

CHAPTER 10 OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

During Harvard's Phase I Master Plan process, the Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) developed a new master plan vision, a series of goals to work toward over the next ten years, and a list of five critical planning issues. Largely informed by Phase I surveys and public outreach conducted by the MPSC and its consultants, the vision and goals reflect what many residents think about their town today and what they want it to be in the future. Though reorganized and expressed somewhat differently, the Phase I vision is very similar to the vision of the 1998 and 2002 Master Plans. What Harvard residents value and how they see the Town have endured over time. All of the goal statements relate at some level to the key planning issues, and they, too, are very similar to the issues identified in previous Plans. The most significant change is the desire to understand and resolve the long-term local governance of Devens.

1. VISION & GOALS

Vision

In 2025, Harvard will be a town that continues to foster a strong and vibrant sense of community and place, embraces careful stewardship and enhancement of its natural, historic and cultural resources, understands a clear direction in its role in Devens' governance, and employs best practices for achieving long-term sustainability. An informed and involved community is critical to accomplishing this vision.

Master Plan Goals

Harvard has a robust sense of community and place:

- Encourage a strong volunteer government and provide necessary staff support
- Encourage active civic life through public and private institutions and organizations
- Develop housing to accommodate a diversity of needs and population
- Foster a variety of gathering places for all generations
- Maintain the Town Center as the institutional, civic and cultural heart of the community, as envisioned in the 2005 Town Center Action Plan

Harvard has a defined role in Devens:

- Analyze fiscal and community impact of Devens on Harvard
- Use public outreach and education to ascertain Harvard's preferred direction and promote the awareness of the stake Harvard has in Devens in terms of economic sustainability, governance, schools, and the civic life of the Town
- Collaborate with Devens' stakeholders, including Ayer, Shirley and MassDevelopment
- Decide on Harvard's role in local governance of Devens

Harvard is assured long-term sustainability:

- Develop plans for investment in public infrastructure, buildings and equipment
- Diversify and strengthen the Town's revenue base
- Invest in near and long-term energy efficiencies
- Encourage retail and commercial activities of appropriate size and in appropriate locations as determined by residents and market
- Develop planning to recover from disasters in the core information technology infrastructure for Town-wide management.

Harvard engages in judicious stewardship of natural, historic and cultural resources:

- Preserve and enhance historic buildings and cultural resources
- Identify and protect critical natural resource areas
- Restore and/or maintain key viewsheds
- Support agricultural heritage and farms
- Preserve stone walls and shade trees along rural roads
- Adopt best management practices on public conservation lands and disseminate them to the public

2. KEY PLANNING ISSUES

Harvard's Phase I report identifies five priority issues that need to be addressed in this Master Plan update: Devens, the Commercial District, Housing, the Town Center, and Conservation. They are cross-cutting issues, i.e., challenges that require actions under more than one Master Plan element. The following section examines each issue and is followed by associated recommendations for the Master Plan elements.

1. DEVENS

The overarching purpose of Chapter 498 was to create good, durable jobs in a region that was about to lose a large share of its employment base. To accomplish this, the State Legislature intervened, and under Chapter 498 created a special district, the Devens Enterprise Zone, and designated the Massachusetts Government Land Bank – now MassDevelopment – to serve as the local redevelopment agency with a forty-year charter. Chapter 498 also established the Devens Enterprise Commission (DEC), a “one-stop” permitting agency for development at Devens, and granted funding of \$200 million to cover the infrastructure and operating costs that would be needed to make Devens viable. Chapter 498 seemed like the best possible solution for gaining control over the base closure process, and in many ways it has worked well.

However, not enough thought was given to the eventual local governance of Devens or the status of the 282 households that would eventually call Devens their home. Living in the midst of a large commerce park imposes quality of life impacts, such as traffic, noise, and views of industrial uses that may affect property values. Furthermore, MassDevelopment makes major decisions that residents cannot change, such as deciding which school system the children will attend. And residents do not enjoy the privileges associated with living in Harvard, such as participating Council on Aging activities. The target of 282 households will not provide a large enough

population to form an effective base of governance.

As conceived in the legislation, the redevelopment process delegated specific powers to each interested party : municipal operations, infrastructure improvements, marketing and real estate development decisions in MassDevelopment’s hands; zoning, permitting, and enforcement in the DEC’s hands, and oversight in the hands of the three towns, acting through the advisory Joint Boards of Selectmen (JBOS)⁷²Just as the Reuse Plan required an affirmative vote of all three towns, so does any amendment to it, however minor. Together, Chapter 498 and the Devens Reuse Plan comprise a type of “indissoluble union” between the state and the three towns, unchangeable except by mutual consent of all of the parties – unless the legislature decides otherwise. By 2033, MassDevelopment and the Towns must submit a report to the Governor and Legislature with a recommendation on a permanent government structure. The longer-term plan could range from returning land to Harvard, Ayer, and Shirley to creating an entirely new town; MassDevelopment and DEC could remain in some way or simply terminate their involvement at Devens. Harvard, for its part adopted “Acceptance Criteria” which set forth actions to occur before the Town would be willing to resume jurisdiction of its portion of Devens. (See Appendix 3.)

To most people following the evolution of Devens from base closure in 1995 to construction of the state’s first major film production studio in 2014, Devens is a success story. Approximately 4,000 people work for public or private employers located there. But Devens is more than an industrial park; it includes retail and commercial uses, a federal medical center, parks and ballfields, zero net energy homes, and diverse open space, including the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. When Harvard finished the last Master Plan update in 2002, townspeople were already affected by the rapid pace of development at Devens. Buildout under the Devens Reuse Plan had progressed well ahead of schedule, so while MassDevelopment was doing its job, residents of North Harvard found themselves living with the associated traffic and noise impacts . Families had moved into the first phase of Devens housing, almost all of it located on Harvard soil, yet they lacked many of the basic rights and privileges of Harvard citizenship. In the beginning, many in Harvard opposed admitting Devens children to the Harvard public schools because of Harvard’s increasing enrollments at the time, so Shirley accepted them instead. As student enrollment declined, Harvard had available capacity in the schools to accommodate Devens students and received fair compensation from MassDevelopment to cover their educational expenses. Today, Devens children attend school in Harvard in exchange for per-pupil fees that MassDevelopment pays to the Town. There seems to be general agreement that the present arrangement benefits everyone. There is no distinction in the schools between students from Devens and Harvard proper. By 2020, however, the school contract will have to be put out for bid again.

For the sake of both Devens and Harvard residents, it makes sense to begin working now on a plan for Devens’ future. Still, while Harvard can influence the decision, the state legislature will ultimately determine what Devens becomes. . To Harvard, there are two key considerations: fiscal impact and cultural compatibility. From the Commonwealth’s perspective, there is far more at stake.

⁷² The Boards of Selectmen of Ayer, Harvard, Lancaster and Shirley formed the Joint Boards of Selectmen (JBOS) in 1992 to provide a forum for addressing issues of mutual concern relating to the closure of Devens and its subsequent redevelopment. By the December 1994 Memorandum of Understanding, the JBOS was designated the official advisory body to the state regarding issues of concern to the towns arising from MassDevelopment’s activities pursuant to Chapter 498.

1A Harvard's Goals for Devens

- Be engaged and informed participants in planning for Devens' development and governance.
- Set a timeline for determining Harvard's preferred direction with respect to local governance of Devens.
- Understand the full scale of potential benefits and liabilities related to jurisdiction.
- Ensure decision on local governance results in a positive outcome for Harvard and other stakeholders, including the Commonwealth, the region, and our neighbor towns.
- Keep Devens' neighborhoods intact.

1B Fiscal Impact Analysis

Many Harvard residents want to decide now rather than several years from now what the Town's position should be about the disposition of Devens. The Town has framed the conversation about Devens around two key issues, the more critical being the fiscal impact of resuming jurisdiction.

The Devens Economic Analysis Team (DEAT) in Harvard has done a commendable job of analyzing MassDevelopment's financial reports, and it understands the revenues and service costs associated with Devens. In 2014, the DEAT estimated the operating revenues for Devens municipal services at \$3.7 million (rounded) including \$2.8 million (rounded) from real estate taxes. Based on an analysis of several Massachusetts towns with populations similar to Harvard (including Devens), and a commercial tax base comparable to that at Devens, the DEAT estimated what Harvard would spend to serve the Devens community by deriving an average per capita cost in the reference towns and using it to project total residential and nonresidential spending. The approach seems reasonable, but the reference towns are so different from Harvard in all other ways that another approach should be tried and compared with the DEAT's model. In its 2015 Report (its final one) DEAT concluded that Devens will soon become fiscally positive, i.e. tax revenues will be more than sufficient to cover costs of operations. "The analysis herein shows that Devens would be economically sustainable as part of the Town of Harvard should that be the preference of the Town, and that Devens has considerable additional economic potential." (Appendix 5, page 4)

Municipal Service Costs Per Sq. Ft.: In one "rule-of-thumb" approach, analysts assume that the average cost of municipal services for retail, restaurant, and related hospitality uses range from \$0.86 to \$0.95 per sq. ft., and for office and industrial uses, \$0.60 to \$0.68 per sq. ft.⁷³ There is always a cost to provide municipal services to nontaxable uses, too. The cost varies significantly depending on the type of use (e.g., charitable, religious, educational) and its location, but for purposes of an order-of-magnitude estimate, most analysts adopt the office and industrial cost

⁷³ Center for Urban Policy Research (CUPR) at Rutgers University and RKG Associates, Inc. In studies of commercial developments in other towns, RKG has found that the ratio ranges reported by CUPR generally hold true.

Municipal Services:

The General Fund

- General Government
 - Police
 - Fire
 - Inspectional Services
 - Department of Public Works
 - Library
 - Recreation
 - Human Services
 - Fixed Costs
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per sq. ft. According to information from MassDevelopment, the combined gross floor area in nonresidential facilities at Devens, located within Harvard, is approximately 4.5 million sq. ft. (rounded).⁷⁴ Divided into broad classes of retail and office/industrial use (including the nontaxable facilities), the estimated cost of General Fund services is \$2,980,600.

Table 10.1 - Estimated Cost of Municipal Services for Nonresidential Land Uses at Devens (Existing Conditions)

Class of Use	Floor Area (Rounded)	Cost Multiplier	Municipal Service Cost (Rounded)
Retail/Hospitality	430,200	\$0.91	\$391,500
Office/Industrial	4,045,400	\$0.64	\$2,589,100
Total	4,475,600		\$2,980,600

The cost of residential services can be estimated on an order-of-magnitude basis with average cost multipliers as well. In FY 2013, the average per-pupil cost for K-12 students at the Harvard Public Schools was approximately \$14,600.⁷⁵ ⁷⁶ In addition, the average per capita cost of municipal services for residents was \$1,050.⁷⁷ Assuming 74 students from Devens and a total household population of 219 (Census 2010), the cost of residential services is \$1,310,400. Since this estimate relies on average cost assumptions, it is very conservative, i.e., at least for near-term purposes, it overstates service costs. Adding one student to the Harvard Public Schools will not “cost” \$14,600, but adding fifty students all at once could cost more than \$14,600 per pupil depending on the marginal cost to the school district. Nevertheless, many communities prefer the average cost approach because it is easy for the public to understand and builds in a buffer against unforeseen costs. It also tends to be a fairly good indicator of long-term service costs (in current dollars).

Table 10.2 - Estimated Cost of Municipal and School Services for Residential Land Uses at Devens (Existing Conditions)

	Number	Cost Multiplier	Cost of Municipal & School Services
Household Population	219	\$1,050	\$230,000
School Students	74	\$14,600	\$1,080,400
Total			\$1,310,400

⁷⁴ Devens Assessors, “deat_normandreconciliation_fy2012_fy2013” (March 2014; November 2014).

⁷⁵ Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), “School District Expenditures, All Funds, by Function: FY11-FY13”.

⁷⁶ By FY 2015, the average cost per pupil had increased to \$15,522.

⁷⁷ Author’s Note. This figure assumes 80 percent of the Town’s FY 2013 expenditures for general government, police, fire, inspectional services, public works; 50 percent of fixed costs, and 100 percent of the Town’s library and recreation expenditures, divided by the Town’s estimated 2012 population (source of expenditures and population data): Massachusetts Department of Revenue).

Adding the figures from Table 10.2 and 10.3, I total estimated cost of municipal and school services at Devens, in FY 2013 dollars, is \$4,291,000. Considering real estate taxes alone, without any factor for additional non-tax revenue sources, such as auto excise taxes and state aid, the total tax revenue generated by taxpaying residential and nonresidential properties would be approximately \$3,384,900, again in FY 2013 dollars.⁷⁸ The deficit is -\$906,100 (rounded). However, this is an “as-is” estimate. It does not account for full build-out under the Devens Reuse Plan or the revenue increase that will occur as existing Tax Increment Financing (TIF) agreements expire. Moreover, it does not account for the probability that housing values at Devens would increase if the residential addresses converted from Devens to Harvard.

**Table 10-3 - Summary of Modeling Estimate:
Costs and Revenues (Existing Conditions)**

Class of Use	Service Costs	Revenues	Difference
Residential	\$1,310,400	\$439,800	-\$870,600
Nonresidential	\$2,980,600	\$2,945,100	-\$35,500
Total	\$4,291,000	\$3,384,900	-\$906,100

An estimate of total service costs helps, but usually communities want to know how an economic event will affect particular departments. For a small town like Harvard, this seems particularly important. The model summarized in Table 10.4 sheds light on the question, also in FY 2013 dollars.

Table 10-4 - Allocation of New Municipal Service Costs to Service Categories

Municipal Service	Nonresidential		Residential		Total
	Allocation	Result	Allocation	Result	
General Government	10%	\$298,060	10%	\$23,000	\$321,060
Public Safety	50%	\$1,490,300	25%	\$57,500	\$1,547,800
Public Works	22%	\$655,732	25%	\$57,500	\$713,232
Culture & Recreation	0%	\$0	8%	\$18,400	\$18,400
Human Services	2%	\$59,612	12%	\$27,600	\$87,212
Fixed Costs	16%	\$476,896	20%	\$46,000	\$522,896
Education			100%	\$1,080,400	\$1,080,400
Total Cost of Services	100%	\$2,980,600	100%	\$1,310,400	\$4,291,000
*Based on costs estimated in Table 10.3.					
Service cost ratios from Rutgers University, Center for Urban Policy Research.					

⁷⁸ Devens Assessors, “deat_normandreconciliation_fy2012_fy2013” (March 2014; Nov. 2014), and RKG Associates, Inc. The tax revenue estimate is simply the sum of assessed values of taxable property, reported by the Devens Assessors as of July 2013, divided by 1,000 and multiplied by the applicable FY 2013 tax rate.

These estimates help to illustrate what Harvard’s financial obligations might be if the Town resumed jurisdiction today. For example, in FY 2013, Harvard spent \$1.4 million on police, fire, and emergency medical services. Given the amount of development that exists in parts of Devens it would not be surprising to see the Town’s public safety budget double (or more) if Harvard became responsible for providing municipal services. Depending on how the services are actually delivered, however – such as an inter-local fire/EMS department – perhaps the cost could be reduced. A regional fire department serving Harvard, Devens, and Ayer should be explored further and considered as part of a future fiscal impact case study.

Service Costs Per Employee: Another approach to estimating service costs assumes that the size of the employment base can be used to estimate nonresidential service costs. To underscore how divergent fiscal impact analyses can be, there is a significant difference between the conclusions of this model and the estimates shown above. For analytical purposes, the model counts each employee as the equivalent of one-half of a local resident and multiplies the result by the community’s average cost of municipal services per capita. (This stems from industry standard practices of counting employees as 0.25 to 0.5 of a resident for capital improvement projects, e.g., water and sewer infrastructure.) The resulting estimate of nonresidential service costs is \$2,115,800, and the total cost of General Fund services (including residents) would be \$3,426,200. This is over \$800,000 less than the estimated deficit in Table 10.3.

**Table 10-5 - Alternative Model:
Costs and Revenues (Existing Conditions)**

Class	Input	Cost Multiplier	Total
Employees (50% of 4,030)	2015	\$1,050	\$2,115,800
Household Population	219	\$1,050	\$230,000
Students	74	\$14,600	\$1,080,400
Total Service Costs			\$3,426,200
Real Estate Tax Revenues			\$3,384,900
Surplus/Deficit			-\$41,300

Utilities: None of the examples shown here includes utility costs at Devens because they are accounted for separately on an enterprise basis. Whenever final disposition of Devens occurs, ownership and management of the utilities operated there will have to be determined. The operation and assets could be sold to a private utility company, or assumed by a public utility owned and operated by a consortium of the three towns, by one of the three towns, or by some other entity created by the state. Decisions about the fate of the utilities at Devens should be made following an assessment of each utility’s income and operations and an appraisal of the utility assets. Water and sewer rates should be sufficient to cover routine operating and capital costs and accumulate sufficient reserves to pay for eventual upgrade or replacement costs.

1C Issues

The future disposition of Devens will affect all aspects of running the Town: town management, finance, schools, public facilities, and economic development – tasks for which Harvard may need to actively prepare. If Harvard decides to pursue re-establishing its authority over the land at Devens, it will be important for the Town to address the following matters:

- **Professional, Centralized Government.** As currently organized, Harvard’s form of government may not be adequate to serve Devens with its many employers and over 4,000 workers, which may eventually top 7,000). The existing decentralized framework, with many elected officials and a Town Administrator position that lacks executive powers, is not designed to support basic economic development, planning, and service delivery functions. Rather, it is designed for shared or overlapping powers, deliberation, consensus building, and decision-making by committee. Business owners usually expect a timely response to their municipal service needs; competent, approachable staff who can answer their questions and work with them; and an efficient decision-making process. As of the writing of this Plan, Harvard is examining its government structure in order to consider changes that might improve its efficiency and add new professional capacity.
- **Capacity for Economic Development.** If Harvard assumes jurisdiction over Devens at some point in the future, it will need to establish open, timely, consistent communications with the businesses there . One key to the success of Devens is the expedited permitting process, which the Devens Enterprise Commission oversees. This process, or something similar, should be retained.
- **Economic Development Organization:** Harvard has very little information about what matters to Devens employers, or generally how to meet service expectations in an employment center as large as Devens. It would make sense for Harvard to establish a competent economic development organization , and develop both the understanding and capacity to address the needs of commercial taxpayers. A decision will also have to be made about MassDevelopment’s future role, if any, as a redevelopment agency. Regardless of whether MassDevelopment stays on in some capacity, Harvard will need its own economic development director or coordinator and an effective framework for communicating with businesses.
- **Housing and Neighborhood Development:** During this Master Plan process, several people commented on the need to include Devens households into Harvard culture and politics, yet there seems to be very limited knowledge of the Devens neighborhoods. Development at Devens has proceeded largely according to the Reuse Plan, which is a testament to the effectiveness of the planning process. A good Plan, excellent infrastructure, and expedited permitting spurred large-scale commercial and industrial development in accordance with the wishes of the communities.

Devens has the water and sewer infrastructure to support multifamily housing and higher density single-family homes. In 2015, MassDevelopment sought and achieved approval by all three communities to re-zone property in Shirley’s portion Devens to accommodate a 120-unit senior residential development. This approval occurred outside of the housing cap. Furthermore, as economic growth occurs at Devens and in the I-495 corridor, there is likely to be additional market pressure over the next several years to increase the amount

of workforce housing in the region. This could affect several aspects of the Town, including education (the capacity of the Harvard school system to absorb additional students), Town politics (if Devens residents choose to vote in town elections and at Town Meeting), added traffic, and enhanced consumer spending.

Harvard has already taken strides to integrate Devens residents into Town affairs. There is no distinction, for example, between Harvard and Devens students in the school system. Seniors from Devens frequently participate in Council on Aging activities, but because they do not pay property taxes to Harvard, participants pay if there is a cost. However, Devens seniors cannot use Harvard's MART van for transportation since it is reserved just for Harvard residents and is partially supported by Harvard payments.

Finally, while operating as an Army base, a neighborhood of military housing arose straddling the Ayer-Harvard town line. These homes are now occupied as private residences. If each town resumes jurisdiction of its historic lands, this neighborhood will be divided, with residents becoming members of the town depending upon which side of the line their homes fall. The disposition process should give some consideration to maintaining the integrity of the neighborhood.

- **Open Space:** The Devens Reuse Plan provides that a substantial portion of the land at Devens will be protected open space. According to data assembled for an update of the Devens Open Space and Recreation Plan, there are 1,241.2 acres of permanently protected open space at Devens and another 198 acres in progress for conservation restrictions (CRs). The Trustees of Reservations and New England Forestry Foundation hold CRs on about 224 acres and have the ability to enforce the terms of the restriction through legal remedies, including seeking restoration of a site to a condition prior to a violation. Harvard needs to consider whether it has the capacity to take on stewardship of the protected lands at Devens, and if not, how it will go about gaining the capacity it would need.
- **Traffic and Circulation:** In 2002, few Devens-related topics raised more anxiety in Harvard than the prospect of reopening an old, now-closed road between Harvard and Devens. There still seems to be considerable concern about it today. This is especially true for the residents of North Harvard, where the impact of truck traffic to and from Devens contributes to the volume, speed, and general safety concerns that residents have along Ayer Road. While some Harvard residents believe a direct connection between Harvard and Devens will be key for building a sense of community, not everyone agrees. It is clear that any opening of road access will generate vocal opposition in Harvard. Depot Road and Old Mill Road are two likely candidates for re-connecting the two communities because of their direct access into Devens. The Town will need to weigh the merits and drawbacks of restoring vehicular access to Devens. Without such a connection, requiring vehicles to leave Harvard to access a large section of the reunited Town (Devens) will be an inconvenience for residents but poses a much more critical issue for police, fire, ambulance and school transportation services. Other options may be easier to implement because of cost and reduced opposition, such as a bikeway.

2. AYER ROAD COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

The Commercial(C) District on Ayer Road north of Route 2 serves as the Town's primary non-residential services area and has presented difficult challenges in Harvard for a long time. The

district is long, oddly configured, and substantially underutilized. The Town needs to commit to progressive planning in these locations and resist the temptation to let “unknowns” about Devens interfere with making Harvard a better place for everyone.

2A Harvard's Goals for the C District

- Diversify Harvard's economy and tax base with an appropriate mix of residential and commercial development in the Commercial District.
- Work with existing and new businesses to attract commercial services that fit the Town.
- Decrease barriers and increase incentives for attracting new business.
- Work with adjacent neighborhoods, Town residents, and other stakeholders to facilitate planning and coordination prior to any permitting processes.
- Understand the relationship between economic development of the C-District and Devens, in terms of various factors such as transportation and circulation, conservation, and housing.

2B Vision

It is not clear how much support exists to spur commercial growth in the C District. Residents had mixed feelings about the desirability of more commercial development when Harvard prepared the 1988 and 2002 Master Plans, and it seems that they still have mixed feelings. In Harvard today, nonresidential property— including commercial real estate and personal property – accounts for less than 5 percent of the Town's total assessed valuation. A survey conducted as part of the Phase 1 Master Plan process indicates that residents remain somewhat divided about the benefits of business development. For example, many respondents said they could support business development in the C district on Ayer Road if the development generates more tax revenue, and about half of the respondents to a Master Plan survey said the Town could improve how it meets the needs of residents by allowing local eateries and a grocery store. Still, residents worry about the impacts of commercial growth on Harvard's wetlands and water resources, and traffic on Ayer Road. Viewed in their entirety, the survey responses imply fear of large-scale or otherwise incompatible development in Harvard. In fact, a measurable change in the tax base would require significant commercial activity in the C District; however, adequate utilities do not exist to support a more intensive land use pattern, and increased traffic would exacerbate conflicts on Ayer Road without developer mitigation and a substantial public investment in road improvements.

The lack of clarity or direction in the C District makes it difficult to forecast how Ayer Road will develop. In addition, the amount of development that could occur in full build-out is very difficult to forecast. Given available data and the provisions of Harvard's zoning, the potential build-out in the C District could range from 1.1 to 1.8 million sq. ft. of floor space, but this is only a mathematical calculation and does not reflect the practicality of how the area could be developed without public water and sewer service

2C Zoning

Harvard's Zoning Bylaw is difficult to navigate, and its commercial development regulations in particular lack clarity and suitability for the purposes they purport to serve. While the Town's zoning outlines several goals for development in the C District, they are not supported with

appropriate dimensional regulations or design guidelines. As explained in 2002, “the Zoning Bylaw sponsors development outcomes that differ from the goals of the Master Plan.”

After the 2002 Plan, Harvard adopted an “Ayer Road Village Special Permit” provision (§ 125-52) that is intended to encourage small-scale mixed use projects and simultaneously reduce curb cuts and encourage parcel assembly. Properties qualify only if they have 300 feet of frontage on Ayer Road, so the provision has limited utility. While the Ayer Road Special Permit made some sense at the time it was adopted, it is generally inconsistent with more successful “best practices” approaches to incentivizing compact nodes of commercial activity and village form. If anything, zoning for compact mixed uses today would call for smaller lots and less lot frontage per site, provided that adjoining properties have some type of shared access and shared parking. The irony of the zoning on Ayer Road today – both the basic requirements that apply in the C District and the Ayer Road Village Special Permit provision – is that it all but prescribes the opposite of small-scale, organic, village-style development.

In addition, many of the properties that front on Ayer Road are “split lots,” or parcels located in more than one district. Most communities have zoning to clarify the use and dimensional rules that apply to so-called split lots, but it seems that Harvard does not. The C District also includes properties that may not be appropriate candidates for commercial development, e.g., an orchard. To preserve the two farms in the district, the owners could apply for agricultural preservation restrictions (APRs) or pursue an ARVSP to cluster commercial buildings while preserving productive farmland. While the C District’s use regulations may be intended to achieve tight control over the mix of business on Ayer Road, the uses are so narrowly defined that Harvard may have tied the hands of applicants and the Planning Board too much. Some of the use terminology is archaic, too. Finally, and most importantly, the C

District requires very deep minimum front setbacks – land between the front of a building and the street – which is not conducive to creating a village “feel” on Ayer Road. Together, the district’s deep front setbacks, building size limitations, and height limits call for development forms that seem antithetical to everything Harvard residents say they want to see in their commercial district.

The zoning on Ayer Road north of Route 2 has not delivered the desired outcomes of a commercial district. While permissible uses allow a wide range of businesses to open, the physical restrictions on development including setbacks and density do not. Moreover, for the businesses that do open, the Town has no design standards or guidelines in place to promote the New England character that Harvard residents value. Current zoning encourages “strip development,” for which there is general opposition in Harvard. The fate of Ayer Road is made

Stated Purposes of the C District (§125-23)

- To permit “shopping and business services type land uses that meet the needs of the local community rather than the region.”
 - To foster “a traditional New England village form of development of appropriate scale, character, vernacular architecture, design, and detail.”
 - To create “opportunities for mixed use development, pedestrian interaction, and a vibrant village atmosphere.”
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even more complicated by the inability of town officials to agree on an approach to commercial development that would be realistic for investors on the one hand, and protective of the Town's community character interests on the other hand. To address these concerns, the Planning Board is preparing Design Guidelines to demonstrate a more compact and less auto-oriented approach to development in the C District. To accomplish this vision, the Board should propose zoning amendments to alter the strip commercial character that presently exists. Harvard needs a clear strategy for economic development and its town boards must work together to implement it.

2D Market

At the Harvard Planning Board's request, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) prepared a report in 2014 with a variety of socio-demographic, market, and commercial indicators for Harvard and 10-, 20-, and 30-minute drive times around the C District. The 10-minute drive area includes almost all of Harvard and significant portions of the adjacent towns. Together, the three areas in MRPC's study represent where the C District's customers are likely to come from and where competing businesses are located. However, the 10-minute drive is a focal point because it comprises the trade area for most of the patrons or clients of Ayer Road businesses.

According to MRPC, moderate population growth is expected to continue in the 10-minute drive area, from 25,600 people in 2010 to 27,300 by 2019, representing a 6.6 percent change. Similarly, this area had 9,000 households in 2010 and it is expected to have about 9,700 households by 2019, for a projected 7.8 percent household growth rate. In 2013, the median disposable household income was nearly \$72,950, with slightly more than 35 percent of the households having disposable incomes of over \$100,000. Divided into householder age cohorts, the highest median disposable household income, at \$98,650, was among those between 45 and 54 years, a group that represents 26.7 percent of all households. Together, the trade area's 9,100 households (2013) generated \$390.4 million in total retail demand, including \$67.7 million for groceries and \$40.0 million for dining and drinking. However, sales within the C District market area were just \$158.5 million, indicating significant sales "leakage" or local demand lost to other locations. The leakage estimate includes \$26.1 million for groceries and \$19.8 million for dining and drinking. The potential re-capture of this leakage represents an opportunity for existing merchants in the C District and may serve to attract new retail development. However, the Town's vision for development in the C District is often inconsistent with market/developer requirements. For example, many grocers require locations with high volume traffic counts, but the residents of North Harvard are concerned about existing traffic on Ayer Road, let alone any increase.

Overall, the data assembled by MRPC indicate that substantial spending power exists in Harvard – spending power that could support more local commercial activity, including retail sales and services. However, much of this potential is currently captured by businesses outside of Harvard, based on geography and shopping/commuter patterns. The C District has the potential to capture a greater share of the discretionary spending by residents of Harvard and others who use Ayer Road as a commuter route or for whom Ayer Road would be a fairly convenient place to shop. According to parcel data from the Harvard assessor's office, there are eighty-two parcels of land located wholly or partially in the C-District. One third are identified as being in commercial use, predominantly as personal services or professional and business services. There are very few stores and restaurants.

The level and type of commercial activity in the C District is typical of a neighborhood corridor supported by scattered residential development and limited municipal utilities. The

demographics surrounding the C District indicate a need for additional locally oriented retail and professional/personal services targeted to small business entities. Demand will grow incrementally, over time, and may eventually produce the “traditional New England village” character on Ayer Road that Harvard wants to see. This type of demand is influenced by economic cycles and financial constraints, resulting in development challenges due to the lack of economies of scale and many of the location factors that drive major real estate projects.

If Harvard wants to encourage better commercial development in the C District, the Town will need to consider changing its zoning requirements, invest in public utilities (at the very least, a shared wastewater treatment facility or connection to the Devens sewer system), and work with MRPC and state officials to secure traffic safety improvements to Ayer Road. Implementing the recommendations of the Ayer Road “Functional Design Report” will help to solve congestion and safety issues along the highway and benefit residents of near-by neighborhoods who have difficulty entering the flow of traffic during peak hours. In addition, Harvard needs to consider empowering an Economic Development Committee or Commission to promote Harvard as a place where small businesses can grow and thrive. A Town Planner or Economic Development Director can assist with business recruitment, retention, and local permitting. It would make sense for Harvard to consider reducing the size of the C District and promoting more compact commercial and mixed-use development activity in a smaller, strategically located area. Professional organizations, notably the MRPC, the 495/MetroWest Partnership, and the Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce, offer technical assistance to promote economic development.

3. HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

Harvard residents have been concerned about housing for a very long time. During Phase I of the Master Plan process and in subsequent roundtable meetings for Phase II, residents named several problems associated with housing in Harvard: lack of housing diversity, the need to preserve Harvard’s town character, and Chapter 40B, the state’s affordable housing law. They also had concerns about the inability of seniors to downsize in their homes and about the merits of zoning for more housing in the Town Center and the C District. Debates are also evident in the overarching question of how to (or whether to) grow, with or without the possible inclusion of Devens. However, while Devens offers a unique opportunity for diversifying Harvard’s housing stock, the Town does not control development there today and may not have that control for another eighteen years (or more). In addition, concentrating housing options at Devens would not meet one of Harvard’s Master Plan housing goals: to provide more variety of housing throughout the Town.

3A Harvard’s Goals for Housing

- Increase the diversity of housing types in Harvard to meet the needs of a greater variety of households.
- Ensure that new housing is harmonious in design with the character of the community.
- Provide a greater variety of housing throughout Harvard.
- Be proactive in meeting the state’s affordable housing goals.

3B Housing Choices

Providing more types of housing will remain very difficult for Harvard, just as it was when Charles Elliot prepared Harvard's first Master Plan in the late 1960s. Although many Harvard residents care about housing variety and affordability, the Town's regulatory framework promotes large homes on private lots and creates barriers to other housing types. The lack of water and sewer infrastructure also inhibits housing development. In many parts of Harvard, the soils are not well suited to on-site septic systems, so the combination of regulatory, physical, and infrastructure constraints make housing diversity a difficult goal to achieve.

Nevertheless, Harvard does have opportunities to create and preserve a wider variety of homes, but the political will has to exist to pursue them. For example:

- Create a District for Multifamily Housing. Changing the tradition of a "one-size-fits-all" residential district and rezoning some areas for moderately dense housing would go a long way toward helping Harvard meet its housing goals. Doing so would be consistent with recommendations made in Harvard's 2011 and 2004 housing plans, too.
- Broaden the Cluster Bylaw to incentivize construction of small houses and cottages to meet needs of seniors who wish to downsize from large single-family homes. Harvard could replace its existing cluster bylaw with the state's new natural resources protection model, which provides for compact development of a variety of housing by right. Undeniably, Harvard has difficult-to-develop land in many parts of town; however, some areas are relatively developable, and Chapter 40B developers have been able to make some projects work with shared septic systems.
- Allow Accessory Apartments by Right. Accessory dwelling units inside a single-family home or perhaps above a detached garage would pave the way for creating small, relatively inconspicuous housing units throughout the Town. In the past, most towns allowed accessory units only by special permit, but this practice is changing. Contrary to popular belief, the "by right" option does not "open the floodgates" to housing growth. Homeowners generally create accessory units to meet a family need. Sometimes when that need no longer exists, the units are made available for rent. As communities work toward creative solutions for senior population concerns such as "aging in place," the opportunity to create secondary units in existing homes will become an increasingly important tool.
- Promote Locally Supported Comprehensive Permits. Harvard could "take charge" of Chapter 40B by identifying areas the Town considers suitable for affordable and mixed-income housing development, and seek developers who are accustomed to working cooperatively with small towns. The Chelmsford Housing Authority and Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH) are good examples of organizations that could bring development capacity to Harvard, but the opportunities have to be realistic - which means they will need many waivers of local regulations.
- Modify zoning to permit higher density housing by special permit to provide an alternative to comprehensive permits; higher density housing would also require allowance of communal septic systems subject to approval by the Board of Health. Modifications to the cluster bylaw is another way to accomplish this objective.

3C Town Character

Whether in survey responses or community meetings, Harvard residents often talk about needing to protect the Town's character, yet "character" is not well defined. Like most communities, Harvard has several "faces" and each one contributes to the Town's look and feel. Through its orchards and horse farms, Harvard projects a rural image; through its town center, it is a well-to-do, historic New England enclave; north of Route 2 it is a low-density suburb. As the Phase I Master Plan report points out, "'Rural character' is an elusive quality influenced by a diverse set of factors." It is dynamic, not static.

Moreover, "character" is not simply a collection of physical qualities. "Character" is measured or defined by a collection of social/cultural, physical, and economic factors (see "Conservation", below).

Unfortunately, Harvard has found it difficult to embrace land use tools that would provide for nodes of moderately dense housing where village development patterns already exist, such as around the Town Center and Still River Village. The Town needs to consider more effective tools for encouraging open space-sensitive design, accommodating housing growth near services, providing small houses in addition to large single-family homes, and clarifying what residents mean when they talk about Harvard's town character. One of the charming aspects of Harvard is that it has recognizable and distinctive places: areas with variations in physical form, use, and building styles, yet the "blueprint" imposed by existing zoning bears no relationship to them. Harvard's toolbox for housing diversity may be limited to Chapter 40B, for the existing cluster bylaw has not worked and the Ayer Road special permit will not address the mixed-use goals that have been articulated for that part of town. Modifications to the cluster provision and Ayer Road Village Special Permit can offer practical alternatives to diversify the Town's housing stock without disrupting existing neighborhoods from incompatible development.

3D Chapter 40B

Since 2002, Harvard has made progress toward meeting the 10 percent statutory minimum under Chapter 40B. When the last Master Plan was prepared, Harvard had just thirty-three units on the SHI: twenty-four at Foxglove Apartments and eight at Harvard Green, or 1.5 percent of the Town's then-existing housing inventory. In 2014, the SHI includes 110 units, or 5.55 percent. Three factors have contributed to the increase: recent comprehensive permits such as Bowers Brook and Trail Ridge, houses improved when Harvard participated in a regional housing rehabilitation program, and the addition of thirteen affordable units at Devens. These developments have benefited Harvard by meeting local housing needs.

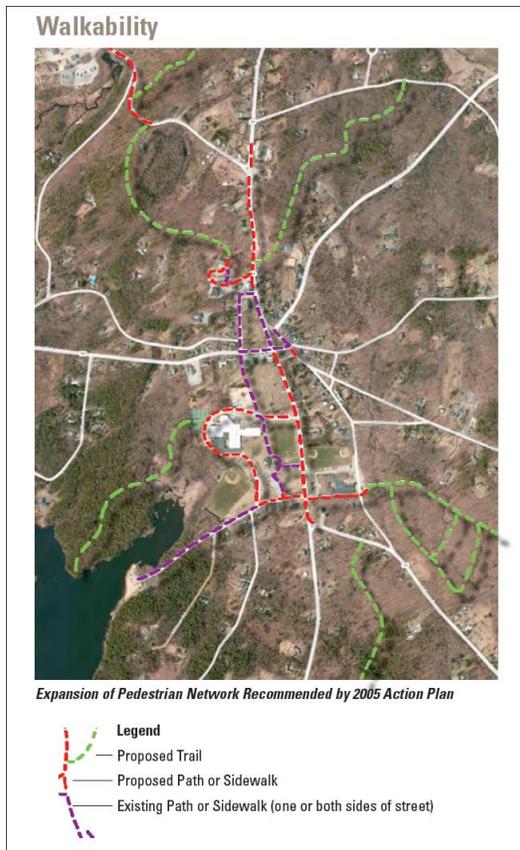
Harvard's affordable housing plan endorses a state-established housing production goal for communities Harvard's size. By adding eleven more affordable units to the SHI each year, Harvard would have more control over the comprehensive permit process. It may be that Chapter 40B comprehensive permits will offer Harvard's best opportunities for creating more types of housing, not just affordable housing. For example, greater use of the Local Initiative Program (LIP) comprehensive permit option is one way to address residents' concerns that may arise when homeowners feel threatened by inappropriate development.

4. TOWN CENTER

Harvard's Phase I report and all of the previous master plans call out the importance of the Town Center as "the heart of Harvard." The Town Center functions as the civic, social, and cultural center of the community, and Harvard residents want to keep it that way. The Town Center is defined by the unique and exquisite collection of civic and private historic buildings that surround the Town Commons. Since the Town Center is one of the few venues in Harvard that can accommodate large indoor and outdoor gatherings, it is here that Harvard holds holiday events, festivals, and community meetings. The Town Center has several natural focal points that provide important viewsheds, such as the large open areas between the two schools, the Common, and the descent to Bare Hill Pond. Unfortunately, circulation within and around these spaces is not well defined. The Town Center has other challenges, many of which involve recommendations from the Town Center Action Plan (2005) that have not been implemented. Although townspeople want to preserve the Town Center they know today, the fact is that the Town Center has changed since 2002 just as it changed between 1988 and 2002. The issue is how Harvard can ensure the best possible outcomes for the Town Center as the area continues to evolve.

4A Harvard's Goals for the Town Center

- Emphasize Town Center's role as the central community gathering place.
- Accommodate land uses that meet different needs of the community across different time scales.
- Integrate the natural landscape with the historic beauty and viewsheds of the Town Center.
- Provide safe, convenient and attractive circulation choices for pedestrians that reduce parking demands.
- Maintain and enhance public buildings for cultural and community uses.
- Protect and optimize multi-family and rental properties to provide diverse housing options.



4B Circulation & Traffic

Harvard's Town Center is a relatively small area. For example, the distance from Hildreth House to the Bromfield Library is less than half a mile, and most of the Town Center is within a quarter-mile radius of the intersection of Still River Road and Massachusetts Avenue. However, negotiating these short distances by foot can be very challenging and often dangerous due to the lack of sidewalks and footpaths. There are only short sections of sidewalks on Ayer Road and Fairbank Street, and around the Common. Among the complete sidewalks, many locations do not have curb cuts for the mobility challenged, and sidewalks are sometimes too narrow or made of uneven stone, or they end before reaching a safe crossing point.

After Harvard finished the Town Center Action Plan (TCAP) in 2005, some safety improvements were made in the Town Center. For example, the main intersection at Still River Road/Massachusetts Avenue/Ayer Road used to be controlled by a flashing signal with a stop in only two directions, and it has been replaced with

a four-way stop. This intersection also lacked clearly marked crosswalks, yet today, there are clear, solidly marked crosswalks at both the irregularly-shaped corner and the adjacent intersection of Old Littleton Road and Fairbank Street. Clearly marked crosswalks were also created at Elm Street and Still River Road, on Massachusetts Avenue at the entrance to the Bromfield School, new Library, and at Pond Road. However, these crosswalks do not connect to any sidewalks.

The main entrance to the high school does not have a separate footpath or sidewalk. The presence of parked cars and utility poles along this curved access road create a dangerous situation for pedestrians. There is, however, a separate walking path to the Library connecting to a crosswalk on Massachusetts Avenue. The TCAP recommended a path from Bare Hill Pond, through the school campus, across the Common and up to Depot Road in the north.

Parking: There are over 500 off-street parking spaces in lots scattered around the Town Center and a limited number of on-street spaces. The TCAP proposed a new parking and landscaping plan around the Ayer Road and Still River Road intersection. This included a landscaped barrier between Still River Road and the General Store parking lot, new angled parking on Common Street, and some parallel parking on Fairbank Street and Still River Road. None of the recommendations had been implemented as of 2014. In addition, the parking areas at Town Hall and the Hildreth House are haphazardly arranged around driveways and access roads and the Fire Department. This area, due to traffic safety and relatively steep topography, is particularly unsafe for both pedestrians and cars.

Bicycles: Cyclists often have a significant presence on the roads in Harvard, particularly on summer weekends. Regional cycling groups and tourists include Harvard in their cycling routes as a destination or way station. The Town Center is a crossroads for many country roads used by cyclists. Many cyclists congregate and relax on the Town Common and at the General Store. Not surprisingly, there is now a bicycle repair shop (CK Bikes) in the General Store building. Still, there are no bike lanes or marked cycling routes, no bike parking and limited signage. Installing “Share the Road” signs is a good first step to minimizing conflicts between bicyclists and motorists. As bicycling will continue and likely expand as a recreational sport, Harvard needs to support it as part of the economy and address the safety of cyclists and other road users.



4C Housing

The Town Center is a logical location for additional housing. It would support good planning and community health by providing walkability and compact design, and help to support the handful of small businesses located here. The sewer system could accommodate infill housing on small lots keeping in character with the prevailing lot pattern. Added residential density that adheres to the Town’s goals for the Town Center could help to meet other goals of the Master Plan, notably diversity of housing and housing that complements the character of the Town. In order to accomplish these ends, the Town needs new zoning for the Town Center, as recommended in the TCAP.

4D Existing Zoning: You Can't Build the Village You See

Harvard’s zoning provides one set of dimensional standards for all districts. Each lot must have a minimum area of 1.5 acres, a minimum frontage of 180’, deep setbacks from the street, and wide side and rear yards. These standards make sense for rural areas of Harvard where the Town desires to limit density, and poor soils constrain septic system suitability. But imposing these standards arbitrarily over a compact village fails to recognize the unique characteristics of the area. The Town Center is an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places and is also a local historic district. The area evolved from the earliest days of Harvard without regard to zoning regulations. Settlers employed a pragmatic approach to home development. They carved out lots that were just large enough to accept the house they wished to build, and added small yard spaces. Before the advent of ubiquitous automobile use, it was important to maintain close proximity between homes and services when walking and horse riding were the principal modes of travel.

It would not be possible to re-create the Town Center as it exists today under current zoning. The General Store for example, one of residents’ most esteemed places, has just 46’ of frontage and sits on a .1-acre lot. Using the sewer district as a proxy for the Town Center, 84% of the privately held lots are non-conforming in area, and 63% are non-conforming in frontage. Altogether, 90% of the lots are non-conforming in area or frontage, and others may not conform to setback requirements. (Town properties are not part of this analysis since the Zoning Bylaw exempts municipal properties within 2,500’ of the intersection of Routes 110 and 111.) As a result of their non-conforming nature, in many cases owners must obtain a special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals for an addition or expansion to their property.

The Town Center was also a hub of commerce in the era when it was necessary to consolidate

services in close proximity to municipal, educational, and religious uses. However, in the AR district today, commercial uses are not permitted. Just four lots in the Center today are in commercial use. Previous surveys have indicated a desire by residents to allow some business uses provided they are consistent with the character of the area. Preferences include restaurants, book stores, small retail shops, and professional offices.

With so many interests vested in maintaining the unique character of the Center, it has proven difficult to make zoning changes that are consistent with the built environment and residents' wishes for additional services. However, the Town Center has changed over time, and it is important to adapt to changing circumstances. It is more common today for people to prefer a mixed use environment with a variety of goods and services conveniently available in one location, which they can easily reach by walking. Such a pattern would reinforce the Town Center as the principal gathering place of the Town and foster greater social interaction among residents. The Town Center's zoning should reflect existing conditions and residents' preferences for a vital place, which is not the case today.

4E Public Facilities and Services

At a public meeting for this Master Plan, residents said that one of Harvard's highest Town Center priorities must be the condition of the Hildreth House, the historic residence that Harvard uses for a senior center. The Hildreth House is not readily accessible throughout, and this is a significant concern because public programs and services must be available equally to people with and without disabilities. It also lacks adequate parking and is not large enough to house all of the Council on Aging's programs. As a result, many programs are actually offered in other spaces, such as church halls. In 2014, the Town's Capital Planning and Investment Committee (CPIC) rejected a proposed \$3.7 million renovation project for the Hildreth House on the grounds that Harvard could not afford to take on a project of that magnitude, especially on the heels of funding major capital improvements at the Town Hall. In 2015, the CPIC gave high marks to a scaled-back plan (Phase 1 of a two-phase plan) with a cost estimate of \$1.3 million. The Phase 1 plan focuses on public safety, parking, and architectural barrier removal, which are important "basics," but do not address the larger problems of adequate and appropriately designed spaces, which will be addressed in Phase 2. In 2015, Town Meeting approved the Phase 1 plan and construction should commence in 2016.

Harvard's civic buildings are integral to the identity of the Town Center. Despite a strong sense of appreciation for its historic civic buildings, Harvard has not undertaken the routine schedule of maintenance that is necessary to preserve the architectural features and building materials of these century-old structures. The Town is now confronted with several of its buildings needing significant investment for restoration as well as for renovations to address programming and access requirements (most notably the Hapgood Library and the Bromfield House).

After many years of deferred maintenance, Town Meeting in 2012 approved \$3.9 million to restore the Town Hall. By the spring of 2016, Town offices will occupy the first floor, and the meeting hall on the second floor will be restored to host civic events. In order to stay within budget, the approved project was scaled-back from a previous plan that included an addition to the building. The building can accommodate existing staff, but additional hires will result in cramped quarters.

While major renovations can seem daunting and the financial expenditure unsurmountable, the Town's recent award-winning restoration and renovation of the Old Bromfield for a new library facility, using a mix of local, state, and private sources, proves the effort can result in an outstanding project and source of civic pride. Furthermore, the Library success exemplifies the potential for completing a restoration project that is both historically sensitive and energy efficient. Utilizing the expertise and guidance of the Historical Commission, whose membership includes preservation enthusiasts and architectural professionals, can help guide future efforts to ensure that renovations are as successful as those undertaken at the Old Bromfield. Once work on these buildings is completed, the Town should ensure the long-term protection of its investment by instituting maintenance plans for its historic facilities.

5. CONSERVATION

Harvard is one of the leading conservationist towns in Massachusetts. Owing to decades of work by the Harvard Conservation Commission, the Harvard Conservation Trust, and others, Harvard has about 1,900 acres of conservation land owned by the Town and Land Trusts, and an additional 523 acres protected by Conservation Restrictions (CR) or Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR). Land owned or otherwise controlled by federal and state agencies in Harvard (but excluding Devens) account for an additional 1,350 acres. In total over 25 percent of Harvard's total land area is permanently protected. The diversity of landscapes reflected in Harvard's conservation land portfolio says a great deal about the Town's environmental ethos on one hand and its physical beauty on the other hand. It is little wonder that people worry about threats to Harvard's character. But for the efforts and spending decisions made by prior generations, residents today would not have the abundance of open space they enjoy.

In Harvard, conservation is about more than protecting natural landscapes. Harvard residents recognize that the Town's character is a composite of the natural and built environment, so preserving farms and protecting scenic roads matter as much as purchasing conservation land. Ideas about conservancy, town character, and stewardship are closely intertwined here. People seem to understand that caring for the resources entrusted to the present is critical for the quality of life and quality of the environment that future generations will inherit. The visual and cultural relationship between Harvard's natural and man-made resources defines Harvard as a distinctive place. In many instances, however, Harvard's conservation groups have worked independently from its historic preservation organizations despite the number of local assets with both historic and environmental significance.

5A *Harvard's Conservation Goals*

- Conserve natural, historic and cultural resources.
- Preserve the Town's defining landscapes that are valued by Harvard's residents and reflective of the rural heritage.
- Protect local watersheds.
- Protect Harvard's agricultural base.
- Preserve historic structures and locations.

5B Stewardship and Collaboration

Water Resources: Despite the good working relationship that currently exists between the Conservation Commission and Harvard Conservation Trust, many people in Harvard say that coordination and cooperation between public bodies and private groups need to be strengthened. Overlapping or competing jurisdiction is a related issue residents cite as a condition that makes stewardship very challenging in Harvard. For example, Harvard has a Conservation Commission, the Bare Hill Pond Watershed Management Committee (“Pond Committee”), and the Parks and Recreation Commission all with a role to play in managing Bare Hill Pond, and all with different interests. As one town official notes, the present system works as long as everyone is willing to work together. Unfortunately, limited or erratic communication makes it difficult for Harvard’s all-volunteer government to coordinate their efforts.

Historic Preservation: Since the 1970s, the Harvard Historical Commission (HHC) has been responsible for advocating for the protection and preservation of Harvard’s historic resources. Successfully managing the dual role of historical commission and historic district commission has been challenging for the HHC, as it would be in any town, because the Commission is composed of volunteers and they have no staff support or budget. As a result, the Commission’s primary focus has been on historic district administration with only limited preservation activities outside of the districts. In times of preservation crisis like the recent downing of several trees in Shaker Cemetery and damage to the Powder House, the HHC has reacted quickly, but they need the time and resources to plan. Preparing a local Historic Preservation Plan for Harvard would provide an opportunity for the HHC to focus more attention on historic asset protection. It would also provide an opportunity to bring Harvard’s diverse historical and conservation groups together to identify common goals and explore collaborative opportunities.

The Freedom’s Way Heritage Association documented Harvard’s noteworthy historic and cultural landscapes and natural resources in 2006 in the Freedom’s Way Landscape Inventory project. The report provides an excellent record of the special places that contribute to Harvard distinctive environment. Appendix 2 contains the list of sites identified by local historians and community preservationists. When sites on the list become endangered by development local officials and non-profit conservation organization leaders should seek to either acquire the properties or develop creative approaches to accommodate the development while preserving its singular features.

Quality of Place: The visual and cultural relationship between the natural and the manmade defines Harvard’s rural character today and its quality of place. In most instances, the Town’s conservation groups have worked independently from Harvard’s historic preservation organizations despite the number of local assets with both historic and environmental significance. For example, the natural resources of Holy Hill in Shaker Village are protected as a Town-owned conservation parcel but historic assets within the landscape are not protected. This situation is repeated on other public and private conservation parcels in the community. Similarly, within the Town’s historic districts, regulations protect the built features of the district but are not designed to protect the landscape. The Town’s historic and conservation groups should identify opportunities to work together to protect Harvard’s special features through a combination of historic preservation regulations and conservation restrictions.

5C Cultural Resources

The 2002 Master Plan identified the potential for more teardown activity, noting that while teardown of older, modest-sized houses was not yet a measurable factor, substantial expansions and much larger replacement homes were beginning to threaten the Town's older neighborhoods, such as around Bare Hill Pond.⁷⁹ In the past few years, Harvard has lost several significant historic properties located outside of the purview of the local historic districts. Besides outright building demolition, the incremental loss of historic building features such as decorative trim and original multi-pane wood windows and the construction of large additions are also contributing to a "fading" of Harvard's historic properties over time. Harvard's previous planning studies have recommended that the Town adopt a demolition delay bylaw, but the Commission has not pursued this regulatory tool. The temporary delay period of the demolition delay bylaw would allow the Commission to assess whether the affected historic building warrants protection. Throughout the state, the tool has helped to preserve many historic properties that would otherwise have been lost. Designation as a single building historic district or the placement of preservation restrictions are two tools the Commission could pursue to protect these threatened buildings once the delay period has expired.

5D Agriculture

Much of the open land that provides views from the road in Harvard is land in some kind of agricultural use. People in Harvard place high value on farms and orchards as a central element in "town rural character", and Harvard is fortunate to still have working orchards. It will be important for Harvard to continue planning for and staying on top of the inevitable "what if" – that is, what if some of these large tracts in agricultural use are eventually offered for sale to a developer? Harvard's land is expensive, and at some point Harvard will have to pass on acquiring a vital piece of open space because it is simply more than the Town can afford. The 2002 Master Plan contains several recommendations about steps the Town could take to support its farms and minimize the risk of development, e.g., by allowing some types of farm-related businesses as of right (above and beyond those protected under state law). It is good that Harvard has an Agricultural Commission today and adopted a Right-to-Farm bylaw, but it still does not have the economic development tools that can help to enhance the profitability of local farms.

⁷⁹ 2002 Master Plan, 2.16.