

TOWN OF BLACKSTONE



MASTER PLAN 2018

BLACKSTONE MASTER PLAN

2018

Adopted by Blackstone Planning Board November 1, 2018

In accordance with

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 41, Section 81D

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BLACKSTONE MASTER PLAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator initiated the process to produce this 2018 Master Plan in 2015. The Planning Board provided guidance during its preparation and is the responsible entity for adopting the Master Plan under MGL Chapter 41, Section 81D. Appreciation is also extended to the Blackstone citizens who participated in the Residents Survey which was the first step of the process.

This document could not have been produced without the assistance provided by all of Blackstone's Town officials, including members of boards, commissions and committees as well as Town staff. Such assistance was provided in the form of reports or other documents as well as personal interviews in some cases.

BLACKSTONE MASTER PLAN

2018

FOREWORD

Master plans serve a number of purposes. They provide an inventory of Town resources, identify trends that may impact the Town, serve as a guide to future decision-making and help to document the need and justification for grant applications. They serve as a blueprint that expresses the desires of the community. The recommendations generally represent a combination of practical, short term actions, as well as medium or long-term actions. They also usually include some aspirational goals that may be difficult to achieve, but including them provides an opportunity to take incremental steps toward achieving those goals or at least not take actions that will preclude those goals.

In Massachusetts, master plans are governed by Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 41, Section 81D. That law specifies the subject areas that must be covered by a master plan and it assigns the responsibility for adopting a master plan to the Planning Board. While master plans are technically required, there is no penalty for not having one, nor does adopting a master plan bind a community to following it. However, as stated above, it is very beneficial to have one. Since master plans are generally produced only every 10 or 20 years, they should be flexible in order to account for changing circumstances. Also, master plans can be updated periodically without producing an entire new plan.

This master plan began with a survey of residents. That led to production of a set of goals and objectives. The survey results and goals and objectives guided the preparation of each of the subject elements as well as the implementation plan that concludes the report.

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives are derived primarily from the results of the survey of residents with input from Town officials.

I. Reduce Tax Burden on Residents

- a. Pursue non-tax revenue sources (fees, leases, etc.)
- b. Strongly encourage and promote economic development
- c. Identify and apply for grants
- d. Identify efficiency measures including regional collaboration

II. Encourage Economic Development

- a. Identify infrastructure needs
- b. Identify needs of existing businesses
- c. Inventory available parcels
- d. Identify economic development assets and issues
- e. Review zoning bylaw
- f. Promote Blackstone River Bikeway
- g. Promote historic and cultural resources

III. Expand Transportation Options

- a. Explore transit service from Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) and/or Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA)
- b. Expand sidewalk and trail networks
- c. Improve pedestrian and bicycle amenities
- d. Explore/improve connections to Blackstone River Bikeway
- e. Support further development of Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT)
- f. Support commuter rail from Providence to Worcester with a stop in Woonsocket

IV. Improve Open Space and Recreation Resources

- a. Acquire additional open space
- b. Link/expand existing open space and recreation areas, including connections to Bikeway
- c. Encourage use of Flexible Residential Development
- d. Improve access and visibility of open space and recreation resources (signage, website, maps, trail heads, etc.)
- e. Expand active recreation resources

V. Provide a Diverse Range of Housing Types to Serve a Variety of Lifestyles and Life Stages

- a. Support and enhance existing wide range of land use patterns
- b. Identify regulatory and infrastructure measures that encourage “aging-in-place” (AARP) and additional over-55 housing
- c. Encourage preservation and enhancement of architectural and historical character

- d. Enhance Village Overlay District
- e. Encourage use of Flexible Residential Development
- f. Encourage mixed uses in Commercial districts
- g. Support pedestrian and bicycle connections between and among residential and commercial neighborhoods

VI. Protect and Enhance Historic and Cultural Resources

- a. Identify and map historic and cultural resources
- b. Promote importance of cultural resources
- c. Prepare a management plan to preserve and protect historic and cultural resources

VII. Town Services and Facilities

- a. Maintain or enhance current level of Town services
- b. Improve Town website
- c. Expand water and sewer networks
- d. Prioritize and implement bridge and road repairs
- e. Expand efforts to utilize green energy
- f. Encourage improved cable TV service and options
- g. Support improved cell service

LAND USE AND ZONING

INTRODUCTION

Blackstone has a diverse set of land uses ranging from dense urban to rural agricultural land that includes suburban-style development, commercial areas, and undeveloped natural areas. As noted in the History section, mills were developed on the Blackstone River resulting in the river area becoming the center of activity.

LAND USE

Land use patterns in Blackstone have been influenced primarily by two major factors. First, the Blackstone River, as a means of transportation and then as water power that attracted residents and mills and the associated commercial, institutional and recreational features. The impact of the river was further enhanced by the later additions of the Blackstone Canal and the railroads. These factors led to the development of a relatively compact and linear town center, leaving areas to the north with primarily agricultural uses.



and mills and the associated commercial, institutional and recreational features. The impact of the river was further enhanced by the later additions of the Blackstone Canal and the railroads. These factors led to the development of a relatively compact and linear town center, leaving areas to the north with primarily agricultural uses.

The second and more recent major factor was the post-World War II trend of suburbanization induced by widespread use of the automobile as a primary transportation mode. This made possible the development of the agricultural and forested lands to the north of the Town Center into residential subdivisions.

Table 1 presents a summary of land use types in Blackstone for the years 1971, 1985, 1999 and 2005. It should be noted that the 1971, 1985 and 1999 data used the “McConnell” method and were derived through manual interpretation of aerial photographs. The 2005 figures were calculated by the Sanborn Map Company using semi-automated interpretations of aerial photographs. The land use categories used are partially, but not fully, compatible with the older method so comparisons are not strictly accurate. Therefore, the data in the 2005 column are separated and additional lands uses are added for 2005 only.

The table indicates that the amount of acreage used for crops, pasture and forest declined about 1019 acres from 5340 acres in 1971 to 4321 acres in 1999. During that period, the acreage occupied by residential uses increased by 748 acres (from 1,034 in 1971 to 1,782 in 1999). This corresponds to an increase in population from 6,566 in 1970 to 8,804 in 2000.

TABLE 1
LAND USES, 1971, 1985, 1999 AND 2005
(Acres)

Land Use	1971	1985	1999	2005*
Crop Land	212.49	210.79	180.77	54.73
Pasture	599.5	438.72	361.11	166.52
Forest	4528.09	4241.8	3779.36	4240.28
Non-Forested Wetlands	96.08	96.08	104.72	168.08
Mining	103.25	175.33	242.14	147.97
Open land	280.63	216.9	339.5	160.86
Participation Recreation	40.99	46.09	62.21	81.99
Spectator Recreation	0	0	0	0
Water-Based Recreation	0	0	0	0
Multi-Family Residential	0	15.25	38.22	128.8
High Density Residential	213.46	208.67	210.51	133.33
Medium Density Residential	345.75	359.84	495.35	382.13
Low Density Residential	474.82	716.3	1044.43	678.17
Salt Water Wetlands	0	0	0	0
Commercial	20.11	29.38	29.39	50.95
Industrial	0	0	1.14	5.9
Urban Open	125.74	183.03	133.09	160.86
Transportation	25.39	28.11	28.84	6.45
Waste Disposal	27.04	55.18	42.4	4.3
Water	183.06	183.06	175.28	201.31
Woody Perennial	24.2	66.06	32.14	0
Cemetery				61.95
Brushland/Successional				2.29
Forested Wetland				291.57
Junkyard				29.69
Orchard				32.05
Powerline/Utility				98.3
Transitional				12.48
Urban Public/Institutional				61.18
Very Low Density Residential				81.9
TOTALS	7300.61	7300.61	7300.61	7444.04

Sources: University of Massachusetts Resource Mapping Project

*Land Use 2005, MassGIS (from Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission)

An issue that ties land use and zoning with economic development is that the survey results indicate that strong majorities of residents believe that current levels of commercial and industrial development are fair or poor, and that efforts to attract more are important or very important. At the same time, there are large vacant parcels zoned for industrial uses. Also, some commercially-zoned land is used for residential development.

Pluralities favor expanding the Commercial and Industrial districts. Commercial district expansion was favored by 41% with 11% opposed and 25% needing more information. The result for industrial district expansion was very similar with 38% in favor, 13% opposed and 25% needing additional information.

Another survey question related to land use is that a minority believes that the current amount of protected open space is good or excellent, while a strong majority feels that the amount of protected open space is important or very important, indicating a need to expand protected open space. Blackstone's Flexible Residential Development provision of the Zoning Bylaw promotes the preservation of open space by allowing smaller lot sizes in return for preserving land as open space.

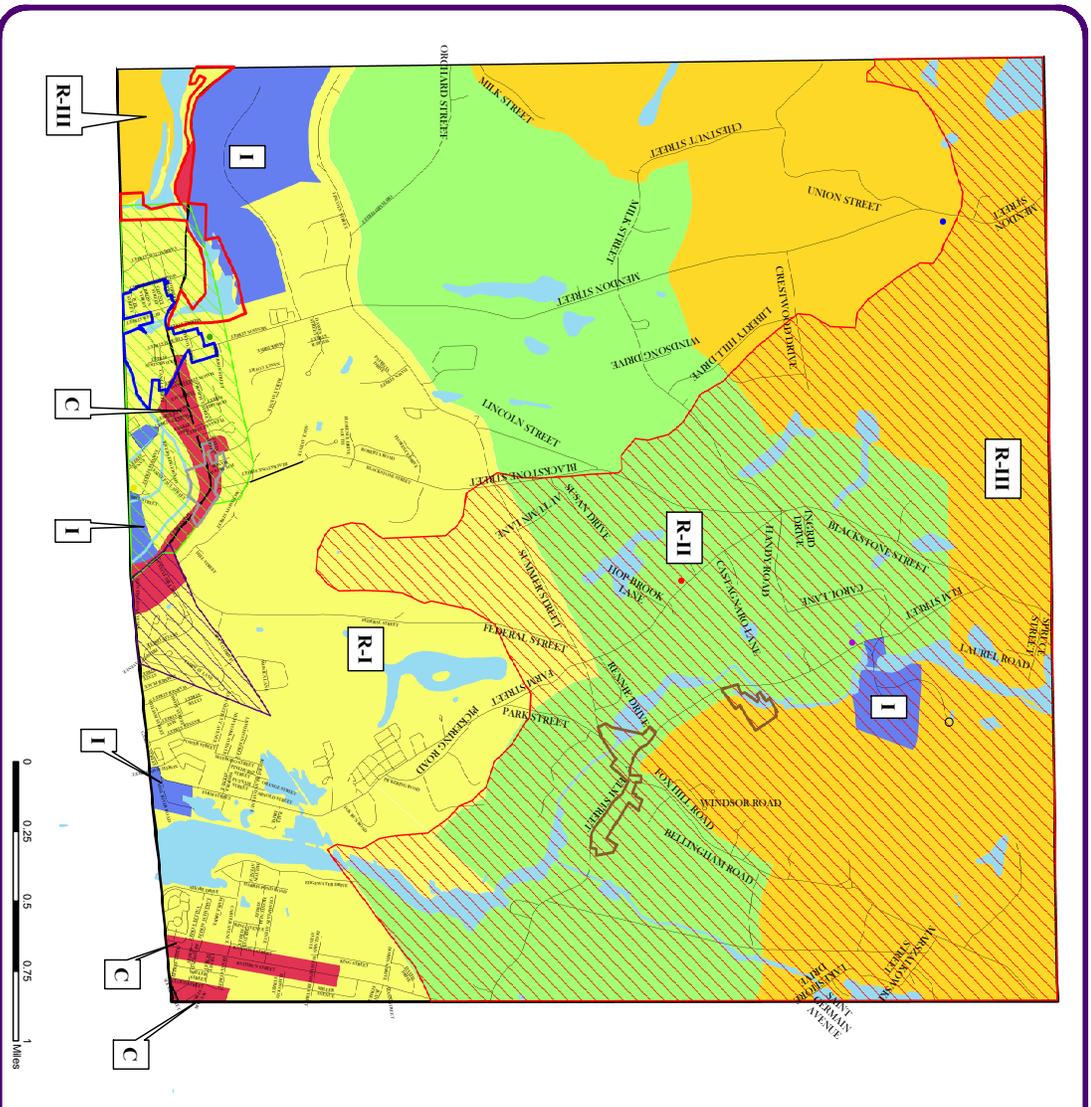
Blackstone also has a Village Overlay District that encompasses most of the Commercial district along the Main Street corridor, as well as some of the residential areas abutting the Commercial district. This overlay district strongly encourages preservation of the existing character of the Town Center area by providing an alternative to the underlying zoning through reducing lot size and setback requirements in return for development that matches the scale and style of neighboring properties.

RECENT ZONING CHANGES

Blackstone has adopted several zoning changes in recent years to promote and/or accommodate potential new uses. The zoning changes did not change the Zoning Map (See Figure 1) but rather influenced the uses allowed or permitted within some of the zoning districts. These changes include the following:

- 2011 – A bylaw was adopted that allows wind turbines by special permit from the Planning Board. Also adopted that year was an amendment that allows assisted living facilities by special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals.
- 2012 – Solar photovoltaic facilities were allowed by special permit from the Planning Board. In addition, renewable energy manufacturing facilities and research and development facilities are now allowed by right in the Industrial district.
- 2013 – The Village Overlay District was amended to encourage mixed uses in the Commercial portion of the district by allowing mixed uses to comply with the dimensional requirements of the VOD rather than the Commercial district.
- 2014 – The Flexible Residential Development provision was amended to clarify that the open space that results from such development remains open and is not built upon.

FIGURE 1



Town of Blackstone Zoning Map

- Zoning Districts**
 - Commercial (C)
 - Industrial (I)
 - Residential I (R-I)
 - Residential II (R-II)
 - Residential III (R-III)
- Overlay Districts**
 - Groundwater Protection
 - Multifamily
 - Village
- Historic Districts**
 - Blackstone Canal
 - Blackstone Manufacturing Company
 - East Blackstone
 - Farmers Gate
- Historic Sites**
 - Bejamin Thayer House
 - Christ Community Church
 - Daniel Farmstead
 - Quaker Meeting House
 - Walden

	Residential I	Residential II	Residential III	Industrial	Commercial
Minimum Lot Area (sq ft)	35,000	65,000	120,000	30,000	15,000
Minimum Lot Frontage (ft)	150	185	275	140	100
Minimum Front Yard (ft)	25	30	30	30	25
Minimum Side or Rear Yard (ft)	15	20	30	20	15
Minimum Lot Coverage (%)	30	25	25	40	40
Maximum Building Height (ft)	35	35	35	45	45

Articles

Adopted:
June 26, 1968 (Article 10)

Revised:

- June 26, 1969 (Articles 1, 2)
- September 25, 1975 (Article 11)
- May 2, 1977 (Article 19)
- December 10, 1979 (Article 9)
- September 20, 1982 (Article 6)
- September 24, 1984 (Article 2)
- April 25, 1994 (Articles 22, 24)
- May 29, 2002 (Article 17)

Revisions

- December 1967
- January 1969
- January 1978
- July 1980
- November 1982
- February 1983
- October 1985



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Economic development is a key component of a community’s fiscal health. In addition to providing a source of tax revenue from non-residential properties and thus lessening the share that must come from residents, it also is a source of jobs, which provide income to residents of Blackstone and the region. This section consists of an overview of the local and regional population, work force, and economic conditions and potential. It also includes an analysis of certain fiscal features of Blackstone in comparison with abutting towns. Finally, the Economic Development element of the Master Plan identifies policies and strategies for the expansion or stabilization of the local economic base and the promotion of employment opportunities.¹

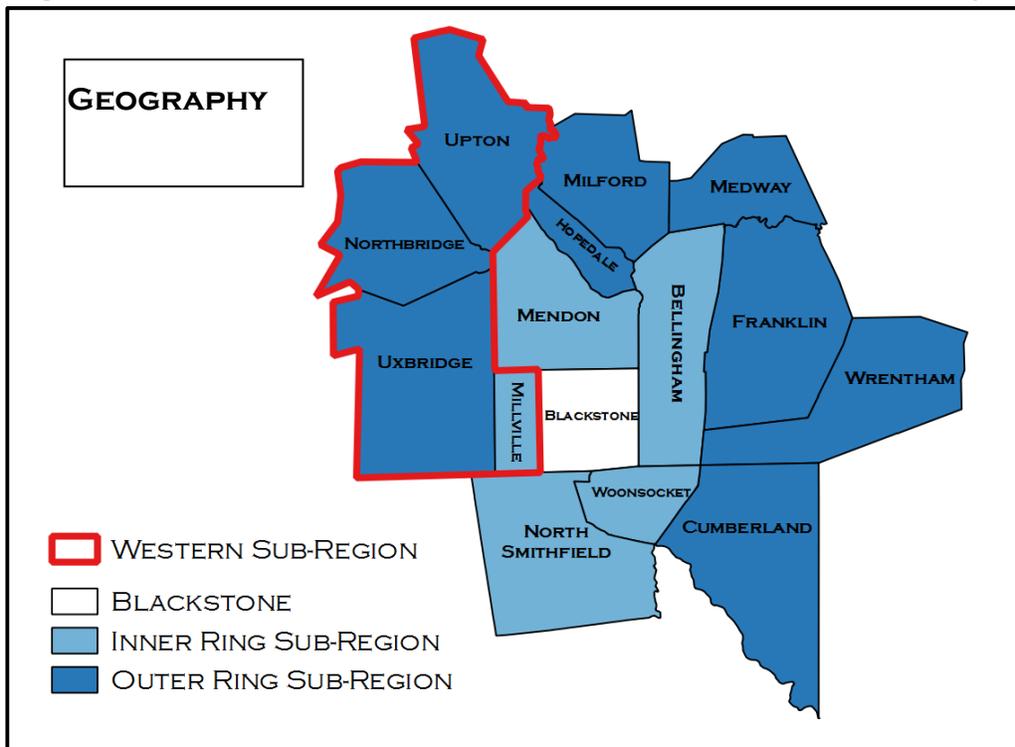
OVERVIEW OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

GEOGRAPHY

Blackstone is situated in the southern extremity of Worcester County, adjacent to the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. It is located approximately 50 (highway) miles from Boston, MA and 20 from Providence, RI. Bordering municipalities are the towns of Millville, Mendon and Bellingham in Massachusetts and the Town of North Smithfield and the City of Woonsocket in Rhode Island.

Additional municipalities that impact the local economy include second tier abutters in Massachusetts and the Town of Cumberland in Rhode Island (together hereinafter, “the Region”).

Economic and demographic differences among the municipalities within the Region also indicate multiple statistical sub-regions. For example,



¹ M.G.L. c.41 §81D (4)

income characteristics distinguish the “Inner Ring” sub-region (directly abutting municipalities) from the “Outer Ring” sub-region (second tier abutters in Massachusetts and Cumberland in Rhode Island). Population characteristics such as recent growth and future growth projections distinguish the Western sub-region (Millville, Northbridge, Uxbridge and Upton).

POPULATION

According to the 2016 American Community Survey, Blackstone was just the eleventh most populous municipality out of the fifteen in the Region. Furthermore, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council projects Blackstone’s population to fall to the twelfth most populous in the Region by 2030, as a result of a projected rate of growth that is just two-thirds the rate of the Region’s.

Population growth distribution distinguishes high growth rates in the Western sub-region from projected slow or negative growth rates in the rest of the Region. Millville, Uxbridge, Northbridge and Upton are each projected to grow between 18.52-30.04% in population by 2030. That projection represents a continuation of the high growth rates seen in the Western sub-region from 2000 – 2010. However, projected growth rates in the majority of the rest of the Region indicate reduced rates of growth, and in some cases, population declines, compared to the recent past.

TABLE 2
LOCAL AND REGIONAL POPULATION

Town	2000	2010	2016	2030	Change 2000-2010	Proj. Change 2016-2030
Bellingham	15,314	16,332	16,833	17,356	6.65%	3.11%
Blackstone	8,804	9,026	9,068	9,305	2.52%	2.61%
Cumberland	31,840	33,506	34,285	36,775	5.23%	7.26%
Franklin	29,560	31,635	32,873	32,866	7.02%	-0.02%
Hopedale	5,907	5,911	5,942	5,633	0.07%	-5.20%
Medway	12,448	12,752	13,135	12,452	2.44%	-5.20%
Mendon	5,286	5,839	5,963	6,323	10.46%	6.04%
Milford	26,799	27,999	28,429	30,509	4.48%	7.32%
Millville	2,724	3,190	3,218	3,814	17.11%	18.52%
North Smithfield	10,618	11,967	12,227	12,899	12.70%	5.50%
Northbridge	13,182	15,707	16,381	19,867	19.15%	21.28%
Upton	5,642	7,542	7,703	10,021	33.68%	30.09%
Uxbridge	11,156	13,457	13,765	16,519	20.63%	20.01%
Woonsocket	43,224	41,186	41,272	37,027	-4.71%	-10.29%
Wrentham	10,554	10,955	11,483	11,069	3.80%	-3.61%
TOTAL	233,058	247,004	252,577	262,435	5.98%	3.90%
AVERAGE	15,537	16,467	16,838	17,496	-	3.90%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000
U.S. Census Bureau, 2010
U.S. Census Bureau, 2000
Population for 1990 – 2030, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Rhode Island Population Projections, 2010 – 2040, Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program

INCOME

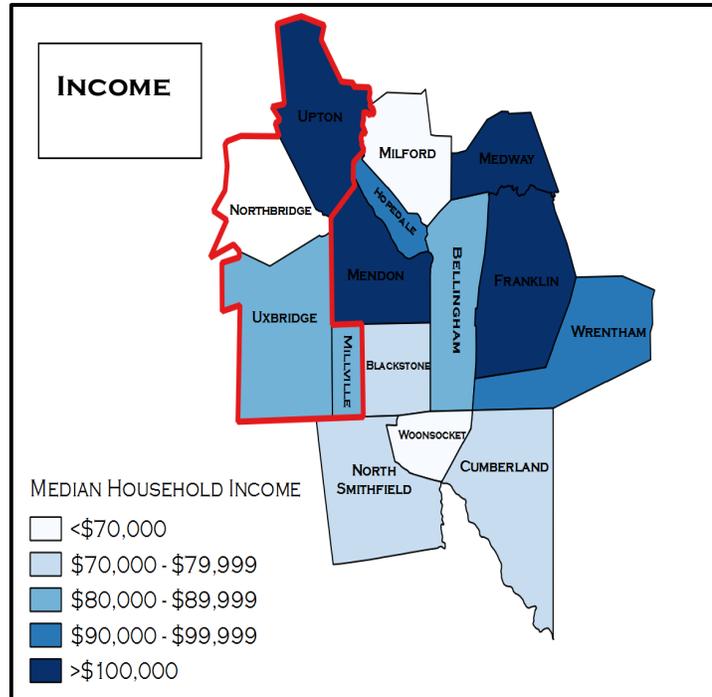
Blackstone residents earn less than regional medians in both Median Household Income and Median Family Income, with local residents bringing home the fourth lowest income under either statistic. Notwithstanding, median incomes in Blackstone remain slightly above those in Massachusetts as a whole and well above national medians.

TABLE 3
INCOME

Municipality	Median Household Income	Median Family Income
Bellingham	\$90,630	\$106,580
Blackstone	\$75,594	\$93,500
Cumberland	\$78,150	\$94,212
Franklin	\$108,815	\$127,639
Hopedale	\$99,792	\$117,964
Medway	\$109,865	\$141,824
Mendon	\$121,298	\$131,473
Milford	\$72,750	\$90,701
Millville	\$91,250	\$106,591
North Smithfield	\$81,227	\$97,386
Northbridge	\$73,464	\$88,898
Upton	\$116,250	\$163,111
Uxbridge	\$88,750	\$96,378
Woonsocket	\$37,235	\$47,682
Wrentham	\$99,924	\$128,942
United States	\$55,322	\$67,871
Massachusetts	\$70,954	\$90,180

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2012-2016

While population growth projections are highest in the Western sub-region, median incomes are, for the most part, highest in the eastern and northern parts of the Region, particularly in the Outer Ring sub-region. In fact, the five municipalities with the highest median incomes are all located in the Outer Ring. The highest median incomes may be driven by the proximity and access of those municipalities to the City of Boston. With the exception of Milford, the municipalities with the fastest access to major highways and rail to Boston are the ones where median incomes are highest.



Source: American Community Survey, 2012 – 2016 5-Year Estimates

LABOR FORCE

Blackstone’s labor force aged persons (age 16 and over) has a higher percentage working than any other town in the region except Bellingham, which is less than 1% higher. The fact that its median income level is lower than most of the other towns in the region indicates that a large percentage of those jobs are low-paying. This is discussed further in the next section on Wages.

TABLE 4
LABOR FORCE CHARACTERISTICS

Town	Population Age 16+	Percent Working	16-19	20-24	25-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
Bellingham	13,777	77.5%	778	998	4,630	2,687	2,558	1,399	727
Blackstone	7,424	76.8%	521	765	2,158	1,579	1,419	638	344
Cumberland	28,108	66.9%	1,531	1,755	8,071	6,091	4,509	3,238	2,972
Franklin	25,550	71.9%	2,308	2,107	7,219	5,608	4,412	2,158	1,757
Hopedale	4,775	68.0%	509	131	1,296	1,149	750	400	540
Medway	10,281	71.1%	845	744	2,691	2,820	1,700	839	642
Mendon	4,641	76.0%	425	316	974	1,115	1,038	575	198
Milford	22,246	72.5%	936	1,530	7,754	4,250	3,959	2,328	1,489
Millville	2,490	74.6%	131	189	742	625	488	199	116
North Smithfield	10,259	68.6%	465	640	2,487	2,077	1,986	1,449	1,155
Northbridge	13,049	72.1%	982	930	3,796	2,782	2,289	1,157	1,113
Upton	5,988	73.0%	505	250	1,781	1,399	1,140	554	359
Uxbridge	11,012	74.5%	924	1,019	3,117	2,344	1,963	982	663
Woonsocket	33,255	58.6%	2,061	2,372	11,637	5,940	5,352	2,964	2,929
Wrentham	9,020	70.9%	852	553	2,134	2,179	1,810	596	896

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey

WAGES

Blackstone’s relatively low median income can be explained in part by the industries in which its residents are employed. Although the average weekly wage is reported at \$737.00, that statistic is a misrepresentation derived from the high earnings of outlier employees in the Professional and Technical Services industry. That industry employs far fewer Blackstone residents than any other and the average weekly wage within it is more than double the average weekly wage across all industries. In fact, it is the only industry that pays an average weekly wage above the \$737.00 average. In Blackstone, the highest employment numbers are concentrated in the lowest paying industries like Accommodation and Food Services and Retail Trade.

TABLE 5
WAGES BY INDUSTRY

Industry	Establishments	Average Employment	Average Weekly Wage
Construction	38	129	\$729.00
Retail Trade	20	142	\$450.00
Transportation and Warehousing	5	106	\$623.00
Professional and Technical Services	8	12	\$1,533.00
Administrative and Waste Services	9	31	\$602.00
Health Care and Social Assistance	22	95	\$640.00
Accommodation and Food Services	13	116	\$256.00
Other Services except Public Administration	17	56	\$433.00
TOTAL	160	1168	\$737.00

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 Economic Census

ECONOMIC SECTORS

The major occupation groups with the highest projected growth rates are in healthcare, personal care, and computers and mathematics. Significant growth of over ten percent is also projected for the construction industry, which represents Blackstone’s largest industry by total employment. Most industries are projected to grow modestly, while only agricultural and production industries are projected to decrease.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics also projects the fastest growing occupations for 2014 – 2024 (Table 6). The top half of the list is dominated by industries requiring less than a bachelor’s degree. The high growth rates projected for the healthcare industry are supported by large projected growth rates in individual healthcare occupations such as occupational therapy assistants, physical therapist assistants, physical therapist aides, home health aides, and nurse practitioners. The growth of these occupations along with their low educational requirements indicate an opportunity for wage growth for residents who could transition from lower paying jobs in the retail trade or accommodation and food services industries.

TABLE 6
PROJECTED OCCUPATION GROUP GROWTH 2014 - 2024

Major Occupation Group	2014 Employment (1000s)	Projected Change %
Healthcare support	4238	23.0
Healthcare practitioners and technical	8,236.5	16.4
Personal care and service	6,006.1	13.2
Computer and mathematical	4,068.3	13.1
Community and social service	2,465.7	10.5
Construction and extraction	6,501.7	10.1
Business and financial	7,565.3	8.4
Education, training and library	9,216.1	7.6
Life, physical, and social science	1,310.4	7.4
Food preparation and serving related	12,467.6	6.5
Installation, maintenance, and repair	5,680.5	6.4
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	5,617.2	6.2
Management	9,157.5	5.5
Legal	1,268.2	5.1
Sales and related	15,423.1	5.0
Transportation and material moving	9,748.5	4.8
Protective service	3,443.8	4.5
Arts, design, entertainment, sports and media	2,624.2	4.1
Architecture and engineering	2,532.7	2.7
Office and administrative support	22,766.1	2.0
Production	9,230.3	-3.1
Farming, fishing and forestry	972.1	-5.9
TOTAL		6.5

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2016-17 Edition

TABLE 7
PROJECTED OCCUPATION GROWTH 2014 – 2024

Occupation	2014 Number (1000s)	Projected Change %	Median wage 2014	Typical education
Wind turbine service technicians	4.4	108	\$48,800	Some college
Occupational therapy assistants	33.0	42.7	\$56,950	Associates
Physical therapist assistants	78.7	40.6	\$54,410	Associates
Physical therapist aides	50.0	39.0	\$24,650	High School
Home health aides	913.5	38.1	\$21,380	None
Commercial divers	4.4	36.9	\$45,890	Postsecondary non-degree
Nurse practitioners	126.9	35.2	\$95,350	Masters
Physical therapists	210.9	34.0	\$82,390	Doctoral
Statisticians	30.0	33.8	\$79,990	Masters
Ambulance drivers and attendants except emergency medical technicians	19.6	33.0	\$24,080	High School
Occupational therapy aides	8.8	30.6	\$26,550	High School
Physician assistants	94.4	30.4	\$95,820	Masters
Operations research analysts	91.3	30.2	\$76,660	Bachelors
Personal finance advisors	249.4	29.6	\$81,060	Bachelors
Cartographers and photogrammetrists	12.3	29.3	\$60,930	Bachelors

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2016-17 Edition

COMMUTING

All of the municipalities in the region have an average commute time between 26 and 38.5 minutes. Blackstone’s rate of 30.8 is slightly higher than the Massachusetts average of 29.0 and much higher than the national average of 26.1 minutes. However, it is shorter than most of the towns in the region, indicating that Blackstone residents generally work closer to home than residents in the rest of the region. This may be in part due to the nature of their employment and also may be influenced by heavier traffic in more populous municipalities.

**TABLE 8
COMMUTING BY PUBLIC
TRANSPORTATION**

Town	Public Transportation
Bellingham	2.3%
Blackstone	0.7%
Cumberland	2.5%
Franklin	8.2%
Hopedale	4.0%
Medway	4.4%
Mendon	4.5%
Milford	2.1%
Millville	1.2%
North Smithfield	0.5%
Northbridge	0.5%
Upton	1.9%
Uxbridge	0.3%
Woonsocket	1.5%
Wrentham	6.6%
United States	5.1%
Massachusetts	9.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey

**TABLE 9
MEAN TRAVEL TIME**

Town	Mean Travel Time (Minutes)
Bellingham	33.3
Blackstone	30.8
Cumberland	27.3
Franklin	35.1
Hopedale	34.7
Medway	38.5
Mendon	32.8
Milford	29.8
Millville	31.2
North Smithfield	27.1
Northbridge	30.6
Upton	33.4
Uxbridge	30.4
Woonsocket	26.0
Wrentham	35.1
United States	26.1
Massachusetts	29.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey

Commuters from Blackstone nearly universally use driving as their mode of transportation. This is common throughout the region. However, public transportation is much more commonly used in the Outer Ring sub-region, particularly in municipalities with easy access to the Franklin MBTA Commuter Rail line.

EDUCATION

The percentage of residents in Blackstone who obtain a high school degree compares favorably to statewide and national percentages and is reasonably close to the Region-wide percentage.

However, only 29.1 percent of Blackstone residents have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, the third fewest in the Region and far fewer than statewide and national percentages. Similarly, only 9.5 percent of Blackstone residents have earned a graduate/professional degree – also third fewest in the Region and well below statewide and national percentages. The lack of educational attainment by Blackstone residents can largely explain why their earnings fall short of the earnings of residents elsewhere in the Region.

TABLE 10
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Town	High School Degree+	Bachelor’s Degree+	Graduate/Professional Degree*
Bellingham	95.2	38.8	10.8
Blackstone	93.3	29.1	8.9
Cumberland	89.6	36.9	14.5
Franklin	96.0	54.4	21.1
Hopedale	92.3	40.2	9.9
Medway	95.4	55.6	21.3
Mendon	96.5	47.3	18.9
Milford	92.1	35.9	11.7
Millville	89.1	27.4	8.0
North Smithfield	91.8	30.0	10.6
Northbridge	92.0	34.0	12.9
Upton	96.4	49.4	19.3
Uxbridge	95.3	33.5	12.2
Woonsocket	79.6	15.8	5.4
Wrentham	97.5	47.7	17.0
United States	87.0	30.3	11.5
Massachusetts	90.1	41.2	18.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey

*Of those 25 and older

ANALYSIS OF FISCAL INDICATORS

TAX CLASSIFICATION

The majority of Blackstone’s municipal revenue is derived from its tax levies on personal property and real estate. Additional revenue is derived from state aid, local receipts such as excise tax, and other miscellaneous sources. Real estate is taxed at a single rate on both residential and business properties. In Fiscal Year 2018, the rate was \$19.49 per \$1,000 of assessed value. However, Blackstone’s development is dominantly residential and its revenue

reflects the same, accounting for 81 percent of the total real estate tax levy. Commercial and Industrial tax levies combined account for less than half of Blackstone’s personal property tax levy.

**TABLE 11
MUNICIPAL REVENUE, FY 2018**

Revenue Source	Amount	% of Total
Tax Levy	\$17,861,518	67.91
State Aid	\$1,679,869	6.39
Local Receipts	\$3,569,853	13.57
Other Available	\$3,191,488	12.13
Total	\$26,302,727	

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue,
Division of Local Services

**TABLE 12
FY 2018 TAX CLASSIFICATION**

Tax Classification	Assessed Values	Tax Levy	Tax Rate
Residential	\$739,267,874	\$14,408,331	\$19.49
Open Space	0	0	0
Commercial	\$26,743,026	\$521,222	\$19.49
Industrial	\$24,753,801	\$482,452	\$19.49
Personal Property	\$125,680,515	\$2,449,513	\$19.49
Total	\$916,445,216	\$17,861,518	

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue,
Division of Local Services

COMPARISON WITH ABUTTING TOWNS

Table 13 compares the breakdown of Blackstone’s property tax classes with each of its abutting Massachusetts towns, as well as the state, as a whole. Among neighboring towns, only Bellingham relies less on residential properties. Bellingham’s commercial and industrial property as a percentage of the total is more than the state average while Blackstone’s is below the state average but higher than Mendon and Millville.

TABLE 13
PROPERTY TAX REVENUES BY CLASS, FY18

	Residential Levy	Commercial Levy	Industrial Levy	Personal Prop Levy	Total Tax Levy	Res as a % of Total	CIP as a % of Total
Massachusetts	\$11,725,268,100	\$3,128,364,364	\$791,948,714	\$741,332,732	\$16,413,604,815	71.43	28.57
Bellingham	\$24,575,178	\$4,964,172	\$3,034,888	\$5,968,394	\$38,542,632	63.76	36.24
Blackstone	\$14,408,331	\$521,222	\$482,452	\$2,449,513	\$17,861,518	80.67	19.33
Mendon	\$13,455,116	\$999,187	\$63,075	\$849,324	\$15,366,702,	87.56	12.44
Millville	\$4,487,597	\$78,478	\$32,869	\$278,425	\$4,877,369	92.01	7.99

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services

Table 14 illustrates that Bellingham is the only town among the four that has a split tax rate. In 2017, 109 cities and towns had split tax rates. The number has varied between 103 and 110 from 1993 to 2017. While Blackstone has the highest overall rate, Bellingham’s rate for commercial and industrial property is the highest rate among the four towns while its residential rate is the lowest.

TABLE 14
PROPERTY TAX RATES BY CLASS, FY18
(Per Thousand)

Municipality	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property
Bellingham	\$14.41	\$20.81	\$20.81	\$20.69
Blackstone	\$19.49	\$19.49	\$19.49	\$19.49
Mendon	\$16.96	\$16.96	\$16.96	\$16.96
Millville	\$16.56	\$16.56	\$16.56	\$16.56

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services

As shown in Table 15, Blackstone has the lowest average value for single family homes among its abutting Massachusetts towns, but the second highest average tax bill. It should be noted, however, at 156, it ranks in the bottom half of average single family tax bills in the state. It should also be noted that Blackstone’s rank has changed only slightly since FY2012, from 159 to

156 while Mendon’s rank has risen from 93 to 75 and Millville’s rank has dropped from 205 to 211 (after rising to 189) during that time period. Bellingham dropped from 206 to 215.

TABLE 15
AVERAGE SINGLE FAMILY TAX BILL, FY17

Municipality	Single Family Values	Single Family Parcels	Average Single Family Value	Single Family Tax Bill*	State Rank*
Bellingham	\$1,379,294,320	4688	\$294,218	\$4,240	215
Blackstone	\$558,979,500	2118	\$263,919	\$5,144	156
Mendon	\$720,420,900	1880	\$383,203	\$6,499	75
Millville	\$227,404,300	830	\$273,981	\$4,537	211

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services

*Rank is for FY17 as FY18 rankings had not yet been released at time of writing

It is important to note that rate and ranking are somewhat misleading in this case since Blackstone includes in its tax rate items for which separate fees are charged in other towns. For example, trash pickup is funded through the property tax rather than charged separately as in many other towns. Also, there are no separate charges for ambulance runs and there are no fees for school bus transportation.

SURVEY RESULTS

The survey of residents completed in 2016 demonstrated significant support for economic development in Blackstone. A strong majority (63%) of respondents rated the current level of commercial and industrial development in Town as fair (31%) or poor (32%). Economic development was ranked as important or very important by 62%. Encouraging business development in the Commercial zones was supported by 70%, while encouraging development in the Industrial districts was supported by 62%. Expanding infrastructure to support economic development was supported by 60% with only 7% opposed.

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

There are three primary opportunity areas in Blackstone with economic development potential. These include:

- The Industrial district in the western part of Town;
- Main Street/Route 122; and
- A section of East Blackstone.

Figure 2 illustrates these three areas. Each of these areas has different strengths and weaknesses.

INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT IN WESTERN PART OF TOWN

This area is the largest Industrial district in Town and is mostly undeveloped. The fact of its zoning indicates it is a priority for economic development in Blackstone. As Table 16 indicates, there are 23 parcels all or partly within this district. Figure 3 illustrates and identifies the 23 parcels.

As indicated in Table 16, there are roughly 160 acres of mostly undeveloped land within this Industrial district. Figure 2 indicates that the area is not seriously impacted by wetlands (at least as shown on MassGIS maps). However, there are three significant constraints on developing this industrial district. These include difficult to access, lack of municipal water and sewer service, and prior development for residential uses.

As Figure 3 illustrates, three current and former rail lines cross the area. The northernmost line is not active and the right-of-way has been incorporated into private land holdings of Parcels 20, 21 and 22. Parcel 8 is privately owned as a standalone strip. The adjacent land of Parcels 2 and 3 have the same owner, but different from Parcel 8. Therefore, Parcel 8 creates a split in what otherwise would be a single parcel in common ownership of more than 30 acres.

The next rail line is now the Blackstone River Bikeway. It would be difficult (maybe impossible) as well as undesirable to cross that Bikeway with vehicular traffic. However, the Industrial district could be accessed from Main Street through Parcel 2 or from Millville through Parcel 2

FIGURE 2

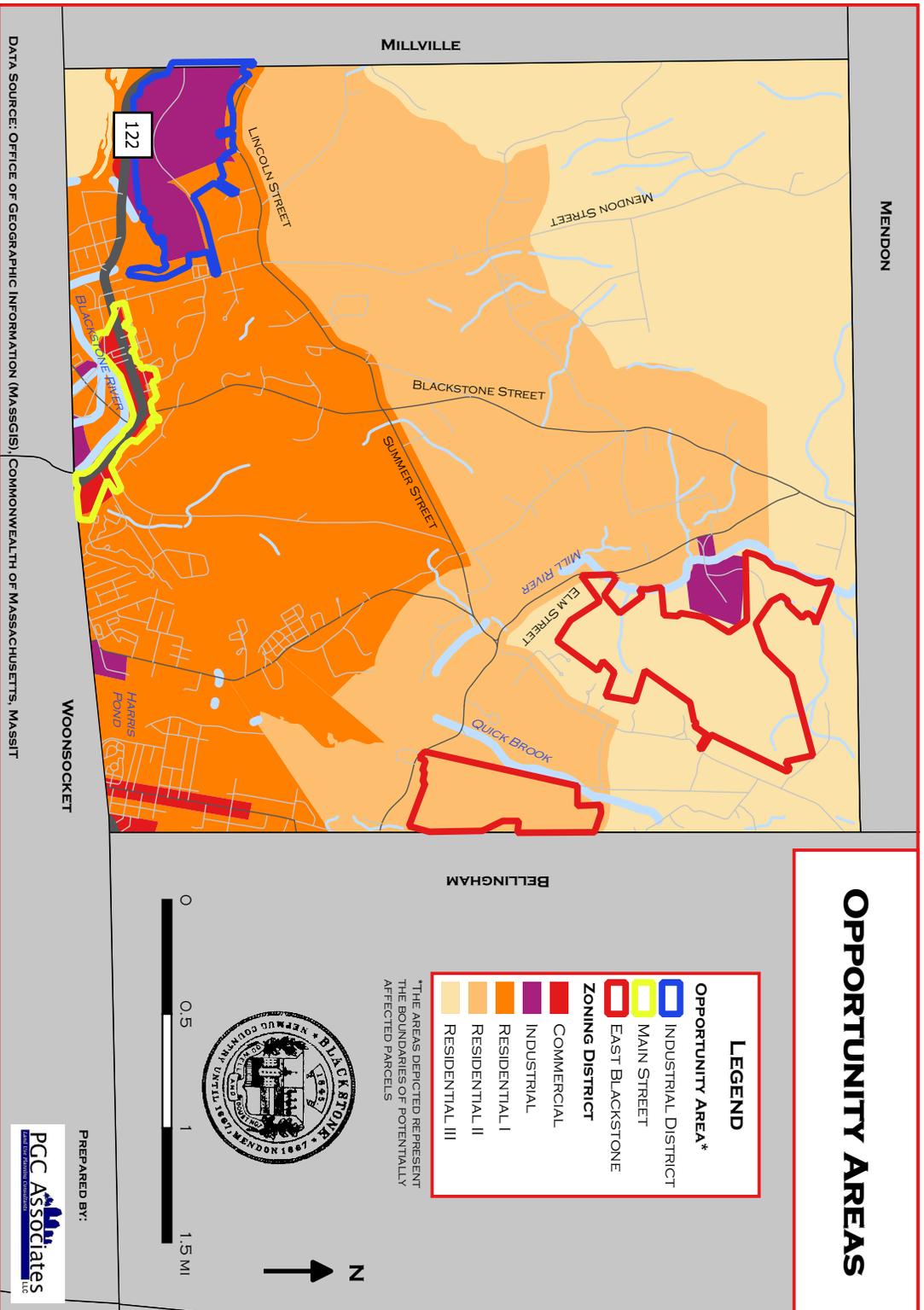


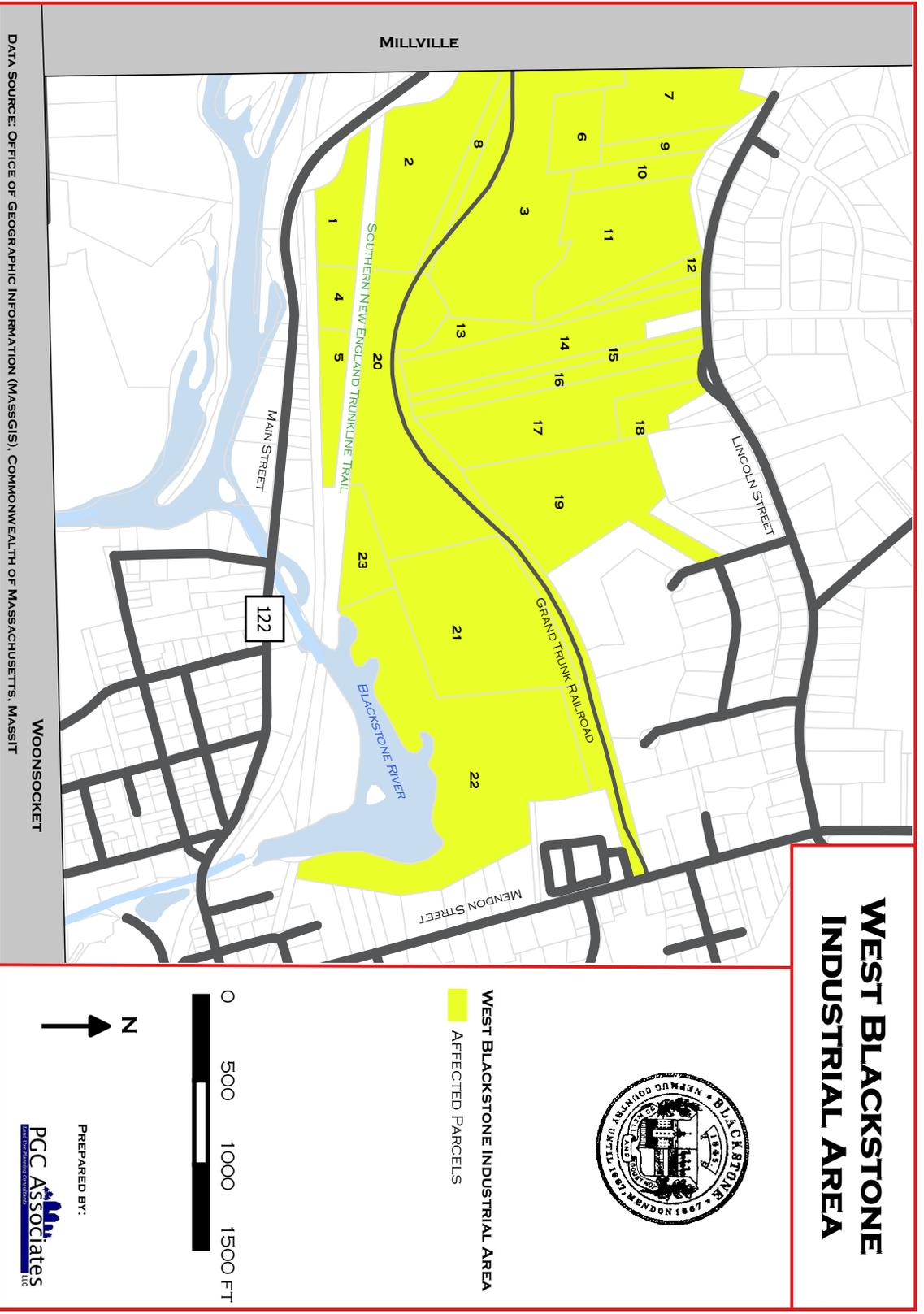
TABLE 16
PARCELS IN INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

Number	Map-Parcel	Owner Name	Area (acres)	Land Use Code*
1	11-63	Lemire	3.90	101
2	11-64	Lemire	11.85	332
3	11-66	Lemire	18.37	442
4	11-85	Perreault	1.72	101
5	11-84	Perreault	2.36	101
6	11-2-c	Lanoe	3.09	131
7	11-2	Webster	10.11	101
8	11.65	Tellstone	2.68	131
9	11-2B	Mendes	2.01	101
10	11-3-A	Lanoe	3.00	101
11	11-3	Town of Blackstone	13.00	938
12	11-9	Noel	1.11	101
13	11-10	Woodward	3.89	101
14	11-11	McKeown	7.95	101
15	11-12	Lund	1.66	101
16	11-13	Paquin	4.29	101
17	11-14	Kauker	12.00	101
18	11-15	Doherty	2.44	101
19	11-192	Green	12.92	130
20	11-24	Makowski	1.15#	101
21	11-17A	Makowski	16.31	601
22	11-27	Boys and Girls Club	23.70	957
23	11-46	Makowski	3.40	132
	TOTAL		161.76	

Source: Assessors Database #Figure must be incorrect as parcel appears to be much larger.

- *Land Use Codes:
- 101= Single Family
 - 131= Potentially Developable Land in a residential zone
 - 132= Undevelopable land in a residential zone
 - 332= Auto repair facility (Commercial)
 - 442= Undevelopable land (Industrial)
 - 601= Chapter 61 land (Forest)
 - 938= Vacant municipal land
 - 957= Charitable services

FIGURE 3



or 8. Furthermore, the Bikeway is a major asset that could be used by future employees to commute to work, access Main Street businesses and/or for recreation purposes before or after work and during breaks.

The third and southernmost rail line is still active. Other than the fact that it separates the Industrial district from Main Street and the Commercial district on the south side, it is not a serious detriment to development of the Industrial district and could be an asset if a potential business needed access to rail freight service.

The next constraint is the lack of municipal water and sewer service. Town water is available on Main Street as well as Lincoln and Mendon Streets so extending into the Industrial land would not be an insurmountable problem. Town sewer is also nearby on Main Street. Grants are available for extending these onto industrial property if tied to a business locating there and creating jobs.

The third constraint is that some of the industrial properties have been developed for single-family homes. Table 16 indicates that 14 of the 23 properties in the Industrial district have single-family homes on them. The 14 properties total 53.69 acres. That's not quite as dramatic as it appears at first glance because several of the properties straddle the line between the Industrial and Residence 1 districts and most of the houses are within the Residence 1 portion of the lot. Three of the single-family homes are along Main Street. Four, with frontage on Lincoln Street or Old Lincoln Street, are set back within or abutting the Industrial district.

If the Industrial district were to be developed for industrial uses, the rear portion of those parcels on Lincoln Street with a single-family home on them could be divided and made available for industrial uses. However, since the frontage along Lincoln Street is zoned Residence 1, access would need to be obtained from the Main Street side.

Parcel 11 is owned by the Town and has frontage on Old Lincoln Street. It has an area of 13 acres. It too would need access from Main Street, but being Town-owned could be an asset in helping develop the Industrial district.

In summary, the Industrial district has good potential for economic development in that it has:

- Developable land
- Proximity to water and sewer service (but would need extension into district)
- Proximity to commercial services
- Proximity to Route 146 (3.5 miles via shortest route and 4.5 miles via primary roads)
- Freight rail service
- Access to the Blackstone River Bikeway

However, it also presents challenges in that all but a single parcel are privately owned by multiple different parties whose interest in developing their land is unknown, as is their willingness to cooperate with the Town and other landowners in promoting its development. Other challenges are the need to extend water and sewer infrastructure into the district, as well as vehicular access from Main Street/Route 122 (again requiring cooperation from and among private land owners).

MAIN STREET

Figure 4 illustrates the Main Street corridor, which serves as the primary Commercial district in Blackstone. While there are other Commercial districts in town (at the western end of Main Street and in Millerville), this is the largest and most important.

In the survey of residents, 70% favored encouraging business development in the Commercial districts. Also, 62% favored providing appropriate infrastructure to foster development in the commercial and industrial districts. Expanding the commercial districts was favored by 41% with 11% opposed and 25% needing more information. Of the 71 residents who responded, 53 supported enhancing the appearance of the Town Center. Improved design was supported by 52 of the 65 who responded to this question. Similarly, 44 of the 67 who responded supported expanded pedestrian and bicycle links between residential areas and Town Center.

The physical appearance of Main Street is also an issue for the Town Center. Of the 71 who answered the question, 53 respondents were in favor of enhancing the appearance of the Town Center. Similarly, 31 out of 47 respondents supported design improvements to increase public gathering and social interaction.

The Main Street Commercial district has traditionally been a mixed-use district. A zoning change to further encourage mixed-use development within individual buildings was approved at Town Meeting in 2013. Table 17 presents the current mix of land uses. As the table indicates, the residential properties have the highest value per square foot. Excluding the condominiums, multiple houses on a single lot have a per square foot value of \$64 followed by single family homes at \$58. The medical building is in the same ball park at \$60. The single-family homes and multiple houses on one lot also have the highest per acre land value.

FIGURE 4

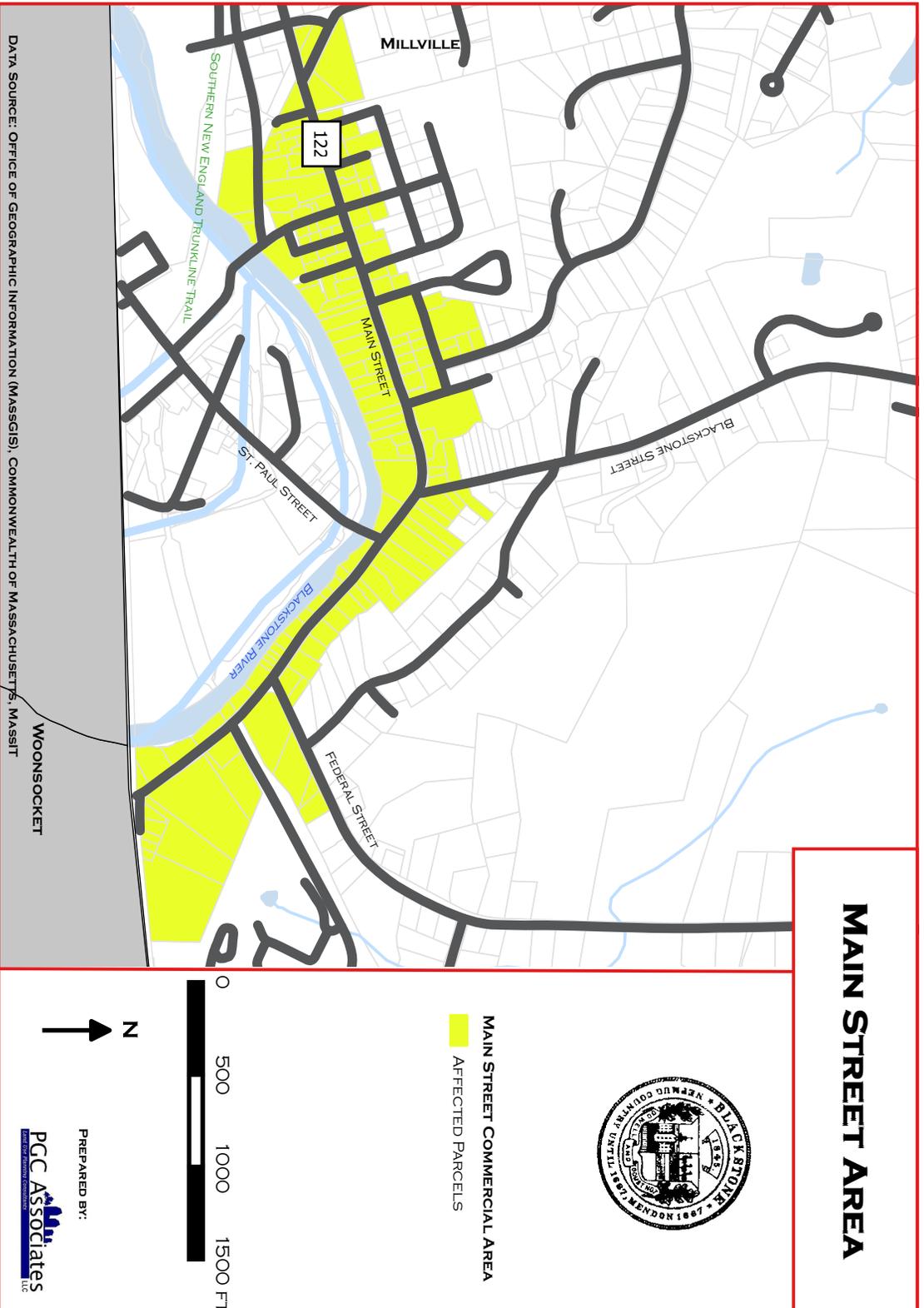


TABLE 17
LAND USES IN MAIN STREET COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

Use	Number	Area (Acres)	Land Value	Land Value Per Acre	Building Value	Building Value Per Acre	Building Value Per Ft ²
Single Family	38	6.93	\$3,619,800	\$522,280	\$4,672,100	\$674,110	\$58
Two-Family	30	9.15	\$2,740,900	\$299,521	\$3,633,900	\$397,107	\$44
Three Family	6	1.64	\$595,900	\$362,114	\$459,800	\$279,409	\$23
Multi-Houses on same lot	4	0.87	\$375,200	\$431,346	\$607,700	\$698,635	\$64
4-8 Apts	10	2.74	\$915,800	\$333,199	\$1,831,700	\$666,434	\$50
Condo	8	NA	NA	NA	\$1,136,200	NA	\$102*
Retail/ Restaurant	16	11.98	\$2,120,700	\$176,939	\$5,265,200	\$439,299	\$54
Office	3	0.84	\$266,000	\$318,061	\$510,000	\$609,816	\$42
Medical	1	0.44	\$116,500	\$262,125	\$521,600	\$1,173,600	\$60
Auto Repair/Gas Station	8	5.31	\$852,000	\$160,328	\$829,400	\$156,075	\$45
Town/Gov.¹	5	4.50	\$641,800	\$142.622	\$2,551,700	\$567.044	\$135
Other²	5	3.41	\$651,600	\$145,803	\$1,448,800	\$424,661	\$66
TOTALS	134	47.81	\$12,896,200	\$3,011,859	\$20,918,952	\$5,519,713	\$49

¹Includes Library, Post Office, housing, and vacant land

²Includes funeral home, church, boarding house, utility land and warehouse

A recent addition to the Main Street area is the Blackstone River Greenway. This has the potential to bring visitors to Main Street from among the users of the Greenway who may want food or drink or other goods and services available on Main Street.



EAST BLACKSTONE

Figure 5 presents some parcels in East Blackstone that warrant consideration for economic development purposes. These are generally large tracts that are just about a mile from Route 126 and about 7 miles to I-495 in Franklin. All of the parcels are currently zoned residential (R-2 and R-3).

Table 18 lists each of these parcels. The parcels total 415 acres and are owned by just three entities plus the Town of Blackstone. As the map illustrates, the parcels form two distinct areas.

Parcels 1 and 2, both owned by Kimball Sand, total about 82 acres. It is zoned R-2 and is currently undeveloped and mostly wooded. Quick Stream and its associated aquifer runs along the western edge of this tract so it needs to be protected. The eastern border is the Bellingham town line and there are residences across the town line in Bellingham, as well as along Elm Street. However, the parcels are big enough to provide adequate buffers to both of these sensitive areas while still allowing some development.

Parcels 3-10 form a contiguous tract of about 330 acres between Elm Street and Bellingham Road. There are residences along both of these streets. To the north is the active Kimball Sand operation, as well as a gas-fired electric power generating plant. The Kimball Sand operation is zoned Industrial while the remainder of the area is zoned R-3. Again, the Mill River and its associated aquifer runs along the western side of the tract and there is an aquifer just to the north. These sensitive environmental areas plus the residences along Elm Street and Bellingham Road need to be protected with buffer areas.

All of the above-mentioned parcels are within the Groundwater Protection District. Therefore, whatever uses are allowed or permitted will need to comply with the restrictions provided for in that district.

FIGURE 5

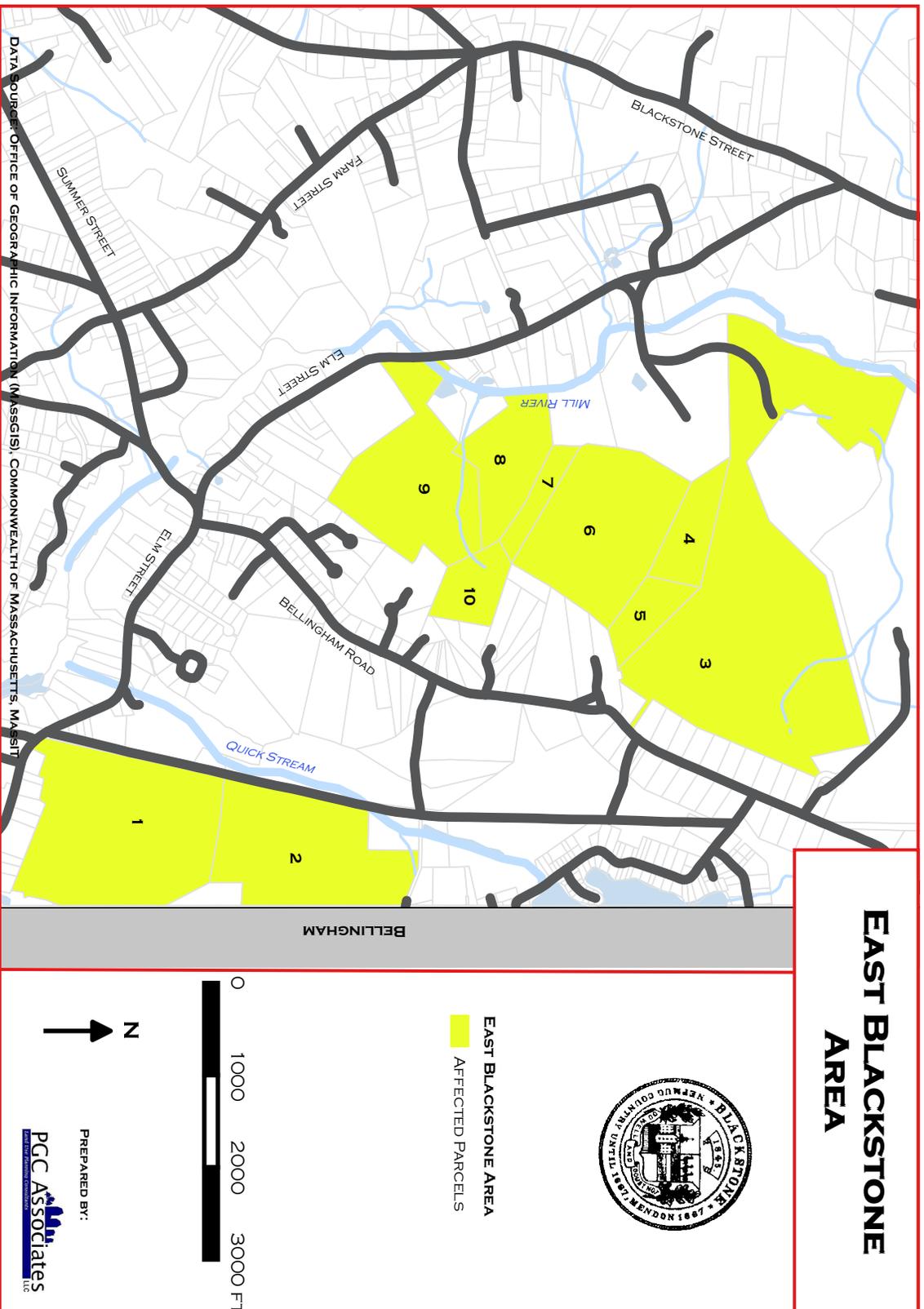


TABLE 18
PARCELS IN EAST BLACKSTONE

Number	Map-Parcel	Owner Name	Area (acres)	Land Use Code*
1	18-19&20	Kimball Sand	72.66	410
2	18-22	Robert Kimball	9.86	410
3	31-4	Kimball Sand	169.18	410
4	20-58	Kimball Sand	14.90	410
5	20-38	Kimball Sand	9.42	410
6	20-2A	Kimball Sand	50.00	410
7	20-3	Mill River LLC	6.32	131
8	20-4	Mill River LLC	22.25	131
9	20-7	Mill River LLC	48.16	101
10	20-33	Town of Blackstone	12.28	938
	TOTAL		415.03	

Source: Blackstone Assessors Records

*Land Use Codes: 101= Single Family
 131= Potentially Developable Land in a residential zone
 410 + Sand and gravel
 938= Vacant municipal land

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Master Plan goals and objectives that pertain most directly to economic development are the following:

GOAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Reduce Tax burden on Residents

- a. Pursue non-tax revenue sources (fees, leases, etc.)
- b. Strongly encourage and promote economic development
- c. Identify and apply for grants
- d. Identify efficiency measures including regional collaboration

GOAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Encourage Economic Development

- a. Identify infrastructure needs
- b. Identify needs of existing businesses
- c. Inventory available parcels
- d. Identify economic development assets and issues
- e. Review zoning bylaw
- f. Promote Blackstone River Bikeway
- g. Promote historic and cultural resources

One of the purposes of economic development is to expand the tax base in order to reduce the taxes paid by residents. In that sense, measures that generate revenue outside of taxes are a form of economic development or “quasi-economic development.” Examples of this could include certain fees or leases of town land or buildings for private purposes such as cell towers, solar facilities, or other purposes.

The other major purpose of economic development is to create jobs. While the jobs created are not limited to Town residents, providing jobs in close proximity to Town residents is an asset. Furthermore, employees from other towns often patronize local businesses further enhancing the economic health of the community.

The following Economic Development recommendations are organized according to the three primary opportunity areas.

INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT ON WEST SIDE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 1:

ENGAGE PROPERTY OWNERS WITHIN DISTRICT

More than half of the area within this industrial district is owned by just four landowners (including the Town and the Boys and Girls Club). Another three landowners control more than ten acres each. These landowners should be contacted to determine their interest in developing their property for industrial purposes. Cooperation from the landowners is an essential element of pursuing future development.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 2:

EXPLORE MEANS OF EXTENDING NEEDED INFRASTRUCTURE TO THE DISTRICT

The primary infrastructure items needed are water, sewer and a roadway. The former right of way of the Grand Trunk railroad runs through the middle of the district from Main Street in Millville to Mendon Street in Blackstone. It would make an ideal roadway for the district providing access on both sides for most of its length, as well as providing a right-of-way for utilities. The route is privately owned by two different owners so their cooperation would be needed.

Financing for the infrastructure could be achieved through several possible means. A MassWorks Infrastructure grant could be applied for. However, those are generally tied to a specific development that is committed to creating jobs using the infrastructure. Similarly, District Improvement Financing (DIF) could be used. DIF is a program that commits the increment in taxes from new development, beyond what is currently collected, to financing bonds used for the infrastructure improvements. Again, a commitment for development is needed in order to use this program. Betterments could also be charged to abutting properties that benefit from the improvements.

A combination of the above could also be used. In all cases though, a commitment for a specific development is necessary or desirable in order to move forward. It creates a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation since many businesses are looking for ready-to-go sites and are not willing to wait for infrastructure to be designed, financed and constructed.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 3:

SECURE ACCESS TO THE TOWN-OWNED SITE FROM MAIN STREET

The Town-owned site of 13 acres has access from Old Lincoln Street through a residential district. Acquiring either an easement or fee-interest access from Main Street would allow the Town to market this site for industrial purposes as a possible means of “jump-starting” development of the district. This would require cooperation from at least two landowners that own property between the Town-owned site and Main Street (eminent domain would be a less desirable option).

One advantage of such an access would be that it could be designed to also provide access to other properties within the district. An incentive for the private landowners to provide this access could be that they could utilize such a road built through their property to enhance the development potential of their land. The road could improve access for the two most significant landowners in the district. Also, if the Grand Trunk roadway option is pursued, this access road would provide adequate access while the larger project is designed and constructed.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 4:

CONSIDER REVISING ZONING DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

As mentioned above, some residences on Lincoln Street are located within the Industrial district. The boundaries could be adjusted to encompass at least some of those houses. Also, Parcel 19 in Table 16 is almost 13 acres but less than half is within the Industrial district. More of this parcel could be included within the Industrial district.

MAIN STREET

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 5:

UPDATE/UPGRADE INFRASTRUCTURE

Reconstructing the street and sidewalks on Main Street and connecting streets would encourage additional business development. Ensuring that the utilities under the street are in good condition and/or identifying utilities in need of replacement should be accomplished prior to any work on the surface.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 6:

PROMOTE THE BLACKSTONE RIVER BIKEWAY

The Blackstone River Bikeway is a major asset to Main Street. Connections between it and Main Street should be easily navigable and clearly marked to encourage users of the Bikeway to exit and patronize Main Street businesses. Way finding signs should be provided and a directory sign of businesses and other attractions should be considered in at least one location. Also, further development of the Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT), which is coterminous with the Bikeway through Blackstone, would increase usage as it would encourage users from Bellingham and Franklin from the east and Uxbridge and Douglas from the west to use the trail and Blackstone would be the crossroads of the two trails.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 7:

IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE CONNECTIONS

In addition to the Blackstone River Bikeway and SNETT, local connections to Main Street through bicycle paths and sidewalks should be enhanced. The Massachusetts Complete Streets program offers an opportunity to provide funding and evaluate and prioritize streets, as well as implement projects that will improve conditions for pedestrians, bicyclists, disabled and elderly, and all users and potential users of the streets. It can also be used to enhance aesthetics through street trees and other landscaping.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 8:

UPDATE AND REVISE SIGN BYLAW

A wide variety of signs can serve as an expression of creativity and artistry. It can also result in an uncoordinated and aesthetically discordant atmosphere. The sign bylaw should be reviewed and revised to encourage higher quality signs that will eventually result in a more attractive business center along Main Street.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 9:

CONSIDER ESTABLISHMENT OF A MAIN STREET ORGANIZATION

The National Trust for Historic Places created a model for downtown revitalization that is based on the four principles of design, organization, promotion and economic vitality. The process has been used successfully in many cities and towns across the country. The approach has recently been refreshed to add community vision and market understanding at the beginning of the process and a transformation strategy using the four principles and then measuring impact and outcomes. A program like this should be considered to help revitalize and enhance Main Street.

Resources for downtowns are available through the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Program which offers grants and technical assistance. Promotion of the historic and cultural aspects of Main Street should be part of every strategy.

EAST BLACKSTONE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 10:

CONSIDER EXPANDING THE INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

One area of East Blackstone, the Kimball Sand operation, is already zoned Industrial. The power plant just north of the Industrial district is not within it and was allowed through a special permit. At a minimum, the district could be expanded to encompass the power plant. However, as indicated on Figure 4 and in Table 18, there are also several other parcels (#3 - #10) south and east of the district between Elm Street and Bellingham Road that merit consideration for industrial uses.

Given the existing residential uses along Elm and Bellingham Streets, as well as the sensitive environmental nature of the area, care should be given to the types of uses that would be allowed here. A Light Industrial district may be more appropriate for this location.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATION 11:

CONSIDER THE AREA EAST OF QUICK STREAM

The area east of Quick Stream (Parcels #1 and #2 on Figure 4 and in Table 18) also merits consideration for alternative uses. Again, this area could be considered for a Light Industrial district, contractor headquarters, indoor recreation or other low impact uses that generate tax revenue. Rather than rezoning, the area could be considered as a potential site for special permit uses. Again, adequate buffers would be needed and, given the existing

residential uses along Elm and Bellingham Streets, as well as the sensitive environmental nature of the area, care should be given to the types of uses that would be allowed here.

HOUSING

INTRODUCTION

Housing is the fundamental element of a community since it is where the residents live. It is a major factor in the quality of life. A safe, stable and affordable place to live allows residents the opportunity to focus on other aspects of their lives, such as education, work and social opportunities. Conversely, the lack of such housing can negatively impact those other aspects of life.

Residents' housing needs differ due to a variety of lifestyles and stages of life. A strong community offers a range of housing types to serve the diverse needs of its residents.

This section consists of an overview of the current housing profile in Blackstone. It also includes an analysis of housing features in comparison with abutting towns. It discusses the survey results that pertain to housing. Finally, the Housing element identifies opportunities and recommendations for future housing policies.



Downtown Blackstone housing

OVERVIEW OF EXISTING HOUSING

HOUSING TYPES

Table 19 presents the number of housing units in Blackstone by type, that is, the number of units in the structure. More than half, 57%, of housing units are in single family detached homes and another 10.9% are single family attached homes (townhouses). Nearly a third, 1117 housing units, are in buildings with 2 to 9 units.

TABLE 19
TOTAL HOUSING UNITS BY BUILDING TYPE

Building Type	Number of Units²	Percentage of Total
1-Unit Detached	2,073	57.1%
1-Unit, Attached	397	10.9%
2 Units	595	16.4%
3 or 4 Units	230	6.3%
5-9 Units	292	8.0%
10-19 Units	9	0.2%
20 or more Units	23	0.6%
Mobile Homes	9	0.2%
TOTAL	3,628	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 – 2015 American Community Survey

² The number of units within each type is an estimate based on a sample. There is a margin of error, which is greater for types with fewer units.

AGE OF STRUCTURE

According to the 2012 – 2016 American Community Survey, the 1980’s was the decade with the largest housing unit production as 694 units were added to the Town’s housing stock. While 25.8% of the current housing stock was built prior to 1940, 43.6% has been built since 1980.

TABLE 20
HOUSING UNITS BY AGE

Time Period	Number of Units	Percentage of Total
2010-2013	44	1.2%
2000-2009	430	11.9%
1990-1999	415	11.4%
1980-1989	694	19.1%
1970-1979	341	9.4%
1960-1969	256	7.1%
1950-1959	277	7.6%
1940-1949	234	6.4%
1939 and earlier	937	25.8%
TOTAL	3,628	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 – 2015 American Community Survey

YEAR HOUSEHOLDER MOVED INTO UNIT

Table 21 presents the year that current residents moved into their homes. Less than 11% of residents have lived in their current homes since before 1980. By contrast, 57.3% have moved into their current home since 2000. Of course, that includes moving into existing houses as well as new and moving from one house to another within Blackstone as well as moving to Blackstone from elsewhere.

TABLE 21
YEAR CURRENT RESIDENTS MOVED INTO HOME

Time Period	Number of Units	Percentage of Total
2015 or later	37	1.1%
2010-2014	568	17.0%
2000-2009	1,306	39.2%
1990-1999	595	17.9%
1980-1989	467	14.0%
1979 or earlier	360	10.8%
TOTAL OCCUPIED UNITS	3,333	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 – 2015 American Community Survey

ROOMS AND BEDROOMS

Tables 22 and 23 disaggregate the housing units by number of rooms and number of bedrooms, respectively. The median number of rooms in Blackstone housing units is 5.7. As Table 22 indicates, there are 912 units with 5 rooms and 677 with 6.

By far, the most common number of bedrooms is three, followed by two-bedroom units. Table 23 indicates that there are 2,526 housing units with two (982) or three (1,544) bedrooms. This equals nearly 70% of total housing units.

TABLE 22
HOUSING UNITS BY NUMBER OF ROOMS

Number of Rooms	Number of Units	Percent of Total
1 room	15	0.4%
2 rooms	72	2.0%
3 rooms	281	7.7%
4 rooms	394	10.9%
5 rooms	912	25.1%
6 rooms	677	18.7%
7 rooms	476	13.1%
8 rooms	415	11.4%
9 rooms or more	386	10.6%
TOTAL	3,628	100%
Median rooms	5.7	--

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 – 2015 American Community Survey

TABLE 23
HOUSING UNITS BY NUMBER OF BEDROOMS

Number of Bedrooms	Number of Units	Percent of Total
No bedroom	28	0.8%
1 bedroom	405	11.2%
2 bedroom	982	27.1%
3 bedroom	1,522	42.6%
4 bedroom	517	14.3%
5 or more bedroom	152	4.2%
TOTAL	3,628	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 – 2015 American Community Survey

OCCUPANCY CHARACTERISTICS

In 2015, 3,333 of the 3,628 housing units in town were occupied and 295 were vacant. Of the occupied units, 2,343 (70.3%) were owner-occupied and 990 were renter-occupied. Table 24 presents the occupied units by household size. As would be expected, the household in owner-occupied housing is significantly greater than renter-occupied housing. More than 70% of renter-occupied units consist of 1 or 2 persons while less than 44% of owner-occupied homes have that

number. On average, the household size of owner-occupied units is about 50% greater than that of renter-occupied units.

TABLE 24
PERCENT OF OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS BY HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Household Size	% of Total Units	% Owner-Occupied Units	% Renter-Occupied Units
1-person	21.7%	12.0%	44.8%
2-person	30.6%	31.8%	27.9%
3-person	20.7%	25.1%	10.2%
4-person or more	27.0%	31.2%	17.1%
Average Household Size		2.99	2.04

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey

ANALYSIS OF HOUSING FACTORS

AFFORDABILITY

As shown on the next page, Blackstone has the lowest average value for single family homes among its abutting Massachusetts towns, but the second highest average tax bill. It should be noted, however, at 157, it ranks in the bottom half of average single-family tax bills in the state. It should also be noted that Blackstone’s rank has changed only slightly since FY2012, from 159 to 157 while Mendon has risen from 93 to 76 and Millville has risen from 205 to 189 during that time period. Bellingham dropped from 206 to 224.



Housing affordability is a major issue in the region and taxes are only one factor that affects it. One of the ways Massachusetts encourages affordable housing is through the state statute known as Chapter 40B. Under this program, any municipality that does not have at least 10% of its housing stock as affordable is vulnerable to development projects that can essentially bypass the local Zoning Bylaw and related regulations if the project includes at least 25% of its units as affordable³

³ It should be noted that 100% of the units in rental projects could towards the 10% minimum as long as 25% of the rental units are affordable, whereas only the 25% of affordable units in ownership projects count.

TABLE 25
AVERAGE SINGLE FAMILY TAX BILL, FY17

Municipality	Single Family Values	Single Family Parcels	Average Single Family Value	Single Family Tax Bill*	State Rank*
Bellingham	1,379,294,320	4,688	294,218	4,240	215
Blackstone	558,979,500	2,118	263,919	5,144	156
Mendon	720,420,900	1,880	383,203	6,499	75
Millville	227,404,300	830	273,981	4,537	211

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services

*Rank is for FY17 as FY18 rankings had not been released at time of writing

Chapter 40B has a specific definition of affordable. It must be affordable to a person or family whose income is less than 80% of the regional⁴ median family income as calculated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, using no more than 30% of that income for housing. The unit also must have some sort of subsidy or local action to make it affordable, as well as restrictions to ensure compliance with fair housing standards and continued affordability for a minimum of 30 years.

The 10% standard is applied to the number of housing units that were counted in the most recent U.S. Census in 2010. In 2010, Blackstone had a total of 3,606 housing units. To meet the 10% standard of Chapter 40B, it would need 361 affordable units. According to the most recent Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) maintained by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), there are 123 affordable units in Blackstone, or 3.4% of the total. Therefore, 238 additional units are needed to reach 10%. That number will increase after the 2020 U.S. Census when the units built between 2010 and 2020 are added to the total.



Table 26 presents a comparison of the income groups in Blackstone with the availability of housing in the ranges that each group can afford based on the Chapter 40B definition of “affordable” (using no more than 30% of income on housing).

⁴ Blackstone is part of the Eastern Worcester County metropolitan region.

TABLE 26
BLACKSTONE HOUSING SUPPLY-DEMAND GAP

HOUSEHOLD INCOME LEVEL	% OF HOUSEHOLDS	# of HOUSEHOLD	AFFORDABLE PURCHASE PRICE ¹	# OF HOMES AT AFFORDABLE PRICE ²	AFFORDABLE RENTAL LEVEL ³	# OF AFFORDABLE RENTAL UNITS ²	TOTAL UNITS
Less than \$10,000	2.6	87	Up to \$49,500	79	\$1-\$250	56	135
\$10,000 to \$14,999	3.0	100	\$50,000-\$74,000	10	\$250-\$375	28	38
\$15,000 to \$24,999	6.9	230	\$74,500-\$123,500	46	\$375-\$625	145	191
\$25,000 to \$34,999	9.7	323	\$124,500-\$172,500	213	\$625-\$875	236	449
\$35,000 to \$49,999	8.3	277	\$173,000-\$246,500	652	\$875-\$1250	228	880
\$50,000 to \$74,999	21.1	703	\$247,000-\$370,000	755	\$1250-\$1875	191	946
\$75,000 to \$99,999	14.5	483	\$370,500-\$483,500	405	\$1875-\$2500	27	432
\$100,000 to \$149,999	20.2	673	\$484,000-\$740,000	115	\$2500-\$3750	--	115
\$150,000 to \$199,999	8.5	283	\$740,000-\$986,500	55	\$3750-\$5000	--	55
\$200,000 or more	5.2	173	\$986,500+	13	\$5000+	--	13
TOTALS	100%	3,333	--	2,343		911⁴	3,254⁴

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and derived by author

¹Based on 30% of income, 5% down payment and a 30-year loan at 4.5% interest

²Figures have been interpolated based on 2011-2015 U.S. Census American Community Survey figures

³Based on 30% of income

⁴Including 79 units for which no rent was paid. U.S. Census reported a total of 3,333 occupied housing units in 2015, so these figures slightly understate actual number.

DIVERSITY OF HOUSING TYPES

Blackstone has a more diverse housing stock than a typical suburb. As Table 27 indicates, Blackstone has a significantly lower percentage of single family homes than its abutting towns

and is more in line with Worcester County and Massachusetts, as a whole, which, of course, include large cities.

More than a quarter of Blackstone’s housing units consist of townhouses (1-unit attached) (10.9%) and duplexes (16.4%). This is a higher percentage than both Worcester County and Massachusetts. The percentage of units in buildings with 5-9 units is also significantly higher than the abutting towns and even higher than Worcester County and Massachusetts, as a whole.

TABLE 27
BLACKSTONE HOUSING TYPES COMPARED TO REGION
(By Percentage)

Housing Types	Blackstone	Millville	Mendon	Bellingham	Worcester County	Massachusetts
Total	3,628	1,127	2,058	6,467	328,627	2,827,820
1-Unit Detached	57.10%	67.70%	92.1	73.50%	56.10%	52.20%
1-Unit Attached	10.90%	4.70%	5.60%	8.30%	6.00%	5.20%
2 Units	16.40%	13.50%	1.60%	7.60%	8.70%	10.30%
3 or 4 Units	6.30%	7.50%	0.40%	1.90%	11.90%	10.80%
5 to 9 Units	8.00%	2.70%	0.40%	2.10%	5.80%	5.90%
10-19 Units	0.20%	0.90%	0.00%	0.20%	3.80%	4.30%
20 or more	0.60%	1.50%	0.00%	6.50%	6.80%	10.50%
Mobile Homes	0.20%	1.60%	0.00%	0.00%	0.90%	0.80%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 – 2015 American Community Survey

Table 28 compares the percentage of Blackstone housing units that are owner-occupied versus renter-occupied with that of abutting towns, Worcester County, and the state. With 70.3% of housing owner-occupied, Blackstone is more comparable to Worcester County and Massachusetts, as a whole, than with its immediate Massachusetts abutters. Again, this is indicative of a more urban pattern than suburban. Most of the rental housing is concentrated in the Main Street corridor.

TABLE 28
BLACKSTONE HOUSING TENURE COMPARED TO REGION
(By Percentage)

Housing Tenure	Blackstone	Millville	Mendon	Bellingham	Worcester County	Massachusetts
Total	3,628	1,127	2,058	6,467	328,627	2,827,820
Owner Occupied	70.3%	94.1%	88.7%	79.6%	64.7%	62.1%
Renter Occupied	29.7%	5.9%	11.3%	20.4%	35.3%	37.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 – 2015 American Community Survey

Table 29 presents average household size for both owner-occupied and renter-occupied units. As would be expected, average household size is larger for owner-occupied units than renter-occupied units.

TABLE 29
BLACKSTONE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE COMPARED TO REGION
(By Percentage)

Housing Tenure	Blackstone	Millville	Mendon	Bellingham	Worcester County	Massachusetts
Owner Occupied	2.99	3.17	3.09	2.81	2.77	2.70
Renter Occupied	2.04	2.52	1.99	2.23	2.04	2.25

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 – 2015 American Community Survey

SURVEY RESULTS

The survey of residents completed in 2016 demonstrated a general satisfaction with the current housing situation. A strong majority (60%) responded that the *diversity of housing types* is “Good” (54%) or “Excellent” (6%). Similar, but slightly lower majorities are satisfied with the level of *senior housing* (55% “Good” or “Excellent”), *affordable housing* (52%) and *multifamily housing* (52%).

When asked about future policies, 41% favored encouraging more over-55 housing compared to 12% opposed and 22% needing more information. Encouraging additional affordable housing was opposed 30% to 20%, with 22% needing more information. Cluster or flexible residential development was favored 26% to 18% with 27% needing more information. Additional housing in or near commercial districts was opposed 27% to 20% with 22% needing more information. The large percentages needing more information for each of these categories is understandable since all of these housing types are heavily dependent on specific design and are more appropriate in some locations than others.

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

There are three main opportunity areas in Blackstone when addressing housing issues. These include:

- The proposed Soldier On housing for veterans;
- Mixed use housing in the Main Street/Route 122 area; and
- Continued/expanded use of current Zoning Bylaws including Flexible Residential Development, the Multifamily and Village Overlay Districts and the Affordable Housing provision.

Each Opportunity Area is discussed below.

Soldier On, Veterans Housing

Soldier On was founded in 1994 to provide transitional housing and supportive services to veterans. In 2010, it opened its first permanent housing project in Pittsfield where it provides homes for 39 formerly homeless veterans. It now has projects underway or planned in several locations in Massachusetts, including Blackstone, as well as in New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire and Florida.

Soldier On has a contract with the Town of Blackstone to use the Veterans Park site off Elm Street to develop a similar community of permanent housing for veterans in need. While the project is still being designed, it will include 150 units of housing, as well as provide funding to the Town to develop playing fields on the site. The housing is “limited equity” housing in which the occupants must buy their units. These units count as part of Blackstone’s Subsidized Housing Inventory under Chapter 40B.

Mixed Use Housing in the Main Street/Route 122 Area

There is already a significant amount of mixed-use development in the Commercial district. There are more than 100 dwelling units within the district. Most of these are separate residential buildings. Furthermore, as a result of a bylaw amendment in 2013, mixed-use buildings within that portion of the Commercial district that is within the Village Overlay District are permitted.

A strong trend in housing is the desire to be close to amenities like restaurants and stores. Allowing and encouraging this type of development takes advantage of this trend. Again, the physical appearance as well as the available services and amenities are critical to support the trend. The addition of the Blackstone River Bikeway is an important added amenity.

Continued/expanded use of current Zoning Bylaws including Flexible Residential Development, the Multifamily and Village Overlay Districts and the Affordable Housing provision

These bylaws have led to the development of

- Single family homes while preserving open space;
- Multifamily housing adding diversity;
- Preservation and enhancement of the character of the Village Overlay District; and
- Affordable housing.

These bylaws have helped to continue producing a diverse housing stock adding to that built prior to the adoption of zoning and the emergence of the automobile as the primary means of transportation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Master Plan goals and objectives that pertain most directly to housing are the following:

GOAL HOUSING: Provide a Diverse Range of Housing Types to Serve a Variety of Lifestyles and Life Stages

- a. Support and enhance existing wide range of land use patterns
- b. Identify regulatory and infrastructure measures that encourage “aging-in-place” (AARP) and additional over-55 housing
- c. Encourage preservation and enhancement of architectural and historical character
- d. Enhance Village Overlay District
- e. Promote use of Flexible Residential Development
- f. Encourage mixed uses in Commercial districts
- g. Support pedestrian and bicycle connections between and among residential and commercial neighborhoods

As noted above, Blackstone already has a more diverse housing stock than its abutting Massachusetts towns and most suburban communities. Its housing stock diversity is closer to that of Worcester County and Massachusetts, as a whole. Recent trends in housing preferences are towards the type of diversity offered in Blackstone. Therefore, dramatic changes in housing policies are not needed.

More affordable housing is not favored in Blackstone, according to the survey results. Nevertheless, it is law in Massachusetts that if a city or town has less than 10% affordable housing, developers can build projects that bypass local requirements. Therefore, efforts should be made to reach the 10% goal in order to retain local control of new housing development.

The following are recommendations for Housing:

HOUSING RECOMMENDATION 1:

SUPPORT MEASURES TO ENCOURAGE HOUSING IN MAIN STREET/ROUTE 122 AREA

This recommendation goes hand-in-hand with many of the recommendations for the Main Street area listed in the Economic Development section, including infrastructure improvements like roadways and sidewalks, a Main Street organization of businesses, promotion of the Blackstone River Bikeway, better pedestrian and bicycle connections, and aesthetic improvements (through signage requirements and/or design guidelines). These will make the area more attractive as a place to live as well as do business.

HOUSING RECOMMENDATION 2:

EXPLORE MEANS TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE HOUSING FOR SENIORS

There are two aspects to this recommendation. One is to assist seniors to “age-in-place.” This can be done through infrastructure improvements like sidewalks to better connect them to businesses, recreation areas and other services. Also, housing assistance programs such as those offered through the Community Development program at the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development could assist seniors with house repairs and handicapped accessibility. The accessory apartment bylaw can make it possible for seniors to remain in their houses by providing rent to help with expenses, as well as potential assistance with small household tasks.

The other aspect is to encourage additional housing for seniors. This can take the form of additional public housing for seniors or private age-restricted independent living or assisted living. The Zoning Bylaw could be amended to encourage this type of development.

HOUSING RECOMMENDATION 3:

PROMOTE ADDITIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING

As noted above, the State requires 10% affordable housing or developers can build at a density and in locations the Town might not otherwise permit. Therefore, it would be prudent to reach the 10% goal. The current affordable housing bylaw requires at least 10% of developments with six or more units to be affordable. It offers a density bonus for the affordable units. It also offers an additional bonus of two market rate units for every affordable unit above the minimum required.

The proposed Soldier On project will make an important contribution toward the number of units needed to reach 10%. Under Chapter 40B, 100% of the rental units in a development count toward the 10% goal even if only 25% of the units are affordable. The Town could encourage such rental units either through a “friendly 40B,” which is a project done in cooperation between a developer and the Town. A second option would be through a new bylaw that requires 25% affordable units but without the regulatory restrictions and State oversight of Chapter 40B. While zoning cannot control rental vs. ownership, policies could be adopted to make clear the preference.

Also, consideration should be given to encourage renovation of existing buildings to meet the affordable housing requirements. This has the dual effect of providing the affordable units while also improving existing housing stock.

HOUSING RECOMMENDATION 4:

CONSIDER DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR VILLAGE OVERLAY AND COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

Currently the Village Overlay District has bulk and size requirements and some minimal guidelines regarding driveway and landscaping options. This may be sufficient, but consideration should be given as to whether additional guidelines (not necessarily mandates) would help preserve and enhance the character of that district. Similarly, design guidelines should be considered for the Commercial district, at least for mixed uses, in order to encourage such mixed uses and result in a more attractive place to live and do business.

HOUSING RECOMMENDATION 5:

IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE CONNECTIONS

As discussed in the Economic Development section, in addition to the Blackstone River Bikeway and SNETT, local connections to Main Street through bicycle paths and sidewalks should be enhanced. The Massachusetts Complete Streets program offers an opportunity to provide funding to evaluate and prioritize streets, as well as to implement projects that will improve conditions for pedestrians, bicyclists, disabled and elderly, and all users and potential users of the streets. It can also be used to enhance aesthetics through street trees and other landscaping.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

Natural and cultural resources are major components of a community's character. Natural resources help determine the physical development of a town, while also influencing its economic development. Cultural resources represent the history of a town and contribute to reflection on its current character by virtue of the elements and resources that are present.⁵

This section consists of an overview of the primary natural and cultural resources in Blackstone. It also includes an analysis of their impact on the development and future of Blackstone. It discusses the survey results that pertain to natural and cultural resources. Finally, this element identifies opportunities and recommendations for future policies.

OVERVIEW OF NATURAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

Blackstone's natural resources include hills, forests, fields, old stone walls, lakes, rivers, streams, marshes, and swamps. These features work together to create a diverse variety of habitats and lifestyles, as well as a pleasant environment in which to live and work. The most prominent natural resource is the Blackstone River. The river (and its tributaries) have played a prominent role in the Town's history through the present day. By way of example, the Blackstone River and Canal contributed to the mills that were developed in Blackstone during the Industrial Revolution due to the water power and transportation of supplies and materials that they provided.

WATER RESOURCES

Surface Waters

Figure 6 illustrates the surface water resources of Blackstone. The Town lies in the Blackstone River Watersheds. The major surface water bodies, in addition to the Blackstone River include:

- Harris Pond
- Lake Hiawatha (western shore)
- Crane's Pond
- Mill River
- Fox Brook
- Aldrich Brook
- Hop Brook
- Quick Stream

⁵ Much of the information in this section is derived from the 1990 Master Plan and/or the 2002 Open Space and Recreation Plan.

None of these surface water bodies serves as a source of drinking water for Blackstone; however, Harris Pond is a drinking water source for the City of Woonsocket, RI. Nevertheless, Blackstone does draw its public water supply from wells that tap into aquifers that are associated with some of these water bodies. Additionally, these water resources contribute to the diverse habitats in Blackstone as discussed further below.

Aquifers

There are two major types of aquifers: sand and gravel aquifers and bedrock aquifers. Sand and gravel aquifers are the most important of the two aquifer types and initially were formed by melting glaciers at the end of the last ice age. Sand and gravel aquifers are shallow and are located near surface water bodies. These aquifers are capable of producing the hundreds of gallons of water per minute that are expected from municipal wells. Such wells generally range in diameter from 10 to 24 inches and in depth from 20 to 80 feet with an average depth of about 50 feet. Their capacity averages around 500 gallons per minute.

The other type of aquifer, bedrock, has formations that underlie virtually the entire area of Blackstone and the region. The bedrock has cracks and crevices through which water travels. Bedrock aquifers are a water source for domestic wells. These wells are drilled into bedrock and intercept the water that is located in the cracks and crevices. The wells are commonly 6 to 8 inches in diameter, and deep enough (usually 50 to 300 feet, but sometimes more) to intercept sufficient water in the crevices to be able to produce about 5 gallons of water per minute. Some wells can produce as much as 50 gallons per minute. These wells are more likely to occur in lowlands rather than higher elevations.

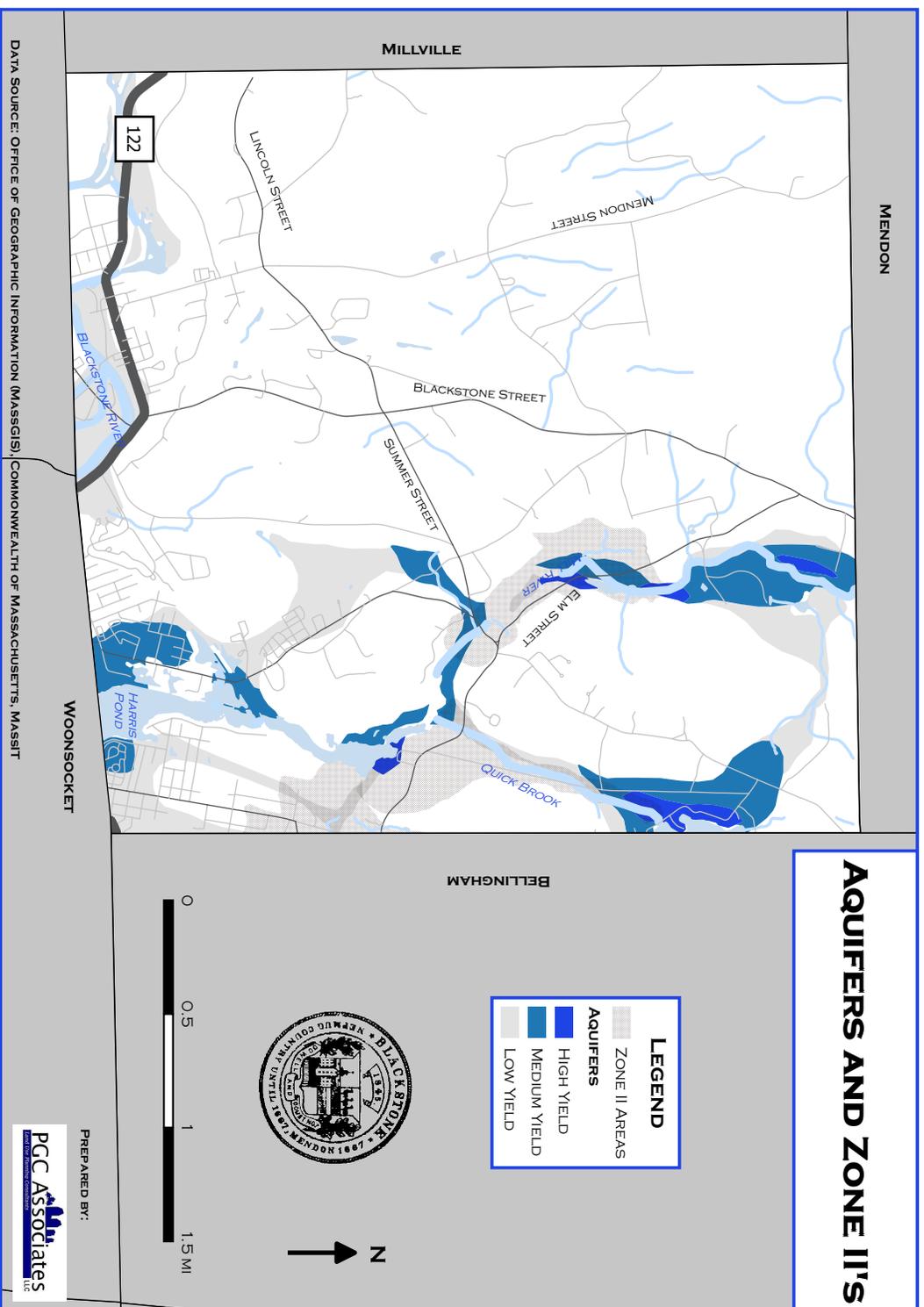
Figure 7 delineates the major aquifers and Zone II areas in Blackstone. Zone II areas are designated by the State and represent the primary recharge areas for its associated well. As the map illustrates, most of the aquifers are connected with, and are in close proximity to, surface water bodies. It is critical that the aquifers and Zone II areas be protected, since they provide the municipal water supply for Blackstone.

Aquifers, in general, are afforded protection by the Groundwater Protection District. Municipal wellheads are provided with at least a 400-foot wellhead protection zone. This 400-foot-area is known as a Zone I.

Wetlands

In addition to surface water bodies, like rivers and lakes, wetlands include “bordering vegetated wetlands” which are the vegetated wet areas adjacent to rivers, streams, lakes or ponds; and “isolated wetlands” that flood occasionally or seasonally, such as vernal pools. The determination of wetlands is a science and is based on a combination of vegetation and soils.

FIGURE 7



Wetlands provide wildlife habitat, floodwater storage, and help clean the water that passes through them. This last characteristic makes them particularly important when located on or near aquifers and Zone II's. Wetlands are already protected by the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (M.G.L Chapter 131, Section 40) and the local wetlands bylaw (Chapter 119 of the Blackstone Code) all of which are enforced by the Conservation Commission, a six-member board that meets throughout the year and advises town officials and boards on matters associated with conservation. Figure 8 presents the major wetlands in Blackstone.



The locations of major wetlands are estimated based largely on information from aerial photos. Wetlands on individual parcels can only be identified and delineated following a site visit by a wetlands scientist, which then needs to be confirmed by the Conservation Commission.

Soils

Soils form the foundation of a town's natural resources and strongly influence the type of vegetation that grows and the wildlife that live there. Of course, soils also determine the suitability of land for farming and the types of crops and/or animals raised.

Most of Blackstone consists of Canton-Montauk-Scituate soils. These soils are very deep, well drained or moderately drained soils on glaciated uplands. The areas along the Blackstone and Mill Rivers are mostly Merrimac-Hinckley-Windsor soils. These soils are very deep, excessively drained soils on outwash plains and terraces. Figure 9 presents the major soil types in Blackstone.

FIGURE 8

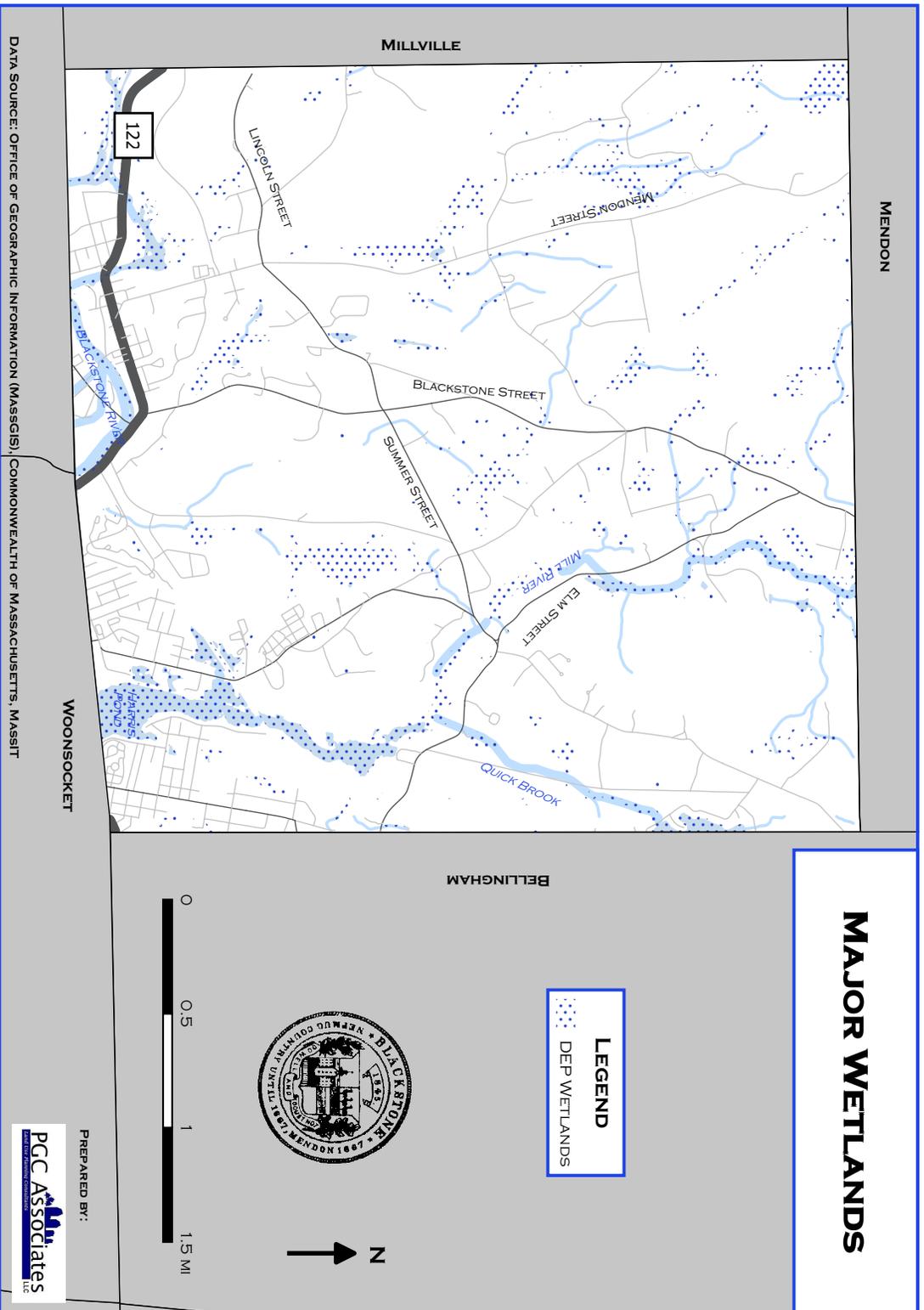
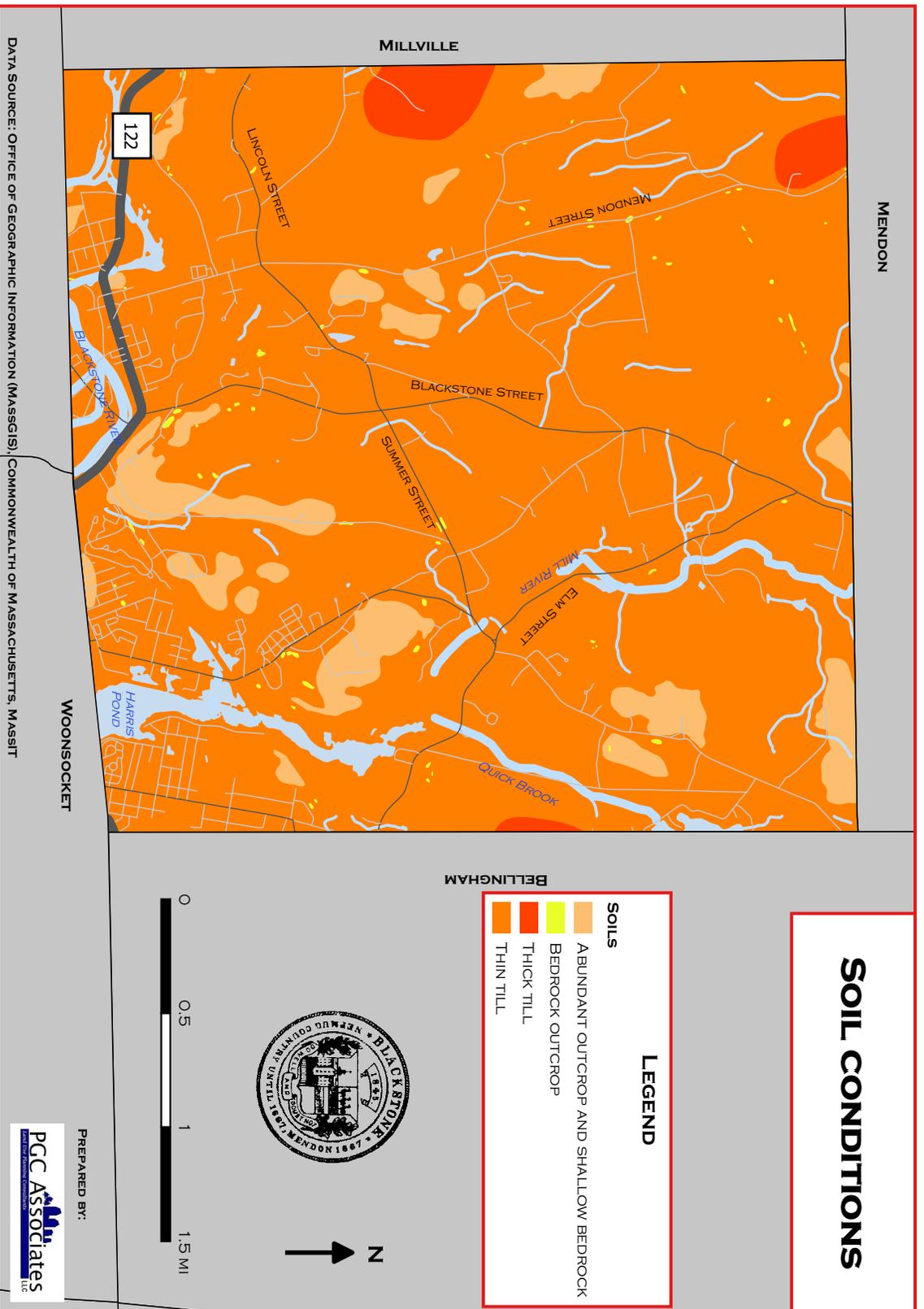


FIGURE 9



IMPORTANT HABITAT AREAS

A habitat is an ecological or environmental area that is conducive to the survival and well-being of a particular species of animal, plant, or other type of organism. Figure 10 illustrates some of the key habitat areas in Blackstone. The Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program has produced BioMap2, which identifies “Core Habitats” that are necessary to protect “Species of Conservation Concern,” including those on the list of rare and endangered species as well as other species identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan, exemplary natural communities, and intact ecosystems. Also illustrated are “Critical Natural Landscapes,” which include intact landscapes in Massachusetts that are better able to support ecological processes and disturbance regimes, and a wide array of species and habitats over long time frames.

Figure 10 also presents Key Habitats, including Areas of Conservation Concern. The three rare or endangered species identified in Blackstone are: *Lampetra appendix*, *Spiranthes vernalis* and *Strophitus undulatus* (Table 30).

Table 30

Rare and Endangered Species in Blackstone

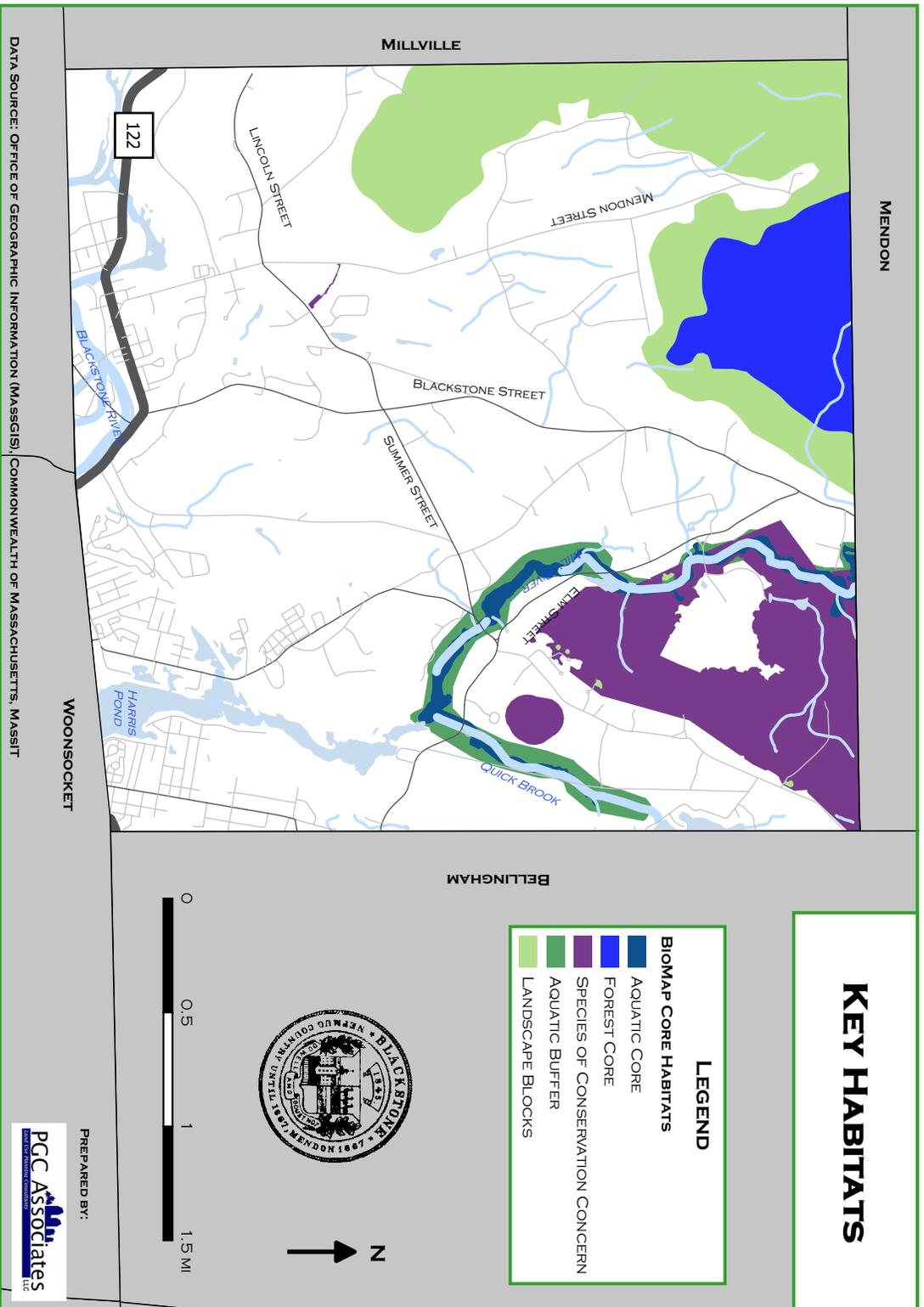
Category	Species	Common Name	Status*	Last Reported
Fish	<i>Lampetra appendix</i>	American Brook Lamprey	T	2008
Vascular Plant	<i>Spiranthes vernalis</i>	Grass-leaved Ladies'-tresses	T	2009
Mussel	<i>Strophitus undulatus</i>	Creeper	SC	1999

Source: Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, 2017

*T = Threatened SC = Special Concern

In recent years, the Eastern Box Turtle and Spotted Turtle have been removed from the list in Blackstone as their populations have recovered. The Creeper mussel and Grass-leaved Ladies Tresses have been added.

FIGURE 10



DATA SOURCE: OFFICE OF GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (MASSGIS), COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS, MASSIT

WOODSOCKET

BELLINGHAM

KEY HABITATS

LEGEND

- BIOMAP CORE HABITATS**
- AQUATIC CORE
 - FOREST CORE
 - SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN
 - AQUATIC BUFFER
 - LANDSCAPE BLOCKS



PREPARED BY:



VEGETATION, FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

Vegetation

Blackstone consists of a variety of soil types and hydrologic conditions which support a wide array of vegetation and wildlife. The native forests of the area are mixed coniferous and hardwood trees. Major forest types are oak, red maple, and white pine. Canton soils are well suited to oak and pine growth. (U.S.D.A., undated).

Black choke cherry and witch hazel shrubs, swamp azalea and highbush blueberry (especially in wetter soils), and dewberry, cinnamon fern, sphagnum, and skunk cabbage are some common examples of the vegetation found in the upland and wetland areas. Other wild herbaceous plants and fruit-producing shrubs include bluestem, goldenrod, beggartick, quackgrass, ragweed, gray dogwood, autumnolive, and crabapple. Some additional wetland plants found in the area are smartweed, arrowhead, burweed, pickerelweed, cordgrass, rushes, sedges and reeds (U.S.D.A., undated).

Fisheries

The Blackstone River, plus the numerous streams, lakes and ponds, provide habitat for numerous fisheries. Among the species found in the area are brown, brook and rainbow trout; pickerel; perch; pumpkinseed (also known as sunfish, kibbie and sun bass); redbreast sunfish; smallmouth bass; white sucker; carp; golden shiner; fallfish; creek chub; yellow bullhead; and brown bullhead (also known as hornpout and catfish).

Wildlife

The kind and abundance of wildlife depends to a large extent on the amount and distribution of food, cover and water. Furbearers such as fox and muskrat live in the area. Other mammals found in town include deer, cottontail, skunk, gray and red squirrels, flying squirrels, chipmunks, vole, mice and bats. Raccoons and woodchucks are plentiful. Opossum have expanded their range northward into the area. Coyotes have also been sighted.

Birds include hawks, kestrel, screech and great horned owls, grouse, pheasant, woodcock and a great variety of songbirds. Cardinal, titmouse, and mockingbird have become increasingly numerous.

Common reptiles include garter and milk snakes as well as snapping and painted turtles. Red-backed salamanders are commonly found under rotting logs. Spotted salamanders are declining in number due to the impact of acid precipitation.

Open areas such as cropland, pastures, meadows, and areas of grasses, herbs, shrubs, and vines tend to attract kestrel, meadow vole, meadowlark, field sparrow, cottontail and red fox. Woodlands provide habitat for nuthatches, ruffed grouse (pheasant), woodcock, thrushes, woodpeckers, squirrels, gray fox, raccoon and deer. Wetlands attract ducks, geese, herons,

muskrat, frogs and tree swallow. Even urbanized areas support raccoon, opossum, skunk, nighthawks, bats, Norway rat, English sparrow and starling (U.S.D.A., undated). All of these habitats are found in abundance.

ENERGY

Energy has been an important natural resource in Blackstone's history and promises to resume an important role in the future. The water power of the Blackstone River attracted the mills that established Blackstone as a manufacturing center in the 1800's. While fossil fuels have been the primary source of energy in Blackstone and the world for the past 150 years, renewable sources are enjoying a resurgence.

Blackstone's Zoning Bylaw has provisions for both large scale wind turbines and large scale solar photovoltaic electric generation systems. A MassGIS map of high wind sites with strong potential for large scale power production shows no sites in Blackstone. However, smaller scale facilities or turbines serving individual properties may still be viable.

Solar photovoltaic (PV) facilities offer much greater potential. Blackstone receives plenty of sunshine that can be turned into electricity. Several proposals for solar PV facilities have been proposed on both public and private land. On site solar PV systems that



serve the premises on which they are located are allowed by right.” Large scale facilities that produce electricity for the grid are also allowed by special permit from the Planning Board if certain criteria are met to protect scenic, natural and historic resources.

In addition to producing clean, renewable energy, reducing energy consumption also protects natural resources both directly and indirectly. Blackstone has already taken steps in this regard by obtaining designation as a Green Community. Using both Green Community grant funds and Town funding, the Town has upgraded lighting in some Town buildings and replaced the HVAC system in the Municipal Center to significantly reduce energy consumption while also improving the comfort of employees and visitors. The Town has also adopted the Stretch Energy Code which will ensure that new buildings will be more energy efficient.

OVERVIEW OF CULTURAL RESOURCE

INTRODUCTION

Blackstone's cultural resources are evident in its built and natural environments, its activities, and its history. Blackstone has hundreds of historic buildings, as well historic areas, objects, structures, and burial grounds. There are numerous institutions, organizations, and boards that address matters of concern to the cultural and historical fabric of the Town. These groups sponsor activities, courses, information sharing, recreation opportunities, educational opportunities, and more for Blackstone's residents.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Blackstone has four historic districts on the National Register of Historic Places:

- **Blackstone Canal Historic District**
- **Blackstone Manufacturing Company Historic District.** The District encompasses the "New City" or "High Rocks" area of Blackstone, includes roughly, the area surrounding Butler, Canal, Church, County, Ives, Main, Mendon, Old Mendon, and School Streets.
- **East Blackstone Village Historic District.** The district is located along Elm Street at the juncture at Summer Street.
- **Farnum's Gate Historic District.** The District is located in the area surrounding the junction of Main and Blackstone Streets.

Additionally, Blackstone has numerous historic structures, four of which are included on the National Registry of Historic Places:

- **East Blackstone Friends Meetinghouse** at 197 Elm Street. This structure was built in 1812 on land donated by Samuel Smith to the Quakers in 1799 (http://blackstonequakermeetinghouse.org/about_us.htm).
- **Benjamin Thayer House** at 200 Farm Street. Built around 1790, Thayer family members lived here until the early 20th century (<https://www.latlongwiki.com/?l=42.0335312&g=-71.5328402&title=Town%20of%20Blackstone,%20MA&all=y&type=h>).
- **Southwick-Daniels Farm** at 286 Mendon Street. The historic farm was initially established in 1750 (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Southwick-Daniels-Farm/108058859217014>).
- **Blackstone Viaduct** built in 1872 by the Boston, Hartford and Erie Railroad. A viaduct is a long, bridge-like structure, supported by a series of arches and generally supports a road or railroad (<http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/highway/Departments/EnvironmentalServices/CulturalResourcesUnit/HistoricBridgeInventory/BridgeDetails/Blackstone%20Viaduct.aspx>).

Besides the nationally recognized historic districts and structures, the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) lists numerous historic areas, buildings, burial grounds, objects and structures located in Blackstone.

The MACRIS list includes the following:

- **Historic Areas** – 27 areas, including the Southwick-Daniels Farm, Blackstone Canal Historic District, East Blackstone Friends Meetinghouse, Blackstone Manufacturing Company Historic District, East Blackstone Village Historic District and Farnum’s Gate Historic District, all on the National Register of Historic Places.
- **Buildings** – 429 properties, including the Benjamin Thayer House, on the National Register of Historic Places
- **Burial Grounds** – 15 burial grounds/cemeteries, some dating to the 18th century
- **Objects** – 5 objects including two war monuments, two located at Southwick-Daniels Farm, and one associated with the Blackstone Canal
- **Structures** – 44 structures, including the Blackstone Viaduct (above) on the National Register. Source: <http://mhc-macris.net/Towns.aspx>



A Scenic Roads Bylaw, submitted by the Planning Board, was adopted at the June 2016 Town Meeting (Warrant Article 24, Chapter 190 Scenic Roads). As part of the bylaw, four roads were designated as Scenic Roads under the Scenic Road Act, MGL Chapter 40, Section 15C. Blackstone’s four designated scenic roads are:

- Milk Street
- Union Street
- Hill Street
- Mendon Street (from Crestwood Drive to Mendon town line)

Under the protection of the Scenic Road Act, trees and stone walls within the town right-of-way of those four streets cannot be removed without a hearing before the Planning Board. Trees require a joint hearing that includes the Tree Warden.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

There are a number of organizations, boards and commissions in Blackstone that facilitate cultural activities and events and/or serve as cultural resources for town residents. Some of these initiatives are supported by the Town budget, others are grant funded, some are fee-driven, and others are hosted by the organization itself.

Blackstone Historical Commission – *To preserve Blackstone’s past to benefit its future*

The Blackstone Historical Commission is comprised of five members and two alternate members. The Commission meets most months and discusses subjects important to the historical fabric of the Town of Blackstone. The Commission also oversees the Blackstone Historical Museum, which is open for tours and programs, on a limited basis.



Blackstone Cultural Council

The Blackstone Cultural Council is an appointed board that awards and manages grants initially funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Through the grant process, the Cultural Council supports many of Blackstone’s nonprofit organizations and programs. The 2016 grant challenge resulted in the Council funding 17 grant applications for a total of \$4,898. The funded grants addressed a variety of programs including music, painting, festivals and celebrations, etc.

Blackstone Parks and Recreation Commission

In addition to the stewardship of its parks and athletic fields, the Parks and Recreation Commission offers a variety of programs and activities throughout the year that are primarily dedicated to youth and their families. Some of these activities include: Free Craft days, Easter Egg Hunt, pumpkin decorating, and the traditional and ever-popular Tags and Trout Program, which receives supplemental funding from the Lions and the Polish American Citizenship Club (PACC). There is more about Parks and Recreation in Section IV Open Space and Recreation Resources.

Blackstone Public Library

The Blackstone Library is described in the 2016 Annual Town Report as having “... continued dedication to be an integral part of the community where people of all ages can meet in a friendly, accessible, and comfortable environment.” Toward that end, the Library is open 35 hours per week and supports ongoing activities for adults and children. The Library also offers summer reading programs for children, young adults, and adults. To augment Town financial support, the Library has received grant funds from Dean Bank, UniBank, the local Cultural Council, and Small Libraries Network Grant. The Library also received funding through State Aid to Public Libraries. These funds, in addition to Town funds, make possible the programs and activities that provide cultural enrichment for Blackstone residents.

Blackstone Public Schools

In addition to the organizations that are focused on cultural activities, the public schools provide a variety of cultural activities for students in kindergarten through grade 12. Many of these activities are extended to the families and friends of participating students. Several of the middle school and high school music concerts are open to students’ families and friends and are streamed on their YouTube channel for viewing.

Blackstone is part of the Blackstone-Millville Regional School District and home to several schools: Blackstone-Millville Regional High School, Frederick W. Hartnett Middle School, John F. Kennedy Elementary School (grades K – 2) and Augustine F. Maloney Elementary School (grades 3 – 5). The survey respondents identified public education as one of the top two categories of importance to Blackstone within the next 15 years.

Blackstone Senior Center and the Council on Aging

The Blackstone Senior Center, located in the lower level of Town Hall, is the location of numerous activities that contribute to the cultural life of Blackstone’s residents who are 60 years of age or older. The Council on Aging, which manages the Senior Center, estimated that in 2016, approximately 2,000 of Blackstone’s 8,655 residents or 23% met this age criterion.

The Senior Center offers hot lunches and hosts a variety of programs Monday through Thursday that include bingo, fitness, painting and more. Fridays are quieter and feature Seniors Choice. There is no lunch served on Friday.

There are speakers on a variety of topics and the Senior Center also sponsors fieldtrips. In May 2017, the Council on Aging made it possible for many of Blackstone’s senior residents to experience part of the new Blackstone River Bikeway using golf carts, rather than bikes. The golf cart ride was followed with a cookout and entertainment at the Senior Center. These activities plus access to Meals on Wheels, transportation, S.H.I.N.E. (Serving the Health Information Needs of Elders), and more contribute to the culture and community of Blackstone’s senior population. (Personal interview with Laurie Keefe, Director, Council on Aging, September 13, 2017.)

Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor

While not an entity under the management of the Town of Blackstone, the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor is an important cultural feature. Including Blackstone, it involves 25



towns or cities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The Blackstone River Gorge is part of the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park. Located on County Street, it offers trails for hiking and walking. There is a dam positioned just



before the Gorge, which provides a great view of the strength of this river. While under the aegis of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor is a significant cultural asset to Blackstone and the surrounding communities.

SURVEY RESULTS

The Residents Survey addressed three categories under the heading **Natural and Cultural Resources**: Wetlands Protection, Stormwater Management and Historic Preservation. Historic Preservation was rated Excellent or Good by 55% of respondents. Wetlands Protection received a 49% Excellent or Good rating, while Stormwater Management received 48%.

Respondents were also asked to **rate the importance** of the three categories. For this prompt, a 5-point scale was used: “Very Important”, “Important”, “Neutral”, “Not very Important”, “Not at All Important”. The “Very Important” and “Important” responses were as follows: Stormwater Management 62%, Wetlands Protection 58%, and Historic Preservation 54%, slightly lower than the other two elements.

In addition to specifically focused questions, the survey touched on cultural resources through questions about services and facilities. One question asked respondents to **rate the importance of 18 town services or facilities**, including the Public School System and the library, services that are associated with cultural benefits. The *Public School System* was rated as “Very Important” by 60% of respondents. Only *Fire Protection* (76%), *Police Protection* (75%) and *Fairness of Local Taxes* (65%) had higher “Very Important” scores. The *Library* had a “Very Important” score of 39%.

When the Very Important and Important scores are combined, the results shift a bit. The *Public School System* has a total rating of 76% (60% “Very Important” and 16% “Important”) and the *Library* has a total rating of 78% (39% “Very Important” and 39% “Important”).

The Survey also asked the respondents whether they considered saving/restoring the Blackstone Viaduct a worthy cause. Of those who answered the question, 84.5% considered it a worthy cause.

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

There are four opportunity areas of consideration for Natural and Cultural Resources. These include:

- Protect and manage Blackstone’s natural and cultural resources;
- Protect and promote historic features;
- Utilize social media resources; and
- Support Senior Center programming.

Each of these opportunity areas is discussed below.

Protect and Manage Blackstone’s Natural and Cultural Resources

As the built environment continues to expand, it is important to safeguard and protect Blackstone’s key habitats, aquifers, wetlands, and surface waters that contribute to Blackstone’s quality of life through the provision of drinking water, as well as recreation opportunities. As

development in the Town increases, and climate change impacts continue, it will become increasingly important to maintain those natural resources to mitigate the impacts of both by improving the resiliency of the Town. Making increased use of renewable energy while also reducing consumption of fossil fuels is an important part of protecting natural resources.

Protect and Promote Historic Features

Blackstone's cultural resources include a number of historic properties and districts. Promoting and protecting these resources is important to the quality of life of Blackstone residents and to economic development within the Town.

Utilize Social Media Resources

Social Media, in its ever-growing and changing representations, is increasingly important to daily communication about, and the sharing of information pertaining to, life in Blackstone. Consideration of a social media plan to better support the Town and its residents is needed for information sharing among Town departments, boards, committees, and commissions.

Support Senior Citizen Programming

The Senior Center provides programs and activities for an estimated 23% of the Town's residents. With the aging of the *baby boomer* subset of the population, this percentage is projected to increase. The Senior Center provides programs and lunch Monday through Thursday. It is suggested that a review of these initiatives be undertaken with the intent of extending them to Friday.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Natural and Cultural Resources goal and its objectives are as follows:

GOAL NATURAL/CULTURAL: Protect and Enhance Historic and Cultural Resources

- a. Identify and map historic and cultural resources
- b. Promote importance of cultural resources
- c. Prepare a management plan to preserve and protect historic and cultural resources.

In addition, some of the objectives pertaining to Open Space and Recreation are also applicable including: acquire additional open space; link/expand existing open space and recreation areas; encourage use of Flexible Residential Development; and, improve access and visibility of open space and recreation resources (signage, website, maps, trail heads, etc.).

The following are recommendations related to Natural and Cultural Resources.

NATURAL/CULTURAL RECOMMENDATION 1:

CONSIDER APPOINTMENT OF CONSERVATION AGENT

A Conservation Agent could assist the Conservation Commission and other Town boards and departments in protecting Blackstone's natural resources including local habitats, wetlands and other surface water areas, and unique natural areas. The Agent could also assist in implementing new stormwater management regulations.

NATURAL/CULTURAL RECOMMENDATION 2:

PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES THROUGH ACQUISITION OF OPEN SPACE

Open space can be protected through outright acquisition, conservation easements, flexible residential development, donation and other means. Protected natural areas help preserve Town character, serve as wildlife habitat, can be used as "green infrastructure" to absorb flood waters and stormwater management in general, and provide passive recreation opportunities.

NATURAL/CULTURAL RECOMMENDATION 3:

ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT OF SOLAR AND OTHER RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES AS WELL AS CONSERVATION MEASURES

Permitting measures are already in place for large scale solar PV facilities. Measures could be taken to encourage use of solar by homeowners (e.g. a program modeled after “Solarize Mass”). Also, as a Green Community the Town should continue to take advantage of grant opportunities to continue to implement conservation measures in Town buildings and to purchase energy-efficient vehicles when available.

NATURAL/CULTURAL RECOMMENDATION 4:

PROTECT AND PROMOTE BLACKSTONE’S HISTORIC CHARACTER

As recommended in the Housing section, consider adopting design guidelines for the Village Overlay District. Consider a special permit provision to grant relief from zoning requirements to certain properties to protect historic structures.

NATURAL/CULTURAL RECOMMENDATION 5:

INCREASE VISIBILITY AND AWARENESS OF HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

A number of steps could be taken to increase awareness of Blackstone’s historic and cultural resources. These include the following:

- a. Create a map or maps of the resources to be placed on the Town website. The map(s) should be accompanied by document with a brief description of each site.
- b. Appoint a study committee to research, discuss, and implement a social media plan, including cable TV, to promote Blackstone’s historic districts and properties, as well as cultural activities.
- c. Create a community event calendar to coordinate and promote Town events.
- d. Work more closely with the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission and Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce to promote facilities and activities in Blackstone.

NATURAL/CULTURAL RECOMMENDATION 6:

SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL ON AGING AND THE SENIOR CENTER

As the population ages, the Council on Aging and Senior Center will become an increasingly important means of communicating with and serving the needs of seniors. Explore the possibility of expanding programming at the Senior Center through the provision of lunch and activities five days each week. Research possible collaborations between the Senior Center and the Blackstone-Millville Regional School District by providing lifelong learning opportunities including lectures, field trips, and other presentations and activities.