

## V. Natural and Cultural Resources

### NATURAL RESOURCES

#### **A. Overview**

Belchertown's residents are the primary custodians of the town's natural resources. Their responsibility to future generations is to preserve the quality of their town's air, land and waters, plant and animal life, and scenic beauty. As active consumers of certain of these resources, they should keep in mind the best interests of the most citizens; for example, gravel banks will be restored and lumbered forests will be replanted. Use of the town's resources must be considered in ways that would sustain them for future Belchertown residents.

The information presented here is drawn from the Conservation Commission's Open Space and Recreation Plan, from various surveys, studies, reports, forum summaries, and the town's GIS maps.

Consider the fact that Belchertown is a pleasant tapestry of relatively unspoiled nature typical of central New England and the eastern uplands of the Connecticut River watershed. It is a balance of the natural and artificial; a miscellany of slopes, open space, wetlands, rock outcrops, lakes and streams, pockets of farmland, forests, and wildlife habitats. It remains a gentle cushion to the less natural, densely populated surrounding cities and towns.

#### **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 natural resources for Goal 1***

- Support the agriculture and forestry industries
- Avoid the degradation of the town's natural resources
- Promote land use and development patterns with focused construction and intervening open space
- Identify, prioritize, and work to conserve key landscape views
- Identify and prioritize key open space parcels for natural resource protection, agriculture, forestry, and recreational use
- Promote education of landowners in methods of land conservation
- Support the traditional conservation-oriented activities of fishing, hunting, trail riding, hiking and other passive forms of recreation, i.e. hiking, birding, etc. Form alliances amongst groups who participate in these activities

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

###### ***Policies related to natural resources for Goal 2***

- Evaluate strategies to lessen the amount and harm of residential construction, and choose ones that fit Belchertown
- Encourage planned residential development that incorporates open space preservation and other amenities

- Discourage the importation of exotic landscaping plants (use UMass Extension guidelines to achieve this policy)
- Discourage lawn chemicals and fertilizers by educating residents of the hazards of these substances
- Encourage development in village areas, perhaps by zoning incentives

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

***Policies related to natural resources for Goal 3***

- Support the agriculture and forestry industries
- Identify, prioritize, and work to ‘green’ business we would like to come to our community
- Designate areas for non-polluting industrial activities where they can be adequately served by the infrastructure systems and buffered from surrounding land uses
- Develop plans to prevent traffic congestion

**C. Inventory**

*Clean Air and Climate as Resources*

Locally produced air pollution is still light. There is no large industrial emitter, and no major highway runs through town. Auto emissions can be heavy during times of student traffic to and from nearby Amherst and during special events such as the Belchertown Fair, commuting hours, etc. On still winter days, air pollution can occur from wood stove/furnace emissions – these are usually brief and dissipate quickly. (Although a recent moratorium on new wood furnace installations is in place while regulations are developed to protect public health while remaining sensitive to the need to be more energy-independent and use sustainable local resources.) Parts of Belchertown are on the flight path to Westover Air Reserve Base, so large military aircraft rumble and disperse their emissions above the town. We have no control over that.

Belchertown does experience air pollution that wafts in from the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions, though. Some of the northeast’s highest air pollution readings have been taken at the apparently pristine Quabbin reservation. Ground-level ozone, carbon dioxide, and other pollutants are brought in by the prevailing winds, which deliver smog from traffic in New York and Philadelphia, coal particulates from power plants in Ohio, and sulfuric acid rain from smelters in Ontario and Michigan.

The expanses of the Quabbin watershed to the east and the tree-cover of the Holyoke Range and Pelham Hills serve as filters to some extent for carbon dioxide and other chemicals. Simultaneously, these same filters produce airborne allergens that many people are sensitive to. These allergens are typical of an area characterized by forests and open spaces having heavy growths of pine, maple, oak, hay, ragweed, and goldenrod.

Because of the town’s varied altitude, Belchertown’s climate offers opportunities for recreation linked to relatively cooler air across the four seasons. Snowfall can be higher in the north end of town near Pelham than in the rest of town. Overall, the climate is typical of Central New England and the Berkshire Hills to the west.

Noise pollution is generally not a problem. There are the occasional instances of loud parties, especially near the end of the school year, traffic, dogs, the active railroad, and aircraft using Westover. Few cases of industrial noise have arisen, and those have been mitigated. Town meeting passed a noise bylaw several years ago.

Some things on the horizon that could influence air quality and climate include global climate change (increased temperature and severe weather events), the likelihood of increased traffic congestion, and the switch to alternative energy sources (most likely wood or other plant-based carbohydrates).

### *Land as a Resource*

The topography [surface] of Belchertown is the consequence of ancient upheavals in Earth's crust modified by the comings and goings of huge glaciers. A distinct feature of the town's landscape is the Triassic Border Fault that slices north and south forming the boundary between the Pelham Hills and the Holyoke Range. (The Route 9 corridor.) Fortunately, there seems to be no suggestion of geologic instability linked with this fault, for the town's main road, Federal Street/Amherst Road (Route 9), and railroad run along this fault. The glaciers left various types of deposits including till, a mix of gravel, sand, silt, and clay, which together make up 36% of Belchertown's land area. Large concentrations are located in both northern and southern Belchertown. Outwash, another deposit, is a highly variable mix of sand and gravel, porous and permeable, excellent for aquifers and recharge areas. Thirty percent of the town's surface is outwash.

The major factors limiting land-use due to soils suitability include permeability, depth to seasonal high water, depth to bedrock, hardpan surface rockiness and stoniness, texture of the subsoil, natural drainage, and soil reaction. [See Map 4, *Soil and Slope Limitation to Development*, in the map appendix.] Septic systems require appropriate soil absorptive ability and level of water table during the wet seasons. Hardpan is a problem northeast of Route 9 and in the southwest of town near the Granby border. Severe wetness is a constraint in eastern and southern Belchertown. Slope is a problem east of the town village and along the western boundary south of U.S. Route 202. Slight limitations prevail near the lakes and in the central southwestern part of town.

A medley of hills characterizes Belchertown made up of steeply sloped wooded hills in the northeast to more gentle hills elsewhere. The Holyoke Range and Pelham Hills have slopes in excess of 15%. Some small areas have 25% slopes, however, most of the slopes in town are less than 15%. The variability of Belchertown's topography presents many opportunities for scenic enjoyment and recreation but makes large-scale agriculture prohibitive. Where the soil cover is appropriate, small specialty farming/horticulture is possible, such as tree farming, berry farming, plant nurseries, and orchards.

### *Water as a Resource*

Concerns relating to the surface waters include the quantity and quality of Belchertown's lakes and streams, its wetlands and vernal pools, and its flood-prone areas. [See Map 9, *Surface Water Resources*.] These are the components of the two major, state-defined watersheds in Belchertown – the Chicopee and Connecticut Rivers.

Beneath the surface, there are three large groundwater aquifer systems: Hop, Scarborough, and Lower Jabish Brooks. All three are especially important to private wells and to the deep town wells.

Fortunately, Belchertown's underground water resources can provide good quality drinking water for years to come provided they and their recharge areas are protected from contamination. The Aquifer Protection District overlay zone with a corresponding section in the zoning bylaw is one level of protection. The Board of Health in May 2002 also adopted new groundwater protection regulations. In 2007, town meeting adopted a storm water bylaw that went into effect January 2008.

The three major lakes ('Tri-Lakes') in Belchertown are a valuable aesthetic and recreational resource. They are vulnerable to both surface and sub-surface degradation linked with nearby residential development and to possible cargo spills on Route 9 and the railroad. Chemical control of weed growth, largely from two particular species, has been applied (to two of the Lakes, Metacomet and Arcadia, only most recently), and a municipal sewer system has been installed that potentially services all waterfront properties. Both of these strategies should slow the eutrophication of these three Lakes, however, there has been considerable controversy among waterfront residents on the role of weed-controlling chemicals. A long-term Tri-Lakes management that everyone can agree upon must be adopted and continually updated to control the weeds and slow-down eutrophication. The lakes provide recreation throughout the year. The town beach is situated on the south shore of Lake Arcadia, and Lake Metacomet has a boat ramp and is stocked with fish. Redevelopment and non-point source pollution are still major issues and threaten the water and aesthetic quality of the Lakes. Consideration might be given to waterfront zoning regulations that help preserve these.

Jabish Brook is the major stream in town. It originates in Knight's Pond near Pelham. In its upper stretch, it is an important component of the City of Springfield's water; Jabish Brook water gets diverted into the Springfield Reservoir in Ludlow via the Jabish Canal, owned by the City of Springfield. The lower length of the brook is important to the Belchertown and Bondsville aquifers. Each of these water districts has wells near the brook. This water supply receives continual monitoring and is worthy of even greater protection.

Flood Plains are those areas prone to periodic flooding. Allowed uses are limited to those that would receive the least property damage or displace the least volume of water in a flood. Accurate mapping of the flood plains has been achieved and zoning created accordingly as part of the Federal Government's flood plain insurance program. With so much high terrain, Belchertown is relatively free of flood threats compared to river delta towns. The Flood Plain District overlay zone provides zoning protection in these areas.

Wetlands are ecological wonderlands dominated by plants that need abundant water. This special vegetation absorbs flood water, stores and degrades pollutants, and provides wildlife habitats. Wetlands consist of shrub swamps, beaver ponds, shallow and deep marshes, wet meadows, bogs, forested swamps, seasonally flood areas, and lands within the charted 100-year flood plains. Belchertown's zoning has the Wetland District overlay zone. In addition to the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, Belchertown also adopted its own Wetland Protection Bylaw to add further protection. Belchertown's wetlands and the 100-foot buffer zone surrounding all wetlands are protected and regulated by the Conservation Commission.

In addition, the Natural Resource Conservation Service has identified twenty-one soil types in Belchertown that have a seasonally high water table and are poorly drained. Consequently, these wet soils limit development.

Wetlands total more than 3,000 acres or 11% of Belchertown's landmass. Where wetlands occur within glacial outwash deposits they may indicate the true water table. Such deposits make up 30% of the town's area.

Despite existing state and local wetlands protection regulations, there is a potential for contamination within the Broad, Batchelor, Hop, and Jabish Brook watersheds. Loss and fragmentation of wetland habitats contribute to the decline of various species of wildlife; at least half of the state's endangered birds are wetland species.

### *Vegetation as a Resource*

Over half of the total land acreage of Belchertown is forested, though the forest is of neither uniform age nor density. Much of the forest is hardwood, consisting of red and white oak, red and sugar maple, cherry, ash, and birch. The majority conifers are white pine and hemlock, with some spots of cedar, red pine, and, rarely, spruce. Belchertown's forests have been changing for many years. Areas once cleared for agriculture or for timber are now in various stages of returning to maturity. For example, in the Belchertown section of the Holyoke Range, oak and hickory are found on the south slope, but maple and post-climax hardwoods are found on the cooler northern slopes.

In Belchertown, human activity has opened the forest and has created an edge between forest and field. This edge is where wildlife flourishes, and it has made shade-intolerant species viable, such as birch, and has brought in early succession pine communities. Additionally, there are many acres of abandoned fields and orchards. These foregone agricultural lands provide good wildlife habitats. Shrub swampland and meadows each have their unique trees and grasses. Studies in the 1970s identified 62 species of trees, 214 species of wildflowers, flowering shrubs and vines and 42 introduced plant species.

The largest unbroken tract of forestland in Belchertown belongs to the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), 3,000 acres of Quabbin Reservoir Watershed in the northeast corner of the town. In addition, adjacent forestland is managed as part of the Swift River Wildlife Management Area; and the Swift River Sportsmen's Club owns approximately 300 acres of forestland adjacent to this land. Other forestland is within a part of Holyoke Range State Park, several municipal watersheds, and in private ownership.

Logging is an important industry in Belchertown. Much of the private land is in the Chapter 61 program, and is regularly harvested for lumber and firewood. The landowner with the most privately-owned acreage in Belchertown is Cows lumber company. DCR land is also managed for forestry and is selectively logged. Forestry, logging, firewood, and milling employ a relatively high number of Belchertown residents directly. Income is also provided to the landowners who have their trees harvested. Oak, ash, pine, maple, and birch are the main and most valuable commercial species.

Another change in the local flora is the displacement of indigenous vegetation with exotic plants brought in as crops, orchards, and ornamental plants. The importation of nursery plants for landscaping is a big business with the many new residences in town. The result of this is that traditional vegetation is removed and landscaping vegetation replaces it. This process has mixed effects on wildlife.

### *Wildlife as a resource*

Belchertown has a good representation of the wildlife found in southern New England. The town has a variety of habitat and, so far, plenty of undeveloped land to support most local species. There are variations in altitude and microclimate, and in vegetation, including meadows, dense underbrush, and open woods. Some common species are whitetail deer, coyotes, foxes, beavers, turkeys, ducks, geese, owls, hawks, minks and other members of the weasel family, such as fishers, and fish, including trout and bass. Ospreys have nested near Lake Arcadia, and pheasants are stocked each autumn for hunting. Some less common species are residents of the Quabbin Reservoir lands, including the bald eagle, black bears and moose.

Overall, one hundred and nineteen species of birds have been identified, including such state-listed threatened species as the great blue heron, the osprey, and the common loon; eleven species of fish, twenty species of mammal, nine species of amphibians, and nine species of reptiles. The Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program has noted town-owned areas that should be preserved for rare species habitat.

Wild animals have their own boundaries and do not acknowledge the lines on our maps. As more species learn to adapt to human-influenced environments conflicts become a concern. Beaver ponds flood back yards; occasionally bears will explore rubbish cans; ducks and geese will create unhealthful conditions near lakes and ponds. People develop an ‘us-or-them’ mentality. As the town’s residential development keeps spreading into the woods and former farms, two things occur to cause conflicts between animals and people: one is that the new houses are now in the animals’ territories; the other is that the animal populations increase because of less hunting and more forage in the form of ornamental lawn plants. Continuity of wildlife habitat (wildlife corridors) is an important attribute that should be considered when planning residential and transportation development(s).

### *Scenic vistas as a resource*

Most citizens are quite aware of Belchertown’s visual treasures: its winding roads, its stone fences, its pastures and fields, and its lines of shade trees. Most of these treasures are privately owned. Nevertheless, in the sense that they are visible to the public, they are part of the public domain.

Certain broad vistas are particularly notable:

- looking southwest from the former state school property to the Holyoke Range
- South Amherst and across the Pioneer Valley from Orchard Street
- the horizon from the Belchertown section of the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail
- from the University of Massachusetts and former Atkins orchards on Sabin Street
- from Rockrimmon Road, Dana Woods, Turkey Hill and Sheffield Estates
- Munsell street (west terminus and new residential development)

### *Additional Relevant Information*

The Community Plan survey showed that Belchertown’s residents care strongly about the town’s natural resources. There is “Strong Support” for preserving and protecting the town’s lakes, rivers and streams, wooded areas, and scenic views; also under “Support” are listed farmland and wetlands. Under Natural Resources-related Recreational Activities, respondents rated hiking trails, bike trails, and town beaches as “very important,” while skiing trails, fishing access, off-road trails, and horse

trails were rated “Moderately Important,” and snowmobile trails and hunting access were included under “Slightly Important.” Respondents felt it “Extremely Important” that Belchertown protect its natural environment (forests, wildlife, fish) and protect its environmental quality (air and water quality). Regarding Recreation Facilities, Quabbin Reservoir Area Access was given top priority by all age groups, except the 30-35 age group – they rated it third behind playgrounds and parks.

Two community forums generated the following goals relating to natural resources:

- Support agriculture and forestry
- Avoid degradation of natural resources
- Identify and prioritize key open space parcels for natural resource protection
- Identify, prioritize, and work to conserve key landscape views

Previous studies and research have also identified assets, goals, and policies for natural resources in Belchertown. The Local Statement of Growth Problems and Priorities in 1976 had as distinct assets the Quabbin area, clean air, potable water, physical beauty, forests, lakes and streams, wetland/aquifer recharge areas, scenic topography, and prime agriculture. From the Conservation Commission’s Plan (1986) developed by the Conway School of Landscape Design, the recommendations for conservation priority were lands that assure safe drinking water, productive agriculture, productive forest lands, and lands most suitable for recreational activities. In the spring of 2002, a UMass studio prepared regional and local greenway plans for Belchertown. Section 6, Open Space and Recreation has more detail on land conservation priorities.

#### **D. Conclusion and Implementation Actions**

From the foregoing descriptions, studies, goals, and survey results, one unequivocal conclusion emerges: the people of Belchertown want serious strategies in place for protecting, enhancing, and using the town’s natural resources, key components in maintaining the “rural atmosphere”. Stated more firmly: As land continues to be developed, do not degrade the natural heritage.

#### **Implementation Actions for Natural Resources**

I.D. & Priority	Action	When Initiate	Remarks	*Convening Group [and others who should be involved]
NR-1	Update and distribute GIS information on natural resources			*Conservation Commission, Planning Board, IS
NR-2	Work with Tri-Lakes Association on comprehensive Lakes Management Plan with emphasis on slowing nutrient run-off			*Conservation Commission [BOH; Building Inspector; DPW]
NR-3	Require wildlife habitat evaluation for all development (other than single family home) projects outside of village areas		Not currently, except for projects regulated by Con. Com. with wetlands. Wildlife habitat evaluations need to follow accepted procedure and documentation	*Planning Board [Con Com]

NR-4	Research and develop incentives for landowners to keep their land in Chapter 61 (forestry, agriculture, and recreation)		Assessors are under pressure to remove Ch. 61 land from favored tax status if not actively used for forestry and agriculture. Landowners must have knowledge, tools, and markets to keep land in active forestry and agriculture	*Agriculture Commission
NR-5	Develop educational programs and materials for agricultural and other open space landowners covering financial planning, liability, and natural resource management		Already a major objective of Ag Com, but needs more work	*Agriculture Commission
NR-6	Develop an education program on natural landscaping and lawn alternatives. Incorporate low-input landscaping into subdivision regulations and review of single family home Con Com filings.		How does the new earth-removal bylaw fit? What is the state-of-art? Could Belchertown become a model community? Or, is it asking too much of citizens?	*Conservation Commission
NR-7	Work with sport organizations – rod and gun clubs, other fishing and hunting groups, trail riders – to develop land, water, and wildlife management plans, and to educate the public in the benefit of these organizations' activities to preservation.			*Conservation Commission
NR-8	Work with state and federal agencies, local landscapers and builders to identify and control invasive species.		How does one report a siting? Do we have information on invasive species on website?	*Conservation Commission
NR-9	Watershed monitoring			*Conservation Commission

## CULTURAL RESOURCES

### A. Overview

The first settlement of non-aboriginal people in the area that became Belchertown occurred in the 1730s. The original meetinghouse for the town's first twenty or so families was established in 1738 in the area of present-day South Main Street. Originally called Cold Spring because of a "never-ending" water source on the path between Hadley and Brookfield, Belchertown was incorporated in 1761, taking its name from Jonathan Belcher, former Governor of Massachusetts and New Hampshire colonies.

Originally a farming community, the town's early notoriety was as a center for the carriage industry in the mid-nineteenth century. Later, Belchertown was known as a resort community to which prominent city-dwellers escaped for relief from the summer heat. Several impressive hotels graced the town

common in the decades surrounding the turn of the century to accommodate visitors who often traveled to the town via the railroad.

In the twentieth century, the Belchertown State School was a significant presence in the community and the town's largest employer. The school, an institution for people with mental retardation, was phased out and closed in 1992. Today, Belchertown's character is largely residential, with its people traveling to Amherst, Springfield and other nearby population centers to work.

Throughout its history, Belchertown has retained the thread of its agricultural heritage. The Belchertown Fair, one of the town's foremost community events, celebrates that heritage with livestock shows, produce displays, and ox- and horse-pulls.

## **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 cultural resources for Goal 1:**

- Promote "traditional" New England small town, encouraging land use with focused construction and intervening open space.
- Identify, prioritize, and work to conserve key landscape views.
- Establish standards for the scale and site planning of construction.
- Avoid suburban-style roadsides.

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

#### **Policies related to cultural resources for Goal 2:**

- Encourage subdivision design to integrate new development with existing neighborhoods.

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

#### **Policies related to cultural resources for Goal 3:**

- Consider the town's cultural heritage in site plan approvals.
- Encourage businesses that are compatible with and supportive of the town's cultural heritage; such as agriculture and forestry.

One goal of this planning process, as articulated in the Community Vision developed in 2000, is to "maintain Belchertown's rural New England look and feel." The characteristics that distinguish this community vision include:

- a value for the town's natural resources, open spaces, and scenic landscapes;
- a value for its agricultural and forestry heritage;
- a value for preserving its historic buildings, traditional architecture, and establishing standards for new construction; and
- a value for recreational spaces, particularly the town common.

This section of the Community Plan is an inventory of Belchertown's most important historical and cultural resources. It describes the steps that have been taken, and can be taken, to preserve our heritage and our quality of life.

## **C. Inventory of Resources**

### **Historic Resources**

#### **1. Belchertown Center Historic District**

Local Historic Districts preserve significant historic structures and maintain historical integrity of new construction by requiring that the Historic District Commission review any exterior alteration to buildings and structures visible from the public way. In this way, builders are encouraged to choose architectural designs that complement the historic setting. Belchertown has one local historic district. [See Map 10, *Town Center Historic Sites.*]

Belchertown Center Historic District was listed as a local historic district in Massachusetts in 1990 and incorporates 74 properties on Main, Maple, Walnut, Park & Jabish Streets. This district has been adopted under the zoning bylaw as an overlay district (see map). The Historic District Bylaw Commission oversees activity within the district. Within this district are located many of the town's historic buildings and landmark locations, some of which are described below:

**TOWN COMMON, BANDSTAND, AND SOLDIERS' MONUMENT.** The town common is the jewel in Belchertown's crown. Colonel Elijah Dwight sold three acres to the town in 1791, which became a portion of the town common. Dr. Estes Howe gave the north portion of the common to the town in 1803 with the provision that no permanent structures be erected upon it. For more than two centuries, the common has served as a community gathering place, being the site of annual events as the Belchertown Fair, the Concerts on the Common, and even a skating rink in the winter. The Farmers and Mechanics Club built the bandstand in 1878. Erected in 1885, the Soldiers' Monument commemorates those who served in the American Revolution and the Civil War. More recent additions honor citizens who fought in the World Wars, the Korean and Viet Nam conflicts.

**CLAPP MEMORIAL LIBRARY.** Born in Belchertown in 1818, John Francis Clapp was a successful businessman in Brooklyn, New York. Upon his death, he left a bequest of \$40,000 for the construction of a library in his native town. The Clapp Memorial Library on South Main Street was dedicated on September 1, 1887. The building was designed in the shape of a Latin cross and is constructed of Longmeadow brownstone. The interior of the library features two elaborate stained glass windows with the muses of art, music, and literature as the central theme. One window is in memory of John Francis Clapp by his brothers Everett, Edward, and Dwight; his wife gave the other in memory of Calvin Bridgman.

**STONE HOUSE MUSEUM, FORD ANNEX & BLACKMER BUILDING.** Jonathan Dwight built the Stone House as a gift to his daughter Diantha when she married Theodore Dwight Lyman in 1827. After many years in the Dwight family, this spacious house was purchased from its heirs in 1922 for the use of the Belchertown Historical Association. Now a house museum, this Federal style home contains superb examples of American furniture, china, and decorative accessories made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Henry Ford donated money for the construction of the Ford

Annex. Ford's interest in the town stemmed from his friendship and business relationship with Belchertown native Gaston Plantiff. Local stonemasons, D.P. Spencer and his son Howard did the stone work. The Ford annex, dedicated in 1923, houses a collection of carriages made in Belchertown. The *Belchertown Sentinel* published its first issue on April 2, 1915 with over 200 subscribers paying five cents per copy. Its founder, editor, and publisher for 50 years was Lewis Blackmer, who began the *Sentinel* in his shop on Cottage Street. Blackmer retired in 1965, but the paper he founded continues to this day under different ownership. The old printing press and other equipment can now be seen in the Blackmer Print Shop at the Stone House Museum.

OLD TOWN HALL. Harrison Root built the Old Town Hall on Park Street for \$2,800 in 1865 and it hosted elections and town meetings until 1946. That year, extensive renovations transformed it into a gymnasium and it now serves as a recreation center for the schools and community.

LAWRENCE MEMORIAL HALL. Myron Lawrence was a prominent lawyer and citizen of Belchertown. He served the town as a member of the General Court for 27 years, and was a president of the Massachusetts Senate. He was instrumental in bringing the New London Northern Railroad through town. His daughter Sarah married Dr. Charles Robinson, a Belchertown doctor who moved west and became active in the Free Soil movement in "bleeding Kansas" before the Civil War. Robinson was elected governor of the territory of Kansas and later its first governor. Sarah, who died suddenly in 1911, bequeathed money for the construction of Lawrence Memorial Hall in her parents' honor. The building was completed in 1923 and once served as the town's high school. Today, it is the center of the town government.

OLD FIRE STATION. Local businessmen organized the Enterprise Hook and Ladder Company in 1887. After a conflagration in 1899, the town appropriated \$900 for apparatus and \$500 for a building to house it. Members of the Enterprise Hook and Ladder Company signed up to become the Belchertown Fire Department. The Engine House was completed in 1902 and served the community for nearly a century. In 1998, a new fire station was built and the Old Fire Station was moved across North Main Street and re-dedicated as the Belchertown Firefighters' Museum, owned by the Belchertown Firefighters' Association.

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH. The Congregational meeting house was dedicated on September 12, 1792. This building has been remodeled several times over the years. Originally, the structure was nearly square with an entryway from the west, or facing the common. The high pulpit was on the east wall and there were galleries on three sides. Major remodeling occurred in 1872 when the galleries were removed, the interior re-arranged, and the large windows constructed.

ST. FRANCIS CHURCH. The building dates to 1834 and was originally home to the Brainerd Church, a second Congregational group formed as a result of dissension over the Masonic order. When these churches reunited seven years later, the building became a Baptist church until that society disbanded in 1913. The building then served as a community hall during which time its steeple was removed. The Catholic Church acquired it in 1922.

METHODIST CHURCH. Records show a Methodist meetinghouse in southern Belchertown as early as 1819, but demand continued for services in the center of town. The first pastor, Reverend William Gordon, held services at both locations, traveling from southern Belchertown to minister in the old

Town Hall. In 1873, the Methodist Society purchased the Union Street Church, the oldest Methodist church in Springfield dating to 1823, and rebuilt it in Belchertown center.

## **2. National Register of Historic Places**

The National Register of Historic Places is a listing of structures or sites that are worthy of preservation for their significance to our nation's history, culture, architecture, or archaeology. It is a federal designation, administered through the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Listing in the National Register provides formal recognition, certain tax incentives for owners of income-producing property and limited protection from federally funded, licensed or assisted projects. However, National Register listing does not limit the owner's use of the property and places no restrictions or conditions on changes made by a private owner, unless there is federal involvement in the project.

### *Belchertown Center Historic District -- see above*

Belchertown Center Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

### *Belchertown State School, 30 State Street*

The Belchertown State School, a residential institution for people with mental retardation, was an important part of the community, and the town's largest employer, for over seventy years. The school opened in 1922 on land purchased from seven or eight families, the Town Farm, and the Deer Falls Farm. The complex of buildings was a village unto itself with its own water supply, electric plant, and its own infirmary and hospital facilities, complete with operating room, dental office, pharmacy, laboratory, and X-ray department. The state school's farm of over 200 acres supplied milk and eggs to Northampton State Hospital and Monson State Hospital, as well as for itself. Residents of the state school presented plays and pageants for the community. Changes in the way people with mental retardation were treated resulted in de-institutionalization and the closure of Belchertown State School in 1992. The Belchertown State School was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1994.

### *Walker-Collis House, 1 Stadler Street*

Myron Walker volunteered for the Union Army at age 14 and became the drummer boy for Company C of the 10th Massachusetts Infantry, serving with the Army of the Potomac and frequently under fire. Walker was successful in the insurance business in California and, upon his return to Belchertown in 1880, had an elaborate home built on the common. The following year, Walker hosted a reunion of the 10th Massachusetts, which was attended by the governor of Massachusetts. Walker served two terms in the state Senate. The house was purchased by the Collis family in 1929 and was moved to its present Stadler Street location in 1979. The location was listed in the National Register in 1982.

## **3. Other Historic Buildings and Sites [See Map 11, *Historic Sites*.]**

### *The Cold Spring*

This water source, frequented by early travelers on the path from Hadley to Brookfield (now Cold Spring Road), was the inspiration for the name by which the town was first known – Cold Spring. The spring is located on the property of the University of Massachusetts Horticultural Research Station and is marked by an historical marker.

### *Historic Homes Project*

In recent years, the Belchertown Historical Commission has begun recognizing historic buildings in town. So far, the following buildings have been so recognized with bronze plaques:

- the Washington Street School,
- the Mason Abbey Homestead (73 Federal St.),
- the Joseph Phelps house (60 N. Main St.),
- the Jonathan Grout homestead (17 Main St.), and
- the Joseph Bridgeman house (393 Bay Rd.).

#### *Stone Mile Markers*

With the settlement of Brookfield to the east, a road was laid, following the paths well-used by the aboriginal residents of the area, connecting Brookfield to Hadley and Northampton. This road became known locally as the "Bay Road" and, in Belchertown, three stones mark distances on this ancient route, though the date of origin of the stones is uncertain. The three existing stones are located at the corner of Federal Street and George Hannum Road, near Lawrence Memorial Hall on South Main Street, and at South Cemetery on Mill Valley Road.

#### *Dwight Chapel*

The cornerstone of Dwight Chapel, a non-sectarian church located on Federal Street, was laid in October 1886 and the building was dedicated on March 12, 1887. The chapel was built on land donated by Mrs. Elizabeth R. Wilson and Patrick Joy and was named in honor of Harrison Dunbar Dwight, the first freight agent for Dwight Station. Funds for the chapel were raised through a variety of creative endeavors, including raising money by making and selling 1,500 potholders. Another group made a quilt, placing the autographs of President Cleveland, his First Lady, and his mother in the center and then charged neighbors ten cents to embroider their own names into it. Others sold jellies, teas, aprons, and other products.

### **4. Archaeological Resources**

Known prehistoric sites contain evidence of human habitation prior to European settlement, particularly in the lakes region. Because of the sensitivity of these sites to vandalism, their locations are not given in this report and information about them is not widely disseminated. Potential effects on archaeological sites by proposed development are reviewed according to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act, or Massachusetts Burial legislation. In most cases, the Belchertown Historical Commission would be contacted to review any potential impacts from any proposed project near one of these sites.

### **5. Scenic Landscapes**

#### **Scenic Areas**

##### *Quabbin Reservoir*

To provide water for metropolitan Boston, the Swift River was dammed in the 1930s to create Quabbin Reservoir, submerging the towns of Dana, Prescott, Enfield, and Greenwich (in this case, this is pronounced as it appears – "Green-wich"). Many of the residents of these towns and some of their houses were relocated to Belchertown. Construction of the Windsor Dam and the Goodnough Dike lasted from 1933 through 1939, and the reservoir was filled over a seven-year period. To transport the water, a long aqueduct pipeline was laid between the Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs to supply many Massachusetts communities. In addition to its value as a drinking water source, Quabbin Reservoir is one of the finest

recreational areas in western Massachusetts. Its miles of beautiful hiking trails and picnic areas are popular with local residents and visitors alike. Limited fishing and deer hunting are possible in season. Quabbin Reservoir is under the administration of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

#### *Holland Glen*

Holland Glen is a "deep, narrow chasm with steep sides covered thickly with a growth of pine and hemlock." The water through the glen "spreads off a vast ledge, falling about 25 feet...then goes tumbling over the rocks, descending about 200 feet in a distance of half a mile..." A favorite spot for hikers, Holland Glen is currently owned by the Belchertown Historical Association and was named for Dr. Josiah Gilbert Holland, a Belchertown native who was a noted educator, publisher, and author.

#### **Scenic Roads**

As noted below in "Areas That Need Improvement," although town meeting adopted a scenic roads bylaw, Belchertown has no designated scenic roads. People were opposed to their own road being designated scenic, as they feared they would be restricted

### **6. Culturally Significant Landscapes**

#### *Belchertown State School*

As noted previously, the Belchertown State School was a significant presence -- and the town's largest employer -- for much of the twentieth century. The huge campus near the center of town represents a valuable asset in terms of the town's economic development, cultural heritage, and recreational potential. Parts of the state school land have been acquired for use as the town's senior center, police station, teen center, and other municipal purposes. The Belchertown Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, who have sold several parcels to businesses, own the bulk of the campus. However, this only scratches the surface of this property's potential.

#### *Tri-Lakes Area and Town Beach*

Belchertown has three lovely lakes, once known as Upper, Middle, and Lower Ponds, or the Bridgman Ponds. John Jackson proposed the names by which they are known today: Lake Holland, Lake Arcadia, and Lake Metacomet. Simon Kelley gave the town land on Lake Arcadia that is now the Town Beach. These beautiful lakes provide recreational enjoyment year-round from swimming and boating in the warm weather to ice skating in the winter.

#### *Quabbin Reservoir*

See the description above under "Other Scenic Areas."

#### *Agricultural Lands*

Belchertown's heritage has always been inextricably connected to the farms and pastures that demarcate the town's agricultural lands. Though few working farms are left, the town has expressed its value for the heritage embodied in its farm lands.

### **7. Cultural Activities**

#### *Belchertown Fair*

The Belchertown Fair is one of the oldest continuously-held fairs in New England and has been a special day in town since the first one was held in 1856. Originally called the Belchertown Cattle

Show, it was for many years sponsored by the Farmers and Mechanics Club (known as the Belchertown Agricultural and Mechanics Association until 1860). Early cattle shows were considered rather rowdy affairs, but more recently the fair has become a true family event. As the number of working farms has diminished, the Belchertown Fair has become an "old home day" for the town. In addition to rides, games, and entertainment, the fair still includes ox and horse pulls and other agricultural competitions as a reminder of our heritage. These days, instead of livestock, the parade on fair day displays local bands, community groups, and activities and is a huge community event. Sponsored and organized by volunteers and the Friends of the Fair, the fair is privately funded, using no town money. Since its inception, the Belchertown Fair has taken place on the town common.

#### *Concerts on the Common*

This popular summertime band concert series takes place on the common annually and is attended by hundreds of residents each Thursday evening.

### **8. Athletic Fields**

#### *Lawrence Parsons Memorial Field*

Mrs. Willing Spencer gave the land for Parsons Field to the town in memory of her father, Lawrence Parsons. The construction of the recreation area was a Works Project Administration project completed in 1940. Today, the popular park, playground, and ball fields are well-used all summer long by adults, youth, and children.

#### *Austin-Gaughan Memorial Field*

The softball field and park was named for Michael Austin and Roger Gaughan, two Belchertown residents who gave their lives in the Viet Nam Conflict.

#### *Constantino Field*

A baseball diamond and park has been designed and laid out to honor former minor leaguer Ron Constantino who served the town as Director of the Recreation Department and coach of the high school baseball team for many years.

#### *Schools*

The Belchertown schools have a complex of sport fields for football, soccer, baseball, softball and tennis.

### **9. Cemeteries**

The town's department of public works maintains nine cemeteries. These are listed in Chapter VII. Community Facilities and Services in the first table.

## **D. Analysis**

### **1. Public Preferences**

#### *Belchertown Community Survey*

As part of the Community Planning Process, a survey of Belchertown residents was conducted in 2000 to ascertain public attitudes and sentiment on key aspects of the town's future.

When asked, “to what extent do you support or oppose the Town of Belchertown preserving/protecting the following types of open space (natural areas)?” respondents *strongly supported* the following items:

- Town common
- Town lakes
- Rivers and streams
- Wooded areas
- Scenic views

When asked, “How important to you are the following types of recreational facilities in Belchertown?” respondents ranked the following as *very important*:

- Quabbin reservoir access
- Town parks
- Playgrounds
- Picnic areas
- Hiking trails
- Athletic fields
- Town beaches
- Bike trails

When asked, “To what extent do you value each of the following as reasons to live in Belchertown?” respondents included “rural small-town atmosphere,” “the town common,” and “historic buildings” among the dozen items valued the highest.

When given a large list of possible activities, Belchertown residents rated “preserve the rural elements of the town” and “encourage historic preservation” and *very important* and ranked them fourth and sixth respectively. The only items ranked with higher priority dealt with preserving environmental quality and limiting residential development.

#### *Belchertown’s Community Vision, 2000-2001*

“Maintaining Belchertown’s Rural New England Look and Feel.”

This was identified as Goal I of Belchertown’s Community Visioning Project and clearly targets the town’s historic resources and landscapes for protection. The following items supported the goal:

- Support agriculture and forestry
- Avoid degradation of natural resources
- Promote “traditional” land use with focused construction and intervening open space
- Identify, prioritize, key open space parcels for natural resource protection, agriculture/forestry, and/or recreational use
- 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 surroundings as the heart of town
- Establish standards for architecture in public places
- Avoid suburban-style roadsides

As a direct result of the visioning project, the town planning process includes activities to focus attention specifically on “open space preservation” and on “creating a plan for the town center, including preserving the town common.”

## **2. Existing Levels of Protection**

### **Belchertown Historic District Commission**

The Belchertown Historic District Commission was established in 1990 with the purpose of protecting the character of Belchertown's common and historic town center. Belchertown's Historic District (see *Inventory of Resources* section) has been recognized for its historic and architecturally significant qualities. The Historic District Bylaw Commission must review any new construction or proposed changes or alterations to the exterior of any existing property that is visible from the public purview. Any such alteration or building may be subject to a formal review process before a building permit can be obtained.

### **Belchertown Historical Commission**

The Belchertown Historical Commission has been developing the Historical Properties survey in conjunction with the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The survey involves determining the age and style of construction of the house, searching the title to identify the original owner, photographing the exterior and mapping its location, and recording the historical importance of the building. In recent years, the Historical Commission has begun recognizing historic buildings in town by offering a bronze plaque for the exterior of the structure.

### **Belchertown Historical Association**

The Belchertown Historical Association is a private, non-profit organization formed in 1903 "to promote and encourage historical, antiquarian, and genealogical investigation relating to the town of Belchertown." In 1921, the Association purchased the Dwight family house, called the Stone House, through a bequest from Harriet Dwight Longley. Today, the Stone House Museum is the headquarters of the Association and houses its impressive collection of historical artifacts and memorabilia from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## **3. Areas in Need of Improvement**

### **Historic Resources**

#### *Unprotected Historic Areas & Structures*

Most of the town's historic structures are unprotected from demolition or alteration by private owners. Only those structures lying within the town's Local Historic District are subject to any public review process, at all. Historic structures in other areas, such as the Bay Road, southern Belchertown, and along Federal Street are not so protected.

As described previously, the National Register of Historic Places provides very limited protection and only when federal money is involved (see *Inventory of Resources* section). Only this listing covers the buildings in the town center, the Belchertown State School, and the Walker-Collis House.

Three of Belchertown's most significant historical structures, the stone mile markers, are virtually unprotected. The recent development of one location for a shopping center has highlighted how much their protection is reliant on the good faith of the property owner, as the relocation of the marker may become a necessity and an issue. The other two markers, thankfully, are situated on town property, affording them a level of protection not subject to the whims of the marketplace. Still, there are issues of preservation from vandalism, accidental destruction, and the effects of auto exhaust and acid rain.

Certainly, Belchertown's many stone walls enhance its New England "look and feel," yet there are no regulations or protections preserving them. Though precedent for this is uncertain, Belchertown might consider developing protections for existing stone walls visible from public ways.

The town's cemeteries suffer from insufficient funding for maintenance. A very small allocation goes toward cemeteries, and that is used for basic mowing. Repairs to stones, walls, fences, etc. are deferred.

#### *Lack of Awareness*

Perhaps, the biggest problem underlying all historic preservation efforts is the lack of awareness and lack of respect for the town's history. The protection of both buildings and landscapes will ultimately depend upon the extent to which the citizens value them. Belchertown is fortunate to have the Stone House Museum and an Historical Association that has been active for nearly a century. Through their efforts, a healthy awareness has developed among long-time residents of the town, but the town's rapid growth and the transient nature of some of the population, point to the need for further work to increase awareness. One possible project might be for the Historical Commission and the Belchertown Historical Association to create an audiotape tour of historic locations, describing their significance to the town's development. This could be one way in which newcomers to Belchertown could learn about the town's past and create a value for preserving it.

#### *Mapping of Historic Resources*

Information about the town's historic resources should be included in the town's geographic information system, so relevant information will be readily available to the Planning Board, Town Planner and other municipal boards and commissions.

#### *Archeological Resources*

Information about archaeological sites of significance should also be included in the town's geographic information system. Inquiries should be made to the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Belchertown Historical Commission for information regarding the precise locations of such sites, though there may be some confidentiality provisions necessary.

#### *Demolition of Historic Buildings*

Belchertown has no Demolition Delay By-law, leaving all its historical properties outside the Historic District subject to immediate demolition. A Demolition Delay By-law has been used in other communities to delay proposed demolition of historic structures, for usually 3 to 6 months, to enable alternatives to be explored.

#### *Historic Structures in Need of Rehabilitation*

Historic structures in need of rehabilitation or repair, both public and private, might benefit from a pool of funds administered by the town that could be used for low- or no-interest loans or grants for these purposes. The town would benefit from having improved appearances and some measure of approval over the designs.

#### **Scenic Vistas Protection Bylaw**

Currently, Belchertown has no protection for scenic vistas – the views of mountains, hills, and rolling terrain and add to the quality of our everyday life. Wilbraham has a bylaw that takes effect above 550

feet of elevation and covers new construction that might be visible from a public area. New buildings must be sensitive to the terrain, existing vegetation, and viewsheds.

### Scenic Roads Bylaw

As a result of the 2002 Community Plan, town meeting adopted a scenic roads bylaw. A subsequent town meeting voted down all the specific roads that had been nominated to become scenic roads under the bylaw. Thus, we have scenic roads bylaw with no designated scenic roads. Other towns have used scenic roads bylaws to designate certain roads for increased, though limited, protection from actions related to the repair, maintenance, reconstruction, or paving of the road. Typically, under a scenic roads bylaw, such actions would require a public hearing and Planning Board approval prior to beginning the project. These bylaws only pertain to the public right-of-way.

### Agricultural Preservation Zone

Although zoning for only agricultural uses is not permitted, a zoning bylaw can be changed to support agricultural uses. Such a bylaw would protect and promote farming by preserving the lands on which it is most viable. The bylaw could require all new subdivisions in the designated agricultural preservation overlay zone to be clustered on areas least suitable for agriculture and livestock. In addition, dwelling units would be located away from farms and road and drainage systems are to be designed for the least possible impact on agricultural lands and uses. Accessory uses on farmland such as conference centers, restaurants, or other small businesses, could be permitted, thereby allowing farm owners to diversify the sources of their incomes.

### E. Implementation Actions for Cultural Resources

I.D. & Priority	Action	When Initiate	Remarks:	*Leadership and others who should be involved
HC-1	Establish a town policy to define and protect scenic vistas and views from town ways.			*Planning Board
HC-2	Develop and adopt a demolition notification bylaw to allow time to consider alternatives to losing historic structures.		This is pending.	*Historical Commission BoS, Consultant
HC-3	Increase awareness of local history and historic structures and sites in order to improve protection efforts, i.e., audiotape waling tour of the town center.			*Historical Commission Belchertown Historical Assoc., NESFI
HC-4	Recognize and document historic structures and sites via the Historical Commission's Historic Properties Survey.		In progress through CPA grant	*Historical Commission
HC-4a	Explore feasibility of funding pool for restoration/maintenance of historic buildings based on inclusion in Historic Properties Survey.		Passage of Community Preservation Act supports this Action Step	*Historical Commission
HC-4b	Consider developing protections for existing stonewalls visible from town ways.		Tools other than Scenic Roads bylaw should be explored	*Planning Board Historical Commission
HC-5	Include information about town's historic		Further	*Historical

	resources and archaeological sites in town's GIS database.		development of town GIS database needs support.	Commission
HC-6	Research requirements for Massachusetts and National Historic Register nomination.			*Historical Commission

## Completed Actions

I.D.	Action	Date Completed	Remarks:
	Create a plan for the town center, including preserving character of town common.		
	Conduct a public workshop to develop a community vision for the town center, that will examine things like design guidelines for construction, utility poles, pedestrian amenities, street lighting, parking, signage, etc.		Workshop was held; vision was established. Action limited.
	Draft a town Scenic Roads bylaw (based on GL Ch 40, 515) and designate scenic roads in Town.		Bylaw passed by town meeting; no scenic roads designated to date.
	Consider modifying current zoning bylaws to support agricultural uses.	2007	Work completed by Agricultural Commission
	Research preservation steps for the stone mile markers.	2005	Work completed by the Historical Commission