



Town of Williamstown, MA

# **Executive Summary**

## **Williamstown Existing Conditions Analysis**

A document that will inform the Envisioning  
Williamstown 2035 Comprehensive Plan

September 26, 2022

# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Existing Conditions Report is to provide a baseline understanding of Williamstown as a community in 2022. This information will inform and guide the work of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, Town Staff, the Consulting Team, and the broader community over the next year. This report represents the first of three phases of the Comprehensive Plan writing process. It will also serve as a resource for outreach activities and the eventual writing of **Envisioning Williamstown 2035**, the Town's new Comprehensive Plan.

Each section of this Existing Conditions Report begins with a short profile that explains the significance of the topic and key findings that should be pursued further to inform this planning process. Following each profile is a longer inventory that includes more data, details, and analysis related to the topic. In each of these sections, information is presented that explains how Williamstown is changing, and what emerging issues, challenges, and opportunities the town may wish to address in the Comprehensive Plan. These inventories are intended to provide a more detailed explanation of the background sources used, data collected, additional context related to the issues identified, and, in some cases, questions and potential actions that should be explored later on in the planning process.



*The Existing Conditions Report will be used to guide and inform the comprehensive planning team, and to engage the public in conversations about planning for the future. It will be the main source of information used to inform discussions and the basis for materials created to engage the public. The intent is for this information to educate community members so that they can help the Town of Williamstown identify a clear vision to work toward, and the many actions that must be taken as a community during the next decade to achieve that vision.*

We would also like to acknowledge that the consulting team who has written this report identify as white and have not been subject to the same biases that have impacted minority populations. We recognize that more outreach and engagement need to be conducted with the community, to identify issues, opportunities, and challenges the town should consider addressing in the Comprehensive Plan as well as equity-related content and recommendations for **Envisioning Williamstown 2035**. This report represents only the beginning of an understanding of equity issues in Williamstown.



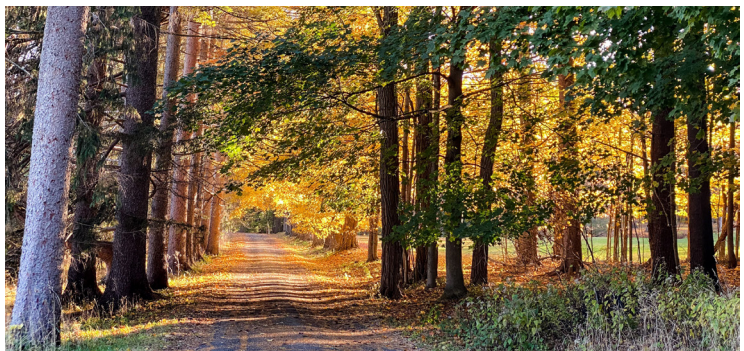
# WILLIAMSTOWN TODAY

Located in Northern Berkshire County and bordering both Vermont and New York, Williamstown's landscape is notable for its steep wooded hillsides, open fields and vistas, and in-town neighborhoods. With Williams College in the core of the community, there is a constant blend of campus and community life that makes Williamstown unique in the region.

The Town Center and surrounding neighborhoods provide the greatest diversity of housing, small businesses, and walkability in the community. With additional investment in sidewalks and pathways needed to safely accommodate these transportation modes, safe, connected, and accessible bicycle and pedestrian connections are possible in these areas. The densely settled neighborhoods already have some access to trail and recreation opportunities. Over time, there is the potential for additional recreation opportunities and trails to be established throughout the community.

Moving out from the Town Center and adjacent neighborhoods, Williamstown quickly becomes much more rural in its character. Large protected open spaces, viewsheds, single-family residences on large lots, and narrow, unpaved back roads all contribute to the distinct feel of these areas. Finding ways to balance the protection of the remaining agricultural lands (which support existing and future farming in these areas of town) while also accommodating Williamstown's desired development pattern is a need. Additionally, housing affordability, which is a pressing issue in many rural communities like Williamstown, should be addressed, in part, by sound land use planning practices.

Housing affordability, limited rental units, housing construction costs, and environmental constraints that impact new development continue to be pressing issues in town as boards, committees, organizations, and developers work to increase the diversity and



availability of high-quality affordable housing units in Williamstown.

Williamstown has had a heavy reliance on the presence of Williams College, but there are other notable businesses and institutions that also attract visitors and employees to the community. Tourism and visitation is also a major driver of the local economy, as Williamstown boasts a number of destinations including the Clark Art Institute, museums, its proximity to Mt. Greylock, and its local trail network. The recent increase in remote workers living in Williamstown is another emerging trend that has been observed and may provide some new opportunities and some new challenges, especially as they relate to increased housing development and reduced affordability.

As a small town, the municipal facilities and services appear to be serving the population adequately. Aside from the need for a new

Town Office Building, Fire Department facility, and improvements to the Library, the other municipal structures have received the necessary levels of investment and the roadway system is well maintained. Older adults make up a significant portion of Williamstown's population and may need additional services or support in the years ahead. Incorporating sustainability and resilience objectives into the design and operation of municipal sites, structures, and fleets is a new opportunity for the community to explore and commit to going forward. Related to this, the biggest threat to the existing transportation system, water and sewer system, and stormwater system is from climate change as large isolated storm events have started to impact different areas of the community at various times causing flooding and increased river bank erosion.

Through the passing of town resolutions and the establishment of the Diversity, Racial Equity, and Inclusion Committee, Williamstown



is demonstrating its commitment towards creating a vibrant, safe, and accessible community that supports the lives of all who live, work, and play in town and. Looking ahead, there is opportunity to continue supporting initiatives that yield tangible results for creating a more equitable and inclusive community, celebrating the past and present diversity of Williamstown's residents, and supporting the needs of long-time residents. This must be considered as the Comprehensive Plan identifies needed infrastructure investments and possible land use policies that will guide this changing community over the coming decade.

While the historic structures and sites in the Town Center area contribute to the charm of the community, they alone do not represent an accurate or complete history of Williamstown. Based on the analysis of prior planning efforts and conversations with Town Staff and the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, it appears there is interest in acknowledging and highlighting life in Williamstown prior to the arrival of European settlers to transparently communicate a more complete historical record.

Going forward, the comprehensive planning process will need to engage the residents in thinking about how to best guide future development activity and infrastructure investment to reinforce the community's desired land use pattern and transportation network, while reflecting its core values of building equity, inclusion, sustainability, and resilience into community life. These decisions will then require both regulatory and non-regulatory actions and a clear vision of the future to guide future development activity, conservation, and infrastructure investments. Williamstown is a really wonderful community, and is attracting residents and visitors for good reason. Planning for the next decade or two of life in Williamstown is an opportunity to



make this exceptional and unique community an even better place to live, work, learn, and play.

# OVERARCHING FRAMEWORKS

**Sustainability and community resilience and diversity, equity, and inclusion** have been identified as overarching frameworks for the Envisioning Williamstown 2035 Comprehensive Plan. Unlike the previous 2002 Master Plan, these topics will be foundational in this new Plan. To effectively plan for the future, the community must be good stewards of its natural and built environment; address global challenges, like climate change, with local actions; and be an inclusive community that provide opportunities for existing and potential residents. Because these topics can be viewed through the lenses of many aspects of community life, from transportation, to economic development, to natural resources, they are discussed in each of the following sections of this report to varying degrees.

## SUSTAINABILITY AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Climate change, loss of habitat, and threats to natural resources are impacting communities around the world. Williamstown is aiming to be a more resilient community that is actively addressing these challenges through coordinated, community-based public and private efforts that mitigate the impacts of climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect natural resources and ecosystem services, reduce waste, and increase sustainability.

Since sustainability and community resilience are new topic areas being added to the Williamstown comprehensive planning process, it is important to first define these terms and explain their role in planning for the future of the community.

## WILLIAMSTOWN AS A "GREEN COMMUNITY"

Williamstown has been a "Green Community" since 2010 and participates in the program which has grown steadily since the first group of 35 municipalities to include more than half of the diverse cities and towns of the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts's Green Community Designation and Grant Program provides a road map along with financial and technical support to municipalities that:

- 1) pledge to cut municipal energy use by an ambitious and achievable goal of 20 percent over 5 years and
- 2) meet four other criteria established in the Green Communities Act.

Nearly 87% of the Commonwealth's population reside in designated Green Communities. Of those 280 designated communities, 160 are also considered environmental justice communities. The benefits of designation extend beyond the program itself, inspiring cities and towns to undertake additional energy-related initiatives, improve coordination between municipal staff and departments, and increase messaging with the public at large about energy and climate-related issues and actions. Williamstown has received over \$200,000 in grants to fund energy efficiency programs.

More information on this program is available at:

<https://www.mass.gov/guides/becoming-a-designated-green-community>

**Sustainability** means meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition to natural resources, we also consider the role of social and economic resources.

**Resilience** is the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.

Williamstown has already been hard at work on initiatives that are aligned with community sustainability and resilience. Some examples of this include:

- The creation of the Spruces as a recreation and flood mitigation area after Hurricane Irene
- The completion of the Spring Street “Big Dig” which addressed critical flooding issues
- Ongoing farmland preservation efforts and education on the challenges and benefits of the local food system
- Interest in the establishment of pollinator gardens and community garden spaces
- The Net Zero Resolution and energy conservation efforts in municipal, institutional, and privately owned buildings
- The development of large solar energy systems and successful residential solarize campaigns
- The completion of several energy saving projects in municipal buildings
- The awarded “Green Community” designation by the State of Massachusetts since 2010

Together, community sustainability and resilience planning will ensure that Williamstown is a community that is socially connected, addresses residents’ current challenges while planning for the needs of future generations, and has the ability to withstand future hardships or disasters while fostering community recovery. At the municipal scale, this will require actions be identified and implemented at the site level, town-wide, and into the surrounding region. Through land use regulations, infrastructure investments, and voluntary actions, the community can work together to generate clean energy, protect and rehabilitate natural habitats, and find solutions to other issues.

## **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

The Town of Williamstown is preparing to create a Comprehensive Plan with a forward-looking vision for the future of the community that is equitable and inclusive for all. A town that focuses on meeting the needs of all residents, especially those historically underserved by local government and planning processes, can help create an accessible and welcoming community and an environment in which individuals achieve their full potential. Williamstown’s commitment to becoming a more equitable and inclusive community represents an opportunity to make equity a guiding principle in policy development, infrastructure investment, capital improvement planning, and in local governmental processes and initiatives. This will help address issues that underserved and marginalized communities face including lack of transportation, secure and affordable housing options, food access, social and recreation opportunities, and the need for other support services.

This desire to integrate equity into the Comprehensive Plan builds on a formal commitment the town has made through the passing of Articles 36 and 37. This was an important first step the town has made as it works towards becoming a more inclusive community that celebrates diversity and provides equitable opportunities for all. Aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion that are observed through the analysis of existing conditions in the following sections focus on the following:

- Highlights populations in Williamstown that have historically been marginalized and underserved in land use and community planning.
- Identifies some of the preliminary needs community members of different ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, sexual orientation, genders, income levels, and others may have and that could be addressed through the Comprehensive Plan.
- Summarizes some of the work that the town and other community groups have undertaken to make Williamstown more equitable and inclusive as a community.

For the purposes of this report, the following definitions are being used:

**Diversity** is the presence of differences within a group of people that encompass, but are not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, immigration status, veteran status, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, language, (dis)ability, age, or political belief (American Planning Association). Acknowledging and embracing the diversity that exists in a community can create opportunities for both finding commonalities between different people, while also respecting the unique differences in perspectives and worldviews that exist in everyone,

**Equity** refers to alleviating barriers so that all community members have access to the same opportunities and can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential (American Planning Association). When striving to become a more equitable community, it is recognized that systemic advantages and barriers exist that disproportionately impact certain community members. Equity in planning is broadly concerned with access to resources and opportunities for those who are disadvantaged, seeks to expand choices, and strives to increase agency.

**Inclusion** is when all residents experience a sense of belonging, feel welcomed, are authentically represented, and are encouraged to fully participate in community life.

**Equitable development** should produce quality of life outcomes, such as affordable housing, quality educational opportunities, living wage employment, healthy environments, and accessible transportation choices. These outcomes should be equitably experienced by the people currently living and working in a neighborhood, as well as for new people moving in. Public and private investments, programs, and policies that are equitable should meet the needs of all residents and should consider historic and current conditions.

**Racial equity:** According to the racial equity organization, Race Forward, “racial equity” can be defined as the process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color.



Ultimately, planning for equity works to (American Planning Association):

1. Create and extend opportunities to each member of the community
2. Recognize and help to build the capacity of each member of the community
3. Acknowledge and take action when the attributes of inequity are present
4. Adopt new approaches to planning that fully embrace equity.

The passing of Articles 36: Not in Our County Pledge and 37: Equity Petition; the establishment of the Diversity, Inclusion, and Racial Equity committee; and efforts like the Williamstown CARES project are tangible steps the town has made in accomplishing this work. Williamstown is also carefully looking to reconcile its history and embrace a more holistic and less Euro-centric story of its past to learn and inform the future (see the Cultural and Historic Resources section). Equitably planning for the future of Williamstown will include direct outreach to and participation by the populations in town that are typically underserved and marginalized (such as people of color, youth, older adults, lower income individuals, those with disabilities, those who speak English as a second language, veterans, LGBTQ+ individuals, and others) in local government and planning processes to ensure a bright and vibrant future for all.

Housing is a fundamental need of all community members in Williamstown. Rising housing prices, limited rental units, a need for more affordable housing options, and constraints that impact new development are challenges the Town will need to address in the coming years.



# HOUSING

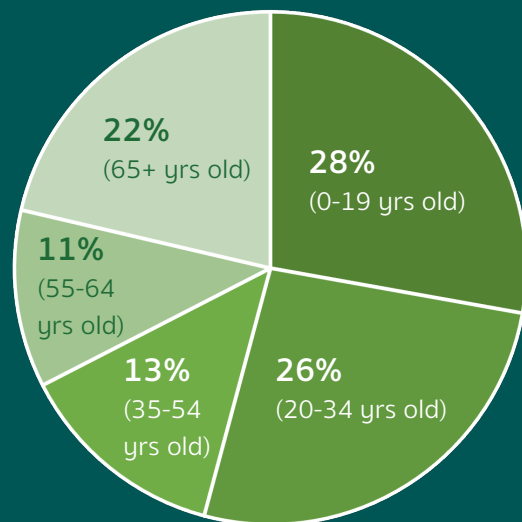
## WILLIAMSTOWN 2022 EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

Williamstown's population decreased by 11 percent from 2000 to 2020 but is projected to increase 18 percent between 2020 and 2040. The 2021 Town Census reported a population of 7,560. This was a 4 percent increase from the Town Census 2020 count of 7,271. About one out of three town residents (28-32%) are Williams College students according to the 2021 Census and Williams College enrollment data.

The town is predominantly White (83 percent) but is more diverse than the County as a whole. Much of this diversity is driven by the student population.

The official subsidized housing inventory (as defined by the state of Massachusetts) accounts for 7.59 percent of the Town's total housing stock. However, using the 2020 housing unit data and including recent construction numbers, the SHI would unofficially increase this to 11 percent, exceeding the 10 percent state requirement.

AGE DISTRIBUTION IN WILLIAMSTOWN  
SOURCE: 2020 CENSUS



The median income has increased from \$63,045 to \$91,258 between 2010 and 2020 (adjusted for inflation). Overall, Williamstown residents are wealthier than residents of Berkshire County as a whole.

28 percent of Williamstown households earn less than 80 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI), potentially making them eligible for subsidized affordable housing.

27 percent of households in the Town are cost burdened, spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. Renters are 2.5 times more likely than owners to face a housing cost burden.

The median home price has risen over 40 percent in the past year to around \$492,000 in 2022, making it difficult for many low and middle income households to compete in the tight housing market.

About 73 percent of Williamstown’s housing units are owner-occupied, and 27 percent are renter occupied. Most renters (90 percent) were below the age of 65, with 24 percent under the age of 35. Homeowners tended to be older, with 93 percent being age 45 and over. Additionally, there is a lack of rental units available at all income levels in Williamstown.

A third of Williamstown’s housing stock was built before 1940, presenting potential difficulties with upkeep and maintenance, and a higher risk of unhealthy building materials.

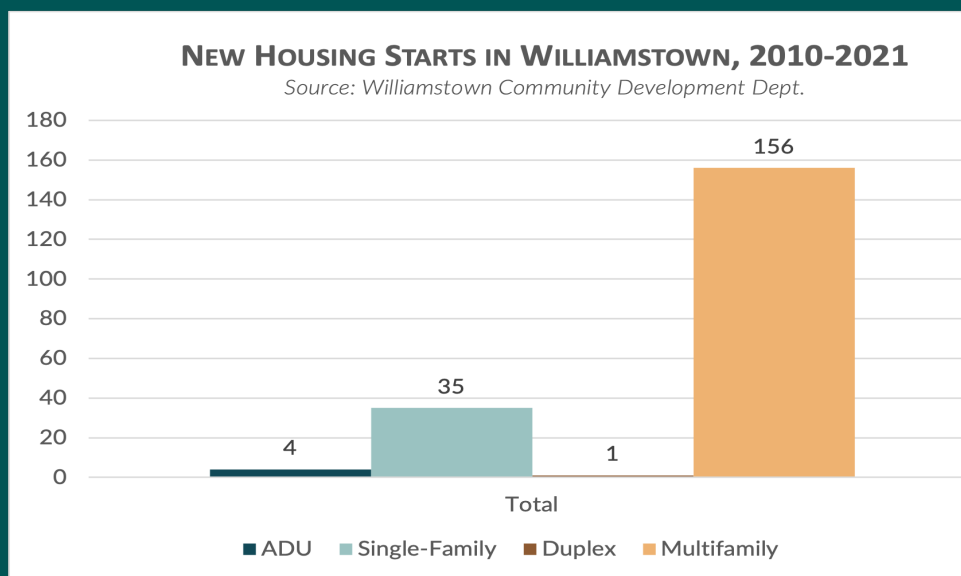
Older residents of Williamstown face issues with older housing, difficulties downsizing, and health conditions associated with aging that can impact their ability to live independently. About 20 percent of Williamstown’s population is over 65

years old. In Williamstown, 59 percent of older residents had some disability or limitation, compared to 19 percent of the overall population.

The Town’s zoning bylaw allows Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and has provisions for required affordable housing production. Several amendments proposed at Town Meeting 2022 to increase capacity for housing production did not come to a vote and were referred back to the Planning Board.

Economic growth in Berkshire County is inhibited by a lack of housing for workers, particularly in the service industries. Providing diverse and convenient housing choices for workers is important for retaining workers in the region and for economic development.

There is a substantial amount of second homes in Williamstown, and a number of short term rental units. According to Williamstown Assessor data, second homes and short-term rentals may comprise around 10 percent of the Town’s housing stock, decreasing the number of units available to Town residents, and thus potentially driving up prices.



Williamstown's local economy is rooted in place and in its many unique assets. The presence of Williams College and an entrepreneurial community has resulted in active commercial areas along Spring Street and Water Street. Its arts and cultural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities draw visitors to the area, and the Town's economic ecosystem includes smaller retail and restaurant businesses, agricultural activity, and one large industrial business headquartered in Town.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

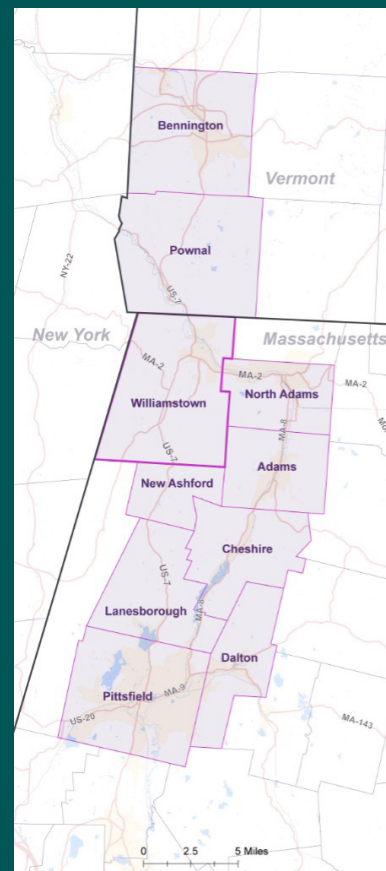
## WILLIAMSTOWN 2022 EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

Williamstown has a fairly stable population that is also very highly-educated and has a large proportion of 18-24 year olds compared to surrounding communities. This is largely due to the presence of Williams College.

Williamstown is part of a 9-ZIP Code "commuter region" that is oriented north-south. Overall, employment in this commuter region – and the key industries within – has shrunk over the last decade. Within the 9-ZIP Code area, Health Care & Social Assistance, with 9,668 jobs, is the industry with the largest employment by a wide margin – approximately 20 percent of all jobs in this commuter region are in this industry, and account for 3,000 more jobs than in any other industry.

Many of the predominant industries in the region are service-related; notably jobs in Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation; Retail Trade; Health Care & Social Assistance; and Educational Services are all unusually common in the commuter region.

Approximately two-thirds of workers that work in Williamstown do not live in Williamstown. Less than a third of Williamstown workers are residents of Williamstown.



Map of Williamstown 9-ZIP Code Commute Shed

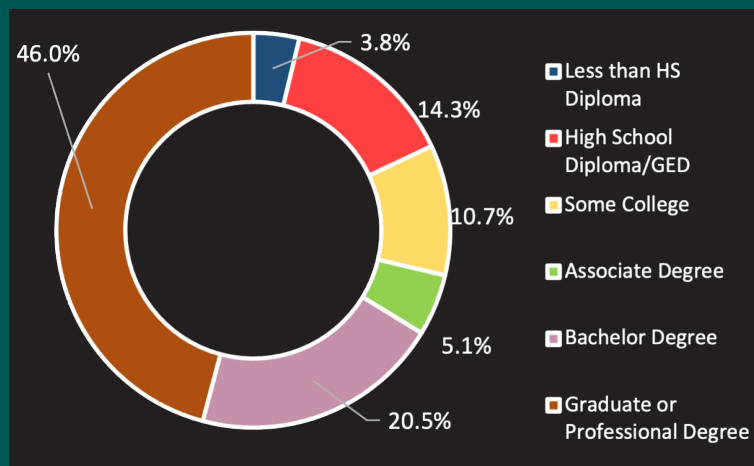
Williamstown has a highly-skilled and high-earning resident population, but there is very little flexibility in the labor market due to extremely low unemployment both locally and regionally.

As a result, it is more difficult for local companies to hire full-time employees.

Williamstown hosts several commercial districts that have specific roles within the town – serving local populations or visitors, anchor institutions or international customers and clients; contributing to quality of life as amenities unto themselves or as important sources of employment. These include Spring Street, Water Street/Route 43, Cole Avenue, Route 7, Sand Springs/Broad Brook, and Route 2/ Mohawk Trail.

There are unique characteristics of Williamstown that help define its economic development strengths and opportunities. The town/gown relationship with the college, world-renowned cultural attractions such as The Clark and the Williamstown Theatre Festival, a long history of agriculture, and ample outdoor recreation resources all contribute significantly to Williamstown’s economic and cultural identity and can guide priorities for the future.

Despite these opportunities, reliance on anchor institutions like the college, that are not likely to grow significantly, will be a challenge for Williamstown. Increasing economic diversity and opportunities for business development and growth is crucial for Williamstown’s future, and there are several organizations that have formed to address these needs.



Currently, there is relatively little commercial and industrial land in town and opportunities to lease commercial or industrial space in Williamstown is very limited.. The very limited commercial and industrial real estate market in town – in part, due to limited land designated for such uses – and the fact that, on average, spaces are quite old, may make it difficult to attract certain types of new businesses.

Tax revenues are highly dependent on residential uses, though the percentage of the tax levy coming from such uses has decreased over the past decade.

Sustainability and resilience related issues are often also economic and equity related issues as well. The impacts of climate change often disproportionately affect those individuals who have lower incomes. For example, in Williamstown, the many of the homes at the Spruces Mobile Home Park were destroyed by Hurricane Irene. Upfront costs are often required in order to get program or infrastructure changes in place, and this is a barrier to some residents and businesses. For those who are able to participate, these investments yield many additional benefits that will be realized over time and future costs that will be avoided.

A multi-modal transportation system provides safe, convenient, and accessible opportunities to move around Town (and in the broader region). Williamstown's dense and walkable Town Center and existing transit services opportunities for additional improvements that enhance the connectivity for vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and others.



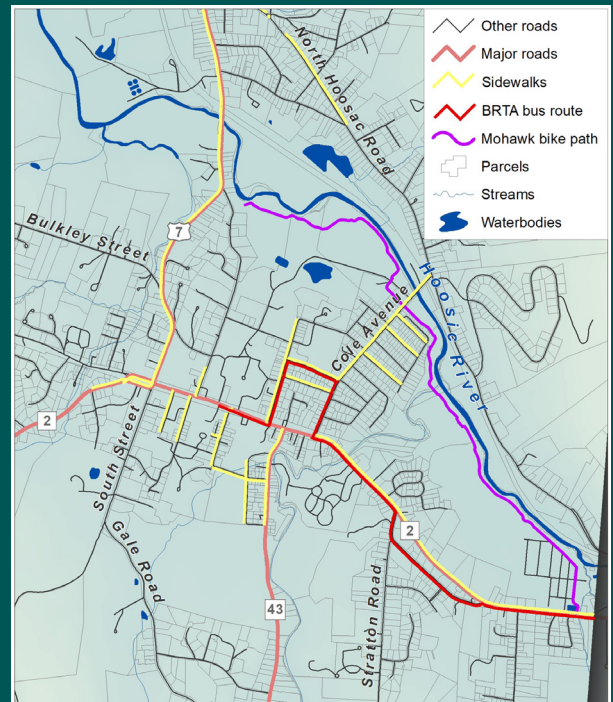
# TRANSPORTATION

## WILLIAMSTOWN 2022 EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

While there are some identified deficiencies in the existing transportation system, Williamstown has been forward thinking and has actively taken steps toward a more equitable and environmentally friendly transportation network. This is demonstrated by the Town's steps taken to become a Complete Street community, including the adoption of a Complete Streets Policy in 2016.

Williamstown has 16 miles of sidewalk that are maintained year round. These are mostly within the village center area, along main roads, and in nearby neighborhoods.

Off-road pathways represent unique opportunities for transportation connections. Both the Appalachian Trail and the soon-to be complete Mohawk Multi-Use Path are unique transportation corridors that have the potential to contribute to the pedestrian and bicycle transportation network.



Williamstown's Transportation Network in the Town Center

Source: MassGIS, Town of Williamstown, Resilience Planning and Design Planning and Design

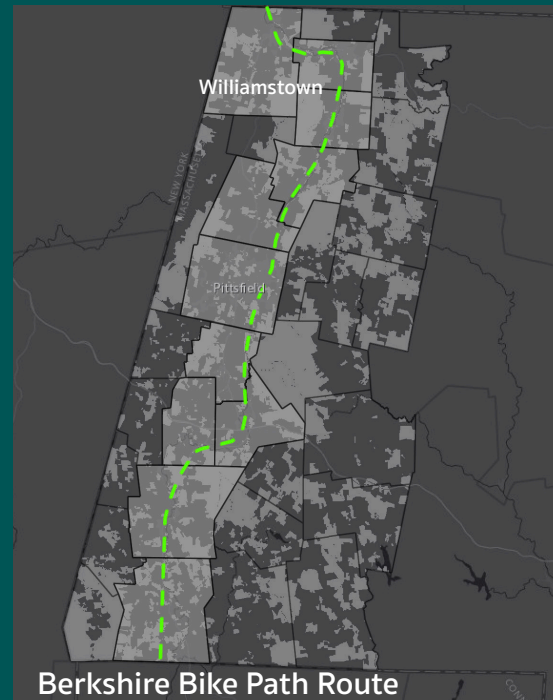
According to the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA), between July 1, 2017 and January 1, 2022 a total of 44,848 passenger boardings were recorded in Williamstown. There are a total of four transit providers that offer service to Williamstown residents.

Access to transit options in Williamstown is limited. Improving this access may require innovative solutions that will provide residents and employees with additional transportation alternatives. Related to this need for improved access is a desire to relocate the existing bus stop closer to the Town Center, and to add weekend bus service in coordination with area transit providers.

Accessibility needs and the economics of transportation should be further investigated through this planning process so that all residents/travelers are accommodated to the best extent feasible as transportation infrastructure and service improvements are made. This is reflected in the Town's commitment to make Williamstown an equitable place to live for all.

The overall condition of the roadways, bridges, and culverts are excellent, but the changing intensity of storms due to climate change poses new challenges to the maintenance and repair of this infrastructure. Increasing the resiliency of Williamstown's transportation infrastructure to the impacts of climate change will continue to be a need in the future.

There are currently 14 electric vehicle charging locations in Williamstown. The current shift to electric vehicles needs to be considered in the build out of infrastructure, the siting of future charging locations, and the budgeting of municipal fleet replacements.



In Williamstown 10.3% of households do not own a vehicle. Some of these households have no workers, perhaps lessening the need for a vehicle, but given the geography of the Berkshires this can still make travel a challenge.

As the region works to create new transportation solutions, Williamstown should participate in these efforts towards expanding alternative transportation options including carpool matching, emergency rides home, vanpooling, and other options to the employers in the community as valid ways to address commuter needs.

There is a strong relationship between the need for transportation alternatives, and the local and regional housing affordability and economic development goals. Transportation, housing, and economic development efforts should be integrated to achieve greater coordination.

Providing high-quality public facilities, services, and infrastructure is an important function of town government. In Williamstown, there are some facilities that are in need of greater attention over the next ten years and some gaps in both infrastructure and services that the town should consider as it plans for its future.



# PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

## WILLIAMSTOWN 2022 EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

Town Hall is in need of a new, more modernized building that adequately supports staff and is more accessible to the public. While the location near the center of Town is ideal, the building is old, antiquated, and lacks the modern layout and accessibility of a newer public building. Since the building is closing in on 100 years old, it lacks modern systems like sprinklers, fire alarms, and a central HVAC system.

The number of older adults continues to comprise an increasing share of the town's overall population. Yet the Harper Center for the Council on Aging has not been improved or expanded since its construction in 1980.

Residents are seeking options for expanding outdoor recreation fields and facilities in Williamstown with several options that could ease pressures on existing fields.

The Williamstown Fire District is in need of a new, modern fire station facility to replace the current one constructed in 1950. To that end, the Fire Department purchased a 3.76-acre parcel of land located at 560 Main Street for the future construction of a roughly 19,000 square foot fire station. The Fire District created a Building Committee and a Community Advisory Committee to guide the process of funding and constructing the new station.



The Town does not currently have in-house IT staff and uses a combination of external consultants and the limited capabilities of Town staff.

Improvements and expansions of the water system need to be considered to ensure Williamstown residents have access to the Town's public water system. According to the Public Works Department, there is some additional capacity for additional growth and expansion of the water and sewer systems. Aging water service on the north side of town requires significant investment.

With climate change impacting the frequency, strength, and duration of storms, the Town needs to consider investing more in replacing and possibly relocating critical water and wastewater infrastructure away from rivers and streams. The Town's Department of Public Works also maintains the stormwater system in Town.


Williamstown has been actively working on sustainability and resilience related efforts which include: the Spruces recreation and flood mitigation area, a Net Zero Resolution, energy conservation efforts, the development of large solar energy arrays and successful solarize campaigns, and its status as a pollinator friendly community. Collaborators such as the Cool Committee are essential to these efforts.

Town of Williamstown Facilities Overview		
Facility	Address	Size (Sq. Ft.)
Town Hall (1927)	31 North Street	12,180
DPW Garage and Yard (1998)	675 Simonds Road	24,555
Police Department (2019)	825 Simonds Road	12,000
Burbank Memorial Chapel (1920)	605 Main Street	2,086
Milne Public Library (1967)	1095 Main Street	16,950
Williamstown Elementary School (2001)	115 Church Street	12,367
Harper Center for the Council on Aging (1985) (leased by Town from Berkshire Housing Corp)	118 Church Street	4,520
<b>TOTAL BUILT SPACE:</b>	---	<b>80,138</b>

An infrastructure limitation exists with the limited capacity of the National Grid system to accommodate future large scale renewable energy projects in Williamstown. This is a significant issue and an opportunity for collaboration with other agencies and organizations on solutions that will support the town's goals for renewable energy production.

Williamstown passed a net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) resolution in 2021. This involves the creation of a climate action plan by 2023. A municipal GHG emissions inventory would also help provide a baseline understanding that can inform efforts to reach the Town's Net Zero goal.

There is an opportunity for the Town to set green building standards through the identification and adoption of zoning and building code provisions that either incentivize or require new development to address energy conservation and renewable energy production.



Williamstown's natural resources provide important ecosystem services to all community members including clean air, clean water, healthy soil, wildlife habitat, climate change mitigation, a sense of place, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

# NATURAL RESOURCES

## WILLIAMSTOWN 2022 EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

The Hoosic River and the Green River drain the two main watersheds in the town, part of a 41.2-mile network of streams and rivers in Williamstown.

The waterways of Williamstown are a key natural resource element of the community, supporting wildlife and recreation while also threatening the town with flooding, sedimentation, and ice jams historically and with predicted greater occurrence in the future. 29 miles of the Hoosic River have been state-designated as a Natural Scenic River. Hopper and Money Brooks, two tributaries on the west side of Mount Greylock, are also state-designated Natural Scenic Rivers.

The Hoosic River is listed as impaired for aquatic life, fish consumption, and primary contact recreation. As a municipality, Williamstown can and should play a role in watershed protection and restoration

efforts for impaired waterways such as the Hoosic River.

The steep valleys and deep ravines of Williamstown are a key defining feature, with the Taconic Mountain Range, the Mount Greylock complex, and the foothills of the Green Mountains bordering the town. These steep slopes with thin, erodible soils have historically confined development and agriculture to the narrow river valleys of Williamstown.

Prime farmland soils compose 17% of the Town of Williamstown and farmland soils of local importance compose 22% of the town, with these soils mainly located in the fertile river valleys.

There has been a dramatic decline of working agricultural lands over the last 50-75 years as 90% of the town's farms have been lost, mostly

to low-density residential sprawl, a trend seen across all of Berkshire County.

**Forest lands cover 76% of the town, and the Upland Conservation District protects forests in high elevation.** Forest cover on the mountainsides and slopes helps mitigate flash flooding and erosion. Forests also provide valuable carbon sequestration, especially mature trees such as those found in Hopkins Forest.

**Climate change will impact New England forests such as those found in Williamstown.** Effects include more variable soil moisture as precipitation patterns change, increased risk of drought, stress from forest pests and diseases, competition from invasive species, and changes in the distribution of trees and forest competition.

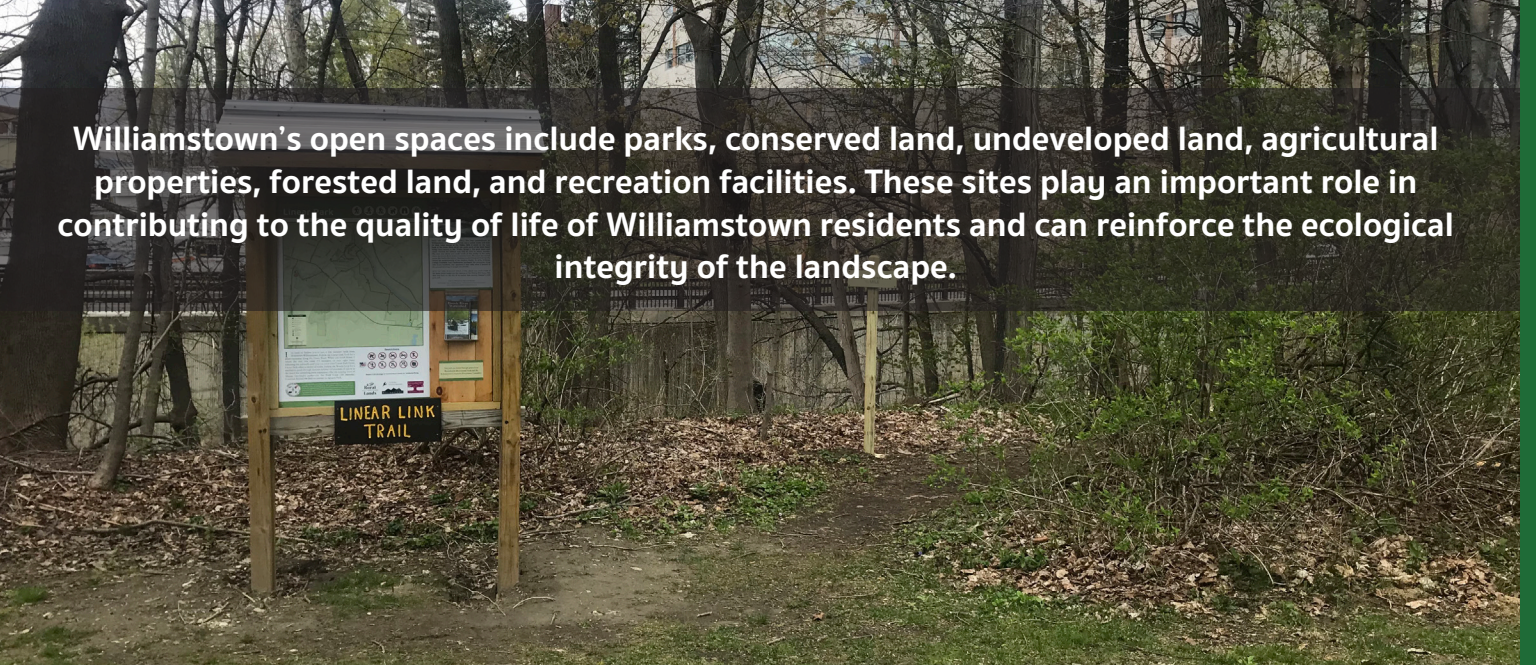
**Twenty-two (22) square miles of Williamstown are identified as core habitat by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program,** composed of the town's forests, wetlands, meadows, and streamside ecosystems mainly on the mountainous edges of the town where large blocks of land remain undeveloped.

**Flooding is the main natural hazard concern for Williamstown and is common during spring melt and thaw cycles.** The Northeast Climate Science (NECS) center predicts both precipitation and temperatures will increase due to climate change, exacerbating melt/thaw cycles and making flooding worse. Within Berkshire County, NECS predicts precipitation increases of 3.55 inches of annual precipitation by the 2050s, and temperature annual increases of 3.3-7.0 degrees Fahrenheit by the mid-century.

**Thirty six percent (36%) of Williamstown is conserved land.** Future conservation priorities may include wetlands, streamside areas, and agricultural land. The Hoosic Valley Confined Aquifer from which Williamstown draws its public water is a very valuable resource and is highly vulnerable to contamination because the clay layer that protects the aquifer does not extend throughout the entire recharge area, leaving the recharge vulnerable to pollution from development.

**Given the importance of water resources in the town – including the aquifer and waterways – preventing non-point source pollution is important for the town especially in light of the development pressures.** It is more cost effective to incorporate low impact development (LID) and green infrastructure ahead of development verses through stormwater control retrofits. The Town should consider incorporating LID and green infrastructure requirements into new development standards.

**The steep topography and changes in rainfall amounts related to climate change are creating localized flooding, erosion, and infrastructure issues.** Future weather events will continue to impact properties within the identified floodplain areas, but others that are outside of the mapped floodplains will be impacted as well.



Williamstown's open spaces include parks, conserved land, undeveloped land, agricultural properties, forested land, and recreation facilities. These sites play an important role in contributing to the quality of life of Williamstown residents and can reinforce the ecological integrity of the landscape.

# PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND RECREATION

## WILLIAMSTOWN 2022 EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

36%, or 11,389 acres of land in Williamstown are conserved. While many neighboring towns have higher percentages of conserved lands, many of those communities' benefit from significant state land holdings. Additional lands exist in Williamstown that are publicly accessible that are not officially conserved.

While municipal lands only account for 6% of Williamstown's open spaces, the municipal properties that exist provide opportunities for recreation relatively close to the town center and play critical roles in connecting other publicly accessible lands.

The State of Massachusetts has many significant land holdings in Williamstown and accounts for 62% of open space lands. Additionally, substantial open space lands are owned by land trusts and other private entities, which account for a combined 31% of open spaces.

For the purposes of this section, "open space" is being defined in accordance with the State of Massachusetts's definition as "undeveloped land with particular conservation or recreation interest". This includes conservation land, forested land, recreation land, active and fallow agricultural land and views, or any open area that is owned by an agency or organization dedicated to conservation."

Several private institutions play critical roles in Williamstown's open space and recreation networks. Of these institutions, Williams College is the largest land holder with publicly accessible properties in the village center and owns other properties that abut important forested lands and state properties.

**Williamstown has done a great job developing open space opportunities with the Spruces and Linear Park along the Hoosic and Green Rivers.**

These areas are proximate to the center of town and provide important recreational options for residents and visitors.

**The Town does not have a Parks & Recreation Department. Recreational programming is provided by schools and non-profit organizations such as the Williamstown Youth Center, Sand Springs Pool, and others, which offers programming and general support for children in grades K-8. However, there are limited programs available for older children beyond what is offered at the regional high school.**

**The Williamstown Council on Aging provides recreational programming for the older residents and the senior population in town. Barriers still exist in the form of communication and transportation (although transportation options are offered through Berkshire Regional Transit Authority).**

**Athletic field space is in high demand from the various activities requiring that resource. As a result, scheduling conflicts exist as do field maintenance and safety concerns from overuse. The Town needs to address the limited field space, while balancing other needs in the community.**

**The identified recreation facility access issues are not easily addressed without dedicated staff, which is another major hurdle for Williamstown. The lack of a formal Parks & Recreation Department means there is limited capacity for the Town to address these complex needs.**

**The existing trail network in town is extensive and includes over 108 miles of trails including the Appalachian Trail. 70% of trails are on permanently protected lands. These trails exist on municipal, state, and privately-owned lands. The Town has done a good job codifying the relationships with private entities to ensure the trails exist for public use for years to come.**

**The Mohawk Bike/Ped Path that was started in 2021 with federal funding will be a tremendous resource for residents and visitors and continues the recreational and open space development along the Hoosic River.**

**There are 16 active farms in Williamstown and 4,184 acres of land in agricultural production. According to the GIS data available by the Town and MassGIS, the average farm size in Williamstown is 262 acres. Significant pressures exist on agricultural operations and farmlands in Williamstown. While there are programs in place to conserve agricultural lands, there continues to be a slow loss across Berkshire County including Williamstown. Ultimately, creative and collaborative solutions must be identified to reduce the burden on farmers for maintaining open spaces that are greatly valued by the public.**

**Williamstown's remaining farmland resources are deserving of permanent protection from development so they can be part of a future food system in the region. Connections to these larger landscapes from the village center and neighborhoods should include smaller scale habitat regeneration in town including "No mow" areas, pollinator gardens, and other site improvements.**

Arts, culture, and history are represented throughout Williamstown in the historic sites, landscapes, and buildings; economic development and tourism efforts; world-class museums, exhibits, and installations; and in the stories about who historically and currently lives in this community and on its land.



# CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

## WILLIAMSTOWN 2022 EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

Arts and culture are significant drivers of the tourism economy in Williamstown. Ten percent of jobs in Williamstown are in Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation and Food Service according to the 2020 American Community Survey. This is similar to the share in Berkshire County and more than the 8.6 percent of jobs statewide.

Tourism was increasing significantly pre-Covid and is likely to continue to increase barring future pandemic-related issues. There is opportunity to continue building historic and cultural preservation work with tourism efforts, as appropriate.

The Williamstown Theatre Festival is a major event on the national theater scene for emerging and established playwrights, directors, and actors, and a major driver of tourism to the town.

The Clark Institute and Williams College Museum of Art are part of a larger network of major art museums in the Berkshires. These museums are the anchors of the town's cultural landscape and attract many visitors as well as catering to residents. Williams College has recently engaged an architect to begin preliminary design work for a new art museum on the site of the former Williams Inn.

Williamstown contains four National Register Historic Districts and two Individual Properties on the National Register, including the Mill Village and Five Corners Historic Districts with a variety of historic buildings and the Mount Greylock Summit Historic District with a combination of natural scenery and mid-century monumental architecture.

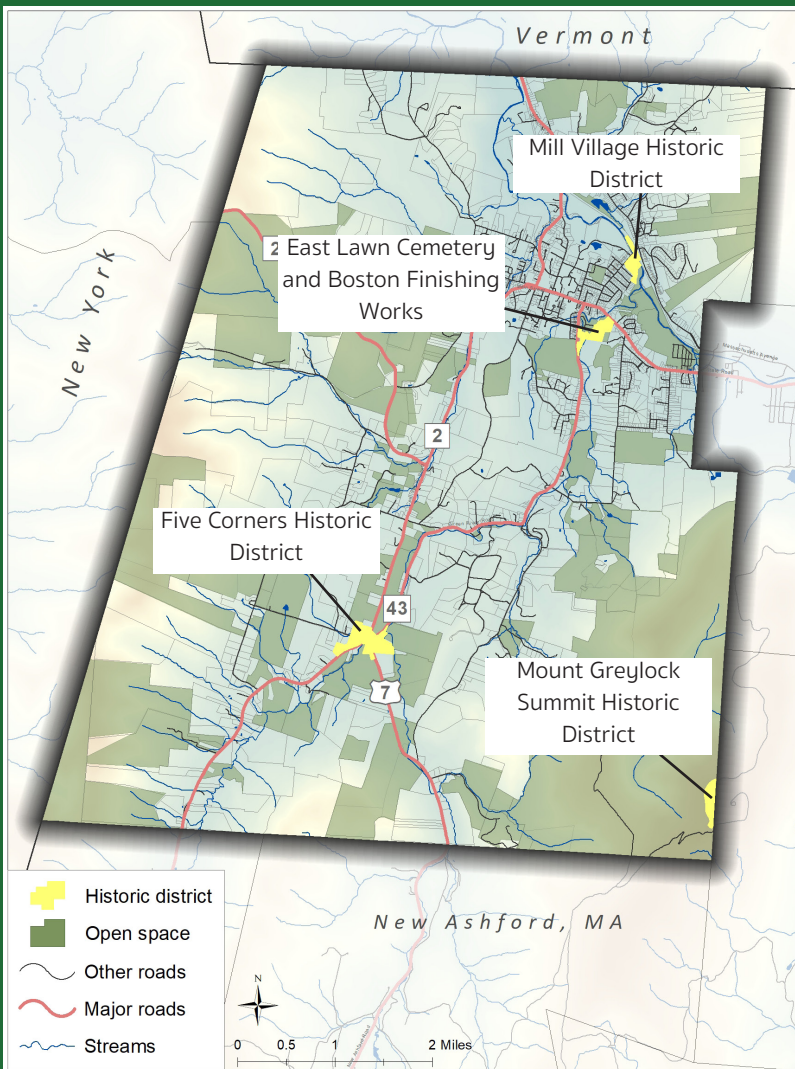
The recent establishment of the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribal Historic Preservation Office in Williamstown restores a local presence of original inhabitants of the land now called

Williamstown, whom were displaced to Wisconsin due to colonization.

The Stockbridge-Munsee Tribal Historic Preservation Office would like to see better archaeological research and protections, potential inclusion of Native American sites on the National Register, and the opening of a public-facing museum in the Town.

A partnership with the Town could help achieve these critical projects that protect important cultural indigenous sites and elevate the history of the Stockbridge-Munsee tribe of the Mohicans.

Williamstown was an early adopter of the Community Preservation Act (CPA), with \$5.5 million in total CPA funds raised to date. CPA has funded many historic preservation initiatives and represents an ongoing stable funding source.



Above: National Register Districts and Individual Properties in Williamstown

Williamstown's land use pattern is characterized by a vibrant village center, a college campus, historic architecture, a mix of walkable neighborhoods and low-density residential development, rolling hills, sweeping vistas, open pastures, and woodlands.



# LAND USE

## WILLIAMSTOWN 2022 EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

Residential uses account for more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of land in town (27%). Density of residential uses vary from the higher density neighborhoods near the village center to the lower-density residential development in the more rural areas of town.

**The Rural Residence 1 Zone accounts for nearly 50% of Williamstown** and only 10% of that zone is currently accommodating residential uses. This upland district has many environmental constraints that does not support residential development.

**The General Residence Zone only accounts for 11% of the town's area** and nearly two-thirds of that zone is currently accommodating residential uses.

Although the business and industrial zones represent a small percentage of the town's area, they provide important economic development for the Town and region. Commercial areas are located in parts of the village center including along Route 2 east of village center, Route 43 in the immediate village center area, along Route 7 near the Vermont border, and smaller areas near the Cole Avenue and North Hoosic Road intersection. Industrial areas include west of Route 7 near the Vermont border, between the Hoosic River and North Hoosic Road, and a smaller area near the intersection of Route 2 and 43.

**40% of Williamstown's land area is currently occupied by tax-exempt uses.** Tax-exempt land includes land owned by the

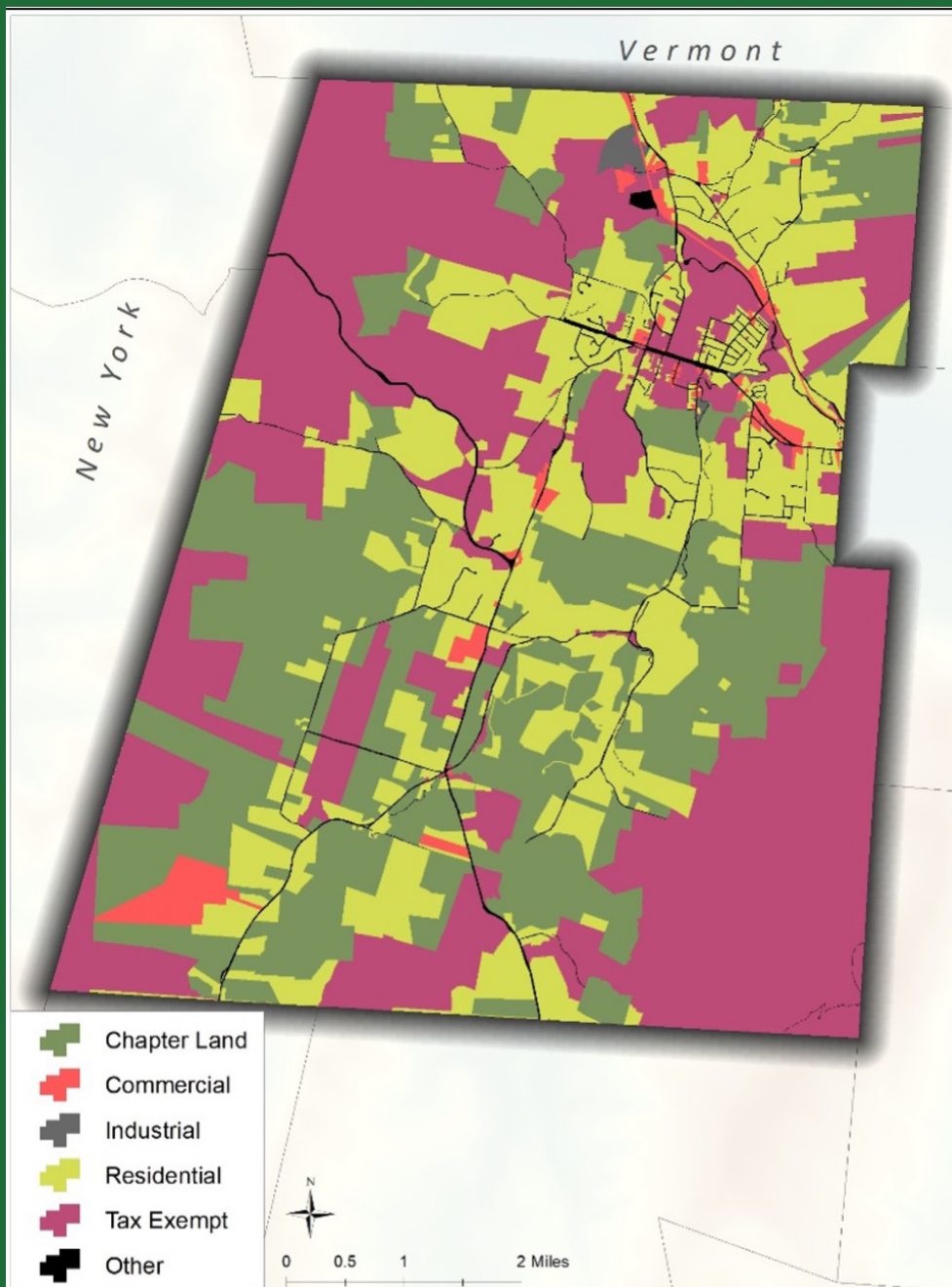


Town, state agencies, Williams College, and other public entities.

**Chapter land accounts for nearly 1/3rd (29%) of Williamstown's existing land use.** Chapter land is designated through the agricultural and horticultural land classification program under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 61. It is designed to encourage the preservation of the Commonwealth's valuable farmland and promote active agricultural

and horticultural land use. Chapter lands include forested lands, agricultural lands, and recreational lands.

**There are seven overlay districts in Williamstown.** These include the Floodplain District, Upland Conservation District, Mobile Home Park District, Water Resource 1 and 2 and Confined Aquifer District, Wellhead Protection District, Waubeeka Overlay District, and the Cable Mills Redevelopment District.



**Existing Land Use in Williamstown**