

# 8.0 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## INTRODUCTION

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, mills, buildings, and Town Center. Holden residents cherish (and fiercely defend) this character. Yet, many residents also desire additional amenities. Luckily, 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 character of the Town. Strategies that leverage the Town's existing cultural, commercial, and civic assets will support economic goals such as:

- Encourage a strong, diversified tax and employee base.
- Offer a variety of quality goods and services to meet the demand of residents, workers, and visitors.
- Concentrate development in the Main Street corridor where infrastructure exists.
- Evaluate and promote adaptive reuse of vacant and/or underutilized commercial properties and industrial sites.
- Develop a walkable, mixed-use village center



*Howes in Holden (CMRPC, 2018)*

that has residential, commercial, historic, and public space components.

- Provide incentives and opportunities for small-scale businesses and other desirable enterprises.
- Foster a local workforce that complements Holden's employer needs.

These goals were identified through the course of extensive outreach including community visioning events, surveys, and prioritization tools. Prior to pursuing any interventions, it is important to understand prior planning efforts in these areas,

as well as present-day conditions. The following sections will orient the reader to the Town's planning efforts, provide a baseline from which to benchmark the success of future economic development strategies, and establish a context for issues and opportunities relating to the preferred development strategies.

## PRIOR PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

Holden's economic planning and engagement efforts include the following initiatives:

### Community Development Plan, Town of Holden (2004)

In 2004, the Town of Holden completed a Community Development Plan that included an economic development and housing needs assessment. The Plan highlighted the limited availability of undeveloped parcels and increasing housing demand as significant limitations to economic development. The Plan identified four key locations to target for economic development:

- The "Holden Sand and Gravel" Site
- The Holden Hospital Area
- The Rice School
- The Route 122A Commercial Corridor

The Plan also indicated an opportunity for new industrial, office, or mixed-use development in the northeast quadrant of Town near Interstate 190. Overall, many of the goals identified in the plan were achieved, including disposition of the Rice School. The former Holden Hospital was sold in 2009 and is now part of the Oriol Nursing Home. The Town also undertook a comprehensive planning process to address residential growth management and the Town's long-range fiscal challenges. In 2018, Holden completed a Buildout and Fiscal Impact

Analysis (included in Appendix C). Goals identified in Community Development Plan (2004) that are relevant in 2019 include:

- Invest disposition sale proceeds to support other economic development initiatives.
- Evaluate the sale of other surplus Town property with commercial development potential.
- Use Tax Increment Financing (TIF)<sup>1</sup> to help pay for additional traffic and streetscape improvements to Route 122A.

### The Holden Town Common: Past, Present, and Future (2007)

In 2006, the University of Massachusetts Amherst Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning Department assisted the Town with a study of the Town Common. Entitled "Holden Town Common: Past, Present, and Future," the study is a cultural landscape plan. In October 2006, the consultant team conducted a visioning workshop to collect resident input on the future development of Holden. Major goals identified at this event included:

- Preserve small town atmosphere.
- Enhance open space.
- Encourage commercial development.
- Improve town center.
- Create community gathering spaces.

The Holden Town Common, Past Present and Future (Holden Town Common, 2007) provided "clear recommendations on how to stimulate this growth in the Town Center in a way that is consistent with the objectives" as defined in the October workshop. The plan provided design concepts to:

- Extend the old Town Common at the heart of Town Center.
- Establish stronger pedestrian links between civic spaces.
- Encourage new commercial development consistent with the Town's historic building style
- Improve pedestrian circulation.

<sup>1</sup> Tax increment financing (TIF) is a public financing method that is used as a subsidy for redevelopment, infrastructure, and other community-improvement projects.

- Decrease impervious cover to include green space.
- Establish a design review board to develop guidelines that respect the integrity of the existing building styles.

### Master Plan (2008)

The Town of Holden Master Plan (2008) yielded additional goals and strategies for economic growth. Through the course of related public outreach activities, residents identified a desire for carefully controlled commercial development, including shopping and services, especially along Main Street and the Main Street corridor. The Master Plan (2008) cites traffic along Main Street as a significant challenge, and projects deeper congestion as a result of commercial growth on Main Street. Economic goals from the plan included:

- Rezone land behind existing commercial development on Main Street from Residential to Commercial.
- Rezone select commercial and residential areas along Main Street to “Village” and permit mixed-use in the new district.
- Encourage development of small office space with business support services to attract existing home occupations into commercial space on Main Street.
- Use design review of commercial and mixed-use projects to better assure quality development consistent with the existing character of Holden.
- Develop design standards and guidelines to ensure new businesses contribute to the Town’s historic architecture and character.
- Implement a business recruitment program to get the types of businesses Holden residents want on Main Street, and conduct a storefront improvement program to upgrade the appearance of existing businesses.

Many of these goals have been achieved or are underway. A mixed-use Village district is in place. In 2019, Holden was assessing and working to

refine this bylaw. The Planning Board incorporated architectural review into their site plan regulations. Goals relevant in 2019 include establishment of a business recruitment program; encouraging the relocation of home-based businesses to Main Street; and creation of a storefront improvement program.

### Holden Village Center Zoning Initiative: Phase I, II, and III (2015 - Present)

Since 2015, the Holden Planning Board has been working with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission on the creation of a village center zoning district. The process is comprised of three phases. Phase I concluded in 2015 and included the development of the Model Village District Bylaw. Phase II began in October of 2015 and included analysis and customization of the model for Jefferson Village. Phase III (currently underway) includes finalization of the study area, creation of zoning bylaw text amendments, public outreach, and presentation of the new village center zoning district for consideration at the 2020 Annual Town Meeting. Key findings from Holden Village Center Phase II (Village Center Phase II, 2018) include:

- Development of the Jefferson Mill area is limited by several factors including the layout and design of Route 122A. In this area, the travel speed of vehicles is greater than in a true village center area. The speed, road layout, and lack of sidewalks, crosswalks and pedestrian amenities will limit and/or restrict to some extent the future of this area as a true village center.
- Additional constraints include Eagle Lake, which significantly reduces the amount of developable land along the east side of Route 122A.
- The Village Center District should be established as a new zoning district. Creating a new Village Center District will provide more flexibility and better allow the Planning Board to tailor the district to the specific uses it might want to encourage, discourage, or prohibit.

The new district should allow for the development

of the Jefferson Mill in line with what was previously approved by Special Permit.

In conjunction with feedback provided by residents through outreach activities, these plans provide a framework with which to benchmark progress and identify next steps. The following section provides an overview of existing conditions.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### History and Overview

Holden's economic activity can be traced to the colonial period. The Town was settled in 1723 and several years later the Town's first sawmill was constructed. Until the 1820s, economic activity centered on agriculture and related trades such as tanning and lumber processing. Changes in cotton and textile technology enabled economic growth in the early 19th century. By 1832, Holden was home to nine textile mills, two boot/shoe manufacturers, and a significant home-based textile sector. Boot/shoemaking and agricultural production peaked mid-way through the 19th century, while textile production peaked around the turn of the century. Most of the Town's textile production took place in Jefferson Village. The historic Jefferson Mill consisted of two mill buildings, a store, offices, and worker housing. The agricultural sector also peaked around the turn of the 19th century. Dairy served as the dominant agricultural product, with vegetables and orchards also being significant. The amount of land used for permanent pasture or haying increased until approximately 1900.

In the early 1900s, many Holden mills burned down or closed. Construction of the Wachusett Reservoir in 1905 further impacted industrial activity in Holden. Although located outside of Holden, the Metropolitan Water Board deemed much of the Town a watershed protection area. As a result, Holden lost 3,500 acres of farmland and most of its remaining industrial sites. Although WWI yielded a slight up-tick in manufacturing, industrial activity

continued to decline. "By the early 1930s, nearly 600 people were employed in agriculture. Of these, nearly 90% were part-time farmers, composed of [former] industrial laborers." Holden's industrial base contracted further when, in 1940, Jefferson Manufacturing Company's stockholders liquidated the company. This was the last large manufacturing operation in Holden. (Massachusetts Historical Commission, 1984)

Present day Holden is characterized by its country charm. The Town has retained its historic Town Center and abundant natural resources. It is also home to several major employment sectors (healthcare and education foremost among these). Well-educated and high earning, its residents are attracted to the Town's excellent schools and proximity to employment opportunities in Worcester and the broader metro area. It is the second most affordable Worcester suburb. Residents enjoy the variety of services and small shops along Main Street/ Route 122A, but traffic in the corridor presents a significant challenge. Route 122A serves as the primary single access route to Worcester for communities west of Holden. In terms of other infrastructure, the Town is fully served by public water and sewer but development is limited by a shortage of available land.

### Conditions Income and Employment

Holden is an Established Suburb (Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2008) with an upper-income demographic profile. On a subregional basis, household incomes are significantly higher than the statewide average (\$70,954) (Table 8 - 1). In Holden, the medium household income (MHI) is 142% of

*Table 8 - 1: Median Household Income (US Census, 2010 and American Community Survey (ACS), 2016)*

Town	2010	2016	% Change
Holden	88,405	100,599	13.79%
Paxton	100,333	93,654	-6.66
Princeton	102,853	121,500	18.13
Rutland	81,295	95,347	17.29
Sterling	102,115	104,187	2.03
West Boylston	79,906	74,005	-7.38
MA	64,509	70,954	9.99



the statewide average, greater than in many nearby communities. Town-wide, income is also increasing. From 2010 to 2016, MHI increased by nearly 14%. Comparing Holden with the five adjacent towns, only Princeton and Rutland experienced higher income

growth during this period. In Holden (and potentially some nearby communities), increasing incomes are partly attributable to Holden's excellent public schools and the new residents they attract. More than 70% of survey respondents indicated that the

Figure 8 - 1: Percent of Employment by Category 2000-2016 (US Census, ACS 2000- 2016)

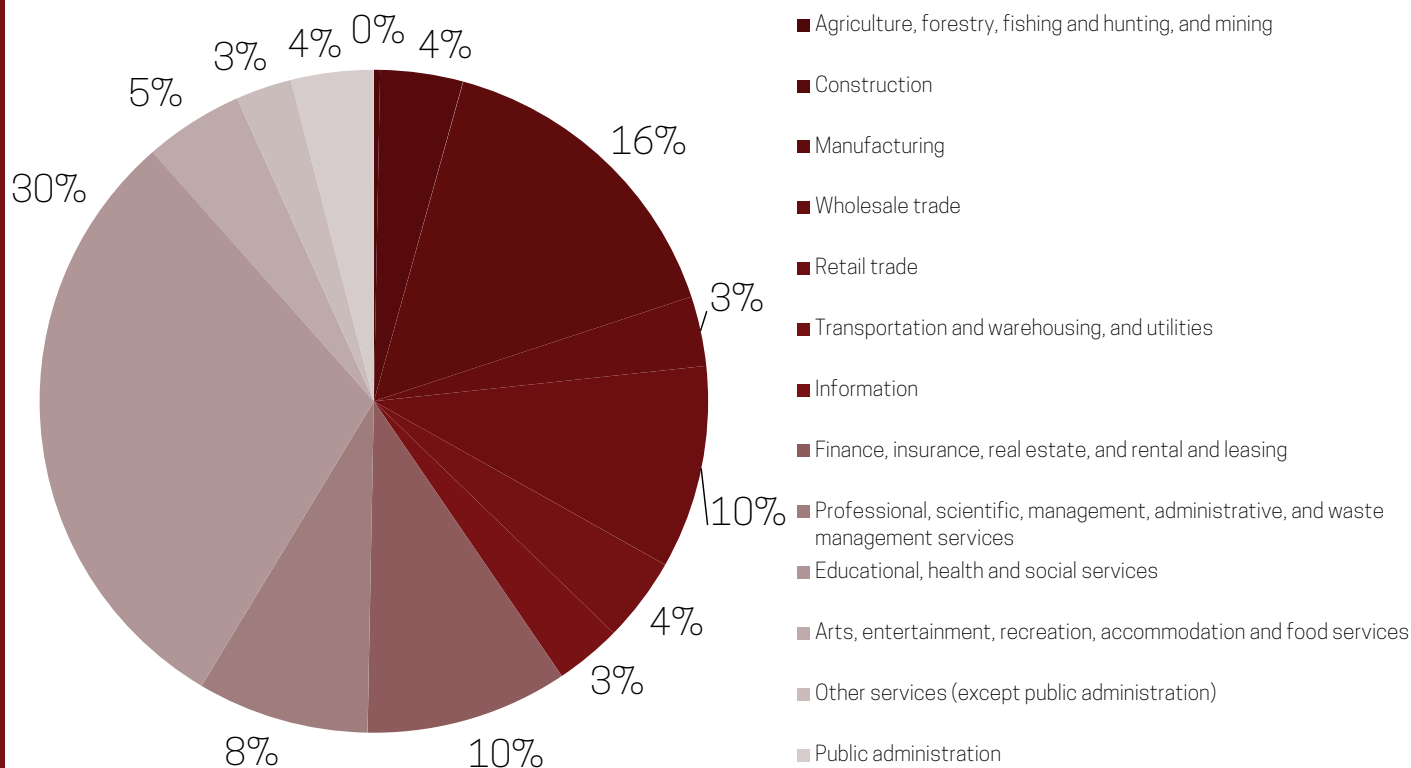
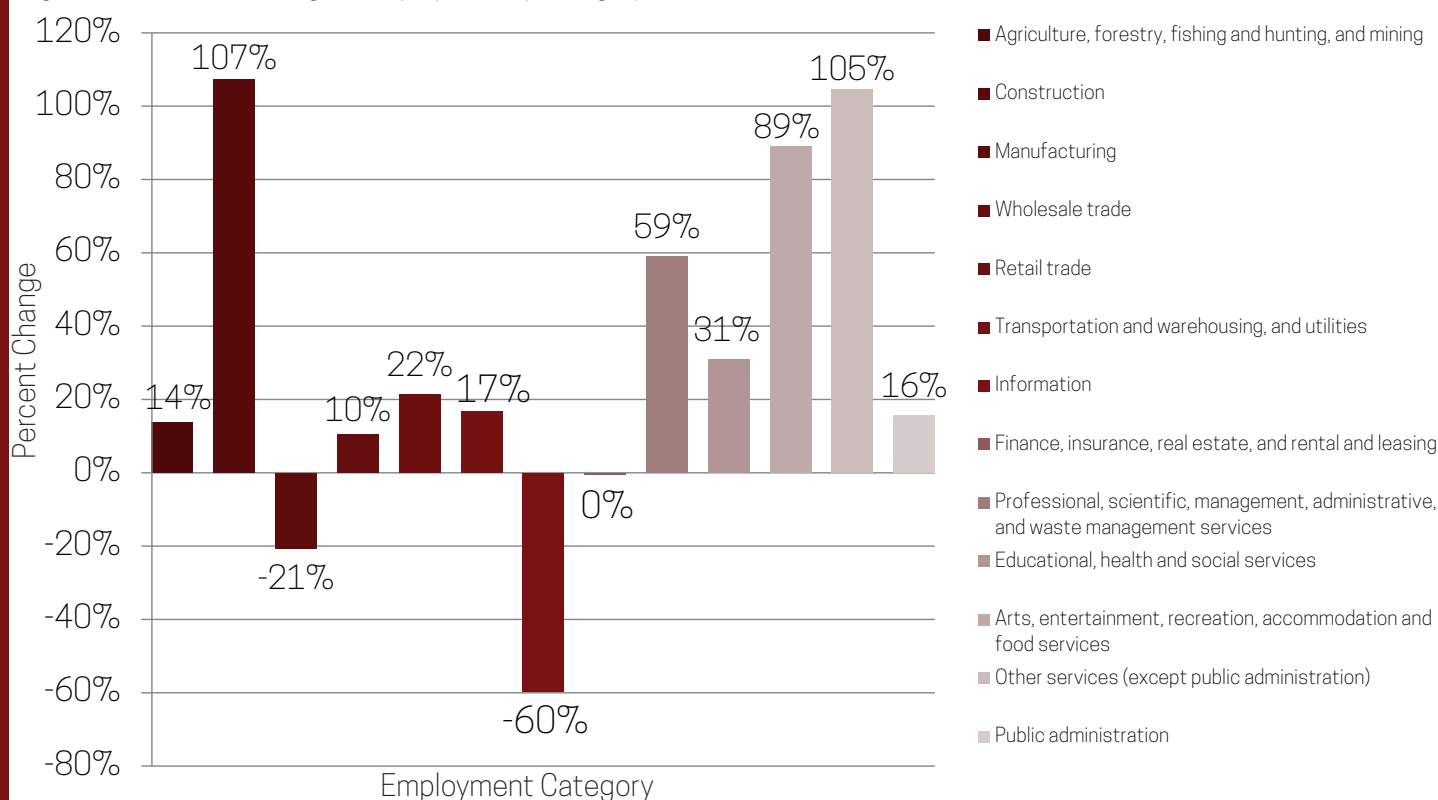


Figure 8 - 2: Percent Change in Employment by Category 2000-2016 (US Census, ACS 2000- 2016)



quality of the Wachusett Regional School District (WRSD) factored into their decision to live in Holden.

Although most residents send their children to Holden schools, a majority of adults work outside the Town. The average commute time for residents is 28 minutes. Approximately 40% of workers employed outside of Town work within 20 miles of home, indicating Worcester is a major employment center for Holden residents.

For Holden residents, the top three employment sectors are education, health and social services (32%); professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services (11%); and manufacturing (10%) (Figure 8-1). Employment in all categories increased between 2000 and 2016 except manufacturing (which decreased 21%) and information (60%) as seen in Figure 8 - 2. Sectors that saw the largest increases included construction (107%); other services (104%); arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services (89%); professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services (59%); and educational, health and social services (31%). The strength of this growth speaks to the business development climate and demand pressure in Holden.

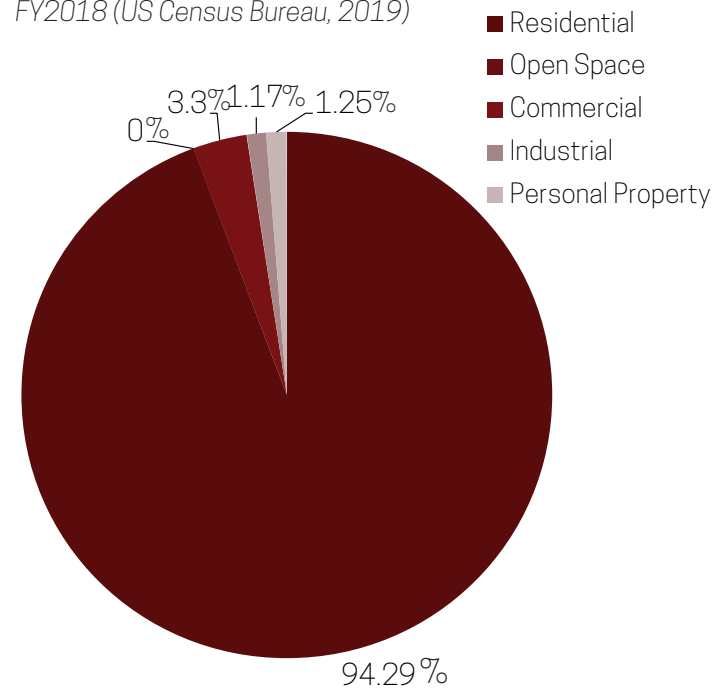
### Tax Base

Holden's tax base is primarily residential as can be seen in Table 8 - 2. Dwellings account for 94% of the local property taxes, as shown in Figure 8 - 3, and comprise 8,000 residential properties (including single-family homes, multi-family homes, and apartment buildings). Commercial and industrial properties total 150 and account for

Table 8 - 2: Percent of Tax Levy by Class, Holden FY2018 (US Census Bureau, 2019)

Type	FY18	FY17	FY16	FY15	FY14
Residential	94.29	93.95	93.79	93.55	93.58
Open Space	0	0	0	0	0
Commercial	3.3	3.37	3.38	3.6	3.63
Industrial	1.17	1.35	1.38	1.47	1.51
Personal Property	1.25	1.34	1.45	1.38	1.27

Figure 8 - 3: Percent of Tax Levy by Class, Holden FY2018 (US Census Bureau, 2019)



approximately 4.5% of Holden's tax base. Personal property includes 400 non-real estate accounts and contributes 1.25% of local property taxes. (Town of Holden, 2017) Consistent with most of the communities adjacent to Holden, property is taxed at a single rate across types. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, the tax rate per \$1,000 of assessed value was \$17.61.

Table 8 - 3: FY2018 Tax Rates (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2018)

FY2018 Tax Rates	
Holden	\$17.61
Paxton	\$20.43
Princeton	\$17.28
Rutland	\$18.13
Sterling	\$17.54
West Boylston	\$18.72
Worcester	Residential: \$18.91
	Commercial: \$34.03

This rate is relatively consistent with most of the adjacent towns. In keeping with statewide trends, Holden's tax rate increased at a slow but steady pace over the last decade. Since 2009 the tax rate has increased by a total of approximately 29%. Despite this increase, FY18 saw the highest amount of new growth (\$818,443) in decades.

## Business Overview

Holden is home to many small businesses and several large employers. To get a sense of the Town's business community and climate, CMRPC reviewed data from the 2012 US Economic Census; ESRI Business Analytics; and Doing Business As (DBA) records filed with the Town. Together, these datasets provide a holistic view of the Town's business community.

ESRI Business Analytics is an excellent source of "ballpark" estimates. According to this dataset, Holden contains 481 businesses, including 100 retail trade businesses; 37 finance, insurance, and real estate businesses; 22 farm or mining operations; and 190 service-based enterprises. (ESRI, 2019) Collectively, these businesses employ approximately 4,513 individuals.

Another perspective is provided by Holden's DBA certificates. The Town's 2018 DBA filings consist of 344 business. Such filings are required under Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 110 Section 5, which states that "any person conducting business under any business name other than the real name of the person conducting the business must file a Doing Business As certificate with the Town Clerk's office." They can provide insights into a Town's smaller enterprises, as corporations and partnerships already registered with the Secretary of the Commonwealth operating a business under their registered name are exempt from the DBA filing requirement. Of Holden's 344 DBAs, 270 filed using a Holden address. Thus, Holden contains an estimated 481 businesses, 43% or greater of which are locally-owned.

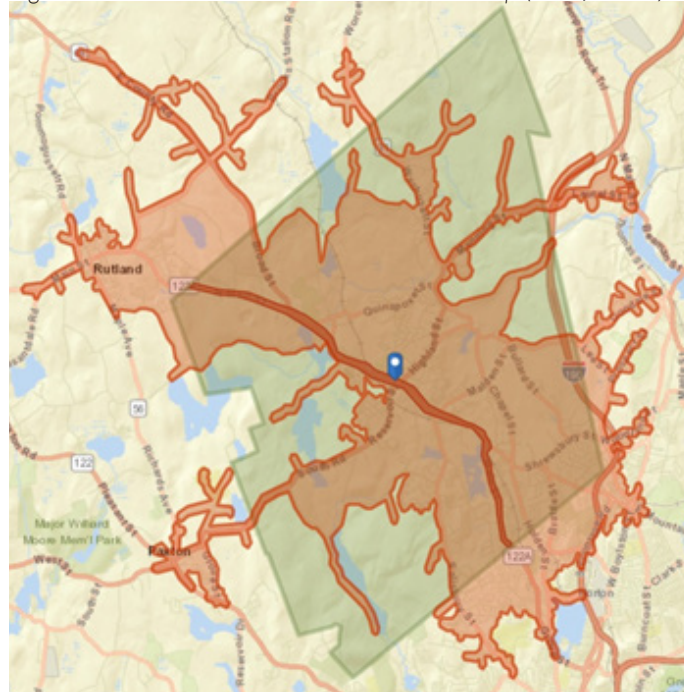
Finally, comparing data from the three most recent US Economic Censuses (2012, 2007, and 2002) reveals trends in the business climate. Generally, wages are up among Holden employers; however, businesses are also employing fewer people. Between 2002 and 2012 (or 2007 and 2012 where 2002 data was unavailable), most industries recorded a decrease in the number of employees. Only accommodation and food services registered a significant increase, growing by 28% from 2002 to 2012. Manufacturing employment declined

significantly, decreasing 55% during the same period. Employment in the healthcare and social assistance sectors also declined significantly, decreasing by 19% between 2002 and 2012.

## Retail Leakage

One way to assess retail sector health is measuring the supply and demand of retail goods. Typically, retail supply and demand are measured based on drive times. On average, people are willing to drive 10 minutes to purchase convenience goods. Although this number varies depending on the person, the products, and other factors, ten-minute drive times are a standard measure of whether an area has everything its residents need for everyday living. Figure 8 - 4 depicts a 10-minute drive time from Holden Town Hall. Similarly, figures exist for

Figure 8 - 4: Holden 10 Minute Drive Time Map (ESRI, 2018)



how much money people typically spend on items. If local stores are not selling a certain amount of a product, it is extremely likely that residents are purchasing that item from a business outside of town. Generally, such "leakage" out of the local economy is the result of goods not being available at stores within town. High degrees of leakage can indicate that new businesses providing such goods within the trade area could be viable.

Many of the highest leakage rates in Holden are in industry groups that may not be desirable (or appropriate targets given the challenges faced by certain types of brick and mortar stores in the era of e-commerce). Examples include office supply, stationary, and gift stores; electronic shopping and mail order houses; electronics and appliance stores; and department stores. However, a number of retail types consistent with priorities of residents (and potentially appropriate for today's online marketplace) have moderate to high leakage factors, including:

- Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores (\$34,972,340 leakage per year)
- Food Services and Drinking Places (\$40,967,315 leakage per year)

- Food and Beverage Stores (\$49,815,595 leakage per year)
- Miscellaneous Store Retailers- e.g., florists, gift stores, etc. (\$17,452,401 leakage per year)
- Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores (\$12,161,167 leakage per year)

Such enterprises may be appropriate targets of business recruitment strategies. Table 8 - 4 shows the overall supply, demand, and leakage in Holden, along with breakouts for retail trade and food and drink. Figure 8 - 5 depicts the leakage factor by business type in more detail.

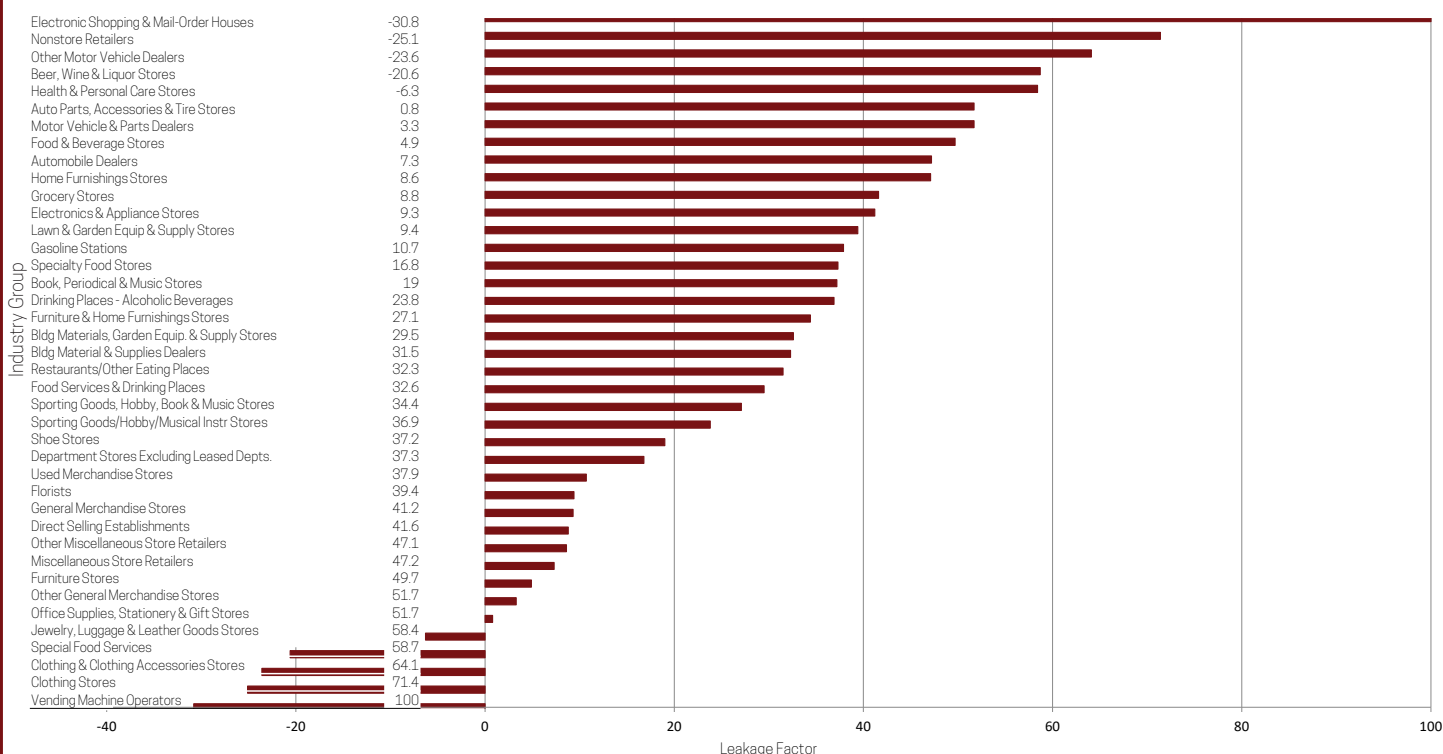
### Commercial Business

The Town of Holden contains two commercially-oriented districts: Commercial (C) and Business

Table 8 - 4: Total Annual Retail Supply, Demand, and Leakage- 10-minute drive time from Town Hall (ESRI, 2018)

	Demand	Supply	Leakage
Total Retail Trade	\$523,924,627	\$164,056,635	\$359,867,992
Total Food & Drink	\$58,432,335	\$17,465,020	\$40,967,315
Total Retail Trade and Food & Drink	\$582,356,962	\$181,521,655	\$400,835,307

Figure 8 - 5: Retail Supply, Demand, and Leakage- 10-minute drive time from Town Hall, (ESRI, 2018)





Office-Professional (BOP). The Commercial District is primarily located along Rte. 122A, with additional areas located along Rte. 31 (south of the train tracks) and near the Rutland border. The District allows a variety of use by-right business uses including: personal service establishments; stores usually selling one or a combination of two or more of the following: dry goods, apparel and accessories, furniture and home furnishing small wares, hardware and food for home preparation; various consumer or commercial establishments (e.g., Beauty Salon; Travel Agent; Dog Grooming; Barber Shop; Florist; Baker; Bookstore). It permits mixed-use development by Special Permit. Restaurants also require a Special Permit.

The Business Office-Professional (BOP) District comprises a small area along Mayo Drive. More restrictive than the Commercial District, the BOP District allows several by-right uses including business offices, personal service establishments, home occupations, banks, and several other commercial uses by-right. The District also permits mixed-use development by Special Permit. A full list of allowed uses for the C and BOP districts are included in the Land Use chapter.

Currently, commercial development is largely concentrated along Rte. 122A/ Main Street. Development consists of a mix of stand-alone businesses and strip developments, which include independent businesses and chain stores. The Town also contains an emergent boutique retail and food-based business cluster, especially in and near Town Center. These businesses contribute to Town character, attract visitors, and provide spillover revenue to nearby businesses. Such businesses may not be subject to the 10-minute drive time rule, as they serve as a destination. Examples of specialty retail and food-based businesses include a stand for homemade ice-cream, a brew pub, coffee houses and breakfast places, and vintage boutiques.

### **Agricultural Business**

With 978 acres and 4.2 % of the Town's land designated as agricultural, Holden contains a significant number of working farms and related

businesses. These enterprises contribute to the Town's country character and help preserve its historic legacy. Residents indicate that agriculture is a favorite aspect of the local economy and should be promoted. It is also an important business sector, providing self-employment, family employment, and jobs outside the household. The Town's agricultural sector includes pick-your-own produce farms, farm stands, farm-to-table catering, and businesses selling prepared products. These uses are allowed in varying capacity according to zoning district; however, the Town's Right to Farm bylaw encourages the pursuit of agriculture, promotes agriculture-based economic opportunities, and protects farmlands within the Town of Holden by allowing agricultural uses and related activities to function with minimal conflict with abutters and Town agencies. It applies to all jurisdictional areas within the Town.

Holden has an Agricultural Commission that serves and promotes agriculture within the town. In addition to advising other boards on matters related to agriculture, the Commission engages in projects and actions to promote the business of farm-related activities and traditions, and the preservation of farmland in town.

### **Industrial Business**

The Town of Holden contains two Industrially-zoned districts: the Industrial District (ID) and the Industrial-Quarry District (IQ). The Industrial District (ID) is primarily located off of Main Street on Industrial Drive. The primary area consists of a 70-acre industrial park comprised of nine parcels. A pocket of ID-zoned land also exists off of Princeton Street at the former Electronic Controls Corporation (ECC) facility. Within this district, uses allowed by-right include manufacturing, construction, and quarrying. Uses allowed by special permit include business offices, personal service establishments, wholesale trade, registered marijuana facilities, and motor freight transportation and warehousing.

Infrastructure at the Holden Industrial Park includes water, sewer, and fiber. The area is located within a flood zone and the back portion of the park



Specialty Food-based Business (CMRPC, 2019)

experiences flooding issues. All pad-ready sites have been developed, and all buildings are occupied; however, not all parcels are fully built out. The park is well-diversified in terms of the types of businesses it houses. Businesses located within The Park include several of Holden's largest employers, including Pepsi Bottling Company. The Industrial Park maintains a "Proactive Key Account Program" that provides the Town with timely access to information about what is going on with tenants and businesses in The Park. Owners of property within The Park attest to a high degree of communication and responsiveness with and from Town officials and staff.

Across Town, the former ECC site is unoccupied and unutilized. The 17-acre site served as an electroplating manufacturing facility from the 1950s until 2005. (US Environmental Protection Agency, 2019) Prior to this use, the site was home to a historic mill. It is located near Town wellheads and requires environmental remediation.

The Industrial Quarry consists of four locations:

- Between 122A to the North and Causeway Street to the south, west to the Rutland border
- North of Unionville Pond in between Union Street and River Street, with Wachusett Street to the east and Snowberry Lane to the west
- Located south of Chaffin Pond, with Main Street to the east and Newell Road bordering the south and west
- Off of Wachusett Street to the east and just south of Elmwood Ave

Uses allowed by right in the IQ district are relatively consistent to those allowed in the ID district. In IQ, processing and treating of mixed and quarried raw materials is also allowed by-right, while manufacturing uses require a special permit. Full lists of allowed uses for the ID and IQ districts are presented in the Land Use chapter.

### Town Center

Holden's Town Center emerged as a transportation crossroads in the 1700s. (Greer, Leonard, & Weiland, 2007) Today, Rtes. 122A and 31 intersect in this area, making it a major thoroughfare. Rte. 122A (Main Street) is also the Town's primary commercial corridor. Commercially-zoned, it contains a mix of local and franchise businesses. Landmarks include the historic Town Common, Town Hall, the First Congregational Church, Damon House, Gale Free Library, Starbard Building, and the First Baptist Church.

The intersection of Rte. 122A and Rte. 31 experiences more than 20,000 daily vehicle trips. (CMRPC, 2013 and 2016) Traffic backs up at the intersection light, contributing to congestion. In part, the traffic stems from limited Worcester access routes for towns west of Holden. Given



*Holden Industrial Park (CMRPC, 2019)*

that Rtes. 122A and 31 are state highways, traffic mitigation strategies are subject to Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) regulations and standards.

Parking is not a major issue in Town Center at this time. Most businesses possess adequate parking. As a State highway, no parking is allowed on Main Street; however, several parking overflow options exist. These include lots at the Town Hall, Damon House, and Senior Center (when the building is closed on weekends). In the not too distant future, parking may become a more significant issue. Vacancies and the number of months on market are increasing for commercial buildings along Main Street that do not have on-site parking. The Town also lacks appropriate parking for community events and food trucks. Holden is taking proactive measures to address these emerging challenges. The Town recently adopted a Tier 1 Complete Streets policy. A Tier II prioritization plan for sidewalks and other multi-modal infrastructure is in

development. (Refer to the Transportation Chapter for additional details)

### **Jefferson Mill Area**

Holden's Jefferson Mill Building is located at 1665 Main Street. The area is a nationally registered historic district. Some portions of the site are zoned Commercial. This zoning district does not readily support desirable new uses such as small multi-family housing, restaurants, or offices. Other areas of Jefferson Mill area are zoned Village. The Village zoning district allows a variety of land uses that integrate different elements such that each complements the function of each other use, thus improving the quality of the Village as a whole. Consequently, Holden's Village District is more restrictive than C or BOP districts. It requires a minimum of three of the following permitted land uses, one of which must be residential:

- Residential
- Restaurant
- Theater or Auditorium
- Recreational Facility
- Parking (open lots, and attached or detached single or multi-space garages)
- Business and Professional Office
- Retail Establishment (not including production facilities, but allowing on-site assembly)
- Personal Service Business
- Hotel or Motel
- Community Facility

The Jefferson Mill area is a focus of Town development efforts. In 2017, permits were reissued to develop condominiums on the site. The project stalled due to uncertainty around Eagle Lake, which is located nearby. There has been no site work to date, and the Village District zoning has not spurred development as expected. Consequently, a new Village Center District zoning bylaw for the area is in development. The purpose of this district is to create a walkable, mixed-use center that has residential, commercial, historic, and public space components that enhance the quality of life in the Town. The Village Center District will generally



support denser, mixed-use development including retail, office, and residential uses.

### Processes and Procedures

Among the major factors that developers look for when considering a town for development, municipal processes and procedures are the ones over which the Town has the most control. Development is shaped by not only the strictness or lenience of regulations but the degree to which processes are streamlined and efficient. Overall, Holden's processes and procedures are working well; however, these processes need to be continually reviewed and refined.

Holden has taken efforts to improve its permitting process. Permitting bodies such as Building Inspection, Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Board, and Conservation Commission share a department (Planning and Development Office, formerly Growth Management Department) and are co-located. The application and issuance of many permit types (including building, plumbing, gas, sewer hookup, and others) is conducted online. In the near future, online permitting will be expanded to include the Board of Heath. Special permit granting authority is split between the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. In some towns, this presents a challenge for applicants. In Holden, staff indicates the split structure is working adequately. Although the Town does not employ a fast track permitting process or combined permitting application, Boards have held joint permitting meetings in the past. Similarly, roundtable review (review meetings attended by multiple departments) is occasionally used, but the Town does not hold standing meetings of review staff to meet with developers at all stages of project conception.

In terms of other best practices, the Town does not maintain dedicated economic development staff and the Economic Development Commission is not active. To date, the Town has not utilized Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or other development incentives. Staff indicates that the permitting process is sufficiently clear but no guidebook exists. Finally, the Town does not utilize Design Guidelines outside of Site Plan Special Permit requirements.

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As detailed in the Executive Summary, the Town conducted outreach activities to identify the needs and priorities of those who live and work in Holden. Through these activities, residents expressed an overwhelming desire to preserve Holden's small-town, country character. On the other hand, residents expressed a strong demand for shopping convenience and stable taxes. Residents particularly favor growing such amenities through the following types of development.

These sectors already play a significant role in the Town's economy. A strategy that supports and encourages such amenities is realistic and provides a solid vision to guide economic development policy.

Small-scale businesses in existing buildings, with development concentrated along Main Street

Restaurants; small-scale home businesses; small retail shops, boutiques, and art galleries

Agricultural businesses and services

Support and promotion of existing local businesses

Clean energy generation, consumer services, and light industry



## Town Center Traffic

Town Center is a cherished part of Holden's character, and residents' preferred area for commercial activity. Yet, traffic in the area is a preeminent concern. Increasing business activity in Town Center will likely yield additional vehicle trips. Thus, strategies to mitigate congestion and improve multimodal transportation options such as walking and biking are a vital component of Holden's economic development planning. Strategies to mitigate Town Center traffic include access (curb cut) management, addition of a left turn only lane, and encouraging multi-modal access. These topics are addressed in detail in the Transportation Chapter.

### Built environment

Although Town Center is well-defined, aesthetic improvements would further brand the area and help encourage patronage from nearby towns. A facade improvement program could incentivize investment in building exteriors. Such programs provide financial incentives such as matching grants<sup>2</sup>, tax incentives, or design assistance. In complement, passage of the Community Preservation Act (CPA)<sup>3</sup> could fund improvements of eligible historic buildings. State and Federal Historic Tax Credits<sup>4</sup> are also available for some historic redevelopment projects. Establishment of a Town Center Tax Abatement District could also spur investment. In such districts, property owners who invest in their properties are eligible for tax relief. The strategy can be used to encourage existing owners to rehabilitate properties regardless of whether current rental rates are sufficient to render investment cost effective. In support, branded wayfinding and pedestrian-level aesthetics would contribute to the character of Town Center. Such amenities could include themed signage, lighting, flower boxes, and other elements. Municipalities can fund downtown design elements

through Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) grants and other sources. Longer-term, expanded design standards could contribute to improved walkability and preserve the cultural and historic assets of the area. The Town may also want to advance a Town Common redesign, either through seeking consensus on the scenarios outlined in the UMass Student Design Studio Project or hiring a design consultant. The design should address traffic flow and connectivity between different types of spaces, especially green spaces.

### Vacancy

Given residents' desire for additional commercial amenities concentrated in Town Center, strategies to address vacancy and target new business are essential. Addressing vacancy requires a multi-pronged approach. Strategies include tenant attraction, temporary activation, and tools to incentivize landlords. Identifying the reason for the vacancy is critical. Some sites possess challenges such as limited parking or inadequate infrastructure. Others may be vacant due to an owner's perception of commercial leasing rates, unfamiliarity with permitting processes, or limited marketing skills. Identifying the cause of the vacancy and working to address it therefore requires staff or volunteer time. The Town should consider appointing a part-time small business liaison or hiring an economic development coordinator who can work in partnership with the Wachusett Area Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Commission to address vacancies. Strategies to address vacancy include:

**Vacancy database or registry:** Typically, municipal employees possess a working knowledge of vacant commercial properties. Maintaining a formal list of vacancies ensures that all development employees possess up-to-date information on current and upcoming vacancies. It also streamlines distributing

<sup>2</sup> Matching grants are funds that are set to be paid in equal amount to funds available from other sources. Matching fund payments usually arise in situations of charity or public good. In the United States, many projects in the various states and communities are partially funded with federal grants with a requirement for matching funds.

<sup>3</sup> The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is a Massachusetts state law (M.G.L. Chapter 44B) passed in 2000. It enables adopting communities to raise funds to create a local dedicated fund for open space preservation, preservation of historic resources, development of affordable housing, and the acquisition and development of outdoor recreational facilities.

<sup>4</sup> An income tax credit is available for the rehabilitation of historic, income-producing buildings that are determined by the to be "certified historic structures." Federal and State Programs are available.

property information to prospective business owners, real estate agents, Chambers of Commerce, and real estate websites (another important strategy). To complement, some towns require property owners to notify the municipality within a defined period after a property becomes vacant. Such registries help municipal staff stay apprised of commercial vacancies and are a means of establishing constructive dialogue with property owners. Once a landlord has registered a vacancy, the Town should work with the property owner to identify and address the cause of the vacancy.

**Business lead tracking:** As Holden's development and planning staff receive inquiries from potential business owners, these leads should be tracked. In most municipal settings, municipal employees will often receive calls about specific properties or business ideas but cannot immediately match the interested party with a suitable property. Formally tracking business leads will ensure that opportunities are not overlooked when they emerge later on. It will also ensure that staff is actively reviewing leads.

**Home-based businesses:** Home-based businesses can be a source of commercial tenants. As a component of business lead tracking, the Town should maintain a list of home-based businesses and engage with such residents when seeking to fill space in Town Center. Another source of tenants is businesses located in nearby communities; successful businesses operating within the region may be interested in expanding or opening a nearby branch.

**Social Media:** The importance of social media in marketing vacant properties should not be overlooked. Many towns use their Facebook and Twitter pages to notify the public of vacancies. Some towns also crowdsource tenants. A 2018 report entitled *Storefront Vacancies Best Practices* prepared for the City of Cambridge suggests the use of websites where residents can identify vacancies and vote on

preferred uses (Larisa Ortiz Associates, 2018). Used in conjunction with more traditional online platforms (Town website, Facebook, etc.), crowdsourcing tenants could be an effective strategy for addressing vacancy.

**Temporary Use Permits:** To activate vacant space, the Town should consider adopting a pop-up retail ordinance that allows and streamlines temporary uses, especially in Town Center. Given Town Center's limited scale, one prominent vacancy (or several less prominent ones) could diminish the area's vitality. Temporary uses allow storefronts to remain active in the absence of long-term tenants. Common temporary uses include art galleries, seasonal retail, pilot businesses, and cause-based uses.

**Vacancy Tax:** Vacancy taxes are sometimes assessed when a property is not leased, redeveloped, or sold within a defined period following vacancy registration. An overview of several Vacant Property Registry and Special Tax programs is included in the *Storefront Vacancies Best Practices* report prepared for the City of Cambridge. (Larisa Ortiz Associates, 2018) This policy is best pursued as part of a comprehensive vacancy reduction strategy that includes providing technical assistance to property owners.

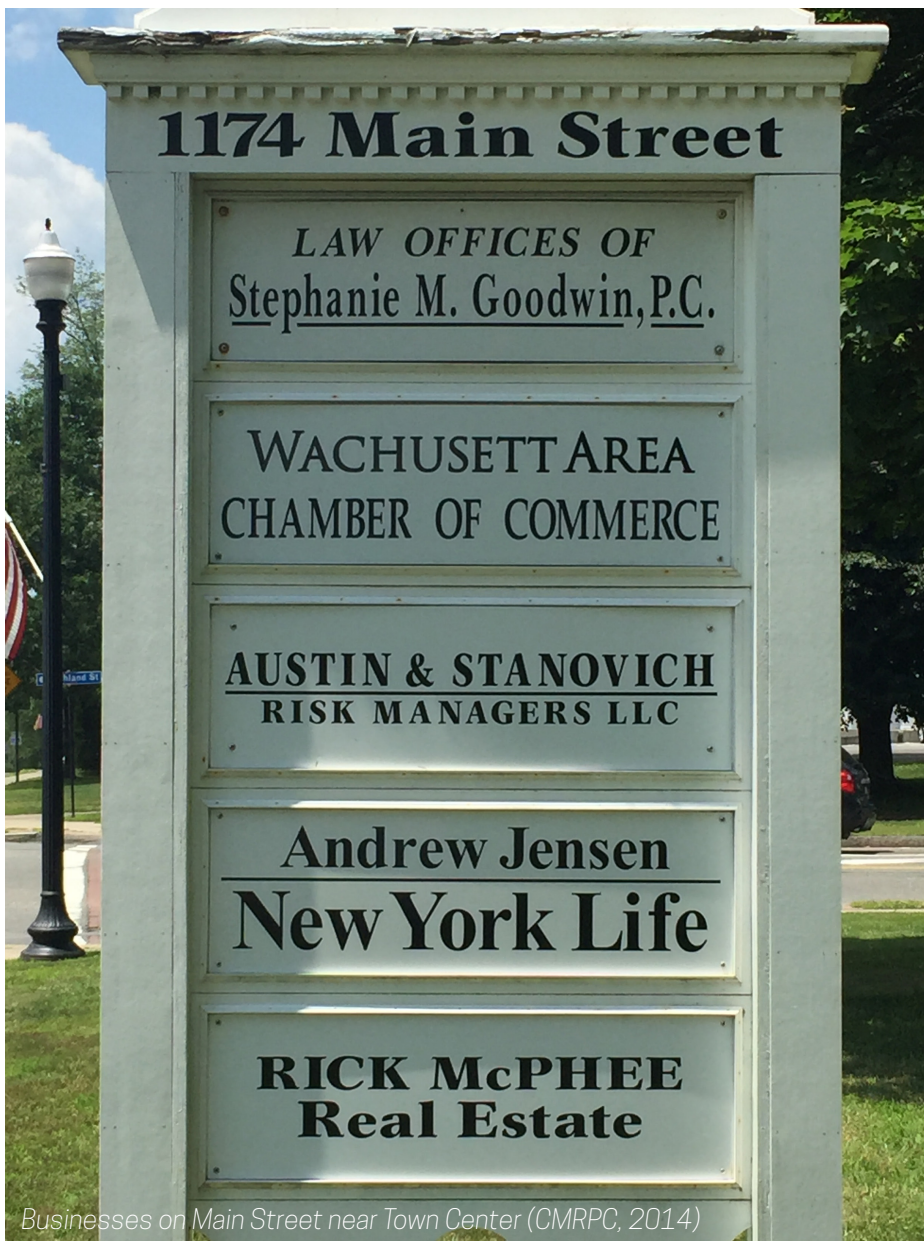
### Parking

Although a majority of 2018 survey respondents indicated that parking is not an issue in Holden, the issue should be addressed proactively. As noted in the Transportation Chapter, parking in Town Center is strained during Holden Days and other Town events. The Town's Planning and Development Office staff indicates that vacant buildings lacking parking are increasingly difficult to fill. The Town should work to identify off-site parking solutions for vacant commercial buildings on Main Street that lack adequate parking. The Town should also review its parking standards to ensure that shared parking is adequately provided for. A shared parking bylaw would support the Town in its effort to locate tenants for hard to fill properties, providing a framework for discussions with property owners proximate to vacant buildings.

## Zoning

To encourage the establishment of new small-scale businesses, restaurants, and mixed-use development, the Town should review and potentially expand by-right uses in Town Center. Select areas on Main Street could be rezoned from Commercial and Residential to “Village,” which permits mixed-use. Additionally, the Village District requires a special permit for restaurants and stores selling a combination of goods, and personal service establishments. It does not permit consumer service establishments, such as bookstores or beauty salons. Allowing these uses by-right in the Village District could facilitate development of new businesses desired by residents, potentially

in a mixed-use context. In the Commercial District, restaurants are permitted by special permit. Allowing this use by-right in the Commercial District could facilitate the establishment of additional restaurants in Town Center. Additionally, creation of additional dwelling units in the Main Street Corridor could further “activate” the area. To do so without compromising the commercial character of the area, the Town could encourage accessory apartments in the commercial area. Currently, The Board of Appeals may authorize an Accessory Apartment by Special Permit in any residential district, provided certain conditions are met. It could be beneficial to explore expansion of this provision to include commercial areas.



*Businesses on Main Street near Town Center (CMRPC, 2014)*

## Eagleville Historic District /Jefferson Mill

With Jefferson Mill as its centerpiece, Eagleville Historic District is a significant economic asset. Located less than two miles from Town Center and proximate to Eagle Lake Recreation Area and Holden Hills Country Club and golf course, the historic mill village is an ideal location for mixed-use development. The mill property could potentially support second-story residential, first floor office and commercial space, and restaurants or similar amenities in several of the smaller buildings. The Jefferson Mill parcel consists of nearly three acres and multiple buildings, the largest of which comprises of approximately 600,000 square feet (sq. ft.). Efforts to encourage developments consistent with a walkable village center, with mixed-use residential, commercial, historic, and public space components, are underway. However, the scope of development will be limited by Eagle Lake, which abuts the area to the east. The layout



and design of Rte. 122A is also a constraint. Near the mill, vehicle travel speeds are greater than in a typical village center area.

### **Village Center**

The Town is currently engaged in strategies to facilitate its vision for the Jefferson Mill area. The Town adopted a Village Center zoning for the area. Due to a variety of factors, including large parcel area requirements and uncertainty surrounding Eagle Lake, this zoning provision has not been utilized. Accordingly, the Town is in the process of finalizing and adopting a new Village Center Zoning Bylaw and District that will replace the previously adopted overlay. The new district will help protect and strengthen the traditional New England character of the area. Specific goals of this new district include:

- Build upon the historic development patterns in existing village centers to create attractive, walkable neighborhoods.
- Encourage adaptive reuse of abandoned, vacant, or underutilized buildings or structures where appropriate.
- Allow for a mix of new land uses that are appropriate to both the needs of the community and the scale of surrounding neighborhoods.
- Provide incentives to develop larger parcels at higher densities and in a coordinated, planned approach.
- Maintain a consistently high level of design quality throughout the district.

The Village District Bylaw should allow for and anticipate the redevelopment of properties over time. This could entail construction of new buildings that are closer to the road, and multiple uses that articulate and enhance the village center. The ability to mix uses and allow for small scale residential density on smaller lots should be encouraged and allowed.

### **Commercial Zoning**

In the vicinity of Jefferson Mill, commercially-zoned properties are fairly limited. To encourage additional

commercial uses in the area, the Town could expand rezoning efforts beyond the Village Center Bylaw initiative. The Town should assess whether there are any parcels proximate to Jefferson Mill but outside the boundaries of the proposed Village Center District that should be rezoned from Residential to Commercial. As noted in the section on Town Center, the Town may also want to expand the by-right uses allowed in the Commercial District.

### **Encourage Housing Development**

To encourage housing development in the Jefferson Mill area, the Town could explore Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF). The Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) Program is a statutory program authorizing cities and towns to promote housing and commercial development. The UCH-TIF Program provides real estate exemptions on all or part of the increased value (the “Increment”) of improved real estate. Tax increment financing may be combined with grants and loans from local, state and federal development programs.

### **Infrastructure**

The Town’s effort to improve pedestrian and bicycle access through the recently adopted Complete Streets policy and prioritization effort will help facilitate the area’s redevelopment. Currently, it lacks the sidewalks, crosswalks and pedestrian amenities consistent with a typical village center.

### **Eagle Lake**

Despite recent issues surrounding Eagle Lake and ownership/maintenance of its dam, the Eagle Lake Recreation Area is an important component of the area’s redevelopment as a village center. The site consists of 362 acres of trails, mature forests, and low-impact recreational activities such as boating, kayaking, and fishing. Proximity to this open space and recreation area is a marketable amenity, and will be especially attractive to those seeking the live-work-play experience offered by mixed-use development. Whether in its current form or restored to its natural state through removal of the dam, the Town can leverage the Eagle Lake Recreational Area for economic development purposes.



## Commercial Businesses and Specialty Retail

Holden residents indicated a strong desire for additional small businesses, including retail and restaurants. With a retail, food, and drink leakage of \$400,835,307, sufficient demand exists to support a variety of new commercial enterprises. A two-pronged strategy that focuses on supporting existing businesses and courting new ones will maximize outcomes.

### Existing Businesses

Existing businesses are assets that should be supported, nurtured, and preserved. To ensure that the existing small businesses are not displaced by big-box, low-cost retailers, the Town should amend the Zoning Bylaws to prohibit or deter big-box retail development. Such uses were rated as highly unfavorable by a majority of residents, and they provide a significant threat to the small business community.

Numerous strategies to support small businesses exist; however, most require staff and or volunteer time. As stated in the section on Town Center, the Town should consider appointing a small-business liaison from among its staff, or hire an Economic Development Coordinator. This person could work with the Economic Development Commission and Wachusett Area Chamber of Commerce to undertake activities to support small businesses and cultivate others.

Municipalities can play an active role in promoting local businesses. Many Economic Development Commissions and Coordinators actively promote new businesses, authoring press releases and sharing updates with the local media. Some municipalities provide businesses with an opportunity to promote themselves through Cable Access, allowing for brief presentations at the beginning of televised meetings. An especially creative example of public/private partnership, one community initiated a “Business Matters” campaign where a Town official visited a local business with a reporter every week, with highlights of the visits and businesses shared by the local media. Business-to-business cultivation is also a means of

supporting existing small businesses. Oftentimes, local businesses would prefer to purchase from other local enterprises, but lack an awareness of local purchasing opportunities. A local business guide, or publicly available list of businesses, can generate greater awareness of local purchasing opportunities. Cooperative capitalism strategies such as joint marketing and cross-business promotion are also effective tools for increasing revenue.

Such initiatives are commonly undertaken by small business merchants associations. The Economic Development Commission or municipal development staff could work to encourage formation of small business or merchants association.

### New Businesses

The development of new businesses can be encouraged through ensuring the Town has pro-business processes and procedures, and effective marketing. Pro-business policies include Round Table review, the elimination of unnecessary special permit requirements, development support services, and other strategies that are detailed in the section on Processes and Procedures. Marketing strategies can take many forms. As a starting point, the Town should review the leakage analysis in conjunction with feedback provided by residents to identify business types that are undersupplied and desirable. Holden residents indicated they want more small-scale specialty retail, restaurants, galleries, and art boutiques. When promoting vacant sites, whether through social media or traditional platforms, preferred uses can and should be articulated. Additional strategies for promoting uses are provided in the sections on Town Center and Industrial Business.

## Agricultural Businesses

Agriculture is an important component of Holden’s character, and a preferred economic development strategy among Town residents. More than three-quarters of Community Vision Survey respondents indicated that an increase in agricultural businesses was desirable or highly desirable. Yet, across the Commonwealth, farmland (in acres and number of



Plant sale near Town Hall (CMRPC, 2019)



farms) is declining (Tota, 2019). Multiple factors are contributing to this decline, including demographic preferences and farm viability. Ensuring that Holden's farms remain viable (and perhaps even increase in number) requires a strategy that pairs new business practices with preservation. Tools to preserve farmland are detailed in the Open Space and Recreation Chapter; the following strategies will help Holden farms adapt traditional business models to meet 21st century consumer demands.

- Online presence: It is essential for farms to maintain an up-to-date, user-friendly website. Social media and email alerts are also important to stay connected to existing customers and expand customer bases.
- New revenue models: Many farms are expanding traditional offerings to include experiential learning, outdoor activities and competitions, farm-to-table dining, and other events. Cooperative capitalism (i.e., where businesses collaborate on opportunities, rather than compete) is also generating new revenue streams for many Central Massachusetts farms. Local

examples of cooperative capitalism include the Back 40 Farm Festival hosted by Lilac Hedge Farm.

- Land Leasing: Farm owners can also lease land to other agricultural producers, Issue Requests for Proposals (RFP)s to gauge interest from the local farming community, or utilize New England Small Farm Institute's New England Land Link, which is an online clearinghouse for parties interested in leasing out or utilizing farm land.

Holden's Agricultural Commission and Holden's professional development staff should work with the Farm Bureau, US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Central Mass Grown, and local farms to support and encourage these strategies.

### Industrial Business

In the Community Vision survey, 52% of respondents indicated the Town should explore the potential for new light industrial development. Growing this sector will help diversify the tax base and contribute to a stable residential tax rate. Given Holden's existing land use patterns and the value its residents place on open space and agriculture,



efforts to expand light industry should focus on maximizing the success of existing industrial areas and developments, including the Holden Industrial Park and former ECC site.

The Industrial Park is Holden's preeminent industrial asset. Although the buildings in the Park are fully occupied, business owners in the Park would like to have a plan in place for when tenants provide notice of an impending departure. Owners would like the Town to develop and disseminate a complete listing of commercial properties for sale or lease, in order to enlist community-wide support in filling properties. This strategy is proving effective in communities across the country; crowd-sourcing development is an emerging strategy for not only addressing vacancies but soliciting desired business types. Additionally, the Park owners suggest building the awareness of realtors who handle commercial properties so that interest is created before the Park and other areas experience a need. This is a tried-and-tested strategy, implementation of which could fall to the Economic Development Commission or an economic development coordinator. Additionally, the Town should continue to explore expanding uses allowed within the Industrial District.

Although the Industrial Park is currently fully occupied, it recently experienced its first vacancy in many years. In response, the Town met with property owners to explore expanding uses in the Park, consumer services in particular. Initially, property owners felt the expanded uses were incompatible with existing uses. Today, property and business owners in the Park are supportive of expanded uses, including a potential brewing company. Expanding the types of uses allowed within the Park will allow the Town and Park flexibility to adapt to changes in the market. Increasingly, vacant and underutilized industrial properties are accommodating new uses and smaller-scale tenants. Retail malls are proving ideal for medical facilities and indoor sports venues. Vacant mill buildings are finding new life by accommodating many small tenants. Makerspaces, co-working and incubator spaces, small-batch artisan manufacturing, and other uses are filling once vacant industrial sites. Expanding allowed

uses in the Industrial District will provide the Town and property owners with greater flexibility and resilience.

The former ECC site (156 Princeton Street) is unutilized. Consisting of 17 acres and a two-story brick and cinder block facility, the site may still be suitable for industrial activities. Adjacent to residential properties and proximate to the Asnebumskit Brook, the site may be better suited to industries with lower levels of traffic and environmental impacts. Currently, the property contains industrial contamination. In 2007, the EPA conducted a partial cleanup of the site, removing toxic substances left behind by the former owners, and cordoning off a wastelagoon. (USEPA, 2019) Additional remediation is necessary, especially given the site's proximity to Town wellheads. The Town should seek funding to conduct further testing and remediation. The highest and best use of the site will be largely determined by the degree of contamination and what type of use restriction is placed on the site. At a minimum, the site may be viable for renewable energy generation, which residents expressed a desire for in the Community Vision Survey.

### Processes and Procedures

According to Town staff, Holden's permitting process is very effective; however, it should be constantly evaluated and available electronically when possible. To compete for quality new businesses (or retain existing ones), it is necessary to be not only business friendly, but more business friendly than nearby communities. There are several strategies not used in Holden that can support aspiring entrepreneurs, improve the desirability of project applications, and speed up development timelines.

### Human Resources

Holden's Economic Development Commission (EDC) is inactive and the Town lacks a dedicated economic development coordinator. To attract new businesses (and ensure that existing businesses thrive and do not relocate out of town), the Town must adopt a proactive approach to economic development. Without a dedicated committee

or staff to monitor conditions and implement strategies, the Town is limited in its ability to undertake the economic recommendations of this plan. Holden should work to reactivate the Economic Development Commission and establish a new vision to guide its efforts. In addition, the Town would benefit from the addition of, at a minimum, a part-time economic development coordinator. Towns throughout the region are working to establish part-time (and full-time) economic development staff positions, and many are seeking inter-municipal job share arrangements. Opportunities for seed/ pilot funding exist, including the Commonwealth's Community Compact Cabinet Efficiency & Regionalization grant.

### **Economic Development Functions**

Currently, municipal economic development functions are provided by Holden's Planning and Development Office staff. Formalized and assigned to a dedicated staffer, these functions will likely increase in magnitude: proactive economic development generates new leads, new business, and new projects. Whether the responsibility of a dedicated economic development person or the community development team, the following strategies will allow the Town to stay reasonably competitive (i.e., business friendly):

- Track business leads or expressions of interest. In many towns, business leads fall through the cracks if a suitable site is not readily available.
- Maintain an inventory of vacant commercial and industrial sites. Match vacant sites with businesses looking to locate in Holden.
- Ensure the Town website is up-to-date with relevant documents such as zoning bylaws, RFPs, permitting forms, and contact information.
- Create marketing materials including an economic development website, Town brochure or video, and economic development social media presence.
- Establish a single point of contact to shepherd aspiring business owners through the permitting process and help troubleshoot issues.
- Conduct outreach to ensure existing businesses

feel supported and have the resources to thrive (and expand) in Holden.

- Identify and apply for grants.
- Spearhead and work with future local business association.
- Seek leads from the Holden Chamber of Commerce, commercial real estate brokers, and state agencies.
- Collaborate with newspapers and other media outlets to promote new businesses.
- Provide resources to new and home-based businesses (and help home-based businesses locate commercial space).
- Spearhead and implement a facade improvement program.
- Join and participate in Main Street America programs.
- Host Open for Business meetings.

### **Roundtable Review**

Roundtable review meetings are a favorite tool of many economic development practitioners (and developers). By holding standing, formal appointment meetings that are open to prospective developers at all stages of the development process, Towns can increase the desirability (and success) of development proposals. Such meetings allow prospective business owners to communicate with community development staff as well as staff from fire, highway, police, and other review departments, from the initial stages of a project through to implementation. Currently, Holden conducts inter-departmental review meetings for any substantial site plans and subdivisions. Transitioning to a standing meeting of all relevant staff could enhance communications between the Town and developers and enable the Town to mitigate potential issues early on.

### **Zoning Combined Permitting**

Best practices support combining Roundtable Review with Zoning Combined Permitting. This process allows the combination of multiple special permit and/or site plan approval applications into a single application and requires a single



public hearing. Doing so can significantly improve permitting timeframes and, perhaps equally important, enhance the Town's image as an easy place to do business.

### Design Guidelines

The Town should work to establish design guidelines outside of site plan review. Design standards that promote walkable places and preserve and enhance the cultural and historic assets of the area will help ensure that development is consistent with the vision expressed by residents. Technical assistance is potentially fundable through the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Planning Assistance Grant Program.

### Permitting Guidebook

The Town should consider creating an up-to-date permitting guidebook to help prospective business owners navigate the permitting process. This strategy may reduce staff time dedicated to answering basic questions about permitting.

### Incentives

The Town should determine whether there is political will to utilize Tax Increment Financing and other development incentives. Promoting the potential availability of Tax Increment Financing and other development incentives can help the Town brand itself as business friendly and generate interest from developers and prospective business owners.

## GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTION ITEMS

The Master Plan recommends the following action items based on the goals and objectives crafted with careful consideration of the public outreach results, analysis of current conditions, and progress achieved since 2008. The action items accompanying the objectives will also be reflected in the Implementation Chapter (Chapter 11).

### CAPITAL ITEMS

Implement wayfinding and pedestrian-level improvements (i.e., flowerboxes) in the Town Center area

Goal 8.1: Encourage a strong, diversified tax and employee base.

Objective 8.1.1: Increase Holden's capacity to provide economic development support services.

- **Action Item 8.1.1.1:** Convene regular meetings of the Economic Development Commission and establish a new vision to guide the Commission's efforts.
- **Action Item 8.1.1.2:** Consider hiring a dedicated economic development coordinator to undertake proactive and responsive economic development activities.

Objective 8.1.2: Enhance the predictability and ease of navigating local permitting processes.

- **Action Item 8.1.2.1:** Consider establishing Zoning Combined Permitting and Round Table Review to streamline application and review processes for developers.

- **Action Item 8.1.2.2:** Establish a single municipal point of contact to shepherd developers and prospective business owners through the permitting process.

Goal 8.2: Offer a variety of quality goods and services to meet the demand of residents, workers, and visitors.

Objective 8.2.1: Increase the number and variety of retail and service establishments in Holden.

- **Action Item 8.2.1.1:** Consider using and promoting the availability of Tax Increment Financing and other development incentives.
- **Action Item 8.2.1.2:** Market Holden as a desirable place to do business; consider creating an economic development website, Town brochure or video, and stronger social media presence.
- **Action Item 8.2.1.3:** Review the Town's leakage analysis in concert with Community Vision Survey to identify suitable retail targets; market accordingly.
- **Action Item 8.2.1.4:** Continue working with the Wachusett Area Chamber of Commerce, commercial real estate brokers, and state agencies to identify prospective business interests.

Goal 8.3: Concentrate development in the Main Street corridor where infrastructure exists.

Objective 8.3.1: Encourage and support investment in the Main Street corridor.

- **Action Item 8.3.1.1:** Identify funding mechanisms for a facade improvement program.
- **Action Item 8.3.1.2:** Identify off-site parking solutions for vacant commercial buildings on Main Street that lack adequate parking.

- **Action Item 8.3.1.3:** Explore Community Preservation Act (CPA) as a means of funding improvements in historic Main Street buildings.
- **Action Item 8.3.1.4:** Explore strategies for establishing a tax abatement district in the Main Street corridor.
- **Action Item 8.3.1.5:** Expand opportunities for mixed-use development by rezoning select areas along Main Street from Commercial or Residential to Village.

Objective 8.3.2: Build on Town Center's existing character through aesthetics and design.

- **Action Item 8.3.2.1:** Pursue branded wayfinding and pedestrian-level aesthetic improvements in Town Center.
- **Action Item 8.3.2.2:** Develop design guidelines (outside of site plan review) that promote walkable places, preserve and enhance Town Center's cultural and historic assets.
- **Action Item 8.3.2.3:** Prepare a design for Town Center that better connects existing open and green spaces to the pedestrian infrastructure.

Goal 8.4: Develop a walkable, mixed-use village center that has residential, commercial, historic, and public space components.

Objective 8.4.1: Employ Smart Growth design principles in the Village Center.

- **Action Item 8.4.1.1:** Explore the Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) Program as a means to encourage housing in the Jefferson Mill area.
- **Action Item 8.4.1.2:** Build upon the historic development patterns to create an attractive walkable village centers.
- **Action Item 8.4.1.3:** Encourage adaptive reuse of abandoned, vacant, or underutilized buildings or structures where appropriate.

- **Action Item 8.4.1.4:** Allow for a mix of new land uses that are appropriate to both the needs of the community and the scale of surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Action Item 8.4.1.5:** In the Jefferson Mill area, provide incentives to develop larger parcels at higher densities and in a coordinated, planned approach.

Objective 8.4.2: Proactively plan for and facilitate growth in Eagleville

- **Action Item 8.4.2.1:** Prepare a design for Jefferson Mill area that leverages Eagle Lake by connecting existing open and green spaces to pedestrian infrastructure.
- **Action Item 8.4.2.2:** Pursue branded wayfinding and pedestrian-level aesthetic improvements in Jefferson Mill area.

Goal 8.5: Evaluate and promote adaptive reuse of vacant properties and industrial sites

Objective 8.5.1: Reduce commercial and industrial vacancies.

- **Action Item 8.5.1.1:** Explore vacancy registry and tax policy models.
- **Action Item 8.5.1.2:** Assess the need for a pop-up retail ordinance that streamlines issuance of temporary use permits for uses such as food trucks, seasonal retail, pilot businesses, and other uses.
- **Action Item 8.5.1.3:** Widely market vacant and available properties; consider traditional platforms as well as social media and emerging online tools.
- **Action Item 8.5.1.4:** Continue to explore expanded uses in the Industrial District.
- **Action Item 8.5.1.5:** Work with the Industrial Park property and business owners to create an action plan for addressing future vacancies in the Park and other areas.

- **Action Item 8.5.1.6:** Establish an inventory of available commercial and industrial space; routinely update and make publicly available.
- **Action Item 8.5.1.7:** Seek funding for additional testing and remediation at the former Electronic Controls Corp. (ECC) site.

Goal 8.6: Provide incentives and opportunities for small-scale businesses and other desirable enterprises

Objective 8.6.1: Support existing and prospective small businesses.

- **Action Item 8.6.1.1:** Amend the zoning bylaw to eliminate undesirable commercial uses such as “big box” retail.
- **Action Item 8.6.1.2:** Convene frequent meetings with the local business community to discuss challenges and desired resources; encourage the establishment of a small business or merchants association.
- **Action Item 8.6.1.3:** Help businesses promote their goods and services by providing access to municipal platforms.
- **Action Item 8.6.1.4:** Support collaborative capitalism. Encourage local businesses and community partners to organize and take part in “buy local” initiatives.
- **Action Item 8.6.1.5:** Encourage development of small office space with business resources (e.g., co-working spaces) to draw existing home occupations into commercial space.

Objective 8.6.2: Support agricultural businesses.

- **Action Item 8.6.2.1:** Assess opportunities to support and encourage the use of social media and online tools by local farms.



- **Action Item 8.6.2.2:** Encourage new and collaborative revenue models including festivals, workshops, active recreation and sports, and farm-to-table dining.
- **Action Item 8.6.2.3:** Encourage joint marketing and peer engagement through organizations such as Central Mass Grown.
- **Action Item 8.6.2.4:** Assist farms with identifying tenants for underutilized land.

Goal 8.7: Foster a local workforce that complements Holden's employer needs.

Objective 8.7.1: Leverage public/private partnerships to ensure an adequate labor supply for local businesses.

- **Action Item 8.7.1.1:** Engage with the local business community to identify unmet labor and workplace transportation needs.
- **Action Item 8.7.1.2:** Work with the WRTA to explore opportunities for workplace transportation.
- **Action Item 8.7.1.3:** Collaborate with the Wachusett Regional School District and local employers to identify internship and apprenticeship opportunities.







Business Sign in Town Center (Credit: CMRPC Staff 2018)



What does  
Holden think  
about Economic  
Development?

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Holden Community Survey Results

### TOP 3 DESIRED BUSINESS TYPES

1. Small retail shops, boutiques, art galleries
2. Agriculture-based business and services
3. Clean Energy (commercial solar)

### MOST UNDESIRED BUSINESS TYPES

1. Shopping malls, big box retail, outlet shopping
2. Hotels, motels, resorts
3. Rental housing



**Holden Tomorrow**  
planning our future together

FOR MORE INFORMATION: [www.holdenmasterplan.com](http://www.holdenmasterplan.com) Town of Holden Master Plan Committee