



SPENCER OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

2021

Town of Spencer
Open Space and Recreation Plan

2021

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Cover Photo: Town of Spencer

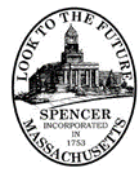
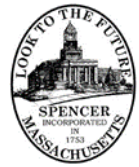
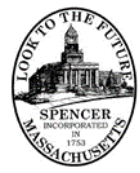


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SECTION 1: PLAN SUMMARY

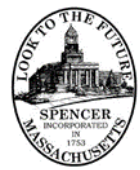
The Town of Spencer is rich in both history and natural resources. It has a multitude of scenic places, recreational areas, and open spaces. Some highlights include Luther Hill Park and Howe State Park. Luther Hill Park and Howe State Park are popular destinations that attract many visitors during the summer months. Both have swimming areas, and Howe State Park has many hiking trails. O’Gara Park is home for many sporting events, such as softball and Pop Warner Football. There are plentiful hiking opportunities throughout the Town, including Buck Hill, the Mid-State Trail, Ralph Warren Park, and Four Chimneys Wildlife Management Area. Spencer also has significant amounts of conservation land such as Burncoat Pond Wildlife Sanctuary, Sibley/Warner Farm, and the St. Joseph’s Abbey property.



Photo Credit: Town of Spencer

The Town, through the Parks and Recreation Commission, has worked hard to maintain recreational facilities (including upgrades to improve accessibility to the disabled) despite limited staffing and resources. Likewise, the Town has worked to protect environmental resources and open spaces. The Town of Spencer purchased a conservation restriction to permanently protect approximately 60 acres abutting Burncoat Pond in 2005. The property is now owned and managed by Mass Audubon as a wildlife sanctuary and provides protection for the wetlands, waterways, and scenic character of this area of town. Sibley and Warner Farms is a 350-acre property that was purchased for conservation in 2012, and is permanently protected by a conservation partnership that includes the Mass Audubon, Greater Worcester Land Trust, Common Ground Land Trust, Town of Spencer, and several agencies of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. Despite the Town’s successes, Spencer continues to face financial and staffing challenges to address long-term recreational and open space needs.

This Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) is an update of Spencer’s previous OSRP completed in 2012. This OSRP builds on an understanding of Spencer’s current place in the region, its history and character, its demographics, and its growth and development patterns. A thorough review of the geology, landscape, water resources, vegetation, wildlife and fisheries, unique and scenic resources, as well as the environmental challenges was completed in order to develop a clear picture of the Town’s strengths and opportunities for improvement. The goals of the OSRP focus on: protecting water resources, protecting and conserving land resources, preserving Town character, providing varied recreational facilities and opportunities throughout the Town, and enhancing use of existing recreation and conservation resources in Spencer. Working with the Town’s assessor and others, an inventory of both public and private lands of conservation and recreation interest was compiled.



A working group was formed in July 2019 to update the OSRP, and the group first met in August 2019. The Town contracted with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) to assist in the development and submission of an OSRP that would meet the requirements of the Commonwealth. This plan will provide substantive updates to the 2012 Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan. Strong community involvement has been integral to the creation of this plan. Through regular meetings, the survey and public forum, the OSRP working group identified many opportunities to improve and enhance the Town's open space and recreation resources. The plan includes an updated inventory of open space and recreation lands and an analysis of Spencer's open space and recreation needs.

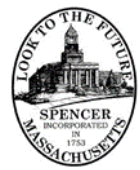
As a result of this planning process, the following five primary goals were developed:

- GOAL 1: Protect valuable water resources from adverse impacts.
- GOAL 2: Preserve Spencer's rural, small-town character.
- GOAL 3: Enhance recreation opportunities for Town residents & visitors
- GOAL 4: Preserve Spencer's open spaces and natural heritage.
- GOAL 5: Establish a continuous open space planning process

DEFINITIONS

The term "*open space*" in this document refers to either public or privately-owned land that is undeveloped. It is land in a predominantly natural state or altered for natural resource-based uses (i.e., farming, orchards, forestry, hunting and fishing, walking-type parks and trails). Examples of privately-owned open space might include farms, forest lands, and passive recreation areas.

The term "*recreational open space*" or "*recreation*" refers to land used for active recreational purposes. Land used for active recreation does not qualify technically as open space because these parcels often have portions covered with paved surfaces such as that for tennis courts, basketball courts and parking lots. In addition, athletic fields require regular fertilizer applications and are usually installed with fencing and outbuildings. Since this plan deals with both open space and recreation, we have presented an approach to obtaining the benefits of maintaining and improving existing recreational facilities, and developing new facilities, without losing scarce valued environmental assets. In addition, grants and partnerships between federal state and local agencies are often based on recommendations the applicant community makes in its OSRP. Thus, we recognize and embrace opportunities for healthy outdoor activities, whether it be hiking along forest trails or a playing with a team on a soccer or football field.



SECTION 2: PLAN INTRODUCTION

A: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This Open Space Plan was created to help preserve Spencer's small-town character, enhance the attractiveness of the community, and encourage compatible growth for the future. The Open Space and Recreation Plan will be an integral part of the Town's Master Plan. The Town of Spencer developed this plan in order to coordinate efforts to best protect, improve, and manage open space and recreation resources, particularly in light of current residential and commercial development pressures, and those likely to occur in the future. The 2020 OSRP builds on past and recent planning initiatives to provide a



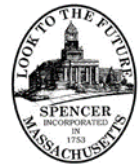
framework for priority needs and actions. It is part of a Town-wide effort to manage growth and protect the natural and built resources that make Spencer a unique and special place. Completion of the Plan will make the Town eligible for matching funds for open space acquisition and park improvements. With an outstanding natural resource base and high development pressure that threatens loss of open space, this Plan provides a thoughtful strategy for guiding investment in land and park facilities in the light of limited municipal finances.

Photo Credit: George Russell

B: PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Open Space and Recreation Plan working group first convened in August of 2019 and began working with CMRPC on a town-wide survey to gauge residents' sentiments regarding open space and recreation resources within the Town. The survey was opened up for responses on the Survey Monkey Platform in October 2019 and kept open for approximately six weeks until late November. The survey was linked electronically on the front page of the Town's website as well as on the OSRP page. Hard copies of the survey were made available at various locations throughout town, including the Municipal Offices, the Town Library, and the Senior Center. Announcements of the survey were included in emails that went out through the schools and the Parks and Recreation Department, and it was also publicized on community cable access, in the Spencer New Leader, and the message signboard in front of Town Hall. Announcements were also posted on the Town website and the Town Facebook page. The survey received 257 responses, primarily through the online survey but a number of responses with the hard copies were received as well. Summaries of the results of the survey are presented in the appendices of the plan.

The Town initially planned to hold a public forum in May 2020, however those plans were put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The working group then planned to hold a virtual public forum over Zoom on October 6, 2020. It was decided that due to Covid-19 and the prohibition on meetings over 25



people that a virtual public forum would be safer than an in-person meeting and allow for more participants. The meeting was publicized through announcements in the local newspaper (Spencer New Leader), postings on various pages on the Town website and on Facebook, ads on the local cable access bulletin board, and posting on the message signboard in front of Town Hall (located at the prominent intersection of Rte. 9 and Rte. 31). The flyer was emailed to the Spencer East Brookfield Regional School District for distribution, and to Quaboag Valley CDC and Spencer Housing Authority in order to target residents living in Spencer's Environmental Justice areas. The flyer was also printed out and handed out with books picked up at the Richard Sugden Library. Anyone interested in attending needed to RSVP and register in order to receive the Zoom link. As of the day before the public forum, only two individuals had registered. Due to this low number, Town staff decided to cancel the public forum and to reschedule. Two public hearings on the OSRP were then held to solicit input from residents. Both of these public hearings were advertised through all of the methods listed above for the first public forum. A slide show providing information about the OSRP process and asking for input was posted on the Town website as well. The first public hearing was a Conservation Commission virtual meeting held on November 18. Two Town residents called in to provide comments. The second public hearing was at a virtual Planning Board meeting held on December 15. One Town resident called in to provide comments.

Working Group members met approximately every two months beginning in August 2019, and provided substantial information and feedback for the plan, including, reviewing and providing constructive feedback on plan drafts, the goals, objective, and action plan, completing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) facility inventory, and stewarding the document through its presentation to the Town Select Board and submittal to the state.

SECTION 3: COMMUNITY SETTING

A. REGIONAL CONTEXT

The 21,592 rolling acres of Spencer are located 12 miles west of Worcester and 40 miles east of Springfield, in Worcester County and are bounded by Oakham, Paxton, Leicester, Charlton, East Brookfield, and North Brookfield. The Town center is located where Route 9, a major Massachusetts east-west highway intersects Route 31, the major north-south road through Town. Route 49 connects Spencer to Sturbridge, Route 20, and the Massachusetts Turnpike.

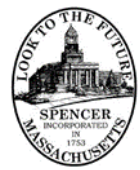
Spencer has many important natural resources, and the Town is both a local and regional destination for outdoor recreation. Spencer waters are tributary to and lie in the headwaters of the Chicopee and French River watersheds. Spencer's seven major ponds (Brooks Pond, Browning Pond, Cranberry Meadow Lake, Sugden Reservoir, Stiles Reservoir, Thompson Pond, and Lake Whittemore) are a significant resource and draw people and economic activity to the town. Spencer also shares its water resources with neighboring towns. The



Photo Credit: George Russell

The Town's emergency water supply, the 64-acre Shaw Pond, is located in Leicester, but it is not an active source and the water is not treated. Spencer owns an additional 94 acres of undeveloped land in Leicester surrounding Shaw Pond for watershed protection. In addition, many waterbodies are shared with adjacent towns. These include, Browning Pond (Oakham), Burncoat Pond (Leicester), Cranberry Meadow Pond and Jones Pond (Charlton), and Stiles Reservoir (Leicester), as well as the privately owned Brooks Pond (North Brookfield, New Braintree and Oakham). The watershed feeding Thompson Pond lies largely in Paxton, and flows from Turkey Hill Pond in Rutland.

The [Midstate Trail](#) is a scenic footpath extending 92 miles across central Massachusetts, from the New Hampshire border on Mt. Watatic to the Rhode Island border in Douglas State Park. The trail enters Spencer from Oakham above the western shore of Browning Pond, and exits into Charlton through the Four Chimneys Recreation Area on Borkum Road. Other trails include the Depot Trail, a 2-mile walking path along an abandoned railroad bed, and trails in the Sibley and Warner Farm property, Spencer State Forest, and Buck Hill Conservation Area. The Spencer Snowbirds Snowmobile Club maintains a network of snowmobile trails throughout the Town. Hunting is permitted in Spencer State Forest, in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife's Wildlife Management Areas (Four Chimneys and Moose Hill), as well as on some private lands.



Spencer is the major economic center in the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) West sub-region. While many Spencer residents travel each day to work outside town, some local businesses, such as Flexcon, Big Y, Price Chopper, and Klem's Department Store provide employment for townspeople and for residents of surrounding communities. The majority of the region's large employers are in Worcester and along the I-495 corridor.

Spencer is a regional hub of activity. The Spencer Fair is a major agricultural exposition. O'Gara Park and the Little League's Small Park are athletic facilities which are utilized regionally and have ample parking. Similarly, Howe State Park and Camp Marshall are regional recreation resources. Saint Joseph's Abbey occupies about 2,000 acres in North Spencer, and offers week-long retreats as well as tours for visitors. The Trappist monks who reside there also produce Trappist jams and jellies and Spencer Trappist Ale. Lastly, the Spencer-East Brookfield School District enables people from other towns to enjoy the athletic facilities at David Prouty High School and Knox Trail Junior High.

B. HISTORY

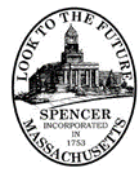
Spencer's history began in 1686 as an eight square mile tract of land purchased from the Native Americans, named Leicester and established as a proprietorship by men from Boston. Approval from the colonial authorities was contingent upon settlement but settlement was slow, at first delayed for a generation by struggles with the natives. Eventually, in 1717, Nathaniel Wood purchased 100 acres for a homestead. In 1721, Samuel Bemis of Watertown bought land adjacent to Nathaniel Wood's property near Seven Mile River and erected the first frame house in the area that later became the Town of Spencer. The Bemis Monument on Route 9 marks the site of this house as well as the contributions that Captain Edmund Bemis made during the French and Indian War.



Photo Credit: Town of Spencer

In 1741, frustrated by Leicester's refusal to provide roads, a church, and schools in the district, the settlers petitioned the General Court and received approval to separate from Leicester but the change was vetoed by the Royal Governor. In 1753, after continued effort, the request was finally granted. The new Town hardly had its affairs in order when the War of Independence broke out. Spencer had a few Tories, but in 1775 Captain Ebenezer Mason led 65 Minutemen to Cambridge to aid the cause of the colonies.

The main livelihood in town was farming, until 1812 saw the start of two industries, boot (later to be shoes) and wire making. Josiah Green established his boot shop in this year, while Elliott Prouty began a small wire business in the section of Town later known as Wire Village. Steel was available locally, made from bog iron at a forge in North Brookfield on the Five Mile River. The growth of the boot and wire



businesses reached its climax in the late 1800s, represented by Isaac Prouty & Company and the Spencer Wire Company respectively.

The Town had several village centers in the 1800s, based on the distribution of suitable locations to dam streams for water power. The Upper Village had the meeting house and a small group of houses, including the Pope Mansion. The Lower Village included three taverns and other buildings. One tavern was the Mason House (which was located in southwest corner of the present parking lot of Price Chopper). The other taverns were the Jenks House (the Massasoit Hotel was later built on this site) and the tavern owned by James Livermore, at the corner of Main Street and High Street. There was a post office and a peg factory in North Spencer. The growth of industry led to growth of population and needs that were previously overlooked. The first Town Hall was built in 1839. Eighteen years later the Town's first high school, Denny Hall, was erected.

The historical Great Post Road, which ran from Boston to Springfield and formed the eventual path of Route 9, begins in Spencer at the Leicester line at the original Polar Spring (1886 source of Polar Beverages). It continues behind the Country Inn to what is now David Prouty High School, follows Route 9 and then old Main Street to the Seven Mile River.

The outbreak of the Civil War, in which 319 Spencer men served, opened an era of growth and expansion. At the start of the war, Spencer's population was 2,800; ten years later it was 4,000; and

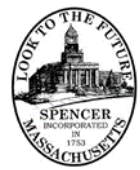


Photo Credit: National Park Service

twenty years later it was 7,500. With this rapid growth came steam power, railroads, street lighting, a newspaper in 1872, water works in 1882, and a gas works in 1886. In 1888, Spencer's prosperity was demonstrated when three citizens - David Prouty, Richard Sugden and Luther Hill - respectively gave the Town a new high school, a library and a public park. The Town re-centered around mills on Muzzy Brook and the rail line connecting Boston with Albany, NY. Howe Park is named for the Howe family that included three great inventors, brothers William and Tyler, and their nephew Elias, and is at the location of the family

farm. William Howe was born in Spencer in 1819 and designed the first wooden truss railroad bridge that was built over the Connecticut River in 1840. This design was patented and used on bridges across the country. His brother Tyler invented and patented the first box-spring bed in 1855, which was a great commercial success. Their nephew Elias designed and patented an innovative design for sewing machines in 1846, and although it never found wide commercial success, it was copied by others, including Isaac Singer (of Singer sewing machines).

In the early 1890s, Spencer experienced a series of setbacks: a labor dispute in its shoe factories, an economic recession and a disastrous fire that leveled six acres of property in the Wall Street area near where Rt. 31 now crosses Route 9. The boom ended. Shifting economic conditions made recovery slow. The advent of automobiles in the early 1900s weakened the influence of railroad transportation; water power was replaced by petroleum-based power sources. Wire making and the shoe industry have gone,



along with a number of small cotton and woolen plants. Currently, the largest manufacturer is Flexcon, followed by Dienes Industries and Mercury Wire, which insulates wire and manufactures cables. Spencer now relies economically on service businesses, trades, and leisure and tourism.

Spencer is governed by a Board of Selectmen/Town Administrator form of government. The Board is comprised of five elected members and is responsible for setting policy for the Town of Spencer. The Administrator is responsible for day-to-day operations. The Town also holds an annual Town Meeting. There are a full-time Town Planner and part-time Conservation Commissioner, and in addition there are many active boards and committees in Spencer run by volunteers.

C. POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

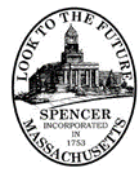
The characteristics of Spencer’s population are important in planning for the recreation and open space needs of Town residents. Table 1 shows the changes in Spencer’s population from 1940. The town grew steadily from 1940 to 1970 with growth rates between 5 and 12 percent, from 6,641 in 1940 to 8,779 in 1970. There was a large jump in population in the 1970s of 22.7%, with the population increasing to 10,774 by 1980. Beginning in 1990, the population grew more slowly, and actually declined by a small amount between 2000 and 2010. The estimated population for 2018 of 11,971 shows a small increase again after 2010.

TABLE 3.1- Spencer Population Over Time

Year	Total Population	Change	% Change
1940	6,641	--	--
1950	7,027	386	5.8%
1960	7,838	811	11.5%
1970	8,779	941	12.0%
1980	10,774	1,995	22.7%
1990	11,645	871	8.1%
2000	11,691	46	0.4%
2010	11,688	-3	-.03%
2018	11,971	283	2.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Central Mass Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) regularly publishes population projections for its constituent communities based on U.S. Census estimates. The town level projections were vetted with the communities for transportation planning purposes as part of the 2016 Long Range Transportation Plan. The CMRPC projections indicate a decline in population from 2010 to 2020, and then a gradual increase until 2040. However, the 2018 American Community Survey data actually shows that the population grew between 2010 and 2018, with the 2018 population higher than the 2020 projection. It



is likely that revised population projections will show a higher population for 2020 through 2040, with the population growing to over 12,000. Projections for surrounding towns show similar gradual increases through 2040, with Charlton projected to have the largest increase in population growth.

TABLE 3.2 - CMRPC population projections for Spencer and surrounding towns

Town	2010 Census	2015 ACS	2020 CMRPC	2030 CMRPC	2040 CMRPC
Spencer	11,688	11,521	11,174	11,673	11,815
Leicester	10,970	11,394	11,278	11,619	11,898
Oakham	1,902	1,963	1,969	2,030	2,053
East Brookfield	2,183	2,215	2,233	2,297	2,367
North Brookfield	4,680	4,808	4,510	4,663	4,804
Charlton	12,981	13,697	13,802	14,675	15,730
Paxton	4,806	4,963	5,054	5,274	5,543

As housing prices in the greater Boston area and towns in the eastern-most portions of the Central Mass region continue to rise, the relative low cost of homes and land in Spencer is likely to attract more homebuyers over the next few decades. It is also possible that the impacts of climate change, such as flooding and high heat, on Boston and coastal Massachusetts towns will also attract more homebuyers to inland communities such as Spencer. As Spencer’s population increases over the next few decades, development pressure on open space in the town will also increase.

Spencer had the second highest population density (number of people per square mile) compared with surrounding towns, using 2018 population estimates from the American Community Survey. As Table 3.3 indicates, Oakham had the lowest population density, and Leicester had the highest population density (likely a result of the town’s proximity to Worcester). Spencer also had the second largest population after Charlton, and the second largest land area compared with surrounding towns, with only Charlton having more land area.

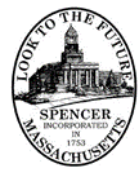


TABLE 3.3 – Population Density of Spencer and Surrounding Towns

Town	Total Land Area in Square Miles	Estimated 2018 Population	Number of People per square mile
Spencer	32.85	11,971	364
Leicester	23.36	11,394	487
Oakham	21.12	1,963	93
East Brookfield	9.84	2,215	225
North Brookfield	21.06	4,808	223
Charlton	42.71	13,697	321
Paxton	14.74	4,963	337

Source: 2013-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

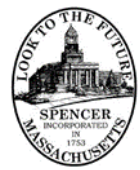
The percentage of the population by age groups is shown in Table 3.4 below for the years 2010 and 2018. The data is from the 2010 Census and the 2018 American Community Survey (estimated population). There have been some significant shifts in age distribution in Spencer, primarily an increase in the population of individuals over the age of 45, and a decrease in the population of individuals under the age of 45, particularly those age 0-19. This indicates that the population of Spencer is aging overall, similar to the population of many other towns in central Massachusetts. The median age in Spencer was 39.0 in 2010, and it increased to 45.2 in 2018. It will be important to consider the needs of the older population when planning for outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities. Despite the aging population, there is still a significant population of younger residents – approximately 15% of the town is under 19 years of age. The recreation needs of younger residents and families will need to be taken into account as well.

TABLE 3.4 - Population by Age Group

Age Distribution by % of Total Population	2010	2018
Under 5 years of age	5.9%	3.8%
5 to 19 years of age	18.9%	14.5%
20 to 44 years of age	33.9%	31.7%
45 to 64 years of age	28.2%	32.1%
65 and over	13.1%	18.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The median household income in Spencer in 2018 was \$71,830, which was lower than all of the surrounding towns as well as for Massachusetts as a whole. The percentage of people living below the poverty level is also relatively high, at 10.1%, and again is the highest among surrounding towns. This low-income population also overlaps with the Environmental Justice population in Spencer, discussed



below, and should be considered when planning for open space and recreation opportunities, including ensuring that there are accessible low-cost and no-cost recreation and outdoor opportunities.

TABLE 3.5 - Household Income

Income by Geography	Median Household Income	Per Capita Income	% Below the Poverty Level
Spencer	71,830	33,055	10.1%
Leicester	82,229	32,621	6.4%
East Brookfield	84,444	34,737	6.8%
North Brookfield	73,599	33,347	6.2%
Paxton	99,875	43,782	2.8%
Oakham	84,375	36,408	3.4%
Charlton	97,805	32,621	3.8%
Massachusetts	77,378	41,794	10%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD), in June 2019 Spencer had a labor force of 6,281. Of this population, 6,030 were employed and 251 were unemployed, resulting in an unemployment rate of 4.0%. This is about one percentage point higher than the state unemployment rate of 3.1% for the same period. However, this was a fairly low unemployment rate, and it had gradually decreased since the great recession in 2008 and 2009. However, as of the writing of this Plan, the Covid-19 pandemic occurring in spring and summer of 2020 has caused significant unemployment, and it will likely take a number of years for the state and the Town to fully recover economically.

Data from the EOLWD for May 2019 (shown in Table 3.6 below) indicates that the industry with the largest number of establishments in Spencer is Education and Health Services (92) followed by Social Assistance (74). However, the industry with the highest average employment is Goods Producing (999), followed by Education and Health Services (634) and Retail Trade (460). Finance and Insurance, Goods Producing, and Construction contribute the largest amounts to the local economy via employee wages.

Table 3.7 shows the 25 largest employers in Spencer in 2019. FLEXcon employs the largest number, between 500-999, with Big Y, Price Chopper, and Klem’s Tractor and Auto Parts the next largest employers, with 100-249 employees.

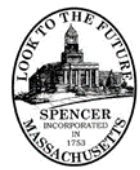


TABLE 3.6: 2019 Estimated Spencer Employment and Wages by Industry

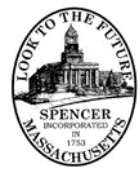
(Civilian Employed Population 16 years and Over)

Industry	# Establishments	Average Employment	Average Weekly Wage
Construction	43	263	\$1,328
Goods Producing	55	999	\$1,319
Education and Health Services	92	634	\$771
Retail Trade	28	460	\$525
Professional and Business	31	141	\$894
Finance and Insurance	8	81	\$1,368
Leisure and Hospitality	23	392	\$372
Professional and Technical Services	18	56	\$928
Administrative and Waste Services	12	72	\$670
Social Assistance	74	111	\$297
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	5	47	\$293
Food Services	18	346	\$382
Other Services	23	90	\$830
Total All Industries	292	3,132	\$894

Source: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development

TABLE 3.7: Largest 25 Employers in Spencer, 2019

Company Name	Address	# of Employees	NAICS* Code	NAICS Category
FLEX Con Corp	S Spencer Rd	500-999	3222	Converted Paper Product Manufacturing
Big Y World Class Market	W Main St	100-249	4451	Grocery Stores
Klem's	W Main St	100-249	4532	Office Supplies, Stationary, Gift Stores
Price Chopper	Main St. #5	100-249	4451	Grocery Stores
St. Joseph's Abbey	N. Spencer Rd.	50-99	8131	Religious Organization
David Prouty High School	Main Street	50-99	6111	Elementary and Secondary Schools
East Brookfield & Spencer RR	Podunk Pike	50-99	4821	Rail Transportation

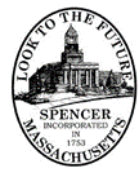


Company Name	Address	# of Employees	NAICS* Code	NAICS Category
McDonald's	W Main St	50-99	7222	Limited-Service Eating Places
Mercury Wire Products Inc	Mercury Dr	50-99	3314	Metal Production & Processing
Wire Village School	Paxton Rd	50-99	6111	Elementary and Secondary Schools
Worcester County 4-H	McCormick Rd	50-99	7212	RV Parks and Recreational Camps
Consolidated Edison Sol.	Wilson Street	20-49	2211	Electric Power Generation
Dienes Corp	W Main St	20-49	3322	Cutlery and Handtool Manufacturing
Dunkin' Donuts	W Main St	20-49	7222	Limited-Service Eating Places
ERA Key Realty	Main St	20-49	5312	Real Estate Agents and Brokers
Knox Trail Junior High School	Ash St	20-49	6111	Elementary and Secondary Schools
Advance Auto Parts	Lake St	20-49	4413	Auto Parts, Accessories and Tire Stores
Spencer Fire Dept.	W. Main St	20-49	9221	Justice, Public Order and Safety Services
Northeast Vehicle Svc LLC	Podunk Pike	20-49	5419	Professional & Technical Services
Pizza Hut	Main St	20-49	7225	Restaurants and Other Eating Places
Spencer Country Inn	Main St	20-49	7223	Special Food Services
US Post Office	Mechanic St.	20-49	4911	Government Services
Todd Vitkos Plastering Inc	Bacon Hill Rd	20-49	2383	Building Finishing Contractors
Town of Spencer Police Dept	Main St #1	20-49	9221	Justice, Public Order & Safety Activities

**North American Industry Classification System*

Source: Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)

Since 2002, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) has been implementing an Environmental Justice Policy to help ensure that all Massachusetts residents experience equal protection and meaningful involvement with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies and the equitable distribution of environmental benefits. This policy was instituted recognizing that communities across the Commonwealth, particularly those densely populated urban neighborhoods in and around the state's older industrial areas, face many environmental challenges associated with Massachusetts' industrial legacy. Residents in these predominantly low-income and minority communities – nearly 29% of the state population – often lack open space and recreational resources, and frequently live near existing large and small sources of pollution and old abandoned, contaminated sites, which can pose risks to public health and the environment. Critical to advancing Environmental Justice (EJ) in the Commonwealth is the equitable distribution of environmental assets such as parks, open space, and recreation areas. Toward this end municipalities should identify and prioritize open space sites in their OSRPs that are socially,



recreationally, and ecologically important to EJ populations within the community. EJ neighborhoods represent areas based upon 2010 Census data that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Households that earn 65% or less of the statewide household median income;
- 25% or more of the residents are minority;
- 25% or more of the residents are foreign-born; or
- 25% or more of the residents are lacking English proficiency.

Map 2 displays the Spencer’s “Environmental Justice” (EJ) neighborhoods, which occur in Census Tract 7262, Block Groups 3 and 5 in Spencer Center. The Spencer EJ neighborhoods qualify because their median household income is below 65% of the statewide median. The EJ population in Spencer in 2010 was 886, which was 7.6% of the total population of the town. As noted above, when planning for open space and recreation, the Town needs to ensure that opportunities for both passive and active recreation are accessible to residents of all income levels.

D. GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

PATTERNS AND TRENDS

By automobile, Spencer is 20 minutes west of Worcester and 45 minutes east of Springfield. Largely residential, the Town has been a supplier of workers for many employers in the greater Worcester area, Fitchburg-Leominster, Springfield and Amherst. In addition to a small commercial airfield on Paxton Road, the Town is less than twenty minutes from the Worcester Regional Airport. The Worcester Airport offers limited commercial passenger service as well as cargo services.

The region’s population has steadily grown over the past half century, with the largest gain during the 1980s. Regional growth has spread out from Worcester to surrounding suburban and rural towns. As Spencer’s population has increased, residential development has increased as well. There were 515 residential building permits issued for housing units from 2000 through 2018, as shown in Figure 9, below. Interestingly there were more residential building permits issued in the years between 200 and 2010 when population growth actually decreased slightly, and fewer building permits issued between 2010 and 2018, when the population increased.

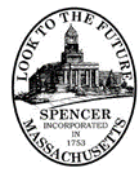
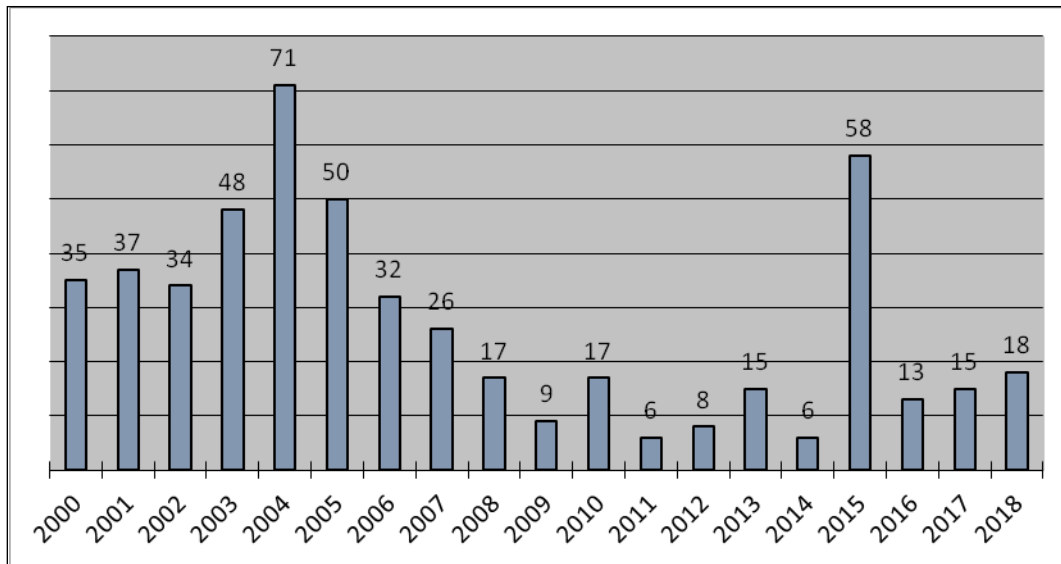


FIGURE 1: Annual Number of Housing Units Authorized by Building Permits, 2000 - 2018

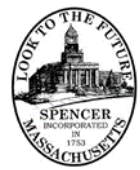


Source: *Spencer Annual Reports*

While a percentage of these authorized units may not have been constructed, the fact that the number of new housing units has increased despite stagnant population growth reflects a general trend in smaller household sizes. Low taxes and relatively low housing costs are attracting new residents to the Town, and these new homes are generally replacing agricultural or forest lands.

According to the 2020 edition of Massachusetts Audubon’s “Losing Ground”, the rate of development in the Town of Spencer has increased significantly in the past two decades. Between 2012 and 2017, there were 121 acres of newly developed land in Spencer, or 3.6 acres per square mile, which was the 54th highest rate of development in the State (standardized by town size). This was up from 2005-2012, when there were 62 acres of newly developed land in Spencer, or 1.8 acres per square mile. That put the Town in 148th place for rate of development.

From 2012 to 2017, the Town of Spencer permanently conserved 467 acres of land, for a total of 3,335 acres of permanently conserved land. This ranked Spencer 145th of all municipalities in the state for amount of total conserved land. However, Spencer is only ranked 245th in the state for the percent of permanently conserved land in Spencer, which is 15%. Only 3 of the 467 protected acres were BioMap2 Core Habitat, and 20 acres were BioMap2 Critical Natural Landscape. Thus, although Spencer has protected a significant amount of land and conservation resources from development, there is more progress to be made.



INFRASTRUCTURE

According to the Town of Spencer Office of Utilities and Facilities, 41% of the total number of households (4,744 according to the 2010 Census) were served by the Town's water supply. Almost all other housing units, 59%, were supplied by private drilled or dug wells. Town data indicates that 36% of housing units were served by public sewer, and the remaining 64% of housing units used private septic systems. Households with public sewer service are located in the Town center and along major roads leading from the center.

Spencer has easy access to the Massachusetts Turnpike via Route 49. Most of Spencer's residents are highly dependent on motor vehicles. In 2010, there were 13,046 vehicles (excluding trailers and boats) registered to Spencer owners, more than 1 per person (MA Department of Revenue). However, the 2018 American Community Survey reported 471 households in Spencer were without access to a motor vehicle. The core area has bus service to Worcester, and this public transportation allows residents of Spencer who are not able to or do not want to drive a motor vehicle to access employment opportunities in Leicester or Worcester. The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) offers a fixed daily route that travels through the center of Spencer along Route 9. SCM Elderbus also offers ADA Paratransit services, which is available to all residents aged sixty and over, as well as residents with disabilities. Together, the fixed route service and the paratransit service are an important element of the transit infrastructure in Spencer.

ZONING AND LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

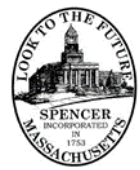
Current zoning districts in the Town of Spencer are: Commercial, Industrial, Town Center Mixed Use, Village Residential, Suburban Residential, Lake Residential, and Rural Residential. Spencer has adopted bylaws to manage its growth and protect open space, including conservation, stormwater, subdivision, and site plan regulations, as well as zoning bylaws for groundwater protection, flood zone protection, and Open Space Residential Development (OSRD).



Photo Credit: Town of Spencer

The cluster of historic buildings in Spencer Center helps anchor the core and define the town's visual character. Spencer's roads and infrastructure follow the streams and ridgelines where the original footpaths and cart paths were located as the Town was settled. The Zoning Map (**Map 3**) shows the current zoning which mimics the existing land use pattern. It clearly shows how that the densest development is in the center of town, with much of the town remaining rural. Development patterns around the lakes and ponds are primarily of a higher density, a vestige of old summer cottage colonies.

With OSRD, residential developments utilize smaller lots in order to create more common open spaces. Growth in many towns has consisted primarily of Approval Not Required (ANR) residential development that permits lots to be developed along existing town roads without town review. This can result in



more sprawl and loss of woodlands and farmland for housing, as well as loss of a town’s rural character. The Town adopted an OSRD bylaw in 2006, and in order to preserve open space the Town also adopted bylaws in 2007 to allow the creation of parcels which do not meet the minimum frontage requirements.

Solar development has become a significant factor in the loss of open space in Spencer since the 2012 OSRP. The large number of acres of open, primarily wooded land in Spencer has attracted many solar development proposals, and as of May 2020, 15 solar projects have been built or permitted in the Town. These projects comprise 56 MW of solar energy production, with project footprints of 212.52 acres on a total 2107.15 parcel acres. The largest of these projects is a solar array at Saint Joseph’s Abbey, which takes up over 1,400 parcel acres cumulatively. This is one of the largest solar arrays in Massachusetts. Three additional projects are in the permitting process, and if granted, these projects will take up an additional 250 parcel acres. The Town is currently considering bylaw revisions that would limit the scale of solar development on open space parcels that are ecologically fragile or valuable, as well as land with prime agricultural soil. In addition, the State is in the process of revising its solar program to provide disincentives to solar companies developing projects on ecologically valuable open space land.

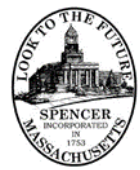
TABLE 3.8: Town of Spencer Zoning Districts

Town of Spencer Zoning Districts	Area	Percent of Town
Rural Residential	328.37	1.62%
Suburban Residential	330.25	1.63%
Lake Residential	346.19	1.70%
Village Residential	17,888.14	88.02%
Town Center Mixed Use	665.17	3.27%
Commercial	51.64	0.25%
Industrial	712.23	3.50%
Total	20,321.99	100%

Source: Spencer Zoning Bylaws and Zoning Map

Since the 2003 Master Plan was adopted, the Town of Spencer has been steadily targeting revitalization in the Town Center. In 2006, the Town revised its zoning bylaws to create a Town Center Mixed Use District. This zoning laid the foundation, from a land use perspective, to allow property owners to realize the value of their property and to begin to rehabilitate buildings that in the past were perceived to be of limited value due to zoning constraints. In 2008, the Zoning Bylaws were again revised to redraft the Town’s Sign Bylaw allowing for reasonable regulations in commercial districts including the Town Center.

Additionally, over the past decade, the Downtown area has been the subject of several planning studies. In 2009, a Town Center Revitalization Project report was issued by a consultant team led by The Cecil Group. That report identified existing conditions within the target area and outlined several potential development options for Downtown, with an emphasis on design and infrastructure improvements in the public realm. In 2013, Downtown Spencer was identified as a Priority Development Area under the Central



Thirteen Prioritization Plan issued by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC). The state designed Downtown Spencer as a Priority Development Area (#280-3) in 2014 and further analyzed by CMRPC as part of a PDA assistance project in 2015. A Property Assessment and Reuse Planning Project (PARP) was carried out in 2015 which identified further revitalization strategies and a parcel-based assessment of property conditions for most properties in the Downtown Area, which was also addressed by a Slum and Blight Inventory performed by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) in 2017. More recently, in 2018 Spencer received a grant from the Mass Downtown Institute (MDI) for the creation of Downtown Design Guidelines, and in 2019, a grant from MDI to perform a downtown parking analysis. Downtown Spencer is also in a Federally designated Opportunity Zone.

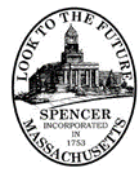
In terms of infrastructure, the Town adopted Complete Streets Guidelines in 2013. Additionally, the town received TIP funding in 2016 to improve Route 31 from Downtown south to the Charlton border on top of \$15 million voted for town-wide road improvements at Town Meeting in May 2016. That roadwork was completed this past year. Also, the Town recently completed a major reconstruction of Main Street through downtown incorporating aesthetic and pedestrian improvements to the public realm. All of these efforts are aimed at revitalizing the Town Center in order to establish a thriving commercial district with proper infrastructure, parking, and suitable housing which coincides with the goals of the 2003 Master Plan.

COMPLETE STREETS

Both the Town Center Mixed Use and Village Residential Districts provide some support for pedestrian travel with sidewalks and crossing lanes. However, until recently there were a number of streets which were narrow and lacked sidewalks in areas without available alternate pedestrian routes. In order to address this issue as well as to improve other issues of safety and access, the Town of Spencer applied for and received Complete Streets funding from the MA Department of Transportation.

Spencer Complete Streets Tier II Priorities, Sidewalk Betterment and ADA Transition Plans were approved by the Spencer Board of Selectmen in November 2016, and approved by Mass DOT in March of 2017. Complete Streets emphasizes improving safety and access for pedestrians, cyclists and transit users. Municipalities are required to pass a Complete Streets Policy and to develop a Prioritization Plan to be eligible for construction funding.

The Town has prioritized a number of projects for Main Street East and West, Pleasant Street, and a number of other streets. This includes the construction of new sidewalks, sidewalk improvements, crosswalks, transit pullouts, bump-outs, and shared shoulders for bicycles. The Town has recently completed the Main Street Sidewalks Complete Streets Project, as well as installation of new sidewalks on Main Street from School Street to Water Street. Currently in design is a project for improvements to Smithville Road (Meadow to Pleasant) and Pleasant Street (Meadow to High Street) using Complete Streets guidelines, although not funded by Complete Streets. In addition, with funding from the State Transportation Improvement Program, the Town will be implementing a project to reconstruct Meadow Road that will include a shared use path from Main Street to Pleasant Street.



Section 4: Environmental Inventory and Analysis

A. GEOLOGY, SOILS & TOPOGRAPHY

The geology of Spencer is the primary structure on which the natural and human communities are based. Bedrock and materials sculpted or deposited by ice age glaciers were then weathered, eroded and relocated to form Spencer's topography of hills, valleys, and today's soils. The soils determine the kinds of vegetation that grow and the limitations or suitability for land uses. Together geology, soils, and topography determine how surface water and ground water systems function together.

In Spencer the bedrock formations are metamorphic or igneous rock with a north-south alignment. Glaciers reformed the bedrock reinforcing the north-south alignment, created the current surficial geology, the soils, and directed Spencer's river and stream courses. The type and structure of the surficial deposits strongly influences the movement of ground water through the soil layers.

SOILS

Most of Spencer is now covered by till soils made up of unsorted rocks, stones, sands and finer particles. 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. A significant fraction of the prime agricultural soils has already been developed irreversibly for other uses such as residential development. Parcels of open space with prime agricultural soils are an important resource to the Town and the State, and should be conserved for agricultural use where possible.

In the valleys, extensive sand and gravel banks were left where glaciers melted. Depressions and valleys carved out by the glaciers are today's ponds, bogs, wetlands, and streams. Wind and water erosion continue to add deposits in low areas and flood plains. These sand and gravel soils lie largely along the Seven Mile and Cranberry Rivers. They 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 gravel is an economically valuable resource but its extraction must be carefully monitored as the process can cause ecological damage. The permeability of these sand and gravel soils makes them suitable for septic systems, however where they are exposed they are easily contaminated, and water movement through them can transport pollutants comparatively rapidly. When used for septic fields, their poor filtering capacity makes careful design essential.

In 1998 USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service published a Soils Report for all of Southern Worcester County. The report has extensive details of the soil composition of Spencer. Soils information can now be found online at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>.

TOPOGRAPHY

Spencer has many named 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 above sea level. Eight to fifteen percent (8-15%) slopes predominate but slopes range up to 35%. Slopes greater than 15% are more susceptible to erosion and have severe limitations for septic suitability and buildings.

B. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Spencer's structure of rolling hills and small river valleys led to the use of water power during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Villages developed in the areas where water mills clustered around stream convergences, and focused around the current town center along the Post Road (Route 9), with businesses, housing, and the railroad creating a bustling downtown. Even in this developed center of Spencer, however, there are panoramic views to the west. Some hills offer views of Mount Wachusett and Boston; Bacon Hill offers views to the south, and from Northwest Road there are vistas across the valley of the Five Mile River to the west.



Photo Credit: Town of Spencer

Spencer's ponds and lakes, most of which were created or enlarged for water power, became attractions for recreation during the 19th and 20th centuries. Summer camps and seasonal homes sprang up along the shores of lakes and in wooded areas. Over time, many of these seasonal homes became year-round homes, and these areas became more densely settled. The landscape in Spencer now alternates between the clusters of housing and open spaces in between these clusters. Many areas of undeveloped land such as Scout camps, Wildlife Management Areas, Spencer State Forest, Howe Park, and the fields and pastures of the remaining farmed land contribute to Spencer's rural character, in spite of the gradual accumulation of residential development along the existing roads. St. Joseph's Abbey, in the northwest corner of the Town, is a significant area of privately-owned open space with 1,754 acres of well-maintained agriculture, wildlife and forest land. There is a large solar development on the land, as mentioned in Section 3. The Abbey is also a cultural landmark – it is a Trappist Monastery settled in 1950 that houses monks and offers programs and retreats. The Abbey is also one of the largest businesses in Spencer, producing and selling fruit preserves as well as Spencer Beer its own brewery.

C. WATER RESOURCES

Spencer's surface drainage network of streams, rivers, ponds and wetlands is the direct result of its topography and soils. These surface waters are important to consider in open space planning. They provide wildlife habitats and corridors, and connect to rich flood plain soils, historic sites and other important community resources. Roadways have followed stream and river valleys or hill ridge ways.

WATERSHEDS

This drainage network is divided into drainage basins, also known as watersheds. A watershed is the land from which rain or snow melt flows to a waterway. Drainage basins can be subdivided into smaller and smaller sub-watersheds for the tributaries of a larger river system. Two of the state-defined 27 major river basins receive water draining from Spencer. Most of the town lies within the Chicopee River Watershed, with the remainder in the French River Watershed.

The small brooks in Spencer are at the headwaters of each of these major basins. Brooks in the northwest corner of Town flow into the Five Mile River in North Brookfield. Further east, water is collected into the Seven Mile River, which joins with Turkey Hill Brook and flows through the Town center. After its confluence with the Cranberry River, the Seven Mile flows to Quaboag Pond in East Brookfield. The Quaboag River begins at Quaboag Pond, flowing westward until it combines with the Swift and Ware Rivers to form the Chicopee River. In southeast Spencer brooks flow to Burncoat Pond and Stiles

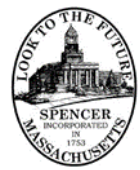


Photo Credit: Town of Spencer

Reservoir, then to Town Meadow Brook in Leicester, and finally to the French River. A small area on the south margin of town drains to the Quinebaug River, which joins the French River in Connecticut.

SURFACE WATER

There are eleven lakes, ponds, and reservoirs in Town, most created by dams. Those that are wholly in Spencer include Buck Hill Pond, Howe Pond, Lake Whittemore, Sugden Reservoir and Thompson Pond. Brooks Pond (privately owned), Browning Pond, Burncoat Pond, Cranberry Meadow Pond. Jones Pond, Moose Hill Reservoir, and Stiles Reservoir are shared with neighboring towns. Moose Hill Reservoir is located partially in the towns of Leicester and Spencer. The reservoir was created when the Moose Hill Reservoir Dam was constructed in the 1960s-1970s as a flood control project, and discharges to Sugden Reservoir. Browning Pond is the only pond recognized as a Great Pond. A great pond is defined as any pond or lake that contained more than 10 acres in its natural state. Ponds that once measured 10 or more acres in their natural state, but which are now smaller, are still considered great ponds. ([The Massachusetts Lake and Pond Guide, MA DCR](#)) Spencer's ponds, lakes, and reservoirs are valued open space and have been popular recreation and scenic amenities for generations of town residents. They also draw people from the region and tourists who contribute to the Town's economy.



The larger ponds, though largely surrounded by houses, are heavily used for fishing, ice fishing, and snowmobiling. The larger ponds are popular for a wide variety of water craft, water skiing, and swimming. The ponds in themselves are scenic open space. Some natural shoreline persists at each pond, with the least at Stiles and Sugden Reservoirs, and the most at Brooks and Browning Ponds. All the ponds help create economic opportunities for local businesses selling equipment for fishing, swimming and boating.

There is boat access open to the public at Browning Pond and Sugden Reservoir. Brooks Pond allows



Photo Credit: Town of Spencer

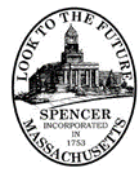
boat access for non-motorized boats or boats with electric motors only. The public has access to Howe Pond, Lake Whittemore, and Buck Hill Pond by car (with limited parking), but there are no boat ramps. There is access to Burncoat Pond, Moose Hill Reservoir, Thompson Pond on foot through land owned by the State, town or a non-profit organization with trails open to the public.

WATER SUPPLY

Spencer's town water supply comes from groundwater. Sand and gravel deposits underlying local rivers can produce high yields of water. The town's primary wells are in the Big Meadow area and a secondary source is near the Cranberry River. The Big Meadow well has an expected yield of 2 million gallons per day. Large areas adjacent to Town wells are delineated as Zone II protection districts. (A Zone II is the area that contributes to the recharge of a public groundwater supply.)

Shaw Pond in Leicester is an emergency backup water supply for the Town of Spencer but it is not actively utilized, and the water is not treated. Shaw Pond water would require treatment if it were to be utilized for drinking water. Shaw Pond is identified as "no uses assessed" by the 2016 Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management Division of Watershed Management 303(d) List.

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.



FLOOD HAZARD AREAS

The 100-year flood plain areas, designated as Zone A by FEMA flood insurance maps, occur in wetlands and along many streams and ponds in Spencer (see **Water Resource Map Part B**). The most extensive flood plain areas are found along the Seven Mile and Cranberry Rivers. Widths of flood plains vary according to topography, and change in the types of land uses in Town will influence the size of the flood plains as well. Careful review of drainage controls for proposed developments are necessary to avoid increasing flood problems.

WETLANDS

There are about 480 acres of wetlands throughout the Town of Spencer (see **Water Resources Map Part A**). Two of the largest are the Big Meadow area along Seven Mile River, and Alder Meadow northwest of Stiles Reservoir. Wetlands provide a number of important environmental services, including water purification, groundwater recharge, flood control, and wildlife habitat. Some of the wetlands have large areas of open water allowing access for small boats and hunting for waterfowl. The locations of rare species habitats mapped by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife's Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program (NHESP) correlate strongly with wetlands.

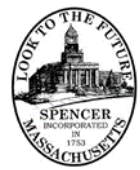
VERNAL POOLS

Vernal pools are a unique habitat that supports a variety of wildlife species. They are small shallow ponds that experience dry periods and therefore lack fish life. However, a number of amphibians breed exclusively in vernal pools and some organisms such as fairy shrimp spend their entire life cycle in vernal pools. Many other species utilize vernal pools for breeding, feeding and other functions. Spencer has many vernal pools, however as of the writing of this Plan only six (6) have been certified by NHESP. The process for certification relies on the efforts of local volunteers. Vernal pool certification only establishes its biological function, not that it is within a resource area protected by the Wetlands Protection Act. However, certified vernal pools are afforded protection under the state Water Quality Certification regulations (401 Program), the state Title 5 regulations, and the Forest Cutting Practices Act regulations.

Outstanding Resource Waters are a classification under the Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards of 2013. According to 314 CMR 4.00: "Certain waters shall be designated for protection under this provision in 314 CMR 4.06(3) including Public Water Supplies (314 CMR 4.06(1)(d)1.). These waters constitute an outstanding resource as determined by their outstanding socioeconomic, recreational, ecological and/or aesthetic values. The quality of these waters shall be protected and maintained." NHESP certified vernal pools are designated as Class B Outstanding Resource Waters and are indicated on Water Resources Map 2.

D. VEGETATION

Spencer's forests are largely second growth forest. These forests are an economic resource, used for timber harvesting as well as for recreation. The State Forests, State Park, and Wildlife Management Areas are subject to periodic timbering. Additional wood products are harvested during land clearing for development and for private owner personal use. Recreational uses of the forests include camps run by



non-profit organizations, and use of trails for hiking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, mountain biking, and cross-country skiing. The forests are also used for hunting, primarily for deer and turkey. Trapping that occurs in forests is primarily for fisher, raccoon, bobcat, and coyote

Abandoned field habitats are decreasing as forest re-grows. The persisting agricultural habitats are largely used for corn, hay or pasture. There are also a few nurseries. These lands are mostly private property but provide a variety of habitats and uniquely provide for grassland birds such as grasshopper sparrow, bobolink. Since most of these lands are privately owned, working with their owners is essential to sustaining these resources. Some of these lands are open to hunting if the hunter obtains specific permission from the landowner.

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 Highway Department conducts roadside mowing from April-November to remove unwanted juvenile trees, and tree-trimming takes place as needed.

The following rare vegetation species were listed in the Town of Spencer. These data were extracted from the database of the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program in July 2019. None of these species have federal status.

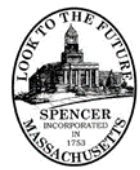
TABLE 4.1: Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Plants

Taxonomic Group	Scientific Name	Common Name	MESA Status*	Most Recent Observation
Vascular Plant	Ophioglossum pusillum	Adder's-tongue Fern	T	1890
Vascular Plant	Ranunculus pensylvanicus	Bristly Buttercup	SC	2006
Vascular Plant	Rhododendron maximum	Great Laurel	T	2018
Vascular Plant	Potamogeton vaseyi	Vasey's Pondweed	E	2015

E = Endangered T = Threatened SC = Special Concern

E. FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

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. These properties provide wildlife corridors within the Town of Spencer. Electric transmission lines also provide wildlife corridors. Habitats that overlap into abutting towns, especially to the less developed north and west, allow movement of larger animals which need relatively large ranges. The developed Route 9 corridor severs the north and south ends of town and interrupts some wildlife corridors. Nonetheless, bear and moose occasionally cross and coyotes regularly manage to cross. The river and wetland systems allow the spread of smaller animals across the Route 9 divide.

The Open Space Map shows that the 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. Size and continuity of open space is particularly important for supporting wildlife populations. Conservation and protection of land linking separated open spaces, with buffers included, would enhance their viability and value for wildlife. Such linking is both a challenge and an opportunity. Recreational trails could run along the links but ensuring dual purpose connections would require careful layout. Creation of long-term formal agreements or easements would be necessary.

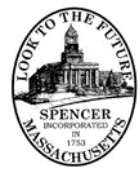


Photo Credit: Town of Spencer

Spencer lacks old growth forest habitat, natural dry grassland, and bare, dry, stony hill tops. The existing habitats are: Wetlands (forested swamp, shrub swamp, marsh, wet meadows), forest, abandoned agricultural fields, vernal pools, active agricultural fields, streams & rivers (riparian), ponds (lacustrine), suburban, and urban. Invasive species have moved into many habitats, primarily in disturbed areas. Many animals utilize more than one of the habitat types. Migrating birds rest and re-fuel in Spencer habitats. Bald eagle, osprey, loon, hooded mergansers, various grebes, and a wide array of warblers have all been sighted and recorded.

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. In a number of wetlands in Spencer there is hunting of waterfowl and trapping of beaver, otter, and muskrat. Kayakers run sections of Turkey Hill Brook during high flow periods, and canoeists paddle on sections of the Seven Mile River.

The densely populated central village supports some 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. The last two routes almost connect along Valley Street. The human habitats are visited by a wide variety of birds, raccoon, coyote, skunk, possum, and fox. These co-exist with the normal array of animals which associate with urban humans, including feral cats, rats, mice, house finches and English sparrows. Even in the center of town, wildlife viewing can be exciting when the occasional bear or moose turn up.

NHESP published the BioMap and accompanying report designating Core Habitats and Critical Natural Landscapes of statewide significance in 2012. The Habitat Features map shows the current NHESP lands in Spencer. As with NHESP habitats, the mapped areas Core Habitat locations correlate strongly with wetlands but these include connected dry lands as well. The report states that “Protection and stewardship of *BioMap2* Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape is essential to safeguard the diversity of species and their habitats, intact ecosystems, and resilient natural landscapes across Massachusetts.” More information about BioMap and Core Habitat map can be found at <http://maps.massgis.state.ma.us/dfg/biomap2.htm>; and the Summary Report at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/biomap2-summary-report/download>. Spencer’s rare, threatened, and endangered animal species are shown in Table 4.2.

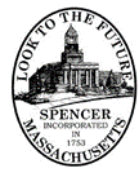
TABLE 4.2: Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Animal Species

Taxonomic	Scientific Name	Common Name	MESA	Most Recent
Amphibian	Ambystoma laterale	Blue-spotted Salamander	SC	1991
Bird	Ammodramus savannarum	Grasshopper Sparrow	T	2008
Bird	Botaurus lentiginosus	American Bittern	E	1996
Bird	Podilymbus podiceps	Pied-billed Grebe	E	2006
Fish	Notropis bifrenatus	Bridle Shiner	SC	2007
Mussel	Strophitus undulatus	Creeper	SC	2010
Reptile	Emydoidea blandingii	Blanding's Turtle	T	1993
Reptile	Glyptemys insculpta	Wood Turtle	SC	2014
Reptile	Terrapene carolina	Eastern Box Turtle	SC	1985

E = Endangered T = Threatened SC = Special Concern

* Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. There currently are no Federally Listed Species in Spencer.

Source: MassWildlife (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/rare-species-viewer-by-town>)



F. SCENIC RESOURCES AND UNIQUE ENVIRONMENTS

Working with Spencer residents, DCR produced a Heritage Landscape Report about Spencer in 2008. The residents identified the Green Property on Main Street and Schoolhouse #3, Sibley Farm/Wendy Warner Farm, Wilson Farm, Wire Village and Turkey Hill Brook, and St. Joseph's Abbey as the highest priority Heritage Landscapes. These properties are a priority for long-term protection. Other heritage landscapes identified by Spencer residents are listed in Appendix F of the Heritage Landscapes Report which is available at the Town of Spencer Office of Development and Inspectional Services (ODIS) or online at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/spencer/download>.

Spencer's ponds are highly valued for their scenic and recreational aspects. The lands held by camps such as Treasure Valley Scout Reservation, Camp Laurel Wood, and Camp Marshall are irreplaceable

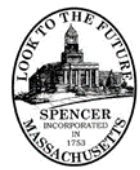


Photo Credit: George Russell

natural, recreational and educational facilities that draw campers from across the region. The Core and Critical Natural Landscape & NHESP Rare Species Habitats identified by MassWildlife as high quality, intact ecosystems and priority natural habitats are critical for preservation.

The Town has an active historic commission that has worked to preserve historic sites, and to document and educate about the history of Spencer. The Spencer Main St. (downtown area) was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. The East Main-Cherry Street District followed in 1996. In 2003, a new survey was conducted resulting in the Main Street Historic District (expansion). Included were West Main Street and portions of street located north and south of the present district. This area was placed on the National Register in 2003. Spencer has 364 buildings listed in the State historic registry, and six (6) monuments, including those dedicated to Samuel Bemis, the Howe family, and soldiers of the Civil War. Three cemeteries in Spencer are considered historic sites – Old Spencer Cemetery, Pine Grove Cemetery, and Saint Mary's Catholic Cemetery.

The Unique Features map indicates the general location of historic buildings, sites and structures. However as most of these are in the center of Town, a map of just the Town Center that labels the most important unique features and historic properties would be useful. Archeological sites, such as the dams of the defunct Spencer Wire Company along Turkey Hill Brook and the remnants of Waite Road, should also be accurately located, inventoried, and mapped. Spencer lacks a stone wall map. There are unidentified stone foundations and dam remains which bear investigation and might be correlated with the written histories of Spencer. The Town is not known to have unusual geologic features, except perhaps for Polar Spring. This local spring water source was the original water source for Polar Beverages, which used Spencer's Polar Spring both for bottled spring water and for flavored soft drinks.



The Town's character is strongly influenced by views from the roads over a variety of landscapes such as along a ridge, along the side of a valley, or the top of a drumlin hill. Spencer has five (5) roads designated as scenic roads: Buteau Road, Borkum Road, William Casey Road, East Charlton Road (from Bacon Hill Road to the Charlton town line) and Briarcliff Lane (formerly Cranberry Meadow Road). A map of these scenic roads can be found in Appendix A. These roads have not been re-evaluated since their designation as scenic roads in 1977. There are several other roads that have scenic value that have not been officially designated as scenic roads, including Hastings Road, McCormick Road, Howe Road, Upper Wire Village Rd (along Turkey Hill Brook), Northwest Road, Brooks Pond Cross Road, Tom Casey Road, and the south end of South Spencer Road.

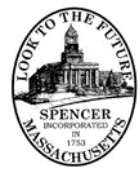
G. ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

There are a number of environmental concerns that affect water resources in Spencer. These include the solid waste disposal area (capped landfill) adjacent to Cranberry River that is near the Cranberry Meadow municipal well. The landfill has been capped and is now home to a solar farm, but will require monitoring into the future. In addition, gravel mining, which occurs in very porous soils, removes filtering layers, thus leaving the underlying groundwater very vulnerable to contamination unless restored with topsoil and active restoration at the new surface. While most of the gravel operations in Spencer have yet to attempt restoration, several are in process. They are expected to set a good example and demonstrate the feasibility of such projects.

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. The Spencer Fire Department supervises privately owned underground fuel and chemical storage tanks. These tanks that are above water supply aquifers must have secondary containment structures for backup and must also be regularly monitored. The Town should consider undertaking an inventory of existing land uses to identify risky activities in the aquifer zone, as well as site inspections and education.

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 old 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.

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. 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.



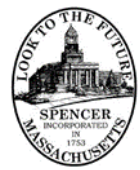
Careful management includes limiting what the stormwater runoff can pick up or removing contaminants, sediment, and debris before the runoff finally reaches a wetland, stream or water body. The Stormwater Management Bylaw requires that development projects which are not exempt to obtain a permit from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

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is responsible for monitoring the waters of the Commonwealth, identifying those waters that are impaired, and developing a plan to bring them back into compliance with the Massachusetts Water Quality Standards. The list of impaired waters, better known as the “303d list” identifies river, lake, and coastal waters and the reason for impairment. Once a water body is identified as impaired, DEP is required by the Federal Clean Water Act to essentially develop a “pollution budget” designed to restore the health of the impaired body of water. The process of developing this budget, generally referred to as a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), includes identifying the source(s) of the pollutant from direct discharges (point sources) and indirect discharges (non-point sources), determining the maximum amount of the pollutant that can be discharged to a specific water body to meet water quality standards, and developing a plan to meet that goal. The Spencer water bodies that were incorporated in the 2016 “303d” integrated list are shown in the table below:

TABLE 4.3: Spencer Water Bodies on the "303 integrated list" 2016

Water Body	Size	Cause	Category
Brooks Pond	179	Non-native aquatic plants	Category 4a “TMDL is
Browning Pond	106 acres	Non-native aquatic plants; mercury in fish tissue	Category 5 “Waters requiring a TMDL”
Burncoat Pond	115	N/A	Category 3, No Uses Assessed
Jones Pond	30 acres	Aquatic Plants (Macrophytes), Nutrient/Eutrophication	Category 4a “TMDL is Completed”
Lake	52	Turbidity	Category 5 “Waters requiring
Sevenmile River	7.3	Escherichia Coli (E. Coli)	Category 5 “Waters requiring
Spencer Brook	3.8	N/A	Category 3, No Uses Assessed
Stiles Reservoir	309	N/A	Category 3, No Uses Assessed
Sugden	85	Nutrient/Eutrophication	Category 4a “TMDL is
Thompson	116	N/A	Category 3 “No uses
Watson Mill	2 acres	N/A	Category 3 “No uses assessed

(Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, 2016)



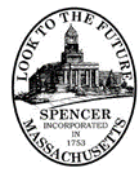
Flooding: Flooding is also an environmental challenge, and the risk of flooding from extreme levels of precipitation is increasing due to climate change. The Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan (2019) recommends development and implementation of minor flood control projects and/or drainage improvements to relieve flooding at the following locations:

- Pine Acres Road.
- Cherry Street neighborhood in the Town center, much of which is an Environmental Justice area.
- McCormick Road at the wetlands below Buck Hill, as well as address a compromised outlet pipe at Buck Hill Conservation Dam.
- North and west of Stiles Reservoir on GH Wilson Road, Clark Road and vicinity.
- Northwest Road, at the brook north of its intersection with Route 31, as well as its brook crossing culvert near the Oakham town line.
- Cranberry Meadow Road, north of Cranberry Meadow Pond dam; and Highland Street west of Whittemore Dam.
- South of Thompson Pond Road, near the pond and local wetlands.
- Ash Street, near Morgan Swamp; Greenville Street, near Kingsbury Road and wetlands; and Smithville Cross Road near the Seven Mile River and wetlands.
- Cider Millpond and its tributaries in the Town Center area.
- Dufault Road near a Cranberry River tributary.

Beaver contribute to the water quality and flooding concerns. Beavers and the ponds they create can provide benefits, such as groundwater recharge and wetlands habitats. However, beaver activity sometimes floods roadways, septic systems, and basements, and damages valued landscape plants and trees. Beaver also change the water level in ponds, which can affect plant and animal life, and transmit *Giardia*, which is a health concern near water supplies.

Climate change will increasingly affect the Town's population, infrastructure, ecosystems, flora and fauna. In 2017, the Town was awarded a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) planning grant from the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. In 2018, the Town held a Community Resiliency Building (CRB) workshop to identify the main climate change-related hazards facing the Town, vulnerabilities to these hazards, and a list of priority actions to increase climate resilience. The workshop identified extreme precipitation and flooding as a top hazard, as well as drought, extreme temperatures, and winter storms. Undersized culverts and bridges of varying conditions are concerns in areas that flood regularly during heavy precipitation, such as those mentioned above. There are 3 High Hazard dams in Town, one of which is in the downtown area near the intersection of the two main roads in town (the north-south running State Route 31 and the east-west running State Route 9). In addition, the wastewater treatment plant and the highway department are both in flood zones.

Maintaining and increasing open space areas is critical in reducing the impacts of climate change such as flooding, drought and extreme temperatures. Open spaces provide natural services including flood storage, groundwater recharge, habitat connectivity, and reduction of the urban heat island effect. The highest priority actions identified at the CRB workshop to increase resiliency in Spencer included

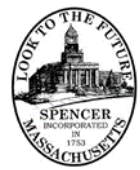


identifying open space priorities, focusing on “areas that will increase flood resiliency through increasing storage capacity in floodplains and/or infiltration capacity in uplands.” This would include both public and private lands. An additional high priority action was to assess green infrastructure opportunities - develop a list of priorities, assess feasibility and cost, rank projects in terms of climate resilience potential, and develop concept designs for key projects. It was also recommended to review Town regulations and update them as necessary to support green infrastructure and low impact development. The Town followed up on these identified priorities and applied for and was awarded an MVP Action Grant with the Town of Charlton to assess the vulnerability of water infrastructure in both communities and recommend measures to strengthen these vulnerabilities and increase climate resilience.

As development continues, trails now used by permission or, less formally, by user discretion are being cut off, restricting recreational use. The various trail uses (wildlife-watching, walking, hiking, running, biking, snowmobiling, and skiing) are enjoyed by a wide range of people from children to senior citizens. Many of them are free of charge or cost very little, making them accessible to those with limited income, and can be done year-round or through 2-3 seasons. How Spencer meets the challenge of linking and preserving trails for the future will have a strong influence on the recreational opportunities available locally.

Forestry: The Town of Spencer has not yet undertaken a comprehensive evaluation of forestry issues such as low canopy cover, number of high hazard trees, ratio of tree removal to plantings, or invasive species. Trees along roadways that are identified as hazardous are removed as necessary. Invasive species are a continual challenge, especially in disturbed areas. The more frequent the disturbance, the more invasive species in general. Multiflora rose is common in many old farm fields. Norway maple seedlings are prominent in the downtown area. Asian bittersweet has invaded many field/wood transitions and competes with trees, and has begun moving into the forests. Barberry, multi-flora rose and eponymous are present in openings created by forestry operations. Any developments that have stalled after tree cutting/clearing has already occurred create ideal conditions for invasive species.

Invasive insect species are also a concern. The Emerald Ash Borer has been moving eastward from the Midwest, and poses a threat to White and Green Ash trees in Spencer. The Asian Longhorned Beetle, which was first discovered in Worcester in 2008, is also a concern in Spencer, most especially for Maple trees, but also other hardwoods. There are also issues with how the State would manage invasive insect outbreaks in Spencer. With extensive public lands in Spencer including those owned by DCR, if and when the DCR invasive species researchers found a similar outbreak on a parcel, best management practices indicate it would follow the same procedure it historically has used. That is, to deforest the entire area affected in order to eradicate invasive species. In Spencer's case, if a silvicultural harvest is previously scheduled and approved on any of the extensive FFVP designated Woodlands, DFW, or WMA lands, it could result in 10-200 acres of clear cuts. Then if there's a separate infested parcel that is clear cut, Spencer could face an extensive deforestation. Inquiries with DCR have shown that each division doesn't cross check activity between invasive species remediation efforts and whether there are any harvests scheduled once a logging permit is given.



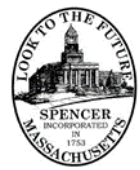
For Spencer's Open Space protection, it behooves any future Open Space Committee to establish and continually maintain semiannual or quarterly contact with each of the state's various agencies (DCR, DFW, WMA, PAB) since the agencies may not communicate the details between each agency. Spencer must be aware of what lands are classified as, their acreage involved and ongoing research involving invasive species threats. The Open Space Committee must also be aware of and act within the 10-day comment period regarding silvicultural activities and addressing public comments.

Timber harvesting on public lands is an issue in Spencer. DCR posts semiannual updates on intended harvest areas and offers public tours in each of the regional silviculture harvest areas beforehand. DCR's lands within Spencer were re-designated in 2012, the changes following the state's forestry chief's acknowledgement that the agency failed to recognize a landowner's wishes for donated property, and a state logging operation occurred that should not have. Numerous public meetings and comment periods were held between 2009 and 2012 as part of DCR's Forest Futures Visioning Process (FFVP). The result was a [FFVP Management Guidelines Document](#) designating lands classified into 3 categories; Reserves, Parklands, Woodlands. (See FFVP PDF Appendix D attached). Each of DCR's three land designations have specific agendas for protection and maintenance. The FFVP designations list allowable uses and how areas are maintained. Separate laws apply to municipal, land trust or agricultural lands.

The 3 DCR lands designations offer guidance for public and state officials alike regarding land usage. It helps guide intended public user groups ranging from passive recreation hikers to full sized motorized OHV use and commercial silviculture. The DCR's oversight includes legal mandates ranging from Reserve protection, management of park lands to Woodlands requiring the DCR continually seek enhancement of OHV areas with existing users in order to comply with funding mandates in Woodland areas. DCR is funded by the state budget. If classified as Woodlands, the forests can be commercially utilized for silviculture under FFVP. Presently, WMA and DFW lands are also viewed as silviculture assets and debate is ongoing on the practices.

Funding Challenges: Lack of funding at the state and local level has impacted Spencer's public lands, resulting in closure of aquatic assets at Howe Park and infrastructure which has been shuttered over 20 years. There are constraints put on state public land fundraising by private citizens or volunteers. For most of a decade DCR's numerous Commissioners have struggled to advance a volunteer policy through the EEA that was acceptable to DCR's legal department, DCR's Human Resources and DCR's Friends Groups for volunteer activities to enhance given areas. Turnover at the agency has become problematic in keeping the focus on developing policy. What has helped is having volunteers establish Friends Groups that could help newly politically appointed DCR leaders gain a better understanding quickly as several Commissioners have stated while attending Friends of Massachusetts State Forests and Parks annual conferences and in public recognition with the Stewardship Council which oversees DCR. DCR has developed "a Public Private Partnerships on Properties" program to help restore and enhance assets.

The difference between a land trust's mandates and public lands needs to be clearly understood but often is not, especially when lay people try to comprehend the differences in the nature of state agencies, agency designated land use, and how the lands are protected and funding. Public lands in simple terms are maintained by the State budget and each agency's share of that budget. What has



become a topic for debate is the use of public lands for commercial silviculture and other purposes. In nearby states, once thought of as solely forested public lands have been designated for fracking by oil and gas industry. The commercial interest in forest and open space potential uses has continually grown and in many cases the public has found limited to no benefit.

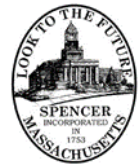
In comparison, land trusts and other non-profit organization lands are funded through donations, camps, private events and endeavors and memberships. While Spencer's public lands and properties are mainly town budget-based funding, they have the benefit and ability to raise funds via private and commercial donations to the town as well as through seeking grants. Land trusts have similar abilities for funding with the addition of memberships to help with maintenance and enhancement. For Spencer, having a vibrant Open Space Committee and Friends Group is an important step toward protecting open space.

Lost Information Due to Technology: One of the biggest challenges facing any group or individual involved in open space protection is the ever-changing conduit of web assets for gaining access to information. For example, the FFVP document referenced above clearly describes each FFVP designation and then includes numerous links for getting further details. However, due to the EEA and other state agencies web service provider changes and state website updates, most all of the links in this and other agencies in the Commonwealth end with a message reading "OOPS 404 That information is missing".

These intended updates have resulted in an unintended dearth of information that previously was easily accessible. Educating the public using the assets for open space protection is thus hampered by the inability to get information, unless a party knows what to specifically search for on the web search engines that trigger the exact page sought. The Commonwealth web team's priority is data transfer based upon search. The State's new web-based information access to older information such as the FFVP's linkage is predicated upon volume of search requests rather than an active archive of searchable information. This means that Spencer's future Open Space Implementation Committee should understand the challenge of finding information and build a repository of relevant information going forward for its own use. As state administrations have changed, so has access to decades of relevant research and information. Most of the IT team appears to have consistently shown a limited understanding of the pressing needs to access information on the local level with constrained budgets and limited paid or volunteer staff.

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO OPEN SPACE

As shown in **Map 2, Environmental Justice Map**, there is one environmental justice (EJ) population located in Spencer in the area just south of Route 9, east of Route 31 and west of Ash Street. This EJ population meets the low-income criterion based on 2010 census data. Residents of the EJ block are within approximately one mile of Isaac Prouty Park, Luther Hill Park, and O'Gara Park. Those living closer to Route 9 are closer to these parks, and walking would be possible. For those living further south of Route 9 there could be safety issues walking on busy roads to these parks. This is an especially important factor for families with young children and for elderly residents. There is no bus service on Route 31, only along



Route 9. There are sidewalks on Route 31 for approximately one mile south of Route 9, but further south there is no safe way for residents to walk along that busy road.

Spencer State Forest and the mid-state trail are also within one mile of most of the residents of the EJ block. However, as with the parks in the center of Town it may be dangerous to walk along busy roads to these passive recreation facilities. There are no sidewalk or bus service on the section of Route 31 heading south to these areas. As the Town continues efforts to expand active and passive recreation facilities, providing playgrounds and active and passive recreation opportunities that are accessible to all residents in the EJ neighborhood should be a priority.

SECTION 5: INVENTORY OF LANDS OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION INTEREST

OVERVIEW

This section provides an overview of Spencer’s open space. Open space includes larger parcels of undeveloped or partially developed land, as well as conservation and recreation land. It also includes agricultural land, cemeteries, and any undeveloped land with conservation or recreation interest. Open space is important to the Town of Spencer for several reasons. Open space improves the quality of life for residents, providing recreational opportunities, scenic views, and places to simply enjoy the outdoors. Parks can provide health benefits by providing places for active recreation, as well as providing places for social gathering. Open spaces also provide valuable wildlife habitat, help to protect water resources, and provide natural stormwater storage. Lands or areas with scenic or historic value are also essential components of a community's public open spaces. Protection of open space is an important Town priority. Spencer’s open space resources have various levels of protection. As shown in Table 5.1 below, a little over half of all open space in Spencer (57.29%) is protected in perpetuity. Close to half the open space in Spencer (40%) has no protection.

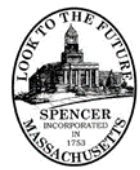


Photo Credit: Town of Spencer

Lands of conservation and recreation interest in the Town of Spencer include:

1. Properties with permanent protections,
 - a. Publicly owned for purposes of conservation or resource protection
 - b. Land owned by non–profits and land trusts with conservation restrictions or agricultural preservation restrictions
 - c. Privately owned land with conservation restrictions or agricultural preservation restrictions
2. Properties with limited protection
 - a. Public ownership provides only limited protection unless specifically deeded or stipulated as permanently protected, since some properties may be sold or developed as schools or town garages, even town halls. Disposal or sale of these properties usually require a town meeting or other public process.
 - b. Private properties used for forestry, agriculture or recreation in exchange for special tax status
3. Privately owned land with special open space or recreational interest such as a rod and gun club.

The Open Space Inventory Map (**Map 7**) shows the open space lands of conservation or recreation interest with their associated level of protection. All lots of greater than 5 acres whether partially



developed or not are included. The map also includes smaller lots currently developed for recreation or used for conservation. Open spaces on the Inventory Map are categorized as Permanently Protected, having Limited Protection, Unprotected, or Unknown.

In Perpetuity (P)- Legally protected in perpetuity and recorded as such in a deed or other official document. Land is considered protected in perpetuity if it is owned by the Town’s conservation commission or, sometimes, by the water department; if a town has a conservation restriction on the property in perpetuity; if it is owned by one of the state’s conservation agencies (thereby covered by article 97); if it is owned by a non-profit land trust; or if the Town received federal or state assistance for the purchase or improvement of the property. Private land is considered protected if it has a deed restriction in perpetuity, if an Agriculture Preservation Restriction has been placed on it, or a Conservation Restriction has been placed on it.

Limited (L) – These lands include those legally protected for less than perpetuity (e.g. short-term conservation restriction or Chapter 61 lands), or temporarily protected through an existing functional use. For example, some water district lands are only temporarily protected while water resource protection is their primary use. These lands could be developed for other uses at the end of their temporary protection or when their functional use is no longer necessary. These lands will revert to unprotected status at a given date unless protection status is extended.

Properties with Limited protection are Protected by legal mechanisms other than those above, or protected through functional or traditional use. These lands might be protected by a requirement of a majority municipal vote for any change in status. This designation also includes lands that are likely to remain open space for other reasons (e.g. cemeteries and municipal golf courses).

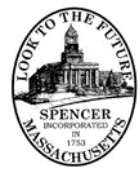
None (N) - Totally unprotected by any legal or functional means. This land is usually privately owned and could be sold without restriction at any time for another use (e.g. scout camps, private golf course, and private woodland).

TABLE 5.1: Open Space by Level of Protection

Level of Protection	Size (GIS Acres)	% of Total
Limited	127.35	2.19%
None	2,351.14	40.36%
Protected	3,337.01	57.29%
Unknown	9.53	0.16%
Grand Total	5,825.03	100.00%

OWNERSHIP SUMMARY

As shown in Table 5.2 below, the largest percentage of open space in Spencer is privately owned by a non-profit at 35.22%. St. Joseph’s Abbey makes up almost 75% of that at 1,533.6 acres. The percentage



of state-owned land is slightly smaller at 30.15%. These are parcels primarily owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation as well as the Department of Fish and Game. The percentage of private for-profit open space is 21.07%, which includes parcels owned by the Girl and Boy Scouts of America and others. Almost 10% of open space in Spencer is owned by a Land Trust, including Mass Audubon, Greater Worcester Land Trust and Common Ground Land Trust. Municipally owned open space is quite limited at 213 acres or 3.66%. Almost 629 acres are permanently protected by Conservation Restrictions or Agricultural Preservation Restrictions, including Spencer State Forest, Burncoat Pond Wildlife Sanctuary, and Sibley/Warner Farms.

TABLE 5.2 Open Space by Ownership

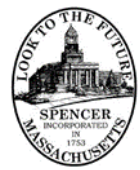
Owner Type	Size (GIS Acres)	% of Total
Land Trust	565.48	9.71%
Municipal	213.36	3.66%
Private for Profit	1,227.49	21.07%
State	1,756.43	30.15%
Private Non-Profit	2,051.73	35.22%
Other	10.54	0.18%
Grand Total	5,825.03	100.00%

5A. PRIVATE PARCELS

Privately-owned parcels described in this subsection include land with agricultural preservation restrictions or conservation restrictions, Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B land, and lands with no protections but of open space or conservation interest.

PERMANENT PROTECTION OR PROTECTION IN PERPETUITY

These lands are legally protected in perpetuity and recorded as such in a deed or other official document. Land is considered protected in perpetuity if it is owned by the Town’s conservation commission or, sometimes, by the water department; if a town has a conservation restriction on the property in perpetuity; if it is owned by one of the state’s conservation agencies (thereby covered by article 97); if it is owned by a non-profit land trust; or if the Town received federal or state assistance for the purchase or improvement of the property. Private land is considered protected if it has a deed restriction in perpetuity, if an Agriculture Preservation Restriction has been placed on it, or a Conservation Restriction has been placed on it. Many permanently protected lands are protected by Article 97 of the State Constitution, which provides permanent protection for certain lands acquired for natural resources purposes. Parkland is protected under Article 97 as well. Removing the permanent protection status of such lands is extremely difficult, as is evidenced by the following steps:



- The municipal Conservation Commission or Parks and Recreation Committee must vote that the land in question is surplus to its needs.
- The removal of permanent protection status must be approved at a Town Meeting/City Council vote and pass by a two-thirds (2/3) vote.
- The municipality must file an Environmental Notification Form with the EOEEA's Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).
- The removal of permanent protection status must be approved by both the State House of Representatives and the State Senate and pass by a two-thirds (2/3) vote.
- In the case of land either acquired or developed with grant assistance from the EOEEA's Division of Conservation Services, the converted land must be replaced with land of equal monetary value and recreational or conservation utility.

In other words, it is intentionally difficult to remove a property's permanent protection status so that it may be developed. Article 97 lands are often owned by the municipal conservation commission, parks and recreation commission, the water department or a state conservation agency.

Lands acquired for watershed and aquifer protection, habitat conservation, or state parks are often permanently protected open space. Municipally-owned properties used for cemeteries, public recreation and conservation areas may be permanently protected via a Town Meeting Vote or a City Council Order. Often these lands are placed under the ownership or protection of the Conservation Commission.

Private lands, including those owned by non-profit organizations, can also be protected in perpetuity through deed conservation restrictions, conservation easements, agricultural preservation restrictions, historic preservation restrictions, or wetlands restrictions. Some easements may run for a more limited period (like 30 years) and those are not considered permanently protected. As mentioned above, these lands may also be protected by Article 97.

In 2007, with the help of a Self Help grant from the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services, Spencer purchased a conservation restriction to permanently protect approximately 60 acres abutting Burncoat Pond. Mass Audubon has since successfully raised funds and purchased the rest of the interest (the fee interest) in the property. This property extends a large natural area and trail system. It connects to 160 acres set aside as open space on the Sibley Farm subdivision and is managed by Mass Audubon as a wildlife sanctuary. The Annual Town Meeting in 2007 approved the purchase of a Conservation Restriction on an additional 4.2 acres on Greenville Street within this area, providing further protection for the wetlands, waterways, wildlife habitat, and scenic character of this area of town.



Photo Credit: Common Ground Land Trust

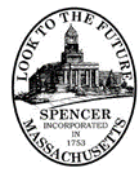
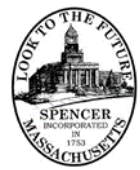


TABLE 5.3 Permanently Protected Open Space in Spencer

Property	Size (GIS Acres)
Moose Hill WMA	195.50
Spencer State Forest	1,387.86
Town Community House	0.28
Sherwood Forest Private Beach	0.43
Kittredge Flood Control Site	94.29
Conservation Commission Land	5.43
Four Chimneys WMA	214.82
Moose Hill Flood Control Site	37.82
Sevenmile River Access	74.85
Bemis Memorial Park	1.30
Burncoat Pond Wildlife Sanctuary	214.94
Adams Richard H APR	206.90
Proctor Farm APR	141.55
Keith Roger E APR	176.06
Zukas Farm APR	48.95
Prouty Park	0.70
Sibley/Warner Farms CR	268.32
Railroad Park	38.12
O'Gara Park	9.66
Luther Hill Park	14.72
Sugden Reservoir Dam	5.51
Sibley Farm APR	82.22
Powder Mill Park	4.32
Ralph Warren Park	9.62
Bixby Road CR	6.95
Spencer Farms APR	77.44
Spencer Water Supply Land	18.46
Grand Total	3,337.01

LIMITED PROTECTION

Private lands that are within the State’s special taxation programs (Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B) are actively managed by their owners, but only have limited or temporary protection. Private owners can manage their land for forestry, agriculture, and/or recreation purposes and receive a benefit of reduced property tax under Chapter 61. Chapter 61 is for forested lands, Chapter 61A for agricultural and horticultural lands, and Chapter 61B is for recreational lands. Chapter lands are considered as having limited protection.



There are approximately 2,429 acres of Chapter Lands in Spencer. The Chapter 61A and 61B programs allow a reduction of about 75% in property taxes. The Town has the right of first refusal on Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B lands if owners sell or convert to residential, commercial or industrial uses (unless it is a residential use for a family member). This kind of private stewardship currently preserves open fields and hilltops, productive forests and scenic stream valleys throughout the Town. Often, Chapter 61 lands have been owned by families for generations and have important places in Spencer’s history. The Town’s right of first refusal on Chapter 61 properties is an important conservation and recreation opportunity. To be prepared, the Town should have a policy and a well-defined process for working with a Chapter 61 landowner who decides to divest the property.

Most private open space lands are Unprotected and not open to the public. Some private land owners, however, do grant permission for a trail to cross their property. The great majority of these permissions are informal. They can and often are withdrawn by the owner at any time.

TABLE 5.4: Chapter Lands in Spencer by Type

Chapter Land Type	Size (GIS Acres)	% of Total
Chapter 61	206.35	8.50%
Chapter 61A	1,315.63	54.17%
Chapter 61B	906.90	37.34%
Grand Total	2,428.89	100.00%

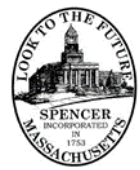
5B PUBLIC AND NON-PROFIT PARCELS

Municipal lands under active use (schools, town halls, highway department facilities, police/fire facilities, etc.) are not generally considered permanently protected. For the purposes of this plan, we will consider that those publicly-owned parcels are not permanently protected. A public disposition process however, theoretically insures some level of protection. The Town can divert these for any municipal purpose at any time, however they cannot be sold without due process. Town schools and parks are popular for recreation activities. Athletic facilities at David Prouty High School are frequently used and the soccer field here offers a panoramic view from the top of Little Moose Hill. Almost 40% of survey respondents noted that Spencer’s recreation facilities could be improved, and common suggestions included improved maintenance, new equipment, and more parking facilities.



Photo Credit: IsaacProutyMemorialPark.com

Much of the open space in Spencer is owned and managed by the State and state agencies, or by a non-profit organization. The majority of these lands have only Limited Protection. Spencer State Forest, Howe State Park, and Buck Hill Conservation Center are among the most popular recreation facilities



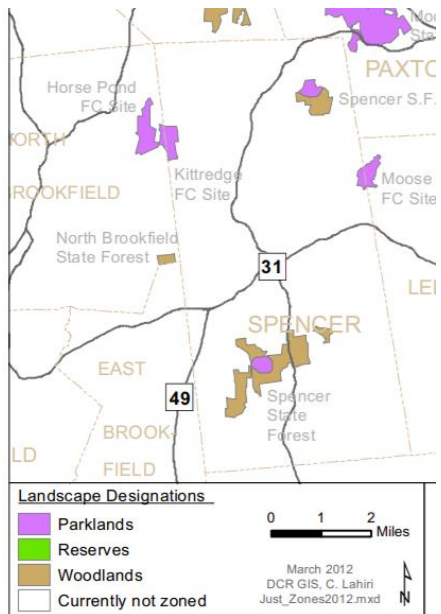
open to the public. The Buck Hill area includes Camp Marshall Worcester County 4-H Center, and features a pond, buildings for 4-H activities, equestrian programs and trails. Howe Park includes Howe Pond, a section of Cranberry Brook, and two smaller ponds that supply fishing, picnicking, and hiking opportunities for Town residents and visitors. Additional state-owned properties are Four Chimneys Recreation Area and Moose Hill Wildlife Management Area, both owned and managed by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

TABLE 5.5 State-Owned Open Space in Spencer

Owner Name	Size (GIS Acres)	% of Total
Department of Fish and Game	485.17	27.62%
DCR - Division of State Parks and Recreation	1,270.68	72.34%
Commonwealth of Massachusetts	0.58	0.03%
Grand Total	1,756.43	100.00%

ISSUES WITH LAND PROTECTION WITHIN THE TOWN OF SPENCER

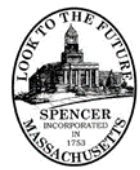
Any discussion of Open Space land protection needs to start by understanding how lands are classified within the Commonwealth, funding that maintains them, and available information resources. Spencer's



Open Space Implementation Committee will need resources to consult for clarity on various topics which arise while implementing their agenda in managing and best management practices. As described above, Spencer's open space assets encompass most all categories of land classifications found within the Commonwealth's public and private land designations. Public lands include Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Mass Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW), Wildlife Management Areas, (WMA) and Public Access Board (PAB) lands and Commonwealth of Massachusetts forest lands held in a separate Division of Capital Planning category. In addition, the Town of Spencer owns numerous parcels ranging from athletic fields, parks and playgrounds to passive recreation woodlands. The DCR [FFVP Management Guidelines Document](#) designating lands classified into 3 categories; Reserves, Parklands, Woodlands. (See FFVP PDF in Appendix D). Each of DCR's three land designations have specific agendas for protection and maintenance. Figure 4.1 shows the

Figure 2: FFVP Designations in Spencer

three categories of landscape designations within the Town of Spencer. The FFVP designations list allowable uses and how areas are maintained. Separate laws apply to municipal, land trust or agricultural lands. Below are descriptions of some of the issues the Town of Spencer faces in efforts to conserve, protect, and manage open spaces.



Silviculture: The DCR Landscape designations clearly show that not all public land is under the protection assumed for how "forest" lands are considered in "protection". On page 42 of the Landscape designations Special Use Section E shows that although the protection is mentioned, the procedure to change that is clearly left available. People don't realize the potential to have a commercial venture in the forest lands under "Special Permits" as outlined in the DCR Landscape Designations in the DCR's Forest Futures Visioning Process.

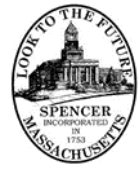
Municipal Public Lands and Bequest Threats: Massachusetts Land Court (MLC) decisions have shown the need for land grantors to specifically list uses and clarify intentions within legal documents whenever land is conveyed to municipalities. Without a grantor's specifications, current allowable uses become subject to MLC interpretation as cases have shown. Land trusts by the nature of the specific trust documentation usually have greater clarity specifying the land's intended uses and offers greater protection.

Commercialization and No Net Loss Policy: Massachusetts' Open Space has recently come under pressure to allow public and Article 97 lands to be swapped for other lands for commercial purposes as long as the intended user offers similar lands so that "no net loss" is established. This practice has become a source of debate due to the perception of what constitutes equal value of lands from species habitat to commercial value. It has been found that state forest land has been given for public use in exchange for lands that were not directly connected with a contiguous parcel.

LAND PROTECTION PRIORITIZATION STRATEGY

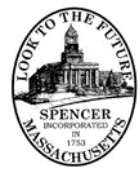
When land is under consideration for acquisition to implement this plan, the following criteria should be considered and a scoring system developed based on the criteria. Land meeting multiple criteria would be deemed worthwhile. Such a system could result in objective evaluation of the public value of purchase and give a rapid pre-crisis established rational justification for expenditure of funds. The following criteria are proposed:

- The presence of Prime Agricultural Soil (an irreplaceable resource).
- The land sits over Zone II of a public water supply well.
- The land is a link in a stream/river corridor.
- The land or an easement thereon provide or preserve a trail link.
- The land is part of a lake/pond watershed and needed for water quality protection.
- The land contains rare species habitat, or has another identified eco-service value.
- The land has potential for development of active recreation (e.g. level and suitable soil for a soccer field) or enhances an existing facility e.g. space for parking, pedestrian access, handicapped access etc.).
- Lake/pond public access.
- Suitable space for a needed water quality management structure.
- Lake/pond shore/bank protection.
- Scenic view or other aesthetic value.
- Historic significance.



- Preservation of a significant archeological site.

As an on-going part of the process for future Open Space Plans, the criteria and their priority should be reviewed and amended to match Spencer's needs.



SECTION 6: COMMUNITY VISION

A. DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS

The Spencer Open Space and Recreation Working Group utilized two methods to assess residents' priorities: a survey that was conducted in October and November of 2019, and two virtual hearings held on November 18 and December 15, 2021. The survey provided the opportunity for residents to answer detailed questions related to open space and recreation needs, while the public forum allowed residents and other stakeholders to voice their opinions. The working group met approximately every other month throughout the duration of the project in public meetings. These meetings were held at town hall and open to the general public until March 2020, when public meetings were discontinued due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the meetings were held virtually over Zoom. All meeting notifications and other news were posted on the Town of Spencer website.

In October 2019, the Spencer Open Space and Recreation Plan Working Group developed and distributed a survey to assess the needs and concerns of citizens regarding the Town's open space and recreational resources. The Working Group and CMRPC used the 2012 survey and similar OSRP surveys from other towns as a starting point for developing questions. Many questions were revised and new questions were added, based on input from both the Working Group and Town Staff. The questions and wording were carefully written in order to elicit substantial input from respondents. The survey was conducted online via the Survey Monkey platform, and was linked electronically on the Town's website. Announcements with links to the survey were included in multiple list serves, including for the schools and the Parks and Recreation Department. Hard copies of the survey were made available at various locations around town, including the Municipal Offices, the Town Library, the Senior Center, and at Spencer Housing Authority properties. The Town received 257 responses, primarily to the online survey. Tabulated results were reviewed and discussed by the Working Group, and the resulting information was integrated into the goals, objectives, and action plan for implementation.

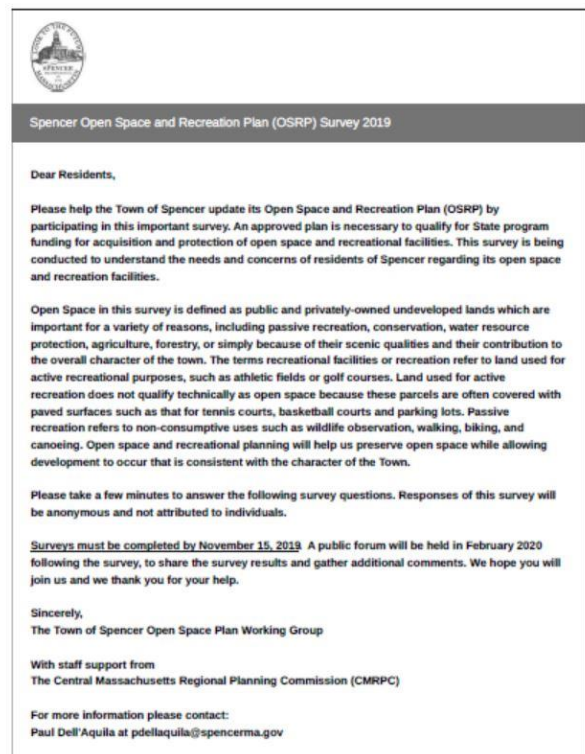
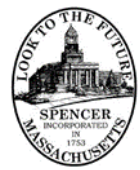


Figure 3: First Page of Survey

The Committee initially planned to hold a Public Forum in early May 2020 to discuss the draft plan, the draft survey results, draft goals, objectives, and action plan. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic,



meetings larger than 10 and later 25 individuals were prohibited by Executive Order. When it became clear in the summer that larger in-person gatherings were unlikely to be feasible in the near future, Town staff made the decision to hold a virtual public forum using the Zoom platform. Due to a very low response rate for a public forum planned for October 2020 and the departure of the Town Planner, the virtual public forum was postponed and eventually replaced with two virtual public hearings held during Conservation Commission and Planning Board meetings in November and December.

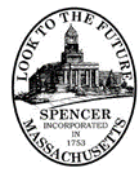
B. STATEMENT OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION GOALS

A pastoral landscape of rolling forests and fields combined with a peaceful small-town character and affordable housing make Spencer very attractive for both new and long-term residents. The Town's wealth of ponds, reservoirs and streams are especially valued by residents, and provide critical habitat, beautiful scenery, and many recreational opportunities. Most respondents to open space surveys clearly agree that conservation issues are important. Results also show townspeople feel it is essential to ensure open spaces for water quality, wildlife habitat and recreation, as well as preserve historic features and farmlands.

The open space goals have not changed since 2012, although the Objectives and the new Seven Year Action Plan have been revised to reflect the progress made since 2012 and to lay out a path forward toward those fundamental goals. The Working Group and community ratified these five broad goals for ensuring the Town's open spaces and recreation uses in the future:

- GOAL 1: Protect valuable water resources from adverse impacts.
- GOAL 2: Retain Spencer's rural, small-town character.
- GOAL 3: Enhance recreation opportunities for Town residents & visitors
- GOAL 4: Preserve Spencer's open spaces and natural heritage.
- GOAL 5: Establish a continuous open space planning process

This planning process provides an accurate assessment of open space and recreational opportunities and needs for Spencer residents, and offers a plan of action that optimizes those opportunities and satisfies those needs. The Working Group, through this plan, has developed a set of action items aimed at addressing the above goals (see the Action Plan presented in Section 9 of this document).



SECTION 7: ANALYSIS OF NEEDS

This section presents resource protection needs, community needs, and management needs that were collected through an analysis of the data presented in previous sections, the survey, the public hearings, and input from the Working Group and Town staff. The majority of the analysis presented below has been drawn from the public outreach survey distributed from October – December 2019, with additional feedback shared during both virtual public hearings in November and December 2020.

A. RESOURCE PROTECTION NEEDS

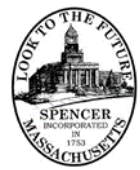
Resource protection is based upon the need to preserve existing natural and cultural resources that are finite and once lost cannot easily be replaced. These resources include wetlands, rivers, streams, aquifers, farmland, historical resources and scenic views. Valuable natural systems provide habitat to many wildlife species, some of which may be endangered. Lakes, streams and underground aquifers provide storage capacity for floodwaters and natural purification for drinking water. Preservation of the Town’s aquifers provides critical protection of drinking water supply. As climate change continues to impact the local, regional, and global environment, it becomes increasingly important to incorporate resource protection into planning efforts.

WATER QUALITY

Preservation of open spaces for water quality protection is very important to Town residents. This conservation strategy also protects adjacent wetlands, wildlife habitats and flood plains, as well as downstream ponds and water supplies. To address this priority, the Town will enforce the Rivers Protection Act and acquire lands beside waterways. Vegetated “riparian corridors” (i.e. land along rivers and streams) serve to reduce pollution and keep streams cooler - thus sustaining oxygen levels and more diverse ecosystems. The health and abundance of fish is directly related to the presence of these stream buffers. Amphibians and mammals also need undisturbed riparian corridors to travel through their home territories, migrate seasonally and reproduce successfully. Many people highly value brooks and streams as beautiful areas that are especially popular for outdoor activities. Trail systems on land along waterways can link large open spaces, such as Worcester County 4-H Center (made up of Camp Marshal and Buck Hill Conservation Area), with Town parks, ponds and reservoirs.

The Cranberry River (as designated on USGS topographic maps; known locally as Cranberry Meadow Brook) is an excellent example of a riparian corridor that is largely protected (by Spencer State Forest). Only a few small additional areas need to be protected to provide a continuous buffer from its headwaters to its confluence with the Seven Mile River. The additions would include Cranberry Meadow and wetlands near Casey Hill that provide habitats for endangered wildlife. The Depot Trail provides a corridor from Chestnut Street to South Spencer Road. When opportunities arise, other trail links should be established to Spencer State Forest and on to Cranberry Meadow Pond.

The Seven Mile River connects with Cranberry River and can extend a natural link to Ralph Warren Park, Buck Hill Conservation Center, St. Joseph’s Abbey and the Moose Hill Wildlife Area. A trail system along Turkey Hill Brook can link Small Ballpark to Sugden Reservoir, Eames Pond and Thompson Pond.



Preservation of Seven Mile River lands will protect important wetlands and endangered wildlife habitats, as well as maintain the quality of water flowing into Great Meadows where Spencer's primary municipal well field is located. Linking the Cranberry and Seven Mile river front areas can extend a valuable recreation and wildlife corridor from the Town's borders with Oakham on the north to Charlton on the south.

A third priority is preserving Alder Meadow which links Stiles Reservoir with endangered habitats off G.H. Wilson Road and R. Jones Road. Connecting Spencer State Forest and this stream belt can establish an east-west corridor from Leicester to East Brookfield and protect the water flowing into Stiles Reservoir.

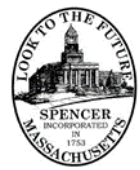
The Town's large ponds and reservoirs have weed problems due to nutrient loads from nearby high-density housing, exotic aquatic plant infestation, and runoff from poorly maintained private roads. As with many lakes and ponds in Massachusetts, the shoreline of most of Spencer's waterbodies were developed decades ago; originally as summer cottage colonies and since redeveloped into year-round neighborhoods. Education of and coordination with the lake and pond associations is essential to the health of the ponds. The creation of a management plan for each of these waterbodies defining problems, remedies, roles, and responsibilities would be beneficial. Cooperation between the Town and associations would increase the opportunities for grant funding.

AGRICULTURAL AND FOREST

Spencer has lost chapter lands in the past because the cost of acquisition was deemed excessive or the town couldn't respond within the 120-day period during which it had the option to purchase. The town needs to develop a coherent policy for rapid response when land in these programs comes up for release. In addition, the Town needs to work with non-profit organizations owning tax exempt land e.g. St. Joseph's Abbey, Camp Laurelwood, Camp Marshall, and Treasure Valley, to establish more permanent protection of these valuable open spaces.

When land is under consideration for acquisition, the criteria listed in Section 5 should be considered and a scoring system developed based on the criteria. Land meeting multiple criteria would be prioritized for acquisition. Such a system could result in objective evaluation of the public value of purchase and give a rapid pre-crisis established rational justification for expenditure of funds.

As mentioned in Section 4, solar development has also become a significant factor in the loss of open space in Spencer since the 2012 OSRP. The Town is currently considering bylaw revisions that would limit the scale of solar development on open space parcels that are ecologically fragile or valuable, as well as land with prime agricultural soil. In addition, the State has been revising its solar program to provide disincentives to solar companies developing projects on ecologically valuable open space land.



B. COMMUNITY NEEDS

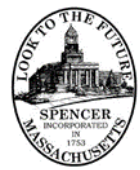
GENERAL COMMUNITY NEEDS

As development continues in Spencer it will be important to provide for continued and expanded public access to trails and water resources now used by custom. Access to some water bodies historically used, such as the Cranberry Meadow Lake where many residents remember being able to swim and fish, has been cut off by the assertion of private ownership rights. Clarification of responsibility for dam maintenance is also a current challenge. Trails are extremely valuable to Town residents, providing a range of recreational opportunities: walking, hiking, running, biking, cross country skiing, bird watching and in appropriate locations snowmobile or ATV riding. These recreational activities can be enjoyed by a wide range of ages and abilities.

Careful planning of recreation facilities and areas important for resource protection can help attract visitors to Town. Tourism is one of the largest sectors of the Massachusetts economy. The availability of open spaces and recreation can create greater opportunities for small retail stores, recreation and agricultural businesses. It is important to carefully maintain the resources and their functions as uses intensify with the growth of the resident and visiting populations. Keeping this balance will require constant effort from staff, volunteers, and citizen-users.

STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP)

Massachusetts Outdoors 2017, the [Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP\)](#), is a comprehensive plan for Massachusetts outdoor recreation. The SCORP surveyed state residents about their preferences and needs for recreation and open space facilities in the state and in their communities. The responses to both online and phone surveys were generally in line with needs and preferences expressed by Spencer residents in both the survey and public forum. Both of these surveys asked what facilities residents would most like to see added in their communities, and biking or multi-use paved paths, hiking and walking trails, playgrounds for younger children, outdoor swimming pools and dog parks topped the lists. These were all mentioned as top needs in Spencer as well in both the survey and the public forum. At the SCORP public meeting for central Massachusetts held at CMRPC in 2017, some of the needs mentioned by communities included paved, multi-use paths, more water access, connected trails and dog parks. A number of these were also top priorities for open space and recreation facilities in Spencer based on feedback in the surveys and public forum.



2019 SURVEY RESULTS

The 2019 Survey Results are provided in **Appendix B**. Question 1 asked “How important is it to you to preserve open space and natural areas, recreation areas, and historical sites in Spencer?” A large majority of respondents (85.1%) felt that it was very important to preserve these areas.

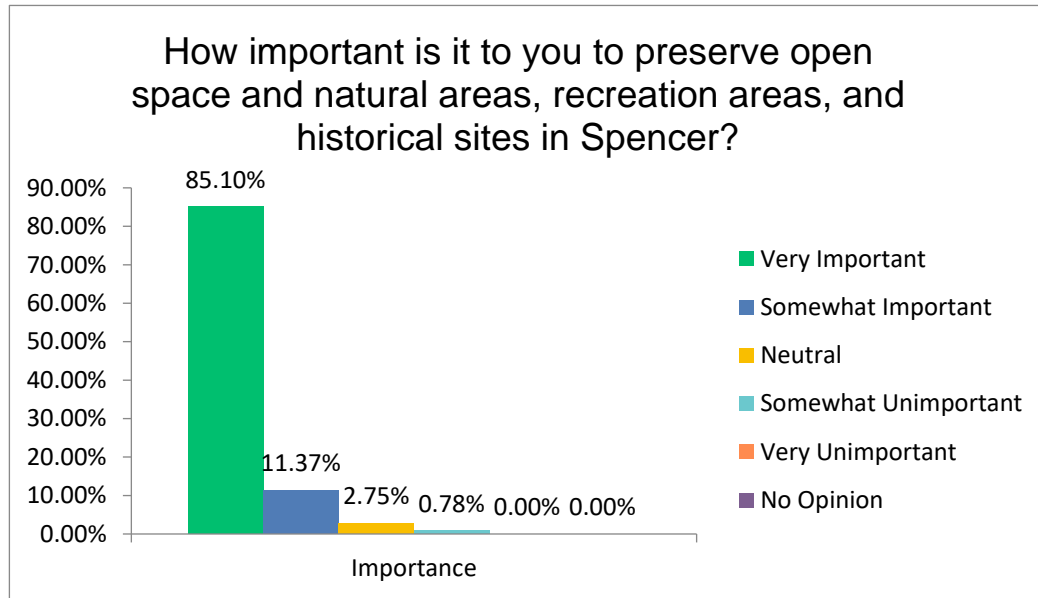


Figure 4 Survey Question 1

Question 3 asked residents how important it was to be able to access open space areas by walking, biking or snowmobiling. The results are shown in Figure 7.2 below. A significant majority of respondents, 68.9%, felt it was very important, 21.65% felt it was somewhat important, with the remainder feeling neutral or that it was unimportant. This points to the need to expand connections between open space areas that can be accessed by foot, bike or snowmobile.

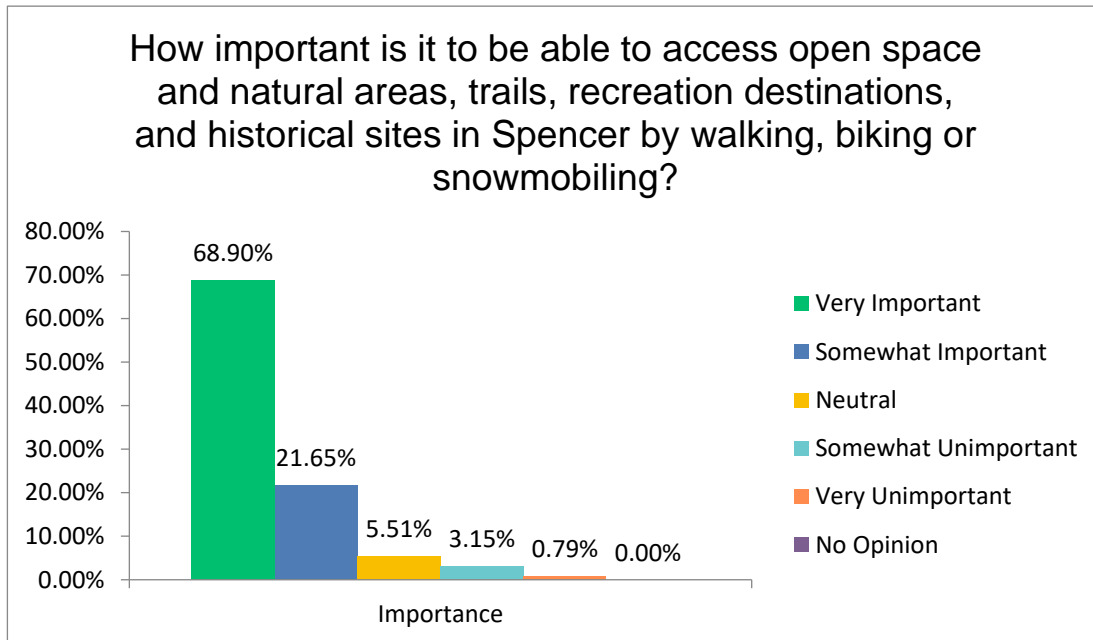


Figure 5 Survey Question 3

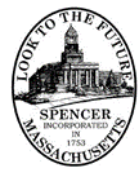
Question 9 asked about satisfaction with passive and active recreation programs, areas, and facilities in Spencer. There was more satisfaction than dissatisfaction overall with the variety and number of adult recreational programs (41% either very or somewhat satisfied, and 27% either very or somewhat dissatisfied). However, there was more dissatisfaction than satisfaction with the variety and number of recreational programs for children (37% either very or somewhat dissatisfied and 29% either very or somewhat satisfied). There was more overall satisfaction expressed with the variety and number of trails than with the condition of the trails in Town (55% for the former and 46% for the latter). There was also some dissatisfaction among respondents with both the amount and condition of sidewalks in Spencer (35% very or somewhat dissatisfied).

Following up on this, in Question 12 survey respondents were asked what they considered to be the biggest unmet recreation needs in Spencer. The top needs given were:

- Children’s playgrounds (27%),
- Activities for seniors (26%),
- ADA accessible walking paths and facilities (26%), and a
- Large park with many facilities (21%).

Respondents were also asked in Question 11 what they considered to be the biggest open space needs in Spencer. The top needs given were:

- Water supply protection (33%),
- Creating a Town Common (30%)
- ADA access to open space (29%)
- Wildlife habitat protection (27%)



- Maintaining and preserving historical sites (26%).

There is also a vocal group of residents who would like to see a dog park built in Town - 21% of respondents chose this as a top unmet need and there were also many comments given about the need for a dog park throughout the survey.

Respondents were asked in Question 13 what the Town's priorities for expenditures should be, and the following were the top five responses.

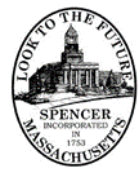
- Improvements to existing athletic and recreation fields (77% important)
- Improvements to existing recreational programming (77% important)
- Publicizing and educating about open space and recreational opportunities in Spencer (76% important)
- Improvements to existing playground facilities (73% important)
- Improving passive recreation (e.g. hiking) opportunities on existing conservation land (70% important)

Expanding connections for walking and connectivity between trails was also given as a priority. The general sentiment expressed was that it is more important and a better use of resources to improve already active and passive recreation opportunities on already existing conservation or recreation land than to acquire additional land.

There were a number of comments in the survey that mentioned the need for more recreational opportunities for teenagers as well as places for them to gather. There is a skate park at Luther Hill Park which is popular with some teenagers. An indoor recreation center and additional recreational programming options for teenagers would help to further meet the needs of this age group in the community.

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

Accessibility is very important not only for the disabled and the elderly, but also for families with children and individuals with other challenges. All of these groups benefit from the accessibility of recreational facilities. People are living longer and staying active to an older age, and as with many towns in the state, the average age of residents in Spencer is increasing. Spencer completed its Americans with Disabilities Act "Transition Plan" in 1997 and promptly implemented an extensive list of improvements to make all of its facilities and services accessible to individuals with disabilities. For purposes of this Open Space & Recreation Plan, Spencer examined its parks and conservation lands to identify barriers that prevent those with disabilities from fully participating in community programs and services. School facilities and privately-owned sites are not a part of this analysis. The Town of Spencer has been proactive in working on improving accessibility in all park and recreational facilities. See **Appendix G** for ADA Access Self-Evaluation.



OPEN SPACE CONFLICTS

One challenge in Spencer and in the state in general has been the growth in trespassing on public and private property, along with noise and street riding complaints caused by illegal Off Highway Vehicle users. To address this challenge, the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and DCR gathered representatives from numerous state and municipal agencies, public and private landowners, environmental, law enforcement and OHV user groups in 2007 to form the Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Enforcement Working Group to address OHV issues. The Massachusetts Office of Conflict Resolution from University of Massachusetts helped facilitate meetings.

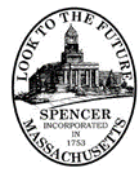
The group assessed existing laws and regulations regarding OHV activity, enforcement capacity, short-term solutions to reduce unsafe and illegal OHV use and improve communication among stakeholders. They developed recommendations to support safe OHV recreation, a clear understanding of which agencies are tasked with enforcement, and, how to develop environmental and property protection. In 2010 Massachusetts OHV laws were changed to reflect group recommendations.

Participants recognized the importance of convenient, designated trails designed for OHV use and effective enforcement of public and private land protection. Another environmental protection has been the development of DCR's multi-layered trail assessment to meet environmental sustainability while ensuring safety of other trail users. There was agreement that stepped up enforcement and education were needed to reduce conflicts.

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) is tasked with OHV enforcement within Massachusetts. As a result of retirements and the group's suggestions, there have been several rounds of hiring for new environmental police officers. DCR's Off Highway Vehicle Advisory Group regularly reviews the reports of Environmental Police Officers (EPOs) to assess ongoing concerns and educate legal OHV rider groups about problematic areas and have had success enlisting help with OHV self-regulated group enforcement.

Presently, existing OHV designated forest areas for compliance with the newer multi-layered OHV trail siting criteria for woodlots as well as an RFP for development of new motorized riding opportunities with state forest and municipalities. The DCR presently has sought to create new and enhance existing Off Highway Vehicle trails between each region of state forest and municipalities to form a network of state forest and private land trails.

An RFP for interested parties to respond to develop a trail network or areas similar to those found in neighboring states is presently open for responses. The EOEEA and DCR hope to create new legal riding trails in areas where there are limited opportunities for legal riding while also helping towns needing additional revenue by facilitating tourism and advance associated services business.



C. MANAGEMENT NEEDS

Spencer has limited financial resources. Identification of funding sources remains a key element for acquisition of open spaces and improvement of recreation facilities. The Finance Committee and Capital Planning Committee need to be drawn into and more regularly involved in the Open Space Planning process.

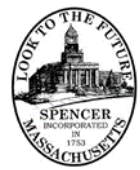
In 2003 the Town adopted a Master Plan, and planning and inspectional services were consolidated in 2005 into one department, the Office of Development and Inspectional Services. The Town hired its first Town Planner, who was also the Director of ODIS. This helped foster better communication among the Town's boards. Since the 2012 OSRP, the Town Planner position has been made full time, which has increased the ability of the Town to undertake long-term planning and resource protection efforts. However, the Conservation Agent position is still part-time, and there is currently no Recreation Director position, which limits the ability of the Town to expand recreational programming and to implement improvements at recreational facilities. The future Open Space Implementation Committee will need to coordinate with Town staff on seeking funding to address Spencer's open space and recreation needs. Adoption of the Community Preservation Act might provide some funding but Spencer residents have, so far, been averse to consideration of a "new tax."

D. PARK IMPROVEMENT NEEDS

In 2008, Spencer's Facilities Maintenance & Repair Committee completed a study of all Town buildings and facilities. The charge of the Committee was to determine the amount of funding needed to adequately maintain buildings and facilities in good repair and to set priorities for improvements by establishing an objective scoring system. The 2011 Capital Needs Assessment and Schedule of Maintenance, prepared by the Spencer Parks and Recreation Commission, updated the 2008 study and outlined all capital and maintenance needs. Some improvements have been made, and others are still needed. Below is a brief summary of some of the improvement needs for O'Gara Park, Luther Hill Park, Powder Mill Park, and the Depot Trail.

O'Gara Park

The park does not currently have a permanently functioning restroom building; porta-potties are currently rented. The concession building is outdated and the equipment has not been enhanced in recent memory. The Park commission recommends the construction of a new modernized accessible concession /restroom building which would enhance both the public enjoyment of and the ability of local groups and the town to hold larger recreational events at O'Gara Park. The park also has no paved parking areas.



Vandalism is a major issue causing maintenance costs at O’Gara Park. To deter vandalism or to at least help town officials hold vandals responsible for the damage they cause, the Park commissioners recommend the installation of an 8 camera system which would be connected to the Police Department to be viewed in real time and film for police to retrieve to use as evidence when needed.

Grandstand repairs and maintenance and field maintenance, reseeding, and refurbishment are items that require an annual set aside of funds. Other issues which need to be addressed include fencing repair/replacement, field refurbishment, walking track upgrades, sprinkler system repairs, lighting upgrades, and connection of the Rail Trail to the O’Gara Parking Lot.

Luther Hill Park

There are three small buildings on the grounds which require routine general maintenance. The old bath house is in need of minor interior demolition of unused facilities and patch work to the floor and walls in order to be used for storage.

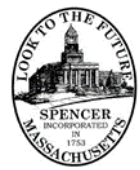
Vandalism is also a major issue causing maintenance costs at Luther Hill Park. To deter vandalism or to at least help town officials hold vandals responsible for the damage they cause, the Park commissioners recommend the installation of an 8 camera system which would be connected to the Police Department to be viewed in real time and film for police to retrieve to use as evidence when needed.

To enhance the experience of families using the beach area, the Park commission recommends the upgrade and improvement of the playground area at Luther Hill Park. This upgrade would include some equipment similar to that now used at Powdermill Park which has been well received by the public. In addition, in order to restore some events which are documented to have historically occurred at Luther Hill Park (such as concerts), the Park commission recommends re-creation of the historic pavilion at Luther Hill Park with accompanying landscaping work. Restoration of the stone walls at Luther Hill Park would also help retain the historical nature of the park. Luther Hill Park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Other projects include adding of paddle boats and a fishing /boating dock. The addition of grills, replacement of skateboard park fencing, refurbishing of picnic tables, repainting of benches and picnic tables, reconstruction of lifeguard stand, purchase of new rescue boat, boathouse repairs, tree work, refurbishment of old bath house for parking attendant station use/storage, and addition of new signage/trash cans are other issues which will need to be addressed. Weed control/treatment, water testing, and Beach preparation each summer, including sand replenishment are items at Luther Hill Park that require an annual set aside of funds.

Powder Mill Park

Vandalism is also a consistent issue at Powdermill Park, and can require the repair or replacement of playground equipment. To help deter vandalism and to help the police hold the vandals accountable for the damages they cause, the Park Commissioners recommend that a 4 camera security system which



would be directly linked to the Police Department for viewing in real time and would provide film for needed evidence.

The addition of more paved parking spaces near the road has been recommended to ensure access for the disabled to the playground equipment, the safety fiber needs to be replaced every 3 years. In addition, fencing repair/replacement work needs to be completed and grassy area need to be treated in an environmentally friendly manner and refurbished due to grub damage. An annual sum of money needs to be set aside for the following items: porta-potty rentals to provide meet the restroom needs of the visiting public, replacement of playground equipment, and maintenance of grass when refurbished.

Depot Trail

The Rail Trail has suffered some erosion and damage due to certain areas being washed out. The drainage system in certain areas of the trail needs to be repaired or improved to lessen potential damage from rain. The pond and dam area need to be assessed and work potentially done to help preserve the pond environment and ecosystem.

To improve public use and enjoyment of the Rail Trail, the Park commission recommends the addition of more benches at appropriate spots along the trail. To encourage the use of the rail trail for exercise purposes, the Park Commissioners recommend the purchase of Wellness Stations to promote stretching. The Park Commissioner would also like to explore the creation of a handicapped-accessible fishing area at the pond along the Rail Trail.

The Park commission will work with the Spencer Conservation Commission and the local snowmobile group to obtain funding and volunteer support to help preserve, maintain, and improve the Rail Trail.

Monument Refurbishment and Repairs

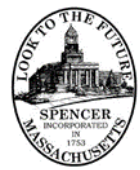
The Park Commission has oversight over various monuments within our parks. These include the Bemis Monument at Bemis Park, the monument at Powdermill Park, and the Soldier's Monument at Prouty Park. The condition of these monuments needs to be evaluated to identify needed repairs or maintenance steps, or estimated costs for long term preservation of these historically important monuments.

Pet Waste Disposal Dispenser Solution System

To help pet owners who utilize park facilities where pets are permitted to clean up after their pets, we have in past capital plans proposed the purchase of eight pet waste disposal dispensers.

Dog Park at Ralph Warren Park

In prior capital plans, the Park Commission has identified a desire to establish a dog park at Ralph Warren Park. Further investigation of the feasibility, design, and costs of this endeavor needs to be conducted, as well as investigation into other possible locations for a dog park.



SECTION 8: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following five (5) overarching goals were developed for open space and recreation activities in the Town of Spencer. These goals can be described as outcome statements that define what the Town is trying to accomplish both programmatically and organizationally. In comparison, objectives define the actions that must be taken with a time period (the duration of an OSRP) to reach toward the strategic goals. Objectives are more specific than goals and they are measurable. They can be output objectives, or they can be attitudinal or behavioral.

The following objectives defined actions that will help the Town achieve its strategic goals. The objectives listed below are not solely tied to one single goal, but may help move the town toward accomplishing multiple goals. They are listed with the principle goal that they help advance. While many more objectives and actions can be developed, performed and measured, these objectives will act in part as indicators of successful outcomes.

GOAL 1: Protect valuable water resources from adverse impacts.

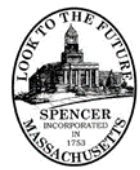
- Objective 1.1 Protect the Town's water supply.
- Objective 1.2 Preserve watersheds, including those of rivers, lakes, and streams.
- Objective 1.3 Preserve the lands adjacent to rivers, lakes, and streams.

GOAL 2: Preserve Spencer's rural, small-town character.

- Objective 2.1 Manage land uses along major roads (For example, Routes 31 & 9).
- Objective 2.2 Preserve and enhance Town center.
- Objective 2.3 Preserve and enhance Town gateways.
- Objective 2.3 Develop tools to manage Town growth.
- Objective 2.4 Preserve the Town's historic character.

GOAL 3: Enhance recreation opportunities for Town residents & visitors

- Objective 3.1 Increase awareness and enjoyment of recreation facilities and programs
- Objective 3.2 Provide for maintenance and expansion of existing Town recreation facilities and programs
- Objective 3.3 Improve water quality in all Town water bodies.
- Objective 3.4 Enhance Spencer's trail network to provide access to existing parks, historic sites, and conservation lands



Objective 3.5 Develop financial plan to support expansion of recreation opportunities and facilities.

Objective 3.6 Promote Tourism and Economic Development in Spencer

GOAL 4: Preserve Spencer's open spaces and natural heritage.

Objective 4.1 Protect open spaces for wildlife habitats.

Objective 4.2 Preserve farmlands and forest lands.

Objective 4.3 Preserve and increase open space.

Objective 4.4 Protect and enhance lands available for hunting and fishing.

GOAL 5: Establish a Continuous Open Space Planning Process



SECTION 9: SEVEN YEAR ACTION PLAN

The purpose of this section is to establish a year - by -year timetable for specific actions needed to accomplish the goals and objectives listed in Section 8. The actions are organized by Goals and their corresponding Objectives. While each action is shown below under a specific objective outlined in Section 8, a proposed action will often serve to benefit multiple objectives. **Map 10**, Action Plan Map, highlights general areas that are a focus for some of the key actions.

This section indicates which action steps or recommendations are priorities based on needs and abilities. Each action step or recommended task associated with a goal is assigned a priority level, either “high,” “medium,” or “low.” Years for implementation are also suggested for each action step. In addition, the table lists a responsible party or parties for each task; potential collaborating parties; and, where possible, estimated funding or resources. Preserving Spencer’s character and enhancing the Town’s open space and recreation resources and opportunities requires a community-based approach. Strong support and participation by all interested parties will be the most critical component when pursuing any of this Plan’s goals and objectives. Implementation of this Action Plan is necessarily subject to constraints of staff, volunteers, and budgets. The schedule should be reviewed annually, and modified as needed, to respond to special opportunities or resources available for implementation.

In the Action Plan Text and Schedule Chart the involved staff, boards, committees, and departments for action are identified and the project lead agency is in **bold** type. The abbreviations used for the responsible parties and collaborators are the following:

ADA-C	American with Disabilities Act Coordinator
BoH	Board of Health
BoS	Board of Selectmen
CA	Conservation Agent
CC	Conservation Commission
CMRPC	Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
C4R	Chicopee River Watershed
CultC	Cultural Council



DC	Disability Commission
DCR	Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
DEP	Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection
DFW	Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife
EDC	Economic Development Committee
FN	Friends of Massachusetts State Forest and Parks Network
HC	Historic Commission
LT	Land Trusts
MPPF	MA Preservation Projects Fund
ODIS	Office of Development and Inspectional Services
OSPC	Open Space Planning Committee
PAB	Public Access Board
PB	Planning Board
PRC	Parks and Recreation Commission
RCT	River Corridor and Trails Committee
SC	Sewer Commission
SD	Sewer Department
SEBRSD	Spencer East Brookfield Regional School District
SHS	Spencer Historical Society



TA	Town Administrator
TP	Town Planner
U&F	Department of Utilities and Facilities
WC	Water Commission
WD	Water Department
WMA	Wildlife Management Agency
ZBA	Zoning Board of Appeals



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
I. Protect valuable water resources from adverse impacts.					
	Objectives: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Protect the Town’s water supply 2. Preserve watersheds, including those of rivers, lakes, and streams. 3. Preserve the lands adjacent to rivers, lakes and streams. 				
	1a) Inventory land use and ownership of aquifer lands supplying the Town’s wellfields.	High, Years 1-2	WC	CC, ODIS, WD, TP	Municipal Staff Time (MST)
	1b) Identify priorities and methods to acquire targeted aquifer recharge areas.	Medium, Years 3-4	CC	WC, WD, ODIS	Municipal Staff Time, volunteer time
	1c) Continue the storm drain stenciling project. Focus on discharges into the Aquifer Protection Zone.	High Years 1-4	U & F	RTC, SEBRSD	Volunteer time, SEBRSD
	1d) Produce and post two public education material products about the location and value of Spencer water resources each year.	Medium Years 1-7	CA, SEBRSD	WD, CC,	Municipal Staff Time, Interns
	2a) Clarify ownership of dams and land under water.	High Year 1	TA	BoS U&F	Municipal Staff Time
	2b) Identify stakeholders for each water body and determine roles and responsibilities.	Medium Year 2	CA	DCR	Municipal Staff Time, Interns



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	2c) Identify and develop solutions for issues where private road drainage is adversely affecting water bodies.	Medium years 2&3	TP	PB, TA, BoS, and CC U&F	Municipal Staff Time, Interns
	2d) Publish information on the contributing watershed for each water body.	Medium Year 2	CA	RCT	Municipal Staff Time, Interns
	2e) Complete sewer and water planning to assist in designation of a high service area	High Year 2	TP	WC., SD. & SC,	Municipal Staff Time, Grants
	2f) Work with identified lake and pond stakeholders using guidance from the state Lakes & Ponds Program to improve waterbody management.	Medium Years 2-5	CA	CC,	DEP Lakes and Ponds Program, Mun. Staff Time
	2g) Encourage the development of management plans for water bodies in Town.	Medium Years 2-7	CA	ODIS, RCT,	MST, local lake assoc.
	3a) Identify protection gaps & consider acquiring rights in land to address same.	Medium Years 2-4	TP	WSS, U&F,	MST, Legal Res.
	3b) Develop Spencer's water protection bylaws and regulations, and upgrade inspection and enforcement.	High Year 2	WC	TA, PB, TP, U&F BOH	MST, Vol. Time, Legal Res., DEP 319 Grant
	3c) Increase coordination of permit reviews by ZBA, BoH, CC, U&F and PB, WC, SC	High Year 1	TP	EDC, BOS	MST, Town Leadership



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	3d) Identify priorities and methods to protect Cranberry River, Seven Mile River/Turkey Hill Brook corridors, and Alder Meadow.	High Years 2-3	RCT	CC, HC, ODIS	MST, Interns, SCA, SEBRSD
	3e) Identify priorities and methods to develop an open space corridor linking Stiles Reservoir with the Cranberry River.	Low Years 4-7	RCT	CC, ODIS, HC,	MST, Interns, SCA, Legal Res., SEBRSD, Stiles Lake Assoc.
II. Preserve Spencer’s rural, small-town character					
	<p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Manage land uses along major roads (For example, Routes 31 and 9). 2. Preserve and enhance the Town center. 3. Preserve and enhance the Town gateways. 4. Develop tools to manage Town growth. 5. Preserve the Town’s historic character. 				
	1a) Maintain and update a list of historic resources, Heritage Landscapes and their locations for use by the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Conservation Commission during development review and planning activities.	High Year 1	HC	PRC, EDC, TP, RCT,	MPPF, MHC, MST, Interns, Local funding
	1b) Enter the historic resources into Spencer’s GIS.	Medium Year 2	ODIS	GIS	MST, Interns, CMRPC, volunteer time
	1c) Inventory scenic resources, roads and views in order to establish priorities and methods to protect same.	High Years 2-4	OSPC	HC, PRC,	MPPF, MST, HC, Interns, SHS



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	1d) Consider adopting the Community Preservation Act as a source of funding.	Medium Years 4-7	BoS	TP, TA, PC, CC, HC,	Vol. Time, Town Leadership, Local Env. Groups
	1e) Consider other sources of funding to preserve Spencer’s rural and small-town character.	High Years 1-7	EDC, PRC, TP, HC,	TA, BOS	Vol. Time, Town Leadership, Local Env. And hist. Groups
	2a) Maintain safe pedestrian routes through and around the Town center.	High Years 2-5	U&F	RCT, TP,	Complete Streets, MassDOT, MST
	2b) Encourage development and re-development of commercial and residential uses in the Town Center (as opposed to outlying areas) to concentrate development in previously-developed areas rather than in undeveloped land with open space or recreational value. Consider use of the Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District Act, (M.G.L. Chapter 40R, for this purpose.	Medium Years 3-4	TP	EDC, PB,	CMRPC, EEA planning grants, MST, LTs
	2c) Consider creating pocket parks on the small Town owned miscellaneous lots	Medium Years 5-6	PRC	TP, CC, EDC,	LTs, CDBG, MST, local env. groups
	2d) Improve landscaping on Town Properties using Low Impact Development (LID) techniques such as rain gardens and native plants.	High Years 1-7	U&F	CC, EDC, PRC,	MVP, Local Bus/ Commun. groups, MST, vol. time



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	2e) Develop incentives for local business to encourage maintenance and appearance upgrades.	Medium Years 2-7	EDC	TP, PD, BoS	Local Bus./Comm groups, MST, vol. time
	3a) Periodically assess and adopt new tools, as appropriate, such as Transfer of Development Rights.	Medium Years 2-7	PB	TP, CA,	MST, Legal Res.
	3b) Encourage donation of land or conservation restrictions. Distribute information about options for landowners.	Medium low Years 3-7	TP	ODIS,	MST, LTs, Interns, DCR
	3c) Annually assess possibility of strategic land acquisition (see criteria above and map). A single land acquisition project may advance multiple action plan's goals and objectives.	High Years 1-7	Bos	RCT, CC, PRC, TP, PB,	MST, Legal Res., LTs, LAND grant
III. Enhance Recreation Opportunities for Town residents and visitors					
	<p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase awareness and enjoyment of recreation facilities and programs 2. Provide for maintenance and improvement of existing Town recreation facilities. 3. Improve water quality in Lake Whittemore 4. Enhance and expand Spencer's trail network where appropriate to provide access to existing parks, historic sites and conservation lands. 5. Develop financial plan to support expansion of recreation opportunities. 				
	1a) Maintain and update a guide to Town conservation and recreation lands.	High Year 1	CC	CA, PRC, RCT, DCR, SEBRSD,	MST, Interns, SEBRSD, Vol. Time



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	1b) Continue to ensure access to recreation for all demographic groups.	High Years 1-7	PRC	EDC, CC	DCR universal access, MVP, MST
	1c) Seek funding for a Director of Recreation to coordinate programs, oversee staff, obtain grant funding, develop new programming, and interact with the public.	Medium Years 2-5	PRC	RCT	Town Leadership, MST, Private grant sources – Youth, Seniors, Rural
	1d) Maintain and seek additional funding for lifeguards, waterfront director, swimming instructors, year-round recreation, program staff and parking attendants.	High Years 1-7	PRC		Private Rec. grant sources, local foundations, credit unions
	1e) Continue and expand partnerships with local schools, Town departments, and community groups to enhance park facilities and recreational programming.	High Years 1-7	PRC, LT, RCT,	SEBRSD	MST, vol. time, SEBRSD time, commun. groups
	1f) Assess need and potential locations for a dog park at Ralph Warren Park or other locations as appropriate.	Medium Year 3	PRC, RCT	EDC, ODIS	Private grant sources for dog parks, local bus. Groups, MST
	2a) Provide restroom facility, permanent if possible, at Powder Mill Park playground.	Medium Years 3-5	PRC	U&F	CDBG, PARC grant, MST, Comm. groups
	2b) Explore construction of a multi-purpose facility at O’Gara Park.	Medium Year 3-5	PRC	HC, U&F	CDBG, PARC grant, MST, Comm. Groups, private grants, MBDE
	2c) Expand use of Luther Hill Park by adding an open pavilion for events and programs, which can serve residents from a wide age range, including concerts, summer movies, and rainy day picnics.	Medium Years 4-5	PRC	BoS, HC, TA,	CDBG, PARC grant, MST, Comm. Groups, private grants, MBDE



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	2d) On an annual basis, conduct regular site visits of park facilities to determine maintenance and capital needs in order to develop a coordinated maintenance and capital task list and seek funding to meet the identified needs.		PRC	U&F	MST, interns, vol. time, user groups
	2e) Seek funding for additional staff for dedicated park maintenance.	High Year 2	PRC	U&F	MST, interns, vol. time, user groups Community groups, bus. Comm. ads
	2f) Continue to improve ADA accessibility of all Town recreational facilities and programs	High Years 1-7	PRC	U&F, EDC, ADA-C,	CDBG, DC, MST, PAB grant
	2g) Maintain and improve playground facilities at Luther Hill and Powder Mill Parks.	High Years 1-4	PRC,	U&F	MST, Vol. time, private foundations, local assoc., PARC
	2h) Restore grandstand at O’Gara Park.	High Years 2-4	PRC,	HC, U&F	MPPF, Env. Bond Bill, CultC, user groups, MST
	2i) Improve parking for Rail Trail and facilities at O’Gara Park and add ADA parking.	Medium Years 2-5	PRC,	TA, BOS, U&F	CDBG, DC, MST, MassTrails
	2j) Assess security needs for all public Parks and Recreation facilities.	High Years 1-3	PRC	U&F	MST, MassTrails, CSX RR
	2k) Develop plan to maintain Veteran’s Park.	Medium Years 3-5	PRC	U&F	MST, Vol. Time and Bus. And Commun. Groups



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	3a) Continue to monitor water quality of Lake Whittemore (including regular testing during the summer season) and identify sources of contamination. Enforce local wetland and stormwater regulations where applicable to identified sources.	High Years 1-7	BoH, CA	PRC, RCT, PB, BOS, CC,	Watershed Groups, DEP 319 grant, SEBRSD, MST
	3b) Seek funding, including application for state funds, to remove sources of contamination at Lake Whittemore.	High Years 1-7	BOH, CA	CC, RCT, SC, BOS,	MST, DCR lakes and ponds grant, DEP 319 grant
	3c) Educate abutters to Lake Whittemore about pollution from stormwater and best practices to avoid non-point source pollution.	High Years 1-7	BOH	ODIS, CC, RCT, SEBRSD	MST, DCR lakes and ponds grant, DEP 319 grant, vol. and interns time
	4a) Establish a River Corridor and Trails Committee	High Year 1	CC	PRC, BoS, PB, TA,	MST, Vol. Time, DFW grants
	4b) Continue to develop partnerships with local trail groups and users to map existing trails with and without formal rights to pass. Identify stewards e.g. Spencer Snowbirds for snowmobile trails.	Medium Years 2-4	RCT	PRC, RCT, DCR,	MST, Vol. Time, DFW grants, SEBRSD, interns, user groups
	4c) Identify Midstate Trail locations in private ownership and susceptible to development. Work with landowners to obtain permanent easements for the Midstate Trail through its entire length in Spencer.	Medium Years 2-4	RCT	PRC, TP,	MST, legal, LTs, User Groups, NEMBA
	4d) Create a master trail map with a key to level of access protection.	Medium Years 4-6	ODIS	PRC, RCT, DCR, CMRPC,	MST, CMRPC, vol. time



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	4e) Maintain, improve, and expand the Depot Rail Trail.	High Years 1-7	PRC	U&F, BOS, TA,	MST, MassTrails, Private funding sources, Local Comm. Groups and vol.
	5a) Research programs offered by other communities.	Medium Years 1-7	PRC		MST, Interns, Vol., SEBRSD
	5b) As part of capital planning process identify park improvements that would enhance recreational and cultural opportunities.	High Years 1-7	PRC	U&F, BOS, TA,	MST, comm. Groups. Vol., interns
	5c) Seek grant and Town funding to expand programming.	Medium Years 1-7	PRC	CultC, BOS, TA,	MST, comm. Groups. Vol., interns, CultC
	5d) Expand community outreach that would enhance recreational and cultural opportunities.	High Years 1-7	PRC	ODIS, CultC, HC, FN	MST, comm. Groups. Vol., interns, CultC
IV Preserve Spencer’s Open Spaces and Natural Heritage					
	Objectives: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Protect Open Spaces for Wildlife Habitat 2. Preserve farmlands and forest lands 3. Enhance and increase amount of conservation lands 4. Protect and enhance lands available for hunting and fishing 				



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	1a) Continue to provide information about Spencer’s rare habitats to all Town departments reviewing projects likely to impact habitat.	High Years 1-7	CC	CA, TP,	NHESP, MST, Interns, DFW
	1b) Publicize MA Endangered Species Act (MESA) regulations and link to Spencer website.	Medium Year 2	CA	CC	NHESP, MST, Interns, DFW, vol.
	1c) Continue to work with MA Natural Heritage Program to preserve habitats of rare wildlife and plants.	High Years 1-7	CC	CA	NHESP, MST, Interns, DFW, vol., SEBRSD
	1d) Develop partnerships and recruit volunteers to certify vernal pools.	High Years 1-7	CC	CA, SEBRSD	NHESP, MST, Interns, DFW, vol., SEBRSD
	2a) Reactivate the Agricultural Commission.	High Year1	TA	BoS	Town Leadership, SAA
	2b) Publicize benefits and support applications for Agricultural Preservation Restrictions, Conservation Restrictions, and Chapter 61 programs.	High Year 1-7	CC	CA, DCR, AO, AC, LT,	MDAR, LTs, MST
	2c) Proactively distribute information to assist private stewardship by large landowners, such as St. Joseph’s Abbey.	Medium Years 1-7	CC	LT, AO,	MDAR, LTs, MST
	2d) Develop policy, process, and funding source for working with landowners when the Town has the right of first refusal on Chapter 61 lands.	High Years 1-7	TP	BoS, TA, EDC, CC, AO,	CPA, LAND grant, private or foundation funding, MST, DCR



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)

Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	2e) Develop partnerships with, and monitor land management policies and practices of MA DCR regarding state-owned or managed land in Spencer.	Medium Years 1-7	FN	CC, PB, PRC, CMRPC, RTC, LT,	CPA, LAND grant, private or foundation funding, MST, DCR
	3a) Identify open spaces and develop a management plan accordingly.	Medium Years 1-7	CC	PRC, RTC, CA	CPA, LAND grant, private or foundation funding, MST DCR
	3b) Continue to foster and support local Land Trusts.	High Years 1-7	CC,	CA, LT	CPA, LAND grant, private or foundation funding, MST DCR
	3c) Identify and preserve corridors linking protected lands.	High Years 1-7	RCT, LT	CC, DCR, FN, CMRPC,	CPA, LAND grant, private or foundation funding, MST DCR
	3d) Develop an active Conservation Fund as authorized by MGLCh.40 §8C and appropriate funds annually.	Medium Years 2	CC	TA, BoS	MST, private or foundation funding, Legal Res.
	3e) Identify opportunities to establish community gardens in Spencer.	Medium Year 2	PRC	CC, ODIS, LT,	CPA, LAND or PARC grant, private or foundation funds, vol time MST DCR
	3f) Publicize opportunities for charitable contributions to Town funds for open space and recreation purposes.	Medium Years 1-7	PRC	LT	SCA TV, MST, comm. And bus. Groups, vol., interns
	4a) Prepare, maintain and update map of lands available for hunting and fishing.	Medium Years 1-7	AO	DFW, VMA, LT, FN,	MST, User groups, DU and TU, KLEMS



Table 0.1 - Seven Year Action Plan (2020-2027)					
Goals	Action Steps	Priority/ Timing	Respon- sible Parties	Collabo- rators	Funding Sources
	4b) Work to ensure that hunting and fishing is included in discussions of land usage.	Medium Years 1-7	ODIS	AO, DFW, WMA, LT, FN,	MST, User groups, DU and TU, Fish and Game Club, KLEMS
V. Establish a continuous open space planning process.					
	Objective: 1. Establish an Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee				
	1a) Re-establish Open Space Plan Committee or other mechanism to ensure oversight of implementation of plan, and foster and monitor proposed actions. The Committee will be tasked with the following actions and will prioritize the order in which they will be	High, Year 1	TA	TP, BOS, CA, PRC	
	1b) Report annually on what was done for Goals 1-4 in the Conservation Commission section of the Town Annual Report and post it on the Town Website.	High, Years 1-7	TP, OSC	PB, CC, CA	MST



SECTION 10: PUBLIC COMMENTS

This Open Space and Recreation Plan has been reviewed and approved by Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, and the letter of approval is included in Appendix I. Letters of approval from the Spencer Board of Selectmen and the Spencer Planning Board will be included once these bodies have reviewed and approved the plan.



SECTION 11: REFERENCES

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