

Land Use

1. Introduction

Chapter Overview

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 Hatfield's Landscape

Hatfield is located in Hampshire County and covers about 16 square miles. The entire landmass of the Town of Hatfield is situated in the Connecticut River watershed. All naturally draining surface water eventually finds its way to the Connecticut River, which forms about 7.5 miles of the town's eastern and southeastern boundaries. The town is bounded by Hadley to the east, Northampton to the south, Williamsburg to the west, and Whately to the north.

Hatfield's location in proximity to the college towns of Northampton and Amherst, as well as its access to Interstate 91, have contributed to its development as a "bedroom community" both for these larger towns and the cities of Springfield, Greenfield, and others along the I-91 corridor.

The community is characterized as a rural farming and residential community. Hatfield has an area of 10,240 acres, or approximately 16 square miles. The largest of the mountains that make up vistas in the town is Horse Mountain, rising approximately 840 ft. and covering approximately 3,100 acres.¹ Hatfield has approximately 3,327 residents.² The 2021 median household income was \$76,688 with 6.5% of residents below the poverty line.³

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 Hatfield in implementing its vision for future land uses.

Connecting Themes

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

¹ 2032, OSRP

² U.S. Census 2020

³ Hatfield Community Data, <https://pioneervalleydata.org/community-profiles/>

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 particularly with relation to the theme that has been emerging with the town ensuring its sense of community and providing a sustainable future.

Themes that emerged that tie the elements of this plan together include:

- Maintain the rural character of Hatfield while also supporting smart growth principles where development makes sense.
- The Town Center is an opportunity, however, its location in the flood zone makes it problematic. Exploring other areas in town to expand business and industrial development opportunities in village center, pedestrian scale type of development can be another option.
- Preserve lands, like farmland, and minimize impacts of future development through regulatory tools.

2. Existing Conditions

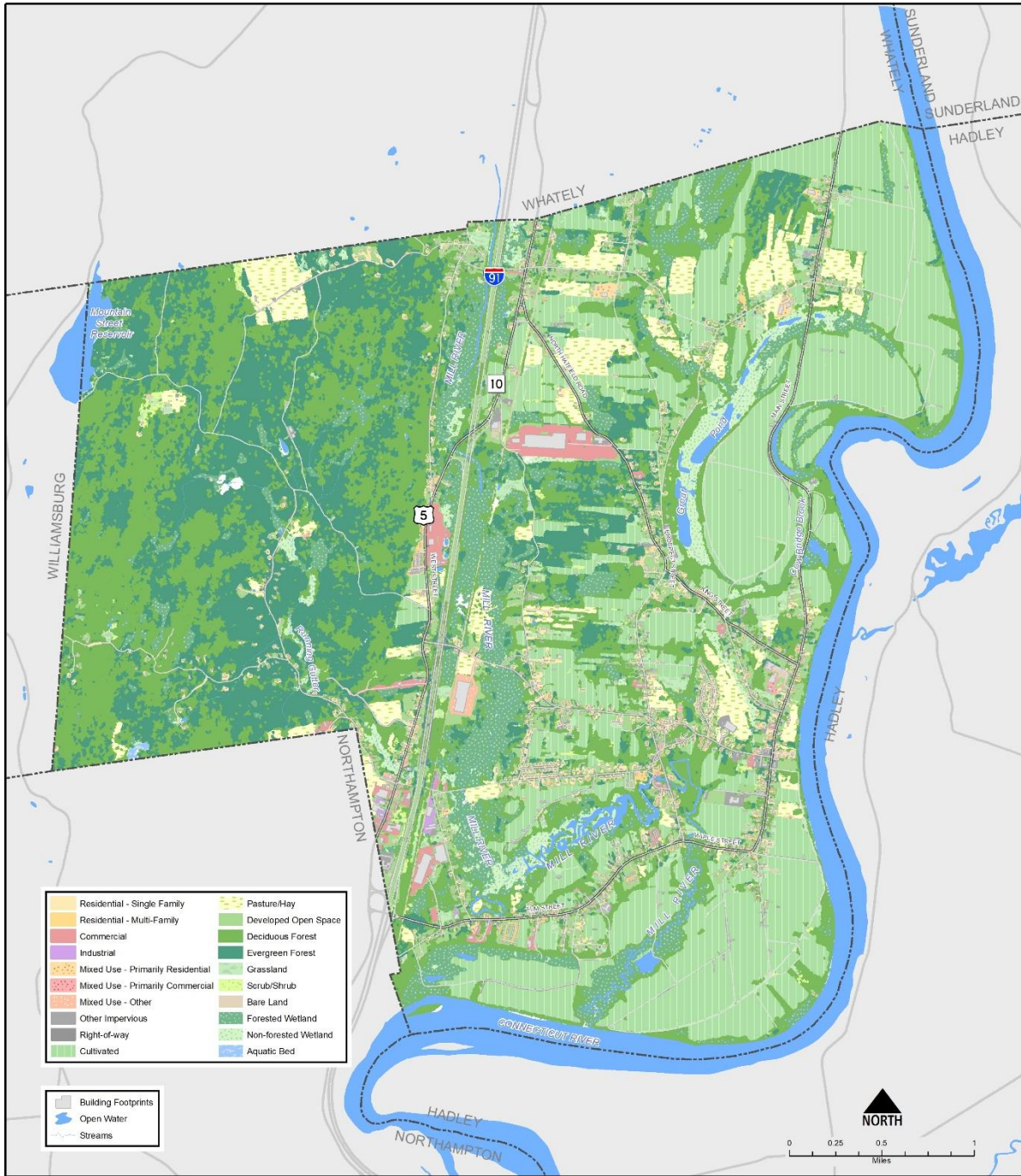
Figure 1 is the most recent data for land use type prepared using recent MassGIS datasets. The dataset contains a combination of land cover mapping from aerial imagery (2016) and land use derived from standardized assessor parcel information. Map 1 shows the land use cover.

Figure 1 Hatfield Land Use

Land Use Type	Acres	Percent of Total (%)
Agriculture	2,906.34	26.99
Commercial	269.39	2.50
Forest	220.94	2.05
Industrial	26.05	0.24
Mixed use (other, primarily commercial + residential)	1,322.75	12.29
Open land	2,012.30	18.69
Recreation	415.61	3.86
Residential (other, multi-family + single family)	2,250.07	20.90
Right-of-way	554.27	5.15
Tax exempt	197.34	1.83
Unknown	33.48	0.31
Water	558.41	5.19
TOTAL	10,766.95	100.00

Source: MassGIS

Map 1 Hatfield Land Use Map



MassGIS LAND COVER/LAND USE 2016
2024 Comprehensive Plan

HATFIELD, MA

DATA SOURCE:
MassGIS, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
This map is based on the most available data
All information is subject to field verification.

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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.

While the town maintains a small town feel according to its residents, there has been lost acreage to development over time, such as solar development and home building. Hatfield's population has fluctuated over the past few decades, from 3,184 in 1990 to 3,259 in 2010 and now with the 2020 Census presenting a population of 3,327 residents. It will be important for the town to utilize its regulatory tools and advisory efforts to preserve key farmland and open space parcels.

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.

Hatfield's current zoning bylaw was adopted on May 13, 2003, by the Town Meeting, and there have been subsequent bylaw amendments in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40A, Section 5. The most recent Zoning Bylaw Amendment was passed by Town Meeting in 2021 to change the Zoning Map and housekeeping cleanup. 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.

Hatfield has eight base zoning districts and five overlay districts. The base districts define the allowed uses and dimensional requirements, while the overlay districts establish additional restrictions in certain areas for the protection of specific public interests. The location, boundaries and characteristics of the base districts are described below and in accordance with *Map 2, Zoning*.

- **Rural Residential District** – This is the town’s single largest district. This is the district where most of Hatfield’s residential growth has developed over the years. It is flat, fertile and contains much farm and forest land suitable for development.
- **Outlying Residential District** – This district is comprised of the hilly terrain westerly of Route 5/10. A significant portion of it is also subject to the Water Supply Protection District. The area is heavily forested and subject to steep slopes, poor soils, under constructed roads and a lack of public utilities. The minimum lot size is 60,000 square feet with 200 feet of frontage. This area is currently not under development pressure due to environmental and accessibility constraints.
- **Town Center District** and **Town Center Business District** are commercial districts that encompass the cultural and institutional amenities of the town. Typically small businesses and retail uses can be found, or at least welcomed here. This area of town is currently being discussed as an area of town where future development should be limited due to climate change and the realities of extreme weather events, like flooding.
- **Business District** – This district is located along primarily three sections of Routes 5/10. Depending on the end of those corridors one can find transitional land uses and types of businesses as one approaches the abutting towns, more rural farms and homes towards Whately, and professional offices towards Northampton.
- **Industrial District** and **Light Industrial District** are industrial districts that are located along Route 10 and that straddles the B&M/Connecticut River Railroad line.
- **Agricultural District** – The district has some of Hatfield’s best farmland and the entire district is situated within the 100-year floodplain of the Connecticut River and is further regulated by the Floodplain Overlay District. The primary uses permitted in this district are agricultural/horticultural/floricultural/viticultural in nature and while single-family homes are permitted, they do require Site Plan Review by the Planning Board.

Overlay Districts

Although appropriate zoning is all relevant to protecting the health and safety of the Town residents, three of Hatfield’s districts are specifically relevant to natural hazard mitigation. These are outlined here:

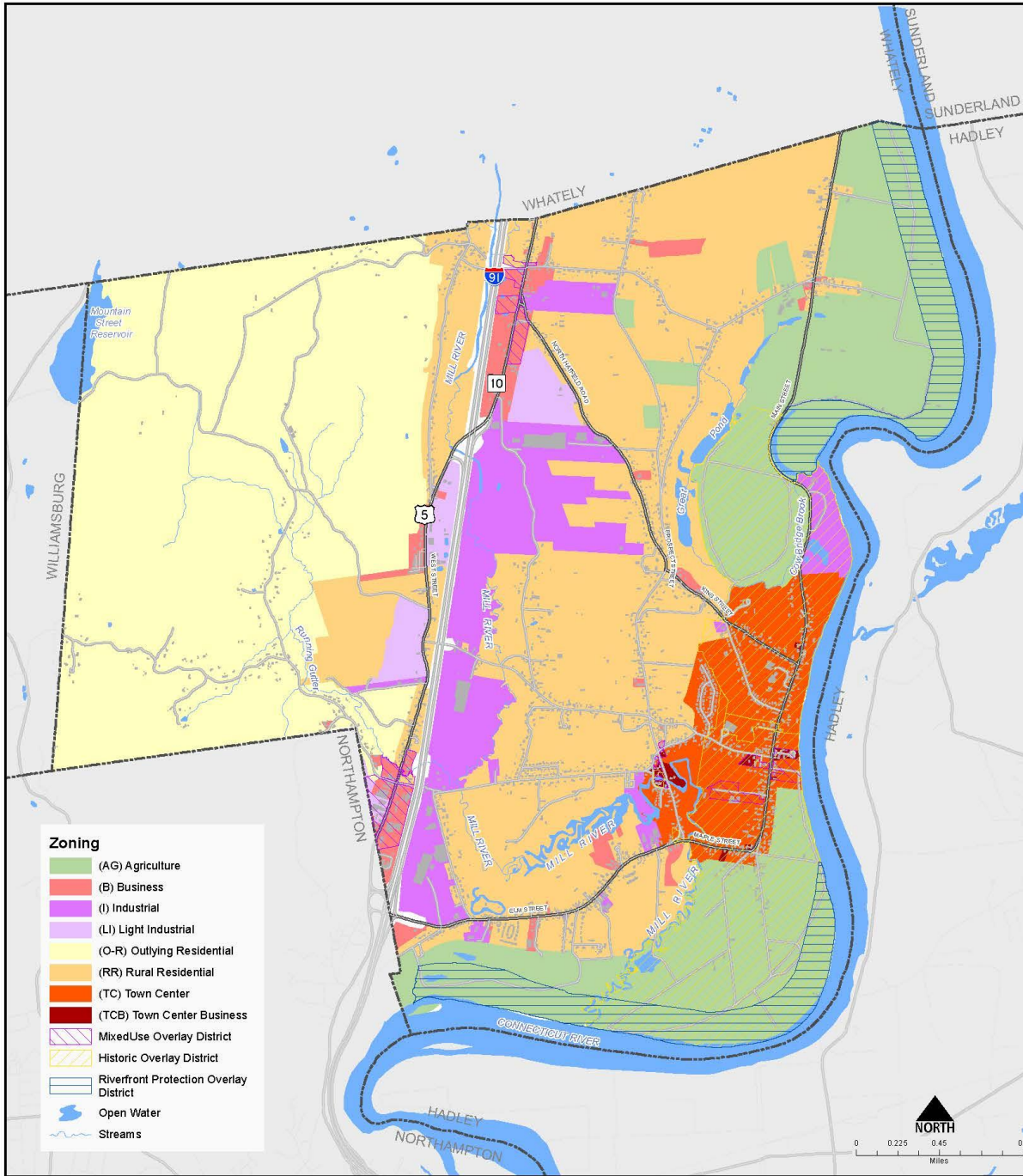
- **Floodplain** – The floodplain overlay applies to those areas within the boundary of the one-hundred-year flood that are considered hazardous according to FEMA. It limits some uses for preventing potential flood damage.
- **Water Supply Protection District** – The purpose of this overlay district is to protect and preserve Hatfield’s groundwater resources from potentially damaging pollution, or environmental degradation, by regulating certain uses within the district. The regulations state specific prohibited and restricted uses, regulate drainage, details site plan requirements and special permit procedures.
- **Riverfront Overlay District** – The purpose of this overlay district is to protect the sensitive natural resources and rural character of the lands adjacent to the Connecticut River in Hatfield, promote the preservation of agricultural lands along the Connecticut

River, and preserve the natural flood control and flood storage characteristics of the floodplain areas in the Riverfront Overlay District.

Additionally, the Zoning Bylaw calls out a **Mixed Use Overlay District**. The purpose of the overlay is to foster a greater opportunity for creative development by providing guidelines which encourage a mix of uses compatible with existing and neighboring properties. The town also has a Historic Overlay which exists on the official zoning map but is not described within the Zoning Bylaw.

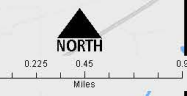
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Map 2 Hatfield Zoning Map



ZONING & OVERLAY DISTRICTS 2022 Open Space & Recreation Plan

HATFIELD, MA



DATA SOURCE:
Maple Valley Planning Commission
This map is based on the 2022 Open Space & Recreation Plan.
All other data is provided by the respective agencies.

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3. Challenges and Opportunities

The Master Plan process has provided the opportunity for residents to present comment and concerns about growth in Hatfield and the 189 survey respondents, along with committee members have affirmed the importance of the Town's "rural character." Most of the survey takers, at least 50%, found that the town should preserve the character of the town and protect open space, natural resources and environmental quality. The intention of this plan is to help Hatfield achieve its vision which has been articulated as maintaining the rural charm of the town and balancing the other perspectives that have been brought forth in the other elements of the plan. Some strategies may include supporting 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.

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

The conversations from the community meetings and focus group suggest that there is broad support to update the boundaries of existing zoning districts particularly along Routes 5 and 10. Ensuring town or village center standards in zoning can provide the opportunities for walkability and access to services like the post office, town offices and retail offerings, especially within the context of the built up development in the zoning districts along the major industrial corridors. The town would want to examine how increased residential density can support the small, local business.

A reexamination of the Town Center, both within the context of the town's historical Town Center and as a concept that can be realized elsewhere in town, particularly with the zoning standards like dimensional requirements can open up opportunities for density and small businesses. With the realities of climate change and possibilities of flooding, the historical Town Center would attract small businesses to support the local economy and offer a continuation of the types of structures and character the town seeks. A bylaw, which currently exists, can be reviewed to see which standards are difficult to address for developers seeking business in Hatfield. The developer would need to continue demonstrating that the development can fit within the context of the neighborhood it is in, but its standards can be reviewed. The town can even explore identifying more than one area where they could foresee this type of development.

(Semi-) Rural, Small Town Features

Urban design can help preserve historic small-town character, ensuring that new development complements the history surrounding it, and creating an accessible, pedestrian-friendly environment. By addressing fundamental site dimensions, like building height, width, coverage, and setbacks, design guidelines can also focus on elements such as signage, building materials, streetscape components, and landscaping.

To some extent we can maintain the remnants of Hatfield past by preserving roads, overarching trees, barns, and other artifacts of the earlier times, as the town still has some visual characteristics of a New England town. More significant, however, could be the opportunity to revitalize the type of uses and activities that help support even a more town-adopted value-based small-town character:

- Preserving and supporting the expansion of the remaining working farms, including on public land, if appropriate;
- Centralizing activity with working greenbelts of gardens, farms and forest;
- Building more support for the strong values of recreation in town.

The approach to small-town 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 by creating specific standards and incorporating them into each of the zoning designations, in addition to exploring overlay districts to preserve qualities unique to specific neighborhoods strengthening guidelines that have already been established.

Restrictions on (Re)Development

Exploring any future development or redevelopment in various parts of town 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 other “villages” 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

Hatfield could support additional affordable housing in town by way of a looking at creating opportunities for multi-family housing and identifying parcels which could have housing, particularly open space residential, ensuring a maximum protection of open spaces, but providing incentive for developers to build more homes on smaller lots, as the town through its visioning session and survey suggested that the town explore this type of development.

New housing constructed under a revisited senior housing zoning bylaw 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 December June 2023, the State's records show the town's SHI at 2.9 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. Hatfield'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 development in the town center concept 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 and other amenities, like the library.
- Working to expand affordable housing opportunities would provide housing for those who want to remain in town and contribute to the success of Hatfield, while also offering opportunities for new residents who can contribute to the growth of Hatfield.
- 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.

4. Examples from other Communities

Farmland Preservation

Massachusetts has been actively working on farmland preservation efforts to protect agricultural lands. There are plenty of offerings on how to get these lands conserved in perpetuity and if not, at least ensuring minimal impact to the active and important farmland soils. This trend includes initiatives to provide incentives for farmers to continue working on the land and programs that promote conservation and sustainable agricultural practices.

Smart Growth and Transit-Oriented Development

The Pioneer Valley has a regional land use plan that discusses smart growth as an opportunity to ensure sustainability in the built form and preservation of important natural resources. This approach encourages compact, mixed-use development near public transportation, aiming to reduce reliance on cars, promote walkability, and improve overall sustainability.

Adapting to Climate Change

The impacts of climate change, such as sea-level rise and increased extreme weather events like flooding and long-term standing waters, influence and impact land use decisions. Some of the concepts that are introduced in the land use sphere include Low Impact Development, requirement of green infrastructure and stormwater control mechanisms.

Agriculture District Intensity

Agricultural or “Ag Zoning,” refers to designations made by municipalities that would typically protect farmland and related activities from incompatible non-farm uses. Usually designated as “A-1” land or zoning, the purpose of the zoning is to conserve and protect open land uses, foster orderly growth in rural areas and prevent urban agricultural land use conflicts.

Looking at an opportunity to differentiate uses in agriculture land, sometimes communities zone land Agricultural-1 (A-1) and/or Agricultural-2 (A-2). Though, this would not necessarily mean A-1 is reserved just for farm or agricultural uses. Churches, schools, utility facilities, business offices, hospitals, clubs, bed & breakfast inns, kennels, feed stores, etc., can be allowed on A-1 zoned property. These types of uses however would likely be sharing common environments that animals or farmland would be in the vicinity of. Agricultural-2 can be codified for those properties that are not as large as the A-1 parcels, as A-2 typically serves as a transitional land use.

5. Recommended Goals and Strategies

A. Maintain and create opportunity for development within the context of the town’s distinctive New England characteristics.

Objectives:

1. *Identify impediments in zoning that create difficulties in developing appropriately in identified zoning districts*
 2. *Focus any development in sections of town that have the infrastructure and environmental conditions to accommodate growth and limit development in environmentally sensitive areas with design guidelines and district center planning.*
 3. *Encourage new commercial and industrial development in the appropriate parts of town.*
 4. *Ensure that new development and redevelopment is appropriate for, and sensitive to, the surrounding neighborhoods and environment through the zoning bylaw and enforcement*
- Perform a Zoning diagnostic to examine readability and content of the town's Zoning Bylaws. Refine and revise Zoning Bylaws as necessary with new format, modern terminology, and definitions that fully describe items discussed within the bylaw to make the development and permitting process clearer and more transparent for all.

- Review the Hatfield Zoning Map to ensure that instances of “spot zoning” are reduced and that the Zoning Map will meet the requirements and intent of MGL Chapter 40A, Section 4.
- Review how design guidelines are currently administered within the context of the Zoning Bylaw and development within town.
- Require operation and maintenance plan for site plan approval of non-residential development, particular to improved stormwater infrastructure.
- Review and revise Subdivision Rules and Regulations and planned unit residential development zoning to promote permanently preserved open spaces, agricultural lands, forest lands, and other natural resources by clustering development where least impactful to those resources.
- Examine what Chapter 40R Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District could accomplish for residential and mixed use development.
- Review lands in current industrial zoning district for developability to get an accurate inventory of non-wetlands available land.
- Explore industrial uses and possible areas for that type of development elsewhere in town.
- Consider purchase of lands in current industrial zoning district that are unable to be developed due to wetlands for conservation in perpetuity.
- Continue and explore additional funding for a Town Planner to stay competitive with neighboring communities and to meet demands of the Planning Board and various initiatives.

B. Enhance and explore where the village centers can be an option in town as livable, workable and walkable neighborhoods.

Objectives:

1. *Allow for the appropriate use, development and redevelopment of land that are similar to the development of the town’s historical center facilitating the creation of similar livable, workable, and walkable neighborhoods.*
2. *Improve and/or create pedestrian network in and around village centers.*
3. *Create and/or implement standards for consistent sign, streetscapes, and architecture.*

- Celebrate and implement standards adopted in the Town Center elsewhere in. Revise standards as necessary.
- Review and revise building size criteria in the Zoning Bylaw based upon standards to keep consistency of appearance in neighborhoods.
- Discuss adaptive re-use and infill development. Adopt zoning to promote re-use of existing underutilized buildings and infill development within larger commercially zoned properties, and to encourage walkable layouts of development.

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