



# SOUTHWICK 2040 Master Plan

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Prepared by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission  
with support by the Southwick Master Plan Advisory Committee



# SOUTHWICK 2040

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts sets forth general laws that are permanent in nature and of general application. Massachusetts General Law (MGL) c. 41, §81D states that a planning board established in any city or town under section eighty-one A shall make a master plan of such city or town or such part or parts thereof as said board may deem advisable and from time to time may extend or perfect such plan. The comprehensive plan shall be internally consistent in its policies, forecasts and standards, and includes specific elements. The elements required under MGL c. 41, §81D are addressed in the Town of Southwick Master Plan.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Southwick Master Plan was finalized in 2023 after more than two years of primary and secondary research, scenario planning and discussion. This Master Plan is a living document meant to serve as a compass for Southwick’s future growth, development, and endurance over the next 20 years. It is a blueprint for the Town to thrive as a preferred location to live, work and play.

The 2040 vision is the heart of this plan and is the inspiration for the goals and recommended actions.

### **SOUTHWICK 2040 VISION**

*Southwick’s distinctive Massachusetts location crossing the Connecticut border makes us a desirable southern New England community. Residents and visitors of all ages enjoy natural resources including lakes and fertile farmland uniquely balanced with modern services and a vibrant social atmosphere. We welcome small to mid-size businesses from services, light manufacturing and agriculture to technology and innovative start-ups and help them thrive, adapt and grow-while enhancing our community.*

### **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

The Planning Board approved the formation of a Master Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC) and appointed membership from several town boards and commissions along with six resident members and two student members. The MPAC completed several stages within the planning process including:

1. Hiring the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)
2. Agreeing on a scenario planning framework to be used as a guide in the process
3. Conducting secondary research studying trends that could hinder or support the vision
4. Designing and executing various primary research activities with residents and businesses using surveys, focus groups and workshops
5. Bi-weekly MPAC meetings

## HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

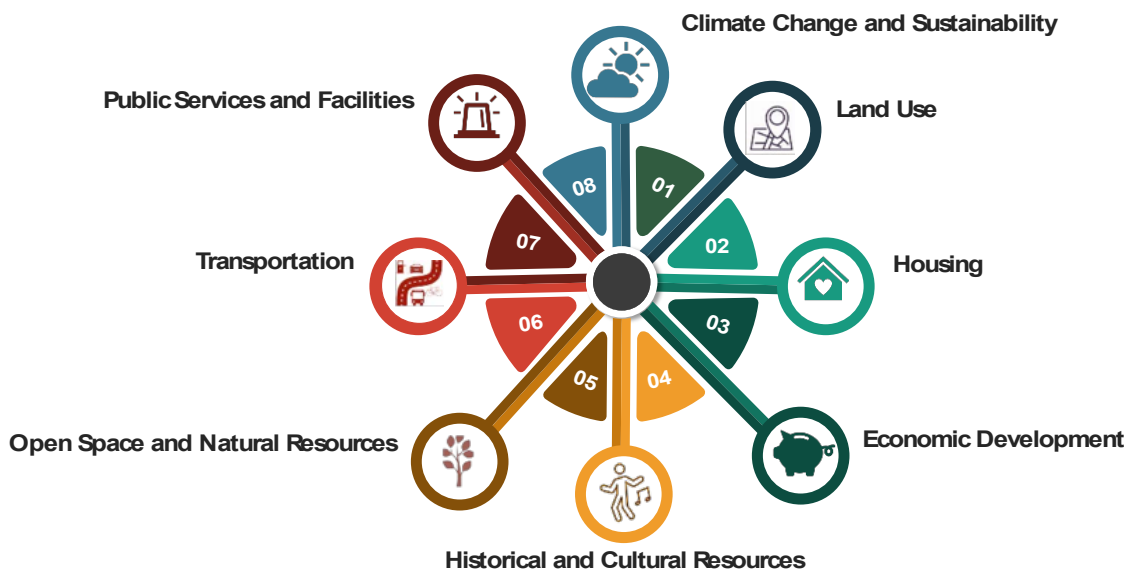
The Southwick Master Plan consists of an Introduction chapter with greater detail on items covered in the Executive Summary and a chapter for each major section identified in Figure 1. Each of the section chapters will dive deeper into these areas and include:

- The chapter vision statement
- The current state within the focus area of the chapter
- Insights from external trends and resident input
- Issues and Opportunities
- Strategy for the focus area of the chapter
- Recommended actions to achieve the topic vision

The Appendix contains relevant data sets including current state, trending details, and the summary of the survey results.

FIGURE 1

### *Master Plan Major Chapters*

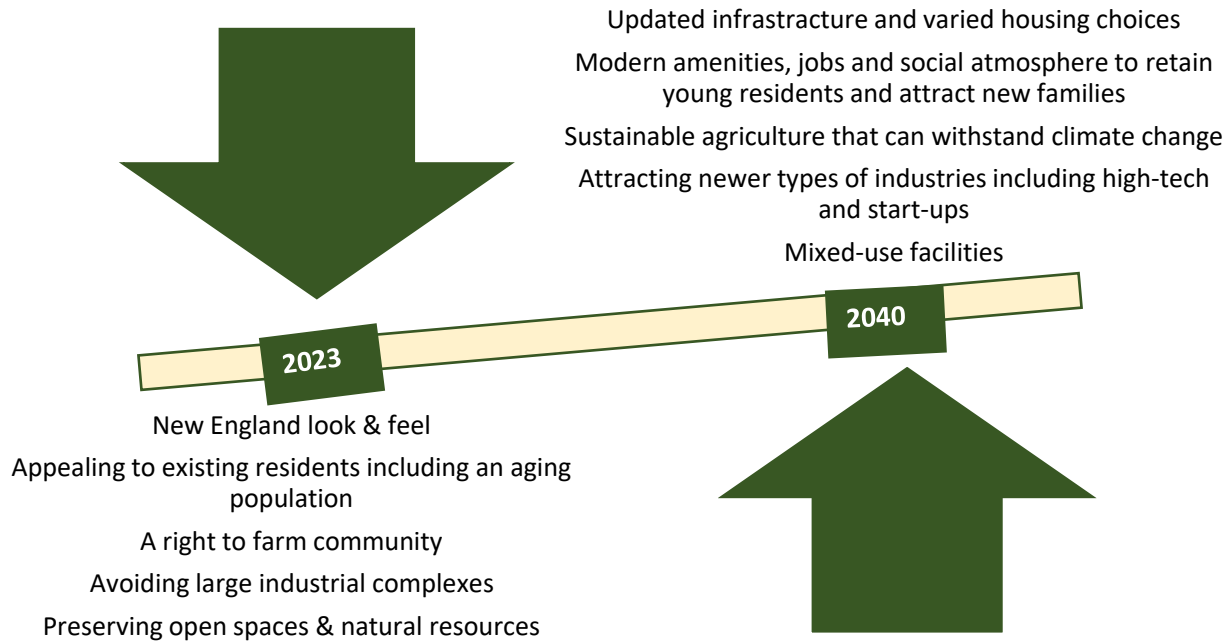


## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

The vision, existing conditions and strategies for each chapter are highlighted below and in much greater detail in the respective chapters for each topic identified in Figure 1. The vision for each chapter is not written from where the Town stands today but rather how we imagine the Town to be in 2040. Each topic chapter contains detailed action plans to achieve the strategies. The actions are designed to close the gap between the 2040 visions and the existing conditions.



The most common theme across multiple chapters is one of *balance*. There are needs and opportunities to balance what is strong and loved about the Town with strategies to overcome external trends, threats, and the ability to be competitive in the region.



## Land Use

### 2040 Vision

*Southwick is a community that preserves its Historical New England Heritage. The Town uses updated zoning bylaws to support the development of residential, small business and light industry in multiple areas while also encouraging a walkable town center. The zoning bylaws also encourage mixed uses with business and affordable residential units. Additionally, the Town protects open space and recreational uses while also promoting farming and open space.*

### Existing Conditions

According to MassGIS analysis, almost 42 percent of the land uses in Town are residential, equating to at least 8,596 acres. About 10 percent of Southwick land is made up of commercial and industrial land uses, as determined in this analysis. More than a quarter of the Town land could be considered agricultural.

Southwick has nine base zoning districts which are shown on the Municipal Zoning Map. There are six additional districts related to more specific uses, known as overlay districts.

### Strategic Goals

- Strategize future development and growth in Southwick, balancing the Town’s distinctive New England heritage, rural character, and commitment to natural resource protection.
- Enhance the Town Center as a livable, workable and walkable neighborhood.
- Create opportunities to allow for new housing options making use of existing corridors of density and infrastructure.

## Housing

### 2040 Vision

*Southwick has diverse housing types and designs that accommodate various ages and income levels, promoting sustainable building materials and methods, creating a community where residents can grow and live for a lifetime.*

### Existing Conditions

Southwick has a limited inventory of homes for sale in line with the overall regional inventory challenges. The Town has an aging population with a 64% increase of seniors age 65+ in the last ten years. This trend creates a concern that older adults may need to

find more appropriate housing to allow them to age in place.

Another challenge is an aging inventory, with the average home age exceeding 40 years. Rented properties have grown from 10-19% in the last twenty years with short-term rentals just approved at the time of this writing. The median home sale price exceeds \$426,000 which is greater than average for Western Massachusetts. The percentage of children and young adults has declined nearly 22% in the last ten years. The pricing of single-family homes may be a barrier to attracting and/or retaining these same single people and young families.

### Strategic Goals

- Provide housing stock that protects and maintains the community's scenic, natural, and historic resources.
- Promote housing availability in Southwick that is financially attainable for and attractive to all ages and household configurations seeking to reside in town.
- Increase Affordable Housing to make progress towards the M.G.L Chapter 40B Affordability housing goal of 10% for Southwick.

## Economic Development

### 2040 Vision

*Southwick has a thriving business community with a strong base of agricultural goods and services in addition to a healthy variety of enterprises and employment opportunities ranging from small businesses to light industrial, as well as a quaint and walkable downtown area with diverse local shops and restaurants. Innovative businesses and start-ups that complement the character of the town are welcomed by the local government and community with the aim of keeping Southwick's economy viable and sustainable.*

### Existing Conditions

Southwick businesses are mostly small to medium in size with 15 manufacturing companies representing a larger than average base for towns of comparable size. The largest employer is the regional school system followed by two manufacturing companies, a retail grocery chain, and a software development company. Overall, the Town has a medium presence of 15 manufacturing organizations including three on the major employer list. Agricultural goods and services are being offered in Southwick with farms in town like Calabrese, Coward Farms, and Ray's Family Farm employing up to 35 employees, where in the past there have been payrolls that included up to 125 employees.

Approximately 544 acres are used for industrial use, with about another 1,440 in commercial or "mixed use with primarily commercial," and about 1,658 acres in agriculture.

The majority of residents (87%) who are employed full or part-time do not work in the Town. Approximately 2300 people who work in the Town commute from other cities and towns.

The majority of Southwick's tax base is comprised of residential property taxes, with only about 7% coming from commercial and industrial taxes. The commercial, industrial, and personal property (CIP) tax rates in Southwick are the same as residential, making them relatively quite low for the region. This creates both pros and cons regarding the number and type of businesses attracted to the Town.

The average single-family tax bill in Southwick is relatively high compared to neighboring communities except Longmeadow, which is the highest in the region.

### **Strategic Goals**

- Fortify and deploy Town Hall resources to establish strong relationships with local businesses as well as create new modalities to convey information to town government about how to update and continue creating a welcoming business environment in Southwick, including small business incubation.
- Examine current policies upheld by Town Hall such as bylaws, zoning, and taxation structure to evaluate their alignment to the vision of making Southwick's economy viable and sustainable in the long-term.
- Continue to galvanize support for local agriculture in town and sustain and grow Southwick farming as a cornerstone of the town and regional economy.

## **Historic and Cultural Resources**

### **2040 Vision**

*Southwick is a vibrant, uniquely beautiful community that balances respect for our past, arts and culture, with future progress.*

### **Existing Conditions**

The Southwick Historical Commission (SHC) is a five-member board that is responsible for ensuring that local historic preservation concerns will be considered in community planning. The SHC is charged with inventory, preserve, protect, and develop the Town's historical and archeological assets and conduct research of individuals and places of historical value.

Residents have expressed desire to have more social and entertainment activities in Town and often go to other cities and towns due to the lack of these opportunities in Southwick. **Strategic Goals**

- Elevate the awareness, respect and pride of our town and our historical and cultural history to the point where our daily actions demonstrate that the town has achieved that goal.
- Broaden cultural programming through the Town fostering relationships between local and regional groups.

## **Open Space and Natural Resources**

### **2040 Vision**

*Southwick has plentiful water resources, wetlands, forests, farmlands, wildlife habitats, and soil diversity that are celebrated, actively used, and well-protected. Residents enjoy a healthy and sustainable community with easy access to the beauty and passive recreational opportunities that come from the preservation of our natural and agricultural heritage.*

## **Existing Conditions**

Southwick has varied topography ranging from rolling hills in the eastern and western edges of the Town, the Congamond Lakes and Great Brook in the central region, to gentle hills, wetlands and floodplains in much of the western region. The main surface water resources for Southwick are the Congamond Lakes, which are a chain of three connected lakes that together cover a total of over 465 acres of surface water. Southwick is already experiencing the impacts of climate change and is taking steps to increase the Town's resilience.

The Town of Southwick established a Flood Hazard and Wetlands District in 1978 that regulated development in the 500-year floodplain of lakes, rivers, and streams.

Southwick's most significant groundwater resource is the Great Brook Aquifer, which supplies drinking water to a large percentage of Southwick's population, and also provides drinking water to West Springfield and Westfield. Most of the western section of Southwick relies on private wells.

There are 14 species considered endangered, threatened, or of special concern that have been identified in Southwick.

## **Strategic Goals**

- Educate the Town's populace and town officials on the value of our town's natural resources.
- Maintain town's open space and natural resources through proper stewardship that is sustained by continued and informed governmental support, volunteer engagement opportunities and allocation of appropriate funding.
- Selectively and purposefully acquire new parcels of land to align with our mandate to maintain Southwick's rural character and our commitment to providing open spaces.

## **Transportation**

### **2040 Vision**

*Southwick promotes easy and safe connectivity between its residential communities and many attractions while protecting and enhancing the quality of life for our residents, businesses and visitors.*

### **Existing Conditions**

Southwick has two roads (Routes 10/202 and most of Rt 57) which are classified as Urban Principal Arterial by MassDOT. The Town is responsible for 82% of the roadways. Overall, traffic volume over the past ten years has remained relatively stable in key areas studied by PVPC. Road condition as rated by the Federal shows 92% as fair or better. There are roughly 15 miles of sidewalks in Southwick but several examples where sidewalks do not connect to other sidewalk networks.

Public transportation is an identified weakness in the Town's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) provides service to surrounding communities but not to Southwick.

There are no designated bike lanes in the Town. The Southwick Rail Trail is a 6-plus- mile multi-use trail bisecting Southwick north-to-south and connecting northerly to the Columbia Greenway and southerly to the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. The only available parking to access the Rail Trail is parking along Miller Road which has approximately 30 vehicles.

Modern transportation needs are unmet. There are no electric vehicle (EV) charging stations. It is very difficult to get a ride-share service to drive to Southwick from the Springfield bus and train stations or from Bradley International Airport.

### **Strategic Goals**

- Continue to provide and invest in a complete and well-maintained, safe system of roads, parking areas, sidewalks, and bridges/culverts.
- Create safe and improved non-motorized transportation opportunities and provide additional transit options within Southwick and between the Town and important regional destinations.

## **Public Services and Facilities**

### **2040 Vision**

*Southwick provides an enhanced quality of life for its citizens with abundant, modern resources and infrastructure. Our schools prepare and propel students for success in advanced education, training, and the careers of their choice.*

### **Existing Conditions**

Overall, a survey shows residents are satisfied with town services. Expanded wireless or broadband was identified as a need. The 2023 Annual Town Meeting approved \$3 million as a startup fund to begin the process of establishing a municipal light plant opening fiber optic opportunities for the Town.

The Town is permitted for water withdrawals of one million gallons per day. The largest concern regarding water supply centers around the geographic distribution of water infrastructure in Town.

There is only a limited sanitary sewer system in Southwick. The majority of the sewer system that was installed in 2004 primarily covers the center of town, and the lakes. Otherwise, most homes, businesses, and industries must still provide and depend upon individual septic systems.

The Town is served by a regional school district system, the Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District. All public school buildings are located in Southwick.

### **Strategic Goals**

- Continue providing efficient and fiscally responsible town services and community facilities through adequately staffed resources and infrastructure and prepare for future infrastructure and needs.
- Proactively prepare and evaluate Town's future needs for utilities and services such as drinking water, sewer, high speed internet, gas, etc. in light of projected population growth, development, climate change and market fluctuations with aim of providing these public services in a sustainable and affordable manner.
- Support a safe and healthy Southwick through education, communication and offering multi-generational events and opportunities to get involved.

## Climate and Sustainability

### 2040 Vision

*Southwick upholds and continuously improves sustainability in town and takes a proactive, holistic, and planned approach to prepare for and respond to climate changes. We focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), finding pathways to affordable, cost-saving renewable energy sources, and protecting natural resources, resident wellness, and local food growing.*

### Existing Conditions

The years 2013-2021 all rank among the 10 warmest years on record and at the time of this writing, we have experienced the two hottest days on record in the past month. Drought conditions are a worldwide risk and a definite impact on the needs of our agricultural businesses and our residents.

### Strategies

- Build local government's capacity to provide leadership for sustainability and climate change resilience and engage community members to do their part.
- Reduce energy and water consumption by residents, businesses, and town government.
- Ensure that all Southwick businesses and residents, especially vulnerable populations, are prepared for and can recover quickly from potential climate-related disasters.
- Develop and implement a plan for protecting natural resources.

## Implementing the Plan

The MPAC believes that the overall vision and aspirational future state can be achieved by the totality of the recommended action items. The MPAC recommends the Planning Board adopt the Master Plan and appoint a Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) to both review and execute these recommended actions or additional actions they may identify.

The MPAC also recommends progress toward the recommended actions be reviewed at the end of each year using a scorecard. A suggested template can be found in the Appendix. Overall, the external trends, opportunities and threats should also be reviewed every three years. This review should evaluate shifts in trend speed and impact that may change the direction of the plan or the ability of the Town to complete the actions.

# INTRODUCTION

## *Southwick Today*

The Town of Southwick was incorporated on November 7, 1770 by people who moved south from Westfield. Southwick was referred to as the south village, or “wick” of Westfield and became a full-fledged town in 1775. Southwick covers a total land area of 31.7 sq mi with 30.8 sq mil being land, and 0.8 sq mi being water.

Based on 2020 data provided by the University of Massachusetts, UMASS Donahue Institute, Southwick had 9,232 residents with a projected growth of approximately 9% by 2040. The population is made up of 22% Seniors (65+), 60% Working Age Adults (19-64), and 18% Children and Teenagers (0-18). The Senior population has increased 8% from 2010, while the Working Age and Children and Teenagers populations have decreased by 3% and 5% respectively. The median household income in 2020 is up approximately 17% from 2010 to \$84,896.

Approximately 23% of available housing units are rented, with 77% being owner-occupied with the majority of housing in Southwick being built between 1990 and 1999 (27%). The median sales price for Southwick in 2015 was \$277,500 (The Warren Group) compared to \$110,000 in 1990.

Southwick’s unemployment rate of 3.4% in January 2022 was lower than the 4.5% unemployment rate for Hampden County during the same time period. 87.3% of Southwick’s employed citizens work outside Southwick with Springfield being the top city for resident’s commute. The largest Southwick-based employers are WGI Inc., B&E Tool Co. Inc., Big Y, Woodland School, and Whalley Computer Associates Inc.

## *The Need for a Master Plan*

A town Master Plan envisions the growth of that town and how it chooses to develop. It serves as a document designed to guide the future actions of a town through a defined time period, usually long-term. Its goal is to help the community create a vision of what residents want the town to look like in the future, and then creates a plan to achieve that vision. Having a Master Plan creates a blueprint for, and creates connections between a town’s population, economy, housing, transportation, infrastructure, community facilities, buildings, land use, environment, and recreation.

Southwick’s last Master Plan was adopted in 1967. A plan was developed in 1997, however was not adopted. Without a Master Plan, Southwick will continue to be developed without a clear, unified direction and without agreement or input from its residents. The need for a Town of Southwick Master Plan is critical and thereby a Master Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC) was created.

## THE COMMITTEE

In 2021, the Southwick Planning Board authorized the creation of a 20-year master plan including a budget allocation and the directive to form an MPAC.

The MPAC was formed by selecting members from many Town boards and commissions and appointing (6) residents who applied for a two-year term. The Town Planner and members of the Planning Board were also added to the committee. The Chair and Vice-Chair were approved by a vote at the inaugural meeting.

The MPAC contracted with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) at the start of the process. PVPC ([www.pvpc.org](http://www.pvpc.org)) is the legally designated regional planning agency for the Pioneer Valley region. The PVPC, under the leadership of Ken Comia, was tasked with guiding the MPAC in the creation of technical reports within the plan, sharing master planning documents and processes from other local towns and assisting with relevant state grant applications.

The MPAC met twice a month in meetings that were recorded and available to residents via Zoom. The minutes and other important documents may be found on the town website ([www.southwickma.org/master-plan/advisory-committee](http://www.southwickma.org/master-plan/advisory-committee)) and on the Master Plan website ([www.Southwick2040.com](http://www.Southwick2040.com)).

## THE PLANNING PROCESS

The MPAC began its work by using a common scenario planning tool called PESTLE, adapted for an urban master planning trend analysis. The student members of the committee, under the guidance of appointed members, captured insights from different sources and identified future relevant trends matching the PESTLE categories (Place, Economy, Social, Technology, Land Use, and Environment). These trends could either challenge or support the vision and help committee members (and later residents) to visualize factors influencing life in Southwick over the next 20 years.

External trends matching the PESTLE categories were researched and factored into template. (Figure 1). These trends could either challenge or support the vision and help committee members (and later residents) to visualize factors influencing life in Southwick over the next 20 years. This scenario planning ensured that the MPAC took into account things that may not be relevant today but could be very relevant to achieving our vision.

### PESTLE input to Southwick 2040 Master Plan



Residents and businesses were involved throughout the two-year process from surveys to workshops and focus groups. In 2022 and 2023, four community visioning workshops and eight focus groups were held with residents and local business owners. These sessions were used to identify aspirational future state ideas for the town along with Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) relevant to the town achieving this future state. Strengths and weaknesses reflect things within the control of the town whereas opportunities and threats are external factors that reflect either roadblocks or things to be harnessed. All input from the resident's SWOT analysis may be found in the Appendix but highlights of the most common responses are found in Figure 2.



**FIGURE 2**



In 2022, an extensive survey was created and sent to town residents and local businesses. 900 surveys were completed. The full survey and results are found in the Appendix section of this document and on the Master Plan website ([www.Southwick2040.com](http://www.Southwick2040.com)).

## **PLAN OVERVIEW**

This MPAC engaged in thoughtful discussion to create this master plan. The committee first assessed where Southwick is today (i.e., our current state). The committee incorporated the survey results and workshop feedback and overlaid these against the external trends that will create both headwinds and tailwinds for the town. Each of the PESTLE categories was reviewed in this manner.

Identifying the gap between the current state of the town and the aspirational future state enabled the MPAC to craft a vision statement and strategic themes for each major area within the PESTLE framework. Topics required by the Commonwealth for municipal master plans were also included.

The committee also recommends short and long-term actions that will bridge the gap between Southwick today and the Southwick envisioned in 2040.

# SOUTHWICK 2040 VISION

The purpose of a vision statement is to inspire residents to picture and support how the town will adapt to changing needs while maintaining our core identity. The Southwick 2040 vision statement is written from the point of view of a resident living in Southwick in the year 2040.

**Southwick's** distinctive Massachusetts location crossing the Connecticut border makes us a desirable southern New England community. Residents and visitors of all ages enjoy natural resources including lakes and fertile farmland uniquely balanced with modern services and a vibrant social atmosphere. We welcome small to mid-size businesses from services, light manufacturing and agriculture to technology and innovative start-ups and help them thrive, adapt and grow-while enhancing our community.

# THEMES

The strategic themes support the vision in areas that are strongly impacted by both trends and the desires of the residents and local businesses. These themes are directional in nature and influenced the actions and opportunities identified in each of the major chapters.

- “*Grow with Southwick*” - Increase reasons for people to live, work and play in Southwick from housing types, modern amenities, economic opportunities, and schools that prepare students for all careers and more social options.
- Prepare the town to meet environmental and regulatory challenges from stabilizing water quality and availability to promoting adaptable farming and sustainable, related services (including electric vehicle support).
- Provide infrastructure upgrades that support small to mid-size businesses from existing services to technology and innovative start-ups, many of which may not exist today.
- Improve or adapt infrastructure/utilities/transportation services that will support an aging population but also appeal to diverse, younger demographics.
- Encourage beautification, modernization, unique services and social options within the region and corresponding marketing to ultimately increase awareness of the same through local market research and campaigns.
- Build upon existing brand recognition (e.g., The Wick Motocross) to increase complementary businesses.
- Support renovation of historical barns and buildings into uses that can accommodate cultural events or activities and businesses in beautiful locations, creating a competitive advantage over nearby communities.



# LAND USE



## VISION

Southwick is a community that preserves its Historical New England Heritage. The Town uses updated zoning bylaws to support the development of residential, small business and light industry in multiple areas while also encouraging a walkable town center. The zoning bylaws also encourage mixed uses with business and affordable residential units. Additionally, the Town protects open space and recreational uses while also promoting farming and open space.

## INTRODUCTION

Land use is the hub of a master plan, with the other elements acting as critical spokes. The land use element of a master plan provides a framework for growth management and an understanding of the kinds of development the community wants balanced with the existing physical and regulatory environment. A community's land use pattern is the physical arrangement and intensity of residential, commercial, industrial and institutional development, open land, natural resources and roadways. All are important, and land use is the element that ties them all together.

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

### *Defining Southwick's Landscape*

Southwick is located in Hampden County on the western edge of the Connecticut River Valley, on the Massachusetts-Connecticut border. Southwick is in the watersheds of the Westfield and the Farmington Rivers and is a town with highly varied terrain. It has mountainous sections, a string of low-lying, freshwater lakes, and, in between, a landscape of rolling hills. At one time partially under Lake Hitchcock, the area of Southwick has rocky gravel soil in the uplands and sandy soil in the lowlands, a fact that has had an impact on its development.

The community is characterized as a rural farming and residential community that is becoming a suburb of the Springfield /Westfield/Hartford region. Southwick has an area of 19,814 acres, or approximately 31 square miles. It is bordered by Granville to the west, Westfield to the north, Agawam to the east, and Suffield and Granby, Connecticut to the South. The town is only 12 miles from the City of Springfield and 22 miles from the City of Hartford, Connecticut. The largest of the mountains that make up vistas in the town is Sodom Mountain on its west border at an

elevation of 1126 feet.<sup>1</sup> Southwick is an agricultural and residential community with approximately 9,232 residents.<sup>2</sup> The 2021 median household income was \$100,337 with 5.5% of residents below the poverty line.<sup>3</sup>

There are two major thoroughfares that come together in the center of the Town of Southwick: Route 57 running east to west and Route 10/202 running north to south. Most residents work outside of town and use private vehicles to commute to work destinations. Currently, no public transportation system is available in Southwick. Such services are available only by traveling to Westfield (bus and airplane, Barnes Municipal Airport), Springfield (bus and train), or (airplane, Bradley International Airport) in Windsor Locks, Connecticut. The closest Massachusetts Turnpike entrance is in Westfield, 7 miles to the northeast.

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

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

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

According to Figure 1, and a qualitative observation about development in town is that almost 42 percent of the land is zoned residential with at least 8,596 acres according to the MassGIS analysis. About 10

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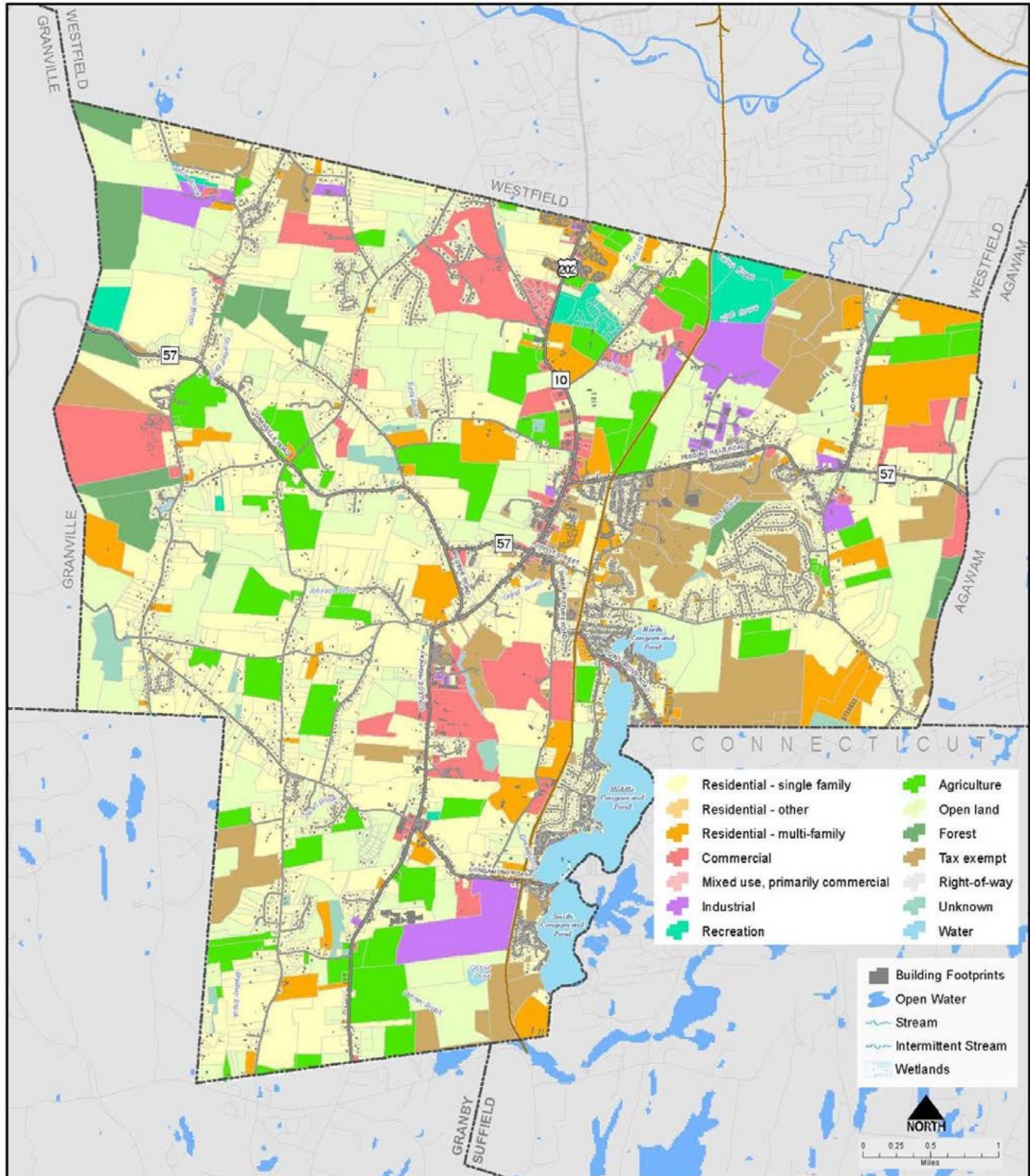
<sup>1</sup>2020, OSRP

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Census 2020

<sup>3</sup>Southwick Community Data,

<https://pioneervalleydata.org/community-profiles/>

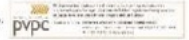
Map 1 Southwick Land Use Map



LAND USE 2016  
2022 Comprehensive Master Plan

SOUTHWICK, MA

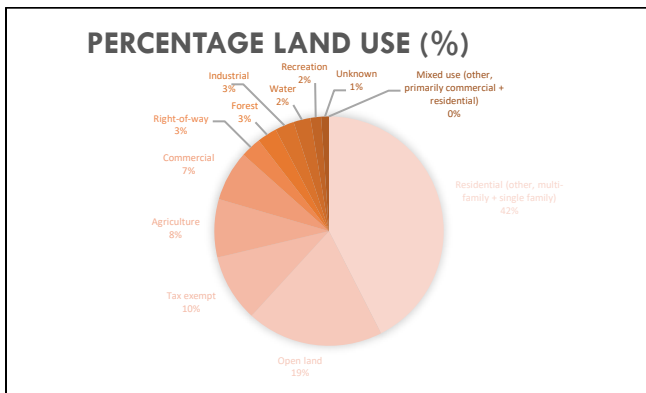
DATA SOURCES:  
MASS. PLANNING BOARD  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS



percent of Southwick land is zoned for commercial and industrial land uses, as determined in this analysis. More than a quarter of the Town’s land could be considered agricultural or open land – lands that are typically conserved or that the town would like to preserve.

Within the various surveys and focus groups, residents voiced concern about the conversion of open space, farmland and natural space into

**Figure 1 Southwick Land Use**



| Land Use Type   | Acres           | Percent of Total (%) |
|---|-----------------|----------------------|
| Residential (other, multi-family + single family)     | 8,596.5         | 42.5%                |
| Open land   | 3,903.8         | 19.3%                |
| Tax exempt  | 1,920.0         | 9.5%                 |
| Agriculture   | 1,658.1         | 8.2%                 |
| Commercial  | 1,436.8         | 7.1%                 |
| Right-of-way  | 578.6           | 2.9%                 |
| Forest  | 560.6           | 2.8%                 |
| Industrial  | 543.9           | 2.7%                 |
| Water   | 493.6           | 2.4%                 |
| Recreation  | 293.2           | 1.5%                 |
| Unknown   | 226.0           | 1.1%                 |
| Mixed use (other, primarily commercial + residential) | 0.00            | 0.00%                |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>20,211.0</b> | <b>100%</b>          |

Source: Mass GIS

developed land (please refer to the results of surveys shown in the appendix). A measurement to rely on to show how lands have been transformed by new residential and commercial development throughout the Commonwealth is through a report produced by Mass Audubon. The Sixth Version of *Losing Ground* analyzes changes every five years on the municipal scale, most recently in 2020.

*Losing Ground* is a good reference for the Planning Board and other boards and committees to address these concerns.

From 2012-2017 there were approximately 119 acres newly developed adding to the 3,200 acres that were already areas of development. Southwick has over 12,000 acres of natural land (much of which contains wetlands) with over 3,600 acres which are considered open land, permanently conserved land or newly conserved land.

Southwick’s population has fluctuated over the past few decades. There was 20 percent increase from 7671 residents in 1990 to 9502 residents in 2010. According to the 2020 Census there was a 3% decrease in the population bringing it down to 9232. The town is projected to grow to 10,099 by 2040, which would represent a possible increase of 9 percent from the present day. It will be important for the town to utilize its regulatory tools and advisory efforts to be proactive to this increase by keeping a balance of residential and business while also attempting to preserve key farmland and open space parcels.

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

### Zoning

Zoning regulations and other land use laws constitute a town’s “blueprint” for its future. Land use patterns over time will continue to look more and more like the



town's zoning map until the town is "built out" – that is, there is no more developable land left. In looking forward, it is important that the town focus not on the current use and physical build-out of today, but on its potential future uses, on appropriate land for development, and build-out allowed under the town's zoning map and bylaws. Zoning regulations and districts are the primary land use tools that are used to manage development and direct growth to suitable and desired areas while also protecting critical resources and ensuring that development is in keeping with the town's character.

Southwick's current zoning bylaw (Chapter 185) was first adopted on December 20, 1950, by the Special Town Meeting, and there have been subsequent bylaw amendments in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40A, Section 5. The most

recent Zoning Bylaw Amendment was passed by Town Meeting in 2023 to add a process for major development review. For the purposes of the Master Plan, the zoning assessment addresses pertinent zoning regulations and permitting procedures as they may relate to potential obstacles to achieving goals as outlined throughout this Master Plan. The zoning code can affect development and redevelopment potential based on where the town allows housing types and commercial and industrial activities throughout town.

Southwick has nine base zoning districts which are shown on the Municipal Zoning Map (Map 2). There are six additional districts are related to more specific uses, known as overlay districts.

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

- **Agricultural and Conservation District AC:** Areas of town which are best suited for land uses and activities in keeping with the Town's rural character, primarily but not limited to farm and forest uses, and single-family homes by special permit.
- **Residence Zone R-40:** Areas of town which

are best suited for low to medium-density residential development as well as land uses and activities in keeping with the Town's rural character, primarily but not limited to farm and forest uses.

- **Residence Zone R-20:** Areas of town which are best suited for the same uses as R-40; but also allowing public boathouses, bathhouses, and commercial uses for recreation, etc.
- **Residence Zone R-20-A:** Areas of town which are best suited for the same uses as R-20; but also allowing apartment buildings.
- **Residence Zone R-20-B:** Areas of town which are best suited for the same uses as R-20; but also allowing group housing.
- **Business Zone B:** Areas of town which are best suited for offices, commercial, and retail businesses.
- **Business Restricted Zone BR:** Areas of town which are best suited for offices, commercial, and retail businesses by special permit or site plan approval.
- **Industrial Zone I:** Areas of town which are best suited for manufacturing and industrial uses, as well as any use permitted in the Business District.
- **Industrial Restricted Zone IR:** Areas of town which are suited for similar uses as in Industrial District I, but subject to site plan approval and additional performance standards.

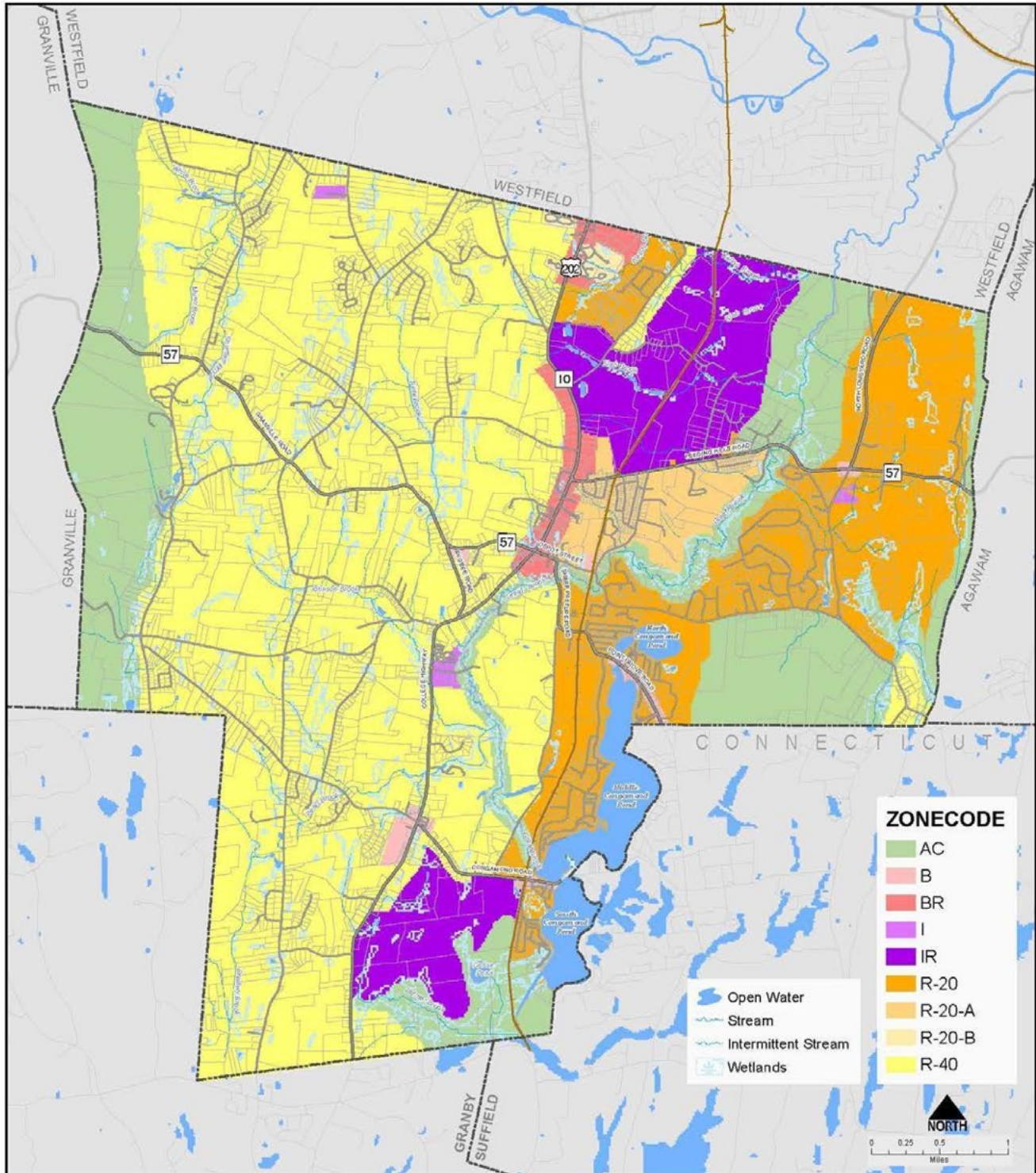
**Overlay Districts – have individual maps or are defined within the text of zoning.**

- **Flood Hazard and Wetlands District FH:** This overlay district (based on FEMA maps) establishes additional regulations within flood hazard and wetlands areas to prevent flooding and manage stormwater and water quality.
- **Wellhead Protection District:** This overlay district is depicted on a map and sets forth standards, rules and permitting procedures for uses that are located within municipal well water source recharge areas.
- **Flexible Residential Zoning District FRD:** This district is permitted in R-40, R-20, R-20-A and R-20-B, only upon issuance of a special

permit and site plan approval, it allows clustering of residential buildings to preserve open space.

- **Adult Entertainment District:** This district provides regulations for adult-oriented businesses and restricts their location to the Industrial Restricted Zone (IR).
- **Marijuana District:** This overlay district is depicted on a map and sets forth standards, rules and permitting procedures for uses related marijuana.

Map 2 Southwick Zoning Map



ZONING  
2022 Comprehensive Master Plan

SOUTHWICK, MA

DATA SOURCES:  
MASSGIS, PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT, AND  
THE TOWN OF SOUTHWICK. THE TOWN OF SOUTHWICK AND  
AGAWAM & GRANVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS.  
pvpc

## TRENDS

### *Farmland Preservation*

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

### *Smart Growth and Transit-Oriented Development*

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

### *Adapting to Climate Change*

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

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Master Plan process has provided the opportunity for residents to present comment and concerns about growth in Southwick. A community-wide survey was conducted in 2022, with several questions pertaining to preferred types of new development, with the results affirming the importance of the Town's "rural character." Of the 970 responses, the greatest support was for further agricultural development (81%), with 63% in favor of new commercial business,

37% approving of office development, and only 24% who wanted to see new industrial development.

Most of the survey takers, 74%, found that over the next 20 years, the town should encourage rural character and feeling. The intention of this plan is to help Southwick achieve its vision which has been articulated as maintaining the rural charm of the town and balancing the other perspectives that have been brought forth in the other elements of the plan. Some strategies may include supporting opportunities to preserve open space, where appropriate, and addressing development thoughtfully. The town could maintain the potential benefits of this balance by becoming more proactive in planning for growth and conservation, exploring targeted plans for key nodes and corridors, and subsequently implementing the recommended policies and regulations.

The survey showed that 55% would like to discourage industrial development. Additionally, 58% would like to encourage commercial business development, particularly small, local businesses in the areas of retail, high technology, restaurants and grocery, and hospitality. In terms of offices, Southwick residents support medical and professional offices, high-tech/IT/software businesses, and start-up and incubator space. All are preferred to be low-rise.

When it comes to industrial uses, residents would be in favor of small operations, light manufacturing, "green" (environmentally-clean) businesses, and high-tech including robotics.

Southwick residents are highly supportive of agricultural uses. They would especially like to see sustainable, organic and regenerative farming operations, year-round greenhouses, food crops, and agritourism.

Another type of development mentioned by several respondents was sports facilities, which would fit in with the town's existing recreational amenities.

In creating consistency with the Open Space and Recreation Plan, the town's documents will show where land could be preserved, like farmland and forestland. With limited financial resources, the Town must be strategic about which parcels provide the most benefit as protected open space and area of where the town can develop. The town can be more proactive

about supporting the other economic development opportunities and its viabilities.

### *Encouraging Redevelopment*

Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents support an update to the boundaries of existing zoning districts, with a similar amount (55%) wanting the town to identify areas appropriate for mixed-use development. Mixed used (business/ residential) is allowed in multiple current zoning districts. The Town may want to look into how to expand or encourage property owners to utilize this bylaw. Additionally, Town center standards in zoning can provide the opportunities for walkability and access to services like the post office, town offices and retail offerings.

Southwick's Town Center can attract more small businesses to support the local economy and offer a continuation of the types of structures and character the town seeks. A Town Center bylaw in conjunction with the current Design Guidelines could help the town advance the maintenance of appropriate development in the center. The bylaw can offer standards of which future development such an allowance for a smaller setback or frontage requirement, etc., where appropriate within a boundary.

### *(Semi-) Rural, Small Town Features*

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

To some extent we have maintained the remnants of Southwick's past, primarily in areas outside of the downtown area, by preserving roads, overarching trees, stone walls, barns, and other artifacts of the earlier times, maintaining some visual characteristics of a New England town. More significant, however, could be the opportunity to revitalize the type of uses and activities that help support a more town-adopted

value-based small-town character, including in the town center:

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

### *Restrictions on (Re)Development*

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

### *Affordable Housing*

Southwick could continue to support additional affordable housing in town by way Chapter 185.15 – Residential zoning R-20B, as the town through its visioning session and survey suggested that the town explore this type of development. As described, new housing constructed under this zoning provision limits who can reside in these units – those ages 55 and above and/or handicapped.

Additionally, there is a need for affordable housing for young families and a need to have more apartments and rental options so as to attract younger residents who want to stay or who are considering moving to the area. This housing would allow them to evaluate Southwick as a place to settle before committing to homebuying.

Many towns strive to achieve a 10 percent subsidized housing inventory (SHI) threshold so they are not subject to development regulated under the State's Chapter 40B laws. A Comprehensive Permit proceeding, as governed by Chapter 40B, bypasses

many local review processes. As of December 2020, the State's records show the town's SHI at 3.4 percent, making the Town subject to Chapter 40B and housing development being permitted through a Comprehensive Permit issued by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

### *Community Resilience*

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

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

- Enhancing the Town's center to facilitate walkability and promote the efficient and design-appropriate repurposing of existing buildings and infrastructure. It also facilitates community building by formalizing a civic space and community, utilizing the town offices, the library, and/or the various parks and recreational facilities.
- Working to expand affordable housing opportunities would provide housing for those who want to remain in town and contribute to the success of Southwick, while also offering opportunities for new residents who can contribute to the growth of Southwick.
- Preserving the Town's rural character by protecting existing farmland, which also could increase local source of food and promote sustainable farming.

# STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

## Strategy 1

Strategize future development and growth in Southwick, balancing the Town’s distinctive New England heritage, rural character, and commitment to natural resource protection.

### Timeframe

Immediate – 0-2 years  
Short Term – 3-5 years  
Medium Term – 6-9 years  
Long Term – 10+ years  
Ongoing – Continuing, still in progress

## Actions

- 1.1 Perform a Zoning diagnostic to examine readability and content of the town's Zoning Bylaws. Refine and revise Zoning Bylaws as necessary with new format, modern terminology, and definitions that fully describe items discussed within the bylaw to make the development and permitting process clearer for all. Include consideration of sustainable construction approaches, climate-change impacts and mitigation/adaptation strategies, and ascertain how to update zoning to include ‘Open Space Design/Natural Resource Protection Zoning’ and facilitation of renewable energy arrays on-site.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.2 Consider the creation of additional committees to help with this strategy.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 1.3 Evaluate how to incorporate principles of ‘Open Space Design/Natural Resource Protection Zoning’ into Zoning Bylaws.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.4 Review how design guidelines are currently administered by the Planning Board and how to enhance them within the current Zoning Bylaws or with the addition of a Town Center bylaw to support the New England Heritage and preservation of Historical sites related to new developments or upgrades to current businesses within the Town.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Historical Commission, Economic Development Commission  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 1.5 Review and consider updates to Subdivision Rules and Regulations (Chapter 315) and the Flexible Residential Development District (FRD) (185.23) to support permanently preserved open spaces, agricultural lands, forest lands, other natural resources as well as climate change mitigation strategies to employ within landscape and construction of subdivision.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Historical Commission, Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 1.6 Evaluate the impact of the Major Development Bylaw (passed in 2022) considering new data from the public input sessions and survey, specifically on uses, size caps maximum square footage and maximum expansions.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission  
Timeframe: Medium Term

## **Strategy 2**

Enhance the Town Center as a livable, workable, walkable, and healthy neighborhood. This enhancement could include how current zoning policies may need to be updated to encourage various development, and redevelopment of land in areas throughout town to allow for new businesses, beautification/vitalization of downtown areas, and addition of mixed-use zones within Town center.

### **Actions**

- 2.1 Utilize the 2004 Community Development Plan and 2014 Town Center Study as well as Master Plan Advisory Committee 2022-2023 primary data from public input sessions and survey when addressing any Town Center redevelopment, revitalization, and beautification strategies to uphold aesthetic standards and scale, while also attempting to make the center walkable.
- Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission, Department of Public Works  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 2.2 Encourage adaptive re-use and infill development. Adopt zoning to promote re-use of existing underutilized buildings and infill development within larger commercially zoned properties, and to encourage walkable layouts of development that feature mixed-use options to facilitate compact footprint and multi-usage opportunities.
- Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission, Department of Public Works  
Timeframe: Medium Term

## **Strategy 3**

Create opportunities to allow for new housing options making use of existing corridors of density and infrastructure.

### **Actions**

- 3.1 Adopt bylaws to allow for both in-law apartments and /or tiny homes and consider other forms of accessory units in existing residential areas to promote diversity of housing options.
- Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Housing Authority  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 3.2 Examine Mass General Law Chapter 40Y to create a starter home district and consider what already developed areas in town could be used for this district.
- Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Housing Authority, District Local Technical Assistance, Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 3.3 Examine Mass General Law Chapter 40R to create a Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District to increase affordable housing choices by encouraging creation of additional dense residential and mixed-use areas in suitable locations.



Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Housing Authority, District Local Technical Assistance, Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities  
Timeframe: Long Term



# HOUSING



## VISION

Southwick has diverse housing types and designs that accommodate various ages and income levels, promoting sustainable building materials and methods, creating a community where residents can grow and live for a lifetime.

## INTRODUCTION

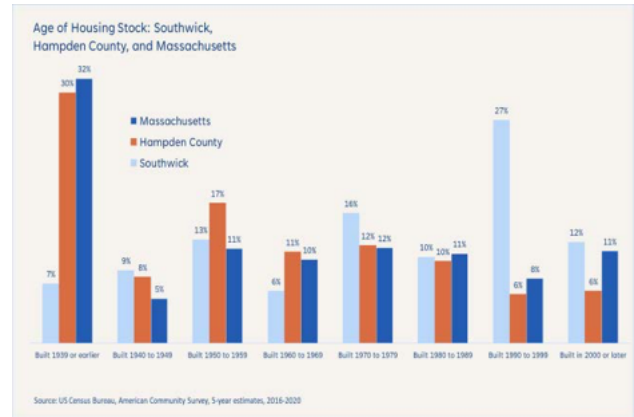
The *Housing* element of the Southwick Master Plan provides an overview of housing conditions, issues, and opportunities facing the Town of Southwick and its residents.

With this chapter being part of the Town's Master Plan, and incorporating its commonalities to other Town goals and policies found in this plan and other town planning documents including the Housing Production Plan, successful housing policies and outcomes can:

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

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

Southwick is characterized as a semi-rural farming and residential community that is located in the Springfield, MA / Pioneer Valley region. Southwick has an area of 19,814 acres, or approximately 31 square miles. It is bordered by Granville to the west, Westfield to the north, Agawam to the east, and both Suffield and Granby, Connecticut to the south. The town is only 12 miles from the City of Springfield and 22 miles from the City of Hartford, Connecticut.



Like many rural and semi-rural communities in Massachusetts, Southwick has an aging population with concern that older adults may need to find more appropriate housing as they age. The supply and cost of housing play a major role in who gets to live in town. Through established and new policies, the Town can influence who lives in Southwick. Zoning can limit the development of housing for a variety of different housing types, likely resulting in a homogeneous population. Residents have indicated they want to keep the current small town nature and feel of Southwick while expanding certain types of housing, particularly for seniors, young families, and early career individuals seeking home ownership.

### Housing Stock

Analysis of homeownership levels and renter opportunities is an important feature of a housing assessment. Data on owner-occupancy and renter-occupancy is used to aid in the distribution of funds for government programs, including mortgage insurance and public housing programs. It also allows planners to evaluate the overall viability of housing markets, to assess the stability of neighborhoods and to aid in the planning of housing programs and services.

Southwick housing units had an occupancy rate of 93.9% in 2020, similar to that for Hampden County, (93.2%), based on the most recent data from the 2020 American Community Survey. As shown below, the vacancy rate in Southwick for 2020 was 6.1%.

### 2020 Housing Occupancy in Adjacent Towns and Hampden County

|                     | Southwick | Granville | Agawam | Hampden County |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|--------|----------------|
| Total Housing Units | 4,119     | 702       | 12,079 | 193,713        |
| Occupied            | 3,869     | 644       | 11,668 | 180,492        |
| Vacant              | 250       | 58        | 411    | 13,221         |

Source: 2020 DP04: SELECTED HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS - Census Bureau Table

#### Age of Housing

The age of housing stock is also an indicator of the type and quality of homes. Although age of housing stock should not be interpreted as “good” or “bad”, and well-maintained older homes are an important element of a town’s local character, older housing, that typically can be identified as older than 40 years, may present challenges.

However, according to the latest data from the 2020 American Community Survey, 49% of all housing units in Southwick were built after 1979 with only 7% built in 1939 or earlier. With older homes, there can be an increased need for costly maintenance and repair, including roofing, water heaters, plumbing, and electrical wiring. Older housing is built to outdated and obsolete code, which can present numerous problems for anyone with limited mobility or homeowners looking to make updates and significant modifications to their homes. This is particularly important for an aging community to address. Older homes often have outdated energy and insulation systems. This is relevant when addressing resiliency in the community and in the home. Finally, outdated materials in older homes can lead to health risks such as lead paint and pipes, asbestos, air quality concerns, and faulty electrical wiring.

#### Building Permits

Building permits are filed by owners or builders when they initiate any type of major construction or demolition in Southwick. Permits for activities such as new construction, renovations, and demolitions are one

<sup>4</sup> Source: [Southwick.pdf \(showingtime.com\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> Source: [Southwick.pdf \(showingtime.com\)](#)

indicator of the housing market in Southwick. The last time new residential building permits were issued for multi-family housing in Southwick was in 2015.

#### Building Permits Pulled in Southwick

|                                     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
|                                     | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
|                                     | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 |
|                                     | 34 | 34 | 34 | 34 | 34 | 34 | 34 | 34 | 34 |
| Total Permits                       | 16 | 23 | 5  | 3  | 8  | 9  | 14 | 14 | 2  |
| Permits in Single Family Structures | 16 | 23 | 3  | 3  | 8  | 9  | 14 | 12 | 2  |
| Permits in Multi Family Structures  | 0  | 0  | 2  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  |

Source: 2020 U.S. Census Bureau

#### Housing Tenure

According to estimates from the American Community Survey, 81% of the occupied housing units in Southwick are ownership units, while 19% are rental units. This is equal to about 3,124 ownership units, and 745 rental units. There has been an increase in renter-occupied units since 2010 (69 or 10%) and a lesser increase in owner occupied units (63 or 2.1% since 2010). Prior to Annual Town Meeting in May 2023, Southwick had not permitted short term rental units.

#### Housing Sales

As of October 2022, there were a total of 78 closed sales for single family homes for the year to date in Southwick with a median sales price of \$426,250.<sup>4</sup> Comparatively, in 2021, there were a total of 106 closed sales, with an average sales price of \$352,500.<sup>5</sup>

As of October 2022, there have been 7 closed condominium sales in Southwick with an average sales price of \$379,500,<sup>6</sup> while in 2021, there were 9 closed condominium sales, averaging \$266,000.<sup>7</sup>

These prices are significantly higher than Hampden County as a whole (which includes several densely developed cities), but lower than Massachusetts as a whole, reflecting the relatively cheaper housing

<sup>6</sup> Source: [Southwick.pdf \(showingtime.com\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> Source: [Southwick.pdf \(showingtime.com\)](#)

market in Western Massachusetts. In 2021, the median sales price of a single-family home in Hampden County was \$265,000.<sup>8</sup> As of October 2022, there have been 3,142 closed sales of single-family homes in Hampden County with a median sales price of \$290,000.<sup>9</sup>

### *Subsidized Housing Inventory*

As of March 2023, there are 132 subsidized housing units in Southwick listed on the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). This amounts to 3.2% of the housing stock being affordable in accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 40B. The SHI is maintained by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities and is the state's official list for tracking a municipality's percentage of Affordable Housing under M.G.L. Chapter 40B.

### *Housing Cost Burden*

**A household is defined as “housing cost-burdened” if the household expends more than 30% of their income on housing costs.** This is derived from the “30-percent rule” that was established in 1968's Fair Housing Act as a way to measure affordability and argues a household should spend no more than 30% of its income on housing costs ([https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr\\_ed\\_ge\\_featd\\_article\\_092214.html](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr_ed_ge_featd_article_092214.html)).

Housing cost-burdened households may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, medical care, as well as saving for their future. A moderately cost-burdened household pays 30% to 49% of its income for housing, while households that pay more than 50% of their income are severely cost-burdened.

According to the 2020 Census, in Southwick, 29.3% of owned households are housing cost-burdened and 47% of rented households are housing cost-burdened.

This is also the generally accepted definition of housing affordability used by the U.S. Department of

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) in the calculation of the Area Median Income (AMI) and promotion of income-restricted housing. The AMI is the median family income for a given area, in this case the Springfield MA HUD Metro Fair Market Rent Area, which includes Southwick. HUD calculates the AMI annually, based on the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey's (ACS) estimated median family income for the area. The Springfield, MA area AMI was \$91,200 in 2022, which is based on a 4-person family

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<sup>8</sup> Source: Hampden County - [2022-10 Counties.pdf \(marealtor.com\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> Source: Hampden County - [2022-10 Counties.pdf \(marealtor.com\)](#)

## Home Value and Housing Costs

| Value of Homes              | With Mortgage<br>(Owner Occupied = 1,854 homes) |      | Without Mortgage<br>(Owner Occupied = 1,198 homes) |      |
|-----------------------------|---|------|--|------|
|                             | Number  | %    | Number   | %    |
| Less than \$50,000          | 30  | 1.6  | 0  | 0.0  |
| \$50,000 to \$99,999        | 0   | 0.0  | 10   | 0.8  |
| \$100,000 to \$199,999      | 843   | 45.5 | 227  | 18.9 |
| \$200,000 to \$299,999      | 822   | 44.3 | 397  | 33.1 |
| \$300,000 to \$499,999      | 130   | 7.0  | 486  | 40.6 |
| \$500,000 to \$749,999      | 29  | 1.6  | 53   | 4.4  |
| \$750,000 to \$999,999      | 0   | 0.0  | 0  | 0.0  |
| \$1,000,000 or more         | 30  | 1.6  | 25   | 2.1  |
| Median Value                | \$316,300                                       |      | \$293,100  |      |
| Median Monthly Housing Cost | \$2,034   |      | \$792  |      |
| Median Rent                 | \$1,149   |      |  |      |

Source: 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates

## TRENDS

*Energy efficiency and net-zero, passive home design and construction*

With a growing emphasis on energy efficiency and utilizing renewable energy sources to power one's home, the Commonwealth has provided opportunities for homeowners to take advantage of audits to identify ways make their homes more energy efficient. Some energy efficiencies can be found in insulation, airtightness, and ventilation throughout a home, the use of eco-friendly building materials, energy-efficient appliances, insulation, and renewable energy systems. Getting a green building certification, such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), has become a way for a homeowner to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and energy efficiency.

Tiny homes has been a concept that has been explored as a sustainable and affordable housing option across the world and the Commonwealth.

Zoning codes typically are where these types of uses are regulated, and many communities are amending their dimensional regulations to allow for smaller dwellings or by addressing accessory dwelling units as a use to the principal home.

### *Population and Household Growth*

The population in Southwick is aging. The percentage of seniors 65+ increased from 14% of the population in 2010 to 22% of the population in 2020. Subsequently, a decline has occurred with children and young adults (under the age of 18) from 23% of the population in 2010 to 18% of the population.

Based on the projected population and household stagnation, along with decline in families and younger residents, proactive planning is needed to accommodate an aging population within the town. Beyond housing, this ongoing change in demographics will also likely impact transportation needs, public infrastructure, and economic development. Also, in

efforts to not tax burden the aging population, the Town needs to encourage a blended age tax base by increasing efforts to attract young families and individuals to purchase homes in Southwick.

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

The ability to work remotely has allowed workers to consider more varied housing options with desirable amenities outside of the expensive cities. This shift has led to increased interest in suburban and rural areas, including Southwick and the Pioneer Valley, as individuals seek more space, lower costs, and a change of scenery. According to the community survey, 35% of the respondents work from home at least 25% of their working time. Housing and related services can be improved for many who may seek to spend more time working from home and become a more attractive place to live for young professionals and families. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) and other housing entities continue to monitor the migration of those coming from larger metropolitan areas like Boston and New York City.

Southwick needs to also carefully consider options to attract new families with children and early career individuals, who have their own set of needs around schooling, transportation, work from home infrastructure, in town job availability, and social outlets.

#### *Housing Affordability*

Like many parts of the United States, Massachusetts has experienced increasing home prices over the years. This trend has been driven by factors such as limited housing supply with high demand and population migration due to social and political environments in other parts of the country and world.

The Pioneer Valley has also seen rising home prices, though at a slower pace compared to the more urban areas of the state.

## **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### *Chapter 40B development as an issue and opportunity*

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

One of the primary purposes of M.G.L. Chapter 40B is to ensure that no city or town shoulders a disproportionate amount of low- and moderate-income housing in any region of the state. To this end, a 10% statutory minimum was established as an indicator that suburbs and small towns were providing their “fair share” of subsidized Affordable Housing. Southwick does not currently meet this statutory minimum, and a need for more Affordable Housing choices can further be seen in the increased share of household incomes going toward housing costs. This is important in a town like Southwick with an aging population.

### *Older adults, housing affordability and aging in place*

An issue in Southwick related to housing affordability is the cost of maintenance and upkeep. Older housing can have numerous challenges including energy inefficiency, design impediments for households with limited mobility individuals, and outdated materials and products. Related to housing affordability are the issues defining senior housing, whether that refers to specific residences that only house seniors, aging in place programs, or a combination of these and other options. Residents are well aware of the needs of their seniors, including appropriate housing. Currently, the



Zoning Bylaw permits housing developments for seniors and/or handicapped persons in other districts where residential is allowed, but only if Southwick Housing Authority is developing those units.

#### *Housing Choice Types*

Housing can be a controversial subject in most towns, however, there is favorable sentiment towards and opportunity in mixed use development as identified in the community survey; where 55.1% of respondents wanted the town to “identify areas appropriate for mixed-use development, where housing and business development could be found on the same structure or land parcel.”

Additionally, the 2003 Community Development Plan called for a goal to create 13 units of Affordable Housing each year. This goal has not been realized to date, and allowing for additional housing choice types in town could be found in mixed use development. Mixed uses can include condominium or apartment units that may be more appropriate for younger adults and families looking to reside in Southwick.

#### *Inclusionary Housing*

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

#### *Community Resilience*

A resilient community, not only one that bounces back after a hardship or disaster, is one that also is able to provide a wide range of housing types that accommodate all stages in a person’s lifecycle. This is an ongoing conversation around housing that should continue to be explored, particularly with a variety of housing types that are built sustainably and in the context of climate risk. New home building and design can benefit from strategic and cost-effective policies that will lead to more energy efficient homes, as there is a growing emphasis on sustainable and energy-efficient housing in Massachusetts. The state has implemented various programs and incentives to promote green building practices, energy-efficient appliances, and renewable energy installations. A greater focus on providing housing options for seniors who are currently living in town, looking to move in with family, or plan to retire in Southwick, along with exploring options to attract younger professionals and families, will go a long way in Southwick’s path to greater resiliency.

# STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

## Strategy 1

Provide housing stock that protects and maintains the community’s scenic, natural, and historic resources.

### Timeframe

- Immediate – 0-2 years
- Short Term – 3-5 years
- Medium Term – 6-9 years
- Long Term – 10+ years
- Ongoing – Continuing, still in progress

### Actions

- 1.1 Use the Town’s Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) to ensure protection of the Town’s open space when building new housing.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee\*  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 1.2 Adopt Low Impact Development (LID) standards for all new residential developments.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Department of Public Works  
Timeframe: Medium Term

## Strategy 2

Promote housing availability in Southwick that is financially attainable for and attractive to all ages and household configurations seeking to reside in town.

### Actions

- 2.1 Adopt an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) “In-law” Zoning Bylaw for owner occupied dwellings.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Board of Health  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 2.2 Increase density in appropriate areas utilizing 40R Smart Growth and/or 40Y Starter Home Zoning Districts.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 2.3 Establish first-time homebuyer educational and assistance programs.  
Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties:  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 2.4 Identify a location for additional public housing and seek project approval and funding.  
Lead Party: Housing Authority  
Supporting Parties: Planning Board  
Timeframe: Long Term

- 2.5 Assist homeowners in getting MassSave assessments and implementing conservation measures on their homes to decrease the cost of heating and cooling.  
Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Council on Aging, Building Inspector  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 2.6 Monitor the impact of short-term rental use on Southwick.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Building Inspector  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 2.7 Allow permitting of alternate home designs (e.g. tiny homes) and clarify their definitions.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Building Inspector, Board of Health  
Timeframe: Long Term
- 2.8 Establish relationships with local housing non-profit organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, Hometown Heroes, Wayfinders, etc. to add to or modify existing housing stock  
Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Council on Aging  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 2.9 Implement incentive programs for civil servants and educators to encourage those working in Southwick to also live in Southwick.  
Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Union Representatives, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee , Finance Committee  
Timeframe: Long Term

### **Strategy 3**

Increase Affordable Housing to make progress towards the M.G.L Chapter 40B Affordability housing goal of 10% for Southwick.

### **Actions**

- 3.1 Prepare a Housing Production Plan and submit to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities for approval, with five-year updates.  
Lead Party: Housing Authority  
Supporting Parties: Planning Board  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 3.2 Establish a public Housing Trust Fund to receive, manage, and administer Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds for housing projects, including rental properties.  
Lead Party: Community Preservation Committee  
Supporting Parties: Planning Board, Select Board, Community Preservation Coalition ([Authors of CPA Housing Guidebook](#))  
Timeframe: Long Term

3.3 Apply for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to rehabilitate existing housing to support low- to moderate-income residents.

Lead Party: Select Board

Supporting Parties: Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

Timeframe: Short Term

3.4 Review potential use of inclusionary housing programs.

Lead Party: Planning Board

Supporting Parties: Housing Authority

Timeframe: Medium Term,





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# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



## VISION

Southwick has a thriving business community with a strong base of agricultural goods and services in addition to a healthy variety of enterprises and employment opportunities ranging from small businesses to light industrial, as well as a quaint and walkable downtown area with diverse local shops and restaurants. Innovative businesses and start-ups that complement the character of the town are welcomed by the local government and community with the aim of keeping Southwick's economy viable and sustainable.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the economic development section of a master plan is to assess a community’s existing economic conditions and develop strategies to take advantage of opportunities and address challenges. This can be done through an evaluation of holistic strengths and weaknesses found within a community and the engagement of residents regarding their desired vision for local business activity. While market conditions affect what types of businesses will ultimately choose to locate in Southwick, the Town can be proactive in encouraging preferred businesses through its zoning bylaws, permitting processes, tax incentive programs, infrastructure improvements, and establishing a branding vision for what kind of economy the community envisions in town, which in turn draw in particular businesses and industries. With careful planning and subsequent review, it will be possible to sustainably increase the commercial base and balance conservation of the community’s valued rural and recreational environment. It is also possible to encourage a thriving Town Center environment that residents will enjoy and frequent for their shopping, dining, entertainment and cultural needs.

Southwick is a rural-residential community on the edge of the Pioneer Valley with significant agricultural activity and a small manufacturing base. It is home to the unique natural resource of the Congamond Lakes, which are some of the largest and most publicly accessible lakes in this part of Western Massachusetts. It is located within commuting distance of several regional employment centers, with most Southwick residents working outside of town. The town is economically connected to Westfield both historically and currently through its major transportation route, College Highway (Routes 202 and 10), and it is linked to Springfield via Route 57. There are also connections

to the south, with employment nodes in northern Connecticut.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

### *Employment and Wages*

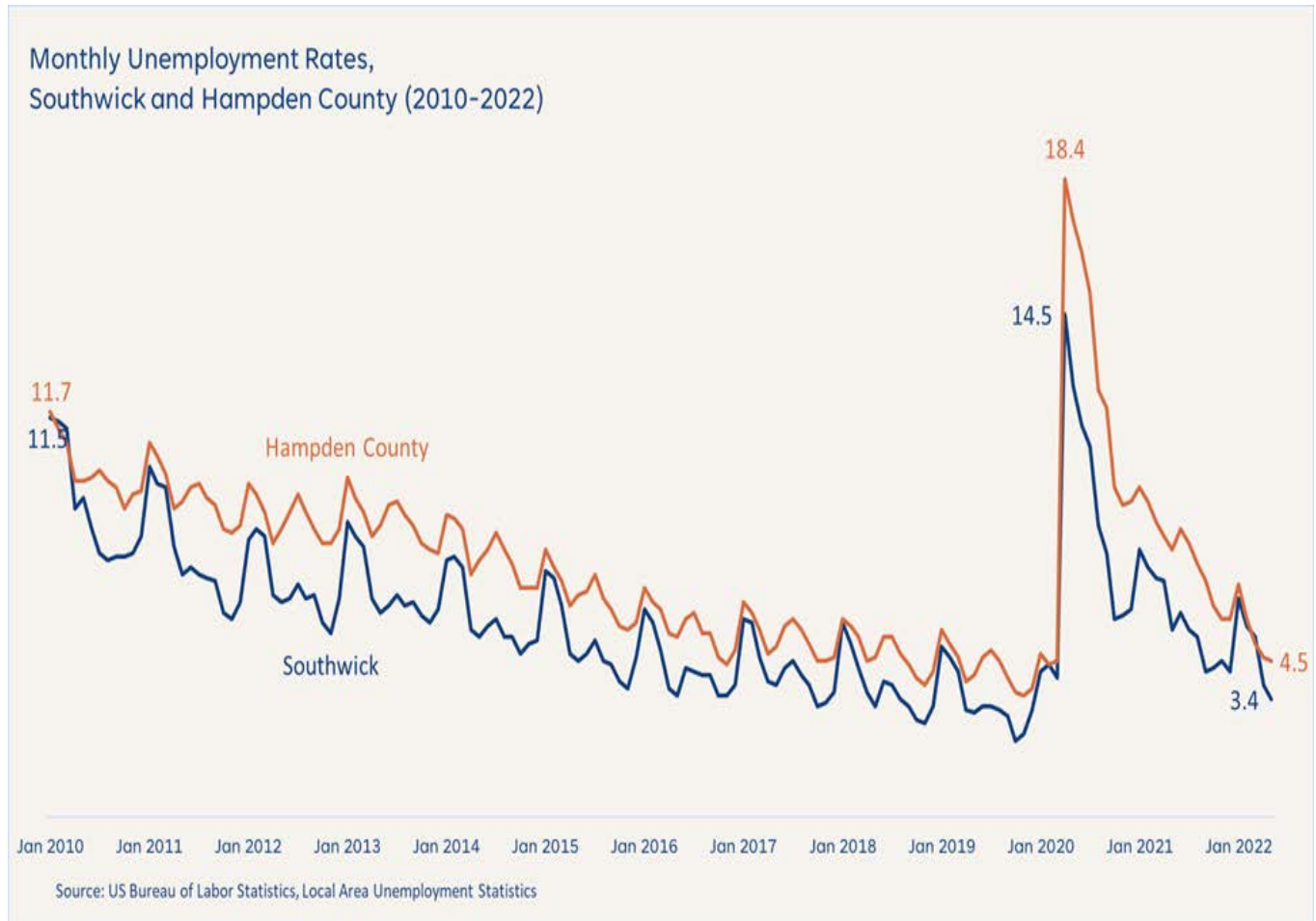
Southwick has a significant business sector for a town of its size and location in Western Massachusetts. Manufacturing is a strong presence in town, with 15 establishments, the highest total wages, and one of the highest average weekly wages among other industries. The education sector, made up of schools at all levels within the Southwick-Granville-Tolland Regional School District, is a significant employer. Other major employment sectors include Retail Trade, Construction, and Accommodation & Food Services. The largest total number of establishments is found in the Health Care & Social Assistance category, but they appear to be small entities, as employment numbers are low. Health Care & Social Assistance comprises establishments providing health care and social assistance for individuals.

| Industry                                     | Establishments | Total Wages          | Average Monthly Employment | Average Weekly Wage |
|--|----------------|----------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Total, All Industries</b>                 | <b>306</b>     | <b>\$118,965,982</b> | <b>2615</b>                | <b>\$875</b>        |
| Manufacturing                                | 15             | \$24,646,639         | 357                        | \$1,328             |
| Education Services                           | 9              | \$16,879,873         | 265                        | \$1,224             |
| Retail Trade                                 | 38             | \$13,061,672         | 430                        | \$584               |
| Construction                                 | 35             | \$9,358,271          | 162                        | \$1,111             |
| Accommodation and Food Services              | 25             | \$5,890,322          | 320                        | \$354               |
| Wholesale Trade                              | 15             | \$5,489,341          | 30                         | \$3,519             |
| Health Care and Social Assistance            | 56             | \$4,675,490          | 189                        | \$476               |
| Administrative and Waste Services            | 19             | \$4,643,186          | 123                        | \$726               |
| Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting   | 9              | \$3,228,561          | 112                        | \$554               |
| Finance and Insurance                        | 12             | \$3,202,447          | 55                         | \$1,120             |
| Other Services, Except Public Administration | 25             | \$3,193,414          | 95                         | \$646               |
| Transportation and Warehousing               | 8              | \$2,078,429          | 51                         | \$784               |
| Professional and Technical Services          | 13             | \$1,825,538          | 30                         | \$1,170             |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation          | 8              | \$1,660,537          | 100                        | \$319               |
| Information                                  | 7              | \$1,654,411          | 17                         | \$1,872             |
| Real Estate and Rental and Leasing           | 6              | \$1,012,656          | 23                         | \$847               |

Source: Massachusetts Department of Economic Research, <https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/lmi/EmploymentAndWages#>



## Unemployment 2020-2022



### Major Employers and Commuting Patterns

The largest single employer in Southwick may effectively be the Southwick Regional School District, when combining employment for the Regional High School, Powder Mill School (middle), and Woodland School (elementary). The other largest employers include two precision manufacturing companies: WGI, Inc., serving the aerospace and medical industries, and B & E Tool Company, which also produces components of aerospace and defense products. The Big Y grocery store is a significant employer, and Whalley Computer Associates is a software development company with high employment. As mentioned previously, manufacturing has a strong presence in Southwick, with three additional businesses on the major employers list.

*Largest Employers in Southwick*

| Company Name                 | Address          | Number of employees | NAICS Code | NAICS Codes, Title                                       |
|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------|--|
| WGI Inc                      | Hudson Dr        | 100-249             | 3327       | Machine Shops, Turned Product, and Screw, Nut & Bolt Mfg |
| B & E Tool Co Inc            | Hudson Dr        | 100-249             | 3364       | Aerospace Product and Parts Manufacturing                |
| Big Y                        | College Hwy      | 100-249             | 4451       | Grocery and Convenience Retailers                        |
| Woodland School              | Powder Mill Rd   | 100-249             | 6111       | Elementary and Secondary Schools                         |
| Whalley Computer Assoc Inc   | Whalley Way      | 100-249             | 5112       | Software Publishers                                      |
| Powder Mill Middle School    | Powder Mill Rd   | 50-99               | 6111       | Elementary and Secondary Schools                         |
| Southwick Regional School    | Feeding Hills Rd | 50-99               | 6111       | Elementary and Secondary Schools                         |
| Southwick-Tolland-Granville  | Powder Mill Rd   | 50-99               | 6111       | Elementary and Secondary Schools                         |
| American Inn                 | Saw Mill Park #1 | 50-99               | 6223       | Continuing Care Retirement Communities & Assisted Living |
| Crepes Tea House             | Feeding Hills Rd | 50-99               | 7225       | Restaurants and Other Eating Places                      |
| Southwick Fire Dept          | Depot St         | 50-99               | 9221       | Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities             |
| Tynic Landscaping            | Tannery Rd       | 50-99               | 5617       | Landscaping Services                                     |
| Whalley Precision Inc        | Hudson Dr        | 20-49               | 3327       | Machine Shops, Turned Product, and Screw, Nut & Bolt Mfg |
| Whip City Tool & Die Corp    | College Hwy      | 20-49               | 3335       | Metalworking Machinery Manufacturing                     |
| Agiresurfacing               | College Hwy      | 20-49               | 3399       | Other Miscellaneous Manufacturing                        |
| Hitachi Kokusai Electric Amr | Feeding Hills Rd | 20-49               | 5616       | Investigation and Security Services                      |
| Open Arms Child Care Ctr     | College Hwy      | 20-49               | 6224       | Child Care Services                                      |
| McDonald's                   | College Hwy      | 20-49               | 7225       | Restaurants and Other Eating Places                      |
| Mrs Murphy's Donuts          | College Hwy      | 20-49               | 7225       | Restaurants and Other Eating Places                      |
| Southwick Selectmens Office  | College Hwy      | 20-49               | 9211       | Executive, Legislative, and Other Gen'l Govt             |
| Southwick Town               | College Hwy      | 20-49               | 9211       | Executive, Legislative, and Other Gen'l Govt             |
| Southwick Police Dept        | Depot St         | 20-49               | 9221       | Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities             |
| Hitachi Comark               | Feeding Hills Rd | 20-49               | 5151       | Radio and Television Broadcasters                        |
| Ocean State Job Lot          | College Hwy      | 20-49               | 4523       | Gen'l Merchandise Stores, incl. Warehouse Clubs          |
| Walgreens                    | College Hwy      | 20-49               | 4461       | Health and Personal Care Retailers                       |
| Calabrese Farm               | Feeding Hills Rd | 20-49               | 4452       | Fruit and Vegetable Markets                              |

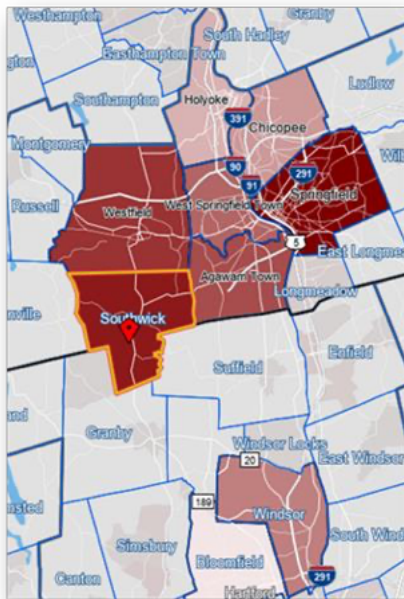
### Southwick Commuting Patterns



| Southwick based jobs                               | #     | Share |
|--|-------|-------|
| Workers Employed in Southwick                      | 2,920 | 100%  |
| Workers employed in Southwick but living elsewhere | 2,305 | 78.9% |
| Workers living and working in Southwick            | 615   | 21.1% |
| Jobs held by Southwick residents                   | #     | Share |
| Total workers living in Southwick                  | 4,855 | 100%  |
| Southwick residents working outside Southwick      | 4,240 | 87.3% |
| Workers living and working in Southwick            | 615   | 12.7% |

Southwick residents travel to work in a variety of locations, with around 15% commuting to Springfield, about 28% to other cities and large towns in the region, and 5.6% to northern Connecticut. A small number commute as far as Boston. The map shows nine of the top ten communities where residents work.

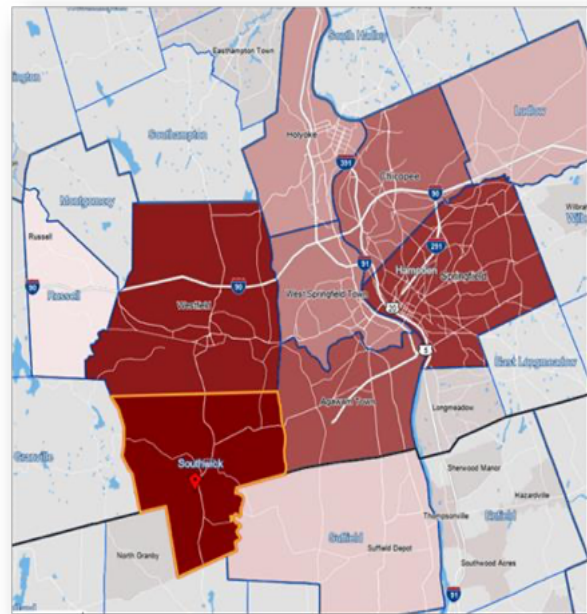
### Southwick Commuting Patterns: Where Residents Work



| Top 10 Cities/Towns in which Southwick residents work |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
|   | #     | %     |
| All jobs  | 4,855 | 100%  |
| Springfield   | 717   | 14.8% |
| Southwick   | 615   | 12.7% |
| Westfield   | 466   | 9.6%  |
| Agawam  | 327   | 6.7%  |
| West Springfield                                      | 251   | 5.2%  |
| Windsor (CT)  | 173   | 3.6%  |
| Chicopee  | 149   | 3.1%  |
| Holyoke   | 144   | 3.0%  |
| Boston  | 96    | 2.0%  |
| Bloomfield (CT)                                       | 95    | 2.0%  |
| All Other Locations                                   | 1,822 | 37.5% |

*Southwick Commuting Patterns: Where Workers Live*

| Top 10 Cities/Towns in which Southwick workers live |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
|   | #     | %     |
| All jobs  | 2,920 | 100%  |
| Southwick   | 615   | 21.1% |
| Westfield   | 495   | 17.0% |
| Springfield   | 199   | 6.8%  |
| Agawam  | 195   | 6.7%  |
| Chicopee  | 141   | 4.8%  |
| West Springfield                                    | 103   | 3.5%  |
| Holyoke   | 49    | 1.7%  |
| Ludlow  | 47    | 1.6%  |
| Suffield (CT)                                       | 46    | 1.6%  |
| Russell   | 37    | 1.3%  |
| All Other Locations                                 | 1,822 | 37.5% |



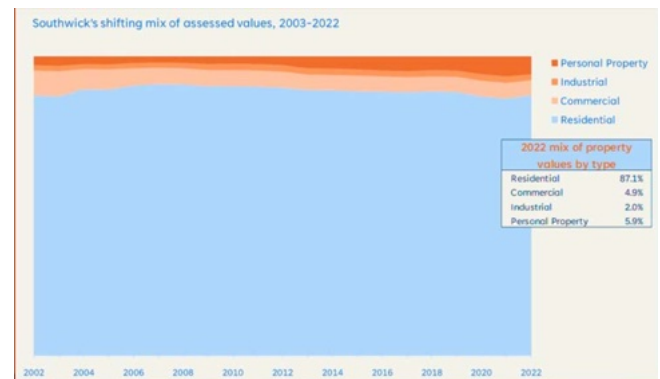
The workers who travel to Southwick for employment come from a similar variety of locations in the region. Most are from nearby cities and large towns, and a very low percentage are from Connecticut. Just over one percent come from the nearby town of Russell.

*Tax Structure*

The majority of Southwick’s tax base is comprised of residential property taxes, with only about 7% coming from commercial and industrial taxes. The average single-family tax bill is comparable to other nearby towns but significantly less than the similar “bedroom community” of Longmeadow. Commercial, industrial, and personal property (CIP) tax rates in Southwick are the same as residential, making them relatively quite low for the region. This has undoubtedly been a draw for the light industrial uses in town.

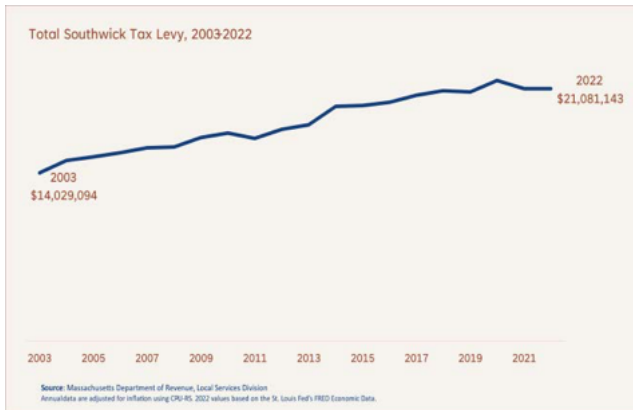
Each of these aspects of the town’s tax structure are examined below via a series of charts and graphs showing taxes over time and comparisons with nearby communities. The graph below shows assessed values over time and demonstrates the large proportion of residential taxes that make up the tax levy. Personal property taxes have increased notably over the last two decades, while commercial and industrial have remained relatively constant.

*Southwick Assessed Values 2002-2022*



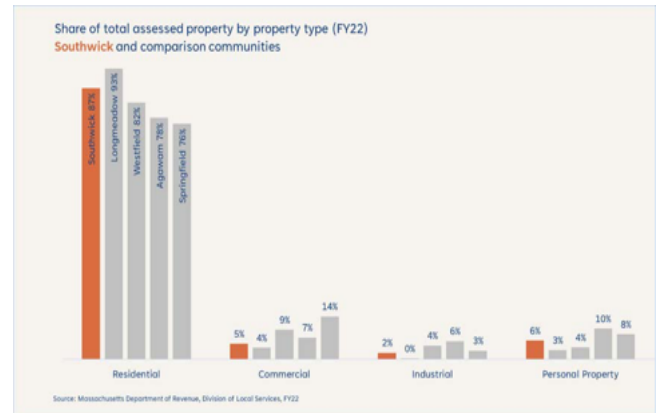
Southwick’s total tax levy has increased gradually since 2003, but it has been relatively stable over the past few years.

## Total Tax Levy 2003-2022



As mentioned above, Southwick’s CIP tax rate is the same as residential and relatively quite low for the region. Residential rate is comparable to nearby towns, including Agawam and West Springfield.

## Assessed Values - Fiscal Year 2022



The average single-family tax bill in Southwick is relatively high compared to neighboring communities except Longmeadow, which is the highest in the region. This may be attributed to home values being higher in Southwick than homes in the surrounding communities in relation to the types of homes being built and the newer inventory.

## Municipal Tax Rates by Tax Source 2022



Southwick is similar to other communities in the region in that the majority of taxes come from residential properties, with a smaller proportion from commercial and industrial uses respectively. Currently, there are approximately 3,600 homes in Southwick and 838 businesses in town.

## Average Single-Family Tax Bill



## TRENDS

### *General Business Environment*

In Southwick, approximately 544 acres are used for industrial use, with about another 1,440 in commercial or “mixed use with primarily commercial,” and about 1,658 acres in agriculture. The industrial uses include several precision machining businesses that are part of the aerospace supply chain and other high technology industries in the region. Agricultural land is located throughout the community, alongside undeveloped land and small housing subdivisions. There is a large amount of tax-exempt land in the eastern portion of town, as well as some throughout the community, totaling about 1,920 acres. These promote both passive and active recreation.

According to an online chamber source<sup>10</sup>, Southwick has 838 businesses, with the highest number in the categories of Professional Services (119), Builders & Contractors (33), and Restaurants (32). Growth in small business has been steady, while agricultural and industrial uses have been more stable.

### *Industrial Economy*

Several large light industrial companies and a number of additional manufacturing, machining, and high-technology businesses provide a stable economic anchor and significant job opportunities in Southwick. Another significant subsector is construction and excavation.

The largest industrial center is the Southwick Industrial Park north of Route 57 (Feeding Hills Road). Anchored by WGI, Inc., B & E. Tool Co., and Whalley Computer Associates, three of the largest employers in town, it hosts another 18 industrial, light industrial, and commercial operations. This area and a large area surrounding it is currently zoned Industrial Restricted Zone (IR). Uses permitted by right are very limited – they include Printing, Engraving and Bookbinding; Adult Entertainment; Off-street Parking and Loading; and Ground-mounted Photovoltaic Systems. Also allowed is enlargement of existing uses by 1,000

square feet or 10%, whichever is greater. However, all uses allowed in the general Industrial (I) zone are allowed in this zone by Special Permit. The most significant protections are the performance standards for this area to prevent negative impacts on the Great Brook Watershed and Aquifer, which provides drinking water to Southwick and other nearby communities, and adjacent residential development.

A second Industrial Restricted Zone (IR) is located in the far south of town, near the Congamond Lakes. This area includes the former Meadow View Farm, two solar farms, and significant open land, with a cell tower well set back at 61 Congamond Road.

Two small areas are zoned Industrial (I), which allows a larger variety of uses by right. However, these areas are mostly built out. One small Industrial zone is located in the far north of town, occupied by Berry Construction Excavating and Septic. The other is along and adjacent to Industrial Road, including the Great Brook Industrial Park and Shepherd Place. This area is the home of Greene Kraft Boat Werks, Crestview Construction and Trucking, Great Brook Lumber Company, Shenango Steel Buildings, a self-storage facility, and a variety of small commercial operations including dance, martial arts, and gymnastics studios. There is also a gas station and car wash in this area.

### *Commercial Business*

The town has a variety of commercial uses, providing goods and services in both national chain, franchise, and locally-owned shops and businesses. The larger stores include Ocean State Job Lot, Tractor Supply Company, Walgreens, CVS, and Big Y Supermarket, which is regionally owned. Small businesses providing services to residents include medical and healthcare providers, accounting firms, lawyers, automotive services. There are several restaurants including national chains, a new brewery, and many other small restaurants and cafes as well as a bakery. Home occupations are allowed, including medical and professional functions. With a growing residential population, and interest in additional services and products expressed in the community survey, there

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<sup>10</sup> [Chamber of Commerce Southwick, MA - ChamberofCommerce.com](http://ChamberofCommerce.com)

appears to be a sufficient market for a growing number of goods and services.

A number of existing businesses are located in areas within the R-40 zone or other areas that are no longer zoned for commercial uses. While those uses are “grandfathered” in, the Town has chosen to focus future commercial business activity at the Town Center and along certain sections of College Highway (Routes 202 and 10). An elongated “Restricted” Business (BR) zone extends along College Highway from about a mile south of the Town Center and north to the Westfield River Brewing Company. Another node of Restricted Business is situated along College Highway at the Westfield border, surrounding the area of the Southwick Village retirement community.

Two general Business (B) zones are located in town. The largest is at Gillett Corner, the site of Big Y, Ocean State Job Lot, McDonalds, CVS and Pride Gas Station, as well as several smaller and some local businesses at the Southwick Crossing Shopping Center. The other is at the corner of Granville Road (Route 57) and Bugbee Road, where a small used car dealership is located.

#### *Agriculture and Forestry*

Southwick has long been a farming community, with food production, dairy, livestock, broomcorn and tobacco as historical crops, many of which continue to this day. The Great Brook Valley is prime farmland and supported a thriving tobacco industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Much of the remaining farmland is under Chapter 61A protection and some is under Agricultural Preservation Restrictions. Residents appreciate this rural landscape and are strongly in support of farming operations, with 81% in favor of encouraging additional agricultural uses, a higher percentage than for any other type of development.

Agricultural uses are permitted virtually everywhere in town, based on the pyramid-style zoning bylaw. There are at least eleven (11) farming operations currently in Southwick, with a recent loss of a longtime, highly successful greenhouse operation at Meadow View Farms. Most of the existing farms include retail operations and may also have petting zoos, events, as well as CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) functions. Black Rabbit Farm includes

incubator space and a commercial kitchen, as well as campsites in addition to their farm store.

Forestry operations remain in Southwick although are minimal compared to farming. Great Brook Lumber and T. J. Bark Mulch are two major operations in this category, but future expansion or additional uses are uncertain.

#### *Recreational Economy and Tourism*

There is a history of economic activity based on the town’s valued natural asset of the Congamond Lakes, which as a ‘great pond’, are technically owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and are bordered by Connecticut on the east. The lakes have always provided fish and fertile adjacent soils to both native Americans and European immigrants. However, the area became a summer vacation destination in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with resort hotels and boarding houses providing respite for city dwellers. At that time, the railroad passed nearby, and there was also a major ice harvesting industry. In the 1930s, the summer accommodations evolved to individual cottages, and over time, many businesses arose to serve summer visitors as well as a growing year-round population. These businesses have included golf courses, boat rentals, restaurants, and fish and tackle shops. Current activities on the ponds include fishing, swimming, and boating, but there have been increasing problems with overcrowding, and safety issues. Water quality will continue to be a focus by the Town. The 2020 alum treatment has been effective in stopping the algae blooms as well as improving water clarity and oxygen content of the water. The volume of invasive weeds has been reduced significantly by annual treatments, but the focus must continue.

Businesses currently in the immediate vicinity of the Congamond Lakes area include several restaurants and the Brass Rail Meeting House, an event venue. There is also a public boat launch site with parking. The land is zoned Residential R-20, which allows commercial recreation, boating related uses, and agricultural uses.

Elsewhere in town are three golf courses, two campgrounds, two boat ramps, the New England Disc Golf Center, and “The Wick 338,” a motocross venue that holds national-level competitions. Together with

the lake amenities, this makes Southwick a destination for outdoor recreation, something that residents support and can be built upon for further economic growth.

Another type of development mentioned by several respondents was sports facilities, which would fit in with the town's existing recreational amenities.

### COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

A community-wide survey was conducted in 2022, with several questions pertaining to preferred types of new development. Of the 970 responses, the greatest support was for further agricultural development (81%), with 63% in favor of new commercial business, 37% approving of office development, and only 24% who wanted to see new industrial development. In fact, 55% would like to *discourage* industrial development. Conversely, 58% would like to *encourage* commercial business development, particularly small, local businesses in the areas of retail, high technology, restaurants and grocery, and hospitality. There is some support for retail cannabis sales (currently prohibited) but roughly equal levels of opposition. In terms of offices, Southwick residents support medical and professional offices, high-tech/IT/software businesses, and start-up and incubator space. All are preferred to be low-rise.

When it comes to industrial uses, residents would be in favor of small operations, light manufacturing, "green" (environmentally clean) businesses, and high-tech including robotics. They wish to constrain any new uses to the existing developed industrial areas.

Southwick residents are highly supportive of agricultural uses. They would especially like to see sustainable, organic and regenerative farming operations, year-round greenhouses, food crops, and agritourism, and some support the growing of cannabis. One resident asked for "more cows, please." Local residents would also like to see the Town encourage and assist farms to help them succeed.



## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### *Vacant farmland in business and industrial zones*

The Carvana proposal in 2021 brought to the forefront a fundamental issue for the community: how will redevelopment of farmland in business and industrial zones be handled? What uses are acceptable and which ones need to be excluded or more carefully regulated? What uses are acceptable by Special Permit in the large, vacant areas of the Industrial Restricted zone? The development of the barns and farmland at the former Chuck's Steak House into a modern brewery and restaurant is in line with current trends across the region and fits local preferences perfectly. The newly vacant Meadow View Farm property will hopefully be purchased by an entity that is enthusiastic to utilize the existing greenhouses, but there is no guarantee of this.

### *Town Center development and improvement*

The Town Center intersection is a key commuter route, and desire for streamlined passage through the area should be contemplated with a desire for a pedestrian-friendly, inviting and quaint Town Center that features mixed-use buildings that keep in character with a small western New England town. The existing development, particularly along Route 202 also has extensive paved areas adjacent to the road, sometimes combined with very wide access drives and limited sidewalks and curbing. Any changes to this layout will need to be comprehensive and will have to apply to any upgrades to existing development as well as to new development.

### *Congamond Lakes as part of the recreational economy*

The lakes are a tremendous asset, but with recent issues such as crowding, excessive numbers of boats, and e coli breakouts demand a continued diligence monitoring system on total water quality . A strong response is needed to preserve and protect this unique and precious resource so that it remains a haven for residents as well as a valued tourist attraction. The next challenge facing the town is the dredging of the two canals that exit water from the lake. This will improve water quality and assist in maintaining a consistent water level. How will future development impact these conditions? What controls can the Town

place on use of the lakes while maintaining access and gaining economic benefit from the visitors to the area? Some areas around the lakes have potential for redevelopment and re-use that might meet more recreational demands during the summer while also serving as destinations in the off-season.

### *Enhancing and growing the agricultural economy*

The current number, type and robust character of Southwick's agricultural operations is a tremendous asset of this rural community. These farms are community-oriented, inviting residents and visitors to enjoy the onsite amenities, purchase products directly at the site, and generally integrate with the community. Some of the farms are developing innovative and unique offerings, and there is clearly an appreciation among residents for these activities. It will be a welcome challenge to support, enhance and grow this type of activity in town. The Southwick Agricultural Commission has taken on the challenge, and the recent brochure with a map and guide to local farms and hiking trails is beautifully produced and can help lead to more local activities and promotion both within and outside of town. In summer 2023, the Agricultural Commission hosted the first Open Farm Day with local agricultural businesses opening their behind the scenes operations to visitors, all with the aim of encouraging further patronage and appreciation of the local farm economy.

### *Cannabis*

There is increasing pressure on the Town and townspeople to accept retail sales of cannabis, as a viable, growing, and low-impact commercial activity. There is strong support for this as well as significant opposition. The issues involved will need to be addressed and investigated further, where the first vote of two needed to allow retail operations of cannabis in town passed in the May 2023 Town Meeting. The second vote to amend the Zoning Bylaw shall take place at a future Town Meeting scheduled for XXX.

### *Business Retention*

Southwick has some very stable light industrial companies that provide tax revenue for the town. It will be important to maintain excellent relationships with these businesses in order to retain them in the long term (and perhaps attract more). Similarly, for commercial business in the desired areas, town support and even assistance will be helpful in retaining the type of businesses that are desired. A formal or informal business retention program can be developed to help accomplish these goals. The town's Economic Development Commission is very active and has a fairly up-to-date website. The Commission can build on what has been done so far to strengthen relations with local businesses.

# STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

As noted in the introduction of this chapter, the overarching goal is for Southwick to have a strong locally-propelled economy that includes and actively encourages a variety of businesses which fortify the tax base and provide well-paying local jobs as well offer more goods and services to residents while also attracting visitors into town. This vision for Southwick’s economy also upholds the betterment of the town as a whole and balances sustainable economic growth with our rural New England character and other Southwick assets such as natural resources, recreation and farmland.

Some committees are discussed in these strategies and actions and have yet to be formed officially. Any item marked with an asterisk (\*) in this section represents “a suggested future Committee or an equivalent” where a lead party for an action is not an established body. A new lead or supporting party can offer flexibility for implementation through a Town committee or even a public/private group.

### Timeframe

- Immediate – 0-2 years
- Short Term – 3-5 years
- Medium Term – 6-9 years
- Long Term – 10+ years
- Ongoing – Continuing, still in progress

### Strategy 1

Fortify and deploy Town Hall resources such as the Economic Development Commission and other relevant boards to establish strong relationships with local businesses as well as create new modalities to convey information to town government about how to update and continue creating a welcoming business environment in Southwick, including small business incubation. Consider developing a Planning and

Economic Development position within town government to support the many initiatives set forth by the Master Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC).

### Actions

- 1.1 Develop database of local business owners with their contact information so EDC can effectively communicate with them and invite to events/engage with them.  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Town Clerk Office, Board of Assessors  
Timeframe: Short Term
  
- 1.2 Update resources on the Economic Development Commission website, including zoning map, farm stands link, recreational and cultural events and passive recreational opportunities, and start social media accounts to connect intergenerationally.  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission, Park and Recreation Commission, Cultural Council, Historical Commission, Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee  
Priority: Short Term
  
- 1.3 Identify a staff position within Town Hall to lead coordination on economic development who would actively maintain business database, update website and social media, lead organization of events/forums and also strategize the hiring of a professional consultant to develop a long-term business growth plan for Southwick that includes how to brand and market the community for cohesion and sustainable growth.  
Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission, Master Plan Implementation Committee\*  
Timeframe: Medium Term

- 1.4 Organize and host local business networking groups with local business owners every quarter, and work with the Agricultural Commission to include local farmers  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission, Rotary Club  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.5 Invite one business, including farms and trade businesses, per month to EDC meetings to discuss needs and issues and ensure publicity of this meeting through proposed Town Hall e-newsletter and other forms of media, including social media, to invite public attendance  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission, Rotary Club  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.6 Hold ‘Small Business in Southwick’ forum once a year and invite current business owners, prospective/potential small business owners, including tech start-ups as well as agencies like MassChallenge and the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency to ensure small business are aware of access to funding and special business loans for small local businesses and start-ups in the Commonwealth  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission, Rotary Club, Regional School  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.7 Invite MassChallenge, Mass Development, Mass Dept. of Economic Development and any other regional small business incubators to discuss in a public forum how to foster an environment of innovation here in Southwick that will lead to “business incubation” and attract new businesses, including green/environmentally-cognizant industries and new models of sustainable and regenerative agriculture. Invite local colleges and universities.  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Planning Board, Master Plan Implementation Committee\*, Agricultural Commission, Rotary Club  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.8 Hold a public forum about what it would entail to establish a Southwick Chamber of Commerce and invite Westfield Chamber of Commerce to help outline steps and encourage volunteer support from attending public to help in establishment.  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Park and Recreation Commission, Historical Commission, Agricultural Commission, Rotary Club, Westfield Chamber of Commerce  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.9 Develop a full-color printed brochure featuring Southwick-grown businesses with short blurbs about businesses, contact info, and photos and distribute across town. Categorize businesses within brochure so readers can use the brochure as a resource when looking for goods and services (retail shops, farms, restaurants, services, trades).  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Park and Recreation Commission, Historical Commission, Agricultural Commission  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.10 Develop a “Buy Local” campaign and include agricultural and locally-produced goods and services as well as help develop marketing ‘brand’ such as lawn or window signage or sticker design that local businesses can use to denote their goods and services are local to create ‘brand cohesion’ showing that Southwick has a thriving and supported small local business economy, utilizing state entities that have offer grant money.  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission

Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission, Southwick Chamber of Commerce\*  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 1.11 Organize public forum with local restaurants, local farms and other local purveyors of food goods to foster conversation about incorporating local and seasonal goods into menus and how/if that can be facilitated.  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission, Rotary Club  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.12 Organize meeting with property owners along Congamond Lakes to find compatible uses for vacant and underutilized properties and discuss possibilities of encouraging short-term rentals for existing cottages.  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Lake Management Committee, Planning Board, Building Department  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.13 Establish a Southwick Social and Entertainment sub-committee with broad demographic representation.  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Planning Board  
Timeframe: Immediate
- 1.14 Explore competitive landscape for venues, live entertainment, and related social or entertainment opportunities west of the Connecticut River and in nearby Connecticut towns such as Simsbury.  
Lead Party: Social and Entertainment sub-committee\*  
Supporting Parties: Historical Society, Planning Board, Select Board  
Timeframe: Short-Term
- 1.15 Survey town and regional residents for preferences in social and entertainment options, define what needs are being met and what are gaps (and therefore opportunities for Southwick).  
Lead Party: Social and Entertainment sub-committee\*  
Supporting Parties: Historical Society, Planning Board, Select Board  
Timeframe: Short-term
- 1.16 Create and execute modern marketing plan for in-town and regional awareness.  
Lead Party: Social and Entertainment sub-committee\*  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Economic Development Commission  
Timeframe: Medium Term

## **Strategy 2**

Examine current policies upheld by Town Hall such as bylaws, zoning, and taxation structure to evaluate their alignment to the vision of making Southwick's economy viable and sustainable in the long-term, specifically if policies are inviting to new businesses which both fortify the tax base and complement town's character and betterment. This evaluation should also include how current zoning policies may need to be updated to allow for appropriate use, development, and redevelopment of land in areas throughout town to allow for new businesses, beautification/vitalization of downtown areas, and possibly the strategic addition of mixed-use zones.

## **Actions**

- 2.1 Connect the Rail Trail at Congamond Lakes to the town beach and other venues.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Park and Recreation Commission, Friends of the Trail  
Timeframe: Ongoing
- 2.2 Review the current zoning bylaws to evaluate allowed uses, specifically with eye to zoning that pertains to any kind of business, commercial, industrial zoning and determine if an update to introduce mixed-use zoning is merited, particularly in downtown areas that are candidates for redevelopment.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission, Department of Public Works, Master Plan Implementation Committee\*, Town Planner, Building Department  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 2.3 Pursue Town Center redevelopment, revitalization and beautification strategies, drawing from 2004 Community Development Plan and 2014 Town Center Study as well as Master Plan Advisory Committee 2022-2023 primary data from public input sessions and survey, with emphasis on upholding aesthetic standards and scale, making center walkable and easy to park within, and planting trees/adding landscaping value.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission, DPW, Master Plan Implementation Committee\*, Town Planner, Building Department  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 2.4 Consider limiting new development until all zoning enhancements, requests for zoning updates and adherence to uniformly-applied design/aesthetic standards mentioned in the Master Plan actions have been considered and have planned pathway to implementation.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Master Plan Implementation Committee\*  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 2.5 Develop and implement an economic incentive program that may include tax incentives and grant writing assistance for new businesses coming to/starting in Southwick to incentivize small and local business generation in town, including new farm businesses that are less than 5 acres in size.  
Lead Party: Economic Development Committee  
Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission, Select Board, Finance Committee, Board of Assessors, Economic Development Commission, Master Plan Implementation Committee\*, Planning Board.  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 2.6 Develop and implement a tax incentive program for existing businesses with aim of creating new and well-paying local employment opportunities.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Finance Committee, Board of Assessors, Economic Development Commission, Master Plan Implementation Committee  
Timeframe: Medium Term

### **Strategy 3**

Continue to galvanize support for local agriculture in town and sustain and grow Southwick farming as a cornerstone of the town and regional economy,

#### **Actions**

- 3.1 Organize an annual Taste of Southwick event with local restaurants, cafes, breweries and encourage addition of local farm products similar to farmers market display.  
Lead Party: Agricultural Commission  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 3.2 Lead Party: Agricultural Commission  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission, Open Space Committee  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 3.3 Explore feasibility of starting a cooperative business in the town center where local agricultural businesses and local makers can sell their products year-round and establish farmers market space within this cooperative. A resource like the Northeast Organic Farming Association can be explored.  
Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission  
Timeframe: Medium Term



C. J. GIL  
manufacturer  
SOUTHWICK, MASS



# HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES



## VISION

Southwick is a vibrant, uniquely beautiful community that balances respect for our past, arts and culture, with future progress.

## INTRODUCTION

Local historic and cultural resource considerations are understood to be integral aspects of community planning. It is also critical to ensure that the culture of a community meets the changing needs of its residents without sacrificing its cultural heritage. This can be one of the most challenging tasks of any master plan.

There is often a symbiotic relationship between a community's historic and cultural resources. The Mass Cultural Council (MCC) is the state agency involved with the promotion and encouragement of community art and culture to include supporting spaces and places where public cultural programming happens. The MCC strives to “promote excellence, inclusion, education, and diversity in the arts, humanities, and sciences, fosters a rich cultural life for all Massachusetts residents, and contributes to the vitality of our communities and economy.” As stated on the MCC website, “Culture elevates. In all its forms, culture is essential to the health and vitality of the Commonwealth...Culture lifts the human spirit and makes Massachusetts a better place to live, work, and prosper.”<sup>11</sup>

### *Defining Southwick's Historic and Cultural Resources*

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight Southwick's historic and cultural assets, review the gaps in meeting the changing cultural preferences and examine potential ways they can be supported, changed or strengthened to benefit the Town and residents. Keys to this effort are planning for resiliency while ensuring continued use, growing active engagement within the town and the region and provide long-term protection.

Methodology involved an examination of the context of Southwick's historic and cultural development; a review of previous insights and related initiatives to understand components which relate to and could support planning for strength and resiliency of Southwick's historic and cultural resources; and a consideration of the current state of local preservation and cultural offerings. For this chapter, cultural resources will include visual, literary, and performing arts, the potential integration of historical sites with modern needs as well as festivals and locations which provide tangible and intangible experiences. Based on project research and community outreach, issues and opportunities related to historic and cultural resources will be examined as well.

### *Southwick's Origins*

Sub-tribes of the Pocumtuc Nation, such as the Matitacooke, Mayawaug, or Woronoake, were the first occupants of the area which would become known as Southwick. Native settlement was likely concentrated in the eastern part of town to focus on agriculture and fishing near the Congamond Lakes, with hunting occurring in the uplands west and northeast of the Lakes.<sup>12</sup> By the late seventeenth century, European Colonists had settled and began to develop a community and in 1770, Southwick was incorporated as a town. By the early nineteenth century, successful cultivation of tobacco and the construction of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal through Southwick supported population and economic growth.

Irish immigrants were initially attracted to Southwick for employment related to the 1820s construction of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal which was the Southwick portion of the New Haven to Northampton Canal. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the ice harvesting industry provided refrigeration for food storage from New York to Boston. After the canal operation was replacement by the railroad system, Southwick experienced a decline in population through the mid-twentieth century.

By 1905, tobacco and dairy farming were primary industries and immigrants made up 17 percent of the total population including residents from Sweden, Austria, Italy, and Poland.

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<sup>11</sup> Mass Cultural Council, <https://massculturalcouncil.org/>

<sup>12</sup> Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Franklin Regional Council of Governments, *Southwick Reconnaissance Report*, June 2009. *Mass.gov*, (site), <https://www.mass.gov/doc/southwick/download>, accessed April 2023.

Increasing popularity of autos supported the twentieth century growth of commercial businesses along transportation routes, specifically along Route 10 and Route 202 and the loss of some historic resources as well. Today, Southwick is classified as part of the Springfield Metropolitan Area and is primarily a bedroom community with residents employed outside of the town. Historic resources have been formally documented throughout the town, with large amounts of inventory work primarily completed around 1984 and 2008 and documentation concentrated in the town’s two historic centers with other inventory points spread throughout the community

The initial town center was located at the axis of Route 10 and Vining Hill Road and later relocated to Southwick Hill (Route 10/College Highway and Depot Street) with important agricultural sites developing throughout the town. A previous iteration of Southwick’s Master Plan (circa 1997) proposed relocating the town center to land across from the schools, off Feeding Hills Road (Route 57), but that proposal was not adopted.

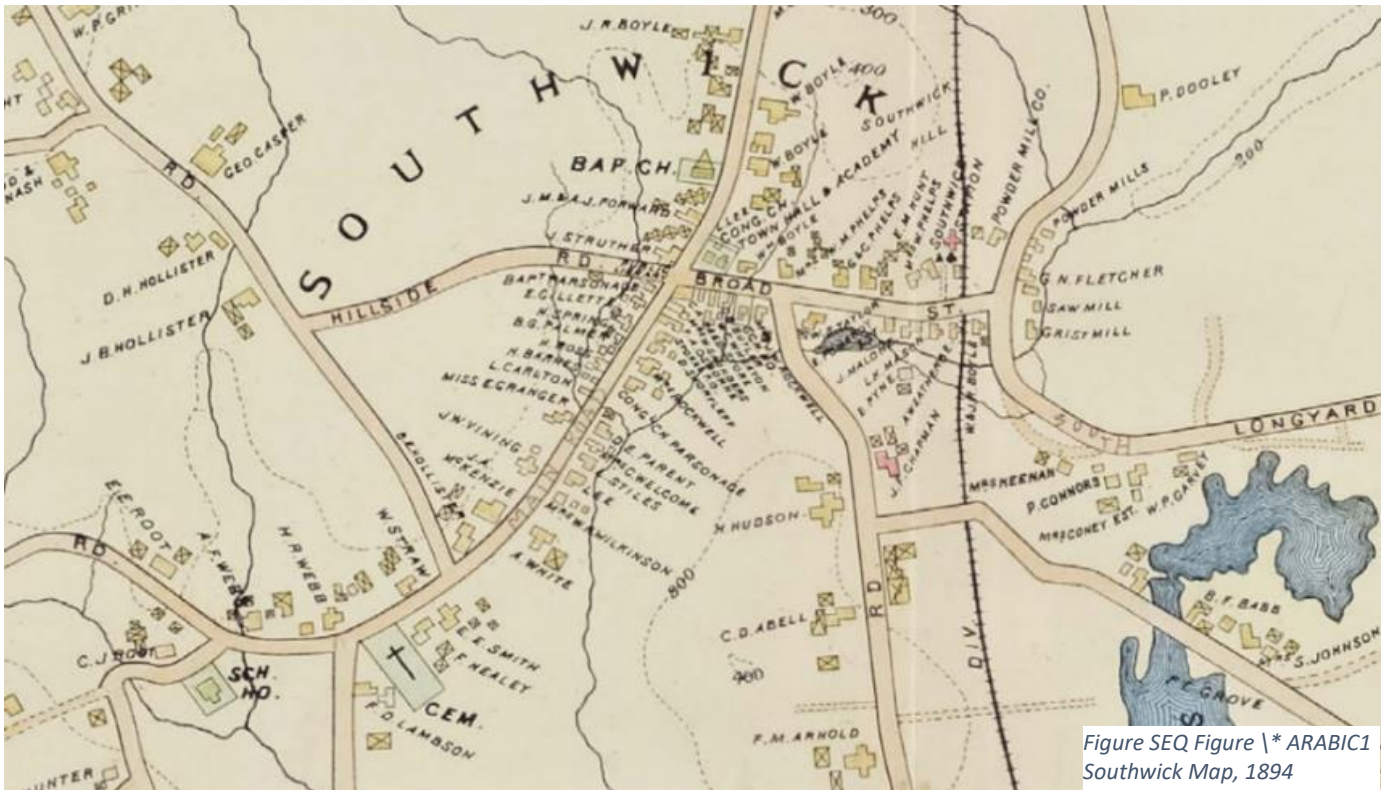


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Southwick Map, 1894

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

### Framework for Defining Southwick’s Historic and Cultural Resources

### Historical Resources

The United States Department of the Interior (DOI) is responsible for the protection and management of the country’s natural resources and cultural heritage.<sup>13</sup> The Secretary of the Interior (SOI) considers types of historic resources to be prehistoric and historic districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects.<sup>14</sup> As a bureau of the DOI, the National Park Service (NPS) “cares for special places saved by the American people so that

<sup>13</sup> “About Interior,” <https://www.doi.gov/about>

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, “Historic Preservation,” <https://www.doi.gov/pam/asset-management/historic-preservation>

all may experience our heritage.”<sup>15</sup> The NPS defines the nation’s historic and cultural resources as the physical and spiritual reminders of the decisive times, people, and places in American history and culture.<sup>16</sup> The NPS considers a general fifty-year cut-off or older to initially determine the potential for historic significance of a historic resource. Other factors such as context, social history, and integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association are also important in determining the level of a resource’s significance.<sup>17</sup>

The NPS National Register of Historic Places (NR) is the official list of the nation’s historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the NHPA, the NR is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America’s historic and archeological resources.<sup>18</sup> Listing is an honorary designation and does not place restrictions on property owners when using private funds to do work related to a listed property.<sup>19</sup> NR listed properties are automatically included in the Massachusetts State Register of Historic Places (SR). In addition to recognizing the historic and cultural significance of a property or district, NR and SR listing provides limited protection from adverse impacts by federal or state involved projects. Listing also provides opportunities for benefiting from preservation and rehabilitation incentives like historic rehabilitation tax credits, and grant programs which are only available to NR properties.

The MHC is the State Historic Preservation Office, as mandated by the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act and supported by enabling legislation in Massachusetts General Law.<sup>20</sup> The MHC has specific



A desire for festivals and music offerings in Southwick figured prominently in the 2022 community engagement survey.

<sup>15</sup> “National Park Service,” <https://www.nps.gov/index.htm>

<sup>16</sup> National Preservation Institute, “What are ‘Cultural Resources’?” <https://www.npi.org/what-are-cultural-resources>

<sup>17</sup> “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation,” *National Register Bulletin*, 1995, nps.gov, [https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB-15\\_web508.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NRB-15_web508.pdf)

forms that are used to document historic resources. The MHC has also developed a map using GIS data which shows properties that have been identified in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, also known as MACRIS. GIS data is displayed through the MACRIS Map, providing a visual for documentation throughout the Commonwealth. The MHC also oversees the State Register of Historic Places, established in 1982 as a comprehensive listing of the buildings, structures, objects, and sites that have received local, state, or national designations based on their historical or archaeological significance. NR and SR listing is often an eligibility requirement for historic preservation grants.

The Southwick Historical Commission (SHC) is a five-member board that is responsible for ensuring that local historic preservation concerns will be considered in community planning. The SHC is charged to inventory, preserve, protect, and develop the town’s historical and archeological assets and conduct research of individuals and places of historical value.<sup>21</sup>

### Cultural Resources

There are varying definitions related to the question of what makes up a community’s “cultural resources.” The establishment of the Mass Cultural Council (MCC) has provided a statewide framework for cultural planning in communities. The MCC asserts that “In all its forms, culture is essential to the health and vitality of the Commonwealth.”<sup>22</sup>

Local and Regional Cultural Councils are addressed in M.G.L. Chapter 10, Section 58:

- Any city or town may establish a local cultural council and any consortium of cities and towns, with the approval of the council, may establish a regional cultural council.

<sup>18</sup> “National Register of Historic Places,”

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission, “There’s a Difference!”

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcpdf/difference.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> MHC enabling legislation: M.G.L. Ch. 9 ss.26-27C

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.southwickma.org/historical-commission>

<sup>22</sup> <https://massculturalcouncil.org/>

- Local cultural councils shall consist of at least five and not more than twenty-two members to be appointed by the mayor of a city, the city manager in a city having a Plan D or E form of government, the board of selectmen of a town or the executive officer in a town having a town council form of government.<sup>23</sup>

The Southwick Cultural Council supports community-based projects and the activities that promote access, education, diversity, and excellence in the arts, humanities, and interpretive sciences to benefit the residents of Southwick. The council is appointed, by the Select Board, to allocate grants funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency. Funding is based on the town census.<sup>24</sup> In 2022, 12 local organizations received grants from a total amount of \$7,500.

From this perspective there are an abundance of cultural sites and programmatic offerings in Southwick including many which relate to and utilize historic buildings, sites, and landscapes and highlight the town’s heritage and culture.

## RELEVANT PLANS and STUDIES

Local, State, Federal, and International plans, studies, and initiatives were considered as historic and cultural planning is a relatively new inclusion within community planning.

*Master Plan Southwick Massachusetts (1967)*<sup>25</sup>

This plan delineated cohesive neighborhood areas and boundaries within the town:

- Center Neighborhood
- West Southwick Neighborhood
- East Southwick Neighborhood
- Congamond Neighborhood

*Cultural Resources in Massachusetts: A Model for Management (1979)*<sup>26</sup>

This National Park Service funded study called for a cultural landscape approach to preservation planning that considered representative and outstanding cultural resources as expressions of the successive patterns of social, cultural, and economic activity that shaped and defined communities.

Priority recommendations included documentation and protection of landscapes and streetscapes, to include clusters of related buildings, structures, landscape features, and archaeological sites. The report emphasized that the recommendations were not anti-development, as the “fragile and irreplaceable” historic landscape is a composite of all those developmental phases which have occurred in the past. Planning should be balanced with caution as, “Once the historic character is lost, whether through new construction, demolition, relandscaping, or other activity, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to replace.”

*MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Southwick*<sup>27</sup> (1982)

Between 1979 and 1987, these important MHC reports introduced the historical development of each municipality in the Commonwealth including a historic overview and survey observations that evaluated the community’s existing historic properties inventory at that time and highlighted significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources.

<sup>23</sup>

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleII/Chapter10/Section58>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.southwickma.org/cultural-council>

<sup>25</sup>

<https://www.southwickma.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf1241/f/uploads/1967masterplan.pdf>

<sup>26</sup>

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pur1.32754076926207&view=1up&seq=17>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcpdf/townreports/CT-Valley/sou.pdf>

Current EPA guidance on how to balance *Smart Growth and the Preservation of Existing and Historic Buildings* notes that:

A historic building or district can be a tangible symbol of a community's interest in honoring its heritage, valuing its character and sense of place, getting the most out of prior investments in infrastructure and development, and encouraging growth in already-developed areas.

Rehabilitating historic properties can be a critical part of promoting energy efficiency by preserving the energy already represented by existing buildings (known as "embodied energy"), rather than expending additional energy for new construction. A new, green, energy-efficient office building that includes as much as 40 percent recycled materials would nevertheless take approximately 65 years to recover the energy lost in demolishing a comparable existing building.<sup>1</sup>

Repurposing old buildings—particularly those that are vacant—reduces the need for construction of new buildings and the consumption of land, energy, materials, and financial resources that they require.

The Southwick report noted that development and commercial expansion was already threatening the integrity of the historic town center. Key findings included the likelihood of a Native American site around the Congamond Ponds. At the time of the survey, the Congregational Church (1824) was the only building inventoried. Priority recommendations were to document the town's Federal, Early, and Late Industrial period resources, particularly farmsteads, to include tobacco barns. The Methodist Meetinghouse at Gillett Corner and the Consolidated School were also

noted, as well as the remains of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal.

*Historic and Archaeological Resources of the Connecticut River Valley. A Framework for Preservation Decisions (1984)*<sup>28</sup>

This regional report noted that a community's preservation focus should be on the identification, evaluation, and protection of historical landscapes and streetscapes. Archaeological surveys were encouraged, as was the expansion of survey work to include a range of buildings, structures, and sites such as vernacular housing, industrial buildings, bridges, and dams, and locally known prehistoric and historic archaeological sites.

*Southwick Master Plan (1997)*<sup>29</sup>

Under the Housing Goals and Objectives section, Goal #1 was "to ensure that new development in Southwick is appropriate for a rural and suburban community." One of the specific objectives related to housing was to ensure that new development is designed to be attractive, well-planned, and consistent with community character. (referenced on page 10 of CDP)

*Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)*<sup>30</sup>

This United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) treaty was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 17 October 2003. As of October 2022, 180 states have ratified, approved, or accepted the convention. Summary: Intangible Cultural Heritage means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcupdf/regionalreports/ctvalley.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.southwickma.org/sites/g/files/vyh1if1241/f/uploads/1997masterplan\\_not\\_adopied.pdf](https://www.southwickma.org/sites/g/files/vyh1if1241/f/uploads/1997masterplan_not_adopied.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups, and individuals, and of sustainable development.

The “intangible cultural heritage” is manifested in the following domains:

- oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- performing arts;
- social practices, rituals and festive events;
- knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- traditional craftsmanship.

*Southwick Community Development Plan (2004)*<sup>31</sup>

At the time of this plan, 432 out of 3,533 housing units had been constructed prior to 1939.

Recommendations included the establishment of a Creative Development bylaw and Overlay Zone for the residential land surrounding the Business district to provide an alternative to the strip residential development that typically emerges adjacent to an intensely developed area.

Another recommendation was to encourage development that maintains a traditional New England rural character and land use pattern by making the bylaws more specific to include requiring consistency of architectural design between shopping center buildings.

The summary of economic development issues and concerns noted a desire for a ‘downtown’ identity in the physical community and an unequivocal desire to protect the community’s open spaces. This research reaffirmed six of the nine goals expressed in the 1997 Master Plan planning process, which can also be seen as beneficial to supporting the preservation of historic and cultural resources:

- To ensure that new development in Southwick is appropriate for a rural and suburban community

- To preserve the open spaces and scenic beauty of Southwick
- To protect Southwick’s natural resources
- To provide appropriate and sufficient active and passive recreation opportunities for its citizens
- To encourage appropriate commercial and light industrial development in Southwick, while protecting environmental quality and town resources
- To provide a safe, dependable, and efficient transportation system for the movement of people and goods

Strategy #6: Town Center Revitalization  
Revitalizing an existing, historic town center can improve community image and enhance economic development. Components of this strategy which could relate to supporting historic and cultural resources include:

- Create a central civic space or park
- Public art
- Encourage mixed uses
- Streetscaping: decorative lamp posts, brick-lined sidewalks, parkway trees, planter boxes, trash cans, seating, etc.
- Design and signage criteria
- Create a development review board (e.g. Town of Amherst)
- Allow outdoor café/restaurant seating
- Allow zero lot lines and require buildings to locate close to the street
- Require parking to be placed in back
- Allow on-street parking
- Marketing just for the downtown businesses
- Forming a special organization just for the downtown businesses

### Major Findings

The Corridor Study, completed two years before the 1997 Master Plan, laid the foundation for many of the recommendations included in the Master Plan (and reaffirmed in this community development planning process). If the Town wants to shape its commercial and residential development, it needs to amend its zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations to enhance the growth management tools available to local

31

[https://www.southwickma.org/sites/g/files/vyh1if1241/f/uploads/swk\\_community\\_dev\\_survey3\\_0.pdf](https://www.southwickma.org/sites/g/files/vyh1if1241/f/uploads/swk_community_dev_survey3_0.pdf)

planners and developers. The study concluded with ten top goals:

1. Focus commercial growth in existing centers/nodes and reduce trip generation.
2. Establish new use recommendations for commercial zones.
3. Streamline the zoning bylaw by improving the site plan review process.
4. Preserve prime farmland parcels by discouraging conversion of agricultural parcels to other uses.
5. Improve the quality of commercial development.
6. Alleviate Traffic Congestion by Providing Improved Pedestrian and Bicycle Paths and Facilities
7. Maintain Rural Character
8. Protect Existing Residential Areas
9. Improve the sign bylaw
10. Control Unplanned Parking Lot Development in Shopping Centers

*Hazard Mitigation Plan (2016)*<sup>32</sup>

Within this plan, the only historic buildings and/or sites specifically identified as facilities to protect in the event of an emergency are the Laflin-Phelps Homestead, the Old Town Library, and the Cemeteries. (p. 58). The Southwick Public Library on Feeding Hills Road is separately identified. Archival materials and collections are not identified. The Hazard Mitigation Plan is being updated in 2023.

*Massachusetts State Historic Preservation Plan (2018-2022)*<sup>33</sup>

This updated plan notes that historic preservation planning in Massachusetts is intended to be a partnership between the MHC, local governments, nonprofit organizations, state agencies, and other organizations and individuals. The role of the Commonwealth's thirteen Regional Planning Agencies was referenced, related to community planning assistance and historic preservation planning. It was noted that only the Cape Cod Commission and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission currently have

professional preservation planners on staff. The plan's thirteen goals identified in the plan are as follows:

- Goal 1: Identify and Document Historic and Archaeological Resources
- Goal 2: Evaluate and Register Historic and Archaeological Resources
- Goal 3: Protect Historic Resources through Education, Collaboration, and Public Awareness
- Goal 4: Protect Historic Resources through Greater Advocacy
- Goal 5: Strengthen the Stewardship of Historic and Archaeological Resources
- Goal 6: Protect Historic Resources through Financial Support
- Goal 7: Protect Historic Resources from Climate Change, Natural Disasters, and Human-Made Disasters
- Goal 8: Include Diverse Ethnic and Cultural Communities in Historic Preservation
- Goal 9: Protect Historic and Archaeological Resources through Assisting Local Governments
- Goal 10: Protect Historic and Archaeological Resources through Local Governments
- Goal 11: Encourage Sustainable Development through Historic Resources
- Goal 12: Encourage Economic Development through Historic Preservation
- Goal 13: Protect Historic and Archaeological Resources through State and Federal Policies and Regulations

*Southwick's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) certification (2018)*

Town of Southwick Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings<sup>34</sup>

A moderate priority finding was to conduct a study to identify alternate sources of tourism funding to ensure that the Town's economy does not suffer as changing climatic conditions increasingly impact recreation opportunities in Town. (p. 13)

Another priority was to develop partnerships with local businesses to distribute information and help facilitate outreach efforts, particularly to vulnerable populations such as senior residents. (p. 14)

*OSRP (2020)*<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.pvpc.org/sites/default/files/SouthwickHMP2016.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhccpdf/statepresplan20182022webversion.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.mass.gov/doc/southwick-report/download>

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.southwickma.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf1241/f/uploads/southwick\\_osrp\\_2019\\_final.pdf](https://www.southwickma.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf1241/f/uploads/southwick_osrp_2019_final.pdf)



Goals and objectives from the town's Open Space and Recreation Plan included:

GOAL 2: Permanently protect important open space and ensure conservation areas are appropriately managed for flora and fauna habitat integrity and resiliency.

- Objective 2-1: Identify and protect important unprotected parcels of open space by securing funding for fee simple land acquisition and/or purchase of Conservation Restrictions.
- Objective 2-2: Promote innovative forms of Low Impact Development (LID) appropriate to Southwick's rural character
- Objective 2-3: Maintenance protocols are established and implemented for all protected open space including conservation land and recreational facilities.

GOAL 4: Improve and expand recreational and environmental education opportunities for people of all ages while preserving Southwick's scenic, cultural, and historic character.

- Objective 4-1: Continue summer recreation program(s) for community.
- Objective 4-2: Implement trail system in Goose Pond area.
- Objective 4-3: Properly manage existing recreational facilities and control non-authorized uses.
- Objective 4-4: Increase community awareness of conservation areas for public use and outdoor education opportunities.

*Southwick Community Preservation Plan*<sup>36</sup> (2020)

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.southwickma.org/community-preservation-committee/pages/annual-community-preservation-plan>

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.communitypreservation.org/databank/projectsdatabase/access?field\\_town\\_tid%5B%5D=701&field\\_historic\\_value%5B%5D=yes&combine=](https://www.communitypreservation.org/databank/projectsdatabase/access?field_town_tid%5B%5D=701&field_historic_value%5B%5D=yes&combine=)

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) was adopted by Southwick voters on November 5, 2002. The act established a local dedicated fund, financed by a voter-approved property tax surcharge and matching funds from the statewide CPA Trust Fund, to undertake open space, historic preservation, outdoor recreation, and community housing projects. Local Community Preservation Committees are required to update CPA plans. Past Southwick CPA funded historical preservation projects include funding towards a survey and planning grant to update the town's cultural resource inventory, funds towards the relocation and restoration of the Gillett Cigar Factory, rehabilitation of the Town Hall Auditorium, towards preservation and the digitization and archiving of the town's historical documents, and assessment of repairs needed to replace the slate roof and repair the cupola on the old fire and police station.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Southwick Zoning*

Southwick's Zoning Bylaws include Flexible Residential Developments, the ability for a project to "earn" points through preservation of open space; or protection of forests, wildlife habitats, old growth trees, views, rural corridors, steep slopes, or historic sites.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Southwick Cultural Council FY23 Local Priorities*<sup>39</sup>

The Southwick Cultural Council (SCC) conducts local yearly outreach and develops funding priorities based on community feedback. For FY23, the SCC has stated that priority will be given to:

- Applicants that have secured a local venue (are there local venues readily available?)
- How well the program meets our local priorities (what are the local priorities?)
- Community support and involvement
- Evidence of track record and dedication of the applicant
- Ability to address the diverse cultural needs of a community's underserved populations or support diverse forms of cultural activities (have these needs been identified?)
- Financial need

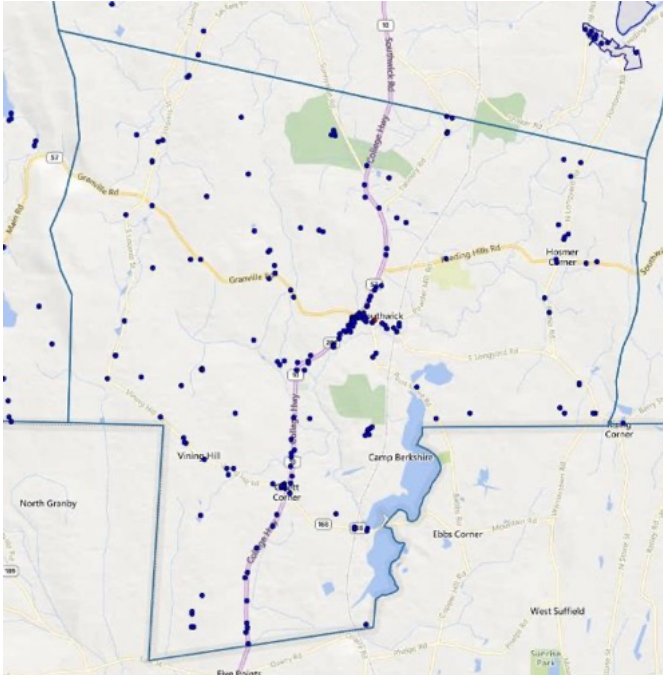
<sup>38</sup> <https://ecode360.com/10448882?highlight=historic&searchId=32401068672349497#10448882>

<sup>39</sup> <https://massculturalcouncil.org/local-council/southwick/>

- Demonstrated planning

Mass Cultural Council's Strategic Plan (FY18-FY23)<sup>40</sup>

The MCC's current strategic plan and "Our Vision for Communities"<sup>41</sup> are both good sources for better understanding broad-perspective state cultural



planning goals and initiatives to determine best practices for adapting these strategies to meet needs in Southwick.

Goals of the Strategic Plan include:

- Enriching communities
- Growing the economy
- Advancing inclusion and equity
- Empowering a creative generation
- Building internal capacity

A large-scale study of the positive impacts of historic preservation, prepared by private-sector firm PlaceEconomics, and based on findings from projects in nearly a dozen cities of all sizes throughout the United States can provide useful information for the conversation about the value of historic and cultural resources within communities.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> <https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/who-we-are/strategic-plan/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://massculturalcouncil.org/communities/our-vision-for-communities/>

## Historic Resources

Southwick's documented historic resources are listed in the MACRIS database by the identifier "SOU" followed by an inventory number. There are currently 203 "SOU" inventory points in the MHC's MACRIS database and visible on MACRIS Maps. This can be compared with Agawam (524), Russell (181), Granville (174), West Springfield (484), and Holyoke (1,338). The largest concentration of formal documentation is along College Highway (Route 10 and 202) with other inventory points generally following older transportation routes.

There are currently two inventoried AREAS (the Charles J. Gillett Cigar Factory and Warehouse (SOU.A) and the Feeding Hills Road Post-World War II Houses (SOU.B). The Laflin-Phelps Homestead (SOU.49) is the sole Southwick property on the National Register of Historic Places, listed as an individual district in 2005.

*A large amount (715) of respondents for the 2022 community engagement survey agreed that above all other options, over the next 20 years, the Town should encourage the historic character of Southwick.*

Burial grounds are also considered to have historical and archaeological significance. The Southwick Old Cemetery College Highway (1771, SOU.800) is the only burial ground documented in the Town and this 1981 inventory form is more than 40 years old.

Documented archaeological sites are not shown on MACRIS and information is only available through a permitting process. There is a likelihood of remaining archaeological resources in Southwick due to the

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.placeeconomics.com/resources/twenty-four-reasons-historic-preservation-is-good-for-your-community/>

known presence of Native Americans, community development beginning in the seventeenth century, canal and railroad related structural remains, and areas of undeveloped land.<sup>43</sup>

Today, historic resources in Southwick include archaeological sites and built resources ranging in period of construction from the eighteenth century through the late twentieth century. Southwick does not currently have any National Register or Local Historic Districts (LHDs) under bylaw.

## TRENDS

### *Adaptive Reuse*

Like any older communities with many historic resources, like buildings, there is a trend to ensure these buildings continue to live on in the fabric of the community. Rather than demolishing the building, some communities find ways to repurpose the building for new uses such as mixed-use developments and art galleries or other cultural uses. This trend helps revitalize neighborhoods while preserving their historic fabric.

### *Balancing development with preservation*

As Southwick continues to evolve, and in a way that residents would like for the town to remain semi-rural in nature and maintain its New England character, new construction should be balanced against preserving its historic and cultural heritage. Planning regulations, historic preservation guidelines, and a community planning process provides a way for accommodating growth and protecting the character and integrity of the town's neighborhoods.

### *Cultural Resources*

Recreational offerings in Southwick include parks and trails including some which were established more than 100 years ago. Multi-modal trail systems along historic transportation routes, such as the Southwick Rail Trail are another draw to Southwick as well as a connection which brings visitors across the state line from Connecticut.

See the appendix for some of these sites and other information.

### *Public input*

Question 10 of the Master Plan Survey asked: "Over the next 20 years, the town should encourage, discourage, or make no changes?" to the following possibilities:

1. Rural character and feeling of Southwick
2. Residential development within Southwick
3. Business development within Southwick
4. Industrial development within Southwick
5. Housing for all ages and income levels
6. Housing that is not only single-family detached homes
7. Historical character of Southwick
8. Lowering our carbon footprint within Southwick

There were 900 residents that responded to the survey and of the items listed above, the highest number of responses went to "Historical character of Southwick" (715 votes to encourage and only 21 votes to discourage).

Two secondary themes appeared multiple times through the Visioning process, the public survey and the post survey public input sessions. The first involves a lack of pride in the appearance of our town. The general lack of streetscapes, the lack of walkability, the abundance of litter and the lack of building facades cohesively tying to our rural character were some of the inputs.

The second theme is related to the lack of awareness to activities in town. The input from the public was "If I

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<sup>43</sup> "MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report Westfield," 1982, <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcpdf/townreports/CT-Valley/wsf.pdf>

had only known about the event, I would have attended.”

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### *Southwick and preservation planning initiative*

Southwick has never developed a town-wide historic preservation plan. Southwick has completed historic inventory work throughout the community, but, depending on when the forms were completed, they may not be up to current MHC standards of documentation which now require detailed information about a resource’s existing conditions and history as well as a fully developed explanation of context. There are also likely resources which have never been documented.

The SHC can take advantage of training by the MA Historical Commission beginning with discussing options to develop a town-wide Preservation Plan. This will incorporate planning for updating and expanding Southwick’s inventory to include landscapes and agricultural outbuildings. If resources are determined to be eligible, the Town and SHC can pursue National Register listing of the town center and other significant areas. This is in alignment with Goal 4 from the OSRP and the MHC State Preservation Plan.

### *A cultural center of town*

The town center is no longer well-defined and there is a lack of identified spaces and sites to support year-round cultural programming.

Southwick’s historic and cultural resources can be viewed as community assets, worthy of support, preservation, and resiliency planning. Form a local cultural stakeholder group, inventory, and map cultural assets, consult with Mass Cultural Council, and explore the feasibility of establishing a local cultural district within a walkable, defined area. This relates to Goals 2 and 4 of the OSRP and recommendations of the MCC. Support neighborhood organizations, like those in existence in the Congamond neighborhood, for all distinct areas like those identified in the 1967 Master Plan: Center Neighborhood, West Southwick Neighborhood, and the East Southwick Neighborhood.

### *Ensuring no further loss of historic resources locally significant*

Historic streetscapes and landscapes have been altered and lost over time. The Town has regulation for the protection of significant architecture and local historically significant resources, to include barns.

The town can consider tools such as Local Historic Districts, Architectural Conservation Districts, Design Guidelines, or a Design Review Board. This is in alignment with Goal 4 from the OSRP and the MHC State Preservation Plan. Protect Southwick’s remaining historic streetscapes and landscapes to include conservation and agricultural preservation restrictions and scenic vistas. (Goes with Goal #2 OSRP) Consider a demolition delay bylaw as mitigation to prevent further loss of local historic built resources. Design guidelines and design review would support preservation of historic streetscapes and Southwick’s built character in encouraging revitalization efforts and any new construction to be compatible with the scale, setbacks, and styles of existing historic resources. (Compatible with \*Establish a Creative Development Bylaw and Overlay Zone & \*Encourage development that maintains a typical New England rural character and land use pattern from page 8, Town of Southwick Community Development Plan)

### *Climate change impacts to historic and cultural resources*

Southwick is in the Westfield and Farmington River Basins and has previously experienced major flooding. Like all communities Southwick needs to prepare for increasingly intense weather conditions related to climate change. Southwick’s cultural resources are not comprehensive and there is not currently a cohesive and prioritized plan for the resiliency of the town’s most significant historic and cultural resources. Aging private and public built resources throughout the town may need repairs and preventative maintenance for longevity and resiliency.

Develop inventory of municipally owned historic properties. Perform annual inspections and plan for phased maintenance and repairs. Apply for funding for repairs and restoration. Apply for Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) for state and/or National Register listed municipally owned or non-profit owned historic resources. Inventory town

archives and collections and assess whether there are storage and resiliency issues. Emergency Management Staff should include cultural resource managers and stakeholders. This is in alignment with Goal 4 of the OSRP, the MHC State Preservation Plan, and recommendations of Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness for Cultural Heritage in Massachusetts (COSTEP MA.)

*Preservation versus energy efficiency*

Older “historic” buildings and other cultural resources may not currently be energy efficient or resilient to increasingly extreme weather conditions. Preservation is sometimes perceived as being cost prohibitive and at odds with energy efficiency.

Consider new guidance for adapting historic resources in areas susceptible to flooding. Provide outreach,

education, and energy advice for owners of older and historic homes about rehabilitation meeting the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and ways to appropriately rehabilitate historic resources for energy efficiency. Consider policies that support rehabilitation to best utilize existing resources.

*Desired destination for social, entertainment and cultural activities*

Southwick has the opportunity to take advantage of its location, diverse landscapes and desire to become synonymous with things to do. Attracting non-residents for social and entertainment activities can increase the chance of relation to the town and keep us growing. It will also reduce the number of residents spending their entertainment dollars elsewhere or worse relocating to a more social town.

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Some committees are discussed in these strategies and actions and have yet to be formed officially. Any item marked with an asterisk (\*) in this section represents “a suggested future Committee or an equivalent” where a lead party for an action is not an established body. A new lead or supporting party can offer flexibility for implementation through a Town committee or even a public/private group.

### Strategy 1

Elevate the awareness, respect and pride of our town and our historical and cultural history to the point our daily actions demonstrate that the town has achieved that goal.

**Timeframe**

- Immediate – 0-2 years
- Short Term – 3-5 years
- Medium Term – 6-9 years
- Long Term – 10+ years
- Ongoing – Continuing, still in progress

### Actions

1.1 Establish short, medium, and long term goals as a Commission for Historic Preservation in Southwick.

Lead Party: Historical Commission  
Supporting Parties: Historical Society, Planning Board, Select Board  
Priority: Immediate

1.2 Develop a town-wide Preservation Plan including an analysis of existing inventory and resources work and recommendations for documentation, outreach, and resiliency. Complete and issue the entire listing of all existing structures (including barns) that were built before 1939. Be sure to include a list all historic farms both working and not working today. Review historical sites, buildings and landmarks that may be repurposed into venues. Included in the plan is a timeline schedule (with dates) to implement the plan.

Lead Party: Historical Commission

Supporting Parties: Planning Board, Select Board, Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission, Open Space Committee\*, Historical Society, Economic Development Commission  
Priority: Immediate

1.3 Complete a cultural asset mapping and define Southwick's community and cultural center.

Lead Party: Planning Board

Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission, Park and Recreation Commission, Cultural Council, Historical Commission

Priority: Immediate

1.4 Establish regulatory tools to ensure the protection of irreplaceable built resources and scenic landscapes and vistas and to encourage appropriate and compatible development. Exploration of new regulations can include a bylaw that requires permission to raze a structure built before 1939.

Lead Party: Planning Board

Supporting Parties: Historical, Beautification and Wellness Commission\*, Agriculture, Conservation, Community Preservation Committee, Economic Development Commission

Priority: Medium Term

1.5 Inventory municipally owned historic properties and collections and plan for resiliency, by completing an inventory of historic properties and addressing preservation by preparing a Historic Preservation Plan.

Lead Party: Buildings and Grounds

Supporting Parties: Local Emergency Planning Committee, Town Clerk, Library Director, Cemetery Commission, Historical Society, Select Board

Priority: Medium Term

1.6 Develop a local preservation award and historic plaque program for property owners.

Lead Party: Historical Commission

Supporting Parties: Library Director, Historical Society

Priority: Medium Term

1.7 Establish policy and zoning to support the adaptive reuse of endangered resources that define the Southwick landscape such as barns and other endangered built resources.

Lead Party: Planning Board

Supporting Parties: Historical Commission, Economic Development Commission, Agricultural Commission

Priority: Medium Term

1.8 Seek training and other resources applicable to municipal roles in historic and cultural planning.

Lead Party: Historical Commission

Supporting Parties: Cultural Council

Priority: Medium Term

1.9 Pursue funds to support the rehabilitation and reactivation of underutilized historic properties and other grants applicable to historic resources in Southwick.

Lead Party: Planning Board

Supporting Parties: Historical Commission

Priority: Long Term

- 1.10 Establish a historical district(s) . The goal of the district(s) would be to encourage the preservation and reuse of historical structures while accommodating future needs. Examples include the housing structures on the West side of College Highway South of Depot Street.  
Lead Party: Historical Commission  
Supporting Parties: Planning Board, Select Board  
Priority: Medium Term
  
- 1.11 Establish a Beautification Commission. The mission of this commission is to assist the town in developing and pursuing initiatives that promote the beautification of the town. The goal of the commission is to create civic pride and to motivate the town’s population to participate in the beautification process. The Commission will identify areas in need of improvement, will create programs, recruit volunteers and will secure the funding resources to achieve its goals.  
Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Economic Development Commission  
Priority: Short Term
  
- 1.12 Install town branding signage that is clear and consistent and visually appealing.  
Lead Party: Beautification Commission\*  
Support Parties: Economic Development Commission, Historical Commission, Historical Society, Cultural Council  
Priority: Medium Term
  
- 1.13 Explore the options and designate studio space for local Art/Makers, painters and musicians.  
Lead Party: Cultural Council  
Support Parties: Select Board, Building Department, Economic Development Commission  
Priority: Medium Term

**Strategy 2**

Broaden cultural programming through the town fostering relationships between local and regional groups.

**Actions**

- 2.1 Pursue the designation of a Southwick Local Cultural District.  
Lead Party: Cultural Council  
Supporting Parties: Economic Development Commission, Greater Westfield Chamber of Commerce  
Priority: Long Term
  
- 2.2 Organize an Oral History Project to engage all citizens in the story of Southwick. Look into utilizing the Southwick Civic Fund. Preserve the video in perpetuity.  
Lead Party: Historical Commission  
Supporting Parties: Historical Society, Council on Aging, Southwick-Tolland Regional High School  
Priority: Long Term
  
- 2.3 Establish a “What’s happening in Southwick“ page on the town web site. There is currently no place that captures all historical, cultural, educational, governmental or social upcoming activities in town. This will enhance the exposure of events and increase the participation of people in town.  
Lead Party: Historical Commission  
Supporting Parties: Chief Administrative Officer, Assistant CAO

Priority: Short Term

2.4 Broaden the knowledge of American Indians in Southwick by exploring historical archives. Share the results with the public.

Lead Party: Historical Commission

Supporting Parties: Public Library

Priority: Long Term







# OPEN SPACE & NATURAL RESOURCES



## VISION

Southwick has plentiful water resources, wetlands, forests, farmlands, wildlife habitats, and soil diversity that are celebrated, actively-used and well-protected, creating a healthy and sustainable community where residents can easily access the beauty and passive recreational opportunities that come from the preservation of our natural and agricultural heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

The *Open Space and Natural Resources* chapter of the Southwick Master Plan provides an overview of the town's natural environment, issues, and opportunities in the future of the Town of Southwick and its residents.

This chapter will also look at the intersections found with other Town goals and policies stated in this plan as well as other town planning documents like the 2020 Town of Southwick Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) and will propose strategies and actions that can:

- Safeguard the ecological integrity of our natural resources such as aquatic ecosystems, forests, soils, air, dark skies, and surface and groundwater drinking supplies
- Permanently protect open space and wildlife corridors, ensuring conservation areas are appropriately managed for flora and fauna habitat integrity and climate resiliency
- Preserve working farms and forests in support of an agricultural way of life in Southwick and educate on regenerative practices for the basis of a sustainable farm economy
- Improve and expand recreational and environmental education opportunities for people of all ages while preserving Southwick's scenic, cultural, and historic character

By embracing this vision, Southwick will become a model community renowned for its commitment to preserving natural and agricultural resources, providing exceptional recreational opportunities, and nurturing a high quality of life for all residents.

Among the town of Southwick's greatest assets are its forests, fields, lakes, and streams. It is believed that Native Americans concentrated their settlements in the eastern half of the town, particularly around the Congamond Lakes, due to the good soils and fishing in this area. They may have also utilized the upland areas for hunting. European settlement in Southwick began in the 1730s and the town was incorporated in 1770. While initially settled as a farming community, by the late 1700s local brooks were being used for powder mills, sawmills and gristmills. The town center formed on Route 10 at its intersection with the County

Road (now Klaus Anderson) and College Highway. The New Haven and Northampton Company Canal was built in the early 1800s and enabled farmers to ship their products to more urban areas. By the mid-1800s, however, the canal closed and a railroad was built along its route. Farming, particularly tobacco growing, remained a major economic activity well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and farms and farmland are still important features of the town, mixed in with residential and commercial areas. Summer populations at the Congamond Lakes led to increased development as well as recreational opportunities. Southwick is now a residential community that is becoming a suburb for the Springfield/Westfield/Hartford region, but it is also still characterized by both its rural landscape and the recreational opportunities offered by the Congamond Lakes.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

### *Geology and Topography*

Southwick has varied topography ranging from rolling hills in the eastern and western edges of the town, the Congamond Lakes and Great Brook in the central region, to gentle hills, wetlands and floodplains in much of the western region.

### Soils

Soils are a major consideration in planning for wise management of Southwick's land use and natural resources. Soil is the layer of mineral and organic material that covers the bedrock on the earth's crust and the surficial deposits. Soil and its characteristics are a product of geologic history, the hardness and composition of the parent material, the content of the decomposing matter topography, climate, and time.

The soils in Southwick were formed primarily from materials resulting from the Pleistocene glaciation. The upland hills, ridges, and drumlins are covered with 2-3 feet of somewhat permeable, stony and sandy loam materials that are underlain by heterogeneous glacial till or bedrock.

Soils are described by several characteristics, each having different implications for agriculture, construction and other uses of the land. Some characteristics are: location, depth to bedrock, structure, depth to water, periodic flooding, permeability, natural fertility, and acidity, among other values. In these ways, soils influence which areas are suitable for specific uses.

The following presents a brief description of the major soil groups found in Southwick:

#### *Charlton-Woodbridge-Paxton*

These soils are located mainly along the western edge of Town and in the central portion east of the Congamond Lakes. Characterized as well and moderately well-drained on glaciated uplands, nearly level to steep.

#### *Wethersfield-Meckesville*

These soils are located primarily from the Westfield border to the Congamond Lakes. Characterized as

well-drained on glaciated uplands, gently sloping to moderately steep.

#### *Holyoke Rock Outcrop*

These soils are found primarily along Provin Mountain. Characterized as shallow, somewhat excessively drained soils on glaciated uplands, gently sloping to steep rock outcrop.

#### *Hinckley-Windsor-Merrimac*

These are the soils, formed from glacial meltwater deposits, that are found in the area of the Congamond Lakes, Great Brook and Munn Brook. These soils are generally permeable non-stony, sandy loams underlain primarily by sands, gravels and silts, with some clays. are the primary soils in this section of town. Characterized as excessively and somewhat excessively drained on glacial out wash terraces, nearly level to steep.

### What is Soil Health?

Soil health is defined as the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. Healthy soil gives us clean air and water, bountiful crops and forests, productive grazing lands, diverse wildlife, and beautiful landscapes. Soil does all this by performing five essential functions:

*Soil does all this by performing five essential functions:*

- **Regulating water:** Soil helps control where rain, snowmelt, and irrigation water goes. Water flows over the land or into and through the soil.
- **Sustaining plant and animal life:** The diversity and productivity of living things depends on soil.
- **Filtering and buffering potential pollutants:** The minerals and microbes in soil are responsible for filtering, buffering, degrading, immobilizing, and detoxifying organic and inorganic materials, including industrial and municipal by-products and atmospheric deposits.
- **Cycling nutrients:** Carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and many other nutrients are stored, transformed, and cycled in the soil.

- Providing physical stability and support: Soil structure provides a medium for plant roots. Soils also provide support for human structures and protection for archaeological treasures.

#### *Agricultural Soils*

In addition to supporting as well as limiting habitat and human development, soil characteristics also influence agricultural productivity. They are mentioned within this chapter because there are compelling federal funding opportunities for permanent conservation based on soil type. The USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has developed a classification system for identifying and evaluating soil productivity specifically for agricultural usage. The relevance of soil types comes into play with planning and future conservation as the NRCS has an Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (known as ACEP) and the Agricultural Land Easement Program (known as ALE), which offer funding for preserving parcels of land depending on their soil classification. In these programs, the landowner is paid the market value less the agricultural value of the land in exchange for limiting non-agricultural uses.

*The following presents a brief description of the NRCS's system of identifying soil groups and their presence in Southwick:*

#### Prime Farmland Soil

This soil is defined by the NRCS as "land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for economically producing sustained high yields of food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods." Southwick has approximately 3,195 acres of prime farmland.

#### Farmland of Statewide Importance Soil

Southwick has 7,360 acres of farmland of statewide importance. The criteria for defining and delineating farmland of statewide importance are determined by the appropriate State agencies. Land that does not meet the criteria for prime or unique farmland is considered to be *farmland of statewide importance* for

the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops.

#### Farmland of Local Importance Soil

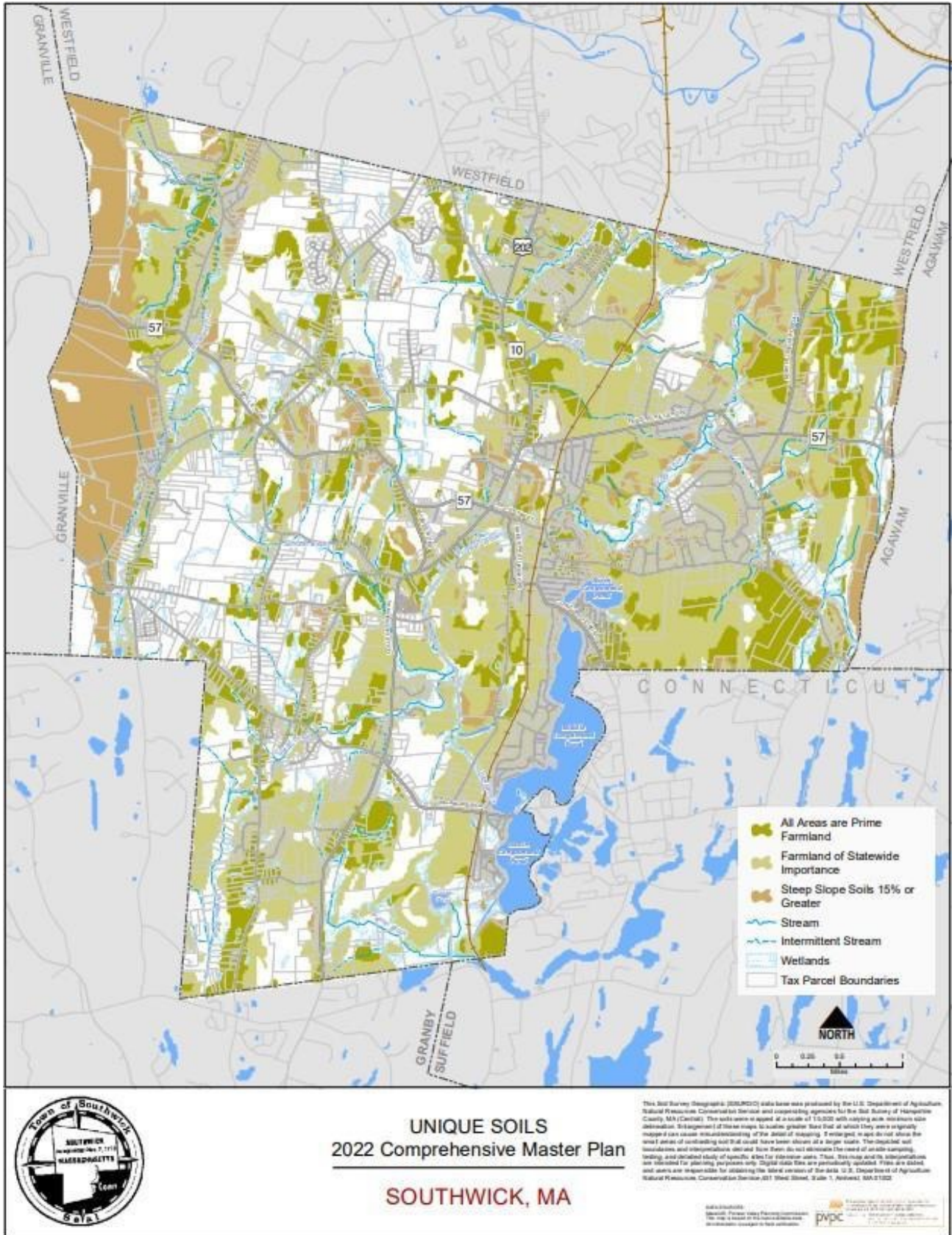
These are soils that are not classified as important farmland soils (Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance) in the Soil Survey. Similar to soil that is of "Statewide Importance", in some local areas there is concern for certain additional farmlands for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. Where appropriate, these lands are to be identified by the local agency or agencies concerned. Importantly, these kinds of soils can be considered for NRCS, Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program funding eligibility. In 2022, the Town of Southwick's Agricultural Commission made contact with an NRCS representative of the ALE program and agreed to begin the process of supporting "The Farmland of Local Importance Initiative" so that Southwick may begin to identify locally important soil that could be eligible for preservation funding. As of 2023, nothing further than the commitment to have Southwick join ALE's initiative has been accorded on; follow-up is advised.

#### Farmland of Unique Importance Soil

These are soils are defined as "land other than prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance that might be used for the production of specific high value food and fiber crops."

Map 1 shows the areas of soils that are prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance in Southwick. These soils are found mainly in the eastern half of Town, although there are some sections in the western part of Town as well. Also shown are all the areas that have soils on steep slopes of 15 percent or greater. These steep slope soils are found primarily in the western and eastern edges of the Town, with a few scattered pockets throughout.

Map 1 - Prime Farmland Soils



## Wetland and Water Resources

The main surface water resources for Southwick are the Congamond Lakes, which are a chain of three connected lakes that together cover a total of over 465 acres of surface water. The lakes drain on the northern end into Great Brook, the largest stream in Southwick. The other major stream is Munn Brook, in the northwest section of town. There are numerous other small brooks and ponds in the town that are vital to wildlife habitats and corridors, scenic landscapes, and recreation.

Southwick has approximately 2,800 acres of wetlands and wet soils. The largest wetland area is at the southern end of the Congamond Lakes, adjacent to Palmer Brook, Canal Brook, South Pond and Goose Pond. There is also an extensive wetland area that borders Great Brook from the outlet of the Congamond Lakes north toward the town center, as well as ecologically important wetlands that are part of the Loupinski Wildlife Management Area along Munn Brook and Honey Pot Road in the northwest area of the town. Wetland areas along Shurtleff Brook, which runs north/south along the western ridge of town by North and South Loomis Streets and parts of Granville Road against the Sodom and Drake Mountains are also significant.

The Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (MGL 131, Section 40) protects wetlands, water sources, and adjoining land areas by preventing or minimizing impacts to these resources. Anyone proposing to remove, fill, dredge, build upon, degrade, discharge into, or otherwise alter resources or areas within the areas listed below must submit an application to the Conservation Commission for review:

- *200 feet of any perennial stream or river*
- *100 feet from any freshwater wetland, wet meadow, marsh, vernal pool, reservoir, pond of any size, or lands subject to flooding or inundation by ground or surface water*
- *100-year floodplains*
- *Isolated wetlands that have not been delineated by the State are not protected unless they are certified vernal pools.*

The Town of Southwick established a Flood Hazard and Wetlands District in 1978 that regulated

development in the 500-year floodplain of lakes, rivers, and streams.

Flood plains and flood hazard areas are designated areas next to rivers, streams and lakes that are likely to flood during large storms. The areas most prone to flooding in Southwick are the floodplains of Great Brook and Munn Brook, as well as some areas along the Congamond Lakes. These areas should be left as undeveloped as possible in order to prevent damage to structures and other properties. Some flood plains are productive agricultural land, having accumulated sediment during flood conditions. This is demonstrated by some parts of towns where there is land in the flood zone area that is also designated as Farmland of Statewide Importance.

Southwick's most significant groundwater resource is the Great Brook Aquifer, which supplies drinking water to a large percentage of Southwick's population, and also provides drinking water to West Springfield and Westfield. Most of the western section of Southwick relies on private wells, with a small number of homes drawing on the Loomis Ridge Aquifer in the Munn Brook Valley. The Great Brook Aquifer underlies almost the entire eastern third of the Town, closely paralleling the course of Great Brook north of the Congamond Lakes and underlying the lakes as well. It is made up of a layer of sand and gravel at least 40 feet thick that is saturated with water year-round. This important regional resource provides the communities of Southwick, Westfield, and West Springfield with a total of 12.5 MGD (million gallons per day). It is estimated that potential supplies may equal or exceed 20 MGD. The storage volume of the aquifer is estimated. to be 15 billion gallons.

The major recharge areas for the aquifer lie within the town and contribute directly to the ground water supply; thus, activities on the surface have a direct impact on the water quality of the aquifer. Sand and gravel terraces above and surrounding the aquifer help to recharge the ground water supply as precipitation infiltrates surface layers as it slowly seeps into the underlying aquifer.

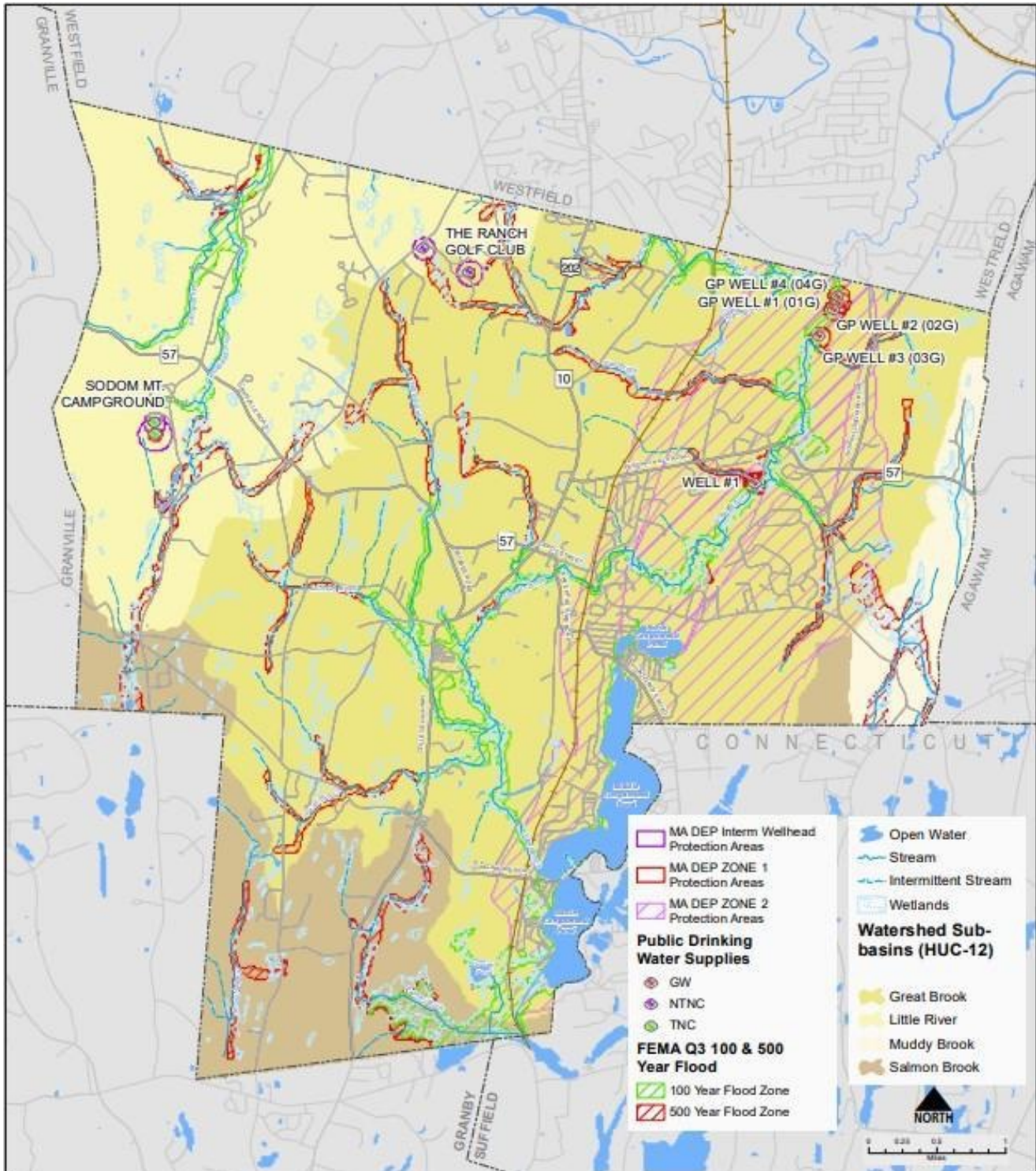
The Town did implement a Wellhead Protection District as part of the Zoning Bylaws that includes Zone I and II Aquifer Recharge Areas. Some of the restrictions include minimum lot sizes, no underground storage tanks, limitations on pesticides and fertilizers,



and specific restrictions on septic systems and periodic septic tank pumping. Much of the IR Industrial Zone lies within the Wellhead Protection District as well. These areas in which the aquifer and aquifer recharge areas lie have been experiencing a significant amount of residential development and it is essential to ensure that further development does not damage the quality of Southwick's drinking water.

Map 2 shows lakes, ponds, rivers and streams in Southwick, watershed sub-basins for Great Brook, Little River, Munn Brook and Salmon Brook, 100 and 500-year flood zones, and Zone 1 and Zone 2 protection areas.

Map 2 Water Resources

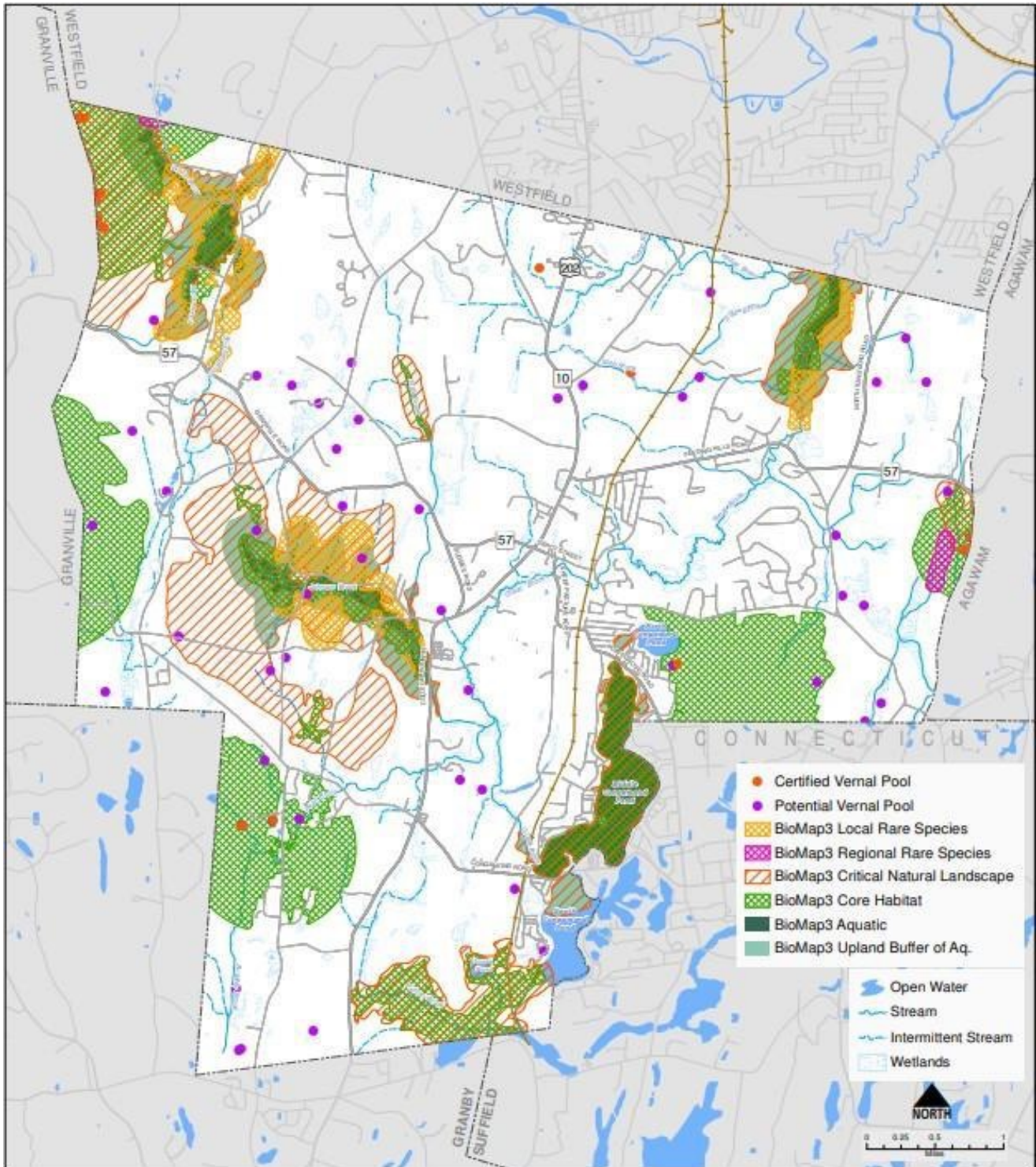


**WATER RESOURCES**  
2022 Comprehensive Master Plan

**SOUTHWICK, MA**

Map 2 Water Resources  
Southwick, Massachusetts  
This map is based on GIS data provided by the Southwick Water Department.  
Map 2 Water Resources  
pvpic

Map 3 Natural Heritage Inventory



UNIQUE ENVIRONMENTS  
2022 Comprehensive Master Plan

SOUTHWICK, MA

DATE: 05/2022  
PROJECT: 2022 Comprehensive Master Plan  
This map is based on the best available data.  
Distribution is subject to map verification.



## **Critical Habitat Areas**

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

There are 14 species considered endangered, threatened, or of special concern that have been identified in Southwick: Wood Turtle, Eastern Box Turtle, Jefferson Salamander, American Bittern, Bald Eagle, Eastern Meadowlark, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Grasshopper Sparrow, Adder's Tongue Fern, Bristly Buttercup, Climbing Fern, New England Blazing Star, Slender Cottongrass, and Swamp Smartweed.

The NHESP has mapped Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscapes throughout the Commonwealth that are significant for conserving biological diversity through the BioMap2, which classifies landscapes as Core Habitat (CH) or Critical Natural Landscape (CNL) as seen in Map 3. Southwick contains 3,216 acres of Core Habitats (CH), which are located primarily in the eastern half of the Town, adjacent to Great Brook, southwest of the Congamond Lakes, and along the border with Agawam south of Route 57. Core Habitat "identifies areas that are critical for the long-term persistence of rare species, exemplary natural communities, and resilient ecosystems". (BioMap 2022) These wetland and upland areas in Southwick support habitat particularly for amphibians (salamanders), reptiles (turtles and snakes), as well as some species of birds, crustaceans, and plants.

Southwick also has 3,578 acres of Critical Natural Landscape (CNL) that overlaps the Core Habitat areas bordering Agawam south of Route 57 and southwest of the Congamond Lakes. There is also a large block in the northwest corner of the town. Landscape Blocks, the primary component of Critical Natural Landscapes, are large areas of intact and predominantly natural vegetation, consisting of

contiguous forests, wetlands, river, lakes, and ponds, pastures and power line rights-of-way. These areas "provide habitat for wide-ranging species and support dynamic and resilient ecosystems." They allow species to "move freely among habitats and buffer smaller natural communities from development and other stressors". (BioMap 2022)

## **TRENDS**

### *Loss of farmland and increasing impervious surfaces*

In the last 15 years, over 11 million acres of farmland were paved-over, fragmented, or converted to new uses that jeopardize farming in the United States, according to the American Farmland Trust. Rising development pressures limit what farmers can accomplish, and New England's food production has been lowered to just 12%. There has been additional 119 acres of development between 2012 and 2017 in Southwick and an additional 408 acres of newly conserved land from 2012 through 2019 in Southwick according to Mass Audubon.

## **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

In the Southwick Comprehensive Plan Community Survey, key questions concerning land usage, development, conservation, and water resources were answered as follows:

- Balance development to the Town's water supply (85.8%)
- Encourage the rural character and feeling of Southwick (74.6%)
- Encourage Agricultural Development - ranging from sustainable farming and year-round greenhouses to agritourism and cannabis ( )
- Adopt additional zoning to protect agricultural lands (87%)
- Educate landowners about options for permanently protecting their land (87%)
- Acquire public lands for recreation (76.1%)
- Acquire public lands for wildlife preservation (81.7%)
- Acquire open space for passive and active

recreation (76.8%)

- Acquire open space to create and restore wildlife habitats (78.6%)
- Would like to see minimal residential development (49.5%)
- Congamond Lake is overcrowded with watercraft (strongly agree: 27.9%, agree: 26.6%, total: 54.5% agreement)

These sentiments suggest that planning for the long-term protection of natural resources and open space should be a priority for the Town, with protection of the drinking water supply, agricultural lands, and Congamond Lake being top priorities. The majority of respondents to the survey (74.6%) would like the Town to encourage Southwick's rural character and feeling over the next 20 years, which was similarly reflected with the majority answer for the question of "Over the next 20 years, where would you like to see new housing built?" being that (49.5%) would like to see minimal residential development. In addition, agricultural development such as sustainable farming, greenhouses and agritourism was the type of development most supported by survey respondents (80.5%). This section explores the issues facing Southwick and the opportunities the Town has to conserve its valuable natural resources and rural character, increase environmental resilience and improve recreational opportunities for all residents.

#### *Sustain High Surface and Groundwater Quality*

High-quality surface and groundwater are critical to the quality of life for all Southwick residents. The protection of drinking water quality was one of the top natural resource protection goal among respondents of the 2019 OSRP survey. The area in which the Great Brook Aquifer and aquifer recharge areas lie have been experiencing a significant amount of residential development, which could pose a threat to water quality. Efforts should be made to limit the number of septic systems installed, and to minimize the amount of stormwater through green infrastructure and other measures. The Town must also decide whether to further restrict development in this area.

Improving water quality in the Congamond Lakes is also a priority for Southwick residents. Survey respondents indicated that they are concerned about water quality in Congamond Lake and generally

support measures to improve the water quality. 55.8% of respondents agreed that measures such as dredging and controlling invasive weeds should be taken to improve the water quality and flow around the Lakes.

New sewage lines have been constructed around part of the Congamond Lakes, and the Town is evaluating suitable locations to further expand the sewer system. Sewer expansion will greatly improve the water quality in the Congamond Lakes by reducing nutrient loading from private septic systems. Excess nutrients in the lakes has contributed to eutrophication and nuisance aquatic weeds. The Town, through the leadership of the Lakes Management Committee (LMC) and the Public Works Department, is also taking many steps to improve stormwater management and water quality in the Congamond Lakes, including the following:

- Mapping all outfalls and catch-basins in Southwick with GIS and creating a database for their operation and maintenance.
- Installing deep sump catch basins, Baysavers (advanced drainage systems), and berms/road milling to redirect runoff in numerous locations around the lakes.
- Constructing green infrastructure features such as grassed swales and vegetated channels to absorb runoff.
- Installing weir gates in Canal Brook to control and maintain lake levels during periods of heavy rainfall and drought.
- Regularly taking wet and dry weather samples of 10 stormwater outfalls, lake and canal bottom samples, and lake water samples to analyze for various parameters. The data is tracked and trended by LMC volunteers and reported to the Town's consultant limnologist.

According to the OSRP, the data shows that phosphorous-laden organic matter is the main cause of algae and cyanobacteria blooms. Recommended actions to address this include a whole-lake alum treatment, and selective dredging of the canal, followed by selective dredging of shallow, organic-matter-laden coves.

#### *Protect and Maintain Open Spaces with Ecological, Recreation, and Agricultural Value*

Only about one-tenth of the acreage in Southwick is permanently protected open space. The land that is not protected may be vulnerable to development and to impacts from human use. Preserving farmland is a top priority. Focus group members discussed the fact that much agricultural land in Town is in the Chapter 61a program, and that although the Town has the right of first refusal to purchase land coming out of the Chapter 61 programs, the process to make a decision about acquisition and to get town approval is lengthy and needs to be streamlined. It would also benefit the Town to partner with a local land trust on acquisition of land of agricultural, ecological, or recreational value.

The focus group also highlighted the issue that although the Town has protected important parcels and developed passive recreational areas such as North Pond Conservation Area and the Rail Trail, there is not enough funding for maintaining these properties and facilities. The Town needs to identify additional funding for ongoing maintenance, as well as develop more capacity for grant writing in order to access this funding.

The areas below were identified in the OSRP as having significant value for habitat, passive recreation, or historic conservation, but currently have little or no protection. The Town should prioritize these areas for protection.

*Beehive stone structure on Drake Mountain* - This unusual man-made feature is thought to have been constructed and used by early colonists or by Native Americans for storing crops or producing gunpowder or charcoal.

*Drake Mountain* - With permission of access, a Sodom Mountain-Drake Mountain hiking trail could be established that would start at Sodom Mountain Road and run for five miles across Drake Mountain, ending at Honey Pot Road. The trail could then extend into Westfield and Granby, Connecticut to create a regional trail.

*Sodom Mountain/Lambson's Hill* - West of South Loomis Street on the south side of Granville Road are grassed slopes (Lambson's Hill) on the edge of a former tobacco field suitable for sledding and beginner skiing. The land abutting these slopes to the north, south, and west of Sodom Mountain would provide an area for hiking, hunting, mountain climbing,

geologic study and cross-country skiing. The woodland provides an opportunity for woodland management.

*Hampden-Farmington Canal Lock* - The last known lock of the Hampden-Farmington Canal is a historical landmark that should be preserved. The Hampden-Farmington Canal was a flourishing canal in the 1800s that ran from New Haven, CT to Northampton, MA. This lock lowered boats to the level of Green Brook before proceeding north. It is located on the north side of South Longyard Road and is within a privately-owned parcel bordered by Great Brook to the north, Granuado Estates to the east, and undeveloped land to the west and south. All other known areas in Southwick where the canal existed have been destroyed by flood, erosion or construction.

*Hardwood Swamp* - Located west of South Loomis Street near the Connecticut state line, this 40-acre hardwood swamp with some open water and cattails is suitable for management and preservation as wildlife habitat for duck and furbearers. The acquisition of this parcel would complete the plan for the very western side of Southwick as a conservation and recreation area.

#### *Environmental Resilience*

Southwick is already experiencing the impacts of climate change and is taking steps to increase the Town's resilience. In 2018, the Town was awarded a planning grant from the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program to begin to proactively plan for resiliency and to implement key climate change adaptation actions. Participants in the Community Resilience Building (CRB) workshop identified concerns and challenges related to infrastructural, societal and environmental resources in the Town. The following environmental concerns were identified:

- **Lakes and Canals:** The impacts of climate change are already visible in the Congamond Lakes. In the past, the three lakes, North, Middle, and South, would freeze over with 30 inches of solid ice. Today, because of the changing climate, there are only 12 inches of ice on the lake in a good year, seasons with no ice are

common, and ice does not last as long into the spring as it once did. The lakes have become an expensive liability, experiencing problems like algal blooms and cyanobacteria that are linked to increasing temperatures. While the lakes are experiencing challenges, they are also becoming more important to the Town in the summer. As days above 90°F increase, having water available to residents for recreation and cooling off is increasingly vital.

Congamond Lakes historically have two outlets, Great Brook and Canal Brook. Canal Brook is part of the old Farmington Canal. However, both brooks have become clogged with debris and organic matter, including hundreds of trees that fell in the 2011 ice storm, the canal was originally 9 feet deep by 15 feet wide, but is now as shallow as 1.5 feet deep in some areas. According to the Lake Management Committee, the clogs extend up to 2.5 miles downstream on Canal Brook and 4 miles on Great Brook. Both Great Brook and Canal Brook have occasionally reversed their flow during significant stormwater runoff events because of downstream blockages. This backflow poses a risk to the health of the lakes by bringing nutrients and organic matter with it. The Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) will be funding a study on dredging both of the brooks.

- **Trees, Forests, and Wetlands:** Forests and wetlands provide critical ecosystem services that help buffer the effects of climate change, including sequestering carbon, increasing groundwater recharge, and storing floodwaters. Street trees are likewise critical for infiltration of rainwater and provision of shade. However, street trees and forests are threatened by the impacts of climate change. Wind and storms cause blowdowns, drought can contribute to die-off, invasive pests (e.g. Emerald Ash Borer, Asian Longhorned Beetle) are eliminating certain tree species, and some species are declining due to shifting temperature and precipitation regimes that favor more southerly species. Trees can also pose threats during many natural hazard events, and ongoing maintenance is necessary to reduce these risks. In the Comprehensive Plan Community Survey, 62.9% of respondents indicated that lowering the Town's carbon footprint was an action that should be encouraged over the next 20 years. Conservation of mature forests and

wetlands is one of the main actions the Town can take to sequester carbon and lower their carbon footprint.

- **Wildlife:** Concerns about beavers were discussed as an environmental issue and also an infrastructure problem. Beaver activity can cause unpredictable problems during heavy precipitation, when flooding occurs in unexpected locations. Southwick has previously experienced problems at Kellogg Brook, where after heavy rains, a break in beaver dams caused a release of water that exposed nearby sewer and gas mains. Beaver impoundments have also been known to flood and overwhelm septic systems in the Town. Other wildlife concerns include water quality issues associated with waterfowl populations, as well as human-animal conflict involving bears, coyotes, and fishers.
- **Invasive Species:** Invasive plants and animals are already a source of concern in Southwick. Forest and upland ecosystems are threatened by a variety of invasive plants, including oriental bittersweet, multiflora rose, autumn olive, burning bush, barberry, garlic mustard, two types of swallowwort, and several non-native honeysuckles. Aquatic habitats are threatened by invasive plants such as common reed, Japanese knotweed, invasive water chestnut, hydrilla, purple loosestrife, and Eurasian milfoil. Invasive insect pests already in the area include the Asian Longhorned Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer, and Spotted Lanternfly, both of which have the potential to do serious damage to Southwick's forests and trees. The impacts of these invasive plants and insects are likely to increase as a result of warmer temperatures and changes in precipitation. Warming temperatures will also bring new invasives to the area, and these will have an easier time gaining a foothold if the Town's natural ecosystems are already weakened.
- **Water Quality:** Both the Congamond Lakes and the canals in Southwick are at risk due to nutrient pollution. These impacts are made worse by the increased erosion and stormwater runoff that accompanies heavy precipitation events. In recent years, algal blooms and aquatic weeds have been

increasing, particularly during periods of extreme heat. The Town treated the lakes twice in 2018, using copper sulfate to control algal growth. In 2020, the Town treated the lake with Alum and for 3 years there has not been any algae blooms. There were two other significant benefits for the Alum Treatment; the average clarity of the lake increased by 29% and the average level of dissolved oxygen increased by an average of 57%. The Lakes are also subject to an influx of bacteria due to both congregation of waterfowl on the lakes, and the fact that homes bordering on the Connecticut side of the lakes are served by septic systems. In addition, homeowners abutting the lakes frequently remove vegetation along the shore in order to gain access and views. This reduced vegetative buffer results in an increase in nutrient run off from fertilizer and animal feces. In 2018 and 2022 the beach was closed during the month of August due to unacceptable bacteria levels.

- **Drought** is also a concern. Over one third of the Town is served by private water wells, many of which are older, shallow wells. The extended drought during summer 2016 led to a number of issues with private wells that went dry. During peak use days Southwick's public water supply is insufficient, and the Town relies on supplemental water via a connection to Springfield Water and Sewer Commission.

#### *Recommendations to Improve Environmental Resilience in Southwick*

Participants at the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness CRB workshop identified a number of recommendations to address vulnerabilities and increase resiliency in three main areas: infrastructure, environment, and society. The recommendations below are those that address environmental vulnerabilities or address infrastructure or societal vulnerabilities utilizing nature-based solutions such as open space protection and green infrastructure.

- Restore Canal Brook and Great Brook to their original depths by conducting dredging and by clearing both channels of debris and blockages, including beaver dam

obstructions (in process).

- Assess cost-effective green infrastructure opportunities to develop a list of priority projects where reduction of stormwater runoff could mitigate flooding risk without the need to conduct expensive culvert replacement and resizing projects. Assess feasibility and cost, rank priority projects in terms of climate resilience potential, and develop concept designs for key projects. Review Town regulations and update as necessary to support green infrastructure and low-impact development approaches.
- Establish a formal drought plan to detail appropriate actions to be taken during times of extended drought, with particular attention to developing alternate water supply sources for farmers, and providing for high water use events, such as Motocross events.
- Increase the efficiency of enforcement and inspections, including providing sufficient numbers of inspectors to effectively monitor and enforce regulations at the Congamond Lakes, including traffic management.
- Educate owners of private septic systems about the importance of having systems pumped out and keeping them in good working condition in order to prevent risks to public health and the environment from systems that become overwhelmed during periods of heavy precipitation.
- Increase coordination and cooperation with Suffield, Connecticut to protect the Congamond Lakes and address issues with erosion, algal blooms, waterfowl, and septic systems.
- Develop a Town-wide plan to limit human/animal conflict, with a focus on maintaining open space corridors and appropriate habitat for large mammals (coyotes, bears, fisher cats), and establishing plans for beaver management. Work in conjunction with neighboring towns to develop cohesive open tracks of land across town boundaries.
- Develop a comprehensive tree and forests management program to identify, remove, and replace problem trees, preserve intact forests and street tree cover, and provide guidance and resources for gradually moving toward more climate-resilient trees and forest communities (e.g. species that will



tolerate warmer temperatures).

- Develop comprehensive invasive species management from inventory stage through management planning and implementation to address existing invasive populations that threaten features such as open space or forests, both of which contribute to resiliency, as well as anticipate new invasives that are likely to move into the area as climates shift.
- Establish and maintain, in conjunction, with neighboring towns a wildlife corridor, also known as an ecological corridor or habitat corridor. This corridor is a stretch of land and/or waterways that connects fragmented habitats, allowing for the movement of various wildlife species between these habitats. It serves as a pathway for animals to migrate, disperse, and access resources such as food, water, and mates. Wildlife corridors are crucial for maintaining biodiversity and preventing the isolation of populations, which can lead to genetic problems and decreased resilience to environmental changes. At present, there is a concerted effort in Simsbury, CT and Granby, CT through their local private land trusts and municipal conservation entities to conserve a corridor in their towns that continues northward into Southwick and

continues from Southwick onto Westfield, MA and Granville, MA. Stakeholders in the Granby, CT portion of the corridor have communicated the importance of Southwick's Sofinowski Preserve in this corridor and have encouraged the expansion of this corridor around Sofinowski and continuing across the areas of Vining Hill Road, Ed Holcomb Road, Klaus Anderson Road, Fred Jackson Road, Granville Road, North and South Loomis Roads, Kline Road, Shurtleff Brook, Sodom Mountain and Drake Mountain.

# STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Some committees are discussed in these strategies and actions and have yet to be formed officially. Any item marked with an asterisk (\*) in this section represents “a suggested future Committee or an equivalent” where a lead party for an action is not an established body. A new lead or supporting party can offer flexibility for implementation through a Town committee or even a public/private group.

## Strategy 1: Educate

Southwick continues to educate the town’s populace and town officials on the value of our town’s natural resources. As the town continues to sustainably develop, we continue to offer opportunities for residents to learn and support stewardship endeavors of our aquifers, air, soil, open spaces, trees in public spaces, forests, working farms, water bodies and dark skies.

### Timeframe

- Immediate – 0-2 years
- Short Term – 3-5 years
- Medium Term – 6-9 years
- Long Term – 10+ years
- Ongoing – Continuing, still in progress

## Actions

1.1 Create and distribute a pamphlet to all lake front property owners explaining the provisions of the Wetlands Protection Act and Southwick Local Bylaw as they pertain to importance of maintaining or increasing vegetative buffers. This would include:

- Regulation for lakeside construction
- Emphasize and clarify that the removal of vegetation on private properties abutting the Congamond Lakes is governed by the Wetlands Protection Act
- Promote a vegetative buffer with specifically recommended native plant species for property owners to use that will help with both erosion and decrease geese visits
- Considerations that must be accounted for when removing trees
- The pamphlet would also educate on reducing use of lawn fertilizers, removing pet feces in order to reduce nutrient runoff into the lakes and improve water quality. The pamphlet would be mailed annually to all property owners on record as well as sent to all new property owners within a month of purchase by the Town Clerk’s office.

Lead Party: Conservation Commission  
Supporting Parties: Town Clerk, Planning Board, Citizens Restoring Congamond, Lake Management Committee  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 1.2 Develop a brochure to promote current areas of open space in town and update it accordingly, highlighting hiking trails and other opportunities for passive outdoor recreation, ensure placement at kiosks at all of the Town-owned properties, Town Beach, and local businesses
- Lead Party: Conservation Commission  
Support Parties: Agricultural Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, Economic Development Commission  
Timeframe Short Term
- 1.3 Mandate annual overview of Chapter 61 Protocol of Right of Refusal procedural policy for lands withdrawn from Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B to ensure all listed boards and commissions below continue to adhere to protocol and are collectively informed about relevant properties.
- Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, Agricultural Commission, Historical Commission, Community Preservation Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, Board of Assessors, Planning Board  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 1.4 Organize an annual open forum to connect with and educate landowners on the options for permanently protecting their land.
- Lead Party: Agricultural Commission  
Supporting Parties: Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Committee  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing
- 1.5 Establish protocols for communicating and working with local land trusts and other regional conservation partners to identify opportunities for support, collaboration and mutual funding regarding land conservation in Southwick.
- Lead Party: Open Space Committee  
Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Committee, Finance Committee, local land trusts  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing
- 1.6 Initiate an ongoing free program that offers workshops that train members of the public on how to certify vernal pools with the MA Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) to ensure regulatory protection under the Wetlands Protection Act and MA Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Engage student volunteers from Southwick Regional High School to assist with this effort.
- Lead Party: Conservation Commission  
Supporting Parties: Open Space Committee, Mass Wildlife/Natural Heritage, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing
- 1.7 Encourage the establishment of an environmental club at the high school to additionally educate and engage on agriculture, conservation and sustainable practices
- Lead Party: Conservation Commission  
Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission, Open Space Committee\*, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee Superintendent's Office, Select Board

Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

- 1.8 Conduct survey among high school students to determine interest in development of a curriculum that offers classes in sustainable and innovative agricultural practices, specifically STEM agriculture, and landscape design to help students develop trade skills and experience. Explore alliances with state agencies, and groups like Future Farmers of America and other high schools doing this work.

Lead Party: Superintendent's Office

Supporting Parties: Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee, Select Board, Economic Development Commission, Master Plan Implementation Committee\*, Conservation Commission, Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*

Timeframe: Short Term

- 1.9 Organize regular free workshops on innovative and regenerative agricultural practices with experts from local and regional organizations and universities and actively invite farmers and community members. Some organizations to assist include universities, Land for Good, Northeast Organic Farming Association, American Farmland Trust, among others.

Lead Party: Open Space Committee\*

Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission

Timeframe: Short Term

- 1.10 Establish a Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee that can support decision-making of other departments and boards and commissions with research and awareness of how to take climate and sustainability into account. Committee to include student members from local school district.

Lead Party: Select Board

Supporting Parties: Department of Public Works, Planning Board, Town Planner, Building Department, Board of Health, Council on Aging, Economic Development Commission, Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission, Park and Recreation Commission, Lake Management Committee, Emergency Services, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee

Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

## **Strategy 2: Maintain**

Maintain town's open space and natural resources through proper stewardship that is sustained by continued and informed governmental support, volunteer engagement opportunities and allocation of appropriate funding.

### **Actions:**

- 2.1 Increase coordination with Suffield, Connecticut to protect water quality in the Congamond Lakes by addressing issues with septic systems, erosion, and waterfowl that contribute to nutrient loading and algal blooms. The Lake Management Committee will create a presentation outlining best practices from *Open Space and Natural Resources* Action 1.1 and including the provisions of the Local Permitting Program for dock and boat registration. Southwick LMC members will be tasked with educating the citizens of Southwick and Suffield LMC members will be responsible for educating Suffield residents.

Lead Party: Lake Management Committee

Supporting Parties: Board of Health, Select Board, Conservation Commission, Lake Management Committee, Citizens Restoring Congamond, New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC)  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

- 2.2 Lake Management Committee to implement an aggressive ongoing program to reduce shoreline erosion. This program should include plans for both short-term and long-term canal dredging projects to maintain adequate water levels as well as to ensure the water quality of the lakes. This plan should be reviewed annually and submitted to the Selectboard for approval and to determine funding sources.

Lead Party: Lake Management Committee  
Supporting Parties: Conservation Commission, Select Board, DPW  
Timeframe: Ongoing

- 2.3 Work with MassDEP as well as local LPP to determine how to regulate number of motorized boats on Congamond Lake with aim to reduce chemical and noise pollution from boats and enhance on safety on the water

Lead Party: Harbormaster  
Supporting Parties: Lake Management Committee, Conservation Commission, Select Board, Police Department, Citizens Restoring Congamond, MassDEP  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 2.4 Establish a multi-community aquifer advisory committee that is inclusive of all towns that tap into the aquifer located in Southwick to regularly address drinking water quality issues and provide education about groundwater protection and adverse effects on the aquifer.

Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Conservation Commission, Water Commission, DPW, New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC), Conservation Law Foundation (CLF)  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

- 2.5 Create and implement a Dark Sky's bylaw for the town of Southwick to preserve and protect the natural darkness of the night sky within the jurisdiction of Southwick. Its aim would be to minimize light pollution, promote energy-efficient lighting practices, enhance the quality of life for residents by reducing glare, promoting astronomical observation, and protect wildlife movement.

Scope and Applicability: This bylaw applies to all outdoor lighting fixtures and installations within the jurisdiction of Southwick including but not limited to residential, commercial, industrial, and public spaces. It applies to new installations as well as retrofitting of existing lighting fixtures.

Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Economic Development Committee, DPW  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 2.6 Establish a Beautification and Wellness Commission. The mission of this commission is to assist the Town in developing and pursuing initiatives that promote the beautification through considered design standards appropriate to the scale and New England aesthetic of the region and sustainable landscaping throughout the community. The goal of this commission is to create civic pride, motivate the town's population to participate in the beautification process and enhance the betterment and wellness of the Southwick community by strategically greenscaping spaces for aesthetics, shade, temperature control and air quality.

The Commission will identify areas in need of improvement, will create programs, recruit volunteers and will secure the funding resources to achieve its goals.

Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Economic Development Commission, Historical Commission  
Timeframe: Medium Term

- 2.7 Develop a planting plan of trees along sidewalks bordering Routes 202/10 and 57 as well as gardens featuring native and pollinator plants on public properties such as Southwick Public Library, Southwick Town Hall, Prifti Park that includes feasibility, maintenance and volunteer involvement

Lead Party: Beautification and Wellness Commission\*  
Supporting Parties: Community Preservation Committee, Department of Public Works, Planning Board, Select Board, Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, and Agricultural Commission  
Timeframe: Medium Term

- 2.8 Work with the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA)'s grant program and the Beaver Institute to get funding and find methodologies that Southwick can implement to humanely and ecologically partner with local beaver populations protect and restore waterways.

Lead Party: Conservation Commission  
Support Parties: Department of Public Works, Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*, Lake Management Committee, MSPCA  
Timeframe: Short Term

### **Strategy 3: Acquire**

Southwick works to selectively and purposefully acquire new parcels of land to align with our mandate to maintain Southwick's rural character and our commitment to providing open spaces for town residents and visitors as well as the diverse and abundant wildlife that lives or traverses in our town.

### **Actions**

- 3.1 Establish a permanent Open Space Committee to focus on land preservation, passive recreation, and sustainability, and to ensure implementation of priority actions in the 2020 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)

Lead Party: Conservation Commission  
Supporting Parties: Parks and Recreation Commission, Agricultural Commission, Historical Commission, Select Board  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 3.2 Organize an annual meeting among lead and supporting parties in list below to collectively update and prioritize parcels of land that are of ecological, agricultural, scenic, or historical significance to permanently protect.

Lead Party: Open Space Committee\*  
Support Parties: Select Board, Agricultural Commission, Historical Commission, Community Preservation Committee, Parks and Recreation Commission, Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*, Beautification and Wellness Commission\*

Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

- 3.3 Establish and fund a position for a town grant writer to assist various department, boards and commissions to apply for available funding opportunities for the acquisition and maintenance of conservation and passive recreation properties.

Lead Party: Select Board

Support Parties: Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission

Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

- 3.4 Continue acquisition and promotion the wildlife corridor spanning Southwick's borders with Granby, CT, Granville, MA and Westfield, MA. Hold annual meetings with landowners along the corridor to proactively engage them regarding conservation options and land maintenance options.

Lead Party:

Support Parties: Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission, Community Preservation Committee, local private land trusts

Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

- 3.5 Continue to annually reach out to the Trust for Public Land and current landowners that abut New England Scenic Trail to proactively stay updated on the possibilities of acquiring more protected land along the trail

Lead Party: Conservation Commission

Support Parties: Agricultural Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, Select Board

Timeframe: Ongoing







# TRANSPORTATION

## VISION

Southwick promotes easy and safe connectivity between its residential communities and many attractions while protecting and enhancing the quality of life for our residents, businesses and visitors.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the transportation and mobility chapter is to provide a detailed inventory of the existing transportation system in Southwick in order to identify deficiencies in the system and develop strategies to ensure that the system meets the needs of users for the foreseeable future.

Southwick has a mix of rural, suburban and commercial uses within the town boundaries. Most commercial uses are located on Route 202 and along Route 57 to the east of Route 202. Southwick's road network consists of 90 miles of roadways of which Southwick is responsible for maintaining 82% (73.7 miles). The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) maintains 7.2 miles of roadway which includes all of Route 202 as well as a small section of Route 57 east of the Foster / North Longyard Road intersection. The remaining 9.2 miles of roadway are classified as private (3.05 miles) or unaccepted (6.17 miles).

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

This section includes an assessment of the existing conditions, including road classifications, traffic volumes, crash data, pavement conditions, bridges and culverts infrastructure, multi-modal transit, and funding options.

### *Road Classifications*

College Highway (Route 10/ 202) is the major north-south corridor through Southwick which is classified as

an Urban Principal Arterial by MassDOT. The major east-west corridor in Southwick is Feedings Hills Road / Granville Road (Route 57) which is classified as an Urban Principal Arterial. A short section of Granville Road between College Highway and Bugbee Road is classified as an Urban Principal Arterial, and the remaining section of Granville Road from Bugbee Road to the Granville Town line is classified as a Rural Minor Arterial. Other roadways that provide access to surrounding communities are Congamond Road (Route 168, an urban minor arterial), Point Grove Road (urban minor arterial) and South Longyard Road (urban collector); all of which provide access to the communities southeast of Southwick. North Longyard Road (urban minor arterial) provides access to the northeast and South Loomis Street (rural minor collector) provides access to North Granby, Connecticut. All other roads are classified as Local Roads.

Over the years, development in Southwick and surround communities has changed traffic patterns. For example, traffic on Tannery Road and Sunnyside Road (in particular truck traffic) has increased due to growth in neighboring municipalities.

### *Traffic Volumes*

PVPC has an extensive database of traffic counts collected with Automated Traffic Recorders (ATRs). Staff identified 7 locations in Southwick collected in 2021. Table 1 Average Annual Daily Traffic Volumes 2014-2023 summarizes the counts.

Table 1 – Average Annual Daily Traffic Volumes 2014-2023

| Facility                      | Location                                | Route  | 2014      | 2015      | 2016     | 2017     | 2018      | 2019     | 2020     | 2021      | 2022  |
|-------------------------------|---|--------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|-------|
| College Hw                    | N/O Tannery Rd.                         | 202    |           |           |          |          | 13,514.00 |          |          |           |       |
| College Hw.                   | @ Connecticut S.L.                      | 10/202 |           |           |          | 7,643.00 | 7,460.00  |          | 5,740.00 | 7,800.00  |       |
| College Hw.                   | S/O Tannery Rd.                         | 202    |           |           |          |          | 14,187.00 |          |          |           |       |
| Congamond Rd.                 | E/O College Hwy. (Rte. 10/202)          | 168    |           |           |          | 5,411.00 |           |          | 4,083.00 |           |       |
| Depot St.                     | E/O College Hwy. (Rte. 10/202)          | --     | 7,238.00  | 7,239.00  |          | 7,243.00 |           | 8,563.00 | 3,539.00 | 6,506.00  | 5,900 |
| Depot St.                     | Btw. Sheep Pasture Rd/ Powder Mill Rd.  | --     | 4,974.00  |           |          |          |           |          |          | 4,413.00  |       |
| Feeding Hills Rd.             | Btw. Rebecca Lobo Way / Powder Mill Rd. | 57     | 13,948.00 | 14,019.00 |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Feeding Hills Rd.             | Btw. Rebecca Lobo Way / Hudson Dr.      | 57     | 13,012.00 | 13,427.00 |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Feeding Hills Rd.             | E/O Hudson Dr.                          | 57     | 13,187.00 |           |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Feeding Hills Rd.             | W/O Foster Rd.                          | 57     | 11,203.00 |           |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Feeding Hills Rd.             | E/O Foster Rd.                          | 57     | 11,160.00 |           |          |          |           |          | 9,913.00 | 11,099.00 |       |
| Feeding Hills Rd.             | W/O Powdermill Rd.                      | 57     |           |           |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Feeding Hills Rd.             | W/O Birchwood Rd.                       | 57     | 11,365.00 |           |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Foster Rd.                    | S/O Feeding Hills Rd. (Rte. 57)         | --     | 2,694.00  | 2,697.00  |          | 2,551.00 |           | 2,905.00 | 2,342.00 |           | 2,722 |
| Fred Jackson Rd.              | S/O Granville Rd. (Rte. 57)             | --     |           | 311.00    |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Fred Jackson Rd.              | N/O Klaus Anderson Rd.                  | --     |           |           |          |          | 379.00    |          |          |           |       |
| George Loomis Rd.             | N/O Ham Hill Rd.                        | --     |           |           | 379.00   |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Granville Rd.                 | E/O Hastings Rd.                        | 57     |           | 3,153.00  |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Granville Rd.                 | W/O Kline Rd.                           | 57     |           | 3,426.00  |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Hastings Rd.                  | W/O Granville Rd. (Rte. 57)             | --     |           | 830.00    |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Hudson Dr.                    | N/O Feeding Hills Rd. (Rte. 57)         | --     | 1,597.00  |           |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Klaus Anderson Rd.            | E/O Fred Jackson Rd.                    | --     |           |           |          |          | 1,344.00  |          |          |           |       |
| Klaus Anderson Rd.            | W/O Fred Jackson Rd.                    | --     |           |           |          |          | 1,007.00  |          |          |           |       |
| Kline Rd.                     | S/O Granville Rd. (Rte. 57)             | --     |           | 545.00    |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Library Entrance              | @ Rebecca Lobo Way                      | --     |           |           |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| N Loomis Rd.                  | S/O Amberleaf Way                       | --     |           |           | 1,133.00 |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| North Entrance Tractor Supply | W/O College Hwy. (Rt. 202)              | --     |           |           |          |          | 1,084.00  |          |          |           |       |
| North Longyard Rd.            | N/O Feeding Hills Rd. (Rte. 57)         | --     | 5,479.00  |           |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Powder Mill Rd.               | N/O Depot St.                           | --     | 3,757.00  |           |          |          |           |          |          | 3,203.00  |       |
| Powdermill Rd.                | S/O Feeding Hills Rd. (Rte. 57)         | --     | 3,883.00  |           |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Rebecca Lobo Way              | Feeding Hills Rd. (Rte. 57)             | --     | 1,379.00  | 1,670.00  |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Sheep Pasture Rd.             | S/O Depot St.                           | --     | 5,562.00  |           |          |          |           |          |          | 5,551.00  |       |
| South Entrance Tractor Supply | W/O College Hwy. (Rt. 202)              | --     |           |           |          |          | 803.00    |          |          |           |       |
| South Longyard Rd.            | S/O Depot St.                           | --     | 2,492.00  |           | 2,573.00 |          | 2,899.00  |          |          | 2,383.00  |       |
| South Loomis St.              | S/O Granville Rd. (Rte. 57)             | --     |           | 747.00    |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Southwick Rail Trail          | @ Congamond Rd.                         | --     |           |           |          |          |           |          |          |           |       |
| Tannery Rd.                   | E/O College Hwy. (Rt. 202)              | --     |           |           |          |          | 1,643.00  |          |          |           |       |

Data in the table has been factored to represent the Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) for all locations.

As can be seen in the traffic volume table, the AADT's have remained relatively stable over the past 10 years. The exception was data collected in 2020, as the data for 2020 showed a significant reduction in volume due to the COVID lockdown. For the most part, volumes have returned to the pre-COVID levels.

*Pavement*

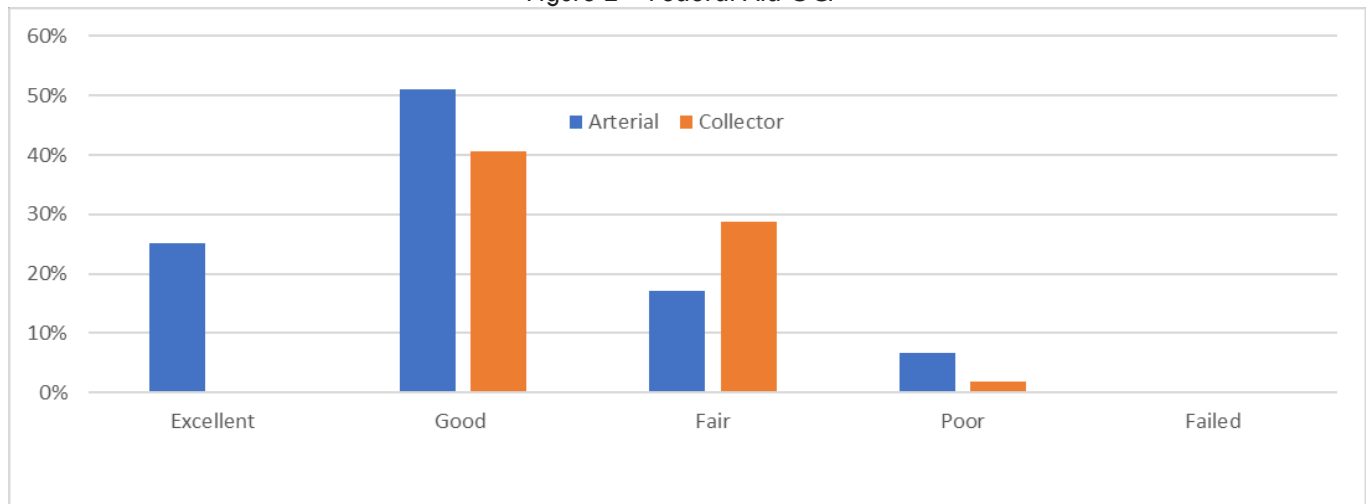
Pavement inventory and distress data was collected for all Federal Aid roadways in Southwick in the Spring of 2023 and analyzed using Cartegraph software. The data was used to calculate the Overall Condition Index (OCI) which measures the serviceability of the road on a scale from 0 – 100. The table below describes the OCI ranges based on roadway classification.

Figure 1 – Roadway Condition Index Ranges

|                             | <b><u>Excellent</u></b> | <b><u>Good</u></b> | <b><u>Fair</u></b> | <b><u>Poor</u></b> | <b><u>Failed</u></b> |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Arterial</b>             | >89.5                   | >69.5 and =<89.5   | >48.5 and =<69.5   | >26.5 and =<48.5   | <=26.5               |
| <b>Collector</b>            | >88.5                   | >68.5 and =<88.5   | >47.5 and =<68.5   | >24.5 and =<47.5   | <=24.5               |
| <b>Residential Through</b>  | >87.5                   | >67.5 and =<87.5   | >46.5 and =<67.5   | >23.5 and =<46.5   | <=23.5               |
| <b>Residential Dead End</b> | >84.5                   | >64.5 and =<84.5   | >43.5 and =<64.5   | >20.5 and =<43.5   | <=20.5               |

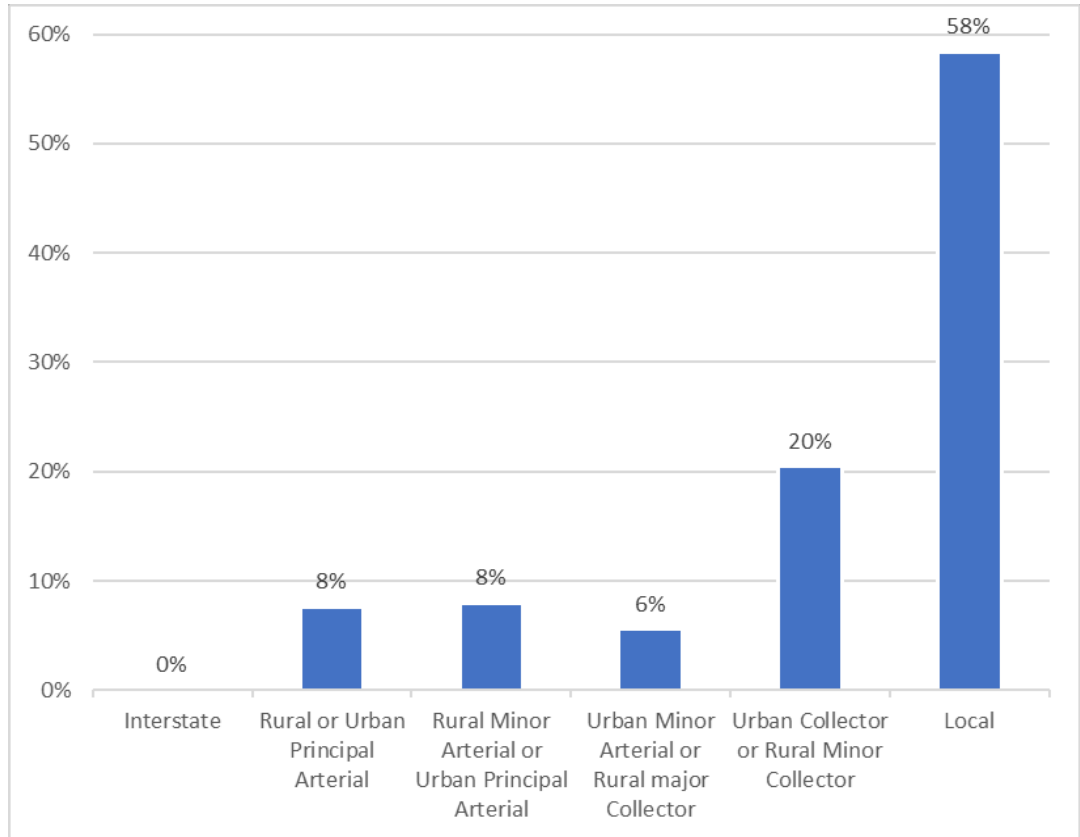
An “Excellent” pavement condition indicates roadway segments where no improvements are warranted. “Good” pavement conditions only require preventive maintenance treatments such as crack sealing. A “Fair” pavement condition is indicated that require more substantial improvements such as resurfacing to improve the roadway. A “Failed” pavement condition will likely require the complete reconstruction of the roadway. The overall condition indices for different segments of roadways are summarized in the graph below.

Figure 2 – Federal Aid OCI



As can be seen in the Figure 2, the majority (92%) of the Federal Aid system is rated “Fair” or better in Southwick. Local roads make up 58% (52.6 miles) of all roads in Southwick, as depicted in Figure 3. Additionally, Hillside Road, North and South Loomis Streets, and Vining Hill Road – comprising an estimated 10+ miles of rural minor collector – are not Federal Aid-eligible and therefore have not been included in the pavement analysis. Generally speaking, the OCI for local roads falls below that of the Federal Aid system due to the high percentage of roadway miles and the limited amount of resource available to make improvements.

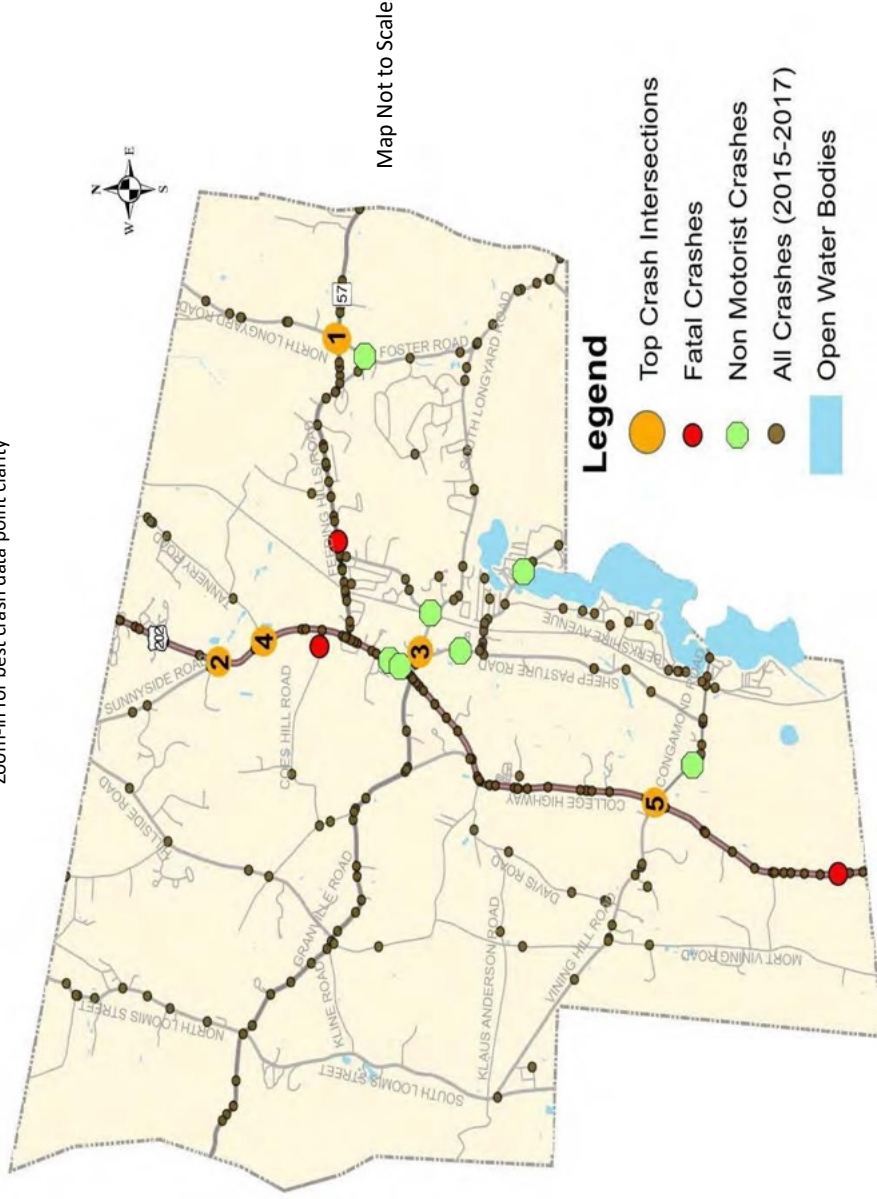
Figure 3 – Roadway Miles by Functional Classification (%)



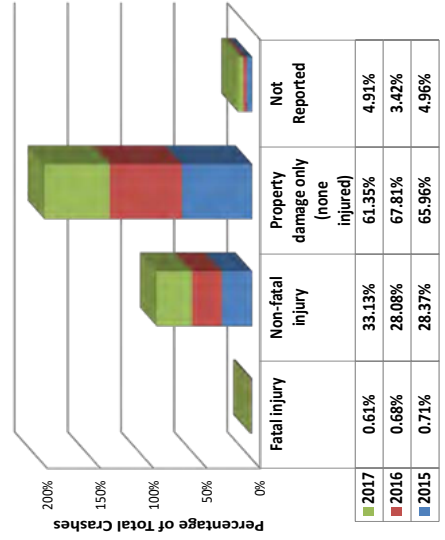
### Crash Experience

PVPC completes the [Pioneer Valley Safety Compass](#) triennially. The Safety Compass summarized the crash trends over a 3 year period for each municipality in the Pioneer Valley.

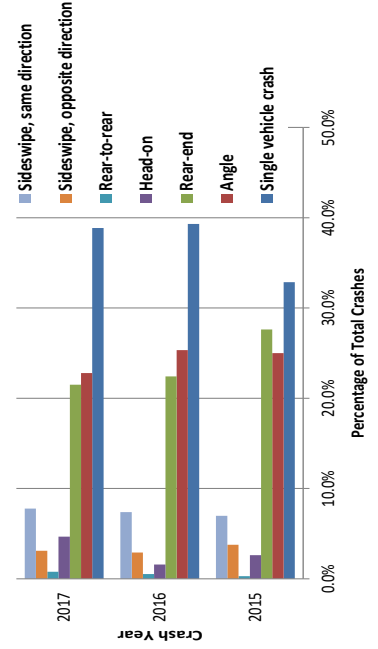
Zoom-in for best crash data point clarity



**Crash Severity**



**Manner of Collision**



**ANNUAL CRASHES**

2015 – 141

2016 – 146

2017 – 163

**ANNUAL CRASHES PER 1000 POPULATION (Census 2019) 15.40**

**TOTAL FATAL CRASHES - 3**

**TOTAL NON-MOTORIST CRASHES - 8**

**TOP CRASH INTERSECTIONS**

1. Feeding Hills Road (Route 57), North Longyard Road, and Foster Road (Crashes 8, EPDO\* 88)

2. College Highway (Route 202 and Route 10) and Sunnyside Road (Crashes 11, EPDO\* 71)

3. Depot Street and Sheep Pasture Road (Crashes 8, EPDO\* 68)

4. College Highway (Route 202 and Route 10) and Tannery Road (Crashes 7, EPDO\* 67)

5. College Highway (Route 202 and Route 10), Congamond Road (Route 168), and Vining Hill Road (Crashes 6, EPDO\* 66)

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

## KEY FINDINGS

- A total of 8 non-motorist crashes were recorded in Southwick between 2015 and 2017.
- One fatal crash was recorded each year of the analysis period in Southwick.
- The majority of collisions were single vehicle crashes which resulted in property damage only and no injuries.
- More than 8% of crashes in the Town occurred when motor vehicles collided with utility poles.

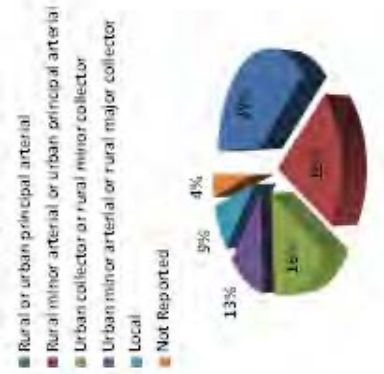
## FIRST HARMFUL EVENT SUMMARY

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Collision with motor vehicle in traffic               | 241 |
| Collision with utility pole                           | 37  |
| Collision with parked motor vehicle                   | 28  |
| Collision with animal                                 | 26  |
| Collision with tree                                   | 25  |
| Collision with guardrail                              | 19  |
| Collision with unknown fixed object                   | 14  |
| Collision with other movable object                   | 9   |
| Collision with other                                  | 8   |
| Collision with other light pole or other post/support | 8   |
| Collision with non-motorist                           | 8   |
| Collision with ditch                                  | 7   |
| Overturn/rollover                                     | 6   |
| Collision with curb                                   | 4   |
| Unknown   | 4   |
| Collision with embankment                             | 3   |

## DRIVER CONTRIBUTION CODES FOR ALL DRIVERS

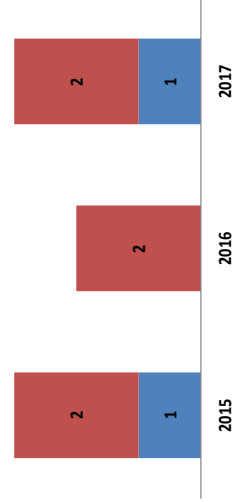
|  |     |
|--|-----|
| No improper driving  | 411 |
| Unknown  | 92  |
| Failure to keep in proper lane or running off road                     | 55  |
| Distracted or inattention  | 51  |
| Failed to yield right of way   | 46  |
| Operating vehicle in erratic, careless, negligent or aggressive manner | 36  |
| Driving too fast for conditions or exceeded speed limit                | 26  |
| Followed too closely   | 23  |
| Other improper action  | 18  |
| Emotional or illness   | 11  |
| Wrong side or wrong way  | 10  |
| Fatigued/asleep  | 9   |
| Glare  | 8   |
| Visibility obstructed  | 7   |
| Made an improper turn  | 6   |
| Over-correcting/over-steering  | 6   |
| Swerving or avoiding due to wind, object, non-motorist, etc.           | 6   |
| Disregarded traffic signs, signals, road markings                      | 2   |
| Operating defective equipment  | 1   |

## Roadway Classification



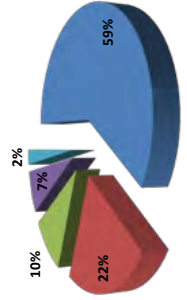
## Non-motorist Crashes by Type and Year

■ Cyclist ■ Pedestrian



## Location of Crashes

■ Not at junction ■ T-intersection ■ Driveaway ■ Y-intersection ■ Four-way intersection



As can be seen in the Safety Compass, 450 crashes were reported from 2015-2017 in Southwick. Eight of the crashes were non-motorist crashes. Three fatalities (1 each year) were reported. The top crash intersection was Feeding Hills Road at North Longyard Road / Foster Road. This location was reconstructed as part of a MassDOT project (603477) as funded through the [2016 Pioneer Valley Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\)](#). Construction was completed in 2017. It is anticipated that this location will show a significant reduction in crashes in the next version of the Safety Compass. It should be noted that 3 of the top 5 top crash locations are along College Highway (Route 10/202) which is maintained by MassDOT and outside of the Town's jurisdiction.

*Bridge and Culverts*

According to MassDOT, there are 23 bridge and culvert structures in Southwick, four of which meet the minimum 20-foot length eligibility for Federal Aid. Thirteen bridges, four culverts, and 2 bikeway structures are defined as Short Span (less than 20 feet in length). In addition, there are dozens of local, small scale culverts that range from simple balance pipes between low areas to culvers managing flows at perennial and intermittent streams.

All bridges and culverts throughout the state undergo routine structural inspection. Of the 17 bridges in Southwick, 4 are classified as being in good condition, 11 are classified as fair, and 1 is unclassified. Currently there are no structures classified as structurally deficient in Southwick. A 'structurally deficient bridge' is defined as a bridge with at least one major weight-bearing component that has serious problems and is in need of repair or replacement.

Table 2 – Federal Aid Eligible Bridge Inventory

| Facility Carried   | Owner | Structurally Deficient | Posted          | Structure Category | Feature Intersected   | Year Built |
|--------------------|-------|------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| HWY N LOOMIS ST    | MUN   | NO                     | Posted For Load | Bridge (NBI)       | WATER MUNN BROOK      | 1956       |
| US202 /ST10/COLLGE | DOT   | NO                     | Open            | Bridge (NBI)       | WATER JOHNSON BROOK   | 2012       |
| ST 57 FDNG HILS RD | DOT   | NO                     | Open            | Bridge (NBI)       | WATER GREAT BROOK     | 1956       |
| HWY N LOOMIS ST    | MUN   | NO                     | Open            | Bridge (NBI)       | WATER SHURTLEFF BROOK | 2018       |

Table 3 – Short Span Bridge Inventory

| Facility Carried   | Owner | Structurally Deficient | Posted | Structure Category | Feature Intersected    | Year Built | Year Reconstructed |
|--------------------|-------|------------------------|--------|--------------------|------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| HWY SHEEP PASTUR   | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER GREAT BROOK      | 1940       | 0                  |
| HWY POINT GROVE    | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | OTHER RAIL TRAIL       | 2009       | 0                  |
| ST 57 GRANVILLE RD | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER TUTTLE BROOK     | 1934       | 0                  |
| US202 /ST10/COLLGE | DOT   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER GREAT BROOK TRIB | 1922       | 2019 <sup>U</sup>  |
| ST 57 GRANVILLE RD | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER SHURTLEFF BROOK  | 1955       | 0                  |
| HWY S LONGYRD RD   | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER GREAT BROOK      | 1932       | 2009               |
| ST168 CONGAMOND RD | DOT   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER CONGAMOND LAKE   | 2007       | 0                  |
| HWY KLAUS ANDRSN   | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER TUTTLE BROOK     | 1955       | 0                  |
| ST 57 GRANVILLE RD | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER GREAT BROOK TRIB | 1955       | 0                  |
| HWY PNT GROVE RD   | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER CONGAMOND LAKE   | 2000       | 0                  |
| HWY BERKSHIRE AV   | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER GREAT BROOK      | 1956       | 0                  |
| HWY S LOOMIS ST    | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER UNNAMED BROOK    | 1990       | 0                  |
| HWY KLAUS ANDRSN   | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Short Span Bridge  | WATER JOHNSON BROOK    | 2022       | 0                  |



Figure 4 – Culvert Inventory

| Facility Carried   | Owner | Structurally Deficient | Posted | Structure Category | Feature Intersected    | Year Built | Year Reconstructed |
|--------------------|-------|------------------------|--------|--------------------|------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| OTHER RAIL TRAIL   | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Bikeway            | OTHER ABNDND BOYCE RD  | 2009       | 0                  |
| US202 /ST10/COLLGE | DOT   | NO                     | Open   | Culvert            | WATER PEARL BROOK      | 1850       | 1922               |
| US202 /ST10/COLLGE | DOT   | NO                     | Open   | Culvert            | WATER KELLOG BROOK     | 1850       | 1935               |
| HWY S LONGYRD RD   | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Culvert            | WATER CANAL            | 1932       | 0                  |
| ST 57 FDNG HILS RD | DOT   | NO                     |        | Culvert            | WATER GREAT BROOK TRIB | 0          | 0                  |
| OTHER RAIL TRAIL   | MUN   | NO                     | Open   | Bikeway            | WATER GREAT BROOK      | 1850       | 0                  |

Identifying funding for improvements to short span bridges and culverts can be challenging if the structure is not included as part of a larger federal aid eligible project. The MassDOT [Municipal Small Bridge Program](#) and [DER's Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant Program](#) are two options available to municipalities.

*Transit*

Southwick is a member of the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA). FRTA does not operate fixed route service in Southwick; rather, FRTA provides [demand response service](#) for those meeting certain eligibility requirements. The demand response service is intended to assist eligible users in getting to medical appointments and the grocery store. Operating hours vary by municipality, and additional information can be found on the [FRTA website](#).

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) provides fixed route service to many communities in Hampden County, including the City of Westfield and the Town of Agawam. The potential exists to add service (fixed route or micro-transit) connecting Southwick with existing service in the neighboring communities.

*Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities*

In 2021, MassDOT released updates to [The Statewide Bicycle Plan](#) and [The Statewide Pedestrian Plan](#). These plans include guides introducing Cities and Towns to core concepts as well as provide additional resources to improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The objective of these plans is to improve safety, reduce fatalities, and increase the use of non-motorized modes of transportation for short trips.

*Sidewalks*

Southwick maintains approximately 15 miles of sidewalks on Town roads (not including College Highway which is State-owned). Congamond Road, Depot Street, Feeding Hills Road, and Granville Road

are the only Arterial and Collector streets that have sidewalks. All other sidewalks are on local roads.

Some of the sidewalks, in particular those on local roads, end without connecting to other sidewalk networks.

Current subdivision regulations require sidewalks to be installed on both sides of new roads unless a waiver is granted by the Planning Board. Recent practice has been to waive sidewalks on one side of the street.

*Bike Lanes*

Southwick does not have designated bike lanes at this time. All roadways lack paved shoulders and pavement markings to accommodate bike lanes. Only a few private businesses have bike racks outside their facility to accommodate bicycle-riding patrons.

*Shared Use Paths and Trails*

The Southwick Rail Trail is a 6-plus- mile multi-use trail bisecting Southwick north-to-south and connecting northerly to the Columbia Greenway and southerly to the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. According to a survey completed by PVPC in the Spring of 2021, over 120,000 users (Westfield / Southwick Line) utilized the trail between January and October of 2020. Completion of the center section of the Columbia Greenway Trail in Westfield was completed in the Summer of 2023, providing access to multiple neighborhoods that currently have limited access to the trail system. This is expected to increase the volume of users on the Southwick Rail Trail as well.

The only available parking to access the Rail Trail is parking along Miller Road which has approximately 30 vehicles. It is not uncommon for the entire parking lot to be completely filled, in particular on weekends and holidays. Residents have created makeshift parking spaces at other locations, such as the intersection of Depot Street and Powder Mill Road and an agriculture field on Feeding Hills Road, but those were done on private property and without the owner's permission.

## TRENDS

### *Focus on Public Transportation*

In an effort to be less reliant on fossil fuel, many communities are identifying ways to increase public transportation services to communities. Introducing new bus routes aims to enhance accessibility, especially for youth and older (over the age of 65) persons who are not driving or choose not to drive any longer. Looking at new opportunities for alternative transportation options can also lead to a reduction of traffic congestion.

### *Bike and Pedestrian-Friendly Transportation Systems and Initiatives*

The Pioneer Valley has been growing their bike and pedestrian infrastructure, with ValleyBike being an opportunity for growth in the region. Numerous communities are identifying locations with bike share stations, expanding bike lanes through Complete Streets, and building upon sidewalk infrastructure where possible.

### *Electric Vehicles*

According to February 2023 report from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the market for electric vehicles (EVs) has grown rapidly in recent years and is expected to continue to grow at a fast pace over the coming decade.

The industry-wide change seen in the transportation world with the expansion of the electric vehicle segment – both for individual passenger vehicles and commercial vehicles – lend confidence that the use of electric vehicles will be a persistent and growing

presence in future years. There are no EV charging stations accessible for public use at any location (public or private) in Southwick. The Town can welcome this opportunity through the revision and/or elimination of regulatory barriers to necessary infrastructure and through the targeted promotion of such installations.

### *Ridesharing*

Platforms for ridesharing, such as Uber and Lyft, have grown as an alternative means to manage transportation convenience, costs, and needs through the online coordination between individual providers – whether co-commuters or private contractors – to arrange for rides typically in a privately-owned vehicle. The direct benefits to ridesharing can be seen in reduced fuel usage, parking fees, and traffic congestion, but the services can also help maintain mobility for those who cannot or choose not to drive.

## FUNDING

The Town of Southwick maintains and improves its road network and infrastructure primarily through local appropriations and Chapter 90 funds. The town also periodically secures funds through state and federal agencies. In recent years, funds for special projects have been secured from State and Federal programs such as EOEEA Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP), MassDevelopment Site Readiness, MassDOT Small Bridge Program, DER Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance, and Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) Community Grants.

Southwick has not benefited from the [MassDOT Complete Streets program](#). A Complete Street is one that provides safe and accessible options for all travel modes – walking, biking, transit, and motorized vehicles – and for people of all ages and abilities. Municipalities that choose to participate are eligible to receive funding for technical assistance to analyze their community needs and develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, and funding for construction of Complete Streets infrastructure projects.

Southwick has also not benefited from the [Safe Routes to School](#) program. Safe Routes to School aims to make it safer and easier for students to walk and bike to school. Communities that participate in Safe Routes to School are eligible to receive funding for

infrastructure improvements that promote alternative means to access school, such as sidewalks and bike lanes.

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### *Complete Streets Program*

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

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

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

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) recognizes the importance of supporting projects that provide context-sensitive, multimodal transportation options on appropriate roadways. In 2013, MassDOT issued its own Healthy Transportation Policy Directive to ensure that all MassDOT projects are designed and implemented in a way that all of their customers have access to safe and comfortable healthy transportation options at all MassDOT facilities and in all the services they provide.

MassDOT also recognizes the importance of supporting Complete Streets on local roads for the benefits they provide and to assist in closing critical gaps in transportation networks. MassDOT initiated the Complete Streets Funding Program to further the development of Complete Streets on local roads across the Commonwealth. MassDOT provides a Complete Streets Funding Program Guidance document, describing the full requirements of the program, including guidance on best practices in Complete Streets Policy development and implementation. The reward for municipalities that choose to participate is funding for technical assistance to analyze their community needs and develop a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, and funding for construction of Complete Streets infrastructure projects.

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

### *Safe Routes to School Program*

The Massachusetts [Safe Routes to School](#) (SRTS) Program is a free, federally-funded initiative of MassDOT that aims to increase safe biking and walking among elementary and middle school students by using a collaborative, community-focused approach that bridges the gap between health and transportation. The program is implemented through the “Six E’s” – Education, Encouragement, Engagement, Evaluation, Engineering, and Equity with the goal of creating a “sustainable cultural shift.” Program coordinators collaborate with partnered schools and community organizations for technical assistance and community events.

### *Increased Southwick Rail Trail Usage*

The Southwick Rail Trail sees a level of weekend and holiday usage that frequently exceeds the available capacity of existing parking areas and access points. Future efforts focused on the analysis, design, and implementation – including funds for takings, as needed – of new and/or improved access points with off-street parking could allow this community-wide recreational resource with regional connections to be more effectively utilized.

# STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Some committees are discussed in these strategies and actions and have yet to be formed officially. Any item marked with an asterisk (\*) in this section represents “a suggested future Committee or an equivalent” where a lead party for an action is not an established body. A new lead or supporting party can offer flexibility for implementation through a Town committee or even a public/private group.

## Strategy 1

Continue to provide and invest in a complete and well-maintained, safe system of roads, parking areas, sidewalks, and bridges/culverts.

### Timeframe

Immediate – 0-2 years  
 Short Term – 3-5 years  
 Medium Term – 6-9 years  
 Long Term – 10+ years  
 Ongoing – Continuing, still in progress

## Actions

- 1.1 Become a Complete Street community and identify locations to provide multi-modal transportation (bike lanes, sidewalks, shared use spaces, etc.).

Lead Party: Department of Public Works  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, MassDOT, PVPC  
Timeframe: Medium Term

- 1.2 Add parking and additional access points to the Southwick Rail Trail, in particular on Powder Mill Road, Feeding Hills Road, and Sam West Road.

Lead Party: Park and Recreation Commission  
Supporting Parties: DPW, Select Board, Friends of the Rail Trail, PVPC  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 1.3 Implement safety improvements at Top Crash Intersections identified in the Safety Compass.

Lead Party: Police Department  
Support Parties: DPW, MassDOT  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

- 1.4 Review MassDOT Road Designations and coordinate updates with MassDOT to provide consistency with actual conditions and proposed Master Plan recommendations.

Lead Party: DPW  
Supporting Parties: Select Board  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 1.5 Promote installation of electric vehicle charging stations, such as on Town properties or through Bylaw updates.

Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Building and Grounds Department, Select Board  
Timeframe: Short Term

## **Strategy 2**

Create safe and improved non-motorized transportation opportunities and provide additional transit options within Southwick and between the town and important regional destinations.

### **Actions**

- 2.1 Identify gaps in the sidewalk network and prioritize projects to fill gaps while updating the current network to meet ADA standards. Add benches in areas where spacing allows.

Lead Party: DPW  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, MassDOT, PVPC  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 2.2 Work with the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) to identify opportunities to add fixed route service and/or the cost and feasibility of implementing Microtransit (an on-demand, software-based transportation requesting and routing service called Access by the Franklin Regional Transportation Agency, a service provider) in Southwick. Consider requesting a town-wide transit survey to identify the demand for expanded transit service and the demand for connections to local colleges and universities, hospitals and health centers, employers and connections to other transit providers.

Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: PVTA, PVPC, Franklin Regional Transportation Authority  
Timeframe: Long Term

- 2.3 Participate in the Massachusetts [Safe Routes to School](#) (SRTS) program in order to improve non-motorized access to the schools.

Lead Party: School District  
Supporting Parties: Police Department, DPW  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 2.4 Create a walkable network by expanding the Rail Trail system and connecting trails to open spaces and sidewalks where feasible.

Lead Party: Park and Recreation Commission  
Supporting Parties: DPW, Open Space Committee\*, Conservation Commission  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 2.5 Promote installation of bicycle stations/bike racks, such as on Town properties or through Bylaw updates.

Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Buildings and Grounds Department, Select Board  
Timeframe: Short Term

2.6 As ridesharing services become available in Southwick, consider the opportunity to educate residents on ridesharing safety and app usage.

Lead Party: Council on Aging  
Supporting Parties: Police Department  
Timeframe: Short Term







# PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES



## VISION

Southwick provides an enhanced quality of life for its residents by creatively and proactively addressing, maintaining, and upgrading services and infrastructure using sustainable methods, and makes strategic investments to keep up with changes in the community to uphold its commitment to Southwick's betterment, wellness, technology, and high-quality education while remaining affordable to residents and taxpayers.

## INTRODUCTION

The Public Services and Facilities element of a master plan helps guide decisions and develop a plan relevant to public buildings, utilities and resilient infrastructure in order to meet future needs for the community. Police, fire and public works, along with the infrastructure that is necessary for these services and awareness of energy challenges and climate change are vital for the Town to function properly and sustainably. Likewise, local decisions about how and what public services and facilities are funded and built will be critical in determining the direction the Town takes in future development, betterment, and continued governance.

Southwick provides many public services to its residents. With that said, the Town's ability to provide high-quality public facilities and services requires both short- and long-term planning. The Town's ability to provide adequate facilities depends on effective capital planning and a commitment to implementation by the Town, asset management policies, and the revenues for the Town to use to support those operations and maintenance requirements. Southwick receives little funding from non-local sources and relies on its residents and businesses for financial support, in addition to grants that the Town would need to administer.

### Some Key Findings:

- Generally, residents are satisfied with the level of public services they receive from the Town.
- The Town takes advantage of state programs that exist to help fund building and infrastructure improvements in Southwick, like the *Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness* program which helps Towns plan for and implement resiliency projects that respond to climate change risks. One of the recommendations from this plan suggested the Town complete the work to become a *Green Communities* designated-community that will help fund energy efficiency upgrades to municipal buildings, taking better advantage of cost savings even as DPW and facility managers have identified where they can be efficient. In August 2023, the Town officially became a certified Green Community.
- Southwick has an aging population that is made up of 22% of the current population and is

overwhelmingly interested in aging in place. Public services and facilities will need to be expanded and adjusted to meet the needs of this demographic.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

### INFRASTRUCTURE

#### *Public Water*

Most of the Town's population East of Routes 10/202 and a very small portion of the Town West of Routes 10/202 are supplied by the municipal water system. The Southwick Water Department operates two wells that draw from the Great Brook Aquifer. The cities of West Springfield and Westfield also have municipal wells that draw from the Great Brook Aquifer and share the Zone II aquifer recharge area. The Town's Water Withdrawal Permit caps the withdrawals 1.02 million gallons per day and 266.45 million gallons per year. Water is purchased from Springfield Water & Sewer to supplement the Town's supply during times of high demand. The Water supply infrastructure is all supported by back-up power, although some infrastructure is located in low-lying and potentially flood-prone areas. In recent years, the water department has constructed two 1 million gallon storage tanks (2014 and 2016), installed a new water meter reading system (2017), replaced section of the water main on College Highway (2020 and 2022), and constructed the Jarry Drive Pump Station to replace the College Highway Pump Station (2021).

Most of the western section of Southwick relies on private wells. A few homes on the west side of the Town draw on a small aquifer at the base of Drake and Sodom Mountains (Loomis Ridge Aquifer), located in the Munn Brook Valley. In 1996 the water main on College Highway was replaced with a larger line, with an extension on Depot Street being constructed in 1997.

#### *Sewage Systems*

A limited section of Town is served by the sanitary sewer system in Southwick. The majority of the sewer system that was installed in 2004 primarily covers the center of Town and the lakes area. This system moves towards addressing the age-old problems of septic system failure. This is especially true along the more densely populated Congamond Lakes where nutrient loading from septic systems contributed to an increase in eutrophication and other environmental problems. Otherwise, most homes, businesses, and industries still

provide and depend upon individual septic systems. Septic systems and other means of on-site sewage disposal are regulated by the Southwick Board of Health under Title 5 of the Massachusetts Environmental Code. Because much of the Town's sewer system was installed in the early 2000's, there are limited issues with infiltration and inflow in the pipe network.

**Dams**

According to the 2016 Hazard Mitigation Plan, there are 13 dams in Southwick. Of these, only the Dr. Logie Dam on Shurtleff Brook is regulated by the Office of Dam Safety.

Southwick depends on several significant dams or other water-control devices throughout Town. At the southern end of Congamond Lakes, a system of batter boards is utilized to manage the water level in the lake. At the northern end, a large dam and embankment prevents a potential breach. In addition, the Town is somewhat susceptible to high hazard dams in neighboring towns, such as Cobble Mountain Reservoir in Granville and the Granville Reservoir.

The overall location of occurrence for a dam failure in Southwick is considered "small," with less than 10 percent of land area affected.

establishing a Municipal Light Plant, and the 2023 Annual Town Meeting approved a \$3 million bond issue to fund

Figure 1 Southwick Dams, classified by Hazard Risk

| Dam                                     | Hazard Risk | Condition | Year Completed | Owner                   |
|---|-------------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Ahrens Pond Dam                         | N/A         | N/A       | Unknown        | Private - Unknown       |
| Basil Tysz Dam                          | N/A         | N/A       | Unknown        | Private - Unknown       |
| Cigar Pond Dam #1 (Lower)               | N/A         | N/A       | Unknown        | Private - Unknown       |
| Cigar Pond Dam #2 (Upper)               | N/A         | N/A       | Unknown        | Private - Unknown       |
| Congamond Lake Outlet - Middle Pond Dam | N/A         | N/A       | Unknown        | Town of Southwick       |
| Congamond Lakes South Dike              | N/A         | N/A       | 1900           | Town of Southwick DPO   |
| Congamond Lakes North Dike              | N/A         | N/A       | 1956           | ConCom                  |
| Dr. Logie Pond Dam                      | Significant | Poor*     | 1955           | Private - Unknown       |
| Hathaway & Steane Farm Pond Dam         | N/A         | N/A       |                | Whalley Properties Inc. |
| Hathaway & Steane Pond Dam #1           | N/A         | N/A       |                | Whalley Properties Inc. |
| Hathaway & Steane Pond Dam #2**         | N/A         | N/A       |                | Whalley Properties Inc. |
| Sackett District Reservoir Dam          | N/A         | N/A       | 1898           | City of Westfield       |
| Unnamed Dam Below Cigar Dam #1          | N/A         | N/A       |                | Unknown                 |

\* Most recent inspection May 25, 2012. \*\*Impoundment drained and no longer regulated.  
Source: Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) updated 2013

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

**MUNICIPAL SERVICES & FACILITIES**

An inventory and of the various municipal services and facilities, including Town Administration, can be found in the Appendix.

The community survey indicates general satisfaction with the majority of town services.

The failure of a low hazard dam should cause little if any personal injury and is not anticipated to affect a significant amount of the land area in Southwick.

**Telecommunications/IT**

Currently, Southwick has moderate broadband internet coverage with seven internet providers. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of survey respondents reported that it is "very important" for wireless and fiber infrastructure should be provided to townspeople in the next 20 years. The Select Board allocated \$900,000 of ARPA funds to startup a municipal fiber project, including

## TRENDS

### *Diversity in Schools*

In the Trends document that was prepared prior to engaging the master plan process, it was identified in the document that the US census projects that the nation will become “minority white” due to increases in minority populations. This trickles down to school populations as families settle around the country. Southwick is currently below the MA average public school diversity percentage of 0.59, sitting at 0.15.

### *Increases in Impervious Surfaces*

With additional development, the town should be aware that there will be an increase in impervious surfaces. These are created through the construction of roads, buildings, houses, and other structures. Impervious surfaces lead to heightened erosion, flooding, polluted water, and increased stormwater runoff, all of which could increase with changes in climate and more extreme weather events.

Identifying the impacts and looking at how the town government can ensure that minimal disruption to the natural resources occurs is important. Some of the considerations include impacts to lake recreation and drinking water, whether there are more sustainable infrastructure opportunities, and how important and strong are the stormwater management policies in place.

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### *Areas of Concern*

#### **Department of Public Works, 454 College Highway**

The Department of Public Works (DPW) is responsible for the storm sewer system which can be overtaxed when a storm event hits. The Town is subject to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Municipal Small Storm Sewer System (MS4) regulations, which regulates and manages stormwater runoff for pollution and erosion control. The town continues to explore and understand, in accordance with its Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings in 2018, its ability as a community to integrate the use of Low Impact Development (LID), green infrastructure (GI), nature-based solutions and techniques within town

practices and bylaws that govern development and maintenance.

The transportation infrastructure that DPW continues to maintain includes undersized culverts and storm sewer systems that have contributed to local flooding. As precipitation events become more intense and less predictable, undersized culverts are expected to pose a greater threat of failure and flooding. For example, undersized structures located on Kline Road, Industrial Road, and Davis Road are known areas of specific concern.

The Town's summary of findings from the Community Resilience Building Workshop included a high priority of assessing where cost-effective green infrastructure can be installed without having to conduct expensive culvert replacement and resizing projects.

The Master Plan community survey received free response comments stating that roads were important for the general development goals of the Town and improving the roads and sidewalks of the town is very important. Roads, sidewalk, and culvert/bridge maintenance is addressed in the *Transportation and Mobility* element of this Plan.

### *Services for Current and Future Needs*

Despite the challenges of town government and tight budgets, like every community navigating limited budgets, Southwick is meeting local needs pertaining to public services and infrastructure. New needs have emerged however, including the exploration for an intergenerational community center as well as improvements that have been identified in the town's *Municipal Building Conditions Assessment Report* such as accessibility and safety features for those persons with disabilities.

### *Maintaining the Master Plan*

The Southwick Master Plan, when adopted by the Planning Board, should be maintained over time. A master plan is designed as a blueprint and will evolve over time as recommendations are implemented and conditions change in the town. A resilient Master Plan Implementation Committee should be formed to oversee implementation of the plan, and engage boards, committees, and town staff, and oversee evaluation and success using the metrics identified in the plan. The town should celebrate implementation as the actions are achieved.

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

According to the community survey, 78.1 percent of the respondents found that alternative energy sources were somewhat or very important as services that the Town can help residents navigate in the next twenty years. Opportunities for production of more electricity from solar, wind, or hydro, an issue that needs attention. As the Town prioritizes energy efficiency, the additionally necessary steps of reducing carbon emissions, responding to the impacts of climate change, and assessing the benefits of having *Green Community* designation will help Southwick become a more resilient, healthy, adaptive and sustainable community in the long term. In turn, this will make it easier and less costly for energy efficiency improvements in municipal buildings and can also be used to advance clean energy infrastructure such as solar, wind and hydro-power. New development should support adaptation to anticipated climatic changes and should align with statewide and regional goals towards reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

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

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

Southwick developed a Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) in 2016 with assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. This plan is currently being updated and is expected to be completed in late 2023.

Recognizing that climate change will continue to exacerbate the threats and hazards Massachusetts communities face, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) created the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant program. As a certified community, Southwick can receive funding for various resiliency projects through action grants.

### *Community Resilience*

Community services and facilities play an important role in the Town's ability to respond to challenges and disasters.

- The siting of future Town-owned facilities plays a role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles, especially if located in a walkable or easily accessible neighborhood where the visitors do not have to rely on a vehicle to get there.
- *Green Communities* designation will bring funding to continue Southwick on the path of retrofitting facilities with energy efficient lighting, appliances, heating and cooling systems, etc. to reduce power consumption.
- Community facilities can also be used to generate power. This includes solar canopies over parking lots, or solar installations on flat roofs, which the town continues to permit.
- The Town could incorporate healthy community policies around transportation, energy, and healthy eating as a way to set an example to residents and increase awareness.
- Inclusiveness, transparency, and encouraging involvement in town government helps to build trust and common bonds across residents.
- Creating a means of regular electronic communication from Town Hall about municipal updates, health and safety, and relevant local events and resources would further build trust and cohesion between Town residents, taxpayers, and Town government

# STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Some committees are discussed in these strategies and actions and have yet to be formed officially. Any item marked with an asterisk (\*) in this section represents “a suggested future Committee or an equivalent” where a lead party for an action is not an established body. A new lead or supporting party can offer flexibility for implementation through a Town committee or even a public/private group.

## Strategy 1

Continue providing efficient, affordable, engaging, and sustainable Town services and community facilities through:

- Ensuring the Town’s departments are sufficiently-staffed, equipped, enabled to communicate and apprised with updates and information
- Preparing the town-wide infrastructure for new future technologies, growth and climate resiliency
- Distribution, consideration and implementation of the Master Plan across Town Hall and amongst residents and taxpayers

**Timeframe**  
 Immediate – 0-2 years  
 Short Term – 3-5 years  
 Medium Term – 6-9 years  
 Long Term – 10+ years  
 Ongoing – Continuing, still in progress

## Actions

1.1 Establish and fund a position for a town grant writer to assist various departments, boards and commissions to apply for available funding opportunities, including for infrastructure, maintenance, historical preservation, land conservation, business development, environmental protection, recreational opportunities, town beautification and climate/sustainability preparedness.

Lead Party: Chief Administrative Officer  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, DPW, Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission, Lake Management Committee, Park and Recreation, Historical Commission, Economic Development Commission, Board of Health  
Timeframe: Medium Term

1.2 Compile an updated Building Needs Assessments for all town facilities, including evaluation of carbon footprint of each building in terms of energy usage, determination of whether renewable energy could be used to power building and building’s viability against extreme weather events

Lead Party: Buildings and Grounds Department  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Chief Administrative Officer, Building Department  
Timeframe: Medium Term

1.3 Identify funding opportunities for capital improvements to Town facilities, including Community Preservation Act funds.

Lead Party: Buildings and Grounds Department  
Support Parties: Select Board Chief Administrative Officer, Finance Committee, Community Preservation Committee, Building Department  
Timeframe: Ongoing

1.4 Ensure that the Town's ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan is up to date, and that progress is being made to improve facilities and buildings for people with disabilities

Lead Party: Buildings and Grounds Department  
Support Parties: Select Board  
Timeframe: Ongoing

1.5 Establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee along with mechanisms and policies linking the Master Plan to staff, board and commission work plans, budgets, and capital projects.

- Sunset the Master Plan Advisory Committee charged with this Master Plan development, replace with Master Plan Implementation Committee reporting to the Select Board, Planning Board and other relevant departments/boards based on action implementation
- Use the Master Plan recommendations and implementation table as a guide of decision making
- Develop an 'Annual Master Plan Implementation Progress Card' to be filled out by Implementation Committee and convene an annual all Town Boards, Committees and Commissions Meeting to share progress on implementing the Master Plan and discussing updates of priorities and plans. **Progress Card will be found in a separate appendix of the Master Plan. This document should be completed for at least 7 years and made available to the public.**
- Ensure the Implementation Committee includes participation, input, and updates from High Speed Internet Committee and additional fiber experts to address development of technological infrastructure for business and educational growth in Southwick.

Lead Party: Master Plan Implementation Committee\*  
Supporting Parties: Planning Board, Select Board, DPW, all Town Hall boards, committees, and commissions, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee  
Timeframe: Ongoing

1.6 Replace the roof at the Police Department facility and include evaluation of durable and sustainable materials and construction for project as well as building energy efficiency assessment post-new roof installation during project outline and bidding stages to understand overall carbon footprint of the building.

Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Finance Committee, Police Department  
Timeframe: Medium Term

1.7 Evaluate the Solid Waste Transfer Stations continued viability, future, costs, and environmental implications as well as opportunities to improve on recycling and waste volume through programs such as curbside pick-up, Pay As You Throw (PAYT), Swap Shop, and additional recycling opportunities.

Lead Party: DPW  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Board of Health  
Timeframe: Short Term

- 1.8 Take advantage of the recent Green Community status by evaluating methods to lower the Town's overall carbon footprint by such means as: 1) Transition Town vehicles to an electric fleet; 2) Incorporate electric vehicle charging stations for Town and resident's use; 3) Incorporate renewable power arrays on Town properties and buildings; 4) Upgrade Town buildings with energy efficient features; and 5) Replace streetlights with LED lights.

Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*, DPW, Police and Fire Departments, Southwick residents  
Timeframe: Short Term

## **Strategy 2**

Proactively prepare and evaluate Town's future needs for utilities and services such as drinking water, sewer, high speed internet, gas, etc. in light of projected population growth, development, climate change and market fluctuations with aim of providing these public services in a sustainable and affordable manner.

### **Actions**

- 2.1 Establish a public multi-community aquifer advisory committee that is inclusive of all Towns that tap into the aquifer located in Southwick to regularly address issues such as water quality, water restrictions, groundwater protections, and regulatory changes and provide educational updates to the public.

Lead Party: Water Commission  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Conservation Commission, Water Commission, DPW  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

- 2.2 Continue to evaluate opportunities for sewer expansion in Town with projected growth in population, climate change and other infrastructural considerations.

Lead Party: Sewer Implementation Committee  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Town Planner, DPW,  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

- 2.3 Expand high speed internet service to all residents and businesses through the Town's recently adopted Municipal Light Plant.

Lead Party: High Speed Internet Committee  
Support Parties: Select Board  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

## **Strategy 3**

Support a safe and healthy Southwick through:

- Encouraging more public participation and awareness of Town Boards, Committees, and other town events
- Creating multi-generational opportunities of engagement at town events and actively foster continuous dialogue between various entities
- Upholding commitment to betterment and wellness of all Town residents and taxpayers



## Actions

- 3.1 Maintain vigilance into the ongoing nature of the pandemic and plan proactively for similar health events in the future.
- Lead Party: Board of Health  
Supporting Parties: Southwick Emergency Management Agency, PVPC  
Timeframe: Ongoing
- 3.2 Develop an engaging electronic newsletter sent approximately every two weeks or monthly by Town Hall to Town residents and taxpayers that provides municipal updates, health and safety news, relevant local events and resources, recreational, cultural and civic opportunities and emergency response preparedness with the aim of improving town outreach and communication. Consider having a student intern help with development of e-newsletter to have intergenerational appeals.
- Lead Party: Chief Administrative Officer  
Supporting Parties: Southwick Emergency Management Agency, Department Heads, Select Board, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing
- 3.3 Create forum on how town can support proliferation of intergenerational opportunities and spaces such as a community center, afterschool hang-out space that is safely walkable from school or working with a local business to cooperatively create space with the aim of facilitating engagement with school-aged residents and seniors and exploring programming through the school district and other opportunities.
- Lead party: Select Board  
Supporting parties: Council on Aging, Park and Recreation Commission, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee, Economic Development Commission, Public Library  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 3.4 Establish quarterly meetings with Park and Recreation Commission and school district to determine ways to support and promote student physical activity and play with town facilities and spaces.
- Lead Party: Park and Recreation Commission  
Supporting Parties: Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee, Select Board  
Timeframe: Short Term
- 3.5 Support athletic leagues in town through donations, concerts, and other events organized by Park and Recreation Commission.
- Lead Party: Park and Recreation Commission  
Supporting Parties: Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee, Select Board, Rotary Club, Lions Club  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing
- 3.6 Create public forum to with Council on Aging and other Town boards and commissions to determine how other town entities can collaborate with Senior Center and engage in events with older adults.
- Lead Party: Council on Aging  
Supporting Parties: Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission, Economic Development Commission, Historical Commission, Park and Recreation Commission, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District  
Timeframe: Short Term

3.7 Establish sheltering space for residents when extreme weather events occur such as cooling or warming center and communicate via e-newsletter, town crier, Code Red telephone system when it will be open.

Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*  
Timeframe: Short Term

3.8 Identify methods to promote more Southwick residents to become active and engaged in Town Boards, Committees, organizations, etc.

Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties:  
Timeframe: Ongoing

## **Strategy 4**

*Ensure a high-quality and safe educational experience in Southwick schools, with aim of successfully preparing students for life after secondary education as well as attracting families to town.*

## **Actions**

4.1 Evaluate educational curricula with eye to future general STEM developments and work with Town entities and local businesses to support hands-on student experience with emerging technology.

Lead Party: Superintendent's Office  
Supporting Parties: Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee, Select Board, Economic Development Commission, Master Plan Implementation Committee\*  
Timeframe: Long-term, Ongoing

4.2 Evaluate feasibility of adding air conditioning system to Southwick public schools as well as renewable power arrays for school to keep overall carbon footprint lower as well as generate potential extra energy for school usage and looking to grant money and incentives.

Lead Party: Superintendent's Office  
Support Parties: Select Board, DPW, Buildings Department, Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee  
Timeframe: Medium Term

4.3 Establish annual public conversation on school safety.

Lead Party: Superintendent's Office  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Police and Fire Departments, Emergency Management, Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*  
Timeframe: Short Term





# CLIMATE CHANGE & SUSTAINABILITY



## VISION

Southwick upholds and continuously improves sustainability in town and takes a proactive, holistic, and planned approach to prepare for and respond to climate changes. We focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), finding pathways to affordable, cost-saving renewable energy sources, and protecting natural resources, resident wellness, and local food growing.

## INTRODUCTION

While not a required element of a Master Plan in Massachusetts, the Town of Southwick has chosen to include a chapter on Climate Resilience and Sustainability with the aim of developing a Master Plan that prepares and accounts for shifts in actual climate patterns as well as the resources needed to keep Southwick safe, healthy, resilient, and sustainable.

Resilience is the ability to respond, absorb, and adapt to, as well as recover from a disruptive event. A resilient structure/system/community is expected to be able to resist an extreme event with minimal damages and functionality disruptions during the event; after the event, it should be able to rapidly recover its functionality similar to or even better than the pre-event level. Sustainability is defined as “meeting the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” A range of local and state and federal regulatory actions can create a supportive framework from which to launch Southwick’s climate resilience and sustainability actions.

*While the land use and natural resources chapters of this master plan, along with other chapters, incorporate awareness of climate change and sustainability in their strategies and actions, this chapter will hone in on more specific recommendations that deal with energy usage, reduction of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, and pollution management.*

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

While not a required element of a Master Plan in Massachusetts, the Town of Southwick has chosen to include a chapter on Climate Resilience and Sustainability with the aim of developing a Master Plan that prepares and accounts for shifts in actual climate patterns as well as the resources needed to keep Southwick safe, healthy, resilient, and sustainable.

*Defining Southwick’s Climate Resilience and Sustainability foundation*

Southwick has been taking advantage of state programs that exist to help fund building and infrastructure improvements, like the *Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP)* program. Specifically, the MVP program helps towns plan for and implement resiliency projects that respond to climate change risks and the Town successfully became a certified Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Community in 2018.

One of the recommendations from the MVP certification process was that the Town complete the work to become a *Green Communities* designated-community, which would help fund energy efficiency upgrades to municipal buildings. This action, apart from helping reduce GHG emissions, would also help the Town generate more cost savings. In August 2023, the Town officially became a certified Green Community.

Additionally, Southwick has a 2016 Hazard Mitigation plan that will be updated in the near future.

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

Southwick recognizes the fact of increasingly severe and unpredictable weather events resulting from our changing climate caused by the still increasing GHG emissions, and commits to both reducing GHG emissions and taking action to increase the resilience of the town’s people, natural and built environment, and infrastructure. Given the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ climate policy legislation and former Governor [Baker’s](#) commitment to 50% reduction in GHG emissions from the 1990 baseline by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050, the Town of Southwick commits to doing its part to achieve these goals.

## [MA Decarbonization Roadmap](#) - Katie Theoharides, Former Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs,

Here in Massachusetts, climate change presents unique challenges, from intense heat waves and droughts, storm surges and flooding, to increases in insect-related diseases such as Eastern Equine Encephalitis and West Nile Virus. The climate crisis is a generational challenge that, without decisive action, leaves residents and communities across the state vulnerable on the front lines.

Recognizing the urgency of this crisis, the Baker-Polito Administration listened to the science, and set Massachusetts on an aggressive path to Net Zero Greenhouse Gas emissions by 2050.

On her first day in office, January 6, 2023, Governor Healey created an office of Climate Innovation and Resilience. Melissa Hoffer is the first cabinet-level Climate Chief in Massachusetts and the nation.

At a time when the nation and the world are grappling with a global pandemic, we are reminded that climate change presents a still greater long-term threat, and one for which there will be no vaccine. Achieving Net Zero by 2050 will require deep change and out-of-the-box thinking, and this report underscores the importance of local and regional partnerships to build stronger, more

A focus on building energy efficiency has proven a win-win strategy for reducing energy costs and creating local jobs. It also produces a ripple effect across the lifetime and operating costs of buildings. For a detailed explanation of the multi-sector system change approach the state is following, from which this simplified explanation is adapted, please review the Massachusetts Decarbonization Roadmap. (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/ma-decarbonization-roadmap>)

Replacing lights, water heaters, and HVAC systems, and adding insulation, can each reduce a building's GHG emissions by a few percent, but these components add up to even more than the sum of their parts. When a building is well insulated, its lights are efficient, and its room temperatures well controlled, it needs a much smaller HVAC system to provide heating and cooling, meaning that a building owner who decides to take the next step and go net-zero energy can invest in a much smaller photovoltaic system and less-expensive battery storage. Building retrofits not only save energy and reduce carbon emissions, but they also improve occupants' health, comfort, and productivity, as well as community resilience.

Likewise, green infrastructure, "a network providing the 'ingredients' for solving urban and climatic challenges by building with nature" offers a multi-benefit and sustainable supplement to most existing gray infrastructure. Green versus gray infrastructure is a matter of whether the infrastructure tries to control

nature or use its natural processes as design solutions. The main components of green infrastructure include stormwater management, climate adaptation, less heat stress, more biodiversity, enhanced food production, better air quality, sustainable energy production, clean water and healthy soils. In turn, this infrastructure also yields tangible benefits such as increased quality of life through recreation and providing shade and shelter in and around the community. Green infrastructure also serves to provide an ecological framework for social, economic, and environmental health of the surroundings.

Adopting the proposed Green Infrastructure and Climate Resiliency Policy is the top priority recommended to advance Southwick's sustainability and climate resiliency. Southwick is also integrating climate resilience and sustainability throughout this Master Plan, and across all the essential infrastructure on which the town depends: transportation, gas, electricity, water and sewage, communications, zoning, design standards, public safety, and recreational and open space resources.

### *Green Communities certification*

Southwick took the important step toward climate resilience and sustainability of working towards becoming a certified Green Community, and as of August, 2023, earned this certification. This means the Town is regularly monitoring municipal energy use in

buildings and vehicles and is working to reduce overall municipal energy use by 20%. The Town has also facilitated clean energy generation and adopted a more energy efficient building code assuring that all new construction in town is energy efficient. [See the Town Code Book: https://ecode360.com/SO1418.](https://ecode360.com/SO1418.)

#### *Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) certification (2018)*

Southwick achieved MVP certification in 2018, making the town eligible to apply for MVP Action Grant funding to implement projects for resilience and climate action. The top four hazards identified by the Community Resilience Building (CRB) workshop participants are:

- Ice and snow
- Wind
- Flooding
- Extreme heat

Areas of concern identified by the CRB workshop participants are:

- Societal vulnerabilities – Senior residents, events (e.g., motocross), water-based recreation
- Natural resources – farms, Congamond Lakes, Great Brook, Canal Brook, trees and forests
- Infrastructure – pole-based electricity and communication lines, undersized culverts, need for renovations to the DPW facility, 1/3 of town on private wells

Particular concerns raised by CRB workshop participants include:

- the lack of air conditioning at the schools
- the need for substantial and costly renovations at the DPW facility, which only has back-up power for fuel pumps and emergency communications
- the reliance of 1/3 of the Town on private wells, many of which are older and shallow wells

- water quality concerns for Congamond Lakes and canals associated with algae blooms and non-point source pollution
- the decline of oak, maple, ash, and pine due to pests and invasive competitors, changing climate, and unplanned development

Additionally, CRB workshop participants identified that extreme heat and wind storms stress the electrical system. Since Southwick has no generation capacity of its own and relies entirely on transmission lines that bring power to the town, there is a need to increase storage capacity for electricity generated by renewable resources and to ensure back-up power for a more resilient grid while also advocating for increased communication with Eversource for preventative tree-trimming and installation of underground lines.

#### *Hazard Mitigation Plan (2016)*

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) define Hazard Mitigation as any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from natural hazards such as flooding, storms, high winds, hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes, etc. Mitigation efforts undertaken by communities will help to minimize damages to buildings and infrastructure, such as water supplies, sewers, and utility transmission lines, as well as natural, cultural and historic resources. In 2016, the Town of Southwick updated its 2008 Local Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan, in collaboration with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. Planning for hazard mitigation involved a Hazard Mitigation Committee comprised of residents of the town.

The top priorities included in the soon-to-be-updated Hazard Mitigation plan are:

- addressing top priorities on the culvert replacement list
- working with the Commonwealth to ensure that dam owners understand their inspection and maintenance responsibilities
- conducting site-plan and subdivision review training of Emergency Management staff



- educating citizens living in the floodplain about the National Floodplain Insurance Program (NFIP).

Lower priority actions identified include evaluating whether to become a part of FEMA’s Community Rating System, implementing the goals of the OSRP, and promoting strategies to provide reliable drinking-water supplies.

#### *Open Space and Recreation Plan (2019)*

The OSRP identifies the investments undertaken by the Town to improve the Congamond Lakes and municipal infrastructure that exists within the watershed, including a long-term plan to address stormwater management, an intensive aquatic weed management program, installation of deep-sump catch basins and infiltration chambers on surrounding streets, extension of sewer service to 95% of the Congamond waterfront within Massachusetts, and treatment and dredging to improve the water quality of the lakes and canal. The Town has also replaced and upgraded culverts on Shurtleff Brook and Tuttle Brook. Steps toward implementing dredging projects are under way.

Goals in the OSRP are consistent with the top priority actions identified in the MVP and HMP planning processes:

Goal #1 – Maintain the ecological integrity of aquatic ecosystems and protect the quality and quantity of surface and groundwater drinking water supplies.

Goal #2 – Permanently protect important open space and ensure conservation areas are appropriately managed for flora and fauna habitat integrity and resiliency.

Goal #3 - Preserve working farms and forests in support of an agricultural way of life in Southwick.

Goal #4 – Improve and expand recreational and environmental education opportunities for people of all ages while preserving Southwick’s scenic, cultural and historic character.

#### *Zoning*

Zoning regulations and other land-use laws constitute a town’s “blueprint” for its future. Southwick’s Zoning Bylaws include Flexible Residential Developments, the ability for a project to “earn” points through preservation of open space, or protection of forests, wildlife habitats, old growth trees, views, rural corridors, steep slopes, or historic sites. Southwick also has adopted the stretch energy code.<sup>44</sup>

## **TRENDS**

#### *Climate Data*

In 2013, atmospheric CO2 levels exceeded 400 parts per million (ppm) – higher than anytime in human history, based on 800,000 years of ice-core data. Worldwide, each of the last three decades has been increasingly warmer than the previous. The years 2013-2021 all rank among the 10 warmest years on record – it has been 45 years since the Earth had a colder-than-average year. Per NASA, collectively, the past 8 years (2021 and prior) are the warmest years since modern recordkeeping began in 1880.<sup>45</sup> July 2021 was the hottest month ever recorded to date, while July 2022 was the 3<sup>rd</sup> hottest July on record for the U.S.<sup>46</sup> NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies found that July 4, 2023, was the hottest July 4 ever!

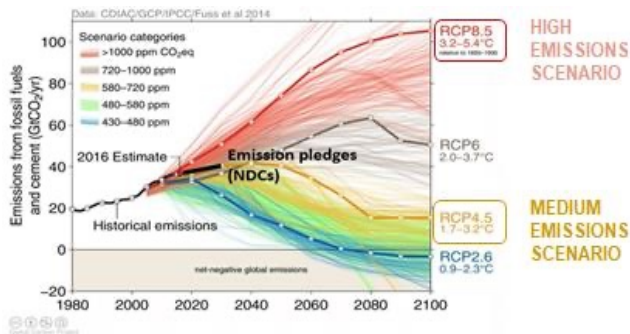
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides climate change projections on the Climate Change Clearinghouse for the Commonwealth.<sup>47</sup> The scenarios of how emissions change in the future become vastly different as we look further out towards the end of the century, which is why it is so important to reduce GHG emissions now to avoid the worst-case scenarios. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) considers a range of scenarios from the extremes of approximately 3.6°F (RCP2.6) to between 7°F (RCP8.5). RCP = Representative Concentration Pathways, essentially defined by their cumulative measure of human emissions of GHGs from all sources, expressed in Watts per square meter.

<sup>44</sup> <https://ecode360.com/38357733>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.nasa.gov/press-release/2021-tied-for-6th-warmest-year-in-continued-trend-nasa-analysis-shows>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.noaa.gov/news/its-official-july-2021-was-earths-hottest-month-on-record>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.Resilientma.mass.gov>



Because of the variation in the different future scenarios possible, the Commonwealth commissioned researchers from the Northeast Climate Adaptation Science Center at UMass to develop projections for changes in temperature, precipitation, and sea level rise specifically for the Commonwealth, and then adjusted the scale for local use.

These projections are based on simulations from the latest generation of climate models from the International Panel on Climate Change and scenarios of future GHG emissions and are made to the river basins and county level.

The Town of Southwick is located in Westfield and Farmington River Basins, which by 2090 are projected to experience:

- Increase (↑) in:
  - Average temperatures
  - Min and max temperatures
  - # of days with temps over 90, 95, and 100 degrees Fahrenheit
  - Cooling degree days (65 and above degrees Fahrenheit)
  - Winter precipitation
  - Frequency of heavy precipitation (winter)
- Decrease (↓) in:
  - # of days below 32 and 0 degrees Fahrenheit
  - # of heating degree days (65 and below degrees Fahrenheit)
  - Fall precipitation (potential)
- The rise of average temperatures is well documented. Maximum and minimum temperatures are also expected to increase throughout the end of the century, and that will be true for annual and seasonal

projections. Summer and fall temperatures are expected to see the greatest increases.

While these projections look forward to 2090, significant progress must be made by 2040.

Even what seems like a very small rise in average temperatures can cause major changes in other factors, such as the relative proportion of precipitation that falls as rain or snow and impacts on species and ecosystem health. New species, that may become invasive, have entered the region due to climate change, species are leaving due to climate change, species hierarchies in ecosystems will change, and climate-induced stress in an ecosystem will facilitate invasive pathways.

We also know that changes to the frequency of extreme heat days will be most pronounced in the summer, with an increase of 16-70 more days by 2090. Why is this important? Heat waves can lead to illness and death, particularly among older adults, the very young, economically disadvantaged groups, and other vulnerable populations such as those in outdoor occupations, including farmers.

In addition, more frequent days above 65°F and more frequent extreme high temperatures will drive an increase in cooling degree days, change patterns of energy use, and increase net electricity demand which could strain the grid enough to force an outage. An analysis conducted for The New York Times by the Climate Impact Lab notes that there were about 7 days per year over 90 degrees Fahrenheit in 1970, compared to 9 days per year in 2015; by 2050, we will likely see 21 days over 90 degrees F.

The flip side of that increased heat in the summer months is that there will be fewer days below 32° and 0° in the winter months, with up to 72 fewer days below freezing by the end of the century. We think about cold weather in terms of the need for heating shelters, and concern about winter storms knocking out power – these concerns don't necessarily change with fewer days below freezing.

However, fewer very cold days also impact the life cycle of certain insects and other species, such as ticks. Southwick may see earlier insect emergence and expansion in the geographic range and population size of tree pests such as the hemlock woolly adelgid, emerald ash borer, and southern pine beetle.

This can also impact agricultural operations as unusually warm winters like the ones experienced recently in this region led to early release from dormancy in perennial plants and, in turn, caused damage to blossoms from late winter or spring cold. In 2016, peach crops in the northern half of the Northeast were affected in this way with almost total losses. Grapes, apples, cherries, and other fruit crops in this region suffered widespread losses following cold conditions after warm winters in 2010 and 2012. Additional crucial factors are wildly fluctuating temperatures and rainfall amounts.

This trend will have an impact on road maintenance, as well. It indicates a likely increase in the frequency of the freeze/frost cycle, something that we have seen in recent years wreaking havoc on highway departments as it leads to increased maintenance needs and increased costs in anti-icing measures in areas that previously rarely had mid-winter thawing and freezing. It is important for the Town to document the amount currently being spent fixing potholes as this is a concrete number that can be used to track an immediate impact of the climate crisis in the community.

Annual precipitation in the basin is expected to increase by up to 9.3" by the end of the century. Rainfall is expected to increase in spring and winter months in particular. Understanding that both winter precipitation and winter temperatures could increase in future decades, we can expect more of this precipitation to fall as rain instead of snow. There are all sorts of human and environmental impacts that could result from this change including reduced snow cover for winter recreation and tourism, less spring snow melt to replenish aquifers, higher levels of winter runoff, and lower spring river flows for aquatic ecosystems. Consequently, this may leave some infrastructure more vulnerable to damage from deep freezes. Pipes are especially vulnerable to freezing if they are exposed to outside air. "Wind chill" can play a major role in accelerating ice blockage, and thus bursting, in water pipes.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, one of the most pronounced changes in climate in the Northeast—more than any region of the U.S.—during the past several decades has been a 71% increase in the frequency of extreme precipitation events since the mid-1990s. The climate projections suggest that the frequency of high-intensity rainfall and storm events will continue to trend upward. Again, we see

the greatest changes in the spring and winter. These are the types of storms that cause flooding, erosion, and pollutant runoff from agricultural activities. Flooding that results from a single intense downpour can cause widespread damage to property, especially farms, and critical infrastructure, as we have seen throughout New England in early July 2023.

High-intensity rainfall events mobilize pollutants such as sediments and nutrients and pose a threat to surface water quality. Other effects of more intense downpours include more inland flooding as soils become saturated and stop absorbing more water, rise in creek and river flows, and failure of storm water systems as their capacity is exceeded.

Rainfall is expected to increase in spring and winter. Conversely, we will see increasing consecutive dry days in summer and fall. When coupled with variable precipitation patterns and higher temperatures, increasing consecutive dry days in summer and fall can deplete groundwater and intensify droughts, like the one we experienced across the Commonwealth in the summer of 2016. More frequent droughts could also exacerbate the impacts of floods by damaging vegetation and soil health that could otherwise help mitigate flooding impacts. Droughts can also weaken tree root systems, making them more susceptible to toppling during high wind events, and increases the risk of wildfire.

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

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities refer to favorable external factors that could give the town a competitive advantage by implementing the actions recommended in this chapter. Massachusetts' commitment to climate action and sustainability, combined with the region's commitment, are significant opportunities for Southwick to act on this plan's recommendations for

reaching net-zero emission, energy efficiency, green initiatives, resiliency to climate change, and creation of infrastructure so people and businesses can locate here on a “turnkey” basis.

The 2021 Massachusetts Climate Legislation amended and strengthened the 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act and will ensure availability of funding in Massachusetts for energy efficiency (reduction in GHG emissions) and clean energy generation for the foreseeable future and beyond. It also includes Environmental Justice (EJ) siting requirements for power as well as things like sector benchmarks and climate requirements for the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) when approving new infrastructure. This amended legislation, combined with the Commonwealth’s existing commitment to climate adaptation in the MVP program, provides significant opportunities for Southwick as it lines up funding for many of the specific actions and strategies identified in this plan.

The co-benefits of climate action and resilience are also compelling factors that enhance the likelihood of Southwick’s success in implementing the strategies. Co-benefits include: saving money; improving public health; creating good-paying, locally-owned jobs; more money circulating in the local economy; improved air and water quality; enhanced public safety; reduced maintenance costs; reduced risks; and an improved ability to accurately project municipal budget needs into the future.

Challenges refer to factors that have the potential to make it difficult for the Town to succeed with implementation. As many people have observed, challenges, can be transformed into opportunities depending upon how one looks at them. This plan could be thought of as a challenge, as it lifts the actions the Town needs to take to move toward the sustainable future. The presence and publication of these recommendations, delivery to the state agency that funded this plan, and institution in the records of the Planning Board and Select Board when they vote to adopt this plan could turn these ‘challenges’ into ‘opportunities’. Many communities have had dramatic

and measurable success enhancing sustainability and climate resilience while boosting local revenues, increasing tourism and the community’s visibility and desirability (e.g., Asheville NC, Northampton MA), providing the evidence to rebut potential challenges to implementing the actions and strategies identified in this plan.

While it is commendable that the Town is doing its part to host solar projects that assist the Commonwealth to meet its ever-increasing clean energy goals, the Town is cautious about balancing concerns for climate resilience, erosion and increased run-off with any new solar development.

Given these goals, it will be very important that all homeowners take advantage of no-cost home energy assessments from the Mass Save program to receive recommendations and no-cost air sealing and insulation to reduce energy use and costs.

#### *Leading By Example—advancing Green Communities certification*

Southwick has been working on becoming a certified Green community since 2021 and received the certification in August 2023. Follow-up grants for energy saving, cost-saving, and comfort-improving projects will come from this certification, which could be implemented for weatherization and energy efficiency improvements.

#### *Community Resilience*

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

*See related recommendations in the Land Use, Economic Development, and Agriculture technical papers.*

# STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Some committees are discussed in these strategies and actions and have yet to be formed officially. Any item marked with an asterisk (\*) in this section represents “a suggested future Committee or an equivalent” where a lead party for an action is not an established body. A new lead or supporting party can offer flexibility for implementation through a Town committee or even a public/private group.

## Strategy 1: TOWN SERVICES AND RESOURCES

*Build local government’s capacity to provide leadership and services for sustainability and climate change resilience so that it can:*

- *Meaningfully and accurately educate community members and empower them to do their part*
- *Significantly and efficiently reduce energy and water consumption by residents, businesses, and town government as well as reduce GHG emissions with eye on net-zero goals for 2050*
- *Ensure that all Southwick businesses and residents, especially vulnerable populations, are prepared for and can recover quickly from potential climate-related disasters and have access to resources to maintain wellness and safety*

### Timeframe

- Immediate – 0-2 years
- Short Term – 3-5 years
- Medium Term – 6-9 years
- Long Term – 10+ years
- Ongoing – Continuing, still in progress

## Actions

1.1 Identify current barriers to public outreach regarding climate change and sustainability and develop techniques to overcome them

Lead Party: Planning Board  
Supporting Parties: Climate Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*, Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee\*, Agricultural Commission, Select Board  
Timeframe: Long Term

1.2 Identify and develop a list of isolated and/or climate-vulnerable populations within the community such as older adults, people of color, adults/children with disabilities, LGBTQ+ community members, low-income households, and others with the aim to establish a robust and ongoing outreach program

Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Council on Aging, Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee  
Timeframe: Long Term, Ongoing

1.3 Organize hybrid workshops/discussions/public forums with guest speakers that aim to educate residents regarding climate change, the impact of changing temperatures and rainfall, flood plains, localized flooding etc. Resources include the local universities.

Lead Party: Conservation Commission  
Supporting Parties: Planning Board, Board of Health, Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing

- 1.4 Create inventory of flat-roof surfaces, town facilities and impervious surfaces or canopy area for renewable-energy siting and implement viable projects. Include this as part of a compilation of an updated Building Needs Assessments for all Town facilities, including evaluation of the carbon footprint of each building in terms of energy usage, determination of whether renewable energy could be used to power the building and building's viability against extreme weather events.
- Lead Party: Buildings and Grounds Department  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Chief Administrative Officer, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee, Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 1.5 Educate and offer insights on private alternative energy options via workshops and guest speakers, dissemination of information on Solarize program, SMART program, MassSave and other state and federal incentives; encourage businesses to expand recycling efforts.
- Lead Party: Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*  
Supporting Parties: Conservation Commission, Select Board, Agricultural Commission  
Timeframe: Short Term, Ongoing
- 1.6 Develop municipal energy storage to enhance the Town's benefits from local private or publicly owned solar arrays.
- Lead Party: Select Board  
Supporting Parties: Planning Board, Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission  
Timeframe: Medium Term

*Solarize Massachusetts* offers communities the tools to run grassroots marketing campaigns and competitive solicitation processes to aggregate homeowner buying power to lower installation prices.. Participating homeowners and business owners can purchase the solar PV systems directly or enter into lease or power purchase agreements with the installer. The Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) program is a long-term sustainable solar incentive program that promotes cost-effective solar development in the Commonwealth.

## **Strategy 2 – PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT**

*A multi-disciplinary broad-based and proactive approach must be taken to protect natural resources, safeguard health and wellness, and have resilient infrastructure to both withstand and have adaptability to climate changes.*

### **Actions**

- 2.1 Create an inventory of town-owned lawns and landscaped areas and determine which areas could be allowed to grow into grasses or wildflowers and/or create pollinator gardens on public property to help sustain local farms.
- Lead Party: Beautification and Wellness Committee\*  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Department of Public Works, Southwick-Tolland-Granville Regional School District/School Committee, Buildings & Grounds, Agricultural Commission, Open Space Committee\*  
Timeframe: Medium Term
- 2.2 Investigate the health of publicly owned forests and develop forestry plans, including enact policies to remove dead or diseased public trees, and those succumbing to invasives, and replace with native trees suited to changing climate. Also, expand collaborative program with utilities for hazardous tree maintenance and removal.

Lead Party: Tree Warden  
Supporting Parties: DPW, Conservation Commission, DCR, Forestry, Select Board, Planning Board, Eversource, Verizon, Comcast  
Timeframe: Medium Term

2.3 Enhance consistency in permitted activities and enforcement in regards to natural resources and stormwater.

Lead Party: Conservation Commission  
Supporting Parties: Planning Board, Board of Health, DPW, Town Planner and Stormwater Manager  
Priority: Short Term

2.4 Continue proactive culvert replacements and improvements for stream crossings with mindfulness of resiliency to increased precipitation events and flooding

Lead Party: Department of Public Works  
Supporting Parties: Conservation Commission  
Timeframe: Ongoing

2.5 Investigate methods for the Town to assist in developing agricultural irrigation (irrigation ponds, water re-use).

Lead Party: Agricultural Commission  
Supporting Parties: Select Board, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Lakes Management Committee  
Timeframe: Long Term

2.6 Enhance town-wide vector control and education programs for ticks and mosquitos.

Lead Party: Board of Health  
Supporting Parties: Conservation Commission, Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District (PVMCD)  
Timeframe: Medium Term

2.7 Implement long-term lake management plans to improve management of bacterial, algal, chemical and organic nutrients and PFAS contamination, including dredging and invasive-plant management where appropriate.

Lead Party: Lake Management Committee  
Support Parties: Conservation Commission, Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*  
Timeframe: Long Term

2.8 Organize public forums with local restaurants, farms and other purveyors of foods to foster conversation about incorporating local and seasonal goods into menus and how/if that can be facilitated to reduce the carbon footprint of food transportation. Resources can include Northeast Organic Farming Association and CISA (Community Involved In Sustaining Agriculture).

Lead Party: Economic Development Commission  
Support Parties: Agricultural Commission, Rotary Club, Southwick restaurants, Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency Committee\*  
Timeframe: Short Term







