

CHAPTER 10: LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT

Chapter Goal

OVERVIEW

The past, present, and future of a community is, in large measure, determined by its geographical location and physical characteristics. The ability of Granby's citizens to harness these elements will determine how Granby changes and grows over the next ten to fifteen years.

Granby is a rural community with a strong history of agriculture, which is evident by the many active agricultural fields that can be seen throughout town. Across these fields, sweeping views of the Holyoke Range can be seen to the north, especially along Route 202.

The portion of the town along the Holyoke Range, with its steep slopes and other environmental constraints, has limited potential for development.

Bisecting the town is Route 202, the main thoroughfare that connects Granby to the neighboring communities of South Hadley and Belchertown. Located in the heart of the community along Route 202 is the town center, with its Town Common surrounded by historic, civic and residential buildings. The Common historically served as a "communal" area, with activities such as livestock grazing in colonial times to more modern events such as small fairs, arts & crafts exhibits and concerts.

Numerous roads radiate from the Town Common area to service the more remote sections. These farm roads have given way to paved streets that still serve to link agricultural areas to the town center. A great deal of the land that was previously in agriculture has been developed and now single family homes dot the landscape that once supported agricultural enterprises, though a few farms still remain.

Commercial uses are primarily located along Route 202, from the South Hadley town line to the town center. Five Corners on the South Hadley town line contains the highest cluster of commercial uses, and is typical of suburban commercial strip development. As the main gateway into the community from the west, commercial development in this part of town does not necessarily convey the same distinct town character as the historic Town Center or other portions of the community.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the recent trends and patterns of residential, commercial, industrial and public development, as well as natural lands within the town of Granby. This chapter forms the basis for comprehensive planning and largely determines the need for environmental protection measures, public facilities, and transportation infrastructure. The goal is to review these trends and provide a series of

recommendations of how Granby can meet its long range Vision, as determined by the citizens of Granby through the public engagement process of this master plan.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Development Trends

In a community about 18,000 acres in size, close to two-thirds of the community, or about 12,000 acres remain in a forested landscape. Farmland comprises approximately 2,100 acres, or 11 percent of the total land use in Granby. In 2005, residential development constituted 10 percent of total land use in Granby, currently the highest percentage of developed land in the community.

Land Use Inventory, 2005

	# of acres	% of total acres
Residential	1,902.7	10.6%
Commercial	120.5	0.7%
Industrial	11.8	0.1%
Forest	11,936.2	66.4%
Farmland	2,126.0	11.8%
Recreational	128.1	0.7%
Urban open lands	624.4	3.5%
Wetlands and Waterbodies	1,100.3	6.1%
Total Acres	17,966.4	

Source: MassGIS, McConnell Land Use Data, 2005

Like many communities in the region, the amount of developed land in Granby continues to increase, while the amount of undeveloped land continues to decline. The percentage of developed lands in Granby increased between the years 1971 and 1999. The MassGIS data reflects a decrease in developed lands in 2005, but this is a result of a change in data collection methodology and improved technology and accuracy in determining land use trends in the community.

Comparison of Developed and Undeveloped Land in Granby, 1971-2005

	1971	1985	1999	2005*
Undeveloped land (in acres)	15,912.5	15,452.4	14,904.6	15,399.9
Developed land (in acres)	2,070.3	2,530.4	3,078.2	2,566.5
Percent Developed	11.5%	14.1%	17.1%	14.3%

Source: MassGIS, McConnell Land Use Data, 1971, 1985, 1999, 2005

** Between the years 1999 and 2005, the methodology to determine land use categories was changed by McConnell and MassGIS. Comparison of 2005 data to previous years may show some inconsistencies in the data sets.*

Granby experienced the largest increase in developed land in the form of residential lots greater than ½ acre in size. Between the years 1971 and 2005, there was a 56 percent increase in large lot residential lands in town. Since 1971, this has resulted in almost 500 acres of new large lot residential development in the community. Based on the Granby zoning bylaws, lots of this size can be built in the two residential zoning districts and the

Agricultural Preservation overlay district with a minimum lot size of 40,000 square feet, or approximately one acre, for any single family home. Residences can also be built in the Water Protection overlay district, with a minimum lot size of 60,000 square feet, or about 1.5 acres per lot. The RS (residential single family) zoning district comprises 96 percent of the town. With such a substantial area zoned for low density residential development, it is no surprise that the greatest change in land use between 1971 and 2005 was in residential lots over one acre.

Land Use Change by Category, 1971-2005

Land Use Category	Change '71-'85 (acres)	Change '71-'85 (percent)	Change '85-'05* (acres)	Change '85-'05* (percent)	Total Change '71-'05* (percent)
Active Agriculture	-95.7	-3.8%	-791.8	-32.4%	-35.0%
Pasture	-16.5	-3.7%	-23.8	-5.6%	-9.1%
Forest	-322.0	-2.7%	479.0	4.2%	1.3%
Multi-Family	7.5	63.1%	-5.9	-30.0%	14.1%
Residential less than ¼ acre	-5.6	-18.7%	-22.3	-92.0%	-93.5%
Residential ¼ to ½ acre	26.5	4.2%	-124.5	-18.7%	-15.4%
Residential greater than ½ acre	269.8	31.4%	217.6	10.9%	56.7%
Commercial	5.9	6.1%	17.1	16.5%	23.6%
Industrial	4.25	n/a**	7.5	177.5%	n/a

Source: McConnell Land Use data 1971, 1985, 1999, 2005

NOTE: Negative Numbers = loss in acres or percentage

* Between the years 1999 and 2005, the methodology to determine land use categories was changed by McConnell and MassGIS. Comparison of 2005 data to previous years may show some inconsistencies in the data sets.

** Cannot calculate due to no industrial lands prior to year 1985

Zoning Districts

Most of Granby, approximately 17,000 acres, is zoned for low-density single family housing, while the remaining four percent of the community is zoned for commercial, industrial, and civic uses. The town has three overlay districts: Floodplain, Water Supply, and Agricultural Preservation.

Granby Zoning Districts

	Zone	Acres	% of total acres
RS	Residential Single Family Units	17,289	96%
RM	Residential Multi-Family Units	41	0.2%
GB	General Business	249	1.3%
GB2	General Business-Limited	59	0.3%
I	Industrial	327	1.8%
I-2	Industrial - Limited	0	0%
MD	Municipal District	18	0.1%
FWD	Floodplain District	1,531	8.5%
WSP	Water Supply District	1,317	7.3%
AP	Agricultural Preservation	1,887	10.5%

Source: MassGIS

As stated earlier, the Residential Single Family (RS) District applies to 96 percent of the community, and uses are generally restricted to single-family housing and low density agricultural or forestry uses. Minimum lot size requirements are 40,000 square feet with

a road frontage of 150 feet. The town also permits estate lots, or flag lots, to be built in this district, with a minimum lot size of 80,000 square feet with a minimum frontage of 40 feet.

The Residential Multi-family (RM) District allows the same uses as RS, with the addition of multi-family housing with a Special Permit. Lot dimensions and maximum lot coverage are the same. Only two areas in Granby are zoned RM: an area adjacent to Porter Street, near the center of town, and a section of Route 116 in the northwest portion of the community. This district comprises only 0.2 percent of the total land area in Granby.

The General Business (GB) District comprises 1.8 percent of the town and does not allow single family residences. The zoning allows general business and office uses with Site Plan Approval. Some higher intensity uses are required to apply for a Special Permit through the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The Industrial District (I), which covers 1.8 percent of the town, does not allow any residential uses, but only general industrial and manufacturing uses. Lot requirements are a minimum of 40,000 square feet and 200 feet of frontage. The zoning bylaws and Schedule of Uses provide regulations for the I-2 (Industrial Limited) zoning district; however, this district is not identified on the town's official zoning map. Updating the zoning bylaws to address this discrepancy and amending the town official zoning map accordingly would eliminate the inconsistency.

The Municipal District (MD) comprises 0.1 percent of the town and restricts buildings to only municipal and institutional uses. Minimum lot size is 40,000 square feet and frontage is 150 feet. This district is in three locations near the center of town. The largest area is between North Street and East State Street. Another MD-zoned parcel is on Crescent Street where the Highway garage is located.

Mixed use development, which allows a combination of residential, commercial, and light industrial uses, is not currently permitted in the community. The Granby Planning Board is considering to strategically rezone certain areas in town to control future development while providing opportunities for development that could include both residential and business components.

Granby was one of the first communities in the state to adopt cluster development regulations for residential developments. Open Space Community developments are permitted by special permit in the RS, RM, and AP districts. These types of developments are permitted on parcels five acres or larger. OSC development requires a percentage of land to be permanently protected as open space, and permits single family home to be built on smaller lot sizes. Despite being in the zoning regulations since the 1970s, no Open Space Community developments have been built in Granby. A review

of the zoning bylaw would be needed to determine what amendment or outreach can be made to encourage the use of this zoning tool over conventional subdivisions.

The Agricultural Preservation, Floodplain, and Water Supply Protection Districts are overlay districts that are designated according to wetland and floodplain requirements and agricultural boundaries on file with the Town Clerk. No new dwellings or improvements over 50 percent are permitted in the Floodway; only low density conservation, agriculture, or forestry uses. The Water Supply Protection District covers all prime aquifer recharge areas or future water supply areas. Minimum lot size in this district is 60,000 square feet rather than 40,000, and uses that may potentially be hazardous to the water supply are prohibited. The Agricultural Protection District allows most agricultural uses by right, and does permit by special permit Open Space community developments, which states that at least 50 percent of any conveyed land must be kept in agricultural use and there must be a buffer between agricultural and residential uses.

In 2010, the Town of Granby commissioned a Wastewater Management Plan, which, among other topics, analyzed the need for improvement to existing wastewater infrastructure and for investment in wastewater systems in the future. As a result, the Town also began working on an initiative to create a Sewer District that would encompass all areas that are identified as current and future sewer areas. The new sewer district is expected to be finalized and presented to the Town Meeting in early 2011 for approval.

Parcel Inventory

There are around 3,000 parcels in the town of Granby, with 67 percent of these parcels assessed as single family homes. Over the past 19 years, Granby has seen an increase of 438 total parcels in the community, with 412 parcels for single family homes. Vacant lands have decreased by a total of 130 parcels. There has also been some growth in condominium developments, with an increase of 29 parcels since 1990.

Town of Granby Parcel Inventory, 1990-2009

FY	Single Family	Multi Family ¹	Condos	Apt	Misc. Residential	Vacant Land	Open Space	Commercial	Industrial	Other Usage	Total
1990	1,621	55	83	7	2	735	1	50	11	26	2,591
1991	1,655	51	109	7	2	737	1	50	12	24	2,648
1992	1,671	41	109	7	20	710	2	50	13	25	2,648
1993	1,560	43	110	7	20	711	2	50	13	129	2,625
1994	1,602	44	110	7	20	703	2	50	13	132	2,683
1995	1,601	45	110	7	19	691	0	51	13	150	2,687
1996	1,619	7	110	7	19	677	0	52	12	146	2,649
1997	1,640	47	110	7	19	693	0	52	12	146	2,726

1998	1,695	46	110	8	20	646	0	50	12	148	2,735
1999	1,722	45	110	8	20	648	0	50	12	144	2,759
2000	1,827	46	110	8	21	572	0	50	13	128	2,775
2001	1,849	46	110	8	21	567	0	48	13	122	2,784
2002	1,878	46	110	8	21	694	0	53	12	134	2,956
2003	1,900	46	110	8	23	691	0	56	12	129	2,975
2004	1,920	45	110	8	23	683	0	61	12	132	2,994
2005	1,946	46	110	8	23	672	0	61	12	133	3,011
2006	1,980	47	112	8	22	634	0	63	13	123	3,002
2007	2,006	46	110	8	21	610	0	63	13	125	3,002
2008	2,021	45	112	8	20	600	0	64	13	127	3,010
2009	2,033	44	112	8	21	605	0	63	13	130	3,029

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, 2010

¹ In 1996, a fire at Granby Heights condominium complex destroyed most of the units.

Currently, there are around 790 parcels assessed as vacant in the town of Granby. Almost one-third of these parcels are assessed as undevelopable by the town of Granby Assessors Office due to steep slopes, wetlands and lack of frontage. The town of Granby has a substantial amount of parcels locally classified as vacant for which the town has not determined development potential. This means that there may be additional lands suited for commercial and industrial development. The Granby Assessor noted that the Assessor's office is aware of this issue and hopes to work with the Granby Board of Selectmen and other town boards to determine the suitability of these parcels.

Vacant Lands		
	Acres	Parcels
Residential		
Vacant, Developable	2,084	279
Vacant, Potentially Developable	162	29
Vacant, Undevelopable	1,793	260
Commercial		
Vacant, Developable	288	6
Vacant, Potentially Developable	29	2
Vacant, Undevelopable	1	1
Industrial		
Vacant, Developable	9	1
Vacant, Potentially Developable	20	1
Vacant, Undevelopable	3	2
Miscellaneous	2,485	208
TOTAL	6,874	789

Source: Granby Assessors Office, August 2010

The town currently has 64 parcels, totaling 1,600 acres, enrolled in the state's Chapter 61A program. Chapter 61A is designed to encourage the preservation of farmland and promote active agricultural use by offering significant local tax benefits to property owners willing to make a long-term commitment to farming. There are an additional 15 parcels (476 acres) enrolled in the Chapter 61 program and 35 parcels (1,350 acres) are enrolled in the Chapter 61B program. These two companion state tax programs offer the same local tax benefits to property owners willing to make a long term commitment to forest management and to offer recreation opportunities on their land. Parcels in these three programs are not permanently protected lands, for once the property is sold, the land loses its Chapter status. However, towns have the "right of first refusal" to purchase any classified land whenever the owner plans to sell or convert it to a residential, commercial, or industrial use. The town should create an inventory of the Chapter 61A lands of highest priority of protection, based on the amount of "prime or significant" farm soils on the parcel, as well as the possibility of linking to other adjacent protected agricultural lands.

Parcels in Farmland Programs

	Number of parcels	Acres	Percent of town acreage
Granby	3,029	17,983	--
Chapter 61-Forest	15	476	2.6%
Chapter 61A-Agriculture / Horticulture	64	1,609	8.9%
Chapter 61B-Recreation	35	1,350	7.5%
Agriculture Preservation Restriction (APR) Property	7	368	2.0%
<i>Total Chapter 61 and APR</i>	121	3,803	

Source: Granby Assessors' Office, 2010; Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, 2010

Building Permit Activity

Consistent with current zoning and land use trends, the most building permits requested in the town of Granby between the years 1998 and 2009 were for single family homes, at total of 248 permits. Over the past two years, and on par with the national housing crisis and economic downturn, only 14 permits for single family homes were requested in the years 2008 and 2009. At the height of the building boom in 2004, 34 permits were requested.

Building Permits for New Construction, 1998-2009

	Single Family	Duplex	Three & Four Family	Multifamily 5+	Commercial and Industrial
1998	24	0	0	0	0
1999	24	0	0	0	4
2000	24	0	0	0	5
2001	23	0	0	0	5
2002	28	0	0	0	1
2003	24	14*	0	0	3
2004	34	0	0	0	1
2005	23	0	0	0	0
2006	19	0	0	0	1
2007	11	0	0	0	2
2008	9	0	0	0	
2009	5	0	0	0	
TOTAL	248	14	0	0	

Source: Town of Granby Building Department, HUD SOCDS Building Permit Data

Infrastructure

Granby currently has limited water and sewer infrastructure available in town. A private community water system supplies water to about 10 percent of the community, mostly located in the southeastern section of town. Granby does not have its own public sewer system, but sewer is available to the Five Corners area through a connection to South Hadley's system. There are also two community systems that serve the Smith Avenue, Leo Drive area, and the Oak Drive area.

In 2009, the town began initial phase of a project to determine whether to install additional sewer in the New Ludlow Road area. This proposed sewer extension project would have enabled landowners in this area to connect to a sewer system and avoid some of the Title V and environmental issues in this area. With this type of infrastructure improvement, this area could be more suitable for mixed use development. This project was voted down at the 2010 Town Meeting.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

There was a general trend from participants in this master plan process that Granby is committed to smart growth. Smart growth is a land use pattern that channels development where the community wants it to happen – generally on land that is not preferable to farming and has existing infrastructure to support new development. With 96 percent of the community zoned for only large-lot residential uses, the town's existing zoning bylaws promote residential subdivisions and Approval Not Required (ANR) developments.

ANR is a unique land use regulation that enables an applicant to subdivide a parcel of land without a formal review process, as long as the parcel has adequate frontage along a public way. It is considered one of the main causes of sprawl in the region and state, given a municipality's inability to regulate this type of development. If Granby's vision is to promote smart growth, then amendments to the existing zoning bylaws are necessary to encourage smart growth developments.

Mixed use development in appropriate locations is one way to promote smart growth and sustainability. Smart growth principals promote the mixing of commercial and residential uses to help create more interesting, functional, and environmentally sensitive built environments. Mixed-use developments integrate housing, shops, offices, schools, parks, and civic facilities into compact areas to make biking, walking, and using transit easier. They can help limit sprawl and lessen air pollution. Thirty-eight (38) percent of community survey respondents support changing zoning to allow mixing of retail and residential uses in specific areas of town, specifically at Five Corners, the West Street School, and land adjacent to the St. Hyacinth Seminary.

Given Granby's lack of public water and sewer, mixed use development and higher density residential development can be difficult to achieve within the state's existing environmental laws, particularly Title V. As Granby considers bringing sewer into specific areas of the community, the town recognizes the possibility of new development pressures in these locations. Participants in the stakeholder interviews, community survey, and charrette made it clear that the town should channel new development towards areas where water and sewer exist, and secondly, where it might be most feasible to get it.

Granby relies heavily on its residential tax base to support the public services that it needs. Possibly as a result of this, 58 percent of community survey respondents support the rezoning of lands for commercial and industrial development. This rezoning of lands should correlate with the expansion of sewer service and access to public water. Survey respondents prefer new commercial development at Five Corners (48 percent), the Old Seminary (26 percent), and on New Ludlow Road (23 percent). Only two percent support new commercial development on farmland.

Other areas identified for more commercial development through the charrette process were along Route 202. However, if the town decides to promote commercial development at the two gateways along Route 202 into Granby, the town should consider strengthening existing design guidelines to address mass, scale, and architectural details of buildings, as well as standards for landscaping, tree planting, parking, and pedestrian circulation.

According to the community survey, 57 percent of survey respondents want to live in a small town with a vibrant town center. The town center currently provides a large, well maintained Town Common that is currently owned by the Congregational Church. Historic homes are located adjacent on the northern side of the Town Common, and the southern side hosts the Town Hall, Center Pharmacy and other residences. If a school project materializes that allows the West Street School to be vacated, there is an interest to encourage a mixed use overlay district that encompasses the West Street School, just a few blocks away from the town common, to create a true gathering place, with a mix of civic, commercial, and residential uses.

Protection of farmland is extremely important to many residents of Granby, who would like to see new development directed away from these resource areas. In the community survey, 84 percent of respondents believe the town should preserve farmland. Town Assessors information shows that there are 3,435 acres of land enrolled in the Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B tax programs, which is property that warrants protection consideration by the town. The town could promote enrollment in the state Agriculture Preservation Restriction program in which currently there are 368 acres. Residents also identified in this master planning process the Holyoke Range, Forge Pond, and Western Batchelor Brook areas as priority open space areas, with ecological greenways along Batchelor Brook, Turkey Hill Brook, and Stony Brook.

Granby residents have the ability to control how Granby's land use changes in the future, through the adoption of zoning that complements this proposed land use plan. The adoption of mixed use development bylaws, design guidelines, and permitting commercial and industrial uses in selected areas of the community will not only provide more economic vitality to the community, but will encourage smart growth development while protecting Granby's community character.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: Amend the current zoning bylaw to identify deficiencies, resolve inconsistencies, and adopt smart growth / sustainable policies.

Strategy 1: Adopt Mixed Use Districts in appropriate locations, such as New Ludlow Road and Five Corners.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Planning Board

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, consultant

Target Date for Completion: 2014

Strategy 2: Provide a district on the official zoning map for the Industrial 2 zone, or remove standards from the existing zoning bylaws.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Planning Board

Resources Needed: Volunteer time

Target Date for Completion: 2014

Strategy 3: Consider enhancements to existing design guidelines and sign bylaw to assure that all new buildings and other development is consistent with Granby's rural character and agricultural heritage.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Planning Board

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, consultants

Target Date for Completion: 2014

Goal 2: Adopt regulations and policies to protect key natural resources areas, including key agricultural lands.

Strategy 1: Encourage local farmers to pursue the possibility of selling their development rights under Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR).

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission

Resources Needed: Volunteer time

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 2: Compile a list of priority parcels for permanent protection, and work with town boards or local / state conservation groups to acquire and protect lands within these priority areas.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Conservation Commission, Selectboard

Resources Needed: Staff / volunteer time, state LAND grant, federal LWCF grant

Target Date for Completion: 2015

Strategy 3: Continue to update the town's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) every five years in order to qualify for state and federal grants.

The state Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) grant and federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants provide funding to communities for acquisition of open space, but the town must have an updated OSRP in order to qualify.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Board of Selectmen

Resources Needed: Staff / volunteer time

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Goal 3: Correlate the rezoning for commercial and industrial uses with future infrastructure improvements.

Strategy 1: Selectively invest in infrastructure improvements to direct new residential units to areas the community has identified for new growth.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard, Planning Board

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, consultants

Target Date for Completion: 2014

Strategy 2: Research feasibility of building an industrial/ light industrial park

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard, Town Administrator, Planning Board

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, staff time, consultants

Target Date for Completion: 2013

Strategy 3: Extend sewer and water infrastructure along New Ludlow Road and consider rezoning to encourage mixed use development.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Planning Board

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, consultant

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Goal 4: Improve the planning process by adopting a streamlined process

Strategy 1: Look into hiring a town planner

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard, Planning Board

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, consultants

Target Date for Completion: 2014

Strategy 2: Create guidelines for applicants to follow

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard, Town Administrator, Planning Board

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, staff time, consultants

Target Date for Completion: 2013

Strategy 3: Improve and expedite the permitting process

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Selectboard, Town Administrator, Planning Board

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, staff time, consultants

Target Date for Completion: 2014