



# 2021 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

## TOWN OF UPTON, MA



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This plan was financed through the Massachusetts Community Compact Cabinet Program

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# INTRODUCTION AND ORGANIZATION



The Town of Upton partnered with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) to develop an Economic Development Strategy Plan (EDSP) between 2018 and 2020. This document establishes baseline existing conditions driving the town's economy and provides an action plan to support economic growth in Upton. Building off an existing body of work and utilizing the most recent data plus input from the community, CMRPC has been able to establish a strategic plan for enhancing local economic development in Upton. **This**

**strategic plan includes specific goals to help local stakeholders and town leaders leverage the town's existing historical, cultural, and economic assets.**

This plan is the culmination of discussions between the Economic Development Committee, Town staff, and the CMRPC Project Team. To establish base line conditions an extensive data collection, mapping, and analysis process took place. The Project Team worked with local residents as part of the Upton Center Revitalization Project to identify a community vision for Upton's future. Subsequently the town's opportunities and challenges for economic development were identified.

A particular focus was paid to enhancing Upton's downtown and simultaneous efforts to redevelop and re-zone the town center have complemented strategic economic planning. Consultants Dodson & Flinker led a public outreach process to revitalize Upton Center and these events have provided significant opportunities to discuss economic development planning. Many communities focus their resources on the town centers when laying out an economic development plan. For small towns in New England, town centers breathe life into typically quiet, residential communities. These centers of commerce and community contain mixed-use buildings and provide spaces for people to live, work, shop, and gather. Town centers aim to be walk-able and bike-able, incorporate open space and historic sites, and have characteristics of traditional, compact New England villages.

This plan is organized in three major parts. Part I provides the historical perspective of the town. The historic character of the town is discussed along with a brief description of historic buildings and relevant historical and cultural information.

Part II includes a detailed Economic Analysis based on extensive research performed by the CMRPC Team. This analysis also informs the Goals included in Part III.

Part III includes several Goals identified by the Economic Development Committee. These include short term, long term and stretch goals. A rationale is included for all goals.

## Map 1 | Regional Context

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MassGIS Community Boundaries from Survey Points: last updated March 2017



# PART I – HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



Upton is a small, suburban town located in the Blackstone Valley of Central Massachusetts. Incorporated in 1735, Upton has an economic history rooted in agriculture, craftsmanship and manufacturing. While the Town was not proximate to a major water source necessary to power the large-scale manufacturing mills prevalent in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Upton residents utilized smaller mills to build a prosperous boot and shoe industry.

Along with the development of the boot and shoe industry, Upton women were braiding

straw hats in homes and small shops. Led by the entrepreneurial genius of William Knowlton, this cottage business resulted in the largest hat factory in the world, employing over 1,000 workers. Many women migrated from other New England states and Canada to work in the hat factories. Numerous social functions, including dances, were provided for these young women and their escorts. This social activity earned Upton the nickname “Capertown”, a designation that persisted into the twentieth century.

Rail service came to Upton in 1871 and up to 1920, Upton residents could travel to Milford, Boston and Worcester on the Upton Street Railway. This trolley line connected West Upton to Upton Center and had stops on the Grafton and Upton Railroad as well.<sup>1</sup>

By 1940, residents began to commute to work in surrounding communities at factories manufacturing products such as military equipment and automobiles. The town’s population expanded significantly in the 1980’s, as people were drawn to Upton’s small size, good school system, open space, and commuting distance to jobs. Upton continues to maintain its small-town charm by managing growth, providing for open space, supporting an excellent K-12 regional school system (Mendon-Upton Regional), hosting an award winning Vocational Technical High School (Blackstone Valley Tech), and providing services that ensure quality of life for its citizens.

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, many former centers of manufacturing transitioned to bedroom communities for larger cities. Upton’s easy access to Worcester, Boston, and Providence has allowed the town to maintain a robust housing market with ample open space and a comparatively high standard of living. However, by shifting the local economy away from the once-thriving manufacturers and town center, and limiting pedestrian-scale development, it has stifled the ability of businesses in the town center to flourish. The nation’s captivation with automobile-oriented development contributed to the rise of regional shopping centers located outside of Upton, thus creating an even greater challenge for local businesses to succeed and for workers to find nearby employment.

“Upton Center has experienced a slow decline in vitality over the past decades. Foot traffic has declined. Businesses have come and gone. The Holy Angels church, an anchor institution in the area, shut its doors. Several buildings have been removed and not replaced. Others suffer from deferred maintenance and/or

<sup>1</sup> Upton’s Heritage, The History of a Massachusetts Town, Donald Blake Johnson, 1984



vacancy. The number of civic events in the Center has declined. Property values in Upton Center, and by extension tax revenues, have not kept pace with other parts of the town.”<sup>2</sup>

This EDSP aims to reimagine economic centers of Upton and take proactive steps to reclaim these spaces as community-oriented, economic destinations. Economic Development Goals from the Town Master Plan 2005:

*Goal: Encourage economic development that maintains a balance between residents’ preferences for limited, selective commercial/industrial growth while recognizing that increasing Upton’s 3.5% commercial/industrial tax base will lessen the residential property tax burden.*

*Key Strategies: Revitalize and expand Upton’s Development & Industrialization Committee; develop the Town’s grant writing capacity; initiate a town center revitalization program.*

In 2018, the Board of Selectmen voted to appoint a new Economic Development Committee to replace the Development & Industrialization Committee that has been dormant for many years. The primary focus of the Economic Development Committee was the revitalization of the Upton Center.

## HISTORIC BUILDINGS

The Town Common was historically the center of social, religious, and economic activity in Upton. Most of the buildings surrounding the Town Common date to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Notable buildings include:

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### Upton Town Hall

The Town Hall is prominently located in Upton Center and had served as the focal point for town life since it was built in 1884.

Architect Elbridge Boyden & Son designed the building, the same firm that designed Mechanics Hall in Worcester. The building is a wood frame structure with a brick veneer; a common construction technique used in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and is listed on Massachusetts Register of Historic Places and National Register of Historic Places for architectural and historical significance.

The Town Hall underwent an extensive historic renovation in 2013-14 and was re-dedicated on September 24, 2014, 130 years to the day from the original dedication in 1884. The renovated Town Hall serves as a focal point for a revitalized Upton Center.

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<sup>2</sup> Upton Center Visioning Project Final Report, May 2, 2019. Prepared by Dodson & Flinker. Available on Town website at <https://www.uptonma.gov/economic-development>



Town Hall in the 1920's



Town Hall Today

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### Knowlton Hat Factory

In 1835 William Knowlton and William Legg formed a business partnership that spawned the creation of the hat factory. In 1845 William Legg retired, and was replaced by Joseph F. Farnum who was in a partnership with Knowlton for a short time. When he retired, Knowlton carried on the business until his sons became of age. This is when the business was named "William Knowlton and Sons."

The factory was expanded in 1872 with the addition of a tower and later an office. This date is engraved over the front door. By this time the factory had become the biggest women's hat factory in the world. Other buildings were added through the years, most notably a large addition of a wing in the rear of the shop in 1908. In 1925 the shop was bought by the Merrimack Hat Company, makers of wool and fur hats, who continued operation until 1952 when the shop was sold to Charles Kartiganer. Shortly following Kartiganer's takeover he sold the business to Lish Industries, where in 1972 it again changed hands and was bought by Millhaus Trust. The factory building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. It was converted into senior housing in 1985.



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### Upton Grange Hall

One of only a few of its kind still standing in the Blackstone Valley, the Grange Hall on School Street is a reminder of the once prominent Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, an organization established as a social and educational group for farmers in 1867. Grange members still meet here on a regular basis.

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### Churches

Holy Angels Church was built in 1848 as the First Unitarian Society but later purchased by the Catholic bishop of Springfield in 1874.

Methodist Episcopal Church was built in 1876. The Methodist Church merged with the Congregational Church in 1970 and is currently the United Parish of Upton. The town acquired the former Methodist Church building in 1970 and named the building the Knowlton-Risteen building. Carpentry students from Blackstone Valley Vocational Technical High School remodeled it. The building currently houses the town library and Historical Society Museum.

United Parish Church was built in 1848 and celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> dedication anniversary in 1998. The United Parish is currently home to a pre-school and a vibrant congregation.

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### Polly Dean Bradish House

This home was built in 1844 and was one of two known stations in Upton on the Underground Railroad. Polly Dean Bradish is said to have provided safe haven for more than 500 slaves through her home.

## HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Upton Center Historic District is focused on the civic and institutional center of the town, from which radiate the major streets that make up this district. These are lined with some 19th-century commercial development and 19th- and 20th-century residential neighborhoods. The village landscape retains historical and architectural significance, with contributing resources dating from ca. 1742 through the period of significance ending 1964. Contributing buildings in the National Historic District are eligible for federal preservation grants as well as state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits.

## CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS (CCC)

Civilian Conservation Corps Resources Historic District is located within Upton State Forest. It includes two of the original camp buildings, which is very rare, as the CCC camp buildings were usually torn down after the camps were closed. Other CCC resources in the district include the site of the camp, roads, water holes, and other stone features constructed by the CCC, as well as Dean Pond, which was created by a dam built by the CCC.

## NIPMUC ALGONQUIN TRIBE

Upton was founded on land previously inhabited by Native Americans, most recently the Nipmuc tribes. Their influence on the landscape remains in the ceremonial stone landscapes including Pratt Hill and, according to tribal lore, the stone chamber in Heritage Park.

## PRIOR EFFORTS

The Town of Upton has a number of previous plans and reports to help form the basis of facilitating economic development, including: Upton Master Plan (2005), Open Space Project (2007), Open Space and Recreation Plan (2011), Housing Production Plan (2012), and Complete Streets Prioritization Plan (2018). The Town is also conducting multiple related projects that are ongoing.

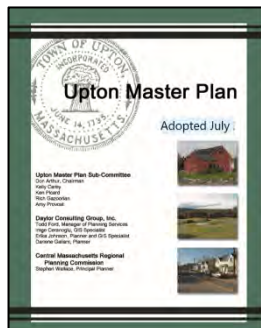
The 2005 Master Plan, while now in need of an update, is the comprehensive guiding document for Upton. Its key strategies for economic development include revitalizing and expanding the Town's Development & Industrialization Committee, developing the Town's grant writing capacity, and initiating a Town Center revitalization program. In the Land Use Chapter of the Master Plan, it stated:

"The Town Center should be improved and enhanced through a combination of mixed use village scale zoning and a town center improvement plan. Transportation improvements should be sensitive to the unique, pedestrian scale of the center and future development should be of a traditional form where mixed use and a diversity of housing types prevail."

Plans and reports that help form the basis of this Economic Development Strategic Plan, include:

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### 2005 MASTER PLAN



The 2005 Master Plan is the comprehensive guiding document for Upton. Its key strategies for economic development include revitalizing and expanding the Town's Development & Industrialization Committee, developing the Town's grant writing capacity, and initiating a Town Center revitalization program. In the Land Use Chapter of the Master Plan, it stated:

"The Town Center should be improved and enhanced through a combination of mixed-use, village scale zoning and a town center improvement plan. Transportation improvements should be sensitive to the unique, pedestrian scale of the center and future development should be of a traditional form where mixed use and a diversity of housing types prevail."

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### 2007 OPEN SPACE PROJECT

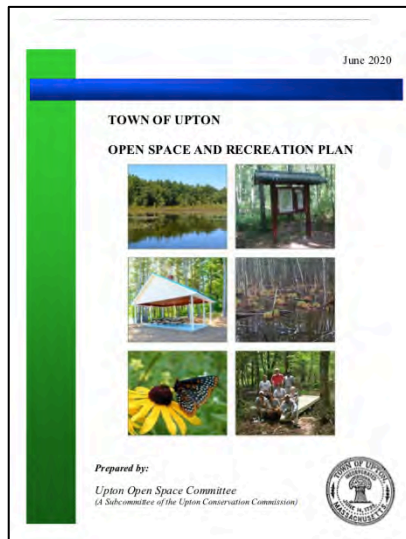
The 2007 Upton Open Space Project was an extensive evaluation of various aspects of the landscape in Upton, including cultural, historic, and ecological elements. The following recommendations related to economic development in Upton Center were extracted from the action plan of this project:

- Protect the historic district from Elm Street to West Upton
- Pursue designation as a historic district
- Prepare GIS inventory of sites
- Seek grants for streetscape improvements
- Plan for historically-sensitive improvements to road corridor
- Adjust zoning to promote restoration and adaptive reuse

- Celebrate the historic district with tours, maps, and outreach
- Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)

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## 2020 OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

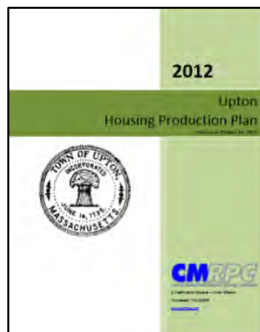


This Plan is an update of the town's 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan. It includes a summary of land conservation and stewardship activities, and recreational facility improvements and program development since May of 2011. The plan presents the results of a 2019 public opinion survey, the most comprehensive survey of Upton residents conducted since a 2003 survey conducted for the Upton Master Plan. It also incorporates the vision of the 2019 Recreation Master Plan prepared by the Recreation Commission. The plan also considers new statewide and northeastern United States studies, including the 2020 Massachusetts Audubon Losing Ground Report, the Nature Conservancy's Resilient Sites for Terrestrial Conservation Project, the 2017 Wildlands and Woodlands vision for forest conservation in New England, the 2015 Massachusetts statewide action plan, and 2017 Massachusetts Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, the 2012 Division of Conservation and Recreation Landscape Designation for Upton State Forest, a 2019 cost of community services study by UMass Amherst, and water quality monitoring conducted by the Blackstone River Watershed Association.

The OSRP was updated in 2020 and relevant information from that plan has been included in this plan.

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## 2012 HOUSING PRODUCTION PLAN



The 2012 Housing Production Plan identifies housing needs within the community, with a focus on affordable housing needs, and creates a strategic plan to create more affordable housing. Housing and economic development are closely interrelated, as the town aims to create diverse jobs along with affordable housing options for the workforce. This Plan recommended the Town allow multi-family homes by right in the Town Center and that the Town promote mixed-use development. (Note that the Upton Center Business District Zone, approved in November 2019, allows for multi-family homes by right as well as encourages mixed-use development. In addition, in 2020, 11 new affordable units located at 149 Main Street became available).

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## 2019 UPTON CENTER VISIONING PROJECT



A recent ongoing effort is the 2018 Upton Center Visioning Project. In January of 2019, the EDC hired the firm of Dodson & Flinker to facilitate a community-based visioning process. The entire process and detailed results have been documented in the report prepared by Dodson & Flinker.<sup>2</sup> Many documents associated with this process, including the report, are posted on the town website.

The revitalization of Upton Center is based on five core principles developed as part of the visioning process. The core principles call for a re-vitalized Upton

Center to be:

- **VIBRANT**
  - Create a re-invigorated and welcoming Upton Center
  - Provide reasons for people to come to Upton Center
- **DIVERSE**
  - Include mixed-use retail and residential
  - Encourage small/home businesses to locate in Upton Center
  - Town Hall and a new Community Center
- **WALKABLE**
  - Improve traffic flow—work with state on roundabout
  - Improve pedestrian safety, sidewalks, crosswalks, and street lighting
  - Future-Connect to Heritage Park, Pratt Pond
- **RETAIN A NEW ENGLAND LOOK AND FEEL**
- **REFLECT THE HISTORICAL NATURE OF UPTON CENTER AND TOWN VALUES**

At the 2019 Annual Town Meeting voters gave the Board of Selectmen the authority to negotiate, sell, lease or transfer two Town-owned parcels (the former Holy Angels church and the Town parking lot). The Board of Selectmen created the RFP Committee to prepare a Request for Proposals (RFP) and Design Standards for the First Phase of the redevelopment of the Shared Vision. In February 2020 the committee released the RFP. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic struck in March 2020 the town and state endured many pandemic-related restrictions. There were no respondents to the RFP by the April submission deadline. In the summer of 2020, the Board of Selectmen voted to disband the RFP Committee and assign the modification and re-issuance of the RFP to the EDC. The EDC plans to issue an updated RFP in 2021 and will then review all responses received from qualified respondents and make a recommendation to the Board of Selectman of a successful respondent for the Board to engage with for the redevelopment of downtown inline with the Shared Vision.

For a detailed discussion of the Upton Center Re-vitalization Project and the Visioning Process, refer to the Dodson& Flinker Final Report.<sup>2</sup>

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## TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE PLANS

Multiple transportation projects are planned for Upton, which will improve existing transportation infrastructure and create safer routes for pedestrians and cyclists. Projects on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) include:



- Hartford Ave. N. – High Street – Hopkinton Road Project:
  - Phase I - Reconstruction of High Street and Hopkinton Road, including a new traffic signal at the School Street, Westboro Road, Hopkinton Road intersection. MassDOT Project ID 606125 – ongoing in 2021.
  - Phase II - Reconstruction of Hartford Avenue North and High Street including sidewalks, granite curbing and improved pedestrian crossings. MassDOT Project ID 606125 – on-going in 2021.
- Resurfacing of Route 140 from Williams Street to Brooks Street/Elm Street planned for 2022-23, including sidewalks, granite curbing and signage. This project may also include a roundabout in Upton Center.
- The Complete Streets Funding Program improvements for Upton Center are designated for Upton's third year of funding and the proposals include Milford Street realignment, plus adding sidewalks, curb ramps, and parking spaces to Main Street, Church Street, and North Main Street.

The Town Manager is actively working with MassDOT on the TIP project to redesign Rte. 140 from Williams Street to Brooks Street. EDC will work with the Town Manager and MassDOT to coordinate design activities based on the Upton Center re-development project as well as the recently approved Community Center.

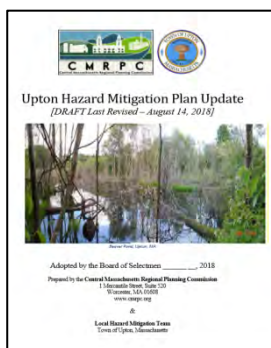
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## GREEN COMMUNITIES

Green Communities Division (GCD) falls under the state agency Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources and provides grants, technical assistance, and local support from Regional Coordinators to help municipalities reduce energy use and costs by implementing clean energy projects in municipal buildings, facilities, and schools. Upton became a green community in December of 2014, receiving two Green Communities grant awards. The first in was for \$148,350 to fund installation of idle reduction systems on a police cruiser and the following energy conservation measure; in Memorial School; digital direct controls (DDC) system optimization, demand control ventilation, refrigeration controls, exterior LED lighting, weatherization upgrades, and variable frequency drives for heating ventilation units; lighting upgrades at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and DPW facility; and weatherization at the Fire Station. The second grant in 2016 was for \$170,549 to fund conservation measures at the Police and Fire Station, LED lighting retrofit, and an upgrade for the HVAC systems and controls; and at the Wastewater Treatment Plant, building weatherization improvements.

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## HAZARD MITIGATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS



Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) programs provide funding for eligible activities that are consistent with the National Mitigation Frameworks' Long-Term Vulnerability Reduction capability. HMA programs reduce community vulnerability to disasters and their effect, promote individual and community safety and resilience, and promote community vitality after an incident. Furthermore, HMA programs reduce response and recovery resource requirements in the wake of a disaster or incident, which results in safer community that is less reliant on external financial assistance.

More recently, the town has prepared a draft of a Municipal Vulnerability Plan to identify potential mitigations for the effects of climate change.

## PART II – DETAILED ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

The following sections provide a detailed economic analysis of many aspects of the town's strengths and weaknesses, land use, natural and cultural resources, population, housing, job market, transportation and parking, tax base, zoning and related topics.

### LAND USE



Upton comprises 21.8 square miles of area in south-central Massachusetts. A notable feature of Upton's landscape is the large region of forestland and open space, comprising 16.8 square miles, or approximately three quarters of Upton's land area. Upton abuts the towns of Westborough, in the north, Grafton and Northbridge, in the west, Mendon, Hopedale and Milford in the south, and Hopkinton, in the east.<sup>3</sup> The town is located 30 miles from Boston and 12 miles from Worcester. Based on the 2010 census, Upton has a population density of 349.7 people per square mile.<sup>4</sup> This is the lowest population density among Upton's neighbors, with the exception of Mendon, which has a similar population density (328.5 people per square mile).<sup>5</sup>

As seen in Map 2 and in Figure 1, based on the most recent 2004 land use classifications, Upton is composed largely of low-density residential and forestland uses, making the town a relatively rural community. With limited commercial development, the majority of commercial and industrial areas are located along Massachusetts Route 140 (MA-140), including a large cluster as you proceed south on MA-140, towards Hopedale. A number of small commercial areas are also concentrated in Upton Center and are spread along the entirety of MA-140, as can be seen in Map 2. While commercial centers in nearby communities are located closer to major highway interchanges, the Upton Center commercial area's location makes it more attractive for local traffic.

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<sup>3</sup> GIS Analysis using MassGIS Town Boundaries via CMRPC GIS Library

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census 2010 SF1 100% Data, Population, Housing Units, Area, and Density: 2010 - State -- County Subdivision, Table: GCT-PH1

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

## MAP 2 | PRIORITY DEVELOPMENT

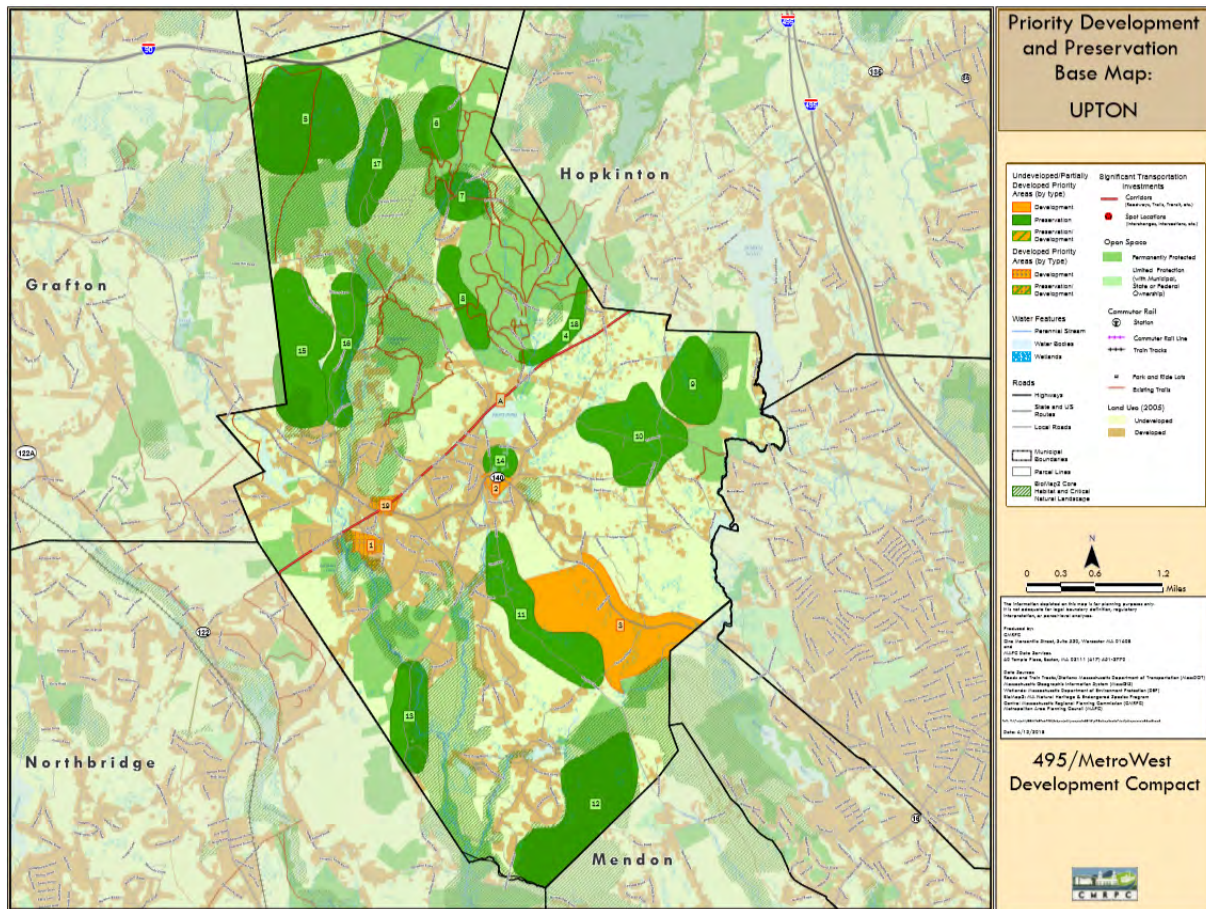
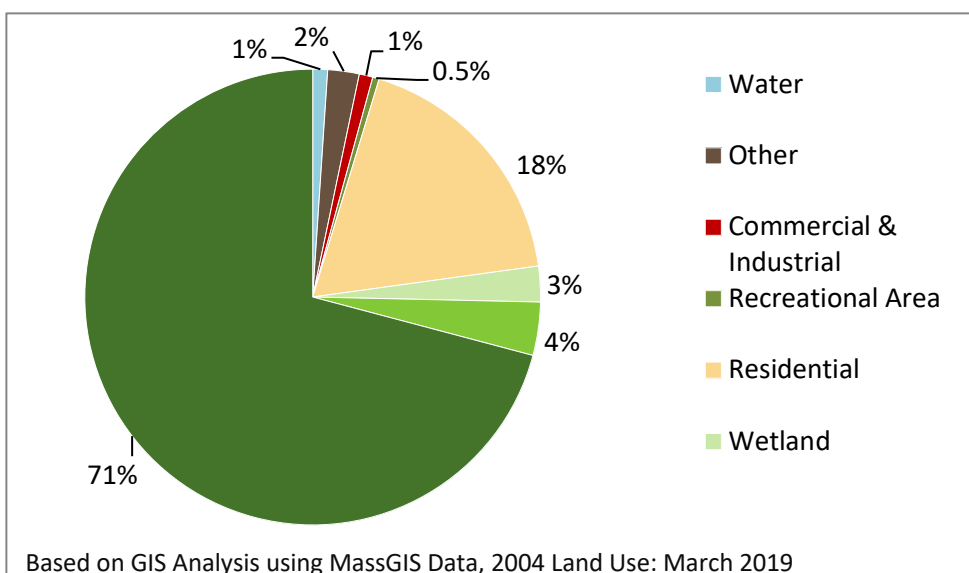


Figure 1 | Land Use in 2005



## NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Natural and cultural resources are some of the most significant assets in Upton. The Cultural Resources Map (Map 3) shows the different types of protected land and trails located in Upton. The majority of protected land is under State-level protections and the most notable area is Upton State Forest. This is a large tract of protected forested area in the northeast section of town and comprises 2,035 acres, or 15% of the town of Upton. Municipal Protected Land is also known as Town Conservation Lands and includes Peppercorn Hill, Howarth Conservation Area, Pratt Pond Conservation Area, and many other areas. Privately owned parcels are protected under conservation restrictions, deed restrictions, and flowage easements, plus landowners using the Chapter 61 programs and maintaining their property as open space receive preferential tax treatment. A small tract of land in the southern section of town is federally owned. Refer to the 2020 OSRP for more details.

### Protected lands

With vast tracts of protected open space, Upton has a long history of open space preservation. Approximately 5,500 acres has some type of permanent or temporary protection. Approximately 3,320 acres are considered to be permanently or very strongly protected. These lands include Town conservation areas, Upton State Forest, cemeteries, Kiwanis Beach, athletic fields, Town-owned wellfields, Old Zachary, Goss Pond, and privately-owned parcels protected by conservation restrictions or deed restrictions. Table 1 provides an overview of the town's land uses and protected natural resources. Map 3 provides an overview of open space. Map 4 shows protected land.

Table 1 | Upton's Land Use Changes 1971-2005

Category	Acres				Percent Change (1971 – 2005)
	1971	1985	1999	2005	
Undeveloped Land	11,748	11,217	10,406	10,366	-11.8
Forestland	10,992	10,500	9,841	9,147	-16.8
Farmland	756	717	565	387	-48.8
Developed	1,110	1,748	2,642	2,734	246
Residential	1,016	1,614	2,459	2,588	255
Commercial/Industrial	94	134	155	145	54.3

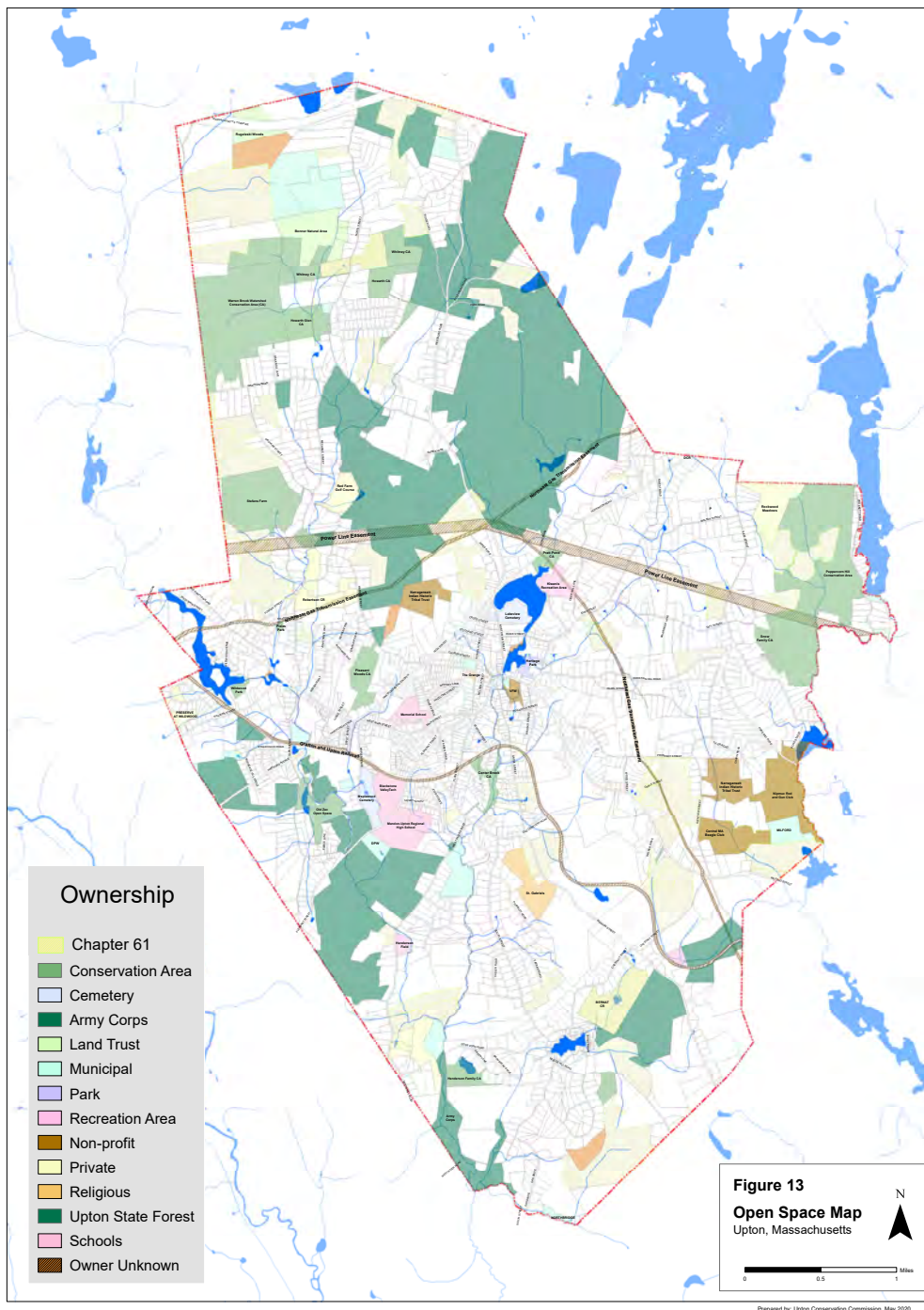
Source: Town of Upton, OSRP 2020, Table 3-6 Upton Land Use Changes 1971-2005

### Trails

Upton boasts an excellent system of trails on both public and private land, including at Upton State Forest, Peppercorn Hill, the Warren Brook Watershed Conservation Area, and Stefans Farm. There are also numerous miles of informal, unmapped trails on public and private land throughout the town, including trails along the West River, in the vicinity of Miscoe Hill, north of the Warren Brook Watershed Conservation Area, and at many other locations.

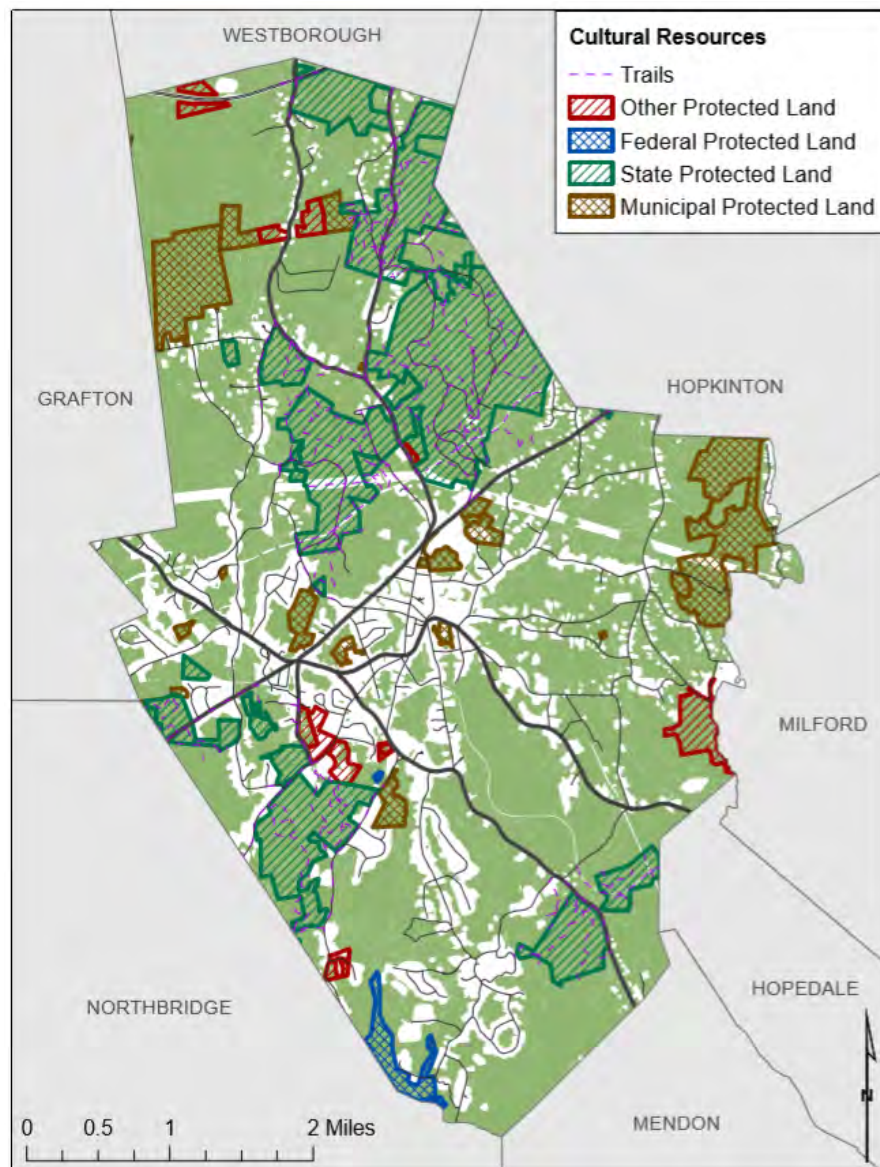


## MAP 3 | OPEN SPACE



Source: Town of Upton, OSRP 2020, Figure 13 Open Space Map

## MAP 4 | PROTECTED LAND



MassGIS Data, Protected Lands: last updated March 2017

### Bodies of Water

Upton additionally has numerous bodies of water, including North Pond, Lake Wildwood, Pratt Pond, Old Zachary Pond, and Goss Pond. Principle streams include Center Brook, West River, Mill River, Warren Brook, Miscoe Brook, and Taft Pond Brook. There are about 150 acres of surface water in Upton.



### Historical Sites

Some of Upton's historical sites include the Knowlton Hat Factory (1834), United Parish Church (1848), Holy Angels Church (1848), First Burying Ground (1730), Whitney House (ca. 1755), and Town Hall (1884). Additionally, there are dozens of residences spread throughout the town that were built prior to 1800.

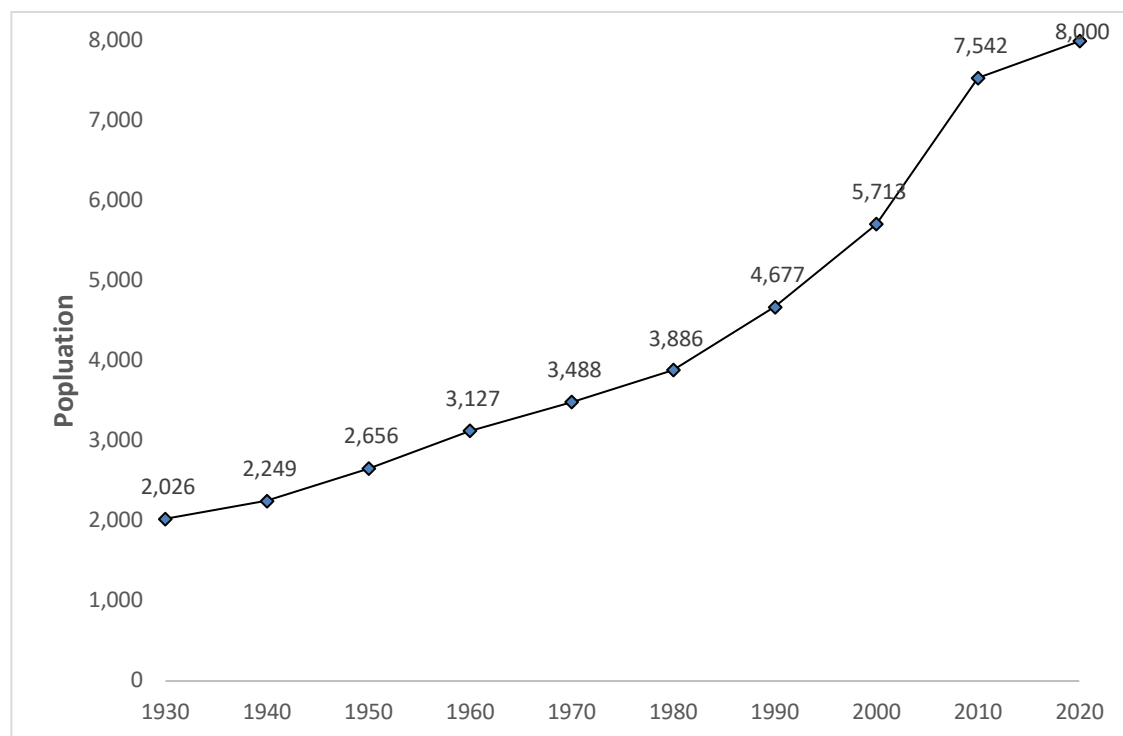
### Scenic Vistas

Upton has a diverse landscape filled with a number of scenic views. One of the most beautiful vistas is the historic Sweet William Farm, a property that includes an 18<sup>th</sup> century farm house, fields, stone walls, and cart paths. Other farms, wetlands, and open spaces offer scenic vistas for Upton's residents and visitors to enjoy.

## POPULATION TRENDS

Figure 2 shows Upton's population has increased gradually since 1930. As of the 2020 Census, Upton's population was 8,000 according to the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 2 | Population Change 1930-2020



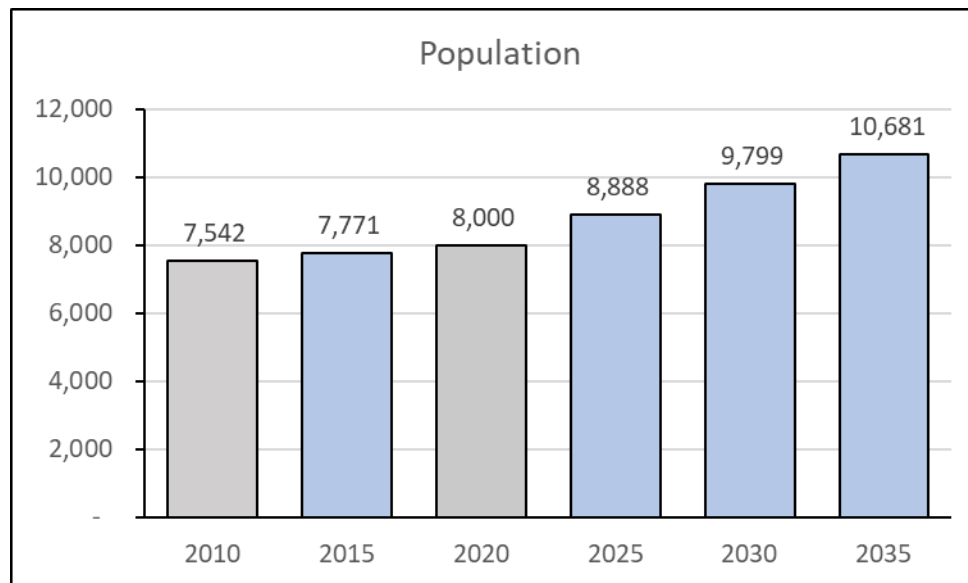
Upton is considered part of the Metro West region, which contains 45 communities and lies at the western fringe of the Boston metro area between Interstates 495 and 95/MA Route 128. This region added nearly 30,000 residents between 2000 and 2010 for an annualized growth rate of just below 0.5% per year. The steady growth of

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census 2020 SF1 100% Data, Population, Housing Units, Area, and Density: 2020 - State -- County Subdivision, Table: GCT-PH1

the Metro West region over the past decade is expected to continue into the foreseeable future, particularly as Boston-area rents continue to rapidly increase, forcing residents and businesses to migrate outwards.

Population projections made some years ago by the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute predicted an increase of between 9% and 11% per 5-year span, out to 2035. Based on that, we would expect the population to grow from 8,000 in 2020 to around 10,700 in 2035, as shown in Figure 3. However, the COVID pandemic is proving to be a major inflection point, with some unpredictable impacts on population flow still to be understood. Surveys are already showing a major flight of younger people from cities to semi-rural communities like Upton. Town committees must remain nimble in the face of pressures on development and changes in demographics.

Figure 3 | Population Projections 2010-2035



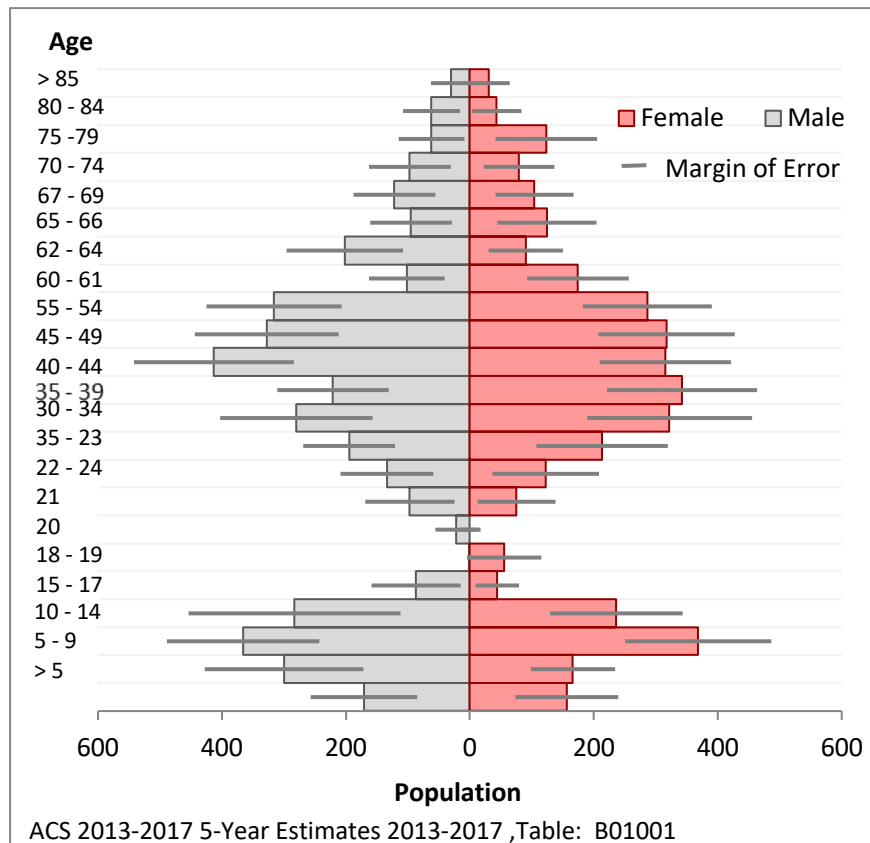
Sources: State projection for 2020. Growth projection from UMASS Donahue Institute.

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## AGE DISTRIBUTION

The American Community Survey population estimates for 2017, displayed in Figure 4, show that Upton's age distribution is concentrated around the age groups of 35-59-year-old and 5-17-year-old. There is a large population gap among the 18-24-year-old age group.

Figure 4 | Population Distribution 2017



## INCOME

Based on recent data, it is evident that incomes in Upton are on the rise. The estimated median household income in 2017 was \$119,392, which is significantly higher than both Massachusetts (\$74,167) and Worcester County (\$69,313).<sup>7</sup> Since 2010, median income has increased by 11% for Upton residents.<sup>8</sup> Further illustrating this upward trend, per capita income was \$48,694 in 2017 and has increased by 18% since 2010.<sup>9</sup> Of households in Upton, an estimated 21% have an income of more than \$200,000 a year.<sup>10</sup> It is significant to note the inequality between the median incomes across age cohorts in Upton. Figure 5 below shows that households with a householder older than age 65 have a median income of less than half that of other age cohorts. The poverty rate in Upton is 4.8%, however among residents 65 and older that number rises to 10.4%.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 5 | Median Income by Age of Householder

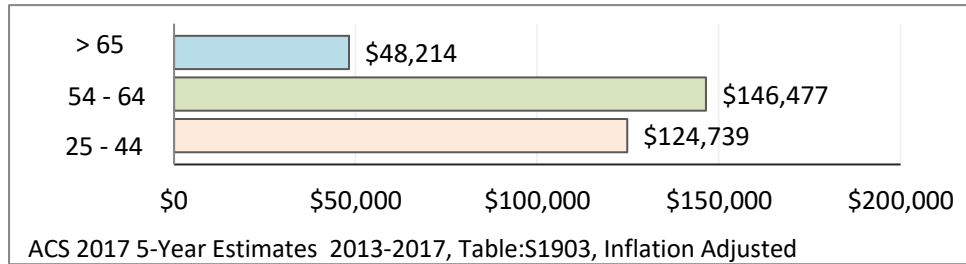
<sup>7</sup> Income in the Past 12 Months (Non- Inflation Adjusted Dollars), 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table: S1901

<sup>8</sup> ibid

<sup>9</sup> ibid

<sup>10</sup> ibid

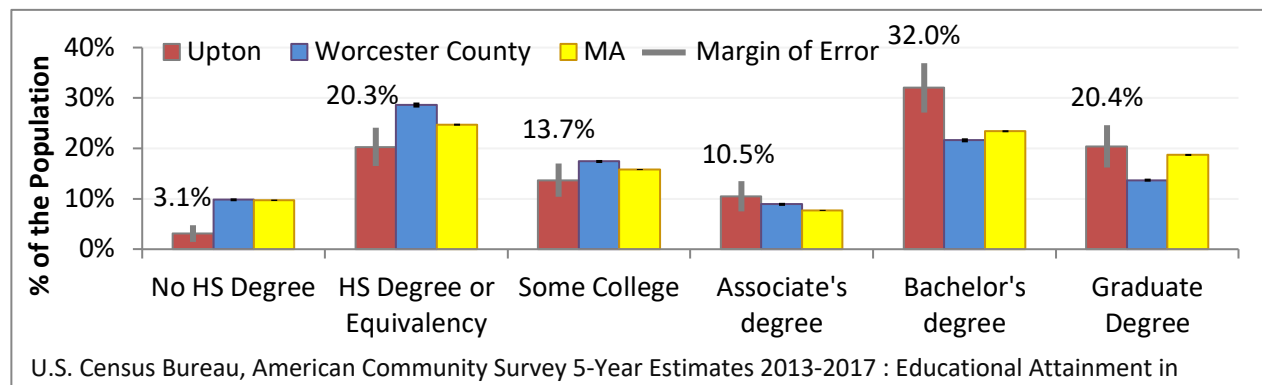
<sup>11</sup> Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table: S1701



## EDUCATION

It is possible that the income trend previously described is correlated with high education levels in Upton. As seen in Figure 6, the population of Upton has higher educational attainment compared to both the state and county. Fewer residents compared to the state and county hold less than a high school degree or only a high school degree, while a greater percentage of residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher. Overall, 61% of Upton residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 6 | Educational Attainment



With a 92% graduation rate, Upton remains in the top performers for school districts based on graduation rates among nearby towns. It should be noted, however, that the Upton-Mendon District graduation rate actually decreased between 2014 and 2018 from 95.7% to 92.9%, as can be seen in Table 1. Upton was one of only nine districts in the region that experienced a decrease in the graduation rate during this time frame.

<sup>12</sup> Educational Attainment, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table: S1501

## HOUSING

### UNITS AND AFFORDABILITY

Of the 2,820 housing units documented in the 2010 Census, 223 units are considered affordable (6.3%) for qualifying individuals earning less than 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Of those 223 qualifying affordable housing units, 178 units are subsidized affordable housing.<sup>13</sup> Since affordable housing comprises less than 10% of Upton's total housing stock, the town does not qualify for exemption from comprehensive permitting allowed by M.G.L. 40B. This law makes it possible for developers to initiate affordable housing projects that do not meet Upton's standards for density, buffers, conversion, and other criteria.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the affordable housing stock in Upton is insufficient to meet the needs of residents. Based on 2017 ACS estimates, 24% of Upton households are housing cost-burdened. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a cost-burdened household as one that pays 30% or more of their income towards housing costs.<sup>15</sup> As seen in Table 8, the majority of Upton's households (84%) are homeowners. Homeowners in Upton tend to be less cost-burdened than renters, as 20% of homeowners are considered cost-burdened while 44% of renters are considered cost-burdened.<sup>16</sup> High rates of cost-burdened households follow trends at the state and county levels. The proportion of cost-burdened households in Upton (24%) is somewhat lower than Worcester County (33%) and the state (35%). This trend is true for both renter and owner households.

Table 2 | Cost-Burdened Households

	Massachusetts	Worcester County	Upton
Total Households	2,585,715	305,975	2,741
Total Cost-Burdened Households	910,359	100,130	647
% of All Households Cost-Burdened	35%	33%	24%
% of Renter Households Cost-Burdened	47%	46%	44%
% of Owner Households Cost-Burdened	28%	26%	20%

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2013-2017: Mortgage status and selected monthly owner costs in Upton, Table: B25087

<sup>13</sup> MA Department of Housing and Community Development, Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), update as of September, 14, 2017

<sup>14</sup> Fact Sheet on Chapter 40B The State's Affordable Housing Zoning Law, Prepared by Citizens' Housing and Planning Association October 2007

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Who Needs Affordable Housing?", Accessed 4/25/2018

<sup>16</sup> Gross rent as a percentage of household income in the past 12 months, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table: B25070 Mortgage status by selected monthly owner costs as a percentage of household income in the past 12 months, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table: B25091

BUILDOUT ANALYSIS

In 1999 the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) initiated an effort to prepare a buildout analysis for each community in the State. A buildout analysis attempts to determine what the town would look like at full buildout, that is, if the town were completely developed under the standards of current zoning. Existing developed lands, protected lands and land with environmental constraints were taken out of the equation, and the remaining developable land was divided by the standards of the local zoning bylaw.

A buildout analysis does not attempt to determine when or if a community will reach full buildout; rather, it is simply an attempt to determine what a community would look like if its remaining vacant land were developed according to the town’s current zoning standards. The town could alter its buildout results by making changes to dimensional requirements for new lots (lot size, frontage) or by permanently protecting more land in town. Thus, a buildout analysis is fluid and represents but a snapshot in time.

The regional planning commissions were contracted to perform buildout studies for each community in their respective regions. In Upton’s case, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) completed a buildout analysis for the Town in July 2000, shown in Table 3. Although now quite dated, the study’s analysis of development constraints and long-term buildout analysis is still informative.

Table 3 | Buildout Analysis

Upton Buildout Analysis

Total Housing Units at Full Buildout	5,147
Total Population at Full Buildout	13,070
Total School-Age Children at Full Buildout	2,931

Source: Town of Upton, 2020 OSRP

The buildout analysis and current population indicates that Upton is roughly 60 percent towards full buildout based on the current standards of the Town’s Zoning Bylaw. Looking towards the future, Upton will most likely retain its present land use pattern of suburban residential development with Route 140 supporting most of the Town’s commercial and industrial uses.

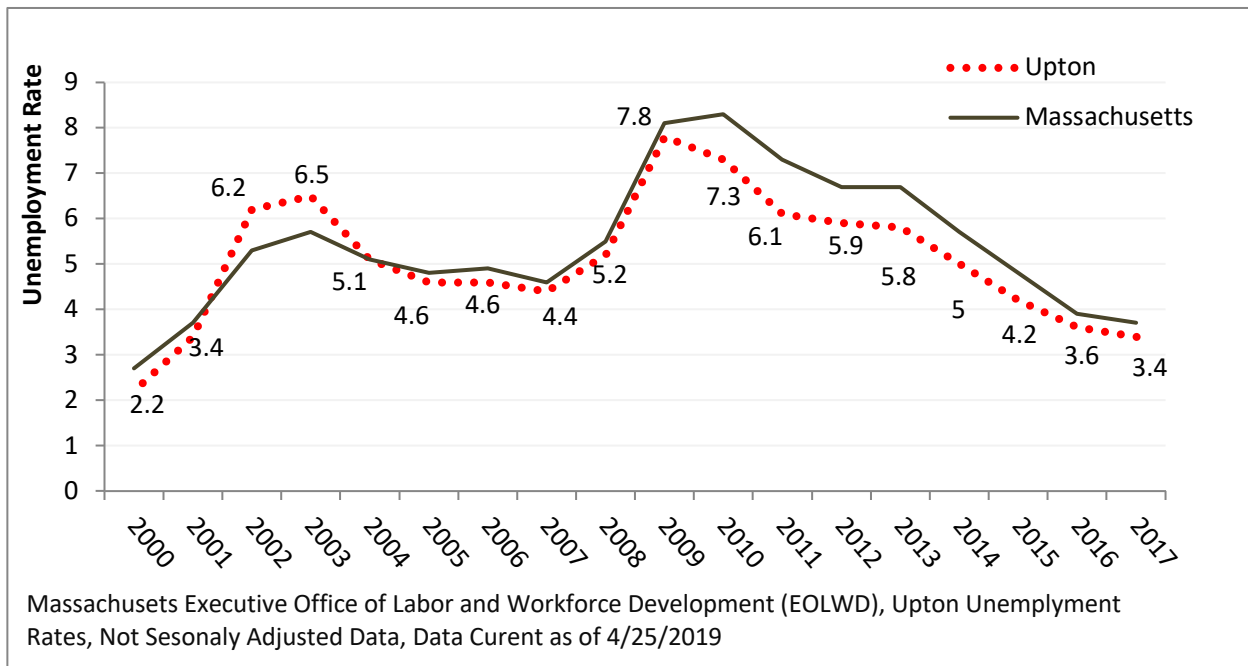
JOBS AND WORKFORCE

RESIDENT EMPLOYMENT

Upton’s unemployment rate is strong 3.4%, and remains at a rate slightly below the state. As shown in Figure 7, the town’s unemployment rate has been decreasing at a similar pace as the state since it peaked in 2010 and is currently at its lowest rate since 2001.



Figure 7 | Annual Unemployment Over Time



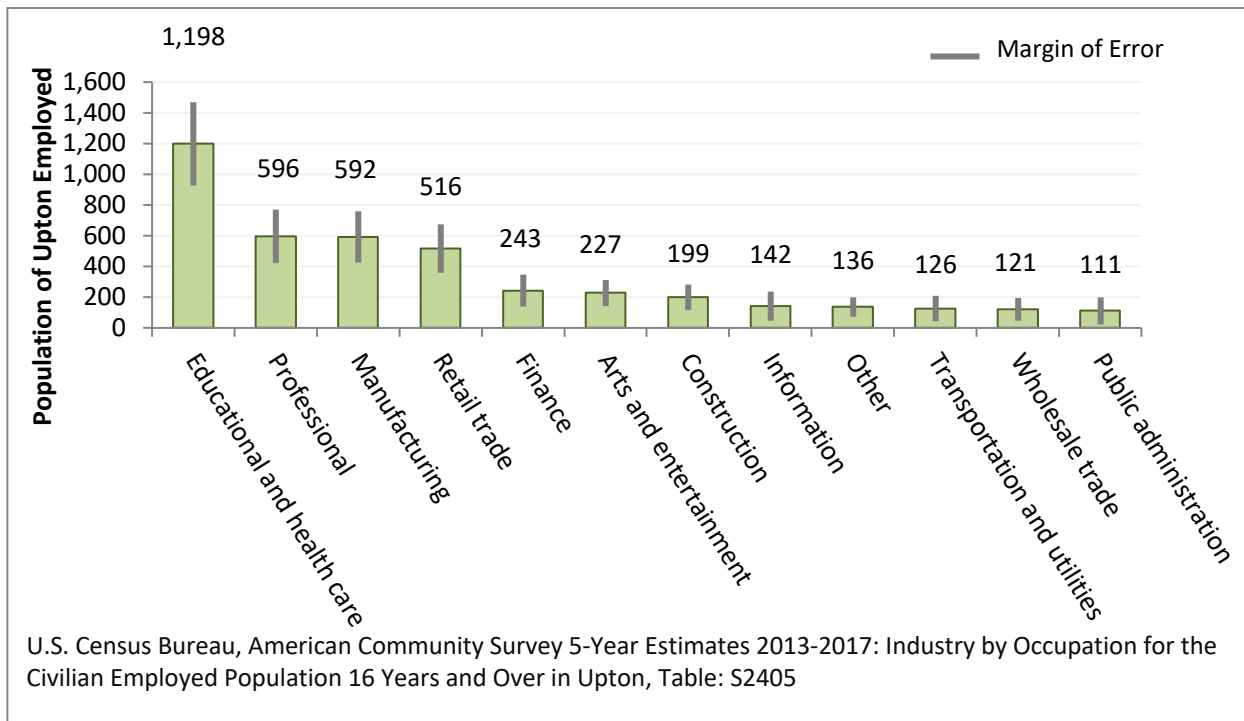
Approximately 50% of Upton residents commute outside Worcester County for work while 2% commute outside of Massachusetts.<sup>17</sup> The average travel time to work for an Upton resident is 35 minutes, which is higher than the state and county average of 29 minutes. About one third (32%) of Upton residents commute more than 45 minutes to work.<sup>18</sup> Like many other small, suburban Massachusetts towns, Upton is a bedroom community for the majority of its workforce that commutes to outside communities for work.

As seen in Figure 8, a majority of the population of Upton is employed in the education and health, professional, and manufacturing industries.

<sup>17</sup> Sex of workers by Place of Work--State and County Level, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table: B08007

<sup>18</sup> Commuting Characteristics by Sex, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table: S0801

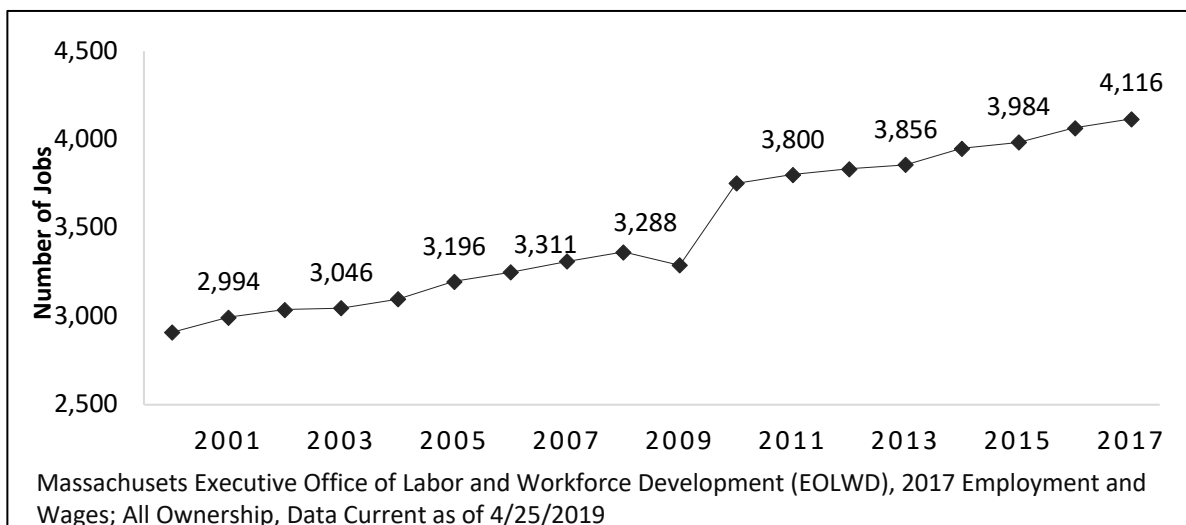
Figure 8 | Population by Employment Industry



## JOBS IN UPTON

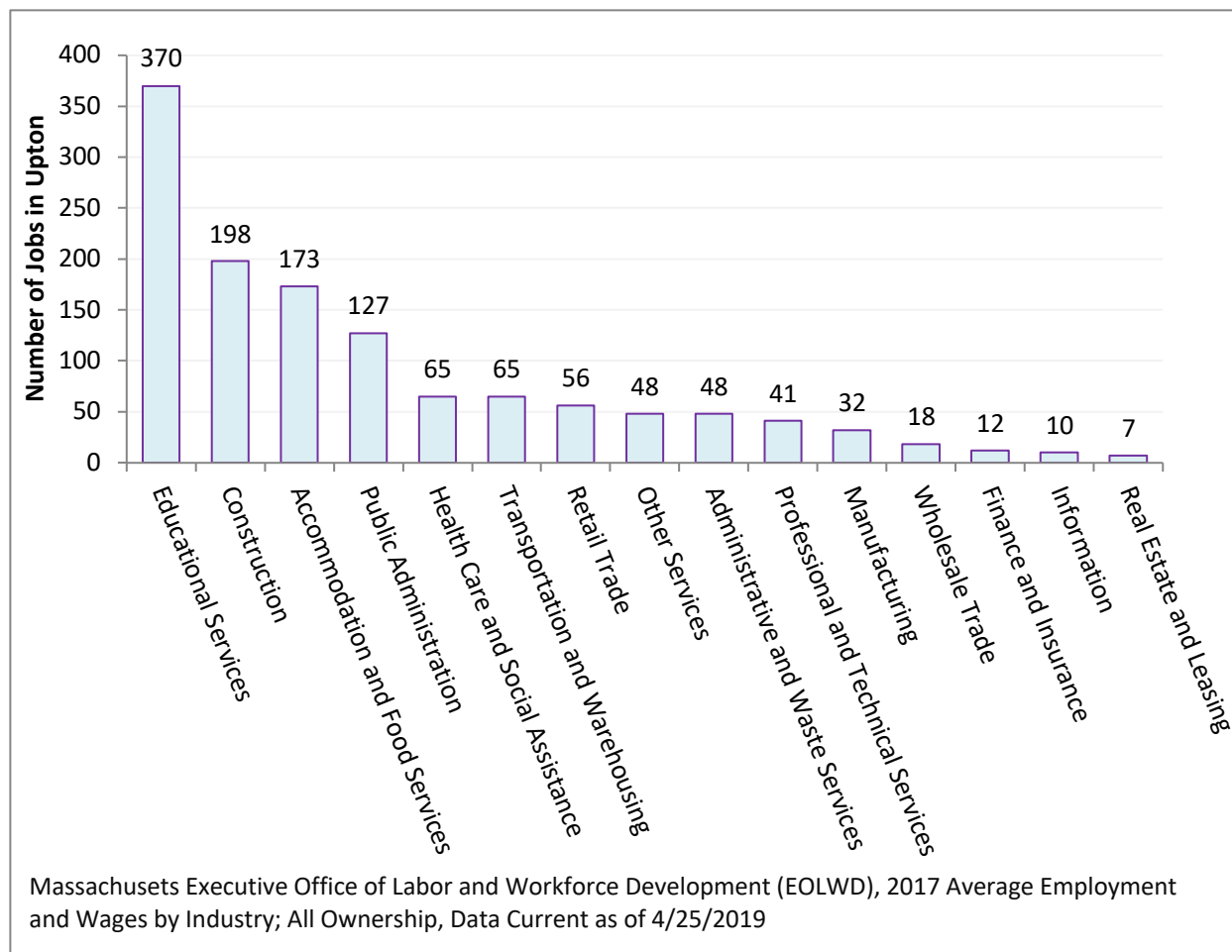
As shown in Figure 9, since 2001, the number of people employed in Upton has experienced a gradual increase, following a slight dip between 2008 and 2009 during the Recession. After a steep increase between 2009 and 2010 of 14%, this continued growth has remained in the 0.5% to 2.5% range. Most recently, Upton added 52 jobs between 2016 and 2017.

Figure 9 | Number of Jobs by Year



The industries that dominate the job market within Upton are educational services, construction, and accommodation and food services, as seen in Figure 10. Educational Services is the only industry that is prevalent between both the jobs that Upton residents are employed in and among jobs in Upton. The discrepancy between the jobs that residents of Upton are employed in and jobs available in Upton indicates that the job market in Upton may not fully match the skill set of its population. Additionally, it is a reflection on the high number of people who commute out of Upton for work.

Figure 10 | Jobs by Industry



The strength of Upton's job market can be assessed in a number of ways to better understand what industries are key players and how the market is changing. Table 4 shows the top industries based on criteria including highest paying industries, top employers, and greatest growth. Professional/ Technical Services and Transportation/ Warehousing both increased their workforce by more than double between 2010 and 2017. Transportation/ Warehousing added 34 jobs to the market, coming close to the Construction industry, which added the most jobs (68) between 2010 and 2017. The highest paying industries (wholesale trade and information services) are not represented in these categories.

Table 4 | Industries Assessment

<b>Largest Proportional Growth:</b> <i>% Change in employment 2010 - 2017</i>	
Professional and Technical Services	156.3%
Transportation and Warehousing	109.7%
<b>Most Jobs Added:</b> <i>Change in number of jobs 2010 - 2017</i>	
Construction	68
Transportation and Warehousing	34
<b>Highest Paying Industries:</b> <i>Highest average weekly wage in 2017</i>	
Wholesale Trade	\$2,453
Information	\$1,791
<b>Largest Employers:</b> <i>Highest average weekly employment in 2017</i>	
Educational Services	370
Construction	198
Source: MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)	

There are only 11 firms in Upton employing more than 20 workers as shown in Table 5. Five of the top 11 are municipal and educational facilities. Upton has issued 321 business licenses, indicating that the town's economy is dominated by small businesses and organizations.

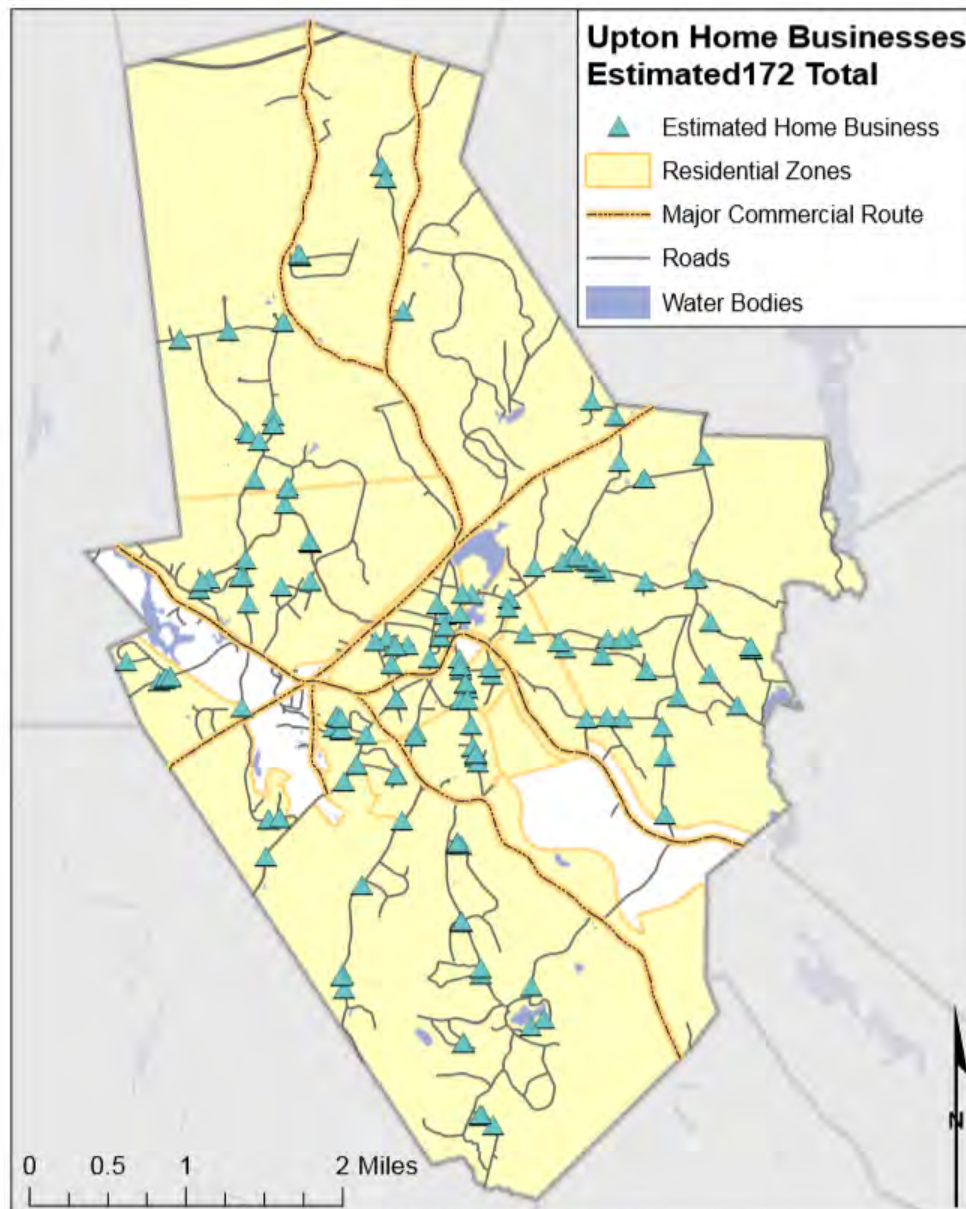
Table 5 | Top Employers in Upton

<b>Top Employers in Upton</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Number of employees</b>
Blackstone Valley Voc. Tech High	Pleasant St.	100-249
Nipmuc Regional High School	Pleasant St.	100-249
Memorial Elementary School	Main St.	50-99
Chem-Dry	Milford St.	20-49
Dunkin' Donuts	Hartford Ave N.	20-49
George J Summers Trucking Co	Church St.	20-49
Hopedale Cardiology	Milford St.	20-49
Red Barn Coffee Roasters	Walker Dr.	20-49
Riverside Outpatient Ctr.	Milford St.	20-49
Upton Fire Dept.	Church St.	20-49
Upton Police Dept.	School St.	20-49

The Official Website of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD): Largest 25 Employers in Upton

It is suspected that a large number of the town's employers are home businesses. Based on a GIS analysis that removed all businesses located in a commercial or industrial zoning district and those located adjacent to a commercial route, an estimated 172 of Upton businesses are home based as shown in Map 5. The data doesn't reflect job losses/gain as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is difficult to project future job losses/gains post-pandemic. The town needs to remain reactive to future trends.

#### MAP 5 | ESTIMATED HOME BUSINESSES BASED ON LOCATION



Town of Upton Business Certificates as of 2019. 98% Geocoded (8 Addresses Not Found). Analysis to Estimate the Number of Home Businesses in Upton: Identified Businesses with Addresses in Residential Zones, and Outside a 100-meter buffer from a Major Commercial Route.

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## MANUFACTURING JOBS

The manufacturing sector in Upton is small, with no manufacturing companies ranking in the top 11 employers, based on having more than 20 employees. There are four firms designated as Manufacturing by the Department of Labor as of 2017, employing an average of 32 workers per month. The total wages distributed by these four manufacturers in 2018 was \$1,622,652, which amounts to an average weekly wage per worker of \$975. This weekly wage is lower than the average for all those employed in Upton, implying those with manufacturing jobs in Upton are not earning as much as employees in service industries.

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## SERVICE INDUSTRY JOBS

Service industries play a stronger role in Upton's economy. Educational Services employ the most workers (1,198), however, Food Services, Technical Services, Finance and Insurance, Information, and Retail Trade all experienced growth in employment between 2010 and 2017. The top three largest employers in Upton fall under Educational Services, a field that dominates the workforce in Upton. The town also contains many home-based businesses that may not be reflected accurately in the U.S. Census data. Overall, Upton's workforce is primarily based in service industries.

## TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

Transportation and parking are major concerns in Upton Center. Upton Center has a relatively high volume of traffic on weekdays. Most traffic travels through the town center. Reducing speed and improving pedestrian safety are a high priority. Map 6 shows commuting times/distances to surrounding towns.

The intersection directly in front of Town Hall is extremely dangerous due to the volume and speed of traffic travelling through Upton Center. The intersection of Main Street/School Street/Pleasant Street is equally dangerous.

The town has made and is considering the following changes to improve both traffic and pedestrian safety in this key area:

- The town has closed Warren Street from Nelson Street to Main Street in an effort to improve traffic and pedestrian safety in the Town Hall area. Parking adjacent to the Town Hall will be re-designed to have handicapped parking next to the building.
- The town is considering re-aligning North Main Street and Church Street to also improve traffic and pedestrian safety.

Multiple state-funded transportation projects are planned for Upton, which will improve existing infrastructure and create safer routes for pedestrians and cyclists. Projects on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) include:

- Hartford Ave N. – High Street – Hopkinton Road
  - Phase I - Reconstruction of Hopkinton Road, including a new traffic signal at School Street, Westboro Road, Hopkinton Road intersection. MassDOT Project ID 606125 – construction began 2021



- Phase II - Reconstruction of Hartford Avenue North and High Street including sidewalks, granite curbing and improved pedestrian crossings. MassDOT Project ID 606125 – construction began 2021
- Resurfacing of Route 140 from Williams Street to Brooks Street/Elm Street planned for 2022-23, including bike lanes, sidewalks, granite curbing, street lighting and signage. This project may also include a roundabout in Upton Center.
- The Complete Streets Funding Program improvements for Upton Center are designated for Upton's third year of funding and the proposals include Milford Street realignment, plus adding sidewalks, curb ramps, and parking spaces to Main Street, Church Street, and North Main Street.

In addition, the town recently approved a new Shared Parking By-law for the Upton Center Business District, which will hopefully encourage shared parking and reduce the amount of space dedicated to parking.

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## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

MBTA Commuter Rail is available in neighboring towns of Westborough, Southborough and Grafton as well as Ashland and Franklin, as shown in Map 6. Upton is a 20-minute drive from 6 Commuter Rail Stations.

The MWRTA runs buses in and out the Metro West area as shown in Map 7. The closest bus stop is in Hopkinton (Price Chopper Shopping Area), which is < 3 miles from the Town Center. Joining the MWRTA and possibly gaining access to bus service is a long range goal.

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## PARKING

Lack of convenient parking is a concern for Upton Center specifically. This lack of convenient parking was raised during the Visioning Process. The resulting Vision for Upton Center does include a significant amount of centrally located parking that would be accessible and possibly shared by businesses, residents and visitors.

There are currently two municipal parking lots in Upton. Both are located within walking distance of the Town Center. One is located adjacent to the VFW Property on Rte 140 (Milford Street) and the other is located across from the Knowlton-Risteen Building on Grove Street. This lot is used primarily for town hall employee parking. The parking spaces that about the Town Hall are reserved for town residents and others who have business in Town Hall.

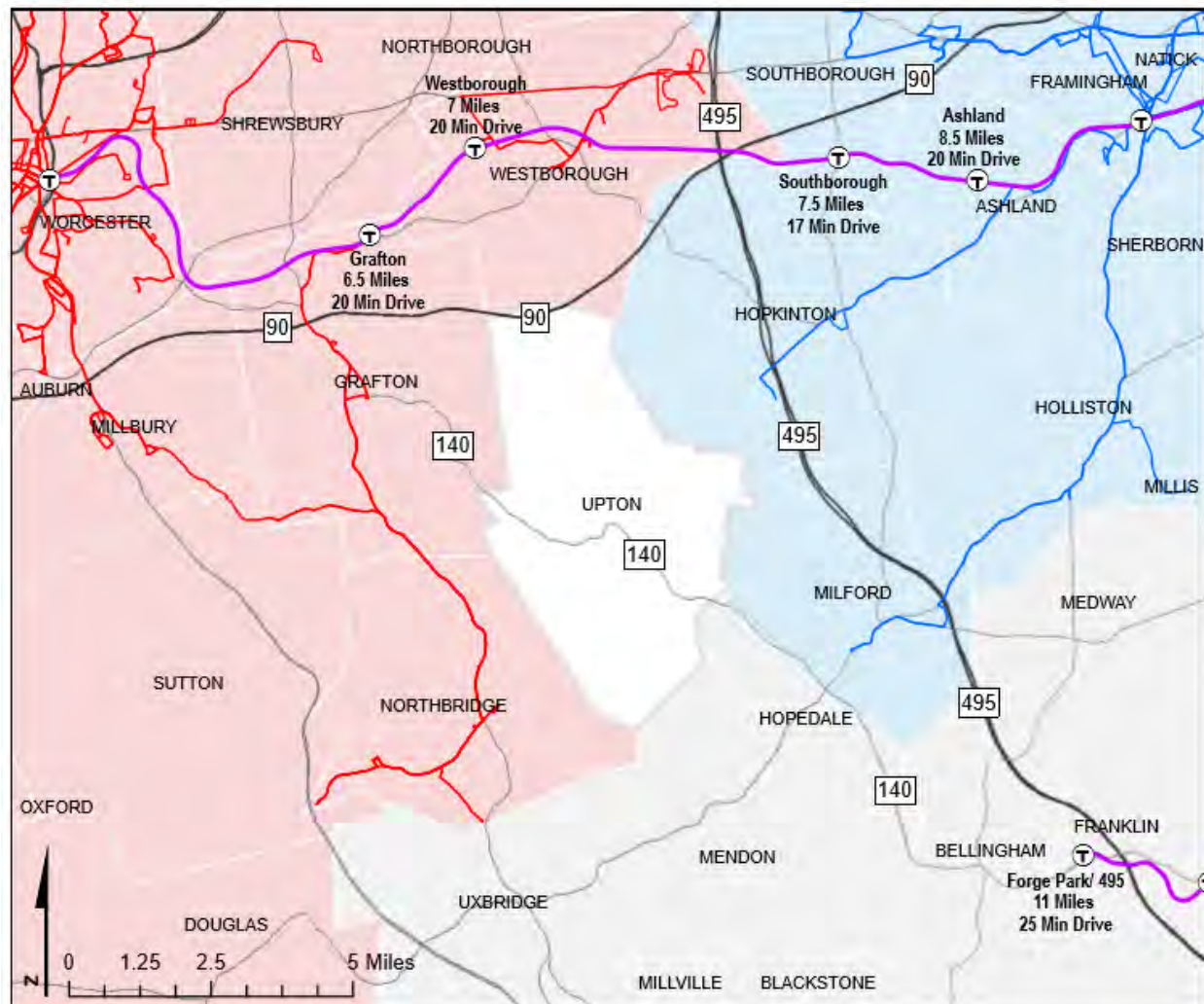
The town recently approved a Shared Parking by-law that can reduce the amount of parking that would normally be required for a business or residence.

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## TRAFFIC VOLUMES

As shown in Map 8, traffic counts heading towards Hopkinton during the morning and afternoon commute are high (~15,000 vehicles). Much of this volume is coming from towns west of Upton. Traffic volumes have certainly decreased since the pandemic but will likely return to pre-pandemic levels eventually. Similar volume has been observed travelling through Upton Center, which is cause for concern from a pedestrian safety perspective.

## MAP 6 | PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS



\*Distance is a linear distance

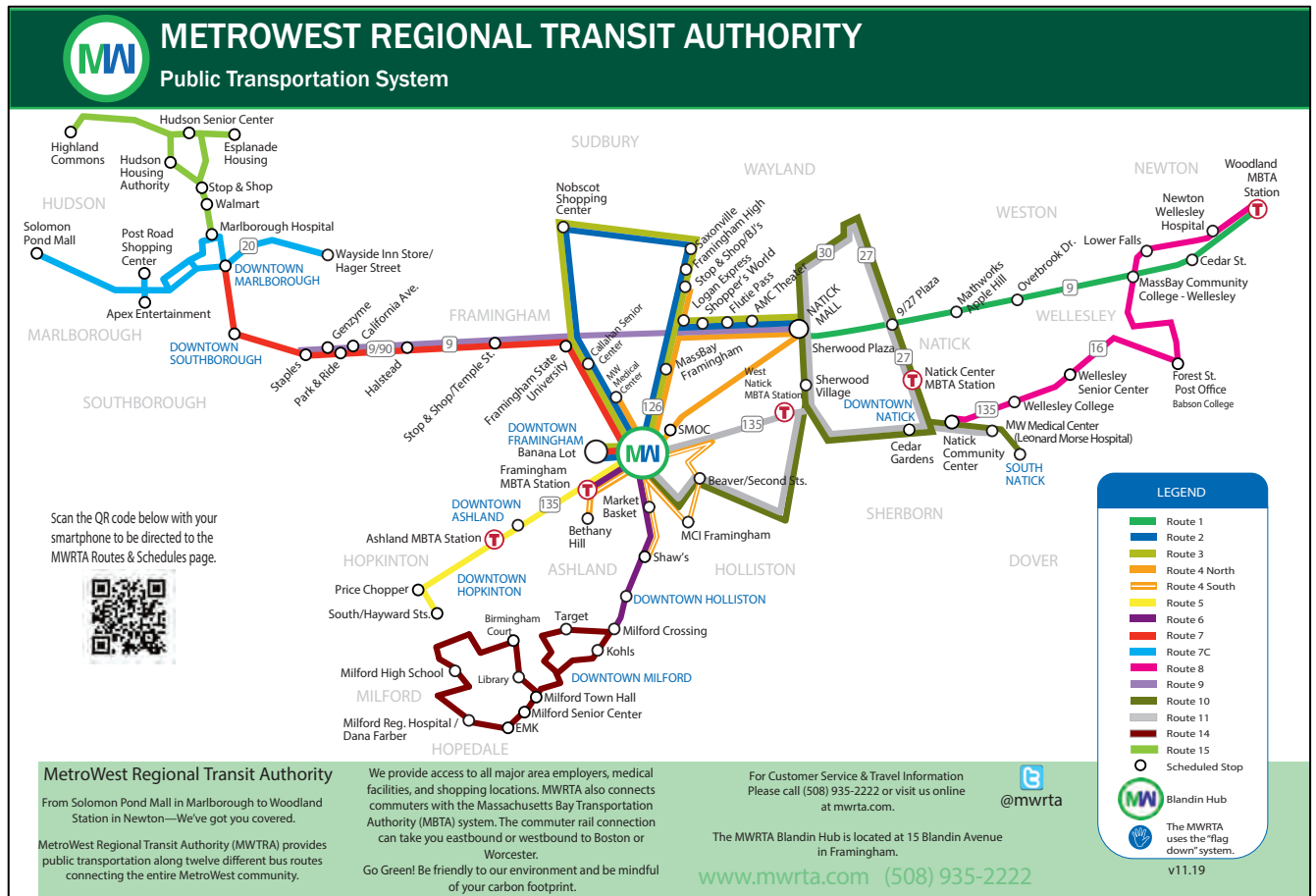
\*\*Travel time based on Google maps estimates during lowest traffic hours

\*\*\*Metro West routes not up to date, new downtown Milford route and Hopedale connection excluded



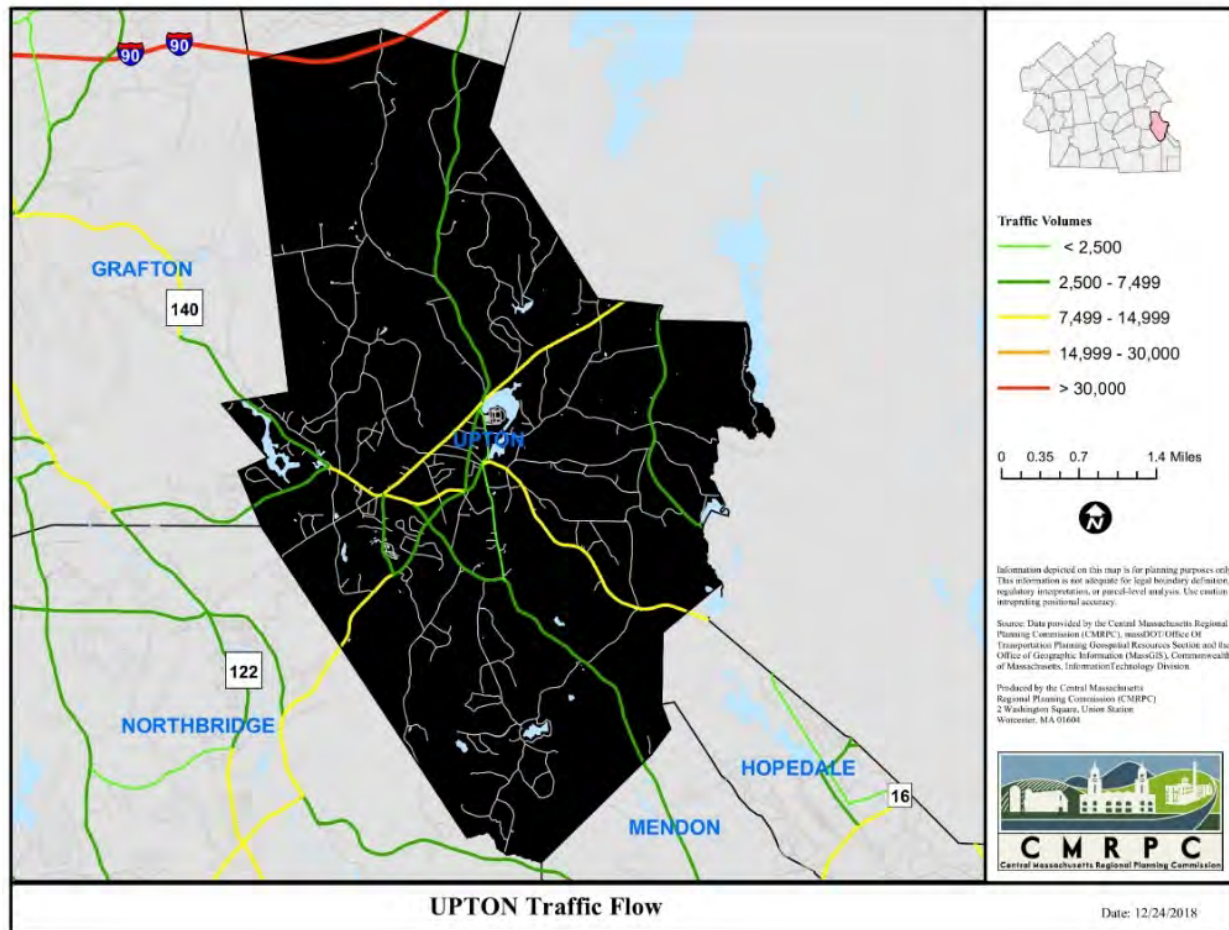
Produced by CMRPC

## MAP 7 | METROWEST REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY BUS ROUTES



Produced by MWRTA

## MAP 8 | PRE-PANDEMIC TRAFFIC COUNTS



Produced by CMRPC

The pre-pandemic traffic flow indicates that weekday traffic volume travelling through West Upton Center heading east towards I-495 was as high as 15,000 vehicles per day. Similar volume of traffic is traveling through Upton Center heading north towards Grafton.



## COMPLETE STREETS

The Complete Streets Funding Program is a Mass-DOT program that distributes up to \$400,000 per year to cities and towns for improvements to streets for “all modes”—pedestrians, bicyclists, freight, transit, emergency responders, etc. There are three steps to the program:

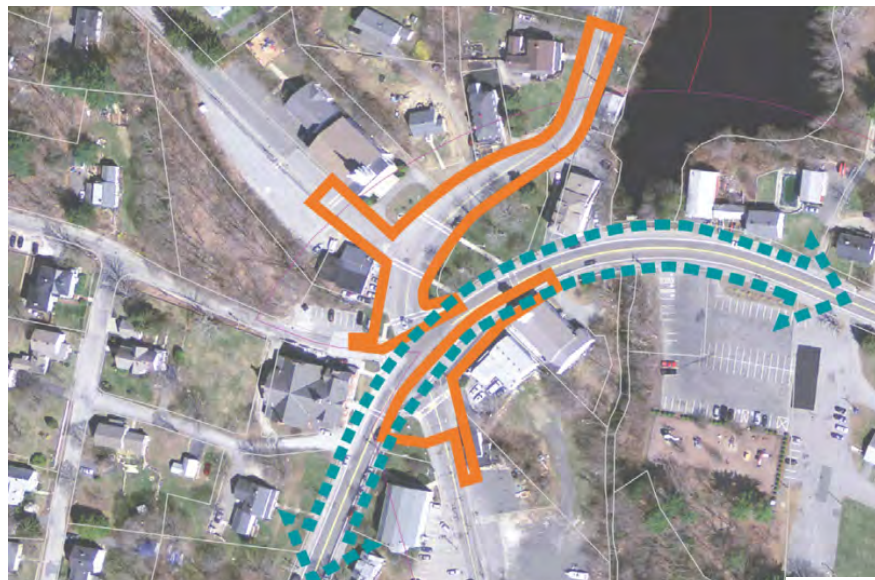
1. Adopting a Complete Streets Policy;
2. Creating a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan that describes projects, estimates their costs, and prioritizes them;
3. Making a funding request to MassDOT for one or more shovel-ready projects not to exceed \$400,000 per year. Even though design is not an eligible expense, Chapter 90 funds can be used for design.


Upton has completed the first two steps. Its Complete Streets Policy was approved in 2017. The Prioritization Plan—created by Beta Group working with the DPW and Town Manager—was approved in January 2019. Complete Streets improvements for Upton Center are shown on Map 9 and designated for the third year of funding (2022), including:

- Milford Street realignment in front of 1-3 Milford St and upgrades to the corner of Grove Street.
- Replacing the small island in front of the Arcade Block with a wide sidewalk/plaza with parking adjacent to Route 140. Parking is also added along the north side of the Town Common.
- Adding sidewalks, curb ramps, and parking spaces to Main Street, Church Street and North Main Street from Main Street to 10 North Main Street.

Additional Improvements to streets, sidewalks in Upton Center and surrounding neighborhoods are proposed for funding years after 2022. It is unclear whether the Complete Streets Funding Program will still be funded in 2022 or beyond.

Map 9 | Complete Streets



 Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), 2022-23

 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, Year 3

## TAX BASE

The Town of Upton's tax rate as of FY2020 is \$17.22 per \$1,000. Upton's primary revenue source is levied taxes, making up 76% of total town revenue. Upton ranks 63<sup>rd</sup> among Massachusetts towns with the highest average single-family tax bill.<sup>19</sup> The tax burden largely falls on residents as 94.58% of Upton's tax ratio derives from taxes on Residential and Open Spaces. The proportion of taxes from residential is greater than 88% of MA towns. Although slightly more in line with surrounding towns, Upton still has the greatest dependence on its residential tax base among its neighbors. In 2017 the average single-family tax bill in Upton was \$7,355, an average higher than many surrounding towns, with the exception of Westborough and Hopkinton. Table 6 compares Upton's tax rate to that of surrounding towns. Table 7 shows the percentage of different property classifications.

Table 6 | FY 2018 Tax Rates by Property Classification

Municipality	Residential (per \$1,000)	Open Space (per \$1,000)	Commercial (per \$1,000)	Industrial (per \$1,000)	Personal Property (per \$1,000)
Westborough	\$18.33	\$0.00	\$18.33	\$18.33	\$18.33
Hopedale	\$17.57	\$0.00	\$28.29	\$28.29	\$28.29
Uxbridge	\$17.35	\$0.00	\$17.35	\$17.35	\$17.35
<b>Upton</b>	<b>\$17.31</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$17.31</b>	<b>\$17.31</b>	<b>\$17.31</b>
Hopkinton	\$17.17	\$17.17	\$17.17	\$17.17	\$17.17
Mendon	\$16.74	\$0.00	\$16.74	\$16.74	\$16.74
Grafton	\$16.66	\$0.00	\$16.66	\$16.66	\$16.66
Milford	\$16.54	\$0.00	\$30.88	\$30.88	\$30.88
Northbridge	\$12.97	\$0.00	\$12.97	\$12.97	\$12.97

Division of Local Services Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DLS), Tax Rates by Class:  
Data current as of 04/04/2019; Upton's Tax Rate is for FY 2020

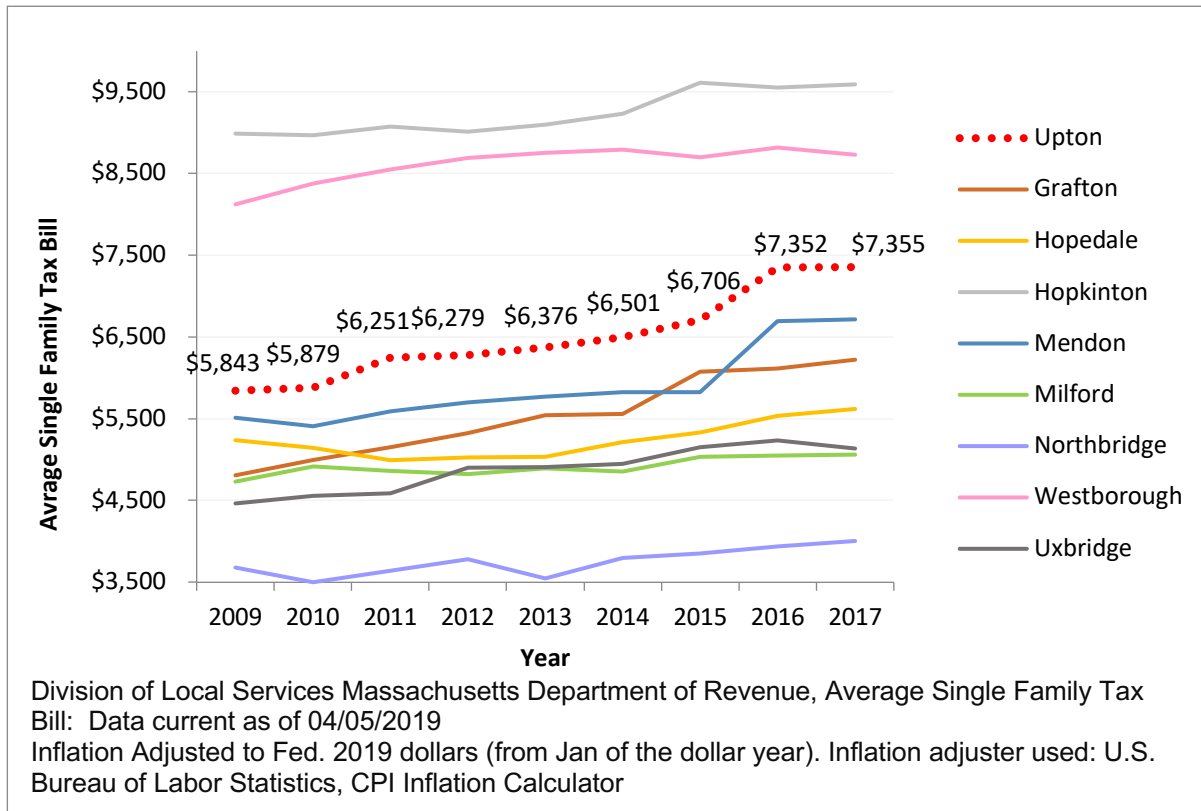
Table 7 | FY 2018 Tax Ratio by Municipality

Municipality	% Residential and Open Space Levy	% Commercial Levy	% Industrial Levy	% Personal Property Levy
Uxbridge	83.18%	5.05%	5.74%	6.03%
Milford	66.92%	17.57%	9.73%	5.78%
Westborough	68.68%	15.50%	10.13%	5.69%
Mendon	87.77%	6.22%	0.39%	5.62%
Hopkinton	83.67%	3.91%	7.89%	4.52%
Hopedale	81.95%	8.38%	5.92%	3.74%
Northbridge	87.22%	8.00%	1.91%	2.88%
Grafton	90.99%	4.02%	2.33%	2.67%
<b>Upton</b>	<b>94.58%</b>	<b>1.91%</b>	<b>0.90%</b>	<b>2.61%</b>

Division of Local Services Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DLS), Tax Levy by Class: Data current as of 04/04/2019

Adjusting for inflation, Upton's average single-family tax bill has steadily increased since 2009, which included a Prop 2 1/2 override in 2016 in support of the Town's regional school district.. This trend is a similar occurrence in nearby towns, as can be seen in Figure 12.

Figure 12 | Average Single-family Tax Bill 2009-2017



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## ZONING

As shown on Map 10, Upton currently has the following zoning districts:

- 1) Single Residential A (SRA)
- 2) Single Residential B (SRB)
- 3) Single Residential C (SRC)
- 4) Single Residential D (SRD)
- 5) Agricultural Residential (AR)
- 6) General Business (GB)
- 7) Commercial & Industrial (C&I)
- 8) Municipal Government Facilities (MGF)
- 9) Upton Center Business District (UCBD)

Upton's initial attempt at zoning was enacted in the late 1950's. General zoning regulations were updated in the 1970's and some specific changes (Planned Village Development and Marijuana Overlay) were approved in the 2000's.

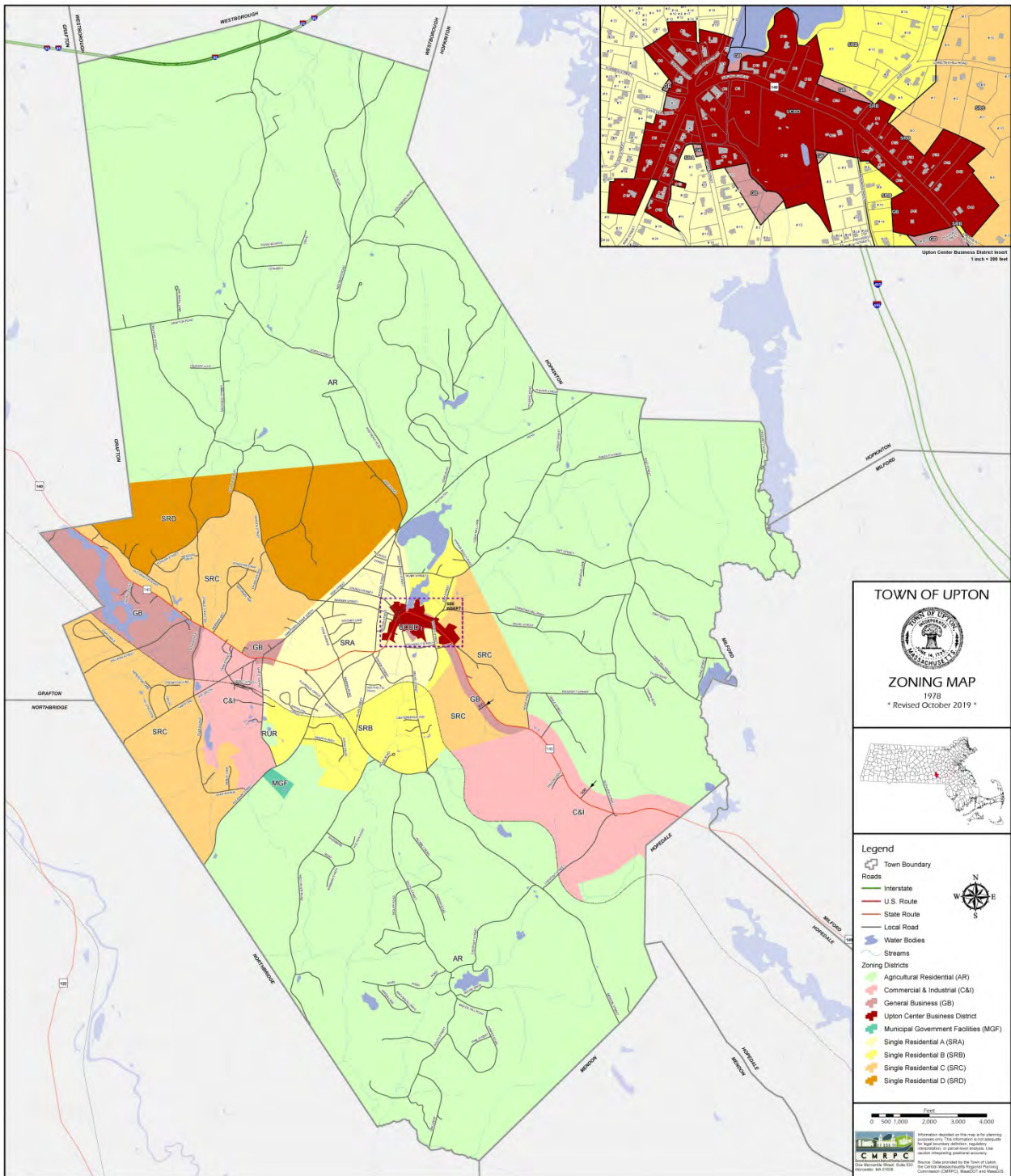
The most recent zoning change was approved at the Fall Town Meeting in November 2019. This change established a new zoning district known as the Upton Center Business District, shown in Map 11.

Some challenges we are currently facing with regard to zoning are:

- Land currently zoned C&I is mostly residential. This is an issue since most of these homes are grandfathered in which severely limits land for commercial use.
- Planning Board and ZBA grant many special permits that allow uses not currently in zoning regulations.
- There is one commercial and industrial area (Walker Drive) that is home to a handful of businesses.
- There are no existing industrial buildings that are available for new businesses to move into.
- There is a limited amount of office space available.

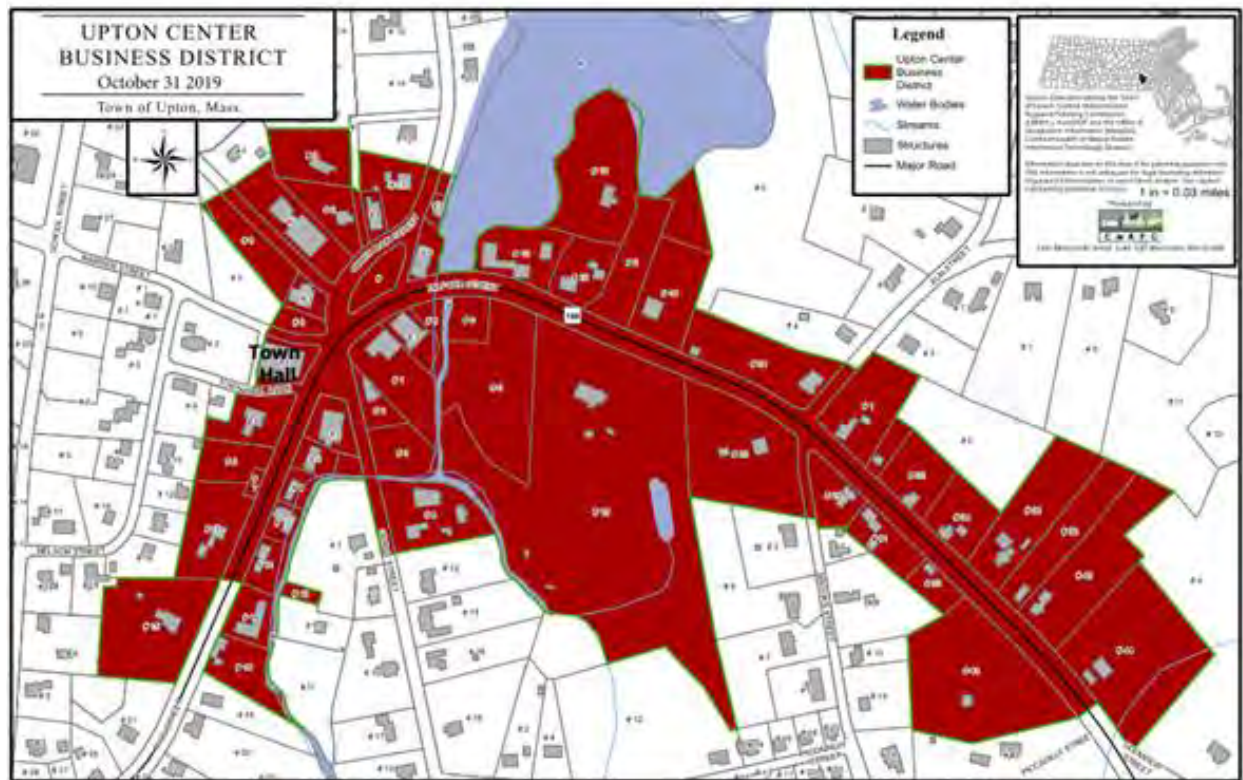


# MAP 10 | UPTON ZONING MAP



Town of Upton zoning areas

## MAP 11 | UPTON CENTER BUSINESS DISTRICT ZONE



## PART III – GOALS AND ACTION PLANS

Using the information presented in Parts I and II of this plan, the EDC has identified short-term, long-term and stretch goals. It is the intent of the EDC to work cooperatively with all town boards and departments to achieve these goals in a timely and responsible manner. Ultimately, the EDC hopes that by achieving these goals, we will preserve the historic nature of the town and at the same time, increase the economic tax base by attracting new and exciting businesses to locate and thrive in Upton.

### STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

The information in Table 6 was compiled from information gathered from residents and stakeholders to summarize the key points raised by the Upton Center visioning process. This information can be useful in determining economic development goals.

TABLE 8 | STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

#### Strengths

Great Schools	Small Retail	1 Hour from Boston	Friendly Residents	Good Sports Teams
Peaceful	Safe	Great Public Services	Nice Local Parks	Wildlife and Open Space

#### Weaknesses

Not Enough Businesses	No Highway Access	Downtown Not Walkable	No Grocery Stores
Pricey Housing	Higher taxes	Lack of Commercial Diversity	

#### Opportunities

State and Federal Funding	Complete Streets for schools	Connect Downtown to Trails	State Roadway Improvements
Farming/ Farm Stands/ Co-op	Close to Commuter Rail	Interested Developers	Excited/ Involved Residents

#### Threats

Capacity of Sewer/ Water	Not a lot of Community Groups
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## GOALS AND ACTION PLANS

These are the goals that the EDC hopes to achieve over the next several years.

### GOAL 1 | IMPLEMENT UPTON CENTER REVITALIZATION

1	Action Plans	Responsible Parties	Time Frame
1.1	Use a business and residents needs survey to help develop plans for the second phase of Upton Center Revitalization Project.	EDC Town Planner	2021
1.2	Use the survey data to create a new Request for Proposals (RFP) for Upton Center Revitalization. Post a revised RFP to the Central Register.	EDC Town Planner	2021
1.3	Support development of the Community Center at May Town Meeting (Library/Senior Center).	EDC and CCBC	<b>Completed</b>
1.4	Coordinate with MA DOT District 3 on Rte. 140 TIP Project to minimize impact with potential Community Center and Upton Center development projects.	EDC, DPW, Town Planner	2022-23
1.5	Work with DPW on the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan for Upton Center.	EDC and DPW	2021

#### Rationale:

The May 2019 Town Meeting voted overwhelmingly to support the Upton Center Revitalization project as described in the Dodson & Flinker Report<sup>2</sup>. The focus of this first goal is to help realize the Vision. While the development environment may still be uncertain due to the pandemic, the EDC believes that expanding the development scope could help attract bidders for the first phase of the project. Planning for the second phase of development is also an important part of realizing the vision. The changing business and cultural environment is driving the town to become a more resilient and adaptable community.



## GOAL 2 | IDENTIFY POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS FOR WEST UPTON CENTER

2	Action Plans	Responsible Parties	Time Frame
2.1	Review current zoning by-laws in West Upton Center. Determine if there are any by-laws that should be updated.	EDC, Planning Board, Town Planner	2021
2.2	Create design guidelines for West Upton Center similar to those created for Upton Center.	EDC, Planning Board, Town Planner	2022
2.3	Coordinate with MassDOT District 3 on Hartford Ave/High Street TIP Project and keep residents informed of project impact.	EDC, DPW, Town Planner	2021-22
2.4	Review Complete Streets Prioritization Plan in West Upton Center.	EDC, DPW, Town Planner	2022
2.5	Coordinate with MassDOT District 3 on the Rte 140 TIP project to assess impact to West Upton Center and Upton Center.	EDC, DPW, Town Planner	2022-23

### Rationale:

The EDC believes that there are several important opportunities for new businesses in West Upton Center. However, the area has been neglected for many years from a zoning perspective. Improvements to zoning and creation of Design Guidelines can help give West Upton Center a needed face-lift, which will result in making that area more attractive to perspective new businesses.



### GOAL 3 | STREAMLINE MUNICIPAL PROCEDURES

3	Action Plans	Responsible Parties	Time Frame
3.1	Add an Economic Development page to the Town Website	EDC and Technology Committee	2021
3.2	Create an Upton Small Business resource guide to help small businesses that want to locate in Upton.	EDC and Town Planner	2021-22
3.3	Enhance online permitting software currently being used by the Town of Upton.	EDC and various town departments	2022
3.4	Create a new business intake process to help new businesses by providing assistance navigating town bylaws and zoning regulations.	EDC and Town Planner	2022

#### Rationale:

Starting a small business in a town like Upton can be a daunting task. There are by-laws that regulate signage, parking, and many other aspects of getting a business off the ground. By streamlining the permitting process as much as possible, we can make it easier and less onerous for new businesses to locate here and grow here.

### GOAL 4 | FOSTER BUSINESS GROWTH

4	Action Plans	Responsible Parties	Time Frame
4.1	Inventory existing businesses and vacancies in commercial and industrial zones to determine mix, needs, and opportunities.	EDC and local realtors	2023
4.2	Conduct a study of infrastructure needs throughout Upton.	EDC and town departments	2023
4.3	Promote the use of vacant buildings as business incubators.	EDC and local realtors	2022
4.4	Update list of small business and home business listings and post/maintain listing on town website.	EDC	2022
4.5	Promote creation of a small business association and encourage business owners to participate.	EDC and local business leaders	2023
4.6	Consider CMRPC Brownfields Program for any necessary remediation of commercial/ industrial property.	EDC and Town Planner	2023
4.7	Work with Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce to host a local Upton Business Roundtable.	EDC and Town Planner	2022
4.8	Work with local businesses on hosting regular events such as Farmer's Market/Artisan Fairs.	EDC and local businesses	2021



**Rationale:**

The primary mission of the EDC is to foster business growth. There are many ways that the EDC can accomplish this. These actions represent a sampling of some of these ways. This goal is supported by the retail opportunities that were identified by CMRPC as outline below.

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**GOAL 5 | LEVERAGE EXISTING CULTURAL RESOURCES AND PUBLIC UTILITIES**


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<b>5</b>	<b>Action Plans</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>
<b>5.1</b>	Leverage existing State Forest Land and town conservation land to help transform Upton into an eco-tourism destination.	EDC, Open Space Committee, Land Stewardship Committee	3-5 years
<b>5.2</b>	Explore expanding existing Walking Tour of Upton to include Milhaus, Town Hall, Bradish House and other historical sites with the goal to expand cultural tourism.	EDC, Historical Commission, Historical Society	3-5 years
<b>5.3</b>	Develop a commuter survey for Upton residents to determine commuting patterns and plan accordingly.	EDC and CMRPC	2022
<b>5.4</b>	Determine if and how a local Regional Transit Authority service could benefit Upton residents.	EDC and Town Planner	3+ years
<b>5.5</b>	Assess feasibility of creating a transit hub. Identify potential State resources that could help.	EDC and State	5+ years
<b>5.6</b>	Promote potential sites suitable for large-scale solar energy battery storage or similar projects. Ensure adequate utility infrastructure is included in plans.	EDC and State	3-5 years

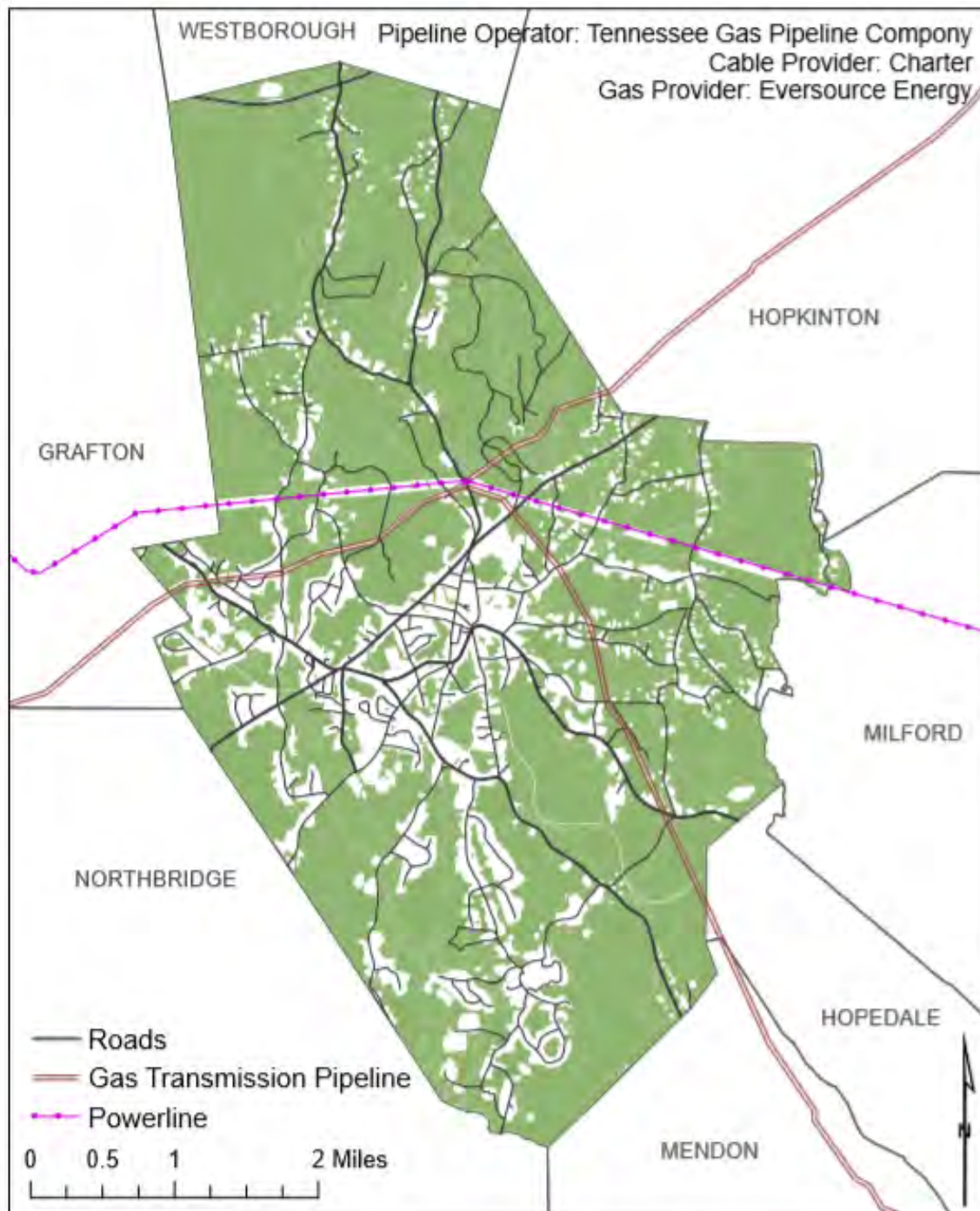
**Rationale:**

Upton can leverage the existing public utilities, including natural gas pipeline and power lines that crisscross our town as shown in Map 12. These resources can be used to the town's advantage by promoting appropriate business opportunities. For example, creating a transit hub could leverage the existing power lines by providing locations for electric bus service for commuters. The power lines can also provide opportunities for large-scale solar battery charging facilities or an energy storage peaking plant. Any energy-related projects must take climate and environmental impact and sustainability as major considerations, also subject to review under existing permitting processes.



Our existing cultural resources can be utilized by creating an eco-tourism industry in Upton that can take advantage of the thousands of acres of conservation land, state forest and miles of hiking trails as shown on Map 13. For the core, we should consider expanding walking tours and promoting existing ones by including specific historic sites such as the Town Hall, Bradish House, Historical Society Museum, and Milhaus.

## MAP 12 | PUBLIC UTILITIES



MassGIS, 2005 Land Use  
USGS, Powerlines

National Pipeline Mapping System, the NIPMS contains information about hazardous liquids and gas transmission pipelines under the jurisdiction of US DOT PHMSA