

Williamstown, MA

Open Space and Recreation Plan

Adopted XX , 2024



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1) Plan Summary

The 2023 update to the Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was the result of a public participation process that involved both local citizens and local officials and board members, along with analysis of ecological and natural resources needs of the community, to develop a set of broad based goals and vision surrounding the protection of our community's open space and recreational assets. This plan builds on work completed by past citizens of Williamstown with previous OSRP processes having been conducted in 1995, 2005, and 2016. The plan update was commissioned to Berkshire Regional Planning Commission by Williamstown Community Development Director Andrew Groff and the Conservation Commission. The consultants were aided by the contributions of various Stakeholders and advisors including Williamstown Town staff members, Williams College Faculty, Non-profit land trust and environmental advocacy organizations, and the concurrent Master Planning process to develop the OSRP. The town hosted two back-to-back community forum events at the Williamstown Youth Center on October 13, 2021.

The draft document was reviewed by the Conservation Commission and was available for review and public comment during January of 2024. Discussion of goals for the updated plan were presented at Conservation Commission Meetings in April, August, and December of 2023. These goals are set forth below, it is the hope of the Conservation Commission that this plan will serve as a guidebook for major decisions concerning open space and natural resource protection as well as recreational choices for the Williamstown community in the ensuing years.

1. Protect, conserve, and steward Williamstown's shared natural resources through regulations, conservation, and nature-based solutions.
 - a. Identify priority areas for protection.
 - b. Safeguard protection of priority lands, including by working with private landowners
 - c. Ensure good stewardship of town-owned open space and parklands.
 - d. Guarantee protection of drinking water supplies
 - e. Diligently protect lands subject to Wetlands Protection Act and River Protection Act
2. Provide and maintain a well-designed, affordable, and integrated multi-modal transportation network that is accessible, convenient, and well-connected for diverse modes of travel.
 - a. Protect and improve existing bikeways and foot pathways.
 - b. Develop new bikeways and foot pathways as opportunities arise.
 - c. Increase linkages between bikeways and foot pathways.
 - d. Enhance public information on bikeways and foot pathways.
 - e. Ensure widespread ADA access throughout town.
3. Support agricultural land preservation and agricultural businesses viability.

- a. Work with agricultural community on enrolling in open space preservation protections such as CR, APR, and Chap. 61 programs.
 - b. Support farming in the local economy, Williamstown Farmer's Market, increased purchasing and production from local farmers.
 - c. Develop a prioritized list of farm properties to be conserved.
4. Develop and maintain access to waterways.
 - a. Maintain existing waterway access locations.
 - b. Identify proposed locations for increased waterway access.
5. Prioritize stewardship resources and funding for public and private lands in Williamstown.
 - a. Develop and implement management plans as appropriate.
 - b. Develop partnerships and volunteer networks.
 - c. Research grants and other sources of funding
 - d. Utilize CPA funding as available.
6. Create Parks/Recreation Committee to oversee and coordinate parks usage, improvements, or assign this role to a existing/new staff member
 - a. Assign oversight responsibilities to one town body or employee for parks/open space coordination (Parks Commission)
 - b. Coordinate use of town fields/facilities through online platform or Parks Commission group
7. Investigate opportunities for new or improved recreational uses in town, including: dog park, pickleball courts, mountain biking trails, additional basketball courts, skate park
 - a. Identify potential additional athletic fields/facilities.
 - b. Partner with private schools such as Buxton or Pine Cobble to develop memorandum of understanding for field use.
 - c. Identify additional potential sites for town acquisition for athletic fields.
 - d. Work with Purple Valley Trail Alliance to develop mountain biking trail network in town.

2) Introduction

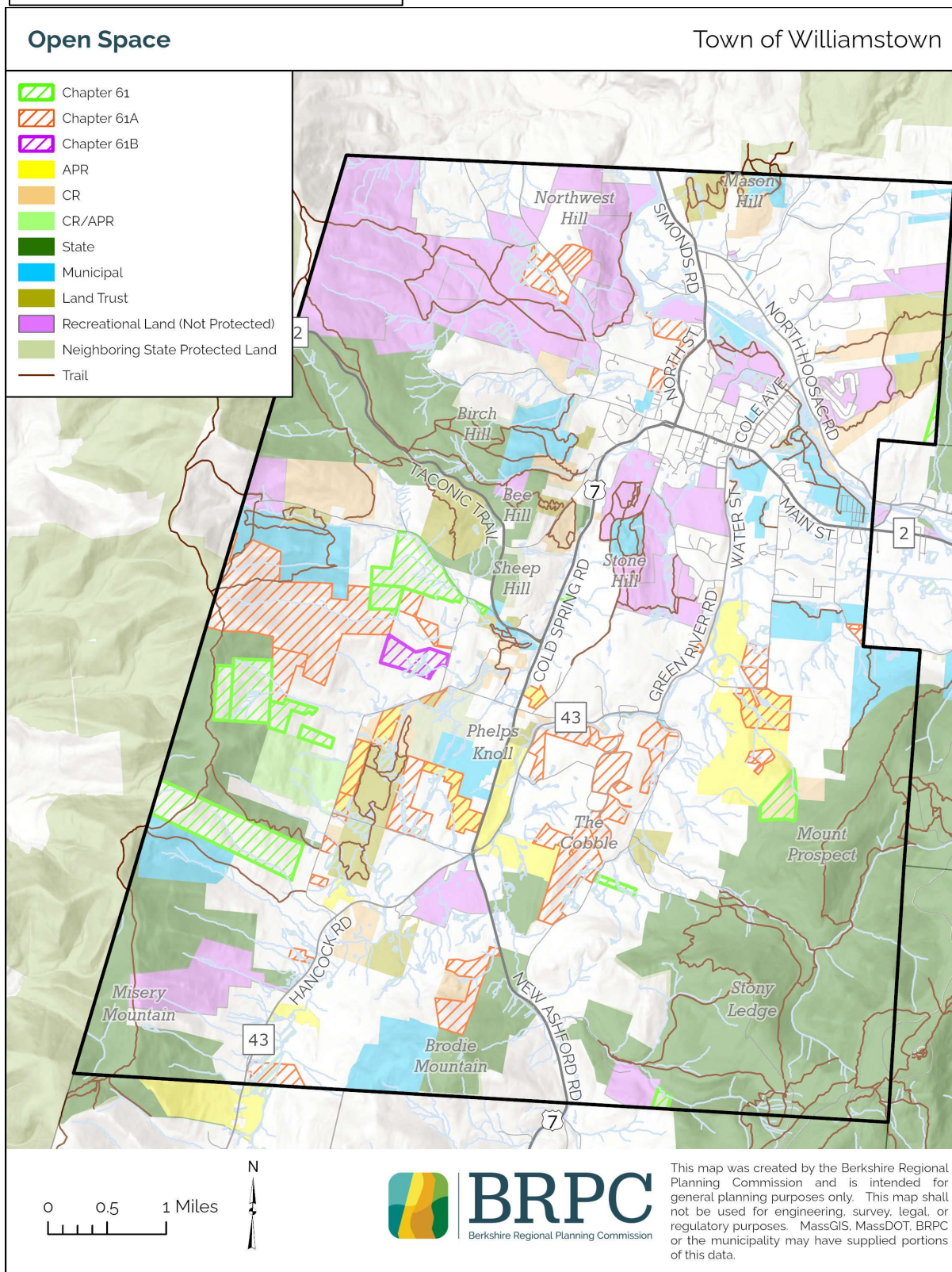
A) Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this 2023 Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) is to document Williamstown's existing wealth of undeveloped, open space and outdoor recreation lands in order to develop informed strategies and actions to protect and enhance these resources for current and future generations. The Plan evaluates the available natural and recreational resources and establishes clear and consistent goals for prioritizing improvements and acquisitions which will best reflect the community's interest in promoting, reserving and enhancing its open space and recreational facilities. In furtherance of these objectives, the Plan is designed to:

- A. Review open lands owned by the state, Town, non-profit organizations, and residents with lands enrolled in Chapter 61, 61A and 61B of the Commonwealth's General Statutes and also examine lands conserved under the state's conservation restriction and agricultural preservation restriction programs, including lands managed by the Conservation Commission, the Select Board and the Planning Board;
- B. Address actions required in order to preserve natural resources and open space and examine ways to update the community's recreation options in light of its residential survey results while at the same time identifying the limiting factors and management issues affecting these improvements;
- C. Develop both short-term and long-term goals to organize the current and future open space and recreation needs of the Town; and
- D. Work in partnership with the overall goals and actions being developed as part of the Town's Master Planning process, Envisioning Williamstown 2035 and those found within the OSRPs of our neighboring towns.

Open spaces in the town are demonstrated in Figure 1 and include public (both state and municipal), private, protected, and unprotected lands within the town.

Figure 1: Town of Williamstown Open Space Map



B)

Planning Process and Public Participation

A public forum and stakeholder interviews were conducted in October of 2021 at the Williamstown Youth Center (located within the identified Environmental Justice or EJ Community boundaries) and through an online survey tool. The events were timed to correspond with after-school pickup of students and then later in the evening for community members after work hours. The Youth Center is contiguous to the College campus and in the center of the Environmental Justice census tract identified in Williamstown. Members of the community were oriented to the project and then invited to provide feedback on a variety of topics including, Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, Natural Resources, Land Use, Parks, Open Spaces, and Recreation, Historic and Cultural Resources, and Public Facilities and Services. An electronic survey was available for those unable to attend the in-person event, and the combined responses from community members totaled more than 156 responses.

To ensure that underrepresented community members were given voice, direct stakeholder outreach was made to the following groups: Williams College students, local elementary and high school students, seniors, and low-income residents. For the OSRP, responses focused on a variety of topics, including: Natural Resources, Land Use, Parks, Open Spaces, and Recreation and Public Facilities and Services (the complete results of this Forum can be found in the appendix to the document.)

In addition to the survey, the Conservation Commission held an open forum discussion for public input related to the OSRP on August 8, 2023. Senior citizens were also given an opportunity to voice their opinions at a meeting in the Harper Center Council on Aging (COA) facility. Finally, pre-teens and teens at the public middle and high schools participated in focus groups. Some of the major findings from the surveys and focus groups are desires for expanded renewable energy production, embracing nature-based solutions, supporting local food production, and improving public transportation alternatives.

The public survey asked questions such as, “How accessible are the parks, open space lands, and recreational offerings in Williamstown (including cultural and social programs, sports, trails, fields, parks, etc.) for all residents?”, “What are the top three parks, open space, or recreation properties you use in Williamstown and what activities do you enjoy at each?”, “What are the barriers to making Williamstown’s parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities accessible to all?” and “What new recreation uses or program offerings should be planned for in the future?” The complete set of questions and responses is included in the appendix to this document. These community opinions are the basis of the recommendations for improvements to open space and recreation in this report.

Additionally, a group of Williams College students, working with Williams College Faculty

Figure 2: Flyer for Goals and Implementation Forum



member Sarah Gardner, Director of Community Development Andrew Groff, and Steve Whitman and Liz Kelly, of Resilience Planning and Design conducted targeted outreach to underrepresented populations including: youth (k-12), Seniors, Low-income residents, Williams College Students, and individuals employed in Williamstown. Through these efforts, they were able to reach more than 450 individuals in the town.

A public forum was held on October 3, 2023 to get feedback from community members on Goals and Objectives presented in the plan. This event was held at the Harper Center COA facility at proprietors Fields in the EJ Community area. Figure 2 shows the flyer for the event. Flyers were posted at the town’s library, at the William’s College Student Union (Paresky Center), at the local Wild Oats Market, at the 330 Cole Avenue Apartments, and was emailed to a variety of student groups and organizations, including the Davis Center for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the Center for Environmental Studies. The

results of the presentation, which was delivered using the interactive Mentimeter program are included in the appendix of the document. Participants were also offered paper copies of the presentation during the event.

Participants offered a variety of recommendations at the October 3rd Forum. Not surprisingly, many of the participants were older individuals and expressed concerns about programming available to seniors in the town. They were concerned about the condition of town sidewalks and gaps in the sidewalk network, about the availability of benches and bathrooms at consistent intervals in the town, and about the town’s leash laws and unleashed dogs knocking over pedestrian in town parks and on town trails. They wanted more events and hikes geared toward older citizens and improved signage and wayfinding in the town directing people to parks.

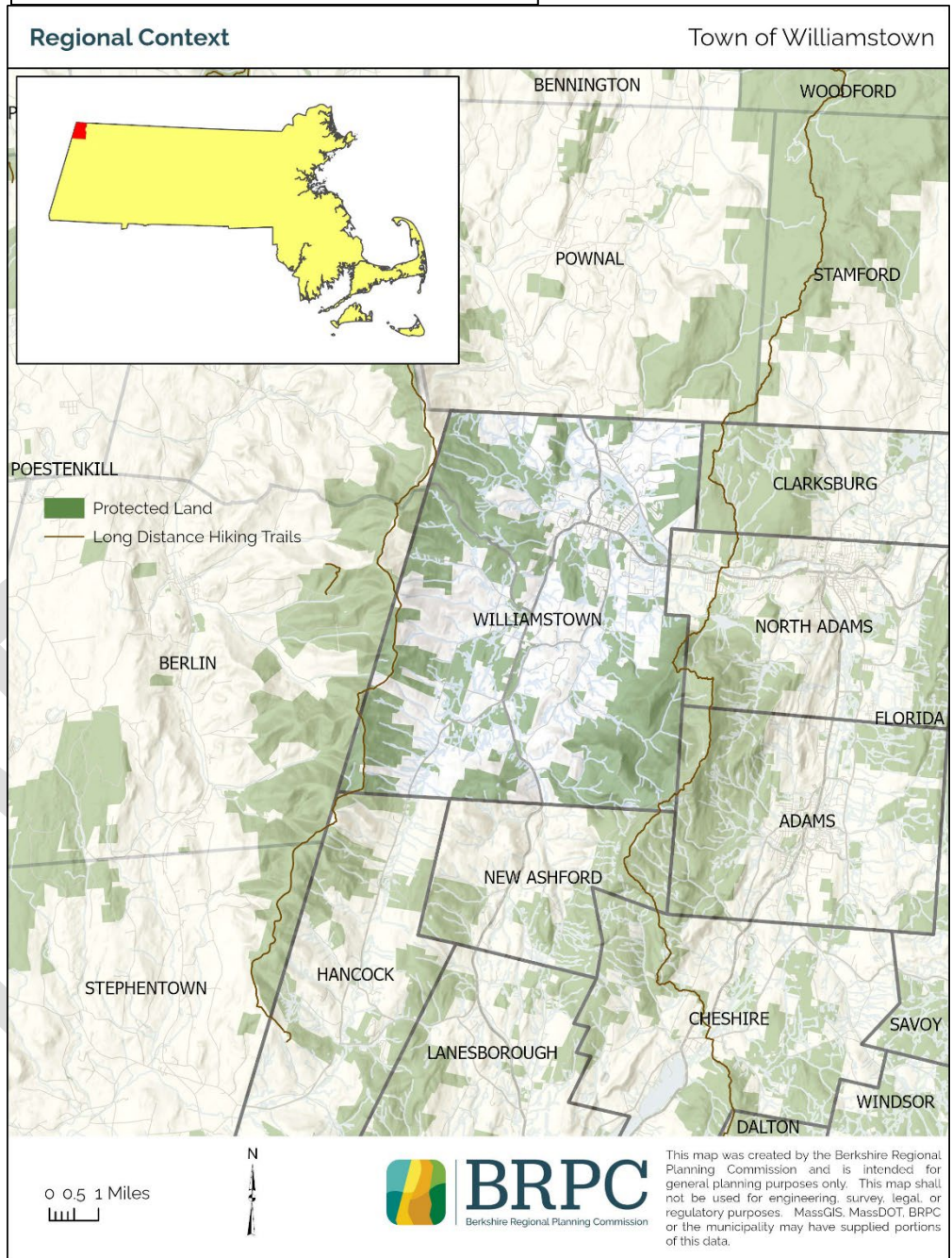
3) Community Setting

A) Regional Context

Williamstown, also known as “The Village Beautiful,” is comprised of steep wooded hillsides, river valleys, open fields and College that shares its name, and the surrounding neighborhoods, farms, and open spaces. With an area of approximately 47 square miles of land. The community sits in the fertile valley of the Hoosic and Green Rivers. The community is entirely surrounded by mountains, Mount Greylock to the South and East, the Green Mountains to the north, and the Taconic Range to the West. The town has a long history of agricultural production and bucolic views of dairy farming and hay production can be found throughout the community. The central small, business sector and Williams College campus mark the center of town. The regional context of the town is demonstrated in Figure 3.

and vistas, the village center

Figure 3: Williamstown and Neighboring Communities



Tourists, students, and retirees alike are attracted to the beauty of Williamstown and Williams College. Residents have come for the rich farmland and employment opportunities at the College and

local industry since the eighteenth century. The resulting population is a mix of longtime residents, academics, administrators, and employees of Williams College and the Clark, college students,, and retirees, many of whom are alumni or affiliated with Williams College.

The natural environment and setting is the community's most precious resource. The Mount Greylock Reservation which crosses the boundary with neighboring North Adams, Adams, and New Ashford sits to the southeast of town. The Taconic Mountains comprise the border with New York. The Green Mountains frame the town to the north and extend into Pownal, Vermont. The Greylock State Reservation, Taconic Trail State Forest, New York State Park lands, and the Green Mountain National Forest serve to protect many of these peaks for the benefit of all neighboring communities. Accessible from the center of town, the 2,200-acre Hopkins Memorial Forest owned by Williams College serves the same function, although the land does not have official legal conservation protection. Extensive trail systems connect Williamstown with the surrounding communities of North Adams, Adams, Clarksburg, New Ashford, Hancock, Pownal (VT), and Petersburg (NY). This multi-town and multi-state trail system is maintained through a group effort of the Williams College Outing Club, Williams College Center for Environmental Studies, Appalachian Mountain Club, National Park Service, Green Mountain Club, Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, Town of Williamstown, Town of New Ashford, Hoosic River Watershed Association, The Trustees of Reservations, Taconic Hiking Club, and Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

The Hoosic River and new Mohican Trail Shared Use Path provides a natural in-town greenway from the North Adams border to south of the Pownal border. On its way northwest to Williamstown and eventually the Hudson River, the Hoosic passes through Cheshire, Adams, and Clarksburg. The northern and southern branches of the river join in North Adams before entering Williamstown. Once contaminated by pollution and direct sewer discharge from municipal sources and upstream industries, the river today is much cleaner, though advisories of PCB contamination still caution anglers from eating fish caught in the river. Williamstown, North Adams, and Clarksburg have formed the Hoosic River Water Quality District (HWQD) with a treatment plant situated on the river in the northern part of Williamstown off Route 7 on Simonds Road. River advocates throughout the region have formed the Hoosic River Watershed Association (HooRWA) and the Hoosic River Revival in nearby North Adams for the purposes of river conservation and distribution of information on recreational use and access. These groups work to monitor the river water quality and temperature and are actively working with government agencies to return the river to a more natural state.

Transitions in employment and the closure of industries have impacted Williamstown and other Northern Berkshire communities and slowed economic growth. There has been a steady loss of jobs in the farming and manufacturing industry and these sectors are no longer considered a significant source of jobs or economic development. Increased emphasis on locally produced foods and a downtown farmer's market have led to renewed viability of local producers. A strong Agricultural Commission is working closely with local farmers to ensure the future stability of agriculture in the region. The

majority of townspeople are employed in professional services, mostly in the fields of education, healthcare, and the service industry that has grown up around tourism. The challenge is to meet the needs for additional new economic development and diversification while preserving the scenic resources of the town in order to ensure continued tourism success. Interest in outdoor recreation has brought visitors to the community, especially in light of concerns from the COVID-19 Pandemic.

B) Community History

Currently there is little evidence of permanent settlement by Mohican and Mohawk people in Williamstown area before the European settlers arrived. The first permanent European settlers were soldiers stationed at Fort Massachusetts and Fort West Hoosac who arrived between 1745 and 1748 during the French and Indian War. Amongst these settlers was Colonel Ephraim Williams Jr., who bought two lots of Williamstown land. The plantation, originally called “West Hoosuck” was incorporated as a town in 1765. This same year Colonel Williams, killed during the Battle of Lake George, bequeathed his estate to the town to form a free school. In return the town was renamed Williamstown. In 1793 the Free School was chartered as Williams College, the second institution of higher learning to be founded in the Commonwealth. The College since its founding has been situated on Main Street in the center of town.

Williamstown was initially dominated by farming, primarily for dairy and wool production. The town also included some small local mills and general stores. The railroad, especially after the opening of the Hoosac Tunnel, brought an influx of people and industrial practices into an agrarian society. Almost immediately, Williamstown was transformed by the appearance of mills producing textiles (Walley and Station Mills) and twine (Water Street Mill).

The railroad also allowed the development of a significant tourist economy in the town. Major resort hotels were constructed in Williamstown and the South Williamstown Five Corners. The Idlewild and Greylock Hotels remained vibrant parts of the community until the early 20th Century. Wealthy industrialists also came to Williamstown for the scenic nature of the valley. In the 1930s and 1940s, E. Parmalee Prentice and his wife Alta, the daughter of John D. Rockefeller, also developed Mount Hope Farm, a respected experimental farm.

Following World War II, Williamstown grew rapidly, significantly changing the business landscape of the town. Major employers historically included manufacturers such as Photech, and Carol Cable. Today, Steinerfilm continues to manufacture in the town. Other major employers include Sweetwood of Williamstown, Williamstown Commons Nursing Homes, Williamstown Medical Associates, the Clark Art Institute, the Mount Greylock Regional School District, and Williams College. Suburban residential development also expanded significantly in this time period. Major subdivisions were constructed in the northern parts of town and the Stratton Hill, Luce Road, and Pine Cobble Road areas saw extensive residential development. Today Williamstown continues to be known for the presence of Williams College, its cultural attractions, and its scenic rural landscape.

C) Population Characteristics

The Town Census reports that the population of Williamstown was 7,271 in 2020, slightly less than the 2020 ACS reported in the same year as shown below. The population of the town has fluctuated since 1960 but in recent decades has mirrored the overall Berkshire County trend of declining population. The sharpest population decline in the area occurred in North Adams, where the city experienced large losses in manufacturing and other industrial employers.

Table 1: Williamstown and its Neighbors: Population Change (1960-2020)

Town/County	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Williamstown	7,322	8,454	8,741	8,220	8,424	7,754	7,513
Clarksburg	1,741	1,987	1,871	1,745	1,686	1,702	1,657
Hancock	455	675	643	628	721	717	757
New Ashford	165	183	159	192	247	228	250
North Adams	19,905	19,195	18,063	16,797	14,681	13,708	12,961
Berkshire County	142,135	149,402	145,110	139,352	134,953	131,219	129,026

Source: Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022, adopted from U.S. Decennial Census, American Community Survey Table DP05

Since 2000, the median age of Williamstown residents decreased from 36 years old to 29.7 years old. Despite the expected growth in residents between the ages of 20 and 34 years old, the number of children (0-19) is expected to decrease 31% by 2040, reflecting larger trends of decreased family size. This will have an impact on the local schools’ enrollment and future recreation needs.

Surprisingly, the percentage of older adults, 65 years of age or more (currently 21%), is expected to grow minimally as an overall percentage of the population in the next 20 years (projected at 28% in 2040), which is different than projected regional and national trends. However, in Williamstown 59% of older residents had some disability or limitation, compared to 19% of the overall population. Among Seniors, the most common limitations reported by Census data were hearing difficulties, ambulatory difficulties, and independent living difficulties.

As might be expected in a college town, a large portion of the population falls into the 18-24 age group. In fact, approximately one-third of all Williamstown residents are included in that category, and the absolute number and the proportion have increased since 2015. This sets Williamstown apart from demographic distribution and changes by age when compared to Berkshire County overall. Williamstown has a lower proportion of residents in every other age category, due to the significant number of residents 18-24. As a result, Williamstown likely represents a very different market for goods and services than many of its neighbors.

Table 2: Williamstown: Population Projection (2020-2040)

Age Cohort	2020 ACS	Percentage of Total Population (2020)	2040 Population Projections	Percent of Total Population (2040)	Percent Change
0-19 years old	2,092	28%	1,444	16%	-31%
20-34 years old	1,983	26%	1,601	25.5%	-19%
35-54 years old	999	13%	1,026	16.4%	+3%
55-64 years old	842	11%	453	7%	-46%
Age 65+	1,606	21%	1,761	28%	+10%
Total Population	7,522		6,266	-	-17%

Source: Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022, adopted from 2020 American Community Survey Table DP05, UMass Donahue Population Projections

Like all Berkshire County municipalities, Williamstown is predominantly white (83%). However, estimates from the Census Bureau show that Williamstown is somewhat more racially diverse than Berkshire County at large, as shown in Table 3 below. This is driven by the significant student and faculty population of diverse backgrounds. According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 2022 Fall Enrollment numbers, 48% of the student population at Williams College is White, 13% Asian, 12% Hispanic or Latino, 5% Black or African American, and 8% two or more races. This includes both part-time and full-time students, as well as graduates and undergraduates.

Table 3: Williamstown and its Neighbors: Racial and Ethnic Groups

Race	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	Some other race	Two or more races
Williamstown	83.4%	4.8%	<1%	5.3%	0.0	1.7%	3.9%
Clarksburg	96.1%	1.1%	0.0	0.0	0.0	<1%	2.8%
Hancock	87.1%	1.2%	0.0	5.0%	0.0	0.0	6.7%
N Ashford	91.4%	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3%	5.3%
N Adams	87.7%	1.9%	<1%	3.2%	<1%	3.0%	4.0%
Berkshire County	90.0%	2.7%	<1%	1.7%	<1%	1.6%	3.7%

Source: Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022, adapted from 2020 American Community Survey Table DP05

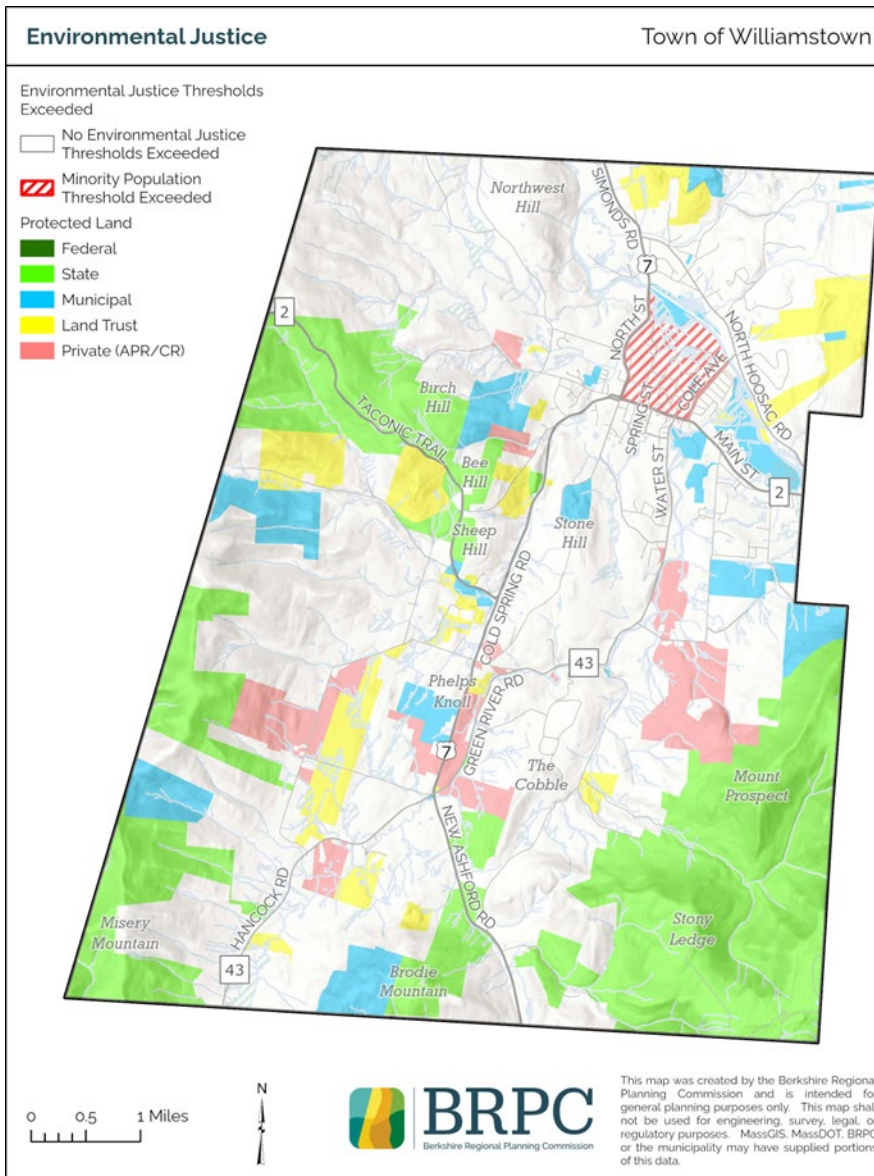
As is noted in Envisioning Williamstown 2035, the town’s comprehensive plan, Households in Williamstown are relatively high-earning compared to those across all of Berkshire County, with a

median household income of \$91,528 compared to the county-wide median of \$62,166. Williamstown also has significantly higher proportions of households earning \$100,000 or more. An estimated 46% of households earn at least that much per year, compared to just 28% of Berkshire County households. Williamstown has similar percentages of households earning between \$50,000 and \$99,999 compared to the county, and both the number and proportion have stayed consistent over the last several years. Higher earnings may be partially due to the fact that the Town is home to a very highly-educated population: approximately 65% of residents aged 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 35% for Berkshire County as a whole. About 28% of Williamstown households earn less than 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI), about half the rate of Berkshire County as a whole (42.7%). As of 2020, 281 or 5.7% of Williamstown's residents lived below the poverty level, significantly lower than the countywide rate of 9.7%.

Owner-occupied households have a significantly higher median household income when compared to renter-occupied households. The 2020 ACS estimates Williamstown's Median Gross Rent at \$955, but a recent search on Rentometer.com in April 2022 estimates an average rent of around \$1,200 based on 16 apartments listed in the past year. Given the current rent estimates in the town, most renter households would not be able to afford rents in the town without being cost burdened. The housing burden disparity between owner-occupiers and renter-occupiers has increased significantly since 2010, where renters are now two and a half times more likely than owners to face a housing burden.

The Town's economy is diverse and includes a small agricultural and forestry presence, small business sector, art museums, historic theater festival, tourist businesses such as lodging, restaurants, and shops, and health care industry. Williams College, which is the Town's largest employer, and is a significant source of jobs regionally, offers a range of job opportunities in food services, maintenance, office staff, administrative personnel, and highly specialized faculty. Unemployment in Williamstown has tended to be notably lower than in Berkshire County. Given the high educational attainment of the local population and the links between local resident workers and Williams College, this is not a surprising finding. By the end of 2021, Williamstown's unemployment rate was 3.3% and Berkshire County's was 4.4%.

Figure 4: Williamstown Environmental Justice Population



In Massachusetts, an environmental justice population is a neighborhood where one or more of the

following criteria are true:

1. Annual median household income is 65% or less of the statewide annual median household income;
2. minorities make up 40% or more of the population;
3. 25% or more of households identify as speaking English less than "very well";
4. minorities make up 25% or more of the population and the annual median household income of the municipality in which the neighborhood is located does not exceed 150% of the statewide annual median household income.

According to the 2020 MassGIS data layer, census track 9201.01 that includes the neighborhood north of Main Street and bordered by Cole Avenue and North Street, minorities make up more than 32.9% of the population and has a median household income

(MHHI) of \$101,833 which is 120% of the MA MHHI. The College's recruitment of a diverse student population has resulted in a more diverse census block group than the surrounding community, coupled with the Proprietors Fields, an age and income restricted apartment complex built to house displaced residents from the Spruces Mobile Home Park, displaced by Tropical Storm Irene in 2011. Highland Woods, a 40-unit independent living facility development was also built in the aftermath of T.S. Irene, and is managed by Berkshire Housing. This census block is also the heart of the Williams College campus with a large percentage of the land dedicated to college athletic facilities and bordered by the newly

constructed Monahan Trail Shared Use path which connects the northern half of the town, along the Hoosic River.

D) Growth and Development Patterns

a) Patterns of Development

As noted in the Existing Conditions Analysis (2022), conducted as part of the updating of the Master Plan, 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. Town lands underwent nine original divisions. These are detailed on the Coffin 1843 Subdivision Map and are detailed as follows;

- 1751: 11-acre house lot on Main Street
- 1754: 10-acre meadow lot near the Hoosic or Green River
- 1st 50-acre lots, 2nd 50-acre lots
- 1763: 60-acre white-oak lot, 60-acre white pine lot, 60-acre lot, 30-acre "pitch" lot

19th Century

Williamstown reached its agricultural peak around 1830, when 77% of all Williamstown lands were cleared of forest. The farming industry gradually declined during the second half of the nineteenth century. Waterpower in Williamstown was too limited for any major development during this time period and the community never experienced a complete industrialization. Three factories in Williamstown were created, but small industry and business supplied most of the local needs. Overall, in the nineteenth century, Williamstown was a compact, central village, surrounded by farms and forests.

20th Century & Present

The distribution and density of residential lots is fairly consistent with what is expected in rural communities wherein density increases in the village center area with lots averaging just over 1-acre. Residential lots beyond the village center, which are significantly less dense, average nearly 7.5-acres. Commercial and industrial uses are almost exclusively found along Routes 2 and 7 and the north side of the Hoosic River with an average lot size of 3.5 acres.

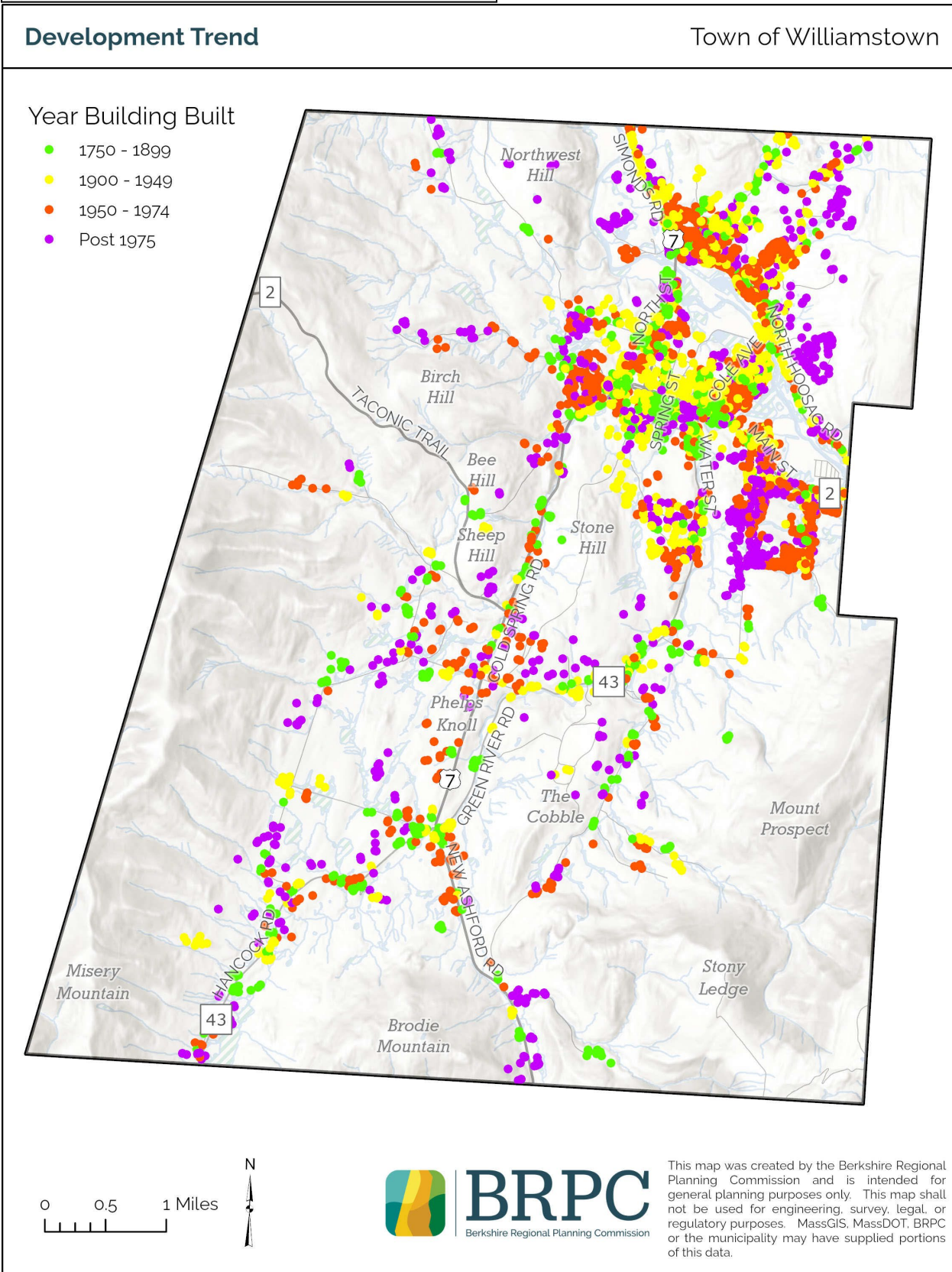
Following World War II, Williamstown changed remarkably as farms and forests have given way to residential development. Williams College created two major subdivisions of farmland and forest to create faculty housing. House lots now line back roads that once served farms in the southern, eastern, and northwest sections of the town, and Mount Hope Farm, offering some of the most scenic vistas, has been subdivided by a group of Williams College alumni. More recent major construction projects for Williams College include building a new stadium complex, new library, and a recently expanded Science Center completed in 2021. A new Elementary School was built in 1999 and the town has completed a major renovation, including some new construction at the regional high school (2019). These

renovations and reconstruction projects have been in previously developed areas. It is in the residential sector that the most recent and significant development of open lands has occurred.

During the decade from 1995 to 2005, 95 new residences were built. The residential sector places the most development pressure on Williamstown's open spaces. These changes have far-reaching impacts on land use patterns and attitudes of citizens. Conversion of agricultural lands to forests and residential use has altered some of Williamstown's traditional view sheds and threatens the rural appearance of the town, although the natural beauty of Williamstown is recognized as its greatest natural resource. Changing ownership of certain parcels has resulted in the rerouting or abandonment of some recreation trails. Trees have grown up along some of the roads into Williamstown, blocking the panoramic views from several scenic overlooks.

This pattern has begun to change following the 2008 financial crisis. In the five years following the financial crisis only 29 single family homes have been built and no single-family subdivisions have been built. This is a decrease in new detached home construction of approximately 60%. Several of these projects have also occurred where a previously built home was torn down, decreasing pressure on surrounding open lands. Other projects in Williamstown are in the works to further this trend by increasing availability of multifamily housing within the town core. In 2010 the Planning Board relaxed restrictions on placing apartments in portions of the Village Business District. Sixty-one units of housing have been completed at the Cable Mill on Water Street, with more town homes and a 51-unit apartment building currently under construction and affordable housing has been completed on Church Street and Cole Avenue. The Cole Avenue Apartments, completed in 2021 at 330 Cole Avenue, feature 42 units with all units reserved as affordable. The project is managed by the Berkshire Housing Development Corporation. At the same time the Planning Board is working on additional efforts to encourage infill development and alternative housing types to further decrease pressure on surrounding open lands. Relaxing zoning regulations to allow for accessory dwelling units has been approved by the townspeople and is hoped to be an additional tool to provide more housing in the town center. At the 2023 Town Meeting the townspeople voted to reduce frontage requirements and allow 3 or 4 unit homes by right in the General Residence zone. The Planning Board is currently investigating other creative options to alleviate the housing shortage, including Cottage Court Housing, manufactured housing, and expanding multifamily housing by right in additional areas of the town. Figure 5 shows development trends in the town with the ages of the structures.

Figure 5: Williamstown Development- Structure Age



b.) Infrastructure

The Williamstown Department of Public Works (DPW), in cooperation with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), maintains 121 miles of roads in Williamstown. The transportation network supports a variety of modes including motor vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, and public transit. The diversity of travelers using these modes of travel include residents, college students, commuters, older residents, and visitors to the region. The current network is primarily focused on roadways serving automobiles, although the Town has made efforts to offer safer routes and off-road paths (such as the Mohican Trail Shared Use Path).

Complete Streets are roadways designed to safely and comfortably accommodate all users, regardless of age, ability or mode of transportation. Williamstown adopted its Complete Streets Policy in 2016, the purpose of which is “to accommodate a wide range of road users by creating a road network that meets the needs of individuals utilizing a variety of transportation modes.”¹ As part of this policy, a Williamstown Complete Streets Report was drafted, which evaluated existing conditions for nonmotorized users of the transportation system and recommended an implementation strategy for Complete Streets improvement projects, including traffic and safety, bicycle facilities, transit facilities, and pedestrian facilities. The town created a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan October 2, 2017 and received project approval for several projects beginning in 2018.

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. Pedestrian-triggered flashing lights and ADA-compliant crosswalks are located along the college-dense portion of Main Street to facilitate pedestrian access and safety. In addition, there are sidewalks and walkways all through the Williams College campus, providing significantly more miles of walkways for outdoor walkers. Although walking and bicycling through the college campus is popular with students and staff and residents alike, the *Williams College Draft Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan* identified a series of recommendations that could improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety. Coordination between the Town and College to connect the various pedestrian networks is paramount to making a cohesive network of pathways. This could take the form of new paths along the Town Green on Route 2, connecting missing elements in the existing network (such as connecting the Linear Parks, or working with nearby communities to expand the network into North Adams or Pownal).

¹ *Town of Williamstown, 2/26/2016*

In Williamstown, 10% of households do not own a vehicle, which approximately corresponds to the student population in the town (First year students are not permitted to have a vehicle on campus and many other students do not have vehicles.) 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. Bicycle facilities are very limited, where many roadways lack the width to be able to easily install bicycle facilities, and are constrained by steep topography, making future reconstruction costly and complicated. The only roadway in Town with dedicated bicycle facilities (striped bicycle lanes) is a

Figure 6: Mohican Trail at Cole Avenue Road crossing.

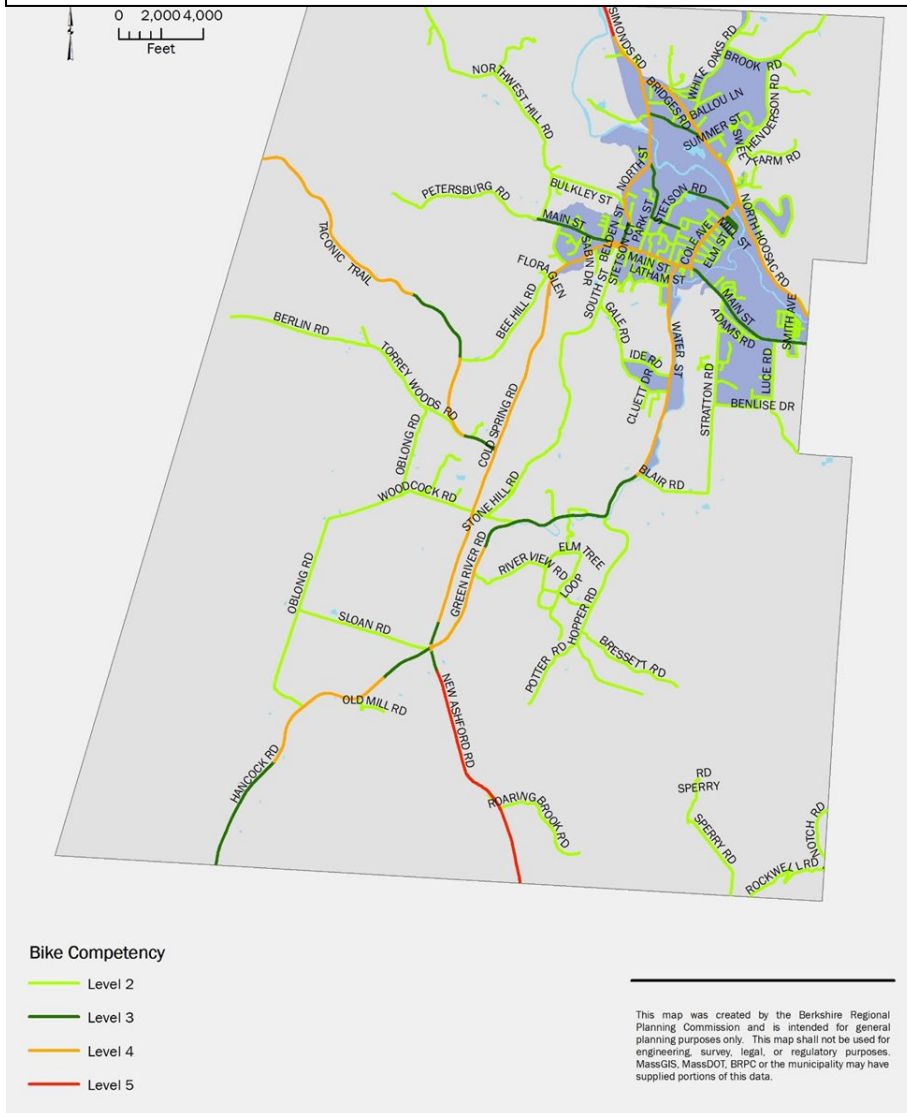


portion of Main Street/Route 2 east of Cole Avenue. The Complete Streets Report evaluated and ranked the Town's roads for bicycle competency. The new Mohican Trail Shared Use Path is the only facility that can be ranked as Level 1 (easiest route, for everyone, including those learning to bike/beginner up to expert riders). While many of the local roads are ranked a Level 2 (easy routes useable by most people), having to travel the main collector and arterial road systems are required to bicycle from the village center with many of the hiking trail systems in the outlying areas. These road systems are ranked as Level 3 (moderately difficult for confident but cautious bike riders) or Level 4 (difficult routes for experienced riders). See Fig. __ for competency rankings. Cold Spring Road/Route 7 is a main north-south commercial route with

heavy and fast truck traffic, while Green River Road/Route 43, is a windy route with little to no

shoulders. Both routes are frequently used by cyclists and runners despite the lack of sidewalks or shoulders.

Figure 7: Williamstown Roads: Bicycle Competency Ratings



Main collector and arterial roads were evaluated for their potential to host future bike lanes and most except Green River Road and a portion of North Hoosac Road appear to have conditions that would allow shoulder width improvements. Plans are currently underway to connect North Adams and Williamstown and the Mohican Trail Shared Use Path. Massachusetts Department of Transportation plans in the coming 5-10 years include roadway improvements that support additional pedestrian safety features.

Hopefully, this will provide some accommodations for those who need or prefer to bike to neighboring areas such as South Williamstown or North Adams for work or services, but the heavy commercial traffic in this corridor makes bicycling

intimidating for many. The opening of the Mohican Trail Shared Use Path provides an off-road alternative parallel to the Main Street/Route 2 corridor. Given the interest in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in Williamstown, a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure analysis should be undertaken.

The Berkshire Regional Transportation Authority is the principal community transportation provider in Berkshire County, but bus options in Williamstown are limited in scope and times of operation. BRTA's Route 3 connects the village center with the North Adams City Center, offering some connections to a few recreational properties, with The Spruces Community Park being located directly on this route. The buses are equipped to transport bicycles. However, there are no bus connections to

the vast majority of hiking trail systems. Travel between Pittsfield and Williamstown is only available via North Adams, no service currently connects the towns along Route 7. There is currently limited Peter Pan Bus Service in Williamstown, however the service is intermittent and should be confirmed on the Peter Pan [website](#). The Green Mountain Express connects the town to Pownal and Bennington in Vermont to the North. The Purple Line runs Monday through Friday every 1.5 hours between the town centers. There is no bus route to connect residents in the village center to recreational facilities along Green River Road. There is no passenger rail service in Williamstown. The nearest rail line is in Pittsfield, which is connected east to Boston and west to Albany. More rail service is envisioned for the area with trial service connecting Pittsfield to New York City during summer months.

The Williamstown DPW manages the Town's potable water system, which services the vast majority of residents, businesses and institutions in Williamstown. The system is focused in the most densely developed and populated area of the Town, including the Williams College campus and facilities (see Water and Wastewater Infrastructure map for extent of service). Sewer service has been extended down Route 7 to the Regional High School facility, however potable water is limited to the downtown area with short extensions on Route 7 and Route 43. Main water sources include three main groundwater sources, drawing from the confined aquifer underneath the Hoosic River. As backup water supplies, the Town maintains the Sherman Springs Reservoir on the Williamstown/North Adams border, and the Rattlesnake Reservoir in Vermont.

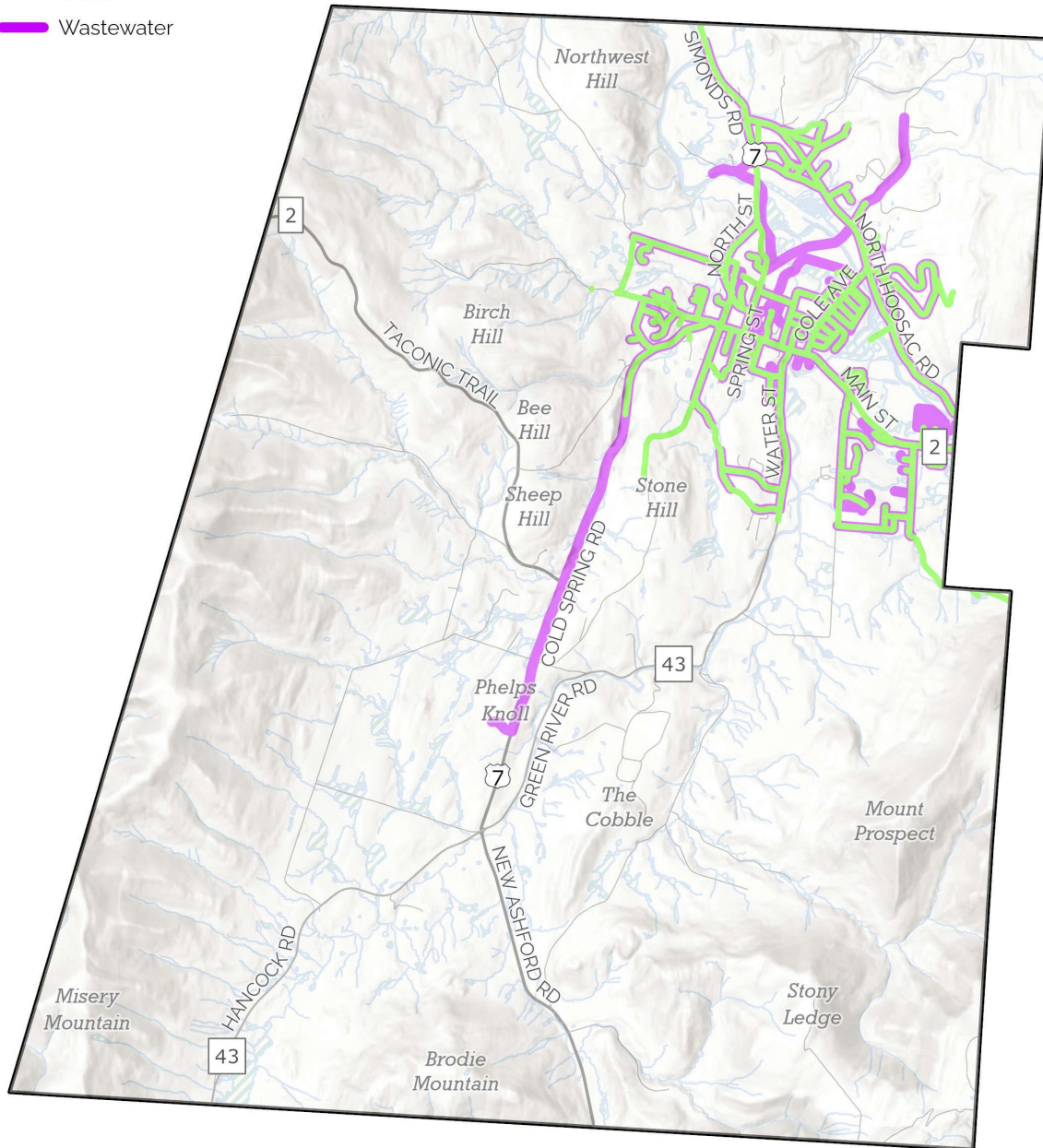
Sewer service is provided by the Hoosac Water Quality District, a separate multi-town entity serving Williamstown, the City of North Adams, and a portion of the Town of Clarksburg. The sewer systems serves an estimated population of 25,500, residing in the sewered areas of these three communities. In Williamstown, the area covered by this system includes the most densely developed areas of Williamstown, focusing on the village center and extending outward to service some outlying larger users such as Buxton School, Mount Greylock Regional High School and the Pine Cobble development. The wastewater treatment plant is located in Williamstown at 667 Simonds Road and handles collection, treatment and disposal of all wastewater for the communities it serves. Figure 8 shows water and sewer infrastructure elements within the town.

Figure 8: Williamstown Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

Town of Williamstown

- Water
- Wastewater

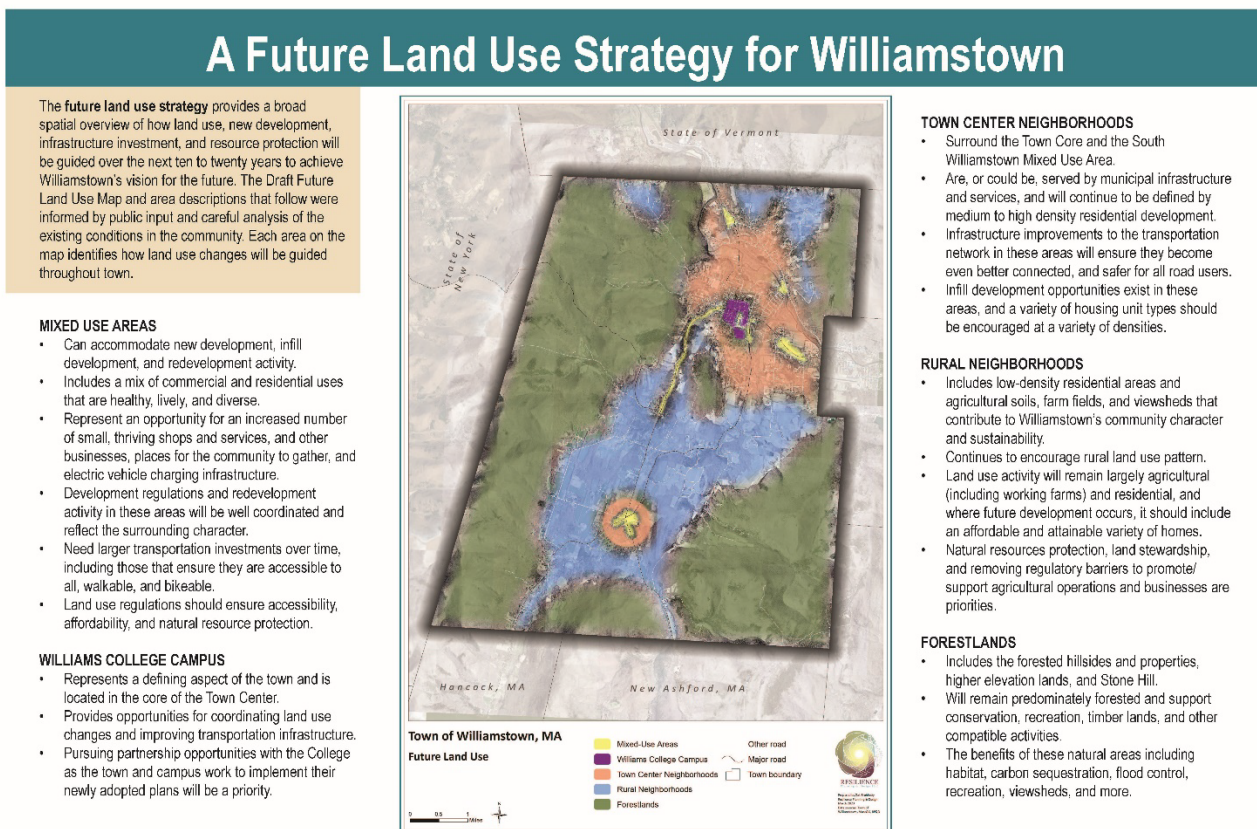


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C.) Long-Term Development Patterns

Between 2010 and 2021, 196 permits were issued for housing construction in Williamstown. The majority of these units (156) were in multifamily construction. Of the multifamily units, most were deed-restricted affordable rental units, including 13 units in Cable Mills, 40 in Highland Woods, and 43 at 330 Cole Avenue. Of the 35 single-family units, at least four were replacements of existing units which were torn down, according to Town staff. In 2014 a significant number (107 units) of multifamily development were permitted. However, all the accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and the remaining 49 multifamily units were all built since 2018, suggesting a trend towards middle housing and multifamily housing development in the Town. As part of the Master Plan process, the committee (using public input) developed a future Land Use Map to guide future development. Areas identified in the community included Mixed Use, Williams College Campus, In-Town Neighborhoods, a Rural Center (South Williamstown), Rural Neighborhoods, and extensive Forestlands. That map is featured as Figure 9.

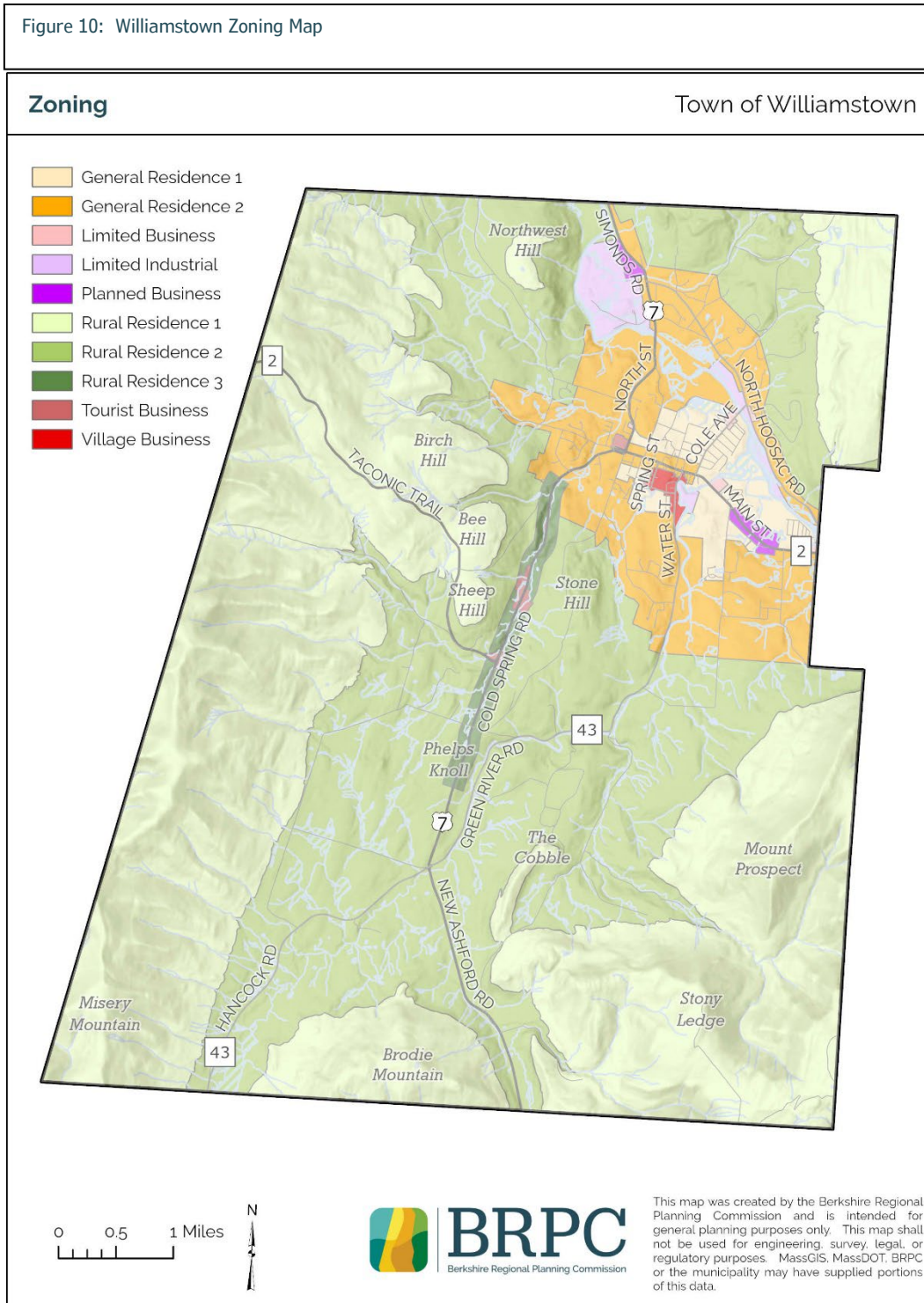
Figure 9: Land Use Strategy Developed by Envisioning Williamstown 2035



Land Use Policy and Design was identified during both public outreach and stakeholder engagement as an area where the town could protect natural resources within the town. Zoning, site plan review, and subdivision regulations have been identified as either enabling or controlling sprawling development

patterns within the town. Changing these regulatory frameworks to enable greater diversity of housing, additional affordable housing, and protected open spaces were identified as community priorities.

Figure 10: Williamstown Zoning Map



Completing an audit of the land use policy is a recommendation of the Master Plan as is considering a Form-Based rather than Use-Based code. The greater flexibility of this type of land use control would enable a greater variety of businesses, homes, and mixed uses. A potential benefit would be to support more restaurants, event spaces, and food related businesses that would support town agriculture. Housing solutions in the town recommended in the Master Plan include allowances for cottage

developments and co-housing, inclusionary zoning requiring affordable units in new developments,

regulating short-term rentals, converting market rate homes to affordable, and creating additional senior housing units. The Zoning Map for the town is shown in Figure 10.

4) Environmental Inventory and Analysis

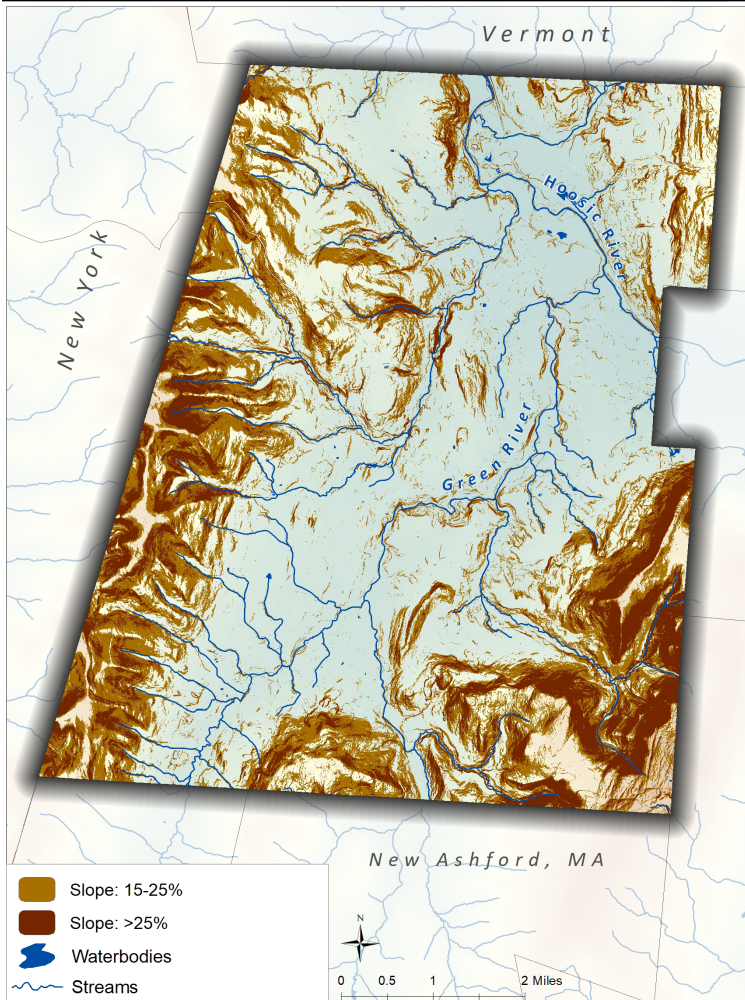
A) Geology, Soils, and Topography

Williamstown is set in the northwest corner of the Berkshire uplands. At the center of town, the valleys of the Hoosic River and the Green River (a Hoosic tributary) join to form a third valley through which the Hoosic flows northwest to the Hudson River. These three valleys are surrounded by hills and mountains with elevations of 3,000 feet or above. The center of town lies in the 600-700-foot elevation range. The lowest point is at 594 feet where the Hoosic River exits into Vermont. The configuration of these hills and valleys was created 500 million years ago by the Taconic orogeny, a mountain formation event that occurred when continental plates collided and the land mass that became Europe pushed offshore islands to the west, across what became New England. Thus, local mountains contain layers of rock formed under the ocean; their contents include quartzite, schists, and limestone (marble).

The different rates of weathering and erosion of these ancient rocks have shaped the ridges and valleys of today's Williamstown. Several local hills and ridges, including Pine Cobble and Stone Hill, are capped and protected from erosion by quartzite, a rock harder than steel and very resistant to weathering by either chemical or physical agents. The Taconic and Greylock Ranges, built from metamorphosed shales (slate, phyllite and schist) also resist chemical weathering to a large degree. By contrast, the lower parts of the Hoosic and Green River Valleys are underlain by the metamorphosed limestone (marble), which is only slightly harder than a fingernail. Over millions of years, streams have cut their valleys through the softer rocks, especially in areas where the more resistant rocks have buckled down far beneath the surface in the troughs of folds. Thus, the hills and valleys of Williamstown had been long established by the time the glaciers moved south from Canada. As dramatic as the successive ice ages were, they did not create the topography; they only modified it. The most recent ice age, which peaked about 18,000 years ago, covered Mount Greylock and filled in the valleys. As the ice moved slowly to the southeast, it scraped across bedrock ridges and left them smoother on the up-ice side and steeper in the down-ice direction. The glacier also widened the existing stream valleys, leaving them with the broad U-shaped profile which is apparent today. As this last ice sheet retreated, its meltwater was blocked by ice dams to the north and south, resulting in the formation of a 450-foot deep lake named Lake Bascom. Shorelines and beaches of this lake can still be seen along the margins of the Williamstown Valley at present elevations of 1050 feet. Streams draining into the lake deposited their sediment loads, building deltas into the lake. Coarser sediment was deposited close to the shoreline, while finer grained silt and clay were carried farther out to settle in the deepest parts of the lake. As the lake fell, successively lower shorelines and deltas were constructed at the 900-, 750-, and 650-foot elevations.

Land use and water supply in Williamstown have been determined by the contours of the hills and valleys and by the distribution of sediment deposits along the various shoreline levels of glacial Lake Bascom. The topography of Williamstown is one of the steepest in the Commonwealth. The overall vertical slope drops from 3,174 feet near the summit of Mt. Greylock (the actual summit at 3,491 feet is in Adams) to 594 feet in the Hoosic River Valley. These slopes are largely undevelopable because of their steepness and lack of stable soils. Residential and commercial development and transportation networks have historically been sandwiched into the valleys, which are relatively narrow, overall vertical slope drops from 3,174 feet near the summit of Mt. Greylock (the actual summit at 3,491 feet is in Adams) to 594 feet in the Hoosic River Valley. These slopes are largely undevelopable because of their steepness and lack of stable soils. Residential and commercial development and transportation networks have historically been sandwiched into the valleys, which are relatively narrow.

Figure 11: Williamstown Topography



Step slopes that are greater than 25% slope compose approximately 23% of the Town, while slopes between 15-25% slope compose approximately 12.5% of the Town². Refer to Fig. 11

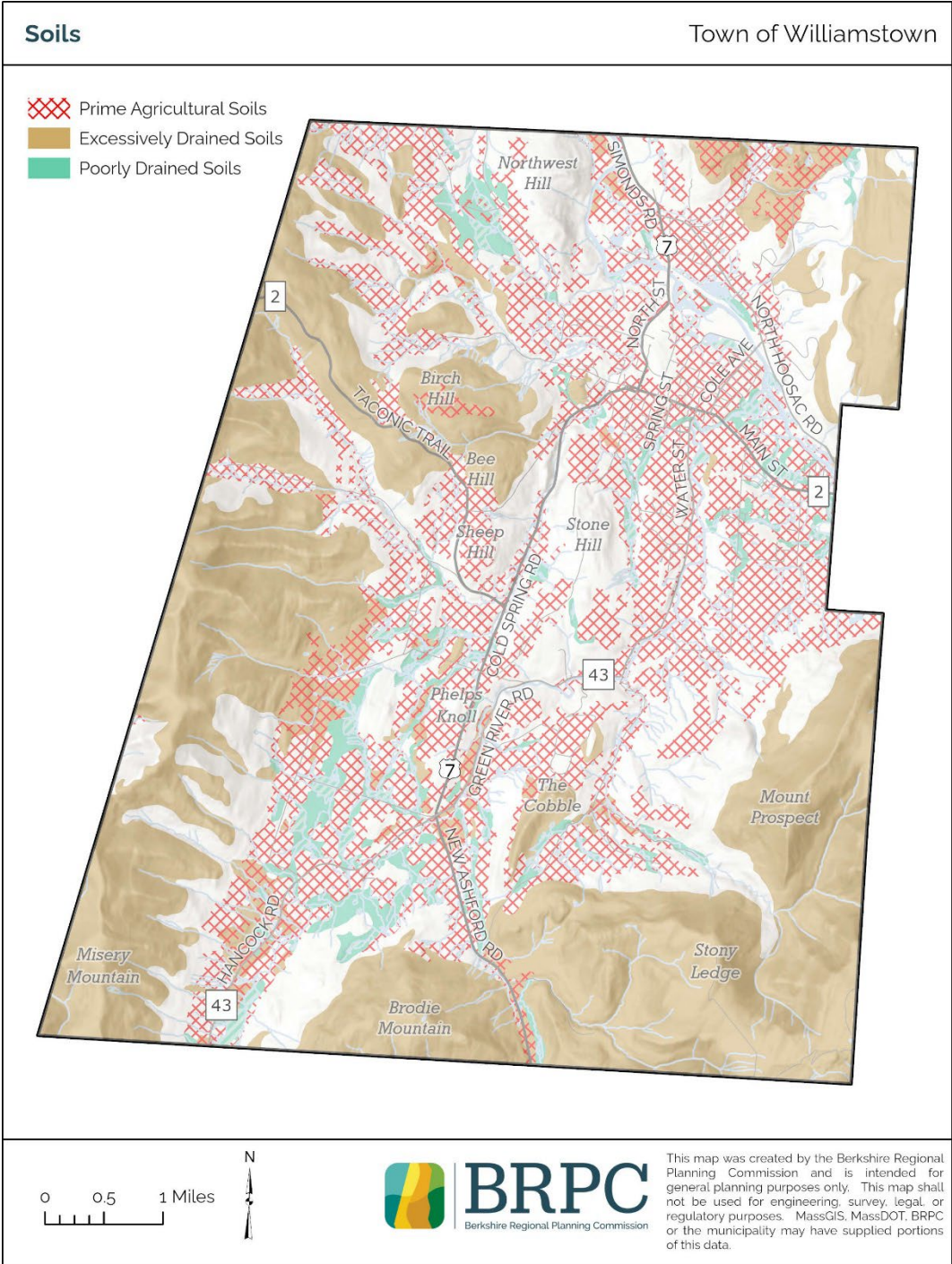
Williamstown's soils tend to be rocky as a result of glacial outwash or poorly drained due to high concentrations of silts and clays. The 1984 report *2003: A Study of Williamstown over the Next 20 Years* found 61% of the soils in Williamstown unsuitable for development. At the higher elevations soils are poor, thin, and easily eroded. Other locations are wet or very heavy clay. These conditions present major problems for sewage disposal. A sewer system serves the central village and has been extended to serve certain outlying areas, such as Route 7 South to the high school. Other properties must be fitted with oversize leach fields or artificial dry wells for septic treatment. The limitations of the underlying soils have combined with the steep topography to contain the spread of development in Williamstown.

² Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022.

As noted in the Existing Conditions Analysis (2022), 17% of soil acreage in Williamstown are prime farmland soils, while an additional 22% are farmland soils of local importance. These soils are

mainly located in the river valleys and at the lower elevations along the former shorelines of a glacial lake. In the last century, at the height of the farming economy, 70% of the land was in agricultural use, though the cleared lands at the higher elevations were used mainly as pasture for sheep or cattle. The confinement of the good agricultural land to the river valleys mirrors the confinement of development to the valleys, creating a large challenge for the Town which has resulted in a dramatic decline of working agricultural lands over the last 50-75 years as 90% of the Town's farms have been lost.³ Figure 12

Figure 12: Williamstown Soils Map



³ Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022

features a soils map of the town.

As late as 1952, 18% of the land was farmed. Today, less than 10% of Williamstown's land is farmed. This figure has remained stable for the past decade or so despite a continuing decrease in dairy farming; either the remaining dairy farms have expanded herd size and use of other farmer's land, or farmers have taken on new agricultural endeavors. There remain only two traditional dairy farms in Williamstown. A third dairy has found success milking cows for cheese and raw milk production and has developed into a local model of alternative locally focused 21st Century agriculture. Thus, though ownership and specific uses have fluctuated, the actual amount of farmland has remained relatively constant.

The amount of land enrolled in Chapter 61A, however, has increased significantly (Numbers reported in 2016 report indicated 10,034 acres in Chapter enrollment, approximately 1/3 of the total town area of 30,000 acres or 47 square miles, it is assumed this was a typo and the correct figure was 1,034 acres, Currently-2,587 acres.) It should be noted that to keep the Williamstown farm economy strong, there needs to be a critical mass of working farms to support the local associated agricultural businesses. Although much of Williamstown's high-quality farmland has been preserved through the

Figure 13: Shoppers at the Williamstown Farmer's Market



Commonwealth's Agricultural Preservation Restriction program, preservation of the remaining farmland will give greater security to the town's remaining farm businesses. Much of the prime agricultural land in Williamstown has been developed. These developments include the White Oaks area in North Williamstown and the Haley Development in the village center, for example.

Figure 14/15: Williamstown Soil Classification and Protected Status

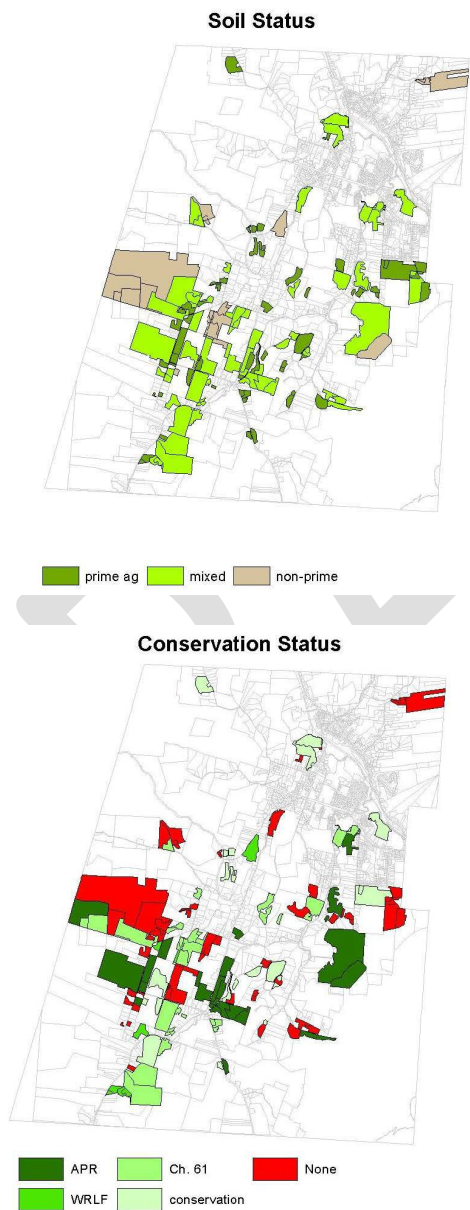


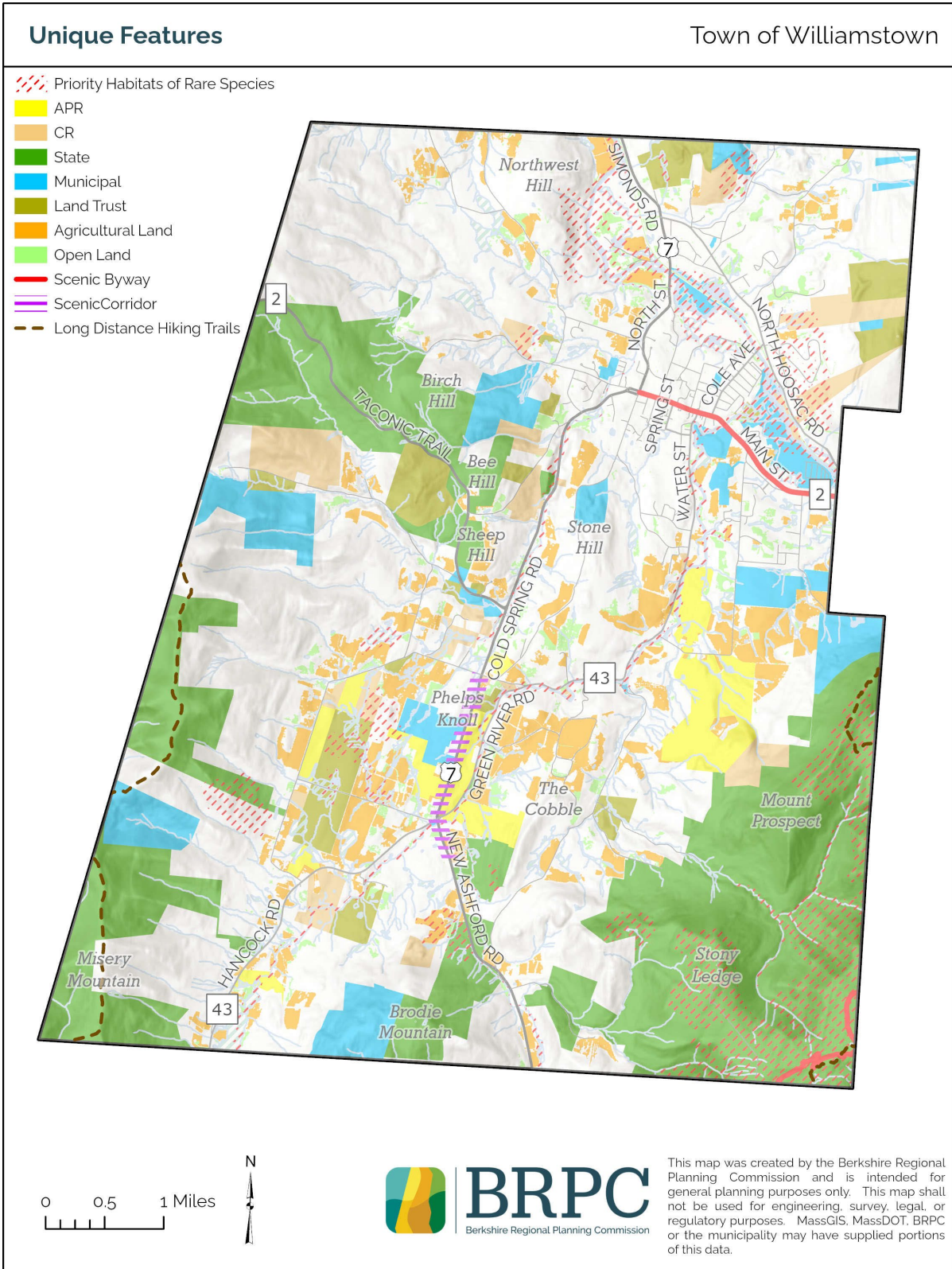
Figure 14/15 are taken from the Williamstown Farmland Project, a Williams College Student Project completed in the Fall of 2020. They show the conservation status of farms identified through this project. Interestingly, the majority of Williamstown's farms are not located on soils classified as prime agricultural soils. student project, including farms that have enrolled in both APR and Chap. 61 programs.

B) Landscape Character

Williamstown's landscape is known as "The Purple Valley or Purple Bubble" probably due to the distinctive purple cast to the surrounding mountains, especially at sunset and has given the college its distinct purple color. Noticeable at all seasons, this subtle color draws the attention of visitors and residents. The central village in the valleys offers tree-lined streets, attractive buildings, and considerable amounts of open space. The surrounding hills present a pastoral aspect of wooded hills and open farmland. The Williams College mascot, the Purple Cow, thus personifies two of the town's prominent characteristics.

Within the past fifty years, many of the open fields have grown back to forest, a trend begun 150 years ago. Some of those that remained open are now dotted with residences, many of them second homes. Openings in wooded areas marking new residences have also appeared. As previously mentioned recent development has occurred on Pine Cobble, Bee Hill Road, Northwest Hill Road, Stratton Road, Henderson Road, and Chestnut Street. Though many of these areas were cleared for agriculture 200 years ago, the clearings for roads and house lots present a far different appearance. The change is particularly apparent at night when lights twinkle from what was once forest and pasture. Housing, especially moderately priced or affordable housing, has become a serious issue in Williamstown. In recent years the town has begun to address these issues through serious use of infill multifamily development. As evidenced by the Town's Master Plans, both in 2002 and 2023, the policy for many years has been to place new development in areas that have previously been developed and to protect remaining open space. Zoning however has generally not reflected this policy, so the challenge remains to find a sustainable balance between development and conservation and preservation of neighborhood character. Zoning limits development on the fragile upper slopes; subdivision regulations encourage clustering and reward the setting-aside of conservation lands in developments. Further zoning changes are likely to be proposed to further promote appropriate infill developments. Notable features of the Williamstown landscape are shown on the Unique Features Map, Figure 16.


Figure 16: Williamstown Unique Features Map



C) Water Resources

1. Rivers and Streams

Williamstown is located within the Hoosic River watershed. The Hoosic River and its tributaries are Williamstown's major surface water resource. Waters of the Hoosic enter the town from North Adams on its eastern border, run through the northern section of the village for 4.6 miles, and exit to the northwest into Vermont; they eventually cross into New York and join the Hudson River

A main tributary to the Hoosic River in Williamstown is the Green River and its tributaries, whose main and secondary branches converge just north of Five Corners to flow north through the center of the village and join the Hoosic near the former railroad yards. The Green River Watershed encompasses approximately 50% of Williamstown, draining the Green River East and West Branches, Phoebes Brook, Goodell Brook, Roaring Brook, and several unnamed tributaries. Land within the Green River watershed is approximately 46% conserved (primarily Mount Greylock State Reservation.) 

The other major Hoosic River tributary is Hemlock Brook, which flows northward and drains the northwestern portion of the town north of Phelps Knoll. When combining this watershed with the Hoosic River watershed, it encompasses 47% of Williamstown, and of this land 23% is conserved. ⁴

There are two other watersheds that encompass small portions of Williamstown, the Headwaters of the Little Hoosic River watershed on the western edge of Williamstown, and the Phillips Creek- Hoosic River Watershed on the southeast corner of Williamstown, composing 2% and <1% of the town, respectively.

All of the main segments of rivers and streams in Williamstown are considered by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife (DFW) to be cold-water fisheries because of their ability to sustain reproducing wild trout populations and other species that require cool year-round temperatures. Species that thrive in coldwater, highly oxygenated waters become stressed or die if water temperatures rise above the level of which they can tolerate. This can lead to a reduction in biodiversity and abundance in these habitats. Cold water streams habitats are considered highly vulnerable to stressors such as increased air temperatures due to climate change, runoff from warmed surfaces areas (roads, lawns, parking lots, etc.) and increased exposure to sunlight due to clearing and removal of vegetative cover. The Town can protect these habitats by encouraging or restricting land clearing and reducing impervious surface areas in development projects. The coldwater fisheries are shown pink on the Fish and Wildlife Map and the Water Resources Map.

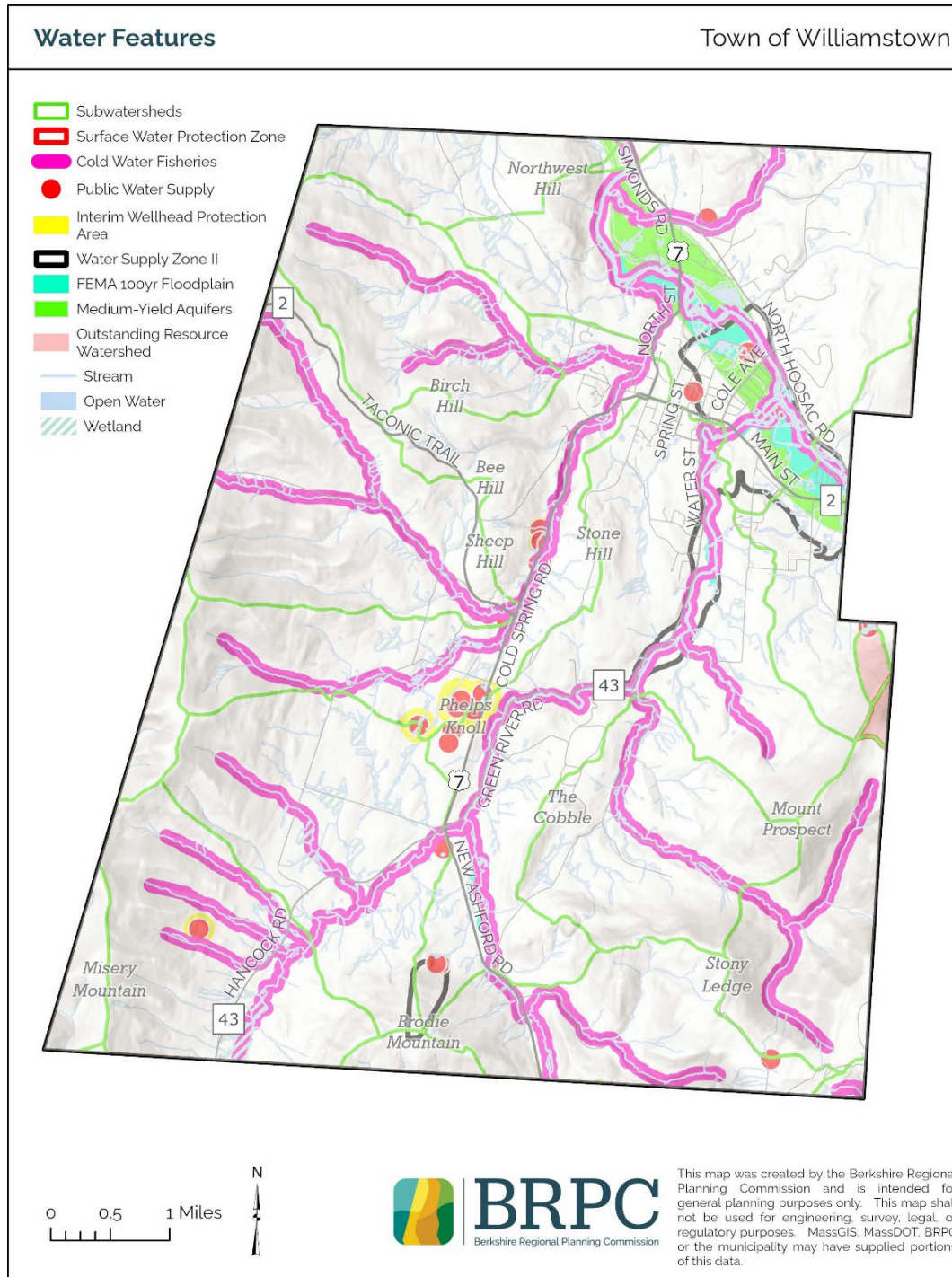
2. Flood Hazard Areas

Flood plain districts exist along the Hoosic and Green Rivers and along the lower reaches of Broad, Hopper, Hemlock, and Buxton Brooks. The 100-year flood plain covers an area of 384 acres. More than half of this land has already been developed; the largest of these developments was The

⁴ *Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022.*

Spruces Mobile Home Park. Tropical Storm Irene flooded the Spruces in August of 2011; this led to the closing of the park and the town taking ownership of the land.

Figure 17: Williamstown Water Features



Former residents of the park have relocated. Williamstown does participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), flood insurance is available to affected households. Flood plain districts along the Hoosic and Green Rivers are easily accessible from the center of town. Trails in Linear Park and near Cole Field are used by the public for walking, jogging, x-c skiing mountain biking, and bird-watching. They are in varying states of repair and are not accessible to people with disabilities. The Mohican Trail Shared Use Path is fully accessible and

follows the course of the river from Syndicate Road at Route 7 to the eastern edge of the town at the Spruces Park on the North Adams border.

3. Ponds

There are few sizable ponds in Williamstown, with only three that are larger than two acres in area. Williamstown hosts several small waterbodies, including Bridges Pond, Eph Pond, Williamstown Reservoir, and Harmon Pond. The largest, Bridges Pond, is seven acres in size, is owned by the Town and maintained by the Conservation Commission as part of the North Street Conservation Area. The two-acre Williamstown Reservoir (also called the Sherman Springs Reservoir) serves as a backup water supply for the Town’s drinking water. Eph’s Pond, owned by Williams College, is one of the most-visited natural areas in Williamstown, thanks to its central position adjacent to the Williams athletic fields and close to the campus and Town Center. This five-acre pond’s swampy shoreline and the adjacent floodplain forest along the Hoosic River attract many bird species in all seasons, despite the intensive use of the Williams College playing fields for sports, family activities, and dog walking. Harmon Pond is owned by the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation.

Bridges Pond, seven acres in size, is owned by the Town and maintained by the Conservation Commission; Five-acre Eph’s Pond is owned by Williams College; and Sherman Springs Reservoir, two acres, is part of the town’s surface water supply. A small nature study pond was also built in 1993 at Mt. Greylock Regional High School by the school’s business partner, Petricca Industries. In addition, there is a small pond at The Trustees of Reservations’ Field Farm. Naturalists and bird-watchers frequent Bridges and Eph’s Ponds. The storm sewer systems have been improved since the last time this plan was updated, decreasing the sedimentation of both ponds. Access to Bridges Pond is very poor and involves trespassing on railroad property; there are also problems with water flow control, beavers, and vandalism at this pond.

4. Wetlands

According to GIS data generated by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), wetlands within the Town of Williamstown are scattered and limited, composing only approximately 2% of the town.

Table 4. Wetlands as Mapped by DEP

Wetland Type	Acres
Deep marsh	14.32
Shallow Marsh meadow or fen	73.36
Shrub Swamp	154.65
Wooded Swamp Coniferous	4.43
Wooded Swamp Deciduous	297.18
Wooded Swamp mixed with trees	3.14
Open Water	135.06
Total	682.14

Source: MA DEP GIS datalayer

As noted in the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, wetland resources provide numerous ecological and public interest services, including flood control, prevention of pollution and storm damage, and protection of public and private water supplies, groundwater supply, fisheries, land containing shellfish, and wildlife habitat. Wetland resources include not only open water, swamps and marshes, but also rivers, streams and land subject to flooding. For outdoor enthusiasts, wetland resources provide the opportunity to fish, boat, hunt and view a wide variety of wildlife.

Wetland types within Williamstown include marshes and swamps, which tend to have emergent vegetation and wooded swamps, which tend to be forested and can be overlooked as being categorized as wetland resources. The forested wetlands are in fact mapped as forest in the 2016 MassGIS Land Use data referenced in Table 4 (while the marshes and swamps are likely mapped as wetlands). The wetlands are under the control of a variety of owners, including the Commonwealth, the Town, public groups, non-profit organizations, and private landowners. Some of the wetlands are used widely for birding, canoeing, hiking, hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities. Approximately 21% of the Town's wetlands are conserved⁵.

There is a calcareous fen located in the northern part of town on a town-owned parcel of land (the Dean property) and adjacent protected property, and other fens lie along the floodplain of the Hoosic River. These wetlands are home to special communities of flora and fauna adapted to these unique environments.

5. Vernal Pools

Vernal pools are indispensable to biodiversity, both locally and globally. In many upland areas, where the nearest wetland or other waterbody is thousands of feet away, vernal pools are the only aquatic breeding grounds in the area. Some of the state's rarest amphibians, including the mole salamanders (Jefferson, spotted, marbled salamanders) and some species of freshwater snails and clams, are inexorably linked to the vernal pool in which they were hatched. Most live out their lives within ¼ miles of their natal pool, returning to breed. For a species with a narrow or small distribution, a specific vernal pool may be the only place in the region where the creature is found. If that pool is destroyed, that specific population of creatures could become locally extinct. Vernal pools are most often found in the Berkshires in woodland areas, where evaporation from sunlight is limited due to the forest canopy. Vernal pools certified by the state have some protections under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, and possibly protection if rare species have been identified using the pool. According to a data layer set developed by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), approximately 14 vernal pools have been certified in Williamstown. However, there are at least 39 additional sites that have been identified as potential vernal pools without the protections afforded by certification. This DEP data layer has been developed through a desktop analysis, so the true number of

⁵ *Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022.*

vernal pools could be much higher due to thick forest canopy and dense areas of evergreen tree cover. Potential and certified vernal pools are shown in the Fish and Wildlife Map.

6. Aquifer Recharge Areas

Williamstown draws its water from wells drilled into the Hoosic Valley Confined Aquifer. Located in sandy gravel deposits under the Hoosic and Green Rivers, it is confined by a thick layer of fine sand, glacial lake silts and clay deposited at the bottom of Lake Bascom. The Confined Aquifer District overlay, intended to protect the integrity of the impervious cover above the aquifers, is located in the northeast corner of the Town and covers approximately 5% of the Town. The Confined Aquifer District covers 100% of the high-yield area of the aquifer, and approximately 89% of the medium yield portion of the aquifer. The Water Resource Districts are intended to protect areas that provide recharge for the aquifer and cover 17% of the town. In addition, the Wellhead Protection District was established to protect the quality and quantity of drinking water for the Town.

The aquifer has areas of both high yield (>300 gallons per minute) and medium yield (100-300 gallons per minute). Two surface reservoirs provide back-up water supply. The water resources of Williamstown are shown on the Water Resources Map, Figure 17.

D) Vegetation-

The mountains and valleys of Williamstown, with their varying altitudes, exposures and soil characteristics are home to diverse plant communities, with the greatest diversity found in landscapes that are in their natural state. Forests blanket 75% of the Town, with large expanses of forest intact and expanding beyond the Town's borders to create large contiguous unfragmented habitat. It is hard to believe that much of these lands were once cleared for agriculture or logged for timber or charcoal. Some have grown back to forest, following natural successional patterns; others have been continually disturbed by logging. The areas in Williamstown where forestlands continue to be cleared are largely due to historic land use patterns such as the densely developed village center, farmlands and scattered development along major roadways. These areas are easily seen on the Land Use Map, Figure 18.

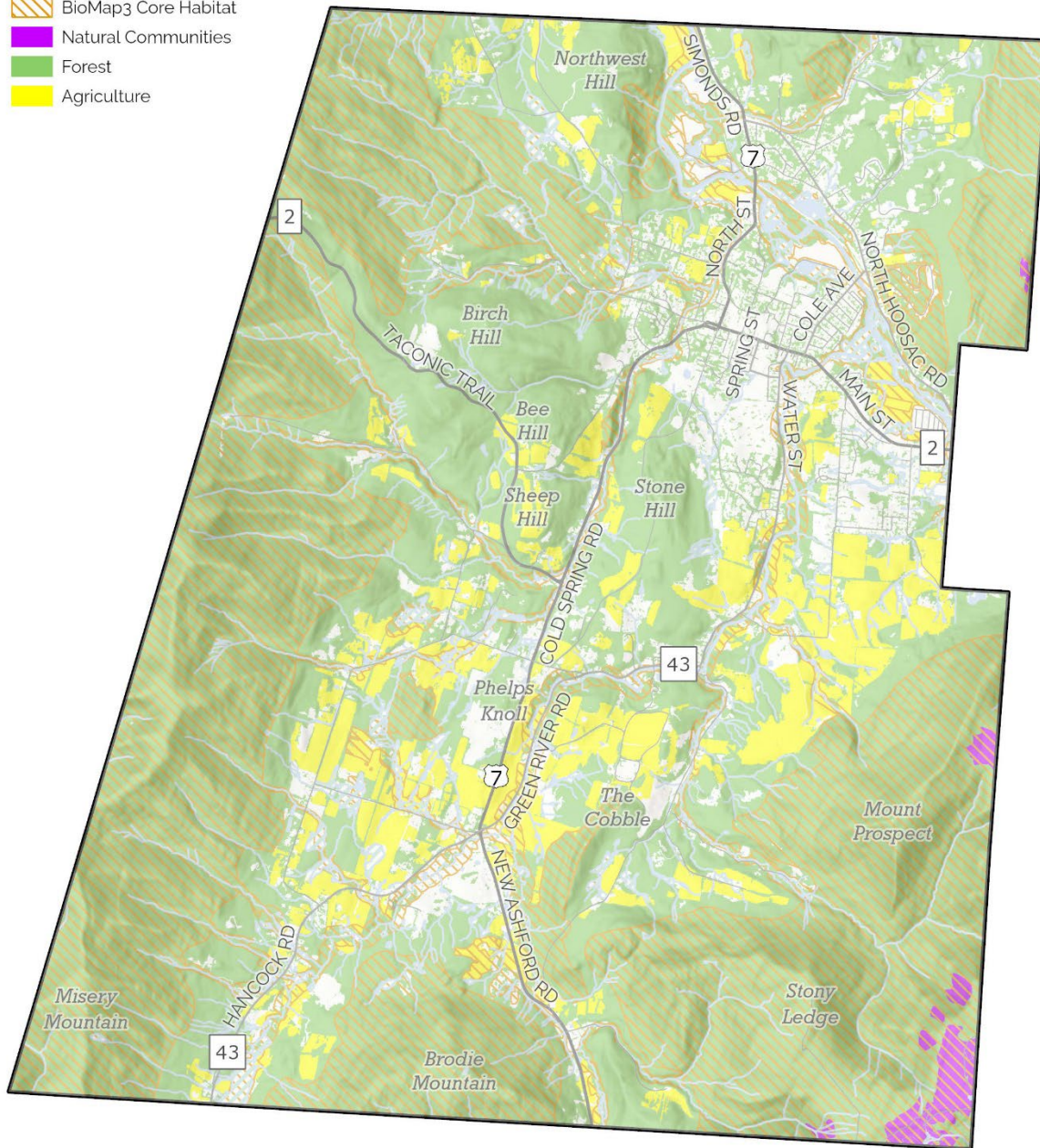
The most common forest type is mesic northern hardwood forest, which is found in extensive unbroken stands on the slopes of the Mt. Greylock complex and the Taconic Mountains that straddle the Williamstown/New York State border. Hardwood forest communities vary by sub-composition throughout the elevation of Williamstown's mountains, including the rich alluvial bottom land forest that is found in the Hoosic River Valley and the mixed deciduous forest stands (including sugar maples) found further up the hillside under approximately 1,300 feet. Steeper slopes are mostly composed of sugar maple, red maple, and American Birch, and yellow birch. The shoulders of the mountains, which tend to be drier, include red, white, and chestnut oak stands and blueberry and huckleberry thickets.

Figure 18: Williamstown Vegetation Types

Vegetation

Town of Williamstown

-  BioMap3 Core Habitat
-  Natural Communities
-  Forest
-  Agriculture



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At the higher mountain elevations with Williamstown, some stands are composed of red spruce and Eastern Hemlock, and occasional northern species such as bunchberry and three-toothed cinquefoil. ⁶

Examples of old-growth forest stands are found in the Hopkins Memorial Forest Beinecke Stand (sugar maple and beech) and in the Hopper (hemlock and spruce). The summit area of Mt. Greylock, just upslope from the southwestern border of the Town, hosts a boreal spruce-fir community, supporting some plant and animal species that may not be found elsewhere in the state. Within Hopkins Memorial Forest, a largely northern hardwood forest, there is an old-growth beech and sugar maple forest known as the Beinecke Stand. A southern calcareous cliff community can also be found within the HMF borders.

Large expanses of forest lands along the eastern and western slopes of Williamstown have been designated by BioMap3 as Core Habitat, which are lands critical for preservation of long-term biodiversity. Rare or uncommon Natural Plant Communities are found in the southeast corner of Williamstown in the highlands with the Mount Greylock State Reservation and in Pine Cobble. These communities include 1) a Spruce-Fir-Northern Hardwoods Forest, 2) an Acidic Rocky Summit community, and 3) a High Elevation Spruce-Fir Forest. These areas are shown on the Vegetation map. The western slopes of Mount Greylock have been designated as a National Natural Landmark because it contains stands of 200-year-old Red Spruce (including the state's largest) and old-growth Eastern Hemlock. The forests of the Hopper are home to many spring ephemeral wildflowers. Sloping calcareous fens and their associated species are found on the Town-owned Deans Property and TTOR's Mountain Meadow Property. These are rare communities that are currently being protected by the Conservation Commission and TTOR. Field Farm and the Green River Wildlife Management Area along New Ashford Road are examples of rich woodlands.

In contrast, the Hoosic River and much of its floodplain have also been designated as Core Habitat, as have large stretches of the Green River and Mills Hollow, and Roaring and Hemlock Brook corridors. At the northern section of town, a floodplain forest follows the lower elevations along the Hoosic River, where giant cottonwoods tower over other floodplain species. The south-facing slopes of Pine Cobble harbor a southern community of plants rarely found in Berkshire County.

Large areas of Williamstown have been designated as Core Habitat, which are specific areas determined to be important for the long-term protection of Species of Conservation Concern, exemplary natural communities, and intact ecosystems. Approximately 22 square miles of Williamstown is categorized as Core Habitat, located mainly along the mountainous regions of the town's borders as well as along the riparian stream corridors of the Green River, Hemlock Brook, and Hoosic River. Large tracts of forests (and wetlands) are critical for carbon storage and sequestration, especially mature forests such as those found in Hopkins Forest. These areas are illustrated on the Vegetation and Unique

⁶ *Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022.*

Features maps. The continued protection of Williamstown's forests is a very important component of natural resource protection in town planning.⁷

In addition to its ecological significance, this range of vegetated habitats adds an important dimension to outdoor recreation in Williamstown. Most hikes, even relatively short ones, pass through multiple plant communities. Because of this, hikers have the opportunity to experience a variety of flora and associated fauna. The region's combination of irregular terrain, scattered rocky outcroppings, many surface water resources, and varied vegetation provides an appealing outdoor experience for people of all backgrounds and interests. The Appalachian Mountain Club, The Trustees of the Reservations, the Hoosic River Watershed Association, the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, the Berkshire Knapsackers and the Williams College Outing Club take advantage of this attractive natural setting and lead hikes and walks to some of the more interesting plant communities in the area. About two-thirds of Williamstown's land area is forested. Both the College and town are actively planting street trees especially as traditional species are lost due to disease or old age.

Priority Habitats are the delineated habitats for rare plants and animals protected under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MEPA). These areas indicate the approximate extent of rare species habitat based on records in the state's rare species database and indicate areas that should serve as focus areas for long-term conservation. While a good portion of the Town's highlands are conserved, the corridors of the Hoosic and Green Rivers and Hemlock Brook are less protected from the impacts of development. Vernal pools, serving as critical habitat for key amphibian and insect species, are found throughout Williamstown. Because these pools are dry most of the year, they are especially vulnerable to land clearing and development activities, and therefore certifying potential vernal pools is key to maintaining these habitats. The red hatched areas on the Unique Features and Fish and Wildlife maps show the Priority Habitat areas of Williamstown. (See Figure 19)

Rare plant species tend to be found in the higher forested elevations or in the lower elevations associated with wetland resources (see Fish and Wildlife map). The Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program documents and monitors plant and animal species that are either at risk, or may become at risk, of extinction. Rarity in the state, population trend, and overall threat are the main criteria used to determine extinction risk. In Williamstown 38 state-listed rare plant species have been documented as living in the Town, of which 19 species are categorized as Endangered, 7 are Threatened, and 12 are of Special Concern. Endangered is the category of greatest concern, where the species is determined to be in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range, or in danger of extirpation from Massachusetts, as documented by biological research and inventory. See Appendix A and B for complete listing of species and brief notes on Endangered species.

As noted during a community-based 2018 climate change planning process, climate-change-related storm events and heat waves and invasive species all have influenced the trajectory of

⁷ *Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022.*

Williamstown's plant communities. The native tree species found in Williamstown include native ash, maple and oak trees, which tend to have long lifespans. But aging tree cover is prone to a variety of ills, including insect infestation, such as the emerald ash borer and the woolly adelgid, both of which have been a growing threat in the region. Public shade trees line many of the Town's streets and are scattered in its parks, but in recent years, Williamstown's urban/suburban tree cover is showing signs of aging out, with both limbs and whole trees coming down during storm events. The need for a forest management plan, including greater species diversity and a reforestation scheme, were raised as important concerns for the overall health of the forest and town center ecosystems. The planning process highlighted the need to develop tree management/replacement plans and to proactively seek financial resources for new trees.⁸ Williams College has worked with Davey Tree to create a GIS based inventory of trees on campus. The program allows the college to identify diseased or damaged trees and plan for replacement with native trees that will be resilient to the projected changes commensurate with climate change. Increasing infestations of invasive species such as Emerald Ash Borer, Woolly Adelgid, and Beech Leaf Disease have the potential to impact trees in the town.

E) Fisheries and Wildlife

The large tracts of forested land, with their varied elevations and vegetative cover, support a wide array of animal species, including some species that are documented in very few sites across Massachusetts. The woodland streams and wetlands support at least twenty-five reptile and amphibian species, two of which are listed as species of special concern, and more than twenty fish species, two of special concern. More than 120 bird species nest within the town limits, three of which are listed as species of special concern, threatened, or endangered⁹. Williamstown hosts a great number of game and non-game mammal species, including bobcat, black bear, fisher, moose, white tailed deer and turkey. Large birds such as great blue herons, various hawks and even bald eagles are commonly found here. With the exception of moose, most of these animals can commonly be found in most peoples' neighborhoods. Williamstown has forests in various levels of maturity, from farmlands reverting back to forest and large, older stands that may never have been cleared or logged. On the other hand, loss of habitat, forest fragmentation, and pesticide and herbicide use can affect wildlife some wildlife populations, and some local songbird populations appear to be in decline. The rivers provide important corridors for migratory animals. Aquatic life, birds, and mammals all make use of them and their bordering wetlands and floodplains for breeding or seasonal migrations. Development pressures can threaten these corridors and lead to habitat fragmentation and water quality degradation, greatly decreasing the ecological integrity of the landscape.

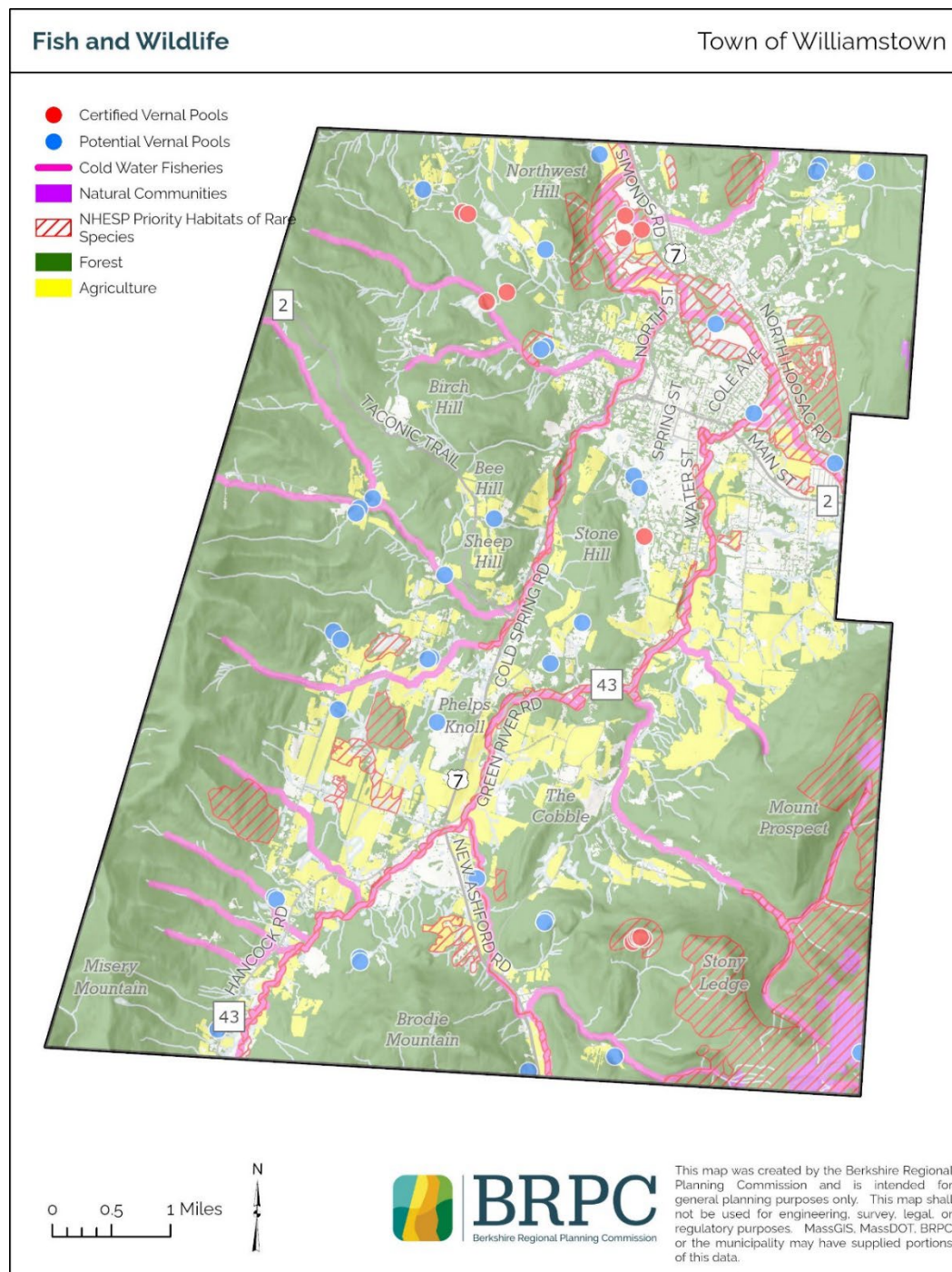
Fishing and hunting are practiced in Williamstown and its environs, but due to the state's ongoing monitoring and regulations, does not represent a threat to local wildlife populations. Most of

⁸ *Town of Williamstown, 2018.*

⁹ *Mass.gov "Rare Species Viewer", [Rare species viewer | Mass.gov](#)*

the main stream and river segments in the Town have been designated as Cold Water Fisheries, which is a waterbody used by reproducing coldwater fish to meet one or more of their life history requirements. Designation is based on fish samples collected annually by state biologists and technicians. Changes in land and water use can reduce the ability of these waters to support trout and other kinds of coldwater

Figure 19: Williamstown Fish and Wildlife Map, Fisheries and Vernal Pools



fish. This habitat has been determined to be highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, and maintaining forest cover along the shorelines is key in protecting these areas. Hemlock Brook and the Green River are stocked with trout each spring and the Hoosic River hosts a substantial population of naturally reproducing Brown Trout, some of which have reached record size. Other species commonly caught in the river include Northern Pike and Chain Pickerel. The presence of PCBs from former industrial sites in North Adams precludes human

consumption of fish caught in the Hoosic. Figure 19 demonstrates fisheries and vernal pools in the town.

Williamstown has been documented as hosting a long list of rare and endangered species of plants and animals. This is partly due to the calcareous soils found in Berkshire County and partly due to the cooler, higher elevation habitats that are found here as compared to the rest of the state. In general, the Town's uncommon, rare and endangered species are found either in the higher elevations and along the steep mountain stream ravines, or they are found along the lowland stream and river corridors and floodplains. The Town currently serves as a haven for rare/endangered plant species, as some that have been found here have only been documented in a few other towns within the Commonwealth. Uncommon moths, damselflies and dragonflies are found in forests and along waterways. The Little brown bat is found in Williamstown, where it overwinters in known hibernacula sites. State biologists discourage human intrusion into these sites to protect the species while populations recover from the devastating mortality caused by white-nose syndrome. Within Mount Greylock State Reservation, the higher elevations of the boreal zone contain what may be the state's only breeding Blackpoll Warbler population. The Massachusetts Audubon Association has designated the state reservation as one of its Massachusetts Important Bird Areas. Mourning warblers are also known to inhabit Williamstown, preferring second growth forests with clearings. The Hoosic River corridor is known to support Wood turtles, which require both aquatic and terrestrial habitats to complete their life cycles: they overwinter and breed in slow-moving streams/wetlands but nest and otherwise live in adjacent uplands. Jefferson salamanders breed almost exclusively in vernal pools or sometimes in shrub swamps. Appendix A and B provides the full list of rare species as documented by the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.

F) Scenic Resources and Unique Environments

The scenery of Williamstown figures prominently in the preceding and following sections because of its intrinsic importance to the character of the town. This section highlights the diversity of the Williamstown landscape and defines the importance of particular sites. Areas described in this list are: 1) scenic landscapes, 2) major characteristic or unusual geologic features, 3) cultural, archaeological, and historic areas, and 4) unique environments.

Scenic Landscapes

- a) Mt. Greylock Reservation and Area Extending West to the Taconic Crest (includes Deer Ridge and Agricultural Area of South Williamstown):

This important section of landscape has been designated a "Distinctive Landscape" by the Department of Environmental Management, which cites the impressive vistas and the most picturesque mountain scenery in the Commonwealth. The Inventory states that this vicinity is entitled to the highest level of protection (called "Class A - Distinctive") as a scenic resource. 1982 *Massachusetts Landscape*

Inventory: A survey of the Commonwealth's Scenic Areas. "The vistas are impressive and the mountain scenery is the most picturesque in the Commonwealth." *Inventory (1982)* at p. 217. This scenery still exists today, and no one in Williamstown would disagree with this characterization. This large section of the town is distinctive because of its sharply defined mountains with steep scarps to the east and west enclosing a broad valley dotted with large farms. The open areas at the summits and in the valley provide breathtaking viewsheds, many of more than ten miles. "The Hopper," a steep three-sided valley in the shape of a grain hopper carved into the west slope of Mt. Greylock is described in Part 2, Major Geologic Features. Route 7 traverses the valley north to south, opening excellent views of the mountains and the agricultural sections of the town along its entire route. Many people call the panorama seen from Route 7 at Mt. Greylock Regional High School the best view in Williamstown. To the east, one looks across open farms, over Deer Ridge, into the Hopper, and up to the summit of Mt. Greylock. To the south, rolling hills rise to South (now Brodie) Mountain. To the west, more farms lead up to the Taconic Range. Much of the land one sees from this point is protected; two town roads in this area are designated scenic roads (Scott Hill Road and Oblong Road).

b) Foothills: Bee, Birch, Sheep, and Stone Hills

This area, which abuts the Mt. Greylock area to the north, is rated "Noteworthy" in the 1982 Inventory. It is marked by open fields, rolling, wooded hills, and high ridges. It is bisected by Route 7, which is the major entrance to the village center from the south and west. The road, which runs in a valley along Hemlock Brook, offers views of fields and wooded hills. It is protected from strip development by its zoning, which is residential along most of its length, but with sections designated for "tourist business." Stone Hill, which rises to the east of Route 7, is a rocky quartzite outcrop just south of the town center. It is crossed by now-abandoned Stone Hill Road, once the main route out of town to the south. Stone Hill provides an area close to the center of town for recreation and offers excellent views of the surrounding hills and fields. Most of Stone Hill is privately owned. Public access is by the tolerance of individual landowners. Although the majority of this land is not officially protected, public sentiment runs high and proposed developments have been met with opposition strong enough to cause landowners to change their plans. The old Rosenberg Farm on Sheep Hill, just west of Stone Hill, was purchased in 2000 by the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation. Renovations to the farmhouse were completed in 2003 and the property is now the WRLF headquarters. The large meadow provides good wildlife habitat and is open to the public for birding, walking, sledding, nature study, and other passive recreation activities. Both Sheep Hill and Bee Hill provide nice views of the Purple Valley as well.

c) Pine Cobble Mountain

A large, wooded mountainous area in the northeast corner of the town, Pine Cobble rises to an elevation of 1894 feet. Its summit offers fine views of the town center and surrounding mountains. From the village center, it looms as the northerly section of the ring of mountains around the town. Pine

Cobble lookout, like Stone Hill, is close to the center of town and is a popular hiking spot. The sandy shoreline of former Lake Bascom can be easily identified along the trail. A short spur trail leads to Bear Spring. Rising at the base of a tall, jagged cliff, Bear Spring is the only dependable source of water for wildlife on the south face of Pine Cobble.

d) Stratton and Blair Roads

Located on the easterly side of town, the 360 degree panorama from the intersection of these roads is another of the best views in Williamstown. To the west are farm fields and the Taconic Range; to the south, Mt. Greylock and the Hopper; to the east is Pine Cobble; to the north, more farms, Stone, Bee, and Sheep Hills, the center of town, and the Green Mountains. Although much of the open land (mostly farmland) in this immediate area is under only temporary protection through Chapter 61A, more than 300 acres is permanently preserved through the Commonwealth's Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program, run by the Commonwealth. Further the Conservation Commission also controls two large agricultural properties known as the Burbank and Lowry lands provide sweeping views of the surrounding mountains.

e) The Glens: Flora's and Ford

Flora's Glen is one of the outstanding woodland brooks in the town. It rises on the foothills of the Taconic Range on state-owned land. It descends in a beautiful ravine, Flora's Glen, where William Cullen Bryant is said to have written "Thanatopsis" during his student days at Williams College. Flora's Glen runs through state-owned, town-owned (Conservation Commission), and non-profit-owned lands, as well as a privately-owned parcel that is under Conservation Restriction to the WRLF. Flora's Glenn Brook once fed the former town ice pond on Bee Hill Road, which is a town-designated Scenic Road. The pond disappeared when the town breached the dam due to concerns about its stability after a flash-flooding event. Ford Glen, a wild and beautiful ravine within the College-owned Hopkins Memorial Forest, is another outstanding brook in the town. It rises on the east slopes of the Taconics and descends through HMF and some privately-owned land to join the Hoosic River, where it flows about one and one-half miles to the Vermont border.

f) Ephs Pond

Eph's Pond is one of the most-visited natural areas in Williamstown, thanks to its central position adjacent to the Williams athletic fields and the new Mohawk Path trail. The pond's swampy shoreline and the adjacent floodplain forest along the Hoosic River attract many bird species in all seasons, despite the intensive use of the Williams College playing fields for sports, family activities, and dog walking.

Major Characteristics or Unusual Geographic Features

a. The Hopper

Deep cuts and steep valleys are characteristic of the mountainsides on all sides of the town. The Hopper is by far the greatest of them all. Part of the Mt. Greylock Reservation, its 1600 acres were designated in 1977 as a Natural Area by the then MA Department of Environmental Management and, in 1978, a National Natural Landmark by the Society of American Foresters. Finally in 1987 the Hopper was designated, by the National Park Service, as a National Natural Landmark. It is a steep, three-sided valley cut deeply into the west face of the Greylock massif. It faces west, with Hopper Brook its only gateway. The vertical drop from the summit to the floor (at the intersection of Money and Bacon Brooks) is 2200 feet. The view east from Route 7 directly into the Hopper reveals its striking geometry but only hints at the majesty of the landscape within. Its floor is surprisingly flat, then rises at first gently, then more and more steeply to the summits on its three sides. Its corners are cut by fast-flowing streams, each with a waterfall and cascades. The forest is mixed hard and softwood, including several stands of very old red spruce. Some of these stands are considered prime old growth over 150 years in age. Countless spring ephemeral wildflowers grow on the forest floor as well.

b. McMaster Caves

This cave system, located on land in South Williamstown owned by TTOR's, and offers a fine example of how fast-flowing water cutting through marble has created the valleys of Williamstown. This parcel is accessible to the public via a marked trail from Field Farm. A Conservation Restriction on the "Caves Lot" is held jointly by the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Although the caves remain open to visitation, disturbance of this important bat habitat is discouraged and should be monitored to ensure the continued health of any Little Brown Bat populations.

Cultural and Historic Areas

a. Main Street/Town Green

Williamstown's Main Street, nearly 250 feet wide and extending for 1 3/8 miles from the Green River on the east to Buxton Brook on the west, was laid out in 1750. Main Street forms the heart of the Williams Campus and the recently designated Williamstown Cultural District. Field Park, at the center of the Town Green, was originally built in the 19th century by the Village Improvement Society; in the park is a replica of an original regulation house, known as the 1753 House, built along the street at the founding of the town. The park also contains a hand-built stone memorial to Williamstown's veterans. Today's Main Street, designed by the Olmstead Brothers from 1902-1912 a tree-shaded way lined with College buildings and large houses. Street trees are very prominent along the Town Green but as the

current large sugar maples reach their end of lifespan, and many of the Town's ash trees become under threat from EAB, a program should be considered to retain this important urban forest cover. The Williamstown seen by tourists who drive through on either route begins and ends with broad vistas from the north and south or with mountain passes from the east and west, while the town green presents a picture of the typical New England college town. Main Street is also the western-most portion of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway, a state-designated scenic byway.

b. Williams College Campus

Williams College is nearly as old as Williamstown itself. The sense of history that comes from the old College buildings that line Main Street has been noted above. In addition, just off Route 7 North, the Haystack Monument commemorates the founding of the Foreign Missions in America. All of the Williams College campus is an important cultural area. It offers theater, concerts, lecture halls, libraries, and an art museum. Historically, the summer Williamstown Theatre Festival (WTF) was a longstanding tradition, the COVID-19 Pandemic has resulted in a transition to a different model. In addition, the College and the Clark Art Institute sponsor various events throughout the year. These cultural resources greatly enhance the quality of life in the town.

c. Clark Art Institute

Located just south of the center of town, this handsome museum is a major tourist attraction, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors annually. It maintains a collection of impressionist paintings as well as rotating exhibits. It is visited often by tourists, local residents, and school children. It sits at the foot of Stone Hill and owns the open fields that rise behind the main buildings. The Clark maintains a mile-long nature trail on its land on Stone Hill. Additionally Town, College, and Buxton and Pine Cobble School lands adjacent to the Clark have extensive trail systems. These have been unified with a common set of trail markings and directional kiosks through the efforts of the Conservation Commission. The Clark recently completed a major building expansion that has attracted many visitors from around the world. An outdoor reflecting basin and large open air terrace with views of Stone Hill are a welcome addition to the open spaces in town. Connecting the trail network at the Clark Art Institute to the Williamstown Rural Lands would be possible with easements or permissions from intervening property owners and would help to connect both the north and south and east and western portions of the town.

d. Sand Springs

Sand Springs runs year-round at a temperature of 74 degrees Fahrenheit and it has been popular as a swimming area and health retreat dating to pre-Colonial times. The pool at the spring now operates as a nonprofit organization. The facility offers a variety of programming to the community including swimming instruction. Listed in this section for its historical significance, it is one of three hot springs in the town. The second is at Wire Bridge Farm and is now owned by Williams College as a part of the Hopkins Memorial Forest, a third hot spring is on private land in South Williamstown.

e. Mt. Hope Farm

Col. E. Parmalee Prentice and his wife, Alta Rockefeller Prentice, daughter of John D. Rockefeller Sr., assembled this property in South Williamstown from four smaller parcels in 1910. During the 1920s and 1930s, Mt. Hope Farm was known throughout the country for its pioneering experiments in animal breeding and husbandry. After the death of the Prentices, the property passed through a number of hands; a consortium of Williams College alumni who have built second homes on the grounds eventually purchased the property. The mansion, Elm Tree House, was donated to Williams College. In 1997, an initiative was begun to bring the mansion up to code and to restore the immediately surrounding grounds. The facility is now used by the College for lectures, retreats, dinners, and other events with students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni.

f. Hopkins Memorial Forest

This large tract of forested land, which extends from the northwest corner of Williamstown into Vermont and New York, was purchased bit by bit and assembled into a gentleman's farm by Amos Lawrence Hopkins, a railroad executive by profession and the son of a Williams College President. The property's acquisition began in 1887 and its expansion continues today. The land was donated to Williams College in 1934; from 1935 to 1967 the forest was used by the U.S. Forest Service for silviculture and forest genetics research. From 1971 to the present, Hopkins Memorial Forest has been used as an environmental studies field station for student and faculty research. The forest contains an extensive trail system used by hikers, skiers and horses.

Unique Environments

a. Diverse Forest Communities

Williamstown is home to a wide variety of forest types. Examples of old-growth forest stands are found in the Hopkins Memorial Forest Beinecke Stand (sugar maple and beech) and in the Hopper (hemlock and spruce); a frequently-disturbed floodplain forest with its giant cottonwoods is found in Linear Park near the confluence of the Green and Hoosic Rivers. The top of Mt. Greylock hosts a boreal spruce-fir community; Field Farm and the Green River Wildlife Management Area along New Ashford Road are examples of rich woodlands. The southern slopes of Pine Cobble are inhabited by a southern hardwood (oak-hickory) forest. This vegetative diversity provides important habitat for the fauna of the region.

b. Rare Environments

Sloping calcareous fens are found on the Town-owned Deans Property and TTOR's Mountain Meadow Property. These are rare communities that are currently being protected by the Conservation Commission and TTOR. In addition, Bullock's Ledge and Pine Cobble provide habitat for the endangered hairy honeysuckle *Lonicera hirsute* and provide a habitat for the Chestnut Oak. Furthermore the vast

majority of our local forest land has been identified by the Bio Map 2 data from the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. These areas of intact forest are identified as Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape by Natural Heritage, making preservation of these landscapes critical to maintaining biodiversity within the Commonwealth. Natural Heritage also identifies our local waterways as Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape as well. These waterways are home to many rare species such as the wood turtle and cold water fish species.

c. Agricultural Land

There is significant productive farmland forming a belt across southern and central Williamstown, with large expanses within the Green River and Hemlock Brook watersheds (shown in orange in the Unique Features map and yellow in the Vegetation and Fish and Wildlife maps). This area has a large region of overlap with the scenic landscape described in section F.1.a. and is part of the rural fabric of the Town. The sweeping open field and pastures are a scenic foreground set against the darker forested hillsides of the Taconic Range and the Mount Greylock mountains, with the Hopper being a distinctive landform above the Green River valley farms.

Although Williamstown is historically a town with numerous farms and working landscapes, agriculture has declined for the past several decades, due partially to the fact that farms and development vie for the same gently sloping lands along the river valleys. As noted in *The Williamstown Farmland Project* (2020), there are 16 active farm operations in Town, with agricultural land uses ranging from beef cattle to dairy, vegetables to maple sugaring, horse boarding to pig farming, and haying to timber lots, etc. Some of the farms operate farm stands or otherwise offer their products directly to the community. Many Williamstown farmers are at or near retirement age, many without succession plans, and five of the 16 farms in this study were determined to be at risk of imminent loss. The loss of farmland is largely due to low-density residential development. This same study notes the decline of agriculture throughout New England, making this open farmland part of a scarce and disappearing resource and habitat type.

d. Scenic Roads

The Massachusetts Scenic Roads Act enabled Towns to designate specific roads in order to protect the aesthetic, environmental and historical values of local rural roads by preserving bordering trees and stone walls. This Act complements the century-old Public Shade Tree Law. The Williamstown Planning Board has jurisdiction over the Scenic Roads Act while the Williamstown Tree Warden has jurisdiction over the Shade Tree Act. Any person wishing to do work on a Scenic Road should consult with both the Planning Board and the Tree Warden to ensure compliance.

Williamstown has five designated scenic roads: Bee Hill, Oblong, Northwest Hill, Scott Hill and Stone Hill Roads. The Town’s Scenic Road bylaw stipulates that “roads designated by Town Meeting as scenic roads not be altered in any way that requires the cutting or removal of trees or the tearing down

or destruction of stone walls unless stated procedures are followed.” Procedures require that any person, organization, public agency or utility company proposing to perform any repair, maintenance, reconstruction or paving work which involves the cutting of trees or the tearing down or destruction of stone walls on a scenic road shall seek written consent of the Planning Board as provided for in the Scenic Roads Act.” The Planning Board shall, after hold a public hearing, issue a decision after considering the degree of alteration, the necessity of the proposed action in terms of public safety or welfare, the availability of reasonable alternatives, and the adequacy of compensatory actions such as replacement of trees and/or stone walls.

G) Environmental Challenges

While Williamstown’s overall environmental quality is quite high, significant environmental problems still exist. The greatest challenges facing Williamstown’s environmental quality at the current time are the large-scale macro level changes from climate change and the spread of invasive species. The Town and other community stakeholders will have to take these challenges into account as planning for future endeavors unfolds.

1. Hazardous Waste and Brownfield Sites

Currently, there are no known contaminated sites within the town that need to be remediated. Williamstown residents also have cause for concern about the possibility of leaching and contamination from some hazardous waste areas upstream on the Hoosic River in North Adams. The presence of PCBs in the river is documented and signs along the river advise anglers to not consume any fish or other organisms caught in the river.

2. Landfills

There are many former landfill and waste disposal sites in Williamstown. The official Williamstown Landfill (on the Moore Property) was closed and capped in 1997, and this facility now serves as a major solar photovoltaic field as well as a transfer station from which Williamstown’s solid waste is hauled to certified disposal sites.

The old Cole Field Landfill, adjacent to the Hoosic River, is located in close proximity to the Williams College athletic fields and is also the site of some walking trails. Including the Mohican Trail Shared Use Path. Whenever the river is high the erosive force of the river exposes landfill contents, which can be carried downstream. Water quality tests have determined that the Cole Field Landfill does not have significant adverse effects on the Hoosic River. Attempts to stabilize the shoreline and contain the landfill have been undertaken, but the site will continue to need monitoring. There are several other old landfill sites in Williamstown that are in similar situations to that of the Cole Field Landfill. This includes the Hart Landfill along the Green River at the southern border of the town with New Ashford

3. Erosion

Erosion is a natural occurrence in Williamstown. There is a history of landslides, large and small, on the steep slopes of Mt. Greylock. The most recent large one occurred in 1990. The threat of erosion on Williamstown's hillsides, with their thin soils and areas of steep slope, is a prime reason for the prohibition of development above the 1,300' level. In this sense, erosion has helped justify the preservation of open space. The banks of the Hoosic and Green Rivers are also subject to periodic erosion, particularly during heavy precipitation events, causing some threat to residences along the riverbank. Erosion along the Hoosic River threatens the Town's closed shoreline landfill and the sewer line that is located at the site, requiring constant monitoring.

4. Flooding

Chronic flooding occurs along both the Green and Hoosic Rivers. The Green River, whose channel makes some sharp meanders, is subject to ice jams in the winter and spring months. The Hoosic is a wider, straighter river, less subject to ice jams, but prone to seasonal flooding. Flood chutes upriver in Adams and North Adams have increased the volume of flood water reaching Williamstown. Much of the open space along the river is in the floodway or flood zone. Thus recreation development in these areas is limited to trails, river access, picnic areas, and other uses that can tolerate periodic flooding.

In 2011 Tropical Storm Irene resulted in such severe flooding of the Spruces Mobile Home Park that the Park was eventually closed and 225 homes were lost. This was a loss of an established neighborhood, further reducing the affordable housing stock within Williamstown. While closing the mobile homes has resulted in the heartbreaking removal of persons from the homes they have lived in for decades, it has resulted in a significant reduction in human health risk. The property is now home to a public park, which has been designed to withstand period inundation from flood events.

The Town of Williamstown has been working to update its municipal infrastructure as funds allow to avoid flooding, sedimentation, and erosion damage. A recent example of this work is the stormwater drainage system redesign at the bottom of Spring Street in 2018-2019 in collaboration with Williams College, which reduced flooding from Christmas Brook due to undersized culverts unable to handle elevated flows. This initiative was funded and led by Williams College. The increase in the number and intensity of severe storm events resulting from climate change will require ongoing monitoring and mitigation where needed. Strategies to address flooding identified in Envisioning Williamstown 2035 include low impact stormwater best management practices, blue-green infrastructure, and reductions in impervious cover along with increased vegetative buffers along flood prone areas. These strategies were also identified in the 2019 Williamstown Hazard Mitigation Plan and should be coordinated with state, regional and private partners.

5. Sedimentation

Sedimentation is a problem in many areas of Williamstown. With the exception of the siltation resulting from periodic flooding, siltation in Williamstown is usually a consequence of development and is discussed later in this section under Item 6. Improving site plan review requirements and enforcement can help to reduce soil loss and erosion at build sites. The Conservation Commission is working with developers, landowners, and others to ensure that best practices are followed that limit erosion within the town.

6. Development Impact

Development has aggravated Williamstown's environmental problems. Its impact has been felt in all parts of town as developmental activities have disturbed soil stability, changed drainage patterns, and altered natural habitat. Open space and recreational areas in the center of town have suffered degradation as described elsewhere in this section. According to the Existing Conditions Analysis (2022), approximately 3% of Williamstown has been calculated to be impervious cover. The majority of the impervious cover is located adjacent along the Hoosic River along Main Street and the dense village center, which includes the Williams College campus, Cole Street, and Water Street heading south past the Taconic Golf Club (along the Green River). This indicates these areas of the watershed are more vulnerable to nonpoint source pollution from stormwater runoff.

The Pine Cobble Development, which was begun in 1988, is a subdivision of single family homes designed for Williams College faculty, and one of the first attempts to site a large residential development on a Williamstown hillside. Because of the site's steep topography, severe slumping, sinking, erosion, and siltation occurred during the clearing and construction. To mitigate the impacts, the College implemented expensive correction measures. This site has since stabilized and now hosts dozens of homes, but the problems experienced during its development underscore the necessity of careful planning for development in Williamstown.

7. Ground and Surface Water Pollution

Surface water resources are most threatened by pollution. The groundwater resource of the Confined Aquifer is protected by the sediments under which it is confined and by the water resource protection district. The two surface water reservoirs, now used only for backup, are protected from pollution by their distance from development, but are subject to pollution from sedimentation in rainy seasons. Two of Williamstown's in-town ponds suffer from significant pollution. Eph's Pond, located on the edge of the College athletic fields and near the Hoosic River, receives runoff from the College campus. It is heavily silted and has shown evidence of pollution from organic compounds. Bridges Pond, which is a town-owned conservation pond, is polluted by runoff from developed areas above, from its location near the railroad, and from its proximity to one of Williamstown's former landfills. It is

contaminated with heavy metals and is also experiencing invasion by exotic species such as Purple Loosestrife.

8. Impaired Water Bodies

According to the Existing Conditions Analysis, the Hoosic River is listed as impaired on the *Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters* for the Clean Water Act 303(d) list. The segment of Hoosic River that starts at the river's confluence with the North Branch of the Hoosic River in North Adams and flows through Williamstown to the Vermont state line, is listed as impaired for 1) aquatic life, due to alteration in stream side or littoral vegetative covers and flow regime modifications, 2) fish and shellfish consumption, due to PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in fish tissue, and 3) primary contact recreation (swimming), due to *Escherichia Coli* (*E. coli*) and fecal coliform bacteria. This segment of the Hoosic River is not impaired for aesthetic use or for secondary contact recreation (boating, etc.).

State data on the Hoosic River indicates that a brownfield site in North Adams is a confirmed source contributing to PCB contamination which thus limits fish consumption. Bacterial contamination, which limits primary contact, can occur from faulty septic systems or sewage pipe leaks and discharges, and also from runoff from agricultural and residential sources. Reducing bacterial contamination from such a varied and dispersed array of sources is challenging for communities, often taking years of investigative monitoring, education and outreach campaigns, and implementation of best management practices to limit polluted stormwater runoff from entering waterways.

Bridges Pond is littered and polluted with heavy metals. The site is difficult to access currently as it is overgrown and crosses an active rail line, resulting in safety concerns for users. This freight line has multiple trains operating in both directions daily and bisects the site, creating hazardous conditions.

9. Environmental Justice Populations

Williamstown contains one census tract with an identified Environmental Justice population, so identified due to minority composition of the neighborhood. Within the town, Census Tract 9201.01 Block Group 3 has been identified as qualifying as an EJ community based upon MINORITY characteristics (all data derived from 2020 DEC Data). This block group overlaps the Williams College Campus (almost entirely) and comprises a total of 1,815 individuals. In reviewing the age categories within this block group, those aged 18-21 (college-aged) constitute 1083 individuals (59%) and approximately Williams College enrollment. Census data indicates that 579 of the total individuals are minorities of one or more races (32%). Age and race data are not correlated with one another, so while it is possible to determine that a majority of the block group is college-aged, it is not possible to determine that the racial diversity in the area is a result of the student population (other than anecdotally or using College Enrollment figures, not publicly available). That being said, Williams College has sought to actively increase its enrollment of students of color and from diverse backgrounds.

According to 2020 DEC census information, the town is 80% white alone, with remaining minorities making up 20%, those identifying as Asian were 7%, and those identifying as two or more races also at

7%. African Americans constitute 3% of the overall community. The 2010 census counts included the over 300 residents of the Spruces Mobile Home Park, a large portion of whom relocated elsewhere in the area. The Spruces was a tight knit retirement community, primarily of low and many very low income individuals. The park was severely flooded in August of 2011 during Hurricane Irene. Following the storm only about 60 of the 225 mobile homes that made up the park were able to be reoccupied, making the park unsustainable economically. The Town then stepped in and applied for and received a FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant to relocate remaining residents and turn the park into open space. This project was completed in June of 2016. Efforts are now underway to turn this area into a public park, complete with a bike path, constructed by Mass DOT and completed in Spring of 2023. This other area, near Cole Avenue, has some of the same income struggles as the Spruces but is much smaller in size. The bike path and Spruces project will ensure that the remaining Environmental Justice population in this census tract will have adequate access to recreational opportunities.

10. Climate Change Impacts

As noted in the Existing Conditions Analysis, 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. Wetland resources will be impacted in a variety of ways, including warming temperatures, an issue for the Town’s cold water habitats as well as warm water habitats such as the Hoosic River and small ponds. It will be increasingly important to maintain or recreate shaded forest cover along shorelines to help mitigate increasing air temperatures.

Figure 20: Bike Racks in Williamstown



5.) Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest

Protected open space lands improve the quality of life for residents, students and visitors alike. As noted in *America's Great Outdoors, A Promise to Future Generations*, outdoor recreation provides Americans with physical and emotional rejuvenation and promotes respect for our natural heritage. Research indicates that regular exposure to nature lowers stress, cultivates creativity, and builds self-confidence among young people. Heritage landscapes, which provide us with a sense of our cultural and agricultural past. Undeveloped natural lands serve many natural and social functions, including wildlife habitat and corridors, water quality protection, flood control and, with the growing impacts of climate change, carbon sequestration. Conserved undeveloped lands entice residents to enter a fresh and quiet environment and to reconnect with nature. Outdoor recreation is increasingly seen as a way to increase peoples' activity level and combat health issues such as high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes.

Open space and natural landscapes are embedded as part of Williamstown's economy. Revenue from farms and forests supports local families, some of whom have worked the land for generations. Local farms also provide fresh produce and meat, while forests provide wood products, heating fuel and maple syrup. As noted in the Commonwealth's *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2017*, the tourism industry cites outdoor recreation as one of the main reasons that visitors come to Massachusetts. This is especially true for the Berkshire region, in which Williamstown plays a key role. It also helps to improve the economy by making the state more attractive for companies to locate.

The many conservation properties in Williamstown form a network of lands that provide recreational, social, and ecological benefits. These lands provide habitat, store and infiltrate stormwater, sequester carbon, and contribute to the health and wellness of residents and visitors. It is important to recognize that Williamstown's conservation and recreation lands are a critical component of a sustainable and resilient community, fostering collaboration and partnership across parcel and municipal boundaries, and building social connections between users while protecting critical natural resources. Williamstown could be further informed by a canopy analysis town-wide and identification of forest management practices that increase carbon capture.¹⁰

Williamstown residents value and embrace its agricultural traditions, acknowledging the natural and public benefits provided by its farmlands, including scenic value, wildlife habitat and local food production. Although agricultural production peaked in New England in the late-19th century, Williamstown has strong agrarian roots and continues to maintain an active agricultural community. In addition to supporting a robust local food network and bolstering the local economy, one benefit of agricultural lands relative to open space in Williamstown is often referred to as helping "maintain the rural character of the town." The 2020 Williamstown Farmland Project highlighted the resiliency of

¹⁰ *Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022.*

farms as a topic of immediate concern as seven out of the 16 farms reported facing high levels of threat to their farmland. Some actions to aid farmers in the long-term protection of their operations include:

- Farm succession planning to promote the future of farming,
- Promotion of innovative and value-added products, and
- Peer-to-peer assistance with grant acquisitions.¹¹

This section contains an inventory of undeveloped lands of interest that provide environmental benefits to both wildlife and the public. There are differing levels of protection that are involved in open space and recreation lands. Most federal and state lands maintained for conservation and recreation can be regarded as permanently protected lands. Most conservation lands owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are protected under Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution, and to remove protection status of these lands for development would require an act of the state legislature. Although such a scenario could occur, the action would undoubtedly be contentious.

Other lands that can be considered permanently protected are private lands upon which a conservation restriction (CR), agricultural preservation restriction (APR), or easement has been placed. These are legal deed-restricted agreements between a landowner and another entity in which the owner agrees to restrict the use of the land in perpetuity. Activities such as farming, forest or wildlife management, recreation and other land uses that the property owner wishes to pursue continue to be allowed. The landowner continues to own the property, but if the land is sold, the new owner must comply with the provisions of the CR, which had been placed on the deed and is transferred. CRs are typically held by governmental agencies, land trusts, environmental organizations and municipalities (Conservation Commissions often hold CRs). A total of 1,299 acres of private land is permanently protected through CRs and APRs.

Other tracts of undeveloped land with a good deal of protection are the municipal lands such as the drinking water supply lands owned by the Town of Williamstown, or lands held for conservation. The Town also owns several open space parcels with varying degrees of protection, such as parks and schools that would have a lower level of protection.

Williamstown encompasses 30,129 acres, and of that total 11,706 acres (39% of total) can be considered to have a high degree of permanent protection. Many of these lands are part of larger, regional mosaic of protected land holdings that extend far beyond Williamstown's borders, such as the vast patchwork of lands along the Taconic Mountain range that extend into Vermont and New York State, the lands in Pine Cobble that abut Clarksburg State Forest, and the Mount Greylock State Reservation (a holding that is the Commonwealth's second-largest state forest), that extends into North Adams, Adams and New Ashford. Table 5 offers a summary of these lands.

¹¹ *Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022.*

Table 5. Summary of Permanently Protected Lands in Williamstown

Landowner	Acreage
State of Massachusetts	6,923
Town of Williamstown	1,756
Land Trusts	1,728
CRs and APRs	1,299
Total	11,706

Source: MassGIS 2016

Williamstown is fortunate in that it has 108 miles of hiking/walking trails within its borders (See Figure 22)¹² These trails encourage residents and visitors to access vast forest lands, open fields and the Hoosic River corridor (see the Trails Map for locations). Many of the higher elevation trails in town including those on Mount Greylock, the Taconic Range and other popular outdoor recreation areas offer views of the valley and agricultural lowlands. While many of the trail systems involve steep slopes that may be difficult for some people, trails on gentler terrain are found Linear Park, Field Farm and at Margaret Lindly Park. The Mohican Trail Shared Use Path has added 2.3 miles of fully accessible trail, terminating in the Spruces Community Park for easy parking and other amenities. It is hoped that one

Figure 21: Paths at Clark Art Institute

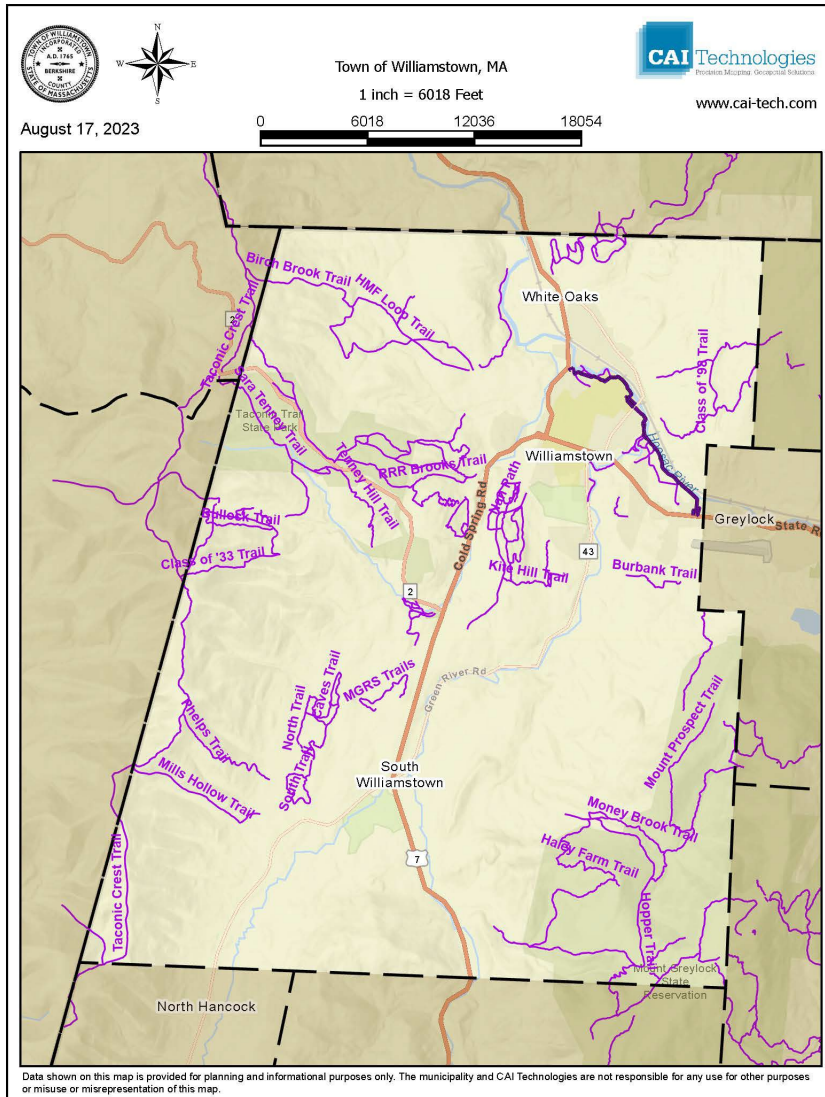


day this trail will link with a multi-use trail system through North Adams that will link to the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail that currently ends at the Adams/North Adams border. Creating trail connections across Route 7 has been identified in previous reports and opportunities to connect Williamstown Rural Lands network on the West side of the

¹² Resilience Planning and Design, 2022.

highway with the Clark Art Museum’s trail network could serve as a potential first step.

Figure 22: Williamstown Trail Network



Hunting and fishing are allowed on most of the lands offered for public recreation, including lands owned by the Town, state and land trusts. Hunting during deer season is also allowed in Hopkins Memorial Forest. Some farmers may allow hunting on their properties with permission. There is relatively limited access to fish, swim or boat in Williamstown. Lauren’s Launch, a town-maintained canoe put-in is located on the Hoosic River, is one of only a few sites to access the river. This river access point is difficult to navigate, with a 3-4 foot drop off from the bank to the river. Interest in improving this site was expressed by both the Hoosic River Watershed Association and the operators at the regional wastewater treatment facility (used for upriver sampling of water quality by the operators.)

Another a canoe launch is close-by off Ashton Avenue, just over the North Adams line. Fishing the Green and Hoosic Rivers offer great rewards but access to these rivers due to steep embankments can be challenging and advisories against consuming fish from the Hoosic river are posted at access points.

The Mohican Trail Shared Use Path is a 2.3-mile fully accessible trail that allows bikes. Mountain biking is allowed on some trails in the Mount Greylock State Reservation, but none that allow biking are located within Williamstown. A local grassroots organization, the Purple Valley Trail Alliance (PVTA) is

working to improve Mountain Biking in the area and is currently surveying local outdoor enthusiasts to determine areas of interest and to educate locals of opportunities. An informal set of trails is used by some Bikers in South Williamstown, the trails are west of Route 43 but cross private land and are not currently open to the public. The PVTA is hopeful to incorporate some of these informal trails into a local trail network by working with both landowners and biking enthusiasts.

Although not a landowner, the Hoosic River Watershed Association (HooRWA) has played a leading role in the promotion of the rivers as a recreational resource. Its long-term goals include increasing protection of the rivers and their riparian buffer zones, developing more public access and a feeling of ownership toward the rivers, and facilitating appropriate recreational use of the rivers. HooRWA partners with the Town, land trusts, colleges and local schools in outdoor events, including river cleanups, promoting fishing and canoeing, and developing trails near the river.

A) Private Lands

Open Space Deed Restrictions

There are several private property owners across Williamstown who have placed CRs or APRs on their lands. Seventy-eight percent of the deed restrictions in the Town are APRs, where the intention is to preserve agricultural lands for future generations. One of these APRs, Green River Farm, occupies a prominent place in the town at the intersection of Route 43 and Route 7 and has been for sale for more than a year.

Table 6. Conservation and Agricultural Preservation Restrictions

Site Name and Type of Deed Restriction	Acres
Windy Hill Farm CR	82.71
Fairfields Dairy Farm APR	208.06
Faison CR	6.88
Northwest Hill Road CR	37.64
Galusha APR	17.16
Mount Greylock State Reservation CR	82.97
Galusha James E APR	229.50
Green River Farm APR	244.12
Lewis CR	15.66
Keep Hill Road CR	1.61
Phelps Farm APR	302.76
Sabot CR	10.41
Sprague CR	43.76
Whole Wholesome Group N Tr APR	16.08
Total	1,299.33

Finding an operator to continue the agricultural operations on the site, perhaps in partnership with a private entity such as Williams College, Trustees of the Reservations, or advocacy organization such as Berkshire Grown would both protect this important viewshed and continue the long history of agricultural production on the site. Distribution of these lands are found on the Open Space Map Chapters 61, 61A, 61B

Source: MassGIS 2016

Chapter 61s lands are undeveloped lands taxed at a lower rate than lands taxed at development value. If the land use is changed or repurposed for development, the owner pays a penalty to account for the previous tax breaks. Chapter 61 refers specifically to forest lands and lands where forest products (e.g. timber) are produced. Chapter 61A refers to agricultural lands and Chapter 61B includes recreational lands. The majority of all Chapters 61s lands in Williamstown are privately owned parcels, which are not typically accessible to the general public. The Chapter 61 tax programs are of interest to municipalities for two main reasons. First, lands that are managed for forest, agricultural or recreational uses remain open and scenic, helping communities maintain their historically rural roots. Second, if a property that is enrolled in any of the Chapters 61 programs is placed on the real estate market for a change of use, the Town has a 120-day right of first refusal to purchase the property at fair market value. For example, if a farm purchased for the development of a subdivision or a commercial use, which is different from its current agricultural use, then the Town or its designee has the right to purchase that property before anyone else. This gives the community some control over the destiny of its rural character. If the Town does not acquire the land and it does change use, the tax savings that had accumulated during the land's enrollment in the Chapter 61 program must be paid back in full prior to the land use taking place. The protection offered by the program is temporary, fairly limited in nature, and easily reversed under certain market conditions. The Town should pay close attention to the status of these lands as there is a limited window for the town to exercise a right of first refusal on these properties. Community Preservation Act funding can be directed towards future APR purchases or towards using the right of first refusal if circumstances warrant.

A total of 2,587 acres of land in Williamstown are enrolled in one of the Chapters 61 tax programs, which is 9% of the total acreage in the Town. Some of the acreage enrolled in the Chapters 61 programs are permanently protected by deed restrictions, including portions of farm properties owned by the Phelps and Galushas. Total lands protected by both Chapters 61 and restrictions total 164 acres.

Table 7. Chapter 61, 61 A, and 61 B Lands in Williamstown

Owner	Acres
ALLEN, HERBERT A	18.00
BECKER, DANIEL I & SAMANTHA C	18.57
BUBRISKI, KEVIN TRUSTEE	16.05
CRICKET CREEK FARM NOMINEE TRUST*	171.70
E.M. REALTY NOMINEE TRUST	12.84
FARMLAND ENTERPRISES, LLC	65.00
FIERRO, DAVID A & SANDRA B	14.80
GALUSHA, JAMES E TRUSTEE*	148.85
GALUSHA, JOHN D	25.40
HAA CORPORATION	12.48
HATTON, ROBERT B JR, ABBIE & DAVID B	12.10
HEEKIN, JAMES R JR & JANE JESSUP HEEKIN	148.20
HOLLAND, DANIEL J	685.76
HOLLAND, DANIEL J & PATTI L	111.00
HUNNEWELL, ARNOLD W JR TRUSTEE	19.06
KRANT, JONATHAN D & KATHERINE WOLFGANG	92.00
LANGLAUF, LLC	66.73
MANNING, LEON A & SHARON K	34.00
MASON, RALPH C JR & ARLENE M, TRUSTEES	18.46
MOUNT HOPE FARM CONSERVANCY, LLC	390.32
MT WILLIAMS DAIRY, INC	2.50
OBLONG ROAD WILD RUMPUS, LLC	11.40
PATRICIA M MASON TRUST	11.20
PATTEN, MICHAEL S	49.39
PHELPS, K BETH*	10.00
RICHARDSON DAVID P TRUSTEE	9.98
STREAMSIDE MEADOWS, LLC	48.00
WHITE, LINDA H	104.70
WYER, JOAN BLAIR, PETER C FITTS, &	258.75
Total	2,587.24

*Note: some portion or all of land also encumbered with deed restriction

Source: MassGIS 2016

Land Trusts

Land trusts are critical land protection partners, as their lands often act as connections between other protected lands owned by the state, the Town of Williamstown or another land trust. Privately-owned permanently protected open space lands are scattered across Williamstown, owned by land trusts or having deed restrictions placed upon them. There are three land trusts that own properties in Williamstown, owning 1,728 acres among them. Of these, the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation (WRLF) protects the most land in Town, owning 1,034 acres and holding deed restrictions on an additional 118 acres. WRLF owns 18 different properties, 17 of which are open for public recreation and the last of which supports a community supported agricultural operation. WRLF holdings include Sheep Hill (a former farm, now open for passive recreation and a variety of cultural and natural history programs), portions of Pine Cobble (a popular hiking destination and overlook) and numerous trails throughout Williamstown. The stated goal of WRLF is “to preserve open and accessible space for the benefit of present and future generations.” The Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation’s Sheep Hill Property is a fully handicap accessible wetlands boardwalk.

The Trustees of Reservations own three properties that total 430 acres, including Field Farm which has a series of popular bird watching areas, paths through field and forest, and a small pond, and Mountain Meadow, which includes a trail from Williamstown into neighboring Pownal, Vermont. The Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC) owns two properties that total 264 acres. As part of the update to the Open Space and Recreation Plan update Berkshire Natural Resource Council (BNRC) was contacted to provide feedback on the plan and to discuss planned acquisitions in the Williamstown area. BNRC hopes to work with the Town and Williams College to implement greater land use protections in the area of the Berlin Road Reserve. The nearby Williams College Ski Area, Class of 33’ trail, and Haley Brook Falls trails constitute a challenging hiking experience for the adventuresome. During the winter the area is popular with snowshoers and backcountry skiers, while summer allows hikers mountain bikers access to the Taconic Crest Trail. Though the area is undeveloped with little more than a parking lot, a ski run clearing in the trees, and corresponding trails network there currently no protections on the land. With nearby land permanently protected by the State and BNRC an opportunity exists to work with Williams College to begin implementing land protections for these important open space lands.

Table 8. Land Trust Conservation Lands

Land Trust	Acres
Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation	1,034.43
The Trustees of Reservations	429.74
Berkshire Natural Resources Council	264.32
TOTAL land trust	1,728.49

Source: MassGIS 2016

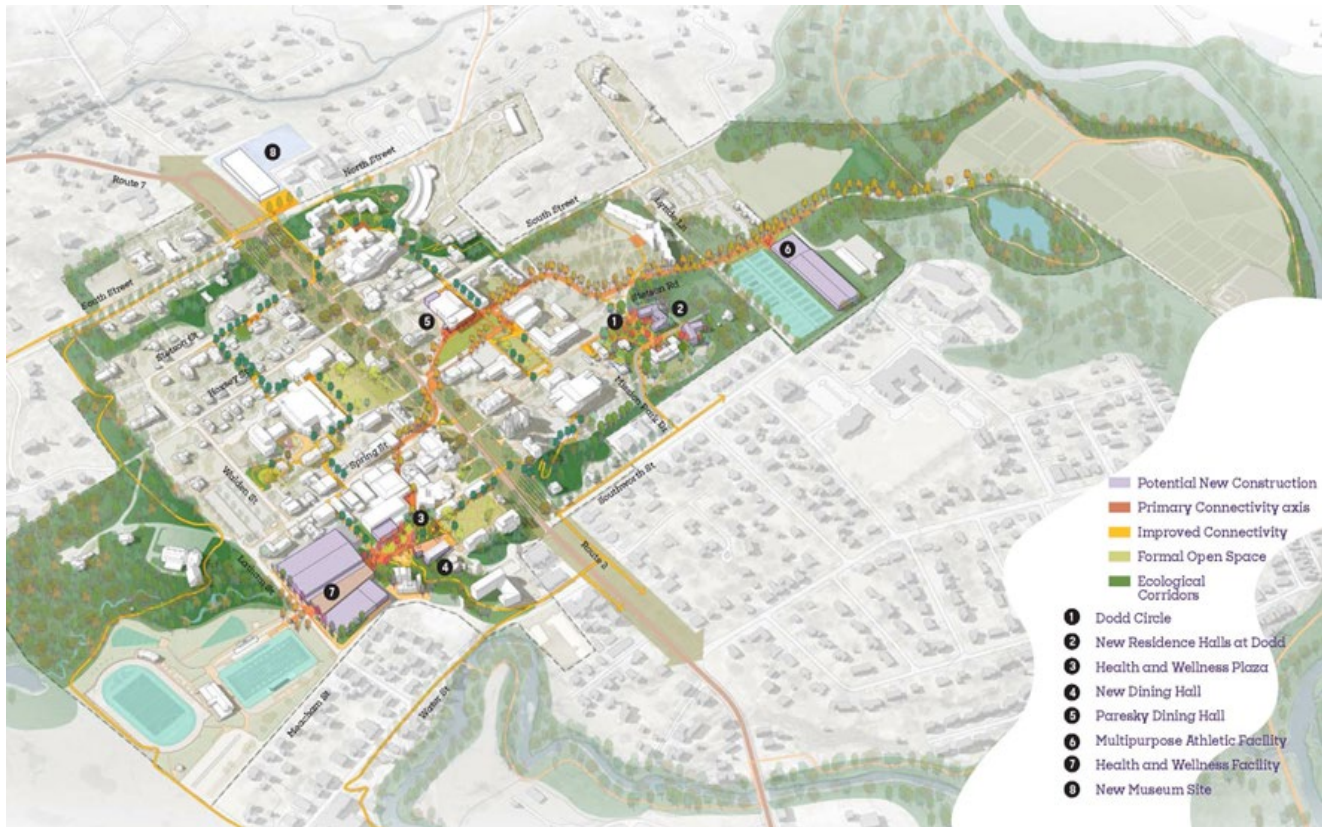
Unprotected Lands of Interest

A large portion of undeveloped land in Williamstown is being considered as unprotected open space lands of interest, as they are privately owned and often open to the public in some manner. These lands are often large and currently offer residents an opportunity to engage in outdoor activities, and the loss of these lands could detrimentally impact the Town by loss of scenic value and/or natural habitat. Williams College is the largest landowner of these types of land, which owns 2,624 acres of land scattered across Williamstown that has been identified as undeveloped open space land (9% of total land area). The largest holding is the Hopkins Memorial Forest (HMF), which totals approximately 2,600 acres, almost 2,000 acres of which is in Williamstown and the rest of which extends into bordering New York and Vermont. This property is a key link in a large mosaic of public lands that straddle the Taconic Mountains that lie along the western border of Williamstown and southward along Berkshire County. The land is designated as an educational facility and research forest, and it is host to a variety of long-term studies and scientific experimentation projects. HMF includes a network of trails where low-impact recreational activities such as hiking, jogging, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and dog walking are encouraged. Hunting and horseback riding are also permitted to a limited degree. The forest also has a variety of public education and outreach programs throughout the year. Williams College has established the Hopkins Memorial Forest Users Committee to define internal policies toward the forest and offer possible mechanisms for protection.

Taconic Golf Course (approx. 116 acres) is a private course that also allows the public to play for a fee. Other Williams College open space lands include a large expanse along the Hoosic River that hosts athletic fields and offers other recreation, a large property on Stone Hill (approx. 149 acres) and lands on Pine Cobble. All these lands are offered for full public recreation, with the exception of the golf course. Williams College owns additional open space lands that are not included in this total, offering several acres of lawn and walkways that complement college buildings, many of which are historic and architecturally significant. The college campus provides a picturesque setting that also offers pedestrian routes and lawns for enjoying the outdoors in the downtown area.

Williams College owns additional open space lands that are not included in this total, offering several acres of lawn and walkways that complement college buildings, many of which are historic and architecturally significant. The college campus provides a picturesque setting that also offers pedestrian routes and lawns for enjoying the outdoors in the downtown area. The college campus is located in the heart of the village center and expands north and south of Main Street, offering open space areas for students and residents within the neighborhoods that surround the campus. The college recently completed the *Williams College Campus Plan, a Framework for the Future* (2023), which “serves as the organizing construct for the physical campus that will guide future development in an accessible and sustainable manner. It identifies opportunity areas based on location and programmatic need, targeting

Figure 23: Williams College Master Plan Campus Plan



public realm investments along key corridors.”¹³ The Plan offers a series of scenarios where the various parts of the campus can be linked by a series of pathways to increase their accessibility and sustainability. The final layout envisions areas of the campus where Formal Open Spaces, Ecological Corridors, and Improved Connectivity can be established to create a more holistic campus. Planning for and protecting these areas benefit students, residents and visitors alike. See Fig. 23 for areas highlighted for open space and connections.

The Clark Art Institute owns 134 acres of unprotected land, most of which is wooded. This property includes an interpretive nature trail and a variety of other paths that are open to the general public. Waubeeka Golf Links (134 acres) is an 18-hole golf course that is open to the general public. This course is a significantly important part of scenic Williamstown, as it is part of a very scenic stretch of Cold Spring Road (Rt. 7), and the views from the course offer some of the finest scenery in the region, particularly during the fall foliage season. The Mount Greylock Ski Club (81 acres) is a small ski area that offers cross country and downhill skiing to its club members. The Buxton School (114 acres) is a private school that

¹³ Sasaki, 2023.

is situated between open space lands owned by the Clark Art Institute, town of Williamstown and Williams College’s golf course and Pine Cobble lands.

Camping is available on Mount Greylock State Reservation at the Sperry Road Campground, at Berlin Mountain off Route 2, and at private campgrounds on Route 43 in Hancock.

Table 7. Private Non-protected Open Space Lands of Interest

Owner	Acres
Williams College	2,623.64
Boy Scouts of Williamstown	30.74
East Mountain Sportsman's Club, Inc.	101.62
Sand Springs Recreational Center	2.91
Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute	133.61
Waubeeka Golf Links	134.08
Pine Cobble School	18.45
Greylock Ski Club	80.96
Buxton School	113.82
Total	3,239.83

source: MassGIS 2016

B) Public and Non-Profit Lands

State Lands

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is the largest single owner of open space lands in Williamstown, owning 6,923 acres, equivalent to 23% of the Town’s total area. The bulk of these lands are in the two DCR-managed the Mount Greylock State Reservation (3,631 acres) and the Taconic Crest State Forest (2,405 acres), the latter of which is spread over three non-contiguous areas along the Williamstown-NYS border. Both properties offer an extensive system of hiking trails, much of which is in steep terrain. Hiking is allowed on all Mount Greylock trails, while a few trails also allow mountain biking and snowmobile use; an easy Heart Healthy Trail is located in Lanesborough. Hike-in camping is offered within the Reservation, as are a few scattered lean-tos, but these amenities are not located within the borders of Williamstown. The Taconic Crest Trail travels through portions of the Taconic Crest State Forest and the Appalachian Trail travels through Mount Greylock, a short section of which travels in the southeast corner of Williamstown. The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) manages three Wildlife Management Areas (WMA): Bullock Ledge WMA on Hemlock Brook, Green River WMA along the Green River and Misery Mountain WMA in the southwest corner of Williamstown. DFG properties lack formal systems of trails, and as such are visited by those who prefer a more wilderness experience.

Table 8. State-owned Properties

Site Name	Acres	Owner	Outdoor Activities
Bullock Ledge WMA	15.15	DFG	Fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, hiking
Green River WMA	485.18	DFG	Fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, hiking
Misery Mountain WMA	387.27	DFG	Fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, hiking
Mount Greylock State Reservation (lodging and accessible trail not located within Williamstown)	3,631.12	DCR	Heart Healthy trail, hiking, fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, snowmobiling, mt biking, hike-in camping, educational programs, scenic views, seasonal lodging
Taconic Trail State Park and Forest	2,404.61	DCR	Hiking, fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing
Total	6,923.33		

Source: MassGIS 2016

Municipal Lands

Municipally-owned lands encompass 1,756 acres of open space lands, which is 6% of the town’s total area. Except for the 114 acres of land associated with the Mount Greylock Regional High School (owned by the regional school district), all these acres are owned by the Town of Williamstown.

The Town owns lands that serve a variety of uses, including water quality protection, conservation and floodplain protection, enjoying nature and active and passive enjoyment of the great outdoors. As can be seen in the Open Space Map, many Town properties act as links to neighboring conserved lands to create contiguous, undeveloped tracts for wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation. Some of the properties offer playgrounds, athletic fields or a public beach, while others host a series of trails. A few properties do not have any recreational facilities or are actively used for agriculture, limiting their use for the general public’s recreation. The town’s water department maintains a reservoir (Rattlesnake Reservoir) in nearby Pownal, Vermont. The town’s Department of Public Works reports that space in the town-owned East Lawn Cemetery is limited and will run out of additional cemetery plots in the near future.

Playgrounds are found in Broad Brook Park, Green River Linear Park, and the elementary school. All of these properties are found close to the village center area, which is where the densest residential development is located. Athletic playing fields are found in Broad Brook Park, the elementary school/Williamstown Youth Center, Mount Greylock Regional High School and at Cole Field. As part of the OSRP process both Pine Cobble and the Buxton Schools were approached for willingness to partner with the town for field usage. Opportunities to utilize field space at these private schools could alleviate excessive demand on town field spaces but would require negotiation and cooperation between the

interested parties. Areas for picnicking can be found in various parks and land trust properties throughout Williamstown. The 2.3-mile Mohican Trail Shared Use Path offers accessible walking and biking on level terrain, providing safe use for people of all abilities and ages. Linear Park also offers trails on gentle terrain, although these are not ADA fully accessible. These trails can also be used for winter walking, snowshoeing and to some extent cross-country skiing.

Margaret Lindley Park provides swimming and small beach for residents during the summer months. A portion of the flow of Hemlock Brook is diverted in the summer to create this seasonal swimming area. The Conservation Commission, and the Department of Cemeteries and Parks have worked together to improve this park; within the last decade the gabion wall, inlet structure, dam, well and bathhouse have been repaired or replaced. The bathhouse was also renovated and a well replaced. Improvements of the trail system are also ongoing. Problems with leakage and elevated coliform counts have been resolved. With the exception of Margaret Lindley Park, there is no handicapped access to Williamstown’s surface waters.

Table 9. Town of Williamstown Open Space Lands –

Site Name	Acres	Condition	Current Uses	Recreational Potential	Management	Public Access	Level of Protection	Zoning
Berlin Road Preserve (Bullock Trust Prop.)	272.75	Good	Hiking, Camping, Backcountry Skiing, Forestry,	High	Town	Yes	High	RR1
Bloedel Park	0.96	Poor	Picnicking	Medium	Con Com	Yes	High	RR2
Bridges Pond/North St. Cons. Area	25.09	Good	Hiking, birdwatching	Low	Con Com	Limited, no trespassing on RR ROW	None	GR
Broad Brook Park	1.84	Poor	Playground, athletic field, Picnics	Low	Town	Yes	None	GR
Burbank/Luce Rd. Lot Property	130.28	Excellent	Agriculture, Walking	Low	Con Com	Farm; limited walking trail	Perpetuity	GR
Clover Hill Farm Conservation Area (Lowry Property)	30.22	Excellent	Agriculture, Walking	High	Con Com	Farmland; passive rec. offseason only	High	GR
Deans Property	45.00	Excellent	Wildlife Habitat	Low	Con Com	High ecological value – use on trails only	None	RR2
Eastlawn Cemetery (incl. Mt. Pleasant Playgrnd.)	38.88	Good	Quiet solitude, Walking	Low	Town	Yes	Limited	GR

Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023

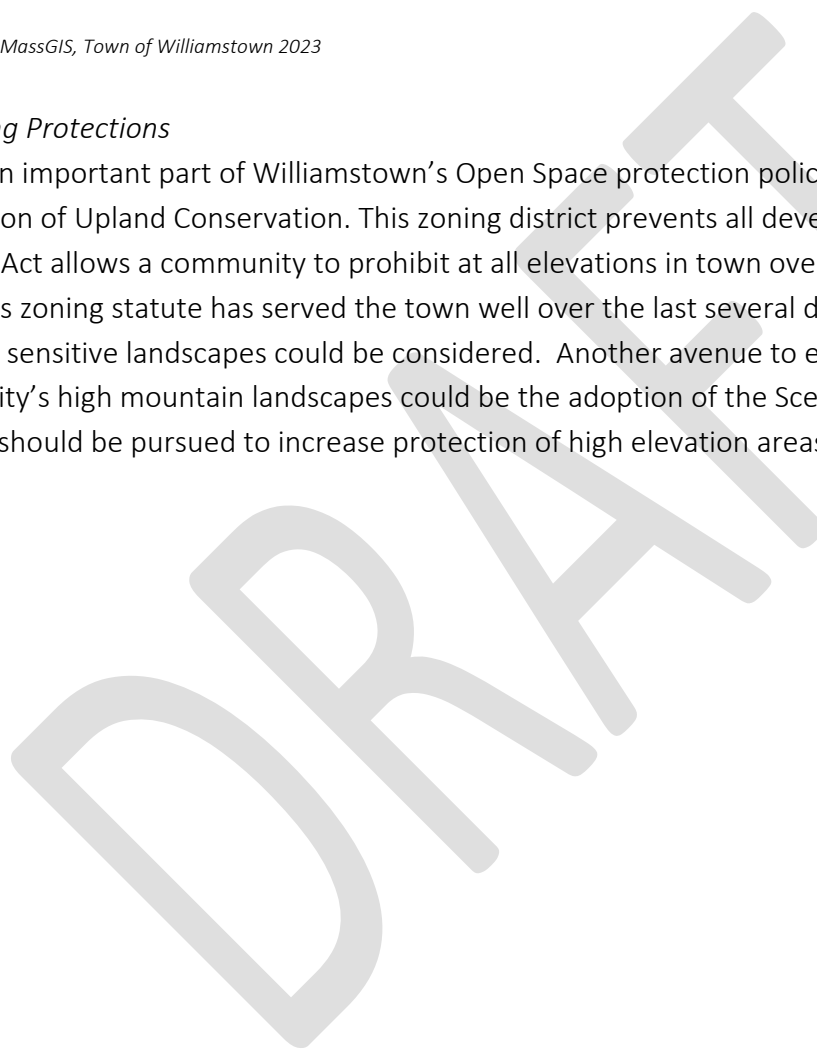
Green River WMA (New Ashford border)	223.68	Good	Wildlife Habitat	Low	Town	Difficult	Perpetuity	RR1
Henderson Road Properties – NE corner	26.81	Fair	Wildlife Habitat	Low	Town	Difficult	Limited	RR1
Hoosic River Floodplain	47.25	Fair	Uncapped Closed Landfill, open access	None	DPW	No	Limited	N/A
Hunter Property	176.28	Good	Hiking; trails connect to neighboring conserved land	Med	Con Com	Yes	Perpetuity	RR2
Green River/Mount Hope Park	3.53	Good	Swimming, fishing, picnics	High	Town	Yes	Perpetuity	RR2
Green River Linear Park	30.75	Poor	Walking, playground, access to river	High	Town	Yes	None	GR
Margaret Lindley Park	31.96	Good	Swimming, Hiking, picnics	Med	Con Com	Yes	Perpetuity	RR2
Mount Greylock Regional High School	113.81	Good	Sports, hiking	High	School District	Yes	None	RR2
Mountain Meadow Preserve	44.89	Excellent	Hiking, Wildlife Viewing	High	Trustees	Yes	Perpetuity	RR2
Pine Cobble Preserve	9.78	Good	Wilderness link to other conserved land	Low	Williamstown Rural Lands	Yes	Limited	RR1
Simonds Road Property (Bridges Rd)	35.71	Poor	Nature Preserve	Low	Con Com	Yes, but not encouraged	Limited	GR
Stone Hill	56.25	Good	Hiking, mt. biking; connects to Clark Art	Low	Con Com	Yes	Some	RR2
The Spruces Community Park	116.03	Fair	Walking trails, multi-use ADA trail, soccer field, picnic	Med; FEMA floodplain restrictions	Town	Yes	Perpetuity	LI
Williamstown Elem. School	4.66	Good	Athletic fields, basketball, playground	High	School District	Yes	None	GR

Williamstown Misery Mountain (Mills Hollow)	202.2	Good	Mt. Biking, Hiking – TRAILS	High	Town	Limited	Limited	RR1
Williamstown Reservoir	161.68	Good	Water Supply	Low	Water Dept	No	Limited	RR2
Westlawn Cemetery	11.9	Good	Quiet solitude, walking	Low	Town	Yes	Limited	GR
Total	1,846.19							

Source: MassGIS, Town of Williamstown 2023

Zoning Protections

An important part of Williamstown’s Open Space protection policies has been the zoning designation of Upland Conservation. This zoning district prevents all development that the state Zoning Enabling Act allows a community to prohibit at all elevations in town over 1,300 feet above sea level. While this zoning statute has served the town well over the last several decades additional protection for these sensitive landscapes could be considered. Another avenue to explore for preserving the community’s high mountain landscapes could be the adoption of the Scenic Mountains Act. Both avenues should be pursued to increase protection of high elevation areas.



C) Indoor Recreation Spaces

Williams College

Williams College has extensive recreational facilities for students and opens many of their spaces, both indoor and outdoor, to the public. The COVID-19 Pandemic had a negative impact on this relationship. Many facilities that had been available to the public were closed. Outdoor facilities are easier to maintain the cooperative relationship between Williams and the surrounding community, particularly local schools. For example, the Williams cross-country team uses a course at Mount Greylock High School, while the College opens its turf fields to youth lacrosse and soccer and allows people to use tennis and paddle tennis courts.

However, there are limitations on the College's ability to provide recreational space to the community. During the COVID 19 Pandemic college facilities were closed to the public and some spaces have not reopened to the public. This brought to light the town's reliance on using the college's facilities and initiated a conversation as to developing additional town facilities. In short, Williams College is happy to contribute to town recreation wherever possible, but its capacity is not great enough to provide for all the residents. During the Spring of 2023, the college was forced to close the Town Field House due to structural problems with the facility. This has further restrained public access to college facilities.

Williamstown Youth Center

The Youth Center, located on School Street, is also an asset to town recreation. The Youth Center was originally started by Williams College Students in the 1930s and has operated continuously since then. In November of 2012, the Center opened a new facility with classrooms and a half-size gym next to the Williamstown Elementary School. They offer before- and after-school programs, school vacation and summer camps, and run snow day activities. In addition, they rent out space to the Berkshire Dance Theatre weekly and to other groups on occasion. The Youth Center is a private non-profit organization, which receives funding from program fees, donations, and the Community Chest. The town also makes an annual appropriation to the Youth Center. Mike Williams, the director of the Youth Center, explains that "the Youth Center takes on some of the needs of the town" because Williamstown does not have a recreation department to run programs. The facility is also home to a limited number of athletic fields used for youth athletic programming. Coordinating use of these fields has been difficult as competing groups sometimes wish to use the facilities simultaneously. Coordinating the use of athletic fields was a high priority item mentioned by Williams.

Another area of concern is inadequate capacity of indoor gyms. The Youth Center has previously partnered with Williams College to provide swim lessons at the Chandler Athletic Center, however this program was discontinued due to COVID and has not been reinstated.

Harper Center

The Harper Center, located on Church Street, is a public facility that runs programs for senior citizens in Williamstown. It is primarily used by residents of the housing development at Proprietors Field, but it is open to Williamstown residents. There is a bus station for the Berkshire Regional Transport Authority at the Harper Center, which is helpful to those residents who cannot drive. The Center also runs shuttles of its own and can take residents to places for recreation if trips are planned in advance there are games and puzzles in the recreation center as well as sidewalks outside. The Harper Center holds events like holiday celebrations and weekly bingo. In addition, there are art classes and fitness classes geared toward senior citizens.

Figure 24: Mohican Trail at Williams Athletic Facilities



6.) Community Vision

A) Description of the Process

1. 2022 Survey and Outreach

A public forum and stakeholder interviews were conducted in October of 2021 at the Williamstown Youth Center (located within the identified EJ Community) and through an online survey tool. Through this methodology, 156 responses were received on a variety of topics, including: Natural Resources, Land Use, Parks, Open Spaces, and Recreation and Public Facilities and Services (the complete results of this Forum can be found in the appendix to the document.) In addition to the survey, the Conservation Commission held an open forum discussion for public input related to the OSRP on October 2, 2023. Senior citizens were also given an opportunity to voice their opinions at a meeting in the Harper Center. Finally, pre-teens and teens at the public middle and high schools participated in focus groups. Some of the major findings from the surveys and focus groups are desires for expanded renewable energy production, embracing nature-based solutions, supporting local food production, and improving public transportation alternatives.

The public survey asked questions such as, “How accessible are the parks, open space lands, and recreational offerings in Williamstown (including cultural and social programs, sports, trails, fields, parks, etc.) for all residents?”, “What are the top three parks, open space, or recreation properties you use in Williamstown and what activities do you enjoy at each?”, “What are the barriers to making Williamstown’s parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities accessible to all?” and “What new recreation uses or program offerings should be planned for in the future?” The complete set of questions and responses is included in the appendix to this document. These community opinions are the basis of the recommendations for improvements to open space and recreation in this report.

Additionally, a group of Williams College students, working with Williams College Faculty member Sarah Gardner, Director of Community Development Andrew Groff, and Steve Whitman and Liz Kelly, of Resilience Planning and Design conducted targeted outreach to underrepresented populations including youth (k-12), Seniors, Low-income residents, Williams College Students, and individuals employed in Williamstown. Through these efforts, they were able to reach more than 450 individuals in the town.

2. Recommendations for Enhancements to Williamstown’s Parks and Recreation Offerings

In late 2018, the Williamstown Select Board appointed an ad hoc committee, the Williamstown Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PARAC) to develop recommended enhancements to the parks and recreation offerings in the town. The committee received more than 450 survey responses, completed 20 presentations to interest groups, and presented their findings to the Select Board. As a result of this process the PARAC committee created a list of 12 Actionable Items in order of

prioritization. This report (see appendix) sought to, “catalyze a process of enhancement, development, and expansion of offerings and activities that will give the town’s residents and visitors more opportunities for enjoyable recreational experiences and increased community engagement.”

Action items identified in the process included:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Staffing, communication, partnerships | 7. Programs & events |
| 2. Multi-use field space options | 8. Dog park |
| 3. Cycling opportunities | 9. Indoor play spaces |
| 4. Accessibility, inclusion and safety | 10. Water play areas |
| 5. Walking & hiking trails | 11. Potential Spruces Park utilization |
| 6. Outdoor playgrounds | 12. Eco-friendly community gardens |

B) Statement of Open Space and Recreation Goals

- 1) Protect, conserve, and steward Williamstown’s shared natural resources through regulations, conservation, and nature-based solutions.
 - a. Identify priority areas for protection.
 - b. Safeguard protection of priority lands, including by working with private landowners
 - c. Ensure good stewardship of town-owned open space and parklands.
 - d. Guarantee protection of drinking water supplies
 - e. Diligently protect lands subject to Wetlands Protection Act and River Protection Act
- 2) Provide and maintain a well-designed, affordable, and integrated multi-modal transportation network that is accessible, convenient, and well-connected for diverse modes of travel.
 - f. Protect and improve existing bikeways and foot pathways.
 - g. Develop new bikeways and foot pathways as opportunities arise.
 - h. Increase linkages between bikeways and foot pathways.
 - i. Enhance public information on bikeways and foot pathways.
 - j. Ensure widespread ADA access throughout town.
- 3) Support agricultural land preservation and agricultural businesses viability.
 - k. Work with agricultural community on enrolling in open space preservation protections such as CR, APR, and Chap. 61 programs.
 - l. Support farming in the local economy, Williamstown Farmer’s Market, increased purchasing and production from local farmers.
 - m. Develop a prioritized list of farm properties to be conserved.
- 4) Develop and maintain access to waterways.
 - n. Maintain existing waterway access locations.
 - o. Identify proposed locations for increased waterway access.

- 5) Prioritize stewardship resources and funding for public and private lands in Williamstown.
 - p. Develop and implement management plans as appropriate.
 - q. Develop partnerships and volunteer networks.
 - r. Research grants and other sources of funding
 - s. Utilize CPA funding as available.
- 6) Create Parks/Recreation Committee to oversee and coordinate parks usage, improvements, or assign this role to a existing/new staff member
 - t. Assign oversight responsibilities to one town body or employee for parks/open space coordination (Parks Commission)
 - u. Coordinate use of town fields/facilities through online platform or Parks Commission group
- 7) Investigate opportunities for new or improved recreational uses in town, including: dog park, pickleball courts, mountain biking trails, additional basketball courts, skate park
 - v. Identify potential additional athletic fields/facilities.
 - w. Partner with private schools such as Buxton or Pine Cobble to develop memorandum of understanding for field use.

7.) Analysis of Needs

Williamstown's physical landscape ranges from densely forested mountains and rivers with cold water tributaries to spectacular agricultural lands in the valleys. This diverse landscape of mountains, forests, valleys, rivers, and streams, paired with elements of an agricultural economy and a close-knit and vibrant village center offer an array of open space and recreation opportunities for locals and visitors. Because of some of the characteristics that are present in Williamstown, the open space and recreation resources must fit the needs of a diverse population ranging in age, income, and other demographic factors that pose challenges and opportunities.

Of the 108 miles of trails in Williamstown, 70% are located in permanently protected lands. The remaining 30% of trails are on private lands operating at the landowner's permission¹⁴, including Williams College's and The Clark's lands. Continuing to acknowledge and coordinate these public benefits will be critical in maintaining the quality of life that residents and visitors alike have come to enjoy. In general, the trail system within the village center is located in gentle terrain and well suited for residents of all ages and abilities. The creation of the Mohican Trail Shared Use Path and those within Linear Park are great examples of this type of trail. It is hoped that one day the Mohican Trail Shared Use Path will be extended eastward through North Adams to eventually meet up with the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail that currently terminates at the Adams/North Adams border. The Bennington Regional Planning Commission has begun to study the feasibility of a pedestrian link between Bennington and Williamstown.

However, the vast majority of longer hiking trails are located outside the densely populated village center, many of which are located on steeply-sloped terrain. There are no safe routes to reach the trailheads for many of these trail systems, so for those residents without vehicles these may be out of reach. While public transportation and certain forms of bicycle infrastructure exist in Town, there are significant limitations, including no bike lanes on Main and Spring Streets, narrow shoulders on Green River Road (Route 43), and high vehicle speeds on other popular roads including Cold Spring Road (Route 7). Investments in public transportation and bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure could prove beneficial to link the village center to some of these vast trail systems. Figures 25 show Strava activity maps for Hiking, Cycling, and Winter activities in Williamstown.

A wide array of outdoor recreational facilities are available to the public within one mile of the village center, including Town properties and those of Williams College and the Clark Art Institute. Williams College owns a large expanse of land on Stetson Road along the Hoosic River that includes open grasslands and athletic fields, including Bud Anderson Field, which is used by the local Cal Ripken program, and a skate park. The walkways that surround this area offer an area for unofficial public walking. However, despite this proximity and diversity, there are limitations to the existing suite of Town-owned facilities. Using some of the Town's athletic facilities can be challenging due to scheduling

¹⁴ *Resilience Planning and Design, et al, 2022.*

conflicts. Residents have for many years voiced a need for more basketball and tennis courts. While there is a basketball court at the elementary school, it has limited availability due to scheduling and school conflicts. Linear Park has one public tennis court. Although the facilities are open to the public, practically they are limited in their reach leaving many residents without access. Williams College has basketball and tennis courts, but they are private and not easily or comfortably accessible by Town

Figure 25: Williamstown Trails: Heat Maps of User Data, Runners, Cyclists, and Winter Activities

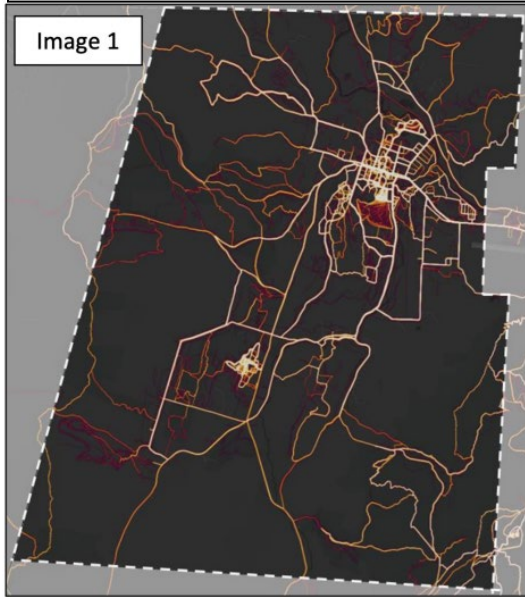


Image 1: the Strava heatmap of walkers, runners, and hikers in Williamstown.

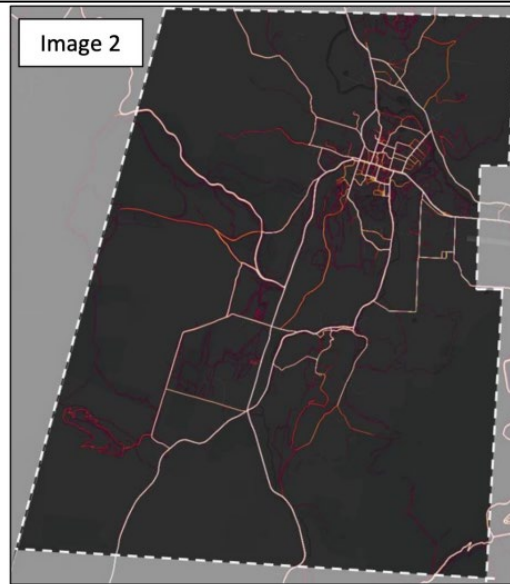


Image 2: the Strava heatmap of cycling in Williamstown.



Image 3: the Strava heatmap for winter activities in Williamstown

residents.

One area of concern is the limited field space in town. While there is a lot of demand for athletic field space, the resources available are finite. One of the resulting challenges is scheduling.

Although the Youth Center assists with field scheduling, with so many local and regional activities requiring limited available fields, scheduling can be challenging for participating organizations. Secondly, the limited field space results in fields that are often over-taxed because of such high usage. This results in fields that could be insufficient for the activity and pose safety risks for children. The 2017 Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) identified the highest funding priorities include ballfields (soccer, lacrosse, baseball/softball, etc.), so this need is not unique to Williamstown. The need for additional athletic fields is experienced by all ages, including children, teens, and adults. An inventory of facilities/fields would help identify resources that are needed.

Although swimming exists at Margaret Lindley Park, it is more of a wading pool rather than a lake or lap pool. Additionally, not all residents have the transportation to access this park. Residents can swim for a fee at Sand Springs, which is owned and managed by a non-profit, but it is at times perceived to be too expensive or not welcoming to all residents. However, the pool has seen significant change in demographics and racial diversity since it was purchased by a non-profit organization.

Although the Hoosic and Green Rivers are significant natural resources, there are limited areas to safely access them for canoe/kayaking. Lauren's Launch and another put-in just within North Adams are the main access points.

As noted in the Existing Conditions Analysis, there is not a dedicated park and recreation committee or department within town government whose main focus is maintaining existing parks and expanding recreational opportunities. The maintenance of Town parks is overseen by the Department of Public Works, whose far-reaching responsibilities also include maintaining the roads, town buildings, water and sewer infrastructure, waste management, and parks and cemeteries management. Some properties are managed and maintained in coordination with the Williamstown Conservation Commission.

The duties for programming sports and maintaining fields is shared between the school district, the Williamstown Youth Center, and DPW. The Youth Center staff is responsible for coordinating town sports programs as well as before and after school care. They receive some funding from the Town each year, but largely rely on fees for the sports and childcare programs to support their work. The fields and town facilities that support park use and recreation are maintained by different groups. The Youth Center maintains the fields at the Williamstown Elementary School which are heavily used. The fields at the high school are maintained by the regional school district, where the Town is able to use them if middle or high school sports are not using them. There have been recent discussions at the Select Board about finding additional locations for more playing fields, including the possibility of expanding fields at the high school. Others have discussed fields at The Spruces, but there are notable constraints including FEMA flood plain restrictions and active farm fields.

The lack of dedicated municipal staff places added pressure on existing departments/staff and other organizations to carry the recreational load that may not be their sole purpose. Discussions with Town staff indicated there are several groups asking for additional recreation spaces and facilities, but not clear direction yet on priorities and locations. Park and recreation projects are complex and demanding, requiring many partners to bring them to fruition. While volunteers are valuable, these relationships and projects demand a level of commitment that often only comes from staff.

The Town is to be commended in that it has established solid collaborative relationships with state, non-profit and private. Many of the Williams College facilities are often available for use by the public. These include the Simon Squash Courts, Towne Field House, Cole and Weston Fields, Lansing Chapman Rink, the 8-lane 400-meter track, an indoor swimming pool, a fitness center with weight room,

and walking paths. Additionally, Williams College staff and its student population represent an important source of volunteers for programs serving children, the elderly, and recreation sites.

One tangible example of the dedication to town-wide collaboration is the development of a Joint Trails Coordinator, which is codified in an agreement between the Town and Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation (WRLF). The Coordinator is a WRLF staff member and is housed at their facility, but the position is jointly funded by the Town, WRLF, and Williams College. The position plans trail projects and is responsible for maintaining the trail network in Town that is not on Mt. Greylock State Reservation. This single position has added a great deal of capacity and efficiency to the management and maintenance of the trail network across major landowners in Williamstown. A significant portion of the existing trails are maintained by the Williams College Outing Club's Summer Trail Crew and the Hoosic River Watershed Association helps to maintain the trail along the Hoosic and Green Rivers.

Williamstown is at a turning point – maintain the current system of non-municipal reliance for many recreational resources that has worked for certain populations in town or, over time, invest in formalizing and strengthening the municipal parks and recreation offerings to provide a more comprehensive and inclusive suite. There is tremendous support in Williamstown for strengthening the recreational resources, making them more inclusive, and ensuring they are safe for all. If those strengths are harnessed effectively, they could make dramatic improvements for all residents. This moment can make real and put into practice the great work staff and volunteer committees are doing and prove to its residents that actions are stronger than words. Ultimately, policies and plans are only as effective as the people implementing them and dedicated town staff should be the primary actors.

Residents have expressed the high value they place on farmland for the open space views and sense of rural character; however, the financial and physical burden of maintaining the agricultural landscape and productivity is placed on the farmers. This inequity exists as much in Williamstown as it does in other rural communities with strong agrarian roots. One of the largest threats to farmland preservation is its market value created by the region's high demand for residential development. With that said, Williamstown has a track record of creative and collaborative solutions to challenging issues, and if the Town, its' residents, and broader community want to actualize their ideals, they need to come together to address this challenge.

A) Local Resource Protection Needs

Williamstown is fortunate in that a large portion of acreage designated as Core Habitat in BioMap3 is already protected from development, particularly along the Taconic Ridge, the Mount Greylock complex and Pine Cobble (see the Vegetation Map). The largest expanse of unprotected BioMap3 Core Habitat acreage lies within Williams College's Hopkins Memorial Forest. While today it seems inconceivable that the college would develop large tracts of these lands, there does not appear to be any legal protections in place to ensure conservation in perpetuity. There are also unprotected gaps along the Taconic Ridge and its lowlands that could be targeted for long-term conservation and biodiversity, particularly those

areas that are documented as Priority Habitat for Rare Species (see red hatching on the Fish and Wildlife Map). Similarly, filling in unprotected gaps in Pine Cobble for the long-term protection of the trail network and viewshed could be another targeted area.

The BioMap3 Core Habitat/Priority Habitat of Rare Species that is most consistently unprotected are the Hoosic and Green River and Hemlock Brook corridors. Although the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act provides some protection from development impacts, the Act is generally limited in scope to the river/stream channels and a 200-foot-wide resource area. It is well documented that development impacts beyond that 200-foot protective area can impact water quality and habitat value, so efforts to reduce land clearing and habitat destruction is key in protecting the rare species that reside and/or use in these rivers and their adjacent lands.

1. Prioritization Protocol for Conservation lands:

The town should develop a rubric for rating lands to determine those most desirable for conservation. A grid or spreadsheet that rates conservation land according to a number of attributes would allow decisionmakers to rate the value of conservation for each parcel. These attributes include:

- Linking areas of existing protection
- Protecting water resources - rivers, streams and wetlands; watersheds; aquifers and vernal pools
- Protecting species diversity, rare species habitat and other significant habitat, or enhancing the protection of these ecosystems
- Protecting working farm and forest lands
- Enhancing the protection of ridge tops (Taconics, Pine Cobble, Brodie Mt., Greylock area)
- Promoting or protecting existing greenways and trails, provide access to now inaccessible significant parcels and new trail development and expanded recreational opportunities

This rubric assigns each attribute an importance level and a corresponding point value. This allowed consideration of not only which parcels have which attributes, but the relative priority of different attributes. However, one of the most important things to note is that these points can be altered based on varying conservation priorities.

B) Community Needs

As outlined in the Existing Conditions Analysis (2022), Williamstown’s Natural resources generate “Ecosystem Services” that benefit humans and other species. These include:

- PROVISIONING SERVICES such as food production, pollination, and clean water;
- REGULATING SERVICES such as flood control, temperature reduction, and carbon sequestration;
- CULTURAL SERVICES such as spiritual, aesthetic, and recreational benefits; and
- SUPPORTING SERVICES like photosynthesis, soil formation, and habitat.

An understanding of the many significant ecosystem services provided by Williamstown's natural lands is important and should inform these community sustainability and resilience efforts. While many of Williamstown's ecosystem services are provided by land in its natural state, each property owner has the potential to protect and restore the provision of these services. The land use regulations should also further emphasize the importance of resource protection and restored habitat connectivity. This can be accomplished through a combination of regenerative landscaping and green infrastructure requirements that will guide and inform future development activity.

Community outreach for both the Comprehensive Plan and OSRP highlighted a number of community needs. Respondents stated a need in the following areas:

- Create entity (Parks Commission or Commissioner) to oversee and coordinate parks activities in the town.
- Improve ADA accessibility at parks/promote universal design.
- Improve transit options to access open spaces in the town.
- Educate town population about open space recreation and provide opportunities for experiencing the outdoors in a safe and mentored way to increase comfort levels.
- Enhance the bike network, install additional bike racks, create a bike share program.
- Add additional athletic fields and provide mechanism for coordinating field usage.
- Improve signage and wayfinding to increase awareness of town owned facilities.
- Promote nature-based solutions (such as bioswales to handle runoff), native plantings, and decrease mowing in natural areas.

C) Management Needs, Potential Changes of Use

Stakeholder interviews indicated a need for better coordination of town facilities, fields, and recreational spaces. Currently these activities are coordinated through a combination of groups including the Williamstown Youth Center, Williamstown Public Schools, Economic Development Office, Conservation Commission, Department of Public Works and various athletic and recreational organizations. Defining an individual or organization to oversee these activities is a potential solution to manage these activities.

In regards to specific recommendations for future land conservation priorities, the GIS analysis highlights the conservation value of two significant privately owned pieces of property in South Williamstown and two significant Williams College owned parcels along the Taconic Range, the former Williams College Ski Area and particularly the Hopkins Memorial Forest. This tract owned by Williams College has the highest conservation value of any unprotected parcel in the community.

Hopkins Forest contains high elevation ridge-top land on the Taconic Crest. It contains BioMap3 endangered species habitat. It is composed almost entirely of CAPS top 50% habitat, including a large amount of CAPS top 10% habitat. It contains very high quality aquatic habitat. It has excellent trails. It contains coniferous stands and forest that has not been cleared since the 1830s. And, although this lies

outside the main parcel, Hopkins forest also contains the Beinecke Stand, one of the only intact pre-colonial forest stands in town. It is adjacent to conserved land to the south. It is also the largest unprotected undeveloped parcel left in Williamstown, even if only the main parcel is considered. In short, Hopkins Forest has all of the important conservation attributes identified by the GIS analysis.

8.) Community Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives set out below were derived from the public participation process presented through both the Comprehensive Plan and Open Space and Recreation Plan processes, and included comprehensive steering committee meetings, Community Forums at the Williamstown Youth Center and Proprietors Fields (both in the EJ Census tract), outreach work to youth, seniors, college students, individuals employed by the college, and through a SurveyMonkey Survey hosted on the Town's website. A detailed Action Plan is presented in Section 9.

1. Protect, conserve, and steward Williamstown's shared natural resources through regulations, conservation and nature-based solutions.
 - A. Identify priority areas for protection.
 - B. Ensure protection of priority lands, including by working with private landowners.
 - C. Ensure good stewardship of town-owned open space and parklands.
 - D. Ensure protection of drinking water supplies.
 - E. Diligently protect lands subject to Wetlands Protection Act and River Protection Act.
 - F. Assign oversight responsibilities to one town body or employee for parks/open space coordination (Parks Commission).
 - G. Identify potential additional athletic fields/facilities.
 - H. Coordinate use of town fields/facilities through online platform or Parks Commission group.
2. Provide and maintain a well-designed, affordable, and integrated multi-modal transportation network that is accessible, convenient, and well-connected for diverse modes of travel.
 - A. Protect and improve existing bikeways and foot pathways.
 - B. Develop new bikeways and foot pathways as opportunities arise.
 - C. Increase linkages between bikeways and foot pathways.
 - D. Enhance public information on bikeways and foot pathways.
 - E. Ensure widespread ADA access throughout town.

3. Support agricultural land preservation and agricultural businesses viability.
 - A. Work with agricultural community on enrolling in open space preservation protections such as CR, APR, and Chap. 61 programs.
 - B. Support farming in the local economy, Williamstown Farmer's Market, increased purchasing and production from local farmers.
 - C. Develop a prioritized list of farm properties to be conserved.
4. Develop and maintain access to waterways.
 - A. Maintain existing waterway access locations.
 - B. Identify proposed locations for increased waterway access.
5. Prioritize stewardship resources and funding for public and private lands in Williamstown.
 - A. Develop and implement management plans as appropriate.
 - B. Develop partnerships and volunteer networks.
 - C. Research grants and other sources of funding.
 - D. Utilize CPA funding as available.
6. Create Parks/Recreation Committee to oversee and coordinate parks usage, improvements, or assign this role to an existing/new staff member.
 - A. Assign oversight responsibilities to one town body or employee for parks/open space coordination (Parks Commission).
 - B. Coordinate use of town fields/facilities through online platform or Parks Commission group.
7. Investigate opportunities for new or improved recreational uses in town, including: dog park, pickleball courts, mountain biking trails, additional basketball courts, skate park.
 - A. Identify potential additional athletic fields/facilities.
 - B. Partner with private schools such as Buxton or Pine Cobble to develop memorandum of understanding for field use.
 - C. Identify additional potential sites for town acquisition for athletic fields.
 - D. Work with Purple Valley Trail Alliance to develop mountain biking trail network in town.

9.) Seven Year Action Plan

This seven- year action plan outlines and prioritizes goals and actions with a proposed timetable for each open space and recreation goal and objective. Some of the following goals, objectives and actions are subject to funding and appropriation. The actions should be reviewed annually, updated, and reevaluated

ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTIES OR LEAD	PRIORITY/TIMELINE 2024-2031	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE
GOAL 1: PROTECT, CONSERVE, AND STEWARD WILLIAMSTOWN’S SHARED NATURAL RESOURCES THROUGH REGULATIONS, CONSERVATION, AND NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS.			
A: IDENTIFY PRIORITY AREAS FOR PROTECTION.			
1	Update inventory of lands prioritized for habitat, watershed, view shed, preservation of climate change resiliency, and other protections	2024-2025	Massachusetts Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities PARC program, Community Forest Grant and Stewardship programs, Conservation Assistance for Small Communities, Land Use Planning Grants, Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND), MassWildlife Habitat Management program, Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program, CPA Funds
2	Continue to work with partner organizations to prioritize protection of identified lands, especially critical private and Williams College owned parcels along the Taconic Ridgeline	Ongoing	Landscape Partnership Program, LAND Grant, Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants, CPA Funds
3	Work to identify Chapter 61 lands in danger of use change.	2024 then ongoing	CPA Funds
4	Identify varied funding sources to continue preservation efforts	Ongoing	Various
5	Prioritize municipal infrastructure updates to reduce flooding such as replacing undersized culverts.	Ongoing	Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant Program, Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program,
6	Continue efforts related to management of town forests for carbon sequestration, pests and diseases related to climate change, and wildlife habitat.	Ongoing	Urban and Community Forest Challenge Grants

Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023

ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY OR LEAD	PRIORITY/TIMELINE 2024-2031	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE	
B: SAFEGUARD PROTECTION OF PRIORITY LANDS, INCLUDING BY WORKING WITH PRIVATE LANDOWNERS				
1	Maintain and increase protection of Hopkins Forest and the Taconic Ridgeline	Williams College, Conservation Commission	2024-2025	Private
2	Promote education on state preservation programs (e.g. 61A)	Agricultural Commission	Ongoing	APR Program, APR Improvement Program
3	Continue to encourage community participation in the Mohawk Forest Partnership project	All	Ongoing	Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Program
C: ENSURE GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF TOWN-OWNED OPEN SPACE AND PARKLANDS.				
1	Develop a program for providing more resources to monitor town owned lands.	Conservation Commission	2026-2028	Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program, DEP Office of Municipal Partnerships
2	Conduct periodic inspections of town lands and identify maintenance needs.	Economic Development, Department of Public Works, Conservation Commission	2024-2025	Community Forest Stewardship Grants, Land Use Planning Grant
3	Identify and obtain resources (personnel and funding) for public land maintenance, including street trees.	Economic Development, Department of Public Works	Ongoing	Community Forest Stewardship Grants

D: GUARANTEE PROTECTION OF DRINKING WATER SUPPLIES

1	Develop plan to evaluate adequacy of wellhead protection programs	Department of Public Works, Conservation Commission,	2024-2025	Federal 604b Water Quality Management Planning Grant Program, Drinking Water Supply Protection Grant Program. State Revolving Fund Loan Program
2	Enforce wellhead protection and other drinking water protection requirements	Conservation Commission	Ongoing	Federal 604b Water Quality Management Planning Grant Program, Drinking Water Supply Protection Grant Program.
DRAFT				
	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY OR LEAD	PRIORITY/TIMELINE 2024-2031	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE

E: DILIGENTLY PROTECT LANDS SUBJECT TO WETLANDS PROTECTION ACT AND RIVER PROTECTION ACT

1	Enforce laws through permitting and inspections	Conservation Commission	Ongoing	Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant Program
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GOAL 2: PROVIDE AND MAINTAIN A WELL-DESIGNED, AFFORDABLE, AND INTEGRATED MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORK THAT IS ACCESSIBLE, CONVENIENT, AND WELL-CONNECTED FOR DIVERSE MODES OF TRAVEL.

A. PROTECT AND IMPROVE EXISTING BIKEWAYS AND FOOT PATHWAYS

1	Develop new bikeways and foot pathways as opportunities arise.	Department of Public Works,	Ongoing	Shared Streets Program, Complete Streets Program, Transportation Improvement Program
2	Increase linkages between bikeways and foot pathways.	Department of Public Works, All	2025-2028	Shared Streets Program, Complete Streets Program, Transportation Improvement Program
3	Enhance public information on bikeways and foot pathways.	Economic Development Department	Ongoing	Shared Streets Program, Complete Streets Program, Transportation Improvement Program
4	Work with Mass DOT and City of North Adams to complete design and construction of the Mohican Path.	Department of Public Works, Town of North Adams, Massachusetts DOT	Ongoing	Shared Streets Program, Complete Streets Program, Transportation Improvement Program
5	Work with MassDOT and other stakeholders to investigate feasibility of bike lane on Water Street/Route 43 as MassDOT enters planning stages for full reconstruction.	Department of Public Works, Massachusetts DOT	2025-2031	Shared Streets Program, Complete Streets Program, Transportation Improvement Program

Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023

ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY OR LEAD	PRIORITY/TIMELINE 2024-2031	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE	
B. ENSURE WIDESPREAD ADA ACCESS THROUGHOUT TOWN.				
1	Complete a full inventory of ADA compliance at all Town owned facilities and update recreational site assessments.	Town Manager	2024	Municipal Americans with Disabilities Act Improvement Grant Program
2	Develop plan to achieve full ADA compliance for Town owned recreational sites.	Town Manager, Department of Public works.	2024-2025	Municipal Americans with Disabilities Act Improvement Grant Program
C. IMPLEMENT 'COMPLETE STREETS' PRINCIPLES WHERE APPLICABLE				
1	Implement 'Complete Streets' principles where applicable	All, Department of Public Works	2024	Complete Streets Program
D. BEGIN REDESIGN OF MAIN STREET ALONG TOWN GREEN FROM FIELD PARK TO WATER STREET TO CALM TRAFFIC, REDUCE SPEED, ENHANCE VEHICULAR AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY, ENHANCE TREE CANOPY, AND BURY OVERHEAD UTILITY LINES.				
1	Study the difficulty of implementing various enhancements and develop a prioritized list and timeline for completion.	All	Ongoing	Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program, Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Grant Program

ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY OR LEAD	PRIORITY/TIMELINE 2024-2031	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE	
GOAL 3: SUPPORT AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION AND AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES VIABILITY.				
1	Work with agricultural community on enrolling in open space preservation protections such as CR, APR, and Chap. 61 programs.	Agricultural Commision, Local farms and farmers	Ongoing	Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program
2	Support farming in the local economy, Williamstown Farmer’s Market, increased purchasing and production from local farmers.	Farmer’s Market Manager, Agricultural Commision, Local farms and farmers	Ongoing	Various
3	Develop a prioritized list of farm properties to be conserved.	Agricultural Commision, Local Conservation Organizations	Ongoing	Urban Agriculture Program

ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY OR LEAD	PRIORITY/TIMELINE 2024-2031	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE	
GOAL 4: DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN ACCESS TO WATERWAYS.				
1	Maintain existing waterway access locations. Work with wastewater facility to improve Lauren’s Launch river access point.	Conservation Commission, Hoosac Water Quality District, HOORWA	2025-2026	Boating Infrastructure Grant Program (BIG), Mass. Land and Water Conservation Fund, MassTrails, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC)
2	Identify locations for increased waterway access. Evaluate options for access points such as Linear Park and Mt. Hope Park	Conservation Commission, HOORWA,	2024-2025	Boating Infrastructure Grant Program (BIG), Mass. Land and Water Conservation Fund, MassTrails, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC)
3	Support efforts of partner organizations (HoorWA, WRLF) to link conserved areas along the Green River with new and existing trails and investigate possibility of linking upland areas (Mount Hope & Lowry land) to the river as well.	All	Ongoing	Mass. Land and Water Conservation Fund, MassTrails, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC)

Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023

ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY OR LEAD	PRIORITY/TIMELINE 2024-2031	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE	
GOAL 5: PRIORITIZE STEWARDSHIP RESOURCES AND FUNDING FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LANDS IN WILLIAMSTOWN.				
1	Develop and implement management plans as appropriate. Plant native trees and plants and improve current land management practices on municipally owned lands to reflect sustainable management best practices.	Town DPW, Conservation Commission	2025-2027	Community Forest Grant Program, Community Forest Stewardship Grant, Landscape Partnership Program
2	Develop partnerships and volunteer networks.	All	Ongoing	Various
3	Working with partners, provide educational materials on nature-based solutions that will encourage residents and landowners to implement these solutions on private properties. These could include meadow areas, native plantings, and perennial gardens.	Local Conservation Organizations, Conservation Commission, DPW	Ongoing	Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Grant Program,
4	Research grants and other sources of funding	All	Ongoing	Various
5	Utilize CPA funding for Parks projects as available.	CPA Committee, All	Ongoing	CPA Funds

Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023

ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY OR LEAD	PRIORITY/TIMELINE 2024-2031	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE	
GOAL 6: CREATE PARKS/RECREATION COMMITTEE TO OVERSEE AND COORDINATE PARKS USAGE, IMPROVEMENTS, OR ASSIGN THIS ROLE TO A EXISTING/NEW STAFF MEMBER				
1	Assign oversight responsibilities to one town body or employee for parks/open space coordination (Parks Commission)	SB, Town Administrator	2024-2025	Mass in Motion Municipal Wellness and Leadership Initiative
2	Coordinate use of town fields/facilities through online platform or Parks Commission group	All	Ongoing	Mass in Motion Municipal Wellness and Leadership Initiative
3	Develop partnerships and volunteer networks.	All	Ongoing	Various
4	Continue to develop The Spruces as a recreational resource.	Conservation Commission	Ongoing	Various, must comply with FEMA regulations
4A	Develop baseline information for future planning.	All	2024	CPA Funding, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities, others.
4B	Develop proposals for phased implementation of park features	All	2025-2031	CPA Funding, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities, others.
4C	Implement approved plans	All	Ongoing	Various.

Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023

ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY OR LEAD	PRIORITY/TIMELINE 2024-2031	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE	
GOAL 7: INVESTIGATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW OR IMPROVED RECREATIONAL USES IN TOWN, INCLUDING: DOG PARK, PICKLEBALL COURTS, MOUNTAIN BIKING TRAILS, ADDITIONAL BASKETBALL COURTS, SKATE PARK, ETC.				
1	Identify potential additional athletic fields/facilities.	All	Ongoing	CPA Funding, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities, others
2	Partner with private schools such as Buxton or Pine Cobble to develop memorandum of understanding for field use.	SB, Town Administrator, Private School Administration	2025	Various.
3	Identify additional potential sites for town acquisition for athletic fields.	All	Ongoing	CPA Funding, Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities, others
4	Work with Purple Valley Trail Alliance to develop mountain biking trail network in town.	PVTA, Local Mountain bike community, private landowners.	Ongoing	Various

10.) Public Comments

A 30 day public comment period for the plan ran from the week of January 1 to the end of the week of February 5, 2024. During this time town staff and members of the ad-hoc OSRP Review Committee presented the plan to the Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Planning Board, and Zoning Board asking for review and comments. The plan was also distributed to members of the public via the Town website & Facebook page as well as local media. Numerous comments were received at various meetings, and through a special email address created to allow the public to comment easily. Most suggestions were minor in nature and have been incorporated into this document.

DRAFT

11.) References

The planning process relied heavily on the work previously completed during other planning efforts in Williamstown as well as the Comprehensive Plan developed concurrently with the Open Space plan. Further other historical works and documents were utilized and summarized below.

- Town of Williamstown, MA ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan. Prepared by Kessler, McGuinness, and Associates, LLC June 30, 2018
- *Brooks, RRR, Williamstown the First 250 Years*
- Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, *Sustainable Berkshires: A Regional Plan for Berkshire County (2014)*
- Bigham, Elizabeth; Sommer, Nicholas; Rebolledo, Juan; *The Williamstown Farmland Project, Assessing Contemporary Threats to Farmland in Williamstown, MA (2020).*
- Dethier D., DeSimone D., & Oelkers E. , *The Surficial Deposits and Hydrogeology of Williamstown, Massachusetts (1989)*
- MA Exec. Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs, *MA Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2017, Boston, MA.*
- National Parks Conservation Assoc., *America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations (2011)*
- Resilience Planning and Design; RKG Assoc.; FB Environmental; JM Goldson; Comprehensive Plan Committee, Town Staff; *Town of Williamstown, MA Existing Conditions Analysis (2022).*
- Town of Williamstown; *Williamstown Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, Williamstown, MA (2019).*
- Town of Williamstown, *Williamstown Complete Streets Report, 2016*
- Town of Williamstown, *Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings (2018)*

12.) Appendix

A. Endangered Plant Species

Common Name	Scientific Name	Taxonomic Group	MESA Status	Most Recent Obs.	Notes on Endangered Species
Appalachian Fir-moss	<i>Huperzia appressa</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1909	needs mt top; only 1 known pop in MA 2012 - not here
Black-fruited Woodrush	<i>Luzula parviflora</i> ssp. <i>melanocarpa</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1999	high elevation; only 1 known site incl Wmstn
Broad Waterleaf	<i>Hydrophyllum canadense</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2017	rich moist forest soils
Bush's Sedge	<i>Carex bushii</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2020	meadow/pastures; only 6 known sites, most in Berk Co
Chestnut-colored Sedge	<i>Carex castanea</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2020	seeps, wet meadows retracted to Berk Co
Downy Wood-mint	<i>Blephilia ciliata</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1871	not shown in Wmstn 2009
Dwarf Rattlesnake-plantain	<i>Goodyera repens</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1941	only 1 known pop in MA in 2010 - not here
False Pennyroyal	<i>Trichostema brachiatum</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1998	needs open dry sandstone or limestone; Wmstn only 1 of 2 towns
Giant St. John's-wort	<i>Hypericum ascyron</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1898	open riparian areas; not here 2010
Hairy Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera hirsuta</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2019	rocky calc till slopes; restricted to Berk Co
Nodding Pogonia	<i>Triphora trianthophoros</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2018	sloping mesic forest; often beech-dominated
Northern Bedstraw	<i>Galium boreale</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2020	Calc fens, wet or dry meadows; restricted Berk Co

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Northern Mountain-ash	<i>Sorbus decora</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2011	mountain slopes; restricted to N Berk Co
Schweinitz's Sedge	<i>Carex schweinitzii</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2020	calc seeps, fens, wetlands; restricted to 3 towns in NW Berk Co
Slender Blue-eyed Grass	<i>Sisyrinchium mucronatum</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2020	calcium-rich soils; only in 3 towns in MA 2010
Small Dropseed	<i>Sporobolus neglectus</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	Historic	restricted to S Berk Co; not here since 2010
Sweet Coltsfoot	<i>Petasites frigidus</i> var. <i>palmatus</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	2019	seeps, calc forest; restricted to 2 Berk towns
Variable Sedge	<i>Carex polymorpha</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	Historic	not here since 2009
White Adder's-mouth	<i>Malaxis monophyllos</i> ssp. <i>brachypoda</i>	Vascular Plant	Endangered	1986	shaded calc wetlands; only in 3 towns in MA
Autumn Coral-root	<i>Corallorhiza odontorhiza</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2020	
Bristly Black Currant	<i>Ribes lacustre</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2021	
Bur Oak	<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	Historic	
Climbing Fumitory	<i>Adlumia fungosa</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	1904	
Dwarf Scouring Rush	<i>Equisetum scirpoides</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2018	
Fen Sedge	<i>Carex tetanica</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	1800s	
Frank's Lovegrass	<i>Eragrostis frankii</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2020	
Hairy-fruited Sedge	<i>Carex trichocarpa</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2019	
Hemlock-parsley	<i>Conioselinum chinense</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2019	
Hitchcock's Sedge	<i>Carex hitchcockiana</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2020	

Large-leaved Goldenrod	<i>Solidago macrophylla</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2011	
Purple Clematis	<i>Clematis occidentalis</i>	Vascular Plant	Special Concern	2020	
Adder's Tongue Fern	<i>Ophioglossum pusillum</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1936	
Bartram's Shadbush	<i>Amelanchier bartramiana</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	2009	
Clustered Sanicle	<i>Sanicula odorata</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1988	
Foxtail Sedge	<i>Carex alopecoidea</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1985	
Great Laurel	<i>Rhododendron maximum</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1800s	
Matted Spike-sedge	<i>Eleocharis intermedia</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	1986	
Woodland Millet	<i>Milium effusum</i>	Vascular Plant	Threatened	2020	

Source: NHESP, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rare-species-viewer>, downloaded 3-10-23

B. Endangered Animal Species

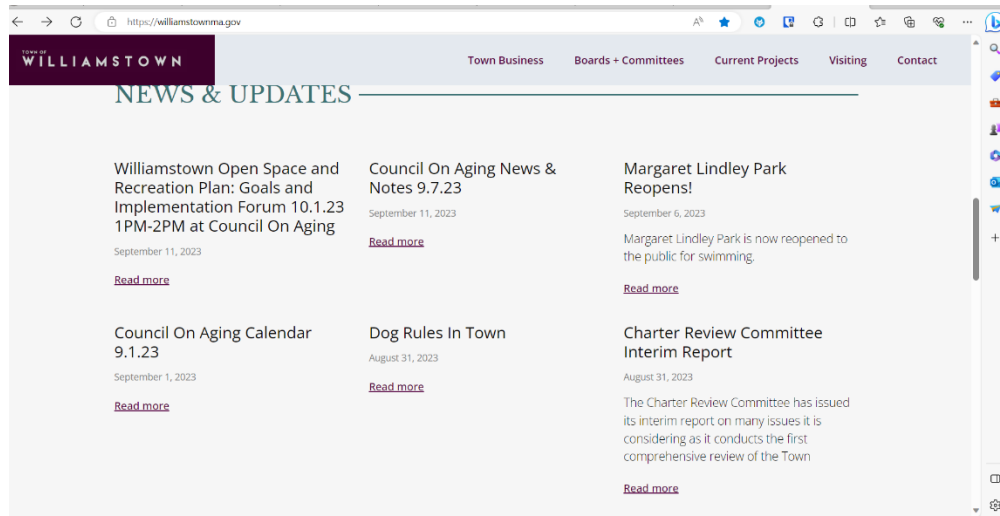
Common Name	Scientific Name	Taxonomic Group	MESA Status	Most Recent Obs.	Notes
Little Brown Bat	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Mammal	Endangered	2019	warm months common roost sites; winter hibernacula high humidity & temp rarely below 0 degrees; high priority to save is keep humans away from known hibernacula
Yellow-banded Bumble Bee	<i>Bombus terricola</i>	Bee	Threatened	2008	restricted to a few known sites in Berk Co, esp. N Berk Co
Dion Skipper	<i>Euphyes dion</i>	Butterfly/Moth	Threatened	2013	restricted large to Berk Co; wetland/riparian hubs
Early Hairstreak	<i>Erora laeta</i>	Butterfly/Moth	Threatened	2017	restricted to a few sites in Berk; northern hardwoods w beech
Mustard White	<i>Pieris oleracea</i>	Butterfly/Moth	Threatened	Historic	restricted to Berk Co; wetlands/riparian floodplains

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Riffle Snaketail	Ophiogomphus carolus	Dragonfly/Damselfly	Threatened	2018	cold clear rocky streams w fine gravel/sand sediment
Tule Bluet	Enallagma carunculatum	Dragonfly/Damselfly	Special Concern	1973	wetlands tolerant
Jefferson Salamander (complex)	Ambystoma jeffersonianum	Amphibian	Special Concern	2013	breeds almost exclusively in vernal pools or shrub swamps;
Blackpoll Warbler	Setophaga striata	Bird	Special Concern	2010	restricted to high elevation spruce-fir forest; Mt Greylock 1 of only 2 known sites in MA
Mourning Warbler	Geothlypis philadelphia	Bird	Special Concern	2000	cleared/2nd growth forest
Upland Sandpiper	Bartramia longicauda	Bird	Endangered	1931	large expanses of open grassy uplands, wet meadows; not known here 1983+
Bridle Shiner	Notropis bifrenatus	Fish	Special Concern	1988	clear slack waters w/ mod levels submerged veg
Longnose Sucker	Catostomus catostomus	Fish	Special Concern	2017	cool upper sections of streams - only Hoosic, Housatonic, Westfield watersheds
Wood Turtle	Glyptemys insculpta	Reptile	Special Concern	2015	riparian areas w/ intact forest

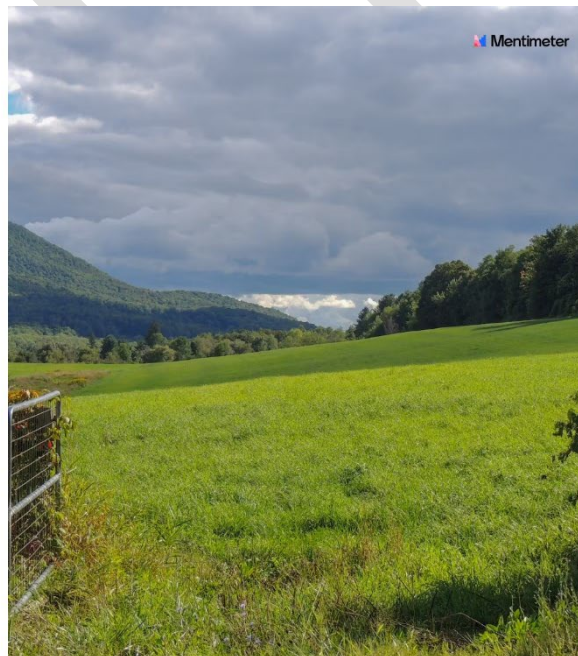
Source: NHESP, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rare-species-viewer>; downloaded 3-10-23

C. Announcement on Town Website and Results of Public Forum, October 3, 2023



Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023: Goals and Implementation Forum

Williamstown Council on Aging, Harper Center, 118 Church Street, October 3, 2023 1-2 PM



The State of Massachusetts defines Open Space as...

is often used to refer to conservation land, forested land, recreation land, agricultural land, corridor parks and amenities such as small parks, green buffers along roadways or any open area that is owned by an agency or organization dedicated to conservation. However, the term can also refer to undeveloped land with particular conservation or recreation interest. This includes vacant lots and brownfields that can be redeveloped into recreation areas.

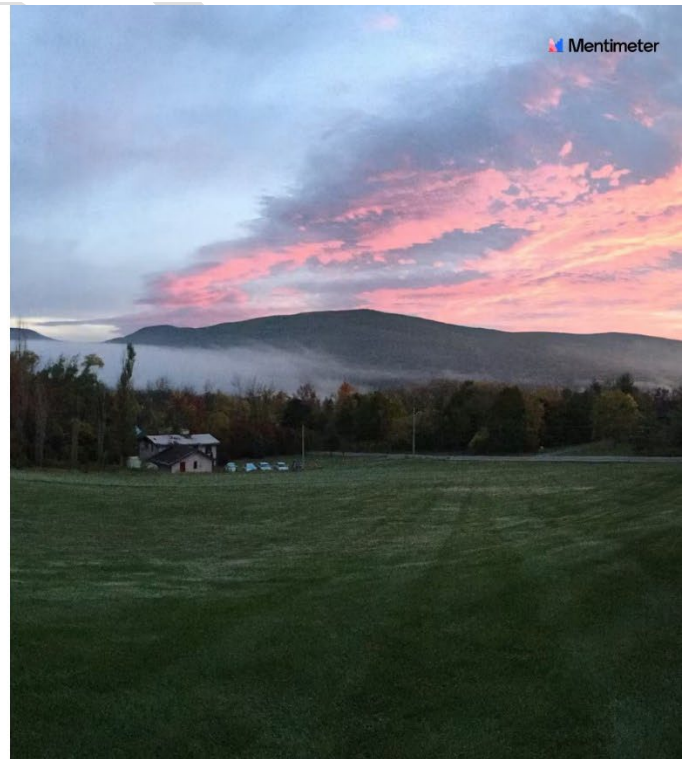


Goal- Updated Plan ready for Public Review November 1, 2023

The existing plan provided both a framework and much of the content for the update.

BRPC gathered information, met and interviewed stakeholders, and updated the 2023 Plan.

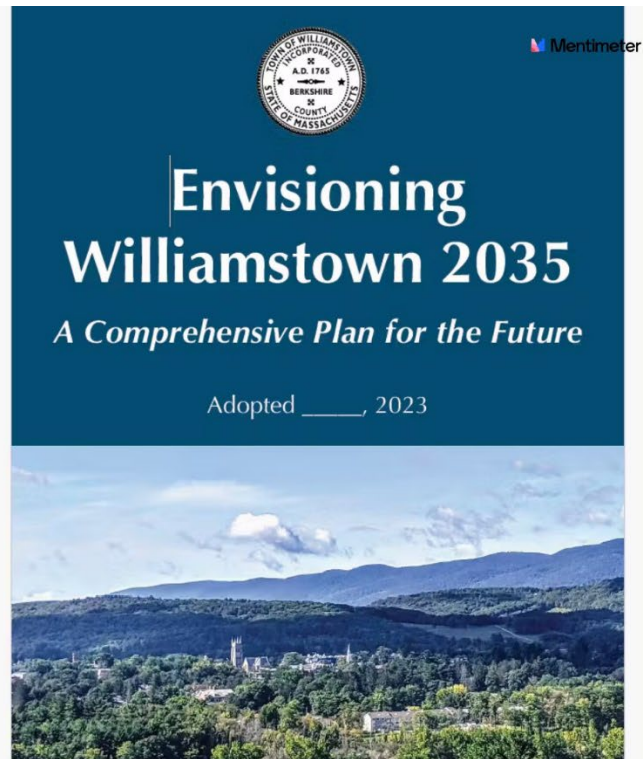
The conservation commission is the primary town body reviewing the various draft sections for.



Use recommendations developed through the Master Planning Process.

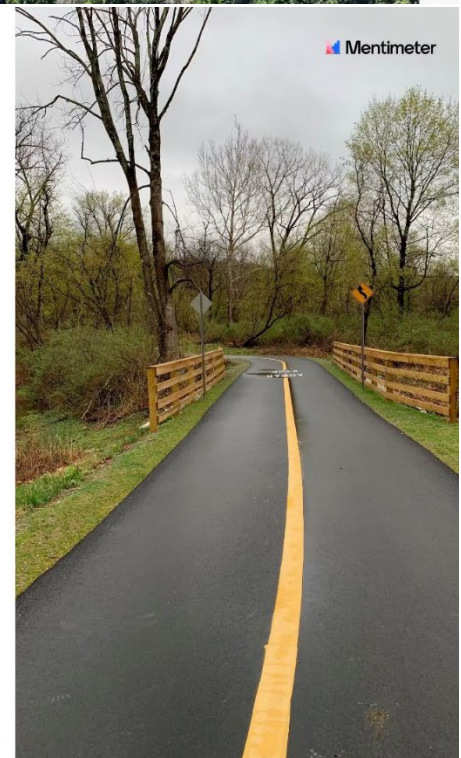
Beginning in January of 2022, town steering committee, in consultation with Resilience Planning and Design LLC, began analyzing and drafting a new plan. That plan is now available for public comment. Steering committee Membership included:

Stephanie Boyd, Co-Chair
Peter Beck, Co-Chair
Sarah Gardner
Melissa Cragg
Daniel Gura
Don Duberndorf
Susan Briggs
Huff Templeton
Justin Adkins
Tanja Srebotnjak
Susan Puddester



Community Needs Identified from Surveys/Outreach from Master Plan Process:

- • Create entity (Parks commission or Commissioner) to oversee and coordinate parks activities in the town.
- • Improve ADA accessibility at parks/promote universal design
- • Improve transit options to access open spaces in the town.
- • Educate town population about open space recreation and provide opportunities for experiencing the outdoors in a safe and mentored way.
- • Enhance the bike network, install additional bike racks, create a bike share program
- • Add additional athletic fields and provide mechanism for coordinating field usage.
- • Improve signage and wayfinding to increase awareness of town owned facilities.
- • Promote nature based solutions (such as bioswales to handle runoff), native plantings, and decrease mowing in natural areas



Community Frameworks and Themes- Envisioning Williamstown 2035 connections to 2023 OSRP

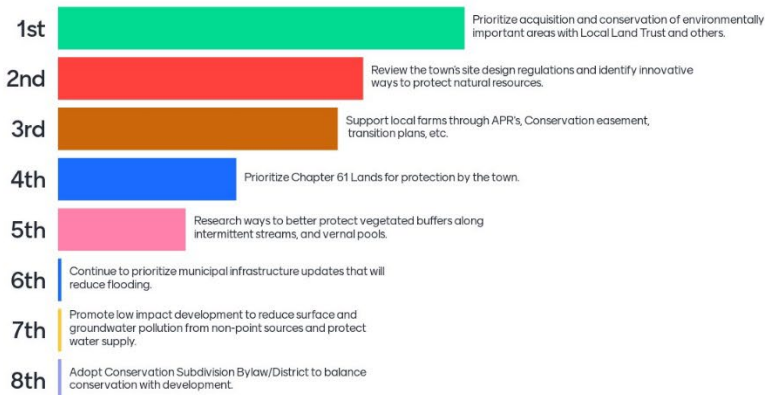
- Theme 2: Stewardship and Services: Natural Resource Protection, Conservation, and Nature Based Solutions
- Theme 2: Stewardship and Services: Energy Conservation and Production
- Theme 3: Welcoming and Connected: Placemaking
- Theme 4 : Character and Place: Land Use Policy and Design
- Theme 4: Character and Place: Parks and Recreation



Figure 1: Frameworks, Themes, and Elements of Envisioning Williamstown 2035

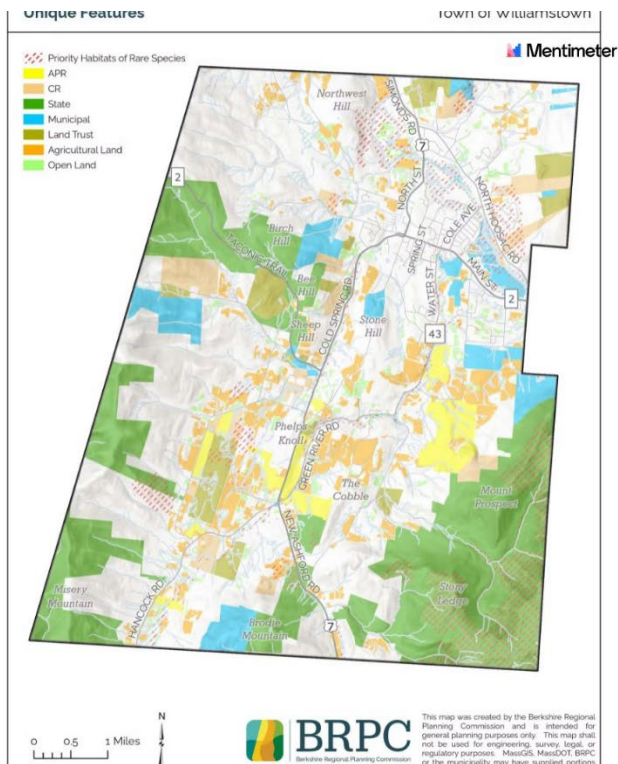


Prioritize the goals identified in the Natural Resource Protection and Conservation Section



Rank the following Energy Conservation and Production Strategies

- 1st Support or incentivize the efforts to complete energy conservation measures and install renewable and battery storage systems.
- 2nd Work with private entities such as National Grid and Williams College to accommodate large scale renewable energy projects in the town.
- 3rd Develop or adopt a Net Zero Plan
- 4th Continue the municipal composting program and expand to local businesses.



Prioritize the following Nature-Based Solutions

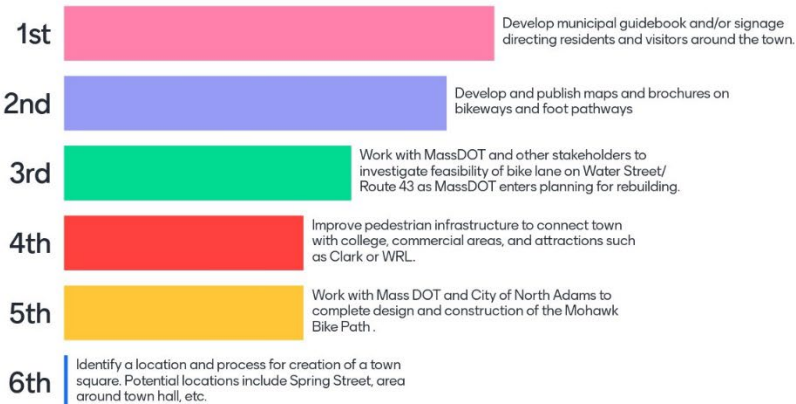
- 1st Revise local regulations to encourage nature based solutions into new development and redevelopment projects.
- 2nd Plant native trees and improve management on municipally owned land to reflect sustainable management best practices.
- 3rd Encourage and publicize residents and local landowners to adopt nature based solutions on private properties.



Mentimeter



Prioritize the following Placemaking Goals



Mentimeter



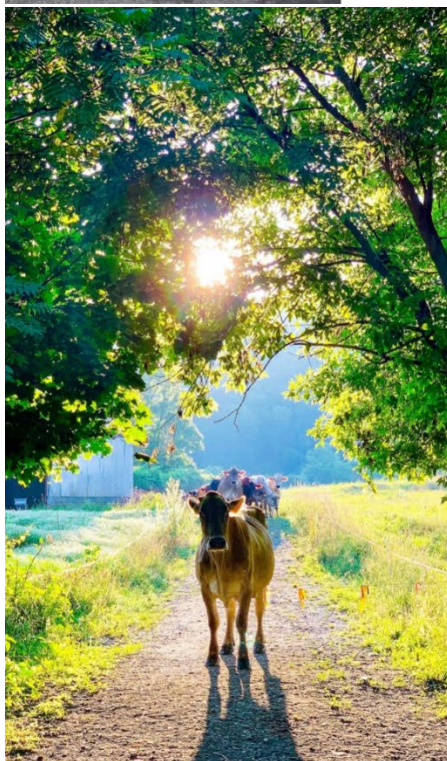
Rank the following Character and Place Goals:





Rank the following goals from the Parks and Recreation Theme

- 1st Identify improvements needed at existing parks and recreation facilities.
- 2nd Identify additional sites for athletic fields in the town, work with local schools to share athletic facilities.
- 3rd Create a Strategic Conservation Plan for Williamstown that identifies and prioritizes undeveloped land for acquisition.
- 4th Identify and develop additional recreation facilities and opportunities throughout the community.
- 5th Develop cohesive recreation signage to help with the overall branding and marketing of recreational offerings across Williamstown.
- 6th Promote coordination between town departments, community partners, and town boards to engage people in a variety of outdoor activities.

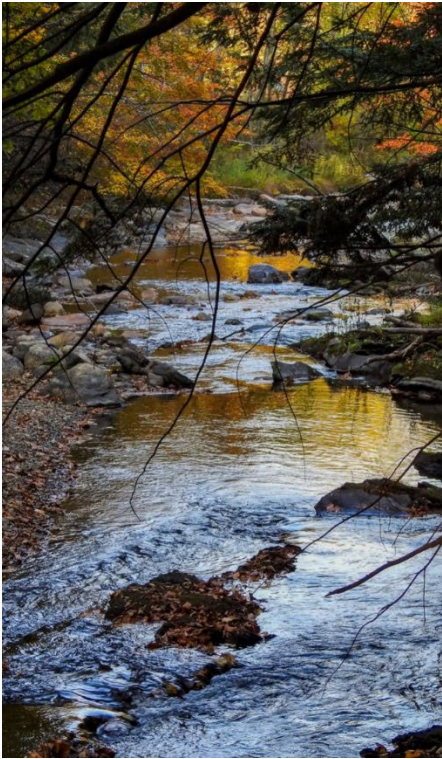


What do you think was missed in terms of Open Space/ Recreation needs in Williamstown?

Tell us your thoughts...



Mentimeter



The most important open space need in Williamstown is...

Waiting for responses ..



Mentimeter

Questions?



0 questions

0 upvotes



We appreciate your willingness to make Williamstown a better place.

Thank you for your participation this afternoon.



DRAFT