

# BOLTON

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M A S T E R P L A N

Existing Conditions Report

 BSC GROUP



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Open Space and Recreation Land Map – Pg. 53\*

\*Map update in process to be consistent with Open Space and Recreation Plan

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the Town of Bolton embarked on a process to develop a long-range master plan to guide the town's growth over a twenty-year period. This master plan was the most recent Comprehensive Plan update initiated by the Planning Board since 1971 and provided the foundation for important decision making regarding the long-term development of the community. Many recommendations from the [1971 Comprehensive Plan](#) have been implemented or appear in subsequent plans. Three top priorities identified during that effort included moderating tax growth, providing good schools, and preserving rural character. Since Bolton has faced significant development pressures and substantial population growth over the last two decades, updating this master plan document to reflect the community's current top priorities is critical to guiding the Town's future growth.

As such, the Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) began working rigorously to prepare a master plan update in 2019. This 2035 Master Plan Update will incorporate important strategies that will continue to guide Bolton's long-term growth and development in a sound, sustainable way. The following document is an assessment and inventory of the existing conditions of Bolton and will be beneficial to the development of the new Comprehensive Plan.

### What is a Master Plan?

The Commonwealth requires towns and cities to produce a master plan under Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 41 § 81D. The master plan sets forth goals and objectives for community growth, with the intention of shaping the town's public policy through informed decision making. This updated Bolton Master Plan addresses climate change, economic development, housing, land use, open space and recreation, and municipal facilities and services, among others, to provide a blueprint for the town's future.

## Components of Bolton Master Plan 2035

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## 2006 Master Plan

The community's vision for Bolton in 2006 was to:

- Maintain Bolton's increasingly unique small-town character, including its volunteer community spirit, working farms, open spaces, and historic places.
- Provide strong schools and municipal services while planning and managing the growth of our population.
- Provide diversity in housing to satisfy a range of incomes, age groups and life stages.
- Moderate the growth of taxes.
- Provide meeting places and opportunities to foster and support the strong sense of community.

While many recommendations of the 2006 Master Plan have been addressed, the remaining ones need to be balanced with new priorities within a more current context. Goals such as managing population growth, protecting open space, providing high quality public facilities and services, encouraging economic development, implementing the Community Preservation Act, and providing a wider range of housing types for all residents remain relevant to the community today.

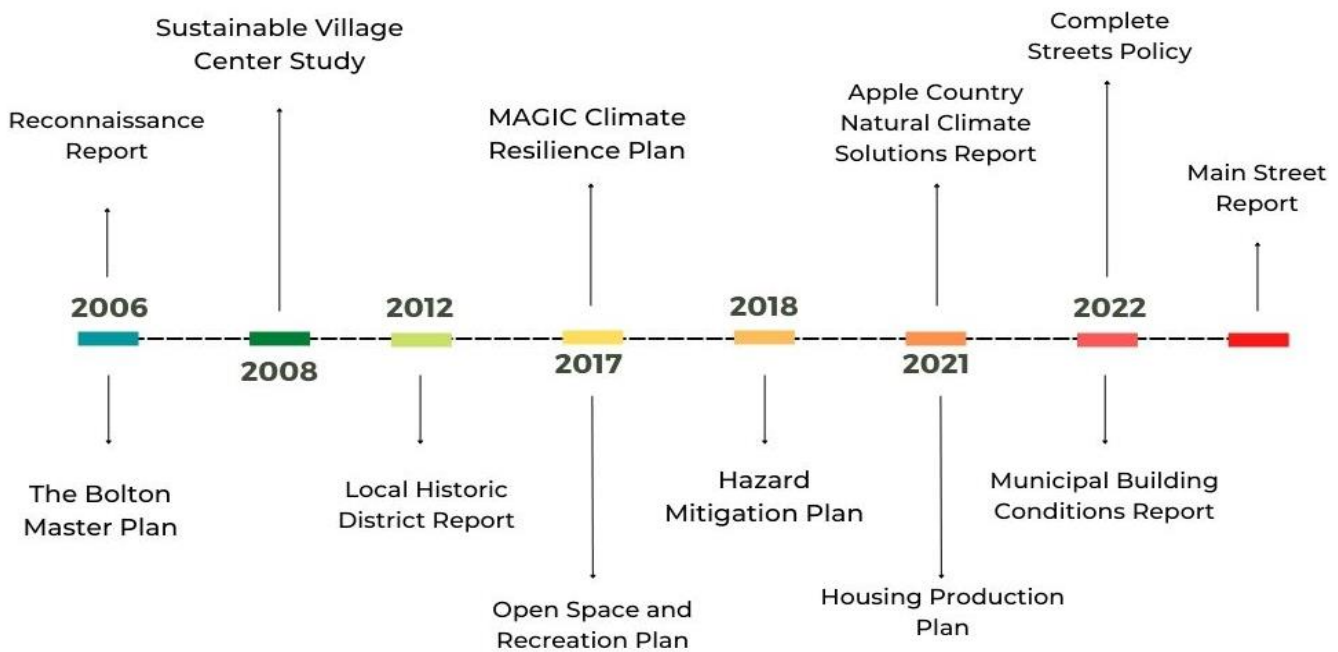
Since the inception of the Master Plan, many of the prior goals established have been implemented or achieved some level of progress. These achievements will be discussed in detail within the individual Master Plan chapters. The green depicts those goals where significant progress has been made, yellow where some progress has been made, and red where little to no progress has been made.

Maintain small-town character, including Bolton's volunteer community spirit, working farms, open spaces and historic places	Green
Provide strong schools and municipal services while planning and managing the growth of our population	Green
Provide diversity in housing to satisfy a range of incomes, age groups, and life stages	Red
Moderate the growth of taxes	Yellow
Provide meeting places and opportunities to foster and support Bolton's strong sense of community	Green

While the Town has stalled on its housing goal to provide a diversity of housing to satisfy a range of incomes, age groups, and life stages, it recently completed a [Housing Production Plan](#) (2021), that identifies strategies for the Town to make progress in the years to come.

Since the 2006 Master Plan, Bolton has completed several strategic planning efforts, as shown in the below timeline, but has maintained an awareness that long-term strategic planning is needed. Goals, objectives, and strategies from these recent plans have been considered and incorporated into the 2035 Master Plan, when appropriate.

## PLANNING IN BOLTON



### Bolton Master Plan Steering Committee

The MPSC is a volunteer committee comprised of residents with varying backgrounds and skill sets appointed by the Planning Board in coordination with the Select Board. The MPSC set three intentions for this master planning process:

1. To preserve community character.
2. To encourage economic development.
3. To provide a framework for change.

In addition, the MPSC identified Core Values to help drive the process. These Core Values are comprised of various elements, as outlined in the updated Vision Statement.



COMMUNITY



OPPORTUNITY



MOBILITY



SUSTAINABILITY

## Vision Statement

“At one level, a community is where we pursue our basic human needs for shelter, sustenance, safety, and security. But at another level, a community can also serve our human needs for connection, purpose, creativity, expression, relationship, collaboration, and the pursuit of happiness. We envision a Bolton that aims to promote human flourishing along all these dimensions.

To make Bolton a true home to all residents, a place of welcome to all visitors, and a source of well-being in the future, we shall use our collective resources to preserve and promote our core values of Community, Opportunity, Mobility, and Sustainability.”

Core Value	Elements
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spaces and events that are welcoming and engaging, and that foster in-person connection and collaboration.</li><li>• Public safety and public health systems that meet multifaceted needs of residents and visitors.</li><li>• Support of cultural programs, the arts, and local non-profits.</li><li>• Historical awareness and understanding.</li><li>• Conscious consideration of diversity (age, race, socioeconomic status, disability status, etc.).</li><li>• Accessible, effective, and efficient municipal services.</li></ul>
<b>Opportunity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diverse housing (types, sizes).</li><li>• Affordable housing (and housing for local employees).</li><li>• Employment opportunities.</li><li>• Business / commerce / amenities.</li><li>• Civics / participation in self-government.</li><li>• Conscious consideration of equity (age, race, socioeconomic status, disability status, etc.).</li><li>• Life-long learning and education.</li></ul>
<b>Mobility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve physical and virtual connectivity.</li><li>• Transportation infrastructure.</li><li>• Multi-modal ways to get around town (walking, biking, driving).</li><li>• De-congestion.</li><li>• Sensibly located and accessible gathering places.</li></ul>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conserve/protect open space &amp; natural resources.</li><li>• Support agriculture.</li><li>• Prepare for and mitigate the causes of climate change at a local level.</li><li>• Waste management &amp; recycling.</li><li>• Physical &amp; psychological health.</li></ul>

## II. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT AND PARTICIPATION

An integral group to the planning process is the Master Plan Steering Committee (BMPSC) who remains active and provides educational materials to the community. The BMPSC has also provided a substantial amount of archival and active reports, plans, and studies on the town website and MPSC Facebook page.

### Public Forum October 17, 2021

The first public forum was hosted at the Florence Sawyer School by the Steering Committee and involved interactive stations that polled community members on a variety of Master Plan topics.

Key findings are summarized below:

#### Housing

Residents top 4 concerns related to housing are density, preservation of open space, options for downsizing and options for affordability. Attendees support the Community Preservation Act, directing growth to the mixed-use overlay district, and creating cottage style housing.


#### Transportation

Attendees expressed a need for more bicycle facilities in the form of shared use paths and on-street bike lanes. For pedestrian facilities, people prefer sidewalks and landscapes paths. For trails, people selected foot trails and accessible trails. For visual preferences, people prefer parking behind businesses. Comments from attendees expressed a desire for improved sidewalks in the town center and better maintenance and drainage of existing roadways. Concerns were voiced about busy roadways and unsafe pedestrian/cyclist facilities, specifically on Wattaquodock Hill Road.

At the October engagement event, the Steering Committee asked community members what their aspirations are for Bolton's future and conducted a SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the town. Aspirations offered included:

1. We aspire to preserve and foster community traditions and practices that promote rootedness and connectedness for current and future generations. The community expressed a desire for residents to remain in town even after their children finish school. A lack of community

### Calling BOLTON RESIDENTS



## Bolton Master Plan Public Forum

**Sunday, Oct. 17, 2021 • 2:00–4:00 p.m.**  
at the Florence Sawyer School cafeteria

Schools

Cultural & Historic Resources

Economic Development

Climate Change

Open Space & Recreation

Land Use

**COME + BRING  
YOUR OPINIONS**

Government & Finance

Housing

Demographics

Transportation

Municipal Services & Facilities

Water & Sewer

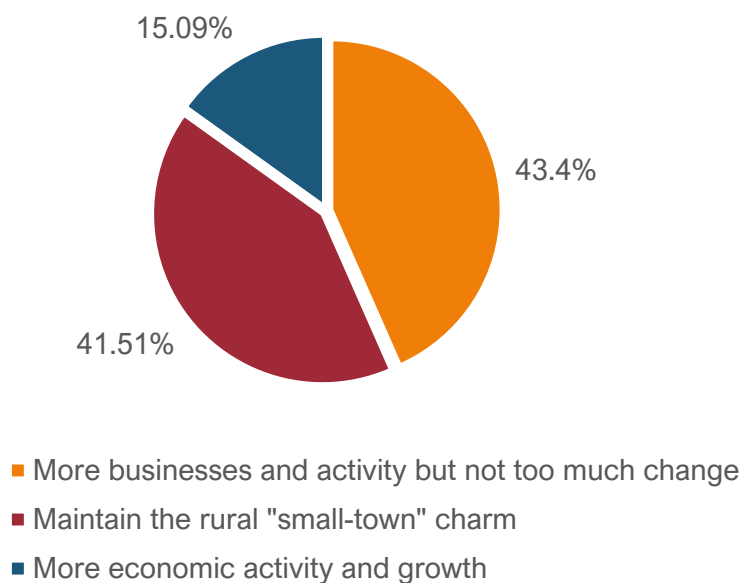
*Masks required. Door prizes.*



support was attributed to traditions fading over time. Participants desire mechanisms for intergenerational relationships.

2. We aspire to preserve our natural resources and pursue sustainable community and development practices that will protect those resources for the future.
3. Bolton aspires to provide high quality municipal and educational services and amenities for all age groups. The community expressed the importance of maintaining good schools and designating more resources to supporting seniors.
4. Bolton aspires to provide affordable and accessible housing options so that current and prospective residents at all income levels, abilities, and in all stages of life can live here.
5. Bolton is part of a regional economy with goods, services, employment, and gathering places inside and outside its borders. We aspire to be regionally well-connected and efficient.
6. Bolton aspires to be thoughtfully developed in a manner that preserves agricultural enterprises and open space while welcoming entrepreneurship and the creation of new neighborhoods.
7. Bolton aspires to be civically healthy, with equitable opportunities to participate in self-determination and community creation through local government and other organizations.
8. Bolton aspires to maintain its rural character and understand and honor its heritage.

#### How do you envision the future of Bolton?



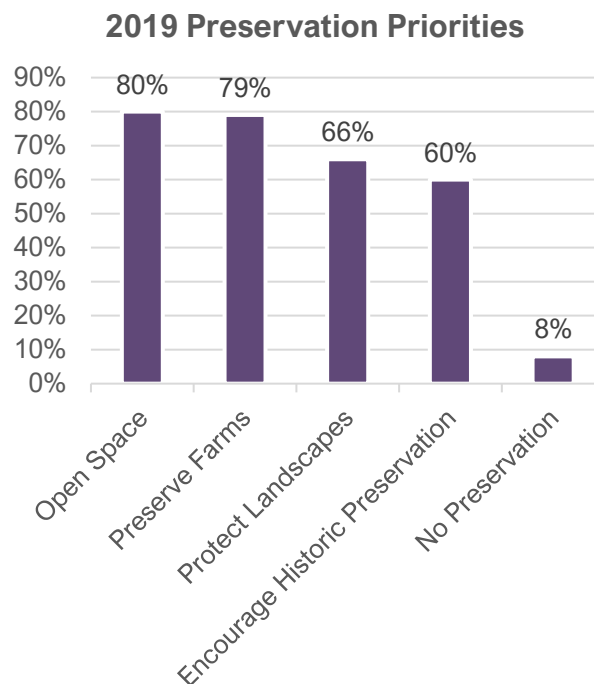
## SWOT Analysis Results

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open space land &amp; trails</li> <li>Rural character</li> <li>Safety</li> <li>Helping one another</li> <li>Devoted volunteers / leadership</li> <li>School system</li> <li>Physical environment</li> <li>Sense of community</li> <li>Family values</li> <li>Local agricultural businesses / orchards</li> <li>Longevity of residents in town</li> <li>Centrally located</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of diversity</li> <li>Communication amongst groups</li> <li>No sidewalks or places to walk to</li> <li>High taxes / too expensive</li> <li>Lack of cultural / racial diversity</li> <li>More involvement from mixed age groups</li> <li>Not hospitable to business development</li> <li>Need better infrastructure</li> <li>Lack of public water and sewer for business incentives</li> <li>Traffic</li> <li>No indoor recreation activities for adults</li> <li>Lack public transit</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional transportation options</li> <li>Housing variety</li> <li>Improve walkability</li> <li>Fill vacant business spaces</li> <li>Community Center / Senior Center</li> <li>Traffic lights</li> <li>Connect diverse age groups</li> <li>Connect more with Montachusett area</li> <li>Regional transportation along 495</li> <li>Modernize roads</li> <li>Climate response opportunities</li> <li>Participation in town government</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate change</li> <li>Development that does not follow bylaws</li> <li>Aging population and lack of housing</li> <li>Narrow winding roads</li> <li>Water resources and overdevelopment</li> <li>Some Ill-suited businesses</li> <li>Risk of uncontrolled development</li> <li>Lack of land protection knowledge</li> <li>Lack of water / sewer knowledge</li> <li>School needs upgrades</li> <li>Traffic gridlock</li> <li>Less resident involvement in the community</li> <li>Lack of transportation for aging population</li> <li>Massive warehouse in Lancaster affects 117</li> </ul>

## 2020 Master Plan Survey

The Steering Committee conducted a town-wide survey to learn more about residents and their concerns and hopes for Bolton's future. In total, 609 residents completed the survey. Questions addressed benefits and strengths of living in the town. Many respondents stated that they value the town's charming rural nature, conservation land and outdoor recreation, good school system, and the strong sense of community.

Community members reported that Bolton's most needed improvements were traffic management and road related improvements, more business opportunities (specifically dining options), a community center, and trash removal services. Other significant findings from the survey show that 14% of respondents reported experiencing financial difficulty living in Bolton. While many hope to stay in town as they age, certain factors were identified as determinants for whether folks will leave town when retired, such as taxes, expensive home maintenance, and home size. There was no clear preference about where affordable housing should be located, but 51% identified senior housing as a priority.

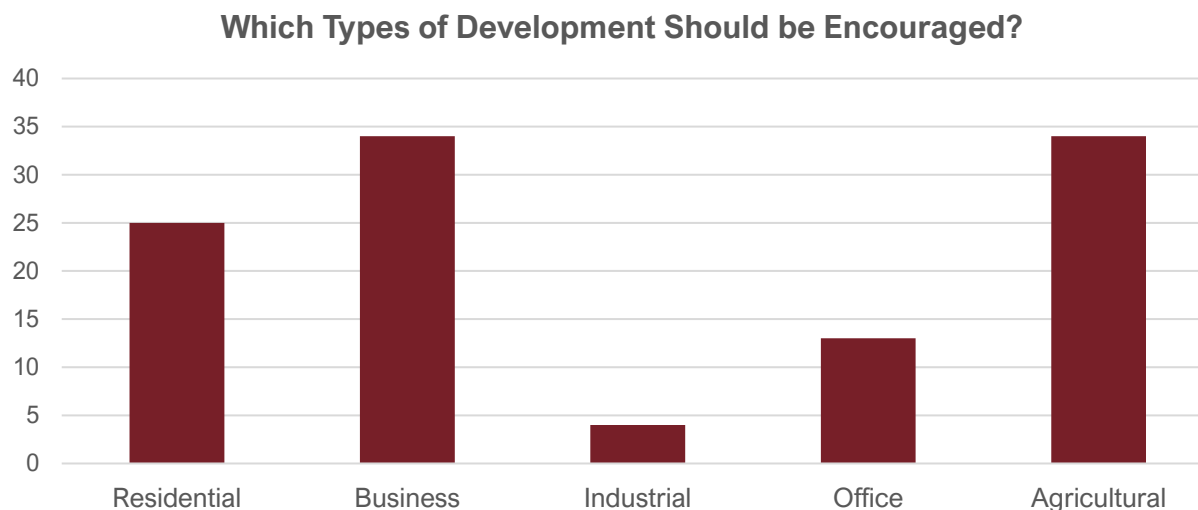


A 2001 survey was conducted to inform the 2006 Master Plan and many findings remain consistent with the present needs and feelings that have been expressed by the community. Findings from 2001 show that residents favor maintaining existing land use, preservation of open space, and exploring more commercial opportunities that comply with local zoning, and the creation of a more cohesive town center. Regarding the topic of wastewater, respondents were in favor of constructing a treatment plant for municipal buildings, however many felt that they needed more information. Regarding future land use respondents did not want to develop all available residential land and they did not want to add more business zoning – they felt that changes in undeveloped open land should reflect more permanent open space and recreation opportunities. Overall, the number one priority in 2001 was to contain tax rates, followed by preserving conservation land, the local schools, then senior housing.

## 2023 Master Plan Survey

A second survey was conducted from January to May 2023 with the primary goal of attracting energy and additional awareness for the Master Plan update process post-COVID, initiating community participation, and gauging resident priorities and concerns that may have changed since the prior survey in 2020. There was a total of 53 respondents. When asked which Master Plan topic was of the most interest to respondents, the majority selected land use, open space, and recreation. Concerns that have been raised through previous surveys were consistent with the 2019 and 2023 survey, including addressing traffic complaints, preserving the small-town rural charm, determining the amount and kind of business development, and the desire for town services and the need to manage tax growth.

Bolton residents were polled on specific actions and asked to rank them by priority. Those surveyed identified the highest priority for increasing pedestrian connectivity and pursuing the protection of open space, natural resources, and agricultural lands. Medium priority actions included increasing recreational opportunities; protecting local historic properties and sites; increasing age 55+ housing opportunities and affordable housing; and pursuing tax relief strategies. Attracting new retail development was identified by 66% of respondents as a medium to high priority. Low priority actions included improving town facilities, attracting new office space, and increasing local employment opportunities.



General open feedback received identified a need to make Bolton more welcoming and accommodating to young families and retired citizens as well as a need for an intergenerational community space. A common concern voiced among residents is maintaining the local natural resources as the town continues to grow.



## Konveio Website

The master planning process was made publicly available online via an interactive web page [PlanBoltonMA.Konveio.com](https://PlanBoltonMA.Konveio.com). This website allowed community members to learn more about a master plan, previous town planning efforts, project updates, and numerous resources and reports that inform the master plan update process. In addition, a second survey as part of the master planning initiative was launched on Konveio for people to take at their convenience.

As chapters are drafted, they will be posted for public comment and review to allow for a transparent and engaging planning process. Residents can also leave questions, comments, and concerns for the Steering Committee and the master plan project team. A photo submission contest was also promoted on the website to encourage residents to send in their favorite photos to be incorporated into the final master plan document.

## Backyard Bolton

BSC Group, the consulting firm assisting the MPSC with the master plan update, attended Backyard Bolton on May 13, 2023, with MPSC Chair, Robert Roemer, among others. Backyard Bolton is a local maker and farmers market held on the town green. BSC prepared materials to display, including maps of the town, demographic and housing data visuals, and information on zoning for open space residential developments. The

primary effort of this public engagement presence at Backyard Bolton was to increase community awareness of the continued effort toward updating the master plan and create awareness in the community relative to the Konveio website.



*Figure 1. Representative Kate Hogan and Steering Committee Chair Robert Roemer at Backyard Bolton*

The project team's presence at Backyard Bolton provided an opportunity for members of the community to speak with consultants and MSPC members, ask questions, raise concerns, and gain a more thorough understanding of what the updated comprehensive plan means for the Town. Conversations included topics such as traffic along Route 117, not enough sidewalk accessibility around town, potential development contributing to traffic, and concerns around residential development and affordable housing.

As part of the effort to generate discussion and awareness of the master planning process, the group had a poster board asking, *“What would your ideal Bolton look and feel like 10 years from now?”* Responses included:

- Preserve and increase green space. Keep our semi-rural feel.
- A big playground and an animal shelter.
- More restaurants and coffee shops/eateries.
- An indoor multipurpose community space to encourage more interaction.
- A community center with all kinds of programming events.
- Still beautiful, age-friendly, welcoming to all, forward-thinking.
- Keep signs and parking off Main Street.
- More sidewalks.

### **III. BOLTON TODAY**

Bolton is a small town in Worcester County, Massachusetts. A residential and agricultural community, it is considered part of the Metrowest region, a cluster of communities west of Boston and east of Worcester. Bolton is approximately 15 miles northeast of Worcester and 28 miles northwest of Boston. The Town spans a total land area of twenty square miles, bounded by Harvard, Stow, Hudson, Berlin, Clinton, and Lancaster. The Nashua River forms part of the town's western boundary, and its territory is traversed by four regional present-day transportation routes: Route 117, Route 110, Route 85, and Interstate Route 495.

The Select Board members are the Chief Executive Officers of the Town. As the policy making arm of municipal government, the Select Board generally oversees the operations of the town departments. It is comprised of three (3) members elected at large by the community. Bolton has an Annual Town Meeting, held the first Monday in May, per the local bylaw. The purpose of the Annual Town Meeting is to gather voters to vote to appropriate money to run the town and vote on the town's local statutes. However, special town meetings may be held to address important issues on a timely basis.

Bolton is a member of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and part of MAPC's sub-region Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC).<sup>1</sup> A member of the three-town (Bolton, Stow & Lancaster) Nashoba Regional School District, the Town is also served by the Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical High School. The Montachusett Regional Transit Authority, through the Bolton Council on Aging, offers transportation services for elderly (60+) and disabled residents. Bolton is a

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<sup>1</sup> MAGIC consists of 13 communities: Acton, Bedford, Bolton, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Hudson, Lexington, Lincoln, Littleton, Maynard, Stow, and Sudbury.

member town of the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health, a regional board of health with fifteen member towns. Bolton is a member of the Assabet Regional Housing Consortium.

Bolton became incorporated as a town in 1738. Originally, the town evolved from the large Lancaster purchase of 1643 and a portion of the area was ceded to Hudson. In 1784 the District of Berlin was formed, a Quaker community consisting of around eighty families, and known as Bolton's South Parish.

Bolton has historically been a rural community "consisting of meadows, woods, and grazing lands on Lancaster's outlying territory in the seventeenth century, subsistence farms in the eighteenth, dairy farms and orchards in the nineteenth, and a diverse culture of orcharding, dairying, poultry-raising, and market-gardening in the first half of the twentieth century. Today its remaining agricultural base has been greatly reduced, and the town has been transformed into a largely residential community of handsome single-family houses, most on large lots, providing homes for people who work outside the town's borders. This change in function, however, and its accompanying increase in population, has made the preservation of the town's rural character and the unique and fragile mixture of its historic resources ever more valuable to its citizens."<sup>2</sup>

## **Land Use**

The UMASS Native American Trails Project identifies that Bolton was once Nipmuc tribal territory. Settled in 1675 as part of neighboring Lancaster, the rolling hills and gently sloping valleys of Bolton attracted its earliest colonial settlers and farmers before establishing township in 1738. The landscape was particularly appealing for agriculture because of the abundance of fertile soils. The economy throughout the Colonial Period was agriculturally based and was home to subsistence farms, dairying, orchards, poultry, and market-gardening for the first half of the twentieth century.

Unlike other prominent New England settlements at the time, Bolton lacked the waterpower necessary for manufacturing, limiting early industrial activity. Other economic activities flourished, including quarrying, sawmills and gristmills, and brick making. Bolton's civic and institutional buildings began to develop along Main Street, which continues to be the heart of town today. Starting at the end of the Second World War, Bolton saw rapid growth and development and by 1960 the town had a population of 1,264. The presence and intersection of major transportation routes like I-495 and Route 117 have made Bolton an appealing location to settle down in a smaller rural town while being in proximity to major metropolitan hubs. The heart of Bolton's community and local economy remains the character and agricultural integrity that the town was

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.townofbolton.com/about-bolton/pages/introduction>

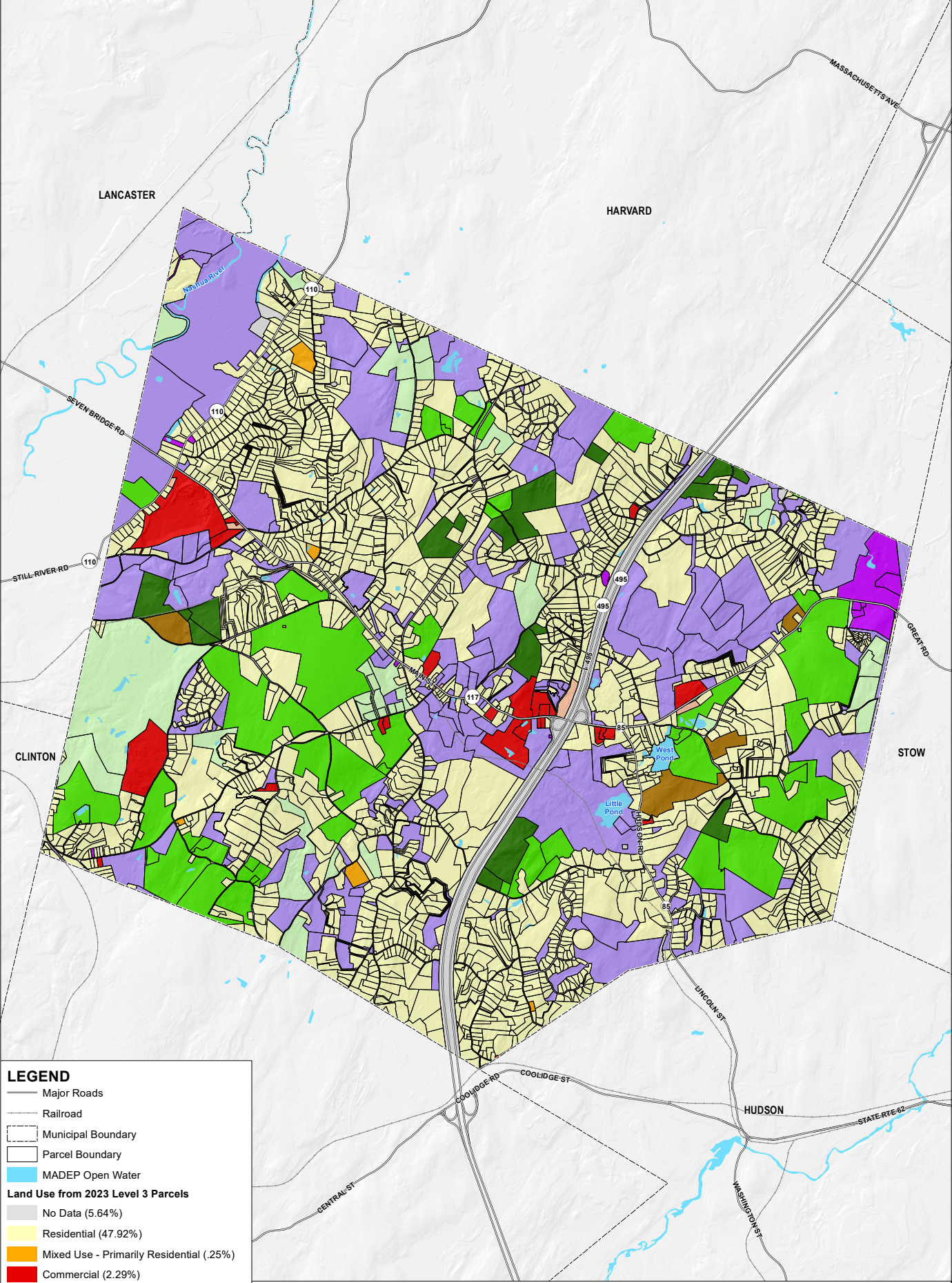
founded upon. Today, Bolton is a growing, thriving, primarily residential community characterized by scenic farms and orchards, historic buildings, expansive recreation and conservation lands, and a quaint downtown.

Today, Bolton is primarily a residential community with significant amounts of agricultural, horticultural, and conservation land. Less than 1% of the land use in town has an industrial use, this is because only a small section of the town neighboring Stow is zoned for industrial uses. Commercial land use is seen along Route 117 and composes less than 3% of the town. Tax exempt property composes approximately 21.83% and includes public and state land or facilities, hospitals, schools, churches, and cultural institutions.



*Figure 2. Town Beach*





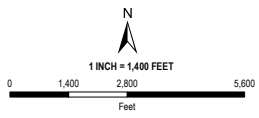
**LEGEND**

- Major Roads
- Railroad
- Municipal Boundary
- Parcel Boundary
- MADEP Open Water

**Land Use from 2023 Level 3 Parcels**

No Data (5.64%)
Residential (47.92%)
Mixed Use - Primarily Residential (.25%)
Commercial (2.29%)
Mixed Use - Primarily Commercial (0.14%)
Industrial (0.97%)
Recreational (6.23%)
Agricultural/Horticultural (11.81%)
Forestry/Chapter 61 Lands (2.48%)
Mixed Use - Other (0.82%)
Tax Exempt (21.83%)

**BOLTON MASTER PLAN  
LAND USE**



## Population Characteristics

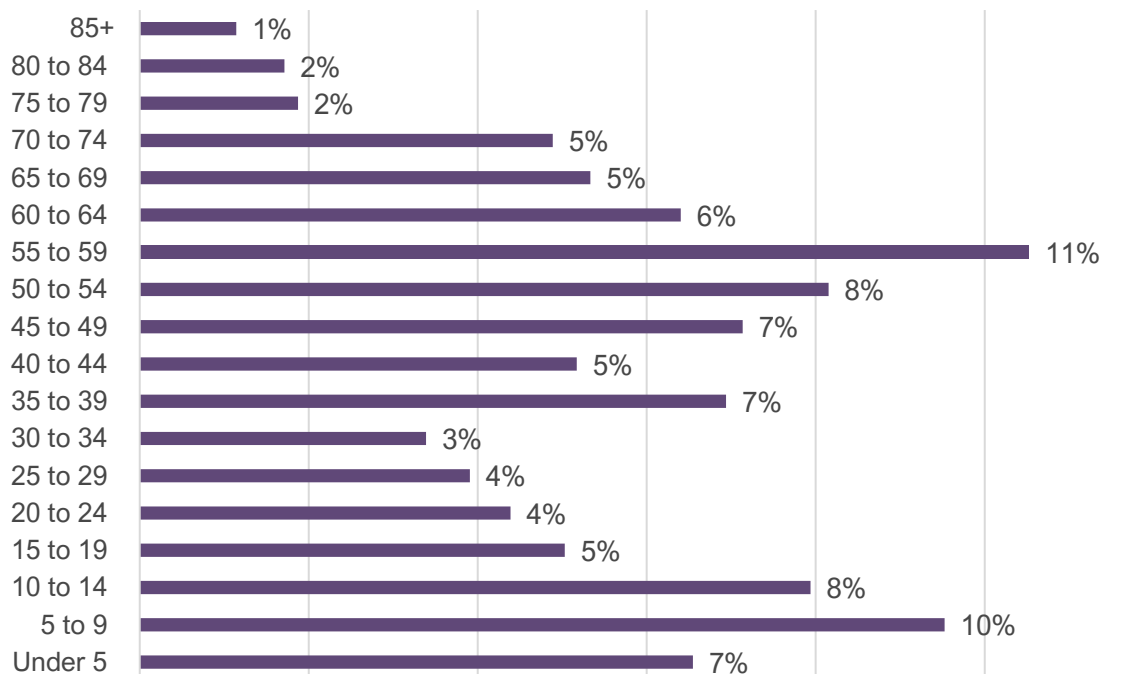
The MPSC reviewed available population data to answer questions such as:

- *What are the actual trends in Bolton's population over the past ten years?*
- *What is Bolton's population projected to be in 2030?*
- *Do the future projections seem consistent with the actual historical data?*

Bolton is a small community that proves to be a comfortable place for families to remain and for older residents to retire. In 2020, the statewide median age in Massachusetts was 39.6 years old, while Bolton's median age was 42.1 years old. Twenty-one percent (21%) of the community is over the age of 60 whereas thirty percent (30%) of the town's population is 19 and under.<sup>3</sup>

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the population in Bolton was 5,665 people.<sup>4</sup> In comparison to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Bolton's population over the last decade has grown at a faster rate – more than double the state's percentage growth.<sup>5</sup> In fact, between 1980 and 2020, Bolton's population grew by 124%, more than doubling in size. The Town now has a population density of 284 people per square mile.

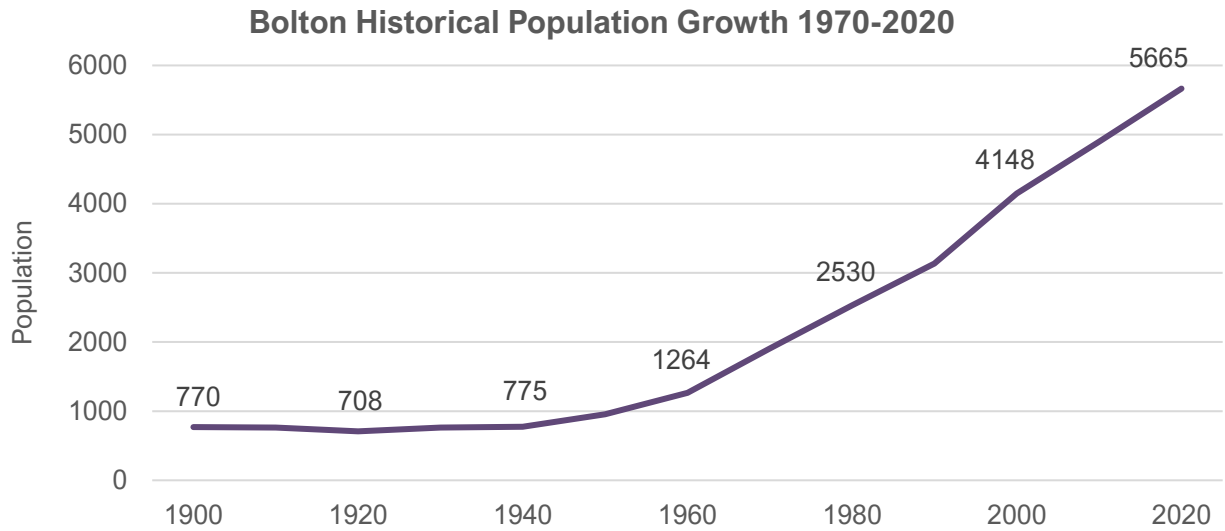
**2020 Census - Bolton Population by Age**



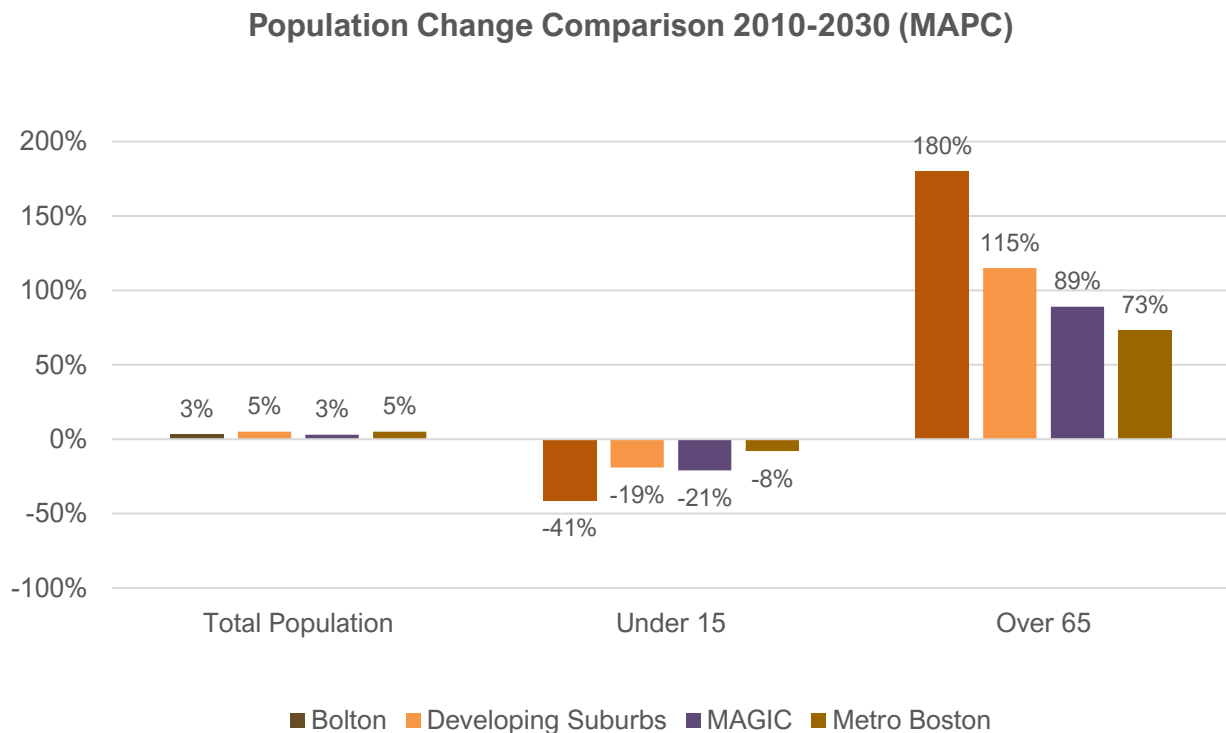
<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census, ACS 5-Year Estimates

<sup>4</sup> US Census Quick Facts

<sup>5</sup> Percent Growth 2010 to 2020 in Bolton was 16% while Massachusetts was 7%.

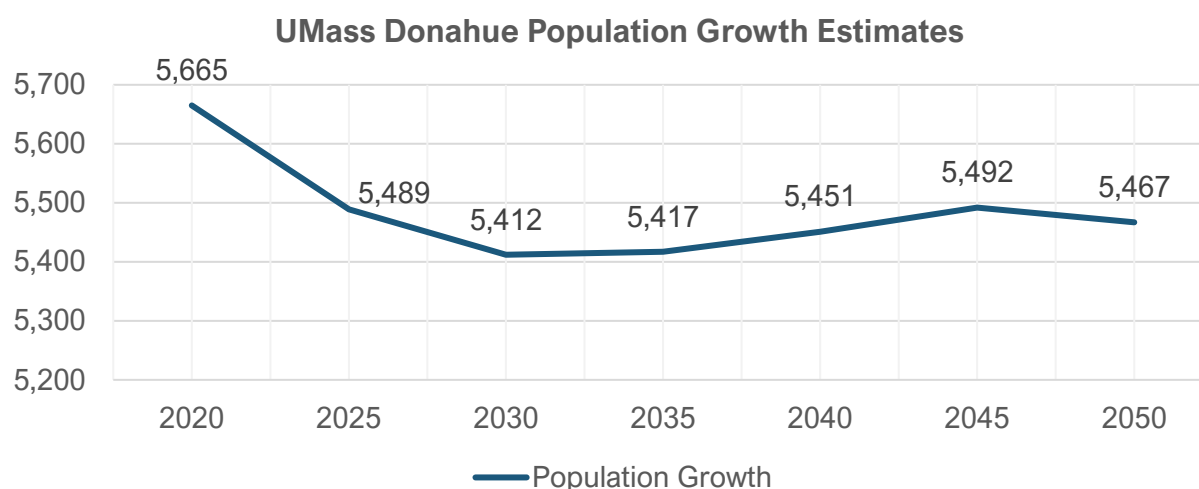


Estimated population growth projections produced by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) identifies that in comparison to other developing suburbs, the MAGIC region, and Metro Boston, Bolton takes the lead for growth, particularly for those ages 65 and over. Addressing the needs of Boltons aging residents will be crucial to the town's prosperity.



The 2014 report completed by MAPC, [\*Population and Housing Demand Projections for Metro Boston\*](#), projected a range of possible future population growth trends to the year 2040. It is estimated that the region's population could grow anywhere between 6.6% (conservative estimate) to 12.6% (strong estimate). The strong scenario predicts that the region will attract and retain more people – especially young adults – than it does today. Additionally, as current single family homeowners age, they are more likely to look to downsize to apartments or condominiums. Under either scenario, the average household size will likely decline 10% by 2040, resulting in the need for approximately 86,000 additional households in the region over the next ten years. This trend can be attributed to more single person households, divorced individuals, and fewer children per family. This may cause suburban communities like Bolton to experience a population decline even if new housing is being offered.

Under either scenario, the number of school aged children in the region appears to have peaked in 2000 and is predicted to continue declining. If Bolton attracts and retains more young adults, then the school population may rebound or hold steady. However, it is anticipated to remain 6% lower in 2040 than in 2010. While the population in Bolton increased by about 16% from 2010 to 2020, the housing stock increased by 14% (244 units). Socio-economic data projections produced by the Commonwealth estimate the population in Bolton to reach 6,665 people by 2040. This population projection estimates 1,000 more individuals than the MAPC “Status Quo” scenario.<sup>6</sup>



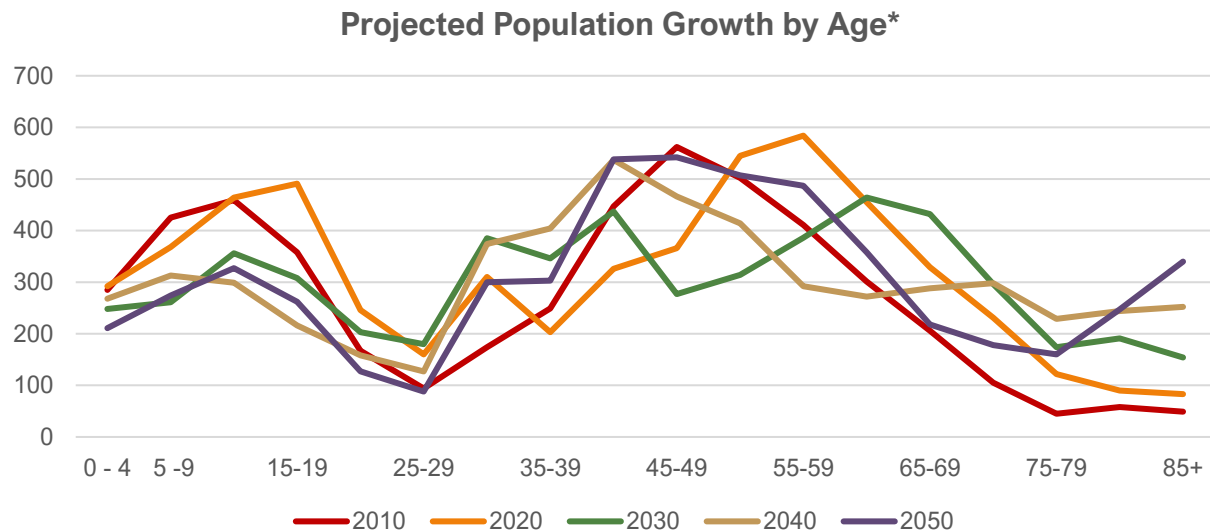
Population growth projections from the UMass Amherst Donahue Institute project the Bolton population staying relatively consistent around 5,500 people up until 2050, likely not to exceed 6,000 people<sup>7</sup>. However, considering approved and potential future

<sup>6</sup> MassDOT Socio-Economic Projections for 2020

<sup>7</sup> UMASS Donahue Institute Population Projections by Age ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010-2019



development in town, population growth may exceed projections. In terms of population growth, the community is ranked forty-third out of 351 municipalities in the Commonwealth.<sup>8</sup>The UMASS Donahue institute population projections estimate that in Bolton the population is aging. Anticipated trends in the next 30 years show a greater population ages 65+ and those middle aged, with a smaller population of children and young adults. Population change, specifically in the context of growth, is something highly anticipated by the Town.

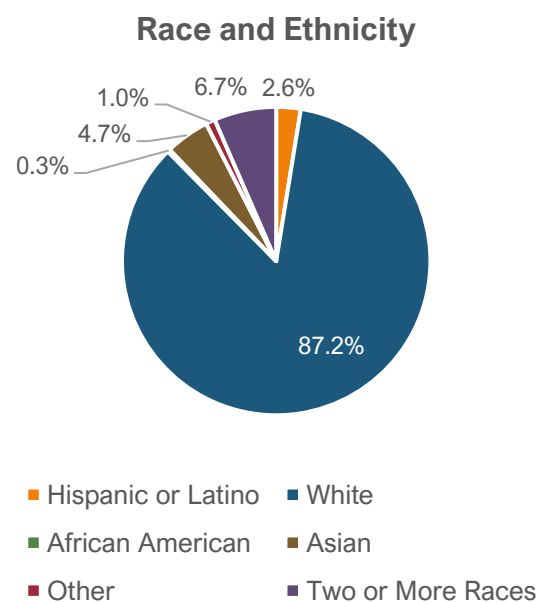


## Race and Ethnicity

In 2010, 93% of Bolton's population identified as white. Since then, greater population diversity has emerged and the percentage of the population that identifies as white in 2020 was 87.2%.<sup>9</sup> Today, 6.7% of the population identify as two or more races and 4.7% identify as Asian.

Bolton is generally less diverse than the rest of Worcester County, which has a white population of 84.4% and a Hispanic or Latino population of 13.1%.

The town has a diverse foreign-born population of 9.7%. Of those foreign-born, 191 people were born in Europe, 156



<sup>8</sup> ClearGov American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

<sup>9</sup> UMass Donahue Institute Municipal Summary 2020

people were born in Asia, 40 people born in Africa, 54 in Latin America, and 9 in North America outside of the United States. Of the languages spoken at home, 90% of the population speak only English, and 494 individuals speak a language other than English. It is estimated that approximately 1.4% of the population speak Spanish, 4.1% speak an Asian language, and 5.6% speak a European language.<sup>10</sup>

## Educational Attainment

Bolton is an education-rich community with 99.4% of the population 25 and over with a high school degree or higher and 72.2% of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher. In total, 39% have achieved a master's degree or higher.<sup>11</sup> Of the population that is school aged, five percent (5%) of those enrolled in school attend private schools and 95% attend public schools.

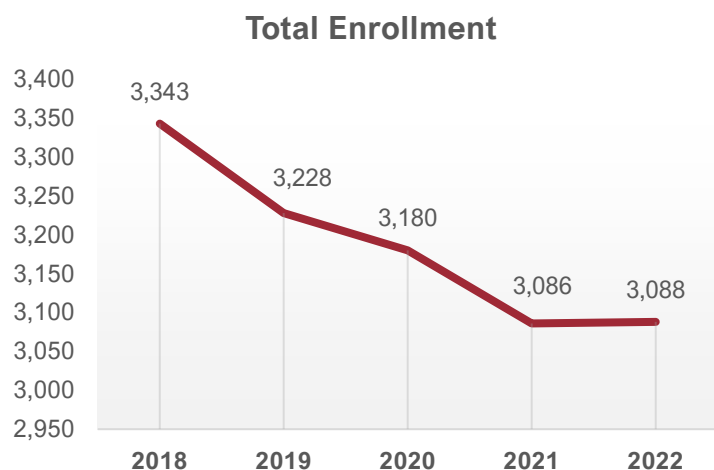
Bolton's school system is the Nashoba Regional School District, a three-town regionalized system containing the Florence Sawyer School for grades Pre-K through eight and the Nashoba Regional High School for ninth through twelfth grades. The High School also offers an optional technical education at the Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical High School.

<b>Table 1. Enrollment by Grade (2022-23)</b>															
	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	SP*
Florence Sawyer School	24	72	82	94	69	82	75	72	95	70	0	0	0	0	0
Nashoba Regional	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	201	207	217	199	7

\*Special Program

Data Source: MA DOE School and District Profiles 2022-2023

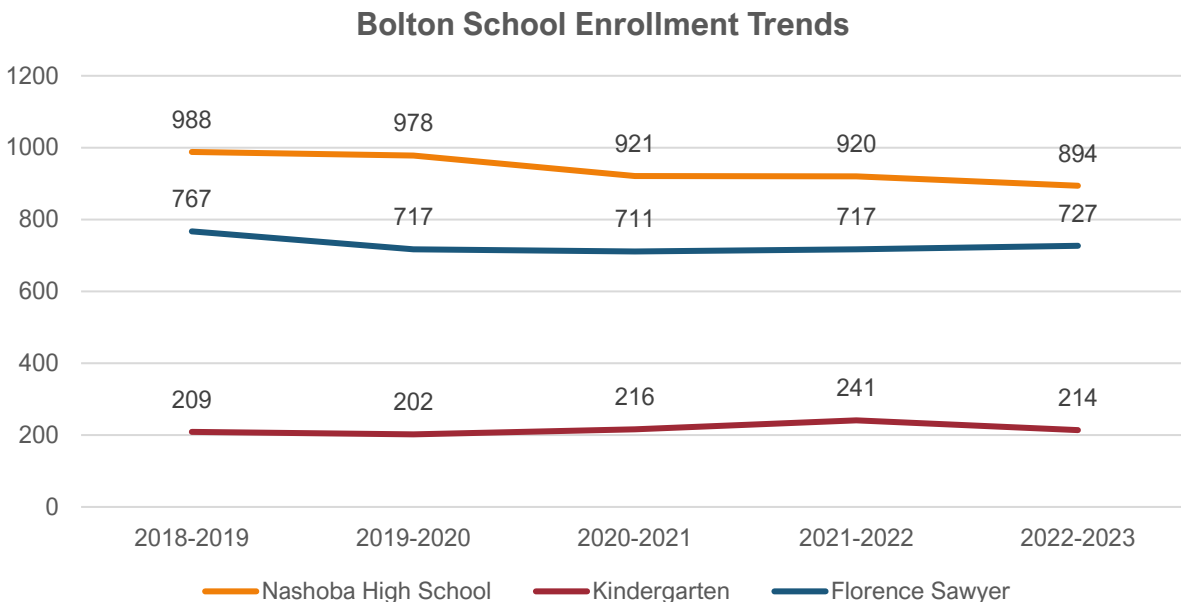
Total enrollment in Bolton schools has declined 7.6% since 2018. In recent years, the Nashoba Regional School District Building Committee (NRSDBC) has started working with the Massachusetts School Building Authority to plan a new high school facility because the current regional high school has been deemed outdated and inadequate in size. At



<sup>10</sup> MAPC Data Common 5-Year Estimate 2017-2021

<sup>11</sup> 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimate Data Profiles

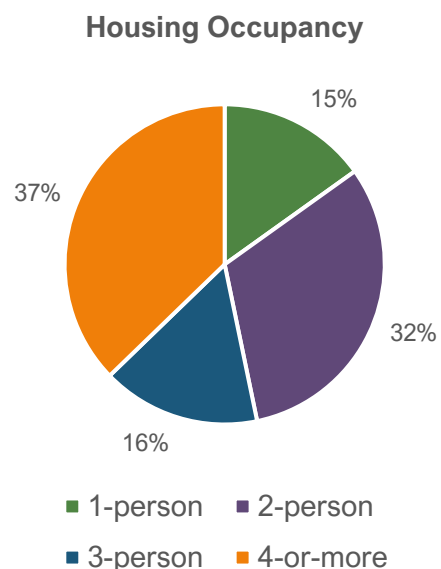
the time of this master plan update, the NRSDBC conducted Phase 4 - Schematic Design and held a Special Town Meeting in September 2023 where the new school was passed by all three Nashoba Regional School District towns.



## Household and Family Composition

According to the 2021 American Community Survey Estimates, there are 1,853 occupied households in Bolton with an average household size of 3 individuals. The total estimated number of family households was 1,499, meaning the town consists of 80% family households.<sup>12</sup> The average family size in town ranges between 3 to 4 individuals.

Bolton is mostly comprised of single-family detached homes (92%) but has a small portion of 2-or-more unit structures (8%). Housing tenure in Bolton is primarily owner-occupied housing units at 94%, while 6% of units are renter occupied. About 80% of households are married couples, 14% are single individuals, and 8% are seniors who live alone.<sup>13</sup> Houses in Bolton predominantly have 4 or more bedrooms (58%), followed by houses with 2 or 3 bedrooms (39%) and 1 bedroom (2.5%).<sup>14</sup>



<sup>12</sup> ACS 5-Year Estimate Data Profiles

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

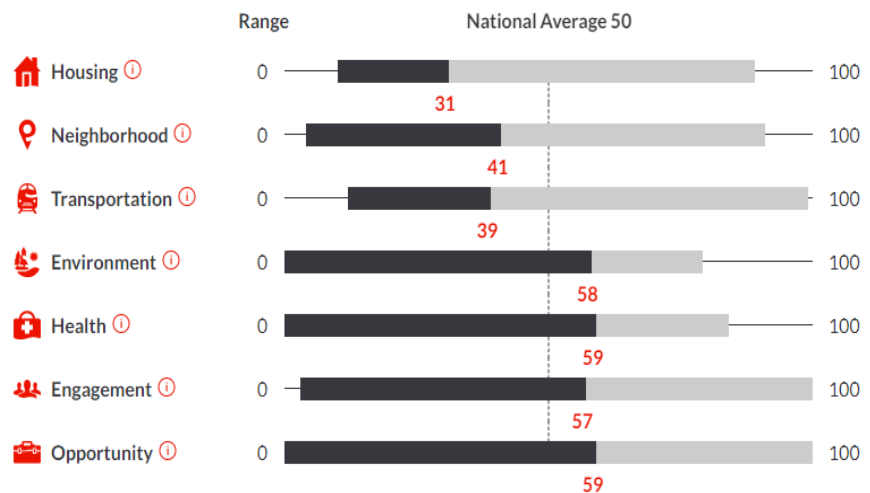
Recently, a rental housing development was approved for 580 Main Street. The housing complex will consist of 229 luxury market rate units that are a mix of one, two and three bedrooms. One-fourth of the apartments will be rented out at affordable rates and will contribute to the Town's overall affordable housing inventory. These units will be reserved for those making less than 80% of the Area Median Income.

## Income and Workforce

Bolton is a wealthy community and more than 70% of residents earn more than \$100,000 annually. The town's annual median household income is \$167,708, which is 117% greater than the annual median income for Worcester County at \$77,155 and is 405 greater than the Middlesex County at \$111,790. About 38% of the population in Bolton makes an annual income of \$200,000 or more. Only about 2.4% of the Bolton population is identified as living in poverty which is lower than Worcester County (10%).

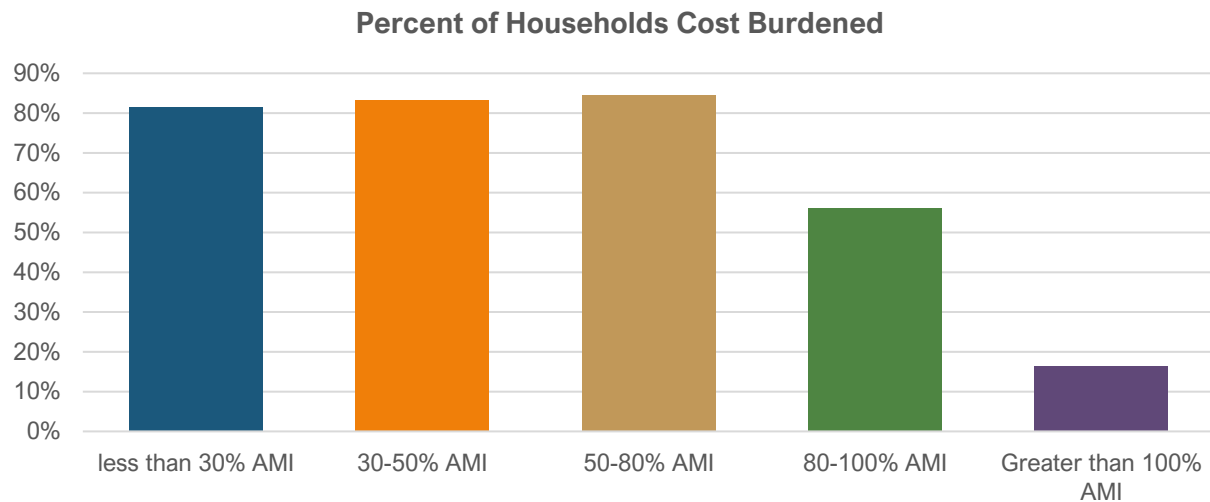
Many residents in the town have expressed that Bolton is becoming too expensive for them to remain in their homes during retirement. Low-income households are defined as those that fall below the Area Median Income (AM). According to MAPC's Housing MA database, in Bolton 8.2% of households qualify as

low income (below 30% AMI), 7.6% qualify as very low income (below 60% AMI), and 4.1% qualify as extremely low income (below 80% AMI). Overall, almost 20% of households can qualify for federal and state affordable housing programs. Households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing can be considered "cost burdened." Statewide, 47% of renter households and 31% of owner households are cost burdened, whereas in Bolton, 67% of renter households and 30% of owner households are cost burdened. Approximately 6% of the population in Bolton rents, comprising a small number of residents. Of the full-time town employees working in Bolton, approximately 26% live in the town.



In Bolton, 54% of elderly family households are cost burdened and 74% of non-elderly, non-family households are cost burdened. AARP has assigned the town an overall livability score of 49 which is on par with the national average. Bolton scored low for

housing and transportation, but high for opportunity, engagement, health, and environment.<sup>15</sup>



Much of Bolton's civilian working population age 16 years and over are employed in the professional, scientific, management, and administrative and waste management services (25%). About 19% are employed in educational services, health care, and social assistance, and 15% are employed in manufacturing.<sup>16</sup>

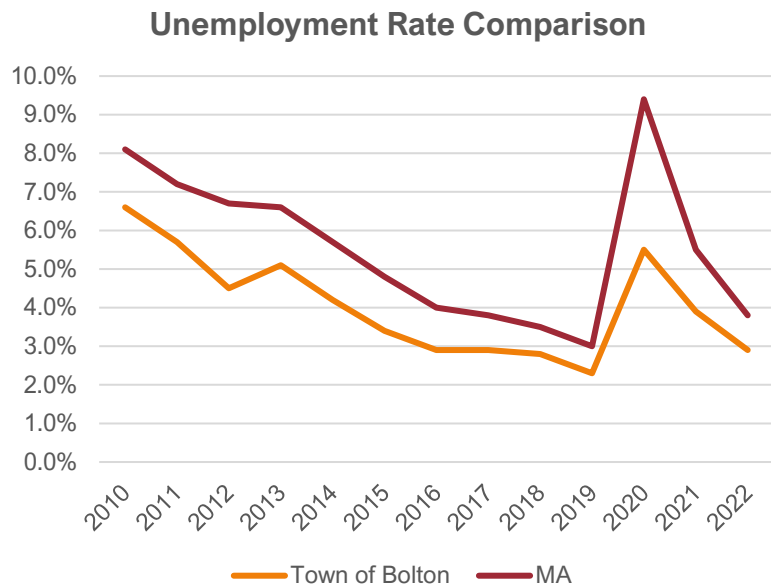
**Table 2. Employment by Industry (ACS 5-Year Estimates)**

INDUSTRY	INDIVIDUALS EMPLOYED
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	12
Construction	114
Manufacturing	495
Wholesale trade	105
Retail trade	263
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	94
Information	106
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	148
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, waste management	701
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	556
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services	102
Other services	45
Public administration	59

<sup>15</sup> AARP Livable Communities Rating

<sup>16</sup> American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The unemployment rate for Bolton in 2020, when initial Master Planning efforts began, was 5.5%, which is unusually high, but can be tied to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the rate has since declined to 2% in May 2023, and is slightly lower than the statewide unemployment average of 2.8%.<sup>17</sup>



#### IV. COMMUNITY ASSETS

The Town of Bolton is historically an agricultural community, heavily influenced by local opportunities presented from natural resources, forests, and rich soil. Bolton lacked industrial potential due to the minimal presence of major waterways. However, the presence of rich forests and geological lime deposits provided other prospects. Today, the town is primarily residential and maintains a desire to keep the current small-town feel. There is a shared sentiment around town in support of the preservation of recreational areas and natural resources. This is emphasized by the many organizations that work to provide and enhance such opportunities: Conservation Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission and associated sports organizations, Bolton Conservation Trust, Bolton Historical Society, and the Trails Committee.

Approximately 20% of the town consists of recreation land, agricultural/horticultural land, and forestry/Chapter 61 land. This is also known as the Forestland Taxation Act, a Commonwealth program that offers tax relief in exchange for the restriction of development on forestland. Agricultural land under Chapter 61A is important to the viability and sustainability of Bolton's farms and orchards. However, Chapter 61 is a ten year management cycle and participating land is withdrawn after this time period unless a new Chapter 61 forest management plan is established.

As the town faces increasing development pressure due to growth, there is a persistent desire to maintain the community's character throughout potential future development by emphasizing the protection of open space. About 89% of the town remains undeveloped, or vacant untouched land. This can be seen while traveling through town

<sup>17</sup> Statista Massachusetts Unemployment Rates 1992 to 2022



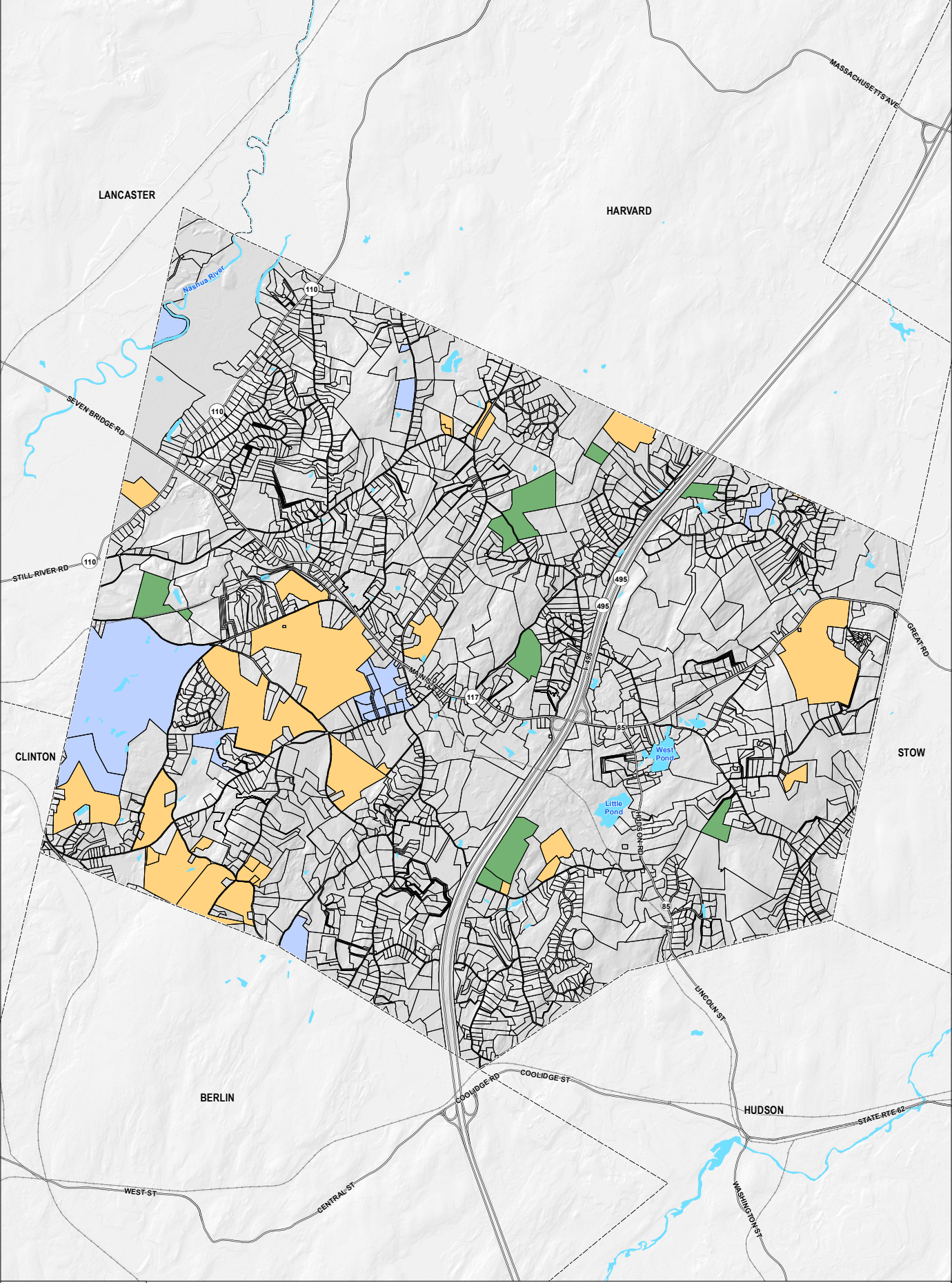
in the fields, forests, wetlands, and other defining landscape. Sloping hills and valleys depict a typical New England countryside, with a majority of the town's elevation falling between 300 and 500 feet. More prominent hills in town are the Vaughn Hills and Wattaquaddock Hill which are the highest points between Mount Wachusett and Boston. The Shrewsbury Ridge runs from the southwest to northeast of town which defines the Nashua and Sudbury Assabet Concord (SuAsCo) watersheds.

Major roads in town have welcomed the gradual development of open space and former farmland. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Town introduced zoning to manage subdivisions while protecting open space, and in 1989, the Farmland and Open Space Development (FOSPRD) bylaw went into effect.



*Figure 3. Old Bay Road*



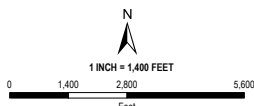


**LEGEND**

- Major Roads
- Railroad
- Municipal Boundary
- MADEP Open Water
- Agricultural/Horticultural
- Forestry
- Recreational

**BOLTON MASTER PLAN**

**LAND ENROLLED IN  
CHAPTER 61 PROGRAMS**



DATA SOURCE: MassGIS, Town of Bolton, BSC Group, Inc.

## Local Recreation and Conservation Stewardship



The Conservation Commission was established in 1967. It has three primary responsibilities: open space protection, the administration of the Wetlands Protection Act and the town's wetlands bylaw and advising other governmental bodies. The Commission manages over 2,000 acres of Town-owned conservation land and oversees applications for Agricultural Preservation Restrictions and Conservation Restrictions on private property.

The Parks and Recreation Commission manages the use of town parks and recreational facilities. They have a focus on maintaining, restoring, and repairing their current properties and infrastructure.



The Bolton Conservation Trust is a non-governmental, independent volunteer organization whose work complements that of the Conservation Commission. The Trust works to preserve and improve the environment, conserve, and maintain land, and actively engage the community while respecting Bolton's heritage. Donations to the Trust have helped to preserve land in town through Agricultural Preservation Restrictions, which have been applied to land at the Nashoba Valley Winery and the Schartner, Nicewicz, and Schultz farms (about 300 acres of farmland). The Trust also offer popular environmental education programs like the Tom Denney Nature Camp and the Four Winds Nature Program.



The Bolton Trails Committee is comprised of volunteers and was re-established in 2014. The Committee is associated with the Conservation Commission and the Conservation Trust. Their work is centered around creating, marking, and maintaining recreational trails for community members in town.

## Farms and Agricultural Resources

Bolton is a 'Right to Farm' community which remains important as the number of farms in Massachusetts continues to decline. This is a bylaw that encourages agricultural practices by right and reduces conflict for a landowner to participate in these activities. The total amount of farmland decreased from 577,637 acres in 1997 to 491,653 acres in 2017.<sup>18</sup> In the Bolton Reconnaissance Report (2006), farms are identified as agricultural landscapes that should be prioritized for preservation.

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<sup>18</sup> UMASS Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment



The town zoning has a farmland and open space planned residential development (FOSPRD) bylaw that permits farmland and open space to be developed for residential use through a special permit. The purpose of the bylaw is to preserve agriculture and open space, preserve the rural and historic character of Bolton, and to provide landowners an alternative to traditional subdivisions. It allows residential units to be developed in a way that preserves the town's character. This is accomplished by requiring a minimum of 33% of the land to be preserved as farmland or open space when developing through this bylaw.



*Figure 4. Bolton Orchards*

Bolton's major agricultural industry consists of six (6) commercial orchards that total 550 acres. As a 'right to farm' community, farmlands are high priority locations for preservation. Nicewicz and Schartner Farms are protected under Agricultural Preservation Restrictions, while Bolton Spring Farm, Bolton Orchards, Townsend Horse Farm, Lord Farm, Wilson Farm, and many other farms remain under 61A. Land protected under Chapter 61 is not perpetually under protection and every ten years a forest management plan may be renewed. Other considerations should be made to perpetually preserve priority land in town.

Many of the farms are still active today, including Bolton Spring Farm, a popular orchard on Main Street. Originating as a dairy farm in the early 1800s, it was discovered that the land has rich soil suitable for fruit and vegetable growing. Part of the Freedom's Way National Heritage Area, this farm is an example of the agricultural integrity that persists in town. Several agricultural heritage landscapes are identified in the Bolton Reconnaissance Report.

## Zoning Districts

Current zoning preserves the small-town rural character by maintaining low housing density. The minimum lot area in the residential and agricultural districts is 80,000 square feet with a minimum frontage of 200 feet. Zoning districts include:

**R - Residential:** for single-family residential use.

**B - Business:** for retail and service establishments where business is conducted wholly within the closed building or partially outside a building.

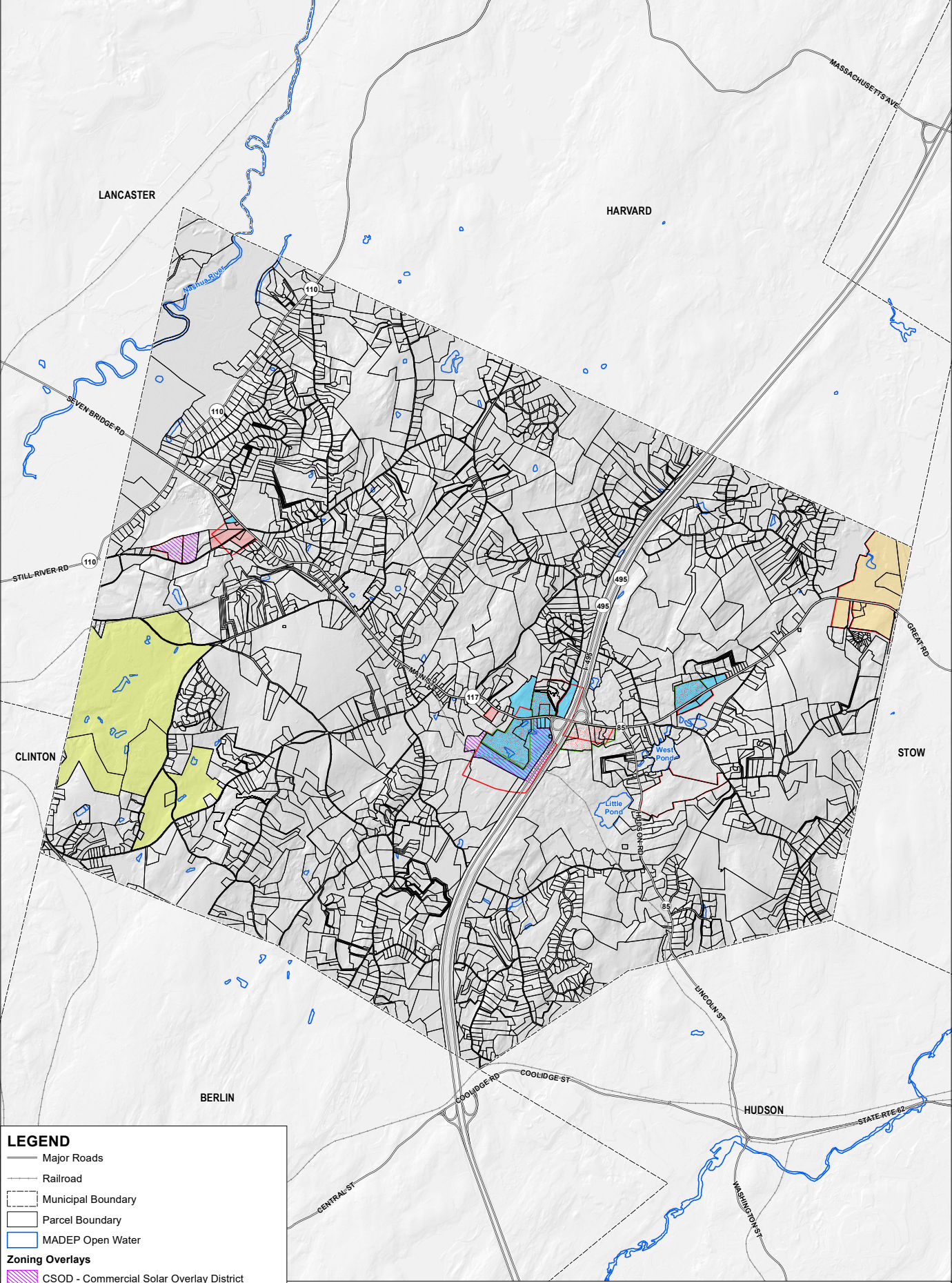
**LB - Limited Business:** for retail and service establishments subject to special permit as required.

**IND - Industrial:** for storage areas, office buildings, research and development laboratories, light manufacturing industries and compatible allied uses. Located to the eastern corner of town, neighboring Stow.

**LRBD - Limited Recreation Business District:** intended to promote recreational businesses, to conserve and secure the public health and safety, to facilitate the adequate provision of water and water supply, aquifers, and recharge areas, and to protect natural and landscapes conditions for other use. Located to the western corner of town, neighboring Clinton and Lancaster.

**WCOD - Wireless Communication Overlay District:** to establish predictable and balanced regulations for the siting of wireless communication equipment for the growth of wireless communication systems while protecting the public against adverse impacts upon the Town's aesthetic resources and the public welfare.

**MVOD - Mixed Use Village Overlay District:** allows for greater design flexibility and creativity in order to develop retail/commercial space along with a diversity of housing types that are compatible with the existing surrounding uses and that are designed to preserve the community's unique rural and historical character.



**LEGEND**

- Major Roads
- Railroad
- Municipal Boundary
- Parcel Boundary
- MADEP Open Water

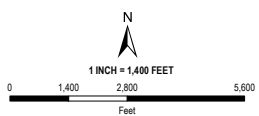
**Zoning Overlays**

- CSOD - Commercial Solar Overlay District
- MVOD - Mixed Use Village Overlay District
- WCOD - Wireless Communication Overlay District

**Zoning Districts**

- B - Business
- LB - Limited Business
- IND - Industrial
- LRBD - Limited Recreation Business District

**BOLTON MASTER PLAN  
ZONING MAP**



DATA SOURCE: MassGIS, Town of Bolton, BSC Group, Inc.



## **2006 Master Plan Goals – Natural and Cultural Resources**

- Create Local Historic Districts
- Nominate structures to state and national historic register
- Protect a future water source site at Bolton Flats
- Maintain Bolton's scenic roads

The 2006 Master Plan recommended that Bolton create a local historic district in the Town Center area, as over two-thirds of the original thirty (30) structures built in 1831 still remain. Presently, the area is a National Register Historic District, however, this does not protect against demolition. An attempt to establish a local historic district failed in 2013, after a draft article was written and withdrawn before town meeting. This has not seen any further efforts. Over 100 other resources and structures have been added to the State and National Historic District since.

It was also recommended in 2006 that the town select a future water source site at the Bolton Flats. As the town is currently serviced by private wells, finding access to a reliable water resource would guarantee future generations clean, accessible water. In 2017, a water resources subcommittee was established and conducted a survey to gauge local awareness of water issues. The committee conducted a local survey and produced a report on their findings in 2018.

A third recommendation was to maintain Bolton's scenic roads. Forty-one (41) of the roads in Bolton are listed under the Scenic Roads Bylaw which allows the town to preserve qualities and character of the town and limits the removal or cutting of trees and deconstructing stone walls without planning board approval. Further progress is currently underway to bolster a tree replacement program that would plant new salt tolerant trees in place of old trees that have been removed due to disease or distress.

## **Landscape, Topography, Soils**

Bolton is largely forested and contains many natural resources critical to water management, storm damage prevention, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitats.<sup>19</sup> A [study focusing on the Apple Country Communities](#) (Devens, Harvard and Bolton) identified challenges that the communities are likely to face regarding climate change, biodiversity loss, and regional development. The report offers nature-based solutions which will be critical to consider throughout this Master Plan.

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<sup>19</sup> Apple Country Natural Climate Solutions

Bolton's natural landscape is defined by wet and dry flats and sloping hills. The ridges and hillsides are made up of well-drained soils and sandy loams. Wetlands tend to be very poorly draining soil with more organic matter. It is estimated that the current soil organic carbon stock in town is about 1.274 million tons and is primarily held in forest and wetland soils.

There are approximately 2,005 acres of wetlands (16% of total land), 6,812 acres of forest (53%), and 1,114 acres of landscape land. Wetlands are comprised of streams, rivers, swamps, marshes, vernal pools, and other water bodies. The report suggests that targeting more vulnerable soils for regeneration and smarter land management will decrease vulnerability and improve resilience to climate change.

Ecological integrity is defined as the ability of an area to support biodiversity and the ecosystem processes necessary to sustain biodiversity over time. Within Bolton the areas of high ecological integrity are forested land, wetlands, and shrublands. Areas with lower resiliency scores are developed land, roads, and neighborhoods.

The Apple Country report states that soil health varies as a priority among Bolton farmers and growers. For example, Schultz Farm is a 105-acre farm that focuses on soil improvement practices and carbon sequestration. Soil tested from this site contained high levels of organic matter. Encouraging practices such as reduced tilling, cover cropping, and adding organic soil amendments can encourage other farmers to adopt these practices and increase capacity for resiliency on a local level.

Bolton is a designated Green Community by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources which makes the town eligible to receive grant funding to pursue energy efficient initiatives, renewable energy, and innovative projects that aid in reducing the towns energy costs and emissions.

## **Water Resources and Wetlands**

Two watersheds comprise the water resources in Bolton, the Nashua and SuAsCo (Sudbury, Assabet and Concord) Watersheds. Three major streams flow through town, the Great Brook, Danforth Brook, and Still River. The Great Brook and Danforth Brook flow to the southeast and join the Assabet River. These brooks are formed by tributary streams, Hog Swamp, and Sunk Meadow, and Mill Brook. The Danforth Brook is

### **Why is soil important?**

Carbon in soil is important because it provides the necessary nutrients to achieve soil health. When soil is healthy and has more organic matter it is resilient and can withstand hydrological processes like erosion, aeration, runoff, infiltration rates, and water holding capacity. (Apple County Natural Climate Solutions Project)

significant in size and covers 21 percent of the land surface in southern Bolton. The Still River is formed by smaller streams that flow down the Vaughn Hills Wattaquadock before finally meeting the Nashua River in the northwest corner of town.

Great Brook, Forbush Mill, and Branch Still River are frequently used for recreational fishing. While larger water resources like the Nashua and Still Rivers are popular for canoeing and hunting in the Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area. The West Pond and Little Pond are the most significant ponds in town, while other conservation and recreation areas contain smaller water bodies. Several water bodies within the town are characterized by their past as millponds and farm ponds but are recognized today by their shallow depressions that fill with water seasonally, hosting vernal pool habitats.

The West Pond, located southeast of the intersection of Rts. 85 and 117, is identified in the state list of Great Ponds, and is used for ice skating and fishing. The land around Little Pond is owned by the Algonquin Council Boy Scouts of America, who leases a section to the Town of Bolton for the town beach. Persons Park on Little Pond was a 5.5-acre gift to the town which offers a kayak launch and swimming. Bowers Springs is used by residents in Bolton and Harvard for passive recreation, which excludes swimming, and is the site of the Bolton Conservation Trust Tom Denney Nature Camp. Smaller ponds at Fyfeshire and Welch Pond are primarily natural habitats. There are 15 designated fire ponds, 15 additional natural ponds in town, and 11 cisterns total.

The Nashua River and its tributary, the Still River, are the two largest waterways in Bolton. These extensive waterways have bordering marsh and wetlands, specifically toward the west where the Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area is. The Bowers Brook and Cold Spring Brook serve as a hydrologic corridor between Bolton, Harvard, and Devens and contribute to a significant number of wetland areas throughout the Apple Country region.

Wetlands in Bolton are vital to water supply, filtration, flood control, storm damage prevention, pollution prevention and providing wildlife habitat. Forested wetlands and swamps are the dominant type of wetland in Bolton, spanning 1,504 acres. As noted in the 2017 Open Space Plan, forested wetlands primarily consist of red maples, such as Hog Swamp and Sunk Meadow. Bolton has 151 potential vernal pools, and 73 vernal pools are officially certified by the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Bolton's Wetlands Bylaw conserves and protects these valuable resource areas, resource interests, and natural resource services.

## Critical Natural Habitats

The Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) is organized by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. It identifies priority habitats based on the known geographical extent of habitat for all state-listed rare species, both plants and animals, and is codified under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act.<sup>20</sup> Estimated habitats are also protected and are defined by the geographical extent of habitats of state-listed rare wetlands and wildlife. These protections require additional review when pursuing projects within the resource area.

In Bolton, there are several areas designated as NHESP Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife and Priority Habitats of Rare Species. See the Natural Resources Map to view the protected areas. The Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area in the northwest corner of town is part of the Nashua River watershed. Another area is located centrally just north of Route 117 and west of I-495, consisting of the Philben Land Conservation. A third area is partially comprised of McGourty Conservation Area and Rocky-Dundee Conservation Area, between Randall Road and West Berlin Road. A fourth area surrounds the residential development of Spectacle Hill and includes wetlands from Mill Brook and Danforth Brook. A protection area is on the eastern side of town, consisting of the Phillips Conservation Area, Great Brook Conservation, and Rattlesnake Hill. Lastly, in the Town's most eastern corner at the border of Bolton, Harvard, and Stow a small area of the much larger Delaney Pond area is a NHESP priority habitat of rare species.

The Commonwealth's [BioMap2 tool](#) combines more than 40 years of rare species and natural records from MassWildlife as well as climate resilience data from the Nature Conservancy. Spatial data identifies fish and wildlife habitats and ecosystems that are central to the MA State Wildlife Action plan. The primary purpose of the tool is to better help communities understand biodiversity distribution and threats to those valuable resources. A significant amount of land in Bolton is identified on the BioMap2 as core habitat and critical natural landscape land. See figure 1 to view the area.

A core habitat is an area that has been identified as critical for the long-term persistence of rare species, exemplary natural communities, and resilient ecosystems. Within Bolton, there are 14 core habitat areas totaling 3,618.48 acres.

A critical natural landscape is an area that has been identified as minimally impacted by development, as well as buffers to core habitats and coastal areas. Within the town there

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<sup>20</sup> Mass.gov Regulatory Maps: Priority and Estimated Habitats

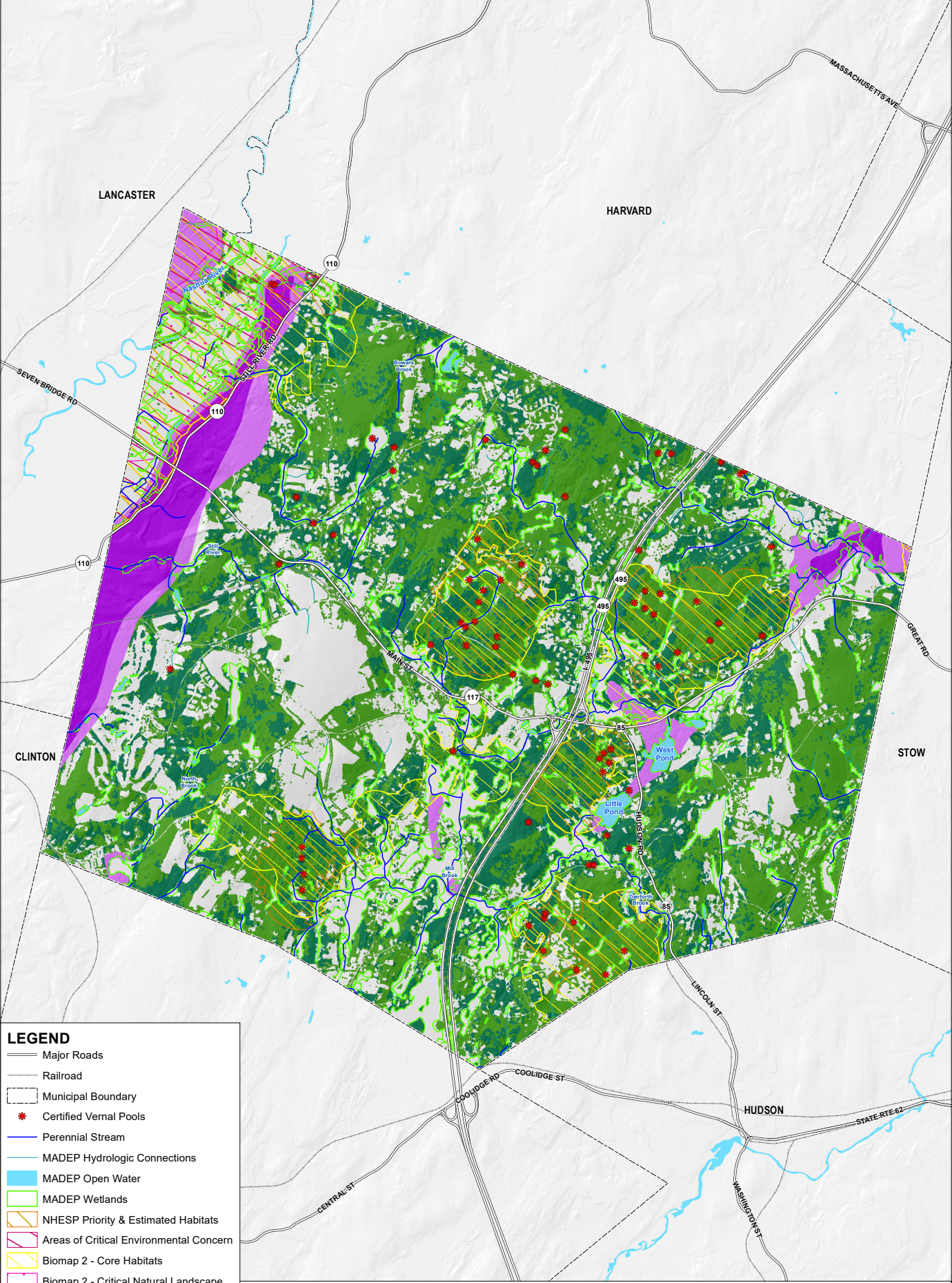
are 8 critical natural landscape area totaling approximately 2,427.71 acres.<sup>21</sup> See table 1. below to view a breakdown of the types of BioMap land that exists in Bolton.

<b>Table 3. Bolton, MA BioMap Summary Report</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Area (acres)</b>
Core Habitat	14	3,618.48
Critical Natural Landscape	8	2,427.71
Aquatic Core	8	939.33
Aquatic Core Buffer	4	753.77
Wetland Core	16	353.78
Wetland Core Buffer	3	220.02
Priority Natural Communities Core	2	14.89
Vernal Pool Core	6	1,838.02
Forest Core	0	0
Rare Species Core	9	2,909.70
Tern Foraging Habitat	0	0
Coastal Adaptation Areas	0	0
Landscape Blocks	0	0
Local Aquatic Habitats	2	98.37
Local Aquatic Habitats Buffer	4	386.14
Local Wetlands	17	313.88
Local Wetlands Buffer	31	435.60
Local Landscapes	20	3,406.04
Local Rare Species	14	497.99
Local Vernal Pools	0	0
Regional Rare Species	1	712.62
Regional Connectivity	0	0

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<sup>21</sup> BioMap Home





**LEGEND**

- Major Roads
- Railroad
- Municipal Boundary
- Certified Vernal Pools
- Perennial Stream
- MADEP Hydrologic Connections
- MADEP Open Water
- MADEP Wetlands
- NHESP Priority & Estimated Habitats
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Biomap 2 - Core Habitats
- Biomap 2 - Critical Natural Landscape

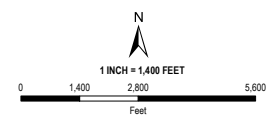
**Aquifers**

- High Yield
- Medium Yield
- Low Yield

**Land Cover-Land Use (2016)**

- Deciduous Forest
- Evergreen Forest

**BOLTON MASTER PLAN  
MAP OF NATURAL RESOURCES**





## **Forestry and Vegetation**

Typical to the Northeast and New England region, Bolton forests are characterized by a mix of deciduous trees, oak-pine-beech forest, with secondary forest lands consisting of white pine, red and black oak, hemlock, white and gray birch, and red sugar maples. The shade adapted species of trees that are common in Bolton are likely over 30 to 40 years old, and many forested areas are in second or third growth phases and approaching maturity. Forest areas with less drainage contain water-adapted species such as red maples, ash, elms, cedars, and numerous types of undergrowth. Many significant woodland areas are protected in perpetuity through state or local ownership. The town's Planning Board and Conservation Commission are working with developers to limit where tree cutting occurs, and the town also enforces a Scenic Roads Bylaw that protects shade trees. Forty-two roads are listed under the bylaw by the jurisdiction of the Town's tree warden.

Several hundred species of wildflowers and herbaceous plants have been documented. Residents can explore local biodiversity and labelled wildflowers on the Bob Horton Trail at the Rattlesnake Conservation Area. Bolton contains the Cranberry Meadow, Welch Pond, and Gould Conservation Area, each supporting bog vegetation. These protected areas are low maintenance and require very little management. Different areas of town contain unique vegetation, native species, and wildflowers indicating varying ecological conditions. There are two rare orchid species recorded in the MA Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, the Arethusa, and Autumn Coralroot.

The Bolton Conservation Commission has identified the top invasive species in town as Autumn Olive, Garlic Mustard, Glossy Buckthorn, Oriental Bittersweet, and Japanese Knotweed.

## **Fisheries and Wildlife**

Bolton is rich in natural history and biodiversity. Hundreds of acres of floodplains are home to a wide variety of mammals and rare birds. Many of the streams flowing through town are popular trout waters. The Still River wetlands and floodplain of the Bolton Flats are home to the Blanding's Turtle, American bittern, least bittern and pied-billed grebe, all species listed on the MA Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program.

The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife stocks the Great Brook and Danforth Brook with brown trout during the springtime. A significant corridor for wildlife and fish mobility is also the Still River and in the Bolton Flats Wildlife Area, deemed the second most important stopover for migratory fowl in Massachusetts. Other important wildlife corridors are Vaughn Hills/Bower Springs and the Rattlesnake Hill area.

In total, there are fifteen listed rare animal and plant species in Bolton including birds, reptiles, vascular plants, and beetles. There are multiple areas of land in town that are identified in the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) which protects any activities on the land through a regulatory process.

## **Historical and Cultural Resources**

The Town of Bolton's historic resources span three time periods. Unique landforms left by glacial action during the ice age have influenced how human settlement patterns have evolved and land use. Landscapes used by Native Americans during 10,000 years of existence provide an opportunity to explore a time period that has not been sufficiently explored. Today, there are many structures and sites that remain from 350 years of European settlement.<sup>22</sup>

### **Bolton Historical Commission**

Bolton has a town Historical Commission that acts as a local representative for the Massachusetts Historical Commission and maintains the goal of preserving Bolton's historical places. As tasked by the Commonwealth, they work toward this goal by planning and implementing programs for the identification, evaluation, and protection of these resources. The Bolton Historical Society is a non-profit charitable organization that works to archive a collective historical memory of the town and community.

In 2006, Bolton completed a Reconnaissance Report through the Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Program. Heritage landscapes are created by human interaction with the land and natural environment. They have a defining impact on the community and provide a sense of place. A primary goal outlined in the 2006 Master Plan is to create a local historic district in the town center area.

To protect historically significant resources in the community, the Town adopted a Demolition Delay Bylaw in 2012. Many surrounding towns have also adopted similar protective measures, including Maynard, Harvard, and Acton. The process prompts a series of local reviews to determine if a building is significantly contributing to the cultural, political, economic, social, or architectural history of the town, state, or country.

### **MHC and National Historical Inventory**

According to the Massachusetts Historical Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) there are 26 Historic Areas, 424 historic buildings, 7 burial grounds, 44 objects, and 104 structures. There are also sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as shown in Table 2.

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<sup>22</sup> BMPSC "Cultural and Historical Resources Teach In"

<b>Table 4. National Register of Historic Places</b>	
<b>Location</b>	<b>Address</b>
Bolton Center Historic District	Roughly along Main Street/Harvard Road/ I-495
Pan Burying Ground	477 Main St.
Pan Historic District	Main St., Annie Moore, Burnham, Hudson & Long Hill Rds.
Whitcomb Inn and Farm	43 Old Sugar Road

In 1998, the Town produced a Preservation Plan to develop a strategy to preserve historic resources. In the plan, three time periods are identified for producing the town's primary resources: unique landforms from the ice age; the Nashaway Tribe settlements; and 300 years of European Settlement.

#### Bolton Center Historic District

The town's first meetinghouse was established nearby in 1740, sparking institutional and commercial life in Bolton. A 73-acre area designated as the Bolton Center Historic District establishes the significance of the area and the important resources that define it, including the 1850s town hall, 19<sup>th</sup> Century schoolhouses, 20<sup>th</sup> Century public library, and historic homes. The district also reflects Bolton's agricultural past and a major east-west route used to transport goods. The federal and Greek revival architecture transports visitors back in time and showcases homes from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

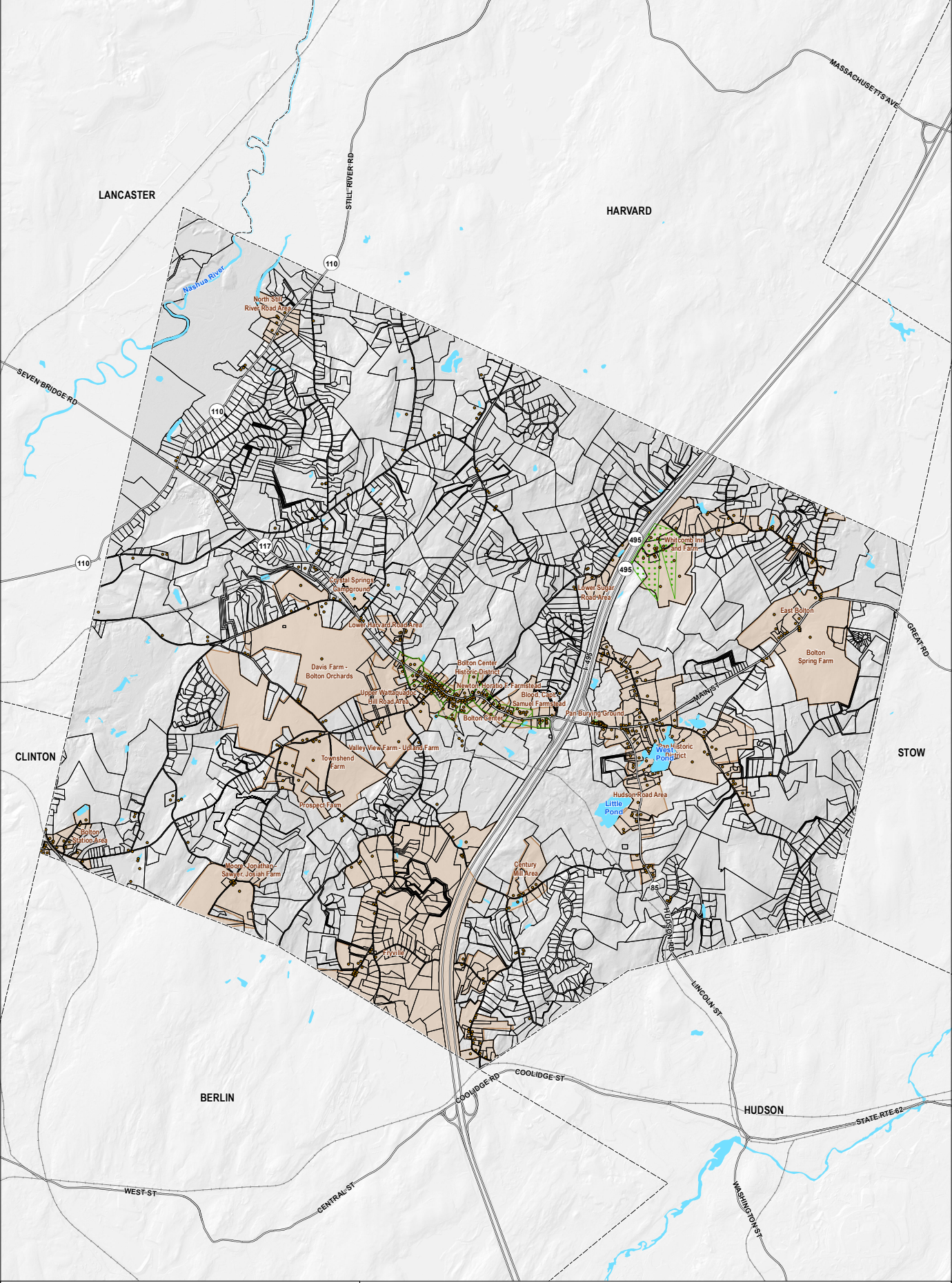
#### Bolton Public Library

The Town Library originally began in the Selectman's Room at Town Hall in 1859 with only a few books. A \$10,000 donation from Misses Emma and Anna Whitney allowed the Town to pursue and build a dedicated library in 1904 at 738 Main Street, where it exists today.<sup>23</sup> The building itself is rooted in local history and constructed with Bolton fieldstone by mason Aden B. Allen. In 2010, the library expanded to its present size and contains over 50,000 resources.

The Friends of the Bolton Public Library was founded in 1994 to raise funds for improving library programs. One million dollars (\$1,000,000) in contributions have helped to build and renovate the new expanded library.

The renovated library features a children's room, young adult area, local history room, a periodicals reading room, and study areas.

<sup>23</sup> Freedoms Way National Heritage Area



**LEGEND**

MHC Historic Point	MADEP Open Water
MHC Historic Area*	Cultural Resource Site Point
Major Roads	Cultural Resource District Polygon
Railroad	Cultural Resource Building Polygon
Municipal Boundary	
Parcel Boundary	

**BOLTON MASTER PLAN  
MACRIS & NATIONAL REGISTER  
OF HISTORIC PLACES MAP**

N

1 INCH = 1,400 FEET

0 1,400 2,800 5,600

Feet



DATA SOURCE: MassGIS, Town of Bolton, BSC Group, Inc.



## V. STATE AND FEDERAL PROTECTED LAND

**Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area:** The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife manages the Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area (WMA) which is a combination of open water, Nashua River, and what is described by MassWildlife as a High-Terrace Floodplain Forest accompanied by a Low-Energy Riverbank which extends through marsh habitat. This property also borders Lancaster and Harvard. The natural resources throughout Bolton Flats provide habitat preferred by various turtle species (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2017). Approximately 642 acres are in Bolton and actively used for hunting.

**Delaney Wildlife Management Area:** The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife manages the Delaney Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The expansive 580-acre Delaney Wildlife Management Area straddles the Bolton, Harvard, and Stow town lines, with 77 acres of the state-owned area located in the northeast corner of Bolton. Delaney Pond, which lies at the center of the property, offers canoeing, fishing, and wildlife viewing opportunities. The pond also provides important habitat for otter, fish, and many bird and fish species. The entire management area is open to hunting in season, so visitors should check the hunting schedule posted at the main entrance off Harvard Road in Stow.

**Wilder Pond to Forbush Mill Road:** The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife manages two parcels that straddle the area – located between the Conservation Commission owned Wilder Pond Area and Forbush Mill Road, with 29.60 acres toward the western side of Bolton. This area provides important habitat for various species.

**Table 6. State and Federal Protected Land**

Area	Location	Acres
Bolton Flats WMA	Autumn Lane	476.00
Bolton Flats WMA	Pine Hill Rd	52.00
Bolton Flats WMA	Pine Hill Rd	7.40
Delaney WMA	East End	71.22
Delaney	Main St	6.2
Wilder Pond to Forbush	Sand Rd	23.00
Wilder Pond to Forbush	Wilder Rd	6.60
Total		642.42

### Private Facilities

Bolton is the home of The International Golf Club, a private members-only course. Built in 1899, the nine-hole course operated for more than 50 years. Today, the now 18-hole course has been recently redesigned and hosts the LIV Golf Invitational Boston. This



serves as a major attraction for the town and region. “Because the IGC is the largest property taxpayer to the town and because of the potential impacts of future residential of the property, the town should aid the IGC in continuing as a golf enterprise and plan for its future. The town rezoned this 575-acre property for recreational uses in 1997.”<sup>24</sup> The 2017 Open Space and Recreation Plan emphasized that the golf courses are valued recreational assets for the town and should remain for the benefit of open spaces.

### **Priority Heritage Landscapes**

In 2006, Bolton participated in the Department of Conservation and Recreation’s Heritage Landscape Inventory Program. Heritage Landscapes embody connections between natural landscapes and human history and works to document these locations and provide strategies for preservation. Bolton is also a member of the Freedom’s Way Heritage Association which includes 37 Massachusetts communities with significant historical context relevant to America’s democratic history.

#### **Bolton Center**

The town center has been identified as one of Bolton’s most significant assets. In 2011 a Local Historic District Report was conducted and in 2013 an article was drafted for town meeting warrant but was withdrawn due to local opposition. Within the Main Street Historic District there are 123 inventoried sites including 54 antique homes, many antique barns and other historical community sites including the Gardener houses, Town Hall, Robinson’s Hall, the powder house, the Sawyer house, the town public library, Goss Mansion, and the Old School House.

#### **Bolton-Lancaster Railroad**

The 1873 railroad ran west from Hudson through Main Street of Bolton Center and toward Lancaster spanning 8.5 miles in length. It was only used once historically before being abandoned. Remnants still exist today where the Town Fields are, and it can be accessed by foot.

#### **Century Mills Area**

This area has been deemed important because of its scenic and geological qualities. Once a prior saw and gristmill complex, the location in southeastern Bolton still exhibits the miller’s house.

#### **Still River – Bolton Flats**

This area has been designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern because of its rich archaeological and cultural heritage, including soils and water resources. There are remaining mill sites along the river and its tributaries, as well as old houses and agricultural land.

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<sup>24</sup> 2017 OSRP

### West's Pond Area

Located east of Route 495, West's Pond is one of the largest in Bolton and was formed from the damming a tributary of Great Brook. Historic sites located along the river make this resource of particular interest. These include Long Hill Farm and Old Settler's Tomb.

### Wilder Road Area

A designated scenic road, the road has important historical significance with other transportation routes. The Bolton orchards farm is located on Wilder Road and supplies the popular Main Street marketplace. The road was named after a prominent family of settlers, the Wilder family.

### Wild and Scenic River Designation:

The Wild and Scenic River program is dedicated to protecting nationally significant rivers and their unique biological, recreational, scenic, historical and/or cultural resources. This effort was voluntarily joined by 11 towns (9 in MA, 2 in NH) that have frontage on the Nashua, Squannacook, or Nissitissit Rivers.

### Old Bay Road

One of Bolton's oldest roads and a designated scenic road historically used by Native Americans. The roadway is important for viewing vistas, historic houses and farms, sugar maple trees and stone walls.

To maintain Bolton's scenic roads, a shade tree program was approved in 2006 with the objective of replacing aging trees or those damaged by blight or distress. Around ten trees were planted along Main Street and several unsightly stumps in the National Register Historic District were removed. In 2009, an additional \$3,000 was appropriated towards the tree replacement program to add shade trees along Main Street. A gift account for tree replacement was established in 2016 to allow funds collected from Scenic and Shaded Tree Hearings where trees within the public ROW were requested to be removed (BMPSC Task Report).



Figure 5. Old Bay Road (Reconnaissance Report)

## **VI. CULTURAL ASSETS**

### **Town Nonprofits and Groups**

- Bolton Historical Society
- Friends of Bolton Seniors
- The Bolton Fair
- Friends of Bolton Public Library
- Bolton Conservation Trust
- Friends of the Oxbow
- Friends of Persons Park
- Bolton Local
- Bolton Artisans Guild
- Boy and Girl Scouts
- Community Churches
- Lions Club
- Rotary of Nashoba Valley
- 4H Club
- Community Youth Sports Organizations

### **Government Departments and Committees**

- Council on Aging
- Public Library
- Parks and Recreation
- Police Department
- Emergency Management Dept.
- Economic Development Committee
- Historical Commission
- Local Cultural Council
- Schools

### **Community Organizations**

- Friends of Bolton Seniors
- Friends of Bolton Public Library
- PTA/School groups
- Bolton Fund

### **Festivals and Events**

- Bolton 5k
- Halloween Parade
- Holiday Celebration on the Common
- Town Clean-Up
- Concerts on the Common
- Farmers Market
- Food-truck Fridays at Nashoba Valley Winery
- Backyard Bolton

### **Faith Based Organizations**

- First Parish of Bolton
- Trinity Church  
Congregational
- St. Francis Xavier Church

## **VII. CONSERVATION AND RECREATION**

According to the 2017 OSRP, the town has 65 recreation and conservation parcels, comprising a total of 1,156.5 acres of open space. The town has three (3) areas owned and managed by state and federal agencies, including the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. In total, these areas make up 642.5 acres and include the Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area, the Delaney Wildlife Management Area, and the Wilder Pond to Forbush Road. According to 2016 Town Assessor's data, there is 4,000 acres of permanently protected land in town. A significant portion of Bolton's open space is private agricultural land, approximately 1,500 acres are owned by local farmers and 1,000 acres of the land are currently in use. Orchards are the major agricultural sector in Bolton, and the town is home to six commercial orchards totaling 550 acres.<sup>25</sup>

Conservation is a practice that the town has emphasized to preserve the local character and rural nature. In 1970, the Town formed the Bolton Conservation Trust to assist with protecting heritage sites and natural assets. They now own 305.96 acres of land. The Trust works closely with the Trustees of Reservations and other land management groups, like the Bolton Trails Committee. There are 26 properties in Bolton protected by conservation restrictions and agricultural preservation restrictions. These restrictions are held by the town, the state, or non-profits, and remain in private ownership receiving tax benefits.

The Bolton Parks and Recreation Commission manages a number of parks and facilities for public use. Pond Park and the Town Beach are two popular areas with maintenance plans in town. Many community and holiday events are hosted at these locations year-round. Sports fields, such as Memorial Field, are maintained by active sports teams who fund the grounds care.

Long term actions identified in the 2017 plan aimed to be accomplished by 2021-2022. The four principles of the action plan are: Efficient and inclusive town government; integrated land planning; coordination with local, regional, and state efforts; excellent and open communication at all levels.

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<sup>25</sup> Bolton OSRP 2017

## Conservation Commission Managed Properties

Annie Moore/ Long Hill	Rattlesnake	Bower Springs	Vaughn Hill	Welch Pond
Fyfeshire	Randall Vinger	Gould-White Hapgood/ Schechter	Rocky Dundee	Powder House
Zink- Northwoods	Danforth	Keyes Farm	Wilder Pond	Houghton Farm
	Butternut	Taggart Forestland		

## Conservation Zoning

The Farmland and Open Space Restricted Developed (FOSPRD) Bylaw was implemented in 1989 and is intended to preserve agricultural land and open space while simultaneously preserving the rural and historic character of Bolton.

This bylaw has allowed for the acquisition of nine (9) parcels of land that have been set aside for the subdivision review process. Under this bylaw, 33% of the area of the FOSPRD must be restricted with either a farmland restriction or an open space restriction. These parcels are not protected by Conservation Restrictions, unless specifically stated, and cannot be used for purposes not permitted by the Planning Board.

Table 7. Conservation Property		
Development	CR	Acreage
Great Brook Estates	--	22
Fox Run	--	13
Danforth Brook	--	43.98
Oaks	--	26.92
Northwoods	--	32.96
Butternut	--	16.1
Rocky Dundee	--	37
Century Mill Estates	BCC	100
Houghton Farm	BCT & BCC	43.6
Total		335.56

Potential updates to this bylaw could be introduced to ensure that the most ecologically valuable parts of a site are conserved. FOSPRD areas should consider location of trails for connectivity, soil integrity, erosion control, and retaining soil carbon.

### Community Input – Conservation Priorities:

A 2017 survey conducted for the Open Space and Recreation Plan asked residents what type of land use should be the focus of land acquisition for conservation. The results included twenty-five (25%) for land that has public access/trails, 20% for land that provides wildlife habitat, 17% for land containing historical interest or rural character, 16% to protect aquifers for municipal or residential water supply, and 15% to augment existing core conservation areas. In the 2020 survey conducted by the steering committee, residents were asked how they believe the rural character of Bolton should be preserved. The majority of responses were in favor of protecting open space, preserving farms, protecting landscapes, and encouraging historic preservation.

### **Bolton Conservation Trust Land**

#### **Bolton Flats / Intervale – 455 acres**

An important flood plain along the Nashua River with scenic views. Widely known as a primary habitat for migratory birds and offers many recreational activities such as canoeing, bird watching, fishing and hiking. As a state-owned property, hunting in season is permitted.

#### **Vaughn Hills - 187 acres**

One of the highest elevation areas between Boston and Wachusett Mountain, offering panoramic mountain vistas. Trails also traverse pine forests, follow creeks and streams, abut beaver dams, ponds, and open meadows. Hiking opportunities connect to Bower Springs via trailheads on Bare Hill Road.

#### **Bowers Springs - 91 acres**

Home to scenic ponds, flat grassy fields and well distinguished trails connecting on to the Vaughn Hills/Hansen conservation areas. Swimming is permitted at the Denney Nature Camp during the summer months. Bluebirds are commonly seen here.

#### **Powder House - 100 acres**

Located behind Town Hall, the area is wooded hillside providing a good climb via either the marked trail or the wider Old Town House Road. The Powderhouse, built for storage of ammunition was constructed in 1812 and sits up above Town Hall.

#### **Zink – Northwoods – 64.24 acres**

This trail climbs alongside a stream with several crossings, one over a scenic dam, before reaching upland habitat. The trail is a connector to future trails in the Northwoods/Levison area off Harvard Road.

#### **Rattlesnake Core Conservation Area – 251.39**



A large network of trails, including wide cart paths, traverses the wooded hillside. An Interpretative Trail is found off the Main Street entrance. This 1.3-mile trail, known as the Bob Horton Memorial Trail, provides information on botany, geology, history and early industry.

#### Delaney – 72 acres

Straddles the Bolton, Harvard, and Stow town lines, with 72 acres of the state-owned area located in the northeast corner of Bolton. Delaney Pond, which lies at the center of the property, offer canoeing, fishing, and wildlife viewing opportunities. The pond also provides important habitat for otter, fisher, and many bird and fish species. The entire management area is open to hunting seasonally.

#### Annie Moore – 90 acres

This quiet and somewhat secluded parcel was gifted to the town in 1987 by Jack Sargent, Christopher Slade and Ken McClure. Originally purchased by the Trust when attempts by the town to secure state self-help funds failed, the land received limited house development with the remaining acreage set aside for conservation purposes by the developers and the Trust.

#### Danforth Brook - 83 acres

Acquired in 2008 through the Danforth Brook residential development project, the area is now owned by the town of Bolton. Danforth provides varied terrain and habitat to its visitors, with loop trail walks leading out to a hidden trail head east of start point.

#### Randall / Vinger - 174 acres

The trails over this Core Conservation Area take one past the Quaker Cemetery dating to the 1770's. Features highlighted are old stone walls, brooks, hilly woodlands, and ledge outcroppings interspersed with several vernal pools. This parcel was a gift from Paul Vinger and Ann Venable in 1990.

#### Gould White Conservation Area – 34.78 acres

A large vernal pool surrounded by hilly woodland and ledge outcrops. Old trees and new growth provide a habitat for coyotes, deer, grouse, and woodpeckers. Two trail easements, donated to the town by H. Mitchell Gould, run to the pond. The trail can be accessed from Randall Road. The Basin Loop trail will take you past the vernal pool, up to "The Cave" and back past "The Lichen Basin." Secondary side trails extend your walk connecting the "Brendan Ridge Trail."

#### Welch Pond - 11 acres

This area was purchased by the town in 1980. The main attraction is the kettle hole bog, which hosts carnivorous plants such as pitcher plants and sundew. The pond provides valuable wildlife habitat (heron and ducks frequent the open water). The pond can be accessed from the Philbin Salmon Trail.

#### Bolton Overlook – 4.5 acres

Bolton Overlook parcel, a gift from a developer (Landquest) in 2011, was part of a proposed housing development that failed to materialize. The lot was donated for tax purposes with the stipulation that the land be maintained as conservation land. In 2015, the Bolton Conservation Trust entered into a 30-year lease with Nashoba Valley Spirits, Ltd. on the property. The purpose of the lease is to return the 4.5-acre parcel to active agricultural use, while maintaining the conservation values and public access to the property.

#### Wilder Pond – 5 acres

This parcel was purchased by the Town from the Trustees of Reservations in 1991. The property contains a small pond and part of an agricultural field offering wildlife viewing, skating, fishing, and walking. The trail crosses a bridge and follows the Lancaster railroad grade running parallel to the fields, a fine fieldstone wall, and out to the pond.

#### Fyfeshire - 38 acres

The Fyfeshire Conservation area was given as a gift to the Town of Bolton by Helen L. Plummer in 1959. Its name comes from an area in Scotland where her ancestors the Fyfes originated. The Fyfeshire conservation area hosts a scenic trail around a pond and a bridge crossing a dam. The trail is picturesque and features some uncommon trees such as black gum, white cedar, and tupelo. During the summer blueberries bushes can be found.



Figure 6. Danforth Brook (Bolton Trails Committee)



## Bolton Trails Committee

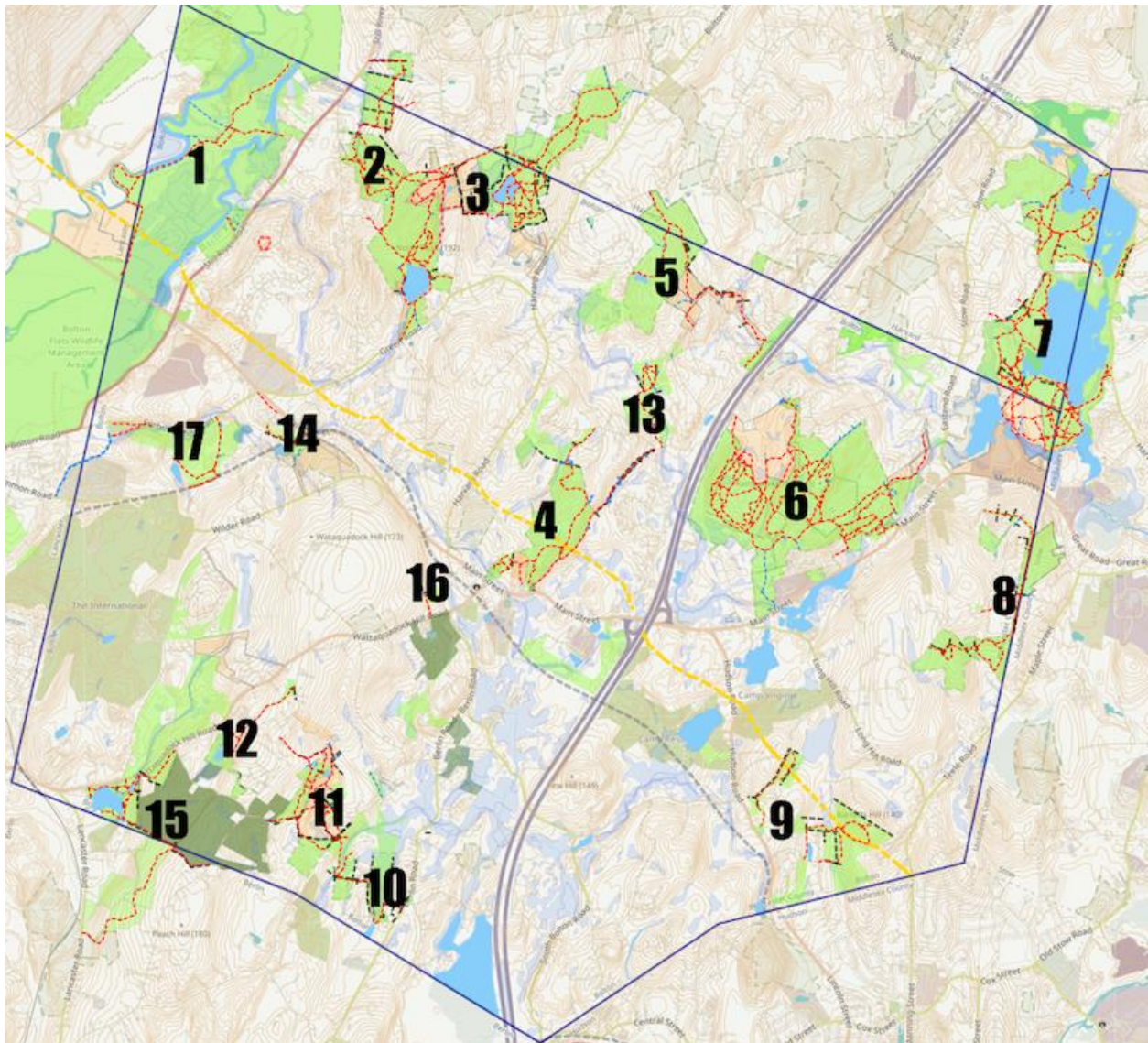


Figure 7. Bolton Trails Committee Trail Map

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Bolton Flats Wildlife Management Area                                | 8. Annie Moore                      |
| 2. Vaughn Hills   | 9. Danforth Brook and Keyes Farm    |
| 3. Bowers Springs   | 10. Vinger-Venable and Rocky Dundee |
| 4. Powder House Hill, Old Town House Road, Town Common and Evans Trails | 11. Gould-White                     |
| 5. Zink-Northwoods  | 12. Welch Pond                      |
| 6. Rattlesnake and Vicinity   | 13. Houghton Farm                   |
| 7. Delane Wildlife Management Area                                      | 14. Wilder Farm                     |
|   | 15. Fyfeshire and Haynes-Wheeler    |
|   | 16. Bolton Overlook                 |
|   | 17. Taggart                         |





**LEGEND**

- Major Roads
- Railroad
- Municipal Boundary
- MADEP Open Water
- Chapter 61 Lands
- Parks & Open Space
- Municipal Parks & Open Space

**OpenSpace: Interest Overlay**

- Agricultural Preservation Restriction

**OpenSpace by Level of Protection**

- In Perpetuity
- Limited

**BOLTON MASTER PLAN**  
**MAP OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION**

1 INCH = 1,400 FEET

0 1,400 2,800 5,600 Feet

DATA SOURCE: MassGIS, Town of Bolton, BSC Group, Inc.



## Burial Grounds

There are many historic cemeteries throughout the town that date back to the 18th and 19th centuries. The following burial grounds are listed in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System as historic resources.



*Figure 8. Pan Burying Ground*

### Historic Burial Grounds in Bolton:

- Friends Burying Ground (1844) – Berlin Road
- Old Fry Burying Ground (1767) – Berlin Road
- West Burying Ground (1822) – Green Road
- Pan Cemetery (1822) – Main Street
- Old South Burying Ground (1740) - South Bolton Road
- Smallpox Cemetery (1845) – Sugar Road
- Eastwood Cemetery (1868) – Wilder Road

## VIII. BUSINESS

Frequently visited businesses in town identified by residents at the October 2021 public meeting organized by the Steering Committee include the Bolton Bean Café, Bolton Orchards, Slater's Pizza, Kitchen Sink Candle Shop, Bolton Spring Farm, Nicewicz Family Farm, and Schartner Farm.

These businesses represent the agricultural foundation in which Bolton is rooted and the continued value that they provide to the region culturally and economically. Residents have also voiced a desire for more retail opportunities and restaurants in town.



*Figure 9. Orchards in Bolton overlooking Trinity Congregational Church*

The Spring 2023 survey had 50% of respondents report that attracting new retail development is a medium to high priority action, the remaining 50% reported that it was of little to no priority for them. Residents polled show an interest in agricultural and business development – and little interest in office and industrial development.

## **IX. TRANSPORTATION**

Bolton is located in Central Massachusetts 43 miles to Boston, 20 miles to Worcester, 26 miles to the New Hampshire border, and 82 miles to Hartford via roadway. Situated directly along Interstate 495 and accessed by exit 70 (old exit 27) onto Route 117 (Main Street), making the community a prime residential location for commuters who can access jobs and commercial activity. There are a total of 61.5 miles of roadway in Bolton, excluding Interstate 495. Other major roadways include Route 110 and Route 85. The town values its historical roadways that showcase stone walls and winding tree-lined country roads with scenic vistas. At present, 42 secondary and minor roads are designated scenic roads.<sup>26</sup>

Transportation in Bolton is primarily car-dependent, and the central location of the town offers access to major regional highways and destinations. The 2006 Master Plan reported, “Bolton’s location on a major commuting route is a prime reason for the housing growth in town and for the increased traffic that comes with new development.” This remains a town-wide concern as the overall population has increased about 25 percent since the report was completed, and pressures to increase housing continue. Along Route 117, average daily traffic volumes see a total of 19,100 vehicle trips per day, and approximately 95,000 trips traveling through Bolton on I-495. This is exacerbated during the school year when school buses increase morning and afternoon demand and traffic delays on main roads (BMPSC).

Lack of transportation has been identified by MAGIC as a barrier to high quality of life. There are no railroads that directly service the town; however, commuter rail stations are within 15 minutes in nearby Littleton and Acton. Among older adults in Bolton there is a shared frustration that paratransit services are not reliable or efficient. MRTA services are currently only available for older adults and people with disabilities weekdays between 9 am and 5 pm. The Clinton Livery is also scheduled through the Council on Aging and provides transportation to residents ages 60+ and for those 18+ with a disability.

The walk score determined by the MAPC for the town is widely between 0-40. Any score between 0-49 indicates car dependency for running errands and completing daily tasks.

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<sup>26</sup> Bolton Master Plan Steering Committee

## Roadway Network and Classification

The functional classification of roadways refers to the character of services that the road is intended to provide, the volume of traffic that they receive, and the connectivity that they provide. Most roads in Bolton are local, providing access to abutting land and residential streets, usually under the town's jurisdiction and with a low traffic volume. There are 34.36 miles of local roads. There are 4.4 miles of interstate roadway I-495. Arterial roadways like Still River Road (Route 110) and Main Street (Route 117) provide a high level of mobility and regional connectivity. There are 10.18 miles of arterial roadways. Bolton has a total of 17.21 miles of collector roadways, such as Forbush Mill Road and South Bolton Road, which collect traffic from local roads and funnel it into arterials.<sup>27</sup>

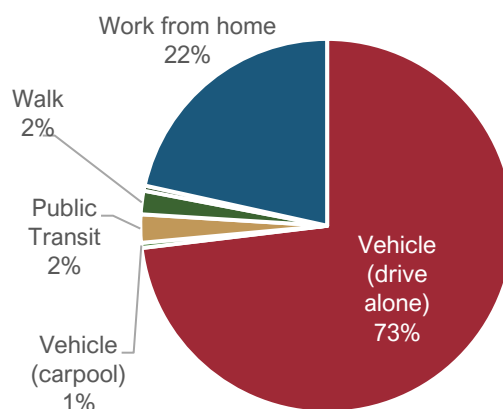
A 2020 Pavement Management Program Report completed for the town includes a roadway repair backlog summary. There are a total of 134.75 miles of roadway in the town, of which 60.36 miles of roads require repairs or additional attention, and 0.4 miles have no maintenance required. Approximately 0.25 miles require major rehabilitation and 14 miles of roadway require minor rehabilitation. Of the combined preventative and routine maintenance, there are a total of 45.7 miles of roadway.

## Means of Transportation

Bolton is a rural community and primarily car dependent. About 73% of residents reported driving alone as their method of travel to work and only 2% reported utilizing public transportation. For those who cannot drive or for senior citizens, the Montachusett Regional Transportation Authority (MART) supplies a van for essential travel needs such as medical appointments.

In the 2020 community survey, 609 community members responded to a question about mobility and what prevents them from using alternative modes of transportation to get to work. Most responses said that they prefer to use their own car (38%), others said that they work late or irregular hours (36%), and transit service doesn't match their route or schedule (36%).

Means of Travel to Work



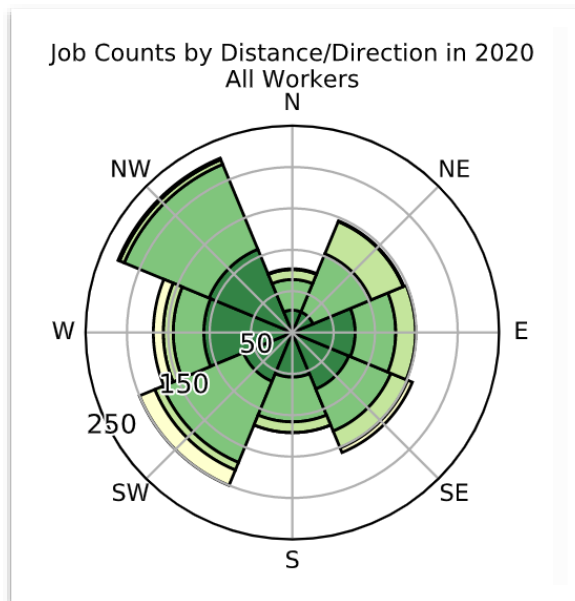
<sup>27</sup> MassDOT Road Inventory Year-End Report 2022

## Employment Travel Patterns

According to the U.S. Census Bureau Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data, 1,118 people commute into Bolton from outside towns for work and 2,562 people live in Bolton and are employed outside of the town. There are 128 people employed in town that also live in town. The top four locations where Bolton's residents commute to are: Leominster (8%), Worcester (4%), Hudson (3.8%), and Clinton (2.7%).

Approximately 43% of Bolton residents travel less than 10 miles to get to work, while 42% travel 10 to 24 miles to get to work. About 11% travel 25 to 50 miles and 3% of workers travel greater than 50 miles.

The image on the right was generated by the LEHD data tool and depicts job counts by distance and by cardinal direction for all workers in Bolton.



## 2006 Master Plan Recommendations

The prior master plan identified four major recommendations to be implemented. The first was to improve traffic and pedestrian safety along Route 117. This is currently in progress and continues to pose challenges to the town. However, a stop light was installed at the intersection of Main Street and Wattaquaddock Road in 2020. The town received a MassWorks grant in 2021 to implement the design and construction of a roundabout where 117/Main Street, Forbush Mill Road, and Green Road cross. It is planned to include pedestrian and cyclist accommodations as well.

Another recommendation stated that the Town should enhance requirements for traffic impact statements and mitigation. This was completed in 2011 when the site plan review bylaw was amended to require a development impact study. In 2015 and 2019, the Town also revised subdivision rules and regulations. An effort to create bicycle transportation improvements remains in progress, but to further the town's Complete Streets policy, additional staff is required. Since 2006, there have been some infrastructure improvements including traffic signals, however, these have not been perceived as effective and may have contributed to additional delays elsewhere (BMPSC).



## Relevant Studies and Reports:

- MAGIC Suburban Transit Study (2012)
- Mobility Committee Non-Motorized Transportation Recommendations (2014)
- Route 117 Prioritization Committee Final Report (2016)
- MassDOT Crash Report (2015-2019)
- Complete Streets Policy (2018)
- Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (2019)
- MART Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan (2020)
- MAGIC Regional Age Friendly Housing and Transportation Assessment (2020)

## 2014 Mobility Report

The Board of Selectmen appointed a Mobility Committee in October 2011 at the request of the Public Ways Safety Committee and the recommendation of the town planner.

There is a growing demand for pedestrian and bicyclist accommodations amidst an increase in vehicle traffic throughout town. The Mobility Committee worked with the planning department, conducted a mobility survey, and held a public forum in November 2012. Furthermore, they met with neighboring town planners and received support from WalkBoston. Survey results concluded that 90% of respondents favored more walkways in Bolton, especially along Route 117 and other major roads, to make local trips and access recreational areas, libraries, and schools.

The Committee released a plan in 2014 that identified ways to provide safer non-motorized mobility options for pedestrians and bicyclists throughout town. Implementation of the report's proposed improvements would slow traffic, improve safety, raise property values, improve health by encouraging active transportation, and enhance quality of life.

### Goals:

- Expand a system of walkways to connect to destinations.
- Improve facilities for safe bicycling in the town.
- Improve safety and quality of life.
- Encourage exercise to promote better health.
- Increase value to the town.
- Complete Streets

## Complete Streets Policy and Prioritization Plan

Bolton is participating in MassDOT's Complete Streets Funding Program, which provides technical assistance and construction funding to eligible municipalities that pass a Complete Streets Policy and develop a Prioritization Plan. Bolton was recently

awarded \$500,000 to reconstruct the intersection on Main Street at Green Road and Forbush Mill Road. It will feature a one-lane roundabout with splinter islands and crosswalks, as well as pedestrian safety features.

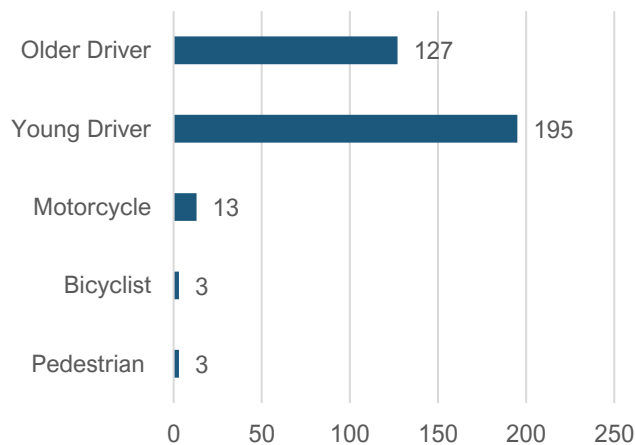
The Town adopted a Complete Streets Policy in 2018. This policy states that all road projects must include accommodation for pedestrians and bicyclists. Complete Streets are designed and operated to provide safety and accessibility for all users. The purpose of the town's policy is "to accommodate all street users by creating a network that meets the needs of individuals utilizing a variety of transportation modes."

There are currently sidewalks in the center of Bolton that offer safe navigation and access to town facilities, however these have been deemed inadequate outside of the immediate central area. Currently there are no designated bicycle facilities, and cyclists must share the road with cars. Complete Streets design is meant to be incorporated into all publicly and privately funded projects. The Town's policy identifies best practices and further outlined a program project prioritization plan in 2019 that details 29 prioritized projects that the Town is working to implement.

## Roadway Safety

Many backroads in Bolton do not have speed limit signs posted. This results in consistent speeding. The MassDOT IMPACT data dashboard identifies a total of 944 crashes in Bolton from 2018 to 2022. Of the total crashes, 3 were fatal, 12 resulted in serious injury, 144 resulted in minor injury, 84 resulted in possible injury, and 692 had no recorded injuries. Crashes primarily involved young drivers and older drivers.<sup>28</sup>

MassDOT Crash Data Summary



The following locations are identified as high crash roadways:

- Main Street
- Wattaquaddock Hill Road
- Hudson Road
- Long Hill Road
- Interstate 495

<sup>28</sup> MassDOT Impact Tool

Built infrastructure within Bolton is frequently vulnerable to flooding, which can occur along important local and regional evacuation routes.<sup>29</sup> Because of Bolton's vicinity to several major roadways, evacuation planning is needed for local and regional traffic.

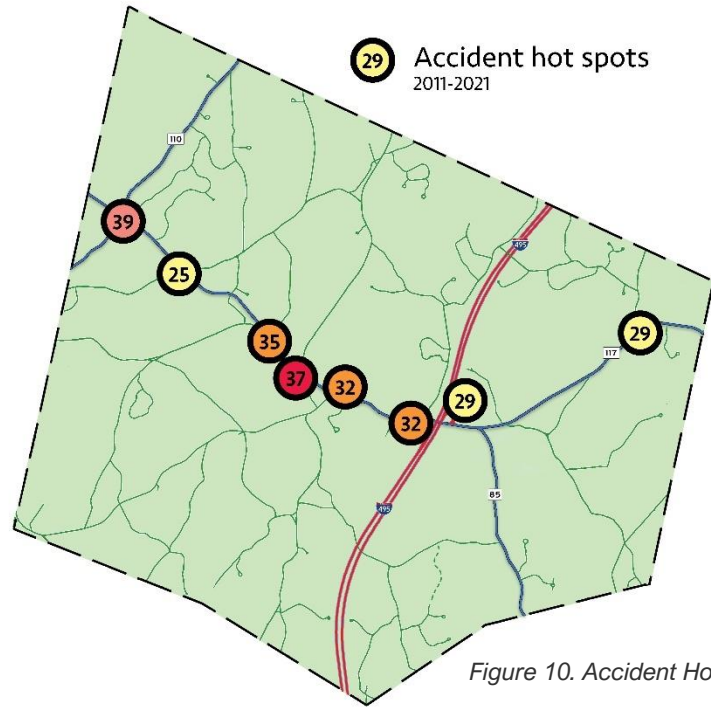


Figure 10. Accident Hot Spots

<sup>29</sup> Community Resilience Building Summary of Findings