trail-friendly communities bringing new young energy and dollars.

### **The Example of Mount Ascutney**

No longer financially viable as a commercial operation, Mount Ascutney Ski Area in West Windsor, Vermont, closed in 2010. The value of second homes and mountainside condominiums plummeted, and many residents feared the place they most loved would become a ghost town.

Through a series of community meetings, residents decided to purchase the 470-acre resort area in 2015. They had support from the Trust for Public Land and individual donors. A conservation and recreation easement was conveyed to the local land trust over what became an expanded 1,581 acres of town forest.

Today, Mount Ascutney includes a 30-mile network of non-motorized, recreational trails that stretch to the peak and hug the western base of the mountain. The network has become a destination for mountain bikers, backcountry skiers, and hikers locally and from across New England.

An independent nonprofit, called Mt. Ascutney Outdoors, is responsible for the management, oversight and development of recreational, educational and community activities and conservation on the land under a delegation of authority from the Town of West Windsor. As part of their work, they are creating a nonprofit community ski area on a portion of the property, providing inexpensive skiing opportunities for all families.

### *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Funding*

Given the tremendous impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on local business and economies, the state and federal governments have developed several programs to help with recovery. Some of these programs are meant to issue direct funding to local businesses and other programs enable





cities and towns to accelerate recovery from the pandemic, address its economic fallout, and lay the foundation for a strong and equitable recovery.

*Economic Development Strategies in the 2003 Community Development Plan*

Blandford's Community Development from 2003 included seven economic development strategies. Several of these have their counterparts in this chapter of the 2021 Master Plan.

- Support and encourage appropriate local business activity that contributes to the rural character of Blandford
- Study ways to compensate the Town for providing and protecting natural resources that are vital to health and prosperity of the region
- Promote Blandford as a destination for tourist and recreational activities
- Mixed use town center development bylaw
- Promote Blandford as a location for retirement and vacation homes
- Encourage and promote specialized agricultural activities that create "value-added" products for the wholesale and retail markets
- Encourage cottage industries and expanded home occupations in Blandford while providing adequate protection of neighborhood character and property values





# OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

## TECHNICAL PAPER

The rural landscape of forests, fields, lakes and streams are the greatest assets to the town of Blandford. The land now called Blandford, Massachusetts, was Mohican and Pocumtuc Territory, where originally due to its rugged upland terrain and general absence of agricultural land suggests that this community was the site of small, seasonal fishing and hunting camps. Its proximity to natural ponds and streams, like Long and Blair Ponds and Wheeler and Bedlam Brooks would provide the food for the native people. In 1741, when Blandford was incorporated as a town, development along Route 23 sprung up, particularly homes and taverns due to its major traveling route between Albany and Springfield. In addition, Russell Stage Road served as the primary route between the Westfield River and Blandford Center, thus Blandford's place as an important pass through community has been secured. Now primarily a bedroom community for people working in the larger communities of Westfield and Springfield, Blandford continues to offer a rural landscape and peace and quiet of a small town. The community has also become an important recreation destination.

### INVENTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

#### *Geology and Topography*

The geology in Blandford is primarily characterized of a mix of limestone and other calcium-rich bedrock, schist, quartzite, and some gneiss. Some areas have dense glacial till, but the presence and amount of till is inconsistent. Variation in bedrock creates changes in terrain as well as soil type and stream alkalinity. Most of Blandford's slopes range from 8 to 15 percent, where 9,573 acres comprise slopes of 15 percent or greater. Slopes of 15 percent along with important water bodies have created natural limits to development in town.

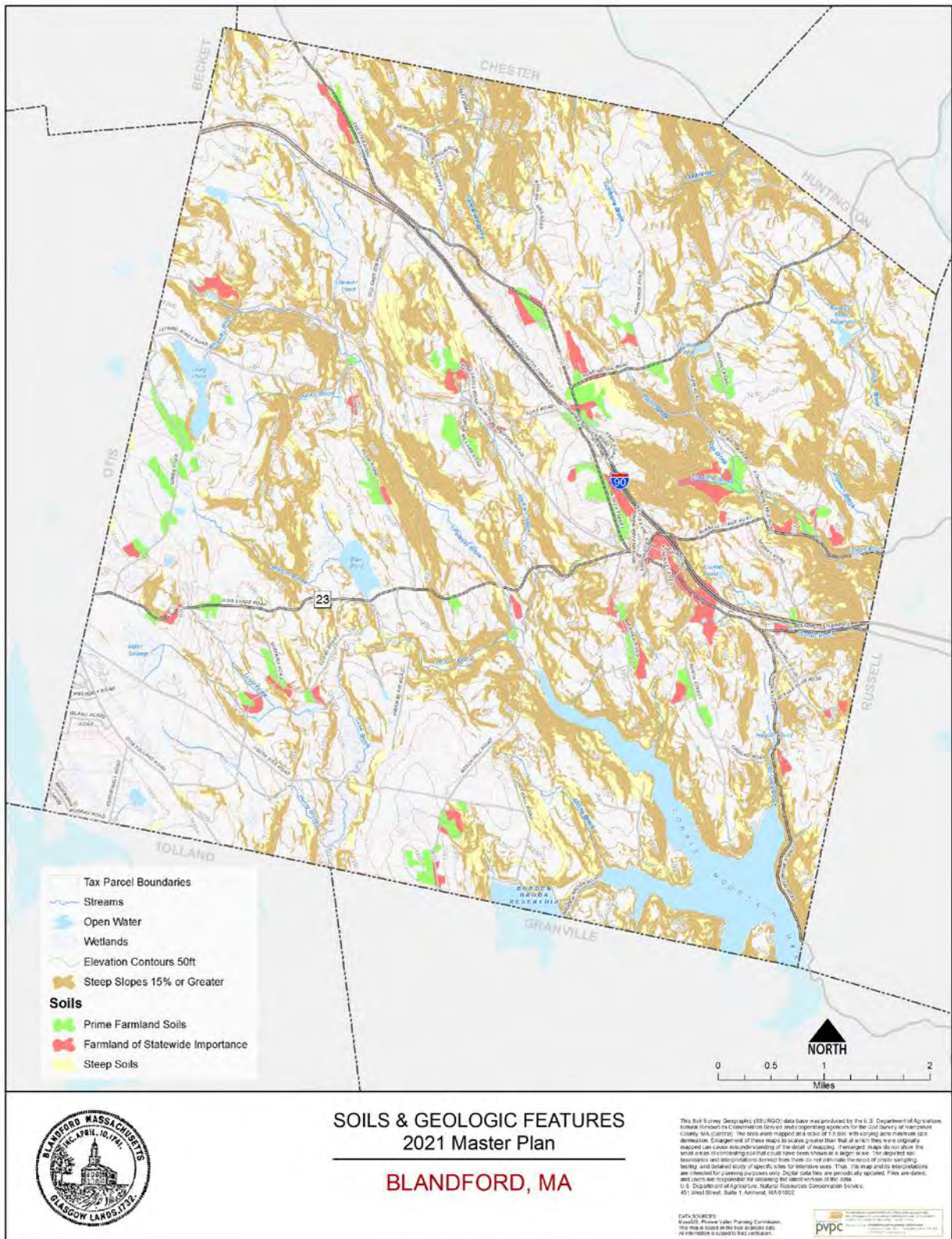
#### *Agricultural Soils*

In addition to supporting and constraining habitat and human development, soil characteristics also influence agricultural productivity. Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) soil data contains a classification system for evaluating agricultural soil productivity. This system identifies soils as Prime farmland soils, Farmland of Statewide Importance and Farmland of Unique Importance. Prime Farmland is defined by the NRCS as "land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for economically producing sustained high yields of food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods." Farmland of Unique Importance are defined as "land other than prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance that might be used for the production of specific high value food and fiber crops."

The soils that make up Blandford are Peru-Marlow, Lyman-Berkshire, Ridgebury-Muck-Whitman, and Merrimac-Sudbury.

Map 1 shows areas of prime farmland soils in Blandford. Areas of Prime Farmland Soils and Farmland Soils of Unique Importance are scattered throughout town. Also of note, are all the areas of Blandford that have steep soils in the steep slopes of 15 percent or greater.

Map 1 - Prime Farmland Soils





## *Wetland and Water Resources*

Development in Blandford has historically been limited by wetlands, steep slopes, and forest. The town is intersected by many streams which flow into the Westfield River and down into the Connecticut River Valley. There are approximately 1,135 acres of wetlands in Blandford. Wetland habitats in town occur primarily along the streams and tributaries as well as in lands adjacent to the major ponds in Blandford. The wetlands, streams, rivers and lakes provide critical wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. If open waters are included this accounting of lands to be protected, the total of wetlands in Blandford rises to 4,117 acres. Wetland habitats in town occur primarily along the streams and rivers as well as in lands adjacent to major ponds.

The Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (MGL 131, Section 40) protects wetlands, water sources, and adjoining land areas by preventing or minimizing impacts to these resources.

Anyone proposing to remove, fill, dredge, build upon, degrade, discharge into, or otherwise alter resources or areas within the areas listed below must submit an application to the Conservation Commission for review:

- 200 feet of any perennial stream or river
- 100 feet from any freshwater wetland, wet meadow, marsh, vernal pool, reservoir, pond of any size, or lands subject to flooding or inundation by ground or surface water
- 100-year floodplains

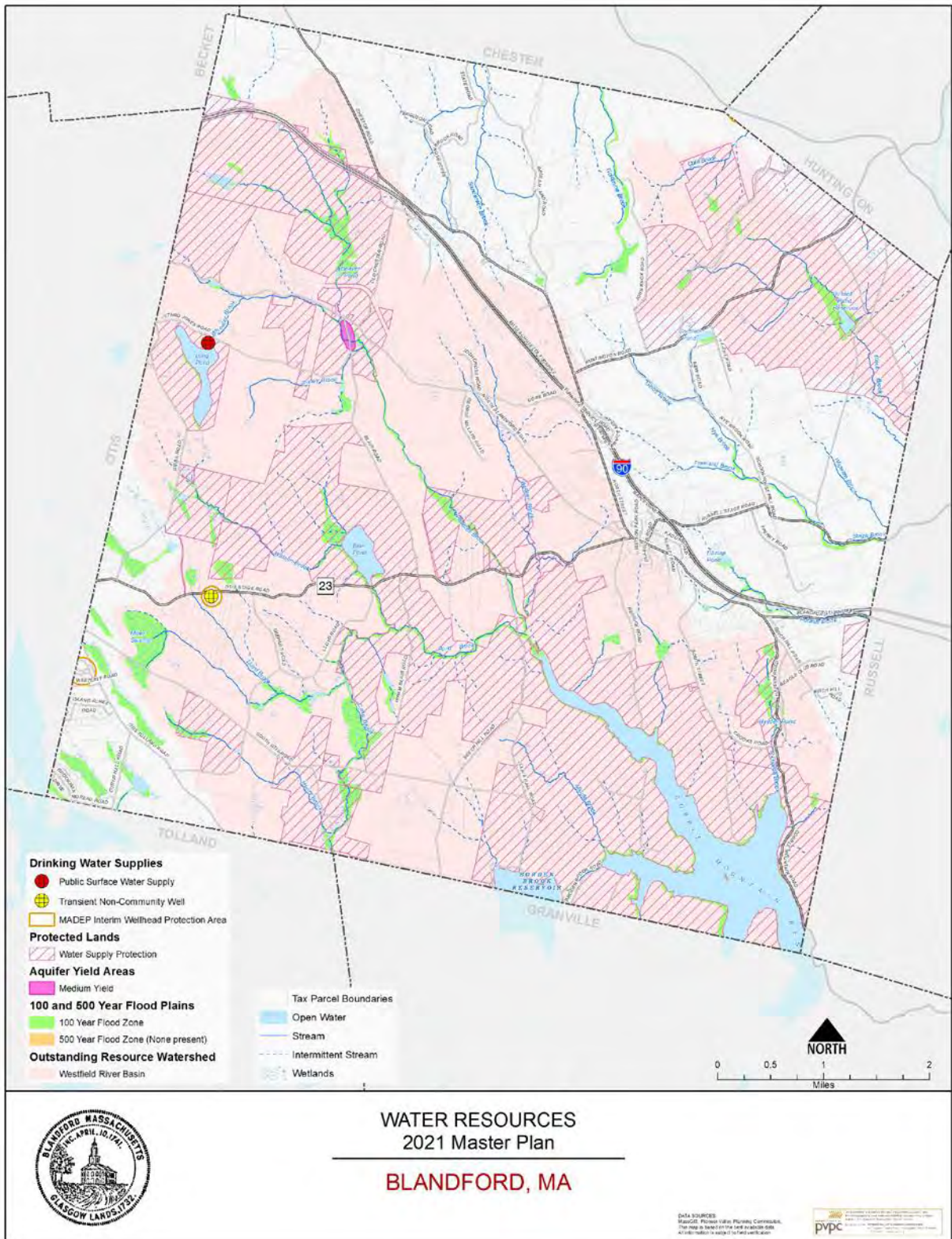
The Wetlands Protection Act does not permit development or disturbance within 25 feet of any of the above resources. Isolated wetlands that have not been delineated by the State are not protected unless they are certified vernal pools.

Flood plains and flood hazard areas are designated areas next to rivers, streams and lakes that are likely to flood during large storms. These areas should be left undeveloped so as to prevent damage to structures and other properties. Some flood plains are productive agricultural land, having accumulated sediment during flood conditions. This is demonstrated by some parts of towns where there is land in the flood zone area and also is designated as Farmland Soil of Unique Importance.

Over 61% of respondents to the Master Plan Community Survey agreed or strongly agreed that the town should prioritize energy efficiency, reducing emissions, and responding to the impacts of climate change. This could mean building further from waterways, limiting development in certain areas, using Low Impact Development (LID) to allow natural filtration of stormwater, and planning for natural disasters.



## Map 2 Water Resources



## *Critical Habitat Areas*

The State's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) is responsible for the conservation and protection of rare and endangered plant and wildlife species and the natural communities that make up their habitats. Map 3 shows areas in Blandford that are part of this inventory, as well as locations of certified vernal pools that are protected through the Wetlands Act, and locations of potential vernal pools that have not yet been verified. If a potential vernal is checked and meets the criteria (<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/vernal-pool-certification>), it can be certified in accordance with the Wetlands Protection Act. There are priority habitat areas along Peebles Brook and north of Wigwam Brook.

There have been seven species that are considered endangered, threatened, or of special concern identified in Blandford: Wood Turtle, Upland Sandpiper, Northern Harrier, Sedge Wren, Andrews' Bottle Gentian, Great Laurel, and the Slender Blue-Eye Grass. There is Blue Spotted Salamander observed near North Blandford Road near the brook.

The NHESP has mapped Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscapes throughout the Commonwealth that are significant for conserving biological diversity through the BioMap2, which classifies landscapes as Core Habitat (CH) or Critical Natural Landscape (CNL) as seen in Map 3.

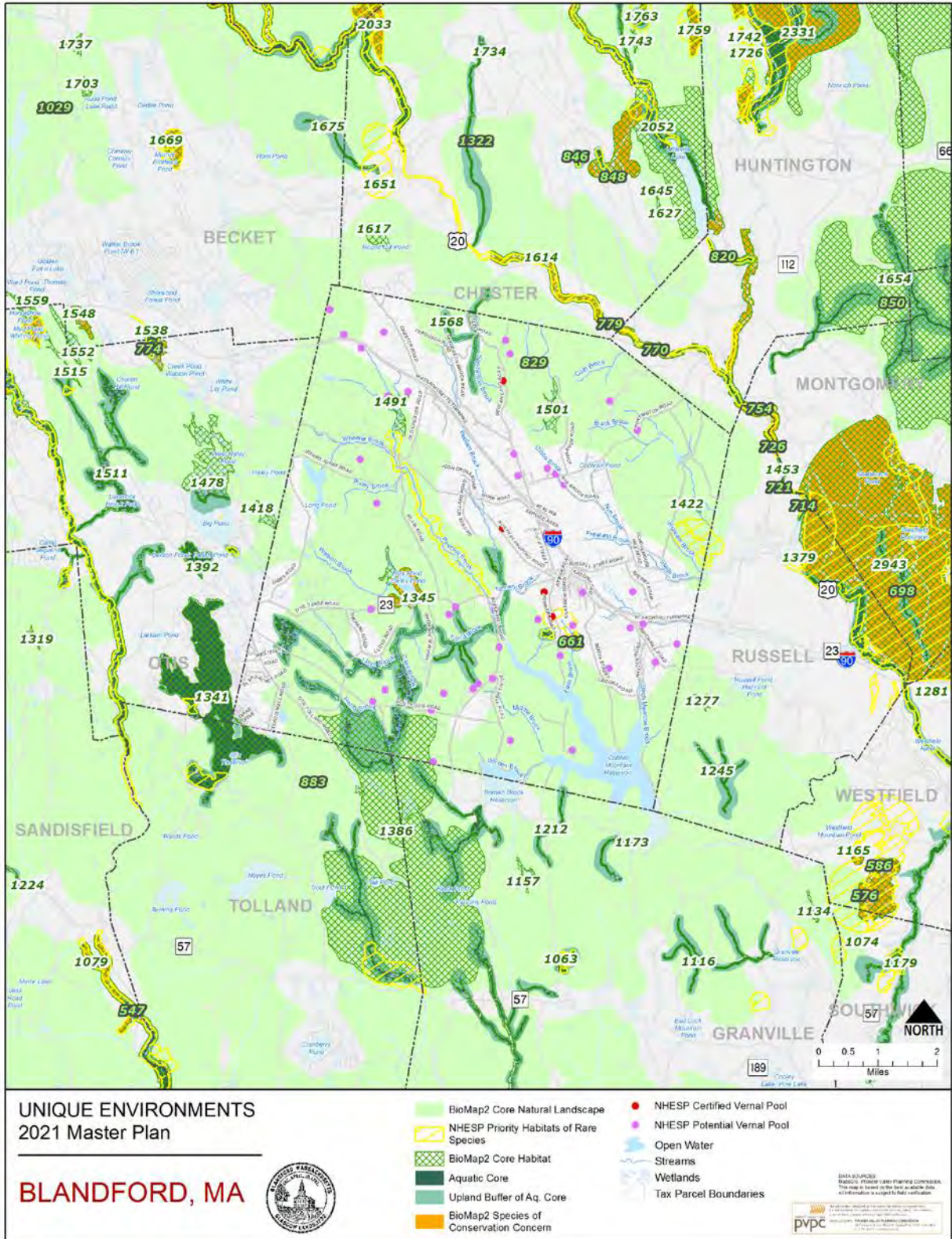
Blandford contains 1,650 acres of core habitats (CH), which are located primarily along the riparian edges of the brooks and wetlands south of Route 23 and west of Cobble Mountain Reservoir, including Bedlam Brook, Pond Brook, Case Brook, Lloyd Brook, Henry Brook, and Miller Pond; a large forest core extends south from Henry Brook out of Blandford and along the boundary between Granville and Tolland. To the north, the land immediately around Blair Pond, Beaver Pond, Sanderson Brook, and Goldmine Brook are also considered CH. These landscapes, taken on the whole, provide vital habitat for species such as the Bridle Shiner, a small minnow and Species of Concern found in the clear water of still streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds; the Little Bluet, a very small damselfly which inhabits ponds and sparse aquatic vegetation and sandy substrate; and the Endangered American Bittern, a heron-like bird which nests primarily in large cattail, tussock, or shrub marshes, and is very sensitive to disturbance (BioMap2, 2012).

Furthermore, Blandford boasts a sizeable 23,584 acres of Critical Natural Landscapes (CNL), comprising pieces of two of the State's 20 largest CNLs, which are bisected by the Interstate 90 (Mass Pike) corridor and Blandford's Town Center. Landscape Blocks, the primary component of Critical Natural Landscapes, are large areas of intact and predominantly natural vegetation, consisting of contiguous forests, wetlands, river, lakes, and ponds...pastures and power line rights-of-way, which are less intensively altered than most developed areas, are also included since they provide habitat and connectivity for many species," (BioMap2, 2012). These large, forested landscapes provide invaluable wildlife habitat and a host of other ecosystem values, including clean drinking water, carbon sequestration, and more





Map 3 Natural Heritage Inventory



## Open Space

A portion of the town of Blandford is protected from future development. There are a total of approximately 15,290.71 acres of land, or 44.67 percent of the town is afforded some level of protection. All of those lands of the town considered permanently protected from future development, minus 2.09 acres which is the North Blandford Cemetery, which is considered temporary/limited, per state statute. Most of the lands that are permanently protected are part of the Cobble Mountain Reservoir Land, owned by the City of Springfield Water Department, or approximately 25.3 percent of the town. Figure 6-4 shows the breakdown of open space ownership in Blandford. Open space landowners with the largest land holdings are shown in Figure 6-5.

Figure 6-4 Open Space Ownership in Blandford

Ownership	Acres	Percent of Open Space
State Owned	2,958	14%
Springfield Water and Sewer	10,270	48%
Owned by Town of Blandford	1,014	4.5%
Owned by Town of Russell	2,952	14%
Non-Profit Organizations	127	0.5%
Private	4,169	19%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>21,484</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Figure 6-5 Significant Open Space and Recreational Land in Blandford

Name	Acres	Owner
Cobble Mountain Reservoir	8,692.45	City of Springfield Water Dept.
Russell Water Supply Land	2,768.47	Town of Russell
Chester-Blandford State Forest	1,637.56	MA Dept. of Conservation & Recreation
Tolland State Forest	731.46	MA Dept. of Conservation & Recreation
Long Pond Conservation Area	300.30	Town of Blandford Conservation Commission
Stage Brook WMA	148.32	MA Department of Fish & Game

### Cobble Mountain Reservoir

Cobble Mountain Reservoir, the lands and waters that provide the supply drinking water to the City of Springfield, provides limited access to the residents of the Town of Blandford. Comprising of at least a quarter of the total land in Blandford, the town continues to seek important cross-town access and enjoy recreational opportunities that were once afforded prior to September 11, 2001. In order to access the southwest corner of town, referred to as “Land’s End,” one has to drive through the Town of Otis to get to this corner of Blandford.

### Chester-Blandford State Forest and Tolland State Forest

Chester-Blandford State Forest is a scenic forest of deep woods, with moderate to steep slopes, and rough, stony landscapes. The forest offers stream fishing, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, and



State Forest woodland management. Destinations for visitors include views of streams and waterfalls, a mica mine, and a gold mine.

The Tolland State Forest, located in Otis on the border of Blandford, consists of approximately 730 acres of woodland and hardwood swamp land within Blandford. South Otis Road and Otis Tolland Road provide access to the forest, which offers hiking, horseback riding and hunting opportunities.

### **Long Pond Conservation Area**

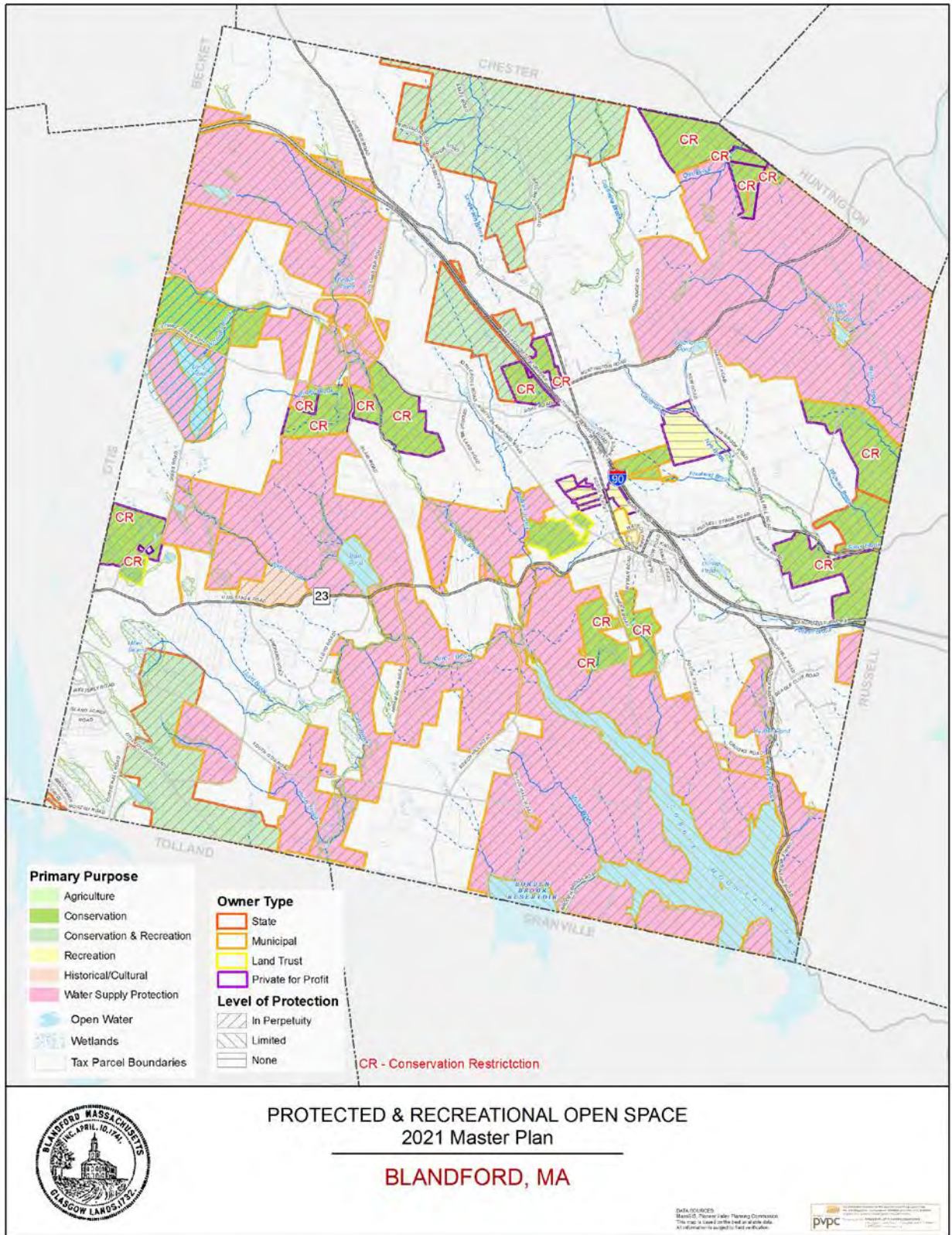
In 1985, the Town of Blandford purchased 234 acres surrounding Long Pond Reservoir to protect drinking water. A beaver pond along the edge of North Blandford Road attracts an abundance of wildlife. In the past, the Boy Scouts have worked on trails around the beaver pond and have added wood duck boxes to this area. This parcel was purchased with assistance from a Self-Help Grant; therefore, the public is encouraged to use the area for passive recreation such as hiking, ice skating, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, birdwatching, photography, etc. In 1999, an additional 69 acres was purchased by the Town to continue efforts to protect the watershed and filtration plant.

As is the case with Cobble Mountain Reservoir, a stated priority action in the Summary of Finding of Blandford's Community Resilience Building workshop, was to engage and coordinate planning efforts with Springfield Water and Sewer Commission around Cobble Mountain Reservoir and Long Pond Reservoir watershed lands and continue to collaborate and build trust.





Map 4 – Protected & Recreational Open Space



## *Lands in Current Use*

The Protected Recreational and Open Space (Map 4) shows private landowner parcels that have been enrolled in the Massachusetts Current Use program. Also known as Chapter 61 lands, they are taxed according to their use. Chapter 61 lands are managed for harvesting of wood, Chapter 61A lands for agriculture, and Chapter 61B for recreational use. Most of the land that is managed for recreational purposes allows access to trails and ponds. Several of the forest land parcels are located next to the Chester-Blandford State Forest, extending areas of forest land and wildlife corridors, owned by Hull Forestlands, LP. The town has identified that understanding the Chapter lands near the state forests and their operations could be helpful to assist with overseeing forestry practices.

## **Recreational Resources**

In addition to the network of trails in Chester-Blandford State Forest, there are opportunities throughout town for recreation both on public and private property.

### *Blandford Walks*

Identified through the community undergoing multiple processes at the time of writing this Master Plan, included an effort to provide for a walking map for those living and visiting town, drawing attention to various amenities the town provides. *Blandford Walks* was as an effort by the town to engage with Highlands Footpath, Healthy Hampshire, and the Hilltown Community Health Center, which identified a map and route descriptions for various levels of skill to traverse places in Blandford.

### *Watson Memorial Park*

Watson Park is located north of Blandford Center on Blandford Road. The park has a gazebo, several picnic facilities, great views of the Connecticut and Westfield River Valleys, and roads suitable for jogging and hiking. The park is adjacent to recreational opportunities like a playground with several swings, two slides, jungle gyms; a little league ball field; several picnic tables with BBQ grills; a tennis court; extensive and well-maintained, rolling open lawn area; a single-lane, 5mph loop road with some mature Rhododendrons, other shrubs, and large shade trees; and a small gazebo. There are also two historic barns on the property. In the past, parts of the park have been purposefully flooded in the winter to accommodate ice skating. There are no curb issues and good access to all areas.

### *Veterans' Park at Town Common*

At the corner of Route 23 and North Blandford Road, next to Highway Dept. Garage, Veteran's Park contains five commemorative stones honoring veterans of the Civil, Spanish, WW1, WWII, Vietnam, and Korean Wars, and seven flag poles. It is a memorial erected by the Commonwealth in 1927 to commemorate General Knox's march from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston to fight the British. General Knox came through Blandford during the winter of 1775-76 carrying canons and arms that were used to liberate Boston.



### *Blandford Fairgrounds*

The fairgrounds have an annual exhibition event on Labor Day weekend, run by the Blandford Fair, a non-profit organization that was created by the Union Agricultural & Horticulture Society in 1867.

### *Blandford Ski Area*

The country's oldest club-owned ski area, which sold in 2017 to Jeff Murdock of Ski Butternut. Blandford Ski Area had been in operation for eighty years, with 465 feet of vertical elevation gain, twenty-two trails, three chairlifts, one surface lift, two lodges, a terrain park, and a half pipe. The resort closed permanently in 2020 after failing to reopen in the 2019/2020 season due to equipment maintenance issues and the rising COVID-19 emergency, though it had been struggling financially since the Springfield Ski Club sold it in 2017. Just before closing, the new owner had made major renovations to the snowmaking system, chairlifts, and terrain park.

### *Blandford Country Club*

The Blandford Country Club is a 9-hole course which features 2,722 yards of golf and tennis courts that are open to the public, for a fee, during the summer. It is a PGA-sanctioned. Members are offered discounts.

The majority of respondents to the Blandford Master Plan Community Survey (92%) responded that forest and wildlife was an important land use that they found important in town. However, 60 percent of the respondents were not in favor of a 1-3% surcharge on their property taxes to preserve open space, farmland, create affordable housing or preserve buildings and landscapes that would be required to adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA), although it has not been determined whether or not residents are already burdened by property taxes or because they do not recognize the value of the CPA. The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is a municipal tool that helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities. CPA also helps strengthen the state and local economies by expanding housing opportunities and construction jobs for the Commonwealth's workforce, and by supporting the tourism industry through preservation of the Commonwealth's historic and natural resources. Over a decade of work went into the creation of the CPA; it was ultimately signed into law by Governor Paul Cellucci and Lieutenant Governor Jane Swift on September 14, 2000.

## **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Although almost half of Blandford is permanently protected through ownership by various entities, like the state or Springfield Water, the land that is not conserved may be vulnerable to impacts from human use. In the Blandford Master Plan Community Survey, the top five land uses that are important to the quality of life in Blandford are forest and wildlife habitat, working farms/farm stands, water quality and water resources, open space for scenic value, and spaces for recreational use. This sentiment suggests that planning for the protection of natural resources and open space should be a priority for the Town.





## ***Sustain high water quality***

High-quality surface and groundwater are critical to all residents quality of life. Protecting lakes and streams and maintaining water quality and water resources was one of the issues ranked of highest importance in the Master Plan Community Survey. Additionally, approximately 250 homes are served by town water. The Town draws its water from one source, the Long Pond Reservoir. Water from the reservoir is processed at the Long Pond Water Filtration Facility, which has a maximum capacity of 250,000 gallons per day. Private wells provide water to some properties in town.

All properties have private septic systems, and attention to the type and proximity of development and wastewater systems is important. Failure of septic systems on these parcels could jeopardize drinking water wells and the quality of the water. To maintain and improve the quality of surface water in town, requiring buffer areas and updating regulations concerning development next to water bodies should be considered, along with stormwater management regulations.

## ***Connect Wildlife and Trail Corridors***

Trails and unmaintained roads are available for public use on public and some private lands throughout Blandford. A system of connected trails and corridors for wildlife habitat migration would add value to these resources. Continued maintenance of the town's Open Space and Recreation Plan would provide detailed information on the habitat and natural resource areas in town and would result in a plan for improvements or protections to these resources going forward. An update is running concurrent to this plan and is expected to be adopted and approved by the state in 2021.

## ***Community Resilience***

Protecting the natural resources in Blandford contributes to the Town's resiliency in a number of ways:

- Sustaining and improving water quality benefits the natural environment, wildlife, and residents who rely on safe, clean, and reliable drinking water and clean lakes for limited recreational activities.
- Minimizing disruption to natural ecosystems whenever possible helps to protect wildlife habitat, and promotes residents' wellness by increasing opportunities to experience nature. Undeveloped land can provide storage for floodwaters.
- Evaluating the potential impacts of climate change can help the Town better plan and adapt to changing climactic conditions and their effects on other natural and man-made systems. This evaluation and planning could lead to specific projects that Town may wish to undertake to adapt systems to future changes in conditions.
- Increasing awareness around best practices for reducing stormwater runoff and pollution will help to protect Water quality.
- Supporting viable wildlife and native plant populations helps maintain biodiversity. When protected land has covers variable terrain and contains multiple microclimates, it provides microhabitats which can help maintain species as the climate changes. Greenbelts and wildlife corridors facilitate migration.





# HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

## TECHNICAL PAPER

The Town of Blandford has a rich and varied history which dates back to pre-Colonial use. An abundance of built resources, such as Native American structures, residential buildings, and stone walls from pre-Colonial occupation through the mid-1900s, as well as early rural and agricultural landscapes, remain intact and are valued by residents even if they are not generally perceived as “historic.” An approachable government and local public and private groups, with enthusiastic volunteers, work to support the Town’s historic and cultural preservation and engagement. These stakeholders are a blended group of longtime and newer residents who are knowledgeable and interested in local history and are actively working to honor, share, and utilize the Town’s resources to benefit residents and attract likeminded visitors from throughout the region. Cultural programming includes events at the former First Congregational Church of Blandford, now owned by the Blandford Historical Society and known as the White Church of Blandford, attractions at the Blandford Fair Grounds, and Blandford Walks.<sup>1</sup> The Blandford Cultural Council utilizes a limited budget to promote robust programming as well. The White Church of Blandford, Porter Memorial Library, Blandford Fair Grounds, Blandford Historical Society Museum, Blandford General Store and Cafe, Blandford Country Club, the Old Burial Ground and the Hill Cemetery, and several residences and outbuildings related to agriculture are all examples of historic resources which remain, relate to Blandford history, and are relevant today. Challenges to preservation and cultural resource offerings include a serious deficit, compared to the rest of the Commonwealth, in the formal documentation of historic built cultural and archaeological resources, mixed opinions about the value of recognizing and preserving historic built resources, minimal funding for achieving preservation and cultural programming goals, and a small Town population with an even smaller pool of volunteers who are often stretched thin through involvement with multiple groups.

### OVERVIEW

A discussion of Blandford’s historic and cultural resources should first consider the history of Blandford. Members of the Woronoco Tribe were probably the earliest area inhabitants, using the land for summer hunting and trapping grounds prior to Colonial occupation and a primary Native American trail was in use from the Berkshire Highlands to the Housatonic Valley which later became known as “the Great Road to Housatonic.”<sup>2</sup> In 1735, Presbyterian Scottish-Irish settlers from Hopkinton arrived and the area became known as New Glasco or Glasgow until formal incorporation as the town of Blandford occurred on April 10, 1741. A road from Springfield to Great Barrington passed through the southern part of town and steady through traffic led to the establishment of several taverns to

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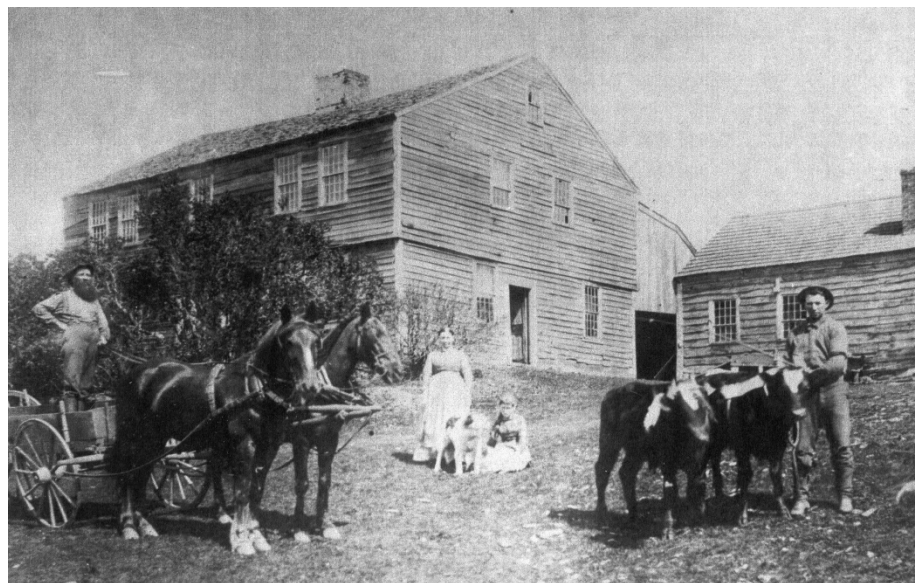
<sup>1</sup> Sampson, Mary Kate and Lee Hamburg, “First Congregational Church of Blandford,” 4 North Street (MHC Inventory #BLA.1), 1985 <https://mhc-macris.net/Details.aspx?Mhclid=BLA.1>, accessed 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

accommodate travelers. The *James Baird Tavern/Bartholomew House 2 Old Chester Road (1768, 1810, BLA.2)*, now a private residence, was an active meeting and resting place in proximity to regional transportation routes during the Revolutionary War, and shares context with “nearly every one of the country taverns throughout the colonies [which] bore some part in the Revolutionary struggle.”<sup>3</sup>

By 1759, a town street and highway was in use, with a view of the Woronoco and Connecticut Valleys.<sup>4</sup> With visitors regularly passing through, Blandford grew to become “the banner town of western Hampden, a stage center, and a social center as well.”<sup>5</sup> With Blandford’s development, the Great Road to Housatonic evolved to become the Old Post Road, today’s Massachusetts Route 23, also known as Otis Stage Road and the Blandford Turnpike. Eighteenth century travelers through Blandford included General Amherst and his army en route to Albany for the Battle of the Ticonderoga during the French and Indian War. In 1776, Colonel Henry Knox used routes through the town to transport cannons and artillery from Fort Ticonderoga, New York, to Boston to support Colonists in the fight for independence from English rule. British General John Burgoyne’s army also traveled through from Boston to New York after the 1777 surrender at Stillwater during the Battles of Saratoga.

Residential and agricultural properties were developed beginning in this period and many



remained or still remain in the same families for multiple generations. An example of this is the circa late 1700s Shepard Farm property along Otis Stage Road.

Photo of Shepard Farm  
ca. early 1800s

Photo:  
Blandford Historical Society

<sup>3</sup> Edward Field. *The Colonial Tavern. A Glimpse of New England Town Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.* Providence: Preston and Rounds, 1897. *Archive.org*, accessed 2021. <https://archive.org/details/colonialtavern100fiel/page/n8>

<sup>4</sup> Sumner Gilbert Wood. *The Taverns and Turnpikes of Blandford*, Blandford: Sumner Gilbert Wood, 1908. *Ancestry.com*, accessed 2021, [https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/17383/dvm\\_LocHist004725-00001-0?backurl=&ssrc=&backlabel=Return#?imageld=dvm\\_LocHist004725-00009-1](https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/17383/dvm_LocHist004725-00001-0?backurl=&ssrc=&backlabel=Return#?imageld=dvm_LocHist004725-00009-1)

<sup>5</sup> “A Deserted Village. Old Days at Blandford.” *Springfield Republican*, February 11, 1870. *Genealogybank.com*, accessed 2021.





Slavery, legal in Massachusetts until 1780, brought enslaved and later freed African Americans to Blandford, to include Jethro Jones who “saw long and arduous service in Washington’s Army” and Jared Cables (ca. 1767-1857) a stable boy for the *James Baird Tavern*.<sup>6</sup> Active abolitionist and women’s right champion John Keep (1781-1870) was a pastor at Blandford’s First Church for 16 years beginning in 1805 and was concerned about ensuring that Blandford’s African American children received an adequate education. A small burial ground along Jethro Jones Road, historically related to a local farmer’s burial ground which provided space for his field hands, is connected to Blandford’s African American residents and is locally known but formally undocumented in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS).<sup>7</sup> A 1903 marker commemorating *Ye Old First Church of the Frontier Town of Blandford, Mass.* is located within the Town Common.

The *First Congregational Church of Blandford* was designed by regionally prominent architect Isaac Damon (1791-1862) and constructed in 1822. Today known as the White Church of Blandford, this building was documented and individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 and is currently owned, maintained, and seasonally operated by the Blandford Historical Society. This organization has actively fundraised and accessed grants for capital improvements to support this valued location for cultural programming.



White Church, Photo: Blandford Historical Society

Beginning in the 1830s, industrial ventures, with a concentration in North Blandford, produced leather, wool, rakes, and cheese and by 1845 Blandford had become the largest

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<sup>6</sup> Sumner Gilbert Wood, *Ibid*; Joseph Carvalho III, *Black Families in Hampden County, Massachusetts, 1650-1865, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society. *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, Vol. 40 (1/2) Summer 2021. Institute for Massachusetts Studies, Westfield State University. <http://pahmusa.mysite.com/Black%20Families.pdf>, accessed 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, <https://mhc-macris.net/>



cheese producer in Massachusetts. Trace fragments of the factories and mills along with worker housing in continued residential use remain in North Blandford.



Blandford Fair Ferris Wheel ca. 1960s, Photo: Blandford Historical Society

The Blandford Fair began as a Farmer's Club in 1867 as a venue for exhibiting crops and animal competitions. The *Agricultural Union Hall* (1869) was the first building constructed at the *Blandford Fair Grounds* on North Street. As the fair evolved, it became a meeting spot for neighboring towns. The main event, now held from Friday through Monday over Labor Day weekend, has only been cancelled four times in more than 150 years: during the 1918-1919 Spanish Flu, during the 1940s for World War II, in 1955 due to catastrophic flooding from Hurricanes Connie and Diane, and in 2020 because of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Today's all-volunteer Blandford Fair Committee continues to care for the grounds and plan for future and evolving programming.

By the late nineteenth century, Blandford's hilltown location and scenic and rural landscape contributed to the town's establishment as a desirable summer retreat for residents from nearby areas like Springfield, Westfield, and Hartford, Connecticut, with five





hotels among the options for lodging. The *W. J. Peebles Post Office and General Store*, today known as the Blandford General Store and Café, was established during this time along Main Street and continues in service today in the center of town. *Porter Memorial Library*, constructed along Main Street in 1892, was funded by summer resident Josephine S. Porter (1834-1908) and named in memory of her son Edgar Sheffield Porter (1857-1891). The building construction used local kaolin clay from the Blandford Brick and Tile Company and at the time of construction the project was highlighted in the *Springfield Republican*.<sup>8</sup>



Porter Memorial Library today

The *Blandford Club*, today known as the Blandford Country Club and located in the former Porter family summer residence, was established in 1909 on North Street near the town center and the *Blandford Fair Grounds* as a privately owned, member only nine hole golf course.<sup>9</sup> Development of the short-lived Berkshire Street Railway trolley line around this time has left remnants of construction in North Blandford. Dairy farms and orchards were a primary source of area income and, as the area's population grew, side streets continued to develop with late Italianate, Queen Anne, Craftsman, and Colonial Revival style architecture along with agricultural outbuildings. From 1909 through 1910, Springfield constructed a water-supply reservoir on Borden Brook along the Blandford/Granville line

<sup>8</sup> "Hampden County. A Fine Library for Blandford," *Springfield Republican*, December 5, 1891, *Genealogybank.com*

<sup>9</sup> "Blandford Club Notes Its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary," *Springfield Union*, August 24, 1959, *Genealogybank.com*





and claimed a large portion of the watershed, buying structures along the brook's tributaries.

The origins of the American film industry have direct ties to Blandford as between 1913 and 1924, 13 silent films were directed and produced at the Gibbs Road summer property of Ada Olive Singer Van Heusen (1871-1940) by nationally known actor and director Edward K. Lincoln (1884-1958), earning Blandford the nickname "Hollywood of the East."<sup>10</sup> Van Heusen was a granddaughter of inventor, actor and businessman, Isaac Merrit Singer (1811-1875). Lincoln and Van Heusen later married and moved to California.

A large portion of Gibbs Road property was taken by the Cobble Mountain Reservoir project, which occurred between 1928 and 1930. The construction and land condemnation of the Reservoir involved damming the Little River in Russell but most of the Reservoir and land taking were in Blandford, majorly impacting North Blandford and other town areas in proximity to the watershed. Circa 1930s structures associated with this project may remain on Cobble Mountain Road.

Catastrophic flooding from Hurricanes Connie and Diane in August of 1955 completely suspended access to Blandford from the rest of the Pioneer Valley along Route 23 and Russell Stage Road. This event is also an early example of the Town's resiliency under hardship as the General Store and Fair Grounds were both utilized at that time for food distribution and emergency response needs.

The Massachusetts Turnpike (Interstate 90) opened in 1957 and bisects the town with no direct exit. This presents preservation, land use, and travel challenges in Blandford.

Today, there are abundant traces of the built history of Blandford, coexisting with newer development and the Town's highly valued rural and agricultural landscape. The Main Street and North Village areas maintain a sense of a traditional New England village including traces of mill buildings and worker housing. Native American Ceremonial Landscapes and archaeological sites remain extant on privately owned property.<sup>11</sup> Colonial and later residents, including African and Euro-Americans, are honored in the local burial grounds and their social history is further tied to the remaining historic architectural resources. Agricultural landscapes, along with related residences and outbuildings, are prevalent with ties to Blandford's past, present, and future. Buildings constructed more than 100 years ago are being cared for and adaptively reused by groups like the Blandford

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<sup>10</sup> "Reel Row Turns on Acts of Real Mother-In-Law," *New York Daily Tribune*, December 9, 1914, [Genealogybank.com](http://Genealogybank.com)

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Donta, "Teaberry Native American Site, Blandford, Massachusetts. *Conference on New England Archaeology*, <https://www.cnea-web.org/docs/2012CNEANewsletter.pdf>



Historical Commission and Blandford Historical Society or are in continuous use as a library, town store, fairground building, club house, residence, and agricultural outbuilding.

## INVENTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) is the State Historic Preservation Office organized in 1971 related to the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. According to the MHC, “Local Historical Commissions are an important part of municipal government in Massachusetts. Almost all cities and towns in Massachusetts have established a local historical commission. Historical Commissions are responsible for community-wide preservation planning.”<sup>12</sup> The Blandford Historical Commission currently has a presence on the town website, has seven members, and generally meets on a monthly basis either virtually or in person. Most, if not all members also serve on other boards, committees, or commissions in the Town.

Local historic preservation should begin with planning and documentation to formally identify an area’s remaining archaeological and built historic resources, structures, objects, areas, and landscapes with potential significance on a local, state, and national level. Documentation of existing conditions and historical narratives will then provide public record in the MACRIS database. If resources are found eligible and listed in the State and National Registers of Historic Places, additional funding opportunities may be available to support preservation, resiliency, and adaptive reuse.

The identification and documentation of historic and archaeological resources is listed as the first goal in the 2018-2022 *Massachusetts State Historic Preservation Plan*. The most recent state documentation of Blandford’s cultural resources was done through a 1982 MHC *Reconnaissance Survey Town Report* and a 1984 report on the *Historical and Archaeological Resources of the Connecticut Valley* which identified multiple remaining historic resources within the Town. The 1982 *Survey* recommended performing comprehensive inventory work to include formal research of the Blandford Center, North Blandford, isolated residential buildings along early developed roads and transportation routes, and groups of buildings related to the Blandford Fairgrounds and Cobble Mountain Reservoir. Preservation of the historic town center and farms, the establishment of meeting or gathering places, maintaining the viability of the fairgrounds, and establishing local “scenic” roads under MGL 40 were more recently identified as *Open Space and Recreation Goals* in the 2003-2004 *Town of Blandford Open Space and Recreation Plan*. That

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<sup>12</sup> “Local Historical Commissions in Massachusetts. A Summary Sheet for New Commission Members.” <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcupdf/lhcsun.pdf>, accessed 2021.



plan identified the Porter Memorial Library, Watson Park, the Congregational Church (White Church of Blandford), the fairgrounds, and Blandford Club as *Scenic Resources and Unique Environments*. *Barns in the Highland Communities*, through the Trustees of Reservations Highland Communities Initiative with documentation by regional preservation planner Bonnie Parsons included agricultural related resources in Blandford.<sup>13</sup>

As of early 2021, there are only 13 inventory points for Blandford in the MACRIS database. This can be compared to 114 in Otis, more than 187 in Russell, 177 in Huntington, 306 in Chester, and 174 in Granville. Recent work by the Blandford Historical Commission, made possible through a Town budget allocation and developed with Historic Preservation Local Technical Assistance by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission included a 2020 Survey and Planning Grant application to the MHC. The project was deemed too small by MHC and a potential state discretionary funding project to support inventory work also didn't come to fruition. This has led to the town working directly with the PVPC to document the *Blandford Main Street* and *Shepard Farm* Areas throughout 2021. Continued planning for and execution of formal documentation to include all of Blandford's historic and cultural resources will support the town's local planning process, is in accordance with the state's preservation plan, and could lead to funding and other preservation and cultural programming opportunities.

Additionally, the Porter Memorial Library, Town Hall, Historical Society, and Blandford Fair Committee all have various types of irreplaceable collections related to local and regional history, to include archival, object, and ephemera, that should be considered in the resilient planning process. Digitization is a good option for back-up paper storage but planning should also consider best practices for storing existing collections, preparing for extreme weather and long-term durability, and utilizing these resources for cultural programming.



2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of the Blandford Historical Society, Photo: Blandford Historical Society

<sup>13</sup> [http://blandfordmasterplan.pvpc.org/docs/Blandford%20-%20OSRP for state reduced size2004-Town.pdf](http://blandfordmasterplan.pvpc.org/docs/Blandford%20-%20OSRP%20for%20state%20reduced%20size2004-Town.pdf) ; <https://www.umass.edu/architecture/sites/default/files/assets/architecture/preservation-barns-in-the-highland-communities.pdf>





## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Blandford contains many historic and cultural resources that are generally valued by residents but are not comprehensively documented and recognized as assets. Feedback during the 2021 Resilient Master Planning process indicated that the White Church of Blandford, the Porter Memorial Library, Watson Park, the Historical Society Building, the Blandford Fair Grounds, the Blandford General Store and Café, Shepard Farm, the Blandford Country Club, and the multiple agricultural properties continue to stand out to residents as the town's most significant local built historic and cultural resources. Cultural programming such as concerts at the White Church of Blandford, programming sponsored by the Historical Society, events, exhibits, and art shows at the Blandford Fair Grounds, and organic, year round activities like the newly mapped Blandford Walks routes are valued and beneficial for town residents and guests.

To help focus efforts, developing an overall Preservation Plan to include identifying significant and irreplaceable built and cultural resources like Native American sites, public, residential, commercial, and agricultural buildings and structures such as stone walls will benefit the town in determining the best way to proceed with documentation, protection, and use for the public benefit. Identifying potential funding sources to complete project goals and utilizing local talent and resources like the regional planning authority and other local agencies could be helpful to plan for projects.

For an area abundant in natural beauty, there are also challenges related to residential access of recreational land due to current restrictions on parcels owned by the Springfield Water & Sewer Company. The 121 acre town-owned Shepard Farm property at 246 Otis Stage Road is within the General Knox Historic Trail area and includes a circa late 1700s residential building and late 1900s agricultural building. The parcel abuts Springfield Water & Sewer land and is currently limited in its entirety and in perpetuity by a conservation restriction which also presents a barrier to the preservation and reuse of the existing buildings and/or of the property for residential/agricultural and/or recreational purposes. The deteriorated state of the built resources and lack of funding for major capital improvements to the buildings for residential and/or agricultural use presents another barrier. The Town is currently working with the PVPC to inventory the Shepard Farm property in MACRIS as the social history of the property, the remaining built resources, and the landscape are locally significant and worthy of documentation in spite of more recent alterations and restrictions.



Cultural opportunities can build on previous and current initiatives. The Blandford Cultural Council is a valuable resource and supports local programming on a limited budget. A 1993 “Back to Blandford” weekend, organized by multiple Town groups, resulted in nearly \$300,000 in funds raised to support restoration work on the White Church of Blandford. More recently, the Blandford Historical Society has been very successful in fund raising and achieving a Massachusetts Cultural Council grant to support the church’s preservation. The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the White Church construction is coming up in 2022 and will be a good opportunity for local preservation and cultural resource groups like the Blandford Historical Society, Blandford Historical Commission, Porter Memorial Library, Blandford Cultural Council, and Blandford Fair Committee and other stakeholders to work together on planning and programming for public benefit.

Existing resources can be considered community assets to support preservation and cultural programming. The *Blandford Community Development Plan* (2003) identified the Town Common as a potential area suitable for passive and accessible recreation with existing resources like a Bicentennial Oak planted in 1935 and some interpretive signage related to the site of the town’s first church. This area could become part of a designated Massachusetts Cultural District and enhanced for resident use with “wayfinding” and interpretive signage. Support to develop community arts festivals and events was another 2003 *Community Development Plan* strategy and existing, underutilized historic spaces could be considered as resources to help achieve this goal. The town-owned Porter Memorial Library and Blandford Historical Society buildings both have initial plans developed for compatibly designed additions to meet ongoing programming, storage, and accessibility compliance needs. The Blandford Fair Committee all-volunteer team anticipates continued programming in 2021 once public gathering restrictions are lifted and this venue can be perceived as an asset and an opportunity for cultural partnerships.

Exploring the adaptive reuse of currently owned town resources like the agricultural buildings in Watson Park for potential public venues would honor the Town’s past and present agricultural economy and support local cultural programming. Utilizing the Town’s existing resources, encouraging and facilitating partnerships among groups with similar missions, and cultivating strategic community outreach campaigns to promote understanding and encourage participation in the preservation of Blandford’s historic and cultural resources could also help support a small volunteer base that is already over extended.





# CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY ELEMENT

## TECHNICAL PAPER

While not a required element of a Master Plan in Massachusetts, the Town of Blandford has chosen to include a special section on Climate Resilience and Sustainability as this is not an ordinary Master Plan, rather it is a resilient Master Plan. This element lifts up the climate resilience and sustainability actions the Town can take to assure a resilient future. However, the land use and natural resources and environment related climate resilience and sustainability content is found in those chapters.

A range of local and state and federal regulatory actions can create a supportive framework from which to launch Blandford's climate resilience and sustainability actions.

### *Defining Blandford's Climate Resilience and Sustainability foundation*

Blandford is a certified Green Community and a certified Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Community. Blandford has an up to date Hazard Mitigation plan.

The purpose of this section is to provide an inventory of existing climate resilience and sustainability characteristics, an analysis of zoning and other regulations related to the topic, as well as a summary of projected and future climate and sustainability-related trends; it will draw on other plan elements and identify opportunities to address resilience and sustainability. The conclusion of this section lays out recommendations for zoning changes, resilience efforts, management tools and other implementation techniques designed to assist Blandford in implementing its vision for climate resilience and sustainability.

## **INVENTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS**

In 2013, atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels exceeded 400 parts per million (ppm) – higher than anytime in human history, (800,000 years of ice core data). World-wide, each of the last three decades has been increasingly warmer than the previous. Twenty of hottest years on record have occurred in the past 22 years. The last five years were the five hottest ever.

A few summers ago, July 2016 went down in the books as the hottest month ever recorded according to NASA. The following month then tied that record. And one year later, July 2017 tied with August and July of 2016 as the hottest month on record.

According to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Resilient MA website, the Westfield River basin is expected to experience:

- increased average temperatures, and in minimum and maximum temperatures, throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- increase in days with daily temperatures over 90, 95, and 100
- Decrease in days below 32 and 0
- decrease in heating degree days (under 65), and increase in cooling degree days (over 65) seasonal projections for total precipitation are variable for most of our

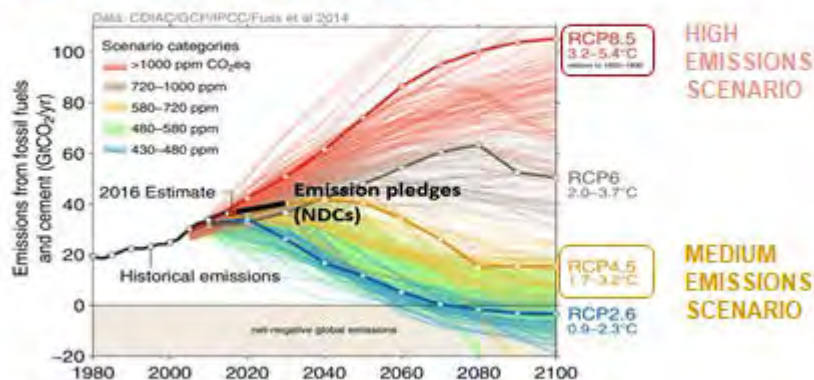


region, but

- the winter and spring seasons are expected to experience the greatest seasonal increase both in total precipitation and the frequency of heavy downpours, or days receiving precipitation over one inch

Concerns and challenges identified by Town officials include: Uneven distribution of snow/rain; Transportation infrastructure and accessibility; Downed trees blocking roadways; Dirt roads washing out during flash thaws, and Pole-based electricity and communication lines

## Emission Scenarios



The scenarios of how emissions change in the future become vastly different as we look further out towards the end of the century. The IPCC considers a range of scenarios from the extremes of approximately 3.6°F (RCP2.6) to between 7°F (RCP8.5). RCP = REPRESENTATIVE CONCENTRATION PATHWAYS, essentially defined by their cumulative measure of human emissions of GHGs from all sources, expressed in Watts per square meter. This variability tells us that mitigation (as in mitigating our current contributions to GHG emissions) is so important to help shape a less disastrous future.

Reducing vulnerability is not just about the challenges Blandford faces but also the assets we have at our disposal to deal with those challenges. CRB workshop participants were quick to point out Blandford's strengths in responding to the previously identified challenges. Assets are important because they help increase our resiliency to hazards and climate change. It's important that these assets are safeguarded so that they continue to serve as strengths well into the future.

### *Green Communities certification*

Blandford has taken the important step toward climate resilience and sustainability of being a certified Green Community. This means the town is regularly monitoring municipal energy use in buildings and vehicles and is working to reduce overall municipal energy use



by 20%, succeeding in achieving a 14% reduction so far. The town has also facilitated clean energy generation and adopted a more energy efficient building code, assuring that all new construction in town is energy efficient.

#### Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) certification

Blandford achieve MVP certification in 2020, making the town eligible to apply for millions of dollars of funding for resilience and climate action. The top four hazards identified by the Community Resilience Building workshop participants (2019) are listed below:

- Flooding
- Severe Weather, such as Severe Storms (including high winds) and Winter Weather
- Extreme Temperatures
- Drought and Wildfire

Areas of Concern identified are:

Infrastructure: Pole-based electricity and communication lines, town and state-owned roads, road passability

Water Infrastructure: Dams, culverts, and bridges; drinking water pump and distribution system; stormwater flooding, especially at Town Hall

Natural Resources: Tree canopy and hazard trees, invasive species, habitat change

Human and Social: Changing age-related demographics, residents with limited mobility, poverty-level and low-income populations, emergency shelter network, emergency communications platform (Blackboard Connect)

#### *Transportation infrastructure*

The specific issues identified within Blandford's roadway network were two-fold: infrastructure maintenance and culvert functionality. Road passability is important for residents who may need to evacuate or travel in case of emergency, and it was noted the town features many roadways with only access point which, should they ever be blocked by flood or debris, could trap residents. Undersized culverts contribute to local street flooding on North Blandford Road, Russell Stage Road near Nye Brook, Birch Hill Road, Hiram Blair Road, and at South Street and Cobble Mountain Road. Many roads in Blandford lack winter maintenance and what may be a passable road in the summer becomes unpassable due to seasonal weather and debris build-up.

Cobble Mountain Road has been inaccessible to the public since 2001, when Springfield Water and Sewer Commission closed it due to terrorism concerns over the reservoir following the September 11 attacks. The road was historically a gateway for residents to have easier access to the Mass Pike and other important connections in the region. Closing the road increased commute times and reduced accessibility to emergency services for residents in neighboring Granville. Blandford participants noted that the road closure also eliminates access to one neighborhood in the southwest corner of town, colloquially



referred to as “Land’s End,” via town roads. Anyone traveling to or from that area today must drive through the Town of Otis to get to this part of Blandford.

### *Electrical distribution system*

At the CRB workshop (2019) participants identified the need to increase storage capacity for electricity generated by renewable resources and to ensure back-up power for a more resilient grid while also advocating for increased communication with Eversource for preventative tree-trimming

### *Communication Networks*

The town has reverse 911 and has lifted up the need to reach out to all residents to make sure they are enrolled so that they receive urgent messages in the event of emergencies.

Other sections of this plan address resilience issues related to stormwater, related flooding and drinking water concerns

### *Hazard Mitigation Plan*

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) define Hazard Mitigation as any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from natural hazards such as flooding, storms, high winds, hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes, etc. Mitigation efforts undertaken by communities will help to minimize damages to buildings and infrastructure, such as water supplies, sewers, and utility transmission lines, as well as natural, cultural and historic resources. In 2016, the Town of Blandford completed their first Local Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan, in collaboration with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. Planning for hazard mitigation involved a Hazard Mitigation Committee comprised of members of the Town.

The Fire Department has two engines that are out of date, a brush truck and a rescue truck. Ambulance service for the town is from Huntington and it can take almost thirty minutes for an ambulance to arrive on scene in Blandford. The Fire Department rescue truck does not have the ability to transport patients. The disrepair of the Fire House is significant. The building is so small that a regular size fire truck would not fit and the small Blandford trucks have only inches of room to back-in. The Fire House does not have adequate heat, it has a combination of bathroom-kitchen, and the ceiling is falling down. (need to check on status)

### *Emergency Management Director and Local Emergency Planning Committee*

The town has a designated Emergency Management Director and an active local emergency planning committee.



## *Engagement with Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council (WRHSAC)*

The town is not currently actively engaged in the WRHSAC.

### *Zoning*

Zoning regulations and other land use laws constitute a town's "blueprint" for its future. Blandford has by right zoning for solar and has adopted the stretch code. Additional regulatory review is being conducted as part of this grant by Dodson Flinker and will be completed by May.

## **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The Master Plan process has provided the opportunity for residents to present comment and concerns about growth in Blandford and the 170 survey respondents, along with committee members and focus group members, have affirmed the importance of the Town's "rural character" which may come under threat in the face of increasingly severe and unpredictable weather events.

As with many other rural towns where there are large tracts of open land, solar developers are seeking to site large scale developments taking 20-30 acres of land per parcel, and that is no different in Blandford, where within the past few years, six solar developers have received permits to construct solar arrays. While it is great that the Town is doing its part to host solar projects that assist the Commonwealth to meet its ever increasing clean energy goals, the Town is cautious about balancing concerns for climate resilience, erosion and increased run off with new solar development.

### *Climate Change and Clean Energy focus group highlights*

Some highlights presented in this focus group include:

- Remote lifestyles have resulted in challenges.
- Climate-related issues:
  - o Power outages and Eversource has poor response time
  - o Slower response times with tornadoes
- In the event of an emergency, community comes together and the senior needs prioritized – strong sense of comradery; mobilization in an emergency situation.
- Maintenance of the water system and water lines take priority.
- An emergency management strategy would be restarting and having a checklist in place with neighboring towns.
  - o Need a professional staff member to help with emergency management.
- We have a "take care of it attitude"
- Trimming trees is an "ongoing/losing battle;" they are growing higher than the tree line.





In the community survey when asked “The Town should prioritize energy efficiency, reducing emissions, and responding to the impacts of climate change”, 61% of respondents answered strongly agree or agree. 24% were neutral and only 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

In the survey 94% of respondents reported that it is important or very important that they be able to live independently in their own home as they age.

Given this desire it will be very important that all home owners take advantage of no cost home energy assessments from Mass Save to receive recommendations and no cost air sealing and insulation to reduce energy costs

### *Facilitating climate resilience and sustainability for residents*

Facilitate and encourage access to Mass Save no cost home energy assessments

### *Leading By Example—advancing Green Communities certification to include the GRSD*

Blandford has been a certified Green community since 2016 and has already secured and completed an additional competitive grant after completing all the work funded by the initial designation grant.

In 2020-2021 the Town of Blandford implemented three (3) energy saving, comfort improving and cost saving projects at the Town Hall (Energy Management System) and Library and Post Office (weatherization) from September 2020 to February 2021. The bulk of this work was funded by the Massachusetts Green Communities program grant award of \$110,764 including the Energy Management System at Town Hall and weatherization at the Library. In addition utility rebates (\$10,655) were secured to complete weatherization work at the Post Office. All energy efficiency work was performed by Energy Source an approved utility provider under MGL 25As.14

The new energy management system is anticipated to save 2,285 gallons of oil and 8,450 kWh of electricity each year. Combined this equates to an energy savings of 346.5 MMBTU annually. The project is anticipated to reduce the energy use of the Town Hall by 29% from the 2019 fiscal year. Additionally, this work is anticipated to save the town \$9,607 in energy and maintenance costs annually. Currently, Town Hall is the largest energy user in town, using more than three times as much energy as the next most energy consumptive building. Implementing energy savings at Town Hall will have the greatest impact on the Town’s overall energy use.

### *Promoting Clean Transportation Options*

In the survey, focus groups and at the vision session there was considerable support for walking and biking in Blandford.



## *Community Resilience*

The Town's ability to utilize its available resources (energy, communication, transportation, food, etc.) to withstand and recover from adverse situations is known as its community resilience. Blandford's resilience will rely on a proactive and planned approach to protect its resources and direct where development and redevelopment can occur. See related recommendations in the Land Use technical paper.



## ***Town of Blandford -- Green Infrastructure and Climate Resiliency Policy DRAFT***

### Section 1. Goals:

The goals of this Town of Blandford policy are to:

1. promote the use of green street facilities and green infrastructure in public and private development as a cost-effective and sustainable practice for stormwater management in current and future projects wherever possible. This includes: road construction and reconstruction projects; sewer projects; and new development and redevelopment projects.
2. promote climate resiliency in public buildings and infrastructure and private development.

### Section 2. Definitions:

**Green Infrastructure:** Keeps rain close to where it falls, using structures to improve on-site infiltration, such as rain gardens, green roofs and permeable pavements, to promote cleaner, slower, and smaller storm flows to nearby rivers and streams.

**Green Streets:** Green Streets are a subset of Green Infrastructure in which the street handles significant amounts of stormwater on site through use of vegetated and/or soil-infiltration facilities. Green Streets can include landscaped street-side planters or swales or tree box filters or porous pavement that capture stormwater runoff and allow it to soak into the ground as soil and vegetation filter pollutants.

### Section 3. Policies:

WHEREAS,

The Town of Blandford recognizes:

1. Stormwater runoff from streets, roads, parking lots, and other impervious urban surfaces is a significant source of water pollution to our rivers, streams and water bodies;
2. The local impacts of climate change in Blandford include more frequent 100-year floods and more severe storms; an increase in insect populations and insect-borne diseases; rising water tables and increases in invasive species.
3. Green Streets can provide cost-effective infrastructure solutions to reduce and manage stormwater runoff and flooding from more intense storm and flooding events and can reduce localized flooding from surcharging, providing some adaptation to climate change.
4. Green Streets can improve water quality by filtering stormwater, removing contaminants, including total suspended solids (TSS), organic pollutants /oils, and heavy metals, and cooling the stormwater before it encounters groundwater or surface water bodies, which benefits watershed health.
5. Green Streets foster unique and attractive streetscapes that protect and enhance



neighborhood livability, integrate the built and natural environments, enhance the pedestrian environment, and introduce park-like elements into neighborhoods.

6. Green Streets encourage the planting of landscapes and trees which contribute environmental benefits such as reduced summer air temperatures, reductions in global warming through carbon sequestration and air pollution screening.
7. Green infrastructure can reduce the long-term costs of gray infrastructure maintenance, and complement gray infrastructure with hybrid systems of gray, piped infrastructure combined with green, vegetated infrastructure.
8. Green infrastructure will be an investment in Blandford's village centers. The costs for installing green infrastructure may be initially higher, but long term costs of climate changes, storm damages and flooding will be mitigated. Green infrastructure, when built in tandem with grey infrastructure, extends the lifespan of both green and grey infrastructure. Green infrastructure reduces water pollution more cost effectively than grey infrastructure alone.
9. Recharge of groundwater sources is a key mitigation activity under the Massachusetts Water Management Act regulations 310 CMR 36.00.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT ORDERED,

The Town of Blandford policy is to promote the use of green street facilities and green infrastructure in public and private development through regulation, capital investment, and management mechanisms as a cost-effective and sustainable practice for stormwater management in current and future projects when technically and economically feasible. This includes road development and reconstruction, bicycle and pedestrian projects, stormwater projects, and other development and redevelopment.

It is Town of Blandford policy to:

1. Incorporate and maintain green street facilities and green infrastructure into all publicly funded development, redevelopment, and enhancement projects, to the extent technically and economically feasible.

To achieve this, *where feasible*, Blandford will:

- a) Evaluate new municipal projects to determine if they will make the town more climate resilient and green, and will provide long-term benefits to the town.
- b) Install new and replacement culverts that are open-bottom culverts designed for fish and wildlife passage, and sized to handle larger storm events expected with climate change.
- c) As streets and parking lots are replaced, re-paved or installed, utilize green streets and parking lot designs with tree box filters, permeable pavement, and curbless planted medians and shoulders.
- d) Purchase electric or hybrid municipal vehicles.
- e) Install EV charging stations and priority EV parking spaces
- f) Support "Solarize" neighborhood programs to incentivize group solar panel purchases
- g) Conduct and periodically update energy audits and upgrades in energy efficiency





for all municipal buildings, and utilize Mass Energy Insight data to track and reduce energy use.

- h) Green existing and new municipal buildings, schools and facilities, using, but not limited to, such techniques as rain gardens, green roofs, rainwater harvesting and porous pavements.
- i) Install LED lighting for traffic lights, street lights and municipal buildings.
- j) Install green stormwater infrastructure in public green spaces.
- k) Work toward Blandford generating its own green power with solar or wind installations.
- l) Work with power companies to bury powerlines to reduce vulnerability to storm-related power outages.
- m) Work to make improvements to municipal buildings, schools and municipal infrastructure including:
  - a. Resiliency improvements for flooding;
    - Green roofs, rainwater harvesting, and re-use for watering;
    - Plant trees, shrubs and vegetation around municipal facilities;
    - Install bioswales, rain gardens, porous pavements and bioretention to infiltrate stormwater on site and reduce flooding;
    - Reduce impervious surfaces and replace with greenspace;
    - Install complete streets including bike lanes, sidewalks, and pedestrian infrastructure;
    - Energy efficiency and weatherization improvements.

2. Ensure that regulations require and incentivize all development to incorporate green streets and green infrastructure features. To achieve this, Blandford will enforce current stormwater regulations, and work toward adoption of zoning best practices for:

- a) On-site stormwater retention, low impact development and minimized impervious surfaces;
- b) Tree protection and planting;
- c) Complete streets and green parking;
- d) Green roofs;
- e) Solar access and streamlined solar permitting.

3. Ensure coordination and communication between town boards and departments, in particular Selectboard, Public Works Department, Building Department and Planning Board to ensure implementation of this policy, as well as fully addressing competing priorities.

#### Section 4. Amendments:

This policy may be amended at any time with the approval the Blandford Selectboard.



Section 5. Effective Date/Authorization:

This policy will become effective for when it is approved by vote of Blandford Select Board.

Approval by Blandford Select Board:

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair, Select Board Date







# PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

## TECHNICAL PAPER

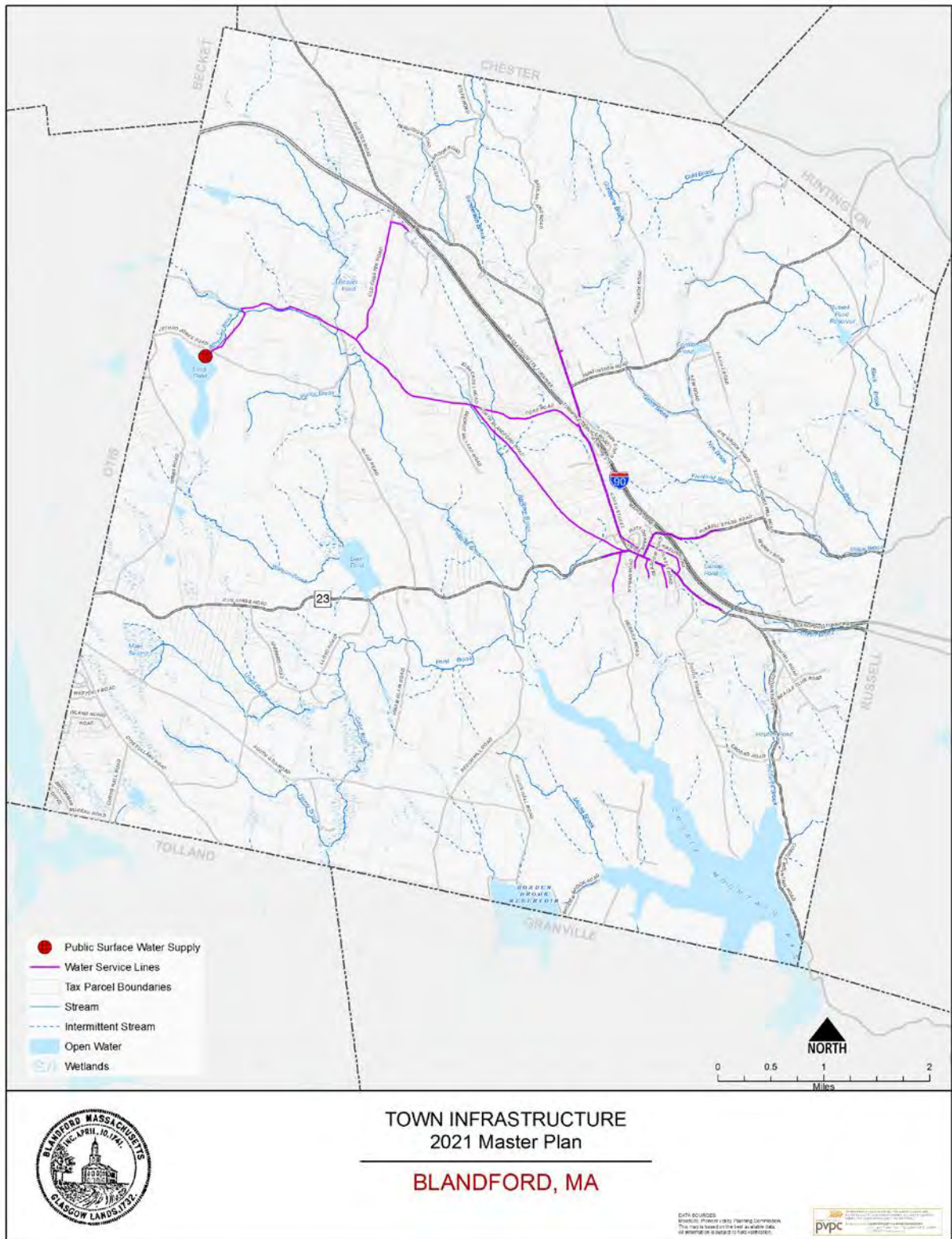
The life blood of any community are the services that it provides its residents. Police, fire and public works, along with the infrastructure that is necessary for these services, are vital for the city to function properly. Likewise, local decisions about how and what public services and facilities are funded and built will be critical in determining the direction the town takes in future development and continued governance.

### **Some Key Findings:**

- Generally, residents are satisfied with the level of public services they receive from the town.
- The Town takes advantage of state programs that exist to help fund building and infrastructure improvements in Blandford, like the *Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness* program which helps towns plan for and implement resiliency projects that respond to climate change risks, and *Green Communities* program that will help fund energy efficiency upgrades to municipal buildings.
- Blandford has an aging population that is overwhelmingly interested in aging in place. Public services and facilities will need to be expanded and adjusted to meet the needs of this demographic.



# Map 8-1 Infrastructure Map



# INVENTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

## INFRASTRUCTURE

### *Public Water*

According to the most recently posted 2017 Annual Drinking Water Quality Report, the Town of Blandford relies on one source of supply, the Long Pond Reservoir which located in the western part of Blandford. The reservoir is approximately 1 mile long by 0.25 miles at its widest point with a surface area of 81 acres and a hydraulic grade elevation of 1,544 feet. Water from the reservoir is processed at the Long Pond Water Treatment Facility, which has a maximum capacity of 250,000 gallons per day.<sup>1</sup> As the sole public water source for the town, this reservoir is an invaluable asset that is protected as best as it can be by an overlay district which restricts development that may impinge on the water resource. Map 8-1 has the water service lines and public service water supply.

### *Wastewater*

Blandford does not have a public sewer service or wastewater treatment. Development in town utilize on-site septic systems to store and process sewage. The wastewater from the McDonalds franchises on the east and westbound Massachusetts Turnpike is pumped to the Russell Sewage Treatment Plant.

Stormwater management is also handled on-site although in most cases stormwater management and erosion control have not been addressed formally, unless related to a site plan approval process or a wetlands-related development application.

### *Dams*

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation Office of Dam Safety is the agency responsible for regulating dams in the state. To be regulated, these dams are in excess of 6 feet in height and have more than 15 acre feet of storage capacity. The dam regulations enacted in 2005 transferred significant responsibilities for dams from the state to dam owners, including the responsibility to conduct dam inspections.

According to the Office of Dam Safety, Blandford has eight dams located in town. The dams include:

<b>Dam Name</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Hazard Potential</b>
Beaver Pond	City of Springfield, Water and Sewer Commission	N/A
Black Brook Dam	Town of Russell, Board of Water Commission	High
Borden Brook Reservoir	City of Springfield, Water and Sewer Commission	High
Dunlap Pond Dam	Non-jurisdictional	N/A
Huntington Water Works	Town of Huntington, Board of Selectmen	N/A
Long Pond Dam	Town of Blandford, Board of Water Commissioners	Significant

<sup>1</sup> Town of Blandford Water Department, 2017 Annual Drinking Water Quality Report



No Name	Non-jurisdictional	N/A
Peck Lumber	Town of Blandford, Board of Water Commissioners	N/A

High hazard dams are classified as likely to cause loss of life and damage to property and infrastructure, where significant hazard dams may cause loss of life and damage to the property.

***Telecommunications/IT***

The availability of broadband technology plays a major role in advancing development, where as the saying goes, “Be Wired or Be Fired”. Companies are less likely to move to a community that does not have dependable broadband service. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, broadband and high-speed internet connections are necessary for those residents who needed to work from home.

Currently, Blandford has moderate broadband internet coverage, with seven internet providers with four providers serving residents. In addition to the more typical internet servicers, the town is nearing complete construction and connectivity at the end of 2021 for a fiber optic network provided by Whip City Fiber of Westfield, Massachusetts. This was made possible by initiatives from the town committee, Blandford Municipal Light Board.

**MUNICIPAL FACILITIES & SERVICES**

***Town Hall (& Shared Police Department), 1 Russell Stage Road***

The Town Hall and Shared Police Department (with Town of Chester) share a building at 1 Russell Stage Road. Most of the town government, its boards and commissions are based at the Town Hall. Some of the departments and boards are listed below:

- Building Department
- Police Department (Shared with Town of Chester)
- Tax Collector
- Town Clerk
- Select Board
- Board of Assessors
- Board of Health
- Conservation Commission
- Finance Committee
- Planning Board
- Council on Aging
- Arts Council
- Municipal Light Board
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Cemetery Commission
- Treasurer
- Recreation Committee
- Town Administrator



The hours of operations for each department and board vary. Some town services are available online, through the Town’s website. Residents can access municipal information, download permit and application forms, and pay bills online. Unlike some towns of a similar size, Blandford does have its own building inspector. This is a critical position for the efficient implementation of community development and economic development strategies.

Community survey results indicate general satisfaction with the majority of town services. The sentiment regarding town services seem to align with many of the issues and opportunities captured elsewhere in this plan.

#### *Council on Aging: Center for Active Adults*

With an aging Baby Boomer population and people living longer than previous generations, the number of residents living over the age of 60 will be higher than in previous generations. As a result, communities need to ensure that town services and the built environment meet the need of this growing population. In 2019, 273 residents, or 25% of the total Blandford population, were age 65 years old or older. This is up from 104 residents and 9% of the population in 2010.

The Council on Aging serves Blandford’s seniors and the rest of the community by organizing and hosting social and health-related activities and keeping seniors informed about available programs and resources. The Council on Aging operates its programming at the Town Offices at 1 Russell Stage Road.

Some of the activities that the Council of Aging supports include book clubs, field trips, exercise opportunities, social hours, meals, etc. In 2020, the Council on Aging began “Need a Ride,” a program to take seniors to various appointments, as well as shopping. The program is assisted by volunteer drivers who are able to take seniors outside of Blandford, on an as-needed basis.

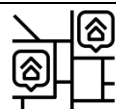
According to the community survey, the ability for the COA to provide transportation to appointments has been an added benefit for the senior services in town. However, transportation services can be improved, with considerations presented in the *Mobility* section of this Plan.

#### *Chester Blandford Police Department*

The Chester Blandford Police Department combined the two municipalities’ police departments, with the formation of an inter-municipal agreement, funded by a Community Compact grant. The grant paid for purchase of dual band portable radios, digital vehicle repeater systems, standardization of uniforms and patches, re-marking of cruisers and legal and consulting costs for the shared service agreement. Both towns have part-time police departments generally providing less than 25 hours of patrol per week, with additional coverage by the Massachusetts State Police, led by a chief of police employed by both communities. The police department budget is split 50/50 between Blandford and Chester.

#### ***Porter Memorial Library, 87 Main Street***

The town’s public library was constructed along Main Street in 1892 and is named in memory of Edgar Sheffield Porter, the son of summer resident Josephine Porter. The library is a community asset that is in the vicinity the town offices, general store, post office, Watson Park, all contributing





to the look and feel of the traditional rural town center. The library is open Monday through Friday 2PM – 6PM and Saturday from 10 AM – 4 PM.

The town library, led by the Library Director and the Board of Trustees, offers programming, books and media resources for the community. Recently, Porter Memorial Library has digitized its entire catalog in order to become a member of the Central and Western Massachusetts Automated Resource Sharing (CW/MARS) network. With this digitization process, residents have access to 8.1 million items waiting to be enjoyed in the shared catalog.

The library relies on funding from the town for its operation, along with foundations, state grants and individual giving.

During the pandemic, the library has become even more important, especially in collaboration with the school system. This past year the library expanded its services by providing curbside pick-up. The library recently was awarded a Libraries Transforming Communities Grant from the American Library Association, which will allow for construction and installation of a permanent story walk along the paths in Watson Park.

Continuing its important role in the community, 2020 has been a year where over 1 million audio and e-books were checked out in the CW/MARS system that the library belongs to – the highest year ever for digital checkouts.

### ***Transfer Station, 20 Huntington Road***

Trash and recycling services are maintained by the town at the Transfer Station at 20 Huntington Road. The transfer station is open two days a week to residents with a valid transfer station sticker. Comments from the community survey suggest the transfer station is very well run, organized, and effective.

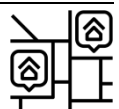
### ***Blandford Fire Department, 93 Main Street***

The Blandford Fire Department operates out of the firehouse facility at 93 Main Street in the center of town. The firehouse also serves as the Emergency Operation Center. The Hazard Mitigation Plan had identified that the Department faces challenges due to the inadequacy of the firehouse and its trucks. The firehouse is so small that a regular size fire truck would not fit and the small Blandford trucks have only inches of room to back-in. Multiple planning efforts (Hazard Mitigation Plan, Community Building Workshop Summary of Findings) suggest the Fire Department be moved to the current Highway Department facility. The fire department had the most positive responses with regards to satisfaction with level of town services in the community survey (Question #5).

The all-volunteer Fire Department is overseen by a part-time Fire Chief.

### ***Blandford Highway Department, 114 Otis Stage Road***

The Highway Department garage is located at 114 Otis Stage Road, however, the salt shed is not located at the same site. According to both the Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings, the Department struggles with having their equipment in multiple places, and a possible relocation and expansion at salt shed had been identified to house all Highway Department vehicles and equipment. This centralization of town



highway services would allow for maximizing their environmentally-friendly products being used for winter weather road preparation, in place of the typical sanding and salting.

Plowing and road maintenance had the second most positive responses of satisfaction with level of town services in the community survey (Question #5). Road maintenance is addressed in the *Transportation* element of this Plan.

### ***Blandford Long Pond Reservoir Water Treatment Plant***

The Blandford Water Department provides water to approximately 67% of the Town's population. There are a total of 238 connections, including two Interstate 90 (Massachusetts Turnpike) service areas, serving an estimated 875 people. Blandford Water Department is supplied solely from Long Pond Reservoir. The treatment plant, located adjacent to Long Pond, went online in July 2007 with an average day design flow of 130,000 gpd. The treatment process consists of a packaged enhanced slow sand filtration system.

Existing infrastructure includes two aged water storage tanks which are in disrepair, town water lines, a pump house to support the reservoir and water treatment plant. Due to the pump station and water treatment plant (WTP) not being automated, they are currently not up to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)'s standards. It has been identified that sometimes the WTP sometimes experiences chlorine leaks due to outdated system technology.

Improvements

## **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### ***Water Infrastructure – Wells, Septic Systems, and Public Services***

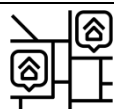
Although the town does not currently provide public sewer infrastructure there are potential future situations where such infrastructure could be considered.

It has also been observed that some areas, particularly near the Muddy Brook Valley, where there may exist large stones and boulders left as glacial debris can be a severe limitation for septic systems. Although these are private systems, if unchecked, these systems could lead to public health concerns and the contamination of water resources. In town, requiring buffer areas and updating regulations concerning development next to water bodies should be considered, along with stormwater management regulations.

### ***Building Maintenance and Accessibility***

As a small town with finite resources, the continued maintenance and operations of public buildings can be a strain. Additionally, several of the town's properties are in need of substantial capital improvements. Blandford does not have a facilities department to oversee a centralized facility management plan and program and capital improvement plan and program for the town. It is recommended that the Town develop and implement a Capital Improvement Budget and Plan, with assistance from a Capital Improvement Planning Committee.

Community Development Block Grants can be used to fund accessibility upgrades where identified, but not general building maintenance.



## ***Municipal Vulnerability and Hazard Mitigation Planning***

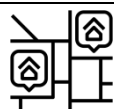
According to the community survey, 61.4% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement that the “town should prioritize energy efficiency, reducing emissions, and responding to the impacts of climate change.” New development should support adaptation to anticipated climatic changes and should align with statewide and regional goals towards reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It is well established that climate change is currently adding and will increasingly add stress to the municipal infrastructure and facilities that keep Towns like Blandford running, both day-to-day, and in the crisis times of natural emergencies.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) define Hazard Mitigation as any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from natural hazards such as flooding, storms, high winds, hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes, etc. Mitigation efforts undertaken by communities will help to minimize damages to buildings and infrastructure, such as water supplies, sewers, and utility transmission lines, as well as natural, cultural and historic resources.

Planning efforts make mitigation a proactive process. Pre-disaster planning emphasizes actions that can be taken before a natural disaster occurs. Future property damage and loss of life can be reduced or prevented by a mitigation program that addresses the unique geography, demography, economy, and land use of a community within the context of each of the specific potential natural hazards that may threaten a community. Preparing a Local Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan before a disaster occurs can save the community money and will facilitate post- disaster funding. Costly repairs or replacement of buildings and infrastructure, as well as the high cost of providing emergency services and rescue/recovery operations, can be avoided or significantly lessened if a community implements the mitigation measures detailed in the Plan. FEMA requires that a community adopt a pre-disaster mitigation plan as a condition for mitigation funding.

Blandford developed a Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) in 2016 with assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. This plan will be due for an update in the coming year as MEMA requires that HMP plans be updated every five years.

Recognizing that climate change will continue to exacerbate the threats and hazards Massachusetts communities face, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) created the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant program. Blandford’s Resilient Master Plan is being funded through this program. This program provides funding for towns to plan for and implement climate-change resiliency projects. The town remains eligible to apply for action grants to fund resiliency projects.



# IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Implementation is a critical step in the Master Plan process. The Implementation Plan is a step-by-step guide for Blandford to follow over the coming years to ensure that the Master Plan recommendations are put into action. Implementing the Master Plan will require a concerted and ongoing effort on the part of the town's elected and appointed officials, volunteers and dedicated citizens. The actions that the town takes now will create a lasting legacy for future generations.

We exist in an ever changing world with ever expanding and increasing social and technological advances requiring that planning must be an iterative process whereby a community should continually evaluate and respond to new external and internal circumstances and challenges as well as changes in the goals and desires of its residents. This Master Plan has a planning horizon of approximately 15 years: that is, planning needs are evaluated and recommendations are made based on their projected benefit over the same timeline. However, the Implementation Plan only has a much shorter timeframe in the sense that most of the Master Plan strategies are targeted to be commenced within the next three-six years. The Planning Board should periodically revisit the Master Plan to determine whether its goals and general strategies are still appropriate to the town. The town should facilitate a public review of the document, modify the goals and strategies as necessary, and prepare a new Implementation Plan for the subsequent six years. The town should consider reviewing the status of its Master Plan around 2030, at which time conditions in the town could have changed and a new plan will be needed to address the challenges that these conditions present.







# IMPLEMENTATION

## ACTION PLAN

The Implementation Action Plan summarizes all of the Master Plan strategies in a matrix format that identifies the approximate timeline and the group(s) responsible for implementing each one. The strategies are divided according to the element in the master plan that is addressed. Most of the actions will cost little or no money to implement because they can be brought about by Town Meeting vote or other action to change local policies. In some cases, the town may need to devote staff resources or hire a consultant to assist with this process (e.g., to help prepare zoning changes). If the town is able to hire a professional planner, this staff person may take the place of a consultant in many of these recommendations. Some of the actions that involve facility or infrastructure improvements will require the expenditure of funds, which may come from the town, the state, and/or other sources.

In the “Timeframe/Priority” column of the Action Plan matrices, actions are classified as either Short Term (indicating action within 12-24 months), Medium Term (indicating action within 2-5 years), and Long Term (indicating action within 5+ years). Many of these strategies are ongoing, indicating action that should be continually repeated and expanded as necessary. All items and strategies within this Master Plan are important however, and the priority designation is simply a means to prioritize generally among all the actions contained within the plan. A number of actions will require state involvement and/or major capital expenditures may require more than six years to implement. Many strategies are linked to one another, requiring much effort in the early phases to lay the groundwork for future progress. The feasibility of implementing certain strategies will be dependent on the town’s ability to set the foundation with a number of the shorter-term strategies and allow the longer-term strategies build from those efforts.

## A. COMMUNITY PRIDE AND RURAL COMMUNITY COMPETITIVENESS

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary	Others	Priority	Funding	Resources	
A-1	Continue to support service and capital improvements for operations like the Blandford Porter Memorial Library and Town Hall.	Select Board	Town Administrator	Ongoing	Capital budget, MA State Rural & Small Town grants	PVPC's LTA program for research and grant writing	
A-2	Pursue noise abatement through MassDOT to alleviate noise from the Turnpike.	Town Administrator	Highway Superintendent	Long-Term	MassDOT Noise Abatement program	MassDOT, Volunteers, PVPC's LTA program	
A-3	Consider prohibiting use of jake brakes near residential areas.	Select Board	Town Administrator, Highway Superintendent	Long-Term	Town funds	Local signage	
A-4	Continue to engage and coordinate planning efforts with Springfield Water and Sewer Commission around Cobble Mountain Reservoir and Long Pond Reservoir watershed lands and continue to collaborate and increase access. Pursue legal review of contract if necessary.	Conservation Commission	Town Administrator	Ongoing	Town funds	Volunteers	
A-5	Continue to advance work with nearby communities that bring like-businesses and economic development strategies together for the benefit of all, including members of the Gateway Hilltowns Collaborative.	Town Administrator	TAs, SBs, Ec Dev comms - Gateway Hilltowns	Ongoing	Capital budget, MA State Rural & Small Town grants	Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee	
A-6	Provide a series of mini grants through recovery funding to enable local businesses to employ new strategies that activate and enliven the use of outdoor spaces in the town center (use of outdoor spaces provide a more attractive option given continuing Covid-19 concerns). Also look into grants and incentives that may be available through the Massachusetts Office of Business Development, particularly the Economic Development Incentive Program.	Select Board	Town Administrator, Finance Committee	Short-Term	American Rescue Plan (ARPA)	Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee	
A-7	Advance drinking water upgrades to ensure continued integrity of homes, institutions, and businesses in the town center.	Water Department	Town Administrator	Ongoing	Capital budget, MA State Rural & Small Town grants, MVP Action grant	PVPC's LTA program for research and grant writing	
A-8	Create a visitor readiness plan for the town center that includes good wayfinding systems to nearby attractions, pedestrian friendly amenities, bathroom facilities, and helpful printed information.	Conservation Commission	Recreation Committee	Medium-Term	Healthy Hampshire, DLTA, MA Community One Stop for Growth	Gateway Hilltowns, Hilltown CDC, Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee	
A-9	Analyze permanent and temporary street-side signage to understand what would be most effective for attracting passersby to town center businesses, as well as events held by town center institutions and share results with local businesses and institutions. This work could also aim to develop an aesthetic for town center signs and achieve new zoning standards, which currently allow for only one sign per business, and do not allow a business to have a sign on their building and also a separate standing sign near the street.	Planning Board	Zoning Board of Appeals	Medium-Term	MA Community One Stop for Growth, DLTA, Town funds	Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee	
A-10	Promote shared technical skills to enable all town center businesses and institutions maximum social media exposure.	Town Administrator	Select Board	Medium-Term	Local	Gateway Hilltowns, Hilltown CDC, Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee	

A-11	Explore and identify possible trail linkages, thinking expansively about the use of the dirt road network, existing off-road trails, and potential opportunities on existing publicly accessible lands, and working with willing landowners to create new trail linkages where needed.	Conservation Commission	Recreation Committee	Long-Term	DCR Trails fund, CPA	Scouts, Volunteers	
A-12	Develop trail wayfinding resources, including a recognizable directional sign that heightens the identity of Blandford trails.	Conservation Commission	Recreation Committee	Medium-Term	DCR Trails fund, CPA	Scouts, Volunteers	
A-13	Evaluate parking, signage, and access to bathroom facilities along the trail network. Authors of the <i>Gateway Hilltowns Economic Development Strategy</i> note that channeling visitors to a centralized parking location adjacent to complementary attractions could result in increased spending. Collaborating on a system of parking lots, bathrooms, and possibly a parking shuttle is an option.	Conservation Commission, Recreation Committee	Gateway Hilltowns, Hilltown CDC	Long-Term	DCR Trails fund, CPA	Scouts, Volunteers	
A-14	Meet with trail advocates in other towns to begin identifying how connections could be made for longer walking journeys.	Conservation Commission	Recreation Committee	Long-Term	DCR Trails fund, CPA	Scouts, Volunteers	
A-15	Initiate a more robust conversation with the owners of Ski Blandford to understand whether and how the Town might help to support exploration of a mountain biking park.	Town Administrator	Conservation Commission	Short-Term	Local	Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee	
A-16	Work with local mountain bikers and perhaps local Northeast Mountain Biker Association members to gauge interest in furthering mountain biking resources in and around Blandford.	Town Administrator	Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	Local	Volunteers	

## B. LIVING WITH WILDLIFE AND NATURE

Strategy #	Strategy	Primary	Others	Priority	Funding	Resources	
B-1	Maintain seven-year updates to the Open Space and Recreation Plan that considers priorities for acquisition or protection of open space.	Conservation Commission	Planning Board	Ongoing	District Local Technical Assistance; EOEEA Conservation Assistance for Small Communities Grant	Volunteers, competitive procurement for Consultant srvs as needed, PVPC	
B-2	Protect Blandford's Scenic Vistas by adopting a new local regulation.	Planning Board	Conservation Commission	Long-Term	DLTA, PBA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning	
B-3	Investigate protection of scenic roads and roadway trees through passage of the Scenic Roads Act.	Planning Board	Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission	Long-Term	DLTA, PBA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning	
B-4	Explore and consider promoting <i>Tread Lightly</i> and <i>Leave No Trace</i> educational campaigns for residents.	Conservation Commission	Recreation Commission	Long-Term	Local	Scouts, Volunteers	
B-5	Prepare and implement a comprehensive strategy for protecting surface water and groundwater and the watersheds that feed them.	Conservation Commission	Highway Superintendent, Town Administrator	Short-term	MA DEP	Volunteer time, Consultant	
B-6	Review subdivision regulations and evaluate addition of performance standards for sensitive natural areas.	Planning Board	Conservation Commission	Ongoing	MVP Action grant, PBA	PVPC, Consultants	
B-7	Require adequate vegetated buffers next to wetlands, streams and rivers to filter stormwater runoff and to allow room for river migration and expansion during heavy storms.	Planning Board	Conservation Commission	Ongoing	Local, PBA, DLTA	MACC, Volunteers, PVPC, Consultants	

B-8	Evaluate the potential for a performance-based stormwater management bylaw.	Planning Board	Conservation Commission, Highway Superintendent	Ongoing	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteers, PVPC, Consultants	
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### C. BALANCED AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

C-1	Explore a Site Plan Review Bylaw and coordinate it with Design Guidelines that ensure that development and redevelopment are consistent with the size, scale and character that the Town is trying to achieve with its buildings.	Planning Board	Zoning Board of Appeals	Ongoing	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning	
C-2	Proactively work with developers to develop projects that are a visual asset to the community and promote Blandford's small-town New England rural character.	Planning Board	Zoning Board of Appeals	Ongoing	Local, PBA	Volunteers	
C-3	Explore an open space residential development/cluster housing bylaw to promote permanently preserved open spaces, agricultural lands, forest lands, and other natural resources.	Planning Board	Conservation Commission	Short-Term	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning and Subdivision Regulations	
C-4	Adopt a Town Center Overlay District to create incentives for mixed use development, including business, retail, residential, and civic uses and including other requirements to assure consistency with the existing look and feel of the Town.	Planning Board	possible Ec Dev Committee	Medium-Term	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning	
C-5	Adopt Low Impact Development standards for all new residential developments.	Planning Board	Conservation Commission	Ongoing	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning	
C-6	Explore the benefits of adopting an Accessory Apartment (In-law) Zoning Bylaw.	Planning Board	Council on Aging, Select Board	Medium-Term	Local, PBA, DLTA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning	
C-7	Expand the types of residential uses allowed in town, including zoning changes to allow three or four unit homes.	Planning Board	Council on Aging, Select Board	Long-Term	District Local Technical Assistance	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning and Subdivision Regulations	
C-8	Plan for Affordable Housing by developing a Housing Production Plan.	Planning Board	Council on Aging, Select Board	Short-Term	District Local Technical Assistance, Community Preservation Committee Funding	Volunteer time, PVPC	
C-9	Plan for and implement building and maintenance improvements by developing and implementing a Capital Improvement budget and plan outlining opportunities for possible funding through Community Development Block Grant.	Select Board	Town Administrator, Finance Committee	Ongoing	CDBG via PVPC	Volunteer time, PVPC	
C-10	Complete feasibility study for new, accessible Highway Department building utilizing site with salt shed.	Select Board	Town Administrator, Finance Committee, Highway Department	Ongoing	Community One Stop for Growth	Consultants, PVPC	



C-11	Move Fire Department operations to current Highway Department building to accommodate better operational capacity for both firefighters and firetrucks.	Select Board	Town Administrator, Finance Committee, Fire Department	Ongoing	Community One Stop for Growth	Consultants, PVPC	
C-12	Pursue adoption of a local Complete Streets Policy and develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan to become eligible for funding from the Massachusetts Complete Streets Program.	Town Administrator, Select Board	Highway Department	Long-Term	DLTA, MassDOT Complete Streets	Consultants, PVPC	
C-13	Continue to monitor pavement condition in the Town of Blandford and advance pavement maintenance and improvement projects based on the results of the 2020 Local Pavement Management Study.	Highway Department	Town Administrator	Ongoing	PVPC LTA, MassDOT Rail & Transit Div	Blandford 2020 Pavement Management Report	
C-14	Perform regular traffic data collection to assess existing travel speeds and volumes at key locations in the Town.	Highway Department	Town Administrator	Ongoing	PVPC LTA	PVPC Traffic Counting System	<a href="http://www.pvpc.org/projects/traffic-counting-system">http://www.pvpc.org/projects/traffic-counting-system</a>
C-15	Consider an in-depth safety study for the curved section of Otis Stage Road as identified in this chapter.	Highway Department	Town Administrator	Short-Term	MassDOT Roadway Safety funds	PVPC Safety Planning, MassDOT Road Safety Audits	<a href="http://www.pvpc.org/content/safety-planning">http://www.pvpc.org/content/safety-planning</a> ; <a href="https://www.mass.gov/service-details/road-safety-audits">https://www.mass.gov/service-details/road-safety-audits</a>
C-16	Work with MassDOT to identify opportunities to replace the existing deficient structure on Otis Stage Road.	Highway Department	Town Administrator, Select Board	Short-Term	MassDOT, PVPC	MassDOT Municipal Transportation Dashboard	<a href="https://gis.massdot.state.ma.us/DataViewers/MunicipalDashboard/">https://gis.massdot.state.ma.us/DataViewers/MunicipalDashboard/</a>
C-17	Continue to monitor the state of bridges and culverts in town through the MassDOT municipal data dashboard. Conduct a town-wide inventory and condition assessment of culverts and map of hot spot flooding in public rights-of-way, and prioritize maintenance, repair, and replacement for future investment.	Highway Dept, Town Administrator	Select Board, Town Clerk	Short-Term	FEMA/MEMABRIC, MVP from EOEEA	Volunteer time	
C-18	Continue to study the feasibility for the regionalization of some municipal services, like a Conservation Agent or Town Planner. Explore regionalized social services delivery.	Town Administrator	Select Board, Finance Committee	Ongoing	District Local Technical Assistance	PVPC	
C-19	Advocate for PILOT payment revenue so that it adequately compensates Blandford for the full value of protected open space.	Town Administrator	Select Board	Ongoing	PBA, DLTA	possible Ec Dev committee	
C-20	Continue to seek out assistance and useful tools for permitting solar and marijuana development projects and ensuring that payments (either PILOT, tax, or host community profit share agreement) are of net benefit to the Town of Blandford.	Town Administrator	Select Board	Ongoing	PBA	UMASS Clean Energy Extension, PVPC	
C-21	Review and consider adopting the proposed Green Infrastructure and Climate Resiliency Policy.	Select Board	Town Administrator, Planning Board	Short-Term	Local, DLTA, PBA	Volunteers	
C-22	Continue to apply for competitive grants to make municipal buildings and vehicles as energy efficient as possible saving the town money and reducing GHG emissions, including working to integrate the Gateway Regional School District (GRSD) into the Town's Energy Reduction Plan (ERP).	Town Administrator	Building Inspector, Select Board	Ongoing	DOER funded Technical Assistance via PVPC	Volunteer time, MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER), W MA staffperson,	
C-23	Work with PVPC through the current Green Communities funding to develop a net zero action plan for residents and businesses.	Town Administrator	Resilient Master Plan Committee members	Short-Term	DOER funded Technical Assistance via PVPC	Volunteer time	

C-24	Educate applicators of roadway snow/ice management products about alternative products to minimize environmental impact, their use, and the equipment associated with their use.	Highway Dept	Town Administrator	Ongoing	DEM, EPA, MVP from EOEEA	Volunteer time	
C-25	Improve the resilience of and modernize the operations of the public water treatment and distribution systems to meet DEP compliance standards.	Town Administrator	Conservation Commission	Long-Term	MVP from EOEEA	Consultants, PVPC	
C-26	Develop and implement a method of tracking hazardous materials transported on I-90 and MA Rt-23; train Fire Department, and others as appropriate on how to respond to spills of different types of chemicals, how to recognize and interpret Tier II symbols, etc.	EMD	Highway Dept, Town Administrator	Long-Term	FEMA/MEMA BRIC, MVP from EOEEA	Volunteer time	

#### D. HIDDEN STORIES AND RICH HISTORY

D-1	Develop a Blandford Preservation Plan to identify significant cultural resources and to prioritize documentation and projects to include all aspects of Blandford's history.	Historical Commission	Historical Society, Porter Memorial Library, Other Town Agencies, Volunteers	Short-Term	Local	PVPC, MHC, Preservation MA, and other preservation plans and programs for reference	Seek training and develop an outline by the end of 2021
D-2	Develop emergency response plans for significant built cultural resources and collections including long-term maintenance plans for significant public and private resources. Utilize existing resources like the Blandford Country Store and Café, Porter Memorial Library, and Blandford Fair Grounds as Disaster Response Locations.	Porter Memorial Library Director and Board	Town Administrator, Historical Society, Historical Commission, Blandford Country Store and Café, Blandford Fair Grounds, local emergency response groups	Short-Term	Preservation Grants for Veterans' Collections, Sites and Memorials; Regrant Program; Roving Archivist Program; Conserving & Digitizing Historical Resources LSTA grant	COSTEP MA, MHC, Preservation MA, Massachusetts State Historical Records Advisory Board, Massachusetts Libraries Board of Library Commissioners MA Cultural Council, Simmons West Mt. Holyoke; CPA	Prepare list of priority properties and collections by the end of 2021
D-3	Consider new outreach techniques such as story mapping, historic building signs, and wayfinding and interpretive signs to help tell the story of Blandford.	Historical Commission	Historical Society, Porter Memorial Library, Planning Board	Short-Term	MA Historic Preservation	Volunteer time, PVPC, MHC, Preservation MA, and other preservation plans and programs for reference	Seek training and develop an outline by the end of 2021
D-4	Formally investigate Feasible Reuse of Shepard Farm by applying to the Rural and Small Town Fund for a feasibility study for the best use of the town-owned Shepard Farm Area on Otis Stage Road.	Town of Blandford	Historical Commission, Historical Society, Conservation Commission, Recreation Committee, Friends of Shepard Farm	Ongoing	OneStop for Growth (Rural and Small Town Fund), EEA, Preservation Massachusetts	Volunteer time, PVPC	Expression of Interest due April 2021

D-5	Consider adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA) as this locally sourced and state matched funding could help to allow residents to control and support many of the current initiatives, challenges, and opportunities present in Blandford.	Form a CPA Committee	Town of Blandford, Community Preservation Coalition, PVPC	Short-Term	PVPC LTA	Community Preservation Coalition, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, talk to reps from other Western MA towns that have this program in place	
D-6	Pursue Cultural District Designation for the Main Street Area between the General Store and Cafe to the Blandford Country Club to include Watson Park. Planning should include consideration for the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) compliance to make Blandford's historic and cultural resources available to anyone who would like to enjoy them.	Cultural Council	Blandford Historical Society, Porter Memorial Library, Blandford Fair Committee, Blandford General Store and Café, Blandford Country Club, Recreation Committee	Short-Term	MA Cultural Council funding	Hilltown Mobile Market, Healthy Hampshire (Blandford Walks), Mass Humanities, Mass Cultural Council, look to other Western MA towns that have adopted cultural districts	
D-7	Establish meetings, at least on a quarterly basis, with representatives from key groups (like the past "All Boards" meetings) and add to public information on related websites to keep stakeholders and residents informed and outline goals through 2030 to foster local, regional, and national partnerships to strengthen Blandford's existing historic and cultural resources.	Historical Society	Historical Commission, Cultural Council, Conservation Commission, Porter Memorial Library Board, Fair Committee	Short-term	Mass Humanities "Revolution Happened Here"	Mass Cultural Council, Revolution 250, Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, Community Foundation of Western MA	Prepare Collaboration Outline and begin core group meeting prior to 2021
D-8	Consider the adoption of a statement affirming celebration of Native American history.	Historical Commission	Select Board	Ongoing	Local	Volunteers	
D-9	Explore national standards for historic preservation and consider their applicability for Blandford.	Historical Commission	Historical Society	Ongoing	Local	Volunteers	

## E. COMMUNITY INTERCONNECTIONS AND ROOTS

E-1	Establish mechanisms and policies linking the Master Plan to staff, board and commission work plans, budgets, and capital projects.	Resilient Master Plan Implementation Committee	Select Board, Town Administrator, Planning Board	Ongoing	Local, PBA	Volunteer time, Consultant	
	a. Sunset the Resilient Master Plan Committee charged with this Master Plan development, replace with Resilient Master Plan Implementation Committee reporting to the Select Board.						
	b. Use the Master Plan recommendations and implementation table as a guide of decision making.						
	c. Convene an annual all Town Boards, Committees and Commissions Meeting to share progress on implementing the Master Plan and discussing change of priorities and plans.						
E-2	Work with residents to promote home occupations and cottage industries within their residential buildings, and providing adequate protections for neighbors as the zoning bylaw allows.	Planning Board	Zoning Board of Appeals	Medium-Term	Local, PBA	Volunteer time, PVPC Best Practices Model Zoning	

E-3	Explore senior housing development and programs that allow for aging in place, such as an accessory apartment bylaw or other regulatory and non-regulatory tools.	Planning Board	Council on Aging	Medium-Term	Community Development Block Grants; Home Modification Loan Program	Hilltown CDC; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; State and federal	
E-4	Support services for seniors, disadvantaged residents, and veterans.	Town Administrator	Select Board, Council on Aging	Ongoing	Massachusetts Council on Aging	Volunteers	
E-5	Strengthen the programs at the Council on Aging to include continued outreach services, health, nutrition and recreation programs.	Council on Aging	Select Board, Town Administrator	Ongoing	Massachusetts Council on Aging	Volunteers	
E-6	Provide intergenerational opportunities and space (i.e., a community center) for engagement with school-aged residents and seniors, exploring programming through the school district and other opportunities.	Town Administrator	Select Board, Council on Aging	Ongoing	Massachusetts Council on Aging	Gateway Regional High School, Volunteers	
E-7	Explore opportunities with the FRTA to improve the reliability of existing services and to expand existing Senior Van service in the future.	Town Administrator	Council on Aging	Medium-Term	Massachusetts Council on Aging, Massachusetts Community Transit Grant Program	FRTA, PVPC, Volunteers	<a href="http://frta.org/#">http://frta.org/#</a>
E-8	Apply to the Massachusetts Community Transit Grant Program to help support existing volunteer senior and disabled ride services provided in town.	Council on Aging	Town Administrator	Medium-Term	Massachusetts Community Transit Grant Program	MassDOT Rail and Transit Division, Volunteers	<a href="https://www.mass.gov/community-transit-grant-program">https://www.mass.gov/community-transit-grant-program</a>
E-9	Work with surrounding communities and special interest groups to identify opportunities to provide additional senior and disabled ride services in the future.	Council on Aging	Town Administrator	Long-Term	Local	Hilltown CDC, Surrounding Communities Councils on Aging	<a href="https://www.rideconnector.org/">https://www.rideconnector.org/</a>
E-10	Utilize the results of WalkBoston's Walk Audit to advance improvements to pedestrian safety and encourage more pedestrian activity.	Town Administrator, Highway Superintendent	Council on Aging	Ongoing	MassDOT Complete Streets funding	Hilltown CDC, Healthy Hampshire	
E-11	Expand the existing map of walking routes for use by local residents.	Town Administrator	Council on Aging	Long-Term	PVPC LTA, DLTA	Hilltown CDC, Healthy Hampshire	
E-12	Improve town outreach and communication to residents for purposes of civic engagement and emergency response preparedness, increasing awareness of Blackboard Connect and other tools.	Town Administrator, Select Board	Emergency Management Director	Ongoing	Local, Homeland Security funding	W Region Homeland Security Advisory Council	
E-13	Form a local collective that brings together all the institutions of the town center for collaborative problem solving and planning.	Select Board	Town Administrator	Ongoing	Local Community One Stop for Growth	Gateway Hilltowns, Volunteers, possible Ec Dev committee	
E-14	Meet MEMA and DPH standards and requirements to make Gateway Regional School and Blandford Town Hall active emergency shelters, including securing backup power. Explore the option of solar generation and battery storage for backup power.	Emergency Management Director, Town Administrator	Select Board	Short-Term	FEMA/MEMA BRIC, MVP from EOEEA	Volunteer time, American Red Cross	
E-15	Continue to facilitate the installation of Town-wide broadband.	Municipal Light Board	Town Administrator, Select Board	Ongoing	MA Broadband Initiative	Volunteers	







SMALL TOWN, **BIG PLANS**

**BLANDFORD**

*Bridge to* **2030**  
RESILIENT MASTER PLAN