

# Shaping Charlemont

A Master Plan for  
Charlemont

Town of Charlemont, MA  
May 2025



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## What is a Master Plan?

A master plan (also referred to as a comprehensive plan) is a long-range policy document that articulates a community's shared vision for its future and outlines action strategies to achieve that vision. In Massachusetts, the requirements for a master plan are defined in Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 41, Section 81D, which encourages municipalities to develop a holistic plan for land use, housing, economic development, transportation and circulation, natural and cultural resources, open space and recreation, and services and facilities that provides a strong basis for decision-making and action.

Shaping Charlemont: A Master Plan for Charlemont (Plan) provides a coordinated framework to guide local decision-making over the next 20 years. To develop the Plan, Town boards, committees, staff, and residents identified pressing issues, made decisions about top priorities, and planned to address them in a coordinated effort. Going forward, the Plan is intended to remain a living document—referenced, revised as needed, and used to guide accountable implementation.

## Why Plan for Charlemont?

Charlemont faces both pressing challenges and exciting opportunities that require thoughtful planning. Like many rural towns, Charlemont is grappling with population decline, a high tax burden, costly infrastructure and public services, and a limited workforce and customer base to support small businesses. The town is also experiencing a housing affordability crisis, complicated by demand for second homes and short-term rentals. Additionally, Charlemont faces climate-related risks such as increased flooding along Route 2—a critical transportation corridor—and in the town center, where emergency services are located.

At the same time, Charlemont benefits from unique strengths. Nestled along the Deerfield River and in the foothills of the Berkshires, the town boasts remarkable natural beauty and robust outdoor recreation opportunities. Dedicated Town staff, engaged officials and volunteers, and creative and community-minded residents are working together to steward Charlemont's future.

## About the Planning Process

The Charlemont Planning Board commissioned the 2025 Master Plan in recognition of the need to update the Town's previous plan, which was adopted in 2003. While many issue-specific studies and plans have been completed since 2003, this Plan brings together those efforts into a single, comprehensive document.

The Town engaged Dodson & Flinker, Landscape Architecture and Planning, to facilitate the planning process, working under the direction of the Planning Board. The project was shaped by robust community participation—including a town-wide survey, focus groups, a public workshop, and a workshop with board and committee members. Town staff, local officials, business owners, and residents contributed essential insight throughout.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## How to Use this Plan

This document is intentionally concise to be user-friendly and actionable. The vision statement and eight overarching goals appear below. The Action Plan in Chapter 4 translates the vision into concrete steps, identifying responsible parties and priority levels for implementation.

Data, community input, and analysis are found in Chapter 3, organized by the State's required master plan elements:

- Demographics and Economy
- Housing
- Land Use
- Agriculture, Recreation, Open Space, and Natural Resources
- Transportation
- Public Services and Facilities
- Historic and Cultural Resources

While each topic is presented separately, many are deeply interconnected. For example, land use decisions influence housing affordability and transportation patterns; economic development is shaped by infrastructure and natural resources; and so on. The goals and strategies reflect these connections and promote integrated decision-making.

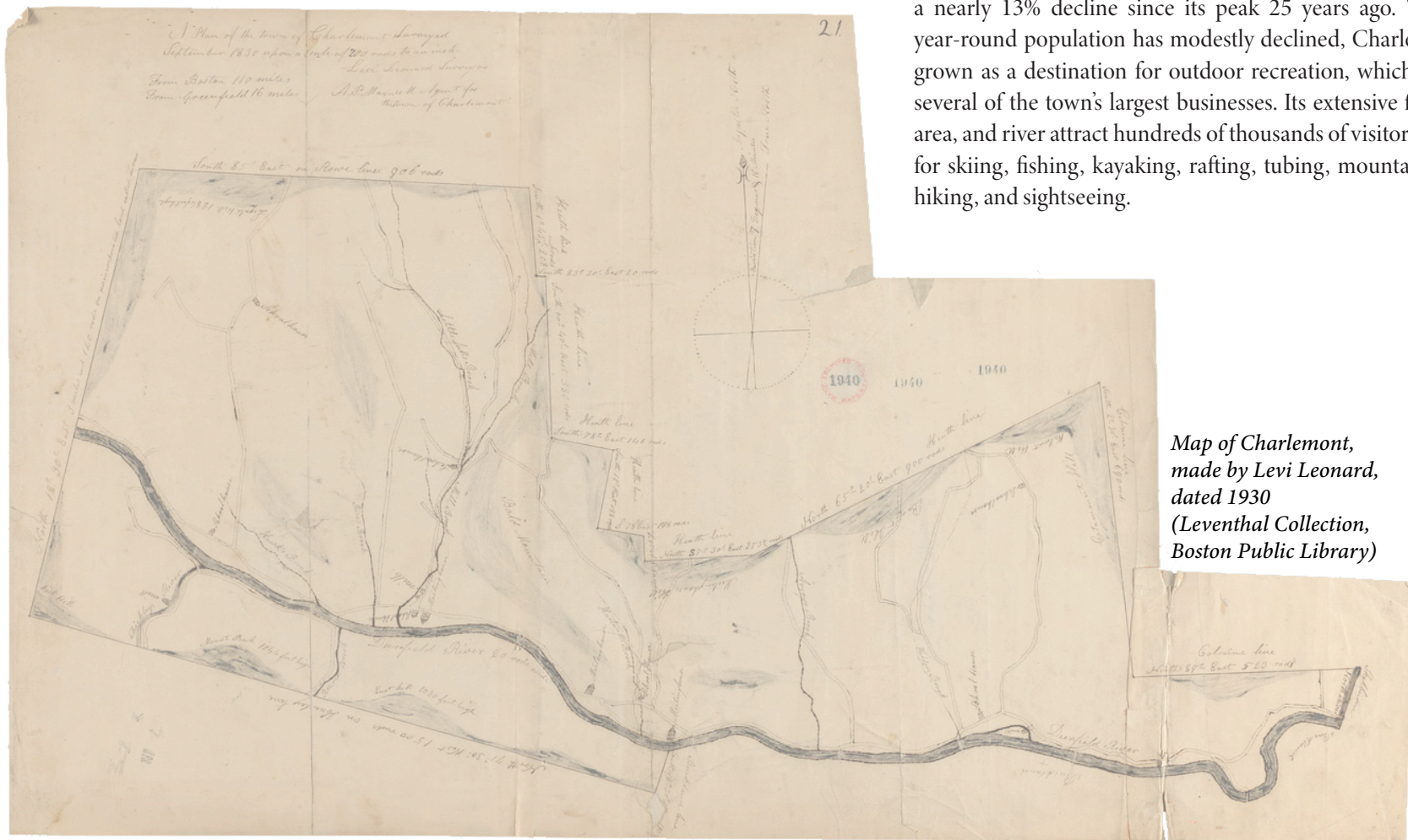


## Town Context

Charlemont is a small, scenic town in northwestern Franklin County. Situated midway between Greenfield and North Adams along Route 2, Charlemont has long been a destination for visitors drawn to its natural beauty and recreational opportunities. Route 2, also known as the Mohawk Trail, runs parallel to the Deerfield River and serves as the Town's main arterial road. Most development, including the town center, is concentrated

along this corridor. Rural roads extend from Route 2, following the Deerfield's tributaries into the hillsides, where homes are scattered across the forested landscape.

The town center includes a general store, Town Hall, Hawlemont School, and several homes and small businesses. With an estimated population of 1,881, Charlemont has experienced a nearly 13% decline since its peak 25 years ago. While the year-round population has modestly declined, Charlemont has grown as a destination for outdoor recreation, which supports several of the town's largest businesses. Its extensive forests, ski area, and river attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually for skiing, fishing, kayaking, rafting, tubing, mountain biking, hiking, and sightseeing.



*Map of Charlemont,  
made by Levi Leonard,  
dated 1930  
(Leventhal Collection,  
Boston Public Library)*



*Bissell Bridge (Photo by author)*

# 1: VISION, GOALS, AND ACTIONS



## VISION, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

The vision for Charlemont in 2045, found on the following page, serves as the foundation of this Plan. Informed by input from more than sixty residents, business owners, Town staff, and board and committee members, it reflects the community's shared aspirations for the next twenty years. Key themes that emerged from the visioning process are woven throughout the goals, objectives, and actions of the Plan. The vision offers a unifying framework for decision-making, grounded in local values and aspirations.

The eight overarching goals were crafted to answer the question, "What do we need to do to realize this vision?" Some of these goals align with standard master plan elements; others emerged organically as top priorities in the process. All eight goals are grounded in community input and are top priorities for town residents and businesses.

While many actions in the Action Plan are identified as "High Priority," several received especially strong and consistent support throughout the public engagement process. These actions may address urgent safety needs, represent quick and achievable wins, or lay the groundwork for implementing other actions. These top-priority items are highlighted on pages 12 and 13. The full action plan can be found on page 75.

*The Deerfield River  
(Photo by author)*

# VISION FOR CHARLEMONT



In 2045, Charlemont is a town where natural beauty, a sense of adventure, creativity, and strong social fabric come together to create a one-of-a-kind community. Our town has masterfully balanced thoughtful development with environmental stewardship, sustaining our clean air, clean water, and scenic landscape while creating housing and business opportunities that support an economically and environmentally thriving community.

The Deerfield River, Mohawk Trail State Forest, and surrounding rural landscapes are the backbone of our town's identity and our quality of life. Our scenic landscapes, outdoor recreation opportunities, and vibrant community make Charlemont a great place to live and draw visitors and new residents.

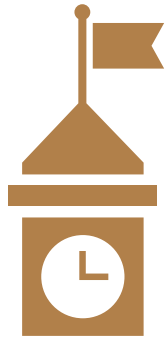
Our revitalized town center is a source of pride. Visitors are drawn to explore unique local shops and restaurants and residents have welcoming gathering places to connect, relax, and celebrate together. Regular community events throughout the year showcase local talent, support businesses, and strengthen the town's cohesion and shared identity. Public spaces in walkable hubs through town serve as the heart of our community, offering beautiful settings where people of all ages can gather and enjoy the company of their neighbors.

The Town has adapted to climate-related challenges such as flooding along Route 2 by moving key infrastructure out of harm's way and improving transportation connectivity outside of the Route 2 corridor.

Through strategic housing initiatives—building affordable homes, renovating historic properties into multi-family units, and refining zoning policies—we've opened opportunities for diverse housing options that respect our rural character while welcoming people at all life stages and income levels. These efforts have attracted new neighbors, strengthened our tax base, and fostered shared prosperity.

At our core, Charlemont treasures its rural character and our adventurous, neighborly, independent spirit. Values of compassion, generosity, and playfulness infuse daily life. By harnessing local talent, embracing volunteerism, and encouraging broad civic participation, we've built a town that residents feel deep ownership of and genuine pride in calling home.

# GOALS



## Revitalize the Town Center

Once a point of pride, Charlemont's town center is currently seen by many residents as a concern. Several businesses have closed, and many properties are vacant or appear dilapidated and poorly maintained. At the same time, flooding threatens numerous existing structures. Revitalizing the town center will create a more welcoming entrance to Charlemont, restore a sense of place, and reestablish the area as a hub for business and civic life.

Both public and private spaces are essential to creating a vibrant town center. The Town can support beautification efforts on private properties by partnering with landowners, while streetscape improvements and high-quality public spaces can create a place where people want to stop and spend time. A Town Center Plan can help the community understand opportunities for new development, as well as the infrastructure and investment needed to make the town center a thriving hub once again.



## Protect and Care for Our Rivers, Forests, and Farms

Charlemont's scenic landscape and rural character are among the town's most cherished qualities—and the primary draw for many visitors. Protecting these landscapes and waterways is essential not only to the town's character and residents' quality of life, but also to the local economy. Stewardship of these resources involves both aesthetic and ecological considerations.

Through design guidelines, Charlemont can ensure that new development in key areas—such as along Route 2 and in the town center—is compatible with the desired character of the town and landscape. Protecting and investing in forest health and management will support both forest ecosystems and the water quality of streams and the Deerfield River. Similarly, preserving farmland and supporting local farms will strengthen the local economy while maintaining agricultural traditions and scenic views.

## Grow the Local Economy

Charlemont residents desire a local economy that offers quality jobs and essential services for the community. Although the town attracts a significant number of visitors, residents note that these visits are not translating into growth for the rest of the economy. Meantime, there are few businesses that meet residents' needs for goods, services, or stable employment. Long-time residents recall a time when Charlemont supported a vibrant mix of restaurants and gathering places. Today, resident-serving businesses are scarce. Local business owners cite challenges such as workforce shortages and regulatory barriers as major obstacles to growth.

To strengthen its economy, Charlemont aims to support a diverse network of small businesses. Enhancing infrastructure to accommodate longer visitor stays and better connecting tourists to local offerings would allow the town to build on its reputation as a destination for outdoor recreation. By investing in key infrastructure—such as water, sewer, and transportation—and updating zoning to allow more housing and support small-scale development, Charlemont can create the conditions for a more resilient, community-serving economy.



## Make Charlemont Climate-Ready

Climate change—and the resulting increase in extreme weather—poses a serious risk to communities everywhere, but particularly to riverfront towns like Charlemont. Flooding along the Deerfield River, and to a lesser extent its tributaries, has already caused significant damage to public and private property. In the years ahead, flooding is expected to become both more severe and more frequent. Other climate-related hazards, such as forest fires and extreme heat, also present growing concerns.

Charlemont can reduce its vulnerability by relocating critical infrastructure out of flood-prone areas, upgrading existing infrastructure, and preserving the health of its forests and open spaces. Promoting emergency preparedness among residents and strengthening emergency response planning are also essential. The Town should continue to assess climate risks and explore additional adaptation strategies by collaborating with neighboring communities and leveraging State programs to conduct further studies and planning. These efforts will help Charlemont prepare for an uncertain climate future while protecting public safety and community well-being.



# GOALS



## Improve Connectivity

Connectivity in Charlemont is constrained by the Town's development patterns, which generally result in longer travel distances. Residents are heavily reliant on personal vehicles, and the existing transportation infrastructure is poorly suited to the large number of visitors who come to the Deerfield River in the summer. Maintaining the Town's extensive road network is an ongoing challenge.

This plan identifies actions to expand transportation options for residents who cannot, or prefer not to, rely on personal vehicles. It outlines steps the Town can take to improve connectivity between key destinations and identifies ways that trail improvements can support active transportation and provide additional recreational opportunities. The Town should also continue working with MassDOT to improve safety along Route 2. Together, these actions offer a path toward more accessible, safe, affordable, enjoyable, and sustainable transportation in Charlemont.



## Strategically Invest in Public Services

Small towns like Charlemont often face difficult choices when navigating modest budgets. Charlemont residents already pay one of the highest property tax rates in the state. Nonetheless, public services remain as essential today as they have ever been.

Charlemont seeks to improve public services in a cost-effective manner by exploring new revenue sources and partnering with neighboring towns and Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) to enhance services and reduce costs. The Town must continue to engage in productive dialogue about challenging decisions, including the potential regionalization of services such as education. At the same time, it must consider all options for raising revenue and work with local representatives to advocate for change at the state level.

## Strengthen Civic Life

Civic life is essential in any community, but especially in a small town like Charlemont, which relies on volunteerism and informed citizens for local government to succeed. Furthermore, all residents benefit when they are connected to one another and feel part of a larger community. This calls for a renewed focus on community events that strengthen social ties and offer opportunities to inform residents about how to participate in town life. Celebrating local history and culture can also foster civic pride, further encouraging volunteerism. In addition to organized events, expanding recreational opportunities geared toward residents—not just tourists—can enhance quality of life and provide informal spaces for neighbors to connect.



## Increase the Supply of Housing

Charlemont aims to expand the availability of diverse housing options so that both current and prospective residents can find homes that meet their needs. At present, limited inventory and high costs make it challenging to buy or rent a home in town. Meanwhile, much of the existing housing stock no longer aligns with current demographics. As household sizes shrink and the population ages, there is a growing need for smaller units that better serve seniors and small households. The shortage of housing also constrains the customer and employee base needed to support local businesses.

This plan recommends a multi-faceted strategy to increase the housing supply. Revising zoning regulations and streamlining the permitting process can help enable new construction. Better utilizing existing buildings can also play a key role. Discouraging new short-term rentals, restoring vacant or deteriorating homes, and converting large single-family homes into multi-unit dwellings are all strategies that can yield more housing. These incremental changes can help residents remain in Charlemont and ensure the town remains a welcoming and inclusive place to live.



# TOP PRIORITY ACTIONS

*The following actions emerged as top priorities. For the full list of actions, see the Action Plan on page 75.*



Appoint a Charlemont OSRP and Master Plan Committee to ensure the successful implementation of the Town's Open Space & Recreation Plan and Master Plan.



Develop a community education and outreach program so residents know how to shelter-in-place and mitigate risk on their properties, and evacuation routes in the case of floods, fires, or other natural disasters. Provide education about these topics in the town newsletter and on printed materials available at Town Hall.



Pursue funding for a Town Center Plan that addresses housing and economic development, and flood resilience.



Support and promote a diverse calendar of community events such as cultural festivals, outdoor recreational events, town picnics, performances, and community dances with the help of volunteers and through partnerships with local businesses, schools, and organizations.



Create a Trails Master Plan that maps existing trails and identifies future trails to create a robust network of various kinds of trails for residents and visitors. Develop a variety of trail types, including hiker/pedestrian trails, mountain bike trails, horseback riding trails, cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing trails, snow mobile trails, and geocache locations.



Form a Charlemont Economic Development Committee or a Business Association to further develop and organize around economic development.

# TOP PRIORITY ACTIONS

Invest in Main Street beautification through streetscape improvements, pedestrian-friendly features, and decorative additions such as lamp posts or hanging baskets.



Conduct a comprehensive economic development study to focus on economic diversification by growing, for example, value-add businesses for local agriculture, light industry, professional services, makerspaces, and forestry.



Revise the cluster development provisions in the Zoning Bylaw to incentivize cluster development over traditional subdivisions so housing can be built efficiently while ensuring the preservation of natural resources. Consider lowering the minimum parcel size threshold, consider requiring conservation of open space, and clarifying how the density bonus is calculated. Reference the Commonwealth's Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit for recommended language.



Work with the Sewer District Commission to evaluate how much sewer capacity should be reserved for additional growth within the town center.



Conduct a corridor study of Route 2 to determine: the desired character of future roadside development, what kinds of improvements are desirable along the corridor (e.g. improvements to rest areas, river access, wayfinding, river access, road improvements for flood resilience, etc.) which properties should be prioritized for protection (e.g. floodplains or prime farmland), and which areas should be prioritized for future development.



Conduct a feasibility study for protecting Town-owned buildings from flood risk, including potential redesigns, flood proofing, and/or relocation of key infrastructure assets, including an analysis of the suitability of alternate sites, preferably Town-owned.



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*All Boards and Committees Meeting  
Stand-on-the-line exercise*

## 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

97

SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS

80

MEETING  
ATTENDEES

30

FOCUS GROUP  
PARTICIPANTS

## FOCUS GROUPS

Dodson & Flinker facilitated three focus groups on Wednesday, January 29th. Participants were invited by Town staff and included individuals who are generally active in town—either as business owners, Town staff, or members of a Town board or committee.

Each focus group included between nine and twelve participants and met for one hour at the Tyler Memorial Library. Dodson & Flinker moderated the discussions to ensure that a broad range of topics were covered and that all participants had an opportunity to contribute. Each session began with a round in which participants shared what they believed to be the biggest challenge facing Charlemont. Following this, facilitators posed questions to prompt further discussion.

Key topics raised in the focus groups included the town's declining population, business and economic development, housing, flooding, town government and services, and transportation. Specific concerns included public water supply regulations and other regulations—including public water supply regulations and Title V regulations, which are seen as obstacles for small businesses; challenges in finding employees; the lack of businesses serving residents (rather than tourists); high property taxes in relation to limited public services; the cost and limited availability of housing; and the need to revitalize the town center by restoring derelict properties. The impact of outdoor recreation on the Town was viewed as both a benefit and a liability if the Town does not diversify into other economic sectors.

## ONLINE SURVEY

An online survey was open to the public from March 7th to March 31st and received 97 responses. It was hosted on SurveyMonkey, with paper surveys available upon request. Participation was voluntary; it is not possible to know whether results are based on a representative sample of resident opinions. Full results of the survey are in the Appendix. A summary of results follows.

### *Demographics*

Survey respondents were: primarily full-time residents and property owners (86%), long time residents (only 20% moved to town since 2010), and diverse in age, though all were 34 years or older (there were not any respondents under 34).

### *What People Value in Charlemont*

The qualities of the town that are valued most by respondents included natural beauty and open spaces (49%), small-town atmosphere (36%), clean air, water and other natural resources (30%), and outdoor recreation opportunities (30%) (Question 2 - see Figure 1).

When asked what is most important for Charlemont's rural character, respondents selected: Deerfield River, brooks, streams (71%), agricultural lands and open fields (52%), forests and woodlands (44%), town center (37%), and scenic vistas and landscapes (36%).

### *The Most Pressing Issues*

The third question of the survey asked respondents to rate the importance of addressing a variety of issues in Charlemont (see Figure 2). A majority of respondents rated all of the issues as either "important" or "very important." Based on a weighted average, the order of issues from most important to least

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

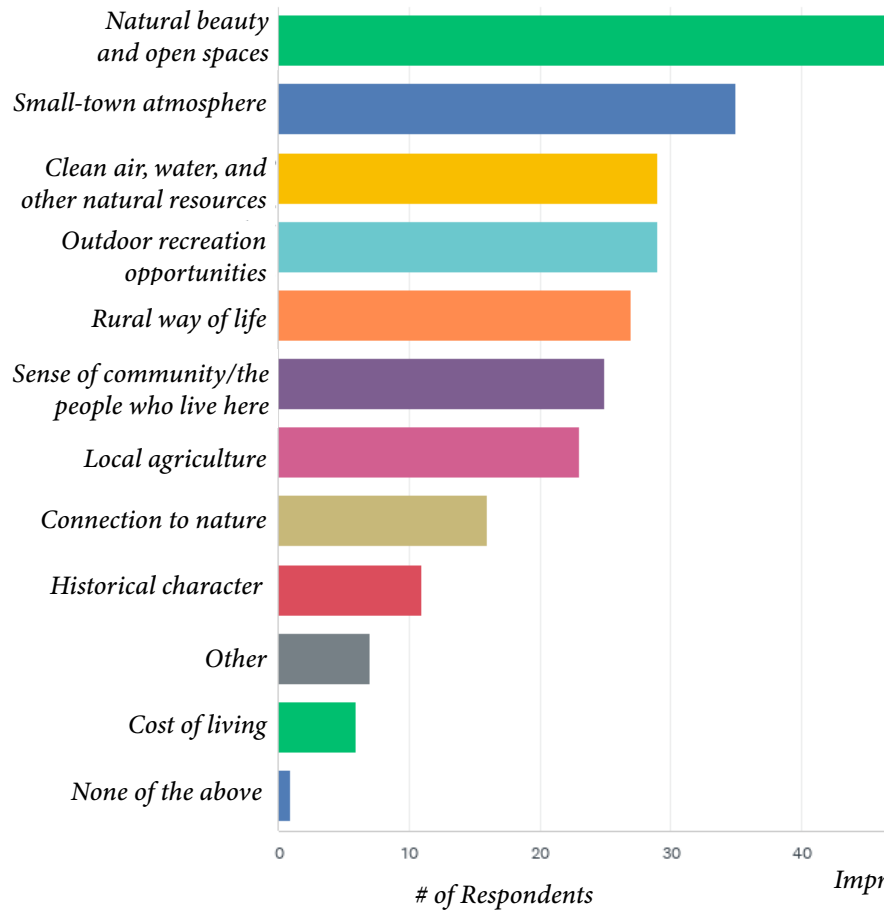


Figure 1. "What aspects of Charlemont do you value most?" (Question 2).

*"We would love to see more businesses that benefit the local residents and improve quality of life here in town."*

- Survey respondent

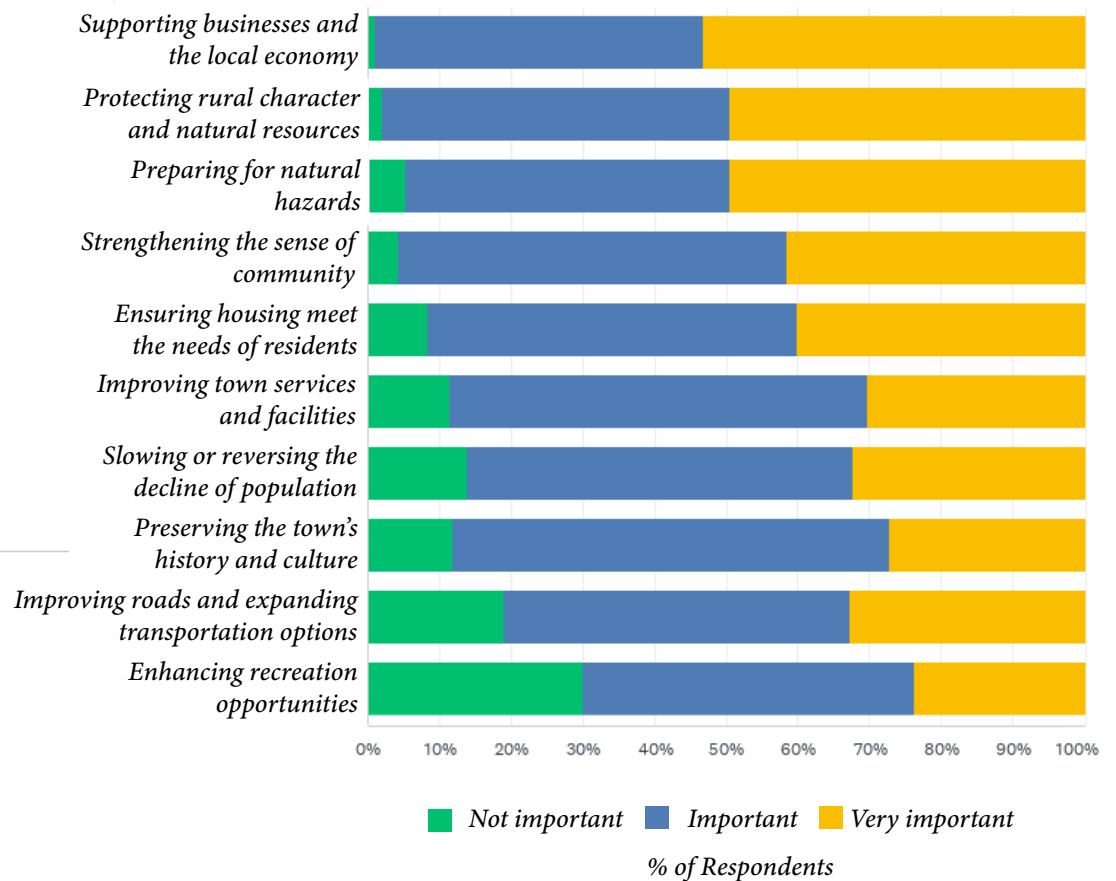


Figure 2. "Please rate the importance of addressing these issues in Charlemont." (Question 3).

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

*"I grew up kayaking on the Deerfield River... The town's connection to outdoor recreation is important to me, as well as recognizing the community that has lived here for generations."*

- Survey respondent

important was: supporting businesses and the local economy; protecting rural character and natural resources; preparing for natural hazards such as flooding and wildfires; strengthening the sense of community; ensuring housing meets the needs of Charlemont's residents; improving roads and expanding transportation options; slowing or reversing the decline of Charlemont's population; improving town services and facilities; preserving the town's history and culture; and enhancing recreation opportunities. Ninety-eight percent of respondents considered supporting businesses and the local economy to be "very important," only one respondent rated it as "not important." Enhancing recreation opportunities received the largest share of "not important" responses (30%), but 69% of respondents still rated it as important or very important (Question 3).

Most respondents felt that the quality of life in Charlemont has either declined a little (34%) or stayed the same (30%) during the time they have been connected to the town. Only 4% said that the quality of life has improved a lot, compared to 19% who said it has declined a lot. Write-in answers pointed to difficulties faced by local businesses, high property taxes, and lack of community experiences and community involvement (Question 4).

## *Growth and Housing*

A majority (68%) said Charlemont should aim to grow modestly in the next 10-20 years. The remainder were nearly evenly split over whether Charlemont should grow significantly (17%) or remain largely as it is today (16%) (Question 5).

Nearly half (48%) felt that new development should occur wherever it is suitable, while 25% supported concentrating

development in the town center and along the Route 2 corridor (Question 6).

Top housing concerns included aging housing stock (54%), the high cost of housing (46%), the impact of short-term rentals (41%), and lack of senior / accessible housing (37%) (Question 7).

One question asked, "which types of housing does Charlemont need?" Respondents were allowed to select up to three answers. The most selected answers were: housing for people with average incomes (56%), affordable housing (51%), senior/accessible housing (37%), and single-family homes (35%). The lowest scoring option was two-family housing (2%), accessory dwelling units (ADUs) (10%), and multi-family housing (10%) (Question 8).

## *Economic Development*

When asked to select three economic development strategies that should be prioritized by Charlemont, respondents prioritized creating an attractive and welcoming village center (67%), attracting and supporting small businesses (60%), and supporting agricultural businesses (59%) (Question 10).

The most desired business types in Charlemont were restaurants and cafés (71%), followed by farm-based businesses (36%), grocery (30%), healthcare services (30%), lodging/hospitality (27%), and general retail shops (22%) (Question 9).

Regarding outdoor recreation, 33% of respondents supported expanding and supporting it as much as possible. Another 31% said current levels were good but required more active management. Just 18% felt current levels were sufficient and

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

well-managed, while only 6% supported the Town trying to reduce tourism (Question 11).

## *Public Services*

Most public services were viewed favorably, with the majority of respondents rating them as excellent, good, or adequate, rather than poor. Exceptions included youth programs and community health services, which were rated as poor by 68%, and 67% of respondents. Hawlemont School, Town Government, the library, and Emergency Services (Police, Fire, and EMS) were given the highest ratings (Question 12).

A separate but related question asked which public services need the most improvement. Respondents selected senior services (41%), youth services (40%), emergency services (36%), recreation facilities (29%), and communication from town government (23%) (Question 15).

When asked about value for their tax dollars, nearly half (47%) said they receive fair value. Of the remaining respondents, slightly more said they receive a poor (22%) or very poor (8%) value than said they receive a good (22%) or excellent (2%) value (Question 14).

Opinions on the importance of keeping Hawlemont School open were evenly divided: 26% said it is extremely important, 24% very important, 26% somewhat important, and 25% not at all important (Question 17).

A strong majority of respondents (65%) shared the opinion that the best approach for addressing the town's budget and the services it provides is to "keep taxes and services stable by improving efficiency, if possible." None of the other possible approaches was supported by more than 7% of respondents.

Those approaches included: increase taxes to maintain/expand services; keep taxes stable, reduce services if necessary; and reduce taxes/cut services. 11% of respondents wrote in responses expressing opinions about school closure, cost of equipment, and ways to generate more taxes.

## *Transportation Improvements*

Participants were asked to prioritize transportation improvements for the town. Respondents' top choices were maintaining and repairing roads (57%), maintaining and repairing bridges (48%), and addressing flood risk on Route 2 (38%). Expanding bus service (26%), improving trail connections (24%), and paving unpaved roads (23%) followed.

*"I hope for a balance between retaining our small town feel and growth, which is important for our success."*

*- Survey respondent*

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

*"It's important to preserve our clean air, water, and scenic beauty because that is what draws visitors and residents here."*

*- Survey respondent*

## *Environmental Concerns*

In response to a question asking about environmental concerns, 62.8% of respondents selected the effects of climate change as one of the three most important issues. Invasive species and pests (33%), fossil fuel pollution (28%), water quality (27%), litter and waste management (21%) were also all selected by 20% or more respondents (Question 21).

## *Additional Comments*

When asked, "Is there anything else that you think is important for us to know?", respondents highlighted the need for Charlemont to grow in order to sustain and improve existing services, with specific calls for more residential housing and visitor accommodations to support the recreation-based economy. Several noted a lack of job opportunities and expressed concerns about blight, including junk cars and abandoned buildings, suggesting a need for stronger property maintenance enforcement. The town's emergency services were flagged as understaffed, with suggestions to focus on recruiting younger personnel. Comments also pointed to inefficiencies in municipal operations, including outdated building use, limited staffing, costly equipment upgrades, and jurisdictional challenges—such as the library's constrained location in Town Hall and the sewer district's influence over downtown development. Participants called for better coordination among town entities and more flexible approaches to land and facility use.

# VISIONING WORKSHOP

The workshop began with a brief presentation, followed by breakout discussions in five small groups. Participants identified and ranked what they perceived to be the town's most pressing challenges, discussed their underlying values and visions behind addressing these challenges, and considered how Charlemont's existing strengths could be leveraged to realize those visions.

Participants then completed a vision "Mad Lib" exercise to describe their ideal future for Charlemont. Some participants read their Mad Lib to each other in the small groups, and a few participants read their vision Mad Lib to the full group.

Top: One workshop group's  
challenges, vision, and values  
Bottom left: Workshop group discussion  
Bottom right: Participant Mad Lib



In 2045, people describe Charleston as prosperous  
beautiful  
and \_\_\_\_\_  
(adjectives).

The town is known for its Resort year round and  
Restaurants and businesses.  
(amenities, resources, or qualities)

Our community has made significant progress in addressing the challenge(s)  
of lack of housing and lack of young people.  
(current challenge(s))

We did this by taking actions like helping develop housing through  
and incentives and offering student discounts  
(actions the town or residents will take)

We leveraged community strengths like the civic leadership and  
strong bonds and willingness to make it happen.  
(community resources or strengths)

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



*Top: Presentation by Dodson & Flinker;  
Middle: Action "playing cards" used in activity. Blank cards were available for participants to write in their own proposed action;  
Bottom: Stand-on-the-line exercise.*

## ALL BOARDS AND COMMITTEES WORKSHOP

On April 28th, 2025, members of all Town boards and committees were invited to participate in a meeting that focused on reviewing a draft action plan and ranking the draft actions in order of importance. The meeting was attended by eighteen people.

Each attendee had the opportunity to visit two of four thematic stations. Each of the stations represented two goals, with five proposed actions per goal. Each action was presented on a card. At each station, participants selected the action cards they felt were most important and discussed their choices with the small group. As they moved from one goal to the next, they could add new actions to their "hand," but only if they discarded cards, keeping a maximum of five actions in their hand at one time. At the end of the meeting, each participant held five cards representing their top priorities and ranked them in order of importance.

To conclude, participants presented their top-ranked action and the group responded by physically positioning themselves along a spectrum of support, with signs ("lead," "support," "neutral," and "opposed") marking points along a line on the floor.

There was very little opposition to most of the actions. Some of the actions had some neutral responses, but by and large, actions were well-supported. Only a few individuals volunteered to lead actions, with a Select Board member, the Town Administrator, Town staff, and the Town Clerk primarily taking ownership.



*Town Center  
(Photo by author)*

# 3: CURRENT CONDITIONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

# DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMY

**13%**

POPULATION DECLINE  
2000-2020

**180K+**

ESTIMATED ANNUAL  
VISITORS

**\$55.6K**

MEDIAN  
HOUSEHOLD INCOME

## CONTEXT

### Population Trends (2000-2020)

- Population declined 12.74%, compared to Massachusetts' 10% growth in the same period.<sup>1</sup>
- Charlemont is aging. The median age is 56.7 years (47.7% increase from previous decades). The 65+ population grew 142% between 2000 and 2020.<sup>2</sup>

### Economic Indicators

- Median household income: \$55,603
  - » 80% of Franklin County average
  - » About 60% of state average
- Unemployment rate: 4.2% (2023)
  - » Higher than county (2.9%) and state (3.4%)<sup>3</sup>

### Employment Sectors<sup>4</sup>

- Recreation/tourism dominant (35% of 2020 employment)
  - » Projected to reach 44% by 2030
  - » Average wages below \$25,000
- Government and education provide most full-time jobs
- Retail and service sectors primarily seasonal/part-time employment
- Growth potential in agriculture and healthcare sectors

### Retail and Business

- Limited restaurant options after recent closures
- Market Analysis:
  - » 1,097 households within sampled 5-mile radius
  - » \$26 million annual spending demand
  - » Most spending occurs outside town
  - » Potential for 13,000-24,000 sq ft new retail space
  - » Below density needed for national chains
  - » Opportunity for specialized businesses<sup>5</sup>

### Tourism

- Berkshire East: 180,000+ annual visits (2020)
- Visitors primarily from Boston Area, New York, and Connecticut
- Fishing on the Deerfield River draws visitors from all over the United States
- 70% of visitation occurs on weekend days
- Winter and summer are peak seasons; early spring is the slowest part of the year

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> 2022 RKG Economic Development Study

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

# DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMY

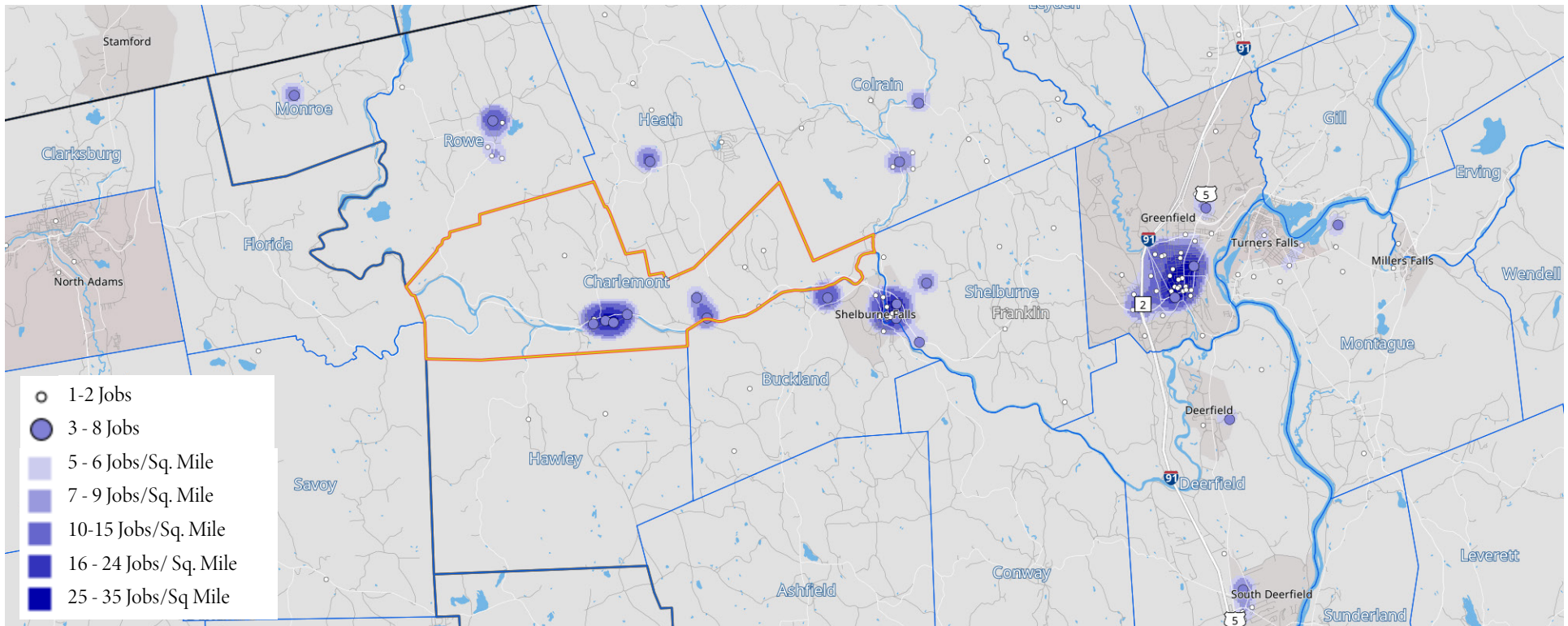
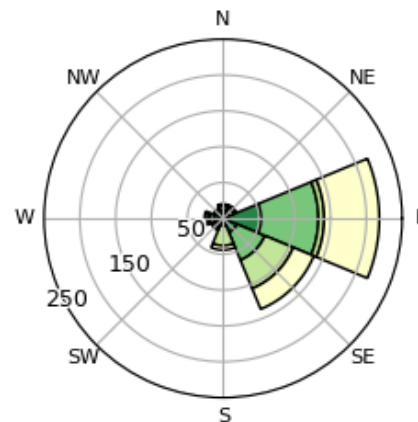


Figure 3. Workplace Locations of Charlemont Residents.

## Employment Locations<sup>6</sup>

- 32 people who live in Charlemont also work in Charlemont
- 307 people live outside of Charlemont and work in Charlemont
- 466 people live in Charlemont and work in other communities
- Of workers who live in Charlemont and work elsewhere, most commute to the east or southeast. 61 have primary jobs in Greenfield, 24 in Northampton, 24 in Springfield, and 20 in Shelburne Falls and other regional cities and towns. Others have longer commutes to Boston (14) and Worcester (12).



	Count	Share
<b>Total</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>100%</b>
Less than 10 mi	127	25.5%
10 - 24 mi	155	31.1%
25 to 50 mi	91	18.3%
Greater than 50 mi	125	25.1%

Figure 4. Job Counts by Distance/Direction, 2022 (All Workers).

<sup>6</sup> Census on the Map. U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (2002-2022), Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program, <https://onthemap.ces.census.gov>.

# DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMY



Route 2 in town center  
(Photo by author)

## ISSUES

### Outdoor Recreation not Converted to Economic Growth for Other Sectors

Charlemont's position as a recreation hub is undeniable, and yet the many recreational resources are not producing economic benefits for other sectors of the economy. One hindrance is the lack of lodging options, which results in day visitors not extending their stays, thereby reducing potential economic benefits for local businesses. Many perceive that users come into town for a day trip, bringing food from elsewhere, and then return home, without spending money at local businesses. Today, there are fewer small businesses in Charlemont, reducing the options for visitors who may otherwise go to a restaurant or shop in town.

The seasonal nature of the demand also makes it difficult for businesses to operate during the off-season. It has been noted that local demand alone is not enough to support certain businesses during this period, sometimes resulting in business closures.

### Declining Population

Like many rural New England towns, Charlemont is experiencing a declining population, down from 1,358 in 2000 to 1,183 in 2020. This decline is likely due to both broader demographic trends, such as lower birth rates, and local factors, including a lack of affordable housing and economic shifts. This decline has raised questions about the financial viability of the Hawlemont School (see Public Services section), as declining enrollment causes the cost per student to increase. Additionally, a declining customer base makes it harder for businesses to thrive.

### Insufficient Labor Force

Businesses in Charlemont are struggling to attract and retain workers. As the town's population ages, the size of the town's working age population is shrinking. Additionally, fewer young people are choosing to settle in town. Housing is limited, and costs may be prohibitive for workers earning local wages, particularly when nearby communities, like Greenfield, can offer higher-paying jobs.

### Limited Infrastructure

Charlemont's infrastructure poses challenges for new development. Sewer capacity is limited, with a large portion allocated to the vacant Charlemont Inn and other uses operating at a reduced capacity. Properties outside the sewer district rely on private septic systems, limiting development capacity and adding cost. There is no municipal water supply in Charlemont, and while water quality is high, permitting and testing for commercial use of wells can be cost prohibitive for businesses.

### Lack of Services and Amenities for Visitors

Despite being a popular destination for outdoor recreation, Charlemont lacks overnight accommodations, restaurants, and other visitor services. As a result, many visitors come only for day trips, spending limited time and money in town. Additionally, few stop on Main Street during their visits.

### Main Street Appearance

The Route 2 traffic that passes through town daily provides a significant potential customer base. However, residents have expressed concerns that town's appearance, perceived as dilapidated, deters visitors from stopping and makes Charlemont as a less attractive place for new businesses.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Capitalizing on Recreation-Based Tourism

To capitalize on recreational tourism, Charlemont could improve connections between outdoor assets and the town center. Investing in transportation infrastructure—such as shuttles, public transit, and expanded parking—could draw visitors to local businesses. Collaborating with neighboring towns could promote regional tourism and present opportunities to prevent any unwanted tourism impacts. Improving signage and consolidating visitor information could further integrate recreational and commercial areas.

### Art and Creative Placemaking

Charlemont is home to a vibrant community of artists, artisans, and craftspeople. Showcasing local art in public spaces—such as the town center and along the river—could create a distinctive sense of place and encourage visitors to explore beyond outdoor recreation. Increasing and promoting arts, crafts, and entertainment programming could draw a broader audience and extend visitor stays.

### Town Center Beautification

Investments in Main Street, such as maintenance, streetscape improvements, and pedestrian-friendly features, could attract businesses and visitors alike.

### Marketing the Town

Charlemont could help visitors discover local attractions by enhancing its marketing efforts. For example, the town could create a visitor center in East Charlemont, use its website to highlight key destinations, expand its presence on Franklin County's tourism website ([moretofranklincounty.com](http://moretofranklincounty.com)), or provide print materials to visitors at key locations.

### Optimizing Sewer Capacity

Charlemont could work with the Sewer District to evaluate capacity constraints and explore ways to optimize existing infrastructure. While expanding wastewater treatment capacity may be costly, identifying opportunities to reallocate capacity could support business growth without major expansion costs.

### Providing Support for Local Businesses to Unlock Access to Funds

There are many state funding programs and Community Development Corporations (CDCs) which support small businesses, especially in rural areas. The Town could develop resources or educate a volunteer on these programs and funds to ensure that local business owners are aware of them. Potential programs/organizations of interest may include: the PVGrows Investment Fund, the Franklin County Community Development Corporation, the SSED Fund (Sudden and Severe Economic Dislocation)—for businesses that require financing for the retention or creation of jobs in Franklin County, the Rural Development Intermediary Lending Program, and the Rural Development (USDA) Rural Microenterprise Assistance Program.

### Monetizing Ecosystem Services

There are an increasing number of programs that provide economic benefits, grants, or other funds for sustainable land stewardship practices. Participating in programs such as these could allow landowners to recuperate some of the costs of managing large forested parcels while ensuring that the forests continue to provide ecosystem services such as flood mitigation and erosion control.



***“We would love to see more businesses that benefit the local residents and improve quality of life here in town, such as grocery stores, cafes, hardware stores, etc.”***

*- Survey respondent*

# HOUSING

73%

DETACHED SINGLE-FAMILY  
HOMES

2.3

AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE

35%

UNITS WITH EIGHT OR MORE  
ROOMS

\$323K

AVERAGE HOME VALUE

## CONTEXT

### Key Trends

- Housing stock has decreased 5.4% (2010-2020)
- Housing prices are increasing
- Predominantly single-family homes
- Aging housing stock (66.8% built before 1979)
- High proportion of seasonal units
- Strong short-term rental market
- Stable occupancy rate since 1970

### Housing Stock Overview

- Total housing units: 644 (2020 census)
- Occupied units: 536 (83.2% occupancy rate)
- Vacant units: 108
- Housing stock decreased by 37 units (5.4%) between 2010-2020
- Occupancy rate has remained relatively stable since 1970 (range: 80-84.1%)<sup>1</sup>

### Housing Types

- Single-family detached: 73.4% (392 units)
- Two-unit buildings: 7.5% (40 units)
- Three/four-unit buildings: 7.3% (39 units)
- Five to nine-unit buildings: 1.3% (7 units)
- Townhouses/attached: 3.4% (18 units)
- Mobile homes: 7.1% (38 units)<sup>2</sup>

### Rental Market

- 35 short-term rental units
- Among highest in Franklin County; only Greenfield and Shelburne Falls have more short-term rentals<sup>3</sup>

### Household Size

- Average: 2.34 people
- Median: 2 people
- Mode: 2 people
- Distribution: 363/536
  - » One person: 157 households
  - » Two person: 206 households
  - » Three person: 71 households
  - » Four person: 62 households
  - » Five person: 23 households
  - » Six person: 10 households
  - » Seven or more: 7 households

### Market Trends

- Current average home value is \$323,738 (2024), up from \$112,354 (2000)
- Growth patterns:
  - » Steady growth in 2000s until 2008 financial crisis
  - » Slow growth through 2010s
  - » Rapid appreciation from 2020 to present<sup>4</sup>

### Affordable Housing

- 3 units on the Massachusetts Subsidized Housing Inventory, 0.52% of year-round housing units.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UMass Donahue Institute

<sup>2</sup> 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

<sup>3</sup> FRCOG Housing Study

<sup>4</sup> Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI)

<sup>5</sup> Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) as of June 29, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/subsidized-housing-inventory-shi>

## Housing Age and Characteristics

### Year Built

- Pre-1939: 34.6% (185 units)
- 1940-1959: 3.2% (17 units)
- 1960-1979: 32.2% (172 units)
- 1980-1999: 19.3% (103 units)
- 2000-2009: 8.8% (47 units)
- 2010-2019: 1.3% (7 units)
- 2020 or later: 0.6% (3 units)<sup>6</sup>

### Room Count

- 2-3 rooms: 8.2% (44 units)
- 4-5 rooms: 36% (193 units)
- 6-7 rooms: 21% (112 units)
- 8 or more rooms: 34.6% (185 units)<sup>7</sup>

### Bedrooms

- One bedroom: 7.9%
- Two-three bedrooms: 62.4%
- Four or more bedrooms: 29.8%<sup>8</sup>

### Occupancy and Ownership

- Owner-occupied units: 404 (75.4% of occupied units)
- With mortgage/loan: 233 units
- Owned outright: 171 units
- Renter-occupied units: 132 (24.6%)<sup>9</sup>

### Vacancy

- 68 seasonal units
- 20 units for rent, 4 units for sale
- 11 “other vacant”
- 0 migrant worker housing<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> NHGIS/IPUMS

<sup>10</sup> Ibid



Figure 5. Charlemont Housing Value Trend (2000 - 2024). Values are an approximation.  
Source: Zillow.

Mohawk Park Campground  
(Photo by author)



## ISSUES

### Limited Developable Land and High Construction Costs

Charlemont's dramatic landscape and steep slopes, which contribute to its scenic appeal, also create significant challenges for development. The town has limited flat land and much of it lies along the Deerfield River and is at high risk of flooding. Infrastructure costs associated with building in rural areas, including septic systems, electric connections, and driveways, add significant cost to already expensive projects.

### Aging Housing Stock Ill-Suited to Current Demographics

Charlemont's population has aged significantly, with the number of residents over 65 doubling in the past decade. Household sizes have also decreased significantly, with about two-thirds of households now consisting of only one or two people. The

housing stock is ill-suited to these demographics. Only about 8% of homes in Charlemont are one-bedroom units, while 30% have four or more bedrooms. Much of the housing stock was built in the first half of the 20th century or earlier, with very little new construction since 2000. These large, older homes can be difficult and expensive for seniors to heat and maintain. The lack of alternative housing options forces many seniors to remain in homes that no longer suit their needs. Not only are seniors unable to move to homes that better suit their needs, but by continuing to occupy larger homes there is a trickle-down effect in reducing the availability of homes for young families to get established in the town.

### Competition from Short-Term Rentals and Second Homes

Charlemont has 37 short-term rental units, one of the highest concentrations in Franklin County, surpassed by only the larger communities of Shelburne Falls and Greenfield. Additionally, 68 seasonal housing units in Charlemont are owned and occupied by individuals who have primary residence elsewhere. Together these account for approximately one-sixth of Charlemont's total housing stock.

These housing units provide economic benefits to Charlemont by accommodating visitors who may support local businesses. Many short-term rentals also provide income for Charlemont residents. However, the high proportion of units not used as primary residences may reduce the supply of housing available for year-round residency.



## OPPORTUNITIES

### Converting Large Homes to Multi-Family Housing

Much of Charlemont's housing stock could potentially be converted to multi-family housing, adding housing units without reducing open space. The town has 185 houses with eight or more rooms and 112 with six or seven rooms, presenting a significant opportunity for adaptive reuse. Converting these homes into two- or three-family units could also generate rental income for current owners, offset the cost of necessary upgrades, and support aging in place, while also expanding housing options for new residents.

### Facilitating New Development in Desired Areas

While Charlemont's topography limits development potential in many areas, some locations close to the town center are viable options. To maximize these limited opportunities, the Town could consider zoning amendments that allow for greater housing density and flexibility in these areas.

### Leveraging Outdoor Recreation Investment

As described above, there are a significant number of short-term rentals and seasonal homes in Charlemont. The large number of visitors to Charlemont and ongoing development of Hinata Retreat points to a demand for more overnight lodging options. In many cases developers may see the opportunity to build dwellings for tourists or part-time residents as a more profitable option than building homes for full-time residents. The Town could try to leverage future investments in tourism to create some full-time housing options. This could be done with zoning incentives that allow relief from certain provisions or increased density

if projects contain housing for year-round residents. The Town could also work with homeowners and local housing developers to study how income from short-term rentals or campsites could be utilized to offset some of the costs associated with new home construction. The Town could also work with institutions like Berkshire East or Charlemont Academy to encourage housing for staff on-site.

### Publicizing Avenues for Adding Accessory Units and Subdividing Residential Lots

Many residents may not be aware of recent legislation that expands their ability to create an additional unit on their property. Massachusetts' Affordable Homes Act went into effect in February 2025. Massachusetts residents can now create accessory dwelling units (ADUs) by right in districts that allow single-family residential, thereby opening this avenue throughout Charlemont. ADUs can be created by converting garages, attics, or basements, or by building a new detached cottage or addition. ADUs are often used as housing for older or disabled family members or for young adult family members. They are also rented to unrelated tenants to bring in income.

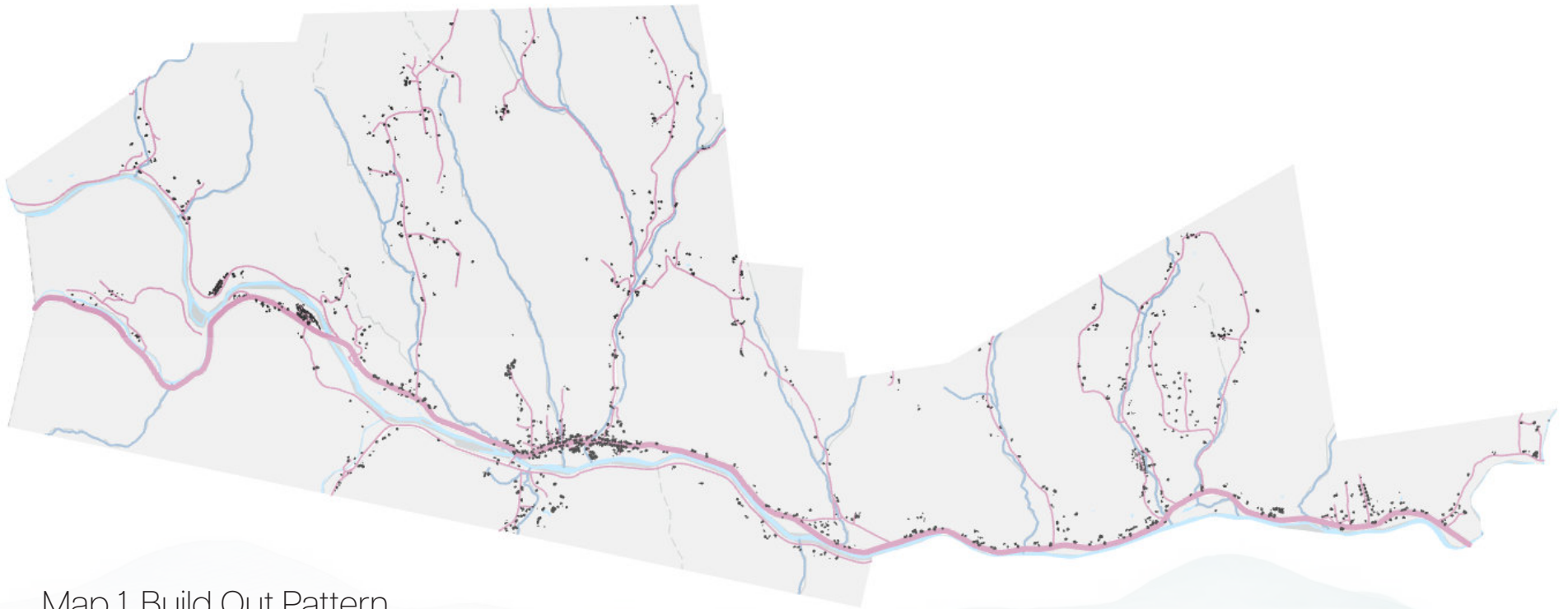
Additionally, Charlemont's Back Lot Development Bylaw gives landowners in Charlemont the ability to divide their lot into two lots even if one of the lots would not meet the minimum frontage requirement if certain conditions are met. This ordinance unlocks further development potential.



***"Affordable housing  
in town is my  
primary concern."***

***- Survey respondent***

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS



Map 1. Build Out Pattern



## CONTEXT

Over time, Charlemont has developed in a branching pattern that generally follows the streams and rivers. Rural roads trace the streams that flow from higher elevations in the north down to the Deerfield River. The Deerfield River runs from west to east, and the town's main arterial street, Route 2, follows the river. Economic activity and circulation are concentrated on Route 2, with the highest density of development in the town center.

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

## Land Cover/Land Use

The 2016 land cover/land use dataset, produced by MassGIS in collaboration with NOAA Office of Ocean Management, is based on multispectral imagery analysis, and in many ways conveys the most accurate view of land uses because it uses land cover data imagery to account for land cover difference within a parcel (for example, house vs. forest).

The land cover data shows that 86% of Charlemont is forested, and very little of the town is developed or used for agricultural purposes (0.4%).

Table 1. Land Cover in Charlemont.

Land Cover Type	Area (ac)	% of Land
<b>Water</b>	230.58	1.40%
<b>Bare Land</b>	101.98	0.60%
<b>Scrub/Shrub</b>	81.43	0.50%
<b>Forest</b>	14453.47	85.70%
<b>Pasture/Hayfields and Grassland</b>	1150.06	6.80%
<b>Cultivated Land</b>	71.47	0.40%
<b>Developed Open Space</b>	446.26	2.60%
<b>Impervious</b>	323.92	1.90%

Source: MassGIS and NOAA Office of Ocean Management

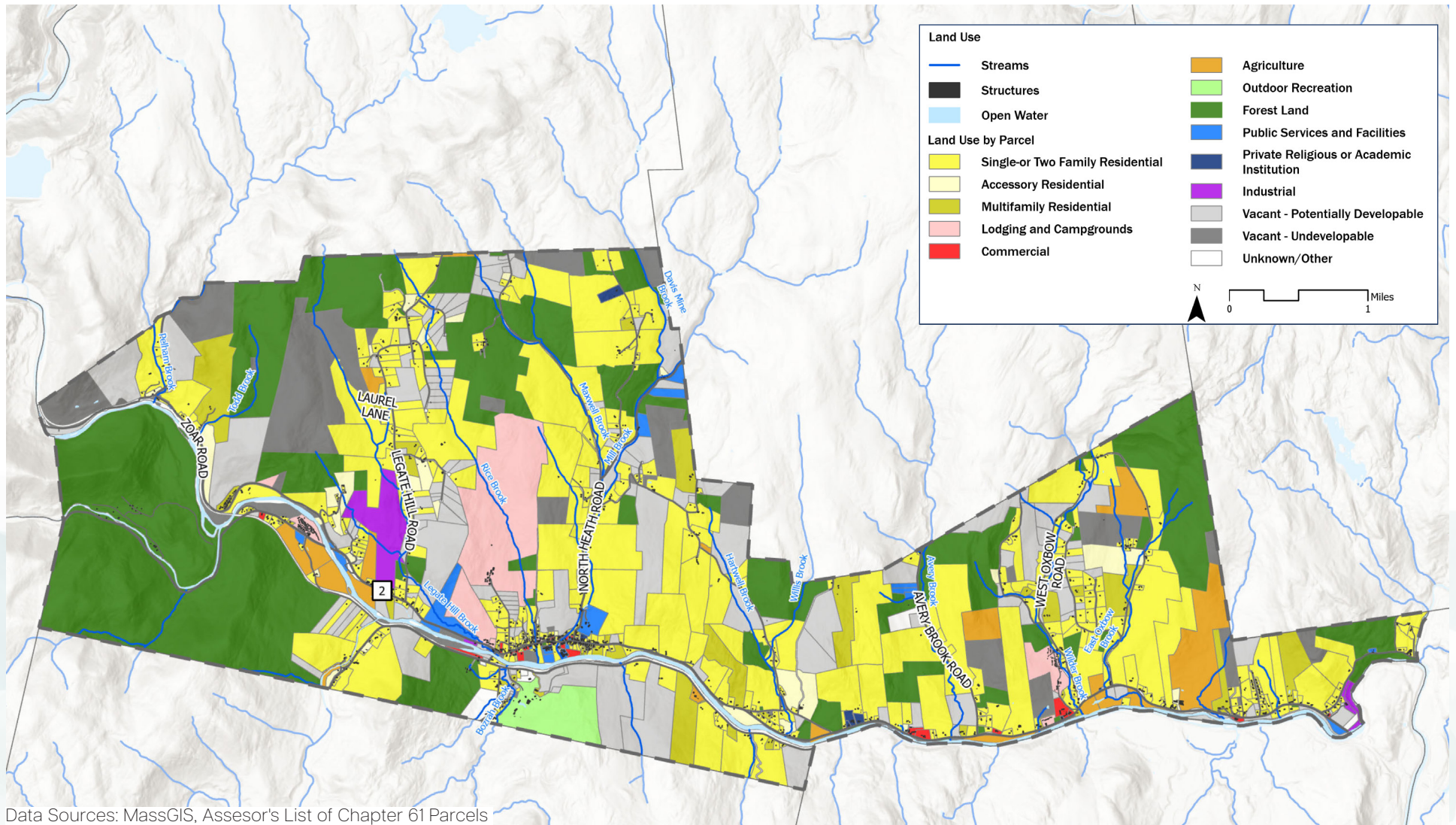
Table 2. Land Use in Charlemont, by Parcel.

Use	Number of Parcels	Area (Acres)	% of the Town
<b>Residential - Single Family</b>	447	4862.9	28.80%
<b>Residential - Two-Family</b>	26	479.9	2.84%
<b>Residential - Multifamily</b>	55	655.1	3.88%
<b>Residential Accessory Land</b>	36	303	1.79%
<b>Commercial</b>	20	50.6	0.30%
<b>Agricultural</b>	19	534.4	3.17%
<b>Forest Land</b>	66	4685.8	27.76%
<b>Industrial</b>	5	163.3	0.97%
<b>Public</b>	26	148.5	0.88%
<b>Vacant -Undevelopable Land</b>	87	1207.5	7.15%
<b>Vacant-Developable Land</b>	158	2221.3	13.16%
<b>Lodging</b>	8	631.7	3.74%
<b>Ski Slope</b>	1	206.6	1.22%
<b>N/A</b>	28	731.7	4.33%
<b>Total</b>	982	16882.3	

Source: MassGIS and NOAA Office of Ocean Management

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Map 2. Land Use by Parcel



Data Sources: MassGIS, Assessor's List of Chapter 61 Parcels

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

## Zoning

- Charlemont has three zoning districts:
  - » Rural Residential (the largest district)
  - » Rural Residential/Route 2
  - » Village Center
- Charlemont also has three overlay districts: Rural Residential/Marijuana Retail, Floodplain, and Solar
- The minimum lot in Charlemont is 45,000 square feet in all districts except for Village Center. The Village Center District minimum lot size is 5,000 square feet.

## Flood Hazard Areas

- There are 1,065.3 acres of FEMA-designated flood hazard area in Charlemont (6.4% of the total area of Charlemont).
  - » 4.6% of the total area of Charlemont is in the 100-year flood hazard area.
  - » 1.8% of the total area of Charlemont is in the 500-year flood hazard area.
  - » There are 248 structures located within the 100 or 500-year flood hazard area (17.6% of all structures in Charlemont).
  - » There are no FEMA-designated repetitive loss structures in Charlemont.<sup>1</sup>

## Slopes

- Charlemont has an abundance of steep slopes:
  - » 20% slopes are found on over 50% of Charlemont's land. This is even more pronounced in areas that are not within the Flood Hazard Area.
  - » Less than 20% of land has less than a 10% slope.
  - » Over 10% of land has a greater than 50% slope.

## Chapter 61 Land

- There are 122 parcels under Chapter 61 in Charlemont.
  - » The total land area in Chapter 61 is 6,368.26 acres or 38% of the total land area of the town.
  - » The total assessed value of Chapter 61 land is \$19,389,853.
  - » Forest land is more prevalent than agricultural land.
  - » Four uses (Residential/Forest Land, Forest Land, Residential/Agricultural, and Productive Woodlot) make up about 2/3 of Chapter 61 parcels.

248

STRUCTURES IN THE  
FLOODPLAIN

122

PARCELS IN  
CHAPTER 61

>20%

SLOPES ON MORE  
THAN HALF OF  
CHARLEMONT'S LAND

<sup>1</sup> 2022 Hazard Mitigation Plan

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Table 3. Chapter 61 Uses.

Chapter 61 Uses	# of Parcels	Area	Land Value	Buildings	Outbuildings	Total Value
<b>Residential/Forest Land</b>	27	1576.51	\$1,248,906.00	\$5,033,300.00	\$169,400.00	\$6,451,606.00
<b>Forest Land</b>	21	1344.73	\$112,957.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$112,957.00
<b>Residential/Agricultural</b>	17	786.19	\$830,668.00	\$4,129,900.00	\$216,200.00	\$5,176,768.00
<b>Productive Woodland</b>	15	679.14	\$66,263.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$66,263.00
<b>Commercial/Agricultural</b>	1	473.52	\$195,947.00	\$1,608,600.00	\$183,500.00	\$1,988,047.00
<b>Agricultural/Residential</b>	3	285.07	\$32,136.00	\$0.00	\$81,000.00	\$113,136.00
<b>Forest Land/Residential</b>	2	279.85	\$24,140.00	\$0.00	\$100.00	\$24,240.00
<b>Residential/Outdoor Recreation</b>	8	224.14	\$390,194.00	\$1,792,900.00	\$51,900.00	\$2,234,994.00
<b>Commercial/Outdoor Recreation</b>	1	205.91	\$306,008.00	\$1,905,500.00	\$373,100.00	\$2,584,608.00
<b>Field Crops - hay, wheat, tillable forage cropland etc.</b>	12	189.09	\$48,553.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$48,553.00
<b>Agricultural/Outdoor Recreation</b>	1	80.93	\$20,895.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$20,895.00
<b>Commercial/Forest Land</b>	1	73.32	\$45,872.00	\$326,700.00	\$84,400.00	\$456,972.00
<b>Necessary Related Farmland</b>	1	45.38	\$12,343.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$12,343.00
<b>Nature Study</b>	4	44.53	\$44,827.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$44,827.00
<b>Outdoor Recreation</b>	1	23	\$4,492.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$4,492.00
<b>Truck Crops - vegetables</b>	1	16.54	\$7,486.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$7,486.00
<b>Hiking - trails or paths</b>	3	15.35	\$38,280.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$38,280.00
<b>Forest Land/Agricultural</b>	1	13.13	\$1,197.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,197.00
<b>Agricultural/Forest Land</b>	1	8.45	\$1,237.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,237.00
<b>Pasture</b>	1	3.5	\$952.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$952.00
<b>Total</b>	122	6368.28	\$3,433,353	\$14,796,900	\$1,159,600	\$19,389,853

Source: Charlemont Tax Assessor, FY2025

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

## Physical Constraints

The physical constraints map (next page) illustrates constraints related to the landform and hydrology (water and its movement) in Charlemont, including steep slopes, wetlands, hydric soils (soils that are saturated for prolonged periods of time, often associated with wetlands), streams, and flood hazard areas. Some of these features, such as wetlands, streams, and floodplains, have associated regulatory constraints.

Steep slopes are the most significant physical limitation in Charlemont, with areas exceeding a 20% gradient covering more than half of the town's land area. While steep slopes do not always physically prevent development, they usually make it much more expensive and so development is less likely on steep slopes. Another major constraint is the FEMA-designated Flood Hazard Areas, which represents locations with a 1% or 0.2% annual chance of flooding. Due to climate change and the associated increase in heavy precipitation, the actual extent and frequency of flooding may exceed what is currently mapped.

Additional areas generally unsuitable for development include wetlands identified by MassDEP and soils classified as hydric.

## Regulatory Constraints

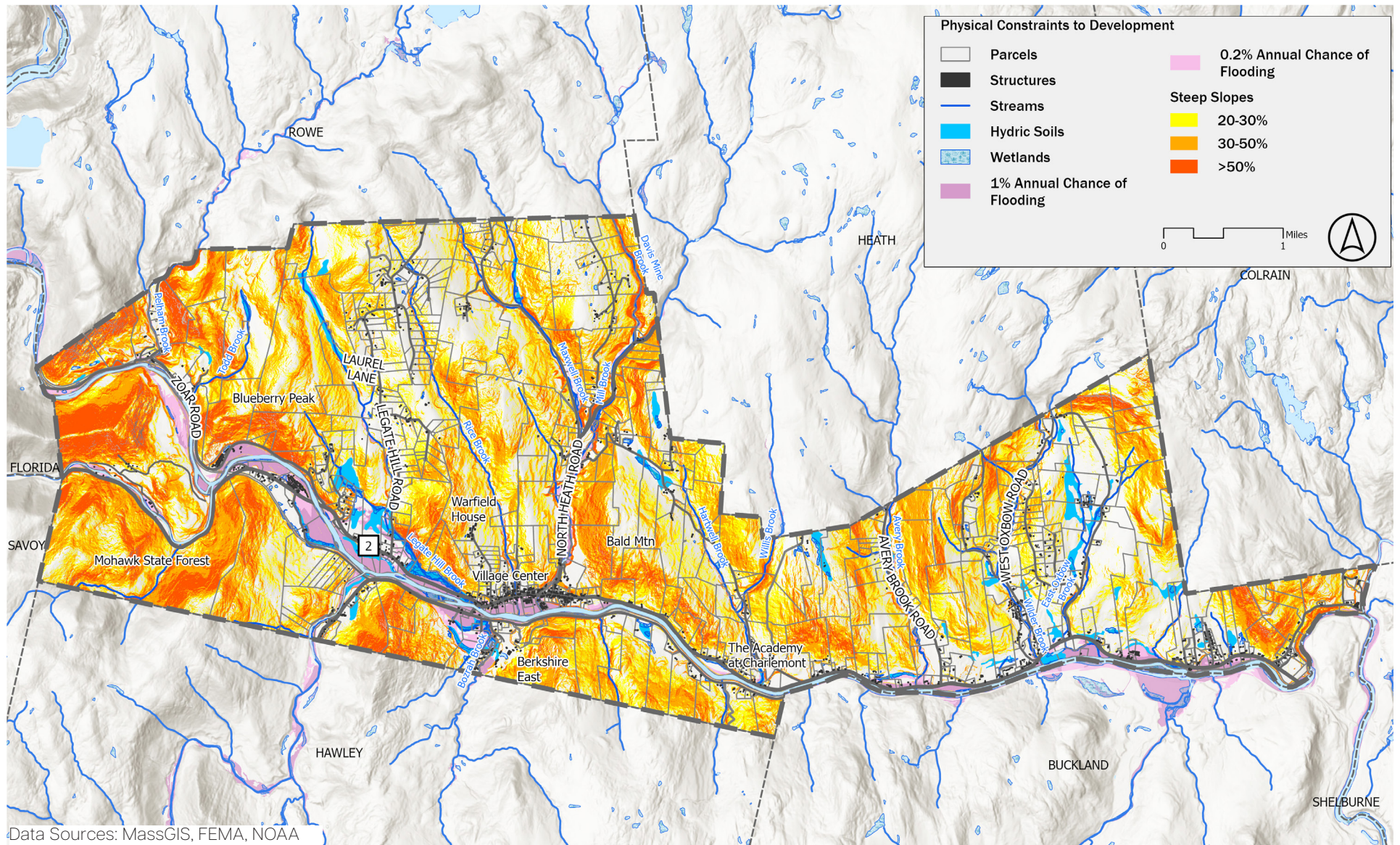
This map (page 39) highlights areas where development is constrained due to regulations and laws. Some regulatory constraints—such as the 200-foot riverfront area on either side of streams and rivers, wetlands, Zone I wellhead protection areas, and FEMA-designated flood hazard areas—effectively prohibit development.

Other constraints—such as the 100-foot buffer zone around wetlands, interim wellhead protection areas, and estimated and priority habitats identified by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP)—impose additional review requirements and standards but do not necessarily preclude development.

All regulations shown on the map are based on Massachusetts state regulations, with the exception of FEMA-designated flood hazard areas, which are federally regulated. Local zoning regulations and other municipal bylaws are not reflected on this map.



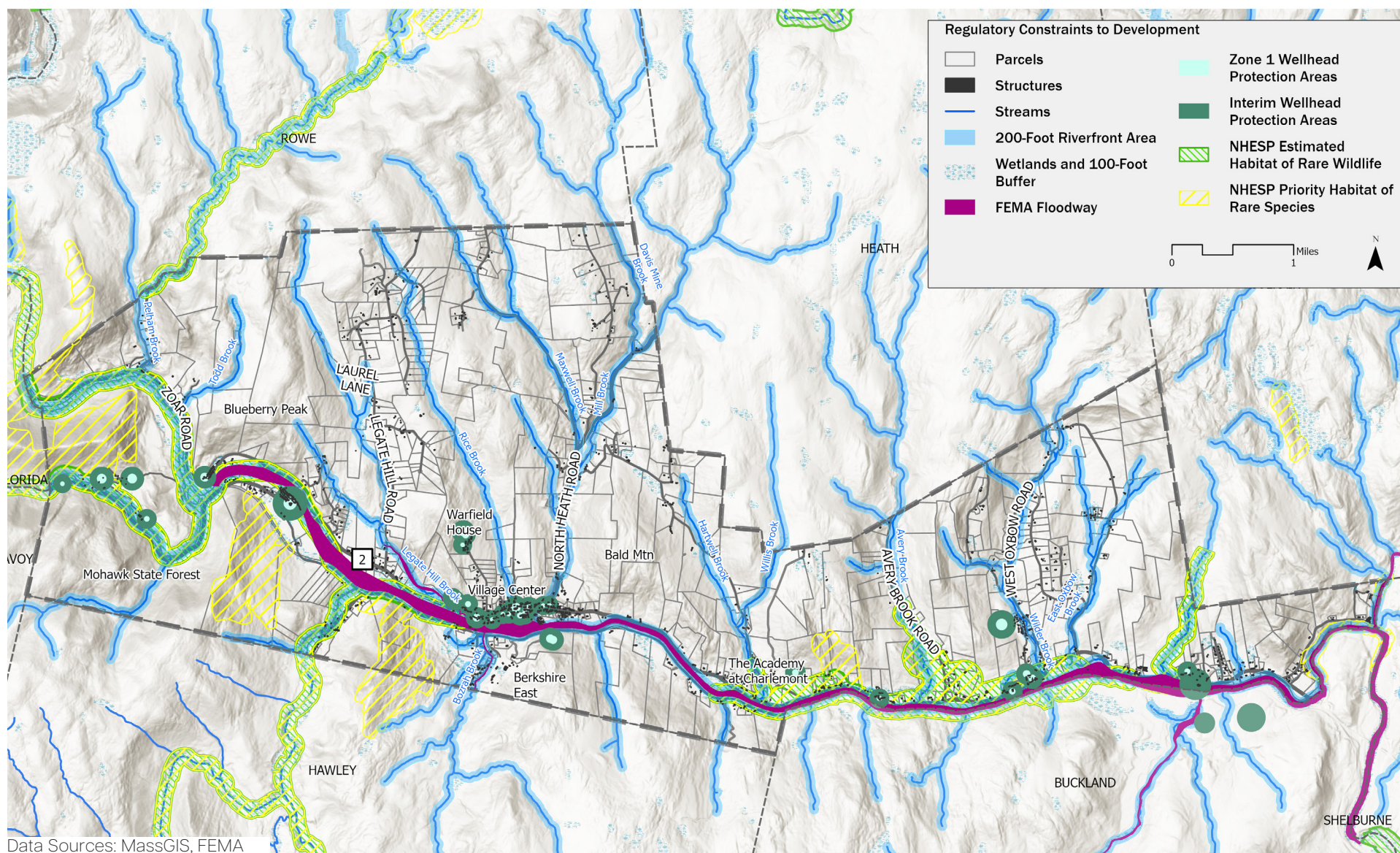
# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS



Data Sources: MassGIS, FEMA, NOAA

Map 3. Physical Constraints

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS



Data Sources: MassGIS, FEMA

Map 4. Regulatory Constraints

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

## Parcels that are Unlikely to be Developed

The Unlikely to be Developed map (facing page) identifies parcels where development is improbable due to current or past use, ownership, deed restrictions, or lot size.

This includes open space protected through ownership or legal restrictions—such as deed-restricted lands, Town-owned parcels, Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) lands, and properties actively used for recreation or camping.

Parcels constrained by zoning are also included. Specifically, lots that are smaller than the minimum lot size required by their zoning district, or lots with eight or more housing units that are less than twice the minimum lot size (and therefore not eligible for subdivision), are considered fully built out.

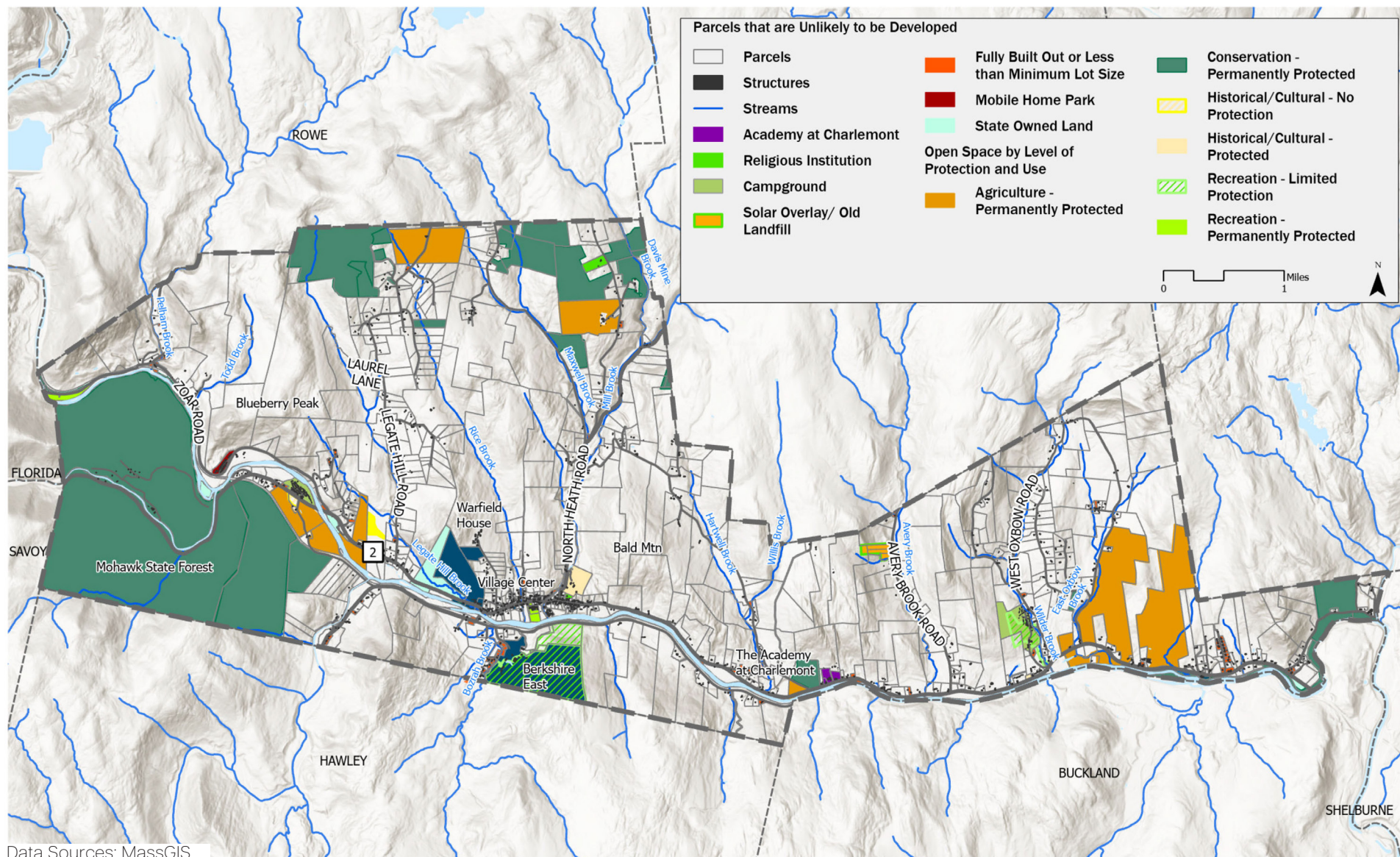
Additionally, the following uses are considered unlikely to be redeveloped: Woodland Mobile Home Park, Charlemont Academy, campgrounds, the former landfill/solar overlay district, State-owned lands, and a utility-scale solar array.

## Development Constraints

This map (page 42) illustrates three categories of development constraints: physical constraints, regulatory constraints, and parcels unlikely to be developed. Each category is shown in a single color. In areas where constraints overlap, physical constraints are displayed on top, followed by regulatory constraints, and then parcels unlikely to be developed. As a result, some regulatory constraints and portions of parcels may be obscured.

This map demonstrates that much of Charlemont's land is constrained, with physical constraints, particularly steep slopes, serving as the most significant barrier to development. Some regulatory constraints included on the previous map are not included because they do not impose significant burdens on development.

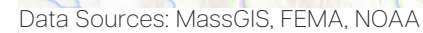
# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS



Data Sources: MassGIS

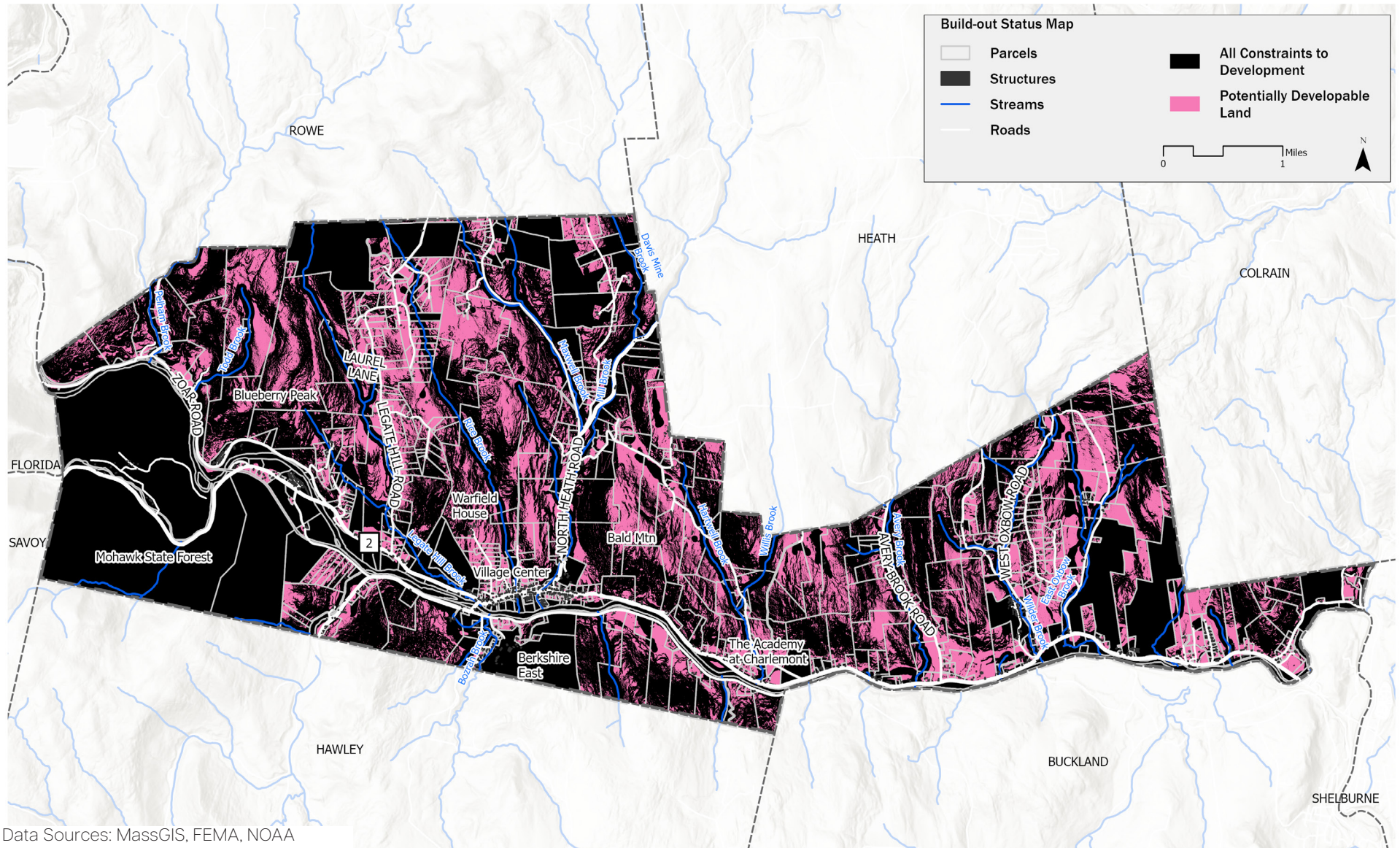
Map 5. Parcels that are Unlikely to be Developed

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS



## Map 6. Development Constraints

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS



Data Sources: MassGIS, FEMA, NOAA

Map 7. Build Out Status

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

## Build Out Status

This map (page 43) displays development constraints in black and potentially developable areas in pink. Bright, high-contrast colors were chosen to ensure that roads, parcel lines, and existing structures remain visible.

Overall, the map indicates that only about one-quarter of Charlemont may be suitable for future development. This map is intended as a general guide to identify areas where development could be feasible and areas where it is likely to be infeasible due to existing constraints.

A site-specific analysis would be required to accurately assess the development potential of any individual parcel or area.

*Charlemont contains varied terrain, with relatively flat floodplains and steeply rising slopes (Photo by author)*



## Conservation Priorities and Potentially Developable Land

This map (facing page) illustrates the intersection of priority conservation areas and potentially developable land to indicate areas where conservation values and development pressures may overlap.

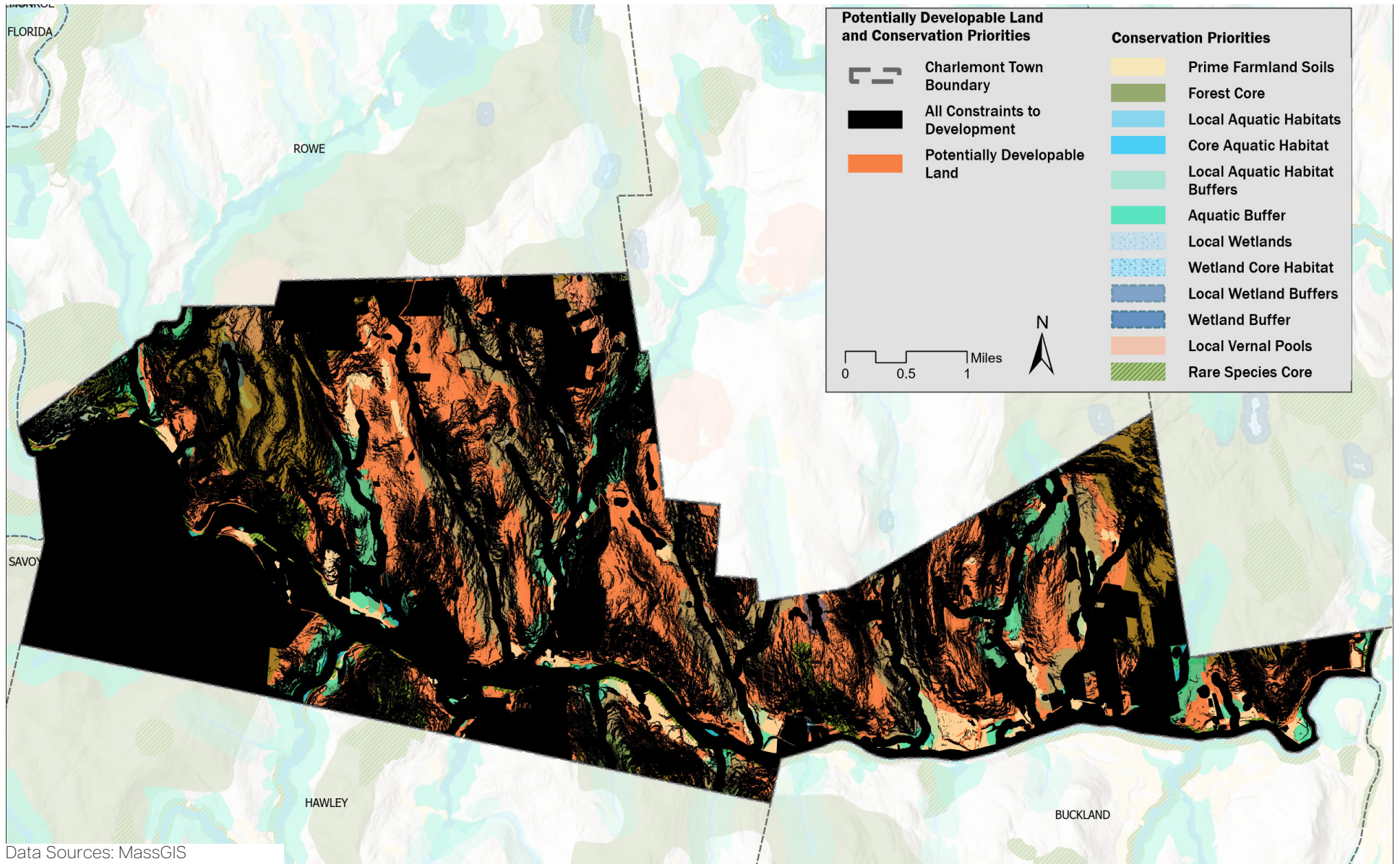
Development constraints are overlaid on top of the conservation priority areas, which in turn are layered above remaining developable land. This highlights conservation priority areas that are at risk of development, and developable land not identified as conservation priorities, which may represent opportunities for lower-impact development.

Conservation areas that are not developable due to physical or regulatory constraints are partially obscured, as they face little immediate development risk.

This map may serve as a planning tool to:

- Prioritize conservation efforts in location with both high ecological value and development potential, and
- Identify areas more appropriate for housing or commercial development that would avoid significant ecological or agricultural impacts.

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS



Data Sources: MassGIS

Map 8. Conservation Priorities and Potentially Developable Land

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

## Future Land Use

The Future Land Use map (next page) integrates findings from the Build-Out Status and Conservation Priorities maps. The Potentially Developable Land not overlaid by Conservation Priorities represents areas where new development may be most appropriate and have less impact on natural resources.

Additionally, the town center and Mohawk Trail/Route 2 are highlighted. The Plan recommends that the town create detailed area plans for the town center and Route 2. These areas are crucial to many of the town's goals.

The town center is highly valued by community members. Its sewer system, walkable pattern, and mix of uses makes it a rare opportunity to advance the town's goals related to housing, economic development, and community life. However, it faces challenges related to limited sewer capacity, flooding, limited parking, some poorly maintained properties, and limited development potential under current zoning and state laws—especially well regulations. Developing an area plan for the town center would enable the town to explore a variety of scenarios for its future and determine which inter-connected actions it can take to help it achieve its potential.

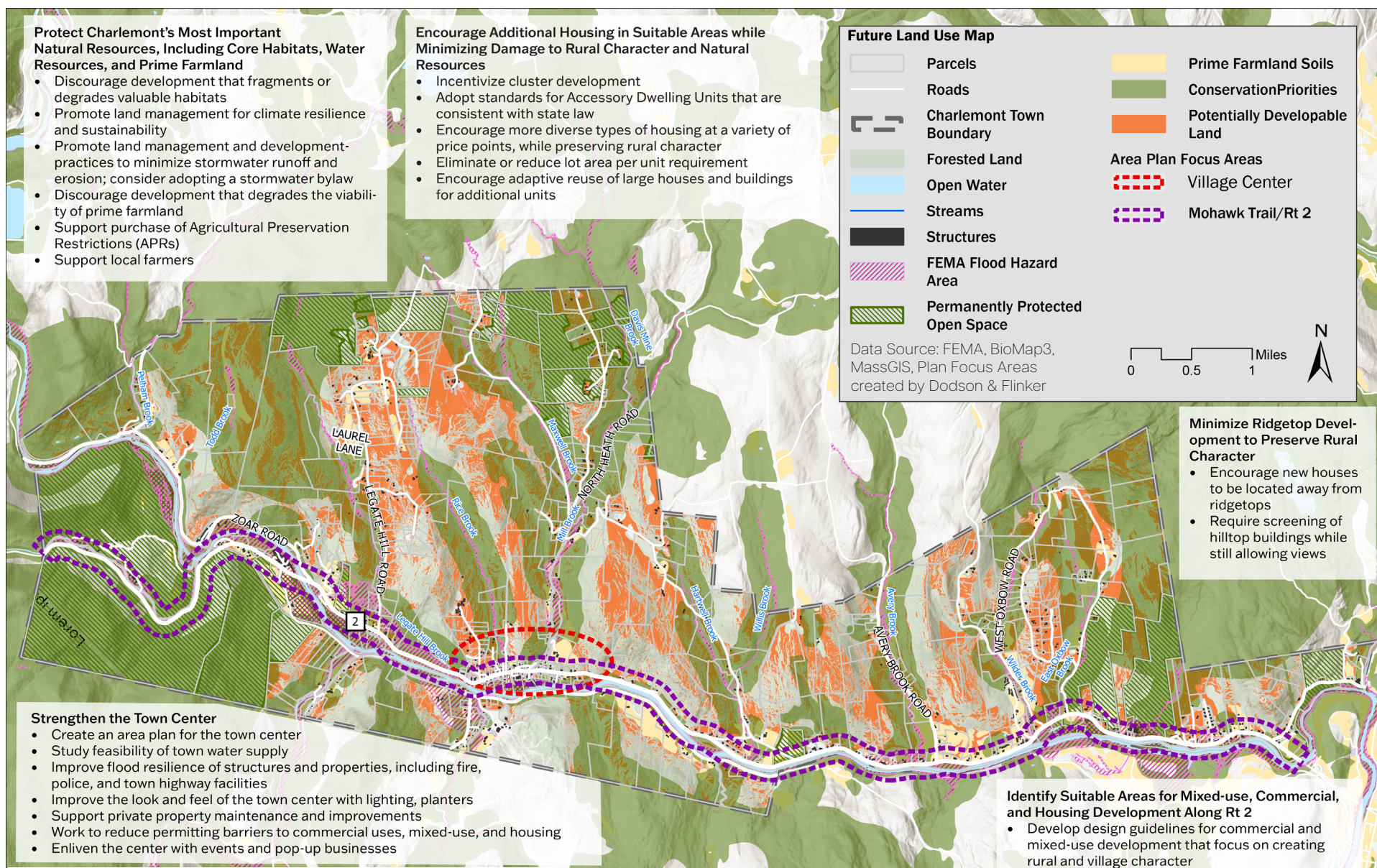
The Mohawk Trail is also an essential part of the town's rural character and sense of place. Route 2 provides the town's best transportation access and highest traffic volumes. That makes it the most likely location for future commercial development that would benefit from attracting passing customers, such as retail, restaurants, personal services, and accommodations. Much of the town's relatively level land is adjacent to it. Some of that is prime farmland, which is important to the town's agricultural goals and its sense of place, but is also relatively vulnerable to development because it is often level, clear, and with relatively suitable soils for

development. With the exception of marijuana-related uses, the town's zoning treats all of Route 2 the same.

An area plan for Route 2 would: help identify whether some parts of it are more suitable for commercial and housing development than others, identify strategies for preserving prime farmland and ensuring continued farm viability, and identify how future development should be designed so that it contributes to the rural character of the Mohawk Trail and functions effectively.

The future land use map also includes callouts for other strategies and actions related to the town's land use goals and actions. The map provides a visual representation of the key land use priorities for the town moving forward.

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS



Map 9. Future Land Use

# LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

*"The community is spread out in such a way that creates a disconnect between residents. How can we feel more connected?"*

*- Survey respondent*

## ISSUES

A Development Pattern that Isolates Uses  
Charlemont lacks a true hub of concentrated activity. This in many ways reflects the broad development pattern within a town. Charlemont is developed in a comb-like pattern with a spine, Route 2, serving as the single point of connection between all the residential streets. Individual streets may be relatively close to one another as the crow flies, but the actual travel distance is usually two or three times longer. Even along the main corridor the linear pattern isolates uses from one another, especially when vacant or under maintained properties are dotted between well-used properties.

### Physical Barriers to Development

Flat land is a rare commodity in Charlemont, flat land without flood risk is even harder to find still. About 57% of the land area of Charlemont has a greater than 20% slope, and about 10% of the land area has a greater than 50% slope. This makes building in Charlemont difficult or impossible in many areas. The areas that are generally most buildable because they are flatter and more connected to infrastructure are also more floodable. Working around steep slopes and minimizing flood risk leaves Charlemont with few options for new development, especially near the town center.

### Important Land Uses are at High Flood Risk

Much of Charlemont's development is located within the 100 or 500-year floodplain. There are 248 structures located within a floodplain, just over 1/6 of all structures in Charlemont. This includes public facilities (such as the Wastewater Treatment Plant, Fire, Police, and Highway Departments, and the Hawlemont School), businesses (such as Mohawk Park Campground, Cold River Market, Dirt Church Brewery, Berkshire Pizza, Green Garage), and many residential properties including several multifamily properties. These areas that are at high flood-risk represent a significant part of the town center and are home to the town's core cultural and social activity.

### Zoning

Compared to other rural towns, Charlemont has relatively permissive zoning that allows two-family dwellings by-right throughout the Town, and up to eight units in a multifamily dwelling by special permit. The minimum lot size is 45,000 square feet in all districts except for the Village Center District where it is 5,000 square feet. Cluster development allows for a modest increase in density for projects that have over 5 acres and reserve 30% of open space. Despite Charlemont's relatively permissive zoning, a lack of flexibility in zoning still impedes new development. Due to the significant physical constraints, and lack of infrastructure in Charlemont, increased flexibility is needed to best take advantage of developable land and protect natural resources.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Increase Flexibility with Cluster Developments

Rural Residential zoning districts are generally established to preserve open space and the rural character of the community through large lot and setback requirements. They often have the opposite effect and lead to more suburban development with large numbers of driveways and fields broken up by houses with lawns in between. The cluster development bylaw was created to address this issue. It incentivizes conservation of large contiguous open spaces by allowing additional density and relief from dimensional requirements in exchange for conservation: subdivisions of parcels 5 acres or larger can receive relief from frontage and lot size for individual lots and are allowed a 20% higher density if 30% of the total area is conserved for open space. This provision, however, is only a modest incentive. The Town could further incentivize cluster development by allowing a higher density of housing and eliminating the requirement that parcels must be 5 acres or larger.

### Incentivize Development near Outdoor Recreation

Charlemont could build on its outdoor recreation and tourism economy by reducing zoning barriers in areas near outdoor recreation businesses or lodging options. Incentivizing mixed-use or commercial development in these areas would make it easier for businesses to locate in a place that could serve both tourists and permanent residents.

### Encourage Alternative Housing Types by Reducing Barriers to Multifamily Development

Charlemont currently allows up to eight units of housing in a single structure with a special permit. An additional 20,000 square feet of lot size per each unit above two units is required in the Rural Residential District. Charlemont could consider removing or reducing lot size requirements and allowing more than eight units on a parcel. Multifamily housing allows greater flexibility than subdivisions because it doesn't require individual lots to be created. Units can be either rentals or owned in a condominium association. This flexibility could allow for development that may better suit Charlemont's needs, such as senior housing, co-housing, or cottage communities. Allowing more units may also give developers a critical mass needed to make alternative wastewater treatments like a package plant more feasible.

### Create New Zoning Districts to Incentivize Nodes of Mixed-Use Development

Due to myriad constraints (slopes, riverfront protection buffers, flood risk, protected open space), there are few areas suitable for new development. This makes it imperative that developable lands are used for their highest and best use. In order to make new centers of activity, the Town will need to create new zoning districts that allow property owners to build mixed-use development that functions similarly to a town center. Charlemont should also consider the barriers to new development and how to make development more feasible. In addition to new zoning districts, it may be necessary to invest in new infrastructure, purchase land, or apply for climate resilience grants.

18%

OF LAND  
CONSERVED

14%

OF SOILS ARE  
PRIME FARMLAND  
SOILS

HOME TO  
THE REGION'S  
LARGEST  
CONTIGUOUS  
FOREST

## CONTEXT

### High-Quality Farmland

- 14% of Charlemont's land consists of prime farmland soils, supporting 14 active farms.<sup>1</sup>

### Protected Lands

- 55.7% of Charlemont's land has some form of development protection:
  - » 44% in Chapter 61 programs (private, undeveloped land).
  - » 11.7% permanently protected by state/municipal conservation.
  - » 4.3% under Agricultural Preservation Restrictions.
  - » 2% in forest Conservation Restrictions.<sup>2</sup>

### Large Contiguous Forest

- Home to the region's only 10,000-acre unfragmented forest (shared with Heath and Colrain).<sup>3</sup>

### High-Priority Wildlife Areas

- Contains BioMap Core Habitats, critical for rare species.<sup>4</sup>

### Deerfield River

- One of the coldest and cleanest rivers in Massachusetts.
- Supports native trout populations and diverse aquatic ecosystems.
- Western portion contains a high-yield aquifer, supplying clean water.<sup>5</sup>

### Development Pressure

- 20 new ANR lots developed between 2016-2024. Thousands of acres of farm and forestland remain vulnerable to development patterns inconsistent with traditional patterns in the region.<sup>6</sup>

### Flooding

- Route 2 was heavily impacted by flooding from Hurricane Irene. Critical facilities are in danger of flooding in heavy storms.

### Threats to Natural Resources

- Charlemont Landfill – Uncapped, unlined landfill may be leaching pollutants.
- Road Salt – Contamination risk to high-yield aquifer.
- Gravel Road Erosion – Increased sedimentation in streams.
- Vehicle Impacts – Car dumps, junkyards, and traffic near the river contribute to pollution.
- Invasive Species – Growing presence along the Deerfield River.
- Hydropeaking – Fluctuating water levels from hydro-power dams destabilize habitats.
- Litter & Trash – Recreational sites impacted by improper waste disposal.
- Davis Mine in Rowe – Leachate from the abandoned mineshafts poses hazards.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2024 Open Space and Recreation Plan  
<sup>2-7</sup> Ibid

# AGRICULTURE, OPEN SPACE, RECREATION, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

## Recreation

Charlemont has been called the “Adventure Capital of New England.”<sup>8</sup> Interest in outdoor recreation continues to grow, spurred by a spike during COVID. The question for the town has become how to capitalize on new economic development potential by harnessing the town’s year-round recreational opportunities.

- Water-based recreation on the Deerfield River has continued to grow in popularity.<sup>9</sup>
- Whitewater rafting and kayaking operators include Berkshire Whitewater, Zoar Outdoor, and Crabapple Whitewater.
- Tubing Rentals & Shuttles – Available from The Great Outdoors Tubing.
- Fishing and swimming – Popular sites include Whirley Baths, Shunpike Rest Area and Zoar Picnic Area.<sup>10</sup>
- As the only ski resort in the Connecticut River Valley, Berkshire East Mountain Resort draws regional visitors. It offers skiing, snowboarding, ziplining, mountain biking, and more.<sup>11</sup>
- Hiking and mountain biking is popular on trail networks at Negus Mountain, Mohawk Trail State Forest, and Thunder Mountain Bike Park.<sup>12</sup>
- Camping is available at Mohawk Trail State Forest and private campgrounds.
- Other popular activities include road cycling, snowmobiling, birdwatching, and wildlife photography

8 2022 FRCOG Outdoor Recreation Plan

9 2023 Deerfield River Corridor Outdoor Recreation Study

10 Ibid

11 2022 FRCOG Outdoor Recreation Plan

12 Ibid

## Community and Cultural Attractions

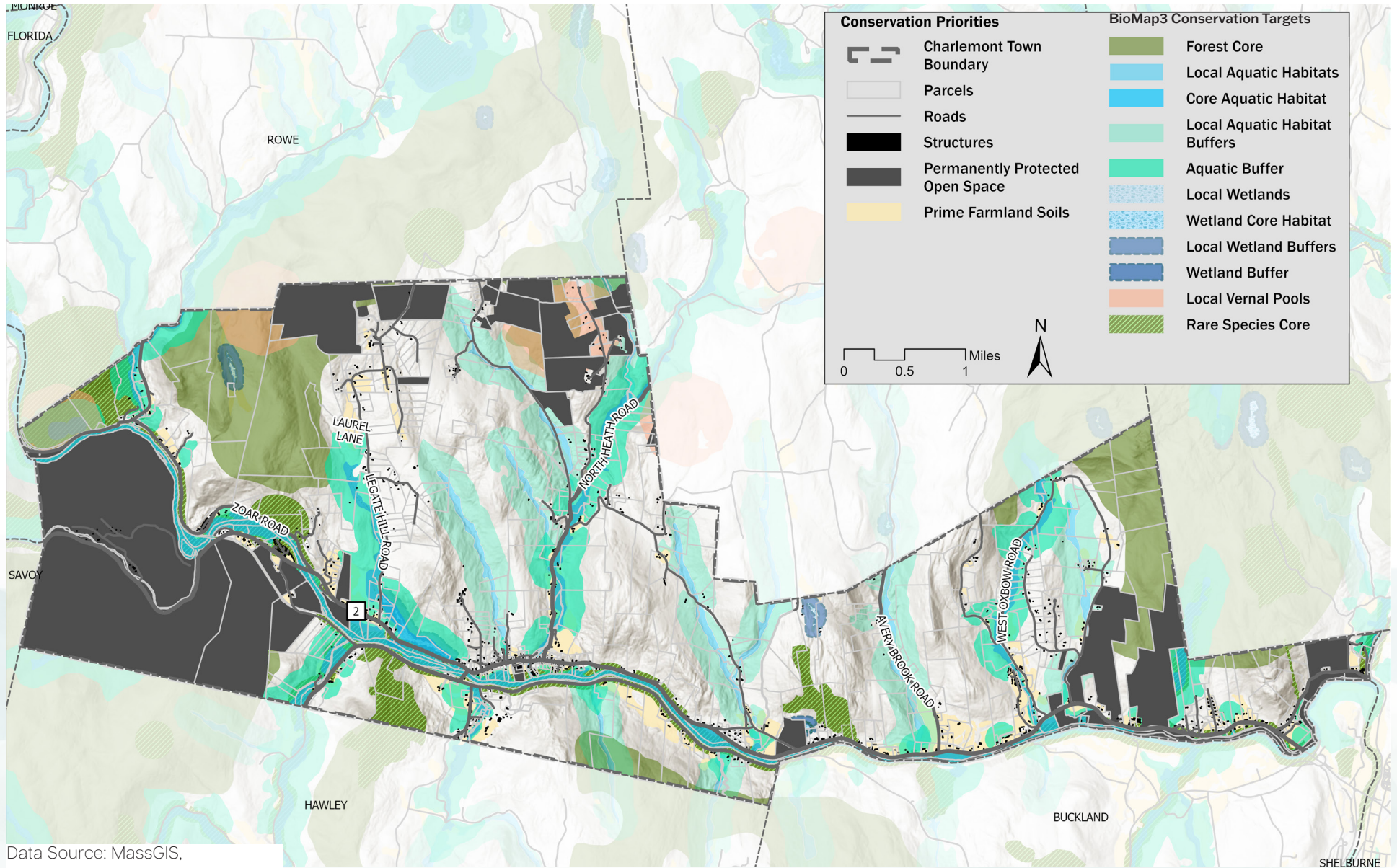
- Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway – A state and nationally designated route.
- Historic Charlemont Fairgrounds hosts local events.
- Hawlemont School facilities offers sports courts for pickleball, basketball, and volleyball. The facilities are currently not in good condition.
- Annual Events:
  - » Mohawk Trail Concert Series (Federated Church)
  - » Charlemont Reggae Festival (Fairgrounds)
  - » American Whitewater Riverfest
  - » Annual Town Picnic (Fairgrounds)<sup>13</sup>

13 2024 Open Space and Recreation Plan

*Mohawk Trail State Forest  
(Photo by author)*



# AGRICULTURE, OPEN SPACE, RECREATION, AND NATURAL RESOURCES



# AGRICULTURE, OPEN SPACE, RECREATION, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

## Conservation Priorities

This map (page 52) shows unprotected areas identified as conservation priorities by BioMap3, a statewide analysis of ecologically significant lands. Priority areas are displayed with transparency to allow overlapping conservation priorities to appear darker, visually indicating areas of greatest significance.

In general, the highest priority conservation areas are located along stream and river channels, as well as in landscapes connected to large, contiguous forest blocks, particularly those that abut large forest blocks in neighboring communities such as Heath, Rowe, and Colrain.

In addition to BioMap3 priorities, the map also includes prime farmland soils, which are an important resource for supporting Charlemont's rural character, agricultural tradition, and overall resilience.

The map indicates which areas the town should prioritize for conservation. While it works toward conservation, the town should discourage development in these areas and ensure that any development that occurs minimizes harm to natural resources.

***“Charlemont is a special and unique place; its rural character, history, scenic roads, local agriculture, and recreational opportunities all contribute to the community. Preserving woodlands, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, and water quality through permanent land preservation is absolutely critical.”***

- Survey respondent



## ISSUES

### Charlemont's Recreational Resources Draw Visitors that Stress Town Capacities

One of Charlemont's biggest strengths is its plentiful opportunities for outdoor recreation. The town sees building on outdoor recreation as a key economic development strategy. In particular, it wants to encourage visitors to patronize more non-recreational businesses in town, such as restaurants, stores, and accommodations. That would support the bottom line of local businesses and could also improve quality of life for residents by enabling existing businesses to expand their offerings and services, or for new businesses to open up. While the town values outdoor recreation, it also experiences some challenges from the influx of visitors during peak recreational seasons. There are sometimes inadequate facilities for self-directed visitors to the Deerfield River, including a lack of parking, insufficient restroom facilities, waste management issues, and underfunded emergency services. Finding ways to address these challenges will benefit both visitors and the town at large.

### Unprotected Agricultural and Forested Lands are Vulnerable to Development

While Charlemont has a large area of protected land, many of the town's private farmlands and forests are not conserved. These lands could potentially be developed in ways that could have a detrimental effect on the town's agricultural heritage, rural character, natural landscapes, and environmental integrity.

### Threats to Natural Resources Posed by Climate Change

Throughout Franklin County, communities are experiencing higher average temperatures and more unpredictable and extreme weather events – like longer droughts and periods of unusually heavy rains and flooding. Recent events in Franklin County, such as Tropical Storm Irene and “Snow-tober,” are salient examples. Climate change-driven weather events are expected to become more extreme in the future and could put many aspects of the town at risk. Many buildings and roads in the town are vulnerable to flooding, including Route 2, the fire station, and the town highway building. The town's outdoor recreation depends on snow and cold temperatures in the winter and enough water in the warmer seasons to allow for river-related activities. In the future, Charlemont may see dieback of some of its extensive forestlands and/or an increase in wildfire risk, as trees and other forest plants are unable to cope with changes in temperatures and precipitation and increased pest and invasive species pressures. The disruption of forests would likely make flooding worse, as forests play a large role in reducing the amount of stormwater entering streams and rivers. Climate change could also reduce the amount of water soaking into the ground in Charlemont, impacting the availability of drinking water in the town.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Increasing Funding from Fees and State and Federal Sources

The town has been exploring diverse funding mechanisms that could support necessary improvements. Options include implementing an Outdoor Recreation Tax, which the Town, in coordination with its state representatives, has been lobbying for, introducing paid parking at the Hawlemont School, access fees for the Deerfield River, and seeking grants. Acquiring the “National Wild and Scenic River” designation for the Deerfield River would open additional funding sources. The town could utilize funding for Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway improvements to enhance access and protection of recreational resources. Additionally, participating in programs such as the Massachusetts Rural Development Fund can aid in land conservation and recreational development.

### Developing and Enhancing Recreational Facilities and Trail Networks

The town has opportunities to invest in recreational spaces including existing tennis and basketball courts. The town has considered developing a Town-owned beach for residents. Expanding trail networks within Charlemont and connecting to surrounding areas could promote eco-tourism and provide residents with increased outdoor opportunities. The town could develop a walking path/greenway from the Fairgrounds to the town center. Public and quasi-public open spaces in the town center could be connected into a greenway to enhance activity and pedestrian access. Collaborations with private landowners may facilitate public access to additional hiking areas, enriching the town’s recreational offerings.

### Protecting Natural Resources and Fostering Smart Growth

Balancing land protection with thoughtful development can preserve Charlemont’s unique appeal. The town could identify and safeguard key scenic areas, productive farmlands, and vital natural resources through conservation efforts. Changes to zoning regulations could encourage growth in suitable areas to promote sustainable development, while discouraging development in important natural areas.

### Enhancing Climate Resilience

Enhancing climate resilience will require a many-pronged approach, but key recommendations which have emerged from past planning efforts include: relocating key Town buildings away from the floodplain; working to restore floodplain connections to trap sediment and slow down floodwaters; implementing an Upland Management Program for the Mill, Rice, and Trout Brooks; public outreach and education about forest management to reduce fire hazard; and identification of communication services to notify residents and visitors in emergencies.

FRCOG has recently received a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Action grant to implement recommendations from its 2017 plan “A Framework for Resilience”, which identified steps that communities in the Deerfield River watershed could take to mitigate flood risk. As a part of this project, FRCOG has formed the Resilient Deerfield River Watershed Coalition (Resilient DRW) and invited all communities in the Deerfield River Watershed to appoint a municipal representative.



*Hall Tavern Farm  
(Photo by author)*

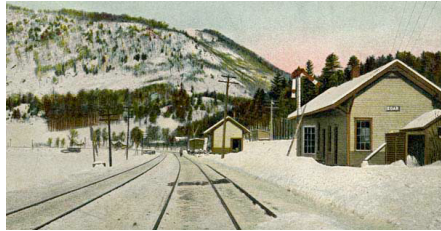
***"I think preparing  
for climate change  
is critical. And  
providing avenues  
for community  
connection and  
mutual aid in  
difficult times."***

***- Survey respondent***

# HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES



*Top: Looking east on Main Street from the corner of North Heath Road in the town center, circa 1891 (Source: Picturesque Franklin)*



*Bottom: Illustration of B&M Station near Entrance to Hoosac Tunnel*

## CONTEXT

- The town of Charlemont was originally known as Charley's Mount and was incorporated in 1765. Although the Massachusetts Historical Commission has no reported Native American sites in the town during the Contact Period (1675-1775), Charlemont is located along the primary travel corridor between the Connecticut and Housatonic Valleys through the Hoosac Range along the Deerfield River.
- The Mohawk Trail was documented as a major east-west route for Native Americans. It was developed as an auto highway in 1914. Today, it is one of the oldest and most scenic roads in New England.<sup>1</sup>
- Charlemont's rich colonial and Victorian history can be seen in the architecture of the community. The entire village of Charlemont has been designated as a National Register Historic District. The Charlemont Village Historic District is a historic district on Route 2 between South Street and Harmony Road, encompassing much of the village center of Charlemont.
  - » The district's properties represent the growth of the village center from its rural origin through a period of 19th century industrialization, including 18th and 19th century farmsteads, Greek Revival buildings of the mid-19th century, and later 19th century Victorian architectural styles.<sup>2</sup>
  - » Archaeological sites include Rice Fort and Taylor Fort.
  - » Historical monuments include the Buttonball Tree Monument, the Old Oak Tree Monument, and the Hall Tavern marker.
- The oldest house in town is located in the town center—the Moses Rice Homestead, known as the “Button Ball House” or the Charles Warner House. It was built in 1742 and rebuilt after a fire in 1749.<sup>3</sup>
- The Charlemont Historical Society plays a pivotal role in preserving the town's heritage. Through its museum, the society collects, preserves, and displays artifacts, records, and folklore significant to Charlemont's history, offering educational programs and publications to engage the community.<sup>4</sup>
- Charlemont is home to many historic buildings, including 152 inventoried historic properties and places and 68 places listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including:
  - » Charlemont Historic Village
  - » Deerfield Valley Agricultural Society Fairgrounds
  - » Mohawk Trail
  - » Bissell Bridge
- East Charlemont is a smaller historic area with 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century farmsteads and structures reflective of the town's early agrarian economy. The “Little Red School” in the district is one of a small number of surviving brick district schoolhouses in Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup>
- There are several historically significant sites located in Zoar Village: Zoar cemetery, Zoar Schoolhouse, and historical houses on Zoar Road.<sup>6</sup>
- There are three historic cemeteries in Charlemont: Leavitt Cemetery, East Charlemont Cemetery and Village Cemetery.

<sup>1</sup> Mohawk Trail Plan, 2014, pg 75

<sup>2</sup> “MACRIS inventory record for Charlemont Center Village”. Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

<sup>3</sup> Mohawk Trail Plan, 2014, pg 76

<sup>4</sup> <https://charlemonthistoricalsociety.omeka.net/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East\\_Charlemont\\_District\\_School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Charlemont_District_School)

<sup>6</sup> Mohawk Trail Plan, 2014, pg 76

# HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

- The Charlemont Inn, established in 1787, is a significant historic landmark in Charlemont. The building has been tied up in bankruptcy court for several years, preventing its use while the condition of the building deteriorates.<sup>7</sup>
- Perhaps the greatest cultural resource in Charlemont is the scenic beauty of the natural landscape, including working farms, extensive forests, rolling hillsides, and the Deerfield River. The scenic beauty is often cited by residents as the thing they love most about Charlemont.
- Bissell Bridge, after years of intensive effort, was restored and historically reconstructed to carry modern loads on Rt. 8A. The Bissell Bridge is the last covered bridge in Charlemont.
- The Fairgrounds, also known as Memorial Park, is a historic 24-acre site situated on a plateau above Charlemont town center.
  - » The grandstand at the Fairgrounds was built in 1892 and is in poor condition today.
  - » The Fairgrounds hosts a variety of annual events, including the Charlemont Reggae Festival, an iconic event that has been running for over 26 years.
  - » The Fairgrounds have been identified in previous plans as an important historical resource and a promising area for future investment.
- Annual events are cherished by the community, including the Stars and Stripes car show, town picnic, and Mohawk Trail Concert Series.
- The Charlemont-Hawley Cultural Council actively supports local arts and humanities, funding projects that benefit residents and enhance the cultural landscape of the area.<sup>8</sup>



*The Historic Bissell Covered Bridge is a community treasure. The bridge is a 2009 restoration of the former 1951 bridge, which replaced the earlier 1849 bridge. (Photo by author)*

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.recorder.com/Charlemont-Inn-owners-given-until-Nov-17-to-find-buyer-52437271?utm>

<sup>8</sup> <https://massculturalcouncil.org/local-council/charlemont-hawley>

# HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES



*The historic grandstand at the Fairgrounds  
(Photo by author)*

## ISSUES

### Maintenance of Structures

Charlemont's center has a wealth of historic structures. Despite the historic character, residents worry that the town center does not appear welcoming and well-maintained. Property owners may lack financial means to maintain and care for historic properties. In addition, many historic structures owned by the Town, such as the wooden grandstand at the Fairgrounds, require costly repairs to ensure long-term viability. Limited funding and resources for preservation efforts make it difficult to prevent deterioration.

### Climate Resilience of Historic Structures

Many historic structures are located in areas that are vulnerable to flooding, extreme weather events, or other climate-related challenges. Damage from extreme weather could result in the loss of historically-significant structures and have negative economic and public health implications.

### Visibility of Cultural Resources

Residents and visitors may not be aware of the historical resources in Charlemont such as buildings, historic sites, historical monuments, and artifacts. This represents a lost opportunity to build a sense of place and connection to history.

### Demographic Shifts and Loss of Institutional Knowledge

As longtime residents age and the town struggles to attract new residents, there is a risk of losing local knowledge about Charlemont's history and local traditions, which could affect how the town tells its story, preserves its heritage, and engages in civic life.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Protecting or Adaptively Reusing Historic Buildings

The Town could work to identify underutilized historic buildings or properties that could be repurposed for community use, such as a cultural center or event space, prioritizing those structures which are not at risk of flooding. If feasible, the restoration and repurposing of the Charlemont Inn could help revitalize the town center and once again provide a vital community gathering space.

### Leveraging the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway for Funding Opportunities

The Town could enhance Charlemont's role as a tourism destination by improving wayfinding signage, tourism infrastructure, and public access points along the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway. The town could seek funding through available grants for scenic byway improvement projects.

### Expanding Heritage Tourism by Investing in and Publicizing Charlemont's Unique Features

The Town could explore ways to advertise Charlemont's historic and cultural resources in addition to its recreational offerings. This could involve historical markers, public art installations, or events that celebrate the community's heritage. "Heritage tourism" could be expanded by showcasing Bissell Bridge, one of the few remaining covered bridges in Western Massachusetts, the Mohawk Trail, the Grandstand, Historical Commission Museum, and other cultural assets. Volunteers could develop walking tours or self-guided heritage trails to increase awareness of the town's history. Additionally, promoting local artisans and craftsmen could be one piece of a broader cultural economy strategy.

### Continuing a Culture of Care and Pride in the Town Center

The Town could explore ways to help property owners maintain structures in the town center. This could include funding, organizing volunteer work parties, or reassuring residents that routine home maintenance such as house painting will not increase the assessed value of their home and has many positive benefits, including reducing maintenance costs down the road and helping the town appear safe and welcoming.



*Top: The Exhibition Hall at the Fairgrounds, built circa 1885*



*Bottom: East Charlemont Schoolhouse, also known as the Little Red School, built circa 1828  
(Photos by author)*

# TRANSPORTATION



## CONTEXT

### Inventory of Transportation Infrastructure: Road and Bridge Inventory<sup>1</sup>

- Miles of Roadway by Type
  - » 63.8 miles of total roadway
  - » 12.1 miles of MassDOT roadway
  - » 42.5 miles of Town roadway
  - » 1.7 miles of State Forest roadway
  - » 7.3 miles unaccepted roadway
- Bridge Inventory
  - » 30 total bridges
  - » 4 structurally deficient bridges
  - » 2 structurally deficient bridges with no posted weight limit
  - » 1 structurally deficient bridge with a posted weight limit
  - » 1 structurally deficient bridge that is closed

### Traffic Counts

- MassDOT collected traffic counts in numerous locations in Charlemont in 2016.<sup>2</sup>
  - » All sections of Route 2 had higher Average Daily Traffic counts than other area of Charlemont
  - » Traffic counts varied greatly on Route 2 from a high of 5,713 in East Charlemont to a low of 2,084 near the Florida border. This reflects a broader trend where traffic counts are higher in eastern Charlemont than western Charlemont.
  - » West Hawley Rd. had the second highest traffic counts at 1,521 AADT (all West Hawley Rd. stations were the same).

<sup>1</sup> FRCOG Transportation Plan

<sup>2</sup> MassGIS -MassDOT Roads

Table 4. Traffic Counts in Charlemont.

Street Name	Low	High
<b>Route 2</b>	5713	2084
<b>West Hawley</b>	1521	418
<b>Zoar Road</b>	1090	376
<b>North River Road</b>	861	861
<b>North Heath Road</b>	329	782
<b>East Hawley Road</b>	552	552
<b>South River Road</b>	418	152
<b>Avery Brook Road</b>	213	213

Source: MassDOT Crash Data Portal

### Traffic Safety

- There have been 332 total crashes in Charlemont since 2005.
- There have been five fatal car accidents in Charlemont since 2005. Four involving motorcycles and one that involved a single vehicle.<sup>3</sup>
- No intersections in Charlemont are designated “crash clusters”<sup>4</sup> or are among the 50 most dangerous intersections in Franklin County.<sup>5</sup>
- Franklin County has a lower incidence of car accidents per vehicle mile traveled but a higher incidence of fatalities.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> MassDOT Crash Data Portal

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> FRCOG Transportation Plan

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

## Public Transportation

- Charlemont is on route 41 bus line that runs from Charlemont Center to Greenfield, at a frequency of four round trips per day.
  - » FRTA ridership decreased significantly during COVID and has not recovered to pre-COVID levels (see Figures 3 and 4).
  - » There is a “park and ride” lot in East Charlemont.

Table 5. Safety Performance Measures, FCTPO vs. Statewide.

Safety Performance Measures	CY2023 Target	Statewide Average, 2017-2021	Franklin County Average, 2017-2021
<b>Number of Fatalities</b>	355	360	6.8
<b>Fatalities per 100 million VMT</b>	0.59	0.59	0.74
<b>Number of Serious Injuries</b>	2,569	2,626	31.8
<b>Serious Injuries per 100 million VMT</b>	4.25	4.30	3.47
<b>Number of Serious Injuries + Fatalities, Non-motorized Modes</b>	437	467	4.2

Source: Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan (2024).

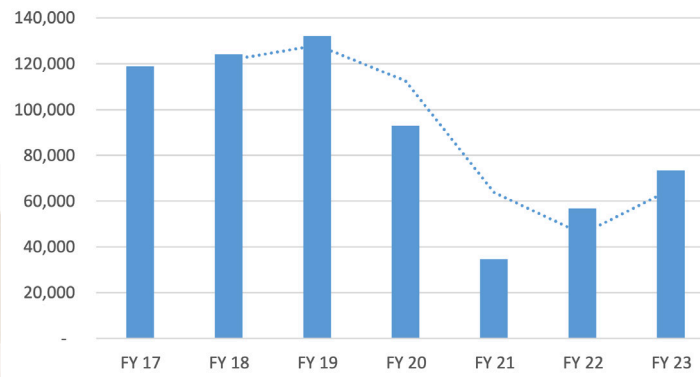


Figure 3. FRTA Fixed Route Ridership 2017-2023.  
Source: Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan (2024)

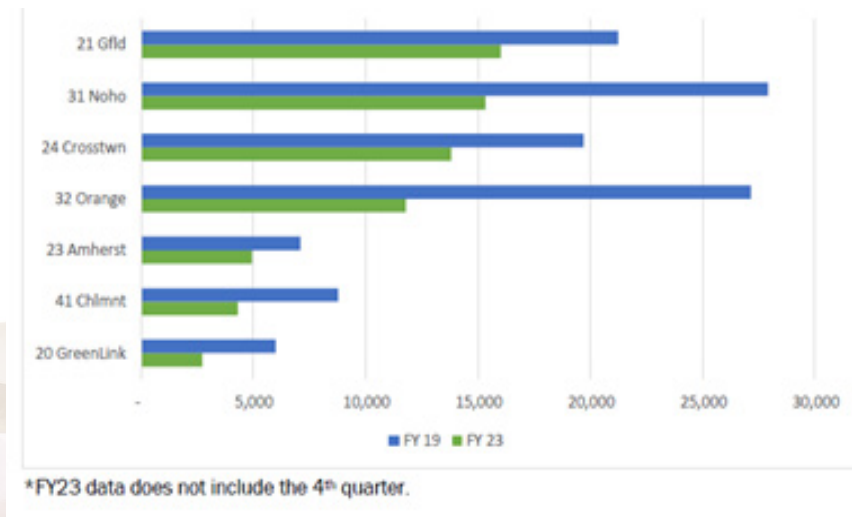


Figure 4: FRTA Ridership by Route, FY 1029 and FY 2023.  
Source: FRCOG Regional Transportation Plan

# TRANSPORTATION



*The Deerfield River running alongside Route 2  
(Photo by author)*

## Recent Roadway Improvements

- MassWorks grants for 8A North realignment, and Long Bridge deck repair for \$720,000 and \$500,000 respectively.
- 1.5 Mile reconstruction of Route 2 in and around Charlemont center.
  - » Roadway reconstruction
  - » Drainage system and culvert repairs
  - » Traffic calming measures
  - » Sidewalk reconstruction, drainage system and culvert repairs, and construction of various traffic calming measures in the Charlemont town center.
- A new sidewalk has been constructed on the north side of Route 2 from Riddell Road to Zoar Outdoor.
- Existing sidewalks and curb-cut ramps have been reconstructed to achieve ADA compliance.<sup>7</sup>

## Scenic Byway Designation

- The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway running from Williamstown (west) to Orange (east) is one of the earliest scenic byways in New England, receiving its designation in 1953.
- The western section of the byway (Williamstown to Greenfield) which was constructed in 1914 follows a route first used by Native Americans to travel between the Hudson River and the Connecticut River Valleys.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

## Freight/Rail

- The “Patriot Corridor” freight rail line runs through Charlemont along the southern bank of the Deerfield River.
  - » The corridor links Eastern MA and Eastern NY (near Albany).
  - » It is one of two east-west rail lines serving MA and provides an important link for the paper and lumber industries in northern New England and Canada.
  - » It carries up to 5 million tons of freight annually.
  - » Owned by Pan Am Southern (PAS), a joint venture between Norfolk Southern and CSX Transportation
  - » A 2018 FRCOG study showed that 22% of eastbound freight cars on the Patriot corridor carried hazardous materials, mainly liquid petroleum, and “3257” which refers to an elevated temperature liquid at or above 100 degrees Celsius or above its flash point.
- A 2018 FRCOG count showed 15% of trucks on Route 2 were transporting hazardous materials.
- The Northern Rail Feasibility Study presented three alternatives for new rail service between Fitchburg and North Adams.
  - » This rail service would go through Charlemont
  - » None of the three alternatives included stops in Charlemont.
  - » New double tracks are considered in Charlemont are considered in some alternatives.
  - » The nearest stops would be in Shelburne Falls or Greenfield.<sup>9</sup>



*The “Patriot Corridor” freight rail line  
(Photo by author)*

<sup>9</sup> Northern Rail Feasibility Study

# TRANSPORTATION

## ISSUES

### Flooding Risk on Route 2

Route 2 is by far the most utilized roadway within Charlemont. The town center and most businesses are located along Route 2. It connects Charlemont to Shelburne Falls, North Adams, Greenfield, Route 91, and most other destinations. Hurricane Irene revealed the vulnerabilities of this corridor, as the road was closed for three months due to flood damage. Flooding along Route 2 significantly impacts emergency response capabilities, the outdoor recreation economy, and the ability for residents to commute to their jobs and access services.

### Limited Alternative Transportation Options

As with many rural communities, Charlemont is reliant on automobile transportation. Charlemont's bus service is limited, running only four times a day, ending at 7 PM, and terminating on its westbound route at the town center. Biking in Charlemont is generally considered dangerous and difficult because of the narrow shoulders and fast speeds along Route 2 and steep slopes along other roads. Other than a recently completed one-and-a-half mile stretch near Charlemont village, Charlemont lacks a sidewalk network. The lack of transportation options makes life more difficult for residents who cannot afford a car, or who are not able to or do not want to drive. Relying solely on personal vehicles for transportation increases resident's transportation expenses, has negative public health impacts like air pollution and diseases associated with lack of exercise. It also increases the cost burden on the Town by increasing the wear and tear on roadways.

### Aging and Deficient Infrastructure

There are structurally deficient bridges (4 in total) in Charlemont. Some have no posted weight limit. This poses a risk to public safety and limits transportation options. Many of Charlemont's roads are unaccepted and not Town-maintained, which could limit the ability to fund and prioritize repairs and upgrades. For Town-maintained roads, budget constraints at the town level could delay repairs.

### Hazardous Materials Transport

The Patriot Corridor rail freight line which runs through Charlemont transports significant volumes of hazardous materials (22% of eastbound freight cars). Transport of hazardous materials on the railroad brings potential for derailments, spills, and fires threatening Route 2, the town's main evacuation route. Additionally, 15% of trucks on Route 2 were found to be transporting hazardous materials according to a 2018 study, which raises safety concerns in a town with limited emergency response infrastructure.

### Parking Congestion

Parking is an issue during peak tubing season, as many popular river access sites do not have adequate parking. This can cause traffic problems and hinder emergency response. The town and business partners could explore shuttle service to parking areas away from the riverfront.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Improving Resilience of Route 2 and Alternative Routes

Given Route 2's critical role and its vulnerability to flooding, the Town and its residents could advocate for state and federal resources to address flood vulnerability, particularly as flooding impacts the town's emergency response capabilities, transportation access, and economic viability. This could include pursuing grants or earmarks for infrastructure upgrades if the area is deemed highly vulnerable over time. Improving less flood-prone roads to make them reliable secondary routes during emergencies could also be a priority. Clear signage and public communication plans can ensure that residents understand what to do in an emergency.

### Expanding Alternative Transportation Options

The Town could advocate with Franklin Regional Transit Authority to expand the bus line past Charlemont Center to connect to Legate Hill, Woodlawn Park Mobile Homes, outdoor recreation amenities and other attractions in western Charlemont. The Town and/or local businesses could provide shuttles for visitors to the most popular destinations. The Town and residents could ensure the newly installed sidewalk remains safe for pedestrians during all seasons and is well lit at night, using dark sky compliant lighting. A walking path/greenway from the Fairgrounds to the town center could expand opportunities for safe walking. Public and quasi-public open spaces in the town center could be connected by a corridor to enhance activity and pedestrian access. Investing in trail connections throughout town, including mountain biking trails, could improve quality of life for residents while strengthening Charlemont's draw as an outdoor recreation center.

### Improving Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

Adding electric vehicle (EV) chargers in town, ideally in a location within walking distance to other amenities, could make it easier for visitors to charge. People waiting for vehicle charging become a captive market for local businesses.

### Managing Speed and Noise on Route 2

The addition of signs, banners, and other placemaking elements could reduce speeds along Route 2 by signaling to drivers that they are entering a town center. Additionally, some towns have regulations against the use of engine compression braking, which emits a loud vibratory sound, in town centers—Charlemont could adopt an ordinance and post signs to discourage the use of engine braking.

*In many areas, Route 2 is only slightly elevated above the Deerfield River, making it vulnerable to riverine flooding (Photo by author)*



# PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES

**\$4.42 M**

TOWN BUDGET  
FY2025

**#7**

HIGHEST TAX RATE IN  
THE STATE

**51%**

OF CHARLEMONT CHILDREN  
ATTENDED HAWLEMONT OR  
MOHAWK REGIONAL  
IN 2023

## CONTEXT

### Town Budget

#### *Expenditures*

- The Town's budget for FY 2025 is \$4.42 million.
- The budget has steadily increased since 2022, when the budget was \$3.98 million.
- Schools make up 55% of expenditures.

#### *Revenue*

- Revenue has nearly doubled over the last 20 years.
- Revenue rose sharply after 2021 and peaked in FY 2024.
- The revenue mix has remained relatively stable.
- In 2023 and 2024 Charlemont collected over \$500,000 in revenue from enterprise funds.
- The residential percentage of the tax levy has gradually decreased as the tax levy for personal property has taken up a greater share of revenue.
- Commercial and industrial levies have made up a relatively consistent share of the total tax levy over the last 20 years.<sup>1</sup>
- Charlemont has recently collected Enterprise funds which directly fund the Municipal Light Plan (MLP) broadband plan.

### Payment In Lieu of Taxes

There is a significant amount of State-owned land in Charlemont that is eligible to receive Payment in Lieu of Taxes (P.I.L.O.T.) payments which reimburse municipalities for tax-exempt State-owned lands within their towns.

- Catamount State Forest, Mohawk State Forest, and Shunpike Rest Area are State-owned lands eligible to receive P.I.L.O.T. payments.
- There are 1,238 acres of P.I.L.O.T. eligible land in Charlemont.<sup>2</sup>
- Disbursements for State-owned land are not equal across the state. Charlemont receives \$12.70 per acre of state-owned land.<sup>3</sup> In FY20, estimates from communities indicated a range in land values from \$11/acre to \$550/acre, representing a significant disparity.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Division of Local Services Municipal Databank

<sup>2</sup> Sum of shape areas for eligible parcels. Derived from MassGIS tax parcels.

<sup>3</sup> 2024 Charlemont Town Report

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/findings-state-owned-land-pilot-program>

# PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES

Table 6: Total Revenue with Enterprise Funds.

	Total Receipts	Tax Levy %	State Aid %	Local Receipts %	Other + Enterprise %
2005	2,762,881	64.73	7.66	8.4	19.2
2006	2,603,034	71.79	9.36	10.7	8.15
2007	2,859,799	70.58	11.81	11.25	6.36
2008	2,975,235	64	12.52	9.04	14.44
2009	3,051,172	67.74	12.7	8.85	10.71
2010	2,949,024	70.93	10.91	7.97	10.2
2011	3,114,037	67.32	11.01	7.32	14.36
2012	3,245,474	65.16	9.35	7.04	18.45
2013	2,971,991	73.62	10.5	7.4	8.48
2014	3,104,311	68.63	10.04	7.29	14.04
2015	3,048,347	73.89	8.54	7.56	10.01
2016	3,441,387	73.5	8.11	7.1	11.28
2017	3,543,408	77.63	7.87	7.33	7.17
2018	3,638,279	78.05	8.58	7.58	5.79
2019	3,578,163	77.05	8.72	9.32	4.9
2020	3,962,570	69.76	8.76	8.98	12.49
2021	3,942,203	77.79	8.6	8.17	5.45
2022	4,515,675	70.85	7.52	8.35	13.29
2023	5,014,770	65.13	7.1	7.52	20.25
2024	5,311,122	67.23	6.77	7.59	18.4
2025	5,138,067	69.06	7.18	9.57	14.19

Table 7: Source of Tax Levy by Percentage of Total.

Fiscal Year	Total Levy	Residential %	Commercial %	Industrial %	Personal Property %
2005	1,788,487	87.41	8.27	0.79	3.54
2006	1,868,794	86.92	8.35	0.77	3.96
2007	2,018,304	88.37	7.63	0.72	3.28
2008	1,904,044	88.65	7.44	0.61	3.3
2009	2,066,939	87.61	7.46	0.6	4.33
2010	2,091,631	87.75	7.32	0.6	4.33
2011	2,096,286	87.21	7.1	0.58	5.11
2012	2,114,880	87.08	7.31	0.58	5.04
2013	2,188,119	86.74	7.26	0.59	5.42
2014	2,130,483	87.47	6.87	0.6	5.05
2015	2,252,575	86.25	7.97	0.59	5.18
2016	2,529,425	84.31	7.93	0.58	7.17
2017	2,750,806	84.97	7.71	0.56	6.77
2018	2,839,824	85.3	7.7	0.54	6.46
2019	2,757,035	85.95	7.7	0.54	5.82
2020	2,764,298	85.62	7.98	0.53	5.86
2021	3,066,471	86.59	6.6	0.54	6.27
2022	3,199,193	84.98	6.74	1.38	6.9
2023	3,266,089	83.99	6.73	1.74	7.54
2024	3,570,844	84.04	6.79	1.65	7.52
2025	3,548,220	80.6	7.38	1.47	10.55

# PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES



*Top: Town Hall*

*Below: Charlemont Fire Department  
(Source: Town of Charlemont)*

## Town Properties and Facilities

### *Town Properties*

- » A four-parcel complex on Factory Road includes the wastewater treatment plant (Sewer District), Fire Department, Police Department, and Highway Department
- » Town Hall
- » Hawlemont School and Field (three parcels)
- » Tennis and basketball courts in front of Hawlemont School
- » Fairgrounds
- » Charlemont Transfer Station
- » 8 Avery Brook Rd. - highway materials
- » 25 properties in total

### *Fire Department*

- » Charlemont's Fire Department is primarily made up of volunteers. There are currently 10 volunteers.
- » The Department also has a Fire Chief and a Fire Inspector which are paid positions.
- » Charlemont is looking for a new Fire Chief with the current chief nearing retirement.
- » Charlemont recently purchased two fire engines, one of which was almost completely paid for by a grant, which the Town paid \$65,000 for in two installments. The new fire engine (not covered by the grant) cost \$700,000.
- » Charlemont recently purchased one new ambulance at a cost of \$350,000.
- » There is a need for new EMTs as several current volunteers are reaching retirement age.

### *Police Department*

- » Charlemont's Police Department has 10 part-time police officers and one full time Police Chief
- » Charlemont purchased two new police cruisers in 2024.
- » The Police Department shares a facility with the Highway Department.

### *Historic and Cultural Areas*

- » East Charlemont School House
- » Village Cemetery
- » Zoar Road Cemetery
- » Old Oaktree Monument

### *Undeveloped Open Space*

- » Forestland adjacent to Fairgrounds
- » Avery Brook Road former landfill site, considered for solar.
- » Undeveloped land on Warner Hill R., Zoar Rd., North Heath Rd., and High St. (8 parcels)

### *Flood Risk*

- » Charlemont's Fire, Police, and Highway Department, Hawlemont School, and Wastewater Treatment Plant are all located within the 100-year floodplain, putting them at high risk.
- » Tropical Storm Irene caused \$900,000 in damages to the Wastewater Treatment plant which was closed for nine months. Hawlemont School also flooded.

### *Town Employees*

- » Charlemont has 24 public employees (not including regional school employees).

# PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES

## Highway Department

- » The Highway Department has four employees: a working foreman, a superintendent and two laborers.
- » The Highway Department has full responsibility for all maintenance and construction on 45+ miles of town roads.
- » The Highway Department is located on factory road along with the Fire Department, Police, Ambulance, and Sewer Department.
- » The Highway Department has a fleet of 14 vehicles.

## Sewer District/Wastewater Treatment Plant

The Town has a Sewer District that serves Charlemont Village. It operates as a separate municipality, and is governed by a Board of Commissioners.

- The Wastewater Treatment Plant serves approximately 450 people in Charlemont Center.
  - » It has a design capacity for 50,000 gallons of water per day
  - » It is not designed to accommodate uses that would require an extension of its collection system or its storage and filtration capacity.
  - » The ordinance authorizing designation of the District does not allow for its boundaries to expand.
  - » There is not enough land surrounding the wastewater treatment facility to allow for an expansion of the holding tanks or sand filters.
- The Plant was shut off for nine months following Tropical Storm Irene, with \$900,000 in damage.
- The Plant currently reserves capacity for a number of properties that are connected to the sewer system but are currently not operating or not operating at full capacity.
  - » There is a significant amount of unused capacity.
  - » In recent years, new connections to the sewer system have been denied due to a lack of capacity.

Table 8. Charlemont Public Employees (Excluding Regional School Employees).

Position	Stipend, Part Time, Full-Time, Shared
Animal Inspector	Stipend
Ambulance Director	Part-Time
Assessor's Secretary	Full-Time
Tax Collector and Treasurer (two roles filled by one employee)	32 Hours
Emergency Medical Technician Basic	On Call
Emergency Management Director	Stipend, part-time
Broadband Municipal Light Plant Manager	Volunteer
Assistant Fire Chief	Part-Time
Fire Chief	Part-Time
Fire Lieutenant	On Call
Firefighter	On Call
Highway Laborer 1	Full-Time
Highway Laborer 2	Full-Time
Highway Working Foreman	Full-Time
Police Chief	Part-Time
Police Officer	Part-Time
Police Sergeant	Part-Time (not filled)
Secretary to the Boards	Part-Time
Superintendent of Streets	Full-Time
Town Administrator	Full-Time
Town Clerk	¾ Time
Town Hall Custodian	Part-Time
Transfer Station Assistant	Part-Time
Transfer Station Alternate	As Needed
Transfer Station Attendant	Part-Time

# PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES

## Education

- Hawlemont is a pre-K through 6 school that serves Charlemont and Hawley.
  - » In 2024, 38 students came from Charlemont, 4 from Hawley, 8 from Heath, and 6 from other towns including Ashfield, Greenfield, and Colrain
- Hawlemont School enrollment has declined significantly in the last 14 years: from 109 in 2010 to 75 in 2024.<sup>5</sup>
  - » There has been a slight decline in student age population from 148 in 2015, to 134 in 2024.
- Students opting for vocational, private, and homeschooling have also impacted enrollment at Hawlemont.
  - » In 2015, 81.1% of school-age children in Charlemont attended Hawlemont School or Mohawk Regional High School.
  - » In 2024, only 51.3% of school-age Charlemont children

attended Hawlemont School or Mohawk Regional High School.

- School choice has hurt enrollment at Hawlemont:
  - » Charlemont and Hawley have sent more students to other districts than have been sent to Hawlemont in every year since 2020.
  - » The cost of tuition is paid from the sending district to the receiving district. The annual cost is \$5,000 per student and higher for students with special needs.
  - » School choice has cost Hawlemont district an average of \$72,346 per year over the last four years.
- Similar trends of declining student age population and opting into non-regional public schools have also occurred in Hawley.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Hawlemont School Principal, email, June 9, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Two Districts 8 Towns Enrollment Report (Draft)

Table 9. Where Students Attend School, Town of Charlemont.

	Academic Regional Schools	Vocational Technical Regional Schools	Charter Schools	Out-of- District Public Schools	Home Schooled	In State Private and Parochial Schools	Total	Total Public	% Local	% Public
2023	72	8	4	39	5	6	134	123	53.7	91.8
2022	82	7	3	42	6	1	141	134	58.2	95
2021	92	7	6	22	11	2	140	127	65.7	90.7
2020	107	0	3	33	4	7	154	143	69.5	92.9
2019	98	0	3	42	4	8	155	143	63.2	92.3
2018	112	0	2	20	4	8	146	134	76.7	91.8
2017	134	0	2	46	0	5	187	182	71.1	97.3
2016	115	0	1	35	0	7	158	151	72.8	95.6
2015	120	0	1	24	0	3	148	145	81.1	98

Source: Two Districts 8 Towns Study - School Attending Report, DESE

## ISSUES

### Property Tax Burden

Charlemont has a high tax rate of \$18.30 per thousand, ranking seventh highest in the state in FY25. This tax burden falls largely on residents, who pay over 80% of local taxes. On average, Charlemont residents spend 16.9% of their income on property taxes, the 51st highest percentage among Massachusetts' 351 towns and approximately 20% above the state average. Given this significant tax burden, residents may be hesitant to support improvements that would result in tax increases, including participation in programs such as the Community Preservation Act program, despite the potential for matching funds.

### Hawlemont School Costs

Hawlemont School is a cherished community resource which serves Charlemont and Hawley, with most students coming from Charlemont. The school offers unique programs, such as animal husbandry, and is a source of community pride. However, enrollment has declined significantly over the past decade and is projected to continue decreasing. Families are increasingly opting for other alternative schooling options, including school choice, private school, charter schools, vocational schools, and home schooling. Additionally, Charlemont's overall school-age population is shrinking. As enrollment declines, per-pupil costs rise, raising concerns about the long-term financial sustainability of the school and whether continued operation will remain feasible. Two Districts Eight Towns—a steering committee made up of school administrators, school board members, parents, and other local advocates from Charlemont, Ashfield, Buckland, Hawley, Plainfield, Heath, Shelburne, and Colrain—was formed to study options for the future of public education in the region.

### Flood Risk for Town Facilities

Flooding along the Deerfield River poses a severe risk to Town facilities, many of which, including the Wastewater Treatment Plant, Fire Station, Highway Department, and Hawlemont School, are located within the 100-year floodplain. FEMA-designated flood hazard areas are based on historic storm data, while climate change will make future storms bigger. That means the flood risks will likely increase in the coming decades.

The most recent major flooding event, Hurricane Irene, caused extensive damage. Floodwater inundated the Hawlemont School's boiler room, left mud deposits throughout the building, and severely damaged the Wastewater Treatment Plant, which was offline for nine months and required \$900,000 in repairs. Given these risks, Charlemont residents have identified relocating public infrastructure as a top priority for emergency preparedness. While relocation would require significant investment, repairing or rebuilding facilities after future flood events could prove even more costly. Typically, money spent on hazard mitigation has a 4:1 return, meaning every dollar spent results in a savings of four dollars on future disaster costs.

*Hawlemont School grounds*  
*Source: Hawlemont School website.*



# PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES

## Declining Civic Life and Volunteerism

Charlemont has seen a decline in civic engagement in recent years, which has impacted both public life and the Town's ability to maintain local volunteerism. As a small community, Charlemont depends heavily on volunteers to serve on boards and committees, staff the volunteer Fire Department, and perform other essential roles. However, local leaders have noted that filling these positions has become increasingly difficult.

This decline in civic participation is likely a result of several factors, including a shrinking and aging population, more people working further away from Charlemont, as well as broader trends of reduced civic involvement. This not only diminishes the Town's capacity to provide necessary services but also erodes the sense of community.

Compounding these challenges is a lack of public gathering spaces. Long-time residents fondly recall a time when local dance halls, restaurants, and the Charlemont Inn served as hubs for community interaction. While the Fairgrounds are still used, the Grandstand is no longer functional, and fewer events are held there and the annual Agricultural Fair is now discontinued. Moreover, the Fairgrounds' outdoor nature makes it an unreliable venue for many types of gatherings. Although Berkshire East has become an important gathering place, it is still a place where, as one resident stated, "you might also be with 100 people from Connecticut." Charlemont residents want more gathering places where they are more likely to see their neighbors rather than tourists.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Advocating for Changes to State Regulations That Would Help Increase Revenue for the Town

Massachusetts is a state where a large majority of people live in urban or suburban areas. As a result, state regulations often reflect the needs of those population centers. Rural towns like Charlemont face very different challenges and can often feel hamstrung by policies designed for more densely populated communities.

Charlemont has already advocated for changes to state law that could increase local revenue, including an Outdoor Recreation Tax and reforms to the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program for the Mohawk State Forest. The PILOT program is intended to offset lost tax revenue from state-owned land, but a 2020 State Auditor's report found that it disproportionately disadvantages smaller, rural communities. Charlemont, for example, receives only about 10% of the statewide median per-acre payment, and one-third of the average per-acre payment in Franklin County. Aligning Charlemont's reimbursement rate with the state median could generate an additional \$141,000 in annual revenue.

Other regulatory reforms could indirectly spur residential and commercial growth. Residents and business owners have noted that requiring businesses with private wells to comply with public water supply standards imposes significant costs, while strict setback requirements for wells limit development. Additionally, some argue that Title 5 septic regulations are overly burdensome in low-density towns. Town officials could work with state representatives to re-examine these regulations and advocate for more locally appropriate policies.

## New Sources of Revenue

Charlemont's long-standing efforts to impose a three percent Outdoor Recreation Tax on purchases such as lift tickets, zipline tickets, rafting tours, and watercraft rentals came close to success with the passage of H.2713 in the State House. Although it was not voted on in the Senate, the bill's potential for generating over \$100,000 annually is considerable. The strong support for this initiative from local businesses such as Berkshire East, and White-water Crabapple demonstrates its viability and local backing. Charlemont could continue advocating for this bill to be revisited and passed in the future.

Another avenue for revenue generation that the town is considering is transforming the Hawlemont School parking lot into a paid public parking area for non-Charlemont residents. The large number of visitors who drive to Charlemont each year to access the Deerfield River presents an opportunity to charge for parking.

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is a funding mechanism that allows municipalities to raise money for community preservation purposes through a property tax surcharge (with the first \$100,000 in property value exempt, and an exemption for low-income individuals). Communities with a CPA surcharge of less than 3% receive the base match, which in 2024 was 18.06%. Communities with a surcharge of 3% receive a higher match, based on population and income. Charlemont is eligible for one of the highest match rates from the State, meaning it could receive significant funding for projects like historic preservation, affordable housing, and public space improvements. While Charlemont's residents face a high tax burden, the potential for

State matching—up to 100%—makes the CPA worth considering. The neighboring town of Shelburne, which is ranked in the second decile of priority, recently passed the CPA with a 3% property tax surcharge, and received a 100% match. As a result, average annual property taxes increased by an average of \$93.98 per homeowner and the Town raised \$167,866 post-match. Charlemont could consider utilizing these funds for projects like improving the Fairgrounds, restoring the grandstand, or repurposing historic structures for affordable housing.

## Revitalizing the Fairgrounds

Charlemont recently worked with the Conway School of Landscape Design on a study for redesigning the Fairgrounds. This report showed several ways the Fairgrounds could be transformed into a community hub, serving as both a public park, a venue for townwide events, and a location for emergency management and sheltering. Making this space a central gathering point has the potential to foster connections among residents and lead to further collaboration and civic engagement in the town.

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#### **Abbreviations**

AC: Agriculture Commission  
BA: Business Association  
BOH: Board of Health  
CC: Conservation Commission  
CPC: Capital Planning Committee  
DRWA: Deerfield River Watershed Association  
EM: Emergency Management  
Fairgrounds: Friends of the Charlemont Fairgrounds  
FC: Finance Committee  
FD: Fire Department  
HC: Historical Commission  
HD: Highway Department  
PB: Planning Board  
PD: Police Department  
PR: Parks and Recreation Commission  
RDRWC: Resilient Deerfield River Watershed Coalition

# **4: ACTION PLAN**

# GOAL 1: GROW THE LOCAL ECONOMY



Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 1: Attract and Retain Small Businesses</b>			
<b>1.1.1</b> Form a Charlemont Economic Development Committee or a Business Association to further develop and organize around economic development.	BA	High	
<b>1.1.2</b> Designate a volunteer Small Business Point Person to help business owners navigate town and state permitting processes. The Small Business Point Person could develop a Business Permitting Guide, connect business owners with business development resources, and provide additional assistance as needed.	BA	High	
<b>1.1.3</b> Support local businesses in expanding workforce development programs to meet existing and future needs of local businesses as well as career objectives of residents. For example, the Commonwealth Corporation provides workforce-training grants.	SB, Businesses, BA	Medium	
<b>Objective 2: Attract Customers</b>			
<b>1.2.1</b> Establish a visitor information center or kiosk. Consider moving the Historic Society Museum to be combined with the visitor center.	SB, HC, BA	High	
<b>1.2.2</b> Create a branding package for the town around outdoor recreation and ecotourism.	BA, Businesses, SB	Low	
<b>1.2.3</b> Strengthen the physical connection between the town center and nearby destinations like Berkshire East through the addition of sidewalks, bike lanes, and/or wayfinding signs.	SB, HD, PR, Deerfield River Trails	Medium	
<b>1.2.4</b> Collaborate with neighboring towns along the Deerfield River to promote regional tourism. Partner with Shelburne Falls to create a "Arts & Outdoors" tourism guide.	BA, SB	Low	
<b>1.2.5</b> Expand Charlemont's web presence, showcasing recreational opportunities, events, businesses, and accommodations, with maps, seasonal activity guides, and information about parking, river access points, and river safety.	BA, Businesses, Deerfield River Groups, SB, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, FRCOG	Low	
<b>Objective 3: Diversify the Economy</b>			
<b>1.3.1</b> Identify locations where food trucks and other mobile vendors would be desirable. Ensure appropriate infrastructure exists and the permitting process is straightforward.	SB, BA, Property Owners	High	
<b>1.3.2</b> Conduct a comprehensive economic development study to focus on economic diversification by growing, for example, value-add businesses for local agriculture, light industry, professional services, makerspaces, and forestry.	SB, BA	High	Consider contracting UMass Donahue Institute for an Economic Development Assessment



## GOAL 1: GROW THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 4: Enhance River Access and Safety</b>			
<b>1.4.1</b> Create signage and wayfinding on the riverbanks with locations of safe pull offs, public access, and safety messages.	SB, PR, DRWA, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce	Medium	
<b>1.4.2</b> Create a brochure and web information about river access and safety.	Town, DRWA, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce	Medium	
<b>1.4.3</b> Approach the state about the construction of a public safety building and river rescue facility in Charlemont. This could be a regional facility with its location on Route 2 and could bring jobs and an anchor redevelopment to the Center area.	Town, DRWA, RDWC, EM, Adjacent Towns	Medium	
<b>Objective 5: Facilitate Longer Visitor Stays</b>			
<b>1.5.1</b> Upgrade all rest areas along Route 2 with added amenities and access to information.	SB, MassDOT	Medium	
<b>1.5.2</b> Conduct a hotel/accommodations study to gauge feasibility of adding more rooms or lodging options, and advertise market opportunities on town webpage.	SB, FRCOG, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, Businesses	Low	
<b>1.5.3</b> Reduce zoning barriers to campgrounds and other unique forms of lodging.	PB, Businesses, Property Owners	Medium	

# GOAL 1: GROW THE LOCAL ECONOMY



Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 6: Set the Stage for Commercial Development</b>			
<b>1.6.1</b> Evaluate the technical and financial feasibility of constructing a municipal drinking water system in the town center.	SB	High	
<b>1.6.2</b> Consider what kinds of commercial uses are appropriate in which areas of town, and if any uses which are currently allowed by Special Permit could be allowed by Site Plan Review. Use the maps showing Conservation Priorities and Potentially Developable Land developed for the master plan to inform this discussion. Consider revising existing districts such as the RR/MD and RR/R2D districts and/or creating new zoning districts where commercial development and mixed-use development is most appropriate. Alternatively, instead of revising districts, adopt further guidance for special permits.	PB	High	
<b>Objective 7: Support Locally Produced Goods and Agriculture</b>			
<b>1.7.1</b> Showcase local art in public spaces—such as the town center and along the river—to help create a distinctive sense of place.	SB, Artists, BA, PR, DRWA	Medium	
<b>1.7.2</b> Organize a farmers' market to support local farms, provide a closer-to-home food retail option for residents, and support community life.	AC	Medium	
<b>1.7.3</b> Review zoning to identify and reduce barriers to farm-related businesses, like farm stores, and agri-tourism.	PB	Medium	
<b>1.7.4</b> Amplify Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture's (CISA) "Buy Local" campaign messaging to promote local crafts and goods.	BA, Businesses, Agriculture Comission	Low	

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## GOAL 2: IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 1: Develop a Bike/Pedestrian Network for Travel and Recreation</b>			
<b>2.1.1</b> Ensure sidewalks in the town center are safe for pedestrians with prompt snow removal and adequate DarkSky-compliant lighting.	SB, Highway Department, MassDOT	High	
<b>2.1.2</b> Identify and implement the highest priority opportunities for safe and accessible walking and biking infrastructure, particularly connections between the town center and nearby residential areas and along Route 2.	Highway Department, SB	Medium	
<b>2.1.3</b> Create a Trails Master Plan that maps existing trails and identifies future trails to create a robust network of various kinds of trails for residents and visitors. Develop a variety of trail types, including hiker/pedestrian trails, mountain bike trails, horseback riding trails, cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing trails, snow mobile trails, and geocache locations.	Deerfield River Trails and/or other Trails Organization, with support from SB, PR, Property Owners, Adjacent Towns, FRCOG	High	The plan could clarify which types of use are appropriate for each trail and accessibility descriptions. It could also develop maps or digital resources that could be shared with users.
<b>Objective 2: Ensure a Safe Transportation System</b>			
<b>2.2.1</b> Conduct a feasibility assessment with MassDOT on the installation of temperature sensors and warnings in critical areas along Route 2 which are the first to freeze and cause traffic accidents.	SB, Highway Department, MassDOT	Low	
<b>2.2.2</b> Continue to upgrade Charlemont's bridges to meet current needs and design requirements.	SB, Highway Department, MassDOT	High	
<b>Objective 3: Improve Parking</b>			
<b>2.3.1</b> Establish visitor parking in the town center with a seasonal weekend shuttle service to key recreation destinations to improve visitor experience, reduce parking congestion at destinations, and bring more visitors into the town center. Integrate electric vehicle charging stations.	SB, Businesses	High	
<b>2.3.2</b> Conduct a parking study for the town center.	SB	High	
<b>Objective 4: Support Diverse Transportation Options</b>			
<b>2.4.1</b> Participate in MassDOT's Complete Streets program to plan safe and transportation for all travel modes and unlock funding for construction of transportation upgrades.	SB, Highway Department	Medium	
<b>2.4.2</b> Advocate with Franklin Regional Transit Authority to expand the bus line past Charlemont Center to connect to Legate Hill, Woodlawn Park Mobile Homes, outdoor recreation amenities and other attractions in western Charlemont	SB, FRTA	Medium	

## GOAL 2: IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY



Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>2.4.3</b> Advocate for the expansion of FRTA service to include on-demand service for those who do not have a car or are unable to drive.	SB, FRTA	Medium	
<b>2.4.4</b> Create a safe pedestrian/bike pathway between the Fairgrounds and the town center.	SB, MassDOT, Friends of Charlemont Fairgrounds, Deerfield River Trails	High	

## GOAL 3: INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF ALL TYPES OF HOUSING



Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 1: Expand the Variety of Housing Options</b>			
<b>3.1.1</b> Allow for more efficient creation of seasonal worker housing by allowing boarding houses or dormitories up to a certain size. Create zoning incentives for mixed-use development to encourage businesses to incorporate year-round housing. Work with institutions like Berkshire East or Charlemont Academy to explore the feasibility of providing housing for staff on site. Funding may be available through the MA HomeWorks program.	PB, SB, Businesses	Medium	
<b>3.1.2</b> Identify suitable areas within the town for future elderly housing opportunities.	SB, Council on Aging	High	
<b>3.1.3</b> Make it easier to build more diverse types of housing in the RR districts by reducing or eliminating additional lot size per unit requirements for multi-family homes and/or allowing 3-unit and 4-unit homes with site plan review.	PB	High	
<b>3.1.4</b> Allow for townhomes (zero lot setbacks) in at least one zoning district.	PB	Medium	
<b>3.1.5</b> Adopt the Model ADU Bylaw. Provide guidance to homeowners and property owners interested in building accessory dwelling units (ADUs).	PB	High	



## GOAL 3: INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF ALL TYPES OF HOUSING

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>3.1.6</b> Disincentivize the conversion of existing residential homes to become short-term rentals or houses that are only occupied part-time.	SB, PB	High	
Objective 2: Incentivize Development			
<b>3.2.1</b> Include affordable housing incentives in the zoning bylaws such as density bonuses or reduced frontage and lot area per unit requirements.	PB	High	
<b>3.2.2</b> Allow multi-family housing at greater than 8 units by Special Permit in VC district.	PB	High	While the Zoning Bylaw does say that any use that is not specified can be approved by Special Permit, specifically listing uses is clearer for potential applicants and indicates that the town has more open-ness to these uses than those that are not listed at all.
Objective 3: Reduce Barriers to Development			
<b>3.3.1</b> Clarify the zoning bylaw's parking requirements and establish provisions for reduced parking requirements for mixed-uses with different peak hour occupancy, shared off-site parking in the town center, and reduced parking requirements for studio and one-bedroom units.	PB	Medium	
Objective 4: Reduce Development Costs to Increase Affordability			
<b>3.4.1</b> Revise the cluster development provisions in the Zoning Bylaw to incentivize cluster development over traditional subdivisions so housing can be built efficiently while ensuring the preservation of natural resources. Consider lowering the minimum parcel size threshold, consider requiring conservation of open space, and clarifying how the density bonus is calculated. Reference the Commonwealth's Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit for recommended language.	PB	High	Reference MA Audubon's 2022 Bylaw Review Tool and the model Natural Resource Protection Zoning/Open Space Design Bylaw that was included in the Commonwealth's Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit: <a href="https://www.massaudubon.org/our-work/climate-change/local-climate-resilient-communities/land-use-rules">https://www.massaudubon.org/our-work/climate-change/local-climate-resilient-communities/land-use-rules</a> . OSD/NRPZ model bylaw: <a href="https://s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/02090436/Model-Open-Space-Design-OSD-Natural-Resource-Protection-Zoning-NRPZ.pdf">https://s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/02090436/Model-Open-Space-Design-OSD-Natural-Resource-Protection-Zoning-NRPZ.pdf</a>
<b>3.4.2</b> Allow common driveways as a way to reduce the cost of housing construction and reduce impervious surfaces.	PB	Medium	

## GOAL 3: INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF ALL TYPES OF HOUSING



Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>3.4.3</b> Work with the Charlemont Board of Health and CPHS to streamline the permitting process for septic systems and wells.	SB, BOH, CPHS, Businesses, Residents	Medium	
Objective 5: Secure Sustainable Funding			
<b>3.5.1</b> Earmark a percentage of Charlemont's lodging tax revenues to fund housing development efforts and housing assistance programs.	SB	High	
Objective 6: Utilize Existing Buildings for Additional Housing			
<b>3.6.1</b> Maintain an inventory of buildings and parcels available for housing development and promote opportunities.	Town Administrator, FRCOG	High	
<b>3.6.2</b> Partner with Franklin County Community Development Corporation to identify redevelopment opportunities for housing or mixed-use projects.	Franklin County CDC, SB, TA, PB, Property Owners	High	
<b>3.6.3</b> Continue to identify, inventory, and rehabilitate abandoned and dilapidated buildings as a source of new housing.	SB, for-profit and non-profit developers	High	See FRCOG's "Vacant and Abandoned Toolkit for Town Officials."
<b>3.6.4</b> Explore whether local zoning creates barriers to adaptive reuse of historic structures, for example through dimensional or parking requirements that may not be feasible.	PB	Medium	
Objective 7: Zoning Housekeeping			
<b>3.7.1</b> Modify the zoning purpose statement to include housing.	PB	Low	
<b>3.7.2</b> Eliminate definition of mobile homes and remove from use table.	PB	Medium	See February 2025 memo from FCCIP and FRCOG regarding zoning for manufactured housing.
<b>3.7.3</b> Change height restriction in the VC district to a desired maximum number of floors rather than a set height.	PB	Medium	



## GOAL 4: MAKE CHARLEMONT CLIMATE-READY

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 1: Enhance Community Education and Engagement</b>			
<b>4.1.1</b> Conduct public outreach and education about forest management to reduce fire hazards. Best practices that might be encouraged include maintaining logging/fire roads in forested areas and cleaning up dead trees resulting from invasive pests and drought conditions that could serve as fuel in a wildfire.	CC, SB, FD, EM	Medium	
<b>4.1.2</b> Consider expanding the Fire Department's educational program for schools to address natural hazards and mitigation topics, like evacuation routes, sheltering-in-place, and mitigating risk on properties.	FD	High	
<b>4.1.3</b> Develop a community education and outreach program so residents know how to shelter-in-place and mitigate risk on their properties, and evacuation routes in the case of floods, fires, or other natural disasters. Provide education about these topics in the town newsletter and on printed materials available at Town Hall.	EM, TA	Medium	
<b>Objective 2: Ensure Charlemont is Positioned for Disaster Funding</b>			
<b>4.2.1</b> Adopt the 2020 MA State Model Floodplain Bylaw and implement required policies, including designating a community Floodplain Administrator (FPA), to bring Charlemont into compliance with National Flood Insurance Program requirements.	PB	High	
<b>4.2.2</b> Collect data following disasters to facilitate benefit-cost analysis in grant applications.	TA, EM	Medium	
<b>Objective 3: Identify and Address Vulnerabilities</b>			
<b>4.3.1</b> Add requirements to Section 42: Mobile Home Parks and Campgrounds of the Charlemont Zoning Bylaws to ensure adequate support and anchoring systems are used for temporary and permanent mobile homes.	PB	High	



## GOAL 4: MAKE CHARLEMONT CLIMATE-READY

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 4: Improve Emergency Preparedness and Response Systems</b>			
<b>4.4.1</b> Execute Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) with local businesses that have buses (e.g. Academy at Charlemont, Crab Apple Whitewater) and with the bus company serving the public schools to provide buses and drivers in an emergency.	SB, Businesses	Low	
<b>4.4.2</b> Execute a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Federated Church and the Academy at Charlemont to provide food and sheltering services to all Town residents, especially vulnerable populations, during emergencies.	SB, Federated Church, Academy at Charlemont	Low	
<b>4.4.3</b> Conduct a feasibility study of the costs of re-installing sirens in the town center and in key recreational areas to notify Town residents and visitors in an emergency. Partner with visitor-serving businesses such as Berkshire East to develop and fund systems.	SB, Businesses that serve visitors	Medium	
<b>4.4.4</b> To assist with implementing substantial damage provisions of the NFIP, develop a local post-disaster substantial damage plan in coordination with the State Flood Hazard Management Program and the Massachusetts Local Guidance for NFIP Substantial Damage Planning.	PB, EM	High	
<b>4.4.5</b> Request evacuation plans from private companies and companies that use hazardous materials.	EM Department	Medium	
<b>4.4.6</b> Consider opting in to Statewide Mutual Aid for Public Works to strengthen regional cooperation and gain access to extra capacity in emergencies.	SB, HD	Medium	
<b>4.4.7</b> Develop an alarm system to notify residents of Harriman Dam failure.	SB, FD, EM	Low	
<b>Objective 5: Mitigate the Risk of Forest Fires</b>			
<b>4.5.1</b> Mitigate risks associated with the railroad by encouraging Pan Am Railways to remove discarded railroad ties that pose a fire hazard.	SB, EM	Low	
<b>4.5.2</b> Identify a strategy for sourcing adequate volumes of water for potential future forest fires.	FD, SB, EM	High	
<b>4.5.3</b> Initiate a fire prevention program for local residents that includes guidance and activities such as brush clearing, controlled burning, and clearing combustible substances away from houses and structures. Pursue funding for the Town to be able to provide Highway or Fire Department assistance.	FD, SB, EM, HD	High	



## GOAL 4: MAKE CHARLEMONT CLIMATE-READY

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 6: Modernize Critical Infrastructure</b>			
<b>4.6.1</b> Replace, upsize, and maintain culverts to prevent flooding and road washouts.	HD, SB, CPC	High	Reference FRCOG's "High Risk Stream Crossings in Charlemont, MA", 2018
<b>Objective 7: Provide Assistance to Vulnerable Residents</b>			
<b>4.7.1</b> Ensure that local residents in the Oxbow Rd area have resources for self-sufficiency including generators, a defibrillator, and a trained EMT.	EM	Low	
<b>4.7.2</b> Work with the Council on Aging and the Federated Church to maintain list of vulnerable persons with special needs and establish an appropriate mode of communication for emergencies.	EM, TA, Council on Aging, Federated Church	High	
<b>Objective 8: Strengthen Resilience to Flooding</b>			
<b>4.8.1</b> Consider adopting a local stormwater management bylaw to prevent development and land clearing from causing harmful impacts due to stormwater flows, like increased downgradient flooding, erosion, and road washouts.	CC, PB, SB	Medium	
<b>4.8.2</b> Conduct a feasibility study for protecting Town-owned buildings from flood risk, including potential redesigns, flood proofing, and/or relocation of key infrastructure assets, including an analysis of the suitability of alternate sites, preferably Town-owned.	SB, Town Administrator, EM, Capital Planning Committee, Users of impact buildings	High	
<b>4.8.3</b> Develop a checklist for review of building/development permit plans and inspection of development in floodplains.	Building Department	Low	
<b>4.8.4</b> Identify roads that are less flood-prone and improve them as needed to make them reliable secondary routes during emergencies.	SB, HD, EM	Medium	
<b>4.8.5</b> Create a flood resilience overlay zone based on the forthcoming Deerfield River Watershed modeling study. The overlay would allow building in high-risk areas to be raised above expected flood levels. For example, within the overlay zone, the building height could be measured from the base flood elevation plus a reasonable amount of freeboard. This would ensure that buildings can be raised above expected flood levels without being limited by zoning.	PB	Medium	
<b>Objective 9: Build Social Resilience</b>			
<b>4.9.1</b> Conduct regular outreach to residents in flood-prone areas to ensure that they have evacuation plans and can be contacted by emergency service providers.	EM	High	



Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>4.9.2</b> Promote residential battery storage and backup power systems to improve household resilience. Facilitate connections between residents with and without backup power—such as through community events or informal gatherings—to support neighbors during extended outages.	EM	Medium	

## GOAL 5: PROTECT AND CARE FOR CHARLEMONT’S RIVERS, FORESTS, AND FARMS

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 1: Protect and Care for Charlemont’s Rivers, Forests, and Farms</b>			
<b>5.1.1</b> Maintain the health and beauty of Charlemont’s waterways by taking actions such as implementing an Upland Watershed Management Program, removing invasive species and restoring native plant communities along the Deerfield River, and restoring floodplain connections along tributaries through involvement in the Resilient Deerfield River Watershed Coalition.	CC, Residents, DRWA, RDRWC	High	
<b>Objective 2: Preserve Charlemont’s Scenic Resources</b>			
<b>5.2.1</b> To minimize the visual impact of hilltop development, adopt zoning provisions that encourage new buildings to be located below the crest of hilltops and require screening of hilltop buildings while still allowing views.	PB	Medium	
<b>5.2.2</b> Create design guidelines or design standards for commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family development along the Mohawk Trail to ensure that future development remains compatible with the Mohawk Trail’s desired character.	PB	High	These guidelines or standards could be adopted into the zoning or via PB Rules and Regulations and reviewed as part of Site Plan Review and/or Special Permits.
<b>5.2.3</b> Maintain and promote Charlemont’s rural and historic character by adopting a bylaw that limits the impact of outdoor storage of non-operable vehicles, waste, etc.	PB and/or SB	Medium	
<b>5.2.4</b> Conduct a corridor study of Route 2 to determine: the desired character of future roadside development, what kinds of improvements are desirable along the corridor (e.g. improvements to rest areas, river access, wayfinding, river access, road improvements for flood resilience, etc.) which properties should be prioritized for protection (e.g. floodplains or prime farmland), and which areas should be prioritized for future development.	PB, SB, AC, CC, Business- es, Residents, Bussiness Association, DRWA, RDRWC, MassDOT	High	



## GOAL 5: PROTECT AND CARE FOR CHARLEMONT'S RIVERS, FORESTS, AND FARMS

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
Objective 3: Reduce Pollution Impacts			
<b>5.3.1</b> Explore ways to reduce the amount of road salt used on roads, or identify more environmentally-friendly alternatives, to reduce contamination entering the Deerfield River and other waterways.	Highway Department	Medium	
Objective 4: Safeguard Water Resources			
<b>5.4.1</b> Update Bylaws to include preserving and maintain existing and potential ground-water and surface water resources within the town and adopting a Water Supply Protection Overlay District.	PB	Low	
Objective 5: Support Protection of Working Lands and Natural Resource Areas			
<b>5.5.1</b> Identify Charlemont's most important natural resources, using this plan's Conservation Priorities map as a starting point. Support stewardship and preservation of these high priority areas by establishing partnerships with landowners and conservation organizations. Explore zoning changes to ensure that any development in these areas minimizes harm to natural resources.	PB & CC	Medium	
<b>5.5.2</b> Work with landowners to secure conservation easements or acquire properties that would protect high-priority habitat or floodprone areas.	CC, SB, Land Trust	Low	
<b>5.5.3</b> Meet with and encourage the Finance Committee to resume contribution to the APR match fund every year	AC, FC	Medium	
<b>5.5.4</b> Identify most important areas of prime farmland and acquire funding for purchasing Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs) so that the town's remaining farmland can be conserved for future generations.	AC	Medium	
<b>5.5.5</b> Conserve forestland while keeping it in private ownership to protect the region's rural character and enhance the role forests play in providing clean water and air, flood control, carbon sequestration and storage, and habitat protection.	CC, Land Trust, Property Owners	Medium	
<b>5.5.6</b> Partner with the Woodlands Partnership to secure grants and technical assistance for private landowners focusing on forest health, wildlife habitat, climate resilience, and invasive species management.	SB, CC, Property Owners	Medium	
<b>5.5.7</b> Discourage development on prime farmland through zoning. Consider a protective overlay requiring site design that minimizes impacts—for example, by clustering development at field edges rather than subdividing fields. Alternatively, adopt design standards for site plan or special permit review, building on the "Development Guidelines by Landscape Type" in the Subdivision Regulations.	PB, AC	High	



## GOAL 6: REVITALIZE THE TOWN CENTER

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 1: Activate Public Spaces</b>			
<b>6.1.1</b> Identify public and quasi-public open spaces in the town center which could be connected by a pedestrian corridor to enhance activity and pedestrian access.	TA, HD, PR	Low	
<b>6.1.2</b> Identify partners and grant opportunities to ensure that the Charlemont Inn is returned to productive use.	SB, Charlemont Inn	Low	
<b>6.1.3</b> Invest in Main Street beautification through streetscape improvements, pedestrian-friendly features, and decorative additions such as lamp posts or hanging baskets.	SB, HD, Property Owners and Businesses in the town center	High	
<b>Objective 2: Improve Parking</b>			
<b>6.2.1</b> Consider establishing a visitor park-and-ride program at the Hawlemont School parking lot to generate revenue for the town and reduce parking issues during busy recreational seasons. Integrate electric vehicle charging stations.	SB, Hawlemont School Committee, Businesses	High	
<b>Objective 3: Plan for Smart Growth</b>			
<b>6.3.1</b> Work with the Sewer District Commission to evaluate how much sewer capacity should be reserved for additional growth within the town center.	Sewer District Commission, PB, SB, Property Owners and Businesses in the town center	High	
<b>6.3.2</b> Create design guidelines or design standards for commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family development in the town center to ensure that future development remains compatible with the village's desired character. These guidelines or standards can be adopted into the zoning or via Planning Board Rules and Regulations and reviewed as part of Site Plan Review process.	PB, Property Owners and Businesses in the town center	Low	
<b>6.3.3</b> Pursue funding for a Town Center Plan that addresses housing, economic development, and flood resilience.	TA, SB, PB, EM, CC	High	MVP and Massachusetts Downtown Initiative are potential funding sources.
<b>Objective 4: Reduce Noise and Speeding Issues</b>			
<b>6.4.1</b> Adopt a bylaw regulating the use of engine compression brakes in the town center and post signs.	SB	Low	
<b>6.4.2</b> To help slow traffic, install visual cues at town center boundaries that indicate to drivers that they are entering a town center, such as banners, planters, and signs.	SB, HD, Property Owners and Businesses in the town center	Medium	
<b>Objective 5: Strengthen Property Owner Support and Education</b>			



## GOAL 6: REVITALIZE THE TOWN CENTER

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>6.5.1</b> Promote the rehabilitation of contributing structures within the Charlemont Village Historic District or those listed on the National Register of Historic Places by informing property owners of available incentives, such as the 20% Federal Investment Tax Credit for certified rehabilitation projects under the Federal Preservation Tax Incentives Program/	HC	Medium	
<b>6.5.2</b> Help property owners maintain facades in the town center. Provide funding for painting and other improvements and organize volunteer work parties.	TA, BA, Volunteers	High	
<b>6.5.3</b> Have the Tax Assessor provide clear written guidelines about what does and doesn't trigger reassessments, and make this information widely available to residents. Clearly communicate that routine maintenance and minor cosmetic changes like painting do not affect property taxes.	Board of Assessors	Medium	
<b>6.5.4</b> Educate residents about home loan programs, such as for accessibility modifications or lead remediation, that they may not be aware of (Franklin County Housing, USDA, Get the Lead Out, etc.)	TA, Volunteers	Medium	



## GOAL 7: STRATEGICALLY INVEST IN PUBLIC SERVICES

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
Objective 1: Enhance Public Safety and Infrastructure			
<b>7.1.1</b> Continue to update the town's pavement management study.	HD	Medium	
<b>7.1.2</b> Reconstruct a spring-fed well supply for fire hydrants to be located in the town center.	SB, HD	High	
<b>7.1.3</b> Evaluate the long-term needs and funding for fire and emergency services. Evaluate staffing, facilities, and potential for sharing services with other towns.	SB, CPC, FD, PD, EM	High	
<b>7.1.4</b> Continue to identify potential ice jam locations and implement monitoring of these locations during the winter and spring for signs of ice jams.	Highway Department, PD	Medium	
Objective 2: Improve Public Facilities and Accessibility			

## GOAL 7: STRATEGICALLY INVEST IN PUBLIC SERVICES



Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>7.2.1</b> Make necessary accessibility improvements at all public facilities and provide accommodations at public programs, such as hearing aids at Town Meeting, in compliance with the Americans with Disability Act.	SB, TA	High	
<b>7.2.2</b> Renovate the structures at the Fairgrounds to provide a gathering space and emergency shelter for the community.	SB, Fairgrounds, EM	High	
<b>Objective 3: Pursue a School Option that the Community Supports</b>			
<b>7.3.1</b> Continue to participate in the 2 Districts 8 Towns (2D8T) Sustainability Study. Ensure residents are well-informed about any vote regarding the Hawlemont School.	SB, Hawlemont School Committee, Residents	High	
<b>Objective 4: Secure Sustainable Funding</b>			
<b>7.4.1</b> Create an Advocacy Committee to support state-level legislative solutions to address the needs and constraints Charlemont faces as a rural town. Advocate for allowing Charlemont to establish a Recreation Tax, reforming the Chapter 90 Transportation Funding formula, supporting the funding and operation of rural schools, and reforming the Payment In Lieu of Taxes for State-owned Land system to be more equitable.	SB	High	See Rural Schools Commission Report from 2022.
<b>7.4.2</b> Consider adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to take advantage of one of the highest match rates in the state and unlock funds for historic preservation, affordable housing, and public space improvements.	SB, FC, HC, PR, PB	High	
<b>Objective 5: Strengthen Town Governance and Administration Capacity</b>			
<b>7.5.1</b> Work with FRCOG to develop and publish clear, consistent guidelines for all permit types that spell out timelines, requirements, and decision criteria. Create a structured mechanism for applicants to provide feedback on the permit process.	FRCOG, PB, Conservation Commission, BOH	Medium	
<b>7.5.2</b> Continue to ensure that all Boards and Committees are in compliance with Open Meeting Law and meeting agendas, materials, and minutes are posted and easy to find on the Town Website.	Town Clerk, All Boards and Committees	Medium	
<b>7.5.3</b> Appoint a Charlemont OSRP and Master Plan Committee to ensure the successful implementation of the Town's Open Space & Recreation Plan and Master Plan.	SB, PB, CC, PR	Medium	
<b>7.5.4</b> Allocate funding for on-call grant writing services under the direction of the Town Administrator.	SB	Medium	
<b>7.5.5</b> Make it easier to find Town Bylaws and town plans and studies on the town website.	TA	Medium	



## GOAL 8: STRENGTHEN CIVIC LIFE

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
<b>Objective 1: Build Community Connections</b>			
<b>8.1.1</b> Support and promote a diverse calendar of community events such as cultural festivals, outdoor recreational events, town picnics, performances, and community dances with the help of volunteers and through partnerships with local businesses, schools, and organizations.	Residents, Businesses, BA	Medium	
<b>8.1.2</b> Form a Welcoming Committee to welcome new residents. Compile and share information, resources, and assistance to newcomers and consider forming small groups for newcomers to meet long-time residents.	Volunteers	Medium	
<b>8.1.3</b> Increase communication and engagement with residents. Start a town Facebook and/or Instagram page and regularly distribute the town newsletter. Develop systems to recruit and train volunteers for town government.	TA, Boards and Committees	High	
<b>8.1.4</b> Continue expanding the use of town facilities for community gatherings, including the Fairgrounds, the town hall and the Hawlemont School.	SB, Hawlemont School Committee, Fairgrounds	Medium	
<b>Objective 2: Celebrate Local History and Culture</b>			
<b>8.2.1</b> Move the historic museum out of Town Hall and/or invest in upgrades to make it accessible.	HC	High	
<b>8.2.2</b> Assess the current condition of buildings and structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the local historic inventory. Identify additional historically significant structures and nominate them for inclusion in the local and/or National Register inventory.	HC	High	
<b>8.2.3</b> Identify and preserve sites of historical and archaeological importance i.e. Native American, French and Indian era forts, Underground Railroad.	HC	High	
<b>8.2.4</b> Identify and develop inroads with educational institutions/programs through learning opportunities that engage in Charlemont's unique geologic landscape, agricultural and recreational culture, and diverse heritage	CC, PR, Agricultural Commission	Low	
<b>8.2.5</b> Develop walking tours or self-guided heritage trails to increase awareness of the town's history. Install historic interpretive markers in key locations.	HC	Low	
<b>8.2.6</b> Identify underutilized historic buildings or properties that could be repurposed for community use, such as a cultural center or event space, prioritizing those structures which are not at risk of flooding.	HC, CPC, SB	Low	



## GOAL 8: STRENGTHEN CIVIC LIFE

Action	Responsible Parties	Priority Level	Additional Comments
Objective 3: Expand Recreation Options			
<b>8.3.1</b> Coordinate with the Hawlemont School to establish a formal agreement for public recreational use of designated Hawlemont School grounds during non-school hours. Install clear, visible signage at both the school property and along Route 2, including public areas, specific hours of operation, and basic usage rules.	SB, Hawlemont School Committee	High	
<b>8.3.2</b> Explore the development of a Pump track and other family friendly recreational facilities at the Fairgrounds.	SB, Fairgrounds, PR, CPC, Deerfield River Trails	High	
<b>8.3.3</b> Develop a location for the Town Beach on the Deerfield River and consider safety protocols to ensure users are notified of dam releases.	SB, PR, CPC, DRWA, RDRWC	High	
<b>8.3.4</b> Improve tennis and basketball courts and add pickleball lines at Hawlemont for open public use.	SB, PR, Hawlemont School Committee	High	

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## Planning Board

Jennifer Mooney

Liz Bouyea

Lori Shulda Merrigan

Bob Nelson

William Harker, Associate Member

## Charlemont Town Staff

Sarah Reynolds, Town Administrator

Star Atkeson, Secretary to Town Boards

## Project Consultants

**DODSON & FLINKER**

Landscape Architecture and Planning

Peter Flinker, FAICP, FASLA, President

Dillon Sussman, Senior Associate Planner

Shaine Meulmester, Associate Planner

Eli Bloch, Associate Planner



