

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Holden ("the Town") has spent 2018 assessing its progress towards a communal vision first outlined in 2008. In 2019, the Town charted a path for the next decade to continue bringing Holden towards the future it envisions.

A Master Plan lays out a community's vision for its shared future and creates a road map of goals and actions. It should be used as a resource and manual for Town officials in creating projects. The Master Plan should be used for assessing funding requests and evaluating the importance and priority of initiatives.

The Master Plan itself will not create or protect anything. Residents, volunteers, municipal employees, and other stakeholders need to organize, plan, commit, act, and seek funding to ensure the future of this Town. Without action, the Town may change in unanticipated or undesirable ways. Use this Master Plan as a living document, and this Town will see its vision come to fruition.

Participation

Our community drove the planning process. The Master Plan is not the product of Holden's Town government or the planning consultant. This living document is a true reflection of Holden's community constructed by the Steering Committee. All Steering Committee meetings were open to the public and conducted with the goal of inclusivity and meaningful participation. This project employed best-practice methods and uniquely creative tools to involve the broadest possible section of Holden in the planning process. The Committee took the public vision expressed to them and, with the help of CMRPC, crafted a path to achieve that vision.



Holden Days Master Plan Booth (CMRPC, 2018)

Project Kick-Off Letter: January 13, 2018

**Visitation Day with Stakeholders:
May 23, 2018**

**Community Survey: June 18 – July 18, 2018,
extended August 1, 2018**

Visioning Day: September 22, 2018

Vision Survey: November 2 – 30, 2018

**Holden Bucks at Tree Lighting:
December 1, 2018**

**Holden Bucks at Town Meeting:
December 3, 2018**

**Adoption at Planning Board Meeting:
July 16, 2019**

**Public outreach: Website, Facebook, On-the-
Ground Outreach, Mailers, Radio Show, etc.**

Radio Interview (CMRPC, 2018)

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

The following is a high-level summary of each chapter and the overarching goals for each topic. Readers should consult the full text to understand the existing conditions, issues and opportunities, and full breadth of each goal and action item.

POPULATION AND HOUSING

Housing in Holden is principally rural in character, typified by large lot, low density development. The exceptions to these patterns are the smaller residential lots in and around the Village Center. Holden residents have expressed an appreciation for the small-town, rural character of the community and have a desire to preserve it. This has resulted in a reluctance to aggressively pursue new housing development.

At the same time, residents have also expressed concerns about a range of issues, many of which can be attributed to the rapid pace of housing production and population growth. These challenges include a rapid increase in housing development, overall increases in municipal service demand, increased numbers of children in the school system, and skyrocketing housing cost burdens. Holden will need to strike a careful balance between preserving historic homes, open space, and agricultural assets with carefully attracting housing and business growth. The Town aspires to remain both rural in character and sustainably vibrant for years to come.

The primary goals for Housing and Population identified in the plan include:

1. Take a proactive rather than responsive approach to emerging issues in housing.
2. Preserve town character by encouraging development in community-determined locations and styles.
3. Ensure that growth prioritizes preservation of open space and uses low-impact development methods.
4. Encourage a varied and inclusive housing stock.
5. Concentrate development along major corridors where infrastructure already exists.
6. Expand housing options by prioritizing denser, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resource management is critical to the protection, restoration, and promotion of scenic landscapes and wildlife in Holden. The Town takes pride in its natural resource maintenance that supplies clean drinking water to residents, allows passive and active outdoor recreation opportunities, provides scenic views, enriches working farms, and gives Holden its unique character. Holden is characterized by extensive woodlands, a network of streams and wetlands,

and many natural resource areas. These include: Quinapoxet River, Asnebumskit Brook, Worcester Brook, Poor Farm Brook, Holbrook Hill, Sergeant Hill, Christian Hill, Davis Hill, Holt Hill, Smith Hill, Kendall Hill, Stonehouse Hill, Maple Spring Pond, Chaffin Pond, and several reservoirs. The Town of Holden highly values its significant natural resources and will continue to maintain them for the use of future generations.

The primary goals for Natural Resources identified in the plan include:

1. Protect natural resource areas from environmental degradation, ssdisturbances, and development.
2. Expand appropriate public access to the Town's natural resources.
3. Improve public awareness of Holden's natural resources.

HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Holden's natural and built environments provide connections to its past, while Town leaders act to preserve the historic, architectural, and aesthetic character of the Town. The Town's cultural identity is enhanced by its arts community, commitment to preserving local history, and active community groups. It is significant to recognize the role that cultural and historic resources play in building a healthy community. In a Town as rich in historic and cultural resources as Holden, it is imperative to inventory and document such resources in order to provide a framework for preservation. This plan is a tool for residents to consider Holden's resources and their role in reinforcing the Town's rural identity and sense of place.

The primary goals for Historic and Cultural Resources identified in the plan include:

1. Preserve and maintain Town-owned and privately-owned historic assets.
2. Preserve the community's rich heritage using protective regulatory tools in key areas of Town.
3. Ensure there are adequate cultural opportunities for Holden residents of all ages and abilities.

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

Open Space and Recreation planning is crucial for preserving resources while enhancing recreational opportunities and experiences for the community. It provides a guide for future actions to ensure consistency with the preservation of open space and the enhancement of recreational uses. Building off the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) completed in 2009, this plan identifies, updates, and incorporates the recreational resource inventory information. Incidentally, Holden is in the initial phases of preparing to update its 2009 OSRP.

The primary goals for Open Space and Recreation identified in the plan include:

1. Preserve important land resources, scenic views, and agricultural resources.
2. Protect lands for active and passive recreation.
3. Establish a wider, more connected open space network.
4. Efficiently manage and maintain open space and recreation areas.
5. Conserve Holden's surface and groundwater for wildlife, recreation, and other uses.
6. Educate community members about conservation tools.
7. Improve public awareness of Holden's open space and recreation resources.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Central Massachusetts possesses a rich history of farming, community, and entrepreneurial spirit. In Holden, much of this history has been preserved, and is reflected in its abundant farms, mill buildings, and Town Center. Holden residents cherish (and fiercely defend) this character. Yet, many residents also desire additional amenities. Commercial conveniences and preservation are not mutually exclusive. Targeted economic development strategies can support an increase in desirable amenities while protecting and contributing to the existing character of the Town. Holden residents would like to expand their local selection of restaurants, small-scale home businesses, small retail shops, boutiques, art galleries, agricultural services, clean energy, and light industry. As these sectors already play a significant role in the Town's economy, a strategy that encourages such business types and land uses is realistic and provides a solid vision to guide economic development policy.

The primary goals for Economic Development identified in the plan include:

1. Encourage a strong, diversified tax and employee base.
2. Offer a variety of quality goods and services to meet the demand of residents, workers, and visitors.
3. Concentrate development in the Main Street corridor where infrastructure exists.
4. Develop a walkable, mixed-use village center that has residential, commercial, historic, and public space components.
5. Evaluate and promote adaptive reuse of vacant properties and industrial sites.
6. Provide incentives and opportunities for small-scale businesses and other desirable enterprises.
7. Foster a local workforce that complements Holden's employer needs.

TRANSPORTATION

Due to its limited transit service and small-town character, the dominant mode of transportation in Town is the automobile. Holden features access to several major regional roadways, including I-190 passing north/south through the east, and Interstate Routes 290 and 90 to the south. Although Holden no longer receives fixed-route transit service provided by the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA), it receives paratransit services operated by the Holden Council on Aging (COA), under contract with the WRTA.

Holden is located in the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) planning region and is also a member of the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO) for transportation planning purposes. Holden's transportation network is evaluated in

this document, including an inventory of existing roadway conditions, infrastructure maintenance, traffic volumes, safety, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, freight rail and trucking, and public transportation.

The primary goals for Transportation identified in the plan include:

1. Maintain and improve the condition of Holden's transportation network.
2. Explore options to alleviate traffic on Main Street (Route 122A), arterial and collector streets.
3. Enhance multimodal transportation access, including transit, pedestrian, and other types.

PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES

Public facilities and services are the most tangible representation of any local government, and are arguably the most important. Respondents to the Holden Master Plan survey agree, with 99% saying that local services are important or very important to their quality of life, and 96% in concurrence about local facilities. Holden's facilities are generally adequate or better in function, scope, condition, and efficiency for a community of Holden's current size and budget, and residents' strong desire for quality services. Holden's Town-owned public works infrastructure – water, sewer, drainage, and electric – faces a number of challenges from recent steady growth, but still serve Holden's needs today. With adequate capacity to support moderate residential and commercial expansion, improvements may be required as the Town continues to grow and evolve. Existing assets will need to be adapted to

changes in technology, to meet the needs of future residents of all abilities, and facilitate economic development.

The primary goals for Town Facilities and Services in the plan include:

1. Ensure public facilities meet the needs of Holden's population.
2. Maintain long-term funding mechanisms to provide for future public facility needs.
3. Improve the sustainability and resilience of Town operations.
4. Deliver infrastructure that meets existing and future Town needs.
5. Uphold the high quality of Holden's educational system and facilities.

LAND USE

The Land Use element is essentially a blueprint for the Town of Holden's future development. It describes land use patterns, their patterns of change, and what zoning regulations/districts are in place to guide development now and into the future. Land use can be complex, as there is a need to maintain and preserve the Town's rural character; its historic, cultural and natural resource assets; ensure adequate infrastructure; and a desire to spur economic development to increase the Town's finances. Land use is a careful balance of trying to weigh all of these issues.

The primary goals for Land Use identified in the plan include:

1. Concentrate development around existing infrastructure.
2. Facilitate adaptive reuse of existing buildings to complement the rural character of the Town.
3. Ensure consistency between Holden's long-range plans and Town and state regulations.
4. Take a proactive and responsive approach to emerging issues in land use.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation ensures that the goals of the Master Plan can become a reality. This is usually facilitated by a committee or working group with a diverse membership. The Plan's recommendations are assigned action items and a proposed timeline.

It is important that the Town carefully review, adjust, and make changes as situations change. This can be done without disturbing the overarching goals of a chapter or the Plan itself.