

Wachusett Corridor Smart Growth Plan

Land Use Element

I. Existing Land Use

a. Overview

The land examined in this plan covers approximately 12,566 acres (19.6 square miles) within the circle designating the corridor with the new Wachusett Station in Fitchburg as the center. The radius of the circle is 2.5 miles. This distance was chosen because it is an easily bikeable distance from the proposed Wachusett Station and is consistent with a fundamental “smart growth” principle of supporting a variety of transportation choices. (Further discussion of “smart growth” principles is presented in Section II.)

The area around the Wachusett Station is already part of an established urban community with a population of 40,318¹ and an efficient infrastructure capable of supporting further development and revitalization of the area. Most of this population lives in Fitchburg but there is also residential development in the Westminster and, to a lesser extent, the Leominster portions of the corridor. Existing development in the corridor includes a variety of industrial uses, concentrated in Fitchburg’s 2/31 Business Park and an adjacent area in Westminster, along with additional but mostly underutilized mill space along the Nashua River and Route 31, and a densely developed residential community, the Cleghorn neighborhood, northeast of the station site in Fitchburg. Establishment of the new Wachusett Station and extension of commuter rail service to the Wachusett Corridor has the potential to act as a catalyst for change and growth within the immediate area. Adoption of smart growth principles will assure that new development provides substantive benefits to the region and positively impacts the quality of life of the surrounding community.

b. Quantitative Assessment

The existing land use within the corridor as calculated through MRPC GIS is shown in Table 1 and Figure 1. As indicated in the Table, the vast majority of land use within the corridor, 8,017 acres or 63.8 percent of total area, is classified as Forest. While much of this forested land is within the Leominster State Forest, there is also substantial forested land outside of the State Forest. Within the three Wachusett communities, Forest is the dominant land use for all three. Although a substantially smaller share of total acreage, other primary land uses are Water (5.4%), High Density Residential (4.5%), and Low Density Residential (4.1). Most of the High Density Residential acreage is within Fitchburg while most of the Low Density Residential is within Westminster. It is interesting to note, given the industrial history of the corridor, that only 1.9 percent of the corridor’s acreage is classified as Industrial, with the majority of that acreage located in Fitchburg. Also, as indicated in the table, nearly 99 percent of Leominster’s land use is shown to be undeveloped and is classified as Forest, Forested Wetland, Non-Forested Wetland, Powerline/Utility, or Water. There is also a small portion of Princeton (17.2 acres) within the corridor that is classified as Forest, Water, or Water-Based Recreation.

¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census

Table1: Existing Land Use	Acres within Wachusett Corridor				% of Area within Wachusett Corridor			
Land Use Description	Entire Corridor	Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster	Entire Corridor	Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster
Brushland/Successional	13.7	11.3		2.5	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Cemetery	66.9	56.8		10.1	0.5%	1.1%	0.0%	0.2%
Commercial	112.1	81.0		31.2	0.9%	1.6%	0.0%	0.6%
Cropland	119.7	30.6		89.1	1.0%	0.6%	0.0%	1.6%
Forest	8017.1	2689.4	1444.7	3869.0	63.8%	52.6%	76.3%	69.8%
Forested Wetland	328.5	77.4	109.7	141.4	2.6%	1.5%	5.8%	2.6%
Golf Course	109.1	108.1		1.0	0.9%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%
High Density Residential	568.0	559.5		8.5	4.5%	10.9%	0.0%	0.2%
Industrial	242.0	197.2	2.6	42.2	1.9%	3.9%	0.1%	0.8%
Junkyard	5.7		5.7		0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%
Low Density Residential	516.5	230.2	5.5	280.8	4.1%	4.5%	0.3%	5.1%
Medium Density Residential	174.0	120.8		53.1	1.4%	2.4%	0.0%	1.0%
Mining	78.8	13.6		65.2	0.6%	0.3%	0.0%	1.2%
Multi-Family Residential	302.5	281.9		20.7	2.4%	5.5%	0.0%	0.4%
Non-Forested Wetland	149.9	38.7	23.3	87.8	1.2%	0.8%	1.2%	1.6%
Open Land	213.7	61.7	1.5	150.6	1.7%	1.2%	0.1%	2.7%
Participation Recreation	60.1	32.1		28.0	0.5%	0.6%	0.0%	0.5%
Pasture	48.3	29.2	2.8	16.3	0.4%	0.6%	0.2%	0.3%
Powerline/Utility	204.0	127.3	35.5	41.2	1.6%	2.5%	1.9%	0.7%
Transitional	116.1	48.0		68.2	0.9%	0.9%	0.0%	1.2%
Transportation	146.8	79.5		67.2	1.2%	1.6%	0.0%	1.2%
Urban Public/Institutional	70.4	65.7	2.8	1.8	0.6%	1.3%	0.1%	0.0%
Very Low Density Residential	107.9	32.3	5.5	70.1	0.9%	0.6%	0.3%	1.3%
Waste Disposal	105.9	27.1	0.2	78.6	0.8%	0.5%	0.0%	1.4%
Water	683.2	116.3	254.1	310.6	5.4%	2.3%	13.4%	5.6%
Water-Based Recreation	5.4			4.2	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Total²	12566.4	5115.8	1893.9	5539.5	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

² Note: There is approximately 17.2 acres of land within the Wachusett Corridor that are within the Town of Princeton. This includes 13.9 acres of Forest, 2.1 acres of Water, and 1.2 acres of Water-Based Recreation acreage that are not shown in this table within the community breakdowns.

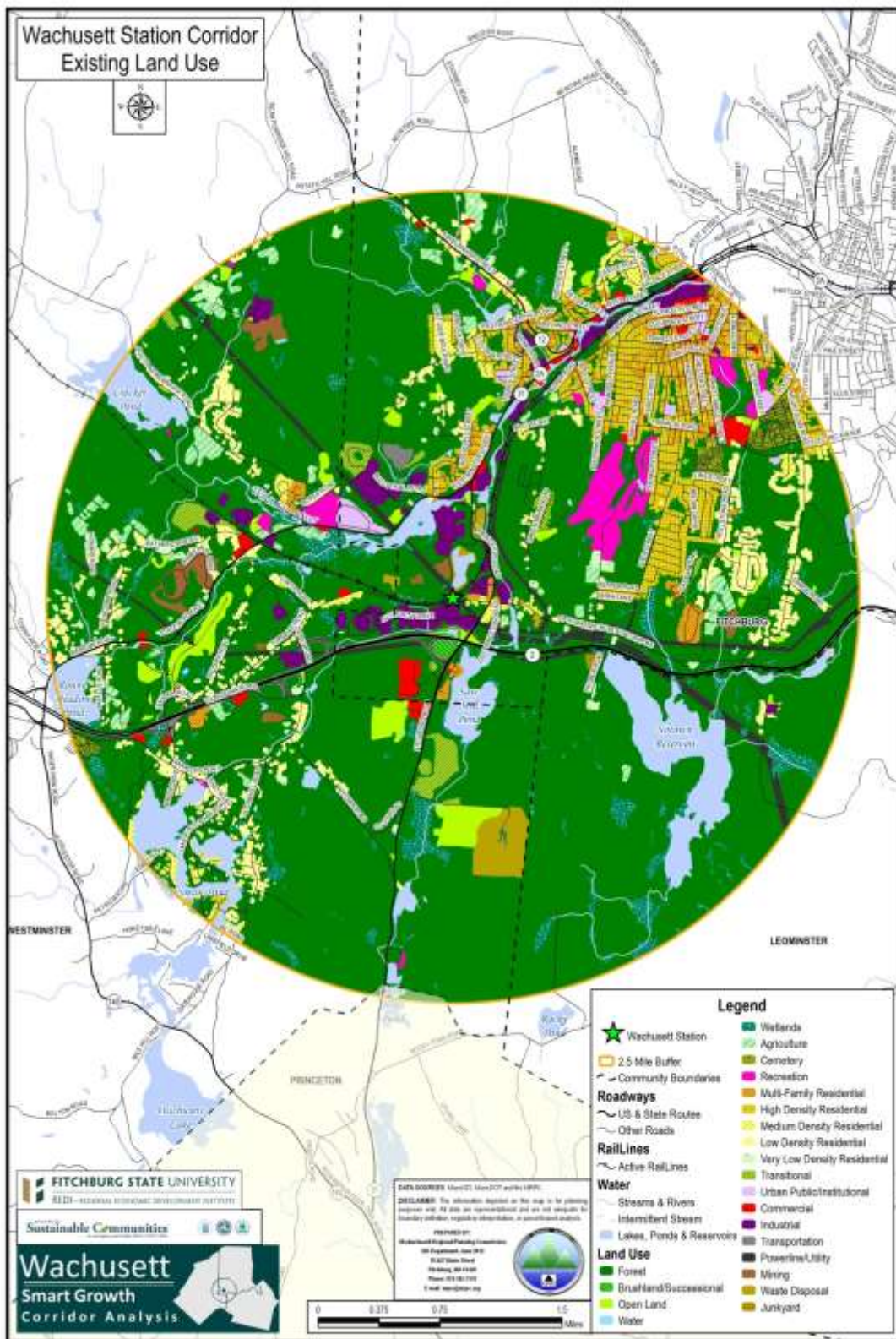


Figure 1: Existing Land Use in Wachusett Corridor

II. Smart Growth/Sustainable Development Concepts

According to the Wachusett Extension Environmental Assessment, prepared during the planning phase of the Wachusett Station project:

“Many areas in the Montachusett region are difficult to access due to limited transportation options, artificially capping the region’s growth potential. Workers seeking affordable housing options west of Fitchburg face a difficult commute to work outside of the region. This condition has an adverse economic effect on employers in metropolitan Boston as well, by limiting their potential labor market due to the distance and the associated excessive commute times caused by an inadequate transportation system. Limited travel options adversely affect the Montachusett region; despite the region’s relatively affordable housing market, compared to other regions with better transportation alternatives, the Montachusett region is not able to compete economically, and will not be able to until its transportation constraints are resolved. Finally, the lack of “reverse commute” options hinders access for potential workers along the corridor to access employment centers in the region, and limits economic development in the 231 Industrial Park and other underutilized commercial and industrial space in the City of Fitchburg and neighboring municipalities.”³

Clearly, the new Wachusett Station and extension of commuter rail service has regional implications for transportation, housing, economic development, and overall quality of life throughout North Central Massachusetts. Each of these are issues addressed by “Smart Growth,” by supporting the environment, the economy, and the community through an approach to development that is based on interconnections between environmental protection, social equity, public health, and economic sustainability.

According to the Smart Growth Network, a coalition of organizations and agencies including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the American Planning Association, the Urban Land Institute, and the Natural Resources Defense Council, among others, the principles of “smart growth” are:

- Mix land uses
- Take advantage of compact building design
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
- Create walkable neighborhoods
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- Provide a variety of transportation choices
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions⁴

³ Federal Transit Administration, Wachusett Extension Environmental Assessment, June 22, 2010, Fitchburg MA, p. 1-4

⁴ Smart Growth Network, “This is Smart Growth”

The Wachusett Corridor Smart Growth Planning process has incorporated these principles throughout its planning process and embodies these principles in the recommended strategies addressing the various components of the overall Corridor plan.

According to the Smart Growth Network, “when communities choose smart growth strategies, they can create new neighborhoods and maintain existing ones that are attractive, convenient, safe, and healthy. They can foster design that encourages social, civic, and physical activity. They can protect the environment while stimulating economic growth. Most of all, they can create more choices for residents, workers, visitors, children, families, single people, and older adults – choices in where to live, how to get around, and how to interact with the people around them.” The establishment of the Wachusett Station and its supportive services can act as a catalyst to transform the surrounding community consistent with smart growth principles, providing a variety of benefits to the overall region.

III. Current Development

a. Attributes of the Corridor

As discussed above, the new Wachusett Station will be located within the existing 231 Industrial Park in Fitchburg and the new layover facility will be located in the Westminster Business Park. The 231 Industrial Park is an older industrial park containing a number of industrial and warehouse facilities which, to a large extent, are or were related to paper production. Most properties are occupied and are currently in operation although a large block of land, formerly owned by ChemDesign and consisting of 10 buildings, is currently vacant. The Westminster Business Park is largely undeveloped at this time although it is being actively marketed. In general, much of the industrial development in the corridor is dated with little new industrial development in the area since the early 1990’s despite some turnover. On the other hand, as discussed below, there has been substantial residential development in the corridor in the past 10 years. In Fitchburg, this new development includes a new subdivision on Bilota Way east of Westminster Street, a single-family subdivision on Roosevelt Street, and condominiums on Greenbrier Road and Revolution Drive. In Westminster, new residential development includes single-family homes on Kimberly Lane and a new 55+ adult community, the Village at Old Mill, on Old Mill Circle.

Despite this residential growth, there is a lack of supporting commercial development within the corridor to serve both current residents of the area and commuters who would utilize Wachusett Station. As a result, most purchases of goods and services by area residents occur outside of the corridor. As of January 2011, in the area within the 2.5 mile radius around the Wachusett Station there are a total of 698,031 square feet of vacant commercial space for sale or for lease⁵. Out of this total, there are 136,000 square feet of vacant mill buildings. These vacant buildings demonstrate that there is infrastructure already in place but that the area is in need of revitalization. The addition of the commuter rail station will help enhance the area by establishing an activity center that will bring people into the area and provide greater choices for efficient and sustainable transportation to serve local and regional travel needs. However, there is a need for convenient commercial and retail services to be

⁵ Source: The Foster Report, January 2011

available for these commuters and potential new residents within the corridor to minimize their need to seek these services elsewhere, resulting in excess travel and wasted time.

c. Residential Building Trends

As indicated in the Housing Element of this plan and the Table 2 below, the housing stock within the Wachusett Corridor grew significantly over the last decade (16.55%), significantly outpacing the growth in population (7.7%) with most growth probably taking place from the years 2000 up until 2007 when the national recession began. The housing stock within the study area and all of its segments (Fitchburg in particular) grew more than all three communities in their entirety and at a rate greater than the overall Montachusett Region average of 9%. It should be noted that during this time span housing unit growth also outpaced population growth in all three communities in their entirety. However, it should also be noted that this trend may have reversed in the past few years: According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 2010 U.S. Census, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, the average household size decreased in Fitchburg, Leominster, and Westminster from 2000 to 2010 but INCREASED from 2010 to 2012.

Table 2: Study Area and Study Area Community Housing Unit Growth

	Wachusett Corridor				Entire Community		
Year	Full Study Area	Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster	Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster
2000	5298	4473	10	815	16001	16974	2694
2010	6175	5246	11	918	17117	17873	2960
% Growth 2000 to 2010	16.55%	17.28%	10%	12.64%	6.97%	5.30%	9.87%

Source: U.S. Census

d. Build-out Analysis and Development Potential

Environmental data is a key component to the development potential analysis. Certain environmental elements are considered inappropriate for development and can be either defined as “Absolute Constraints” or “Partial Constraints” for the purposes of the development potential analysis. Absolute constraints are defined as water (as coded by Land Use data), 100 Foot DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) RPA (River Protection Act) Buffers, Slopes >26%, and Permanently Protected Open Space. Partial Constraints are defined as FEMA Flood Zones 100 and 500 year as well as DEP Wetlands. Absolute constraints are completely unsuitable for development, while partial constraints could be developed if pursued in an appropriate manner.

Once the constraints have been determined and defined, the next step is to identify lands that have already been developed. Based on MassGIS Land Use data the categories that are included in “Developed Lands” are participation, spectator, and water recreation, residential, commercial, industrial, transportation, waste disposal, power lines, cemeteries, and urban public/institutional.

The final category that is determined is “Future Developable Lands”. In order to determine what has potential for development GIS tools are utilized and involve combining all of the constraints and currently developed lands. The result produced is a new coverage indicating lands that are developable based on areas that do not have any development or constraint.

The development potential map shown as Figure 2 depicts all of these data categories (Absolute Constraints, Partial Constraints, Developed Lands, and Future Developable Lands) and provides information for local officials to identify the location and current zoning of future developable lands. GIS tools offer additional useful information by calculating the acreage for each category (Absolute Constraints, Partial Constraints, Developed Lands, and Future Developable Lands) by zoning district. The data provided by the GIS phase of the analysis is then given to the planner who further investigates the future developable lands within the given zoning districts.

Table 3: LEOMINSTER - Environmental and Development Characteristics by Zoning District within the Leominster Land Area of the Wachusett Corridor Study

Zoning District	Undevelopable Acres (Absolute Constraints)	Developed Acres	Developable Acres with Partial Constraints
Rural Residence/Agricultural	1704.76	52.15	884.17
Sub-Total All Residential District	1704.76	52.15	884.17
Percent	64.55%	1.97%	33.48%
SUBTOTAL ALL ZONING DISTRICTS	1704.76	52.15	884.17
PERCENT	64.55%	1.97%	33.48%

As shown in Table 3 above, all land in the City of Leominster Wachusett Corridor Study Area is zoned Rural Residence/Agricultural. 1,704.76 acres are undevelopable or categorized as being absolutely constrained, a little more than 52 acres has already been developed, and 884.17 acres is developable with partial constraints – however, it should be noted that according to GIS calculations but not included in Table 1, developable acres without partial constraints is less than half that number (438.66 acres).

Table 4: WESTMINSTER - Environmental and Development Characteristics by Zoning District within the Westminster Land Area of the Wachusett Corridor Study

Zoning District	Undevelopable Acres (Absolute Constraints)	Developed Acres	Developable Acres with Partial Constraints
Commercial - 1 Map Label 1	23.59	58.74	201.67
Commercial - 11 Map Label 1	.01	7.34	2.12
Sub-Total All Commercial District	23.6	66.08	203.79
Percent	8.04%	22.52%	69.44%
Industrial - 1 Map Label 2	63.14	55	487.39
Industrial – 1 Map Label 3	0	4.02	13.58
Industrial - 11 Map Label 1	33.73	9.12	166.40
Sub-Total All Industrial District	96.87	68.14	667.37
Percent	11.63%	8.19%	80.18%
Residential – 1 Map Label 1	458.78	343.15	1505.93
Residential - 11 Map Label 1	264.04	184.56	1019.21
Residential – 11 Label 2	992.13	79.77	204.57
Sub-Total All Residential District	1714.95	607.48	2729.71
Percent	33.95%	12.02%	54.03%
SUBTOTAL ALL ZONING DISTRICTS	1835.42	741.7	3600.87
PERCENT	29.71%	12.0%	58.29%

Table 4 above indicates that, in its entirety, about 58.29% of land in the Westminster Wachusett Corridor Study Area is available for residential, commercial and industrial development; about 29.71% is undevelopable (absolute constraints) and 12% is already developed. Most of the developable land is within the residential districts - the R-1 District has the most developable land with partial constraints at 1,505.93 acres followed by the R – 11 district Map Label 1 (1019.21 acres with partial constraints) and the R - 11 District Map Label 2 (204.57 acres with partial constraints) for a total of 2,729.71 acres with partial constraints – or, according to GIS calculations but not part of Table 4), about 2,200.82 acres without partial constraints.

About 11.63% of both Industrial Districts combined is undevelopable (absolute constraints), 8.19% or 68.14 acres has been developed, and 80.18% (667.37 acres) is developable with partial constraints. Largest tracks of developable land with partial constraints in the Industrial Districts include Industrial – 1 Map Label 2 (487.39 acres), Industrial – 11 Map Label 1 (166.40 acres), followed much further behind by Industrial – 1 Map Label 3 (13.58 acres). In terms of commercially zoned land, developable land with partial constraints in Commercial – 1 Map Label 1 is 201.67 acres (184.6 without partial constraints) followed by Commercial 11 Map Label 1 at 2.12 acres.

Table 5 on the following page indicates that, in its entirety, about 55.81% of land in the Fitchburg Wachusett Corridor Study Area is available for residential, commercial and industrial development; about 12.77% is undevelopable (absolute constraints) and 31.42% is already developed. Similar to Westminster, most of the developable land is within the residential districts - the Rural Residence Zoning District has by far the most developable land with partial constraints at 1,614.29 acres followed much further behind by Residence A-1 (425.28 acres with partial constraints), the Residence A- 2 District (367.16 acres with partial constraints), the Residence B District (41.27 acres with partial constraints), and finally the Residence C District at 2.26 acres for a total of 2450.26 acres with partial constraints (or, according to GIS calculations but not included in Table 5, about 2,245.49 acres without partial constraints).

About 289.98 acres of both Industrial Districts combined is undevelopable (absolute constraints), 21.13% or 221.49 acres has been developed, and 51.19% (536.49 acres) is developable with partial constraints – or, according to GIS calculations not included in Table 5, about 315.2 acres without partial constraints. The industrial zoning district with the most developable land with partial constraints is Industrial – Map Label 1 (333.98 acres) followed further behind by Limited Industrial map labels 1, 2, and 3 (67.91 acres, 55.63 acres, and 79.26 acres respectively). In terms of commercially zoned land, developable land with partial constraints totals 21.37 acres with 55.2 acres already developed, and 9.4 acres undevelopable (absolute constraints).

Table 5: FITCHBURG - Environmental and Development Characteristics by Zoning District within the Fitchburg portion of the Wachusett Corridor Study Area

Zoning District	Undevelopable Acres (Absolute Constraints)	Developed Acres	Developable Acres with Partial Constraints
Central Business District Map Label 1	0.12	15.61	1.68
Neighborhood Business District Map Label 1	0.01	17.12	3.81
Neighborhood Business District Map Label 2	4.07	15.9	7.57
Commercial & Automotive – Map Label 1	5.20	6.65	8.31
Sub-Total All Commercial District	9.4	55.28	21.37
Percent	10.92%	64.24%	24.84%
Industrial Label 1	172.93	252.51	333.98
Limited Industrial – Map Label 1	20.57	76.81	67.91
Limited Industrial – Map Label 2	73.0	39.93	55.63
Limited Industrial – Map Label 3	23.48	50.21	79.26
Sub-Total All Industrial District	289.98	221.49	536.49
Percent	27.67%	21.13%	51.19%
Residence A-1 – Map Label 1	19.87	328.36	279.92
Residence A-1 – Map Label 2	2.7	0.83	45.91
Residence A-1 – Map Label 3	41.8	19.30	95.90
Residence A-1 – Map Label 4		26.96	3.55

Residence A – 2 Map Label 1		3.75	2.17
Residence A – 2 Map Label 2	7.25	90.7	69.29
Residence A – 2 Map Label 3	5.48	67.11	95.70
Residence A – 2 Map Label 4	123.82	358.36	200.00
Residence B – Map Label 1	0.34	103.63	8.72
Residence B – Map Label 2		31.15	4.14
Residence B – Map Label 3	0.0	10.94	3.50
Residence B – Map Label 4	10.45	66.46	18.40
Residence B – Map Label 5		33.72	6.51
Residence C – Map Label 1	0.06	87.89	2.26
Rural Residence – Map Label 1	1.36	51.24	561.53
Rural Residence – Map Label 2	66.54	61.55	190.01
Rural Residence – Map Label 3	43.81	59.09	738.44
Rural Residence – Map Label 4	65.52	15.73	124.31
Sub-Total All Residential District	389.0	1416.77	2450.26
Percent	9.14%	33.29%	57.57%
SUBTOTAL ALL ZONING DISTRICTS	688.38	1693.54	3008.12
PERCENT	12.77%	31.42%	55.81%

Source: MRPC Environmental and Development Characteristics Analysis for the Wachusett Corridor, Fall 2013.

Table 6: WACHUSETT CORRIDOR - Environmental and Development Characteristics by Zoning District within the Wachusett Corridor Study Area

Zoning District	Undevelopable Acres (Absolute Constraints)	Developed Acres	Developable Acres with Partial Constraints
Sub-Total All Fitchburg Commercial District	9.4	55.28	21.37
Sub-Total All Leominster Commercial District	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sub-Total All Westminster Commercial District	23.6	66.08	203.79
Sub-Total <u>Wachusett Corridor</u> Land Zoned Commercial	33.0	121.36	225.16
Percent	8.69%	31.98%	59.33%
Sub-Total All Fitchburg Industrial District	289.98	221.49	536.49
Sub-Total All Leominster Industrial District	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sub-Total All Westminster Industrial District	96.87	68.14	667.37
Sub-Total <u>Wachusett Corridor</u> Land Zoned Industrial	386.85	285.61	1190.28
Percent	20.77%	15.33%	63.9%
Sub-Total All Fitchburg Residential District	389.0	1416.77	2450.26
Sub-Total All Leominster Residential District	1704.76	52.15	884.17

Sub-Total All Westminster Residential District	1714.95	607.48	2729.71
Sub-Total Wachusett Corridor Land Zoned Residential	3808.71	2076.40	6064.14
Percent	31.87%	17.38%	50.75%
TOTAL ALL WACHUSETT CORRIDOR ZONING DISTRICTS	4232.5	2483.38	7485.29
PERCENT	29.8%	17.5%	52.7%

Source: MRPC Environmental and Development Characteristics Analysis for the Wachusett Corridor, Fall 2013.

Table 6 and the Development Potential Map shown as Figure 2 indicates that, in its entirety, about 52.7% of the Wachusett Corridor area is available for residential, commercial and or industrial development; about 29.8% is undevelopable (absolute constraints) and 17.5% is already developed. The vast majority of developable land is within the residential districts (about 6,064 developable acres with partial constraints). About 20.8% of the Industrial Districts within the Wachusett Corridor is undevelopable, 15.33% or 285.61 acres has been developed, and 63.9% (1190.28 acres) is developable (with partial constraints). There is about 225.16 acres of developable land in commercial districts (with partial constraints) in the corridor. About 121.36 acres has been developed, and 33 acres is not developable (absolute constraints).

Besides having ample developable land for residential development, the amount of developable land when looking at the non-residential and mixed use districts in their entirety is about 1,415.44 acres (with partial constraints), much more than that occupied by existing development (406.97 acres) and considerably more than undevelopable acres with absolute constraints (419.85 acres), so there does seem to be some land, if used efficiently, that could be utilized to promote economic development. It is important that appropriate design guidelines are in place to retain community character along with adequate performance standards to protect the environment and apply smart growth principles.

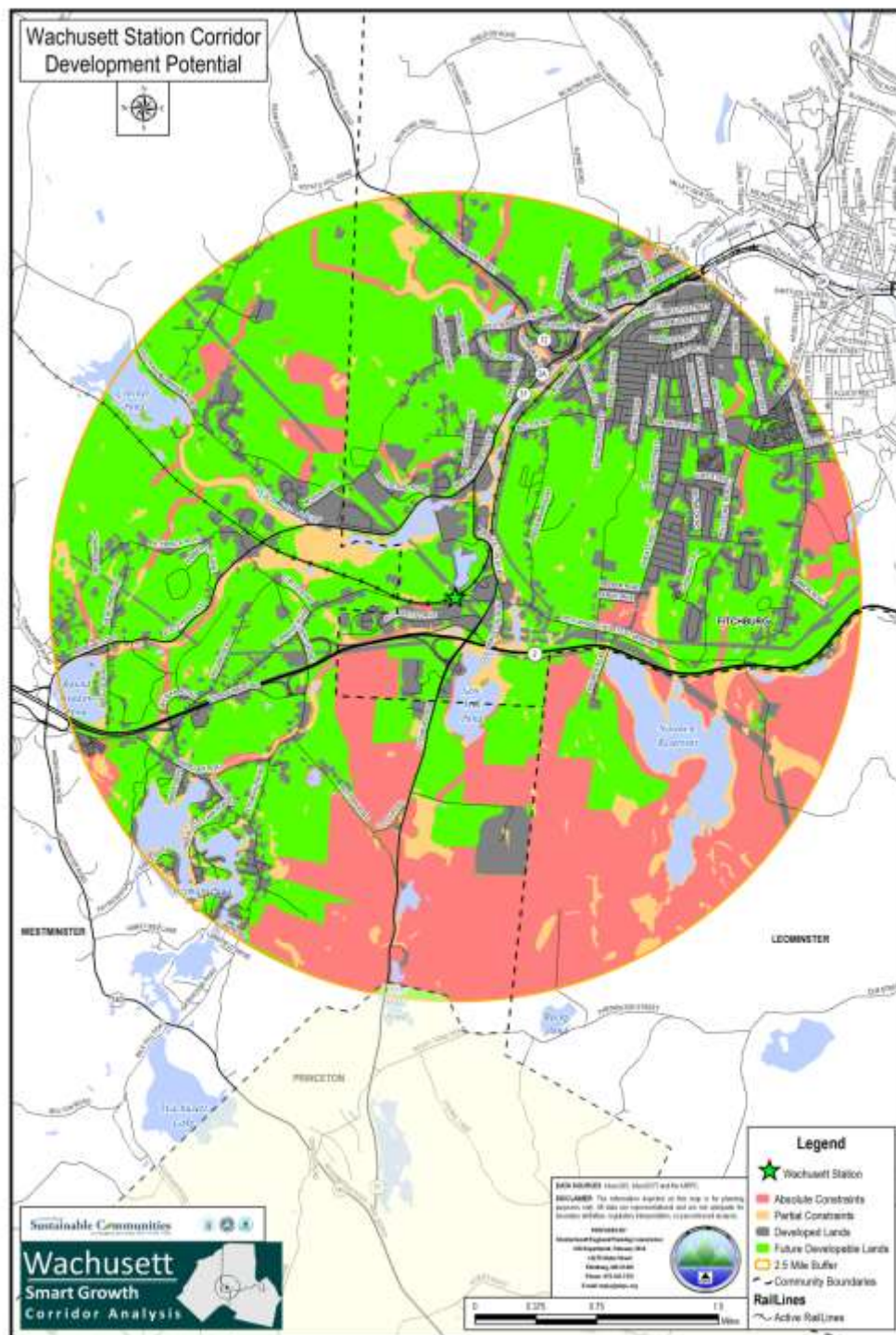


Figure 2: Development Potential in Wachusett Corridor [REPLACE]

IV. Water and Sewer Infrastructure

Relevant to current and future land use in the Wachusett Corridor is the availability of water and sewers to accommodate potential future development. According to the City of Fitchburg website⁶, Fitchburg obtains its drinking water from numerous surface water reservoirs. One primary series is located in the northern section of the City and consists of the Falulah, Lovell, and Ashby Reservoirs. Another series is located south of the City, including the neighboring town of Westminster, and consists of Wachusett Lake, Bickford Reservoir, Mare Meadow Reservoir, and Meetinghouse Pond. Additional reservoirs (Scott Reservoir and Overlook Reservoir) have served other areas of the City. To cost effectively treat the existing surface water supplies, the City contracted with Earth Tech for the design of two independent treatment facilities – the Regional Water Filtration Facility near Meetinghouse Pond and the Falulah Water Filtration Facility located near Falulah/Lovell Reservoir. Designed to meet all the drinking water demands of the City, the Falulah Water Filtration Facility processes 6 million gallons per day (mgd) while the Regional Water Filtration Facility processes 12 mgd, with potential expansion to 15 mgd in the future.

The portion of Leominster within the Wachusett Corridor has experienced limited development and is largely within the Leominster State Forest. There is no municipal water or sewer infrastructure located in this area and existing development is dependent on private wells and septic.

In Westminster, the primary means of dealing with wastewater is through on-site septic storage for the majority of the town. The remaining 19 percent (January 2005)⁷ is tied to the waste system to Fitchburg. Westminster does not have its own treatment facility and shares water and sewage resources with Fitchburg. In 1998, the Town of Westminster reached an agreement with the City of Fitchburg to siphon off water supply from the vast Fitchburg network, which includes seven reservoirs and two water treatment facilities. Westminster sends its wastewater to Fitchburg for treatment through the Whitman River Pump Station. As of 2000, Westminster was able to discharge 320,000 gallons per day of “normal strength wastewater,” with provisions for an overflow of 250,000 gallons per day of overflow. Until recently the system has been highly beneficial to both Fitchburg and Westminster, but with the introduction of the Wachusett station, and the potential for new industrial development within the Corridor, Westminster is finding its sewer capacity to be inadequate to accommodate further growth.

Figure 3 illustrates existing water and sewer lines within the Wachusett Corridor. Note that water lines within the City of Fitchburg are not shown due to apparent problems with the accuracy of the City’s available mapping.

Wastewater Issues in Westminster

The town of Westminster’s Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan, in July 2007, stated:

Simply put, the lack of capacity at the Whitman River Pump Station is THE single biggest impediment to economic development in Westminster. Without a substantial upgrade of the

⁶ http://www.ci.fitchburg.ma.us/government/water_division/regional-water-treatment-plant/default.cfm

⁷ Draft Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan Westminster)

pump station, new buildings in the Town Center cannot tie into the municipal sewer system and existing buildings cannot expand if they will generate additional wastewater. Thus, the capacity issue hinders all types of development in Town Center (commercial and residential). Without an upgrade of the pump station or other means of increasing the capacity of the sewer system ... new development cannot take place in the Town Center and the heart of Westminster will be left to stagnate. Additionally, the sewer system cannot accommodate additional sewer flow from new or expanded industrial or commercial buildings in the Town's two largest 43D Priority Development sites... The Westminster Business Park Priority Development site consists of plans for the eventual construction of 1.57 million square feet of new industrial floor space on 312 acres of land. While the Town is committed to hosting new economic development in the Town Center and its two largest Priority Development Sites, new development at these locations is at a standstill until the Whitman River Pump Station is upgraded. The Town should continue to search out grant/loan opportunities that will fund the sewer upgrade project (such as the MassWorks infrastructure grant program and the Rural Development infrastructure loan/grant program) and continue to press its case to our legislative delegation and State funding entities.

To remedy the situation the Town needs to pursue one or more of the following options: 1) the capacity of the pump station must be upgraded; 2) a second pump station is needed to increase the overall capacity of the line; or 3) Westminster must install its own water treatment station. One option discussed in the past involved regionalizing wastewater treatment with the Town of Ashburnham, which is in a similar situation as Westminster but utilizes the City of Gardner's wastewater treatment facilities. A regional plant would allow Westminster and Ashburnham to build higher capacity networks, and relieve stresses on the Gardner and Fitchburg systems. Westminster does not have the land available to build a plant due to DEP restrictions on land use, so a proposed plant in Ashburnham would be a potentially feasible joint venture for the communities to ensure their future. However further investigation of this approach found it to be cost prohibitive.

According to Westminster Economic Development Committee (EDC) meeting minutes for February 12, 2014, the Westminster DPW now has plans to remove the Whitman River Pump station and replace it with a three barrel siphon under the Whitman River. This will have the effect of allowing the town to follow through with its Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan, and potentially accommodate up to 50 years of new development. This would also eliminate the need for a second pump station or upgrading the existing pump infrastructure. Furthermore, this allows for the increase in the diameter of the existing gravity sewer system into the Fitchburg plants. However, this plan does come with a potential \$4.9 million price tag.

To fund this plan, the Westminster DPW plans to go to a future town meeting to seek the Town's approval to apply for a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) infrastructure grant/loan package. The grant would fund approximately 30% of the project, and a 40-year loan could cover the remainder. USDA assistance would not preclude the Town from seeking funding from MassWorks as well, assuming that the plans are ready and fully permitted by the time of the next MassWorks grant round in August, 2014.

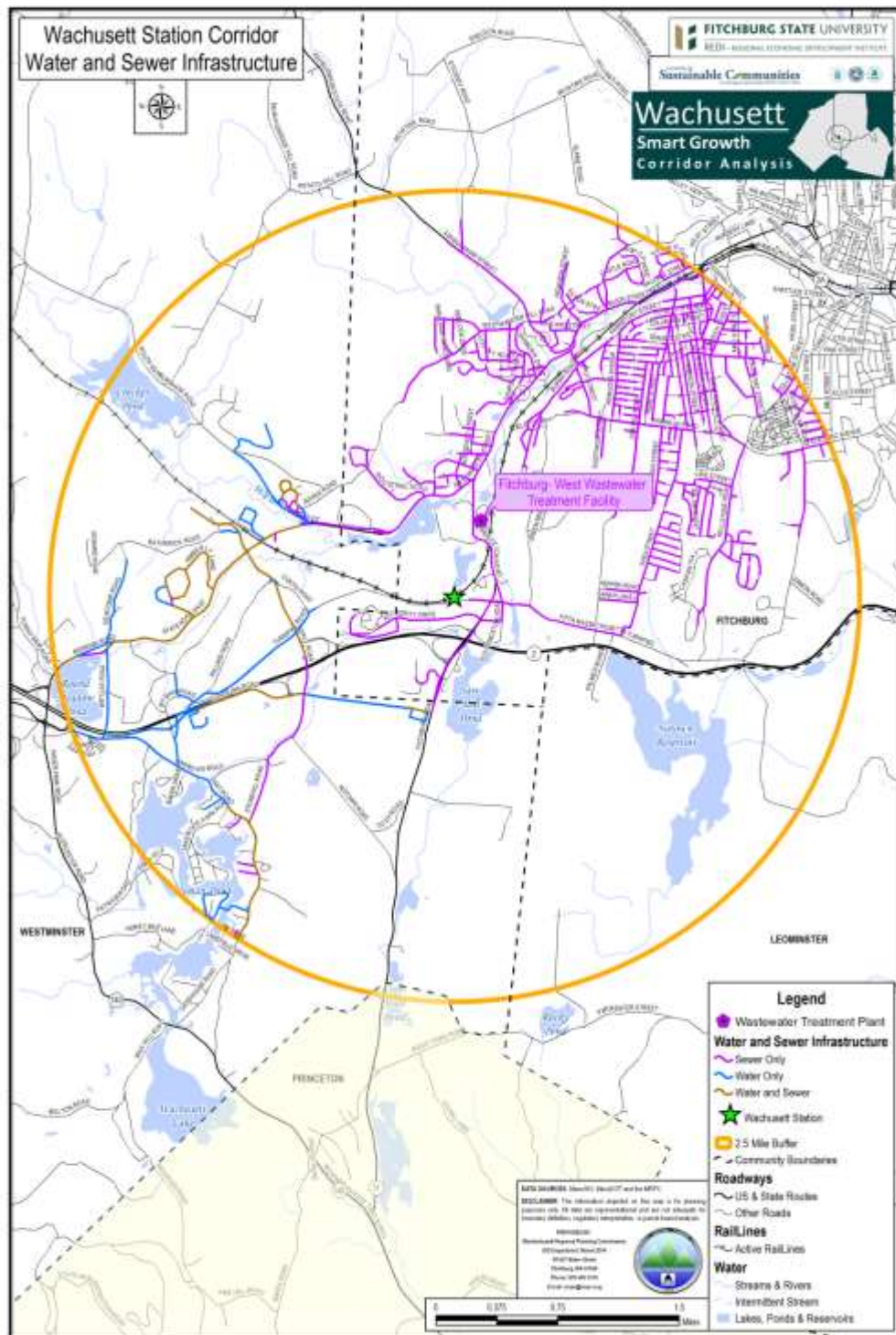


Figure 3: Water and Sewer Infrastructure

V. Zoning Districts/Current Zoning Overview

Figure 4 (at the end of this section) illustrates existing zoning districts for each of the three communities in the Wachusett Corridor. Table 7, below, provides a summary matrix showing the zoning district classifications that are currently within each community. Note that in the City of Fitchburg, certain “Overlay” districts allow for uses in areas with other *underlying* use and dimensional specifications.

Table 7: Zoning/Overlay Districts with in Wachusett Corridor

Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster
Light Industrial (LI)	Rural Residence & Agriculture (RR)	Residential -II
Industrial (I)	Water Supply Protection District (WSP)	Industrial - I
Residential (RR) & (RB)		Industrial -II
Mill Conversion Overlay District (MCOD)		
Priority Development Site Overlay District (PDS)		

In Table 8, various use categories were selected from each community’s tables of use regulations that generally correlate with Smart Growth Principles to show if this type of development is currently allowed, prohibited or regulated by special permit within each of the Wachusett communities. Current dimensional standards are shown for reference and comparison in Table 9.

Table 8: Wachusett Corridor Uses that Correlate with Smart Growth Principles

City of Fitchburg

Uses	Zoning/Overlay Districts					
	LI	I	RR	RB	MCOD	PDS
Multi-Family	N	N	N	SP	SP	SP
Retail Sales	N	N	N	SP	SP	SP
Restaurant	SP	SP	N	SP	SP	SP
Industrial (Manufacturing)	Y	Y	N	N	N	SP
Mixed Use on a Lot	N	N	N	N	SP	SP
Mixed Use w/in a building	N	N	N	N	SP	SP
Open Space Preservation	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP

Town of Leominster

Uses	Zoning/Overlay Districts
	Residential (RR)
Multi-Family	N
Retail Sales	N
Restaurant	N
Industrial (Manufacturing)	N
Mixed Use on a Lot	N
Mixed Use w/in a building	N
Open Space Preservation	SP

Town of Westminster

Uses	Zoning/Overlay Districts		
	Residential -II	Industrial - I	Industrial -II
Multi-Family	N	N	N
Retail Sales	N	Y	Y
Restaurant	N	SP	SP
Industrial (Manufacturing)	N	Y	Y
Mixed Use on a Lot	N	N	N
Mixed Use w/in a building	N	N	N
Open Space Preservation	SP	SP	SP

Table 9: Dimensional Standards

Districts	Lot Area	Frontage	Lot Width	Front Setback	Side Setback	Rear Setback	Height
City of Fitchburg							
LI	65,000 w/out sewer	20	20	50	50	50	75
	43,560						
I	65,000 w/out sewer	20	20	20	25	20	75
	NONE						
RR	65,000 w/out sewer	175	50	40	25	50	36
	30,000						

RB	65,000 w/out sewer	80	50	25	15	30	40
	10,000						
City of Leominster							
Residential (RR) Not Sewered	43,560	175	130	30	20	40	30
Town of Westminster							
Residential -II	60,000	175	N/A	30	15	20	35
Industrial - I	40,000	200	N/A	80	30	50	50
Industrial -II	40,000	200	N/A	80	30	50	50

City of Fitchburg Zoning Overview

With commuter rail service soon to be initiated to Wachusett Station, the City of Fitchburg has an opportunity to facilitate the establishment of a dynamic place to live, shop, work, and play in the Wachusett Corridor. However, current zoning within this area of Fitchburg could be a limiting factor. Table 2 shows a handful of uses that correlate with the Smart Growth Principles for districts located within the corridor. Most of these uses are not allowed or are allowed only by special permit. It is important to understand that these zoning restrictions would be a deterrent to potential developers or small business start-ups which may be attracted to the area. Another aspect to consider is the dimensional standards for the area. To create a more walkable environment the City may want to consider standards that mimic those of other commercial districts within the City, allowing for smaller lots with reduced setback from the street. To overcome these limiting factors the City of Fitchburg should consider conducting an extensive Zoning Study to see how the area's zoning could be adjusted to foster redevelopment efforts. As past public meetings and forums have indicated, there is a lack of small retail and restaurants within walking distance of residential areas within the community. As shown in the use table, these uses are either prohibited in certain districts within the corridor or require a special permit. Enabling a mix of these uses and reducing the need for motorized transportation for their access is supportive of Smart Growth. Changes in allowable uses, dimensional standards, and design guidelines can be considered for the Fitchburg portion of the corridor would enable this kind of new development and provide the ability to change the character of the area to better serve area residents and commuters who will be drawn to Wachusett Station.

City of Leominster Zoning Overview

The portion of Leominster within the Corridor is primarily zoned residential with a Water Supply Overlay. The preservation of Open Space is a key Smart Growth principle to be considered for this area. All three communities located in the corridor have adopted some sort of Open Space Preservation Bylaw such as cluster development. This is a good first step in preserving open space although all three communities require that a special permit must be acquired for this use. The three communities may want to consider a less cumbersome method such as site plan review or review done through their Subdivision Control Law, which could provide an incentive to attract developers to this method of

development. Further, Leominster may want to expand the provision to include “Approval Not Required (ANR) as well, as Fitchburg has done, to target more potential developments.

Another zoning provision the City may want to consider is a Transfer of Development Right (TDR) Bylaw. TDR is described on the State’s website as follows:

TDR is a regulatory strategy that harnesses private market forces to accomplish two smart growth objectives. First, open space is permanently protected for water supply, agricultural, habitat, recreational, or other purposes via the transfer of some or all of the development that would otherwise have occurred in these sensitive places to more suitable locations. Second, other locations, such as city and town centers or vacant and underutilized properties, become more vibrant and successful as the development potential from the protected resource areas is transferred to them. In essence, development rights are "transferred" from one district (the "sending district") to another (the "receiving district"). Communities using TDR are generally shifting development densities within the community to achieve both open space and economic goals without changing their overall development potential. While less common, TDR can also be used for preservation of historic resources.⁸

Town of Westminster Zoning Overview

The area of Westminster within the corridor in proximity to the Wachusett Station is not nearly as walkable as the portion of the corridor located in Fitchburg. This area of Westminster is primarily zoned for Industrial and Residential. As shown in Table 8, the Industrial designated districts do allow for retail sales and restaurants which do correlate with the findings from public forums that there is an unmet need in the corridor for such amenities. However, Westminster could further adjust the area’s zoning to meet upcoming needs of the Wachusett Station and the Great Wolf Resort. This area in Westminster has close proximity to Route 2. Therefore, zoning for Highway Business may be a suitable option to consider, providing for such amenities for small commercial facilities such as restaurants, banks, gas stations, and other small establishments that are appropriate for a Highway Business District. The Industrial District can still exist just behind the commercial district to enable the Town to maintain some industrial uses within the area. Given impending changes to the area, it is recommended that the community take a close look at the uses, dimensional standards, and design standards in the vicinity of this new development.

⁸ http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/pages/mod-tdr.html

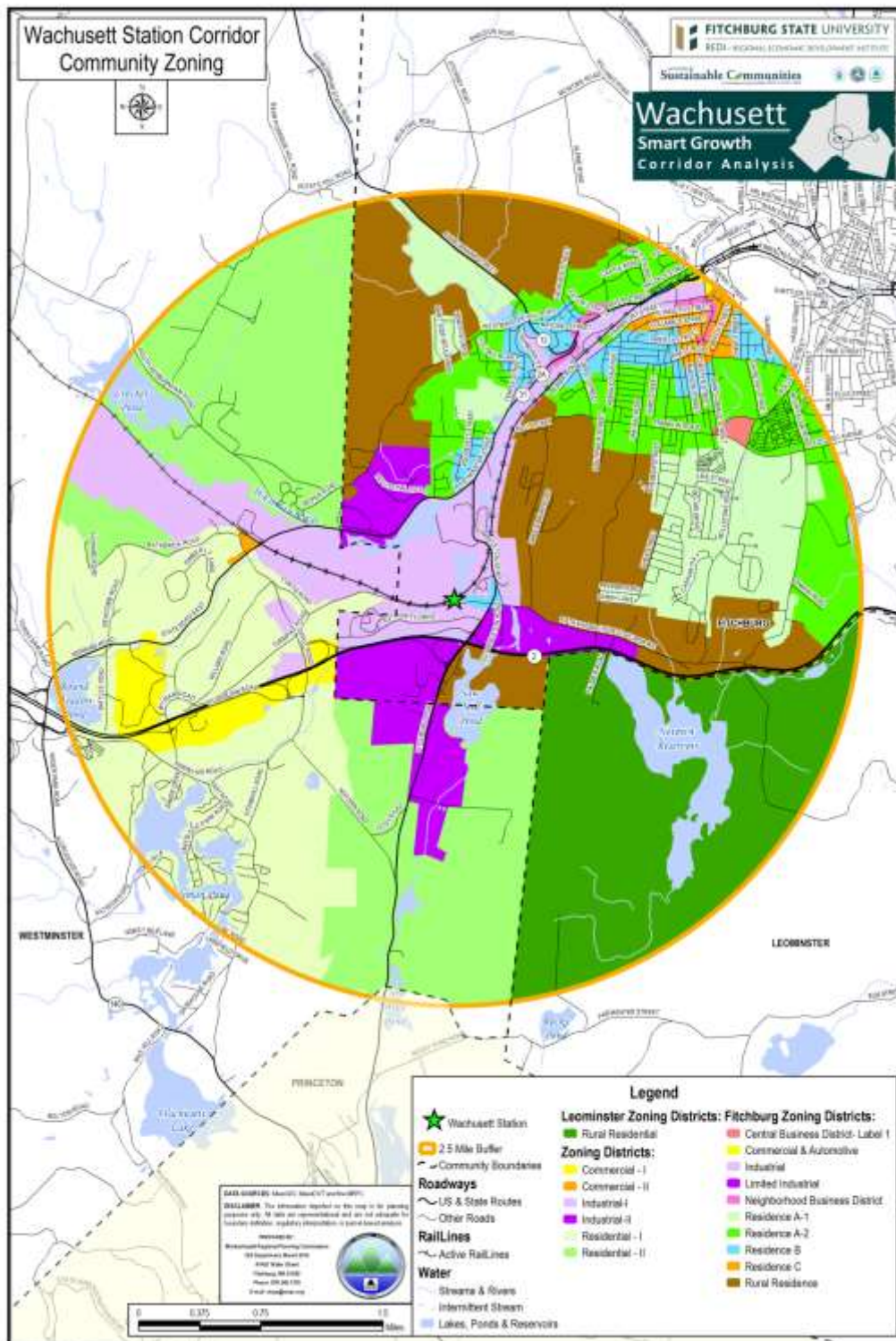


Figure 4: Current Wachusett Corridor Zoning

VI. Development Regulations

Apart from the zoning regulations which influence the nature of development, discussed above, there are a number of other regulations which need to be considered which could have a bearing on future land use and development in the Wachusett Corridor. Some of these regulations may provide incentives for development while others may impose restrictions.

Chapter 43D of the Massachusetts General Laws establishes an expedited local permitting program that offers communities a tool for targeted economic development. If a potential developer can expect to go through a smooth, efficient, and expedited permitting process, it can be an incentive to consider an area for development as opposed to an area which may have a more challenging development process. To initiate the Chapter 43D program, qualifying parcels must be identified by the community as a priority development site and have permission of the property owner to participate in the program. Participation in the program then requires that the community establish an expedited permitting process which can make the property more attractive to developers. The benefits of the program are threefold:

- It provides a transparent and efficient process for municipal permitting
- It guarantees local permitting decisions on priority development sites within 180 days
- It increases visibility of the participating community and the target development site(s)

In addition, benefits of 43D designation include priority consideration for MassWorks Infrastructure Program grants and online marketing of the site including promotion of a pro-business regulatory climate for the site.

There are current three 43D sites within the Wachusett Corridor, each in close proximity to the Wachusett Station site. One site is in Fitchburg and two are in Westminister:

- Route 31/Princeton Road (north of Route 2), Fitchburg
- Westminister Business Park, Westminister
- Route 31/Fitchburg Road (south of Route 2), Westminister

As discussed in the Open Space and Recreation element of this plan, **Chapter 61 of the Massachusetts General Laws** is a voluntary current use program designed by the Massachusetts Legislature to tax real property at its timber resources value rather than its “highest and best use” development value. Landowners who enroll their land in the program receive property tax reductions in exchange for a lien on the property. The lien requires that enrolled land remain in undeveloped state and be managed for forest resources extraction under a forest management plan approved by the state, effectively maintaining the land as open space. Therefore Chapter 61 provides an incentive to keep land as undeveloped as opposed to promoting new development. The lien also provides the municipal government of the town in which the property is located a right of first refusal should the landowner put the land up for sale while it is enrolled in the program. Landowners who develop their land while enrolled in the program or for a period of time after withdrawing from the program may be required to pay penalties.

There are three programs under Chapter 61:

- **Chapter 61:** Intended for landowners interested in long-term, active forest management. The value of the property is based on the land's ability to grow timber.
- **Chapter 61A:** Intended for landowners engaged in agricultural or horticultural use. Assessment is based on the property's ability to produce agricultural or horticultural products.
- **Chapter 61B:** Intended for landowners interested in maintaining the land in substantially natural, wild or open condition. Assessment of the forestland under Chapter 61B is 25 percent of the current assessed values of the land. In this category, there must be at least 5 contiguous acres of property to qualify.

As assessed by MRPC GIS, there are currently 1584.2 acres of property within the Wachusett Corridor which are classified as Chapter 61 lands (1367.8 acres in Fitchburg and 216.3 acres in Westminster).

Another tool that could be considered to preserve open space within the corridor is **Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)**, which is discussed in the preceding section.

VII. City/Town Goals and Objectives

As part of the process of identifying goals and objects for land use in the Wachusett Corridor, a review of municipal plans was conducted to identify the specific community-wide land use goals of each of the three Wachusett Communities. As noted below, some of these plans were adopted before planning for the Wachusett Station was undertaken and, as such, do not account for the project's impact on the surrounding community. Nevertheless, the community plans do reflect overall land use goals and objectives which remain in effect and therefore should be taken into consideration in the identification of land use goals and objectives relevant to the Wachusett Corridor.

The City of Fitchburg documents its land use goals and objectives in its Vision2020 Comprehensive Master Plan which was adopted in 1998. Fitchburg's overall Citywide goal for land use is:

"Promote land uses which maintain and enhance the essential historic and neighborhood character of the City of Fitchburg, particularly the strong downtown and neighborhood centers, stable residential neighborhoods, watershed lands, woodlots and other important open spaces. This includes new construction and historic preservation and adaptive reuse of buildings and sites that complements Fitchburg's historic patterns and natural landscape and creation of new economic development opportunities that "fit" Fitchburg."

Fitchburg's Vision2020 objectives to accomplish this goal which have relevance to the Wachusett Corridor and reflect Smart Growth principles are:

- Identify, manage and protect significant environmental resources using imaginative, cost effective, equitable and multi-sector approaches.
- Accommodate new housing stock in areas of the city where site character, access and infrastructure can accommodate such uses while preserving natural resources.
- Identify infill opportunities in the city to improve commercial/neighborhood centers.

- Provide options for land resource management including mixed-use developments and open space preservation

Fitchburg's Vision 2020 Master Plan also states a land use goal specific to City Character which is also relevant to Smart Growth in the Wachusett Corridor:

Maintain and enhance the existing character of the City of Fitchburg. Protect existing land uses, historic structures, landscapes and environmental features which define this character.
Promote carefully planned new construction that adds to the existing character of the City.

Fitchburg's Vision2020 objectives to accomplish this City Character goal which have relevance to the Wachusett Corridor and reflect Smart Growth principles are:

- Tailor innovative techniques for implementing the land use policies of the master plan to preserve the visual character of Fitchburg and preserve its key cultural resources while accommodating the growth of economic land uses.
- Promote economic development that is visually compatible with the residential character of the neighborhoods.
- Provide community decision-makers with innovative zoning and site planning tools that facilitate economic use of key parcels while maintaining the essential character of the community.
- Agriculture, identified as active farmlands, prime and significant agricultural soils and agribusiness, and important large tracts of forest lands should be preserved using creative land management opportunities available under state enabling legislation related to transfer and purchase of development rights, incentive zoning and agricultural real estate tax benefits.
- Preserve the city's key resources based on the development and use of an inventory and analysis of the physical and cultural features of the town.
- Implement a coordinated, comprehensive plan of development and conservation to achieve a vibrant 21st Century city with a mutually supportive balance of land uses – neighborhoods, business, civic facilities, natural and cultural resources.
- Ensure that new development is designed in a manner which is safe, visually appealing, and environmentally sound.

The City of Leominster does not have a Master Plan but adopted a Community Development Plan in 2004. This plan identifies a number of economic development goals for the community. Goals which have relevance to the Wachusett Corridor are:

- Promote regional cooperation in housing, transportation and boundary development issues.
- Encourage businesses that are compatible with adjacent land uses and resource protection concerns.
- Encourage the development of and help to promote tourism in the community (eco-tourism, agri-tourism and historic tourism). The presence of recreational amenities, farms and historic buildings and old homes is important to the tourism industry.

- Create and consistently implement and fund a capital improvements program to maintain existing infrastructure in order to facilitate business development, enable the workforce to access local commercial and industrial businesses and facilitate the delivery of raw materials and shipment of finished goods.
- Encourage the development of housing appropriate and affordable for the workforce needed by the businesses in the community.
- Promote development that is consistent with the Sustainable Development Principles promulgated by the Massachusetts Office for Commonwealth Development. In addition, promote compact development, expand housing opportunities, reutilize brownfields and abandoned buildings, plan for livable communities, promote livable communities, advance sound water policy, preserve working natural landscapes and promote sustainable development via other actions.

The Town of Westminster is currently going through an update of the community's Master Plan. A draft of the community's Existing and Future Land Use chapter, dated March 20, 2014, cites the following Land Use Goals, which are highly relevant to land use in the Wachusett Corridor:

- Westminster desires a walkable thriving New England-style village center that provides service-shopping-dining opportunities for residents and visitors alike;
- Commercial & Industrial districts that support existing businesses and industries while attracting new economic enterprises that will provide tax revenue for the Town and living wage jobs for the residents of Westminster and the region;
- A rural countryside that preserves the Town's working landscapes and scenic vistas; and
- Updated Zoning Bylaws, regulations and permitting systems that accomplish the above.

Westminster's objectives to accomplish these goals direct relevance to land use in the Wachusett Corridor are reflective of Smart Growth principles, including the following:

- Enact zoning tools that will create a vibrant and lively village center containing a mixture of residences, businesses, service providers, municipal offices and institutional uses.
- Ensure that new growth does not outstrip the Town's ability to provide quality municipal services to its residents.
- Recognize farming as an integral part of Westminster's economy and rural character, and work towards preserving the long-term viability of the Town's agricultural resources.
- Ensure that development on and near agricultural lands is sensitive to the value of the agricultural resource.
- Encourage development that provides work, live and play opportunities for residents of all income levels.
- Welcome new development that can integrate itself into the fabric of the Town and reflect Westminster's community character.
- Welcome new development that can help the Town address and achieve its municipal and infrastructure needs.

VIII. Corridor Vision (Team/Steering Committee?)

TBD

IX. Recommended Goals/Objectives/Strategies

Based on a review of current conditions, the goals and objectives of the three Wachusett Communities, and the issues and concerns of the Corridor's ethnic communities, the following goal, objectives, and strategies were identified to guide future land use, consistent with Smart Growth principles, within the Wachusett Corridor:

Goal:

To foster the future growth and development of the Wachusett Corridor consistent with Smart Growth principles and the plans and objectives of the Wachusett Corridor communities.

Objectives:

The objectives of the Wachusett Corridor Smart Growth Plan are consistent with Smart Growth Principles and the plans and objectives of the Wachusett Corridor communities. These principles are:

- Mix land uses
- Take advantage of compact building design
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
- Create walkable neighborhoods
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- Provide a variety of transportation choices
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions⁹

Strategies:

1. Wachusett Corridor Memorandum of Understanding -- Establish a mechanism for cooperation and collaboration between the three Wachusett Communities through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which commits each of the communities to support the implementation of the Wachusett Corridor Smart Growth Plan and Smart Growth principles in the planning, zoning, and development of their respective communities in the Wachusett Corridor.

2. Establishment of a Wachusett Corridor Steering Committee -- Establish a collaborative oversight body with representation from the three Wachusett Corridor Communities that can act as a steering committee to guide and facilitate the application of Smart Growth policies and the implementation of the Wachusett Corridor Smart Growth Plan. One option for such a body would be to establish a subcommittee of the CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy) Committee, facilitated by

⁹ Smart Growth Network, "This is Smart Growth"

MRPC. Whatever body is designated to lead planning and implementation of strategies for the Wachusett Corridor, its authority and the support of the Wachusett Corridor communities should be substantiated through the recommended Memorandum of Understanding discussed as Strategy #1.

3. Preservation of Open Space – Open space and natural areas provide recreational opportunities, habitat for plants and animals, and critical environmental areas such as wetlands. These areas are also components of economic development opportunities for the Wachusett Corridor as discussed in the Economic Development Element of this plan. The preservation of open space and the enhancement of open space and recreational resources in the Wachusett Corridor should be facilitated, consistent with the Open Space Plans of the three Wachusett Corridor communities. This would include identification and inventory of open space resources and identification and application of appropriate tools such as Chapter 61, Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), and open space zoning to preserve these resources. Opportunities to acquire land for open space/conservation should also be considered, particularly in Leominster. Leominster has previously obtained grants through the Massachusetts Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) Program to purchase open space within the community. Another option to consider would be participation in the state’s Community Preservation Act (CPA) program (discussed in the Housing Element of this plan).

4. Provide Improved Access to Wachusett Station – Fundamental to the principles of Smart Growth is the establishment of a walkable neighborhood. It is essential that safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle connections be made between Wachusett Station and the surrounding community as discussed in the Transportation and Open Space/Recreation elements of the Wachusett Corridor Smart Growth Plan. These mobility improvements can also provide benefits for land use and development in the surrounding area by reducing reliance on the use of single-occupant automobiles and reducing demand for vehicular parking to serve local development.

5. Create More Housing Choices -- Consistent with the Housing Element of the Wachusett Corridor Smart Growth Plan, new housing providing a diverse mix of housing options (including single-family homes and apartments, condominiums, affordable units) should be developed to allow people with different housing needs to live in the same neighborhoods and allow residents to remain in the same neighborhood if their housing needs change. Higher densities of housing should be permitted in proximity to the new station which will facilitate greater utilization of transit services and reduced dependency on single-occupant vehicles. Tools to facilitate the development of new housing in the corridor are discussed in the Housing Element of this plan.

6. Smart Growth Zoning Through a Smart Growth Overlay District – To support Smart Growth principles in the Wachusett Corridor, area zoning should be modified to support a mix of land uses that promote economic development, enhances the quality of life, and preserves open space resources. This could be facilitated through the application of a Smart Growth Overlay District for the Wachusett Corridor that provides for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) in the vicinity of the new Wachusett Station and a mix of land uses in the surrounding community. Given that the Wachusett Corridor covers three separate municipalities with difference development characteristics, the zoning characteristics of this overlay will differ between each community. Elements of this zoning could include increased

opportunity for commercial development to serve area residents and commuters and for higher densities of housing in proximity to the new station, including multi-family housing as recommended in the Housing Element of the Wachusett Corridor Smart Growth Plan. All development would be limited in scale to conform to the standards of the surrounding community and could be controlled through maximum size limits and design standards.

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