

DRAFT: SPENCER HOUSING PRODUCTION PLAN 2023

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Town of Spencer

Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission

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TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are for key terms used throughout this document and are based on information from the United States Census Bureau, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), or other sources.

AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (ACS): The American Community Survey, or ACS, is a survey conducted every year by the United States Census Bureau. It is the premier source for detailed population and housing information for the country. New data is released each year in the form of estimates, in a variety of tables, tools, and analytical reports.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Housing that is restricted to individuals and families with qualifying incomes and asset levels, and receives some manner of assistance to bring down the cost of owning or renting the unit, usually in the form of a government subsidy, or results from zoning relief to a housing developer in exchange for the income-restricted unit(s). Affordable housing can be public or private. In Massachusetts, affordable housing units are reserved for households with incomes at or below 80 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) under long-term legally binding agreements and are subject to affirmative marketing requirements.

AREA MEDIAN INCOME: To determine who qualifies for affordable housing, a metric called Area Median Income, or AMI, is used. The Area Median Income (AMI) is the midpoint of a region's income distribution – half of families in a region earn more than the median and half earn less than the median. For housing policy, income thresholds set relative to the area median income – such as 80% of the AMI – identify households eligible to live in income-restricted housing units and the affordability of housing units to low-income households.

COMPREHENSIVE PERMIT: A local permit for the development of low- or moderate- income housing issued by the Zoning Board of Appeals pursuant to M.G.L. c.40B §§20-23 and 760 CMR 56.00. Comprehensive permits can be issued if a municipality has not met any of the three statutory minima for the amount of affordable housing that exists in the community. A comprehensive permit allows a developer to build more densely than the municipal zoning bylaws would permit, allowing more units per acre of land when constructing a new development, if at least 25% (or 20% in certain cases) of the new units have long-term affordability restrictions.

COST BURDENED: Households are considered cost burdened if they pay more than 30 percent of their gross income for housing costs.

FAMILY: A family is defined by the United States Census as a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family.

HOUSEHOLD: A household is defined by the United States Census as includes the related family members and all the unrelated people, if any, such as lodgers, foster children, wards, or employees who share the housing unit. A person living alone in a housing unit, or a group of unrelated people sharing a housing unit such as partners or roomers, is also counted as a household. The count of households excludes group quarters.

HOUSING UNIT: A housing unit is a house, an apartment, a mobile home or trailer, a group of rooms, or a single room that is occupied, or, if vacant, is intended for occupancy as separate living quarters.

M.G.L. CHAPTER 40B: This state law enables developers to request waivers to local regulations, including the zoning bylaw, from the local Zoning Board of Appeals for affordable housing developments if less than 10 percent of

year-round housing units in the municipality is counted on the SHI. It was enacted in 1969 to address the shortage of affordable housing statewide by reducing barriers created by local building permit approval processes, local zoning, and other restrictions.

MEDIAN AGE: The age which divides the population into two numerically equal groups; that is, half the people are younger than this age and half are older.

MEDIAN INCOME: Median income is the amount which divides the income distribution into two equal groups, half earning incomes above the median, half earning incomes below the median. The medians for people are based on people 15 years old and over with income.

MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING: Multi-family housing is a commonly used term referring to residential structures that contain more than one separate residential dwelling unit. Occupants do not necessarily have to constitute a “family”, however, as single-person households can be occupying these units.

SUBSIDIZED HOUSING INVENTORY: The Subsidized Housing Inventory, or SHI, is used to measure a community’s stock of low-or moderate-income housing. It is the State’s official list for tracking a municipality’s percentage of affordable housing under M.G.L. Chapter 40B.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B requires cities and towns in the Commonwealth to work towards ensuring that a minimum of 10% of their total housing stock qualifies as affordable to households earning at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI). The State encourages municipalities to prepare a Housing Production Plan (HPP) to assist in achieving the 10 percent goal as well as take a proactive step in developing affordable housing. A Housing Production Plan is a plan authorized by M.G.L. Chapter 40B and administered by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). The Plan is organized into three principal components:

1. **HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT**
2. **HOUSING CHALLENGES**
3. **HOUSING PRODUCTION GOALS AND STRATEGIES**

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In 2021, the Town of Spencer was awarded funding from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) FY21 Planning Assistance Grants Program to develop a Housing Production Plan. The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) submitted the application on behalf of the Town and was awarded \$15,875 from EOEEA to initiate and complete the effort. Additionally, District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) funding in the amount of \$5,625 was committed to fulfill the 25% match funding requirement along with an additional match of roughly 25 in-kind hours by the Spencer Town Planner.

The Spencer Housing Production Plan Committee is a group of five (5) volunteers appointed by the Select Board. Governance of the committee is by one Chair and each member has full voting rights. Tasked with the responsibility of guiding the creation of the Town's first Housing Production Plan, the committee met remotely approximately once per month between November 2021 and January 2023. Meetings were open to the public, in accordance with Open Meeting Law. CMRPC staff worked collaboratively with the Housing Production Plan Committee to understand local housing conditions, seek input from the community using multiple platforms, and develop strategies that will support the town with meeting the housing needs of current and future residents. CMRPC provided any technical support needed to achieve the deliverables of the Plan.

The goal in developing a Housing Production Plan (HPP) for the Town of Spencer is to provide the town with a strong tool for implementing alternative and affordable housing options to meet Chapter 40B regulations. This Plan represents the culmination of baseline demographic and housing research, community outreach, zoning and regulatory review, plus an implementation plan for goals and objectives.

SUMMARY OF HOUSING PRODUCTION GOALS

AS OF 2022, SPENCER'S SUBSIDIZED HOUSING INVENTORY (SHI) CONSISTS OF 311 UNITS, OR 6.05% OF ITS TOTAL HOUSING STOCK. Data from the most recent United States Decennial Census is used as a baseline for the total housing stock. As of the 2010 Census, Spencer has 5,137 year-round housing units. The Massachusetts SHI is the most comprehensive listing of deed-restricted affordable housing units compiled by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). To meet the M.G.L. Chapter 40B SHI target of 10% and not be vulnerable to comprehensive permitting, the town needs to have 513 total subsidized units. If the town increases its affordable housing stock by 0.5% per year, or 25 units, it will meet the 10% threshold by 2029. At this

rate, in five years the town will have a SHI of 8.5%, or 436 units, and will need 77 additional units to achieve 10% affordable housing. When the complete results of the 2020 Census are released, these goals will change slightly, depending on the number of new housing units that have been built since 2010.

It should be noted that the State's subsidizing agencies have entered into an Interagency Agreement that provides additional guidance to localities regarding housing opportunities for families with children and are now requiring that at least 10% of the units in affordable production developments that are funded, assisted, or approved by a State housing agency have three or more bedrooms (with some exceptions including age-restricted housing, assisted living, supportive housing for individuals, etc.).

SUMMARY OF HOUSING GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The strategies outlined below were established based on prior planning efforts, regular meetings with the Spencer Housing Production Plan Committee, results of the Housing Needs Community Survey, community input from the public workshop on September 21, 2022, and input from housing stakeholders. These specific strategies will help the town achieve its affordable housing production goals while creating more diverse housing options to meet changing needs of the community.

The full descriptions of the Housing Goals and Strategies begin on page XX.

CAPACITY BUILDING STRATEGIES

1. Conduct ongoing community outreach and education on housing issues and activities
2. Consider hiring a dedicated Affordable Housing Coordinator
3. Actively seek out and apply for funding and technical assistance to implement the HPP Action Plan
4. Pursue adoption of a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund
5. Consider local approval for Community Preservation Act (CPA)
6. Develop a process to oversee implementation of the HPP Action Plan
7. Participate in regional collaborations addressing housing development and affordability
8. Encourage relevant boards, committees, and Town leaders to participate in trainings and education programs related to affordable housing
9. Investigate and research funding opportunities to expand the inventory and condition of units managed by the Housing Authority
10. Pursue opportunities to expand supportive services targeting special populations such as veterans, homeless, or those in recovery

ZONING AND POLICY STRATEGIES

1. Modify the existing Accessory Apartment bylaw to allow for more flexible opportunities for development
2. Amend the Open Space Residential Development bylaw to allow greater flexibility with housing development and facilitate production of affordable units
3. Promote Spencer's Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bylaw and Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw to raise public awareness of opportunities for small-scale housing development
4. Pursue designation as a Housing Choice Community
5. Prepare design guidelines or standards for new multi-family housing developments
6. Explore adoption of an Inclusionary or Incentive Zoning Bylaw and possible incentives
7. Explore incentives for owners of existing multi-family housing to deed-restrict units as affordable

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

1. Support cluster development and multi-family housing where feasible
2. Create an inventory of Town-owned land suitable for new housing development
3. Pursue adaptive reuse of underutilized or vacant properties into housing units
4. Advocate for a higher inclusion of accessible units in proposed affordable housing developments
5. Partner with for- and non-profit developers to create affordable housing
6. Develop a system to monitor local housing data and community trends

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INTRODUCTION

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Spencer is a small, rural-suburban town located in Worcester County. The town covers an area of 34.1 square miles, of which 32.9 square miles is land and 1.2 square miles are water. A roughly rectangular shaped town, Spencer is bounded by Leicester and Paxton to the east and northeast; Oakham to the north; East Brookfield and North Brookfield to the west and northwest; and Charlton to the south. Settled in 1717 and incorporated as a town in 1753, Spencer was historically an agricultural community until the early 19th century when manufacturing of boots, wire, and textiles rapidly dominated the local economy. Route 9 serves as a primary east-west state highway which intersects with Route 31, the major north-south route through town. The town has a distinct downtown corridor that is home to a variety of residences, offices, municipal buildings, and businesses including a supermarket, hardware store, and several restaurants. Notable landmarks include Spencer State Forest, Saint Joseph's Abbey, Spencer Agricultural Fairgrounds, and unique historic features such as the Town Hall. The town is governed by an open meeting form of government and is led by an elected five-member Board of Selectmen responsible for setting policy for Spencer. The town's K-12 public schools are regionalized with East Brookfield.

PLAN PROCESS

The Town contracted the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) to develop a Housing Production Plan consistent with the State of Massachusetts' requirements under 760 CMR 56.03(4). To adequately oversee all steps of the plan's development in a timely manner, a Housing Production Plan Committee was created. Consisting of four volunteer members of the community and one Town employee, the committee met remotely approximately once per month with staff from CMRPC between November 2021 and January 2022 using the Zoom platform in accordance with Open Meeting Law.

A Housing Needs Community Survey was utilized as a tool for gathering widespread public input on affordability and availability of various types of housing in Spencer. The 18-question survey was available to take online, and paper copies were made available for pick-up and drop-off at the Spencer Public Library, Senior Center, Town Hall, and Housing Authority. The community survey was open from February 2022 through August 2022. In total, 351 surveys were completed by town residents. 25% of survey respondents were under the age of 45, 41% of those who completed the survey were between the ages of 45 and 64, and 34% of survey respondents were 65 years or older. The complete survey, survey results, promotional flyer, and article in the local newspaper Spencer New Leader can be viewed in the Appendix.

A hybrid in-person/remote public workshop was held on September 21, 2022 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. at the Spencer Town Hall and online via Zoom. Approximately 10 community members participated in the event and engaged in discussions on the future of housing in Spencer. Attendees were introduced to the Housing Production Plan with a presentation by CMRPC, allotted time to ask questions, presented with the results from the community survey, and asked to participate in a breakout group activity on the potential design and placement of alternative housing options for the town. Those who attended virtually were sent a link to a survey asking residents to select the types of housing they would be most comfortable seeing developed in each of the study areas. The survey was open for a few months following the public forum so those who could not attend the event would have an opportunity to submit their input. The valuable public input gathered from the discussions and activity of this event has proven helpful in understanding who needs housing and the types and locations of housing that are in demand in Spencer.

Materials from the public workshop and an article from the local newspaper Spencer New Leader can be viewed in the Appendix.

PLAN METHODOLOGY

Data for this report was gathered from a number of reliable and available sources, including:

- 2000 and 2010 U.S. Decennial Census
- 2020 Census Redistricting Data
- 2016-2020 American Community Survey
- Warren Group
- ESRI Business Analyst
- Massachusetts Department of Revenue
- Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development
- Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
- Spencer Assessor's Office
- Spencer Housing Production Plan Committee open meetings
- Community input from the September 21, 2022 Public Workshop and survey
- Spencer Housing Needs Community Survey

M.G.L. c. 40B, §§ 20-23 – known as Chapter 40B or the Comprehensive Permit Law – is a Massachusetts state law that was enacted in 1969 to facilitate construction of low- or moderate-income housing. It establishes a consolidated local review and approval process (known as a “comprehensive permit”) that empowers the zoning board of appeals (ZBA) in each city and town to hold hearings and make binding decisions that encompass all local ordinances or bylaws and regulations. In certain circumstances, that ZBA's comprehensive permit decision may be appealed to the Massachusetts Housing Appeals Committee (HAC), which has the power to affirm, modify, or overturn local decisions. Under Law Chapter 40B, cities and towns must work to ensure that at least 10% of their total housing stock qualifies as “affordable” to households earning at or below 80% of the area median income (AMI). For communities that have not achieved the 10% affordable housing requirement, developers can override local regulations by receiving a comprehensive permit from local ZBA's if they include affordable housing in their projects.

To help meet this 10% goal and take a proactive approach toward developing affordable housing, the State encourages communities to pursue preparing a Housing Production Plan (HPP). This is a plan authorized by M.G.L. Chapter 40B and administered by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) that can allow some relief from 40B pressures if the plan is approved by DHCD and the town meets the required number of affordable housing units that must be created in a year. Communities that have a DHCD approved HPP and that have produced units that are deemed “affordable” totaling at least 0.5% of the community's year-round housing stock will be granted a “certification of compliance with the plan” and become temporarily “appeal-proof” from Chapter 40B for 12 months following certification, or 24 months following certification if 1.0% of its year-round housing units have been produced as affordable.

SAFE HARBORS

In regard to Chapter 40B, “safe harbor” refers to conditions under which a ZBA's decision to deny a comprehensive permit will qualify as consistent with local needs and not be overturned by the HAC, provided the conditions were met prior to the date that the comprehensive permit was filed with the ZBA. Safe harbors include:

STATUTORY MINIMA

- The number of low- or moderate-income housing units in the city or town is more than 10 percent of the total number of housing units reported in the most recent Decennial Census;
- Low- or moderate-income housing exists on sites comprising 1.5 percent or more of the community's total land area zoned for residential, commercial, or industrial use;
- The comprehensive permit before the ZBA would lead to construction of low- or moderate-income housing on sites comprising more than 0.3 of 1 percent of the community's total land area zoned for residential, commercial, or industrial use, or 10 acres, whichever is larger, in one calendar year.

ADDITIONAL SAFE HARBORS CREATED BY REGULATION

DHCD has certified that the community complies with its affordable housing production goal under its approved Housing Production Plan.

- The community has met DHCD's "recent progress" threshold (760 CMR 56.03(1)(c) and 56.03(5)). This implies that within the past 12 months, the community has created new SHI units equal to or greater than 2 percent of the total year-round housing units reported in the most recent decennial census. The recent progress threshold can be helpful to a community that does not have a DHCD-approved Housing Production Plan.
- The project before the ZBA is a project that exceeds DCHD's definition of a "large" project under 760 CMR 56.03(1)(d), where the definition of "large" project varies by the size of the municipality (see 760 CMR 56.03(6)).

As of 2022, Spencer does not meet any of the safe harbors and will not be able to deny a comprehensive permit filed by with the Zoning Board of Appeals.

DEFINING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

"Affordable housing" does not refer to the design, type, or method of construction of housing units, but to the cost of the housing to the consumer. "Affordable" means that the housing unit qualifies for inclusion in the Subsidized Housing Inventory, a state-wide comprehensive list of affordable units under long-term, legally binding agreements that are subject to affirmative marketing requirements. In order for a household to be eligible to rent or purchase an income-restricted unit, the household's income cannot exceed 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) use Area Median Income (AMI) to promote income-restricted housing. The AMI is the median family income for the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Spencer belongs to the Worcester, MA HUD Metro FMR Area which includes 33 communities in southwest Worcester County. HUD calculates the AMI annually based on the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey's (ACS) estimated median family income for the MSA. **As of 2022, the AMI for the Worcester Metro FMR Area is \$114,400. For a family of four, the household income limit is \$88,440.**

Municipalities and/or developers are responsible for updating their inventory directly with DHCD. When new subsidized units are occupied or permitted within a municipality, the municipality (or the developer) must make a written request for units to be added to the municipality's inventory. This task is accomplished through the *SHI: Requesting New Units Form*, available on the Massachusetts Subsidized Housing Inventory website, which must be submitted to DHCD.

TABLE 1: AREA MEDIAN INCOME LIMITS FOR THE WORCESTER, MA HUD METRO FMR AREA

Area Median Income	FY 2021 Area Median Income Limit Category	Persons in Household				
		1	2	3	4	5
\$114,400	Low (80%) Income	\$61,900	\$70,750	\$79,600	\$88,400	\$95,500
	Very Low (50%) Income	\$38,700	\$44,200	\$49,750	\$55,250	\$59,700
	Extremely Low (30%) Income	\$23,250	\$26,550	\$29,850	\$33,150	\$35,850

FAIR HOUSING AND HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Title VIII of the Civil Right Act of 1968, also referred to as the Fair Housing Act, was enacted with the primary purpose of prohibiting discrimination in transactions involving the rental, sale, or financing of a home based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and mental or physical handicap. Massachusetts law included the following protected classes for tenants and homebuyers: marital status, children, sexual orientation, age, gender identity and expression, military or veteran status, ancestry, genetic information, retaliation, and receipt of public assistance or rental subsidies.

Under Federal law, state and local governments that receive federal housing funds are required not only to refrain from discriminatory practices, but they must also take initiative in promoting open and inclusive housing patterns, also known as “affirmatively furthering fair housing” or “AFFH”. As defined by HUD, this practice includes the following:

- Analyzing and eliminating discrimination in the jurisdiction;
- Promoting fair housing choice for all persons;
- Providing opportunities for inclusive patterns of housing occupancy regardless of race, color, religion, sex, familiar status, disability, and national origin;
- Promoting housing that is structurally accessible to, and usable by all persons, particularly persons with disabilities;
- Fostering compliance with the nondiscrimination provision of the Fair Housing Act.

In 2021, the White House issued a Memorandum to the Secretary of HUD, which declared that the affirmatively furthering fair housing provision in the Fair Housing Act, “...is not only a mandate to refrain from discrimination but a mandate to take actions that undo historic patterns of segregation and other types of discrimination and that afford access to long-denied opportunities.”¹ A number of Executive Order implicating HUD’s responsibility for implementing the mandate of AFFH were issued by the White House in 2021, including Executive Order 13895, “Advancing Racial Equity for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government” and Executive Order 13988, “Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation.”

Under Federal and State law, municipalities must also ensure that municipal policies and programs do not have a disparate impact on members of a protected class. Disparate impact is a significant legal theory in which liability based upon a finding of discrimination may be incurred even when the discrimination was not purposeful or intentional. The municipality should consider if the policy or practice at hand is necessary to achieve substantial, legitimate, non-discriminatory interests and if there is a less discriminatory alternative that would meet the same interest.

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) Website

HOUSING AND POLITICAL ADMINISTRATIONS

As of January 6, 2023, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a new governor administration in place. Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll succeed former Governor Charlie Baker and former Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito.

Governor Healey and Lt. Governor Driscoll have stated that affordable and abundant housing is a top priority for the new administration. A new Secretary of Housing position has been created, which will support cities and towns across the state to ensure housing goals are met. The Secretary of Administration and Finance has been directed to identify unused State-owned land and public property to turn into rental housing or home ownership. The Healey-Driscoll administration also prioritizes expanding opportunities for first-time homebuyers through increased funding of down-payment and closing assistance programs, as well as expansion of rental assistance and rental tax deduction programs. Healey has explained that strategies for increasing housing production across the state include investing in the preservation and rehabilitation of existing housing stock while simultaneously incentivizing communities to improve zoning procedures and boost production.

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HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

POPULATION AND HOUSEHOLD TRENDS

Spencer is a small community located about a 20-minute drive west of Worcester, the second-largest city in New England. Neighboring communities, which will be used for comparison purposes in this report, include Leicester, Paxton, Oakham, North Brookfield, East Brookfield, and Charlton. According to the 2020 Decennial Census, the town has a population of 11,992. Spencer saw strong population growth in the postwar period, increasing from 7,027 residents in 1950 to 10,774 in 1980. The town’s growth has slowed considerably since the 1990’s, increasing by less than 400 residents in the past three decades.

As of 2020, with a population of 11,992 Spencer has already exceeded its population projections made by CMRPC in 2018. The town increased its population by 2.5% between 2010 and 2020, therefore if this growth rate remains consistent the population can be anticipated to reach 12,292 by 2030 and 12,599 by 2040. Future population change patterns will be determined by housing development patterns, local and regional economic conditions, utilities and associated infrastructure, and evolving living preferences of current and future generations.

As the COVID-19 pandemic and economic shutdown forced countless employees across the nation to work remotely from their homes for months in 2020, it is possible that people may continue working remotely and elect to relocate outside of employment centers, such as the Boston region, to attractive and more affordable rural and suburban communities in Central Massachusetts, such as Spencer. Even as conditions gradually return to a state of normality, remote work is likely to increase in popularity and feasibility, with workers embracing greater freedom and flexibility without needing to make lengthy commutes every day. Major companies have announced that employees working from home may continue to do so permanently. It is possible that Spencer could experience a high demand in housing in the coming years due to these factors. The town’s quality of life, clean air, open space, and other attractive small-town features make it a prime location for families to gravitate towards.

TABLE 2: HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES, 2000-2020

	2000 Census		2020 ACS Estimates		Percent Change 2000-2020	
	Households	Families	Households	Families	Households	Families
Spencer	4,579	3,107	5,114	3,105	10%	0%
Worcester County	283,927	192,423	314,081	205,474	10%	6%
Massachusetts	2,443,580	1,576,696	2,646,980	1,673,992	8%	6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2020

The U.S. Census Bureau states that a *household* consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit, including the related family members and all the unrelated people. A *family household* includes the family householder and all other people in the living quarters who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption⁴. Table 2 shows that Spencer’s household composition has increased by 10% in the last two decades. This change is about proportionate to the increase seen across Worcester County at 10% during the same time period. Comparatively, Massachusetts has experienced a slower growth rate in the number of household units since 2000, which grew by 8%. The number of family households has remained stagnant in Spencer, with 3,107 families reported in 2000 and

3,105 families reported in 2020. Worcester County and Massachusetts both saw a 6% increase in family units. Overall, family units have increased at a slower pace than household units in Spencer, Worcester County, and Massachusetts.

HOUSEHOLD TYPES

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a *family group* is any two or more people residing together, and related by birth, marriage, or adoption². *Family households* are defined as households maintained by a householder who is in a family group, and can include any unrelated people who may be residing there. A *household* consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit. A *non-family household* consists of a household living alone or where the household shares the home exclusively with people to whom he/she is not related.

In 2020, 3,105 households in Spencer were classified as family households (Table 3). Of all households, 61% are considered family households, while the remaining 39% consist of single-person households or members living together who are not related to one another. Family households with their own children under the age of 18 make up 18% of all households in Spencer, which is lower than the state's rate of 26%. One-third of all households in town are single-person households, higher than the Massachusetts 2020 rate of 28%. 17% of all Spencer households are elderly single-person households, higher than the state's rate of 12%, respectively.

As regional and national trends indicate, the number of people living in a household has been declining as more people choose to live alone, delay having children, or have fewer or no children. The number of family households with their own children under the age of 18 living in Spencer has decreased from 1,405 in 2000 to 945 in 2020. At 3% of all households as of 2020, Spencer has a lower proportion of single-parent households than both the county and state, each of which were at 8% during the same time period. Single-parent households may have more difficulty affording a safe and spacious home to live because of the reliance on one income to support the family. Families with children are a protected class under federal law, and Massachusetts has made it unlawful to discriminate based on marital status.

TABLE 3: SPENCER HOUSEHOLDS BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE, 2020

	Number	Percent of All Households
Total Households	5,114	100%
Family Households	3,105	61%
Family Households with own children under 18 years old	945	18%
Male householder, no spouse present with own children under 18 years	49	1%
Female householder, no spouse present with own children under 18 years	87	2%
Non-family households	2,009	39%
Householder living alone	1,709	33%
Elderly single-person households	886	17%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2020: ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables

² United States Census Bureau; Technical Documentation; Subject Definitions

AGE

It is important to examine age distribution in a community as different age groups may have various requirements and preferences for housing. Additionally, age is a protected class under State Law. American Community Survey 5-year Estimates as of 2020 show that 19% of the Spencer population are under the age of 20; 14% are between the age of 20 and 34 years; 26% are between the ages of 35 and 54 years; 19% are between the ages of 55 and 64 years; 20% are between the ages of 65 and 84 years; and just 2% are ages 85 or higher (Table 4). Between 2000 and 2020, Spencer experienced an increase in its populations over the age of 55. The Advanced Elderly age cohort increased by 123%, the Seniors age cohort increased by 79%, and the Near Seniors age cohort increased by 113%. Age cohorts under 55 years all experienced a decrease since 2000. These include Pre-school (-48%), School Ages (-23%), Young Adult (-32%), and Young Family (-28%), and Middle Family (-16%). The loss of residents under the age of 19 and those between the ages of 25 and 54 has significant implications on school enrollment, as these groups represent both future students of the public school system and parents of school age children.

Spencer's median age (47.7 years) has increased by almost 11 years since 2000. It is now the second highest of the surrounding communities (Figure 1), with Oakham being the highest at 50.9 years.

TABLE 4: SPENCER POPULATION BY AGE (LIFECYCLE GROUP), 2000-2020

Lifecycle Group	2000		2010		2020	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
TOTAL POPULATION	11,691	100.0%	11,724	100.0%	11,942	100.0%
Pre-school (0-4 years)	765	6.5%	691	5.9%	400	3.3%
School Ages (5-19 years)	2,424	20.7%	2,212	18.9%	1,858	15.6%
Young Adult (20-24 years)	704	6.0%	632	5.4%	482	4.0%
Young Family (25-34 years)	1,540	13.2%	1,850	15.8%	1,146	9.6%
Middle Family (35-54 years)	3,740	32.0%	3,278	28.0%	3,132	26.2%
Near Seniors (55-64 years)	1,075	9.2%	1,518	12.9%	2,290	19.2%
Seniors (65-84 years)	1,326	11.3%	1,344	11.5%	2,373	19.9%
Advanced Elderly (85+)	117	1.0%	199	1.7%	261	2.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000, 2010; American Community Survey Estimates 2020

FIGURE 1: MEDIAN AGE, 2000-2020

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU 2000; AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATES 2020

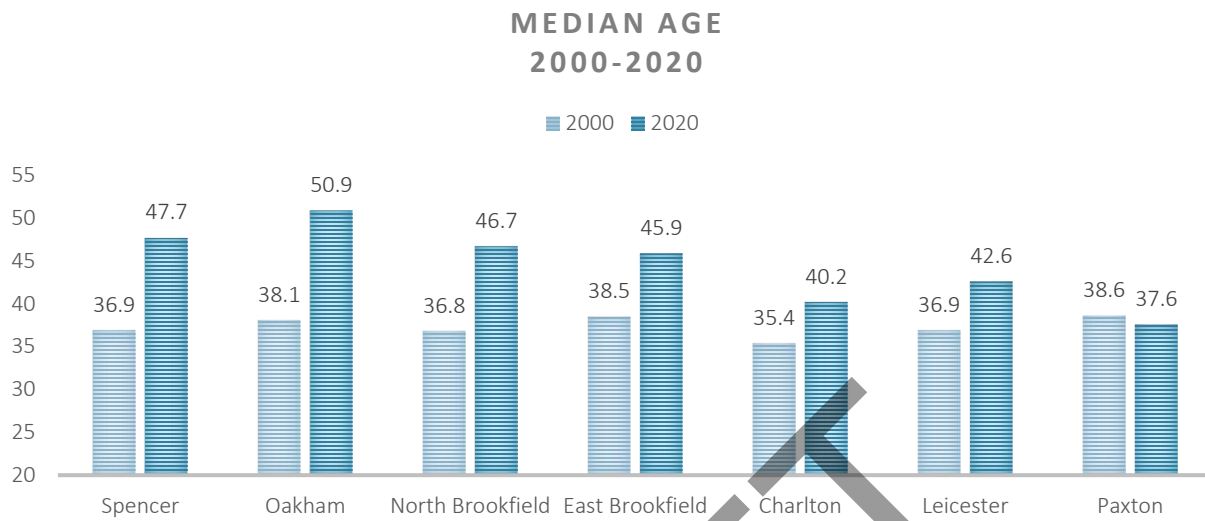
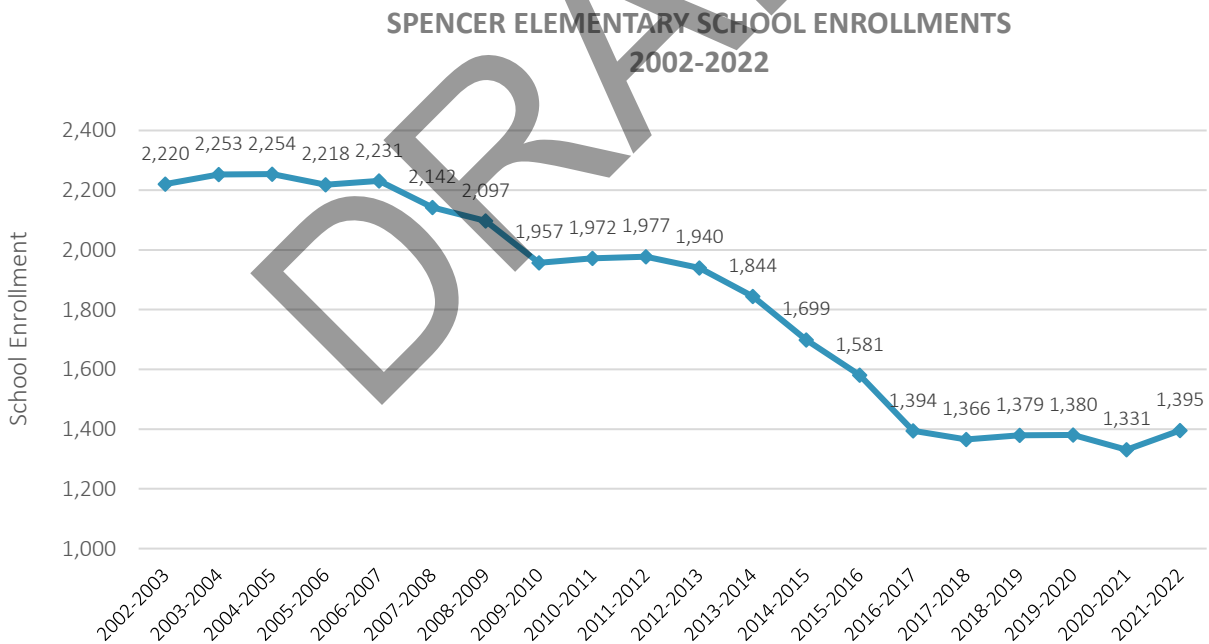


FIGURE 2: SPENCER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, 2002-2022

SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION



GROUP QUARTERS

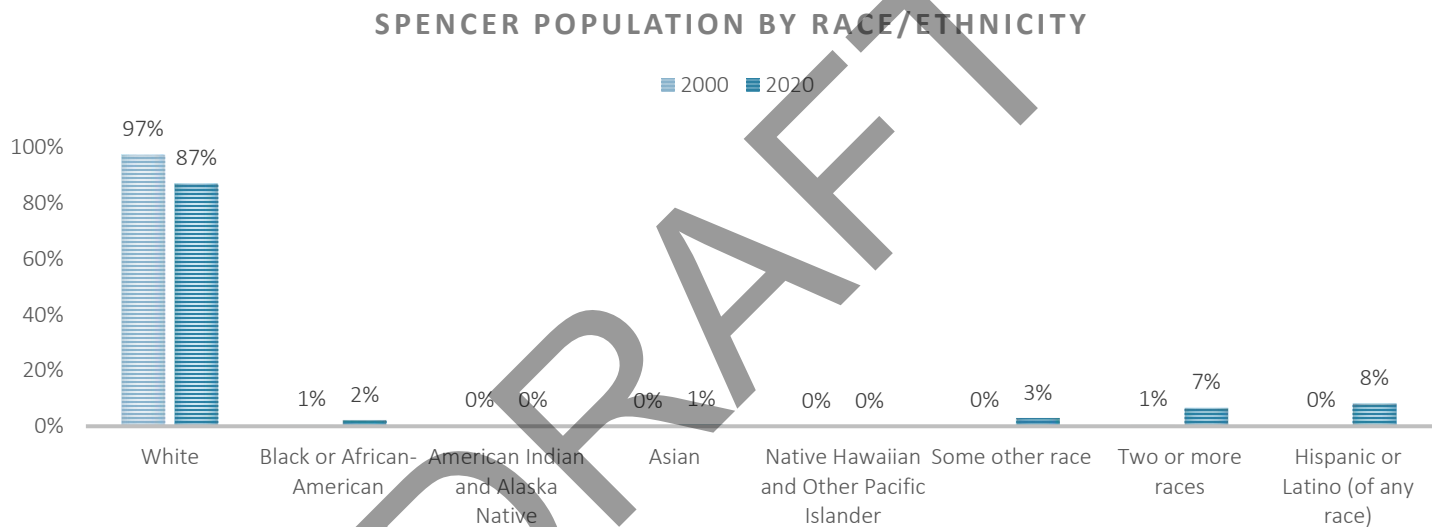
People not living in a family or non-family household are classified by the U.S. Census Bureau as living in *group quarters*. Group quarters include facilities such as prisons, nursing homes, and hospitals as well as college dormitories, military barracks, group homes, missions, and shelters. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2020 Decennial Census, there are 70 total Spencer residents living in group quarters, all of which are noninstitutionalized.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

The population of Spencer is primarily White, at 87% of the town’s total population, according to the 2020 Decennial Census Redistricting Data. The White alone population decreased by almost 9% from 11,382 residents in 2000 to 10,428 residents in 2020, indicating the town has diversified in recent decades. The Hispanic or Latino (of any race) population experienced the most significant increase, from 40 residents in 2000 to 989 residents in 2020. The Black or African American population increased by 201 residents, now constituting 2% of the town’s population. The Asian population has additionally increased by about 1% since 2000. The American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Island residents of Spencer have remained a very small percentage of the town’s population. There was a large increase in the population identifying as two or more races in the 20-year time period, which may be a result of the dataset’s category labeling rather than any significant population change.

FIGURE 3: SPENCER POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2000-2020

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU 2000; AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATES 2020



DISABILITY

A disability is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as a long-lasting physical, mental, or emotional condition. This condition can make it difficult for a person to do activities such as walking, climbing stairs, dressing, bathing, learning, or remembering. This condition can also impede a person from being able to go outside the home alone or to work at a job. Many residents with one or more disabilities face housing challenges due to a lack of housing that is affordable and physically accessible. Disability is a protected class under Federal Law.

Table 5 shows that an estimated 9% of Spencer’s population (628 residents) ages 18 to 64, also known as “working-age residents,” reported having one or more disabilities. Among this age cohort reporting a disability in Spencer, ambulatory difficulties are the most common disability, at 3% of the population. This differs from the county and state, both of which report cognitive difficulties to be most common among this age cohort. Of Spencer residents ages 65 and over, an estimated 32%, or 834 people, reported having one or more disability. Difficulties with hearing are currently the most common disability faced by the elderly population in Spencer, followed by ambulatory difficulties. These, along with independent living difficulty, are the most commonly faced disabilities among the elderly population in the county and state, with ambulatory difficulty generally being the most common.

With projections of an increasing elderly population in Spencer, the demand for affordable and barrier-free/accessible housing may be on the rise. The range of disabilities present in the town’s population requires different types of accessible housing to serve the needs of persons with disabilities. Some communities in Massachusetts have put more effort and resources into integrating accessible housing and housing with supportive services into planning for market-rate and affordable housing development. There are a few affordable housing complexes in town dedicated to serving people with disabilities including the Spencer Housing Authority, Astorwood Place, Senior Living at Prouty, and several group homes.

TABLE 5: POPULATION BY ESTIMATED DISABILITY STATUS, 2020

	Spencer		Worcester County		Massachusetts	
	Estimate	Percent of total population with a disability	Estimate	Percent of total population with a disability	Estimate	Percent of total population with a disability
Total civilian non-institutionalized population	11,923	(X)	813,041	(X)	6,800,682	(X)
<i>With a disability</i>	1,518	13%	98,164	12%	784,593	12%
Population 18 to 64 years	7,284	(X)	516,414	(X)	4,340,893	(X)
<i>With a disability</i>	628	9%	51,880	10%	387,106	9%
With a hearing difficulty	196	3%	8,939	2%	66,023	2%
With a vision difficulty	96	1%	7,454	1%	60,775	1%
With a cognitive difficulty	181	3%	27,025	5%	194,260	5%
With an ambulatory difficulty	241	3%	19,984	4%	154,704	4%
With a self-care difficulty	77	1%	8,845	2%	63,821	2%
With an independent living difficulty	221	3%	20,953	4%	144,433	3%
Population 65 years and over	2,634	(X)	124,756	(X)	1,100,787	(X)
<i>With a disability</i>	834	32%	39,384	32%	344,660	31%
With a hearing difficulty	413	16%	17,428	14%	145,356	13%
With a vision difficulty	169	6%	6,135	5%	54,636	5%
With a cognitive difficulty	123	5%	9,451	8%	81,762	7%
With an ambulatory difficulty	344	13%	24,143	19%	209,584	19%
With a self-care difficulty	65	3%	9,102	7%	81,218	7%
With an independent living difficulty	301	11%	16,400	13%	148,208	14%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2020

POPULATIONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Populations with special needs are considered to be residents who require specialized housing and/or support services. Included in this category, in no particular order, are:

- People with physical disabilities
- Elderly and frail elderly
- Veterans
- Survivors of domestic violence
- Youth aging out of foster care and at-risk youth
- People with psychiatric and cognitive disabilities
- People with substance abuse issues
- Ex-offenders
- People living with HIV or AIDS
- People who are homeless

The needs of these sub-populations may overlap in many cases, as well as the institutions that serve them. Special needs populations are more likely than the general population to encounter difficulties securing and retaining adequate and affordable housing, due to lower incomes and other obstacles, and often require enhanced support services. While members of these populations often move through temporary housing placements, they often seek permanent and stable housing options.

The Spencer Housing Authority participates in the State Chapter 689 Housing Program, which is designed to provide housing with specialized services for persons with mental illness, developmental disabilities, or physical disabilities. Under this Special Needs Housing Program, the Spencer Housing Authority owns two buildings at 77 Maple Street, each with four bedrooms, which are leased to the Department of Developmental Services who supplies the service staff necessary to support and assist residents. The housing authority does not select residents for this program, with exception of family housing where households need wheelchair accessibility.

South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) provides housing for low-income clients, some with mental health or substance abuse issues. Residents of SMOC facilities undergo background checks, and anyone who is a sex offender or has a felony or history of violent crime is not admitted.

According to 2020 American Community Survey data, 8% of Spencer's civilian population 18 years and over are veterans. Almost 73% of the town's veterans are over the age of 65. There are currently no housing facilities specifically for veterans, however there is an active Veterans Agent to assist residents and their families with medical and financial support as well as employment assistance and counseling.

There are numerous organizations that provide support services and group homes in Worcester County. There are likely individuals with developmental disabilities who live independently in town with support from the Department of Developmental Services (DDS).

INCOME

Income of households is directly related to the amount of money that individuals and families can allocate for housing. Housing that is affordable for lower-income households is significant for creating household stability and economic self-sufficiency. To build and retain a strong and talented workforce to improve the region and state's economic competitiveness, housing that is affordable to working class and middle-class households must be readily available.

Median household income in Spencer was lower than that of Worcester County and Massachusetts in 2020, based on ACS estimates (Table 6). Nonfamily households in Spencer also earned significantly less than the county and state in 2020. Compared to eight nearby communities, Spencer ranks among the lowest for household income, with only North Brookfield households earning a lower median income in 2020.

In terms of household income distribution among residents, Figure 4 shows that there is a slightly higher percentage of households earning between \$100,000 and \$150,000 per year in Spencer compared to Worcester County and Massachusetts. However, the county and state have a greater proportion of high-income households earning more than \$150,000 annually. Spencer has a greater percentage of lower-income households earning between \$10,000 and \$25,000 than the county or state as of 2020.

TABLE 6: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY, AND NONFAMILY INCOME, 2020

	Median Household Income	Median Family Income	Median Nonfamily Household Income
Spencer	\$70,265	\$97,860	\$32,414
Worcester County	\$74,679	\$96,393	\$39,474
Massachusetts	\$81,215	\$103,126	\$46,467

Source: American Community Survey Estimates 2020

FIGURE 4: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME, 2020

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES 2020

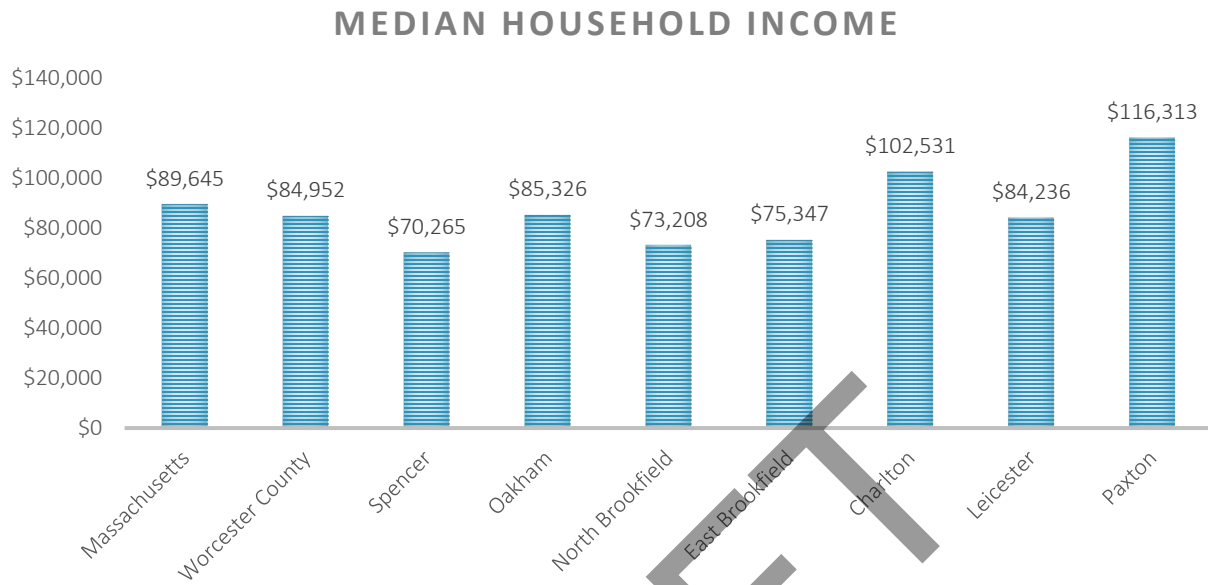
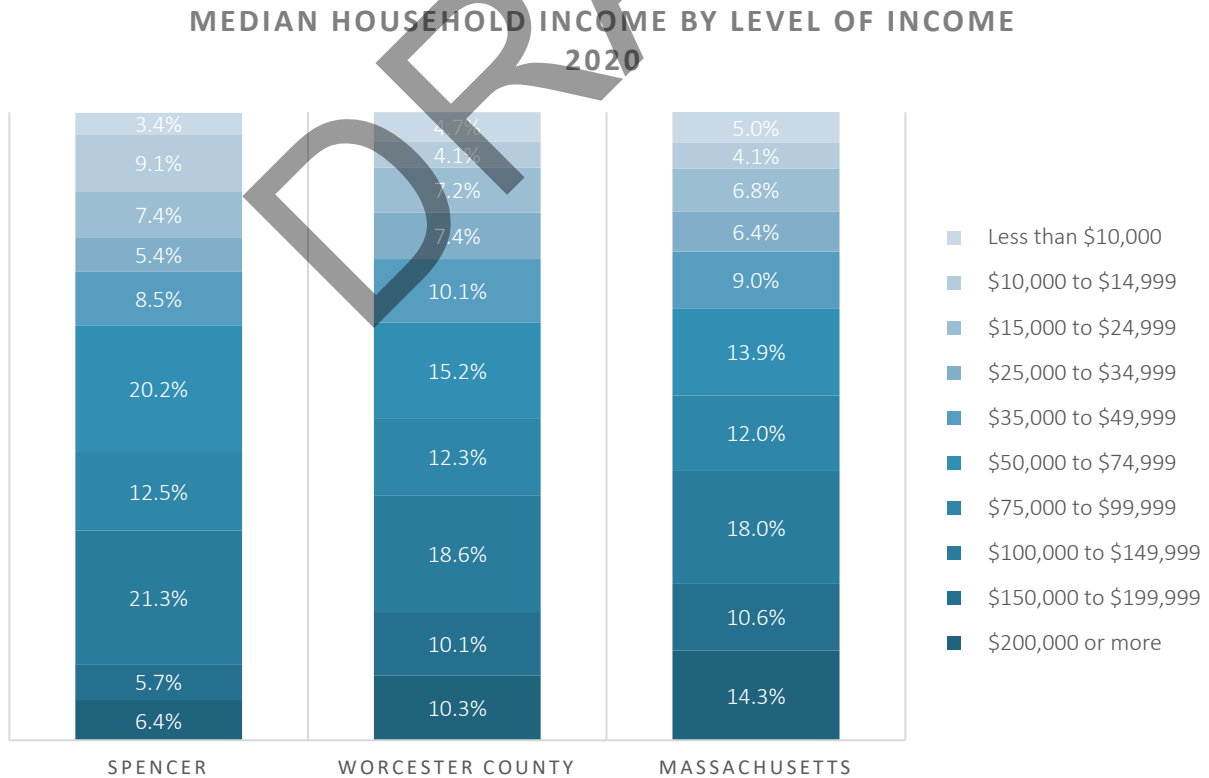


FIGURE 5: HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY LEVEL OF INCOME, 2020

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATES 2020



In the United States, housing can be considered “affordable” if the household pays no more than 30% of its annual income on housing. Households who pay more than 30% of their income towards housing are considered ‘cost-burdened’ and may have difficulties affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care, as well as saving for their future. This definition typically operates under the following assumptions: (1) Housing costs for renters typically include gross rent plus utilities; (2) a calculation of total housing costs for owner-occupied households includes a mortgage payment – consisting of principal, interest, taxes, and insurance. Households paying between 30% and 50% of their income on housing are considered moderately cost-burdened, while households paying greater than 50% of their income are considered to be severely cost-burdened.

In the community survey, 41% of respondents reported paying more than 30% of their annual income towards housing costs. When respondents were questioned if they can comfortably afford their home and associated housing costs, 20% responded that affording their home is a challenge. Five percent of survey respondents stated that they will not be able to afford their home as they age into retirement, while 26% are unsure if they will be able to. From this sample of Spencer’s population, it is clear that there are numerous residents who are struggling to afford to live here. Many may be unaware they are considered “cost burdened” and could likely qualify for deed-restricted affordable housing options.

Spencer’s local food pantry—Mary, Queen of the Rosary Parish Food Pantry—served 1,688 households in 2022. This amounted to 5,065 people and of this population served, 1,162 (or 23%) were seniors.

EDUCATION AND LABOR FORCE

Educational attainment is one of the most significant factors that determine employment and wealth, particularly now that a high school education is the minimum requirement to obtain a job in most industries. The most recent American Community Survey estimate that 89.4% of Spencer residents over the age of 25 hold a high school degree or higher, whereas the state and county have educational attainment rates above 91% (Table 7). Spencer residents with at least a bachelor’s degree (21%) is lower than both Worcester County (37%) and Massachusetts (44%). Of the working age population totaling 10,196 Spencer residents in 2020, 64% were participating in the labor force, a rate slightly lower than the county and state percentages. Spencer is primarily composed of a blue-collar workforce with a fairly strong labor force participation rate. Based on educational attainment rates in the town, the workforce in Spencer is diverse. Some Spencer residents may be well-positioned to hold high-paying, professional or management jobs while others are skilled workers in industries such as manufacturing and construction. Employees in services, administration, sales, transportation, or production are prevalent as well.

TABLE 7: LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

	Population 16 Years and Over		Educational Attainment of Population 25 Years and Over				
	Total	Percent of Total Population In Labor Force	Population 25 Years and Over	Less than High School Degree	High School Graduate or Higher	Some College, no degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Massachusetts	5,678,025	67.2%	4,815,331	8.9%	91.1%	15.3%	44.5%
Worcester County	674,054	66.3%	572,388	8.8%	91.3%	17.3%	37.1%
Spencer	10,196	63.8%	9,202	10.6%	89.4%	24.0%	20.8%

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2020

EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIES

According to Table 8, currently the top industries that employ Spencer residents include educational services, health care, and social assistance (23%), manufacturing (17%), and retail trade (10%). Since 2000, the most notable increases in the employment of Spencer residents have been in the industries of agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining (+1045%), construction (+32%), as well as finance and insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing (+26%). Additionally, the industry labeled “other services, except public administration” experienced an increase of 127% since 2000, gaining 286 jobs. Since 2000, considerable job loss among Spencer residents has occurred in the industries of wholesale trade (-45%), arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services (-31%), and information (-30%). Despite remaining top employment industries for Spencer residents, the categories of manufacturing and retail trade saw a significant loss of employees between 2000 and 2020, decreasing by 427 residents.

In December 2022, the unemployment rate in Spencer was 4.0%. This rate decreased from a rate of 5.7% in December 2021. These rates are slightly higher than the unemployment rates of Massachusetts, which was at 3.2% in 2022 and 4.1% in 2021.

TABLE 8: SPENCER EMPLOYEES BY INDUSTRY CLASS, 2000-2020

	2000		2020		Change 2000-2020	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	6,137	100%	6,494	100%	357	6%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	11	0%	126	0%	115	1045%
Construction	456	7%	601	9%	145	32%
Manufacturing	1,308	21%	1,078	17%	-230	-18%
Wholesale trade	251	4%	137	2%	-114	-45%
Retail trade	839	14%	642	10%	-197	-23%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities:	263	4%	188	3%	-75	-29%
Information	156	3%	109	2%	-47	-30%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	320	5%	403	6%	83	26%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	417	7%	342	5%	-75	-18%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	1,355	22%	1,506	23%	151	11%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	370	6%	257	4%	-113	-31%
Other services, except public administration	226	4%	512	8%	286	127%
Public administration	238	4%	197	3%	-41	-17%

Source: 2000 Census; 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

COMMUTING CHARACTERISTICS

Spencer is conveniently located proximate to several major centers of employment which offer a variety of jobs, including Worcester, Boston, and Providence. While there are a variety of job opportunities within Spencer, such as such as Flexcon, Big Y, Price Chopper, and Klem's Department Store, many residents commute to work outside of town.

Six percent of residents are self-employed workers in their own business. In 2019, 5% of laborers worked from home, however the most current statistics estimate that this has increased to 12% of employed people working from home, primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority (68%) of Spencer residents commute to work alone by automobile as of 2020, although this has decreased slightly from previous years. Ten percent of workers in Spencer commute by public transportation. As remote work becomes more feasible in many professions, attractive small towns such as Spencer may see a migration of families looking to relocate outside of the pricey Boston metro area.

HOUSING SUPPLY CHARACTERISTICS

HOUSING OCCUPANCY

The 2000 U.S. Census showed that there were 4,583 occupied housing units in Spencer. Between 2000 and 2020, the number of housing units in town grew by 12%, increasing the housing supply by an estimated 531 units (Table 9). Meanwhile, Worcester County's total housing units increased by 11% during this same time period and Massachusetts' total units increased by 9%. There are 5,120 occupied housing units and 395 vacant housing units in Spencer as of 2020. The rate of owner-occupancy in Spencer has increased by 2% since 2000, rising to approximately 65% owner occupancy. This rate is approximately on par with the county and state, which have owner occupancy rates of 66% and 63% respectively. However, compared to its neighboring towns, Spencer has the lowest rate of owner-occupied housing, with a large proportion of renters occupying housing units.

In recent decades, the average household size of both owner-occupied units and renter-occupied units has declined in Spencer, Worcester County, and Massachusetts. A notable change has occurred with renter-occupied units in Spencer, which decreased from an average household size of 2.17 in 2000 to an average household size of 1.78 in 2020. The number of renter-occupied units in town only increased by 74 units, or 4%, in the past two decades. Meanwhile, the number of owner-occupied units has increased by 457 units, or 14%. There are a number of reasons that could be attributed to the decrease of average household sizes. This may be attributed to families having fewer children, empty nesters with adult children who have moved out of town, or barriers preventing new families from moving into Spencer. The availability of housing units with multiple bedrooms may be a factor as well, particularly for rental housing.

FIGURE 6: UNITS OCCUPIED BY TENURE, 2020

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATES 2020

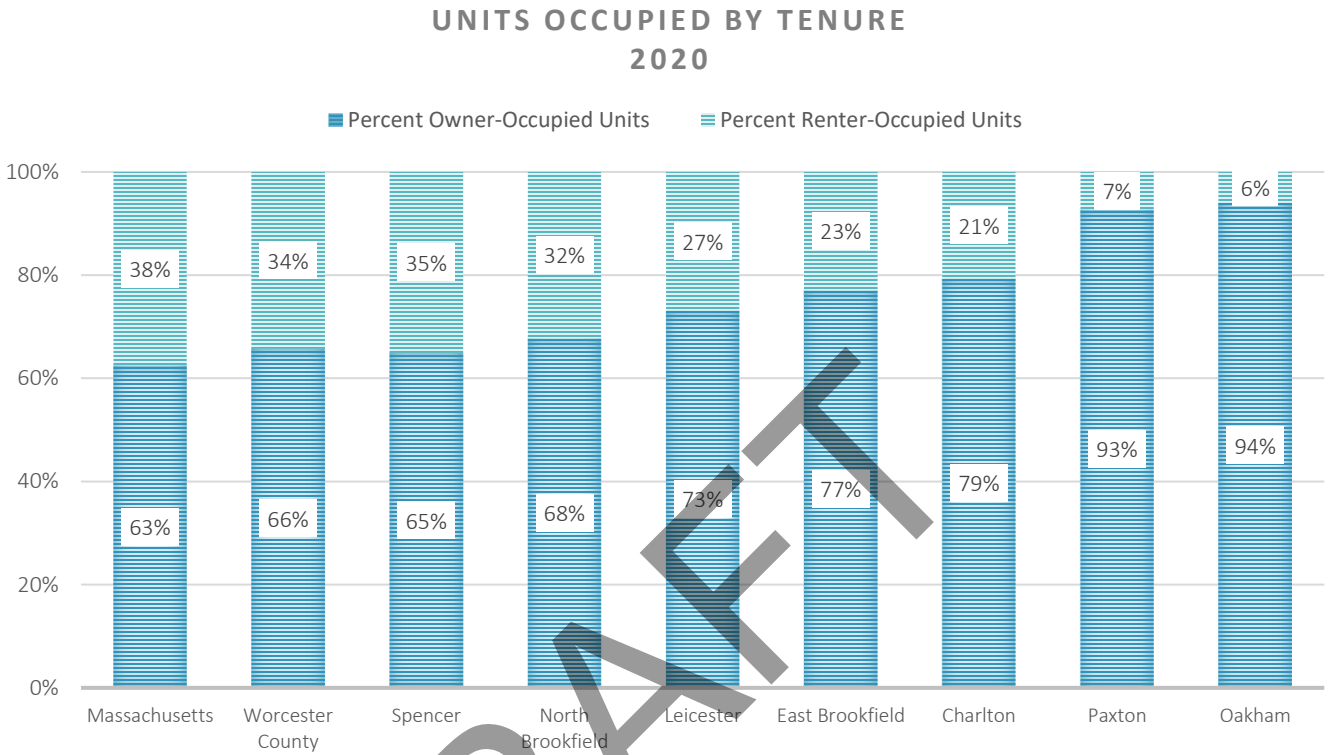


TABLE 9: HOUSEHOLDS BY TENURE, 2000-2020

	2000						2020					
	Massachusetts		Worcester County		Spencer		Massachusetts		Worcester County		Spencer	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Occupied housing units	2,443,580	100%	283,927	100%	4,583	100%	2,646,980	100%	314,081	100%	5,114	100%
Owner-occupied	1,508,052	61.7%	182,104	55.2%	2,863	62.5%	1,654,892	62.5%	206,343	65.7%	3,320	64.9%
Renter-occupied	935,528	38.3%	101,823	44.8%	1,720	37.5%	992,088	37.5%	107,738	34.3%	1,794	35.1%
Average household size of owner-occupied unit	2.72	-	2.76	-	2.74	-	2.69	-	2.76	-	2.7	-
Average household size of renter-occupied unit	2.17	-	2.19	-	2.17	-	2.26	-	2.24	-	1.78	-

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2020

Vacancy status is used as a basic indicator of the strength or weakness of a housing market and its stability. It shows demand for housing, identifies housing turnover, and suggests the quality of housing for certain areas. There are five reasons a house can be classified as vacant by the United States Census Bureau, including: the house is (1) for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use; (2) for rent; (3) for sale; (4) rented or sold, but not occupied; or (5) all other vacant units. Rental vacancy rates have steadily been declining across the U.S., in both urban, suburban, and rural areas.

In Spencer, vacant housing units increased from 355 units to 665 units between 2000 and 2020 (Table 10). The vacancy rate in Spencer was most recently estimated to be at 11.5%, according to the 2020 American Community Survey estimates. Nearly 200 units are considered vacant as they are used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, so they may be occupied only at certain times of the year. The greatest increase in vacancy occurred in the “Other Vacant” category, which increased from 69 units in 2000 to 332 units in 2020. Vacancy on some level is necessary for a sustainable market and economy, and a vacancy rate between 4% and 6% is typically considered healthy in that supply is close enough to demand to keep prices relatively stable. A low vacancy rate suggests that demand is greatly outpacing supply and generally results in rising costs of housing. Alternatively, a high vacancy rate may indicate that homes are sitting empty, something that could lead to blight and a housing stock in disrepair. High rental vacancy rates do not always correlate with lower market rents as well.

According to Table 10, as of 2020 the number of vacant units for sale is reported to be zero, however the margin of error +/-21. These statistics imply that it is likely very challenging for people to purchase homes in Spencer or for current residents to relocate within the town. The high vacancy rate in town may be attributed to a high number of homes in Spencer that are second residences for households whose primary residences are listed elsewhere. It can be estimated that there are retirees who wish to keep their home but spend part of the year in areas that have a warmer climate or lower cost of living. Short term rental platforms such as Vrbo and Airbnb are on the rise, which allows homeowners to rent out their vacant homes for vacations or short stays, often resulting in higher incomes for hosts than long-term rentals would otherwise provide.

TABLE 10: SPENCER VACANCY RATES. 2000-2020

	2000	2010	2020
Total housing units	4,938	5,022	5,779
Occupied housing units	4,583	4,608	5,114
Vacant housing units	355	414	665
For rent	94	134	118
Rented or sold, not occupied	40	71	17
For sale only	29	56	0
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	122	43	198
For migrant workers	1	0	0
Other vacant	69	110	332
Vacancy rate	7.2%	8.2%	11.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000, 2010; American Community Survey Estimates 2020

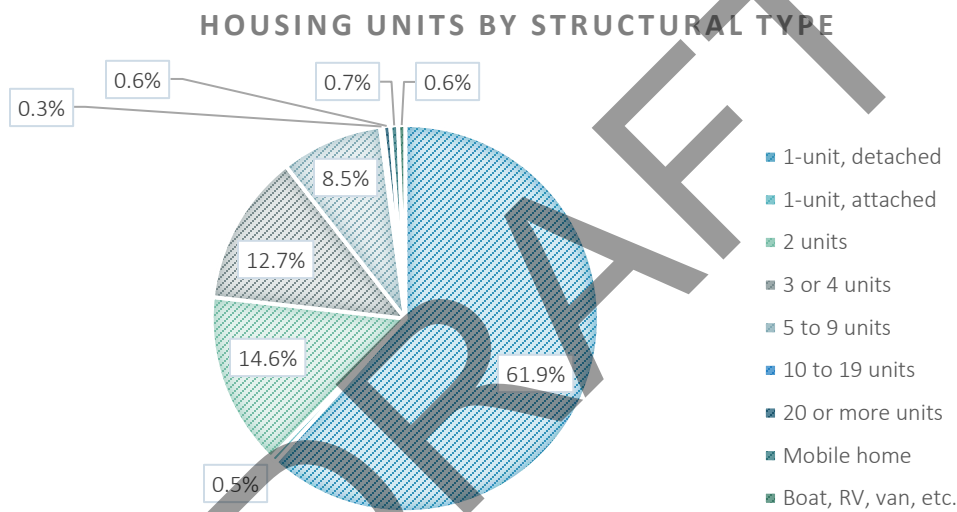
HOUSING BY STRUCTURAL TYPE

The ACS estimates that 62% of homes in Spencer are single-family detached homes, which slightly exceeds the ratios within Worcester County and the State, both of which remain under 60% of total homes (Figure 7). In terms of infrastructure needs and land use, this type of housing is the least efficient in terms of supplying homes to current and future residents. In Spencer, 15% of housing structures are considered 2 units (or duplexes), 13% are 3 or 4 units, and 9% are 5 to 9 units. There are few structures with more than 10 residential units in Spencer. Less than 1% of the housing stock is mobile homes. Spencer's housing stock is more diverse than many of its surrounding neighbors.

It should be noted that the American Community Survey Estimates are useful for comparison purposes, but the numbers may over report or under report the types of residential uses in town. The Spencer Assessor's Office has local data that can provide a more accurate description of the types of uses in town.

FIGURE 7: SPENCER HOUSING UNITS BY STRUCTURAL TYPE, 2020

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ESTIMATES 2020

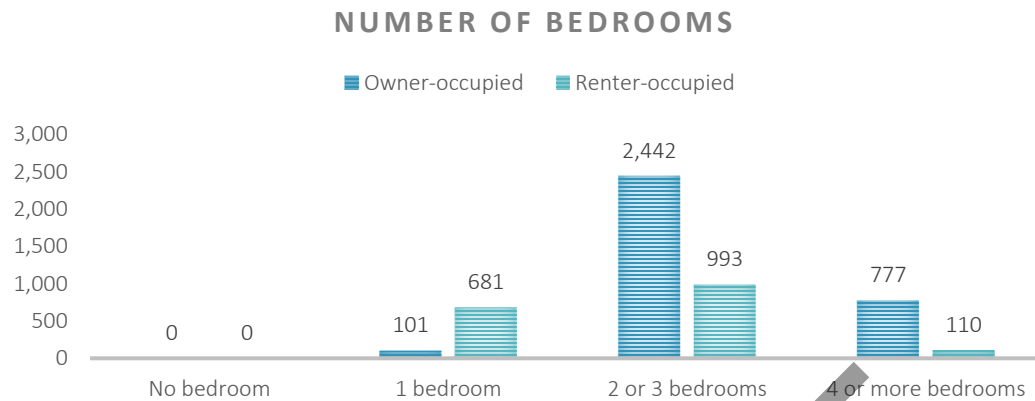


HOUSING BY NUMBER OF BEDROOMS

Analyzing the town's housing stock by number of bedrooms is useful in determining if there are housing deficiencies such as availability of one-to two-bedroom homes for smaller households or three-bedroom units for larger families. By the most recent ACS estimates, there are zero rental or ownership housing options that have no bedroom, such as studio apartments (Figure 8). Studio apartments are often the cheapest options for individuals living alone. The town is also lacking in one bedroom housing for owner occupancy, which often comes in the form of condominiums and apartments for sale. Overall, the majority of housing options, both ownership and rental units, have between two and three bedrooms. If families need housing with four or more bedrooms, the opportunities for renting are fairly slim in Spencer and purchasing a home is the primary option. It is important for communities to offer a variety of bedroom options within their housing stock in order to accommodate individuals and families of all sizes and budgets.

FIGURE 8: SPENCER HOUSING UNITS BY NUMBER OF BEDROOMS, 2020

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 5-YEAR ESTIMATES 2020



AGE OF HOUSING

Nearly one-third of homes in Spencer were constructed prior to 1940 (Table 11), indicating a significant portion of the housing stock is historic. Older homes can have implications for numerous structural, accessibility, safety, and energy issues. Examples of potential challenges include: a high demand for maintenance and repairs, home design that is inaccessible for people with disabilities and mobility impairments, inefficient heating/cooling/insulation systems, outdated materials that present health risks such as lead paint, asbestos, and lead pipes. It is also a priority to preserve important historic homes that add to Spencer's charming character, something that can be achieved through establishing Local Historic Districts or other protective measures.

Half of Spencer's housing stock was constructed between 1950 and 1990, a time period that saw the largest growth in residential development. Development trends in the United States during this time period are exemplified in many parts of Spencer's built landscape outside of its downtown. Prior to WWII, Americans lived in metropolitan areas where they could find housing and nearby jobs; however, postwar population growth saw an expansion of suburban areas. The extension of the highway system and accessibility to automobiles allowed families to live farther from job centers. Suburban sprawl, characterized by low-density, owner-occupied, detached single-family home neighborhoods, was the common development pattern of this time period. This trend was further enforced by zoning codes that divided municipalities' land use into separate districts and allowed this type of housing by-right, a practice that remains today in Spencer and most other communities.

Since 2010, the town has added only a fraction of new homes to its housing stock compared to previous decades in Spencer's history. Homes built in the past two decades make up 10% of the town's existing housing stock. Spencer's affordable housing stock was primarily built in the 1970's and 1980's. The newest affordable housing complex in Spencer is Bixby Trail Estates, which opened in 2017.

TABLE 11: SPENCER HOMES BY AGE

	Number of Housing Units	Percentage of Housing Units
Total Housing Units	5,779	100%
Built 1939 or earlier	1,736	30%
Built 1940 to 1949	217	4%
Built 1950 to 1959	541	9%
Built 1960 to 1969	627	11%
Built 1970 to 1979	844	15%
Built 1980 to 1989	906	16%
Built 1990 to 1999	336	6%
Built 2000 to 2009	380	7%
Built 2010 or later	192	3%

Source: American Community Survey Estimates 2020

SENIOR HOUSING

Seniors are a growing sector of the Spencer population and housing should reflect their needs. Seniors have unique and varying residential needs. Most seniors require smaller, affordable, and accessible housing, of which the town has modest availability. There are limited senior housing options in town, making it a challenge for those who have established roots here to remain in the community. Elderly residents require a range of options for levels a care, as some can age in place while other are more dependent and need assistance with daily tasks.

There are several age-restricted housing options in Spencer. Howe Village and Depot Village, which are managed by the Spencer Housing Authority, are reserved for those age 60+ and handicapped residents. Senior Living at Prouty is a very low-income senior housing community for those who meet the age and financial criteria. 77 Maple Street is an 8-bedroom complex that is not age-restricted but is reserved for those with disabilities. Astorwood Place is a 24-unit elderly housing complex with income restrictions. Lincoln Hill Manor Rest Home and Assisted Living is a 30-bedroom facility licensed to provide assisted living facilities to ambulatory residents.

The Spencer Council on Aging is a strong asset to the local senior community. The Council offers health and wellness, fitness, support groups, recreation and leisure, and nutrition programs, as well as socialization, referral services, employment resources, and transportation. Programs and services are open to all seniors living in Spencer. The Board meets on a regular basis. Should the Town pursue more housing options for seniors, the Council on Aging should be a strategic partner in such an effort.

An aspect of Spencer’s Healthy Aging Initiative is to help seniors age in place. The COA helps connect seniors with local cost savings resources such as senior property tax exemptions, senior circuit breaker tax credit, senior worker tax work off program, and the senior tax deferral program.

INCOME RESTRICTED HOUSING (SUBSIDIZED HOUSING)

TABLE 12: DHCD CHAPTER 40B SUBSIDIZED HOUSING INVENTORY (SHI) FOR PRINCETON

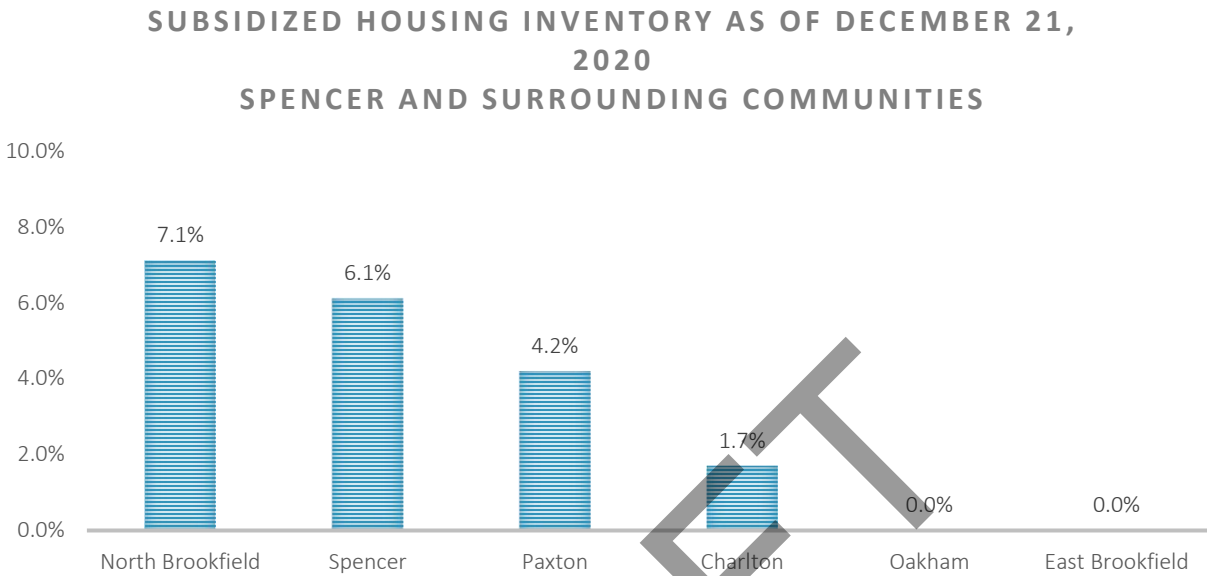
SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, 2021

Name	Address	Type (Rental/Ownership)	SHI Units	Affordability Expires	Built with Comp. Permit	Subsidizing Agency
Depot Village	40 Wall St.	Rental	30	Perpetuity	No	DHCD
Howe Village	McDonald St.	Rental	60	Perpetuity	No	DHCD
Howe Village	McDonald St.	Rental	84	Perpetuity	No	DHCD
N/A	77 Maple St.	Rental	8	Perpetuity	No	DHCD
N/A	Lloyd Dyer Drive	Rental	8	Perpetuity	No	DHCD
Astorwood Place	Rt. 31 Charlton Rd.	Rental	24	10/01/2041	No	RHS; DHCD
DDS Group Homes	Confidential	Rental	20	N/A	No	DDS
Living at Prouty	Main St.	Rental	35	2046	No	HUD
Bixby Trail Estates	19 Bixby Road	Rental	42	2067	No	DHCD; MassHousing
Total Spencer SHI Units						311
Census 2010 Year-Round Housing Units						5,137
Percent Subsidized						6.05%

There are currently 311 units in Spencer that are restricted for occupancy by lower-income households. Spencer has a Housing Authority that manages public income-restricted housing for households earning less than 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI), specifically the units at Depot Village, Howe Village, 77 Maple Street, and Lloyd Dyer Drive. There is also private income-restricted housing owned and operated by non-profit owners who receive subsidies in exchange for renting to low- and moderate-income individuals and families.

FIGURE 9: CHAPTER 40B SUBSIDIZED HOUSING INVENTORY (SHI) PERCENTAGES AS OF DECEMBER 21, 2020 FOR SPENCER AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

SOURCE: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



At 6.1%, Spencer currently falls below the State-mandated 10% affordable housing requirement. Figure 9 shows where Spencer and its surrounding communities currently stand in terms of their Subsidized Housing Inventories (SHI). None of Spencer’s neighbors have met the 10% threshold, and only North Brookfield has a higher percentage of housing deed-restricted as affordable compared to Spencer. Two of Spencer’s neighbors have no affordable units listed on the Subsidized Housing Inventory, adding pressure to the region’s affordable housing market.

Communities that do not meet the goal of 10% affordable housing designated for those earning 80% or less of the Area Median Income (AMI) risk the vulnerability of developers being granted comprehensive permits to forego existing zoning restrictions. These permits are granted to developers if they reserve at least 25% (or 20% in some cases) of proposed units as affordable. In order to mitigate this risk, towns falling under the 10% requirement must increase their housing stock by at least 0.5% each year, or 1.0% over two years, and have an approved Housing Production Plan, showing that the community is making strides to address its housing needs.

HOUSING MARKET

SINGLE-FAMILY HOME MARKET

In 2021, the median sales price for a single-family home in Spencer was \$344,500, a rate significantly higher than past decades. Between 2006 and 2011, housing prices in Spencer declined considerably, a phenomenon that can be attributed to the Recession and housing crisis. Since a low of \$149,000 in 2011, median single-family home prices have experienced consistent annual growth. By 2019, Spencer saw single-family home prices exceed pre-Recession prices.

Figure 10 shows the single-family home median sale price compared to the number of sales for Spencer between 2006 and 2021. Generally, increases in sales price have simultaneously occurred with increases in number of sales, other than in 2009 and 2010. This chart demonstrates the high demand for single-family homes leading up to and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic years. In Spencer, the majority of homes (75%) are valued between \$200,000 and \$500,000 (Table 13). About 7% of owner-occupied units in Spencer are valued under \$150,000, while about 7% are valued over \$500,000.

TABLE 13: HOME VALUE OF OWNER-OCCUPIED UNITS IN SPENCER, 2020

Value	Estimate	Percent
Owner-occupied units	3,320	100%
Less than \$50,000	100	3%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	17	<1%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	104	3%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	389	12%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	1,218	37%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	1,283	39%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	187	6%
\$1,000,000 or more	22	<1%
Median (dollars)	\$281,100	--

Source: American Community Survey Estimates 2020

Spencer’s residential tax rates have historically been lower than most of its neighbors. As of 2022, Spencer’s tax rate is \$13.16 per \$1,000 (Figure 11). Currently, only Oakham has a lower tax rate. Property taxes are an important factor that shape local housing markets as they influence the costs of buying, renting, or investing in homes. Despite comparatively low tax rates to other communities, some Spencer residents who completed the community housing survey wrote about the challenge of paying increasing taxes but wanting to remain in their homes. High property taxes may exclude many renters who aspire to purchase a home but are unable to afford the high tax bills along with a mortgage, utilities, and other associated costs.

In Spencer, seniors over the age of 70 can qualify for the senior property tax exemption to receive a \$500 tax exemption. The Town’s senior worker tax work off program allows residents to receive up to \$1,000 per household off real estate tax bills by working for a variety of town departments. If a senior’s household income is less than \$20,000 per year, residents can defer paying taxes, but with an 8% interest rate.

FIGURE 10: SPENCER SINGLE-FAMILY HOME MEDIAN SALE PRICE AND TOTAL SALES BY YEAR

SOURCE: THE WARREN GROUP

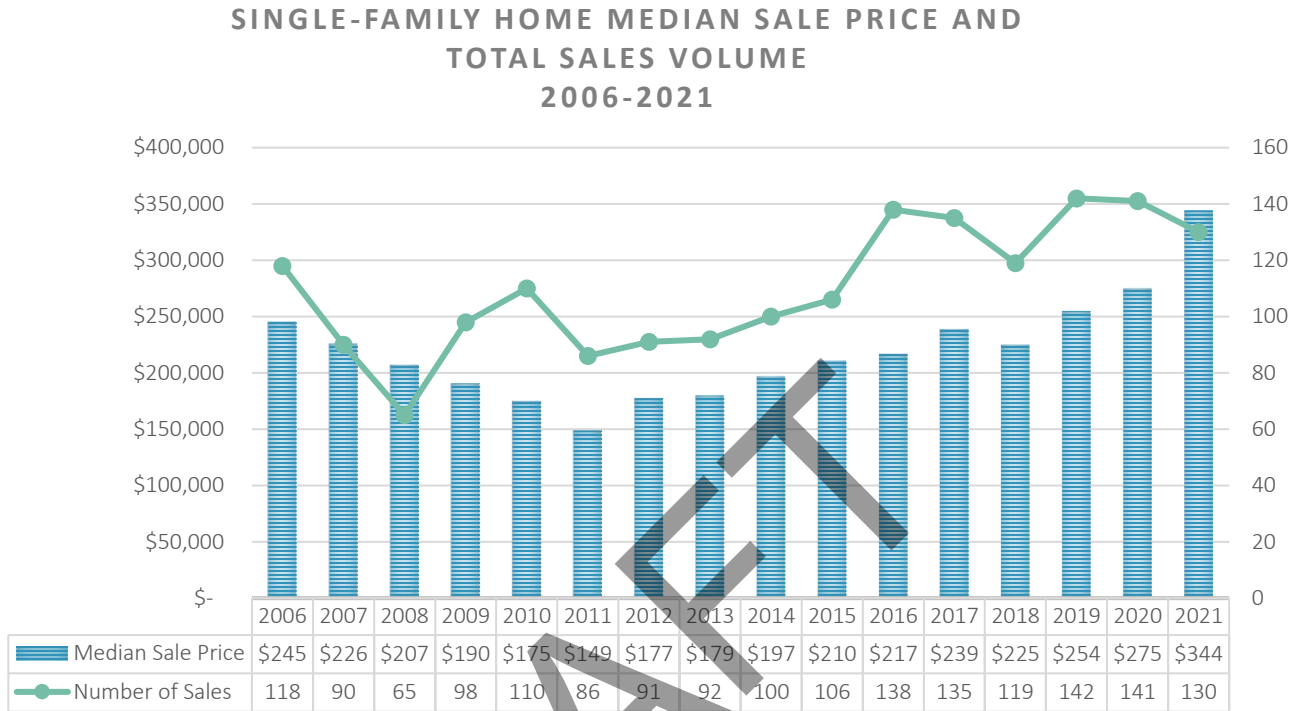
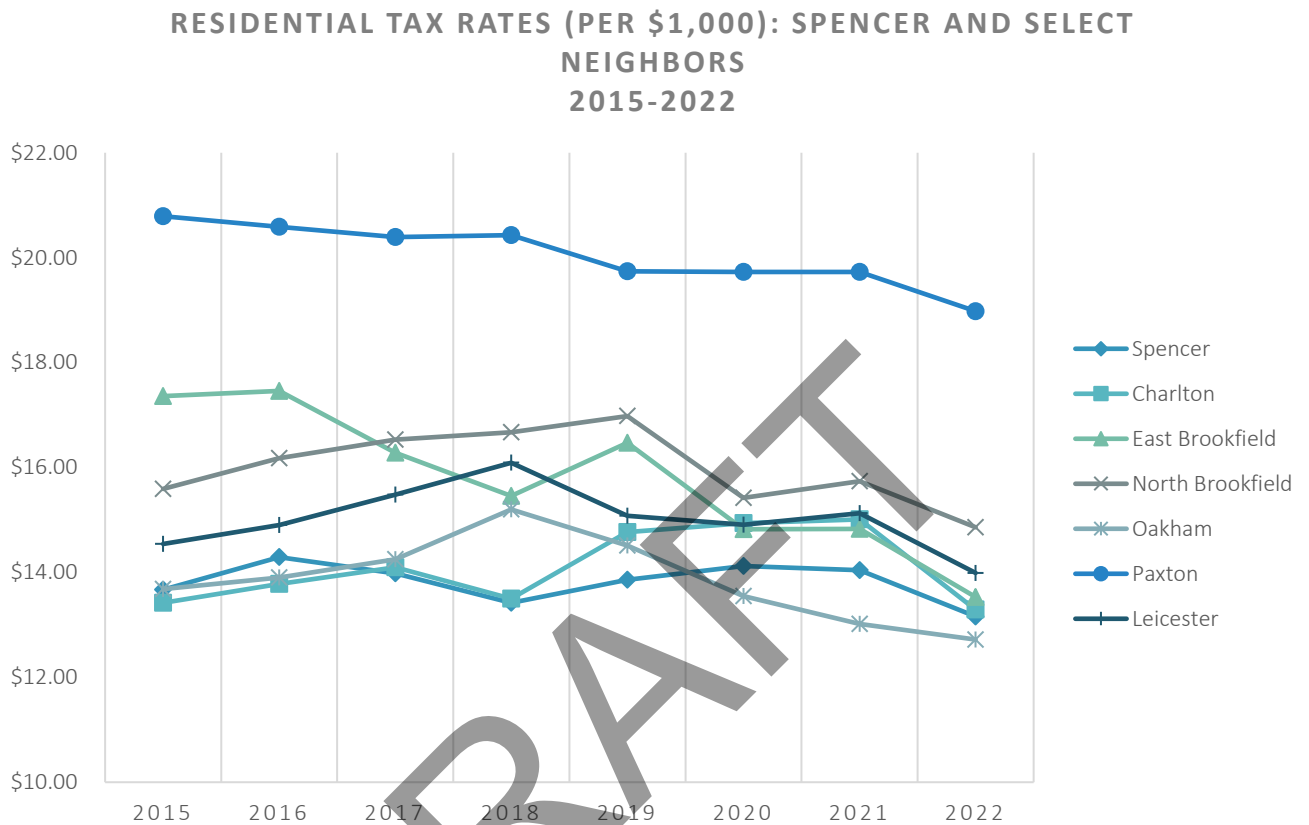


TABLE 14: TOWN OF SPENCER RESIDENTIAL PARCELS AND ASSESSED VALUE, FY 2023

Category	Number of Parcels	Residential Assessed Value
Single Family	3,155	\$ 1,061,690,400
Condominium Units	104	\$ 18,821,500
Mobile Homes and Multi-House	55	\$ 22,094,100
Two Family	319	\$ 90,872,600
Three Family	110	\$ 31,908,600
4 Units or More	93	\$ 44,403,600
Vacant Land or Land with Outbuildings	847	\$ 28,437,300
Mixed Use	64	\$ 36,833,467

Source: Town of Spencer Assessor's Office, FY 2023 Assessor's Classification Report

FIGURE 11: RESIDENTIAL TAX RATES OF SPENCER AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES, 2015 – 2022
 SOURCE: OFFICIAL TOWN WEBSITES



CONDOMINIUM MARKET

Condominiums are often regarded as a middle ground between apartment rental and single-family home ownership, plus occupancy in these units can indicate demand from households in transition. A transitional household is a household that is moving between rental housing and single-family housing. This could be a young family purchasing a starter home or a senior that wishes to downsize. A low level of activity in the condominium market suggests that Spencer has a very low supply of condominiums and is not effectively attracting demand from a diverse range of households. Table 15 shows that the volume of transactions in condominiums has been extremely low since a high of 16 sales in 2006. The unit prices are significantly lower than the median housing price in Spencer, suggesting they could be an affordable alternative if Spencer had a larger supply. Fiscal Year 2023 data from the Town of Spencer Assessor shows that there are 104 condominium units in town.

TABLE 15: SPENCER CONDOMINIUM MEDIAN SALE PRICE AND TOTAL SALES, 2006 – 2021

SOURCE: THE WARREN GROUP

Year	Median Sale Price	Number of Sales
2006	\$ 179,963	16
2007	\$ 176,000	6
2008	\$ 199,450	8
2009	\$ 240,000	6
2010	\$ 103,000	3
2011	\$ -	2
2012	\$ 159,330	9
2013	\$ 202,500	6
2014	\$ 125,500	4
2015	\$ 169,174	3
2016	\$ 163,485	4
2017	\$ 117,250	4
2018	\$ 135,000	7
2019	\$ 172,105	6
2020	\$ 170,500	8
2021	\$ 197,500	8

RENTAL MARKET

As of 2020, Spencer has an estimated 1,577 units of occupied rental housing, or around 35% of the total occupied housing stock (Table 16). The American Community Survey estimated the median gross rent for Spencer to be approximately \$856, which is lower than the state and the county, both of which are above \$1,000 per month. The most recent local data on asking rents collected from Zillow, Trulia, and Craigslist in 2022 shows a handful of rental options. A one-bedroom apartment was listed on these sites for \$1,450 per month while two-bedroom apartments were listed between \$1,400 and \$1,500 per month. A three-bedroom apartment was listed for \$1,800 per month and a four-bedroom apartment was listed for \$1,900 per month. Rental units for any other number of bedrooms were not listed. All listed units were concentrated in the center of town. Compared to its surrounding communities, Spencer had the most apartments listed for availability to rent, however this is indicative of a fairly low vacancy rate in the region. Handicapped accessible units were not listed.

Low vacancy rates paired with high asking rents pose challenges for low-income families that participate in the Section 8 Program. The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) issues eligible households a voucher to obtain their own rental housing, in which a rental subsidy is paid directly to the landlord on behalf of the participating family by a participating housing agency. The subsidy is determined by the family's income and the family pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the Section 8 program. Individuals and families often wait years to make it off the waiting list for this program. Eligible households are issued a Section 8/HCVP Voucher and given only 120 days to locate their own rental housing. If no rental housing options within their price range come on the market, then the families lose the voucher opportunity. Initial costs of renting an apartment (first and last month's rent, security deposit, and sometimes broker fees) can be costly and preclude some lower-income households from affording to rent a home that meets their needs. While home sales prices are on the rise, so too have rents risen in the region. Reasons for price increases may be attributed to financial

uncertainty of owning a home, an expensive housing market that excludes first-time homebuyers from entering the homeownership market and forcing them to rent for longer periods of time, or significant individual debt (such as emerging college-graduates) preventing entrance into the homeownership market.

TABLE 16: SPENCER ESTIMATED MONTHLY RENT, 2020

	Estimate	Percent
Occupied Units Paying Rent	1,577	100%
Less than \$500	194	12%
\$500 to \$999	817	52%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	427	27%
\$1,500 to \$1,999	139	9%
\$2,000 to \$2,499	0	0%
\$2,500 to \$2,999	0	0%
\$3,000 or more	0	0%
Median Gross Rent (\$)	856	X
<i>Source: American Community Survey Estimates, 2020</i>		

FORECLOSURES

Foreclosures are a useful indicator of the health of a housing market. Unusual spikes in foreclosure rates can indicate instability in the market. Table 17 shows both petitions to foreclose and foreclosure sales for all home types since 2006. Petitions to foreclose have been fairly high since 2006, particularly between 2006-2012, but have decreased significantly since 2020. While foreclosure sales were very high in 2006 and 2007, these rates have also diminished to no more than four sales per year since that time period. Based on the foreclosure rates, it is clear that the Recession and housing crisis of 2008 had lasting impacts on the Spencer housing market. Recent years have demonstrated much greater stability in the local market, however.

Petitions to foreclose indicate foreclosure action has been initiated by the mortgage holder. Such action does not necessarily lead to a resident losing their home. Rather, it suggests some hardship or instability that affected the homeowners’ ability to keep up their payments. The number of foreclosure sales tells us the volume of mortgages that have completed the foreclosure process and the mortgage holder is attempting to recoup their losses. Comparing these two numbers gives a sense of how much instability there is in the Spencer market. As the table below shows, several of the foreclosure petitions have made it to the sale stage annually, indicating that homeowners have occasionally been unable to come to some sort of arrangement to keep their home.

TABLE 17: SPENCER FORECLOSURES FOR ALL HOME TYPES, 2006 – 2021

SOURCE: THE WARREN GROUP

	Petitions to Foreclose	Foreclosure Sales
2006	50	15
2007	79	19
2008	25	4
2009	60	0
2010	75	3
2011	29	1
2012	51	4
2013	16	1
2014	25	3
2015	34	2
2016	33	1
2017	29	0
2018	20	4
2019	19	0
2020	4	0
2021	6	0

Source: The Warren Group, 2022

DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING ACTIVITY

Like other commodities, the value of a home is greatly influenced by supply and demand. While there are many factors at work in determining home value, high demand intersecting with constrained supply will inevitably result in higher prices. Table 18 shows the number of building permits for new housing units issued annually between 2006 and 2021. According to the table, housing production has varied across the years. The majority of new housing has been single-family homes, with only eight building permits issued for structures of 2 or more units since 2006. While a percentage of these authorized units may not have been constructed, the fact that the number of new housing units has increased despite minimal population growth reflects a general trend in smaller household sizes.

According to the 2020 edition of Massachusetts Audubon’s “Losing Ground³,” the rate of development in Spencer has increased significantly in the past two decades. Between 2005 and 2012, there were 62 acres of newly developed land in Spencer, or 1.8 acres per square mile. This increased between 2012 and 2017, in which 121 acres of land was newly developed, or 3.6 acres per square mile.

³ <https://www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/policy-advocacy/local-climate-resilient-communities/losing-ground/statistics/town/spencer>

TABLE 18: SPENCER HOUSING UNIT BUILDING PERMITS BY STRUCTURE TYPE, 2006-2021

Year	Total Building Permits	Single-Family Structures	2-Family Structures	3+ Unit Multi-Family Structures
2006	31	28	0	3
2007	2	2	0	0
2008	17	17	0	0
2009	9	9	0	0
2010	16	11	2	3
2011	8	8	0	0
2012	8	8	0	0
2013	14	14	0	0
2014	0	0	0	0
2015	42	42	0	0
2016	12	12	0	0
2017	0	0	0	0
2018	18	18	0	0
2019	20	20	0	0
2020	21	21	0	0
2021	0	0	0	0

Source: Department of Housing and Urban Development SOCDs Building Permits Database, 2022

DRAFT

HOUSING CHALLENGES

REGULATORY CONSTRAINTS

Zoning authority in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is devolved to local governments by M.G.L. Chapter 40A. Spencer is divided into seven zoning districts, plus three overlay districts (Aquifer Protection, Floodplain, and Residential Business). Table 19 summarizes the existing base zones with their abbreviations as used in the zoning code and acreage of each zone. The Planning Board primarily acts as the special permit granting authority (SPGA) for different types of uses, along with the ZBA in some cases. The ZBA also holds the power to grant variances.

TABLE 19: TOWN OF SPENCER ZONING DISTRICTS

Name	Short	Area (acres)	Percent of Town	Description
Rural Residential	RR	17,888.14	88.02%	This district includes a mixture of agricultural and low-density residential uses and is key to the “rural character” of the northern and southern areas of town.
Suburban Residential	SR	330.25	1.63%	This district is closer to the core area of town and has public water and/or sewer service available either now or in the future. The “high service area” encompasses this district, which includes a substantial amount of the residential development in Spencer.
Lake Residential	LR	346.19	1.70%	This district encompasses the dense residential development along the shores of the major lakes within the Town. These areas are unique in their development history and have issues not shared by other districts.
Village Residential	VR	328.37	1.62%	This area encompasses the denser residential development in the core area surrounding downtown Spencer, and includes a substantial amount of duplex and multi-family housing. There are small neighborhood-oriented business establishments mixed into this area, as well as establishments geared to serving the population, such as churches.
Town Center Mixed Use	TC	665.17	3.27%	The district encompasses downtown Spencer and includes a mixture of business, service, and residential uses. The district regulations are designed to encourage a vibrant area where people can shop, eat, conduct business, and live in a pedestrian friendly environment.
Commercial	C	51.64	0.25%	This district includes commercial uses which are larger and typically draw from a wider region, along with more intense uses than are permitted in the Local Business district. The Commercial district provides for moderate to high intensity commercial development, especially office and general retail development.
Industrial	I	712.23	3.50%	This district provides for light industrial and service-related land uses with large buildings or outdoor storage requirements.

Regulatory constraints are zoning bylaws, policies, and regulations which may be impeding the development of affordable housing. Regulations and ordinances set by local and state authorities in Massachusetts are often exclusionary and are designed to favor single-family homes. The various regulatory constraints to Spencer's affordable housing market are described in this section.

MULTI-FAMILY DWELLINGS

An important strategy for increasing affordable housing options is to facilitate the development of multi-unit dwellings in an area of a community. While multi-family dwellings are allowed in Spencer, they are only permitted under specific and relatively restrictive conditions. Spencer's zoning defines a multi-family dwelling as a building designed with three (3) or more dwelling units intended to be occupied exclusively by families living independently of each other.

Multi-family housing is allowed by-right in the Town Center zoning district, and by special permit in the Suburban Residential and Village Residential districts. Two parking spaces are required per unit in multi-family dwellings, however for multi-family rentals this may be reduced to 1.5 spaces per unit provided 50% of the units have 1,000 square feet or less of living space.

ZONING PROVISIONS THAT ADDRESS AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND SMART GROWTH

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS (ADU)

Accessory apartments, or accessory dwelling units, are allowed by special permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals in the Rural Residential, Suburban Residential, Lake Residential, Village Residential, and Town Center zoning districts. Construction of units may be either within or attached to (by a completely enclosed breezeway type of structure), a new or existing detached single-family dwelling, subject to certain requirements.

The residence must be owner-occupied and only one accessory apartment is allowed per residence. Accessory apartments cannot exceed 700 square feet or be larger than one-third of the floor space of the living area of the residence. No more than one bedroom is permitted in an accessory apartment, plus the unit must have its own complete kitchen and toilet facilities. There must be at least one off-street parking space, but not more than two, to serve the accessory apartment.

While this is generally a robust bylaw that allows for diverse housing options, particularly for Spencer's special needs populations such as seniors, there are a few opportunities for improvement. Currently, the bylaw does not allow for detached accessory apartments to be built, which is a major barrier for residents who may wish to construct accessory dwelling units in a detached barn, garage, or new structure on their property. Additionally, the Town may want to increase the maximum size that accessory apartments are limited to in order to allow for greater flexibility. The bylaw limits accessory apartments to one bedroom, but the Town may consider increasing this limit to two bedrooms. The Town might consider allowing accessory to be constructed by-right (provided they meet all necessary criteria) in one or more districts in town.

OPEN SPACE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT (OSRD)

Spencer has an Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw, which is defined in the zoning bylaws as a form of residential development that permits lots with reduced lot area, frontage, and setbacks to create a development in which the dwellings are clustered together in one or more groups with adjacent common open land. An OSRD is permitted by-right in the Rural Residential, Suburban Residential, and Village Residential zoning districts.

Permitted residential uses include detached single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, or attached single-family dwellings with no more than four dwellings in a single building, and uses accessory thereto, including accessory apartments. A tract must contain of a minimum of ten (10) acres and consist of one or more contiguous parcels.

The maximum number of dwelling units may not exceed 15% above the maximum that would be obtained under a conventional subdivision design for single-family homes, except when a density bonus is granted by the Planning Board, provided that the total density shall not exceed 30% above that which could be obtained with a conventional subdivision design. If a minimum of 10% of the units within the OSRD are restricted to occupancy in perpetuity by persons or families who qualify as low or moderate income, as those terms are defined for the area by the Commonwealth's Department of Housing and Community Development, a density bonus of 5% will be granted.

This bylaw could be strengthened in a few ways. The bylaw could require that proposed projects reserve a greater percentage of affordable units in exchange for a density bonus. Likewise, increasing the density bonuses offered to developers for reserving affordable units is an option that could entice developers to create this type of development to make it more financially viable. The bylaw is not flexible in terms of the location of the required common open space portion, which must be adjacent to the residences. The bylaw could be amended to allow conserved open space as part of an OSRD development to be located elsewhere in town.

TOWN CENTER MIXED USE DISTRICT

The Town Center Mixed Use Zoning District (TC) encompasses downtown Spencer. Regulations for this district encourage a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environment for shopping, eating, walking, living, and conducting business. In the TC district, multi-family housing is permitted by right. The Town has developed a set of [design guidelines for the Town Center Mixed Use District](#), with the intention of supporting revitalization efforts through the design of attractive buildings and active public spaces. The design guidelines focus on the categories of infill development, rehabilitation/restoration, storefront design, front yard and landscaping, and lighting/signage.

DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Article 5 of Spencer's Zoning Bylaws explains Spencer's dimensional requirements and provides a schedule showing the required minimum lot size, minimum lot frontage, minimum lot width, minimum setbacks, and minimum buffer for each zoning district. Table 20 replicates the table of area requirements in Spencer's Zoning Bylaws. In terms of layout, this section could be placed closer to the General Provisions or Establishment of Districts, in order to avoid unnecessary confusion.

The minimum lot size for the Rural Residential (RR) district, which encompasses a large majority of the town, is 60,000 square feet. This lot size minimum dimension is quite high, and could be decreased to allow for new residences on lots that may not meet the square footage requirements. Currently, this requirement in the RR district could be a barrier to new housing. All other zoning districts in Spencer have much lower requirements for minimum lot size.

TABLE 20: DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS

Zoning District	Minimum Lot			Minimum Setbacks		Minimum Buffer
	Area (sq ft)	Frontage (feet)	Width (feet)	Front	Side & Rear	
Rural Residential	60,000	200	100	55	25	--
Suburban Residential	22,500 – 1 or 2 family 26,000 – 3 family 29,500 – 4 family 22,500/unit – 5+ family	150	75	25	15	--
Lake Residential	22,500	100	50	15	10	--
Village Residential	10,000 – 1 or 2 family 12,500 – 3 family 15,000 – 4 family 8,000/unit – 5+ family	80	40	20	10	--
Town Center	--	--	--	--	10	--
Commercial	20,000	100	--	30	20	60
Industrial	40,000	150	--	30	20	60

PARKING PROVISIONS

Article 6.1 of the Town Zoning Bylaws dictates off street parking and loading standards. Generally, the Zoning Bylaws encourage projects designed to minimize visual intrusion by controlling the visibility of parking, storage, or other outdoor service areas viewed from public ways or premises residentially used or zoned. A table of parking requirements is included in the bylaws which describes the number of spaces required for each use type, and any special comments. The article also dictates the maximum number of spaces, location of parking, and design requirements of a parking facility.

For all types of dwelling units, a minimum of two (2) off-street parking spaces is required per unit. For multi-family rental dwellings, parking may be reduced to 1.5 spaces per unit provided 50% of the units have 1,000 square feet or less of living space. Accessory apartments must have at least one off-street parking space, but no more than two, provided for the accessory apartment. In the TC district, the number of parking spaces for each use is required to the extent that it is physically possible to provide said parking on the site.

Home businesses must provide off-street parking, and new parking areas must be screened from the view of abutters and from public ways (streets or pedestrian ways) utilizing plantings, fencing, and/or topography. Customary home occupations do not need to provide more than four parking spaces for clients, patients, non-resident employees, or other business-related demands. Parking for home-based contractors cannot constitute more than one quarter (25%) of the parcel lot area exclusive of areas covered by buildings, business activities, including parking.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

SOILS, LANDSCAPE, AND TOPOGRAPHY

Most of Spencer is covered by till soils made up of unsorted rocks, stones, sands, and finer particles⁴. These soils are generally found on ridges and side slopes. Many of the till soils have layers with low permeability, limiting their suitability for septic systems. On milder slopes they are often suitable for agriculture, and the great majority of Spencer's prime agricultural soils are of this type. Much of the town's prime agricultural soils have been developed for other uses such as residential and commercial development.

Upon the melting of the glaciers, the valleys that formed now feature extensive sand and gravel banks. These sand and gravel soils lie largely along the Seven Mile and Cranberry Rivers. The soils here are very permeable to water and carry large quantities of groundwater to the Big Meadow and Cranberry Meadow municipal wells. At several locations, these soils are mined in gravel pits for construction materials. The permeability of these sand and gravel soils makes them suitable for septic systems, however they are easily contaminated wherever they are exposed, and water movement through the soils can transport pollutants comparatively rapidly. When used for septic fields, their poor filtering capacity makes careful design essential.

Spencer has numerous hills with steep grades dipping to winding valleys of small rivers. Large, low-lying areas are found along the floodplains of the Seven Mile River, the Cranberry River and in the large wetland systems of Alder Meadow and Morgan Swamp. Elevations in Town range from 620 feet to 1,063 feet above sea level. Slopes with grades 8-15% are predominant but slopes can range up to a 35% grade in Spencer. Slopes greater than a 15% grade are more susceptible to erosion and have severe limitations for septic suitability and buildings.

FLOODPLAINS, WETLANDS, AND WATER RESOURCES

There are about 480 acres of wetlands throughout the town of Spencer. Two of the largest are the Big Meadow area along Seven Mile River, and Alder Meadow northwest of Stiles Reservoir.

The 100-year floodplain areas, designated as Zone A by FEMA flood insurance maps, occur in wetlands and along many streams and ponds in Spencer. The most extensive floodplain areas are found along the Seven Mile and Cranberry Rivers. Widths of floodplains vary according to topography, and change in the types of land uses in town will influence the size of the floodplains as well. Careful review of drainage controls for proposed developments are necessary to avoid increasing flooding problems.

There are six (6) certified Vernal Pools, according to the Natural Heritage and endangered Species Program of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Certified vernal pools are protected if they fall under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act Regulations (310 CMR 10.00), however certification only establishes that it functions as a vernal pool and does not determine that the pool is within a resource area protected by the Wetlands Protection Act. Certified vernal pools are also afforded protection under the state Water Quality Certification regulations (401 Program), the state Title 5 regulations, and the Forest Cutting Practices Act regulations.

⁴ <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>

VEGETATION, FISHERIES, AND WILDLIFE

Spencer's forests are largely considered second growth forest. These forests are an economic resource, used for timber harvesting as well as for recreation. The Town of Spencer does not have a public shade tree program. However, in order to provide wildlife habitat and shade, and enhance aesthetics, developers of new subdivision roads are required to plant shade trees within the right-of-way (two to three trees per lot depending on the zoning district).

The variation in soils, topography, and landscape uses in Spencer support a variety of habitats, each with their attendant plant and animal species. The varied distribution of different landscapes and habitat types creates many habitat edges, which increases the diversity of plants and animals. An abundance of well-distributed habitat types with significant amounts of vegetative diversity makes it more likely that all of the habitat requirements for various species will be met.

Connections between habitats that provide wildlife corridors are also important. Spencer has several large tracts of open space (with a range of protection levels) including the Spencer State Forest, Four Chimneys Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Moose Hill WMA, Burncoat Pond Wildlife Sanctuary, and St. Joseph's Abbey property. In addition, Seven Mile River, Turkey Hill Brook, Alder Meadow and Morgan swamp provide significant areas of wildlife habitat. Well-connected open space areas appear to be largely in the northern part of town, whereas the rest of the protected open space areas are fragmented.

The habitats in streams, rivers, and ponds support a healthy fish population. Browning Pond, Seven Mile River, Turkey Hill Brook, Sugden Reservoir, and Howe Pond are stocked by the Mass Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Brook trout can be found in some of the smaller streams.

The densely populated central village supports some wildlife habitats along sections of undeveloped land. These habitats in the central village are along the west side of Hastings Road, around the east end of Lake Whittemore, along the rail trail from south Spencer to Chestnut Street, up from the Seven Mile River along Muzzy Brook through Muzzy Meadow, and from south of the high school and water tower to Knox Trail Junior High School, and down to the east end of Muzzy Pond.

Spencer is home to two endangered species, two threatened species, and five special concern species, as defined by Mass Wildlife. Species of concern include the blue-spotted salamander, bridle shiner, creeper, wood turtle, and the eastern box turtle.

HAZARDOUS WASTE, POLLUTION, AND STORMWATER

As of December 2018, there were eight (8) hazardous waste sites in Spencer identified as Brownfields with MassDEP. These known hazardous waste sites have been or are currently being addressed.

Sediment from construction, unpaved private roads, and winter sanding wash into these water bodies and cause water quality issues. Aggregation of impervious surfaces causes rainwater, with whatever sediment or pollution it picks up, to run off into water bodies unless managed carefully.

Careful management includes limiting what the stormwater runoff can pick up or removing contaminants, sediment, and debris before the runoff finally reaches a wetland, stream or water body. The Stormwater Management Bylaw requires that development projects which are not exempt to obtain a permit from the Planning Board or Stormwater Authority verifying that they have met design and post development management criteria.

LIMITED COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

In the most densely populated center of Town, the availability of water and sewer service generally reduces impacts to water quality. Unfortunately, the sewer and water infrastructure is aging and maintenance has been repeatedly deferred due to financial constraints. The sewer and drainage systems have not been accurately mapped which will increase the cost of maintenance. Seepage from the old pipes affects ground and surface water quality.

Town residents living outside the central area rely on their own wells, and yields can vary. The average residential well is around 100 to 150 feet deep, although well depths can be much deeper if low yields require additional storage capacity. Some of Spencer's bedrock is soft and can break down into clays that have lower levels of permeability, making water less available to residential wells. However, adequate water is generally available in most locations for residential development.

The water quality impairments in Spencer's rivers and ponds need to be addressed. There is no sewer service around the ponds in spite of the urbanized density of development. Eventually the impact of pond-side septic systems will need evaluation, as will nutrient inputs from lawn fertilizer and impervious surfaces.

Public transportation options exist in Spencer but are fairly limited. The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) serves the town of Spencer. Two WRTA Bus Routes, Route 33 and Route 19 have stops at Spencer's DPW department. There are additional stops along Route 9 (Main Street). The town is within the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Paratransit buffer. The town is not connected by rail service and the nearest commuter rail station is in Worcester. Travel in Spencer is primarily by car.

LIMITED SUBSIDIES AND STAFF CAPACITY

State and Federal financial resources to subsidize affordable housing production is very limited and competitive across Massachusetts. As housing prices continue to rise, deeper subsidies are required to fill the gaps between what housing costs to develop and what residents can realistically afford. Record-high housing sale prices and buyers willing to pay tens of thousands of dollars over asking prices are part of a highly competitive housing market. The need for deed-restricted affordable housing has only become more crucial as subsidies become less available.

Spencer has not voted to approve the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to establish a Community Preservation Fund. Under CPA, at least 10% of the funding raised through a local property surcharge paired with additional funding through the statewide CPA Trust Fund, must be dedicated to local housing efforts to preserve and produce affordable housing. Likewise, the Town does not have an Affordable Housing Trust Fund to reserve funds specifically for affordable housing initiatives. These two resources could be immensely beneficial, allowing Spencer to have a reliable source of funding for all items related to affordable housing.

The Town of Spencer currently lacks adequate staffing capacity to prioritize affordable housing efforts. The Town staffs a Town Planner but as this person dually serves as the Town's Conservation Agent, there is little extra capacity for additional responsibilities. There is presently no committee dedicated to affordable housing efforts. Limited Town resources to fund a part-time, full-time, or shared position to adequately address affordable housing initiatives is a barrier to Spencer achieving the goals of this HPP.

LAND AVAILABILITY

Although there are large tracts of undeveloped land in Spencer, much of the land has major restrictions on it that constrain feasible development for housing. About 60% of open space in Spencer is under either limited or permanent protection. Entities such as the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Fish and Game, Saint Joseph’s Abbey, Girl and Boy Scouts of America, Mass Audubon, Greater Worcester Land Trust, and Common Ground Land Trust own land in Spencer for open space or recreation purposes. There are some municipally owned sites that have potential for the creation of new housing, as well as vacant or underutilized properties that could be redeveloped.

TABLE 21: OPEN SPACE BY LEVEL OF PROTECTION

Level of Protection	Size (GIS Acres)	Percent of Total
Total Open Space	5,825.03	100%
Permanent Protection	3,337.01	57.29%
Limited Protection	127.35	2.19%
None	2,351.14	40.36%
Unknown	9.53	0.16%

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

Proposed new housing development in rural and suburban towns such as Spencer can easily raise concerns and apprehensions by residents. Wariness about the impact that new units will have on local services, capacity of schools, property values, quality of life, etc. are common, and impressions of what “affordable housing” looks like often hold negative connotations. Misunderstandings about affordable housing and the people living in these units result in their stigmatization, and development proposals are consistently faced with local opposition.

Throughout the public outreach process, Spencer residents expressed a mix of reactions to discussions regarding new housing development. In general, residents were quite hesitant to the proposal of new housing units in town, particularly developments with any amount of density. In the community survey and at the public forum held on September 21, 2022, residents ranked cottage housing communities, accessory dwelling units, and single-family homes geared towards first-time homebuyers and seniors as highly favorable. Larger-scale apartments, conversion of larger homes into apartments, and luxury single-family homes were the least favorable. While multi-family housing is the fastest way to increase Spencer’s subsidized housing stock, this type of housing may prove to be challenging and receive pushback from community members.

It is essential to use this Plan to continue community outreach and education on the importance of affordable housing in the community and region. Informing local leaders and residents on these issues will help dispel negative stereotypes and garner political support. The provision of updated, accurate information to the greater community on the topic of affordable housing is an important strategy to rallying support. Community concerns should be addressed with sensitivity.

HOUSING PRODUCTION GOALS

This Housing Production Plan is intended to guide the town in taking local control of its approach to affordable housing. Although the Town of Spencer has not yet met the 10% affordable housing threshold set by the State, the town does not necessarily face repercussions if that goal is not immediately met. The State encourages communities to gradually add affordable units to their housing stock. For a small town such as Spencer, this approach ensures that municipal resources are not overly strained with new housing and families. If the Town has a certified HPP in place, demonstrating that it has added a set number of affordable units to its housing stock each year and gradually making progress of adding units to the Subsidized Housing Inventory, the Town will be granted the power to deny comprehensive permits under Chapter 40B until the 10% threshold is satisfied.

TABLE 22: FIVE YEAR HOUSING PRODUCTION SCHEDULE FOR SPENCER

Year	Annual Additional Units to the SHI	Total Affordable Units on the SHI	Percent Affordable	Gap (# Units needed to achieve 10%)
Current (2010 Census)		311	6.10%	202
2023	25	336	6.50%	177
2024	25	361	7.00%	152
2025	25	386	7.50%	127
2026	25	411	8.00%	102
2027	25	436	8.50%	77

An HPP is required to set two types of goals: an annual numerical goal for affordable housing production, and qualitative strategies based on the type, affordability, location, and other desired aspects of new affordable housing. Table 21 shows the annual numerical goal for affordable housing production.

Using the current DHCD baseline of 5,137 year-round housing units (based on data from the 2010 U.S. Decennial Census), Spencer currently has 6.1% of its housing stock qualify on the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), or 311 affordable units. The Town needs to add 202 more affordable units to the SHI in order to achieve 10% on the SHI.

To ensure this Housing Production Plan is certified, the Town of Spencer will need to produce SHI-eligible units totaling 0.5% of the housing stock according to the most recent Census over the course of one year, or 1.0% over the course of two years. To produce 0.5% of its total units annually as SHI units, Spencer will need to add 25 SHI-eligible housing units each year. Table 21 is a schedule that shows the progress that the town would make if 25 affordable units were added each year to the SHI. In five years, the town would reach 8.5%, or 436 units. At this gradual pace, the town would meet the 10% threshold by 2029.

It should be noted the housing production schedule is based on 2010 Census data. When the full results of the 2020 Census are released, the DHCD baseline will be updated and the percent of affordable housing will change along with the number of units needed to achieve the 10% threshold. Initial redistricting data estimates that the town has 5,515 units as of 2020, an increase of 378 residential units.

HOUSING STRATEGIES

To achieve the housing production goals efficiently, the following strategies have been developed based on a wide variety of sources including:

- Prior planning efforts in Spencer
- Priority housing needs identified in the Housing Needs Assessment
- Public comments from the Housing Production Plan Public Workshop on September 21, 2022
- Results of the 2022 Spencer Housing Needs Survey
- Discussions of the Housing Production Plan Committee at regularly scheduled meetings
- Successful case studies of housing initiatives in other municipalities throughout the Commonwealth

[Insert sentence here when Spencer Board of Selectmen and Planning Board vote to adopt the Plan]

While the primary objective of the Plan is to guide the Town to meet the 10% affordability threshold under Chapter 40B, it should be noted that the Town also strives to serve a wide range of local housing needs. Therefore, there are instances within this Plan in which housing initiatives may be promoted to meet such needs that will not necessarily directly result in the inclusion of units on the Subsidized Housing Inventory.

CAPACITY BUILDING STRATEGIES

1. CONDUCT ONGOING COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION ON HOUSING ISSUES AND ACTIVITIES

Spencer Town staff, boards, committees, and volunteers should continue the valuable work that the Housing Production Plan Committee has accomplished in developing this Plan. Much momentum has been built with the public outreach initiatives of this Plan, including the survey and public workshop. Public education and dialogue on the need and benefits of affordable housing, plus keeping the community informed as to any new housing initiatives the Town is pursuing, will help remove barriers to creating affordable housing.

One of the greatest obstacles to creating affordable housing is gathering community support. Many of these housing strategies rely on local approval, including Town Meeting, hence community support is essential to pass new initiatives. Outreach and education efforts can include hosting community meetings or special forums on specific housing initiatives, offering town officials the opportunity to present various proposals and solicit feedback from the public, public information on existing programs and services, enhanced use of public access television, making information on housing easily accessible to the public. Outreach efforts should also target housing developers interested in including affordable units in their developments.

There are a number of outreach and public education efforts at the Town can consider pursuing:

- Host community meetings or special forums on specific housing initiatives
- Offer Town officials the opportunity to present various proposals and solicit feedback from the public
- Provide the public with information on existing housing-related programs and services
- Expand the Town website to include a housing section
- Make general information on housing and affordability easily accessible to the public
- Host roundtable discussions between developers and Town officials

2. CONSIDER HIRING A DEDICATED AFFORDABLE HOUSING COORDINATOR

If Spencer is committed to assuming a more proactive role in promoting affordable housing and implementing the strategies outlined in this Action Plan, its capacity to coordinate these activities should be enhanced. Based on current job responsibilities, the Town Planner has limited capacity to take on additional duties. Added professional support and expertise can benefit the town tremendously. A dedicated Housing Coordinator could provide a number of services to the town, depending on what the needs are, including:

- Public education
- Grant writing
- Maintaining the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI)
- Outreach to establish relationships with developers, lenders, funders, service providers, etc. to promote community housing efforts
- Overall coordination of the implementation of strategies outlined in this Plan and providing necessary professional support as needed

There are many options and models for securing professional expertise. The Town could hire a full-time or part-time housing coordinator, or a shared position with another community. A part-time consultant could be secured. An Assistant Town Planner could be hired to assume coordination of housing-related activities. CMRPC recently was granted funding to develop a Regional Housing Coordinator position for interested communities in Central Massachusetts. This is an opportunity that the Town is encouraged to consider participating in, especially if it does not have the capacity to hire a full-time coordinator.

Many communities with housing coordinator positions utilize CPA funding to support them, therefore the adoption of CPA may be critical to funding a part-time housing staff person or consultant.

3. ACTIVELY SEEK OUT AND APPLY FOR FUNDING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO IMPLEMENT THE HPP ACTION PLAN

Implementation of the strategies in this Action Plan will require funding and technical assistance. There are a variety of avenues for funding and support that the Town can pursue to achieve its housing production goals. Organizations such as Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP), Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA), MassHousing, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance (CMHA), and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) offer resources and services including, but not limited to:

- Rental assistance
- Homelessness prevention
- Emergency shelter placement
- Home repair and maintenance for seniors
- Public education and advocacy
- Data and research
- Financing programs
- Homebuyer resources
- Trainings and events
- Model bylaws
- Funding opportunities

Planning assistance grants are made available each year through the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA), offering municipalities in the Commonwealth technical assistance support to improve their land use practices, including provision of sufficient and diverse housing.

The District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) Program is funded annually by the Legislature and the Governor through a state appropriation. CMRPC is one of the 13 regional planning agencies that administer the program. Towns are encouraged to apply for technical assistance funding to complete projects related to planning for housing, growth, Community Compact Cabinet activities, or support of regional efficiency. Additionally, CMRPC offers up to 24 hours of Local Planning Assistance to each of its member communities annually for a variety of technical support projects.

Community One Stop for Growth, the Commonwealth's single application portal and collaborative review process of community development grant programs, offers opportunities to support housing, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, and community development. Through this grant application process, programs including, but not limited to the Housing Choice Grant Program, Massachusetts Downtown Initiative, Rural and Small Town Development Fund, and MassWorks Infrastructure Program offer a range of funding opportunities. Communities can be considered by multiple grant programs simultaneously, have access to guidance and partnership from state agencies, and are able to receive referrals to additional funding opportunities. To apply, municipalities are encouraged to first submit an Expression of Interest to seek input on a number of potential projects.

The Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program is a federally funded, competitive grant program designed to help small cities and towns meet a range of community development needs in housing, infrastructure, revitalization, economic development, and public social services. Eligible CDBG projects related to housing include housing rehabilitation or development. Municipalities with a population of less than 50,000 that do not receive CDBG funds directly from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are eligible for CDBG funding. Applications can be submitted by individual communities or regionally by multiple communities.

4. PURSUE ADOPTION OF A MUNICIPAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST FUND

The state enacted the Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act on June 7, 2005, which simplified the process of establishing housing funds that are dedicated to subsidizing affordable housing. The law enables communities to collect funds for housing, segregate them out of the general budget into an affordable housing trust fund, and subsequently use these funds without returning to Town Meeting for approval. Additionally, trusts can own and manage real-estate, though most trusts choose to dispose of property through a sale or long-term lease to a developer to clearly differentiate any affordable housing development from a public construction project to be in compliance with Chapter 30B. Possible types of assistance through the affordable housing trust fund include:

- Deferred payment loans
- Low or no interest amortizing loans
- Down payment and closing cost assistance for first-time homebuyers
- Credit enhancements and mortgage insurance guarantees
- Matching funds for municipalities that sponsor affordable housing projects
- Section 8 Project Based Vouchers

The trust statute mandates that a board of trustees with a minimum of five members be created. The board could be comprised of members with expertise in affordable housing development, real estate development, banking, finance, or real estate law. One trustee must be the chief executive officer of the municipality, who will then appoint the remainder of the trustees. For Spencer, one member of the Board of Selectmen would be designated as a trustee. Along with managing the trust fund, the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board of Trustees can also become the entity in Spencer that oversees affordable housing issues, utilizing this HPP as a guiding document and implementing the strategies.

There are numerous ways to capitalize the fund. Some communities that have passed the Community Preservation Act (CPA) choose to annually commit a percentage of CPA funds to their local housing trust, without targeting the funding to any specific initiative. Towns with inclusionary zoning bylaws that allow cash in-lieu of affordable units have also chosen to commit these funds to their housing trusts. Some communities have received funding from developers through negotiations on proposed developments. In addition to these methods, other opportunities to capitalize the housing trust could include potential inclusionary zoning fees, donated funding or property, special fundraisers, or grants.

Over 100 communities in the state have a local affordable housing trust fund. For more information, the Massachusetts Housing Partnership offers a [guidebook to establishing Municipal Affordable Housing Trusts](#).

5. CONSIDER LOCAL APPROVAL FOR COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT (CPA)

Spencer's lack of local subsidy funds is a major constraint to pursuing greater housing affordability, diversity, and sustainability. Many towns that have made significant strides with respect to affordable housing have had Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding available to subsidize locally sponsored housing initiatives. The Town is recommended to pursue a study to understand how CPA would enhance life for the Spencer community and the estimated costs for taxpayers. Information on CPA should be made widely available to the public so voters have full knowledge if CPA should be brought to Town Meeting in the future.

Cities and towns that adopt CPA obtain community preservation funds from two sources - a local property tax surcharge and a yearly distribution from the statewide CPA Trust Fund. Trust fund revenues are derived from a surcharge placed on all real estate transactions at the state's Registries of Deeds. The surcharge for most documents filed at the Registries is \$50, which is immediately deposited in the CPA Trust Fund held at the Department of Revenue (DOR), plus municipal lien certificates are subject to a \$25 surcharge. Depending upon how the real estate market is doing, the \$50/\$25 fees add up to approximately \$60 million per year. Each spring, every CPA community receives a distribution from the trust fund at a formula-based percentage of what they raised locally.

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) establishes the authority for municipalities in the Commonwealth to create a Community Preservation Fund derived from a surcharge of 1% to 3% of the property tax, to be matched by the state based on a funding commitment of approximately \$36 million annually. Once adopted, the Act requires that at least 10% of the funding raised through taxes be distributed to each of the three categories – open space/recreation, historic preservation, and affordable housing – allowing flexibility in distributing the majority of the money to any of these uses as determined by the community. CPA also allows communities to target funds to those earning up to 100% of the area median income.

[Communities in Central Massachusetts that have adopted CPA](#) include the towns of Berlin, Boylston, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon, Northbridge, Northborough, Sturbridge, Shrewsbury, Upton, Westborough, West Boylston, and Worcester among the 194 CPA communities across the Commonwealth (55% of the state's municipalities).

There are many ways that the Town could utilize CPA funding to enhance affordable housing efforts in Princeton, including the following:

- Acquire land for the purpose of creating affordable housing
- Adaptive re-use of existing buildings
- Purchase of existing market-rate homes and conversion to affordable homes to create permanent deed-restricted affordable rental housing

- Buy-down the cost of homes to create affordable mortgage costs for first-time homebuyers with qualifying incomes
- Support the development of affordable housing on publicly owned land
- Support the construction of new housing in existing neighborhoods
- Support the costs of improvements necessary to develop accessory dwelling units, with the provision that the units be permanently deed-restricted to preserve affordability
- Finance predevelopment activities (soft costs) to promote better project planning
- Provide financial support to help cover down-payment and closing costs for first-time homebuyers
- Offer direct assistance in the form of rental vouchers that subsidize the difference between market rents and what a household can afford to pay
- Fund a professional to support the implementation of local affordable housing plans

To learn more about the Community Preservation Act and see examples of housing projects funded by CPA in other communities, visit the [Community Preservation Coalition official website](#).

6. DEVELOP A PROCESS TO OVERSEE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HPP ACTION PLAN

Spencer does not currently have a committee, group, or Town employee that oversees housing initiatives in town. The Housing Production Plan Committee was formed to support the development of this Plan but was not intended to be a permanent standing committee. A process should be put in place to ensure the recommended strategies of the Housing Production Plan are implemented. This could be the responsibility of an existing committee or the Master Plan Steering Committee. A new committee can also be established to direct housing activities in Spencer, although it is recognized that the town's volunteer base is stretched thin. If the Town needs support in establishing a housing committee, Massachusetts Housing Partnership offers resources in their Housing Toolbox for Massachusetts Communities.

Spencer is a small town with limited staff capacity and a strong reliance on its volunteers. Without dedicated funding from the Community Preservation Act or a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust, it is unlikely that the town would be able to hire a housing coordinator at this time to focus on increasing affordable housing. Encouraging more participation from volunteers will be an essential step to implementing this action plan.

7. PARTICIPATE IN REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS ADDRESSING HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND AFFORDABILITY

It is important to acknowledge that towns in Massachusetts do not exist in a vacuum, and issues that Spencer is facing are similar to many other small towns in the state. While Spencer is limited in its capacity as a single town, there may be multi-jurisdictional efforts that the community could participate in. Housing is an increasingly urgent issue, therefore surrounding communities may be interested in pursuing collaborative solutions. There are a few regional housing collaborations in Massachusetts that could be utilized as examples:

- [Regional Housing Services Office](#)
- [Assabet Regional Housing Consortium](#)
- [Metro North Regional Housing Services Office](#)

Spencer could consider joining with neighboring towns to establish an entity similar to the existing regional housing programs. A regional approach could offer Spencer access to housing services at a much lower cost than the town would typically obtain. Spencer could receive assistance with affordable housing monitoring, project development, technical assistance, and regional activities. Other regional housing entities have successfully contracted

professional housing consultant services, conducted senior housing forums, held workshops on affordable housing topics, developed Emergency Rental Assistance programs in response to COVID-19, provided affordable housing information to residents, and more. CMRPC is launching its first Regional Housing Coordinator position. This is an opportunity Spencer could consider participating in if the Town wants to share a planner with other communities in Central Massachusetts.

The town could partner with other communities on specific development projects. For example, seven outer Cape Cod towns with CPA funds partnered to create a housing community for adults with autism. This development, called Cape Cod Village, was a collaborative project to address a regional need.

The Town can also focus on strengthening existing partnerships with housing agencies. Entities such as DHCD, MassHousing, and Mass Housing Partnership have very resourceful staff that are willing to meet with communities to discuss programs that are offered. Spencer is encouraged to reach out to local and state housing agencies to determine the best ways that the town can improve the quality of life for its current and future residents.

8. ENCOURAGE RELEVANT BOARDS, COMMITTEES, AND TOWN LEADERS TO PARTICIPATE IN TRAININGS AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS RELATED TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Housing and land use in Massachusetts are constantly evolving fields, with new funding programs, zoning opportunities, and law and policy changes. Leadership in Spencer should attempt to stay up to date with ways in which they can best serve their community. There are numerous ways to build knowledge and enhance capacity to plan for housing. Workshops, trainings, conferences, and general resources are offered by [Citizen Planner Training Collaborative \(CPTC\)](#), [Mass Housing Partnership \(MHP\)](#), [Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association](#), and [Citizens' Housing and Planning Association \(CHAPA\)](#), to name a few. These are also unique opportunities to learn about success stories from other communities.

Town staff and all members, even the most veteran public servants, of the Planning Board, Board of Selectmen, ZBA, Council on Aging, and other boards are encouraged to participate annually in learning opportunities that are offered.

9. INVESTIGATE AND RESEARCH FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND THE INVENTORY AND CONDITION OF UNITS MANAGED BY THE HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Spencer Housing Authority manages the majority of the town's affordable housing units. The Town should explore ways to support this important provider of housing for low-income, elderly, and disabled community members. Since most of the units were constructed prior to 1990, they may need repairs or upgrades. There are various programs that will support this type of work for housing authorities. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers funding for capital investments in public housing units. This work can range from smaller improvements such as water conservation measures or heating system upgrades to large-scale improvements such as roof replacements.

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is a funding resource that many communities utilize to support efforts with their local housing authorities. With this funding, there are creative opportunities that the Town and Housing Authority could partner on. Communities can allocate CPA funds to the local housing authority to preserve expiring affordability restrictions, repair existing units, develop affordable housing on publicly-owned land, support rental voucher programs, convert market-rate homes to deed-restricted affordable rental housing, and more.

10. PURSUE OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES TARGETING SPECIAL POPULATIONS SUCH AS VETERANS, HOMELESS, OR THOSE IN RECOVERY

Safe and stable housing is important for everyone. However, for those with mental illness, chronic health conditions, histories of trauma, or other struggles, it can be difficult to maintain a stable home without additional help. Combining affordable housing with supportive services can provide that needed assistance. Easy access to services like health care, support groups, legal advice, or transportation is essential for people to thrive in their communities. There are many contributors to homelessness, and supportive services are a necessary component to helping many people achieve permanent, stable housing.

The Town is encouraged to seek out opportunities to support special populations in the community. This could include enhancing partnerships with existing non-profit organizations in the region such as Veterans Inc., United Way of Central Massachusetts, AIDS Project Worcester, Seven Hills Foundation, Community Legal Aid, or Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, just to name a few. The Town could explore opportunities to boost its relationship with South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) to offer programs in addition to the housing that is provided by the organization in Spencer. The Spencer Council on Aging is another opportunity for collaboration to determine if additional services, programs, or activities are needed. The Town may also want to consider working with the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) on increasing public transportation in town.

ZONING AND POLICY STRATEGIES

1. SUPPORT CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT AND MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING WHERE FEASIBLE

To meet local housing demand, a range of housing types and building scales is needed in Spencer. This includes alternatives to single-family homes on traditional subdivisions, such as cluster development, multi-family housing, or other “missing middle” housing types. Small housing options that utilize less undeveloped land can serve populations such as seniors looking to downsize and young professionals seeking starter homes. In order to retain and attract a diverse mix of households, Spencer needs to support a variety of housing and tenure types.

Residential cluster developments are types of design that feature homes on smaller lots while protecting open space that would have been allocated to individual home sites. There are many advantages to cluster development as opposed to traditional subdivision design. The open space preserved as part of a cluster development can provide community members with common recreational areas while also offering habitat for wildlife and reducing stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces. These designs can benefit developers by reducing the cost of site development and increasing the market price of individual home sites.

One opportunity for future cluster developments in Spencer is cottage house communities or pocket neighborhoods. These developments can consist of single- and two-family houses, townhouses, or apartment buildings, typically smaller in size and clustered around a common area. They are identifiable by walkable paths, shared green spaces, and detached parking spaces. The Town may consider adopting a Cottage Housing Community Zoning Bylaw in order to facilitate the development of this type of housing.

Multi-family housing that is compatible in scale and form with the existing detached single-family and duplex homes in Spencer should be strived for. While density is often associated with mid-rise apartment buildings, there are plenty of house-scale buildings that can fit into the town’s existing residential neighborhoods and not be detrimental to its small-town character. Options such as duplexes, fourplexes, mixed use, courtyard buildings, townhouses, small-scale condominiums, etc. can blend seamlessly into the physical character of the community. Smaller-scale multi-family housing can increase housing access and affordability in order to address housing needs.

2. MODIFY THE EXISTING ACCESSORY APARTMENT BYLAW TO ALLOW FOR MORE FLEXIBLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Town of Spencer's Zoning Bylaws allow accessory apartments by special permit in five of the town's zoning districts (RR, SR, LR, VR, TC). As previously noted in the Housing Challenges section, the bylaw is generally strong and meets some Smart Growth principles, however there are some modifications that the Town should consider in order to allow this favorable type of housing to be constructed more easily. Currently, the Accessory Apartment zoning bylaw only allows for attached accessory apartments that cannot exceed 700 square feet, or one-third of the floor space of living area in residence. This should be amended to allow detached accessory apartments and an increased maximum size. The Town Planner and Building Inspector have held discussions about amending this bylaw to allow detached units up to 900 square feet. This change would allow homeowners greater flexibility with adding accessory apartments to their residences. Additionally, applying for a special permit is often a barrier for homeowners who would like to create a accessory apartment on their property. The Town is encouraged to consider permitting this use to be allowed by-right in one or more residential zoning districts, provided they meet all necessary criteria. The Town should also consider waiving the parking requirement, as accessory dwelling units built for an elderly relative who no longer drives should be able to avoid this requirement without seeking a variance, particularly if options like the WRTA Paratransit service are available.

3. AMEND THE OPEN SPACE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT (OSRD) BYLAW TO ALLOW GREATER FLEXIBILITY WITH HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND FACILITATE PRODUCTION OF AFFORDABLE UNITS

The Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw is a tool for facilitating development and conservation that meets Smart Growth principles. It is a fairly strong bylaw, allowing density bonuses and flexibility in the design of residential developments, and permitting OSRD projects by right in three zoning districts. However, there are several improvements that could be made to the bylaw in order to promote the best use of valuable land in town and increase the affordable housing stock.

Under the OSRD bylaw, a density bonus of 5% is granted to developers that reserve 10% of proposed units for qualifying low- or moderate-income households. Given the Town's commitment to increasing its affordable housing stock, the reserved 10% affordable units could be increased to at least 15% in order to produce more units for low-income households. In order to entice developers, the bylaw could also be strengthened by offering density bonuses greater than 5% for reserved affordable units. Similarly, increased density bonuses could be offered to developers that set aside affordable units for very low-income households (those earning 50% or less of the Area Median Income) or extremely low-income households (those earning 30% or less of the Area Median Income). With a granted density bonus, the total density cannot exceed 30% above that which could be obtained with a conventional subdivision design, so this limit should be reevaluated as well. Some communities opt to take an inclusionary zoning approach, in which a percentage of dwelling units are required to be restricted to low-income households as part of an OSRD development.

An additional issue that has been raised with the current OSRD bylaw is the inflexibility with the location of the open space conservation as required to achieve higher density. The OSRD tract must consist of one or more contiguous parcels and be a minimum of 10 acres. A minimum of 40% of the tract must be common open space, of which a maximum of 50% of that acreage can be wetlands. This requirement may not always result in development and conservation efforts that are in the Town's best interests if the open space must be adjacent to the residential development. The Town should explore options for amending the bylaw to allow conserved open space as part of an OSRD development to be located elsewhere in town. This recognizes that there are areas in town that are

appropriate for higher density development, meanwhile there is open space, recreational land, forests, and farmland in other areas that are in need of permanent protection. The transfer of development rights concept should be incorporated into the OSRD bylaw in order to allow greater flexibility and attract prospective developers.

4. PROMOTE SPENCER'S ACCESSORY APARTMENT BYLAW AND OPEN SPACE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT (OSRD) BYLAW TO RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALLER-SCALE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Spencer has two zoning bylaws in place to encourage housing development with more flexible density and affordability opportunities. The Accessory Apartment bylaw allows for the development of residential units in accessory to an owner-occupied single-family dwelling. The Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw allows for increased residential density in exchange for preserving open space. There are many creative prospects that homeowners and developers could construct using either of these bylaws. Accessory apartments allow more affordable housing options for elderly family members or recent college graduates to stay close to home but retain their independence. New OSRD's could take the form of a cottage housing community, in which smaller homes are clustered around a common area with a pedestrian-oriented layout.

During the public outreach process, clustered single-family homes and accessory dwelling units were highlighted by residents as some of the most favorable options for future residential development, as these housing types blend with the existing small-town character. However, the Town has not received many applications for permits to construct either of these types of residences in recent years. It can be speculated that many residents or developers are not aware of these opportunities. The Town is encouraged to take steps to make the local community aware of the opportunities for each zoning bylaw and allow for a clear permitting process.

5. PURSUE DESIGNATION AS A HOUSING CHOICE COMMUNITY

A Housing Choice Designation rewards communities that are producing new housing and have adopted best practices to promote sustainable housing development. A community that achieves this designation receives both exclusive admission to Housing Choice Capital Grants and priority access to many other Commonwealth grant and capital funding programs (i.e. MassWorks, Complete Streets, LAND and PARC grants). Spencer has not applied for grants from this program in the past.

The program is now part of the Community One Stop for Growth, a single application portal of community and economic development programs, and access to the program is exclusively available through One Stop. Housing Choice Communities are designated in two ways: 1) At least 5% increase or 500 increase in new units over the previous 5 years; or 2) At least a 3% increase or 300 unit increase in new units over the previous 5 years and demonstrate 7 of 14 best practices, two of which must be affordable. As of 2022, there are a total of 86 communities that have achieved designation.

If the town experiences a significant increase in housing units in future years, this program is an incredible funding opportunity. Designation will ensure the Town has priority access to the Commonwealth's financial resources that will assist the municipality with future housing developments. Examples of potential projects include feasibility studies, pedestrian infrastructure enhancements, upgrades to water and sewer infrastructure, conversion of Town-owned property into affordable units, land acquisition, and much more. CMRPC staff are available to provide technical assistance with designation and grant applications.

6. PREPARE DESIGN GUIDELINES OR STANDARDS FOR NEW MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

Design guidelines and standards are mechanisms to ensure that new development compliments a community's character and meets its goals and needs. In a community such as Spencer that has many areas consisting of low-density, single-family dwellings, residents often worry that dense, multi-family housing developments will alter the small-town feeling. To give residents more input on the design of new developments, design guidelines (optional but encouraged design elements) or design standards (required design elements) can be prepared and included in the Town Zoning Bylaws which inform the proposals of multi-family housing proposals. Established review criteria and design guidelines provide information to prospective developers regarding the scale, type, design, tenure, and municipal benefits related to multi-family development that the Town of Spencer prefers.

Design guidelines are a document outlining various aspects of residential developments that are encouraged and discouraged. These aspects can include, but are not limited to, style and materials, bulk masking and scale, sidewalks and pathways, driveways and parking, landscaping, utility and waste storage areas, lighting, and drainage and stormwater. Currently, Spencer has [Town Center Mixed Use District Design Guidelines](#) to promote design compatibility of new and existing buildings in the downtown. There are many examples of design guidelines or standards for areas permitting multi-family housing in other municipalities that the Town of Spencer can refer to. Additionally, CMRPC is available to help with compiling such a document.

7. EXPLORE ADOPTION OF AN INCLUSIONARY OR INCENTIVE ZONING BYLAW AND POSSIBLE INCENTIVES

Inclusionary zoning is a mandatory approach that requires developers to make a portion of the housing units in their project affordable to low- and moderate-income households. Some flexibility can be incorporated into the mandatory provisions of an inclusionary zoning bylaw. For example, bylaws may only apply to certain types of development, such as new construction or substantial rehabilitation. Bylaws can include in-lieu-of payment or construction alternatives providing developers the option of paying a fee per unit, building affordable units off-site, or rehabilitating units elsewhere in place of constructing affordable units within the proposed development. Inclusionary zoning bylaws can also contain a unit threshold (i.e. 10 or more units), identify income targets for the population to be served, and identify control periods and mechanisms (i.e. permanent deed restrictions)

Alternatively, *incentive zoning* is a voluntary approach that can waive certain regulatory requirements or provide additional density for developers in exchange for providing affordable housing. Incentives for developers may include density bonuses, expedited permitting, or cost offsets such as tax breaks, parking reductions, and fee reductions.

The Town of Spencer is encouraged to explore the possibility of adopting a new bylaw, or amending an existing bylaw, that requires or incentivizes affordable housing as part of new developments. There are numerous model bylaws and examples of municipalities that have adopted this type of zoning. The Town could craft the bylaw in a manner that reflects the local housing demands and market conditions.

8. EXPLORE INCENTIVES FOR OWNERS OF EXISTING MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING TO DEED-RESTRICT UNITS AS AFFORDABLE

Spencer has much housing that is considered affordable by HUD standards, however these individual rental units managed by local property owners have not been registered to the Subsidized Housing Inventory. The Town should explore opportunities that would encourage owners of multi-family housing to deed restrict their properties as affordable to low- to moderate-income households. Incentives can be offered in exchange for the cooperation of local property owners in deed-restricting their rental units as affordable. Possible incentives include property tax relief or housing rehabilitation. If the Town passed CPA or established an Affordable Housing Trust Fund, these funds could be used to support this type of partnership. This type of endeavor requires further exploration, and housing professionals at agencies such as DHCD or Mass Housing Partnership are available to offer advice and insight.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

1. CREATE AN INVENTORY OF TOWN-OWNED LAND SUITABLE FOR NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

To proactively create affordable housing and avoid unwanted comprehensive permits, the Town should take all necessary steps to prepare for new housing development. By developing an inventory of Town-owned properties and assessing each parcel of land based on constraints and factors such as zoning restrictions, topography and soils, infrastructure, traffic patterns, existing residences and businesses, access to services, proximity to schools, presence of wetlands or endangered species, wildlife corridors, historic resources, open space conservation restrictions, etc. the Town will position itself for successful future development. This inventory should be utilized when developers want to submit proposals to the town for residential developments, so the Town can determine and prioritize the properties that are most appropriate.

Town-owned parcels or buildings that are not essential for municipal purposes or conservation should be considered for new housing in order to address local needs. The Town's inventory of municipally owned properties should be evaluated by Town officials to determine the most suitable properties for housing. There are many communities across the Commonwealth that have turned to town buildings such as former mills, elementary schools, and community centers as redevelopment opportunities for housing. Spencer's Lake Street property, a former school and Town-owned parcel, is an excellent opportunity for new housing. Residents should be given an opportunity to voice their opinions on future use of the 23-acre property, as there are many options for future use of this site.

2. PURSUE ADAPTIVE REUSE OF UNDERUTILIZED OR VACANT PROPERTIES INTO HOUSING UNITS

Adaptive reuse is the use of abandoned, underutilized, or functionally obsolete properties as housing. Reuse opportunities can involve properties that are important to the community's history and character, such as former schools, mills, hospitals, churches, and municipal buildings. This type of development oftentimes draws less opposition from the local community than new construction, as it is an alternative to building on undeveloped land that combines historic preservation with provision of housing. Sometimes zoning regulations need to be modified in order to encourage new uses such as housing. Mill redevelopment overlay districts, adaptive reuse overlay districts, mixed-use or village overlay districts are tools that can facilitate the reuse of buildings to new residences.

The Town has had success with adaptive reuse in the past. A historic building constructed in the late 19th century, David Prouty Intermediate School was adapted into 35 apartments for very low-income seniors. The project was funded through grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the Community Economic Assistance Corporation (CEDAC), and MassHousing. This successful project helped preserve an important historic building while providing housing to a vulnerable population in Spencer.

There are underutilized or vacant buildings in Spencer that may be suitable for redevelopment as housing. Historic rehabilitation projects may qualify for federal funding and state historic tax credits. If the Town decides to pursue adoption of the Community Preservation Act, then funds from CPA may be used for converting non-residential properties into affordable housing units. Vacant buildings can be extremely costly for towns to maintain without any return to the community, therefore if the Town is positioned to close any municipal buildings or schools in the future, it should strategize ways to turn these properties into housing.

3. ADVOCATE FOR A HIGHER INCLUSION OF ACCESSIBLE UNITS IN PROPOSED AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

There should be adequate housing options that accommodate people with disabilities and seniors who have limited mobility or special needs, particularly those that are low-income. While there may be accessible units that are market rate, oftentimes people with disabilities or those with limited mobility cannot afford to live in them. It is crucial that this population is advocated for and that there is enough availability of affordable units that are also accessible. Spencer Town staff, boards, and committees, and Council on Aging should advocate for additional accessible units that are deed-restricted as affordable when developers submit proposals.

4. PARTNER WITH FOR- AND NON-PROFIT DEVELOPERS TO CREATE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Actively seeking out developers that are willing to create affordable housing, establishing a working relationship with them, and ensuring the development process is clear and fluid are significant steps. Working cohesively with private developers to facilitate the construction of affordable housing for households earning below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) is preferable to being subject to Comprehensive Permitting from developers who will not necessarily seek out community input. Collaborating with developers can also help the Town better understand and mitigate challenges associated with developing affordable housing. The Town could host round-table discussions in which one or more developers are invited to talk with representatives of the Town including the Town Administrator, Town Planner, Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Agent, and any others wishing to be involved in the process. Where feasible, cluster housing and multi-family housing should be encouraged.

5. DEVELOP A SYSTEM TO MONITOR LOCAL HOUSING DATA AND COMMUNITY TRENDS

The Town does not currently have a sustainable method for monitoring community data and trends in order to inform local decision making. Data and knowledge-based decisions in town administration are essential to ensuring the needs of the community are adequately met. Enhanced access to and analysis of data can help the work of government, including improved budget decisions and equitable delivery of town services. Tools such as geographic information system (GIS) maps that help visualize and store large sets of data are a very useful feature for town and city governments. Spencer Town staff have reported that a more sophisticated GIS system is needed at Town Hall. Additionally, there is currently a lack of capacity among Town staff and volunteers to be responsible for collecting and managing local data.

Housing is one of the many aspects that could benefit from a coordinated and organized approach to monitoring local data and community trends. Understanding factors such as the housing stock's structural and safety conditions, infrastructure, land use, permitting, neighborhood-level population data, etc. can help when determining future housing needs and potential locations, or maintaining the existing affordable housing stock. There is currently no person in town tasked with ensuring that newly created deed-restricted affordable units are registered on the Subsidized Housing Inventory. Additionally, it is essential that the Town be aware of any expiring units on the Subsidized Housing Inventory. Should this be the case in the future, Town staff will need to take steps to work with owners of any expiring SHI units to recertify them.

6. IDENTIFY SPECIFIC SITES TO ENCOURAGE THE FILING OF COMPREHENSIVE PERMIT APPLICATIONS AND/OR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING UNITS

To proactively create desired affordable housing, the Town should take all the necessary steps to prepare for new housing development. By creating an inventory of Town-owned properties and assessing each parcel of land based on constraints and factors such as zoning restrictions, topography and soils, infrastructure, traffic patterns, existing residences and businesses, presence of wetlands or endangered species, wildlife corridors, historic resources, open space conservation restrictions, etc. the Town will position itself for successful future development. This inventory should be utilized when developers want to submit proposals to the town for residential developments, so the town can determine and prioritize the properties that are most appropriate. Specific sites should be identified that could be utilized as "Friendly 40B" developments or would be most appropriate for providing housing with higher density. In a "Friendly" 40B approach, a developer works cooperatively with town boards to minimize density, improve setbacks, or blend architectural aesthetics with the neighborhood. Utilizing vacant, underutilized, and publicly-owned land can help reduce costs associated with developing affordable housing.

A number of areas, most with Town-owned land in them, that could potentially be suitable for the development of housing were discussed by residents at the September 21st public workshop. The benefits and drawbacks of each site plus the types of housing that would be most appropriate in each area were the foundations of the discussions in each breakout group at the event. These are areas in which the filing of comprehensive applications would also be encouraged. The study area sites, which are general areas but contain Town-owned land within them, include:

- **Town Center:** Spencer's downtown is a walkable neighborhood with three- and four-story mixed-use buildings of homes, shops, restaurants, offices, services, and civic uses centrally arranged along Main Street. Some of the buildings and land in this area are underutilized which is an opportunity for new housing paired with retail, services, or commercial uses.

- **Lake Street School Property:** There are 23 acres of land on the former Lake Street Elementary School site. Nestled within a residential area, the property includes a vacant school building, paved parking areas, recreational areas, and a scattering of small outbuildings.
- **Kittredge Road / Deer Run Road:** There is Town-owned land south of Kittredge Road and off of Deer Run Road. This area is primarily single-family homes and open space on the border with North Brookfield.
- **Donnelly Cross Road:** A primarily single-family home neighborhood located near Wire Village School, there is land in this area suitable for residential development.

7. EXPLORE CREATIVE SENIOR LIVING OPPORTUNITIES AND MODELS

Spencer residents may be interested in pursuing creative living arrangements tailored to older adults so they can remain in the community as they age. Seniors are particularly vulnerable to isolation and loneliness, which can be detrimental to their health. A *cohousing* style of living allows individuals to share resources and facilities while maintaining their own residence, allowing an independent lifestyle while surrounded by a community. These residences are typically intergenerational, but they can be age specific. In the nearby town of Berlin, MA, the Sawyer Hill EcoVillage is comprised of two cohousing neighborhoods, [Mosaic Commons](#) and [Camelot Cohousing](#), which feature small clustered houses, pedestrian-only walkways, common areas, and shared meals. *Home sharing* is another arrangement gaining popularity, in which a person who has a home may invite a friend, family member, or tenant to move in and help with expenses and household chores. Scenarios could involve people of the same age living together or a younger person willing to provide some caregiving and transportation assistance in exchange for affordable or flexible housing.

DRAFT

GOALS AND STRATEGIES		Short-Term Actions (0-12 Mo.)	Medium-Term Actions (1-3 yrs.)	Long-Term Actions (4+ years)	Ongoing Actions	Responsible Parties
Capacity Buildings Strategies						
1.1	Conduct ongoing community outreach and education on housing issues and activities				X	TA; TP
1.2	Consider hiring a dedicated Affordable Housing Coordinator		X			BOS; TA; TP
1.3	Actively seek out and apply for funding and technical assistance to implement the HPP Action Plan				X	CMRPC; TP; TA; EDC
1.4	Pursue adoption of a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund	X	X			BOS; TA; TP
1.5	Consider local approval for Community Preservation Act (CPA)		X			BOS; TA; TP; HC; CC
1.6	Develop a process to oversee implementation of the HPP Action Plan	X				TA; TP; EDC; Master Plan Committee
1.7	Participate in regional collaborations addressing housing development and affordability				X	TA; CMRPC; Housing agencies
1.8	Encourage relevant boards, committees, and Town leaders to participate in trainings and education programs related to affordable housing				X	BOS; PB; ZBA; TA; TP; EDC; HC; HA
1.9	Investigate and research funding opportunities to expand the inventory and condition of units managed by the Housing Authority		X			HA; TP; TA
1.10	Pursue funding opportunities to expand supportive services targeting special populations such as veterans, homeless, or those in recovery				X	TP; TA; COA; BOS

GOALS AND STRATEGIES		Short-Term Actions (0-12 Mo.)	Medium-Term Actions (1-3 yrs.)	Long-Term Actions (4+ years)	Ongoing Actions	Responsible Parties
Zoning and Policy Strategies						
2.1	Modify the existing Accessory Apartment Bylaw to allow for more flexible opportunities for development		X			PB; TP
2.2	Amend the Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) Bylaw to allow greater flexibility with housing development and facilitate production of affordable units		X			PB; TP
2.3	Promote Spencer's Accessory Apartment Bylaw and Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) Bylaw to raise public awareness of opportunities for smaller-scale housing development				X	PB; TP; BOS; TA
2.4	Pursue designation as a Housing Choice Community		X	X		CMRPC; TP; TA
2.5	Prepare design guidelines or standards for new multi-family housing developments		X			TP; PB; BOS; ZBA
2.6	Explore adoption of an Inclusionary or Incentive Zoning Bylaw and possible incentives			X		PB; TP; TA; ZBA
2.7	Explore incentives for owners of existing multi-family housing to deed-restrict units as affordable		X			BOS; TA; CMRPC

GOALS AND STRATEGIES		Short-Term Actions (0-12 Mo.)	Medium-Term Actions (1-3 yrs.)	Long-Term Actions (4+ years)	Ongoing Actions	Responsible Parties
Housing Development Strategies						
3.1	Support cluster development and multi-family housing where feasible				X	PB; BOS; ZBA
3.2	Create an inventory of Town-owned land suitable for new housing development	X				TP; PB; Assessor
3.3	Pursue adaptive reuse of underutilized or vacant properties into housing units		X	X		EDC; TA; TP
3.4	Advocate for a higher inclusion of accessible units in proposed affordable housing developments				X	COA; PB
3.5	Partner with for- and non-profit developers to create affordable housing				X	TA; BOS; PB; ZBA
3.6	Develop a system to monitor local housing data and community trends	X				TA; TP; HA; Assessor
3.7	Identify specific sites to encourage the filing of comprehensive permit applications and/or the development of affordable units	X				TP; PB; EDC
3.8	Explore creative senior living opportunities and models		X			COA; HA; TP

Responsible Parties

BOS – Board of Selectmen

PB – Planning Board

TA – Town Administrator

COA – Council on Aging

CC – Conservation Commission

ZBA – Zoning Boards of Appeals

TP – Town Planner

HC – Historical Commission

CMRPC – Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission

HA – Housing Authority

EDC – Economic Development Committee