

Community Master Plan

Great Barrington, MA

August 22, 2013

Planning Board
Board of Selectmen
Town of Great Barrington

Dear Board Members:

The Master Plan Committee, charged by the Planning Board in 2010 to update the Great Barrington Master Plan, has completed its mission. Enclosed for your review is the final draft Master Plan.

This document is the result of a rigorous review of data, a healthy debate of strategies and priorities in monthly meetings, and three years of public participation, input, and discussion. Not all issues could be resolved, but all were discussed.

We will attend the September 26, 2013 Planning Board meeting with the Board of Selectmen, when we hope the Planning Board will vote to approve the plan, and the Selectmen will endorse it.

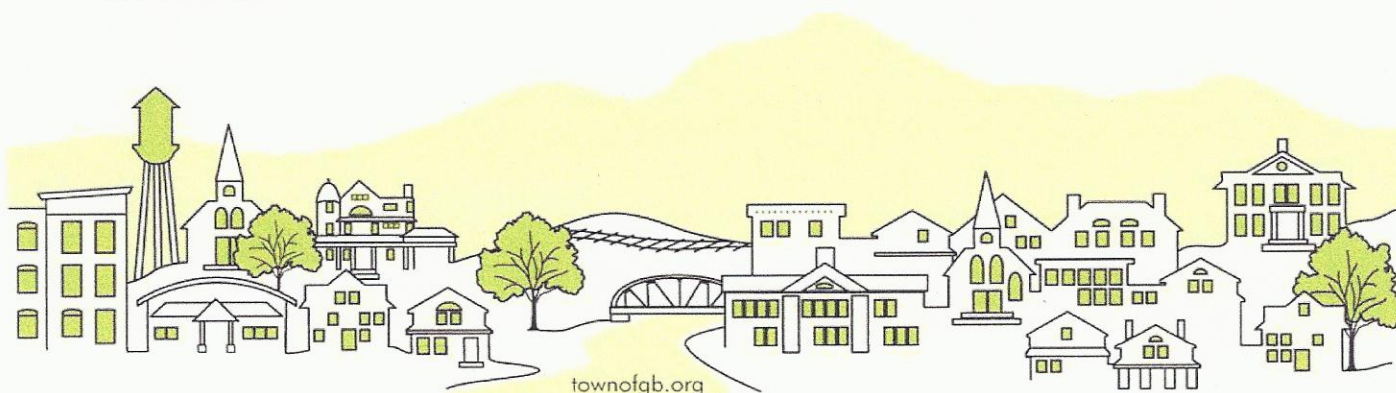
We would like to thank both boards and the entire Master Plan Committee for their input and dedication to this effort.

Very truly yours,



Michele Gilligan and Michael Wise
Co-Chairs
Master Plan Committee

cc: Master Plan Committee
Town Manager
Town Clerk
Town Planner



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Community Master Plan

Town of Great Barrington, MA

Final Draft for Approval

September 2013



This Master Plan was prepared in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Ch. 41, sec. 81D, and approved by the Great Barrington Planning Board and Board of Selectmen on September 26, 2013.

On the Cover:

The graphic on the cover was developed free of charge by Hussey Graphics for the exclusive purpose of the Great Barrington Master Plan. The graphic represents the historic villages of Housatonic and Great Barrington, linked, as they have been for generations, by the central spine of the Housatonic River and the Housatonic Railroad. They are surrounded and framed by the rural landscapes and natural beauty of the Berkshires.

Community Master Plan 2013

Great Barrington, MA

Greetings

In 2010 your Planning Board recognized that changing trends, new challenges, and emerging opportunities, in our town, in our region, and in our country, needed to be addressed in a comprehensive manner. To do so, the Planning Board, with the support of the Board of Selectmen, established a Master Plan Committee and charged it with writing a new Master Plan that would put Great Barrington on a sound footing for the future.

We believe we have fulfilled that charge. This Master Plan was developed after a rigorous review of data, a healthy debate of strategies and priorities in monthly meetings, and three years of public participation, input, and discussion. Not all issues could be resolved, but all were discussed.

Several common themes emerged from that process. Our town is a successful and vibrant community, one whose fundamental asset is natural beauty. People are attracted to live and visit by the open space and wonderful scenery. The town's historic character, arts and cultural amenities, and close-knit community feeling are the envy of the region. Residents and visitors enjoy our lively downtown, with its mix of locally owned restaurants and retailers. Maintaining our unique rural-urban configuration and traditional-modern eclectic will preserve our appeal as a model small town for a long time to come. This special balance defines our character, and must be given our consideration in all future decisions.

But affordability is a critical concern. Taxes, real estate prices, and the cost of living strain the budgets of many young families and seniors. More well-paying jobs and reasonably-priced housing options are needed. To assure the quality of life in our neighborhoods, we should invest in such things as improved sidewalks, walking trails, and biking routes, while aging buildings and other infrastructure require repair and updating. Investments must be thoughtful, strategic, and thoroughly justified.

Prominent sites, notably the Housatonic mills and the Fairgrounds, whose revival could spark economic development, a balanced tax base, and sustainable land use should get particular attention. Local agriculture and food production present an important economic opportunity. Other strategies to boost the economy include redeveloping underused sites, introducing fiber-optic data service, promoting small business development and entrepreneurship, and maintaining our excellent school system. And we should plan for the longer term prospect of renewed passenger railroad service.

We hope this plan protects and promotes our town's core strengths, and that the strategies we propose will be actively implemented, and updated as needed.

On behalf of the Master Plan Committee, sincerely,

Michele Gilligan

Michael Wise

Master Plan Committee Co-Chairs
August 2013

Acknowledgements

Master Plan Committee

The 15-member Master Plan Committee was established by the Planning Board in 2010 to guide the public participation process and the development of the plan itself. Members met monthly beginning in November 2010 through July 2013. The Committee consisted of long-time residents and relatively new residents, young professionals and senior citizens, and members resided in every neighborhood in town. This plan is a direct result of their dedication and hard work.

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Town Planner Christopher Rembold guided the work of the Master Plan Committee and wrote the bulk of the plan.

The Master Plan Committee extends its thanks to:

Citizens and business owners who attended public forums, workshops, master plan meetings, and neighborhood meetings, and responded to surveys and questionnaires. These participants reviewed and shaped every aspect of the Master Plan.

Great Barrington's Boards, Commissions, and Committees who provided support and feedback through this process.

Businesses, community organizations, service groups, and nonprofits that hosted events, participated in plan development, and organized their members to review aspects of the plan. Special thanks are extended to the American Institute of Economic Research, Bard College at Simon's Rock, Barrington Brewery, Berkshire Hills Regional School District, Great Barrington Rotary Club, Berkshire South Community Center, Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School, Great Barrington Trails & Greenways, Multicultural BRIDGE, RBC Wealth Management, South Berkshire Friends, and the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce.

State agencies that provided advice, data, and input to us, including the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission staff and commission members who provided maps and data analysis for Great Barrington, especially Amy Kacala, Senior Planner and Mark Maloy, mapping and GIS specialist. BRPC helped ensure that Great Barrington's plan and the Sustainable Berkshires Plan were developed and will function together.

Town staff, who fielded countless planning, regulatory and financial questions. Special thanks are extended to Jennifer Tabakin, Town Manager, Kevin O'Donnell, former Town Manager, Joseph Sokul, Superintendent of Public Works, Joan Johnsen, Assistant to the DPW and Town Planner, and to Charles Burger and Harry Jennings, current and former Fire Chiefs, for their help and hosting of public events and Committee meetings at the Fire Station.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Why Plan?

A Master Plan guides a community's growth and development over a period of one to two decades. It establishes the community's common vision—the desired outcome—and it sets priorities, policies and actions, including capital expenditures, to achieve that vision. The Master Plan informs decision makers, such as town boards and staff, as well as residents and businesses, about these goals and measures. The Master Plan forms the basis of the town's local zoning and development regulations. The Master Plan can also help secure grant funds to support projects and services that are important to Great Barrington.

Why Plan Now?

Circumstances and trends have changed since the latest master plan was adopted in 1997. The plan before that dated from 1973. Both were good plans, attentive to their times and visionary in scope, but important aspects of them are no longer applicable. They expected population growth, but instead our population has declined. The 1997 Plan proposed policies to address traffic and other impacts of new development, but our town has seen little of that activity since then. Our housing stock has become more expensive, while relative incomes have declined.

Several significant buildings and sites have been vacated, including the Housatonic, Searles, and Bryant school buildings, the New England Log Homes property, and the Fairgrounds. Industry had already left the Housatonic mills. Depending on one's perspective, these sites are either holes in the neighborhoods or redevelopment opportunities. But potential developers and investors are cautious in the aftermath of the "great recession", while the decline in federal and state support requires municipalities to become more self-sufficient.

Projects such as the Housatonic River Walk and the town's 250th Anniversary celebrations show that Great Barrington has the energy, initiative, and appreciation of our setting and heritage that will be needed to make the most of these opportunities. Efforts will be supported by new programs, notably the recently adopted Community Preservation Act, and creative collaborations like Great Barrington Trails and Greenways. Since the last plan was adopted, promising prospects for economic growth and diversification have appeared, in the revival of local agriculture and the shift toward renewable energy.

In 2010, recognizing that much of the data and assumptions of previous Master Plans were out of date, and that many of the prescribed actions were no longer relevant, the Planning Board set out to update the Master Plan. This updated plan responds to four key issues in Great Barrington's future.

Key Issues: Four Challenges We Face

Four general challenges connect all the parts of this plan. First, our old infrastructure needs repair and/or replacement. Second, our population is aging, but not growing, and town services and facilities must adapt. Third, our economy has shifted from manufacturing to services, and we need a more diversified, higher-paying economic base. Fourth, planning must consider the likely effects of climate change. The general strategies of this plan — to reinforce the village centers and neighborhoods, redevelop historic assets like the mills and the fairgrounds, promote open space by reviving agriculture, and embrace the future economy through better communications and alternative energy — address each of these challenges.

Aging infrastructure needs to be replaced and upgraded.

Public assets that were built in and for an earlier era — roads, sidewalks, bridges, water lines, sewer systems, and the regional high school — are aging. Some prominent, historic buildings that contribute to the town's cultural landscape stand unused. Modern health and environmental mandates require upgrading the water and sewer systems. Costs to repair and upgrade water and wastewater networks, roads and schools will total tens of millions of dollars over the next 20 years. To afford these, we may have to reduce funding for other services and priorities and/or raise more revenue. If these assets and systems are left to deteriorate, businesses and visitors likely will go elsewhere.

The town's age by itself is not a problem: after all, people come here in part because they appreciate that the town has been here for a while. Its scale reflects that history, and it also focuses the task of renewing the infrastructure. Historic buildings that are obsolete for their original functions can be put to new purposes. Because the village centers are compact, like cities and towns used to be when people walked, we can renew our infrastructure to fit the emerging trend of reducing dependence on the automobile. As roads, sidewalks and bridges need repair and replacement, a "complete streets" approach can be applied to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists as well as automobiles, while roads and bridges are adapted to deal with more extreme weather events. The need is not to expand and extend roads and utility services, but to renew facilities where they already are in order to continue to serve existing neighborhoods. Reinforcing compact neighborhoods and redeveloping historic structures are consistent with current market trends. People pay a premium to live in places like our village centers. Traditional neighborhoods of mixed uses and green spaces, which are walkable and connected to public transportation and which embrace a diversity of households, are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable communities.

Changing demographics call for changing services.

The population of Great Barrington is getting smaller, older and more diverse. The current population of about 7100, down nearly ten percent from 1990, is roughly the same as it was 60 years ago — and not much greater than it was a century ago. Little or no population growth is projected over the next decade. The region around Great Barrington is growing, but slowly, and seasonal and second-home owners and retirees account for much of that growth. (About 15 percent of the residences in Great Barrington are seasonal or second homes; in some neighboring towns, half of them are). Paying for infrastructure renewal and economic development is up to us; we will not grow in numbers, and state and federal support will be limited.

The composition of the population has changed. The median age has risen to nearly 50. Some of the change is explained by the influx of second-home owners and retirees, who tend to be older and not to have schoolchildren. Some is explained by the departure of younger adults, who tend to leave for more promising jobs elsewhere. Their place is being taken by another group of newcomers, our growing Latino population. At least six percent of Great Barrington residents now are Latino or Hispanic. There are more older people here than before, who will need more "senior" services and housing that is appropriate for smaller households on fixed incomes. There are also many people with lower incomes, who need affordable housing if they are going to live near their jobs and better public transport to get to them. Promoting compact, diverse, walkable neighborhoods and better public transportation will serve the needs of our changing population.

Demographic changes have brought some economic advantages. Many seasonal and second-home newcomers buy or build more expensive places, and thus pay higher taxes, yet they do not use as many town-funded services because their children are not in school. On the other hand, many of the second-home owners and retirees want places in the scenic open country or in the woods, so they buy and build on farmland and wooded hills. Too much of that could kill the goose that lays the tourist golden eggs. Ridgeline views and rural countryside are among the community's most important economic assets. Farmland is as economically important here for its contribution to our sense of place as it is for its contribution to our supply of food. The public value of this scenic beauty, open space and farmland must be considered in economic planning.

Economic transition demands flexibility and imagination.

The southern Berkshires are now primarily a visitor-oriented, service sector economy. Manufacturing is gone, and nothing in the regional economy has replaced those steady well-paying jobs. Nor has business or industry yet made much use of the empty mills and sites that bear witness to our industrial past. Great Barrington has always been the local commercial hub, and it continues to have solid professional, health care, and educational sectors. It has become a cultural and educational center too, symbolized by the success of the Mahaiwe Theater revival joining historic preservation with the creative economy. But in the retailing, accommodations and arts sectors that now dominate the regional economy, activity is strongly seasonal and wages are not keeping pace with housing costs and costs of living.

The quality of life here, combining nature, history and culture, attracts a mobile skilled workforce. Many work creatively and independently. Our diversity of owner-operated businesses is a more resilient employment base than one or two large companies would be. People can live in a village or country setting, enjoy culture like that of a bigger city, and still participate in sophisticated, wide-ranging business, if they can communicate and travel. But attracting and retaining mobile, sophisticated businesses and independent professionals will require investment in fiber optic telecommunications and transportation infrastructure, especially reviving passenger rail service to New York.

Beauty is Great Barrington's money crop. Some of that beauty is nature: forests, trails, rivers, mountains, fields and meadows. And some of it is man-made: old barns, farms, churches, Main Street storefronts, historic residences, bridges, public buildings, cemeteries, mills, and even roadside architecture from the 50's and 60's. The country atmosphere and the small town setting must be preserved, enhanced and marketed. One way to preserve them is to make them useful again.

Old structures can be transformed into workspaces for a new economy, or into affordable housing or assisted living facilities to serve our changing population. Redevelopment of now-unused facilities, like the mills and the fairgrounds, will increase value and utility, will add to the tax base and thus will help pay for needed infrastructure improvements. Great Barrington's infrastructure is already located in the right places to support compact land use and redevelopment, and sewer and water systems have sufficient capacity to accommodate any expected growth. Focusing on developing the core will save resources and pay for itself, compared to the much greater cost of extending service to unserved areas.

The land can also become more productive. Encouraging local agriculture will serve the local market and keep the town green and open. Renewed interest in local agriculture reinforces demographic trends, by serving the demand for quality local produce. Expanded, varied local production will also help our town be more resilient in the face of a changing climate and energy price shocks. Local agriculture could also become another magnet for tourists.

Climate change creates risks and opportunities.

Rising temperatures shift seasonal rhythms and multiply extreme weather events such as storms, floods and droughts. Efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will make fossil fuel more expensive. Fuel and commodity prices may become more volatile, and changing conditions could interrupt supply and marketing chains. Inefficient old buildings and houses are not adapted to the new conditions. Systems for water supply and storm water management must be improved to deal with more droughts and floods. Our regional tourism economy depends on the weather — for skiing, summer arts and theater, and fall color — and it could be vulnerable to shifts in climate, if, for example, leaf-peeping tourists change their schedules or head farther north.

Changing climate is a practical reality and also an opportunity for creativity to mitigate it, to deal with its effects, and perhaps even to take advantage of them. People who live and visit here tend to be sensitive to environmental issues. They will support forward-looking priorities. A "green", environmentally responsible local reputation will attract visitors and new businesses who are sympathetic to those goals.

Efficient land use — concentrated development that protects natural resources — can help us adapt locally to global changes. Repaired and upgraded infrastructure can be made ready for the new conditions. Improving energy efficiency will boost the local economy, as experts and workers are needed to make these upgrades. Integrating the latest technologies for energy and water conservation and production can help homeowners and the town be more resilient to energy price shocks. Reusing older buildings can be at least as efficient and environmentally responsible as replacing them with new ones, when total life-cycle costs are considered. Reusing existing structures also focuses activity and people into historic, sustainable neighborhoods, countering sprawl and tapping existing infrastructure services. Open space will be preserved by not extending infrastructure outside the cores.

Reviving local agriculture, to preserve open spaces and support local self-sufficiency, is also a response to the changing climate. Some consequences of change could be harmful, such as higher costs for inputs based on fossil fuels and the incursion of new pests and diseases into the region. On the other hand, local agriculture and thus the local economy could benefit from longer growing seasons than have historically been typical here.

The Town We Want: Our Vision

Great Barrington today is the product both of our natural assets and of the dedication of our people. From the settlers, pioneers, and entrepreneurs of past generations we have inherited a wonderful place to live, work, and visit. Our rich soils, abundant water resources, and stunning landscapes supported agriculture and industry for generations. Now they support our Town's economy and quality of life. Great Barrington today is the commercial hub for the surrounding towns in three states. It attracts businesses, residents, and visitors from around the world.

Our Vision for Great Barrington is that our small town continues its vibrant combination of rural landscapes and urban infrastructure. The balance between these two features, a legacy of our Town's agricultural origins and its industrialized history, serves our civic, cultural, economic, and social needs. Great Barrington thrives because of this legacy, and maintaining this balance will be the foundation of our Town's tomorrow.

In the coming decades, Great Barrington will continue to be both rural and urban. It will embrace and support people of many ages, incomes and ethnicities. Our landscapes, history, walkable neighborhoods, and vibrant village centers will remain the foundations for the prosperity of future generations.

Core Initiatives

Undertaking the following Core Initiatives will help us reach this vision. These Core Initiatives form the structure and the foundation of this Master Plan, and they inform the Goals and Strategies detailed in the chapters of this plan.

Character

1. Protect the special places and features—our compact village centers, historic treasures, natural resources, farms, and open space—that contribute to Great Barrington's distinctive character.
2. Ensure that development contributes to the viability and character of the villages while sustaining our rural countryside and agricultural areas.
3. Direct development and growth into the village centers, while preserving their character by encouraging the reuse of existing sites, structures, and infrastructure.

4. Facilitate improvement of existing structures, redevelopment of previously built sites, and new development in keeping with the principles of the Master Plan.
5. Encourage infill in developed areas as well as benign mixed uses.

Community and Connections

6. Support vibrant, livable and affordable neighborhoods, by encouraging a variety of housing types and home business opportunities, by making them safe and pedestrian-friendly, and by providing activities, amenities, and gathering places for people of all ages.
7. Promote walkable connections within and between neighborhoods, as well as to commercial, civic, cultural, educational, and recreational activities.
8. Plan for sustainability and resiliency. Support technology, land use and development practices, public transportation and infrastructure that reduce reliance on fossil fuels, enhance our economic base, and promote connectivity.

Commerce

9. Promote economic development appropriately scaled to the town, that helps to diversify the tax base, and that supports the Downtown and Housatonic Village.
10. Economic development should be balanced among a variety of commercial activities, serve the needs of all sectors of the economy, and create skilled jobs at higher wages for young people.

Coordinate and Collaborate

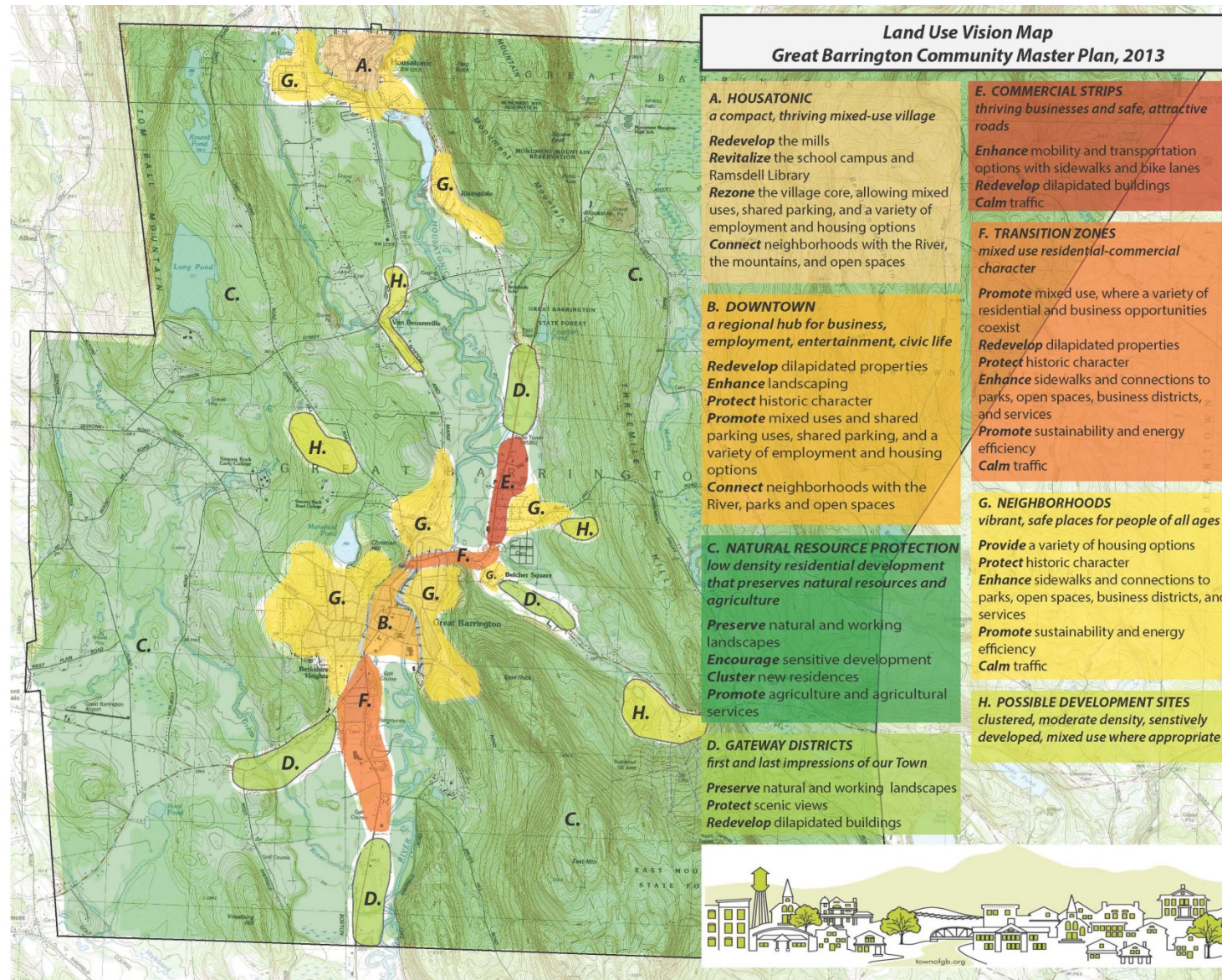
11. Utilize this Master Plan to guide town policy and to coordinate town actions, regulations, and investments to achieve the vision and goals of this Master Plan.
12. Communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with businesses, non-profits, and volunteers, in order to best serve our town's needs and to reinforce community ties.
13. Collaborate and plan regionally, considering Great Barrington's influence on the region, and the region's influence on Great Barrington.

Vision Maps

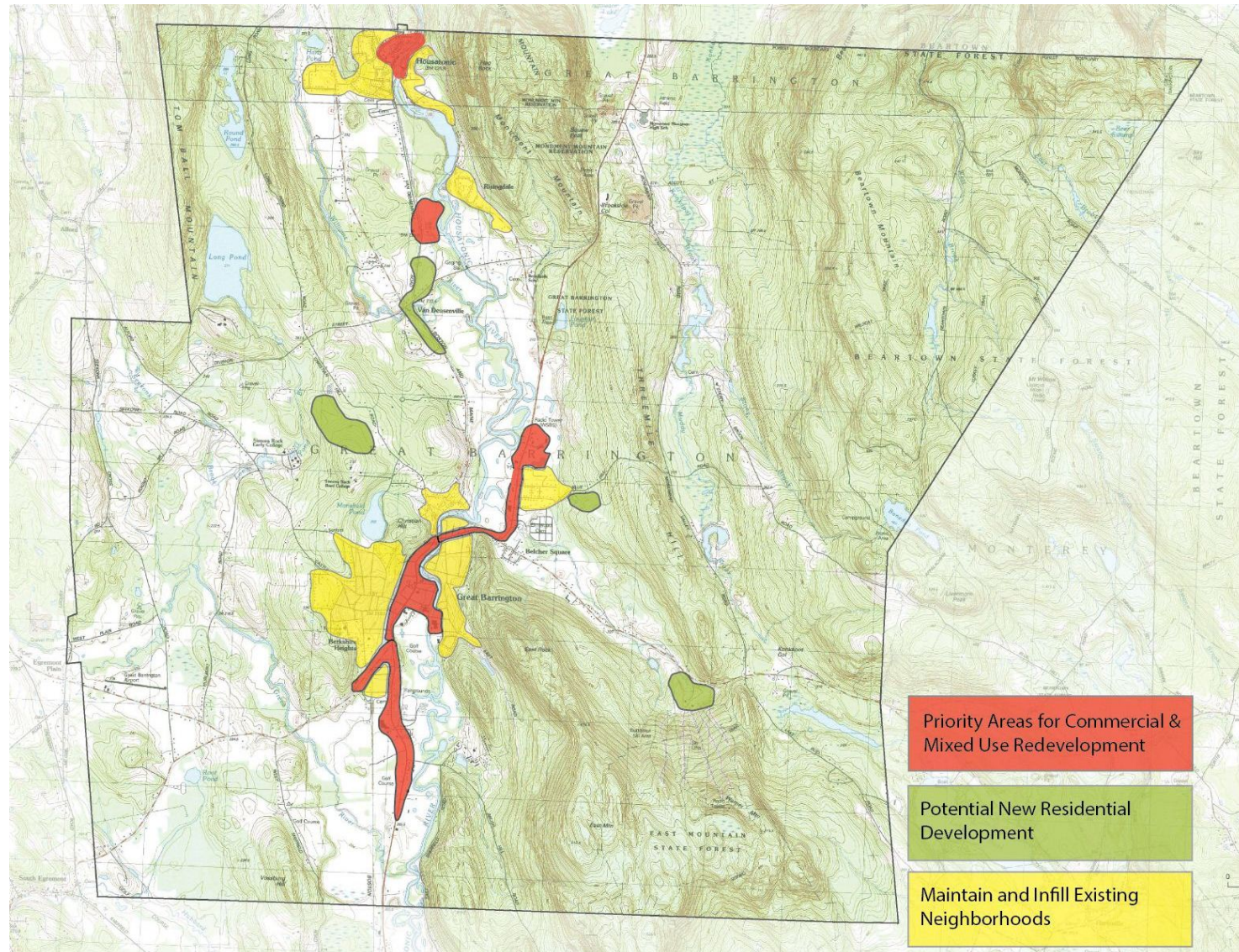
The maps that follow graphically represent the Core Initiatives of this Master Plan. More detail is included in each chapter. Applicable data and details are provided in the Appendix.

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Vision Map 1: Land Use

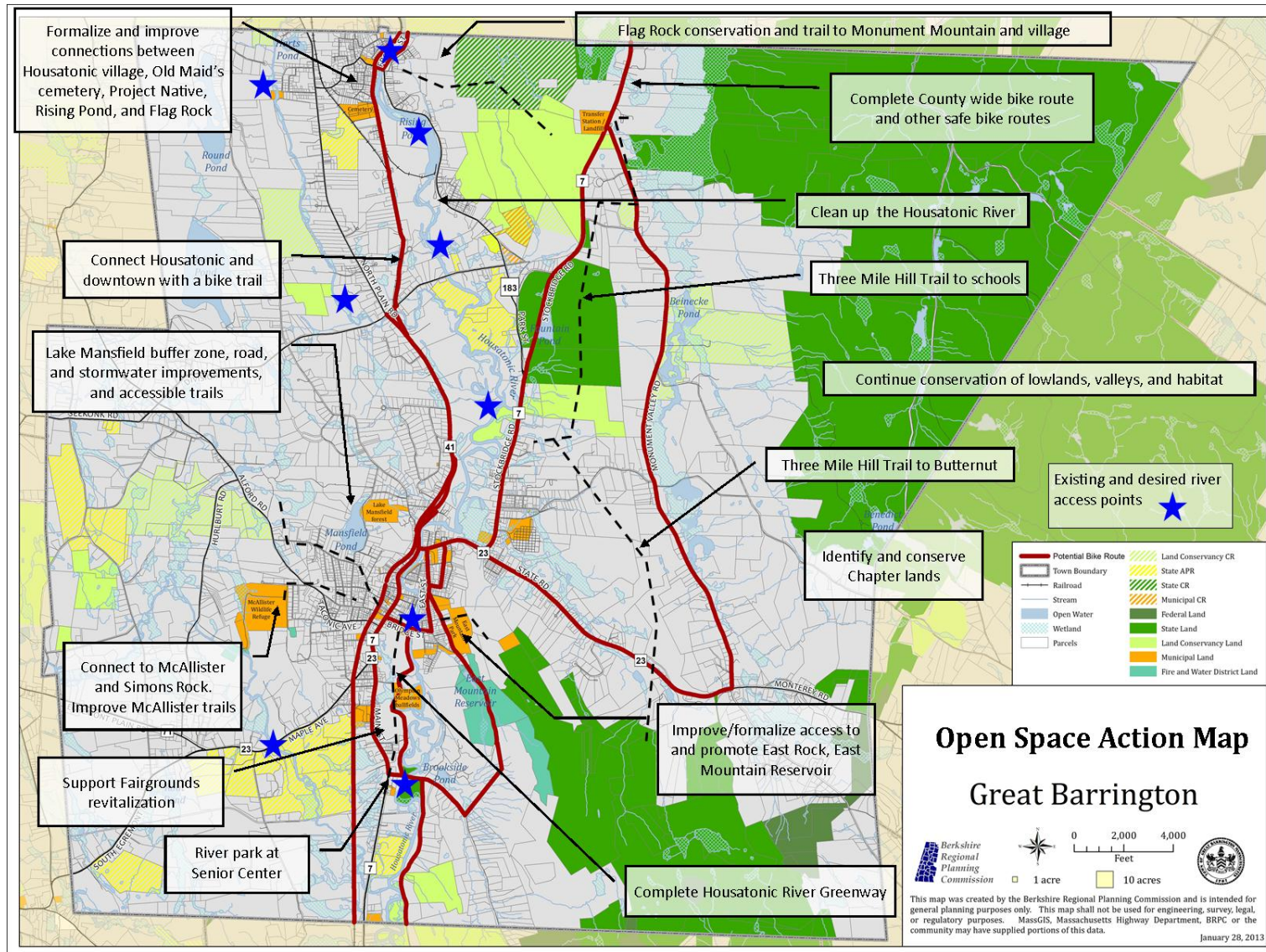


Vision Map 2: Development and Conservation Areas



Map 2: Conservation Areas



Vision Map 4: Open Space and Recreation

Organization of this Master Plan

An overview about our town—population, diversity, housing, incomes, jobs— and how our town is changing—is presented in Chapter 2. The chapters that follow address specific topics, which Massachusetts law prescribes for a community master plan.¹ Each chapter includes a summary of the topic and a discussion of each goal and a strategy for implementation. The topical chapters are:

- Land Use (Chapter 3)
- Natural Resources, Open Space, and Recreation (Chapter 4)
- Economic Development (Chapter 5)
- Housing (Chapter 6)
- Agriculture (Chapter 7)
- Historical and Cultural Resources (Chapter 8)
- Energy and Climate (Chapter 9)
- Transportation (Chapter 10)
- Services and Facilities (Chapter 11)

The final chapter addresses how the Master Plan is to be implemented. It includes a table illustrating how each of the goals and strategies of the plan is assigned to a staff person or town board for action, and the timeline for the action.

The Appendix includes data, tables, maps, and a detailed discussion about each topic. It also includes a short glossary of abbreviations and a compilation of flyers, outreach materials, news reports, and summaries from public meetings. Minutes of the Master Plan Committee are on file with the Town Clerk.

Process and Public Participation

The Master Plan effort began in the summer of 2010 when the Great Barrington Planning Board established a 15-member Master Plan Committee. The Committee was charged with creating an updated community master plan through a comprehensive and inclusive public participation process. The Committee included members of seven key town boards and commissions, who acted as liaisons to those bodies, and five members of the general public. The members were:

- three members of the Planning Board;
- two members of the Board of Selectmen;
- one member of the Agricultural Commission;
- one member of the Conservation Commission;
- one member of the Council on Aging;
- one member of the Historical Commission;
- one member of the Parks Commission;
- five citizens at large

The Committee membership reflected our town's diversity. Some members were young parents, some middle aged, and some retirees. Some members were born and raised in town, some were long-time residents, and some were more recent transplants. Members brought with them perspectives shaped by a wide variety of professional experience and volunteerism. Members lived in all parts of town, including village centers and rural areas, and could speak as "experts" about the strengths and weaknesses of our town's neighborhoods.

¹ Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 41, Section 81D.

Three overall goals shaped the Committee's public participation and outreach strategies. The Committee sought to:

- (1) Generate excitement and enthusiasm;
- (2) Provide timely and useful information; and
- (3) Promote broad and diverse involvement.

The Committee used surveys, interviews, public meetings, and neighborhood workshops to reach out to people representing the spectrum of Great Barrington's population and community groups. Master Plan Committee members contacted and interviewed stakeholders ranging from downtown businesses, to civic groups, to high school students, the health community, and conservation and recreation organizations. The outreach process is summarized below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Master Plan Development Process



The Master Plan Committee met nearly every month from November 2010 through August 2013. Every meeting was publicly posted, held in an accessible location (at the Fire Station), and open to the public. Meeting minutes were kept up to date and posted on the town's master plan webpage. Slide presentations, workshop results, and draft documents were all posted on the webpage as well. Outreach materials, meeting results and notes, newspaper articles, and other public participation materials are included in Appendix 2 of this Master Plan.

Public Forum 1

After a substantial outreach effort, including newspaper articles and radio interviews, a Town-wide public forum was held in July 2011. This was an opportunity for the public to craft the vision and goals of the plan. More than 70 people participated, gathering around tables to discuss topic areas ranging from open space and recreation to housing and transportation. Each table then reported its priorities back to the group, and the results were summarized for the group.

Neighborhood Workshops and Questionnaires

To supplement the large public forum, and to bring the process closer to home, members of the Master Plan Committee hosted workshops in each neighborhood in the late summer and fall of 2011. A total of 11 workshops were held. Committee members used a five-point questionnaire to guide the workshop discussions. These questionnaires helped kick-start conversations by getting people talking about our town

and improvements they felt were needed. The questionnaires could be completed anonymously and returned to any town staff. Over 100 completed questionnaires were received.

All workshops were well advertised, in the newspaper, on the town website, through phone calls to residents in target neighborhoods (using the town's reverse 911 service), and with flyers delivered door-to-door by volunteers. Some workshops attracted over 20 participants, many of whom were new to the planning process. The outreach efforts paid off—over 250 people participated directly in the first Public Forum and the neighborhood workshops, to provide the Committee with insights and ideas.

Seniors and Youth

Special consideration was given to reaching our growing senior citizen population and youth groups. The five-point questionnaire was used to conduct in-person surveys at the Senior Center. Held during a popular lunch hour, Master Plan volunteers held over 40 focused conversations with Great Barrington seniors. A forum was held at the high school during an activity period (common study hall) and students were able to share ideas, thoughts, and vision for the community.

Outreach to non-English Speakers

A special effort was made to reach minority residents and residents who were not proficient in English. Working with local nonprofit organization Multicultural BRIDGE, the five-point questionnaire was translated into Spanish and distributed to English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. A member of the Master Plan Committee attended an ESL meeting to receive and discuss the responses with participants. There were 20 responses to this effort.

Topical Workshops and Focus Groups

Workshops and focus groups were convened to gather additional detail about specific topics in the plan, including affordable housing, economic development, health services, historic preservation and cultural resources, open space and recreation, and solar energy planning. Key stakeholders, professionals, and the public were invited or interviewed for these sessions.

Public Forum 2

With a year's worth of public input processed, the Master Plan Committee developed a draft Vision and draft Goals for each component of the Master Plan. At a second public forum, held in June 2012, the draft Vision and Goals were presented for public comment. The forum was well advertised using the successful outreach strategy of the first forum and neighborhood workshops.

Draft Master Plan

Following the forum, the Master Plan Committee revised the draft Vision and Goals and set to work writing the chapters of the Master Plan. Once each chapter was drafted, the Committee reviewed and revised the draft, sharing it with the public on the master plan website, asking for comments, and taking more critical input from key stakeholders.

Master Plan Adoption

In August 2013, the final draft Master Plan was made available for public review for several weeks, in the libraries, senior center, and on the town website, and the final draft Master Plan was transmitted to the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen. At a public hearing on September 26, 2013, the Board of Selectmen formally endorsed the Master Plan, and the Planning Board, in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 41, Section 81D, adopted it. Both Boards committed to implement the plan.

Implementing the Master Plan

The goals and strategies of this plan are connected by four general themes or challenges, as discussed above. Achieving our community's Vision, and addressing these challenges, requires the active implementation of the strategies set forth in each of the plan chapters. Chapter 12 is the Implementation chapter. It takes into account all of the chapters that precede it, and sets forth the strategies, actors, priority, and timing for getting things done.

2. OUR TOWN

Our People

With 7,104 people, according to the 2010 Census, Great Barrington is the largest town in southern Berkshire County as well as within the 20-mile tri-state radius (including southern Berkshire, northwestern Connecticut, and eastern Columbia County in New York). **Great Barrington's population has been declining**, at a rate faster than South County or Berkshire County as a whole. In the decade between 1990 and 2000, Great Barrington's population dropped by 210, or 2.7 percent. This was during a time when smaller South County towns like Egremont, Monterey, and Sheffield were growing. Great Barrington's population dropped even faster over the decade from 2000 and 2010, losing another 409 people, or 5.5 percent. Most other towns in South County also lost population during the last decade, but only two at a rate faster than Great Barrington.

The 1997 Master Plan projected that by 2020 Great Barrington's population would grow to around 8,000. Instead, trends computed by the Census show the town's population in 2020 is likely to be approximately 6,900. That would represent a drop of about 20 percent below the average population in the last quarter of the 20th century, and a return to the level of the 1950s and 1960s. Table 1 shows the long-term population trends and comparisons between Great Barrington, the county and the state.

Table 1: Population Change since 1800, Great Barrington and Selected Places

	Great Barrington		South County*		Berkshire County		Massachusetts	
Year	Total	% Change	Total	% Change	Total	% Change	Total	% Change
1800	1,754	--	14,230	--	33,633	--	422,845	--
1850	3,264	86.1%	17,755	24.8%	50,118	49.0%	994,514	135.2%
1900	5,854	79.4%	15,309	-13.8%	95,667	90.9%	2,805,346	182.1%
1950	6,712	14.7%	15,702	2.6%	132,966	39.0%	4,690,514	67.2%
1960	6,624	-1.3%	16,121	2.7%	142,135	6.9%	5,148,578	9.8%
1970	7,537	13.8%	18,301	13.5%	149,402	5.1%	5,689,170	10.5%
1980	7,405	-1.8%	19,559	6.9%	145,110	-2.9%	5,737,093	0.8%
1990	7,725	4.3%	20,462	4.6%	139,352	-4.0%	6,166,425	7.5%
2000	7,527	-2.6%	21,395	4.6%	134,953	-3.2%	6,349,097	3.0%
2010	7,104	-5.6%	20,824	-2.7%	131,219	-2.8%	6,547,629	3.1%

* South County includes the 12 towns of Alford, Egremont, Great Barrington, Monterey, Mount Washington, New Marlborough, Otis, Sandisfield, Sheffield, Stockbridge, Tyringham, and West Stockbridge

Source: US Census

Great Barrington is comparatively old and getting older. Between 1980 and 2010, the median age of Great Barrington's population increased by over 10 years, from 34.8 to 45.5, while for Massachusetts it increased by eight years, from 31.1 to 39.1. Berkshire County is even older, and aging faster, than Great Barrington. Over the last decade, the age distribution of Great Barrington's population has moved toward the national norm, particularly for working age people aged 25-64. The principal reason for the relatively high median age here is the low and declining proportion of infants and schoolchildren.

Enrollment data compiled for the Berkshire Hills Regional School District, which includes Great Barrington as well as Stockbridge and West Stockbridge, reflect these overall trends. The number of school age children has been decreasing over the last decade. The decline is projected to level off in the next decade, but enrollment is not projected to increase.

Great Barrington is becoming more diverse. The 2010, Census found that the share of Great Barrington's population that was Hispanic or Latino was six percent. That proportion is higher than in the county as a whole and in most towns within the county. Anecdotal reports suggest that the proportion could be higher.

Local service provider Multicultural BRIDGE estimates the local Hispanic or Latino population at about 12 percent. The latest Census shows that the share of the population that is non-white is 11.0 percent, while 6.3 percent speak English less than very well.

Nationwide, households are shrinking and more people live alone. These trends are reflected locally. The 2010 Census found 2,879 households in Great Barrington, containing 89 percent of the total population. (The other 11 percent, 766 people, live in skilled nursing and residential care facilities, college dormitories, and other group settings.) Most of these, 57 percent, are classified as family households, meaning there were at least two people (not necessarily related) living together in the housing unit.

Relatively few Great Barrington households include children. Only 24 percent of all households contained children under 18 years of age. That percentage is slightly higher in the Housatonic CDP (26 percent), and slightly lower in the Great Barrington CDP (22 percent).² The share of households with children is higher in Berkshire County (at 26 percent), and much higher in Massachusetts (31 percent) and the nation (33 percent).

Forty-three percent of households in Great Barrington are non-family households (a household that is either a one-person household or where the householder shares the home exclusively with people to whom he/she is not related). And the share of households with one person living alone is unusually high, at 35 percent of households. This percentage is higher than in the county (at 33 percent) and much higher than in the state, (29 percent) and the nation (27 percent).

Many households have senior citizens, often living alone. Overall, 30 percent of households contained individuals age 65 years and over. This share is not as high as for the county or Cape Cod (31 and 39 percent, respectively), but it is markedly higher than for the state or the nation (26 and 25 percent, respectively). Over 13 percent of all Great Barrington households are non-family households with a person aged 65 or over living alone.

About 14 percent of housing units in town are seasonal or second homes, according to the Assessor's estimate. That proportion has been increasing, but it is still low compared to the surrounding area. In southern Berkshire County as a whole, the proportion of seasonal or second homes is over 30 percent, and in some communities it reaches 50 percent.

More detailed data is included in the Appendix.

Our Economy

Great Barrington is a regional employment center. Businesses in Great Barrington employ almost 10,000 employees, or more than twice the number of workers that reside in our town. Most of these jobs are in retail, health care and social assistance. Other sectors accounting for substantial employment include educational services and accommodation and food services.

Most Great Barrington residents are service, sales, or office workers. Only seven percent are employed in manufacturing, and only six percent in construction.³ Great Barrington relies more on the retail sector and the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food service sector than the county, state, or nation.

² CDP stands for Census Designated Place. The Great Barrington CDP includes all of downtown, the neighborhoods west of the railroad and east of the river, and from approximately Welcome Street south to Brookside Road. The Housatonic CDP includes Housatonic village and approximately the area bounded on the west by the old state line railroad branch, the east by Monument Mt., and the south by Division Street. A map of these areas can be found in the Appendix.

³ US Census 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP-03

Self-employment is also important in our town. Nearly 11 percent of workers in Great Barrington are self-employed, a higher rate than that for the county, state, or nation. Forty-six percent of respondents to a 2013 town survey indicated that they were self-employed, and more than 50 percent of them reported that self-employment accounts for more than half of their household income.

Agriculture is a significant component of the regional economy. Berkshire County has the third largest agricultural sector in the state. Many county farms operate as a primary source of income. The acreage dedicated to farming is lower than some other areas of the state, and the value of products sold per acre is lower in Berkshire County than in adjacent economic regions, though.

Housing growth has slowed recently. This drop parallels the depressed national housing market. It may also reflect the shrinking population or a lack of easily developed land. Only 14 dwellings were built per year between 2000 and 2010, despite a strong national market for most of that period. In 2008, when the nationwide housing market crash began, Great Barrington issued only five permits for new dwellings. The current rate, just under nine new dwellings per year, is well below the previous 20-year trend. New residential growth is likely to be relatively slow.

Over the last decade, Great Barrington has seen ***relatively little new commercial development***. Large scale commercial development of the former Fairgrounds was proposed in the mid-2000s but did not materialize. The Community Health Program filled out its campus on Stockbridge Road, at the northern end of the business district, in 2010. Fairview Hospital acquired the shuttered Condor Chevrolet building at Maple Avenue and Main Street and located its growing rehabilitation services center there. Bard College at Simon's Rock invested in a new dorm, science center, arts center, and athletic center. Iredale Mineral Cosmetics is renovating the old Bryant school in downtown to be its world headquarters.

Our Land

Great Barrington's 46 square miles (29,280 acres) include a historic downtown business district, compact neighborhoods, a legacy of industrial buildings, agricultural bottomlands, and vast tracts of forested mountains. Beginning in the late 18th century, the first areas to be developed were those areas most suitable for farming, and later, in the late 19th century, for manufacturing. The commercial core of town developed near the manufacturing centers, first near the "Great Bridge," now known as the "brown bridge" on Route 7 over the Housatonic River, then along what was to become Main Street. Housatonic developed similarly as mills were established along the river. The coming of the railroad, constructed along the relatively flat river valley, reinforced development where the mills already were located and opened other areas up to industrial uses.

Today, over one-third of the town's area (34 percent) is permanently protected, as state and federal parks, in land trusts, or under the Agriculture Preservation Restriction Program and conservation easements. The amount of protected land has increased slightly from the time of the 1997 Master Plan. The state added approximately 125 acres to Fountain Pond State Park in 1997, and nonprofit organizations acquired lands for conservation. Table 2 categorizes these protected lands.

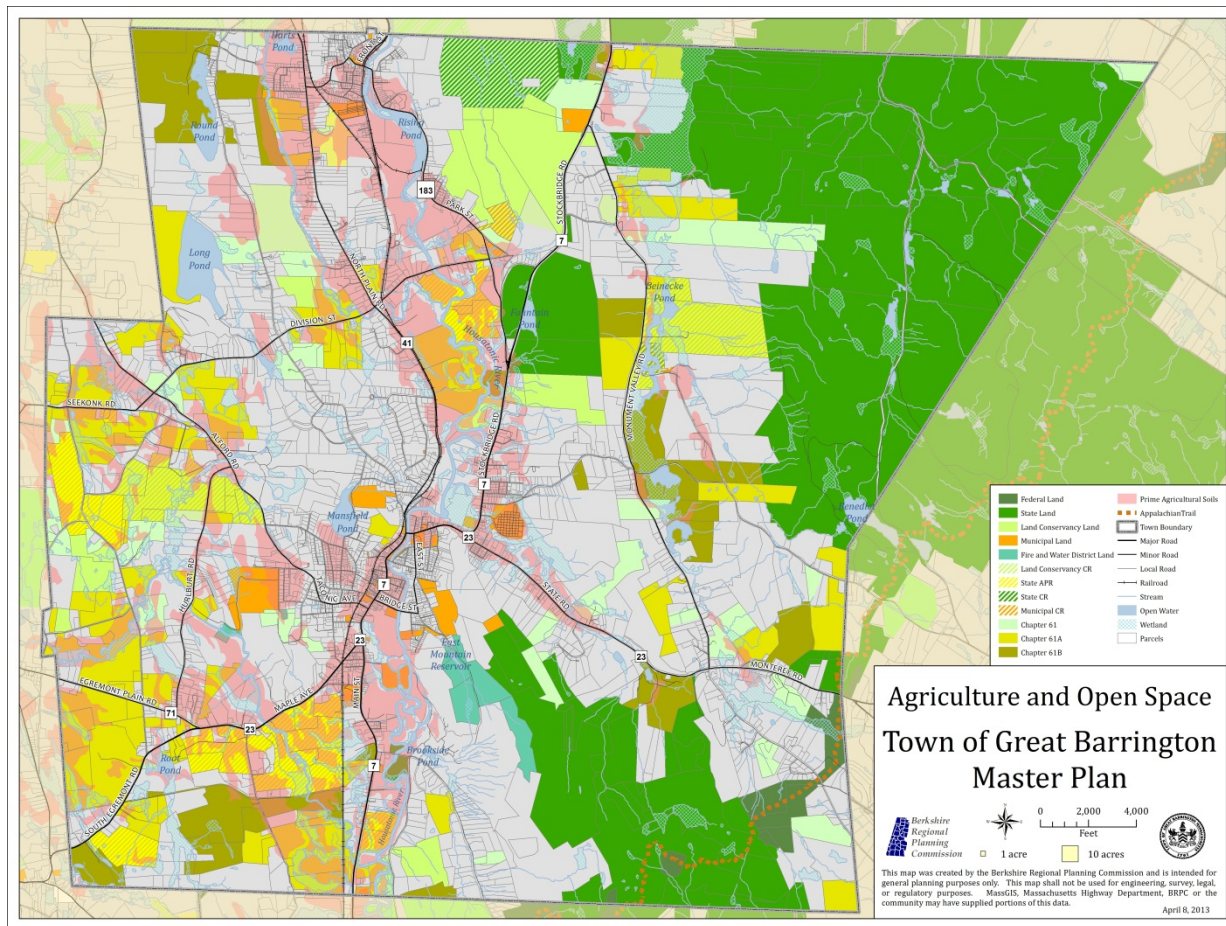
Table 2: Protected Land in Great Barrington, 2011

Ownership	Acres	Acreage as % of Protected Land	Acreage as % of Total Land
Non-Profit	5	0%	0%
Federal	221	2%	1%
Municipal	336	3%	1%
Land Trust	793	8%	3%
Private	1,602	16%	5%
State	7,109	71%	24%
	10,064	100%	34%

Source: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Figure 2 shows open space and agricultural lands. The darkest greens show the state and federal lands. Town land is in orange. The public lands are predominantly hills and uplands. Valleys and lowlands tend to be privately held, and a smaller portion is permanently protected.

Figure 2: Protected Open Space and Agricultural Land



Source: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Today, **approximately 69 percent of our town is covered by forest**, according to aerial imagery data, and only about 10 percent is cropland or pasture. One hundred years ago, the opposite was true—what is forest today was pasture or agricultural land. Wetlands and open water cover nine percent of Great Barrington. Residential development covers 1,880 acres, or only six percent, of the total land area. Commercial and industrial uses cover a scant 310 acres, or 1 percent.

3. LAND USE

Great Barrington is a special town, one that combines the best aspects of rural living with amenities and services of an urban community. Maintaining this combination requires balancing long-standing concerns to protect open spaces with considerations of affordability, changing demographics, and climate change. Most of all, it means using all of our resources—natural, economic, financial, human, and social—wisely, and making coordinated, cooperative, and well-considered investments that support these resources.

Great Barrington has two village centers and a very compact commercial core bounded closely by residential neighborhoods and surrounded by open space. Historically, commercial and industrial uses developed along the Housatonic River and the major transportation routes, Route 7 (Main Street) and the railroad. The commercial spine of downtown is Main Street, the core of Housatonic is the Monument Mills cluster along the Housatonic River, and Stockbridge Road has defined another center, one which is more linear and diverse. Each is surrounded by residential neighborhoods.

This efficient, productive pattern of development should be reinforced. Development over the past several decades departed from this pattern, however. The regional trend in Great Barrington and Berkshire County has been toward a version of sprawl, notably through large lot residential development outside the cores and in areas that were previously less accessible.

New residences are occupying more land to house fewer people. Despite declining population, some residential development continues. One reason is that households are also shrinking. This is a nationwide trend: over the last 50 years, the number of people per household has dropped from 3.57 to 2., but the average lot has grown by 60 percent.

Contraction of industrial and commercial uses has been more noticeable than the growth in the hospitality, health care and entertainment sectors. Mixed-use redevelopment is planned for some former industrial and school sites. Even though much of the town is protected from development, more than enough land remains available to accommodate any realistic projection of residential or commercial growth. Infill development, reversing the trend towards sprawl, has proven very successful. Redevelopment and reuse of existing buildings and infrastructure preserves open spaces. It can also return unused properties to the tax rolls, reducing the incentive to develop our outlying open spaces.

Decisions about land use must protect the environment, history, scenery, and recreation opportunities that make our community such a unique place to live and work, while controlling costs to keep taxes affordable.

Challenges and Opportunities

The 1973 Town Plan and the 1997 Master Plan grappled with the threat of relatively rapid development and its impact on environmental quality, natural resources, and the vitality of the core business districts. Some of these issues remain today, while other challenges are arising:

- The cost of maintaining and repairing our aging infrastructure is daunting. Repairs are needed for major bridges and roads. Upgrades for the 21st century are needed at the high school and the wastewater treatment plant.
- Conserving tracts of land can reduce the tax base and shift the burden on to residential property. Development and redevelopment must accompany conservation, in order to keep property taxes reasonable and ensure the town has enough resources to meet the service needs and challenges ahead.

- Real estate market demands are changing. Locally and nationally, people increasingly want to live in or near downtown locations.
- To encourage core development while preserving and promoting the countryside, nearly every public workshop identified better public transportation, including passenger railroad service, and fiber-optic service, along with agriculture and small business development as the keys to our future economic health.
- Climate change, which could bring warmer weather and more extreme storms, means land use plans must anticipate risks of flood and drought.
- Growing interest in local renewable energy, particularly solar, could compete with the interest in retaining farm land and scenic vistas. Clear regulations or standards will be needed to forestall potential land use conflicts between solar energy arrays, agricultural lands, and aesthetic concerns.

Opportunities to address these issues and to fulfill our community's vision include:

- Overwhelming agreement from participants in this planning process, that these are the key issues to address, has created a consensus on the issues facing us which is a major step towards developing solutions.
- Protections already in place limit development in sensitive and scenic areas.
- Infrastructure capacity to support economic growth is already located in areas that are suitable for compact development.
- An existing stock of residential and commercial buildings can be repurposed for mixed use, both improving the tax base and preserving historic structures.
- Initiatives like the Massachusetts Broadband Initiative, discussions of restoring passenger rail service, and substantial private-sector interest in redeveloping historic buildings already are moving development in the right direction.
- Great Barrington's tax base and strong credit rating can support borrowing, if needed, for major projects.
- Dedicated local business owners, who volunteer for and contribute to a community causes and care greatly about the future of the town, will be key players.
- Dedicated Boards and Commissions, and professional staff will implement the recommendations of this Master Plan.

Land Use Vision

The land use vision map on page 6 identifies areas of where the Town envisions future conservation, growth, and reinvestment.

Great Barrington's vision includes protecting and enhancing our compact village centers, historic treasures, natural resources, farms, and open spaces, all of which contribute to Great Barrington's distinctive character. Our goals include directing development and growth into the village centers, supporting existing residential neighborhoods, and ensuring that new developments in resource areas are sited and built in such a way that sustains our rural countryside and agricultural areas. Our zoning and other land use regulations should implement this vision and these goals, not simply cement existing land use patterns.

The planning and zoning recommendations that follow respect the unique attributes, challenges and opportunities inherent in the different places of our town. These recommendations will help implement the Land Use vision.

Goal LU 1: Support a compact, thriving, mixed-use village in Housatonic.

The small scale, dense development pattern, and existing streets and sidewalks in Housatonic evoke a village atmosphere valued by long time and new residents alike. History, culture, and wilderness are within walking distance. These assets, coupled with underutilized infrastructure, including the mill buildings, can support redevelopment and boost the town's tax base. Redevelopment must be accomplished responsibly, respecting the historical character and scale of the village and the river that runs through it. The current village zoning was instituted in 1960 with little regard to the density, pattern and mix of uses. Nonconformities, mixed use barriers, and parking requirements could all present obstacles to redevelopment. The regulations need to be reexamined and revised in order to achieve this land use goal.

- **Strategy LU H.1:** Redevelop the mills, supporting where possible the coordinated efforts of building owners, particularly when it involves access to the river and shared parking.
- **Strategy LU H.2:** Revitalize the school campus, attending to the concerns and opportunities outlined in the Task Force Report, and recognizing that the market is not currently interested in the school building.
- **Strategy LU H.3:** Rezone the village core, updating dimensional and use regulations that will promote village scale development, allow mixed uses, shared parking, and a variety of housing and employment options without requiring special permits;
- **Strategy LU H.4:** Improve village quality of life, by calming traffic, providing safe and convenient transportation options, and implement the Housatonic Walkability Report.
- **Strategy LU H.5:** Improve the school park and the streetscape, especially Front Street and in front of the School, with new equipment, plantings, benches, and lighting.
- **Strategy LU H.6:** Evolve Ramsdell Library to serve 21st Century needs, using the grant-funded accessibility designs as a starting point, and recognizing that the library may take the place of the school as the village's civic space.
- **Strategy LU H.7:** Connect neighborhoods with the village core and open spaces including Old Maid's swimming hole, Greenlawn Cemetery, Flag Rock, the Housatonic River, and Rising Pond.

Goal LU 2: Support Downtown so that it continues to prosper as a regional hub of business, employment, entertainment, and civic life.

Downtown Great Barrington is a year-round, 24-hour per day employment, cultural, and historic hub of South County. Businesses and residents thrive here. During the week, retail stores and restaurants are buttressed by a stable professional service and government sector. On weekends, Main Street / Route 7 traffic delivers a constant stream of activity and customers. The Main Street Reconstruction project, beginning in the spring of 2014, will ensure excellent infrastructure, landscape, and walkability long into the future. Redevelopment can support new businesses, residents, and historical and cultural offerings, and increase the tax base. But a few persistent issues like parking and blighted properties should be addressed, and several opportunities realized.

- **Strategy LU D.1:** Redevelop blighted properties and support ongoing efforts at the former Searles School, St. James Place, and the New England Log Homes site.
- **Strategy LU D.2:** Enhance landscaping, particularly of parking lots, and maintain the new landscaping and trees being installed by the Main Street project.
- **Strategy LU D.3:** Protect historic character, by expanding and promoting the historic district. An enforceable demolition pause (except in emergencies) might be considered.

- **Strategy LU D.4:** Extend the River Walk north and south, connecting from Stanley Park south to the Senior Center.
- **Strategy LU D.5:** Plan proactively for the possibility of restored passenger railroad service, attending to parking and the needs for associated services.
- **Strategy LU D.6:** Work in concert with the Chamber of Commerce and private landowners to address parking needs, including improving directional signage and connecting parking lots with signage and landscaping. A parking structure is not envisioned.

Goal LU 3: Improve safety and aesthetics on the Route 7 corridor, ensuring it remains a strong business corridor surrounded by safe neighborhoods.

The modern commercial strip supports shopping centers on either end of downtown, bookending the historic business core and providing convenient shopping for a regional consumer base. The safety and appearance of these areas are important for business, for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists, and for the abutting residential neighborhoods. Route 7 north and south of downtown is a gateway to our community.

- **Strategy LU R7.1:** Expand landscaping requirements to include renovations and conversions, not just new construction.
- **Strategy LU R7.2:** Work with land trusts, businesses, the community center, and the hospitality industry to promote trails and safe connections to open spaces and services. Some of the protected open spaces along Route 7 are connected and these are a good model to follow. These spaces should be promoted through the tourist and hospitality industry.
- **Strategy LU R7.3:** Establish controls for driveway and access locations, connections and shared curb cuts between adjacent commercial uses. Route 7, particularly Stockbridge Road, can be unsafe to cross or bike or walk along. Better access management is needed.
- **Strategy LU R7.4:** Establish controls to buffer adjacent residential neighborhoods from noise, glare, and other impacts of commercial activities.
- **Strategy LU R7.5:** Retain zoning controls limiting by-right retail to 20,000 square feet, and maintain a maximum of 50,000 square feet by special permit. Formulaic big box commercial development can create traffic congestion and is not in keeping with the town's small scale character.

Goal LU 4: Make transition zones, where business and residential uses coexist, mixed use corridors.

On portions of Route 7, such as on State Road near the Fire Station and on Main Street south of the Police Station, retail, offices, and multifamily residences intermingle despite the B-2 strip zoning that was imposed 50 years ago. Here, buildings are close to the road. Old homes support professional offices and multifamily apartments. Parking, if any, is located to the side and the rear of the building. This is a mixed-use corridor in form and in function, yet new mixed uses would not be possible if forced to conform to the existing zoning scheme. Regulatory changes are called for, and design guidelines may be necessary, to achieve the goal of small-town mixed-use.

- **Strategy LU T.1:** Consider revising regulations to limit size of new commercial development in these transition zones to less than 10,000 square feet by-right, and between 10,000 and 50,000 square feet by special permit only. This would control so called "medium box" retailers that can be significant traffic generators and tend to be formulaic in design, in scenic locations.
- **Strategy LU T.2:** Review, update, or expand B2A zone regulations and boundaries or eliminate this if it does not accomplish the goals of this master plan or is no longer relevant. The current B2A zone includes Fountain Pond State Park and the Thornewood Inn.
- **Strategy LU T.4:** Allow mixed use and shared parking by right in transition zones. Consider also allowing multi-family housing by-right.
- **Strategy LU T.5:** Use the existing Great Barrington Design Guidelines Workbook to ensure sites are developed in character with the surrounding form, lot coverage, and general appearance.

Goal LU 5: Ensure all neighborhoods are safe places with housing and home business opportunities for people of all ages and incomes.

In some areas, mixed-use is not an appropriate goal, and it is better for both businesses and residences if the two are buffered from one another. Businesses need to conduct business, receive deliveries, and unload their trash dumpsters. Residents expect and deserve quiet neighborhoods free from odor, glare, noise and other impacts of commercial activity. Proper buffering and design standards can help ensure business remains healthy and residential property values remain stable, while still encouraging concentration of development in the core areas.

- **Strategy LU N.1:** Revise zoning to allow two-family housing by right wherever it is currently by special permit and by special permit wherever it is currently prohibited.
- **Strategy LU N.2:** Review zoning district boundaries to determine where lots split by zoning district lines should be rezoned.
- **Strategy LU N.3:** Improve zoning and subdivision regulations to promote infill residential development where water and/or sewer are available in keeping with the scale, character, and connectivity of existing neighborhoods. Flexible regulations would permit mixed use, cottage-style developments, and reuse and redevelopment of historic sites and buildings.

Goal LU 6: In rural areas and gateways, preserve natural resources and agriculture and promote sensitive development.

Gateways make a first and last impression on visitors, and they are the first thing residents see that tells us “we’re home.” Some are iconic spaces with long views of mountains and farm fields, like Maple Avenue near the Green River and Stockbridge Road near Fountain Pond. The scenery in these areas is as important to our sense of Great Barrington as the historic mills and downtown, and it should be protected with sensitive land use regulation.

- **Strategy LU R.1:** Explore Natural Resource Protection zoning that preserves agricultural, water and wetland, and scenic resources with sensitive house siting, roads, and driveways, and mandating subdivisions that conserve open space, particularly contiguous tracts of important habitat, wetlands, and agricultural soils.
- **Strategy LU R.2:** Use the Planning Board’s power of subdivision review and approval to ensure new roads, public or private, are as narrow as practicable.
- **Strategy LU R.3:** Review and update B2A zone regulations and boundaries to ensure it accomplishes goals of this master plan. Consider expanding its use, or doing away with the zone if it does not further these goals.

Goal LU 7: Ensure that the Town’s land use policies and regulations are consistent, easy to use, and transparent.

Previous Master Plans have had only limited practical impact. Sometimes the Master Plans have been undermined by case-by-case or ad-hoc decisions, such as special permits, capital projects, or zoning amendments. Linking the Master Plan with important regulatory and policy initiatives is critical to implementing the Master Plan and to ensuring that growth, development, and spending are working in concert to achieve our common goals. More must be done to ensure that town boards, town staff, and homeowners and businesses understand and can implement the various regulations and policies that govern our growth, development, and spending.

- **Strategy LU G.1:** Make consistency with the Master Plan a consideration in developing and evaluating the Capital Improvement Plan. Since capital spending is a large and visible component of

the annual budget, such a requirement would ensure infrastructure investments support, and do not detract from, the vision and goals of the Master Plan.

- **Strategy LU G.2:** Make consistency with the Master Plan a consideration in all special permit and site plan review decisions. This will help ensure that new development occurs as envisioned by the community.
- **Strategy LU G.3:** Develop and adopt performance based zoning controls for business and industry, such as specific controls for stormwater management, noise control, and light pollution, to replace the outdated and over-specific limitations to certain categories. For example, instead of regulating uses by category (retail, restaurant, general business, etc.), uses would be regulated as to how they impact the surrounding neighborhood. This will open up new flexibility for businesses and investors, recognize that commercial uses need not necessarily be segregated from residential uses, but will protect the safety, desirability and livability of neighborhoods near these commercial uses.
- **Strategy LU G.4:** Develop standards and possibly regulations for siting renewable energy facilities. Use existing Site Plan Review authority and consider using model guidelines that have been developed by the state.
- **Strategy LU G.5:** Working with the business community, review and revise sign regulations in accordance with the goals of this master plan.

4. NATURAL RESOURCES, OPEN SPACE, AND RECREATION

Great Barrington's varied landscape is the foundation of our quality of life. Through the years, descriptions of our town's best qualities always begin by citing its natural beauty. The geography underlying this beauty gives us clean air and clean water, supports working farms and forests, and provides habitat for wildlife and spaces for recreation. Our setting attracts visitors and supports an important sector of the local economy. Our natural resources are valuable economic assets, making it possible, and desirable, to live and work here.

Much of Great Barrington's open spaces and resources are protected. One third of our land area, 10,000 acres, cannot be developed. Scenic and water resources are protected by laws and regulations such as the Scenic Mountain Act and the Wetlands and Rivers Protection Acts, and by zoning measures such as the Water Quality Protection Overlay District. These protections are the result of generations of stewardship by landowners, and of the dedication of land trusts, advocacy groups, and town officials. Because of their efforts, today we are reasonably assured that many of our valuable resources are protected.

Still, more should be done to preserve our resources and to take better advantage of them. The hills and highlands are largely protected, but the lowlands and river valleys are not. Division of farmland and forest into building lots remains a concern. Our older and more diverse population may have recreational needs that are not now being met. Natural recreation areas, including the Housatonic River, Flag Rock, East Mountain, and Reservoir Rocks, are polluted, threatened, unknown or inaccessible. These are valuable not just as ecological and scenic assets, but also for their potential to boost outdoor recreation and the tourism economy.

Success in these areas will depend on:

- Better utilizing and maintaining the open space and recreation resources we already have;
- Promoting partnerships with nonprofit groups and property owners and supporting volunteer stewardship.

Goal OSR 1: Maintain town-owned parks, open space and recreational resources at least at today's level.

Great Barrington has an excellent system of recreational resources to meet the needs of our resident population and the curiosity of visitors. Maintenance is required to keep these areas in a state of good repair .

- **Strategy OSR 1.1: Increase DPW staff and building and grounds supplies budget.** This will enable more time to be spent maintaining parks and the grounds of town buildings. If budget limitations do not allow for an increase, then at the absolute minimum, maintain current staff and funding levels. Do not decrease the Parks Commission budget or DPW services for town buildings, grounds, cemeteries and parks.
- **Strategy OSR 1.2: Work with the Police Department to improve the police presence** at all facilities, particularly the Memorial Field Skate Park and Housatonic Park, at all hours.
- **Strategy OSR 1.3: Continue to support the existing Housatonic River Walk** in downtown through Town funds and DPW services such as trash pickup. Continue the contribution of approximately \$2,000 annually from the Town's Grants & Aid account.
- **Strategy OSR 1.4: Keep playground equipment in a state of good repair.** Develop a regular inspection, maintenance, and replacement plan if necessary.

Goal OSR 2: Make information about parks, open space and recreational resources widely available.

Many participants in the Master Plan process expressed a desire for more parks, even though more than 50 percent of our town's population lives within a 10 minute walk of a park or playground. Despite dedicated outreach by groups like River Walk and Great Barrington Trails and Greenways, many remain unaware of the recreation resources that lie right at our doorsteps. More parks are not needed; rather, better information and promotion can expand the use of the recreational resources we already have. Increasing use of these resources may stretch the maintenance budgets, but it will also develop a core constituency to care for the parks and reinforce quality neighborhoods.

- **Strategy OSR 2.1: Develop signage to direct people to recreation areas.** Signs and/or informational kiosks at recreational areas will help people get the most out of our existing parks.
- **Strategy OSR 2.2: Develop and publish a map of town parks and other recreational areas.** Highlight opportunities for those with varied interests, such as flat trails for non-hikers, best walks for dog walkers, or bike rides for families. Partner with Great Barrington Trails and Greenways and other groups in order to share information and pool resources. Increase public awareness of our resources by distributing the map as widely as possible. Suggested outlets include the Chamber of Commerce, visitor centers, cultural institutions, supermarkets, hotels, downtown merchants and offices, schools and Parent-Teacher Associations, websites, and the Annual Town Meeting. This could build on, or complement, the downtown walking tour iPhone app.

Goal OSR 3: Parks, open space and recreational area should serve the changing needs of our community.

As Goal 2 above is implemented, and as more people use our parks and playground, we need to ensure that our parks programs and equipment meet the needs of our changing population.

- **Strategy OSR 3.1: Continue the Parks Commission initiatives of making parks multi-dimensional.** The installation of fitness equipment at South Street Park is a great example of this. Offer barbeque grills like those currently at Lake Mansfield at other locations like Old Maid's Park. Review the need for additional improvements to parks based on the needs of the community, such as picnic tables, pavilions, and playgrounds..
- **Strategy OSR 3.2: Improve facilities at the Claire Teague Senior Center.** The recent efforts of the Council on Aging to develop gardening plots and bocce courts point in this direction. Future plans, including accessing the Housatonic River, or providing a quiet landing near the bank for painting, bird watching, and star gazing, should be supported with CPA and capital funds.
- **Strategy OSR 3.3: Support efforts to make resources accessible to those with physical disabilities.** Most of our parks and playgrounds currently lack universal access. As our population ages, wheelchair accessibility, gentle paths, and plenty of resting places will become increasingly important. The recently-completed trail in the Lake Mansfield Forest, completed by the Lake Mansfield Alliance with a combination of State funds, partnerships, and sweat equity, is a model for this goal. Accessible locations should not be isolated from other areas, so that seniors and the disabled can be with their children at parks and playgrounds.
- **Strategy OSR 3.4: Add picnic tables, benches, chess tables, and other amenities** at existing playgrounds and parks, to be enjoyed by those who prefer passive recreation.

Goal OSR 4: Make our parks, open space and recreation areas thriving facets of our economy.

Great Barrington is a four-season haven for outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Hiking, biking, swimming, boating, fishing, skating, and skiing are all popular pastimes. Our parks system is an important component of the quality of life that attracts so many residents and businesses to Great Barrington, but it is also an important aspect of our economy.

- **Strategy OSR 4.1: Join forces and marketing efforts with existing recreation resources** like Ski Butternut and Berkshire South to market parks and trails.
- **Strategy OSR 4.2: Take advantage of the emergence of “healthy living” trends.** For example, working with the Chamber and a future Business Improvement District, develop ideas like a “Hike GB” package that would offer guided trail hikes, historical tours, agricultural experiences and promotional deals at retailers, hotels and restaurants.
- **Strategy OSR 4.3: Market Great Barrington’s open space resources for competitive events.** Build on the established success of the Josh Billings Run Aground and the more recent success of the Memorial Day Marathon and the GBLC Run for the Hills. Consider linking well-known spaces like Lake Mansfield with lesser-known spaces like East Rock and McAllister Park, via swim/bike/run triathlons and other competitive sports. Such events can be an economic boon as demonstrated by the thousands of visitors and tens of thousands of dollars in local spending for the Memorial Day event.

Goal OSR 5: Provide linkages between our recreation resources and community facilities, neighborhoods, and village centers.

We boast an impressive variety of recreational resources, but connecting and promoting them remains a goal and a challenge. A statement made in the 1974 Town Plan remains true today: “A good trail system would make the entire Town a park.” Certain routes need to be better publicized. Other components of the trail system need to be protected. What’s more, trails are a natural way to connect our culture, our history, and our open spaces.

- **Strategy OSR 5.1: Promote local and regional trails to tourists.** In addition to signs that point out the Appalachian Trail, prominently post GB Trails walking routes, biking routes, and trail route signs.
- **Strategy OSR 5.2: Conduct walkability studies,** as was recently done in Housatonic, to identify where improvements to sidewalks and crosswalks are needed and where connections can be made. Use these studies to inform the Capital Improvement Plan. Marshal town funds, CPA funds, and whatever private funds become available to accomplish these connections.
- **Strategy OSR 5.3: Accommodate bike lanes, sidewalks, and crosswalks when any road is rehabilitated.**
- **Strategy OSR 5.4: Connect Great Barrington and Housatonic village with a bike route or off-road bike trail.** Work with local bike advocates and regional partners to build on the possible routes they have already identified, and connect this route to the planned County-long north-south bike route.
- **Strategy OSR 5.5: Complete the River Walk south, as detailed below in 8.2.**
- **Strategy OSR 5.6: Support the development of theme-based walking and biking trails,** as the African American Heritage Trail has done for the region. Local themes might focus on William Stanley

and electricity inventions, and W.E.B. Du Bois and civil rights. Partner with the UHVNHA to accomplish this. Those local examples that already exist—an African American Heritage Trail brochure and the Du Bois River Garden site, to name two—should be properly promoted, maintained, and used as inspiration for others.

- **Strategy OSR 5.7: Identify unprotected lands, including lands in Chapter 61 tax status**, for potential permanent protection and integration into the recreation and trail system. Key parcels would include those that could complete trail systems, link recreation areas, and our neighborhoods.
- **Strategy OSR 5.8: Identify and publicize the best walking roads**, for those who prefer not to be off-road. Rural, low-traffic roads can be pleasant walking routes and an alternative to wilderness trails.

Goal OSR 6: Partner with the private sector to create new open space and recreational resources.

Community Preservation Act funds could be used for conservation and recreation, but other demands will compete for them. Partnerships with the private sector should be pursued to implement these proposed projects and develop the stewardship resources necessary for long term maintenance.

- **Strategy OSR 6.1: Improve access to the town-owned parts of East Mountain** (not including the fire district's interests around the reservoir where they currently must maintain no-trespassing rules). Investigate the possibility for a trailhead, with a map or sign kiosk, at Park Street Park or on Quarry Street.
- **Strategy OSR 6.2: Cooperate with the new owners of the Fairgrounds** to improve the site and create a recreation and scenic space that benefits the entire community. This includes the extension of the Housatonic River Greenway through the rear (east) of the property, roughly along the existing sewer easement, to connect the new trail north and south. Town participation may include community events, grant writing, funding, or other efforts.
- **Strategy OSR 6.3: Work with pet owners, trainers, and kennel clubs to create a dog park.** Numerous possible sites exist, including near existing parks, or on private properties that are currently undeveloped.
- **Strategy OSR 6.4: Complete the accessible trails in Lake Mansfield Forest** through the existing partnership with Lake Mansfield Alliance and building on their success in securing funding, building partnerships, and encouraging volunteer stewardship.

Goal OSR 7: Protect, maintain, and care for street trees.

Great Barrington's landscape is dotted with an impressive variety and number of trees. Some prominent ones like the Town Hall elm and the Constitution Oak at Simon's Rock have been standing for centuries. The value trees impart to our town is incalculable. They provide pleasant surroundings for our business districts. They frame views of historic buildings. They provide shade. They provide privacy. They soak up carbon dioxide and clean the air. And they increase property values—neighborhoods with street trees are more desirable and valuable than those without.

Trees are, in other words, a critical but unsung component of our town infrastructure. And like our other infrastructure, they are aging. They need more attention in order to serve us well into the future.

- **Strategy OSR 7.1: Care for our town's trees effectively.** Mature trees define our neighborhood streets, add distinctive character and value, and reduce our carbon footprint. Utilize the expertise of

the Tree Committee and the resources and research available to Great Barrington as a newly-designated Tree City. Be proactive in protecting and maintaining our trees; for example, develop a tree plan and inoculate elms against Dutch Elm Disease.

Goal OSR 8: Embrace the Housatonic River.

The Housatonic River, the town's central spine, has been an important element of its history and development. The town grew up in the fertile agricultural lowlands of this river valley. Mills, tanneries, and industry were first concentrated along the river in what is now downtown, and soon expanded to power industry in Housatonic Village. Lesser streams also supported industry—sawmills on the Green River, a plaster mill on the Lake Mansfield outlet, iron works on the Williams River in Van Deusenville, and the paper mill in Risingdale.

Recreational uses of the river include walking trails, such as River Walk, and bird watching and paddling. Only one formal public access to the river in Great Barrington exists—a canoe launch owned by Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife at Brookside Road. Other canoe access points, like the one at Division Street and the one at Bridge Street, near the former Searles School, are informal and require improvement.

While fishing in the Housatonic River is permitted, consumption of the fish is not recommended because of the polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination. Persistent chemicals, especially PCBs from General Electric in Pittsfield, contaminate the entire Housatonic River from Pittsfield to Long Island Sound. In Great Barrington, the largest concentrations occur in the sediments of Rising Pond, where the River is impounded by the Rising Dam.

In 1998, the US Environmental Protection Agency, General Electric, the states of Massachusetts and Connecticut, and the City of Pittsfield agreed on a PCB remediation concept, which is embodied in a consent decree. This document provided the basic framework on deciding where and how the PCBs would be removed from the river. To help with determining the details of this framework, in December 1999, Housatonic River Restoration, Inc. (HRR), a coalition of numerous Berkshire County organizations and individuals interested in protecting the river, issued its plan for a long term, comprehensive restoration of the Housatonic River. HRR compiled the input of over 1,000 local residents and called for a river clean of toxins, connecting the towns and villages along its path to a shared prosperous future made possible by a restored river. It recognized that a collective vision of embracing the river, turning attention to the river, would inspire the long term care of the river by generations of new river stewards.

As of late 2012, PCB remediation scenarios being considered include the dredging of the river to remove much of the contaminated soil, restoration of the riverbanks, and potentially capping contaminated soils. In Great Barrington, remediation might include dredging the sediment in Rising Pond. Remediation methods, however, remain controversial, and some are untested, and thus the strategy has not been finalized.

The town has been working closely with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and neighboring watershed towns to comment on the cleanup planning process, which could take decades. The BRPC has advocated for consideration of recreational, economic, and social issues in the cleanup process, and has been a strong voice for a comprehensive cleanup of the river. This process must continue, for the foreseeable future, until a remediation plan is agreed upon and implemented. The town must ensure it has active and dedicated representation in this process.

If dredging occurs, the access roads needed for equipment could later be converted into trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. Access points could become canoe and boat launches, trail heads, and parking areas. Invasive species would be removed, and risk of contamination from a dam failure will be reduced. In addition, funding arising from settlement agreements with General Electric could be used to support recreation and preservation in this resource area. Thus, dredging, while disruptive, could have significant benefits for the town over the next one or two decades.

Throughout the development of this Master Plan, people have expressed the desire for increased public access, for paddling, fishing, and swimming, to our surface water resources. Access points given high priority include the Housatonic River in Housatonic near the mills, at Rising Pond (near the sewer pump station and/or on the west bank of the pond), below the dam nearer Division Street, in downtown near Bridge Street (at the former Searles School or redeveloped Log Homes site), and south of Bridge Street, perhaps at the Fairgrounds.

Each of these possible access sites is a real opportunity, which can be accomplished in the short to medium term by virtue of planned redevelopment (at the Housatonic mills, at Searles School, or at the Log Homes sites), remediation activity (at Rising Pond), conservation (at Division Street), and programming goals (at the Senior Center). Open dialogue and cooperation with property owners, the Conservation Commission, and the State and Federal government (for permits) is, of course, required.

All of our rivers, particularly the Housatonic, also provide opportunities for quiet reflection and connections to history and culture. The legacies of W. E. B. Du Bois and William Stanley are celebrated along the stunning Great Barrington Housatonic River Walk in downtown, a project of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy,. Here, thousands of hours of volunteer work over decades have resulted in a quiet natural oasis used by thousands of residents and tourists every year. The River Walk's embrace of nature, culture, and history is so exemplary that it was designated a National Recreation Trail by the US Park Service in 2009. Its success depends in large part on volunteers; for example, Greenagers was recently contracted to maintain the trail, and the town provides trash pickup and other in-kind services. Continued town support, and the development of the next generation of River Walk stewards, is critical to the success of River Walk (and, of course, any possible extension of the River Walk).

- **Strategy OSR 8.1: Take a formal position on the cleanup strategy for the Housatonic River.** Gather information about the cleanup strategy by working with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission then develop a formal town position. Comment regularly and often in the public process to ensure town concerns are heard and met.
- **Strategy OSR 8.2: Utilize CPA funds to accomplish the long-held vision of extending River Walk south,** to connect downtown with Olympian Meadows, the Fairgrounds, the Historical Society at the Truman Wheeler Farm, and the senior housing and Senior Center, as detailed in the 1997 Master Plan and in feasibility studies. Reach out to and cooperate with the John Dewey Academy school at Searles' Castle to attend to their access, insurance, and liability concerns. Explore alternate routes if needed.
- **Strategy OSR 8.3: Develop a River Walk in Housatonic,** extending from the Monument Mills to the Berkshire Mountain Bakery, and south, if possible.
- **Strategy OSR 8.4: Create more canoe and kayak launches on the River.** Two launches currently exist—one informal, unmaintained launch on private property at the former Searles School, and one on State property at Brookside Road. Additional launches should be developed in Housatonic, Rising Pond, and at Division Street. The launch at the former Searles School should be improved (designs funded by the Natural Resource Damages fund are already completed), or a new launch could be explored at the redeveloped New England Log Homes site.
- **Strategy OSR 8.5: Extend the downtown River Walk north to Cottage Street and Stanley Park.**

Goal OSR 9: Protect biodiversity, habitat, and natural resources.

Great Barrington's underlying geology is reflected in landforms and topography, as well as in patterns of land use. The scenic hills of Beartown and Monument Mountain, and the ridges of East Mountain, Three Mile Hill, and McAllister Park, are reserves of wilderness and important habitat. Development in these areas can be disruptive, to the observer and to the ecosystem. The steep slopes are often eroded, limited topsoil is lost, and

wetlands and streams become silted. New homes situated along the ridges are often visible for miles, especially in the winter months, and the effect can be aesthetically jarring. Flatter areas and rolling meadows along the flood plains of the three main rivers are favorite places for swimming and paddling, and the soils here are perfect for commercial cultivation. The aquifer beneath the Green River is the primary source of drinking water for Great Barrington. Many of these important areas are protected, but many, particularly the lowlands, are not. To be sure, protection is less important for floodplain areas, where development would require a special permit and would face potentially exorbitant insurance costs.

Invasive species are taking hold throughout Berkshire County's forests, fields, and waters. Pests like the Asian longhorned beetle, emerald ash borer, and hemlock wooly adelgid threaten the health and continuity of forests. Bittersweet vines strangle acres of forest, and burning bush has overtaken field edges, along with multiflora rose, buckthorn, honeysuckle, Japanese barberry, and Russian olive. In lakes, ponds and streams, plants like Eurasian milfoil outcompete native plants that are important for fish habitat and keep waters cool. Nonnative fauna like zebra mussels can overtake aquatic habitats. Fortunately, Great Barrington's lakes lack the water chemistry and rocky substrate that zebra mussels prefer.

Residents and visitors alike frequent Lake Mansfield. It is unusual in this area, being both close to downtown and publicly accessible yet free of docks, boat houses, and other structures on the lake shore. After a decade of cleanup and restoration efforts by the Lake Mansfield Alliance and the Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force the lake is a popular year-round recreational retreat for the entire town. But the lake road is a serious concern. The vegetated buffer that once captured nonpoint source pollution is eroding rapidly. Speeding cars, increased pedestrian activity, and a narrowing paved roadway create a dangerous situation.

The integrity of our natural systems is fundamental to our quality of life and continued prosperity. Over the years, hard work and model citizen-drive efforts like River Walk and the Lake Mansfield Alliance have helped turn the town's attention to vital natural resources. Our responsibility now is to maintain these resources for future generations.

- **Strategy OSR 9.1: Track, monitor, and combat invasive species.** On town conservation lands, develop management and removal plans. In lakes, ponds, and stream, post information about invasives, boat washing stations, and other resources with help from the Massachusetts DEP and Fish and Wildlife. On private lands, educate and encourage owners to include management plans in their subdivision documents, conservation restrictions, or other land policies. The Conservation Agent, Town Planner, and groups like the Conservation Commission, Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force, and Agricultural Commission can help carry out this strategy on Town lands and connect with private landowners.
- **Strategy OSR 9.2: Protect, preserve, and connect habitat areas to one another.** Open space conservation should prioritize lands and waters that will connect and increase vital habitat areas. Institute land use controls like sensitive home siting and subdivision regulations that have as a primary design purpose conservation of habitat area. Stream crossings including culverts and bridges must use the latest connectivity standards to maintain water connectivity even in times of drought.
- **Strategy OSR 9.3: Minimize stormwater runoff.** In municipal projects, use the latest best management practices to collect and infiltrate stormwater runoff. In private projects, use zoning regulations and subdivision standards to require the latest best management practices.
- **Strategy OSR 9.4: Protect buffer zones around lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams.** These areas provide aquatic and terrestrial habitat, help infiltrate and clean runoff, stabilize river banks, and perform countless other ecosystem services important in times of drought or deluge. This strategy is best managed by the Conservation Commission through its application of the Wetlands and Rivers Protection Act.

- **Strategy OSR 9.5: Continue stormwater improvements and planning at Lake Mansfield.** Pay special attention to Lake Mansfield Road, the boat launch and Knob Hill, and the beach area. Engineering and designs for improving Lake Mansfield Road must account for the safety and enjoyment of all users of the recreation area, including bicyclists, fishermen, runners and walkers, as well as vehicles. Work with Bard College at Simon's Rock to establish a long term water quality monitoring and education program.

5. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Quality of life makes Great Barrington a place that people choose to move to, rather than away from. Recognizing what residents already know, and what thousands of tourists experience every year, in 2012 Smithsonian magazine named Great Barrington the Best Small Town in America. Our town boasts an impressive array of services and attractions, convenient to nationally known cultural and entertainment destinations, that attract visitors from around the world.

Economic prospects and priorities for Great Barrington today resemble those at the time of the last Master Plan in 1997. Certainly the economic situation has changed less in the last 15 years than it had as the town's industries shut down in the two decades after the 1973 Town Plan. And because Great Barrington's economy is insulated from national economic trends—our busts are not as deep, and are our booms as not as big—over the last few tumultuous years our economy has remained comparatively healthy and stable. The unemployment rate here remained lower than the state's, for example.

Great Barrington shares most of Berkshire County's economic strengths and weaknesses, while enjoying some advantages of its own. The region's principal economic development strength is its wealth of cultural and natural resources that make people want to visit and live here. Great Barrington profits from its attractive geographical setting, which attracts part-time and full-time residents who bring resources into the community. It is closer than the rest of the county to New York City metropolitan area, from which many of these people come. The town's location makes it the natural commercial hub for the south county area and nearby parts of New York and Connecticut that have also attracted seasonal and part-time residents.

The cost of living in the county is relatively low, compared to the New York and Boston metropolitan areas. Our educational system is generally sound, and there is a prestigious college in Williamstown and an innovative one here in Great Barrington. Infrastructure for industry is in place, with adequate water and utility capacity and freight rail service, and there are properties—abandoned industrial sites—available for development or conversion. The county has a tradition of small-scale innovation in creative industries. Great Barrington shares these regional strengths, as well as being home to an award-winning local hospital and medical professionals, and quality public and private schools.

Some of the region's weaknesses are counterparts to its strengths. Abandoned industrial sites are a blight. The population has been declining for a long time and household income has been falling, as manufacturing jobs are replaced by low-paying retail and hospitality trades. Educational institutions have not been training local young people for higher-paying jobs. The age cohorts of the population are increasingly unbalanced, with a greater share of the aging population who are not in the workforce. Modern infrastructure is lagging, and even some older infrastructure has gaps — Housatonic does not have natural gas service — but fiber optic broadband is in the works.

Great Barrington's economic future depends on how well we can compete not just regionally, but nationally and globally. Great Barrington's competitive strengths include excellent schools, enviable quality of life, and a pool of talented and motivated entrepreneurs and unique, locally-owned businesses.

Economic Opportunities

Economic development planning should capitalize on what we already have and do well, rather than waste time and resources trying to become something else. We should not offer tax incentives to bring firms that would provide only low paying jobs and whose facilities would detract from our small town character. We should strive instead to continue to do well what the local economy already does, as a regional commercial hub and provider of health and education services. The natural scenic, historical, cultural, and entertainment attractions of Great Barrington and the Berkshires, and the strength of the industry sectors

that depend on these assets, make it a natural center for sustainability, wellness and healthy lifestyle, and outdoor recreation. ***Smart growth will come from an economic climate in which existing businesses want to stay and new businesses want to locate.***

The character of downtown Great Barrington and Housatonic village is an important feature of the town's overall attractiveness and economic competitiveness. The town must take account of and support that contribution. Retailing is a principal economic function of the town, and the challenge is to keep it consistent with other development and planning goals. Downtown Great Barrington is a perfect site for boutiques and specialty shops, and so is Housatonic, to a lesser degree. Neither is a good place for high-volume sales of general merchandise. The town should ensure that it is the most desirable location in the region for good niche retailers.

Large- and intermediate-scale industry has left Great Barrington, but smaller and medium sized firms can flourish here. The experience of Iredale Mineral Cosmetics points the way toward this kind of development. The firm, which had been founded in 1994, just before the last master plan was prepared, has been transforming an old school in the heart of downtown into a corporate headquarters. Great Barrington could be an attractive location for other lean corporate headquarters. The town already houses some small-shop high-tech fabrication firms. Compact headquarters operations and light-industry fabrication and distribution could be well suited to some of the town's dormant sites. Extending natural gas service to Housatonic would make the old mill sites more attractive for this kind of development.

Services will remain important, notably health care and education. Communication to support these sectors, and the creative economy, is becoming critical. High-speed broadband internet is a necessity, to support the new way of doing business with the world and to support the kinds of businesses that Great Barrington wants to attract. Great Barrington ought to do everything it can to be sure that the whole town is served at reasonable cost with the best possible communications technology. Fiber optic service must reach all the way to the home, where many of our independent artisans, consultants and professionals do their work. Improved wireless communications service is also a priority, for the whole town, not just the core along Route 7. The town should consider whether and how to set up open wireless service. In the longer term, restoring passenger rail service will make Great Barrington more attractive as a base of operations.

Marketing, promoting, and supporting our recreational landscapes will capture emerging active lifestyle trends. Connections between our farms, lodging establishments, and restaurants will support our working landscapes and capitalize on demand for local food experiences.

Goal ED 1: Ensure regular, ongoing, and effective communication and coordination of business and government efforts.

Communications need to be improved, among businesses and with town government. Establishing regular channels of communication between town government and the business community, to promote a shared understanding of business needs and town priorities, will help retain and attract successful businesses. Regulation should be transparent, and decisions should be prompt, fair and reasonable.

- **Strategy ED 1.1: Establish an economic development committee** as a liaison between businesses and town government, to track and understand the town's changing needs, to focus on implementing Plan goals and strategies, and to be a channel for encouraging and facilitating the entry of new businesses
- **Strategy ED 1.2: Ensure that permitting processes are transparent, prompt, reasonable and consistent.** Businesses and citizens should be confident that actions are unbiased, well deliberated, and rational. The staff Development Review Team should continue its proactive approach to communicating with applicants, reviewing projects, and assisting both applicants and town boards in decision making.

Goal ED 2: Reinforce downtown as a business center and showcase of a classic, vital, small town.

Visually, downtown Great Barrington has the charm of a New England small town. The scale is walkable, wide sidewalks encourage shopping and strolling, and architecturally consistent period buildings frame the street. That character must be protected. Vacancies on either end of the commercial core now blight the downtown. Dilapidated buildings and sidewalks are eyesores, yet they form a visitor's first impression on entering town and last sight on leaving. Some revitalization was done in the early 1990s, when a business group, Main Street Action, was able to help secure grants and institute limited cleanup and marketing programs. That group has been inactive since the late 1990's, however, primarily due to lack of consistent funding and staff.

Downtown merchants lack an organized voice to advocate for additional services, beautification, special events, maintenance, or regulatory changes. Some marketing and promotional activities have been undertaken by a rejuvenated Chamber, but that organization is not specifically focused on downtown .

Great Barrington's economic future depends on maintaining downtown's role as the principal business center and mixed use commercial-residential-cultural district in south Berkshire County .

- **Strategy ED 2.1:** Improve the downtown setting and services for businesses and customers through a Business Improvement District (BID). A BID would develop and fund a district-specific plan for marketing, beautification, sanitation, security, signage, parking, and other key services. The town must develop and commit to a specific baseline of services that it will provide as a BID member.
- **Strategy ED 2.2:** Improve prominent, unattractive downtown sites such as the Ely property, the Betros market, Ried Cleaners, and the former Hong Kong Buffet across from Town Hall. Work with owners and sponsor needed remediation efforts or façade improvements with small grants and low cost loans.
- **Strategy ED 2.3:** Ensure quality streetscape environment, including landscaping and signage, appropriate to downtown. Work with the BID, Chamber, Design Advisory Committee, Historical Commission, and Historic District Commission to develop signage and information kiosks to help visitors.
- **Strategy ED 2.4:** Make it easier to locate and grow a business in the village centers. Work with the BID and the Chamber of Commerce to market vacant storefronts and buildings. Ease the permit process burden for businesses that locate downtown, by implementing clear special permit and design review decision criteria, or by reducing the need for special permits for some uses that have been shown to have little impact elsewhere in town.
- **Strategy ED 2.5:** Develop a local investment fund, for those seeking returns from small town "Main Street" businesses, rather than "Wall Street."
- **Strategy ED 2.6:** Monitor traffic and parking in downtown and adapt to seasonal and shifting demand. Improve directing signs, and implement a comprehensive strategy about employee parking.

Goal ED 3: Redevelop underutilized sites where infrastructure already exists.

Great Barrington has the basic infrastructure systems, such as water, wastewater, natural gas, electric, cellular phone, and high-speed internet service, that are necessary for economic growth. Our stock of existing buildings and sites, like the mills and other in-town commercial sites, is an important economic development asset. Reusing these sites, which are in developed locations and in convenient locations in our downtowns, may allow businesses and industries to reduce start-up costs and integrates employers into the existing

economic and social fabric of our downtowns. As Iredale Mineral Cosmetics is showing, these sites can be redeveloped for use as corporate headquarters or small-scale specialty manufacturing to add jobs and tax revenue while preserving rural landscapes.

But the costs and risks of redeveloping old buildings are significant challenges. Old mill buildings usually have confounding environmental and regulatory constraints. Anecdotal reports suggest that asking prices and rents of vacant buildings are unrealistically high, considering the degree of structural repair and environmental remediation they could require. Development of old sites may depend on brownfields funds, subsidy programs that help assess environmental issues and remediate contamination. The BRPC has been administering the federally-funded brownfield program for the region. It has funded sites such as the New England Log Homes. Another priority is the cleanup of the Ried Cleaners site. The town must continue to partner with BRPC so that the brownfields programs can be tapped as much as possible.

- **Strategy ED 3.1:** Support redevelopment of the Housatonic mills. Work with the owners, the Chamber of Commerce, and regional economic development organizations to market the mills. Utilize CPA funds for aspects of redevelopment efforts that support historic preservation, affordable housing, or open space and recreation in the mill district.
- **Strategy ED 3.2:** Support redevelopment of the former New England Log Homes site and the Searles School site by facilitating the permitting process. When appropriate, provide town backing for economic development grants and loans. Improve connections, including sidewalks and the Bridge Street Bridge, if necessary, between the site and downtown.
- **Strategy ED 3.3:** Market the town's history of industrial innovation and invention, its entrepreneurial workers, its unique and historic architecture, broadband service, and its quality of life, as a next generation Invention City.
- **Strategy ED 3.4:** Explore new and creative ways to encourage redevelopment of blighted buildings in gateway locations. Use Economic Opportunities Areas, such as those instituted for the Searles-Bryant, the Big Y plaza, and the Housatonic mill district, to encourage investment. Consider programs where the town could make small improvement in return for an equity stake in the project. If the municipality cannot legally do this, establish a community development agency that is empowered to do so.

Goal ED 4: Enhance highly visible "gateway" locations.

Gateway sites are often the first impression of our town, but, unfortunately, many of them are dilapidated eyesores.

- **Strategy ED 4.1:** Identify gateway sites and target them for redevelopment efforts; particularly mixed use redevelopment.
- **Strategy ED 4.2:** Support appropriate redevelopment of the Fairgrounds, including for uses that reflect the agricultural and recreational history of the site. Consider flexible zoning to encourage mixed uses and utilizing CPA funds to support appropriate components of new development.
- **Strategy ED 4.3:** Revise regulations to allow mixed-use development by-right along State Road (between the brown bridge and Belcher Square), particularly where existing footprints are preserved. Require adherence to design standards that promote pedestrian friendly development.

Goal ED 5: Attract, build, and retain a talented workforce.

Great Barrington has a sizeable labor force and a very low unemployment rate. Great Barrington's labor force, meaning those town residents of working age (ages 16 to 65), is approximately 4,000 people. The unemployment rate in Great Barrington at the end of 2012 was estimated at 5.1%, lower than the county or the state.⁴

Our population, and that of the region, is getting older. There are several components to this trend. The share of infants, school age children and young adults is dropping. In the county, the drop is most apparent in the age group of between 20 and 30 years old.⁵ Interviews with high school and local college students suggest this is because many young people are looking outside the region for new opportunities and for good jobs in skilled fields. While this trend may have little effect in lower skilled sectors such as accommodation, food service, and retail, if talented young people leave the area and employers cannot find workers with appropriate skills it could have a significant impact on higher paying sectors like administration, management, education, and health care.

The other reason that the median age is rising is the increasing share of mature workers and younger retirees. Many baby boomers are delaying retirement, and many of them are moving or staying here, often to work. Broadband internet and other innovations may make it easier to telecommute from the Berkshires. A population of older, experienced workers could be a resource for training young workers. Retirees spending their savings or pensions support the hospitality, food service, entertainment, and second home industries. Another economic effect of the aging population is the likely growth in the health care and social services sectors.

We have excellent educational institutions, but our workforce is not as well educated as in other parts of the state. The Berkshire Hills Regional School District has been graduating a higher percentage of students than ever. Our town is home to the nationally-recognized Rudolf Steiner School and to two colleges, Bard College at Simon's Rock and Berkshire Community College. Nonetheless, the education level of our local workforce lags. Students come to the area to learn but then leave to find jobs. Changing this pattern would have a beneficial feedback effect: if graduates could find appropriate jobs here, local employers would benefit now from higher-skilled employees and the presence of a more highly skilled workforce would attract new employers.

- **Strategy ED 5.1:** Continue to invest in a quality K-12 school system. As the largest member of the regional Berkshire Hills Regional School District, Great Barrington shoulders most of the financial burden of the school budget. While many Great Barrington taxpayers find their overall tax burden to be too high, most also recognize that quality schools are an important asset to the community. Close scrutiny of the school budget should continue, but so should the desire to invest in our schools as a basic foundation of our quality of life and our workforce development.
- **Strategy ED 5.2:** Renovate the high school to better meet the educational needs of our youth and to bring the building up to 21st century learning and safety standards. This investment is significant, but its benefits will be long lasting. Investing at a time when interest rates and borrowing costs are low is advantageous.
- **Strategy ED 5.3:** Support vocational and technical training. Education should continue its goal of better preparing students for the jobs that Great Barrington wants to attract and retain, and also for the jobs that will always be here. An introduction to entrepreneurship and to practical business skills should be part of the curriculum, so high school graduates can make a smooth transition to the world of small-scale independent business. The school district is investing in relevant new programs . For

⁴ Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (data for November 2012)

⁵ The US Census estimates that in Berkshire County in 2010, there were approximately 6,000 people in the 25-29 age group. In 1980 and 1990, that figure was approximately 10,500 people.

example, the green house and horticultural program can train young farmers to support our growing agricultural sector. The automotive and child care programs are other examples of career-oriented training programs. The district is planning a property management and culinary program to train workers for the restaurant industry, an online business or virtual enterprise program for training in new media, and an Allied Health program with Berkshire Community College. The high school also runs an after school culinary arts program in partnership with Railroad Street Youth Project and local restaurants and farms. These programs are directly relevant to the economic future of our region.

Goal ED 6: Connect homes and businesses throughout town to broadband internet.

Great Barrington and the Berkshires have for decades attracted entrepreneurs who move here for the quality life. They choose to work where they live, not live where they work. One reason this has been possible in recent years is that most of Great Barrington has access to high-speed internet service. But it is not state-of-the-art. Data capacity (bandwidth) can be limited and unreliable. This has made it difficult for the emerging professional and creative sectors, and for emerging business headquarters like Iredale Mineral Cosmetics. Bandwidth is also important for higher education and medical institutions. Availability of superior telecommunications service is as fundamental to the future of our communities as was electricity in the last century.

Great Barrington has a higher percentage of self-employed workers than the rest of Berkshire County, the state or the nation. This general trend is obvious in Census data. In 2013 the town set out to develop this data, by surveying 4,300 residences. Of the 17 percent who responded, an impressive 46 percent indicated that someone in their household was self-employed. More than half of the self-employed reported that they receive more than half of the household income from self-employment. The most common sectors of self-employment were arts and design (particularly music), healthcare and social assistance (particularly physical and psychotherapy), and professional and management occupations (particularly architects and consultants). Many would benefit from access to top quality telecommunications infrastructure. Moreover, high speed telecommunications, when coupled with this core of talented entrepreneurs, could help grow more local businesses and the overall economy.

- **Strategy ED 6.1:** The Massachusetts Broadband Initiative (MBI) is now connecting central hub locations throughout the Berkshires with fiber optic cable. As a member of Wired West, the town should do all it can to support Wired West or other approved broadband internet provider and its initiative to provide the critical “last mile” connections from the hubs to all homes and businesses.

Goal ED 7: Reestablish passenger train connections between the Berkshires and New York City.

The Berkshires heyday was ushered in by the passenger train, which enabled people to travel north from the New York City area to vacation, and often, remain, in the area. Over a century later, in 1971, passenger train service ceased. Now automobiles and the twice-daily bus are the only way to get to Great Barrington..

Fortunately, the tracks still exist and the Housatonic Railroad Company has shown great interest in restoring passenger service, convinced that it makes economic sense to do so. It has been studying the market and planning upgrades of the tracks in pursuit of this goal. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission has just begun a one-year study to determine where in Berkshire County the passenger stations should be located. It would seem that at least one would be within the limits of our town.

Townpeople too are convinced the passenger railroad makes sense, for both convenience and the sake of the environment. Not only would it connect people from the New York metro area to the Berkshires, but it would

also be an internal connection within the Berkshires. Workers could commute to Pittsfield or Great Barrington via rail, if they had the choice and the price was right.

- **Strategy ED 7.1:** Lobby for and support Housatonic Railroad's efforts.
- **Strategy ED 7.2:** Incorporate railroad passenger support infrastructure, including stations, parking, and other services, into plans for downtown.

6. HOUSING

Housing in Great Barrington is becoming more difficult to afford. Even though prices have dropped from their prerecession peak, the median price of a moderately sized house in Great Barrington has more than doubled since the time of the last Master Plan, in 1997. Incomes are not keeping pace with housing prices: over that same period, the median income has not changed. Despite some recent growth in higher-paid jobs in administration, construction, finance, and professional management, employment is growing more in lower paying sectors like education, health care, hospitality, retail trade, and tourism. Property taxes are higher here than in most of Berkshire County. Thus, many people who work here have trouble finding an affordable place to live here.

The local housing market has changed since the 1997 Master Plan. Then, five percent of housing units were seasonal; now, that proportion has grown to 11 percent. At the time of the earlier plan, someone with an income of only 80 percent of the median could afford to buy the median house (with a price of \$105,000); now, to buy the median-priced house here requires an income of 168 percent of the median income. Rents have nearly doubled. The housing stock is old, most of it dating from before World War II, and thus it is relatively expensive to heat and maintain.

More affordable housing is needed. Some new housing units are being built, mostly outside the village centers, but few of them qualify as affordable units. Demand for seasonal and second homes has bid up prices for existing properties and for developable land. New affordable housing is difficult to build unless it is part of a mixed-use or mixed-income redevelopment project.

Housing needs will shift as the median age rises. A larger population of seniors will need housing that is accessible for those with physical disabilities. Demand may increase for smaller homes, less landscaping, and one-floor living arrangements.

Redevelopment could meet these needs. Some projects are already in the works. Redevelopment plans for the New England Log Homes and the Searles School sites both include affordable housing (up to 45 units at the Log Homes). Other vacant and underused units, buildings and sites, such as the mills in Housatonic, present opportunities to meet housing needs. New residential development of more than four units in the Housatonic Mills overlay district must include or contribute to affordable housing. Some older and larger homes could be converted into affordable units such as accessory apartments or two-family homes. With the adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA), the town will have funds that can be applied to affordable housing.

Taking advantage of these types of housing opportunities will allow our town to strengthen our village centers and downtown, to reduce demand for sprawling development that is costly on infrastructure and threatens our scenic and working landscapes.

Goal HO 1: Allow for a diversity of housing opportunities available at a variety of price levels and in infill locations.

Most of the housing in Great Barrington is single family homes, which are comparatively inefficient and expensive. According to the 2010 Census, 57 percent of Great Barrington's 3,730 housing units are single family detached homes. But that share is much lower downtown and in Housatonic village. In these denser, more built-up areas, only 37 percent of units within the Great Barrington CDP and 38 percent of units within the Housatonic CDP are single family detached homes. Housatonic has a high proportion of two-family homes (46 percent of units in the Housatonic CDP) and structures of three or more units are common in the center of Great Barrington (46 percent of units within the Great Barrington CDP).

Our housing stock is also very old, and the homes in our historic village centers, where our town originally developed, are the oldest. In Housatonic, 76 percent are more than 70 years old. In Great Barrington, 61 percent are more than 70 years old. While older homes contribute to our historic character, this character can be expensive to maintain and heat. As population shrinks, there is limited local demand for new homes to replace the old homes. On the other hand, if the old homes could be readily divided into two-family homes, they could be upgraded, provide income to the owners, and provide a low-cost in-town housing option for renters.

Zoning regulations make this difficult to do, though. In most districts, zoning rules require a special permit for two family residences. Even where two-family is permitted by right, in certain business districts, the lot must have at least twice the minimum area required for residential use. In areas with dense development patterns, this can be impossible. The requirement is not insurmountable: special permits have not been denied. Nonetheless, the additional cost, delay and uncertainty of the special permit process can discourage desirable types of residential development.

The Planning Board has proposed zoning reforms to encourage infill development and accessory dwelling units (sometimes called mother-in-law apartments), and Town Meeting has supported these measures. More needs to be done. The accessory dwelling unit provision has been moderately successful, but it still requires special permits in most locations. The rear lot provision, which allows infill, only works on larger lots, and it also requires a special permit. Consideration should be given to how these bylaws can be moderated to encourage more creative provision of low cost housing opportunities in compact settings.

- **Strategy HO 1.1:** Ensure zoning and development regulations encourage, and do not preclude, a variety of housing options in appropriate locations, including smaller homes and apartments and continuing care options for seniors.
- **Strategy HO 1.2:** Revise zoning to allow two-family housing by right in all zoning districts. Allow multi-family housing by right where it is by special permit now, and by special permit in all other districts.
- **Strategy HO 1.3:** Allow mixed use and multi-family buildings by right in downtown and Housatonic village.
- **Strategy HO 1.4:** Facilitate the development of infill and rear lots, including creating criteria to permit rear lots where zoning district boundaries split lots and revising minimum lot width where practical.

Goal HO 2: Proactively create lower cost and affordable units.

Nearly half of all homeowners and almost two-thirds of all renters in Great Barrington spend more than 30 percent of their household incomes on housing costs. In this calculation, “housing costs” include mortgage, insurance, taxes, utilities, and association dues if applicable. The 30 percent level is a generally accepted metric of measuring whether housing is “affordable”. Thus, by that definition, much of Great Barrington’s housing is unaffordable. Census data for 2006-2010 estimates that 48 percent of owners with mortgages spend more than 30 percent of their household income on housing costs, and 61 percent of renter households spend more than 30 percent of their household income on rent. These figures have doubled since 2000, when just 23 percent of owner households and 37 percent of renter households spent more than 30 percent of their incomes on housing costs.

Affordable housing is a pressing need. Redevelopment of the Log Homes site and the former Searles School would help increase the stock of affordable units. The former Housatonic School might be adapted for a similar project; that prospect has drawn some interest, but also considerable opposition. But such large developments are relatively rare and they can take a decade to come to fruition. More nimble strategies are

required to increase the stock of affordable units, perhaps on a smaller but more tractable scale. Community Preservation Act funds could be applied in part to creating affordable housing.

- **Strategy HO 2.1:** Target blighted properties to create new affordable housing units. Provide zoning or financial incentives in order to spur redevelopment and the creation of affordable units. Contact the owners and work with realtors and banks to identify opportunities where multi-unit buildings are appropriate and can raise much needed revenue to make repairs and improvements.
- **Strategy HO 2.2:** Promote an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) program, in partnership with realtors and housing advocacy groups, to educate homeowners about the opportunities and procedures for creating ADUs. Consider whether to ease permitting requirements for ADUs.
- **Strategy HO 2.3:** Identify owners of two-family and multi-family properties that are below median value or in need of repair to connect them with professional resources and funding sources to make improvements to their properties. In return, owners would restrict rents to affordable levels for a period of years, for example. Work with realtors and housing advocacy groups.
- **Strategy HO 2.4:** Create a municipal affordable housing trust fund. Such a fund, once created by Town Meeting, could be independently funded and would need only executive approval to dispense funds to worthy projects. It could be funded by donations, grants, contributions from B-3 mixed use developments, and other money, including CPA funds, to fund grant and loan programs on both the supply side (e.g., to create new affordable units and purchase or renovate distressed properties) and the demand side (e.g., to assist young families and first time homebuyers with homeownership costs). A housing committee would oversee and manage the fund. Proactively advertise this fund.
- **Strategy HO 2.5:** Working with partners such as Construct, Inc., identify and create locations for transitional housing, for those in domestic or economic crisis or in the case of a natural disaster.
- **Strategy HO 2.6:** Explore, and if feasible implement, a property tax abatement program for those property owners who rent units below the market rent.
- **Strategy HO 2.7:** Offer grants to property owners and organizations that rehabilitate or convert existing single family homes into two-family homes or create accessory dwelling units.
- **Strategy HO 2.8:** Explore monetary incentives to create accessory dwelling units.

Goal HO 3: Increase the organizational capacity of the town to promote affordable housing.

Numerous nonprofit agencies, including Construct, Inc., the Southern Berkshire Community Development Corporation (CDC), the Great Barrington Housing Authority, the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, and the Berkshire Housing Development Corporation, already provide or fund affordable housing in the area. The town should tap into their experience in order to leverage its funding and limited staff time.

- **Strategy HO 3.1:** Create a housing committee, or form a partnership with the Housing Authority or CDC, that will work with town staff, homeowners, realtors, and other professionals in town and region-wide to implement these housing strategies.
- **Strategy HO 3.2:** Develop a municipal affordable housing plan that quantifies housing needs, develops strategies to meet those needs, and works toward a production goal of affordable units. CPA funds could be used to fund this effort.

- **Strategy HO 3.3:** Meet regularly with local and regional housing advocates, like Construct, to identify trends in housing needs and to share resources, including lists of available subsidized units and units for those with special housing needs.

7. AGRICULTURE

Local agriculture is a growing sector of our economy. Customers seek out locally produced products, both for their quality and for the satisfaction of supporting local farmers and businesses. Local agriculture is becoming so popular that farmers have trouble meeting the year-round demands of restaurants, grocery stores, and farmers markets.

These trends create an important opportunity to strengthen the local economy while improving our diets. The timing is right to stimulate local agriculture. Climate change will affect agriculture worldwide, while rising energy costs could upset the supply chain. Increased availability of locally produced, healthy food will improve our food security by making the region more resilient in the face of global uncertainty. Encouraging local production, through methods that restore and sustain productive soils, will also tend to preserve the pastoral landscape that gives our town its scenic character. This in turn will strengthen the agricultural economy, as well as the hospitality and tourism sectors, over the long term.

To realize the full potential of this emerging agriculture and local food movement, to preserve scenic working landscapes and boost the local economy, existing farmland must be preserved. In addition, we need to support, encourage and promote local farms and the restaurants and stores that sell their products.

This section of the plan is drawn in part from a parallel planning project. The Great Barrington Agricultural Commission partnered with the Glynwood Center of Cold Spring, New York, to apply Glynwood's grassroots planning approach, Keep Farming, to our town. Because the farming economy is regional, the initiative was expanded to include the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, into what became the Keep Berkshires Farming (KBF) program. The KBF program involved four teams, for Agricultural Economics, Local Foods, Urban and Natural Habitat, and Health and Nutrition. Data was gathered from in-person surveys, forums with farmers and with the general public, local assessors, and regional and state databases. This chapter presents Great Barrington-specific information and strategies from the KBF effort.

Goal AG 1: Permanently preserve as much existing working farmland as possible.

Farmland in production has dropped considerably since the middle of the twentieth century, when there were about 6,000 acres in production. Much of the former farm land remains undeveloped. Some has been divided and sold off as single family lots, so it is unlikely to be used again for large scale production. Recovering the rest will require some work, for much of the unused farm land is now overgrown. According to estimates based on 2005 aerial imagery data, approximately 69 percent of our town is covered by forest, and only about 10 percent is cropland or pasture. A century ago, the opposite was true—what is forest today was pasture and agricultural land 100 years ago. Today's land use cover is illustrated in the map in Figure 1.

Today, between eight and 14 percent (2,300 - 3,500 acres) of our town's total land area is in agricultural production. Ten farms, totaling 982 acres, are in the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program.⁶ Thus, approximately one-third of our farmland is permanently protected.

⁶ APR is a voluntary program, in which the Commonwealth pays landowners the difference between the "fair market value" and the "agricultural value" of their farmland in exchange for a permanent deed restriction which precludes any use of the property that will have a negative impact on its agricultural viability. Great Barrington farms in APR include lands farmed by Beebe along Route 23 and Egremont Plain Road, lands of Taft Farms on Division Street and Route 183, lands of Lila Berle's sheep farm on Seekonk Cross Road, and Project Native on North Plain Road, for example.

A higher estimate of the extent of farming comes from data about the Chapter 61 program. Approximately 4,060 acres of agricultural land are in Chapter 61A, according to the 2011 data from the Great Barrington Assessor. There are another 1,670 acres in Chapter 61, for forest. (In addition, 1,380 acres are in Chapter 61B, for recreation).

- **Strategy AG 1.1:** Partner with farms, farmers, and land conservancies to purchase APRs. The Town's recently instituted Community Preservation Act (CPA) fund, as well as State Department of Agricultural Resources grant funds (Muni APR) and funds from private sources like land conservancies, could be used to support this strategy.

Goal Ag 2: Preserve prime agricultural soils and unused farmland for future agricultural use.

Great Barrington has the natural resources to be even more productive. Our town has over 4,500 acres of soils that are suitable for agriculture, but only 32 percent, or 1,460 acres, of these prime soils are actually farmed. That means that a great deal of the farming here is done on less desirable soils. Agricultural soils are illustrated in the map in Figure 2.

A principal reason for this seeming mismatch is that nearly 25 percent, or 1,125 acres, of Great Barrington's prime agricultural soils are developed, because the same attributes that make land desirable for farming—relatively flat, accessible, little clearing required, and perhaps limited environmental constraints—also make land the target of development. Traditional settlement patterns have favored development in river valleys, like downtown Great Barrington and Housatonic village. Some of our best agricultural lands face competition from commercial development, because areas zoned for commercial and industrial development, along key transportation routes like Route 7 and the railroad, also have productive agricultural soils.

- **Strategy AG 2.1:** Revise zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations to support and protect farmland and farm soils. In agricultural resource areas, require clustering of new homes, minimum or maximum setbacks, and common driveways, and no permanent disturbance of agricultural soils. Consider Agricultural Protection Overlay Zones for areas with important agricultural resource where new homes must be clustered and conventional subdivisions are only be allowed by special permit.
- **Strategy AG 2.2:** Evaluate where prime farm soils and undeveloped industrial zones coexist, and consider whether a rezoning away from industrial would better preserve the area for farm use and reduce underlying land costs for prospective farmers.
- **Strategy AG 2.3:** Encourage development that incorporates existing or future agricultural and food production into its overall plan. Through responsible land use planning, agriculture can co-exist with and even add value to new development. For example, mixed use redevelopment schemes involving agriculture, housing, recreation, and renewable energy generation are currently being considered for the former Fairgrounds.
- **Strategy AG 2.4:** Encourage the preservation and restoration of prime agricultural soils. One technique is to use locally-produced compost; that would also reduce the town's waste stream. Another is to move toward perennial agriculture, such as pastures and tree crops; that would reduce soil depletion from tilling and capture more carbon too.

Goal Ag 3: Increase the economic viability of local agriculture.

Agriculture is a business, in which long-term survival requires that revenues exceed costs. One strategy for increasing revenues is to add value to the product. Another is to supplement farm income from another, unrelated job. For local agricultural production to grow and attract new, young farmers, it needs to be a more attractive business proposition.

Dependable buyers, particularly retail outlets, are key to agricultural success. Most local farmers report that fruits and vegetables are easier for smaller farms to produce. They also report that selling products at retail prices directly to consumers, rather than at wholesale prices to stores and restaurants, is important to farm viability. Although raw products like fruits, vegetables, eggs and honey are important, value added products like maple syrup, jams, pies, and sauces are more profitable. By comparison, a local market for meat would be more challenging. KBF survey results show that local consumers and restaurants would like locally raised meat to be both more available and easier to afford. But farmers reported to KBF that meat will be expensive unless it can be produced on a larger scale.

Diversifying income streams can support working farms. One way is to do a variety of different farm operations on one farm. Vegetable growers are also raising chickens, growing flowers for cutting, and perhaps harvesting tree products like nuts and fruit, or the trees themselves. Other diversification strategies could include leasing a portion of land for renewable energy use, using scenic locations for outdoor events like weddings, and tapping directly into the tourism industry by renting rooms to visitors.

- **Strategy AG 3.1:** Ensure that regulations support diverse income streams for working farms, such as special events on farm lands, farm restaurants, farm stands, and renewable energy facilities.
- **Strategy AG 3.2:** Develop an “agri-tourism” sector of our hospitality industry, working closely with the farms, the Chamber of Commerce, local hotels and restaurants, and Berkshire Grown.
- **Strategy AG 3.3:** Develop a commercial community kitchen facility where farm products can be processed into value added products. Most churches in Great Barrington as well as the Berkshire South Community Center have licensed and inspected commercial kitchens that could be used for this purpose. Whether this need is fulfilled locally or regionally, the Agricultural Commission can start the ball rolling by working with Berkshire Grown and these resources to come to acceptable arrangements.
- **Strategy AG 3.4:** Increase year round production, storage and sales. Ensure that regulations support greenhouses and “hoop houses” that extend the growing season, especially for fragile but valuable fruits and vegetables, and permit root cellars that provide sustainable storage. Assess the need for a central market hall for retail sales of agricultural products on a year round basis, and for wholesale sales to commercial buyers. This need might be fulfilled locally or in the south county region.
- **Strategy AG 3.5:** Encourage a variety of farming practices, including combining forests with food production, diverse perennial polycultures, nurseries, and aquaculture especially where there is a clean water source.
- **Strategy AG 3.6:** Allow for renewable energy facilities on working farms, so long as they increase the overall economic viability of the agriculture enterprise and provide the opportunity to return the land to agricultural use in the future as farming and technologies evolve. The Agricultural Commission has developed guidelines for siting solar energy facilities on pastureland. These include maintaining a minimum amount of light to properly grow pasture and minimizing the compaction of soil during construction and operation.

Goal Ag 4: Increase “agricultural awareness” and food production.

A healthy agricultural sector depends not only on good soil and good zoning, but also on a supportive community culture. The more consumers know where their food comes from, how it is produced, who produces it, and its health and economic benefits, the more demand there will be for local food production. Allowing consumers to participate directly in the food economy informs them about this process increases the demand for local products. Farmers generally report that the “buy local” movement has had a positive impact on them.

- **Strategy AG 4.1:** Ensure that realtors, sellers, and buyers of land are aware of the town's Right to Farm bylaw.
- **Strategy AG 4.2:** Promote agricultural education with high schools and colleges, and partner with garden clubs, garden centers, and town facilities like the senior center to introduce gardening programs, strategies, and techniques to a wide audience.
- **Strategy AG 4.3:** Improve local food connections with Fairview Hospital, local nursing homes, the School District, food pantries and the WIC program.
- **Strategy AG 4.4:** Promote community gardens and residential gardens in front and back yards as a way to increase local food security and appreciation for local food. Work with existing programs like Greenagers and use CPA funds to support residential food garden programs and community supported agriculture.
- **Strategy AG 4.5:** Revise zoning bylaws to recognize the keeping of chickens as a legitimate accessory use of residential land. Regulations should limit flock size in dense neighborhoods and health codes should be enforced.

Goal Ag 5: Make it easier for new and young farmers to connect with existing farms and to bring unutilized farms back into production.

Great Barrington now has about 20 different farms, according to the KBF data. Some farms are operated by the land owners themselves, and others are operated by lessees. Some farmers both own and lease land. The average Great Barrington farm is 164 acres.

In principle, this region could be nearly self-sufficient. A 2010 study by Williams College students estimated that Berkshire County has almost enough agricultural land or potential agricultural land to meet the food needs of its population, assuming we ate a vegetarian or light meat diet. For agriculture at that scale to be economically viable here, potential farmers will need support in growing, processing, and selling healthy value-added products.

- **Strategy AG 5.1:** Consider policies, procedures, farm-farmer land matching services, and incentives that would encourage more land in production, while protecting soil and water, along with access by new farmers.
- **Strategy AG 5.2:** Ensure that all farmers are aware of environmental regulations that may apply to them. As farmers want to put new areas into production or use fields that have not been in production within the last five years, they will be subject to the Wetlands Protection Act. Consider a joint Agricultural Commission and Conservation Commission effort to educate landowners and farmers, especially those where prime soils and wetlands may coexist, about the regulations.
- **Strategy AG 5.3:** Lease new agricultural lands to new farmers. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation has a program to lease agricultural lands in state parks to farmers. New developments like the Fairgrounds may incorporate farmland into their planning. The Agricultural Commission can maintain a database of lands and farmers to match farms and farmers.
- **Strategy AG 5.4:** Increase the supply of housing for farm workers. Farmers, like most employers in the region, cite the lack of reasonably priced housing for employees as a problem. The Planning Board should assess zoning regulations to ensure farm worker housing can be provided on farms. Local CPA funds could be used to support the development of farm worker housing.

8. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Great Barrington's historic legacy and cultural resources are important contributors to our quality of life and economy. They are an important basis of our downtown tourism and essential to our small town feeling and sense of place. Our history helps to shape our identity and inspires our arts and culture.

Great Barrington can boast an impressive array of cultural venues and programs, which range from music and film festivals to outdoor sculpture to performing arts centers and libraries. These are an important aspect of the regional economy. The Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center in downtown Great Barrington estimates that it spends \$5 million in the local economy and draws 40,000 people to Great Barrington annually. These venues and festivals attract new businesses and residents who want to enjoy these historical and cultural resources.

Successfully preserving our historic and cultural resources will advance a number of this master plan's Core Initiatives—protecting our community character, enhancing our neighborhoods, and promoting redevelopment in our village centers.

Historic resource preservation will also help Great Barrington be a more sustainable community. It creates jobs and increases property tax revenue and tourism. It preserves important educational opportunities and resources. It reuses existing buildings and directs growth pressures to locations where infrastructure already exists, allowing for the conservation of important landscapes.

We are justifiably proud of our local historic and cultural preservation successes, including the renovation of the Mahaiwe Theater, recognition of the W.E.B. Du Bois home site and birthplace, the Housatonic River Walk, and the popular 250th Anniversary celebrations in 2011. Local organizations are striving to ensure that residents and tourists are more aware of these resources and our town's rich history. The goals and strategies in this plan capitalize on recent efforts and provide a new impetus for embracing historic and cultural resources as integral to our community's past, present, and future.

Goal HC 1: Preserve existing historical and cultural assets.

Many of Great Barrington's historic and cultural resources face uncertain futures. Restoration and reuse of the Housatonic mills and the Fairgrounds are top priorities. There is a clear consensus that these sites should be protected and reused; however, the future of the Housatonic School has been the source of much disagreement.

A long-range plan is needed for historic preservation, with assigned priorities, responsible parties, timelines, goals and specific objectives. The Great Barrington Historical Commission, in cooperation with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), local committees and organizations, including cultural organizations, should undertake a long range, three-phase program to identify, evaluate and protect the town's historic resources. The Plan should follow three principal steps:

1. Identification would review the existing inventory of historic and archaeological places on MHC Inventory forms (Area, Buildings, Objects, Prehistoric and Archaeological Sites, Structures, Parks and Landscapes). The purpose of the inventory is to identify, describe and document the historic resources in the town. It creates the big picture, a context for considering which sites are the most significant.
2. Evaluation of properties for the National Register of Historic Places: The National Register is the federal government's official list of historic properties worthy of preservation. Buildings, districts, structures, sites and objects can be listed, either through individual nomination or, if appropriate, through National Register District nominations.

3. Protection of historic resources: the Historical and Historic District Commissions, Historical Society and other pertinent town boards should undertake a program of protecting historic resources.

- **Strategy HCR 1.1:** Educate property owners about the benefits of historic designation. Clearly address potential development constraints, costs or legal ramifications that designation would have, if any.
- **Strategy HCR 1.2:** Develop and adopt a clearly defined historic preservation action plan, with a timeline and responsible parties. The plan should include identification, evaluation, and protection of historic properties and cultural resources, recommend National Register listings, and prioritize preservation projects. A map should list all identified assets. The plan could be funded with Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds and state historic preservation funds and/or as part of a cooperative regional effort.
- **Strategy HCR 1.3:** Coordinate the local historic preservation plan with regional preservation studies. Collaborate on methods and identification techniques, and in prioritization of projects. Doing so can help pool historic preservation efforts, leveraging local volunteer time and local funds.
- **Strategy HCR 1.4:** Raise funds for historic and cultural preservation. Use the Community Preservation Act to leverage other public funds and private donations to protect, preserve, and list historic properties identified.
- **Strategy HCR 1.5:** Concentrate preservation funds on properties that also include other community objectives such as creating or preserving affordable housing and jobs.
- **Strategy HCR 1.6:** Complete an inventory of artistic and cultural assets, including buildings, exhibits, galleries, monuments, and sites. Make the inventory available to the public, as a brochure, or by sponsoring signage (see below).
- **Strategy HCR 1.7:** Consider requiring a demolition delay, except in the case of emergency, in the town bylaws.

Goal HC 2: Promote historical and cultural assets.

Education, organization, and promotion will help preserve historic and cultural resources for future generations, in part by nurturing a preservation ethic. Recent successes like the 250th Anniversary, Bryant School renovations, and the adoption of the Community Preservation Act show that appreciation of our historic heritage already enjoys substantial support.

Many organizations are involved in preservation matters, and their differing powers and jurisdictions can be confusing. But memberships on these bodies and on open space and advocacy groups often overlap, which should make it easier for them to collaborate. Working together, the Historical Commission, Historic District Commission and Society, along with partners like Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area (UHVNHA) should develop programs that enhance the history and preservation literacy of the town, to build support for historic districts and other preservation regulations.

- **Strategy HCR 2.1:** Continue and expand the oral history programs and walking tours that highlight our historical and cultural assets and educate people, locals and tourists. The downtown walking tours and the work of the Historical Commission that successfully developed a walking tour “app” for smart phones, with assistance of the UHVNHA is a model in this regard. Post information, brochures, maps, and photos on the town website, and share them with partners like the Chamber of Commerce.
- **Strategy HCR 2.2:** Extend similar programs to Housatonic Village. Develop a historic walking tour of Housatonic Village as well as an accompanying brochure, signage, and promotional materials

- **Strategy HCR 2.3:** Establish a uniform signage scheme for historic buildings and streets in historic districts.
- **Strategy HCR 2.4:** Expand existing and create new historic districts to raise the visibility of historic properties.
- **Strategy HCR 2.5:** Explore the feasibility and benefits of creating a Cultural District.
- **Strategy HCR 2.6:** Develop and implement a public art master plan, open to local artists of all ages (work with the schools and senior center), as well as to regional and national artists.
- **Strategy HCR 2.7:** Work with regional and local partners, like Berkshire Creative, 1Berkshire, and the Chamber of Commerce to market local artistic and cultural assets to a regional and national audience. Consider festivals, lectures, murals, performances, and public art as being both cultural promotion and economic development.
- **Strategy HCR 2.8:** Promote cultural and ethnic diversity through our food and hospitality establishments. Work with BRIDGE, the Chamber, restaurants and hotels locally and regionally to sponsor tastings, festivals, and other events centered on food and culture.
- **Strategy HCR 2.9:** Consider bike tours in partnership with neighboring towns to highlight significant places. Build on existing efforts like the bike maps sponsored by UHVNHA.

9. ENERGY AND CLIMATE

Energy in this region comes primarily from fossil fuels. In Berkshire County and in Massachusetts, most electricity is generated from natural gas, and heat comes mostly from fuel oil, followed by natural gas and propane. Transportation depends on petroleum. These energy sources are nonrenewable. Burning them puts greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change.

The effects of climate change are already apparent. Future temperature and weather patterns could be very different from our historic four New England seasons. According to some projections, over the next century average summer temperatures could increase 6-14 degrees Fahrenheit, and average winter temperatures could increase 8-12 degrees. Increases of that magnitude would profoundly change the natural resources—plants, animals, water—and the economic sectors—tourism and agriculture in particular—that depend on these seasonal rhythms. In addition, climate change from higher temperatures is likely to increase the frequency and severity of weather events such as storms and tornados.

- **Agriculture**: A longer growing season would be a plus; however, erratic precipitation and more frequent extreme conditions risk greater losses from flood, drought and heat;
- **Energy**: Higher summer cooling costs might be offset by lower winter heating costs. The reliability of the electrical power grid could be undermined by more frequent severe storms.
- **Human health**: More frequent and severe storms would be a threat to safety. High temperatures will lead to more heat related illnesses, which might be especially challenging to seniors and young children.
- **Natural resources**: Warmer temperatures will attract invasive species from warmer climates, stressing ecosystems and reducing biodiversity.
- **Transportation and infrastructure**: Bridges and culverts will need to be redesigned and strengthened to handle larger volumes of runoff.
- **Tourism**: Warmer, rainy winters could eliminate low-altitude, low-latitude ski resorts like Butternut, making summer activities more important.
- **Water resources**: Variable rain and less snow could make our water supply and quality less reliable.

Increased walking, bicycling, and public transit would reduce fossil fuel used for transportation. Changing consumption habits by buying local products would reduce the use of fossil fuel for long-distance shipping.

This master plan sets forth goals and strategies that will help our town realize new economic opportunities while meeting the challenges of global climate change and rising energy costs. As global forces beyond our immediate control have an impact on our tourist economy and our infrastructure, and as the costs of food, transportation and heating and cooling continue to rise, a commitment to local resilience and self-sufficiency will help us prosper.

Goal EN 1: Promote energy conservation.

Great Barrington should reduce its energy use, install renewable energy sources, adapt to climate change, and take advantage of the opportunities of a clean energy future. The town's Energy Committee, established in 2010, has been developing plans and strategies to reduce municipal energy use and promote energy efficiency in town operations and to recommend programs for residents and businesses to increase energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy. In 2012, the work of the Energy Committee led to Great Barrington being designated a Green Community, under the Green Communities Act. As consequences of this designation, new construction here must meet the Stretch Code, the town adopted a plan to reduce municipal energy use by 20 percent within five years, and Great Barrington received a \$142,700 grant to fund clean energy and energy conservation projects.

Local strategies will help our town mitigate and adapt to energy costs and climate change, while improving our quality of life and supporting our local economy. Conservation is the fastest and least expensive option, compared to other strategies. Homes and buildings in Great Barrington are old, and many have poor insulation. Increasing insulation and sealing gaps around doors and windows can yield dramatic energy savings. The Stretch Code now mandates such measures in new construction. Higher efficiency appliances, light bulbs, and vehicles may also be options to help reduce energy use.

- **Strategy EN 1.1:** Provide technical assistance to homeowners and businesses for energy audits and conservation measures. This can include providing to property owners on a regular basis, perhaps in the tax bills, information about existing free energy audit programs, and rebates for efficient upgrades.

Goal EN 2: Promote renewable energy systems for residences and businesses.

The typical Massachusetts household spent an average of \$5,200 on energy in 2008 (\$1,300 for electricity, \$1,700 for heating, \$2,200 for gasoline). Most of this money is paid to service providers outside the region, indeed outside the country. Conservation and a shift toward renewable energy can increase economic competitiveness, create jobs, and lower fossil fuel emissions. This will benefit the health of the planet, our own wallets, and the regional economy.

Support is growing for locally produced renewable energy. New technologies are becoming more available, cost effective, and scalable. Financial and regulatory incentives are making it economically attractive.

But energy production occupies land and thus competes with housing, businesses, and open space and recreational uses. Objectors to energy production facilities cite concerns about aesthetics, compensation, property values, property rights, public health, and safety. A balance must be struck between these concerns and costs and the benefits to the property owner, to the tax base, and to meeting regional energy needs.

Using renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and geothermal would reduce fossil fuel use and better insulate consumers from high and volatile energy prices. The town should investigate how and whether other alternative energy sources, such as anaerobic methane digesters that break down compostable materials and animal manure into usable gas, could be used for local energy production and to add income opportunities for farmers.

- **Strategy EN 2.1:** Educate homeowners and businesses about small scale solar, wind, or other renewable technologies that may be available and feasible at their sites. Priority should be given to low income households, seniors on fixed incomes, and first-time homebuyers.
- **Strategy EN 2.2:** Using technical assistance funds from Green Communities grants, establish a revolving loan fund to underwrite costs of installing renewable energy systems. Priority should be given to low income households and seniors on fixed incomes.
- **Strategy EN 2.3:** Revise zoning regulations to allow wind turbines up to 60 feet tall on lots of two acres or more, and consider up to 100 feet on lots of five acres or more, and develop siting standards. Taller turbines or those on smaller lots may be permitted by special permit.
- **Strategy EN 2.4:** Ensure zoning does not preclude other renewable energies like bio/waste digesters.
- **Strategy EN 2.5:** Investigate, and promote where feasible and environmentally friendly, small scale hydroelectric projects using the town's abundant water resources.

- **Strategy EN 2.6:** Investigate property tax and personal property tax incentives for small scale rooftop or off the grid renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Goal EN 3: Promote large scale renewable energy systems in appropriate areas.

Commercial-scale hydroelectric power and commercial-scale wind power are not likely to occur in Great Barrington. The resources are not present. Commercial-scale solar energy is possible, subject to some practical limitations. Commercial solar developers search for large sites, of 20 acres or more, on unshaded flat or south-facing slopes, close to three-phase power and free from constraints such as wetlands and floodplains. There are many such sites in Great Barrington where commercial-scale solar energy systems could be located. None of these sites are public land, so commercial scale solar will only be possible by private initiative. Public oversight of commercial solar would be limited. Solar energy systems are exempt, under Massachusetts General Law, from local zoning regulations. Some homeowners in Great Barrington have installed solar panels on their rooftops for domestic use. The Energy Committee and DPW are considering the feasibility of the Claire Teague Senior Center roof for a small solar panel array. But the fact that there is not yet commercial scale solar in Great Barrington has less to do with regulation and much more to do with economic feasibility and landowner participation.

If solar is to be promoted in Great Barrington, the town must be ready to address the tradeoffs. Agriculture and solar energy both need sunny, flat land. The town should establish guidelines that balance land uses and public and private interests.

- **Strategy EN 3.1:** Develop town policy, zoning regulations, and special permit criteria for large scale solar energy systems.
- **Strategy EN 3.2:** Actively pursue the Solarize Mass program in Great Barrington in order to maximize the available solar incentives offered by the Commonwealth.

Goal EN 4: Make Town operations self-sufficient in electricity use by 2025.

The Town would save money on heating, cooling, and power and also set an example for others.

- **Strategy EN 4.1:** Reduce municipal energy use by 20 percent within five years of Green Community designation. This is in accordance with the Green Communities program and the energy reduction plan developed by the Town's Energy Committee.
- **Strategy EN 4.2:** Conduct renewable energy feasibility studies at town sites, including the landfill and the rooftops of all town buildings and in parking lots. Develop renewable energy systems wherever the studies are favorable.
- **Strategy EN 4.3:** Sponsor renewable energy facilities on private property, most likely by purchasing the power generated by systems on private property.

Goal EN 5: Encourage smaller, more efficient homes and energy efficient site design.

Compact development, well-sited homes, with conservation and renewable energy technologies integrated into them, could help reduce costs of home ownership and transportation. Regulatory changes and incentives should be explored.

- **Strategy EN 5.1:** Reduce regulatory barriers and explore incentives to residential, nonprofit, and commercial projects that redevelop existing buildings or sites, and incorporate small energy efficient dwelling units and mixed uses.
- **Strategy EN 5.2:** Provide zoning or regulatory incentives to new developments that build small energy efficient homes or multifamily homes in efficient layouts.
- **Strategy EN 5.3:** Streamline permitting and provide incentives to homeowners with older homes who are undertaking energy efficient improvements such as insulation, air sealing, and heating system upgrades.
- **Strategy EN 5.4:** Emphasize water conservation as well as energy conservation. Educate homeowners and businesses about planting native, drought tolerant lawns rather than plants that need extensive irrigation, for example.

10. TRANSPORTATION

Housing, employment, and transportation choices are interrelated. In an area like Berkshire County with little public transportation, not having a personal car limits housing and employment choices. The transportation system should serve neighborhoods and important resource and recreation areas. To support the economy and catalyze redevelopment, it should connect workers with employment and housing opportunities across the region. A balanced transportation system makes a town livable. To that end, participants in the Master Plan process have called for housing and jobs to be developed in accessible, even walkable locations.

Great Barrington and the region need affordable, practical alternatives to private vehicles. Service sector jobs, often low paying, are increasingly important in the local economy. Workers often cannot afford to live where the jobs are. Yet as energy costs rise, they have trouble getting to the job from where they can afford to live. A growing, less mobile senior population will need transportation service. We need lower cost transportation alternatives to the individual automobile, whether walking and bicycling, car pools or mini-buses, or public transit. A complete transportation plan would provide for mobility, access, and connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists, and the physically handicapped and it would address roads and bridges, sidewalks and crosswalks, railroad and trails.

Goal TR 1: Improve neighborhood safety and connections by using a “complete streets” approach to all transportation improvements.

Citizens demand that transportation projects focus on more than cars and potholes. Roads should be designed to enhance the safety of all users. We want streets that are safe and attractive for pedestrians and bicycles, as well as for cars and trucks.

The town has an extensive network of roads and sidewalks. Maintaining and repairing this infrastructure and ensuring safety for all users is a major task for town government. There are over 95 miles of roads in Great Barrington. The major arterial roads, which carry the most traffic, are generally in good condition, but most lack safe accommodations for pedestrians and bicycles. The minor arterial roads, like North Plain Road, and collector roads, like Alford Road, often have high-speed traffic, with dangerous curves and multiple intersections, and some are in poor condition. They are dangerous for non-motorists.

Only 13.5 miles of the town’s roads have town-owned sidewalks. Half, or 6.6 sidewalk miles, are rated in poor condition by DPW. If budgets stay constant, reconstructing the sidewalks that are in poor condition would take eleven more years.

Demand for non-automotive transport will increase, and improvements must be coordinated and integrated to meet that demand. An aging population may not be able to drive. Although 80 percent of workers now drive to work alone, as gas prices increase modes other than personal vehicles could become more important. Public transportation is provided now by the regional bus system, but it is inconvenient and inefficient; less than one percent of workers use it. Planning for energy price increases and meeting the needs of our aging population will require new services, like shuttle buses, and safe connections for walking and cycling.

Well-planned road and bridge improvements that include accommodations like sidewalks and crosswalks will help us meet these 21st century challenges. Such a “complete street” system will help us rely less on cars for daily transportation needs, allowing us to live healthier, more active lifestyles, interact more with our neighbors, reduce our dependency on expensive gasoline, and curb fossil fuel emissions.

A complete street is designed and operated to accommodate different kinds of users safely: motorists, freight, public transportation, bicycles and pedestrians of all ages and abilities. The “complete street” approach

recognizes the need for flexibility. Streets differ, needs of different users should be balanced, and the design should fit in with the context of the community. A complete street provides modal options for non-vehicular travelers in a way that can reduce conflicts between modes. Elements of a “complete street” can include sidewalks and pedestrian facilities, bike lanes, crosswalks, wide shoulders, medians, and bus pullouts. Where major roads travel through neighborhoods, landscaping, road width, and signage all help calm traffic, reducing speeds and accidents and increasing overall safety.

Sidewalks and bike lanes are not always possible, and they may not be necessary where shoulders and signage can help make for a complete street. Indeed, some narrow residential streets with little through traffic, like Lake Avenue in Great Barrington or South Street in Housatonic, and some low-speed local rural roads may be safe enough to walk in the roadway. By contrast, collector roads and arterial roads often have speeding traffic and limited sight distance on curves and hills, so walking in the roadway is decidedly unsafe. Even there, where possible, use of the shoulder can improve safety for non-motorists. DPW can investigate shoulder conditions, mow and trim roadside vegetation to improve visibility, and improve sweeping and plowing of shoulders in order to provide walking and biking space. “Share the road” signs would also improve safety on all roads.

- **Strategy TR 1.1:** Calm traffic speeds in neighborhoods using passive means such as speed humps, bump outs, and traffic signs. See also Strategy 2.3 below.
- **Strategy TR 1.2:** Make walking easier. Ensure there are enough sidewalks, in good repair, and connected to each other, to services, and to other neighborhoods in a logical manner. Undertake walkability studies to develop a walkability improvement plan.
- **Strategy TR 1.3:** Make walking more appealing to pedestrians. Buffer sidewalks from roads with street trees, grass strips or other means. Partner with local garden clubs and volunteers an “adopt a median / flower box” program following the example of other local towns.
- **Strategy TR 1.4:** In the Capital Improvement Plan, integrate the complete streets approach into transportation improvements. Design and budget decisions about tree plantings, and the type materials used such as asphalt or concrete, can impact the aesthetics and safety of the transportation system and should be addressed by DPW and town boards when completing the transportation plan.
- **Strategy TR 1.5:** Develop a connectivity plan that improves town-wide connections, using sidewalks, bike paths, and multi-use paths. Paths should connect to jobs and services such as health care, downtown, and the schools, Great Barrington and Housatonic, and scenic resources like the River and open space.
- **Strategy TR 1.6:** Improve winter sidewalk maintenance in neighborhoods. Adopt a town regulation that requires homeowners and businesses to clear their sidewalks within 24 hours of a snow event. Attend to concerns of the disabled and the elderly.
- **Strategy TR 1.7:** Commit at least 15 percent of local spending for transportation improvements to non-automobile improvements, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, street trees, trails, bike accommodations, and signage. At current levels, this would be about \$90,000 annually, enough to repair and add significant trails or sidewalks. Demonstrate this yearly when presenting the street improvement and Capital Improvement Plan.
- **Strategy TR 1.8:** Commit that every street or road improvement, such as widening, intersection redesign, repaving, and guardrails, also accommodate pedestrians and bicycles. Mandate this in all public roads, subdivision roads, and the driveways of any new commercial development. Attend especially to the needs of our youngsters and senior citizens. Where the road is state-maintained, that is, all of Route 7 and Route 23 outside of downtown, advocate to Mass DOT to include bike lanes.

- **Strategy 1.9:** Work with Bard College at Simon's Rock to develop signage and maps for a pedestrian route from campus to downtown, using the on-campus trails, gas easements, and Castle Hill Avenue.

Goal TR 2: Improve traffic safety town wide.

Slowing traffic and increasing safety of pedestrians and bicyclists is a major concern of Great Barrington residents. Some streets are particularly bad, due to design speed, lack of enforcement, or heavy use as a bypass around downtown congestion. So-called "traffic calming" measures, to slow traffic physically or cue drivers to slow down, can maintain connectivity for vehicles and access to homes and businesses, but mitigate the effects of excessive traffic speed, noise, and volume.

- **Strategy TR 2.1:** Slow speeds and reduce curb cuts to minimize vehicle-pedestrian-bike conflicts. Address high volume arterial roads and major neighborhood through streets (like East Street) first.
- **Strategy TR 2.2:** Work with Mass DOT and the BRPC to conduct an access management study of Stockbridge Road to assess needed pedestrian, bicycle, and traffic safety improvements.
- **Strategy TR 2.3:** Continue proactive traffic enforcement. Increase patrols at high-traffic periods.

Goal TR 3: Improve local public transit.

Funding will be needed to support convenient and widely-used public transit. The public transit service that is available now, from the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA) and the Southern Berkshire Elderly Transportation Corporation (SBETC), is limited in availability and flexibility. There is no BRTA service on Sunday, one of the busiest travel days for resorts in the Berkshires. For seniors, SBETC is an on-call door-to-door weekday service, which relies heavily on discretionary subsidy support from the town.

- **Strategy TR 3.1:** Cooperate with regional partners to fund adequately the Southern Berkshire Elderly Transportation shuttle bus service.
- **Strategy TR 3.2:** Cooperate with regional partners, and state and federal officials, to improve the efficiency of and adequately fund the Berkshire Regional Transportation Authority. Consider a "local hub" from which more frequent service can be provided to employment and community centers in Great Barrington and South County, yet make easy connections to points north.
- **Strategy TR 3.3:** Take the lead in developing a ride share system, utilizing town website space or other resources as necessary to host a bulletin board or phone number for ride service. This is particularly important in providing access to Town Meeting, held at the high school, and to other services that may be remote to populations without access to a car.

Goal TR 4: Be proactive in bridge maintenance and repair.

Bridges are critical in a town that is crisscrossed by three rivers and multiple smaller streams. There are 17 bridges in Great Barrington. Ten bridges are the responsibility of the town. Several of these need repair or restoration. The Bridge Street bridge over the Housatonic River was one of the lowest-rated bridges in town. Because of its low score and after subsequent site inspections, weight limits were posted on this bridge in 2010. The Cottage Street Bridge scored higher, but it has rust and structural concerns and weight limits were posted there too. Other low scoring town-owned bridges were the Division Street bridges over the Housatonic River and the Williams River.

Of the seven state-owned bridges in town, the lowest scoring was the Park Street (Route 183) bridge in Housatonic. The Great Bridge downtown, also known as the Brown Bridge, on Route 7 / State Road over the Housatonic River, was built in 1931 and is one the oldest bridges in town. Its structure is good, but because it

is such a key bridge in the arterial road network and carries so much traffic, Mass DOT has a close eye on this bridge. Mass DOT has it in line for planning and design funds, including a possible realignment to better accommodate north-bound trucks, but the priority of that project is low, for now.

The cost to repair the Bridge Street bridge was estimated recently at approximately \$2.3 million. For the Cottage Street Bridge, repair estimates are \$1.3 million. The Town Manager should direct the Department of Public Works to set a priority list for bridge repairs, in consultation with the Selectboard and Planning Board. Setting priorities should include determining what these bridges connect, what functions they serve or people/goods they move, available alternate routes, if any, and their role in supporting future development. The Bridge Street bridge should be a high priority. It provides a bypass to Main Street, carrying close to 3,000 vehicles per day, and is a critical connector to residential neighborhoods. Its continued function is important to the success of the planned redevelopment of the New England Log Homes site and the former Searles School. It is a likely detour-alternative if the Brown Bridge were to be out of service for repair or redesign. Because this is a town bridge, the town will be responsible for funding the design and repair.

- **Strategy TR 4.1:** Focus on Bridge Street and Cottage Street bridges. Accommodate pedestrians and bikes, and add fishing piers where possible.
- **Strategy TR 4.2:** Do a basic analysis of uses, functions, and traffic counts, to set priorities. If necessary, limit weights rather than spend large sums to fix them.
- **Strategy TR 4.3:** Continue cooperation with regional and state transportation officials to inspect and monitor bridges on a regular basis.
- **Strategy TR 4.4:** In making repairs and inspections, recognize that more frequent and more violent storm events might necessitate armoring abutments and raising bridges higher.

Goal TR 5: Improve parking; address real and perceived parking problems.

Parking is important to a business community that depends on customers and visitors driving into town from elsewhere. Visitors, shoppers, theater-goers, employees, and business owners all need parking. Addressing the parking issue is partly about reducing demand, through measures discussed in other recommendations about encouraging walking, bicycling, and public transit. This part addresses the problem of supply.

Adequate parking has long been considered a problem in downtown Great Barrington. Available spaces are generally well used, varying of course with the day and season. Some events at the Mahaiwe Theater, a crucial anchor for downtown and a regional cultural attraction, draw 700 guests and fill most of the parking lots in the immediate vicinity. There are approximately 1,000 parking spaces in downtown, 200 on-street and 800 off-street. Only 200 of the off-street spaces are public spaces, available for anyone. The other 600 off-street spaces are private and reserved by employers for their employees and customers. The Main Street reconstruction will reduce the number of on-street spaces by 20 (two in the downtown core, six between Elm and Rosseter, and 12 between Rosseter and Cottage).

Great Barrington's parking is primarily behind buildings off of Main Street. Any new parking lots should follow this pattern. The same is true for Housatonic village. Locating parking lots directly on the main thoroughfare would disrupt the historic architectural patterns and the pleasant pedestrian environment, and it would also yield little direct economic value.

There are few, if any, options for new parking lots in downtown. The space behind Ried Cleaners might be useable, but parking issues here are secondary to the remediation of the contamination and reuse of the building. Spaces could be added behind the renovated St. James Church, now St. James Place, but these are likely to be few in number and most likely for users of the building. In any case, this lot should be connected with the Town Hall lot, forming a logical and easy pedestrian connection to the Mahaiwe Theater and through

the alley to Railroad Street. The lot west of the railroad tracks could handle a substantial number of cars. Despite an agreement between the owner and abutting property owners restricting commercial parking here, it remains the best option of adding to the parking supply.

Parking lots are expensive, but parking garages are even more expensive, costing from \$20,000 to \$40,000 per space. These structures do not pay for themselves unless there is continuous full occupancy and high rates. Rather than build new lots, existing public lots such as the ones on Castle Street and Railroad Street could be reconfigured to maximize efficiency and aesthetics. The lot around Town Hall could also be redesigned, perhaps achieving parking on both sides of the travel aisle (double loaded parking).

The convenient “prime” spaces should be available for shoppers and visitors. The Downtown Parking Task Force has taken an important step with business owners, working with them to lease or purchase remote parking spaces for themselves and for their employees, thus leaving prime on-street spaces for shoppers. The Task Force work should be continued and supported by the Town with staff and resources such as signage, whenever possible

Shared parking lots and clear signage can mitigate the parking problem. Even on busy weekends, private lots downtown might be only half or three-quarters occupied. These lots are conveniently located behind buildings, but the terms of the restrictions on their use have not always been clear. New signage on some of the lots may help. Signs directing motorists to these lots from Main Street would reduce the waste of time and fuel circling town looking for a space.

These tasks could be done best through strong partnerships with the business community. The town could work with the Chamber of Commerce or a Business Improvement District to raise funds to acquire land to add supply, to beautify existing lots making them more attractive to users, to add landscaping or low level security lighting were needed. The town can assist with signage and coordination of efforts and enforcement.

In Housatonic village, parking is very limited. This is not surprising, because the town developed to serve people, horses and trains, not automobiles. Nevertheless, the lack of parking is a serious constraint to future redevelopment of the school and the mill buildings. Any redevelopment must take into account issues of parking supply. Past recommendations about parking in Housatonic are still valid and should be implemented. The Housatonic Visioning effort in early 2004, begun as the school system announced plans to vacate the school, culminated in a report, “Housatonic Village Common,” in December 2004. This report included recommendations to reconfigure and landscape the parking area around the school and Community Center. Implementing these recommendations would also achieve the community’s land use vision for Housatonic as a vibrant, pedestrian oriented community. Of course, the ultimate configuration depends on the fate of the school.

Redevelopment efforts at the Housatonic mills will face parking supply challenges. It is likely that a large portion of parking can be found on site at the mills, but this may require expensive infrastructure in the form of parking decks, or it may require demolition of obsolete buildings. Any provision for parking must take due regard of scale, pedestrian access and connectivity, cost, and historic appropriateness. The Housatonic Mill Revitalization Overlay District, a zoning district adopted in 2011, sets out some guidelines for future redevelopment efforts, including shared parking possibilities.

- **Strategy TR 5.1:** Improve parking access and availability. As past studies and task forces have demonstrated, parking supply is not the key issue. Rather, the issue is helping shoppers find available public and private spaces. Providing signage, maps, and wayfinding kiosks can help visually connect parking lots, via walking paths and alley ways, to the shopping and entertainment district.
- **Strategy TR 5.2:** Partner with property owners to develop seasonal or employee parking lots. Further, encourage owners of private parking lots to sign their lots clearly for after-hours and weekend public use. Consideration might be given to a joint public private effort to create uniform signage on all privately owned lots clearly stating the days and hours that they are open to the public.

- **Strategy TR 5.3:** Working with the Chamber and/or BID, assess whether parking meters or parking kiosks could increase availability of parking for customers and generate revenue. Any revenue should be reinvested into beautification or services within the downtown.
- **Strategy TR 5.4:** Adapt parking lots to future needs. Include provisions for compact car parking, electric car charging stations, and bike racks.
- **Strategy TR 5.5:** Redesign existing lots for more efficient use, and acquire additional land or easements where possible. The lot at the western end of Castle Street near the old Fire Station could be redesigned for better circulation, and the lot at the end of Railroad Street could be extended and redesigned, with a pedestrian connection across the railroad. The lot behind Town Hall should be adapted to connect with improvements behind St. James Church.

Goal TR 6: Reestablish passenger train service connecting Berkshire County to New York City.

The Housatonic Railroad Company (HRRC) currently carries only freight trains on its route through Great Barrington and Housatonic, between Pittsfield and Connecticut. Passenger service, which brought visitors from Grand Central Terminal in New York City north to the Berkshires, ceased in 1971.

Passenger rail is an opportunity on the horizon. The HRRC is examining the viability of passenger rail. A study of economic impact that it commissioned suggests that the market for passenger rail is strong and the economic benefit to the region would far exceed the costs.

The town should prepare for passenger rail service by planning ahead for appropriate rail station services like pedestrian and bike connections, bus connections, and parking accommodations. While passenger service may be a decade or more away, and it is beyond the direct control of the town, the town should participate with Berkshire Regional Planning Commission as it studies passenger rail options and needed infrastructure. Great Barrington has three potential station locations. Downtown and Housatonic offer opportunities for a “village” styled transit oriented development/redevelopment with some on-site parking along with pedestrian scaled amenities and access to commercial and residential areas in the immediate vicinity. There are areas around Van Deusenville Road and Division Street that have space available for a “park and train” lot that offered basic ticketing but would be intended for longer term parking. Eventually, any successful passenger rail station would need effective paratransit feeder service to complement passengers that parked on-site. Great Barrington is unlikely to have more than one station; logically, it should be in the downtown area.

- **Strategy TR 6.1:** Cooperate with the Housatonic Railroad and regional, state, and federal entities in railroad planning. Support applications for funding and lobby government officials when appropriate.
- **Strategy TR 6.2:** Proactively plan for rail station services like pedestrian and bike connections, bus connections, and parking accommodation.

11. SERVICES AND FACILITIES

The scope and nature of the services provided in Great Barrington—police and fire departments, inspection and regulation, health care, libraries, courts—are more like those of a small city than a small town, and Great Barrington's budget reflects that. Some of the infrastructure related to these services, notably for schools and utilities, is now dated and in need of repair, replacement, repurposing or upgrading. Some difficult decisions are now upon us.

The town police station, on South Main Street, is staffed with 17 officers. A new state of the art fire station on State Road and a small branch fire station in Housatonic are manned by volunteers, directed by full time fire chief. The sewer system was built in 1970; the network is sound, but the plants need updating. The Department of Public Works is responsible for town roadways and bridges, the Transfer Station and Recycling Center, and some 15 town buildings. The town still owns its two former grammar schools. The Dewey School in Great Barrington is leased to the Southern Berkshire District Court, but the Housatonic school is vacant. Two libraries, Mason in Great Barrington and Ramsdell in Housatonic, are well equipped and staffed and offer comprehensive programs. The Claire Teague Senior Center, which serves as a social outlet and a health and information resources center, is run by a full time director, a part time assistant, and many volunteers.

Some public services are not provided by the town government directly. Two separate entities handle water supply. Public education is offered by regional school system, to which Great Barrington supplies most of the students and most of the funding. Berkshire South Community Center, a fitness and community facility, is also a partner for open space and conservation programs.

Health care services comprise a significant part of the local economy. Fairview Hospital in Great Barrington is a federally designated Critical Access Hospital, serving the town and region. Southern Berkshire Volunteer Ambulance Service is based there. Two organizations in Great Barrington, Volunteers in Medicine and the Community Health Program, provide affordable healthcare. Three long and short term care facilities are among the town's largest employers.

The 2014-2019 Capital Improvement Plan for repairs and upgrades of roads, buildings and other items is over \$21 million. This does not include two major pending projects. One involves the water and sewer system, which must be upgraded to meet current regulatory requirements; the cost for the wastewater treatment plant project is over \$20 million. The other is the high school, which is 50 years old. The regional school district is planning its renovation, and Great Barrington's share of the cost could be another \$20 million. These costs are on top of the regular need to replace equipment such as snowplows, police cruisers, and fire trucks.

And there will be further demands. As the population ages, more investment may be required to deal with the health, housing, social, and transportation needs of seniors. As the regional economy shifts toward lower-paying jobs in tourism and retail trade, investment will be needed in affordable housing and better public transportation. Attracting and retaining higher-paying jobs and promoting emerging sectors will call for investments in communications technology, marketing and promotion, and rehabilitation and reuse of historic buildings. As the climate warms and storm events are increasingly random and severe, investment will be needed to strengthen roads and bridges against the threat of flooding.

Taxes are already high, compared to the rest of Berkshire County. (On the other hand, to people who come here from major metropolitan areas our taxes seem relatively low.) Citizens want continued high quality services, but they also do not want to increase their taxes further. Yet the town's population is unlikely to grow. To deal with these challenges, the town must decide how to shift services, adapt to a changing world, and control its budget.

Some combination of new sources of revenue and expenditure reductions is in order. Reducing expenditures could mean disposing of town buildings with historic and emotional appeal or reducing services to which we have grown accustomed. There will be more demands for volunteers, and more emphasis on partnerships that deliver effective services to citizens at the lowest possible cost.

Goal SF 1: Maintain existing Town services, facilities, and programs.

The town provides a wide range of services, to its residents and business owners, and also to thousands of shoppers, tourists, and other visitors, many of them coming from neighboring towns. The Police Department responds to over 13,000 calls per year. It dispatches emergency 911 responses. It recently instituted a K-9 patrol, with the help of donations, and a bike patrol for the summer tourist season. A paid Fire Chief maintains the training and morale of the otherwise volunteer fire department, and coordinates first responders at over 500 calls per year. Fire and health inspections maintain the safety of restaurants, hotels, and other businesses. The senior center provides front line and support services to our seniors, relying on a small staff and volunteers. The library staff, along with an invigorated board and friends group, provides diverse educational experiences and information to our evolving community.

The scope of the town's services is summarized by this listing of principal offices, bodies and officials:

- A. General Government Services
 - a. Agricultural Commission
 - b. Assessor's Office
 - c. Conservation Commission
 - d. Historical Commission
 - e. Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Community Development
 - f. Town Accountant / Financial Coordinator
 - g. Town Clerk and Registrar
 - h. Town Manager and Board of Selectmen
 - i. Treasurer and Revenue Collections
- B. Public Safety and Public Health
 - a. Animal Control and Inspections
 - b. Building Inspections
 - c. Communications and Emergency Management
 - d. Fire Department
 - e. Health Inspections
 - f. Police
- C. Community, Cultural, and Recreation Services
 - a. Senior services (Council on Aging)
 - b. Grants and aid
 - c. Libraries
 - d. Parks
 - e. Veteran's Affairs
- D. Public Works
 - a. Highways (including drainage, roads, sidewalks, and winter maintenance)
 - b. Public Buildings
 - c. Transfer Station and Recycling
 - d. Cemeteries/Parks maintenance
 - e. Wastewater Treatment

Education is a regional function. Great Barrington the largest of the three towns that have joined into the Southern Berkshire Regional School District.

- **Strategy SF 1.1:** Maintain police, fire, senior center and library services. Increase where recommended by the Master Plan and/or by Department Heads.
- **Strategy SF 1.2:** Continue regular coordination with the School Committee in developing town and school district budgets, recognizing that Great Barrington, of the three member towns, provides most of the students and bears most of the budget burden.

Goal SF 2: Be fiscally prudent by increasing partnerships and cooperation.

The total town budget for the current fiscal year is over \$26 million. Nearly half of that total (\$12 million, or 46 percent) is allocated to the Berkshire Hills Regional School District. Approximately \$14 million, or 54 percent, is spent on town services. The town has been prudent in its finances. Based on sound financial management and strong reserves, it enjoys an excellent AA+, bond rating.

Property tax bills are high and increasing. Average tax bills in Great Barrington increased over the decade 2003-2013 by about 39 percent, from \$3,022 in 2003 to \$4,942 in 2013. (Assessed values increased even more during that period of real estate boom, or bubble; the average assessed value for a single family residence in 2003 was \$193,496, and that increased 49 percent by 2013, to \$376,078). By comparison, the average single family tax bill in the county in FY 2013 is \$3,125. Out of Berkshire County's 32 municipalities, only Williamstown has a higher average single family tax bill. (The housing chapter of the Appendix includes more information about property taxes in the County.)

- **Strategy SF 2.1:** Minimize reliance on property taxes to fund existing services and facilities by seeking public/private partnerships.
- **Strategy SF 2.2:** Consider memberships, cafés, business incubators, and other innovative methods to generate revenue from after-hours or special use of town facilities. Buildings like the Housatonic Community Center, the libraries, and parks could be considered. Taxpayers rightly deserve access to town facilities, but frequent special events and after-hours staff time can burden operational budgets.
- **Strategy SF 2.3:** Improve communication and access to information about all the events, resources, and local talent that exist already. Before considering expansion of facilities, like the Senior Center, maximize the use of existing facilities first, and enhance programs, publicity, and awareness.
- **Strategy SF 2.4:** Coordinate resources. Have regular meetings of service and program directors in order to coordinate programs and avoid duplications. The South County resource list is a great example in this regard. It will be updated twice yearly.
- **Strategy SF 2.5:** Be more proactive in recruiting volunteers for services and for government service. In particular, work with the local colleges and schools to develop internship and community service programs. Establish a calendar for volunteers, and/or a list, database, or 311 phone information service for volunteers to learn about opportunities and respond. The town website could be a home for these lists and bulletin boards. Consider social media as venues for public announcements.

Goal SF 3: Optimize the use of Town facilities.

- **Strategy SF 3.1:** Formalize building use policies. Working with appropriate departments and volunteers, develop policies to govern the use of town buildings for regular programming, and for special events. The policy should address fees, cleaning and maintenance, marketing, and the types of events allowed.

- **Strategy SF 3.2:** Make accessibility improvements to the Ramsdell Library. Because of the cost of these improvements, grant funding will be required. This is a medium to long term priority. If funding is limited, consider a partnership with private non-profit agencies.
- **Strategy SF 3.3:** In concert with the resolution of the Housatonic School (see 4.1 below), consider improving the Housatonic Community Center with a community room on the southern or eastern sides. Either this building or an improved and accessible Ramsdell library would be logical locations if senior services demands required program space in Housatonic.

Goal SF 4: Reuse or dispose of redundant town buildings.

Two buildings in Housatonic, the now-closed elementary school and the Ramsdell Library, present the most difficult choices. A third building, the old fire station on Castle Street, is in the process of being transferred to private ownership.

The future of Ramsdell Library deserves serious debate. As a stand-alone library, it is underused, according to data about visitation. With over 8,000 square feet, it is a substantial facility. Closing Ramsdell could save approximately \$140,000 of the library budget, \$37,000 in annual building operational costs, and allow library staff to concentrate efforts, funds, and thus programs on the Mason Library. But the Ramsdell library is much loved by the dedicated patrons who use its services. It allows the town to maintain a larger overall collection. Dating from 1908, it is a beautiful, historic fixture in Housatonic. And it can serve as a public meeting space.

Thus Ramsdell should be retained for community use in some fashion, especially if the Housatonic school is not retained. The library could be transformed to include space for a café, meeting rooms, performances, or office spaces. Development of a strategic plan for the building should include village and town residents, the Library Board, the Planning Board, the Historical Commission, and the Historical Society. Such a strategic plan would be a prerequisite for getting grant funds to support renovation.

The building needs improvements, to allow it to be used by a wider audience and make it viable in the long term. It is not universally accessible. There is no ramp, and the front doors are too narrow to meet current accessibility standards. The second floor, which has a stage and could be a wonderful performance space, is reached only by narrow staircases. Because it thus cannot be used for public meetings, it now serves as a storage room for the historical society's collection. In 2010, the town applied part of Community Development Block Grant to develop a construction-ready set of plans to make the library handicapped accessible. The plans call for the addition of an elevator to the north east corner of the building, new restrooms, and an improved interior layout including wider aisles. It also included full access to both the basement and the second floor. The projected cost would be over \$2 million. It is not programmed until 2016. It is hoped the state will pay for a portion of the costs. The town should continue to plan for the improvements and seek funds to complete the work. The building would become a tremendous community resource if these plans could be accomplished.

Consideration of the future of the former Housatonic School should be included in planning about the Ramsdell Library. The full building has been heated and maintained in order to house one tenant, a non-profit organization that uses two ground floor classrooms. The building is now mothballed, which will save the town up to \$50,000 in annual heating and utility costs.

The status of the School and Ramsdell Library should be determined not later than the end of 2014. Spending town funds to maintain surplus buildings cannot be justified indefinitely. If both can be saved and reused, then the village and the Town will be spared a difficult and emotional decision. But if scenarios for new uses are not feasible, the town must be prepared to divest or demolish one or the other.

- **Strategy SF 4.1:** Resolve the status of the Housatonic School. Costs for demolition are estimated to be \$500,000 and costs for rehabilitation are estimated to be between \$2 million to \$4 million. A Task Force

presented the Board of Selectmen with recommendations in 2011, including the preference to keep the site in public ownership (i.e., do not sell it or the land). It is now vacant and mothballed, pending decision.

- **Strategy SF 4.2:** Keep the District Court at the former Dewey School. The town owns the building and leases it to the state. A multi-year lease agreement is in the works. Nevertheless, a reuse or disposition plan should be considered in case the court vacates the building in the future. The discussion should include the formalization of the grounds as a town park, and should accommodate the possibility of using the building for the Southern Berkshire Registry of Deeds.

Goal SF 5: Consolidate facilities and operations where possible.

The Building and Health inspectors' offices will need to move. The offices are now housed in the Castle Street Fire House, which the town is selling for a historic rehabilitation. When the building is redeveloped, the Inspections staff may have to move. Their new location should be convenient to the public and to the staff with whom they work. The best locations would be either the Fire Station on State Road or Town Hall. The Fire Station has limited office space, however, and Town Hall is fully occupied.

DPW equipment is housed in three locations, the Highway Garage on East Street, the transfer station on Stockbridge Road, and the ground floor of the Castle Street Fire House. When the old Fire House is sold and rehabilitated, DPW equipment stored on the ground floor will need to be relocated. Since space at the Highway Garage is already limited, and the equipment needs to be in an efficient location (i.e., not remote, like the transfer station), consider locations such as a cemetery, or a lease or partnership for space with the Fire District, National Grid, Verizon or other business or industrial location near to downtown.

- **Strategy SF 5.1:** Move Inspectional Services to Town Hall or the Fire Station. After the historic Fire House on Castle Street is sold, the Building Inspector and Health Department will need to be relocated.
- **Strategy SF 5.2:** Relocate DPW equipment now at the Castle Street Fire House. Consider locations such as a cemetery, or a lease or partnership for space with the Fire District, National Grid, Verizon or other business or industrial location near to downtown.
- **Strategy SF 5.3:** If expansion of senior services to Housatonic is required, co-locate them at an improved Ramsdell Library, Housatonic School or Housatonic Community Center.

12. IMPLEMENTATION

Town Boards, Commissions, staff, and citizens should see their Master Plan as a business plan for accomplishing the things that our citizens have expressed as important to their future. Achieving our community's Vision, and the usefulness of this Master Plan, requires the active implementation of the strategies set forth in each of the plan chapters. This section sets forth the strategies, actors, priority, and timing for getting things done.

Guiding Principles of Implementation

This Master Plan gives special focus to the four Key Issues in our town's future. These are the issues around which many of the public comments have centered—Aging Infrastructure, Changing Demographics, Economic Transition, and Climate Change. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 1. The goals and strategies that meet multiple challenges simultaneously are leverage points. Similar to the way a lever helps move an otherwise heavy load, strategies that meet several challenges at once are critical to the implementation of this Plan.

The implementation chart that follows organized around the Core Initiatives established by the community (which were discussed in Chapter 1). In this way the chart shows how the proposed strategies accomplish the Vision and Goals that Great Barrington's citizens have said they want. Within each of these Core Initiatives, strategies are grouped further according to the type of action that they represent or achieve.

- A. Character
 - a. Redevelopment
 - b. Design and Detail
 - c. Natural and Rural Spaces
 - d. History and Culture
- B. Community
 - a. People
 - b. Health and Quality of Life
 - c. Homes and Housing
 - d. Sustainability
 - e. Municipal Facilities
- C. Connections
 - a. Complete Streets
 - b. New Connections
 - c. Trails and Tourism
 - d. Trains and Transit
 - e. Wayfinding
- D. Commerce
 - a. Business Needs
 - b. Economic Opportunities
 - c. Parking
- E. Coordination and Collaboration
 - a. Education
 - b. Information Sharing
 - c. Partnerships
 - d. Policies and Procedures

Although organized by Core Initiative, each strategy identified with one of the master plan elements required by state law. These elements are identified in the suffix to each strategy. For example, HO 1.1 is first goal from

the Housing chapter. This Implementation Plan also assigns town staff or Board to be responsible for each strategy. In some cases they are to be led by town staff, and in some cases they are to be guided by Board or Commissions.

The reader will note that many of the strategies seem repetitive. For example, there is a Housing strategy, a Historic preservation strategy, and an Economic Development strategy that each call for the redevelopment of the mills in Housatonic. In fact, these repetitions represent the overlap and interconnection of different plan elements, and they are another way of identifying which strategies can accomplish several goals at once.

The Costs column of the following chart is an attempt to identify those strategies that have significant costs associated with them. Most strategies are low or co-cost items. Many strategies would be of significant cost to the town, but it is anticipated that partnerships will help implement these at little or no cost to the town. Some projects may have recurring annual costs, impacting the operating budget of the town. Some projects, such as the high school renovations and renovations to town buildings and bridges, are expected to be high cost to the town, requiring significant capital investments.

Timing and Reevaluation

This Implementation Plan does not extend beyond 10 years. This short-term emphasis is intentional, because focusing on short term implementation requires prioritization and constant reevaluation. It forces the Master Plan to be constantly used, modified, and updated. Within five years, the Master Plan and its strategies should be comprehensively reevaluated, and strategies, timelines, and priorities updated according to what has, or has not, been accomplished in the intervening years. The Planning Board and Board of Selectmen should make reevaluation a regular task.

The items that follow are classified in four ways. Some are considered “No Regrets.” These are low cost, relatively easy to implement projects. They can be accomplished in the short term through policy or regulatory changes, or existing partnerships. “Building Blocks” are necessary in order to establish policies, programs, or regulations that will make future projects possible. For that reason, these should be accomplished within the immediate future. “Near Term” projects will take a modest amount of effort, research, and, perhaps, funding to accomplish. They are desirable or achievable in the next several years. “Vision” projects are significant projects that require a great deal of effort, coordination, and, in many cases, significant investment.

Goal IM 1: Regularly review progress in implementing this plan.

To be effective as a guide for town policy, this plan must be a living document. The boards, committees and officials who are charged with carrying out its recommendations should regularly check their progress in achieving its goals. We recommend that the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen set this review as an agenda item each year, and that other town boards, committees and officials do a similar review every two or three years.

Implementation Table

STRATEGIES:

AG = Agriculture
 ED = Economic Development
 EN = Energy
 HC = Historic & Cultural
 HO = Housing
 OSR = Open Space & Recreation
 SF = Services & Facilities
 TR = Transportation
 LU G = Land Use/Zoning General
 LU H = Land Use/Zoning Housatonic
 LU D = Land Use/Zoning Downtown
 LU R7 = Land Use/Zoning Route 7
 LU T = Land Use/Zoning Transition Zones
 LU N = Land Use/Zoning Neighborhoods
 LU R = Land Use/Zoning Rural Areas and Gateways

COSTS:

A \$__ = relative *annual* cost to the Town, if any.

A \$ = less than \$10,000
 A \$\$ = \$10,000 to \$50,000
 A \$\$\$ = over \$50,000

C \$__ = relative *capital* cost to the Town, if any.

C \$ = less than \$100,000;
 C \$\$ = \$100,000 to \$500,000
 C \$\$\$ = over \$500,000

<u>Action or Strategy</u>		<u>Lead and Responsibility</u>	<u>No Regrets</u>	<u>Building Blocks</u>	<u>Near Term Projects</u>	<u>Vision Projects</u>	<u>Cost to the Town</u>
<i>Organized by Guiding Principle and by type of action</i>		<i>Town Department, Town Board or Town Commission who will initiate the Strategy and see it through to completion. (Supporting actors in parentheses)</i>	<i>(Take action within 0-2 years) Actions or projects that have low risk and/or certain reward, and address one or more Key Issues</i>	<i>(Take action within 0-3 years) Actions or projects to implement in the near term, as prerequisites to priority and vision projects</i>	<i>(Take action within 1-5 years) Projects that take longer to achieve, need ongoing planning, or need significant investment</i>	<i>(Take action within 2-10 years) Long term projects that require sustained, multi-party effort and significant investment</i>	<i>A \$___ = relative annual cost, if any C \$___ = relative capital cost, if any n/a – no cost, or, to be achieved through a partnership</i>
1.	CHARACTER						
2.	REDEVELOPMENT						
3.	Support redevelopment of the Housatonic mills. Work with the property owners, as well as local and regional partners in comprehensive planning and marketing. Consider using CPA funds for historic preservation, affordable housing, or open space and recreation actions in the mill district. ED 3.1 Support the coordinated efforts of the mill owners, particularly when it involves access to the River and shared parking. LU H.1	Town Planner (Town Manager, Planning Board, Board of Selectmen)			Plans by 2018	Redevelopment by 2025	C \$
4.	Improve prominent, unattractive and blighted downtown sites. Work with owners and partially fund or sponsor needed remediation efforts or façade improvements with grants and cost loans. ED 2.2 Explore new and creative ways to encourage redevelopment of blighted buildings outside of downtown, such as on State Road. Consider and research tools such as targeted town investment in return for an equity interest and/or first position on the property. ED 3.4 Identify and target gateway sites for redevelopment. ED 4.1	Town Planner, (Town Manager, Financial Coordinator, Planning Board, Board of Selectmen)			Plans, funding or strategies established	Activity by 2018	C \$
5.	Support redevelopment of the former New England Log Homes site, the Searles School, St. James Place, and the Fairgrounds by facilitating the permitting process. When appropriate, provide town backing for economic development grants and loans. Improve connections, including sidewalks, trails, parking, and the Bridge Street bridge, if necessary, between the sites and downtown. ED 3.2 and LU D.1	Town Planner (Town Manager, Planning Board, Board of Selectmen)			Plans, funding or strategies established	Activity by 2015	C \$
6.	Support appropriate redevelopment of the Fairgrounds, including for uses that reflect the agricultural and recreational history of the site. Consider flexible zoning to encourage mixed uses and utilizing CPA funds to support appropriate components of new development. ED 4.2	Town Planner (Town Manager, Planning Board, Board of Selectmen, Agricultural Commission)			Plans, funding or strategies established	Activity by 2015	C \$
7.	Revitalize the Housatonic school campus, attending to the concerns and opportunities outlined in the Task Force Report, including the building itself and parking, and recognizing that the market has not interested in the school building. Explore a CDBG grant. LU H.2	Board of Selectmen (Town Manager)			Plans, funding or strategies established	Activity by 2015	C \$
8.	DESIGN & DETAIL						
9.	Ensure quality streetscape environment, including landscaping and signage, appropriate to downtown. Work with a Business Improvement District Chamber of Commerce, Design Advisory Committee, Historical Commission, and Historic District Commission to develop signage and information kiosks to help visitors. ED 2.3 (see also Strategy ED 2.1)	Planning Board (Town Planner)	X		Signage and kiosks installed		A \$
10.	Establish a uniform signage scheme for historic buildings and streets in historic districts. HC 2.3	Historical Commission	X	Already in process		Signage on all District buildings	A \$
11.	Encourage development that incorporates existing or future agricultural and food production into its overall plan. AG 2.3	Planning Board (Town Planner)	X				n/a
12.	Revise regulations to allow mixed-use development along State Road by right, particularly where existing footprints are preserved. Require adherence to design standards that promote pedestrian and bicycle friendly development. ED 4.3	Planning Board (Town Planner)	X				n/a
13.	Provide zoning and explore other regulatory incentives to residential, nonprofit, and commercial projects that redevelop existing buildings or sites, and incorporate small energy efficient dwelling units and mixed uses. Incentives might include shared parking or density increases. EN 5.1	Planning Board (Town Planner)	X				n/a
14.	Allow mixed use and multi-family buildings by right in downtown and Housatonic village. HO 1.3	Planning Board (Town Planner)	X				n/a
15.	Facilitate the development of infill and rear lots, including creating criteria to permit rear lots where zoning district boundaries split lots and revising minimum lot width where practical. HO 1.4	Planning Board (Town Planner)	X				n/a
16.	Rezone the Housatonic village core, updating dimensional and use regulations that will promote village scale development, allow mixed uses, shared parking, and a variety of housing and employment options without requiring special permits. LU H.3	Planning Board (Town Planner)		X			n/a

<u>Action or Strategy</u>		<u>Lead and Responsibility</u>	<u>No Regrets</u>	<u>Building Blocks</u>	<u>Near Term Projects</u>	<u>Vision Projects</u>	<u>Cost to the Town</u>
<i>Organized by Guiding Principle and by type of action</i>		<i>Town Department, Town Board or Town Commission who will initiate the Strategy and see it through to completion. (Supporting actors in parentheses)</i>	<i>(Take action within 0-2 years) Actions or projects that have low risk and/or certain reward, and address one or more Key Issues</i>	<i>(Take action within 0-3 years) Actions or projects to implement in the near term, as prerequisites to priority and vision projects</i>	<i>(Take action within 1-5 years) Projects that take longer to achieve, need ongoing planning, or need significant investment</i>	<i>(Take action within 2-10 years) Long term projects that require sustained, multi-party effort and significant investment</i>	<i>A \$___ = relative annual cost, if any C \$___ = relative capital cost, if any n/a – no cost, or, to be achieved through a partnership</i>
17.	Improve zoning and subdivision regulations to promote infill residential development where water and/or sewer are available, and in keeping with the scale, character, and connectivity of existing neighborhoods. Consider innovative zoning like cottage and cluster zoning. LU N.3	Planning Board (Town Planner)		X			n/a
18.	Enhance landscaping, particularly of parking lots, and maintain the new landscaping and trees being installed by the Main Street project. LU D.2	DPW Superintendent (Tree Committee)		X			C \$ A \$
19.	Protect historic character, by expanding and promoting the historic district. LU D.3	Historic District Comm. (Town Planner)			X		n/a
20.	Expand landscaping requirements to include renovations and conversions, not just new construction. Route 7 north and south of downtown is a gateway to our community. LU R7.1	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
21.	Establish controls to buffer adjacent residential neighborhoods from noise, glare, and other impacts of commercial activities. LU R7.4	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
22.	Retain zoning controls limiting by-right retail to 20,000 square feet, and maintain maximum of 50,000 square feet. Formulaic big box commercial development can create traffic congestion and is not in keeping with the town's small scale character. LU R7.5	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
23.	Consider revising commercial regulations to limit size of new commercial development in transition zones to less than 10,000 square feet by-right, and between 10,000 and 50,000 square feet by special permit only. This would control so called "medium box" retailers that can be significant traffic generators and tend to be formulaic in design, in scenic locations. LU T.1	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
24.	Review B2A zone regulations and boundaries. Update or eliminate the zone if it does not accomplish the goals of this master plan or is no longer relevant. LU T.2 and LU R.3	Planning Board (Town Planner)	X				n/a
25.	Allow mixed use and shared parking by right in transition zones. Consider also allowing multi-family housing by-right. LU T.4	Planning Board (Town Planner)	X				n/a
26.	Use Design Guidelines Workbook to ensure new development and rehabilitated sites are in character with the surrounding form, lot coverage, and general appearance. LU T.5	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
27.	Review zoning district boundaries to determine where lots split by zoning district lines should be rezoned. LU N.2	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
28.	Use the Planning Board's power of subdivision review and approval to ensure new roads, public or private, are as narrow as practicable. LU R.2	Planning Board (Town Planner)	X				n/a
29.	Develop and adopt performance based zoning controls for business and industry, specific controls for stormwater management, noise control, and light pollution, to replace the outdated and over-specific limitations to certain categories, to promote new flexibility for businesses and investors, while maintaining the desirability and livability of neighborhoods near business zones. LU G.3	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
30.	Develop standards and regulations for siting renewable energy facilities that balance the aesthetic concerns with the market realities of the energy developers. LU G.4	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
31.	Using the expertise of the Tree Committee, identify how better to care for our town trees. Utilize resources or research available to Great Barrington as a newly-designated Tree City USA. Develop a tree plan for maintenance, protection, and promotion. OSR 7.1	Tree Committee (DPW Superintendent)	X				A \$
32.	NATURAL & RURAL SPACES						
33.	Ensure realtors, sellers, and buyers of land are aware of the Town's Right to Farm Bylaw. AG 4.1	Agricultural Commission (Town Planner)	X				n/a
34.	Explore Natural Resource Protection zoning that preserves agricultural, water and wetland, and scenic resources with sensitive house siting, roads, and driveways, and mandating conservation subdivisions. LU R.1	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
35.	Evaluate where prime farm soils and undeveloped industrial zones coexist, and consider if a rezoning away from industrial would better preserve the area for farm use. AG 2.2	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
36.	Identify unprotected lands, including lands in Chapter 61 tax status, for potential permanent protection and integration into the recreation and trail system. Key parcels would include those that could complete trail systems, link recreation areas, and our neighborhoods. OSR 5.7	Town Planner (Assessor)			X		C \$

<u>Action or Strategy</u>		<u>Lead and Responsibility</u>	<u>No Regrets</u>	<u>Building Blocks</u>	<u>Near Term Projects</u>	<u>Vision Projects</u>	<u>Cost to the Town</u>
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37.	HISTORY & CULTURE						
38.	Educate property owners about the benefits of historic designation. Clearly address any potential development constraints, costs, or legal ramifications that designation might have. HC 1.1	Historical District Comm	X				n/a
39.	Continue and expand the oral history programs and walking tours that highlight our historical and cultural assets and educate the public, including locals and tourists. HC 2.1 See also HC 2.3	Historical Commission	X				n/a
40.	Consider historic-site bike tours in partnership with neighboring towns, historical and bicycle organizations, to highlight significant places. HC 2.2	Historical Commission (Town Planner)			X		n/a
41.	Continue to post historical and cultural information links on the Towns website, and link to a partner website like the Historical Society or Chamber of Commerce. The site should include downloadable maps and brochures as well as virtual photo and audio tours. HC 2.10	Historical Commission	X				n/a
42.	Develop and adopt a clearly defined historic preservation action plan, with a timeline and responsible parties. HC 1.2	Historical Commission (Town Planner)			X		n/a
43.	Coordinate the local historic preservation plan with regional preservation studies. Collaborate on methods and identification techniques, and in prioritization of projects. Doing so can help pool historic preservation efforts, leveraging local volunteer time and local funds. HC 1.3	Historical Commission (Town Planner)			X		n/a
44.	Raise funds for historic and cultural preservation. Use the Community Preservation Act to leverage other funds and donations to protect, preserve, and list historic properties identified. HC 1.4	Historical Commission (Town Planner)			X		A \$
45.	Concentrate preservation funds on properties that also include other community objectives such as creating or preserving affordable housing and jobs. HC 1.5	Historical Commission (Town Planner)			X		C \$
46.	Complete an inventory of artistic and cultural assets, including buildings, exhibits, galleries, monuments, and sites. Make the inventory available to the public, as a brochure, or by sponsoring signage. HC 1.6	Historical Commission, Cultural Council	X				n/a
47.	Expand existing and create new historic districts to raise the visibility of historic properties. HC 2.4	Historical Commission (Town Planner)			X		n/a
48.	Explore the feasibility and benefits of creating a Cultural District. HC 2.5	Cultural Council (Town Planner)			X		n/a
49.	Develop and implement a public art master plan, open to local artists of all ages (work with the schools and senior center), as well as to regional and national artists. HC 2.6	Cultural Council			X		A \$
50.	COMMUNITY						
51.	PEOPLE						
52.	Promote cultural and ethnic diversity. For example, work with BRIDGE, the Chamber of Commerce, Berkshire Grown, restaurants and hotels to sponsor events that bridge cultural differences, such as food festivals and other events centered on food and culture. HC 2.8	Cultural Council	X				n/a
53.	HEALTH & QUALITY OF LIFE						
54.	At existing playgrounds and parks, add picnic tables, benches, chess tables, and other amenities to be enjoyed by those who prefer passive recreation. OSR 3.4	Parks Commission (DPW Superintendent)			X		C \$
55.	Maintain police, fire, senior center, and library services. Increase where recommended by this Plan and/or by Department Heads. SF 1.1	Town Manager	X				A \$
56.	Increase DPW staff by at least one person, and correspondingly increase building and grounds supplies budget, enabling more time to be spent maintaining parks and the grounds of Town buildings. OSR 1.1	Town Manager			X		A \$\$
57.	Improve recreation facilities at the Claire Teague Senior Center, maintain gardening plots and bocce courts, complete future plans including accessing the Housatonic River, providing a quiet landing near the bank for painting, bird watching and so forth. OSR 3.2	Council on Aging (COA Director)			X		C \$
58.	Work with pet owners, trainers, and kennel clubs to create a dog park. OSR 6.3	DPW Superintendent				X	C \$
59.	Formalize building use policies. The policy should address fees, cleaning and maintenance, marketing, and the types of events allowed. SF 3.1	Town Manager	Already completed				n/a

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60.	Work with the Police Department to improve the police presence at all facilities, particularly the Memorial Field skate park, at all hours. OSR 1.2	Police Chief (DPW Superintendent)	Ongoing				A \$
61.	Continue to support the existing Housatonic River Walk in downtown through DPW funds and services such as trash pickup. OSR 1.3	DPW Superintendent	Ongoing				A \$
62.	Continue the Parks Commission initiatives of making parks multi-dimensional. The installation of fitness equipment at South Street Park is an example of this. OSR 3.1	Parks Commission (DPW Superintendent)			X		C \$
63.	Support efforts to make open space resources accessible to those with physical disabilities. OSR 3.3	DPW Superintendent				X	C \$
64.	Take a formal position on the cleanup strategy for the Housatonic River. Comment regularly and often in the public process to ensure Town concerns are heard and met. OSR 8.1	Town Manager			X		n/a
65.	Create more boat launches for paddlers on the River. OSR 8.4	DPW Superintendent				X	C \$
66.	Calm traffic speeds in neighborhoods using passive means such as speed humps, bump outs, and traffic signs. TR 1.1 Slow speeds and reduce curb cuts to minimize vehicle-pedestrian-bike conflicts. Address high volume arterial roads and major neighborhood through streets (like East Street) first. TR 2.1 Continue proactive traffic enforcement. Increase patrols at high-traffic periods. TR 2.3	DPW Superintendent (Police Chief)	X				n/a
67.	Improve the school park and the streetscape, especially Front Street in Housatonic and in front of the former Housatonic School, with new equipment, plantings, benches, and lighting. LU H.5	DPW Superintendent				X	C \$\$
68.	Make accessibility improvements to the Ramsdell Library. Because of the cost of these improvements, grant funding will be required. If funding is limited, consider a partnership with private non-profit agencies. SF 3.2 Evolve Ramsdell Library to serve 21 st Century needs, using the grant-funded accessibility designs as a starting point, and recognizing that the library may take the place of the school as the village's civic space. LU H.6	DPW Superintendent Library Director (Town Planner)				X	C \$\$\$
69.	Implement the Housatonic Walkability Report from 2012, slow traffic speeds, provide safe and convenient transportation options, sidewalks and connections LU H.4	DPW Superintendent (Town Planner)				X	C \$
70.	HOMES & HOUSING						
71.	Ensure zoning and development regulations encourage, and do not preclude, a variety of housing options in appropriate locations, including smaller homes or apartments and continuing care options for seniors. HO 1.1		X				n/a
72.	Revise zoning to allow two-family housing by right all zoning districts. Allow multi-family housing by right where it is by special permit now, and by special permit in all other districts. HO 1.2 and LU N.1		X				n/a
73.	Promote an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) program, including educating homeowners about ADUs and their requirements. HO 2.2	Town Planner	X				n/a
74.	Identify owners of two-family and multi-family properties that are below median value or in need of repair, and work with partners to connect owners with professional resources and funding sources to make improvements to their properties. HO 2.3	Planning Dept. (Town Planner)			X		n/a
75.	Create a municipal affordable housing trust fund managed by a housing committee. Proactively advertise this fund. HO 2.4	Board of Selectmen (Town Manager, Financial Coordinator, Town Plnr)			X		A \$
76.	Explore, and if feasible implement, a property tax abatement program for those property owners who rent units below the market rent. HO 2.6	Assessor (Town Planner)			X		A \$\$
77.	Offer grants to property owners and organizations that rehabilitate or convert existing single family homes into two-family homes or create accessory dwelling units. HO 2.7	Town Planner (Financial Coordinator)				X	A \$\$
78.	Explore monetary incentives to create accessory dwelling units. HO 2.8	Town Planner				X	A \$
79.	Working with partners including Construct, Inc, identify and create locations for transitional housing, for those in domestic or economic crisis or in the case of a natural disaster. HO 2.5	Town Planner			X		C \$

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80.	Target blighted properties to create new affordable housing units. Provide zoning or financial incentives in order to spur redevelopment and the creation of affordable units. Contact the owners and work with realtors and banks to identify opportunities where multi-unit buildings are appropriate and can raise much needed revenue to make repairs and improvements. HO 2.1	Town Planner			X		C \$
81.	Increase the supply of housing for farm workers. Assess zoning regulations to ensure farm worker housing can be provided on farms. Local CPA funds could be used to support the development of farm worker housing. AG 5.5	Planning Board (Town Planner)				X	n/a
82.	Develop a municipal affordable housing plan that quantifies housing needs, develops strategies to meet those needs, and works toward a production goal of affordable units. CPA funds could be used to fund this effort. HO 3.2	Town Planner			X		A \$
83.	SUSTAINABILITY						
84.	Promote community gardens and residential gardens as a way to increase local food security. Work with existing programs like Greenagers and use CPA funds to support garden programs and community supported agriculture. AG 4.4	Agricultural Commission			X		n/a
85.	Revise zoning bylaws to recognize the keeping of chickens as a legitimate accessory use of residential land, with limits to flock sizes in dense neighborhoods. AG 4.5	Planning Board (Town Planner)	X				n/a
86.	Provide technical assistance to homeowners and businesses for energy audits and conservation measures. This can include providing to property owners on a regular basis, perhaps in the tax bills, information about existing free energy audit programs, and rebates for efficient upgrades. EN 1.1	Energy Committee	X				A \$
87.	Educate homeowners and businesses about small scale solar, wind, or other renewable technologies that may be available and feasible at their sites. Priority should be given to low income households, seniors on fixed incomes, and first-time homebuyers. EN 2.1	Energy Committee	X				n/a
88.	Emphasize water conservation as well as energy conservation. Educate homeowners and businesses about planting native, drought tolerant lawns rather than plants that need extensive irrigation, for example. EN 5.4	Conservation Commission Energy Committee	X				n/a
89.	Using technical assistance funds from Green Communities grants, establish a revolving loan fund to underwrite costs of installing renewable energy systems. Priority should be given to low income households and seniors on fixed incomes. EN 2.2	Energy Committee (Town Accountant)			X		A \$
90.	Investigate property tax and personal property tax incentives for small scale rooftop or off the grid renewable energy and energy efficiency. EN 2.6	Energy Committee (Assessor)			X		A \$
91.	Provide incentives to homeowners with older homes who are undertaking energy efficient improvements such as insulation, air sealing, and heating system upgrades. EN 5.3	Energy Committee			X		A \$
92.	Actively pursue Solarize Mass program in Great Barrington in order to maximize the available solar incentives offered by the Commonwealth. EN 3.2	Energy Committee (Board of Selectmen)	X				n/a
93.	Reduce municipal energy use by 20 percent within five years of Green Community designation. This is in accordance with the Green Communities program and the energy reduction plan developed by the Town's Energy Committee. EN 4.1	Energy Committee (Board of Selectmen, Town Manager)			X		C \$\$
94.	Sponsor renewable energy facilities on private property, most likely by purchasing the power generated by systems on private property. EN 4.3	Energy Committee			X		n/a
95.	Develop a local investment fund, for those seeking returns from small town "Main Street" businesses, rather than "Wall Street." ED 2.5	Economic Dev. Comm. (Town Planner)			X		n/a
96.	Revise zoning regulations to allow wind turbines up to 60 feet tall on lots of two acres or more, and consider up to 100 feet on lots of five acres or more, and develop siting standards. Taller turbines or those on smaller lots may be permitted by special permit. EN 2.3	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
97.	Ensure zoning does not preclude other renewable energies like bio/waste digesters. EN 2.4	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a

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98.	Allow for renewable energy facilities on working farms, so long as they increase the overall economic viability of the agricultural enterprise and provide the opportunity to return the land to agricultural use in the future. AG 3.6 See also EN 4.3				X		n/a
99.	Develop town policy, zoning regulations, and siting criteria for large scale solar energy systems. EN 3.1	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
100.	Provide zoning or regulatory incentives to new developments that build small energy efficient homes or multifamily homes in efficient layouts. EN 5.2	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
101.	Investigate, and promote where feasible and environmentally friendly, small scale hydroelectric projects using the town's abundant water resources. EN 2.5	Energy Committee (Conservation Comm.)				X	n/a
102.	Conduct renewable energy feasibility studies at town sites, including the landfill and the rooftops of all town buildings and in parking lots. Develop renewable energy systems wherever the studies are favorable. EN 4.2	Energy Committee (DPW Superintendent)			X		C \$
103.	MUNICIPAL FACILITIES						
104.	Improve the Housatonic Community Center with a community room on the southern or eastern sides. Either this building or an improved and accessible Ramsdell library would be logical locations if senior services demands required program space in Housatonic. SF 3.3	Town Manager (DPW Superintendent, Town Planner)				X	C \$\$
105.	Resolve the status of the Housatonic School, attending to recommendations of the Housatonic School Campus Task Force, ongoing maintenance or operational costs, and plans for Ramsdell Library and the Community Center. SF 4.1	Board of Selectmen (Town Manager, Planning Board, Town Planner)			X		C \$\$\$
106.	Keep the District Court at the former Dewey School. Conduct building improvements and complete negotiation of long-term lease. SF 4.2	Board of Selectmen (Town Manager, DPW Superintendent)	Already in process		X		C \$
107.	Plan ahead to consider alternate locations for Town Inspectional Services (Building Commissioner and Health Agent) should they need to vacate the old Fire House on Castle Street. SF 5.1	Town Manager (Building Commissioner)			X		n/a
108.	Relocate certain DPW equipment from the old Fire House on Castle Street. SF 5.2	Town Manager (DPW Superintendent)			X		n/a
109.	If expansion of senior services to Housatonic is required, co-locate them at an improved Ramsdell Library or an improved Housatonic Community Center. SF 5.3	Town Manager (Council on Aging Director, Library Director)			X		C \$
110.	Consider memberships, cafés, business incubators, and other innovative methods to generate revenue from after-hours or special use of town facilities. Buildings like the Housatonic Community Center, the libraries, and parks could be considered. SF 1.2	Town Manager (All Department Heads)			X		n/a
111.	CONNECTIONS						
112.	COMPLETE STREETS						
113.	Rehabilitate Bridge Street and Cottage Street bridges. Accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, and add fishing piers where possible. TR 4.1	DPW Superintendent (Town Planner)			X		C \$\$\$
114.	Improve sidewalks, bicycle accommodations, and roads downtown via the improvement plans for Railroad Street, Bridge Street, Church Street, and Elm Street. Extend Bridge Street improvements to connect with new development at Searles School and the Log Homes site. TR 6.3	DPW Superintendent (Town Planner)				X	C \$\$\$
115.	Ensure sidewalks are in good repair, and connect logically to each other, to services, and to other neighborhoods. Undertake walkability studies to develop a walkability improvement plan; add sidewalks and crosswalks where recommended. TR 1.2	DPW Superintendent (Town Planner)			X		C \$
116.	Make walking more appealing to pedestrians; buffer sidewalks from roads with street trees, grass strips or other means. Partner with garden clubs, residents, and businesses an "adopt a median / flower box" program following the example of other local towns. TR 1.3	DPW Superintendent (Town Planner)			X		C \$

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117.	Improve winter sidewalk maintenance in neighborhoods. Consider a regulation that requires homeowners and businesses to clear their sidewalks within 24 hours of a snow event; attend to concerns of the disabled and the elderly for whom this might be a burden. TR 1.6	Board of Selectmen (Town Manager, DPW Superintendent, Police Chief)			X		n/a
118.	Commit at least 15 percent of local spending for transportation improvements to non-automobile improvements, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, street trees, trails, bicycle accommodations, and signage. Demonstrate this yearly when presenting the street improvement budget and Capital Improvement Plan. TR 1.7	DPW Superintendent (Town Planner)	X				C \$
119.	Commit that every street or road improvement, such as widening, intersection redesign, repaving, and guardrails, also accommodate pedestrians and bicycles. Mandate this in all public roads, subdivision roads, and the driveways of any new commercial development. Attend especially to the needs of our youngsters and senior citizens. Where the road is state-maintained, e.g., all of Route 7 and Route 23 outside of downtown, advocate to Mass DOT to include bike lanes. TR 1.8	Board of Selectmen (DPW Superintendent, Town Planner)	X				n/a
120.	Identify and publicize the best walking roads, for those who prefer not to be off-road. Rural, low-traffic roads can be pleasant walking routes and an alternative to wilderness trails. OSR 5.8	Town Planner (DPW Superintendent)	X				n/a
121.	Encourage shared driveways, connections and curb cuts between adjacent commercial uses. Route 7, particularly Stockbridge Road, can be unsafe to cross or bike or walk along. Better access management is needed. LU R7.3	Planning Board (Town Planner, DPW Superintendent, Massachusetts DOT)			X		n/a
122.	Conduct walkability studies to identify where improvements to sidewalks and crosswalks are needed, and where connections can be made. Use studies to inform the Capital Improvement Plan. OSR 5.2	Town Planner (DPW Superintendent)			X		n/a
123.	Develop a connectivity plan that improves Town-wide connections, using sidewalks, bike paths, and multi-use paths. TR 1.5	Town Planner (DPW Superintendent)			X		n/a
124.	Work with Mass DOT and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to conduct an access management study of Stockbridge Road to assess needed pedestrian, bicycle, and traffic safety improvements. TR 2.2	Town Planner (DPW Superintendent)			X		n/a
125.	Before fixing bridges, do a basic analysis of bridges, uses, functions, and traffic counts, to set a priority list. If necessary, limit weights rather than spend large sums to fix them. TR 4.2	DPW Superintendent (Town Planner)			X		n/a
126.	Continue cooperation with regional and state transportation officials to inspect and monitor bridges on a regular basis. TR 4.3	DPW Superintendent	X				n/a
127.	In making repairs and inspections, account for more frequent and more violent storm events that might necessitate armoring abutments and raising bridges higher. TR 4.4	DPW Superintendent				X	C \$\$\$
128.	NEW CONNECTIONS						
129.	Complete the Housatonic River Greenway (the River Walk south), to connect downtown with Olympian Meadows, the Fairgrounds, the Historical Society at the Truman Wheeler Farm, and the senior housing and Senior Center, as detailed in the 1997 Master Plan and in feasibility studies. Reach out to and cooperate with the John Dewey Academy school at Searles Castle to attend to their access, insurance, and liability concerns. Explore alternate routes if needed. OSR 8.2	Town Manager, Town Planner, DPW Superintendent, Conservation Agent				X	C \$\$\$
130.	Develop a River Walk in Housatonic, extending from the Monument Mills to the Berkshire Mountain Bakery, and south, if possible. Preferably as part of development, not as an independent capital project. Consider both the east and west banks of the River. OSR 8.3	Town Planner (DPW Superintendent, Conservation Agent)				X	n/a
131.	Extend the downtown River Walk north to Cottage Street and Stanley Park. OSR 8.5	Town Planner (DPW Superintendent, Conservation Agent)				X	C \$
132.	Work with Bard College at Simon's Rock to develop signage and maps for a pedestrian route from campus to downtown, using the on-campus trails, gas easements, and Castle Hill Avenue. TR 1.9	Town Planner (DPW Superintendent)				X	n/a
133.	Accommodate bike trails, sidewalks, and crosswalks when any road is rehabilitated. (See also "Complete Streets" strategies, above) OSR 5.3	DPW Superintendent				X	C \$
134.	Connect Great Barrington and Housatonic village with a bike route or off-road bike trail. Work with	DPW Superintendent				X	C \$\$\$

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	local bike advocates and regional partners to build on the possible routes they have already identified, and connect this route to the planned County-long north-south bike route. OSR 5.4	(Town Planner)					
135.	Connect neighborhoods with the village core, open spaces including Old Maid's Greenlawn Cemetery, Flag Rock, the Housatonic River, and Rising Pond. LU H.7	Town Planner				X	n/a
136.	Extend the River Walk north and south, connecting from Stanley Park to the Senior Center. LU D.4	Town Planner (DPW Superintendent, Conservation Agent)				X	C \$\$\$
137.	Work with land trusts, businesses, the community center, and the hospitality industry to promote trails and safe connections to open spaces and services. Some of the protected open spaces along Route 7 are connected and these are a good model to follow. These spaces should be promoted through the tourist and hospitality industry. LU R7.2	Town Planner	X				n/a
138.	TRAILS & TOURISM						
139.	Increase promotion of local and regional trails to tourists, including the Appalachian Trail – prominently post GB Trails walking routes, biking routes, and trail route signs. OSR 5.1	Town Planner	X				n/a
140.	Continue to develop and support theme-based walking and biking trails, such as the African American Heritage Trail and downtown walking tours about Du Bois and Stanley. Partner with a downtown BID and UHVNHA to accomplish this. OSR 5.6	Historical Commission (Town Planner)	X				n/a
141.	TRAINS & TRANSIT						
142.	Cooperate with regional partners and towns to fund adequately the Southern Berkshire Elderly Transportation shuttle bus service. TR 3.1	Town Manager (Council on Aging)			X		A \$\$
143.	Cooperate with regional partners, and state and federal officials, to improve the efficiency of and adequately fund the Berkshire Regional Transportation Authority. Consider a "local hub" from which more frequent service can be provided to employment and community centers in Great Barrington and south county, and that make easy connections to points north. TR 3.2	Town Manager (Town Planner)			X		n/a
144.	Take the lead in developing a ride share system, seeking business partnerships or other resources as necessary to host a bulletin board or phone number for ride service. TR 3.3	Town Manager			X		n/a
145.	Cooperate with the Housatonic Railroad and regional, state, and federal entities in railroad planning. Support applications for funding and lobby government officials when appropriate. TR 6.1	Town Planner	X				n/a
146.	Proactively plan for rail station services like pedestrian and bike connections, bus connections, and parking accommodation. TR 6.2	Town Planner	X				n/a
147.	Lobby for and support Housatonic Railroad's efforts to restore passenger railroad service. ED 7.1	Board of Selectmen, Town Manager	X				n/a
148.	WAYFINDING						
149.	Develop signage to direct people to recreation areas; develop signs and/or informational kiosks at recreational areas. OSR 2.1	Parks Commission, Conservation Commission (DPW Superintendent)			X		A \$
150.	Develop and publish a map of town parks and other recreational areas. Highlight opportunities for those with varied interests; e.g., flat trails for non-hikers, best walks for dog walkers, bike rides for families, and the like. Partner with GB Trails & Greenways and other groups in order to share information and pool resources. Increase public awareness of our resources by distributing the map as widely as possible. Suggested outlets include the Chamber of Commerce, visitor centers, cultural institutions, supermarkets, hotels, downtown merchants and offices, websites, as well as the Annual Town Meeting. OSR 2.2	Parks Commission, Conservation Commission (DPW Superintendent)	X				n/a

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151.	COMMERCE						
152.	BUSINESS NEEDS						
153.	Establish an economic development committee as a liaison between businesses and town government, to track and understand the town's position and changing needs, and to focus on implementing Plan goals and strategies. ED 1.1	Board of Selectmen (Town Manager)		X			n/a
154.	Improve the downtown setting and services for businesses and customers through a Business Improvement District (BID). ED 2.1	Town Planner (Town Manager)		X			n/a
155.	Ensure quality streetscape environment, including landscaping and signage, appropriate to downtown. Work with a Business Improvement District, Chamber of Commerce, Design Advisory Committee, Historical Commission, and Historic District Commission to develop signage and information kiosks to help visitors. ED 2.3	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		A \$
156.	Ensure that permitting processes and other interactions between town government and businesses are transparent, prompt, fair and consistent, to reassure businesses and citizens that actions are unbiased, well deliberated, and rational. ED 1.2	Town Manager (Town Planner)	X				n/a
157.	Make it easier to locate and grow a business in the village centers. Work with the BID and the Chamber of Commerce to market vacant storefronts and buildings. Ease the permit process burden for businesses that locate downtown, by reducing the need for special permits or by implementing clear special permit and design review decision criteria. ED 2.4	Town Planner			X		n/a
158.	Working with the business community, review and revise sign regulations in accordance with the goals of this master plan. LU G.5	Town Planner (Building Commissioner)			X		n/a
159.	Continue to invest in a quality K-12 school system. Close scrutiny of the school budget should continue, but so should the desire to invest in our schools as a basic foundation of our quality of life and our workforce development. ED 5.1					X	A \$\$
160.	Renovate the high school to better meet the educational needs of our youth and to bring the building up to 21 st century learning and safety standards. ED 5.2					X	C \$\$\$
161.	Support vocational and technical training. Education should continue its goal of better preparing students for the jobs that Great Barrington wants to attract and retain, and also for the jobs that will always be here. ED 5.3				X		A \$\$
162.	ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES						
163.	The town should do all it can to support Wired West or other approved broadband internet provider and its initiative to provide the critical "last mile" connections from the hubs to all homes and businesses. ED 6.1	Town Manager (Town Planner)	X				n/a
164.	Market the Town's history of industrial innovation and invention, its entrepreneurial workers, its unique and historic architecture, broadband service, and its quality of life, as next generation Invention City. ED 3.3	Town Planner			X		n/a
165.	Work with regional and local partners, like Berkshire Creative, 1Berkshire, and the Chamber of Commerce to market local cultural assets to a regional and national audience. Festivals, lectures, murals, performances, and public art can be both cultural and economic activity. HC 2.7	Historical Commission			X		n/a
166.	Partner with farms, farmers, and land conservancies to purchase Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs) to keep working farms in production. AG 1.1	Agricultural Commission (Town Planner)				X	A \$\$ C \$\$
167.	Develop the "agri-tourism" sector of our hospitality industry, working closely with the farms, the Chamber of Commerce, local hotels and restaurants, and Berkshire Grown. AG 3.2	Agricultural Commission (Town Planner)			X		n/a
168.	Develop a commercial kitchen facility where farm products can be processed into value added products. Work with local Churches, Berkshire South, and Berkshire Grown for example. AG 3.3	Agricultural Commission (Town Planner)				X	n/a
169.	Improve local food connections with Fairview Hospital, nursing homes, and School District. AG 4.3	Agricultural Commission (Town Planner)			X		n/a

<u>Action or Strategy</u>		<u>Lead and Responsibility</u>	<u>No Regrets</u>	<u>Building Blocks</u>	<u>Near Term Projects</u>	<u>Vision Projects</u>	<u>Cost to the Town</u>
<i>Organized by Guiding Principle and by type of action</i>		<i>Town Department, Town Board or Town Commission who will initiate the Strategy and see it through to completion. (Supporting actors in parentheses)</i>	<i>(Take action within 0-2 years) Actions or projects that have low risk and/or certain reward, and address one or more Key Issues</i>	<i>(Take action within 0-3 years) Actions or projects to implement in the near term, as prerequisites to priority and vision projects</i>	<i>(Take action within 1-5 years) Projects that take longer to achieve, need ongoing planning, or need significant investment</i>	<i>(Take action within 2-10 years) Long term projects that require sustained, multi-party effort and significant investment</i>	<i>A \$___ = relative annual cost, if any C \$___ = relative capital cost, if any n/a – no cost, or, to be achieved through a partnership</i>
170.	Take advantage of the emergence of “healthy living” trends. For example, working with the Chamber and a future Business Improvement District, develop ideas like a “Hike GB” package that offers guided trails hikes, historical tours, agricultural experiences and promotional deals at retailers, hotels and restaurants. OSR 4.2	Town Planner				X	n/a
171.	Capitalize on the long history of success of the Josh Billings Run Aground, and the more recent success of the Memorial Day Marathon and the GBLC Run for Hills to market Great Barrington open space resources for competitive events. Consider linking well-known spaces like Lake Mansfield with lesser-known spaces like East Rock and McAllister Park, via swim/bike/run triathlons and other competitive sports. OSR 4.3	Town Planner				X	A \$
172.	Consider policies, procedures, farm-farmer land matching services, and/or incentives that would encourage more land in production and new farmers. AG 5.1	Agricultural Commission (Town Planner)			X		n/a
173.	Lease new agricultural lands to new farmers. The Agricultural Commission can work with Berkshire Grown to maintain or improve the database of farms and farmers. AG 5.4	Agricultural Commission (Town Planner)			X		n/a
174.	Encourage a variety of farming, including tree farming, timber harvest, forage, edible forest, nurseries, and aquaculture especially where there is a clean water source. AG 3.5	Agricultural Commission			X		n/a
175.	Revise zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations to support and protect farmland, including, for example, agricultural resource areas to require clustering of homes, minimum or maximum setbacks, and common driveways, and no permanent disturbance of agricultural soils. AG 2.1	Planning Board (Town Planner)			X		n/a
176.	Ensure that regulations support diverse income streams for working farms, including, for example, special events on farm lands, farm restaurants, farm stands, and renewable energy facilities. AG 3.1	Planning Board (Town Planner, Conservation Agent)			X		n/a
177.	Ensure regulations support greenhouses and “hoop houses” that extend the growing season, and year-round farmer’s market halls, all in order to increase year round production and sales. AG 3.4	Planning Board (Town Planner, Ag. Comm. Conservation Agent)			X		n/a
178.	PARKING						
179.	Plan proactively for the possibility of restored passenger railroad service, attending to parking and the needs for associated services. (See also “Trains and Transit” strategies, above) LU D.5	Town Planner	X				n/a
180.	Partner with property owners to develop seasonal or employee parking lots. Further, encourage owners of private parking lots to clearly sign their lots for after-hours and weekend public use. TR 5.2	Town Manager (DPW Superintendent)	X				A \$
181.	Working with the Chamber and/or BID, assess whether parking meters or parking kiosks could increase availability of parking for customers and generate revenue. Any revenue should be reinvested into beautification or services within the downtown. TR 5.3	Town Manager (DPW Superintendent)			X		n/a
182.	Adapt parking lots to future needs. Include provisions for compact car parking, electric car charging stations, and bike racks. TR 5.4	DPW Superintendent			X		C \$
183.	Redesign existing parking lots for more efficient use, acquire additional land or easements where possible, and connect to adjacent lots. The lot at the western end of Castle Street near the old Fire Station could be redesigned for better circulation, and the lot at the end of Railroad Street could be extended and redesigned, with a pedestrian connection across the railroad. The lot behind Town Hall should be adapted to connect with improvements behind St. James Church. TR 5.5	DPW Superintendent (Town Planner)			X		C \$\$
184.	Monitor traffic and parking in downtown and adapt to seasonal and shifting demand. Work with the Chamber of Commerce, BID, and Parking Task Force. ED 2.6	DPW Superintendent (Police Chief)			X		n/a
185.	In Downtown, improve parking access and availability by using signage, maps, and wayfinding kiosks that locate and connect parking lots via walking paths and alley ways, to the shopping and entertainment district. Alleys and sidewalks should be pleasant, safe, and well-lit. Work with the Chamber of Commerce, BID, and Parking Task Force. TR 5.1	DPW Superintendent			X		C \$
186.	Work in concert with the Chamber of Commerce to address parking needs by connecting parking lots with signage and landscaping. LU D.6	DPW Superintendent			X		n/a

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187.	Incorporate railroad passenger support infrastructure, including stations, parking, and other services, into plans for downtown and Housatonic. ED 7.2	Town Planner			X		n/a
188.	COORDINATION & COLLABORATION						
189.	EDUCATION						
190.	Promote agricultural education with high schools and colleges, and partner with garden clubs, garden centers, and town facilities like the senior center to introduce gardening programs, strategies, and techniques to a wide audience. AG 4.2	Agricultural Commission (Town Planner)			X		n/a
191.	Ensure all farmers are aware of environmental regulations that may apply to them. Consider a joint Agricultural Commission and Conservation Commission effort to educate landowners and farmers, especially those where prime soils and wetlands may coexist, about the regulations. AG 5.3	Conservation Commission Agricultural Commission (Conservation Agent)	X				n/a
192.	INFORMATION SHARING						
193.	Create a housing committee, or form a partnership with the Housing Authority or Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire, that will work with town staff, homeowners, Realtors, and other professionals in town and region-wide to implement these housing strategies. HO 3.1	Board of Selectmen (Town Manager)			X		n/a
194.	Meet regularly with local and regional housing advocates, like Regional Planning, Construct, CDC of South Berkshire, and Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, to identify trends in housing needs and to share resources, including lists of available subsidized units and units for those with special housing needs. HO 3.3	Town Planner			X		n/a
195.	Continue regular coordination with the School Committee in developing Town and School District budgets, recognizing that Great Barrington, though only one of three member towns, provides most of the students and bears most of the budget burden. SF 1.2	Town Manager	X				n/a
196.	Improve communication and access to information of all the events, resources, and local talent that exist already. Before considering expansion of facilities, like the Senior Center, maximize the use of existing facilities first, and enhance programs, publicity, and awareness. SF 1.3	Town Manager (All Department Heads)	X				n/a
197.	Coordinate resources. Have regular meetings of service and program directors to coordinate programs and avoid duplications. The South County resource list is a great example. SF 1.4	Town Manager	X				n/a
198.	Be more proactive in recruiting volunteers for services and for government service. In particular, work with the local colleges and schools to develop internship and community service programs. Establish a calendar for volunteers, and/or a list, database, or 311 phone information service wanted for volunteers to learn about opportunities and respond. The Town website could be a home for these lists and bulletin boards. SF 1.5	Town Manager (All Department Heads)	X				n/a
199.	PARTNERSHIPS						
200.	Seek public/private partnerships to minimize reliance on property taxes to fund existing services and facilities. SF 1.1	Town Manager (All Department Heads)			X		n/a
201.	Join forces and marketing efforts with existing recreation resources like Ski Butternut and Berkshire South to market parks and trails. OSR 4.1	Town Planner			X		n/a

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202.	POLICIES & PROCEDURES						
203.	Make consistency with the Master Plan a consideration in developing and evaluating the Capital Improvement Plan. Since capital spending is such a large and visible component of the annual budget, such a requirement would ensure infrastructure investments support, and do not detract from, the vision and goals of the Master Plan. LU G.1	Board of Selectmen	X				n/a
204.	Make consistency with the Master Plan a requirement of special permit and site plan review decisions. This will ensure new development occurs as envisioned by the community. LU G.2	Planning Board, Board of Selectmen (Town Planner)	X				n/a
205.	Regularly review progress in implementing this plan; annually, for the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen	Planning Board,, Board of Selectmen; all town boards and committees	X				n/a

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Data and Details

Appendix 2: Commonly Used Abbreviations

Appendix 3: Public Participation Materials