



One-third of Brookfield residents are over the age of 65.

OVERVIEW

With a current population of 3,443, a median age of 50.6, and one-third of the residents over the age of 65, Brookfield's housing dynamics reflect the challenges that arise from an aging populace. This chapter

seeks to address the challenges brought by the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) deficits and rising housing costs. It also makes a case for the sustainable revitalization of Brookfield's existing housing stock. Given that the 2020 Census data revealed the presence of 78 vacant houses within the town, this plan suggests leveraging these underutilized resources to foster a more robust housing ecosystem.

From streamlining regulatory processes to diversifying housing types and fostering collaborations with developers, this master plan aspires to meet immediate housing

needs, and lay the foundation for a resilient, inclusive community.

KEY FINDINGS

Aging population

A comparison between the demographics of Brookfield, Worcester County, and Massachusetts reveals an aging population in all three geographies. The 65 to 69 years age group in Brookfield is divided between 10% males and 7% females. This accounts for 708 households that have an old individual 60 years and over out of the complete 1445 households in

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"We need housing for the elderly."
(Community Workshop, February 2023)

"Very limited housing. I know of at least one family in church that has an elderly lady that can't find a place to live and suitable housing. Senior housing needed."
(Community Workshop, February 2023)

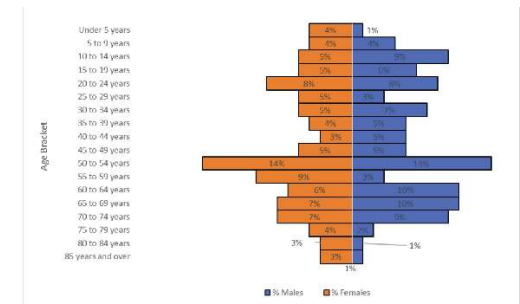


Figure 9. Population Pyramid in Brookfield, 2022. Source U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

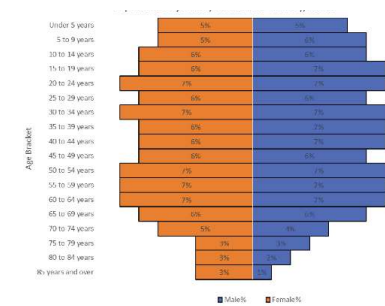


Figure 10. Population Pyramid in Worcester County, 2022. Source U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

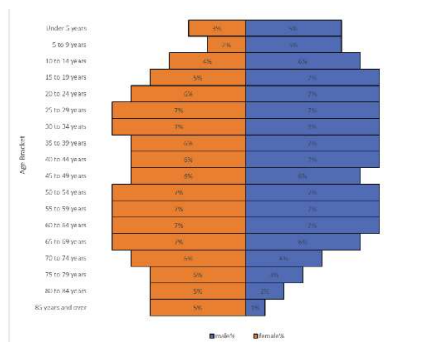


Figure 11. Population Pyramid in Massachusetts, 2022. Source U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

Limited housing variety that is not affordable for the local workforce

Much of the existing housing stock and new housing developments consist of single-family homes that are not affordable for various income levels.

The analysis of owner-occupied housing units with a mortgage in Brookfield indicates a varied distribution across different mortgage value ranges. Most of these units fall within the \$100,000 to \$499,999 range, with 366 households falling into this category. A significant portion—360 households—are in the \$300,000 to \$499,999 range. However, it is noteworthy that 439 owner-occupied housing units have no mortgage. This underscores the importance of considering not only mortgage-associated housing but also those without mortgages. While some residents own their homes outright, there is a need to focus on providing subsidized and affordable housing options for those who may face financial constraints. By addressing the housing needs of various income groups, including those with no mortgages, Brookfield can enhance its housing diversity and inclusivity.

Housing Cost Burden

The income distribution in Brookfield reveals significant disparities in its socioeconomic landscape. A considerable portion of the population falls within the lower income brackets, with 203 individuals earning less than \$20,000, and 174 falling within the \$20,000 to \$34,999 range. The need for SHI becomes particularly evident, especially for

those in the 30 percent or more income bracket. Notably, Brookfield's poverty rate (7%) is lower than that of the county (11%) and state (10%). Addressing the housing needs of these income groups is imperative to ensure that the community provides affordable and accessible housing options for all residents. Implementing strategies to increase the SHI can play a pivotal role in creating a more inclusive housing environment that caters to the varied financial capacities of Brookfield's population.

Need for Senior Housing

Brookfield is undergoing a significant demographic shift, with over 33% of its population surpassing the age of 65, exceeding 1000 individuals. The Brookfield Master Plan must address the need for senior-specific housing and community facilities due to this transformation. The absence of dedicated housing options and a designated senior center compounds challenges for the aging population. Many Massachusetts communities have incorporated senior housing laws into their zoning and development plans, covering

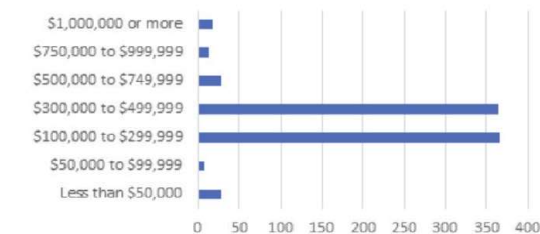


Figure 12. Owner-occupied housing units with a mortgage, 2022. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Need more housing and jobs. People are working in Worcester or Westboro or other more urban/suburban areas.”

“People in tech or similar jobs are moving to towns like this because they don’t necessarily need to be in the city. This was accelerated by COVID.” (Community Workshop, June 2023)

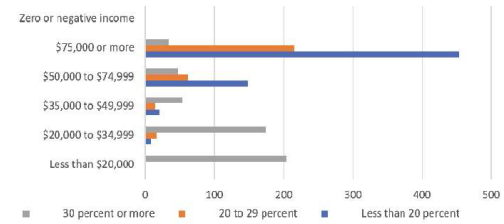


Figure 13. Monthly Housing Costs as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months, 2023. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

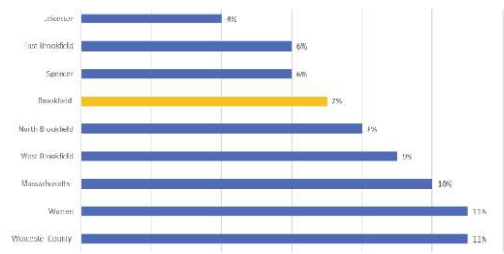


Figure 14. Percentage of Population Below Poverty in Brookfield and Surrounding Towns, 2022. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



various structures like senior residential communities, retirement communities, assisted living, and private care facilities, all governed by state regulations.

Need for Supportive Services

The Brookfield Master Plan aims to holistically address the housing and supportive service needs of its aging population. With more than one-third of the population being seniors, the creation of senior-specific housing options and community centres is important. Allocating funds from the town, exploring grant opportunities like CDBG, and prioritizing accessible transportation are integral components of a comprehensive strategy.

Shift in Housing Tenure

Over the past decade, housing tenure in Brookfield has witnessed a notable shift, marked by an increase in owner-occupied housing units from 80.6% in 2012 to 87.5% in 2022. Correspondingly, renter-occupied housing units have decreased from 19.4% in 2012 to 12.5% in 2022. While the rise in owner-occupied units may indicate a growing trend of homeownership, it also underscores the importance of addressing the need for SHI to ensure a balanced housing landscape that caters to diverse economic backgrounds. As most housing remains owner-occupied, there is an evident need to enhance affordable housing options to accommodate a broader demographic range, thereby fostering a more inclusive and resilient community in Brookfield.

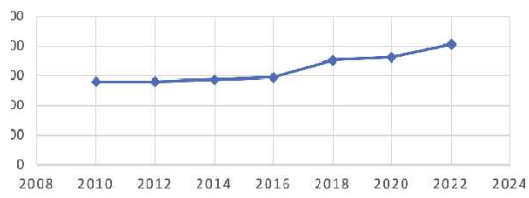


Figure 15. Brookfield's Increasing Elderly Population since 2010. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

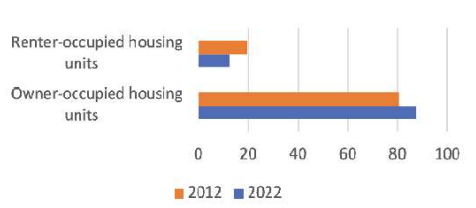
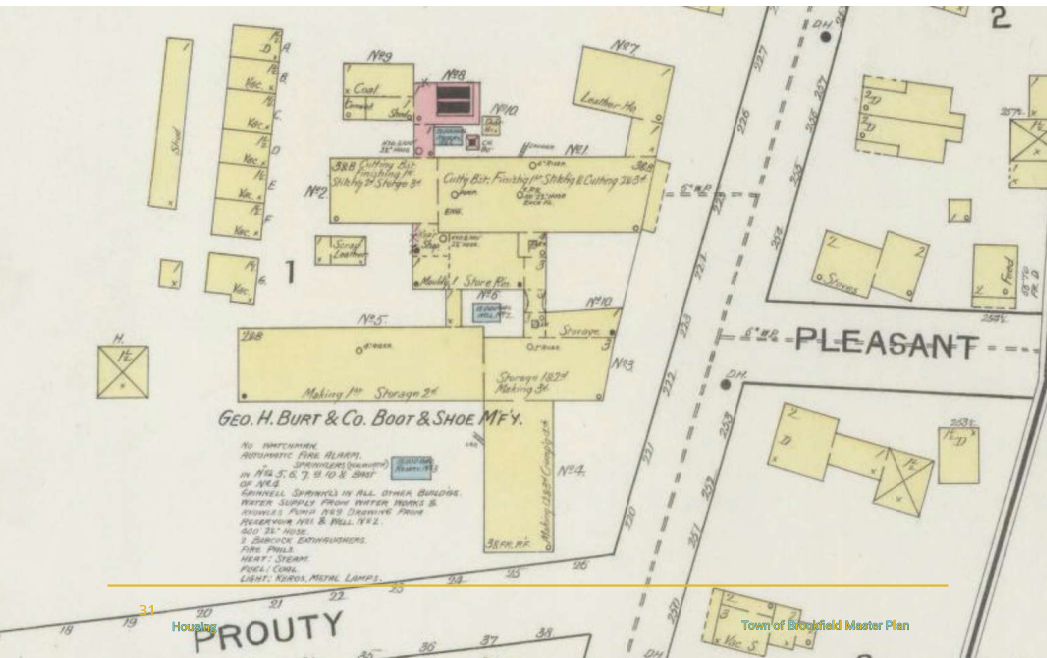


Figure 16. Brookfield's Housing Tenure 2012 and 2022. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



GOALS AND STRATEGIES

SUMMARY

Goal 1: Build local capacity to advance new housing development that is compatible with Brookfield's small-town character.

- Objective: Foster collaborative partnerships with for-profit and non-profit housing developers.
 - o Action Item 1.1: Establish and maintain an active committee to guide local housing initiatives.
 - o Action Item 1.2: Conduct ongoing community engagement and education on housing issues and activities.
 - o Action Item 1.3: Pursue "Friendly 40B" opportunities as a means of creating new affordable units in appropriate locations in town.
 - o Action Item 1.4: Work cooperatively with developers by providing zoning incentives—such as density bonuses, reduced parking requirements, and expedited permitting—while also directing development to areas with existing infrastructure.
 - o Action Item 1.5: Support affordable housing providers in obtaining financing by endorsing financing applications and leveraging funding resources such as CDBG, Mass Housing, Massachusetts Housing Partnership, Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC).
- Objective: Identify and leverage funding and technical assistance resources to implement housing planning and community engagement initiatives.
 - o Action Item 1.6: Explore funding sources such as the Community Preservation Act (CPA) or a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund to effectively support local affordable housing initiatives.
 - o Action Item 1.7: Actively seek out and apply for planning assistance and community development grant opportunities offered through programs such as Community One Stop for Growth, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, CMRPC District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program, and more.

87.5%
owner occupied
units in 2022

12.5%
renter occupied
units in 2022

33%
of Brookfield's
population are
over the age of 65

Goal 2: Explore innovative housing solutions that enable a greater diversity of housing choices.

- Objective: Pursue creative policies that support the redevelopment of underutilized properties.
 - o Action Item 2.1: Develop a housing action plan to assess how the available stock of vacant housing could be rehabilitated and expanded to increase the naturally occurring affordable housing inventory.
 - o Action item 2.2: Explore zoning and policy changes, and streamline the permitting process, to encourage home conversions, accessory dwelling units, and redevelopment on nonconforming lots.

Goal 3: Provide housing opportunities that meet the needs of special populations, including the senior population.

- Objective: Expand options to "age in place" for Brookfield's senior population.
 - o Action item 3.1: Encourage creative senior living opportunities, such as accessory dwelling units, intergenerational cohousing, or home sharing.
 - o Action item 3.2: Connect residents with existing programs and resources that assist qualifying households with repairs and improvements, energy efficiency upgrades, and accessibility modifications.
 - o Action Item 3.3: Actively seek partnerships to fund supportive services for special populations within the community.



GOAL 1

Build local capacity to advance new housing development that is compatible with Brookfield's small-town character.

Working cooperatively with for-profit and non-profit developers is a key step in creating the conditions for attracting new development. An Economic Development Committee (EDC), if established in Brookfield, could help buttress the town's administrative capacity to enable new development. The EDC could take on tasks such as identifying developers open to creating affordable housing, establishing a collaborative relationship with them, and ensuring a transparent and streamlined review process.

Objective: Foster collaborative partnerships with for-profit and non-profit housing developers.

The EDC could host roundtable meetings between developers and Town officials to discuss challenges and opportunities associated with affordable housing development in Brookfield.

Action Item 1.1: Establish and maintain an active committee dedicated to guiding local housing initiatives.

Establishing an Economic Development Committee to work on advancing the Town's economic development and housing agenda would help build administrative capacity.

The EDC could identify potential

housing development sites that could support multifamily housing, assess applicable zoning, and create a site inventory that can be used as a tool for outreach to developers. In particular, identifying publicly-owned parcels would allow the Town to leverage vacant, underutilized land to reduce the funding gap that typically exists with affordable housing developments. [Fig 7 Vacant Land]

Action Item 1.2: Conduct ongoing community engagement and education on housing issues and activities.

Securing community buy-in presents a significant challenge in the creation of affordable housing. Housing initiatives or projects hinge on receiving local approval, underscoring the crucial role of community support in implementing new measures. To gain this support, outreach and educational efforts might include organizing community gatherings or workshops dedicated to specific housing proposals. Additional outreach strategies involve making information on existing programs and services easily accessible to the public through social media or public access television. Furthermore, the Town should conduct outreach to developers who are open to incorporating affordable units into their projects.

Action Item 1.3: Pursue "Friendly 40B" opportunities as a means of creating new affordable units in appropriate locations in town.

The "friendly 40B" process through the state's Local Initiative Program

(LIP), is a useful mechanism for encouraging projects that may need a comprehensive permit to allow a development to be built at a higher density than allowed under the existing zoning. Through this process, developers collaborate with town boards to reduce dimensional requirements, or to integrate the development's architectural features with the neighborhood context and character. The Town could organize discussions with developers, property owners, and Department representatives such as the Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission, and other relevant boards.

Action Item 1.4: Work cooperatively with developers by providing zoning incentives—such as density bonuses, reduced parking requirements, and expedited permitting—while also directing development to areas with existing infrastructure.

The Town could consider introducing incentives for the inclusion of affordable housing in new developments. An approach worth exploring is incentive zoning, a voluntary method that allows developers to forgo specific regulatory obligations or benefit from density bonuses by incorporating affordable housing. Developer incentives could also involve reduced fees and parking requirements, density bonuses, or a streamlined permitting process.

Action Item 1.5: Support affordable housing providers in obtaining financing by endorsing financing applications and leveraging funding resources such as CDBG, Mass Housing, Massachusetts Housing Partnership, Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC).

While Brookfield does not have the capacity to provide predevelopment or gap financing to help developers structure their capital stack, the Town's (presumptive) Economic Development Committee could advocate for a housing project by helping the developer secure funding and local political support. The Town could help a project pencil out by supporting applications for financing and leveraging other sources of funding such as CDBG, Mass Housing, Massachusetts Housing Partnership, Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC).

Objective: Identify and leverage funding and technical assistance resources to implement housing planning, and community engagement initiatives.

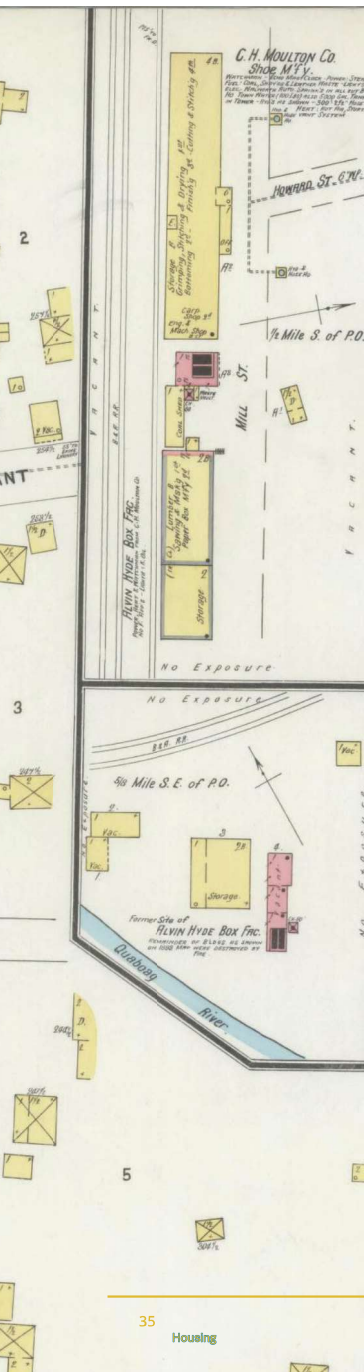
Action Item 1.6: Explore funding sources such as the Community Preservation Act (CPA) or a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund to effectively support local affordable housing initiatives.

The town's inability to access subsidies is a major barrier in developing housing. Exploring tools such as the CPA would help the Town access funding for a variety of projects, including accessible and affordable housing. The Town could

start by assessing how the CPA could help advance critical projects, and conduct community outreach to inform the community of the benefits of the CPA. Many communities across Massachusetts have benefitted from CPA support. Bedford, the first community to pass the CPA, created a housing plan for the town with the help of CPA funding.

Action Item 1.7: Actively seek out and apply for planning assistance and community development grant opportunities offered through programs such as Community One Stop for Growth, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, CMRPC District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program, and more.

An important resource and capacity-building strategy for the Town is continuing to access planning assistance from CMRPC. This enables the town to build on the efforts of its current grant writer and get assistance with grant administration.



GOAL 2

Explore innovative housing solutions that enable a greater diversity of housing choices.

Most housing units in Brookfield are single-unit structures (69.3%), with 2 or more-unit structures constituting 13.6%, and mobile homes and other structures making up 17.1%. The age distribution of the housing stock reveals a significant portion built before 1940, indicating potential rehabilitation needs for older residences.

A mismatch between household income and available housing types can worsen the affordability problem.

Objective: Pursue creative policies that support the redevelopment of underutilized properties.

Residents have identified multiple vacant properties in town that are in need of reuse and rehabilitation. Some properties may be suitable for adaptive reuse and repurpose as affordable housing developments. Historic buildings may be eligible for federal and state historic tax credits. Former industrial buildings, such as some of the former shoe factory buildings in town, could be repurposed and converted into housing units with appropriate modifications of zoning regulations. Non-profit housing providers, such as the Preservation of Affordable Housing, are actively pursuing acquisitions and rehabilitations of underutilized structures.

Action Item 2.1: Develop a housing action plan to assess how the available stock of vacant housing could be rehabilitated and expanded to increase the naturally occurring affordable housing inventory.

Brookfield faces a housing challenge with approximately 78 vacant houses, identified in the 2020 ACS survey, due to reasons like renovations, abandonment, and evictions. These vacant properties offer a valuable opportunity for the town to address its housing needs. By implementing initiatives to recover and revitalize these houses, Brookfield can enhance affordable housing options, aligning with the town's commitment to sustainable development. In comparison to Worcester and Massachusetts, where the number of vacant houses is higher, Brookfield's focused efforts can lead to a targeted and impactful approach in addressing housing challenges. [Figure 16: Occupied and vacant housing units]

To chart a course forward, Brookfield could enact a comprehensive housing action plan. This plan should include streamlining the permitting processes, fostering collaborative efforts between public and private sectors, incentivizing affordable housing initiatives, engaging the community in decision-making processes, utilizing grants strategically, diversifying housing types to meet varying needs, and addressing employment discrepancies through partnerships with local businesses. By prioritizing sustainable and affordable housing,

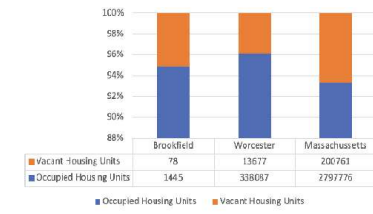


Figure 16. Brookfield's Occupied and Vacant Housing Units, 2022. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

this proactive strategy seeks to guide Brookfield toward a housing plan that aligns with the aspirations of its residents.

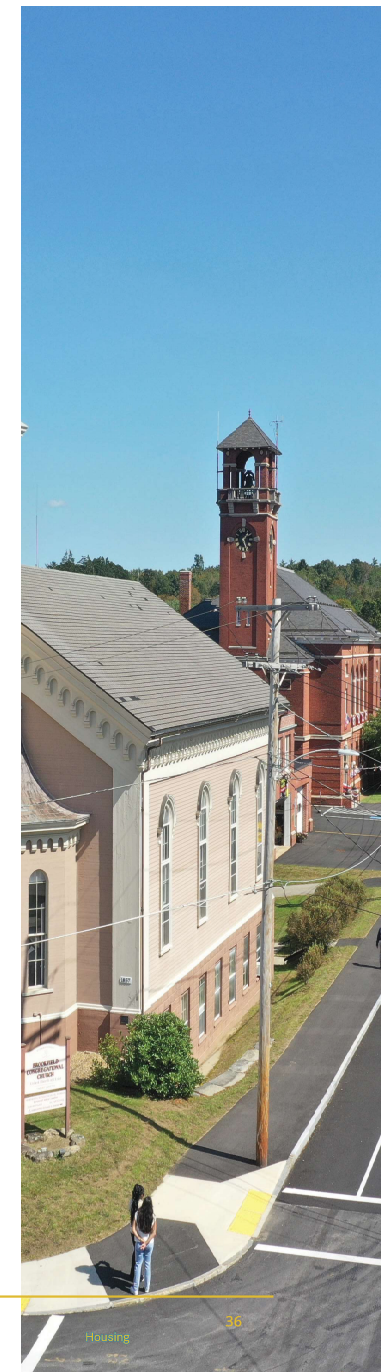
Action item 2.2: Explore zoning and policy changes, and streamline the permitting process, to encourage home conversions, accessory dwelling units, and redevelopment on nonconforming lots.

Brookfield's zoning bylaw includes provisions that allow for ADUs limited to 600 square feet of gross floor area under a Special Permit. Accessory apartments enable elderly family members to remain close to home while maintaining their independence. This type of housing also blends with the existing town character and aligns with Smart Growth principles. However, the Town should consider some amendments to the existing bylaw, such as increasing the allowed maximum square footage. In addition, removing barriers, such as the application for a special permit, would also encourage the production of this type of units. The Town could consider allowing ADUs by right, if the criteria for adequate sewage disposal are met.

GOAL 3

Provide housing opportunities that meet the needs of special populations, including the senior population.

The data from the 2022 ACS reveals a diverse living scenario for adults aged 65 and over in Brookfield. With 232 individuals living alone, there is a clear need for specialized senior housing solutions to cater to this demographic's unique challenges. Additionally, varying living arrangements, including those with spouses, unmarried partners, other relatives, and nonrelatives, highlight the complexity of senior housing needs. It is crucial to address the specific requirements of individuals living alone, ensuring tailored housing options, while also recognizing that seniors living with relatives may have distinct care considerations. This emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive and nuanced approaches to senior housing planning in Brookfield.





Objective: Expand options to “age in place” for Brookfield’s senior population.

The town’s population aged 65 and over has shown consistent growth, with the age group changing into seniors (45-64) encountering the most noteworthy rate of growth beginning around 1990. Seniors now make up one-third of the total population. While Nanatomqua Manufactured Home Park offers units to occupants aged 55, there is a need for Brookfield to extend its lodging choices for the elderly, reflecting a statewide pattern. Intergenerational co-housing arrangements, or accessibility upgrades can be effective solutions for helping seniors age in place.

Action item 3.1: Encourage creative senior living opportunities, such as accessory dwelling units, intergenerational cohousing, or home sharing.

Adjoining communities with local Housing Authorities grapple with extensive waiting lists for senior housing units. As Brookfield’s senior and soon-to-be senior populations continue to grow, the demand for senior housing is anticipated to intensify over the next decade. Recognizing this pattern, numerous Massachusetts communities have integrated senior housing into their zoning and development plans, incorporating different structures like senior residential communities, retirement networks, and assisted living, all represented by state guidelines.

Intergenerational co-housing and home sharing are forms of living arrangements that are particularly

useful in alleviating loneliness and isolation in older adults. Co-housing is an arrangement that allows residents to share facilities while living in separate units. Notable examples in Central Massachusetts are Hager Homestead in Littleton, and Mosaic Commons Cohousing in Berlin. Home sharing—used by various age groups—is an arrangement in which the homeowner rents out rooms to friends, family, or caregivers.

Action item 3.2: Connect residents with existing programs and resources that assist qualifying households with repairs and improvements, energy efficiency upgrades, and accessibility modifications.

Seniors generally prefer to stay in their homes and “age in place.” Several obstacles, including affordability, accessibility, and access to supportive services prevent this from becoming a reality for many. Brookfield’s aging demographic underscores the need for suitable housing, the most important of which is a supply of affordable housing tailored to fixed incomes, such as accessory dwelling units. Accessibility upgrades, including single-level residences, ramps, or handrails, enable elderly relatives to live autonomously within their family unit. The Town does not have capacity to offer financial help for accessibility upgrades, but non-profit organizations can fill this gap. Habitat for Humanity’s Aging in Place program is an example of a service that allows older adults to continue living in their homes as they age by making needed accessibility

upgrades.

Senior residences situated in walkable neighbourhoods are also desirable, as well as options like assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and retirement communities.

Action Item 3.3: Actively seek partnerships to fund supportive services for special populations within the community.

Supportive services are an integral part of housing provision. The Town could actively collaborate with Central Massachusetts service providers, such as United Way of Central Massachusetts, Seven Hills Foundation, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, or the South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC).

Brookfield could also get involved in regional partnerships and form a regional housing program in collaboration with neighbouring towns. Regional examples that could serve as a model are the Assabet Regional Housing Consortium and the Metro North Regional Housing Services Office. These organizations offer a range of programs, the most notable of which are the Emergency Rental Assistance programs that were established in response to COVID-19.



Photo: Jackie Mushinski
Spencer Cable Access



06

Land Use



Balance between growth and preservation.

OVERVIEW

Brookfield's development patterns are rooted in its rural and agricultural heritage. Characterized by minimal change, Brookfield's land use reflects a rural and suburban lifestyle primarily centered around creating

single-family homes within the Rural Residential (RR) district. Commercial activities are concentrated along Route 9 and Central Street, offering residents a limited range of essential services.

The Town Common area is primarily residential, with small businesses contributing to the neighborhood's character while minimizing disruption. The Common's inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places acknowledges its significant historic structures contributing to the town's New England character. Furthermore, the open spaces within the Common serve as a scenic

backdrop for local fairs and cultural events.

The Land Use chapter aims to provide a roadmap for the practical and sustainable utilization of the Town's land resources. It focuses on a balance between preserving the town's New England Village character and promoting responsible growth and development. This chapter outlines specific land use goals, objectives, and actionable strategies shaped to meet Brookfield's needs and aspirations for the next two decades.

KEY FINDINGS

Following an assessment of existing conditions, data analysis, and engagement with key stakeholders and residents, three central themes emerged: maintaining Brookfield's small-town and historical character, diversifying commercial uses that accommodate current needs, and preserving rural character through open space. These themes will guide the Town in implementing strategic measures that align with Brookfield's built environment's current and future priorities.

Emphasizing Small-Town and Historical Characteristics

As the 20th century unfolded, Brookfield experienced a notable shift toward residential development, marked by the construction of lakeside cottages and the emergence of scattered residential properties. Brookfield's development patterns have not changed significantly in the last decades. According to the American Community Survey 2020 Census data, Brookfield comprises 1,368 households, with single-family detached homes being the dominant housing type within Brookfield at 66% of the housing stock (refer to image X). This data shows Brookfield's continued preference for single-family homes, contributing to preserving Brookfield's small-town, rural character.

Survey respondents and workshop participants identified Brookfield's

"historic character" as one of its main strengths. The Town Common, placed on the National Register of Historic Places, is one of its most notable historic assets. The Master Plan Land Use and Open Space, Natural, Cultural and Historical Resources chapters provide recommendations for tools to protect these areas and prevent inappropriate changes to historic areas like the Town Common.

and portraying an auto-dominated appearance. As for Business B (BB) district, permitted uses mainly consist of light manufacturing that does not aim to provide convenience services and goods for the residents of Brookfield.

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I think we should keep our town small. I moved here to be in a rural country setting [...]" (Community Survey, 2023).

"Allow for growth that doesn't destroy character" (Community Workshop, February 2023).

Need for Diversified Commercial Services in Business and Mixed-Use Districts

Brookfield has prominently zoned Route 9 with Business A (BA) district, allowing commercial uses to provide highway-oriented services

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Consolidate businesses to make them accessible to the community, including the elderly."

"More small businesses near the center of town."

"Change zoning in the Village district to make a walkable business district with ground floor commercial."

"Allow development between existing buildings on Central Street and the surrounding areas." (Community Workshop, May 2023)

Brookfield residents have consistently voiced their support for broadening the availability of small-scale commercial services concentrated in the Business A and B zoning districts. The proposed strategy encourages neighborhood retail, ensuring convenient access to essential goods and services.

Critically, these commercial areas will be positioned near the Town Center, preserving a clear boundary between commercial and the residential zones south of the Quaboag River. The residents' advocacy for increased business accessibility extends beyond convenience; it also reflects a desire to bolster the Town's tax revenue and employment opportunities by establishing new businesses.

Preserving Rural Character through Open Space

To maintain Brookfield's unique rural character and extensive open spaces, particularly South of the Quaboag River, the Town should guide development away from agricultural land and toward development along main corridors near existing development, which will require updated conservation strategies and land use policies and upgrades to current infrastructure.

Emerging Issues in Land Use

From time-to-time, zoning bylaws should be reviewed and updated to remove potential conflicts, provide clarity, and bring the bylaws up-to-date due to changes in Massachusetts General Law

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"The community should prioritize agriculture. Allow for as much farming as the community can still hold." (Community Workshop, February 2023).

"Control growth and ensure it does not result in sprawl" (Community Workshop, February 2023).

(MGL). Brookfield would benefit from undertaking a zoning diagnostic and comprehensive zoning update to ensure that the bylaws are in accordance with MGL and for ease of use. A few sections that are highlighted here are sections pertaining to parking, signs, and solar energy facilities. The Parking and Loading Regulations (Section 9) of the Zoning Bylaws are limited and do not provide specific parking requirements based on the use and size of a facility. While this allows for flexibility in a time when there is an effort to reduce impervious areas to reduce stormwater runoff, guidelines should be established for residential units and for commercial

uses based on use and size of facility. It is commendable to see that shared parking is permitted as this is another strategy to help reduce stormwater runoff.

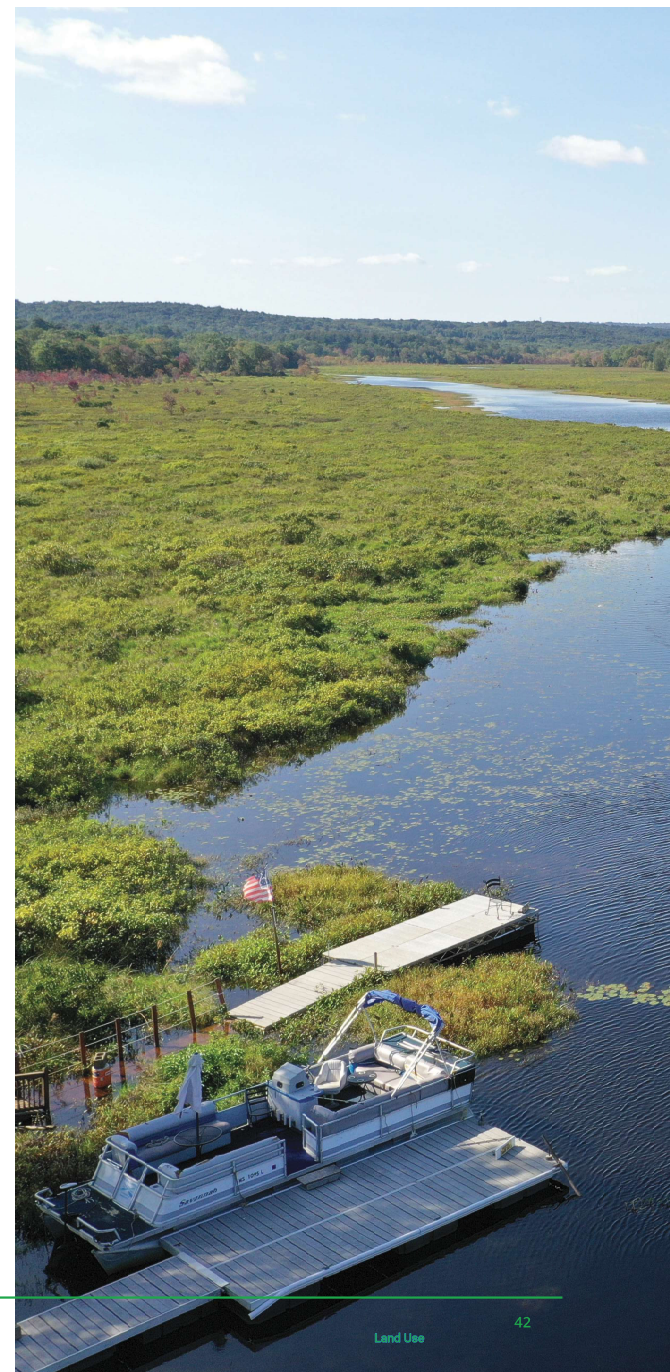
Regarding the Sign Regulation (Section 10.), there have been recent legal cases pertaining to signs. It is good practice to review and update the Sign Bylaw to ensure the bylaw reflects these changes. Additionally, while electronic message centers (also known as LED reader board signs) have been in existence for some time, some older sign bylaws do not yet have language established to regulate these types of signs particularly regarding the size, brightness, and animation capability. The Town should consider whether these types of signs will be permitted in Brookfield and, if so, a definition should be drafted for this type of sign and criteria established to regulate them. If the Town does not support this type of sign, the sign bylaw should be amended to prohibit them.

A newer circumstance that has emerged with solar energy systems (Section 12.) is the development of "micro grid systems," also referred to as large-scale Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). These systems use large batteries (typically lithium batteries) stored in shipping containers that can power a particular area when the main electrical grid is not operating. While these systems can be beneficial in that they provide electricity during times when local power is down, there are some concerns with them.

The primary concern is with the inability of fire department personnel to extinguish lithium battery fires, and there are also aesthetic concerns. These systems are divided into different classes depending on the amount of energy that can be stored and distributed through them. With these systems being so new, most communities do not yet have adopted bylaws to regulate them. The Town should consider reviewing the solar energy systems bylaw and amending it to include provisions for battery energy storage systems.

The following goals and strategies provide ways to address the issues and opportunities presented in this chapter.

The Town should consider reviewing the solar energy systems bylaw and amending it to include provisions for battery energy storage systems.





GOALS AND STRATEGIES

SUMMARY

Goal 1: Preserve and enhance Brookfield's cultural heritage and small-town character while incorporating new growth.

- Objective: Encourage new development strategies and standards within the Town Common and business districts to ensure that alterations of existing structures fit with the community's small-town and historic character.
 - o Action Item 1.1: Create Design Guidelines to ensure that New Development maintains alignment with Brookfield's small-town characteristics.
 - o Action Item 1.2: Implement Demolition Delay Bylaw for historic preservation within the Town Common to provide a robust framework for preservation of Brookfield's historical assets.
 - o Action Item 1.3: Promote Adaptive Reuse Programs to put historic structures back into productive use within the town center.

Goal 2: Diversify allowed uses to support various commercial services within business and mixed-use areas.

- Objective : Expand allowed uses in Brookfield's BA, BB, and Village districts to encourage a diverse mixture of businesses that provide essential goods and services for residents.
 - o Action Item 2.1.1: Hire a Town Planner who can provide technical expertise and implement Land Use goals through the Zoning Bylaws.
 - o Action Item 2.1.2: Conduct a Community-Led Retail Needs Assessment to identify demand for specific essential goods and services for different neighborhoods in Brookfield.
 - o Action Item 2.1.3: Encourage diverse commercial uses in Brookfield's BA, BB, and Village districts by reviewing and revising the current Zoning Bylaw to allow certain uses that are currently restricted.
- Objective: Initiate a comprehensive zoning diagnostic and update to ensure the Zoning Bylaws are current and in compliance with Massachusetts General Law (MGL).
 - o Action Item 2.2.1: Establish parking standards that provide guidance to residents and developers to provide sufficient parking while being cognizant of minimizing impervious areas and reducing stormwater runoff.
 - o Action Item 2.2.2: Amend the Sign Regulation to reflect precedent setting legal cases and to address new technology in signage.
 - o Action Item 2.2.3: Expand the Solar Energy Systems Bylaw to establish regulations for large-scale battery energy storage micro grid systems.

Goal 3: Encourage utilizing Smart Growth strategies within new housing developments, such as compact development, to preserve open space and community character

- Objective: Review and amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow for compact development within the RR district by using Smart Growth principles to ensure that new housing development design and location prioritize the preservation of open space and farmland.
 - o Action Item 3.1: Support cluster development to encourage the preservation of open space.
 - o Action Item 3.2: Reduce dimensional requirements for duplexes and other small-scale multifamily housing forms.

GOAL 1

Preserve and Enhance Brookfield's Cultural Heritage and Small-Town Character while Incorporating New Growth

Brookfield has many locations recognized for their historic buildings and impressionable history, such as the Old Post Road Corridor, Town Common, and Elm Hill Farm, to mention a few. With that said, the Town continues to experience a consistent annual population growth rate of 1%, evident in the transition from a population of 3,390 in 2010 to 3,439, according to the latest American Community Survey as depicted in the Housing Chapter . Projections for the future align with this upward trend, advocating for a measured and intentional approach to enhancing Brookfield and preserving the Town through the projected growth in the upcoming years. Goal 1 of the Land Use Chapter aims to not only consider this growth trend but also to preserve Brookfield's qualities, its historical heritage, and its defined small-town characteristics. Findings from surveys and workshops conducted by CMRPC acknowledge this trend, with residents consistently emphasizing that the Town's strength lies in its "rural" and "small-town" traits. This goal reflects a commitment to thoughtful planning and sustainable development that respects the ongoing population growth while preserving Brookfield's cultural heritage.

Objective: Encourage new development strategies and standards that emphasize and maintain Brookfield's small-town and historic character within the Town Common and business districts to ensure that alterations of existing structures fit with the community's historic character.

Emphasizing and maintaining small-town characteristics in Brookfield reflects the community's commitment to preserving its historic features and cultural heritage. The Town aims to foster a sense of continuity and identity amongst potential growth by implementing development strategies prioritizing the conservation of Brookfield's unique character.

In achieving this objective, Brookfield seeks to strike a delicate balance between growth and preservation, ensuring that future developments align with the distinctive small-town characteristics that define the community. For instance, the approval of the Molasses Hill Subdivision by the Brookfield Planning Board in 2022 is a noteworthy example. Originally proposed as a 31-lot subdivision, the Planning Board created a 10-page draft agreement to modify it to nine lots for Phase One. The agreement extends to 2025 and highlights the Town's commitment to maintaining its small-town character while permitting controlled growth. The Molasses Hill project demonstrates Brookfield's proactive approach to preserving its unique identity while accommodating development opportunities that align with its cultural heritage.

Action 1.1: Create Design Guidelines for New Development to guarantee Brookfield maintains alignment with the small-town characteristics

Develop and institute precise design guidelines for upcoming developments in zoning districts of Business A (BA), Village (V), and Mixed-use areas to guarantee alignment with Brookfield's overall premise of the small-town characteristics. These guidelines will include architectural styles, building scale, and landscaping requirements, fostering elements of the Town's existing qualities. As new developments arise, implementing clear guidelines becomes instrumental in preserving and enhancing Brookfield's character, preventing any adverse impact on the Town.

Action 1.2: Implement a Bylaw for Historic Preservation within the Town Common to provide a strong framework for the preservation of Brookfield's historical assets

The Town Common is already recognized as a historical asset to the residents of Brookfield and the National Register of Historic Places. The Common has been well maintained throughout the years, but efforts have yet to be made to ensure the historical aspect stays predominant as new or updated development occurs. Outlining the establishment and functioning of Local Historic Districts, the bylaw provides a strong framework for preserving Brookfield's rich historical assets.

A feature of implementing this bylaw would be the support from the created local historic district commission that will provide the authority to evaluate and approve changes made to buildings within the Town Common. The commission's role becomes essential in preserving the historical authenticity and character of the Common. Implementing the bylaw reinforces Brookfield's dedication to responsible growth, sustainable development, and cultural heritage preservation. This action item aligns with the Open Space, Recreation, and Cultural Resources chapter.

Action 1.3: Promote Adaptive Reuse Programs to put historic structures back into productive use within the Town Common

Residents express that existing zoning bylaws deter proactive engagement, fostering a perception that limits any potential action. This action item is to launch initiatives and incentives to encourage adaptive reuse of historic structures within the Town Common.

By introducing adaptive reuse programs, Brookfield aims to provide solutions to the challenges posed

by existing zoning bylaws. These initiatives may include establishing grants, tax credits, or technical assistance programs. These mechanisms serve as proactive measures to support property owners in repurposing historic buildings within the Common. The programs foster a positive environment for property owners to engage actively in the adaptive reuse of historic structures. Reuse programs not only address the perceived obstacles but also align with the broader goal of preserving the unique character and cultural heritage of Brookfield's Common.

GOAL 2

Diversify Allowed Uses to Support Various Commercial Services within Business and Mixed-Use Areas:

Brookfield zoning bylaw currently has five (5) zoning and two (2) overlay districts, with each district providing specific regulations as to what is and is not permitted and what development uses may need to obtain a Special Permit. As described in the bylaw, the purpose of these zoning districts and their regulations "is to preserve the rural character of the Town of Brookfield, to provide suitable locations for various uses of property, and to protect the town's natural resources, especially water supplies." Refer to Figure 17 to review each zoning district and its purpose. The intent of Goal 2 is to review Brookfield zoning bylaw and create new avenues that can provide additional support to various commercial services within the Business and Mixed-use districts by diversifying the allowances within those regulations. Goal 2 can assist with updating the current bylaw and allow it to reflect the Town's current needs and future growth.

Objective: Expanding allowed uses in Brookfield's existing zoning districts within the zoning bylaw, such as BA, BB, and the Village districts, to open up opportunities that can increase and establish a mixture of businesses that provide essential goods and services for the local residents.

The objective is to provide a more diversified commercial presence within the current zoning districts.

| BROOKFIELD 2023 ZONING DISTRICTS | |
|---|---|
| District Classification | Purpose Description |
| Rural-Residential District (RR) | Facilitate low-density residential development, agriculture, and other compatible uses with the overarching goal of preserving Brookfield's rural character. |
| Village District (V) | Establish centralized and compact centers while the district is predominantly zoned for residential uses. It's important to note the historical presence of various commercial, industrial, institutional, and municipal uses, which creates mixed uses. |
| Business A District (BA) | Primarily zoned for retail and service establishments, the BA district allows for the potential consideration of certain other uses through a Special Permit |
| Business B District (BB) | The district is subdivided into four sections. This zone caters to light manufacturing and similar employment uses mentioned in the BA district |
| Flood Plain District (FP) | Permits specific uses that won't worsen downstream flooding or lead to the construction of significant new buildings vulnerable to flood damage. Residential development is strictly forbidden. The primary purpose of the FP is to ensure the protection of public health, safety, and general welfare |
| Overlay Classification | Purpose Description |
| Wellhead Protection Overlay District (WP) | Preserve public health, safety, and general welfare and maintain the quality and quantity of the water supply derived from the wellhead |
| Marijuana Overlay District (MOD) | Designating appropriate locations for establishing Adult Use/Medical Marijuana Facilities. Aims to create more opportunities for residents and businesses while addressing community concerns and maintaining regulatory oversight. |

Figure 17. Zoning districts. Source: Town of Brookfield.

Currently, limited locations provide residents with essential goods and services. Expanding the allowed uses within the zoning districts can preserve Brookfield's character while at the same time providing more opportunities for new development that meets the needs of the residents. To expand commercial uses, the Town needs to conduct an in-depth review

of the bylaw, create a community partnership, and provide any required amendments from the current bylaw regulations. From workshops and provided survey results conducted by CMRPC and shown in the last Master Plan, residents desire businesses that can meet their needs and not require them to travel outside of Town.





Action 2.1: Hire a Town Planner who can provide the knowledge of planning processes and provide consistent assistance to enhance and maintain Land Use goals through the Zoning Bylaws

Currently, Brookfield does not have a staffed Town Planner. The position of a Town Planner can help Brookfield plan for development by performing a variety of routine and complex technical and administrative work for land use development activities, including development review, permit processing and coordination, land use development analyses, report writing, zoning, and regulation review and development, etc. The town planner can continue to work with other departments, developers, and residents to reach the Town planning goals. It will also provide an in-depth knowledge of the zoning bylaws and what changes can be applied to meet the Town's needs.

Action 2.2: Conduct a Community-Led Retail Needs Assessment to identify specific essential goods and services for different neighborhoods in Brookfield

While creating Brookfield's Master Plan, CMRPC conducted various workshops and surveys to understand and identify what Brookfield residents wanted from their Town. Within the 2023 survey results, one of the questions asked about which type of businesses would be most beneficial to Brookfield. The results showed that 70% wanted more Restaurants, brewpubs, and other food and beverage establishments.

Then grocery stores/supermarkets/ convenience stores came in second, with around 60% demonstrated within the survey. Conducting a Community-Led Retail Needs Assessment represents a critical strategy to recognize Brookfield's main priorities, as seen in the survey results above. Continuing assessments can provide insights into what particular uses residents perceive are missing in their neighborhood and how those uses can be beneficial. Assessments ensure that the proposed retail spaces not only cater to essential needs but also reflect the distinctive character of each neighborhood, respecting the Town's commitment to its residents. The outcomes of this assessment will serve as a guide for fostering a deeper connection between the residents and the zoning bylaw.

Action 2.3: Review and Plan to Revise the current Zoning Bylaw to allow uses that are currently restricted within the zoning districts

The existing Zoning Bylaw in Brookfield presents a challenge by requiring a special permit from the Board of Appeals for multiple principal uses on a single lot, acting as a deterrent to small-scale commercial development. While this provision aims to preserve the Town's character, there is a growing recognition that restructuring these procedures could enhance the feasibility of small-scale commercial enterprises in Brookfield.

The significance of this action item lies in its potential to directly address Goal 2, which aims to identify its residents' evolving needs and create necessary amendments to the current bylaw to best reflect what Brookfield is. The current Use Table provided by the Zoning Bylaw shows specific uses as permitted, not permitted, or requiring a Special Permit (SP). For example, currently, the table shows that the use of Veterinary or Boarding Kennels is allowed in all the zoning districts (minus the Flood Plain) with an approved SP; these regulations may be seen as unnecessary and could be permitted by right in the BA and V districts.

Recognizing Brookfield's character as a community committed to small-town characteristics and a blend of residential and commercial services, this action item strategically focuses on enhancing the Town's zoning framework to accommodate needed neighborhood retail. The existing Zoning Bylaw poses limitations, like the one mentioned above, and when re-evaluated, could introduce greater flexibility into land use regulations. The objective is to create a more adaptable framework, allowing business and mixed-use zoning designations to align seamlessly with the Town's vision of fostering convenient access to essential goods and services for local residents.

Objective 2: Initiate a comprehensive zoning diagnostic and update to ensure the Zoning bylaws are current and in compliance with Massachusetts General Law (MGL).

The objective is to put forth the effort to ensure that the Zoning Bylaws reflect changes that have occurred in state laws since adopting and amending the bylaws. Many communities, particularly small communities, do not have the staffing to complete comprehensive updates in-house; however, state funding is available so that communities can hire consultants to work with them to bring the bylaws up to date. Creating bylaws that are clear and easy to use will aid in bringing business to the community as will streamlining the permitting process.

Action Item 2.2.1: Establish parking standards that provide guidance to residents and developers to provide sufficient parking while being cognizant of minimizing impervious areas and reducing stormwater runoff.

The current parking section does not provide specific parking requirements such as a minimum number of parking spaces per residential unit or distinguish between single-family homes and multi-family dwelling units. Neither does it provide requirements that distinguish between retail, restaurant, assembly or warehouse uses that all have different parking needs. The stormwater management benefits of minimizing or sharing parking that reduce impervious area agree with the recommendations set forth in the Open Space, Recreation, Natural and Cultural Resources chapter to protect surface and ground water.



land by primary use

41.5% residential

0.75% commercial

4.02% recreational/ chapter 61B

Action Item 2.2.2: Amend the Sign Regulation to reflect precedent setting legal cases and to address new technology in signage.

The purpose of this action item is to ensure that the Town's Sign Regulations are not at risk of being in violation of recent legal rulings. It is also to provide clear direction about the size, location, and type of lighting that is permitted for signs. Lastly, it encourages the adoption of language that clearly indicates whether the Town supports electronic reader board signs.

Action Item 2.2.3: Expand the Solar Energy Systems Bylaw to establish regulations for large-scale battery energy storage micro grid systems.

Some communities in Massachusetts are developing regulations for micro grid battery energy storage systems because there are facilities currently requesting approval to construct these facilities. It is best to have regulations in place and to be prepared in advance of such a facility submitting an application. These regulations should take into consideration the needs of emergency personnel and any potential aesthetic impacts to the Town.

GOAL 3
Encourage utilizing Smart Growth Strategies, such as compact development within new housing developments, to preserve open space and community character:

Brookfield's is a "Bedroom community" with a predominance of single-family homes, a housing type central to its

historic development patterns. Goal 3 aims to examine this aspect of Brookfield's development over time while recommending Smart Growth strategies. This approach seeks to guide new developments toward a standard that preserves open space through compact design. Among thoughtful planning and adoption of Smart Growth principles, Brookfield can balance accommodating growth and preserving its characteristic rural landscape, thus ensuring a sustainable future for the community.

Objective: Review and amend the Zoning Bylaw to allow for compact development within the RR District by using Smart Growth principles to ensure that new housing development design and location prioritize the preservation of open space.

Smart Growth Strategies can help ensure Brookfield maintains its small-town character while providing different options for residential development. By re-evaluating the current Zoning Bylaw, Brookfield can apply strategies that encourage cluster development and low-impact designs while preserving the open space and strong character of the Town. The accompanying table offers a comprehensive snapshot of Brookfield's current land uses, shedding light on the distribution of various land use types across the Town. Notably, residential is the dominant land use at 41.73% of total lots in Brookfield.

By leveraging this data, Brookfield gains valuable insights into the

| Brookfield Land Use Table | | |
|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Use Types | Lot Size (Acres) | Lot Size % |
| Multi-use | 1,313.48 | 12.64% |
| Residential | 4,337.60 | 41.73% |
| Commercial | 78.16 | 0.75% |
| Industrial | 37.4 | 0.36% |
| Chapter 61 - Forestry | 254.24 | 2.45% |
| Chapter 61A - Agriculture | 208.11 | 2.00% |
| Chapter 61B - Recreational | 417.76 | 4.02% |
| Exempt | 3,747.05 | 36.05% |
| Grand Total | 10,393.80 | 100.00% |

Figure 18. Land Use by Assessor Acreage. Source: Town of Brookfield.

substantial footprint residential uses occupy within the Town. Recognizing the significance of this aspect, implementing diverse housing development strategies becomes necessary. These strategies, such as the ones outlined in the action items below, can equip Brookfield with the essential tools to optimize development and minimize development pressure on open space.

Action 3.1: Support cluster development within the Village (V) district to be permitted by right

Incorporating Action Item 3.1 involves amending Brookfield's existing zoning bylaws to expand the allowance of cluster development within the Village (V) district, which will complement the Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) Bylaw. The OSRD Bylaw permits developers to pursue OSRD projects with a Special Permit, limited to the

Rural Residential (RR) and Village (V) zoning districts. The primary objective is to bolster the OSRD Bylaw by emphasizing cluster development more, allowing cluster development within the (V) district to promote its implementation in residential zones. Action item 3.1 encourages updates of the bylaw to allow by right of developers to cluster buildings and structures more closely together while optimizing open space allocation within the (V) districts. Allowing Cluster development by right can encourage a more compact site plan, protect environmentally sensitive areas, diversify housing options, and streamline the development review, improving predictability in the review process.

Action 3.2: Reduce dimensional requirements, such as height and lot coverage, for duplexes and other small-scale multifamily within the Village District.

The Village (V) District is centrally zoned within Brookfield, allowing for more compact development of both residential and commercial structures. Currently, the Zoning Bylaw dimensional requirements for (V) districts for multi-family have the minimum lot area as 35,000 sq. ft and an additional lot area for each additional dwelling unit of 5,000 sq. ft. The setbacks from the street line and side and rear yards are 25 ft. As for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU), both zoning districts (RR) and (V) follow the same regulations. Within the Bylaw it states that an ADU cannot exceed 600 sf. Only one accessory apartment is permitted that is subordinate to a one-family dwelling.

Reduced dimensional requirements within the Village District can provide a greater variety of housing types and create more opportunities to meet the housing needs of the Town. Any reductions in dimensional requirements should conform with the minimum requirements of on-site sewage disposal systems. As for regulations for ADUs, zoning districts (V) and (RR) should not be using the same standards as they provide different purposes for residential development in their district. (V) promotes more density and mixed-use development, whereas (RR) encourages larger lots for single-family homes. ADU regulations should reflect and match each district's purpose. Since (V) has a mixed allowance for development, an ADU should become more flexible to accommodate the various developments within the district.



07

Transportation



Need for multi-modal transportation options

OVERVIEW

Located approximately 18 miles west of the City of Worcester and approximately 9 miles north of the I-90 and I-84 interchange, Brookfield relies on its transportation system to connect to regional economic hubs. However, a transportation system does more than connect employers and employees. It provides the

means for residents to access local amenities, from schools and healthcare providers to parks, shopping centers, and more.

For the Town of Brookfield, transportation is a critical aspect of planning for the future. A transportation system can go beyond the function of providing mobility and access by offering opportunities to positively impact health, lifestyle, and sustainability. In this sense, transportation can provide a framework for how communities evolve with respect to active transportation, efficient circulation, and land use. Transportation frameworks can reduce congestion, improve safety, and cut down on

noise and air pollution.

Since the publication of the 2011 Master Plan, Brookfield has accomplished a lot in terms of advancing its goals. In 2019, Brookfield developed a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, in which 22 potential projects were outlined that would improve traffic and safety. There has been one TIP project over the past 5 years in Brookfield. This project was a bridge replacement in 2019 for the South Pond Road bridge over South Pond Inlet. While substantial work has been done toward achieving these goals, there are still many opportunities for improvements to Brookfield's transportation network.

KEY FINDINGS

Existing Transportation Network Classification of Roadways

The functional and jurisdictional classification of Brookfield's streets is important to understanding how the streets relate to one another, how they are used, and who exercises control over them. Function classifications of roadways in Brookfield are listed and described below.

Principal arterial

A principal arterial roadway primarily serves through traffic and major circulation movements. Route 9 is a principal arterial roadway, running east-west through Brookfield, providing local access to the surrounding towns of East Brookfield and West Brookfield, as well as further destinations such as Worcester.

Minor arterial:

A minor arterial roadway provides through movement with little interference and generally high speeds. Route 148, running north-south through Brookfield, provides local access to the surrounding towns of North Brookfield and Sturbridge, as well as connections to the I-84 and I-90 interchange.

Local roads

Local roads provide access to arterials for residents and generally observe low speeds. Local roads represent most roads in Brookfield. Figure 19 lists the agencies that have jurisdiction over the use and maintenance of the roadways in town.

| Controlling Agency | Location | Mileage |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| MassDOT | Route 9 | 2.65 |
| Town of Brookfield | Throughout Town | 35.74 |
| Unaccepted | Throughout Town | 1.11 |
| Total Road Mileage | | 39.5 |

Figure 19. Zoning districts. Source: Town of Brookfield.

Traffic Volumes

The CMRPC conducts traffic counts on an ongoing basis throughout the Central Massachusetts region. Automatic Traffic Recorder (ATR) machines are installed along a roadway to record the number of vehicles travelling in each direction over a 48-hour period. In addition to volume, ATRs collect data on vehicle speed and classification. Throughout Brookfield, most local roads handle fewer than 1,000 cars per day; however, Route 9, Route 148, and several other roads are more heavily traveled. In 2019, Route 9 handled approximately 6,500-7,500 cars per day, and Route 148 handled approximately 2,000-4,000 cars per day.

Roadway Conditions

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) maintains Route 9 through Brookfield. The Brookfield Highway Department is responsible for the maintenance of all other roads, as they are considered local roadways. There are some private roads in Brookfield, several of which are dirt roads. It is the responsibility of residents/owners to maintain private roads.

Transportation Patterns and Mode Choice

In Brookfield, there are 44 homes with no vehicles available. There are 445

homes with one vehicle available, 543 homes with two vehicles available, and 413 homes with three or more vehicles available. The average commute time for residents in Brookfield in 2022 was 31 minutes and 90.1% of workers drove alone to work.

Public Transport

The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) services the Brookfield area with bus route number 33. Inbound buses leave the Brookfield Common at 5:39 AM, 7:39 AM, 6:10 PM, and 7:10 PM, with the ultimate destination being The Hub in Worcester. This schedule provides transit options for commuters traveling to and from Worcester. Additionally, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVRTA) services Brookfield. Route B79 stops in Brookfield at 8:04 AM, 1:04 PM, and 5:19 PM, offering transport east to Worcester. Route B79 stops in Brookfield at 9:16 AM, 2:16 PM, and 6:31 PM, offering transport west to UMass Amherst. Further, Brookfield is serviced by the Quabog Connector, a reliable and affordable community transportation option. This is a favorable option for those looking to book a ride to destinations beyond the reach of other public transport services.

Safety

From 2016 to 2023, the Town of Brookfield observed 238 reported crashes, of which 47 involved an injury. The Town recorded no crash related fatalities in this time. There are no Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) crash clusters in Brookfield in the 2018 – 2020 reporting period; this includes vehicle, pedestrian, and bicyclist crash clusters. Crash data from 2016 to 2023 shows no vulnerable user crashes in the Town of Brookfield.

Many Brookfield crashes are single-vehicle crashes (54.45%). This number is more than double of the regional (24.68%) and State (22.96%) percentage for single-vehicle crashes in the same time period (2016 – 2023). These single-vehicle crashes often occurred on a segment of a singular road as opposed to being at an intersection or junction. There were 193 vehicle crashes that occurred “Not at junction,” representing 68.68% of all crashes in the Town. This is in comparison to the region with 58.84% and State with 56.7% of “Not at junction” crash.

A potential contributing factor to single-vehicle crashes is the presence of unstable shoulders in the Brookfield’s road network. The Town has a higher percentage of unstable shoulder crashes (37%) compared to CMRPC (9%) and State (5.4%) [Figure 20].

The following challenges and

opportunities were informed by the documentation and analysis presented above, as well as input received from the community through the public engagement process.

Challenges:

The aging population of Brookfield needs improved transportation and increased awareness of transportation options. There is no senior center in Brookfield, and sometimes people need to contact West Brookfield to travel to the West Brookfield Senior Center.

Opportunities:

More transportation options could potentially attract a younger population and labor force to Brookfield. Amenities such as sidewalks on Quaboag Street would improve quality of life.

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Could have something like a “road advisory committee” to help determine needs and allocate funding. This could include a pavement management plan and a way to incorporate pavement management into the town budget.” (Community Workshop, June 2023.)

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Quaboag Street needs a sidewalk. There is a lot of pedestrian traffic on this road, including elderly. Would provide access to Clam Box on Rt. 9.”

“The Walking area behind Elementary School & State Police Barracks never got accomplished.”

“Path at South Pond Beach needs improvements.”

“There are not any good, comprehensive trail maps of the area.” (Community Workshop, June 2023.)

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Brookfield should continue to provide an efficient, safe, and well-maintained transportation system in keeping with Brookfield’s rural character, one that reduces negative impacts on residential areas while encouraging non-motorized modes of transportation.

Goal 1: Enhance transportation infrastructure throughout Brookfield at key identified locations.

- Objective: Access state and federal aid for improving Brookfield’s transportation infrastructure.
 - Action Item 1.1: Construct pedestrian and bicycle facilities along Quaboag Street.
 - Action Item 1.2: Provide infrastructure and accessibility improvements along trails throughout Brookfield.
 - Action Item 1.3: Provide improvements to transportation options for the aging population of Brookfield.
 - Action Item 1.4: Develop a strategy for electric vehicle charging inclusive of residents, employees, and visitors.

Goal 2: Establish and commit to policies and programs that plan for the future needs of all users of Brookfield’s transportation network.

- Objective: Provide multi-modal transportation options.
 - Action Item 2.1: Continue and expand Brookfield’s participation in state transportation funding programs, especially those that aim to prioritize the safety of all roadway users.
 - Action Item 2.2: Update Brookfield’s policies and bylaws to prioritize the implementation of pedestrian, bicycle, and electric vehicle-friendly facilities as the town commits to various (re)developments.

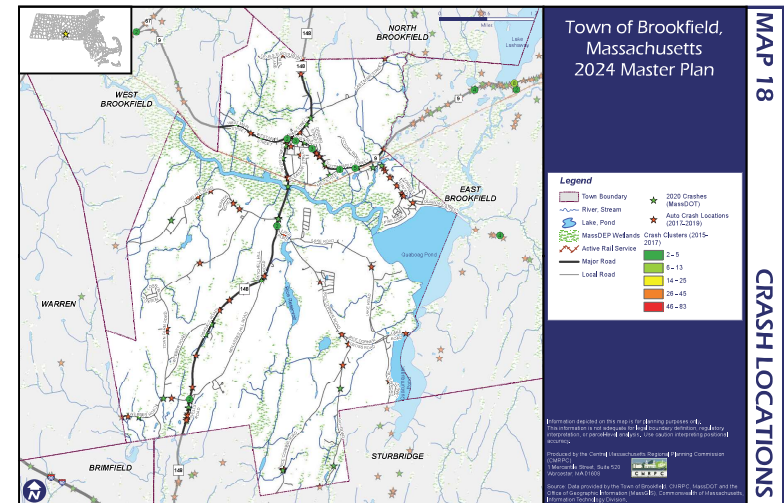


Figure 20. Crash Locations. Source: CMRPC, MassDOT.



GOAL 1

Enhance transportation infrastructure throughout Brookfield at key identified locations.

In 2017, Brookfield's Select Board voted to adopt the MassDOT Complete Streets policy, emphasizing Brookfield's commitment to design, construct, maintain, and operate streets in a way that accommodates all road users. There are several key locations in Brookfield that do not currently accommodate all road users. It is recommended that the Town works toward achieving these accommodations, as "complete" streets accommodate users of all ages and abilities.

Action Item 1.1: Construct pedestrian and bicycle facilities along Quaboag Street.

This street connects to Route 9 at The Clam Box, a highly traveled location. Currently, there are no pedestrian or bicycle accommodations to provide safe access to this location. Numerous residents have reported seeing people walking in the roadway along Quaboag Street.

Action 1.2: Provide infrastructure and accessibility improvements along trails throughout Brookfield.

During public outreach, several Brookfield residents noted that improvements could be made to Brookfield's trail network. Community input underscored that maintenance and upkeep, as well as trail maps, are a priority.

Action 1.3: Provide improvements

to transportation options for the aging population of Brookfield.

Conversations with residents also underscored the need for improved transportation options for seniors. Many seniors rely on vans to access services at the West Brookfield Senior Center due to the absence of a local senior center. Addressing this need would include increasing awareness of available services, exploring viable transportation alternatives, and potentially investing in accessible and senior-friendly transportation options.

As noted in the Public Transport section, Brookfield is serviced by the Quaboag Connector, a reliable and affordable community transportation option. This is a favorable option for those looking to book a ride to destinations beyond the reach of other public transport services, or at specific times of day. Increasing awareness of the Quaboag Connector would play a crucial role in improving transportation for the aging population of Brookfield.

Action 1.4: Develop a strategy for electric vehicle charging inclusive of residents, employees, and visitors.

This strategy aligns with several of Brookfield's goals to expand electric vehicle infrastructure in town. Accessible EV charging infrastructure creates economic opportunities, improves visitor experiences, and aligns with general environmental goals. Further, electric vehicle infrastructure plays a pivotal role in accommodating all road users by providing diverse options for transportation.

GOAL 2

Establish and commit to policies and programs that plan for the future needs of all users of Brookfield's transportation network.

Brookfield's commitment to the MassDOT Complete Streets Policy and Program is a prime example of how this goal can be achieved. After adopting the Complete Streets policy in 2017, Brookfield developed a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan that outlined 22 potential projects eligible for funding, all of which included pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure improvements. In 2021, a project that made upgrades to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure

on Central Street was approved, and in 2022, this project was completed.

Action Item 2.1: Continue and expand Brookfield's participation in state transportation funding programs, especially those that aim to prioritize the safety of all roadway users.

It is recommended that Brookfield continue its participation in the Complete Streets program. There are numerous other programs and funding sources that can contribute to reaching this goal. They include, but are not limited to, the following programs: Safe Routes to School, Transportation Improvement Program, and MassTrails.

Action Item 2.2: Update Brookfield's policies and bylaws to prioritize the implementation of pedestrian, bicycle, and electric vehicle-friendly facilities as the town commits to various (re) developments.

In accordance with the adopted Complete Streets policy, Brookfield recognizes that all roadway projects are potential opportunities to incorporate the design principles of "Complete Streets," whether public or private. Project implementation must be sensitive to Brookfield's physical, economic, and social setting. This context-sensitive approach can help Brookfield maintain its rural character while making the necessary changes to achieve future success.

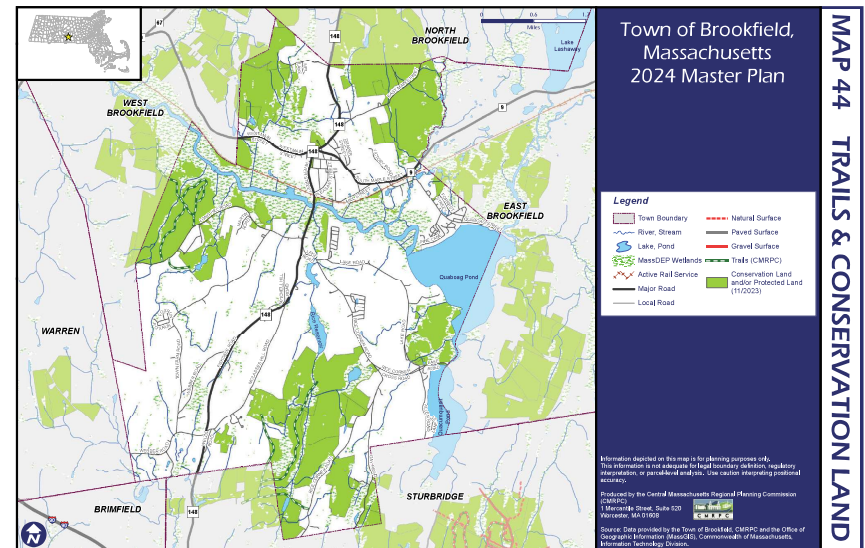


Figure 21. Trails and Conservation Land. Source: CMRPC, MassDOT,

08

Open Space,
Recreation,
Natural, and
Cultural
Resources





Need for improved access to recreation sites.

OVERVIEW

Brookfield is home to a variety of natural resources, from the Elm Hill wildlife sanctuary, with its scenic views of the surrounding rural landscape, to the Quaboag and Quinebaug rivers that spurred the town's industrial growth and linked

it to other nearby communities. These sites shape Brookfield's identity, and serve a significant role in maintaining the environmental, health, and socioeconomic wellbeing of the Central Massachusetts region. Careful planning and management will ensure the sustained health and vitality of these resources.

Brookfield also features an abundance of historic and cultural resources, providing residents and visitors with a sense of community, and a connection to Brookfield's past. The community has a strong tradition of agriculture, a historic common and environs, and relics

from each era of Brookfield's past scattered throughout the Town. Moreover, Brookfield's cultural resources extend beyond its physical landmarks to include the community organizations and events that celebrate the town's heritage and bring its history to life.

This chapter outlines the various actions Brookfield can take to preserve the Town's open space, recreation, cultural, and historical assets. Guided by community input, these strategies aim to enrich the lives of those who call Brookfield home and to invite visitors to explore and connect with its enduring legacy.

KEY FINDINGS

Brookfield would benefit from creating local historic districts.

Throughout the community engagement period, the preservation of the Town's historic sites was consistently cited as an important concern. Local historic districts (LHD) are among the most effective tools for preserving and maintaining historic properties in Massachusetts. Like the National Register designation, LHDs increase eligibility for grants and financial incentives. However, they also enable the community to enact their own preservation measures through a local review and approval process for changes or alterations. There are multiple locations in Brookfield with historical significance



that have already been documented, including two National Register districts, which could serve as the first targets for LHD designation.

Encourage adaptive reuse of historic properties, where appropriate.

Another protection measure for Brookfield's historic properties would be adaptive reuse. The term describes the process of repurposing old buildings for new uses, often maintaining the historic or aesthetically pleasing characteristics of the building while making renovations or alterations for it to support housing, commercial, or other uses. Some properties in Brookfield may be too historically significant to undergo these kinds of alterations. Others, such as some of the old factory buildings, have the potential to be turned into vibrant cultural spaces with the necessary modifications in place.

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Our historic buildings need to make a comeback"

"We need beautification of Central St. in Downtown."
(Community Workshop, Febriary & June 2023)

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Would like to see something done with the Native American burial grounds. The site was made into a national historic park last year. It could receive further protection and should turn it into a walking site and learning center like Sturbridge."

"Mill Street mill could be made into a restaurant and have its parking improved."
(Community Workshop 2, June 2023)

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BROOKFIELD

The lands making up what is now Brookfield were initially stewarded by the Nipmuc peoples along the Quaboag River and nearby ponds. Brookfield was established in 1673 after being granted to Ipswich petitioners in 1660. The town initially struggled due to King Philip's War in 1675, which led to the destruction of its first major settlement, Foster Hill. Post-war, a new settlement near Elm Hill emerged, and by 1718, Brookfield expanded to include several surrounding towns, becoming a prominent agricultural area.

Throughout the 18th to 20th centuries, parts of Brookfield became independent towns, with East Brookfield separating in 1920. The local economy diversified into small-scale manufacturing, including textiles, shoes, and mills, alongside farming. The arrival of the Western Railroad in 1839 spurred industrial growth and prosperity. However, the Great Depression led to an economic decline, with many farms abandoned or repurposed for residential developments. By the mid-20th century, agriculture, particularly dairy and poultry farming, resurged.

Need for access to, and maintenance of, Brookfield's natural assets.

Much of the open space land in town is owned by the Department of Fish and Game. Although these lands feature trails that are open to the public, they currently are not maintained and not accessible. Some are overgrown and muddy, causing discomfort for trailgoers and creating breeding grounds for ticks and mosquitoes. Parking is also limited, and this frequently leads to residents having to park illegally to access trails.

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"South Pond beach should be made more accessible. The path isn't safe for anyone."
(Community Survey, 2023)

"A Sidewalk on Quaboag Pond would be a good addition."
(Workshop 1, February 2023)

Most of the open space land in town is owned by the Department of Fish and Game.

BROOKFIELD RESIDENTS, IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Access to hiking or biking trails would be wonderful."

"It would be great if trails were made wider and maintained--the fear of ticks makes it harder to use them. It would be nice to have trail maps too--I don't even know where I could park or hike at the wildlife management areas, and when it's safe to do so because of hunting."

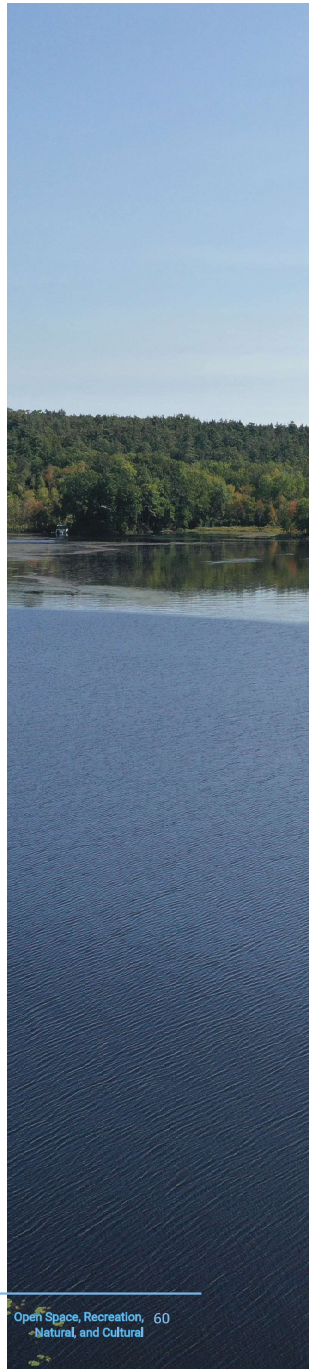
(Community Survey, 2023)

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

SUMMARY

Maintain Brookfield's Rural, Agricultural, And Historic Character.

- Objective: Pursue the recommendations of the Heritage Landscape Inventory for the Brookfield Common Historic District.
 - Action Item 1.1: Prepare a Preservation Master Plan for the common area, including a circulation component to improve vehicular traffic patterns as well as address the continuation of the pedestrian-friendly atmosphere.
 - Objective: Develop a strategic plan to restore, preserve, maintain, and promote Brookfield's historical and cultural monuments and sites.
 - Action Item 1.2: Develop a strategic plan and determine who will have oversight authority for historical and cultural monuments and sites.
 - Objective: Use regulatory tools to protect assets.
 - Action Item 1.3: Establish Local Historic Districts for key locations.
 - Action Item 1.4: Explore the use of a scenic vista protection bylaw.
 - Action item 1.5: Inventory and protect lands identified as containing archaeological resources.
 - Action Item 1.6: Develop a strategy for acquisition of Chapter 61 parcels along the river to anticipate change of land use or ownership.
 - Action Item 1.7: Explore the establishment of a river corridor protection overlay district.
 - Action Item 1.8: Enforce and update the Scenic Roads Bylaw.
 - Action Item 1.9: Facilitate the establishment of conservation easements or restrictions; possibly purchasing critical parcels.
 - Objective: Encourage Local Agriculture
 - Action Item 1.10: Develop a "buy-local" campaign.
 - Action Item 1.11: Promote community gardening.
 - Objective: Investigate possible funding sources to provide support for preserving and maintaining historic structures within Brookfield.
 - Action Item 1.12: Assess the possibility of adopting the Community Preservation Act.
 - Action Item 1.13: Research information regarding available funding program sources and cycles.
 - Action Item 1.14: Promote the Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (MHRTC).
- #### Goal 2: Educate And Build Awareness About The Historic and Environmental Assets That Lie Within Brookfield's Borders.
- Objective: Promote historical and ecotourism opportunities.
 - Action Item 2.1: Form an ecotourism working group to identify, develop, and publicize a calendar of activities.
 - Action Item 2.2: Develop promotional materials to market the town's many assets.
- #### Goal 3: Protect open space and natural resources from ecological harm and over-development.
- Objective: protect surface and ground water resources, wetlands, vernal pools, unique habitats, and wildlife corridors
 - Action Item 3.1: Work with interested stakeholders such as DEP, the Quaboag Quacumquasit Lake Association, and Chicopee River Watershed council on water resource protection efforts and outreach.
 - Action Item 3.2: Identify and seek certification of Brookfield's vernal pools.
 - Action Item 3.3: Develop a strategy for open space acquisition.
 - Action Item 3.4: Redevelop brownfields and reuse land and buildings before building on undeveloped land.
 - Objective: Maintain and improve open space facilities to ensure Brookfield can accommodate users of all ages, incomes, and ability groups.
 - Action Item 3.5: Ensure that open space is accessible.
 - Action Item 3.6: Keep an inventory of open space and recreation facilities along with a record of the status of maintenance needs at each facility.



GOAL 1

Maintain Brookfield's Rural, Agricultural, And Historic Character.

Brookfield's architectural heritage, scenic landscapes, and farmlands shape the economy and identity of the community. The following action items take a comprehensive approach to the protection of these essential resources.

Objective: Pursue the recommendations of the Heritage Landscape Inventory for the Brookfield Common Historic District.

The Heritage Landscape Inventory was a DCR program in the 2000s to identify and document significant landscape resources in communities throughout Massachusetts and provide strategies for preserving them. Many of the recommendations for the different landscapes identified in the HLI Reconnaissance Report for Brookfield have either been addressed by the Town or are echoed in other action items throughout this plan. It is still recommended to review the recommendations and additional information provided in the original report; however, the item below deserves to be expanded upon here for its relevance to this chapter.

Action Item 1.1: Prepare a Preservation Master Plan for the common area, including a circulation component to improve vehicular traffic patterns as well as address the continuation of the pedestrian-friendly atmosphere.

The Banister Common area features

buildings of various architectural styles built from 1797 to 1900, including important civic and institutional buildings like the Unitarian-Universalist Church, the Congregational Church, and Town Hall. The landscape has seen minimal changes despite some building relocations and demolitions. The area was listed on the NRHP in 1990 and has since been considered for the establishment of a local historic district (see action item 1.3 for more information on LHDs). The landscape integrity has been well-preserved and around 75% of survey respondents said they already use the Town Common for recreational purposes. However, much of the land receives no further protection than what is offered through the NRHP designation. Furthermore, the vehicular circulation pattern is also confusing and dangerous. A full preservation master plan can provide a strategic framework for the preservation and enhancement of the Common. It can also help identify funding opportunities and help make the Town competitive for future grants.

Objective: Develop a strategic plan to restore, preserve, maintain, and promote Brookfield's historical and cultural monuments and sites.

Brookfield features many historical and cultural resources that are at least inventoried if not receiving some level of protection. The protection measures in place came about through individual efforts, and there is not yet a coordinated strategy for preservation. A well-crafted strategic

plan not only ensures the protection of the sites, but also can ensure their utility for tourism, education, and fostering civic pride.

Action Item 1.2: Develop strategic plan and determine who will have oversight authority for historical and cultural monuments and sites.

Brookfield has an active historical commission that fosters and encourages the preservation of the community's historical resources. There also exists a cultural council that promotes and facilitates local arts and culture, including organizing the Memorial Day parade and holding summer concerts on the common. The Planning Board, Agricultural Commission, Recreation Committee, and other municipal departments all have a stake in the preservation of cultural and historical monuments and sites throughout Brookfield. This abundance of groups and committees can benefit from a guiding document to provide structure and coordination for their work.

Objective: Use regulatory tools to protect assets

Although Brookfield has already made use of many tools such as a scenic roads bylaw to protect valued assets, there are still many ways the town can enhance its existing practices and adopt new ones.

Action Item 1.3: Establish Local Historic Districts for key locations.

Local Historic Districts are often confused with National Register Districts. Designation as a National Register District has benefits such

as qualifying property owners for state and federal preservation grants or making certain tax incentives available for preservation, however it does not protect buildings and structures within the district from demolition or substantial alteration.

Local Historic Districts are designated by local ordinance, which falls under the jurisdiction of a local historic preservation review commission. This designation protects historic properties and encourages sensitive development through a design review process. LHDs contribute to stable property values and can enhance the overall appeal of neighborhoods. To establish a LHD in Brookfield, the process involves referencing M.G.L. Chapter 40C, identifying the designated area, forming a historic district study committee, and presenting a final report at a town meeting for approval. Once established, a historic district commission oversees future LHD designations. Despite the abundance of historic sites in Brookfield, including two Massachusetts Historical Commission inventoried areas, two national register districts, and one historic landmark, there are not yet any designated local historic districts, which means many sites and buildings in town are under threat from development pressure. Some potential locations for local historic districts include the Elm Hill Farm and Town Common National Register Historic Districts.

Action Item 1.4: Explore the use of a scenic vista protection bylaw.

A scenic vista protection bylaw could

designate specific scenic areas in the town and regulate development within those areas, such as setting height restrictions, setback requirements, and landscaping restrictions to preserve natural features contributing to the scenic quality.

Action item 1.5: Inventory and protect lands identified as containing archaeological resources.

There are several protection measures that can be taken to preserve the Quaboag Pond and Lake Road area, and other significant locations in the community. There exists a high density of archaeological sites identified in the Town, particularly in the area between the Quaboag River, the southwestern shore of Quaboag Pond, and Lake Road in Brookfield. There are likely additional archaeological resources yet to be uncovered and an archaeological survey should be conducted for remaining potential sites. Archaeological protection overlay districts or preservation restrictions would be among the safest measures to ensure permanent protection of lands with inventoried archaeological sites.

Action Item 1.6: Develop a strategy for acquisition of Chapter 61 parcels along the river to anticipate change of land use or ownership.

Towns can preserve farmland through Chapter 61A by being given a right of first refusal (ROFR) to acquire land in the program being sold or converted to non-agricultural use. However, towns often miss out due to a lack of funding to acquire

the parcels or the inability to act within the required time frame. To overcome these barriers, Brookfield should identify and prioritize Chapter 61A parcels for acquisition ahead of time to respond more quickly to the right of first refusal notice and communicate with landowners to understand their future intentions and timeline. Brookfield could also formalize its process for responding to notifications and work with local conservation organizations to discuss a strategy for acquiring the land.

Action Item 1.7: Explore the establishment of a river corridor protection overlay district.

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments developed a draft model River Corridor Overlay District that can be used as a framework to protect river corridors by limiting new development and certain land use activities within these areas, with the goal of reducing flood damage, preserving riverbank integrity, and maintaining natural river processes. The Quaboag and other rivers in Town could greatly benefit from this added layer of protection.

Action Item 1.8: Enforce and update the Scenic Roads Bylaw

A Scenic Roads bylaw is a type of local regulation aimed at preserving the rural and historical aspects of community roads. This bylaw implements a review process for any changes to stone walls or the cutting and removal of trees within the public right-of-way of designated scenic roads. Massachusetts law mandates that such actions within designated

scenic roads need prior consent from the Planning Board or Select Board. It specifies which roads are considered scenic and are therefore subject to this review process

The Town of Brookfield has designated portions of several roads as Scenic Roads consistent with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40 Section 15C. The 6 designations include portions of the following roads:

- East Main Street (One-half mile of East Main is the only portion of the original Boston Post Road that remains in its original condition

unpaved and the original width.)

- Lake Road
- Long Hill Road
- Molasses Hill Road
- Rice Corner Road
- Webber Road

Enforcement and monitoring of the protections for these roads have been sporadic and the scenic roads bylaw could be updated to further support sustainable development principles and enforcement measures. Scenic Road Designation could also be granted in additional locations such as extended designation along the Boston Post Road Corridor to West

Brookfield Road from Route 9 to the West Brookfield Border (Figure 22).

Action Item 1.9: Facilitate the establishment of conservation easements or restrictions. The town could work with local land conservation organizations for assistance. Key landscapes could include the Richardson and Overlook Farms, and the old Boston Post Road. Easements such as Conservation Restrictions or Agricultural Preservation Restrictions could permanently protect important lands such as farmland or sensitive habitats along the corridor.

Preservation restrictions can also be utilized to protect the markers and other locations along the roadway, potentially funded through CPA.

Objective: Encourage Local Agriculture.

Brookfield has a long history of farming and several farms that embody the rural character of the Town. Farming was named as a priority at the Master Plan workshops, with participants saying they want Brookfield to hold onto as much farmland as it can sustain. Thus, Brookfield can support these aims through promoting sustainable farming practices, obtaining grants and resources for local farmers, and enhancing the market for locally grown produce. Agritourism and ecotourism are brought up elsewhere in this chapter and plan, but some additional important measures are discussed here. (Figure 23)

Action Item 1.10: Develop a “buy-local” campaign

A strong buy-local campaign will support the local economy and keep farmers in business, promote healthy eating habits, and foster a sense of community. To kick off the campaign, a steering committee could be formed of volunteers, the business community, and other relevant stakeholders. The group should conduct research and planning to determine how to shift consumer spending and determine what resources are available for the campaign. They should then engage local businesses and leverage partnerships with the chamber

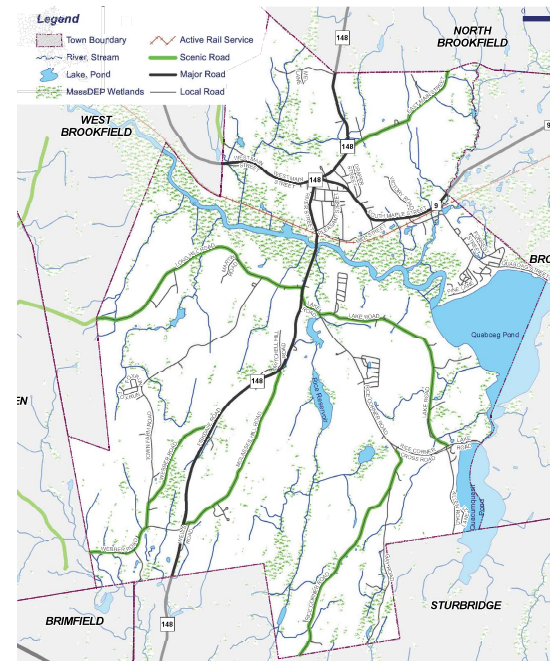


Figure 22. Scenic Roads. Source: CMRPC, Mass GIS.

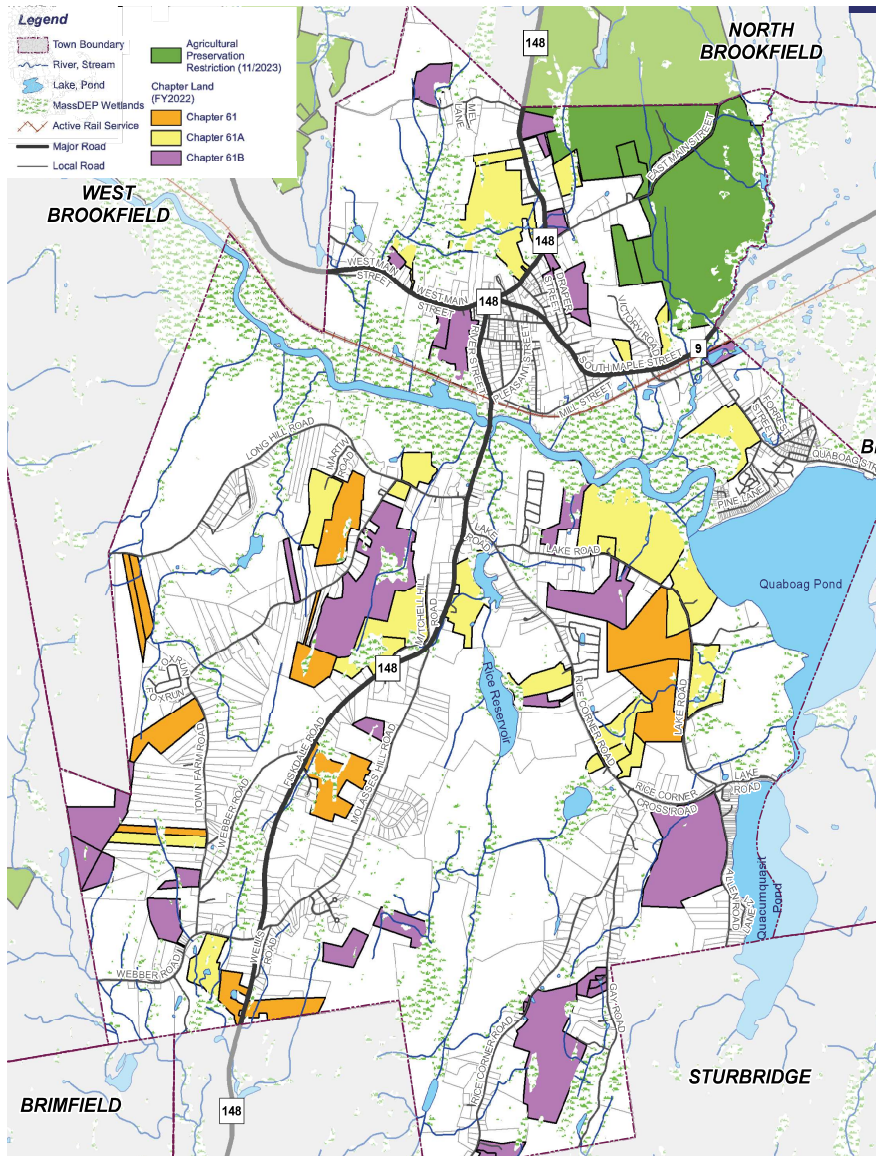
of commerce, local schools, and nonprofits to take part in launching a full marketing campaign. The Town may wish to combine this effort with the tourism effort discussed in Goal 2.

Action Item 1.11: Promote community gardening.

Brookfield is a rural town with the Town Common serving as one of the only gathering areas for the community. Because of this, many community members may feel

disconnected from local issues and events. Brookfield also has a growing aging population and will need more recreational opportunities suitable for aging adults. A community garden can help address both of these concerns by providing a new gathering area with activities suitable for folks of all ages and ability. They also provide unique educational opportunities and promote healthy eating habits.





Objective: Investigate possible funding sources to provide support for preserving and maintaining historic structures within Brookfield.

Survey data reveals that 43% of respondents prioritize the protection of historic character during new development or renovation of historic buildings. One of the biggest issues for historic preservation in small towns is the lack of funding for proposed projects. Brookfield is no exception. The Town will benefit greatly from more time spent documenting and learning about potential grant opportunities. CMRPC and other local/regional organizations can also be called upon to help investigate potential grants and provide support with grant writing.

Action Item 1.12: Assess the possibility of adopting the Community Preservation Act (CPA).

Almost all of the action items of this chapter could be implemented with support from CPA funding. CPA funds must be dedicated to open space preservation and recreation. One example of potential use for CPA funds cited in the Reconnaissance Report is adding more access points along the Quaboag River. The Town is encouraged to actively promote the availability and benefits of CPA funding to the broader community. This could be achieved through various outreach efforts, such as organizing community information sessions, distributing educational materials, and leveraging social

Figure 23. Agricultural lands.
Source: CMRPC, Mass GIS.

media platforms. These initiatives could inform residents about how CPA funds can be used to enhance the quality of life in the community, the process for proposing projects, and the overall impact of past projects funded through the CPA in other towns.

Action Item 1.13: Research information regarding available funding program sources and cycles.

It is important that the town stay apprised of any upcoming funding programs they may wish to pursue for relevant projects. Town staff can leverage capacity from CMRPC and local nonprofits to assist with research and grant writing. Developing a timeline of annual grant cycles and completion dates for deliverables can help staff plan accordingly.

Action Item 1.14: Promote the Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (MHRTC)

This program provides state tax credits to developers, homeowners, or business owners who undertake substantial rehabilitation of historic buildings. The MHRTC program provides a credit of up to 20% of the qualified rehabilitation expenditures. This means if the rehabilitation project qualifies, the property owner could receive a state tax credit worth 20% of the costs they incur in rehabilitating the property.

GOAL 2

Educate And Build Awareness About The Historic and Environmental Assets That Lie Within Brookfield's Borders.

Despite valuing the historic and environmental assets in their community, Brookfield residents may not be aware of how to fully experience or support them. Over 45% of residents agreed in the community survey that Brookfield's many historic resources are at risk of being erased and over 70% agreed that Historic resources are an essential part of Brookfield's character. However, only slightly over 30% agreed that when they have visitors, they take them to visit historic places in Town. Promotion of opportunities, events, locations, and activities related to Brookfield's environment and history can engage people in learning about and supporting the preservation of these valuable resources. (Figure 20)

Objective: Promote historical and ecotourism opportunities.

Brookfield's scenic landscapes and historical sites present a unique opportunity for ecotourism and agritourism. These new forms of tourism would not only call attention to natural, agricultural, or historical features of the town, they also emphasize the importance of conservation and preservation efforts, often including activities that give back to the host community. The Town could develop informative tours, improve access to key landmarks, and offer educational programs. The ecotourism and



Figure 24. MHC Inventory Buildings in Brookfield. Source: Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System Maps (MACRIS).

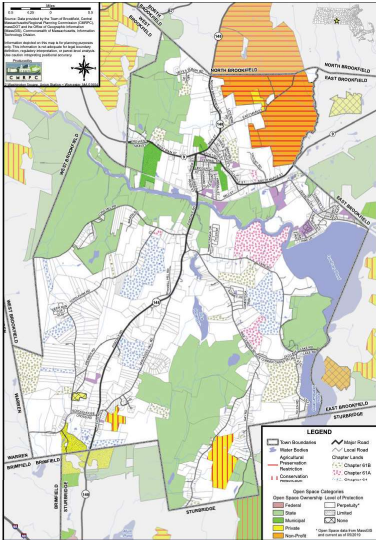


Figure 25. Open Space Inventory. Source: CMRPC, Mass GIS.

agritourism approach could bring new revenue to the town, promote the protection of important sites, and bring the community closer together with new activities and a common objective.

Action Item 2.1: Form an ecotourism working group to identify, develop and publicize a calendar of activities.

Brookfield already has several committees involved in promoting artistic and cultural events year round, including the Recreation Committee, Cultural Council, and Agricultural Commission. These existing groups and committees, along with area businesses, farmers, and other potential stakeholders could initiate a strategic planning process to develop and expand on the list of community events and activities. The group could

develop educational materials and plan for major ecotourism initiatives such as a town history tour/trail. The Brookfield Reconnaissance Report could serve as an important guiding document in this initiative.

Action Item 2.2: Develop promotional materials to market the town's assets.

The working group mentioned above can work to create promotional materials such as an informational packet and map of Brookfield's open spaces to introduce

Action Item 3.2: Identify and seek certification of Brookfield's vernal pools

Vernal pools support a complex foodweb and serve as critical breeding habitat for many amphibians and invertebrates. They also improve water quality, contributing to groundwater recharge and helping to filter pollutants. Brookfield currently only has 7 vernal pools certified and mapped. Aerial imaging from MassWildlife's Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program in 2013, recorded over 50 other potential vernal pools within Brookfield's borders. The conservation commission may consider launching an effort to identify and document the remaining pools, perhaps with the use of citizen science to help with scouting new sites.

Action Item 3.3: Develop a strategy for open space acquisition.

Much of the open space in Brookfield is unprotected and privately owned. Over 32% of the land in Brookfield is classified as open space, however much more green space in Brookfield is currently unprotected. The town should work with local land trusts to identify areas with high ecological value or that serve as important wildlife corridors, and then develop a collaborative strategy for the acquisition of priority lands.

Action Item 3.4: Redevelop brownfields and reuse land and buildings before building on undeveloped land.

Brookfield's development pattern

consists primarily of single family housing and scattered commercial areas. To maintain the rural aesthetic without further degrading the environment, the town should focus on redevelopment and reuse of existing buildings and infrastructure. Moreover, cleaning up and repurposing brownfields can improve public health and the environment and raise property values.

Adopting low impact development guidelines for new development would help prioritize the preservation of open space on development sites. This approach typically incorporates green infrastructure to manage stormwater runoff, reduce pollution, and enhance the natural hydrological cycle. This strategy protects local ecology from the impacts of climate change.

Objective: Maintain and improve open space facilities to ensure Brookfield can accommodate users of all ages, incomes, and ability groups.

Brookfield features an income-based Environmental Justice (EJ) population covering a large portion of the town. This group has a median household income of \$34,779, which is 41% of the Massachusetts Median Household income. Folks in low-income EJ communities are more likely to have health issues, limited transportation options, or other barriers limiting their access to and enjoyment of natural amenities in town. As such, it is important to consider the location of these EJ populations in Brookfield when

planning for open space.

Brookfield also has a growing aging population, necessitating greater emphasis on ensuring facilities are equipped with accessibility features. The Town could develop additional accessible trails and additional recreational facilities catered to the interests of aging adults. This also further emphasizes the need to ensure public sites are well maintained.

Action Item 3.5: Ensure that open space is accessible.

Much of the passive recreational land in Brookfield is owned by the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game. As stated in the key topics section, the trails on these properties are not maintained and there are few parking options for getting to the trails. With an aging population, residents in Brookfield will need more accessible options for trails. As a first step, Brookfield can look to the 2019 Open Space and Recreation Plan's ADA transition plan, which includes a list of necessary improvements for existing facilities to be brought into compliance with ADA regulations. The Town should also map and document trails, listing their difficulty levels and the amenities available at each site, and post the findings on the Town website. This process can also help in determining if the Town needs to develop more trails that are fully accessible.

Action Item 3.6: Keep an Inventory of open space and recreation facilities and record of the status of

maintenance needs at each facility. Like many small towns, Brookfield has limited capacity and funding to support the maintenance needs of the open space and recreation facilities in town. Unfortunately, this means that many facilities are at risk of falling into disrepair. Sites were already inventoried during the OSRP planning process and the existing list can serve as a starting point for organizing and prioritizing maintenance efforts.

