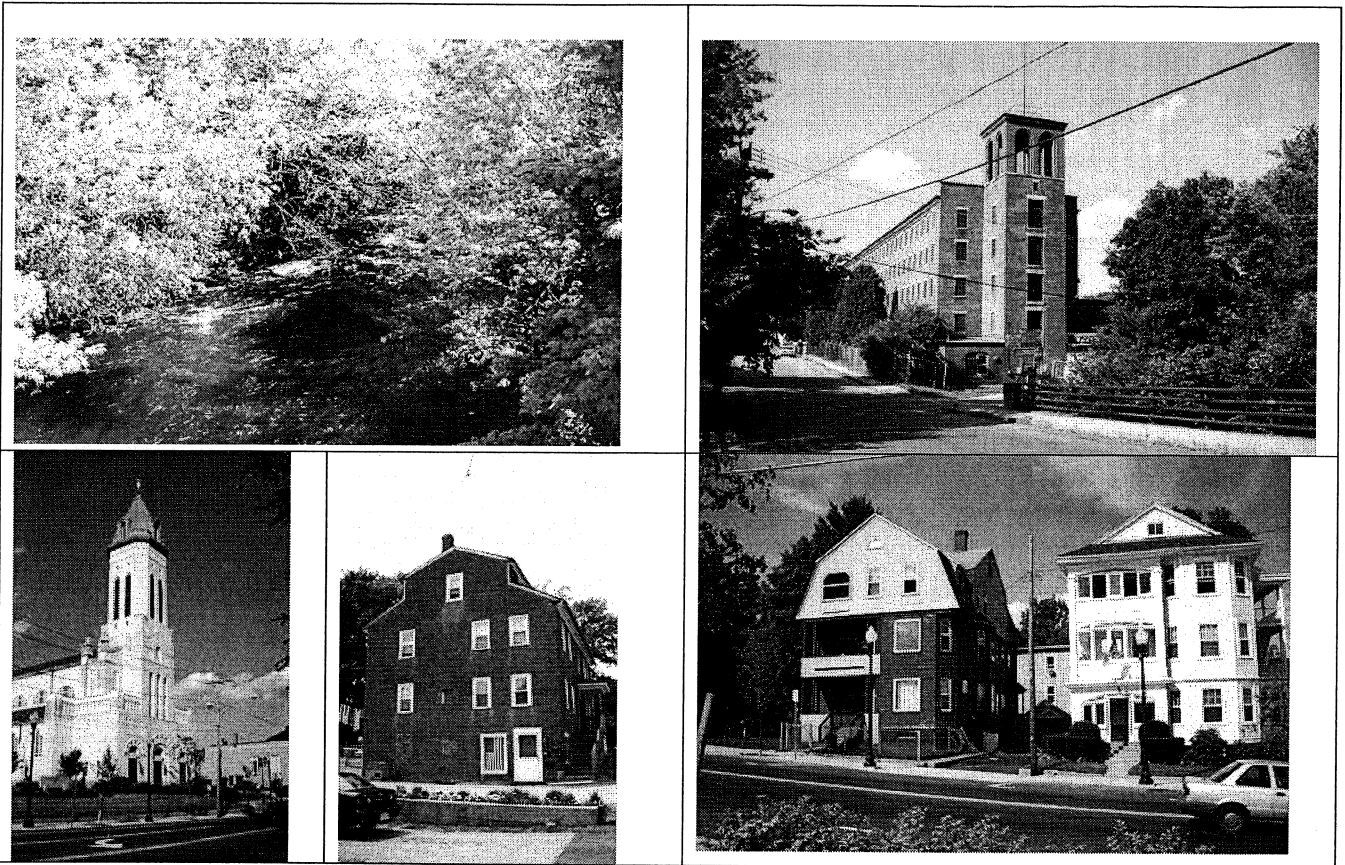


# 2003 -- 2004 Southbridge Long Term Plan



**Approved by Town Council**  
**By Unanimous Vote:**

**May 24, 2004**

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## Summary of the Long Term Plan

The 2003 - 2004 *Southbridge Long Term Plan* is intended to serve as a reference and guide in future years as local officials work to make good decisions on behalf of the community. The *Plan* grew out of a year and a half of local efforts that:

- began with a vision statement generated by the community,
- gathered information about Southbridge's current situation
- discussed potential action strategies,
- reached agreement on the most promising actions to help Southbridge move toward the future townspeople want.

The planning process focused on hearing what the community has to say about our desired future and how we want to work together to achieve that future. We began with a visioning forum in November of 2002. The vision statement that emerged from that first forum has been reviewed and endorsed by every subsequent community planning meeting. (See Section II of the *Plan*.) Community workshops in April and May 2003 considered a set of town-wide maps and suggested a prioritized list of actions relating to open space, natural resources, and recreation. At the June workshop townspeople began discussing desires relating to the housing and business components of town life. At a September morning listening meeting, members of the local business community described Southbridge's advantages as a place to do business, and they recommended a set of actions for the Town to take to strengthen our economic base. The October public workshop confirmed action strategies for business and housing and suggested specific places in Southbridge that would be good locations for the development and redevelopment desired by the community. (See Section III of the *Plan*.) Progress will require cooperative and consistent effort by numerous boards and groups both inside and outside Town Hall. Between December and early March members of the Long Term Plan Steering Committee visited such groups to review the actions desired by townspeople. Feedback from these sessions was incorporated into the *Plan*. On March 18, 2004, a community working session reviewed, discussed, and strongly endorsed the priorities and strategies presented in Section IV of the *Plan*. On April 8, 2004, the Town Council Planning and Development Subcommittee voted to endorse the chart of actions, strategies, & responsibilities that is presented in Section IV.

The *Long Term Plan*'s priority action objectives are:

1. Continue to revitalize the Town Centre.
2. Continue to revitalize neighborhoods.
3. Keep current business & industry, AND bring in new business & industry.
4. Get the access road to the Airport Industrial Park and rest of Town-owned property.
5. Gain more balanced set of housing choices.
6. Keep improving the schools.
7. Don't give up recreation space & programs.
8. Do a full, Comprehensive Plan for Southbridge.

Each of these priorities is key to the future that is desired by the community of Southbridge.

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## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Purpose of the *Long Term Plan***

The 2003 - 2004 *Southbridge Long Term Plan* is intended to serve as a reference and guide in future years as local officials work to make good decisions on behalf of the community.

### **B. The Process That Produced the Plan**

The *Plan* grew out of a year and a half of local efforts that:

- began with a vision statement generated by the community,
- gathered information about Southbridge's current situation
- discussed potential action strategies,
- reached agreement on the most promising actions to help Southbridge move toward the future townspeople want.

The planning process was guided by the members of the Long Term Planning Steering Committee, who were appointed by the Town Manager. The process focused on hearing what the community has to say about our desired future and how we want to work together to achieve that future. We began with a visioning forum in November of 2002. The vision statement that emerged from that first forum has been reviewed and endorsed by every subsequent community planning meeting. Community workshops in April and May 2003 considered a new set of town-wide maps and suggested a prioritized list of actions relating to open space, natural resources, and recreation. At the June workshop townspeople began discussing desires relating to the housing and business components of town life. At a September morning listening meeting with members of the local business community described Southbridge's advantages as a place to do business, and they recommended a set of actions for the Town to take to strengthen our economic base. The October public workshop confirmed action strategies for business and housing and suggested specific places in Southbridge that would be good locations for the development and redevelopment desired by the community.

From December through January the Long Term Plan Steering Committee briefed Town Council Subcommittees, Town boards, and community groups on the highlights that had emerged from the community's deliberations. A summary of these groups' advice and feedback is presented in the Appendix. Their suggestions were incorporated into the draft list of priority actions that was presented and discussed at the March community workshop.

On March 18, 2004, townspeople gathered again for a working session to map out specific ways to make progress on actions for which there is general, broad-based agreement in the community. The Action Plan in Section IV of the Long Term Plan reflects this working session and all the input achieved between November 2002 and spring 2004.

## **C. Acknowledgements**

On behalf of the Town, the Long Term Planning Steering Committee thanks all the townspeople who provided information, attended community working sessions, and otherwise helped shape this grass-roots community plan.

Townspeople who served on the Long Term Planning Steering Committee were:

Laurent McDonald	Margie Ducharme	Jackee Cepeda	David Livengood
Michael Loin	Lawrence Spinelli	John Szugda	Daviel Mercado
Cassandra Acly			

Councilors who served on the Planning and Development Subcommittee were:

		Dale Ferron, Chair	
Ronald Chernisky	James Marino	Edgar McCann	Mayra Pantoja

Anna Smith volunteered many hours to pull together the preliminary draft of the Open Space and Recreation Plan component of the effort, and to note corrections and additions to Southbridge's original set of GIS [Geographic Information Systems computer-generated] maps from the build-out study previously provided funded by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs.

William Scanlan and Paul Samara of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission produced the finished GIS maps created during the course of the project.

Jeanne H. Armstrong of LandUse, Incorporated, served as facilitator and planning consultant to the 2002 – 2004 planning process.

**Consulting services were funded through a Local Planning Grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts's E. O. 418 Community Planning Program, administered by the Interagency Working Group of funding agencies:**

- the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs,
- the Department of Housing and Community Development,
- the Department of Economic Development, and
- the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction.

**The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission administered the 418 planning grant at the regional level.**

## **II. The Future Townspeople Desire, and Where We Are Now**

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### **A. Where We Are and Where We Want to Be: A Vision Statement from the Community of Southbridge**

On Thursday, November 21, 2002, the community of Southbridge began our local planning process with a community-wide forum. Participants described the future we desire for our town, highlighted Southbridge's strong points, and began to identify the areas we need to work on. Below is the vision statement of the areas of agreement that surfaced at that first forum. This statement was reviewed and reaffirmed at every subsequent working session of the Long Term Planning project.

As we move proactively into Southbridge's future, we see our town as continuing the tradition of being a vibrant, diverse community. The mission of our town is to promote balanced diversity in economic activity, housing, and the pattern of development and open space. A broad business base of industry, retail, and service businesses will provide goods, services, and employment to households with a full spectrum of income levels. This vital economic base will also support the level of services desired by current and potential residents and business owners. Southbridge will be attractive to upper middle income people without leaving behind working people with limited skills and incomes, so local businesses will provide increasing numbers of professional, higher skilled jobs while continuing to provide jobs for less skilled workers. Well designed and well maintained homes will be available for the full range of people who will work for and do business with local firms. Green spaces and recreation areas will be integrated into developed areas, from our historic Downtown Centre, through existing neighborhoods, and into future development in outlying areas. Green spaces and recreation facilities will add to the community's quality of life, which will improve the vitality of our residential areas and attract desirable businesses to town. Similarly, a high quality of town services will continue to support the quality of life desired by residents and business owners. An excellent school system for youngsters and adults will be particularly key to achieving a vibrant and diverse range of businesses and residents.

Here in Southbridge we have a good base to work from, but there are specific gaps that need to be filled. We have a strong manufacturing tradition, family-owned businesses, finance and insurance, the AO Business Center, the Hospital and Airport, pedestrian and historic Town Centre, infrastructure, and good regional access. We need to gain more high end employment, retail, broader technology sector, more specialty shops, tourist-based business. It is important to improve access to the Industrial Park and to reuse vacant

buildings including historic mills. Our housing stock offers good prices, historic design, and a good mix of neighborhoods. We need to address the problem of poor maintenance, with a special concern about the affect of absentee ownership. We also need to make sure that we continue to offer homes that are affordable to lower income persons at the same time that we increase the offerings to upper middle income persons. There will be an expanding need for elderly housing, too. In terms of recreation and open space, we have built new sports fields, have begun a trail system, and have a significant amount of undeveloped acreage in outlying areas. We need more sports fields, extension and upgrading of the trail system, conservation of key open spaces such as the watershed, and integration of open spaces into future development.

During the 2003 planning effort we call on our fellow townspeople to help gather key information, consider its implications, and work for consensus on the next steps Southbridge should take forward into the future our community desires.

The community of Southbridge envisions a future marked by **balance**:

- A broad business base
- A wide range of housing choices
- A vibrant town center and quiet outlying areas
- A compatible, lively mix of the old and the new



## **B. Summary of Current Situation**

### **1. Open Space, Natural, Cultural, & Scenic Resources**

*[For more details see the information presented in the Appendix, and the full 2004 Open Space and Recreation Plan for the Town of Southbridge.]*

Southbridge is a town of more than 17,000 people located on the banks of the Quinebaug River in the south central portion of Massachusetts, nearly equidistant from the cities of Hartford, Springfield, Providence and Worcester. Although conveniently situated near larger more urbanized areas, Southbridge is the nucleus of a scenic, semi-rural region. The town's rolling landscape is composed of a series of drumlins that are bisected by the River. South of the River lie Blackmer Hill in the east, Lebanon Hill toward the center, and Dennison Hill in the western part of town. The town's north side is shaped by the long double hill known as Clemence Hill or Pleasant Hill. The well-drained soils of this landscape attracted farmers from the days of early European settlement up to the Industrial Revolution. The waters of the Quinebaug River then provided power for the mills that grew up in what became Southbridge Centre and Globe Village. Outlying areas of town remained agricultural until the mid-twentieth century.

Fortunately for the town, The Southbridge Water Supply Company bought up much outlying land by approximately the 1930s, including watershed land across the town boundary in Sturbridge and across the state boundary in Connecticut. These holdings were sold to the town in the late 1980s. Consequently, Southbridge is one of the few communities in southern Worcester County that own and operate their own water, sewer and municipal landfill. The Town has 5 reservoirs that provide municipal water. Approximately 2,024 acres are protected by the watershed district.

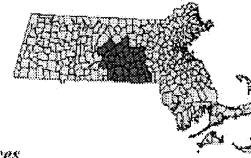
Southbridge and Sturbridge share a joint recreational facility, the Westville Lake recreation area. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers owns and operates this 23-acre lake that also offers picnic sites, ball fields and lake fishing. Nearby undeveloped lands are managed by the State, which also stocks trout.

Other key regional open space and recreational resources include the Quinebaug River, the historic Grand Trunk Railway, and an expanding regional system of paths and trails.

Historically, Southbridge has been the vibrant economic core of our scenic rural region. The development and open space in Southbridge still reflect our historic pattern of: (1) civic buildings, commerce, and residences clustered densely around large mills, and (2) outlying, lightly settled open spaces. Recent years have seen the expansion of residential development along roads out into formerly undeveloped areas.

Southbridge's rich and varied history of agriculture, industrial revolution, thriving mill villages, and civic center has resulted in many natural and cultural resources. These are shown on the accompanying Map: *Unique Features and Special Places*.

# TOWN OF SOUTHBRIDGE Unique Features & Special Places Map



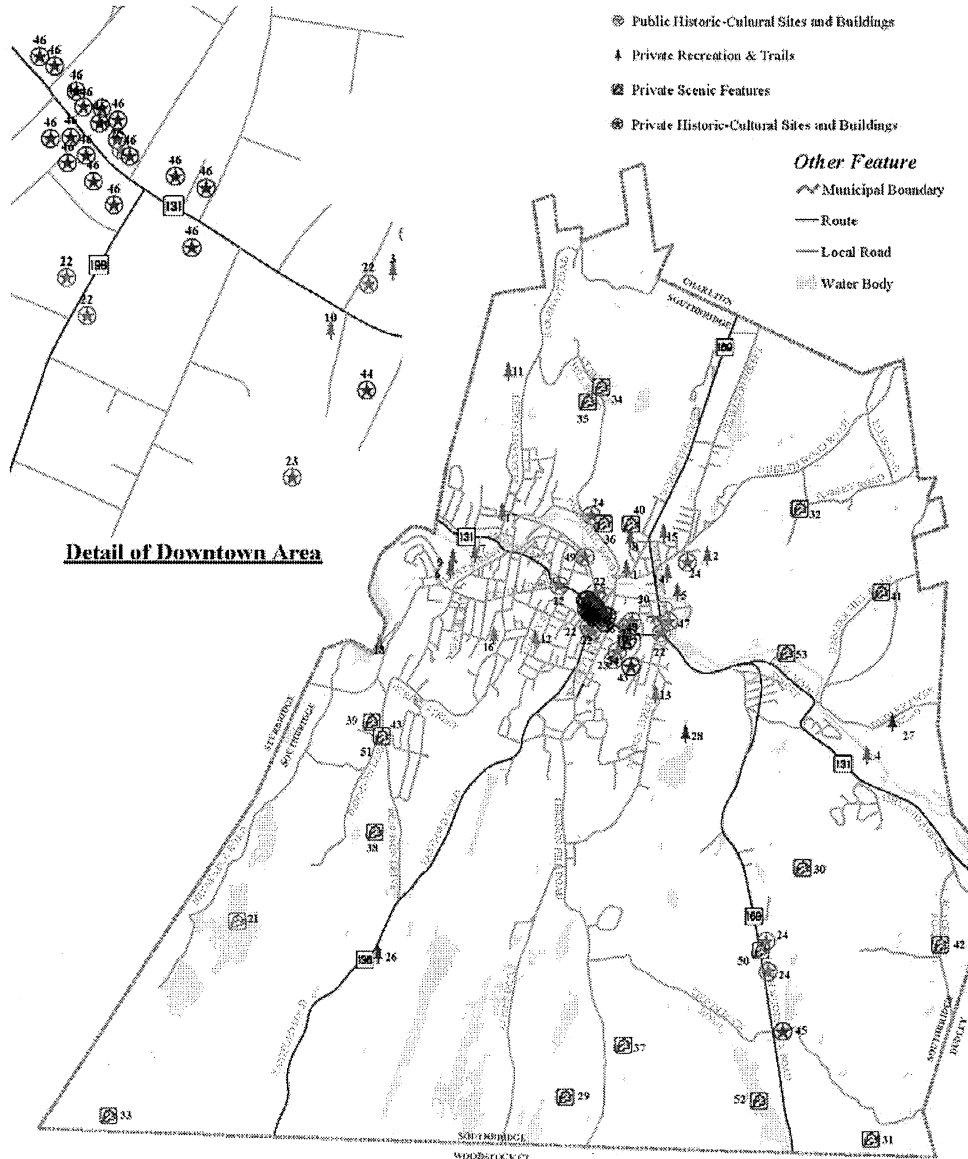
## Legend

### Special Places

- Public Recreation & Trails
- Public Parks
- Public Scenic Features
- Public Historic-Cultural Sites and Buildings
- Private Recreation & Trails
- Private Scenic Features
- Private Historic-Cultural Sites and Buildings

### Other Feature

- Municipal Boundary
- Route
- Local Road
- Water Body

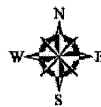


**Detail of Downtown Area**

Information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis. Use caution interpreting positional accuracy.

Produced by the GIS Center at  
Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission,  
35 Harvard Street, Second Floor, Worcester, MA 01609-2801

Map Produced May 2004



0 1,320 2,640 5,280  
Feet



Source data:  
Hydrography derived from Mass Dept. of Enviro. Protection.  
Roads derived from MassHighway.  
All other data from MassGIS and enhanced by CMRPC GIS Center.

**Key to Map: *Unique Features & Special Places***

<b>1</b>	Capillo Park	<b>28</b>	Royal Oaks Golf Course
<b>2</b>	Charlton Street Recreation Area	<b>29</b>	Kings Rock
<b>3</b>	Dresser Park	<b>30</b>	Palmerino Property
<b>4</b>	Future Site of P&W Rail Trail	<b>31</b>	Stone Room
<b>5</b>	Gibraltar Field	<b>32</b>	Torrey Road
<b>6</b>	Globe Village Recreation Area	<b>33</b>	Cats Rock
<b>7</b>	Grand Trunk R.R. Trail	<b>34</b>	Clemence Hill/Airport Area
<b>8</b>	Henry Street Field	<b>35</b>	Clemence Hill Farm
<b>9</b>	Heritage Nature Trail	<b>36</b>	Paige Hill
<b>10</b>	Main Street Tot-lot	<b>37</b>	Lebanon Hill
<b>11</b>	McKinstry Brook Trail	<b>38</b>	Lasalette
<b>12</b>	McMahon Field	<b>39</b>	Dennison Hill
<b>13</b>	Morris Street Field	<b>40</b>	Carpenter's Pond
<b>14</b>	Pearl Street Field	<b>41</b>	Dresser Hill Road
<b>15</b>	State Pool	<b>42</b>	Blackmer Hill
<b>16</b>	Town Pool	<b>43</b>	Dennison Rock
<b>17</b>	Walcott Street Tot-lot	<b>44</b>	Arts Center
<b>18</b>	Westville Lake Recreation Area	<b>45</b>	Morse Family Cemetery
<b>19</b>	Youth Center	<b>46</b>	Numerous Privately-Owned Buildings in Town Center
<b>20</b>	Town Common	<b>47</b>	American Optical Buildings and Campus
<b>21</b>	Reservoirs	<b>48</b>	Notre Dame Church
<b>22</b>	Numerous Monuments	<b>49</b>	Flat Iron Building
<b>23</b>	Cole Forest	<b>50</b>	North Woodstock Road
<b>24</b>	Parish Cemeteries	<b>51</b>	Fork in the road Duck Pond
<b>25</b>	Numerous Publicly-Owned Buildings in Town Center	<b>52</b>	Morse Pond
<b>26</b>	Cohasse Country Club	<b>53</b>	Quinebaug River
<b>27</b>	Rama Soccer Fields	<b>54</b>	Oak Ridge Cemetery

## 2. Southbridge's Population, Housing Supply, Demand, and Needs

*[For more details see the data summary and analyses presented in the Appendix.]*

The 2000 U. S. Census reports that Southbridge is home to a diverse population of 17,214. The community is comprised of persons from a wide variety of backgrounds, times of life, economic situations, and households. Southbridge traditionally thinks of itself as a "family town", and the Census shows that there are, indeed, many families of all ages living in Southbridge. At the same time, the Census shows that in 2000 more than 35% of Southbridge households were not "family" households, but rather were people living alone or unrelated people living together. Of Southbridge residents aged 15 and over in 2000, fewer than half [47.6%] were currently married with their spouse present in the home. 6% were married but their spouse was absent, 27.2% had never been married, 19.5% were widowed or divorced.

Participants at the June 12 community meeting spoke of working parents' need for child care. In 2000 more than 1400 families were headed by a single father or mother, and 424 of those families included children under the age of 6. There were 356 single mothers with children under the age of 6. In 2000 240 residents were grandparents living with their own grandchildren under the age of 18 years. Of these, 140 grandparents were responsible for their grandchildren.

Residents of Hispanic or Latino origin comprise 20.7% of Southbridge's population. 14.9% of the population identify themselves as multi-racial or of a race other than "white". In 2000 97.6% of Southbridge residents were citizens of the United States, with the great majority born in Massachusetts. During the 1990s there was an increase in the number of arriving foreign-born residents, which may explain why 507 households reported being "linguistically isolated" in 2000. This in-migration is a continuation of a long-standing local tradition. Southbridge residents report many different ancestries outside the United States, and often residents report a mix of ancestries.

There is mobility within the community. Approximately 46% of the population [almost 7,300 people] were living in a different home in 2000 than they were in 1995. Of those, about 2,700 had moved from a different home in Southbridge., and about 4,100 has moved in from somewhere else in the United States. 291 had moved from Puerto Rico, and 186 from a foreign country or "at sea".

Family households were working hard in 2000, with many having multiple jobs in a range of occupations. Southbridge residents clearly depend heavily on private sector employers. 75.7% of working residents in 2000 were receiving wages or salaries from private for-profit companies. Another 6.1% were self-employed or working in a family business. 10.3 % worked in the public sector, and 7.9% were employed by private non-profits. The great majority of jobs were reported to be in Worcester County. Of 7,530 workers, only 236 reported working outside Massachusetts. The average travel time of commuting workers was 24 minutes. More than 88% of commuting workers drive alone.

Many families were struggling financially in 2000. The incomes of almost 600 families [13%] were reported to be below the federal definition of poverty level. Families with children under the age of 18 were significantly more likely to be below poverty level, and married couples were faring much better than single parents. More than 28% of residents had not received a High School diplomas as of 2000. Another 17% had started college, but still need more schooling to receive a degree. 14% had earned an Associate's or Bachelor's Degree. Fewer than 6% had received a post-graduate or professional degree.

In 2000 Southbridge had more rental units [55%] than owner-occupied [45.0%]. There was a 5.8% vacancy rate among rental units, and a 2.2% vacancy rate among owner-occupied units. The median household size for renters was lower [2.21] than for owner occupants [2.65], due largely to the fact that more than twice as many single person households rented than owned their homes in 2000. Southbridge has a large proportion of historic housing stock [almost 40% built prior to 1939]. There was a flurry of residential construction following World War II through the 1950s. Construction held fairly steady through the '60s, 70's, and '80s, but then slowed during the 1990s. Rental and owner-occupied tenure is fairly evenly distributed among all periods of housing stock. Age medians for rental and owner-occupied structures are both very close to the town-wide median year of construction: 1949.

Southbridge offers a range of housing types: mixed use, single family, 2-family, 3-family, multiple houses on one lot, small and large apartment buildings, and condominiums. For rentals, there is a range of unit sizes from studio through 3 or more bedrooms. The 2000 Census reports that the median and average monthly rents for occupied units was in the mid-\$400s range.

Bankers and public agencies use the rule of thumb that a household should spend not more than 30% of its income on housing costs. For a homeowner, this means utilities, insurance, taxes, and mortgage. In 1999 483 homeowner households were spending over this "affordability" limit, including 120 who did not have a mortgage. 158 households were spending more than half their income on housing, including 29 who did not have a mortgage. For renting households the "affordability rule of thumb" is that no more than 30% of the household income should be spent on rent, electricity, heating, & insurance. In 1999 1,521 renting households exceeded the affordability limit, including 706 who were paying more than half their income on housing. Combining owner-occupied and renting households, the 2000 Census reports more than 2,000 households were in "unaffordable" living situations. These comprised 33.9% of the households and housing units for which these figures were computed. 14.6% of the households reported paying more than half their income on housing.

### 3. Southbridge's Business Base

[For more details see the data summary and analyses presented in the Appendix.]

#### Key characteristics of Southbridge's economic base in private ownership.

**1. Of the more than 2,000 acres in private ownership zoned for business, vacant developable land zoned for business is sparse and fragmented.**

- 29.34 *developable acres zoned commercial* are contained in 8 lots with a median parcel size of 0.91 acres
- 12.43 *potentially developable acres zoned commercial* are contained in 7 lots with a median parcel size of 1.38 acres.
- 76.13 *developable acres zoned industrial* are contained in 18 parcels with a median parcel size of 2.09 acres.
- 59.98 *potentially developable acres zoned industrial* are contained in 6 parcels with a median size of 0.41 acres.

**2. In descending order, the most wide-spread types of business development in Southbridge are:**

- |   |              |            |                   |
|---|--------------|------------|-------------------|
| • Mixed use:<br>residential with some commercial<br>(Average value \$19,964 per acre) | 843.39 acres | 65 parcels | median 0.21 acres |
| • Golf courses<br>(Average value \$9,415 per acre)                                    | 305.35 acres | 3 parcels  | median 91.4 acres |
| • Manufacturing buildings<br>(Average value \$120,132 per acre)                       | 294.28 acres | 33 parcels | median 1.37 acres |
| • Other storage<br>(Average value \$48,606 per acre)                                  | 95.53 acres  | 26 parcels | median 0.68 acres |
| • Auto sales and service<br>(Average value \$58,555 per acre)                         | 49.05 acres  | 11 parcels | median 0.68 acres |

Other than golf courses, Southbridge's most wide-spread businesses occupy very small parcels.

**3. The average values per acre of these most wide-spread types are well below the ones that top the list for average assessed value in Southbridge, see below. These higher value uses are limited in size.**

- Hotels  
(Average value \$2,980,208 per acre)      10.08 acres      1 parcel
- Nursing homes  
(Average value \$1,764,152 per acre)      2.77 acres      1 parcel
- Bank buildings  
(Average value \$1,700,905 per acre)      3.38 acres      7 parcels      median 0.39 acres
- Medical office buildings  
(Average value \$1,048,949 per acre)      3.14 acres      5 parcels      median 0.43 acres

[Please note that this list of highest assessed values per acre includes only land uses of more than 1 total acre. The average value per acre for smaller land uses are distorted, for example the single bowling alley that occupies only 0.12 acres.]

From a fiscal perspective, Southbridge's economic base is dominated by relatively low assessed value business uses, while having very limited numbers of high assessed value businesses.

**4. Southbridge can make positive gains in the Town's fiscal base through a combination of:**

- a. achieving more development with high assessed values per acre, and ...
- b. upgrading the properties [and therefore assessed value] of current types of business and mixed use development.

**5. Assessor records identify approximately 178 scattered, privately-owned acres zoned for business that are developable or potentially developable. The Town of Southbridge owns approximately 135 acres of vacant, developable, industrially zoned land in two sections: a major land holding surrounding the Airport, and a second large holding located off Torrey Road behind the American Optical complex.**

Unless there is a significant amount of rezoning and development of private residential land into commercial or industrial districts, what happens on the Town-owned industrially zoned property will be the largest determining factor for long-term impact on Southbridge's economic base<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Town's land holdings in these areas are much larger than 135 acres. Some areas are zoned residential, and at least some of the industrially zoned land has development constraints due to topography. 135 is a preliminary estimate of developable acres, pending more detailed site analysis and planning.

**Southbridge has positive attributes that provide a competitive advantage for attracting business investment:**

- Available space
- Public utilities: water and sewer
- Utility costs favorable
- Access to highways and the airport. **Southbridge is an affordable hub.**
- Visibly defined downtown and architectural character
- Available workforce – diverse, skilled/trained, access to trade school
- Available parking
- Established industrial community
- Downtown Partnership
- Community working together and supportive of all activities
- Supportive services e.g. YMCA, hospital, Arts center, Library etc
- Housing stock – close to the workplaces, reasonable price range, availability
- Supportive business community – word of mouth
- Conference Center
- For a town this size lots of service organizations: arts, theater, YMCA, Hospital Bay Path College, banks, full-time Town staff
- Library
- Single, favorable tax rate
- Safety



#### 4. Development Constraints & Guiding Change

Subsection #1, above, outlines the natural factors that have historically shaped development in Southbridge: rolling well-drained hills with intervening streams and wetlands, and the River. [See following Map: *Development Constraints & Land Appropriate for Development*.] The *Town Zoning* Map shows how the Town's Zoning Bylaw reflects Southbridge's historical pattern of development:

- a. dense mixes of civic, business, and residential activities centered on the River
- b. less dense residential development in the outlying areas, with a Watershed Overlay District in the southwest quadrant to protect Southbridge's drinking water supply.

With the decline of traditional mill industries into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, a third major component of zoning was added:

- c. large, outlying landholdings zoned Industry, to allow a new generation economic base to replace the loss of Southbridge's traditional base.

a. Denser mix of uses along the River. A ribbon of Heavy Industry zoning districts lie along the River, corresponding with historic mill complexes from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nearby and located along main streets are small, mainly built-up General Business and Retail Business districts, which comprise 1.0% and 0.5 % of Southbridge's land base, respectively. Small, built-out spots of Multiple Family districts [1.10% of the land base] are scattered in the mix, also, marking the sites of preexisting multifamily buildings. In the case of new construction in these sewered areas, single family homes would require 22,500 square foot lots with 100 foot frontage, while 2-family structures would require 25,000 s.f. and 125 foot frontage. New multifamily structures are only allowed on sewered parcels, and require 25,000 s.f. plus 5,000 additional square feet per unit over one.

The Town adheres to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts stormwater regulations. Applications for sewer opening permits and driveway permits trigger review by the Department of Public Works to be sure that new construction is complying with stormwater regulations. New business development goes before the Conservation Commission or the Planning Board, according to the Special Permits or Site Plan Approvals that are required of most types of business.

An Historic District Committee is working on a proposal to create an Historic District in the Town Centre.

By far the largest downtown district is the Two Family District [6.9% of the land base]. Although designated "two family", the downtown areas of this district were developed by the early 1900s as multifamily housing for mill employees. Almost all the Two Family districts are served by the municipal sewer system, in which case a new single family home is allowed on a minimum lot size of 22,500 square feet., with 100 feet of frontage; anew 2-family home requires a 25,000 s.f. lot with 125 feet of frontage. Unsewered areas in Two Family districts require 30,000 s.f. and 125 foot frontage for a single family home, and 45,000 s.f. with 150 foot frontage for a 2-family home. The Two Family District allows no manufacturing, storage, or vehicle-related uses except for shared parking lots.

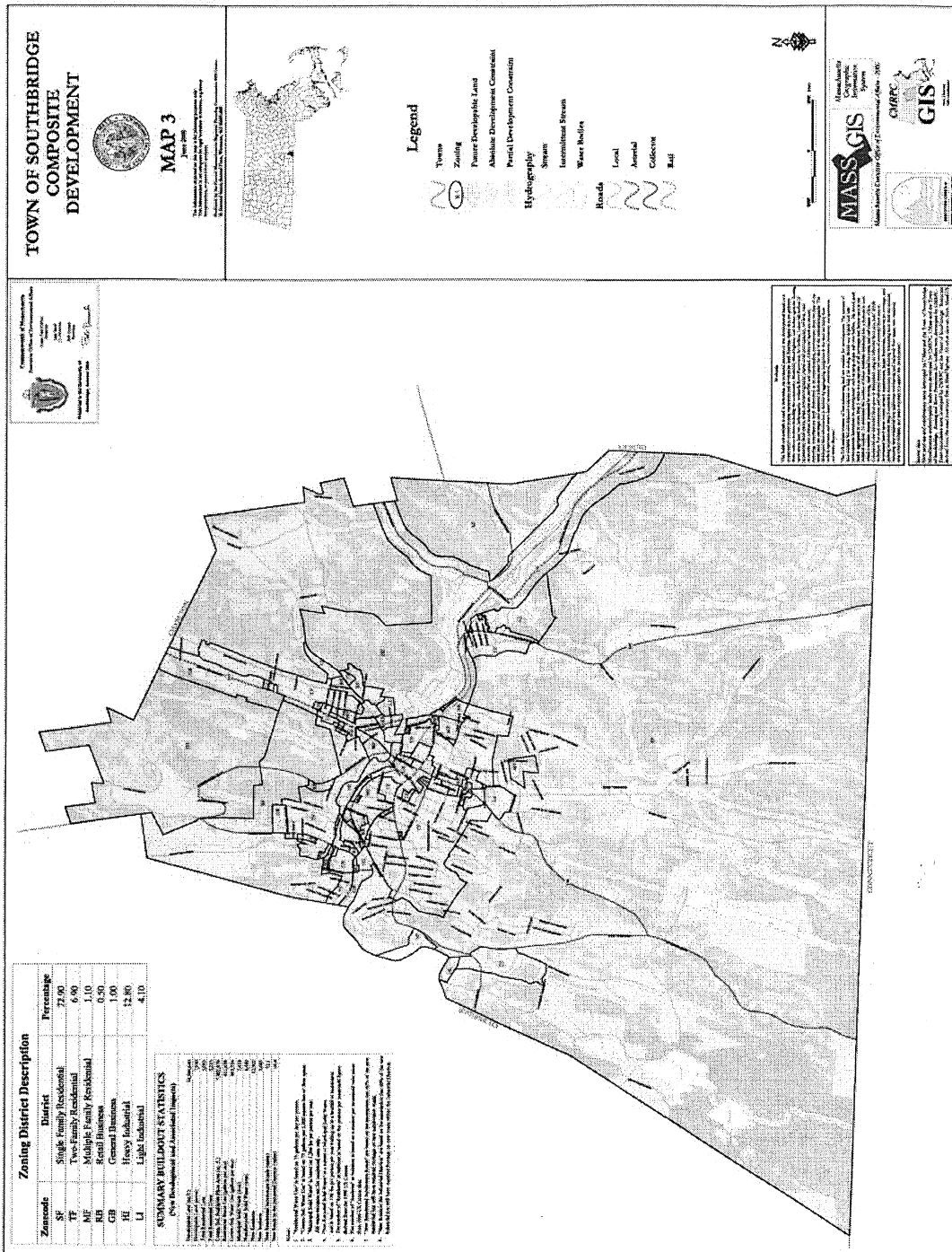
b. Much less dense residential development in the outlying areas, with a Watershed Overlay District in the southwest quadrant. By far the greatest portion of Southbridge lies in the Single Family District:

72.9% of the land base [including the area with the Watershed Overlay District]. The majority of this district is not served by sewer and requires 30,000 square feet and 125 foot frontage for a single family home. With sewer such a home would require 22,500 s.f. and a 100 foot frontage.

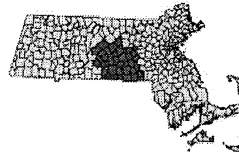
Cluster residential development of single family and two-family homes is allowed by Special Permit in all districts on a minimum 3 acre tract of land. Given how built out are the districts in the center of town, cluster is most likely to occur in the outlying, Single Family District. The Cluster provision requires that 25% of the land be set aside as open space. There are setback requirements but no minimum lot size for the clustered homes.

The Watershed Overlay District protects most of the land surrounding the Town's 4 large reservoirs, known as Reservoir 3, Reservoir 4, Reservoir 5, and Hatchet Pond. [Reservoir 2 has not been used in years, is dry most of the time, and is reverting back to a natural state. Reservoir 1, commonly called "The Rez", used to be a swimming and ice skating pond, and is bordered by an in-town recreation area.] The Overlay District requires a 3 acre minimum lot size and allows a maximum of 25% impermeable surface, and a maximum of 25% removal of vegetation.

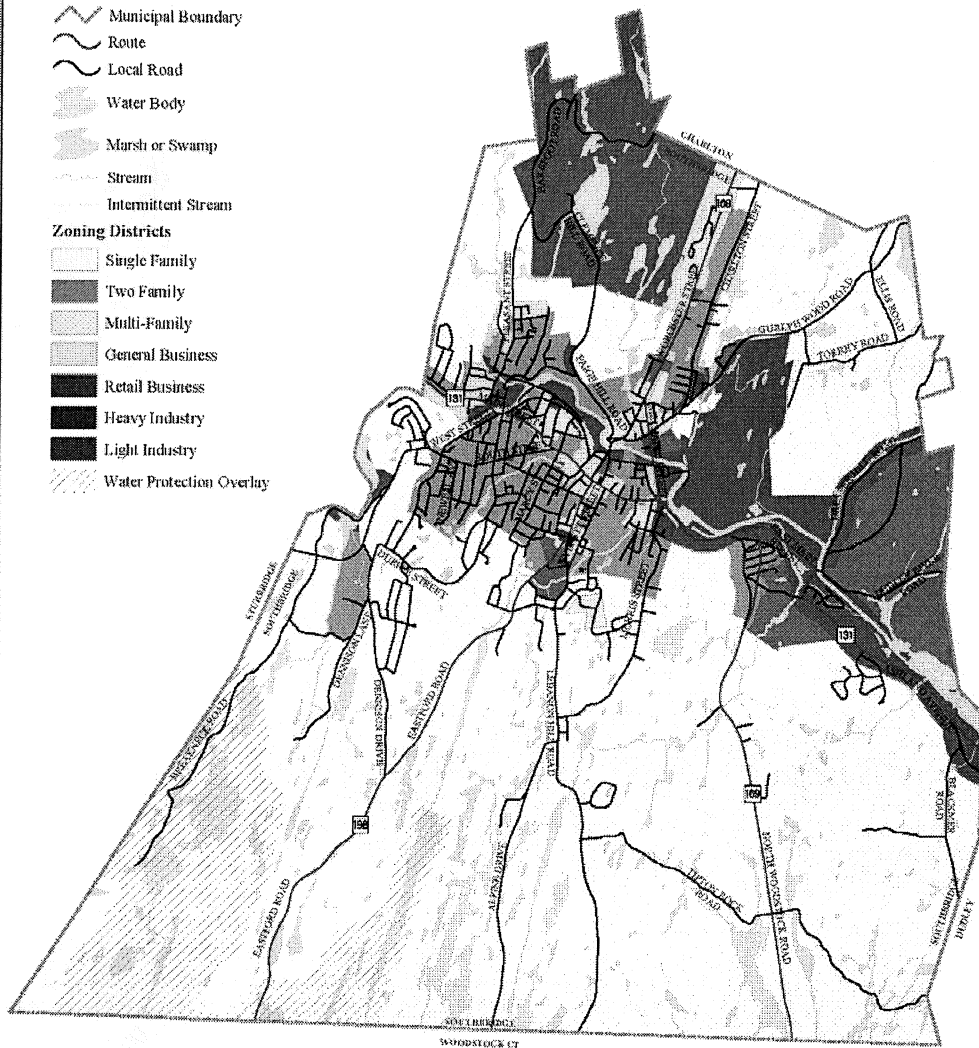
c. Large outlying Heavy Industry and Light Industry Districts, with accompanying Retail Business and General Business Districts. Subsection #3, above, reports the importance of these outlying, largely undeveloped portions of Southbridge's economic base. Section III and materials in the Appendix will show that these outlying districts prompted significant discussions during the 2003 – 2005 planning process. The future of these areas is an especially important policy issue, since the Town of Southbridge owns large tracts of land around the Airport and also off Torrey Road up behind the American Optical complex. Being zoned for Industry, but not having sewer or water service, and often lacking access, has served to "bank" these holdings.



# TOWN OF SOUTHBRIDGE Zoning & Overlay District Map



- Municipal Boundary
- Route
- Local Road
- Water Body
- Marsh or Swamp
- Stream
- Intermittent Stream
- Zoning Districts**
  - Single Family
  - Two Family
  - Multi-Family
  - General Business
  - Retail Business
  - Heavy Industry
  - Light Industry
  - Water Protection Overlay



## C. Key Questions That Face Southbridge

The information summarized in the previous pages raises the following questions about where Southbridge is now, in comparison with where townspeople want Southbridge to be in the future:

### *Over all . . .*

After reviewing new information and comparing different viewpoints, does the Vision Statement from our November 2002 forum still seem on track? Are there more specific objectives that we should spell out?

### *In regard to open space, natural resources, and recreation . . .*

What really distinctive places in Southbridge make our Town special?

In what ways is Southbridge well supplied with opportunities for active & passive recreation?

What additional recreation areas or facilities do we need? Specifically what & where?

### *In regard to business . . .*

What are the potential strong points or competitive advantages that Southbridge should make use of to build a strong, diversified business base?

What are the community's preliminary ideas about where to achieve or maintain diversity in business?

Through redevelopment of existing buildings

Through development in new areas

What specific questions do we need to answer in order for the community to make good decisions regarding balanced diversity in business?

### *In regard to housing . . .*

What are the community's preliminary ideas about where to achieve or maintain diversity in housing?

Through redevelopment of existing buildings

Through development in new areas

What specific questions do we need to answer in order for the community to make good decisions regarding balanced diversity in housing?

### *To achieve a balanced, action oriented plan . . .*

For each priority, what specific action(s) are needed to make progress? What do we agree on?

What are specific things the Town can do to get us moving into the future we want?

What would fit where?

Do our strategies for business, housing, open space & recreation work together? Are there conflicts we need to deal with?

What specific actions need to be taken next?

Over the course of the community's 2003 – 2004 Long Term Planning deliberations, townspeople discussed and offered guidance on all these key questions. Section III, below, emerged from these broad-based discussions.