

THE VISION TASK FORCE REPORT
SEPTEMBER, 2013

WILBRAHAM LOOKS FORWARD

*An Important Step
for
Our Future Together*



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Appendix*	

*Due to the large size of documentation, the appendix is being made available on-line and limited printed copies will be available at Wilbraham Town Hall and the Wilbraham Library. The on-line appendix can be found on the Town of Wilbraham website at <http://www.wilbraham-ma.gov/vision>.

INTRODUCTION

In January of 2012, the Wilbraham Planning Board appointed a group of volunteers to collect a community vision of Wilbraham and report back with their findings. The official mission statement, *To lead a community-driven process to make Wilbraham a better place to live and work by gathering broad-based public input and generating a consensus-based guiding vision to address Wilbraham's current and evolving challenges and opportunities.* The Vision Task Force set about its tasks with enthusiasm, a firm dedication to work with complete integrity and a commitment to produce an accurate report that can be used as a guide for future planning and discussion.

General Methods

An organized visioning effort was required for collecting large amounts of information. Meetings were held with interested parties and subject matter experts. Key Town Employees, Senior Groups, Senior Class Students at MRHS, Business Leaders, School Teachers/Administrators, Rotary, Wilbraham Community Association and Wilbraham Athenaeum Society were some of the groups from whom vision information was collected.

The Vision Task Force developed an extensive online survey, "Community Insights". The survey was publicized at meetings with interested parties, and was frequently mentioned in the Wilbraham Times. Cards with the survey web address were placed at key locations in town and distributed at the Transfer Station and Fountain Park concerts. 340 respondents completed the online survey. Questions were structured to gain full discovery of the responder's vision. The ability to respond to the survey in writing – rather than online -- was provided at meetings with interested parties, as well as at Fountain Park Concerts and at tours of the high school at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year. An additional 161 handwritten surveys were scanned and converted to digital output by the Captricity transcription and conversion service. This service was provided free of charge to the Vision Task Force through a grant from Captricity. A mail survey was conducted of 200 Wilbraham businesses to solicit broad business involvement in the visioning process.

To gather further input, the Vision Task Force hosted Imagine Wilbraham Day, a free-form participant feedback event, and publicized it in the Wilbraham Times, the Reminder, the Springfield Republican, on WGBY's Connecting Point, on our local cable access channel, at business locations throughout town, Fountain Park, and at the Disposal and Recycling Center. Fifteen businesses in town contributed door prizes or refreshments for the event (see Acknowledgments at the end of the report). Nearly 100 residents attended this general participation session where Task Force Team Leaders used a variety of techniques to gather visionary thoughts.

Team Specific Methods

Business Team

Insight and data for the Business chapter includes aggregated insight from research, surveys and business topic meetings with multiple business organizations. To understand the needs and wants of the Wilbraham community from standpoints of both individuals and businesses the Vision Task Force obtained information from:

1. 498 citizens answered questions relating to businesses in the 501 surveys from the town-wide Community Insights survey
2. 47 citizens filled out the survey “Your Vision of Business in Town” at Imagine Wilbraham Day
3. 32 business leaders representing the Boston Road Business Association (BRBA) and East of the River Chamber of Commerce (ERC5) met several times to discuss their thoughts on Wilbraham’s business landscape
4. 37 business representatives completed surveys regarding business in Wilbraham
5. 4 surveys were completed by citizens on “Business@Home”
6. Data was obtained regarding employment, shopping, commuting and other business-related information
7. 2007 Money Magazine article, “Best Places To Live” available at their website, <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bplive/2007/>
8. Wilbraham Business Listing obtained from www.referenceUSA.com website

Education Team

1. Examination of data provided by residents in both the online and handwritten versions of the Community Insights Survey, completed by 501 respondents, related to education
2. Examination of data provided by participants of Imagine Wilbraham Day
3. Meeting at Minnechaug Regional High School with 43 Outgoing Senior Class members from Minnechaug Regional High School and Wilbraham Monson Academy
4. Meeting with Superintendent of Schools, M. Martin O’Shea
5. Joint meeting with Superintendent and 4 School Educators and Staff Members of Minnechaug Regional High School
6. Meeting with Stony Hill Principal, Sherrill Caruana
7. Joint meeting with Stony Hill Principal and 5 teachers
8. Meeting with the Wilbraham Middle School principal, Daniel Roy
9. An HWRSD Town Report January 2012
10. A New England School Development Council Report to the School Board December 2012

Land Use Team

1. Examination of data provided by residents in both the online and handwritten versions of the Community Insights Survey, completed by 501 respondents, related to land use
2. Trees, Trails and Table Survey data from Imagine Wilbraham Day
3. Meetings with limited number of owners of five or more acres. Included were landowners who hold Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs) in Chapter 61 – agriculture, Chapter 61A – forestry, and Chapter 61B – recreation, as well as landholders with unrestricted land
4. Comparison of acreage and land use in surrounding towns provided by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Community Profiles website
5. Use of maps of Wilbraham from Town provided by Planning Board and Open Space and Recreation Plan
6. Dan Buettner’s article for AARP magazine, “Give Yourself a Happiness Makeover”, AARP: The Magazine, February/March 2013, p. 34
7. Wilbraham Farmland Preservation Plan, Lower Pioneer Valley Regional Planning Commission (LPVRPC), 1980 (available from Wilbraham Town Office)

Livability Team

1. Examination of data provided by residents in both the online and handwritten versions of the Community Insights Survey, completed by 501 respondents, related to Livability
2. Residents were polled on topics of Lifestyles, Entertainment and Recreation during Imagine Wilbraham Day held at Minnechaug Regional High School where they were asked to list and rank various lifestyles, entertainment and recreation
3. Design Charrettes were conducted at Imagine Wilbraham Day where people were asked to discuss what they wished to change in town. A total of 26 respondents answered 6 open-ended questions with 40 responses being related to entertainment and recreation.
4. At Imagine Wilbraham Day pictures of various places around town were on display with a question of “I wish this was” allowing respondents to envision potential uses. A total of 12 Images were on display with a total of 405 responses
5. Members of the Wilbraham Vision Task Force held meetings with several groups in Town to introduce and encourage participation in the Community Insights Survey. The groups were varied in ages and included:
 - Senior Citizens
 - Students at Minnechaug Regional High School
 - Families at the Wilbraham Children’s Museum
 - School PTO
 - Mother’s of PreSchoolers (MOPS)
 - Young Mother’s Group at St. Cecilia's Church
6. Meeting with local Realtors to discuss home buyers needs and wants and to encourage

on-line and paper survey participation

7. Housing questions asked at the December 8th, Imagine Wilbraham Day included 2 questions with 43 respondents
8. Multiple Listings Service (statistics on home sales) for number of houses sold and condos sold for 10 years
9. 2007 Money Magazine, “Best Places To Live” available at their website, <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bplive/2007/>
10. Dan Buettner’s article for AARP magazine, “Give Yourself a Happiness Makeover”, [AARP: The Magazine](#), February/March 2013, p. 34
11. Recreation Trends, PHYS ORG website article, <http://phys.org/news/2012-06-americans-outdoor-recreation.html>
12. Youth biking trends, Outdoor Foundation, Outdoor Participation Report 2013, <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/ResearchParticipation2013.pdf>

Town Services Team

1. Examination of data provided by residents in both the online and handwritten versions of the Community Insights Survey, completed by 501 respondents, related to town services
2. Two meetings were held with 23 Key Town Employees and Surveys administered
3. Interviews were conducted with 3 key employees unable to attend previous meetings
4. A service preference interview (37 respondents) was conducted at Imagine Wilbraham Day
8. Comparisons of Wilbraham were made to Belchertown, East Longmeadow, Hampden, Longmeadow, Ludlow, Monson and Palmer provided by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Community Profiles website
5. Graphs on Wilbraham’s population data was provided by the US Census Bureau

Wilbraham Compared to Neighboring Towns

United States Census and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Community Profiles were used to assemble Wilbraham demographic data and allow comparison to neighboring communities. The towns of Palmer, Monson, Belchertown, Ludlow, Hampden, East Longmeadow and Longmeadow were selected for comparison. Areas explored included acreage, road miles, land use, population/density, work location, education, unemployment and family income.

Instructive information was either converted to bullet statements or graphics, in some cases, both.

Data Management and Consolidation

Survey data (501 total surveys), from online survey provider, Survey Monkey, and hand written surveys, converted to digital format with Captricity software, were categorized and uploaded to Google docs spreadsheets. Extensive reviews were conducted to verify the accuracy of the Captricity conversion effort. Entries that could not be read were entered as blanks. Finally, handwritten survey outputs were formatted as an exact match to the online surveys to allow for merging into a single data source for analysis.

Excel, JMP, Wordle, and WriteWords software programs were used to facilitate graphic presentation of key elements in the data and to allow comparisons among differing data points.

Team Writing Responsibility

Team Captains have completed the Final Report under a Project Manager, Data Supervisor and Editor's supervision. The intent of the report has been to create a cascading pyramid-shaped document that allows the reader to step down through increasing levels of detail as desired or remain at the higher level in the visionary elements of summary findings. The Vision Task Force believes that this approach will allow readers the luxury of either grasping the overall Vision of respondents or mining the information for a more detailed analysis.

Report Availability

The full report, detailed survey responses, and selected reference documents, that are noted in the report, will be available on-line from the Town of Wilbraham website - <http://www.wilbraham-ma.gov/vision>. Additional paper copies will be made available at Town Hall, Wilbraham Library, and the Senior Center. An excerpt of the report is being planned as an insert to the Wilbraham Times.

Errors and Omissions

The Vision Task Force has worked with complete integrity with regards to the control of data, research, and report writing. If an error or omission has occurred in this report, it is an oversight and will be corrected in the digital copy of the report. If you have a question regarding this report or would like to report an error, please contact the Vision Task Force at the Town of Wilbraham website - <http://www.wilbraham-ma.gov/vision>.

CHANGE AND THE COMMUNITY

The Task Force was asked to “gather, review, and analyze data about existing conditions in Wilbraham that will inform the Planning Process”. The study was designed to understand “The Dynamics of Change: Where are we going? What are we in the process of becoming if we follow the current course? What will Wilbraham look like in 20 years and beyond if current trends continue?” The following findings shed some light on the changes found and raise important questions for the future.

Wilbraham’s Changing Demographics

10 Years of Age Distribution Changes

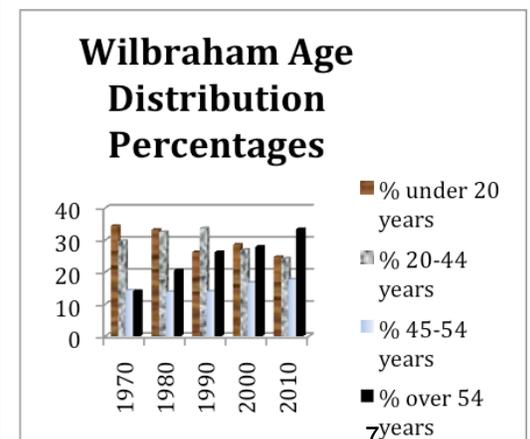
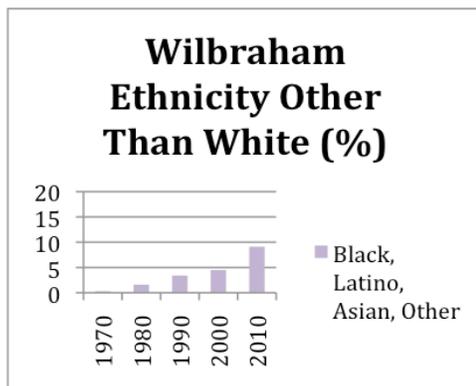
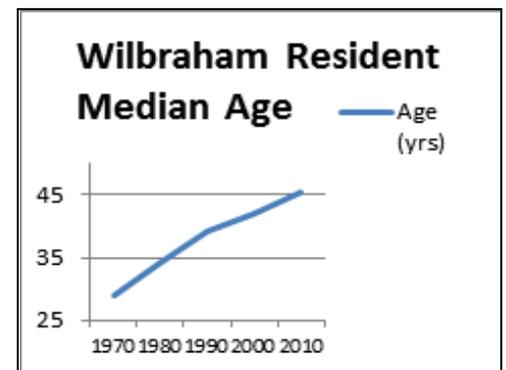
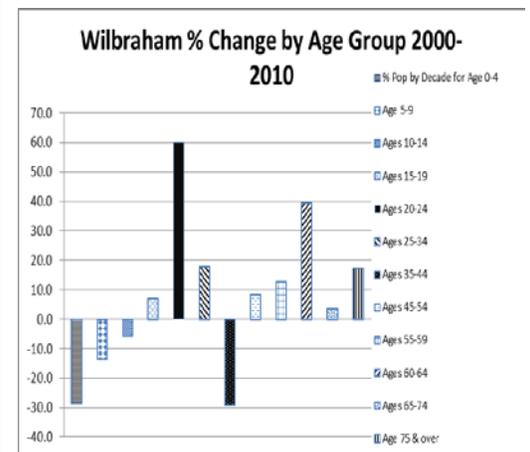
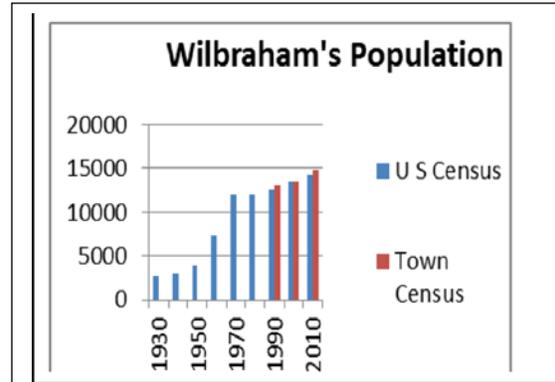
Wilbraham’s age structure shifted markedly between 2000 and 2010. Age 0-4 declined. Ages 20-34 increased. Age 35-44 declined. Age 60-64 baby boomers increased, as did the numbers of elderly over 75 years of age.

Aging Of Residents

There has been a general aging of Wilbraham’s population and fewer younger workers. Since 1970, we can see that the median age for Wilbraham residents has increased from about 28 to 46.

Changing Ethnic Distribution

Between 2010 and 2012, Hampden County population growth was slow, rising only 0.52%. Black and white ethnic groups grew by only 1.46% and 0.08% respectively. Asian and Hispanic ethnic groups grew by 5.44% and 5.78% respectively.



Declining School Population

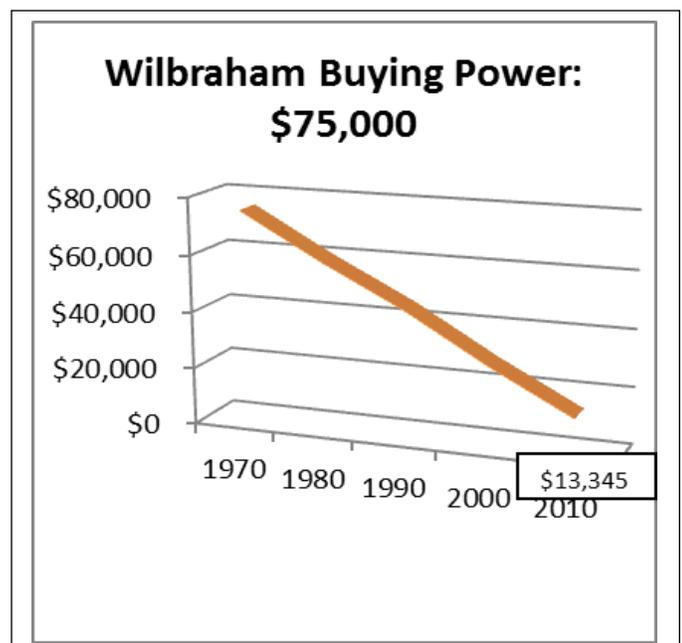
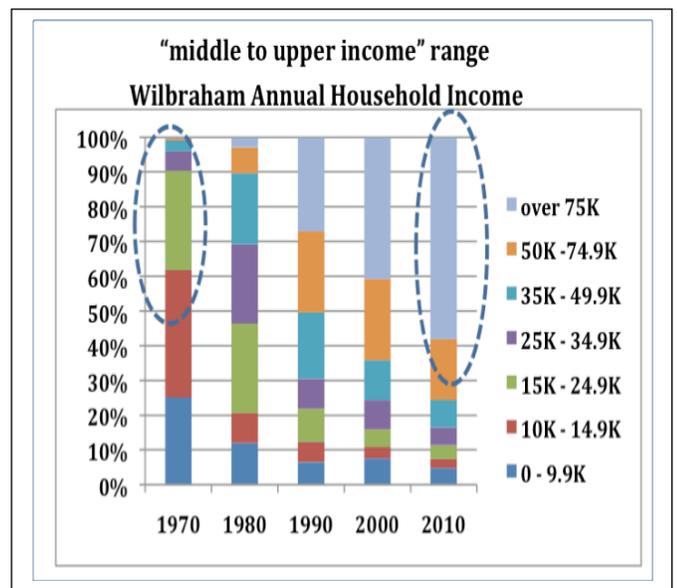
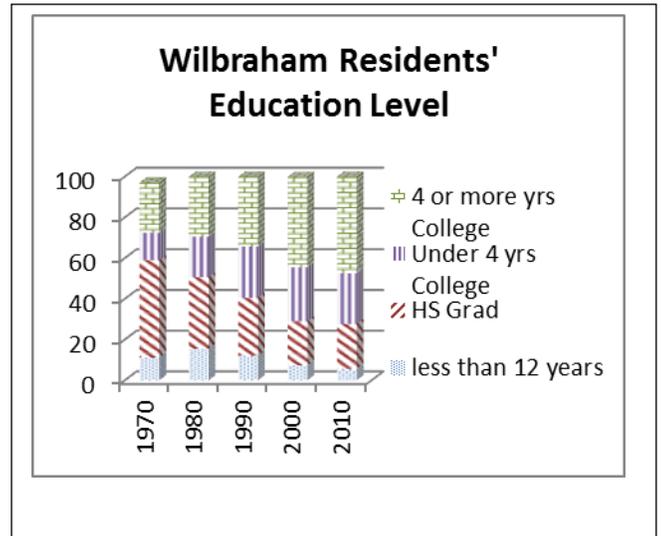
Wilbraham's declining school population has led to the closure of Memorial School. Enrollment is expected to decline from 2012 to 2023 by 14%.

Increases In Education Level

Wilbraham is a leader in the local area for high school students pursuing education beyond four years of high school and successful graduation from two and four year colleges.

Household Buying Power

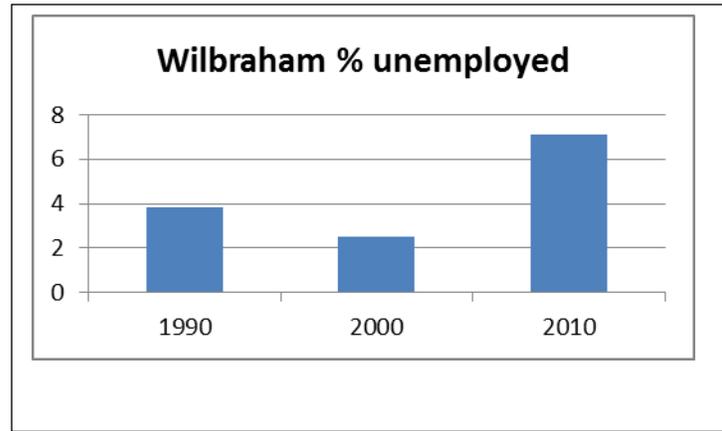
There is an increase in middle to upper household income categories from 1970 to 2010. Inflation has decreased buying power as the next chart shows the value of \$75,000 adjusted for inflation in 2010.



Increasing Unemployment

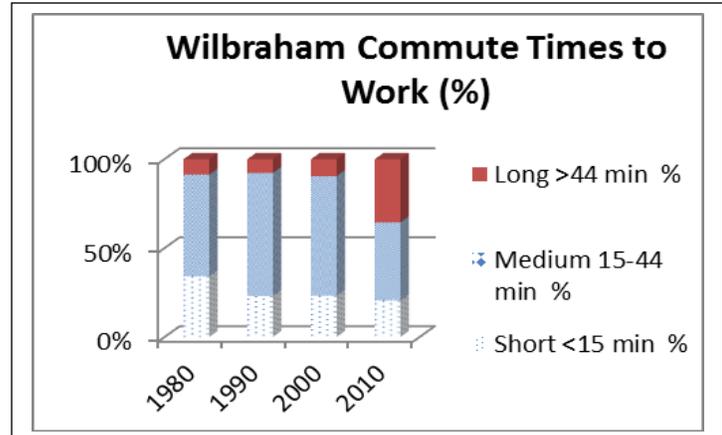
In 2010, Wilbraham's unemployment rate had grown to 7.1%

What would the impact to Wilbraham if a major area employer had major layoffs or shut its doors?



Increasing Commute Times To Work

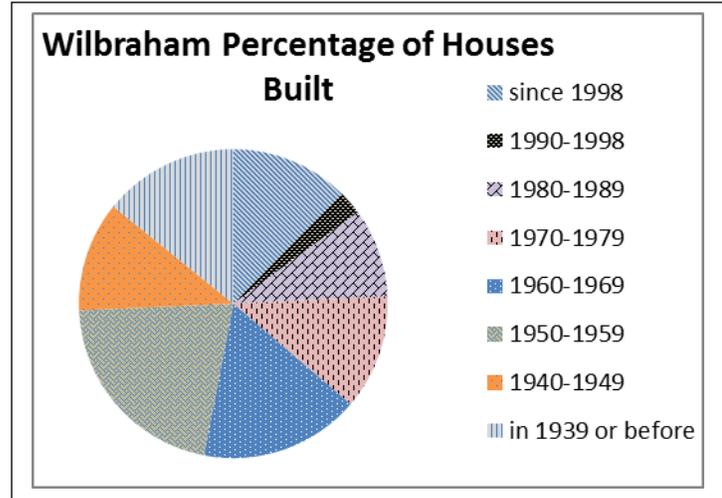
In order to find jobs, employees are commuting further. While indications are that home businesses are expanding, commuting times were still lengthening in 2010.



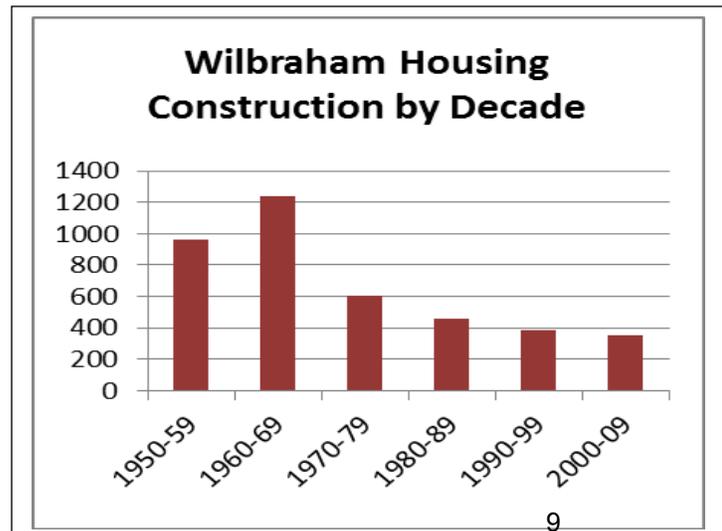
Reduced & Shifting Demands For Housing

Although house construction has declined over the last four decades, Wilbraham offers a broad spectrum of home ages for buyers. The majority of these homes are owner occupied rather than rental properties.

As a result of housing developments located on a large system of secondary roads, Wilbraham has maintained its natural beauty and feel despite being more residential than other local communities.

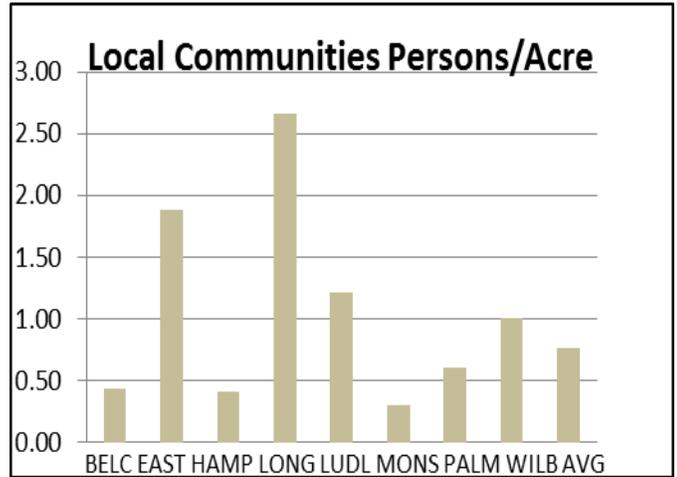


As one of the more residential suburban towns in the local area, how will Wilbraham approach housing in the future? Will potential buyers find the real estate options in town desirable and affordable?



Population Density Comparison

While residents see Wilbraham as “small town”, population density figures show Wilbraham as above average for local selected communities.



Change is often something beyond our control, but our preparation for and adaptability to change can make us much more effective in dealing with that change.

CORE VALUES

The Vision And Core Values

When planning for the future, it is important to know what the people of Wilbraham *really* like and want—now and for the future. What is their vision, their values? Going forward, the Town should place high value on the core questions of the Community Insights Survey that asked real world, open-ended questions to the most compelling subjects.

1. The best thing about Wilbraham today
2. The three words that characterize Wilbraham today and Wilbraham in 10 years
3. Three things you would change in Wilbraham
4. Positive, forward-thinking action you would take if you had authority to position Wilbraham for the future
5. If you had \$10M, what you would build to make Wilbraham a better place to live
6. Three core values for Wilbraham to guide the vision
7. Newspaper headline in 10 years that celebrates Wilbraham's progress

Notes About The Compilation Of Answers

As you read the answers to the questions, the following simple methods were used in tallying answers to each of the 7 questions.

- The graphics below are “Wordles”. Each word is graphically sized automatically in order of its number of answers. The larger the number of similar answers, the larger the word.
- If a word was not a “descriptor” it was eliminated from the list. For example, the word “town” doesn’t tell anything. But when you put the two most common words together in an answer, “small town” becomes the key subject.
- Comparable words were combined in counts: Example: “school” and “education”
- A “Rule of 40” was used. If a leading word did not reach a minimum of 40 answers, it was not included as representing enough people.

Best Thing About Wilbraham Today

The words below were in response to the question: When you tell your friends and family members who don't live in Wilbraham as to the best thing about this town. . . . what's the first thing that comes to your mind?



Three Words That Characterize Wilbraham - Today And In Ten Years

Clearly the town wants Wilbraham to stay beautiful, friendly, and safe, with a strong sense of community.

Wilbraham Today

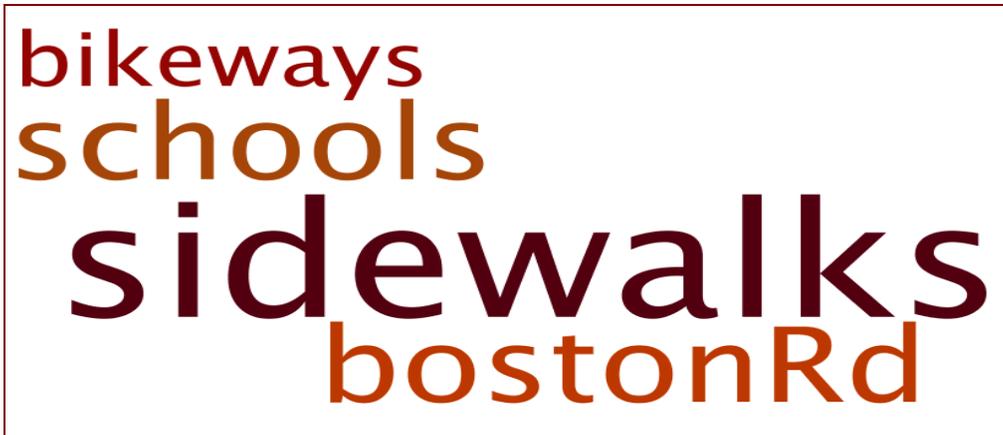


Wilbraham in 10 Years



Changes Wilbraham Wants

While the answers to the previous questions tended to be general in nature, the next question, “If you could change three things in town, what would they be?” communicated interests for everyday living. The Wordle below includes the top four. Based on other responses in the survey, it is clear that many folks value education as one of the best things about Wilbraham, and here, for these responses, the sense of education was primarily about making a good thing better.



Immediate Action To Best Position Wilbraham For The Future

When asked what positive and forward thinking action a person would take immediately if they were given the authority at the town level, the answers turned to the serious issues of infrastructure and commerce first of all. The references to community seen in this Wordle for Immediate Action refers to community as “a sense of place” rather than community as “a sense of togetherness of people”, which is the way “community is used in the responses about words that characterize Wilbraham Today and Wilbraham Tomorrow.



Making Wilbraham A Better Place

The survey asked a bold question “If you were given \$10 million to build something that would make Wilbraham a better place to live, what would you build?” The question sought to free the respondent from financial constraints and identify changes that would be meaningful to their lives. The responses this time clearly “hit home” on subjects of everyday living.



Core Values...Critical Guidelines For Moving Forward

Understanding our community’s core values for Wilbraham is critical to guide future plans. These are the values that our town wants to ensure are not forgotten as Wilbraham moves forward. Wilbraham’s core values should inspire and guide everyone in the community.



Imagine Wilbraham — Headlines From The Future

The Community Insights survey was designed to take the pulse of the community and synthesize a collective vision of where our community would like to be in the future. While community planning must be grounded in the realm of fiscal and practical considerations, imagining allows us to build a vision without constraints, understand the collective aspirations of the community, and then take the common sentiments and develop priorities and guidelines as we move forward as a community. In our survey, respondents were asked: **“What is a headline you’d like to see in the newspaper (if one exists) in ten years that looks back and shows our progress as we envision, plan and build a future for our community and town?”** Here are some highlights of the answers. The full range of headlines can be seen in the Appendix.

Accolades And Recognition

60 individuals were envisioning more accolades and having Wilbraham build upon our *Top 100 Small Towns to Live In* highlighted in *Money Magazine* in 2007.

- Wilbraham's 10th year in top 100 towns in America
- Ideal Place to Live
- WILBRAHAM MASSACHUSETTS - #1 PLACE TO RAISE A FAMILY AND #1 PLACE TO RETIRE!
- The Best Little Town in the USA. One you can afford!
- Wilbraham school rank #1 for education and the town of Wilbraham places in the top 50 places to live
- Wilbraham named top 5 healthy and sustainable communities for MA!
- Wilby makes Top 100 towns in the US once again. Thanks to the foresight of the planning to retain open space and preserve land.
- . . . community with a friendly business community that is convenient esthetically pleasing and fits into the community in a complementary way

Creative Advertising Minds

Some of the creative advertising minds gave us a few marketing taglines we could use.

- The Town that Changed the World
- "Wilbraham...the place you want to live"
- WE DID IT!
- Better Than Ever!
- Business thrives in small Western MA town
- Wilbraham Comes into the 21st Century

Our Schools

Being proud of our dedication and commitment to education is seen throughout the survey results - some headlines reflect a vision for an enviable position as an education leader . . . comments ranged from the quality of learning, what students achieve after graduation, some discussed new construction and the new high school. Here are some highlights.

- **The Learning Environment**
 - Diverse community has best schools in the nation!
 - Best school system in Mass.
 - If you educate them, they will come. (As Wilbraham continues to cultivate a quality educational community, we will attract more quality small business owners into our community who have families with young children.)
 - Great Community, Excellent Education
 - Partnership between the schools and elderly residences.
- **The Results**
 - Wilbraham youngsters rate high in state ranking of kindergarten readiness.
 - Wilbraham children excel in job market. Credit their educational experience and community involvement.
 - Highest education levels in New England
 - Wilbraham Students Receive Highest Statewide Test Scores
 - Minnechaug achieves 100% graduation rate!
- **The Buildings**
 - New Minnechaug High School has proven to be a big success for Wilbraham
 - Chaug still looks new!
 - Minnechaug building considered 'good as new' because the town committed to and kept up with necessary building maintenance.
 - New Minnechaug for our future generations!
 - Wilbraham completes middle school renovations - giving town students a world class school with latest technology.
 - Wilbraham planning new high school - building out of date
- **And. . . .**
 - Four-year university takes over Wilbraham/Monson

Town Planning

Some respondents envisioned headlines about the town planning process.

- Forward Planning Pays Off in Dividends
- The Plan Worked
- Long Term Planning Allows All to Stay in Town
- The changes in Wilbraham have made a healthy impact.
- Community consultation, innovative ideas and unity of action by all made Wilbraham into the model town that is now.
- "Town Center Project Completed"
- Wilbraham Planting Seeds for Growth and Long Term Prosperity--A Welcoming Place to Raise Your Family.
- That Wilbraham has invested in its future but not changed significantly.
- Wilbraham is the same as it was 10 years ago ---- Keeping Historic Value

And although some love Wilbraham the way it is, there were suggestions to allow us to be prepared for the future.

- Smart Town Adapts to Needs of Next Generation and Builds Economic Stability
- Wilbraham builds for the future with keeping up to date with the changing worlds.
- Wilbraham builds for the future
- Wilbraham Comes into the 21st Century

The balance of a great today and a vibrant future is also seen in some of these headlines.

- a Town that Values the Past but Explores a Vibrant Future.
- A community building on its past for an even brighter future.
- Wilbraham: a town rooted in history yet positioned for the future.
- Town of Wilbraham was able to keep small town culture during times of economic growth.
- Wilbraham: A Historical town Moving Forward Towards the Future.
- Wilbraham - a Town unchanged which has looked towards the future and provided options for all ages to live independently.
- Then and now, the progress of a town rebuilt through neighbors helping neighbors
- Wilbraham balances past and future to create a great place to live and work
- Progressing With Technology While Preserving Our History
In an Electronic Age, we Still Know how to Communication in a Personal Fashion.

When asked about what to do if significant funding was available for town projects, recreation was at the forefront of the recommendations. Here are some headlines focused on the recreation and activities the community would like to see.

- Wilbraham- greatest town to live in for health, arts and education
- "Improved recreation makes Wilbraham greener, healthier"
- Connected community achieved emphasizing recreation and socializing.
- Preserved the character of Wilbraham + developed a plethora of active + passive recreational opportunities
- Wilbraham becomes top community for hiking and outdoor activities
- Dog park and maybe a swimming pool for local residents of Wilb to swim in.
- Wilbraham-East Longmeadow-Longmeadow Bikeway Named One of Nation's Best
- Wilbraham opens New Community Center for Youth to gather - no Membership Fees
- "Wilbraham residents brought together by series of community events for people of all ages"

- Peach festival back.
- Wilbraham Completes Recreation Center That Will Foster 12 Months of Community Gatherings for Every Age

And finally, a number of individuals are very interested in celebrating the possible creation of a full service Senior Center in Wilbraham.

- Wilbraham. has a state of the art Senior Center
- New senior center opens
- Senior Center/Community Center at the old Memorial School property, celebrating its sixth year as a recognized facility dealing with community needs.

Economics and Town Management

Whenever a town considers a vibrant future, there is an investment that requires funding from the public and private sectors. Although one headline suggested that taxes could be an important vehicle to prepare for the future, most wanted to find alternative ways to finance our future or more importantly to keep taxes low to protect the financial future of our residents.

- Those for Taxes to Plan for the Future.
- Wilbraham, 'a Decade of Progress'. A Town Center that truly is indicative of its past strong tax base leads to thriving community

Others were much more excited about a future with lowered taxes and maybe even other financing models. . .

- Wilbraham maintains stable tax base
- Wilbraham low tax rate makes is a retirement haven
- Wilbraham residents for the umpteenth time have rejected a two and half override and now placed a ban on any proposed two and a half override proposals.
- Property tax reduction attracts new people to town
- Wilbraham town taxes have NOT increased for 10 years. Wilbraham's Fiscal Responsibility Pays Off! Voted BEST IN THE VALLEY for town with lowest tax rate and best services.
- Town collects taxes from Wilbraham Monson Academy non-academic buildings.
- Because of our efforts to keep taxes low our children can actually afford to live here now.
- Citizens employed...young & old; tax rate low; Future gov't building (schools, town offices, etc. ...not on the agenda

- Wilbraham proud to reduce taxes but still meets needs of all residents by continuing to manage growth appropriately and not by taking away a homeowners/developers personal freedoms as many communities have done.

And finally, headlines from the future suggest a wide range of recommendations that fit into their own categories.

- Wilbraham appoints teens to town committees
- Wilbraham - protects of individual rights and preserves property rights
- We need innovative thinkers in our town hall that can think in a more progressive manner while still remembering the charm that makes us Wilbraham.
- We have been successful in changing government from Selectmen and Town Meeting to a Town Administrator or something similar.
- Town resists big government
- Town become a better environment for growth.
- A new state-of-the-art Police Station and a good, modern Fire Station with all of the top quality equipment to keep our town safe.

BUSINESS

Wilbraham’s business environment is quite diverse, from 75+ year old Friendly’s restaurant chain home office on Boston Road to much younger high technology business incubator, FloDesign on Main Street. The majority of Wilbraham’s 995 businesses are privately owned and have a single physical location. A fast growing sector nationally, home-based businesses and home-based workers also make up the Wilbraham business landscape.

Visioning for Wilbraham’s business community included several approaches. The Community Insights survey probed respondents regarding the types of services, restaurants and stores they desire in Wilbraham. Targeted business question surveys were collected at Imagine Wilbraham Day. The business surveys collected additional data on types of businesses that respondents would like to work for. Business Associations were approached and interactive meetings generated group discussions among business leaders which culminated in prioritized lists of challenges and opportunities.

An overriding opportunity for the town was uncovered in the early stages of research on Wilbraham’s business environment. The most basic inquiry regarding a current inventory of Wilbraham businesses could not be acquired from the town. The town has the opportunity to create this list of current businesses and analyze this list to determine how to best provide support to current businesses and attract future businesses.

Business represent 9% of the Wilbraham tax base – a below average revenue compared to other similar towns. Creation of a business development plan based on the common interests of businesses and residents is clearly a positive idea for the future. Understanding the business landscape will help position the town to generate economic development opportunities and broaden the tax base.

Wilbraham Future Headlines

Future Headlines represent Community Insights survey individual respondents’ visionary hopes for the future of Wilbraham. The following future headlines, submitted by respondents, that reference Business are:

<p style="text-align: center;">Strong Tax Base Leads to Thriving Community *** Downtown Wilbraham Bustling with Hometown Business *** Boston Road expansion drives town growth, keeps taxes low *** Boston Road Before & After (Modern Buildings, Smooth Traffic Flow) ***</p>
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Business thrives in small Western MA town

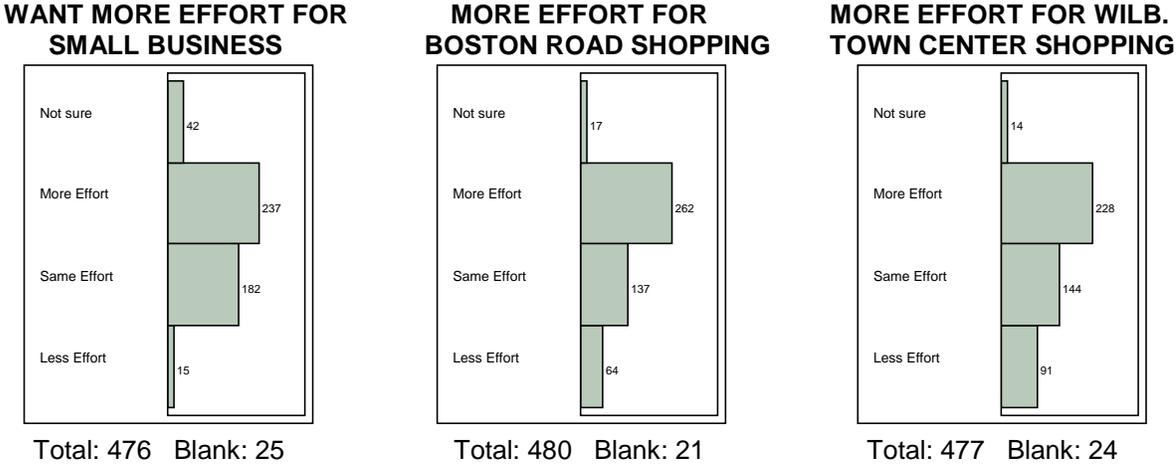
 Residential Community now a hub for Small Business

Business Findings Summary

After reviewing survey responses and additional business research, the most important findings for the future are:

Findings From Survey Respondents

1. Respondents voiced strong support for Wilbraham to give **more effort to business.**



- 2. Survey respondents and business leaders see a strong need for a **Comprehensive Boston Road Plan** to serve families who need services, shopping and employment, and for businesses who want to provide them. Both groups clearly stated their mutual need and desire for Boston Road to have a more attractive feel with better sidewalks and traffic control.
- 3. Survey respondents have a clear desire to **add value to the Town Center** by adding needed small eating venues, shopping, sidewalks and benches while maintaining the small town New England feel.

Findings From Business Leaders

1. Town Officials and Committees Need to Partner With Business

Achieve a public private partnership to generate more revenues. Work together to deal with change. Business leaders state that in the next 20 to 30 years, the residential base of Wilbraham is going to change dramatically. To make sure that the Town doesn't lose too many residents, employers, jobs and employees; business leaders see the need for strong joint efforts. In the words of one employer, "Our business alone needs 30 to 50 incoming employees a year! We simply don't get enough applications!" Wilbraham needs people who can and want to live here, work here, and spend here. It is very important to convince businesses that they have the ability to be in Wilbraham. All business meetings spoke strongly for an improved relationship with town officials by working together in a more formal process. The ERC5 and BRBA specifically requested a regular interchange.

Need a Wilbraham Business Development Director. Business leaders see a strong advantage in a Business Development Director who would work with business groups and helping individual businesses get through the Town's formal processes. They urge Wilbraham to create a "One Stop Process for Businesses" to eliminate the lengthy and difficult process they see in working with the Town.

2. Zoning Needs To Help Maintain Town Fiscal Strength

No. 1 zoning request: change sign restrictions that impact businesses. This is true for all of the business areas: citizens don't know the businesses are there! The town seems to have a negative position on this for business. The standard is to limit signs, not to help business attract or to help shoppers find the shops they want and need.

Encourage zoning laws to allow housing options that attract and retain young and senior residents. Setbacks, frontages, sizes of lots, etc., restrict the ability of business to appeal to young families and seniors who no longer need large homes. This is perceived by business as a critical financial stability issue for the town. Need clusters and mixed-use areas. (This is in contrast to many Community Insights survey respondents that preferred less effort on clusters and mixed-use.) Need attractive neighborhoods where retail, youth and seniors are able to live and interconnect. This is an important concept to embrace...or we will lose youth and elderly in big ways. **Support home businesses since this is a growing nationally and locally.** Need to evaluate related zoning.

3. Meet The Infrastructure Needs Of Business

Need to manage faster broadband. Internet speed a real problem. Boston Road gives easy access and central location but this has been a real issue. If you are slower than your competition this is a real disadvantage. This needs to be number one for the town to watch and manage well if businesses will come to Wilbraham.

Provide/encourage more public transportation options to help businesses attract employees

There is limited bus availability to get to work or bring employees in. This cuts down on the number of workers that employers can attract to Boston Road.

Make sure that emergency communications reach town businesses

Business leaders see a need to plan for emergency response. The power took too long to get back. Need to step up faster to help citizens. Please consider a siren. Recommend strong

communications and response system. (Note this was accomplished with the Blackboard Connect.)

Business Key Facts & Trends

Income, Taxation, Employment, & Demographic Facts

The many pluses for Wilbraham’s financial stability and purchasing power were brought to light nationally when *Money Magazine*, selected Wilbraham, as a Top 100 Small Town in the United States in 2007. The following table shows the comparisons.

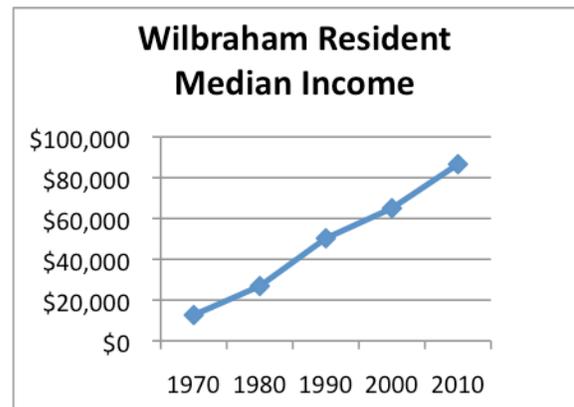
WILBRAHAM COMPARED TO THE TOP 10: “Top 100 Towns Best Places to Live in the U.S.”, <i>Money Magazine</i> , 2007		
	Wilbraham	Average of Top 10 Towns
Median Family Income (Per Year)	\$86,825.00	\$90,316.00
Family Purchasing Power (Annual Cost of Living Adjusted)	\$73,957.00	\$82,867.00
Job Growth (2000-2006)	13.41%	13.41%
Median Commute Time (Minutes)	21.7	23.1
% of Population with Commute 45 minutes or Longer	9.6%	15.6%
% of Population Who Walk or Bike to Work	1.3%	2.7%

Strong Employment Earnings

50% of Wilbraham households earn more than \$100K. Median income has grown steadily since 1970. Median family income is in the 72nd percentile for Massachusetts. About 3% live below poverty level.

Average Family Tax Bill Is “Moderate To High”

The average single-family tax bill is in the 73rd percentile - a “moderate-to-high” number relative to other towns in Massachusetts.



Potential Employers Mentioned

Some survey respondents spoke about new businesses as potential employers. Potential employers mentioned were: College campus, trade schools and education fields, Technology,

Development, Light Industrial, Agriculture, Hospital and Medical fields, Commuter Train Station.

High “White-Collar” Work Force

87.5% of the town’s population workforce is “white collar”.

Rise In Median Age Could Have Negative Impact On Business, Real Estate Values, Taxes

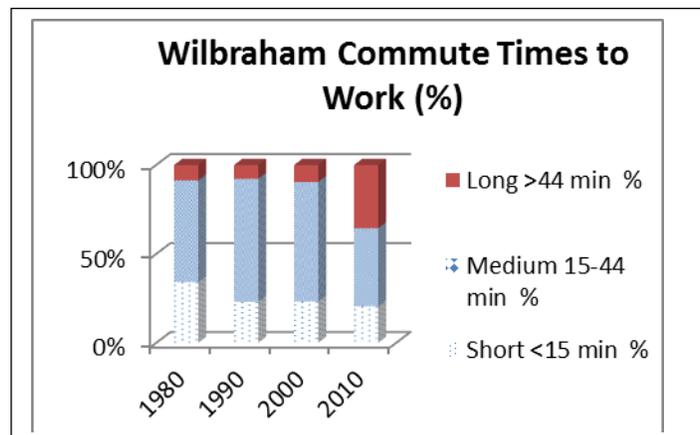
The percent of Wilbraham population over 65 is in the 82 percentile of Massachusetts towns, a much higher percent than most of the other towns in the state. Looking at this in reverse order, it means that 80% of the Massachusetts towns have fewer seniors. The Town also has a lower birth rate per capita (in the 17 percentile category). These two realities could have a strong impact on Town income, real estate values and more. There is a need to attract younger people, critical for attracting and keeping businesses in town.

Rising Unemployment Rate Due To Recession

Wilbraham’s unemployment rate is in the 21 percentile, a relatively low rate compared to all towns in Massachusetts. However, unemployment in Wilbraham between, 2000 and 2010, nearly tripled, growing from 2.5% to 7.1%.

Growing Commute Times

16% of residents work in town, 84% commute. From 1980 to 2010, long commutes grew significantly, leaving 40% of Wilbraham commuters traveling over 45 minutes.

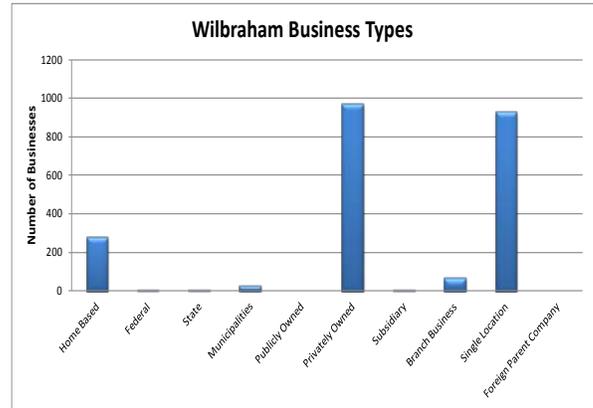


Below Average Commercial Tax Receipts

Wilbraham has below average commercial tax receipts compared to other Massachusetts towns (in the 44th percentile). Town officials stated that Wilbraham receives about 9% of its income from commercial receipts.

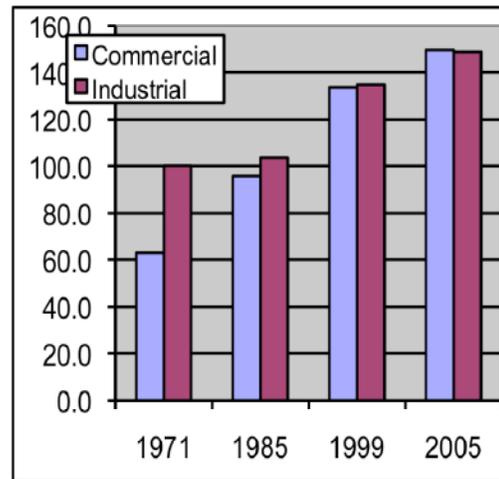
Wilbraham Businesses

There are about 995 businesses in Wilbraham. The town has no current list of businesses in Town. The last time a complete list of businesses was put together was 1992. The Vision Task Force had to seek out a list through a data service - ReferenceUSA.



Growth In Commercial & Industrial Properties

The chart to the right shows the changing balance and growth of commercial and industrial properties in Wilbraham.



WILBRAHAM BOSTON ROAD BUSINESS

What Residents and Shoppers Want

Put more effort in Boston Road. 55% want the town to put more effort into expanding shopping opportunities on Boston Road.

Seek out national brands. Boston Road is the location that the larger and familiar “brand” businesses are being requested (e.g. Target, Whole Foods, Panera Bread).

Clean up Boston Road. The majority of the 57 people who filled out the Imagine Day business survey on "What you want Boston Road to be?" mentioned words like “cleaned up”, “attractive” “neat well-kept” and “well maintained.”

Want more upscale feel. Respondents gave suggestions on shopping venues to imitate like Northampton, Longmeadow, South Hadley, and Manchester, CT.

Make it much safer to drive and walk. Requests included: more sidewalks and safer traffic and “traffic friendly”.

Top 5 requested Boston Road businesses by type:

- Big Box/Department Stores
- Grocery/Market
- Restaurants
- Entertainment & Leisure
- Other (Home Goods, Crafts, Pets)

Top 5 requested Boston Road businesses by name:

- Target
- Trader Joes
- Whole Foods
- Costco
- Panera Bread

Insights from Business Leaders

Need a Comprehensive Boston Road Plan

Fix Boston Road to help residents and businesses. An official Business Development Officer should lead a proactive approach.

Need first class improvements in traffic flow, sidewalks, cross walks, lights, similar to the Longmeadow Shops and Post Office Park.

Improve curb appeal. The business leaders attending all sessions spoke of the importance of improving the look and feel of Boston Road. “Keep small town charm while rebuilding Boston Road.”

Fix abandoned buildings. Empty buildings and parcels are a real turnoff to potential business customers. The town needs to look at this and help. Demolish and rebuild.

Fix unsafe traffic. A traffic study should be planned. Fix congestion and connect parking between businesses. Getting on and off Boston Road at a number of turning points is difficult and unsafe. Country Bank has to hire a Safety Officer to help customers get out. At Wilbraham Shoppes you can’t see what’s coming around the bend. If the traffic design is corrected, more shoppers would be attracted to the area.

Fix unsafe walking. We need sidewalks and crosswalks for safety and community feel.

Invest effort in Riverfront Walk & Ludlow Mills. Help develop the riverfront. Have shops and restaurants along with residential areas. Support and encourage.

Improve PVTA availability. Employers need increased public transportation availability to bring employees into Wilbraham businesses.

WILBRAHAM TOWN CENTER BUSINESS

What Residents and Shoppers Want

Put more effort into Town Center. Nearly half, 48%, of the 477 people who responded to the Town Center Shopping question said that we should place more effort in town.

Seek out local retail businesses. Town Center is where respondents are looking for more local, unique, small-scale retail businesses. Familiar retail brands for Town Center were much lower in relation to Boston Road responses.

Top 5 requested Town Center businesses by type:

1. Restaurants (ex: bakery, ice cream shop, outside dining, breakfast restaurant, lunch place)
2. Grocery/Market/Farm Type Market
3. Clothing/Boutique
4. Entertainment & Leisure
5. Other (gifts, crafts, newsstand)

Provide more options in the Town Center. Participants who attended Imagine Wilbraham Day and filled out the Vision in Town Survey said that they wanted more in the Town Center...mixed use, place to meet, a mix of shops offering everyday useful products, food (bakery, breakfast place or lunch place) an inviting area, sidewalks, walking areas, benches, family friendly, integrate the library.

Place priority on the “look and feel.” It is clear from the survey responses that the quaint and historic feel of Town Center is strongly desired and should be a priority when planning and introducing new businesses in town. Survey respondents request that the Town Center retain its “quaint feel” and “classic New England town character”.

Insights from Business Leaders

The Town Center businesses and shops need the right signs. Business leaders say that these businesses don't need a Boston Road style, but the signage disappears. A person driving a car down Main Street doesn't even know that businesses exist in the Town Center. They don't know to stop. If you want business to stay in the Town Center, a business needs customers. This is a big issue if the town wants to keep tax revenues in Wilbraham.

Business Opportunities

1. Attract New Revenues From Business

Business leaders have requested more help from the town and more integrated cooperation with the town. Survey respondents have clearly stated their desire for more shopping and business. This is an opportunity. Take the initiative to grow revenues to compensate for the cost of a Town Business Development Officer. Develop plans for both Boston Road and the Town Center. The focus on protecting and even increasing tax revenues from business sources is not a visible top priority of the Town and this could be a major opportunity.

2. Create And Market A Compelling “Community Identity” To Attract Business

In contrast to Community Insights survey responses that valued the sense of community, in terms of people and place, business leaders stated, “There is no sense of community” in town. The town needs an identity, a claim to fame. Also need far better communications to town residents. You don’t know about the things going on in town. Need a better way to draw citizens together.” Business leaders see the capturing of a new sense of identity as a way to increase the vibrancy and stability of the town...very important to businesses.

3. Improved Retail Business Options Represent A Positive Opportunity

The Community Insights Survey asked a telling question, “When you tell your friends and family members who don’t live in Wilbraham as to the best thing about this town, what’s the first thing that comes to your mind?” Only a small number of surveys responded to business as an important aspect of Wilbraham, further increasing the idea that improved business/retail options represent an opportunity for Wilbraham.

4. Act On The Village Center Committee Report Of Year 2000 And Solve The Confusion Of Town Center Identity

The clear majority of residents, shoppers and businesses want a beautiful Town Center. The Village Center Committee Report of June 30, 2000, 13 years ago addressed many of today’s wants of the Town. It’s time to address this. Clearly there is confusion about what is the Town Center. Survey respondents included different buildings, streets. There is no real “town center” by name...signage is nearly invisible. The Village Center Committee report will be available in the appendix of this report available on-line on the Town of Wilbraham website.

Business Challenges

1. Attracting New Young Adults, Young Families And Keep Seniors

Retaining population. Median age is rising. Seniors need and want smaller homes. Young buyers need affordable housing. Business leaders noted the importance of changing demographics and the impact on business. Between 1990 and 2010, the number of residents age 45+ grew 23%. Residents between 25 and 44 decreased 21%. (Source: New England School Development Council Hampden Wilbraham Study, December 2012) Business leaders strongly recommend facing this issue, “The town has zero appeal for college grads, or the early 20’s. We need more for youth.” Need to attract new buyers and renters to replace those who are moving out to make sure Wilbraham stays economically healthy. Need smaller

houses, 1200 sq. ft. to 1400 sq. ft. housing in order to attract young people and seniors. This allows young families to start here because the average young family of today can't reach the \$250K price point. The current housing stock doesn't work for the new generation or the downsizers. Apartments would be an attraction. Singles and young professionals need affordable single housing or apartment housing. **Need to appeal to the "Next Generation," the 30-50 age group.** If we don't find a way to do this—we could find Wilbraham slowly deteriorating due to lack of the right type of housing, sufficient employment, etc.

2. Partner Better With The State On Boston Road

Is there a better way to partner with the state on improvements to Boston Road? Can a cooperative team of the Town and Boston Road Business Association engage the State better? Wilbraham citizens and Boston Road businesses want improvements in traffic, sidewalks, etc. Needed: a new partnership or new team effort and initiative to solve this issue.

3. Assess And Monitor The Potential Impact Of Future Large Employer Layoffs

What is the potential impact to housing values, housing starts, tax revenues if residents are unable to handle loss of employment or longer commutes? What could happen if the remaining large employers cut back more? Recommend the town analyze and monitor the outlook for large employers; consider how to attract small business employers and other revenue generating businesses.

Business Important Unexplored Questions

The Vision Task Force documented important questions during the study that were felt to require additional consideration and discussion beyond the scope of the mission.

1. Study The Impact Of Growing Home Businesses

Wilbraham does not know how many residents are working from home. Home-based businesses and employees working from home are trends that are expected to double in the next five years. What will be the opportunities and impacts from this clearly coming change in the American lifestyle? What type of support will keep wage earners in town? What are the issues relating to mobile technologies and broadband? What do those who work at home need and want? Will they choose Wilbraham...or another type of community? Respondents desire places to gather, or ways to be more interconnected. Recommended: a study to understand the home-based business and work from home employee needs.

2. Study The Impact of Nearby Casino Development on Wilbraham's Businesses

Wilbraham's businesses will be impacted by a casino development in a neighboring community. How can Wilbraham understand the impact of this proposed development and prepare?

Bold Ideas For the Future From Our Community

Bold Ideas represent Community Insights survey individual respondents' suggestions for the future of Wilbraham. The following is a sample of Bold Ideas submitted by respondents that mentioned business topics. All responses were documented verbatim without editing for spelling or grammar.

1. Update zoning as needed and incentivize local shop owners and businesses to create a New England downtown that would offer a small-scale alternative to destination towns like Northampton.
2. What about working with WMA (Wilbraham Monson Academy) to promote education outreach. WMA had a wonderful economic forum that was open to the public but almost no one from the outside the school participated. How can the community work with the school for the benefit of both?
3. Center of town closed to traffic and upscale shops and restaurants like Northampton.
4. Flow design rocks the world with innovative wind turbines that gets us off oil and gas!!!! All houses and businesses are hook(ed) up.
5. I think the New England charm of town center is very important. I'd like to see small businesses have the opportunity to use the older homes as coffee houses or small boutiques.
6. Hire an expert in finding grants and get advice from an economic development specialist.

EDUCATION

History suggests that our community cares deeply about education and wants us to continue supporting and focusing on a quality educational experience for our present and future students. Recently, with a combined investment of state and taxpayer dollars, the Hampden Wilbraham Regional School District built a new high school, which exemplifies how much our community is serious about continually building, supporting and investing in the education of our children.

Our survey results suggest that Wilbraham stakeholders felt strongly that education is an important aspect of our community. Whether it is Pre-K or K-12 offerings, over 200 out of 501 respondents mentioned education as one of the best things about our community. More than 1/2 want the town to put more effort on improving our school system. Some suggest we need to focus on curriculum or rebuilding/maintaining our schools (possibly with new middle and elementary schools), while others, which included some recommendations from our educators, want more collaboration with businesses in the community or enhancing the technology offered to students in the elementary and middle schools (equipment, applications and a fiber optic network), now seen in the newly built high school. A few others suggest that we need to make sure that we continue to fund the schools at levels that allow the quality to be maintained and increased. It is assumed that most of the interest in supporting education reflects a focus on our public schools.. However, there was an interesting suggestion by more than 1/3 of respondents that they'd like to see the town put more emphasis on the relationship our community has with Wilbraham Monson Academy. Additionally, there were more than a few who suggested that we revisit the commitment to having a "regional" school district.

As Wilbraham residents imagine the future, they envision a town where education is a powerful priority, technology prevails, students treat each other with respect, and new partnerships with WMA and businesses extend the learning experience beyond the classroom. This long-term commitment to building a strong and vibrant school system could also yield more businesses and families to move here and make Wilbraham their home.

Wilbraham Future Headlines

Future Headlines represent individual respondents' visionary hopes for the future of Wilbraham. The following Future Headlines are a sampling that referenced Education:

Great Community, Excellent Education

If you educate them, they will come. (As Wilbraham continues to cultivate a quality educational community, we will attract more quality small business owners into our community who have families with young children.)

School is in Top 10 in State

Minnechaug achieves 100% graduation rate!

Chaug Still Looks New!

New Middle School to be Built

Wilbraham.. a Town Where Bullying is Old News

Wilbraham Selected As The Top Town in Massachusetts For Quality of Life And Educational Achievement

Education Findings Summary

After reviewing survey responses and additional data we collected about the future of education in Wilbraham, the most important findings for the future are:

1. **Education continues to be a high priority** for survey respondents. Education is a desired priority and from survey comments it seems as though our community feels we still have a way to go in maintaining and increasing the quality of education.
2. There is interest in **increasing our use of technology** and connectivity to keep up with other communities and prepare our children with skills of the 21st Century as they enter the work force. This includes more updated computers, tablets, increased bandwidth, and a possible wireless cloud throughout the community.

3. Respondents believe that **collaborative partnerships between Business and Education** will enable students to be more relevant and prepared for the future.
4. Survey respondents believe that **public buildings, including schools, should be multi-use**. The demographic trends of family and senior populations could inform the future strategy for the use of school-owned buildings as community centers after hours, or underused buildings during the days.
5. Beyond just access to buildings, some respondents want the community to **explore education services** beyond the school day for students, seniors and other adults to support their own personal commitment to life-long learning.

Education Key Facts & Trends

The key facts of importance discovered through Town Comparison Data, Quality Ratings, population statistics and demographics are:

1. A major indicator of educational success, as suggested by the superintendent, is to see where students continue their education after they graduate.
 - a. Of the Minnechaug Regional High School Class of 2011, 92% were accepted to and planned to attend post-secondary institutions of higher education, with 62% enrolled in four-year colleges and 30% enrolled in two-year colleges. These schools included Bentley University, Boston University, Catholic University, Colby College, College of the Holy Cross, Connecticut College, DePaul University, Dartmouth College, Fordham University, James Madison University, Northwestern University, Stonehill College, Syracuse University, Tufts University, Union College, US Air Force Academy, US Naval Academy, Vassar College, and Villanova University. (HWRSD Town Report 2012)
 - b. In 2010, HWRSD had the highest college attendance rate of our closest peer communities at 89.5%. See the chart below that compares this rate to nearby communities.
2. Of 472 respondents who expressed an opinion on the Town Library, 193 wanted more effort spent on Library services. Only 38 felt less effort should be paid to it.
3. Wilbraham residents are very interested in the education efforts and outcomes that define our community – this is seen in their response to the question about what they think is the best thing about Wilbraham (205/503 mentioned Pre-K – 12 or Wilbraham Monson Academy). They want the community to continue to put more emphasis on K-12 moving forward.
4. There was more than a passing interest, over 1/3 of respondents, wanted more involvement with Wilbraham Monson Academy in the community. More research could uncover what the community would want this involvement to look like.
5. Although student enrollment is projected to decline from 2012 until 2023 losing almost 14% of student enrollment, consultants who are guiding the school district state that other data

suggests that this decline could reverse. Their belief is that baby boomers will downsize and free up housing for families, which in turn will fill school vacancies. Student enrollment is a critical area for the town to continue to monitor and proactively plan resource adjustments. (Report of the New England School Development Council to HWRSD presented in 2012).

2009-10 Graduates Attending Institutions of Higher Education							
All Colleges and Universities - All Students							
DISTRICT	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	Attending Coll./Uni	Private 4 Year	Public 2 Year	Public Four-Yr	MA Comm. College	MA State Univ.	UMass.
Agawam	85.1	23.3	48.8	27.9	47.1	11.7	12.5
Amherst-Pelham	81.4	56.9	22.8	20.3	22	1.7	14.7
Belchertown	82.2	34.3	38.1	27.6	36.6	7.5	14.2
East Longmeadow	87.1	37.2	29.6	33.2	28.1	9.7	16.8
Easthampton	69.5	27.4	47.9	24.7	47.9	9.6	15.1
HWRSD	89.5	37.9	33.5	28.6	31	12.9	8.5
Longmeadow	88.8	54.7	14.3	30.9	13	7.6	10.8
Ludlow	79.6	25.1	53.1	21.8	53.1	10.6	9.5
Monson	83.3	23.1	32.3	43.1	30.8	13.8	20
Northampton	83.6	48	27.4	24.6	26.3	7.8	8.9
Palmer	78.9	30.2	40.7	29.1	39.5	15.1	10.5
South Hadley	82.6	33.6	41.4	25	41.4	12.5	9.4
Southwick-Tolland	78.8	30.6	38.9	30.6	38	14.8	10.2
State Totals	74.7	37.4	29.2	33.2	28	10.5	14.2

Education Key Findings from the Community

The majority of surveys and meetings show that the top needs and wants are:

1. Commitment to Education in Wilbraham now and in the future
 - a. Of 481 survey respondents, a total of 262 wanted more effort placed on K-12 education and 189 wanted the same amount of effort. Only 11 were unsure or felt K-12 education should receive less effort.
 - b. Technology -- Insights from a wide range of individuals that include the superintendent, principals, teachers, and residents suggest that investing more in technology is critical. Students have more technology and connectivity at home than

they do at school. We may not on par with our peer communities and need to better prepare our students for the future.

- i. It was suggested that we strategically secure updated computers, more computers, tablets, increased bandwidth (fiber and Wi-Fi) and more. It was even suggested that we build a Wi-Fi cloud that provides access to the entire town that would be available no matter where your location is.

2. Business Connections

- a. It was suggested that businesses in Wilbraham could provide a powerful force in creating relevance and better prepare students for their future. Recommendations include: Internships, speaking opportunities, mentor programs, apprentices, jobs, etc.
- b. Have . . . companies like “FloDesign” . . . help. . . to inspire more student interest in energy alternatives creative more green jobs as part of our economic recovery process.

Education Expert Insight

Superintendent of Schools

M. Martin O’Shea, Hampden-Wilbraham Superintendent of Schools, expressed a number of ideas how he sees education in Wilbraham today and into the future.

- Moving to Wilbraham from another district, Mr. O’Shea sees a strong sense of tradition and spirit with a well-balanced and healthy set of expectations that is welcoming for all students – regardless of their performance level.
- Mr. O’Shea has also noticed that students come back to live in Wilbraham after graduation more than in Longmeadow where he was an administrator prior to HWRSD.
- The new high school has set the bar for how technology could be a stronger driver of learning in school and throughout the community. Mr. O’Shea hopes that the use of technology in other schools in the district would reach this level.
- Finally, with the new High School coming on board, Mr. O’Shea is very interested in exploring how the building could be used after hours to support the learning needs of all residents.

Other School Leaders

- Other conversations with school administrators and educators reinforced the superintendent’s desire for more technology and bandwidth in the schools.
- Educators were also passionate about the role businesses could provide to allow students to be more relevant as they enter into the business world later in life. Educators also need exposure to the business world and the destination of where their students will be in the future.

- “Bring teachers to corporations for “real life experiences””
- “Stimulate students as they explore potential problems in the world –with companies like FloDesign”
- “High Speed connection and more technology, devices, digital textbooks”

Education Opportunities

The core opportunity for education in Wilbraham suggested by respondents mostly leads to:

1. Embrace new technology and partnerships that help students extend their learning environment and increase their relevance as they prepare for the world in front of them.
 - a. Build bridges between education and business and town entities that allow students to envision their own future.
 - b. Infuse all aspects of our learning program with technologies that empower, prepare, engage and inspire our students who are more technically advanced than the system supports.
 - c. Develop more collaboration with Wilbraham Monson Academy, taking advantage of having students from around the world within our community.
2. Find ways of promoting Wilbraham’s commitment to education and welcoming young families outside of our area who want to live in the region, but who don’t know the strength and quality of living and learning that Wilbraham provides.
3. Utilizing our existing resources of buildings - schools and libraries and even Wilbraham Monson Academy – to support the learning needs of adults, with a particular emphasis on seniors.

Education Challenges

1. Declining elementary school populations could lead to education funding problems and underutilized investments (the high school).
2. The Middle School is overcrowded and resources need to be invested for students at this critical time in their development.
3. Not having the technology to support our educators and students will hurt our graduates’ ability to compete in tomorrow’s world.
4. Funding pressures elsewhere in the community that compete with school needs.

Education Important Unexplored Questions

The Vision Task Force documented important questions during the study that were felt to require additional consideration and discussion beyond the scope of the mission.

1. How do we stay on top of population and other trends to keep our school system healthy and well funded?
2. How can we financially support being technologically relevant for our teachers and students?
3. How can our students achieve a better balance between technological skill and interpersonal communication effectiveness?
4. How is technology changing traditional education methods and what are the implications for educators, budgets and student outcomes?

Bold Ideas for the Future From Our Community

Bold Ideas represent Community Insights survey and Imagine Wilbraham Day individual respondents' suggestions for the future of Wilbraham. The following is a sample of Bold Ideas submitted by respondents that mentioned Education topics. All responses were documented verbatim without editing for spelling or grammar.

1. Business/schools collaborate as a 21th century-think tank for the community
2. Business partnerships, internships and part time jobs foster connectivity between business and education partners.
3. Build a wireless cloud over the community for student and public access.
4. Having students from the HS spend time with the elementary school students and in the community.
5. Make sure that the scaling back of foreign language be halted, risking our students' future in the global economy.
6. Enhance programs for gifted and talented students, adding more rigor and challenge to their learning.
7. Establish smaller schools with smaller classes.
8. Require mandatory education for parents, (educators) and children trying to ebb racial discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment and enhance civic pride, duty and mindfulness.
9. Open up the high school gym, pool and other resources for residents to use in after school hours for recreation, adult education opportunities and community meetings/gatherings.
10. Wilbraham needs to be on top of technological changes and the changing needs of our country and world to ensure we are working towards a higher quality of life
11. Focus a bit more on careers – skills – real world skills – life skills

12. Connect youth and adult/senior citizens' populations – facilitate collaborative learning opportunities for each to learn from the other: ex. youth teaching computer classes to adults.
13. We need a teen center.
14. Have more companies like Flo Design to inspire more student interest in energy alternatives, create more green jobs as part of our economic recovery process

LAND USE

Wilbraham's land use practices to date have maintained its small, quaint, rural, historic New England town feel. Subdivisions on side roads off primary and secondary roads have camouflaged residential growth.

In Wilbraham, residential development has been a primary focus for the past 50 years. With the exception of the Boston Road corridor, flat and dry land holdings, including agricultural lands, are often the first to be subdivided. Most arable land, farmable, in Wilbraham has been developed.

A majority of town stakeholders describe the best part of Wilbraham as its look and feel. The words used by survey respondents include: quaint, historic, open, rural, quiet and beautiful. It is the respondents' expectation and hope for the future that Wilbraham's desired aesthetics will continue.

Research studies have proven that where you live is one of the highest components of your quality of life. Dan Buettner, award winning writer and researcher, working with National Geographic to study the longevity of cultures, has written extensively on gaining a higher well being. Buettner states, "Where you choose to live is one of the most important determinants of your happiness...Look for communities with sidewalks, meeting places and other characteristics that nudge you into social interaction. Easy access to green spaces and recreation also favors well-being."

Some change to the beauty and feel of Wilbraham is unplanned and uncontrollable, as the storms of 2011 proved. The question for Wilbraham land use vision is planned change. How does Wilbraham balance inevitable growth and development with the desire to hold onto Wilbraham's beauty and feel? Current residential and commercial development initiatives are changing the look of some areas of the town.

Residents in town have many opinions about future growth and land use. Wilbraham's taxes are mostly derived from property ownership, approximately 91%. An increase in taxes impacts all property owners. Some in town see keeping land on the tax rolls and continued development as a way to broaden the tax base. Some in town wonder how best to assimilate future growth while enabling Wilbraham to retain its character and appeal. Some are concerned about the remaining agricultural land. These concerns about land use all need to be considered as part of Wilbraham's Vision.

Wilbraham Future Headlines

Future Headlines represent Community Insights survey respondents' visionary hopes for the future of Wilbraham. The following future headlines that reference Land Use are:

Wilbraham Preserves Open Spaces As Businesses Grow

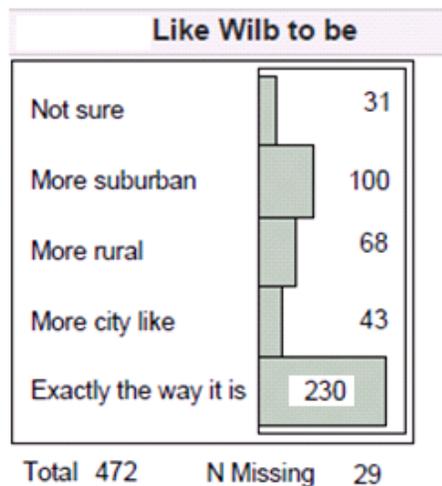
Wilbraham Maintains Its "Country Feel" Despite Development

Wilbraham preserves its history, its beautiful land, and fosters community spirit

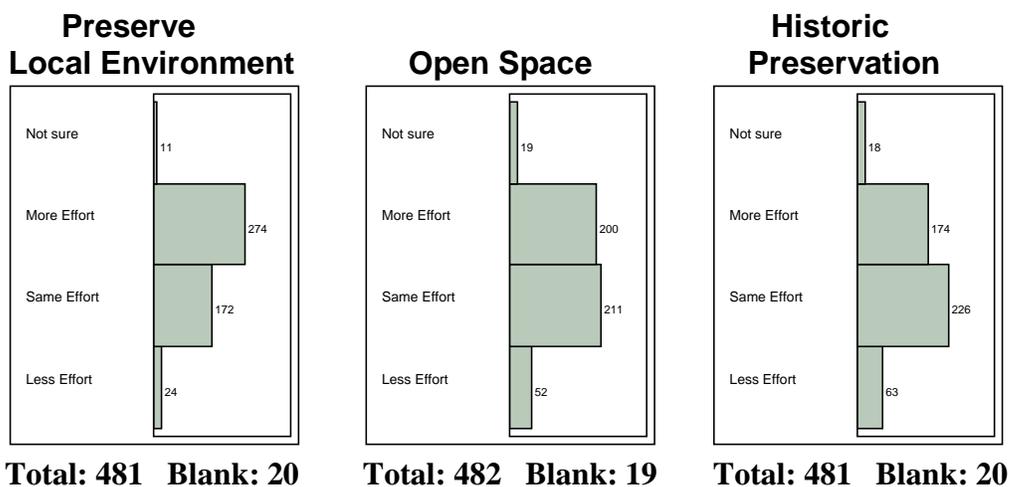
Land Use Findings Summary

After reviewing survey responses and additional land use research, the most important findings for the future are:

1. **Wilbraham's aesthetics** are very important to survey respondents. Respondents described the Best Thing About Wilbraham by communicating these aesthetics – small, quiet, beauty, vistas, trails, quaint, and historic. Looking forward the town needs to balance future growth with these highly valued aesthetics that attract and keep survey respondents in Wilbraham. Asked a direct survey question, “Would you like Wilbraham to be more rural, more city like or exactly the way it is?”, the selection with the highest number of responses, 230 out of 472 chose - “exactly the way it is”.



2. **Preserving the local environment** is in keeping with the aesthetic feel and received a high response for the town to place more effort towards. Respondents, 456 out of 481, selected more effort (274) or the same effort (182) to the survey question regarding preserving the local environment.
3. **Open Space** continued this theme. Respondents, 411 out of 481, selected either more effort (200) or the same effort (211) to preserve open space.
4. Of the 266 respondents who noted that “the **Best Thing about Wilbraham**” was the **community – meaning “place”** – 131 also asked for “more effort” on Open Space and 157 asked for “more effort” for Preserving the Local Environment.

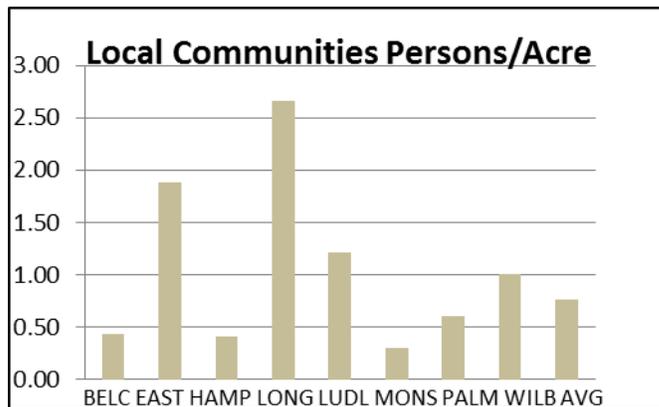


5. At Imagine Wilbraham Day and other community meetings, some members of the community indicated that they are uncomfortable with or opposed to anything that would increase a town-level role in land stewardship. Others expressed enjoyment of town trails and conserved areas. Specific comments are included in the appendix.
6. The trails in town have had increased use as they have become better known through community organizations that are using them. Examples of groups using the trails are the Hiking Club, the Cross Country Team from the High School, Boy Scouts, Seniors, equestrians, as well as, dog walkers and families. Volunteers maintain Wilbraham’s trail system. The display on Trails at Imagine Wilbraham Day elicited visitor enthusiasm, and surprise from some who had been unaware of the trail system in Wilbraham. Communication is needed to bring awareness of the trail system to public attention. Information and maps for the trails can be found on the Town of Wilbraham website under Departments/Parks & Recreation/Hiking Trails in Wilbraham.
7. Maps indicate much of Wilbraham’s most arable land has already been developed. See the Land Use Data: Maps section at the end of this chapter.

Land Use Key Facts & Trends

Land use data for Wilbraham and surrounding towns can be found in the Land Use Data: Town Comparison section at the end of the chapter.

1. Wilbraham's density is about one person per acre. Our residential percentage is more like suburban towns -- East Longmeadow and Longmeadow -- than like rural towns, such as Belchertown, Monson, and Hampden. Yet, our development choices to date make Wilbraham look more rural than suburban. The topography of Wilbraham, which includes a large central wetland and steep eastern ridgeline, has prevented traditional grid road construction, which is believed to have kept Wilbraham looking more rural.



2. The percentage of land used for public recreation in Wilbraham is more reflective of rural towns rather than suburban.
3. East Longmeadow, Hampden and Palmer have more land in active agriculture than Wilbraham but do not have either an Agriculture Commission or Right-to-Farm By-Law to support farming, as does Wilbraham.
4. The use of Open Space areas was cited as a reason for Wilbraham being included in 2007 *Money Magazine* "One Hundred Best Places".
 - a. Fountain Park was established by private community fund-raising efforts
 - b. Rice Nature Preserve, the Alton MacDonald Preserve, and Gazebo Park were funded with the help of Community Preservation Act "CPA" funds.
5. Over the past 30 years, many large parcels of land in town have been subdivided. Large farms have mostly disappeared, but horses, home gardens, small flocks of chickens and beehives have increased on properties with sufficient acreage to meet town by-laws.

6. Two Farmers Markets (Hampden Bank on Boston Road and Christ the King Church) offered produce in the summer of 2012. Hampden Bank has continued in 2013. Attendance was variable by both attendees and vendors.
7. The Community Garden on Monson Road, which began in 1975, averages rental of sixty plots (25x50 ft) as reported by overseer Melissa Graves. By providing water sources (first a tank filled by the Fire Department and then a well drilled in 2003) and the annual Plow Day Event, the Wilbraham Community Garden is now the largest civic garden in the Pioneer Valley. It has served as a model for surrounding communities who are establishing community gardens. A number of users of the Community Garden are from outside of Wilbraham. This indicates a desired activity that is unique and attracts more people to Wilbraham.
8. The two APR tracts in Wilbraham (Green Acres Farm owned by Kathy Smedberg and Rice Orchard owned by Dr. Robert Mathews) are locked into agricultural use and cannot be developed. Labor costs and markets for produce present ongoing issues for the two owners.
9. Semi-protected lands listed in the 2012 Town Assessment include:
 - a. 8 plots (5 owners) in Chapter 61 (Forestry)
 - b. 25 plots (20 owners) are in Chapter 61A (Agricultural)
 - c. 25 plots (14 owners) are in Chapter 61B (Recreational)

This land is protected while in these programs, but can be developed in the future by paying back five years of taxes at the regular assessed rates.

Land Use Opportunities

1. To attract and retain residents, visitors and businesses for Wilbraham, the town must develop growth strategies that support and sustain the “quaint feel and beauty” of Wilbraham.
2. Develop/brand Wilbraham’s identity by focusing on the strength of its aesthetics (charm, beauty, vistas, trails, history). Leverage Wilbraham’s aesthetics in communications, news articles and advertising.
3. To support survey respondent’s desire for open space and preserving the local environment, continue to formulate strategies to preserve arable land areas in Town.
4. Increase residents’ knowledge of opportunities in Wilbraham by increasing communication and encouraging exploration. Wilbraham needs to increase communication to inform citizens of Open Space recreational trails, Community Garden and to buy produce of its local farmers. Develop and run special programs that can enhance communication using the library and the hiking club.
5. Explore greater land use for individual recreational needs, as well as, large group recreational use (see the Livability chapter of this report for more information about recreation). Most of Wilbraham’s organized recreation programs use municipal land. Examples include: Soccer Club, Disc Golf, Spec Pond programs.
6. Encourage development of current underutilized properties, which have already been developed instead of focusing on undeveloped land.

Land Use Challenges

1. The planning challenge is to balance development and preservation in a way that is financially supportive to the community while also recognizing that preserving Wilbraham's beauty and feel is also vitally important to its long term value and economic health.
2. A realization that continued conversion of farmland and open space into housing lots could change the character of Wilbraham.
3. Some respondents are concerned that initiatives to increase open space or maintain land as farmland could infringe upon private property rights.
4. A concern that preserving land by removing it from the tax rolls could adversely affect property tax rates for homeowners.
5. A concern that increasing tax rates will cause some older homeowners to decide to leave the town they love.
6. How can the town and community work more collaboratively on land use conflicts? How can the town work towards solutions that meet multiple objectives of opposing parties trying to get to "win win"?
7. How can the community gain clear impartial data regarding land use conflicts to help town committees and residents make informed decisions for Wilbraham's future?

Land Use Important Unexplored Questions

The Vision Task Force documented important questions during the study that were felt to require additional consideration and discussion beyond the scope of the mission.

1. Does Wilbraham need additional expert consultation regarding how to incorporate future development while sustaining the beauty of the town?

Bold Ideas For The Future From Our Community

Bold Ideas represent Community Insights survey individual respondents' suggestions for the future of Wilbraham. The following is a sample of Bold Ideas submitted by respondents that mentioned Land Use topics. All responses were documented verbatim without editing for spelling or grammar.

1. Survey Responses about Viewscapes:

- "Limit the construction of McMansions that cut into our beautiful mountain as seen going east on Faculty St."
- "Perhaps a mountain top observatory. Our mountain is unique to the surrounding communities, but isn't something that most residents have access to. Creating an

observatory area that can be accessed by car and by hiking would be great for the town”

- “Rebuild all stone walls which can be seen from every street in Wilberville!”

2. Survey Responses regarding Agriculture and Farming

- “Sell the rice farm and allow homes to be built there to increase tax rate.”
- “have a vegetable truck visit senior housing to help provide fresh fruits and vegetables to seniors”
- “I love the mixture of farms and modern convenience. You can still find a tractor driving down the street! Help local farms like Rice's Fruit Farm Re-establish in the community. Offer a Randalls' (in Ludlow) type shop with local goods.”
- “More fair type farmers markets but incorporate education (how to spin yarn, grow a better plant)”
- “I think that we should create more community based initiatives such as more land for farming, hiking and other recreational use. We should start a program where we can buy and grow our vegetables locally instead of at the supermarket.”
- “...Establish an organic town garden at the pheasant farm to be maintained by a division of the highway dept. with the produce going to the senior center and put by for use by the school system.”
- “Acquisition of natural & conservation lands + maintenance of existing agricultural lands”
- “Reopen Bennets farm. Reopen pheasant farm. Help struggling farms with incentives to keep their doors open.” (Note: as of this writing, Bennett’s Turkey Store building was demolished).
- “Large Farmers Market lining the center of Wilbraham on a Saturday morning.”
- “We have beautiful, historic farms in town. Let's promote them, get our schools involved with them, make them accessible, encourage local farmers markets or preferably recruiting a new Rice's farm store.”
- “ice rinks at the community gardens”
- “... I would also try and get some of our farms back.”

3. Survey Responses asking for Town Clean-up; there were many comments similar to these:

- “Enforce codes to clean up the stretch of Boston Road from the Post Office to Brainard Road, too many old unsafe looking buildings”
- “We need more pride of place. The edges of roads are overgrown and full of trash. So many areas look strangely out of place with developments of manicured lawns linked together by roads that are messy.”

- “Can we do something about the 13 abandoned properties on Route 20?? If I was a hobo, I would come to town and have the pick of the litter about where to stay. Rt. 20 is an embarrassment to our community.”

4. Survey responses regarding Open Space, and Hiking and Biking:

- “Minimize the amount of town owned property”
- “The town needs to stop acquiring open space at the taxpayers' cost. All undevelopable open space in town should be sold off to individuals who are willing to put the land into Chapter 61A or 61B. The burden to maintain open space should not be left to the taxpayers but to those individuals who insist that such land be preserved.”
- “Create a bike path along the power lines which runs North-South which could be connected to existing hiking trails and almost all of the schools.”
- “Figure out how to build a way to connect Main Street to Stony Hill Road without having to go to either Springfield Street or Boston Road.”
- “I would also encourage the creation of a public walking area that is off the main road, but not isolated. A fine example is the Ludlow Reservoir area, which is paved and scenic, and enjoyed by people of ALL ages: What a healthy thing this would be as it would encourage walking, biking and wholesome outdoor exercise.”
- “We need to create an identity for the town-a tagline-‘The suburb with the trails’ ”.
- Other ideas include trails through the woods at the dead ends of side streets to connect them to the main streets for pedestrians only; and possibly a button to push for pedestrians at busy intersections.
- “...Wilbraham-East Longmeadow-Longmeadow Bikeway”
- “...If it (the CPA) remains, funds should be used to enhance Bruer Pond by sinking a well so that it remains a pond year round and not a mud hole. Could be an attractive area for picnics, ice skating, educational activities and so on.”
- “I would make sure that we did all we could to maintain places like the Pheasant farm, hiking at the end of Highmoor etc. I truly believe the thing that makes our town special is the feeling of community and more like I remember things to be when I was young”
- “...Keep it much as it is now, but increase opportunities for independent, non-driving living. Connect open space; provide tax incentives for privately owned open space WITH public access.”
- “Set up a task force to work with Minnechaug Land Trust to encourage larger land owners in town to put their land into conservation”
- “Deep investment in preserving open spaces and public land within the town, to ensure that my children have a town to enjoy a decade or two from now.”

- “Maintain the grow the focus on open space in town, but allow for smart development on Route 20”
- “Take steps to ensure that rural character is preserved, but provide options for senior/semi-urban housing and minimal driving living, including mixed use housing/retail/services in defined areas.”
- “Continue to find and secure open spaces and forested land to protect. Wilbraham doesn't need any more cell or power towers to look at, and our green spaces should be VIGOROUSLY protected from development and corporate expansion. I believe that most residents of our Town live here because of the natural beauty that we have and the green spaces and small town living that is provided. In fact, we pay a LOT to live here and enjoy these things. I think that you'll find that most residents want the town kept small, isolated and somewhat elitist.”
- “I would purchase undeveloped land and put it in a protected status. We don't need to build anything.”

5. Survey response on History and Land Use:

- “The town of Wilbraham needs to focus on caring for and preserving the historical buildings it owns, not allowing them to decay because of neglect and lack of care. The town and the people who live here should be very proud of our town's history, the buildings that are still standing after all those years and the stories behind them and what the people of Wilbraham have represented over the past several hundred years. Wake up and preserve our History!”

6. Survey Responses on Mixed Use Development

- “A Mixed Use Plan Development with new homes, fun and inviting shops with a "fresh" look.”
- “Incentivize a good mixed use development so that I could live here forever without having to drive, as well as connecting the existing open space corridors into a unified, Town-wide greenway for walking and non-motorized recreation. Buy the remaining Mountain areas or buy the development rights from owners. Also, set up public/private transportation along school bus routes for non-drivers.”

7. Survey Responses regarding government involvement with respect to land use

- “Elimination of authoritative government regulations that seek to direct people on the use of their private held property”
- “Do not change what made the town what it is. Do not presume you can structure the future (you did not structure the past). Allow people to live as they wish, so

long as they respect others rights. Do not under estimate the long term visions of Agenda 21 and similar government initiatives.”

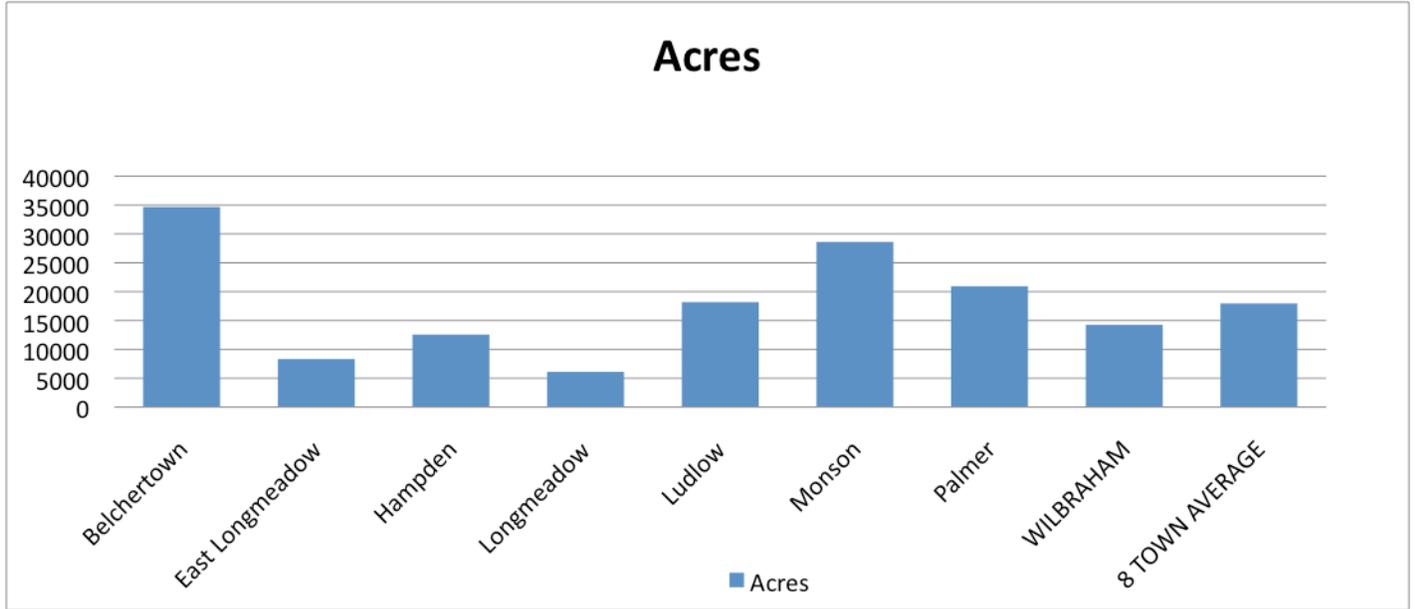
- “I hope as Wilbraham moves forward on this project that the town does not fall into a trap of mandates/by-laws. Many communities have adopted programs that will limit and in some cases take away rights of landowners. All based on green growth, energy consumption, and other non-proven environmental factors. All I ask as a resident is be smart and continue that path we are on, why deviate? We are a part of a larger community of Western MA and the State of MA and need to take advantage of opportunities provided through that relationship.”
- “Current planning practices foster a reactive approach to developer proposals. Sometimes, ‘working with developers’ ends up meaning ‘giving in to developers’ in the long run. Would like to see the town become more locally proactive in shaping its future instead of letting its future happen to it.”

Land Use Data: Town Comparison

Wilbraham has an area of 14,312 acres of land:

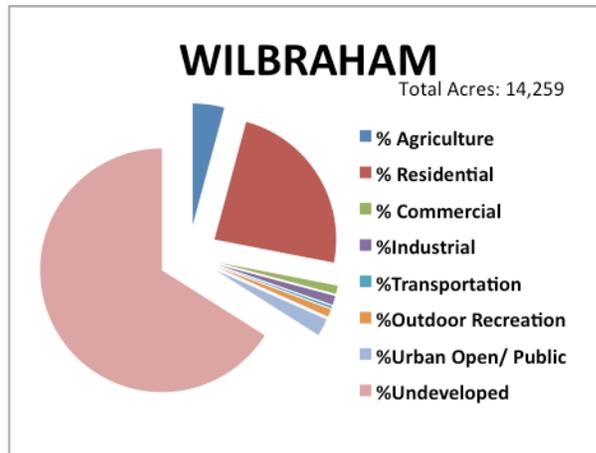
- 3830 acres are developed in some way (residential, commercial, industrial, roads, transportation)
- 594 acres are agricultural
- 604 acres are water, “open urban/public”, and outdoor recreation
- 9284 acres are either undevelopable (wetlands and steeply sloped lands) or potentially developable.
- Soils east of the mountain range are more arable than west of the mountains. Southwest slopes of the mountain provided ideal locations for orchards.
- Wilbraham has fewer acres than Belchertown, Monson, Palmer, and Ludlow but more than Hampden, East Longmeadow, and Longmeadow.
- The percentage of land in agriculture compared to land used for residence in Wilbraham is less than in Belchertown, Hampden, Monson, Palmer or Ludlow but greater than in East Longmeadow or Longmeadow.
- Population density is about one person/acre in Wilbraham. Longmeadow, East Longmeadow and Ludlow show greater population densities and Palmer, Belchertown, Hampden and Monson are less dense than Wilbraham

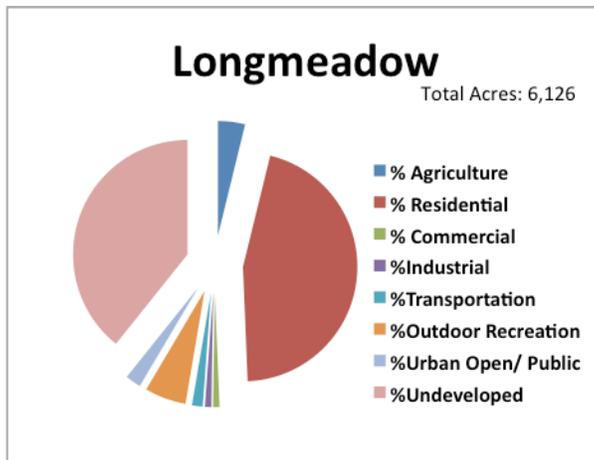
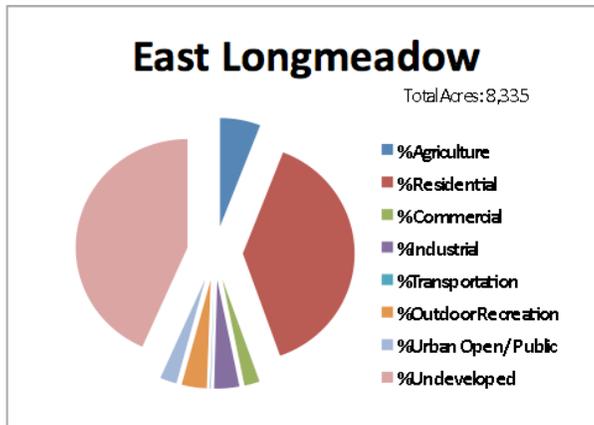
- Wilbraham, Ludlow, Monson and Belchertown have a Right to Farm By-Law and Agriculture Commission. Hampden, East Longmeadow, Longmeadow and Palmer have neither.



COMMUNITIES OVER 20% RESIDENTIAL

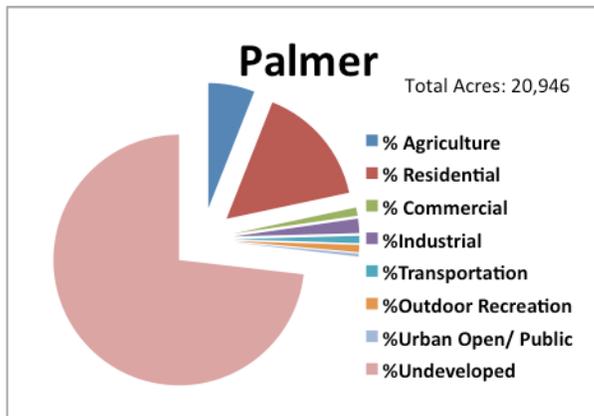
Wilbraham, East Longmeadow, Longmeadow

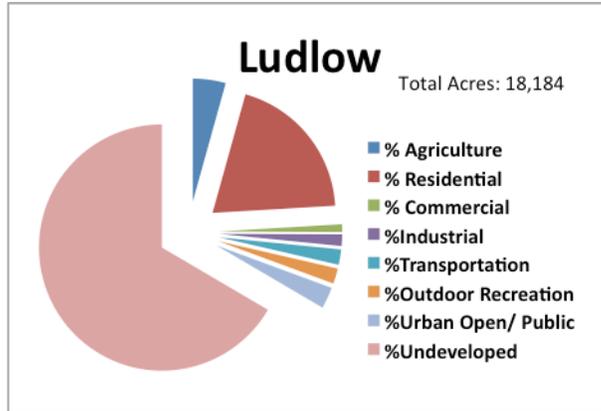




COMMUNITIES BETWEEN 15% AND 20% RESIDENTIAL

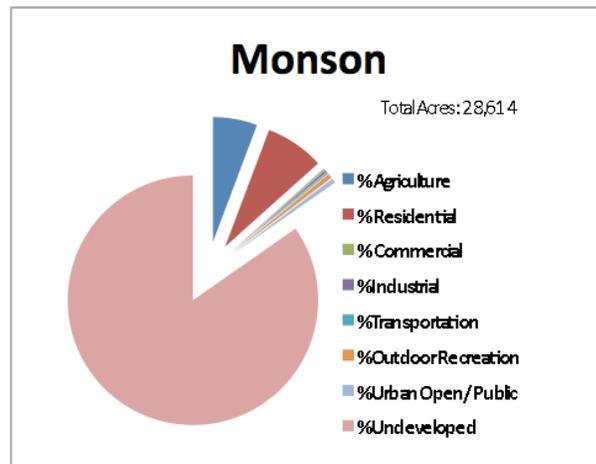
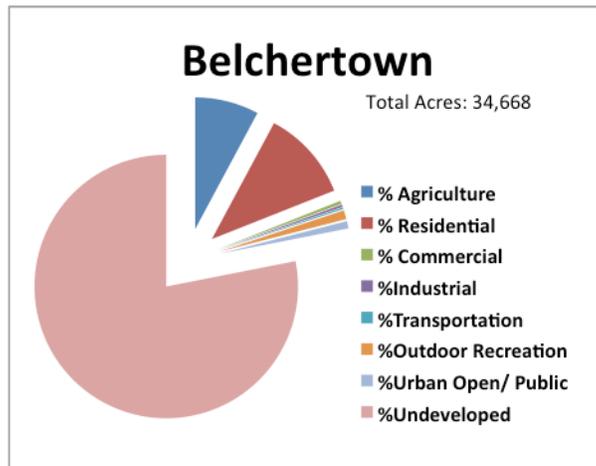
Palmer, Ludlow

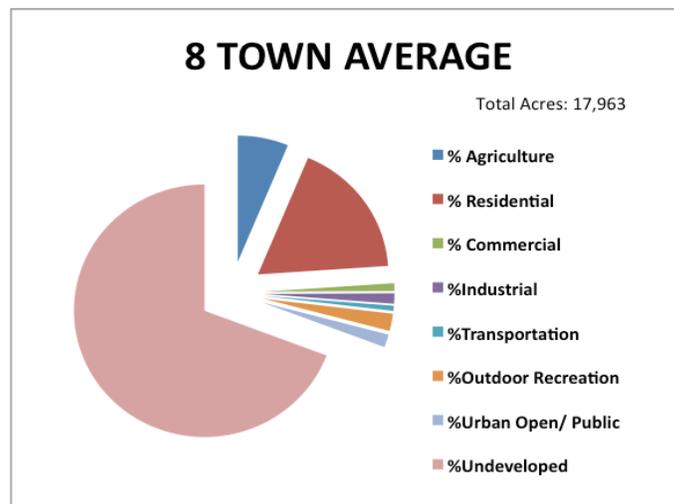
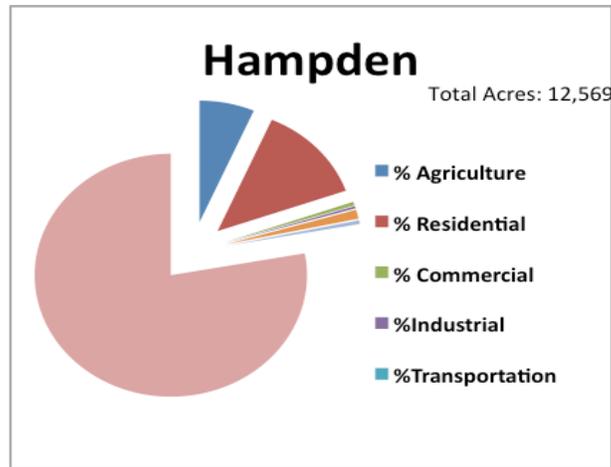




COMMUNITIES UNDER 15% RESIDENTIAL

Belchertown, Monson, Hampden





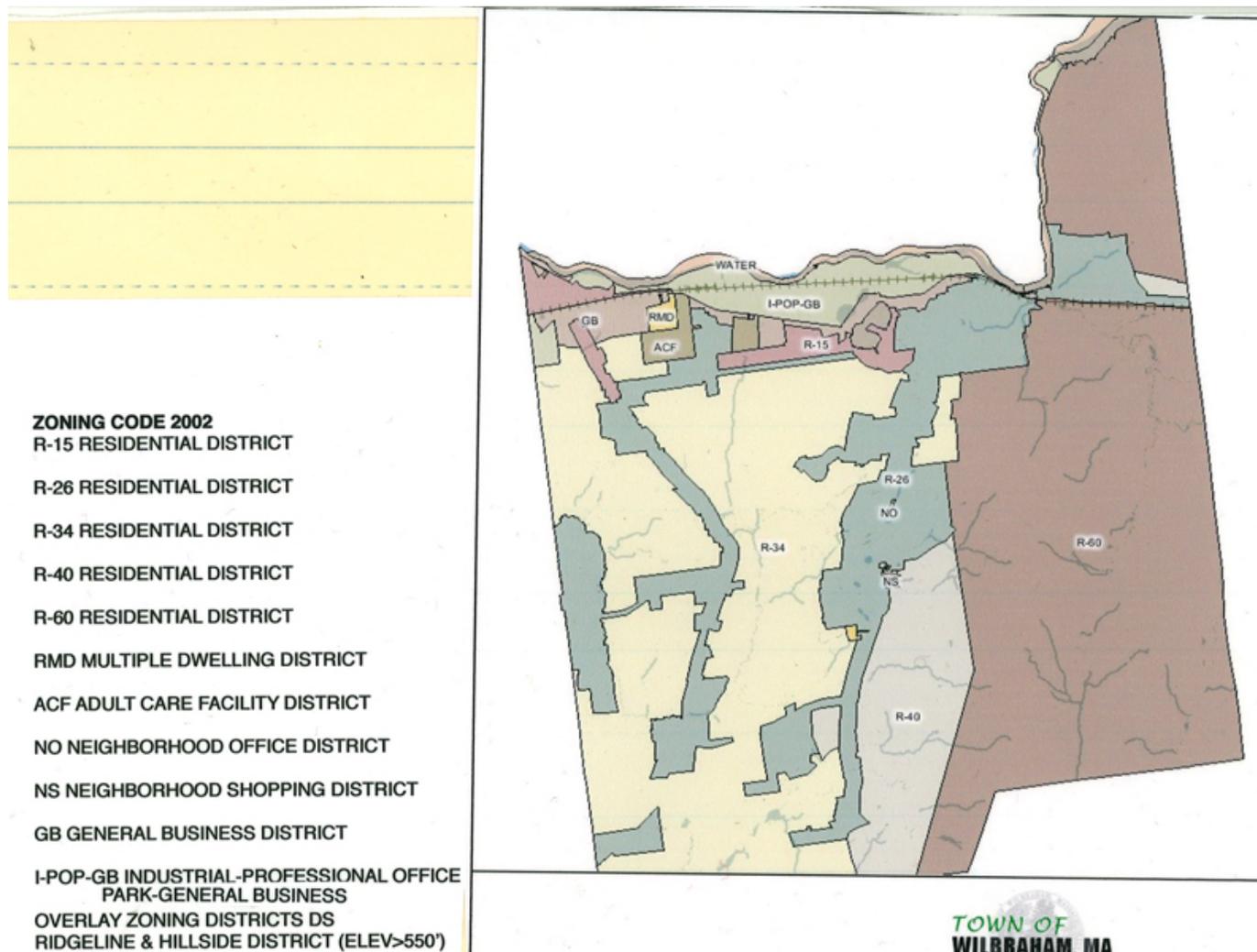
Land Use Data: Maps

Note on maps: All maps referenced in this chapter came from town sources. Most of the maps which follow in this report can also be viewed on our town website:

Description	Date or Source	Link	Location
Town Zoning Map	May, 2012	http://www.wilbraham-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/125	This link is the map
Soils in Wilbraham	OSRP 2000-2005 and OSRP 2010 Update	http://ma-wilbraham.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/View/90	Figure 10
Wetlands in Wilbraham	OSRP 2000-2005 and OSRP 2010 Update	http://ma-wilbraham.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/View/90	Figure 15
Land of Conservation and Recreational Interest	June, 2009	http://www.wilbraham-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/81	This link is the map
Subdivision map from 2005 (Figure 8)	OSRP 2005-2010	This is from a pre-final version of the OSRP 2010 Update which is no longer online	
Development 2005-2010	OSRP 2010 Update	http://ma-wilbraham.civicplus.com/DocumentCenter/View/90	Figure 7

Additionally, a large map with an overlay of property lines superimposed upon lands with soil suitable for farming shows that much of the town's arable lands are now residential areas. The entire map could not be reduced in size without making it too dense and dark to read. A lightened version of it is included in this appendix to provide an idea of where the arable areas in town are located. Blue tones indicate arable land. The entire map is available for viewing at the Town Planning Office. It was created by Becca Weaver, as part of a Tufts University Project in January, 2013 which sought to match Massachusetts farmers seeking land with landowners who are interested in having their land used for active agriculture.

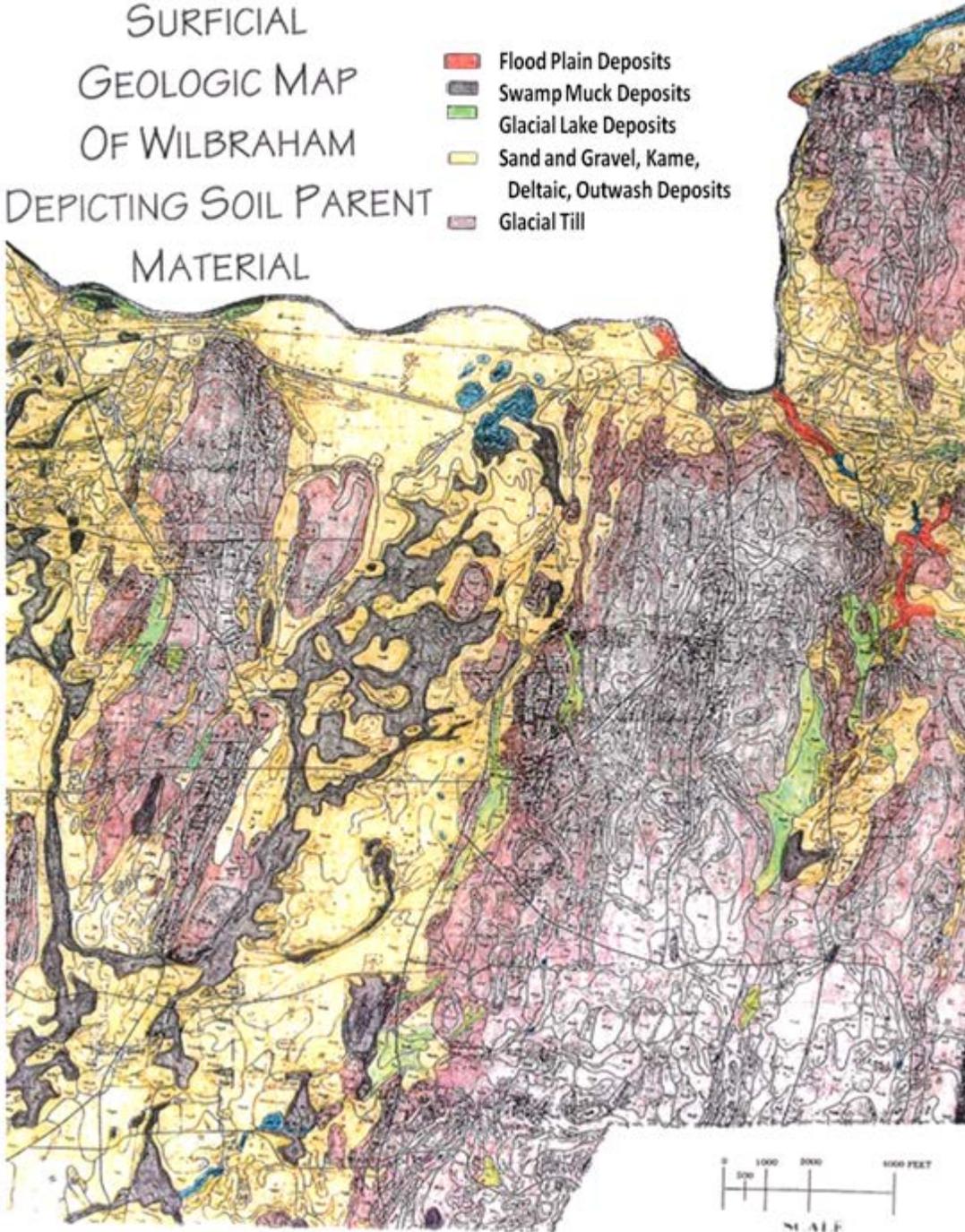
TOWN ZONING MAP



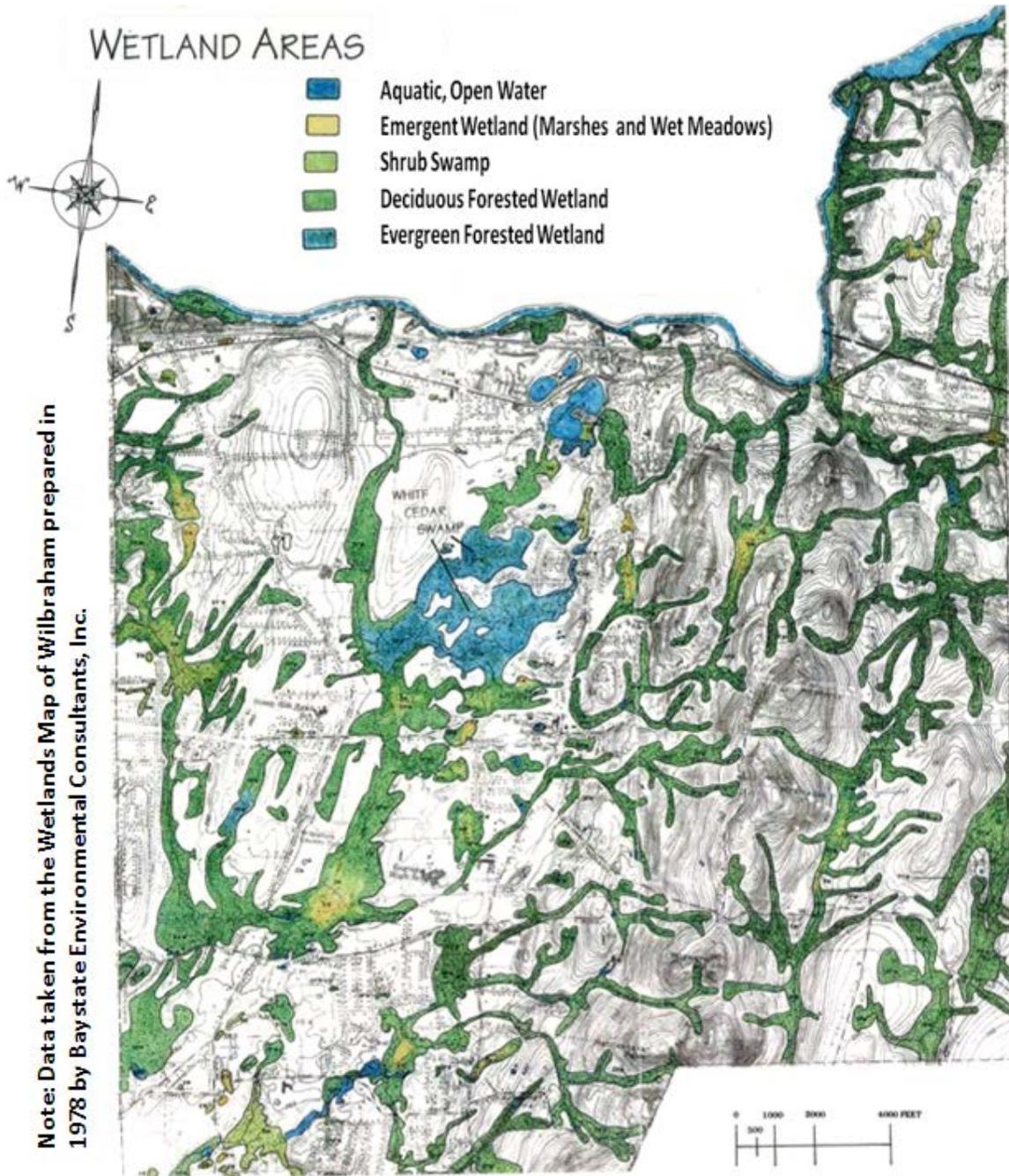
SOILS IN WILBRAHAM

SURFICIAL
GEOLOGIC MAP
OF WILBRAHAM
DEPICTING SOIL PARENT
MATERIAL

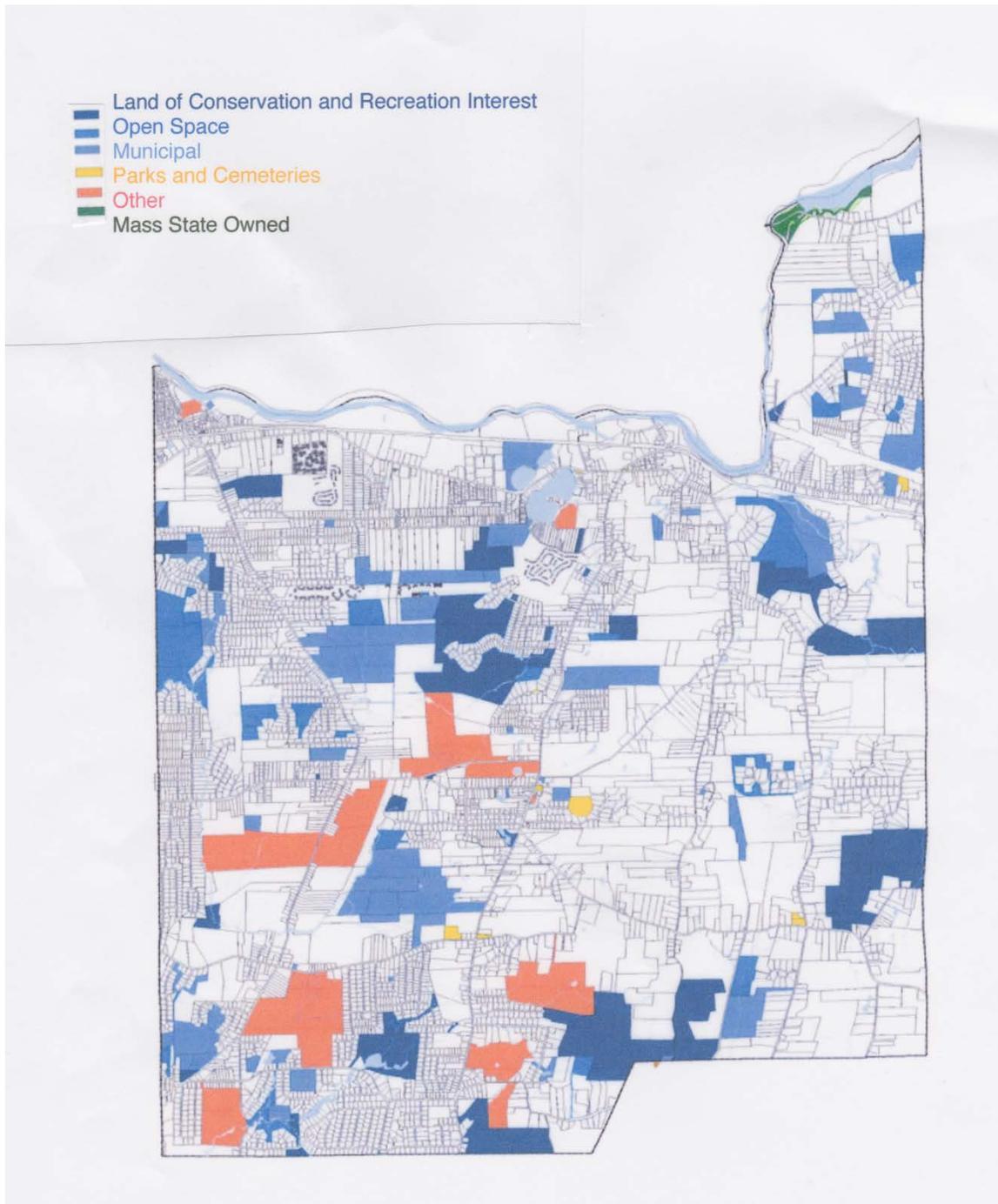
- Flood Plain Deposits
- Swamp Muck Deposits
- Glacial Lake Deposits
- Sand and Gravel, Kame,
Deltaic, Outwash Deposits
- Glacial Till



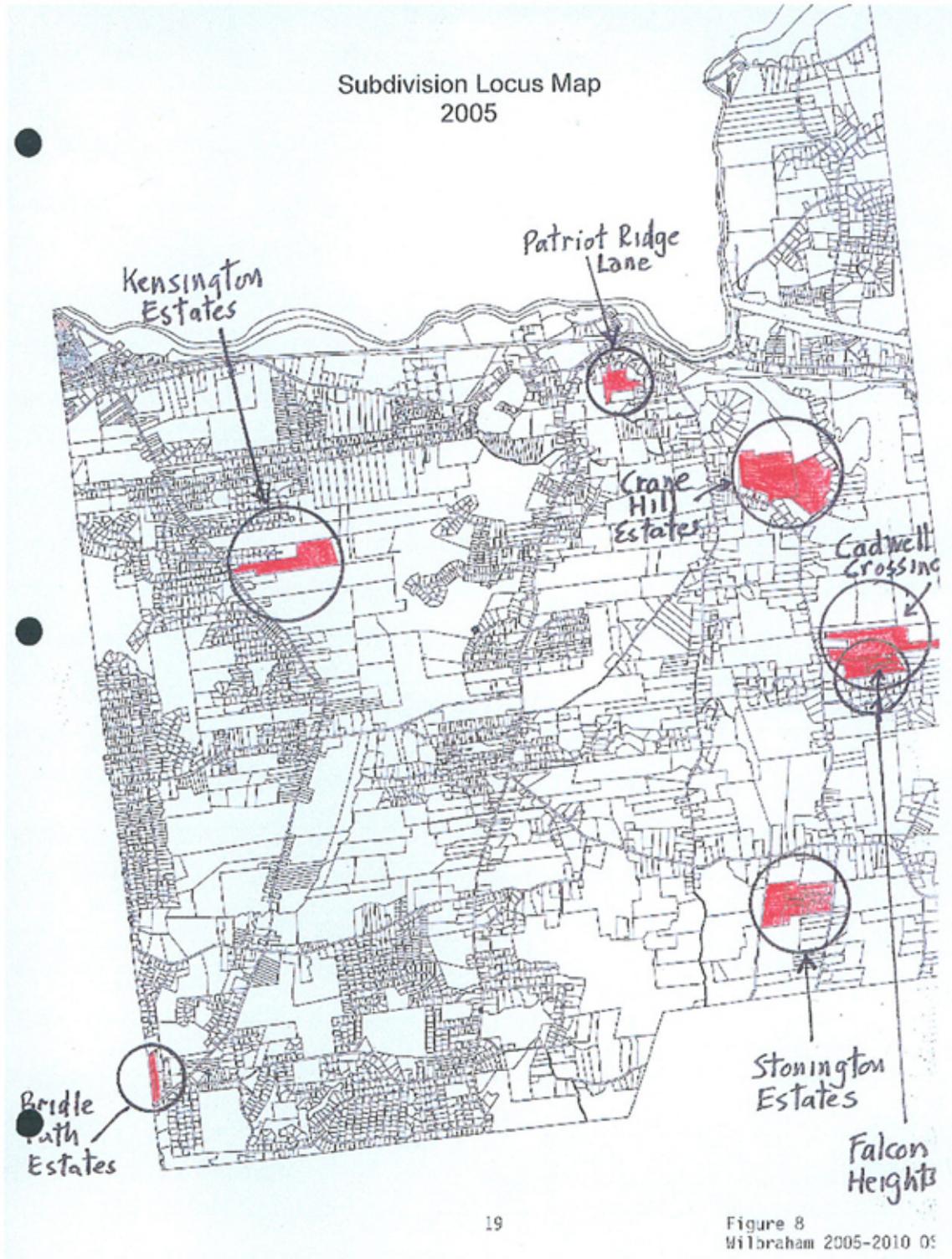
Wetland, protected Conservation Area



Land of Conservation and Recreation Interest



Subdivision Locus Map from 2005



Development 2005 – 2010

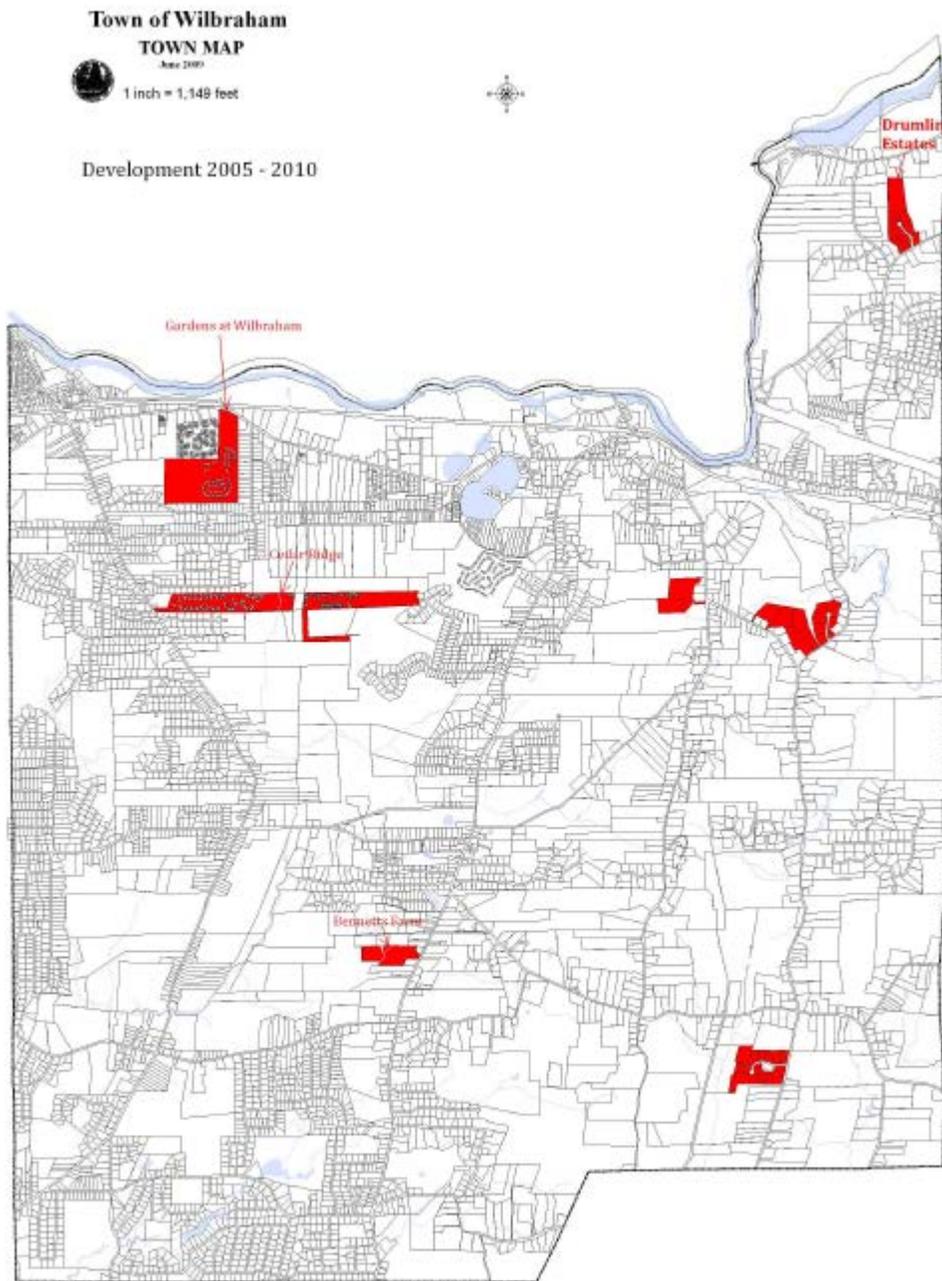
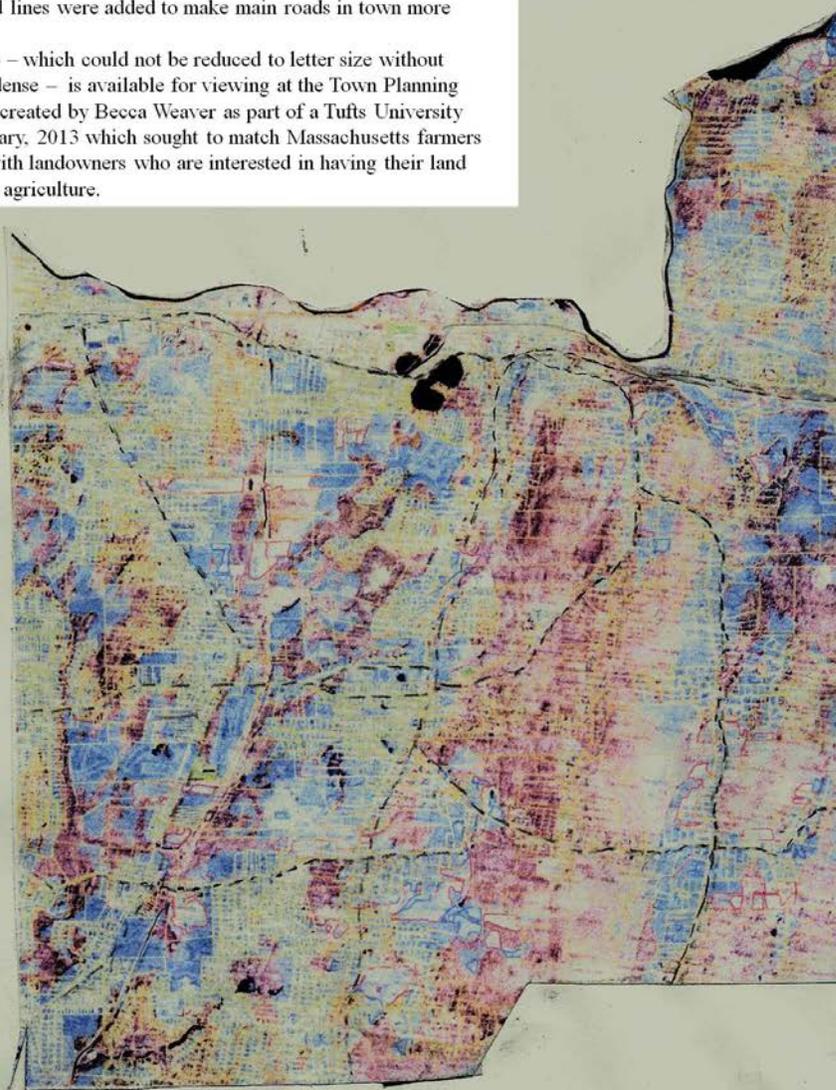


Figure 7

Lightened version of a map with an overlay of property lines superimposed upon lands with soil suitable for farming shows that much of the town's arable lands are now residential areas.

- Blue tones indicate arable land.
- Yellow lines are the property lines
- Black dashed lines were added to make main roads in town more visible.

The entire map – which could not be reduced to letter size without making it too dense – is available for viewing at the Town Planning Office. It was created by Becca Weaver as part of a Tufts University Project in January, 2013 which sought to match Massachusetts farmers seeking land with landowners who are interested in having their land used for active agriculture.



LIVABILITY

ENTERTAINMENT & RECREATION / HOUSING

In 2007 Money Magazine voted Wilbraham as no. 94 in their Top 100 Best Places to Live, one of several Massachusetts towns and one of many New England towns listed. They cite the Town's purchase of hundreds of acres of land, preserving it as open space as a major benefit. Other categories they used to rank towns include Financial Data, Housing, Education, Quality of Life, Leisure and Culture, Weather, Health and Neighbors. For all Best Places to Live categories, Wilbraham ranked either on par with or better than the average scores for the other top 100 towns.

When it came to the Quality of Life and Leisure and Culture categories the study ranked amenities not only in town, but also in the surrounding towns 15 to 30 miles out. Topics such as Commute Time, Percentage of the Population that Walks or Bikes to Work, Movie Theaters, Restaurants, Bars, Golf Courses, Libraries, Museums and the Arts, would be ranked significantly less if the focus was narrowed to just what is available in town.

Research studies have proven that where you live is one of the highest components of your quality of life. Dan Buettner, award winning writer and researcher, working with National Geographic to study the longevity of cultures, has written extensively on gaining a higher well being. Buettner states, "Where you choose to live is one of the most important determinants of your happiness. Look for communities with sidewalks, meeting places and other characteristics that nudge you into social interaction. Easy access to green spaces and recreation also favors well-being." The Community Insights survey reflected many of these same desires by respondents.

National trends show that a growing number of the population are living in environments where you can walk to all types of amenities, or at least drive to a walkable town center that contains a variety of activities - rather than driving directly to a single destination. As we envision the future of Wilbraham, the focus of the Livability chapter is to determine what types of amenities the residents of Wilbraham dream of having in town.

Wilbraham Future Headlines

Future Headlines represent individual respondents' visionary hopes for the future of Wilbraham. The following Future Headlines are a sampling that referenced Livability:

<p>Wilbraham best place to live in America ***</p> <p>Wilbraham is back on the top 100 small towns in America ***</p> <p>Wilbraham, Massachusetts - #1 place to raise a family and #1 place to retire! ***</p>
--

Peach festival is back

Wilbraham a great place to work live and play

Wilbraham preserves its history, its beautiful land, and fosters community spirit

Wilbraham has a family friendly feel

Still a wonderful place to live

Best volunteer town in the country

Little town has got it all

Town of Wilbraham leads the way with its mission of sustainability

Wilbraham one of the happiest and healthiest towns in western mass

Wilbraham towns people come together in community to celebrate

Wilbraham historical town moving forward towards the future

Connected community achieved, emphasizing recreation and socialization

Then and now, the progress of a town rebuilt through neighbors helping neighbors

Wilbraham strikes the perfect balance of amenities for people of all ages

Same community feel while providing a place to work and grow

Wilbraham not just a great place to live but a destination for business and
entertainment

The changes in Wilbraham have made a healthy impact

Wilbraham: The ideal place to live

Wilbraham is still the best!

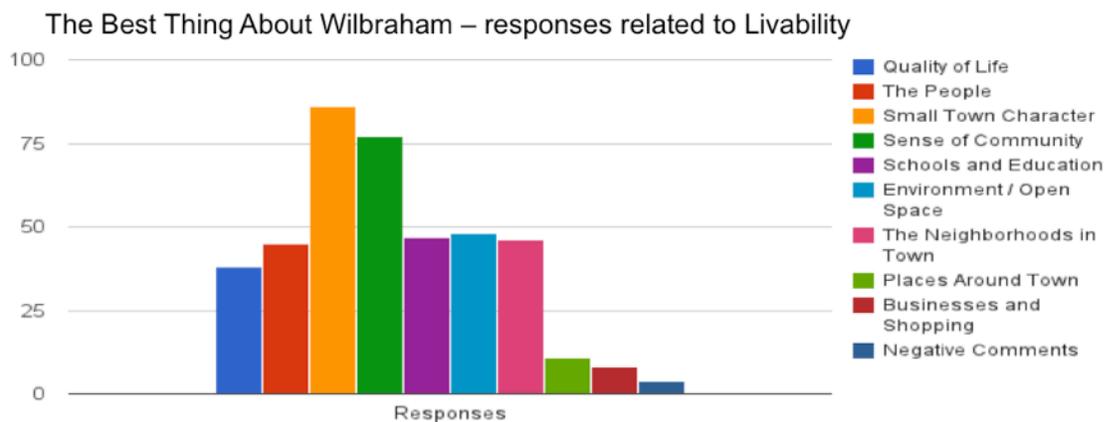
Wilbraham! Same small town feel!

Livability Findings Summary

After reviewing survey responses and additional livability research, the most important findings for the future are:

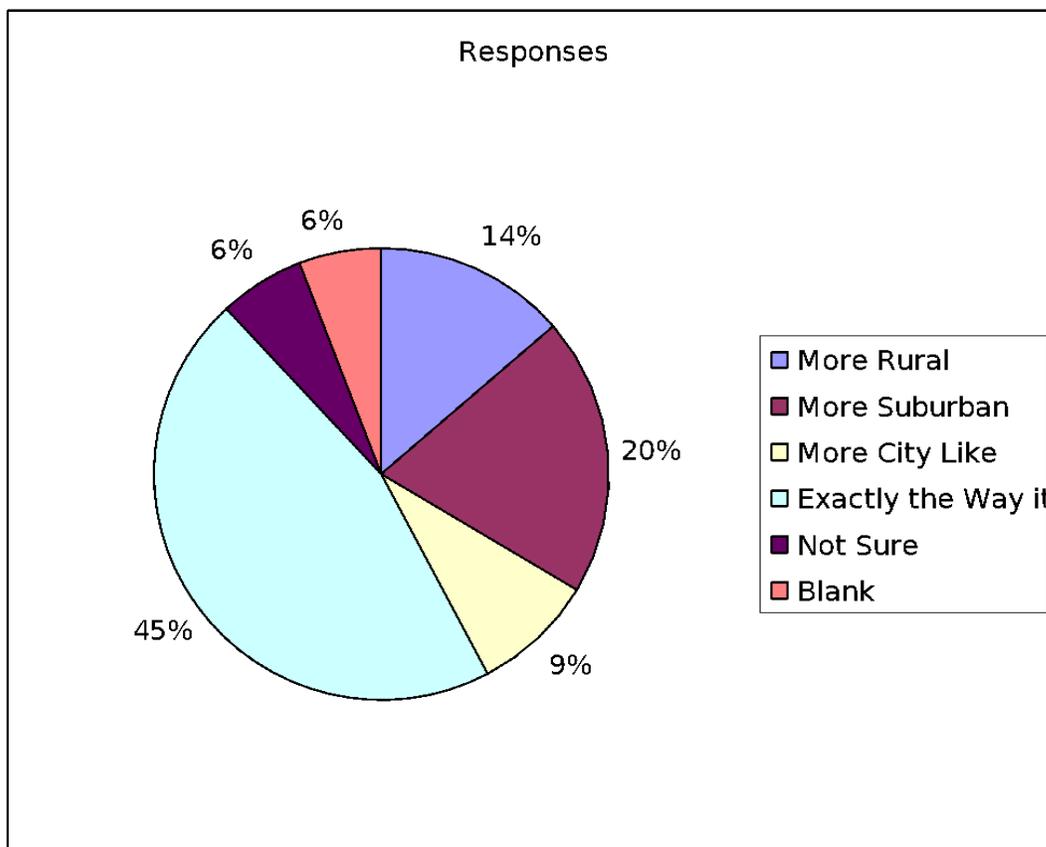
Entertainment and Recreation

1. **New bikeways and sidewalks** are highly desired by respondents for improved accessibility, community feel, recreation and safety. These two areas were the top “more effort” vote getters in survey questions regarding more effort, same effort and less effort - 346 responses for more effort on bikeways and 331 responses for more effort on sidewalks. Multiple respondents specifically indicated that the town should focus on connecting town center, schools, parks, and shopping. Some respondents commented on the poor condition of Stony Hill Road sidewalks.
2. **Increase in restaurant options** is highly desirable according to survey respondents. Respondents are looking for dining options that offer cultural variety, fine dining options, brand names on Boston Road (e.g. Panera Bread), and small local options (e.g. dessert, coffee) in Town Center. - 303.5 responses.
3. **Recreation** received high votes for more effort – 211 responses. Individual recreation was the top answer in the survey question “where would you spend 10 million dollars”. Respondents are looking for more focus and investment in hiking trails, bike paths, community center, etc.
4. **Increase in shopping options** - many respondents are leaving town to shop. They are looking for an increase in brand names on Boston Road and an increase in boutique type stores for town center. When naming other shopping areas that respondents enjoy and would like to model, areas like Northampton, Longmeadow, South Hadley, Manchester, CT were named. – 262 responses for more effort for Boston Road shopping and 228 responses for more effort for Town Center shopping.
5. Respondents requested an **increase in Community Events**. Events that were mentioned most included Fountain Park activities, The Peach Festival, etc. - 72 responses.
6. **Senior Services** were strongly supported by all age groups that responded to the survey – 262 responses for more effort. There were many comments requesting a new senior center be developed. This desire should be balanced with the high response request for a Community Center.



Housing

1. **Wilbraham's aesthetics are very important** to survey respondents. Respondents described the Best Thing About Wilbraham by communicating these aesthetics – small, quiet, beauty, vistas, trails, quaint, historic, and beautiful neighborhoods. Looking forward, the town should balance future growth with these highly valued aesthetics that attract and keep survey respondents in Wilbraham. Asked a direct survey question regarding would you like Wilbraham to be more rural, more city like or exactly the way it is, the selection with the highest number of responses, 230 out of 472 chose - “exactly the way it is”.
2. **Wilbraham's history and historic houses** are also desired and supported by survey respondents. Historic preservation - 174 responses for more effort and 226 for same effort.
3. **Attracting and retaining young families and seniors by having housing options that are affordable is strongly desired by business leaders in town.** While business leaders in town recognize a need to attract and retain housing options for young professionals, families, and seniors, **traditional affordable housing options were not a priority for survey respondents.** When asked survey questions regarding mixed-use zoning, and clustered housing responses came in consistently low. Limited income housing garnered a majority of same effort responses.



Livability Key Facts & Trends

The key facts of importance discovered through Town Comparison Data, Quality Ratings, Population Statistics, and Demographics are:

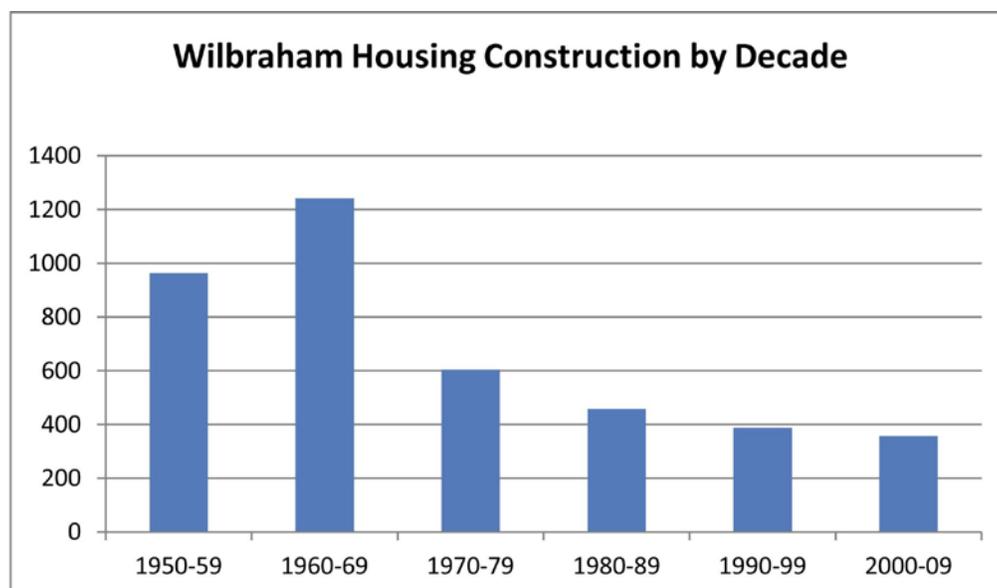
Entertainment and Recreation

1. Creating connection means inviting people into the community to take advantage of recreation and leisure opportunities available not just by car, but via trails, walkways and bike paths. Walking and biking are emerging as some of the most popular fitness trends. In a 2013 outdoor recreation trend report, biking is the leading outdoor activity for youth aged 6-17 in the United States.

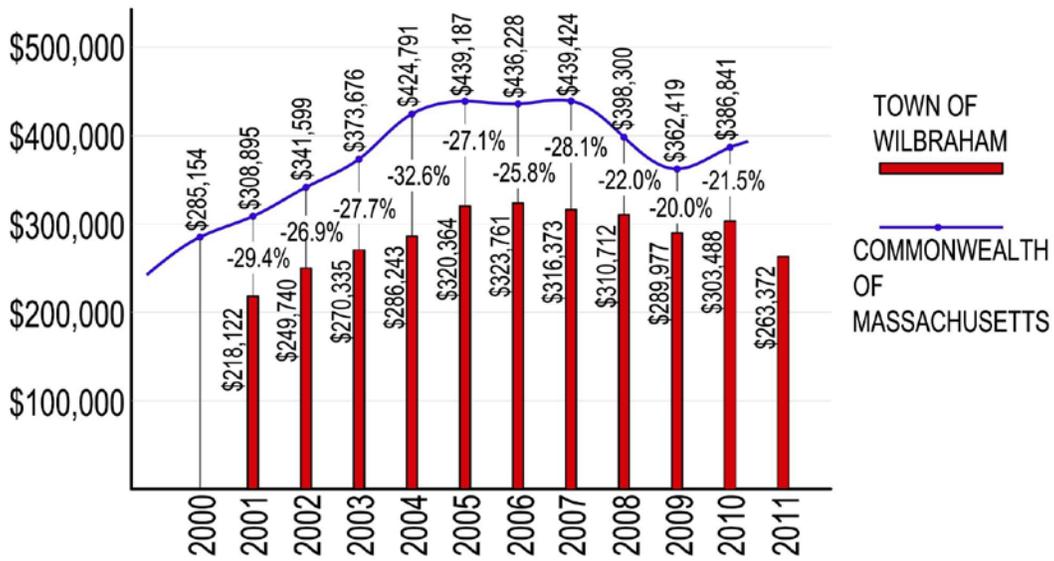
"Our research shows that not only are more Americans participating in outdoor recreation, the number of times they participated in many of the outdoor activities surveyed has grown," said author and lead researcher Ken Cordell, SRS pioneering scientist and one of the foremost authorities on recreational trends in the United States.

Housing

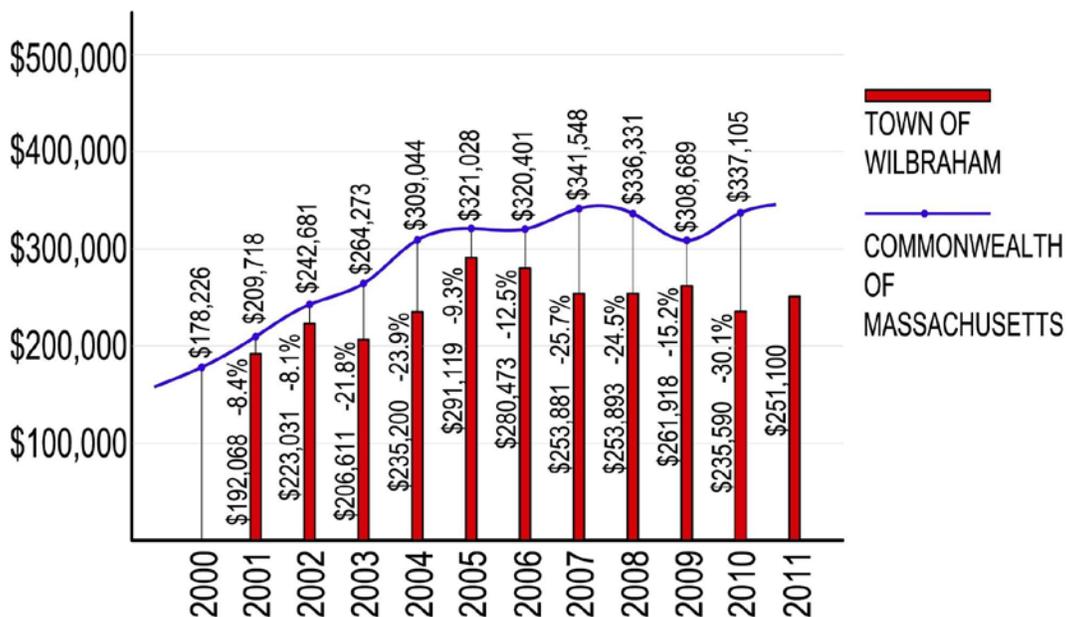
1. Houses built in Wilbraham from 1939 to 1998 shows that the most homes built were between 1950-1959, and 1960-1969. Since this time the trend has shown that construction has slowed down.
2. Wilbraham in comparison to the Commonwealth of MA had a lower average single-family home price, although high prices in Eastern Massachusetts are impacting these averages. Wilbraham is thought to be high for a single-family home in Western Massachusetts.
3. According to Wilbraham town statistics, there is very little rental property in comparison to homes that are owned. Does this limitation in the availability of rental properties prevent young adults and young families from living in town?
4. The US has completed research on how lack of community design contributes to poor health and obesity, and how new thinking in design can help contribute to healthy lifestyles. Currently in the United States 65% of the adult population are overweight and 15% of children aged 6-17 are overweight.

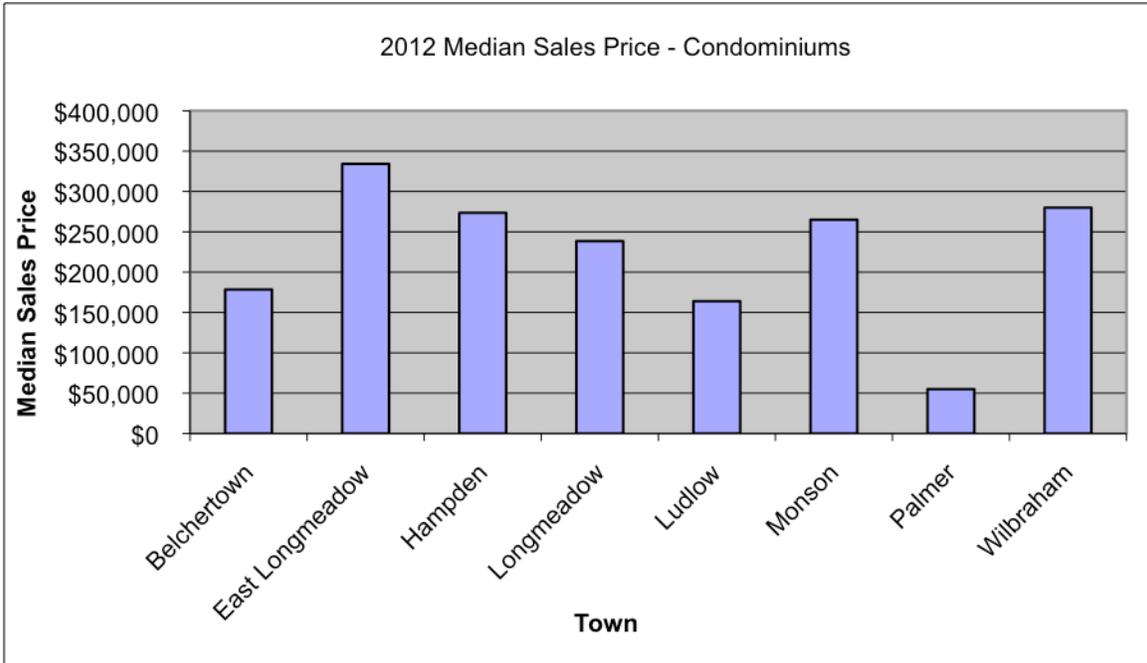
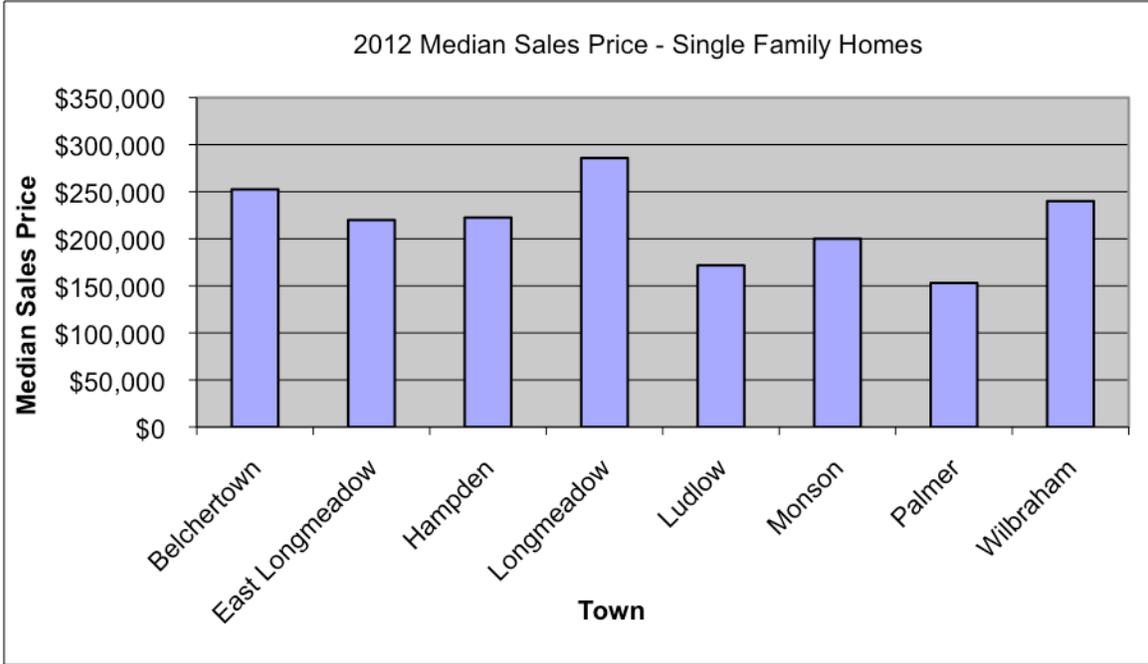


TOWN OF WILBRAHAM HOUSING STATISTICS AVERAGE SALE PRICE DETACHED SINGLE FAMILY HOMES

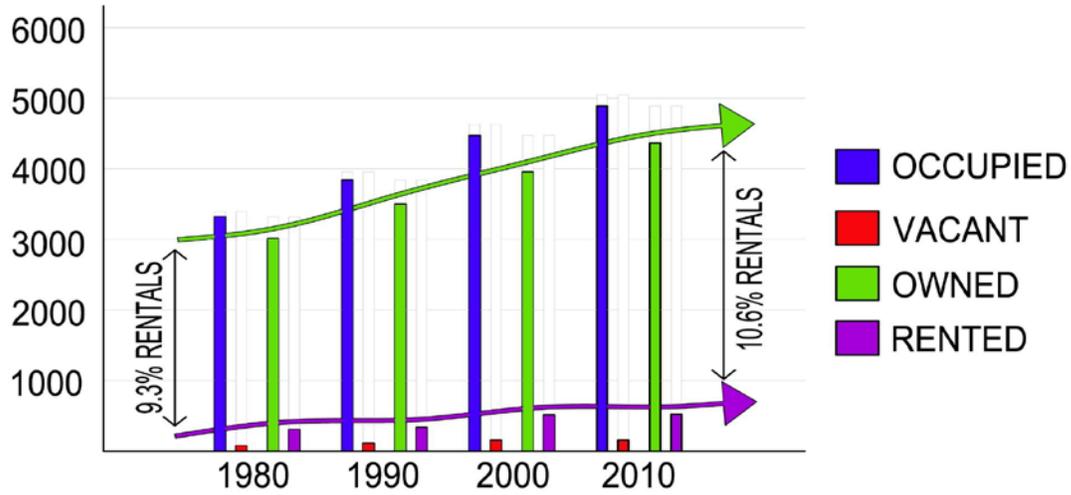


TOWN OF WILBRAHAM HOUSING STATISTICS AVERAGE SALE PRICE CONDOMINIUMS





TOWN OF WILBRAHAM HOUSING STATISTICS OWNED AND RENTAL PROPERTIES

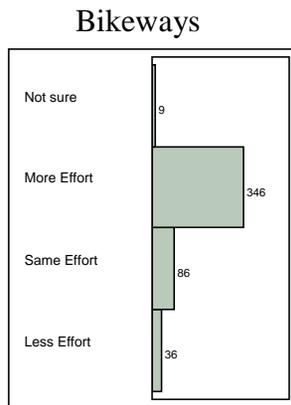


Livability Key Findings from the Community

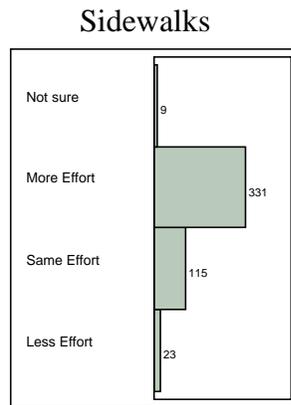
The majority of surveys and information gathered from residents show that the top needs and wants are as follows:

Entertainment and Recreation

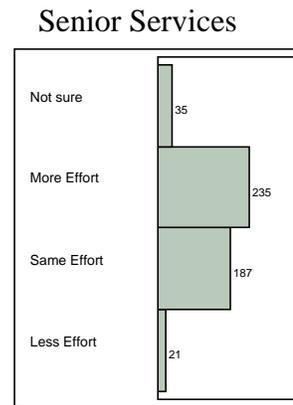
1. Boston Road and Town Center Shopping / Restaurants are highly desired by respondents
2. Family Outdoor Activities /Adding Sidewalks and Bike trails throughout town
3. According to the survey, a high majority wanted the same and more effort on senior services/programs
4. Community Center-needed for all ages without religious association and ongoing membership fees
5. According to the survey, data a high majority wanted the same or more effort placed on recreation
6. According to the survey, the majority wanted the same or more effort for library services
7. According to the survey, a high majority wanted the same or more effort for social opportunities for young professionals
8. Desire for more community events such as reinstating the Peach Festival



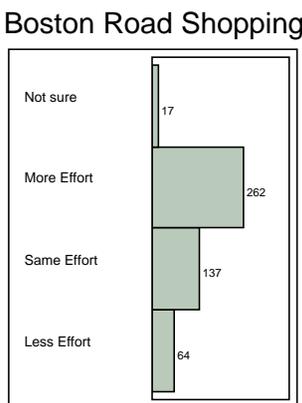
Total: 477 Blank: 24



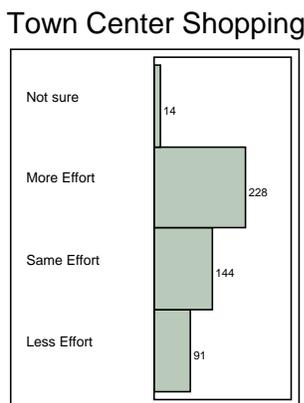
Total: 473 Blank: 23



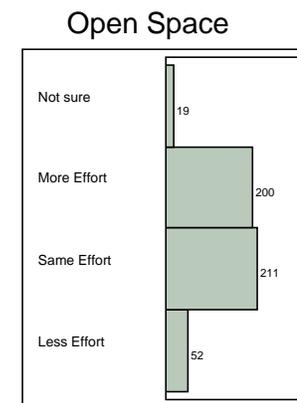
Total: 478 Blank: 23



Total: 480 Blank: 21

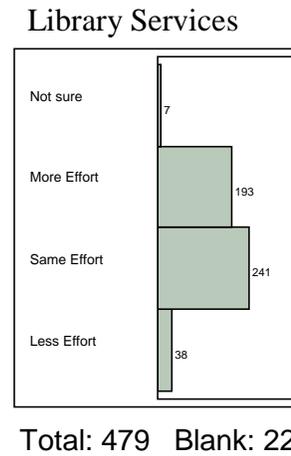
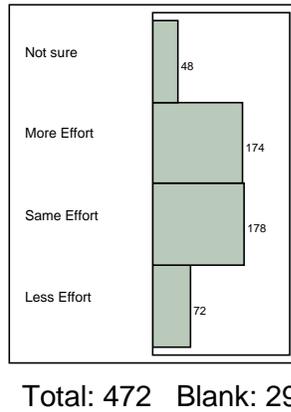
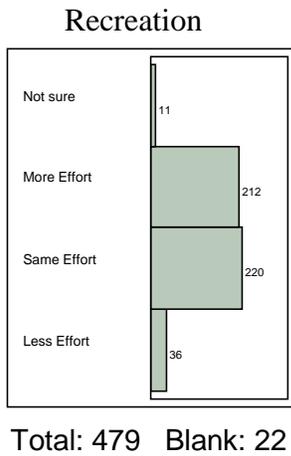


Total: 477 Blank: 24



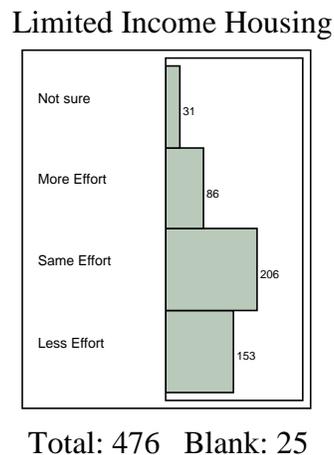
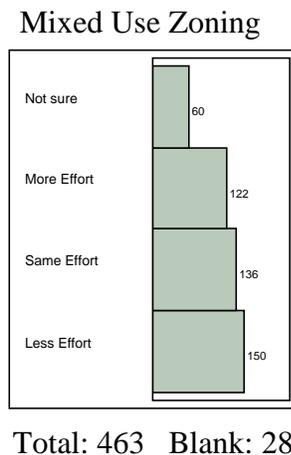
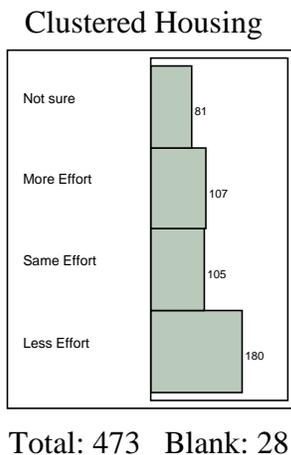
Total: 482 Blank: 19

Social Opportunities for Young Professionals



Housing/Aesthetics

1. According to the survey, data the majority of respondents wanted less effort on clustered housing and mixed use zoning.
2. An overwhelming desire for Wilbraham to maintain its current character, rather than becoming more urban or more rural.
3. According to the survey, data the majority of respondents wanted the same or less effort on affordable housing.
4. From Imagine Wilbraham Day when participants were asked to “Describe the Neighborhood of Your Dreams”, the words used most frequently were sidewalks, walkable, quiet, trees and safe.



Livability Expert Insight

An interview was completed with Bryan Litz, Wilbraham's Parks and Recreation Director regarding Wilbraham's recreation programs. The full notes on this interview can be found in the appendix. A summary of key points is provided here.

1. Thousands of families have been served by recreation programming since the early 2000's.
2. There is an increase in demand for individual recreation programming and adult programming.
3. Top five recreation activities participated in are:
 - a. Youth Sports
 - b. Pavilion Rentals
 - c. Classes/Clinics
 - d. Spec Pond Beach
 - e. Spec Pond Day Camp
4. Recreation activities are organized by multiple organizations. (YMCA, Minnechaug Regional High School, Recreation Department, Senior Center). (Examples of adult programming: women's volleyball, hiking, men's softball and basketball).
5. Trends in recreation are moving from organized team mainstream sports to alternative programs.
6. Many programs are dependent on volunteers.

Livability Opportunities

1. The town should discuss a plan for connectivity through the town center, schools, parks and green spaces and shopping districts through the development of sidewalks and bikeways. Sidewalks and bikeways are the number one and number two most responded to questions and comment areas in the Community Insights survey. Sidewalks and bikeways have the most immediate payback to increasing livability satisfaction by residents.
2. Dining and shopping desires make investment on Boston Road and Town Center opportunities for the right businesses. Responses indicated both of these locations are destinations within town that would be advantageous for improved shopping, dining, entertainment and recreation. Attracting residents to stay in Wilbraham for their shopping and dining also helps support business in town and attract new businesses to the town.
3. Wilbraham is positioned to meet the current recreation trends of outdoor recreation. Continuing emphasis on preserving outdoor space for hiking and walking strengthens the community and continues to provide an environment that promotes health and well being. The current look and feel of Wilbraham is highly desired by residents, it is critical to protect.
4. Seniors are a growing demographic segment in Wilbraham. Seniors need housing near shopping, dining, cultural and educational activities and reliable transportation options for mobility. Seniors are also looking for improved social connections through the use of a center that would better cater to their needs.
5. Public education quality is one of the strongest draws to attract young families to Wilbraham. Housing options must be available that young families can afford.
6. Our community supports a community center that would serve all ages. Wilbraham seniors are requesting a new senior center. There is an opportunity to have a center that could provide options that would support multiple age groups. Multi-use centers that have flexible physical space are a current trend in community center design.

7. Recreation activities are supported and in some cases are completely run by volunteers. There is a need to continue to recruit volunteers to keep programming in place and to enable new programming. Wilbraham could benefit from creating a more robust area of the town's website for volunteer opportunities. This would not just support recreation volunteers but other volunteer opportunities as well. Both on-going volunteer positions, as well as, one-time opportunities when special requests come up so more people could be involved. Currently on the town website, the volunteer information is limited to a link to a form to fill out for town committees.

Livability Challenges

1. Limited funding and many competing community projects create challenges for Wilbraham making investment choices that provide the most satisfaction for the community.
2. Survey respondents placed low priority on housing strategies like affordable housing, mixed use zoning, and clustered housing. The challenge still remains on a strategy to attract and retain residents to Wilbraham with housing options that work for young adults, young families and seniors.

Livability Important Unexplored Questions

The Vision Task Force documented important questions during the study that were felt to require additional consideration and discussion beyond the scope of the mission.

1. How can a community center be developed for all age levels that is affordable?
2. Demographic research shows that Wilbraham has an aging population, how can Wilbraham plan for and support an active aging population?

Bold Ideas For The Future From Our Community

Bold Ideas represent Community Insights survey and Imagine Wilbraham Day individual respondents' suggestions for the future of Wilbraham. The following is a sample of Bold Ideas submitted by individual respondents that mentioned Livability topics. All responses were documented verbatim without editing for spelling or grammar.

1. Fountain Park movie night - rent screen
2. Use town calendar to communicate events
3. Senior bus for events - PVTA
4. Utilize more local talent - music and theater
5. Have a 4th of July Fireworks display
6. Need smaller homes for seniors to move into and stay in town
7. Need more opportunities for young families and first time home buyers
8. Institute a trolley system (antique looking bus that appears to be a trolley) that runs down Main Street and Stony Hill Road and across at Boston Road, Springfield Street, Pinkham Road and Soule Road - would allow residents to get to Town amenities without driving.

9. Create a Riverfront park with walking trails between the two bridges into Ludlow. Could be a phased development which first starts as walking trails, could develop into having restaurants, etc. at each end or near Post Office Park. Create pedestrian bridge into Ludlow at Mill Redevelopment Project. Could have crew races on the river and more access to a beautiful amenity.
10. Replace strip mall atmosphere in Town Center and in Boston Road - create an integrated development of shops, restaurants and businesses.
11. Build a hockey rink in Post Office park.
12. Redevelop the Mills with a boardwalk along the river
13. Develop teen center for afterschool activities for Middle School children.
14. Relocate town Hall into the Town Center and turn the existing Town Hall into a Senior Center.
15. In the town center - knock down the two strip mall buildings, extend Burt Lane straight and loop around Library into Mountain Road - then infill the area with new shops, restaurants, business offices and even condominiums. Businesses which were in the original strip mall buildings can be relocated into the new buildings. Example = South Hadley Village Commons.

TOWN SERVICES

In this chapter on town services, some topics thought of as a responsibility of town services are being covered in separate comprehensive chapters. Please see the Table of Contents for Business, Education, Land Use, and Livability coverage.

This chapter is specifically focused on Town Services future vision encompassing safety, infrastructure, town government, and taxes.

The challenge presented to a Town is to provide the highest level of service to its residents for the available tax dollars generated. Wilbraham has a reputation for providing good service and residents expect nothing less for the future despite the desire for stable taxes, and for some survey respondents, a desire for lower taxes.

Wilbraham Future Headlines

Future Headlines represent Community Insights survey individual respondents' visionary hopes for the future of Wilbraham. The following future headlines that reference Town Services are:

Town Center Project Completed

We need innovative thinkers in our town hall that can think in a more progressive manner while still remembering the charm that makes us
Wilbraham

Long Term Planning Allows All to Stay in Town

Forward Planning Pay Off In Dividends

Strong tax base leads to thriving community

Town resists big government

Wilbraham town taxes have NOT increased for 10 years

Wilbraham's Fiscal Responsibility Pays Off! Voted BEST IN THE VALLEY for town with lowest tax rate and best services

Town Services Findings Summary

After reviewing survey responses and additional town services research, the most important findings for the future are:

1. Residents are generally pleased with Town Services. In survey questions asking for what the town should focus “less/same/more” effort on - the areas of focus are (in order, highest to lowest, with largest response count in parentheses out of 501 total surveys):

More Effort

Bikeways (348), Sidewalks (331), Green Initiatives (281), Preserve Local Environment (274), Boston Road Shopping (262), K-12 Education (262), Recycling (250), Roads/Infrastructure (243), Small Business Services (237), Senior Services (235), Town Center Shopping (228), Natural Gas (213)

Same Effort

Emergency Services (281), Town Dump (267), Pre-K Education (255), Library (241), Historic Preservation (226), Local Control (226), Recreation (220), Public Transportation (217), Open Space (211), Limited Income Housing (206), Relationship with Wilbraham Monson Academy (194), Social Opportunities for Young Professionals (178)

Less Effort

Clustered Housing (180), Dog Parks (169), Mixed Use Zoning (150)

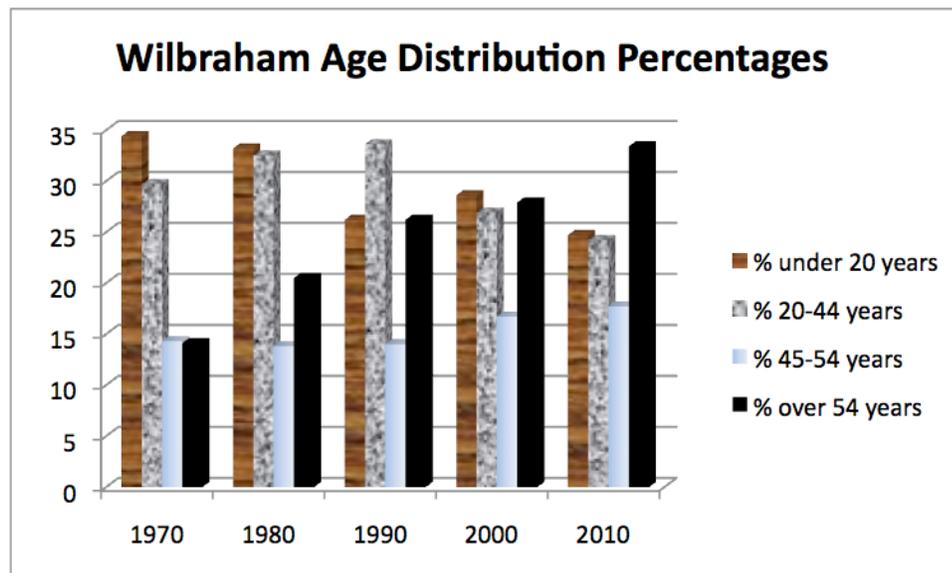
2. **Wilbraham aesthetics** are very important attributes to survey respondents. Respondents described the Best Thing About Wilbraham by describing these aesthetics - small, quiet, quaint, historic, open, and green. Faced with growth pressures, the town needs to balance future growth with the highly valued aesthetics that attract and keep respondents in Wilbraham. Asked a direct survey question regarding would you like Wilbraham to be more rural, more city like or exactly the way it is, the selection with the highest number of responses, 230 out of 472 chose - “exactly the way it is”.
3. **Maintaining the level of town services is the biggest challenge** from the input of Key Town Employees. They described the difficulty of holding the line on service in the face of increased demands and static or reduced funding and increasing administrative requirements.

4. **Improve disaster response communication and shelter.** The 2011 sustained power outages due to severe snowstorms and the tornado have demonstrated a clear need for residents and Town Services personnel who are striving to improve the Town’s disaster response for communication and shelter. This need was communicated in high responses for communication (100) and shelter (81) in the survey question regarding “next catastrophe”.
5. **Improve participation in Town Government.** Town Government had a high number of responses in the survey question “With Authority”. A number of respondents spoke about improving the participation in town government by changing the type of government structure and the format.

Town Services Facts & Trends

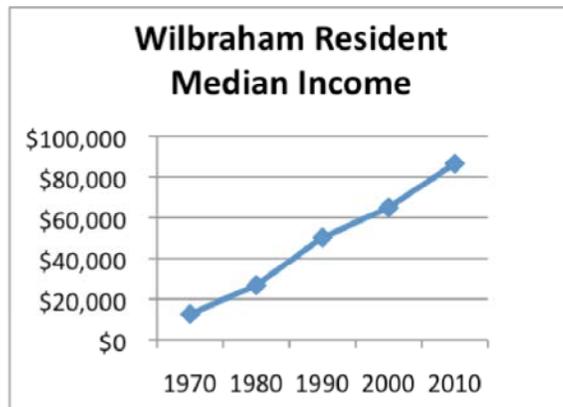
The key facts of importance discovered through population statistics and demographic trends for Town Service providers to be aware of are:

1. In 1970, people over 44 years of age comprised 28% of Wilbraham’s population; in 2010, they comprised 50%.



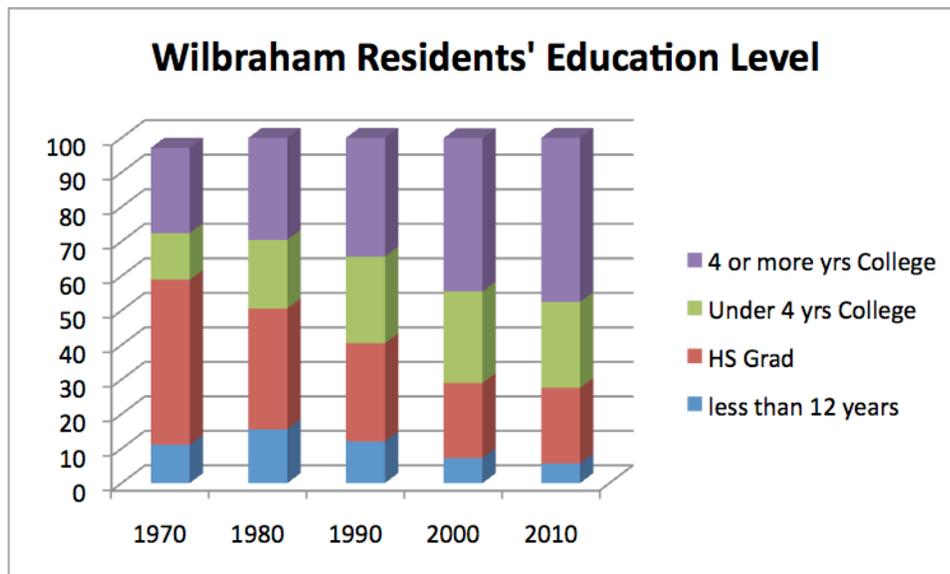
Wilbraham’s population is aging and the implications to town services needs to be better understood. How will the aging population need to be supported differently now and in the future?

- In 1970, Wilbraham households earning \$80,000.00 or more comprised 0% of the Population; in 2010 the average median income was over \$80,000.00.



Town Services requirements have changed and will continue to do so based on the numbers of higher income households and their interest in service.

- In 1970, 47% of students attended school after high school graduation; in 2010 that number was 79%.



Town Services Key Findings From The Community

The majority of surveys and meetings show that the top needs and wants are:

- New bikeways and sidewalks are highly desired by respondents for improved accessibility, community feel, recreation and safety. Some respondents specifically indicated that the town should focus on connecting town center, schools, parks, and

shopping. Some respondents commented on the poor condition of Stony Hill Road sidewalks.

2. The aesthetics (small, quiet, green, open, quaint, historic) of Wilbraham are a top priority of respondents and took a top five position in the survey question “What is the Best Thing About Wilbraham?” The impact of future development must be considered in regards to maintaining these highly valued attributes of Wilbraham.
3. Safety is a top priority in Wilbraham. If funded with \$10,000,000.00, respondents chose individual recreation, emergency services and sidewalk improvements as their top 3 priorities. Need for better shelter and communication by the Town for residents in the event of the next disaster is critical.

Town Services Expert Insight

1. Infrastructure is in need of maintenance (roads, storm sewers, sidewalks, etc.)
2. Fire vehicles and equipment will continue to require periodic replacement at high cost to the community.
3. Addition of department stores along the Boston Road corridor should be carefully planned to avoid rises in shoplifting crime.
4. Town employees are performing in the face of increased administrative requirements and static or declining funding levels. Residents expect that Town Service employees will either meet or exceed current service levels in the future.
5. State administrative requirements are adding processing time to many Town administrative efforts.

Town Services Opportunities

1. Finding the methods of sustaining infrastructure while incorporating resident desires for improvements like bikeways and sidewalks will be very important.
2. Finding the balance and managing potentially competing interests such as improved Boston Road shopping and preserving the local environment provides some creative opportunity. Survey respondents are clear in their support for keeping Wilbraham’s beauty, history, and quaint feel, but support a business district for improved shopping and recreation options. Finding the right balance will continue to attract and maintain residency and support local businesses for Wilbraham.
3. Keeping aging emergency services equipment serviceable until it can be replaced will have to be done systematically and effectively to minimize the requirements for added revenue from taxpayers. Financial responsibility and efficiency will remain crucial to Wilbraham’s future effectiveness. Alternative funding options will prove vital.

4. Developing mechanisms to preserve the aesthetics of the Wilbraham community “as is” will be essential if resident desires are to be met.
5. Emergency shelter and improved communications need to be established and communicated to provide service to the community. Town Website improvements and Blackboard Connection services have already made some improvement in disaster preparedness. An opportunity exists for these improvements to be more widely communicated to keep residents and business owners updated to their availability.

Town Services Challenges

1. Declining state support may require greater creativity and budgeting in the face of resident interest in more Town Services effort.
2. There may be a separation in residents’ minds between preventing undesirable community change and implementing preventative techniques that some residents see as undesirable. Residents wish to preserve the community and aesthetics, but are not particularly interested in some of the current preservation techniques (Cluster Housing, Low Income Housing, Mixed Use Zoning).
3. Funding for infrastructure maintenance and replacement has not kept pace with the needs.
4. Future development of the Boston Road corridor, which is desired by respondents for additional shopping, restaurants and entertainment, needs to be assessed for additional pressure on town services like safety. The town should strive to foster businesses that will not boost crime rates; for example shoplifting. Additional challenges to Boston Road are traffic, lack of sidewalks, and poor aesthetics that don’t reflect the feel of Wilbraham.
5. In a disaster that interrupts Internet access, telephone and television, the Town must provide communication and shelter to the community. Audio signals for impending weather conditions are not currently in place.

Town Services Important Unresolved Questions

The Vision Task Force documented important questions during the study that were felt to require additional consideration and discussion beyond the scope of the mission.

1. How can Wilbraham fund large projects like bikeways and sidewalks that are highly desired by the community?
2. Can competing projects like; senior center and community center, be combined to make the most use out of limited funding, building space, staffing, and maintenance?

3. How can we balance the need for increased services and infrastructure maintenance with community desires to hold the line on taxes?
4. Our population is well educated and well financed, how can we keep them well informed and supportive of community improvement initiatives?
5. How do we foster a sense of community that easily reaches new residents?
6. Do we understand the impacts to Wilbraham from the proposed casino projects in our neighboring communities?

Bold Ideas For The Future From Our Community

Bold Ideas represent Community Insights survey individual respondents' suggestions for the future of Wilbraham. The following is a sample of Bold Ideas submitted by respondents that mentioned Town Services topics. All responses were documented verbatim without editing for spelling or grammar.

1. Broaden Wilbraham's commercial vision. Provide greater Economic Development assistance to prospective and current employers. Foster "destination" and "cultural" themes.
2. Floating bonds for a block of money to create a reverse mortgage program for the aging population that would enable seniors to fund their taxes, insurance and upkeep of their house (grass, snow, leaves, roof cleaning, minor repairs).
3. Establish a pool of funds to formalize: 1) "Quality of Maintenance Awards Program" 2) Quality of Public Service Awards Program 3) Quality through Innovation Awards Program All three would improve innovation, on-line Town Services, improved maintenance including schools and parks and our general Town Service levels
4. Complete the formal cost/benefit analysis of whether a paid fire department is needed and whether public safety should be shared in a pool with other towns (perhaps Hampden and East Longmeadow).
5. Close the defined benefit (DB) pension for new town employees (2014), replacing it with a defined contribution plan.
6. Consider a small incubator fund for Wilbraham residents who start new businesses in Wilbraham, a grass roots approach.
7. I think a website, contained, controlled, to show where town volunteers are needed and how they can volunteer would be great.
8. Wilbraham Nails Its Big 3! I believe in the power of 3. Any plan that focuses on more than 3 big things will get mired down and relegated to the dust bin of history.

EPILOGUE

Task Force Insights and Reflections

The following represents the thoughts of Task Force members upon the completion of their task.

Diversity in the Voice of the Community

A report produced by town citizens has elements that would not be present if an outsourced marketing group had written it. The Vision Task Force was a strong team of residents with a powerful commitment to complete the project where members learned to deal with approaches and opinions that varied from their own. Ultimately, the diversity of opinion and expertise on the Vision Task Force contributed greatly to the quality of this report. Likewise, residents' opinions that emerged from both the Community Insight Survey and Imagine Wilbraham Day were pleasingly diverse.

While the survey results revealed significant numbers of individuals who had a similar vision for Wilbraham, there are also segments of our population who have alternative viewpoints for either or both:

- what they would like the town to be
- how initiatives should be funded for acting on the vision

As Wilbraham moves forward to act on its vision, it will need to find ways to balance the concerns of all of its citizens.

Increasing Levels of Communication, Participation and Volunteerism Needed

Direct communications by the Town to the residents (households) is lacking. The only real messages received are bills. Wilbraham must assume more responsibility to connect directly to the residents beyond the capacity of the updated Town website. The amount of talent and expertise our town leverages from the community presently is amazing, however we are only scratching the surface. As a town, we need to work harder to encourage, and enable, greater participation by residents in activities and decisions that impact the entire town.

- We should find ways to either allow remote participation at town meetings or change town meetings to daytime on weekends and provide childcare so that more residents with younger families can easily participate. Wilbraham could also have events and experiences like Imagine Wilbraham Day to bring together insights and ideas from the community in an open forum, non-typical government manner. People really wanted to be heard and have their ideas included in the community's vision. Even after Imagine Wilbraham Day, some wanted to know when we were going to have another.
- We could continue to optimize our usage of our new website and its notification features to make sure that more folks in town are aware of town events. We should leverage the

website to notify residents of broader volunteer opportunities. Volunteer opportunities shouldn't be limited just to on-going committees and boards, but also to one time opportunities to help with special projects, park clean-ups, town events, student internships, etc.

- One of the major obstacles to innovation is a lack of cross-organizational dialog and connections. If people of diverse or even similar types of organizations have a way to connect, share ideas and explore collaboration - we can benefit from these discussions. It seems as though those who sense there are problems often don't find ways to connect with others, ask questions, offer recommendations and generate collaborations that elevate the success of our community.

The open television environment of the open meeting law can get in the way of dynamic discourse, dialog, idea generation and collaboration, it's confining. While the law is there for the right reasons, the implementation of the law can impede open-minded discussion. If businesses had to live under the lights of the camera at every meeting, people will spend too much time performing for the camera since they know others may be watching. This limits progress.

Wilbraham residents need to feel more connected and to know more about what is going on in town. Communication and Volunteerism offer two-way benefits for the Town and its citizens.

Wilbraham's Look and Feel

Wilbraham residents are here because they appreciate the beautiful views, the open space and the charm and history of Main Street. To sum up, residents love "the look and feel" of our Town. It would be easy to discount these qualities in the face of progress, however voiced by many of the survey respondents, these qualities of Wilbraham are exactly the ones that attract and retain our residents.

Vision for the Future

We continue to be in an economic period of our history that requires everyone to make hard choices. Limited funding should be used for the most important priorities. This report can be used to help focus priorities and to understand that change can happen on many levels – both small and large.

The vision process started by this team can be used to involve the community on a much larger scale and collect feedback before decisions are made. This report will leave a legacy behind that will not remain on the shelf.

VISION TASK FORCE BIOGRAPHIES

The following Vision Task Force members have participated in the project from its start through data compilation, final report writing and town-wide presentations.

Carol Albano

Personal: Husband: Joe, four grown children. Wilbraham resident since 1964

Professional: Realtor for 35 years, Past member of the Board of Directors and President of the Realtor Association of the Pioneer Valley

Community: 20 year member of the Wilbraham Historical Commission. Previously served: Board of the Athenaeum Society, the Grange Study Committee, Wilbraham School Committee, Main Street Historic District Study Committee; Member, Wilbraham Community Chorus

Sue Burk

Personal: Married, husband: Ray, 2 grown daughters

Professional: Consultant for evolving and optimizing business and software requirements and analysis practices

Community: former associate member and interim full member of the Wilbraham Planning Board, Wilbraham Vision Task Force

Edna Colcord

Personal: Divorced, 3 grown children

Professional: Retired High School Science Teacher

Community: Wilbraham Friends of the Library, Agriculture Commission, the Grange Study Committee, Wilbraham Garden Club, Wilbraham United Church (God's Little Acre, 2008 Christmas Home Tour), Master Gardener, Hampden County Beekeepers, Wilbraham Vision Task Force

Karen Wilson Furst

Personal: Married, husband: Ken, 4 grown children

Professional: Sales growth consultant for CEO's. Senior Marketing Officer for manufacturer. Founder, Chair of Momentum Group and the Strategic Market Planning Institute.

Community: New England Public Radio, WGBY TV and World Affairs Council, Wilbraham Vision Task Force

Charles Phillips

Personal: Married, Wife: Sherry, 4 grown children

Professional: Fishery Biologist, Management Trainer/Facilitator, US Naval Reserve Officer

Community: Conservation, Recreation and Open Space Planning, Wilbraham Vision Task Force

Additional Task Force members that joined the project in progress include:

Stephen Brand

Personal: Married, proud father of 4 adult daughters

Professional: Master's in Education, Doctorate in Management. President and Chief Imagination Officer of the New Enterprise Factory, Inc. helping non profit and educational organizations launch new ventures. Clients: Jim Henson Company, Creative Education Foundation, WGBH, US Paralympics Division, US Olympic Committee, Ford Motors, Center for Medical Simulation, Kingsley Montessori School. Former business professor at UMASS, WNEU and Case Western Reserve University. Former museum executive - Roles included: President National Inventors Hall of Fame, VP Liberty Science Center, Manager of Public Outreach Boston Museum of Science

Community: VP Springfield Public Forum, Doctor of Mgt. Advisory Team - Case Western Reserve University, Wilbraham Vision Task Force

Christopher J. Novelli, AIA, NCARB

Personal: Married, Lisa, 3 young children - Ethan, Samantha and Jocelyn

Professional: Licensed Architect in MA and CT), nationally certified (NCARB), Member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), Senior Project Manager: Studio One, Inc Architects - Springfield, MA - 15 years, Master of Architecture: Boston Architectural College, Bachelor of Architectural Engineering: Wentworth Institute of Technology, Adjunct Professorships: UMass, Amherst - Architecture and Building Construction Technology Departments and Boston Architectural College - Advanced Architecture Studio and Thesis Studio

Community: Wilbraham Vision Task Force

Tracey Plantier

Personal: Married, husband: David, 1 grown son, Robert, Wilbraham Resident Since 1997

Professional: Retired Information Technology Senior Executive

Community: Wilbraham Vision Task Force, Wilbraham Open Space and Recreation Plan committee member, Wilbraham Nature and Cultural Center Board Member

Nancy Ross

Personal: Married 35 years, husband: Richard, 1 grown son, Nicolas

Professional: Springfield Public Schools Administrative School Leader, BA, Elementary Education; MA, English Literature Arts/Reading/Elementary Education; MA, Certification of Advanced Graduate Studies in Administration, National Institute for School Leadership Certificate, Achievement Network Team-Research Based Assessment Collaborator, Team Building Collaboration Team, Organizational Health/Culture of Building Team

Community: Wilbraham Vision Task Force, Delta Kappa Gamma Society

Former Vision Task Force Members who provided support to the process: **Don Binns, James Burke, Meg Linehan Hutcherson, Dave Sanders**

Volunteers: **Gerda Terziak, George Gordon, Patricia Gordon**

Special Recognition: **Raymond Burk**, for his tireless work on survey graphics

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Imagine Wilbraham Day Sponsors

Refreshments

The Gaudreau Group
Big Y Foods
Dunkin' Donuts of Wilbraham (Salema Management Co.)
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Fancy That Antiques
Friendly's
Gregory's Pizza Pub and Restaurant
Horizons Restaurant
Johnsens Catering
Krazy Jake's
Papa Gino's
Pop's Biscotti and Chocolates
Scales and Tails
The Spa at Gasoline Alley
The Village Store and Café
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Residents that have generously provided pictures of Wilbraham for use with the report

Cable Access Recordings of Vision Task Force Meetings

Dave Sanders

And to the many Vision participants - thank you for your time, your thoughts and your insights. This is your vision.

THE VISION TASK FORCE REPORT

WILBRAHAM LOOKS FORWARD

Read about our core values.

Find out what's changed!

Catch the common vision, priorities, wants, ideas and aspirations for the future on business, education, land use, town services, and livability

Here are the facts and findings — from students, seniors, parents, residents, town hall staff, elected officials, businesses and shoppers.

Here's a valuable tool to move forward together.

