

# TOWN OF BLACKSTONE



## HOUSING PRODUCTION PLAN 2019





Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lt. Governor ♦ Janelle Chan, Undersecretary

December 10, 2019

Daniel P. Keefe, Chairman  
Blackstone Board of Selectman  
15 St. Paul Street  
Blackstone, MA 01540

Dear Mr. Keefe:

**RE: Housing Production Plan - Approved**

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) approves the Town of Blackstone's Housing Production Plan (HPP) pursuant to 760 CMR 56.03(4). The effective date for the HPP is November 8, 2019, the date that DHCD received a complete plan. The HPP has a five year term and will expire on December 7, 2024.

Approval of your HPP allows the Town to request DHCD's Certification of Municipal Compliance when:

- Housing units affordable to low and moderate income households have been produced during one calendar year, during the initial year of eligibility, totaling at least 0.5% (18 units) of year round housing units.
- All units produced are eligible to be counted on the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). If you have questions about eligibility for the SHI, please visit our website at: [www.mass.gov/dhcd](http://www.mass.gov/dhcd).
- All units have been produced in accordance with the approved HPP and DHCD Guidelines.

I applaud your efforts to plan for the housing needs of Blackstone. Please contact Phillip DeMartino, Technical Assistance Coordinator, at (617) 573-1357 or [Phillip.DeMartino@mass.gov](mailto:Phillip.DeMartino@mass.gov), if you need assistance as you implement your HPP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Louis Martin".

Louis Martin  
Associate Director

cc Senator Ryan C. Fattman  
Representative Michael J. Soter  
Paul Marvelle, Chairman, Blackstone Planning Board  
Daniel M. Keyes, Town Administrator, Blackstone

# **Blackstone Housing Production plan**

**2019**

**Adopted by Blackstone Planning Board on October 3, 2019.**

**Adopted by Blackstone Board of Selectmen on October 8, 2019.**

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All photos in this document were taken by the authors.



# **Blackstone Housing Production Plan**

## **Acknowledgements**

### **Board of Selectmen**

Daniel P. Keefe, Chairman  
Margo Bik, Vice-Chairman  
Robert Dubois, Clerk  
Gerald P. Rivet, Selectman  
Taylor Greene, Selectman

Daniel Keyes, Town Administrator

### **Planning Board**

Paul Marvelle, Chairman  
Kirk Van Dyke, Vice-Chair  
Joseph Belrose, Member  
Owen Bebeau, Member  
Anthony Catalano, Member  
Robert Ring, Associate Member

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# Introduction

This Housing Production Plan (“HPP”) for the Town of Blackstone is the foundation for the Town’s proactive strategy for planning and developing affordable housing. This plan provides statistical data as well as municipal goals and implementation strategies. It is intended to comply with the most recent Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (“DHCD”) guidelines for producing an HPP, pursuant to the Code of Massachusetts Regulations.

As stated in the DHCD guidelines:

A Housing Production Plan (HPP) under 760 CMR 56.03(4) is a proactive strategy for planning and developing affordable housing. It should be developed with opportunities for community residents to become informed of the planning process and the plan, and to provide input. The HPP will assist communities to plan for low and moderate-income residents by providing a diverse housing supply.

The HPP should provide a strategy by which affordable housing needs can be met in a manner consistent with the state’s affordable housing statute, M.G.L. c. 40B (“Chapter 40B”). It should also result in producing affordable housing units in accordance with the HPP.

Municipalities that adopt a proactive approach by preparing an HPP and then executing its implementation strategies by producing affordable housing are more likely to achieve both their affordable housing goals and their community development goals. In municipalities where less than ten percent of the local housing stock qualifies as affordable under Chapter 40B, developers may override local zoning bylaws and regulations if they propose projects meeting certain thresholds of affordability.

However, the HPP provides an alternative pathway called “safe harbor” for those municipalities to maintain local zoning control. Under Chapter 40B, if a municipality adopts an HPP and increases the percentage of its housing stock that qualifies as affordable by at least 0.5 percent per year, then it will have the same power to regulate comprehensive permit applications as a municipality that exceeds the ten percent threshold. Therefore, by implementing an approved HPP and annually producing new affordable housing units, the Town of Blackstone will retain more control over local housing development. As a result, the Town is better positioned to maintain its community character and to adequately prepare to handle growth.

# **Executive Summary**

This HPP for the Town of Blackstone, prepared pursuant to 760 CMR 56.03(4), consists of three sections: (1) Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment; (2) Affordable Housing Goals; and (3) Implementation Strategies. This plan was derived from, and is consistent with, the 2018 Blackstone Master Plan.

## **Section 1: The Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment**

This section is a summary of the Town's demographic statistics. In some cases the statistics are compared to neighboring towns and/or Massachusetts as a whole. It also includes the current status of affordable housing in Blackstone as well as the numbers needed to reach "safe harbor" and 10 percent. Infrastructure and development constraints are also discussed.

Among the major findings:

- A significant increase in those 60 and older and a decline in those under 30.
- A median household income of \$80,260 in 2017, which is higher than that of Worcester County, Massachusetts and the United States as a whole.
- The 2017 median house value was \$267,800; median rent was \$852.
- 30.2% of homeowners and 38.2% of renters spent more than 30% of their income on housing (30% percent of income on housing is considered affordable).
- The percentage of affordable housing in Blackstone is 3.4% (123 units out of 3,606). To meet 10%, 238 additional units are needed currently. This number will increase to about 248 after the 2020 U.S. Census.

## **Section 2: Affordable Housing Goals**

- Support and enhance existing wide range of land use patterns.
- Identify regulatory and infrastructure measures that encourage "aging-in-place" (AARP) and additional over-55 housing.
- Encourage preservation and enhancement of architectural and historical character.
- Enhance Village Overlay District.
- Promote use of Flexible Residential Development.
- Encourage mixed uses in Commercial districts.
- Support pedestrian and bicycle connections between and among residential and commercial neighborhoods.



## **Section 3: Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment**

### **Key Strategies:**

- Review Affordable Housing Zoning Bylaw.
- Promote Housing to Serve a Diverse Population and Range of Life Stages.
- Consider Increasing Supply and Types of Housing for Seniors.
- Promote Mixed Uses in Commercial Districts.
- Consider Commercial District Design Guidelines.
- Consider Village Overlay District Residential Design Guidelines.
- Improve Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections.

### **Targets:**

- Affordable units needed to reach 10%: 238.
- Affordable homes needed to reach “safe harbor”: 18 (1-year) or 36 (2-year).  
Additional units needed to reach 10% after 2020 U.S. Census: 248 (approximate).

Upon approval by DHCD, the Town may begin implementation of the HPP. Thereafter, upon achieving production of affordable housing units in accordance with the HPP, the Town will be eligible to request certification of its HPP.

Upon certification of the HPP, the Town will achieve “safe harbor,” which will provide the Town the option of denying a Chapter 40B comprehensive permit application, giving it more options to maintain community character and control growth. Certification will be valid for one year if the Town achieves a 0.5 percent increase in the number of local housing units that are recognized as affordable in DCHD’s Subsidized Housing Inventory. It will be valid for two years if it achieves an increase of 1.00 percent.

# Section I: Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment

## A. Demographic Profile

### **Blackstone Population**

Blackstone's total population, as of the 2017 American Community Survey, was 9,201 residents. The population distribution by age cohort indicates a large middle-aged population with fewer young children, young adults, and senior citizens than the average in Massachusetts. Indeed, only 9.2 percent of the population of Blackstone consists of children under the age of ten, while the same age cohort represents 11.5 percent of the population of Massachusetts. Conversely, children ages ten to nineteen represent 14.1 percent of Blackstone's population, and only 13.3 percent of the State's population.

**Table 1: Blackstone Population by Age Cohort**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>State</b>
Total Population	9,201		
Male	4,402	47.80%	48.40%
Female	4,799	52.20%	51.60%
Under 5 years	316	3.40%	5.60%
5 to 9 years	531	5.80%	5.90%
10 to 14 years	665	7.20%	6.20%
15 to 19 years	637	6.90%	7.10%
20 to 24 years	745	8.10%	7.30%
25 to 34 years	994	10.80%	12.90%
35 to 44 years	1,258	13.70%	13.60%
45 to 54 years	1,581	17.20%	15.50%
55 to 59 years	709	7.70%	6.60%
60 to 64 years	714	7.80%	5.70%
65 to 74 years	632	6.90%	6.90%
75 to 84 years	303	3.30%	4.60%
85 years and over	116	1.30%	2.20%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Similarly, only 4.6 percent of Blackstone's population is over the age of 75, compared to 6.8 percent of the State's population. However, residents ages 45 to 64 constitute 32.7 percent of Blackstone's population and only 27.8 percent of the State's population. As a result, the senior citizen percentage of population in Blackstone is likely to reach or surpass the State's in future years.

Young adults ages 25 to 34 represent just 10.8 percent of Blackstone's total population compared to 12.9 percent of the State's population. This distribution is typical of suburban communities, as young adults in Massachusetts tend to populate urban centers with more opportunities for higher education and entry-level professional jobs.

Population growth in Blackstone has significantly slowed during the past thirty years. After rapid growth in the 1980s and moderate growth in 1990's, the rate of growth has slowed significantly since 2000. In the new millennium, population growth has resulted in an increase of only 397 residents between 2000 and 2017.

**Table 2: Blackstone Population Growth**

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2017
<b>Population</b>	6,556	6,544	8,023	8,804	9,026	9,201
<b>Percent Change</b>	-	-0.2%	22.6%	9.7%	2.5%	1.58%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1970 – 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Regional Population

Blackstone's population is smaller than the average town population within its region. For the purpose of this report, Blackstone's Region is defined as the Massachusetts municipalities located within a 5-mile radius (Bellingham, Franklin, Hopedale, Mendon, Millville, and Uxbridge), as well as North Smithfield, RI and Woonsocket, RI. Blackstone has the sixth largest population in the nine-municipality region, and its population is just over half of the regional mean population. The Region is heavily influenced by two population centers: Franklin, MA (32,843) and Woonsocket, RI (41,759).

**Table 3: Regional Population**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Population</b>
Bellingham	16,929
<b>Blackstone</b>	<b>9,201</b>
Franklin	32,843
Hopedale	5,955
Mendon	5,995
Millville	3,237
North Smithfield, RI	12,301
Uxbridge	13,815
Woonsocket, RI	41,759
<b>Total</b>	<b>141,991</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>15,777</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Income

Blackstone's per-capita income is \$35,249 per year. Its per capita income, as well as its median household and family incomes, indicate that its residents' incomes are similar to the incomes of residents of Worcester County and Massachusetts, and significantly higher than the incomes of residents of the United States.

Table 4: Basic Income Characteristics				
	Blackstone	Worcester County	Massachusetts	United States
<b>Median Income Per Capita</b>	\$35,249	\$34,691	\$39,913	\$31,177
<b>Median Household Income</b>	\$80,260	\$69,313	\$74,167	\$57,652
<b>Median Family Income</b>	\$98,083	\$88,971	\$94,110	\$70,850

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Median household and family income distributions indicate that a majority of Blackstone residents are members of middle class households and families. According to the American Community Survey, 58.1 percent of households and 67.1 percent of families earned between \$50,000 and \$149,999 per year, and an additional 14.8 percent of households and 19.9 percent of families earned over \$150,000 per year. Conversely, 27.1 percent of households and 12.9 percent of families earned less than \$50,000 per year. Therefore, although Blackstone residents out-earn national averages in aggregate, a significant portion of Blackstone residents are members of families or households who earn less than median incomes. Furthermore, incomes in Blackstone are lower than other Massachusetts municipalities within its Region.

**Table 5: Income Distributions**

Households			Families		
Income*	Number	Percentage	Income*	Number	Percentage
<b>Less than \$10,000</b>	54	1.60%	<b>Less than \$10,000</b>	6	0.20%
<b>\$10,000 to \$14,999</b>	104	3.00%	<b>\$10,000 to \$14,999</b>	23	0.90%
<b>\$15,000 to \$24,999</b>	225	7.40%	<b>\$15,000 to \$24,999</b>	68	2.70%
<b>\$25,000 to \$34,999</b>	224	6.50%	<b>\$25,000 to \$34,999</b>	70	2.80%
<b>\$35,000 to \$49,999</b>	294	8.60%	<b>\$35,000 to \$49,999</b>	157	6.30%
<b>\$50,000 to \$74,999</b>	637	18.50%	<b>\$50,000 to \$74,999</b>	499	20.00%
<b>\$75,000 to \$99,999</b>	545	15.90%	<b>\$75,000 to \$99,999</b>	433	17.40%
<b>\$100,000 to \$149,999</b>	815	23.70%	<b>\$100,000 to \$149,999</b>	738	29.70%
<b>\$150,000 to \$199,999</b>	290	8.40%	<b>\$150,000 to \$199,999</b>	290	11.70%
<b>\$200,000 or more</b>	220	6.4%	<b>\$200,000 or more</b>	205	8.20%
<b>Total households</b>	3,438		<b>Total Families</b>	2,489	
<b>Median household income</b>	\$80,260		<b>Median family income</b>	\$98,082	

\*Income in 2017 inflation-adjusted dollars

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

**Table 6: Regional Income Characteristics**

	Median Family Income			Median Household Income		
	2010	2017	Change	2010	2017	Change
Bellingham	\$87,950	\$113,390	14.61%	\$78,290	\$95,533	29.09%
<b>Blackstone</b>	<b>\$85,58</b>	<b>\$98,083</b>	<b>30.40%</b>	<b>\$71,875</b>	<b>\$92,786</b>	<b>25.31%</b>
Franklin	\$105,16	\$137,130	10.36%	\$89,330	\$111,935	4.66%
Hopedale	\$103,17	\$113,856	26.79%	\$97,227	\$101,761	22.57%
Mendon	\$115,96	\$147,031	29.77%	\$102,65	\$125,816	17.15%
Millville	\$83,125	\$107,875	15.80%	\$77,250	\$90,500	4.39%
N. Smithfield, RI	\$87,833	\$101,708	11.48%	\$75,838	\$79,167	16.68%
Uxbridge	\$90,737	\$101,152	-1.53%	\$81,127	\$94,656	-0.74%
Woonsocket, RI	\$48,348	\$47,608	14.61%	\$38,625	\$38,340	29.09%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Not only are Blackstone's incomes among the lowest in the Region, but income growth has been very slow since 2000. The median household income increased by only 2.51 percent between 2000 and 2017.

Despite wide variation in income characteristics among municipalities within the Region, the provisions of Chapter 40B use a regional median income to determine income limits for affordable housing occupants. The pertinent median income for Blackstone is calculated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") for the entire Eastern Worcester County Statistical Area ("EWCSA")<sup>1</sup> and applied to every member municipality. HUD uses the median income of the EWCSA and adjusts that figure based on the number of people occupying a housing unit, then divides the income into categories to determine affordable housing eligibility. The resulting HUD Income Limits for Housing Affordability for the EWCSA are presented in Table 7.

<sup>1</sup> The municipalities in the EWCSA are Berlin, Blackstone, Bolton, Harvard, Hopedale, Lancaster, Mendon, Milford, Millville, Southborough, and Upton.

**Table 7: HUD Limits for Housing Affordability U**

Size of Household	30% of Median	Very Low Income	60% Of Median	Low Income
1	\$24,400	\$40,700	\$48,840	\$52,850
2	\$27,900	\$46,500	\$55,800	\$60,400
3	\$31,400	\$52,300	\$62,760	\$67,950
4	\$34,850	\$58,100	\$69,720	\$75,500
5	\$37,650	\$62,750	\$75,300	\$81,550
6	\$40,450	\$67,400	\$80,880	\$87,600
7	\$43,250	\$72,050	\$86,460	\$93,650
8	\$46,050	\$76,700	\$92,040	\$99,700

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019

## **B. Growth Projections**

### **Age Cohorts**

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) projects Blackstone's population to remain stable for the foreseeable future, with a projected population of 9,304 by the year 2030, an increase of just 3 percent over 20 years. This very slight increase represents a continuation of the slow growth the Town has experienced so far this millennium. In contrast, the Town grew in population by about 10 percent between 1990 and 2000. Furthermore, MAPC's projections indicate a marked decrease in the population of residents under the age of 60, counteracted by a significant increase in the population of residents ages 60 and over. Specifically, between 2010 and 2030, MAPC projects that the population of residents under 60 will decrease from 7,518 in 2010, to 6,928 in 2020, to 6,314 in 2030. In the

**Table 8: Blackstone Population Projections by Age Cohort**

Age Group	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
0 - 4	702	557	485	478	416
5 - 9	632	692	581	545	484
10 - 14	577	772	640	554	556
15-19	519	619	659	529	500
20-24	553	462	512	399	345
25-29	777	538	473	466	389
30-34	892	687	567	610	519
35-39	702	872	618	590	597
40-44	585	872	733	642	710
45-49	420	640	847	610	597
50-54	340	531	804	685	608
55-59	241	352	599	820	593
60-64	260	320	490	779	666
65-69	288	223	294	543	753
70-74	224	236	243	388	623
75-79	147	220	171	238	435
80-84	87	121	150	148	240
85 plus	77	90	160	220	273
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8023</b>	<b>8804</b>	<b>9026</b>	<b>9244</b>	<b>9304</b>

Source: Metropolitan Area Planning Council Projections, January 2014



same period, MAPC projects a population increase of residents ages 60 and over from 1,508 to 2,316 to 2,990.

The MAPC projections used in this report represent a “status quo” scenario as defined by MAPC. MAPC also publishes an alternative “stronger region” scenario that projects higher levels of growth. This study uses the “status quo” projections because they are based on recent trends while the “stronger region” scenario depends on certain policy changes that may or may not take place.

## Regional Growth<sup>2</sup>

Blackstone’s projected population decrease in the youngest age cohorts, and projected population increase in the oldest age cohorts, is not unique within the Region. However, Blackstone is unique in its lack of growth projected for its young adult population. Regionally, the population of residents ages 0-24 is projected to decrease from 28,694 in

<b>Age</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2030</b>
<b>0 - 4</b>	5724	6363	5038	4379	4522
<b>5 - 9</b>	4945	6713	6356	5406	5557
<b>10-14</b>	4409	6403	6760	5288	4721
<b>15-19</b>	4898	5006	6412	5794	4960
<b>20-24</b>	4648	3053	4128	4002	3140
<b>25-29</b>	6170	4127	3766	4379	4088
<b>30-34</b>	7114	6728	4321	5276	5358
<b>35-39</b>	6193	8481	6003	5944	6762
<b>40-44</b>	5060	7792	7531	5334	6534
<b>45-49</b>	3681	5998	8554	6214	6312
<b>50-54</b>	2951	4833	7290	7135	5143
<b>55-59</b>	2594	3301	5589	8076	5947
<b>60-64</b>	2482	2480	4393	6793	6684
<b>65-69</b>	2196	2122	2862	5181	7555
<b>70-74</b>	1633	1944	2099	3897	6030
<b>75-79</b>	1228	1620	1660	2261	4111
<b>80-84</b>	773	1014	1391	1411	2628
<b>85 plus</b>	623	773	1237	1403	1765
<b>Total</b>	67,322	78,751	85,390	88,173	91,817

2010 to 22,899 in 2030. The population of residents ages 40 and over is projected to increase from 42,606 in 2010 to 52,709 in 2030. However, the Regional population of young adults ages 25-39 is projected to increase from 14,090 in 2010 to 16,207 in 2030. In Blackstone alone, the same age cohort is projected to decrease from 1,658 in 2010 to 1,505 in 2030. The Regional growth for that cohort is understated, as Blackstone’s population loss is included in the cumulative data.

\*Does not include Rhode Island municipalities

Source: Metropolitan Area Planning Council Population Projections, January 2014.

<sup>2</sup> These projections do not include RI towns

## Racial Demographics

Blackstone is a largely homogeneous municipality with over 94 percent of its population being white. However, the minority population has steadily increased in the past 27 years. In 1990, only 2.6 percent of Blackstone's population was non-white, compared to 5.3 percent in 2017. The largest minority gains have been African Americans (29 persons in 2000 to 237 in 2017), persons listing an "other" race (21 in 2000 to 56 in 2017) and persons listing "two or more races" (91 in 2000 to 189 in 2017).

**Table 10: Blackstone Racial Demographics**

	<b>2000</b>		<b>2010</b>		<b>2017</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>White</b>	8,574	97	8,704	96	8,655	94
<b>Black or African American</b>	29	0	82	1	237	1.9
<b>American Indian and Alaska Native</b>	21	0	22	0	29	0.3
<b>Asian</b>	67	1	71	1	35	0.4
<b>Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander</b>	1	0	3	0	0	0
<b>Some Other Race</b>	21	0	28	0	56	1.5
<b>Two or More Races</b>	91	1	116	1	189	1.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## C. Existing Housing Stock

### Types of Housing

According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, Blackstone's housing inventory consists of 3,627 total housing units. Most of those units, 58.5 percent, are detached single family houses. An additional 10.8 percent of all housing units are in a duplex, and a further 12.2 percent are attached single family homes. Therefore, just over 18 percent of all housing units in Blackstone are in multi-family buildings with three or more units. Only 62 units are in complexes with ten or more units.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this calculation, however, the Census Bureau classifies condominium units as "1-Unit, Attached" and not as multifamily dwellings because the housing units are separately deeded.

**Table 11: Types of Housing Units**

Building Type	<u>Blackstone</u>		<u>Massachusetts</u>
	Number of Units	Percentage of Total	Percentage of Total
<b>1-Unit Detached</b>	2,120	58.50%	52.20%
<b>1-Unit, Attached</b>	442	12.20%	5.30%
<b>2 Units</b>	392	10.80%	10.10%
<b>3 or 4 Units</b>	351	9.70%	10.70%
<b>5-9 Units</b>	223	6.10%	5.80%
<b>10 or more Units</b>	92	2.50%	15.00%
<b>Mobile Homes</b>	7	0.20%	0.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	3,627	100%	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Age of Housing

New building in Blackstone has slowed significantly, in line with the Town's population growth. The most common period during which housing units were built is 1980 – 1999, consisting of over 27% of Blackstone's entire housing inventory. This building boom coincides with the large population growth from 6,544 in 1980 to 8,804 in 2000 (See Table 2). The next most common period during which housing units were built is 1939 and earlier, representing a further 23.5 percent of the inventory. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 58 new housing units were built in 2014 and later. The Bureau's data is an estimate but it matches pretty closely the 13, 19, and 23 (55 total) permits that were issued for new single-family homes in 2014-2016, respectively.

Since 2010, fewer Blackstone residents moved into their

**Table 12: Age of Housing Units**

Time Period	<u>Blackstone</u>		<u>Massachusetts</u>
	Est. Number of Units	Percentage of Total	Percentage of Total
<b>2014+</b>	58	1.6%	0.6%
<b>2010-2013</b>	48	1.3%	1.4%
<b>2000-2009</b>	380	10.5%	7.3%
<b>1980-1999</b>	991	27.3%	18.5%
<b>1960-1979</b>	775	21.4%	22.8%
<b>1940-1959</b>	523	14.4%	17.1%
<b>1939 and earlier</b>	852	23.5%	33.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	3,627	100%	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

current housing unit than residents in the rest of Massachusetts. In the state of Massachusetts, 39.7 percent of

all residents have moved into their current housing unit since 2010. In Blackstone, 31.6 percent have done the same. This is partly the result of many residents moving into their current residence between 2000 and 2009. That percentage is 32.9, compared to just 27.9 in Massachusetts.

Table 13: Year Householder Moved into Unit				
Time Period	Blackstone		Massachusetts	
	Number of Units	Percentage of Total	Number of Units	Percentage of Total
2015 or later	360	10.50%	236,119	9.1%
2010-2014	726	21.10%	765,450	29.6%
2000-2009	1,132	32.9%	721,020	27.9%
1990-1999	513	14.90%	392,117	15.2%
1980-1989	387	11.3%	203,850	7.9%
1979 or earlier	320	9.3%	267,159	10.3%
<b>TOTAL OCCUPIED</b>	<b>3,333</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2,585,715</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Household Size

The average household size in Blackstone is larger than the State's in owner-occupied units, and smaller than the State's in renter-occupied units. Small housing units are less common in Blackstone than they are in the State, with just 22.5 percent of Blackstone housing units containing 1-4 rooms compared to 31.1 percent in the State.

Table 14: Average Household Size		
	Blackstone	Massachusetts
<b>Owner-Occupied</b>	3.07	2.7
<b>Renter-Occupied</b>	1.68	2.25

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Housing Occupancy

Blackstone's most common form of housing occupancy is owner-occupied, accounting for 70.7 percent of total housing units. The overall vacancy rate is 5.2 percent. Although Blackstone's vacancy rate is lower than the rate in Massachusetts, it has steadily increased since the year 2000. In 2000, only 2.9 percent of housing units in Blackstone were vacant. An estimated 189 units were vacant by 2017, compared to just 96 in 2000.

Table 15: Number of Rooms				
Number of Rooms	<u>Blackstone</u>		<u>Massachusetts</u>	
	Number of Units	Percent of Total	Number of Units	Percent of Total
1	70	1.90%	72,569	2.5%
2	72	2.00%	89,931	3.1%
3	281	7.70%	284,803	9.9%
4	394	10.90%	452,275	15.8%
5	912	25.10%	523,907	18.3%
6	677	18.70%	499,624	17.4%
7	476	13.10%	348,167	12.2%
8	415	11.40%	261,442	9.1%
9+	386	10.60%	332,271	11.6%
<b>TOTAL UNITS</b>	3,627	100.0	2,864,989	100.0
<b>MEDIAN ROOMS</b>	5.7		5.5	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Table 16: Housing Occupancy Status						
	<u>2000</u>		<u>2010</u>		<u>2017</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	3,331		3,628		3,627	
<b>Vacant Units</b>	96	2.90%	225	6.02%	189	5.20%
<b>Occupied Units</b>	3,235	97.10%	3,403	93.80%	3,438	94.80%
<b>Owner-Occupied Units</b>	2,264	70.00%	2,419	71.10%	2,431	70.70%
<b>Renter-Occupied Units</b>	971	30.00%	984	28.90%	1,007	29.30%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, and 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Current Development Trends

In the last four years, 80 building permits for new construction were issued, all for single family homes. Regionally, new construction is split between municipalities with stagnant growth (Hopedale, Millville), and municipalities experiencing palpable growth. In Bellingham, Franklin, Mendon, and Uxbridge, dozens of permits for new construction have been issued annually. Franklin, however, is the only municipality in the region to have issued building permits for multiple-unit dwellings. The source of the building permit data presented in Table 17 is the U.S. Bureau of the Census Building Permits Survey. The data do not always align with data presented in the annual reports of the individual municipalities.

## Affordable Housing Stock – 40B

Chapter 40B provides a statutory incentive for municipalities to maintain an

adequate supply of affordable housing. Under the statute, municipalities whose stock of affordable housing consists of less than ten percent of the municipality's total housing stock have diminished power to regulate proposed housing developments. If at least 25

**Table 17: Building Permits**

	2014	2015	2016	2017
Bellingham				
Single Family	44	40	43	
2+ Units	0	0	0	
Blackstone*				
Single Family	13	19	23	25
2+ Units	0	0	0	
Franklin				
Single Family	21	37	31	
2+ Units	26	0	2	
Hopedale				
Single Family	1	1	3	
2+ Units	0	0	0	
Mendon				
Single Family	20	10	20	
2+ Units	0	0	0	
Millville				
Single Family	5	7	0	
2+ Units	0	0	0	
North Smithfield				
Single Family	32	25	27	
2+ Units	0	0	0	
Uxbridge				
Single Family	38	28	35	
2+ Units	0	0	0	
Woonsocket				
Single Family	8	9	13	
2+ Units	0	0	0	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Building Permits Survey

\*For Blackstone only, source is Annual Reports, 2014-2017

percent of units in a proposed housing development qualify as affordable under the statute, then the developer may apply for a comprehensive permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals (“ZBA”) that waives certain requirements of local bylaws and regulations. If the proposal is not approved by the ZBA, then the developer may seek relief from the State’s Housing Appeals Committee.

<b>Table 18: Subsidized Housing Inventory</b>		
	<b>Units</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Bellingham	551	8.7%
<b>Blackstone</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>3.4%</b>
Franklin	1352	11.9%
Hopedale	119	5.2%
Mendon	40	1.9%
Millville	26	2.2%
Uxbridge	264	5%

Source: Department of Housing and Community Development

DHCD lists 3,606 total housing units in Blackstone in 2010. Blackstone has 123 qualified housing units listed in DHCD’s Subsidized Housing Inventory (“SHI”)⁴. The 123 units constitute only 3.4 percent of Blackstone’s total housing inventory. This relatively low SHI is consistent with the Region, where Franklin is the only municipality that has met the State’s 10 percent threshold.

In order to reach 10 percent, Blackstone requires 361 eligible units. That means it would need to add 238 affordable units to its current stock. Since only 80 building permits for new construction were issued in the past four years, it appears that increasing the number of affordable units to 10 percent of the total inventory is a large hurdle in the short-term. However, the State’s affordable housing regulations provide an alternative, more obtainable annual production goal that can be achieved by implementing a municipal HPP and producing a more manageable number of affordable units per year⁵. Compliance with the alternative production goal enables the ZBA to retain local control over proposed housing projects by obtaining “safe harbor” status. Safe harbor provides a community the same control as if the municipality met the ten percent threshold. An increase in affordable units of 0.5% will achieve one year of safe harbor status while an increase of 1% will provide two years. This regulation and its associated goals are discussed further in Section III.

## Home Values and Rent Levels

Blackstone’s median owner-occupied housing unit value of \$264,500 reflects its working class socioeconomic composition. Furthermore, the majority of housing units in Blackstone have a median value of under \$300,000. The median housing value in Blackstone is more affordable than every Massachusetts municipality within the Region.

⁴ DHCD publication 9/14/17

⁵ 760 CMR 56.03(4)(c)(2)



The rental market in Blackstone is similarly affordable, despite a marked increase in median rents since 2010. At \$929 per month (2015), Blackstone's median rent is less than every Massachusetts municipality in the Region, and more affordable than Millville's

<b>Table 19: Median Housing Values</b>	
<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Value</b>
Bellingham	\$288,900
<b>Blackstone</b>	<b>\$267,800</b>
Franklin	\$403,000
Hopedale	\$322,500
Mendon	\$422,400
Millville	\$298,000
N. Smithfield	\$280,300
Uxbridge	\$280,800
Woonsocket	\$158,500
Regional Average	\$302,467

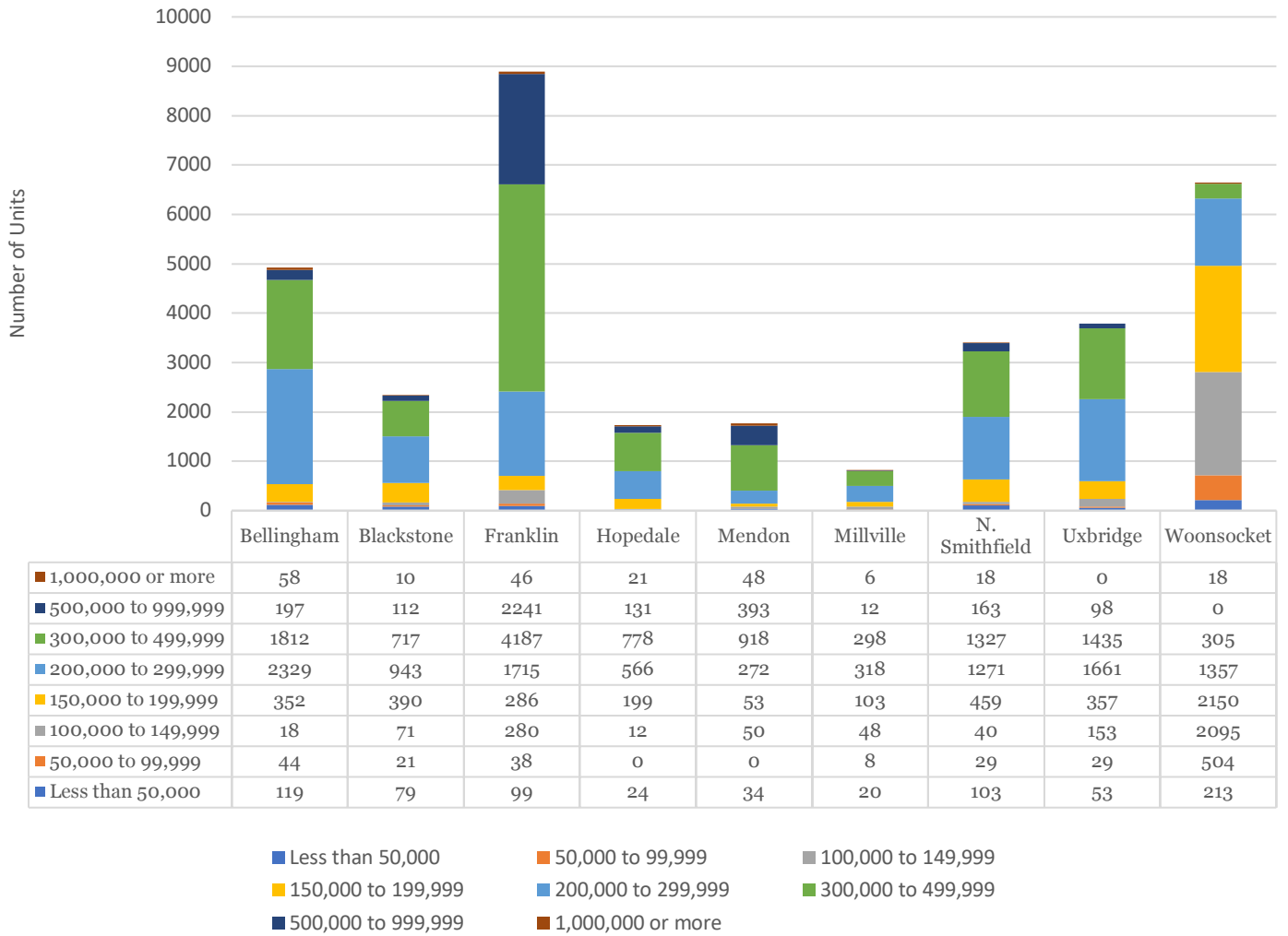
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017  
American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

second-lowest rent of \$1096 per month. Notwithstanding, the median rent in Blackstone increased by over fourteen percent between 2010 (\$814 per month) and 2015. Since most renters are lower income-earners than owner-occupants, it is important to monitor rising rents.

<b>Table 20: Median Rent Values</b>			
	<b>2010</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
Bellingham	1125	1,364	21.2%
<b>Blackstone</b>	<b>814</b>	<b>852</b>	4.7%
Franklin	1135	1,190	4.8%
Hopedale	1042	1,054	1.2%
Mendon	880	1,486	68.9%
Millville	939	1,154	22.9%
N. Smithfield	890	992	11.5%
Uxbridge	951	1,134	19.2%
Woonsocket	751	848	12.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American  
Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

**Table 21:  
Local and Regional Housing Values**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## D. Future Housing Needs

### Supply-Demand Housing Gap

Table 22, below, approximates the income levels that are needed to afford a median-value house in Blackstone (\$267,800) using a conventional 30-year mortgage with various down payments and interest rates. The calculations were made to include principal, interest, taxes and insurance in all monthly payments, as well as private mortgage insurance in scenarios where the down payment is under 20 percent. HUD uses the rule that no more than 30 percent of household income should be used towards housing costs. That 30 percent benchmark is used in calculating the income needed to afford the purchase.

Table 22: Income Needed to Purchase Median Value House								
Down Payment	Interest Rate	PITI	PMI	Total Payment	Income required	GAP		
						Very Low	Low	Median
<b>20 Percent</b>	3.50%	\$1,456	\$0	\$1,456	\$58,228	-\$18,098	\$5,980	\$22,032
	4.50%	\$1,574	\$0	\$1,574	\$62,946	-\$22,816	\$1,262	\$17,314
	5.50%	\$1,699	\$0	\$1,699	\$67,947	-\$27,817	-\$3,738	\$12,313
<b>15 Percent</b>	3.50%	\$1,559	\$190	\$1,749	\$62,363	-\$22,233	\$1,844	\$17,897
	4.50%	\$1,690	\$190	\$1,880	\$67,611	-\$27,481	-\$3,403	\$12,649
	5.50%	\$1,829	\$190	\$2,019	\$73,175	-\$33,045	-\$8,967	\$7,085
<b>10 Percent</b>	3.50%	\$1,619	\$201	\$1,820	\$64,768	-\$24,638	-\$560	\$15,492
	4.50%	\$1,758	\$201	\$1,959	\$70,325	-\$30,195	-\$6,117	\$9,935
	5.50%	\$1,905	\$201	\$2,106	\$76,216	-\$36,086	-\$12,008	\$4,044
<b>5 Percent</b>	3.50%	\$1,679	\$212	\$1,891	\$67,173	-\$27,043	-\$2,965	\$13,087
	4.50%	\$1,826	\$212	\$2,038	\$73,039	-\$32,909	-\$8,830	\$7,221
	5.50%	\$1,982	\$212	\$2,194	\$79,260	-\$39,130	-\$15,052	\$1,000

Source: Calculated by authors. Taxes calculated with FY2019 rates. Insurance at \$1380 annually. PMI estimated at 1% of loan amount (annually).

Although Blackstone's median housing value is low from a regional perspective, the lowest income required to purchase a median-value house is \$58,228. That scenario assumes a down payment of twenty percent, which can be difficult or impossible for a working-class household to save, and also assumes an extremely low interest rate of 3.5 percent. Conversely, a five percent down payment with 4.5 percent interest, which

triggers Private Mortgage Insurance (PMI), requires an income of almost \$80,000.

The GAP portion of Table 22 represents the difference between the income required for a

<b>Table 23: Gross Rent as a Percentage of Income</b>		
<b>Occupied Units Paying Rent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Less than 15%</b>	201	20.9%
<b>15 to 19.99%</b>	152	15.8%
<b>20 to 24.9%</b>	116	12.1%
<b>25 to 29.9%</b>	125	13.0%
<b>30 to 34.9%</b>	28	2.90%
<b>35% or more</b>	340	35.3%
<b>Total</b>	962	100.00%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013- 2017 American Community Survey  
5-Year Estimates

produce a significant down payment and/or obtain a low interest rate. However, a household that earns the median income can afford a median-value house under any of the scenarios presented.

Renters in Blackstone must spend a higher percentage of their incomes on housing costs than those who can afford to purchase. As shown above, 38.2 percent of all renters spend more than the 30 percent threshold recommended by HUD. The majority of those (35.3 percent) spend 35 percent or more of their incomes on rent. The significant percentage of income required for rent often contributes to the difficulty of saving for a down payment making it out of reach for many.

In owner occupied, mortgaged units, the most common segment of homeowners are the 32.5 percent who spend less than 20 percent of their incomes on housing costs. In fact, 69.8 percent of all homeowners with

a purchase under the given scenario, and the income realized by persons with very low (50% of median), low (80% of median), and median (\$80,260), household incomes according to HUD. Notably, no household with very low or low income can afford to purchase the median-value house in Blackstone unless they can

<b>Table 24: Monthly Housing Costs for Owner-occupied Units</b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Units with a mortgage</b>		
<b>Total</b>	1924	100.00%
<b>Less than 20%</b>	626	32.5%
<b>20 to 24.9%</b>	446	23.2%
<b>25 to 29.9%</b>	271	14.1%
<b>30 to 34.9%</b>	213	11.1%
<b>35% or more</b>	368	19.1%
<b>Units without a mortgage</b>		
<b>Total</b>	507	100.00%
<b>Less than 10%</b>	228	45.0%
<b>10 to 14.9%</b>	51	10.1%
<b>15 to 19.9%</b>	70	13.8%
<b>20 to 24.9%</b>	41	8.1%
<b>25 to 29.9%</b>	37	7.3%
<b>30 to 34.9%</b>	33	6.5%
<b>35% or more</b>	47	9.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey  
5-Year Estimates

a mortgage spend less than HUD’s 30-percent recommendation on housing costs. Furthermore, the lack of available housing units valued at the most affordable range renders a purchase even more difficult for households who earn less than the median income. Table 25 presents the supply-demand housing gap. An estimated 71 housing units valued between \$100,000 and \$149,000 exist in Blackstone, while 287 households cannot afford a purchase above this range. However, the 390-unit inventory valued between \$150,000 - \$199,999 is a sufficient supply for the 393 households with budgets in this range. At higher income levels, households are able to afford homes using significantly less than 30% of their income.

### Market trends affecting future demands

The supply-demand housing gap indicates a demand for entry-level homes priced in the \$100,000’s. New construction of housing units is slow in Blackstone. Population projections by age cohort indicate significant future increases in the senior citizen population. These factors suggest that demand for small, inexpensive housing units will continue to grow.

Table 25: Supply-Demand Housing Gap				
Value of Housing Unit	Number	Income Needed*	Est. Number of Households	Gap
<b>100,000 to 149,999</b>	114	\$41,662-\$50,733	164	<b>-50</b>
<b>150,000 to 199,999</b>	360	\$50,733-\$59,804	254	106
<b>200,000 to 299,999</b>	952	\$59,804-\$77,945	451	501

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Gap computed by authors.

\*Based on 5% down and interest rate of 4%.

## E. Developmental Constraints

### Chapter 21E Sites

The Massachusetts Oil and Hazardous Material Release Prevention and Response Act<sup>6</sup> (Chapter 21E) sets forth laws with incentives for municipalities, landowners, and developers to remediate sites that are contaminated by oil or other hazardous materials. These sites are inventoried by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (“DEP”) and assessed according to their level of contamination and their

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<sup>6</sup> M.G.L. c.21E

owners' compliance with response requirements. The DEP database indicates that there have been 25 reported releases in Blackstone since 1989. Most of those release sites are classified in a status that poses no current significant risk.

Seven sites in Blackstone are classified under certain tiers based on numerical scores that indicate a current threat imposed by their contamination. Some contaminated sites could be suitable for future redevelopment as affordable housing following remediation activities.

<b>Table 26: Blackstone 21E Sites</b>			
<b>Address</b>	<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Chemical Type</b>
<b>15 Main Street</b>	Drake Petroleum	DPS	Tetrachloroethylene
<b>7 May Street</b>	Rivard Residence	Tier 1D	Fuel Oil #2
<b>22 Chestnut Street</b>	Country Side Auto Salvage	Tier 1D	Waste Oil
<b>23 Chestnut Street</b>	Impacted Residence	Tier 1D	Benzene, MBTE
<b>25 Montcalm Avenue</b>	Giguere & Marchand	WCSPRM	Fuel Oil #2
<b>299 Blackstone Street</b>	Millette's Garage	PENNFA	Unknown
<b>7 Elmwood Avenue</b>	Plot 2 Lot 150	WCSPRM	Petroleum

Source: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, 2019

A key component of Chapter 21E is the regulation of contaminated sites posing a continuous significant risk as “Activity and Use Limitation” (AUL) sites by deed restrictions that limit land uses until satisfactory decontamination has been completed. No such sites are currently on record in Blackstone.

## **Natural Resources Constraints**

It is important to designate sites for affordable housing development that are not adversely affected by natural resources constraints. For example, steep slopes can burden the development potential of an otherwise suitable site by increasing the cost of site work and decreasing the buildable area of a parcel. They can also present issues regarding runoff and drainage. Watershed areas, wellhead protection areas, and wetlands also present limitations on development potential (See Figure 1).

The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (“NHESP”) produces a BioMap that identifies important natural habitats and their supporting natural landscapes. The Core Habitat is an area designated by NHESP scientists as a most viable habitat for rare and endangered species. The Supporting Natural Landscape (“SNL”) habitat is a buffer around Core Habitats and provides connections between Core Habitats.





According to NHESP, the designation of SNL zones is based on four characteristics:

1. Natural vegetation patch characteristics;
2. Size of relatively road-less areas;
3. Sub-watershed integrity; and
4. Contribution to buffering BioMap Core Habitat polygons for plants and exemplary communities.

Blackstone's Core Habitat and SNL habitats are mostly located in the northern section of town, and along Quick Stream and Mill River. The habitats are contiguous with the Quissett Wildlife Management Area, which spans the northern extremity of Blackstone but is mostly located in Mendon. It is contiguous with Inman Hill Wildlife Conservation Area in Mendon.

### **Regulatory Constraints**

Blackstone's as-of-right intensity of use schedule<sup>7</sup> represents the most prominent regulatory constraint on development of additional affordable housing units. The minimum lot sizes in the three residential zoning districts (R1, R2, R3) are 35,000, 65,000 and 120,000 square feet, respectively. Furthermore, these zoning districts require 150, 185 and 275 feet of frontage, respectively. The resulting development potential in these districts is limited to expansive lots, each capable of supporting only one single-family home or duplex.

However, Blackstone's Zoning Bylaw does provide multiple alternative zoning provisions to allow higher density and greater flexibility to developers:

#### **1. Multifamily Overlay District**

The multifamily overlay district is a small area on the Woonsocket border, east of the Blackstone River and Route 122. It allows multifamily use with a special permit from the Planning Board, and slightly reduces the minimum lot size to 28,000 square feet. However, the vast majority of the overlay district is occupied by a single complex, Castle Hill Condominiums, which consists of 32 units built in the late 1980s.

#### **2. Village Overlay District**

The Village Overlay District covers most of the Main Street- County Street Corridor along Route 122 in Blackstone's highest density neighborhood, just west of the Multifamily overlay district, along the Blackstone River, and also bordering Woonsocket. The stated

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<sup>7</sup> Code of the Town of Blackstone, Massachusetts, §123-13

purpose of the overlay district is “to facilitate new investment within the district, to build pedestrian-scale convenience and amenity, *to meet housing needs*, to serve entrepreneurial interests of Blackstone residents and to protect and enhance the village heritage.” (emphasis supplied).<sup>8</sup> The intent of the district’s alternative regulations is that, with a special permit from the Planning Board, significantly higher density lots and multifamily uses are allowed. The minimum lot area in the overlay district is 7500 square feet and minimum frontage is 70 feet.

### 3. Flexible Residential Development bylaw

The Flexible Residential Development bylaw<sup>9</sup> is designed to balance the interests of open-space and natural resource preservation with development needs. In essence, the bylaw allows a developer to demonstrate the number of lots that could be permitted on a given parcel of land, and instead build that same number in higher density on a smaller portion of the parcel, while preserving the parcel’s remainder in perpetuity.

### 4. Affordable Housing bylaw

The Affordable Housing bylaw provides that a development of six or more units must make at least ten percent of the dwelling units affordable to households meeting HUD’s “low income” (80% of area median income) threshold.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, developers receive a density incentive allowing the number of dwelling units to be increased above the number otherwise allowed by a number equal to the number of affordable units required plus twice the number of affordable units proposed in excess of the number required, to a maximum increase of 50%.

### 5. Duplexes

Blackstone allows duplexes by right in all three residential zoning districts. The minimum lot size must be 50% larger than the minimum for a single family home. This helps with the goal of providing affordable housing by accommodating two dwelling units on less land than two single family homes.

### 6. Accessory Apartments

Blackstone also has provisions for accessory apartments. These are allowed in all three residential districts and the Commercial district. There are minimum conditions related to size, design and occupancy, but no additional land is required.

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<sup>8</sup> Code of the Town of Blackstone, Massachusetts, §123-23.2

<sup>9</sup> Code of the Town of Blackstone, Massachusetts, §123-13.1

<sup>10</sup> Code of the Town of Blackstone, Massachusetts, §123-13

## **F. Overview of Municipal Infrastructure**

### **Water<sup>11</sup>**

The Department of Public Works personnel continue to operate and maintain six pumping stations that pump water from eight wells. The water is treated at the corrosion control facility before it is distributed to customers/residents. The meters in all wells were calibrated in 2016. The water distribution system includes four water storage standpipes and approximately forty miles of water main providing drinking water and fire protection to 90% of Blackstone's population. The water department has continued its annual water main flushing program during the spring and fall seasons. The department continues to work on the water meter replacement program. Water testing is required by the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act and Massachusetts Drinking Water Regulations. Once a month [the water department collects] bacteria samples from nineteen locations throughout the water distribution system. During the year, it also sampled for contaminants such as: Carbon based products called volatile Organic Compounds (VOC), Disinfectant Byproducts such as Trihalomethane and Halo Acetic Acids and others such as Nitrate, Tetrachloroethylene, Arsenic, Iron, Manganese, and Asbestos. It also tested 20 residential homes and the schools for lead and copper. The Town worked with Toomey Water Services to inspect the backflow devices throughout town. The Town's fire hydrants are winterized in the fall to protect them from freezing. Harris Pond is used as a source for Woonsocket's municipal water system.

### **Wastewater<sup>12</sup>**

The Department of Public Works ("DPW") currently operates and maintains fifteen (15) waste water pump stations throughout town. These pump stations are checked daily by DPW employees. All the sewer stations are cleaned. The wet wells in four of the stations were cleaned. The flow meter at the Main lift station was calibrated.

Blackstone's sewer system was initiated in 1972 to serve the densely populated southern part of town. It ties into Woonsocket's system for treatment. In 1987, design work began on extending the system to the High Rocks district, Mendon Street to Lincoln Street, Lincoln to the Kennedy School, and Blackstone Street to Summer Street. It was extended into High Rocks extension and Millerville in 2001-2002. More recently, a new sewer line was installed along the Southern New England Trunkline Trail ("SNETT") to serve The Meadows at Harris Pond subdivision.

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted from Annual Report of the Town of Blackstone, Massachusetts, 2016

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from Annual Report of the Town of Blackstone, Massachusetts, 2016

## **Roads and Highways<sup>13</sup>**

In the spring/summer of 2017 the Highway Division started and completed its annual clean-up season. Streets were swept, street lines and cross walks were painted. In 2016, the Highway Division repaved numerous streets including First Avenue, Orchard Street, Chestnut Street, Union Street, and Old Lincoln Street. It also repaved portions of Rathbun Street, Farm Street, and Mendon Street, and replaced the sidewalks on Rathbun Street.

Transportation for seniors ages 60 and over and disabled residents is provided by the Blackstone Van Transportation Service, which provides trips for medical and non-medical appointments according to a scheduled dial-a-ride, first come/first serve, curb-to-curb program. The service operates 8:00am to 3:30pm Monday through Friday.

## **Municipal and Recreation Facilities**

Blackstone's municipal center, located at 15 Saint Paul Street, serves as headquarters for municipal offices and administration, as well as the Police and Fire Departments. The Fire Department maintains two additional substations, both unmanned, located at 666 Rathbun Street and 132 Elm Street.

The Blackstone Public Library, located at 86 Main Street, is a 17,000 square foot facility constructed in 2004. It is fully compliant in the requirements for State aid and certified by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. In 2016, the library benefited from fifteen new computers, ten for patrons and five for staff, allowing increased efficiency at the circulation desk and an improved customer experience.

The Blackstone Housing Authority maintains an office in Fox Brook Manor, a 32-unit subsidized housing facility that it manages. Fox Brook Manor was constructed in 1974. Additional municipally-owned facilities include the Polish American Citizens Club building at 6 Mill Street, the Blackstone Water Department building at 51 Elm Street, and the Blackstone Valley Regional Recycling Center at 14 Chestnut Street.

The Town maintains recreation facilities with playing fields and equipment. The Roosevelt Babe Ruth Field, at 15 Saint Paul Street, has baseball and softball fields and a basketball court. The fields were recently re-seeded and a new irrigation system was installed. Goulet Field, located behind John F. Kennedy Elementary School, includes full sized and smaller-sized soccer fields. A new well and sprinkler system and a lighting system were recently installed. The same complex includes a new basketball court that was constructed in 2016. Finally, the Town maintains Turesi Park at 655 Rathbun Street.

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<sup>13</sup> Blackstone Annual Report 2016

Turesi was renovated in 2015 when old and dangerous playground equipment and a cracked and broken basketball surface were removed.

- Roosevelt Babe Ruth Field, 15 Saint Paul Street
  - Baseball, softball, basketball
  - Recently re-seeded and a new irrigation system was installed
- Goulet Field
  - Soccer
  - New lights added in 2015
  - New well and sprinkler system recently installed for soccer fields
- Elementary School Complex, Lincoln Street
  - New outdoor basketball court, 2016
- Turesi Park, 655 Rathbun Street
  - Facelift in 2015 – removed old and dangerous playground equipment and a cracked and broken basketball surface was replaced.

## **Schools**

Blackstone, along with neighboring Millville, is a member of the Blackstone-Millville Regional School District. The District was established in 1967 to serve the needs of both towns, and was fully regionalized in 1984, replacing both local school committees. The District consists of five schools, four of which are in Blackstone:

- Blackstone-Millville Regional High School, Grades 9 - 12 (1970)
- Frederick W. Harnett Middle School, Grades 6 - 8 (2003)
- John F. Kennedy Elementary School, Grades K - 2 (1965/renovated 2003)
- Augustine F. Maloney Elementary School Grades 3 – 5 (1988)

According to the Blackstone-Millville Regional School District 2014-2016 District Improvement Plan, it is a District goal to understand building needs (building systems, instructional and programmatic needs) to ensure that facilities meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

## Section II: Affordable Housing Goals

### **Summary of affordable housing goals:**

#### **Overall Goal - Provide a Diverse Range of Housing Types to Serve a Variety of Lifestyles and Life Stages**

- 1.** Support and enhance existing wide range of land use patterns.
- 2.** Identify regulatory and infrastructure measures that encourage “aging-in-place” (AARP) and additional over-55 housing.
- 3.** Encourage preservation and enhancement of architectural and historical character.
- 4.** Enhance Village Overlay District.
- 5.** Promote use of Flexible Residential Development.
- 6.** Encourage mixed uses in Commercial districts.
- 7.** Support pedestrian and bicycle connections between and among residential and commercial neighborhoods.

### **A. Affordability**

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development affordability guidelines are set forth in Table 7. The table indicates the requisite income for households and families of various sizes to qualify for affordable housing. For example, a household of four qualifies for affordable housing if its household income is less than \$68,000 per year. According to Blackstone’s income characteristics presented in Table 5, 27.1% of households have incomes below \$50,000 and another 18.5% have incomes above \$50,000 and below \$75,000. Interpolating that range results in an estimate of another 13.32% with incomes below \$68,000, indicating that more than 40% of Blackstone households qualify for affordable housing.

With the percentage of affordable housing in Blackstone’s housing stock at 3.4% (123 units), the Town must produce additional units to accommodate the needs of current and future residents. This percentage will drop after the 2020 U.S. Census is released with a new denominator of total housing units. In order to consistently increase access to housing, SHI units with the attributes described in the above-listed goals should be produced in accordance with 760 CMR 56.03(a) at a rate totaling at least .5 percent of Blackstone’s total housing units every calendar year.

## **B. Overview of Affordable Housing Goals**

The Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment section of this report analyzes the Town's existing housing stock, existing population, projected changes in the population that indicate the need for a change in the housing stock, as well as recent development trends. The analysis indicates that Blackstone's housing stock is more diverse than many suburban towns, and more similar to the state as a whole. It has a higher percentage of single-family detached and attached units and a much lower percentage of units in buildings with 10 or more units. However, the percentages of duplexes, 3 and 4 unit buildings, and 5-9 unit buildings are in line with the state as a whole. Thus, Blackstone has a good foundation for accommodating changing demographic trends.

Future growth indicates a continued increase in the population of senior citizens (60+ years) and mid-career adults (40 – 59 years), and decreased populations of young adults and children. Rising senior populations require a variety of housing options including traditional housing, assisted living, and other facilities for the elderly and frail elderly. The decrease in the young adult population may be a function of the lack of both affordable ownership and rental housing.

In order to accommodate both populations, an increased supply of smaller and more affordable housing is required. The housing needs of the two populations are similar in that both require smaller units that are affordable to own or rent. Furthermore, the location of such units is more important than the size of their parcels. Therefore, developing these units in transit-oriented and pedestrian-friendly areas is essential.

The Town has responded to this need by requiring that at least 10 percent of the units in new housing developments are affordable. The units can be provided either on site as part of the development, or off site in either new buildings or rehabilitated existing units. This requirement has resulted in 4 new affordable units in recent years. The Town has also permitted accessory apartment units. These have tended to accommodate either elderly or young adult family members in housing occupied by mid-career adults.

Recent housing developments have been single family detached units. These include developments known as Rolling Brook, The Meadows at Harris Pond, and Sycamore Park Estates. These projects include 133 new houses, and several host accessory apartments.

Blackstone's housing goals are derived from the recently adopted Master Plan. As noted above, Blackstone already has a more diverse housing stock than its abutting Massachusetts towns and most suburban communities. Its housing stock diversity is closer to that of Worcester County and Massachusetts, as a whole. Recent trends in housing preferences are towards the type of diversity offered in Blackstone. Therefore, dramatic changes in housing policies are not needed.

The housing goals from Blackstone's 2018 Master Plan are as follows:

**OVERALL HOUSING GOAL: Provide a Diverse Range of Housing Types to Serve a Variety of Lifestyles and Life Stages**

While additional affordable housing was not strongly supported in Blackstone, according to the survey results, it is law in Massachusetts that if a city or town has less than 10% affordable housing, developers can build projects that bypass local requirements. Therefore, efforts should be made to reach the 10% goal in order to retain local control of new housing development. Measures can be taken to provide for a wide range of housing types that would serve Blackstone's population while retaining its character.

**Goal 1: Support and enhance existing wide range of land use patterns.**

The Town should continue to adjust its housing inventory to accommodate the needs of its evolving resident demographics while simultaneously preserving its character by ensuring that new units are compatible with the existing housing stock. Blackstone's character is generally rural to suburban in the northern part of town and more urban in the southern part. It is important to implement diverse strategies that allow development in any part of town to conform to the appropriate architecture and scale.

**Implementation Actions for Goal 1:**

1. Consider zoning amendments to encourage affordable housing production in conformity with each zoning district where affordable housing is desirable, such as:
  - a. Including measures to encourage housing in the Main Street/Route 122 Area.
  - b. Promoting or expanding the density bonuses to developers in exchange for the construction of affordable housing units in new housing developments.
  - c. Establishing design standards that would ensure that the appearance and scale of new affordable housing are compatible with the character of its surrounding area.
  - d. Researching a zoning provision that could be a development alternative to MGL Chapter 40B.



- e. Adopting zoning changes to allow and incentivize smaller and more affordable housing units for first time home buyers.

**Goal 2: Identify regulatory and infrastructure measures that encourage “aging-in-place” (AARP) and additional over-55 housing.**

The senior population in Blackstone is projected to increase substantially. The needs of seniors will range broadly both economically and in degree of independence. While progress has been made, it is important to provide diverse housing options through rental and ownership that allow Blackstone’s residents to continue living in Town as they grow older. Access to amenities and services, as well as social interaction, are important elements of this goal.

There are two aspects to this goal. One is to assist seniors so that they may “age-in-place.” This can be done through infrastructure improvements like sidewalks to better connect them to businesses, recreation areas and other services. There are state and local resources and programs available to assist in some aspects of “aging-in-place” such as those offered through the Community Development program at the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development that assist seniors with house repairs and handicapped accessibility. The existing accessory apartment bylaw also already helps make it possible for seniors to remain in their houses by providing opportunity for rental income to help with expenses as well as potential assistance with small household tasks.

The other aspect is to encourage additional housing for seniors. This can take the form of additional public housing for seniors or private age-restricted independent living or assisted living. The Zoning Bylaw could be amended to encourage this type of development.

**Implementation Actions for Goal 2:**

1. Improve sidewalks and other pedestrian amenities between current neighborhoods and business and recreation areas and other services.
2. Review transportation services to ensure needs of seniors are being met.
3. Consider development of additional public housing for seniors in areas that offer easy access to goods and services.
4. Consider a Zoning Bylaw provision for age-restricted housing.
5. Research and apply for public housing resources for both new construction and modernization earmarked for seniors and special needs populations.

### **Goal 3: Encourage preservation and enhancement of architectural and historical character.**

Currently, the Village Overlay District has bulk and size requirements and some minimal guidelines regarding driveway and landscaping options. This may be sufficient, but consideration should be given as to whether additional guidelines (not necessarily requirements) would help preserve and enhance the character of that district. Similarly design guidelines could be considered for the Commercial district, at least for mixed uses, in order to encourage such mixed uses and result in a more attractive place to live and do business.

#### **Implementation Actions for Goal 3:**

1. Consider amending the Village Overlay District bylaw to require or provide further incentives to owners or developers to comply with more comprehensive design guidelines or standards.
2. Consider adopting design guidelines or standards for Commercial districts, at least for mixed-use developments including housing.
3. Consider design guidelines for residential districts with incentives for compliance such as dimensional flexibility.
4. Consider an historical preservation special permit to provide flexibility and/or incentives to preserve historic structures and/or features.

### **Goal 4: Enhance Village Overlay District.**

The Village Overlay District already has older housing and is in close proximity to, and encompasses, Main Street. In addition to the design guidelines or standards recommended above, infrastructure improvements in both the residential and commercial areas of the district could increase its appeal.

#### **Implementation Actions for Goal 4:**

1. Improve sidewalks, streets, and landscaping within the Village Overlay District.
2. Consider expanding district to nearby areas and to the area around and within the East Blackstone Historic District and apply design guidelines and standards to those areas.
3. Encourage or require compliance with the density and dimensional requirements of the Village Overlay District.

### **Goal 5: Promote use of the Flexible Residential Development Bylaw.**

The last three subdivisions have been developed under the Flexible Residential Development Bylaw. The inclusionary zoning provision requires that at least 10% of the units in developments of 6 or more units be affordable. The combination of these two provisions of the Zoning Bylaw have resulted in preservation of open space and production of affordable housing at no cost to the Town.

#### **Implementation Actions for Goal 5:**

1. Consider revisions to the Flexible Residential Bylaw to provide more incentive to incorporate affordable units within the development.
2. Consider revisions to the Flexible Residential Bylaw to provide standards for resulting open space.

### **Goal 6: Encourage mixed uses in Commercial districts**

Main Street in Blackstone already has a mix of housing and commercial uses. However, most of those uses are in separate buildings. There are few mixed-use buildings. In 2013, the Zoning Bylaw was amended to encourage mixed-use buildings within the Commercial districts. However, there has been little activity so far in converting existing or constructing new mixed-use buildings. Demographic trends favor mixed-use and multifamily housing in walkable mixed-use neighborhoods. The Blackstone River Greenway is an important asset to the neighborhood and the proposed Worcester-Woonsocket-Providence commuter rail service will be another when it starts service as planned in 2020. These should help attract new residents.

#### **Implementation Actions for Goal 6:**

1. Study the Commercial corridor along Main Street to identify assets and liabilities for both residential and commercial uses.
2. Review Zoning Bylaw and identify measures that could encourage additional mixed-use conversions or new construction.
3. Consider establishing criteria for properties to qualify for incentives for mixed-use development.
4. Promote assets of Commercial corridor to help attract residents and businesses.

## **Goal 7: Support pedestrian and bicycle connections between and among residential and commercial neighborhoods**

As stated above, Blackstone has a major pedestrian and bicycle asset in the Blackstone River Greenway. Also, the density in and around the Main Street Commercial corridor lends itself to pedestrian and bicycle activity. The Greenway itself should be highlighted and used as a focal point to improve connections to it, but also to improve and add new pedestrian and bicycle amenities within the Commercial district, from outlying neighborhoods to the Commercial district and to neighboring communities.

### **Implementation Actions for Goal 7:**

1. Take advantage of Complete Streets program to implement pedestrian and bicycle improvements.
2. Support efforts to further improve the SNETT from Franklin to Douglas making Blackstone the crossroads of two significant trails.
3. Add trees, benches, etc. that enhance pedestrian and bicycle travel but also improve desirability of the Main Street Commercial district and nearby neighborhoods as place to live.

## Section III:

### Implementation Strategies

#### Key Strategies:

- Review Affordable Housing Zoning Bylaw.
- Promote Housing to Serve a Diverse Population and Range of Life Stages.
- Consider Increasing Supply and Types of Housing for Seniors.
- Promote Mixed Uses in Commercial Districts.
- Consider Commercial District Design Guidelines.
- Consider Village Overlay District Residential Design Guidelines
- Improve Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections.

#### Targets:

- Affordable units needed to reach 10%: 238.
- Affordable homes needed to reach “safe harbor”: 18 (1-year) or 36 (2-year).
- Additional units needed to reach 10% after 2020 U.S. Census: 248 (approximate).

This section presents several strategies for addressing the housing needs of Blackstone. The overarching goal of these strategies is to result in the Town’s achieving the goals listed in Section II and reaching and maintaining a level of 10 percent of its housing stock as affordable in compliance with Chapter 40B.

#### **A. Implementation Techniques**

##### **1. Amend Zoning Bylaw and Other Regulatory Actions to Encourage Development of More Affordable Housing**

###### **Review Affordable Housing Bylaw**

In addition to increasing its supply of affordable housing, Blackstone must provide additional affordable units as new market rate housing is created in order to maintain and/or increase its percentage of affordable units. The existing affordable housing provision of the Zoning Bylaw already requires that at least 10% of housing units within

developments of more than six units to be affordable. It also provides for an optional density bonus of two units for every unit above the required minimum. The latter provision has not been taken advantage of. One option to consider is a density bonus for “workforce housing” in addition to housing that qualifies for inclusion on the Subsidized Housing Inventory.

Another alternative to consider is a provision for off-site units. Providing affordable units on site is desirable, but there are advantages to off-site units as well, particularly if the off-site units are provided by renovating existing housing units that are deteriorating and/or located in areas that may increase support for local businesses and/or help stimulate revival of declining neighborhoods. Inclusionary zoning requirements can be more attractive and successful when designed to include such flexibility. Off-site units have been approved in past projects but provisions for them with specific criteria could be incorporated into the bylaw. Another feature to consider is adopting a sliding scale for affordable requirements based on the size of the project. After implementation, the bylaw should be monitored to determine its effectiveness and whether any adjustments are warranted.

#### Promote Housing to Serve a Diverse Population and Range of Life Stages

Blackstone has taken a major step in diversifying its housing stock by entering an agreement with Soldier On to develop housing for veterans on a parcel of Town-owned land. At this point an agreement has been reached and funding is being secured. No permits have been issued and construction has not yet begun. This project serves as an example of a mutually-beneficial project in which much needed housing with associated services is provided to veterans who need both while the Town also benefits from tax revenue and new soccer fields included in the project.

#### Consider Increasing Supply and Types of Housing for Seniors

As shown in Section I, the over 55 population is increasing rapidly in Blackstone and the region. Consideration should be given to encouraging development of additional housing serving this population group. This could include a bylaw allowing private development of age-restricted housing (with an affordable component) as well as an expansion of public housing for seniors. The Town-owned site between Lewiston and Webster Streets and abutting the SNETT is one possible location for additional public housing for seniors.

Promoting home care services to help seniors remain in their home also advances this goal. The current accessory apartment bylaw also helps seniors remain in their home and should be encouraged for this purpose.

### Promote Mixed Uses in Commercial Districts

Mixed uses are already allowed in the Commercial districts. Generally, housing is in separate buildings from commercial uses. Since a zoning bylaw was passed to allow mixed uses in the same buildings, there has been little or no activity. A recent study by Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) could serve as the basis for a review and updating of the Commercial zoning district to encourage more mixed-use development, including housing on the upper floors over commercial uses on the first floor.

## **2. Adopt Design Standards for Main Street/Route 122 Commercial District and Village Overlay District**

### Consider Commercial District Design Guidelines

The Commercial district corridor along Main Street/Route 122 is the primary commercial district in Blackstone. It provides needed retail, restaurant, professional and other services to residents of Blackstone and the surrounding region. It also includes a significant amount of housing.

Design guidelines would take time to have an impact. However, over time, they could result in a more cohesive and more aesthetically desirable neighborhood that would make it more appealing as a place to live as well as a place to do business. Such guidelines should address facades, signs, architectural features, parking, and pedestrian and bicycle amenities. Guidelines addressing mixed uses should also be considered.

### Consider Village Overlay District Residential Design Guidelines

Currently, the Village Overlay District has bulk and size requirements and some minimal guidelines regarding driveway and landscaping options. This may be sufficient, but consideration should be given as to whether additional guidelines (not necessarily mandates) would help preserve and enhance the character of that district.

The Village Overlay District straddles the Commercial and Residence I districts. Therefore, design guidelines for the Residence I district, at least for mixed uses, should be different from those in the Commercial district. They should focus on residential architectural features that maintain the character of the Village Overlay District, and enhance its appeal as a place to live.

### **3. Improve Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections**

In addition to the Blackstone River Bikeway and SNETT, local connections to Main Street through bicycle paths and sidewalks should be enhanced. The Massachusetts Complete Streets program offers an opportunity to provide funding to evaluate and prioritize streets, as well as to implement projects that will improve conditions for pedestrians, bicyclists, disabled and elderly, and all users and potential users of the streets. It can also be used to enhance aesthetics through street trees and other landscaping.

#### **B. Numerical Targets and Schedule**

As shown in Table 17, during the 4-year period of 2014-2017, Blackstone issued permits for 80 dwelling units, an average of 20 per year. Since DHCD lists 3606 total housing units in Blackstone in 2010, and 123 SHI units, the Town currently needs 238 (for a total of 361, 10% of 3606) units to reach 10 percent. It could achieve a 1-year “safe harbor” from 40B developments if it developed 18 units (.5% of 3606) in a calendar year or a 2-year “safe harbor” if it developed 36 (1% of 3606) units within a calendar year.

It should be noted that the 2017 American Community Survey estimated 3627 housing units. However, that appears to be a low estimate based on 80 units being developed just from 2014-2017. In order to be conservative regarding the need, if one assumes the 20 units per year average was maintained for the entire 10-year period from 2010 through the 2020 U.S. Census, the total number of housing units that would be counted in 2020 would be about 3706. This would raise the benchmark for safe harbor status to 19 units for one year and 37 units for two years of safe harbor. About 248 SHI units will be needed to reach 10 percent after the 2020 U.S. Census is released.



To help meet the goals outlined in Section II, it is essential to identify specific geographies for implementation. Due to easy access to goods and services and a pedestrian-friendly environment, the Main Street/Route 122 and Millerville sections of Blackstone are the most suitable locations for new or renovated housing.

In addition, the Town -owned properties included in Table 27 have been previously identified as suitable locations for affordable housing development. Figure 2 illustrates these locations.

<b>Table 27: Potential Sites for Affordable Housing</b>					
<b>Site Number</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Parcel</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Zoning</b>	<b>Ownership</b>
<b>1</b>	Elm Street	18-9 & 10, 17-68	39.54	R2	Town of Blackstone
<b>2</b>	Webster and Lewiston Sts.	4-92 & 94	.95	R1	Town of Blackstone



### **C. Certification**

Upon achieving production of housing in accordance with the numerical targets suggested above, Blackstone will be eligible to request certification of its Housing Production Plan. Certification will provide the Town the option of denying a Chapter 40B comprehensive permit application. Certification will be valid for one year if the Town achieves an increase in the number of units in its Subsidized Housing Inventory of .5 percent in one year, or it will be valid for two years if it achieves an increase of 1.0 percent.

If a community has achieved certification within 15 days of the opening of a local hearing for a Comprehensive Permit, the ZBA shall provide written notice to the applicant, with a copy to DHCD, that it considers a denial of the permit or the imposition of conditions or requirements would be Consistent with Local Needs, the grounds that it believes have been met, and the factual basis for that position, including any necessary supportive documentation.

If the applicant wishes to challenge the ZBA's assertion, it must do so by providing written notice to DHCD, with a copy to the ZBA, within 15 days of its receipt of the ZBA's notice, including any documentation to support its position. DHCD shall review the materials provided by both parties and issue a decision within 30 days of its receipt of all materials. The ZBA shall have the burden of providing the grounds for asserting that a denial or an approval with conditions would be Consistent with Local Needs, provided, however, that any failure of the DHCD to issue a timely decision shall be deemed a determination in favor of the municipality. This procedure shall not toll the requirement to terminate the hearing within 180 days.

