

IV. Economic Development

A. Overview

Many people believe that Belchertown's growing population places a strain on residential property owners because of Belchertown's small non-residential tax base. Economic development may help relieve that burden a little. Businesses tend to be tax-paying entities that generally pay more in taxes than they require in services, thereby yielding net tax revenue to the town. Such development though, if poorly planned, may be in conflict with the townspeople's desire to maintain Belchertown's small-town character, and could end up costing the town more in decreased property values and increased demand for some services, such as road maintenance and police and fire coverage.

The object of this section of the master plan is to examine the types of economic development that are possible and desirable given the community's goals, and to analyze their potential affect on the community. It seeks to find the right blend of economic growth that will contribute to the existing tax base and enhance Belchertown's character.

A property that will need special consideration in the quest for suitable economic development is the former Belchertown State School. The Belchertown Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC) is developing detailed plans for this property. The state school is currently zoned as general business and light industrial, therefore providing great potential as an economic development zone that could be the center of the town's growth, and perhaps provide for business sites that do not contribute to sprawling development. Development of this property is inextricable from the economic development of Belchertown.

For successful economic development that meets the community's objectives, townspeople must adopt two traits: openness to change, and patience. That Belchertown will change is inevitable. Much hard work and patience will be required to manage that change and to plan for the new character of Belchertown. Bluntly, this economic development effort will not be easy. Hard work, dedication, and input from many people will be required.

B. Goals and 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 economic development for Goal 1:

- Support Belchertown's traditional agriculture and forestry industries

- Identify, prioritize, and plan to attract the types of businesses compatible with Belchertown's character and that would enhance its tax base

Goal 2: Manage residential construction to increase benefits to the community while lessening potential negative effects.

Policies related to economic development for Goal 2:

- Encourage builders to buy and hire locally

Goal 3: Evaluate and achieve business development that contributes to town life, and mitigate potential negative effects.

Policies related to economic development for Goal 3:

- Designate areas for non-polluting industrial activities where they can be adequately served by the infrastructure systems and be buffered from surrounding land uses
- Designate focal areas for shopping and service centers
- Specify site plan and construction standards that support Belchertown's community character
- Encourage mini-center type development rather than commercial sprawl that detracts from Belchertown's small-town character.
- Provide the infrastructure necessary to serve the kinds of businesses Belchertown wishes to attract in the places they fit best
- Encourage local entrepreneurial enterprises that provide the services required by the community
- Promote home businesses with standards for parking, signs, hours of operation, and other elements to avoid negative effects on the surrounding neighborhood
- Encourage "eco-tourism" in a rural setting

C. Inventory

Community Description

With over 50 square miles of land, Belchertown has the sixth largest land area of any community in Massachusetts. This rapidly growing community is close to both Amherst and Springfield and has experienced extensive residential development over the last two decades. The population was 12,968 in 2000. Mid-decade estimates have Belchertown's population at about 15,500. Belchertown consists primarily of single-family homes that are largely owner-occupied. Most new residents commute to work in other towns.

Belchertown is close to four of the major colleges comprising the region's Five College system. These colleges include Amherst College, Hampshire College, and the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, and Mt. Holyoke College in South Hadley. The

breadth and scope of the resources represented by these institutions add significant potential to many economic development activities that can be complemented by these resources.

The following is a list of some characteristics that define Belchertown:

- Classic New England appeal with Town Common
- Belchertown State School property
- High percentage of forestland
- 6th largest land area in Massachusetts
- Contains primary entrances for Quabbin Reservoir.
- Proximity to Five Colleges
- Commuting distance to Springfield and other metropolitan areas
 - ~25 min. to Springfield,
 - ~50 min. to Hartford,
 - ~55 min. to Worcester,
 - ~1.5hrs. to Boston
 - ~2.75 hrs. to New York.
- Excellent public schools
- Limited service by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority's regional bus system
- Access to interstate highways
 - ~10 miles from Rt. 90, ~15 miles from Rt. 91
- Limited existing commercial/industrial development
- Potential train access
- Skilled work force
- Growing demand for goods and services

Community Comparison

The following data show Belchertown to be growing rapidly in comparison to its neighbors; only Amherst and Sunderland have a greater population per square mile. Belchertown is the largest geographically, and has the most public road mileage of our area. As of 1999, Belchertown had by far the greatest number of working age people, except for Amherst. Amherst is usually a statistical outlier because of its very high student population. This fact seems to have not changed by 2009. The number of jobs located in Belchertown is believed to be far fewer than the number of working age residents, which implies that working people must commute to jobs elsewhere. This also implies that potential new businesses could find local residents who might well fit their labor needs.

Belchertown's population of residents over age 60 is increasing. People in this group are generally regarded as the retirement age population, but may not necessarily be retired. Local jobs could provide opportunities for this group, perhaps increasing the number of home businesses and helping local merchants stay in business or expand, which in turn would maintain the character of the town.

Inventory of Belchertown's Current Business Development

Considering Belchertown's accessibility and large amount of developable land, the town's current business base is limited and scattered. See Map 2, *Existing Business Parcels* in the appendix.

Along Routes 9 and 21, removed from the town center: Small-scale mixed highway businesses, including retail, service, and auto-related, are along these roadsides.

Along Routes 9 and 21 nearing the town center: Professional offices and retail businesses are in these areas. That Stop & Shop opened in 2002 shows that larger retailers see a sufficient market to warrant investment. Route 21 south shows a similar trend.

Figure 32: Socioeconomic Community Comparison

Municipality	2006 Estimated US Census	2006 EQV/2006 US Census	School District Type	Pop. Per Sq. Mi.	2000 Census Labor Force	1999 Unemployment Rate	Land SQ Miles	2006 Public Road Miles
AMHERST	34,049	63,184	K to 12	1,228	20,102	5.3%	27.72	137.1
BELCHERTOWN	14,103	92,583	K to 12	267	7,650	3.8%	52.73	157.02
GRANBY	6,347	90,234	K to 12	228	3,446	3.3%	27.86	67.75
HADLEY	4,812	183,359	K to 12	206	2,556	2.1%	23.31	83.63
HATFIELD	3,261	140,537	K to 12	204	1,948	1.0%	16.02	59.43
MONSON	8,792	80,464	K to 12	199	4,383	2.6%	44.28	112.58
PELHAM	1,403	106,581	Local Elem	56	829	2.3%	25.07	45.98
SUNDERLAND	3,774	93,147	Local Elem	262	2,377	3.5%	14.39	46.32

Source: [Mass. Department of Revenue](#) (look under Municipal Data Bank then under Community Report Builder then choose Community Comparison Report) Date: 08/17/06

Figure 33:

Commuting Patterns	
Total Respondents: Workers 16 years and over	5,628
Drove alone	84.8%
In carpools	10.4%
Using public transportation	0.8%
Using other means	0.4%
Walked	1.3%
Worked at home	2.3%

Source: [U.S. Census](#); Date: 2000

Around the town common: The basic type and mix of businesses is similar to those in the rest of the town center, but the scale and design are different. Here small scale and historic appearance set the tone for the town common, which the community regards as the heart of Belchertown.

Former Belchertown State School property: The vacant campus is the “big unknown” regarding Belchertown’s business base. The state school once employed over 1,000 people.

Manufacturing: The main manufacturing operations in Belchertown are two pressure treatment plants near the center, a wire manufacturer on Stadler Street, an electronic LED sign maker on Mill Valley Road, and an insulation plant in Bondsville. There are several small operations, including saw milling, and some cottage industries.

Golf courses: As of early 2008 there is one golf course, located off Mill Valley Road, Route 181. This is a scenic 18-hole course with a slope of 130 and a rating of 72.2. A second eighteen-hole course has been started off Chauncey Walker Road, Route 21. The front nine holes have been completed and the back nine are mostly finished. The development of this course has paused while more financing is sought.

Home Occupations: As shown by the following chart, by far the greatest numbers of businesses in Belchertown are those categorized as Home Occupations.

Figure 34:

Belchertown Business Certificates	
Date	
Total Sept. 17, 2001	292 Total Certificates 187 of these are home businesses (i.e. the business address matches the owner's home address) approx. 32 of the home businesses relate to construction and landscaping
Total Jan. 8, 2007	516 Total Certificates Estimated that most are home businesses

Source: Belchertown Town Clerk

Sample home occupations from the business certificate list are:

- farming, logging, tree removal
- auto service
- real estate
- construction, painting, landscaping, inspection, electric
- day care

computer services
pet grooming
civil engineering
graphics
nursing, massage, behavior specialists
movers
artist, photographer, interior design
bookkeeping
hair stylist
translation

Agriculture, forestry, and related businesses: By far the largest area of land used for business in Belchertown is for agriculture and forestry. Belchertown has several small cattle operations, a horse farm, several Christmas tree farms, and other wood lots. Large acreage is devoted to hay fields and feed corn. The New England Small Farm Institute and the University of Massachusetts Horticultural Station are two large public holdings of active farming activity. Businesses that support agriculture include loggers, and a log transfer, sorting, and shipping facility. Earth removal is usually included as resource extraction. Belchertown has two fully-commercial sand and gravel operations located just off Route 9, one in the northwest and one in the east.

In summary, the current profile of business activity other than home-based is predominantly retail and service for the residential community, with vestigial agriculture, and minimal manufacturing activity.

Current Zoning Bylaw Districts as They Relate to Economic Development

Existing zoning districts reflect Belchertown's scattered business pattern. General Business is located along Route 9, some outlying but mostly closer to the Route 9 and 202 intersection. At the Amherst line is another area of General Business, but there is neither sewer nor water service there. Other business districts are across Route 21 and 202 from the state school, and farther south at the Routes 21 and 202 intersection.

The town Planning Department reports that the current pattern and extent of parcels zoned for business activity presents a problem. Until recently, businesses that wanted to expand or locate in Belchertown could not find properly zoned, developable land that is large enough.

Current Utilities as They Relate to Economic Development

Belchertown has limited areas served by sewer and water. The town center is served by the sewage treatment facility on the former state school property. The commonwealth turned this over to the town when the state school closed. The town's water supply is from wells near Jabish Brook near Johnson Street. Bondsville in southern Belchertown

has sewer and water from the Bondsville Fire and Water District. This is an interlocal agreement, because that village straddles the Palmer town line. Sewer does not serve the business area along Route 9 at the Amherst town line, but part of it does have Amherst water. The water agreement was adopted in 1979. Amherst water serves Old Amherst Road, northern Warren Wright Road, and a short section of North Street to the town line. An interlocal agreement with Amherst could extend sewer service to improve the business sites in that highly visible location.

Types of Business Development That Might Fit in Belchertown

Forestry, Farming and Agriculture. Belchertown has an agricultural history, and these economic activities are the ones that most contribute to Belchertown's traditional rural character. The continued viability of these enterprises serves many of the community's growth management purposes:

- They increase open space; farms, tree farms, and forests are aesthetically pleasing
- They reduce the amount of land available to development
- They retain the character of the town

It can be difficult and frustrating to carry out farming activities in an increasingly suburban setting; newcomers are not familiar with or accepting of the odors, machinery, noise, clearing, harvesting, and other working characteristics of agriculture. New England's small-scale agriculture industry is struggling; diversification of products and business activity is often necessary for a farm to survive. New England Small Farms Institute (NESFI) offers a course, "Exploring the Small Farm Dream," on how to run a small farm as a start-up business. A book version is also available to be used for self-instruction. Excerpts and instructions for ordering are available on NESFI's website, at <http://www.smallfarm.org/>.

Home Business or Home Occupation. Home businesses are conducted in the owner's house and employ few or no people other than the business's owner. The zoning regulations for home business are set forth in section 145-25 of the zoning by-laws. Home businesses have the advantage of providing income to residents, jobs (albeit limited), and tax base (again limited) with limited generation of traffic.

Home businesses are consistent with Belchertown's rural tradition. Like agriculture, this tradition can come into conflict with new suburban neighbors. Such businesses provide employment for people without commuting, but care must be taken to ensure the character of the neighborhood is not disrupted. Further investigation is required to see whether Belchertown can provide office space for those that outgrow the home.

Tourism and "Quaint" Commercial. Examples include seasonal cafés, "Village on the Commons" type retail centers, antique and crafts shops, and farm stands. This type of development provides jobs, services and a greater tax base, as well as helping reinforce the traditional common and village pattern of New England development. The primary

disadvantage of this type of development is that it increases traffic, although it a stream of traffic [potential customers] is what makes such businesses possible. Clustering buildings with pedestrian access can help mitigate traffic congestion.

Specialty Service Centers. Current market dynamics have spawned new kinds of businesses that were not envisioned just a few years ago. One example is assisted living, or continued care facilities. As more people live longer and knowledge about wellness expands, we should anticipate and plan for businesses to serve the elder population.

Professional Office Parks. This type of development provides office space for doctors and medical professionals, lawyers, software and engineering companies, insurance firms, banks, and other office uses. These can be further subdivided into those that directly serve the public, for example medical, and those that do not, such as software development. Depending upon market forces and the design of the park, these businesses may tend to be small and serve limited, niche, or specific markets. Belchertown's zoning by-laws categorize these as Limited Business.

These types of businesses have the following advantages:

- Provide a relatively stable job and tax base
- Buildings can have more aesthetically pleasing appearances since these businesses do not generally need mass advertising to promote their service
- Trip generation tends to be scattered throughout the day, rather than focused at rush hour

Light Industrial & Manufacturing. Firms in this category range in size from small starter and specialty shops to large enterprises with many employees, significant assessed valuations for land and buildings, and significant excise tax revenue to the local town. In today's New England market place light industrial jobs often require highly skilled employees. Depending upon local site plan regulations and regional market forces, the appearance of properties developed or redeveloped for light industry can range from utilitarian to up-scale.

These types of businesses have the following advantages:

- Significant tax revenue
- Do not rely on customers seeing signs and parking from road, and so can be less visually intrusive than retail and commercial businesses
- A wide range and number of employment opportunities
- Companies often contribute to local events and causes

Summary of Town Survey

The following two questions from the survey conducted in the spring of 2000 pertained to economic development:

To what extent do you support or oppose the following forms of economic development in Belchertown?

Support:

Small retail shops
Agriculture
Restaurants
Home-based business
Artisan and craftsman
Technical services
Professional office space
Tourism
Light industry

Neutral:

Large retail
Warehousing distribution

Oppose:

Heavy industry

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of each of the following in Belchertown?

Satisfied:

Gas stations
Pharmacy
Convenience stores
Liquor stores
Banks
Telephone service
Bars and taverns

Legal services
Internet access
Septic/sewer service
Book stores
Restaurants
Overnight lodging
Music stores
Retail stores

Neutral:

Automotive repair shops
Medical services
Heating oil suppliers
Propane gas suppliers
Video stores

Dissatisfied:

Health/fitness clubs
Cell phone coverage
Food stores

D. Analysis: Opportunities to Expand Belchertown's Business Base In Ways That Fit Belchertown and Contribute to Town Life

Taking into account the requirements of business and townspeople's desires to attract and foster businesses that fit into the community and add to the local quality of life, the following categories of business appear the most promising:

- Forestry, agriculture and agriculture-related
- Home occupations
- Properly sited, site planned, served with utilities as needed:
 - Small-scale retail & service
 - Trades' storage, shop, and vehicle lot
 - Medium-scale retail and service
 - Office buildings & parks
 - Light industrial buildings and parks

- Tourist and recreational
- Assisted living facilities

At the March 14, 2002, Community Planning Forum, residents concurred with focusing desirable development in the town center to make best use of the extant public investment in road, sewer, and water systems. A high priority of townspeople is to retain the character and scale around the common as the unique heart of the community. Townspeople also endorsed the concept of outlying, small-scale village centers in Bondsville and Dwight. The former state school property was viewed as a key to economic vitality in the town center, perhaps including its own village-style plan. For remaining outlying areas, townspeople would like to accommodate residential development in ways that conserve open space and small town character. This overall land use concept suggests the following potential fit between business development and the community's land use plan. In each instance, the town should seek a combination of regulations and procedures to achieve an appropriate combination of design characteristics to complement the pattern of surrounding activities.

At the November 7, 2007 Community Planning Forum, residents suggested the following uses for the State School property:

- Mixed-use, suggested uses:
 - Museum
 - School
 - Restaurants
 - To be determined by NESFI
- Destination spa and resort (and hotel?)
- Equestrian facility

Town Common: Small specialty shops and services

Former State School Property: Industrial park, office park, utilitarian businesses that do not need view from roadways, assisted care, large potential for mixed use

Rest of Town Center: Medium-sized retail and service, office buildings, industrial parks, with potential for mixed use

Outlying Villages: Small retail and service clustered in village-style pattern with potential for mixed uses

Other outlying areas: Agriculture and agriculture-related, home occupations, tourism and recreation-related.

E. Implementation Actions

Recommended Actions

I.D. & Priority	Action	When Initiate	*Leadership [and others who should be involved]
ED-1 <i>(old ED-2)</i>	Work with the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation to plan and achieve redevelopment of the state school property in ways that gain the most for the community. Consider how utilitarian service facilities might be tucked into the site plan concept.		*Planning Board
ED-2 <i>(old ED-1)</i>	Examine the zoning bylaw, and compare the types of businesses that are allowed in the town center with the types that have been identified as promising for that area. Identify developable parcels in the town center; consider whether they need to be rezoned; and whether adjustments are needed in allowed uses, dimensional and site plan requirements, sign regulations, and development review procedures. Consider full or partial implementation of the 2003 Town Center Plan.		* Planning Board
ED-3 <i>(old ED-3, 8, 10, and 13)</i>	Advance agriculture and related businesses. Appoint a town NESFI liaison and/or an Agricultural Commission to attract and retain farming professionals. Consider zoning and other tools to encourage this industry.		*Conservation Commission [Agric Cmsn, NESFI, town NESFI liaison]
ED-4 <i>(old ED-4)</i>	Identify suitable businesses for those developable parcels of land available in town.		*Planning Board
ED-5 <i>(new)</i>	Work with the Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation to encourage and support job creation and job retention through assistance to small and micro-enterprise businesses in the forms of business loans, training, and technical assistance.		*QVBAC
ED-6 <i>(new)</i>	Work with the Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation to encourage and support job creation, job enhancement, and job retention through assistance to individuals in the forms of skills training and financial literacy.		*QVBAC
ED-7 <i>(old ED-12)</i>	Work with the Quaboag Valley C.C., NESFI, and others in encouraging eco-tourism through local farms, the Quabbin Reservoir, and other open space in town.		*BoS [Planning Board]

Completed Actions

I.D. [Old]	Action	Date Completed	Remarks
ED-1	Examine the zoning bylaw, and compare the types of businesses that are allowed in the town center with the types that have been identified as promising for that area. Identify developable parcels in the town center; consider whether they need to be rezoned; and whether adjustments are needed in allowed uses, dimensional and site plan requirements, sign regulations, and development review procedures. Consider full or partial implementation of the 2003 Town Center Plan.	2003	Town Center Plan only was completed to consider revitalization efforts for this critical section of town.
ED-2	Work with the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation to plan and achieve redevelopment of the state school property in ways that gain the most for the community. Consider how utilitarian service facilities might be tucked into the site plan concept.	ongoing	There is an ongoing effort to redevelop this property into a mixed-use spa, equestrian, and retail center.

Actions Recommended for Deletion *(from 2002 Community Plan)*

I.D. [Old]	Action	Reason for Deletion
ED-3	Visit all owners and operators of agricultural and agriculture-related businesses. Ask and listen carefully for specific ways the community could help the continued viability of these enterprises. Incorporate their suggestions into the implementation program.	Not necessary for BoS to monitor; these owners and operators should be encouraged to provide input at any time; incorporated into ED-3 above
ED-5	Initiate collaborative planning with the residents of Bondsville and the Town of Palmer. Consider how business might better serve the residents and add to the village's vitality.	This is a necessary task only after the completion of ED-4 above.
ED-6	Work with the Town of Amherst to extend sewer and water service into Belchertown to support a small scale clustered, village-type development off Route 9, perhaps on both sides of the town line.	This has been investigated and should be pursued on a case-by-case basis.
ED-8	Support the UMass Horticultural Station and the New England Small Farms Institute as major contributors to Belchertown's agricultural based.	Incorporated into ED-3 above.
ED-9	Develop a web site to outline the resources available to entrepreneurs/home-based businesses and encourage development of a home-based business support group.	Best supported on a case-by-case basis - there are many neighbors not desiring businesses operating in their neighborhoods.
ED-10	Consider adopting a "Right to Farm" bylaw, which underscores Belchertown's support for agriculture and alerts newcomers to the fact that they are moving into an agricultural area.	Incorporated into ED-3 above.
ED-11	In accordance with Mass. General Law Ch. 41 section 81D, propose the town hire an economic development consultant.	Hired as required.
ED-13	Appoint an Agricultural Economic Development Council.	Incorporate into ED-3 above.

F. References

Further Information:

- The U.S. Census's Economic Census data for 1997 (<http://www.census.gov/epcd/www/econ97.html>). Use the "Report by State" to get information for Hampshire county. This includes Number of Establishments per sector.

Ref ID	Name	Location	Date	# of pages
1	Build out report	Belchertown_buildout.xls	cd pub Fall 2000	-
2	Implications of Input Received from the Community	http://www.belchertown.org/departments/planning/Implications of input so far.htm		6
3	Residential Property in the Pioneer Valley Region	Real Estate Sales 1998, parcel count by property class, Tax Rate, Residential Taxes, Building Permits Issued http://www.pvpc.org/info/docs/property.pdf	1998	
4	Belchertown Business Certificates	Town Clerk	Oct. 21, 1999	12
5	Available business parcels	Visual survey, assessors' records	2002	1
6	Other town statistics			
7	Community Plan Project First Community Forum	http://www.belchertown.org/departments/planning/Notes from Fall forum .htm	Oct 26, 2000	49
8	Community Plan Project Second Community Forum	http://www.belchertown.org/departments/planning/Notes from Feb forum.htm	Feb. 8, 2001	17
9	Existing Studies of Town of Belchertown Resources	Copy of report by Matthew Steinberg (the grad student from UMASS)	Fall 1999	5
10	Master Plan: Belchertown's Future Presence	Copy of report by Matthew Steinberg (the grad student from UMASS)	Fall 1999	17
11	2000-2001 "Community Visioning"		2000	1
12	Belchertown Survey Result		2000	6

13	“Economic Development” section of Orleans’ community plan	http://www.town.orleans.ma.us.lcpc2/chap06.htm		22
14	Town of Belchertown Community Plan Project	http://www.belchertown.org/departments/planning/planhome.htm	April 22, 2001	18
15	Town of Belchertown Economic Development & Industrial Corporation Economic Development Plan – 2001 Town Meeting Warrant Proposed Version	EDIC		11
16	US Census	http://www.census.gov/		
17	Massachusetts Government	http://www.state.ma.us/		
18	Mass. Department of Revenue Division of Local Services	http://www.dls.state.ma.us/		
19	Historic Maps of New England	http://docs.unh.edu/nhtopos/nhtopos.htm		
20	Massachusetts General Laws	http://www.state.ma.us/legis/laws/mgl/index.htm		

“Every even numbered year, the Commissioner of Revenue is required to develop an estimate of the fair cash value of all taxable property in each city and town as of January 1 of that year. This estimate is called the equalized valuation or EQV. The purpose of EQV is to present municipal property values in a comparable manner by adjusting for the differences in local assessing practices and revaluation schedules.” For more information check out <http://www.dls.state.ma.us/mdm/eqv/98EQV1.htm>