A. Introduction

Unlike some of the other topics in this master plan—such as watersheds, land use, housing, transportation, and services—the topic of economic development requires some discussion of how the term is defined. A conversation about a community’s economic health can variously be about, for example, the town’s fiscal health or the ratio of incoming municipal revenues to outgoing expenditures. It can focus on average household incomes, real estate taxes, wage employment, or financial flows. It can be presented in terms of an inherent conflict between improving quality of life and protecting the environment, or it can be presented as the simultaneous and complementary improvement of both of those.

For the purposes of this master plan, “economy” is defined as the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services and its purpose is understood to be the improvement of the wellbeing or quality of life of the community. There are various ways to assess Bernardston’s current economic conditions and this section will present analyses and recommendations based upon both conventional and non-conventional approaches.

Conventional economic development studies typically assess, for example, demographics, workforce characteristics, major employers, and the potential for industrial or commercial development.

An example of a more non-conventional approach is called community economic development, which involves determining strategies to improve a community’s social, cultural, and ecological well-being in addition to its fiscal health.

A second and related approach is known as asset based community development. This approach first determines what a particular town, city, or region’s key assets are and then develops strategies that capitalize on them. Rather than concentrating on the perceived problems or what a town’s needs may be, asset based community development focuses on a town’s unique characteristics and determines how they can be leveraged to achieve desired goals.

This section will draw upon these various approaches to provide a holistic examination of Bernardston. All analyses and recommendations look to strengthen the community, improve quality of life for residents, and promote well-being in a ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable way.
1. Expanding a Forest-Based Economy

As was discussed in the Land Use section, most of Bernardston is forested, and this can be seen as a key asset for the town. Bernardston’s forested land not only provides forest products but offers a space for recreational activities and performs valuable ecosystem services.

The forest-based economy is one of the oldest industries in the Commonwealth and includes both forest products and forest-based recreation. Statewide, about 17,000 workers are employed in the forest products, maple, and Christmas tree sectors while another 9,000 jobs are found in the various sectors that support the forest-based recreation economy (North East Foresters Association, 2015).

While forestry and forest products are an important part of the regional and state economy, trends point to more wood being processed out of state, with sawmills and other primary processing facilities declining in number and jobs. At the same time, forestry and logging jobs have remained steady. A steep decline in paper manufacturing has resulted in a loss of local markets for low grade wood. An estimated 14 percent of homes in Franklin County heat with wood, making firewood production one sector of the forestry industry that has remained in the region. Losses in employment have been more severe in Berkshire and Franklin Counties than the state (FRCOG, 2015).

The 2010 Massachusetts Forest Action Plan notes that when wood is shipped out of state, it only employs two local jobs—a forester and a logger—whereas local processing and sale of wood products increases the economic benefit to the local and regional economy. Since the 1970s, Massachusetts’ sawmill production has declined steadily, from 130 sawmills in 1973 to 49 in 2006 (MADCR in FRCOG, 2015). A 2007 survey of licensed harvesters in Massachusetts revealed that roughly two-thirds of logs harvested in Massachusetts are sold out-of-state for processing. (Damery in FRCOG, 2015). At the same time, approximately 2 percent of the wood used in the state is actually grown, harvested, and manufactured within Massachusetts, while the remaining 98 percent of wood products consumed in Massachusetts are imported from out of state (UMASS in FRCOG, 2015).

In the Massachusetts Climate Adaptation Report (2011), the American Forest and Paper Association states that forest harvesting directly supports 3,700 jobs for foresters, loggers, sawmill workers, and wood processing plant workers in Massachusetts, and produces over $385 million of goods annually.

Converting buildings to high-efficiency wood heating systems can reduce fossil fuel use, heating costs, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. If the wood is sourced locally, the impacts are even greater—local jobs are supported and more money stays within the local economy. It is estimated that with development support, the wood heating market could reduce GHG emissions by 500,000 tons and create over 2,000 jobs in Massachusetts by 2020 (Meister in FRCOG, 2015).

Forest covers 70 percent (11,683 acres) of Bernardston. Of that land, 22 percent (2,606 acres) is enrolled in Chapter 61 for long-term, active forest management. Assessment of forest land under Chapter 61 is based on the land’s ability to grow timber. The program requires 10 or more contiguous acres, a state-approved forest management plan developed by a licensed forester or landowner, and periodic forest management as recommended by the forest management plan. Thus, almost 78 percent of forest in Bernardston may not have a forest management plan and may not be taking full advantage of the potential to generate some revenue from forestry-related activities. Hull Forest LLC is the largest working woodland owner with 1,150
acres under active timber management. This land is protected by both a conservation restriction and Chapter 61.

Recreational use of forest land could also contribute to a forest-based economy. In Bernardston, 6 percent of forests (710 acres) are enrolled in Chapter 61B for active recreational use. In addition, the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game owns the 1,493-acre Satan Kingdom’s Wildlife Management Area, which makes it the largest owner of forest land in Bernardston. This land is managed to provide upland forest wildlife habitat and passive recreation such as hunting; timber is not harvested. Therefore, over 2,000 acres in Bernardston are available for outdoor recreation and have the potential to contribute to the tourism industry in the region.

**Economic Value of Ecosystem Services Provided by Forests**

Forests provide many services that are not conventionally accounted for in our economic system, such as filtering and infiltrating water, purifying the air, sequestering carbon, providing wildlife habitat, and preventing erosion among many others. Studies to estimate the economic value of ecosystem services are currently being conducted throughout the country. As was discussed in the Land Use section, the Massachusetts Audubon Society valued the non-market ecosystem services provided by forests in the Commonwealth at $984 per acre (American Farmland Trust, 2008). For all of Bernardston’s 11,683 acres, this would amount to almost $11.5 million. These services include “climate and nutrient regulation, habitat, soil retention and formation, pollination, recreation and aesthetics” and could easily go unnoticed (2). While not traditionally viewed as economically valuable, Bernardston’s forests contribute valuable non-market ecosystem services and can be seen as having a direct influence on the town’s economy, beyond the raw materials they provide.
2. Agriculture

In addition to forestry, agriculture has played a role in Bernardston’s economy through much of the town’s history and is valued by many residents for contributing to the town’s rural character.

As was discussed in the Land Use section, there are thirty farms in Bernardston. Eight of them rely on farming as their primary source of income. Below is a breakdown of the primary products of Bernardston’s farms. Most farms raise livestock, whether it be horses, beef, dairy cows, sheep, poultry, or goats. Several farmers practice forestry and maple sugaring, and two farmers grow vegetable and plants.

Number of farms producing certain products in Bernardston
(farms that produce more than one are included in multiple categories)

![Diagram showing number of farms producing certain products]

A weekly farmers’ market runs from the end of May to the beginning of October but only two of ten vendors are from Bernardston. Some residents have said that more awareness about what foods are being offered at the weekly farmers’ market would encourage more people to shop there. A weekly community-wide email listserv or an ad in The Recorder, for example, could advertise what products will be sold at each farmers’ market.

A community survey found that over 85 percent of people that responded would support local producers if they were made more accessible. CISA’s Local Hero campaign helps raise awareness about the social and economic benefits of supporting local farmers. Of the thirty farms in Bernardston, only three of them are currently Local Hero members and are listed on CISA’s Farm Guide (Couch Brook Farm, Eden Pond Farm, and River Maple Farm). This means there are many farms that could potentially benefit from joining this program.

“[If local products were easy to access in local stores, would you shop locally more frequently?]”
(2016 community survey)

![Pie chart showing survey results]
Franklin County’s Agricultural Needs

Establishing connections between Bernardston residents and Bernardston’s farmers could help strengthen the local economy in town, prevent farmland from being abandoned, and contribute to the town’s food security. Studies have been conducted at the county level as well, in order to help determine how agriculture in Franklin County can be supported.

According to the FRCOG’s 2015 Farm and Food System Project, farmers in Franklin County could benefit from better access to a dairy processing facility, additional livestock slaughter and processing capacity, and a poultry processing facility.

Livestock slaughter must be USDA inspected if a farmer wishes to sell their meat and currently there are only two such facilities in Massachusetts: Adams Farm in Athol and Blood Farm in Groton. While poultry processing may be done on-farm, processing options are limited and expensive. The study found that there are only three slaughter facilities and one post-slaughter facility within fifty miles of Greenfield. A 2013 CISA report, Confronting Challenges in the Local Meat Industry: Focus on the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts, found that:

The mean round-trip distance traveled by a producer in the Pioneer Valley to the processing facility is roughly 73.8 miles, with travel time totaling over an hour and fifty minutes. This represents an additional expense of roughly $87 per trip to producers in terms of vehicle and gasoline usage, which results in an even higher cost of meat products, as well as the large opportunity cost of spending this time away from on-farm activities. (13)

An additional slaughter facility in the area could support Bernardston’s farmers, especially because most of the town’s farmers raise livestock.

Creating Local Economies and Collaborative Businesses: Hardwick, Vermont

Hardwick, a small rural town of about 3,000 people, has received national attention in recent years for its diversified and thriving local economy based on food. Following the decline of the granite industry, which had been a central driver of Hardwick’s economy, Hardwick has experienced a revitalization driven by the production of high quality, local food and value-added products. Over the past few decades, several ambitious and business savvy “agripreneurs” established business ventures and collaborated to create economic relationships where by-products (“waste”) of one industry were recognized as resources and used as inputs to another industry (Hewitt, 2009).

A whole interconnected system of businesses was gradually established, where waste products or outputs from one business was used as an input but another, providing the foundation for a thriving local economy. For example food scraps and compost produced by restaurants and stores, and farms and composted at an in-town composting facility. Compost then returns fertility to the soil for farms and gardens that produce food, which is sold at local stores and restaurants. Those farms also provide inputs to a variety of businesses such as soy for Vermont Soy, which makes tofu and whey to Vermont Natural Coatings, which makes a whey-based non-toxic wood finish. Money and materials are exchanged within the local economy to a large degree rather than exported out of the region (Hewitt, 2009).

A few of the many connections in Hardwick
Dairy Processing
The study also assessed the level of interest farmers in Franklin County have for a dairy processing facility. Farmers were questioned about how they would use a processing facility, for example, to expand production or bottle and sell their own milk.

The responses were:

- Bottling and selling my own brand of fluid milk
- Processing and selling my own brand of other dairy products
- Working with other local farmers to process and sell other dairy products
- Selling my brand to another business using the processing plant

The study found that the farmers interested in a dairy processing facility were clustered in the northern part of Franklin County around Bernardston.

Based on these regional needs, Bernardston could work with the FRCOG and investigate the potential of attracting one of these types of processing facilities to one of the Priority Development Sites. As has been discussed previously in the master plan, the current lack of wastewater infrastructure is an obstacle in hosting one of these types of processing facilities, especially because they all likely would use substantial amounts of water. Regardless, these are land uses that would support farmers living in Bernardston and Franklin County.

Poultry Processing
A survey of Franklin County farmers gauged the level of interest in a new poultry processing facility. Fourteen farmers throughout Franklin County said they were “very interested” and that the facility would likely increase their production significantly. Twenty-two said they were “interested” and believed the facility “might likely increase my production significantly.” One farmer in Bernardston echoed these findings and said they travel 100 miles to Rhode Island for poultry processing and do not like the added stress the long travel causes the chickens.
A dairy processing facility would allow many to expand their operation. Interested farmers were clustered in northern part of Franklin County.

With a dairy processing facility farmers would be able to expand into a number of different products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Level of interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very interested and would likely increase my production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interested and might change my production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat interested but probably would not change my production</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many farmers throughout Franklin County are interested in a small-batch poultry processing facility
3. Major Employers in Bernardston

While some residents find paid work in agriculture and forestry, there are many other businesses and industries operating in Bernardston. These include commercial and industrial businesses, restaurants, and schools, among others. The map opposite shows that most of the major employers are located in the southern portion of town, along Route 5/10 and along Route 10, especially at the east end of Route 10 near the Northfield border. At these places of employment, not all of those employed are residents of Bernardston.

Clearing forested land or farmland for new businesses or industries could be avoided if future development is focused in areas that have already been developed, such as along South Street and Route 10. This not only would preserve Bernardston’s open space but could help create a more lively place; for example a compact cluster of shops and homes could make for a walkable, more vibrant space.

Some residents have said that they would like to see more jobs offered in Bernardston, and in fact, over 80 percent of Bernardston residents commute out of town for work, largely travelling by car (as was described in the Transportation section). More employment opportunities and services in town could potentially lessen the need for people to commute out of town.

Largest Employers in Bernardston

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Number of employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kringle Candle</td>
<td>South St</td>
<td>50-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardston Elementary School</td>
<td>School Rd</td>
<td>20-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardston Fire Dept</td>
<td>Church St</td>
<td>20-49 *on call, not full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crumpin-Fox Club</td>
<td>Parmenter Rd</td>
<td>20-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead River Co</td>
<td>Northfield Rd</td>
<td>20-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Leaf Clover</td>
<td>South St</td>
<td>20-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Farm Table</td>
<td>South St</td>
<td>20-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley Concrete &amp; Construction</td>
<td>Northfield Rd</td>
<td>20-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardston Police Dept</td>
<td>South St</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardston Town Selectman</td>
<td>Church St</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina Eastern</td>
<td>Northfield Rd</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunkin’ Donuts</td>
<td>Church St</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feed Commodities International</td>
<td>Northfield Rd</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillside Pizza</td>
<td>Church St</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rulewhich &amp; Fleury Golf Design</td>
<td>Purple Meadow Rd</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steel Shed Warehouse</td>
<td>Bernardston Rd</td>
<td>10-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio’s II Pizza &amp; Grinders</td>
<td>South St</td>
<td>5-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardston Council On Aging</td>
<td>Church St</td>
<td>5-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardston Farmer’s Supply</td>
<td>River St</td>
<td>5-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Corner</td>
<td>Church St</td>
<td>5-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox Inn</td>
<td>Northfield Rd</td>
<td>5-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Circle School</td>
<td>Parmenter Rd</td>
<td>5-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smc Security Management</td>
<td>Bald Mountain Rd</td>
<td>5-9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mass.gov Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)
4. Bernardston’s Tax Base

A community survey found that many residents see business and industrial development as a means to bring more services and jobs to Bernardston and increase tax revenue to both help stabilize residential taxes and maintain current services. Different types of development, however, can contribute varying amounts of tax revenue, and some types of development may actually cost the town more than they provide in tax revenue.

The town’s current total assessed property value is $210,174,131 (Massachusetts Department of Revenue Division of Local Services Municipal Databank, 2016). Most (85 percent) of this comes not from business or industry, however, but in the residential sector.

A goal of the town’s Finance Committee is to increase the town’s tax base to $230 million by 2035. This would add $389,000 to the Tax Levy, which the Finance Committee predicts would allow the town’s tax rate to be more affordable. It would also provide more money for maintaining and improving the town’s bridges, roads, and buildings (Bernardston Finance Committee, 2016).

### All tax revenue is not created equal

A community with many different kinds of businesses is often more resilient than one with one or two large employers, even if in each scenario the tax revenue to the town are the same. Many towns have experienced a boom when a large industry comes in but as soon as the market changes, the industry is no longer profitable, or resources are depleted, jobs are no longer viable and the town’s economy declines. Having a diversified group of businesses can prevent this and better ensure that even if one business fails or leaves, the town does not lose a large percentage of its tax revenue.

**What do you see as the benefit(s) of encouraging business/industrial development in Bernardston?**

- More retail stores: 17
- More in-town jobs: 28
- More services: 33
- Tax revenues to help ease residential tax burden: 27
- Tax revenues to help maintain current services: 24
- Tax revenues to help improve town services: 14

**Percentage of Assessed Property Value (2016)**

- Residential Value: 85%
- Commercial Value: 8%
- Industrial Value: 5%
- Personal Property Value: 2%

(Source: Mass DOR Division of Local Services, Municipal Databank, Assessed Values by Class)
How different businesses can contribute differently to a town’s tax base

Planner Peter Flinker’s Village Guidance: Tools and Techniques for Rhode Island Communities (2015) summarizes the findings of an analysis (by Pam Sherrill Planning) of the fiscal impacts of conventional residential development on the small Rhode Island town of Exeter, and compares these with the impacts of denser village development. In the conventional scenario, 89 new homes—single-family houses on large lots—could be built, given current zoning. In the Exeter village center scenario, in which density is increased through Transfer of Development Rights, 356 new homes could be built. Two-thirds of these were designated to be single-family homes (each of which would send 0.58 students to the school system) and one-third apartments or townhouse units (each of which would send just 0.05 students to the system). The fiscal impact analysis examined revenues (from real estate taxes, with a rate of $14.16 per $1,000 assessed value) and cost of town services (for education, road construction, and road maintenance). In sum, “The analysis showed that a single family home on a large lot will cost Exeter approximately $1,025 every year. However, the average village residential unit generates an annual surplus of about $1,649” (Flinker 40, emphasis added).

Flinker also summarizes the findings of a number of organizations that calculate the relative fiscal costs and benefits of various forms of non-residential land use. The American Farmland Trust has found that residential development costs communities $1.15 in services for every $1.00 the community collects in taxes; farmland and open space cost only $0.35 in services for every $1.00 collected, and commercial and industrial cost only $0.27 (42). A study of Barnstable, Massachusetts, however, determined that the type of commercial use was significant, finding that:

shopping centers, big boxes, restaurants and fast food establishments are all net money-losers for the town, while business parks, offices, hotels and specialty retail all generate an annual surplus. Specialty retail, which combines relatively high assessed value with lower costs, ended up generating the best fiscal benefits for the town. (43)

There are considerable differences between Bernardston and the wealthy Cape Cod community of Barnstable, and conclusions about the particular costs and revenues of the Barnstable study can not automatically transfer to Bernardston. However, the study suggests that different commercial land uses bring significantly different fiscal costs and benefits to a community.
5. Priority Development Sites

In an effort to create jobs and increase tax revenue to the town, Bernardston has designated two areas in town as Priority Development Sites. These could potentially host new commercial or industrial businesses as part of the Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 43D program. The sites were designated in an effort to promote commercial and industrial development in Bernardston by offering an expedited permitting process to developers, businesses, or industries seeking to locate in Bernardston. This is a streamlined process where a decision will be made by the Planning Board within 180 days.

The criteria for a Priority Development Site (PDS), as determined by MGL, are that the area:

- May be zoned for commercial, industrial development, residential or mixed use purposes.
- Must be eligible for the development or redevelopment of a building of at least 50,000 square feet of gross floor area (may include existing structures and contiguous buildings).
- Must be approved by the local governing authority.
- Must be approved by the state Interagency Permitting Board local expedited permitting process - 180 day turn around time.

(MGL Local Expedited Permitting, Chapter 43D)

As outlined in the Zoning Bylaws of the Town of Bernardston, Massachusetts, the functions of the Priority Development Sites are:

- To promote commercial and industrial development and redevelopment in Bernardston that is located in an appropriate location adjacent to existing highways and transportation infrastructure.
- To ensure high quality site planning, architecture and landscape design that enhances the character of the development and provides safety, convenience and other amenities.
- To generate positive tax revenue for the Town, and to benefit from the financial incentives provided by Commonwealth, while providing the opportunity for new business growth and additional local jobs.

(Bernardston's Bylaws, 38)

The Priority Development Sites have several assets that could be useful to a business or industry, including easy access to I-91, access to a rail siding for freight transport as described in the Transportation section (for PDS 1), access to Mass123 Broadband Institute high speed fiber optic network (both lit fiber and broadband), and water infrastructure.

A wastewater infrastructure proposal developed in 2009 by Tighe & Bond proposed using PDS 1 for a wastewater treatment plant that would service part of Church Street. It proposed a separate wastewater treatment system for PDS 2 but the high cost of creating this wastewater treatment infrastructure was deemed prohibitive. Many residents in town see this as a critical obstacle for the commercial and industrial development of these sites. Land uses or industries that do not require extensive wastewater infrastructure should be investigated.

Two Priority Development Sites

Both sites were approved for this designation in 2008 and are located along Route 10. PDS 1 is approximately 15 acres located on the west side of the I-91 interchange and wraps around Kringle Candle's facility. PDS 2 is approximately 29 acres and is located on the east side of the I-91 interchange.
MBI installed (high speed fiber optic network)

PDS 1

PDS 2

Zoning
- Expedited Permitting District
- Central Village

Transportation
- Major roads
- Other roads
- Rail
- MBI installed (high speed fiber optic network)
- MBI installed and Lit Fiber
- Rail siding present

Expedited Permitting District
2016 Master Plan
Town of Bernardston
6. Additional Economic Drivers

Even if Bernardston had municipal wastewater treatment and was better able to attract businesses, responses to the community survey indicate that many in town are concerned that increased economic development could potentially change Bernardston’s rural character, lead to a loss of open space, and increase automobile and truck traffic. The Level of Service assessments for different potential uses of the PDS described in the Transportation section confirm some of these concerns. Big box stores and retail stores over a certain size (depending on which PDS), as well as a mixed use over 250 KSF for PDS 2 would require alterations to the roadway to maintain adequate traffic conditions.

Economic development is often thought of in terms of commercial or industrial development; however, there are many other potential economic drivers that may not appear as obvious, and that could potentially contribute to Bernardston’s development, rather than detracting from its character.

**Housing as a Driver for Community Economic Development**

The median age of 50.1 is noticeably older than the region and Commonwealth: 44.9 in Franklin County and 39.3 in Massachusetts. About 36 percent of people living in town are between 45 and 65 years old, which means that many people in town will be leaving the workforce and will be receiving Social Security over the next few decades. As a result, and as described in the Housing section, there will be a need for senior housing in the coming decades.

Unlike single-family residential development for families with children, senior housing would likely provide revenue to the town without the additional expenses associated with more children entering the education system. If such housing were in infill development near or within the most densely populated part of Bernardston, it would also entail lower infrastructure costs.

Constructing new homes and retrofitting old houses will require labor. Agreements could be made with a community land trust, the Franklin Regional Housing Authority, or a developer that workers from Bernardston are involved in the construction or retrofitting of buildings.

Services needed by seniors could also create jobs in town, for example health care services, personal care, transportation, and household maintenance. In addition, if more people live in or near Center Village, there will be more support for local businesses.
**But How Might Zoning Influence Future Development?**

One of Bernardston’s goals is to develop a more dense, walkable village center with more homes, shops and other businesses. However, the current zoning bylaws for Center Village and Route 10 may not support this vision. Much of Route 10 east of the I-91 interchange is zoned for Rural Agricultural, which does not permit businesses along the road. However, there are currently small areas zoned for business and for expedited permitting on either side of the interchange. Near the border of Northfield, at the east end of Route 10, there is an area zoned for business and an area zoned for industrial uses.

In Bernardston, minimum setback requirements push houses and other buildings away from the road, and the minimum lot frontages push buildings apart and spread them out, resulting in development that is less compact. This is the case in Center Village, as well as in the residentially zoned areas, as was discussed in the Housing section. To preserve Bernardston’s open space, future development should be more concentrated and focused in areas that are already developed to some extent, which may require changes in zoning. The *New Urbanism Best Practices Guide* (2009) provides examples of how zoning bylaws can be reformed to encourage denser development through reducing minimum lot frontages and bringing buildings closer to the road.

### Current zoning bylaws in Bernardston compared with best practices for clustered development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Center Village</th>
<th>Route 10 - (the area currently zoned as R/A)</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Downtown Best Practices*</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Min lot area</strong></td>
<td>20,000 (0.46 acre)</td>
<td>60,000 (1.37 acres)</td>
<td>20,000 (0.46 acres)</td>
<td>No minimum lot sizes in commercial districts. Lots in smart growth residential zones typically range from 3,000 to 5,000 sq. ft. APA workshop: In general use the low end of prevailing lot sizes in the district as the minimum, allow homes on lots as small as 3,000 sq. ft. but fit the standards to neighborhood needs.</td>
<td>Consider reducing minimum lot sizes in Center Village (CV) and along Route 10 from the east of the Interchange to Northfield (which could be rezoned for Mixed Use).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Min frontage</strong></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>No requirement in commercial districts. Residential 30-70’ for a 1-family home lot. Use the low end of prevailing frontages as minimum.</td>
<td>Consider reducing the minimum lot frontage in CV, along Route 10 and in the Business Zone to encourage more compact development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Max building height</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Residential: 2.5 stories or 30’ max, not taller than iconic town buildings.</td>
<td>Leave as is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Min front setback</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Identify a build-to-line at 5-25’, not a setback requirement, and no different setbacks for commercial versus residential buildings.</td>
<td>For CV: consider creating a maximum setback of 30’ with a minimum setback of 15’ to bring new buildings closer to the street.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider adjusting the numbers in **red** to allow for more compact development.

7. Mixed-Use Zoning

The physical characteristics of buildings, specifically the design, layout, and density, can help promote or hinder activity in an area. When businesses are clustered together with residences and people are able to walk among them, there is a better chance people will spend more time in a place, making for a more lively space.

Center Village zoning currently allows mixed use, but most of Route 10 is zoned for Residential/Agricultural (R/A), which prohibits most business, except a bed & breakfast. As described in the Land Use section, rezoning Route 10 to be a mixed use corridor can encourage both residential and commercial development, allowing for shops and other businesses. To prevent unwanted development, the town can require a Special Permit for land uses that could threaten Bernardston’s character.

8. Use Placemaking to Encourage Community Economic Development

Community economic development (CED) is an approach that looks to improve many aspects of a community, including social and ecological well-being in addition to fiscal matters. Placemaking, a process of creating a sense of place by capitalizing on local assets, engaging people, and strengthening a sense of community, can also contribute to community economic development. By focusing on making Bernardston more of a destination in the eyes of residents and visitors, people will want to spend more time in town. Socializing, gathering for events, shopping, and visiting can also contribute to and strengthen Bernardston’s community and economy.

Using Bernardston’s goal of creating a vibrant central village as a leverage point, Bernardston can create a stronger sense of community and add to the town’s character, which can serve as a catalyst for other changes in town.

Bringing people into the town’s center—whether it be residents of Bernardston, people looking to move to town, or visitors—will support existing businesses, for example when people come to shop or eat at the restaurants. A more welcoming and attractive streetscape in Center Village also has the potential to encourage new businesses and could result in increased property values (Smart Growth America). Clustering new development, particularly the senior housing and affordable housing that the town needs, will result in more people living in or near Center Village, which will lend itself to more people spending time downtown and a more lively community.
Creating a Vibrant Center Village to Promote Placemaking and CED

A community meeting in February 2016 helped identify key aspects of village centers that appealed to residents of Bernardston. Images of nearby town centers were presented and residents provided feedback on what they found to be desirable and undesirable characteristics of a town center. Among others, some of the most common responses include:

- Compact development but not “crammed together”
- Well maintained houses, shops, restaurants, and other businesses
- Central space for gathering and events
- Walkable with sidewalks on both sides of the road
- Street trees
- Easily accessible

Beyond altering the town’s zoning bylaws to help encourage more compact development, several physical alterations to the streetscape in Center Village and Route 10 (as described in the Transportation section) could also help create a more vibrant and welcoming Center Village:

- Design and develop a Complete Street with sidewalks on both sides of the road and designated bike lanes to create a more pedestrian- and bike-friendly streetscape.
- Install benches and create public sitting areas along Route 5 and Route 10.
- Assess need for parking in Center Village, identify potential locations, and create a parking lot.
- Plant street trees to create shaded sidewalks and sitting areas.
- Consider installing street lights in Center Village to support evening activities.

Street trees in Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts

At a community meeting held in February 2016, many residents identified street trees as being a desirable feature for creating a vibrant central village.
C. Recommendations

Sustainable economic development is a priority for residents of Bernardston, but the community faces a number of challenges. Seen through a traditional economic development approach, Bernardston can investigate methods for encouraging more businesses to move into town. However, a lack of wastewater infrastructure has hindered the town’s ability to attract business. It may be possible to find particular industries that do not need much water treatment.

Looking at the town’s economy through a broader framework that includes quality of life, there are a number of additional strategies the town can pursue as part of a community economic development strategy.

Issues

• The town wants to maintain its rural character, but increased development could potentially pose a threat to this, depending on the form it takes.
• Lack of sewer infrastructure in town potentially hinders Bernardston’s ability to attract businesses and industries to Center Village and the Priority Development Sites. Additional housing or infill development in Center Village would also require alternative wastewater infrastructure.
• Residents feel taxes are high, there are not many jobs, and there is little affordable housing.
• A large portion (82%) of the workers in Bernardston commute out of town for work, relying primarily on cars for transportation.
• There are few vacant lots in Center Village for new building development.
• Current zoning in Center Village and along Route 10 prevents compact infill development.
• Agriculture in Bernardston has been on the decline in recent years, due in part to the inability of local farmers to compete with the lower prices that larger farms are able to offer.

Considering Sustainability

Creating or strengthening connections among business owners in Bernardston and Franklin County will create a more resilient local economy. Additionally, by promoting locally sourced products such as food, money is recirculated within the town and county, supporting the livelihoods of those who live in Bernardston and the area.

• Center Village is fairly spread out and offers little in terms of seating for people wanting to spend time there. Cushman Park often floods and is rarely used as a gathering space by residents. The Cushman Hall Property was considered as a site for an attractive public event space, but a restriction that prevents new permanent structures prevented this from being carried out. A central gathering space could encourage more residents and visitors to spend more time in Center Village.
• With few options for shopping in town and for daily essentials, people spend most of their money elsewhere rather than in Bernardston.

Where do you do most of your shopping? (2016 community survey)
Recommendations

Recommendations for sustainable economic development involve leveraging Bernardston’s assets and making Bernardston more of a destination in the eyes of residents and those visiting town. This entails implementing various strategies for creating a more welcoming central village that draws people to town, which may encourage new businesses. In the absence of wastewater infrastructure, Bernardston should investigate industries or businesses that do not require extensive infrastructure for the Priority Development Sites. The town can encourage existing business owners and farmers to collaborate and determine how they can support each other, for example by engaging in the Massachusetts Farm to School Project. Fulfilling Bernardston’s need for affordable housing and senior housing can serve as an economic driver as well.

Support and encourage local agriculture and sustainable forestry in Bernardston

Work with CISA to encourage local farms, restaurants, and businesses to get involved with its “Local Hero Program” to raise awareness of the social, environmental, and economic benefits of eating locally. Of the thirty farms in Bernardston, only three are currently Local Hero members and listed on CISA’s Farm Guide (Couch Brook Farm, Eden Pond Farm, River Maple Farm). Make it easier for food produced in town to be sold nearby in stores, served at restaurants in the region, and promoted as being locally sourced.

Promote agritourism in Bernardston, as suggested by many residents and by the Community Development Plan of 2009. This would be a way to help support local farms and bring people to town to enjoy its rural qualities. This might entail, for example maple sugar houses, hosting events on farm, pick-your-own fruit, workshops in gardening or processing food, or a bed and breakfast.

Create a community wide email list-serve or newsletter that informs people of what particular produce or product a farmer might have in a given week.

Work with the Massachusetts Farm to Schools Project and engage the Pioneer Valley School District to determine how the area’s schools could help support local agriculture and source some of its food from local farmers, at whatever scale is most appropriate. For example, depending on the supply, this may just be a one day per week meal that serves locally sourced products. This could potentially require a middleman between Bernardston’s farms and the Bernardston Elementary School. Explore options for grants that would allow the town to establish a position to develop and coordinate with surrounding towns.

Many farmers may not have the time to manage relationships with multiple buyers. This committee or individual also could serve as a middleman between Bernardston’s farms and the various restaurants and businesses in the region, working to coordinate the supply from the farms and the demand from the different buyers.

Work with private landowners and encourage active forest management plans, for example using Chapter 61 for temporary land protection and tax abatement, maintaining Bernardston’s beautiful landscape character.

Encourage homeowners to switch to wood heat for buildings and convert to high-efficiency wood heating systems. If that wood is sourced locally from Bernardston or the surrounding towns, this will stimulate the area’s local economy.

Encourage farmers to investigate the potential of cultivating non-timber forest products in their forests or woodlots. Growing shiitake, oyster, or lion’s mane mushrooms on hardwood logs could supplement a farm’s income with a niche crop. Mushroom production requires relatively little maintenance through the growing season and much of the work can be done during the winter when things are generally slower on the farm.
Support existing businesses in town and encourage new ones while maintaining rural character and environmental values

Establish a Development and Marketing Committee and work with NATABA to determine how the town and region could attract more businesses to Route 10 and the Priority Development Sites. The committee could run a fiscal analysis to determine how much revenue could be generated for the town by different industries, what expenditures would be needed to attract businesses, for example in the form of wastewater treatment infrastructure, construction, or landscaping.

Coordinate with the county to attract businesses and industries that support the regional rural economy and the processing of natural resources to develop in the Expedited Permitting District (examples include a slaughterhouse, milk processing facility, or sawmill). A study of county industries could reveal possibilities to link industries and businesses by supplying materials needed by already established industries or utilizing the waste product of other industries. The study should include areas of southern Vermont.

Encourage business owners in town to establish an informal organization or association, that would entail periodic meetings and where business owners could collaborate and support each other. Alternatively, encourage business owners to affiliate with the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and NATABA. The Franklin County Chamber of Commerce offers free business counseling, creates networking opportunities, and helps businesses market and advertise themselves.

Encourage and promote tourism in Bernardston. Bernardston’s natural features, for example its forested land and trail systems, can be promoted as part of a strategy to encourage tourism. Promote hiking, hunting, and other recreational activities in the town’s forests for both residents and tourists. Encourage low-impact recreational activities at Satan’s Kingdom WMA and use of the trail systems on Charity Lot. Improve tourism infrastructure such as wayfinding signage.

Natural beauty alone cannot support tourism however, as many people are looking for a broader experience that involves accommodations, shopping, and cultural opportunities (FRCOG, 2011). Bernardston is already home to several restaurants, an inn (The Inn at Crumpin Fox) and a renowned golf course, so marketing and promoting these services along with Bernardston’s natural features could increase the number of visitors to town.

Conduct a market study to determine what the most appropriate businesses are that Bernardston can support, given its assets, location, and physical constraints, and target marketing efforts towards these industries. For example, many skiers and outdoor enthusiasts travel through Bernardston on their way north to Vermont and New Hampshire and so an outdoor recreation outfitter located in Bernardston could potentially do well. A local brewery and pub, restaurants, or a bed and breakfast would also potentially fit Bernardston’s character, encourage tourism, bring more people to town, and add to Bernardston’s tax base.

Reassess the viability of using the Bernardston landfill site for a solar array. As described in the Land Use Section, an assessment by Nexamp done in 2009 found that the 8.72-acre site could produce roughly 860,000 kwh of electricity. Because the financing system is currently in the process of being updated, a new financial assessment would need to be done. This could potentially reduce electricity bills for institutions in town, for example the Bernardston Elementary School.
Reform Zoning Codes for Center Village and Route 10

Rezone Route 10 for mixed use (as described in the Land Use section), allowing for shops, businesses, and residential uses. The town can require a Special Permit for various uses to prevent unwanted development that could potentially detract from Bernardston’s character.

Alter zoning bylaws to encourage more clustered development by reducing the minimum lot size, and the minimum lot frontages and creating a maximum front setback rather than a minimum setback. Increased density will require alternative wastewater treatment systems, such as composting toilets or a decentralized system (as described in the Services section).

Develop Form-Based Codes for Center Village and Route 10 through a community design charrette (as recommended in the Land Use section)

Community building and community based economic development.

Invest in making Center Village a more attractive, welcoming, and pedestrian-friendly space. Design a Complete Street for Church Street, plant street trees and create more sitting areas in Center Village to encourage people to spend more time there.

Form an Event Committee to plan more events in town. Many residents have expressed how much they enjoy Bernardston’s different events, for example the Gas Engine Show, Scarecrow in the Park, and the Kiwanis’ Club dinners, among others. Music concerts, shows, and events for families would bring people together, add to the town’s vibrancy and build a stronger community.

Promote the arts and culture in town. This could take the form of art shows or galleries hosted by the various institutions in town or outdoor exhibits in Cushman Park.

Revitalize Cushman Hall Property to serve as a more welcoming public park and a central gathering space for events. Currently there is a deed restriction that no permanent structures can be built on site. The town can reassess the feasibility of Elaine Williamson’s 2010 design project for the Cushman Hall Property and explore options for implementation.

Promote outdoor recreation in Bernardston through its trail systems (walking, horse, and snowmobile trails) and assess the potential for mountain biking trails in Bernardston. Utilize Center Village as a gateway for Bernardston’s outdoor recreation facilities with wayfinding signage to direct people to those destinations.

Consider creating a “Farm Structure Reuse Bylaw.” This could encourage the adaptive reuse of the historic barns and other farm buildings within the town for structures that are no longer in agricultural use. Examples of adaptive reuse include “event space for weddings and other functions, studio space for artists or musicians, or other commercial use that is compatible with the surrounding landscape” (Community Development Plan, ES-9).