

## **II. Land Use and Growth Management**

### **A. Overview**

The land use and growth management section is an inventory of how land is used in Belchertown with proposed management strategies compatible with town goals. Land use in Belchertown is examined by presenting information on the current land use, recent growth, and development trends, and town regulations related to land use. This information is projected into the future in the form of a “build-out” analysis to give a sense of what the town will look like if current conditions and regulations stay the same. These results are compared to growth management goals and policies developed by town residents during the 2000-2001 *Vision Project* and made current during the 2007-2009 Community Plan revision.

### **B. Goals & Policies**

The following policies were developed to work toward the three overall goals for the town determined during the community vision phase of the community plan project.

#### **Goal 1: To maintain Belchertown’s rural New England look and feel.**

##### **Policies related to land use for Goal 1:**

- Support agriculture and forestry
- Avoid degradation of natural resources
- Promote “traditional” land use with focused construction and intervening open spaces
- Identify, prioritize, key open space parcels for natural resource protection, agriculture/forestry, and/or recreational uses
- Identify, prioritize, and work to conserve key landscape views
- Establish standards for the scale and site planning of construction
- Maintain the town common and its immediate surrounds as the heart of the town
- Establish standards for architecture in public places
- Avoid suburban-style roadsides

#### **Goal 2: Manage Residential Construction to Increase Benefits to the Community while lessening Potential Negative Effects.**

##### **Policies related to land use for Goal 2:**

- Evaluate strategies to lessen the amount and detriment of residential construction, and choose strategies that fit Belchertown
- Encourage planned residential development that incorporates open space preservation and other amenities
- Encourage the development of housing that fits the needs, resources, and preferences of groups of particular concern, including seniors, retired people, households with modest incomes, and young people just starting out

#### **Goal 3: Evaluate and Achieve Business Development that Contributes to Town Life, and Mitigate Potential Negative Effects**

### **Policies related to land use for Goal 3:**

- Support agricultural and forestry industries
- Identify, prioritize and work to attract types of businesses we would like to come to our community
- Designate areas for non-polluting industrial activities where they can be adequately served by infrastructure systems and buffered from surrounding land uses
- Designate focal areas for shopping and service centers, and specify site plan and construction standards that support Belchertown's community character
- Allow outlying, small scale neighborhood business
- Provide the infrastructure necessary to serve the kinds of businesses we want to attract
- Encourage home-based businesses, with standards for parking, signs, hours of operation, and other elements that might complement the surrounding neighborhood

### **C. Current Land Use Patterns**

Belchertown is a residential community of about 15,500 people with a land area of 52.74 square miles (approximately 34,000 acres). In land area, it is the sixth largest municipality in Massachusetts. Located on the eastern edge of the Connecticut River valley, it stretches twelve miles north and south and five miles across. Quabbin Reservoir and the Swift River along the Ware town line define the eastern border. To the north are the hills leading into Pelham. To the west are Amherst, Granby and Ludlow. Palmer is south. Belchertown is at the edge of the Springfield metropolitan area to the southwest.

Belchertown's developed land is mostly residential, and most undeveloped land is zoned as residential. Most of the undeveloped land is enrolled in the Chapter 61 forestry, agriculture, and recreational tax programs, or it is protected conservation and watershed land. It is important to note that the Chapter 61 programs do not prevent development, so all that land could be developed.

Of the developed land, over 95% is residential with less than 3% representing commercial or industrial uses. A series of roads radiate from the town's central common area. Along these roads are the prime residential areas. There are occasional more dense residential nodes resulting from subdivisions. In between the roads are less developed areas of forest and agricultural land.

The actual pattern of land use evolved from Belchertown's rural New England heritage, early 20<sup>th</sup> century state land policies, and late 20<sup>th</sup> century suburbanization. In turn, Belchertown's topography, soils, and physiography (lakes, rivers, wetlands and watershed areas) shape and constrain these culturally determined land use patterns.

Belchertown's settlement began in the 1730s, and for its first 200 years, land use patterns reflected a dispersed agricultural community focused on the town common with its surrounding churches and stores. Summer residences and informal camps were built on the three lakes to the northwest. Various small manufacturing businesses, mills, and commercial stores were located near the town center and along the Swift River, Jabish Brook, and the major north/south and

east/west railroad and transportation hubs. Small farms, horticulture and forestry operations flourished in the outlying areas. In addition to the town center, outlying village areas included Dwight Station to the north, Bardwell Village, and the manufacturing village of Bondsville (mainly in Palmer) to the south.

In the early 1900s, two large state projects, the Belchertown State School and Quabbin Reservoir, brought major changes to Belchertown and its land use patterns. Each of these altered the settlement patterns, employment opportunities, and transportation routes.

The Belchertown State School, built on approximately 800 acres just west of town center, opened in 1921. The school played a dominant role in the economy and community life from the time it was built in the 1920s until it closed in 1990. At one time, the school had over 1,500 residents, employed about 1,000 people, and had a 200-acre farm that supplied agricultural products to the surrounding community.

The town depended upon the state school's infrastructure, including its power plant and wastewater treatment facilities, to serve the town center. This shared arrangement worked to the town's advantage until the state abandoned the property in the 1990s. At that time, the town took over the wastewater treatment facilities only to find them woefully antiquated. The town has since built a new treatment facility with increased capacity to serve the town center, state school campus, nearby schools and commercial areas. In the late '90s, a sewer line was extended south to the Pine Valley Plantation mobile home park. In the early '00s, another line was extended northwest to the lakes area.

In 1980, the New England Small Farms Institute assumed the farm portion of the state school property and continues to occupy this area on Jackson Street under an agreement with the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture. In 2002, Belchertown's Economic Development and Industrial Commission (EDIC) assumed control of most of the remaining state school lands for economic development. Several parts of the campus have been sold and a commercial area has begun to grow at the intersection of Turkey Hill Road and State Street. The EDIC is developing a business and technology park subdivision on the main campus, and four business buildings have been built there. An adjoining parcel was previously conveyed to the town and is used for a municipal complex. The re-use of the several hundred-acre state school property is one of the major land use issues facing the town.

Quabbin Reservoir was the second major state project affecting land use in Belchertown. Constructed from 1934-39, Quabbin is one of the largest drinking water reservoirs in the country. It displaced residents from eleven towns; many of these displaced people moved to Belchertown. Four towns, Dana, Greenwich, Prescott, and Enfield, were dissolved, while the other seven, Pelham, Shutesbury, New Salem, Petersham, Hardwick, Ware, and Belchertown had much of their area included in the watershed. These seven towns' boundaries were altered to incorporate the dissolved towns' areas. In Belchertown, the state took by eminent domain approximately 4,000 acres in the northeastern area. Today, the reservoir occupies over 1,000 acres of Belchertown's land and the other 3,000 acres are permanently protected state owned watershed land. Quabbin and other surrounding state protected lands represent approximately 9% of Belchertown's land. Quabbin and closely associated protected lands have essentially prevented any development in Belchertown's northeast corner. Preserving and enhancing the

environmental resources within the Quabbin area and surrounding watershed are important land use issues for the town and its neighbors.

The most recent influence on land use patterns has been population growth and suburbanization. For its first 200 years, Belchertown grew generally at about 2% a year. In 1970, the population was 5,936. By 2000, the population had nearly doubled to 12,968. The US Census estimates Belchertown’s population to be about 15,500 in 2007. In the 10 years between 1990 and 2000, the population grew by 22%; well over the 5% growth rate for the population in the region as a whole. Projections indicate that Belchertown’s population is to grow to nearly 25,000 over the next twenty years. The majority (75%) of these new citizens work elsewhere. Once a “company town” for the state school with an active farming and forestry economy, Belchertown has become a bedroom community for surrounding towns and cities. The result in terms of land use has been a major shift from agricultural activities and forestry to residential uses.

#### D. Land Use Inventory

Figure 1 – Assessors’ Land Use Classification

<u>Use</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>% Total</u>
All Residential	13,176	39.04%
All Open Space	195	0.58%
All Commercial	268	0.79%
All Industrial	371	1.10%
All Forest Property - Chapter 61	2,830	8.39%
Agricultural/Horticultural Chapter - 61A	1,476	4.37%
Recreational Property - Chapter 61B	742	2.20%
Multiple-Use	6,140	18.19%
Exempt Property	8,551	25.34%
Total Land in Belchertown	33,748	100%

**Source: 2007 Assessors' Data**

Belchertown has a land area of approximately 34,000 acres, or approximately 52.74 square miles. Data presented in the section are based on several sources: Belchertown Assessors Data 2007; The Belchertown Community Data Profile and Build-out, 2001, prepared by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission; and, A Build-out Analysis and Fiscal Impact Assessment For Belchertown Massachusetts, prepared by the Center for Economic Development, 1998, UMass.

#### Residential Uses

Residential uses represent approximately twenty six percent (26%) of the land use in Belchertown (8,900 + acres). Residential uses include, single family homes, 1,2 and 3 family residences, condominiums, multifamily units and residential mobile homes. Single-family homes are the predominant residential (88%) land use in Belchertown. (See Figure 2)

Traditionally, single-unit houses were clustered near the center of town, with small vacation style cottages along the three lakes. Scattered throughout town in outlying areas were farmhouses. In the last 30 years, single-unit houses have proliferated in outlying areas, either along existing roads or in new subdivisions.

The few duplexes and triplexes are concentrated along Route 9 (Federal St) going north towards Amherst and on Hamilton Street. Likewise, multi-unit housing and condominiums are concentrated along Route 9, George Hannum Road, and the intersection with Route 202, and south along North Main Street towards the center of town. One condominium is situated on the Amherst line. There are several 55-and-over condominium projects under construction in 2008. The zoning bylaw change allowing them is an implementation of one of the tasks identified in the 2002 Belchertown Community Plan. There was also a zone change in 2007 to provide for expansion of the Village Greene condominium neighborhood.

Figure 2 - Residential Land Use in Belchertown

Use	#Parcels	Acreage	% of Total Residential
Single Family	4,139	8,501.45	90.01%
Condominiums	142	0.00	0.00%
Mobile Homes	3	88.16	0.93%
Two Family	146	309.63	3.28%
Three Family	22	54.26	0.57%
Accessory Land with Improvement	56	381.49	4.04%
Multiple Houses on one parcel	17	30.89	0.33%
Apartments 4-8	14	46.47	0.49%
Apartments 8+	7	33.44	0.35%
Total	4,546	9,445.79	100.00%

**Source: 2007 Assessors' Data**

Belchertown has two mobile home parks. Pine Valley Plantation is a co-operative restricted to adults. It is on Chauncey Walker Road, Route 21, and has over 300 units. Sportshaven is much smaller, with about 30 units, off Mill Valley Road, Route 181. Sportshaven has no more development potential, while Pine Valley has room for more units.

Overall, potential growth of multi-unit housing is restricted by zoning (any new multi-unit housing would require rezoning) and limited access to town water and sewer. This provides the opportunity for the community to encourage affordable housing through locating appropriate zoning districts in places where town water and sewer services are available. (See Appendix Map 1, Public Sewer System)

#### *Commercial/Industrial Uses*

Commercial and industrial uses are limited to four zoning districts: limited business, general business, light industrial & industrial. Slightly over 1,000 acres (1,096) are zoned commercial and industrial; this represents only 3% of the total land mass in town (see Figures 3 and 4, and Appendix Map 2, Current Business Parcels)

Commercial uses are concentrated along the Route 9/Route 202 intersection and south into the center of town, along the common and west on State Street (Route 202) to the intersection of Turkey Hill Road (Route 21). Some additional businesses are located on Federal Street (Route 9) in Dwight and further north near the Amherst border. The Belchertown side of Bondsville has a couple of factories and a package store. There are scattered business sites throughout the town.

Figure 3 - Commercial Land Use in Belchertown

Use	#Parcels	Acreage	% of Total Commercial
Auto Repair	8	20.62	7.71%
Auto Sales	3	5.38	2.01%
Bank	4	9.66	3.61%
Bus Facilities	3	28.02	10.47%
Car Wash	1	0.43	0.16%
Developable Land	20	52.33	19.56%
Eating/Drinking Estab.	4	2.82	1.06%
Fuel Service	3	0.81	0.30%
Gas and Engine	2	5.38	2.01%
Hardware/Farm Equipment	8	14.14	5.29%
Medical	9	11.08	4.14%
Office Space	14	58.69	21.94%
Other motor vehicle	1	1.49	0.56%
Post Office	1	2.47	0.92%
Potentially Developable Land	1	0.14	0.05%
Small Retail	8	8.09	3.02%
Storage/Warehouse	5	30.46	11.39%
Supermarkets	1	8.73	3.26%
Trucking Terminals	2	2.97	1.11%
Undevelopable Land	2	3.83	1.43%
<b>Total Commercial</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>267.53</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: 2007 Assessors' Data

Three large-scale business developments have been developed since the 2002 Community Plan was adopted. At the corner of George Hannum Road and Federal Street, Stop and Shop is the first supermarket in town. The commercial complex so far includes a 57,000 square foot supermarket, a bank, and several small businesses. Stop and Shop might add a gas station in 2009. In the center of town, several small businesses have gone into renovated buildings on the west side of the common. A third office and retail complex is developing at the intersection of Turkey Hill Road and State Street (Routes 21 and 202). This site includes offices, a bank, a gas station and convenience store and a couple of fitness centers. The Eastern Hampshire District Court has also opened here along with probation offices of the Sheriff's department. There are two chain retail stores approved that are to be built in 2008. This location is part of the former state school economic development plan.

Manufacturing uses are in three areas with a few minor exceptions. One is a pressure treated lumber plant on Springfield Road; another is Harris Industrial Park, off Bay Road; and the third is a small area in the older manufacturing core of Bondsville along the Swift River. Further industrial development is constrained by zoning (areas would have to be rezoned) and environmental considerations. The largest light industrial zone is on the state school property along Route 202. This parcel is subject to the state school economic development plan.

Figure 4 - Industrial Land Use in Belchertown

Use	#Parcels	Acreage	% Total
Manufacturing	5	75.79	20.44%
Warehouse	2	9.67	2.61%
Industrial Office	1	1.67	0.45%
Sand & Gravel	3	124.99	33.71%
Electric Right-of-Way	26	105.68	28.50%
Electric Regulating Substation	1	2.27	0.61%
Gas Storage	1	3.00	0.81%
Telephone Exchange Station	1	0.50	0.13%
Telephone Relay Towers	1	0.23	0.06%
Developable Land	5	11.27	3.04%
Undevelopable Land	6	35.75	9.64%
Total Industrial	52	370.82	100%

Source: 2007 Assessors' Data

### Forestry and Agricultural and Recreational Uses

Belchertown has approximately 23,126 acres of forested land. Forestry and forest products are an important commercial contribution to the town's economy. The largest contiguous forested area is the Quabbin watershed land (over 3,000 acres) managed by the Mass. Dept of Conservation and Recreation. Privately owned and managed agricultural, forestry and recreational land classified under MGL Chapter 61 (forestry uses), Chapter 61A (agricultural uses), and Ch. 61B (open/recreational land) comprises almost 30% of Belchertown's landmass. (See Appendix Map 3, Parcels in Chapter 61.) Landowners with this classification are assessed at the current use value of the land rather than development potential. However, owners can remove property from these classifications at any time for residential or other development. When owners change classifications, the town has the right of first refusal to purchase the land.

Chapter 61 forestry land is mostly in the north end of town. In contrast, agricultural and cropland is found mainly in the south. Agricultural land is dispersed throughout the town, with the largest concentrations in the south. As shown in the figure, the most common agriculture uses include Christmas tree farms, woodlots, pasture, and mixed use in combination with a residence.

Figure 5 - Chapter 61 Forest Land

Use	#Parcels	Acreage	% Total
All Ch. 61 land	108	2,829.93	100%

Source: 2007 Assessors' Data

Figure 6 - Chapter 61A Agricultural Land

Use	#Parcels	Acreage	% Total
Field Crops	28	516.86	35.02%
Orchards	6	207.06	14.03%
Cropland	4	102.90	6.97%
Christmas tree/wood lot	7	293.30	19.87%
Pasture	12	170.24	11.53%
Necessary related land	2	3.14	0.21%
Wet/scrub/rock land	8	182.45	12.36%
Total Ch. 61A	67	1,475.95	100%

Source: 2007 Assessors' Data

Figure 7 - Recreational/Open Space Ch. 61B

Use	#Parcels	Acreage	% Total
Recreation	18	182.25	24.56%
Hiking	10	123.27	16.62%
Nature Study	14	246.85	33.27%
Golf	11	137.51	18.53%
Hunting	2	46.02	6.20%
Target Shooting	1	6.00	0.81%
Total Ch. 61B	56	741.90	100%

Source: 2007 Assessors' Data

Private semi-protected lands include:

- Fairview Fish and Game (20 acres) – west
- Swift River Sportsmen’s Club (318 acres) – southeast
- Mill Valley Golf Club (38 acres) – central

These private lands are protected only because of the present operations of the owners. Their use could be converted at any time.

Although temporarily protected through property classification, the Chapter 61 lands represent over 10,000 acres that could be developed at a house per acre under current zoning.

### State-Owned Lands

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts controls approximately 6,400 acres or 19% of Belchertown’s land. Quabbin Reservoir and surrounding protected watershed comprise approximately 4,100 acres (1,000 acres of water, 3,000 land) and is the largest state holding. This property is controlled by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and allows for some passive recreation and fishing. Other state controlled land includes: the Swift River Wildlife Management Area (916 acres) and the McLaughlin Trout Hatchery (50 acres), managed by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, UMass Horticultural Research Center on Sabin Street (127 acres), 35 acres in the Holyoke Range State Park, and the farm land associated with the former Belchertown State School (400 plus acres) now leased to the New England Small Farms Institute.

Except for the trout hatchery and state school campus, these state-owned natural resource based lands represent a significant portion of Belchertown's open space. Other than this land, there is relatively little protected open space in town. The town has been active lately in pursuing conservation land, but other than that, most land is available for development, including the former state school parcels.

Figure 8 - Tax Exempt Land (state, town, churches)

Use	#Parcels	Acreage	% Total
<b>Reimbursable</b>			
U.S. Government	11	93.22	1.09%
Municipalities	187	2,201.11	25.74%
Charitable	40	251.73	2.94%
Churches	9	26.38	0.31%
Housing Authority	3	9.58	0.11%
Dept. of Environmental Management	2	38.13	0.45%
Fisheries and Wildlife	7	849.92	9.94%
Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (watershed)	2	3,860.21	45.14%
Post-secondary Education	3	94.08	1.10%
<b>Non-reimbursable</b>			
Dept. of Environmental Management	1	2.20	0.03%
Fisheries and Wildlife	3	332.18	3.88%
Dept. of Public Health	3	23.84	0.28%
Mass Highway	1	8.00	0.09%
Dept. of Conservation and Recreation	2	197.00	2.30%
Post-secondary Education	2	126.47	1.48%
Bureau of State Office Buildings	4	437.01	5.11%
<b>Total Tax Exempt</b>		<b>2808,551.06</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: 2007 Assessors' Data

### Town-owned land and land owned by other municipalities

Approximately 5%, or 1,500 acres, of the town's land mass is owned by Belchertown and other municipal entities. Belchertown owns approximately 100 scattered tracts totaling over 600 acres. These include town municipal buildings, schools, playing fields, several conservation areas, and well and water resource protection areas. Land owned by other municipal entities is almost entirely for watershed and aquifer protection. The Town of Amherst, the City of Springfield, and the Bondsville Water and Fire District own hundreds of acres.

### Wetlands, Steep Slopes, Poor Soils

Wetlands, steep slopes, and poor soils place major constraints on land use. Belchertown is rich in water resources and wetlands. Almost 10% (3,000 acres) of the town's land mass is classified as wetlands – rivers, lakes, and undevelopable wet soils. Steep slopes, primarily in the northeast section of town, comprise another 10% (3,000 acres). Poor soils are another potential constraint. (See Map 4, Soils and Slope Limitation to Development in the appendix for a perspective on the distribution of wetlands, poor soils, and steep slopes.)

## Land Available for Development

There are several different ways of estimating land available for development. The assessors define land available for development as privately-owned land, with sufficient frontage and square footage to meet zoning requirements for residential, commercial, or industrial development. For this part of the land use inventory, “land available for development” is defined as all land not classified as residential, commercial, industrial or mixed use and excludes Chapter 61 lands, state, municipal, and private protected lands, as well as some open space and wetlands. Under this restrictive definition, the estimate of land available for development is about 3,200 acres or 10% of the total land mass. However, this is a very conservative estimate; at any time, Chapter 61 lands can be reclassified as developable lands. If all chapter 61 land became available, as much as an additional 10,600 acres, for a total of 40% of the town’s landmass, would be available for development.

## E. Recent Trends in Land Use

The most noticeable trend in changing land use over the last five years has been the continual steady growth in single-family housing through subdivisions and ANR approvals. In 1989, Belchertown had 2,436 single-family housing units. Twelve years later in 2001, the town had 3,674, and in 2007, 4,139 units. This represents an increase of 465 units (a 13% increase) in single-family units in the last six years. Other trends and activities related to land use include: expansion of the town center, including new schools, police and senior center buildings; outlying commercial developments; redevelopment of the state school property; and efforts to protect town watershed areas.

Figure 9 - Developable Land - Counting Neither Residential nor Ch. 61

Use	#Parcels	Acreage	% Total
Industrial	5	11.27	17.73%
Commercial	20	52.33	82.28%
Total Developable	25	63.60	100%

Source: 2007 Assessors' Data

## Subdivision Trends 2000-2007

Since 2000, 11 subdivisions have been created in Belchertown resulting in approximately 180 new single-unit houses. One subdivision includes the new post office and a condominium complex of 26 units, and another is the business park at the former state school. One subdivision was approved under the Open Space Community Development zoning bylaw. Reflecting the national recession, in 2008 there is only one new subdivision being proposed, one has been foreclosed on and has an uncertain future, and the condominium projects have stalled. Map 5 in the appendix shows subdivisions that are approved but incomplete as of March 2008.

Figure 10 – Approved Subdivisions from 1996

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Lots Approved</u></b>
Plaza Ridge	1996	1. 10 were later created by ANR.
Hunter Ridge (phase 1)	1996	13
Hunter Ridge (phase 2)	1998	13
Back Home Estates (Nathaniel Way)	1997	15
River's Edge (phase 1)	1999	5
River's Edge (phase 2)	2001	8
Harris Industrial Park (industrial)	1999	6
Belchertown Business Center	2001	1
Concord Road	2003	1
Cold Springs Park (B&T Drive)	2003	13
Emily Lane	2004	12
High Bluff Road	2004	26
Meadow Pond Road	2004	27
Pheasant Run	2004	9
Pepper Ridge Road	2005	14
Wood's Edge Road (Wood's Edge Road)	2005	10
Wood's Edge Road (Willow Lane)	2005	11
<u>Oasis Drive</u>	2007	<u>17</u>
Total		193

Source: Planning Department

## **Roadside Development (ANRs)**

Another component of residential development that has a strong influence on the “rural look and feel” of the town is roadside development - better known as “approval not required” lots (ANR). These are building lots created out of larger lots. To qualify as an ANR lot, the lot must fulfill three requirements: the lot must have frontage on an accepted town way; the frontage must meet minimum zoning requirements, and there must be access to the lot. No matter how many ANR lots may be created along a road, as long as they meet the three basic requirements, they are not subject to subdivision review. Massachusetts is the only state that allows this, and such development is the primary factor in why houses are strung along otherwise rural roads.

ANR lots have little effect on residential development in towns already “built out” along town roads. In contrast, Belchertown has large areas of open agricultural and forested land bordering town roads, so ANR lots are a major factor in the increase in residential development. Over the last seven years (2000-2007) 76% of the new building lots in Belchertown were created through the ANR process. This statistic contrasts with the widely held opinion that new subdivisions are the major contributor to residential growth.

Another consequence of the ANR process is the creation of lots on marginally passable town roads. Belchertown has old town roads that are actually little more than dirt or gravel woods roads. Some of these roads are dead-ends; others could be used for through-traffic but are blocked by vegetation, swamps, or steep slopes. The roads appear to have been abandoned or

are impassable. However, unless the roads are legally abandoned or discontinued by the town, property along the road is eligible for the creation of building lots through the ANR process. With no say over such lot development, the town's only options are to challenge the ANR requests in court or assume the cost and responsibility for improving the roads to a suitable safety standard for residential use. In either case, it is a costly process for the town.

Figure 11 ANR vs. Subdivision Lot Creation 2000 through November 2007

<u>Type of Lot</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	Total	% Total
ANR	39	46	106	69	88	69	54	9	480	76.3%
<u>Subdivision</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>74</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>149</u>	<u>23.7%</u>
Total	39	55	106	83	162	104	54	44	629	100%

Source: Planning Department

### **Extended Town Center Development**

Traditionally, most commercial and municipal land uses (stores, churches, town offices, schools) were found around the Belchertown town common. Another small commercial area was centered at the Route 202 and Route 9 intersection just north of the town common. Over the last 30 years, the 'town center' and its commercial uses have slowly spread west to the state school area and north to join Route 9. In essence, the town center has migrated to areas with more space for parking.

In recent years, the town has built three new schools on property west of the town center. Additionally, it has built a new police station and senior center across the street from the schools on land formerly part of the state school. The town is currently re-using several buildings on the state school property for the recreation department, the IT department, and veterans programs. Opposite the state school there is a small retail shopping area. The EDIC has plans for more extensive development on the state school grounds. Clearly, the town's commercial, educational, and social focus is slowly shifting away from the common.

At the Route 202 and Route 9 intersection, several retail complexes house a mix of fast food restaurants, convenience stores, a drug store, supermarket, and other businesses.

In contrast to the increase in commercial activity away from the common, the more traditional town common area has seen a decrease in commercial uses. Ten years ago, there was a variety of small businesses, but now the common has only three small restaurants (primarily take-out), some professional offices, a bed-and-breakfast, and several other smaller businesses. Preserving the historic town common and maintaining appropriate uses is important to town residents.

### **Building Permits**

The issuance of building permits is another indicator of land use change. For the last eleven years Belchertown has averaged 97 new residential building permits a year versus an average of 3.5 commercial building permits a year. In 2006 and 2007, new residential building permits

were fewer. Despite this reduction, residential building still predominates new building activities.

Figure 12 Belchertown Building Permits 1996-2006

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
Single-Unit	80	81	104	118	88	97	92	91	100	89	54	994
Double Unit	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	6	0	0	10
Business/ Commercial	6	2	4	8	6	5	5	6	1	3	3	49
Total Building Permits	86	83	109	126	95	103	98	97	107	92	57	1,053

Source: Building Inspector

### State School Development

The former Belchertown State School property consists of approximately 800 acres, situated west of the town center. Disposition and redevelopment of this property has been occurring sporadically since the early 1980s when the state first announced its intentions of closing the school. Since 1980 the following actions and changes in land use or ownership have occurred:

- 1980 – 400 acre farm portion transferred to Department of Food and Agriculture. The New England Small Farms Institute (NESFI) became the leaseholder for developing a demonstration project for small farms.
- 1980 – 40+ acres transferred to town for building new middle school.
- 1992 – State School officially closes.
- 1990s – State transfers wastewater treatment facility to town. Town begins upgrading and expanding the facility.
- 1992 – Belchertown Economic Development Industrial Corporation (BEDIC) formed by town and charged with implementing an economic development plan for the state school property.
- 1990s – Belchertown buys two other parcels and builds a new police station and senior center.
- 1990s – Belchertown renovates several buildings for use by the school department, teen center, and veterans’ affairs.
- 1993 & 2001 – EDIC Economic Development Plan ratified by Town Meeting.
- 2000 – State announces plans for building a courthouse on a portion of the state school property.
- 2001 – Town meeting approves designation of state school property as Economic Opportunity Area for 20 years. This provides the way for tax incentives to be offered to qualified businesses.
- 2002 – With backing from the EDIC, a local developer receives site plan approval for a “business center” including supermarket and bank on the Route 21 parcel.
- 2002 – EDIC buys all but 7 acres of the remaining 270+ acre campus for redevelopment. Plan is to develop ‘clean’ parcels and use profits to clean up other parcels. Plan calls for a mix of business, light industry, and senior housing.

- 2003 –EDIC has a Business and Technology park subdivision approved.
- 2003-2008 – EDIC sells several lots in the B&T park to local companies for their headquarters.
- 2005 – Parcel E is sold to Townline Development for the court, and to Pride for further development of the retail area.
- 2005 – part of Parcel D on Route 21 was sold for an office building, that was built and occupied.
- 2007 – the courthouse is built on part of Parcel E, the 21 and 202 property. Also, site plans were approved for Grand Lumber and Tractor Supply Company.

As plans continue for the property, it is important to coordinate them among the various interested parties including the state, NESFI, the senior center, town officials, EDIC and potential developers. The eventual build-out of the state school property offers a unique opportunity for the town to fulfill multiple goals including maintaining the rural look and feel of the town (farm portion), providing for residential housing for specific groups (seniors/assisted living) and promoting compatible economic development.

#### **F. Current Zoning and Land Use Controls** (See Map 6, Zoning Map, in the appendix.)

The Belchertown Zoning Bylaw establishes ten zones:

- Five residential zones -- VR, Village Residential; AG-B, Rural Residential; LR, Lakes Residential; MDR Multiple-Dwelling Residential; and MHP, Mobile Home Park Residential
- One open zone -- AG-A, Primary Agriculture
- Two commercial (business) zones -- B1, Limited Business and B2, General Business
- Two industrial zones – I, Industrial, and LI, Light Industrial.
- There are four overlay zones addressing environmental and historical concerns:
  - Wetland Protection Overlay
  - Floodplain Overlay
  - Aquifer Protection Overlay
  - Historic Village Protection Overlay
- The bylaws also include regulations and requirements for:
  - Common Drive Development
  - Open Space Community Development
  - **Wireless Communications Facilities**
  - Site Plan Review
  - 55-and-Over Housing
  - General Regulation including sign regulations
  - Business and Industrial Regulations
  - Earth Removal

Each zoning district has a detailed set of regulations that guide the type and density of development. The four overlay districts add special regulations on top of the existing zone beneath to ensure appropriate development in an environmentally sensitive or historically significant area. The common drive and open space regulations provide for alternative forms of development. The wireless communications regulations provide guidance for suitable placement

of communication towers. The 55 and over housing definition and use allows for residential complexes restricted to residents mainly aged 55 and over. These complexes may be allowed by special permit in districts where traditional multi-family housing is not allowed.

Figure 13 - Belchertown Zoning Districts and Their Acreage

District	Ag-A	Ag-b	VR	LR	MHP	MDR	B1	B2	LI	I	Total
Acreage	27,487	5,102	692.4	734	224.3	63.4	165.8	437.9	363.5	129.6	35,400
% of total	78 %	15%	2%	2%	.06%		.04%	1.2%	1%	.03%	

### Open District

Ag-A, or primary agriculture with over 27,000 acres is Belchertown’s largest zoning district. Although designated as primary agriculture, containing prime farm soils and active farm and forestry operations, this district also allows single-family uses in addition to agricultural and forestry uses and related businesses. Two-unit residences, small inns, bed and breakfasts, and a few other business uses are allowed by special permit. Open space community development and common drives are allowed by special permit. The minimum lot size is 40,000 square feet, with 140’ of frontage, front, and rear setbacks of 40’ and a 20’ side yard setback. Estate lots of 150,000 square feet and 50’ of frontage are allowed. With the growth in single-unit houses, the Ag-A district is gradually losing its special characteristic as “primarily agriculture.” Often, especially along the road, the Ag-A zone appears more residential than agricultural. Additionally, with the increase in single-unit houses, the incidence of incompatible uses causing friction between residential neighbors and agricultural and forestry uses is increasing. The town needs to address the dichotomy in the Ag-A district between purpose and actual use. As more lots that are residential are created, there is less and less contiguous open land necessary for economically viable agriculture and forestry activities.

### Residential Districts

Ag-B, or rural residential, at over 5,000 acres is the second largest zoning district. This district encompasses most of the major subdivisions approved in the last 20 years and provides a transition area from the lakes and village residential zones to primary agriculture areas. This district has the same dimensional requirements as the Ag-A district, but it prohibits some of the more incompatible agricultural and forestry-based business uses found in the Ag-A district. Other types of rural businesses are allowed by special permit.

VR, village residential, at almost 700 acres, encompasses the residential district surrounding the town center and served by town water and sewer. These neighborhoods can accommodate smaller lots (minimum 20,000 square feet.) Only a few business uses are allowed.

LR, lakes residential, at 700 acres, encompasses residential development around the town’s three small lakes. Historically a resort area of summer cottages, most residences are now year-round. The district was designed to protect the environmentally sensitive lake area. The district has the same dimensional requirements as the Ag-B, but prohibits almost all businesses and open space community development.

MHP, the mobile home park district, is limited to two mobile home parks, Pine Valley Plantation and Sportshaven. Dimensional requirements within the parks are compatible with mobile homes.

MDR, the multiple dwelling residence district, is limited to areas where there are currently apartments and condominiums. Multiple dwelling units must be on a minimum of three acres with a density of no more than six units per acre. The fifty-five and older residential option added to the zoning by-law in 2001, allows for condominium and rental units for residents 55 and older to be built by special permit in the VR and Ag-B districts as well as MDR.

## **Business Districts**

B-1, the limited business district, is primarily for small retail and professional activities. The district was designed to serve as a transitional buffer district between residential areas and general business. The largest portion of the limited business district encompasses the town common area and the traditional town center. This district also allows for mixed use residential and business.

B-2, the general business district, encompasses areas suitable for larger scale commercial and retail business. Currently, the general business zone occurs along the major roads, Route 202 west of town, and north around the intersection of Route 202 and Route 9, and further north on Route 9 near the Amherst border. Two state school parcels off of Route 21 are zoned general business.

## **Industrial Districts**

LI, the light industrial district is intended for use by research laboratories, office buildings, and other 'clean' or 'light' industries that are compatible with a low-density, rural residential community. The main campus of the state school property was zoned light industrial to encourage productive redevelopment compatible with other uses already on the campus.

I, the industrial zone is suited for manufacturing and other business uses which require large expanses of land, access by truck and isolation from residential uses. There are three industrial zones; one off Springfield Road currently used by a pressure treated lumber business, another off Bay Road and Hamilton Street encompassing an industrial park and several other businesses, and a small area in the center of Bondsville with two factories.

## **Environmental Protection Overlay Districts**

### **Flood plain protection**

The flood plain overlay applies to those areas within the boundary of the one-hundred-year flood that are considered hazardous according to the Federal Emergency Agency. It limits some uses and for monitoring potential flood damage.

## **Wetlands protection**

This overlay district applies to all lands within 100 feet of the annual high-water line of a stream, lake, pond or watercourse and all lands within 100 feet of poorly drained soils. It provides for oversight by the conservation commission and adds certain requirements to protect wetlands.

## **Aquifer Protection District overlay**

This purpose of this overlay district is to protect and preserve Belchertown's groundwater resources from potentially damaging pollution or environmental degradation by regulating certain uses within the district. The regulations state specific prohibited and restricted uses, regulates drainage, details site plan requirements and special permit procedures.

## **Other Zoning Regulations**

### **Open Space Community Development (OSCD)**

This zoning bylaw provides regulations for cluster subdivision development by special permit. The purpose is to provide for a form of subdivision development that 'clusters' housing in a denser pattern on a parcel and leaves large contiguous areas of open space. Since 1990, only one subdivision, Dana Woods, has been completed as an OSCD. Belchertown's OSCD bylaw was written twelve years ago. Since that time changes have been made in the subdivision regulations, definitions of open space, the Board of Health septic regulations, and other areas that have made the current OSCD regulations, definitions and dimensions confusing and difficult to implement. Additionally, the state has determined that OSCD no longer needs to have a special permit, but can be by right under subdivision regulations. Consequently, the planning board needs to review and revise the current OSCD bylaw to make it more appealing to developers.

### **Common Drive Bylaw**

The purpose of this zoning bylaw is to provide for minor residential development for backland lots. The original intent was to create less adverse impact to wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas by providing alternative access to lots by allowing one driveway to serve several lots. Ideally, this bylaw should help preserve the "rural look and feel" of town by preserving roadside frontage.

### **Site Plan Approval and Review**

The purpose of this zoning bylaw is to assure that new commercial and industrial development meets a range of environmental standards and does not result in a detriment to the neighborhood.

This review process has proved helpful in assuring regulatory compliance before building, and allowing neighbors and interested parties to have input on aspects of site design affecting the neighborhood. The current regulations have provided a means for town officials to encourage "maintaining the rural look and feel of town" in business developments. The Planning Board may want to review the current site plan review performance standards to provide a more performance-based evaluation for the term, "rural look and feel."

## **General Regulations**

The purpose of this zoning bylaw is to provide performance standards and guidelines for non-conforming uses, accessory structures, swimming pools, fences, signs, and design standards for parking, loading and landscaping non-residential uses. With the increasing desire of the community to preserve the “rural character”, encourage historic architectural design and support compatible businesses, it would be appropriate for the planning board to review general regulations related to signage, fencing, design standards and landscaping as related to rural and historic elements and to provide clear performance guidelines for businesses.

## **Earth Removal**

The purpose of this bylaw is to regulate sand and gravel operations by special permit and to set standards for the removal of soil, loam, and other mineral deposits from building sites. It emphasizes environmental concerns, noise and dust abatement, and consideration for neighbors. The bylaw addresses: the application process, performance standards, and restoration.

## **Historic Review/Architecture**

The historic village protection district overlay district applies to areas within the Belchertown Center Historic District, mainly around the town common. It limits the type, appearance, intensity of businesses, and other uses in order to maintain the historic character of the neighborhood.

## **Subdivision Regulations**

Subdivision regulation is used to ensure that new residential and commercial developments meet a minimum set of design standards, including lot configuration, road construction, drainage, and health and safety considerations. The purpose of the Belchertown subdivision regulations includes:

- Provision of adequate access to all lots
- Lessening congestions in ways and adjacent public way and coordinating ways
- Providing for health and safety of residents
- Securing safety in case of fire, and other emergencies
- Ensuring compliance with Belchertown’s Zoning Bylaws
- Ensuring provision of water, sewer, drainage, utilities to subdivisions
- Support of Belchertown’s master plan to maintain community character, agricultural and forested lands
- Protect open space, maintain ecological diversity, natural resources especially water supply

The subdivision regulations are promulgated subject to Mass. General Law, Ch. 41, Section 81K-81GG. Subdivision rules and regulations are separate from zoning; the subdivision process renders a lot saleable while zoning renders a lot buildable.

Subdivision regulation in Belchertown is similar to other communities. Plans are submitted to the planning board, which in turn sends the plan out for review by various departments and a professional consulting engineer. The specific rules and regulations must be met by all subdivisions unless the planning board grants a waiver.

In recent years the Planning Board has revised the subdivision regulations several times in order to more closely adhere to the goals of preserving rural character and improving the safety standards necessary for a growing community. Recent changes have included shortening cul-de-sac roads, tightening the definition of open space, requiring traffic and environmental analyses, requiring open space for increased road length.

## G. Analysis

### Trends in Land Use and Development

As noted in the previous section, Belchertown is steadily changing into a suburban bedroom community. The town is growing at a faster rate than any of the surrounding communities. Between 1990 and 2000, the population grew at 22.6 %, and census estimates are that this has continued this decade. Single-unit housing increased at about the same rate. On the average, 97 new houses have been built every year for the last twenty years. In contrast, commercial and industrial growth was around 3%. Both subdivisions and ANR lot creation have contributed to the growth in single-family house. In the last five years, ANR lots represented 76% of the new single-family housing lots, making it the most common method of lot creation.

An alarming element of Belchertown’s rapid growth is the amount of land still available for continuing residential growth. If one combines the Assessors’ “developable” land classification (3,000 plus acres) with Chapter 61 lands, nearly 40% of Belchertown’s lands, or approximately 13,000 +/- acres are theoretically available for development. In 2001 the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and Mass GIS conducted a build-out study looking at the potential impact of additional development in Belchertown. The purpose of a build-out study is to assess development potential under current zoning codes and within the context of environmental and land use constraints. A build-out previews the community’s future if nothing is changed. Figure 13 provides a summary of the Belchertown Build-Out study results.

This study shows that under current zoning and land use practices Belchertown has the potential of growing to the point of becoming a city of over 50,000 residents. Residential units could quadruple. This growth potential should alarm the town if it truly wishes to preserve its “rural look and feel” and small town atmosphere.

Figure 14 Summary of Build-Out Statistics for Belchertown - Mass GIS Study 2001

Potential Developable Land	21,748 acres
Potential Developable Land - minus land with partial constraints (steep slopes, wetlands etc)	17,133 acres
Estimated Additional Residential Units	13,537
Additional Residents (average 2.89 persons per household)	39,175
Additional Students (average 2.4 school-aged children per household)	5,634
Additional Miles of Roadway	181
Additional Residential Solid Waste (tons) per year	20,097

While the build-out projects the potential *amount* of growth, the projected *rate* of growth is also important in assessing the demands of growth and developing management strategies. One way

of estimating growth rates is to look at the history of building permits in town. As shown in Figure 12, for the last ten years Belchertown has averaged 97 new single family permits a year. Holding this average constant for the next 10 years translates into the following prediction for 2012:

Figure 15 - 10-Year Projected Residential Growth in Belchertown based on 97 Building Permits per Year

Additional Residential Units	970
Additional Residents	2,716
Additional Students	400
Additional Solid Waste – tons per year	1,393 tons

### **Commercial Build-out Potential**

In contrast to residential development, Belchertown’s potential commercial and industrial build-out is meager. Less than 3% of the land is currently used for commercial and industrial purposes. Over the last 10 years, commercial building permits have averaged barely three per year. As discussed earlier, the most promising area for potential commercial and light industrial growth will be the former state school property, now owned by the Belchertown EDIC.

### **Results of Development**

As Belchertown considers growth management strategies, the community must estimate how future development might affect the health and safety of the community, as well as community character.

*Water Supply* –Belchertown’s residential areas are mostly served by private wells. While this is sufficient so far, no one knows how many more wells can be accommodated by Belchertown’s underground water supplies. As more development occurs, the possibility of wells being polluted or affected by neighboring development increases. Additional roads will also increase the likelihood of polluting runoff. The Board of Health may need to consider additional protection for private wells and town water supplies.

*Waste Water & Septic* – Most of Belchertown’s residential areas are served by private septic tanks. A concern for the future is the siting of new tanks and the need to replace old ones. The new wastewater treatment facility is at about 50% capacity. The town will need to plan further expansion based on targeted development areas and to prevent further environmental degradation in areas where septic systems are failing. To help prevent future private septic system problems, the town might consider an educational program on the maintenance of private septic systems. Many new residents have no idea how a septic system works or how to maintain one. An educational program with pamphlets and information would be helpful.

*Transportation* – As the town expands, it must consider how to encourage building and maintaining roads that will efficiently and effectively promote the safe flow of traffic, while retaining community character. The town also will need to evaluate how to encourage different types of transportation in different areas. For the new commercial areas (around the state school and at the intersection of Route 9 and Route 202), the town should consider pedestrians and bike

traffic and build and maintain sidewalks and bikeways. Bus stops should also be sited in these areas.

*Emergency Services* – Emergency safety services must be consistently improved to keep current with technology and with the demands of an increasing population. The police department will need more officers. The volunteer fire department may need to consider more full-time staff. To cover the area of Belchertown, the fire department will need to expand with substations in the south and north to provide adequate fire protection. Ambulance services will also have to be upgraded.

*Education* – The school department has addressed its future needs in its planning report.

*Community Character* – Continued rapid residential growth will undoubtedly affect community character. In a survey conducted in 2000 for the Belchertown Community Plan, residents were asked the ten most important reasons for living in Belchertown. These reasons were:

1. Low crime rate
2. Privacy
3. Environmental quality
4. The rural small-town atmosphere
5. Open spaces
6. Forests
7. The town common
8. Sense of community
9. Belchertown schools
10. Residential neighborhoods.

All of the above elements will be affected by continued growth. New land use management strategies should address preserving open spaces, forested lands, and maintaining the quality of the environmental. Ways to preserve the town common area and at the same time provide for viable and suitable commercial development is critical. Without an expanded economic base, the town will not be able to maintain its health, safety, and educational services.

*Natural Resources* - Growth will undeniably affect Belchertown's natural resources, especially its forests and agricultural land. The open spaces and rural character so much a part of its current natural resources are threatened. As part of growth management, the town must find a way to concentrate some of the development to leave larger parcels of forests and open space. Additionally the town must find ways to work with landowner to preserve natural resources.

*Accommodating Future Houses and Businesses Where They Can Be Best Sustained* – Some beneficial development requires density; clusters of businesses become their own attraction, and housing creates the mass of customers. Not all housing is *family* housing; often there is a need for alternative types of housing to family housing. This non-family housing often creates an immediate and reliable customer base for retailers who serve the larger community. Such development usually requires fairly dry and level land. Public sewer and water might also be needed.

## **H. Guidance From Townspeople At the Spring 2002 Community Forum**

To be sure the Community Plan incorporated the priorities of Belchertown's residents, the development of the original plan included public forums. On March 14, 2002, townspeople gathered for a community forum that began with the Community Plan goals and considered a preliminary list of potential actions. Participants were asked to give their feedback regarding whether the potential actions seemed on target, and to note questions that needed to be answered regarding the potential actions. Here is a summary of input gained through the evening's small discussion groups.

### **Goal 1: Maintain Belchertown's Rural New England Look and Feel**

Encourage landowners to donate land or conservation restrictions, or easements; or to allow public use of their land. The most frequent point raised on this dealt with liability. In general, participants did not see this as a viable strategy, although some felt that it was worth encouraging landowners to consider it.

Make existing town-owned land more accessible to all residents. Some participants suggested better marking and marketing of public land, that is, with signs, maps, and other means of information. Some pointed out that the location of public lands mattered; for example, accessible lands near centers of population are most useful.

Create a "scenic roads bylaw", and revise driveway permit procedures to avoid destruction of scenic roadside stone walls and large trees. There was general support – some of it strong – for a scenic roads bylaw. Few comments were recorded regarding driveway permit procedures; this may be a tool that requires more information for townspeople to offer an opinion.

Specify town budget money into a fund for this purpose. There was almost unanimous opinion that this is either a bad idea or one that will not work.

Create a Belchertown-specific Land Trust. There was wide-spread support for this, largely because residents feel that they will not have to pay for the preservation of open space through such an entity.

Hire permanent town employee to seek out and apply for grants. There were a few voices in support of this, but most who were in support wanted the person to be paid through the grants received.

Increase the application fee on some developments with funds set aside for land protection. There was general support for this, in the spirit of making the outside developers pay for the loss of open space. Some thought this would be a deterrent to unwanted development. A few voiced concerns that this would make housing even less affordable. Some thought that only residential development should be charged the fees, so as not to discourage desirable business development.

Use of the former Belchertown State School property. In terms of Goal 1, participants suggested buffers to screen development, increased public trails, more access to enjoy the open fields of NESFI. Some wanted to avoid further development of the property, but later discussion regarding housing and business development showed much more support for varied kinds of development [see below]. The appearance of new development, and the maintenance of scenic views were mentioned as being more important than the actual use.

*On the whole, townspeople who attended the Forum want to conserve open space and rural character, but they want someone else to pay for it.*

## **Goal 2: Manage Residential Construction to Increase Benefits to the Community While Lessening Potential Negative Effects**

Create a Phased Growth Bylaw. The majority of opinion was positive toward this, and some participants strongly urged the adoption of this technique. Numerous practical questions were raised: how to set a cap of building permits, how to create a point system, whether a developer could propose two subdivisions at once to double the number of units that can be phased in. The responses show a general desire to slow things down. It is likely that much careful information and discussion will be needed to reach general agreement on the particulars of a Phased Growth Bylaw.

Cluster Development. Opinions were split, but there were more positive than negative statements regarding Cluster – as long as septic capacity [or sewers] can handle it. Supporters saw this as a way to conserve open space, and some saw Cluster as a way to provide senior housing and more affordable housing. Some participants voiced very strong dislike and opposition to the concept, however.

Increase the minimum lot size. There was a range of opinions voiced on this. Some are strongly in favor, as a growth limiting strategy, while others say that it will just eat up landscape more quickly. Others worry about larger lots making Belchertown even less affordable, one describing larger lots as “elitist”.

Housing for Seniors. There was very strong support expressed for this, both because of concern for older people, and because this type of housing is viewed as making few demands on town services. Assisted living was generally seen as a needed and desirable type of residential development.

Affordable housing for families and young people. There is a current of concern that Belchertown is becoming a more expensive place that will price out traditional residents. Significantly less support was voiced for this than was voiced for senior housing, however.

Location of alternative housing choices. The Town Center and the Belchertown State School property were frequently mentioned, since both are within walking distance of services and are either on – or potentially on – the PVRTA route. [Route 9 near the Amherst town line was also mentioned because of the PVRTA route]. The availability of sewer and water were also reasons for siting denser housing choices in the Town Center.

*Two major themes were voiced: slow down and discourage residential subdivisions, and site desired denser housing – especially for seniors – in the Town Center or on the BSS property so as to be close to services and served by sewer and water.*

### **Goal 3: Achieve Business Development that Contributes to Town Life and Mitigates Potential Negative Effects**

The Town Common. Small scale, specialty shops and services are desired, with emphasis on maintaining the historic scale and appearance of buildings. Townspeople at the forum desire increased walkability, with more emphasis on paths and trees. A number of people suggested removing the parking lot from the Common. There is strong, wide-spread desire to reduce traffic somehow – or at least to avoid uses that would generate more.

Outlying Villages. General support was voiced for this idea, although there is a desire to know more about where, what, and how.

Town Center. The large majority of voices at the forum support the concept of focusing denser, larger construction where there are sewer and water – with careful imposing of standards regarding appearance and landscape treatment. Most seemed to think that careful design was more important than the particular type of use [i.e. type of business or housing].

Former Belchertown State School Property. As with the Town Center, most participants seemed open to a variety and mix of uses, as long as design and landscape considerations shaped the construction with sensitivity to buffers, appearance, architectural design, and maintaining scenic vistas. Many see this as an opportunity to have a mix of specialty housing [e.g. assisted living] and light industry, in a campus or village style layout. There is a desire to have more public access and enjoyment of the undeveloped NESFI acres, and some regard these as underutilized.

*Generally, Forum participants view business development as potentially contributing jobs, services, and tax revenue to the town. Locating business where there is sewer and water makes sense, as long as the buildings and landscaping are appropriate to the scale and appearance of a New England town. The former Belchertown State School property is generally seen as offering the opportunity to absorb larger scale business development that would be out of place elsewhere.*

### **Land Use Concept Plan**

Townspeople who attended the March 2002 Community Plan Forum confirmed that the *Land Use Concept Maps* convey the community's consensus regarding the pattern of development and conservation that Belchertown should work for. The crucial components of the concept are:

#### The Historic Town Common Area.

- The Common will be preserved and continue to be our special gathering spot.
- Buildings around the Common will be of traditional size and design
- Shops, services, housing, and civic activities will occur here.

#### Vibrant Town Center

- In-fill and careful expansion of the town center will make best use of sewer, water, roads
- This is the place for larger scale business development with careful site planning

- Here is where we can site denser housing development for targeted needs in ways that foster the vitality of the center without detracting from its character.

Outlying “Villages”

- Buildings similar to those around the town common will provide opportunities for homes and businesses to serve outlying areas of town
- Neighborhood-scale shops and services will contribute to our small town character while at the same time reducing the need to drive to the center or to other towns to conduct business.

Outlying “Rural” Areas

- We will proactively conserve natural resources, open space, stone walls & large trees along roads
- Larger minimum lot sizes in especially sensitive areas will help protect environmental resources.
- Open Space Cluster Developments will be encouraged to gain open space and resource conservation as part of the development process. Open Space Cluster Developments will accommodate both single family and other combinations of housing.

Former Belchertown State School Property

- Carefully sited combinations of business & housing will offer jobs, services, residences, and increased tax base.
- Necessary utilitarian business development will be tucked out of sight.
- Trails, recreation opportunities & scenic views will be incorporated.

**I. Implementation Actions for Land Use and Growth Management**

I.D.	Action	When Initiate	Remarks	*Leadership [and others who should be involved]
LU-1	Draft a Phased Development Bylaw that provides incentives for developers to save open space, provide housing for preferred groups, avoid suburban landscapes and promote the rural look and feel of town by phasing the number of building permits			*Planning Board [Conservation Commission]
LU-2	Draft zoning bylaw revisions that would increase lot size in areas of environmental concern including poor draining soils, steep slopes, active farm and forestry production and wellhead/watersheds			*Planning Board [Conservation Commission, Agriculture, Economic Development Council]
LU-3	Draft a “creative or flexible development” bylaw to provide incentives for subdivision developers and multiple ANR developers to enhance the use of natural resources and preserve the rural look and feel of town by offering flexible frontage requirements, varied lot sizes, road widths and use of common drives			*Planning Board

LU-4	Consider prioritizing the use of sewer and water capacity to support and encourage desired types and locations of development			*BoS [DPW, Planning Board, Board of Health]
LU-5	Develop Education programs and materials to encourage residents to preserve elements of the towns rural look and feel – information on stone walls, preservation of trees, preserving land			*Historical Commission, [Conservation Comm., Library]
LU-6	Develop Educational programs to teach residents about protecting water resources through proper maintenance of private septic systems.		Combined with LU-19	*Board of Health [Conservation Comm., Library]
LU-7	Revise performance standards for site plan review to include specific demonstration of protecting rural look and feel and natural resources.			*Planning Board [Conservation Comm.]
LU-8	Appoint a town liaison to work with the New England Small Farms governing body at the 'farm' portion of the state school property to coordinate open space preservation with town efforts and the EDIC			*BoS [Agric. Comm.]
LU-9	Create zoning for commercial properties to achieve village development rather than strip development			*Planning Board
LU-10	Form a study committee to consider how Transfer of Development Right might help achieve Belchertown's desired future land use.			*Planning Board
LU-11	Advocate and lobby for change in the state statute to allow more local regulation of frontage ["ANR"] lots			*BoS [Planning Board, Conservation Commission]
LU-12	Advocate and lobby for revising and strengthening regulations relating to release of lands in Chapter 61			*BoS, [Planning Board, Conservation Commission]
LU-13	Compile a list of 'undeveloped' town roads for possible abandonment and/or discontinuance			*BoS [DPW]
LU-14	Educate the public on a Scenic Roads Bylaw (based on MGL Ch 40, 515)			*Planning Board

BoS = Board of Selectmen