

PALMER MASTER PLAN

AUGUST 2021

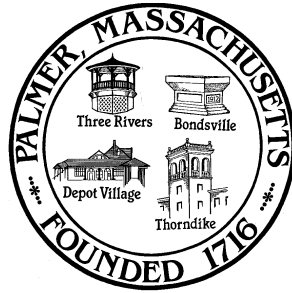
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BY



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WITH



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Town of Palmer, Massachusetts

Master Plan

FINAL REPORT
JULY 2021

Presented to: Planning and Economic Development Department

 Planning Board

 Town Council

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Acknowledgments

This Master Plan was prepared through the course of over a year, and largely during the COVID-19 pandemic that forced much of the planning process to be conducted virtually. Despite this challenge, the Master Plan was informed by extensive public participation. Special thanks are due to Linda Leduc, Town Planner and Economic Development Director; Rebekah Wright, Senior Clerk; and to the Master Plan Steering Committee Chairperson, Dave Golden, and Vice Chairperson, Mike Marciniac.

The following members of the Master Plan Steering Committee were also responsible for guiding the development of this Master Plan and reviewing the work performed by the consultants, VHB and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

- ▶ Dave Golden – Chairperson, At-Large
- ▶ Mike Marciniac – Vice Chairperson, Planning Board
- ▶ Jessica Sizer, Town Council
- ▶ Gerry Skowronek, Public Works
- ▶ Paul Bernard, Board of Health
- ▶ Nick Zeo, Conservation Commission
- ▶ Cathy Plouffe, Council on Aging/Senior Center
- ▶ Barbara O'Donnell, Historical Commission
- ▶ Charlie Baker, School Committee
- ▶ Tricia Koss, At-Large
- ▶ Sean O'Donnell, At-Large
- ▶ Patience Hartley, At-Large

The Town and Master Plan Steering Committee would like to thank the members of Palmer community and other participants that contributed toward the development of this Master Plan.

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1

Planning for Palmer's Future – Process and Vision

In March 2020, the Town of Palmer—located in central western Massachusetts in Hampden County—launched a process to prepare a Town-wide Master Plan with extensive community participation. The Town's last comprehensive master plan was completed nearly 50 years ago in 1975, prior to the adoption of the Town's first zoning bylaw in 1980. Since 2005, the Town has been operating under an Executive Order 418 Community Development Plan, which lays out goals and strategies related to open space and resource protection, housing, economic development, and transportation. Though the Town's most recent comprehensive town-wide planning document, the *Community Plan* is out-of-date and inadequate for current and future planning purposes. This Master Plan, the development of which was led by the Town's planning consultant (VHB), updates the information presented in the *Community Plan*, as well as builds upon its findings to provide a strategic roadmap to achieving a shared community vision for Palmer's future.

For fiscal years 2020 and 2021, the Town was awarded a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Action Grant, which partially funded the preparation of this Master Plan. Accordingly, the topics of sustainability and climate resilience are integrated throughout its elements, including the elements required under Chapter 41 Section 81D of the General Laws of Massachusetts that are listed later in this chapter. The opportunities and challenges related to sustainability and climate resilience that are not specific to the required elements are covered in a separate element (Chapter 9, *Sustainability and Climate Change*).

As part of the fiscal year 2021 Work Plan for the Palmer Mass in Motion program, funded through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, this Master Plan also includes a Public Health Addendum (Appendix A) prepared by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). This addendum is summarized in Chapter 10, *Public Health* and its recommended actions have been incorporated into this Master Plan's implementation plan (Chapter 11). The Public Health Addendum provides research and data analyses around the aspects of the Town's built and social environments (e.g., transportation, housing, access to

healthy food) that impact health outcomes of people who live and work in Palmer, with a focus on healthy aging and the assets and challenges of older adults.

This Master Plan's addressment of sustainability and climate resilience, along with public health, reflect the increasing need of municipalities to address the health and well-being of their residents in the face of emerging challenges. This is evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic that began in early 2020 and continued throughout the planning process.

What is a Master Plan?

Consistent with Chapter 41 Section 81D of the General Laws of Massachusetts, a master plan serves as "a statement, through text, maps, illustrations or other forms of communication, that is designed to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality."¹ However, master plans today do more than address just buildings and infrastructure – they also consider the important social, environmental, and economic values associated with them.

A master plan is meant to be a living, dynamic document that records where a community has been, where it is currently, and what it wants to be in the future. In the process, it assesses existing community assets and resources in consideration of current trending and projected future conditions, and puts forth a shared community vision that is translated into goals and a policy framework.

A master plan typically covers a timeframe between 10 and 15 years, though shorter-term evaluations will help keep it current with changing needs of the community. It is also tightly integrated with other municipal plans and initiatives, such as an open space and recreation plan, housing production plan, etc. It is important to note that a master plan is not a zoning ordinance, a subdivision regulation, a budget plan, a capital improvement program, or other regulatory document. Rather, it is meant to guide the development of these implementation tools.

Consistent with Chapter 41 Section 81D of the General Laws of Massachusetts, this Master Plan addresses the following required elements as they relate to the Town of Palmer and its regional context: Land Use and Development Patterns (Chapter 2); Housing (Chapter 3); Economic Development (Chapter 4); Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources (Chapter 5); Open Space and Recreation (Chapter 6); Public Services and Facilities (Chapter 7); Transportation (Chapter 8), and Implementation (Chapter 11). Another required element that identifies the goals and policies of the municipality for its future growth and development has been integrated into the other elements of this Master Plan, including Sustainability and Climate Change (Chapter 9) and Public Health (Chapter 10).

A key outcome of any master plan is its implementation program, which generally defines and schedules the recommended actions that contribute to the achievement of the goals

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

defined under each element. For the Palmer Master Plan, the implementation program is summarized in Chapter 11.

Planning Process

The planning process for this Master Plan was carried out over approximately 16 months beginning in March 2020 and ending in June 2021. This process is summarized below, arranged into five focused efforts:

1

► Identify Palmer's Challenges and Opportunities

Through a review of past and recent planning documentation; data from local, state, and federal sources; and input received from stakeholders and the community at-large over the course of seven public forums conducted between July 2020 and January 2021, a baseline of existing conditions in Palmer was prepared relevant to the topic-based elements covered in this Master Plan (e.g., Land Use and Development Patterns, Housing, etc.), except for Public Health (see explanation below). The findings of this existing conditions analysis helped to identify the challenges and opportunities the Town faces, now and in the future.

2

► Set Palmer's Shared Vision and Supporting Goals

In July 2020, an overview of the Town's existing conditions was shared with the community for feedback, which provided an understanding of their values and general priorities for the Town's future. Based upon this feedback, and supported by previous stakeholder conversations, a Vision Statement was prepared and confirmed that reflects the Town as the community intends it to exist at the end of the planning horizon.

Through the course of the community engagements held as part of this planning process, namely the six topic-based public forums and an economic development roundtable, challenges and opportunities were translated into Goals that support the achievement of the Vision Statement.

3

► Develop and Prioritize Supporting Actions

Consideration of existing initiatives, best practices, and emerging technologies, along with ideas generated by stakeholders and the community at-large, contributed to the development of recommended Actions (i.e., policies, programs, and projects) that support the achievement of the Goals.

In May/June 2021, through Community Survey #2, the community was asked to support the prioritization of the recommended Actions based on perceived levels of relative importance.

4

► Create an Accountable Implementation Program

Implementation details for the recommended Actions were defined, including their lead implementation entities and supporting partners, timelines, and estimated costs. Actions were further defined by their related elements and actions to realize potential implementation efficiencies and to maximize co-benefits.

5

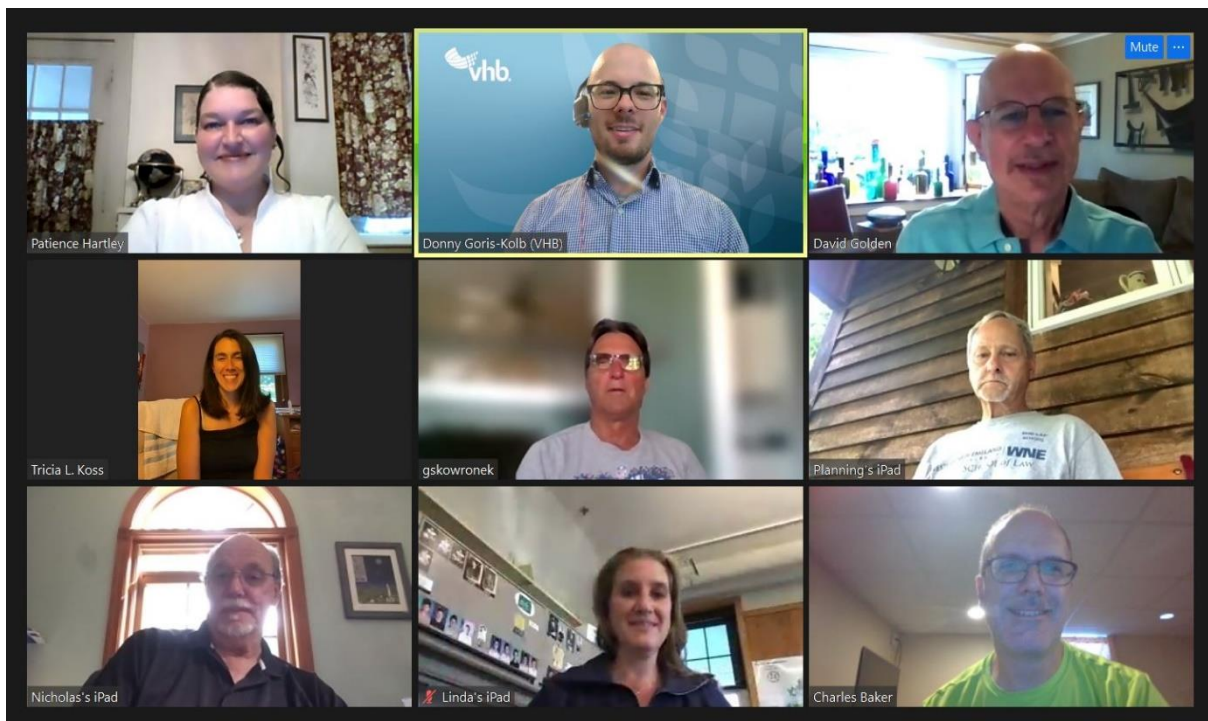
► Pull it All Together for Review and Adoption

Full drafts of the Master Plan elements were provided to the public in June 2021. The Palmer Planning Board received comment on the Master Plan throughout July 2021 and adopted it in August 2021.

As noted earlier, the Public Health Addendum was completed under the Palmer Mass in Motion program. Its planning process, which is described in Appendix A, was conducted concurrent to, but largely separate from that of this Master Plan. To promote consistency, the planning consultants leading each process coordinated regularly and attended each processes' key public meetings. Further, there was cross-representation between the Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) and the Palmer Health Addendum Working Group.

Engagement Process

Despite limitations that the COVID-19 pandemic presented throughout the course of this planning process, the Town of Palmer embraced an extensive and inclusive public engagement process that also provided opportunities for learning. This involved direct engagement with stakeholders, including the formation of the MPSC; seven online and televised public forums; both online and hardcopy surveys; an economic development forum; and a dedicated project-website.



Virtual Meeting of the Master Plan Steering Committee

A separate public engagement process was conducted as part of the Public Health Addendum. For a summary of those outreach efforts, please see Appendix A.

Master Plan Steering Committee

The engagement process for this Master Plan began with the establishment of the MPSC. Working with the Town Planner and Economic Development Director, as well as the planning consultants, the MPSC provided invaluable guidance and oversight throughout the planning process. Members of the MPSC also acted as liaisons to the larger Palmer community, reaching out to relevant local and regional groups and generally raising awareness of the project to solicit input to, and feedback and comment on, the Master Plan.

Aside from four at-large members representing the general public, including the chairperson, the MPSC had representation from the following eight Town departments, boards, and committees.

- ▶ Planning Board
- ▶ Town Council
- ▶ Board of Health
- ▶ Conservation Commission
- ▶ Council on Aging/Senior Center
- ▶ Department of Public Works
- ▶ Historical Commission
- ▶ School Committee



MPSC Chairperson, Dave Golden, raising awareness of the Master Plan and its merits on M-PACT-TV.

Over the 16-month project schedule, the MPSC held 14 meetings, not including their participation at public forums. These meetings were primarily held in support of key milestone-decisions (e.g., approval of draft elements). Each meeting was held virtually and broadcast live by M-PACT-TV, the public television studio servicing both Monson and Palmer, and posted to M-PACT-TV's website for broader viewing.

Targeted Stakeholder Conversations

At the onset of the planning process, the Town's planning consultant held several conversations with key Town officials and staff, interest groups, residents, property owners, business leaders, and others who live or work in Palmer. The purpose of these conversations was to gather input on the key issues and opportunities facing the Town. Representative questions included "What do you most appreciate about Palmer?" and "What are your biggest ongoing or future concerns for the community?"

Public Forums

A total of seven public forums covering a combination of Master Plan elements were planned, facilitated, and documented. They were widely advertised by the Town through means that included: postings on popular social media group pages; flyer placements at the four corners town signboard and post offices; advertisements/articles in the local newspaper, *The Journal Register*, and in the Senior Center's newsletter; email blasts to interested persons; announcements on the Town's municipal website and on the dedicated Master Plan website; advertisements on M-PACT-TV; and personal outreach conducted by the Town Planner and Economic Development Director and the MPSC. In light of in-person restrictions imposed by the State due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all public forums were held virtually. To gain the widest possible audience under these conditions, the public forums were held on Zoom in webinar format and broadcast on both Facebook Live and M-PACT-TV. Regardless of how participants viewed the meetings, all were provided opportunities to contribute to the discussion. Persons on the Zoom meeting were able to speak or use the platform's chat function. Those viewing through Facebook were able to post comments in that platform, which were monitored and then shared with the rest of the participants for discussion. Persons viewing through M-PACT-TV were provided the contact information of the Town Planner and Economic Development Director, and similar to comments received through Facebook, any comments received during the meeting were shared with the rest of the participants for discussion. Finally, all participants were invited to participate in polling through Poll Everywhere (<https://www.poll Everywhere.com/>), which was independent of the above platforms, accepting responses through either a web browser or through SMS text message. Poll responses were shown in real-time. As applicable, polls remained open for persons viewing meetings after their scheduled times.

List of Public Forums

Forum #1—Kick-Off and Visioning

Forum #2—Economic Development

Forum #3—Public Facilities and Services, and Historic and Cultural Resources

Forum #4—Transportation and Mobility

Forum #5—Housing

Forum #6—Sustainability and Climate Change

Forum #7—Natural Resources and Open Space



Example public forum advertisements prepared for social media postings and flyer placements.

Community Surveys

Two surveys were administered to the community, with hardcopies made available at strategic locations such as the Senior Center and Public Library. The first survey solicited input on the Town's current conditions and the community's desired future, while the second survey requested feedback on the draft Actions that represented the culmination of what the MPSC heard from the public and other stakeholders throughout the planning process for the Master Plan. In addition to requesting general feedback on the Actions, the second survey asked respondents to assist in their prioritization by selecting those that they believed to be of the highest relative importance.

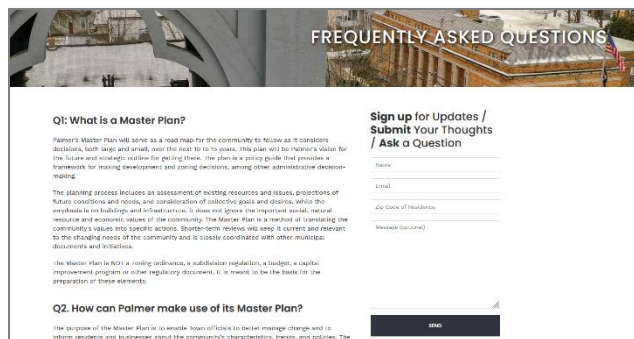
A total of 476 persons responded to this first survey, while 56 responded to the second (see responses in Appendix B).

Economic Development Roundtable

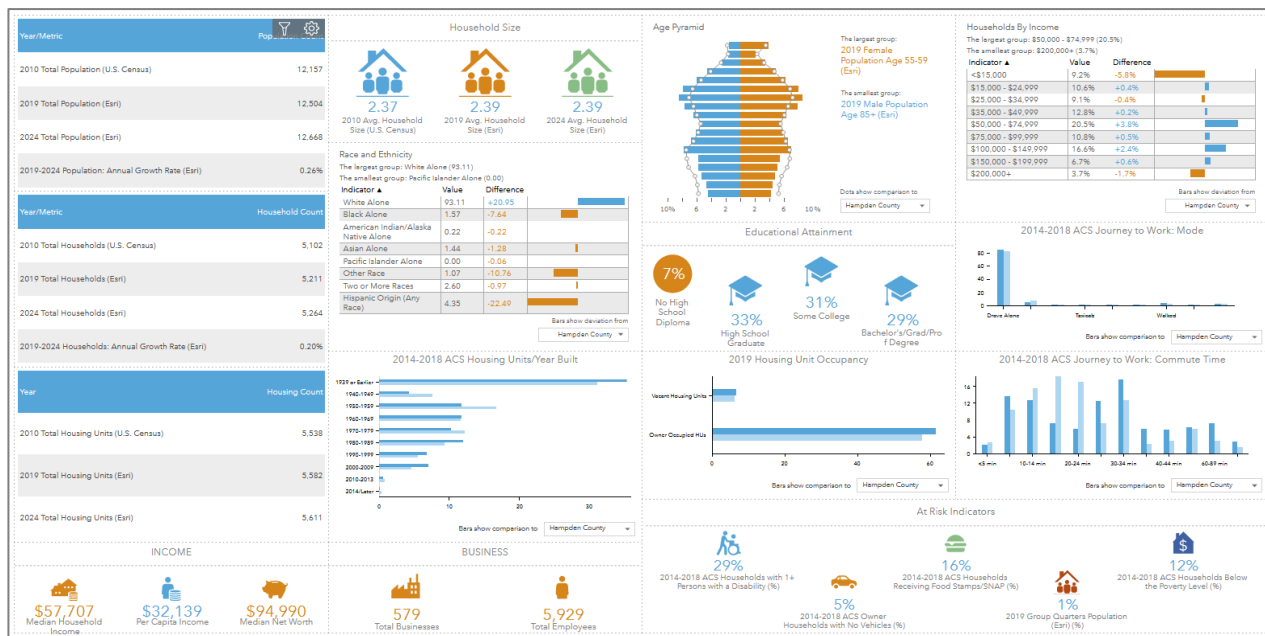
On September 10, 2020, the Town held and facilitated a virtual economic development roundtable that included participation from Town staff, PVPC, MassDevelopment, and representative local businesses small and large. The outcomes of this discussion were incorporated into, and are summarized in, the Economic Development Element (Chapter 4).

Master Plan Website

This Master Plan was supported by a dedicated website, <http://palmermasterplan.com/>, where information on the planning process was provided, highlights of community demographics were shared, and information on opportunities to engage were noticed. Additionally, this website served as a document repository for the draft and final elements, public forum presentations (including polling results), and meeting recordings, among other documents that contributed to the development of this Master Plan. A communication element was also incorporated into the website, which asked visitors to sign up for updates, submit thoughts and comments, and/or ask a question.



Screenshots of the Palmer Master Plan website.



Screenshot of an interactive community profile on the Palmer Master Plan website.

Vision Statement

Developed through the planning and engagement processes, the community came to consensus on the following Vision Statement. This Vision Statement set the tone for the development of this Master Plan, including the determination of its Goals and identification of its recommended Actions. Building on the Town's past and existing strengths, it characterizes the community's ideal future for itself, with emphases on sustainability and resilience.

Palmer is a preeminent destination to live, work and play in Western Massachusetts. Our collective, small-town identity is defined by the unique qualities of our four villages—Depot Village, Thorndike, Three Rivers and Bondsville. This identity is continually built upon by residents and organizations with incredible spirit and who are deeply invested in and celebrate the Town and its history. Palmer is planning its future with sustainability in mind and with a focus on climate resilience so as to be a thriving and vibrant community both now and in the future.

Known as the "Town of Seven Railroads," Palmer is a picturesque New England town boasting abundant open spaces, recreation areas and natural habitats—including lands along the Ware, Swift, Quaboag and Chicopee Rivers, which are all maintained and preserved for the enjoyment of all. These assets, along with housing accessibility and affordability, a top performing school system, high quality local health care facilities and convenient road and rail transportation access to points across the state and beyond, help to support and strengthen our existing residents and businesses as well as attract new ones that will be a part of our community for years to come.

2

Land Use and Development Patterns

Land use refers to how land is utilized by the community for activities such as economic and cultural development. Development patterns refer to how land uses are organized within a community—including the arrangement of agricultural, residential, industrial, commercial, and recreational uses, among other uses—and is the product of many years' worth of human interactions with the natural setting. An examination of a community's mix of land uses and development patterns helps to inform a fundamental understanding of its history and determine its needs relative to housing, economic development, environmental and cultural resources, open space and recreation, public facilities and infrastructure, and transportation.

This Land Use Element functions as an overarching component of the Master Plan, as it incorporates considerations of all other elements. It presents historical and current day perspectives on land use in the Town of Palmer to facilitate decision-making on how land resources should be strategically used to address the issues and opportunities identified through this planning process.

Baseline Conditions Analyses

Regional Context

The Town of Palmer is a predominantly rural community with four distinct village centers (i.e., Bondsville, Depot Village, Thorndike, and Three Rivers). It is situated in the easterly portion of Hampden County, Massachusetts, and within the administrative area of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) (see Figure 2-1). The Town is surrounded by the Towns of Belchertown and Ware to its north, Ludlow and Wilbraham to its west, Brimfield and Monson to its south, and Warren to its east. It is proximate to the regional economic

centers of Springfield (approximately 20 miles via Interstate 90 westbound) and Worcester (approximately 35 miles via Interstate 90 eastbound).

Palmer is within the Chicopee River Watershed. Important shared waterbodies include the Ware River, which flows southwesterly from the Town of Ware; the Quaboag River, which flows southwesterly from the Town of Warren; and the Swift River, which flows southerly from the Town of Belchertown. The confluence of these three rivers in the Village of Three Rivers forms the headwaters of the Chicopee River that flows southwesterly toward the Town of Wilbraham. More information on Palmer's water networks is provided in Chapter 6, *Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources*.

From a transportation perspective, Palmer is connected to its region and beyond via Interstate 90, running east-west. Other major thoroughfares crossing the Town include Route 20, also running east-west, and Route 32, running north-south. Palmer is served by regional transit services, including the Quaboag Connector that links Palmer, Belchertown, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Hardwick, Monson, Ware, Warren, and West Brookfield, as well as the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority's Ware-Palmer Circulator. Additionally, the Town is also being considered as a potential rail transit stop along the proposed East-West Passenger Rail project, which would provide passenger rail service from Boston to Springfield and Pittsfield. The Town boasts three active rail lines servicing regional freight operations: CSX moves freight east-west, Central New England moves freight north-south, and Mass Central is a short line running between Palmer and the Town of Barre. More information on Palmer's transportation networks is provided in Chapter 8, *Transportation and Mobility*.

Other regional connections include shared open spaces, such as the Colonels Mountain Wildlife Management Area, Red Bridge State Park, and Titanic Rail Trail/Grand Trunk Trail, as well as the to-be-completed Mass Central Rail Trail. Additionally, the Town is a member community of the Pathfinder Regional Vocation Technical School, along with Belchertown, Granby, Hardwick, Monson, New Braintree, Oakham, Ware, and Warren.

Historical Land Cover/Land Use

The four major rivers (i.e., Ware, Quaboag, Swift, and Chicopee) in Palmer played a critical role in the development of the Town, particularly with respect to its transformation from a farming community to an industrial community where waterpower was harnessed for the operation of textile mills. These textile mills catalyzed the development of three of the Town's four villages (i.e., Bondsville, Thorndike, and Three Rivers), which were developed to provide worker housing and related services.

Palmer's unique character is defined by its more densely developed village centers, juxtaposed against an abundance and diverse range of natural resources, such as upland forests and vast open spaces. As shown in Figures 2-2 through 2-4 and Table 2-1, natural land in Palmer has and continues to comprise the majority of land cover in the community, encompassing more than 70 percent of the Town's land area since at least 1985.^{2, 3}

2 MassGIS (Bureau of Geographic Information). MassGIS Data: Land Use (1951-1999).

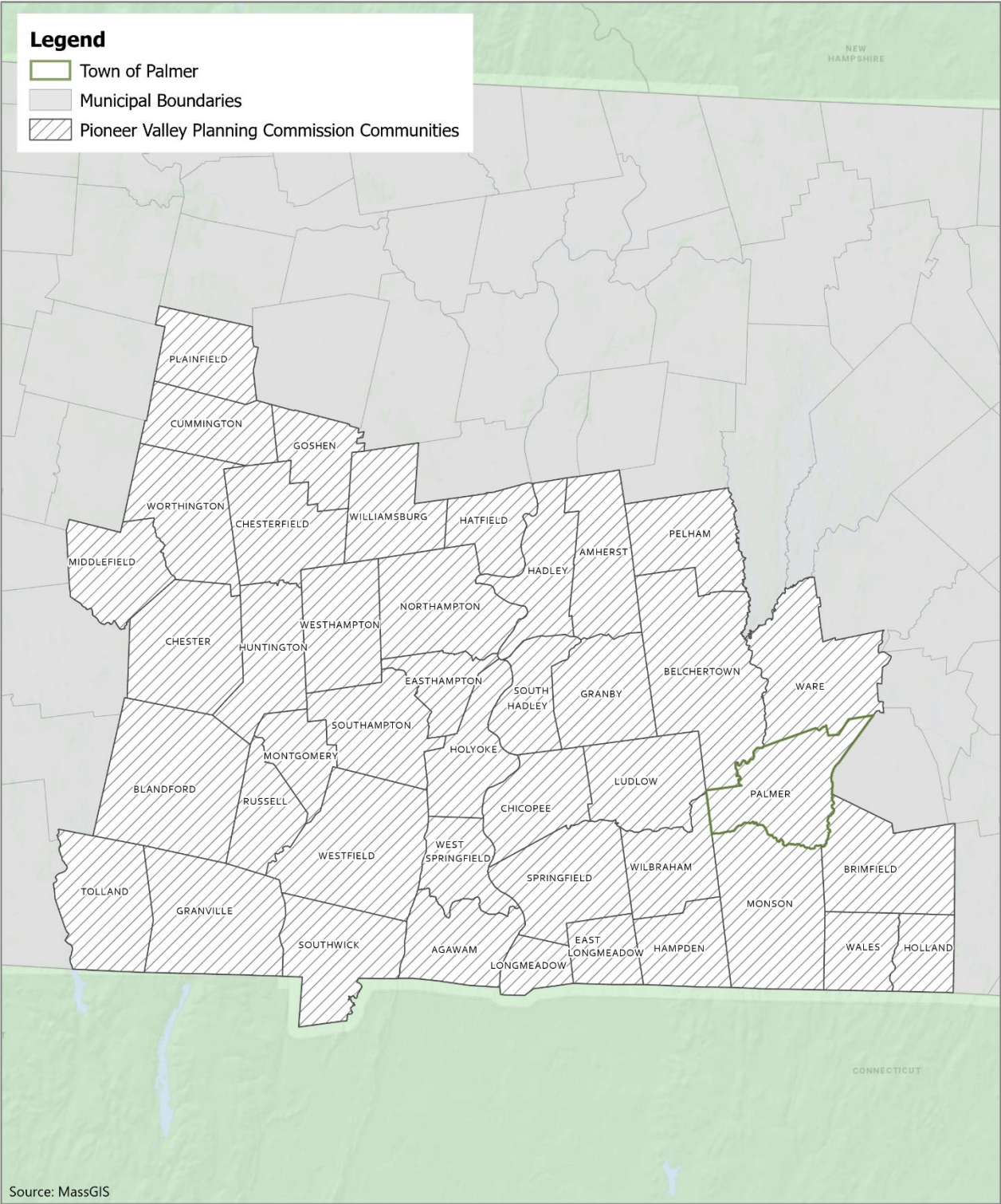
3 MassGIS (Bureau of Geographic Information). MassGIS Data: Land Use (2005).

PALMER
MASTER PLAN



July 19, 2021

FIGURE 2-1



Source: MassGIS



Regional Context

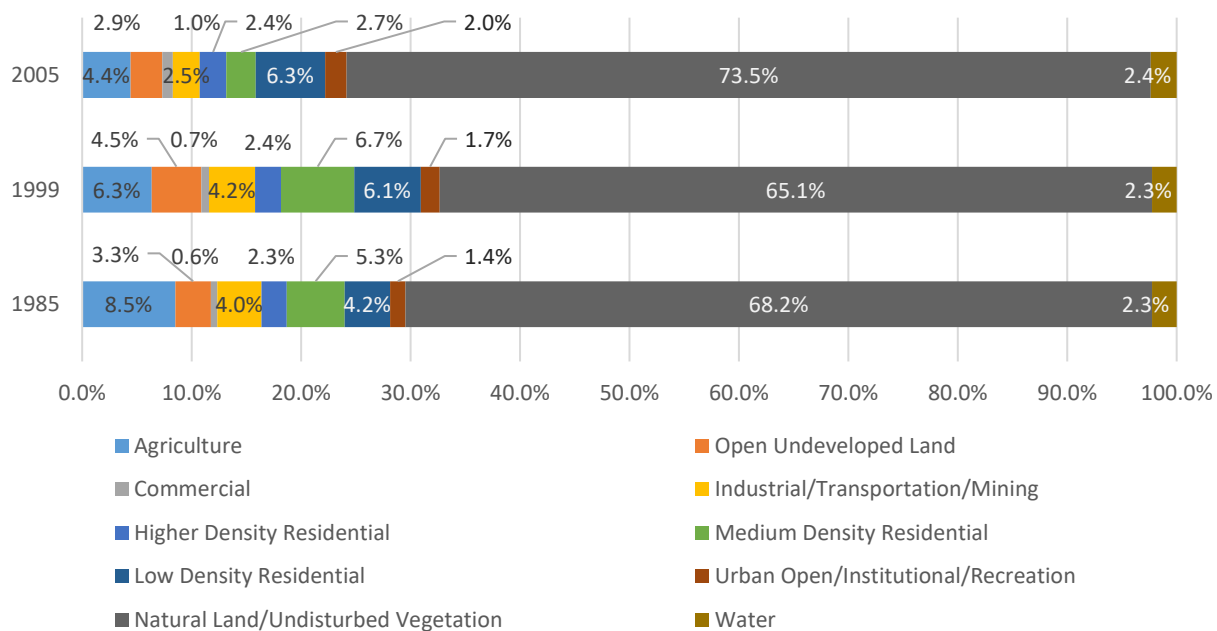
Palmer, Massachusetts

Table 2-1 Breakdown of Land Cover/Land Use, 1985, 1999, 2005

Land Use/Cover Type	1985	1999	2005	1985-2005 Change (%)
Agriculture	1,743.3	1,300.4	907.1	-48.0%
Open Undeveloped Land	668.2	929.0	594.1	-11.1%
Commercial	118.0	142.9	196.9	66.9%
Industrial/Transportation/Mining	824.8	864.5	504.1	-38.9%
Higher Density Residential (multi-family developments and units on lots smaller than 1/4 acre)	474.6	485.2	497.1	4.7%
Medium Density Residential (units on 1/4 - 1/2 acre lots)	1,083.8	1,374.0	549.4	-49.3%
Lower Density Residential (units on lots larger than 1/2 acre)	853.9	1,242.1	1,298.0	52.0%
Urban Open/Institutional/Recreation	287.4	354.5	406.0	41.3%
Natural Land/Undisturbed Vegetation	3,975.6	13,337.1	15,054.5	7.7%
Water	462.6	462.6	485.0	4.8%
Total	20,492.3	20,492.3	20,492.3	--

Source: MassGIS (1985, 1999, 2005)

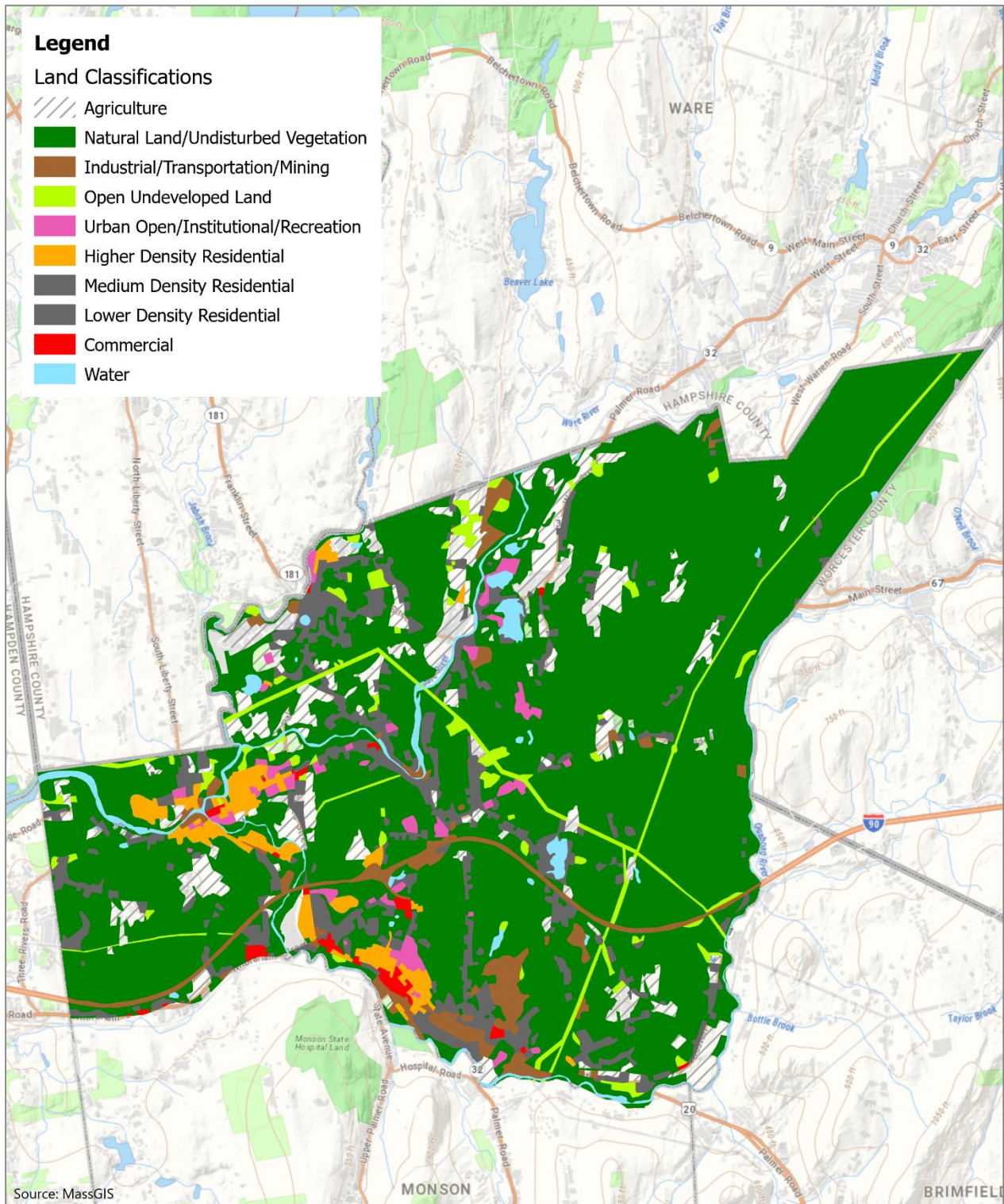
Figure 2-2 Breakdown of Land Cover/Land Use, 1985, 1999, 2005



Source: MassGIS

PALMER
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 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 2-3**

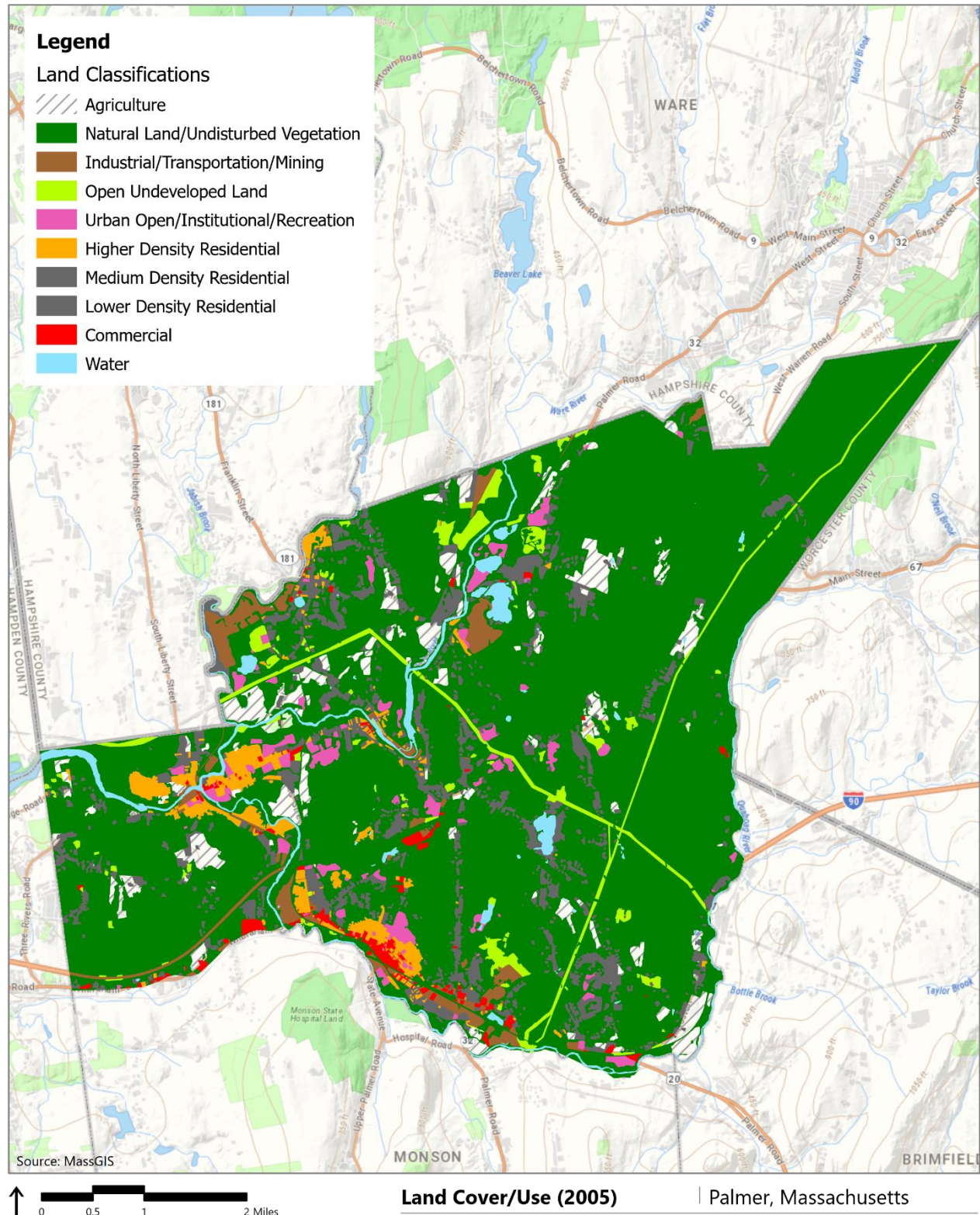


0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Land Cover/Use (1985) | Palmer, Massachusetts

PALMER
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 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 2-4**



As shown in Figures 2-3 and 2-4, according to MassGIS land cover/land use data, the pattern of development in Palmer (i.e., developed versus undeveloped areas) did not change significantly between 1985 and 2005. Among the changes that did occur, Palmer saw new industrial developments in northwest Bondsville and north of Wilbraham Street in Depot Village; a southeast extension of commercial uses along South Main Street and Park Street in Depot Village; and low density residential expansions throughout the Town, particularly in its southeastern, north central, and northeastern portions.

The make-up of the Town's developed areas did undergo some notable shifts. As shown in Table 2-1, trends in land cover/land use between 1985 and 2005 include large declines in medium density residential (-49.3 percent) and agriculture (-48 percent), while noteworthy gains were realized in commercial (66.9 percent) and lower density residential (52 percent). It is important to note that the 2005 data have more detailed delineations of cover/use, which has influence over these trends.

Existing Land Use

Based on classification codes embedded within the Town Assessors Division's 2019 property database, the largest land uses represented in Palmer include residential (50.6 percent) and exempt property (22.7 percent). Residential uses are distributed throughout the Town, with larger densities found within and surrounding the village centers. Among the residential land uses, 47.5 percent is of the single family typology. Much of the exempt property in Palmer is owned by the Town or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for open space and water resource protection purposes.

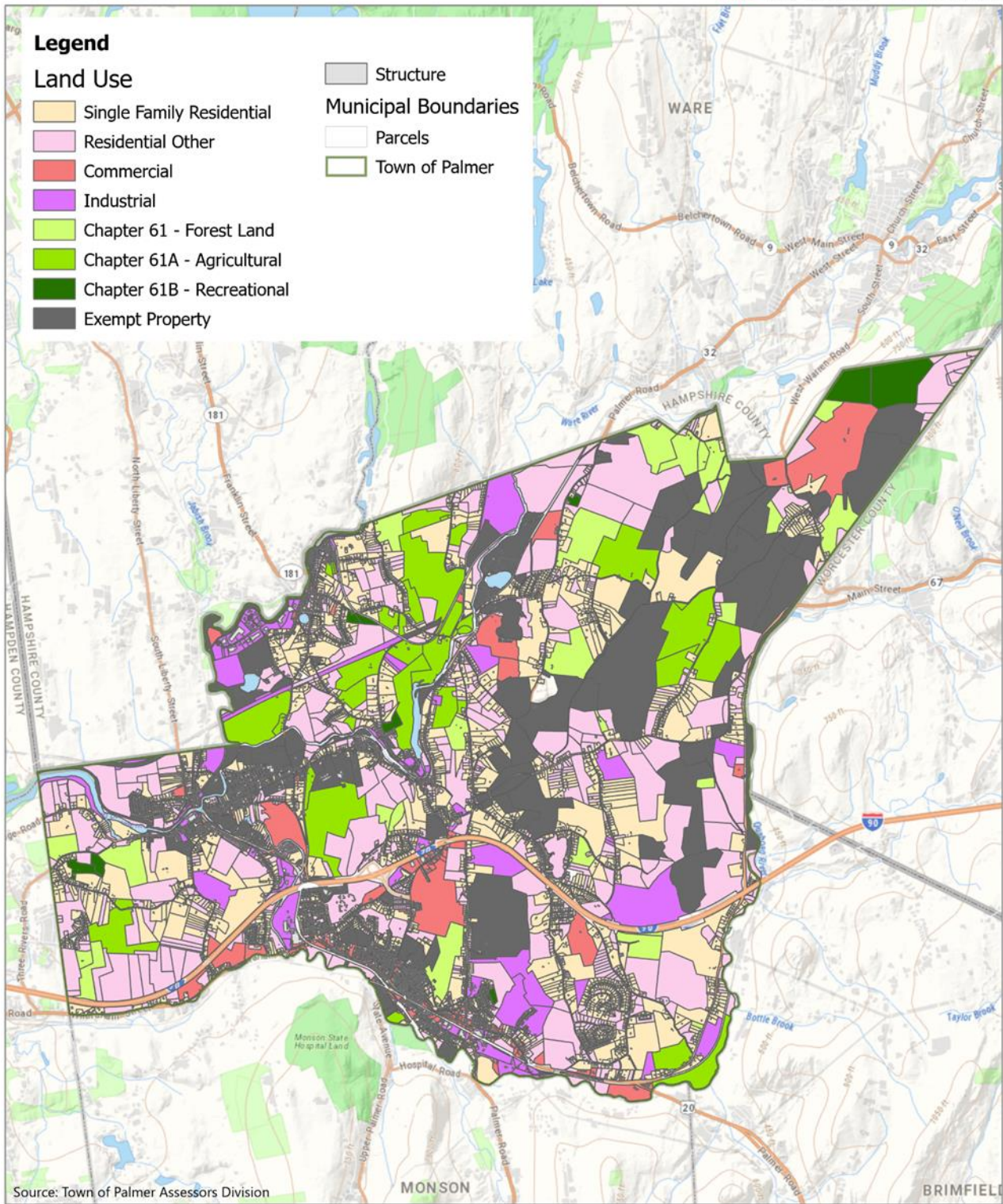
Though limited in comparison to the presence of residential and exempt uses, industrial and commercial activities comprise 6.2 percent and 5.8 percent of the Town, respectively. Industrial activities are generally proximate to the Town's rail lines, and many are concentrated in industrial parks, such as the Mapletree Industrial Center (Depot Village), Chamber Road Industrial Park (Three Rivers), and Palmer Industrial Park (Bondsville). Additional concentrations can be found along South Main Street in Depot Village (e.g., Sanderson Mcleod) and along Church Street in Thorndike (e.g., Thorndike Mills). Notably, Palmer has several solar energy facilities spread throughout the Town.

Commercial activities predominantly occur within Palmer's village centers, along North and South Main Streets and Park Street in Depot Village, Main Street and Springfield Street in Three Rivers, Commercial Street in Thorndike, and Main Street in Bondsville. Areas developed for commercial purposes are also present along Wilbraham Street to the east of Town and along Thorndike Street in the central part of Town, both south of Interstate 90. For more information on commercial and industrial activities in Palmer, see Chapter 3, *Economic Development*.

Figures 2-5 and 2-6 depict current land uses in the Town of Palmer.

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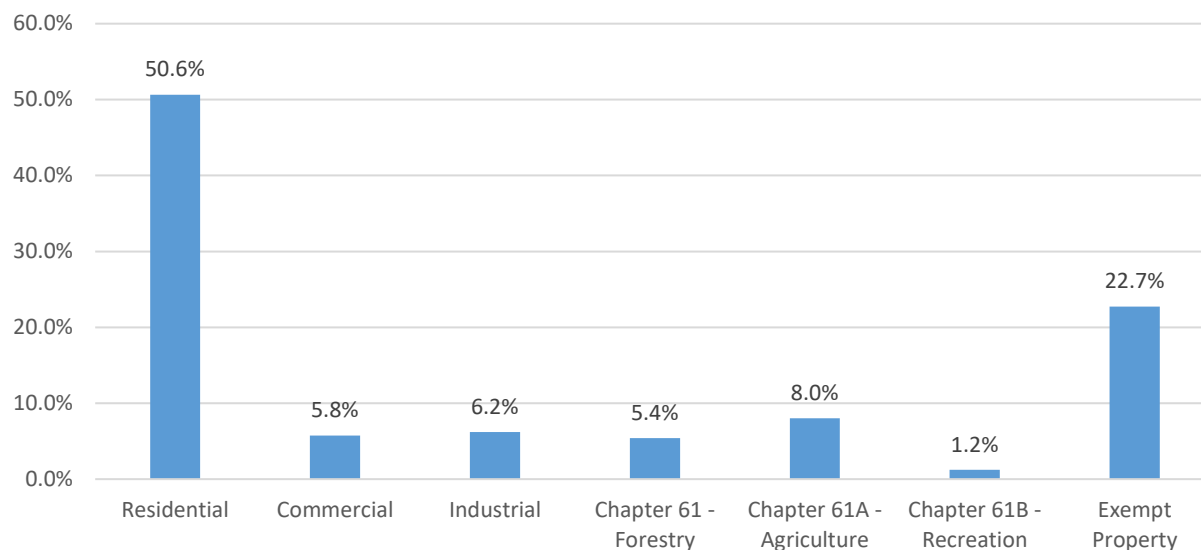
 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 2-5**



↑ 0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Existing Land Use (2019) | Palmer, Massachusetts

Figure 2-6 Breakdown of Property Type Classification Codes by Land Area, 2019



Source: Town of Palmer Assessors Division, 2019 Property Database

Vacant Land

As of 2019, parcels in Palmer classified as some form of vacant amounted to 4,735.1 acres or 23.9 percent of Palmer's total acreage. Most of these lands (4,240.6 acres) were classified as residential, while vacant commercial lands totaled 312.9 acres and vacant industrial lands totaled 181.6 acres. With respect to development potential, 73.2 percent of vacant lands in the Town have been determined to be developable or potentially developable, while an additional 1.3 percent involve vacant agricultural lands not included in Chapter 61A. The remaining 25.6 percent has been determined to be undevelopable (e.g., properties with an existing easement).

Table 2-2 breaks down the Town's vacant land uses as classified by the Town Assessors Division's 2019 property database. This includes parcels with the following land use codes: 130, 131, and 132 (residential); 211, 220, and 230 (open space); 390, 391, 392, and 393 (commercial); and 440, 441, and 442 (industrial), as present. It excludes vacant properties classified as exempt.

Palmer also has a number of properties enrolled in the Chapter 61 programs (61 for forest land, 61A for agricultural land, and 61B for open space and recreational land) that are afforded by the State to assist landowners with the cost of maintaining their working forests, farms, and natural areas. It should be noted that the Chapter 61 programs are only temporary land protection measures, and accordingly, enrolled properties are vulnerable to market pressures for development. With some exceptions, the Chapter 61 programs afford towns with a first refusal option that is triggered when a chapter parcel is converted to non-chapter use while enrolled or within one year of program withdrawal.

In Palmer, Chapter 61 program lands account for 14.7 percent of the Town. Among these lands, Chapter 61 comprises 26.9 percent, Chapter 61A comprises 54.8 percent, and Chapter 61B comprises 8.3 percent (see Figure 2-5).

Table 2-2 Breakdown of Vacant Lands, 2019

Land Use	Acres	% of Total Vacant Area	% of Total Area
Residential	4240.6	89.6%	21.4%
Developable Land	2704.4	57.1%	13.7%
Potentially Developable Land	341.4	7.2%	1.7%
Undevelopable Land	1194.8	25.2%	6.0%
Commercial	312.9	6.6%	1.6%
Developable Land	222.2	4.7%	1.1%
Potentially Developable Land	26.5	0.6%	0.1%
Undevelopable Land	4.2	0.1%	0.0%
Agricultural Land (non-Chapter 61A)	60.0	1.3%	0.3%
Industrial	181.6	3.8%	0.9%
Developable Land	32.7	0.7%	0.2%
Potentially Developable Land	137.6	2.9%	0.7%
Undevelopable Land	11.3	0.2%	0.1%
Total	4735.1	100.0%	23.9%

Source: Town of Palmer Assessors Division, 2019 Property Database

Zoning Ordinance

The Town of Palmer's Zoning Ordinance, which was originally adopted in 1980 and significantly revised in 2000, generally aims to make the Town a more viable and more pleasing place to live, work, and play. Specific objectives include:

- ▶ To lessen congestion in the streets
- ▶ To conserve health
- ▶ To secure safety from fire, flood, panic, and other dangers
- ▶ To provide adequate light and air
- ▶ To prevent overcrowding of land, to avoid undue concentration of population
- ▶ To encourage housing for persons of all income levels
- ▶ To facilitate the adequate provision of transportation, water supply, drainage, sewerage, schools, parks, open space and other public requirements
- ▶ To conserve the value of land and buildings, including the conservation of natural resources and the prevention of blight and pollution of the environment
- ▶ To encourage appropriate uses of land throughout the Town
- ▶ To preserve and increase amenities

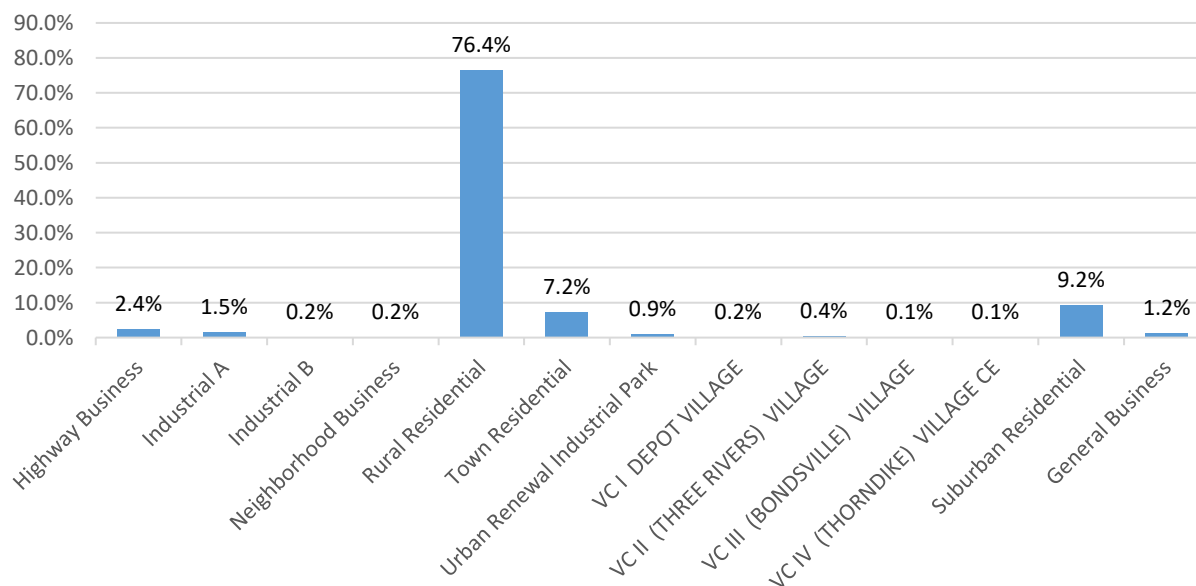
To accomplish these objectives, the Zoning Ordinance promulgates regulations, such as dimensional and density regulations (Article VI) and use regulations (Article VII). The Town's Building Inspector, who is also the Zoning Enforcement Officer, is responsible for the administration and enforcement of these regulations.

Palmer is divided into 13 zoning districts, including three residential districts, four mixed use districts, three commercial districts, and three industrial districts. They are as follows:

- ▶ Rural Residential (RR)
- ▶ Suburban Residential (SR)
- ▶ Town Residential (TR)
- ▶ Village Center District I – Depot Village (VC I)
- ▶ Village Center District II – Three Rivers (VC II)
- ▶ Village Center District III – Bondsville (VC III)
- ▶ Village Center District IV – Thorndike (VC IV)
- ▶ General Business (GB)
- ▶ Highway Business (HB)
- ▶ Neighborhood Business (NB)
- ▶ Industrial A (IA)
- ▶ Industrial B (IB)
- ▶ Urban Renewal Industrial Park (URIP)

As quantified in Figure 2-7 and illustrated in Figure 2-8, among the above districts, the RR District is by the far the most prevalent, accounting for 76.9 percent of the Town. As the RR District only allows single family housing on lots sized 60,000 square feet or more (with or without public water and sewer), this is both indicative of, and a contributor to the Town's predominantly rural character.

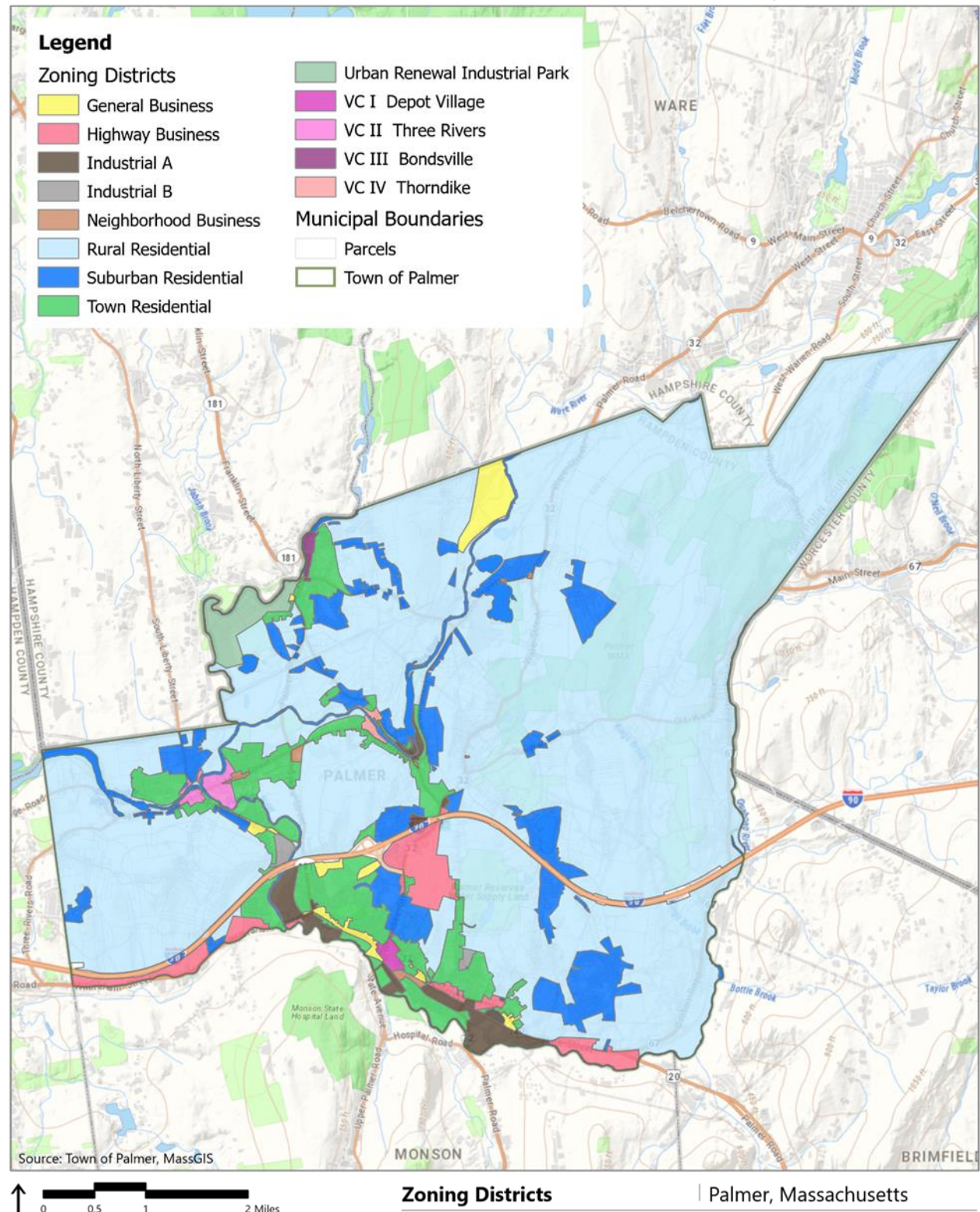
Figure 2-7 Breakdown of Base Zoning Districts, 2019



Source: Town of Palmer, 2019

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MASTER PLAN

 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 2-8**



Single family homes are also allowed by-right in the SR District (minimum lot size is 30,000 square feet) and the TR District (minimum lot size is 20,000 to 30,000 square feet depending on the presence of public water and sewer). Meanwhile, two-, three-, and four-family homes are only permitted within the TR District, with minimum lot areas of 30,000 square feet for two-family homes and 60,000 square feet for three- or four-family homes. Townhouses/condominiums/or multi-family units are only allowed in the SR and TR Districts, unless they are for elderly housing. In that case, they are also allowed in the RR District. Minimum lot areas in any allowable district are 20,000 square feet per unit or family.

Notably, accessory apartments for family members require a special permit and site plan approval. Meanwhile, accessory apartments for non-family members are not allowed in the RR District but can be built in the SR and TR Districts subject to a special permit and site plan approval. Also noteworthy is the fact that elderly housing in the form of multi-family units requires a special permit and site plan approval in all residential districts.

As discovered during the development of this Master Plan's build-out analysis (see below), many parcels do not meet minimal dimensional requirements (e.g., minimum lot size, frontage, rear and side yard requirements). If these parcels do not have vested rights as allowed under Chapter 40A Section 6 of the General Laws of Massachusetts, Palmer has a number of permitting avenues for development and redevelopment of non-conforming parcels. If the improvements are relative to one or two family dwellings, the review would fall under the purview of the Zoning Board of Appeals who would make a finding of detriment. If the proposal is commercial in nature or involves complete demolition and reconstruction, the finding of detriment would be issued by the Planning Board. In certain statutory circumstances where grandfathered rights do not exist, their redevelopment would require a variance granted in accordance with the required variance procedures.

As communicated during the stakeholder engagement process for this Master Plan, the existing parking requirements found within the Town's Zoning Ordinance may require more parking than necessary. This encourages excessive pavements for development projects. The Town's Planning and Economic Development Department has drafted a revision to these requirements, which would further require recommendation by the Planning Board and adoption by the Town Council.

As part of this Master Plan's first community survey, when asked to identify common land use concerns most relevant to Palmer, 42 percent of respondents selected "outdated zoning bylaws" and 21.4 percent selected "inadequate zoning/building code enforcement."

Village Center Districts

As part of the Zoning Ordinance's overhaul in 2000, a prominent addition was village center zoning. The Town's Village Center Districts are unique in that they concentrate denser development in areas that are served by public water and sewer and are proximate to amenities, such as shops and schools. These districts provide for mixed uses within one zone, including by promoting commercial (locally oriented retail, service, and office uses preferred) and residential uses in a single building (businesses on the ground floor with housing on the upper stories). Busier streets in these districts are afforded higher density allowances, attempting to avoid a strip commercial appearance. These districts are intended

to support transit use, provide a buffer between busy streets and residential neighborhoods, and provide new housing opportunities.

Dimensional requirements of the Village Center Districts promote a pedestrian-oriented environment with buildings close to and oriented to the sidewalk, especially at corners. However, these districts lack form-based zoning elements, such as street frontage/site configuration (e.g., building and parking lot location, building entry location), and architectural design guidelines (e.g., façade enhancements, ground level transparency), that would help achieve this intended environment.

Overlay Districts

In addition to these base districts, two overlay districts provide supplemental regulations and standards. They include the Water Supply Protection District and Floodplain District. The purpose of the Water Supply Protection District is to promote health, safety and welfare of the community by protecting and preserving the surface and groundwater resources of the Town and the region. The boundaries of this district include any areas lying within the primary and secondary recharge areas of groundwater aquifers and watershed areas of reservoirs that provide public water supply.

The Floodplain District primarily includes all special flood hazard areas designated as Zone A, A1-30 on the Town of Palmer Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM), which includes areas of base flood elevation (BFE)—also referred to as the 1-percent annual chance flood or 100-year flood. The purpose of the Floodplain District is to protect the public health and general welfare from the hazards of flooding, and to this end, uses within this overlay district need to meet additional requirements, including those of the State Building Code concerning construction within floodplains. It is important to note that, in consideration of a changing climate and associated future impacts, good practice in planning has been to also consider moderate flood hazard areas, i.e., areas between the 100-year flood and the 0.2-percent annual chance flood or 500-year flood.

Transfer of Development Rights

The Transfer Of Development Rights Ordinance provides for increased density of residential and commercial development in receiving districts, while suitable open space land is permanently preserved from development in sending districts. Sending districts are areas of the Town where developers sell the development rights to their land, while retaining all other rights, for a fair-market value. Receiving districts are areas where a purchased development right can be transferred, allowing for a greater density than what would normally be allowed through the underlying zoning.

The Transfer Of Development Rights Ordinance has the following purposes:

- ▶ To protect scenic and rural areas of the Town.
- ▶ To protect property values and provide a fair economic return to property owners.
- ▶ To foster compact development in areas served by public services and infrastructure.
- ▶ To promote compact development, both residential and commercial, in areas that have been identified as potential suitable sites for both future development and infrastructure improvements.

- ▶ To promote the creation of traditional neighborhood developments with compact, pedestrian-friendly, predominantly residential areas on gridded streets.
- ▶ To preserve the rural, historic, and agricultural character of the community by directing compact new development, both residential and commercial, to appropriate locations adjacent to existing urbanized centers.
- ▶ To preserve the rural, historic, and agricultural character of the community by directing compact new commercial development to appropriate locations adjacent to major transit routes.

Of note, the Transfer Of Development Rights Ordinance has not yet been utilized since its adoption in 2007.

Open Space Residential Development

Open space residential development refers to a variety of housing types clustered together and adjacent to permanently preserved open space. As stated in the Town's Open Space Residential Development Ordinance, open space residential development is the Town's preferred method of subdivision development wherever the following purposes would be served:

- ▶ To allow for greater flexibility and creativity in the design of residential developments, provided that the overall density of the development is no greater than what is normally allowed in the district;
- ▶ To encourage the permanent preservation of open space, agricultural lands, forest lands and other natural resources including aquifers, water bodies and wetlands, and historical and archaeological resources;
- ▶ To encourage a less sprawling and more efficient form of development that consumes less open land and conforms to existing topography and natural features;
- ▶ To maintain the traditional New England rural character and land use pattern in which small villages contrast with open space and farmlands;
- ▶ To facilitate the construction of streets, utilities and public services in a more economical and efficient manner;
- ▶ To ensure that residential developments respect the natural features of the land, including wetlands, watercourses, forests, prime agricultural land, steep slopes, plants, wildlife, historic sites, scenic views, and rural character;
- ▶ To encourage development out of view from the road, and promote alternatives to strip residential development lining roadsides in the town; and
- ▶ To provide wildlife corridors connecting open spaces, needed by wildlife to ensure its survival.

Similar to the Transfer of Development Rights Ordinance, the Open Space Residential Development Ordinance has not yet been utilized since its adoption in 2007. This may be due to the requirement for a special permit, whereas traditional subdivision development is allowed by-right.

Transit Oriented Development

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is a fast-growing trend focused on building multimodal transportation options around high quality transit systems. TOD works to enhance existing pedestrian and bicycle networks and create new transportation connections to existing or proposed train stations in a variety of communities on both a local level and regional scale. Through these efforts TOD helps to limit suburban sprawl and provide access to local goods and services. The goal of TOD is to reduce the dependency on single-occupant vehicle usage, promote mobility across a variety of modes that will support transit, and provide opportunity for mixed-use developments near transit stops.

As part of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT's) *East-West Passenger Rail Study* (2021), and due in part to local advocacy, Palmer is being considered for a prospective passenger rail stop on a train line that would connect South Station in Boston to Union Station in Springfield. While a location has not been specifically identified, this section summarizes the TOD opportunities and challenges associated with a new train station in downtown Depot Village, in the general vicinity of Main Street where existing rail tracks intersect with Bridge Street. As stated in *Towards a Passenger Station on the East-West Massachusetts Train Line: The Case for Palmer* (2019), downtown Depot Village "offers a mix of attractive traditional buildings and pedestrian scale streetscapes that could be the building blocks for related transportation developments."

A passenger rail station in downtown Depot Village, supported by the area's dense local roadway network, provides opportunities to enhance the existing pedestrian and bicycle network that would improve local and regional connectivity. With improved regional connectivity comes the opportunity for mixed-used development and downtown growth/improvements to accommodate the influx of potential commuters with local businesses and amenities. Economic buildup around the potential station would introduce new jobs to Palmer, which could attract new residents. Greater urbanization of Depot Village has the potential to expand existing public transit services available in Palmer (see Chapter 8, *Transportation and Mobility*).

As part of early planning for a new train station, the Town commissioned the *Palmer Transit Oriented Development Draft Conceptual Downtown Plan* in 2017. This study, prepared by Fuss & O'Neill, looked at factors that would impact TOD in downtown Depot Village, such as available/ underutilized land, opportunities for increased densities, scale and character of the existing downtown fabric, and more. Sites in Depot Village considered as part of this study are shown in Figure 2-9.

As reported in the 2017 study, some positive attributes and opportunities that would support TOD in Depot Village include lands available for structured and surface parking options, lands available for bus transit and bus staging, and the construction of pedestrian and car loops. On the other hand, notable challenges identified include underpasses that cannot accommodate buses and/or both two-way traffic and bicycle/pedestrian access; limited vacant land for supporting development; and inefficient block patterns and parking areas.

Still relevant next steps identified by the 2017 study include:

- ▶ Secure a position as a reviewer on forthcoming state transportation plans.
- ▶ Position Palmer for additional funding/study that can support the development and submittal of an Urban Redevelopment Plan per state statutes and a TOD plan that is supported by the community.
- ▶ Seek available funding predicated on a plan.
- ▶ Protect downtown from unwanted development form or uses, including through the use of short-term zoning controls and downtown guidelines tied to zoning approval.

Related to the last bullet above, it was noted through the course of this Master Plan the potential importance of the Holbrook site at 1412-1416 Main Street. This site is currently owned by the Palmer Redevelopment Authority and could significantly support the Town in achieving its TOD objectives for downtown Depot Village.

Figure 2-9 East-West Passenger Rail, Station Site Options in Depot Village



Source: Fuss & O'Neill (2017)

Build-Out Analysis

Based on the vacant land uses identified through a review of the Town Assessors Division's 2019 property database (see Table 2-2) and the Town's existing land use regulations, a build-out analysis was performed to determine Palmer's new development potential. Informing this analysis were environmental constraints, which removed areas of potential build based on development difficulty (i.e., steep slopes [greater than 25 percent]), natural resource protection (i.e., wetlands [100-foot buffer] and rivers/streams [200-foot buffer]), open space protection (both permanent and temporary), and hazard avoidance (i.e., flood

hazard areas [1 percent and .2 percent]). Lands included in the build-out analysis are shown in Figure 2-10 by their underlying zoning district.

Applying the number of allowable residential units per acre provided by the Town's Zoning Ordinance, along with the Town's average household size in 2020 (2.38⁴), Palmer could potentially grow by as many as 2,973 new units and 7,197 new residents. This represents a high development scenario, where the maximum allowable units per acre are developed (e.g., four family homes built, where allowed, instead of a single family home).

With respect to new commercial and industrial development, Palmer could see an additional 3.4 million square feet of new commercial space supporting 1,666 new employees, and an additional 112,000 square feet of new industrial space supporting 58 new employees. These values reflect the application of floor area ratio (FAR) values consistent with the Town's dimensional requirements and assumed growth factors for number of employees per acre by development type.

Table 2-3 presents the results of the build-out analysis performed for this Master Plan. It is important to note that the values provided in the table do not account for potential redevelopment opportunities (i.e., properties with buildings and/or are currently active but perhaps not meeting highest and best use). Accounting for such opportunities would increase the estimates of the analysis. These values also assume no constraints relative to public infrastructure (e.g., water and sewer).

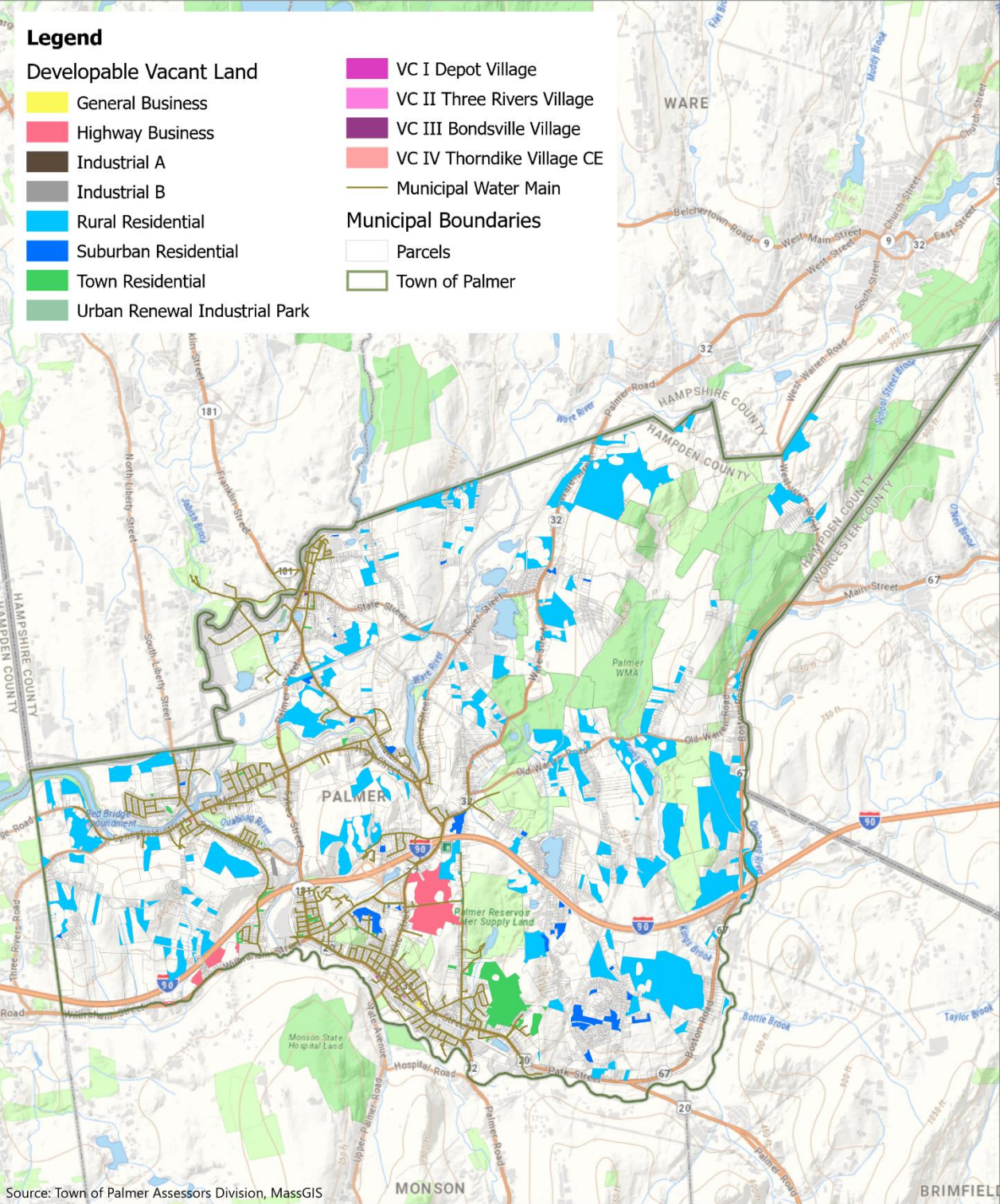
Table 2-3 Results of Palmer's Build-Out Analysis

Land Use	Value
Commercial	
New Commercial (Sq Ft)	3,422,956
New Commercial (Employees)	1,666
Industrial	
New Industrial (Sq Ft)	112,194
New Industrial (Employees)	58
Residential	
New Residential (Units) - High Scenario	2,973
New Residential (Residents) - High Scenario	7,227
New Residential (Units) - Low Scenario	1,074
New Residential (Residents) - Low Scenario	2,567

4 Esri. (2020). Current-year estimate of the population age 25 years or older who earned a bachelor's, graduate or professional degree.

PALMER
MASTER PLAN

 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 2-10**



↑ 0 0.5 1 2 Miles


Build-Out Analysis | Palmer, Massachusetts

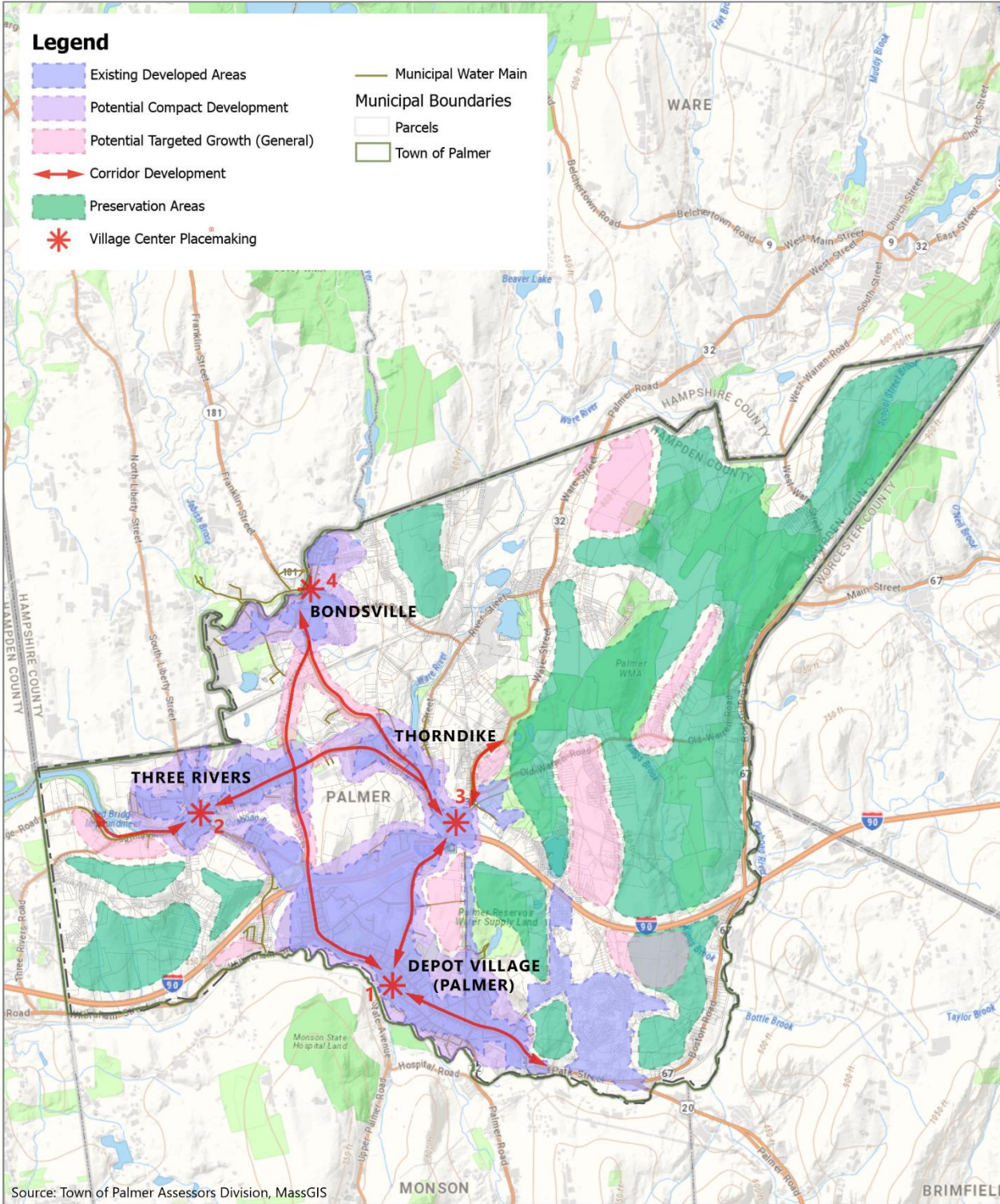
Land Use Vision

Based on public feedback obtained throughout the planning process for this Master Plan, as well as the results of the build-out analysis described above, a land use vision for the Town was developed. This vision was built around the following four core themes that are illustrated in Figure 2-11.

- ▶ Targeted Growth – Development occurring outside of the village centers should be focused in priority areas, such as:
 - Lands east and west of Route 32, just south of the Ware town line (commercial and/or light industrial).
 - The former casino site currently proposed for a large water park and sports complex, located west of Thorndike Street and south of Interstate 90 (commercial).
 - Lands west of Thompson Street and south of Interstate 90 (open space residential development [i.e., a residential development in which a variety of housing types are clustered together, adjacent to permanently preserved open space]).
- ▶ Corridor Development – Heavily traveled roadways that have development potential (e.g., have access to water/sewer and are adjacent to existing corridor development) can serve to better connect the Town’s commercial nodes located in its village centers.
 - Corridors identified for growth include portions of Route 32, particularly segments just north and south of its intersection with Interstate 90; Route 181; Thorndike, Springfield, Church, and High Streets; and the Main Streets extending out of the village centers.
- ▶ Compact Development and Placemaking in the Village Centers – Development and redevelopment opportunities for additional residential, retail-based commercial uses, and small-scale industrial uses exist within and immediately surrounding Palmer’s four village centers.
 - New development within the village centers can help to define each of their unique characters (e.g., main street commercial and transit oriented development in Depot Village, arts and culture in Three Rivers, mill-based commercial and light industrial activities, including energy, in Thorndike; and recreation in Bondsville).
 - Greater housing choice can be realized by expanding the Town Residential District around the village centers where connections to municipal water and sewer are presently feasible and not cost-prohibitive to the Town or would-be developers.
- ▶ Preservation – As much of the Town is comprised of natural areas, and as these natural areas provide many functions beneficial to humans (e.g., health and wellness through recreation and water filtration; hazard mitigation, such as flood storage and cooling during heat waves; and climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration) and to local wildlife (e.g., biodiversity conservation), the community seeks to preserve large swaths of existing undeveloped areas that are not already protected. These areas are primarily located in the eastern portions of the Town, as well as in the western portions north of Interstate 90, and to the north between Jim Ash Road and Emery Street.

PALMER
MASTER PLAN

 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 2-11**



0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Future Land Use Vision | Palmer, Massachusetts

Goals and Recommended Actions

Goal 1. Promote development patterns that are consistent with the overall vision of the Master Plan, as well as the Goals and recommended Actions of related elements (e.g., Housing, Economic Development, etc.).

Land use is the fundamental element of the Master Plan, with changes made to land use policy and controls affecting other master plan elements.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 Implement policies that position the Town to realize its future land use objectives, focusing on targeted growth, corridor development, compact development and placemaking in the village centers, and preservation. Refer to Figure 2-11.

Targeted Growth

- 1.1.1 Seek agreements with neighboring communities for the expansion of public infrastructure, namely water and sewer, to catalyze desired growth. In particular, continue previous efforts with the Town of Ware to expand infrastructure into Palmer to areas east and west of Route 32 and south of the Ware town line in support of new commercial and/or light industrial activities.
- 1.1.2 Regularly identify cost-effective public infrastructure expansion opportunities, coinciding with desired future development projects, and adjust the Town's Zoning Ordinance accordingly.
 - In doing so, ensure that the infrastructure to support desired growth is in place prior to completing any formal re-zoning. This will help limit undesirable interim activities (e.g., on-site industrial storage).

Corridor Development

Corridors identified for growth include portions of Routes 32 and 181; Thorndike, Springfield, Church, and High Streets, and the Main Streets extending out of the Village Centers.

- 1.1.3 To better connect the commercial nodes of the village centers, examine opportunities to revitalize or re-zone areas along the connecting corridors, such as through new overlay districts, to encourage appropriate development and redevelopment.
- 1.1.4 Identify appropriate locations along Route 32, potentially including just north and south of its intersection with the Massachusetts Turnpike, which would support large-scale commercial mixed-use centers that would achieve local and regional growth opportunities (e.g., hotels, office parks, workforce housing, etc.).

Compact Development and Placemaking in the Village Centers

- 1.1.5 Explore opportunities to expand the Town Residential Districts along areas currently served by municipal water and sewer, to provide increased development flexibility that can support greater housing choice.
- 1.1.6 Explore augmenting the Village Center Districts with elements of form-based code. For example, street frontage/site configuration (e.g., building and parking lot location, building entry location), combined with architectural design guidelines (e.g., façade enhancements, ground level transparency).
- 1.1.7 Prepare a comprehensive inventory of vacant and underutilized properties within the Village Center Districts and Town Residential District to understand and prioritize development and adaptive reuse/redevelopment opportunities.
 - Where properties are not considered buildable under the Town’s existing Zoning Ordinance, explore how to reduce barriers to development.
- 1.1.8 Proactively prepare a Neighborhood Transit-Oriented Development Plan for the area around a preferred location for a new rail station associated with the East-West Passenger Rail Project. In doing so, ensure coordination and collaboration with the public residing in the neighborhood and the community at-large, as well as local landowners, private developers, and government stakeholders. This plan shall serve as a guide for future public and private investments.
- 1.1.9 Explore the potential of creating a Mill Reuse Overlay District in Thorndike, which could incorporate both commercial and light industrial activities, as well as residential uses, to foster creativity in growth.
 - Explore the potential for designating and developing the area around the Thorndike Mill as an EcoDistrict – essentially, a public-private innovation zone that prioritizes sustainability outcomes with focuses on equity, resilience, and climate protection.
- 1.1.10 Build upon the existing hub of arts and culture in Three Rivers by reviewing the Town’s Zoning Ordinance to ensure artistic uses are properly defined and allowed, providing density bonuses to promote artist live/workspaces, and promoting creative re-uses of vacant buildings as cultural facilities or otherwise allow for temporary or permanent artistic showcases.
- 1.1.11 Ensure land use controls within and applicable to Bondsville support and promote the village’s recreational assets and enable synergetic development.

Preservation

For actions related to the preservation of lands, particularly along the eastern areas of town, see LU 2.1 and NR Goal 1. These actions address topics such as expanding conservation lands, the state’s Chapter 61 program, and balancing open space preservation with development at the project level.

- 1.2 Through a review and revision of the Town's Zoning Ordinance, enable the development of smaller home typologies (e.g., tiny homes, microunits), where appropriate.
- 1.3 Enable and encourage small-scale modern manufacturing and creative industrial activities (e.g., local food production and packaging, artisan production, brewpubs, distilleries, etc.) in non-industrial zones. These activities typically do not generate negative externalities (e.g., loud noises and odors).
- 1.4 Conduct a comprehensive review of the Town's zoning and other land use controls to ensure they properly address considerations of climate change.

Goal 2. Ensure existing land use controls are meeting their intended purposes, and where not, make appropriate adjustments.

Well intentioned land use controls, inclusive of incentives, may not be understood and/or used by the development community, or may have unintended consequences. Those regulations falling short of expectations may require revision or replacement for the Town to achieve their original intentions, as still relevant.

Recommended Actions

- 2.1 Review the provisions of Transfer of Development Rights and Open Space Residential Development in the Town's Zoning Ordinance for enhancement opportunities. Refer to other communities where similar provisions have been successful. Such benchmarking should consider the best practices employed in executing these provisions as well as communicating their merits and benefits to the development community.
 - Considerations for this review include, but may not be limited to, whether the provisions are too restrictive, (e.g., where special permitting may be required), whether they are undermined by other zoning provisions and processes (e.g., where extra density is available through the use of variances, such that the purchase of development rights is deemed unfavorable or unnecessary), and whether they are supported or limited by external factors (e.g., where public infrastructure within receiving areas of transferrable development rights are capable/incapable of accommodating increased densities).
- 2.2 Conduct a comprehensive review of, and revision if necessary, the Town's Zoning Ordinance focused on the criteria of consistency and clarity.
 - As part of broader community engagement in this evaluation, include existing and would-be developers to gain their unique perspectives.
- 2.3 In coordination with ED4.4, prepare a "Zoning 101" guidebook that clearly lays out the Town's land use controls and processes. This guidebook should be readily available to the public and shared with potential developers. It can also be used as a reference by other Town departments, boards, and committees to ensure consistency in messaging, policies, and programs.

- 2.4 Evaluate the Town's Zoning Ordinance to identify opportunities to make project permitting more efficient. For example, by removing special permit requirements for specific uses (e.g., accessory apartments for non-family members) and/or by streamlining the special permit and site plan approval processes.

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3

Housing

The general lack of local housing production in Massachusetts has contributed to the low availability, which has led to increased housing costs in the form of higher rents and home prices. As a consequence, many households are forced to spend less on essentials (e.g., food, health care) and in local and regional economies more generally. Further, high housing costs have the unintended consequence of promoting sprawl, as households seek more affordable options away from densely populated areas, generating adverse environmental effects (e.g., development of natural areas, higher emissions from long commutes).

Communities play an important role in the production of housing, though this role is challenged by the need to create enough homes at all prices levels that also accommodate the diverse needs of their residents (e.g., aging populations). Further, communities are faced with various constraints, such as the lack of adequate infrastructure. Some of these constraints may be self-imposed. For instance, local governments in Massachusetts have “home rule” authority, which enables them to enact zoning bylaws that often dictate where and what types of housing can be developed. In many cases, such bylaws promote large single family units that cannot be afforded by lower- or even middle-income households.

Importantly, housing production should not be thought of in the limited terms of supply and demand. The production of housing can be leveraged for improved economic conditions through increased tax revenue and opportunities for economic development, particularly if located near local business districts. It can also be leveraged to address inequality in terms of increasing access to housing and attracting high paying jobs.

This Housing Element presents an assessment of the Town of Palmer’s housing stock in consideration of population and household characteristics, as well as its age, condition, and cost. Specific needs of different population groups are also addressed. Data found within this Element primarily derives from the U.S. Census and Esri, as well as the Massachusetts

Housing Data Portal (www.housing.ma) maintained by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

Baseline Conditions Analyses

Planning for Housing in Palmer

Planning for housing takes place at all levels of government. In Palmer, the key players locally are the Community Development Department and the Palmer Housing Authority. The Community Development Department seeks to revitalize Palmer by meeting the housing and service needs of the low-and moderate-income population, building and repairing infrastructure vital to the health and safety of the residents, and supporting business development and retention. This is accomplished with funding from a wide variety of sources, almost three quarters of which comes through Community Development Block Grants provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Notably, the Palmer Housing Authority has been largely inactive for several years.

Municipalities in Massachusetts have the ability to prepare a Housing Production Plan through M.G.L. Chapter 40B, as facilitated by the Department of Housing and Community Development. This allows towns to establish a strategy for meeting core goals and objectives in relation to affordable housing. Palmer does not have a current Housing Production Plan, though the Community Development Department is currently pursuing funding to complete one.

In addition to not having a Housing Production Plan, the Town does not have an affordable housing trust. Affordable housing trusts provide municipalities with a mechanism to buy, sell, and transfer real property, personal property, and money, all to the end of achieving locally defined affordable housing goals and objectives.

It is understood that there are also many agencies at the regional, state, and federal levels with influence over residential development. The following non-local agencies have/can have an impact on the housing market in Palmer:

- ▶ **Pioneer Valley Planning Commission**, the regional planning commission that also provides low- and no-interest loans to make modifications to the homes of elders, adults with disabilities, and families with children with physical and/or cognitive disabilities.
- ▶ **MassHousing**, a quasi-public agency charged with providing financing for affordable housing throughout Massachusetts.
- ▶ **Massachusetts Housing Partnership**, a statewide public non-profit organization that supports and finances affordable housing.
- ▶ **Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development**, a state agency that provides affordable housing options, financial assistance, and other support to Massachusetts communities.
- ▶ **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**, administers Federal aid to local housing agencies (HAs) that manage the housing for low-income.

The Town, with assistance from its partners, has most clearly articulated its housing strategy in its *Community Plan* prepared by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission in 2015 and in the *Community Development Strategy* prepared by the Town in 2018. The *Community Plan* features goals and objectives, some of which still resonate, while others have become less relevant due to changing socioeconomic conditions. The *Community Development Strategy* highlights the need for safe, high-quality affordable housing, emphasizing the connections between the housing market and economic development.

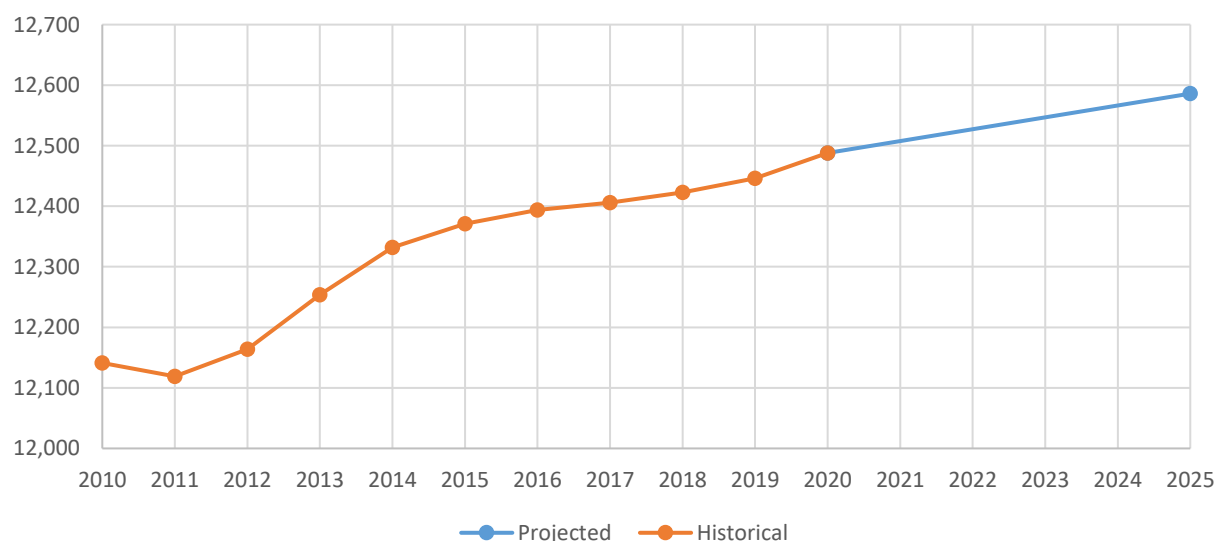
Palmer's Demographic Conditions

Demographic shifts in a community can affect the needs of and demand for housing. To assess these effects on Palmer, it is critical to understand the Town's unique demographic conditions. The following sections provide an overview of the Town's population and household characteristics.

Population and Households

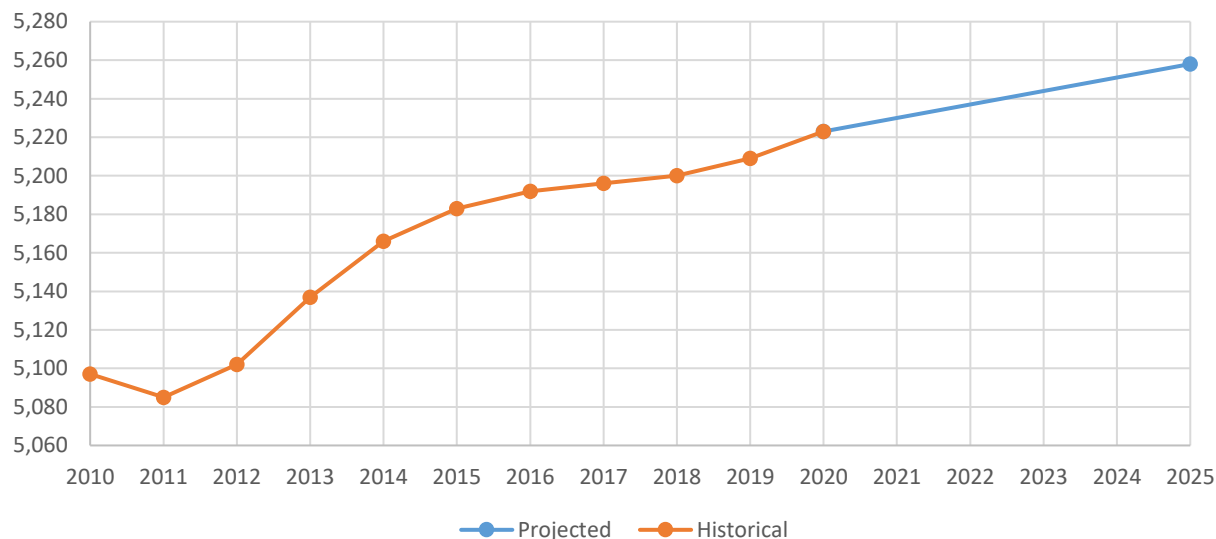
The population of Palmer has been growing at a relatively slow pace over the last decade. Based on data provided by Esri, from 2010 to 2020, the Town's population grew by only 347 persons or 2.9 percent. Similarly, the number of households in Town grew by just 2.5 percent over the 10-year period, from 5,097 to 5,223. Looking out through 2025, the Town's population is estimated to grow by 0.16 percent annually, while its households are estimated to increase at a slightly lower rate of 0.13 percent per year. For comparison purposes, the annual growth rates from 2020 to 2025 for the populations of Hampden County and the State of Massachusetts are estimated at 0.14 percent and 0.55 percent, respectively, and the annual growth rates for the number of households in the County and the State are estimated at 0.1 percent and 0.54 percent, respectively. Figures 3-1 and 3-2 illustrate the historical and projected changes in Palmer's population and households between 2010 and 2025.

Figure 3-1 Changes in Palmer's Population, 2010-2025



Source: Esri

Figure 3-2 Changes in Palmer's Households, 2010-2025



Source: Esri

Tables 3-1 and 3-2 present the Town's historical population and household statistics in comparison to neighboring communities. Notably, increases in population and households are most prevalent in the Towns of Belchertown, Brimfield, and Warren. In contrast, the Town of Monson has seen the slowest growth in population and households amongst the comparison communities, with annual declines expected between 2020 and 2025.

Table 3-1 Population—Community Comparison, 2010-2020

Town	2010 Population	2020 Population	2010-2020 Population Change (%)	2025 Population	2020-2025 Annual Growth Rate (%)
Palmer	12,141	12,488	2.9%	12,586	0.16
Ludlow	21,139	22,175	4.9%	22,538	0.33
Belchertown	14,697	15,738	7.1%	16,132	0.5
Ware	9,868	10,013	1.5%	10,061	0.1
Warren	5,144	5,494	6.8%	5,637	0.52
Brimfield	3,626	3,863	6.5%	3,947	0.43
Monson	8,539	8,557	0.2%	8,549	-0.02
Wilbraham	14,259	14,749	3.4%	14,903	0.21

Source: Esri

Table 3-2 Households—Community Comparison, 2010-2020

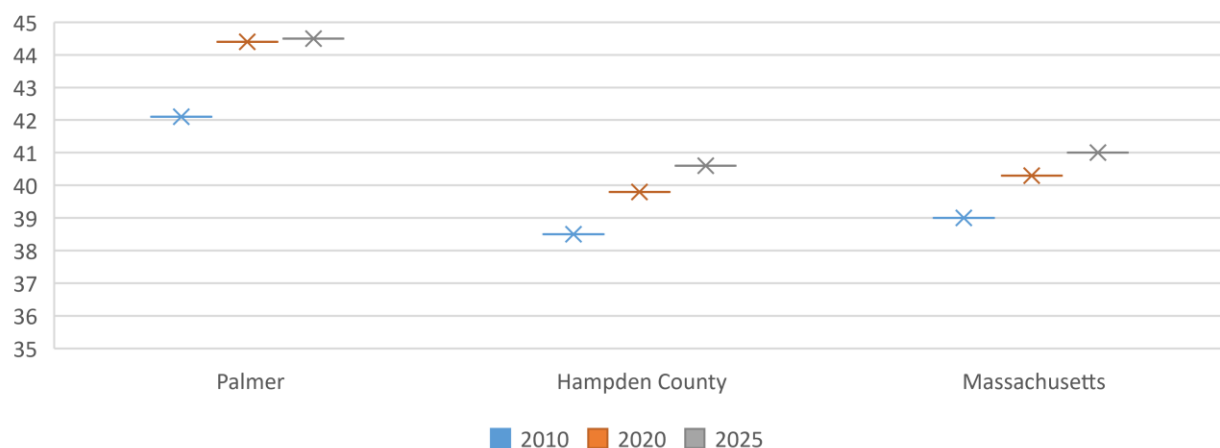
Town	2010 Households	2020 Households	2010-2020 Households Change (%)	2025 Households	2020-2025 Annual Growth Rate (%)
Palmer	5,097	5,223	2.5%	5,258	0.13
Ludlow	8,097	8,475	4.7%	8,609	0.31
Belchertown	5,613	5,949	6.0%	6,073	0.41
Ware	4,121	4,144	0.6%	4,152	0.04
Warren	2,025	2,152	6.3%	2,204	0.48
Brimfield	1,435	1,523	6.1%	1,554	0.4
Monson	3,270	3,265	-0.2%	3,257	-0.05
Wilbraham	5,325	5,496	3.2%	5,555	0.21

Source: Esri

As growth in the number of households in Palmer is trailing that of its population, the Town's average household size has been increasing, if only slightly. According to the U.S. Census and Esri, between 2010 and 2020, the average household size in Palmer increased from 2.37 to 2.38 persons. This compares to the current average household size in the County at 2.49 persons and the State at 2.48 persons.

Typically, increases in average household size translates to a reduced demand for housing, resulting in less residential construction. This condition is compounded by Palmer's slow population growth. However, there are a number of economic and demographic factors at play that result in the need for on-going adjustments to Palmer's housing supply. For example, the Town has an older population. According to the U.S. Census and Esri, the median age in Palmer has increased from 42.1 in 2010 to 44.4 in 2020, and this value is expected to increase further to 44.5 in 2025. As shown in Figure 3-3, the Town's median age has exceeded and is expected to exceed the median age in the County and the State in 2010, 2020, and 2025.

Figure 3-3 Median Age in Palmer, Hampden County, and Massachusetts; 2010, 2020, and 2025



Source: U.S. Census (2010), Esri (2020, 2025)

Further underlining the trend of an aging population in Palmer is the composition of persons 65 years or older relative to the total population. According to Esri, the senior population in the Town is expected to rise from 18.8 percent in 2020 to 22.1 percent in 2025. For reference, the senior populations in the County and the State are expected to comprise 20.3 percent and 19.9 percent of the relative total populations in 2025, respectively. The increasing prevalence of seniors will have a meaningful impact on housing needs, including housing type and residential services typically associated with assisted living facilities.

As another example of the need for on-going adjustments to Palmer's housing supply, the Town has a relatively low-income population. According to Esri, in 2020, the median household income in Palmer was \$57,479 and its per capita income was \$32,745. Though higher than the values in the County (median household income = \$53,682 and per capita income = \$30,135), they are substantially lower than the State (median household income = \$80,643 and per capita income = \$44,587). Further, according to the latest American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), 10.7 percent of households in Palmer are below the poverty level. These factors contribute to a strong need for high-quality affordable housing. Emphasis is placed on "high-quality" because housing units in poor condition can have higher maintenance and utility costs.

Palmer's Housing Stock

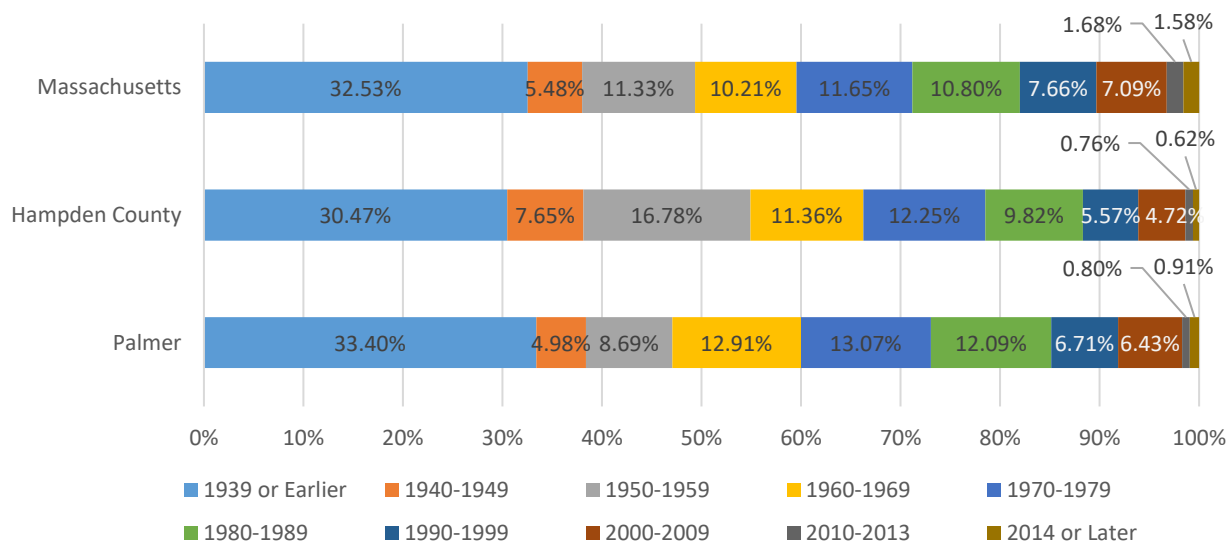
Based on data provided by Esri, Palmer had 5,614 housing units as of 2020. This represents an increase of only 1.5 percent since 2010. Amongst the 2020 housing unit total, 63.6 percent were owner occupied and 36.4 percent were renter occupied. Rental occupancy in the Town trails that of Hampden County (40.8 percent) and Massachusetts (39.3 percent). A shortage of rental units makes it difficult for younger professionals and families to reside in Palmer, given that rental housing often plays the role of "entry housing" for such householders.

According to the latest American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), among the Town's housing units, 9.2 percent were vacant, and 10.8 percent of vacant units were available for rent. This represents an overall increase from 2010, when 7.9 percent of housing units in the Town were vacant, but a substantial decline in vacant units available for rent; 34.6 percent of vacant units were available for rent in 2010. Vacant units can have an adverse impact on property values, and can also contribute to increased blight and crime.

The Pioneer Valley region, including the Town of Palmer, has a prevalence of older housing units. According to the latest American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), the median year of construction for the housing units in the Town (1962) is slightly newer than the County (1957) and the State (1961). Figure 3-4 illustrates the distribution of the housing units by year built in Palmer, Hampden County, and Massachusetts. Relative to the County and the State, Palmer has a higher percentage of units built before 1939 (33.4 percent), and a lower percentage built after the year 2000 (8.1 percent).

In many cases, Palmer's housing stock shows its age. Quality of housing has a significant impact on the local economy. As housing ages and shows visible signs of disrepair, its value is adversely affected, as is the value of the surrounding residential properties.

Figure 3-4 Distribution of Palmer's Housing Stock by Year Built



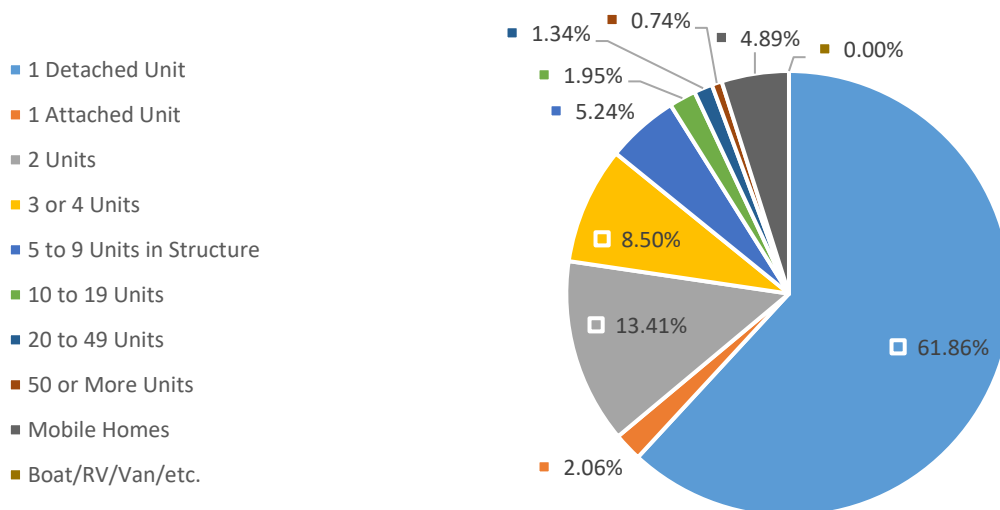
Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019)

Palmer has witnessed a steady decrease in median home values in recent years, a trend that must be reversed as the economy continues to recover from the Great Recession. To reverse this trend, the Town should continue to run programs like the successful Palmer Housing Improvement Program, a Housing Rehabilitation Program that supports renovation and remodeling work on existing residences in Depot Village and Three Rivers. In 2020, the median home value in Palmer was \$212,336, compared to \$228,215 in the County and \$414,992 in the State. Though housing in Palmer is relatively inexpensive, as mentioned, poor housing conditions can increase maintenance and operational costs.

According to the latest American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), as shown in Figure 3-5, 63.9 percent of the housing units in Palmer are single-family units – either detached or attached. This is higher than the countywide and statewide rates of 59.3 percent and 57.4 percent, respectively. Two-unit structures and three or four unit structures comprise 13.4 percent and 8.5 percent of the Town's housing stock, respectively, with multifamily structures of five or more units representing just 9.3 percent. Multifamily structures in the County and the State represent 18.4 percent and 21.2 percent of the relative housing totals, respectively.

When asked how important a variety of housing types were to fulfill the Town's housing needs, most (85.7 percent) felt "detached single-family homes" were "very important" or "important." Other popular choices included "duplexes" (59.7 percent) and "townhomes" (51.7 percent).

Figure 3-5 Palmer's Housing Stock by Number of Housing Units in Structure, 2020



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019)



Example of Single-Family Residential Development in Palmer; Lauren and Countryside Drives, off River Street.

With a housing stock so heavily weighted toward single-family structures, options are limited for those who desire to rent or own smaller units, efficiency units, or more affordable options. These populations typically include many younger professionals and families, lower-income households, and seniors.

Planner and designer Daniel Parolek published *Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Building Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis* in 2020, which presents his vision of bringing back the nation's "missing middle housing." He coined this term back in 2010, but it is applied broadly to medium-density housing that preserves local character while allowing for more affordable and diverse housing products, including duplexes, triplexes, courtyard

buildings, cottage courts, townhouses, multiplexes, and live-work units. These types of housing can act as a buffer zone between single-family units and a commercial district, corridor, or transit hub. Some of these unit types can also be designed to look like single-family homes, so as not to disrupt the look and feel of the community. Further, accessory dwelling units, already permissible to a degree in residential zones per Palmer's current Zoning Ordinance (subject to Special Permit and Site Plan Approval), can be introduced into a suburban area without negatively impacting the rural-suburban experience.

Multifamily residential development opportunities are limited in Palmer. There are many undeveloped parcels that are zoned residential; however, they are almost all zoned Rural Residential or Suburban Residential, which according to the Town's Zoning Ordinance are "intended to create, maintain and promote single-dwelling neighborhoods." Parcels falling within the Town Residential district, which is "intended to provide opportunities for multi-dwelling housing," are almost all built out.

Infrastructure is also a limiting factor for multifamily developments. The Town's sanitary sewer system, storm drainage system, and roads and sidewalks are inadequate and would need to be expanded. As identified in the 2018 *Community Development Strategy*, upgrading substandard infrastructure is one of the Town's greatest needs.

Housing Costs

Generally speaking, the more money that households spend on housing costs, the less they have to spend on other key essentials of living, and the less they have to circulate in the local economy and support local commercial establishments. As mentioned, however, housing in Palmer is relatively affordable, with median home values nearly 49 percent lower than in the State. Further, median gross rent in Palmer (\$962) is nearly 25 percent lower than in the State (\$1,282).

Based on data from the 2010 Census and the latest American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2015-2019), homeowners in Palmer paying mortgages each month have not suffered from significant growth in housing costs. Although their monthly housing costs are higher than renters or owners without mortgages at \$1,599 (2019), this value has only increased by 1 percent since 2010. Owners without mortgages and renter households, however, have seen notable increases in monthly costs at 16.3 percent and 33.1 percent, respectively.

Cost Burden

In order to understand the need for affordable housing, it is helpful to frame the data in the same terms used by federal agencies. One such measure is whether a household is cost-burdened. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's definition holds that a household is cost-burdened if housing costs are greater than 30 percent of the household income. Additionally, if a household pays at least 50 percent of its income, it is considered to be severely cost-burdened.

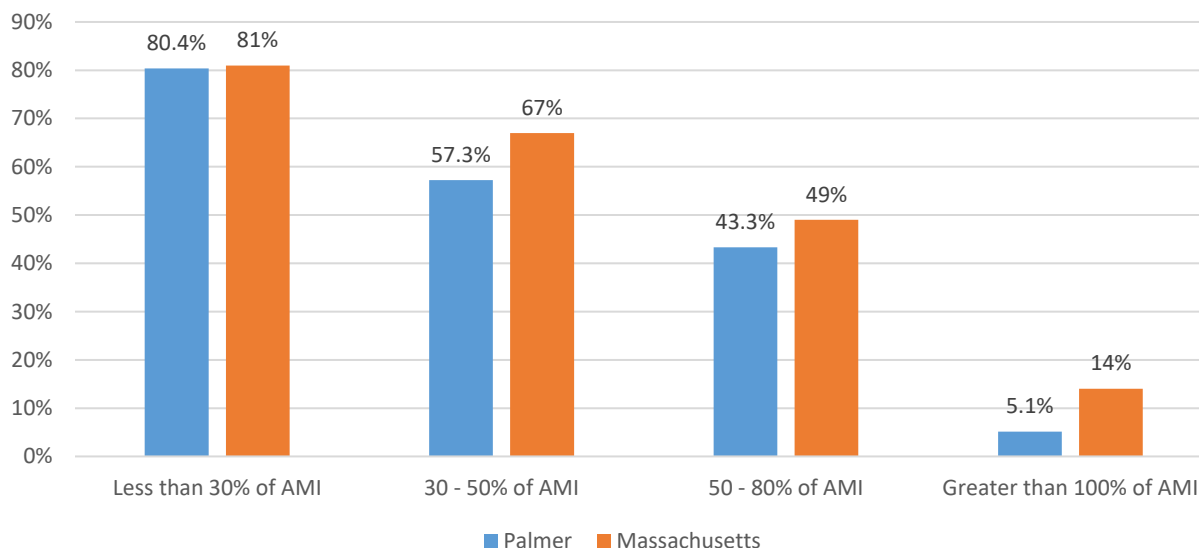
According to data obtained from the Massachusetts Housing Data Portal, 33.7 percent of households in Palmer are cost burdened and 15.4 percent are severely cost burdened. Comparatively, in the State, 29 percent of households are cost burdened, and 14 percent are severely cost burdened. A general rule of thumb is that if a community has 30 percent

or more of households that are cost burdened, then that community has an affordable housing shortage.⁵

Cost burden status is typically more prevalent among renters and low-income households. By tenure, 47.7 percent of renter households in Palmer are cost burdened and 27 percent are severely cost burdened. This compares to just 28 percent of owner households that are cost burdened and 10.7 percent that are severely cost burdened. Statewide, 47 percent of renter households are cost burdened, and 23 percent are severely cost burdened, while just 31 percent of owner households are cost burdened, and 12 percent are severely cost burdened.

In terms of low-income status, roughly 80 percent of households in Palmer making less than 30 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) are cost burdened, a similar level to the State at 81 percent. Figure 3-6 breaks down cost burden status by income in Palmer and Massachusetts.

Figure 3-6 Cost Burden Status by Income in Palmer and Massachusetts



Source: Massachusetts Housing Data Portal (2012)

Notably in the Town, 18.9 percent of elderly family households, 46 percent of elderly non-family households, and 50.6 percent of large family households are cost burdened.

Taxes

One of the contributing factors to housing costs are local taxes. For the 2021 fiscal year (FY), the property tax rate in Palmer was \$21.12 per thousand in value. This rate ranks Palmer as the 13th highest residential tax rate in the State, though it represents a decline from \$21.22 in FY2020. In addition to the basic rate, the FY2021 Fire District tax rates are: \$1.51 (Palmer),

5 MAPC. (2020). "Basic Housing Needs Assessment for Palmer, MA." Retrieved May 25, 2021, from <http://www.housing.ma/palmer/report>

\$2.16 (Three Rivers), \$2.55 (Bondsville), and \$2.50 (Thorndike). Palmer has a tax structure wherein residential and commercial properties are charged the same rates.

As part of the Master Plan's first community survey, 44.2 percent of participants identified "affordability" as a quality that makes Palmer a great place to live. However, 64.26 percent noted that affordability is "very challenging" or "somewhat challenging" to improving quality of life in Town.

Affordable Housing

The Massachusetts Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) is an inventory of housing units that are affordable to households who earn no more than 80 percent of AMI. As of the most recent update to the SHI (December 2020), Palmer had 266 subsidized units, or approximately 4.8 percent of its overall housing inventory, including rental and ownership units built with assistance from MassHousing, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services. This is less than half of the 10 percent measure that the Department of Housing and Community Development encourages through M.G.L. Chapter 40B – and many of these units are set to expire in the coming years. Table 3-3 lists and describes the subsidized housing projects in Palmer.

Table 3-3 Palmer's Subsidized Housing Inventory, 2020

DHCD ID #	Project Name	Address	Type	Total SHI Units	Affordability Expiration
2365	Laurel Manor	Fletcher St.	Rental	48	In Perpetuity
2366	Kirkwood Place	4216 Main Street	Rental	27	2023
2368	Palmer Green Estates	Beacon Drive	Rental	156	2046
2369	Palmer Neighborhood Homes	Hillside Drive	Rental	4	2021
4413	DDS Group Homes	N/A	Rental	28	N/A
8712	Crystal Lake Village	Off Fuller Road	Ownership	3	In Perpetuity

Source: Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (2020)

Notably, there are currently no provisions in the Town's Zoning Ordinance that require affordable units to be included in multifamily residential developments.

Senior Housing

According to the Urban Institute, the number of Americans aged 65 and older will more than double from 2000 levels over the next 40 years nationwide.⁶ This will have a profound impact on housing throughout the country, and certainly in a place like Palmer, where the

6 Urban Institute. (2004). "Program on Retirement Policy." Retrieved May 21, 2021, from <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/program-retirement-policy/projects/data-warehouse/what-future-holds/us-population-aging>

senior population is high relative to its region and state and is expected to continue to increase.

Seniors have a specific set of housing needs, and frequently require Assisted Living options. Assisted Living can be broken down into categories by level of care, ranging from residential living and skilled nursing centers to fully equipped medical facilities. An example of Assisted Living in Palmer is the Palmer Healthcare Center on Shearer Street in Depot Village.

The Town needs to ensure that its housing stock provides the right mix to accommodate its growing senior population. To fulfill senior housing needs, communities in Massachusetts have looked to develop age restricted housing, where units are targeted to specific age groups (e.g., 55 or 62 years and older). Often, these units are subsidized or qualify for an individual tax credit. Currently, the only residential developments in Palmer with age restrictions are Palmer Green Estates and Kirkwood Place.

In an effort to expand age restricted senior housing in Palmer, the Town's Zoning Ordinance allows for Planned Senior Housing Developments. This provision is intended to serve the 55 and older population, and can include single-family detached units, townhouses, condominiums, and multifamily buildings (not to exceed four units per building). Planned Senior Housing Developments are subject to Special Permit and Site Plan Approval.

Goals and Recommended Actions

Goal 1. Increase the Town's housing affordability.

Take steps to make housing more affordable in Palmer, which is essential to accommodating the community's diverse residential base and attracting new residents such as young professionals and families.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 Complete and regularly update a Housing Production Plan to identify housing needs in a targeted way and articulate specific actions, roles, and responsibilities for addressing each need. As part of this plan, attempt to understand the unique aspects of housing in Palmer's four villages to inform land use, zoning regulations, and housing policies, as well as to provide for the efficient and effective allocation of resources.
- 1.2 Re-energize the Palmer Housing Authority, which has been largely inactive over the past few years. This should include revisiting the rules and regulations of the Authority and providing formal training sessions for board members and staff, as well as exploring an expansion of its programming – particularly in the area of social services.
- 1.3 In coordination with the Housing Production Plan, evaluate the need to create a "Friendly 40B" policy that would encourage the pursuit and promotion of low- and moderate-income housing that qualify under the state's regulatory requirements.

- 1.4 Through a grassroots, community-led effort, seek the passage and adoption of the Community Preservation Act. This would provide necessary funding for expanding community housing locally.
 - 1.4.1 In partnership with the community, and leveraging the Community Preservation Coalition program, craft and disseminate (e.g., through the U.S. Post Office's Every Door Direct Mail program) educational materials that explain the value of affordable housing with respect to its economic (e.g., increased spending power, job creation, higher taxes and other local government revenue) and social benefits (e.g., healthier child development, improved quality of life).
- 1.5 Explore the formation of a municipal housing trust, which would allow Palmer to collect and segregate funds for affordable housing and use these funds for local affordable housing initiatives. Funds for the trust may derive from the Community Preservation Act, if passed and adopted by the Town, along with the Town's general fund, tax title sales, and negotiated developer fees, among other sources.
- 1.6 Conduct targeted outreach to educate the community on affordable housing, engaging them in constructive dialogues, providing evidence of the widespread benefits of affordable housing, and showcasing design options within the context of Palmer's aesthetic characteristics.
- 1.7 Create new programs or expand program relationships with partners (e.g., Way Finders, Valley Opportunity Council) to provide greater financial assistance to existing homeowners and potential home buyers in Palmer. Such programs may include, but are not limited to, down payment and closing cost assistance, lease-purchase programs, no-interest loans, financial literacy and mortgage counseling.

Goal 2. Create greater housing choice within Palmer with a focus in and around the Town's Village Centers.

Similar to increasing housing affordability, diversifying Palmer's housing stock is essential to accommodating and attracting a broad residential base. Focusing in and around the Village Centers, with consideration paid to their historic characters, is likely to generate synergistic benefits with respect to economic development, the conservation of fiscal resources, the protection of environmental resources, and public health.

Recommended Actions

- 2.1 Identify and work to eliminate or minimize barriers to non single-family residential development where currently allowed by the Town's Zoning Ordinance – particularly in the Village Centers – through a review of the Town's dimensional and density and use regulations along with associated approval processes. Engage property owners and would-be developers as part of this process.
- 2.2 Identify key opportunity sites for non single-family residential development projects, considering underlying land use and zoning regulations, water and sewer infrastructure, hazard potential, and proximity to the mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly

Village Centers. Note that the availability of vacant parcels is extremely limited in the Town Residential District, which may present the need for strategic rezoning.

- 2.3 Understand the barriers to and incentivize the creative re-use of older, underutilized properties – for example, converting unused commercial space into housing or converting older single-family homes into multifamily buildings. Look to local success stories such as the former St. Mary’s Episcopal Church on Main Street in Thorndike.
- 2.4 Understand the barriers to and incentivize (e.g., through items such as density bonuses) the development of a range of smaller housing types to accommodate the demand for such units (e.g., from young professionals, young families, and seniors), which is expected to continue to increase as the average household size continues to decline.
- 2.5 Establish and maintain relationships with private developers that are experienced in developing senior care facilities (e.g., residential living, skilled nursing centers, fully-equipped medical facilities) for the purpose of bringing these facilities to Palmer. This action can be coordinated with ED 4.1.
- 2.6 In coordination with ED 3.4, promote the creative design of housing types that complement and meet the needs of Palmer’s neighborhoods.

Goal 3. Preserve and improve the existing housing stock.

Look to increase home values in Palmer, while creating more attractive and healthier neighborhoods.

Recommended Actions

- 3.1 Continue the Blight and Abandoned Property Reduction Initiative, which was designed to identify blighted and abandoned properties and enable the Town to work with property owners and the community on their clean up. Regularly evaluate the performance of this initiative and publicize its success stories. This action should be coordinated with ED 3.3.
- 3.2 Encourage the development of neighborhood groups and associations that would not only foster a sense of community, but could also supplement the Town’s efforts to improve the look and feel of neighborhoods. As part of this effort, assess the potential for more localized Community Development Corporations.
- 3.3 Evaluate existing housing improvement programs—both educational and financial—to assess if they are funded adequately, marketed broadly, and are being used effectively, or if they need to be supplemented with additional programming (e.g., targeted programs for seniors). Engage partners including non-profits, lenders, and businesses where needed.
- 3.4 Evaluate the Town’s allocation of Community Development Block Grant funds, and dedicate a fair portion of such funds to housing rehabilitation projects (and affordable housing production) and promote awareness around program availability.

4

Economic Development

Economic development involves strategic planning, coordinated between municipal and regional governments and quasi-governmental organizations, businesses, and the community to stimulate investment that enables sustainable economic growth in the long-term. In order to define the best economic development strategy for the Town of Palmer, it is critical to develop an understanding of its baseline economic and demographic conditions.

This Economic Development Element presents an assessment of the Town's regional context, followed by a high-level summary of local conditions relating to population, income, education, employment, businesses, tax policy, and economic development resources.

Baseline Conditions Analysis

Regional Context

The Pioneer Valley Region is in the midwestern section of Massachusetts at the "crossroads of New England" (i.e., the interchange of the Interstate 90 [Massachusetts Turnpike or MassPike] and Interstate 91). It benefits from proximity to Bradley International Airport (presently the second-largest airport in New England by annual passenger traffic)⁷ and is crossed by many dormant and active freight and passenger rail lines.

⁷ Bradley International Airport. (2019). "Bradley International Airport Marks Six Years of Consecutive Passenger Growth." Retrieved 01 September 2020, from <https://bradleyairport.com/2019/02/27/bradley-international-airport-marks-six-years-of-consecutive-passenger-growth-2/>

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) represents 43 cities and towns, including the Town of Palmer.⁸ The research that PVPC performs each year on regional economic conditions, including industry trends, educational resources, and workforce training, is useful in identifying the region's key strengths and weaknesses.

In 2019, PVPC prepared the most recent annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report, which serves as a blueprint for economic growth in the region, outlining long-term goals and strategies focused on: talent, business development, infrastructure, and collaboration and engagement.⁹ It notes that "the Pioneer Valley has recovered from the [2008] recession, is seeing renewed public and private investment, and has a positive economic outlook." Further, the region has seen decreases in unemployment since the recession, similar to state and national trends.

Some issues persist, however, including a rising overall trend of net out-migration, and, in many cases, the lack of support infrastructure for workers (i.e., transit, childcare, and affordable housing). Additionally, poverty rates in the region have increased from 13.4 percent in 2000 to 16.3 percent in 2017. The 2017 rate is far higher than the statewide rate of 11.1 percent. Conditions of poverty are exacerbated by race, as the poverty rate is 28.7 percent in the Hispanic and Latino community and 22.7 percent among Black residents. Meanwhile, the poverty rate amongst White residents is only 9.3 percent. The PVPC region is also challenged by low population growth, deteriorating physical infrastructure including roads and bridges, and an increasingly limited supply of "shovel-ready" industrial parcels.

In response to these challenges, PVPC has developed a number of strategies to move the region forward into the new decade. Chief among them is to advocate for expanded passenger rail service. PVPC is working with cities and towns and the state to activate the rail lines running both north-south and east-west. This would enable the region to become more closely connected to Boston, New London, Connecticut, Vermont, Springfield, and many other destinations.

Additionally, PVPC is working to strengthen the region's network of business and employment support resources. This network includes partnerships between businesses and schools that promote career exploration for youth. It also includes agencies and civic organizations that provide technical and financial assistance to small businesses. PVPC is



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

8 PVPC. (2020). "What is the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission?" Retrieved 01 September 2020, from <http://www.pvpc.org/about>

9 PVPC. (2019). *The Pioneer Valley's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS): 2019-2024*. Retrieved 01 September 2020, from <http://www.pvpc.org/sites/default/files/FINAL%202019%20CEDS%20Report%20web%20optimized.pdf>

also advocating for greater coordination amongst the region's municipalities to market the region to visitors, workers, and businesses.

The CEDS report emphasizes the significance of three primary industries underpinning the region's economic activity: health care and social assistance, educational services, and advanced manufacturing. These sectors have demonstrated significant growth potential and high wages. Manufacturing remains a substantial employer in the region and offers a career pipeline for unskilled labor.

Secondary to these three industries, but also important, are finance and insurance; professional, scientific, and technical services; accommodation and food services; and agriculture and sustainable food system.

Local Demographic Data

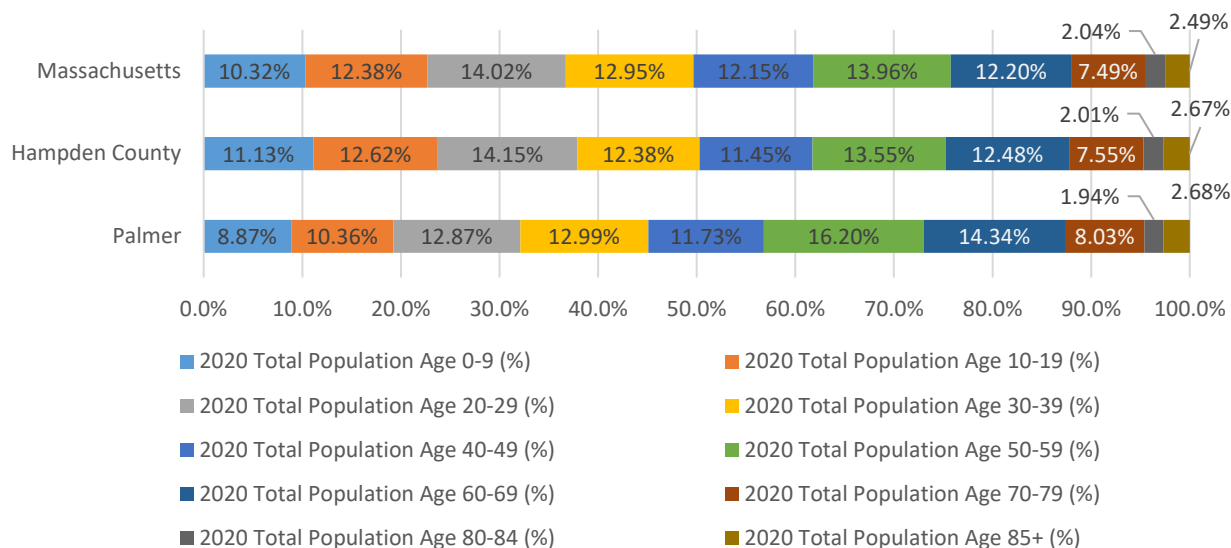
After a prolonged period of growth during the 19th and 20th centuries, the Town of Palmer has seen tepid growth over the past 20 or so years. According to PVPC, Palmer is among the 10 slowest growing municipalities in the region. Based on data provided by the U.S. Census and Esri, from 2010 to 2020, Palmer's population grew by only 347 persons, representing an increase of just 2.9 percent over the 10-year period. This rate is slightly higher than Hampden County at 2.4 percent, but it significantly trails the rate of Massachusetts at 6.7 percent. The Town's annual population growth rate between 2020 and 2025 is estimated to be 0.16 percent; its 2025 population is estimated to be 12,586. Annual growth rates for the county and state are estimated at 0.14 percent and 0.55 percent, respectively.

As is the case in many of Massachusetts' rural towns, Palmer's population trends older. Based on data provided by Esri, as of 2020, the median age in Palmer was 44.4 (up from 42.1 in 2010), versus 39.8 for the county (up from 38.5 in 2010) and 40.3 for the state (up from 39 in 2010). Figure 4-1 illustrates the age distribution in Palmer, Hampden County, and Massachusetts. Notably, in 2020, the Town's senior population (i.e., residents over the age of 65) comprised 18.8 percent of the total population. This value is expected to rise to 22.4 percent in 2025.

Household income is notably low in Palmer. In 2020, the median household income in the Town was \$57,567. This value is higher than Hampden County at \$53,682 but trails that of Massachusetts at \$80,643. Figure 4-2 illustrates the income distribution among households in Palmer, Hampden County, and Massachusetts.

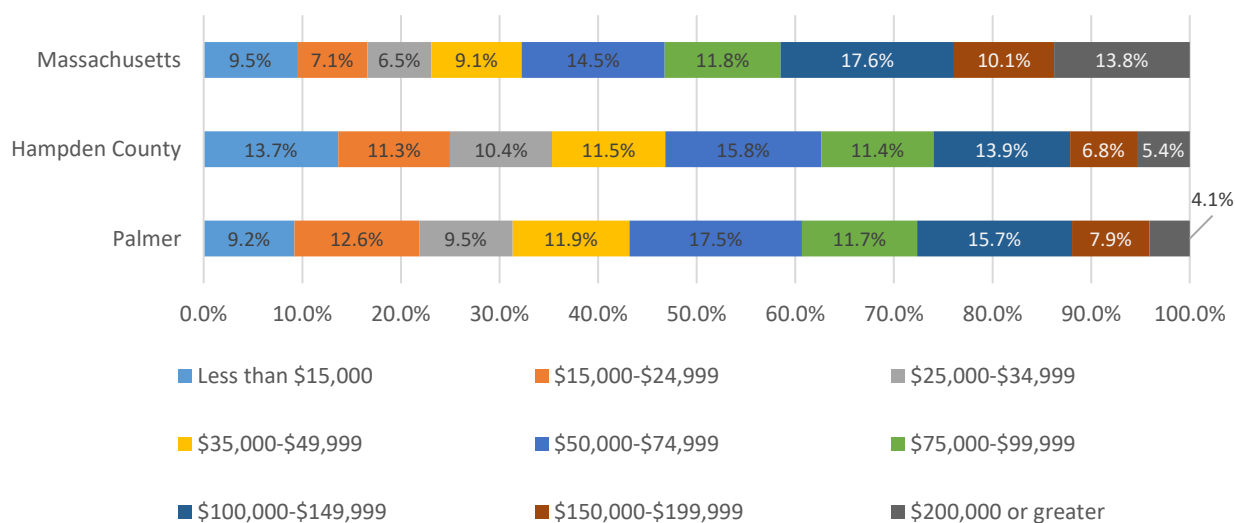
Related to income, per the CEDs report, the poverty rate in Palmer almost doubled from 2000 to 2017, increasing from 7.9 percent to 14.1 percent. According to the 2015-2019 American Community Survey, the percent of individuals below the poverty line in Palmer currently sits at 11.3 percent.

Figure 4-1 Distribution of Age, 2020



Source – Esri (2020)

Figure 4-2 Distribution of Household Income, 2020



Source – Esri (2020)

In terms of educational attainment, only 20.1 percent of the population aged 25 years or more in Palmer has a bachelor's degree and only 6.8 percent has a graduate or professional degree. Notably, the percent of persons with a graduate or professional degree in Palmer is lower than that of the county at 12.0 percent and significantly lower than that of the state at 20.7 percent.¹⁰

10 Esri. (2020). Current-year estimate of the population age 25 years or older who earned a bachelor's, graduate or professional degree.

Business and Employment Data

The slow population growth in Palmer may be connected to a lack of available jobs in the community. A sustained period of disinvestment, exemplified by the closure of the Tambrands plant in 1997, has led to high unemployment. Indeed, Palmer had the fourth highest unemployment rate in the region in 2017 at 4.8 percent. As of 2020, the unemployment rate was 14.9 percent, which was actually lower than the rate of the county (16.2 percent) and the state (15 percent); however, unemployment rates in 2020 were likely significantly impacted by the effects of the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic.

As revealed through this Master Plan's first community survey, the majority of survey participants (93.3 percent) identified current economic vitality and employment conditions in Palmer as "very challenging" or "somewhat challenging" to improving quality of life in the Town. Similarly, only 3.2 percent of survey participants identified "economic opportunities" as a quality that contributes to making Palmer a great place to live.

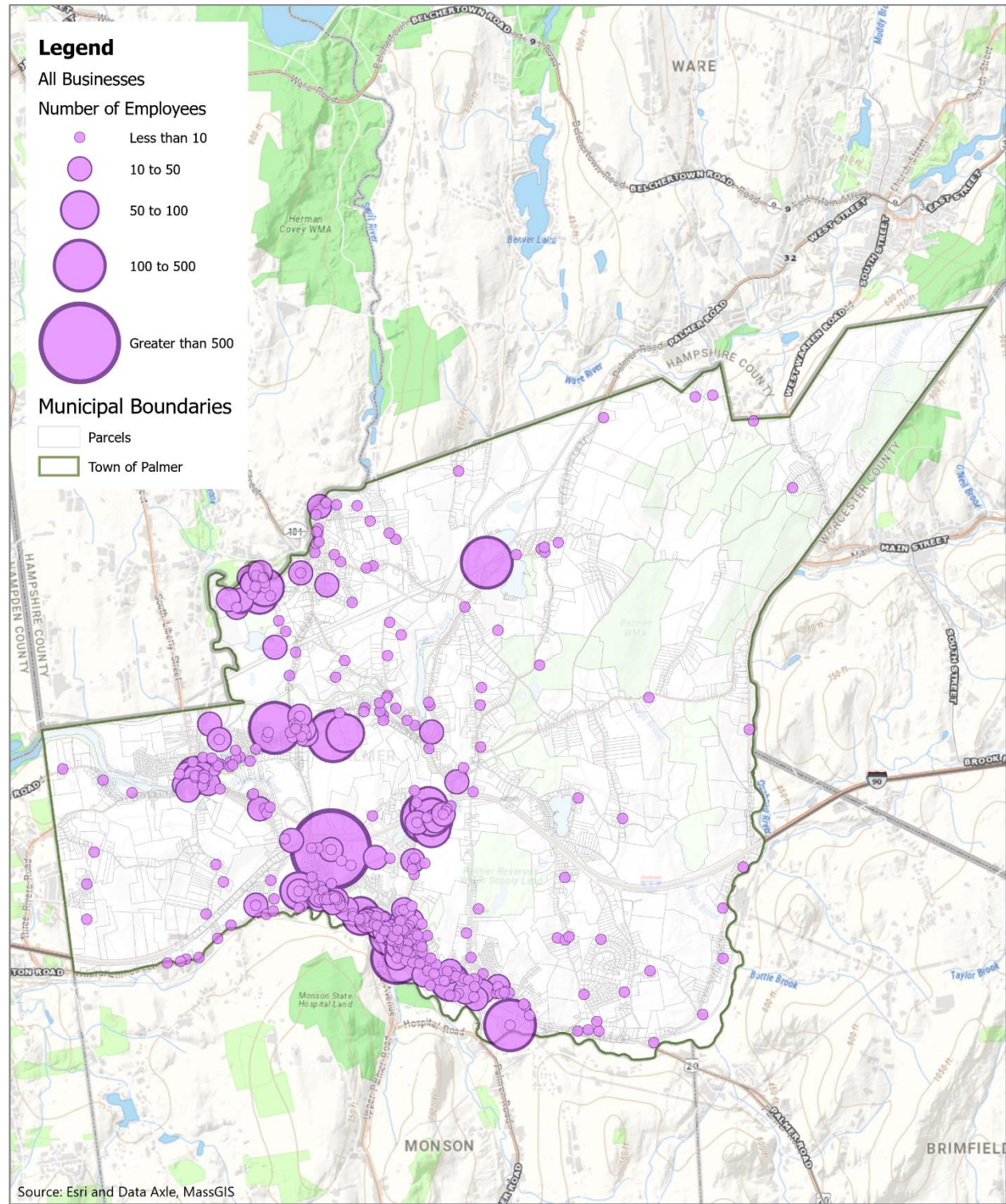
Although unemployment has been historically high in Palmer, there is a variety of employers who maintain a steady source of jobs. In 2020, there were 577 business in Palmer with 5,809 employees according to Esri and Dat. The Baystate Wing Hospital was Palmer's largest employer with approximately 720 jobs. Table 4-1 provides a list of all employers in Palmer with 100 or more employees, while Figure 4-3 illustrates the distribution of businesses in the Town.

Table 4-1 Palmer's Largest Employers

Employer	# of Employees	Sector Description
Baystate Wing Hospital	721	General Medical-Surgical Hospitals
Camp Ramah in New England	300	Sporting-Recreational Camps
Big Y	150	Grocery Stores
Palmer Paving Corp	140	Asphalt Paving Products
Pathfinder Regional Tech High	130	Vocational Schools
Old Mill Pond School	125	Elementary-Secondary Schools
Turley Publications Inc	125	Publishing and Printing
Sanderson Macleod Inc	100	Equipment and Sales

Source: Esri and Data Axle (2020)

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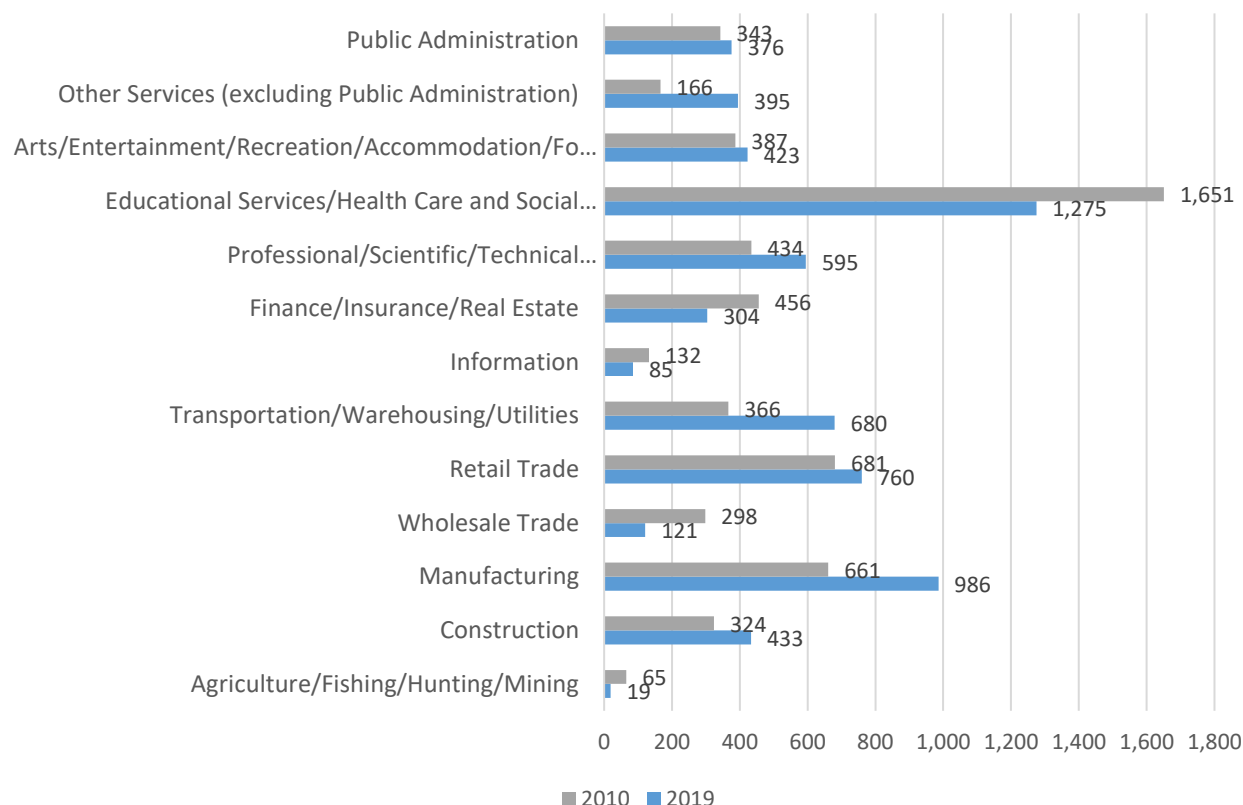


Businesses and Employment | Palmer, Massachusetts

According to the 2015-2019 American Community Survey data on labor force by industry, the industry in Palmer with the highest number of workers is Manufacturing with 986 persons employed (or 15.3 percent of the total civilian workforce), followed by Retail Trade at 760 (11.8 percent of the total civilian workforce), Health Care/Social Assistance at 749 (11.6 percent of the total civilian workforce), Transportation/Warehousing at 585 (9.1 percent of the total civilian workforce), and Educational Services at 526 (8.2 percent of the total civilian workforce). Figure 4-4 shows the distribution of employment by industry in Palmer.

For comparison purposes, the employed civilian population in Palmer increased by 8.2 percent between 2010 and 2019. The industry demonstrating the biggest gains was Other Services (excluding Public Administration) with an increase of 138 percent, followed by Transportation/Warehousing and Utilities combined at 85.8 percent, Manufacturing at 49.2 percent, and Construction at 33.6 percent. In contrast, the industries with the largest demonstrated declines were Agriculture/Fishing/Hunting and Mining/Oil & Gas Extraction combined with a decrease of 70.8 percent, followed by Wholesale Trade at -59.4 percent, Information at -35.6 percent, and Finance/Insurance and Real Estate combined at -33.3 percent.

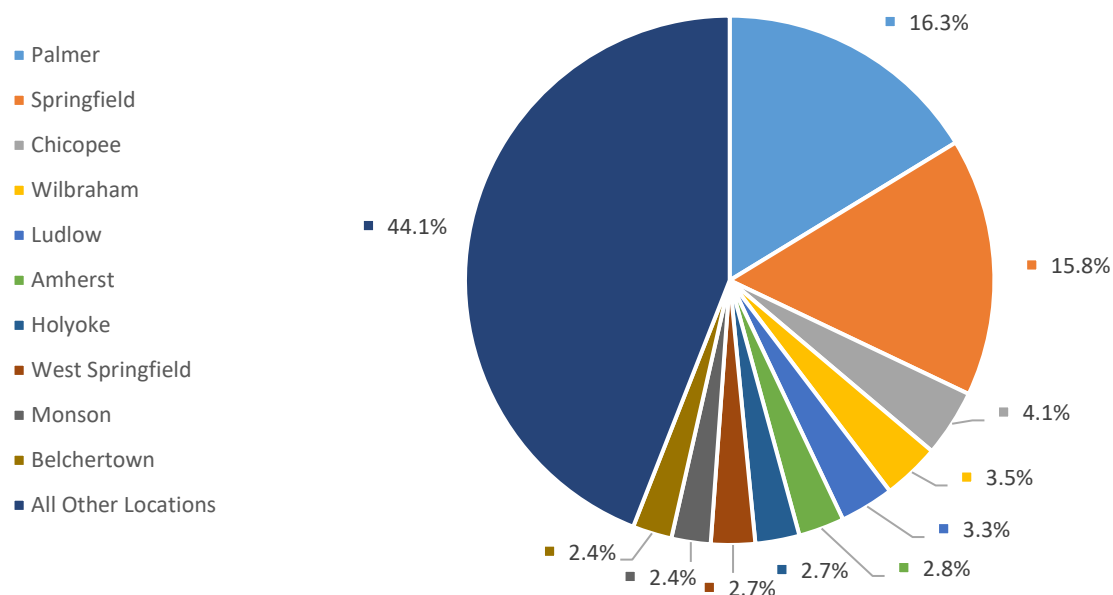
Figure 4-4 Employment in Palmer by Industry, 2019



Source: U.S. Census, 2015-2019 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

According to 2018 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Origin-Destination Employment Statistics from the U.S. Census, among employed residents (primary jobs), 16.3 percent work in Palmer, followed by 15.8 percent in Springfield, 4.1 percent in Chicopee. Figure 4-5 breaks down total primary jobs by where workers are employed.

Figure 4-5 Primary Jobs by Where Workers Are Employed, 2018



Source: U.S. Census, LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (2018)

Palmer's Economic Geography

Palmer is characterized by its unique political and economic geography. In many ways, the Town's four villages – Bondsville, Depot Village, Thorndike, and Three Rivers – exist as separate entities. This condition has the advantage of providing a diverse array of districts to support complementary types of commercial activity. It was discovered through community input received in the development of this Master Plan, however, that this economic synergy may not be working as well as possible. Opportunities to strengthen economic connections between villages exist in leveraging the historical and current day strengths of each village:

- ▶ Bondsville – the Town's historical industrial hub and provides many recreational opportunities, including access to the Swift River;
- ▶ Depot Village – has an active and historic Main Street with a collection of businesses, several of which involve antiques (e.g., Palmer Antiques Co-op, Yankee Flea Market, Antique Junction);
- ▶ Thorndike – has the former Thorndike Mills with redevelopment potential and a history of generating renewable energy; and
- ▶ Three Rivers – has a vibrant, diverse downtown area with burgeoning arts and cultural activities.

The word cloud in Figure 4-7 summarizes the feedback received from the community during Public Forum #2 when asked “what one word describes Palmer’s greatest economic challenge.” Major responses included blight and infrastructure.

Figure 4-7 Palmer's Greatest Economic Challenges, Public Forum #2 Feedback



With respect to blighted physical conditions, the downtown of Three Rivers suffers most visibly from a proliferation of vacant storefronts and deteriorating physical conditions. However, local residents and businesses are collaborating and pulling together resources to define a new vision for the village. This includes identifying targeted redevelopment opportunities and working with state agencies to obtain technical assistance. These efforts are exemplified by the *Market Assessment & Business Recruitment Tool* for the Three Rivers Downtown Business District prepared by FinePoint Associates for the Three Rivers Downtown Task Force, which includes the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce, Town of Palmer and Palmer Redevelopment Authority, and Community Development Department.

The downtown of Depot Village, though well-connected regionally via Route 32 and Route 20, is also struggling. Like Three Rivers, this area is home to a variety of underutilized commercial properties. Unlike Three Rivers, businesses in Depot Village are not represented by a local chamber of commerce, nor are the businesses in Bondsville and Thorndike. The Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce, however, is an organization that supports businesses in a similar manner at the regional scale.

To address concerns of blight, the Town formed the N.I.C.E. (Neighborhood Improvement through Code Enforcement) Task Force in 2020 that is geared toward addressing problematic properties town-wide. The N.I.C.E. Task Force is a collaboration between various Town departments that meet on a regular basis to discuss and develop strategies to address problem properties (i.e., properties that are fire damaged, vacant/abandoned, foreclosed, blighted, have alleged criminal activity, and/or have code violations). Strategies to be explored by the Task Force include coordinated code enforcement inspections, working directly with owners to address issues, receivership, and demolition.

As part of the Master Plan's first community survey, 86.1 percent of participants identified Palmer's visual appeal as "very challenging" or "somewhat challenging" to improving quality of life in Town. Meanwhile, 89.5 percent noted that vibrancy of the Town's commercial centers was "very challenging" or "somewhat challenging."

Another challenge facing the Town's villages is that they also require significant infrastructure investments to make them welcoming spaces and to keep them competitive in the region. Such investments include improved sidewalks, as well as lighting and signage, and notably in the case of Thorndike, bridge repairs. Relatedly, according to the Town's Community Development Department, local efforts to find funding for streetscape and façade improvements have had mixed results.

In addition to blight and infrastructure, some of the bigger community concerns applicable to economic development represented in the word cloud in Figure 4-7 include attracting more businesses and industrial activity, attracting investors, and developing and recruiting workforce. It was noted in the conversation that Palmer does have a significant industrial base, and that industrial parks such as the Mapletree Industrial Center routinely have no vacancies.

Not directly referenced in Figure 4-7, but frequently mentioned throughout the planning processes, is the challenge presented by Palmer's four village structure as its effects the taxes and fees imposed on residents and businesses. Currently, the Town has multiple independent water and fire districts, which leads to a complicated and uneven tax structure. Further, rising fixed costs for services have resulted in increased tax rates that pose a financial challenge to the Town's low-income housing and senior population.

One last identified challenge to Palmer's economic vitality is that many commercial and industrial properties in Town lie within the 1-percent annual chance (or 100-year) floodplain and 0.2-percent annual chance (or 500-year) floodplain. Notable areas include those south of North Main Street and South Main Street as well as at the Mapletree Industrial Center in Depot Village, near the intersection of Bridge Street and Main Street in Three Rivers, at the Thorndike Mills in Thorndike, and at industrial properties such as Maple Leaf Distribution Services near the Swift River in Bondsville. These hazards need to be addressed in order to sustain existing economic activity as well as to promote further development that will be successful over the long-term as climate conditions change. See Figure 5-4 for a depiction of the flood hazard areas in Palmer.

Palmer's Opportunity Sites

There are a number of specific sites in Palmer that present an opportunity to advance the Town's economic well-being. Each site has a unique character and presents a unique set of opportunities. For instance, some sites are suitable locations for retail, while other sites are better suited to support industrial development. Similarly, whereas some sites are largely vacant, others are already built out but still have potential for redevelopment.

The following list identifies and describes the sites in Palmer under the Chapter 43D program, which offers communities a tool to promote targeted economic and housing development. To this end, the Chapter 43D program provides transparency and an efficient process for municipal permitting, guarantees local permitting decisions within 180 days, and increases the visibility of the community and targeted sites. Palmer has the following four sites available under Chapter 43D:

- ▶ 4145 Church Street (Thorndike Mills) – a prominent industrial site central to the Thorndike Village with newly renovated office spaces and high reuse potential;
- ▶ 8 Chamber Road – a largely undeveloped, shovel ready industrial park located in Three Rivers approximately 3 miles from the MassPike;
- ▶ 1412-1416 Main Street (Holbrook Site) – a shovel ready site located in a prime downtown area in Depot Village across from the Palmer Diamond;
- ▶ 289 Wilbraham Road (Olson Farm) – a former farm with mostly open land and gentle slopes with high visibility from the MassPike; and
- ▶ L32 Thorndike Street (former casino site) – 150 acres of undeveloped wooded land consisting of gradual to steep slopes. This site has been slated for large scale commercial development, most recently a waterpark and/or outdoor commercial recreation center.

In addition to the properties under Chapter 43D, the community identified the former Converse Middle School (24 Converse Street) as having redevelopment potential during the Master Plan process. Some ideas floated for redevelopment include makerspace, affordable housing, and a community center. The community did express a desire to maintain recreational uses at this site.



Canal at Thorndike Mills, Thorndike



1412-1416 Main Street (aka the Holbrook Site), Depot Village

Economic Development Programs and Supporting Players

The Town of Palmer benefits from a variety of organizations dedicated to economic development at the local, regional, and state levels. At the neighborhood level, for instance, the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce is a useful resource for many village businesses. In addition to advocating for these businesses' interests, this organization performs fundraising and supports the community through physical improvement programs.

Within the Town's government, the Planning and Economic Development Department and the Community Development Department collectively seek opportunities to advocate for and seek funding to support economic development initiatives. Additionally, within the Town, the five-member Palmer Redevelopment Authority is also tasked with promoting economic development opportunities in Palmer.

Notable is the work of the Community Development Department, which is entirely funded by grants secured from a variety of federal and state sources. The mission of this Department is to revitalize Palmer by meeting the housing and service needs of the low- and moderate-income population, building and repairing infrastructure vital to the health and safety of the residents, and supporting business development and retention. This Department has accomplished much since its inception in 1991, including the provision of microenterprise loans, technical assistance to small businesses, physical upgrades to the public realm, and supporting infrastructure projects.

At the regional scale, the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QVDCD) is a member-based non-profit organization committed to economic development within its 15 member towns, including Palmer. Based in Ware, the QVDCD provides small business loans, training programs, and consulting resources to businesses based within the region.

Also at the regional scale, the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce assists businesses throughout the region. In addition to helping regional businesses grow and improve, this chamber of commerce represents a voice for the region's business community and advocates on its behalf.

Economic Development Roundtable

On September 10, 2020, as part of the development of this Master Plan, project planners held and facilitated an economic development roundtable discussion that included participation from Town representatives and staff, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, MassDevelopment, and large and small businesses in the community. Key takeaways from this discussion included a desire for the Town to:

- ▶ Better market itself and its existing assets (e.g., its location, arts and culture – steampunk, antique shops, and outdoor recreation opportunities)
- ▶ Create new attractions and catalyst projects
- ▶ Enable the development of additional senior care facilities, particularly around the Baystate Wing Hospital
- ▶ Create electrically independent areas (e.g., microgrids), potentially at the Thorndike Mills

- ▶ Promote better communication between its surrounding towns and counties
- ▶ Generate additional collaboration opportunities on economic development issues
- ▶ Attract and retain a younger populations
- ▶ Build upon grassroots efforts (e.g., holiday lights in Depot Village)
- ▶ Invest in infrastructure, particularly with respect to transportation and municipal water/sewer
- ▶ Develop more pad-ready sites to encourage additional industrial activities
- ▶ Provide greater clarity to developers looking to invest in Palmer
- ▶ Continue to advocate for a new passenger rail station in the downtown area of Depot Village with surrounding transit oriented development

Goals and Recommended Actions

Goal 1. Put Palmer more prominently on the map.

Develop a new narrative around Palmer's existing and future assets/resources that better promotes the Town as a unique destination to attract residents, businesses, and visitors.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 Identify those qualities that make Palmer special through an inventory of its assets/resources (e.g., location, recreational opportunities, arts and culture, antiques, and flea markets).
- 1.2 Hire a marketing/public relations firm to evaluate and make recommendations on the effectiveness of the Town's "brand," including the tagline "The Town of Seven Railroads," and conduct a community dialogue about how the brand could be improved.
- 1.3 Leveraging the findings of Action ED 1.2, create marketing materials (e.g., pamphlets, videos, social media, and other web content) around the agreed upon brand to promote the Town's assets/resources throughout the region and state.

Goal 2. Attract and retain younger residents and families.

Find ways to enhance the appeal of Palmer for diverse and younger populations, who could play a critical role in advancing economic conditions in the Town.

Recommended Actions

- 2.1 Actively engage diverse and younger residents/families regionally to identify key issues and opportunities (e.g., attractions, school system) that will attract them to or keep them in Palmer.
- 2.2 Converse with and educate Palmer's diverse and younger residents/families on playing a key role in local government operations and decision-making.

- 2.3 Define and pursue those types of economic activities that are important to younger populations, such as physical recreation; arts, culture and education (e.g., STEAM); cafes; dining; microbreweries; etc.
- 2.4 Based on the activities identified as part of Action ED 2.3, pursue or enhance supporting infrastructural improvements (e.g., expanded sidewalks, Wi-fi, multi-mode electric vehicle charging stations and sharing).
- 2.5 Promote an entrepreneurial culture through the provision and possible development of, for example, public markets, pop-up shop infrastructure, makerspace, and shared/collaborative workspaces.
- 2.6 Establish partnerships between existing and newly located businesses, local and regional student population, and local government to promote paths toward successful employment and careers.

Goal 3. Improve the look and feel of Palmer's village centers and gateways.

Create visual and programmatic experiences that will attract more visitors, diners, and shoppers, as applicable, and give residents a sense of community and pride.

Recommended Actions

- 3.1 Continue to proactively work with the owners of vacant commercial properties throughout Palmer, particularly in each Village Center District, informing them about opportunities to improve the visual appearance and marketing of their property holdings and encouraging redevelopment, where appropriate.
- 3.2 Craft an ordinance to regulate vacant commercial properties that creates a monetary disincentive for owning such properties without the legitimate pursuit of sale or lease.
- 3.3 Continue the coalition consisting of representatives from the various Town departments (i.e., the N.I.C.E. Committee) and expand to include Town residents. This coalition shall routinely deal with individual properties of concern in a concerted manner and regularly discuss plans to address real estate issues in Palmer more generally.
- 3.4 Explore the potential for the establishment of Design Review Guidelines and a Design Review Committee to review and provide recommendations – related to architectural and sign design – for building projects in the Village Center Districts.
- 3.5 Continue to identify and pursue local and state grant opportunities to improve streetscapes, in concert with Action ED 2.4, and multi-modal facilities in the village centers (e.g., more pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, and adding appropriately designed lighting, benches, trash bins, etc.)

Goal 4. Identify existing "market clusters" of economic activity and find ways to grow them.

Encourage the growth of "market clusters" where businesses operating in a similar location can complement and support one another and become greater than the sum of their parts.

Recommended Actions

- 4.1 Explore the potential for a medical overlay district to promote the development of a medical cluster around the Baystate Wing Hospital, with potential for assisted living/nursing homes, medical equipment manufacturing, medical research, etc.
- 4.2 Work with local and regional organizations to develop and fulfill strategies to build upon the existing hub of arts and culture in Three Rivers and make connections to other art establishments and activities throughout the Town.
 - Such strategies may include developing a map of local arts and culture destinations, supporting the creation of an artist-led organization for networking and marketing purposes, and establishing a “cultural district” through the Mass Cultural Council.
- 4.3 Hire a real estate advisory firm to explore the potential for new economic clusters. This may include alternative energy in Thorndike via the Thorndike Mill, recreational businesses in Bondsville, and antique shops as well as traditional downtown retail and service-oriented businesses in Depot Village.
- 4.4 Develop and regularly update a “Guide to Starting and Growing a Business in Palmer” to encourage the growth of small businesses in alignment with envisioned economic development. Such guidance may identify and describe local resources, permitting and zoning processes, tax policies, and available financing (e.g., business loans and/or grant opportunities).

Goal 5. Pave the way for catalyst projects.

Advance strategies that promote large development opportunities with the potential for widespread economic benefits.

Recommended Actions

- 5.1 With Palmer’s industrial-zoned land almost fully built out, explore opportunities to expand upon the supply of parcels available for industrial development.
- 5.2 Strengthen the Town’s relationships with existing businesses to support their continued operations and growth (i.e., identify their evolving needs and how these needs relate to the Town’s infrastructure and services).
- 5.3 Evaluate the impact that Palmer’s tax policy and rates have on economic development and adjust as appropriate.
- 5.4 Engage regional partners to conduct an economic development study to understand how Palmer performs against and fits in with communities within the Pioneer Valley Region.
- 5.5 Collaborate with regional entities to pursue the re-development of the Monson Development Center, which would serve as a source of local employment and could induce economic activity in Palmer.
- 5.6 Regularly engage property owners and strategic partners to identify prime development sites throughout the Town and develop clear visions and marketing strategies for their redevelopment.

Goal 6. Organize locally to drive this Master Plan's economic development Goals and recommended Actions.

Keep the conversation going so that Palmer can benefit from collective enthusiasm and shared ideas.

Recommended Actions

- 6.1 Create a diverse network of representatives to continue the work started during the Economic Development Roundtable of this Master Plan. This network may take the form of an Economic Development Committee or an advisory body.
- 6.2 Build upon the success of the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce to create additional business networks/organizations that will drive economic growth and represent the interests of the Town's market clusters.

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5

Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources

The natural environment, inclusive of air, water, soil, and vegetation (and the interactions among them), is an important aspect of a community's function. It holds tremendous value by contributing to human health and well-being in various manners including, but certainly not limited to, the provision of food, respite from urban environments, recreational opportunities, and hazard mitigation (e.g., flood storage).

A community's cultural identity is influenced by its history. This history is manifested in its historic resources, such as buildings, sites, landmarks, or districts, which tell the story of a how the community came to be, including the persons or events that shaped its development. A community's cultural identity is also embodied in the manners by which its diverse inhabitants interact and for what purposes. These interactions are shaped by local organizations and facilities providing programs and activities that bring people together for a common purpose (e.g., arts, entertainment, education, religion, and charitable giving).

Together, natural, historic, and cultural resources play important roles in defining a community's values and sense of place. Increasing development and intensive human activities, however, can cause them irreparable harm. Accordingly, this Element not only highlights and characterizes the natural, historic, and cultural resources in the Town of Palmer, it also identifies strategies for their protection and enhancement.

Baseline Conditions Analyses

Natural Resources

The Town of Palmer enjoys a diverse range of natural resources, including prime farmland soils, wildlife habitats, and water resources. By inventorying these resources, the Town can identify those that are critical and deserve special attention and protection from threats, such as the expansion of development.

Nearly 52 percent of persons responding to this Master Plan's first community survey identified Palmer's "natural and scenic areas" as a quality that contributes to making the Town a great place to live, and nearly 30 percent identified "loss of natural lands to new development" as their biggest land use concern.

The following sections leverage information prepared for the Town's 2014 *Open Space and Recreation Plan* (OSRP), prepared by the Palmer Open Space and Recreation Update Committee with assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). Though the Town is currently in the process of updating its OSRP, much of the information provided in the 2014 plan remains relevant.

Geology, Soils, and Topography

Palmer is one of the northernmost towns in Hampden County within the central uplands of Massachusetts. It sits at the confluence of three rivers forming the Chicopee River, south of the Quabbin Reservoir and east of the Connecticut River Valley on the Worcester Plateau. The geology of the Town and its larger region is a reflection of the relatively recent glacial history that imprinted its effects on the land. Moderately thick ice-deposited glacial till and exposed bedrock in the rugged uplands intermingle with glacial out wash terraces and alluvial deposits in the major river valleys and floodplain terraces.

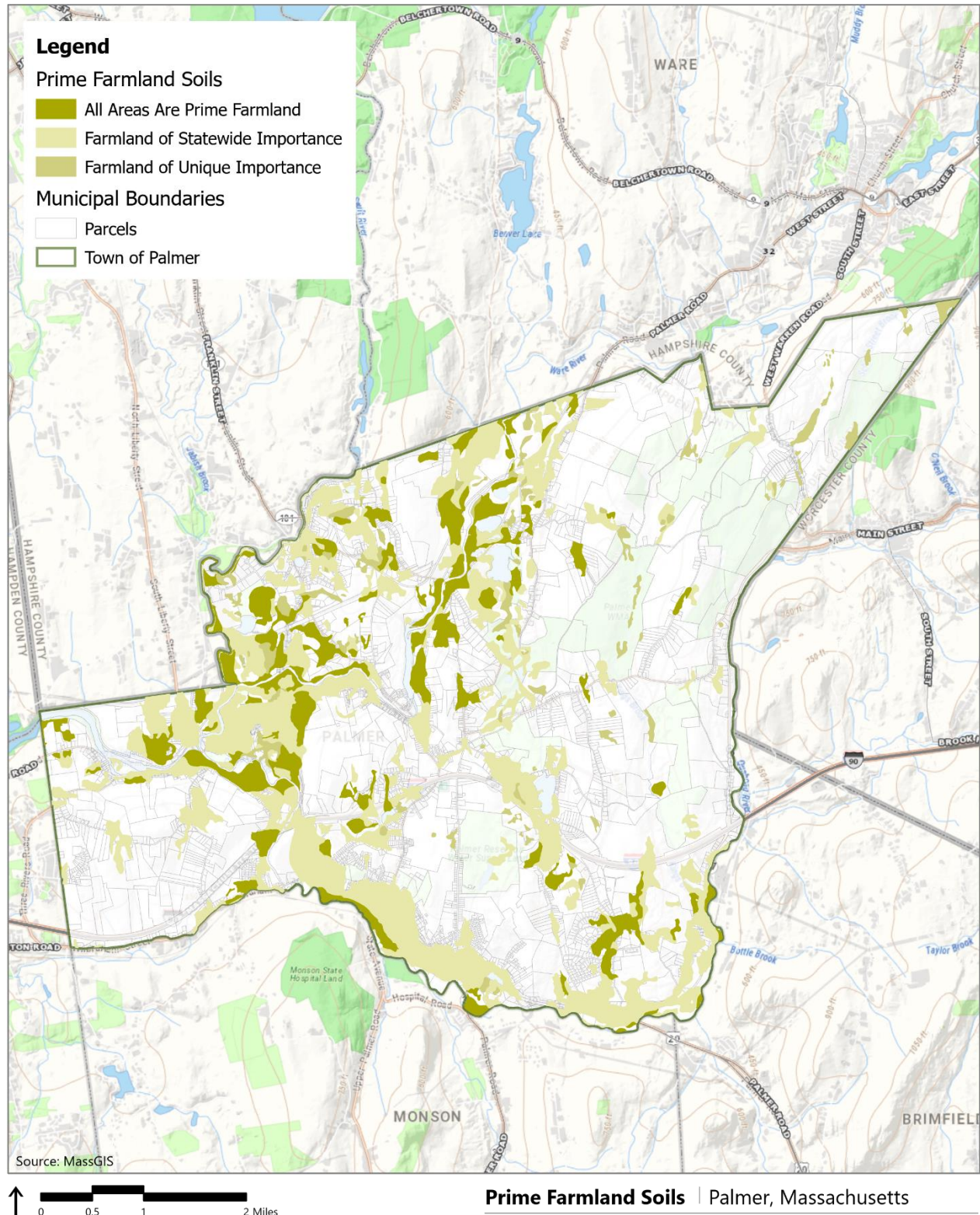
According to the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources and Conservation Service Soil Survey, there are four major soil associations that make up the Town's land area. These include the Charlton-Woodbridge-Paxton Association, Narragansett-Charlton Association, Hinckley-Windsor-Merrimac Association, and Brookfield-Brimfield Association. The Hinckley-Windsor-Merrimac Association soils derive from glacial outwash, while the others are glacial till with varying drainage and slope.

Figure 5-1 depicts the areas of agricultural soils in Palmer. Roughly 7 percent of the Town is comprised of prime farmland, 2 percent is comprised of farmland of unique importance, and 17 percent is comprised of farmland of statewide importance. The definitions of these soil categories are provided below.

- ▶ Prime Farmland Soils – Land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses (i.e., the land could be cropland, pastureland, rangeland, forest land, or other land, but not urban built-up land or water).
- ▶ Farmland Soils of Unique Importance – Land other than prime farmland that is used for the production of specific high value food and fiber crops, such as citrus, tree nuts, olives, cranberries, fruit, and vegetables.
- ▶ Farmland Soils of Statewide Importance – Land in addition to prime and unique farmlands that is of statewide importance for the production of food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, as determined by the appropriate state agency. Further, these lands generally include soils that are nearly prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.

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 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 5-1**



Elevations in Palmer range from 330 feet above sea level within flood plains and river corridors to peaks at Mt. Pattaquatic (1,094 feet) and Colonel's Mountain (1,129 feet). Steep hills and ridges on glacial uplands with stone outcrops are predominantly located within the Town's eastern and northern parts, while gentle slopes generally comprise the remainder of the Town.

Some lands in Palmer, and more generally speaking, are more prone to problems such as erosion and flooding. Accordingly, they are sensitive to development and intensive land uses. These conditions are influenced by steep slopes and stony and erosive subsoils.

Landscape Character

Upland forests, rocky ledges, river valleys, and ponds and wetlands help to define the visual character of Palmer from a natural environment perspective, along with the Town's rolling hills and mountain peaks that provide scenic views. Built-up areas have historically been concentrated in the river valley areas – in the villages of Bondsville, Depot Village, Thorndike, and Three Rivers, though encroachment upon forested uplands as well as non-forested open spaces has taken place in recent years. This encroachment threatens the unique character of the Town, including its scenic views, as well as the services that these areas offer (e.g., recreational uses, wildlife habitat, watershed productivity).

Water Resources

Palmer has numerous water resources, including rivers, ponds, and wetlands. Together, these resources comprise approximately 3 percent of the Town's total land area. Notably, four rivers intersect the Town including the Quaboag, Ware, and Swift Rivers, which form the headwaters of the Chicopee River that flows through Palmer downstream to the Connecticut River.

The Chicopee River basin is the largest basin in Massachusetts at 721 square miles, and all of Palmer is within the Chicopee River Watershed – an important sub-watershed within the larger Connecticut River Watershed. The Chicopee River Watershed includes the Swift River, Quaboag River, Ware River, and Chicopee River subbasins. Given these connections, local water resources are integral to regional water systems, and any changes to local water quality can have associated impacts in surrounding towns and the larger region.

The following sections discuss the various water resources found in the Town of Palmer. The locations of these resources are shown in Figures 5-2 through 5-4.

Surface Waters

As mentioned, Palmer has four major rivers flowing through its municipal boundaries (see Figure 5-2). The Quaboag, Ware, Swift, and Chicopee Rivers collectively provide recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and flood control. Among these rivers, however, only the Quaboag and Swift Rivers can be publicly accessed. The Ware and Chicopee Rivers can only be accessed by way of privately held lands.

Additionally, the Town boasts three lakes and five ponds. Among the lakes, Forest Lake is the only publicly accessible waterbody and is the largest covering approximately 44 acres. Lake Thompson is the next largest at 32 acres, followed by Crystal Lake at 16 acres.

Palmer's five ponds include the privately-owned Round Pond, Ice House Pond, Allen's Pond, and Knox Pond, as well as the Town-owned Lily Pond. Knox Pond and Lily Pond are both publicly accessible, with Knox Pond frequently used by educational facilities as an educational workshop.

Aquifer Recharge Areas

The provisions and requirements of Article XIV: Water Supply Protection District within the Town's Zoning Ordinance offer protections for the Town's aquifer recharge areas, including by designating permitted, prohibited, and restricted uses. The Town's larger aquifer recharge areas are located at the confluence of the Swift and Ware Rivers, as well as at the Quaboag River by South Main Street in Depot Village. Smaller aquifer recharge areas in the Town are widely distributed. A map of the Water Supply Protection District is on file with the Town Clerk.

Relatedly, Figure 5-3 illustrates water supply assets, including surface water protection areas, outstanding resource waters, and public water supply sources.

The Palmer Reservoir and surrounding areas have delineated Surface Water Supply Protection Zones, included in the Massachusetts Drinking Water Regulations (310 CMR 22.00). These zones include:

- ▶ Zone A – Represents a) the land area between the surface water source and the upper boundary of the bank; b) the land area within a 400 foot lateral distance from the upper boundary of the bank of a Class A surface water source, as defined in 314 CMR 4.05(3)(a); and c) the land area within a 200 foot lateral distance from the upper boundary of the bank of a tributary or associated surface water body.
- ▶ Zone B – Represents the land area within one-half mile of the upper boundary of the bank of a Class A surface water source, as defined in 314 CMR 4.05(3)(a), or edge of watershed, whichever is less. Zone B always includes the land area within a 400 ft lateral distance from the upper boundary of the bank of a Class A surface water source.
- ▶ Zone C – Represents the land area not designated as Zone A or B within the watershed of a Class A surface water source, as defined in 314 CMR 4.05(3)(a).¹¹

Graves Brook (Upper) is the only water resource in Palmer to be given Outstanding Resource Water protection under the Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards, 314 CMR 4.00. Graves Brook is also a Cold Water Fisheries Resource designated by the Department of Fish and Game.

Wetlands

Wetlands have many beneficial functions, including the protection of public and private water supply, protection of surface and ground waters, nutrient retention, shoreline anchoring and dissipation of erosive forces, pollution prevention, fisheries and wildlife habitat, and aquifer recharge. They also importantly serve as a tool for flood control and prevention, as they trap and slowly release flood waters. Their flood control benefit is

11 MassGIS. (2017). "MassGIS Data: Surface Water Supply Protection Areas (ZONE A, B, C)." Retrieved May 25, 2021, from <https://docs.digital.mass.gov/dataset/massgis-data-surface-water-supply-protection-areas-zone-b-c>

enhanced if the wetlands are located within or downstream of urbanized areas, counteracting increased rates and volumes of surface water run-off from impervious surfaces, such as pavements.

In Massachusetts, wetlands are protected by Wetlands Protection Act Regulations (310 CMR 10.00) under authority of M.G.L. 131, Section 40: the Wetlands Protection Act. The Massachusetts Rivers Protection Act amended the Wetlands Protection Act to establish and regulate activities within the “Riverfront Area.” The Riverfront Area is a wetland resource area generally defined as a 200-foot wide corridor on each side of a perennial river or stream. In 2003, Palmer was granted special legislation to create the River Protection Act 25-foot Set Back Area map. This map delineates a 25-foot river protection setback on approximately 440 densely developed parcels primarily located in and surrounding the Village Center Districts. Palmer provides further wetland protections through its Wetlands Protection Ordinance, last amended in 2016.

The Palmer Conservation Commission, along with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), is responsible for administering the Wetland Protection Act Regulations. The Conservation Commission, a seven-member board of volunteers appointed by the Town Manager, is additionally responsible for administering the Town’s Wetlands Regulation.

Wetlands are typically found in areas of low-lying topography, and are areas saturated or flooded that produce hydric soils and support the growth of wetland vegetation. In Palmer, significant wetland areas occur along the Swift, Ware, and Quaboag River corridors in conjunction with their floodplains; at the State Fish Hatchery on Route 32; along King’s Brooke, and at the confluence of the Swift and Ware Rivers (see Figure 5-2). According to MassDEP (2005), the Town has approximately 1,380 acres of wetlands including open water, marsh/bog, wooded swamp.

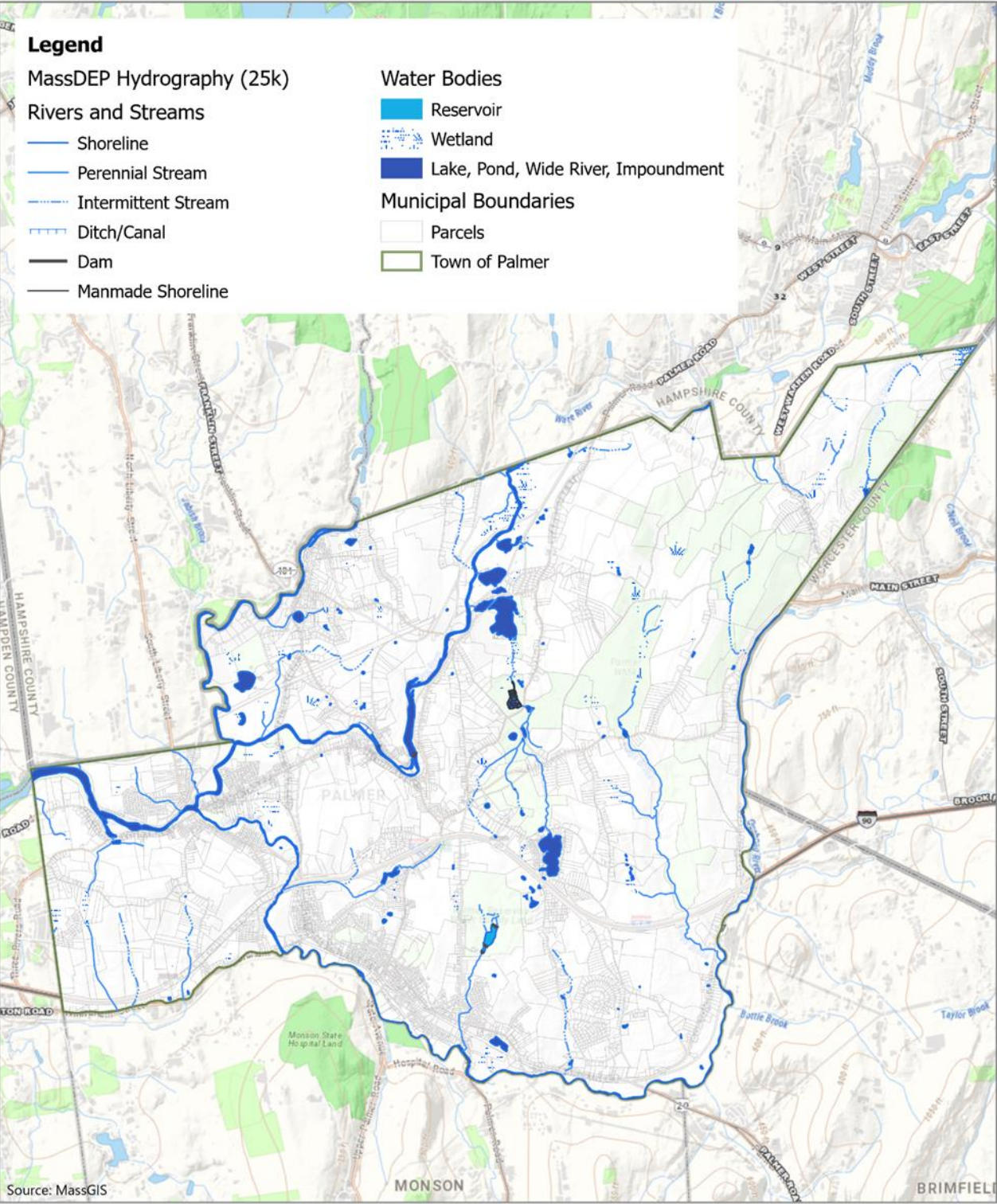
Flood Hazard Areas

Shown on the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM), flood hazard areas are defined as lands adjacent to or near rivers and streams that have a certain probability (e.g., 1 percent [100-year floodplain] or 0.2 percent [500-year floodplain]) of flood risk due to rain events, rapid snow melt, and/or frozen ground conditions. Such areas are determined primarily through an examination of historic flooding in an area. In consideration of climate change, however, FEMA-designated floodplains are expected to flood more frequently, and further, land that is not typically affected by flooding may become subject to inundation. Such impacts would result from more intense periods of precipitation coupled with more frequent episodic drought.

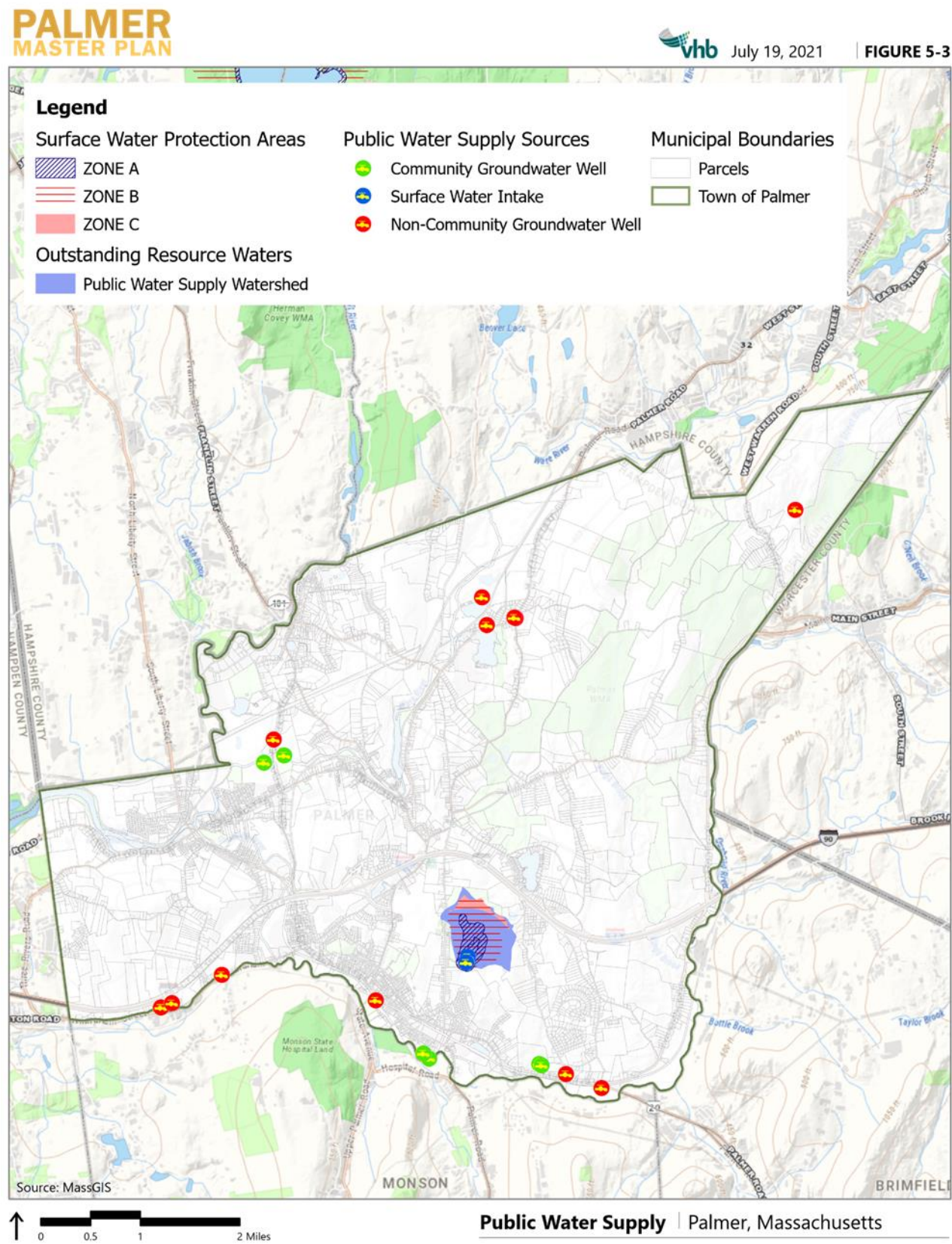
In Palmer, floodplains are most expansive around the Quaboag and Ware Rivers. Figure 5-4 shows the flood zone designations in the Town.

PALMER
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 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 5-2**

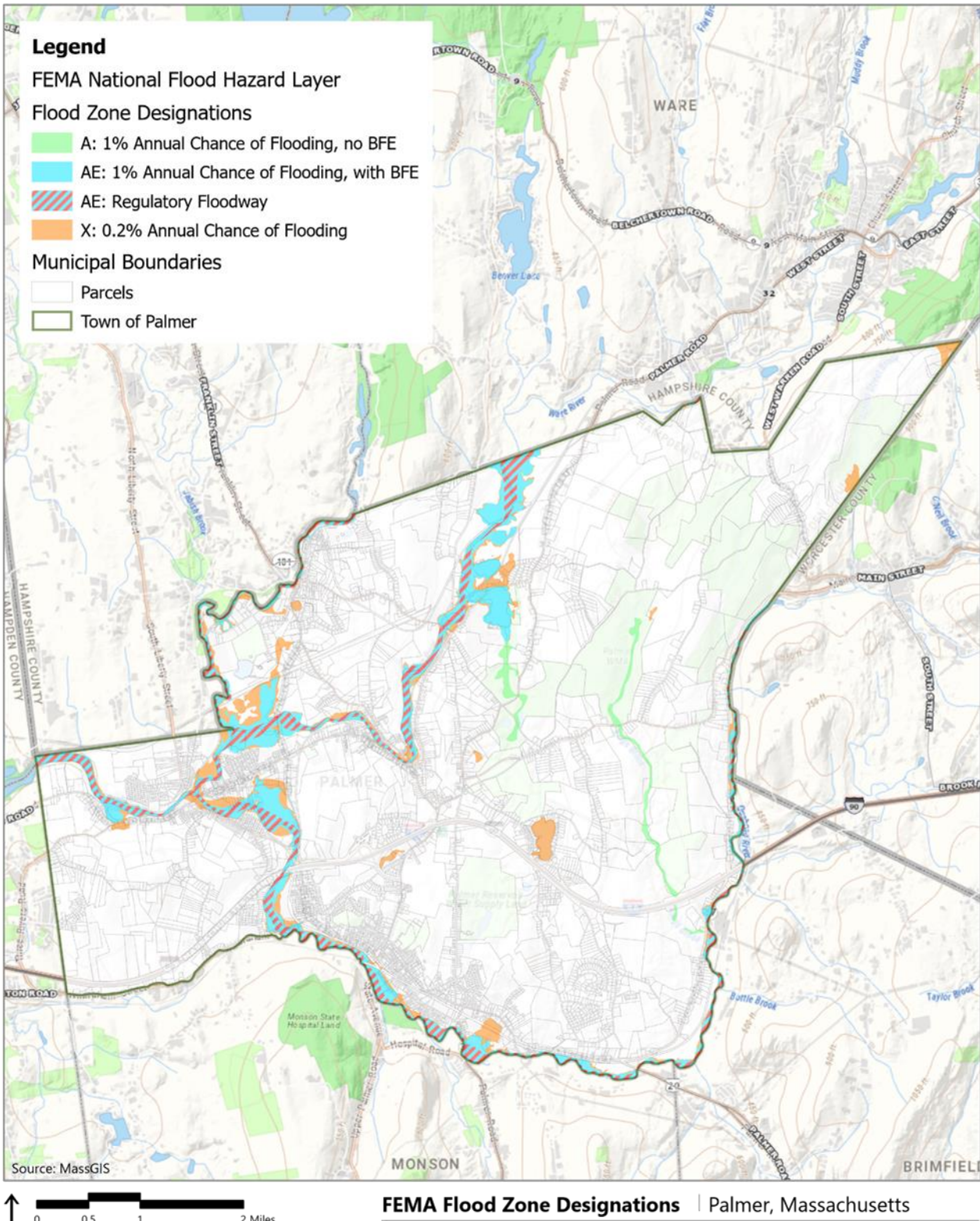


MassDEP Hydrography (25k) | Palmer, Massachusetts



PALMER
MASTER PLAN

 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 5-4**



Biodiversity – *BioMap2*

In 2010, the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) and The Nature Conservancy's Massachusetts Program developed BioMap2 to aid in the conservation and protection of the state's biodiversity, particularly in the context of climate change. BioMap2 includes two complementary spatial layers, Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape.

- ▶ Core Habitat – Key areas of habitat that support the longevity of rare species listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (M.G.L., Chapter 131A) (i.e., Endangered, Threatened, or of Special Concern).
- ▶ Critical Natural Landscape – Large natural Landscape Blocks that are minimally impacted by development capable of providing habitat for wide-ranging native species, supporting intact ecological processes, maintaining connectivity among habitats, and enhancing ecological resilience to natural and anthropogenic disturbances in a rapidly changing world.¹²

As reported in the *BioMap2* Town Report for Palmer (2012), the Town sits within the Lower Worcester Plateau Ecoregion that is generally comprised of open hills and transition hardwood and central hardwood forests. The components of its Core Habitat (2,514 acres) and Critical Natural Landscape (1,617 acres) are primarily located in the northeastern portion of the Town and are shown in Figure 5-5. These components include:

- ▶ Core Habitat
 - Nine Exemplary or Priority Natural Community Cores
 - Two Wetland Cores
 - Five Aquatic Cores
 - Seven Species of Conservation Concern Cores including three amphibians, one fish, five insects, three mussels, and three plants
- ▶ Critical Natural Landscape
 - One Landscape Block
 - Three Wetland Core Buffers
 - Five Aquatic Core Buffers

Also shown in Figure 5-5 are the Town's 23 NHESP-certified vernal pools. Vernal pools are unique wildlife habitats that are seasonally important for amphibians and invertebrate animals. Certification by NHESP affords vernal pools protection under the State's Water Quality Certification regulations (401 Program), Title 5 regulations, and the Forest Cutting Practices Act regulations. Palmer's Wetland Protection Ordinance protects vernal pools more generally by creating a 100 foot "no disturb zone."

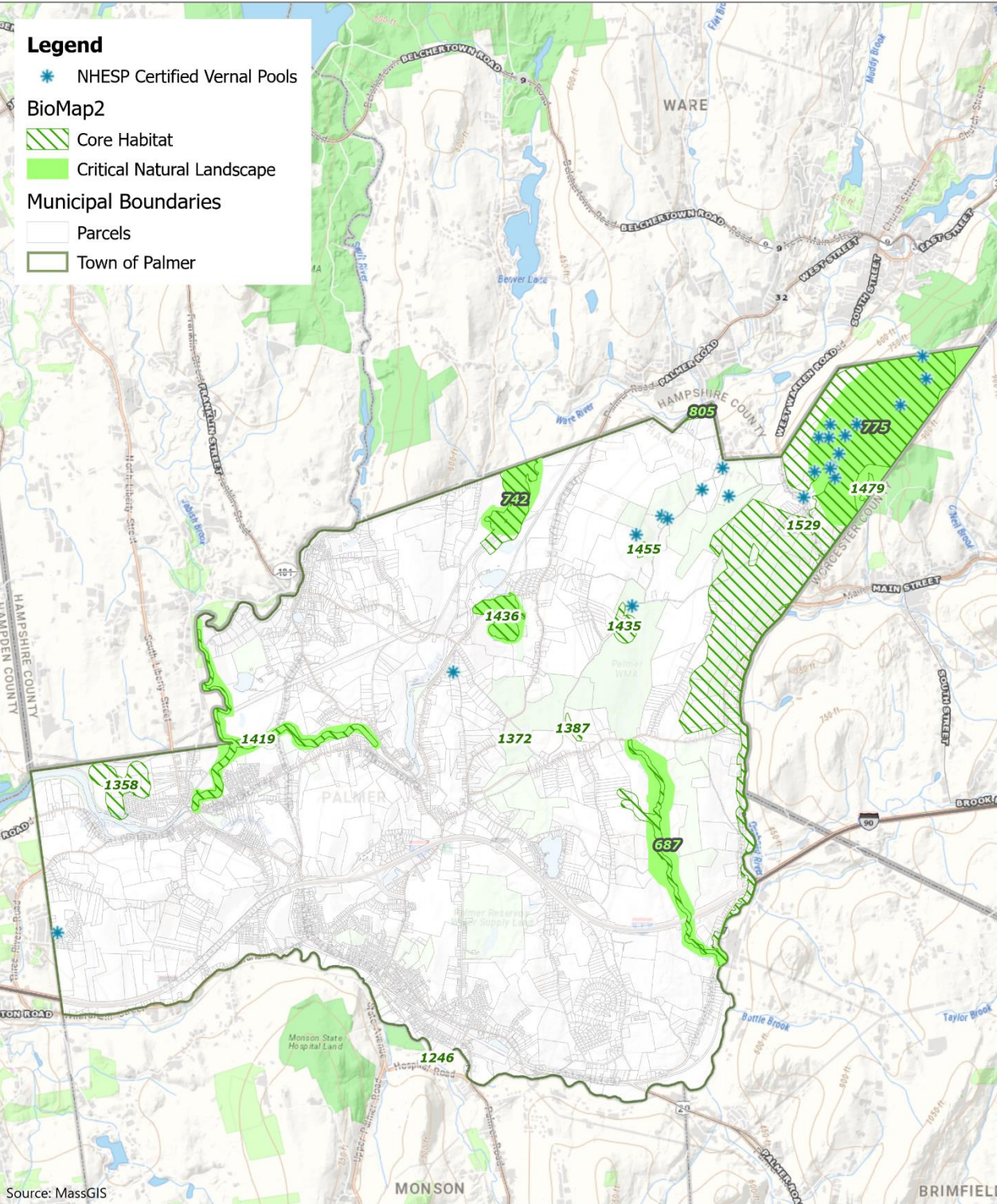
12 Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. (2012). *BioMap2 – Palmer Report*. Retrieved May 25, 2021, from http://maps.massgis.state.ma.us/dfg/biomap/pdf/town_core/Palmer.pdf

PALMER
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July 19, 2021

FIGURE 5-5



Source: MassGIS



Ecological Integrity | Palmer, Massachusetts

Participants in this Master Plan's first public community identified "water bodies" (41.6 percent), "groundwater supplies" (32.4 percent), and "forested areas" (31.7 percent) as their most pressing natural resource protection needs.

Known Threats to Natural Resources

Not atypical, Palmer is faced with challenges that need to be addressed to achieve sustainability with respect to the Town's natural resources. The biggest of which include new greenfield development that has historically and recently decreased and fragmented open spaces, a pattern which reduces ecosystem resilience, wildlife diversity, and watershed productivity.

As climate is a major determinant of ecosystem function, climate change is another significant challenge. Changing temperatures have the potential to affect biodiversity by replacing native, northern adapted species with more generalist species, as well as augmenting existing stressors, such as invasive insects (e.g., increased presence of the gypsy moth) and diseases. Ecological changes in response to climate change have already been observed in Massachusetts; for example, with plants leafing out and blooming earlier, and amphibian breeding seasons beginning earlier.¹³

The following sections identify and describe other environmental threats facing Palmer.

Hazardous Waste and Brownfields

As of December 2018, Palmer had seven properties meeting the unofficial definition of a brownfield, described by MassDEP as "a real property whose redevelopment may be complicated by actual or perceived contamination by oil or hazardous materials."¹⁴ Table 5-1 presents the disposal sites included within the MassDEP's Brownfield Program, along with their Release Tracking Numbers (RTNs).

Table 5-1 Sites within MassDEP's Brownfield Program in Palmer

Site Name	Address	Primary RTN
Mapletree Industrial Center	Maple Tree Industrial Center - Route 20	1-0000142
Cascades Diamond Mill	Church Street	1-0000482
Jarvis East	127 South Main Street	1-0000681
Former Winton's Food and Fuel	1239 Park Street - Route 20	1-0000716
Residence	113 Bourne Street	1-0018904
Former Palmer Lumber Company	1239 South Main Street	1-0000827

Source: MassDEP (2018)

- 13 Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and the Adaption Advisory Committee. (2011). *Massachusetts Climate Change Adaptation Report*. Retrieved May 21, 2021, from <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/11/29/Full%20report.pdf>
- 14 MassDEP. (2018). "Find Brownfields Sites." Retrieved May 25, 2021, from <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/find-brownfields-sites>

In addition to the properties listed in Table 5-1, there are over 200 disposal sites dating back to 1986 within the Town with recorded releases that are regulated under the Bureau of Waste Site Cleanup. These sites can be found on MassDEP's searchable sites list accessible through the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' Data Portal.¹⁵

The approximately 4-acre PSC Resources site on Water Street is the only U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Superfund site in Palmer. On July 6, 2020, the EPA completed the fifth *Five Year Review Report*, and operations and maintenance activities are ongoing with concentrations for the contaminants of concern steadily decreasing.¹⁶

Landfills

The Town has a former landfill on Emery Street in Bondsville that closed in December 1997. A solar project at this site, a qualified brownfield/landfill project under the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources SREC II solar energy incentive program, was completed in April 2017 by Syncarpha Capital LLC, Borrego Solar Systems Inc., and Renewable Energy Massachusetts LLC. The Palmer Landfill Solar Project had a rated capacity of 5 Megawatts at the time of completion.

Another former landfill on State Street, also in Bondsville, closed in 1975. This facility is unlined. Unlined landfills present a risk of contaminants leaching into surrounding groundwater. Closure requirements, as administered by the MassDEP Bureau of Solid Waste under 310 CMR 19.00, were not as strict at the time this landfill was closed as they are today.

Erosion and Sedimentation

Soil erosion is a naturally occurring event, but accelerates with the removal of vegetative cover and alteration of natural grades. As reported in the 2014 OSRP, erosion is impacting Palmer's ponds, wetlands, and rivers. Exposed soils, unpaved roads, and construction sites contribute tons of silt and sediment to these water resources every year, and this sedimentation interferes with their natural processes and the life cycles of many fish and aquatic species.

The Town's Stormwater Management Ordinance has an objective of preventing erosion and sedimentation from land development, and to this end, requires an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan with proper inspection protocols. Stormwater Management Permit applications are reviewed by the Town's Department of Public Works.

Flooding

As mentioned above, there are flood hazard areas in Palmer, primarily around the Quaboag and Ware Rivers (see Figure 5-4), and these flood hazard areas are evolving with climate change where the floodplains are expected to flood more frequently and lands that are not typically affected by flooding may become subject to inundation.

15 <https://eeaonline.eea.state.ma.us/Portal/#!/search/wastesite/results?TownName=PALMER>

16 EPA. (2020). "Superfund Site: PSC Resources, Palmer, MA - Cleanup Activities." Retrieved May 25, 2021, from <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.Cleanup&id=0100747#bkground>

As noted in the Town's *2016 Hazard Mitigation Plan*, much of the Town's developed areas sit within the floodplains. The Town's Zoning Ordinance, through its Floodplain Overlay District, does prohibit construction within floodplains, though many structures were constructed prior to enacting the regulations. Further, the Floodplain Overlay District only covers the 100-year floodplain.

As reported during the Town's 2019 Community Resilience Building Workshop conducted under the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program, it was noted that drinking water wells may be affected by contact with contaminated flood waters, particularly those located along the Quaboag River floodplain. Additionally, the *2016 Hazard Mitigation Plan* notes the following areas have experienced or are vulnerable to flooding:

- ▶ Route 20 and Route 67 at the Palmer-Warren Town Line
- ▶ Area surrounding Route 181
- ▶ Ludlow Dam Area
- ▶ Emery Street Area
- ▶ Route 32 south of Fay's Bridge
- ▶ Water Street
- ▶ Foundry Street

Tied to these areas are the critical facilities of Town's Department of Public Works building at 1015 Bridge Street, the Palmer Wastewater Treatment Plant at 1 Norbell Street, and the Galaxy Wellfield.

Dams

According to the Massachusetts Office of Dam Safety (2012), there are 15 dams in Palmer, among which six are publicly-owned with the remaining falling under private ownership. Among those that are publicly-owned, two are under the jurisdiction of the Town and both are managed by Fire District #1. One of them, the Palmer Reservoir Upper Dam, is listed as presenting a Significant Hazard (see definition below). Three other dams in Town present a Significant Hazard (Bondsville Upper Dam and Diamond International Corp Lower Dam) or High Hazard (Diamond International Corp Upper Dam). The Massachusetts Office of Dam Safety's hazard codes are defined as:

- ▶ High – Dam located where failure will likely cause loss of life and serious damage to home(s), industrial, commercial facilities, important public utilities, main highway(s) or Railroad(s).
- ▶ Significant – Dam located where failure may cause loss of life and damage home(s), industrial or commercial facilities, secondary highway(s) or railroad(s) or cause interruption of use or service of relatively important facilities.
- ▶ Low – Dam located where failure may cause minimal property damage to others. Loss of life is not expected.

Table 5-2 lists the dams in Palmer along with their ownership and hazard codes, if applicable.

Table 5-2 Dams and Dam Safety

Dam Name	Ownership Type	Owner	Hazard Code
Palmer Reservoir Upper Dam	Palmer Fire District #1	Town of Palmer	Significant Hazard
Thompson Lake Dam	Private	Private	Low Hazard
Forest Lake Dam	Private	Private	Low Hazard
Bondsville Upper Dam	Private Association or other non-profit	Belchertown Land Trust	Significant Hazard ²
Diamond International Corp Upper Dam	Private	Private	High Hazard
Diamond International Corp Lower Dam	Private	Private	Significant Hazard
V.V. McNitt Dam	Private	Private	N/A
Mongo Pond Dam	State	DOT - Dept. of Transportation	Low Hazard
Lizak Pond Dam	State	DFG - Fisheries and Wildlife State	N/A
Lizak #2 Basin Dam	Private	Private	N/A
Lizak #3 Basin Dam	Private	Private	N/A
State Fish Hatchery Upper Dam	State	DFG - Fisheries and Wildlife State	N/A
State Fish Hatchery Lower Dam	State	DFG - Fisheries and Wildlife State	N/A
Sasur Pond Dam	Private	Private	Low Hazard
Palmer Lower Reservoir Dam	Municipality	Town of Palmer	N/A

Source: Massachusetts Office of Dam Safety (2012)

Notes:

- 1 N/A = No hazard code. Non-jurisdictional dams do not have hazard codes except when owned and regulated by the Federal Government.
- 2 The Bondsville Upper Dam underwent major repairs, such as mending leaks, removing trees growing too close to the dam, and raising flood controls, in 2018.

Water Quality

The quality of water can be influenced by many factors, such as land use and development patterns, stormwater run-off, and wastewater treatment. Palmer has an extensive water resources network that is vital both locally and regionally. Protecting the Town's waters and the elements that contribute to them is therefore essential to maintaining them as a vital resource for human and ecological health and social and economic development.

As documented in the Town's 2019 Stormwater Management Program (SWMP) document and based on the Massachusetts Year 2016 Integrated List of Waters, however, there are several impaired waterbodies in Palmer that include the Chicopee River, Ware River, and the Quaboag River. Based on Clean Water Act standards, these waterbodies are impaired for

bacteria/pathogens (Escherichia Coli (E. Coli)). Additionally, mercury has been demonstrated to be present in fish in the Chicopee River, as another pollutant causing an impairment.

The Town is addressing the pollutants of concern through the implementation of Best Management Practices that address pollution reduction largely through preventative measures that seek to eliminate pollution from entering the stormwater drainage system. These BMPs address the six minimum control measures under Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) guidelines:

- ▶ Public Education and Outreach
- ▶ Public Involvement and Participation
- ▶ Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination
- ▶ Construction Site Stormwater Runoff Control
- ▶ Post Construction Runoff Control
- ▶ Pollution Prevention and Good Housekeeping

Invasive Species

Non-native species often have the ability to spread rapidly and displace native species, jeopardizing biodiversity and ecosystem health. Though necessary to support the health of native plant and animal species, the management of invasive species is a time consuming and costly endeavor. As previously noted, the impacts of invasive species can be compounded by climate change.

According to the 2014 OSRP, there are many species of invasive species that thrive in disturbed and/or degraded environments in Palmer. Examples include Japanese knotweed along the Quaboag and Swift River riverbanks, as well as at Lake Thompson. Other examples of invasive species in the Town include Glossy buckthorn, Japanese barberry, Winged euonymus, and multi-floral rose. The recent gypsy moth infestation is an example of an invasive nonnative insect that caused significant defoliation and permanent damage to many native trees in Palmer.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Historic and cultural resources often overlap in goals, audiences, events, and organizations. By considering these resources together as “heritage,” we create a stronger link between our environments and the communities that create and inhabit them.

The loss of a historic building represents a loss in cultural memory. Similarly, a failure to create cultural opportunities results in fewer traditions, stories, and artists that will define a community’s heritage in the future. Actively seeking to preserve and promote historic and cultural resources enhances the prominence and longevity of each individual resource.

When most people think about historic resources, they picture a specific building or streetscape. The range of physical, man-made resources that contribute to our heritage is much broader than buildings with four walls and a roof. The National Register of Historic

Places (National Register), which was established in 1966 as the country's official list of historic places worthy of preservation, recognizes five main categories of historic resources:

- ▶ Buildings – Structures intended to shelter human activity, such as houses, offices, stores, farm buildings, churches, etc.
- ▶ Structures – Constructions that facilitate human activity but are not intended for long-term shelter, such as bridges, gazebos, and dams.
- ▶ Objects – Are often artistic works, which are relatively small in scale (in comparison with a building), such as monuments, fountains, and statues.
- ▶ Sites – Land areas that are significant due to a past event or usage, such as archaeological sites, battlefields, parks, and gardens.
- ▶ Districts – Areas that comprise multiple historic resources and may contain any combination of the above property types.

Heritage also consists of less tangible resources or resources that are not part of the built environment. These include artifact and document collections, displays of artistic expression, events associated with cultural and/or ethnic identity and heritage, and oral histories. These memory resources bridge the gap between physical historic places and modern users, making otherwise inanimate items relatable by adding “people” into “history.”



This postcard of Three Rivers Village, dating from the turn of the 20th century, is part of the Palmer Historical Commission's extensive collections.

Palmer's Historic and Cultural Resources

The diversity of what is considered a historic or cultural resource, along with the dynamic nature of these categories, means there is no single, centralized place to consult for up-to-date data on which of these resources exist in the Town of Palmer. Instead, understanding which resources are currently recognized in the Town requires information from a number of sources. To this end, published documents, state-maintained databases, Town records, and interviews with key stakeholders were all consulted as part of this Master Plan planning process.

Palmer has hundreds of archaeological and architectural historic resources that have been documented by different entities, with the Palmer Historical Commission serving as the primary driver of major survey efforts since the 1980s. The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) serves as the central repository for these files, which can be found in a searchable public database called MACRIS (Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System)¹⁷ and through a companion GIS website¹⁸. In addition, MHC staff authored a series of Reconnaissance Survey Reports across the state in the early 1980s that details the pre-Contact and post-Contact periods of development and historic contexts.¹⁹ Although completed nearly 40 years ago, much of the historic overview in the 1982 report is still relevant.



Three men pose in front of the Palmer Carpet Company Plant in Depot Village, c. 1890s.

Credit: Pictorial Palmer Massachusetts: Descriptive and Illustrative, Carpenter and Cady (pub.), 1896. Palmer Public Library, <https://archive.org/details/pictorialpalmerma/mode/2up>. Public domain.

In addition to inventoried resources included in MACRIS and the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Report, a 2009 report compiled as part of the Heritage Landscape Inventory program identified a number of heritage landscapes in Palmer.²⁰ Taking into account both manmade and natural features whose relationship proved crucial to the development of the

17 Available at <http://mhc-macris.net/> as of May 24, 2021.

18 Available at <http://maps.mhc-macris.net> as of May 24, 2021.

19 As of May 24, 2021, Palmer's MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report can be found at <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcpdf/townreports/CT-Valley/pal.pdf>.

20 As of May 24, 2021, the Palmer Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/palmer/download>.

Town, heritage landscapes can incorporate scenic features, ecological features, land use patterns, as well as community history to tell complex stories. The Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program was an initiative undertaken by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) in partnership with regional planning agencies. In the case of the Palmer Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report, partners included PVPC and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments.

MHC Records and Inventory

As explained above, historic resources can be considered and recorded individually, such as a building or a farm, or grouped into districts that collectively tell a broader cultural story. Some resources have been listed in the National Register, while others have received similar recognition at the state level.

The following are the Palmer's National and State Register listings:

- ▶ Union Station (listed 1988)
- ▶ Palmer Memorial Hall (listed 1999)
- ▶ U.S. Post Office – Palmer Main Branch (listed 1985)

In Palmer, there are over 600 properties in MACRIS that have no current official designation. These inventoried structures and areas have some level of documentation on file, identifying them as potential subjects for further research. Figure 5-6 illustrates the geographic distribution of inventoried historic resources in Palmer.

Inventory Patterns

The MACRIS inventory has a number of limitations – most importantly, it is not comprehensive and instead reflects the historic priorities of each town at any given time. A high percentage of the inventory forms were completed between 1975 and 1994, when funding for large-scale surveys was more readily available, which means that some newly-constructed buildings at the time of the initial surveys are nearing the 50-year threshold for National Register eligibility consideration. Additionally, historic research, descriptions, and architectural style typologies have become more rigorous over time, meaning there is a wide spectrum of information included on forms in the MACRIS inventory.

The inventory, however, remains a valuable resource in identifying general patterns of recorded historic resources in Palmer, and potential opportunities for further study. It is possible to pinpoint informational gaps to help inform future survey priorities and possible threats to as-yet unidentified significant resources.

Nearly all of Palmer's existing inventory in MACRIS dates to a town-wide survey effort largely undertaken in 1983. This survey included an impressive number of forms, over 600, and recognized the strong village identities in the Town through consideration of survey areas such as Thorndike and Bondsville. Over 60 percent of the individual inventory forms are grouped into these areas, and the thoughtful grouping of these properties is an excellent foundation for identifying historic patterns, stories, and contexts for educational and documentation purposes.

The Village of Bondsville has a dense concentration of surveyed resources (Figure 5-7) and is an example of an area grouping. The associated MACRIS inventory is represented by a large area, highlighted in the figure as "PAL.D" (Ducksville), and several individual properties indicated by dots. Although all of these properties were captured in the 1983 survey, they are clustered both inside and outside PAL.D. It may be beneficial to look at this village with a modern perspective and consider whether the heritage of the village actually encompasses this entire concentration of properties (thus expanding PAL.D), or whether there are multiple distinct themes represented by the current groupings, warranting additional inventoried areas.

A second example can be seen in the downtown area of Depot Village. MACRIS shows four overlapping and contiguous inventoried areas (i.e., "PAL.B," "PAL.C," "PAL.E," and "PAL.G."), with over 100 inventoried properties clustered within and outside these areas (Figure 5-8). While it is common to have multiple overlapping inventoried areas in village and commercial centers, the decades that have passed since the initial historic survey mean that this village may warrant an updated evaluation. Considerations can include noting alterations, demolitions, and infill where appropriate; resources that have reached 50 years of age (the threshold often used in National Register evaluations) since the 1983 survey; and prioritizing the themes best represented by extant resources for educational, documentation, and designation purposes.

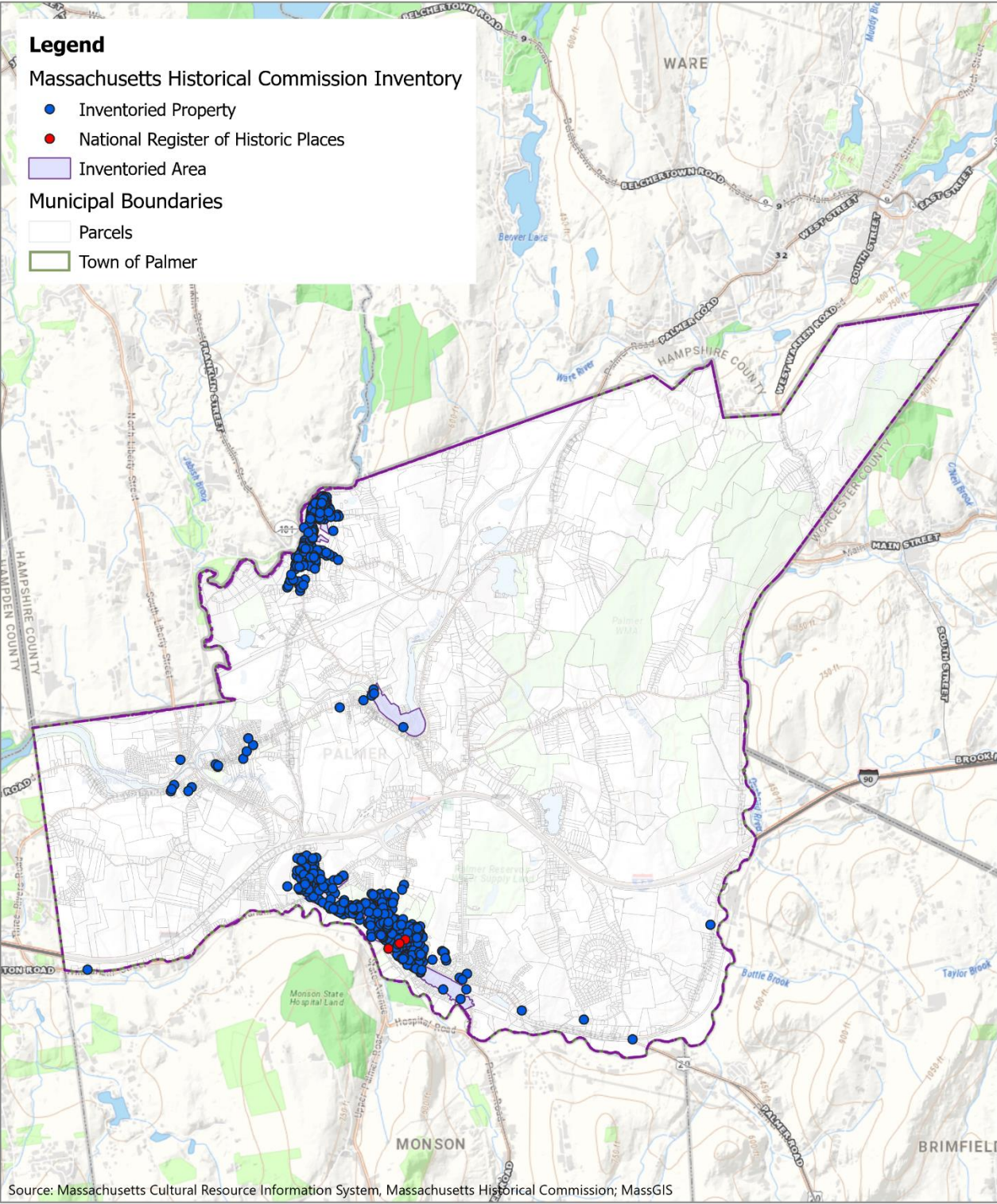


The Palmer High School class of 1896.

Credit: Pictorial Palmer Massachusetts: Descriptive and Illustrative, Carpenter and Cady (pub.), 1896. Palmer Public Library, <https://archive.org/details/pictorialpalmerma/mode/2up>. Public domain.

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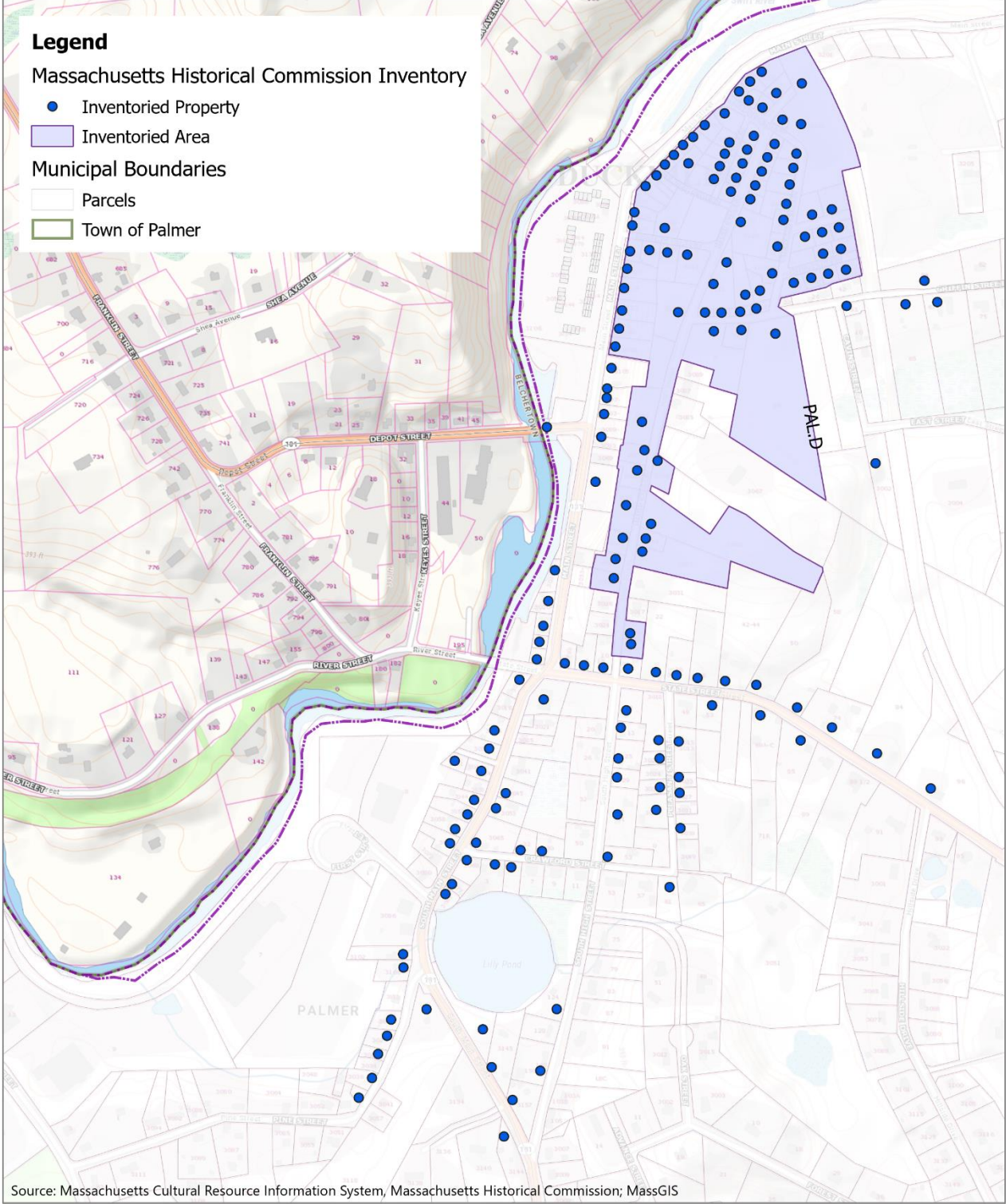
 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 5-6**



Inventoried Historic Resources | Palmer, Massachusetts

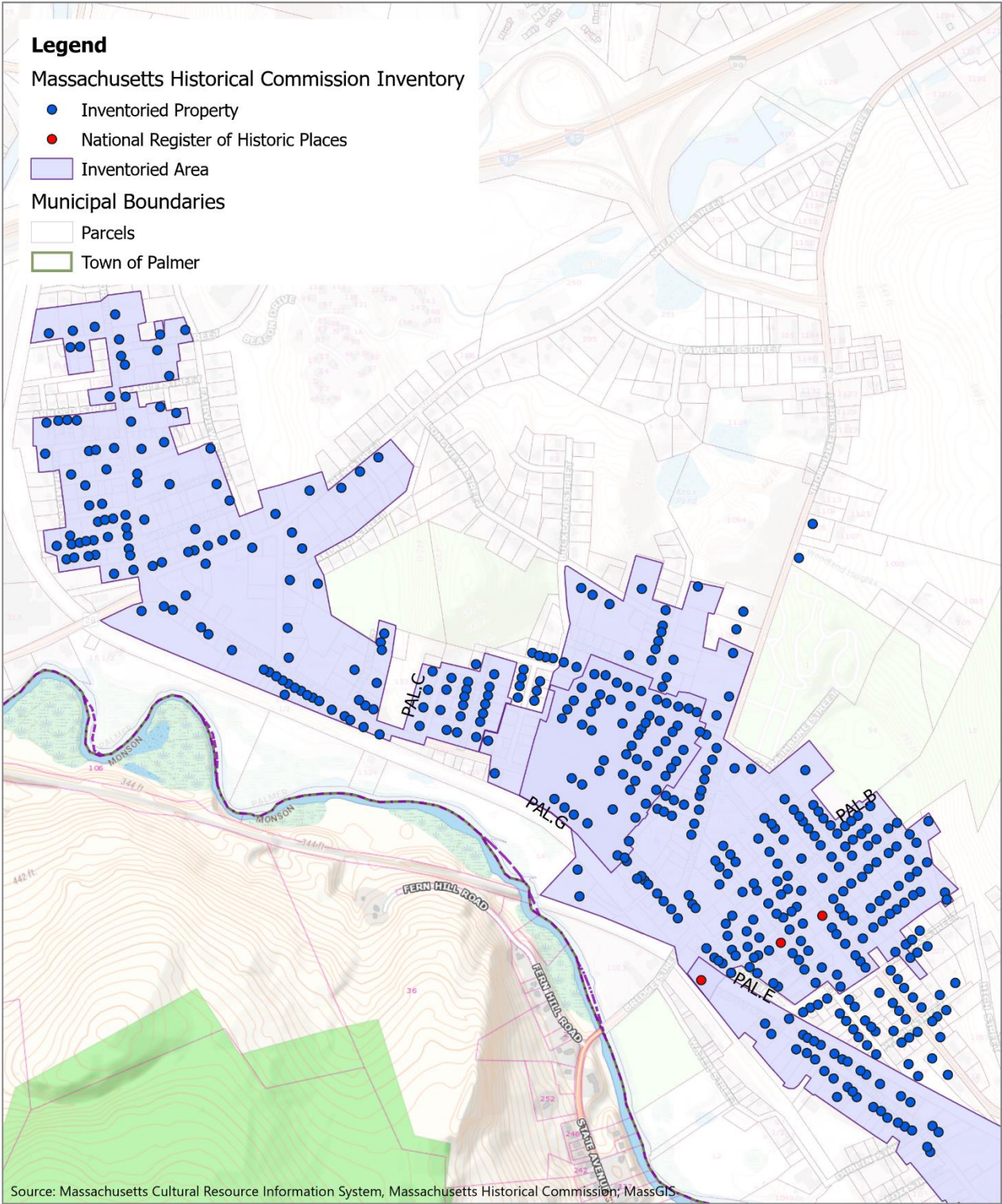
PALMER
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 July 19, 2021 | **FIGURE 5-7**



↑ 0 125 250 500 Feet

Inventoried Historic Resources - Bondsville | Palmer, Massachusetts



Palmer's Heritage Landscape Inventory

The Palmer Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report from 2009 identified seven priority landscapes for preservation and protection from threats of encroaching development and/or deterioration. This diverse list includes archaeological, architectural, and natural resources, demonstrating how people and the environment have shaped each other throughout the Town, both before and after European settlement. Locations of the priority landscapes are shown in Figure 5-9, while the list below also reports the current recordation status.

- ▶ Native American Fishing Weir (inventoried archaeology site)
- ▶ Thorndike Mills (inventoried area)
- ▶ Ice House Pond (N/A)
- ▶ Old Center Cemetery (N/A)
- ▶ Shaw District (inventoried archaeology sites)
- ▶ Robert Rogers and Jesse King Farms (King Farm is inventoried; Rogers Farm is not)
- ▶ Union Station and Olmsted Park (listed in the National Register)

Palmer's Historic and Cultural Entities and Events

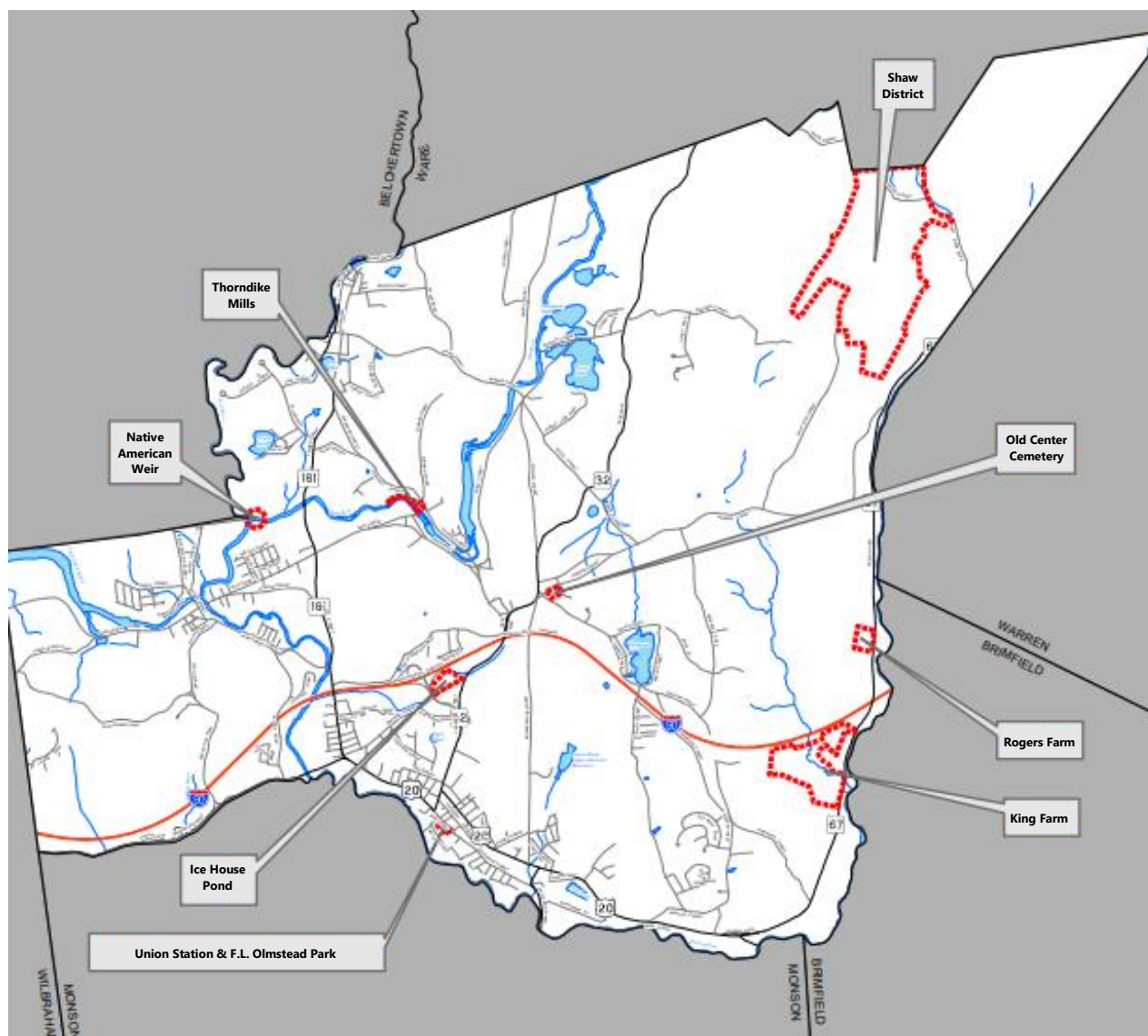
Preserving, promoting, and celebrating Palmer's heritage takes a whole community. Several community groups, Town departments, Town committees, and dedicated volunteers have taken on various responsibilities to connect the Town's past, present, and future residents. While the Plan can't include an exhaustive list of all the individuals and entities that actively engage with the Town's historic and cultural resources, below are some of the key stakeholders identified through the planning process.

Palmer Historical Commission (M.G.L. Chapter 40 s. 8D)

The Palmer Historical Commission is mandated to protect and preserve historic buildings, structures, properties, cemeteries, and archaeological sites in the Town. This Commission consists of seven Members and Associate Members. To achieve this goal, the Commission's responsibilities include reviewing site plans as needed, advising other Town entities and departments on preservation-related issues, and serving as a consulting party for historic reviews through Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR 800) and State Register Review (M.G.L. Chapter 9, sections 26-27c, as amended by Chapter 254 of the Acts of 1988, (950 CMR 71)). The Town's Zoning Ordinance also allows for the Commission to designate local landmarks and identify historic properties that are locally significant.

The Commission has also amassed a collection of memorabilia, artifacts, ephemera, and objects associated with the Town's heritage. While some of the collection is available in the Palmer Public Library, most of this collection does not currently have a centralized storage facility. The Commission has been considering ways to safely store, catalog, and make available its material holdings.

Figure 5-9 Palmer's Priority Heritage Landscapes



Source – Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Palmer Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report (2009)

Palmer Cultural Council

As the local council representative of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Palmer Cultural Council administers and distributes grant funding for a variety of projects. Funding for the grant program is provided by the Massachusetts Cultural Council and Town appropriation.

Grants recently awarded in 2021 ranged from approximately \$280 to \$3,850. These grants supported a wide spectrum of projects, such as a summer reading performance series, musical and dance programs and performance, and more.

Palmer Historical and Cultural Center (PHCC)

Housed in the former Union Evangelical Church in Three Rivers that dates back to the 1830s, the Palmer Historical and Cultural Center presently serves as a multipurpose performance center and function hall. It provides space for live music, guest lectures, movie screenings, and other cultural events. The property was purchased in 2012 by the non-profit group PHCC, Inc., and has since become one of Palmer's primary cultural assets.



*The Palmer Historical and Cultural Center.
Credit: PHCC, Inc.*

Palmer Public Library

The Palmer Public Library's local history room, named the Quaboag Valley Historical Center, includes several Town records, paper memorabilia, maps, newspaper archives, and other primary sources for research. In collaboration with the Palmer Historical Commission, library staff have been actively making some of its most popular resources available to the public through online interfaces such as Digital Commonwealth and Archive.org.

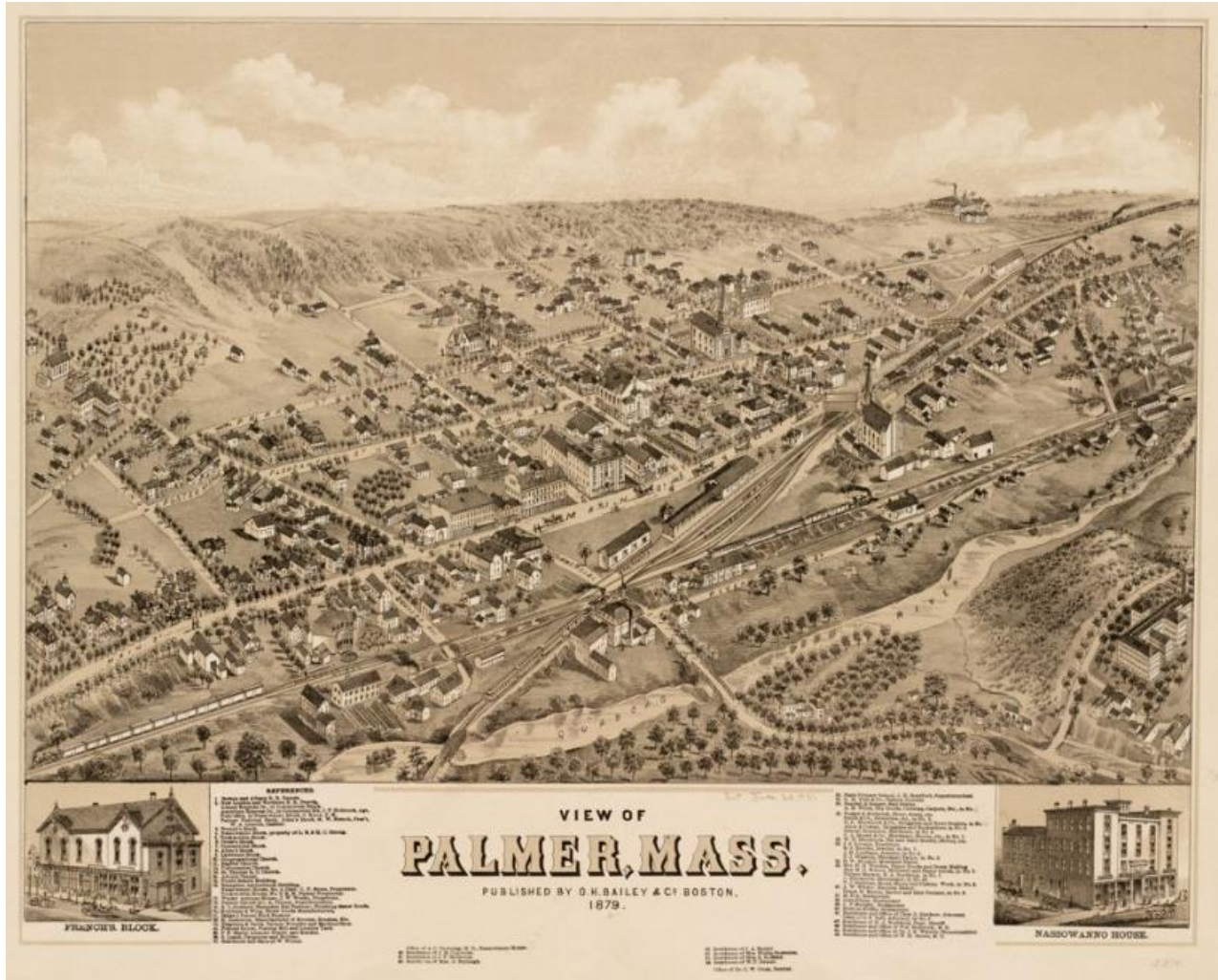
In addition to the Quaboag Valley Historical Center and digital conversion of research resources, the Palmer Public Library hosts a number of meetings, classes, and programs for Palmer residents. These include a wide range of offerings, from American Sign Language instruction to cooking classes, to presentations on pop culture topics and trivia nights.

Elbow Plantation Historical Society (EPHS)

Established in 1973 to promote and preserve local history, the Elbow Plantation Historical Society collects, performs research, and archives materials related to the history of the area and its residents. Up until recently, this Historical Society offered a regular schedule of speakers and presentations. It currently faces major challenges, including declining membership and a lack of exhibition space for its collections.

ModVic

Founded by artists and educators Bruce and Melanie Rosenbaum, ModVic uses Steampunk design to repurpose salvaged objects into pieces that fuse modern technology, engineering, aesthetics, and function. In 2017, the company moved to Palmer, converting an 1876 Gothic Revival-style church in Thorndike into "Steampunk Wonderland," a home, workshop, and gallery. Modvic has connected with local institutions and Town administration to promote S.T.E.A.M education for local students, most notably the Steampunkinetics program, a team-based creative building workshop.



Birds-eye view maps like the above were the original aerial maps. Often paid for through subscriptions, these oblique views can prove accurate to the last detail, and often label major businesses and municipal buildings.

Credit: View of Palmer, Mass., O.H. Bailey and Co., 1879. Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/x633ff96t>. Public domain.

Major Community Events

Palmer boasts several events that promote or enhance its cultural identity. These events include, but are certainly not limited to:

- ▶ Annual Memorial Day Parade – hosted by the Town of Palmer Veteran Services Department, this event typically runs along Thorndike Street to Main Street in Depot Village.
- ▶ Light Up Palmer – run by committee, this event has seen the installation of holiday decorations in downtown Depot Village with the goal of presenting these installations annually if enough funding can be raised from local businesses and individuals.
- ▶ Celebrate Palmer – an event that has been held irregularly in past years, Celebrate Palmer has featured numerous booths of local crafts, products, businesses, and civic organizations, along with live music and a food truck court.

- ▶ Artisan Fair – a large craft/vendor event held in the downtown area of Three Rivers on the grounds of the Palmer Historical and Cultural Center.

State and Regional Partners, Programs, and Resources

In addition to local groups, there are several state and regional partners whose programs and services can help preserve, promote, and celebrate Palmer's heritage.

Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC)

The MHC is a statewide commission chaired by the Secretary of State, established "to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth" (M.G.L. Ch. 9 Sections 26-27D). The name also applies to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), comprising the State Historic Preservation Officer, State Archaeologist, and professional staff who support the commission. The MHC has three divisions:

- ▶ Preservation Planning – Assists and supports local entities with survey and inventory initiatives, National and State Register nominations, and local historic designations. This division also assists local historical commissions with planning and the use of preservation by-laws.
- ▶ Grants – Administers federal grants-in-aid and state matching grants for preservation activities.
 - Survey and Planning Grants provide 50 percent matching federal funds for the preparation of community surveys, preservation plans, preparation of historic district studies and legislation, archaeological surveys, nominations to the National Register, and educational preservation programs. Eligible applicants are local historical commissions, Certified Local Governments, local and state agencies, educational institutions, and private organizations.
 - Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) provides money for the restoration, rehabilitation, stabilization, and documentation of historic and archaeological properties owned by municipalities or nonprofit organizations. Up to 50 percent matching grants are available to qualifying properties listed on the State Register, to ensure their physical preservation. Scopes of work for projects range from the acquisition of an endangered property, to the restoration of an historic building, to research projects such as historic structures reports.
 - Preservation Restrictions are easements that protect historic resources into the future, whether for a set number of years or in perpetuity. Preservation restrictions can be donated or purchased by a government body or private preservation organization and are enforced by the holder of the restriction. Charitable donations of easements on historical buildings or archaeological sites may qualify for federal income tax deductions.
- ▶ Technical Services – Oversees historic review and compliance processes, including Section 106 and State Register Review. This division also administers the Historic Preservation Certification program on the local level, a federal historic tax credit incentive for the rehabilitation of income-producing historic buildings. There is currently a state

historic tax incentive program as well, overseen by Technical Services, which can be awarded in tandem with the federal program.

Preservation Massachusetts (PM)

Preservation Massachusetts is the statewide preservation advocacy organization in the Commonwealth. This non-profit organization promotes local preservation on the state level, through a variety of lobbying efforts, educational offerings, and services. Of particular note is the following:

- ▶ Circuit Rider Program – These part-time staff members work directly with communities as a resource for preservation projects, development planning, and local issues. They facilitate intra-community networking and information sharing, to help enhance grassroots preservation efforts. There is a Circuit Rider for Central and Western Massachusetts communities, who also coordinates the Western MA Historic Commissions Coalition for members of historical commissions, such as the Palmer Historical Commission.
- ▶ Preservation Action Center – This webpage gathers years of Preservation Massachusetts experience into one centralized library, covering technical topics, funding questions, project models, and toolkits for local preservation efforts.
- ▶ Local Commission Resource Library – In cooperation with the MHC's Director of Local Government Programs, Preservation Massachusetts has recently added a webpage with resources specifically geared to the needs and questions of local historical commissions. Additions to the page are ongoing, but as of May 2021, the page includes information on public outreach, local bylaws and ordinances, the Certified Local Government program, and procedures for public meetings and hearings (including virtual meetings).

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)

Among its services, PVPC has a Preservation Planner on staff to assist its member communities with review and compliance, resource surveys, National Register nominations, preservation plans, historic tax credit projects, and as a resource for local historical commissions and historic district commissions.

Massachusetts Cultural Council

As a state agency, the Massachusetts Cultural Council promotes arts, humanities, and sciences throughout Massachusetts, often through local commission partners such as the Palmer Cultural Council. In partnership with MassDevelopment, the Massachusetts Cultural Council manages the Cultural Facilities Fund, which provides grants to support the acquisition, design, repair, rehabilitation, renovation, expansion, or construction of nonprofit cultural facilities, many of which utilize vacant historic buildings as studio, gallery, classroom, and shop spaces.

Goals and Recommended Actions

Goal 1. Continually enhance the Town's natural resources—including its water resources and plant and wildlife habitats—and implement effective protection measures.

The protection of the town's natural environment provides numerous benefits, from safeguarding public health, to improving aesthetic character, to supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation, and more.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 In coordination with partners, such as the Opacum Land Trust and Massachusetts Department of Fish & Game, continue to expand the Town's inventory of conservation lands and protected open spaces, particularly within its eastern areas, including the Shaw and Pattaquatic Districts, and with a focus on lands designated as Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscapes under BioMap2.
- 1.2 Drive support for the development of conservation restrictions or agricultural preservation restrictions on privately held lands through strategic engagements and provision of technical assistance.
- 1.3 Continue to educate private landowners, as well as appropriate Town staff, on Chapter 61 tax incentive programs for forestry, agricultural land, and recreational land, and ensure the Town adequately considers its right of first refusal as such opportunities arise. In this process, consult the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan's approach to actions and acquisitions.
 - 1.3.1 Increase landowner outreach, provide guidance on programs available to landowners such as MassWildlife Habitat Management Grant Program, Forest Stewardship Program & Green Certification, Foresters for the Birds, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) and Tax Tips for Forest Landowners. Offer webinars on estate planning, land conservation options, and caring for your land.
- 1.4 Continue to investigate potential vernal pools and certify them where applicable.
- 1.5 Identify the need for, and engage partners in the development of, one or more land stewardship plans for Town-owned conservation land – e.g., Swift River Green Belt, Shaw District. Such plans would establish management goals and provide management guidance over a (typical) 10-year period.
- 1.6 Continue efforts to become a Tree City USA® Community, including the establishment of a tree care ordinance, to demonstrate the Town's commitment to planting, maintaining, and managing tree resources, as well as to gain preference for grant awards under the Urban and Community Forestry Program at the Department of Conservation and Recreation.
 - 1.6.1 As part of demolition, new construction, or major renovation projects, explore requiring owners or developers who remove trees – under conditions where

saving the tree is not feasible—to plant new trees elsewhere to compensate or alternatively donate to a municipal tree fund.

- 1.6.2 Explore options for a Town-owned tree nursery, which among other benefits could realize long-term costs savings for municipal tree plantings.
- 1.7 Conduct a tree inventory and analysis—including pest and disease information—for all public trees on streets, parks, schools, and other public areas to inform a tree management program for maintenance, new plantings, and replacements, as necessary.
- 1.8 Develop an educational program that increases community understanding and support for the protection and enhancement of the Town’s natural resources.
 - 1.8.1 Engage local school systems, including educators and students, in taking the learning experience from the classroom into the natural environment. For example, tree planting, wildlife counting, and/or invasive species removal in and around vernal pools.
- 1.9 Continue to utilize federal and state resources, including partnerships (e.g., the Department of Agricultural Resources), for public education campaigns to prevent the spread of invasive species.
- 1.10 Review the Town’s ordinances and policies to ensure that invasive species control and prevention measures are adequately addressed with respect to private sector development.
- 1.11 Educate residents and businesses about stormwater and the municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permit requirements through public outreach campaigns, brochures, social media posts, and webinars with a focus on local impaired waterways.

Goal 2. Make preservation and promotion of heritage resources a planning priority.

Proactively planning for the future of Palmer’s heritage resources protects against future threats to them, identifies ways to capitalize on them for economic development, and is an important component in Palmer’s identity and branding as a destination.

Recommended Actions

- 2.1 Revisit the 2009 Heritage Landscape Inventory report and its recommendations. Ensure that each priority heritage landscape is inventoried and consider local, state, and/or federal designation. Assess the current status and condition of these resources and be proactive about supporting their continued use.
- 2.2 Update the inventory forms for major concentrations of historic and cultural resources, like the villages. Consider using MHC’s matching grant programs that provide additional benefits like helping towns develop request for proposals to find qualified consultants and establishing guidelines to ensure survey consistency.

- 2.3 Commission a Town-wide Preservation Plan or neighborhood-based Preservation Plans to supplement and inform the execution of this document's implementation plan. Use the MHC, PVPC, and Massachusetts Cultural Council for technical advice and potential funding sources for preservation plans.
- 2.4 Identify planning ordinances and tools that are provided through the M.G.L., such as the Community Preservation Act as well as a scenic road bylaw, affirmative maintenance bylaw, adaptive reuse bylaw, which have been useful in neighboring communities to protect heritage resources. Be proactive about addressing misconceptions that result in residents and property owners making decisions based on incorrect or outdated information.
- 2.5 Develop a guidebook for Historical Commission members with reference information. Include information on important bylaws; responsibilities of the Commissioners; brief accounts of the Commission's successes, challenges, and programs on an annual basis; contact information for regional, state, and federal heritage entities; and common funding programs.

Goal 3. Establish a permanent curation and exhibition facility for object and ephemera collections.

Providing a home for these items makes them more accessible and relieves the burden on individuals and groups who are currently storing them in disparate locations.

Recommended Actions

- 3.1 Consider combining the collections of the Historical Commission and Elbow Plantation Historical Society. Bringing these collections together into a single space will enhance their research and educational benefits and make climate control and archival organization more efficient.
- 3.2 Solicit professional advice about archival storage, cataloguing, and access for collections. This will help Palmer understand the best way to preserve and use these invaluable items. Professionals will also help the Town establish priorities that makes this a multi-step initiative rather than a single, huge outlay of financial and labor resources.
- 3.3 Utilize items from the collections for miniature, online, and social media-friendly educational experiences on a regular basis. For example, doing a "50 Objects that Made Palmer" series of posts weekly over the course of a year.
- 3.4 Collaborate with museum studies programs to create a catalog that is accessible and will be easy to maintain in the future. Explore the possibility of using Palmer's collections for class projects that evaluate cataloging needs and systems, develop record types, and establish a usage guide to ensure consistency in the catalog into the future.

Goal 4. Broaden cultural engagement and programming.

Make culture and the arts a community-wide experience through creative events that foster coordination with local and regional groups.

Recommended Actions

- 4.1 Turn vacant and underutilized facilities into a makerspace/studio space. Providing spaces to create and interact is vital to supporting Palmer's artists and storytellers and attracting new talent. Using historic buildings, which often have layouts that facilitate studios and classrooms, maximizes funding opportunities through history and cultural-based agencies. Establishing an artist-in-residence program would promote Palmer's arts community to a wider audience.
- 4.2 Use a historic survey initiative as an opportunity for engagement. Crowdsource information to attract attention and collect information that can be used in inventory forms. For example, use Historypin (www.historypin.org) to collect photographs of houses and streetscapes to use in survey forms, and collecting historic property information using a mobile survey application and a "train-the-trainer" program that allows residents and community groups to join in.
- 4.3 Turn Palmer's distinct village identities into an asset by creating place-based stories. The village centers, residential streets, and infrastructure development are ready-made environments to learn about who lived in these villages and why, and how they all interacted in the built environment. Stories can foster more active connection and engagement than buildings alone.
- 4.4 Support and sponsor programming specifically for students and families. Offer activities that cross multiple topics like arts, heritage, and engineering and integrate into STEAM education. Work with local and regional schools, vocational programs, camps, and colleges to use and develop students' skills while promoting Palmer's heritage assets.
- 4.5 Utilize community, regional, and state partners to enhance culture and programming. Team up with local conservation groups and artists for interactive experiences, bring heritage programs directly to youth groups, and use established networks such as the Western Massachusetts Coalition of Historical Commissions.

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6

Open Space and Recreation

Open space is defined as “conservation land, forested land, recreation land, agricultural land, corridor parks and amenities such as small parks, green buffers along roadways or any open area that is owned by an agency or organization dedicated to conservation.”²¹

Recreation refers to activities undertaken specifically for enjoyment purposes. This includes passive recreation, which requires minimal physical exertion and resources, as well as active recreation, which requires considerable exertion and, oftentimes, special facilities, fields, or equipment.

This Element of the Master Plan highlights the Town of Palmer’s open space and recreational assets, and explores opportunities for their enhancement. Much of this Element leverages information included in the Town’s *2014 Open Space and Recreation Plan* (OSRP), prepared by the Palmer Open Space and Recreation Update Committee with assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. The Town is currently in the process of updating its OSRP; however, much of the information provided in the 2014 plan remains relevant.

Baseline Conditions Analyses

Palmer’s Open Space Inventory

According to the latest data available from MassGIS—derived from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (December 2020), the Town of Palmer has 3,363.3 acres of open space. With a population of 12,488 according to Esri (2020), this equates to 269.3 acres per 1,000 residents. The National Recreation and Parks Association

21 Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. The Open Space and Recreation Planner’s Workbook. March 2008.

(NRPA) suggests that municipalities aim to have 10 acres of open space for every 1,000 residents. Palmer far exceeds NRPA's recommendation.

Among the Town's total open space inventory, 2,961.4 acres (or 88.1 percent) are protected in perpetuity, 159.2 acres (or 4.7 percent) have limited protection, 4.5 acres (or 0.1 percent) have temporary protection, and 238.2 acres (or 7.1 percent) have no protection. These levels of protection are defined below.

- ▶ In Perpetuity – Legally protected in perpetuity and recorded as such in a deed or other official document. Land is considered protected in perpetuity if it is owned by a municipality's conservation commission or, sometimes, by the water department; if a municipality has a conservation restriction on the property in perpetuity; if it is owned by one of the state's conservation agencies; if it is owned by a non-profit land trust; or if the municipality received federal or state assistance for the purchase or improvement of the property. Private land is considered protected if it has a deed restriction in perpetuity, if an Agriculture Preservation Restriction has been placed on it, or a Conservation Restriction has been placed on it.
- ▶ Temporary – Legally protected for less than perpetuity (e.g., short term conservation restriction), or temporarily protected through an existing functional use. For example, some water district lands are only temporarily protected while water resource protection is their primary use. These lands could be developed for other uses at the end of their temporary protection or when their functional use is no longer necessary. These lands will revert to unprotected status at a given date unless protection status is extended.
- ▶ Limited – Protected by legal mechanisms other than those above, or protected through functional or traditional use. These lands might be protected by a requirement of a majority municipal vote for any change in status. This designation also includes lands that are likely to remain open space for other reasons (e.g., cemeteries and municipal golf courses).
- ▶ None – Totally unprotected by any legal or functional means. This land is usually privately owned and could be sold without restriction at any time for another use.²²

The open space assets that are protected in perpetuity are predominantly located in the northeastern and eastern portions of the Town, particularly in the Pattaquatic District (i.e., areas around the Pattaquatic and Colonels Mountains, Quarry Road, and the Mountain Roads Trail System) and the Kings Brook Watershed. The largest among these assets are the Palmer Wildlife Management Area (1,332.4 acres), owned by the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, and the Midura Family Conservation Area (302.7 acres), owned by the Town and managed by the Town's Conservation Commission.

The Town's only Agricultural Preservation Restriction, Strzeminski's Farm on Skyes Street, borders the Swift River and is publicly accessible. Additionally, the Town has three Conservation Restrictions including the Pendrak Property (Brown Road), Mullins Property (Lot 65 Main Street), and Cascades Property (Lot 18 & 19 off Main Street). The Pendrak and

22 MassGIS. (2020). "MassGIS Data: Protected and Recreational OpenSpace." Retrieved June 2, 2021, from https://docs.digital.mass.gov/dataset/massgis-data-protected-and-recreational-openspace#type_codes

Cascades Properties are publicly accessible, offering opportunities to hike, bike, swim, and fish, while the Mullins Property is land locked and does not have public access.

Table 6-1 provides a breakdown of the Town's open space inventory, while Figure 6-1 illustrates this inventory by a property's level of protection, presence of any deed restrictions, and primary purpose.

Table 6-1 Palmer's Open Space Inventory

Protected and Recreational Open Space	Acres	Percent
Town Conservation		
Protected in Perpetuity	548.8	16.3%
Town Recreation		
Protected in Perpetuity	233.1	6.9%
Limited Protection	73.4	2.2%
No Protection	2.8	0.1%
Town Water Supply Protection		
Protected in Perpetuity	322.2	9.6%
Town Historical/Cultural		
Protected in Perpetuity	0.2	<0.1%
Limited Protection	28.0	0.8%
State Conservation		
Protected in Perpetuity	1,628.9	48.4%
State Conservation and Recreation		
Protected in Perpetuity	32.4	1.0%
Private Conservation		
Protected in Perpetuity	134.3	4.0%
Temporary Protection	4.5	0.1%
Private Recreation		
No Protection	235.4	7.0%
Private Agriculture		
Protected in Perpetuity	61.0	1.8%
Private Historical/Cultural		
Limited Protection	57.9	1.7%
Land Trust Conservation		
Protected in Perpetuity	0.7	<0.1%

Protected and Recreational Open Space	Acres	Percent
Total (Protected and Unprotected)	3,363.3	100.0%
Protected in Perpetuity	2,961.4	88.1%
Limited Protection	159.2	4.7%
Temporary Protection	4.5	0.1%
No Protection	238.2	7.1%

Source: MassGIS (2020)

Chapter 61 Program Lands

In addition to the inventory presented above, the Town has a number of properties enrolled in Chapter 61 programs (61 for forest land, 61A for agricultural land, and 61B for open space and recreation land). These programs are afforded by the State to assist landowners with the cost of maintaining their working forests, farms, and natural areas. They provide property tax breaks in exchange for keeping some or all of a qualifying property undeveloped for a specified time period. With some exceptions, the Chapter 61 programs afford municipalities with a first refusal option that is triggered when a chapter parcel is converted to non-chapter use while enrolled or within one year of program withdrawal. The Town has and continues to educate landowners on the Chapter 61 tax incentive programs to increase enrollment.

In Palmer, according to land use codes provided in the Town's 2019 Assessors database, Chapter 61 program lands comprise 12.8 percent of the Town's jurisdictional area. Among these lands, properties under Chapter 61 account for 35 percent, properties under Chapter 61A account for 55.6 percent, and properties under Chapter 61B account for 9.4 percent.

Palmer's Open Space Priorities

Since the 2014 OSRP, the Town and its partners have worked to build the community's open space assets. This includes formalizing the Swift River Greenbelt, adding over 130 conservation acres in the Kings Brook Watershed (with another 500-plus acres identified for future acquisition), and assisting the Department of Fish and Game in acquiring lands adjacent to Forest Lake, which will expand public access to this water body, to name a few. Much of this work has been made possible by external funding mechanisms, such as a 2017 MassTrails grant and a 2019 Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) grant.



View of Forest Lake and Forest Lake Beach, River Road

Ongoing and still relevant priorities included in the 2014 OSRP for the protection and preservation of open space in Palmer include:

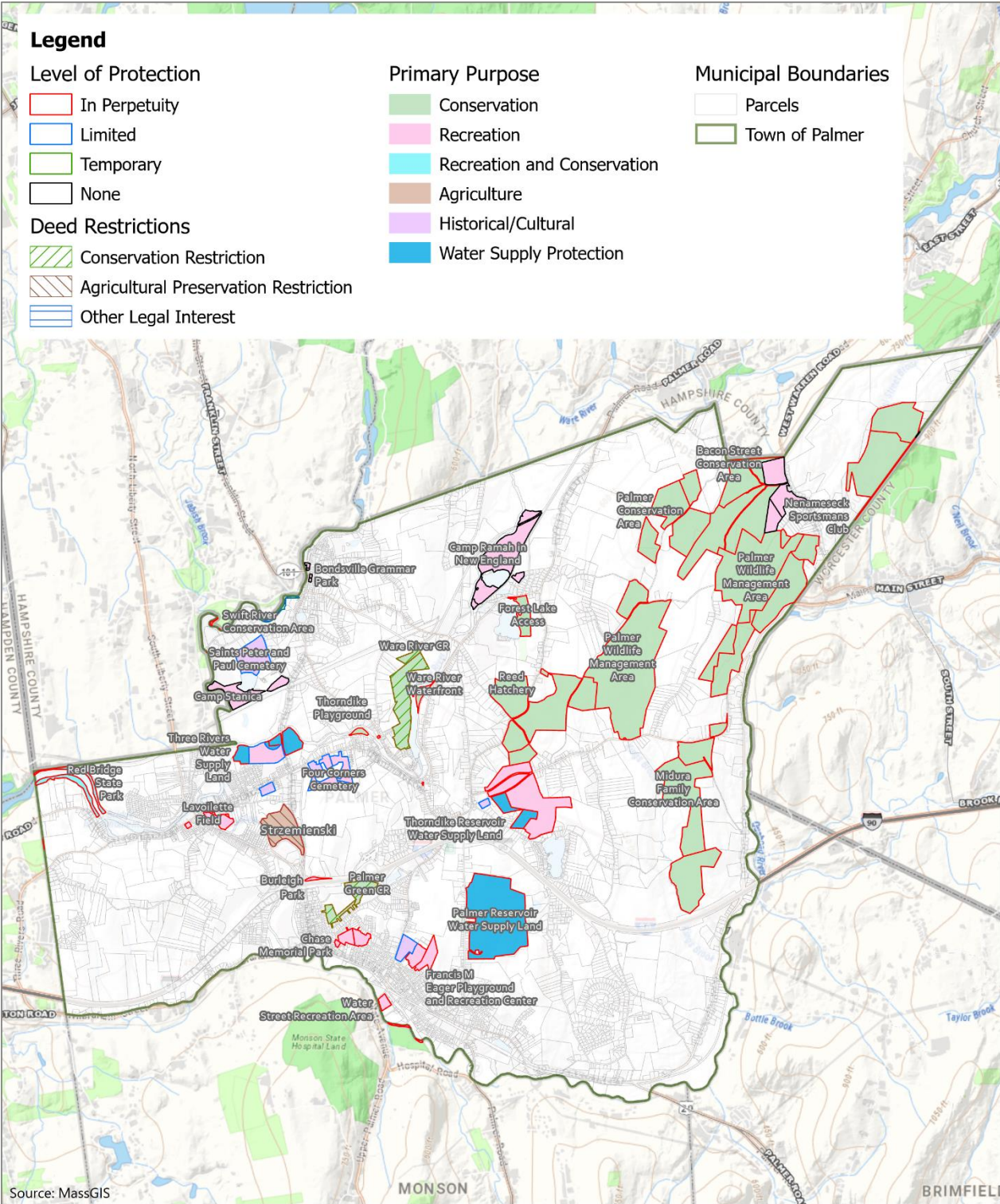
- ▶ Working with property owners to gain access to non-Town-owned land, especially along the Ware River for a proposed "Urban Trail"
- ▶ Developing a clear document agreements/template for public use of private lands.
- ▶ Acquiring land or easements along the four major rivers (i.e., Swift, Quaboag, Ware, and Chicopee), whereas only the Swift and Quaboag are publicly accessible today
- ▶ Create greenways and/or blue ways along the four major rivers and their tributaries
- ▶ Starting an Agricultural Commission
- ▶ Continuing to preserve open space in the Pattaquattic and Shaw Districts
- ▶ Developing a historical walking trail along the Ware River Urban Area
- ▶ Working with landowners to renovate Olmsted Park and the Train Station as a point of historical significance in the Town
- ▶ Preserving and protecting the areas identified in the 2009 Palmer Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report (see Chapter 5, *Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources*)
- ▶ Working to develop a regional connection with Red Bridge State Park by expanding the trail system along the Chicopee River (in progress)
- ▶ Ensuring greenways, trails, or walking paths are incorporated during subdivision review, and easements are required as a condition of approval
- ▶ Developing bike paths and routes in Town to connect to parks and open space lands
- ▶ Working with neighboring towns' trails committees to expand and connect the current Grand Truck Trail and Titanic Rail Trail

A lack of available funds has been identified as one of the primary obstacles in acquiring and protecting land in Palmer. Relatedly, the Town has twice failed to adopt the Community Preservation Act, though many residents have expressed support for its adoption during this Master Planning process. The adoption of the Community Preservation Act, a smart growth tool, would not only help Palmer preserve open space, but it would support the development of outdoor recreation facilities, create affordable housing, and preserve historic sites.

Approximately 52 percent of participants in this Master Plan's first community survey identified "open space preservation" as "very challenging" or "somewhat challenging" with respect to improving quality of life in Palmer.

Further, just over 80 percent believe that "open space protection" is "very important" or "important" when it comes to addressing future development in the Town.

PALMER
MASTER PLAN



Open Space Inventory | Palmer, Massachusetts

Palmer's Open Space Partners

There are several groups that work with the Town on the preservation and protection of its open spaces. A description of each of these groups can be found below.

- ▶ **Palmer Conservation Commission:** a seven-member board of volunteers appointed by the Town Manager with the mission of “protect[ing] wetlands and resources in the Town of Palmer through acquisition, management, education, and regulations.” The Commission serves as a liaison between public and other governmental agencies in protecting local natural resources, as well as an educational resource. It also develops and implements management plans for lands under their control, including the Midura Family Conservation Area.
- ▶ **Open Space and Recreation Committee** – was created to assist in the development and maintenance of the Town's OSRP. This Committee also works to acquire and preserve land and ecosystems within the Town, and provides public education on its mission through informational signage at the Town's open space properties, outdoor educational activities, and land use protection workshops.
- ▶ **Opacum Land Trust** – Formed in 2000, the Opacum Land Trust is a 13-town regional land conservation, non-profit organization created to protect the natural and cultural resources of South Central Massachusetts. In Palmer, the Opacum Land Trust has assisted the Town with landowner outreach and has supported the identification and mapping of potential and existing greenways and wildlife corridors.

Palmer's Recreational Amenities

Palmer residents and visitors have ample opportunities for recreation throughout the Town. Afforded are passive recreational opportunities, such as walking and biking along trails (e.g., Midura Family Conservation Area, Swift River Greenbelt, Mountain Roads/ Pattaquattic District, Burleigh Park), fishing at local waterbodies (e.g., Ware River Waterfront, Red Bridge Connection, Forest Lake), and wildlife viewing at conservation properties (e.g., Palmer Wildlife Management Area, Burleigh Brook Recreation Area). These opportunities, along with more active forms of recreation (e.g., playgrounds), are presented in Table 6-2.

Notably, only 5.5 percent of persons responding to this Master Plan's first community survey identified Palmer's "recreational amenities" as a quality that contributes to making the Town a great place to live.

Table 6-2 Palmer's Public Recreation Lands/Facilities

Facility	Recreational Use/Activity	Address
Bondsville Minipark	Playground	Main Street
Burleigh Brook Recreation Area	Wildlife Viewing	Old Warren Road
Burleigh Park	Playing Fields, Sliding Hill, Picnic Tables, Tennis Courts/Practice Wall, Playground	Old Warren Road
Eager Playground	Playground	Walnut Street and French Street
Endelson Playground	Basketball Court, Playground	Main Street
Greenbelt Industrial Park	Hiking Swimming, Fishing	Second Street, Third Street
Laviolette Field	Fishing, Swimming, Boating	Main Street
Laviolette School	Playing Fields, Open Playing, Playgrounds	Main Street
Legion Field	Playing Fields	Rathbone Street
Memorial Park WWI	Grassy Area	Park Street and Converse Street
Midura Family Conservation Area	Hiking, Biking, Nature Study/Observation, Trail Maintenance, Wildlife and Forest Management	Old Warren Road
Mountain Roads System	Hiking, Nature Study, Wildlife Habitat Preservation, Watershed Protection	Onley Road, Mt. Road, McMasters Road
Old B&A Railroad Bed	Hiking, Biking	Lot 44 Barker Street
Old Mill Pond Elementary School	Playground	4107 Main Street
Palmer Grammar and High School	Track, Playing Fields	4105 Main Street
Palmer Reservoir	Open Space	Breckenridge Street
Pathfinder School	Open Playing, Open Fields	Route 181
Palmer Wildlife Management Area (PWMA)	Hiking, Nature Study, Wildlife Habitat Preservation, Watershed Protection	Ware Rd, West Ware Rd, Old Warren Rd
Quaboag Field	Soccer Field	Water Street
Quaboag River	Fishing, Swimming, Boating	Bourne Street
Rail Road Bed/Trunk Trail	Hiking, Biking	Lot 4-1 River Road
Red Bridge Connection	Fishing, Swimming, Boating	Springfield Street
Red Bridge State Park	Hiking, Biking, Swimming, Kayaking, Nature Study, Watershed Protection	East Street
Shaw District	Hiking, Biking, Photography, Nature Study/Observation, Trail Maintenance, Wildlife & Forest Management	Tavern Road, Brown Road, West Ware Road, Bacon Road
Swift River Greenbelt	Hiking, Swimming, Fishing	River Road

Facility	Recreational Use/Activity	Address
Thorndike Reservoir	Grassy Area	Flynt Street
Thorndike Playground	Playground	Church Street
Three Rivers Well Field	Grassy Area	Oak Street
Town Land	Open Space	Emery Street
Town Land	Open Space	Ware Street
Veterans Monument	Grassy Area	Church Street
Ware River Waterfront	Fishing, Swimming, Boating	Main Street
Walter "Beebe" Chase Memorial Park	Open Fields	Shaw Street

Source: Town of Palmer, OSRP (2014)

Recreational opportunities are available at a number of privately-owned or semi-public facilities as well, though public access is limited. These include Camp Ramah in New England (active recreation), Camp Stanica (active recreation), Forest Lake Beach (fishing and swimming), Nenameseck Sportsmen's Club (hunting and fishing), Pulaski Park (active recreation), River Walk (fishing and swimming), and St. Joseph's Park (active recreation).

When asked to rank the Town's facilities and services in terms of their performance/condition, the majority of respondents to this Master Plan's first community survey (70.4 percent) believed the Town's recreation facilities and services to be "fair" or "poor."

Through the public engagement process for this Master Plan, the community identified several recreation needs. The needs most frequently mentioned, as recorded by this Master Plan's first community survey, included:

- ▶ Additional recreational trails
- ▶ Indoor recreational facilities
- ▶ Additional outdoor athletic fields
- ▶ A community center
- ▶ Canoe/kayak access
- ▶ A dog park
- ▶ A community wellness/exercise facility
- ▶ Additional small neighborhood parks

Needs specific to the Town's senior population are discussed in Chapter 10, *Public Health*.

Often mentioned during this Master Plan's public engagement process was the less than satisfactory condition of the Town's recreational facilities, particularly Burleigh Park. Facility maintenance is performed by the Town's Public Works Department, which noted additional staffing as a means to perform more frequent maintenance activities. The Town typically performs inspections once or twice per year.

Palmer's Recreation Priorities

The Town has made strides in enhancing the community's recreational amenities since the 2014 OSRP. This includes completing renovations at the Endelson and Thorndike Playgrounds, improving access to parks for the elderly and handicap, installing dog waste bins and trash cans at trail heads, and completing the handicap-accessible 1st Street Trail Loop at the Swift River Greenbelt, to name a few. Ongoing and still relevant priorities included in the 2014 OSRP for enhancing recreational amenities in Palmer include:

- ▶ Developing town-wide bike paths and adding bike lanes to existing roads
- ▶ Renovating Burleigh Park with upgraded facilities, a new recreation building, additional/repaired bathrooms, a swimming area, and additional picnic facilities
- ▶ Increasing the availability of winter sport programs and facilities
- ▶ Reopening/renovating bathroom facilities at all parks, with a focus on complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act
- ▶ Developing a public beach at Crystal Lake
- ▶ Identifying areas for a community garden within an existing recreation area
- ▶ Working to renovate parks and adding community gardens within designated environmental justice areas
- ▶ Enforcing against illegal ATV/off road vehicle use and illegal dumping on Conservation Lands and Roads
- ▶ Developing a transportation plan to recreation areas within the Town



View of the Newly Renovated Endelson Park, Main Street in Bondsville



View of the 1st Street Trail Loop at the Swift River Greenbelt, Behind the Palmer Industrial Park in Bondsville

Palmer's Recreation Partners

The Town does not currently have a Recreation Director, although the position will be funded in the fiscal year 2022 budget. Absent that department lead, several groups in Palmer focus on providing and enhancing recreational opportunities in the Town. These include the aforementioned Open Space and Recreation Committee, as well as youth sports providers, such as the Palmer Soccer Association and Palmer Youth Baseball and Softball. Additionally, the Lake Thompson Association, a group of residents who maintain the Lake Thompson Area (e.g., control nuisance and non-native plant and algae growth), offer recreational opportunities for its members.

Palmer's Regional Recreation Opportunities

Palmer has the opportunity to collaborate with neighboring communities on several open space and recreation projects. Among them, the most prominent include:

- ▶ **Colonels Mountain Wildlife Management Area** – an area of open space shared by Palmer and Ware located in the northeast portion of Palmer.
- ▶ **Red Bridge State Park** – trails in this area are not currently accessible from Palmer. Work is underway to expand the trail system along the Chicopee River to the 31-acre Red Bridge State Park, which is controlled by the Massachusetts Division of State Parks and Recreation.
- ▶ **Titanic Rail Trail/Grand Trunk Trail** – established in 1992 as a proposed comprehensive trail system, the Titanic Rail Trail/Grand Trunk Trail begins in the City of Franklin and currently terminates in east Brimfield, though the intended end is the Grand Trunk's Central Vermont Railway in Palmer. The proposed 60 to 80-mile non-motorized trail system will link the Blackstone with the Pioneer Valley.
- ▶ **Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT)** – an envisioned 104-mile off-road shared use trail that will connect the City of Northampton to the City of Boston. Approximately 51 miles of the rail trail have been fully developed to-date. This project is discussed in more depth in Chapter 8, *Transportation and Mobility*.

Goals and Recommended Actions

Goal 1. Enhance the Town's open space and recreational assets to better serve the community.

Municipal parks and recreation facilities are essential public services that improve the quality of life of residents by promoting physical activity and social connectivity, and often have economic and environmental benefits.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 Increase financial/staffing resources allocated to the maintenance and renovation of the Town's open space and recreation assets (e.g., Burleigh Park).
 - 1.1.1 Ensure maintenance/renovation projects for the Town's open space and recreation are built into the Town's capital improvement plan, where appropriate.
 - 1.1.2 Seek a Parkland Acquisition and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant to complete renovations at Burleigh Park.
 - 1.1.3 Expand the Conservation Commission's volunteer program, for example, by establishing regular service days for efforts such as open space trash cleanup, facility graffiti removal, etc.
 - 1.1.4 Engage local colleges and universities, particularly those with landscape architecture programs, to develop one or more studio-based or graduate projects focused on local park enhancement.
- 1.2 Seek improvements at Chase Memorial Park, such as the introduction of irrigation and parking, to enable greater use of this facility which exists within an environmental justice community.
- 1.3 Through a grassroots, community-led effort, seek the passage and adoption of the Community Preservation Act. This would provide necessary funding for open space preservation and the acquisition and development of outdoor recreational facilities.
 - 1.3.1 In partnership with the community, and leveraging the Community Preservation Coalition program, craft and disseminate (e.g., through the U.S. Post Office's Every Door Direct Mail program) educational materials that explain the value of open space and recreation amenities with respect to their economic (e.g., increased property values, municipal revenue), environmental (e.g., water quality protection), and social benefits (e.g., public health – active living, gathering places).
- 1.4 Prepare a proper inventory of the walking/biking trails within the community and centralize it, along with relevant information such as access and use restrictions, on the Town's website—with emphasis on usability and accessibility—and through an alternate physical medium (e.g., brochure).
- 1.5 Develop a plan to identify and improve means of access to the Town's open space and recreation assets with an emphasis on equity, including compliance with ADA guidelines.
- 1.6 Update the Town's 2014 Open Space and Recreation Plan to guide the maintenance, protection, and improvement of its open spaces and recreation assets over the next several years, and enable the Town to continue to be eligible for state funds for conservation and recreation land acquisition and improvement projects.

Goal 2. Work to align the Town's recreation assets and programming with the current and projected wants/needs of the community.

Recreational opportunities within the community should reflect the diversity of its residents regarding race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and level of ability.

Recommended Actions

- 2.1 Conduct a regular (e.g., bi-annual) community survey to identify and prioritize recreation needs, and utilize the survey results to plan the Town's future recreation investments.
- 2.2 Continue to seek opportunities to develop walking/biking trails, emphasizing connectivity with existing trails within the community and with those in adjacent communities.
 - 2.2.1 Continue to work to develop a regional connection with Red Bridge State Park by expanding the trail system along the Chicopee River.
 - 2.2.2 Work with property owners to gain access to privately-owned lands along the Ware (namely, between Main Street in Thorndike and Route 181), Quaboag (namely, northwest from the Department of Public Works facility and Water Street Field), Chicopee, and Swift Rivers for the development of river walks—leveraging public lands where present.
 - 2.2.3 Encourage the incorporation of greenways, trails, or walking paths in proposed subdivision developments. Consider making such incorporations required as a condition of approval.
 - 2.2.4 In association with TM2.6, pursue the incremental development of connections to the Mass Central Rail Trail where there are less implementation barriers, such as the presence of an active rail line, bridge crossing requirements, etc. (e.g., Griffin Street to Emery Street).
- 2.3 Develop a clear legal agreement template for public use on private land with limited landowner liability clause.
- 2.4 Explore opportunities to establish permanent recreation facilities and programming at the former Converse Middle School (e.g., youth basketball).
- 2.5 Continue to pursue the design and construction of in demand recreational amenities, including one or more boat launches along local waterways, a dog park, a public beach at Crystal Lake and Forest Lake, and winter sport facilities.
- 2.6 Identify suitable parcels, with priority given to those in underserved neighborhoods, for the construction of community gardening plots. Partner with local organizations that can support their development, organization/operation, and maintenance.

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7

Public Facilities and Services

The Town of Palmer provides many public services to its residents including, but not limited to education and public works. In addition to these services, buildings, infrastructure, and utilities provided by the Town offer a critical foundation for the wellbeing and functioning of the community.

Palmer's ability to provide high-quality public facilities and services requires both short- and long-term planning. Effective capital planning and asset management policies are often challenged by limited revenue for government operations. This can put the long-term investment at risk. Prioritizing goals for short- and long-term investment needs can help the Town ensure it meets the community's expectations for municipal services.

As part of the development of this Master Plan, surveys were delivered to and received from several Town Departments. These surveys were intended to obtain information on municipal operations and the adequacy of the Town's public facilities and services now and in the future. This Public Facilities and Services Element is largely based on the responses to these surveys, as well as feedback obtained from the community during the planning process and information put forth in other municipal documents and plans, such as the Annual Town Reports.

Baseline Conditions Analyses

Administratively, the Town of Palmer's facilities and services are organized amongst the following departments and divisions:

- Department of Public Service
 - Board of Health
 - Building Department
 - Community Development

- Conservation Commission
- Council on Aging
- Housing Authority
- License Commission
- Planning and Economic Development
- Town Clerk
- Town Council
- Town Manager
- Veterans Services
- ▶ Department of Municipal Finance
 - Accountant
 - Assessor
 - Parking Clerk
 - Tax Collector
 - Treasurer
- ▶ Department of Public Safety
 - Police Department
- ▶ Department of Public Works
 - Highway-Parks-Cemetery
 - Wastewater Treatment Plant
- ▶ Palmer Public Library
- ▶ Palmer Public Schools

The Town's Department of Public Service and Department of Municipal Finance primarily operate out of the Town Administration Building at 4417 Main Street, except for the Council on Aging, which is based at the Senior Center at 1029 Central Street. The Town's other primary administrative buildings include the Police Department's headquarters at 4419 Main Street, the Department of Public Works Building at 15 Bridge Street, the Public Library at 1455 N Main Street, and the Public Schools Superintendent's Office is at 4107 Main Street. The Town's Water Pollution Control Facility (i.e., the Wastewater Treatment Plant) is located at 1 Norbell Street. As they are relevant to the community conversations that occurred during the development of this Master Plan as well as to the implementation of this Master Plan, many of these departments are discussed in the following sections.

In addition to the above departments, the Town has three Fire Districts (i.e., Bondsville, Palmer, and Three Rivers) and four Water Districts (i.e., Bondsville, Palmer, Thorndike, and Three Rivers). These districts are also described in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Town Administration—Town Council and Manager

The Town Council, which includes five District Councilors and three Councilors At-Large, exercises all legislative powers of the Town and appoints a Town Manager. The Town Manager serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the Town, administering all Town fiscal,

business, and municipal affairs, and supporting the work of the Town's Department Managers.

In 2020, the Town Manager adopted several goals. Highlights from these goals include:

- ▶ Facilitating the creation of a WELCOME section on the Town's website for new residents and businesses.
- ▶ Improving the quality and quantity of communications with the public and Town employees to improve knowledge and increase public confidence in local government.
- ▶ Facilitating a meeting with all Fire/Water District officers to discuss consolidating into a single District.
- ▶ Implementing three ways to improve service to residents (e.g., outside payment lockbox).
- ▶ Developing a Financial Policy that reflect strategies that addresses pension costs, deferred maintenance, and continues to meet the needs to residents while maintaining a conservative approach.
- ▶ Developing strategies and a comprehensive plan for an expansion of the tax base through development, and improving ease of doing business with Town government.
- ▶ Re-establishing the Palmer Redevelopment Authority and assisting in the creation of an Urban Renewal Plan for all Palmer Villages to address disinvested and to create the environment needed to promote growth and attract/support private investment.
- ▶ Reducing the inventory of surplus Town buildings (Thorndike & Converse schools) through sale, requests for proposals, or similar development.

The Town Manager, who is supported by an Executive Assistant, operates out of the Town Administration Building. This building was originally built in 1964 and was formerly a courthouse, but was modified for its current use in 2018. Office space within the Town Administration Building is reportedly adequate in terms of meeting current service levels for the Town Manager, as well as all other departments operating out of this facility. Staffing at the Town Manager's Office is also reportedly adequate.

Department of Public Works

Palmer's Public Works Department is generally comprised of the Highway and Grounds Maintenance Divisions. The Highway Division is responsible for roadway maintenance, including plowing, line painting, etc., while the Grounds Maintenance Division cares for the Town's administrative and school facilities, four cemeteries, and various parks and playgrounds. This Department primarily operates out of a facility at 15 Bridge Street, which is located within both a regulatory floodway and the 1 percent annual chance flood hazard area. This facility has reportedly flooded twice in the last 50 years.

This Department is supported by 12 full-time staff (eight at the Highway Division and four at the Grounds Maintenance Division). According to the Director of Public Works, the Department is collectively understaffed by six full-time positions given its current workload. In terms of fleet equipment and vehicles, the amount is sufficient, but their age and condition vary.

Wastewater Management

The Town's Water Pollution Control Facility is on the banks of the Ware River at 1 Norbell Street and discharges treated effluent into the Chicopee River in Three Rivers. This facility was first operational in 1979, uses the activated sludge process to reduce organic matter present in the wastewater, and has a current service population of 18,000. This facility is located within the 0.2 percent annual chance flood hazard area.

The Town's sewer system is comprised of 58 miles of pipe, 10 pump stations, and 50 grinder pumps. About half of this system was upgraded in 2014, while the remaining infrastructure is aging and will require upgrading/replacement in the coming years. Public sewer in Palmer services approximately 50 percent of the Town's residents. The Town's fiscal year 2021 flat rate for sewer was \$247 (\$494 a year), which represents an increase of 33.5 percent since fiscal year 2009.

Police Department

The current headquarters of the Palmer Police Department is at 4419 Main Street, adjacent to the Town Administration Building. This facility was rebuilt in 2014. It is reportedly adequate for existing and projected levels of service; however, it lacks adequate security measures (e.g., standoff perimeter, barriers to accidental/purposeful building breach).

The Police Department has four divisions:

- ▶ Administrative Division – Responsible for Department administration. Oversees the accomplishment of the Department's goals and objectives through the supervision, planning, directing, and organizing of its divisions.
- ▶ Criminal Investigation Division – Responsible for follow-up of major case investigations for crimes against property, crimes against persons, narcotics violations, and other investigations which require a substantial time and investigative resource investment. The Criminal Investigation Division provides for 24/7 response to major crimes.
- ▶ Operations Division – Responds to crimes in progress and provides uniform patrol, traffic enforcement, investigation of traffic collisions, special operations response, and first responder emergency medical response. It is also responsible for public safety and community relations. The Operations Division is divided into shifts to provide police coverage throughout the Town over a 24-hour period, seven days a week.
- ▶ Support Services Division – Comprised of Communications/Dispatch, Detention, Property and Evidence, Records, Court Officer, and School Resource Officer(s). This Division serves as the hub for all communications and provides services to all other divisions within the Department.

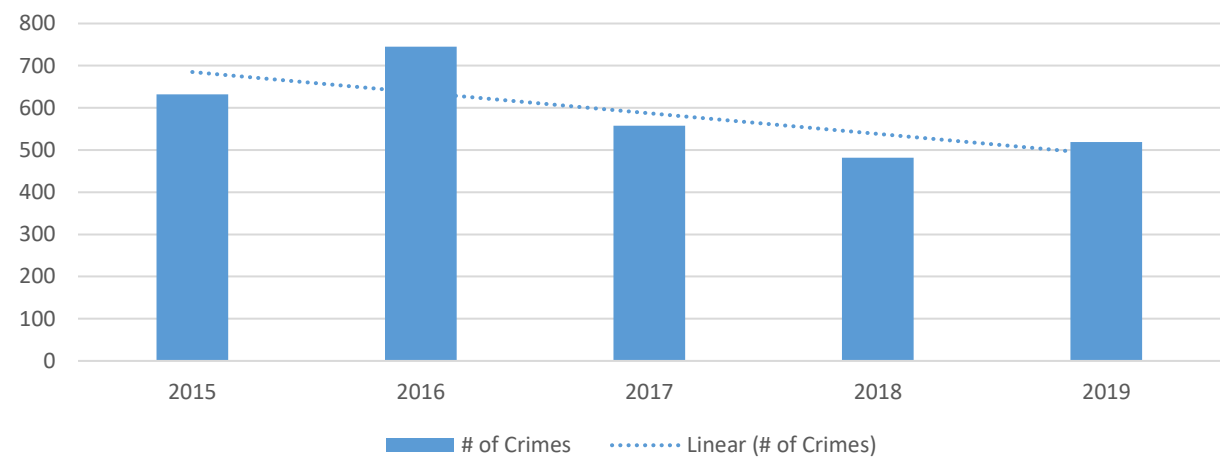
These divisions are supported by 21 full-time sworn members, five part-time sworn members, seven full-time civilian support staff, and two civilian part-time support staff. Staffing is reportedly not adequate for current and projected levels of service.

The Department has 10 police cruisers and three unmarked criminal investigation vehicles, which is sufficient in number. Seven of these vehicles, however, have mileage that exceeds 100,000 miles and will soon require replacement.

Concerning crime statistics, there were 519 crimes in Palmer in 2019, which represents a crime rate of approximately 42.3 crimes per 1,000 residents. This rate was higher than the State at 29.2 crimes per 1,000 residents. With respect to arrests, there were a total of 575, with the majority (62.8 percent) classified as Group B arrests, which tend to be minor in nature. The second most prevalent arrest type in 2019 was crimes against a person (i.e., assault) at 21.9 percent.²³

Figure 7-1 illustrates total crimes in Palmer between 2015 and 2019, along with a linear trend line depicting a general decline over time. Figure 7-2 depicts the breakdown of arrests by type in 2019.

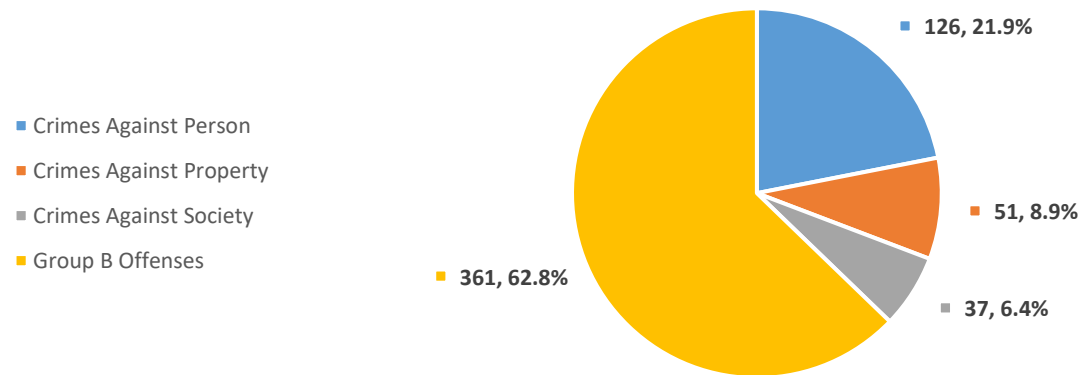
Figure 7-1 **Trend in Total Crimes, 2015-2019**



Source: Massachusetts Crime Statistics, Beyond 20/20 (2021)

Figure 7-2 **Arrests by Type, 2015-2019**

<https://masscrime.chs.state.ma.us/tops?print=true&&autoprint=true>



Source: Massachusetts Crime Statistics, Beyond 20/20 (2021)

23 Commonwealth of Massachusetts. (2021). "Massachusetts Crime Statistics: Crime Overview 2019, Town of Palmer." Retrieved June 2, 2021, from <https://masscrime.chs.state.ma.us/tops/report/crime-overview/palmer/2019>

The Town of Palmer currently subscribes to a reverse 911 system that can distribute information to any residents who sign up for alerts. The system, however, can only help those residents who know about it and sign up.

The Police Department has implemented a number of programs to support the community beyond its core mission. This includes the Drug Addiction and Recovery Team (DART), a free service that supports people who are at risk for an opioid overdose or family members affected by overdose. Additionally, the Department has Crisis Intervention Teams that will provide crisis intervention in a timely manner to children and adults who are going through a mental health or substance abuse crisis.

Fire Districts

There are three fire districts in Palmer including Palmer Fire District No. 1 (12 Walnut Street), Three Rivers Fire District No. 2 (50 Springfield Street), and Bondsville Fire District No. 3 (3174 Main Street), with the Palmer Fire District also servicing the Village of Thorndike. Each of these districts have the general mission of protecting life and property from the ravages of fire, hazardous materials incidents, and emergencies. In fulfilling this mission, each employs training and education. Additionally, the Town's fire departments perform fire inspections and code compliance.

Overall, many members of the Palmer community mentioned throughout this Master Plan process the need to study the consolidation of the Town's fire districts. Common concerns included having too much apparatus across too many stations.

As part of the Master Plan's first public survey, 62.8 percent of participants identified "multiple fire/water districts" as "very challenging" or "somewhat challenging" to improving quality of life in Town.

Palmer Fire District No. 1

The Palmer Fire Department has two facilities, including the main fire station built in 1939 (renovated in 2004) and a facility behind the station that originally housed the Palmer Water Department but now houses the Department's tanker truck and rescue vehicle. The apparatus area of the main station is limited, and most of the Department's apparatus is designed around this limitation. Further, if the Department were to pursue an advance in emergency medical services in the future, it could not accommodate ambulance(s) in the main station. Lastly, given increasing levels of services, the Department will likely need to provide 24/7 services; however, the main station cannot currently accommodate overnights.

The Palmer Fire Department's operations are supported by five full-time employees and 15 part-time employees. This is adequate given current levels of service, though staffing will need to be reviewed if 24/7 services are introduced.

Among its apparatus, the Palmer Fire Department has two fire pumpers, one aerial tower, one command vehicle, one rescue vehicle, one tanker/tender, two brush trucks, and one support vehicle. Additionally, the main station has a back-up generator. It is known that one of the fire pumpers (i.e., Engine #2) will need replacement in the coming years. The Department is currently considering the consolidation of one pumper and one brush truck.



Palmer Fire District No. 1, 12 Walnut Street.

Three Rivers Fire District No. 2

The Three Rivers Fire Department's facility, level of staffing, and fleet are reportedly adequate for current and anticipated levels of service. The Department's mostly volunteer staff includes one chief and two deputy chiefs, along with a captain, three lieutenants, and seventeen privates. Additionally, the Department employs an engine mechanic. The Department's apparatus fleet includes two fire pumpers, one rescue vehicle, one brush truck, and one support vehicle. The station is equipped with a back-up generator.

Bondsville Fire District No. 3

The Bondsville Fire Department's facility, level of staffing, and fleet are reportedly adequate for current and anticipated levels of service. The Department is co-located with the Bondsville Water District in a facility that is in good condition. The roof at the station, however, will need replacement in the short-term.

All members of the Department are volunteer, but are paid an annual stipend. Total membership amounts to 27 including six officers, 18 privates, and three auxiliary members.

The Department has two fire pumpers, one vacuum tanker, one rescue/brush truck, one mule for personnel/off road brush fires, and one motorboat. The station is equipped with a back-up generator.

Water Districts

The Town of Palmer has four community public water supply systems consistent with the boundaries of the fire districts. Each of the water districts have the general mission to provide reliable and cost-effective, high-quality water to the populace of the Town's water supply service areas in accordance with the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974 (amended in 1986 and 1996).

Historically, the districts' water distribution lines were mainly established to service the older mill housing in the Town's village centers, and have not been expanded to cover much more than these areas over the years. Like many New England communities, the Town's water districts suffer from aging infrastructure that are in need of attention (i.e., rehabilitation or replacement). Further, increasing regulatory requirements also strain resources available to meet foundational missions.

Palmer Water District

The service area of the Palmer Water District generally encompasses the area from the Quaboag River, north to the Massachusetts Turnpike and from Palmer Paving, west to the turnpike bridge overpass at Route 181. The District also services the Mt. Dumplin Road area.

The District oversees a distribution system of approximately 29 miles that ranges in size from 1 ¼-inch laterals to 16-inch mains. The downtown sections of the District receives water from a 953,000-gallon concrete clearwell (constructed in 1995), located at the Graves Brook Reservoir Treatment Facility, while areas of higher elevations in the District are supplied by a 750,000-gallon steel water storage tank located at the top of Breckenridge Street (constructed in 1963).

Water is sourced by the District from two groundwater supplies and two surface water supplies. The groundwater supplies are located off Breckenridge Street and include Galaxy Wellfield #1 and Gravel Pack Well #2. The surface water supplies include the Upper and Lower Graves Brook Reservoir.

The District operates two treatment plants. The Granular Activated Carbon Treatment Plant (online as of 1989) treats the groundwater sources, while the Graves Brook Reservoir Treatment Facility (online as of 1995) treats the surface water sources. The District's offices are located at the Graves Brook Reservoir Treatment Facility.

Bondsville Water District

The service area of the Bondsville Water District generally encompasses the north-northwestern portion of the Town, west of the Ware River and north of the Village of Thorndike. Water is sourced from three gravel packed wells (Wells #1, #2, and #4) located at the intersection of Bardwell and River Streets near Jabish Brook in Belchertown. Well #3 was replaced by Well #4 due to decreased capacity, though Well #3 is maintained as an emergency source. The District has pursued a New Source Approval Process for Well #5, and if ever put into service, Well #3 will be abandoned as a public water supply. Water from the wells is chlorinated for disinfection purposes prior to distribution.

Three Rivers Water District

The service area of the Three Rivers Water District generally encompasses the western portion of the Town, west of Sykes Street and the Quaboag River. This excludes an area annexed by the Palmer Water District in 1990 located north and south of the Massachusetts Turnpike—generally west of the old Kmart property on Wilbraham Street.

The District oversees a distribution system of approximately 18 miles that ranges in size from 2-inch laterals to 12-inch mains. The service area receives water from water tanks on Baptist Hill that have a collective capacity of about 1.5 million gallons. District water supplies include groundwater wells located near the Ware River on Route 181 near the Pathfinder Regional Vocational High School. These include Well #1 and Well #3. The District adds sodium hydroxide to the water from both wells to raise the pH for corrosion control purposes.

Thorndike Water District

The service area of the Thorndike Water District is within the center of the Town, generally bordered by High Street to the west, and follows Pleasant and Summer Streets to the north and River Street and Old Warren Road to the east. Route 32 serves as its approximate southern border.

Due to previous water quality problems with the Thorndike Water District's source, water provided by this district is obtained through interconnections to and water purchase agreements with the Palmer, Bondsville, and Three Rivers Water Districts. There are no current plans to introduce new, independent potable water sources.

Council on Aging/Senior Center

The Council on Aging/Senior Center has the mission of identifying the total needs of the senior population in Palmer, and in the process, seeks to promote and encourage new and existing activities, provide services and education to enhance the quality of life for elders, and assist elders to age with dignity and independence. This mission is supported by the Friends of the Palmer Senior Center, Inc.

Around 52 percent of persons responding to this Master Plan's first public survey classified Palmer's "senior services and accommodations" as either "very challenging" or "somewhat challenging" to improving quality of life in Palmer.

The Senior Center is located in Memorial Hall at 1029 Central Street, which was originally constructed in 1890 as a Memorial Hall for Civil War Veterans and Public Library. This facility was redesigned/renovated around 2010, a project that included expanding the kitchen area and adding a handicapped upgrade to the building (e.g., new elevator, new toilet rooms), among other updates.

The Senior Center is approximately 54,000 square feet and is staffed by four full-time and eight part-time staff. There are over 50 volunteers that support the Council on Aging's mission at the Senior Center. These figures are reportedly adequate under current conditions, though there is a need for expanded parking, a new ramp, and additional shade

areas outdoors, which are a crucial resource during times of extreme heat. The Senior Center is likely to be space constrained in the years to come as the population of the Town averages older and demand for its services increases. The need for additional space in the future would worsen existing parking constraints.

The Council on Aging/Senior Center offers a variety of programming, both in and out of its facility. These programs including home delivered meals for homebound elders and brown bag program, organized "Friends Trips" to regional destinations, recreation and socialization activities (e.g., quilting class, walking group, exercise programs, painting class, etc.), support groups, and safety and wellness events (e.g., massage therapy, hearing aid checks, blood pressure and blood glucose screenings). In addition, the Council on Aging/Senior Center runs a van service that provides transportation for the Town's senior population. This service is available to all residents over the age of 60, as well as those under 60 that are disabled. Short- and long-distance rides are available for errands, such as shopping and medical appointments, and to places like the Senior Center, Public Library, and more. This service utilizes two lift-enabled passenger vans.



Palmer's Senior Center at Memorial Hall, 1029 Central Street.

Board of Health

The mission of Palmer's Board of Health is to educate, promote, improve, and protect the health and well-being of the Town's residents, while contributing to building a healthy community and environment in which to live. Its responsibilities relate to the control of disease, the promotion of sanitary living conditions, and the protection of the environment from damage and pollution. Programs and activities of the Board of Health include the provision of educational materials (e.g., guide to mental health and substance abuse, tick identification and prevention, etc.); the provision of free drug disposal kits; and setting and enforcing regulations concerning issues such as the keeping of animals, tobacco sales, septic system installation and maintenance, and the maintenance of abandoned, foreclosing, and foreclosed residential properties. As of January 2020, the Board of Health

also maintains a vacant property registry in connection with the Palmer Blight and Abandonment Reduction Initiative.

The Board of Health operates out of the Town Administration Building, where office space is sufficient for the Department's current and projected needs. It is staffed by one health inspector and one joint public health nurse, which reportedly does not provide enough capacity to meet the needs of the Town given its size, number of houses on septic, income levels, and housing conditions.

Notably, the Board of Health has reported physical risks to septic systems stemming from climate change. For example, the siting of septic systems in Palmer is being affected by changes to the seasonal high water table.

Public Library

The Palmer Public Library provides a gathering space and a variety of materials to meet the personal, educational, and cultural needs of its patrons in a safe and welcoming setting. It offers materials and items for checkout, programming for all age groups, and formal and informal meeting spaces. It also serves as an important resource for those without reasonable access to a computer or the internet.

According to 2018 summary data from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, the Palmer Public Library's total circulation activity amounted to 138,296 (representing a decline of 3.1 percent since 2006) and total visitors amounted to 68,964 (up 21.4 percent since 2006). In 2018, the Public Library offered 166 children's programs (up 72.9 percent since 2006) and 107 adult and young adult programs (up 137.8 percent since 2006). Appropriated municipal income per capita was \$64.32 (up 17.3 percent since 2006), which is lower than the average amongst other library systems on record at \$92.18.

82.8 percent of persons responding to this Master Plan's first public survey identified the facility and services of Palmer's Public Library as either "excellent" or "good."

Built in 2005, the Public Library is in decent shape and provides adequate building space relative to its intended purpose. Parking is a constraint, however, particularly when there is a large meeting or popular program taking place. As the site of the Public Library is constrained by the building's size, a use or purchase agreement of an adjacent property would be required to expand parking. Additionally, ADA compliance improvements at the facility are necessitated.

The Public Library and its operations are supported by 11 full-time staff and two part-time staff. This is typically sufficient, though additional part-time staff are needed/hired during the summer months due to increases in circulation materials and programming. The Public Library possesses one van, which is used by its Outreach Librarian/Librarian Technician to make home deliveries for elders and persons with disabilities, and to attend local events. The Public Library does not have any known additional fleet vehicle needs at this time.

Use of the Public Library is impeded by the relative lack of public transportation in the Town. This is of particular concern with respect to youth and lower income individuals and households in areas more than a mile from the center of Depot Village. This concern was

exacerbated by the closing of the Converse Middle School in 2017, from which kids could walk to/from the Public Library.

In addition to its core mission, the Public Library does serve as a heating and cooling center during periods of extreme temperature, though only during its normal business hours. It can also serve as a place of shelter during a disruptive event. For example, after the tornadoes of June 2011, the Public Library offered its outlets, computers, WiFi, and bathroom facilities to anyone who needed them.

As reported in its *2019-2024 Long-Range Plan*, the Public Library has the following goals:

Cultural Awareness

- ▶ Goal 1 – An awareness of heritage and cultural background, including issues of class and special needs.
- ▶ Goal 2 – A broad multi-media collection in several languages easily accessible to library users of all ages.
- ▶ Goal 3 – Promote dramatic, musical, and dance performances along with lectures and discussion groups reflecting a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Commons

- ▶ Goal 1 – The community will be more aware of Palmer Public Library programs, events, and opportunities.
- ▶ Goal 2 – Create an outdoor space for library users.
- ▶ Goal 3 – Identify a social area in the library for informal meetings and gatherings.
- ▶ Goal 4 – Expand programming topics and services to engage all ages in library programs.

Information Literacy

- ▶ Goal 1 – Provide computer and technology training.
- ▶ Goal 2 – Create and make tutorials available online for 24/7 instruction in life skills.
- ▶ Goal 3 – Provide job training webinars with appropriate technology support.

School Department

The Palmer School District is comprised of two schools serving students in Pre-K through 12, Old Mill Pond Elementary (4107 Main Street in Thorndike) and Palmer High School (4105 Main Street in Thorndike). According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the District served 1,188 students during the 2020-21 school year, which represents a substantial decrease of 26.6 percent from 2010-11 enrollments. Among its 2021 enrollments, 50.8 percent are economically disadvantaged, 18.3 percent are

students with disabilities, and 4 percent are English language learners. The District has a student/teacher ratio of 10.7 to 1, compared to 12.1 to 1 for the State.²⁴

Table 7-1 shows current enrollments by public school and grade in Palmer.

Table 7-1 Palmer School District – Enrollments by School (2020-21)

Grade	Old Mill Pond Elementary	Palmer High School
Pre-K	20	
Kindergarten	88	
Grade 1	83	
Grade 2	97	
Grade 3	106	
Grade 4	111	
Grade 5	83	
Grade 6		88
Grade 7		110
Grade 8		121
Grade 9		62
Grade 10		73
Grade 11		60
Grade 12		81
SP		5
Total	588	600

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021)

As part of the Master Plan's first public survey, only 11.3 percent of participants identified "schools and educational system" as a top quality that makes the Town a great place to live.

In 2019, the Palmer School District lagged the State in several next generation Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) student achievement metrics: English Language Arts—Grades 3 – 8 (494 versus 501 at the State), Grade 10 (502 versus 506 at the State); Mathematics—Grades 3 – 8 (488 versus 499 at the State), Grade 10 (503 versus 505 at the State); and Science and Tech/English—Grades 5 and 8 (488 versus 499 at the State). These scores run from 440 to 560, and within this range are brackets representing various achievement levels: "Exceeding Expectations" (530-560), "Meeting Expectations" (500-529), "Partially Meeting Expectations" (470-499), and "Not Meeting Expectations" (440-469). The Palmer School District's performance within the above

24 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2021). School and District Profiles: Palmer (02270000). Retrieved June 6, from <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

referenced MCAS metrics falls within the “Meeting Expectations” and “Partially Meeting Expectations” achievement levels.

According to the District’s Improvement Plan for 2019-2022, the Palmer School District intends to focus on: 1) improving achievement for all students through targeted instruction (frameworks), in order to enhance student growth and close the Achievement Gap; 2) ensuring all students receive targeted, data-driven instruction that supports social/emotional growth; and 3) implementing with consistency standards-based, aligned curriculum delivered through high-quality instruction with a focus on improving attendance to close the Achievement Gap. The District has the following overall vision:

Palmer Public Schools is a community that develops life-long learners by engaging in a rigorous curriculum which creates opportunities for academic and social/emotional growth of all students through a safe, supportive, and collaborative environment.

Notably, due to declining enrollments, the District recently closed the Converse Middle School after the 2016-17 school year. The following school year, grades 6-8 were integrated into the facility housing the Palmer High School. Resultantly, this facility is reportedly constrained for space and the layout is not ideally suited for either middle school or high school functions. A new use for the Converse Middle School has yet to be identified.

Pathfinder Regional Vocation Technical School

In addition to Palmer High School, residents of the Town have the option of sending their children within grades 9-12 to the Pathfinder Regional Vocation Technical School at 240 Sykes Street. In addition to Palmer, member communities of this school include Belchertown, Granby, Hardwick, Monson, New Braintree, Oakham, Ware, and Warren. As of the 2020-21 academic year, enrollments at Pathfinder Regional totaled 610 students, with a student/teacher ratio of 8.9 to 1.²⁵

Anecdotally, some resident parents and community members noted during this Master Plan process that Pathfinder Regional is often chosen over Palmer High School for enrollment. Reasons cited include the previously noted space and layout issues of the latter, as well as the need for the Palmer School District to offer a wider range of classes and programming.

The former Converse Middle School, Old Pond Elementary, Palmer High School, and Pathfinder Regional Vocation Technical School all serve as emergency shelters. Each are equipped with back-up generators.

Community Development Department

As referenced in Chapter 2, *Housing*, the Community Development Department seeks to revitalize Palmer by meeting the housing and service needs of the low-and moderate-income population, building and repairing infrastructure vital to the health and safety of the residents, and supporting business development and retention. This is accomplished with funding from a wide variety of sources, almost three quarters of which comes through

25 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2021). School and District Profiles: Palmer (02270000). Retrieved June 6, from <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

Community Development Block Grants provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Annual programs of the Community Development Department include a housing rehabilitation program, which corrects building and sanitary code violations in homes owned and occupied by low income residents, and the provision of funding for domestic violence prevention services. This Department has also used acquired funding to undertake projects such as sidewalk repairs and playground renovations, and has overseen the development and implementation of the Town's Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan.

The Community Development Department operates out of the Town Administration Building and is staffed by a full-time director, a part-time housing rehabilitation specialist, and a part-time clerk. Current office space is sufficient, but under ideal conditions, the clerk position would be full time. As the Department is primarily funded through grants, its largest constraint is budgetary.

Conservation Commission

As referenced in Chapter 5, *Open Space and Recreation*, the mission of the Palmer Conservation Commission is to protect wetlands and resources in the Town through land acquisition, land management, public education, and regulations. It also serves as a liaison between the public and other governmental agencies in protecting the Town's natural resources and to an environmental/educational resource for citizens, groups, organizations, as well as local, State and Federal agencies. This mission is adequately supported by two full-time employees, along with numerous volunteers.

The Conversation Commission operates out of the Town Administration Building, with no need for additional office space. Concerning the Commission's conservation lands, many could be developed to be more accessible to the public, such as with improved ADA compliance, more benches and picnic areas, better trails, larger parking lots, and better signage. As a specific example, the Red Bridge Trail is inaccessible, and is the site of illegal dumping. Of concern to the Commission is the fact that all of its lands are outside of established Environmental Justice areas (i.e., low income communities and communities of color). Chapter 5, *Open Space and Recreation* further discusses the Town's needs relative to existing and planned conservation lands.

Stormwater Management

The Town's Conservation Agent also serves as the Stormwater Coordinator, leading the Town's Stormwater Management Program and Team. The Stormwater Management Program Team also includes the Town's Director of Public Works, Superintendent of the Wastewater Treatment Plant, Town Planner and Economic Development Director, and Board of Health Director.

The Town's stormwater infrastructure is aged, over 80 years old, and is in poor condition. Further, its capacity is inadequate. Drainage issues in many areas of the Town have caused stormwater flooding, resulting in hazardous conditions such as icy roads. As with towns across the region, many of Palmer's culverts are clogged with sediment and debris, in

addition to being undersized for current and future rainfall patterns. Palmer does not currently have a stormwater infrastructure management plan.

Relatedly, projects in the Town typically develop to minimum stormwater design standards under the current Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection calculations. The community has raised concerns that this has recently resulted in extreme flooding, erosion, and excessive run-off, and will likely continue to do so until the State's stormwater design standards are updated. The State is currently in the process of updating these standards.

Increasing regulatory requirements, namely related to the federal Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit, are increasing management costs to the Town. To fund needed improvements and maintain regulatory compliance, the Town is exploring the feasibility of a stormwater utility/enterprise fund. Elements of MS4 permitting that relate to stormwater flooding include new low impact development standards (e.g., vegetated filter strips, rain gardens, permeable pavers, green roofs), the mapping of the municipal stormwater system and more regular inspections of outfalls and interconnections, and more regular cleanings of catch basins.

More information on stormwater in the Town of Palmer is provided in Chapter 5, *Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources*.

Goals and Recommended Actions

Goal 1. Maximize the Town's existing facilities and services.

Ensure the Town's existing facilities and services are being utilized to their greatest potential without exceeding the demands of the Town's occupants.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 Assess the feasibility of consolidating the Town's Fire Departments and/or Water Districts to potentially minimize excessive personnel and capital assets, as measured against the Town's needs and regulatory standards.
- 1.2 Explore opportunities to make the services and fees associated with the Town's Water Districts more equitable, while maintaining the highest standards for water quality and meeting the water demands of the Town's population overall.
- 1.3 In a centralized manner, inventory and develop re-use plans for Town-owned properties, including the Converse Middle School, to promote their highest and best use in consideration of community needs/benefits.
- 1.4 Continue to implement the ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan, and work with an accessibility consultant on all the Town's future facility construction activities, where appropriate, to ensure the incorporation of design, policies, and products that enhance access for all users.
- 1.5 Explore the expansion, relocation, or new construction of the Senior Center to enable greater use of the facility by the Town's elderly population and perhaps, the larger community, and an expansion of programming now and in the future.

- 1.6 In partnership with the School Committee and/or School Administration, assess the implications – adverse or beneficial – of the student consolidation (i.e., grades 6 through 12) at the Palmer High School and pursue recommended changes as identified.
- 1.7 Working with the School Department and other local educational authorities, continue to explore opportunities to integrate STEM/STEAM into curriculums.

Goal 2. Ensure the Town's departments are sufficiently staffed and equipped.

Ensure that the Town's departments have the resources necessary (i.e., fleet vehicles and equipment, staff, training, etc.) to meet the service demands of the community today and tomorrow.

Recommended Actions

- 2.1 Conduct regular surveys to understand the public perception of the Town's services and evolving service needs (particularly with respect to human services [e.g., mental health, youth development, substance abuse, food/nutrition, etc.], and pursue program changes accordingly.
- 2.2 Regularly review the Town's trending and projected broader demographics (e.g., race, income, age, health status, educational attainment, labor force status, etc.) and assess appropriate adjustments relative to the Town's service provisions to meet anticipated needs.
- 2.3 Ensure the Town's public safety departments (i.e., police, fire, etc.) have the necessary members and support staff to meet the existing and projected service needs of the community.
- 2.4 Explore the need for support staff dedicated to the Town's economic development activities and pursuits and pursue role fulfillment.
- 2.5 In concert with the Town's capital improvement planning process, perform a fleet vehicle assessment to understand if the Town's departments have the correct number, types, and sizes of vehicles in their inventories, and plan for optimizing fleet efficiency. Ensure new and replacement vehicle purchases meet the Town's Fuel-Efficient Vehicle Policy.

Goal 3. Efficiently manage the Town's infrastructure and advocate for the proper maintenance of infrastructure within the Town owned by others.

Invest in routine and capital maintenance/improvement activities at local roads, bridges, water supply and resources, etc. to minimize long-term reconstruction costs and to ensure the ongoing effective use of these assets, and implore state and federal agencies to do the same.

Recommended Actions

- 3.1 Continue to pursue federal and state grants and other advantageous financing for the maintenance/ improvement and, as necessary, replacement of the Town's existing infrastructure, including through competitive state infrastructure grants (e.g., MassWorks Infrastructure Program).
- 3.2 Broaden the performance of asset analyses to comprehensively determine the existing and future condition of the Town's infrastructure and develop phased, long-term capital plans for their maintenance/ improvement and, as necessary, replacement.
- 3.3 Expand the Town's investment in an asset management program or tool that will, at minimum, enable the Town to understand what assets are in its inventory, along with their age, location, and condition.
- 3.4 Identify additional revenue streams for the Community Development Department that can support its work in building and repairing infrastructure vital to the health and safety of the Town's residents, among its other assignments.
- 3.5 Inventory non-Town owned infrastructure within the municipal boundaries, and advocate for needed improvements, as identified.
- 3.6 Evaluate the impact of, and opportunities associated with, 5G-enabled technologies on the Town's infrastructure and services.

Goal 4. Explore the strategic expansion of the community's water infrastructure.

As nearly all sectors of the economy rely on water infrastructure (i.e., potable water, wastewater, and stormwater utilities), invest in such assets in line with the Town's economic development and land use goals.

Recommended Actions

- 4.1. Pursue federal and state grants for the expansion of the Town's wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. Such investments should prioritize the necessary upgrades at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and connected assets (e.g., pump stations [and generators] and sewer lines).
- 4.2. Continue to engage in and be proactive with respect to expanding public-private partnerships (P3s) to support the expansion of the Town's wastewater infrastructure among other infrastructure improvements.
- 4.3. Explore potential partnerships with adjacent communities for the development of a regional wastewater treatment plant and ancillary facilities.
- 4.4. Evaluate the imposition of limited impact fees to fund a revolving account for Town-wide wastewater infrastructure among other infrastructure improvements.
- 4.5. Review the Town's existing stormwater ordinance(s) for compliance with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's standards and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's municipal separate stormwater system (MS4)

permitting program, and review opportunities to be more proactive to reduce development-associated erosion and run-off.

- 4.6. Establish a stormwater utility fund as a revenue source to support the Town in meeting its MS4 permit requirements.
- 4.7. Regularly coordinate with the Town's Water Districts to understand their future capital plans and seek alignment with the Town's economic development and land use goals.

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8

Transportation and Mobility

The Town of Palmer owns a premier location in Western Massachusetts, about 20 road miles east of the City of Springfield and 35 road miles west of the City of Worcester—both major population and economic centers in the region. Palmer is connected to these centers and other regional assets, such as the University of Massachusetts Amherst and other schools in the Five College Area, via direct access to Interstate 90 (Massachusetts Turnpike) (east/west), as well as Routes 20 (east/west), 32 (north/south), and 181 (north/south). The Town relies on this regional transportation network, along with local roads, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and commercial train lines for its economic vitality and to establish vital social and resource connections.

A well-functioning transportation system goes beyond the principles of mobility and access. By providing the right opportunities, communities can help convert vehicle trips into walking, biking, or transit trips, promoting active lifestyles and reducing unnecessary environmental impacts. Efficient circulation also means less congestion, which can reduce stress, improve safety, and cut down on both noise and air pollution.

Transportation can also provide the framework for how communities evolve. Decisions on where housing and businesses are located and what land uses are permitted in certain locations must consider how users will access these locations and whether the existing system can handle such trips.

In short, transportation not only serves a specific purpose—to connect people to various destinations – but it can also impact health and lifestyle, and provide a mobility framework for the future. For Palmer, transportation is an essential aspect to consider in planning for the years ahead.

This Transportation and Mobility Element presents an assessment of the Town's transportation system. It also discusses the activities and programs that have influence on the modes used to access local and regional assets and destinations.

Baseline Conditions Analyses

Transportation Networks

While the predominant mode of transportation in the Town of Palmer is the automobile, the Town's transportation networks consist of much more than different roadway classifications (see Figure 8-1). Sidewalks, bicycle and pedestrian pathways, and public transportation work together to allow people in Palmer to access various parts of the Town. In examining each of these networks, a full picture of the baseline of Palmer's transportation system emerges.



Active Freight Rail in Palmer

Roadways

Roadways provide primary access to most of Palmer's resources. According to geospatial data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), there are roughly 118 centerline miles of roads through Palmer. These roads serve a variety of purposes, from providing access to residential driveways, to acting as a corridor for thousands of daily commuters.



Aerial View of Interstate 90, Exit 8

As depicted in Figure 8-1, the functional classifications of roadways in Palmer include:

- ▶ Interstates – a type of arterial roadway, but for the purposes of this Master Plan is presented independently.
 - Interstate 90, a limited access highway located in the southern portion of the Town, provides connections to the City of Springfield to the west and the Cities of Worcester and Boston to the east. Access to/from Interstate 90 in Palmer is provided via Exit 63. The adjacent exits are Exit 54, located 7.7 miles westbound, and Exit 78, located 15 miles eastbound. The relatively large distance between exits along this section of Interstate 90 makes Palmer a critical location as both a passenger and freight link for the region.

- ▶ Urban and Rural Arterials – provide the highest level of mobility at the greatest vehicular speed for the longest uninterrupted distances and are not intended to provide access to specific locations. It should be noted that arterials can be further subdivided into principal and minor classes, but for the purposes of this Master Plan, they have been grouped together.
 - Route 20 runs east-west providing local access to destinations along the same corridor as Interstate 90, notably the Cities of Springfield and Worcester.
 - Route 32 runs north-south providing local access south to Stafford Connecticut and north, through Ware, to its intersection with Route 2.
 - Route 181 runs north-south providing local access north to Belchertown, to its connection with Route 202.
- ▶ Urban and Rural Collectors – provide some level of both mobility and access, as they collect traffic from local roads and funnel it to arterials. It should be noted that collectors can be further subdivided into major and minor classes, but for the purposes of this Master Plan, they have been grouped together.
 - Route 67 runs north-south connecting Palmer to the Town of Warren, and continues north to the Town of Braintree.
 - Main Street, Bridge Street, Shearer Street, Old Warren Road, High Street, and Stimson Street are examples of local collectors in Palmer.
- ▶ Local Roads – provide access to abutting land with little or no emphasis on mobility.

As quantified in Table 8-1, among the above functional classifications, local roadways comprise the majority of centerline miles (52.5 percent). This is followed by urban and rural arterials (27.4 percent) and urban and rural collectors (13.7 percent).

Table 8-1 Palmer’s Roadways by Functional Class

Functional Class	Centerline Miles	Percent (%) of Total
Local	62.0	52.5%
Urban and Rural Arterials	32.4	27.4%
Urban and Rural Collectors	16.2	13.7%
Interstate	7.5	6.4%
Total	118.1	100.0%

Source: MassGIS (2019)

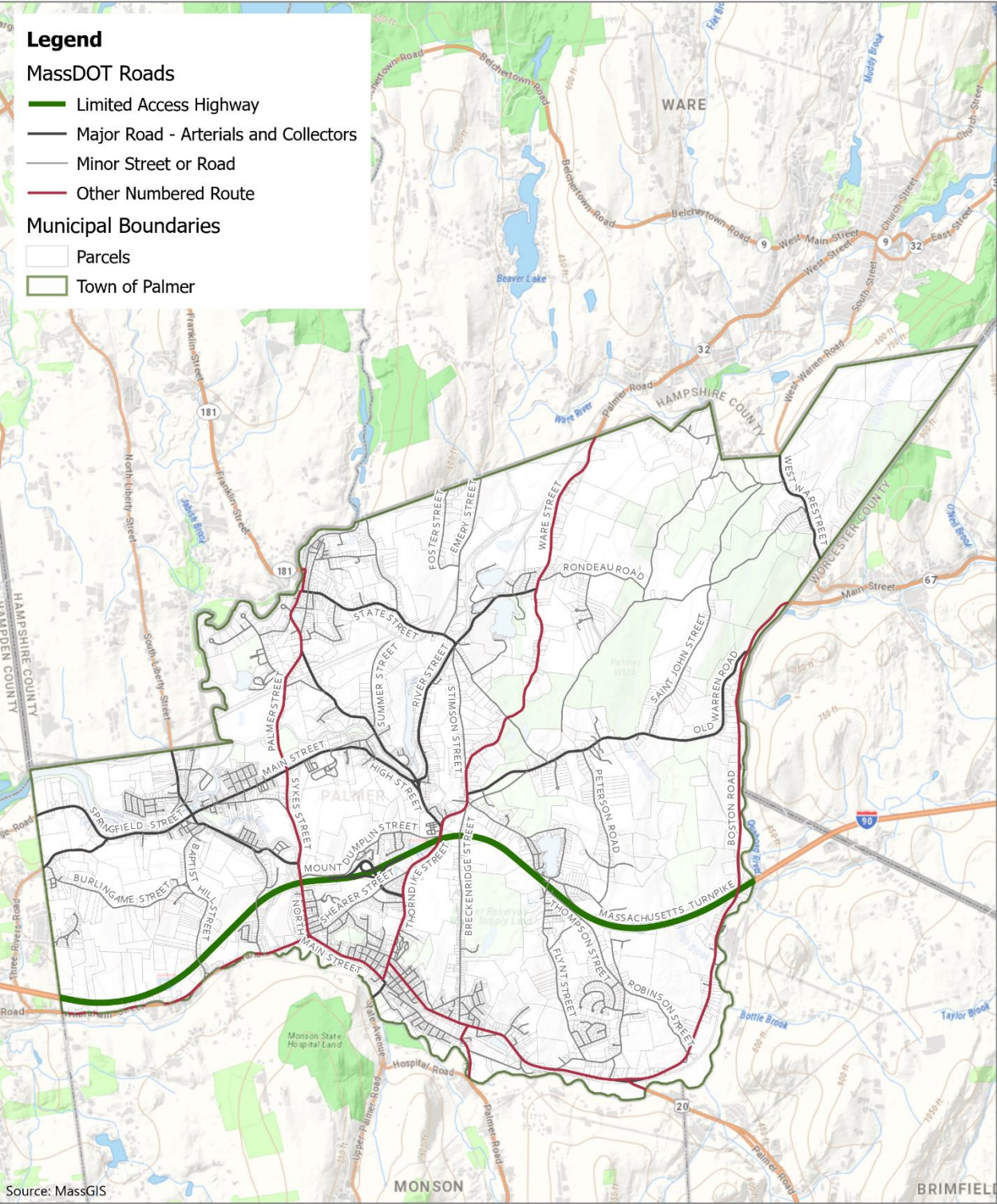
Of the approximately 118 centerline miles of roadway in Palmer, 86.9 miles (73.6 percent) are accepted under the Town’s jurisdiction. MassDOT has jurisdiction over 23.3 miles and 7.8 miles are unaccepted.

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July 19, 2021

FIGURE 8-1



Source: MassGIS



Roadway Classification

Palmer, Massachusetts

Bridges

In Palmer, there are 30 National Bridge Inventory bridges. As reported in the *2020 Regional Transportation Plan* prepared by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), the average Bridge Health Index (BHI) of these bridges was 76.9 (out of 100). This is just under the Pioneer Valley community average of 79.7. BHI is a weighted average of health indices of all bridge elements, such as trusses and decks. For context, a bridge with a BHI over 85 is considered to be in good condition. Palmer's bridges can be further broken down into municipally-owned and state-owned, with averages of 83.38 and 74.58, respectively.

Under the rating system, a "structurally deficient" bridge is one where the deck, substructure, or superstructure requires attention. Bridges with this rating in Palmer include the Town-owned bridge on Church Street over the Ware River in Thorndike (deck and superstructure) and the State-owned bridge on Flynt Street over Interstate 90 (deck). The bridge on Church Street in Thorndike, including the sidewalk, was recently closed indefinitely due to deteriorating conditions, with detours set up on High and Commercial Streets. Additionally, the Town-owned bridge on Main Street in Thorndike will soon require attention, as the deck, superstructure, and substructure are in "fair" condition per a January 2020 MassDOT inspection.

Transit Networks

Though limited, public transit is available in Palmer through the Quaboag Connector and bus services provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA). Additionally, Palmer is being considered as a potential rail transit stop along the proposed East-West Passenger Rail project, which would provide passenger rail service from Boston to Springfield and Pittsfield.

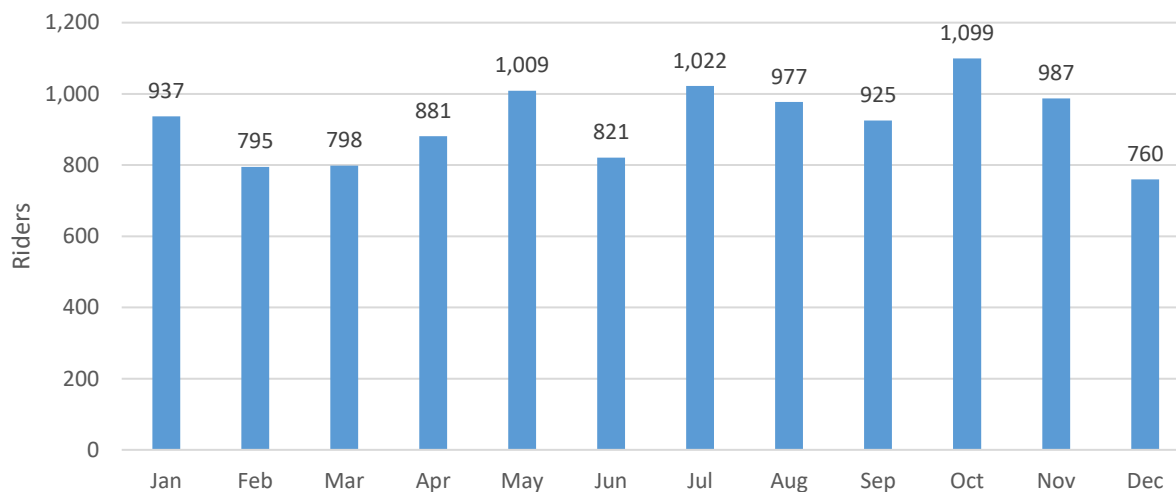
As part of this Master Plan's first community survey, when asked to identify the Town's "most pressing transportation needs," the majority of respondents (63.7 percent) identified "developing and promoting transit."

Quaboag Connector

The Quaboag Connector is a call-ahead van transportation service that provides 'curb-to-curb' pick-up/drop-off operations within Palmer, Belchertown, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Hardwick, Monson, Ware, Warren, and West Brookfield. Service is provided Monday through Friday (except major holidays) from 6:00 AM to 7:00 PM. Rides must be requested 48 hours in advance of service. Ridership on the Quaboag Connector can include anyone within the service communities, but prioritized rides include trips for persons with disabilities and seniors. Other prioritized rides include trips related to employment, job training, and for medical purposes. The Quaboag Connector provides connections to Worcester Regional Transit Authority Route 33, PVTA Ware-Palmer Express, PVTA Ware-Palmer Circulator, PVTA Palmer Village Shuttle, and PVTA Route 45. The Quaboag Connector is currently piloting a fixed route service and integrating a new scheduling software that will offer a ride scheduling app.

In 2019, total ridership on the Quaboag Connector was 11,011, with the most popular trip destinations relating to work/training (61.1 percent), medical (18.6 percent), and shopping (7.1 percent). Figure 8-2 breaks down total ridership on the Quaboag Connector in 2019 by month.

Figure 8-2 Quaboag Connector Ridership, 2019



Source: Esri

Pioneer Valley Transit Authority Ware-Palmer Circulator

The Ware-Palmer Circulator operates wheelchair-accessible flex/van buses Monday through Friday connecting Union Station and the Eastfield Mall in Springfield to Ware Center, with stops in between. Stops in the Town of Palmer include the Palmer Senior Center, Baystate Wing Hospital, and the Palmer Big Y. Express service is provided to/to from Union Station to the Palmer Big Y. The Circulator does serve Three Rivers and Thorndike on select trips, while on demand service is provided to Bondsville.

Service on the Ware-Palmer Circulator is provided six times periodically throughout the day. The first service departs the Baystate Mary Lane Outpatient Center at 8:00 AM, with the last service departing from Union Station at 4:30 PM. Headways are roughly 1.5 to 2 hours, though it is important to note that not every stop is serviced during each trip.

Shared Mobility Services

Currently, no shared mobility services (e.g., bikes, electric bikes, and electric scooters) operate in Palmer. However, ValleyBike, a bike share service, operates in the Pioneer Valley region in the nearby communities of Amherst, Easthampton, Holyoke, Northampton, South Hadley, and Springfield. Shared mobility services are often privately run and have the benefits of diversifying local transportation networks with convenient, accessible, and low- or no-emission mobility options.

Sidewalks and Pedestrian Networks

Palmer provides pedestrian accommodations, namely sidewalks, on many of its roadways. Sidewalks in the Town primarily exist along North Main Street, South Main Street, Thorndike Street, Park Street, and Wilbraham Street in Depot Village; Main Street and Springfield Street in Three Rivers; High Street and Ware Street in Thorndike; and Main Street and High Street in Bondsville. Each of these roadways provide important access to amenities, including the Main Streets that provide access to the village centers and their amenities. Palmer's existing sidewalk inventory is shown in Figure 8-3.

Plans to improve Palmer's pedestrian network are underway as part of the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, as well as the Fairview Street Sidewalk Project that will provide neighborhood pedestrian connections to the nearby Baystate Wing Hospital. Projects associated with the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan are discussed in detail later in this document.

When asked to rate the Town's roadways and sidewalks in terms of their condition, 20.2 percent of persons participating in this Master Plan's first community survey rated them "good," 45.8 percent rated them "fair," and 30.3 rated them as "poor."

Mass Central Rail Trail

The Mass Central Rail trail is a partially complete multi-use path that, upon its completion, will offer 104 miles of trail connecting Boston to Northampton, making it the longest rail trail in the northeast. Approximately 51 miles of trail are open today, with the remaining sections either under active construction or planned for future construction. Once complete, the Mass Central Rail Trail, formerly the path of the Massachusetts Central Railroad, will connect 25 communities, including Palmer, providing a "linear park" for bicyclists, hikers, joggers, and walkers alike. The Mass Central Rail Trail is a high priority for the State's trail and greenway system.

In March 2021, MassDOT released the *Mass Central Rail Trail Feasibility Study* for the completion of the Mass Central Rail Trail. As reported in this study, areas to be completed within Palmer face issues relating to private parcel ownership, the need for new bridges at the Swift River and Main Street in Bondsville, active freight services, and steep grades.

Bicycle Facilities

More so than pedestrian facilities, bicycle facilities in Palmer are lacking. Other than recently installed bike lanes on Route 67, the Town has no formal bicycle lanes or other accommodations. The 2015 Bikeability Assessment conducted by PVPC for the Palmer "Mass in Motion" program generally noted that the Town's main streets and major thoroughfares are difficult to navigate, and that the lack of bicycle accommodations, including clear markings, creates safety risks.

The Bikeability Assessment identifies specific roadways and intersections that would benefit from bicycle accommodations and help the Town to develop an overarching bicycle network with connectivity among its four villages. Recommendations generally include, but are not limited to, adding exclusive bike lanes along applicable corridors and conducting parking utilization studies with the potential to reallocate roadway space. A few notable locations and accompanying recommendations are listed below:

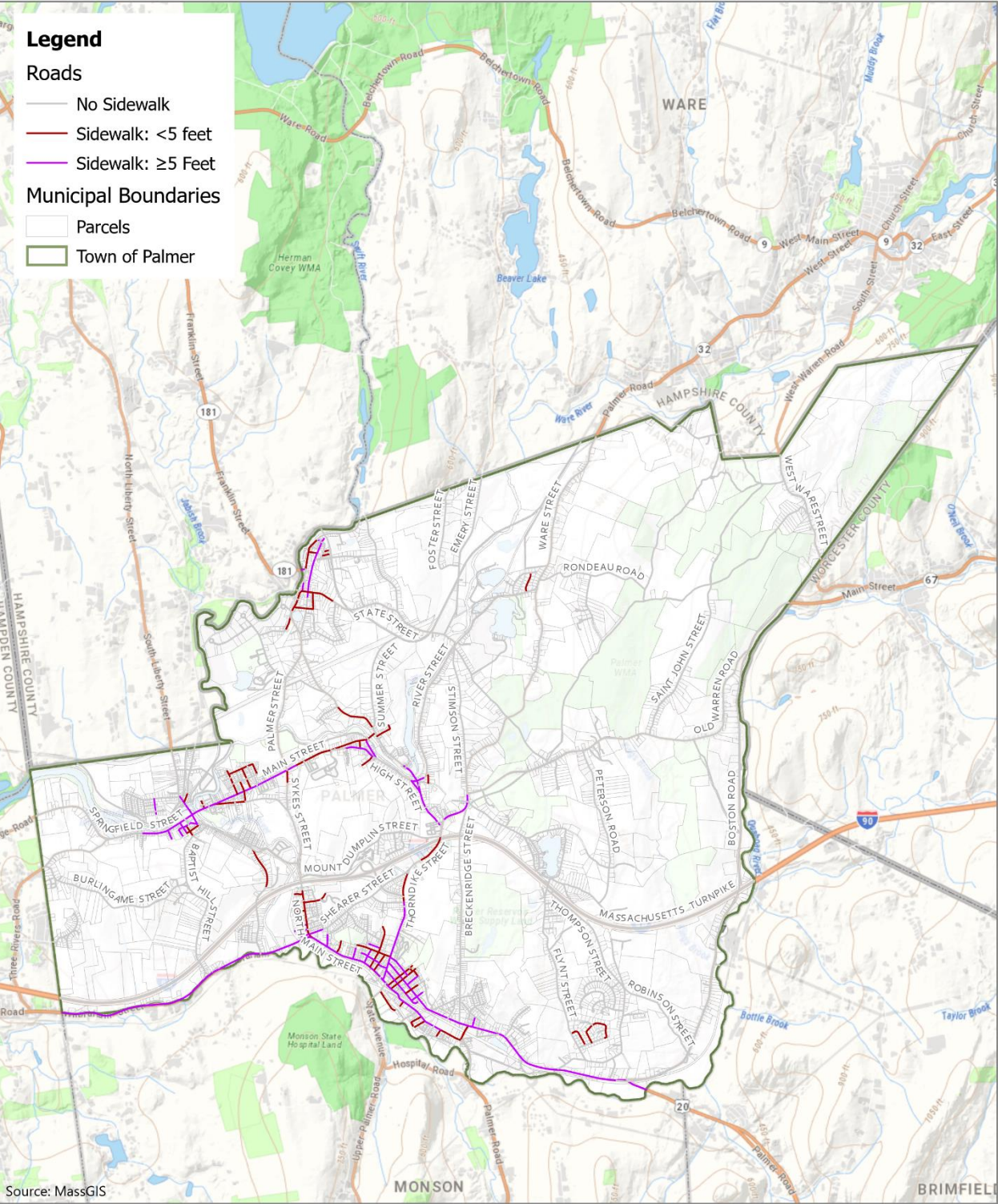
- ▶ North Main Street (Depot Village)
 - Consider adding bicycle signage along the street, such as “Bicyclists may use full lane.” This will increase motorists’ awareness of cyclists and increase safety on the roadway.
 - Consider temporary placemaking pilot programs to activate vacant storefronts and create a more walkable and bikeable downtown.
 - Consider adding bicycle racks (potentially designed by local artists) along the street to accommodate and encourage bicycling.
- ▶ Thorndike Street (Depot Village)
 - Consider implementing Shared-Use Arrows (“Sharrows”) on the pavement for bicyclists. Also, consider adding bicycle signage along the street.
 - Consider widening the median separating traffic at the intersection with North Main Street. This will decrease motor vehicle speeds and improve the safety of the intersection.
- ▶ Main Street (Depot Village)
 - Consider undertaking placemaking initiatives on the street. Encourage public usage of the park on Main Street, consider turning around benches on Main Street to face hillside.
 - Consider adding an additional crosswalk where sidewalk ends on the southeastern end Main Street.
- ▶ Main Street (Three Rivers)
 - Consider adding wayfinding signage to Laviolette Field.
 - Consider implementing temporary curb extensions using paint and bollards at the intersection of Main Street and Bridge Street. If the pilot is successful in calming traffic, then consider implementing permanent curb extensions.
 - Relocate STOP sign for traffic leaving High School closer to Main Street intersection.
- ▶ Main Street (Thorndike)
 - Repaint the crosswalk in front of the High School and relocate the Pedestrian Crossing sign before the crosswalk to improve crosswalk safety.
- ▶ Main Street (Bondsville)
 - Consider adding a STOP sign at State Street/River Street intersection to create an All-Way Stop.

- Consider adding bike racks at both the Veteran's Memorial Park and at the playground.

Complete Streets

A "complete street" is one that provides safe and accessible options for all modes of travel, including walking, biking, transit, and vehicles, for people of all ages and abilities. MassDOT's Complete Streets Funding Program provides technical assistance and construction funding to eligible municipalities that pass a Complete Streets Policy and develop a Prioritization Plan. Palmer's Complete Streets Policy was approved by MassDOT in 2016, and its corresponding Complete Streets Prioritization Plan was developed in 2018.

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Sidewalks | Palmer, Massachusetts

The Town's Complete Streets Prioritization Plan lists 28 proposed improvement projects, and among them, the following projects have been funded and constructed since 2017.

- ▶ Mid-Block Crosswalk along Springfield Street at Hryniewicz Park (Village of Three Rivers) – included the installation of a new single mid-block crosswalk to replace two existing crosswalks, a new Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant ramp along north side of the street and new curb extension/ADA compliant ramp along the south side of street, and the removal of existing pavement markings and installation of new pavement textured surface and new advanced warning signs.
- ▶ New sidewalk along Palmer Street (Route 181) from Main Street to the District Courthouse (Village of Three Rivers/Thorndike) – included the installation of a new 6-foot wide cement concrete sidewalk and granite curb along the west side of the street from the intersection with Main Street to the Palmer District Court House access drive.

Transportation Patterns and Mode Choice

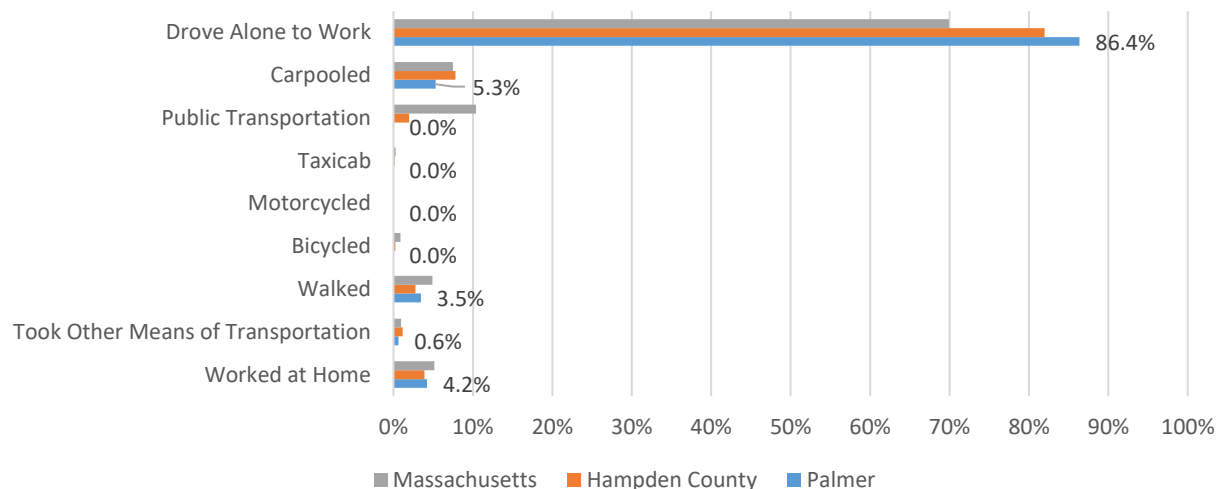
Commute Mode Share

According to the *2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*, the majority of workers aged 16 years or older (86.4 percent) drove alone to work. This is not surprising given the Town's limited public transit network, low bikeability, and ease of access to Interstate 90. This rate is higher than Hampden County (82 percent) and the State (69.9 percent). It should be noted that while only 4.2 percent of workers in the Town work from home as of 2019, this percentage may significantly increase due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as more people are likely to elect to work from home in the future. Figure 8-4 illustrates the commute mode shares for Palmer, Hampden County, and Massachusetts.

Vehicle Access

While only 4.1 percent of owner households in Palmer do not have access to a car, this number rises to 13.8 percent among renter households according to the *2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*. Further, 30.2 percent and 54 percent of owner and renter households, respectively, only have access to one car. A second vehicle can be crucial for mobility especially in emergency situations or during unexpected maintenance. Therefore, while a small percent of the resident population in Palmer must solely rely on public transportation, many more might have to periodically rely on the Town's secondary transportation options, including its limited public transit network.

Figure 8-4 Journey to Work, Workers 16 Years and Over



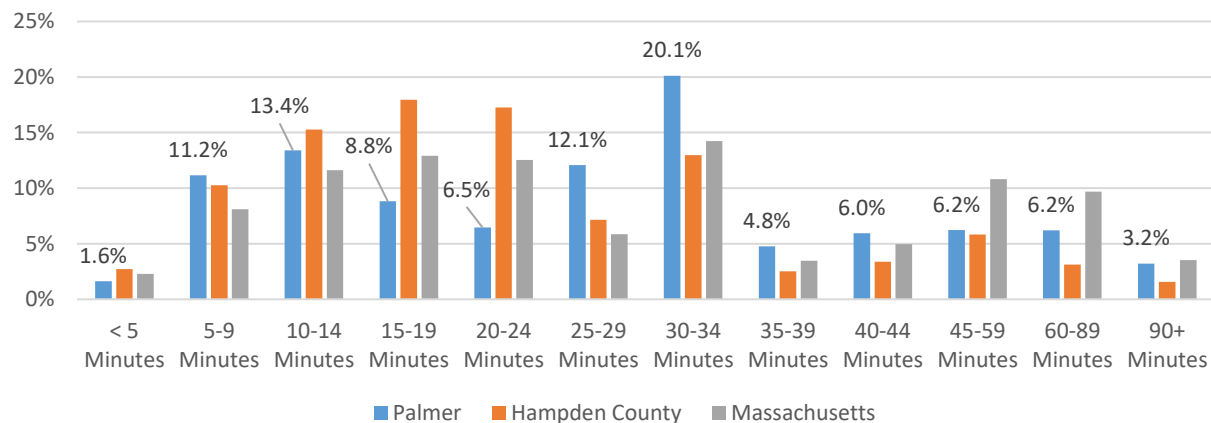
Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019)

Commute Patterns

As noted in Chapter 3, *Economic Development*, according to 2018 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Origin-Destination Employment Statistics from the U.S. Census, 16.3 percent of employed residents (primary jobs) work in Palmer. Other most common employment centers include Springfield (15.8) percent and Chicopee (4.1 percent).

In terms of commute times, according to the *2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*, the average one-way commute for Palmer workers is 27.7 minutes long, which is higher than Hampden County at 22.9 minutes, but less than the State at 30.2 minutes. Approximately 54 percent of Palmer residents have an average one-way commute of fewer than 30 minutes, though a significant 9.4 percent have commute times greater than 60 minutes. Figure 8-5 shows the distribution of commute times for Palmer workers.

Figure 8-5 Travel Time to Work, Workers 16 Years and Over



Source: 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2019)

Traffic Congestion and Delay

MassDOT records traffic volumes at a number of locations throughout Palmer and, expectedly, the highest volumes in Town are along Interstate 90 and Route 20. Also making the list of high-volume roadways are segments on Thorndike Street, Ware Street, and South Main Street. All locations recorded by MassDOT with average daily volumes above 5,000 vehicles are shown in Table 8-2.

Table 8-2 High Volume Traffic Locations in Palmer

Locations of High-Volume (5,000+ AADT)	Direction	Volume
Interstate 90, between Exits 54 & 63	2-Way - EB/WB	58,136
Wilbraham Street (Route 20), west of Route 181	2-Way - EB/WB	13,094
Thorndike Street	2-Way-NB/SB	12,389
Ware Street	2-Way-NB/SB	9,157
Ramp – Route 90 EB to Route 32	Ramp	8,038
South Main Street, north of High Street	2-Way-NB/SB	7,123

Source: MassDOT, 2019

Notes: AADT = Annual Average Daily Traffic, NB = Northbound, SB = Southbound, EB = Eastbound, WB = Westbound

Beyond this, as part of the *2020 Regional Transportation Plan*, PVPC collected data on the top locations in the region for congestion and delay through the Congestion Management Process (CMP). The Pioneer Valley CMP works towards identifying the major traffic congested locations within the Pioneer Valley Region, assessing these locations, implementing transportation strategies, and continually monitoring these areas. The CMP ranks corridors as having “Minimal,” “Moderate,” “Serious,” or “Severe” congestion. As part of the CMP, 73 corridors in the Pioneer Valley were ranked, and only one of these corridors were in Palmer. The corridor of Route 32 from High Street to Route 20 to Boston Road was ranked as having moderate congestion. It should be noted that it is difficult to ensure that every congested roadway in the region is being monitored. At the request of a community’s chief elected official, PVPC will perform 3 days of travel time data collection along a proposed corridor and consider adding the corridor to the CMP database if congestion is verified.

Additional roadways and intersections have been mentioned by the community during this Master Planning process as sources of congestion or delay. This includes congestion at the intersection of Thorndike Street and the Interstate 90 exit ramp.

Transportation Safety

In addition to providing access and mobility to Palmer residents, the Town’s transportation networks must also prioritize safety of use. MassDOT’s Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) database was reviewed as part of analyzing transportation safety within the Town of Palmer. An HSIP-eligible cluster is one in which the total number of “Equivalent

Property Damage Only” (EPDO)²⁶ crashes in the area is within the top five percent of all clusters in that region. An HSIP-eligible cluster qualifies for Federal Highway Administration and MassDOT funds to address identified safety issues. None of the intersections in Palmer are listed as HSIP-eligible clusters.

According to MassDOT’s Crash Data Portal, Palmer recorded 255 crashes within its limits in 2019, which represents a decline from recent years: 2018 (343), 2017 (386), 2016 (379), and 2015 (344). Among these crashes, only one resulted in a fatality, while 10 resulted in a severe injury. Top crash locations in the Town (based on EPDO) included the intersections of Church Street and Center Street, Thorndike Street and Ware Street, Thorndike Street and the Interstate 90 exit ramp, and Depot Street and Sykes Street.

Additionally, the intersection of North Main Street (US Route 20 and MA Route 181) with Wilbraham Street (US Route 20) and Shearer Street in Palmer has appeared as a highly ranked intersection out of the Top 100 High Crash Intersections in the Pioneer Valley Region.²⁷ This prompted a transportation and safety study in 2010, prepared by PVPC.

Parking

As discussed below, the Town offers a variety of parking options within each of its four villages. Primarily, there is a main street that runs through the villages’ economic centers with varying parking options and restrictions. Additionally, several municipal parking lots are provided, though these lots are reportedly underutilized. All on-street parking and off-street municipal parking in Palmer is free.

In Bondsville, along Main Street, there are no designated parking spaces. Cars do, however, park along both sides of the street. This village does not have a municipal parking lot. Main Street, east of North Main Street in Depot Village offers parking on both sides of the roadway with angled spaces on the north side and parallel parking on the south side. Parking on the south side of the street is prohibited east of Central Street. Depot Village has a municipal lot on the corner of Main Street and Bridge Street. Parking on Main Street in Thorndike is not allowed. However, cars have been observed parking in the road’s narrow shoulders for short periods or for longer stays in front of residences. There are no municipal lots in Thorndike. Parking on Main Street in Three Rivers ranges from parking on both sides of Main Street with 2-hour parking limits for portions of the roadway, to no parking on either side, to parking on the south side only. Three Rivers offers two municipal lots along Main Street in the vicinity of Bridge Street and Belanger Street.

26 Equivalent property damage only” is a method of combining the number of crashes with the severity of the crashes based on a weighted scale. Crashes involving property damage only are reported at a minimal level of importance, while collisions involving personal injury (or fatalities) are weighted more heavily.

27 Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. (2010). Transportation and Safety Study: North Main Street (US Route 20 and MA Route 181), Wilbraham Street (US Route 20) and Shearer Street Intersection, Palmer. Retrieved June 17, 2021, from <http://www.pvpc.org/sites/default/files/N.%20Main-Wilbraham-Shearer%20Report1.pdf>

Goals and Recommended Actions

Goal 1. Improve the Town's transportation infrastructure.

Maintain and improve the Town's transportation infrastructure to safely and efficiently connect its neighborhoods with destinations and amenities.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 Work with applicable agencies to incorporate the concepts of Complete Streets into transportation improvement projects.
- 1.2 Continue to actively pursue and update priority projects through the MassDOT's Complete Streets Funding Program.
- 1.3 Identify and monitor a diverse array of potential federal, state, and private funding sources to complete transportation improvement projects throughout the Town. Examples of such sources as of this writing include the MassWorks Infrastructure Program, Community Transit Grant Program, Helping Hand Mini-Grants, the Workforce Transportation Program, and the Efficiency and Regionalization Grant Program.
- 1.4 Continue the Town's pavement management program as currently carried out by the Department of Public Works. Include a sidewalk management program as part of this effort to maintain existing sidewalks and identify areas of needed improvement. Prioritize sidewalk construction and repair within the vicinity of Town offices, commercial centers, senior and subsidized housing developments, the Palmer Senior Center, in school zones, and around medical facilities.
- 1.5 Subject to available funding, advocate for the expansion of existing transit services (i.e., routes and schedules), including PVTA's Palmer/Ware bus routes and the Quaboag Connector, to provide Palmer residents with more convenient access to local/regional destinations and regional populations with greater access to Palmer's employment and commercial centers.
- 1.6 In partnership with PVTA, Quaboag Connector, and other relevant organizations, explore innovative methods to increase transit ridership, such as advancing the digitization of service information and developing audience-specific materials (e.g., brochures, info sheets).
- 1.7 In partnership with PVTA, Quaboag Connector, and other relevant organizations, and to inform TM 1.5, administer a public transit rider survey(s) to discover what works best for transit users and to identify any populations with unmet transportation needs. Strive to target disadvantaged populations in the survey's distribution, e.g., those associated with the Palmer Food Share and Ware Regional Recovery Center.

- 1.8 Continue to work with MassDOT and local officials to monitor traffic levels and crash frequencies at high-crash locations, while identifying problem intersections and roadway segments. As part of this action, continue participation in the State's Road Safety Audit Program and implement intersection improvements, as necessary.
- 1.9 Evaluate the need to restore major, structurally deficient transportation infrastructure owned by the Town prior to making funding commitments. Consider criteria such as impacts to mobility, business and workforce, and equity.
- 1.10 Continue to work with local industrial operations as well as freight rail and trucking operators to understand and address the long-term needs of the railway infrastructure that is critical to Palmer's economy.
- 1.11 Continue to advocate for the East-West Passenger Rail Project with a stop in downtown Palmer (Depot Village) and work with MassDOT and other stakeholders in advancing this important project that offers opportunities for improved local and regional connectivity, private partnerships, development, and improved infrastructure.
 - 1.11.1 In the event that Palmer becomes a transit stop along the East-West Passenger Rail Corridor, seek local representation over the station in coordination with MassDOT and the established regional service operator.

Goal 2. Become a bicycle and pedestrian-friendly community.

Promote enhanced mobility, along with overall public health and wellness, by expanding bicycle and pedestrian accommodations throughout Town – in particular, around a potential future passenger rail station along the proposed East-West Passenger Rail Corridor.

Recommended Actions

- 2.1 Create a Palmer Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to oversee the implementation of pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, obtain funding for improvement projects, advocate for pedestrians and cyclists, and maintain continued dialogue with regional planning agencies.
- 2.2 Develop a Town-wide Bicycle Network Master Plan to improve Palmer's bikeability, as well as provide connections to off-road paths and surrounding communities.
- 2.3 Explore opportunities to enhance or expand pedestrian and bicycle access in ways that support retail, business activities, schools, and arts/ cultural events. Seek funding through MassDOT's newly launched Shared Streets and Spaces Program.
- 2.4 Seek full compliance with the ADA within Town right-of-way (e.g., curbs, sidewalks, pedestrian crossings/signals) by ensuring ADA requirements are implemented as part of any new applicable construction or replacement project.
- 2.5 Enhance the Town's sidewalk network, particularly along its arterial corridors, while incorporating traffic-calming measures to connect Palmer's villages.
- 2.6 Explore reducing the vehicle travel lane width of Main Street in Depot Village to allow for bicycle lanes and/or expanded sidewalks to accommodate all modes of travel.

- 2.7 Continue to work with MassDOT and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, along with private landowner(s), to complete connections along the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail in Palmer between Belchertown and Ware.
 - 2.7.1 In concert with the state, pursue funding to support the construction of required infrastructure for the completion of the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail in Palmer, e.g., roadway crossings and bridges over Main Street and over the Swift River into Belchertown. A potential funding source is the MassTrails Grants Program.
 - 2.7.2 Explore opportunities to connect existing and future trails in Palmer to the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail to increase access to this future recreational and commuter transportation network.
- 2.8 Explore bicycle and pedestrian improvements along Shearer Street, Route 181, and Route 32.
- 2.9 Coordinate with surrounding communities on the potential to join Valley Bike Share to enhance bicycle access and local/regional travel and connectivity.
- 2.10 Install bicycle parking and/or storage in strategic locations around each of the village center areas, employment centers, commercial centers, and other Town assets/amenities.
- 2.11 Encourage representation from the Bay State Wing Hospital on local transportation committees to ensure transportation-related projects and policies are implemented or enacted with public health in mind.
- 2.12 Work with the Bay State Wing Hospital to commit to incorporating bicycle and pedestrian improvements in its institutional master plan and/or setting aside financial resources for such improvements.
- 2.13 Ensure that safe and accommodating bicycle and pedestrian access is incorporated into local development projects. Explore additional enforcement mechanisms that can be integrated into the site plan review process.

Goal 3. Make Palmer's transportation networks future ready.

Plan for the future of transportation and how potential changes may impact Palmer's transportation network.

Recommended Actions

- 3.1 Evaluate the feasibility of implementing adaptive signal systems along high congestion corridors for locally maintained traffic signals, including along Thorndike Street, Ware Street/Route 32, North Main Street (in Palmer), and South Main Street (north of High Street in Bondsville).

- 3.2 Explore the potential installation of smart technologies (i.e., streetlights, small cell wireless facilities, etc.) and related technology to capitalize on the early adoption of autonomous and connected vehicles, along with associated data collection, maintenance, and distribution.
- 3.3 Expand the Town's network of publicly-accessible electric vehicle charging stations and work with private property owners to expand such stations outside of the Town's control.
 - 3.3.1 Review the Town's Zoning Ordinance to ensure electric vehicle charging stations of different types are explicitly and widely permitted, where appropriate.
 - 3.3.2 Investigate ways to encourage new commercial and multi-family developments as well as major renovations of these facility types to include electric vehicle charging infrastructure (i.e., stations and conduit) and/or parking spaces. At a minimum, such developments should be "electric vehicle-ready" (i.e., conduit only).
- 3.4 Conduct a parking study on major roadways, particularly in the village centers, to identify and address current and future curbside demand, taking into consideration autonomous vehicles, drop-off/pick-up, outdoor dining, parklets, etc.
- 3.5 Collaborate with MassDOT on the development of a new Park and Ride lot for the Massachusetts Turnpike. Explore the potential of locating this lot near downtown Palmer (Depot Village) to increase the area's visibility and visitation.

9

Sustainability and Climate Resilience

Similar to municipalities across Massachusetts, opportunities and challenges related to sustainability and climate resilience are of increasing focus in the Town of Palmer. This Element of the Master Plan highlights the Town's sustainability and climate action planning efforts to-date as they relate to energy and solid waste management. This Element also addresses the Town's climate change-related hazards and associated adaptation measures, a discussion that predominantly derives from the community's *Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Community Resiliency Building Workshop – Summary of Findings* (2019). It is worth noting that the preparation of this Master Plan was substantially funded by a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant (fiscal year [FY] 2020 and FY 2021) provided to the Town by the State.

Climate action in Massachusetts took on increased importance and urgency during the course of this planning process. In March of 2021, Governor Baker signed climate legislation that codified the Commonwealth's commitment to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050 (i.e., the amount of greenhouse gas emissions generated must be balanced with the amount removed).²⁸ This legislation, "An Act Creating a Next Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy," builds upon the State's *2050 Decarbonization Roadmap*²⁹ and *Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2030*.³⁰

28 Commonwealth of Massachusetts. (2021). "Governor Baker Signs Climate Legislation to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Protect Environmental Justice Communities." Retrieved June 17, 2021, from <https://www.mass.gov/news/governor-baker-signs-climate-legislation-to-reduce-greenhouse-gas-emissions-protect-environmental-justice-communities>

29 Commonwealth of Massachusetts. (2021). "MA Decarbonization Roadmap." Retrieved June 17, 2021, from <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/ma-decarbonization-roadmap>

30 Commonwealth of Massachusetts. (2021). "Massachusetts Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2030." Retrieved June 17, 2021, from <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-clean-energy-and-climate-plan-for-2030>

The legislation focuses on:

- ▶ Establishing new, more ambitious interim goals for emissions reductions
 - 50 percent reduction in emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 (baseline year)
 - 75 percent reduction in emissions by 2040 compared to 1990
- ▶ Increasing protections for Environmental Justice communities by codifying related language, including community definitions, into law
- ▶ Allowing the Commonwealth to procure an additional 2,400 Megawatts (MW) of clean, reliable offshore wind energy by 2027

Of particular relevance to Palmer, this new law also authorizes the creation of a more efficient “Stretch Code” to address buildings with net-zero emissions. Like the previous iteration of the Stretch Code, which requires more efficient buildings than the state-wide building energy codes (or base building energy codes), this new version is voluntary. Municipalities, including Palmer, will be able to opt-in to requiring higher efficiency standards for buildings built within its jurisdiction. As of July 2021, the new Stretch Code is currently under development by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) and will be subject to public review.

Baseline Conditions Analyses

Among the Town of Palmer’s sustainability priorities are a keen focus on reducing municipal energy consumption and related costs, and promoting the generation and use of fossil fuel-free energy sources. Through these efforts, the Town is positively contributing to climate mitigation by reducing and offsetting greenhouse gas emissions.

The Town’s sustainability priorities are evidenced by the Town’s Green Community designation in 2010 under the Green Communities Act of 2008, which is administered by DOER. This program supports Massachusetts towns and cities with technical assistance, educational opportunities, and funding to promote municipal energy efficiency projects and kick-start clean, renewable energy technologies in their communities.³¹

To apply for and become a designated Green Community, municipalities must meet several criteria that demonstrate their commitment to reducing energy consumption and shifting to cleaner energy sources. These criteria include:

1. Pass zoning that enables as-of-right siting of green energy generation and research and development facilities in designated locations.
2. Adopt expedited permitting processes for facilities locating in renewable energy zones.
3. Inventory municipal building energy use and approve an Energy Reduction Plan charting a five-year path toward 20 percent energy reduction.

31 Green Communities Division, Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources. (2020). “Guide: Becoming a Designated Green Community.” Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/guides/becoming-a-designated-green-community> on April 17, 2020.

4. Mandate the purchase of hybrid and electric vehicles for municipal use, as commercially available, as well as maintain a vehicle inventory and develop a plan to upgrade vehicles with fuel-efficient alternatives.
5. Adopt the Massachusetts' Board of Building Regulations and Standards (BBRS) Stretch Code (780 CMR 115.AA).³²

Related to Criteria #3 above, with assistance from National Grid, the Town performed energy audits of its facilities and worked with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to develop an energy reduction plan. By the end of FY2014, as result of these efforts, the Town achieved a reduction of approximately 37 percent against a FY2009 baseline, surpassing the required 20 percent target of the Green Communities Designation & Grant Program. Overall, these efforts were estimated to result in a total annual savings of more than \$55,000.

Through the Green Communities Designation & Grant Program, Palmer has received nearly \$840,000 to-date to support the implementation of energy conservation measures. Table 9-1 provides a list of the grant awards and their associated project summaries. Obtaining these grants and spearheading the implementation of the resulting projects was led by the Town's Planning and Economic Development Director. The Town does not currently have an Energy Program Manager. Moving forward, it will be important for the Town to have a staff person dedicated to energy efficiency efforts and leading the fossil fuel transition.

Table 9-1 Grant Awards under the Green Communities Designation & Grant Program

Award Date	Award Amount	Project Summary
May 2010	\$169,103	To fund energy conservation measures at Town Hall including design services, conversion to a natural gas boiler, chiller, and condenser replacements with energy efficient units
July 2013	\$224,190	To fund energy conservation measures, energy management system, HVAC piping, HVAC design and commissioning, unit ventilators, and vending machine timers, in the Town Hall
July 2015	\$211,584	To fund energy conservation measures, weatherization, lighting, HVAC upgrade at municipal facilities including DPW Garage, Library, Wastewater Treatment Plant, Converse Middle, Old Mill Elementary, and Palmer High Schools
July 2017	\$94,974	To fund energy conservation measures in municipal facilities including Town vehicle fleet, namely, the purchase of electric vehicles and electric vehicle charging stations
July 2018	\$139,420	To fund energy conservation measures, LED streetlight conversion, in municipal facilities including streetlights

Source: DOER (2021)

32 Green Communities Division, Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources. (2020). "Guide: Becoming a Designated Green Community." Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/guides/becoming-a-designated-green-community> on June 17, 2021.



Electric vehicles among the Town’s municipal vehicle fleet.



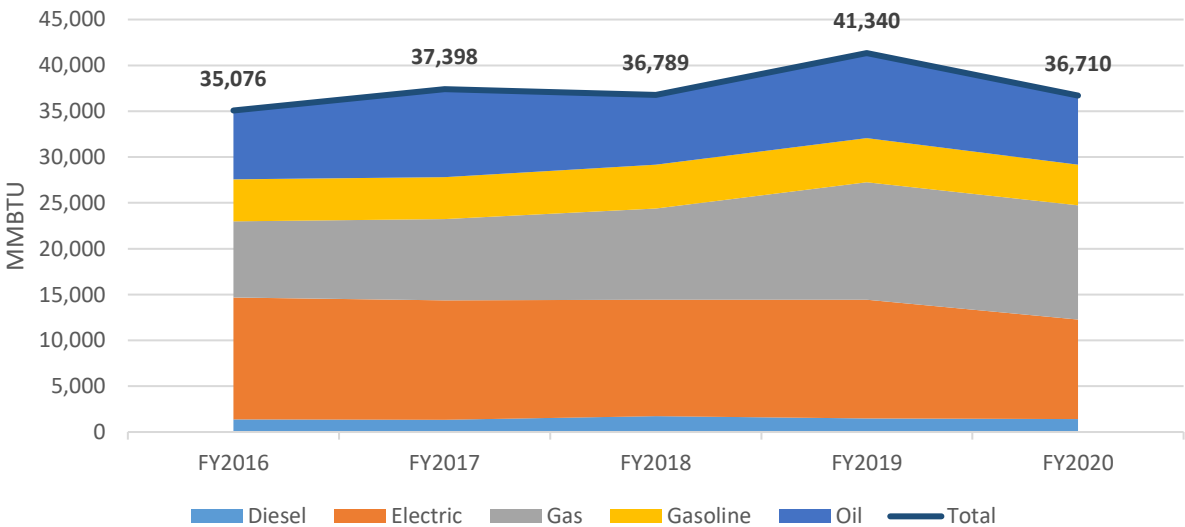
LED streetlights in Depot Village.

Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Municipal Operations

Figure 9-1 summarizes municipal energy consumption at the Town of Palmer. Overall, the Town’s municipal energy consumption has increased by 4.7 percent over the past five years (FY2016 to FY2020), with a notable decline of 11.2 percent between FY2019 and FY2020. Some of this decline can be attributed to the 2020/2021 COVID-19 pandemic, as some buildings saw reduced occupancy toward the end of FY2020 (i.e., March, April, May, and June 2020). However, another contributor to this decline were reductions in energy consumption associated with the Town’s street and traffic lights, as described below.

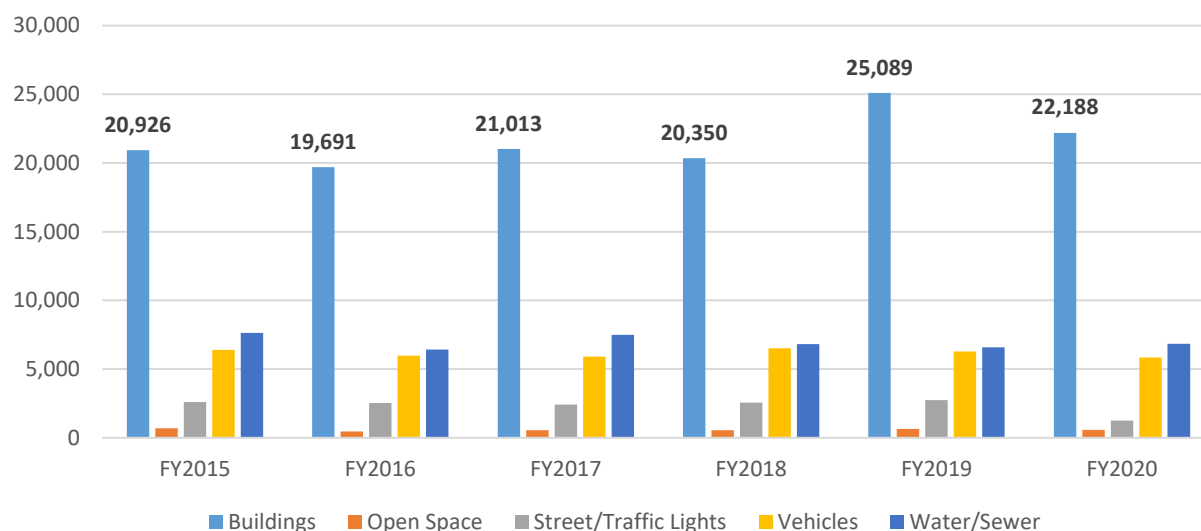
Figure 9-1 Total Energy Consumption by Fuel Type, FY2016 to FY2020



Source: MassEnergyInsight (2021)
Note: MMBTU = million British Thermal Units

As shown in Figure 9-2, energy consumption can largely be attributed to Town-owned buildings, followed by the wastewater treatment plant (including water and sewer equipment) and vehicles of the Department of Public Works. In FY2020, buildings accounted for 60.4 percent of overall consumption, while water/sewer accounted for 18.7 percent and the Public Works' fleet accounted for 15.9 percent.

Figure 9-2 Total Energy Consumption by Source, FY2016 to FY2020



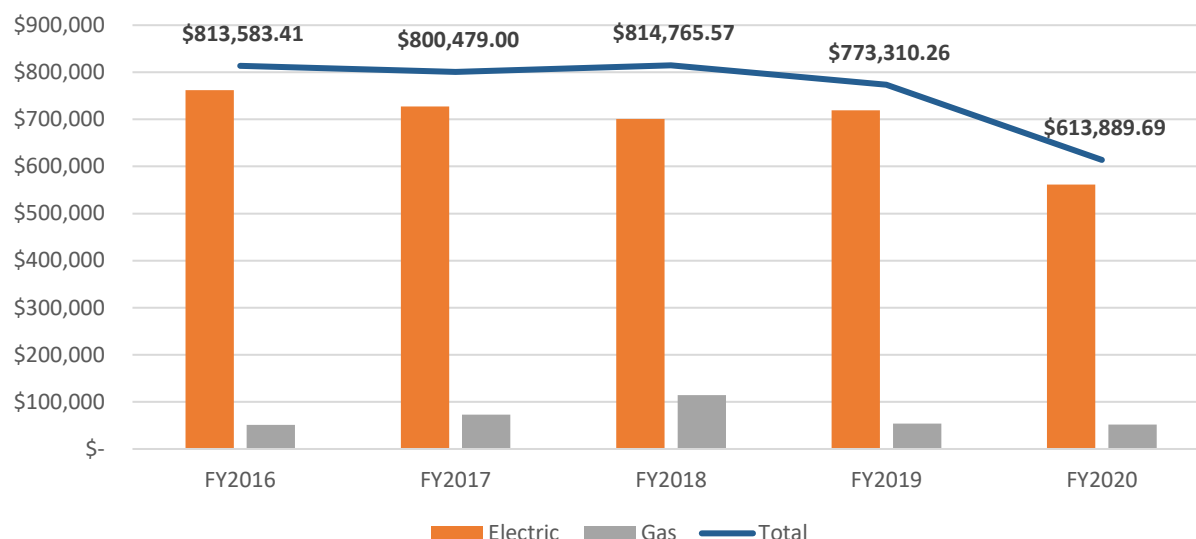
Source: MassEnergyInsight (2021)

Concerning specific buildings, the Town's schools (including the former Converse Middle School) are responsible for the majority of the Town's building-based energy consumption. In FY2020, these facilities accounted for 86.8 percent of all building-based energy consumption, with the Palmer High School accounting for 38.5 percent, the Old Mill Pond Elementary School accounting for 33.9 percent, and the Converse Middle School accounting for 14.4 percent. In terms of energy use intensity (EUI) (i.e., energy consumption per square foot [sf]), the Police Station performs the worst at 103.2 thousand British Thermal Units (kBtu)/sf, followed by the Old Mill Pond Elementary School at 79.2 kBtu/sf and the Palmer High School at 64.8 kBtu/sf. The best performing building in the Town's portfolio is the Public Library with an EUI of 8.6 kBtu/sf.

Noteworthy is the decline in consumption that occurred between FY2019 and FY2020 at the Town's street and traffic lights (-54.7 percent). This decline is due in part to LED streetlight conversions implemented by the Town, a project supported by a Green Communities Designation & Grant Program grant awarded in 2018 and a Rapid LED Streetlight Conversion Program grant awarded in 2021.

Associated with the above detailed municipal energy consumption, Figure 9-3 summarizes the Town's energy costs (electricity and natural gas only). Between FY2016 and FY2020, such costs have decreased by 24.5 percent. Similar to energy consumption, there was a notable decline in energy costs between FY2019 and FY2020 (-20.6 percent).

Figure 9-3 Total Energy Costs by Fuel Type, FY2016 to FY2020



Source: MassEnergyInsight (2021)

The Town’s municipal energy consumption generates greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to global warming and climate change by trapping heat in the Earth’s atmosphere. Figure 9-4 illustrates the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the Town’s energy use as reported by MassEnergyInsight; however, this does not account for any renewable energy credits purchased/retired by the Town. A discussion of these credits is provided later in this chapter.

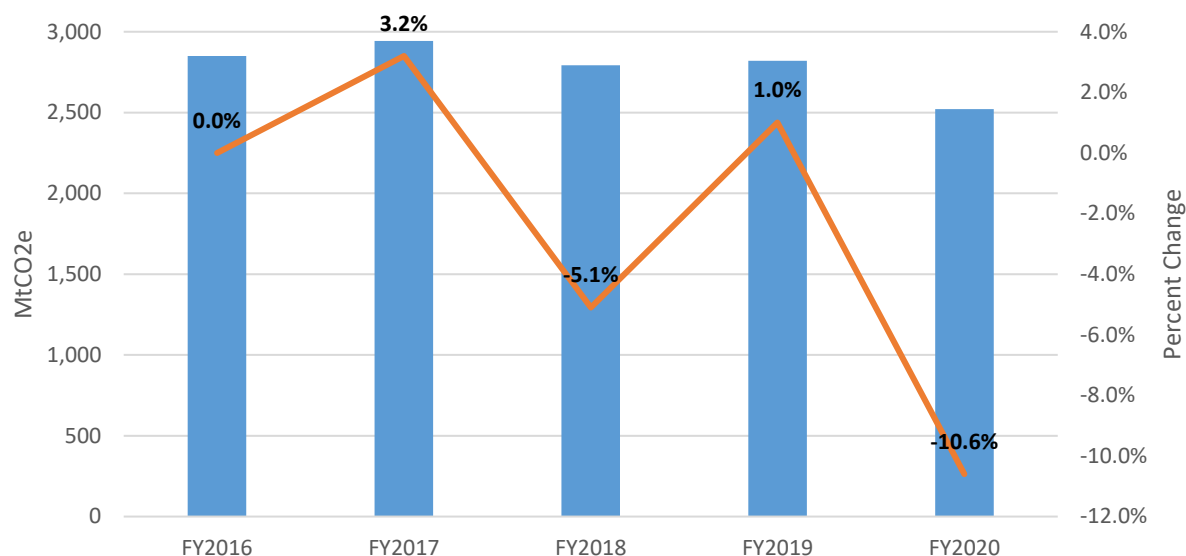
It should be noted that Figure 9-4 does not fully represent the extent of emissions associated with the Town’s operations and activities. For example, the values presented in Figure 9-4 do not account for direct process emissions (i.e., from physical or chemical processing) or direct fugitive emissions (e.g., hydrofluorocarbons [HFCs] from refrigeration leaks and methane [CH₄] from solid waste landfills), nor do they address indirect emissions associated with product use, waste disposal, employee commuting, etc.

With respect to direct process emissions, the Town employs an aerobic wastewater treatment system. Its wastewater treatment plant does not currently capture and use the methane emitted during the handling and treatment of municipal wastewater. Methane, which has an ability to trap heat in the atmosphere that is around 21 times that of carbon dioxide (CO₂), is generated during the anaerobic decomposition of organic material. There are several approaches to methane recovery at wastewater treatment plants, such as the installation of anaerobic sludge digesters. These approaches enable the use of methane as fuel to generate electricity to offset purchased electricity, and/or for heat to meet digester heat loads or for space heating, among other uses.

The Town has not prepared a local government operations greenhouse gas emissions inventory, nor has it prepared a community-scale greenhouse gas emissions inventory. Preparing such studies can help the Town understand its major sources of emissions across scopes and sectors (e.g., stationary energy, transportation, waste, etc.), identify the areas

where the Town has the greatest leverage for improvement, and enable the tracking of progress over time as measured against a baseline.

Figure 9-4 Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Total and Percent Change, FY2016 to FY2020



Source: MassEnergyInsight (2021)

Notes:

1 MtCO₂e = metric tons of CO₂ equivalent

2 Does not account for any renewable energy credits obtained/retired by the Town.

Community-Wide Energy Consumption

Leveraging UrbanFootprint (<https://urbanfootprint.com/>), based on parcel data and energy use rates (per dwelling unit by residential type and per square foot for commercial floor area) derived from U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) survey data on energy consumption, estimates of residential and commercial electricity and natural gas use for existing buildings were calculated for the community at-large. Total annual energy consumption in the community is estimated to be approximately 762,400 million British Thermal Units (MMBTU), with residential uses accounting for 62.6 percent of that value and commercial uses accounting for 37.4 percent. Per household annual energy use is estimated at 94.3 MMBTUs.

Relatedly, according to UrbanFootprint, annual greenhouse gas emissions generated within the community from building energy, water energy, and passenger vehicles amounts to 132,422 metric tons of CO₂ equivalent (MtCO₂e). Use of passenger vehicles is the largest source of emissions in Palmer (53.3 percent), followed by building energy (46.3 percent). Per household annual greenhouse gas emissions are estimated at 18 MtCO₂e, with passenger vehicles accounting for 61.1 percent of that value.

To encourage greenhouse gas emissions reductions related to the use of passenger vehicles, the Town has installed two electric vehicle charging stations – one at the Town Hall and the other at the Public Library. These are the only two publicly-accessible electric vehicle charging stations in Palmer. Access to electric vehicle charging stations is important to decarbonizing the transportation sector through increased electric vehicle adoption.

According to the *2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*, the majority of households in Palmer (57.5 percent) heat their homes using fuel oil/kerosene, etc. This is followed by electricity (electric resistance heating or heat pumps) (16.7 percent), utility gas (9.17 percent), liquefied petroleum gas (7.9 percent), wood (5.4 percent), some other fuel (2.9 percent), and no fuel (0.4 percent). The large percentage of households in the community relying on fuel oil/kerosene, etc. and other fossil fuels for space heating represents a significant opportunity to reduce emissions through heating system conversions, preferably to efficient electric technologies (e.g., heat pumps) that enable decarbonization when connected to renewable power generation.

Of note, natural gas is currently only available in certain locations within Palmer. The Town is looking into opportunities to expand natural gas access, particularly in support of future commercial developments. Though still a fossil fuel that produces greenhouse gas emissions when burned, natural gas is “cleaner” than many other fossil fuels. For example, it produces nearly 40 percent fewer emissions of CO₂ per unit of heat compared to fuel oil #2.³³

Renewable Energy Considerations

In 2011, Palmer adopted the Large-Scale Solar Ordinance and has since enabled a few large-scale ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) installations, such as the 6 MW facility on the former Palmer Metropolitan Airfield and the 5 MW facility on the Palmer Municipal Landfill. To date, a total of 14 projects, estimated 55 MW generated annually, have been approved. These projects often serve as net metering credits for other municipalities, while the Town of Palmer receives long-term lease payment and tax revenue. These funds are used for the Town’s operating budget and to fund programs that benefit the Town’s residents.

Palmer’s Large-Scale Solar Ordinance was amended in 2019. The more significant changes involve land clearing and habitat impacts. For example, the 2019 amendments address the loss of forest (carbon) sequestration and habitat, habitat restoration, and mitigation for loss of stone walls and/or historic features. The amendments also prohibit the use of herbicides and pesticides, require a diversity of native plant species, and encourage plant mixes that support pollinator species.

Related to its own consumption, the Town has entered into a power purchase agreement with the solar project located at a former orchard off Baptist Hill Road. It also purchases renewable energy credits from a solar project in the Town of Tewksbury.

Community Choice Aggregation

Community choice aggregation (also known as municipal aggregation or green municipal aggregation) is a program leveraged by many cities and towns in Massachusetts, historically for cost savings and price stability purposes. Under an aggregation program, on behalf of residents and businesses on basic service (i.e., non-competitive), a municipality contracts with an electricity supplier for long-term, bulk purchases. In many cases, some aggregations

33 United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2021). *Emission Factors for Greenhouse Gas Inventories*. Retrieved June 17, 2020, from https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2021-04/documents/emission-factors_apr2021.pdf

choose to source electricity in a manner that generates new demand for renewable energy, the development of which lowers greenhouse gas emissions.

As of this writing, the Town of Palmer has not implemented a municipal aggregation program. In order to proceed with such a program, the Town Council would need to authorize the development of an aggregation plan, which can be developed with assistance from an energy broker.

Waste Management

The Palmer Board of Health adopted regulations for town-wide refuse and recycling collection, effective January 1, 2016. These regulations “provide for the systematic collection of refuse and recyclables in order to promote recycling, to comply with state-mandated waste bans and to assist in cost reduction for residential waste disposal by removing those items from the waste stream which can be managed more effectively in other ways.”

Trash and recycling service in the Town is drop-off only, though residents are able to contract directly with private haulers (e.g., Casella, Republic Services). Recycling drop-off is offered on the first Saturday of each month at the Department of Public Works Garage at 1015 Bridge Street. Allowed are basic recyclables, including glass containers, aluminum cans, plastic cans, paper products.

When asked to identify “the most important sustainability issues facing the Town,” 30.5 percent of respondents to this Master Plan’s first public survey selected “reducing community-wide solid waste generation and increasing waste diversion (i.e., reuse, recycling/composting).”

Waste Generation/Recycling Data

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) routinely surveys municipalities statewide on their waste collection programs, including trash and recycling tonnage data, in part to inform its *Solid Waste Master Plan*. The Town of Palmer has not responded to these survey efforts, and therefore, no data on its waste generation and diversion performance is available. The Town is currently working with its partners to collect such data for future reporting.

For informational purposes, Table 9-2 provides trash and recycling tonnage, as well as recycling rates for the municipalities surrounding Palmer that responded to MassDEP’s 2020 survey. Like Palmer, the Towns of Brimfield, Ludlow, and Ware did not report. Notably, Belchertown and Wilbraham have relatively high recycling rates, due in part to the inclusion of yard waste collection.

Table 9-2 Trash and Recycling Data for Reporting Surrounding Communities, 2020

Town	Trash Tonnage	Recyclables Tonnage	2020 Recycling Rate ¹
Belchertown	1,541	2,040	57.0%
Monson	2,544	443	14.8%
Warren	487	314	39.2%
Wilbraham	663	1,359	67.2%

Source: MassDEP (2020)

Notes:

- 1 Recyclables tonnage include "Basic Recyclables," such as cardboard and mixed paper, and "Other Recyclables," such as bulky rigid plastic and scrap metal/white goods.

Ludlow and Monson are the only municipalities surrounding Palmer that offer curbside trash and recycling service, with all other communities offering drop-off service. None of the communities offer food waste service (i.e., composting).

The Towns of Belchertown, Brimfield, Ludlow, Warren, and Wilbraham have Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT)/Save-Money-And-Reduce-Trash (SMART) programs, where residents pay a per-unit fee for disposal of the solid waste that they generate. Other sources funding solid waste programs in the communities around Palmer include property taxes, transfer station access fees, per transfer station per-visit fees, and annual fees.

Among the communities surrounding Palmer, only Monson is a Recycle Smart partner. Recycle Smart is a statewide recycling education initiative administered by MassDEP. The focus of Recycle Smart is to reduce contamination within the recycling stream (i.e., non-recyclables mixed in with recyclables), which drives up recycling costs for cities and towns, slows down the ability of Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) to process recyclable materials, and increases the risk of worker injuries.

Climate Resilience

The Town of Palmer faces multiple challenges related to the impacts of climate change and natural hazard-related weather events. Town officials are aware of the increasingly unpredictable nature of these events along with their growing frequency. It is this awareness, along with hard evidence provided by past disruptive dangerous events (e.g., the unusually early October snowstorm of 2011 and Hurricane Irene, also of 2011) that is motivating the Town to build community resilience.

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program

In 2018, Palmer received a planning grant from the MVP program, administered by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA). Through this planning grant, the Town led a Community Resiliency Building (CRB) workshop, which convened Town elected officials and community stakeholders to characterize hazards, identify existing vulnerabilities and strengths, and identify/prioritize resilience strategies.

During the workshop, participants identified severe weather (including snow, ice, blizzard, and wind), hurricane/tropical storms, flooding (including riverine, stormwater, and/or

culvert-based), and extreme temperatures as the climate hazards most impactful to the Town. Related to these hazards and climate hazards more broadly, Table 9-3 lists the areas of concern identified as they pertain to the Town’s infrastructural, environmental, and social components.

Table 9-3 Community Resilience Building Workshop—Areas of Concern

Infrastructural	Environmental	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culverts • Bridges • Dams • Sewer system • Private wells • Stormwater system • Critical facilities in floodplain (e.g., DPW building) • Decentralized fire and water districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The four rivers and buffer zones • Wetlands and water bodies • Forest coverage • Invasive species • Cold water fisheries and fish hatcheries • Water supply and quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public facilities (i.e., school, etc.) • Low income and senior housing communities • Town-public communication systems • High prevalence of vulnerable populations (including elderly, low income, disabled or handicapped)

Some of the strengths and assets that were discussed during the workshop and that will assist Palmer in preparing for climate change and building community resilience include:

- ▶ The Town’s abundant conservation lands, trails, and waterbodies that foster a local recreational economy.
- ▶ Commitment to reducing municipal energy use.
- ▶ The Baystate Wing Hospital, located in Depot Village, which provides healthcare, community benefits, and jobs to residents.
- ▶ The Swift River Greenbelt conservation project.
- ▶ A microgrid feasibility study by Thorndike Energy to leverage Palmer’s existing solar and hydropower assets.
- ▶ The existing railroads (for economic and cultural opportunities).

The CRB workshop culminated in the identification and prioritization of more than 65 actions intended to improve community resilience to the impacts of climate change. In their identification, workshop participants recognized the importance of collaborating with neighboring municipalities, regional partners, and state agencies for effective action implementation. The top recommendations identified for the Town of Palmer include (presented in no specific order):

- ▶ Conduct a town-wide inventory of roadways, culverts, bridges, and other transportation and stormwater infrastructure to assess condition, identify vulnerable infrastructure in need of maintenance, repair, or replacement, and prioritize projects for investment.
- ▶ Improve communication to the public.
- ▶ Conduct a feasibility study for relocating the Department of Public Works Garage out of the floodplain; include analysis of costs, potential locations, and grant opportunities.

- ▶ Prioritize and implement infrastructure repairs and upgrades to Route 20 to alleviate impacts from flooding.
- ▶ Establish protected status of King's Brook Area.
- ▶ The Department of Public Works and Tree Warden should develop and implement a tree management plan.
- ▶ Identify strategies and move forward with drinking water supply protection.
- ▶ Establish a wood bank for use by low-income residents, supplied by timber from Town-owned downed trees and tree limbs.
- ▶ Establish emergency shelter for the homeless and develop an emergency plan.
- ▶ Develop a stormwater infrastructure management plan, identify project funding, and prioritize nature-based solutions in future stormwater projects.

A comprehensive list of final recommendations, organized by level of priority (i.e., low, medium, and high) is provided in the Town's *Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Community Resiliency Building Workshop – Summary of Findings* report. This report can be accessed through the MVP program website: <https://www.mass.gov/municipal-vulnerability-preparedness-mvp-program>.

In addition to partially funding this Master Plan, Palmer received an MVP Action Grant (FY2020) to inventory and assess Town culverts according to the North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative standards for aquatic and terrestrial passage. This project also includes permitting, development of construction documents, and construction of the Route 181 culvert redesign to upgrade the crossing to meet State stream crossing standards, and to address stormwater quality and flow concerns. This grant award was provided in the amount of \$26,000.

Hazard Mitigation Plan

Palmer's Hazard Mitigation Plan was first adopted in 2010 and last updated in 2016. These iterations were supported by the Town's Hazard Mitigation Committee, with representation from the Emergency Management Director, Assistant Town Manager, Town Planner, Conservation Agent, Palmer Fire and Rescue, and the Director of the Department of Public Works. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires communities to update their pre-disaster mitigation plan every five years as a condition for mitigation funding, including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program (FMA), and the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program (PDM). The Town's current Hazard Mitigation Plan Update is set to expire on December 20, 2021.

The 2016 Hazard Mitigation Plan Update describes the natural hazards to which the Town is most susceptible. It also provides Palmer's capabilities to reduce long-term hazard vulnerabilities and an inventory of critical facilities and resources and their vulnerabilities to the identified hazards. Mitigation strategies were identified and prioritized for implementation. The high priority strategies identified in the 2016 Hazard Mitigation Plan Update include:

- ▶ Revise hazardous materials definitions in Water Supply Protection District zoning for clarification, using DEP state model.
- ▶ Increase enforcement of burning regulations, having fines in place for offenders.
- ▶ Update priority list of culvert replacements and other construction projects to effectively manage flooding.

This document is one of the few key plans recently developed in Palmer with consideration of climate change projections and potential impacts. The 2016 Hazard Mitigation Plan Update notes higher probability of future events related to general flooding, severe snow storms/ice storms, hurricanes, and extreme temperatures due to climate change. Climate change was also identified as a contributor to increased wind damage and new pest types, which along with extreme temperature could increase the risk of wildfires.

Goals and Actions

Goal 1. Consistent with the State's commitment to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, work to eliminate municipal as well as community-wide greenhouse gas emissions.

Upgrading Palmer's built environment, and shifting the energy used to power these structures and related activities to cleaner, renewable sources will be essential to eliminating the Town's greenhouse gas contributions and mitigating the potential impacts of climate change.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 Create a Municipal Aggregation (also known as Community Choice Aggregation), which can be used to procure a competitive supply of electricity as well as switch everyone in Palmer who is on basic service over to cleaner energy. Explore a regional collaboration, as appropriate.
- 1.2 Participate in and promote the State's Solarize Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) incentive program, along with other renewable energy incentive programs, to increase solar development in Palmer consistent with the community's desires and needs, as well as to install solar plus storage on Town-owned facilities.
 - 1.2.1 Engage the School Department to develop a solar photovoltaic demonstration project to educate both students and the larger community on the benefits of solar energy.
- 1.3 Perform professional energy audits or assessments at all municipal buildings to identify measures that would make them operate more efficiently. Such assessments should be performed on a regular basis – at least every 10 years.

- 1.4 In coordination with SCC 1.3, where applicable, perform deep energy retrofits (e.g., upgrading mechanical systems, lighting systems, and appliances; insulating walls, roofs, crawlspaces, and foundations; upgrading HVAC and plumbing; replacing windows; and air sealing) at existing municipal facilities. The installation of renewable energy systems and the electrification (i.e., heat pumps) of building systems should be pursued where feasible.
- 1.5 Continue to pursue and obtain funding for energy efficiency projects and clean energy solutions through the State's Green Communities Grant Program.
- 1.6 Work with regional jurisdictions on the planning of a new regional Wastewater Treatment Facility, and in doing so, advocate for the integration of a sludge-to-energy system.
- 1.7 Perform a municipal fleet vehicle assessment to ensure the Town has the right vehicles necessary to achieve its mission based on current and projected conditions, as well as to define a replacement schedule that focuses on the procurement of electric or other alternative fuel vehicles.
- 1.8 Conduct educational outreach (e.g., fairs) to share information on residential energy efficiency and home weatherization programs, concentrating on those that provide financial and technical support to low-income and elderly households (e.g., Mass Save – HEAT Loan Program, Residential and Small-Scale Ground-Source Heat Pump Rebate Program, LEAN Multifamily).
 - 1.8.1 Leverage the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center's Solarize and HeatSmart Tool Kit, which provides communities with the information necessary to create a local clean energy adoption program.
- 1.9 Explore opportunities to provide locally administered financial incentives for energy efficiency improvements for the commercial, industrial, and residential sectors, such as the establishment of an Energy Revolving Loan (re: the Property Assessed Clean Energy [PACE] model).
- 1.10 Evaluate the potential for hiring a dedicated Energy Coordinator, or supplementing municipal staff resources with external resources, for the facilitation and management of local energy conservation and efficiency initiatives.
- 1.11 Prepare formal municipal and community-scale greenhouse gas emissions inventories to understand the largest sources of emissions and greatest opportunities for reduction.
- 1.12 For all new construction and major renovations of Town-owned facilities and infrastructure, ensure they are certifiable by a third-party green building rating system (e.g., Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design [LEED], WELL, Envision) as applicable. Require all Town-owned facilities to have full electrification, where feasible, and strive for net-zero energy buildings.

Goal 2. Better manage waste generated from Town operations and community activities, and reduce—consistent with state goals—associated waste to landfill or incineration.

Recommended Actions

- 2.1 Explore enhancements to and the expansion of the Town's waste management services, including recycling and composting. Engage regional partners as advantageous to the Town.
- 2.2 Strive to improve the recycling stream in Palmer by engaging the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and becoming a Recycle Smart Partner, and administering an associated educational program.
- 2.3 Work with partners to advance a formal means of tracking municipal solid waste generation and material diversion in Palmer.

Goal 3. Prepare and protect local businesses and residents from the implications of climate change.

Ensure that all Palmer businesses and residents, especially vulnerable populations, are prepared for and can recover quickly from potential climate-related disasters.

Recommended Actions

- 3.1 Continue to provide training for Town staff and board/committee members on climate-related public health threats, impacts, and response, especially related to vulnerable populations.
- 3.2 Identify and develop transportation options and support for vulnerable residents, including communication strategies and resource supplies (food, water, necessities), in case of disruptions in transportation, mail, and/or federal assistance programs, such as WIC and SNAP.
- 3.3 In coordination with ED 2.4, find ways to expand broadband and Wi-Fi access throughout Palmer, particularly in limited-access and low-income areas, to ensure reliable access to information and Town-wide communications.
- 3.4 Explore funding or other programming to provide small solar and battery storage systems to support individuals with in-home health care devices and those in need of essential services, such as refrigeration of medications.
- 3.5 Seek the establishment of an emergency shelter, potentially at local school buildings.
- 3.6 Update the Town's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and make it available to the public, including by digital means.
- 3.7 Incorporate potential climate change impacts into the Town's emergency management and response planning, as well as hazard mitigation planning.

- 3.8 Consistent with the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program, continue to engage the community in learning about how climate change is affecting the Town and ideas for how to address it.
- 3.9 Engage partners in the provision of public community emergency preparedness training workshops for residents (e.g., what to do under various climate impact scenarios and emergencies, how to support vulnerable neighbors, etc.).
- 3.10 Develop an educational program for local businesses to raise awareness of the potential climate change impacts facing Palmer, as well as to share information on emergency preparedness measures and resource distribution.
- 3.11 Engage local businesses within Federal Emergency Management Agency-defined Flood Hazard Areas (e.g., Sherwood Lumber Corporation, Maple Leaf Distribution Services) on climate preparedness and collaborate on adaptation measures to ensure their operations are able to remain in Palmer for the long-term.
- 3.12 Incorporate climate hazard considerations (e.g., flooding) into the Town's land use regulations to ensure future development is not unnecessarily put at risk for damage.
 - 3.12.1 Evaluate the potential need for the floodplain district to incorporate projected flood conditions.
- 3.13 Review the Town's Wetlands Bylaws to incorporate climate change considerations related to potential habitat loss/degradation, flood storage, etc.
- 3.14 Promote the incorporation of green infrastructure measures/best practices into all future construction projects, new and major renovations.

Goal 4. Continually assess the implications of potential climate change impacts and strengthen adaptive capacity of the Town's facilities and infrastructure.

Building upon previous efforts, including the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program, implement measures to ensure critical facilities and infrastructure are resilient, adaptive, and redundant so that they can withstand climate stressors and the Town can recover quickly during extreme events.

Recommended Actions

- 4.1 Conduct a Town-wide inventory of local roadways (especially official evacuation routes), culverts, bridges, and other transportation and stormwater infrastructure to assess condition; identify vulnerable infrastructure in need of maintenance, repair, or replacement; and prioritize projects for investment. This includes prioritizing and implementing repairs and upgrades to Route 20 to alleviate impacts from flooding.
- 4.2 Identify funding opportunities for bridge repair. All bridges in Palmer have spans greater than 25 feet, and therefore, are ineligible for MassDOT's Small Bridge Grant Program.

- 4.3 Continue to assess the feasibility, including costs, potential locations, and funding opportunities, for the relocation of the Department of Public Works building out of the floodplain.
- 4.4 Perform an assessment of the Wastewater Treatment Plant, its vulnerabilities and adaptive capacity based on future storm events and flood projections.
 - 4.4.1 In coordination with SCC 1.6, conduct a feasibility study, including analysis of costs, potential locations, and funding opportunities, for hardening or relocating the Wastewater Treatment Plant as appropriate.
- 4.5 Evaluate and acquire additional backup power capacity (e.g., generators, distributed/renewable energy sources) across the Town's critical facilities and emergency shelters.
- 4.6 In coordination with SCC 3.6, engage Local Emergency Planning Committee in frequent discussions about potential climate change impacts and their implications on Palmer's critical facilities and infrastructure.
- 4.7 Develop guidelines and/or design recommendations for new public infrastructure to consider increased storm frequency and enhancing flood resiliency.
- 4.8 Assess existing stormwater infrastructure and improve its condition based on future storm events and flood projections.
- 4.9 Continue to pursue annual Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Action Grants through the State, potentially in collaboration with regional entities to maximize resources and effects.
- 4.10 Continue to implement the remaining high priority actions, as well as other actions as feasible and reasonable, identified as part of the Town's Community Resilience Building Workshop, funded under the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Planning program.

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10

Public Health

This chapter summarizes baseline conditions that contribute to the health of the residents of the Town of Palmer, as well as presents goals and actions to address some of their health concerns and health needs. A more detailed analysis is included in the Health Addendum which is included in Appendix A. The Health Addendum provides research and data analysis around the aspects of Palmer's built and social environments that impact the health outcomes of people who live and work in the Town. It was developed in parallel with this Master Plan as part of the Fiscal Year 2021 Work Plan for the Palmer Mass in Motion program, funded through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Mass in Motion promotes active living and healthy eating to reduce the rates of chronic disease, especially among marginalized populations that are at greater risk for poor health outcomes. These can include people living in poverty, older adults, people with disabilities, those whose first language is not English, and children under 18 who live in single parent households.

Community Engagement

Staff from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) participated in four out of the seven public forums incorporated into the engagement process for this Master Plan. Forums in which health considerations were highlighted included Public Forum #4: Transportation and Mobility; Public Forum #5: Housing; Public Forum #6: Sustainability and Climate Change; and Public Forum #7: Natural Resources and Open Space. In addition, a separate forum on the Health Addendum was held in January 2021, with a focus on healthy aging and access to healthy food.

A Healthy Palmer Survey was administered online through the Palmer Master Plan website and was advertised on several Town-administered Facebook pages. Paper copies were distributed through the Council on Aging food delivery program to reach elders who were not comfortable with the online format. As an incentive, two Big Y gift cards were offered

through a drawing for anyone who responded to the survey and provided contact information for the drawing. A total of 188 people responded to the survey. The results of this survey have been integrated into this chapter and the complete results can be found in the Health Addendum.

Baseline Conditions

Through an analysis of demographics, a community can begin to gain a broad understanding of the makeup of its population and where higher numbers of people with challenges live. Some of the demographic factors that could lead to challenges to accessing healthy food or places to be active include age, disability, income and poverty status, race and ethnicity, and first language other than English.

Palmer's population is aging, along with the populations of cities and towns across the U.S. and abroad, due to higher life expectancies and declining birth rates. According to projections by the Donahue Institute, residents over 65 are expected to outnumber children under 18 in Palmer before 2025. With age comes increased risk of physical impairments, such as loss of mobility, eyesight or hearing, and increased risk of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. In Palmer, 17 percent of the population has a disability, and 58 percent of people over the age of 75 have a disability (compared to 47 percent in the State).

Palmer is also becoming increasingly diverse. According to *American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates*, the Hispanic/Latinx population is estimated to have increased from being 1.5 percent of the population to 5.3 percent between 2013 and 2019. The Palmer Schools reported an increase in the number of children whose first language is not English and have increased from one half-time teacher of English as a Second Language to two full time teachers over the last two years.

According to 2018 ACS 5-year estimates, 12.5 percent of Palmer's population as a whole is living below poverty level. In the census tract that covers the Three Rivers neighborhood, 23.3 percent of residents are living in poverty. More families with householders who are Latino or Hispanic (of any race) or of two or more races live in poverty in Palmer compared to families with white householders. Families with female heads of households, with no spouse present and with children under 18 are the most likely to be living in poverty in Palmer (23.2 percent), and families with householders over 65 are less likely to live in poverty (2.3 percent). According to data from the Palmer Schools, 46 percent of students are considered Economically Disadvantaged.

Health Concerns and Prioritized Health Needs

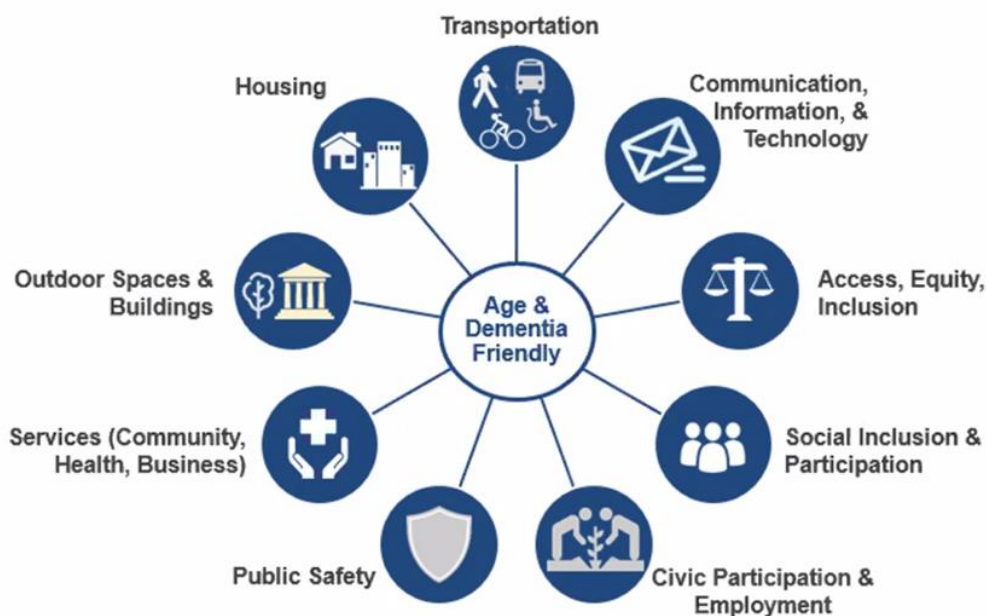
According to the *Community Health Needs Assessment* (2019) for the Baystate Wing Hospital, the primary health concerns for the Baystate Wing Service area include mental health and substance use disorders, infant and perinatal health, Alzheimer's disease, and chronic health conditions including high rates of cancer, diabetes, asthma, and obesity. More children are obese or overweight in Palmer compared to surrounding communities according to the semi-annual report on Body Mass Index screenings in schools statewide.

Prioritized health needs are related to social determinants of health, or those factors in the social or built environments, and behaviors that affect people's health. In the Baystate Wing service area, the areas of need include the social environment, housing, transportation and access to healthy food, physical activity and nutrition, and lack of resources to meet basic needs.

Active Living and Healthy Aging

The Domains of a Livable or Age and Dementia Friendly Community are those elements of the social and built environments that provide opportunities for people of all ages to live long and productive lives. According to results of the Healthy Palmer Survey, the areas that are most challenging for older adults in Palmer are transportation, social isolation, housing and financial security. More survey respondents (38 percent) thought Palmer was fair or poor place to grow old than those who thought Palmer was only a fair or poor place to grow up (29 percent).

Figure 10-1 Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community



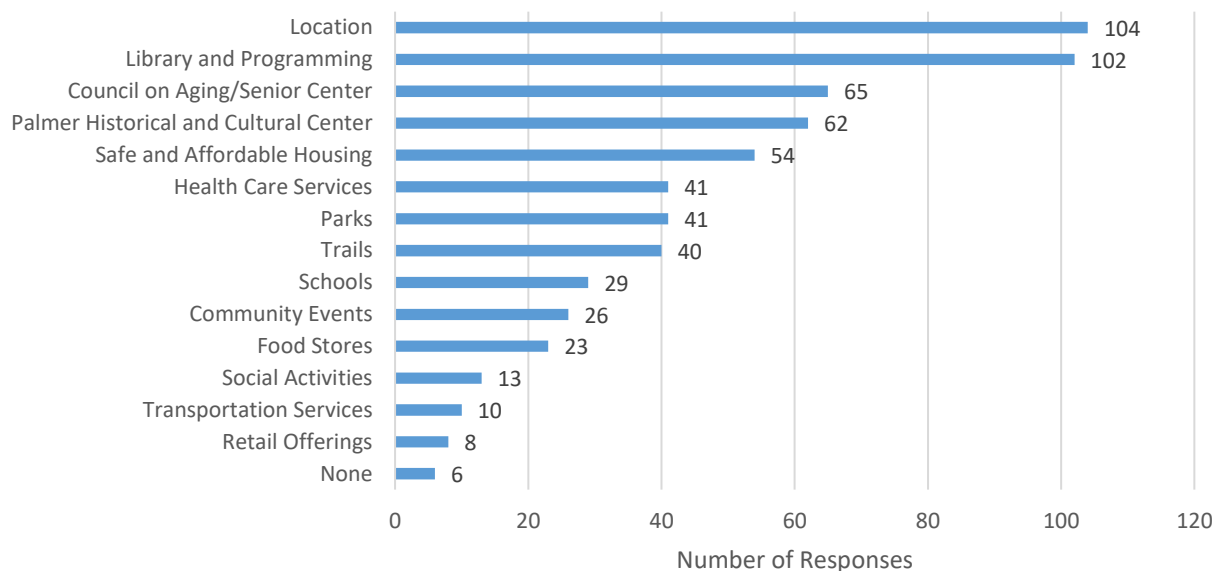
Source: Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative

The Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community affect the livability of the community for people of all ages, so this model is used to examine these domains as they impact the health of all Palmer's residents.

The Healthy Palmer Survey asked residents to check the greatest assets and challenges that exist for older adults living in Palmer. Responses to both questions reflect the importance of places to gather and participate in programs or other social events. The greatest assets for living in Palmer included location (104 responses), the Library and its programming (102), the Senior Center (65), and the Palmer Historical and Cultural Center (62). The greatest challenges for older adults according to the Healthy Palmer Survey are transportation (98) and social isolation (94). During the COVID-19 pandemic, these two factors were particularly

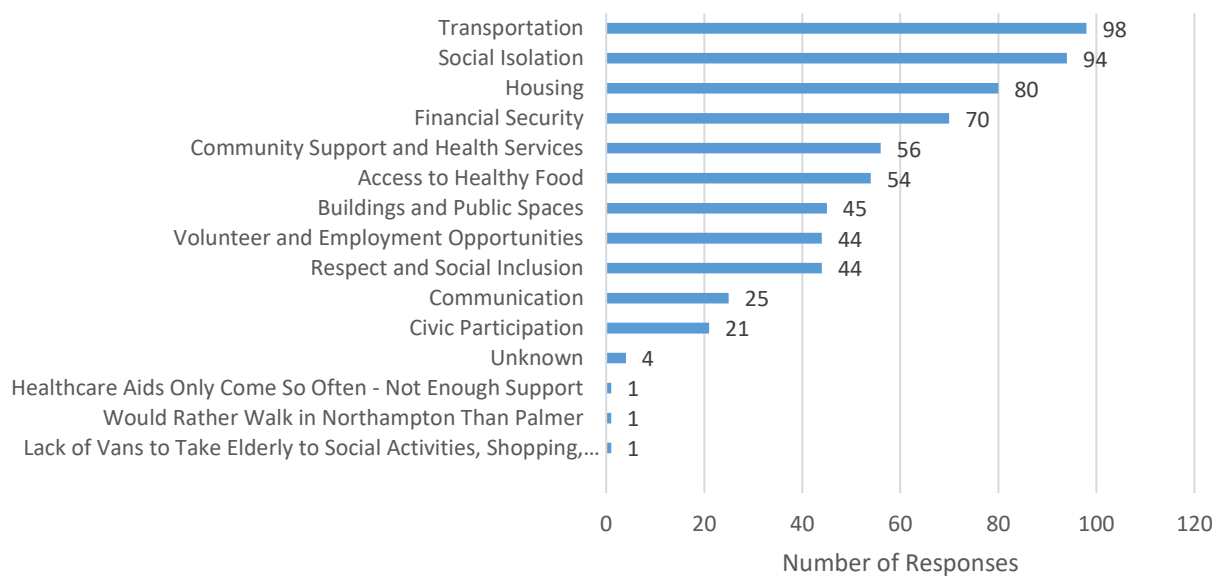
debilitating to some households when transportation services were halted or limited, and people with weaker immune systems were cautioned to stay home to avoid contracting the virus. Housing and financial security were also considered challenges to older adults living in Palmer.

Figure 10-2 Healthy Palmer Survey—Palmer’s Greatest Assets for Older Adults



Source: Healthy Palmer Survey

Figure 10-3 Healthy Palmer Survey—Palmer’s Greatest Challenges for Older Adults



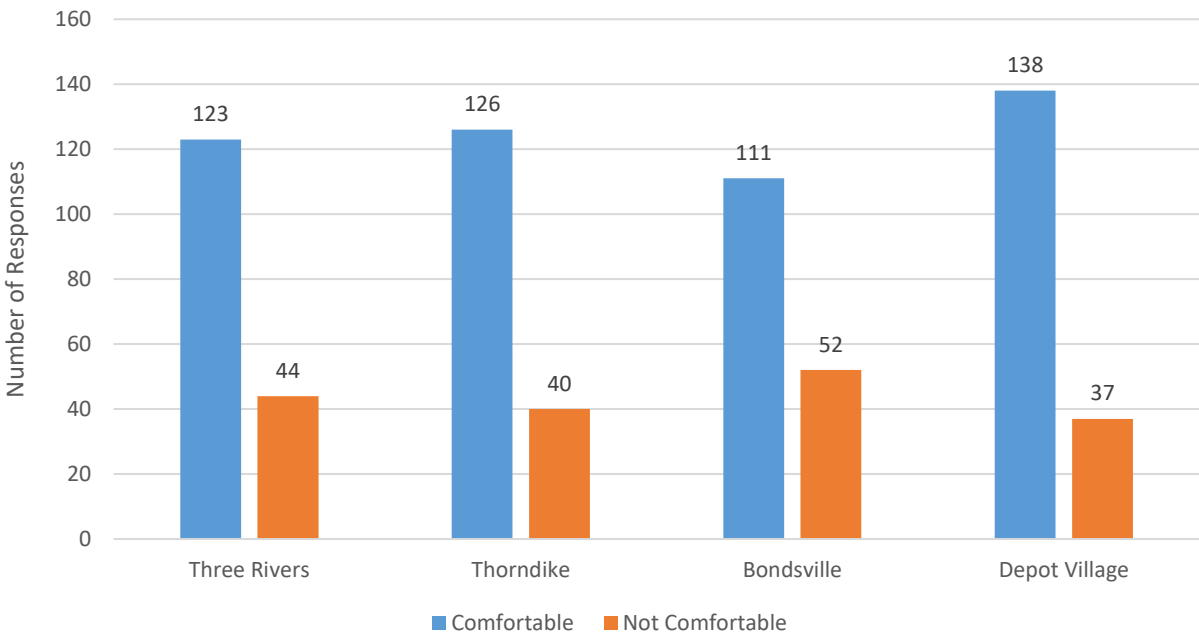
Source: Healthy Palmer Survey

Transportation

As a mostly rural community, access to transportation is a concern for many who live in Palmer. Six percent of residents do not own cars, and many older adults are losing their ability to drive themselves, making transportation services critical for many of the Town’s residents. The Quaboag Connector provides transportation for people to get to work, shopping, and medical appointments. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTa) also offers some fixed routes and on-demand services for seniors and people with disabilities.

The ability for people to walk or bike to get to work or access food can contribute to the health and well-being of Palmer’s residents. Almost one-third of respondents to the Healthy Palmer Survey said that they were not comfortable walking in the Town’s village centers due to lack of shoulders or sidewalks in poor condition, and traffic speeds.

Figure 10-4 Healthy Palmer Survey—Level of Comfort Walking in Palmer’s Village Centers



Source: Healthy Palmer Survey

Short commute times (16 percent of workers had a commute of less than 20 minutes) suggest that biking to work could be a feasible alternative to automobiles for many Palmer residents if safe routes for biking and walking were available. Participants at public forums voiced support for expanding the Mass Central Rail Trail through Palmer. Such a facility could provide a valuable recreational resource for the community.

The Old Mill Pond Elementary School has participated in an audit of walking routes for students through the Safe Routes to School program. This program, administered through the Massachusetts Department of Transportation provides technical assistance through Safe Routes to School coordinators to identify and improve roadways and campus transportation circulation systems (including pick-up and drop-off areas). Participation in the Safe Route to School program could encourage more children to walk to school and would provide the

Town with access to funding for infrastructure improvements through the Safe Routes to School grant programs.

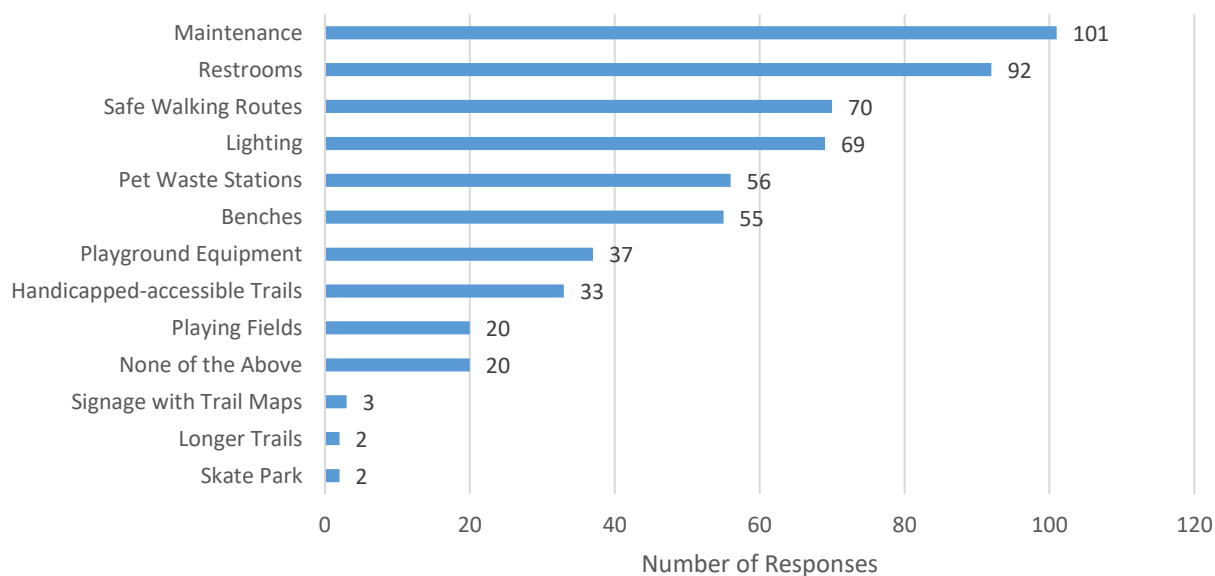
Buildings and Outdoor Spaces

Healthy and livable communities include places to gather both indoors and outside. The pandemic halted programming in some of the public buildings that provide programming and places to gather, enhancing the importance of outdoor spaces for gathering and recreational programs.

The Park Service Density Map, developed through the Mass in Motion program in the Park Access Project in 2019, showed that some higher density housing is more than a half-mile from parks and trails. Reviewing walking and biking routes to parks or trails from these areas could allow people better access to recreational resources without the need for a car or transportation services.

The Park Access Project also showed that several parks in Palmer have been recently renovated and equipped with playground equipment, walkways and benches for people with disabilities. However, sidewalks and curbs located near the parks were not handicapped accessible or were in poor condition. These are areas that could be improved to allow better access to parks by people of all ages who live within walking or rolling distance of the parks. Responses to the Healthy Palmer Survey suggest that better maintenance of parks, public restrooms, safe walking routes and better lighting would encourage people to use parks and trails more frequently. Many respondents also asked for pet waste stations, benches, playground equipment and handicapped accessible trails.

Figure 10-5 Healthy Palmer Survey—Amenities That Would Encourage More Frequent Use of Parks and Trails



Source: Healthy Palmer Survey

Palmer's parks and trails offer opportunities for winter recreational activities such as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and ice skating (on Forest Lake). Promotion and organized programming around winter recreation resources and activities could encourage residents to be more active during winter months. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation's Shared Streets and Spaces grants also offer communities resources for developing outdoor gathering spaces, such as fire pits with benches or covered picnic areas. Planning for additional areas or outdoor activities to promote outdoor recreation in the winter should be included in planning for recreational resources to improve overall health of the community.

The gym in the old Converse School was noted as an important indoor recreational resource for youth basketball leagues and should be maintained in Town control, if possible. The Town may also want to consider exploring joint use agreements with the School Department, so that the public can use gymnasiums and fitness equipment while schools are not in session. Three private gyms are also currently available as indoor recreation resources that are particularly important during winter months.

Public buildings provide spaces for people to congregate indoors and also to access educational and fitness programs. The Library and Senior Center are two such facilities that are important in Palmer, especially to older adults. It is important to ensure that all public and commercial buildings are accessible to people with mobility limitations so that people of all ages and abilities can fully participate in opportunities for social interaction and civic engagement.

Housing

Housing is both a challenge and an asset for older adults living in Palmer according to responses to the Healthy Palmer Survey. While housing is somewhat more affordable in Palmer than in some other communities, there is no housing with supported services for older adults, such as assisted living facilities or full-care nursing homes, and there are very few subsidized units that are handicapped accessible. Many older adults want to downsize from single family homes to apartments or smaller single-story homes that are more affordable and require less maintenance. Providing a greater variety of housing options for older adults could open up larger homes for families as well.

For older adults to age in place, or to continue to live in their own homes as they age, support services may be needed. While not everyone loses their ability to drive at the age of 80, people are more likely to have physical or cognitive limitations as they age making driving less safe. Locating new housing within walking distance of the Village Centers, retail opportunities, and indoor or outdoor spaces that provide opportunities for social gatherings or recreational programming can offer older adults the ability to maintain some independence without the need to own an automobile. Home modifications may also be necessary for people with mobility or visual impairments, as well as assistance with basic tasks such as shoveling snow, cooking or cleaning.

The majority of Palmer's housing stock (69 percent) was built before 1969. Challenges with older housing include outdated heating and cooling systems, poor insulation, design not suited for people with mobility limitations, and prevalence of contaminants, such as

asbestos, lead paint and lead pipes. In Palmer, 74 percent of children ages 9 to 47 months were screened for lead in 2017, and 38 per 1,000 had blood lead levels greater than 5 micrograms per deciliter (ug/dl). The statewide average is 20.3 per 1,000. Careful attention to testing and remediation of lead paint in older units should be considered, especially for families of young children who purchase older homes in Palmer. Older homes may also be more difficult to modify for people with mobility limitations.

Communication and Technology

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the importance of technology and internet connection for employment as well as for participation in all aspects of the community, from public meetings to social programs and medical appointments. The pandemic also highlighted the divide between those who have the technology, internet service, and knowledge of how to use this technology and those who do not. In Palmer, age presents the greatest disparities between households who have internet subscriptions and own computers. Whereas 94.6 percent of children under 18 had internet subscriptions, only 63.8 percent of adults 65 and older had internet, and more than 28 percent of adults over 65 do not own a computer according to the 2018 ACS 5-year estimates.

Many councils on aging in the PVPC region and statewide have established tablet or laptop loan programs accompanied by training on how to use the equipment and assistance in obtaining low-cost internet. Should access to technology continue to be a barrier for residents to access health care or other services after the pandemic, the Palmer Council on Aging/Senior Center may want to consider similar programs.

Health Care, Social and Community Services

The Town provides social and health services through Council on Aging and Senior Center, and the Veterans Services Department. The Palmer Senior Center provides wellness check calls for home-bound seniors and expanded this service during the COVID-19 pandemic when many more seniors were confined to their homes. The Senior Center also offers health screenings, a fall prevention program, fitness classes, and hearing aid checks in addition to the transportation and meal services noted elsewhere in this section.

The Veterans Services Department in Palmer assists veterans in the community to learn about and apply for benefits including housing, fuel assistance, financial assistance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other state and federal programs. The Brookfield Institute, located in Brookfield, also provides services for veterans including food delivery to families of veterans during the pandemic.

The mission of the Palmer Health Department and Board of Health is to “educate, promote, improve and protect the health and well-being of the citizens of Palmer.” The Board of Health and Palmer Health Department are responsible for issuing permits for food establishments, bodywork businesses, private wells, tobacco sales, and septic systems; educating the public about infectious diseases carried by ticks and mosquitos; and inspecting residential properties to ensure the health and safety of occupants.

Baystate Wing Hospital, located on Wright Street, offers a broad range of medical, surgical and psychiatric services. The Emergency Department is open 24 hours/day and includes a critical care unit and primary stroke center. Inpatient and outpatient behavioral health and addiction treatment services are offered through the Griswold Behavioral Health Center and the Center for Geriatric Psychiatry. The closure of the Baystate Mary Lane hospital in Ware may bring additional patients and employment opportunities to the Baystate Wing Hospital, and also the need for transportation services for Ware residents to access health care services in Palmer.

Employment and Civic Engagement

Finding meaningful employment supports financial stability and one's ability to support themselves and their families and, for older adults, can supply a form of social engagement and mental stimulation that can lead to longer and more fulfilling lives. As the population gets older, employment that offers part-time hours and that are not physically strenuous could support many older adults who cannot survive on social security income.

Older adults are valuable members of the community and can offer years of knowledge and experience gained from careers and time spent in the community. As Palmer plans for the future, it is important to include older adults in planning processes to understand the challenges that they face. Offering orientation for volunteer positions or local boards and committees, providing transportation, or hours that are manageable for older people could ensure participation by people in their later years.

Access to Healthy Food

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Generally, this translates into a lack of available financial resources for food at a household level.

People of all ages experiencing food insecurity may be at increased risk for multiple health risks. Among food insecure populations, studies have found higher rates of diabetes in adults and obesity in adults and children. Children without reliable access to nutritious food also face increased risk of developmental problems and mental health. The U.S. counties with the highest rates of food insecurity tend to have a higher share of people with a disability, diabetes, or obesity.

Out of 188 Healthy Palmer Survey respondents, over 50 percent said that they were not able to get the food they wanted or needed at some point in the previous 12 months. Approximately one-third of respondents said that they experienced concern about shopping during the pandemic, and 26 percent said that the cost of food was an issue. Others said that the food that they wanted was not available at local stores. Many survey respondents said that they experienced food insecurity before the pandemic as well as during the shutdown.

Food Retail Options

Palmer hosts one full-service grocery store (the Big Y), a couple of discount department stores (Ocean State Job Lot and Dollar General), and several convenience and neighborhood corner stores. The majority of respondents to the Healthy Palmer Survey said that they got food at a grocery store, and almost half went to discount department stores. Smaller numbers of respondents (27) also said that they purchased foods at warehouse stores (such as Costco), or local convenience stores (10); and some said that they used food delivery services (6) or Amazon (1). A corner store survey conducted for the 2018 Mobile Market Feasibility Study conducted through the Mass in Motion program for Palmer and surrounding towns found that few corner stores offer fresh produce or any perishable food items.

Healthy Palmer Survey respondents expressed interest in having a Farmers Market in the Town. While a privately owned farm stand operates in warmer months, it is not currently able to accept SNAP (EBT cards) or the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) that matches SNAP dollars for locally grown produce or seedlings from some farms or farmers markets—for payment of the produce offered. A farm located in Hampden, D&R Farms, does accept the HIP benefits that are automatically available to all SNAP recipients and is willing to deliver farm shares to a location for pick-up in Palmer. More education about the HIP program and helping families access SNAP benefits could help many families who are food insecure. Working with neighborhood stores to encourage them to carry healthier food options could also provide better access to healthy food for households that do not have access to cars.

Food Production

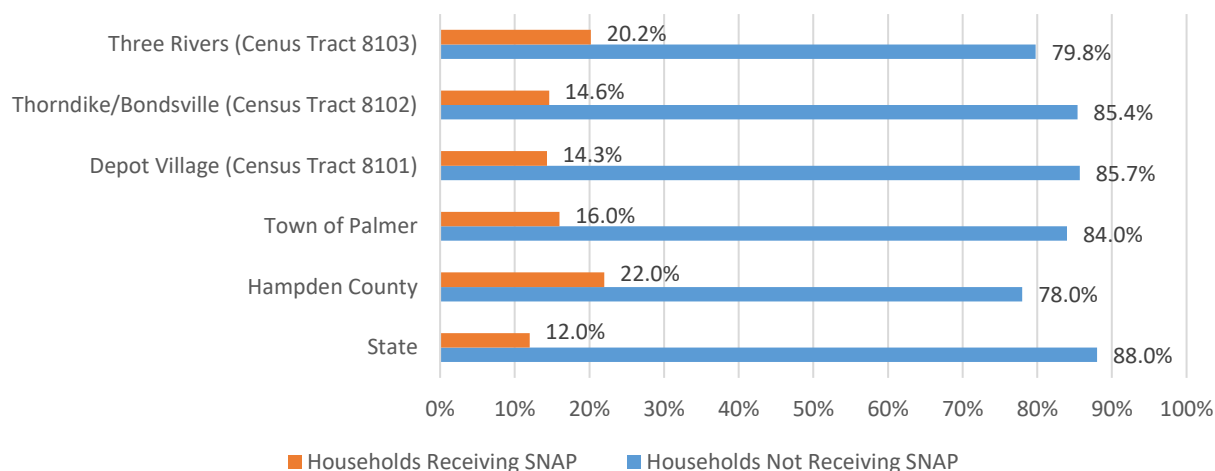
There are no active farms in Palmer that grow fresh fruits and vegetables for sale, and only one farm, the Strzemienski Farm on Route 181, has land preserved through the State's Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program. The Strzemienskis used to offer plots for community groups and individuals to garden, but management of the plots and invasive species caused them to stop this practice. There is interest in starting up community gardens again on Town-owned property, with 87 percent of Healthy Palmer Survey respondents in favor of the Town building community gardens. Most survey respondents said that community gardens should be built in Depot Village or Three Rivers (38 percent each). Management of community gardens has been a barrier to the Town moving forward with building them as Town staff do not currently have the capacity to manage a community garden in addition to their other responsibilities.

The Town of Palmer's Zoning Ordinance does not prohibit any horticultural food production or gardening for personal use in any zoning district, and some agricultural uses (e.g., agriculture, floriculture, vita culture, aquaculture and silviculture; temporary greenhouses or retail stands for sale of agricultural products; and non-commercial forestry and growing of all vegetables) are specifically listed as permitted uses in all residential and business districts. Palmer's Zoning Ordinance does not include a Right to Farm provision, which would "encourage the pursuit of agriculture, promote agriculture-based economic opportunities, and protect farmlands within the town by allowing agricultural uses and related activities to function with minimal conflict with abutters and town agencies." Adoption of such an ordinance could signify the Town's support for agricultural uses.

Food Assistance Locations and Programs

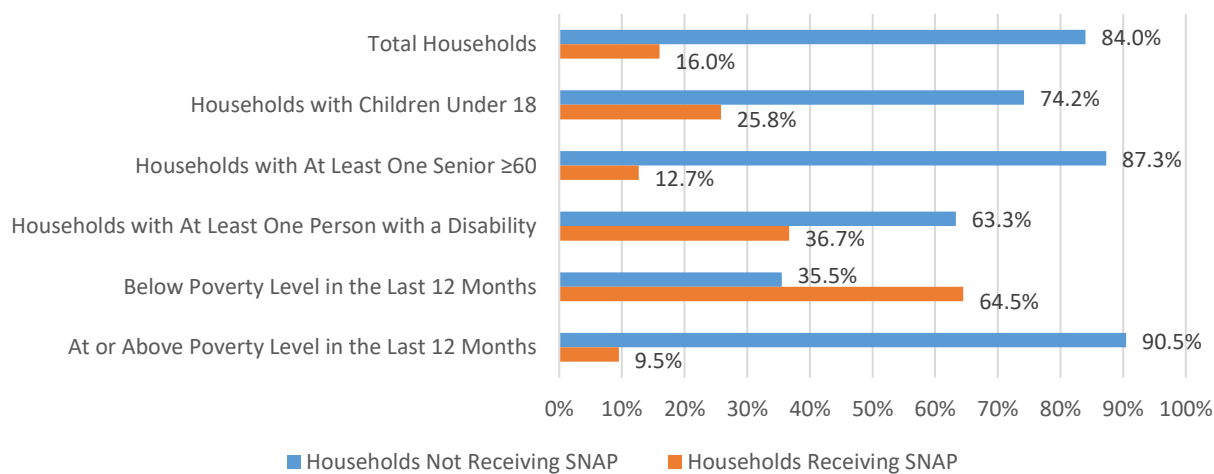
Government programs such as SNAP (or EBT cards) provide financial assistance to expand the buying power of low-income individuals and families and have been shown to improve long-term health outcomes for recipients, particularly women. However, not all people who are eligible for SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs participate. The percentage of households that are signed up to receive SNAP is 16 percent town-wide, with the most households living in the census tract that includes Three Rivers (20.2 percent). The total number of households receiving SNAP in Palmer is approximately 781, and 369 of those households were living below poverty level in the last 12 months. However, according to census data, there were 203 households or 35.5 percent of households living below poverty who did not receive SNAP benefits and would likely qualify for the program.

Figure 10-6 Percent of Palmer Households Receiving SNAP Benefits



Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 10-7 Percent of Palmer Households Receiving SNAP Benefits by Characteristics



Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The HIP program is a Massachusetts based food assistance program that matches the amount of funding that households receive through the SNAP program funding for the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables from authorized vendors. The program is available for use at farmers markets, farm stores, farms stands, and mobile markets that have been accepted into the program and have the card readers that are required for purchase through the HIP program. Anyone with a SNAP card (although not the special pandemic-EBT cards that were issued to many families who had not previously used SNAP) is automatically enrolled in the HIP program. Data obtained through the Department of Transitional Assistance indicates that the program is vastly underutilized. In Palmer, less than 4 percent of households that used SNAP used their HIP benefits in the busiest produce months in 2019. The lack of HIP vendors in Palmer and the complexities of the program may be some barriers that prevent Palmer residents from benefitting from this program.

Free food for families in need is distributed primarily through Palmer Food Share, Inc. with supplies from the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and supplemented through donations from neighborhood stores and cash contributions. The Second Congregational Church also offers a smaller food pantry that will supply food for a couple of days for people who need it. During the pandemic, the Palmer Schools became a central distribution point for meals to families with children who would normally have meals at school during the week. The schools distributed over 10,000 meals during the summer of 2020, operating five days a week and at three different locations. The Senior Center, when open, also offers meals for seniors and a “brown bag” food distribution program supplied by the Food Bank. The Senior Center used their vans to deliver food during the pandemic and increased the delivery of meals on wheels.

Schools’ Roles in Healthy Food Access

The Palmer Schools provide an important food source for many children, and an opportunity for education about nutrition and growing food. The Old Mill Pond Elementary School has a school garden, and makes an effort to source local produce for its nutrition program. A more formalized policy around sourcing local food and offering a curriculum around growing and eating nutritional food could be a good way to introduce many families to nutritious diets.

Public Health Goals and Actions

Goal 1. Promote active living and healthy aging.

Create a welcoming culture for people of all ages by becoming an Age and Dementia Friendly Community.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 Change the narrative about the aging population to celebrate the wisdom, skills, talents and lived experience, both personal and professional, of older adults and the contributions that they have made to the community.

- 1.2 Ensure that older adults, people with disabilities, and other marginalized populations are included in planning for improvements to the social and built environments in Palmer.

Goal 2. Ensure transportation services support the needs of all Palmer residents.

Ensure that all residents have access to transportation services from fixed route PVRTA buses to supported transportation services for people with disabilities.

Recommended Actions

- 2.1 Evaluate the needs of older adults and people with disabilities annually to ensure that they know about the transportation services available to them and that the services meet their needs in terms of travel destinations and support.

Goal 3: Provide safe walking and biking routes for people of all ages and abilities.

Provide improvements to pedestrian infrastructure including sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, shoulders on rural roads, and traffic calming measures to promote a safe environment for pedestrians.

Recommended Actions

- 3.1 Evaluate walking and biking routes between areas of dense residential development and retail and employment centers. Engage residents in walk audits to educate them on the elements of safe pedestrian infrastructure and to involve them in planning for improvements.

Goal 4. Provide recreation buildings and outdoor spaces that are safe and accessible for all users.

Ensure access to recreational resources for all residents in all seasons.

Recommended Actions

- 4.1 Explore the development of Shared Use Agreements with the Palmer Schools to allow community use of recreation and fitness facilities after school hours.
- 4.2 Improve accessibility in and around parks through sidewalk maintenance and improvements; visible crosswalks, curb ramps and detectable warning strips at intersections; lighting; and adding benches and shaded rest areas.
- 4.3 Add accessible public restrooms to identified recreation areas to encourage more use.
- 4.4 Engage older adults and people with disabilities in the design for reconstruction of parks and recreation facilities.

- 4.5 Develop outdoor recreational programming for residents of all age groups including older adults.
- 4.6 Develop and promote places for winter outdoor recreation.

Goal 5. Make communications and technology resources available and affordable.

Ensure all residents have access to technology and the ability to use it. Encourage greater access to affordable high-speed internet, create pathways of access to equipment and training for people on how to use these devices to ensure greater connectivity among all members of the community.

Recommended Actions

- 5.1 Study the feasibility of a program to loan tablets or laptops to households that do not currently own computers, and a system for training and connecting all households to affordable internet service.
- 5.2 Work with service providers to ensure that discounted internet options are available to older adults and low-income households and promote awareness of these programs.

Goal 6. Develop a communications plan for all Town information and events.

Use multiple formats and outlets so that announcements and events are broadcast through multiple modes for people who may not have or use internet.

Recommended Actions

- 6.1 Promote installation of kiosks or community boards in neighborhoods (new and existing) as well as all communication resources (including websites and social media) that can be used by the town to post information about community resources, upcoming events, etc. Announcements should be printed in large type for those who are visually impaired.

Goal 7. Provide all residents with opportunities for employment and civic engagement.

Provide opportunities for older adults to work and become engaged in the community. Celebrate the experience of working and living in the community that long-time residents and older adults can offer.

Recommended Actions

- 7.1 Establish a mentoring program between older adults and prospective entrepreneurs to celebrate the knowledge and experience that older adults bring to the community, and to provide opportunities for intergenerational learning.

- 7.2 Ensure that people of all ages have access to employment opportunities through expanded transportation services and partnerships between the COA and local businesses.

Goal 8. Promote food security.

Ensure that Palmer Residents have more affordable and healthy food options. Increase food retail options that are affordable, healthy, and include locally produced food.

Recommended Actions

- 8.1 Reinststate a Farmers Market or a farm stand that accepts SNAP, HIP and WIC benefits, or otherwise incentivizes purchase of healthy foods.
- 8.2 Launch a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in cooperation CISA and area farms with monthly shares available through HIP and delivery location(s) in Palmer.
- 8.3 Research eligible grant and loan programs to assist local corner stores in obtaining equipment and resources needed to provide fresh local food options.
- 8.4 Explore partnering with surrounding communities to provide a Mobile Food Market for sale of fresh local produce.

Goal 9. Ensure that municipal planning, design and development increases access to healthy food for all residents.

Identify opportunities for future food retail development and support increased healthy food availability at existing food stores, particularly in areas with limited healthy food availability.

Recommended Actions

- 9.1 Explore mechanisms for adding healthy food retail provisions to local development processes through community benefits agreements, density bonuses, tax incentive packages or similar tools.
- 9.2 Prioritize transportation infrastructure and services to ensure access to food retail and assistance programs.
- 9.3 Include access to food retail options in prioritization of Complete Streets, public transit, and highway and sidewalk maintenance projects.
- 9.4 Ensure that Site Plan Review and Special Permit Review facilitate increased food access by requiring safe and easy access by pedestrians, bicyclists, people in wheelchairs, public transit users and automobiles.

Goal 10. Enable all residents to have access to and receipt of food assistance resources.

Support Palmer residents having access to food assistance resources that increase food security and improve health. Ensure that all eligible residents receive food assistance resources and that residents in need know how and where to access emergency food resources.

Recommended Actions

- 10.1 Partner with the Department of Transitional Assistance, health care providers, the Behavioral Health Network, and other organizations that assist with public benefit programs to ensure that all residents who qualify for SNAP and other food assistance programs are aware of the resources and how to apply for enrollment.
- 10.2 Provide information on signing up for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and how to use the Healthy Incentive Program (HIP) on Town websites and in all departments that offer public assistance programs.
- 10.3 Advocate for a stop by the Food Bank Mobile bus in Palmer.
- 10.4 Increase visibility of all emergency food resources (Palmer Food Share, Inc.; Second Congregational Church, Senior Center, School) in Palmer through Town website and printed resource guides. Print flyers and resources in large print for older adults and others with vision impairments.
- 10.5 Publicize eligibility criteria for Brown Bag pickup and other food assistance resources.

Goal 11. Encourage local food production through agricultural opportunities and incentives.

Municipal planning, policy and programs promote opportunities for farmers and residents to grow food in Palmer. Provide incentives and opportunities for commercial agriculture and community gardening.

Recommended Actions

- 11.1 Identify at least one Community Garden site and seek funding for construction and management.]
- 11.2 Explore interest in making Palmer a Right to Farm community to signify the importance of local agriculture to the local economy and health of the community.
- 11.3 Promote the development of home-based gardens through training programs on soil testing, building raised beds, home garden practices and food safety, and best practices for keeping chickens.
- 11.4 Explore the implications of promoting donations of excess produce from home gardeners to food pantries throughout summer months.

- 11.5 Design community gardens to include well-constructed compost facilities for garden waste. [also mentioned in Open Space]
- 11.6 Continue to promote home based composting efforts through training on composting and programs that offer discounted compost bins.

Goal 12. Support the Palmer Schools in continuing efforts to provide students with nutritious meals and snacks.

Support the Palmer Schools in the development of an evidence-based School Wellness Policy that includes provisions for nutritious school meals and snacks and support establishing school gardens at all schools and integrate gardening into the school science, health and other curricula.

Recommended Actions

- 12.1 Engage the School Committee, food service providers, parents, and students to provide information and review the current School Wellness Policy and promote revisions where needed.
- 12.2 Further nutritional goals in the School Wellness Policy for school meals and provisions for including locally grown fresh food in school meal and snack programs where feasible.
- 12.3 Ensure that the Palmer School Wellness Policy promotes consumption of water including providing bottle filling stations and encourage students to carry refillable drinking water bottles in school.
- 12.4 Support school gardening already established at Old Mill Pond School and assess the feasibility of integrating gardening and nutrition education into the science and/or health curriculum.
- 12.5 Assess the feasibility of installing additional garden beds and integrating gardening and nutrition programs into middle and high school curricula.
- 12.6 Investigate possible intergenerational programs for school or community gardening.

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11 Implementation

This Implementation Element provides the framework actualizing specific recommended Actions that have been identified as part of the planning process for this Master Plan. These Actions were developed through a review of previous planning efforts at the Town and regional levels, ideas crowdsourced through public and stakeholder engagement, case studies from similar towns and cities across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and beyond, and best practices and emerging trends and technologies identified by the planning consultants. The implementation of these recommended Actions shall support the achievement of the Vision Statement and Goals of this Master Plan over the course of its planning horizon – approximately 15 years.

As included in the matrix presented later in this chapter, the implementation plan for the recommended Actions addresses:

- ▶ Related Elements – identifies the other Master Plan Elements where an action has influence or can be influenced.
- ▶ Related Actions – identifies the recommended Actions that have synergies; for example, can be implemented simultaneously or in succession.
- ▶ Implementation Leadership – the entities that hold responsibility for implementing a recommended action, seeing it through to completion.
- ▶ Implementation Partners – the entities that shall assist the Implementation Leadership in implementing a recommended action, providing valuable input or services.
- ▶ Cost Estimate – an approximation of direct financial cost of a recommended action, generally defined as either "\$" (less than \$50,000), "\$\$" (between \$50,000 and \$100,000), and "\$\$\$" (greater than \$100,000).
- ▶ Timeframe Target – the schedule of implementation, defined as either "1 to 5 years," "5 to 10 years," or "10 to 15 years."

- **Priority** – the level of importance the community and stakeholders placed on each recommended action, defined as either “High,” “Moderate,” or “Low.” The community provided input on priority setting as part of Community Survey #2 (see Appendix B).

Upon formal adoption of this Master Plan by the Planning Board, it is recommended that the Town develop an implementation program. It will be important to track and regularly report (internally and externally) the implementation status of recommended Actions for accountability and transparency purposes. Further, it is critical that the Town monitor its progress toward goal achievement, and if necessary, make adjustments to the implementation plan and program to ensure success. To this point, the implementation plan and program should be considered flexible, and allowed to evolve as the community and its operating environment change. For example, grant funding not available today may be available at a later date.

In support of the implementation program, it is recommended that the Town form a Master Plan Implementation Committee. If created, this committee would be responsible for coordinating with Implementation Leaders on action implementation plans, tracking implementation progress, and regularly reporting on that progress to the Town and community at-large, such as at annual or bi-annual (twice per year) Town Council meetings.

The defined acronyms listed below are included in the implementation matrix:

Master Plan Elements (presented in alphabetical order)

ED	Economic Development	PFS	Public Facilities and Services
H	Housing	PH	Public Health
LU	Land Use	SSC	Sustainability and Climate Change
NHC	Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources	TM	Transportation and Mobility
OSR	Open Space and Recreation		
Other			
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics
HIP	Healthy Incentive Program	STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program	WIC	Women, Infants, and Children

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Land Use (LU)								
LU Goal 1: Promote development patterns that are consistent with the overall vision of the Master Plan, as well as the Goals and recommended Actions of related elements (e.g., Housing, Economic Development, etc.).								
LU1-1	Implement policies that position the Town to realize its future land use objectives, focusing on targeted growth, corridor development, compact development and placemaking in the village centers, and preservation. Refer to Figure 2-11 .	See below sub-actions.						
LU1-1.1	Seek agreements with neighboring communities for the expansion of public infrastructure, namely water and sewer, to catalyze desired growth. In particular, continue previous efforts with the Town of Ware to expand infrastructure into Palmer to areas east and west of Route 32 and south of the Ware town line in support of new commercial and/or light industrial activities.	ED; PFS; SCC	LU1-1.2; LU1-1.4 PFS4-1; PFS4-2; PFS4-3	Town Council/ Manager	Public Works; Planning and Economic Development	\$\$\$	1-5 years	Low
LU1-1.2	Regularly identify cost-effective public infrastructure expansion opportunities, coinciding with desired future development projects, and adjust the Town's Zoning Ordinance accordingly. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In doing so, ensure that the infrastructure to support desired growth is in place prior to completing any formal re-zoning. This will help limit undesirable interim activities (e.g., on-site industrial storage). 	H; PFS; SCC	LU1-1.1; H2-2; PFS3-1; TM1-3; TM1-11; SCC4-1; SCC4-7	Planning and Economic Development; Town Council/ Manager	Public Works	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
LU1-1.3	To better connect the commercial nodes of the village centers, examine opportunities to revitalize or re-zone areas along the connecting corridors, such as through new overlay districts, to encourage appropriate development and redevelopment.	H; ED; HCR; TM	LU1-1.8; LU1-1.9; TM2-5; TM2-7	Planning and Economic Development	Palmer Redevelopment Authority	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
LU1-1.4	Identify appropriate locations along Route 32, potentially including just north and south of its intersection with the Massachusetts Turnpike, which would support large-scale commercial mixed-use centers that would achieve local and regional growth opportunities (e.g., hotels, office parks, workforce housing, etc.).	H; ED; TM	LU1-1.1; ED5-1; ED5-4; TM1-5	Planning and Economic Development	Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Town Council/ Manager; Community Development; Public Works	\$	1-5 years	High
LU1-1.5	Explore opportunities to expand the Town Residential Districts along areas currently served by municipal water and sewer, to provide increased development flexibility that can support greater housing choice.	H; OSR; PFS; SCC	H2-1; H2-2; H2-3	Planning and Economic Development	Community Development	\$	5-10 years	Low
LU1-1.6	Explore augmenting the Village Center Districts with elements of form-based code. For example, street frontage/site configuration (e.g., building and parking lot location, building entry location), combined with architectural design guidelines (e.g., façade enhancements, ground level transparency).	ED; HCR; NR; PFS; TM; SCC	ED3-4; ED3-5	Planning and Economic Development	Building Department	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
LU1-1.7	<p>Prepare a comprehensive inventory of vacant and underutilized properties within the Village Center Districts and Town Residential District to understand and prioritize development and adaptive reuse/redevelopment opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where properties are not considered buildable under the Town's existing Zoning Ordinance, explore how to reduce barriers to development. 	H; ED; HCR; SCC	LU1-1.10; H2-3; H3-1; ED3-1; ED3-2; HCR3-1	Planning and Economic Development; Community Development	Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Building Department; Board of Health	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
LU1-1.8	Proactively prepare a Neighborhood Transit-Oriented Development Plan for the area around a preferred location for a new rail station associated with the East-West Passenger Rail Project. In doing so, ensure coordination and collaboration with the public residing in the neighborhood and the community at-large, as well as local landowners, private developers, and government stakeholders. This plan shall serve as a guide for future public and private investments.	H; ED; PFS; TM; SCC	LU1-1.3; TM1-3; TM1-5; TM1-7; TM1-11; SCC3-2; PH2-1	Planning and Economic Development; East/West Rail Steering Committee	Palmer Redevelopment Authority	\$\$	1-5 years	High
LU1-1.9	<p>Explore the potential of creating a Mill Reuse Overlay District in Thorndike, which could incorporate both commercial and light industrial activities, as well as residential uses, to foster creativity in growth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the potential for designating and developing the area around the Thorndike Mill as an EcoDistrict – essentially, a public-private innovation zone that prioritizes sustainability outcomes with focuses on equity, resilience, and climate protection. 	H; ED; HCR; SCC	LU1-1.3; ED4-3	Planning and Economic Development	Board of Health; Community Development; Building Department; Town Council/ Manager	\$	1-5 years	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
LU1-1.10	Build upon the existing hub of arts and culture in Three Rivers by reviewing the Town's Zoning Ordinance to ensure artistic uses are properly defined and allowed, providing density bonuses to promote artist live/workspaces, and promoting creative re-uses of vacant buildings as cultural facilities or otherwise allow for temporary or permanent artistic showcases.	H; ED; HCR; OSR; PFS	LU1-3; LU1-1.10; ED2-5; ED4-2; NHC4-1	Planning and Economic Development	Community Development; Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce; Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
LU1-1.11	Ensure land use controls within and applicable to Bondsville support and promote the village's recreational assets and enable synergetic development.	OSR	ED1-1; OSR2-5	Planning and Economic Development	Conservation Commission	\$	1-5 years	Low
LU1-2	Through a review and revision of the Town's Zoning Ordinance, enable the development of smaller home typologies (e.g., tiny homes, microunits), where appropriate.	H; SCC	H2-4	Planning and Economic Development	Building Department	\$	1-5 years	Low
LU1-3	Enable and encourage small-scale modern manufacturing and creative industrial activities (e.g., local food production and packaging, artisan production, brewpubs, distilleries, etc.) in non-industrial zones. These activities typically do not generate negative externalities (e.g., loud noises and odors).	ED; PFS	LU1-1.10; ED2-3; ED4-4	Planning and Economic Development	Building Department	\$	1-5 years	High
LU1-4	Conduct a comprehensive review of the Town's zoning and other land use controls to ensure they properly address considerations of climate change.	SCC	LU2-2; LU2-3; SCC3-12	Planning and Economic Development	Conservation Commission; Building Department	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
LU Goal 2: Ensure existing land use controls are meeting their intended purposes, and where not, make appropriate adjustments.								
LU2-1	<p>Review the provisions of Transfer of Development Rights and Open Space Residential Development in the Town's Zoning Ordinance for enhancement opportunities. Refer to other communities where similar provisions have been successful. Such benchmarking should consider the best practices employed in executing these provisions as well as communicating their merits and benefits to the development community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considerations for this review include, but may not be limited to, whether the provisions are too restrictive, (e.g., where special permitting may be required), whether they are undermined by other zoning provisions and processes (e.g., where extra density is available through the use of variances, such that the purchase of development rights is deemed unfavorable or unnecessary), and whether they are supported or limited by external factors (e.g., where public infrastructure within receiving areas of transferrable development rights are capable/incapable of accommodating increased densities). 	H; NR; OSR; PFS; SCC	LU2-2; LU2-3; LU2-4; OSR1-6	Planning and Economic Development	Public Works; Conservation Commission	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
LU2-2	<p>Conduct a comprehensive review of, and revision if necessary, the Town's Zoning Ordinance focused on the criteria of consistency and clarity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As part of broader community engagement in this evaluation, include existing and would-be developers to gain their unique perspectives. 	H; ED; HCR; NR; OSR; PFS; TM; SSC	LU1-4; LU2-3; LU2-4	Planning and Economic Development	Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce; Building Department	\$	1-5 years	Low
LU2-3	In coordination with ED4.4, prepare a "Zoning 101" guidebook that clearly lays out the Town's land use controls and processes. This guidebook should be readily available to the public and shared with potential developers. It can also be used as a reference by other Town departments, boards, and committees to ensure consistency in messaging, policies, and programs.	H; ED; HCR; NR; OSR; PFS; TM; SSC	LU1-4; LU2-2; LU2-4; ED4-4	Planning and Economic Development	-	\$	1-5 years	Low
LU2-4	Evaluate the Town's Zoning Ordinance to identify opportunities to make project permitting more efficient. For example, by removing special permit requirements for specific uses (e.g., accessory apartments for non-family members) and/or by streamlining the special permit and site plan approval processes.	H; ED; HCR; NR; OSR; PFS; TM; SSC	LU2-2; LU2-3	Planning and Economic Development	Building Department	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Housing (H)								
H Goal 1: Increase the Town's housing affordability.								
H1-1	Complete and regularly update a Housing Production Plan to identify housing needs in a targeted way and articulate specific actions, roles, and responsibilities for addressing each need. As part of this plan, attempt to understand the unique aspects of housing in Palmer's four villages to inform land use, zoning regulations, and housing policies, as well as to provide for the efficient and effective allocation of resources.	LU; PFS; TM	H1-3	Community Development	Housing Authority; Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Low
H1-2	Re-energize the Palmer Housing Authority, which has been largely inactive over the past few years. This should include revisiting the rules and regulations of the Authority and providing formal training sessions for board members and staff, as well as exploring an expansion of its programming – particularly in the area of social services.	PFS	-	Town Council/ Manager	Community Development	\$	1-5 years	High
H1-3	In coordination with the Housing Production Plan, evaluate the need to create a "Friendly 40B" policy that would encourage the pursuit and promotion of low- and moderate-income housing that qualify under the state's regulatory requirements.	LU; ED; PH	H1-1; H1-4.1	Community Development	Housing Authority; Planning and Economic Development; Palmer Redevelopment Authority	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
H1-4	Through a grassroots, community-led effort, seek the passage and adoption of the Community Preservation Act. This would provide necessary funding for expanding community housing locally.	NHC; OSR	H1-5; H3-3.1; OSR1-3; NHC2-4	Community Development	All Town Departments, Boards, and Committees	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
H1-4.1	In partnership with the community, and leveraging the Community Preservation Coalition program, craft and disseminate (e.g., through the U.S. Post Office's Every Door Direct Mail program) educational materials that explain the value of affordable housing with respect to its economic (e.g., increased spending power, job creation, higher taxes and other local government revenue) and social benefits (e.g., healthier child development, improved quality of life).	ED; PH	H1-3; H1-6; OSR1-3.1	Housing Authority; Community Development	Town Council/Manager	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
H1-5	Explore the formation of a municipal housing trust, which would allow Palmer to collect and segregate funds for affordable housing and use these funds for local affordable housing initiatives. Funds for the trust may derive from the Community Preservation Act, if passed and adopted by the Town, along with the Town's general fund, tax title sales, and negotiated developer fees, among other sources.	ED	H1-4; H3-3.1; OSR1-3; NHC2-4	Community Development	Housing Authority; Town Council/Manager	\$ (Depending on the Funding Source)	5-10 years	Low
H1-6	Conduct targeted outreach to educate the community on affordable housing, engaging them in constructive dialogues, providing evidence of the widespread benefits of affordable housing, and showcasing design options within the context of Palmer's aesthetic characteristics.	ED	H1-4.1; H3-3; H3-3.1; SCC1-8	Community Development	Housing Authority; Town Council/Manager	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
H1-7	Create new programs or expand program relationships with partners (e.g., Way Finders, Valley Opportunity Council) to provide greater financial assistance to existing homeowners and potential home buyers in Palmer. Such programs may include, but are not limited to, down payment and closing cost assistance, lease-purchase programs, no-interest loans, financial literacy and mortgage counseling.	ED	H3-3; ED2-1	Community Development	Housing Authority	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
H Goal 2. Create greater housing choice within Palmer with a focus in and around the Town's Village Centers.								
H2-1	Identify and work to eliminate or minimize barriers to non single-family residential development where currently allowed by the Town's Zoning Ordinance – particularly in the Village Centers – through a review of the Town's dimensional and density and use regulations along with associated approval processes. Engage property owners and would-be developers as part of this process.	LU; ED	LU1-1.5; ED5-6	Planning and Economic Development	Housing Authority; Palmer Redevelopment Authority	\$	5-10 years	Low
H2-2	Identify key opportunity sites for non single-family residential development projects, considering underlying land use and zoning regulations, water and sewer infrastructure, hazard potential, and proximity to the mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly Village Centers. Note that the availability of vacant parcels is extremely limited in the Town Residential District, which may present the need for strategic rezoning.	LU; ED; PFS; SCC	LU1-1.5; LU1-1.2; ED5-6; PFS4-1; SCC3-12	Planning and Economic Development; Public Works	Housing Authority; Community Development; Palmer Redevelopment Authority	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
H2-3	Understand the barriers to and incentivize the creative re-use of older, underutilized properties – for example, converting unused commercial space into housing or converting older single-family homes into multifamily buildings. Look to local success stories such as the former St. Mary's Episcopal Church on Main Street in Thorndike.	LU; ED; NHC	LU1-1.5; LU1-1.7; H3-3.1; ED3-1	Community Development; Palmer Redevelopment Authority	Housing Authority; Planning and Economic Development; Building Department	\$	5-10 years	High
H2-4	Understand the barriers to and incentivize (e.g., through items such as density bonuses) the development of a range of smaller housing types to accommodate the demand for such units (e.g., from young professionals, young families, and seniors), which is expected to continue to increase as the average household size continues to decline.	LU; ED	LU1-2; ED2-1	Planning and Economic Development; Housing Authority	Community Development; Council on Aging	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
H2-5	Establish and maintain relationships with private developers that are experienced in developing senior care facilities (e.g., residential living, skilled nursing centers, fully-equipped medical facilities) for the purpose of bringing these facilities to Palmer. This action can be coordinated with ED 4.1.	ED; PFS; PH	ED4-1; PFS1-5; PH1-2	Community Development	Planning and Economic Development; Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Council on Aging	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
H2-6	In coordination with ED 3.4, promote the creative design of housing types that complement and meet the needs of Palmer's neighborhoods.	ED; SCC	H1-6; ED3-4; SCC3-12	Planning and Economic Development	Housing Authority; Palmer Redevelopment Authority	\$	5-10 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
H Goal 3. Preserve and improve the existing housing stock.								
H3-1	Continue the Blight and Abandoned Property Reduction Initiative, which was designed to identify blighted and abandoned properties and enable the Town to work with property owners and the community on their clean up. Regularly evaluate the performance of this initiative and publicize its success stories. This action should be coordinated with ED 3.3.	LU; ED; NHC	LU1-1.7; ED3-1; ED3-3; NHC4-1	Town Council/ Manager	Building Department; Board of Health	\$	1-5 years	High
H3-2	Encourage the development of neighborhood groups and associations that would not only foster a sense of community, but could also supplement the Town's efforts to improve the look and feel of neighborhoods. As part of this effort, assess the potential for more localized Community Development Corporations.	ED; NHC; PH	ED2-2	Community Development	Housing Authority; Town Council/ Manager; Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
H3-3	Evaluate existing housing improvement programs – both educational and financial – to assess if they are funded adequately, marketed broadly, and are being used effectively, or if they need to be supplemented with additional programming (e.g., targeted programs for seniors). Engage partners including non-profits, lenders, and businesses where needed.	ED; SCC; PH	H1-6, H1-7, SCC1-8; PH5-2	Community Development	Housing Authority; Council on Aging	\$	1-5 years	Low
H3-3.1	Evaluate the Town's allocation of Community Development Block Grant funds, and dedicate a fair portion of such funds to housing rehabilitation projects (and affordable housing production) and promote awareness around program availability.	ED	H1-4; H1-5; H1-6; H2-3	Community Development	Housing Authority	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Economic Development (ED)								
ED Goal 1. Put Palmer more prominently on the map.								
ED1-1	Identify those qualities that make Palmer special through an inventory of its assets/resources (e.g., location, recreational opportunities, arts and culture, antiques, and flea markets).	LU; ED; NHC; OSR	LU1-1.11; ED4-2; ED5-4; NHC1-1; NHC2-3; NHC4-3; OSR1-4; PH6-1	Planning and Economic Development	Open Space/ Recreation Committee; Cultural Council; Town Council/ Manager	\$	1-5 years	Low
ED1-2	Hire a marketing/public relations firm to evaluate and make recommendations on the effectiveness of the Town's "brand," including the tagline "The Town of Seven Railroads," and conduct a community dialogue about how the brand could be improved.	All	ED1-3; ED5-6	Town Council/ Manager	Residents; Future Palmer Branding Group	\$\$	1-5 years	Low
ED1-3	Leveraging the findings of Action ED 1.2, create marketing materials (e.g., pamphlets, videos, social media, and other web content) around the agreed upon brand to promote the Town's assets/resources throughout the region and state.	All	ED1-2, NHC3-3; NHC4-2; NHC4-3	Planning and Economic Development; Hired PR Firm	Town Council/ Manager; Cultural Council; Future Palmer Branding Group	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
ED Goal 2. Attract and retain younger residents and families.								
ED2-1	Actively engage diverse and younger residents/families regionally to identify key issues and opportunities (e.g., attractions, school system) that will attract them to or keep them in Palmer.	H; OSR; PFS; SCC	H1-7; H2-4; ED2-2; ED2-3; ED2-6; OSR2-1; PFS1-3; SCC3-8	Planning and Economic Development	Community Development; Town Council/ Manager; School Department/ Pathfinder; Open Space/ Recreation Committee	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
ED2-2	Converse with and educate Palmer's diverse and younger residents/families on playing a key role in local government operations and decision-making.	H	H3-2; ED2-1	Planning and Economic Development	Town Council/ Manager	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
ED2-3	Define and pursue those types of economic activities that are important to younger populations, such as physical recreation; arts, culture and education (e.g., STEAM); cafes; dining; microbreweries; etc.	LU; NHC; OSR; PFS; TM; SCC	LU1-3; ED2-1; ED2-4; ED4-2; NHC4-5; OSR2-5; PFS1-7	Planning and Economic Development	Cultural Council; Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Open Space/ Recreation Committee	\$\$	1-5 years	High
ED2-4	Based on the activities identified as part of Action ED 2.3, pursue or enhance supporting infrastructural improvements (e.g., expanded sidewalks, Wi-fi, multi-mode electric vehicle charging stations and sharing).	PFS; TM; PH; SCC	ED2-3; ED3-5; TM1-4; TM3-2; TM3-3; SCC3-3	Community Development	Public Works; Planning and Economic Development	\$\$	5-10 years	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
ED2-5	Promote an entrepreneurial culture through the provision and possible development of, for example, public markets, pop-up shop infrastructure, makerspace, and shared/collaborative workspaces.	LU; NHC; PH	LU1-1.10; NHC4-1; PH7-1	Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Planning and Economic Development	Cultural Council; Town Council/ Manager	\$-\$\$	5-10 years	Moderate
ED2-6	Establish partnerships between existing and newly located businesses, local and regional student population, and local government to promote paths toward successful employment and careers.		ED2-1; ED4-4; ED5-2; ED6-2; NHC4-4; OSR1-1.4; PH7-2	Planning and Economic Development	Town Council/ Manager; School Department/ Pathfinder	\$	1-5 years	Moderate

ED Goal 3. Improve the look and feel of Palmer's village centers and gateways.

ED3-1	Continue to proactively work with the owners of vacant commercial properties throughout Palmer, particularly in each Village Center District, informing them about opportunities to improve the visual appearance and marketing of their property holdings and encouraging redevelopment, where appropriate.	LU; H	LU1-1.7; H2-3; H3-1; ED3-2; ED3-3	Planning and Economic Development	Building Department; Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Community Development	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
ED3-2	Craft an ordinance to regulate vacant commercial properties that creates a monetary disincentive for owning such properties without the legitimate pursuit of sale or lease.	LU	LU1-1.7; ED3-1	Town Council/ Manager	Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
ED3-3	Continue the coalition consisting of representatives from the various Town departments (i.e., the Neighborhood Improvement through Code Enforcement [N.I.C.E.] Task Force) and expand to include Town residents. This coalition shall routinely deal with individual properties of concern in a concerted manner and regularly discuss plans to address real estate issues in Palmer more generally.	H	H3-1; ED3-1; ED4-3	Town Council/Manager	All Town Departments	\$	1-5 years	Low
ED3-4	Explore the potential for the establishment of Design Review Guidelines and a Design Review Committee to review and provide recommendations – related to architectural and sign design – for building projects in the Village Center Districts.	LU; SCC	LU1-1.6; PFS1-4; SCC1-12; SCC3-14	Planning and Economic Development	Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Town Council/Manager; Building Department	\$	5-10 years	Low
ED3-5	Continue to identify and pursue local and state grant opportunities to improve streetscapes, in concert with Action ED 2.4, and multi-modal facilities in the village centers (e.g., more pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, and adding appropriately designed lighting, benches, trash bins, etc.)	LU; TM; SCC; PH	LU1-1.6; ED2-4; TM1-4; TM2-1; TM2-2; TM3-2; PH3-1; PH4-2; SCC3-12	Community Development; Public Works	Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
ED Goal 4. Identify existing “market clusters” of economic activity and find ways to grow them.								
ED4-1	Explore the potential for a medical overlay district to promote the development of a medical cluster around the Baystate Wing Hospital, with potential for assisted living/nursing homes, medical equipment manufacturing, medical research, etc.	H; PH	H2-5; PH1-2	Planning and Economic Development	Town Council/ Manager; Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Baystate Wing Hospital	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
ED4-2	Work with local and regional organizations to develop and fulfill strategies to build upon the existing hub of arts and culture in Three Rivers and make connections to other art establishments and activities throughout the Town. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Such strategies may include developing a map of local arts and culture destinations, supporting the creation of an artist-led organization for networking and marketing purposes, and establishing a “cultural district” through the Mass Cultural Council.	LU; NHC	LU1-1.10; ED1-1; ED2-3; NHC4-1; NHC4-5	Community Development	Cultural Council	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
ED4-3	Hire a real estate advisory firm to explore the potential for new economic clusters. This may include alternative energy in Thorndike via the Thorndike Mill, recreational businesses in Bondsville, and antique shops as well as traditional downtown retail and service-oriented businesses in Depot Village.	LU; SCC	LU1-1.9; ED3-3; TM1-11; SCC1-2	Planning and Economic Development	Town Council/ Manager	\$\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
ED4-4	Develop and regularly update a “Guide to Starting and Growing a Business in Palmer” to encourage the growth of small businesses in alignment with envisioned economic development. Such guidance may identify and describe local resources, permitting and zoning processes, tax policies, and available financing (e.g., business loans and/or grant opportunities).	LU; SCC	LU2-3; LU1-3; ED2-6; ED5-2; ED5-3; SCC3-10	Planning and Economic Development	Community Development; Finance Committee; Palmer Redevelopment Authority	\$	1-5 years	Low
ED Goal 5. Pave the way for catalyst projects.								
ED5-1	With Palmer’s industrial-zoned land almost fully built out, explore opportunities to expand upon the supply of parcels available for industrial development.	LU	LU1-1.4	Planning and Economic Development	Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Public Works	\$	1-5 years	Low
ED5-2	Strengthen the Town’s relationships with existing businesses to support their continued operations and growth (i.e., identify their evolving needs and how these needs relate to the Town’s infrastructure and services).	TM; SCC; PH	ED2-6; ED4-4; ED6-2; PFS3-2; TM2-2; SCC3-10; PH7-2; PFS4-2	Town Council/ Manager Planning and Economic Development	Building Department; Public Works	\$	1-5 years	Low
ED5-3	Evaluate the impact that Palmer’s tax policy and rates have on economic development and adjust as appropriate.		ED4-4; NHC1-3; PH9-1	Assessor’s Office	Finance Committee; Town Council/ Manager; Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
ED5-4	Engage regional partners to conduct an economic development study to understand how Palmer performs against and fits in with communities within the Pioneer Valley Region.	LU; TM	LU1-1.4; ED1-1; TM1-5	Town Council/ Manager	Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Low
ED5-5	Collaborate with regional entities to pursue the re-development of the Monson Development Center, which would serve as a source of local employment and could induce economic activity in Palmer.			Community Development	Planning and Economic Development; Town Council/ Manager	\$\$	1-5 years	Moderate
ED5-6	Regularly engage property owners and strategic partners to identify prime development sites throughout the Town and develop clear visions and marketing strategies for their redevelopment.	H	H2-1; H2-2; ED1-2	Planning and Economic Development	Community Development; Palmer Redevelopment Authority; Building Department	\$	1-5 years	Low

ED Goal 6. Organize locally to drive this Master Plan's economic development Goals and recommended Actions.

ED6-1	Create a diverse network of representatives to continue the work started during the Economic Development Roundtable of this Master Plan. This network may take the form of an Economic Development Committee or an advisory body.	PFS	All ED; PFS2-4	Planning and Economic Development	Town Council/ Manager	\$	1-5 years	Low
ED6-2	Build upon the success of the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce to create additional business networks/organizations that will drive economic growth and represent the interests of the Town's market clusters.	-	ED2-6; ED5-2	Planning and Economic Development	Town Council/ Manager; Community Development	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources (NHC)								
NHC Goal 1. Continually enhance the Town's natural resources - including its water resources and plant and wildlife habitats - and implement effective protection measures.								
NHC1-1	In coordination with partners, such as the Opacum Land Trust and Massachusetts Department of Fish & Game, continue to expand the Town's inventory of conservation lands and protected open spaces, particularly within its eastern areas, including the Shaw and Pattaquatic Districts, and with a focus on lands designated as Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscapes under BioMap2.	OSR	ED1-1; NHC1-2; NHC1-5; OSR1-3; OSR1-6	Conservation Commission	As stated in action	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
NHC1-2	Drive support for the development of conservation restrictions or agricultural preservation restrictions on privately held lands through strategic engagements and provision of technical assistance.	OSR; PH	NHC1-1; PH11-2	Conservation Commission	Planning and Economic Development; MassWoods (UMass Amherst); Other Town Boards	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
NHC1-3	Continue to educate private landowners, as well as appropriate Town staff, on Chapter 61 tax incentive programs for forestry, agricultural land, and recreational land, and ensure the Town adequately considers its right of first refusal as such opportunities arise. In this process, consult the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan's approach to actions and acquisitions.	ED; OSR	ED5-3; NHC1-3.1; OSR1-6	Conservation Commission	Planning and Economic Development; MassWoods (UMass Amherst); Other Town Boards; Other Land Trusts	\$	Ongoing	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
NHC1-3.1	Increase landowner outreach, provide guidance on programs available to landowners such as MassWildlife Habitat Management Grant Program, Forest Stewardship Program & Green Certification, Foresters for the Birds, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) and Tax Tips for Forest Landowners. Offer webinars on estate planning, land conservation options, and caring for your land.	ED; OSR	NHC1-3	Conservation Commission	As stated in action	\$	Ongoing	Low
NHC1-4	Continue to investigate potential vernal pools and certify them where applicable.	-	NHC1-8.1	Conservation Commission	Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation	\$	Ongoing	Low
NHC1-5	Identify the need for, and engage partners in the development of, one or more land stewardship plans for Town-owned conservation land – e.g., Swift River Green Belt, Shaw District. Such plans would establish management goals and provide management guidance over a (typical) 10-year period.	OSR; SCC	NHC1-1; OSR1-1; OSR1-6; SCC3-13	Conservation Commission	Historical Commission; Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation	\$	5-10 years	Low
NHC1-6	Continue efforts to become a Tree City USA® Community, including the establishment of a tree care ordinance, to demonstrate the Town's commitment to planting, maintaining, and managing tree resources, as well as to gain preference for grant awards under the Urban and Community Forestry Program at the Department of Conservation and Recreation.	SCC	NHC1-1.6; NHC1-6.2; NHC1-7; NHC1-8.1; SCC3-14	Tree Warden	As stated in action; Public Works; Conservation Commission	\$	Ongoing	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
NHC1-6.1	As part of demolition, new construction, or major renovation projects, explore requiring owners or developers who remove trees – under conditions where saving the tree is not feasible - to plant new trees elsewhere to compensate or alternatively donate to a municipal tree fund.	LU	NHC1-6	Public Works	Planning and Economic Development; Tree Warden	\$	1-5 years	Low
NHC1-6.2	Explore options for a Town-owned tree nursery, which among other benefits could realize long-term costs savings for municipal tree plantings.	ED	NHC1-6	Tree Warden	Public Works	\$-\$\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
NHC1-7	Conduct a tree inventory and analysis – including pest and disease information - for all public trees on streets, parks, schools, and other public areas to inform a tree management program for maintenance, new plantings, and replacements, as necessary.	-	NHC1-6	Tree Warden	Public Works; Local Volunteer Groups; UMass Amherst; School Department/ Pathfinder	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
NHC1-8	Develop an educational program that increases community understanding and support for the protection and enhancement of the Town's natural resources.	OSR; SCC; PH	NHC1-8.1; OSR1-3.1; SCC1-2.1; SCC2-2; SCC3-10; PH4-5; PH12-4	Conservation Commission	School Department/ Pathfinder; UMass Amherst	\$	5-10 years	Low
NHC1-8.1	Engage local school systems, including educators and students, in taking the learning experience from the classroom into the natural environment. For example, tree planting, wildlife counting, and/or invasive species removal in and around vernal pools.	PFS	NHC1-4; NHC1-6; NHC1-8; NHC1-9; PFS1-7	Conservation Commission	School Department/ Pathfinder; UMass Amherst	\$	Ongoing	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
NHC1-9	Continue to utilize federal and state resources, including partnerships (e.g., the Department of Agricultural Resources), for public education campaigns to prevent the spread of invasive species.	-	NHC1-8.1; NHC1-10	Conservation Commission	Federal and State Farm Services; Department of Forestry	\$	Ongoing	Low
NHC1-10	Review the Town's ordinances and policies to ensure that invasive species control and prevention measures are adequately addressed with respect to private sector development.	LU	NHC1-9	Conservation Commission	Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Low
NHC1-11	Educate residents and businesses about stormwater and the municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permit requirements through public outreach campaigns, brochures, social media posts, and webinars with a focus on local impaired waterways.	ED; PFS	PFS4-5; PFS4-6	Public Works	MVP Coordinator; Conservation Commission	\$	Ongoing	Low
Goal NHC2: Make preservation and promotion of heritage resources a planning priority.								
NHC2-1	Revisit the 2009 Heritage Landscape Inventory report and its recommendations. Ensure that each priority heritage landscape is inventoried and consider local, state, and/or federal designation. Assess the current status and condition of these resources and be proactive about supporting their continued use.	-	NHC2-2; NHC2-3; NHC2-5	Historical Commission	MA Historical Commission; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	\$	Ongoing	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
NHC2-2	Update the inventory forms for major concentrations of historic and cultural resources, like the villages. Consider using Massachusetts Historical Commission matching grant programs that provide additional benefits like helping towns develop request for proposals to find qualified consultants and establishing guidelines to ensure survey consistency.	-	NHC2-1; NHC4-2	Historical Commission	Palmer Historical & Cultural Center; MA Historical Commission; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	\$	1-5 years	Low
NHC2-3	Commission a Town-wide Preservation Plan or neighborhood-based Preservation Plans to supplement and inform the execution of this document's implementation plan. Use the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, and Massachusetts Cultural Council for technical advice and potential funding sources for preservation plans.	ED	ED1-1; NHC2-1	Historical Commission	As stated in action; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
NHC2-4	Identify planning ordinances and tools that are provided through the M.G.L., such as the Community Preservation Act as well as a scenic road bylaw, affirmative maintenance bylaw, adaptive reuse bylaw, which have been useful in neighboring communities to protect heritage resources. Be proactive about addressing misconceptions that result in residents and property owners making decisions based on incorrect or outdated information.	LU	H1-4; H1-5; NHC2-5; OSR1-3	Historical Commission	As stated in action; Planning and Economic Development; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	\$	5-10 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
NHC2-5	Develop a guidebook for Historical Commission members with reference information. Include information on important bylaws; responsibilities of the Commissioners; brief accounts of the Commission's successes, challenges, and programs on an annual basis; contact information for regional, state, and federal heritage entities; and common funding programs.	LU	NHC2-1; NHC2-4; NHC4-5	Historical Commission	-	\$	Ongoing	Low
Goal NHC3: Establish a permanent curation and exhibition facility for object and ephemera collections.								
NHC3-1	Consider combining the collections of the Historical Commission and Elbow Plantation Historical Society. Bringing these collections together into a single space will enhance their research and educational benefits and make climate control and archival organization more efficient.	-	NHC3-2; NHC3-4	Historical Commission	Elbow Plantation Historical Society	\$-\$\$	1-10 years	Moderate
NHC3-2	Solicit professional advice about archival storage, cataloguing, and access for collections. This will help Palmer understand the best way to preserve and use these invaluable items. Professionals will also help the Town establish priorities that makes this a multi-step initiative rather than a single, huge outlay of financial and labor resources.	-	NHC3-1	Historical Commission	UMass Amherst Libraries; Palmer Public Library; National Library Relocations	\$	Ongoing	Low
NHC3-3	Utilize items from the collections for miniature, online, and social media-friendly educational experiences on a regular basis. For example, doing a "50 Objects that Made Palmer" series of posts weekly over the course of a year.	ED	ED1-3	Historical Commission	-	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
NHC3-4	Collaborate with museum studies programs to create a catalog that is accessible and will be easy to maintain in the future. Explore the possibility of using Palmer's collections for class projects that evaluate cataloging needs and systems, develop record types, and establish a usage guide to ensure consistency in the catalog into the future.	-	NHC3-1; NHC4-4	Historical Commission	As stated in action	\$	5-10 years (ongoing)	Low
Goal NHC4: Broaden cultural engagement and programming.								
NHC4-1	Turn vacant and underutilized facilities into a makerspace/studio space. Providing spaces to create and interact is vital to supporting Palmer's artists and storytellers and attracting new talent. Using historic buildings, which often have layouts that facilitate studios and classrooms, maximizes funding opportunities through history and cultural-based agencies. Establishing an artist-in-residence program would promote Palmer's arts community to a wider audience.	LU; H; ED	LU1-1.10; LU1-1.7; H3-1; ED2-5; ED4-2	Town Council/ Manager	Planning and Economic Development; Volunteer Makerspace Committee	\$	1-5 years	High
NHC4-2	Use a historic survey initiative as an opportunity for engagement. Crowdfund information to attract attention and collect information that can be used in inventory forms. For example, use Historypin (www.historypin.org) to collect photographs of houses and streetscapes to use in survey forms, and collecting historic property information using a mobile survey application and a "train-the-trainer" program that allows residents and community groups to join in.	ED	ED1-3; NHC2-2	Historical Commission	Local Volunteer Groups; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	\$	5-10 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
NHC4-3	Turn Palmer's distinct village identities into an asset by creating place-based stories. The village centers, residential streets, and infrastructure development are ready-made environments to learn about who lived in these villages and why, and how they all interacted in the built environment. Stories can foster more active connection and engagement than buildings alone.	LU; ED	ED1-1; ED1-3	Historical Commission	Town Council/ Manager	\$	5-10 years	Low
NHC4-4	Support and sponsor programming specifically for students and families. Offer activities that cross multiple topics like arts, heritage, and engineering and integrate into STEAM education. Work with local and regional schools, vocational programs, camps, and colleges to use and develop students' skills while promoting Palmer's heritage assets.	ED	ED2-6; NHC3-4; NHC4-5; OSR1-1.4	Historical Commission	As stated in action	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
NHC4-5	Utilize community, regional, and state partners to enhance culture and programming. Team up with local conservation groups and artists for interactive experiences, bring heritage programs directly to youth groups, and use established networks such as the Western Massachusetts Coalition of Historical Commissions.	ED	ED2-3; ED4-2; NHC2-5; NHC4-4; PH4-5	Historical Commission	As stated in action	\$	Ongoing	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Open Space and Recreation (OSR)								
Goal OSR1: Enhance the Town's open space and recreational assets to better serve the community.								
OSR1-1	Increase financial/staffing resources allocated to the maintenance and renovation of the Town's open space and recreation assets (e.g., Burleigh Park).	ED; NHC; PFS; SCC; PH	NHC1-5; PH4-2; PH4-3; PH4-4; All sub-actions	Town Council/ Manager	Open Space; Conservation Commission	\$	1-5 years	High
OSR1-1.1	Ensure maintenance/renovation projects for the Town's open space and recreation are built into the Town's capital improvement plan, where appropriate.	PFS	OSR1-1; PFS3-2	Town Council/ Manager	Public Works	\$	1-5 years	High
OSR1-1.2	Seek a Parkland Acquisition and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant to complete renovations at Burleigh Park.	-	OSR1-1	Town Council/ Manager	Community Development	\$	1-5 years	High
OSR1-1.3	Expand the Conservation Commission's volunteer program, for example, by establishing regular service days for efforts such as open space trash cleanup, facility graffiti removal, etc.	ED	OSR1-1	Town Council/ Manager; Conservation Commission	Volunteers; Boy Scouts; Chicopee 4 Rivers Watershed Council; Student Conservation Association - AmeriCorps; Other Environmental Agencies	\$	1-5 years	High
OSR1-1.4	Engage local colleges and universities, particularly those with landscape architecture programs, to develop one or more studio-based or graduate projects focused on local park enhancement.	ED; NHC	ED2-6; NHC4-4; OSR1-1	Conservation Commission	UMass Stockbridge School of Agriculture and 5 College Area	\$	5-10 years	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
OSR1-2	Seek improvements at Chase Memorial Park, such as the introduction of irrigation and parking, to enable greater use of this facility which exists within an environmental justice community.	PH; SCC	PH4-2; PH4-3; PH4-4	Town Council/ Manager	Public Works	\$\$	5-10 years	High
OSR1-3	Through a grassroots, community-led effort, seek the passage and adoption of the Community Preservation Act. This would provide necessary funding for open space preservation and the acquisition and development of outdoor recreational facilities.	H; NHC	H1-4; H1-5; NHC1-1; NHC2-4; PH4-5	Civic Grassroots Organizations (e.g., Rotary Club); Palmer Historical and Cultural Center; Boy Scouts; Chamber of Commerce	Town Council/ Manager	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
OSR1-3.1	In partnership with the community, and leveraging the Community Preservation Coalition program, craft and disseminate (e.g., through the U.S. Post Office's Every Door Direct Mail program) educational materials that explain the value of open space and recreation amenities with respect to their economic (e.g., increased property values, municipal revenue), environmental (e.g., water quality protection), and social benefits (e.g., public health – active living, gathering places).	ED; SCC; PH	H1-4.1; NHC1-8	Civic Grassroots Organizations; Town Council/ Manager	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Conservation Commission; Future Recreation	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
OSR1-4	Prepare a proper inventory of the walking/biking trails within the community and centralize it, along with relevant information such as access and use restrictions, on the Town's website – with emphasis on usability and accessibility – and through an alternate physical medium (e.g., brochure).	TM; PH	ED1-1; OSR2-2; TM2-2; TM2-3; TM2-4; TM2-5; TM2-7; TM2-10	Town Council/ Manager	Conservation Commission	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
OSR1-5	Develop a plan to identify and improve means of access to the Town's open space and recreation assets with an emphasis on equity, including compliance with ADA guidelines.	TM; PH	TM2-3; PH4-4; OSR1-6; PFS1-4	ADA Coordinator	Building Department; Public Works	\$	1-5 years	Low
OSR1-6	Update the Town's 2014 Open Space and Recreation Plan to guide the maintenance, protection, and improvement of its open spaces and recreation assets over the next several years, and enable the Town to continue to be eligible for state funds for conservation and recreation land acquisition and improvement projects.	LU; NHC; SCC; PH	LU2-1; NHC1-1; NHC1-3; NHC1-5; OSR1-5	Conservation Commission	Town Council/ Manager	\$	1-5 years	Low
Goal OSR2: Work to align the Town's recreation assets and programming with the current and projected wants/needs of the community.								
OSR2-1	Conduct a regular (e.g., bi-annual) community survey to identify and prioritize recreation needs, and utilize the survey results to plan the Town's future recreation investments.	ED	OSR1-1; ED2-1; OSR2-5; PFS2-1	Town Council/ Manager	Open Space and Recreation Committee; Community Development	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
OSR2-2	Continue to seek opportunities to develop walking/biking trails, emphasizing connectivity with existing trails within the community and with those in adjacent communities.	TM	OSR1-4; TM2-2; TM2-3; TM2-5; TM2-7; TM2-8; TM2-13; All sub-actions	Conservation Commission	Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	High
OSR2-2.1	Continue to work to develop a regional connection with Red Bridge State Park by expanding the trail system along the Chicopee River.	TM	OSR2-2	Conservation Commission	Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation	\$\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
OSR2-2.2	Work with property owners to gain access to privately-owned lands along the Ware (namely, between Main Street in Thorndike and Route 181), Quaboag (namely, northwest from the Department of Public Works facility and Water Street Field), Chicopee, and Swift Rivers for the development of river walks - leveraging public lands where present.	TM	OSR2-2; OSR2-3	Conservation Commission	Planning and Economic Development	\$	Ongoing	High
OSR2-2.3	Encourage the incorporation of greenways, trails, or walking paths in proposed subdivision developments. Consider making such incorporations required as a condition of approval.	LU; TM; SCC	OSR2-2; TM2-13; SCC3-14	Planning and Economic Development	Conservation Commission	\$	Ongoing	High
OSR2-2.4	In association with TM2.6, pursue the incremental development of connections to the Mass Central Rail Trail where there are less implementation barriers, such as the presence of an active rail line, bridge crossing requirements, etc. (e.g., Griffin Street to Emery Street).	TM	OSR2-2; TM2-7	Public Works; MassDOT	Planning and Economic Development	\$\$	Ongoing	High
OSR2-3	Develop a clear legal agreement template for public use on private land with limited landowner liability clause.	LU	OSR2-2.2	Town Attorney	Planning and Economic Development	\$	As needed	Low
OSR2-4	Explore opportunities to establish permanent recreation facilities and programming at the former Converse Middle School (e.g., youth basketball).	PFS; PH	OSR1-1; PFS1-3; PH4-1	Town Council/ Manager		\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
OSR2-5	Continue to pursue the design and construction of in demand recreational amenities, including one or more boat launches along local waterways, a dog park, a public beach at Crystal Lake and Forest Lake, and winter sport facilities.	LU; ED; PH	LU1-1.11; ED2-3; OSR1-1; OSR2-1; PH4-5; PH4-6	Conservation Commission	MASS Fish and Wildlife	\$\$	Ongoing	High
OSR2-6	Identify suitable parcels, with priority given to those in underserved neighborhoods, for the construction of community gardening plots. Partner with local organizations that can support their development, organization/operation, and maintenance.	LU; ED; PH	OSR1-1; PH11-1; PH11-1	Conservation Commission; Future Community Garden Committee; Local Volunteer Groups	Public Works	\$	Ongoing	Moderate

Public Facilities and Services (PFS)

Goal PFS1: Maximize the Town's existing facilities and services.

PFS1-1	Assess the feasibility of consolidating the Town's Fire Departments and/or Water Districts to potentially minimize excessive personnel and capital assets, as measured against the Town's needs and regulatory standards.	LU; ED	PFS1-2; PFS2-3; PFS4-7	Town Council/Manager	All Fire & Water Districts	\$\$ (With Potential Long-term Savings)	1-5 years	Moderate
PFS1-2	Explore opportunities to make the services and fees associated with the Town's Water Districts more equitable, while maintaining the highest standards for water quality and meeting the water demands of the Town's population overall.	SCC	PFS1-1; PFS4-7; SCC4-8	Town Council/Manager	All Water Districts	\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PFS1-3	In a centralized manner, inventory and develop re-use plans for Town-owned properties, including the Converse Middle School, to promote their highest and best use in consideration of community needs/benefits.	ED	ED2-1; OSR2-4; PFS1-6; PFS3-5	Planning and Economic Development; Palmer Redevelopment Authority	Town Council/ Manager; Council on Aging; Assessor's Office	\$	1-5 years	High
PFS1-4	Continue to implement the ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan, and work with an accessibility consultant on all the Town's future facility construction activities, where appropriate, to ensure the incorporation of design, policies, and products that enhance access for all users.	ED; OSR; TM; PH	ED3-4; OSR1-5; TM2-3; PH4-4	Public Works; ADA Coordinator	Community Development; Planning and Economic Development	\$	Annually	Low
PFS1-5	Explore the expansion, relocation, or new construction of the Senior Center to enable greater use of the facility by the Town's elderly population and perhaps, the larger community, and an expansion of programming now and in the future.	LU; H; PH	H2-5; PH1-2	Town Council/ Manager; Council on Aging	Planning and Economic Development; Building Department; ADA Coordinator	\$\$	1-5 years	High
PFS1-6	In partnership with the School Committee and/or School Administration, assess the implications – adverse or beneficial – of the student consolidation (i.e., grades 6 through 12) at the Palmer High School and pursue recommended changes as identified.	ED; PH	PSF1-3	School Department/ Committee; Town Council/ Manager	Parents; Teachers; Students	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PFS1-7	Working with the School Department and other local educational authorities, continue to explore opportunities to integrate STEM/STEAM into curriculums.	ED; NHC; SCC	ED2-3; NHC1-8.1; SCC1-2.1	School Department/ Pathfinder; Local Volunteer Groups	Teachers; Parents	\$	1-5 years	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Goal PFS2: Ensure the Town's departments are sufficiently staffed and equipped.								
PFS2-1	Conduct regular surveys to understand the public perception of the Town's services and evolving service needs (particularly with respect to human services [e.g., mental health, youth development, substance abuse, food/nutrition, etc.], and pursue program changes accordingly.	OSR; TM; PH	OSR2-1; PFS2-2; PFS2-3; TM1-7; PH12-1	Board of Health; Community Development	Town Council/ Manager	\$	1-5 years	Low
PFS2-2	Regularly review the Town's trending and projected broader demographics (e.g., race, income, age, health status, educational attainment, labor force status, etc.) and assess appropriate adjustments relative to the Town's service provisions to meet anticipated needs.	All	PFS2-1; PFS2-3	Board of Health; School Department/ Pathfinder; Council on Aging	Town Council/ Manager; Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Low
PFS2-3	Ensure the Town's public safety departments (i.e., police, fire, etc.) have the necessary members and support staff to meet the existing and projected service needs of the community.	PH	PFS1-1; PFS2-1; PFS2-2	Town Council/ Manager; Police Department; Fire Districts; Public Works	-	\$	1-5 years	Low
PFS2-4	Explore the need for support staff dedicated to the Town's economic development activities and pursuits and pursue role fulfillment.	ED	ED6-1; SCC3-2	Town Council/ Manager	Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Low
PFS2-5	In concert with the Town's capital improvement planning process, perform a fleet vehicle assessment to understand if the Town's departments have the correct number, types, and sizes of vehicles in their inventories, and plan for optimizing fleet efficiency. Ensure new and replacement vehicle purchases meet the Town's Fuel-Efficient Vehicle Policy.	ED; TM; SCC	TM3-3; SCC1-7	Town Council/ Manager; Finance Committee; Department Heads	Planning and Economic Development	\$	5-10 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Goal PFS3: Efficiently manage the Town's infrastructure and advocate for the proper maintenance of infrastructure within the Town owned by others.								
PFS3-1	Continue to pursue federal and state grants and other advantageous financing for the maintenance/ improvement and, as necessary, replacement of the Town's existing infrastructure, including through competitive state infrastructure grants (e.g., MassWorks Infrastructure Program).	LU; ED; TM; SCC	LU1-1.2; PFS3-4; PFS4-1; TM1-3; TM2-7.1; SCC4-2	Community Development; Planning and Economic Development; Public Works; Town Council/ Manager	Finance Committee	\$	Annually	High
PFS3-2	Broaden the performance of asset analyses to comprehensively determine the existing and future condition of the Town's infrastructure and develop phased, long-term capital plans for their maintenance/ improvement and, as necessary, replacement.	ED; TM; SCC	ED5-2; PFS3-3; TM1-9; TM1-10; SCC4-8	Town Council/ Manager; Public Works	Finance; Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PFS3-3	Expand the Town's investment in an asset management program or tool that will, at minimum, enable the Town to understand what assets are in its inventory, along with their age, location, and condition.	ED; TM; SCC	PFS3-2; PFS3-5; SCC4-1	Town Council/ Manager	Assessor's Office; Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Low
PFS3-4	Identify additional revenue streams for the Community Development Department that can support its work in building and repairing infrastructure vital to the health and safety of the Town's residents, among its other assignments.	ED; TM; SCC; PH	PFS3-1; PFS4-1; TM1-3; TM2-7.1; SCC4-2	Town Council/ Manager; Community Development	Public Works	\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PFS3-5	Inventory non-Town owned infrastructure within the municipal boundaries, and advocate for needed improvements, as identified.	LU; ED; TM	PFS1-3; PFS3-3	Town Council/ Manager; Planning and Economic Development; Public Works	Local Utilities; State Agencies	\$	1-5 years	Low
PFS3-6	Evaluate the impact of, and opportunities associated with, 5G-enabled technologies on the Town's infrastructure and services.	ED; PH	-	School Department; Public Works: Town Council/ Manager; Future 5G Technologies Preparations Committee	Planning and Economic Development; Mobile Communication Companies	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
Goal PFS4. Explore the strategic expansion of the community's water infrastructure.								
PFS4-1	Pursue federal and state grants for the expansion of the Town's wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. Such investments should prioritize the necessary upgrades at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and connected assets (e.g., pump stations [and generators] and sewer lines).	LU; H	LU1-1.1; H2-2; PFS3-1; PFS3-4; PFS4-2; PFS4-3; PFS4-4; SCC1-6; SCC4-4	Public Works; Town Council/ Manager; Community Development; Planning and Economic Development	Wastewater Treatment Plant Superintendent/ Staff	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PFS4-2	Continue to engage in and be proactive with respect to expanding public-private partnerships (P3s) to support the expansion of the Town's wastewater infrastructure among other infrastructure improvements.	LU; ED	LU1-1.1; ED5-2; PFS4-1; PFS4-3	Public Works; Town Council/ Manager	Wastewater Treatment Plant Superintendent/ Staff	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PFS4-3	Explore potential partnerships with adjacent communities for the development of a regional wastewater treatment plant and ancillary facilities.	LU	LU1-1.1; PFS4-1; PFS4-2; SCC1-6; SCC4-4	Town Council/ Manager; Public Works	Wastewater Treatment Plant Superintendent/ Staff	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
PFS4-4	Evaluate the imposition of limited impact fees to fund a revolving account for Town-wide wastewater infrastructure among other infrastructure improvements.	ED	PFS4-1	Town Council/ Manager; Stormwater Coordinator; Public Works; Conservation Commission	Finance Committee	\$	1-5 years	Low
PFS4-5	Review the Town's existing stormwater ordinance(s) for compliance with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's standards and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's municipal separate stormwater system (MS4) permitting program, and review opportunities to be more proactive to reduce development-associated erosion and run-off.	LU; NHC; SCC	NHC1-11; PFS4-6; SCC4-8	Stormwater Coordinator; Conservation Commission; Public Works	Consulting Engineering Firm	\$	1-5 years	Low
PFS4-6	Establish a stormwater utility fund as a revenue source to support the Town in meeting its MS4 permit requirements.	ED	NHC1-11; PFS4-5	Town Council/ Manager; Conservation Commission; Stormwater Coordinator; Public Works	Finance Committee; Assessor's Office	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PFS4-7	Regularly coordinate with the Town's Water Districts to understand their future capital plans and seek alignment with the Town's economic development and land use goals.	LU; ED	PFS1-1; PFS1-2	Town Council/ Manager	Public Works	\$	1-5 years	Low
Transportation and Mobility (TM)								
Goal TM1: Improve the Town's transportation infrastructure.								
TM1-1	Work with applicable agencies to incorporate the concepts of Complete Streets into transportation improvement projects.	SCC; PH	TM1-2; PH9-4	Complete Streets Committee	Public Works; Planning and Economic Development; Town Council/ Manager; Community Development; Police Department	\$	1-10 years	Low
TM1-2	Continue to actively pursue and update priority projects through the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT's) Complete Streets Funding Program.	SCC; PH	TM1-1; PH9-4	Complete Streets Committee	Public Works; Planning and Economic Development; Town Council/ Manager; Community Development; Police Department	\$	1-10 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
TM1-3	Identify and monitor a diverse array of potential federal, state, and private funding sources to complete transportation improvement projects throughout the Town. Examples of such sources as of this writing include the MassWorks Infrastructure Program, Community Transit Grant Program, Helping Hand Mini-Grants, the Workforce Transportation Program, and the Efficiency and Regionalization Grant Program.	LU; PFS	LU1-1.8; LU1-1.2; PFS3-1; PFS3-4; SCC4-2	Town Council/ Manager; Planning and Economic Development; Community Development	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
TM1-4	Continue the Town's pavement management program as currently carried out by the Department of Public Works. Include a sidewalk management program as part of this effort to maintain existing sidewalks and identify areas of needed improvement. Prioritize sidewalk construction and repair within the vicinity of Town offices, commercial centers, senior and subsidized housing developments, the Palmer Senior Center, in school zones, and around medical facilities.	ED; PH	ED2-4; ED3-5; TM2-4; TM2-5; PH3-1	Public Works	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion; Complete Streets Committee; Community Development; Planning and Economic Development	\$-\$\$\$	1-5 years	Low
TM1-5	Subject to available funding, advocate for the expansion of existing transit services (i.e., routes and schedules), including the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority's Palmer/Ware bus routes and the Quaboag Connector, to provide Palmer residents with more convenient access to local/regional destinations and regional populations with greater access to Palmer's employment and commercial centers.	LU; ED; PFS	LU1-1.8; LU1-1.4; ED5-4; TM1-6; TM1-7	Community Development; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation; Pioneer Valley Transit Authority; Council on Aging	\$\$\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
TM1-6	In partnership with the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, Quaboag Connector, and other relevant organizations, explore innovative methods to increase transit ridership, such as advancing the digitization of service information and developing audience-specific materials (e.g., brochures, info sheets).	PH	TM1-6; TM1-7	Community Development	Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation; Pioneer Valley Transit Authority; Council on Aging	\$	1-5 years	Low
TM1-7	In partnership with Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, Quaboag Connector, and other relevant organizations, and to inform TM 1.5, administer a public transit rider survey(s) to discover what works best for transit users and to identify any populations with unmet transportation needs. Strive to target disadvantaged populations in the survey's distribution, e.g., those associated with the Palmer Food Share and Ware Regional Recovery Center.	LU; PFS; PH	LU1-1.8; PFS2-1; TM1-5; TM1-6; PH9-5	Community Development	Pioneer Valley Transit Authority; Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation; Council on Aging; Library Board of Trustees; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	\$	1-5 years	Low
TM1-8	Continue to work with MassDOT and local officials to monitor traffic levels and crash frequencies at high-crash locations, while identifying problem intersections and roadway segments. As part of this action, continue participation in the State's Road Safety Audit Program and implement intersection improvements, as necessary.	PH	TM3-1	Public Safety	Public Works; MassDOT	\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
TM1-9	Evaluate the need to restore major, structurally deficient transportation infrastructure owned by the Town prior to making funding commitments. Consider criteria such as impacts to mobility, business and workforce, and equity.	ED; PFS	PFS3-2; SCC4-1	Public Works	Town Council/ Manager; Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
TM1-10	Continue to work with local industrial operations as well as freight rail and trucking operators to understand and address the long-term needs of the railway infrastructure that is critical to Palmer's economy.	LU; ED; PFS	PFS3-2	Town Council/ Manager; Planning and Economic Development	-	\$	5-15 years	Moderate
TM1-11	Continue to advocate for the East-West Passenger Rail Project with a stop in downtown Palmer (Depot Village) and work with MassDOT and other stakeholders in advancing this important project that offers opportunities for improved local and regional connectivity, private partnerships, development, and improved infrastructure.	LU; ED	LU1-1.8; LU1-1.2; ED4-3; TM1-11.1	East/West Rail Steering Committee	Town Council/ Manager; Planning and Economic Development; MassDOT; Local Elected Representatives	\$	1-5 years	High
TM1-11.1	In the event that Palmer becomes a transit stop along the East-West Passenger Rail Corridor, seek local representation over the station in coordination with MassDOT and the established regional service operator.	-	TM1-11	Town Council/ Manager	East/West Rail Steering Committee; Planning and Economic Development; Community Development	\$	10-15 years	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Goal TM2: Become a bicycle and pedestrian-friendly community.								
TM2-1	Create a Palmer Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to oversee the implementation of pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, obtain funding for improvement projects, advocate for pedestrians and cyclists, and maintain continued dialogue with regional planning agencies.	LU; ED; PH	ED3-5; All TM Goal 2 Actions	Town Council/ Manager; Board of Health	Community Development; Public Safety; Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Low
TM2-2	Develop a Town-wide Bicycle Network Master Plan to improve Palmer's bikeability, as well as provide connections to off-road paths and surrounding communities.	ED; OSR	ED3-5; ED5-2; OSR1-4; OSR2-2; TM2-1	Future Palmer Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee	Public Safety; Conservation Commission; Planning and Economic Development; Community Development	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
TM2-3	Explore opportunities to enhance or expand pedestrian and bicycle access in ways that support retail, business activities, schools, and arts/ cultural events. Seek funding through MassDOT's newly launched Shared Streets and Spaces Program.	ED; OSR; PFS; PH	OSR1-4; OSR2-2; PFS1-4; TM2-1; PH3-1; PH4-2	Town Council/ Manager; Community Development	Chamber of Commerce; Palmer Historical & Cultural Center; School Department/ Pathfinder	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
TM2-4	Seek full compliance with the ADA within Town right-of-way (e.g., curbs, sidewalks, pedestrian crossings/signals) by ensuring ADA requirements are implemented as part of any new applicable construction or replacement project.	OSR; PH	OSR1-4; OSR1-5; TM1-4; TM2-1; TM3-1	ADA Coordinator	Public Works; Community Development	\$	10-15 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
TM2-5	Enhance the Town's sidewalk network, particularly along its arterial corridors, while incorporating traffic-calming measures to connect Palmer's villages.	LU; OSR	LU1-1.3; OSR1-4; OSR2-2; TM1-4; TM2-1; TM2-6	Public Works	Public Safety	\$\$	10-15 years	Low
TM2-6	Explore reducing the vehicle travel lane width of Main Street in Depot Village to allow for bicycle lanes and/or expanded sidewalks to accommodate all modes of travel.	LU	TM2-1; TM2-5	Public Works; Public Safety	-	\$	10-15 years	Low
TM2-7	Continue to work with MassDOT and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, along with private landowner(s), to complete connections along the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail in Palmer between Belchertown and Ware.	LU; OSR	LU1-1.3; OSR1-4; OSR2-2; OSR2-2.4; TM2-1; TM2-7.1; TM2-7.2	Conservation Commission	Planning and Economic Development	\$\$	1-5 years	High
TM2-7.1	In concert with the state, pursue funding to support the construction of required infrastructure for the completion of the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail in Palmer, e.g., roadway crossings and bridges over Main Street and over the Swift River into Belchertown. A potential funding source is the MassTrails Grants Program.	LU; PFS	PFS3-1; PFS3-4; TM2-1; TM2-7	Conservation Commission	Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	High
TM2-7.2	Explore opportunities to connect existing and future trails in Palmer to the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail to increase access to this future recreational and commuter transportation network.	ED; OSR	TM2-1; TM2-7	Conservation Commission	Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
TM2-8	Explore bicycle and pedestrian improvements along Shearer Street, Route 181, and Route 32.	OSR	OSR2-2; TM2-1	Palmer Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee	Public Safety; Public Works	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
TM2-9	Coordinate with surrounding communities on the potential to join Valley Bike Share to enhance bicycle access and local/regional travel and connectivity.	-	TM2-1	Community Development	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	\$	10-15 years	Low
TM2-10	Install bicycle parking and/or storage in strategic locations around each of the village center areas, employment centers, commercial centers, and other Town assets/amenities.	ED; OSR	OSR1-4; TM2-1	Palmer Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee	Public Works	\$\$	1-5 years	Low
TM2-11	Encourage representation from the Bay State Wing Hospital on local transportation committees to ensure transportation-related projects and policies are implemented or enacted with public health in mind.	PH	TM2-1; TM2-12; PH2-1	Town Council/ Manager	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	\$	1-5 years	Low
TM2-12	Work with the Bay State Wing Hospital to commit to incorporating bicycle and pedestrian improvements in its institutional master plan and/or setting aside financial resources for such improvements.	LU; PH	TM2-1; TM2-11; TM2-13	Town Council/ Manager	-	\$	1-5 years	Low
TM2-13	Ensure that safe and accommodating bicycle and pedestrian access is incorporated into local development projects. Explore additional enforcement mechanisms that can be integrated into the site plan review process.	LU; OSR	OSR2-2; OSR2-2.3; TM2-1; TM2-12	Planning and Economic Development	-	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Goal TM3: Make Palmer's transportation networks future ready.								
TM3-1	Evaluate the feasibility of implementing adaptive signal systems along high congestion corridors for locally maintained traffic signals, including along Thorndike Street, Ware Street/Route 32, North Main Street (in Palmer), and South Main Street (north of High Street in Bondsville).	-	TM1-8; TM2-4	Public Works; Public Safety	-	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
TM3-2	Explore the potential installation of smart technologies (i.e., streetlights, small cell wireless facilities, etc.) and related technology to capitalize on the early adoption of autonomous and connected vehicles, along with associated data collection, maintenance, and distribution.	ED	ED2-4; TM3-4	Public Works; Public Safety	Town Council/ Manager	\$	5-10 years	Low
TM3-3	Expand the Town's network of publicly-accessible electric vehicle charging stations and work with private property owners to expand such stations outside of the Town's control.	ED; PFS; SCC	ED2-4; PFS2-5; TM3-3.1; TM3-3.2; SCC1-7	Planning and Economic Development	-	\$\$	1-5 years	Low
TM3-3.1	Review the Town's Zoning Ordinance to ensure electric vehicle charging stations of different types are explicitly and widely permitted, where appropriate.	LU; SCC	TM3-3	Planning and Economic Development	-	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
TM3-3.2	Investigate ways to encourage new commercial and multi-family developments as well as major renovations of these facility types to include electric vehicle charging infrastructure (i.e., stations and conduit) and/or parking spaces. At a minimum, such developments should be “electric vehicle-ready” (i.e., conduit only).	LU; H; ED; SCC	TM3-3; SCC1-9	Planning and Economic Development	Building Department	\$	1-5 years	Low
TM3-4	Conduct a parking study on major roadways, particularly in the village centers, to identify and address current and future curbside demand, taking into consideration autonomous vehicles, drop-off/pick-up, outdoor dining, parklets, etc.	LU; ED	TM3-2	Planning and Economic Development	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	\$\$	1-5 years	Low
TM3-5	Collaborate with MassDOT on the development of a new Park and Ride lot for the Massachusetts Turnpike. Explore the potential of locating this lot near downtown Palmer (Depot Village) to increase the area’s visibility and visitation.	LU; ED	TM1-11	Planning and Economic Development	Public Works; MassDOT	\$\$\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Sustainability and Climate Change (SSC)								
Goal SSC1: Consistent with the State's commitment to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, work to eliminate municipal as well as community-wide greenhouse gas emissions.								
SCC1-1	Create a Municipal Aggregation (also known as Community Choice Aggregation), which can be used to procure a competitive supply of electricity as well as switch everyone in Palmer who is on basic service over to cleaner energy. Explore a regional collaboration, as appropriate.	ED	SCC1-4; SCC1-5; SCC1-9; SCC1-10; SCC1-11	Town Council/ Manager	Energy Coordinator; State Partners; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Planning and Economic Development	\$	5-10 years	Low
SCC1-2	Participate in and promote the State's Solarize Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) incentive program, along with other renewable energy incentive programs, to increase solar development in Palmer consistent with the community's desires and needs, as well as to install solar plus storage on Town-owned facilities.	ED	ED4-3; SCC1-2.1; SCC1-4; SCC1-10; SCC3-4; SCC4-5	Town Council/ Manager	Public Works; Future Energy Coordinator	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Moderate
SCC1-2.1	Engage the School Department to develop a solar photovoltaic demonstration project to educate both students and the larger community on the benefits of solar energy.	ED; OSR; PFS	NHC1-8; PFS1-7; SCC1-2; SCC1-10	Town Council/ Manager	Energy Coordinator; Conservation Commission; School Department; Pathfinder; Private PV Company	\$	5-10 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
SCC1-3	Perform professional energy audits or assessments at all municipal buildings to identify measures that would make them operate more efficiently. Such assessments should be performed on a regular basis – at least every 10 years.	PFS	SCC1-10; SCC1-4	Town Council/ Manager; Town Departments, as needed	Energy Coordinator; MassSave	\$\$	5-10 years	Moderate
SCC1-4	In coordination with SCC 1.3, where applicable, perform deep energy retrofits (e.g., upgrading mechanical systems, lighting systems, and appliances; insulating walls, roofs, crawlspaces, and foundations; upgrading HVAC and plumbing; replacing windows; and air sealing) at existing municipal facilities. The installation of renewable energy systems and the electrification (i.e., heat pumps) of building systems should be pursued where feasible.	ED; PFS	SCC1-1; SCC1-2; SCC1-3; SCC1-5; SCC1-9; SCC1-10; SCC1-12	Town Council/ Manager	Energy Coordinator; MassSave; Town Departments. as needed; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; State Partners	\$\$\$	10-15 years	Moderate
SCC1-5	Continue to pursue and obtain funding for energy efficiency projects and clean energy solutions through the State's Green Communities Grant Program.	-	SCC1-1; SCC1-4; SCC1-10	Town Council/ Manager	Energy Coordinator; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; State Partners	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Moderate
SCC1-6	Work with regional jurisdictions on the planning of a new regional Wastewater Treatment Facility, and in doing so, advocate for the integration of a sludge-to-energy system.	LU; PFS	PFS4-1; PFS4-3; SCC4-4; SCC4-4.1	Town Council/ Manager; Public Works	Appropriate State and Federal Authorities	\$	5-10 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
SCC1-7	Perform a municipal fleet vehicle assessment to ensure the Town has the right vehicles necessary to achieve its mission based on current and projected conditions, as well as to define a replacement schedule that focuses on the procurement of electric or other alternative fuel vehicles.	PFS; TM	PFS2-5; TM3-3	Public Works	Relevant Town Departments; Green Communities Program; State Partners	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
SCC1-8	Conduct educational outreach (e.g., fairs) to share information on residential energy efficiency and home weatherization programs, concentrating on those that provide financial and technical support to low-income and elderly households (e.g., Mass Save – HEAT Loan Program, Residential and Small-Scale Ground-Source Heat Pump Rebate Program, LEAN Multifamily).	H; ED; PH	H1-6; H3-3; SCC1-8.1; SCC1-10	Future Energy Coordinator	Town Council/Manager; Planning and Economic Development; Conservation Commission; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Chambers of Commerce; State Partners	\$	1-5 years	Low
SCC1-8.1	Leverage the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center's Solarize and HeatSmart Tool Kit, which provides communities with the information necessary to create a local clean energy adoption program.	H; ED	SCC1-8; SCC1-10	Future Energy Coordinator	Town Council/Manager; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
SCC1-9	Explore opportunities to provide locally administered financial incentives for energy efficiency improvements for the commercial, industrial, and residential sectors, such as the establishment of an Energy Revolving Loan (re: the Property Assessed Clean Energy [PACE] model).	H; ED	TM3-3.2; SCC1-10; SCC1-1; SCC1-4	Energy Coordinator; Town Council/ Manager	Planning and Economic Development	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
SCC1-10	Evaluate the potential for hiring a dedicated Energy Coordinator, or supplementing municipal staff resources with external resources, for the facilitation and management of local energy conservation and efficiency initiatives.	All	Most SCC Actions	Town Council/ Manager	-	\$\$	Immediate	High
SCC1-11	Prepare formal municipal and community-scale greenhouse gas emissions inventories to understand the largest sources of emissions and greatest opportunities for reduction.	All	SCC1-1; SCC1-10; SCC2-3	Future Energy Coordinator	State and Federal Partners; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Outside Consultant	\$\$	5-10 years (as required)	Low
SCC1-12	For all new construction and major renovations of Town-owned facilities and infrastructure, ensure they are certifiable by a third-party green building rating system (e.g., Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design [LEED], WELL, Envision) as applicable. Require all Town-owned facilities to have full electrification, where feasible, and strive for net-zero energy buildings.	PFS	ED3-4; SCC1-10; SCC1-4; SCC3-14; SCC4-7	Town Council/ Manager	Future Energy Coordinator	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Goal SSC2: Better manage waste generated from Town operations and community activities, and reduce – consistent with state goals – associated waste to landfill or incineration.								
SCC2-1	Explore enhancements to and the expansion of the Town's waste management services, including recycling and composting. Engage regional partners as advantageous to the Town.	PH	SCC1-10; SCC2-2; SCC2-3; SCC4-3; PH11-5; PH11-6	Town Council/ Manager; Future Energy Coordinator	-	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
SCC2-2	Strive to improve the recycling stream in Palmer by engaging the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and becoming a Recycle Smart Partner, and administering an associated educational program.	NHC	NHC1-8; SCC1-10; SCC2-1; SCC2-3	Town Council/ Manager; Future Energy Coordinator	As stated in action	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
SCC2-3	Work with partners to advance a formal means of tracking municipal solid waste generation and material diversion in Palmer.	-	SCC1-10; SCC1-11; SCC2-1; SCC2-2	Town Council/ Manager; Future Energy Coordinator	As stated in action SCC2-2	\$	5-10 years	Low
Goal SSC3: Prepare and protect local businesses and residents from the implications of climate change.								
SCC3-1	Continue to provide training for Town staff and board/committee members on climate-related public health threats, impacts, and response, especially related to vulnerable populations.	PH	SCC3-9	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator	Relevant Town Departments; Local Emergency Planning Committee	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
SCC3-2	Identify and develop transportation options and support for vulnerable residents, including communication strategies and resource supplies (food, water, necessities), in case of disruptions in transportation, mail, and/or federal assistance programs, such as WIC and SNAP.	PFS; TM; PH	LU1-1.8; PFS2-4; PH2-1; PH9-2; PH10-1	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Future Energy Coordinator	Town Council/ Manager; Local Emergency Planning Committee; State and Federal Partners	\$\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
SCC3-3	In coordination with ED 2.4, find ways to expand broadband and Wi-Fi access throughout Palmer, particularly in limited-access and low-income areas, to ensure reliable access to information and Town-wide communications.	ED; PH	ED2-4	Town Council/Manager	-	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	High
SCC3-4	Explore funding or other programming to provide small solar and battery storage systems to support individuals with in-home health care devices and those in need of essential services, such as refrigeration of medications.	PFS; PH	SCC1-10; PFS2-4; SCC1-2	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Future Energy Coordinator	Town Council/Manager	\$	1-5 years	High
SCC3-5	Seek the establishment of an emergency shelter, potentially at local school buildings.	PFS	SCC3-9; SCC4-1; SCC4-5; PH10-5	Local Emergency Planning Committee	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; School Department/Pathfinder	\$\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Moderate
SCC3-6	Update the Town's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and make it available to the public, including by digital means.	PFS; PH	SCC3-7; SCC4-6	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Local Emergency Planning Committee	Town Council/Manager	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	High
SCC3-7	Incorporate potential climate change impacts into the Town's emergency management and response planning, as well as hazard mitigation planning.	-	SCC3-6	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Local Emergency Planning Committee	Town Council/Manager	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
SCC3-8	Consistent with the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program, continue to engage the community in learning about how climate change is affecting the Town and ideas for how to address it.	H; ED	ED2-1; SCC3-9; SCC3-10; SCC4-9	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Local Emergency Planning Committee	Town Council/ Manager	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
SCC3-9	Engage partners in the provision of public community emergency preparedness training workshops for residents (e.g., what to do under various climate impact scenarios and emergencies, how to support vulnerable neighbors, etc.).	H	SCC3-5; SCC3-8; PH10-5	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Local Emergency Planning Committee	Town Council/ Manager; School Department/ Pathfinder; Relevant Town Departments	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
SCC3-10	Develop an educational program for local businesses to raise awareness of the potential climate change impacts facing Palmer, as well as to share information on emergency preparedness measures and resource distribution.	ED	ED4-4; ED5-2; NHC1-8; SCC3-8; SCC3-11	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Local Emergency Planning Committee	Town Council/ Manager; Relevant Town Departments; Chambers of Commerce	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
SCC3-11	Engage local businesses within Federal Emergency Management Agency-defined Flood Hazard Areas (e.g., Sherwood Lumber Corporation, Maple Leaf Distribution Services) on climate preparedness and collaborate on adaptation measures to ensure their operations are able to remain in Palmer for the long-term.	LU; ED	SCC3-10	Town Council/ Manager; Conservation Commission	Planning and Economic Development; State and Federal Partners	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
SCC3-12	Incorporate climate hazard considerations (e.g., flooding) into the Town's land use regulations to ensure future development is not unnecessarily put at risk for damage.	LU; H; ED	LU1-4; H2-2; ED3-5; SCC3-12.1	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Town Council/Manager; Conservation Commission	Planning and Economic Development; State and Federal Partners	\$	5-10 years, (ongoing)	Low
SCC3-12.1	Evaluate the potential need for the floodplain district to incorporate projected flood conditions.	LU	SCC3-12	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Town Council/Manager; Conservation Commission	Stormwater Coordinator	\$	1-5 years	Low
SCC3-13	Review the Town's Wetlands Bylaws to incorporate climate change considerations related to potential habitat loss/degradation, flood storage, etc.	LU; NHC; OSR	NHC1-5	Conservation Commission	State and Federal Partners	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Low
SCC3-14	Promote the incorporation of green infrastructure measures/best practices into all future construction projects, new and major renovations.	LU; H; ED; NHC; OSR	ED3-4; NHC1-6; OSR2-2.3; SCC1-12; SCC4-7	Town Council/Manager	Planning and Economic Development; Building Department; Conservation Commission	\$	5-10 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Goal SSC4: Continually assess the implications of potential climate change impacts and strengthen adaptive capacity of the Town's facilities and infrastructure.								
SCC4-1	Conduct a Town-wide inventory of local roadways (especially official evacuation routes), culverts, bridges, and other transportation and stormwater infrastructure to assess condition; identify vulnerable infrastructure in need of maintenance, repair, or replacement; and prioritize projects for investment. This includes prioritizing and implementing repairs and upgrades to Route 20 to alleviate impacts from flooding.	PFS; TM	LU1-1.2; PFS3-3; TM1-9; SCC3-5	Town Council/ Manager	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Stormwater Coordinator; Public Works; Local Emergency Planning Committee	\$\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	High
SCC4-2	Identify funding opportunities for bridge repair. All bridges in Palmer have spans greater than 25 feet, and therefore, are ineligible for MassDOT's Small Bridge Grant Program.	PFS; TM	PFS3-1; PFS3-4; TM1-3	Town Council/ Manager	Planning and Economic Development; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Community Development; Local Emergency Planning Committee; State and Federal Partners	\$	Ongoing	High
SCC4-3	Continue to assess the feasibility, including costs, potential locations, and funding opportunities, for the relocation of the Department of Public Works building out of the floodplain.	LU; PFS	SCC2-1	Town Council/ Manager; Public Works	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator	\$	1-5 years (ongoing, immediate)	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
SCC4-4	Perform an assessment of the Wastewater Treatment Plant, its vulnerabilities and adaptive capacity based on future storm events and flood projections.	PFS	PFS4-1; PFS4-3; SCC1-6	Town Council/ Manager; Public Works	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Federal and State Partner Agencies	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Moderate
SCC4-4.1	In coordination with SCC 1.6, conduct a feasibility study, including analysis of costs, potential locations, and funding opportunities, for hardening or relocating the Wastewater Treatment Plant as appropriate.	LU; PFS	SCC1-6	Town Council/ Manager; Public Works	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Federal and State Partner Agencies	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	Moderate
SCC4-5	Evaluate and acquire additional backup power capacity (e.g., generators, distributed/renewable energy sources) across the Town's critical facilities and emergency shelters.	PFS	SCC1-2; SCC3-5	Town Council/ Manager	Local Emergency Planning Committee; Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; FEMA	\$\$	5-10 years	Moderate
SCC4-6	In coordination with SCC 3.6, engage Local Emergency Planning Committee in frequent discussions about potential climate change impacts and their implications on Palmer's critical facilities and infrastructure.	All	SCC3-6	Town Council/ Manager; All Departments	Local Emergency Planning Committee; Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator	\$	1-5 years	High
SCC4-7	Develop guidelines and/or design recommendations for new public infrastructure to consider increased storm frequency and enhancing flood resiliency.	LU; NHC; OSR; PFS; TM	LU1-1.2; SCC1-12; SCC3-14	Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator; Stormwater Coordinator	Planning and Economic Development; Conservation Commission; Community Development; Public Works	\$	1-5 years	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
SCC4-8	Assess existing stormwater infrastructure and improve its condition based on future storm events and flood projections.	PFS	PFS1-2; PFS3-2; PFS4-5	Stormwater Coordinator; Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator	-	\$	1-5 years (ongoing)	High
SCC4-9	Continue to pursue annual Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Action Grants through the State, potentially in collaboration with regional entities to maximize resources and effects.	-	SCC3-8; SCC4-10	Town Council/ Manager; Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator	-	\$	1-5 years (ongoing, immediate)	High
SCC4-10	Continue to implement the remaining high priority actions, as well as other actions as feasible and reasonable, identified as part of the Town's Community Resilience Building Workshop, funded under the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Planning program.	-	SCC4-9	Town Council/ Manager; Municipal Vulnerable Preparedness Coordinator	Conservation Commission; Planning and Economic Development; Stormwater Coordinator; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	\$-\$\$\$	Ongoing, Immediate	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Public Health (PH)								
Goal PH1: Create a welcoming culture for people of all ages by becoming an Age and Dementia Friendly Community.								
PH1-1	Change the narrative about the aging population to celebrate the wisdom, skills, talents and lived experience, both personal and professional, of older adults as well as the contributions that they have made to the community.	All	PH1-2; PH7-1; PH7-2; PH12-6	Council on Aging; Veterans Agent	Planning and Economic Development; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; Greater Springfield Senior Services; Alzheimer's Association; Brookfield Institute	\$	1-5 years	Low
PH1-2	Ensure that older adults, people with disabilities, and other marginalized populations are included in planning for improvements to the social and built environments in Palmer.	LU, H, ED, OSR	H2-5; ED4-1; PH1-1; PH4-4	Town Council/Manager; Community Development; Conservation Commission; Council on Aging; ADA Coordinator	Planning and Economic Development	\$	Ongoing	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Goal PH2: Transportation services support the needs of all Palmer residents.								
PH2-1	Evaluate the needs of older adults and people with disabilities annually to ensure that they know about the transportation services available to them and that the services meet their needs in terms of travel destinations and support.	LU, TM, SCC	LU1-1.8; TM2-11; SCC3-2; PH7-2	Council on Aging	Planning and Economic Development; Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation; Quaboag Connector; Pioneer Valley Transit Authority; Baystate Wing Hospital	\$	1-5 years	Low
Goal PH3: Provide safe walking and biking routes for people of all ages and abilities.								
PH3-1	Evaluate walking and biking routes between areas of dense residential development, schools, retail and employment centers. Engage residents in walk audits to educate them on the elements of safe pedestrian infrastructure and to involve them in planning for improvements.	H, ED, TM, SCC	ED3-5; TM1-4; TM2-3	Board of Health	Planning and Economic Development; Public Works; Council on Aging; Safe Routes to School; School Department/ Pathfinder	\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Goal PH4: Ensure access to recreational resources for all residents in all seasons.								
PH4-1	Explore the development of Shared Use Agreements with the Palmer Schools to allow community use of recreation and fitness facilities after school hours.	OSR	OSR2-4	Board of Health	Open Space/ Recreation Committee; Town Council/ Manager; School Department/ Pathfinder	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
PH4-2	Improve accessibility in and around parks through sidewalk maintenance and improvements; visible crosswalks, curb ramps and detectable warning strips at intersections; lighting; and adding benches and shaded rest areas.	OSR, TM	ED3-5; OSR1-1; OSR1-2; TM2-3; PH4-4	Community Development; Public Works; ADA Coordinator	Planning and Economic Development; Council on Aging; Conservation Commission	\$\$	Ongoing	Moderate
PH4-3	Add accessible public restrooms to identified recreation areas to encourage more use.	OSR	OSR1-1; OSR1-2	Community Development; Public Works; ADA Coordinator	Open Space/ Recreation Committee; Council on Aging	\$\$	1-5 years	High
PH4-4	Engage older adults and people with disabilities in the design for reconstruction of parks and recreation facilities.	OSR, PFS	OSR1-1; OSR1-2; OSR1-5; PFS1-4; PH1-2; PH4-2	Community Development; Council on Aging; Public Works; ADA Coordinator	Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	High
PH4-5	Develop outdoor recreational programming for residents of all age groups including older adults.	NHC, OSR	NHC1-8; NHC4-5; OSR1-3; OSR2-5; PH4-6	Recreation; Council on Aging; School Department	Safe Routes to School	\$	1-5 years	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PH4-6	Develop and promote places for winter outdoor and indoor recreation.	OSR	OSR2-5; PH4-5	Conservation Commission; Recreation; School Department	Planning and Economic Development; Public Works; Council on Aging	\$	1-5 years	High
Goal PH5: Ensure all residents have access to technology and the ability to use it.								
PH5-1	Study the feasibility of implementing a program to loan tablets or laptops to households that do not currently own computers, and a system for training and connecting all households to affordable internet service.	PFS	PH5-2	Council on Aging (and Senior volunteers)	Library; School Department; Greater Springfield Senior Services	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PH5-2	Work with service providers to ensure that discounted internet options are available to older adults and low-income households and promote awareness of these programs.	H	H3-3; PH5-1	Town Council/ Manager	Council on Aging; Library; M-PACT-TV	\$	1-5 years	High
Goal PH6: Develop a communications plan for all Town information and events.								
PH6-1	Promote installation of kiosks or community boards in neighborhoods (new and existing) as well as all communication resources (websites and social media) that can be used by the Town to post information about community resources, upcoming events, etc. Announcements should be printed in large type for those who are visually impaired.	ED	ED1-1; PH10-2	Community Development	Town Council/ Manager; Municipal Departments	\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Goal PH7: Provide opportunities for older adults to work and become engaged in the community.								
PH7-1	Establish a mentoring program between older adults and prospective entrepreneurs to celebrate the knowledge and experience that older adults bring to the community, and to provide opportunities for intergenerational learning.	ED	ED2-5; PH1-1; PH2-1; PH12-6	Council on Aging	School Department/ Pathfinder; Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
PH7-2	Ensure that people of all ages have access to employment opportunities through expanded transportation services and partnerships between the Council on Aging/Senior Center and local businesses.	ED, TM	ED2-6; ED5-2; PH1-1; PH2-1	Council on Aging	Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation; Community Development; Chamber of Commerce	\$\$	5-10 years	Moderate
Goal PH8: Ensure that Palmer Residents have more affordable and healthy food options.								
PH8-1	Reinstate a Farmers Market or a farm stand that accepts SNAP, HIP, and WIC benefits, or otherwise incentivizes purchase of healthy foods.	ED	PH8-2; PH8-4; PH10-2; PH11-2	Community Development	Town Council/ Manager; Local Farms; Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture; Department of Transitional Assistance; Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation	\$\$	1-5 years	High

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PH8-2	Launch a Community Supported Agriculture program in cooperation with Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture and area farms with monthly shares available through HIP and delivery location(s) in Palmer.	ED	PH8-1; PH11-2	Board of Health	Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture; Council on Aging; Local Farms	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PH8-3	Research eligible grant and loan programs to assist local corner stores in obtaining equipment and resources to provide fresh local food options.	ED	All PH Goal 9	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	Community Development; Mass Food Trust (Franklin County Community Development Corporation); Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PH8-4	Explore the feasibility of partnering with surrounding communities to provide a Mobile Food Market for sale of fresh local produce.	ED	PH8-1; PH9-2; PH10-4; PH11-4	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation	\$\$	1-5 years	Moderate
Goal PH9: Ensure that municipal planning, design and development increases access to healthy food for all residents.								
PH9-1	Add healthy food retail provisions to local development processes through community benefits agreements, density bonuses, tax incentive packages or similar tools.	LU, ED	-	Town Council/ Manager	Board of Health; Community Development	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PH9-2	Prioritize transportation infrastructure and services to ensure access to food retail and assistance programs.	TM, SCC	SCC3-2; PH8-4; PH10-4	Community Development; Town Council/ Manager	Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation; Quaboag Connector; Public Works; Planning and Economic Development; Council on Aging	\$\$	Ongoing	Low
PH9-3	Include access to food retail options in prioritization of Complete Streets, public transit, and highway and sidewalk maintenance projects.	ED, PFS, TM	TM1-1; TM1-2	Community Development; Town Council/ Manager	Planning and Economic Development; Public Works	\$	Ongoing	Low
PH9-4	Ensure that Site Plan Review and Special Permit Review facilitate increased food access by requiring safe and easy access by pedestrians, bicyclists, people in wheelchairs, public transit users and automobiles.	LU, TM	TM1-7	Planning and Economic Development	Board of Health	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
Goal PH10: Ensure that Palmer residents have access to food assistance resources that increase food security and improve health.								
PH10-1	Partner with the Department of Transitional Assistance, health care providers, and other organizations that assist with public benefit programs to ensure that all residents who qualify for SNAP and other food assistance programs are aware of the resources and how to apply for enrollment.	ED, PFS	SCC3-2; PH10-2; PH10-3	Board of Health	DTA; Council on Aging; GSSS; Food Bank of Western Mass; WIC; Behavioral Health Network; School Department/ Pathfinder; Baystate Wing Hospital; Veterans Agent; Brookfield Institute	\$	1-5 years	Low
PH10-2	Provide information on signing up for the SNAP, and how to use HIP on Town website and in all departments that offer public assistance programs.	-	PH6-1; PH8-1; PH10-5; PH10-6	Board of Health; Council on Aging; Veterans Agent	Town Council/ Manager; School Department/ Pathfinder; Brookfield Institute; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PH10-3	Advocate for a stop by the Food Bank Mobile bus in Palmer.	-	PH8-4; PH9-2	Town Council/ Manager	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion; Board of Health; Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation; Council on Aging; Baystate Wing Hospital; Veterans Agent; Brookfield Institute; Food Bank of Western MA	\$\$	1-5 years	Low
PH10-4	Increase visibility of all emergency food resources (Palmer Food Share, Inc.; Second Congregational Church, Senior Center, School) in Palmer through Town website and printed resource guides. Print flyers and resources in large print for older adults and others with vision impairments.	PFS, SCC	SCC3-5; SCC3-9; PH10-2	Board of Health	Town Council/ Manager; Council on Aging; Palmer Food Share, Inc.; School Department/ Pathfinder; Second Congregational Church	\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PH10-5	Publicize eligibility criteria for Brown Bag pickup and other food assistance resources.	-	PH10-2	Council on Aging; School Department/ Pathfinder	Board of Health; Food Bank of Western MA; Town Council/ Manager	\$	1-5 years	Low
Goal PH11: Municipal planning, policy and programs promote opportunities for farmers and residents to grow food in Palmer.								
PH11-1	Identify at least one Community Garden site and seek funding for construction and management.	OSR	OSR2-6; PH11-5	Conservation Commission; Town Council/ Manager; Community Development; Board of Health; Open Space and Recreation Committee; Future Community Garden Committee	Planning and Economic Development	\$\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PH11-2	Explore interest in making Palmer a Right to Farm community to signify the importance of local agriculture to the local economy and health of the community.	ED, NHC	PH8-1; PH8-2	Planning and Economic Development	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
PH11-3	Promote the development of home-based gardens through training programs on soil testing, building raised beds, home garden practices and food safety, and best practices for keeping chickens.	SCC	PH11-4; PH11-6; PH12-4	School Department/ Pathfinder	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion; Boy Scouts; Conservation Commission	\$	1-5 years	Moderate

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PH11-4	Explore the implications of promoting donations of excess produce from home gardeners to food pantries throughout summer months.	-	PH8-4; PH11-3	Palmer Food Share, Inc.	Board of Health; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PH11-5	Design community gardens to include well-constructed compost facilities for garden waste.	SCC	SCC2-1; PH11-1; PH11-6	Public Works; Community Development; Town Council/ Manager; Conservation Commission; Open Space/ Recreation Committee; Future Community Garden Committee	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion; Planning and Economic Development	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PH11-6	Continue to promote home based composting efforts through training on composting and programs that offer discounted compost bins.	SCC	SCC2-1; PH11-5	Conservation Commission	Public Works; Future Community Garden Committee	\$	1-5 years, Ongoing	Moderate
Goal PH12: Support the Palmer Schools in continuing efforts to provide students with nutritious meals and snacks.								
PH12-1	Engage the School Committee, food service providers, parents, and students to provide information and review the Palmer School Wellness Policy and promote revisions where needed.	PFS	PFS2-1; PH12-2; PH12-3	School Wellness Committee	School Department/ Pathfinder; Board of Health	\$	1-5 years	Low

Implementation

#	Action	Related Elements	Related Actions	Implementation Leadership	Implementation Partners	Cost Estimate	Timeframe	Priority
PH12-2	Further the nutrition goals in the School Wellness Policy nutrition standards for school meals and explore provisions for including locally grown fresh food in school meal and snack programs where feasible.	NHC	PH12-1	School Wellness Committee	School Department/ Pathfinder; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PH12-3	Ensure that the Palmer School Wellness Policy includes a provision to promote consumption of water including providing bottle filling stations and encouraging students to carry refillable drinking water bottles in school.	SCC	PH12-1	School Wellness Committee	School Department/ Pathfinder; Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	\$	1-5 years	Moderate
PH12-4	Support school gardening already established at Old Mill Pond School and assess the feasibility of integrating gardening and nutrition education into the science and/or health curriculum.	NHC, PFS	NHC1-8; PH11-3; PH12-5	School Department/ Pathfinder	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
PH12-5	Assess the feasibility of installing additional garden beds and integrating gardening and nutrition programs into middle and high school curricula.	NHC, PFS	PH12-4	School Department/ Pathfinder	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/ Mass in Motion	\$	5-10 years	Moderate
PH12-6	Investigate possible intergenerational programs for school or community gardening.	NHC, PFS	PH1-1; PH7-1	Council on Aging; School Department/ Pathfinder	Future Community Garden Committee	\$	1-5 years	Low



Appendices

- ▶ Appendix A Public Health Addendum
- ▶ Appendix B Community Survey Results

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Appendix A: Public Health Addendum

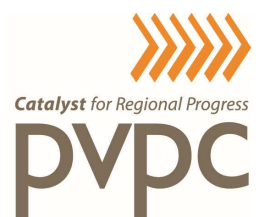
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HEALTH ADDENDUM to the Palmer Master Plan

Promoting Opportunities for Healthy Eating,
Active Living, and Healthy Aging

July 2021



Acknowledgements

This Health Addendum was produced with funding provided by the Massachusetts Department of Health through the Mass in Motion Healthy Hampden program, for which the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission serves as the Coordinator for the towns of Palmer and West Springfield.

We are grateful for the assistance and time spent on reviewing content and drafts of this Health Addendum by the Palmer Health Addendum Working Group which consisted of the following individuals and the organizations that they represent:

Jessica Sizer, Town Council and liaison to the Master Plan Steering Committee

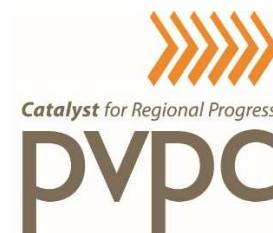
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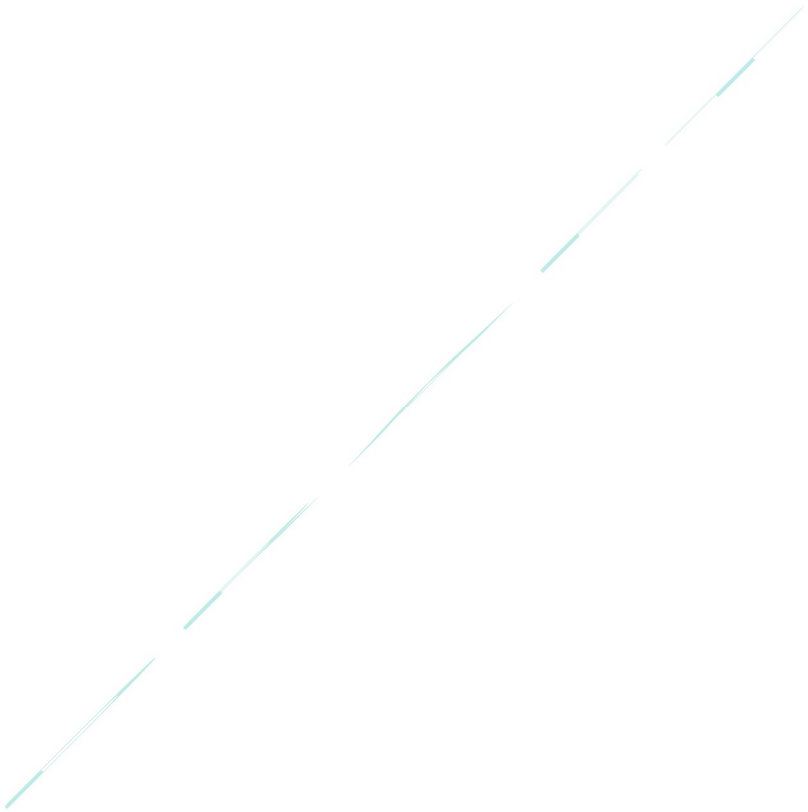
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Executive Summary

The Health Addendum to the Palmer Master Plan provides the research and data analysis around the aspects of Palmer's built and social environments that impact the health outcomes of people who live and work in Palmer. This Addendum was developed in parallel with the Palmer Master Plan as part of the FY21 Work Plan for the Palmer Mass in Motion program, funded through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Demographic Trends

Palmer's population is aging, along with the populations of cities and towns across the US and abroad, due to higher life expectancies and declining birth rates. According to projections by the Donahue Institute, residents over 65 are expected to outnumber children under 18 in Palmer before 2025. With age comes increased chance of disabilities such as mobility, visual and auditory impairments. In Palmer, 17% of the population has a disability, and 58% of people over the age of 75 have a disability (compared to 47% in the state).

Palmer is becoming increasingly diverse and the number of people who do not speak English is also increasing. The Palmer schools have increased the number of teachers of English as a Second Language. According to American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, the Hispanic/Latinx population is estimated to have increased from being 1.5% of the population to 5.3% between 2013 and 2019. More families with householders who are Latino or Hispanic (of any race) or of two or more races are likely to live in poverty compared to families with white householders.

In 2020, a four-person household earning less than \$26,200 was considered below poverty level. The low-income threshold is considered to be 200% of the poverty line, or approximately \$52,400 for a family of four. According to 2018 ACS 5-year estimates, 12.5% of Palmer's population as a whole is living below poverty level. In the census tract that covers the Three Rivers neighborhood, 23.3% of residents are living in poverty.

Families with female heads of households, with no spouse present and with children under 18 are the most likely to be living in Poverty in Palmer (23.2%). Families with householders over 65 are less likely to live in poverty (2.3%). According to data from the Palmer Schools, 46% of students are considered Economically Disadvantaged.

Health Concerns and Prioritized Health Needs

According to the 2019 Baystate Wing Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), the primary health concerns for the Baystate Wing Service area include Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders, Infant and perinatal health, Alzheimer's disease, and chronic health conditions including high rates of cancer, diabetes, asthma, and obesity. More children are obese or overweight in Palmer compared to surrounding communities according to the semi-annual report on Body Mass Index screenings in schools statewide.

Prioritized health needs listed in the area CHNAs are related to social determinants of health, or those factors in the social or built environments, or healthy behaviors that affect people's health. In the

Baystate Wing service area, the areas of need include the social environment, housing, transportation and access to healthy food, physical activity and nutrition, and lack of resources to meet basic needs.

A community's ability to support an aging population is influenced by the Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. According to results of the Healthy Palmer Survey, the areas that are most challenging for older adults in Palmer are transportation, social isolation, housing and financial security. More survey respondents (38%) thought Palmer was fair or poor place to grow old than those who thought Palmer was only a fair or poor place to grow up (29%).

The Built Environment and Impacts on Health

Transportation

As a mostly rural community, access to transportation is a concern for many who live in Palmer. Six percent of residents do not own cars, and many older adults are losing their ability to drive themselves, making transportation services critical for many of the town's residents. The Quaboag Connector provides transportation for people to get to work, shopping, and medical appointments. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority also offers some fixed routes and on-demand services for seniors and people with disabilities. The Town should continue to support these services and develop a better understanding as to whether they meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities.

The ability for people to walk or bike to get to work or access food can contribute to the health and well-being of Palmer's residents. Almost one-third of respondents to the Healthy Palmer Survey said that they were not comfortable walking in village centers due to lack of shoulders or sidewalks in poor condition, and traffic speeds. Consideration of older adults and children, both population groups that could walk more with more supportive infrastructure for walking, should be incorporated into the Town's plans for improvements to sidewalks and roadways.

Short commute times (16% of workers had a commute of less than 20 minutes) suggest that biking to work could be a feasible alternative to automobiles for many Palmer residents if safe routes for biking and walking were available. Participants at public forums voiced support for the section of the Mass Central Rail Trail that goes through Palmer. Such a facility could support access to stores and employment as well as providing a valuable recreational resource for the community.

Participation in the Safe Route to School program could encourage more children to walk to school and would provide access to funding for infrastructure improvements through the Safe Routes to School grant programs.

Buildings and Outdoor Spaces

Healthy and livable communities include places to gather both indoors and outside. The Palmer Public Library and the Senior Center are two important assets that provide space for activities and programs that are open and accessible to people with mobility limitations. The pandemic halted programming in these spaces, enhancing the importance of outdoor spaces for gathering and recreational programs.

The Park Service Density Map developed for a Park Access Project in 2019 showed that some higher density housing is more than ½ mile from parks and trails. Reviewing walking and biking routes to parks or trails from these areas could allow people better access to recreational resources without the need for a car or transportation services.

The analysis also showed that several parks in Palmer have been recently renovated and equipped with playground equipment, walkways and benches for people with disabilities. However, sidewalks and curbs located near the parks were not handicapped accessible or were in poor condition. These are areas that could be improved to allow better access to parks by people of all ages who live within walking or rolling distance of the parks. Responses to the Healthy Palmer Survey suggest that better maintenance of parks, public restrooms, safe walking routes and better lighting would encourage people to use parks and trails more frequently. Many respondents also asked for pet waste stations, benches, playground equipment and handicapped accessible trails.

The gym in the old Converse School was noted as an important indoor recreational resource for youth basketball leagues and should be maintained in Town control if possible. The Town may also want to consider exploring joint use agreements with the schools so that the public can use gymnasiums and fitness equipment while schools are not in session.

Public buildings provide spaces for people to congregate indoors and also to access educational and fitness programs. The Library and Senior Center are two such facilities that are important in Palmer, especially to older adults. Assessment of the Senior Center's capacity to serve an aging population

Housing

Survey results suggest that housing is both a challenge and an asset for older adults living in Palmer. While housing is somewhat more affordable in Palmer than in some other communities, there is no housing with supported services for older adults, and there are very few subsidized units that are handicapped accessible.

For older adults who wish to age in place, or to continue to live in their own homes as they age, support services may be needed. While not everyone loses their ability to drive at the age of 80, people are more likely to have physical or cognitive limitations as they age making driving less safe. Home modifications may also be necessary for people with mobility or visual impairments, as well as assistance with basic tasks such as shoveling snow, cooking or cleaning.

The majority of Palmer's housing stock (69%) was built before 1969. Challenges with older housing include outdated heating and cooling systems, poor insulation, design not suited for people with mobility limitations, and prevalence of contaminants such as asbestos, lead paint and lead pipes. In Palmer, 74% of children ages 9-47 months were screened for lead in 2017, and 38 per 1000 had blood lead levels greater than 5 ug/dl. The statewide average is 20.3 per 1,000. Careful attention to testing and remediation of lead paint in older units should be considered especially for families of young children who purchase older homes in Palmer.

Communication and Technology

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the importance of technology and internet connection for employment as well as for participation in all aspects of the community, from public meetings to social programs and medical appointments. The pandemic also highlighted the divide between those who have the technology, internet service, and knowledge of how to use this technology and those who don't. In Palmer, age presents the greatest disparities between households who have internet subscriptions and own computers. Whereas 94.6% of children under 18 had internet subscriptions, only

63.8% of adults 65 and older had internet, and more than 28% of adults over 65 do not own a computer according to the 2018 ACS 5-year estimates.

Health Care, Social and Community Services

The Town provides social and health services through the Health Department, Council on Aging and Senior Center, and the Veterans Services Department. The Town is also fortunate to have a full-service hospital located in the community. The closure of the Baystate Mary Lane hospital in Ware may bring additional patients and employment opportunities to the Baystate Wing hospital, and also the need for transportation services for Ware residents to access health care services in Palmer.

Access to Healthy Food

Out of 191 Healthy Palmer survey respondents, over 50% said that they were not able to get the food they wanted or needed at some point in the previous 12 months. Approximately 1/3 of respondents said that they experienced concern about shopping during the pandemic, and 26% said that the cost of food was an issue. Others said that the food that they wanted was not available at local stores. Many survey respondents said that they experienced food insecurity before the pandemic as well as during the shutdown.

Palmer residents expressed interest in having a Farmers Market in town. While a privately owned farm stand operates in warmer months, it is not currently able to accept SNAP (EBT cards) or HIP for payment of the produce offered. A farm located in Hampden, D&R Farms, does accept the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) benefits that are automatically available to all SNAP recipients and is willing to deliver farm shares to a location for pick-up in Palmer. More education about the HIP program and helping families access SNAP benefits could help many families who are food insecure. Working with neighborhood stores to encourage them to carry healthier food options could also provide better access to healthy food for households that do not have access to cars.

There are no active farms in Palmer that grow fresh fruits and vegetables for sale, and only one farm has land preserved through the State's Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program. The Strzemienski Farm on Route 181 used to offer plots for community groups and individuals to garden, but management of the plots and invasive species caused them to stop this practice. There is interest in starting up community gardens again on town-owned property, with eighty-seven percent of Healthy Palmer Survey respondents in favor of Town building community gardens. Most survey respondents said that community gardens should be built in Palmer Depot or Three Rivers (38% each). Management of community gardens has been a barrier to the Town moving forward with building them as Town staff do not currently have the capacity to manage a community garden in addition to their other responsibilities.

The Town of Palmer's Zoning Ordinance does not prohibit any horticultural food production or gardening for personal use in any zoning district, and some agricultural uses (agriculture, floriculture, vita culture, aquaculture and silviculture; temporary greenhouses or retail stands for sale of agricultural products; and non-commercial forestry and growing of all vegetables) are specifically listed as permitted uses in all residential and business districts. Palmer's Zoning does not include a Right to Farm provision which would "encourage the pursuit of agriculture, promote agriculture-based economic opportunities, and protect farmlands within the town by allowing agricultural uses and related activities to function

with minimal conflict with abutters and town agencies.” Adoption of such an ordinance could signify the Town’s support for agricultural uses.

Free food for families in need is distributed primarily through Palmer Food Share, Inc. with supplies from the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and supplemented through donations from neighborhood stores and cash contributions. The Second Congregational Church also offers a smaller food pantry that will supply enough food for a couple of days for people who need it. During the pandemic, the Palmer Schools became a central distribution point for meals to families with children who would normally have meals at school during the week. The schools distributed over 10,000 meals during the summer of 2020, operating five days a week and at three different locations. The Senior Center, when open, also offers meals for seniors and a “brown bag” food distribution program supplied by the Food Bank. The Senior Center used their vans to deliver food during the pandemic and increased the delivery of meals on wheels.

The Palmer Schools provide an important food source for many children, and an opportunity for education about nutrition and growing food. The Old Mill Pond Elementary School has a school garden, and the school makes an effort to source local produce for its nutrition program. A more formalized policy around sourcing local food and offering a curriculum around growing and eating nutritional food could be a good way to introduce many families to nutritious diets.

Introduction

This Health Addendum provides a detailed analysis of the aspects of the built and social environments that impact the health and well-being of Palmer residents and the people who work in and visit Palmer. This Addendum was developed in parallel with the Palmer Master Plan as part of the FY21 Work Plan for the Palmer Mass in Motion program, funded through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. The findings of this Addendum are included as the Health chapter of the 2021 Palmer Master Plan, and the Goals and Actions included at the end of this report are the same that were included in the Master Plan.

The Town of Palmer has participated in the Mass in Motion program since 2015, receiving technical assistance from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) which serves as the Mass in Motion Coordinator for the Town. Mass in Motion is a statewide movement to prevent obesity and chronic diseases by promoting opportunities for Healthy Eating and Active Living in places where people live, work, learn and play. This report compiles the research and recommendations that have been developed through the program in Palmer, as well as census data and the results of a Healthy Palmer Survey conducted during the Fall of 2020, to establish a baseline understanding of the current conditions in Palmer and lay out an action plan to improve conditions to support a healthy built environment and to improve some of the social determinants of health, food access, that affects individual, family and community health and well-being.

As demonstrated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color, marginalized populations tend to be at the greatest risk of having poor health outcomes due to the impacts that multiple environmental factors can have on one's health. For this reason, the Mass in Motion program (and this health addendum) focuses on vulnerable or marginalized populations. In Palmer, these include people living in poverty, recent immigrants, children, and older adults. Improving conditions for these populations benefits the community as a whole.

The Town hired the consulting firm of VHB to develop the Palmer Master Plan through an MVP Action Grant during the FY21 State fiscal year. This timing allowed the Health Addendum to be developed in parallel with the Master Plan, and for presentations on the health considerations in many chapters of the Master Plan during the public forums that were scheduled and coordinated by VHB and the Master Plan Steering Committee. The process provided a venue for the Health Addendum to highlight the ways that the built and social environments in a town can impact health.

As this last year (2020-2021) has demonstrated, good health can be fleeting and dynamic, changing with the climate and different strains of a virus. It is therefore expected that this Health Addendum will be a dynamic document that may be updated as needed to reflect the changing needs and desires of the community.

Community Engagement

As noted throughout this Addendum, every aspect of the built environment impacts the health of the community. PVPC staff participated in four out of seven Public Forums coordinated and facilitated by VHB during the development of the Palmer Master Plan. Forums in which health considerations were highlighted included Transportation; Housing; Resiliency; and Open Space, Recreation and Natural Resources (one forum covered these last three topics). In addition, a separate forum on the Health

Addendum was held in January 2021, with a focus on healthy aging and access to healthy food. The Master Plan and the Health Addendum were developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore all forums were conducted through Zoom meetings, and were also broadcast live on local cable access (M-PACT) television, and recordings of the forums were available on the M-PACT TV and Master Plan websites. Most of the Master Plan forums were also broadcast on Facebook Live, and comments were monitored by Town staff during the forums.

A Healthy Palmer Survey was administered online through the Palmer Master Plan website and was advertised on several town Facebook pages. Paper copies were distributed through the Council on Aging food delivery program in order to reach elders who were not comfortable with the online format. As an incentive, two Big Y gift cards were offered through a drawing for anyone who responded to the survey and provided contact information for the drawing. A total of 188 people responded to the survey. The results of this survey have been integrated into this Health Addendum and can be found in **Appendix A**.

PVPC staff also conducted interviews with stakeholders and representatives from organizations and businesses that provided emergency food during the pandemic. Some organizations such as the Council on Aging and the Palmer Schools substantially changed how they served clients due to the state-mandated shutdown and distancing requirements, providing meal pick-up sites or delivering food to home-bound seniors. Others such as the Brookfield Institute started food delivery programs as they found that many clients were food insecure as a result of fear or financial difficulty caused by the pandemic. While systems will likely get back to “normal” once the majority of the community receives vaccinations and businesses re-open, lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic may encourage the Town to make changes to increase the food security of all residents.

Health and Community Resilience

Planning for the health of all members of the community increases the overall resilience of the community. This Health Addendum focuses on ways that the built and social environments can improve access to healthy food, opportunities for active transportation and recreation, and how these environments can also support the needs of older adults by eliminating barriers for those who have increasing health needs to fully participate in the community. Goals and associated actions that will maintain Palmer’s healthy built environment and improve and transform unhealthy built environments have been incorporated into the Implementation chapter of the Palmer Master Plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for systems to respond to emergency food needs, communicate with isolated older adults, and provide outdoor spaces for people to recreate when indoor programming is not available. Healthy eating and an active lifestyle can also improve one’s immune system and fight chronic diseases that increase risks of severe illness or death from the coronavirus.

Recent data has shown that life expectancy rates are falling due to the number of deaths that occurred from COVID-19 in 2020. Even prior to the pandemic, Palmer’s rates of life expectancy were lower than some of the surrounding communities based on a map of life expectancy rates included in the 2019 Baystate Wing CHNA.¹ This is a point of concern and another indicator that the Town should consider in

¹ 2019 Baystate Wing CHNA – Map of Life Expectancy rates for western Massachusetts

its development of changes to policies, systems or the built and social environments to promote better health for everyone in the community.

Demographic Factors

Through an analysis of the demographics of a community, we can begin to gain a broad understanding of the makeup of the population and where higher numbers of people with challenges live in the community. Some of the demographic factors that could lead to challenges to accessing healthy food or places to be active include age, disability, income and poverty status, race and ethnicity, and first language other than English.

Age

Age alone does not determine one's physical or cognitive health, but as people get older they are more likely to lose some of their intrinsic capacities that allow them to live independently and to participate fully in their communities. In 2017, approximately 15% of the population of Palmer was over the age of 65. According to population projections by the Donahue Institute, residents of Palmer over the age of 65 are soon expected to outnumber the number of residents under the age of 19 (**Figure 1**).

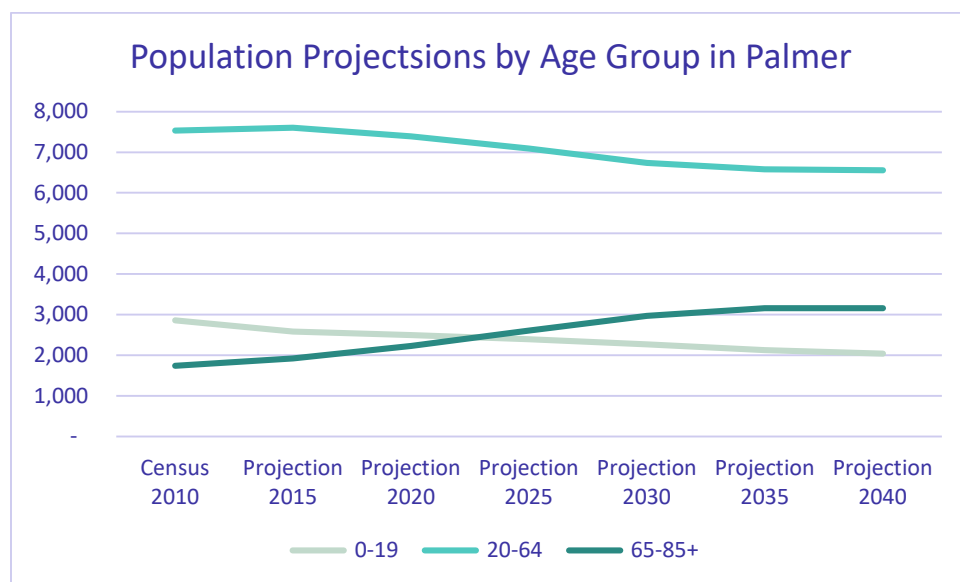


Figure 1 - Population Projections by Age Group (UMass Donahue Institute).

Disability

In Palmer, 17% of the population is disabled, with 7% having two or more disabilities. The number of people with disabilities rises among older adults. In Palmer, 7% of people ages 18-34 have a disability (compared to 6% at the state level) while 22% between the ages of 65 and 74 (21% at the state level), and 58% over the age of 75 (47% state) have a disability. According to data from the Palmer Schools, 19.7% of students have some kind of disability.

Race and Ethnicity

The majority of Palmer's residents identify as being White or Caucasian, but the number of people from different racial and ethnic origins is increasing. According to American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year

estimates, the Hispanic/Latinx population is estimated to have increased from being 1.5% of the population to 5.3% between 2013 and 2019 (**Figure 2**), and the population that is White alone (non-Hispanic) is estimated to have decreased from 96.9% to 88.5%.

Data from the Palmer School District (Mill Pond Elementary School and Palmer Middle and High School) shows a larger racial diversity in that 77.1% of students were non-Hispanic White, 2.8% African American, 2.7% Asian, 12.3% Hispanic and 5% Multi-Race Non-Hispanic.² The number of students whose first language is not English is also on the rise in Palmer Schools. According to data from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), 4.9% of students speak a language other than English as their first language and 3.6% are considered English Learners.

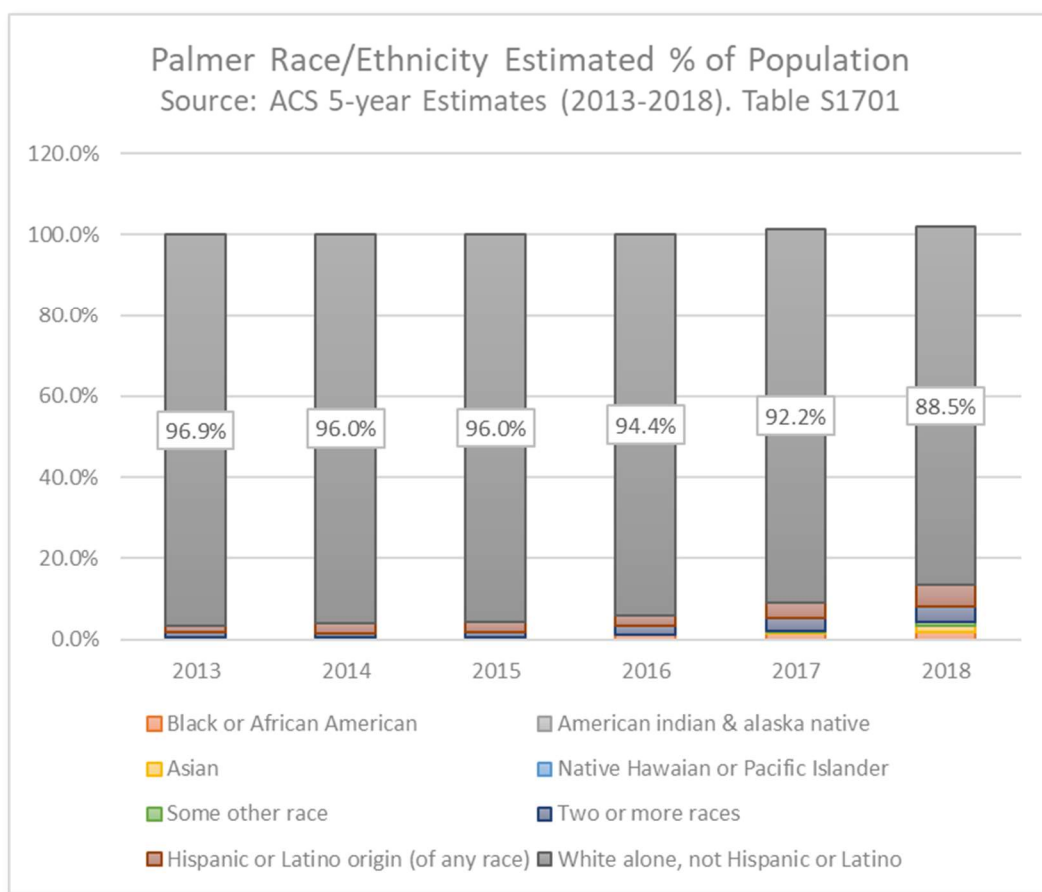


Figure 2 - Estimated Race/Ethnicity as % of Population - 2013-18 ACS 5-year estimates. Table S1701.

² <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2020-21)		
Race	% of District	% of State
African American	3.3	9.3
Asian	2.6	7.2
Hispanic	12.8	22.3
Native American	0.1	0.2
White	76.5	56.7
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.0	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	4.7	4.1

Figure 3 - Enrollment by Race - Palmer School. Source: DESE.

Data at all geographic levels shows that families with non-white householders are more likely to live in poverty than white families. As noted above, a history of systemic racism has led to black and brown populations having poor health outcomes. In Palmer, families with Hispanic or Latino householders or householders of two or more races are more likely to live in poverty than families with white householders. Compared to white householders in Hampden County and the State, more white householders in Palmer live in poverty (**Figure 4**).

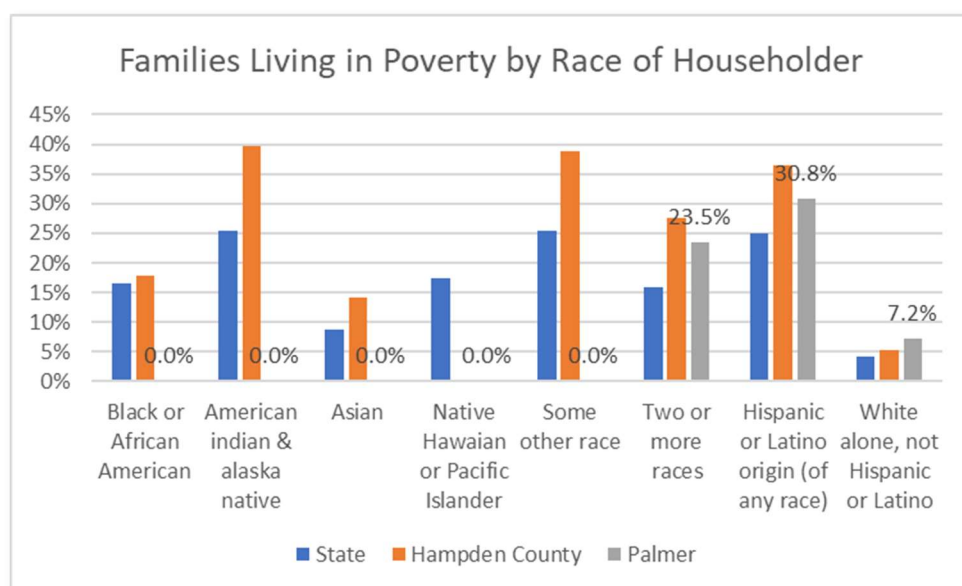


Figure 4 - Families Living in Poverty by Race of Householder. Source: ACS 2018 5-yr estimates.

The Palmer Schools have seen increases in the number of non-English speaking students in recent years and reported that they have 50-60 students whose first language is not English in the 2020-2021 school year. They have moved from having one ½-time ESL teacher to hiring 2 full-time teachers. There are currently 13 languages spoken among students in the schools, with many speaking Mandarin, Russian, and Spanish.³

³ Interview with Amanda Babinski, Palmer Schools, October 10, 2020.

Income and Poverty Status

Economic stability depends upon employment and consistent income, and fosters a person's access to high quality housing, healthy food, and educational opportunities. Low-income and poor households spend a higher proportion of their income on housing-related costs, transportation, and food costs, and therefore their food budgets may be more vulnerable to rent increases, changes in employment, and fluctuations in utility bills and/or food prices.

In 2020, a four-person household earning less than \$26,200 was considered below poverty level. The low-income threshold is considered to be 200% of the poverty line, or approximately \$52,400 for a family of four. In Palmer, 20.9% of families overall are low income (living at 200% of poverty level), and 12.5% live at poverty level or below.⁴ Families with female heads of households, with no spouse present and with children under 18 are the most likely to be living in Poverty in Palmer (23.2%). Families with householders over 65 are less likely to live in poverty (2.3%). According to data from the Palmer Schools, 46% of students are considered Economically Disadvantaged.

2020 Federal Poverty Rates by Household Size

Household #	100%	130%	185%
	\$12,760	\$16,588	\$23,606
	\$21,720	\$28,236	\$40,182
	\$26,200	\$34,060	\$48,470
These rates do not vary from state to state (except in AK and HI), despite significant differences in cost-of-living.			
SOURCE: Federal Register , Vol. 85, No. 12, January 17, 2020, pp. 3060-3061			
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services			

Figure 5 - 2020 Federal poverty rates by Household Size. Source: *Hunger and Poverty in Massachusetts: Map the Meal Gap. Feeding America.* (n.d.). Retrieved August 25, 2020, from <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/massachusetts/county/hampden>

⁴ ACS 2018 5-year estimates. Table S1701.

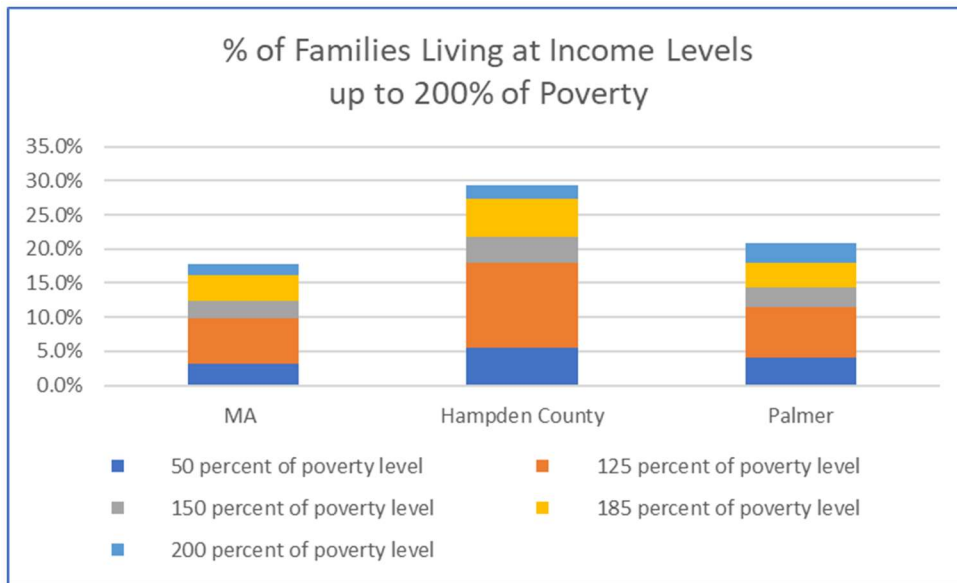


Figure 6 - % of Families Living at Ratios of Poverty Level up to 200% (Low Income). Source: ACS 2018 5-yr estimates.

Health Concerns and Prioritized Health Needs in Palmer

Where one lives and how that location affects an individual's ability to access health care, wellness programs, access to healthy food, employment, and places to exercise can play a large role in an individual's overall health and longevity. The Social Determinants of Health, which include elements of the built environment, social and economic factors, and healthy behaviors, have a greater impact on one's health and life expectancy than access to clinical care alone. Changes in policies, systems or environments can impact health in both positive and negative ways, therefore considering health in all policies can help to eliminate unintended negative consequences.

Populations that are considered most vulnerable and prone to poor health outcomes may have a number of contributing factors such as poor access to transportation due to low income or poverty status, which can also lead to fewer opportunities for employment or access to healthy food. These factors can be compounded for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) due to a history of cultural and systemic racism that for many generations limited opportunities to own property, build capital and access educational opportunities. The resulting disparate opportunities for different races have led to poor health outcomes in BIPOC communities. These disparities were highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic when, in addition to having greater numbers of risk factors leading to worse health outcomes from COVID-19 infection, many essential workers were BIPOC and therefore at risk of greater exposure to the virus.

Community Health Needs Assessments

Every three years, all hospitals must conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). These documents include a review of health data and community engagement through community chats, key stakeholder interviews, and public forums. The document presents health concerns in the service area

as well as the prioritized health needs for the communities served by each facility. Since Palmer is home to the Baystate Wing Hospital, the town is at the center of the Baystate Wing assessment area. Although much of the data is not available at the town level, the results of the assessment provide an overall understanding of many of the health needs that exist in Palmer.

The 2019 Baystate Wing CHNA included many of the health concerns that were highlighted in the 2016 CHNA. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of these concerns and highlighted the need to make broad systems and policy level changes in areas associated with the Social Determinants of Health in order to create long-term improvements to health outcomes.

The primary **health concerns** for the Baystate Wing service area included the following:

- **Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders** including high rates of opioid related hospitalization, high rates of tobacco use and youth vaping.
- **Infant and perinatal health** – High rates of smoking during pregnancy, disparities between public and private insurance. Between 5-7% of Baystate Wing births are pre-term or have low birth weights.
- **Alzheimer’s Disease** – Palmer has higher rates of Alzheimer’s disease (15%) among adults over 65 than the state (14%). Age is a risk factor for contracting dementia and Alzheimer’s disease, and according to the CDC, social isolation increases the likelihood of contracting dementia by 50%.⁵
- **Chronic Health Conditions** – High rates of cancer, diabetes, asthma and associated morbidities. Cancer is the leading cause of death in Palmer. Obesity is a concern among children and older adults, with 24.5% of adults over the age of 65 diagnosed as obese⁶ and over 40% of children identified as either obese or overweight.

In addition to the Health Concerns in the Baystate Wing service area, the CHNA lists elements of the social and built environments that could be contributing to the health concerns listed above. Many of these Prioritized Health Needs are addressed in this Health Addendum and should be considered throughout the chapters of the Palmer Master Plan.

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>

⁶ Mass Healthy Aging Collaborative Community Profiles: https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/wp-content/themes/mhac/pdf/community_profiles/MA_Towncode227_Palmer.pdf

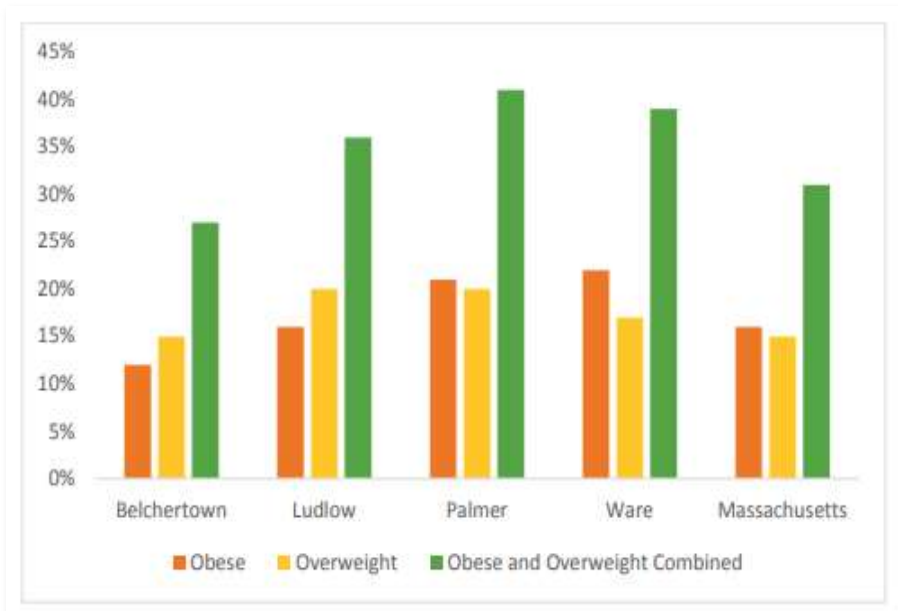


Figure 7 - Rates of Obesity and Overweight Children. Source: Baystate Wing 2019 CHNA/MDPH Results from the Body Mass Index screening in MA Public School Districts, 2015.

The **Prioritized Health Needs** listed in the Baystate Wing CHNA and the ways in which they correspond to the elements of this Addendum and the Master Plan are as follows:

- 1) **Social Environment** – According to the Baystate Wing CHNA, social isolation was a concern prior to the pandemic and was the main challenge for older adults in responses to the Healthy Palmer Survey (primarily after the state mandated shutdown). A report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), determines that loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of premature death and has been associated with a 50% increased risk of dementia. The report also highlights increased risk of loneliness among more vulnerable populations of older adults including immigrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) populations; minorities; and victims of elder abuse.⁷ Planning and community design can create or enhance connections between places where people live and work, and places to gather. The pandemic highlighted the need for connection through technology, and the importance of outdoor spaces as places to get exercise and see friends.
- 2) **Housing** – According to the Baystate Wing CHNA, the average household in the Baystate Wing service area pays more than 50% of their income on housing and transportation, and lower income households may spend up to 2/3 of their income on housing and transportation. High rates of unemployment due to the pandemic led to higher rates of homelessness and evictions as well.

⁷ Mass Healthy Aging Collaborative Community Profiles: https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/wp-content/themes/mhac/pdf/community_profiles/MA_Towncode227_Palmer.pdf

-
- 3) **Lack of Access to Transportation and Healthy Food** – Nearly 6% of households in the Baystate Wing service area do not own cars, and public transit in Palmer is limited. Without a car or other reliable transportation, it is difficult to access education and employment opportunities, to participate in programs that can offer social connection, and to access healthy food if a grocery store is not located within walking distance. Areas of Palmer have been identified as food deserts or having high rates of insecurity. More on access to healthy food and transportation will be discussed later in this Addendum.
 - 4) **Physical Activity and Nutrition** – The Baystate Wing CHNA highlights the need for increased physical activity and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, as low rates of physical activity and healthy eating contribute to high rates of chronic disease and also impact mental health.
 - 5) **Lack of Resources to meet Basic Needs** – Lower levels of education contribute to unemployment and the ability to earn a livable wage. In Palmer, 25% of residents 25 and over have a bachelor's degree or higher (compared to 42% in Massachusetts), and 7.5 % do not have a high school degree (compared with 9.3% at the state level). Unemployment in the region at the writing of the CHNA was 6%. In Palmer, unemployment tripled from 4.3% in July of 2019 to 16.9% in July of 2020 due to the state-mandated shutdown and other COVID-related factors.

According to 2018 ACS 5-year estimates, 12.5% of Palmer's population as a whole is living below poverty level. In the census tract that covers the Three Rivers neighborhood, 23.3% of residents are living in poverty.

Healthy Aging and the Domains of Livability

The World Health Organization (WHO) developed a model for assessing the elements of a community that affect healthy aging. These Eight Domains of Livability include aspects of the built environment (Transportation, Housing, Buildings and Outdoor Spaces), the Social Environment (Social Participation; Respect and Social Inclusion; Employment and Civic Participation) and Community and Health Support (Community Support and Health Services; Communication, Information and Technology). The Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative (MHAC) has built on those domains to include the domains of Dementia Friendly Communities in addition to the eight domains of an Age Friendly community. New domains include Public Safety and Access Equity and Inclusion; and technology has been added to the Communications and Information domain. Similar to the Social Determinants of Health, the Domains of Livability model illustrates the importance of multiple sectors of a community that contribute to opportunities for people to live long and healthy lives.

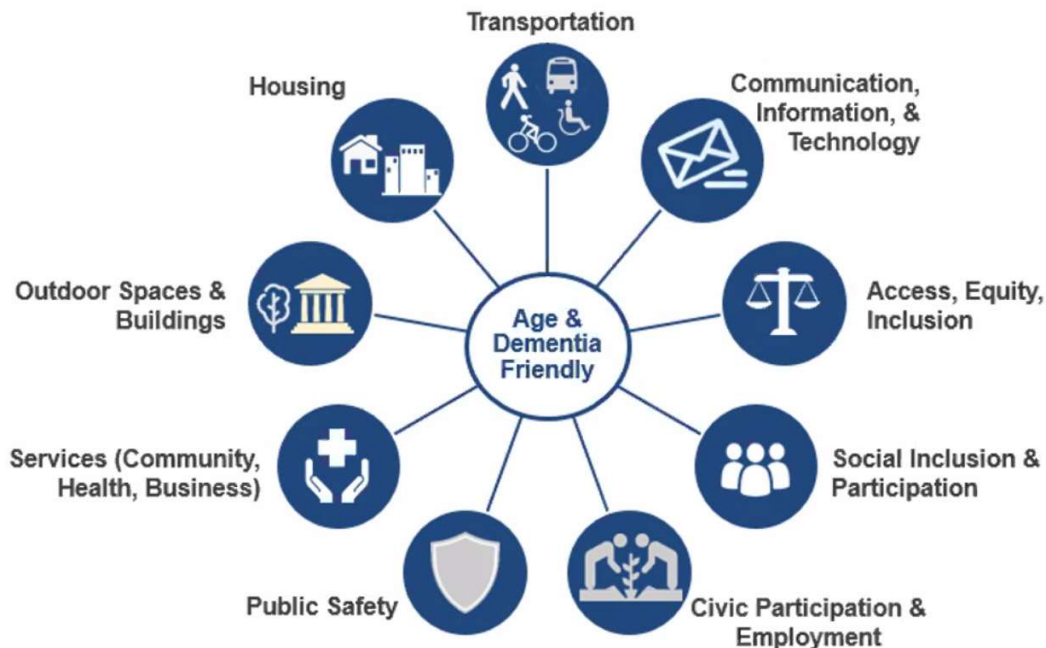


Figure 8 - Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. Source: Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative.

Many communities in the Pioneer Valley and throughout the state are becoming designated “Age and Dementia Friendly Communities” through a process of community assessment and the development of an Action Plan for creating improvements to the social and built environments. The purpose of becoming designated as an Age and Dementia Friendly Community is to build awareness of the needs of older adults and to evaluate needs for improvements to the social and built environments that will allow older adults to continue to be active members of the community as their needs change. As communities are made more accessible for older adults and people with disabilities, conditions for all ages and abilities are improved. A person pushing a stroller will benefit from ramps at road crossings as someone in a wheelchair.

The Healthy Palmer Survey included questions that were focused on the Domains of an Age and Dementia Friendly Community. The survey was distributed to many older adults through meal deliveries from the Palmer Senior Center. In response to the questions that asked whether Palmer is a good place to grow up or to grow old, more respondents rated the town as a better place to grow up than to grow old.

Assets and Challenges for Older Adults

The Healthy Palmer Survey asked residents to check the greatest assets and challenges that exist for older adults living in Palmer. Responses to both questions reflect the importance of places to gather and participate in programs or other social events. The greatest assets for living in Palmer included location (104 responses), the library and programming (102), the senior center (65), and the historical and cultural center (62). The greatest challenges for older adults according to the Healthy Palmer Survey was Transportation (98) with Social Isolation a close second (94). It is interesting to compare the two charts as location may be an asset for those who have transportation, but a challenge for people without access to cars.

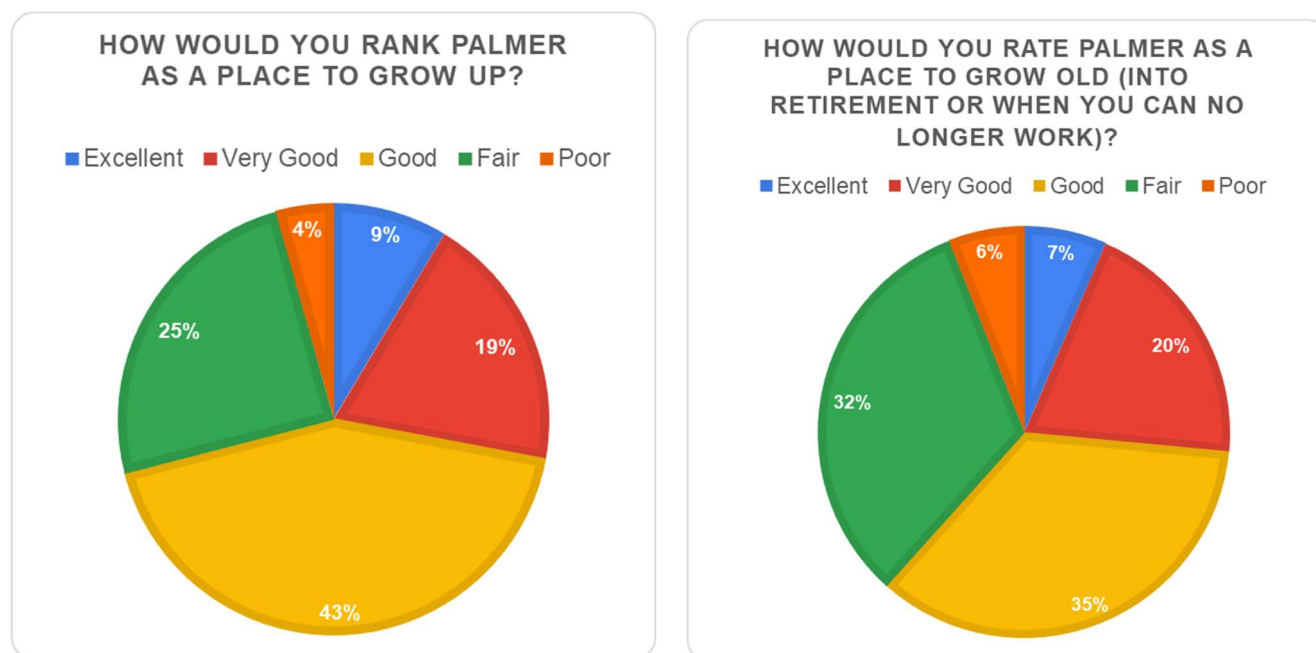


Figure 9 - Healthy Palmer Survey - Ranking Palmer as a good place to Grow Up or to Grow Old

The rural nature of many neighborhoods in Palmer and the difficulty in accessing transportation services has made the social environment and social isolation key health concerns even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic increased isolation for many older adults who relied on Senior Center vans or the Quaboag Connector for transportation or stayed in to avoid interaction with people in fear of contracting the coronavirus. As noted above (in the Health Concerns section), social isolation and loneliness can lead to increased rates of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease in older adults.

The following sections examine the domains of the social and built environments that support the health of all residents of Palmer. By highlighting the needs of older adults and other vulnerable populations, the whole community benefits.

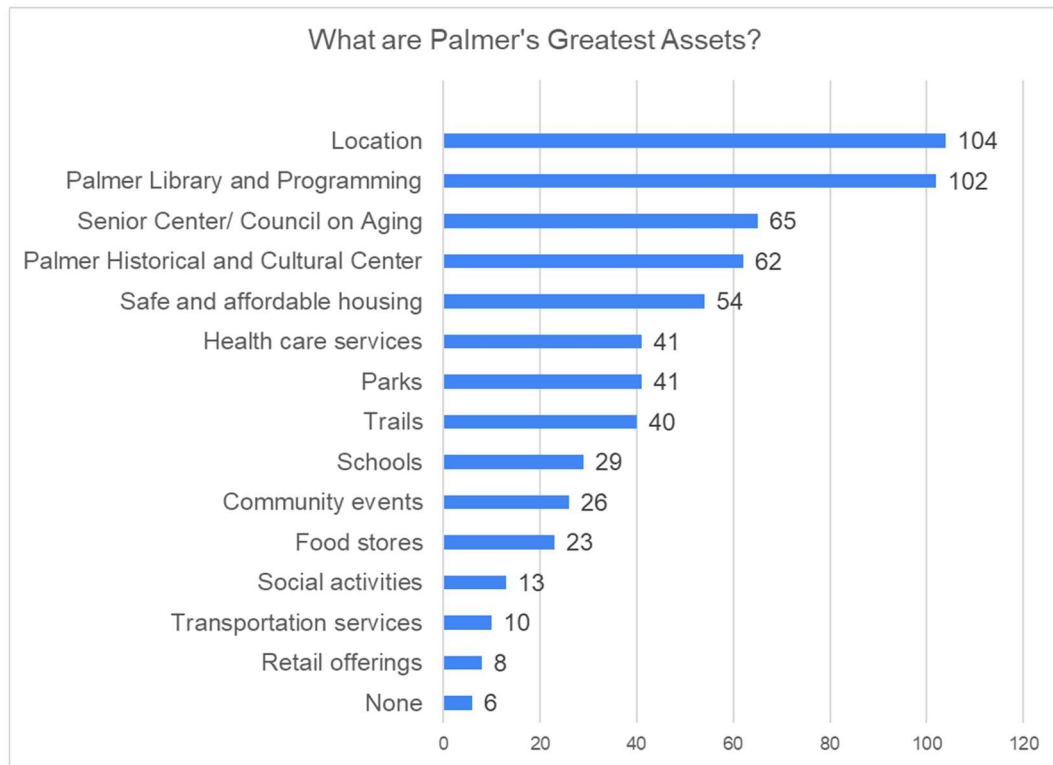


Figure 10 - Palmer's greatest assets (Healthy Palmer Survey)

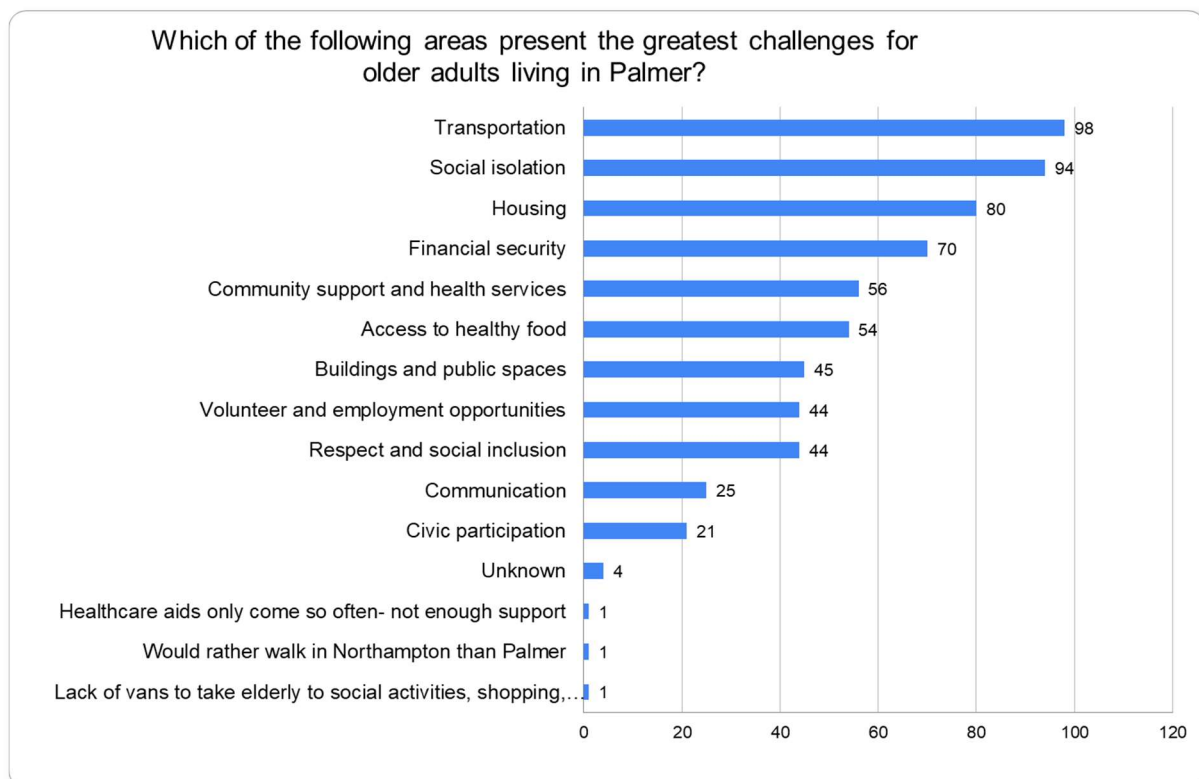


Figure 11 - Palmer's greatest challenges (Healthy Palmer Survey)

The Built Environment and Impacts on Health

Transportation

As people age, they are more likely to acquire impairments to vision or hearing and may lose some physical or cognitive abilities. As a result, many lose the ability to drive personal vehicles for transportation, having to rely on family, friends, or transportation services to buy food or other supplies or to socialize and participate in community events. Although not everyone loses their ability to drive personal vehicles, many choose to give up driving as response times slow and/or disabilities prevent them from being able to safely operate a vehicle.

As the population ages overall, the need for assisted transportation services is likely to increase. Complicating that need is an ongoing desire of older adults to be independent and to maintain the ability to travel when they want to rather than having to rely on a fixed schedule or reserve rides in advance. Many older adults continue to walk even when they no longer drive, so walkability in the vicinity of senior housing and connections to services and retail locations by sidewalks and walking paths are important considerations when planning for future transportation needs of older adults.

Transportation Services

The **Palmer Council on Aging** offers rides for Palmer residents over the age of 60 and to residents of any age who have disabilities. The van provides round trip rides to the Senior Center for Palmer residents and to the Monson Medical Center, Ware, and shopping malls as well as several other locations outside of Palmer. Rides range from \$1.00 for a round trip ride within Palmer Depot to \$10 for round trip rides to Springfield, Westfield, Holyoke and Boston. Rides can be scheduled with the Senior Center on the same day as travel, but the van only operates during hours that the Senior Center is open.

The **Pioneer Valley Transit Association (PVTA)** provides fixed-route service between Palmer and Ware, with stops in Palmer at the Senior Center, Big Y and Baystate Wing, and on demand stops in Bondsville. The PVTA offers Senior Service door-to-door van service for anyone over 60 in all of the towns served by PVTA buses, from 8:30 am to 4 pm Monday through Friday. Rides must be scheduled in advance and are available on a space-available basis. Van drivers are required to assist passengers with up to 3 bags with a combined weight of up to 25 pounds. Paratransit service is also available for people with disabilities who live within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from a fixed transit route.

The **Quaboag Connector** is a transportation service run out of the Town of Ware with the assistance of the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QV CDC). Vans operate Monday through Friday from 6 am to 4 pm (subject to change) and serve riders from Belchertown, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Hardwick, Monson, Palmer, Ware, Warren and West Brookfield, and cost \$2 each way or \$4 round trip for all destinations. Rides must be reserved at least two business days in advance of the date of travel. Rides are prioritized for seniors and people with disabilities, and for trips related to employment, job training, and medical appointments. Other rides are provided as space is available.

A record of trips taken on the Quaboag Connector by Palmer residents between October 2019 and October 2020 shows that most trips were taken from Palmer to other towns, and most for work or for medical appointments. A few trips (not shown) were taken for social visits or for court appointments. As the Connector had to operate with reduced hours during the COVID-19 pandemic due to social

distancing requirements and difficulty in finding drivers willing to work during the pandemic, the numbers during this year may be lower than in more normal years.

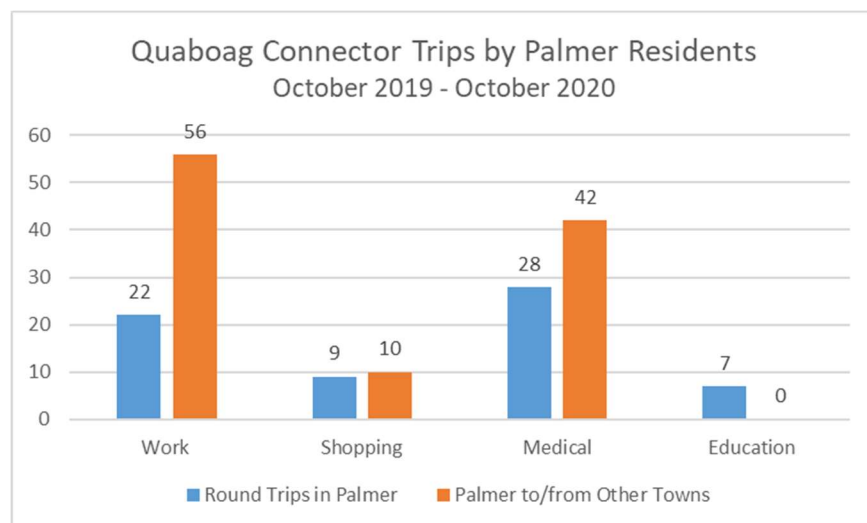


Figure 12 - Quaboag Connector trips by Palmer residents October 2019–October 2020. Source: Quaboag Connector/QV CDC.

None of the providers listed above offer transportation services on weekends, and all but the PVTa fixed route buses must be reserved in advance.

Active Transportation

Palmer has participated in the Mass in Motion program for several years, working on initiatives to increase opportunities for healthy eating and active living. Through this program and other funding sources, the Town has worked toward improving facilities for walking, biking, and active recreation throughout the community.

For vulnerable populations, particularly people living in poverty who do not own cars and older adults who may lose the ability to drive themselves, having the option to walk to purchase food, socialize, or visit parks and other gathering places provides greater independence and opportunities for improved health. The Mobility chapter of the Palmer Master Plan addresses facilities for biking and walking in Palmer. Likewise, parks and recreational opportunities are addressed in both the Master Plan and the Open Space and Recreation Plan which is currently under development (2021). This section of the Health Addendum highlights the health benefits that opportunities for active transportation and recreation can have for the whole community.

Complete Streets

The Town of Palmer adopted a Complete Streets policy in November of 2016, and the policy was approved by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) shortly after it was submitted to the State. The Vision and Purpose of the policy includes the following language:

The Town of Palmer Complete Streets Policy is designed to provide safety and accessibility to the users of Palmer's roads, sidewalks, and trails; including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, public transportation, commercial vehicles and emergency vehicles; used by people of all ages and abilities. Palmer's Complete Streets Policy contributes to the safety, health, and quality of

life in our community by allowing safe ways to access and connect between home, school, work, recreation and retail areas by improving the pedestrian and vehicle relationship throughout our town. (Town of Palmer Complete Streets Policy, adopted by Town Council on November 7, 2016).

Adopting a Complete Streets policy was the first step in developing a Complete Streets program, followed by submission of a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (submitted in 2018) which enabled the Town to apply for up to \$400K per year to implement projects in the Prioritization Plan. The Town received funding to complete improvements to a few sections of sidewalks and crosswalks in 2019.

In 2014, the MassDOT adopted a Healthy Policy Directive which provided design guidelines for all State maintained roads. This directive includes design criteria for bicycle and pedestrian accommodation in any state road reconstruction project where bicycles and pedestrians are allowed on state roads. The state will include sidewalks on state roads where adjacent land uses include commercial or residential development greater than five units per acre, and roadways that allow bicycles will be designed to include shoulders for bicycle travel.⁸

Walking and Biking

Palmer has aspects of both a rural community and a small city, with village centers that offer parks, shops and higher density residential neighborhoods and rural areas with less population density and traffic. Sidewalks are present in the village centers and on some connecting streets. However, as has been noted in the Master Plan and Healthy Palmer surveys as well as in public forums, many of the sidewalks are in disrepair and present tripping hazards in some areas. The Town is working on upgrading pedestrian crossings through the Complete Streets funding, but many pedestrian crossings at roadway intersections are faded and do not provide handicapped accessible wheelchair ramps.

Opportunities for improving facilities for biking and walking in Palmer can address multiple goals of improving health as well as access to retail and employment and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from personal automobiles. Research has found positive associations between walking for transportation and access to and the quality of pedestrian infrastructure such as maintained sidewalks, pedestrian-level lighting and shade, and street furniture.⁹

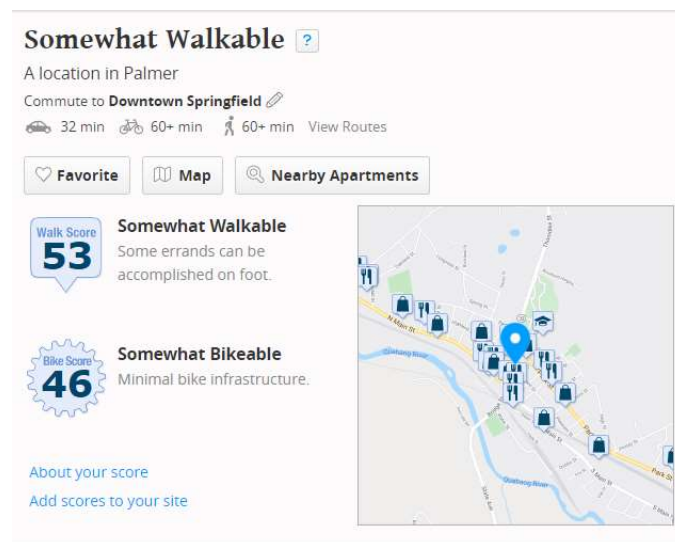
Walkability

“Walk Scores” for the three neighborhoods range from 9 for Thorndike (“car-dependent”) to 53 for Palmer Depot (“somewhat walkable”). As much of Palmer is rural, these scores are not surprising, but point to the need for automobiles or transportation services to get to most destinations including a full service grocery store (see Map 1 in the Healthy Food section), employment or most retail destinations.

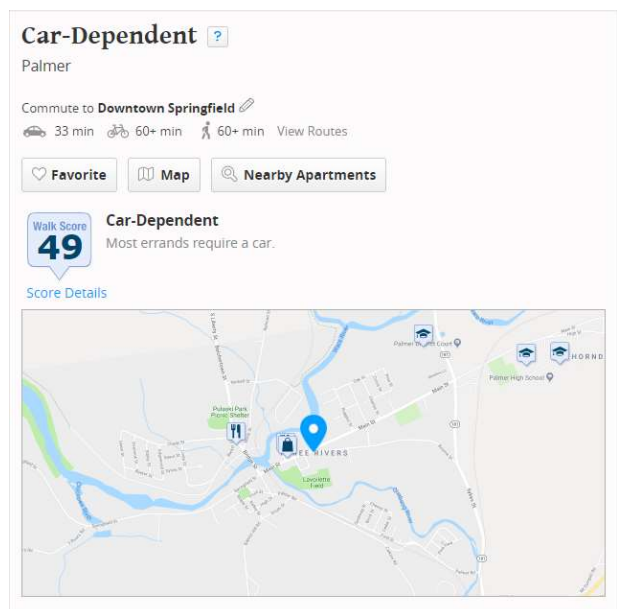
⁸ MA DOT Healthy Roads Policy Directive – accessed at <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/03/05/E-14-006.pdf>

⁹ [Hoehner, Christine M. et al. “Perceived and objective environmental measures and physical activity among older adults.” American Journal of Preventive Medicine Volume 28, Issue 2 \(February 2005\).](#)

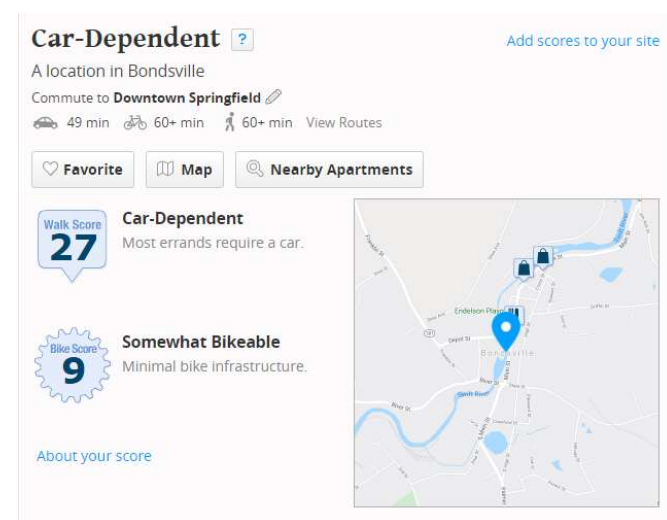
Palmer Depot Walk Score



Three Rivers Walk Score



Bondsville Walk Score



Thorndike Walk Score

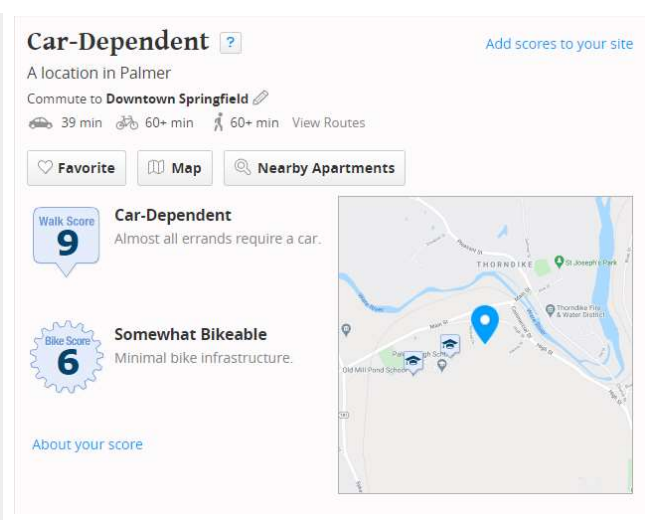


Figure 13 - Palmer Walk Scores (www.walkscore.com)

The Healthy Palmer Survey asked if people were comfortable walking in the four villages of Palmer. In each village, between 21% and 32% said that they were not comfortable walking in the village centers. When asked why, most respondents said that cars were going too fast, there were no shoulders or sidewalks, or sidewalks are in poor condition (**Figure 14**).

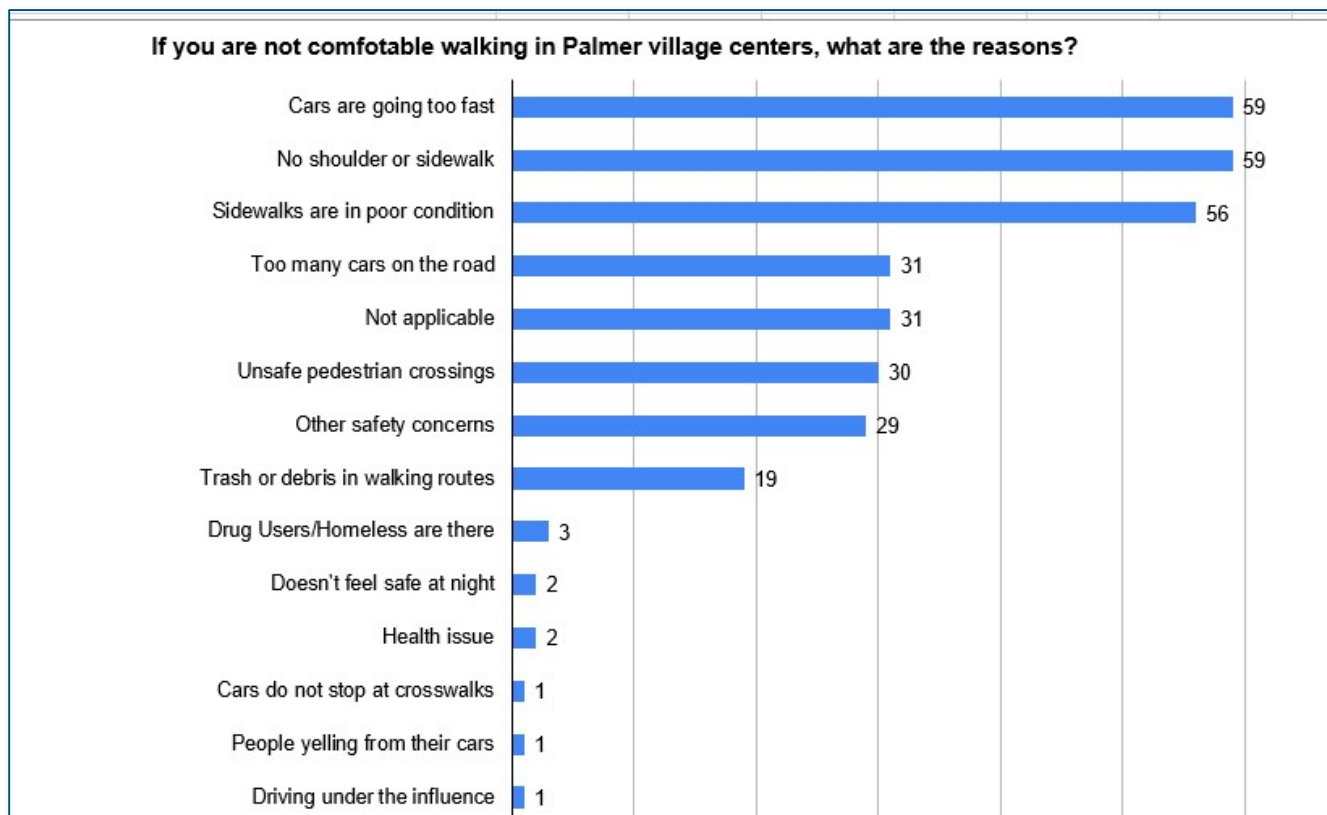


Figure 14 - Healthy Palmer Survey: Why it is uncomfortable to walk in Palmer's village centers

In 2015, PVPC developed walking maps for loops in Depot Village, Three Rivers, and Bondsville. These maps showed destinations along each route and were made available at the Senior Center and Palmer Health Department as a way to promote walking in the village centers. Review and improvement of the condition of sidewalks along these routes could encourage more residents to walk for exercise on available sidewalk routes in the village centers. Walking maps are included in **Appendix B**.

Bikeability

According to the Massachusetts Bicycle Transportation Plan, 52% of trips in Massachusetts are 3 miles or fewer, a typical distance that people will bike, and yet 80% of those trips are made in vehicles.¹⁰ In Palmer approximately 16% of workers who did not work from home had commuting times of less than 16 minutes, and 28% had commute times of less than 20 minutes (by automobile)¹¹, suggesting that with favorable conditions for biking, many workers could commute by bicycle. As noted in the Walk Score ratings for Palmer's village centers, most neighborhoods are rated as "somewhat bikeable."

A Bikeability Assessment was completed for Palmer in 2015 through the Mass in Motion program with assistance from MassBike. This assessment identified key corridors and intersections of concern in each

¹⁰ [Massachusetts Bicycle Transportation Plan](#) (2019)

¹¹ ACS 2018 5-year estimates, Table B08012.

of the four villages that would need to be improved to build out a bikeable network and to improve connectivity between the four villages. Some of the recommendations for improvements that came out of this assessment were included in the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, and many of these recommendations have also been included in the Palmer Master Plan.

In order to encourage bicycling by people of all ages and abilities, facilities must provide separation between automobile traffic and bikers or walkers. Shared use paths provide the greatest amount of protection and are very popular in areas where they have been constructed. A section of the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail is proposed in Palmer, with the goal of connecting rail trails from Northampton to Boston. Participants at the Transportation Forum for the Master Plan and at the Health Addendum Forum expressed support for moving the rail trail project forward in Palmer.

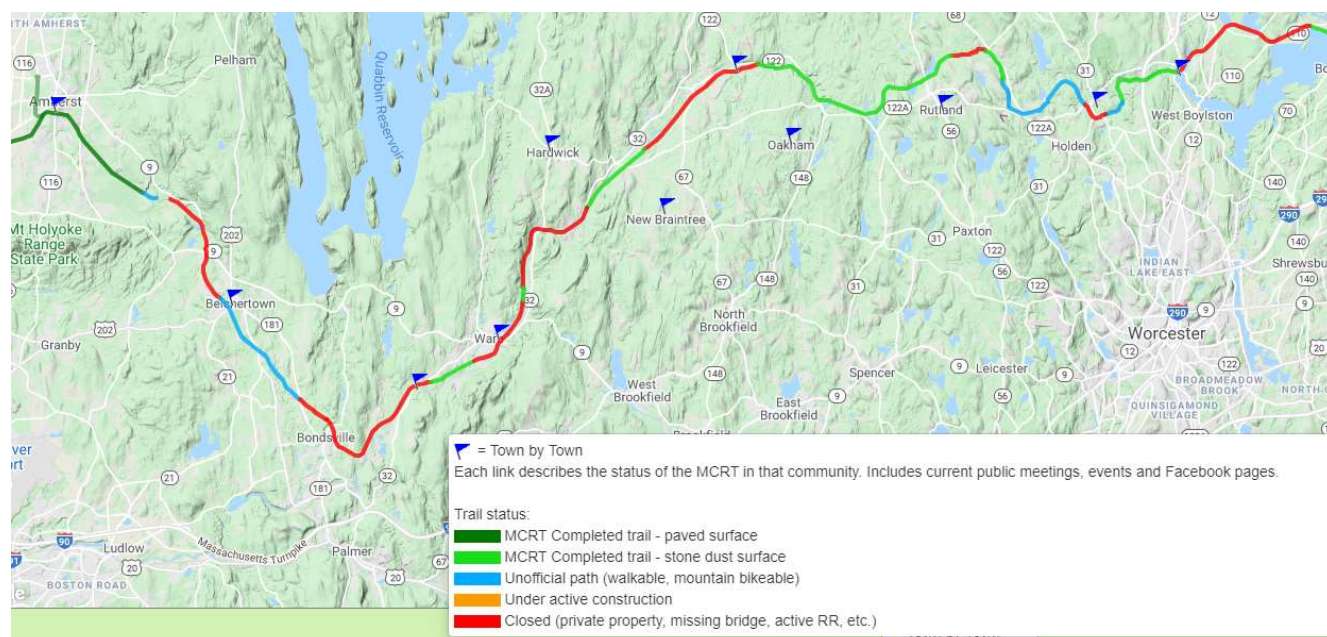


Figure 15 - Proposed Route of the Mass Central Rail Trail

Safe Routes to School

The Healthy Palmer survey asked if parents of school aged children were comfortable letting their children walk to school. Of the respondents who said that they had school aged children (21 or 11%), non said that they were comfortable letting their children walk to school. The reasons for this were similar to the question about sidewalks in the villages (cars going too fast, no shoulders or sidewalks, sidewalks in poor condition), but most also said that they did not want their children to walk alone.

The Palmer Schools currently have a policy that all students have the opportunity to ride the school bus to school, no matter how close they live to campus. However, efforts have been made by the school and the Mass in Motion program to implement a Safe Routes to School program and improve walking routes to the school for those who choose to walk or bike. Prior to the pandemic, the school also operated regular “walking school buses” from the Town Hall to the school, as a way to increase active lifestyles for children and to show that walking to school can be a fun activity.

In 2019, the Safe Routes to School program conducted an audit of walking routes in the area around the school. A map showing the locations of student homes was also developed to identify potential walking routes and in preparation for a survey of parents to determine whether there would be support for increasing the number of students who walk to school.

The Safe Routes to School program provides technical assistance to schools for elementary and middle school children to improve walking routes and circulation patterns on school campuses. The program offers grants for road and circulation improvements for schools that are enrolled in the program.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Healthy and livable communities include places to gather both indoors and outside. The Palmer Public Library and the Senior Center are two important assets that provide space for activities and programs that are open and accessible to people with mobility limitations. The pandemic halted programming in these spaces, enhancing the importance of outdoor spaces for gathering and recreational programs.

Palmer offers many parks and trails for public use. Town-owned parks offer facilities for soccer, basketball, tennis, and baseball; playgrounds; a walking loop with fitness stations (in Laviolette Park); picnic areas, and access to a lake. Numerous trails have also been developed on town-owned conservation land as well as privately owned land with and without conservation restrictions. Palmer's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was last updated in 2015 and is in the process of being updated in 2021. As this document and the Master Plan go into more detail about the recreational opportunities for Palmer's residents that are available on Town-owned land, this section will focus on the aspects of these resources that promote improved health for community residents.

Access to Parks and Trails

As noted in the Walkability section of this chapter, people are more likely to be active when they have access to sidewalks that are in good condition. Likewise, older adults and people with mobility limitations need walkways that are smooth with no trip hazards. People in wheelchairs need handicapped parking and ramps at pedestrian crossings in order to get to parks on their own.

In 2019, PVPC staff completed the Park Access Project through the Mass in Motion program which included a mapping analysis of parks in Palmer and assessment of accommodations for people with disabilities in and around public parks. The project looked at recreational facilities for people of all ages, such as benches and walking loops for older adults, playgrounds and splash pads for children, and fields and tennis or basketball courts for active recreation. A Park Service Density map (**Map 1**) calculated the number of people within ½-mile of each park and noted houses that were more than ½-mile from a Town-owned park.



Figure 16 - Endelson Playground includes walkways and picnic tables that are accessible for people in wheelchairs

Name	Acres	Total Population Served	People Per Acre Served
Swift River Greenbelt	22.87	573	25
Burleigh Park	144.44	794	5
Chase Memorial Acq.	24.20	2,192	91
Depot Village Park	0.26	1,463	5,659
Endelson Playground	1.62	496	307
Forest Lake Boat Launch	0.08	187	2,415
Hryniewicz Park	1.47	1,382	938
Lavoilette Field	18.70	2,217	119
Legion Field/Eager Playground	34.15	1,938	57
Palmer Public Schools Campus	59.41	961	16
Pathfinder Vocational Tech	46.67	1,460	31
Pulaski Park	6.29	1,440	229
St. Joseph's Park	11.80	657	56
Thorndike Playground	0.33	617	1,871
Water St Recreation Area	7.23	1,451	201
Bondville Grammar Park	1.10	495	450

Park Access Project

PALMER, MA

Park Service Density
1/2 Mile Radius
People Served Per Acre of Park Land
(ACS 5 Year Estimates - 2017)
Park Facilities Score

- Sidewalks
- Residential Building Footprints Without Park Service
- Non-Residential Building Footprints
- Parks - Recreation
- Open Space - Conservation
- Water Bodies

Park Service Density - People Per Acre

- 5 - 120
- 200 - 450
- 940
- 1,850 - 2,400
- 5,650

Facilities for Active Recreation

- 1
- 3
- 5
- 6
- 12

Facilities for Children

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 4

Facilities for Disabled/Older Adults

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

Data Sources:
MassGIS, PVPC, Town of Palmer MA, U.S Census Bureau.



The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. It is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis without proper field verification.

Produced by the PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION
60 Congress Street • Floor 1 • Springfield, MA 01104-3409
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The park service analysis did not include the trails that many residents of the more rural areas of Palmer can access close to their homes, mainly because many trails are located on both private and public property and most trails that are located on conservation land are not handicapped accessible.

The Park Service Density map shows that there are many residential properties in Palmer that are located more than ½ mile from a park. As many of these properties are located in more rural sections of town, it is likely that residents in these areas have access to conservation land or trails. However, some areas of higher density, including neighborhoods east of Depot Village, may not have access to parks or recreation facilities, especially if households lack access to transportation. Reviewing walking and biking routes to parks or trails from these areas could allow people better access to recreational resources without the need for a car or transportation services.

The analysis also showed that several parks in Palmer have been recently renovated and equipped with playground equipment, walkways and benches for people with disabilities. However, sidewalks and curbs located near the parks were not handicapped accessible or were in poor condition. These are areas that could be improved to allow better access to parks by people of all ages who live within walking or rolling distance of the parks.

What Draws People to Parks?

The Healthy Palmer Survey asked which parks people had used in the last 12 months, and what would encourage them to use parks more. Most respondents said that they used trails on conservation land (63 respondents), Burleigh Park (56) and Laviolette Field (49), while 48 respondents said that they had not used any parks in Palmer. When asked what would encourage them to use parks more, most respondents said that better maintenance (101) and restrooms would encourage them to use parks more. As noted above, many people do not live near parks, and 70 survey respondents said that safe walking routes or lighting would encourage them to use parks more.

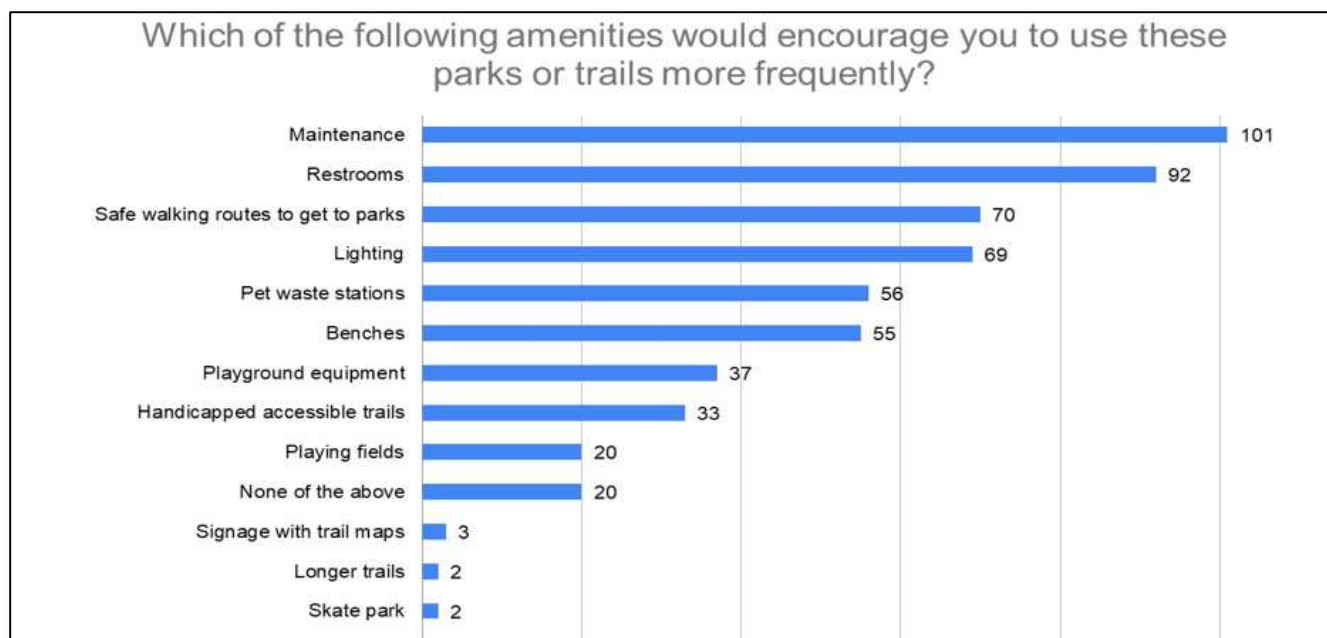


Figure 17 - Healthy Palmer Survey: What would encourage people to use parks and trails more frequently?

A study by the City Parks Alliance which observed park use and design in 174 neighborhood parks in 25 cities over a 2-year period found three major areas that increase use of neighborhood parks:

- **Programming** – Parks that had programming for people of all ages showed a 48% increase in park usage and a 37% increase in physical activity at those parks.
- **Design** – Parks with walking loops had 80% more users, twice as many seniors, 90% higher moderate to vigorous physical activity. For every playground element, use increases by 50%.
- **Marketing and Outreach** – Marketing that included banners, posters, signs, and/or social media saw an increase by 62% in park users, 63% in physical activity.

Two of Palmer's parks, Lavolette Field and the Swift River Trail include walking loops that are accessible for people in wheelchairs and benches for resting. These are valuable resources for older adults and people with disabilities and should be promoted to encourage more use by older residents.

Winter Recreation

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of recreational facilities as places to gather with friends when social distancing requirements prohibited indoor gatherings and many cultural facilities such as libraries were closed. Palmer's parks and trails offer opportunities for winter recreational activities such as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and ice skating (on Forest Lake). Promotion and organized programming around winter recreation resources and activities could encourage residents to be more active during winter months. The Mass DOT's Shared Streets and Spaces grants also offered communities resources for developing outdoor gathering spaces such as fire pits with benches or covered picnic areas. Planning for additional areas or outdoor activities to promote outdoor recreation in the winter should be included in planning for recreational resources to improve overall health of the community.

Indoor Recreation Resources

Indoor recreation facilities are important assets for exercise in winter or year-round. Three privately owned gyms are located in Palmer (in 2021), offering weightlifting equipment, fitness classes and private training instruction. These include Asylum Fitness, Crossfit Ardor and Lords of Discipline.

The Converse Middle School, which closed in 2018, continues to be owned by the Town and allows use of the gym for youth basketball leagues. Participants at the Health Addendum public forum advocated for continued access to the gym for public use. The Palmer High School and Pathfinder Regional Technical High School also have gyms which could potentially be used by the public during after school hours. Many communities have established "shared use agreements" with local schools to allow for use of gyms and other indoor recreation facilities. The Palmer High School also has a pool that the school rents out to groups (during non-COVID times). Further discussion with the community may be warranted to determine if there is interest in opening school facilities to the public.

Public Buildings

In addition to facilities for active recreation, areas for people to gather and participate in educational or social programs are important considerations in terms of the livability of a community, particularly for residents who are retired or otherwise not engaged in social or professional activities during the day. As

noted above, social isolation was a concern prior to the pandemic and became the greatest challenge for older adults during the pandemic according to responses to the Healthy Palmer Survey.

The Palmer Library, Senior Center, and Historical and Cultural Center are all facilities that were listed as Palmer's greatest assets, after location (also listed as an asset on the Master Plan survey). These facilities offer programming and services as well as spaces to gather or spend time during daytime hours. Closure of these buildings as well as schools, churches and restaurants during the pandemic cut many people off from regular programs such as congregate meals (at the senior center), church services, and educational or cultural events, leaving many to be isolated in their homes. While some remote programming was made available, many do not have access to internet or do not own computers (see next section on Communication and Technology).

In addition to providing nutritional support and fitness programming and transportation services, the Palmer Senior Center offers assistance with legal and health insurance needs, access to SNAP benefits, medical equipment, and provides a venue for support groups and services for older adults. The current Senior Center is located in Memorial Hall, a historic brick building that housed the Town Library until 1977. Participants at public forums noted that the parking at the Senior Center is inadequate to meet the needs of the people who use the facility, causing people to have to park on the street. Space for additional parking or an expanded senior center in a new location should be considered in order to accommodate the aging population.

Housing

Housing is a social determinant of health that affects all vulnerable populations. The four factors related to housing and its effects on one's health include the quality of the housing, affordability, location, and the community in which the housing is located.

- The **quality** of a housing unit can have a strong influence over the health of its inhabitants. Housing that is safe, dry, clean, well maintained, free of pests, adequately ventilated, and free from contaminants reduces the likelihood of injuries and illnesses such as asthma, cancer, neurotoxicity, cardiovascular disease and poor mental health. Other factors that can impact the quality of housing include excessive noise, which can lead to anxiety, stress, and deteriorated cognitive function; and lack of daylight which can lead to depression.
- A lack of **affordable** housing impacts both an individual's ability to find quality housing as well as their ability to pay for other necessities such as food, medical care, and utilities. Not only does the loss of these necessities lead to negative health outcomes such as malnutrition and diabetes, but the mental stress of dealing with this imbalance can also lead to anxiety and depression. Without affordable housing individuals are more likely to live in overcrowded conditions, substandard housing, and locations which lack community and service resources, or to become homeless. The instability caused by these situations can further exacerbate existing medical and mental health conditions.
- The **location** of housing can have a major impact to one's health. Proximity to community services and resources and access to public transportation, parks and recreation areas, good schools and jobs provides both physical and mental health benefits. Additionally, access to healthy foods and medical care can reduce chronic disease and injury. Housing that is located in blighted areas or that is exposed to industrial uses, highways, or waste sites can expose residents to unhealthy physical

environments. This can lead to injury, chronic illness, and mental health concerns. As communities grow older, the infrastructure and services that are needed to keep older residents healthy become more and more critical.

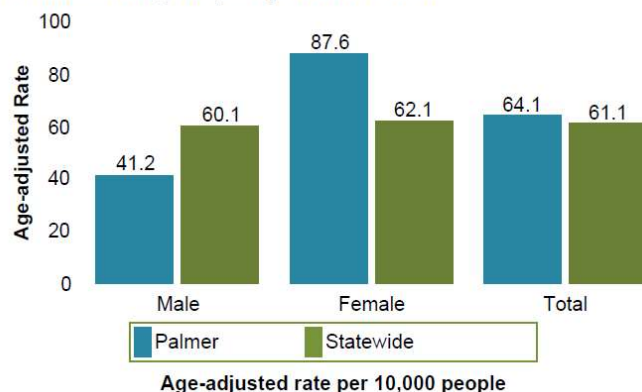
- **Housing community or neighborhoods** considers the makeup of a community and the relationships of its residents. Areas of concentrated poverty and crime can lead to stress and concerns of safety which in turn keep people from feeling free to walk for exercise or transportation purposes. Conversely, a community where residents have strong bonds and are supportive of one another can provide better health outcomes. Similarly, access to good schools, jobs and civic engagement provide residents with a sense of control and community participation which benefits mental health and overall well-being.

While it is difficult to get numbers of homeless individuals and families in Palmer, the school reports that several children attending the school can be classified as “un-homed.”

Older housing is also a concern as it can affect asthma and other respiratory conditions and may contain lead paint. The majority of Palmer’s housing stock (69%) was built before 1969. This is slightly less than the state figure of 71% built before 1969. Challenges with older housing include outdated heating and cooling systems, poor insulation, design not suited for people with mobility limitations, and prevalence of contaminants such as asbestos, lead paint and lead pipes. In Palmer, 74% of children ages 9-47 months were screened for lead in 2017, and 38 per 1000 had blood lead levels greater than 5 ug/dl. The statewide average is 20.3 per 1,000. Although the number of children with high blood levels is twice the statewide average, Palmer is not considered a high-risk lead community.¹²

The rate of emergency department visits for asthma is lower for males (41.2 per 10,000) than the state average (60.1 per 10,000) but higher for females (87.6 per 10,000) than the state average of 62.1 per 10,000. The pediatric prevalence for asthma in K-8 students at approximately 9 per 100 students is better overall in Palmer than in the state as a whole.¹³

Asthma Emergency Department Visits



Pediatric Asthma Prevalence in K-8 Students

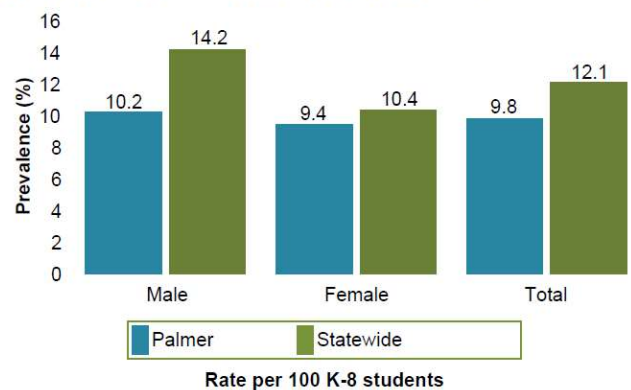


Figure 18 - Asthma Emergency Department Visits and Asthma Prevalence in K-8 Students. Source: MA DPH Bureau of Environmental Health

¹² Massachusetts Department of Health – Bureau of Environmental Health Community Profile

¹³ Ibid.

Housing for Older Adults

In the question about Assets and Challenges for older adults on the Healthy Palmer Survey, responses were divided. Housing was the third highest response (80 responses) after transportation and social isolation as one of the greatest challenges for older adults in Palmer, while safe and affordable housing received 54 responses as one of Palmer's greatest assets (after Location, Library programming, the Senior Center and Palmer Historical and Cultural Center). This dichotomy is found in many communities. While people want to stay in their homes as long as possible, many older adults would like the option to downsize from larger single-family homes to apartments or single-story houses, or to facilities that offer some level of care such as assisted living facilities or nursing homes. Providing additional affordable options for people to downsize within the community can provide the additional benefit of opening up larger single-family homes for younger families that want to move into the community. There are not currently any facilities that provide supported services for older adults such as assisted living or full care nursing homes.

For older adults to age in place, or to continue to live in their own homes as they age, support services may be needed. While not everyone loses their ability to drive at the age of 80, people are more likely to have physical or cognitive limitations as they age making driving less safe. Home modifications may also be necessary for people with mobility or visual impairments, as well as assistance with basic tasks such as shoveling snow, cooking or cleaning.

Communication and Technology

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the importance of technology and internet connection for employment as well as for participation in all aspects of the community, from public meetings to social programs and medical appointments. The pandemic also highlighted the divide between those who have the technology, internet service, and knowledge of how to use this technology and those who don't. In Palmer, age presents the greatest disparities between households who have internet subscriptions and own computers. Whereas 94.6% of children under 18 had internet subscriptions, only 63.8% of adults 65 and older had internet. Similarly, whereas 0.7% of children under 18 did not own a computer, estimates showed that 28.5% of adults over 65 in Palmer did not own a computer, a rate higher than both Hampden County and the state.

The "digital divide" among older adults is widely recognized in the state, and many agencies at all levels of government are working to eliminate the barriers to access. Many councils on aging in the PVPC region and throughout the state have established tablet or laptop loan programs accompanied by training on how to use the equipment and assistance in obtaining low-cost internet subscriptions or using laptops with Sym cards that allow access to the internet via cell signals. Should access to technology continue to be a barrier for residents to access health care or other services after the pandemic, the COA may want to consider similar programs.

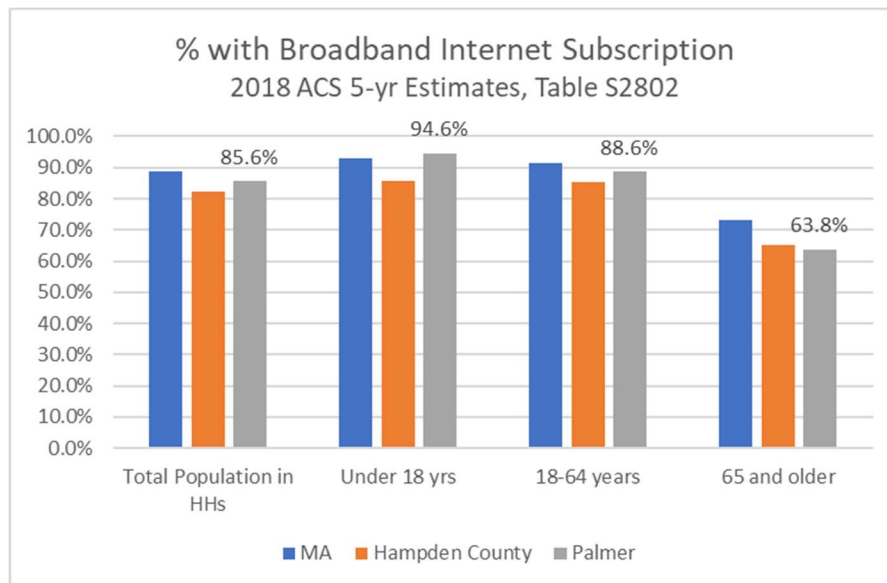


Figure 19 5 - Residents with Broadband Internet Subscriptions. Source: ACS 2018 5-year estimates, Table S2802

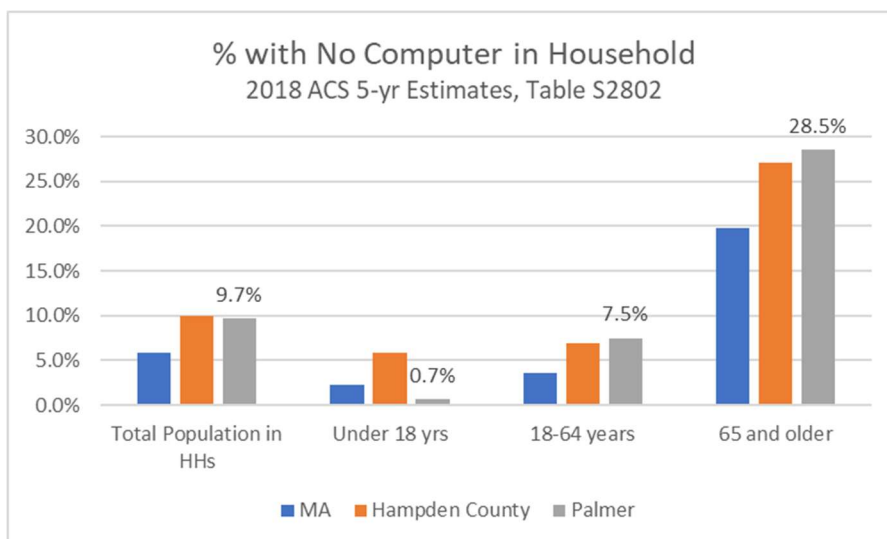


Figure 20 - Residents with computers in the Household. Source: ACS 2018 5-year estimates, Table S2802.

Heath Care, Social and Community Services

Residents of Palmer are fortunate to have access to a full-service hospital in their community. **Baystate Wing Hospital**, located on Wright Street, offers a broad range of medical, surgical and psychiatric services. The Emergency Department is open 24 hours/day and includes a critical care unit and primary stroke center. Inpatient and outpatient behavioral health and addiction treatment services are offered through the Griswold Behavioral Health Center and the Center for Geriatric Psychiatry. The closure of

the Baystate Mary Lane hospital in Ware may bring additional patients and employment opportunities to the Baystate Wing hospital, and also the need for transportation services for Ware residents to access health care services in Palmer.

The **Palmer Senior Center** provides wellness check calls for home-bound seniors and expanded this service during the COVID-19 pandemic when many more seniors were confined to their homes. The Senior Center also offers health screenings, a fall prevention program, fitness classes, and hearing aid checks in addition to the transportation and meal services noted elsewhere in this section.

The mission of the **Palmer Health Department** and Board of Health is to “educate, promote, improve and protect the health and well-being of the citizens of Palmer.” The Board of Health and Palmer Health Department are responsible for issuing permits for food establishments, bodywork businesses, private wells, tobacco sales, and septic systems; educating the public about infectious diseases carried by ticks and mosquitos; and inspecting residential properties to ensure the health and safety of occupants. The Health Department also helped schools and businesses to comply with state regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Palmer Health Department website provides a guide to Mental Health and Substance Abuse services located in Palmer and within driving distance of Palmer.

The **Veterans Services Department** in Palmer assists veterans in the community to learn about and apply for benefits including housing, fuel assistance, financial assistance, SNAP, and other state and federal programs. The **Brookfield Institute**, located in Brookfield, also provides services for veterans including food delivery to families of veterans during the pandemic.

Several other health and community service organizations are located in Palmer and neighboring communities. The **Behavioral Health Network** provides a addition and recovery services, counseling and wellness programs, emergency services for individuals who are experiencing behavioral health crises, services to support individuals with developmental needs, and other trainings.

Employment and Civic Engagement

Finding meaningful employment supports financial stability and one’s ability to support themselves and their families and, for older adults, can supply a form of social engagement and mental stimulation that can lead to longer and more fulfilling lives. Older adults are valuable members of the community and can offer years of knowledge and experience gained from careers and time spent in the community.

Access to Healthy Food

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Generally, this translates into a lack of available financial resources for food at a household level.¹⁴ Around 11% of households nationwide were food insecure at least some time in 2018,¹⁵ and locally, Hampden County experienced about the same rate that same year.¹⁶ Earlier studies at the Census Tract level showed food insecurity rates in tract that includes the Three Rivers neighborhood at rates as high as 15-20% and at 10-15% in the tract that encompasses the eastern side of town.¹⁷

Rates of food insecurity among children in Massachusetts increased by 102% during the pandemic, the highest relative increasing the United States. As of October 2020, 16.6% of Massachusetts households were food insecure, compared to 8.4% the previous year, and one in five households with children were food insecure. People of color are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity with one in three black households and one in four Latinx households being food insecure compared to one in six white households.¹⁸

People of all ages experiencing food insecurity may be at increased risk for multiple health risks. Among food insecure populations, studies have found higher rates of diabetes in adults¹⁹ and obesity in adults and children.²⁰ Children without reliable access to nutritious food also face increased risk of developmental problems and mental health. The United States counties with the highest rates of food insecurity tend to have a higher share of people with a disability, diabetes, or obesity.²¹

Diabetes, heart disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), also chronic diseases related to diet and exercise, are of concern in Palmer. An estimated 35% of adults over the age of 65 have diabetes in Palmer (compared to 31.7% for the state); and 27.6% of adults over 65 have COPD compared to 21.5% at the state level.²² The number of heart attack hospitalizations in Palmer is much higher than the state level at 54.3 per 10,000 people for males (32.4 for the state) and 41.1 per 10,000 for females (25.3 state).

¹⁴ <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/>. Retrieved February 8, 2021.

¹⁵ Definitions of Food Security. (n.d.). Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Retrieved August 26, 2020, from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/>

¹⁶ Hunger and Poverty in Massachusetts: Map the Meal Gap. Feeding America. (n.d.). Retrieved August 25, 2020, from <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/massachusetts/county/hampden>

¹⁷ Map of Food Insecurity Rates, 2019 Baystate Wing CHNA. Food insecurity rates from Map the Meal Gap 2016: a Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the US in 2016, Feeding America 2018.

¹⁸ <https://www.projectbread.org/hunger-by-the-numbers> - data retrieved February 12, 2021.

¹⁹ Seligman et al.: Food Insecurity and Diabetes Mellitus. Society of General Internal Medicine 2007;22:1018-1023

²⁰ Food Insecurity. (n.d.). Retrieved November 09, 2020, from <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/food-insecurity>

²¹ Dewey, Adam. "Food Insecurity and Health Indicators at the County Level." Feeding America. 2018.

²² Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative Community Profile

Barriers to Accessing Healthy Food

Out of 191 Healthy Palmer survey respondents, over 50% said that they were not able to get the food they wanted or needed at some point in the previous 12 months. As the survey was administered during the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 1/3 of respondents said that they experienced concern about shopping during the pandemic. Fifty respondents (26%) said that the cost of food was an issue, and 36 said that the food that they wanted was not available at local stores. Forty-six percent of respondents said that they experienced barriers to getting food during the COVID-19 shutdown period, while 19% said that they experienced barriers before and during the pandemic.

This section of the Health Addendum focuses on the food system in Palmer and how it meets – or does not meet – the ability of residents to access enough food to feed their families.

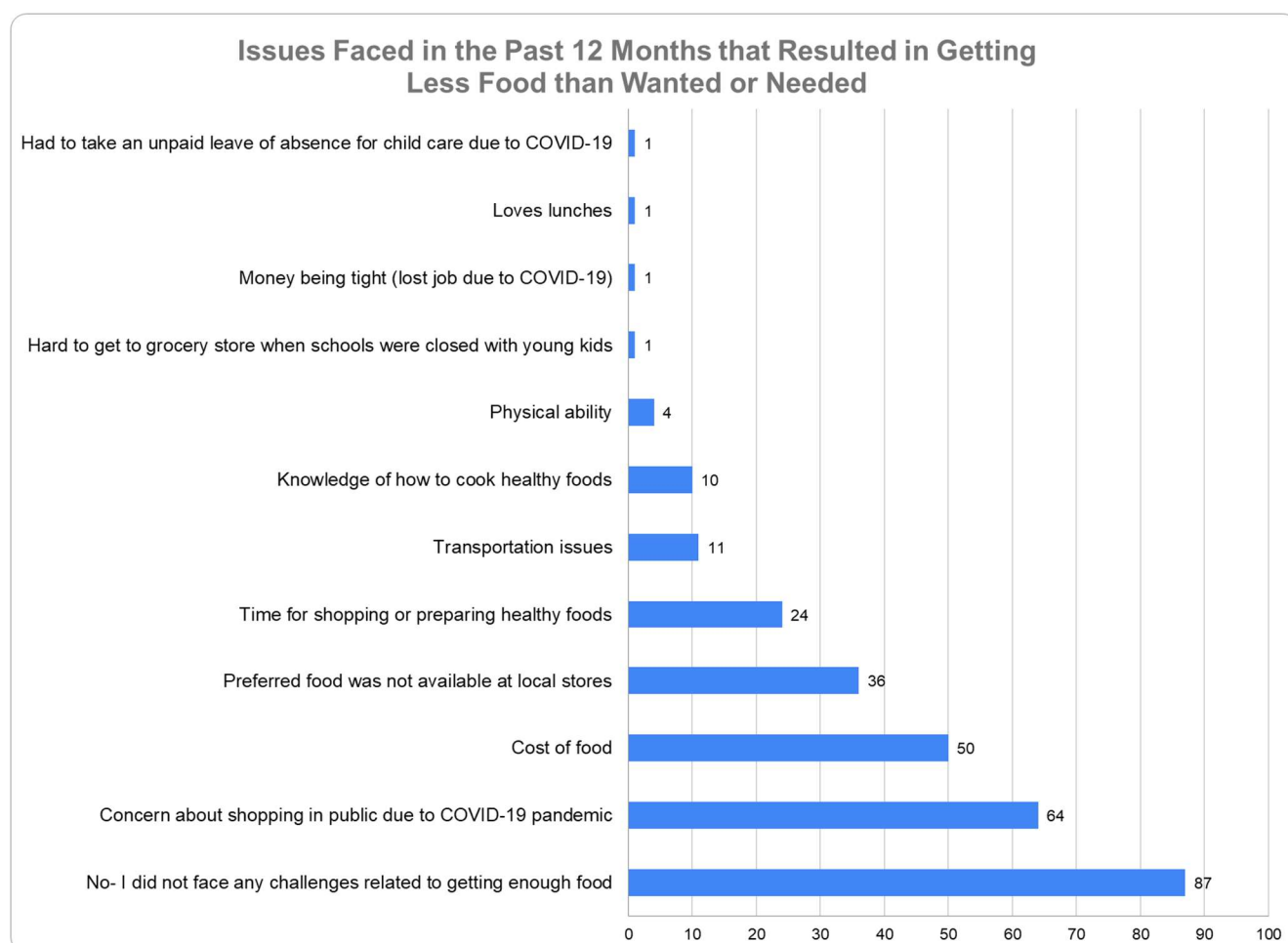


Figure 21 - Healthy Palmer Survey: Issues faced in the past 12 months that resulted in not getting enough food

The Local Food System

The two main goals of the Pioneer Valley Food Security Plan, a regional plan for the three counties in the Pioneer Valley (Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden Counties) completed by PVPC in 2014, are simple: No One Goes Hungry, and We Grow Our Own Food. Palmer is part of the food system of the Pioneer Valley and is not likely to be able to solve all of its food needs without the larger region. However, it is possible

that by addressing some of the barriers that residents face in accessing healthy food, the Town can develop a more sustainable food system within its borders. Broadly, the local food system is made up of the following elements:

- Food Retail Options
- Fast food and other restaurants
- Food Production
- Public assistance programs including SNAP, HIP and WIC
- Emergency Food Distribution Sites
- School food

Each of these elements of the local food system are examined below.

Food Retail Options

Full-service Grocery Stores, Discount Stores and Corner Stores

Palmer hosts one full-service grocery store (the Big Y), a couple of discount department stores (Ocean State Job Lot and Dollar General), and several convenience and neighborhood corner stores. The majority of respondents to the Healthy Palmer Survey said that they got food at a grocery store, and almost half went to discount department stores. Smaller numbers of respondents (27) also said that they purchased foods at warehouse stores (such as Costco), or local convenience stores (10); and some said that they used food delivery services (6) or Amazon (1).

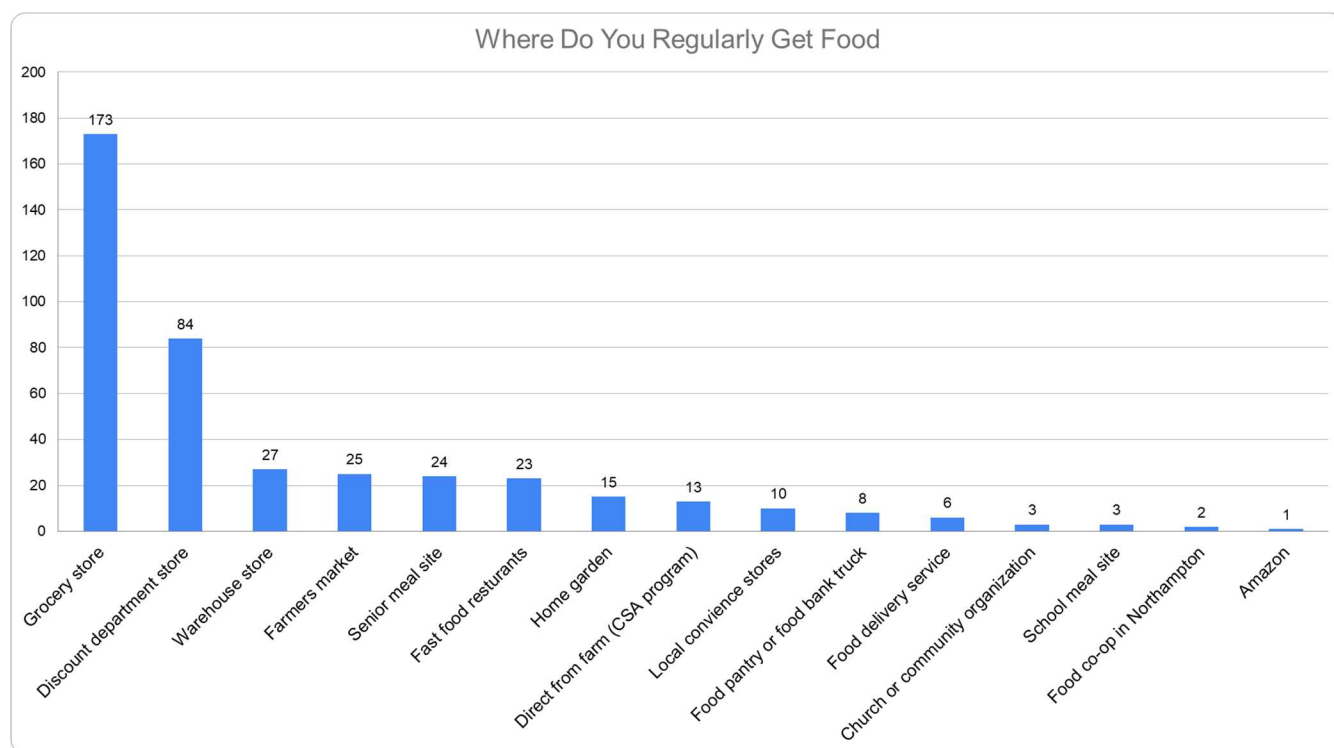


Figure 22 - Healthy Palmer Survey: Where do you regularly get food?

A survey of cost and food options at several retail establishments was completed by PVPC and the Quaboag Community Development Corporation (QVDC) for the Mobile Market Feasibility Study through the Mass in Motion program in 2018. The survey found that other than the Big Y, most corner stores (Sam's Food Store and Junction Variety) and discount stores (Dollar General) did not carry produce or other perishable items. The Cumberland Farms store in Palmer carried milk, eggs, and bread but minimal fresh produce; and pharmacies including CVS and Rite Aid carried milk and eggs but not bread or produce. The Big Y does carry a wide range of organic and locally grown produce and many different brands. At the public forum for the Health Addendum, one participant commented that only having one full-service grocery store makes prices higher than they would otherwise be with competition. As noted above, cost was one of the biggest barriers for survey respondents in terms of being able to get the food that they wanted or needed.

Although only a few survey respondents (Figure 22, above) identified transportation as a barrier to getting enough food, it is part of the reason that part of the town is considered a "food desert" according to some calculations. **Map 2** shows the location of the major grocery store (the Big Y) and the area around that store that is within a 1-mile walk, and also areas of town that are within a 10-minute drive of one or two major grocery stores. For people who do not have transportation, walking is sometimes the only way in which they can access food so they may have to rely on convenience stores or corner stores close to where they live when other means of transportation are not available. This presents an opportunity for encouraging corner stores to carry more fresh produce and other healthy food options.

Farm CSAs, Farm Stands and Farmers Markets

Farmers markets have operated in Palmer in the past, but as of the writing of this Addendum (2021), a regular weekly or monthly market has not operated in town for several years. One privately run produce stand operates during the summer months in the Thorndike neighborhood. Although we were not able to reach the owners for an interview, residents have commented that the produce is reasonably priced, and that some but not all of it is locally grown. SNAP and HIP benefits are not accepted at this farm stand.

Ninety-eight percent of survey respondents said that they would like to see a farmers market in Palmer, and participants in the public forum on Health also expressed interest in re-starting a farmers market in the community both to provide better access to fresh local food and to provide a place for people to gather. The Mass in Motion Wellness Leadership Team met with a representative from Communities Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) in the Fall of 2019 to discuss the feasibility of starting a farmers market or farm stand in the community. The group was advised that it can take several years before a farmers market is profitable, and often takes dedicated volunteers to start and manage a market.

Although there are no active farms selling produce in Palmer, D&R Farms from Hampden supplied the Senior Center with free senior Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares financed through a grant from CISA and was open to bringing additional CSA shares for pickup at the Senior Center. However, the COVID-19 pandemic required the Senior Center to close and the barriers to additional in-person interactions made it impossible for the program to operate at the senior center during the summer of 2020. D&R Farms is authorized to accept SNAP and associated HIP benefits as payment for CSA shares and produce from their farm store located in Hampden. The farm is also open to operating a farm stand in Palmer if they have capacity and there is enough local interest.

Supermarket Access

People in Poverty with Low Access

- ## People in Poverty with High Access

- ### Supermarkets within 1 Mile Walk

- ### Supermarkets within 10 Minute Drive

- ## Other Food Outlets & Infrastructure

-
- The map displays the town of Thorndike, Massachusetts, and its immediate surroundings. The town of Thorndike is highlighted in yellow, while a specific area within it is shaded green. The map includes the following locations and features:
- Towns and Communities:** Bondsville, Three Rivers, Thorndike, Depot Village, Belchertown, Ware, Warren, Brimfield, Monson, and Wilbraham.
 - Streets:** Numerous streets are labeled, including Griffin Street, State Street, Forest Street, Pine Street, Main Street, Bourne Street, Mount Dumplin Street, and others.
 - Landmarks:** O'Connell's Convenience, Country Corner (CITGO), and various food stores like S&S Food Mart and Jane's are marked.
 - Scale and Orientation:** A scale bar shows distances in feet (0, 2,500, 5,000) and miles (0, 0.5, 1, 2). A north arrow is located in the bottom left corner.

Fast Food and Other Restaurants

Palmer offers a number of small independent restaurants, most of which are located along Route 20 in Palmer Depot, and some located in Three Rivers and Bondsville. The Town also hosts several fast food, pizza and Chinese restaurants. Most of the fast food restaurants are located near the interstate exit and Big Y plaza. Twenty-three or 12% of Healthy Palmer survey respondents said that they regularly got food from fast food restaurants. While they provide convenient and low-cost food, most fast food restaurants offer food that has high fat, sodium and sugar content and should not be considered as providing access to healthy food.

Restaurants are a valuable element of the food economy in Palmer, providing jobs, places to gather, and also attracting people to downtown locations. Restaurants can also provide good markets for locally grown produce. Additional investigation into connections between farms and local restaurants may be warranted to increase support for local growers and to increase the amount of healthy locally grown food on restaurant menus.

Food Production

Farms and Prime Agricultural Soils

The Massachusetts Connecticut River valley is home to many small- and medium-sized farms, cultivating some of the most fertile agricultural soils in the world. Many grocery stores and supermarkets stock local agricultural products, and the region has dozens and dozens of farmer's markets in summer and winter. In 2014, there were approximately 1,960 farms in the Pioneer Valley, which is one-fourth of all farms in Massachusetts. The region contained about 169,000 acres of farmland, which was 14% of the total land area of the region and one-third of all agricultural land statewide. However, the region is rapidly losing its working lands to residential and commercial development. In 1997, American Farmland Trust listed the Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts and Connecticut as one of the 20 "most threatened agricultural regions in the United States."

A search for farms in Palmer reveals a few private farms (Hay Hay Farms, Herman Langevin Farm), but there are not currently any farms located within Palmer that grow fruits and vegetables for local sale. One large property the Strzemienski Farm on Route 181, has 60 acres of farmland enrolled in the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program through the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture. The APR program pays farmers the difference between "fair market value" and the "agricultural value" of farms in exchange for a permanent deed restriction which prevents the land from being developed in non-agricultural uses. The Strzemienski Farm formerly operated as a dairy farm, and at one time offered 30' by 40' community plots for residents and nonprofits to grow food for personal use and to provide food for the local food pantry. The farm stopped offering community garden plots prior to 2019 as it became too difficult to manage the plots and run a farm at the same time. According to the farmers, invasive weeds were also introduced and moved into their hay fields.²³ The Strzemienskis cultivate over an acre of vegetables for their own use and donate surplus produce to the Palmer Senior

²³ Interview with Dianna Strzemiensk, April 28, 2021.

Center. In the Healthy Palmer Survey, 93% of respondents supported Town efforts to conserve farmland in order to develop a source of fresh local produce.

Community Gardens

Eighty-seven percent of Healthy Palmer Survey respondents thought that the Town should build community gardens, and most thought community gardens should be built in Palmer Depot or Three Rivers (38% each).

Through the Mass in Motion program several locations have been analyzed as potential locations for community gardens in Palmer. Water Street and Chase Memorial Acres are two locations for which designs were developed for community gardens. However, frequent flooding at the Water Street location would make siting a community garden there subject to the threat of contamination from floodwaters, and contamination from prior uses of the land would require that raised beds be built for all community garden plots. Chase Acres is an emergency landing location for helicopters bringing cases to Baystate Wing hospital, making it a difficult garden location. Property adjacent to the Town Hall is a possible location for a community garden. Although small, it would be visible and close to a water supply. The Town would need to seek funding for building raised beds, fencing and compost facilities, and would have to designate a staff person or department to manage the garden. Management of community gardens has been a barrier to the Town moving forward with building them as Town staff do not currently have the capacity to manage a community garden in addition to their other responsibilities.

In designing a community garden, it is important to consider people with disabilities. A smooth, wheelchair accessible path and, raised beds that are built at a height that is accessible by people in wheelchairs would offer locations for people in wheelchairs and would be more comfortable for older adults as they would enable gardeners access while standing or sitting next to the beds.

Home Food Production and Zoning

The Town of Palmer's Zoning Ordinance does not prohibit any horticultural food production or gardening for personal use in any zoning district, and some agricultural uses (agriculture, floriculture, vita culture, aquaculture and silviculture; temporary greenhouses or retail stands for sale of agricultural products; and non-commercial forestry and growing of all vegetables) are specifically listed as permitted uses in all residential and business districts.²⁴ Community gardens have been considered a permitted uses on private land in the past. The definition of Agriculture in the definitions section of the Ordinance says that keeping of farm animals is not allowed on properties of 5 acres or less, and sale of products is limited to those grown on site. It is not clear whether the Village districts allow these same agricultural uses. From the definition of agriculture may also prohibit the keeping of chickens or hens, although there is not a definition of "livestock or farm animals" included in this section to indicate whether chickens are considered farm animals.

Palmer's Zoning does not include a Right to Farm provision which would "encourage the pursuit of agriculture, promote agriculture-based economic opportunities, and protect farmlands within the town

²⁴ Palmer Zoning Ordinance, Section 171-55, Table of Use Regulations – Residential Zones; and Section 171-62, Table of Use Regulations, Business Zones;

by allowing agricultural uses and related activities to function with minimal conflict with abutters and town agencies.”²⁵ Adoption of such an ordinance could signify the Town’s support for agricultural uses.

A Farm and Garden survey conducted by the Mass in Motion program in early 2020 showed significant interest in both community gardens and assistance in starting backyard gardens on the properties where people live. In Springfield, the Springfield Food Policy Council built more than 60 raised beds and supplied plant starts to allow residents to grow their own food. This effort provides a source of fresh food and also offers residents a source of pride in the ability to provide food for their families and an outdoor activity that improves mental health. Partnering with schools, youth groups and social organizations to build raised beds could provide a benefit for both the garden recipients and for those participating in the construction and dissemination of the raised beds.

Public Assistance Programs

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Often, consumers perceive healthier food to cost more. On average, consumers pay \$1.50 more per day per person for a healthy diet of whole foods and fresh produce compared to an unhealthy one of processed foods and ready-to-eat products. Government programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or EBT cards) provide financial assistance to expand the buying power of low-income individuals and families, and have been shown to improve long-term health outcomes for recipients, particularly women. However, not all people who are eligible for SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs participate, and for those who do, their benefits may not be sufficient to provide as healthy of a diet as they would like.

In order to be eligible for SNAP and other major federal nutritional assistance programs, household incomes must be within 200% of federal poverty level (a common determination of low-income status), with SNAP at 130% and WIC at 185%. Poverty and food insecurity are not mutually inclusive, and not all participants of federal nutrition assistance programs live in poverty. Poverty rates are determined by the number of members in a household and their annual income, and the federal poverty level is set at the same threshold across all 48 contiguous states, despite significant differences in cost-of-living. A family determined to be living below poverty-level by income standards may describe themselves as being food secure due to access to a large home garden and well-equipped kitchen. At the same time, another household may technically earn above poverty-level wages but may describe themselves as food insecure for any number of reasons, such as lack of access to the transportation necessary to make routine trips to a supermarket, or having outsized medical, childcare, or other bills that cut into their regular food budget.

The percentage of households that are signed up to receive SNAP (**Figure 23**) is 16% town-wide, with the most households living in the Census Tract that includes Three Rivers (20.2%). The total number of households receiving SNAP in Palmer is approximately 781, and 369 of those households were living below poverty level in the last 12 months. However, according to Census data, there were 203 households or 35.5% of households living below poverty who did not receive SNAP benefits (Figure 23) and would likely qualify for the program.

²⁵ <https://www.mass.gov/doc/model-right-to-farm-by-law>

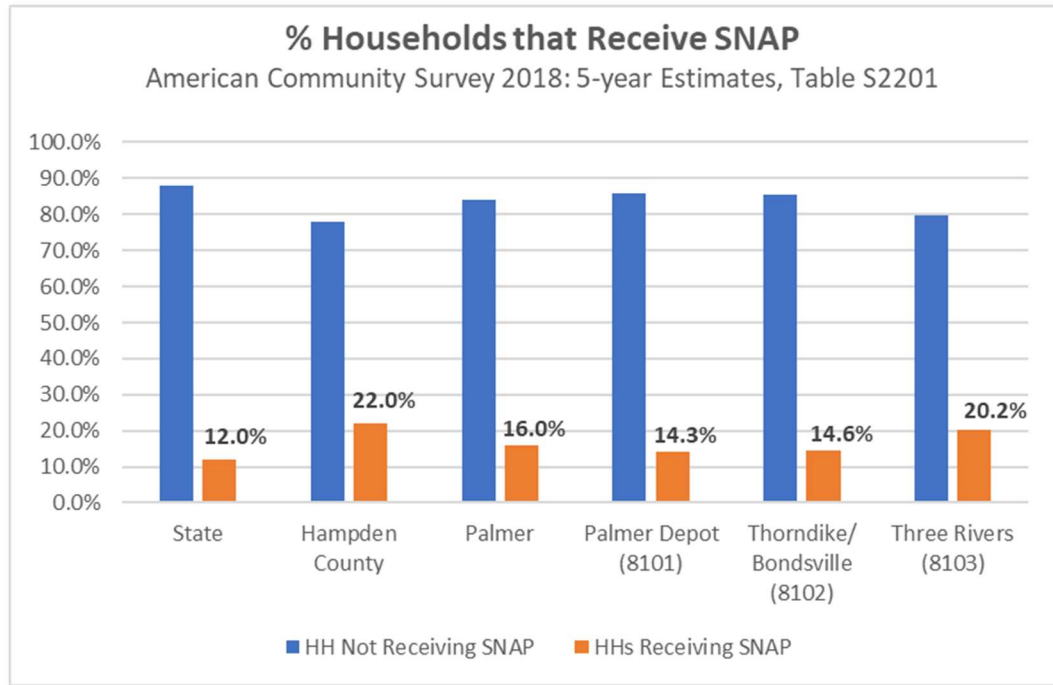


Figure 23 - % of Households that Receive SNAP. Source: ACS 2018 5-year estimates, Table S2201

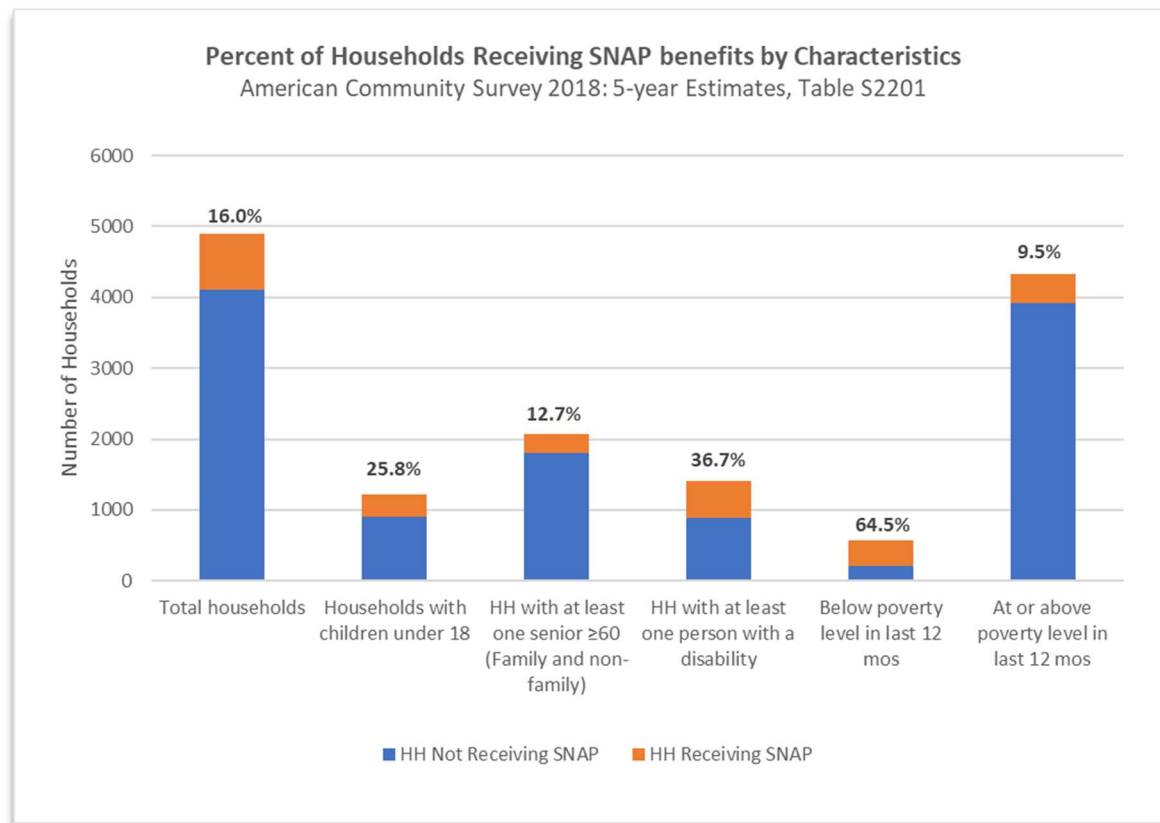


Figure 24 - Households Receiving SNAP by Characteristic. Source: ACS 2018 5-year estimates, Table S2201

Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)

The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) is a Massachusetts based food assistance program which matches the amount of funding that households receive through the SNAP program funding for purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables from authorized vendors. The program is available for use at farmers markets, farm stores and farms stands, and mobile markets that have been accepted into the program and have the card readers that are required for purchase through the HIP program. Anyone with a SNAP card (although not the special pandemic-EBT cards that were issued to many families who had not previously used SNAP) is automatically enrolled in the HIP program.



**Fresh. Canned. Dried. Frozen.
It's **HIP** to be healthy!**

Data obtained through the Department of Transitional Assistance indicates that the program is vastly underutilized. In Palmer, less than 4% of households that used SNAP used their HIP benefits in the busiest produce months in 2019 (**Figure 25**). There are a number of potential barriers that may prevent people from using this program: 1) knowledge of the program, and how and where to use it; 2) there are no HIP vendors in Palmer; and 3) the logistics of the program (SNAP/EBT cards are used and then reimbursed for the amount used on the HIP purchases). This underuse leaves thousands of potential food dollars unused for families that need food. Further outreach and education to SNAP users and service providers who help people enroll in public assistance programs may be warranted to ensure that the program is understood by potential users.

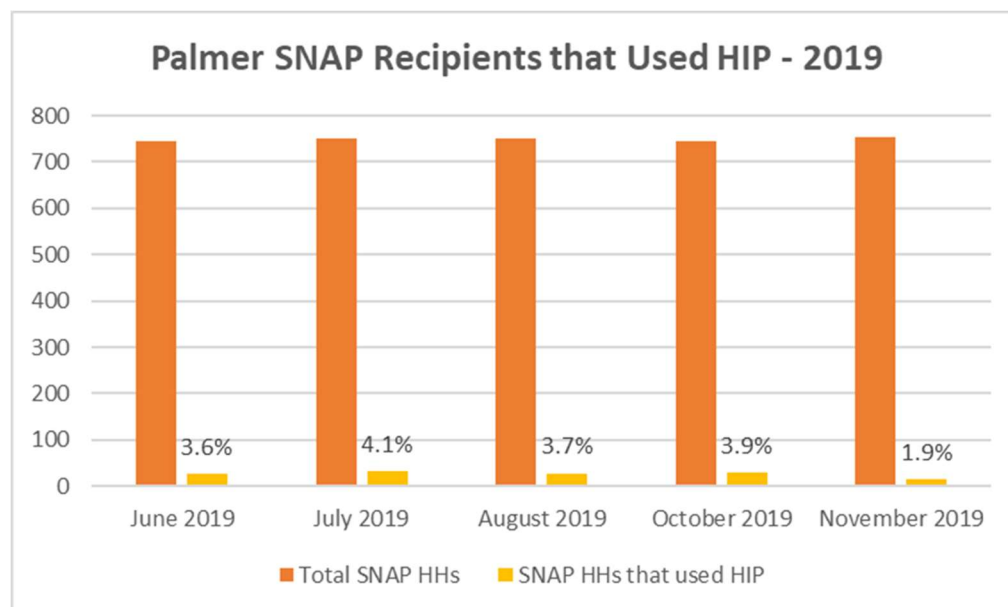


Figure 25 - Percentage of SNAP Households that used the HIP program - 2019. (Source: HIP data obtained by request from DTA; SNAP usage by zip code obtained from DTA website)

Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

The Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a federal program that is administered out of branch offices throughout the state. The closest WIC office to Palmer has been at the Baystate Mary Lane Hospital but will be moving as this branch of Baystate will be closing in 2021. The WIC program provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education to low income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding post-partum women, and to infants and children up to five years of age who are found to be at nutritional risk.²⁶ According to the WIC administrator for the Palmer region, 21 women and 67 children from Palmer were registered for the program at the time of our interview.²⁷ Women and children who meet the criteria for the program and are income-eligible for SNAP or are enrolled in certain health plans are automatically eligible for WIC as well.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women were able to enroll in the program online, eliminating the need for transportation to WIC offices. The program also expanded the WIC approved food requirements to add more food options. A farmers market nutrition program which provides coupon books for use at farmers markets that have signed on to the program, was also rolled out in August of 2020. Farms and farmers markets have to sign up with the state to be able to take the WIC coupons. Currently, the Monson Farmers Market is eligible to accept WIC coupons. According to the WIC administrator, enrollment in the program stayed fairly steady during the pandemic.

Food Pantries and Distribution Sites

Palmer hosts one regular food pantry, Palmer Food Share, Inc., that is supplied in part by food from the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. Another smaller pantry operates out of the Second Congregational Church. The Palmer Senior Center (in non-COVID times) provides lunches several days a week as well as Meals on Wheels and has a Brown Bag distribution program supplied by the Food Bank of Western Mass. Palmer residents also access emergency food distribution programs offered outside of the community, including the mobile Food Bank truck that provides free food at Glenville Park in Ware once a month, and the Amherst Survival Center. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, several alternative emergency meal programs became available through federal and private sources of funding to meet the increase in need that grew out of the state-mandated shutdown. Information on the type and quantity of food distribution that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic was obtained through interviews from coordinators of the food distribution programs.

Palmer Food Share Inc.

Palmer Food Share, Inc., located on Walnut Street in Palmer Depot is open two days a week (Tuesdays and Fridays) from 9:30 am to 11:30 am for pickup of large quantities of food (40 pounds for a single person, 60-70 pounds for a 2-person family), intended to feed a family from one to 3 months. The pantry is primarily supplied by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, but also receives donations in food from the Big Y and cash from private donors and local fund drives. Customers to the site should be eligible for food assistance programs, but the pantry does not turn anyone away. Palmer Food Share receives donations of fresh produce from Big Y on occasion, and from the farmers market in Belchertown or from

²⁶ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic>

²⁷ Interview with Jenny McDonnell, WIC program administrator, August 8, 2020.

local growers. They direct clients to the Food Bank mobile bus that gives out food at Glenvale Park in Ware once a month for more free fresh produce.

According to the Palmer Food Share representative interviewed for the Health Addendum, the overall amount of food given out in 2020 was less than the amount distributed in 2019 over the same amount of time. They did not know the reason for this decline in demand, but speculated that the food distribution provided at the Palmer Schools and the Pandemic-EBT cards likely supplemented the nutritional needs of their clients during the months these additional assistance programs were in operation.

Palmer Food Share does not have a website and is only reachable by leaving a phone message for one of the volunteer coordinators. A Facebook page was started by a local resident on behalf of the pantry, but otherwise outreach about the program is only by word of mouth. Additional outreach may be warranted to ensure that people who need food know when and where to get it.

Second Congregational Church

The Second Congregational Church on Pleasant Street has a small food pantry that is open on Wednesday mornings and provides a couple of days of food for people in need. The pantry is supplied with food and monetary donations from the congregation. Bruce Prestwood-Taylor, the minister at the church, said that the food pantry was used less frequently during pandemic, likely due to the additional sources of food distribution (daily distribution from the school) and pandemic assistance. The church also has a small cash relief fund to help people with small donations for needs other than food.

The Brookfield Institute

The mission of the Brookfield Institute, located in Brookfield, is “to build resilience in military families through targeted programs and resources in order to aggressively combat the causes and impacts of veteran suicide.”²⁸ Prior to the pandemic, the Institute connected military families with area food pantries or to the Mass Military Foundation for food distribution services if they were experiencing food insecurity. While the facility was closed due to the pandemic, staff conducted check-in calls with clients to see what they needed and found that many were in need of food. As a result, and with funding from Project New Hope out of Worcester, the Institute provided food delivery to veterans and military families in their service area during the pandemic. They delivered food to 38-43 families or 91-107 individuals in total, with 29 of the families or 57 individuals being located in Palmer. The Executive Director of the Brookfield Institute commented that many of the veterans suffered from PTSD so were less likely to go to farmers markets or other crowded places to get food. She also said that mental health challenges suffered by many of their clients were getting worse with the COVID-19 shutdown.

Palmer Schools

The Palmer Schools operated another new food distribution program during the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were closed and then operating at limited capacity to comply with social distancing requirements. Funding for the school food distribution program over the summer was provided through the USDA Summer Food program, with the understanding that many children rely on school food for the majority of

²⁸ <https://brookfieldinstitute.org/>

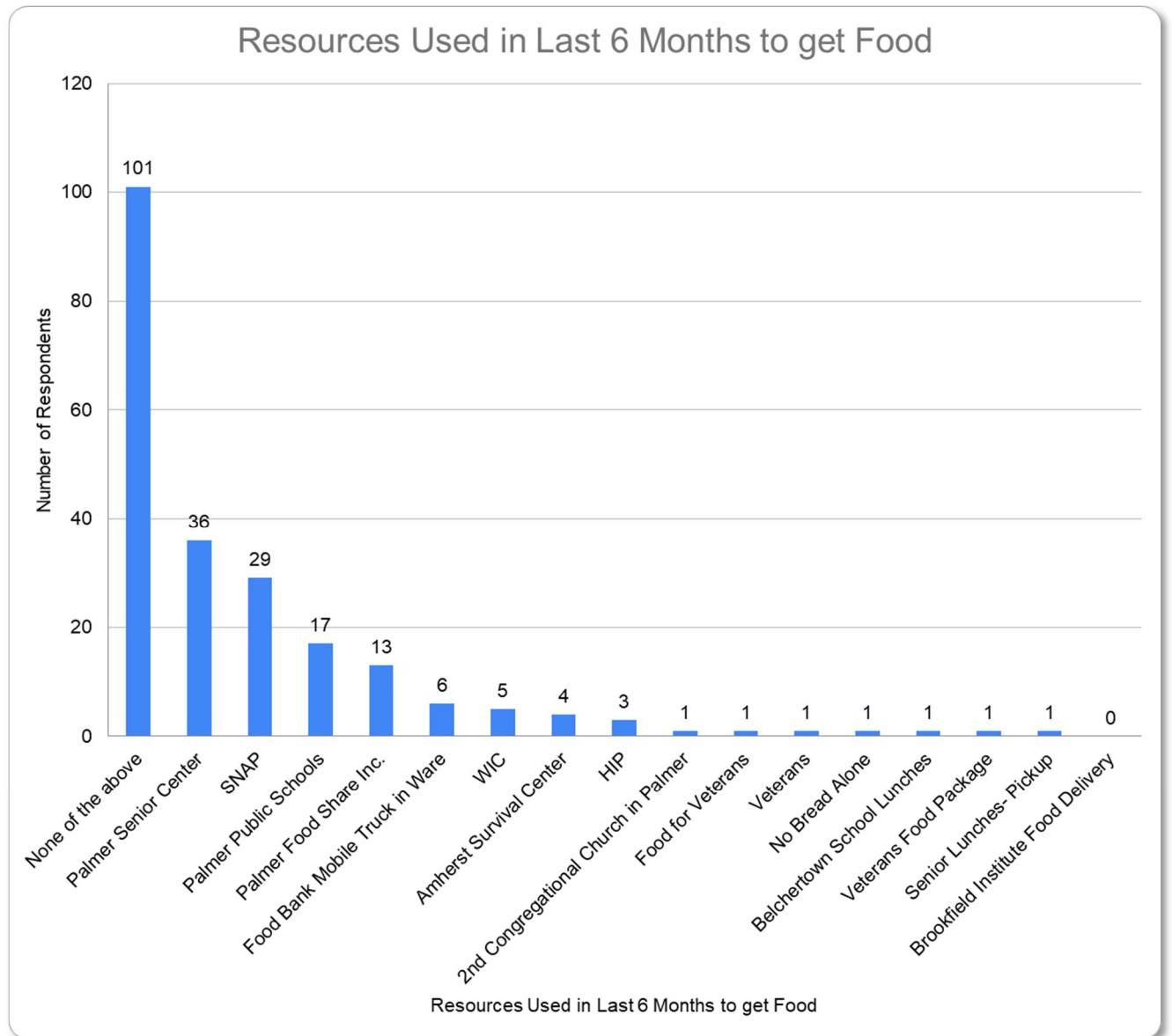


Figure 26 - Healthy Palmer Survey: Resources used to get food in the last 6 months

their nutritional needs. Over a period of five weeks in the summer when the food distribution program was in full operation, the school provided 10,942 meals during a 5-day per week distribution schedule at three different locations in the community. As the school is operating a hybrid program, they continue to provide meals for families of children who are not coming into the school.

Palmer has seen an increase in students eligible for the free and reduced lunch program, and therefore the Palmer Schools campus is now in an area that qualifies for the Summer Meals program. Formerly the program was offered through the Monson school system. The representative at the school who was

interviewed for this Addendum said that the school has seen an increase in students living in transitional housing and students who speak languages other than English in recent years.²⁹

Food Bank Mobile Bus and other outside food distribution sites

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts operates a Mobile Food Bank truck that brings food once a month (3rd Tuesdays) to Grenville Park in Ware. The truck also makes stops at several locations in Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee and Westfield in Hampden County, and to Easthampton and Amherst in Hampshire County. The monthly stop in Ware draws hundreds of people, many who come from Palmer. The truck brings fresh produce and meat and dairy on occasion in addition to the regular food bank offerings. As the Ware site is extremely popular, it is likely that an additional stop in Palmer could be warranted. Many respondents to the Healthy Palmer Survey (**Figure 26**) also said that they got food at the Amherst Survival Center and through veterans assistance programs.

Palmer Senior Center

The Palmer Senior Center provides services and meals for people over 60 and people with disabilities who live in Palmer. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Senior Center provided congregate meals on site (daily lunches and occasional breakfasts) which offered older adults regular nutritious meals as well as a place to socialize. Senior Center vans provide rides for seniors and people with disabilities (during non-COVID times) to the Senior Center and to medical appointments.

During the pandemic, the Senior Center was forced to close its doors and stop offering meals on site. The center pivoted to providing Grab n Go meals for pick up at the senior center in place of congregate meals through a program offered by Greater Springfield Senior Services and offered delivery of these and brown bag food distribution (through the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts) to seniors who were not able to drive themselves to the Senior Center. The Grab n Go program served 75-85 people three days a week, many more than came for congregate meals at the Senior Center. The Senior Center also operates a Meals on Wheels program that expanded during the pandemic.

School Food

The school food distribution program that was in effect during the COVID-19 pandemic is one example of the importance that schools play in the food system, particularly for families with children under 18 that are living in poverty. Schools are positioned to provide education on nutrition and food systems in addition to being able to offer nutritious food to students while schools are in session (or even when they are not in session, as was evidenced by the Summer Meals program). Schools can increase the opportunities for children to consume more fresh fruits and vegetables through three venues:

Procurement, Education, and School Gardens. Several Farm to School networks are available as resources for schools to learn from other programs on the best ways to increase the amount of fresh local food in school nutrition programs, develop curricula around growing food, and to build school gardens as educational tools. The National Farm to School Network, Northeast Farm to School Collaborative and Farm to Institution New England (FINE) all offer websites and technical assistance for starting Farm to School programs. In 2019, the Old Mill Elementary School operated a school garden on the property, and the school nutrition program procures fresh fruit from local growers. However, a formal Farm to School program is not yet in place in the Palmer Schools.

²⁹ Interview with Amanda Babinski, Palmer Schools, October 20, 2020.

Goals and Actions

The following Goals and Actions for creating a healthier environment for the residents of Palmer are included in the Health chapter of the Palmer Master Plan and have been assigned lead entities and timeframes in the Implementation Chapter of the Master Plan. We have included these Goals and Actions in the Health Addendum so that it can serve as a road map for better health on its own and as an element of the Master Plan.

Goal 1. Active Living and Healthy Aging.

Create a welcoming culture for people of all ages by becoming an Age and Dementia Friendly Community.

Recommended Actions

- 1.1 Change the narrative about the aging population to celebrate the wisdom, skills, talents and lived experience, both personal and professional, of older adults and the contributions that they have made to the community.
- 1.2 Ensure that older adults, people with disabilities, and other marginalized populations are included in planning for improvements to the social and built environments in Palmer.

Goal 2. Transportation services support the needs of all Palmer residents.

Ensure that all residents have access to transportation services from fixed route PVRTA buses to supported transportation services for people with disabilities.

Recommended Actions

- 2.1 Evaluate the needs of older adults and people with disabilities annually to ensure that they know about the transportation services available to them and that the services meet their needs in terms of travel destinations and support.

Goal 3: Provide safe walking and biking routes for people of all ages and abilities.

Provide improvements to pedestrian infrastructure including sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, shoulders on rural roads, and traffic calming measures to promote a safe environment for pedestrians.

Recommended Actions

- 3.1 Evaluate walking and biking routes between areas of dense residential development and retail and employment centers. Engage residents in walk audits to educate them on the elements of safe pedestrian infrastructure and to involve them in planning for improvements.

Goal 4. Buildings and outdoor spaces are safe and accessible for all users.

Ensure access to recreational resources for all residents in all seasons.

Recommended Actions

- 4.1 Explore the development of Shared Use Agreements with the Palmer Schools to allow community use of recreation and fitness facilities after school hours.

-
- 4.2 Improve accessibility in and around parks through sidewalk maintenance and improvements; visible crosswalks, curb ramps and detectable warning strips at intersections; lighting; and adding benches and shaded rest areas.
 - 4.3 Add accessible public restrooms to identified recreation areas to encourage more use.
 - 4.4 Engage older adults and people with disabilities in the design for reconstruction of parks and recreation facilities.
 - 4.5 Develop outdoor recreational programming for residents of all age groups including older adults.
 - 4.6 Develop and promote places for winter outdoor recreation.

Goal 5: Communications and technology resources are available and affordable.

Ensure all residents have access to technology and the ability to use it. Encourage greater access to affordable high-speed internet, create pathways of access to equipment and training for people on how to use these devices to ensure greater connectivity among all members of the community.

Recommended Actions

- 5.1 Study the feasibility of a program to loan tablets or laptops to households that do not currently own computers, and a system for training and connecting all households to affordable internet service.
- 5.2 Work with service providers to ensure that discounted internet options are available to older adults and low-income households and promote awareness of these programs.

Goal 6. Develop a communications plan for all Town information and events.

Use multiple formats and outlets so that announcements and events are broadcast through multiple modes for people who may not have or use internet.

Recommended Actions

- 6.1 Promote installation of kiosks or community boards in neighborhoods (new and existing) as well as all communication resources (including websites and social media) that can be used by the town to post information about community resources, upcoming events, etc. Announcements should be printed in large type for those who are visually impaired.

PH Goal 7. All residents have opportunities for employment and civic engagement.

Provide opportunities for older adults to work and become engaged in the community. Celebrate the experience of working and living in the community that long-time residents and older adults can offer.

Recommended Actions

- 7.1 Establish a mentoring program between older adults and prospective entrepreneurs to celebrate the knowledge and experience that older adults bring to the community, and to provide opportunities for intergenerational learning.
- 7.2 Ensure that people of all ages have access to employment opportunities through expanded transportation services and partnerships between the COA and local businesses.

PH Goal 8. Food Security

Ensure that Palmer Residents have more affordable and healthy food options. Increase food retail options that are affordable, healthy, and include locally produced food.

Recommended Actions

- 8.1 Reinststate a Farmers Market or a farm stand that accepts SNAP, HIP and WIC benefits, or otherwise incentivizes purchase of healthy foods.
- 8.2 Launch a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in cooperation CISA and area farms with monthly shares available through HIP and delivery location(s) in Palmer.
- 8.3 Research eligible grant and loan programs to assist local corner stores in obtaining equipment and resources needed to provide fresh local food options.
- 8.4 Explore partnering with surrounding communities to provide a Mobile Food Market for sale of fresh local produce.

PH Goal 9: Ensure that municipal planning, design and development increases access to healthy food for all residents.

Identify opportunities for future food retail development and support increased healthy food availability at existing food stores, particularly in areas with limited healthy food availability.

Recommended Actions

- 9.1 Explore mechanisms for adding healthy food retail provisions to local development processes through community benefits agreements, density bonuses, tax incentive packages or similar tools.
- 9.2 Prioritize transportation infrastructure and services to ensure access to food retail and assistance programs.
- 9.3 Include access to food retail options in prioritization of Complete Streets, public transit, and highway and sidewalk maintenance projects.
- 9.4 Ensure that Site Plan Review and Special Permit Review facilitate increased food access by requiring safe and easy access by pedestrians, bicyclists, people in wheelchairs, public transit users and automobiles.

Goal 10. All residents have access to and receipt of food assistance resources.

Support Palmer residents having access to food assistance resources that increase food security and improve health. Ensure that all eligible residents receive food assistance resources and that residents in need know how and where to access emergency food resources.

Recommended Actions

- 10.1 Partner with the Department of Transitional Assistance, health care providers, the Behavioral Health Network, and other organizations that assist with public benefit programs to ensure that all residents

who qualify for SNAP and other food assistance programs are aware of the resources and how to apply for enrollment.

- 10.2 Provide information on signing up for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and how to use the Healthy Incentive Program (HIP) on Town websites and in all departments that offer public assistance programs.
- 10.3 Advocate for a stop by the Food Bank Mobile bus in Palmer.
- 10.4 Increase visibility of all emergency food resources (Palmer Food Share, Inc.; Second Congregational Church, Senior Center, School) in Palmer through Town website and printed resource guides. Print flyers and resources in large print for older adults and others with vision impairments.
- 10.5 Publicize eligibility criteria for Brown Bag pickup and other food assistance resources.

Goal 11. Agricultural opportunities and incentives are in place to encourage local food production.

Municipal planning, policy and programs promote opportunities for farmers and residents to grow food in Palmer. Provide incentives and opportunities for commercial agriculture and community gardening.

Recommended Actions

- 11.1 Identify at least one Community Garden site and seek funding for construction and management.]
- 11.2 Explore interest in making Palmer a Right to Farm community to signify the importance of local agriculture to the local economy and health of the community.
- 11.3 Promote the development of home-based gardens through training programs on soil testing, building raised beds, home garden practices and food safety, and best practices for keeping chickens.
- 11.4 Explore the implications of promoting donations of excess produce from home gardeners to food pantries throughout summer months.
- 11.5 Design community gardens to include well-constructed compost facilities for garden waste. [also mentioned in Open Space]
- 11.6 Continue to promote home based composting efforts through training on composting and programs that offer discounted compost bins.

Goal 12. Support the Palmer Schools in continuing efforts to provide students with nutritious meals and snacks.

Support the Palmer Schools in the development of an evidence-based School Wellness Policy that includes provisions for nutritious school meals and snacks and support establishing school gardens at all schools and integrate gardening into the school science, health and other curricula.

Recommended Actions

- 12.1 Engage the School Committee, food service providers, parents, and students to provide information and review the current School Wellness Policy and promote revisions where needed.

-
- 12.2 Further nutritional goals in the School Wellness Policy for school meals and provisions for including locally grown fresh food in school meal and snack programs where feasible.
 - 12.3 Ensure that the Palmer School Wellness Policy promotes consumption of water including providing bottle filling stations and encourage students to carry refillable drinking water bottles in school.
 - 12.4 Support school gardening already established at Old Mill Pond School and assess the feasibility of integrating gardening and nutrition education into the science and/or health curriculum.
 - 12.5 Assess the feasibility of installing additional garden beds and integrating gardening and nutrition programs into middle and high school curricula.
 - 12.6 Investigate possible intergenerational programs for school or community gardening.

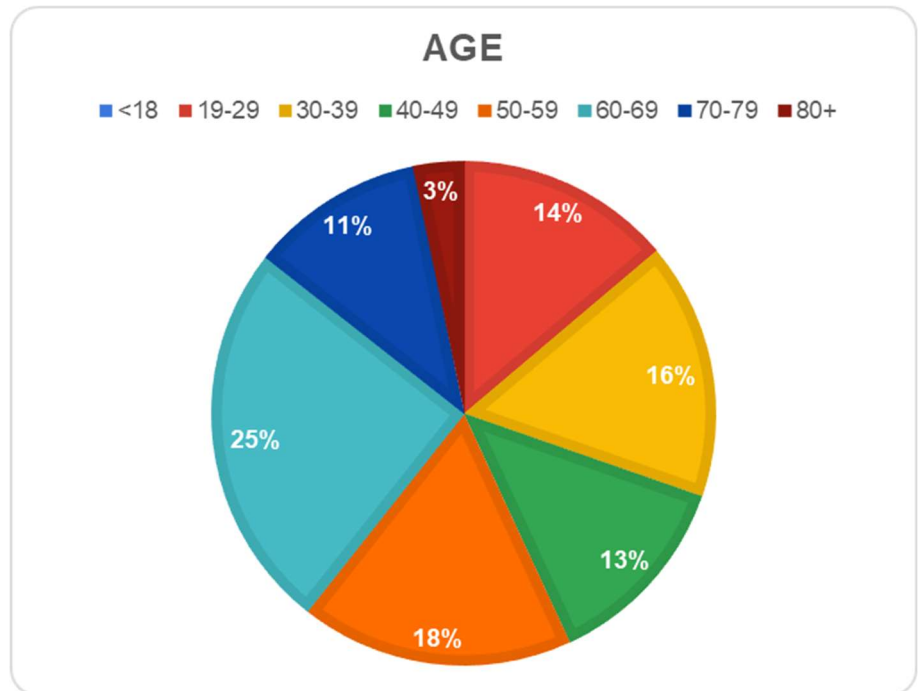
Appendix A – Healthy Palmer Survey

Healthy Palmer Survey Results – January 2021

Total Responses: 188

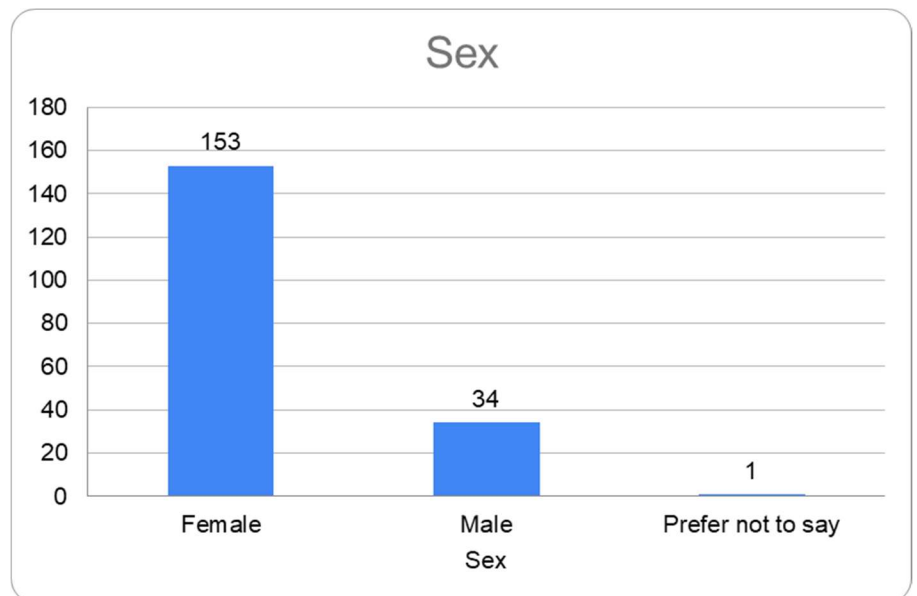
1. What is your age?

Age	Number of Respondents	%
<18	0	0.0%
19-29	26	13.8%
30-39	31	16.5%
40-49	24	12.8%
50-59	33	17.6%
60-69	47	25.0%
70-79	21	11.2%
80+	6	3.2%
	188	



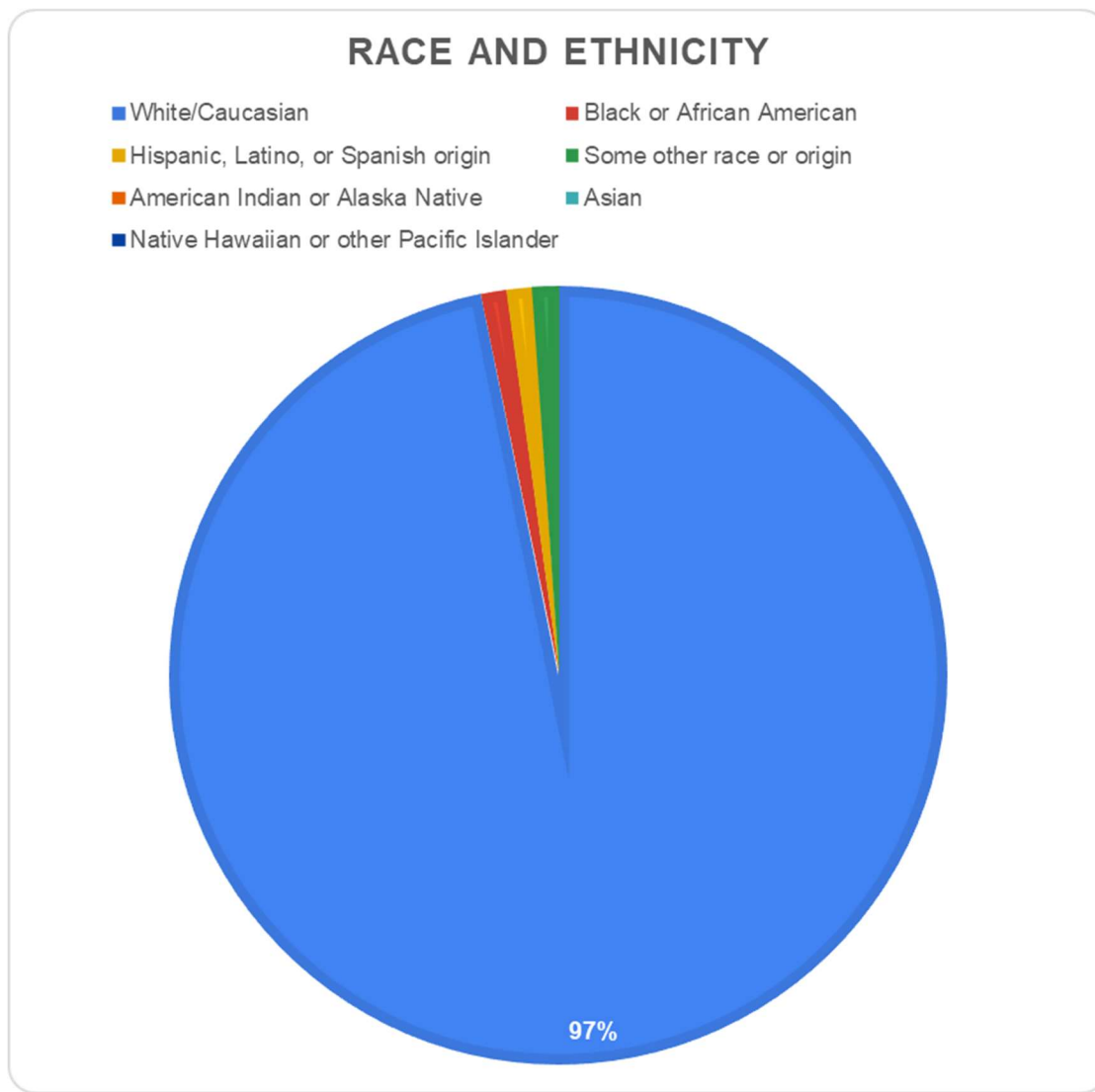
2. Sex

Sex	Number of Respondents
Female	153
Male	34
Prefer not to say	1

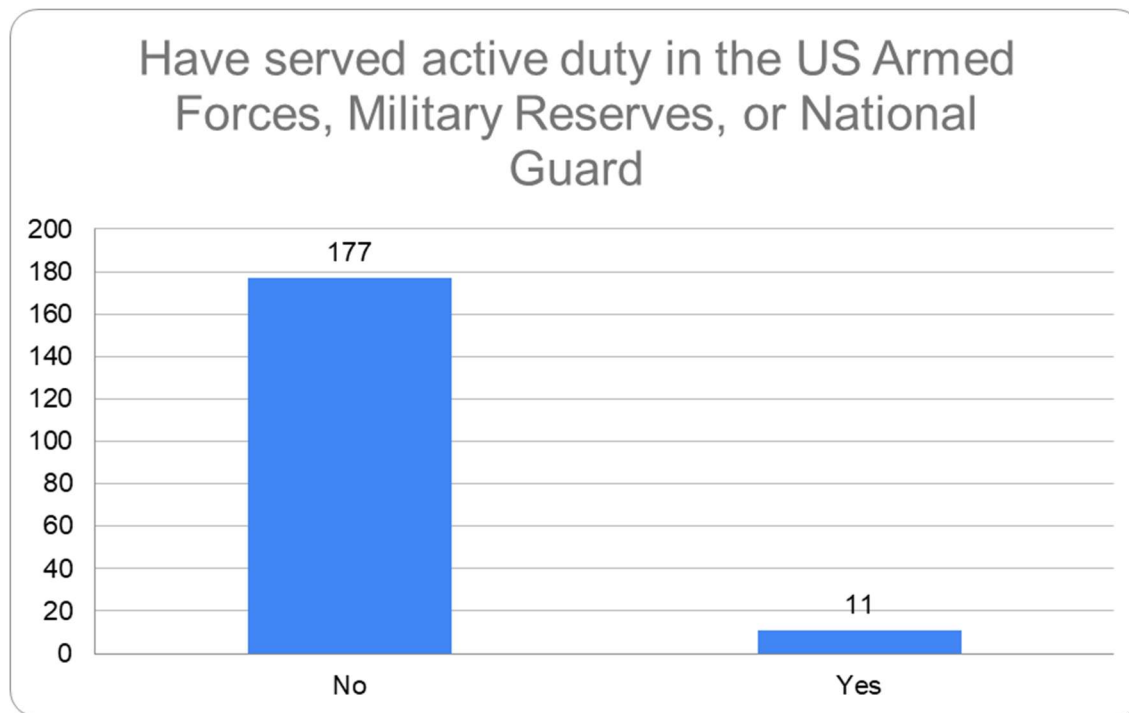


3. Race and Ethnicity

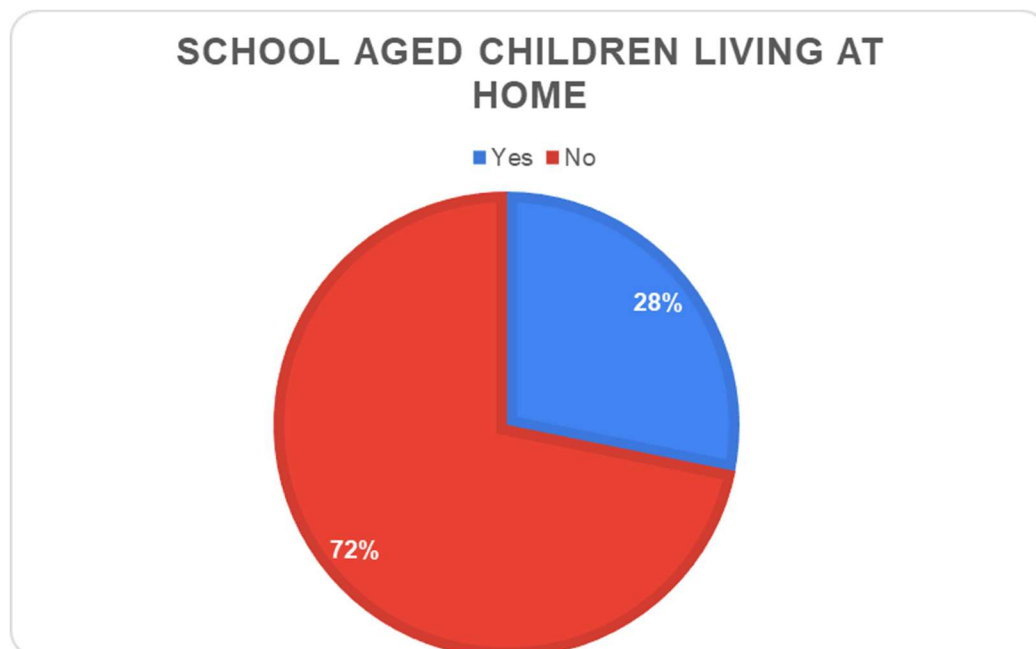
Race and Ethnicity	Number of Respondents
White/Caucasian	182
Black or African American	2
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	2
Some other race or origin	2
American Indian or Alaska Native	0
Asian	0
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0



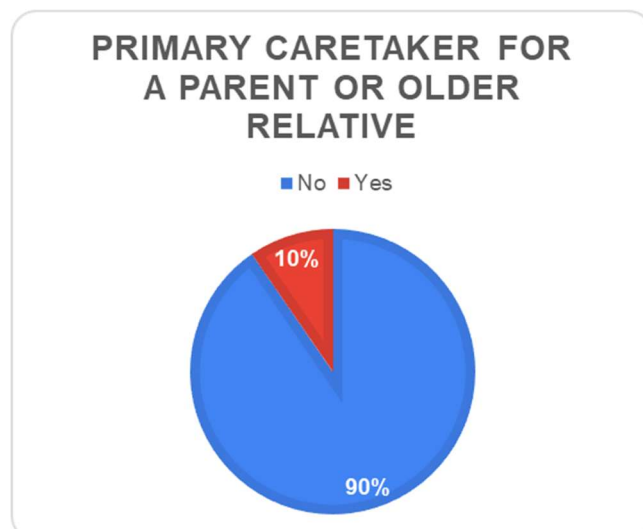
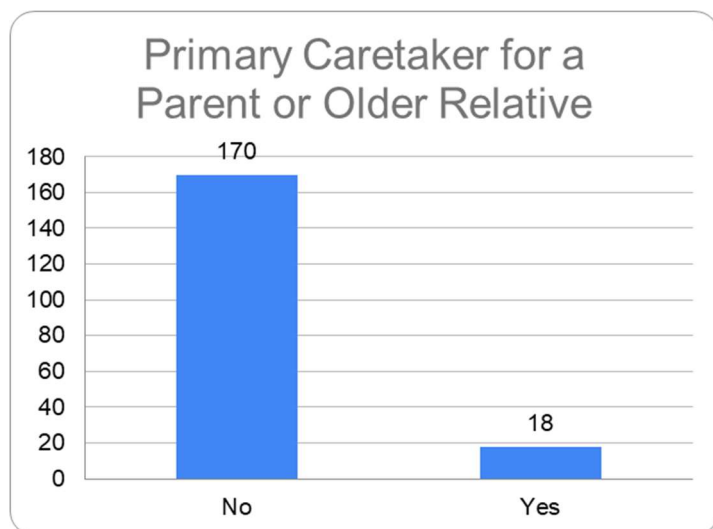
4. Have you served in the US Armed Forces, Military Reserves or National Guard?



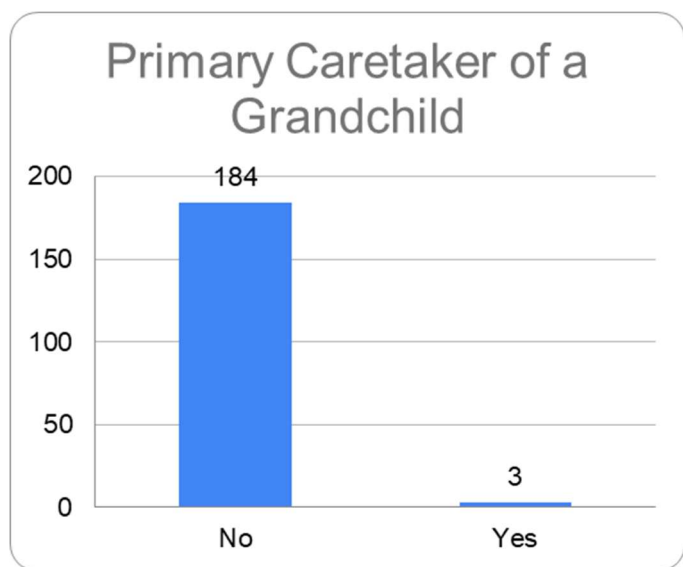
5. Do you have School Aged children living at home?



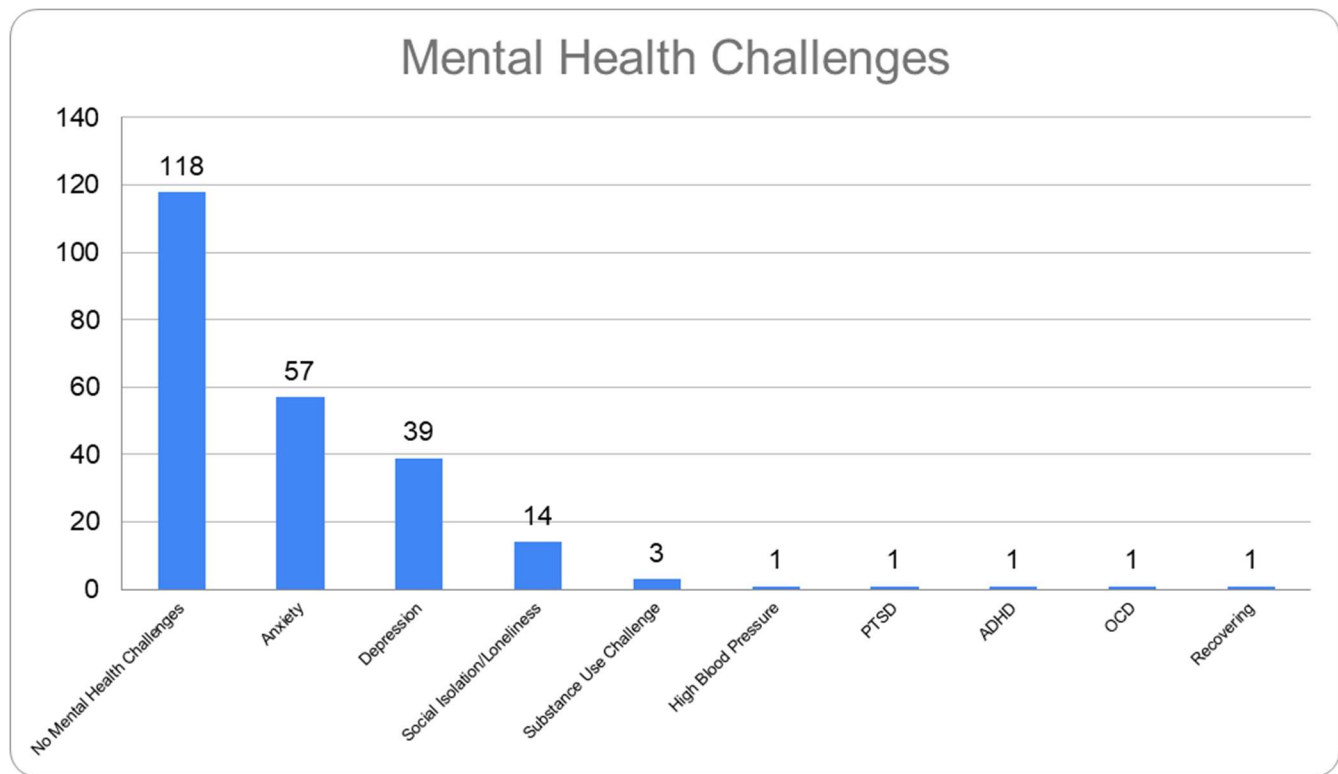
6. Are you a primary caretaker for an older parent or relative?



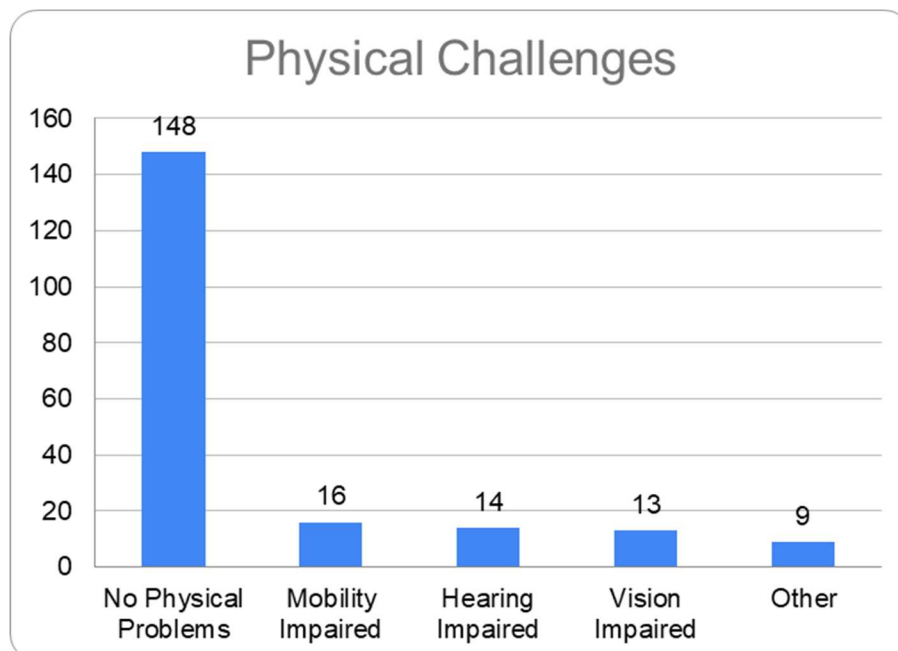
7. Are you the primary caretaker of a grandchild?



8. Do you have any of the following Mental Health challenges? (check all that apply)

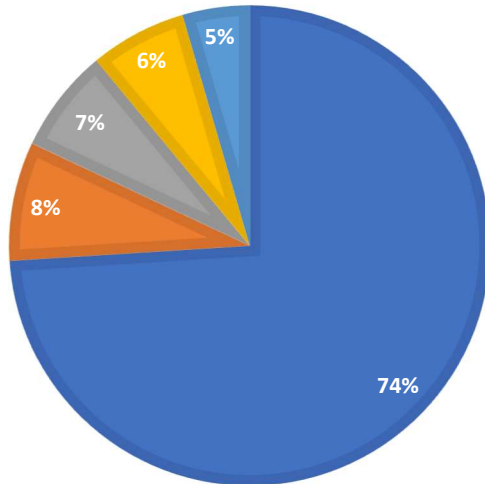


9. Do you have any of the following physical health challenges?



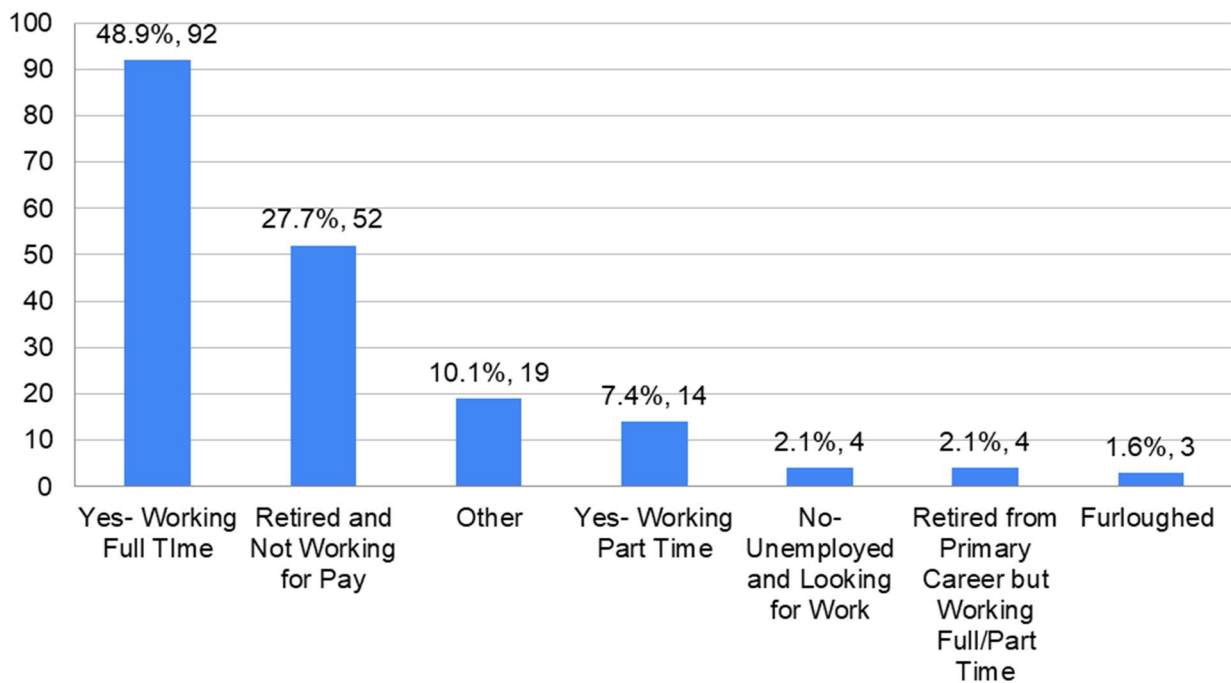
PHYSICAL CHALLENGES

■ No Physical Problems
 ■ Mobility Impaired
 ■ Hearing Impaired
 ■ Vision Impaired
 ■ Other

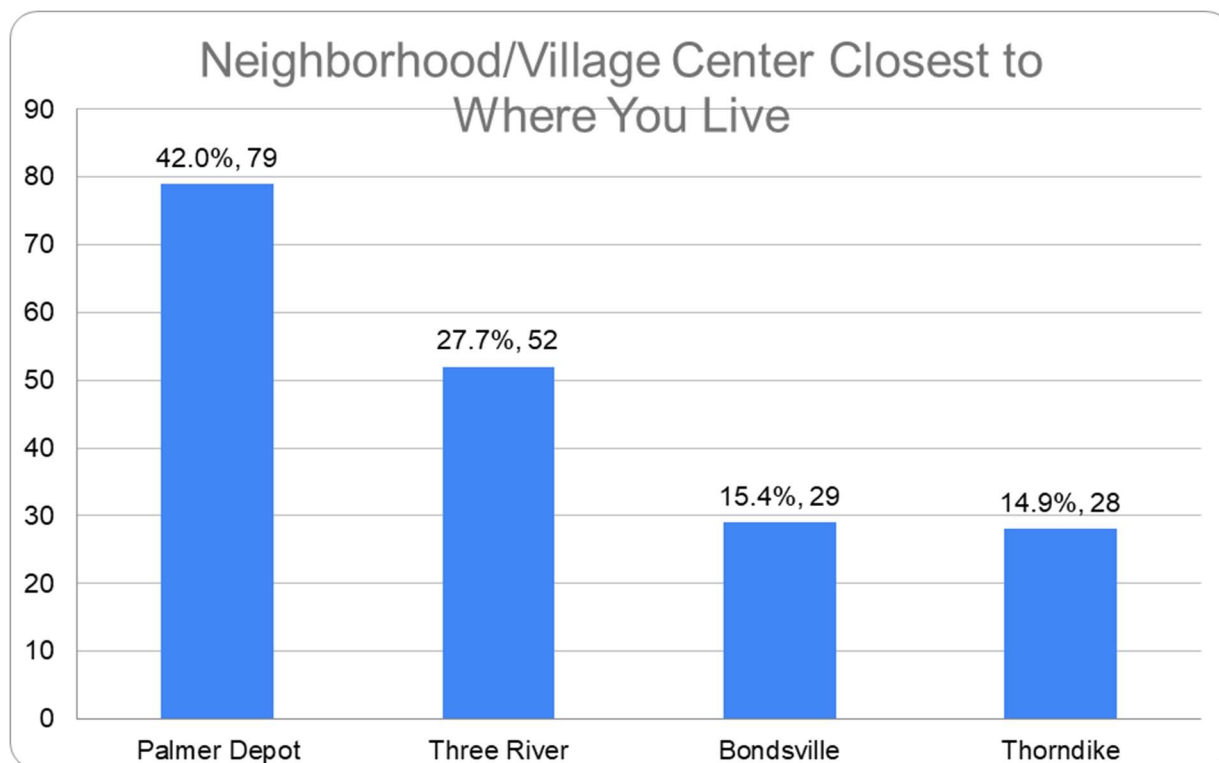


10. What is your employment status?

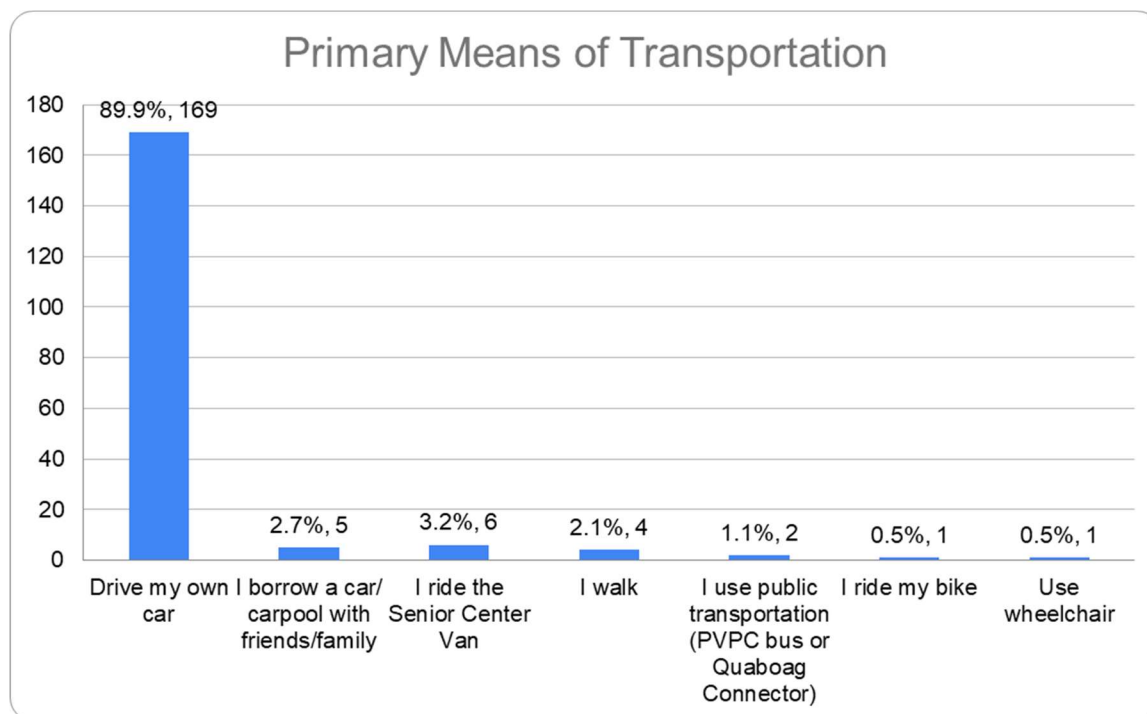
Employment Status



11. What is the closest village center to where you live?



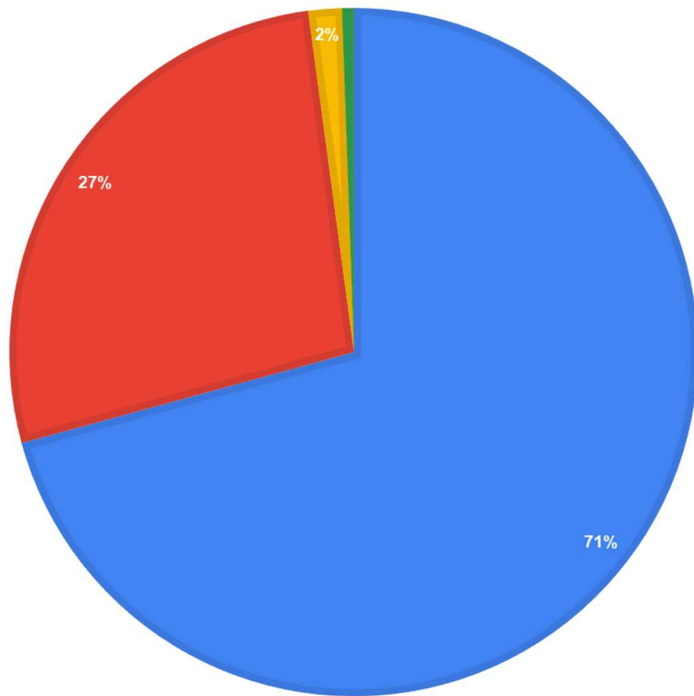
12. What is your primary means of transportation?



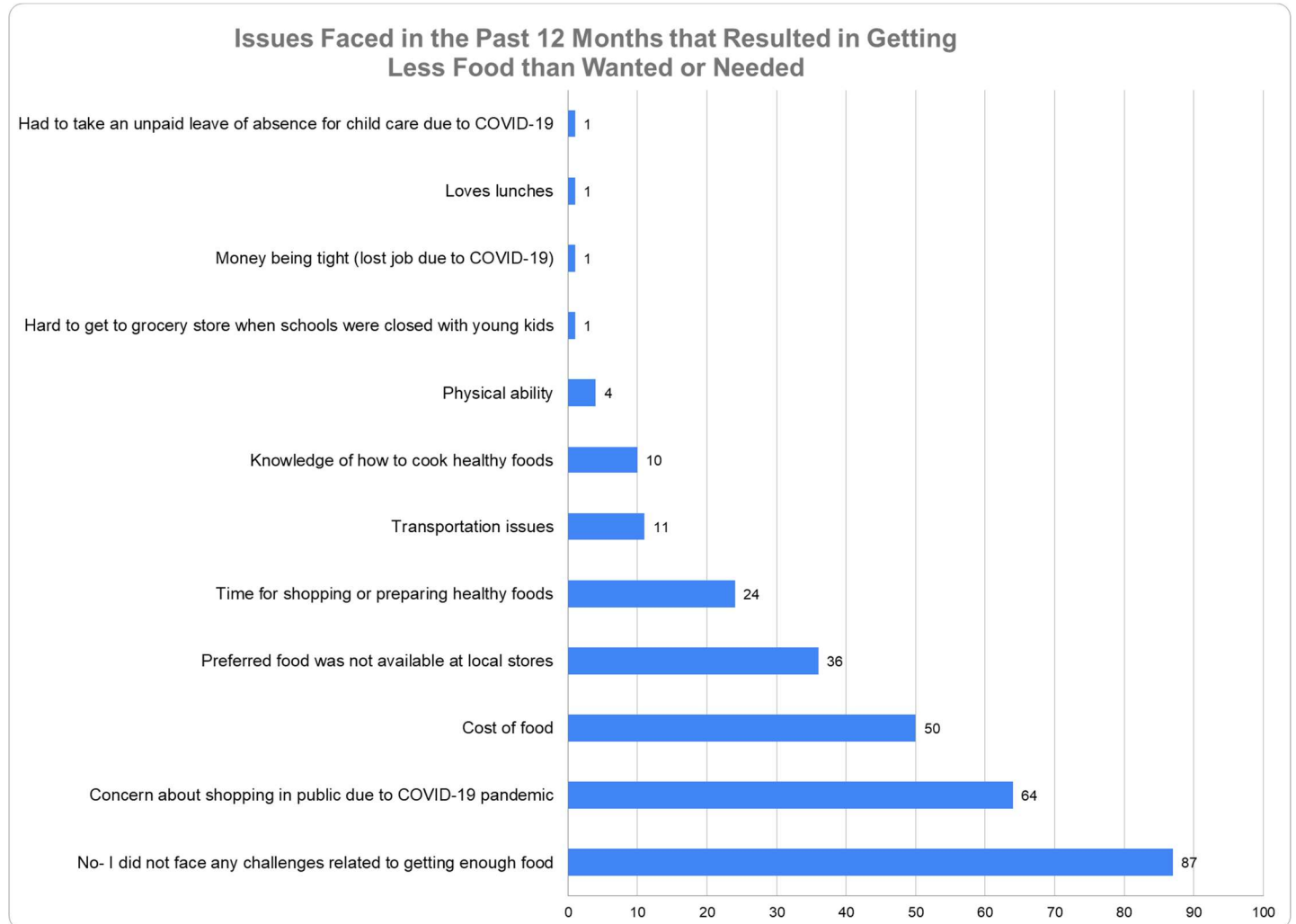
13. Do you rent or own your home?

RENT OR OWN HOME

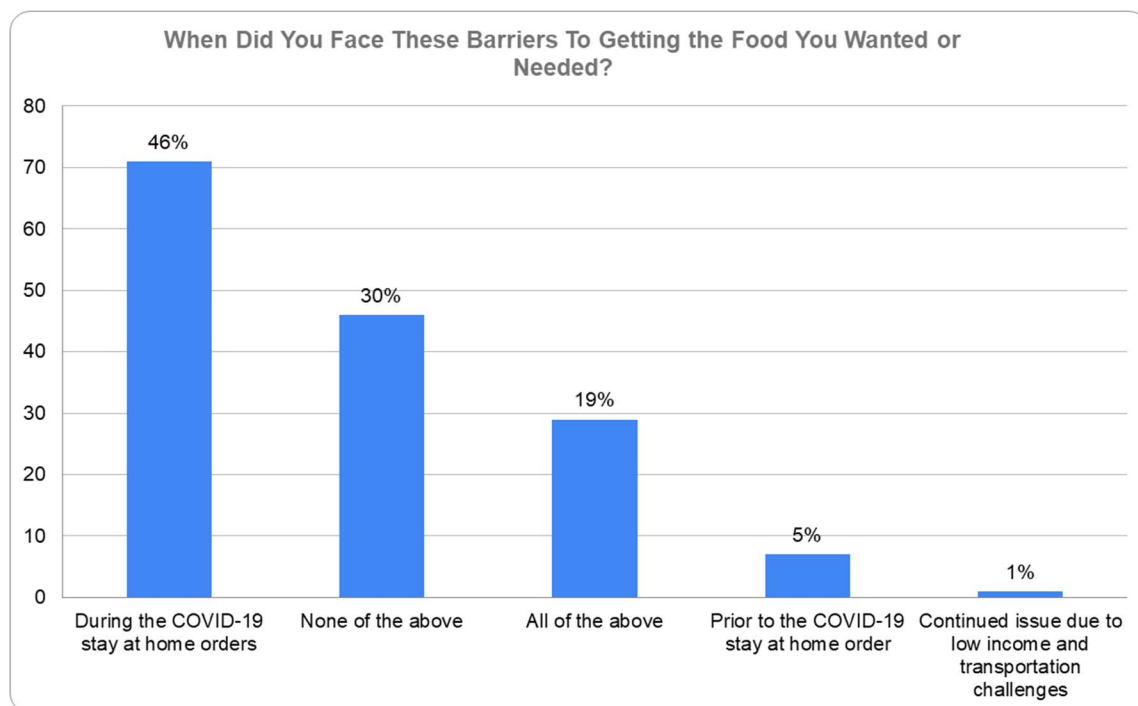
■ Own ■ Rent ■ Live at home with parents ■ None



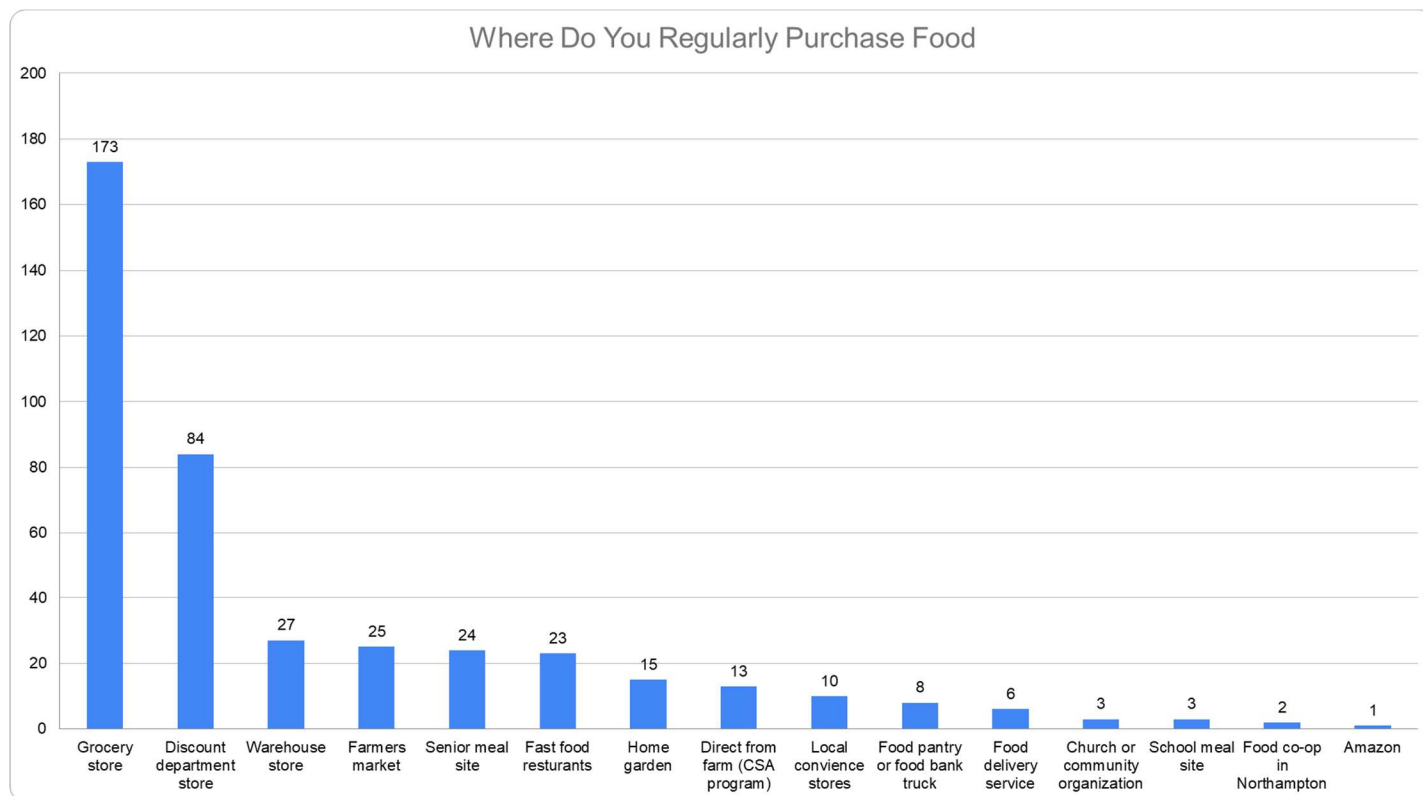
14. Did you face any of the following issues in the last 12 months that resulted in you getting less food than you wanted or needed? (Check all that apply)



15. When did you face these barriers to getting the food you wanted or needed?



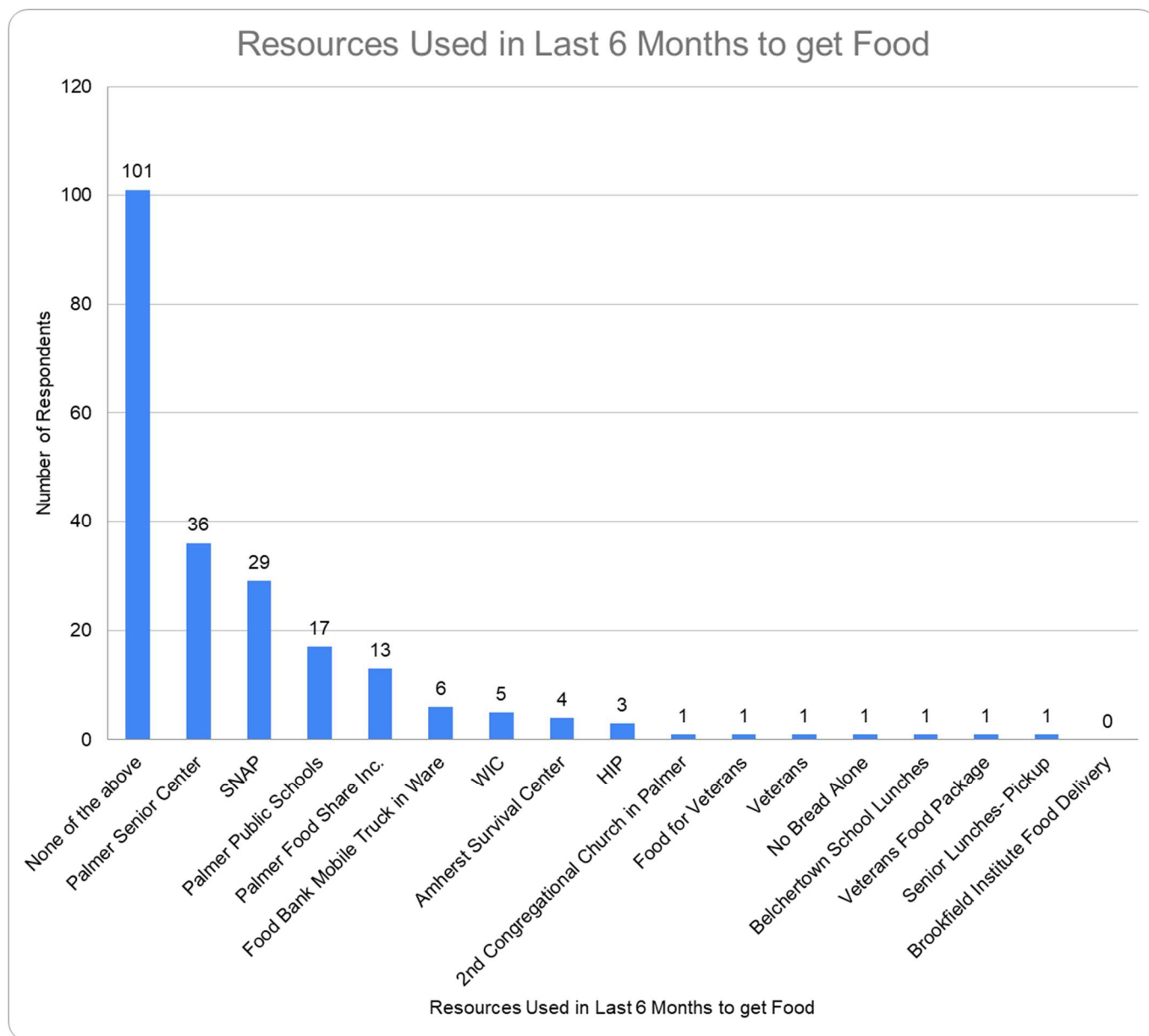
16. Where do you regularly purchase food? (check all that apply)



17. If you get your food from a local convenience store, Farmers Market or Farm Stand, which do you go to?

Farm Stand/Farmers market/Convenience Store	# Responses
Belchertown	6
Brimfield	4
Big Y	4
Atkins	3
Varies/Multiple	3
Veggie/Fruit Stand on Commercial Street in Thorndike	4
Cumberland Farms	2
Local convenience store	2
Walmart	2
Ware	2
Randalls in Ludlow	2
Northampton	2
Sullies in Belchertown	2
Belchertown Farmers Market	1
Chestnut Farm in Hardwick	1
Farmers Market	1
Roger's Farm	1
Randalls in Thorndike	1
O'connells in Bondsville	1
Phoenix	1
Sturbridge	1
Amherst	1
Farm Stand	1
Red Fire Farm	1
Randalls	1
Stop and Shop	1
Front Yard Farm in Ware	1
Aldi's	1
Three Rivers park	1
Sullivan's in Belchertown	1
Austin Valley in Belchertown	1
Whole Foods	1
Trader Joe's	1
Springfield	1
Joe's Veggie Stand	1
Stillman's in West Brookefield	1
Farm stand near Griselda Glass	1
Farmer's World in Ware	1

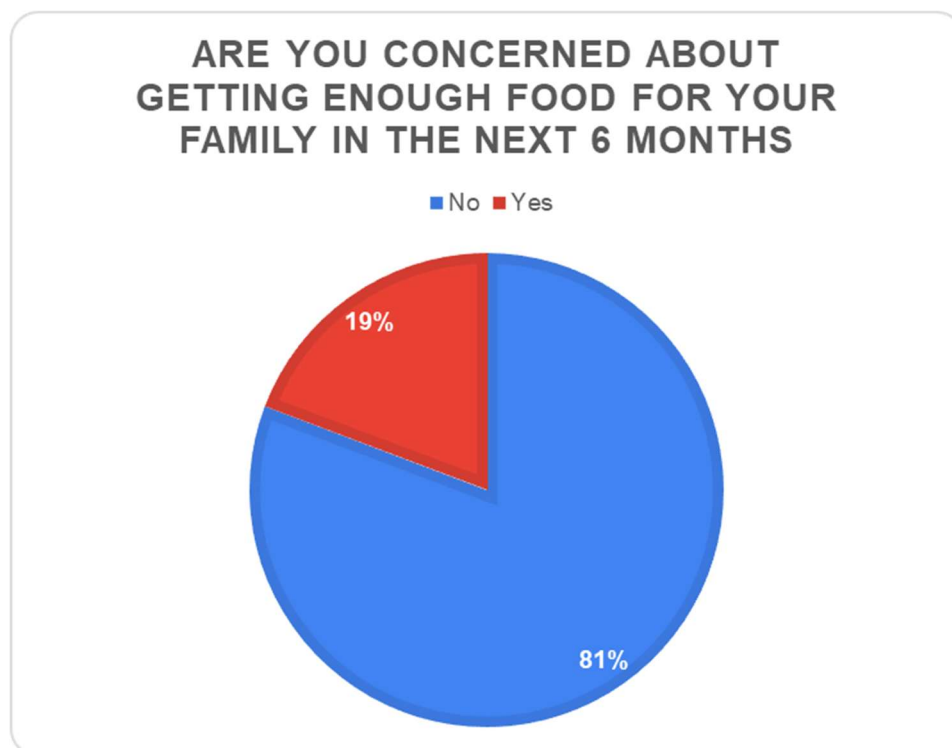
18. Have you used any of the following resources in the last six months to get food? (check all that apply)



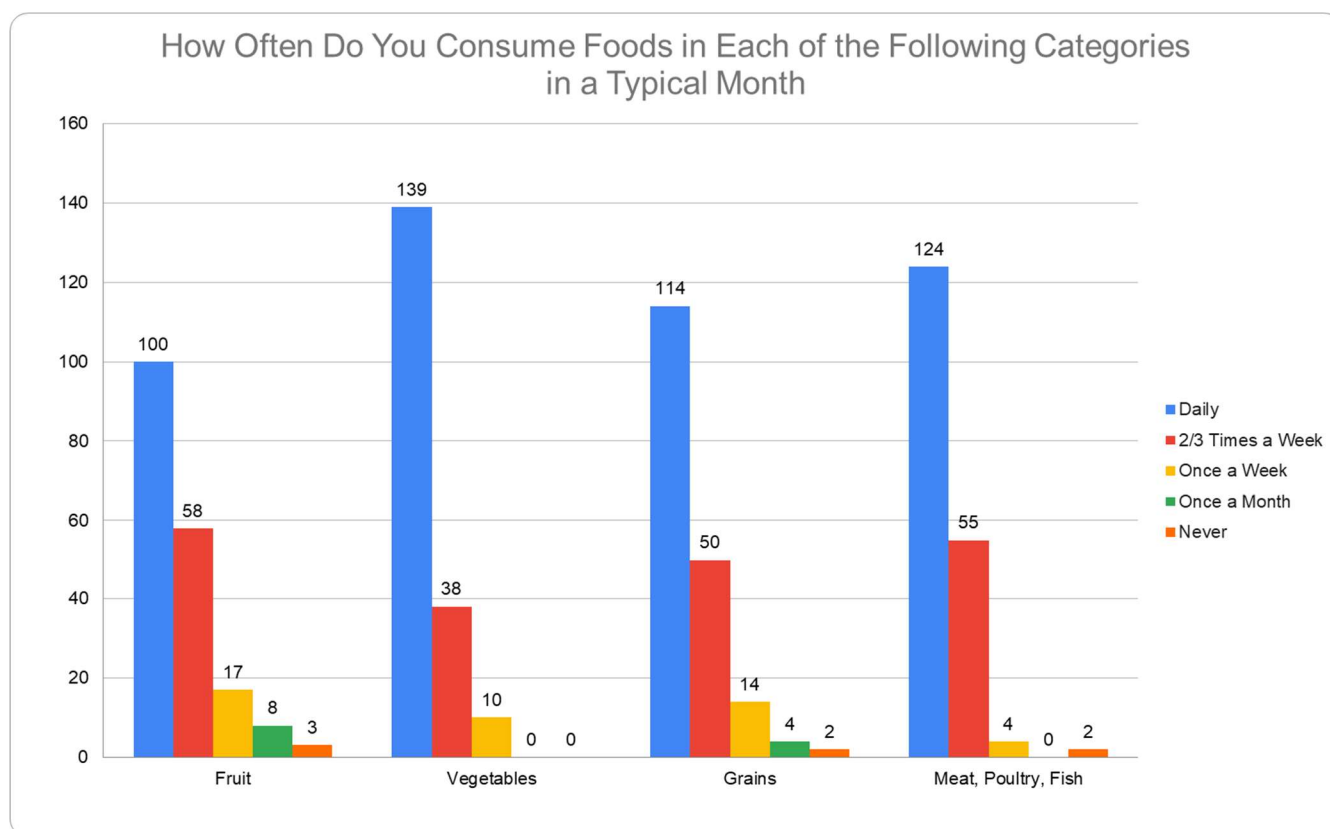
19. If you used HIP, where did you use your HIP benefits?

Where Do You Use Your HIP Benefits	# Responses
Belchertown Farmers Market	1
Monson Farmers Market	1
Farm Stand in Belchertown	1

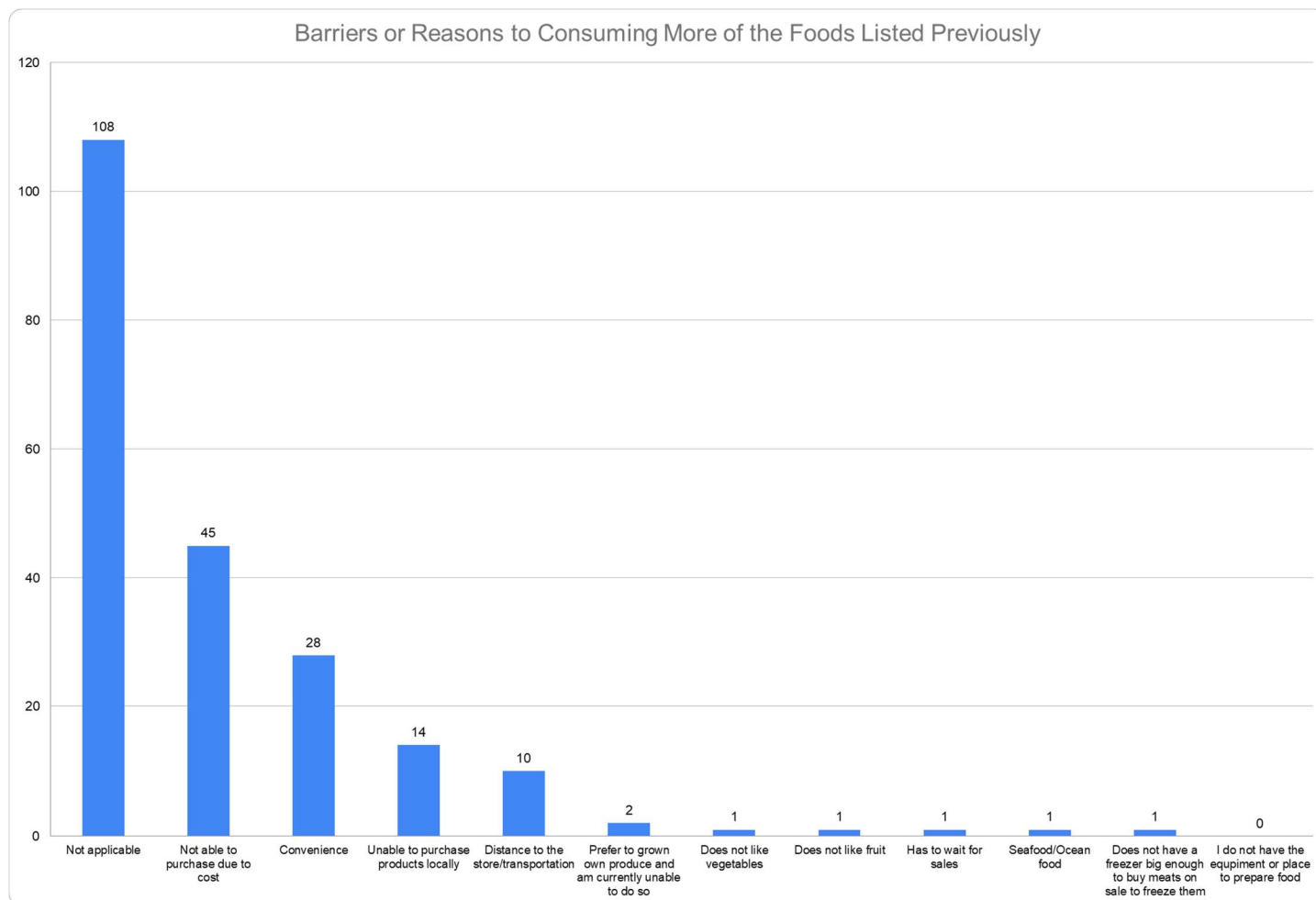
20. Are you concerned about getting enough food for your family in the next 6 months?



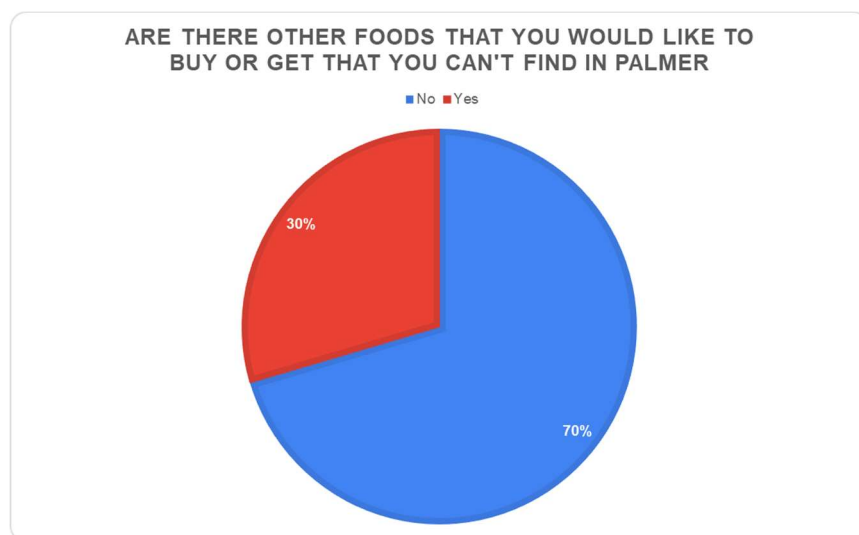
21. How often do you consume foods in each of the following categories in a typical month?



22. If you would like to consume more of the foods listed above, what is the main barrier or reason that you do not?



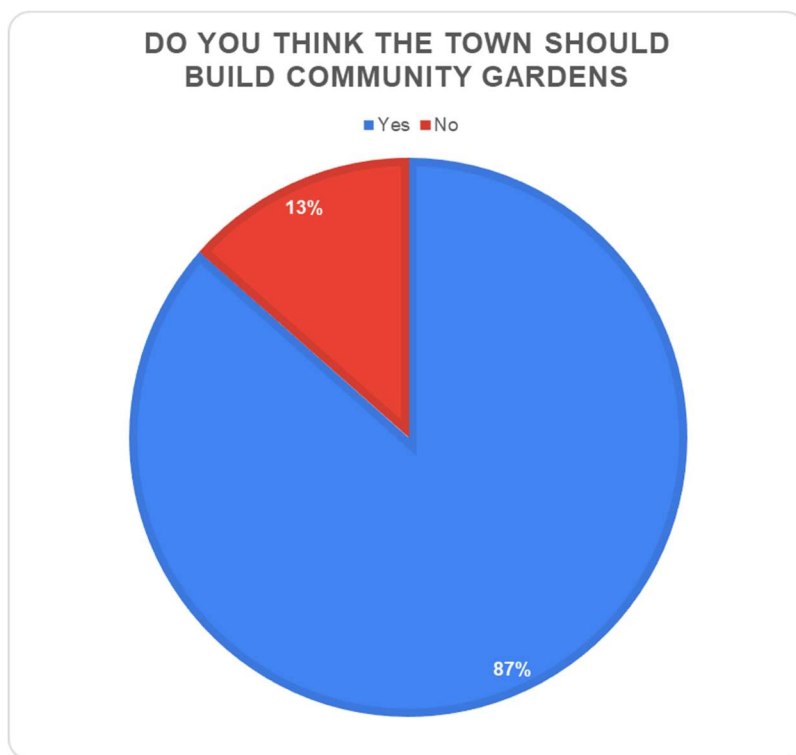
23. Are there other foods that you would like to buy or get that you can't find in Palmer?



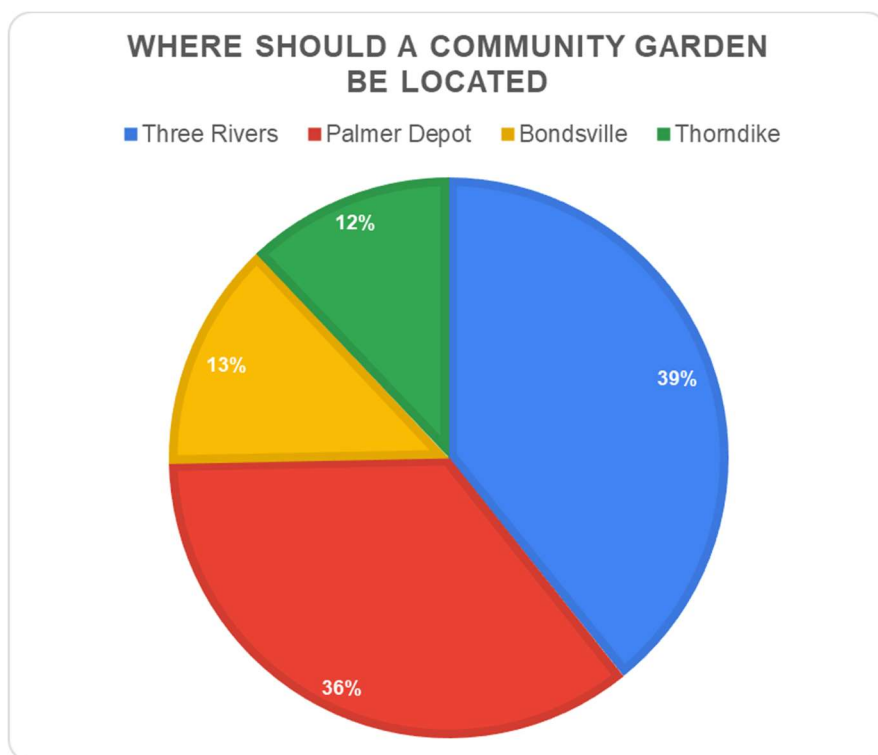
24. What kinds of food are you unable to find?

Food type	# Responses
Organic foods	6
Organic Vegetables	5
Farm stand/Famers market	5
Ethnic food	4
Thai	4
Meat and poultry from local markets	4
Indian	3
More vegetables	3
Seafood	3
Allergy sensitive foods/ gluten free	2
Keto friendly foods	2
Affordable food	2
Affordable beef	2
N/A	1
Real food smoothies/ juices	1
More fruit	1
Any produce when grocery store runs out	1
Grains (rice, pasta, potatoes, etc.)	1
Healthy alternatives (vegetable pasta, cauliflower rice, etc.)	1
Ground churk	1
Ginger root	1
Hispanic food	1
Vegan substitutes	1
647 Bread	1
Goya	1
Sugar free or low sugar	1

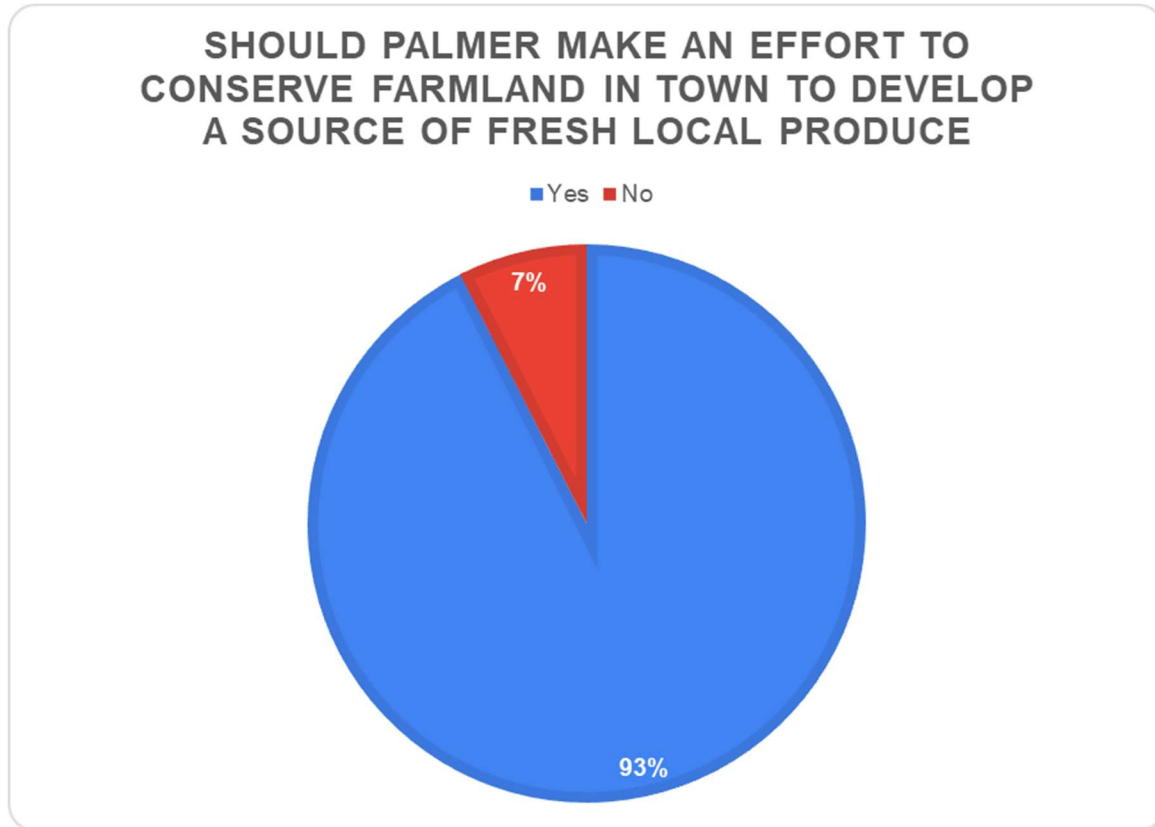
25. Do you think the Town should build community gardens?



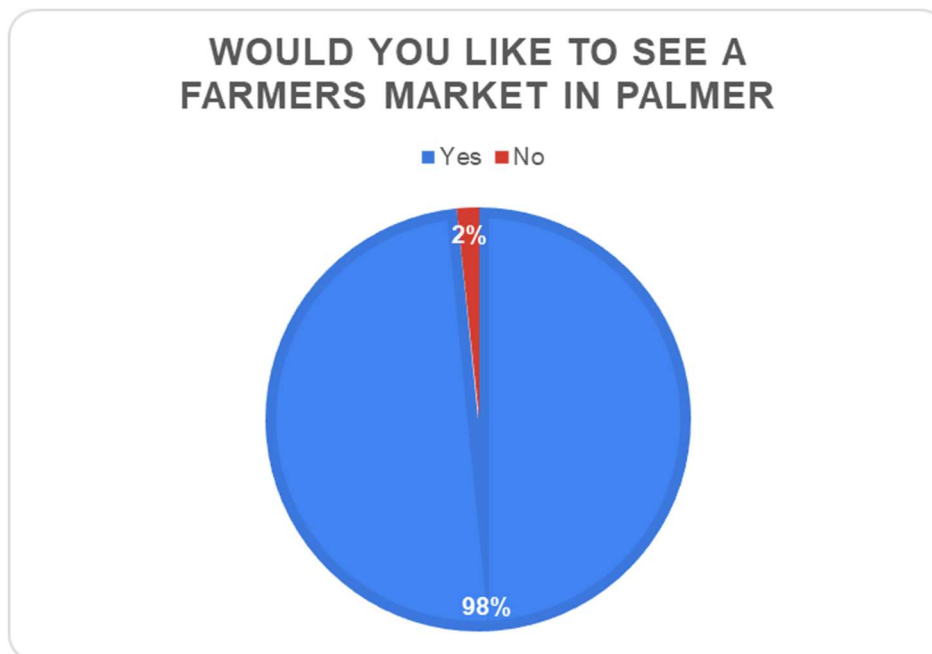
26. If yes, where should a Community Garden be located?



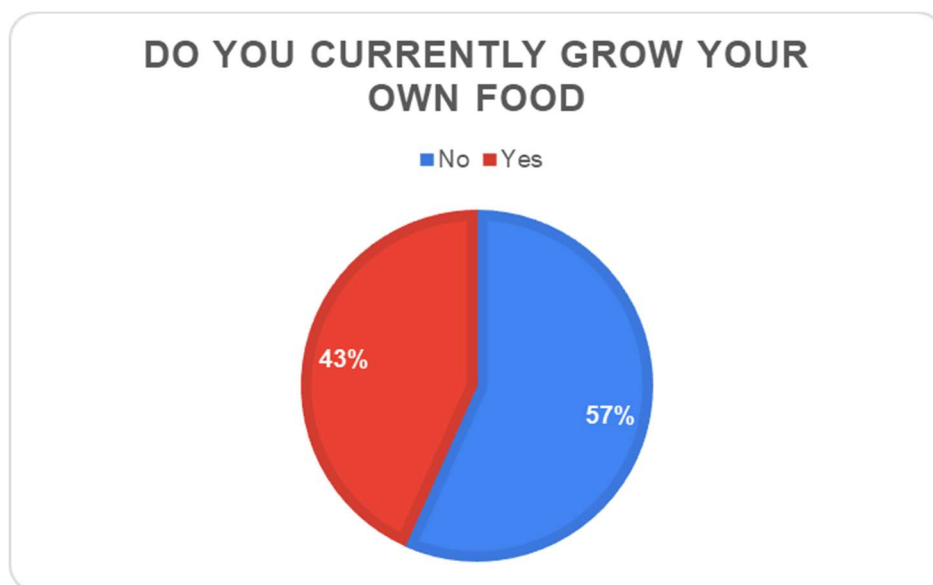
27. Should Palmer make an effort to conserve farmland in town in order to develop a source of fresh local produce?



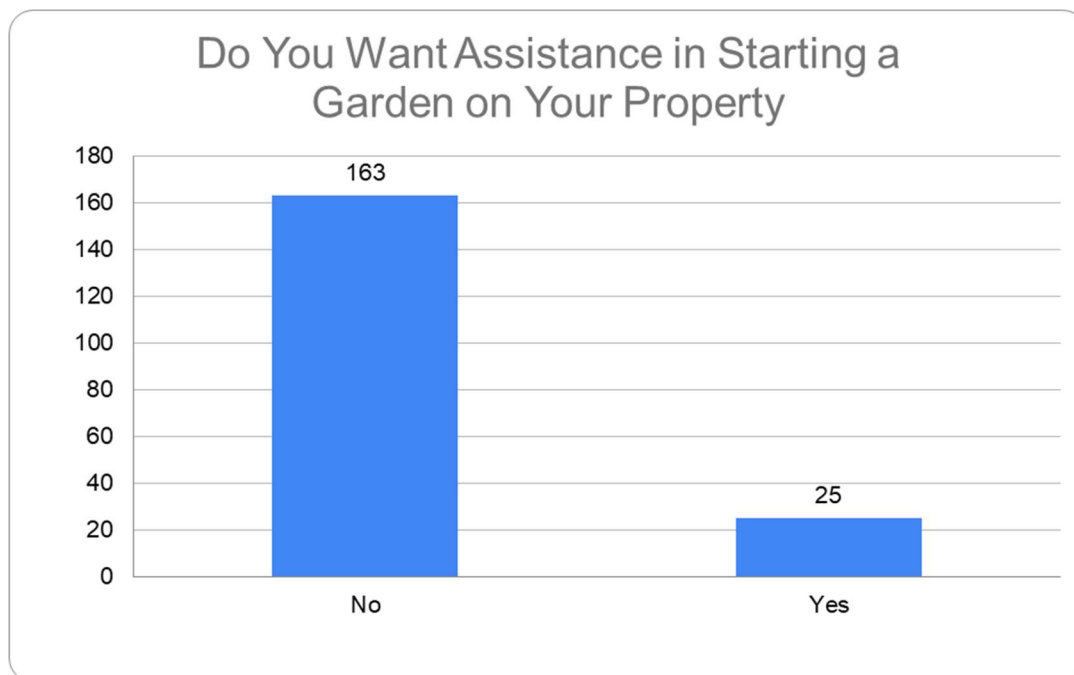
28. Would you like to see a Farmers Market in Palmer?



29. Do you currently grow your own food?



30. Do you want assistance in starting a garden on your property?



31. Do you have any other comments or challenges related to getting enough food?

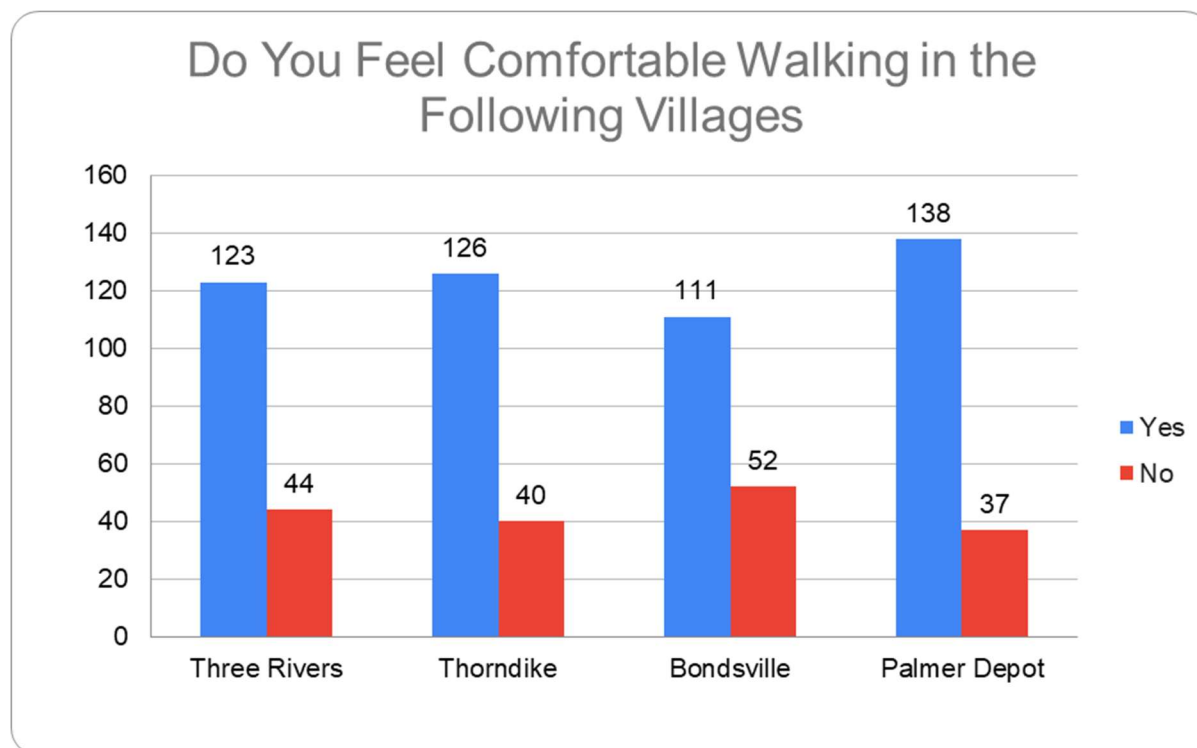
Would like an Aldi or Trader Joes
Farmers market close to home
Need more options in town
Can't do a garden where I rent
Efforts should be focused on bringing more grocery store options to town, hate driving to other towns
Farm stands
Wants a community garden
Priorities on what is most important
Need a larger refrigerator
Put Trader Joe's into old Kmart Plaza
Community garden at Burleigh Park
Dollar or Price Rite to save money
Low cost sugar free items
Big Y should keep shelves stocked, not just early morning
Gardens should be in Three River, Thorndike, Bondsville, and Palmer Depot
Can only garden on property in the summer
How can a community garden work with COVID?
Hard to find cuts of beef, food shortages, and price gouging

Active Transportation

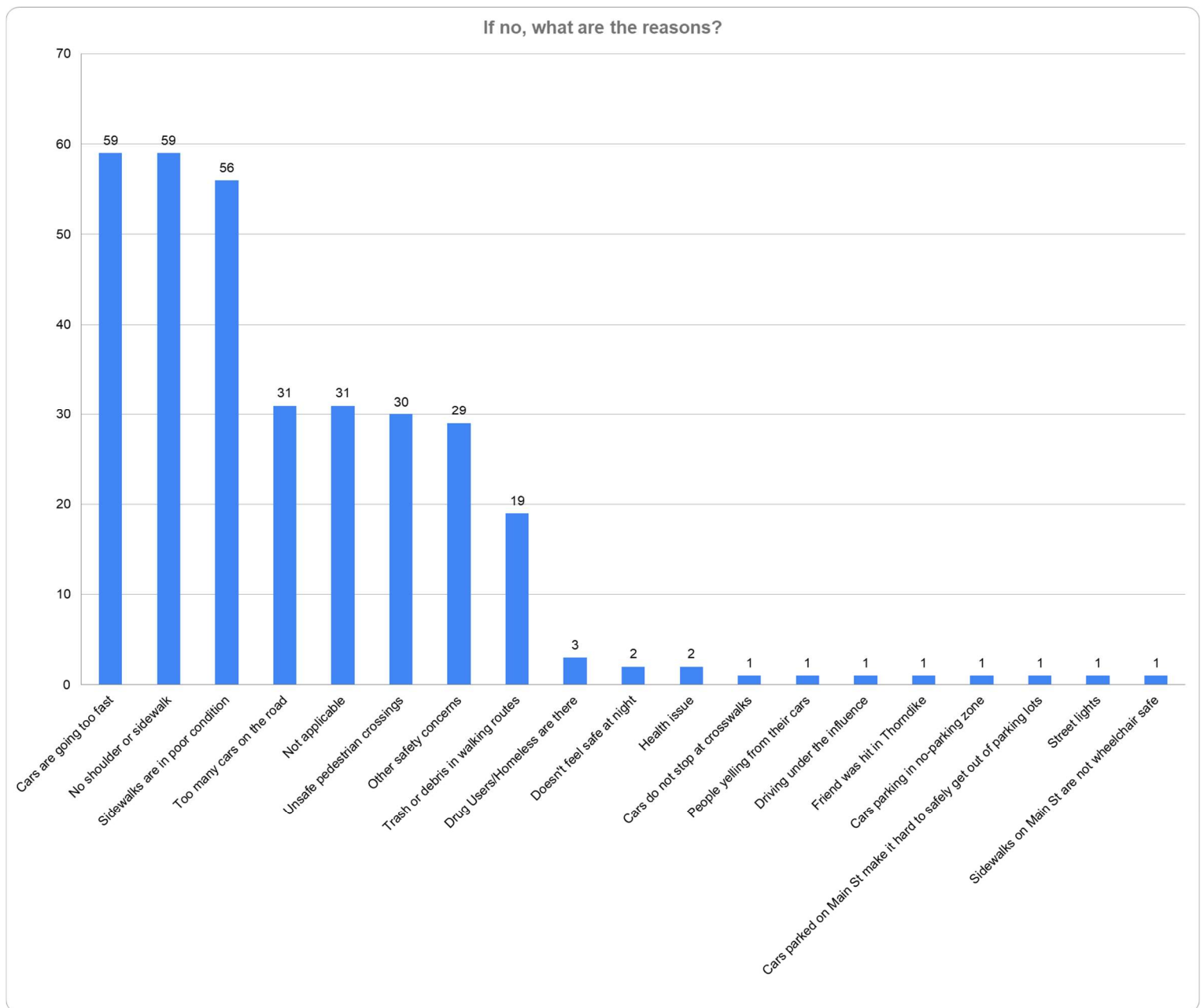
32. Do you feel comfortable walking in the neighborhood where you live?



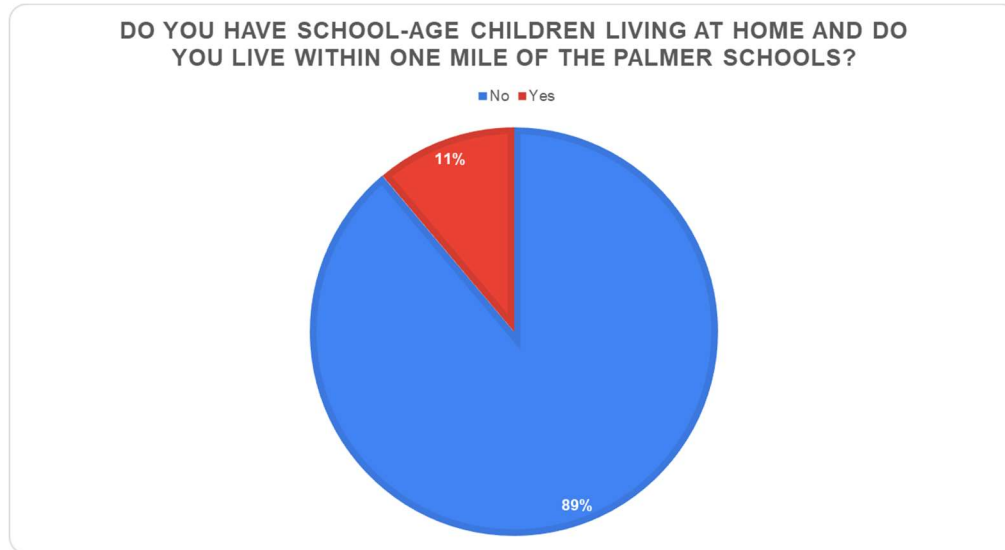
33. Do you feel comfortable walking in the following villages?



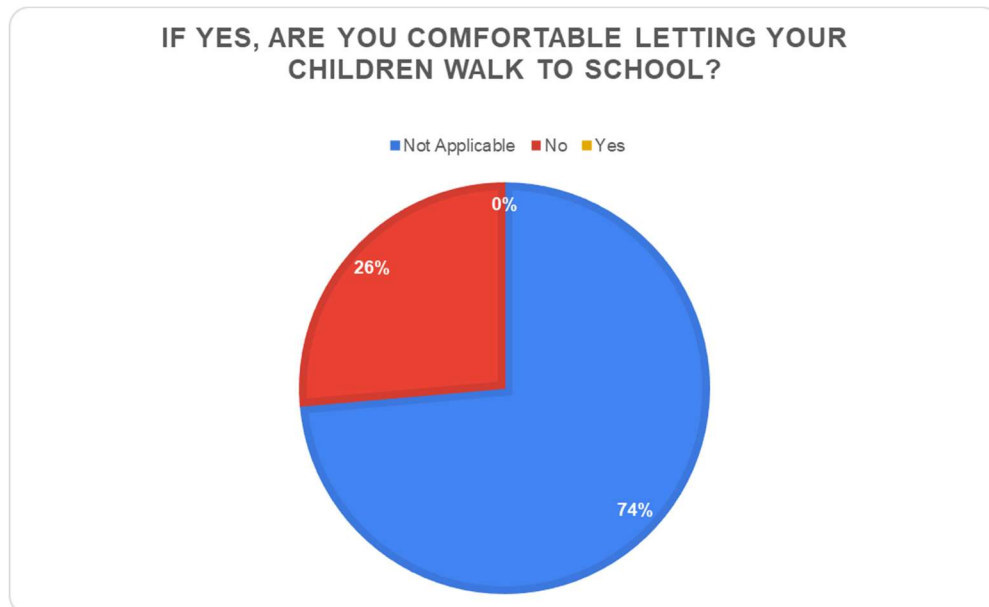
34. If no, what are the reasons? (please check all that apply)



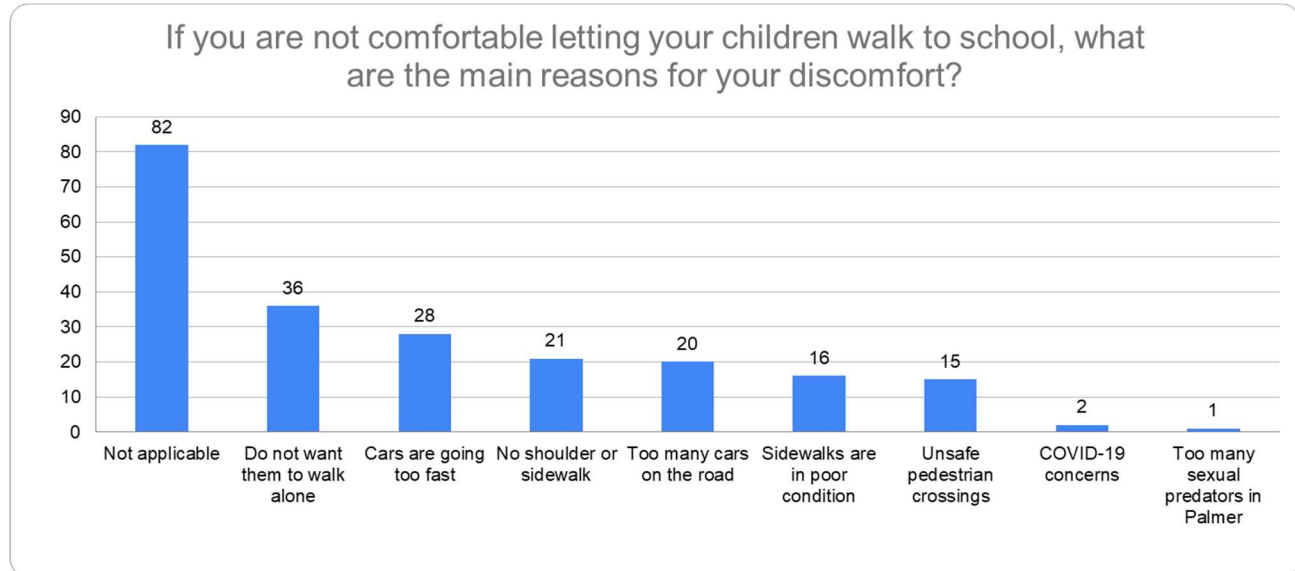
35. Do you have school-age children living at home and do you live within one mile of the Palmer Schools?



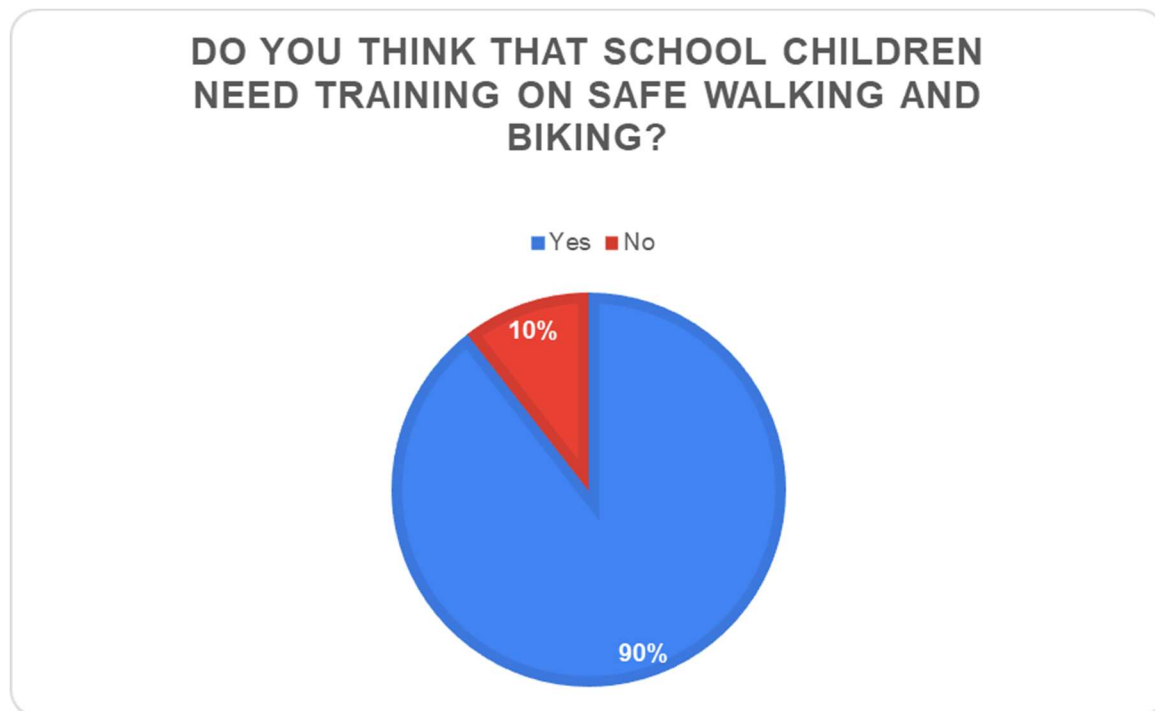
36. If yes, are you comfortable letting your children walk to school?



37. If you are not comfortable letting your children walk to school, what are the main reasons for your discomfort?

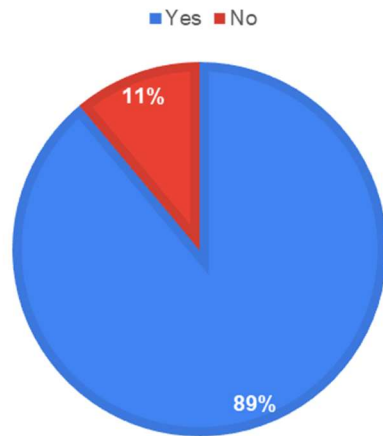


38. Do you think that school children need training on safe walking and biking?

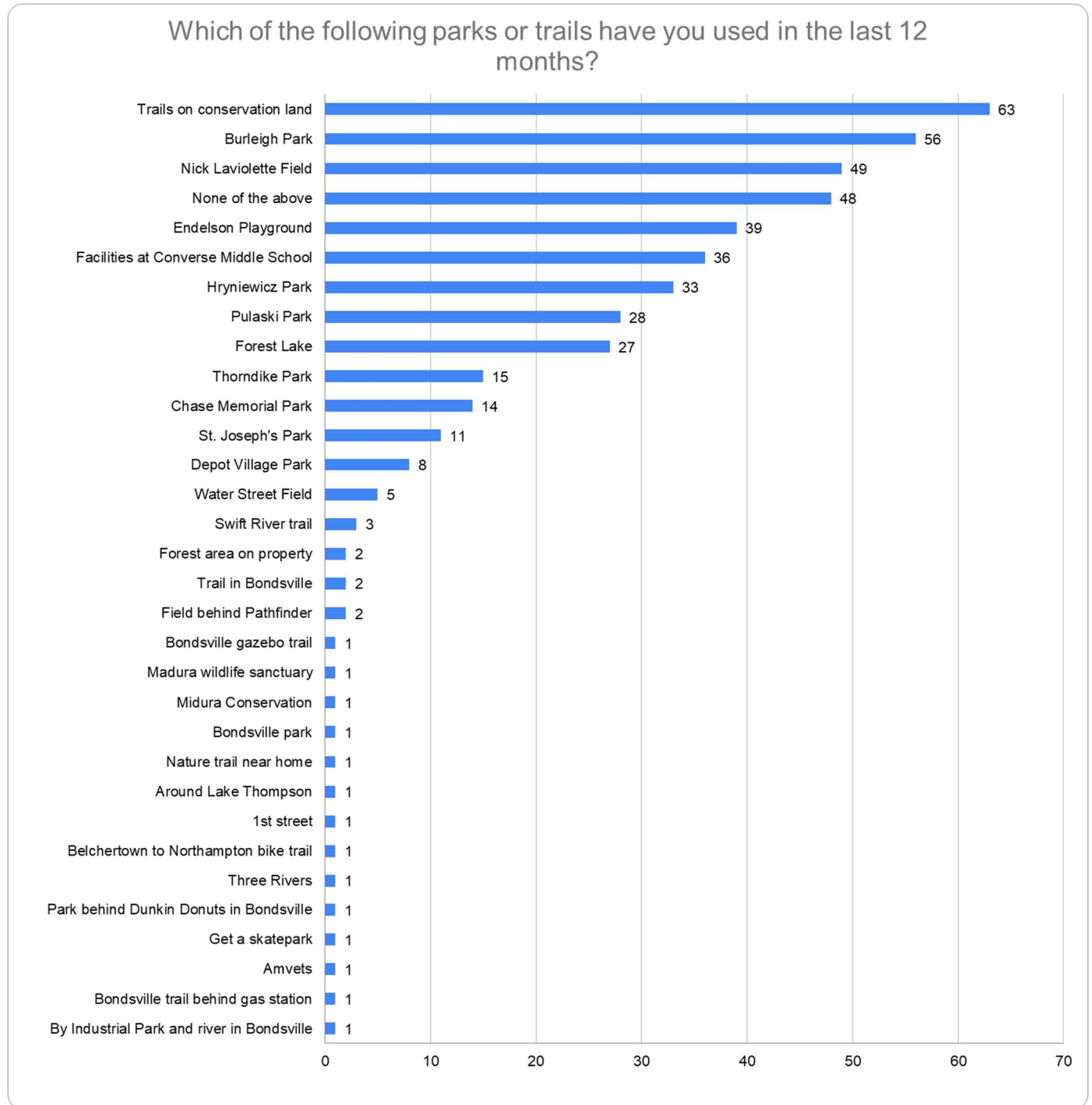


39. Do you think drivers need education about bikes and pedestrians on the road?

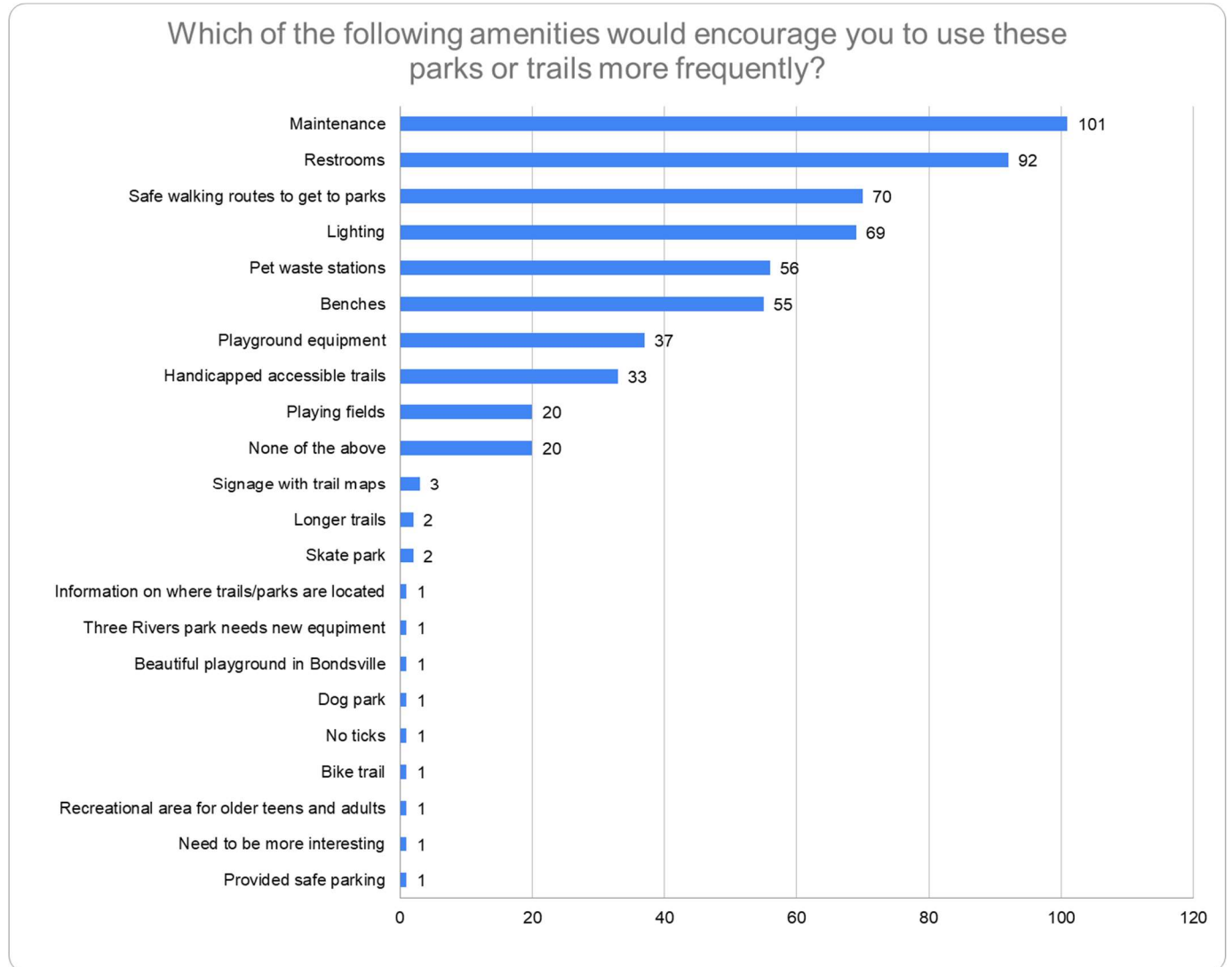
**DO YOU THINK DRIVERS NEED EDUCATION
ABOUT BIKES AND PEDESTRIANS ON THE
ROAD?**



40. Which of the following parks or trails have you used in the last 12 months?



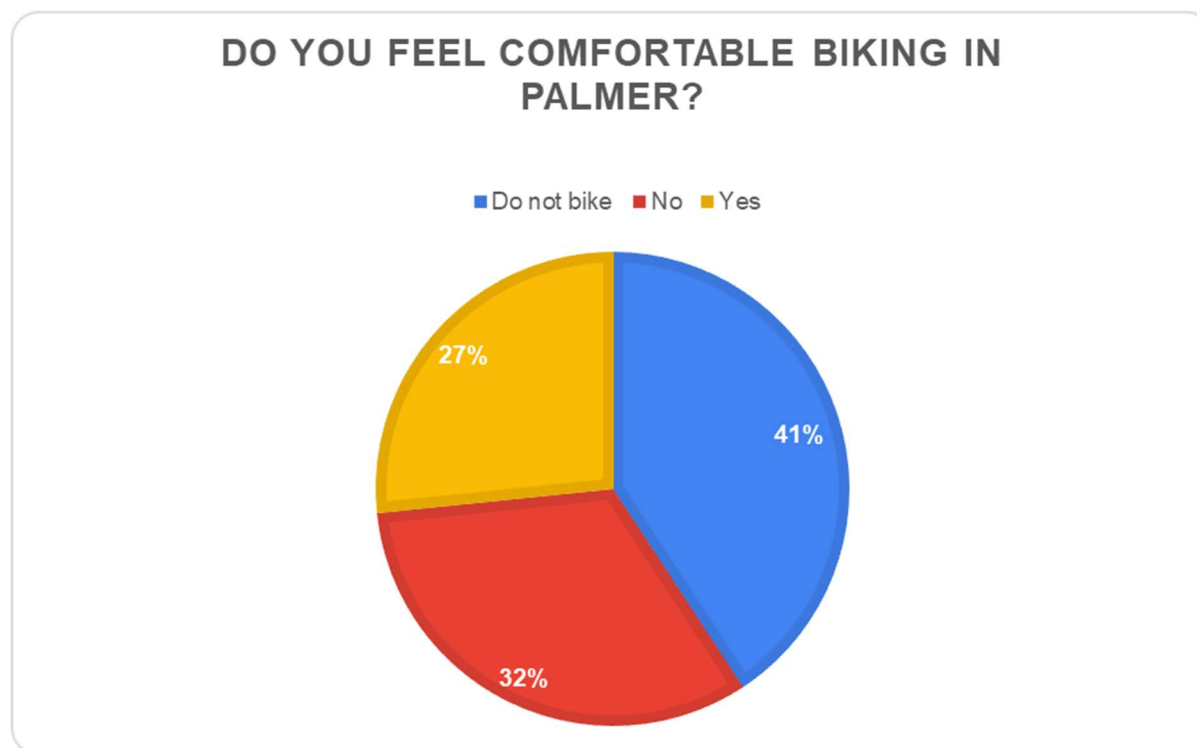
**41. Which of the following amenities would encourage you to use these parks or trails more frequently?
(check all that apply)**



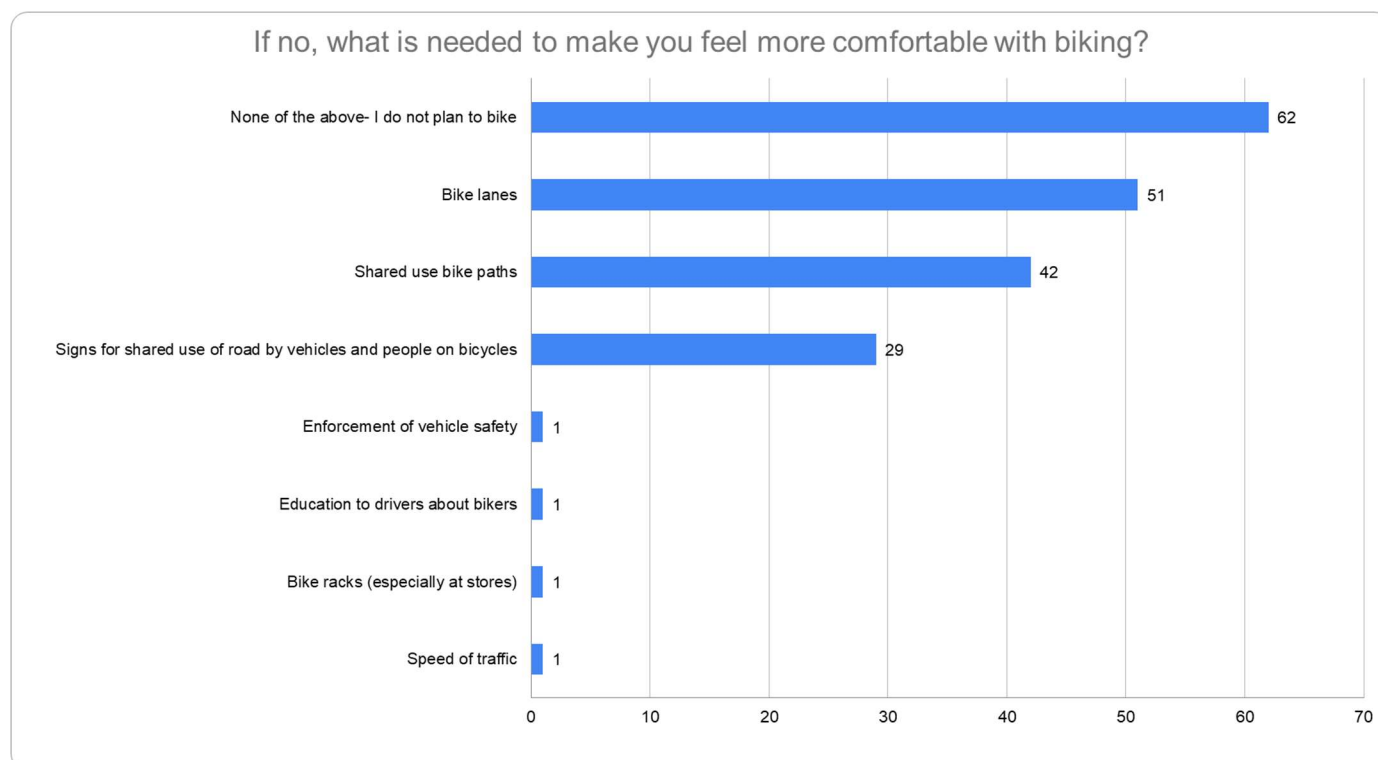
42. Do you have a park or trail within walking distance of your house?



43. Do you feel comfortable biking in Palmer?

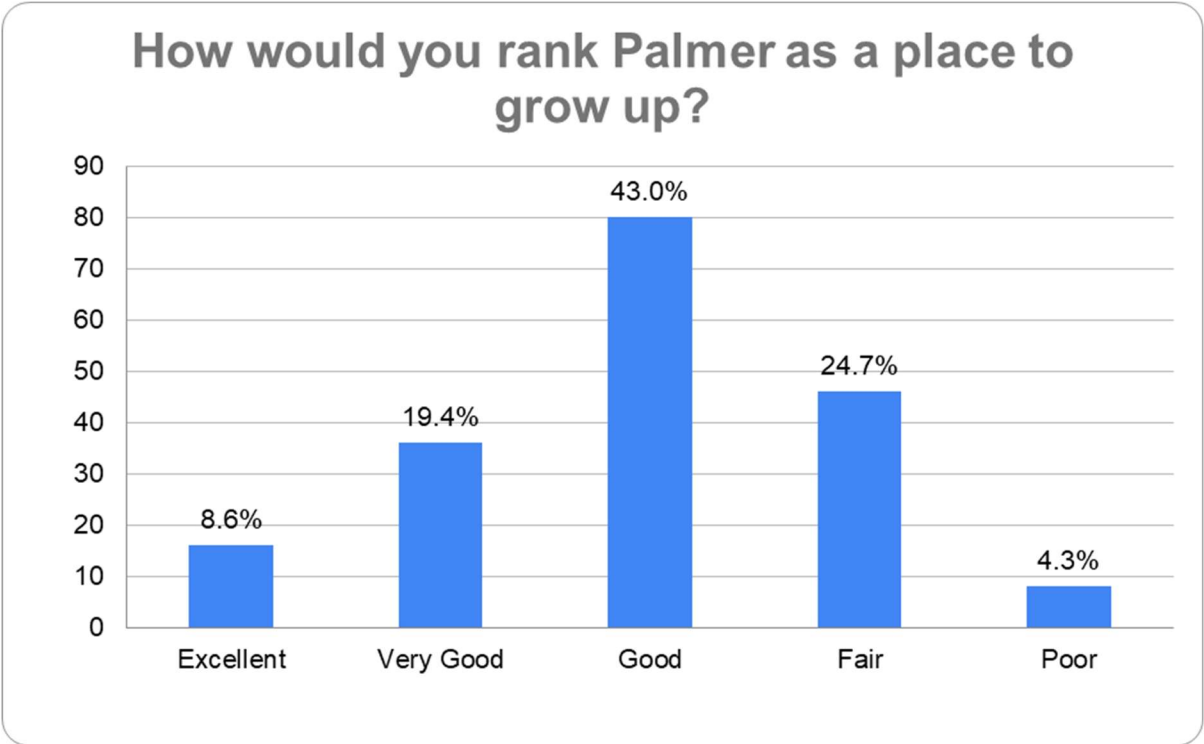


44. If no, what is needed to make you feel more comfortable with biking?

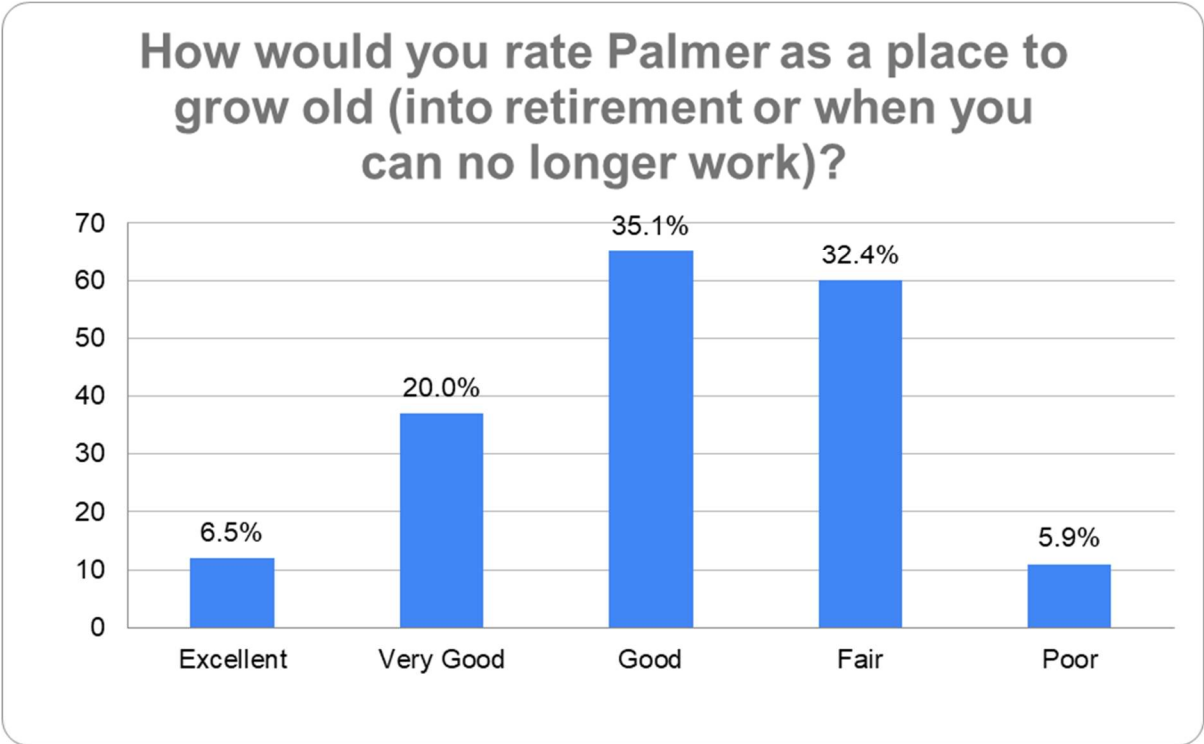


Livable (Age Friendly) Communities

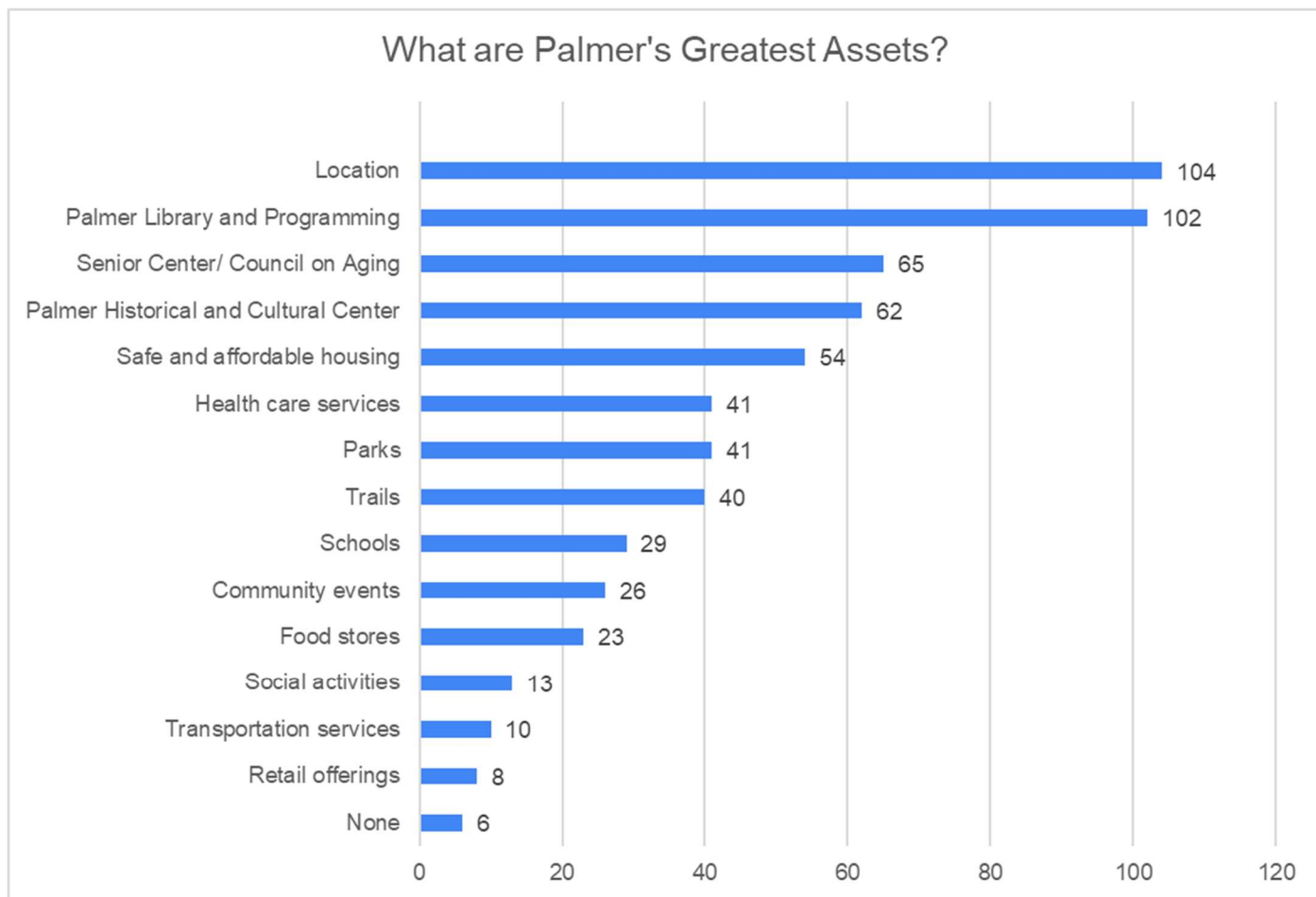
45. How would you rank Palmer as a place to grow up?



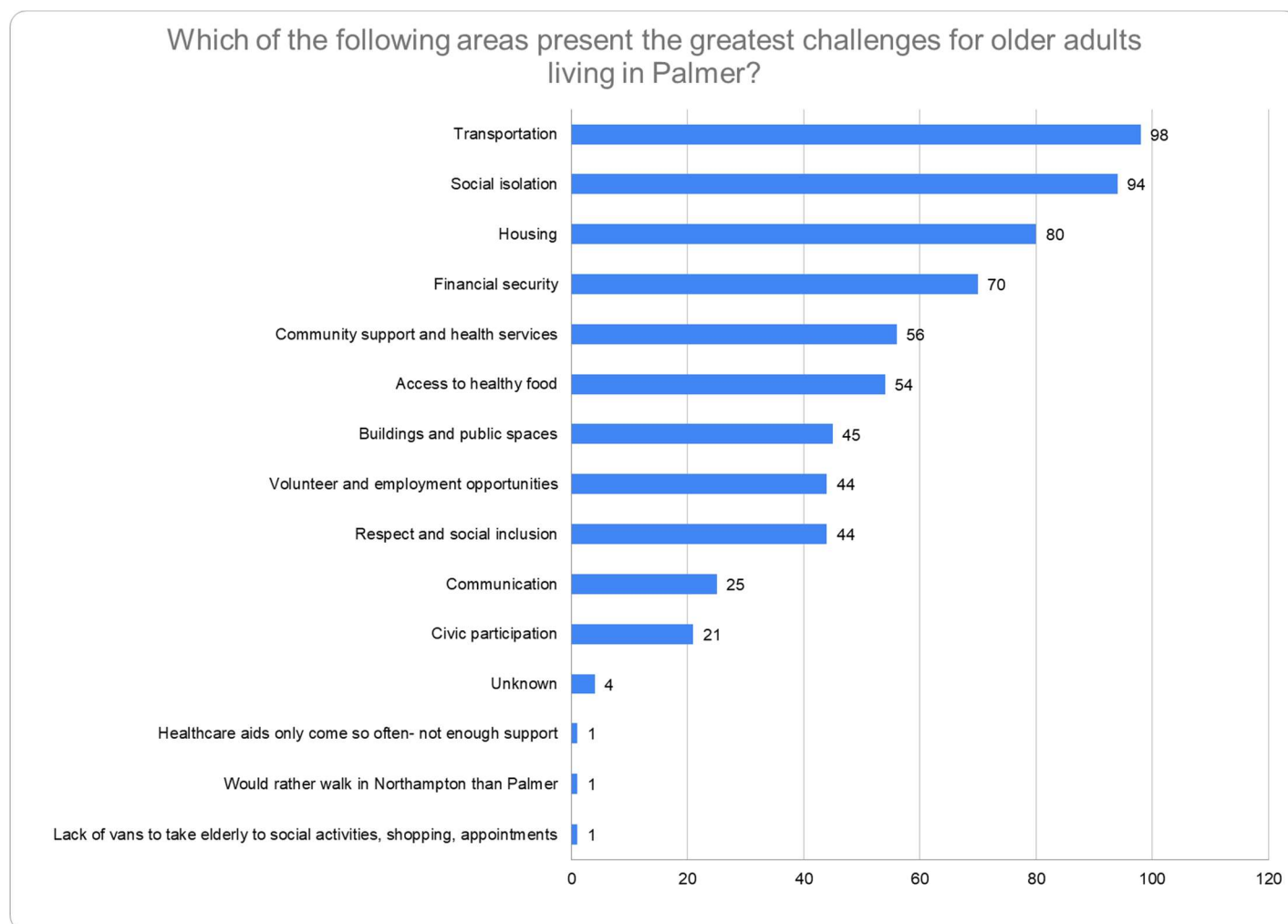
46. How would you rate Palmer as a place to grow old (into retirement or when you can no longer work)?



47. What are Palmer's greatest assets? (check all that apply)



48. Which of the following areas present the greatest challenges for older adults living in Palmer? (check all that apply)

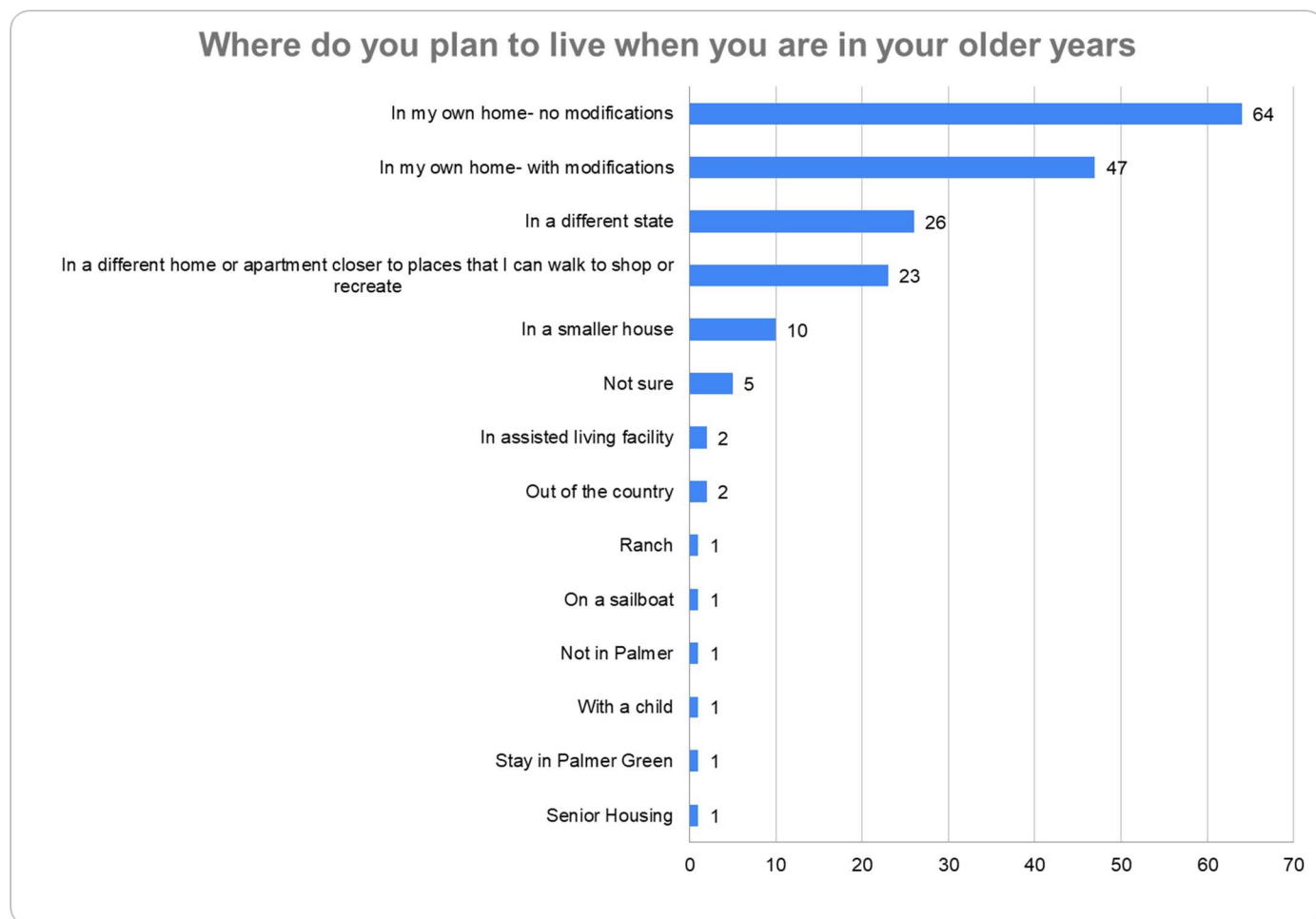


49. Please elaborate on the previous question:

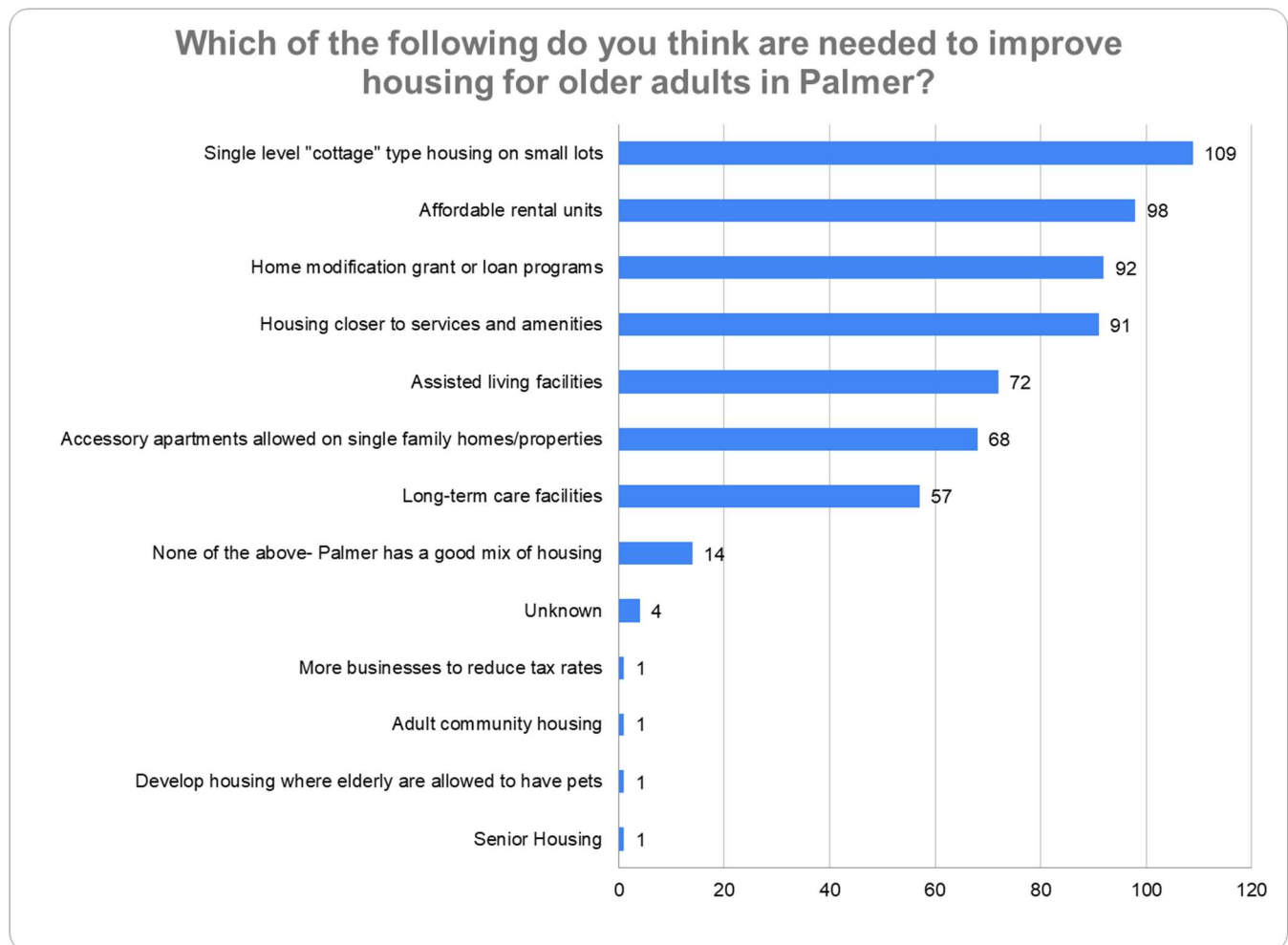
- A safe dry place to walk in the winter icy months (sidewalks that are not kept clear by residents)
- Would be nice to have upscale elderly housing.
- Need more housing options for elderly
- I think the community is lacking as a whole to support each other previous to covid. We need more events like craft fairs to help generate income for people of all ages and to help our local churches who support our elderly.
- Healthy food is very expensive and the closest grocery store is Big Y which is a very expensive store
- need more resources
- Palmer has high tax rates / affordable apts have such long waiting lists
- Palmer lacks housing in general. However, we need an over 55 community as well as senior living that offers amenities like dining areas, walking trails, art and music lessons, health classes, gym, library, theater, pool and tennis.
- Less community events even prior to Covid
- Lack of senior housing/assisted living
- My parents are retired and plan to stay in their home for as long as they can but I worry the senior center programming is in a weird building, not very inviting or robust. And it seems like there aren't many early 60s retirees who utilize it.
- Cost of housing
- Need to bring back more block parties, more inclusion. Bring back safe watch neighborhoods
- Places to go
- I especially find that the people living in my large apartment building feel socially isolated. I am looking for a way to get people out in the community together.
- It is expensive and not always available
- Too many elderly are isolated
- Lack of taxi service
- The roads
- Cost
- I think it would be great asset to integrate the elderly into the school system and child care systems. I know how lonely people living alone can be. They could be encouraged to volunteer/ mentor the tour of Palmer.
- Being a senior but still driving and living on my own, I haven't dealt or experienced many of these possible hardships but I do hear from people about the ones I checked off quite often.
- Property taxes go up but the town stays the same. No one should have to pay 2/3's of their check to rent or mortgage.
- Everyone kind of just keeps to themselves. My husband is great at reaching out and helping our elderly neighbors.
- the elderly need to be cared for in a way that they can just have someone to talk to and trust specially those that live alone and don't have family they need a place to go daily 7 days a week even in crisis like this Covid 19, specially now.
- If you have a drink at dinner there is no place to walk it off. You need to get back in your car and drive. I had several bad meals in town in well known restaurants. I guess I have been turned off to staying in town.
- I feel like there is many opportunities for older adults to get involved in community like activities once retired

- Seniors need mental stimulation for their well being and some need financial support that appears to go elsewhere first
- Discounts for seniors on their property taxes, sewer fees, water bills
- Affordable condos or updated senior housing or apartments
- If you cannot drive, transportation options are limited.
- There are not enough options in Palmer for an elderly resident who needs assisted living, they are forced to leave the town they have lived in all of their lives.
- There is a lack of public transport which makes the elderly reliant on ride-sharing to get to appointments
- Unless you are born and bred in Palmer you are not as welcomed. Too many click type committees.
- Need More Affordable Housing For Elderly
- Not to many places for adults to work here in Palmer
- We don't have many retirement community options, there are few job opportunities in town, they aren't involvement opportunities for collaboration
- The outreach and communication from the senior center could be greatly improved
- Not an over all feeling of safety
- Could use more community things
- Lack of public transportation
- People have bad attitudes
- Taxes are ridiculous
- Many buildings do not have handicap accessible option. For example the Bank ATM. Impossible for me, in my big wheelchair , to pull the door open and get into the ATM.
- Much needed senior housing. We don't have enough for all that would like it
- Over 55 housing needed
- Need more public transit
- Very limited public transportation. Housing- has long waiting list, would like to see once or twice a month to discount stores- Aldi's, Arnold's, dollar tree; Rents are high, need more industries to keep younger people here
- With no shopping options they have to travel to west springfield and all around...not good for them. Wish there was more in town to keep them engaged, social, and satisfied.

50. Where do you plan to live when you are in your older years?

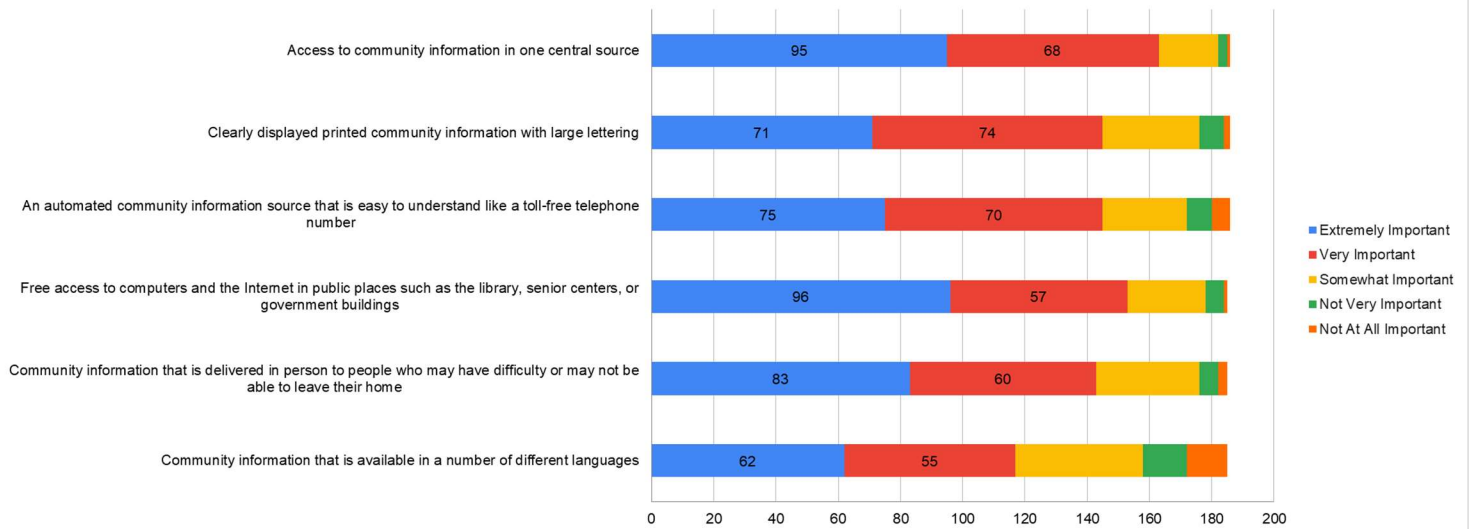


51. Which of the following do you think are needed to improve housing for older adults in Palmer?



52. How important do you think it is to have the following in your community?

How important do you think it is to have the following in your community



Appendix B – Palmer Walking Maps

Bondsville

Hours:
Monday – Friday, 8am to 4pm
413 283-2670



WALKING MAP

PALMER

Locator Guide Map



Tips For Your Walk

- Warm-up and **S-T-R-E-T-C-H!**
Before starting any exercise, move around a little to warmup your muscles (walk in place, arm circles, etc).
- Remember the following items so you are prepared for any change of plans or weather:

1. Water (especially in summer)
2. Food or snack
3. Sunscreen or hat
4. An extra layer (jacket, etc) and comfortable, supportive shoes
5. Walking map
6. Cell phone or other mode of communication

- Cool down – Let your body transition to regular activities after exercising. Slow your pace towards the end of the walk. Stretch your leg and arm muscles.

- Emergency Numbers, 911 or 413 283-2241

Other Walking/Activity Resources

Palmer MA

www.townofpalmer.com

Walk Boston:

www.walkboston.org/resources/maps

Pioneer Valley Trails map:

pvpc.org

Thank you to Palmer Walking Map Advisory Group for assistance in developing this map!

For suggestions and comments on this map, please contact
Catherine Ratté cratte@pvpc.org

Information About Routes

	DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE
BONDSVILLE		
Route 1	Advanced	1.3 miles
DEPOT VILLAGE DOWNTOWN		
Route 4	Easy	1.32 miles
Route 5	Easy	1.65 miles
Off-road	Moderate	.5 miles
THREE RIVERS		
Route 2	Moderate	1 mile
Route 3	Moderate	1 mile

Bondsville


 Route 1
- Advanced
(1.30 miles)

 Senior Housing

 Senior Center


 Post Office

 Libraries


 Church

 Schools

 Parks

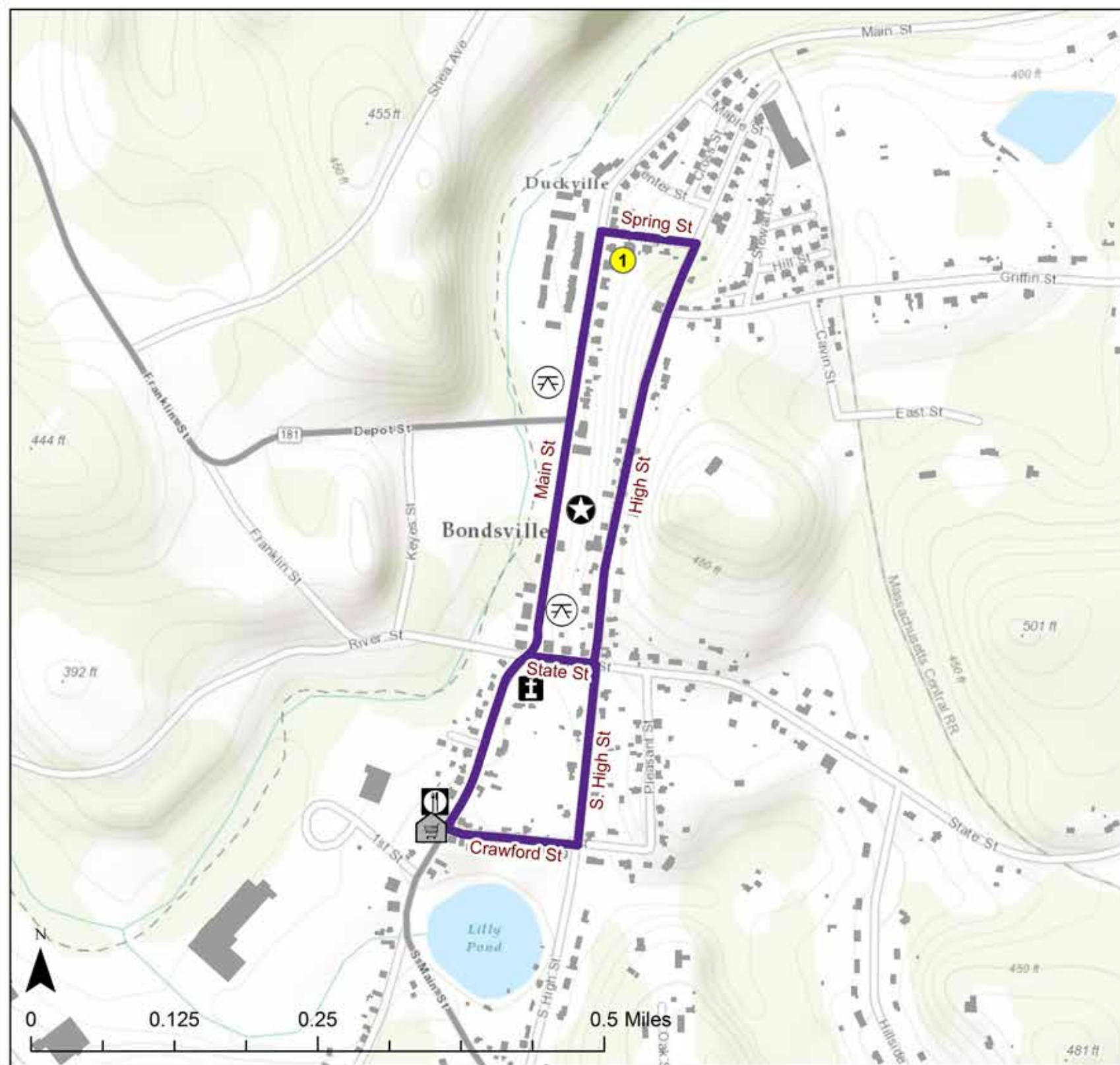
 Automatic Teller
Machine

 Prepared Food
Services

 Grocery Stores

 Convenience
Stores

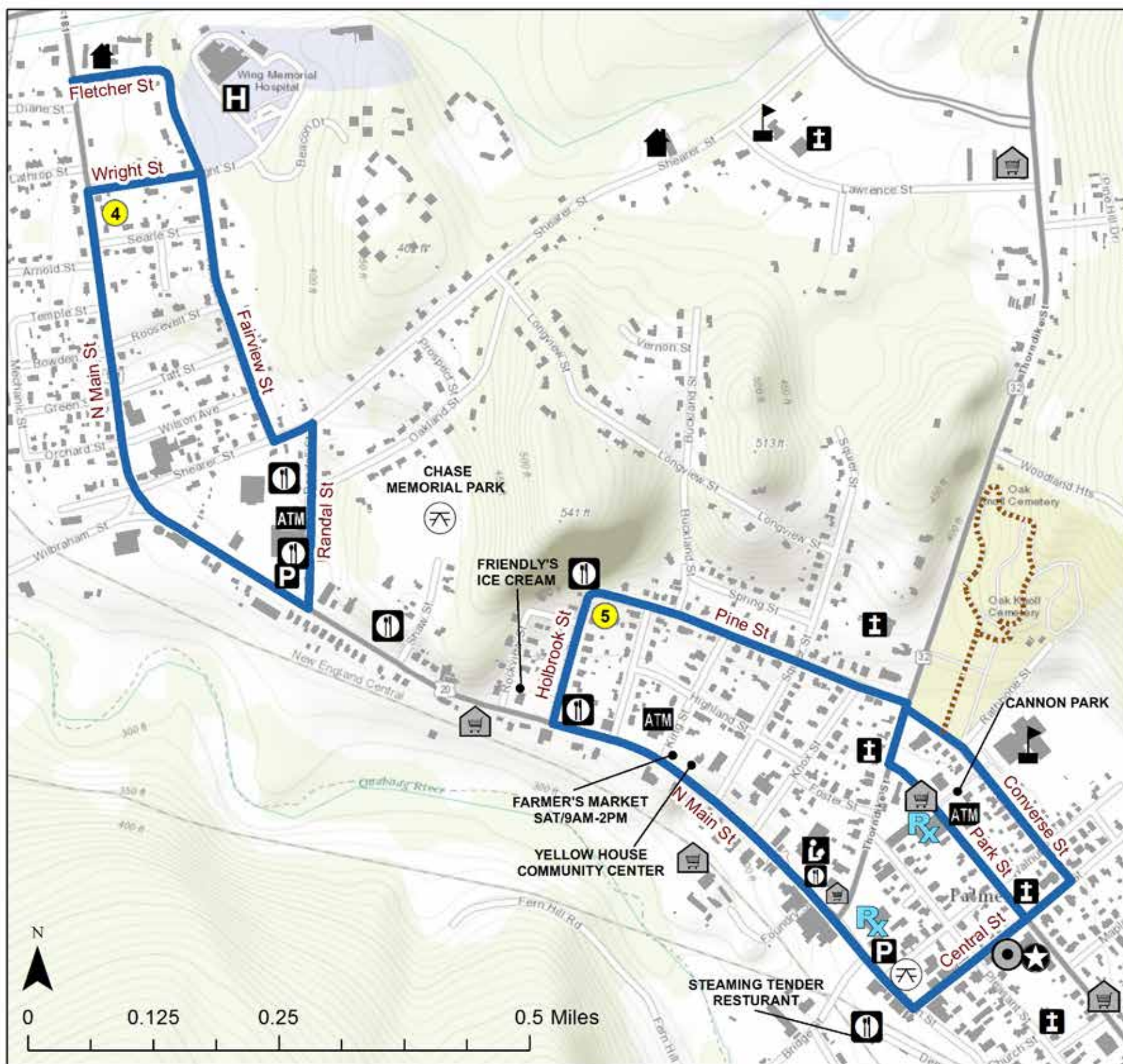
 Pharmacies



Depot Village Downtown

-  Route 4 - Easy (1.32 Miles)
-  Route 5 - Easy (1.65 miles)
-  Off-Road Trail -Moderate (0.50 miles)

-  Senior Housing
-  Senior Center
-  Post Office
-  Libraries
-  Church
-  Schools
-  Parks
-  Automatic Teller Machine
-  Prepared Food Services
-  Grocery Stores
-  Convenience Stores
-  Pharmacies
-  Hospital
-  Parking



Three Rivers

 Route 2
- Moderate
(1.0 miles)


 Route 3
- Moderate
(1.0 miles)


 Senior Housing


 Senior Center


 Post Office


 Libraries


 Church

 Schools


 Parks

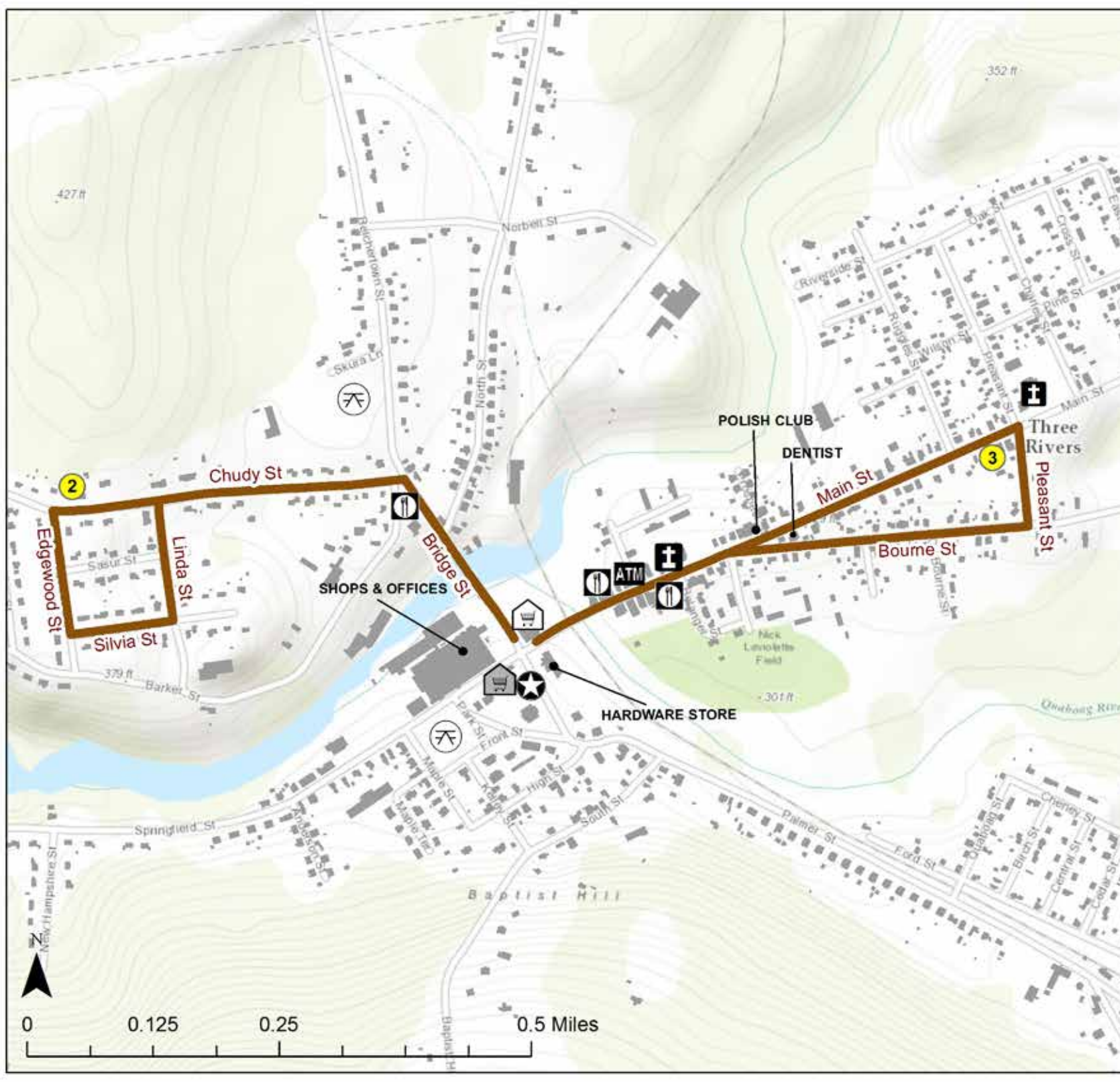
 Automatic Teller Machine

 Prepared Food Services

 Grocery Stores

 Convenience Stores

 Pharmacies



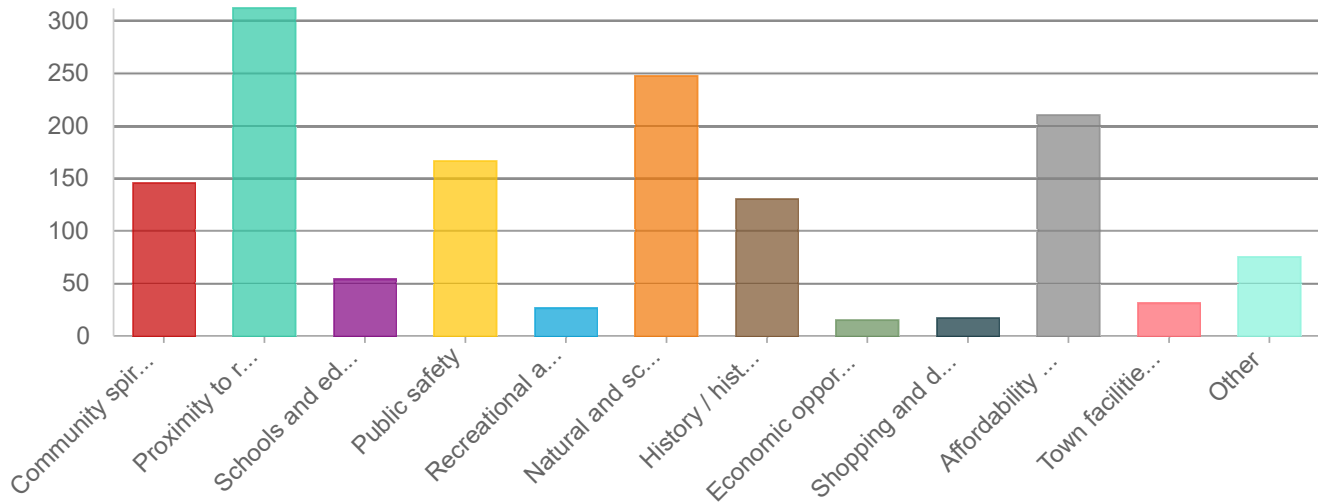
Appendix B: Community Survey Results

- ▶ Community Survey #1
- ▶ Community Survey #2

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Palmer Master Plan - Community Survey 1

1. What do you think makes Palmer a great place to live? Please select your top three. *



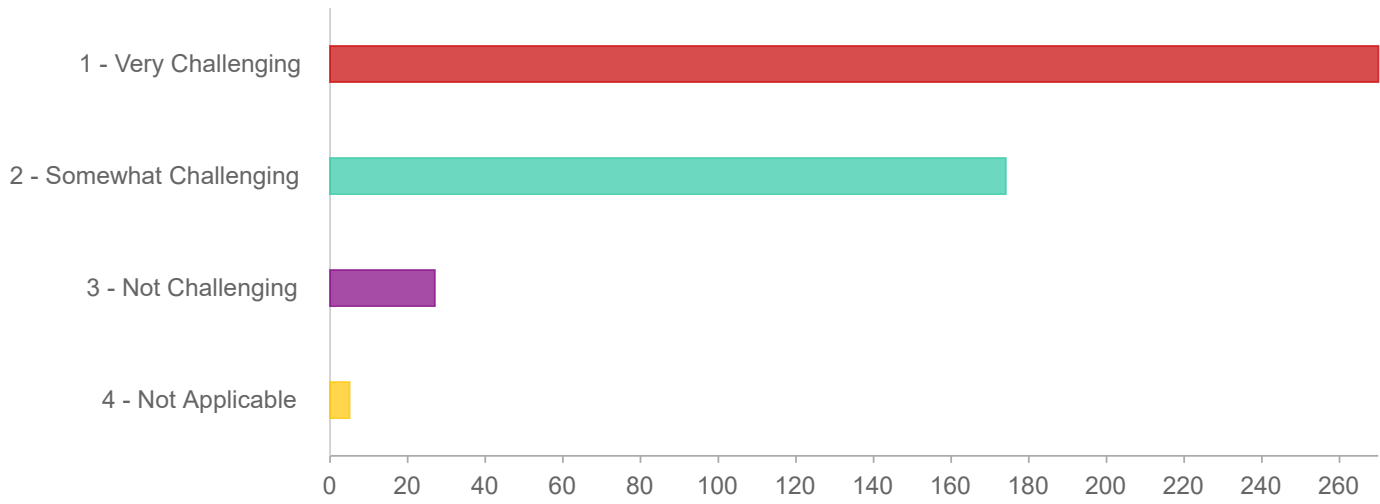
Answers

Count

Percentage

Community spirit / connection	145	30.46%
Proximity to regional assets	312	65.55%
Schools and educational system	54	11.34%
Public safety	166	34.87%
Recreational amenities	26	5.46%
Natural and scenic areas	247	51.89%
History / historical features	130	27.31%
Economic opportunities	15	3.15%
Shopping and dining	17	3.57%
Affordability (e.g., housing, food, taxes)	210	44.12%
Town facilities and services	31	6.51%
Other	75	15.76%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

2. Please rank the following potential challenges to improving quality of life in Palmer:☐ **Economic vitality / employment *****Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Very Challenging

270

56.72%

2 - Somewhat Challenging

174

36.55%

3 - Not Challenging

27

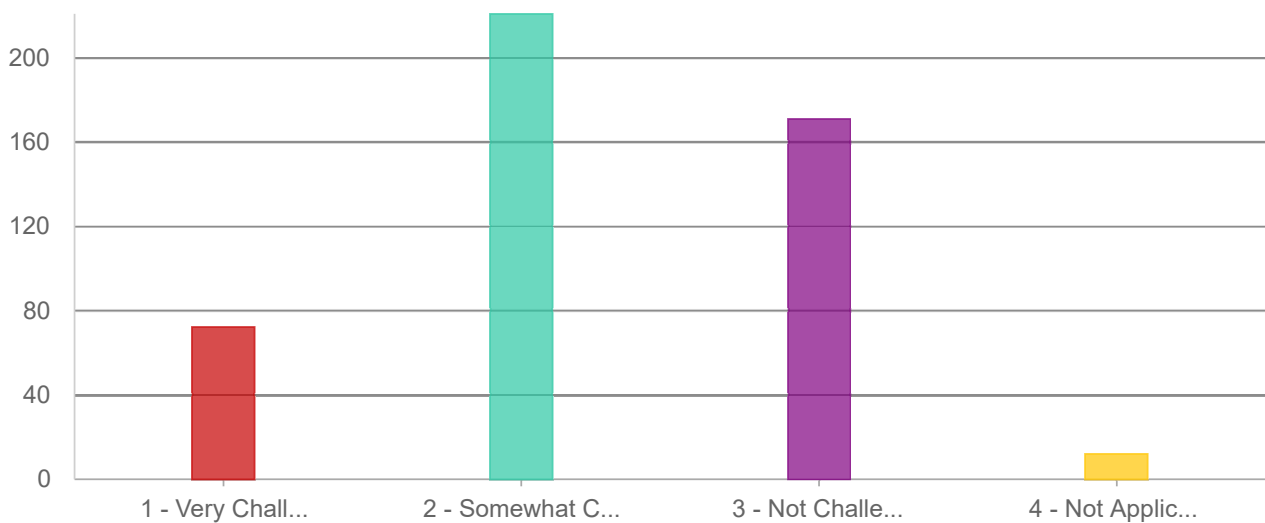
5.67%

4 - Not Applicable

5

1.05%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Housing options (i.e., diversity in age, size, and type) ***

Answers**Count****Percentage**

1 - Very Challenging

72

15.13%

2 - Somewhat Challenging

221

46.43%

3 - Not Challenging

171

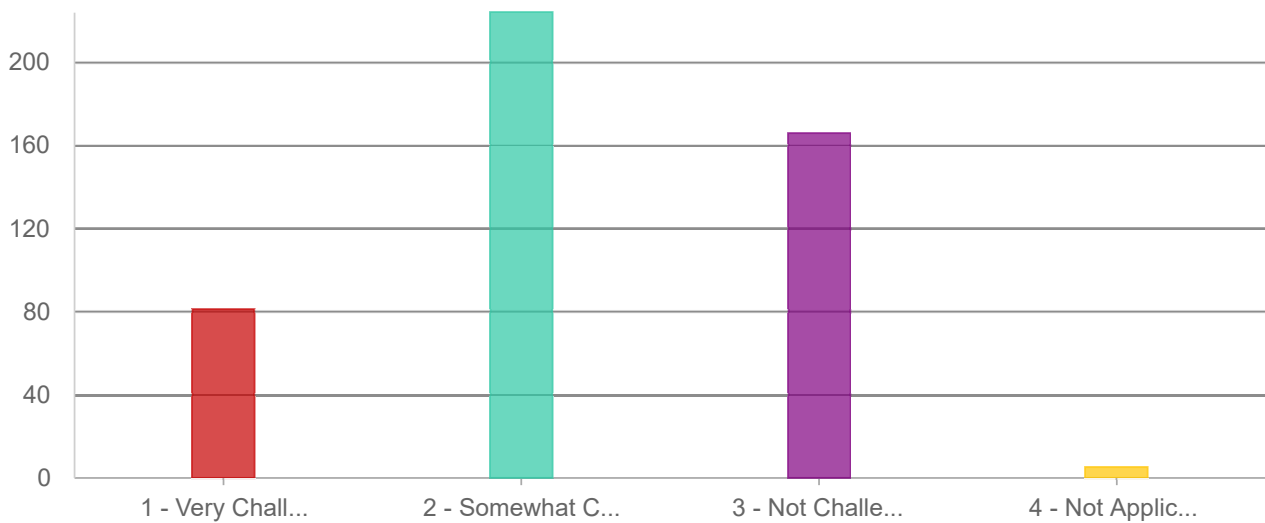
35.92%

4 - Not Applicable

12

2.52%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Affordability (e.g., housing, food, taxes) *****Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Very Challenging

81

17.02%

2 - Somewhat Challenging

224

47.06%

3 - Not Challenging

166

34.87%

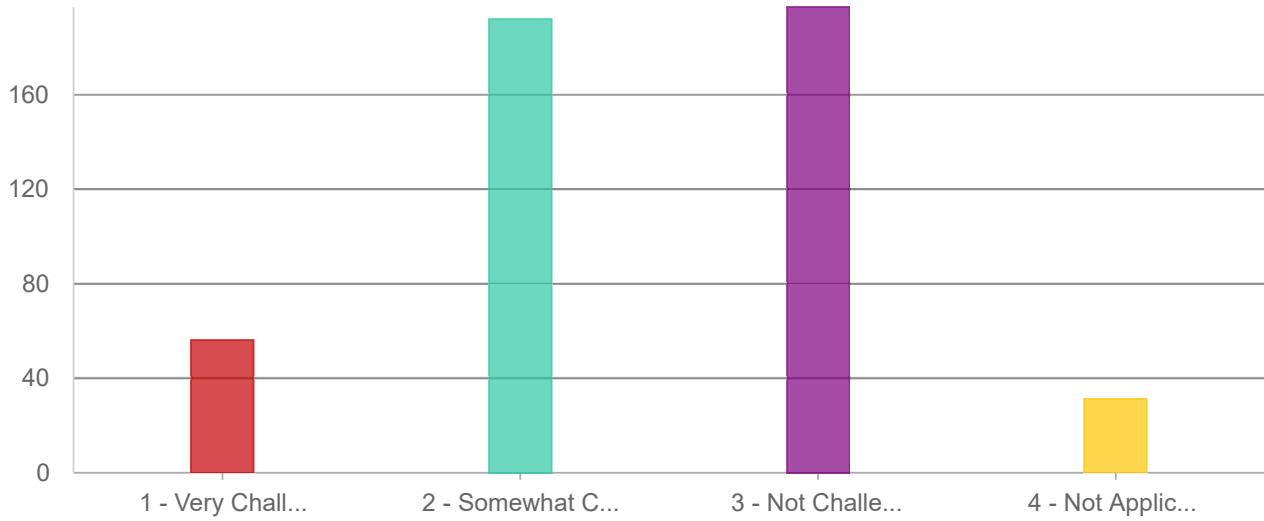
4 - Not Applicable

5

1.05%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Inequality (e.g., equal access to services and resources, income) ***

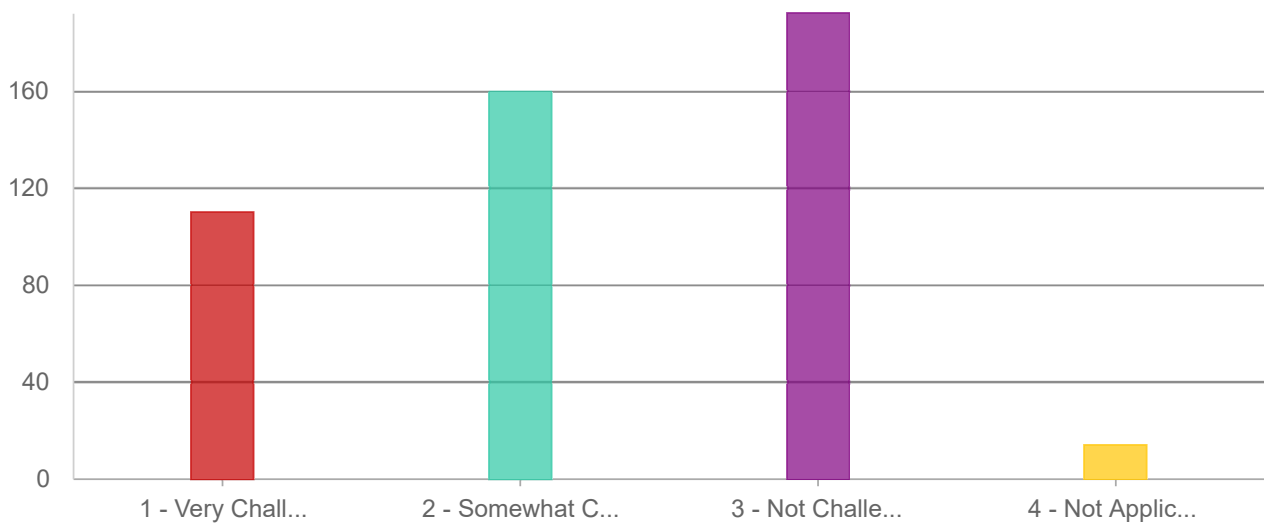


Answers	Count	Percentage
1 - Very Challenging	56	11.76%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	192	40.34%
3 - Not Challenging	197	41.39%
4 - Not Applicable	31	6.51%

1 - Very Challenging	56	11.76%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	192	40.34%
3 - Not Challenging	197	41.39%
4 - Not Applicable	31	6.51%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

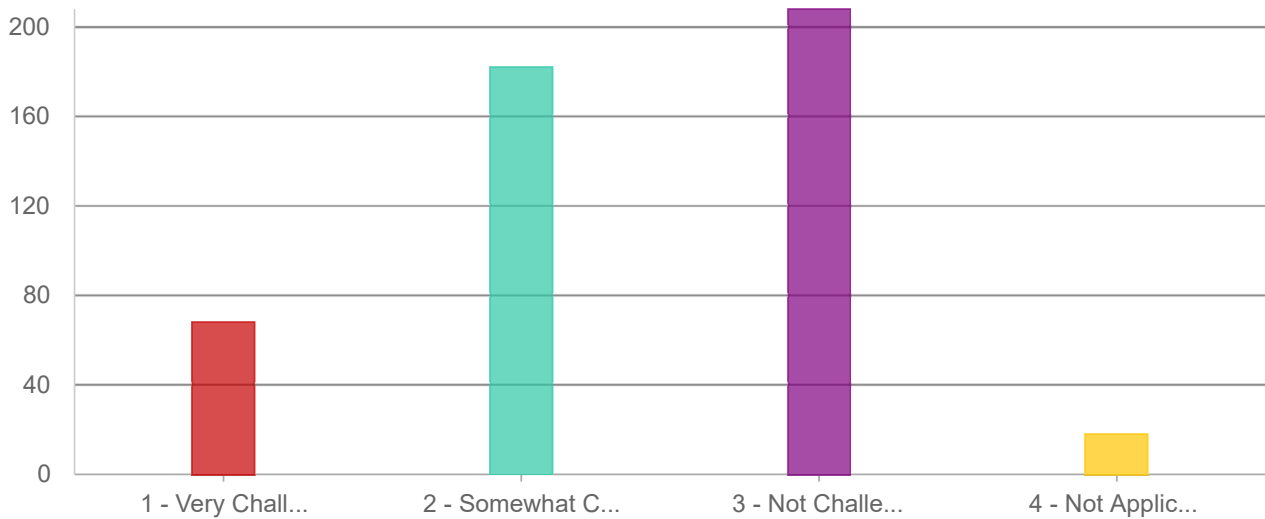
○ **Ease of mobility (i.e., efficiency and options to get around and outside of Town) ***



Percentage	ntage
11.76%	
40.34%	
41.39%	
6.51%	

1 - Very Challenging	110	23.11%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	160	33.61%
3 - Not Challenging	192	40.34%
4 - Not Applicable	14	2.94%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

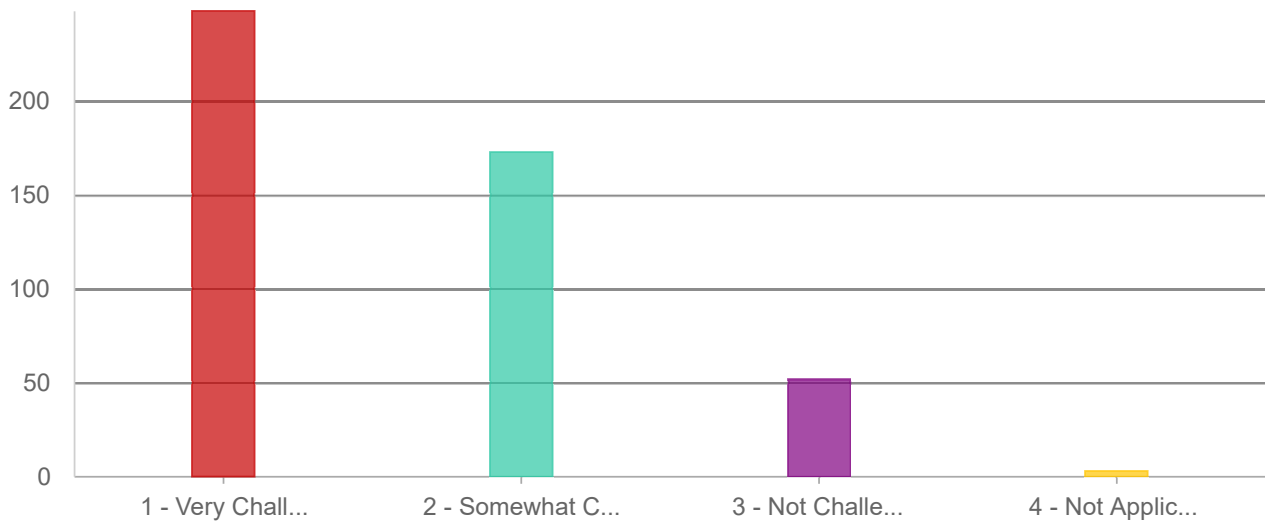
☐ **Open space preservation** *

Answers	Count	Percentage
---------	-------	------------

1 - Very Challenging	68	14.29%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	182	38.24%
3 - Not Challenging	208	43.7%
4 - Not Applicable	18	3.78%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Town Infrastructure (e.g., roads, sidewalks, sewer)** *

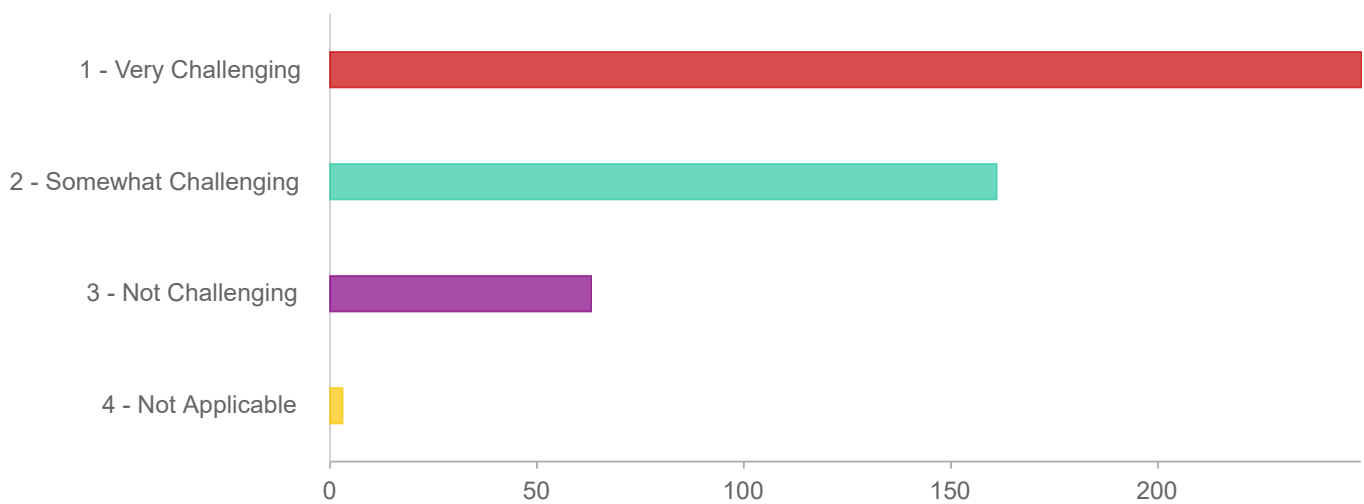


Answers	Count	Percentage
1 - Very Challenging	248	52.1%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	173	36.34%
3 - Not Challenging	52	10.92%
4 - Not Applicable	3	0.63%

1 - Very Challenging	248	52.1%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	173	36.34%
3 - Not Challenging	52	10.92%
4 - Not Applicable	3	0.63%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Visual appeal of the Town *

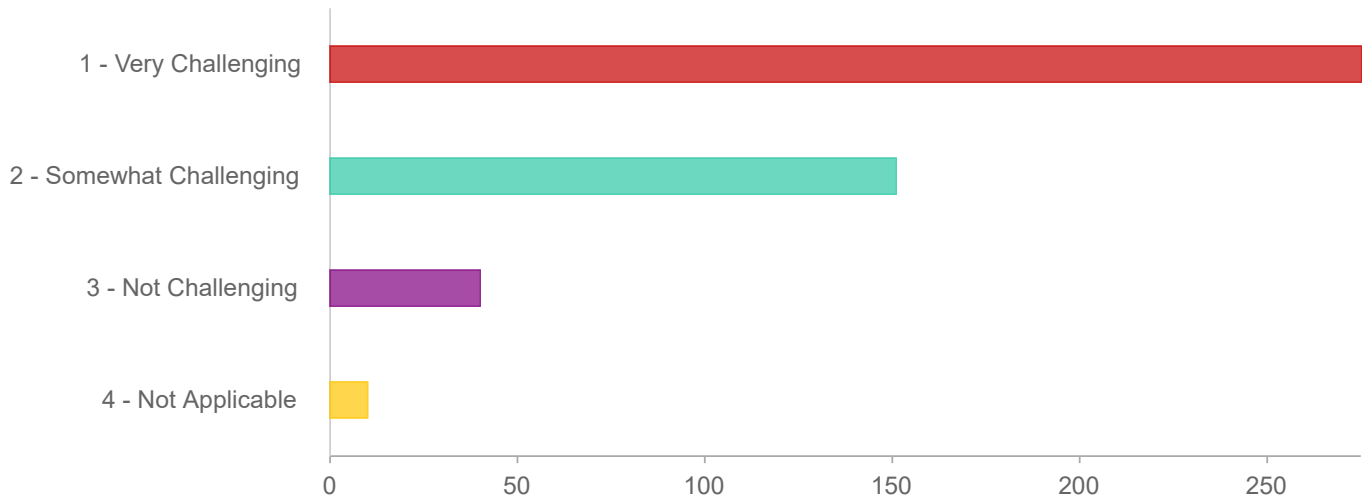


Percentage	Count	Percentage
1 - Very Challenging	249	52.31%

1 - Very Challenging	249	52.31%
----------------------	-----	--------

2 - Somewhat Challenging	161	33.82%
3 - Not Challenging	63	13.24%
4 - Not Applicable	3	0.63%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

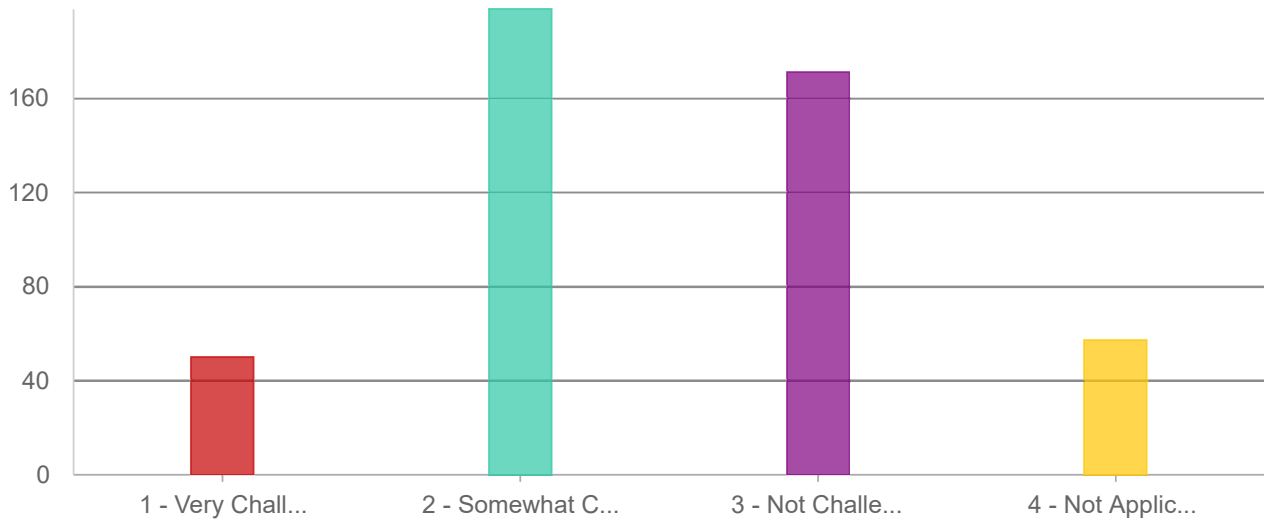
☐ **Vibrancy of commercial centers** *

Answers	Count	Percentage
---------	-------	------------

1 - Very Challenging	275	57.77%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	151	31.72%
3 - Not Challenging	40	8.4%
4 - Not Applicable	10	2.1%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Senior services and accommodations** *



Answers

Count

Percentage

1 - Very Challenging

50

10.5%

2 - Somewhat Challenging

198

41.6%

3 - Not Challenging

171

35.92%

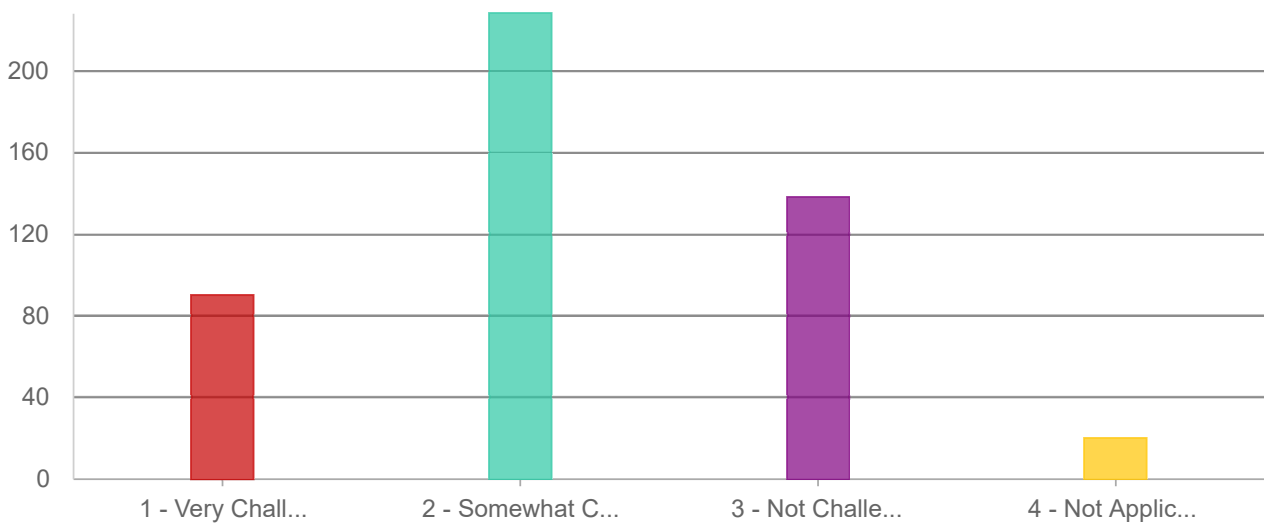
4 - Not Applicable

57

11.97%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Resident health and mental wellbeing *



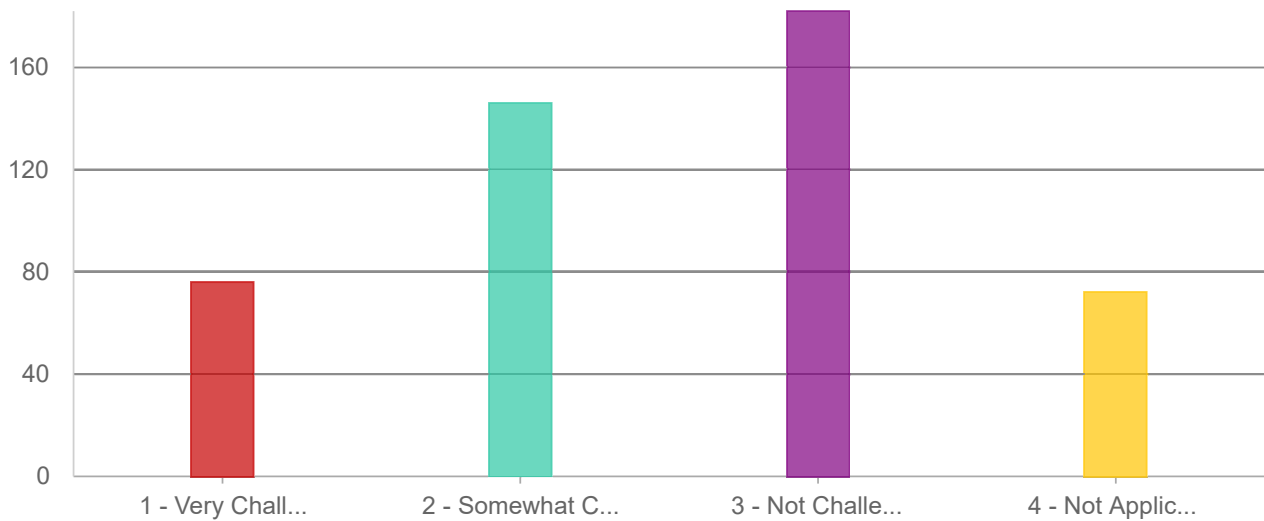
Percentage

ntage

1 - Very Challenging	90	18.91%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	228	47.9%
3 - Not Challenging	138	28.99%
4 - Not Applicable	20	4.2%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Implications of climate change *

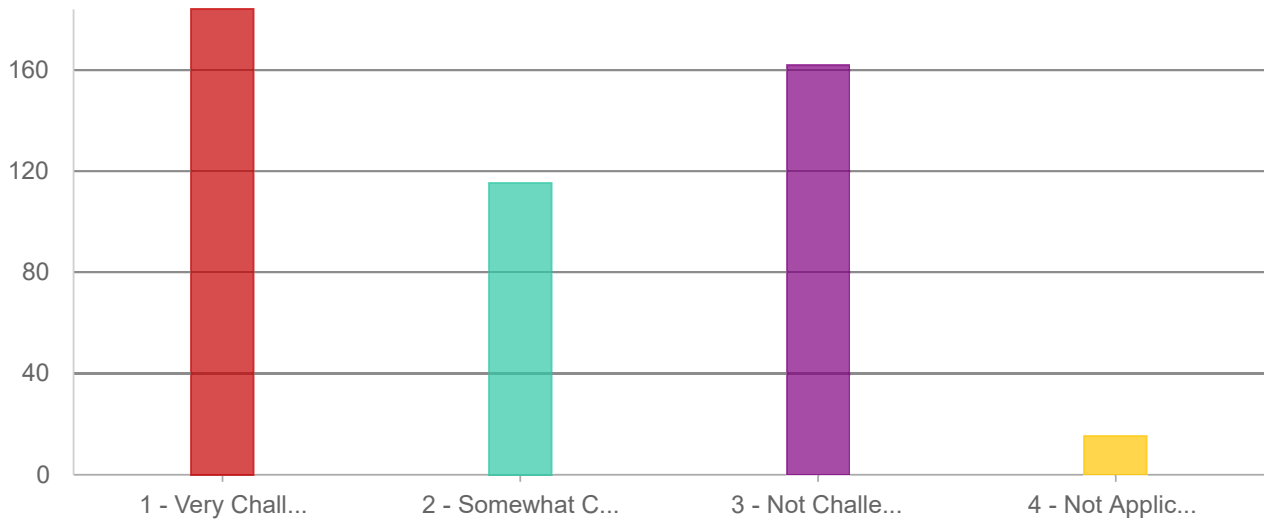


Answers	Count	Percentage
---------	-------	------------

1 - Very Challenging	76	15.97%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	146	30.67%
3 - Not Challenging	182	38.24%
4 - Not Applicable	72	15.13%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Multiple fire/water districts *



Answers

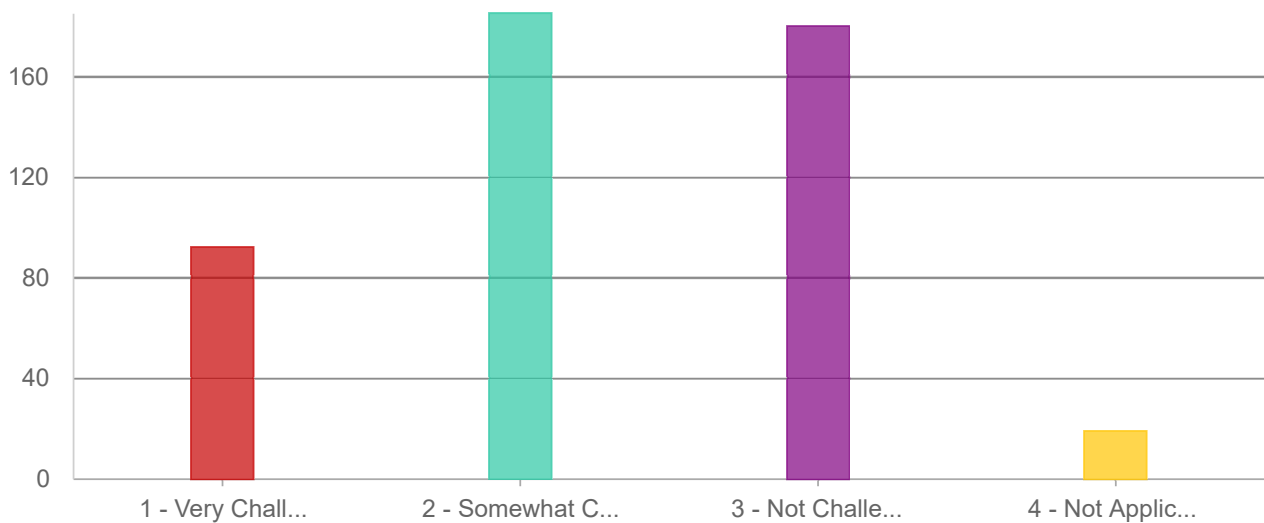
Count

Percentage

1 - Very Challenging	184	38.66%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	115	24.16%
3 - Not Challenging	162	34.03%
4 - Not Applicable	15	3.15%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ **Access to fresh, local food** *



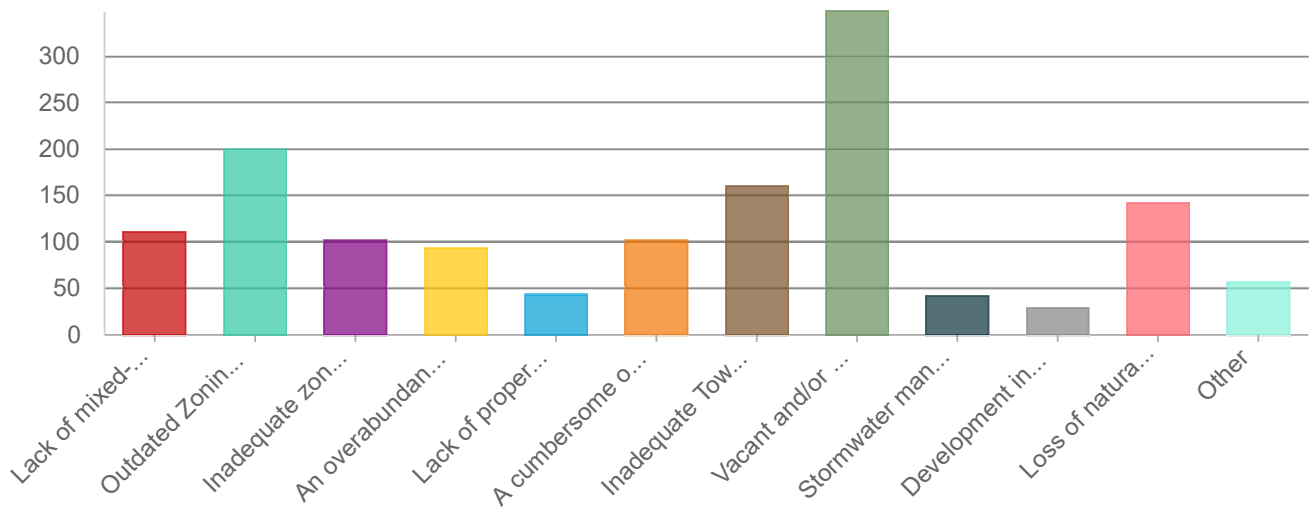
Percentage

ntage

1 - Very Challenging	92	19.33%
2 - Somewhat Challenging	185	38.87%
3 - Not Challenging	180	37.82%
4 - Not Applicable	19	3.99%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

3. Below are some common land use issues/concerns. Please select your top three concerns that you believe are ...



Percentage

ntage

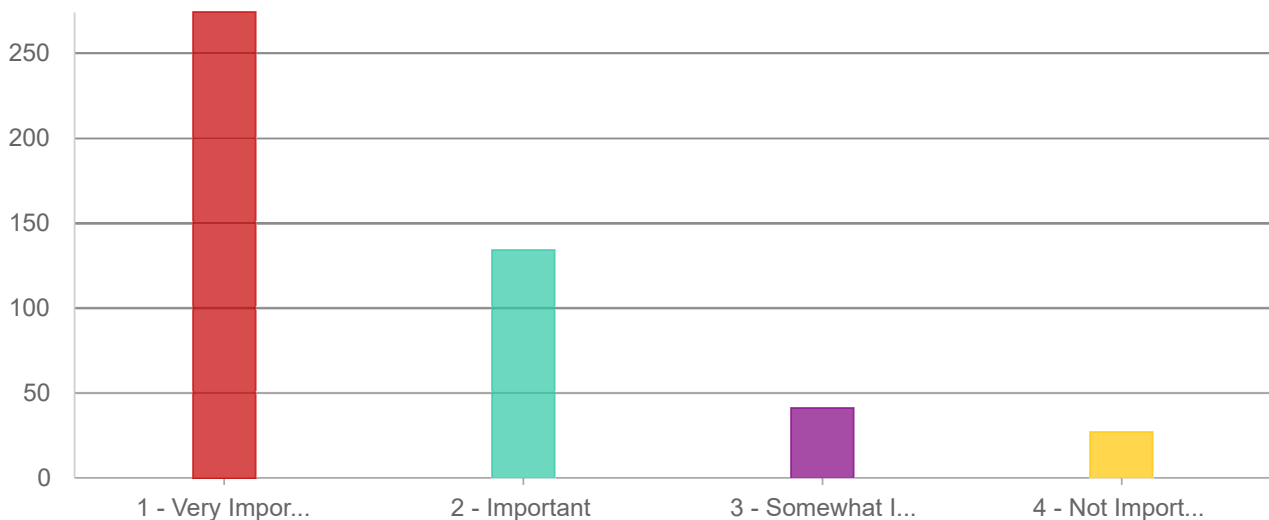
Lack of mixed-use development (e.g., residential use above or otherwise combined with commercial use)	111	23.32%
Outdated Zoning Bylaws (e.g., disorganized and/or conflicting regulations, not aligned with current trends)	200	42.02%
Inadequate zoning/building code enforcement	102	21.43%
An overabundance of or otherwise unfitting rural residential subdivisions	93	19.54%
Lack of proper buffers between different types of uses (e.g., plantings, fence, etc.)	43	9.03%
A cumbersome or confusing project permitting process	102	21.43%
Inadequate Town utility and infrastructure connections (e.g., water and sewer)	160	33.61%

Vacant and/or underutilized lands (including abandoned properties)	348	73.11%
Stormwater management	42	8.82%
Development in hazard areas (e.g., floodplains)	29	6.09%
Loss of natural lands to new development	142	29.83%
Other	56	11.76%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

4. Referencing the image in the introduction above, please rate the following in terms of how important they are to fulfilling Palmer's housing needs. Please rate each of the following as:

☐ **Detached single-family homes** *



Answers

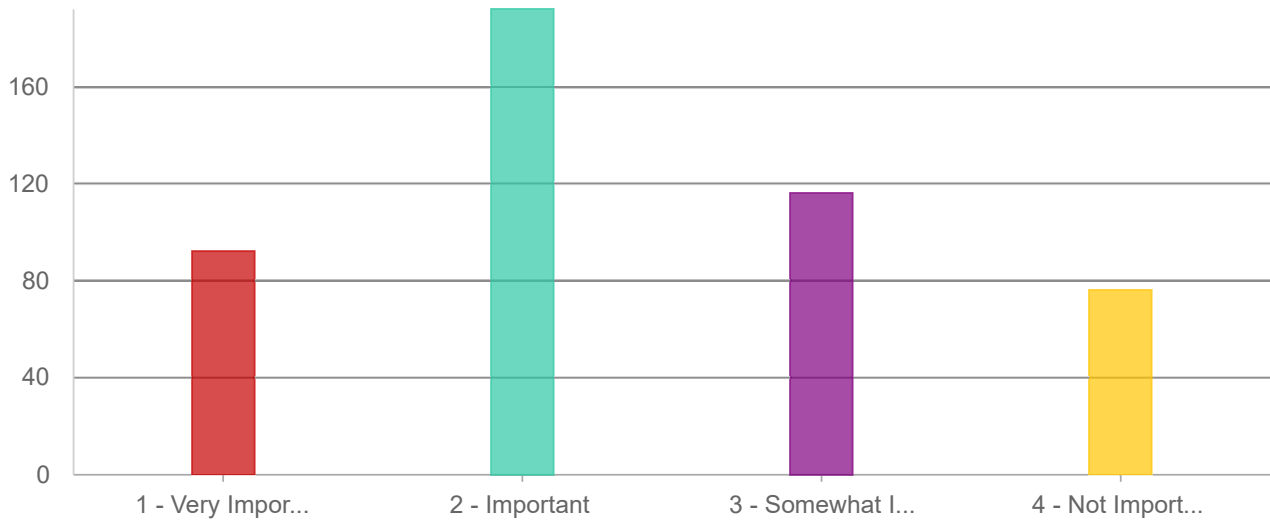
Count

Percentage

1 - Very Important	274	57.56%
2 - Important	134	28.15%
3 - Somewhat Important	41	8.61%
4 - Not Important	27	5.67%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Duplexes (2 housing units)** *



Answers

Count

Percentage

1 - Very Important

92

19.33%

2 - Important

192

40.34%

3 - Somewhat Important

116

24.37%

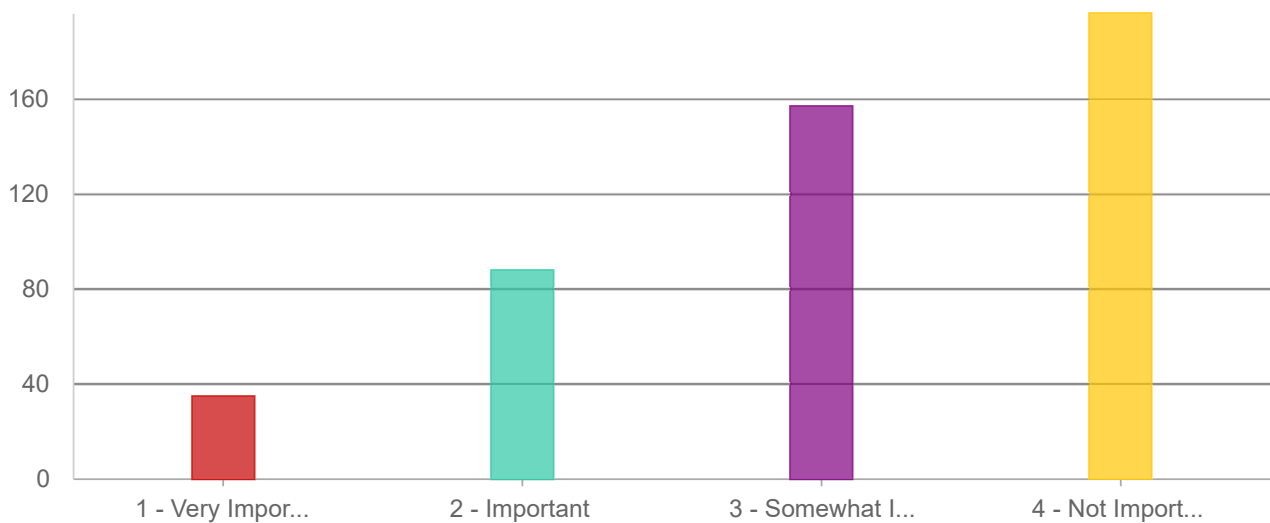
4 - Not Important

76

15.97%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Triplexes (3 units) and fourplexes (4 units) *



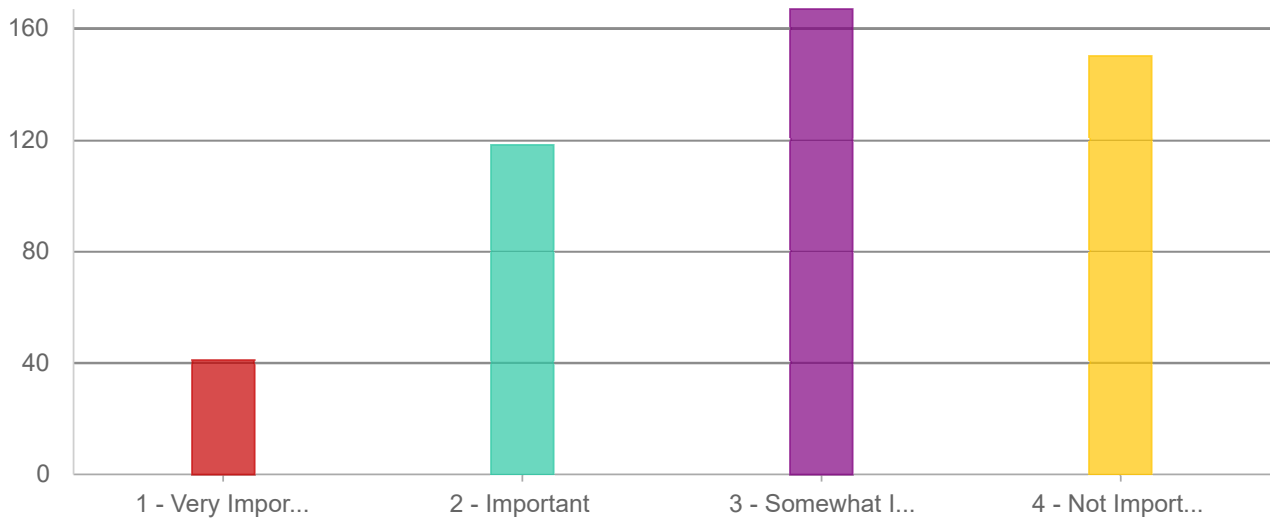
Percentage

ntage

1 - Very Important	35	7.35%
2 - Important	88	18.49%
3 - Somewhat Important	157	32.98%
4 - Not Important	196	41.18%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Courtyard apartments** *

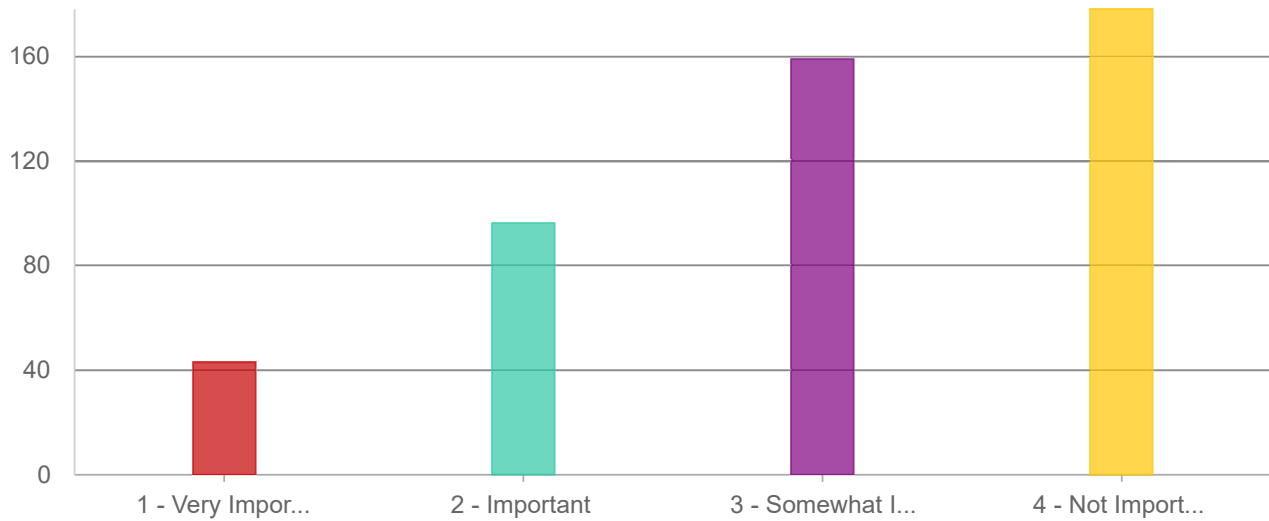


Answers **Count** **Percentage**

1 - Very Important	41	8.61%
2 - Important	118	24.79%
3 - Somewhat Important	167	35.08%
4 - Not Important	150	31.51%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Bungalow courts / cottage developments** *

**Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Very Important

43

9.03%

2 - Important

96

20.17%

3 - Somewhat Important

159

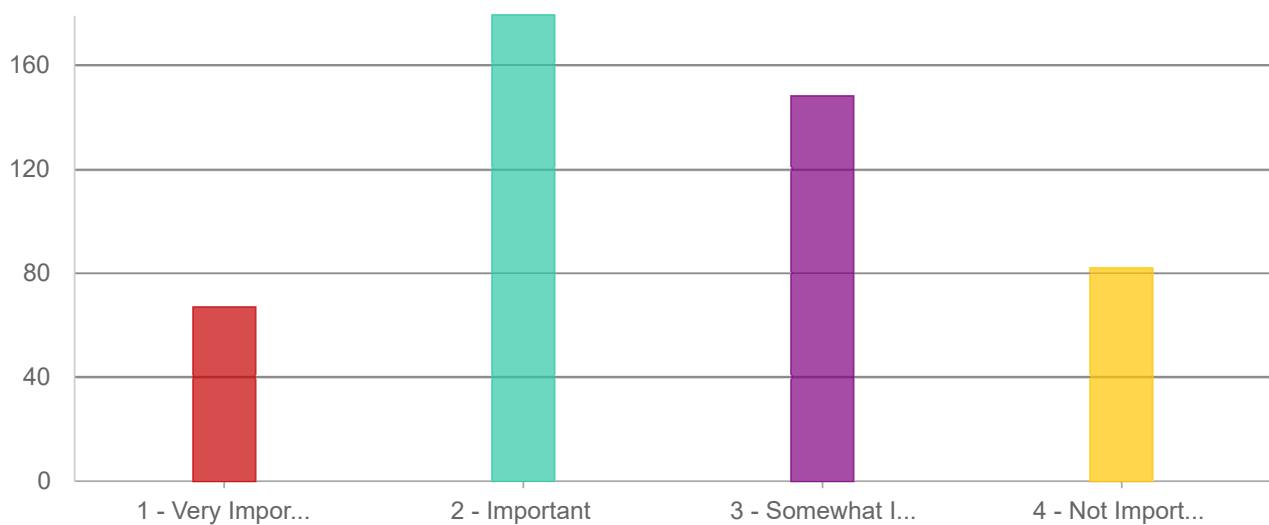
33.4%

4 - Not Important

178

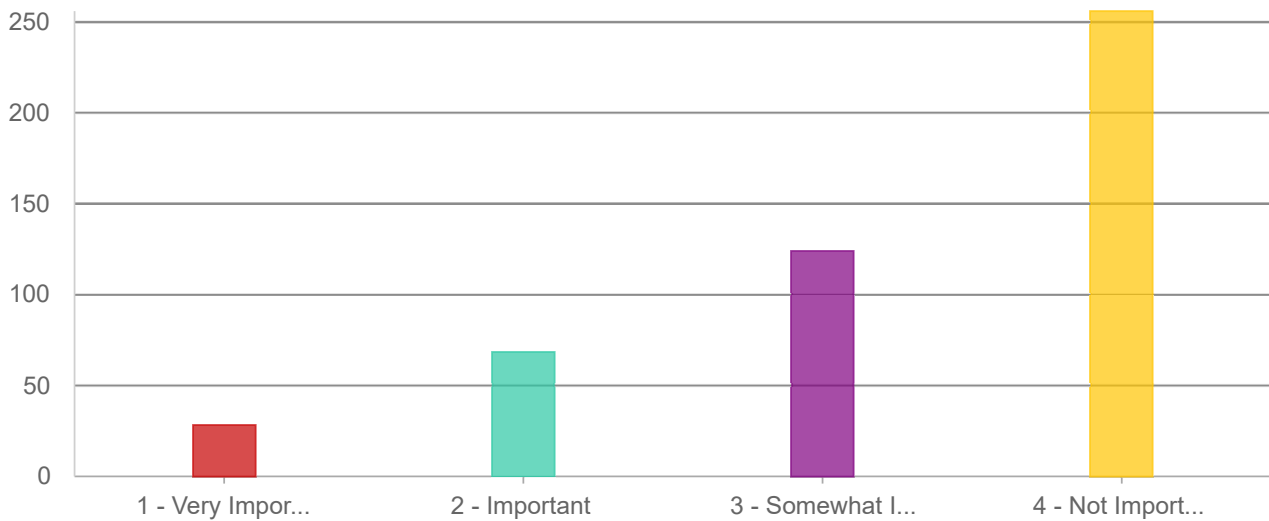
37.39%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Townhouses (attached single-family units) ***Percentage****ntage**

1 - Very Important	67	14.08%
2 - Important	179	37.61%
3 - Somewhat Important	148	31.09%
4 - Not Important	82	17.23%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

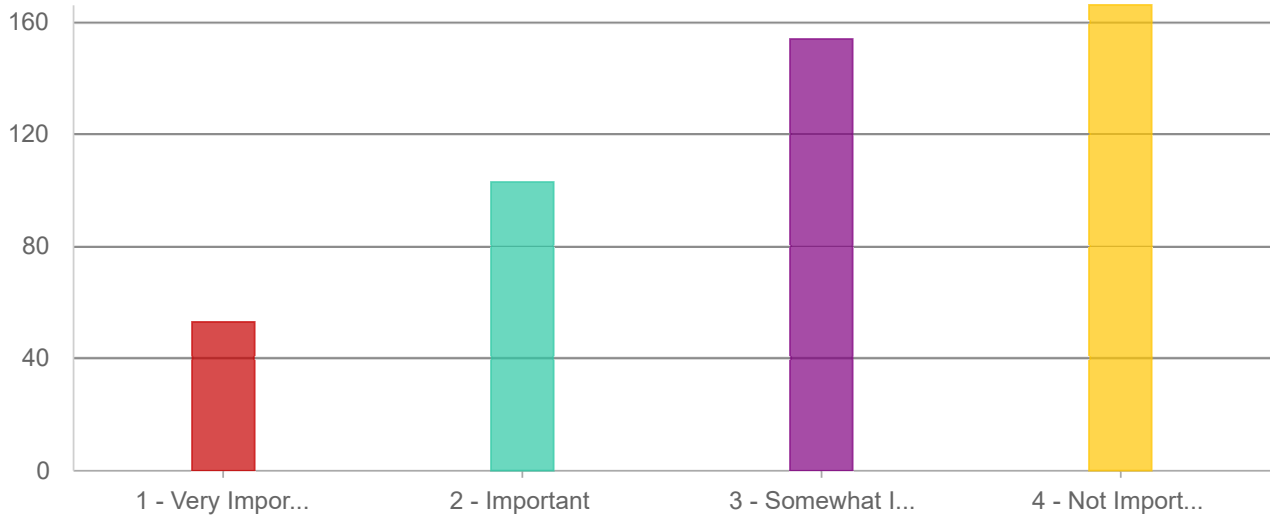
☐ **Multiplexes (more than 4 units) ***

Answers	Count	Percentage
---------	-------	------------

1 - Very Important	28	5.88%
2 - Important	68	14.29%
3 - Somewhat Important	124	26.05%
4 - Not Important	256	53.78%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Live/work units ***

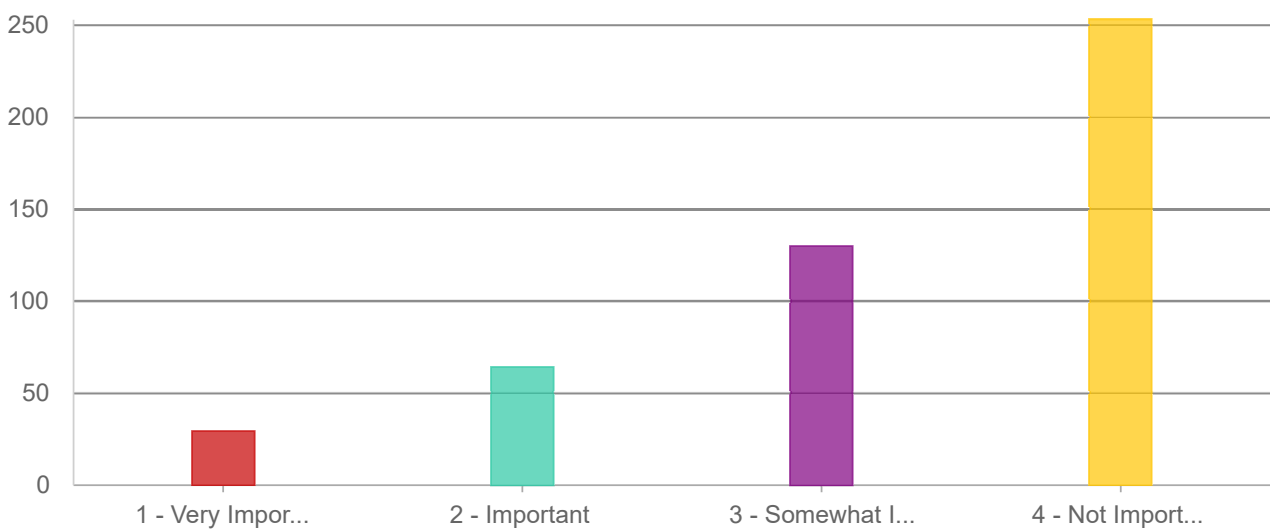


Answers **Count** **Percentage**

1 - Very Important	53	11.13%
2 - Important	103	21.64%
3 - Somewhat Important	154	32.35%
4 - Not Important	166	34.87%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ **Mid-Rise multi-family developments ***

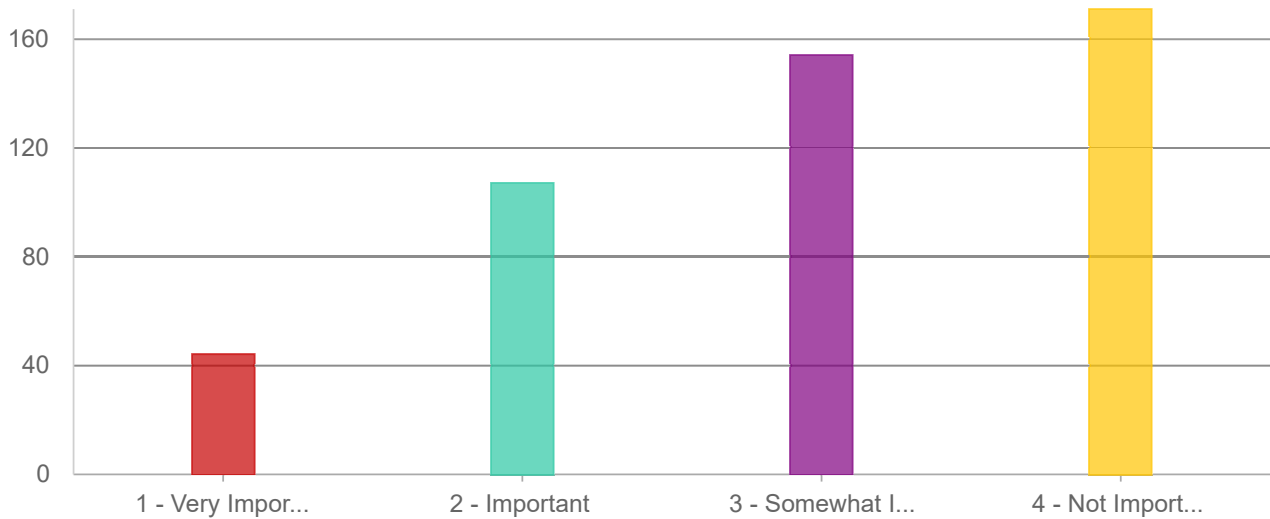


Percentage **ntage**

1 - Very Important	29	6.09%
2 - Important	64	13.45%
3 - Somewhat Important	130	27.31%
4 - Not Important	253	53.15%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Accessory dwelling units (small attached or detached housing units on existing residential lots) - not pictured *

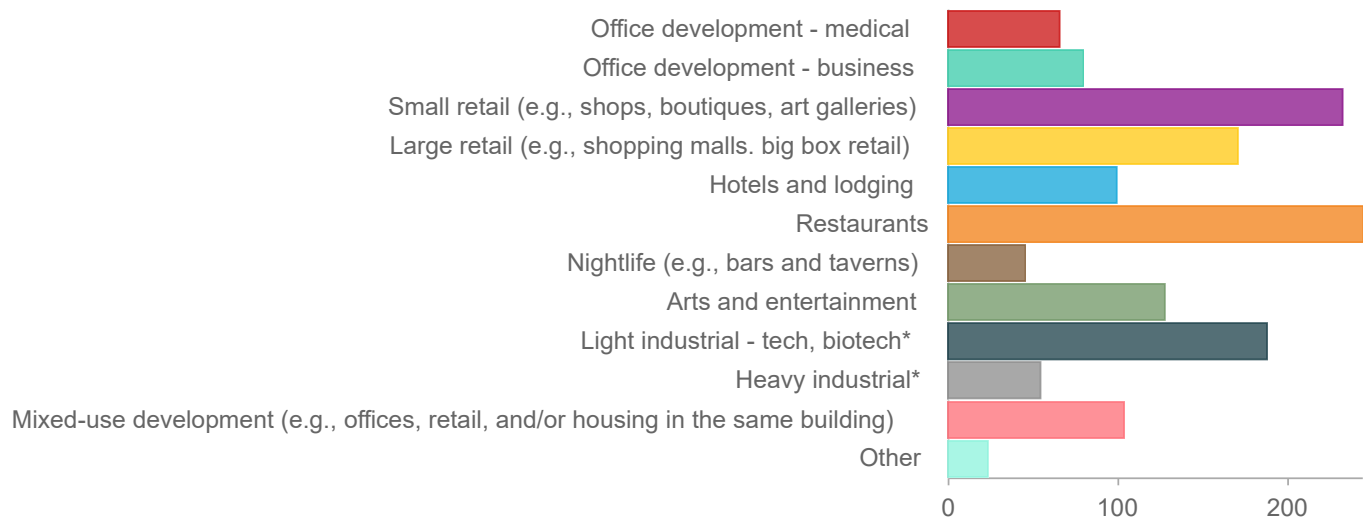


Answers	Count	Percentage
---------	-------	------------

1 - Very Important	44	9.24%
2 - Important	107	22.48%
3 - Somewhat Important	154	32.35%
4 - Not Important	171	35.92%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

5. What type of future economic development do you feel is most needed in Palmer? Please select your top three. *



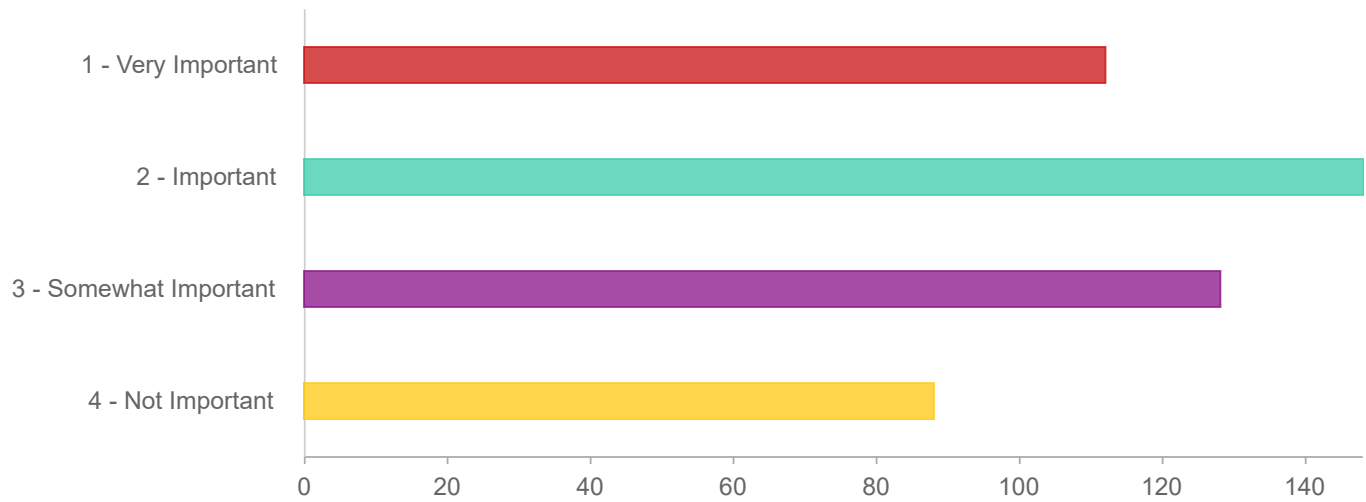
Answers **Count** **Percentage**

Office development - medical	65	13.66%
Office development - business	79	16.6%
Small retail (e.g., shops, boutiques, art galleries)	232	48.74%
Large retail (e.g., shopping malls, big box retail)	170	35.71%
Hotels and lodging	99	20.8%
Restaurants	244	51.26%
Nightlife (e.g., bars and taverns)	45	9.45%
Arts and entertainment	127	26.68%
Light industrial - tech, biotech*	187	39.29%
Heavy industrial*	54	11.34%
Mixed-use development (e.g., offices, retail, and/or housing in the same building)	103	21.64%
Other	23	4.83%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

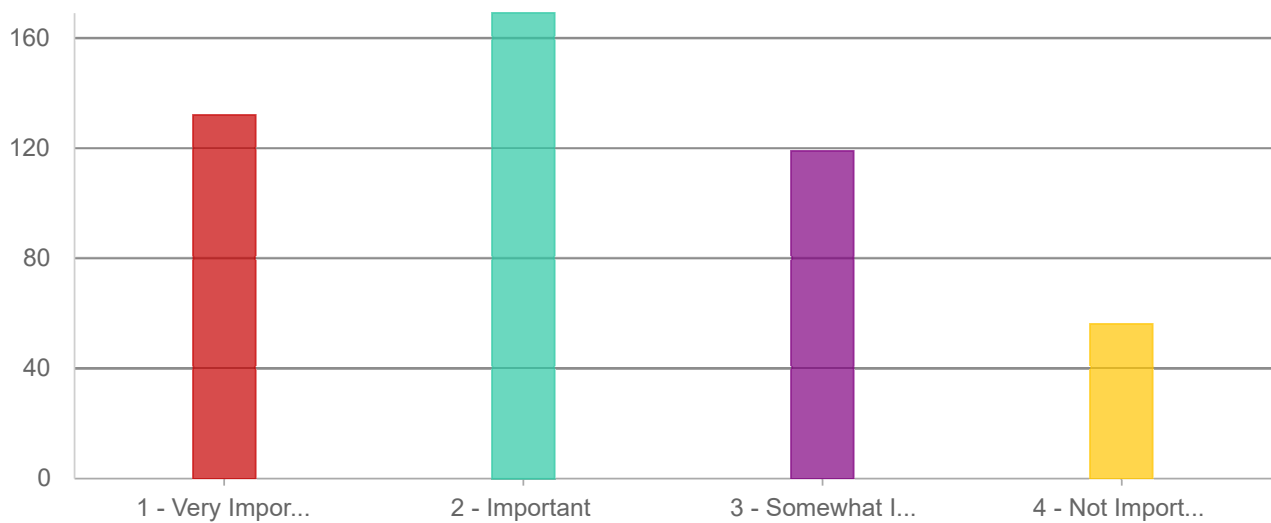
6. In terms of future development, how important are the following?

☐ **Height and size of buildings** *

**Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Very Important	112	23.53%
2 - Important	148	31.09%
3 - Somewhat Important	128	26.89%
4 - Not Important	88	18.49%

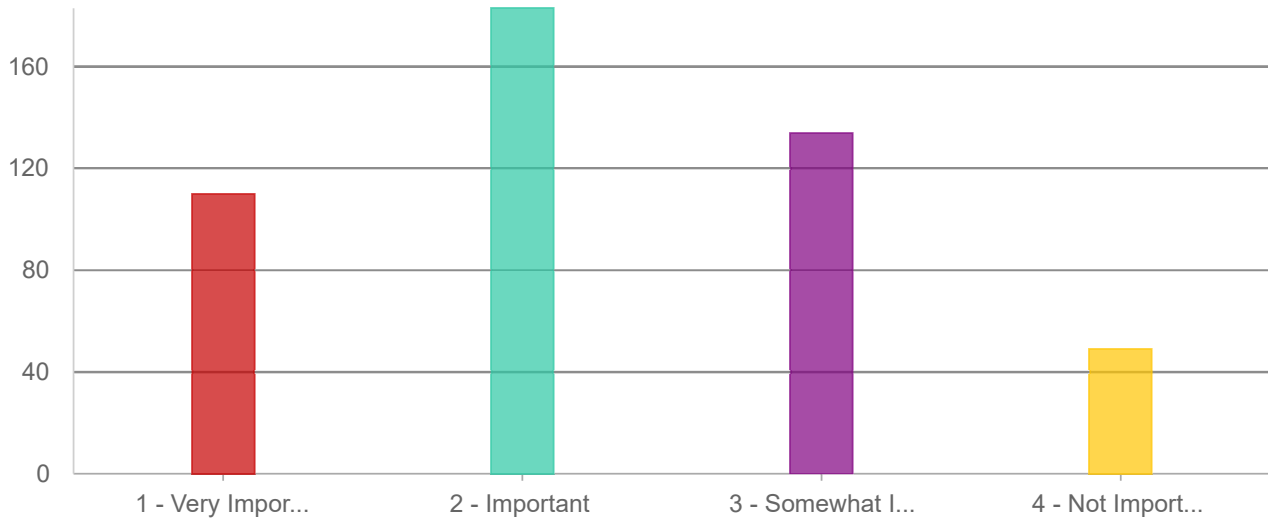
Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ **Style of buildings** ***Percentage****ntage**

1 - Very Important	132	27.73%
--------------------	-----	--------

2 - Important	169	35.5%
3 - Somewhat Important	119	25%
4 - Not Important	56	11.76%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

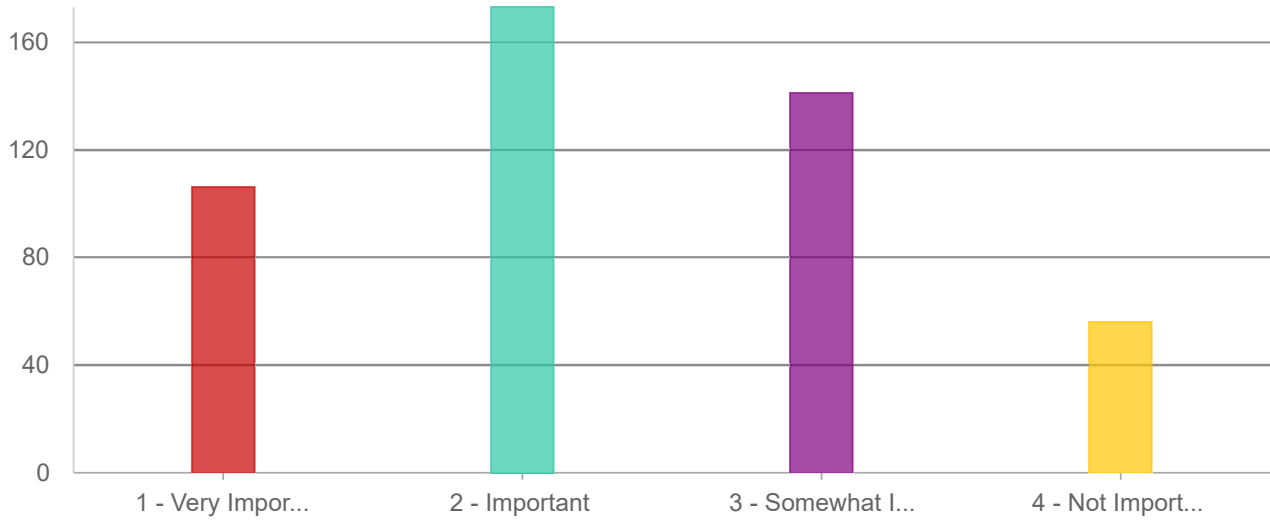
☐ **Density of buildings** *

Answers	Count	Percentage
---------	-------	------------

1 - Very Important	110	23.11%
2 - Important	183	38.45%
3 - Somewhat Important	134	28.15%
4 - Not Important	49	10.29%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Encouraging a mix of uses in the same building / site** *



Answers

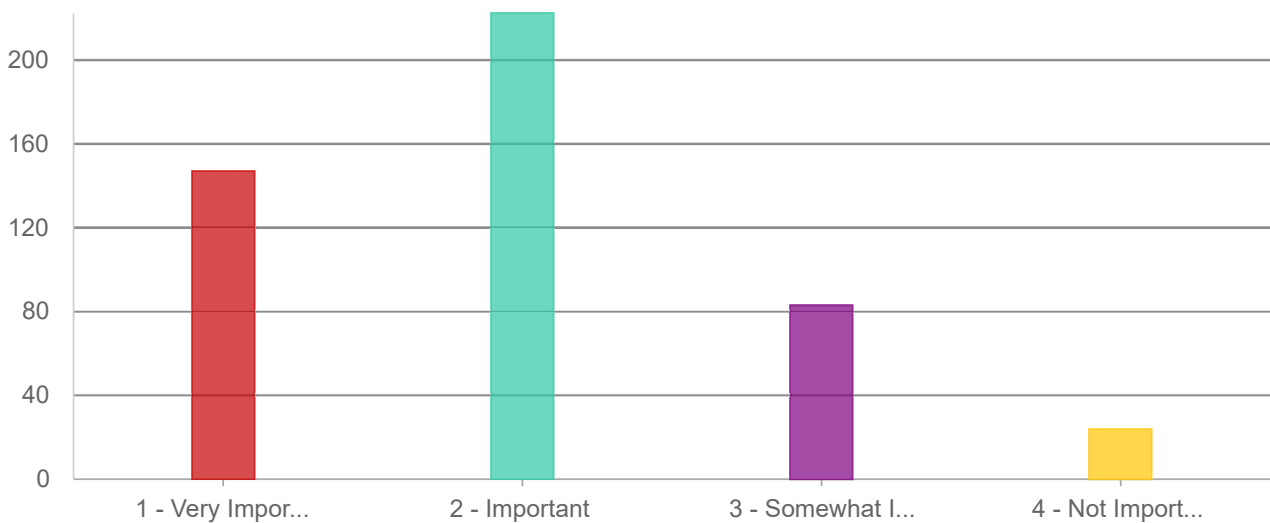
Count

Percentage

1 - Very Important	106	22.27%
2 - Important	173	36.34%
3 - Somewhat Important	141	29.62%
4 - Not Important	56	11.76%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Resolving incompatible land uses *

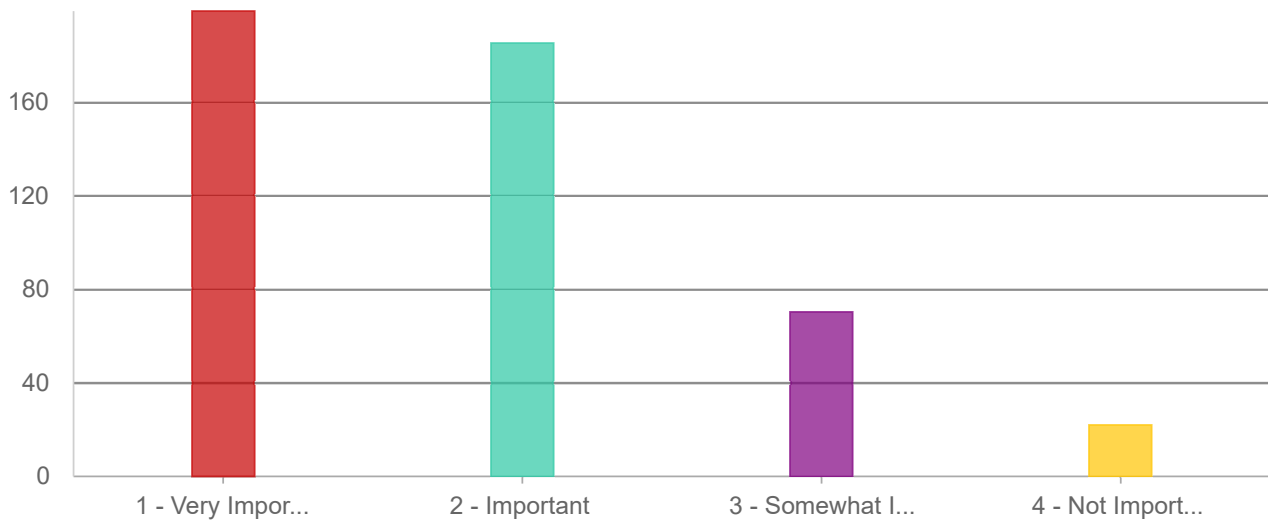


Percentage

ntage

1 - Very Important	147	30.88%
2 - Important	222	46.64%
3 - Somewhat Important	83	17.44%
4 - Not Important	24	5.04%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

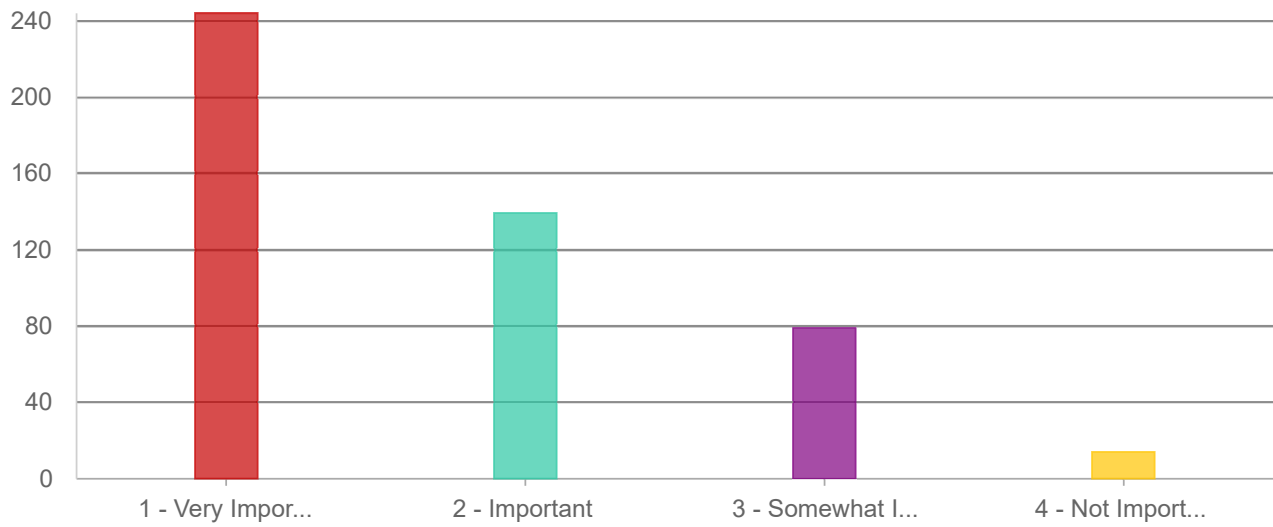
☐ **Promoting walkability between spaces** *

Answers	Count	Percentage
---------	-------	------------

1 - Very Important	199	41.81%
2 - Important	185	38.87%
3 - Somewhat Important	70	14.71%
4 - Not Important	22	4.62%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Protection of open spaces** *



Answers

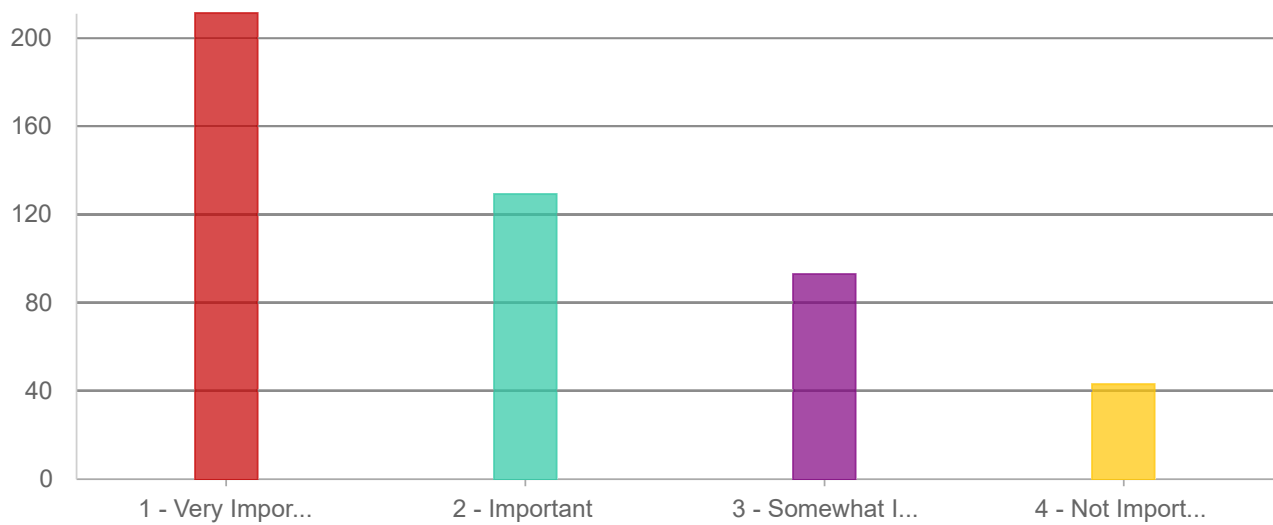
Count

Percentage

1 - Very Important	244	51.26%
2 - Important	139	29.2%
3 - Somewhat Important	79	16.6%
4 - Not Important	14	2.94%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas/carbon emissions *



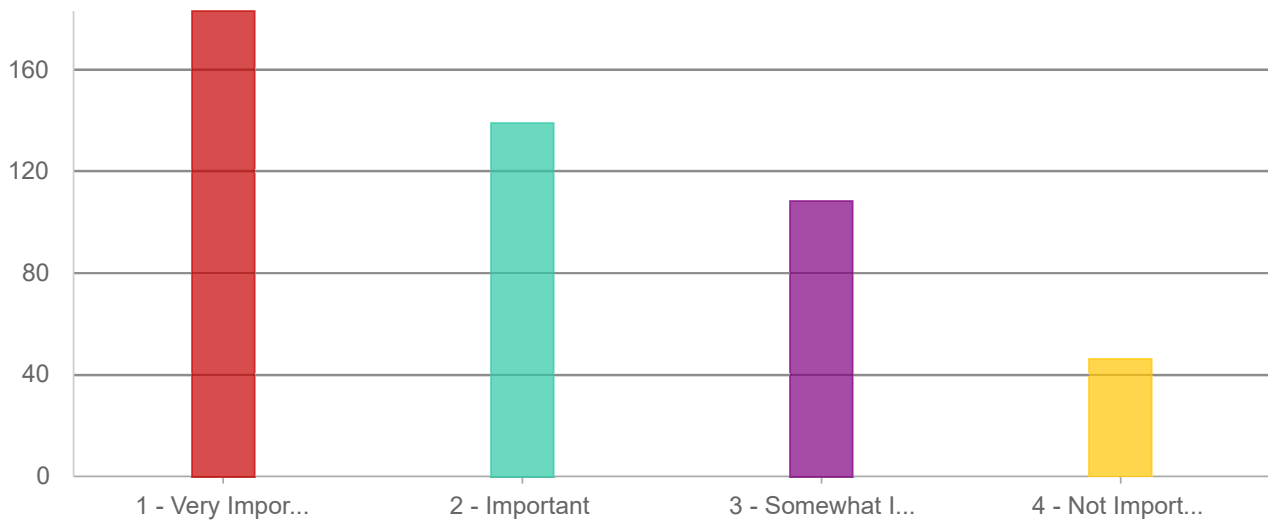
Percentage

ntage

1 - Very Important	211	44.33%
2 - Important	129	27.1%
3 - Somewhat Important	93	19.54%
4 - Not Important	43	9.03%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ **Building resilience* to climate's emerging impacts** *

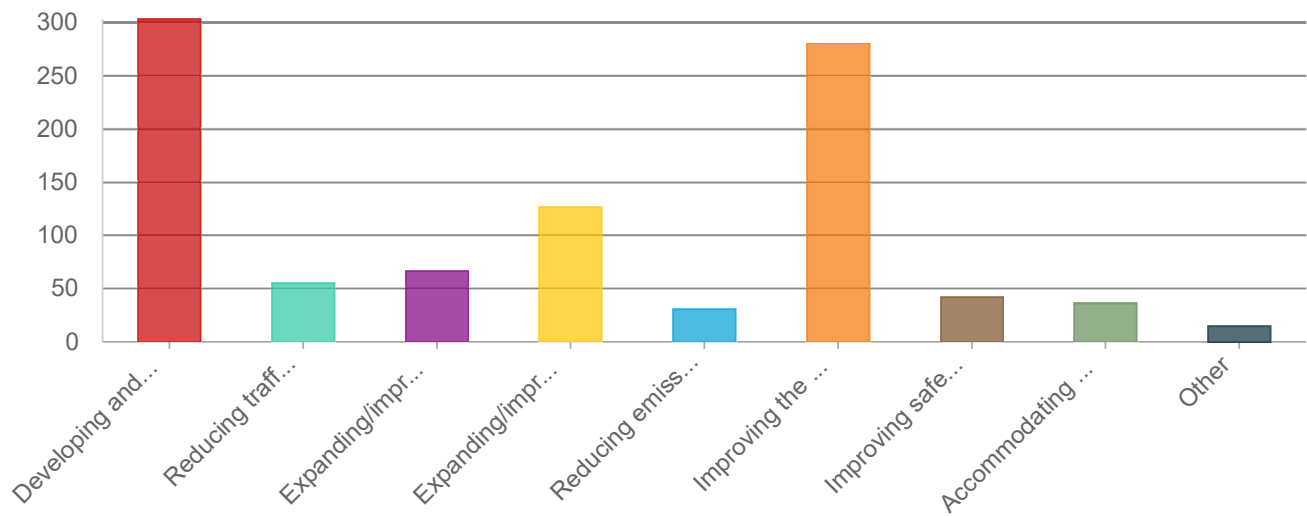


Answers	Count	Percentage
---------	-------	------------

1 - Very Important	183	38.45%
2 - Important	139	29.2%
3 - Somewhat Important	108	22.69%
4 - Not Important	46	9.66%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

7. What are the most pressing transportation needs? Please select your top two. *



Answers	Count	Percentage
---------	-------	------------

Developing and promoting transit (e.g., passenger rail connections, local/regional bus service, bike share program, park-n-ride lots)	303	63.66%
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--------

Reducing traffic congestion	55	11.55%
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Expanding/improving bike infrastructure and access (e.g., lanes, storage facilities)	66	13.87%
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----	--------

Expanding/improving pedestrian infrastructure and access (e.g., side walks)	126	26.47%
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----	--------

Reducing emissions (greenhouse gases and other pollutants) from vehicles	30	6.3%
--------------------------------------------------------------------------	----	------

Improving the physical condition of the Town's roadways	280	58.82%
---------------------------------------------------------	-----	--------

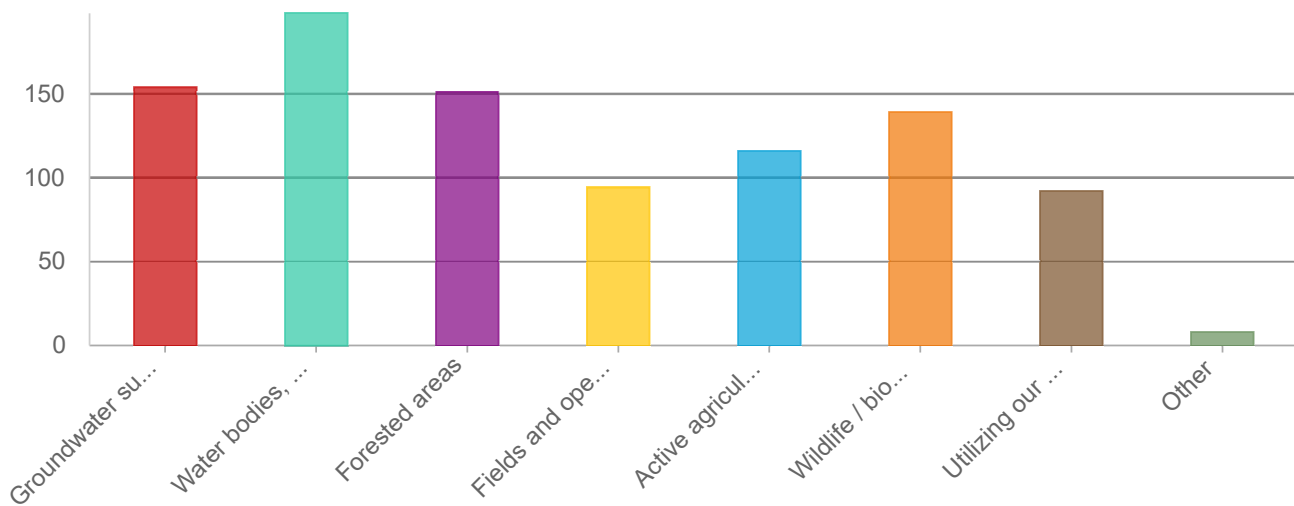
Improving safety for all users of the Town's transportation infrastructure	42	8.82%
----------------------------------------------------------------------------	----	-------

Accommodating new transportation trends/technologies (e.g., electric vehicles)	36	7.56%
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----	-------

Other	14	2.94%
-------	----	-------

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

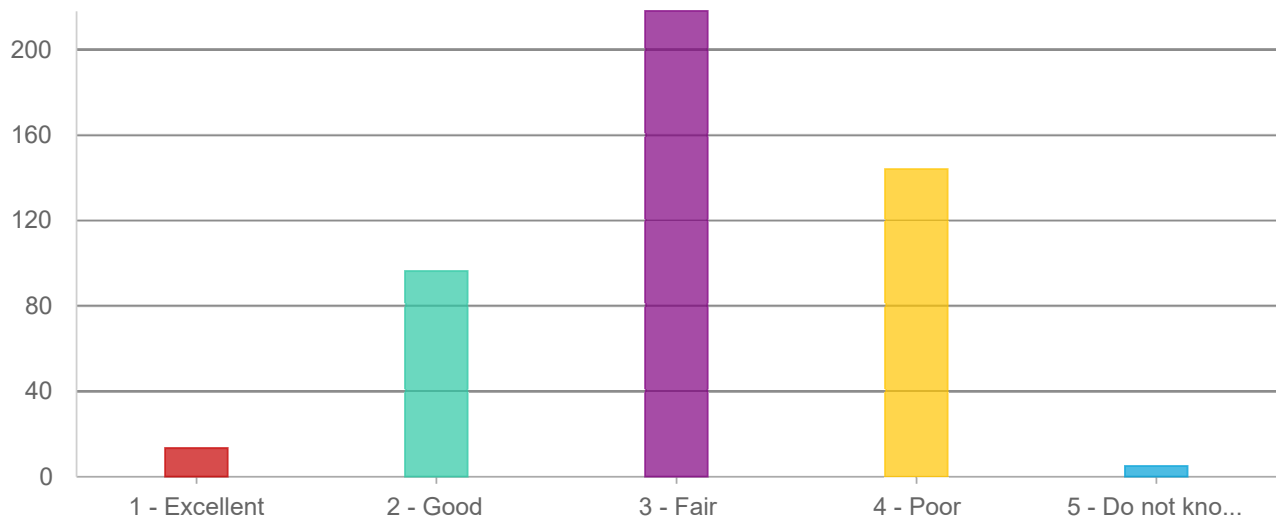
8. What are the most pressing natural resource protection needs? Please select your top two. *

**Answers****Count****Percentage**

Groundwater supplies	154	32.35%
Water bodies, including surface water and wetlands	198	41.6%
Forested areas	151	31.72%
Fields and open space land	94	19.75%
Active agricultural lands	116	24.37%
Wildlife / bio-diversity	139	29.2%
Utilizing our natural resources to mitigate and guard against climate change	92	19.33%
Other	8	1.68%

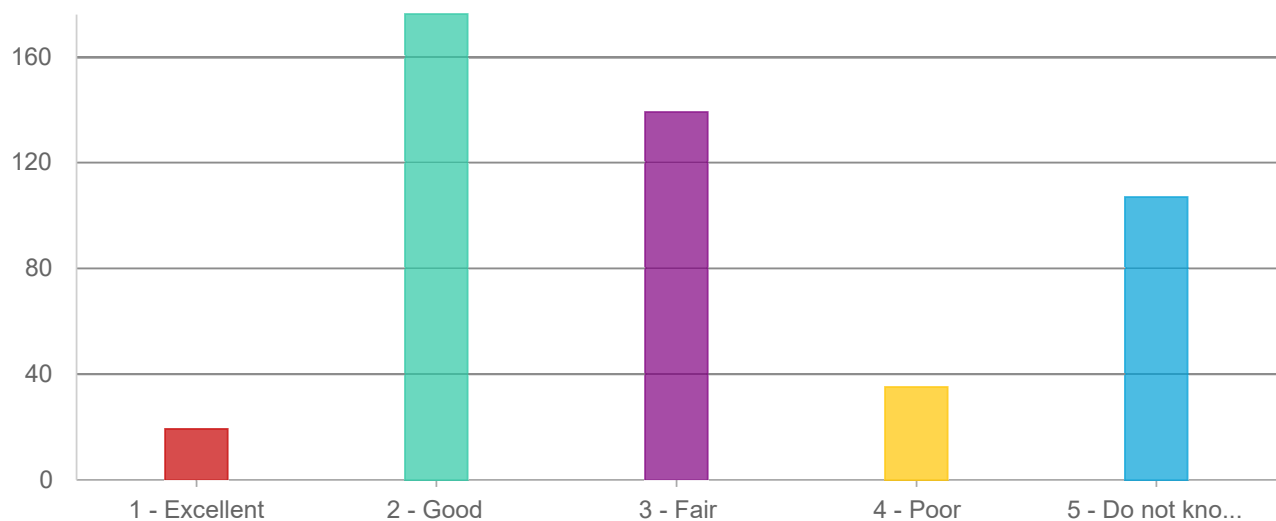
Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

9. Please rank each of the following Town facilities or services in terms of their performance/ condition, as applicable.
☐ **Public Works - Roadways/Sidewalks** *

**Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent	13	2.73%
2 - Good	96	20.17%
3 - Fair	218	45.8%
4 - Poor	144	30.25%
5 - Do not know/not Applicable	5	1.05%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Public Works - Sewer** *

Answers**Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent

19

3.99%

2 - Good

176

36.97%

3 - Fair

139

29.2%

4 - Poor

35

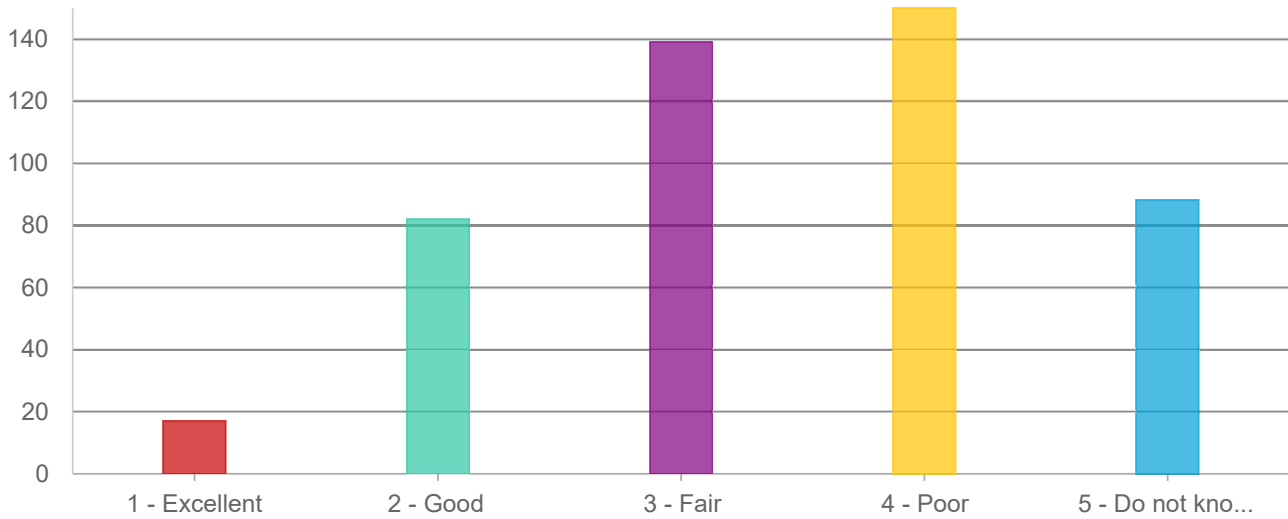
7.35%

5 - Do not know/not Applicable

107

22.48%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Public Works - Recycling** ***Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent

17

3.57%

2 - Good

82

17.23%

3 - Fair

139

29.2%

4 - Poor

150

31.51%

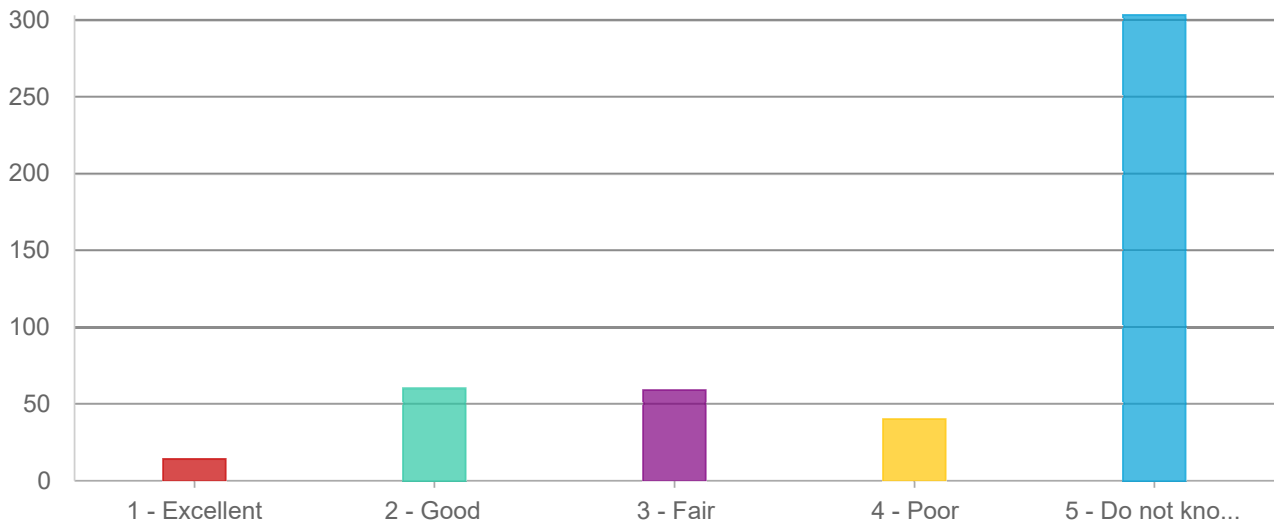
5 - Do not know/not Applicable

88

18.49%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Water District - Bondsville** *



Answers

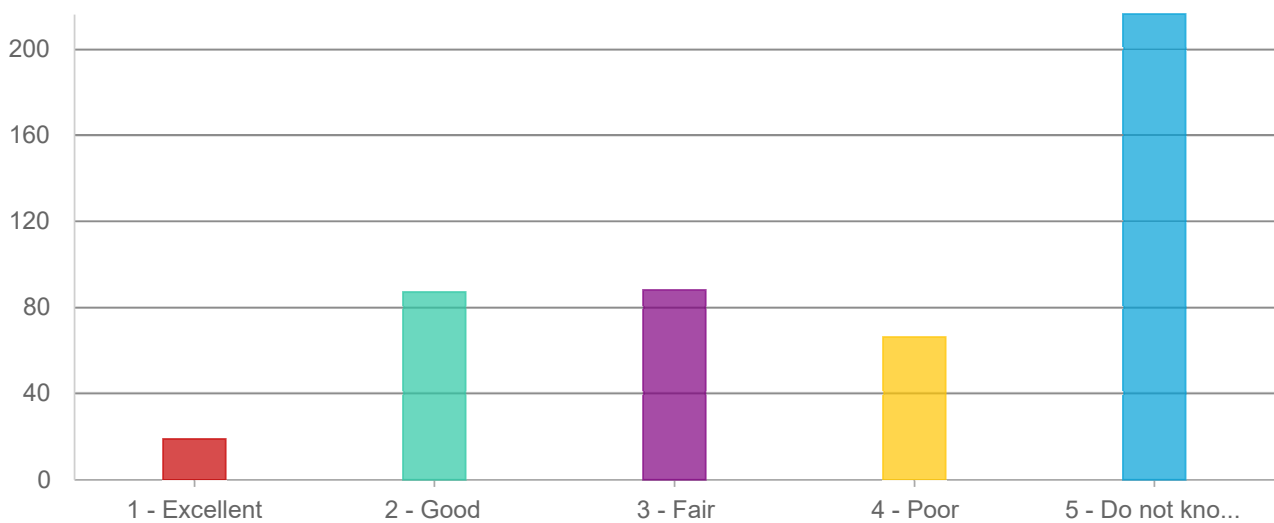
Count

Percentage

1 - Excellent	14	2.94%
2 - Good	60	12.61%
3 - Fair	59	12.39%
4 - Poor	40	8.4%
5 - Do not know/not Applicable	303	63.66%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Water District - Palmer *



Answers**Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent

19

3.99%

2 - Good

87

18.28%

3 - Fair

88

18.49%

4 - Poor

66

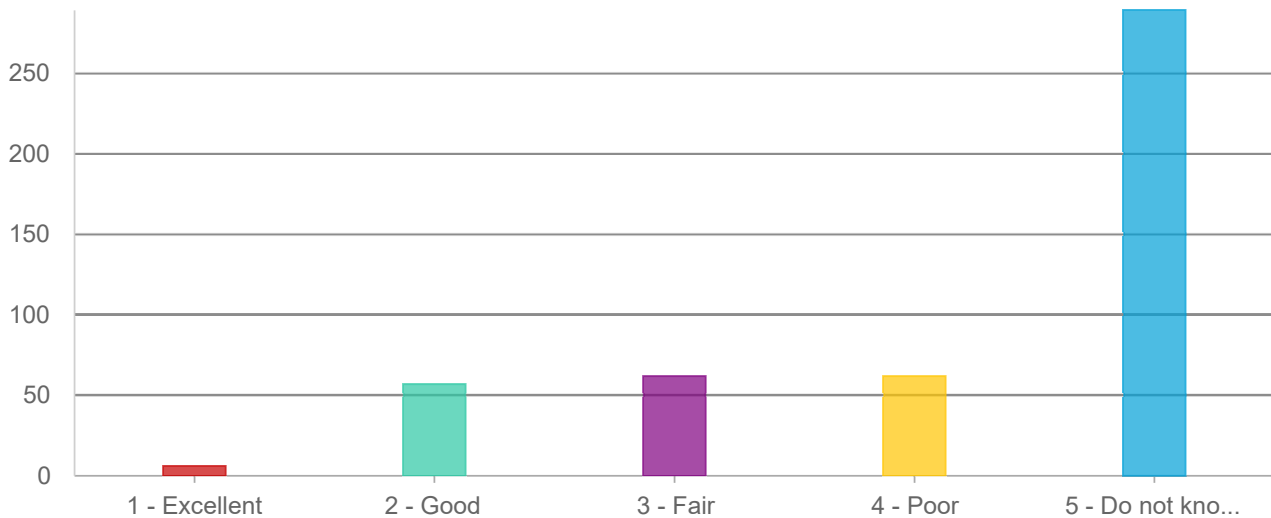
13.87%

5 - Do not know/not Applicable

216

45.38%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ **Water District - Thorndike** ***Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent

6

1.26%

2 - Good

57

11.97%

3 - Fair

62

13.03%

4 - Poor

62

13.03%

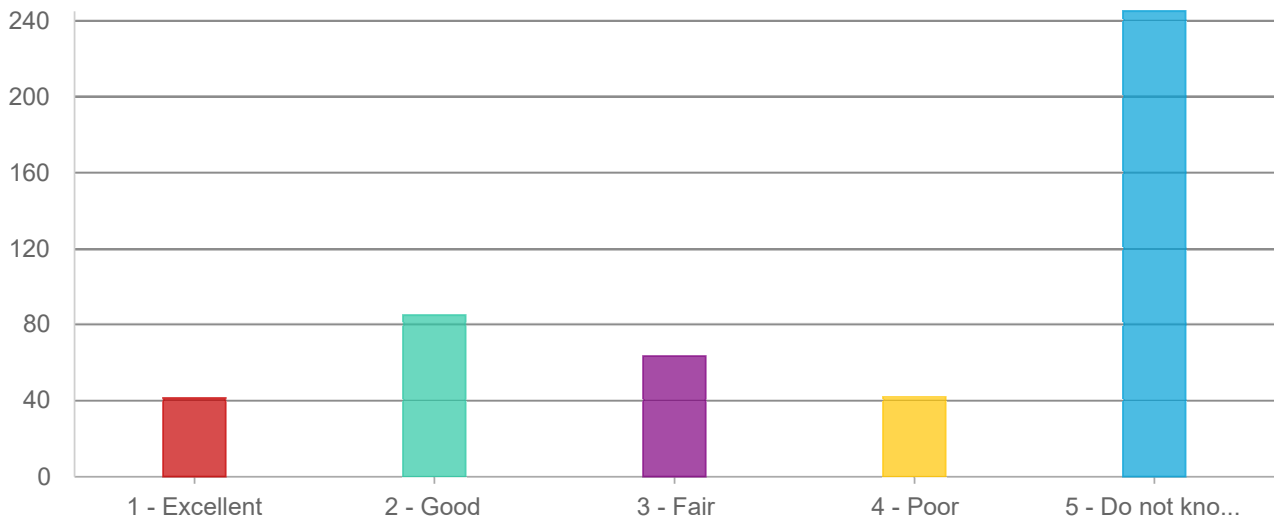
5 - Do not know/not Applicable

289

60.71%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ **Water District - Three Rivers** *



Answers

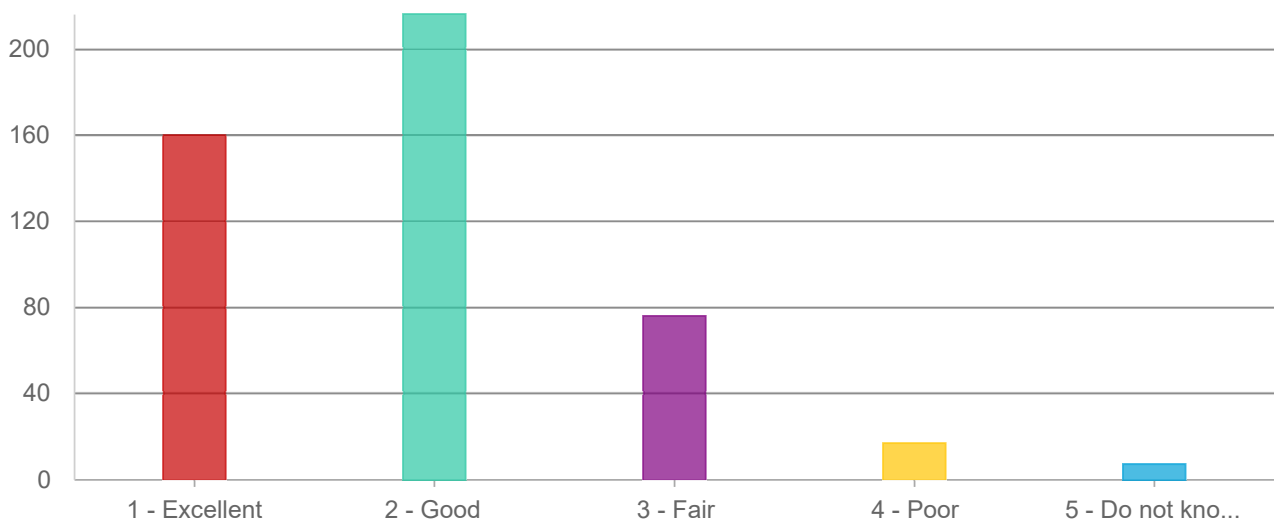
Count

Percentage

1 - Excellent	41	8.61%
2 - Good	85	17.86%
3 - Fair	63	13.24%
4 - Poor	42	8.82%
5 - Do not know/not Applicable	245	51.47%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ Police services *



Answers**Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent

160

33.61%

2 - Good

216

45.38%

3 - Fair

76

15.97%

4 - Poor

17

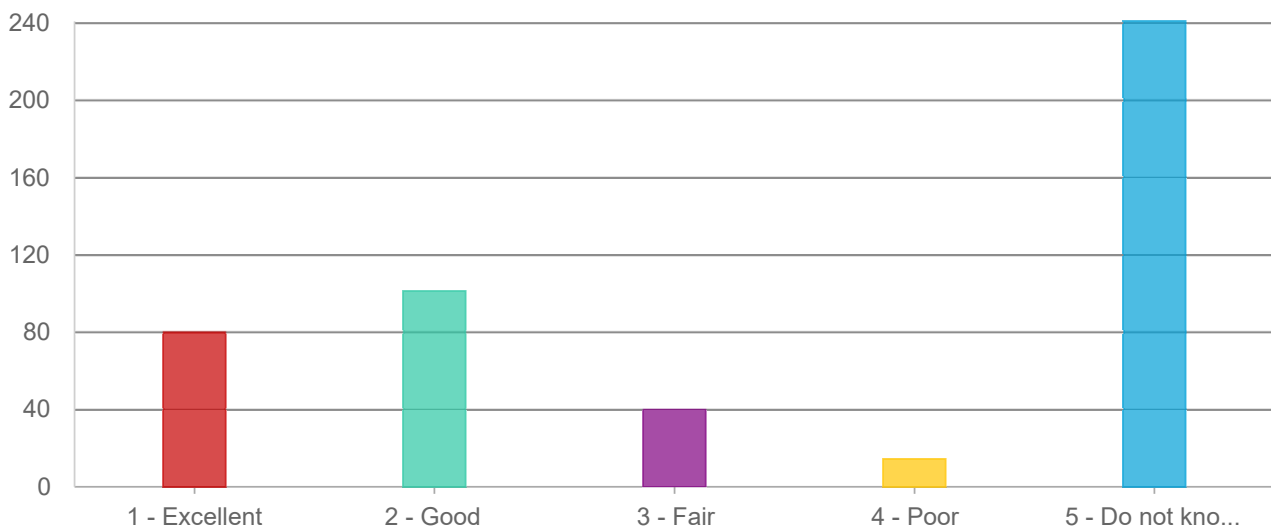
3.57%

5 - Do not know/not Applicable

7

1.47%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Fire Services - Bondsville** ***Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent

80

16.81%

2 - Good

101

21.22%

3 - Fair

40

8.4%

4 - Poor

14

2.94%

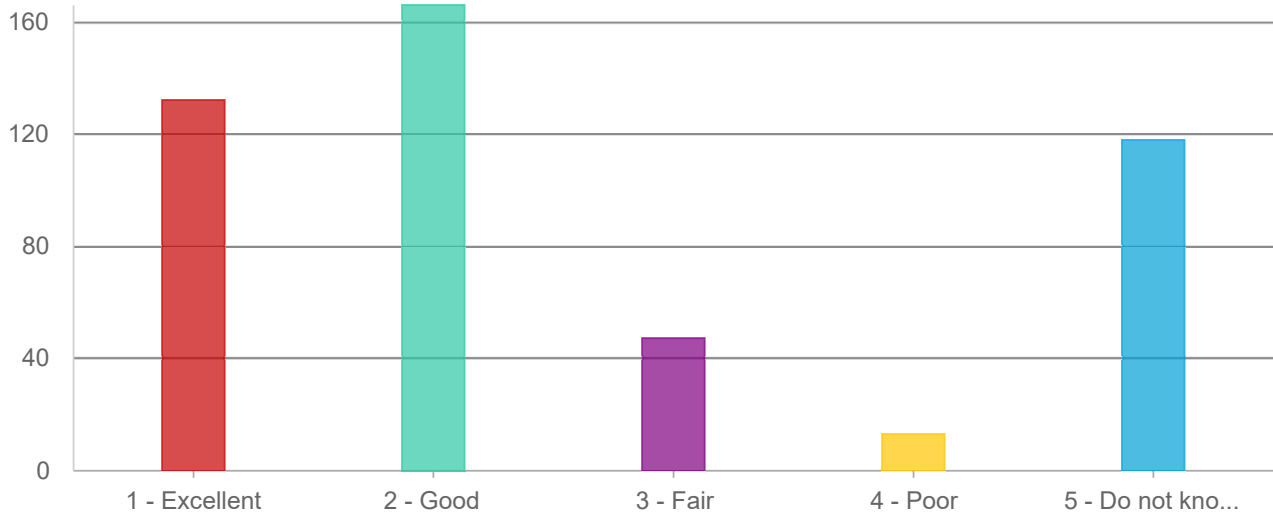
5 - Do not know/not Applicable

241

50.63%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Fire Services - Palmer** *



Answers

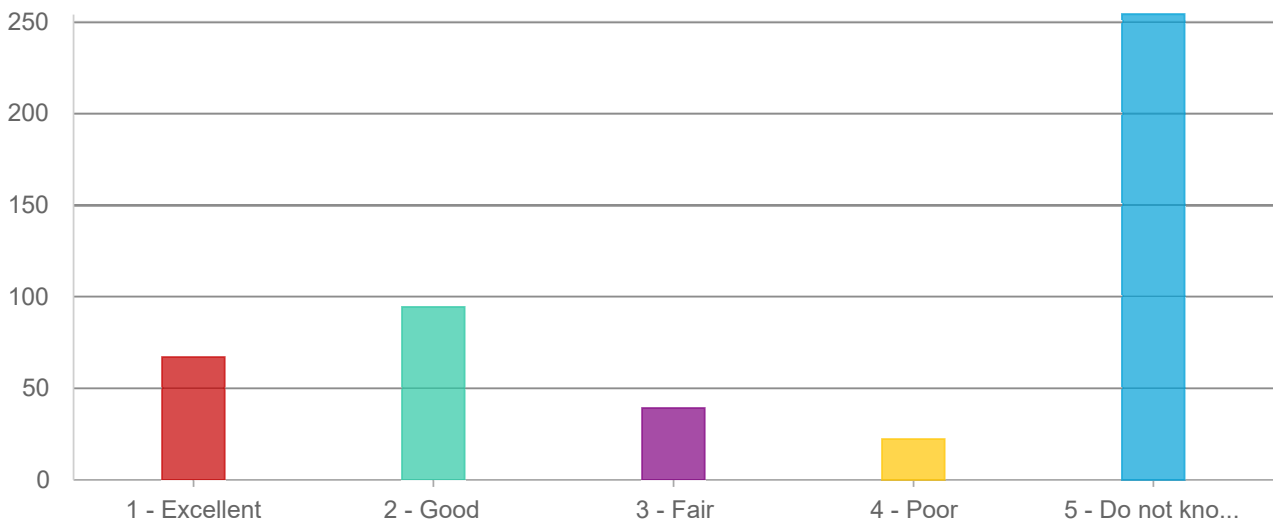
Count

Percentage

1 - Excellent	132	27.73%
2 - Good	166	34.87%
3 - Fair	47	9.87%
4 - Poor	13	2.73%
5 - Do not know/not Applicable	118	24.79%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

○ **Fire Services - Thorndike** *



Answers**Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent

67

14.08%

2 - Good

94

19.75%

3 - Fair

39

8.19%

4 - Poor

22

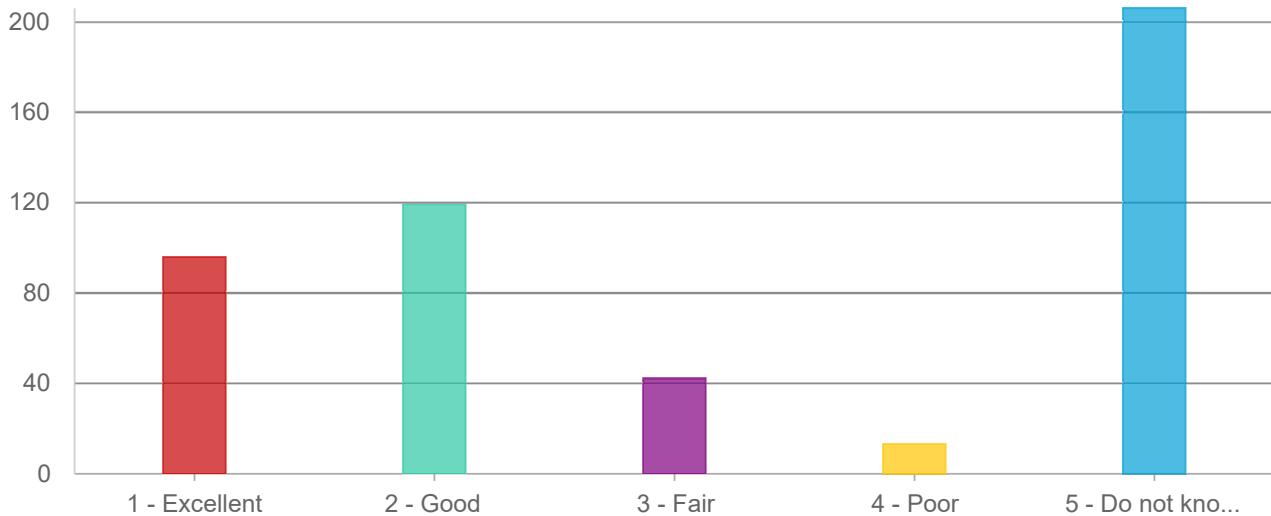
4.62%

5 - Do not know/not Applicable

254

53.36%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Fire Services - Three Rivers** ***Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent

96

20.17%

2 - Good

119

25%

3 - Fair

42

8.82%

4 - Poor

13

2.73%

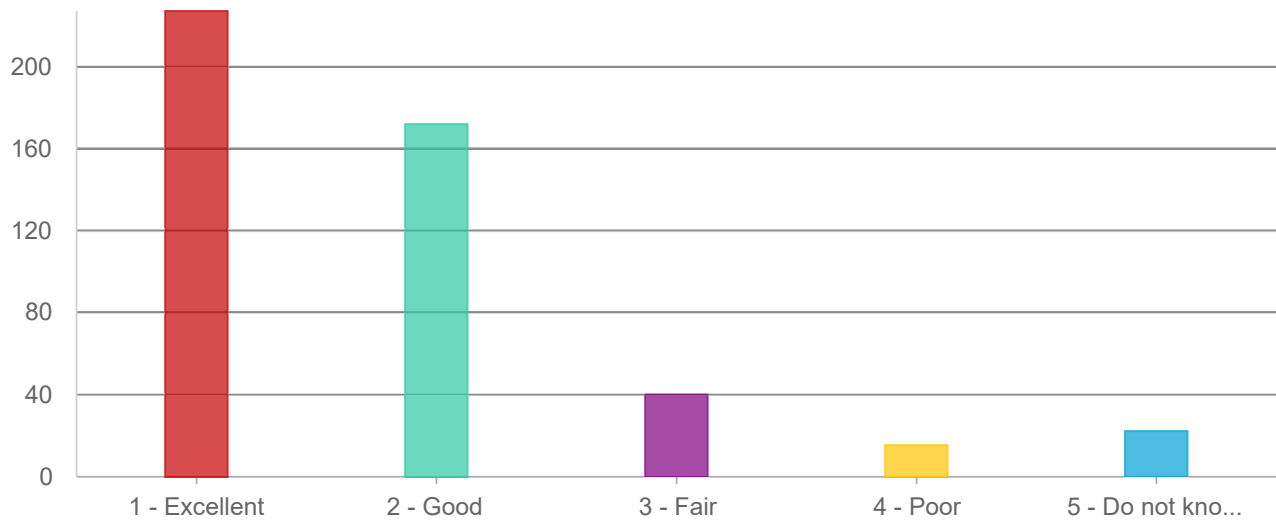
5 - Do not know/not Applicable

206

43.28%

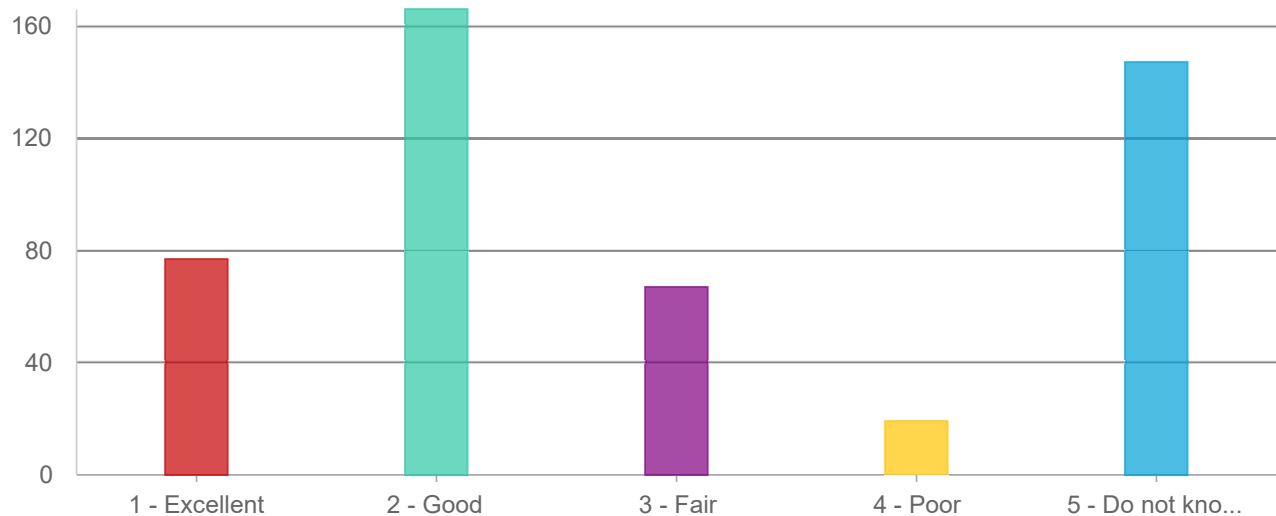
Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Public Library** *

**Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent	227	47.69%
2 - Good	172	36.13%
3 - Fair	40	8.4%
4 - Poor	15	3.15%
5 - Do not know/not Applicable	22	4.62%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Council on Aging / Senior Center ***

Answers**Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent

77

16.18%

2 - Good

166

34.87%

3 - Fair

67

14.08%

4 - Poor

19

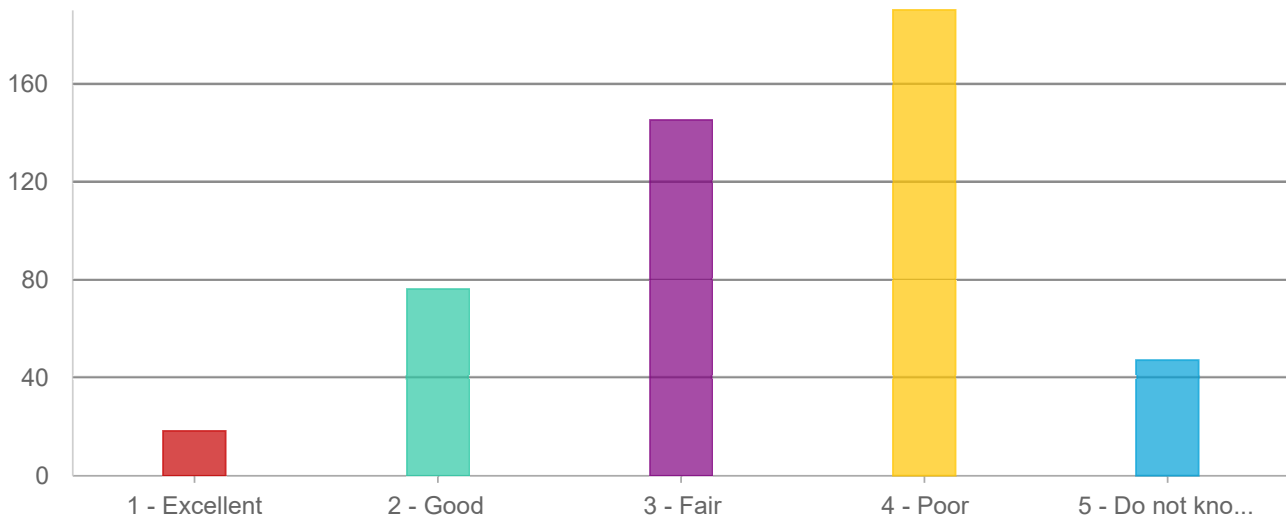
3.99%

5 - Do not know/not Applicable

147

30.88%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **Recreation facilities and services** ***Answers****Count****Percentage**

1 - Excellent

18

3.78%

2 - Good

76

15.97%

3 - Fair

145

30.46%

4 - Poor

190

39.92%

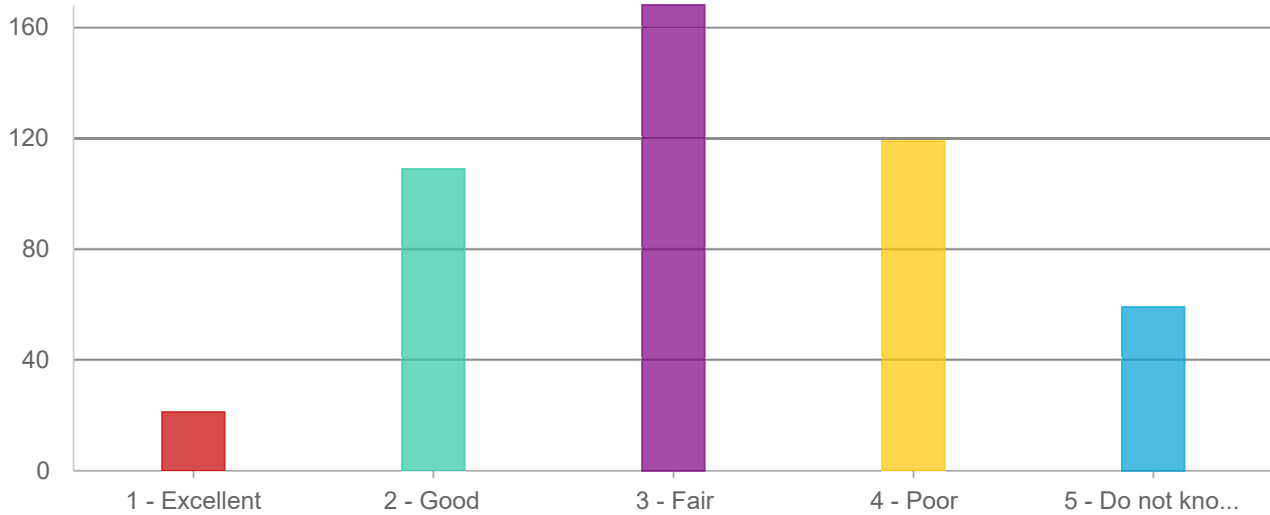
5 - Do not know/not Applicable

47

9.87%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

☐ **School facilities and services** *



Answers

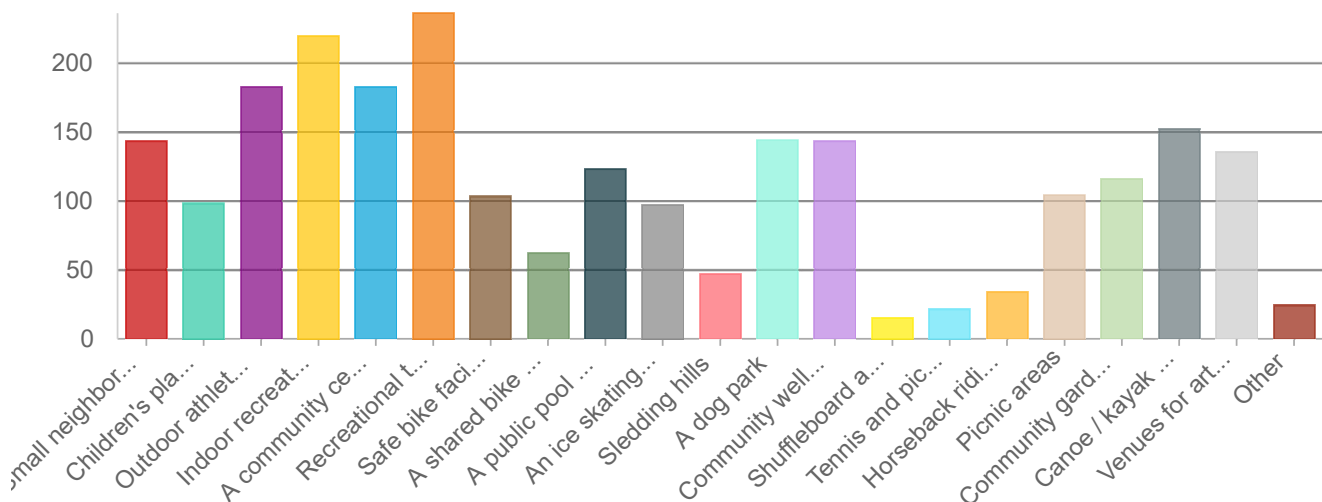
Count

Percentage

1 - Excellent	21	4.41%
2 - Good	109	22.9%
3 - Fair	168	35.29%
4 - Poor	119	25%
5 - Do not know/not Applicable	59	12.39%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

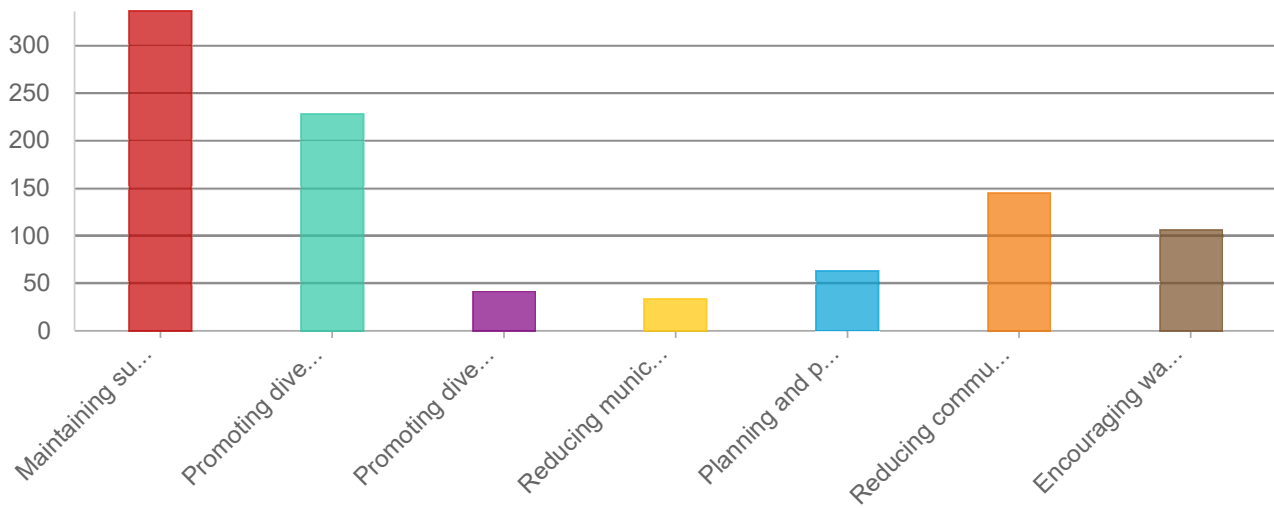
10. Which recreation assets do you think the Town needs the most? Please select your top five. *



Answers	Count	Percentage
Small neighborhood parks	143	30.04%
Children's playgrounds	98	20.59%
Outdoor athletic fields	182	38.24%
Indoor recreational facilities	219	46.01%
A community center	182	38.24%
Recreational trails	236	49.58%
Safe bike facilities	103	21.64%
A shared bike system	62	13.03%
A public pool or splash pad	123	25.84%
An ice skating rink or area	97	20.38%
Sledding hills	47	9.87%
A dog park	144	30.25%
Community wellness / exercise facility	143	30.04%
Shuffleboard and bocce courts	15	3.15%
Tennis and pickle ball courts	21	4.41%
Horseback riding and equestrian trails	34	7.14%
Picnic areas	104	21.85%
Community garden plots	116	24.37%
Canoe / kayak access	152	31.93%
Venues for arts and cultural showcases	135	28.36%
Other	24	5.04%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

11. What are the most important sustainability issues facing the Town? Please select your top two. *

**Answers****Count****Percentage**

Maintaining sufficient cash flow to sustain Town's long-term finances and capital plans

336

70.59%

Promoting diversity in the types of businesses

228

47.9%

Promoting diversity in housing types

41

8.61%

Reducing municipal- and community-scale greenhouse gas/carbon emissions to address the Town's impact on climate change

33

6.93%

Planning and preparing for the long-term impacts of climate change (i.e., building community resilience)

63

13.24%

Reducing community-wide solid waste generation and increasing waste diversion (i.e., reuse, recycling / composting)

145

30.46%

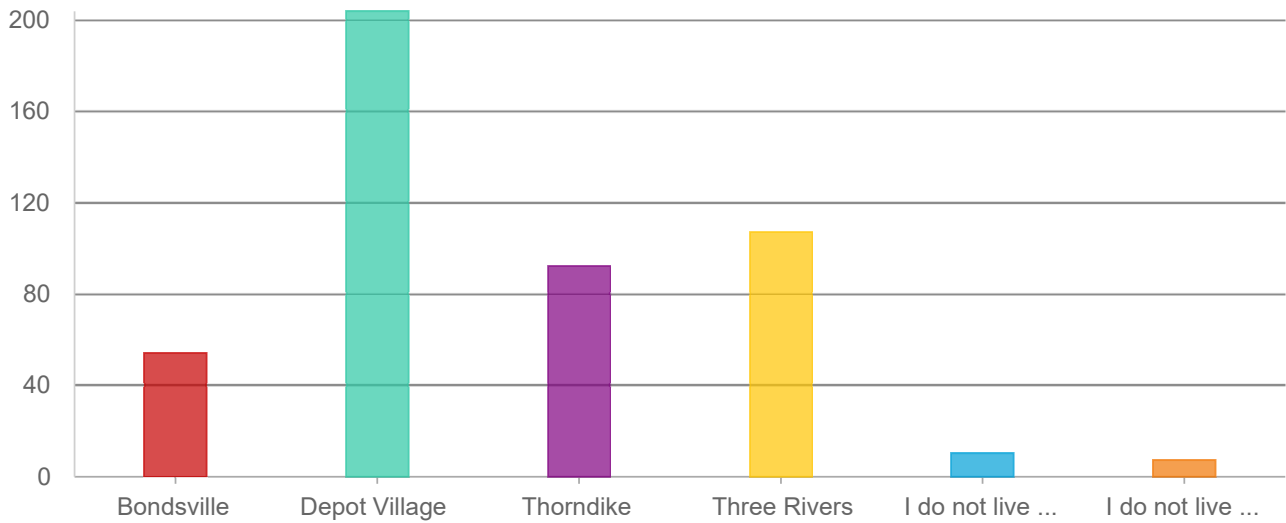
Encouraging water conservation community-wide / planning for a lasting water supply

106

22.27%

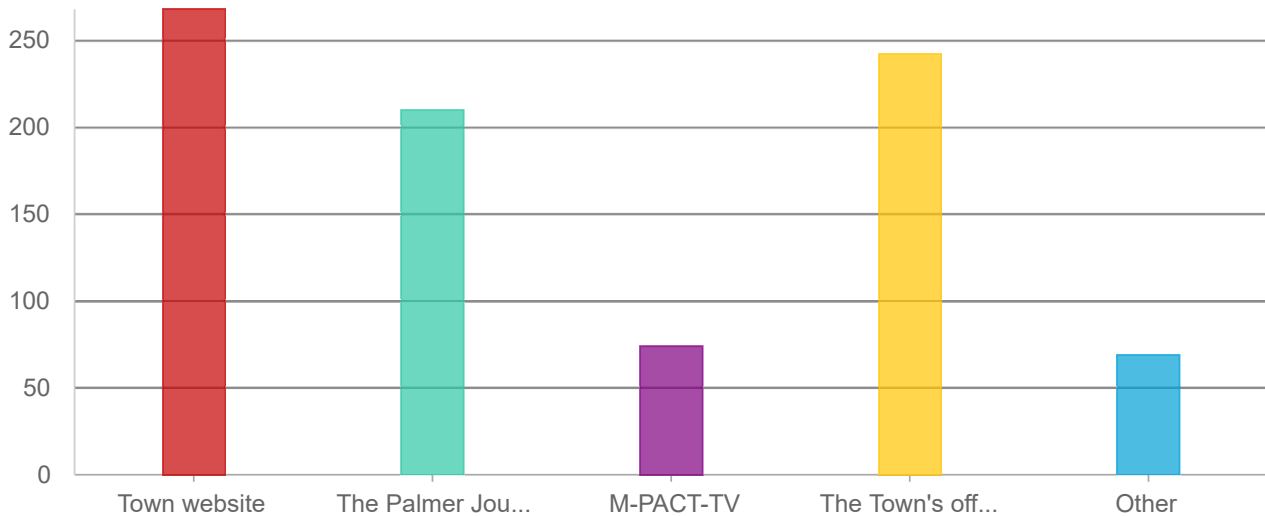
Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

12. What Village do you live in? *

**Answers****Count****Percentage**

Bondsville	54	11.34%
Depot Village	204	42.86%
Thorndike	92	19.33%
Three Rivers	107	22.48%
I do not live in Palmer, but work in Palmer	10	2.1%
I do not live or work in Palmer	7	1.47%

Answered: 474 Skipped: 2

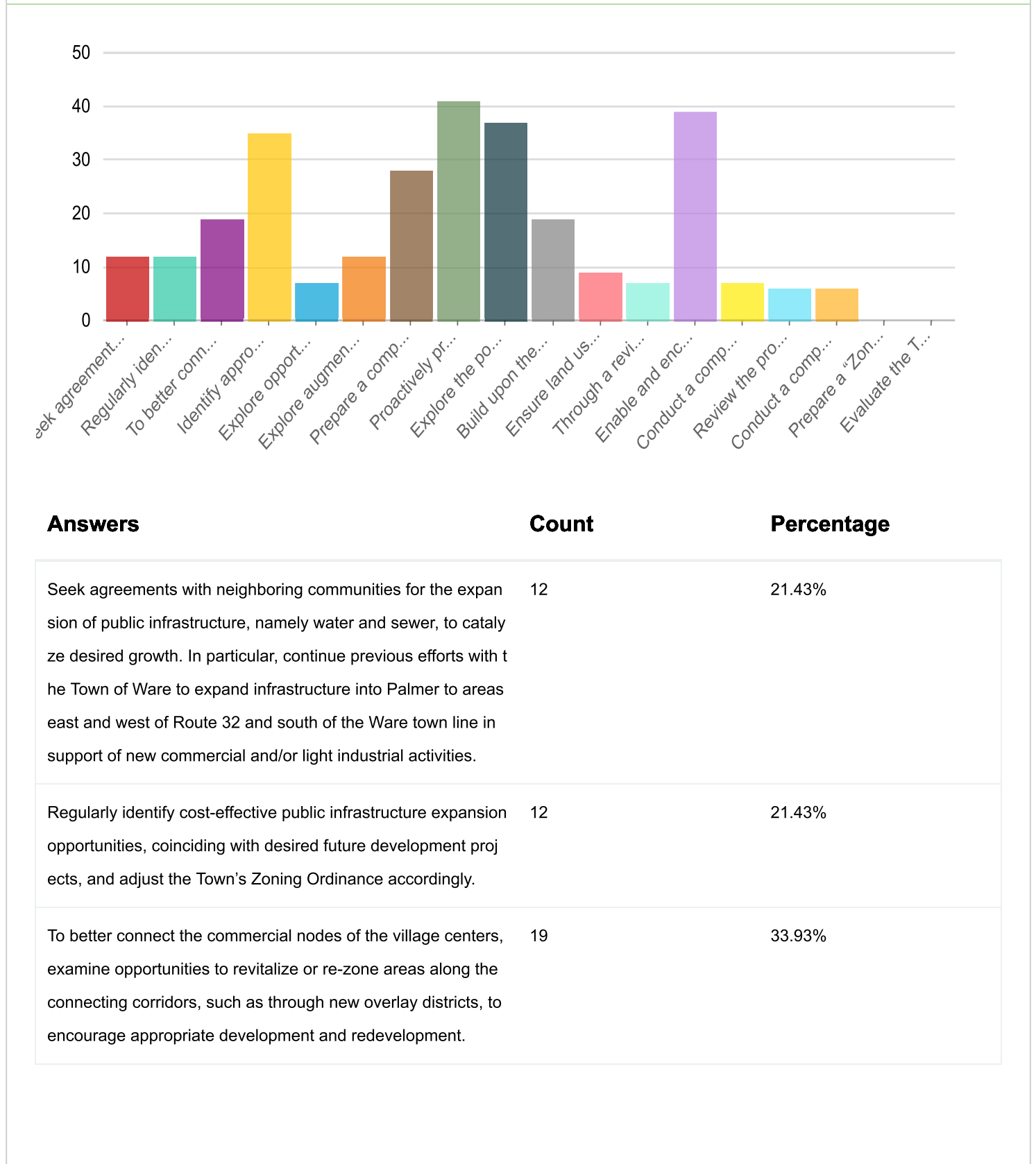
13. How do you regularly follow Town government? Please select all that apply. *

Answers	Count	Percentage
Town website	268	56.3%
The Palmer Journal	210	44.12%
M-PACT-TV	74	15.55%
The Town's official social media accounts	242	50.84%
Other	69	14.5%

Answered: 476 Skipped: 0

Town of Palmer Master Plan, Public Survey #2: Action Prioritization

1. Please review the following draft Actions identified for the Land Use Element of the Palmer Master P...



Identify appropriate locations along Route 32, potentially including just north and south of its intersection with the Massachusetts Turnpike, which would support large-scale commercial mixed-use centers that would achieve local and regional growth opportunities (e.g., hotels, office parks, workforce housing, etc.).	35	62.5%
Explore opportunities to expand the Town Residential Districts along areas currently served by municipal water and sewer, to provide increased development flexibility that can support greater housing choice.	7	12.5%
Explore augmenting the Village Center Districts with elements of form-based code. For example, street frontage/site configuration (e.g., building and parking lot location, building entry location), combined with architectural design guidelines (e.g., façade enhancements, ground level transparency).	12	21.43%
Prepare a comprehensive inventory of vacant and underutilized properties within the Village Center Districts and Town Residential District to understand and prioritize development and adaptive reuse/redevelopment opportunities.	28	50%
Proactively prepare a Neighborhood Transit-Oriented Development Plan for the area around a preferred location for a new rail station associated with the East-West Passenger Rail Project. In doing so, ensure coordination and collaboration with the public residing in the neighborhood and the community at-large, as well as local landowners, private developers, and government stakeholders. This plan shall serve as a guide for future public and private investments.	41	73.21%
Explore the potential of creating a Mill Reuse Overlay District in Thorndike, which could incorporate both commercial and light industrial activities, as well as residential uses, to foster creativity in growth.	37	66.07%

Build upon the existing hub of arts and culture in Three Rivers by reviewing the Town's Zoning Ordinance to ensure artistic uses are properly defined and allowed, providing density bonuses to promote artist live/workspaces, and promoting creative re-uses of vacant buildings as cultural facilities or otherwise allow for temporary or permanent artistic showcases.	19	33.93%
Ensure land use controls within and applicable to Bondsville support and promote the village's recreational assets and enable synergetic development.	9	16.07%
Through a review and revision of the Town's Zoning Ordinance, enable the development of smaller home typologies (e.g., tiny homes, microunits), where appropriate.	7	12.5%
Enable and encourage small-scale modern manufacturing and creative industrial activities (e.g., local food production and packaging, artisan production, brewpubs, distilleries, etc.) in non-industrial zones. These activities typically do not generate negative externalities (e.g., loud noises and odors).	39	69.64%
Conduct a comprehensive review of the Town's zoning and other land use controls to ensure they properly address considerations of climate change.	7	12.5%
Review the provisions of Transfer of Development Rights and Open Space Residential Development in the Town's Zoning Ordinance for enhancement opportunities. Refer to other communities where similar provisions have been successful. Such benchmarking should consider the best practices employed in executing these provisions as well as communicating their merits and benefits to the development community.	6	10.71%
Conduct a comprehensive review of, and revision if necessary, the Town's Zoning Ordinance focused on the criteria of consistency and clarity.	6	10.71%

6/18/2021	Town of Palmer Master Plan, Public Survey #2: Action Prioritization	
<p>Prepare a “Zoning 101” guidebook that clearly lays out the Town’s land use controls and processes. This guidebook should be readily available to the public and shared with potential developers. It can also be used as a reference by other Town departments, boards, and committees to ensure consistency in messaging, policies, and programs.</p>	<p>0</p> <p>0%</p>	
<p>Evaluate the Town’s Zoning Ordinance to identify opportunities to make project permitting more efficient. For example, by removing special permit requirements for specific uses (e.g., accessory apartments for non-family members) and/or by streamlining the special permit and site plan approval processes.</p>	<p>0</p> <p>0%</p>	
<p>Answered: 55 Skipped: 1</p>		

2. Please provide any comments on the above draft Land Use Actions.

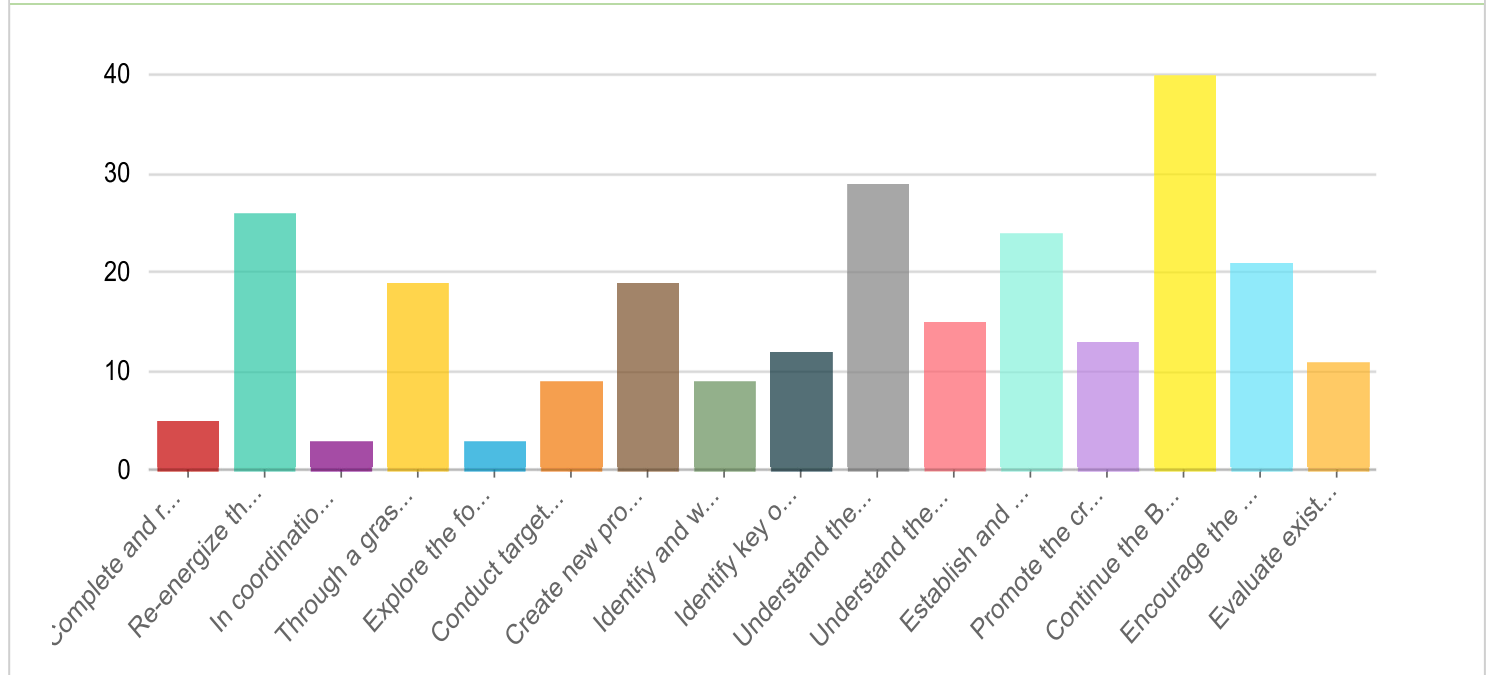
The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Response	Count
Where will the pickleball courts be built?	1
We need to actively pursue and encourage businesses that will generate taxes and then support them and their employees with interesting downtown options (GOOD restaurants, boutiques, salons, all at prices the town can truly support). We need to support their success in every way possible. Reach out to reputable marketing teams with experience in small towns. We need to make Palmer clean and beautiful by enforcing code and continuing to maintain sidewalks and green space so we can attract homeowners. Having nice playgrounds and well maintained access to outdoor activities (festivals, trails, etc...) will continue to bring people to town.	1
Utilize the unutilized land and resources! Make Thorndike Mills the innovation center that it should be for the village of Thorndike that is based around it and the rest of the town can follow suit after it's successful. Depot Village should keep its style and charm and be retrofitted for mixed uses that will be great when the train comes in. Three Rives should be our arts and culture district. Burleigh Park and Bondsville should be our outdoor activities areas. We should have a dog park.	1

Use exsisting rail station to connect future plans for north and south. Stop listening to pvpc who is trying to protect the knowledge corridor. The union station is the place. Help partner with real estate restorations inc. to save and rebuild your exsisting hub. And station And people arrive at a spectacular location. With the Olmsted down park. Let's get smarter about this. No new station is necessary.	1
Test	1
None.	1
It is frustrating to see no progress on the east west railroad stop for Palmer for another year. It only seems to come up during election time.	1
I would like to see the zoning areas have corresponding architectural guidelines. For instance, businesses surrounded by large surface parking lots should not be situated in village centers, but could be appropriate for other areas. I also feel it's important not just to preserve our historic buildings, but to make sure that those areas with a large number of historic buildings are zoned to preserve the area as well as the buildings. I was happy to see that this goal is incorporated in the master plan.	1
I feel this town needs a major change. We need public transportation and access to high speed rail. More money needs to be spent on public education to encourage young families to purchase a home and move here. The schools lost their accreditation. Also having access to public transit people can work in Boston, go to college. We must put in local businesses that will encourage the younger generations. Infrastructure is crumbling. We must do something before we become another Indian orchard. The children and teens need a community center and we need a community outreach advocate program to connect people with services. Also homelessness is a huge problem	1
I feel that there is duplication in some of zoning related questions. I think with the re-thinking of the zoning, the opportunities that present themselves by revamping the zoning other items on the list will be addressed.	1
I believe we should look further into development of a green community and bringing in small businesses	1
I believe expanding public transit and train service from Palmer is the top priority for the community.	1
Do whatever is necessary to make it easier for businesses to come into Palmer and its villages.	1
Begin to explore new water sources for the entire town.	1
	0

Answered: 14 Skipped: 42

3. Please review the following draft Actions identified for the Housing Element of the Palmer Master Pl...



Answers	Count	Percentage
Complete and regularly update a Housing Production Plan to identify housing needs in a targeted way and articulate specific actions, roles, and responsibilities for addressing each need. As part of this plan, attempt to understand the unique aspects of housing in Palmer's four villages to inform land use, zoning regulations, and housing policies, as well as to provide for the efficient and effective allocation of resources.	5	8.93%
Re-energize the Palmer Housing Authority, which has been largely inactive over the past few years. This should include revisiting the rules and regulations of the Authority and providing formal training sessions for board members and staff, as well as exploring an expansion of its programming – particularly in the area of social services.	26	46.43%
In coordination with the Housing Production Plan, evaluate the need to create a "Friendly 40B" policy that would encourage the pursuit and promotion of low- and moderate-income housing that qualify under the state's regulatory requirements.	3	5.36%

Through a grassroots, community-led effort, seek the passage and adoption of the Community Preservation Act. This would provide necessary funding for expanding community housing locally.	19	33.93%
Explore the formation of a municipal housing trust, which would allow Palmer to collect and segregate funds for affordable housing and use these funds for local affordable housing initiatives. Funds for the trust may derive from the Community Preservation Act, if passed and adopted by the Town, along with the Town's general fund, tax title sales, and negotiated developer fees, among other sources.	3	5.36%
Conduct targeted outreach to educate the community on affordable housing, engaging them in constructive dialogues, providing evidence of the widespread benefits of affordable housing, and showcasing design options within the context of Palmer's aesthetic characteristics.	9	16.07%
Create new programs or expand program relationships with partners (e.g., Way Finders, Valley Opportunity Council) to provide greater financial assistance to existing homeowners and potential home buyers in Palmer. Such programs may include, but are not limited to, down payment and closing cost assistance, lease-purchase programs, no-interest loans, financial literacy and mortgage counseling.	19	33.93%
Identify and work to eliminate or minimize barriers to non single-family residential development where currently allowed by the Town's Zoning Ordinance – particularly in the Village Centers – through a review of the Town's dimensional and density and use regulations along with associated approval processes. Engage property owners and would-be developers as part of this process.	9	16.07%

Identify key opportunity sites for non single-family residential development projects, considering underlying land use and zoning regulations, water and sewer infrastructure, hazard potential, and proximity to the mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly Village Centers. Note that the availability of vacant parcels is extremely limited in the Town Residential District, which may present the need for strategic rezoning.	12	21.43%
Understand the barriers to and incentivize the creative re-use of older, underutilized properties – for example, converting unused commercial space into housing or converting older single-family homes into multifamily buildings. Look to local success stories such as the former St. Mary's Episcopal Church on Main Street in Thorndike.	29	51.79%
Understand the barriers to and incentivize (e.g., through items such as density bonuses) the development of a range of smaller housing types to accommodate the demand for such units (e.g., from young professionals, young families, and seniors), which is expected to continue to increase as the average household size continues to decline.	15	26.79%
Establish and maintain relationships with private developers that are experienced in developing senior care facilities (e.g., residential living, skilled nursing centers, fully-equipped medical facilities) for the purpose of bringing these facilities to Palmer.	24	42.86%
Promote the creative design of housing types that complement and meet the needs of Palmer's neighborhoods.	13	23.21%
Continue the Blight and Abandoned Property Reduction Initiative, which was designed to identify blighted and abandoned properties and enable the Town to work with property owners and the community on their clean up. Regularly evaluate the performance of this initiative and publicize its success stories.	40	71.43%

6/18/2021	Town of Palmer Master Plan, Public Survey #2: Action Prioritization	
<p>Encourage the development of neighborhood groups and associations that would not only foster a sense of community, but could also supplement the Town's efforts to improve the look and feel of neighborhoods. As part of this effort, assess the potential for more localized Community Development Corporations.</p>	<p>21</p> <p>37.5%</p>	
<p>Evaluate existing housing improvement programs – both educational and financial - to assess if they are funded adequately, marketed broadly, and are being used effectively, or if they need to be supplemented with additional programming (e.g., targeted programs for seniors). Engage partners including non-profits, lenders, and businesses where needed.</p>	<p>11</p> <p>19.64%</p>	
<p>Answered: 54 Skipped: 2</p>		

4. Please provide any comments on the above draft Housing Actions.

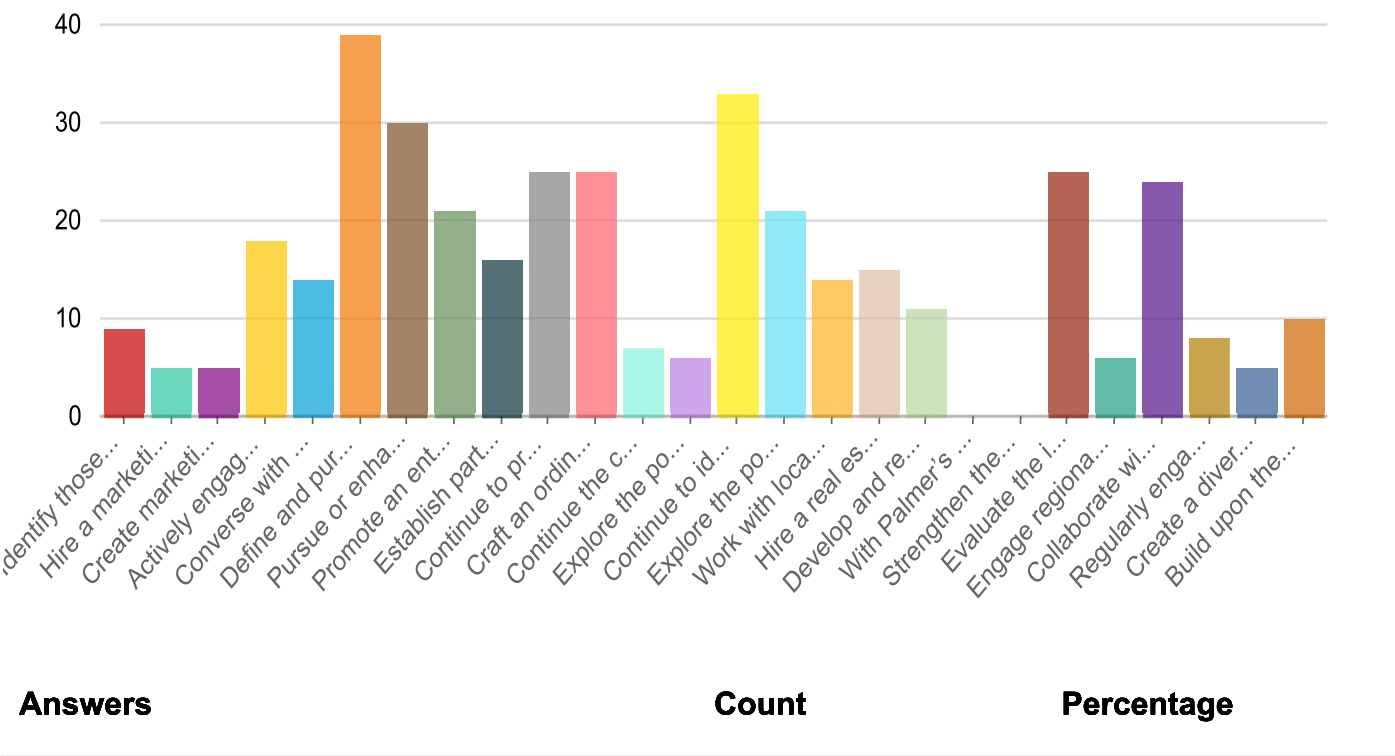
The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Response	Count
Thought needs to be given when working towards opening up housing units. The low income/shelter housing in Three Rivers has changed that small town for the worst. The pressure put on the school system has been unnecessary. Additional programs, ESL programs have caused funding to be taken away from other areas.	1
The question regarding the Housing Authority should not be a question. That should be a matter of fact and should be done as an adjacency of the Town. The Town Manager along with the Town Council should be ensuring that we have an active and effective Housing Authority along with making sure that policies are in place and followed.	1
Test	1
No low income housing. We have enough. Build Better homes. Do not promote smoc. These are problems we should of never taken on.	1
Mixed use modern, sustainable, appealing looking, with nature scape. Options for young and old and all points of life. The water and sewer situation needs to be addressed to make it more realistic and appealing.	1

Low income housing will turn this town into Springfield in all the wrong ways. We need to encourage homeowners, not low-income renters, because homeowners naturally respect and care for their towns more due to their personal investment.	1
Encourage the purchase of single family homes by giving an incentive to prospective buyers ie: a reduction in real estate tax during the first year after the purchase of the house. This would only apply to owner occupied homes. This incentive would be in place only during the first year and if the house is sold in the 5 years after the purchase the home owner must repay the full amount of the reduction in real estate tax. Encourage owner occupied multi-family houses which would encourage pride in ownership. Absentee landlords usually result in deteriorating properties.	1
All of the listed goals are of course worthwhile--it was hard to choose. The goal about creating housing types suitable for Palmer is a bit vague (perhaps deliberately so), but I would prefer to see more multi-unit dwellings in the village centers, possible converted from existing housing where feasible. At least some of these could meet state guidelines for affordable housing. I also think tiny house developments would be great.	1
	0

Answered: 8 Skipped: 48

5. Please review the following draft Actions identified for the Economic Development Element of the P...



Identify those qualities that make Palmer special through an inventory of its assets/resources (e.g., location, recreational opportunities, arts and culture, antiques, and flea markets).	9	16.07%
Hire a marketing/public relations firm to evaluate and make recommendations on the effectiveness of the Town's "brand," including the tagline "The Town of Seven Railroads," and conduct a community dialogue about how the brand could be improved.	5	8.93%
Create marketing materials (e.g., pamphlets, videos, social media, and other web content) around the agreed upon brand to promote the Town's assets/resources throughout the region and state.	5	8.93%
Actively engage diverse and younger residents/families regionally to identify key issues and opportunities (e.g., attractions, school system) that will attract them to or keep them in Palmer.	18	32.14%
Converse with and educate Palmer's diverse and younger residents/families on playing a key role in local government operations and decision-making.	14	25%
Define and pursue those types of economic activities that are important to younger populations, such as physical recreation; arts, culture and education (e.g., science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics); cafes; dining; microbreweries; etc.	39	69.64%
Pursue or enhance supporting infrastructural improvements (e.g., expanded sidewalks, Wi-fi, multi-mode electric vehicle charging stations and sharing).	30	53.57%
Promote an entrepreneurial culture through the provision and possible development of, for example, public markets, pop-up shop infrastructure, makerspace, and shared/collaborative workspaces.	21	37.5%
Establish partnerships between existing and newly located businesses, local and regional student population, and local government to promote paths toward successful employment and careers.	16	28.57%

Continue to proactively work with the owners of vacant commercial properties throughout Palmer, particularly in each Village Center Districts, informing them about opportunities to improve the visual appearance and marketing of their property holdings and encouraging redevelopment, where appropriate.	25	44.64%
Craft an ordinance to regulate vacant commercial properties that creates a monetary disincentive for owning such properties without the legitimate pursuit of sale or lease.	25	44.64%
Continue the coalition consisting of representatives from the various Town departments (i.e., the Neighborhood Improvement through Code Enforcement Committee) and expand to include Town residents. This coalition shall routinely deal with individual properties of concern in a concerted manner and regularly discuss plans to address real estate issues in Palmer more generally.	7	12.5%
Explore the potential for the establishment of Design Review Guidelines and a Design Review Committee to review and provide recommendations – related to architectural and sign design – for building projects in the Village Center Districts.	6	10.71%
Continue to identify and pursue local and state grant opportunities to improve streetscapes and multi-modal facilities in the village centers (e.g., more pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, and adding appropriately designed lighting, benches, trash bins, etc.).	33	58.93%
Explore the potential for a medical overlay district to promote the development of a medical cluster around the Baystate Wing Hospital, with potential for assisted living/nursing homes, medical equipment manufacturing, medical research, etc.	21	37.5%
Work with local and regional organizations to develop and fulfill strategies to build upon the existing hub of arts and culture in Three Rivers and make connections to other art establishments and activities throughout the Town.	14	25%

Hire a real estate advisory firm to explore the potential for new economic clusters. This may include alternative energy in Thorndike via the Thorndike Mill, recreational businesses in Bondsville, and antique shops as well as traditional downtown retail and service-oriented businesses in Depot Village.	15	26.79%
Develop and regularly update a "Guide to Starting and Growing a Business in Palmer" to encourage the growth of small businesses in alignment with envisioned economic development. Such guidance may identify and describe local resources, permitting and zoning processes, tax policies, and available financing (e.g., business loans and/or grant opportunities).	11	19.64%
With Palmer's industrial-zoned land almost fully built out, explore opportunities to expand upon the supply of parcels available for industrial development.	0	0%
Strengthen the Town's relationships with existing businesses to support their continued operations and growth (i.e., identify their evolving needs and how these needs relate to the Town's infrastructure and services).	0	0%
Evaluate the impact that Palmer's tax policy and rates have on economic development and adjust as appropriate.	25	44.64%
Engage regional partners to conduct an economic development study to understand how Palmer performs against and fits in with communities within the Pioneer Valley Region.	6	10.71%
Collaborate with regional entities to pursue the re-development of the Monson Development Center, which would serve as a source of local employment and could induce economic activity in Palmer.	24	42.86%
Regularly engage property owners and strategic partners to identify prime development sites throughout the Town and develop clear visions and marketing strategies for their redevelopment.	8	14.29%

6/18/2021	Town of Palmer Master Plan, Public Survey #2: Action Prioritization	
	Create a diverse network of representatives to continue the work started during the Economic Development Roundtable of this Master Plan. This network may take the form of an Economic Development Committee or an advisory body.	58.93%
	Build upon the success of the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce to create additional business networks/organizations that will drive economic growth and represent the interests of the Town's market clusters.	1017.86%
Answered: 56 Skipped: 0		

6. Please provide any comments on the above draft Economic Development Actions.

The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

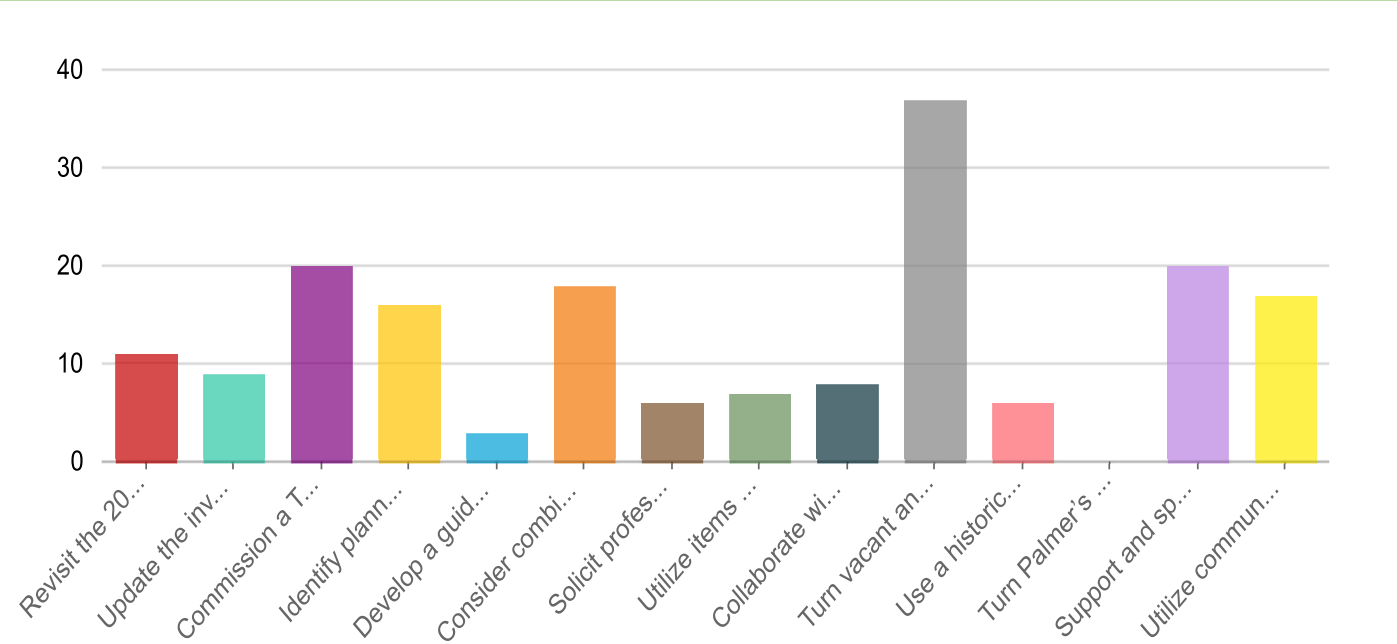
Response	Count
We need to attract good businesses that want to thrive and invest in our town, not just take advantage of us. We need a great food store, like Trader Joe's. They need to be actively recruited and built around. We should nurture arts and entertainment and make our town aesthetically appealing and maneuverable in many modes. We should encourage outside healthy family eateries next to the parks. We should also look for mid sized data technology industry. There are wasted spaces and opportunities all around our town for interesting business and mixed use spaces. If people let great sites go unutilized, they should be fined heavily and the money put into a town economic development grant fund.	1
Push Monson to create a college based collaboration With Wilbraham Monson academy. Or a hillsdale college at that location. Create a school of a higher Standard.	1
None.	1
make use of the town's rivers and dams to create more recreational areas near these rivers and possibly make more use of the town's dams to create power	1
Let's keep the focus in Palmer, although seeking to understand how other successful towns operate would be very worthwhile. A cohesive town system is important. The few attractions in town are hard to find, seem off-putting due to their surroundings and would benefit from a directory of sorts. Ex: the lack of a functioning rec department is a huge shame.	1

It is an embarrassment to be the Town of Seven Railroads with zero stops. Palmer's future depends on daily service to Springfield, Worcester, and Boston, especially now that people are only working 1-3 days in the office. Only after rail transit service is restored can we consider publicizing the Town of Seven Railroads.	1
Instead of being negative by creating monetary disincentive ideas efforts should be made making it a positive incentive by providing them ways to turn a profit and make money vs. trying to think of ways to take money away. Will only invest in property if it is in their best financial to do so, and if so they should benefit (with profit) for taking the risk and in the end the town benefits. If they win the town wins. The town needs to seek out bigger regional or national players. The town needs to be a leader in enticing, recruiting and luring these entities. A design manual for downtown entities already exists for the Town of Palmer. A design manual was created in early 80s for the Downtown Business Partnership for Depot Village but can be used in any village.	1
Incentivize making a cool town to live in that also functions financially. It would pay in the long run to be a trendy arts and tech rich resourced environment. Students from UMass could build great experiences and memories here and stay to raise their families and have great careers....If we have recreation, jobs, services and housing for each stage of life.	1
I believe that doing something with the Monson State property is something that would greatly improve this area. Perhaps a college would be the perfect fit. Bringing in students and staff would bring people to Palmer to live, eat, shop, and spend their money.	1
Bringing new businesses to town is key (microbrews, farm stands/small grocer with organic options and locally sourced goods, deli) and also new restaurants. Thinking of ways to bring people into Palmer— focus on marking our trail heads and maintaining them, more water access options, look into Rail Explorers and see if something similar could be built on our abandoned railways. Finding something special about our town/community and really running with it! I feel like our history of railroads, historic properties, and beautiful land should be a focus.	1
Bicycle and pedestrian accommodations and the redevelopment of Monson Developmental are top priorities for the area.	1
Absolutely need to improve Cellular service. I never have 3g anywhere in Palmer. People worry about 5G when do we even have 3G. Living in Bondsville in two separate properties I had NO cell service. Renewable energy infrastructure to power villages, town buildings, schools etc would save the town a lot of money and be good for the planet. This will also encourage residents to use it for their own homes. We have solar panels and just added two more panels. Town wide recycling would be a bonus for younger generations to make them want to live here. Community involvement in general is something Gen x Y and Z are important. Homeless shelters, soup kitchens, daycare headstart programs or after school/summer programs and year round Breakfast and lunch programs also lifts up residents.	1

0

Answered: 12 Skipped: 44

7. Please review the following draft Actions identified for the Historic and Cultural Resources Element ...



Answers

Count

Percentage

Revisit the 2009 Heritage Landscape Inventory report and its recommendations. Ensure that each priority heritage landscape is inventoried and consider local, state, and/or federal designation. Assess the current status and condition of these resources and be proactive about supporting their continued use.

11

19.64%

Update the inventory forms for major concentrations of historic and cultural resources, like the villages. Consider using Massachusetts Historical Commission matching grant programs that provide additional benefits like helping towns develop request for proposals to find qualified consultants and establishing guidelines to ensure survey consistency.

9

16.07%

Commission a Town-wide Preservation Plan or neighborhood-based Preservation Plans to supplement and inform the execution of this document's implementation plan. Use the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, and Massachusetts Cultural Council for technical advice and potential funding sources for preservation plans.	20	35.71%
Identify planning ordinances and tools that are provided through the Massachusetts General Laws, such as the Community Preservation Act as well as a scenic road bylaw, affirmative maintenance bylaw, adaptive reuse bylaw, which have been useful in neighboring communities to protect heritage resources. Be proactive about addressing misconceptions that result in residents and property owners making decisions based on incorrect or outdated information.	16	28.57%
Develop a guidebook for Historical Commission members with reference information. Include information on important bylaws; responsibilities of the Commissioners; brief accounts of the Commission's successes, challenges, and programs on an annual basis; contact information for regional, state, and federal heritage entities; and common funding programs.	3	5.36%
Consider combining the collections of the Historical Commission and Elbow Plantation Historical Society. Bringing these collections together into a single space will enhance their research and educational benefits and make climate control and archival organization more efficient.	18	32.14%
Solicit professional advice about archival storage, cataloguing, and access for collections. This will help Palmer understand the best way to preserve and use these invaluable items. Professionals will also help the Town establish priorities that makes this a multi-step initiative rather than a single, huge outlay of financial and labor resources.	6	10.71%
Utilize items from the collections for miniature, online, and social media-friendly educational experiences on a regular basis. For example, doing a "50 Objects that Made Palmer" series of posts weekly over the course of a year.	7	12.5%

Collaborate with museum studies programs to create a catalog that is accessible and will be easy to maintain in the future. Explore the possibility of using Palmer's collections for class projects that evaluate cataloging needs and systems, develop record types, and establish a usage guide to ensure consistency in the catalog into the future.	8	14.29%
Turn vacant and underutilized facilities into a makerspace/studio space. Providing spaces to create and interact is vital to supporting Palmer's artists and storytellers and attracting new talent. Using historic buildings, which often have layouts that facilitate studios and classrooms, maximizes funding opportunities through history and cultural-based agencies. Establishing an artist-in-residence program would promote Palmer's arts community to a wider audience.	37	66.07%
Use a historic survey initiative as an opportunity for engagement. Crowdsource information to attract attention and collect information that can be used in inventory forms. For example, use Historypin (www.historypin.org) to collect photographs of houses and streetscapes to use in survey forms, and collecting historic property information using a mobile survey application and a "train-the-trainer" program that allows residents and community groups to join in.	6	10.71%
Turn Palmer's distinct village identities into an asset by creating place-based stories. The village downtowns, residential streets, and infrastructure development are ready-made environments to learn about who lived in these villages and why, and how they all interacted in the built environment. Stories can foster more active connection and engagement than buildings alone.	0	0%
Support and sponsor programming specifically for students and families. Offer activities that cross multiple topics like arts, heritage, and engineering and integrate into science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics education. Work with regional schools, vocational programs, camps, and colleges to use and develop students' skills while promoting Palmer's heritage assets.	20	35.71%

Utilize community, regional, and state partners to enhance culture and programming. Team up with local conservation groups and artists for interactive experiences, bring heritage programs directly to youth groups, and use established networks such as the Western Massachusetts Coalition of Historical Commissions.

1730.36%

Answered: 52 Skipped: 4

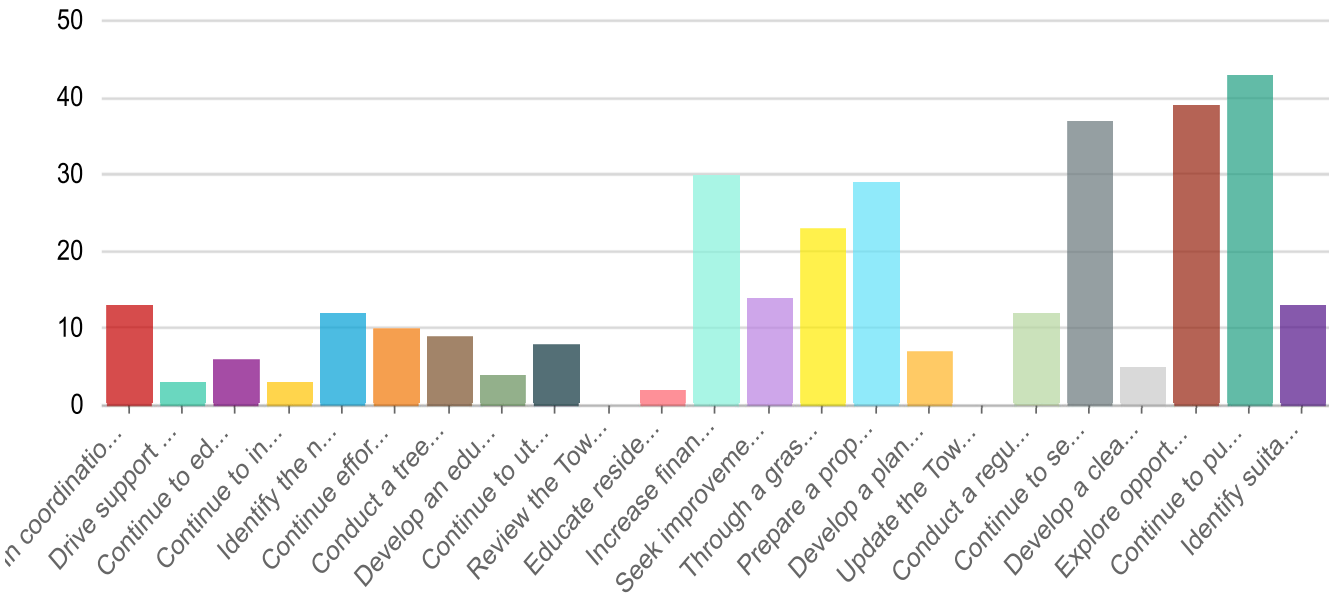
8. Please provide any comments on the above draft Historic and Cultural Actions.

The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Response	Count
We have so much history here. It should be honored and preserved by making our town beautiful again and great for the people that live here and inviting to people that may come in the future. We can have all of those qualities while moving into the 21st century. We really need to reclaim our towns assets.	1
There are items noted above that the various organizations can perform, with volunteer help but first need to get the foundation of resources established. I am all for preservation but I am also a bit guarded as guidelines or regulations become too restrictive, with the understanding that some of those are state and federal criteria. The current senior center Memorial Hall should be used for the historical archives and museum of the town. What fitting use of the building as it was the library once. The senior center could be moved to the converse middle school that is accessible and has many rooms for activities and has a gym for various exercise programs.	1
Test	1
Please focus on maintaining some of what Palmer used to be. So much of our "charm" downtown was lost by fire and the demolition of the old bank. I'd love to see us really focus on grant funding the assist with marking historical homes and providing funds to preserve them.	1
None.	1
Memorial Hall (if the Senior Center is moved to Converse and promote intergenerational interaction with the other activities there.) could be utilized for preserving the collection of the Palmer Historical Commission, if not, the Thorndike school should be utilized for it. The Thorndike School could also have annexed town hall offices for various town commissions.	1

Carful of this to much over reach.	1
Also historical tours and information is something the towns fb page gets a lot of positive feedback. Perhaps putting together a book and or Video available online would get residents interested in the towns history. I believe using the historical link to trains to encourage a high speed rail stop into town might be a palatable way to get support.	1
Establish programs in our 4 schools that would educate our children with regard to all aspects of Palmer's history. Not just high school children, but children of all grade levels.	1
	0
Answered: 9 Skipped: 47	

9. Please review the following draft Actions identified for the Natural Resources and Open Space/Recreation



Answers
Count
Percentage

In coordination with partners, such as the Opacum Land Trust and Massachusetts Department of Fish & Game, continue to expand the Town's inventory of conservation lands and protected open spaces, particularly within the eastern areas of town, including the Shaw and Pattaquatic Districts, and with a focus on lands designated as Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscapes under BioMap2.	13	23.21%
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----	--------

Drive support for the development of conservation restrictions or agricultural preservation restrictions on privately held lands through strategic engagements and provision of technical assistance.	3	5.36%
Continue to educate private landowners, as well as appropriate Town staff, on Chapter 61 tax incentive programs for forestry, agricultural land, and recreational land, and ensure the Town adequately considers its right of first refusal as such opportunities arise. In this process, consult the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan's approach to actions and acquisitions.	6	10.71%
Continue to investigate potential vernal pools and certify them where applicable.	3	5.36%
Identify the need for, and engage partners in the development of, one or more land stewardship plans for Town-owned conservation land – e.g., Swift River Green Belt, Shaw District. Such plans would establish management goals and provide management guidance over a (typical) 10-year period.	12	21.43%
Continue efforts to become a Tree City USA® Community, including the establishment of a tree care ordinance, to demonstrate the Town's commitment to planting, maintaining, and managing tree resources, as well as to gain preference for grant awards under the Urban and Community Forestry Program at the Department of Conservation and Recreation.	10	17.86%
Conduct a tree inventory and analysis – including pest and disease information - for all public trees on streets, parks, schools, and other public areas to inform a tree management program for maintenance, new plantings, and replacements, as necessary.	9	16.07%
Develop an educational program that increases community understanding and support for the protection and enhancement of the Town's natural resources.	4	7.14%
Continue to utilize federal and state resources, including partnerships (e.g., the Department of Agricultural Resources), for public education campaigns to prevent the spread of invasive species.	8	14.29%

Review the Town's ordinances and policies to ensure that invasive species control and prevention measures are adequately addressed with respect to private sector development.	0	0%
Educate residents and businesses about stormwater and the municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permit requirements through public outreach campaigns, brochures, social media posts, and webinars with a focus on local impaired waterways.	2	3.57%
Increase financial/staffing resources allocated to the maintenance and renovation of the Town's open space and recreation assets (e.g., Burleigh Park).	30	53.57%
Seek improvements at Chase Memorial Park, such as the introduction of irrigation and parking, to enable greater use of this facility which exists within an environmental justice community.	14	25%
Through a grassroots, community-led effort, seek the passage and adoption of the Community Preservation Act. This would provide necessary funding for open space preservation and the acquisition and development of outdoor recreational facilities.	23	41.07%
Prepare a proper inventory of the walking/biking trails within the community and centralize it, along with relevant information such as access and use restrictions, on the Town's website – with emphasis on usability and accessibility - and through an alternate physical medium (e.g., brochure).	29	51.79%
Develop a plan to identify and improve means of access to the Town's open space and recreation assets with an emphasis on equity, including compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines.	7	12.5%
Update the Town's 2014 Open Space and Recreation Plan to guide the maintenance, protection, and improvement of its open spaces and recreation assets over the next several years, and enable the Town to continue to be eligible for state funds for conservation and recreation land acquisition and improvement projects.	0	0%

Conduct a regular (e.g., bi-annual) community survey to identify and prioritize recreation needs, and utilize the survey results to plan the Town's future recreation investments.	12	21.43%
Continue to seek opportunities to develop walking/biking trails, emphasizing connectivity with existing trails within the community and with those in adjacent communities.	37	66.07%
Develop a clear legal agreement template for public use on private land with limited landowner liability clause.	5	8.93%
Explore opportunities to establish permanent recreation facilities and programming at the former Converse Middle School (e.g., youth basketball).	39	69.64%
Continue to pursue the design and construction of in demand recreational amenities, including one or more boat launches along local waterways, a dog park, a public beach at Crystal Lake and Forest Lake, and winter sport facilities.	43	76.79%
Identify suitable parcels, with priority given to those in underserved neighborhoods, for the construction of community gardening plots. Partner with local organizations that can support their development, organization/operation, and maintenance.	13	23.21%

Answered: 54 Skipped: 2

10. Please provide any comments on the above draft Natural Resources and Open Space/Recreation A...

The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Response	Count
When will the pickleball courts be built?	1
To much over reach. Down size this operation. Invest in beach areas and boating. And canoe launches. People don't need the government to walk on their land or figure out what you're pushing here.	1

This town desperately needs a rec department!! So many young families are going to neighboring towns' rec departments. I can imagine older folks would benefit from classes at a rec department as well. The Three Rivers playground is in desperate need of updating. That whole park has such great potential.	1
The CPA is again an important program to pursue as is the multi use and purposes of the former Converse Middle School. The DPW needs to be relocated possibly to the Burleigh Park area. Burleigh Park fields could be developed elsewhere in town that might be more accessible and with potentially better security. I feel some of the items above are possibly considered as tactical in means of achieving the strategic goal.	1
Test	1
Our Natural Resources and Open Space are what makes this town worth working on. Mass Rail Trail is so important, great businesses and opportunities grow along them. Our town should be 100% walkable, bike able and dog friendly. The town should be mentally stimulating, people, mobility and activity focused. Burleigh Park should be returned to its glory of being the "Center" of Palmer culture and community activity. We should have a Dog Park with a reasonable annual membership fee for upkeep. Dogs aren't allowed in town parks, where families go to be together (dogs should be included). We should have more river access for swimming, kayaking and other recreation, instead of having to go to Belchertown.	1
None.	1
Dog Park! It's an important need and would be a great asset...worth the money and disclaimers could negate liability. Utilize Burleigh Park to its full potential and make it a community epicenter for recreation. Move the DPW across the street. Build an invasive species incinerator and bring income from other towns in with its use to fund Natural Resources and sustainability goals. People need to be able to ride bikes at parks, they are currently not allowed.	1
Consider the establishment of a transfer station. Look to our surrounding communities that have facilities that provide this service to their residents. Most residents would welcome a facility that could recycle many items that are currently thrown into a landfill.	1
Burleigh park is the biggest opportunity I see anywhere in town. It has such potential but not even a basketball hoop to use. Basketball courts are not expensive when most of it already exists. Also need tennis courts there and how about an actual playground. Its empty there except for baseball for a reason.	1
A recreation facility at Converse would be wonderful for our community and the communities around us!	1

6/18/2021

Town of Palmer Master Plan, Public Survey #2: Action Prioritization

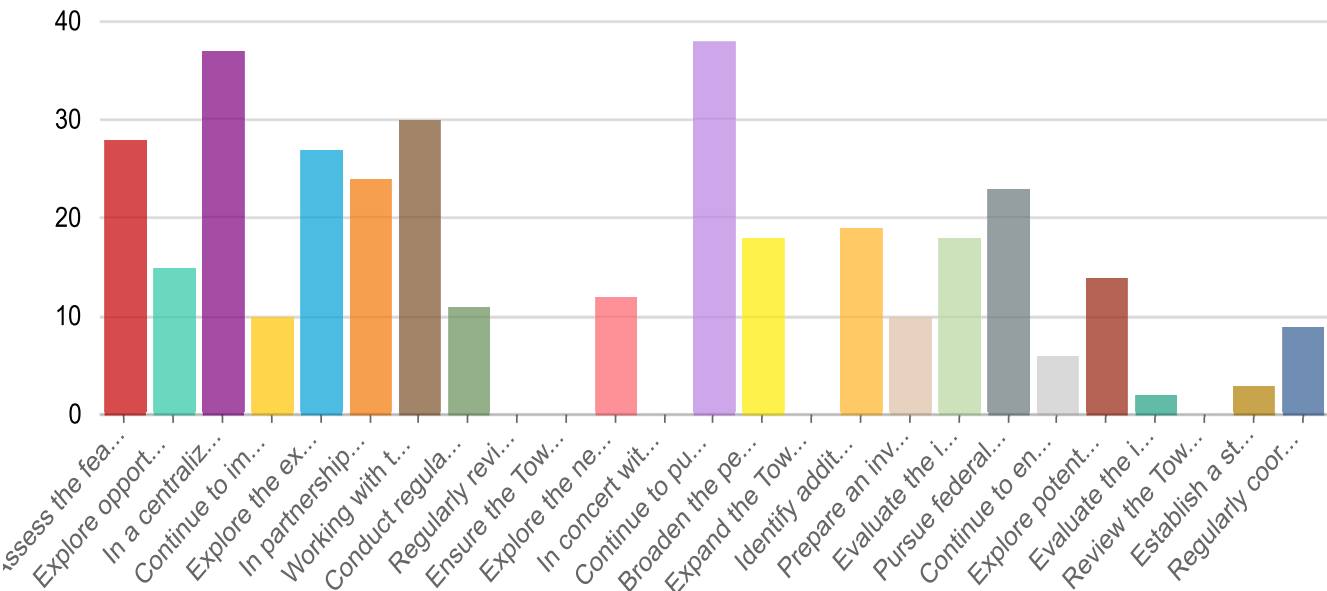
A cooperative land management between Palmer and Mass. Fish and Wildlife allowing the town to provide residential parking passes for spots at the beach which would fund the maintenance of the sanitation can and two trash receptacles would be excellent. Defining and empowering the palmer police to be more involved in the policing of this area in exchange for a portion of the fines would also help the quality of use at Forest Lake.

1

0

Answered: 12 Skipped: 44

11. Please review the following draft Actions identified for the Public Facilities and Services Element of...



Answers	Count	Percentage
Assess the feasibility of consolidating the Town's Fire Departments and/or Water Districts to potentially minimize excessive personnel and capital assets, as measured against the Town's needs and regulatory standards.	28	50%
Explore opportunities to make the services and fees associated with the Town's Water Districts more equitable, while maintaining the highest standards for water quality and meeting the water demands of the Town's population overall.	15	26.79%

In a centralized manner, inventory and develop re-use plans for Town-owned properties, including the Converse Middle School, to promote their highest and best use in consideration of community needs/benefits.	37	66.07%
Continue to implement the Americans with Disabilities Act Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan, and work with an accessibility consultant on all the Town's future facility construction activities, where appropriate, to ensure the incorporation of design, policies, and products that enhance access for all users.	10	17.86%
Explore the expansion (or relocation) of the Senior Center to enable greater use of the facility by the Town's elderly population and perhaps, the larger community, and an expansion of programming now and in the future.	27	48.21%
In partnership with the School Committee and/or School Administration, assess the implications – adverse or beneficial – of the student consolidation (i.e., grades 6 through 12) at the Palmer High School and pursue recommended changes as identified.	24	42.86%
Working with the School Department and other local educational authorities, continue to explore opportunities to integrate science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics into curricula.	30	53.57%
Conduct regular surveys to understand the public perception of the Town's services and evolving service needs (particularly with respect to human services [e.g., mental health, youth development, substance abuse, food/nutrition, etc.], and pursue program changes accordingly.	11	19.64%
Regularly review the Town's trending and projected broader demographics (e.g., race, income, age, health status, educational attainment, labor force status, etc.) and assess appropriate adjustments relative to the Town's service provisions to meet anticipated needs.	0	0%
Ensure the Town's public safety departments (i.e., police, fire, etc.) have the necessary members and support staff to meet the existing and projected service needs of the community.	0	0%

Explore the need for support staff dedicated to the Town's economic development activities and pursuits and pursue role fulfillment.	12	21.43%
In concert with the Town's capital improvement planning process, perform a fleet vehicle assessment to understand if the Town's departments have the correct number, types, and sizes of vehicles in their inventories, and plan for optimizing fleet efficiency. Ensure new and replacement vehicle purchases meet the Town's Fuel-Efficient Vehicle Policy.	0	0%
Continue to pursue federal and state grants and other advantageous financing for the maintenance/ improvement and, as necessary, replacement of the Town's existing infrastructure, including through competitive state infrastructure grants (e.g., MassWorks Infrastructure Program).	38	67.86%
Broaden the performance of asset analyses to comprehensively determine the existing and future condition of the Town's infrastructure and develop phased, long-term capital plans for the maintenance/ improvement and, as necessary, replacement.	18	32.14%
Expand the Town's investment in an asset management program or tool that will, at minimum, enable the Town to understand what assets are in its inventory, along with their age, location, and condition.	0	0%
Identify additional revenue streams for the Community Development Department that can support its work in building and repairing infrastructure vital to the health and safety of the Town's residents, among its other assignments.	19	33.93%
Prepare an inventory and regularly monitor the condition of non-Town owned infrastructure within the municipal boundaries for the purpose of advocating for needed improvements with private, state, and federal entities.	10	17.86%
Evaluate the impact of, and opportunities associated with 5G-enabled technologies on the Town's infrastructure and services.	18	32.14%

Pursue federal and state grants for the expansion of the Town's wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. Such investments should prioritize the necessary upgrades at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and connected assets (e.g., pump stations [and generators] and sewer lines).	23	41.07%
Continue to engage in and be proactive with respect to expanding public-private partnerships to support the expansion of the Town's wastewater infrastructure among other infrastructure improvements.	6	10.71%
Explore potential partnerships with adjacent communities for the development of a regional wastewater treatment plant and ancillary facilities.	14	25%
Evaluate the imposition of limited impact fees to fund a revolving account for Town-wide wastewater infrastructure among other infrastructure improvements.	2	3.57%
Review the Town's existing stormwater ordinance(s) for compliance with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's standards and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's municipal separate stormwater system (MS4) permitting program, and review opportunities to be more proactive to reduce development-associated erosion and run-off.	0	0%
Establish a stormwater utility fund as a revenue source to support the Town in meeting its MS4 permit requirements.	3	5.36%
Regularly coordinate with the Town's Water Districts to understand their future capital plans and seek alignment with the Town's economic development and land use goals.	9	16.07%

Answered: 54 Skipped: 2

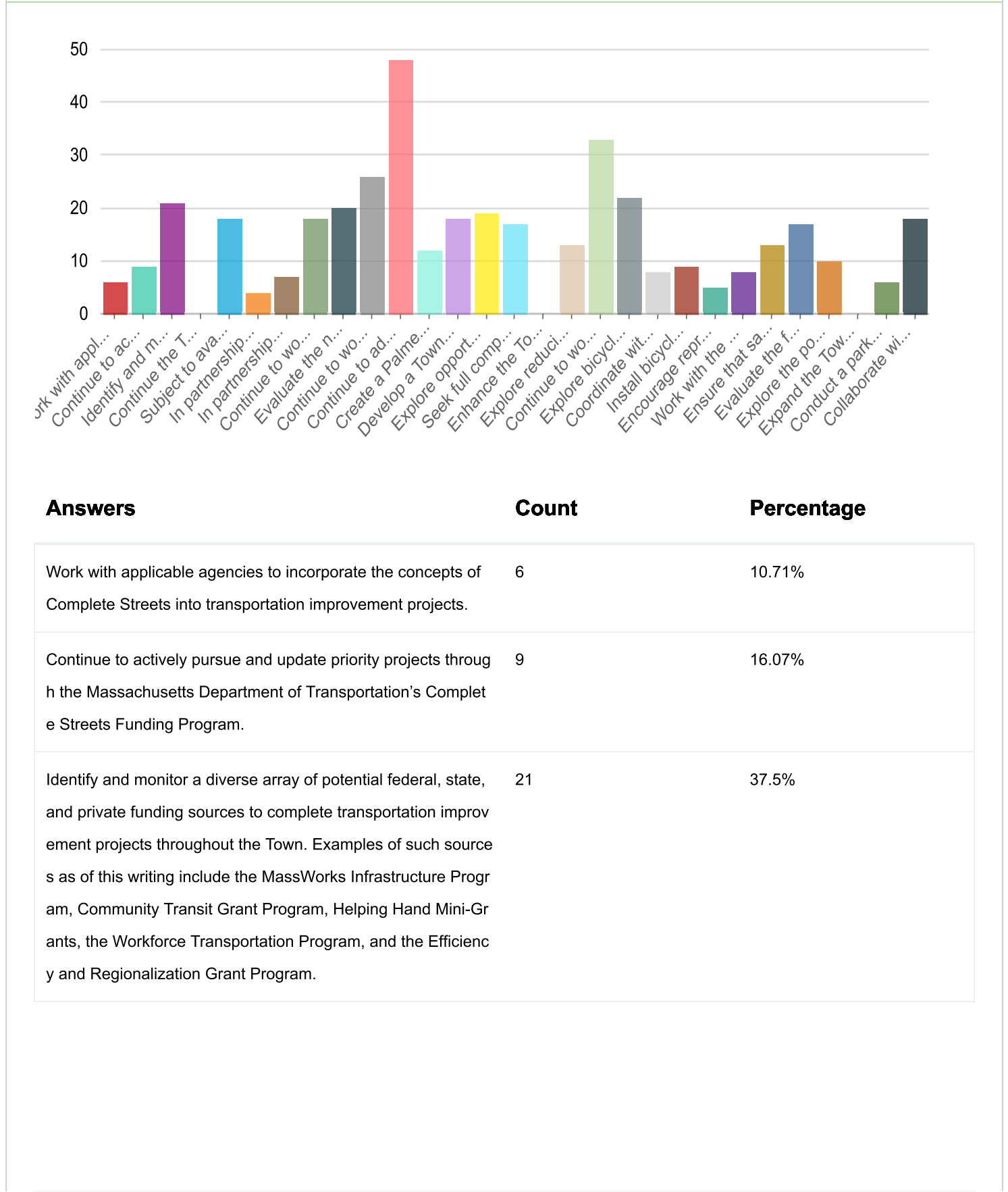
12. Please provide any comments on the above draft Public Facilities and Services Actions.

The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Response	Count

They should relocate the senior center to Converse school and include some on site residency. It provides central location to hospitals, shopping, libraries, transportation, and all down town amenities for ease of access to and from the site for our seniors.	1
There seems to be repeated or related items specific to the Wastewater Treatment Plant possibly suggesting it is reaching end of life or need of expansion or other. I also feel there are multiple suggested items that I would consider as management issues that the Town should be handling year to year in general operations and prudent planning.	1
Test	1
Public infrastructure in town needs a lot of work. The DPW needs a new and better building somewhere else. They don't have enough support, personnel or equipment and everyone and everything is overworked. There should be brush hogs going up every side street clearing the edges of all the roads before the street sweepers, so that plowing can be done correctly in the Winter. I don't trust the private entity superintendent of the all of water departments, that's private gain and the expense of logic and the citizens. There should be a better Animal Control and Education Center.	1
Our DPW needs support in personnel. They do an amazing job, but need more resources and guiding roles to do the research, funding sourcing and planning before things get to them. The DPW and Waste Water Treatment plant should be built as top of the line as possible for the future, with a Regional Invasive Species incinerator.	1
It is extremely inappropriate to have grade 6 students mixed with grade12. Bring back the middle school.	1
I am very concerned about 6th and 7th graders being merged into Palmer High. I remember when I entered PHS as an 8th grader in the late 90s that we grew up quickly and were influenced by our older peers. I cannot even imagine how quickly these preteens are "growing up" within the high school walls and then add on all of the influences of technology and social media	1
Help the town look at its historic locations for investment. The township Will prosper only if it makes the right move at union station let's not look foolish here. What's at union station for infrastructure can only be duplicated for Maybe 50 million. And connections north & south are on the horizon. Think smart and ahead. Don't get distracted by idiots. Or people that can't see palmer's future.	1
Converse Middle School - community center for all ages	1
Begin to explore new municipal water sources for all of the villages, Depot, Thorndike, Three Rivers and Bondsville. Consider using Quabbin water in the future for all of Palmer.	1
	0

13. Please review the following draft Actions identified for the Transportation and Mobility Element of t...



Answers

Count

Percentage

Work with applicable agencies to incorporate the concepts of Complete Streets into transportation improvement projects.	6	10.71%
Continue to actively pursue and update priority projects through the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's Complete Streets Funding Program.	9	16.07%
Identify and monitor a diverse array of potential federal, state, and private funding sources to complete transportation improvement projects throughout the Town. Examples of such sources as of this writing include the MassWorks Infrastructure Program, Community Transit Grant Program, Helping Hand Mini-Grants, the Workforce Transportation Program, and the Efficiency and Regionalization Grant Program.	21	37.5%

Continue the Town's pavement management program as currently carried out by the Department of Public Works. Include a sidewalk management program as part of this effort to maintain existing sidewalks and identify areas of needed improvement. Prioritize sidewalk construction and repair within the vicinity of Town offices, commercial centers, senior and subsidized housing developments, the Palmer Senior Center, in school zones, and around medical facilities.	0	0%
Subject to available funding, advocate for the expansion of existing transit services (i.e., routes and schedules), including Pioneer Valley Transit Authority's Palmer/Ware bus routes and the Quaboag Connector, to provide Palmer residents with more convenient access to local/regional destinations and regional populations with greater access to Palmer's employment and commercial centers.	18	32.14%
In partnership with Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, Quaboag Connector, and other relevant organizations, explore innovative methods to increase transit ridership, such as advancing the digitization of service information and developing audience-specific materials (e.g., brochures, info sheets).	4	7.14%
In partnership with Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, Quaboag Connector, and other relevant organizations, administer a public transit rider survey(s) to discover what works best for transit users and to identify any populations with unmet transportation needs. Strive to target disadvantaged populations in the survey's distribution, e.g., those associated with the Palmer Food Share and Ware Regional Recovery Center.	7	12.5%
Continue to work with Massachusetts Department of Transportation and local officials to monitor traffic levels and crash frequencies at high-crash locations, while identifying problem intersections and roadway segments. As part of this action, continue participation in the state's Road Safety Audit Program and implement intersection improvements, as necessary.	18	32.14%

Evaluate the need to restore major, structurally deficient transportation infrastructure owned by the Town prior to making funding commitments. Consider criteria such as impacts to mobility, business and workforce, and equity.	20	35.71%
Continue to work with local industrial operations as well as freight rail and trucking operators to understand and address the long-term needs of the railway infrastructure that is critical to Palmer's economy.	26	46.43%
Continue to advocate for the East-West Passenger Rail Project with a stop in downtown Palmer (Depot Village) and work with Massachusetts Department of Transportation and other stakeholders in advancing this important project that offers opportunities for improved local and regional connectivity, private partnerships, development, and improved infrastructure.	48	85.71%
Create a Palmer Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to oversee the implementation of pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, obtain funding for improvement projects, advocate for pedestrians and cyclists, and maintain continued dialogue with regional planning agencies.	12	21.43%
Develop a Town-wide Bicycle Network Master Plan to improve Palmer's bikeability, as well as provide connections to off-road paths and surrounding communities.	18	32.14%
Explore opportunities to enhance or expand pedestrian and bicycle access in ways that support retail, business activities, schools, and arts/ cultural events. Seek funding through Massachusetts Department of Transportation's newly launched Shared Streets and Spaces Program.	19	33.93%
Seek full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act within Town right-of-way (e.g., curbs, sidewalks, pedestrian crossings/signals) by ensuring Americans with Disabilities Act requirements are implemented as part of any new applicable construction or replacement project.	17	30.36%
Enhance the Town's sidewalk network, particularly along its arterial corridors, while incorporating traffic-calming measures to connect Palmer's villages.	0	0%

Explore reducing the vehicle travel lane width of Main Street in Depot Village to allow for bicycle lanes and/or expanded sidewalks to accommodate all modes of travel.	13	23.21%
Continue to work with Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, along with private landowner(s), to complete connections along the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail in Palmer between Belchertown and Ware.	33	58.93%
Explore bicycle and pedestrian improvements along Shearer Street, Route 181, and Route 32.	22	39.29%
Coordinate with surrounding communities on the potential to join Valley Bike Share to enhance bicycle access and local/regional travel and connectivity.	8	14.29%
Install bicycle parking and/or storage in strategic locations around each of the town center areas, employment centers, commercial centers, and other Town assets/amenities.	9	16.07%
Encourage representation from the Bay State Wing Hospital on local transportation committees to ensure transportation-related projects and policies are implemented or enacted with public health in mind.	5	8.93%
Work with the Bay State Wing Hospital to commit to incorporating bicycle and pedestrian improvements in its institutional master plan and/or setting aside financial resources for such improvements.	8	14.29%
Ensure that safe and accommodating bicycle and pedestrian access is incorporated into local development projects. Explore additional enforcement mechanisms that can be integrated into the site plan review process.	13	23.21%
Evaluate the feasibility of implementing adaptive signal systems along high congestion corridors for locally maintained traffic signals, including along Thorndike Street, Ware Street/Route 32, North Main Street (in Palmer), and South Main Street (north of High Street in Bondsville).	17	30.36%

Explore the potential installation of smart technologies (i.e., streetlights, small cell wireless facilities, etc.) and related technology to capitalize on the early adoption of autonomous and connected vehicles, along with associated data collection, maintenance, and distribution.	10	17.86%
Expand the Town's network of publicly-accessible electric vehicle charging stations and work with private property owners to expand such stations outside of the Town's control.	0	0%
Conduct a parking study on major roadways, particularly in the town center areas of Depot Village and Three Rivers, to identify and address current and future curbside demand, taking into consideration autonomous vehicles, drop-off/pick-up, outdoor dining, parklets, etc.	6	10.71%
Collaborate with Massachusetts Department of Transportation on the development of a new Park and Ride lot for the Massachusetts Turnpike. Explore the potential of locating this lot near the downtown to increase the area's visibility and visitation.	18	32.14%

Answered: 54 Skipped: 2

14. Please provide any comments on the above draft Transportation and Mobility Actions.

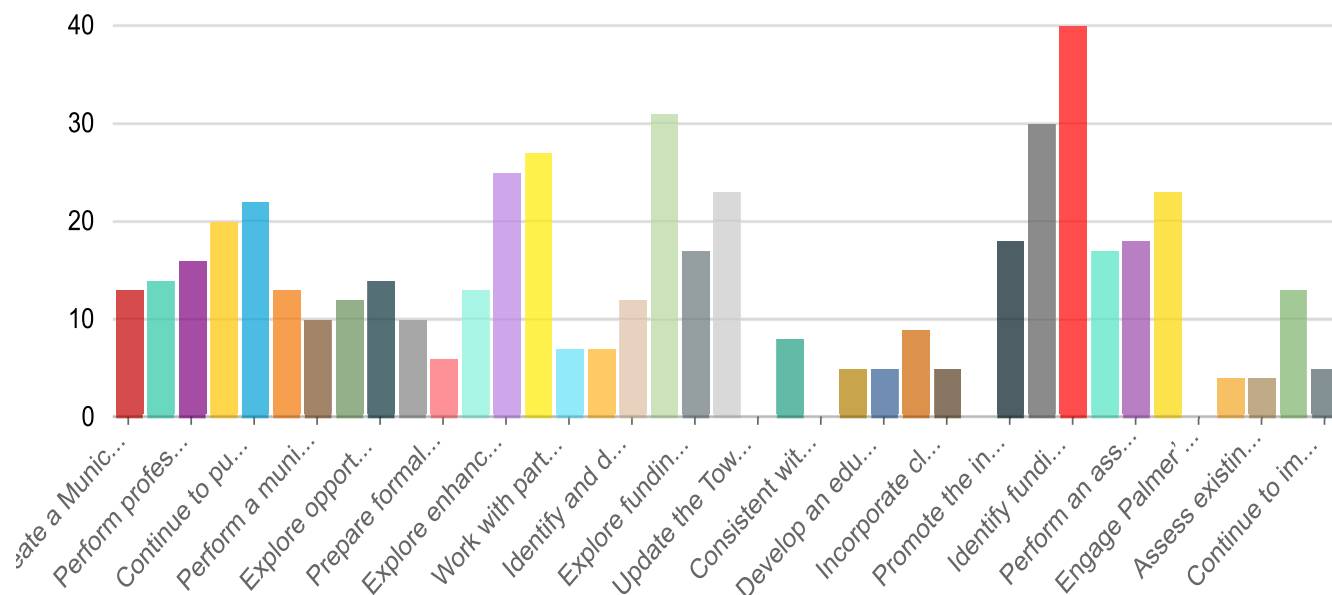
The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Response	Count
There appears to be a fair amount of self serving suggestions by the PVPC within these action items. As for grants, I don't think they should be listed as action items to be selected from as I would think it is within the duties and obligations of the town administration to pursue these as a matter of course in the best interest of town and not only if the general public opinion lists it as a priority. It is a known fact that the PVPC has not been a supportive entity for the east west train passenger rail stop in Palmer as they gave all the support and interest to the 91 corridor. It is time that they provide the same support for Palmer's passenger rail stop as it is the cross roads going NES&W serving the region.	1
Test	1

Palmer's future success depends upon a Depot Station stop. Many people are commuting into work only 1-3 days a week now and need access to communities where they can purchase a home.	1
None.	1
Mass Rail Trail is so important, great businesses and opportunities grow along them. Our town should be 100% walkable, bike able and dog friendly. We should have ADA crosswalks where ever we can. The town should be mentally stimulating, people, mobility and activity focused. The East West Rail possibility should be completely nurtured, proactively planned and supported 100%. We should have a town trolley/train again, that's what our town was designed around with the mills.	1
Many people walk and bicycle along route 181, especially along the stretches near the mobile home park by the river (it doesn't directly adjoin but my impression is people are coming to it from there), and also near Pathfinder. (Great sidewalk improvements there btw.) It desperately needs a bike/pedestrian path, especially in these areas. I know the state did extensive work along it not many years ago. Should there be an opportunity, we should advocate as much as possible for expanded pedestrian/bicycle access. We also need to connect the sidewalks near the turnpike to the businesses there. The Shearer St. sidewalk ends just before Ocean State and Big Y, even though many people from Palmer Green Estates and other apartment buildings near the Pike entrance walk to these businesses.	1
Forward looking function and aesthetic should be an important focus to promote success of the town's future, especially planning for the train stop and intergenerational mixed use town housing, transportation connection, public health, recreation and sustainability planning.	1
By the Hess station tear it down. Put a round about in it with a Fountain and flowering in the middle. Keep traffic flowing. Restore union station to its glory with the Olmstead park.	1
A sidewalk along 181 would be wonderful	1
	0

Answered: 9 Skipped: 47

15. Please review the following draft Actions identified for the Sustainability and Climate Change Elem...



Answers

Count

Percentage

Create a Municipal Aggregation (also known as Community Choice Aggregation), which can be used to procure a competitive supply of electricity as well as switch everyone in Palmer who is on basic service over to cleaner energy. Explore a regional collaboration, as appropriate.

13

23.21%

Participate in and promote the State's Solarize Massachusetts Renewable Target incentive program, along with other renewable energy incentive programs, to increase solar development in Palmer consistent with the community's desires and needs, as well as to install solar plus storage on Town-owned facilities.

14

25%

Perform professional energy audits or assessments at all municipal buildings to identify measures that would make them operate more efficiently. Such assessments should be performed on a regular basis – at least every 10 years.

16

28.57%

Where applicable, perform deep energy retrofits (e.g., upgrading mechanical systems, lighting systems, and appliances; insulating walls, roofs, crawlspaces, and foundations; upgrading heating, ventilation, and air conditioning and plumbing; replacing windows; and air sealing) at existing municipal facilities. The installation of renewable energy systems and the electrification (i.e., heat pumps) of building systems should be pursued where feasible.	20	35.71%
Continue to pursue and obtain funding for energy efficiency projects and clean energy solutions through the State's Green Communities Grant Program.	22	39.29%
Work with regional jurisdictions on the planning of a new regional Wastewater Treatment Facility, and in doing so, advocate for the integration of a sludge-to-energy system.	13	23.21%
Perform a municipal fleet vehicle assessment to ensure the Town has the right vehicles necessary to achieve its mission based on current and projected conditions, as well as to define a replacement schedule that focuses on the procurement of electric or other alternative fuel vehicles.	10	17.86%
Conduct educational outreach (e.g., fairs) to share information on residential energy efficiency and home weatherization programs, concentrating on those that provide financial and technical support to low-income and elderly households (e.g., Mass Save – HEAT Loan Program, Residential and Small-Scale Ground-Source Heat Pump Rebate Program, Low-Income Energy Affordability Multifamily).	12	21.43%
Explore opportunities to provide locally administered financial incentives for energy efficiency improvements for the commercial, industrial, and residential sectors, such as the establishment of an Energy Revolving Loan (re: the Property Assessed Clean Energy model).	14	25%
Evaluate the potential for hiring an Energy Coordinator, or supplementing municipal staff resources with external resources, for the facilitation and management of local energy conservation and efficiency initiatives.	10	17.86%

Prepare formal municipal and community-scale greenhouse gas emissions inventories to understand the largest sources of emissions and greatest opportunities for reduction.	6	10.71%
For all new construction and major renovations of Town-owned facilities and infrastructure, ensure they are certifiable by a third-party green building rating system (e.g., Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, WELL Building Standard, Envision) as applicable. Require all Town-owned facilities to have full electrification, where feasible, and strive for net-zero energy buildings.	13	23.21%
Explore enhancements to and the expansion of the Town's waste management services, including recycling and composting. Engage regional partners as advantageous to the Town.	25	44.64%
Strive to improve the recycling stream in Palmer by engaging the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and becoming a Recycle Smart Partner, and administering an associated educational program.	27	48.21%
Work with partners to advance a formal means of tracking municipal solid waste generation and material diversion in Palmer.	7	12.5%
Provide training for town staff and board/committee members on climate-related public health threats, impacts, and response, especially related to vulnerable populations.	7	12.5%
Identify and develop transportation options and support for vulnerable residents, including communication strategies and resource supplies (food, water, necessities), in case of disruptions in transportation, mail, and/or federal assistance programs, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.	12	21.43%
Find ways to expand broadband and Wi-Fi access throughout Palmer, particularly in limited-access and low-income areas, to ensure reliable access to information and town-wide communications.	31	55.36%

Explore funding or other programming to provide small solar and battery storage systems to support individuals with in-home health care devices and those in need of essential services, such as refrigeration of medications.	17	30.36%
Seek the establishment of an emergency shelter, potentially at local school buildings.	23	41.07%
Update the Town's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and make it available to the public, including by digital means.	0	0%
Incorporate potential climate change impacts into the Town's emergency management and response planning, as well as hazard mitigation planning.	8	14.29%
Consistent with the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program, continue to engage the community in learning about how climate change is affecting the town and ideas for how to address it.	0	0%
Engage partners in the provision of public community emergency preparedness training workshops for residents (e.g., what to do under various climate impact scenarios and emergencies, how to support vulnerable neighbors, etc.).	5	8.93%
Develop an educational program for local businesses to raise awareness of the potential climate change impacts facing Palmer, as well as to share information on emergency preparedness measures and resource distribution.	5	8.93%
Engage local businesses within Federal Emergency Management Agency Flood Hazard Areas (e.g., Sherwood Lumber Corporation, Maple Leaf Distribution Services) on climate preparedness and collaborate on adaptation measures to ensure their operations are able to remain in Palmer for the long-term.	9	16.07%
Incorporate climate hazard considerations (e.g., flooding) into the Town's land use regulations to ensure future development is not unnecessarily put at risk for damage.	5	8.93%

Review the Town's Wetlands Bylaws to incorporate climate change considerations related to potential habitat loss/degradation, flood storage, etc.	0	0%
Promote the incorporation of green infrastructure measures/best practices into all future construction projects, new and major renovations.	18	32.14%
Conduct a town-wide inventory of local roadways (especially official evacuation routes), culverts, bridges, and other transportation and stormwater infrastructure to assess condition; identify vulnerable infrastructure in need of maintenance, repair, or replacement; and prioritize projects for investment. This includes prioritizing and implementing repairs and upgrades to Route 20 to alleviate impacts from flooding.	30	53.57%
Identify funding opportunities for bridge repair. All bridges in Palmer have spans greater than 25 feet, and therefore, are ineligible for Massachusetts Department of Transportation's Small Bridge Grant Program.	40	71.43%
Continue to assess the feasibility, including costs, potential locations, and funding opportunities, for the relocation of the Department of Public Works building out of the floodplain.	17	30.36%
Perform an assessment of the Wastewater Treatment Plant, its vulnerabilities and adaptive capacity based on future storm events and flood projections.	18	32.14%
Evaluate and acquire additional backup power capacity (e.g., generators, distributed/renewable energy sources) across the Town's critical facilities and emergency shelters.	23	41.07%
Engage Palmer's Local Emergency Planning Committee in frequent discussions about potential climate change impacts and their implications on Palmer's critical facilities and infrastructure.	0	0%
Develop guidelines and/or design recommendations for new public infrastructure to consider increased storm frequency and enhancing flood resiliency.	4	7.14%

Assess existing stormwater infrastructure and improve its condition based on future storm events and flood projections.	4	7.14%
Continue to pursue annual Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Action Grants through the State, potentially in collaboration with regional entities to maximize resources and effects.	13	23.21%
Continue to implement the remaining high priority actions, as well as other actions as feasible and reasonable, identified as part of the Town's Community Resilience Building Workshop, funded under the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Planning program.	5	8.93%

Answered: 51 Skipped: 5

16. Please provide any comments on the above draft Sustainability and Climate Change Actions.

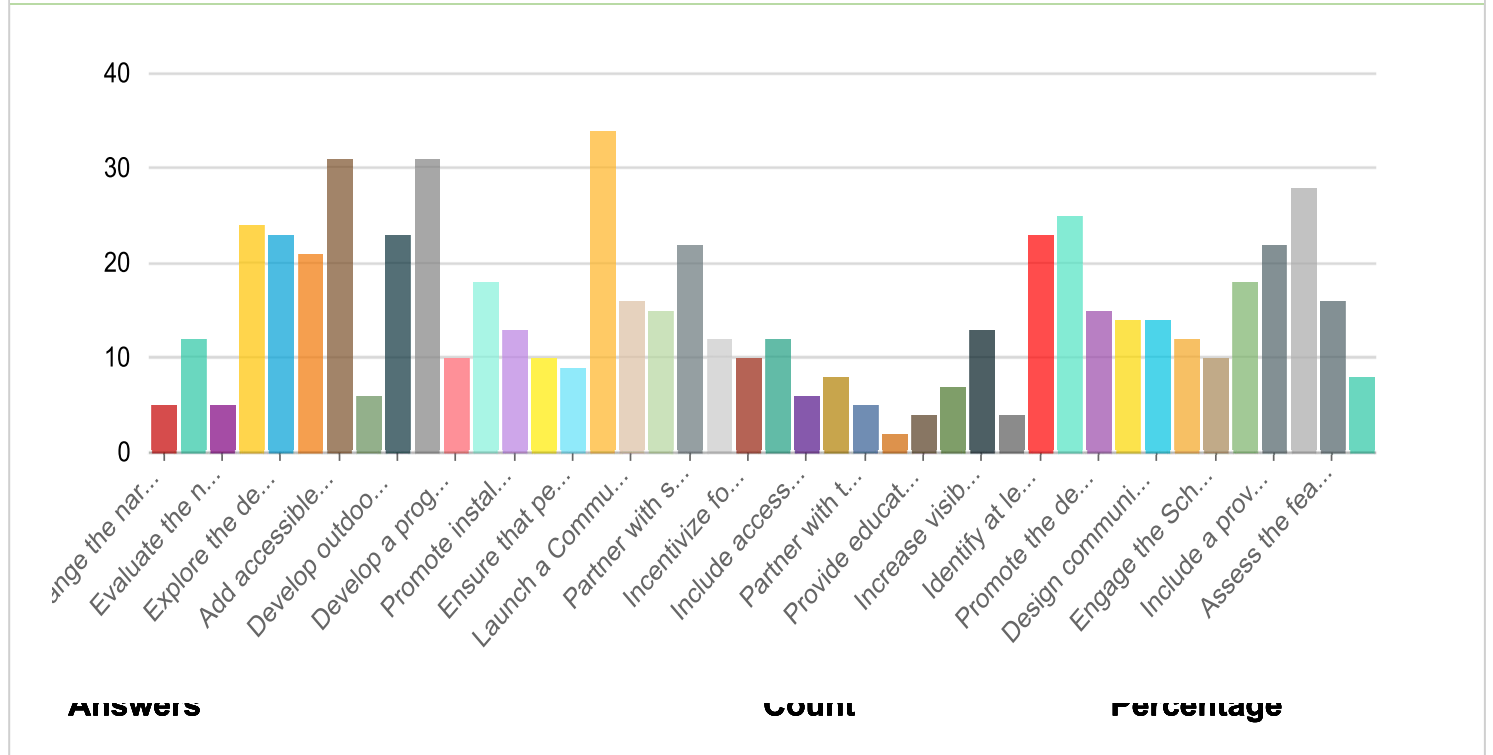
The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Response	Count
You shouldn't have to select 12. Half of these are politically driven and dumb.	1
We should be planning for severe weather changes and emergencies. Our town needs serious water run off considerations and work. We should have a committed staff person for water runoff and a separate one for future energy and sustainability planning. The officials in town should take the state of the water departments into in depth and serious consideration, even get the state involved if needed. The Windy Mills should be more utilized for energy and water and even low cost town wi-fi or be fined. The town lawyer should retroactively look at some of the past land agreements to see what can be done about the public losses and private gains that have occurred with the goal of looking toward improving the future sustainability. The town had been fairly self sufficient a few generations ago, we need that great quality back for progress/resilience. We have too many cooperate outsourcing situations and costs that go along with them, it hurts us as individual residents and as a community.	1
To much government programs	1
Test	1
None.	1
Look into use of unused rail branches to become a full waste/ recycling center for the town.	1

Keeping with the times will make Palmer desirable.	1
I'm very pleased that the town has already been pursuing energy saving initiatives in our municipal buildings, and installed electric car charging stations. The charging station at the library allowed me to get an electric car, since I could charge it there while my own charging station was being installed. Since there are so few stations in our area, I wouldn't have gotten the car without this back up. I would love to see next a town-wide solution to waste management (difficult, I realize) and possibly a composting site for kitchen waste. But the most important goal should be continued improvement of our wastewater management and improvement of our waterways.	1
I believe the former Converse Middle School has been designated as an emergency shelter or used in that fashion over the years when needed. I believe it is equipped with an emergency generator. Other villages however may need to identify similar type sites.	1
Forward looking function and aesthetic should be an important focus to promote success of the towns future, especially planning for the train stop and intergenerational mixed use town housing, transportation connection, public health, recreation and sustainability planning. We should design our towns common spaces like useful garden parks. We need to preserve natives and diminish invasive species. I think that a municipal invasive species incinerator here would be a regional asset.	1
	0

Answered: 10 Skipped: 46

17. Please review the following draft Actions identified as part of the Public Health Addendum of the P...



Change the narrative about the aging population to celebrate the wisdom that is held by an older population.	5	8.93%
Ensure that older adults, people with disabilities, and other marginalized populations are included in planning for improvements to the social and built environments in Palmer.	12	21.43%
Evaluate the needs of older adults and people with disabilities on a regular basis to ensure that they know about the transportation services available to them and that the services meet their needs in terms of travel destinations and support.	5	8.93%
Evaluate walking routes between areas of dense residential development and retail and employment centers. Engage residents in walk audits to educate them on the elements of safe pedestrian infrastructure and to involve them in planning for improvements.	24	42.86%
Explore the development of Shared Use Agreements with the Palmer Schools to allow community use of recreation and fitness facilities after school hours.	23	41.07%
Improve accessibility in and around parks through sidewalk maintenance and improvements; visible crosswalks, curb ramps and detectable warning strips at intersections; lighting; and adding benches and shaded rest areas.	21	37.5%
Add accessible public restrooms to some recreation areas to encourage more use by older adults.	31	55.36%
Engage older adults and people with disabilities in the design for or reconstruction of parks and recreation facilities.	6	10.71%
Develop outdoor recreational programming for older adults.	23	41.07%
Develop and promote places for winter outdoor recreation.	31	55.36%
Develop a program to loan tablets or laptops to households that do not currently own computers, and a system for training and connecting all households to affordable internet service.	10	17.86%

Work with service providers to ensure that discounted internet options are available to older adults and low-income households after discounted services connected with the pandemic expire.	18	32.14%
Promote installation of kiosks or community boards in neighborhoods (new and existing) that can be used by the town to post information about community resources, upcoming events, etc.	13	23.21%
Establish a mentoring program between older adults and prospective entrepreneurs to celebrate the knowledge and experience that older adults bring to the community, and to provide opportunities for intergenerational learning.	10	17.86%
Ensure that people of all ages have access to employment opportunities through expanded transportation services and partnerships between the Council on Aging and local businesses.	9	16.07%
Reinstate a Farmers Market or a farm stand that accepts Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program, and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children benefits, or otherwise incentivizes purchase of healthy foods.	34	60.71%
Launch a Community Supported Agriculture program in cooperation with area farms with monthly shares available through Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program and delivery location(s) in Palmer.	16	28.57%
Assist local corner stores in obtaining equipment and resources to provide fresh local food options.	15	26.79%
Partner with surrounding communities to provide a Mobile Food Market for sale of fresh local produce.	22	39.29%
Add healthy food retail provisions to local development processes through community benefits agreements, density bonuses, tax incentive packages or similar tools.	12	21.43%

Incentivize food retailers to stock healthy food through amendments to the zoning or establishment of local licensing for food retail.	10	17.86%
Prioritize transportation infrastructure and services to ensure access to food retail and assistance programs.	12	21.43%
Include access to food retail options in prioritization of Complete Streets, public transit, and highway and sidewalk maintenance projects.	6	10.71%
Ensure that Site Plan Review and Special Permit Review facilitate increased food access by requiring safe and easy access by pedestrians, bicyclists, people in wheelchairs, public transit users and automobiles.	8	14.29%
Partner with the Department of Transitional Assistance, health care providers, and other organizations that assist with public benefit programs to ensure that all residents who qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and other food assistance programs are aware of the resources and how to apply for enrollment.	5	8.93%
Provide information on signing up for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and how to use the Healthy Incentive Program on Town website and in all departments that offer public assistance programs.	2	3.57%
Provide education and outreach to health care and case workers to ensure that they know how to explain to clients how and where to use Healthy Incentive Program benefits.	4	7.14%
Advocate for a stop by the Food Bank Mobile bus in Palmer.	7	12.5%
Increase visibility of all emergency food resources (Palmer Food Share, Inc.; Second Congregational Church, Senior Center, School) in Palmer through Town website and printed resource guides.	13	23.21%
Publicize eligibility criteria for Brown Bag pickup and other food assistance resources.	4	7.14%

Identify at least one Community Garden site and seek funding for construction and management.	23	41.07%
Make Palmer a Right to Farm community to signify the importance of local agriculture to the local economy and health of the community.	25	44.64%
Promote the development of home based gardens through training programs on soil testing, building raised beds, home garden practices and food safety, and best practices for keeping chickens.	15	26.79%
Promote donations of excess produce from home gardeners to food pantries throughout summer months.	14	25%
Design community gardens to include well-constructed compost facilities for garden waste.	14	25%
Promote home based composting efforts through training on composting and programs that offer discounted compost bins.	12	21.43%
Engage the School Committee, food service providers, parents, and students to provide information and promote revision and improvement of the Palmer School Wellness Policy.	10	17.86%
Include in the School Wellness Policy nutrition standards for all meals and provisions for including locally grown fresh food in all school meal and snack programs.	18	32.14%
Include a provision in the Palmer School Wellness Policy to promote consumption of water including providing bottle filling stations and allowing students to carry refillable drinking water bottles in school.	22	39.29%
Support school gardening already established at Old Mill Pond School and assess the feasibility of integrating gardening and nutrition education into the science and/or health curriculum.	28	50%
Assess the feasibility of installing additional garden beds and integrating gardening and nutrition programs into middle and high school curricula.	16	28.57%

Investigate possible intergenerational programs for school or community gardening.	8	14.29%
Answered: 53 Skipped: 3		

18. Please provide any comments on the above draft Public Health Actions.

The word cloud requires at least 20 answers to show.

Response	Count
Yes! All of these topics are wonderful talking points! I had marked off far too many and had to then eliminate some from my priority list. Please bring an emphasis back to local farming. We had so many farms in Palmer in the 80s and 90s (Langevin dairy, Olson farm stand sunset farm). Local food, growing our own food, the right to farm, access to local foods, and making it easier to walk and be active in our community are great places to focus. Additional trails along rivers and scenic views in town would be great.	1
Where will the pickleball courts be built?	1
We need more healthy food options. Big Y has been taking advantage of our town for years. The fresh produce is too expensive and goes bad too quickly. They should be expected to do more for our town in exchange for their captive market. I would love a Trader Joes to actively pursued by official channels. We need healthier water options, as well. we need better sidewalks and bike trails that connect everyone and keep us all actively moving. Lower middle income families that are just over qualifying for food assistance have it rough.	1
This does not relate to the topic above but wanted to thank the MP Committee for their efforts over the last year.	1
Test 43	1
Palmer has potential. There are a lot of young families who are interested in progress and waking up this sleepy town. A cohesive and thoughtful plan is necessary, as is town support. Let's motivate each other to do more than just live here, but thrive here and remain interested and interesting. Generating taxes to fund development is huge. 'The town of 7 railroads' sounds so old fashioned. Let's change slogans and work towards changing the way this town is thought of. In the same breath, let's expand on what makes Palmer unique by maintaining and highlighting our outside areas like trails, water access and adding a farmer's market (how are we the only town without one??!).	1

None.	1
Need more outdoor recreation!!	1
Forward looking function and aesthetic should be an important focus to promote success of the towns future, especially planning for the train stop and intergenerational mixed use town housing, transportation connection, public health, recreation and sustainability planning.	1
Conduct a study if there would be interest in the community to establish a Hospice facility and a mid-wife birthing facility	1
A lot of socialist categories. W It's government control. Not what people are wanting. More about raising costs and socialist programs. We don't need this ,this will encourage camps and low end people and housing. Let's not ruin palmer.	1
	0

Answered: 11 Skipped: 45