



Town of Ware Economic Development Strategic Plan

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

December 2024

**Plan funded by a Community Compact Grant from the
Massachusetts Executive Office of Administration and
Finance (EOAF)**

Town of Ware

Economic Development Strategic Plan

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
December 2024

Plan funded by a Community Compact Grant from the
Massachusetts Executive Office of Administration and Finance (EOAF)

Acknowledgements

This plan was created with the contributions of a range of local participants, including the following:

Ware Town Manager

Stuart B. Beckley

Ware Department of Planning and Community Development

Paralee Smith, Director of Planning and Community Development

Katlyn Lucis, Assistant to the Director of Planning

Ware Community Development Authority

Kathleen Deschamps

Brandy Bruso

Denise Blodgett

Ware Historic Commission

Lynn Lak, Chair

Ware Business & Civic Association

President: Dan Flynn-Turley Publications

Secretary: Blair Robidoux – Country Bank

Technology: Chris Murphy – colorblindguy

Treasurer: Melissa Fales – Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation

Members at Large:

- Katherine Gagner-Moulton Insurance
- Shannon Ortona-Monson Savings Bank
- Jamie Fitzgibbon-Superior Plus Energy
- Susan Barbiasz-Westfield Bank
- Mary Dembrowski-Cedarbrook Village

The plan was prepared by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC):

Eric Weiss, Director of Economic and Municipal Collaboration

Lori Tanner, Senior Planner II – Special Projects

Douglas Hall, Data Manager/Analyst

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

60 Congress Street, Floor 1

Springfield, MA 01104

Phone: (413) 781-6045

www.pvpc.org

Photo credits to Douglas Hall, Data Manager/Analyst, PVPC, or as indicated.

Table of Contents

Introduction	9
Background and Purpose.....	9
Prior Efforts	9
2022 West Street Corridor Zoning & Build-Out Analysis & Market Review.....	9
2021 DHCD-sponsored Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP)	11
2016 Master Plan: A Window to Ware’s Future.....	11
Process and Methodology	11
Existing Conditions.....	12
Regional Context.....	12
General Business Environment	12
Demographic and Socio-Economic Overview	13
Population	13
Race and Ethnicity	13
Age Distribution.....	14
Median Age.....	14
Median Household Income	15
Income Distribution.....	15
Poverty Rates.....	16
Taxes	17
Trends in Overall Tax Levy	17
Average Single Family Tax Bills	17
Property Taxes Compared with Incomes	18
Tax Rates.....	18
Tax Levies by Property Class.....	19
Housing	20
Occupancy/Vacancy Status	20
Housing Prices	20
Age of Housing Stock.....	21
Labor Market and the Economy.....	22
Unemployment Rates.....	22

Work From Home	22
Commuting Patterns.....	23
Industry Sectors and Major Employers	26
Industry Sectors.....	26
Major Employers	26
Health Care.....	28
Land Use and Zoning.....	29
General Land Use.....	29
Downtown Ware	30
Route 32 – West Street and Palmer Road	31
Zoning	32
Infrastructure.....	35
Water and Sewer.....	35
Other Utilities	35
Transportation.....	36
Town Hall.....	37
Small Business and Entrepreneurship	37
Current and Potential Redevelopment Sites.....	39
Ware Millyard.....	39
Former Country Bank Building	40
Former Mary Lane Hospital Building	41
Ware Opportunity Zone	42
Action Plan	44
STRATEGY #1: Support Local Businesses to Start Up and Grow.....	45
<i>Revise the Town Website to Promote Business Resources</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Develop a Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Program</i>	<i>50</i>
STRATEGY #2: Enhance Collaboration Internally and With Key Stakeholders	52
<i>Hold Periodic Meetings with Key Decision Makers.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Hold an Annual Economic Development Forum</i>	<i>53</i>
STRATEGY #3: Continue to Create a Vibrant Downtown	55
<i>Plan Creative and Unique Town Center Events</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Organize Pop-up Activities in Vacant Storefronts.....</i>	<i>57</i>

STRATEGY #4: Develop Priority Sites for New Activities	61
<i>Conduct Feasibility Studies for High-Potential Sites</i>	61
<i>Pursue Developers for Currently Vacant Properties</i>	63
<i>Partner with Mill Owners to Develop Business Incubator</i>	64
STRATEGY #5: Promote Ware as a Recreation Destination	67
STRATEGY #6: Review and Update the Zoning Bylaw to Support Economic Development	69
Partners and Resources.....	71
Federal Partners.....	71
<i>U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration</i>	71
<i>U.S. Small Business Administration – Massachusetts Office</i>	71
State and Regional Partners	71
<i>Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD)</i>	71
<i>MassDevelopment</i>	72
<i>Massachusetts Economic Development Council (MEDC)</i>	72
<i>MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, Inc. (MHHCWB)</i>	72
<i>Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)</i>	73
<i>Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)</i>	73
<i>Massachusetts Small Business Development Center (MSBDC)</i>	74
Regional Initiatives and Plans.....	75
<i>Pioneer Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)</i>	75
<i>Valley Vision IV</i>	75
<i>Climate Action and Clean Energy Plan</i>	75
<i>Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)</i>	76
<i>The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)</i>	76
<i>Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)</i>	76
<i>Pioneer Valley Regional Brownfields Plan</i>	77
<i>Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint</i>	77
Loans, Grant Programs and Technical Assistance	78
<i>U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration</i>	78
<i>Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED)</i>	80
<i>Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC)</i>	84
<i>MassDevelopment</i>	85

Introduction

Background and Purpose

The Town of Ware wishes to support and sustain a multi-faceted economic base that meets the current needs of the Town and is also adaptive to future trends. This Economic Development Strategic Plan will help the Town identify existing conditions that affect the local economy; assess the Town's economic development constraints and opportunities; and outline recommended implementation strategies to expand and deepen the local economic base. These strategies will include any needed regulatory changes, incentive programs, municipal programs, potential grant opportunities, and increased local capacity for economic development.

With guidance and input from the Ware Planning Department this plan is intended to serve as a strategic approach to opportunities, challenges, and objectives. The report reflects priorities expressed during public outreach as well as needs and opportunities identified throughout the research and planning process.

Prior Efforts

The Town of Ware has engaged in previous planning and economic development efforts. Three common threads stand out from these studies: a recognition that the "West Street (MA-32) Corridor" has potential that has yet to be realized; the need to redevelop/repurpose the buildings and/or land of the Ware Millyard; and the need to improve the appearance and amenities especially in the Downtown area. A selection of previous studies are summarized below:

2022 West Street Corridor Zoning & Build-Out Analysis & Market Review

This report was prepared by a multi-disciplinary consulting firm, the Pare Corporation, which has recently opened an office in Holyoke Massachusetts.

The analysis undertaken in this report bears consideration. Noteworthy determinations include the fact that the demand for residential properties has been growing, while retail and office space faces a substantial element of uncertainty, and weak growth: "The real estate market for retail and office uses in 2022 is weak and uncertain. The rise in e-commerce, which accelerated during the pandemic, has decreased the demand for retail space. The office market is changing with remote work and work-from-home options, decreasing the for traditional office developments." While these trends are consistent with regional and statewide trends, their implications for smaller communities are potentially greater, given a narrower range of viable alternative uses.

The report's recommendations included the following:

- 1. School-Home Neighborhood Development:** Create new private construction near the educational campus with a school-home neighborhood theme that includes diverse housing types (single-family, two-family, townhouses, duplexes, multi-family).
- 2. Planned Unit Development (PUD) Zoning:** Consider creating PUD zoning regulations to allow flexible, creative site plans for larger properties in the West Street Corridor, accommodating commercial, residential, and mixed-uses with incentives for community benefits.

3. Senior Housing and Services: Promote infill development near the Ware Senior Center with a focus on senior housing and services, incorporating walkable connections.

4. Flood Resilience: New developments in flood-prone areas near Muddy Brook should be elevated to mitigate flood risks, following successful examples like the elevated CVS.

5. Riverfront and Recreational Opportunities: Leverage the Ware River as a resource by encouraging recreational businesses and amenities along the river and the Ware Rail Trail.

6. Transitional Zoning: Develop a hybrid transitional zone along West Street to address non-conforming parcels, incorporating Downtown Commercial zone features with appropriate parking design standards.

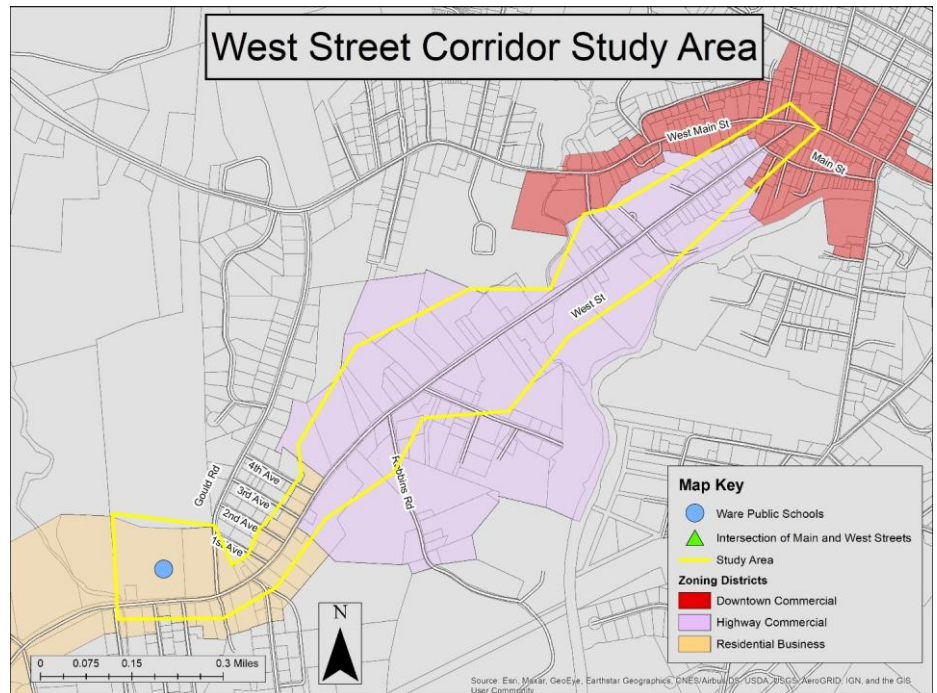
7. Activating Main Street: Utilize the Town-owned parcel at 121 Main Street to create an outdoor dining area with tables and umbrellas, potentially supported by a MassDOT's Shared Streets grant.

8. Redevelopment Focus: Allocate resources for staff to manage and support redevelopment efforts in the West Street Corridor, including professional development in redevelopment and economic development.

9. Community Engagement: Implement a detailed planning process for the West Street Corridor that involves community engagement with residents, businesses, and property owners for a successful mixed-use development approach.

One concrete element this report (and its supporting documents) includes is a list of potential funding sources to catalyze the transformation of West Street, including the following:

- Complete Streets Funding Program
- Chapter 90 Program
- Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Grant Program
- MassWorks Infrastructure Program
- State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)
- Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)
- Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF)
- Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program



2021 DHCD-sponsored Local Rapid Recovery Program (LRRP)

Ware participated in the Rapid Recovery Plan (RRP) Program administered by the EOHLC through the MA Downtown Initiative Program. The Town was able to develop a project-based recovery plan that addressed local needs and COVID-19 related impacts to downtown, and other commercial areas. The program provided technical assistance through Plan Facilitators assigned to each community and subject matter experts who supported the development of ideas for project recommendations. LRRP project recommendations included the following:

- Develop of design guidelines for downtown Ware
- Engage community vendors, organizations, and residents via cultural events programming
- Undertake Ware downtown façade improvement program
- Develop comprehensive parking implementation communication program to promote public knowledge of parking assets and policies
- Connecting downtown [primarily focused on improving the experience of pedestrians].

2016 Master Plan: A Window to Ware’s Future

The 2016 Master Plan specifically included recommendations for “Land Use and Economic Development.” These primarily focused on Downtown Prosperity, including implementing a wayfinding system, supporting the Ware Business & Civic Association, improving the streetscape and pedestrian experience, and enhancing marketing and business recruitment for the downtown. Other recommendations included the creation of guidelines for the restoration of historic structures (to encourage investment), increasing utilization of existing non-residential space, encouraging outdoor recreation-related businesses to locate in Ware, and the creation of an ombudsman position in town government to assist applicants in navigating permitting processes.

Process and Methodology

The PVPC, with guidance and assistance from the Ware Planning & Community Development Department, will develop an economic development strategic plan that includes opportunities, challenges, and specific goals and objectives. The report will reflect priorities expressed to the PVPC during public outreach as well as needs and opportunities identified throughout the planning process. The PVPC team will engage with a broad range of stakeholders to gather information and discuss key issues.

The PVPC has collected and analyzed demographic and economic data to determine Ware’s local economic conditions within the context of the regional economy. The local and regional data include:

- Population data and projections
- Tax base
- Workforce and labor statistics
- Commuting patterns
- Industry employment trends including top local employers

Existing Conditions

Regional Context

The Town of Ware is located in the Pioneer Valley of western Massachusetts and is part of an interstate region known as New England's Knowledge Corridor – which comprises the Hartford, Springfield and New Haven metro areas and celebrates the area's rich tradition of inventions, research and higher education.¹ Although Ware is located in Hampshire County (southernmost county in the Pioneer Valley) it also borders on three other counties – Hampden County, Franklin County, and Worcester County. It is located equidistant between Worcester to the east (27.1 miles) and Springfield to the southwest (27.2 miles). From Ware, it is approximately 45 miles to Bradley International Airport (located in Windsor Locks, CT, serving both Hartford and Springfield) and 80 miles Logan International Airport in Boston.

Ware is the 6th largest community in Hampshire County, with a population just over 10,000 and is part of the Springfield Metropolitan Statistical Area.

General Business Environment

The Town of Ware is the commercial hub of the Quaboag Valley region, which is situated between the larger commercial centers of the cities of Springfield and Worcester. Ware, particularly its downtown and the West Street corridor (Route 32 south of the town center), provides the region with places to do business, shop, and enjoy a range of restaurants. The commercial district extends south from the Town Center and includes a wide range of offerings, from Walmart and Lowe's to small local restaurants and services.

However, Ware's economic base has recently suffered a substantial blow as a result of the closure of the Baystate Mary Lane hospital. While the loss of the medical care in Ware is a substantial inconvenience (requiring residents to travel to neighboring Palmer to access Baystate Wing Hospital), the impact on the local economy has also been problematic. Because Baystate Mary Lane had been one of the Town's largest employers, its closure has deprived the town – especially the downtown region – of potential customers. On the upside, the Town has been trying to determine how best to repurpose the Mary Lane building and/or land. Integrating the redevelopment of Mary Lane with a broader strategy for the West Street Corridor could provide the momentum required to transform what has been an underwhelming section of Town.

As explored at greater length below, changes stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic (and associated economic downturn and restructuring) continue to shape the economic fortunes of both the Town of Ware and the broader region. Western Massachusetts would be dramatically impacted by the completion of a high-speed rail corridor spanning from Boston in the East to Pittsfield (and beyond) in the East. Given Ware's proximity to the proposed route (which includes a station in neighboring Palmer) the Town could both attract new residents with

¹ New England's Knowledge Corridor is an interstate partnership of regional economic development, planning, business, tourism and educational institutions that work together to advance the region's economic progress and transcend political boundaries. The group markets the region, which is centered on seven counties linked by a shared economy, history and culture and by features including Bradley International Airport, rail lines, Interstate 91 and the Connecticut River. [History of the Interstate Knowledge Corridor Partnership – New England's Knowledge Corridor](#).

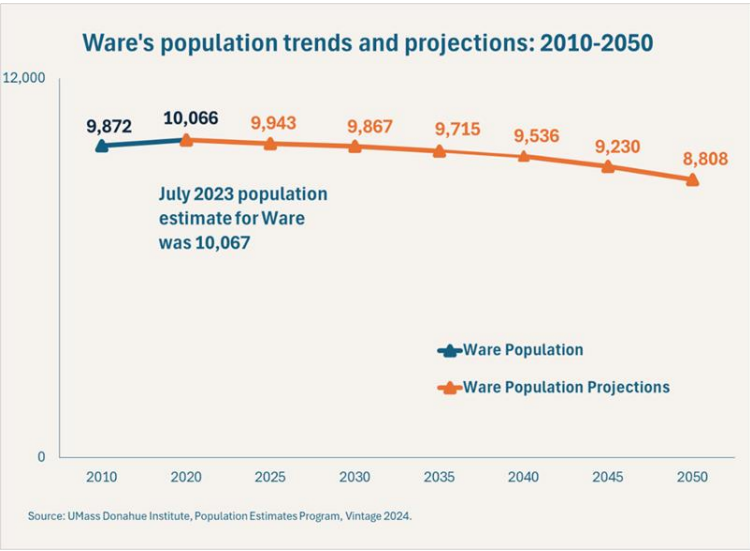
more efficient commutes to larger centers including Boston, and realize larger local markets for goods and services.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Overview

Population

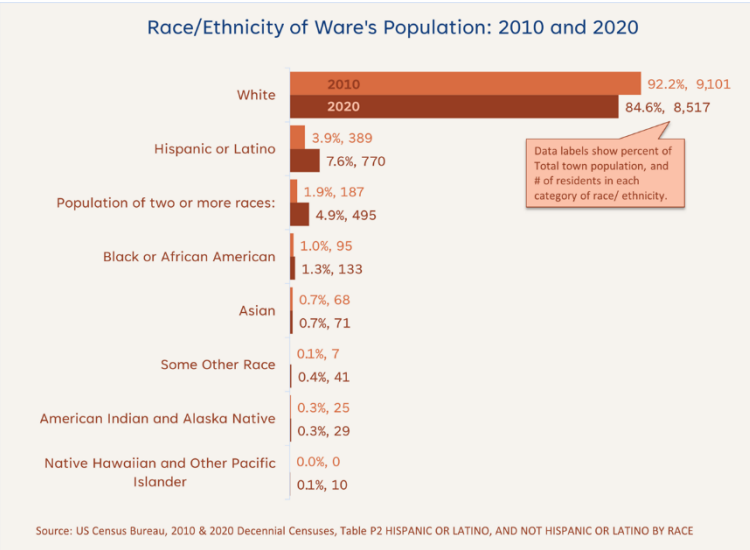
Ware’s population has grown very slightly in recent years, increasing by less than 2% over the decade between 2010 and 2020. According to the UMass Donahue Institute’s Population Projections program, Ware is currently projected to have a slightly smaller population of 8,808 by 2050, down from its 2023 population of 10,067, a decline of 12% since 2020, consistent with Hampden County’s 12% decline over the same period.

By comparison, both statewide and in neighboring Worcester County, growth is projected to continue through 2035, before declining to net zero growth by 2050.



Race and Ethnicity

Although Ware remains predominantly white and non-Hispanic, there has been a shift in population since 2010, with the number of People of Color doubling from 771 in 2010 to 1549 in 2020. The race/ethnicity groups that have growth most notably over the decade 2010 to 2020 include the Hispanic or Latino population, and the population of two or more races. Both these trends are consistent with the changes we have seen throughout the region.



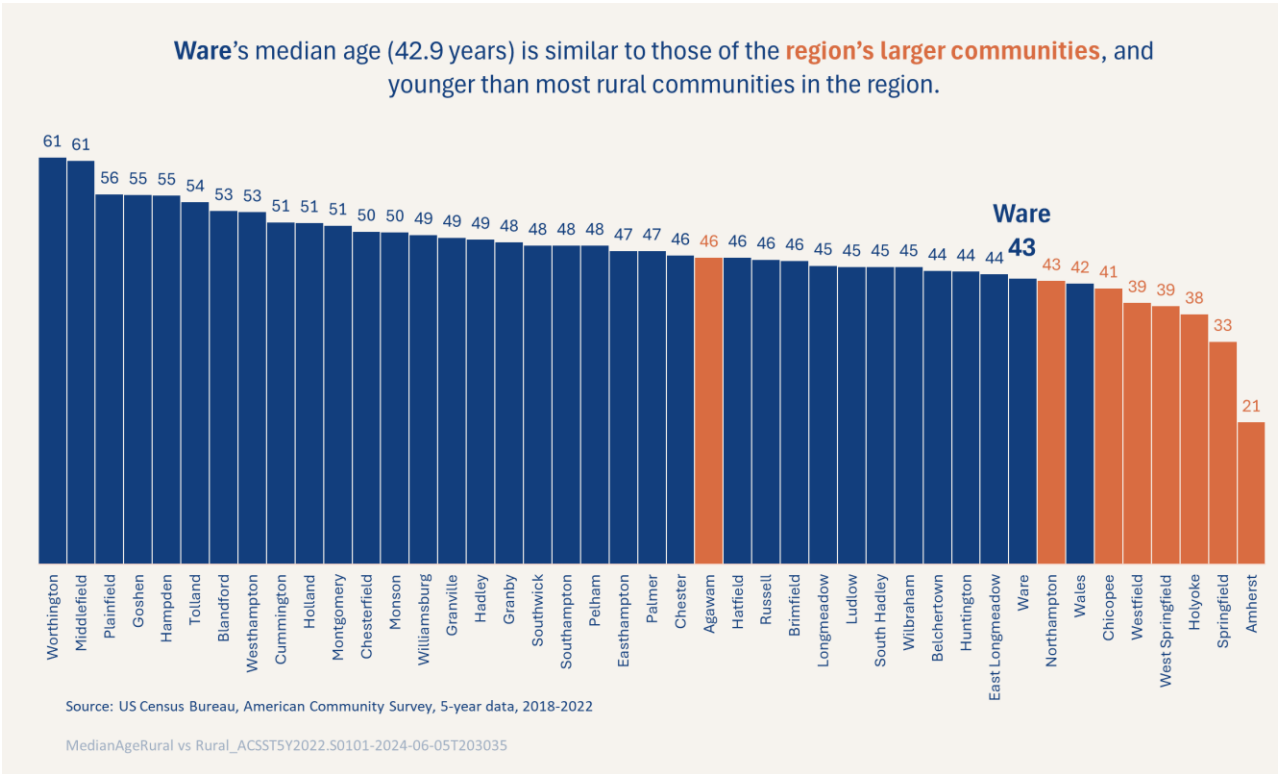
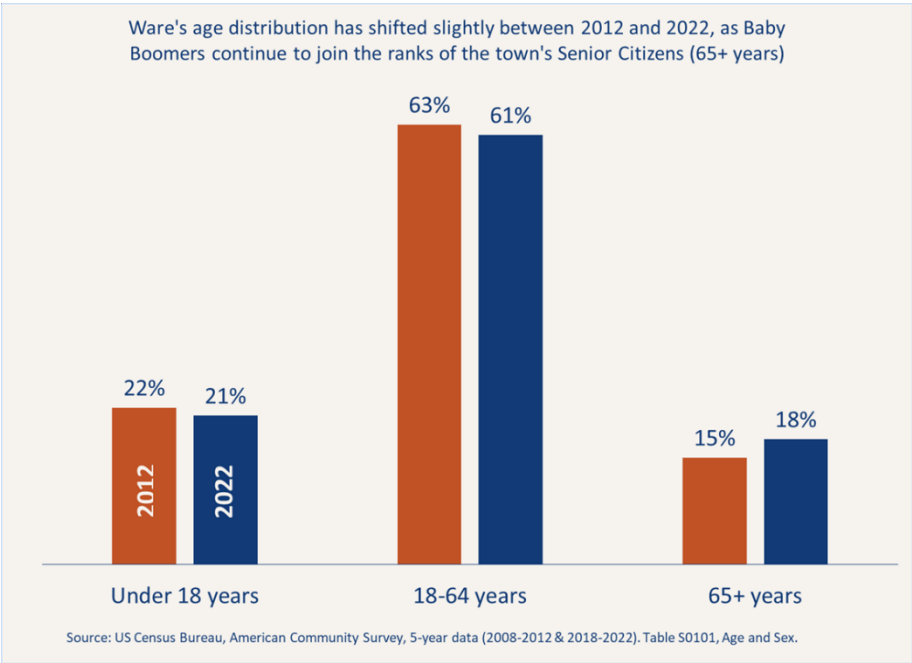
Age Distribution

The distribution of Ware’s population by age has shifted slightly between 2012 and 2022

Most noteworthy is growth of the town’s Senior Citizen share of the population. This is consistent with regional and statewide trends, and reflects the continued aging of the Baby Boom generation, the youngest of whom would be turning 60 years old in 2024.

Median Age

Ware’s median age (43 years) places Ware among the 10 youngest communities, placing it between most of the region’s cities and the region’s smaller rural communities.



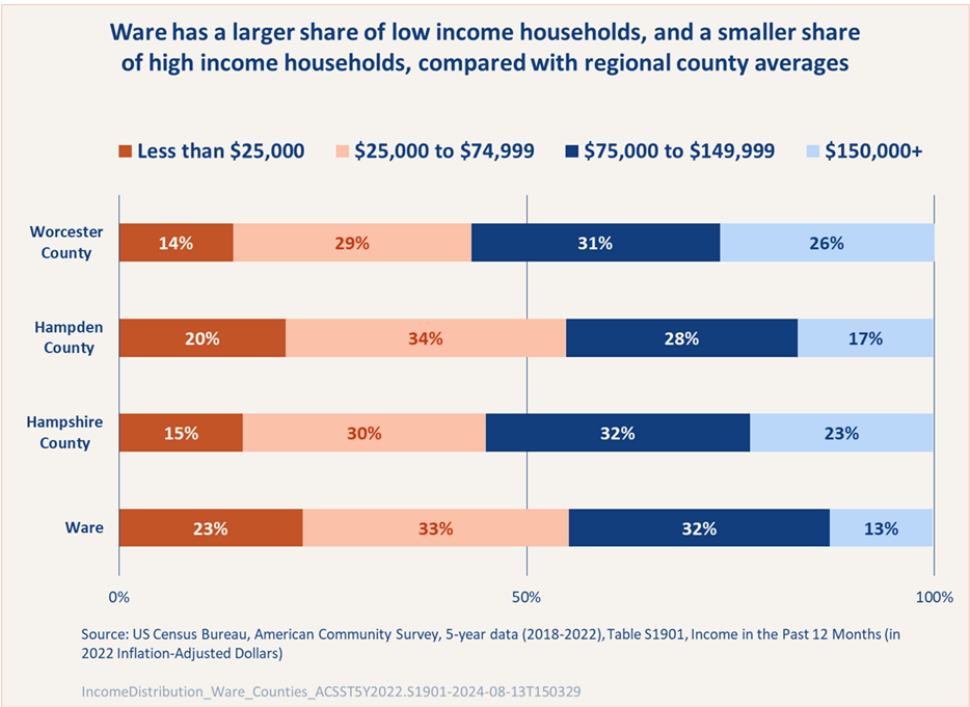
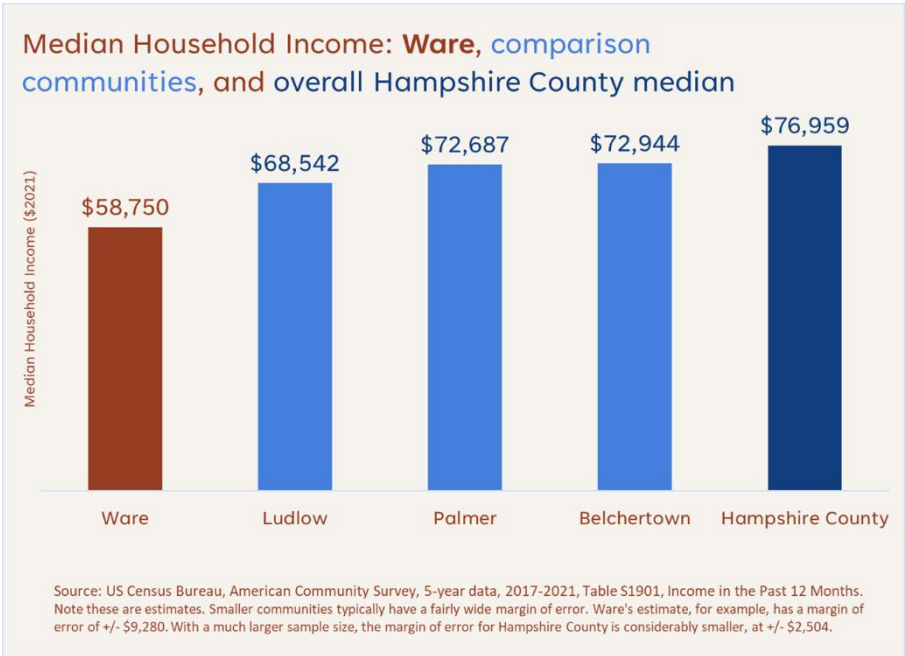
Median Household Income

Ware’s median household income of \$58,750 is low in comparison to the communities of Ludlow, Palmer, and Belchertown, as well as the overall median household income for Hampshire County.

Income Distribution

The Town of Ware has a larger share of low and middle income households, and a smaller share of high income households, compared with Worcester, Hampden, and Hampshire Counties.

Twenty-three (23) percent of Ware households had annual household incomes less than \$25,000 compared with 14% in Worcester County, 20% in Hampden County, and 15% in Hampshire County. By contrast, only thirteen (13) percent of Ware households had incomes of \$150,000 or higher, compared with 26% in Worcester County, 17% in Hampden County, and 23% in Hampshire County.



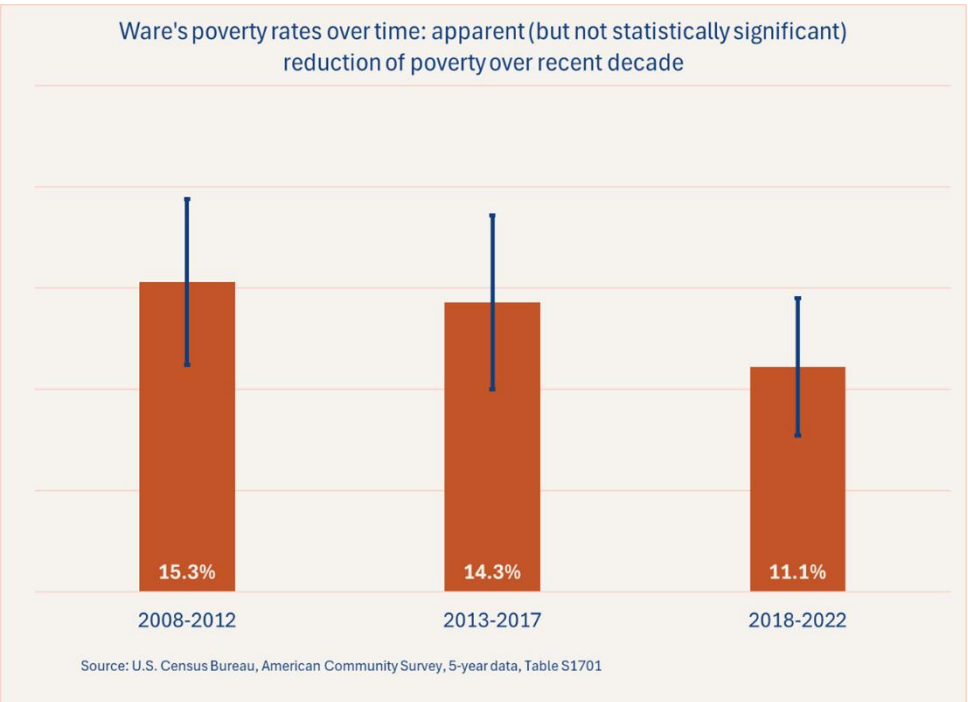
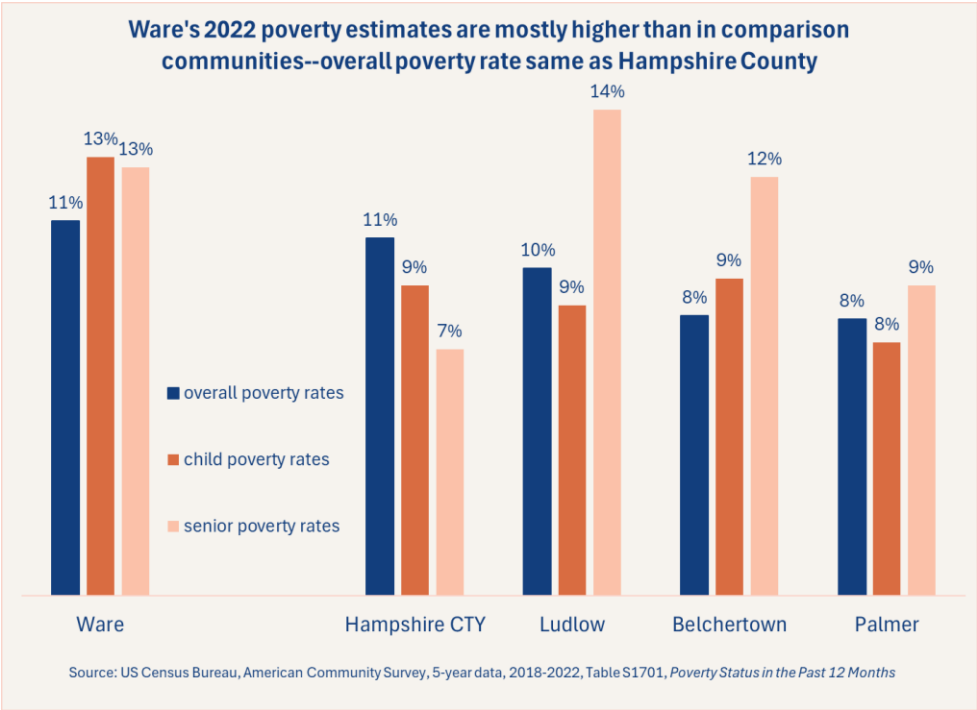
Poverty Rates

Given Ware’s lower median household income than seen in comparison communities, it’s not surprising that estimates of the poverty rate in Ware are also higher than in neighboring towns. As seen below, Ware’s estimates of the overall poverty rate, child poverty rate, and senior poverty rate are higher than in Hampshire County as well as its comparison communities of Ludlow, Belchertown, and Palmer.

We also compare Ware’s overall poverty rate in the most recent time frame (2018-2022) to two earlier periods (2008-2012 and 2013-2017), we see from estimates of the poverty rate that a smaller

proportion of Ware residents are living in poverty. Despite the fact that the differences over time are not statistically significantly different from each other, because the evident trend is consistent with what we see at the county level over the same time frames, we can be fairly confident that the direction of change in Ware indicates decline in poverty rate over time.

Between 2008-2012 and 2018-2022, Hampshire County’s poverty rate declined from 17.1% to 15.8%, Hampden County’s from 11.9% to 10.6%, and Worcester County’s from 10.3% to 10.0%.



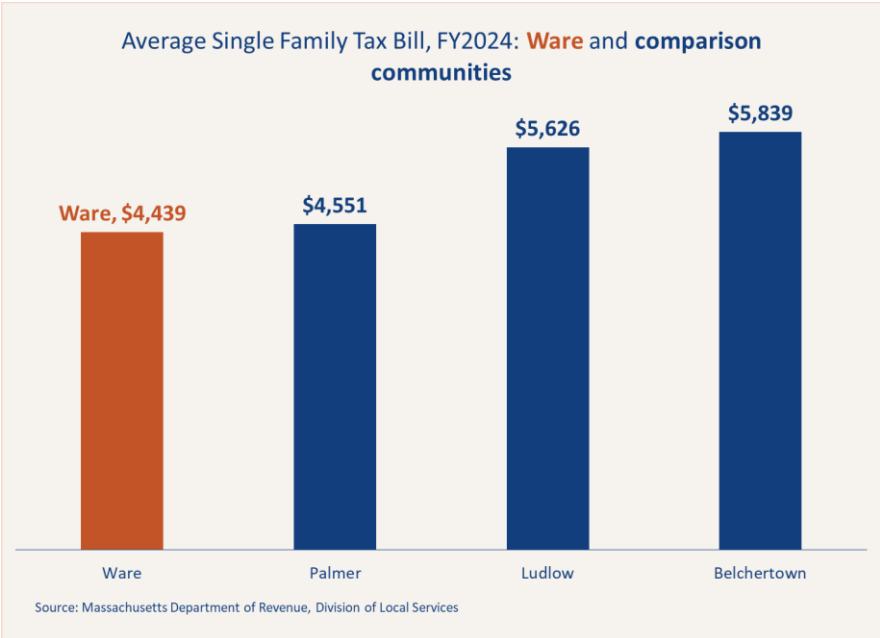
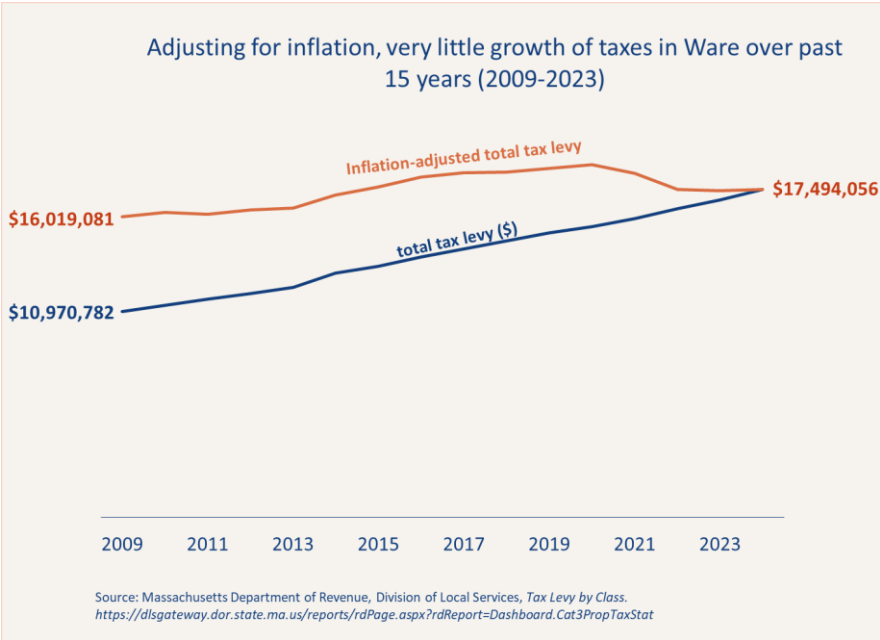
Taxes

Trends in Overall Tax Levy

Adjusted for inflation (orange line in chart below), growth in property taxes levied has been slow, and has declined since 2020. Between 2009 and 2024, the inflation adjusted growth was approximately \$1.5 million, or 0.6% annually on average.

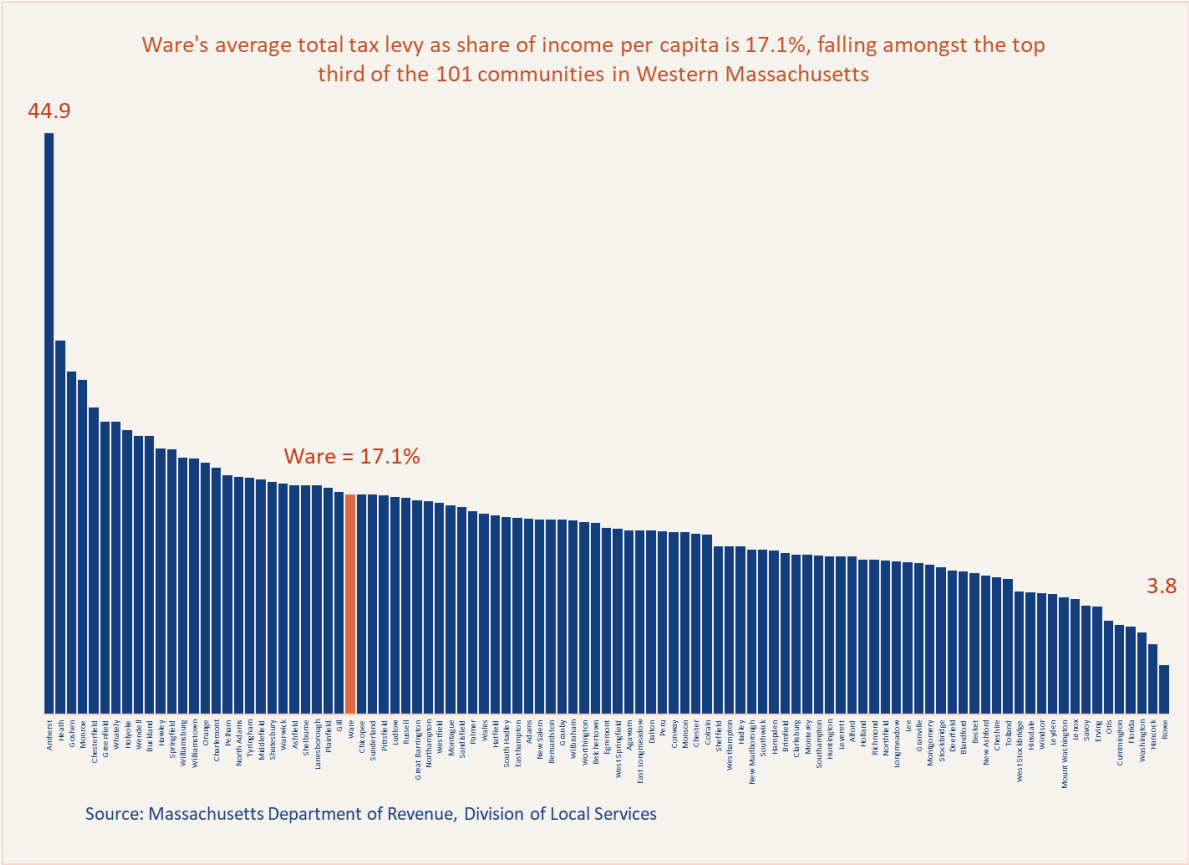
Average Single Family Tax Bills

Ware’s single family tax bill (\$4,439 in FY2024) is lower than the single family tax bills in each of its comparison communities. The town tax bills in Palmer, Ludlow, and Belchertown are \$4,551, \$5,626, and \$5,839, respectively.



Property Taxes Compared with Incomes

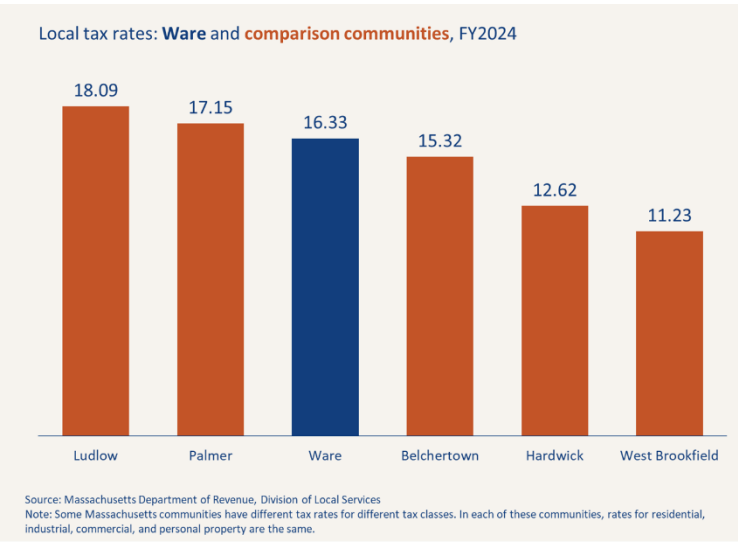
One way to determine the tax effort within each community is to calculate the share of per capita income goes to local taxes. In Ware, the 2014 rate translates to 17.1% of the town’s per capita income (\$26,022). This rate places Ware in the top third of all communities in Western Massachusetts, despite falling in the bottom third for average single-family taxes paid. While Ware’s taxes are comparatively low, the average income is even more so.



Tax Rates

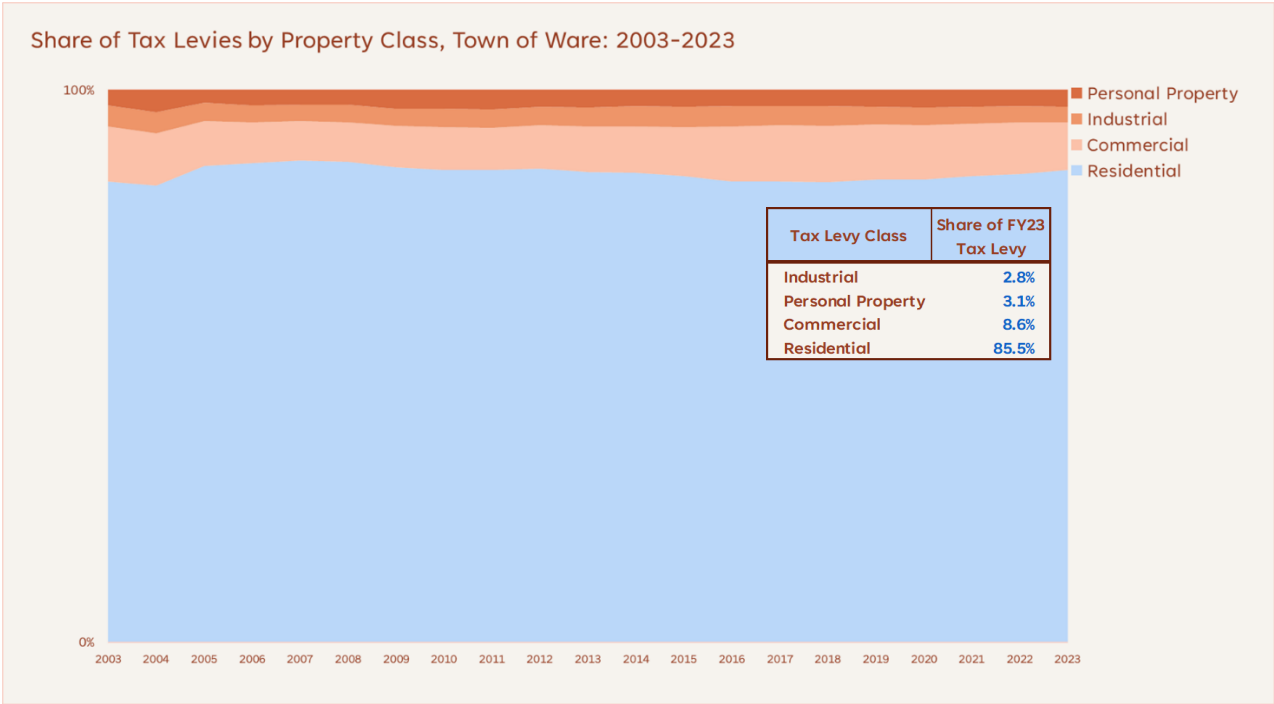
Ware’s FY2024 tax rate of \$16.33/\$1,000 of assessed value is slightly higher than in neighboring Belchertown, Hardwick and West Brookfield, but lower than in both Ludlow and Palmer

Notably, all six of these communities lowered their rates in FY2024. Ware’s FY2023 rate was \$17.26/\$1,000 of assessed value.



Tax Levies by Property Class

Ware’s mix of taxes by property class have not varied considerably over the past two decades. Ware’s residents are carrying the largest share of the current tax levy, at 85.5% in FY2023, compared with 8.6% from commercial properties, 3.1% from personal property, and 2.8% from industrial properties.



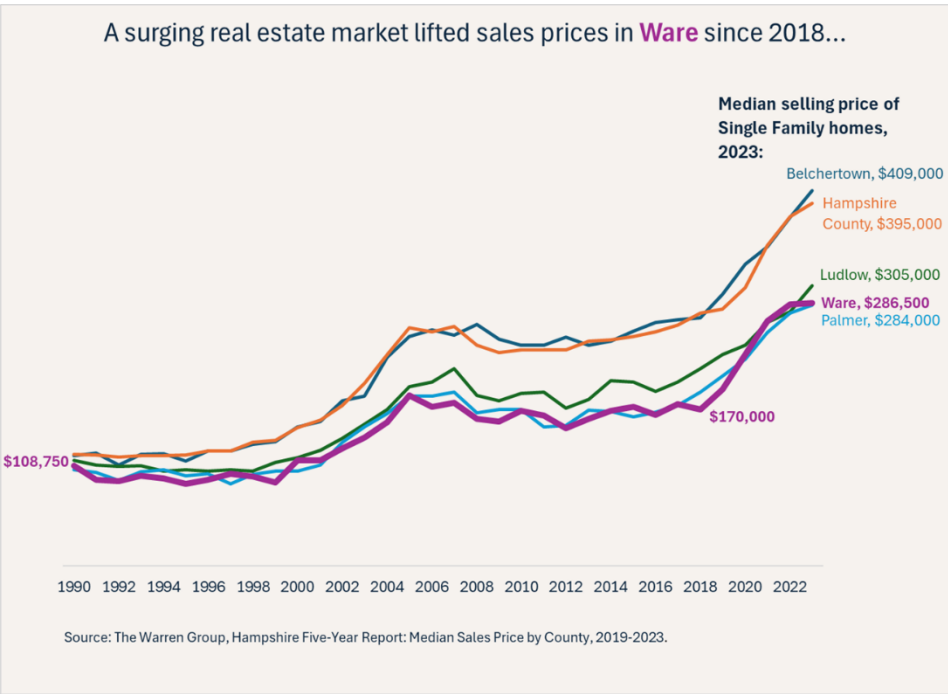
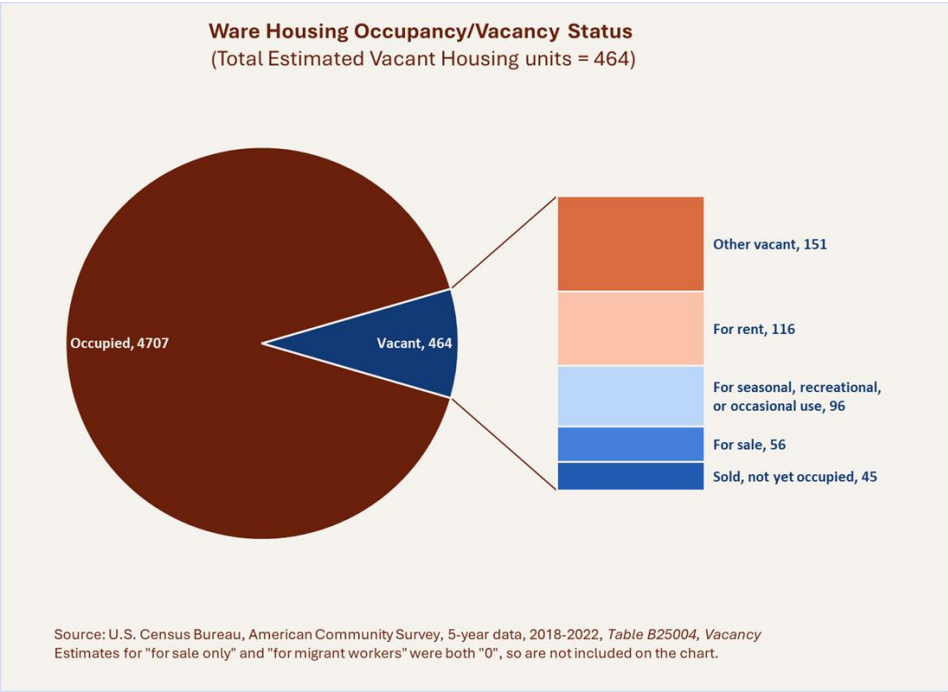
Housing

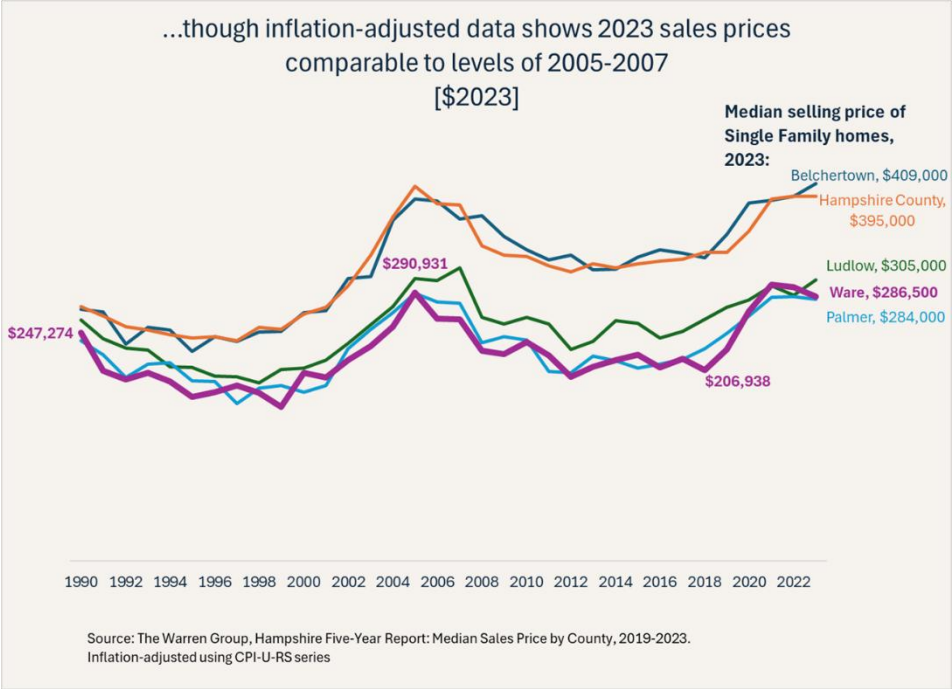
Occupancy/Vacancy Status

Ware has a comparatively high vacancy rate, with nearly ten percent of units (464/4707) vacant according to the 2022 Census Bureau estimates. Of those vacant units, 116 were estimated to be for rent, 96 for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, 56 for sale, 45 sold but not yet occupied, and 151 categorized as “other vacant”.

Housing Prices

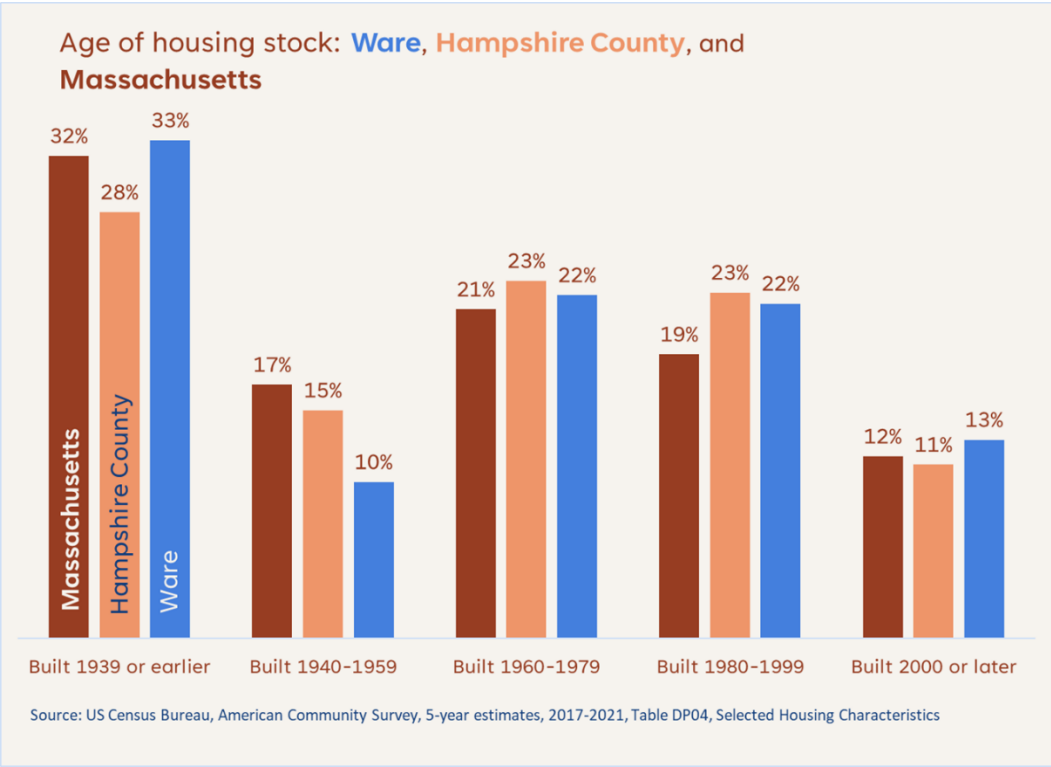
In the chart below, we see that Ware’s housing prices (based on median annual sales prices) have followed similar patterns to its comparison communities of Belchertown, Ludlow and Palmer, though Ware and Palmer have trailed the other communities as well as the median sales prices for Hampshire County. While house prices have grown substantially since 2019, when we inflation-adjust the data, we see that the uptick evident in recent years is diminished, and that Ware’s 2023 median sales price of \$286,500 just returns Ware to the level it was at in 2005.





Age of Housing Stock

Ware’s housing stock is similar in age to that found throughout Hampshire County and also statewide across Massachusetts, according to US Census Bureau estimates. Ware has a slightly larger share of housing units that were built in 1939 or earlier, and a smaller share built between 1940 and 1959.



Labor Market and the Economy

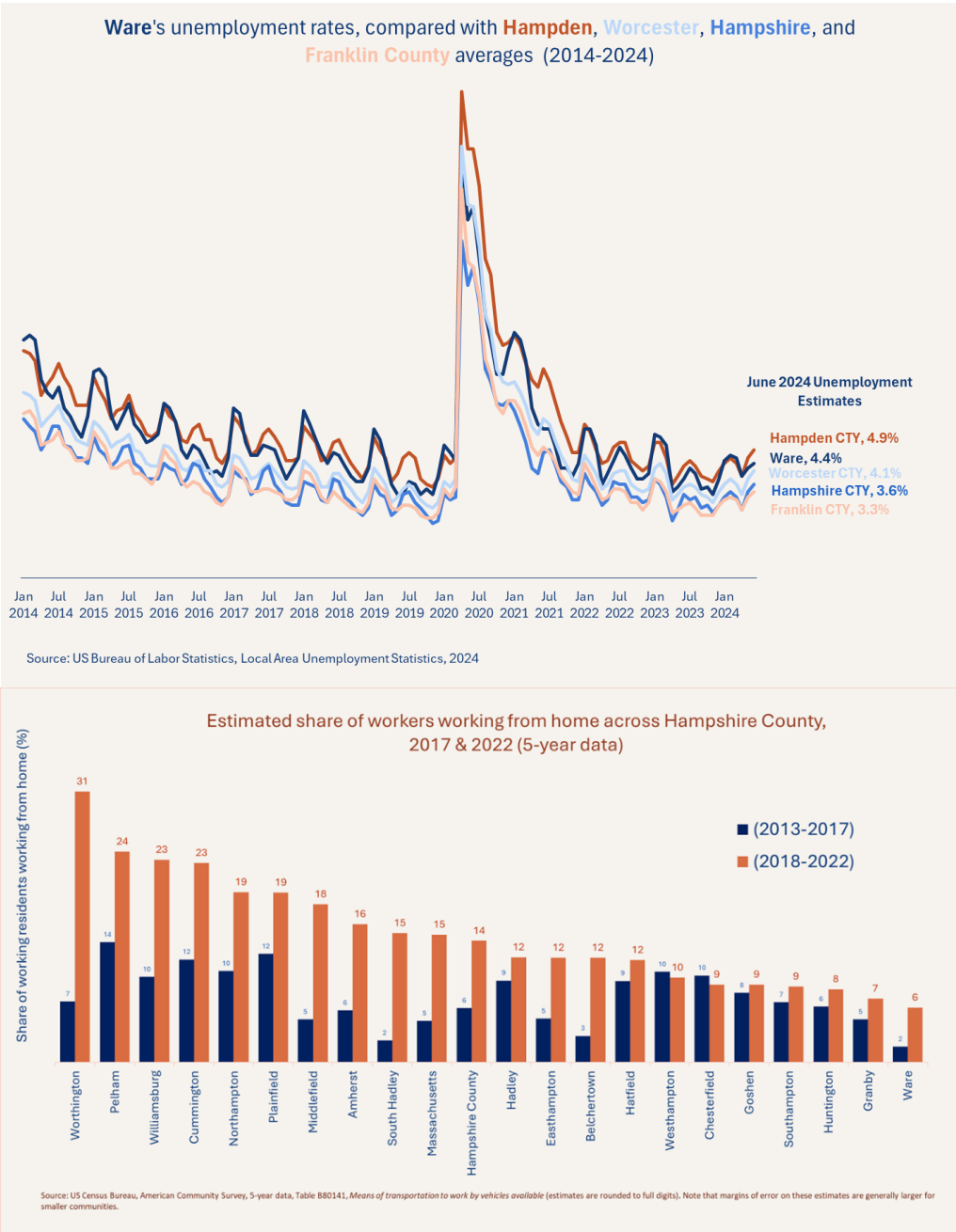
Unemployment Rates

Ware’s unemployment rate has been most similar to rates in Hampden County, and is consistently higher than the rates in Worcester, Hampshire & Franklin Counties.

Unemployment rates in both Ware and surrounding Counties have returned to pre-COVID levels, after soaring to record high levels following the shutdown of the state economy in late March, 2020.

Work From Home

Comparing Ware to workers across all towns of Hampshire County, we see two noteworthy patterns. Ware’s share of workers working from home during the window from 2018-2022 is the smallest share across the county. Yet, the growth evident since the previous 5-year window is also substantial, from 2% to 6%.



Commuting Patterns

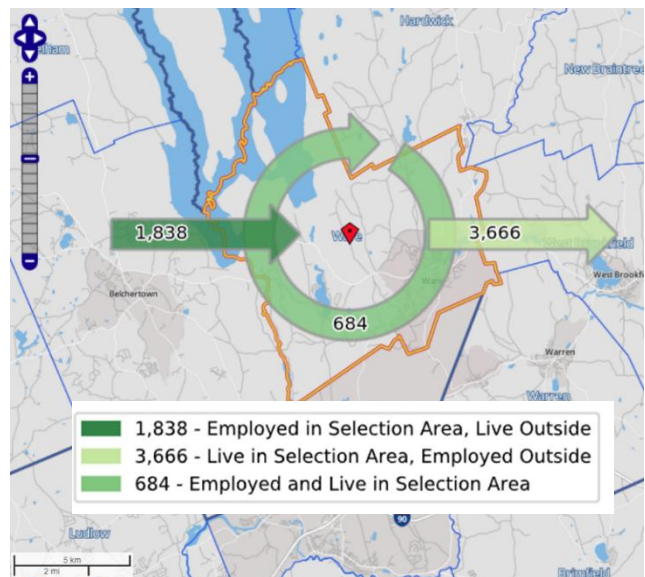
The majority of people (73%) who work in Ware live elsewhere. Of the people employed in the 2,522 jobs based in Ware, 1,838 were residents of communities outside of Ware, compared with 684 who both lived and worked within the Town of Ware.

An even larger share of the jobs held by Ware residents were outside the Town of Ware: 84% vs just 16% within the Town of Ware.

This suggests an opportunity to engage workers from elsewhere more fully in the Ware economy. Efforts targeting the non-resident workforce in Ware as potential customers for local goods and services bear exploring. Similarly, inviting residents who work elsewhere to act as ambassadors for the Town of Ware in their interactions with colleagues may help attract a larger customer base.



Jobs Located in Ware	#	%
Workers employed in Ware	2,522	100%
Workers employed in Ware but living elsewhere	1,838	73%
Workers living and working in Ware	684	27%
Location of Jobs held by Ware Residents	#	%
Total workers living in Ware	4,350	100%
Ware residents working outside of Ware	3,666	84%
Workers living and working in Ware	684	16%

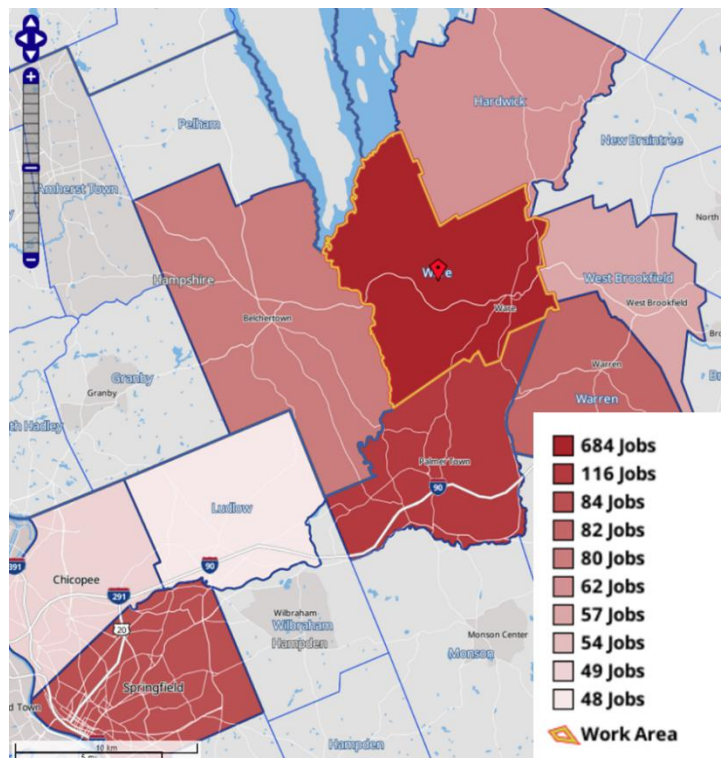


U.S. Census Bureau data show that Ware's workforce travel throughout the region to their Ware-based jobs, with 27% living in Ware, 5% living in Palmer, 3% living in Springfield, and 3.7% in Belchertown.



Top 10 cities/towns in which workers employed in Ware live		
Town/City (County)	#	%
Total	2522	100%
Ware (Hampshire)	684	27%
Palmer (Hampden)	116	5%
Springfield (Hampden)	84	3%
Warren (Worcester)	82	3%
Belchertown (Hampshire)	80	3%
Hardwick (Worcester)	62	3%
West Brookfield (Worcester)	57	2%
Worcester (Worcester)	54	2%
Chicopee (Hampden)	49	2%
Ludlow (Hampden)	48	2%
All Other Locations	1206	48%

Source: US Census Bureau, On The Map, 2021



Ware Economic Development Strategic Plan

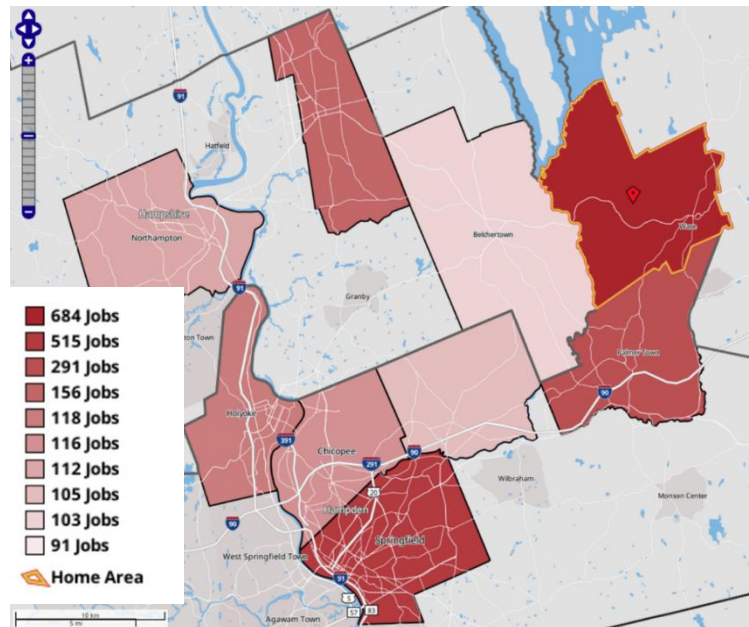
Of the 4,350 workers living in Ware, just 16% (684) work in Ware. Substantial numbers work in neighboring cities and towns, including 515 (12%) in Springfield, 291 (7%) in Palmer, and 156 (4%) in Amherst. Holyoke, Chicopee, Northampton, Ludlow, Belchertown, and Worcester together account for 15% of workers, while nearly half (47%) work in other communities, primarily, but not exclusively, within Massachusetts.

The following images show the top ten communities where Ware residents commute for work.

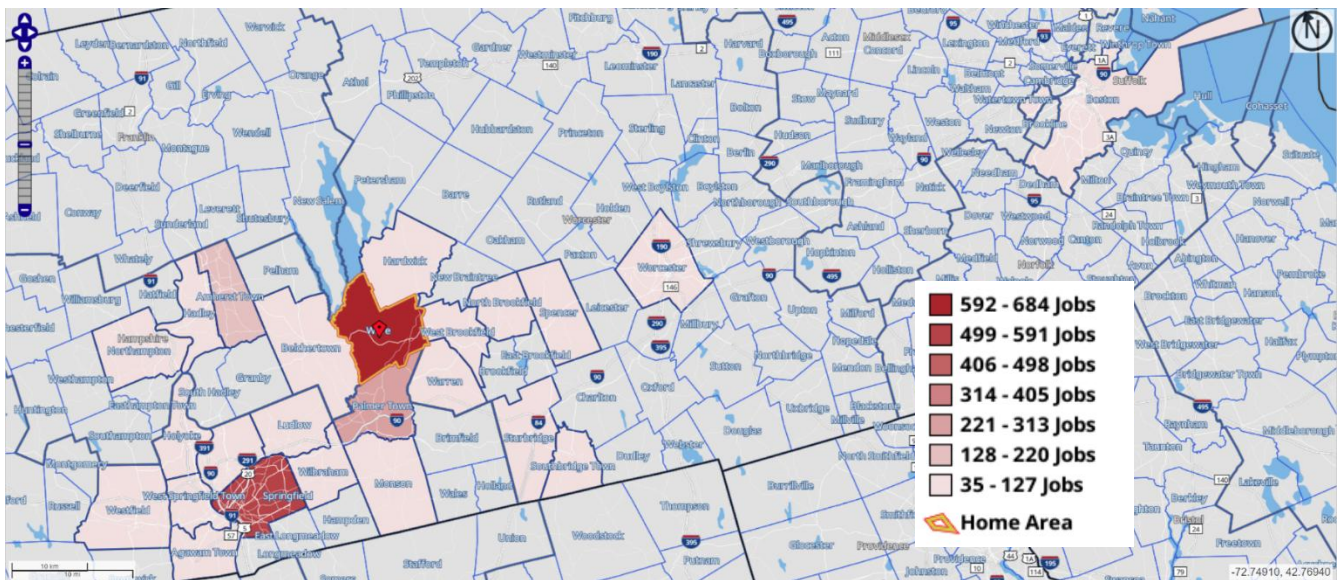
Top 10 cities/towns in which workers living in Ware work

Town/City (County)	#	%
Total	4350	100%
Ware (Hampshire)	684	16%
Springfield (Hampden)	515	12%
Palmer (Hampden)	291	7%
Amherst (Hampshire)	156	4%
Holyoke (Hampden)	118	3%
Chicopee (Hampden)	116	3%
Northampton (Hampshire)	112	3%
Ludlow (Hampden)	105	2%
Belchertown (Hampshire)	103	2%
Worcester (Worcester)	91	2%
All Other Locations	2059	47%

Source: US Census Bureau, On The Map, 2021



The following map illustrates how far many Ware residents commute – even as far as Boston. In this case, only 24 of the top 25 are shown; the 25th is Hartford, CT. Approximately one in four working residents work in the gray-shaded communities.



Industry Sectors and Major Employers

Industry Sectors

As indicated in the previous section, over 2,500 people are employed within the Town of Ware, and they work in a wide range of industries. The following chart is sorted by Average Monthly Employment, with retail trade and health care and social assistance providing the most jobs in town (44% of the total jobs). These two sectors are also among the top total wage payers. They are notably NOT, however, among the industries paying the highest weekly wages. That distinction applies to the manufacturing (\$1,475/week), administrative and waste services (\$1,553), and finance and insurance (\$1,369) industry sectors, while the sectors paying the lowest weekly wage are accommodation and food services (\$398), professional and technical services (\$641), and retail trade (\$650).

Industry Sector	Establishments	Total Wages	Average Monthly Employment	Average Weekly Wage
Total, All Industries	292	\$124,260,063	2571	\$929
Retail Trade	29	\$28,036,906	830	\$650
Health Care and Social Assistance	119	\$10,856,099	309	\$676
Manufacturing	10	\$21,397,980	279	\$1,475
Accommodation and Food Services	19	\$4,818,680	233	\$398
Administrative and Waste Services	15	\$9,122,552	113	\$1,553
Construction	21	\$4,711,681	77	\$1,177
Finance and Insurance	6	\$3,916,457	55	\$1,369
Professional and Technical Services	11	\$1,666,899	50	\$641
Other Services, Except Public Administration	18	\$1,612,747	44	\$705
Transportation and Warehousing	5	\$2,350,527	40	\$1,130
Information	3	\$645,972	16	\$776
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	5	\$329,876	8	\$793

Source: Massachusetts Department of Economic Research

The blue highlights in the chart indicate the top five values for each category. The largest numbers of total establishments are in health care and social assistance, retail trade, construction, and accommodation and food services.

Major Employers

The town's major employers are in many of the top industry sectors discussed above, from Health Care and Human Services to Retail and Manufacturing and other industry sectors. The public school system also falls within the top ten employers. The largest manufacturing facility in town is Kanzaki Specialty Papers, which has a large footprint in the Industrial zone in the former hospital neighborhood and employs 170+ people.²

Among the top four employers (by number of employees) are three large retail stores – Walmart (250-499 employees), Lowe's (100-249), and Big Y (100-249). While these stores employ a large number of people and draw people into Ware from neighboring communities to shop, they also likely pull consumers out of the downtown area, and generally extract money from the community in profits paid to shareholders. Regionally

² [Kanzaki Specialty Papers | Direct thermal paper | 20 Cummings Street, Ware, MA, USA](#)

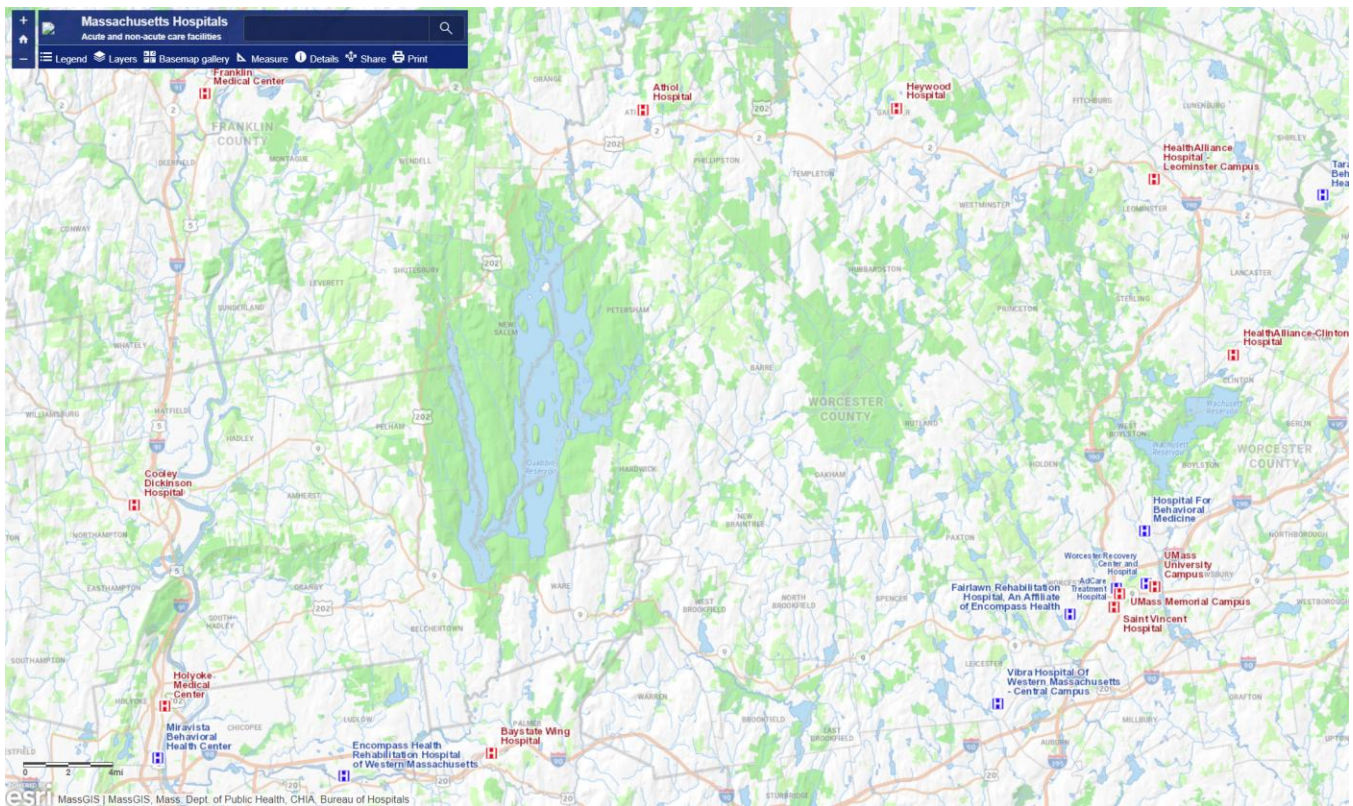
owned Big Y stands as an exception, giving back to the region in many ways that strengthen communities, while also relying heavily on local/regional suppliers for much of their offerings.

Company name	Address	Number of employees	NAICS Code [Industry Sector]
Big Y	West St	100-249	NAICS 4451 Grocery stores
Country Bank For Savings	Main St	100-249	NAICS 5221 Depository credit intermediation
Kanzaki Specialty Papers Inc	Cummings St	100-249	NAICS 4241 Paper and paper product merchant wholesalers
Lowe's Home Improvement	Palmer Rd	100-249	NAICS 4441 Building material and supplies dealers
Walmart Supercenter	Palmer Rd	100-249	NAICS 4551 Department Stores
Ware Public Schools	West St	100-249	NAICS 6111 Elementary and secondary schools
Quabbin Wire & Cable Co Inc	Maple St	50-99	NAICS 3359 Other electrical equipment and component mfg.
Berkshire Blanket	E Main St # 5	20-49	NAICS 4491 Furniture and Home Furnishings Retailers
Carson Center For Human Svc	South St	20-49	NAICS 6211 Offices of physicians
Church St Sch Senior Housing	Church St	20-49	NAICS 6233 Continuing care, assisted living facilities
Cleanslate Outpatient	South St # 3	20-49	NAICS 6221 General medical and surgical hospitals
Dunkin'	West St	20-49	NAICS 7225 Restaurants and other eating places
Gillespie Corp	Pine St	20-49	NAICS 3339 Other general purpose machinery manufacturing
J R Z Enterprise Corp	Main St	20-49	NAICS 5132 Software Publishing
Janine's Frostee Inc	East St	20-49	NAICS 7225 Restaurants and other eating places
Mc Donald's	West St	20-49	NAICS 7225 Restaurants and other eating places
North Brookfield Savings Bank	Main St	20-49	NAICS 5221 Depository credit intermediation
Taco Bell	West St	20-49	NAICS 7225 Restaurants and other eating places
Town of Ware	Main St # C	20-49	NAICS 9211 Executive, legislative and general government
United States Postal Svc	West St	20-49	NAICS 4911 Postal service
Ware Fire Dept	West St	20-49	NAICS 9221 Justice, public order, and safety activities
Ware Police Dept	North St	20-49	NAICS 9221 Justice, public order, and safety activities
Source: Data Axle, 2025, via Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Economic Research.			

Health Care

As noted above, the closure of the Baystate Mary Lane hospital in Ware has concerned city officials and citizens alike. While there is a Baystate Adult Medicine & Urgent Care facility to the west in Belchertown, just under 10 miles from Ware Town Hall, and Baystate Wing Hospital (9.6 miles from Ware Town Hall) to the South, residents have expressed an interest in seeing a hospital or at least urgent care facility established within the Town of Ware (perhaps even in the former Mary Lane facility).

Ware is not alone in lacking medical care options. Indeed, the Commonwealth's online map of acute and non-acute care hospitals clearly shows a large unserved area between I-190 to the east, I-90 to the west, and between Route 2 and the Mass Pike.



Addressing this health care void locally is clearly a priority for current residents of Ware, and would surely make Ware a more attractive community.

Land Use and Zoning

General Land Use

Ware is a community with a wide range of land uses, from the sprawling old industrial Millyard downtown to the forests along the shores of the Quabbin Reservoir. Between these ends of the land use



Ware River and Millyard

Most of the town's developed area is in the southeast corner, while the majority of land area is rural and wooded, with some farmland. Historic residential neighborhoods exist both north and south of downtown, including the Church Street Historic District and the area between the Millyard and the railroad tracks.

A wide variety of commercial uses are located along Route 32, including two major shopping centers: Gibbs Crossing, with Walmart and Lowe's Home Improvement, and Phillips Plaza, anchored by a Big Y World Class Market.



Industrial uses are located primarily at the Millyard and the adjacent areas. The historic neighborhood south of the Ware River recently was home to a full service hospital, Bay State Mary Lane, but the facility has been closed and new uses are being sought.

spectrum are rural residential areas, more densely developed residential neighborhoods (often mixed with commercial uses), commercial and industrial uses along Route 32, and of course, Main Street shops and services.



Quabbin Reservoir

*Photo: "Gate 52 Day Trip" at
MassDayTripping.com*

Downtown Ware

The Town Center is located along Main Street and East Main Street where Route 32 and Route 9 coexist in the historic center of town and is home to the town hall, police department headquarters, and public library. There is a mix of retail and service businesses, casual restaurants, cultural organizations, historic church buildings, and residential neighborhoods. Also coming to downtown Ware is the new Fieldcrest Craft Brewery, to be located in a former restaurant space. However, there are still numerous vacant buildings and storefronts. Some are boarded up, and some have temporary signs or awnings in disrepair. One building is set to be demolished.



Downtown Ware

An important resource downtown is the satellite campus of Holyoke Community College. The Ware campus of Holyoke Community College (HCC) is located on Main Street, where the Education to Employment (E2E) Quaboag Region Workforce Training and Community College Center is a collaboration between HCC and the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation.

One of the highlights of downtown Ware is the presence of Workshop 13, a non-profit arts organization, and its two storefront operations, an art gallery and a pottery studio. Workshop 13 offers numerous



ClayWorks Community Ceramics Studio

classes, programs and events at its facility in a former church building on Church Street, as well as at its locations on Main Street. The arts hub has recently received funding to relocate and expand its pottery studio into space at the Millyard.

Other sites that have been redeveloped or have potential include the former Ware Savings Bank, the former Friendly's that is now a jewelry store, and Gabe's restaurant, which is slated for the brewery.

The Ware Millyard is located on East Main Street and is comprised of the multiple buildings of the former Ware Industries Mill, on about 10 acres along the Ware River. The Millyard remained largely in use until the mid-1980s when a fire destroyed the main building and damaged several others. Several businesses have utilized the remaining spaces over the past decades, most notably the Berkshire Blanket Factory Outlet. The Town has conducted a study examining the existing underground infrastructure of tunnel and penstock systems, including water, sewer, and electric infrastructure and has obtained state funding to prepare a redevelopment plan for the property.



In support of town businesses and the community as a whole, the Town has been upgrading infrastructure throughout the Town Center, using multiple state and federal funding sources (Chapter 90, CDBG, MassDOT, Federal Highway Administration, ARPA funds). The Town recently completed a comprehensive overhaul of Main Street infrastructure, including sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, paving, and lighting.



The town's 2021 Rapid Recovery Plan, completed by the PVPC with several other consultants, pointed out that Ware's Town Center is in need of additional improvements, such as easier access to parking, upgraded storefronts, and redevelopment of vacant buildings.³ Although public parking exists that provides access to sidewalks, parking lots can be difficult to find, and it can be a long wait to cross the street because of high traffic volumes. There is a perception from both business owners and town residents that lack of parking is a major issue and an impediment to a stronger downtown environment.

Route 32 – West Street and Palmer Road

Route 32 in Ware south of the town center allows for commercial and industrial uses, as well as residential uses in some locations. Much of the land immediately adjacent to the roadway has been



developed, and there continues to be demand; Walmart is expanding on the Palmer Road segment, and a Tractor Supply Company is coming to West Street near the high school. Two major shopping centers along the corridor are anchored by the Walmart and a Lowe's (Gibbs Crossing) as well as a Big Y supermarket, and numerous smaller chain stores exist along West Street. Several key town functions

³ Ware Rapid Recovery Plan, 2021

are located along this stretch of road, including the town schools, fire department, post office, and senior center. A retail market analysis completed in 2015 by Arnett Muldrow & Associates found that Ware's primary trade area gained retail sales while surrounding areas did not generate sales, making Ware a retail center for the larger region. This was borne out in the Rapid Recovery Plan that found that Ware was a destination for residents of surrounding towns.

Zoning

Ware has 11 zoning districts: five residential, three mixed-use, and three commercial/industrial. There is also an Aquifer Protection Overlay District and a Floodplain Overlay District, and a Rural Residential Business Overlay District. The Town's Zoning Bylaw was last updated in 2023.

These districts are primarily residential:

- Rural Quabbin (RQ) – Allows agriculture, recreational and community uses, and limited residential development.
- Rural Residential (RR) – Lower density residential development, with more flexibility than Rural Quabbin District.
- Suburban Residential (SR) – Higher density residential development allowed; some office and research uses with special permits; some other small-scale non-residential uses.
- Beaver Lake Residential (BLR) – Intended to preserve this community, allowing similar development and limited other uses.
- Downtown Residential (DTR) – Much higher densities existing and allowed; multifamily residential allowed by right, and some limited other uses allowed by special permit.

These are mixed use:

- Residential Business (RB) – This district is located along two sections of Route 32 where there are existing business and residences.
- Downtown Commercial (DTC) – This is the heart of downtown and allows high density residential as well as office and small-scale retail.
- Millyard (MY) – Mixed use development is encouraged, with a variety of uses that fit the unique spaces available in the mill buildings.

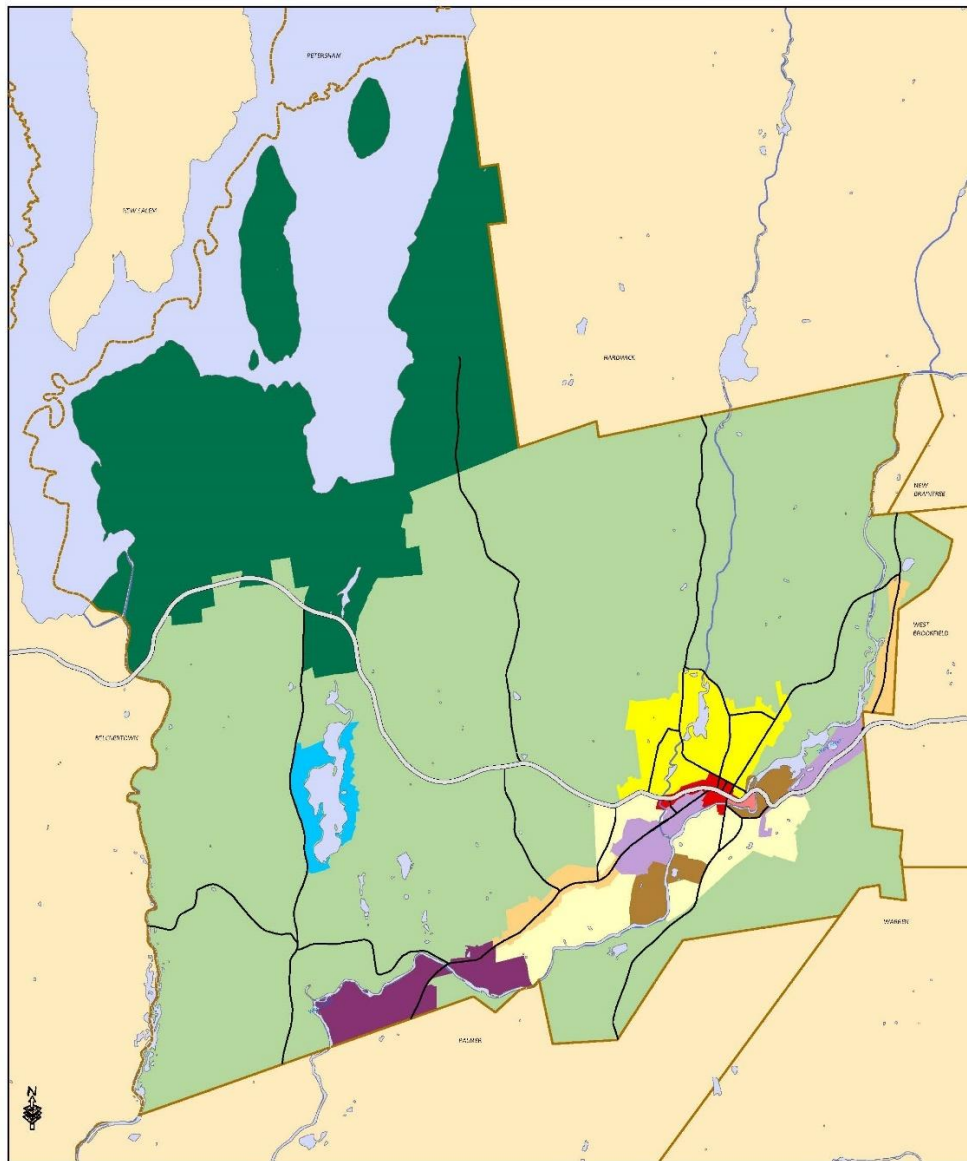
The following three allow commercial and/or industrial uses:

- Highway Commercial (HC) – These are two areas along Route 32 where there is existing concentrated commercial development. Some more intensive commercial and light industrial uses are allowed.
- Commercial Industrial (CI) – At the very southern edge of town, this district has significant areas of open space and does not allow further residential development.

- Industrial (I) – These two areas include existing industrial development, some originally related to the rail line and river industries.

A map of the Town's current zoning is on the following page and on the Town's website.

Ware Zoning Map



- Zoning Districts**
- RQ - Rural Quabbin
 - RR - Rural Residential
 - SR - Suburban Residential
 - BLR - Beaver Lake Residential
 - DTR - Downtown Residential
 - RB - Residential Business
 - DTC - Downtown Commercial
 - MY - Millyard
 - HC - Highway Commercial
 - CI - Commercial Industrial
 - I - Industrial
- Rt 9
— Local Roads

Zoning Map of the Town of Ware

May 13, 2013

Adopted by the Annual Town Meeting on May 14, 2012
Amended by the Annual Town Meeting on May 13, 2013

Sources:
MassGIS: Roads, Town Boundaries,
Waterways, Waterbodies
Town of Ware: Zoning Districts,
Parcels (2011)



Planning Department
126 Main Street, Suite G
Ware, MA 01082
413-967-9648
www.townofware.com



Infrastructure

Ware's infrastructure serves the community reasonably well but may lack capacity for additional growth. Ongoing maintenance, repairs, and replacements of key elements requires the majority of the available infrastructure budget and state grants. This section will explore current conditions.

Water and Sewer

The town's water system serves 2,321 customers.⁴ Water supply is from groundwater wells that feed to a cistern on Barnes Street and pump about half a million gallons of water a day, sending it through over 40 miles of water main. The sewer system collects wastewater from 1,740 locations, and it is treated at the Water Pollution Control Plant. Residents and businesses not served by the water and sewer systems utilize wells and septic systems.

The Town considered privatization of the Water and Wastewater Enterprise utilities, but given substantial concerns about the impact on residents, this effort was set aside and a committee has been established to assess and prioritize the capital needs of the utilities. A master plan for the water and wastewater systems was created in 2016 and showed over \$6 million in needed upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant and over \$10 million in fixes to the water system over 10 years. However, residents voted against these expenses.

Other Utilities

The town of Ware is served by National Grid for its electricity needs. There are no natural gas lines in town, and given state regulations limiting new gas infrastructure, it is unlikely that Ware will ultimately be served by natural gas. Other options may include networked geothermal systems or electricity from solar and wind power. The state is also promoting the use of non-gas appliances and battery-driven tools and vehicles.

The town is served by three internet providers:⁵

- Xfinity offers a cable connection to 98.9% of Ware with speeds up to 2 Gbps.
- Viasat Internet is 100% available in Ware via satellite connection with speeds up to 150 Mbps.
- EarthLink 5G Home Internet offers service to about 38% of Ware, with 5G speeds up to 100 Mbps.

Broadband for businesses in Ware is considered "average."⁶ It is estimated that each business in Ware has an average of 2.37 wired providers available at their location, and based on this, Ware is less competitive than 87% of cities in the state of Massachusetts, which means it is the 402nd most competitive city in the state out of 460 cities when it comes to business broadband connectivity. Ware is more competitive than 53% of cities nationally. According to this source, the business internet providers

⁴ 2023 Annual Town Report; Ware, Massachusetts

⁵ [Top 6 Internet Providers in Ware, MA](#)

⁶ [Top 10 Business Internet Service Providers in Ware, Massachusetts](#)

with the largest coverage within Ware are: North Atlantic Networks, Comcast Business, Verizon High Speed Internet, EarthLink 5G Home Internet, and Verizon Business.⁷

Transportation

Ware has 101 miles of road, of which 86 miles are local roads maintained by the Ware Department of Public Works. Two major state roads provide access both east and west. Route 9 extends west to I-91 and east to Worcester, and Route 32 runs southwest to northeast, following the Ware River Valley through town. It provides access to the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) in Palmer.

There is limited transit service in Ware, primarily provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) and Quaboag Connector. The Quaboag Connector co-operates the B79 Amherst to Worcester intercity Route with the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority.

There are plans for passenger rail service in Palmer, with a new rail station along the line from Albany to Boston, and this will have significant impacts on the town of Ware. Amtrak plans to run two round-trip trains between Boston and New Haven, stopping in Palmer, in 2029. In the meantime, MassDOT and CSX Rail will conduct track upgrades between Worcester and Springfield and build out a high-level platform in Palmer. MassDOT's Rail and Transit Division (RTD) selected a consultant in December of 2023 for Planning and Conceptual Design of a Palmer intercity passenger rail station. MassDOT, consulting firm VHB, and Palmer officials are currently evaluating eleven potential passenger rail platform locations and the planning should be completed by mid-2025.



⁷ Top 10 Business Internet Service Providers in Ware, Massachusetts

It would be beneficial to the Town to follow the development of the rail project closely, and when plans for a Palmer rail station near completion, it would make sense to commission a study of the economic and community impact of the station on the Town of Ware. There will be reverberations from housing demand to commercial development that will need to be considered.

The nearest airport with commercial passenger flights is Bradley International Airport (BDL), in Windsor Locks, Connecticut. The airport handles an average of 12,000 passengers daily with an average of 120 daily flights. The nearest general aviation airport is the Worcester Regional Airport.

Town Hall

The Ware Town Hall was built in 1885 in the Romanesque Revival style, with additions in 1904 and 1935. The town offices are located in the lower level of the building on the West Street side, and the Great Hall is accessible from Main St. and is currently used for meetings, elections and town events. The building is in need of significant upgrades and preservation work so that deferred maintenance does not result in loss of original building fabric. Several years ago, the Town received a Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) grant for preservation work, and the town is developing a maintenance and phased repairs plan.



Small Business and Entrepreneurship

Local businesses are served by the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce, which covers 15 towns in the region. The Chamber is based in Palmer but works closely with the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QV CDC) & Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation, both of which are located in downtown Ware. The Chamber also partners with the Ware Business and Civic Association.

The Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce provides access to and information about small business resources, including webinars provided by SCORE, an organization sponsored by the U.S. Small Business Administration and providing volunteer mentors to assist local businesses. A well-maintained calendar on the Chamber website provides information about other offerings of members and partners, including the QV CDC.

The Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QV CDC) is a member-based, non-profit organization that serves 20 towns of the Quaboag Region and Southern Worcester County. QV CDC and its partner organization, Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation (QVBAC) offer programs and services that support small business throughout the region. The QVBAC makes loans from \$500 to \$100,000 to existing and startup businesses operating within the area that cannot access such funding through conventional resources. The CDC offers webinars for small businesses as well as computer

training and business planning programs. It is also a partner with Holyoke Community College on the E2E program; E2E is short for “Education to Employment: Quaboag Region Workforce Training and Community College Center.” The center is located in downtown Ware and includes classrooms, private study areas and office space. Computer workstations are available for community members enrolled in online credit classes at HCC.

The Ware Business and Civic Association, or Ware BCA, was created to strengthen the business community in Ware and promote the town as an appealing place to visit. It has begun including several neighboring communities to participate. The BCA also focused on downtown revitalization in Ware.

Current and Potential Redevelopment Sites

The following sites are actively being redeveloped or evaluated for new uses.

Ware Millyard

The area includes surviving mill buildings, the oldest of which date to the 1840s, located on both sides of the Ware River and comprising about 32 acres of land. The Ware Millyard area first saw industrial use in the 18th century, with a sawmill at the falls of the Ware River.

Intending to pursue textile manufacturing, investors purchased mill privileges at the falls in 1821 and incorporated the Ware Manufacturing Company in 1823. Although elements of the water power infrastructure date to this period, only one building, the company office, survives. All of the major mill buildings date to later in the 19th century.⁸



One of the largest buildings in the complex is the “Stone Mill,” originally the Otis Company Mill No. 1. It is a five-story mill building built out of coursed stone, built in 1845. It is the only stone mill in town. The Otis Company, which manufactured woven cotton fabric, was Ware's largest employer for about 100 years. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. It was further listed as a contributing property to the Ware Millyard Historic District in 1986.⁹



⁸ [Ware Millyard Historic District - Wikipedia](#)

⁹ [Otis Company Mill No. 1, Ware | Roadtrippers](#)

The Millyard buildings house a variety of tenants, and the Town created a special mixed-use district for the complex in 2012, allowing higher density housing (up to 22 units per acre), and a wide variety of commercial uses including warehousing and wholesaling. It also potentially allows light industry with a special permit. Infrastructure studies have



Existing Ware Millyard Businesses

been carried out in 2001 (Ware Mill Yard Site Assessment and Economic Development Planning Project) and 2021 (Ware Millyard Redevelopment: Existing Site Utilities and Existing Conditions Review of Building #9) by Tighe and Bond, as well as a new study to be conducted with FY24 state grant funding (Millyard Redevelopment Plan).¹⁰

Former Country Bank Building

The Country Bank building, a historic structure built in 1893,¹¹ was offered to the Town by Country Bank in 2022, with the intent to convert it into a new Town police station. However, rehabilitation costs for municipal use were prohibitive. Instead, a private buyer purchased the property and is seeking a tenant for medical use, including a potential urgent care facility.

The location served as Country Bank's corporate headquarters for many years, but the facility suffered from the loss of foot traffic during the COVID-19 pandemic and the general shift to online banking.



Country Bank Building ca. early 1900s

¹⁰ 2016 Ware Master Plan

¹¹ [Search Result Details - MACRIS](#)

Country Bank still has a presence in still in Ware, now on West Street, and the bank operates branches in 10 other cities and towns in the region. It has operated in Ware for more than 170 years.¹² The building itself has housed different banks, including Country, the Ware Trust Company, and Ware Savings, since before World War I.

The property has been valued at approximately \$3 million and includes the former banking office located on the corner of Main and Bank Street along with the E2E building located at 79 Main St., the rear parking lot and garage, and rooftop parking situated behind the 65-71 Main Street location that was donated by Country Bank to the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation in 2016.



The site would be convenient for a walk-in medical facility, given the location in the center of downtown Ware and availability of parking, and it would fill a major gap in medical services since the loss of Baystate Mary Lane Hospital, discussed below.

Former Mary Lane Hospital Building



Former Mary Lane Hospital

The original Mary Lane hospital was dedicated to the town by Lewis Gilbert, a local woolen manufacturer and philanthropist. The hospital served the region for nearly 100 years, with numerous additions and in various capacities. Baystate Medical Center purchased the building in 1999 and continued to expand the facilities. In 2023, Baystate closed the hospital and moved its operations to Baystate Wing Hospital in Palmer. There was a slow reduction of departments and services until its full closure in 2023.¹³

The hospital also served the wider region, including the towns of Belchertown, Hardwick, New Braintree, Warren, and the Brookfields. The closest hospitals are now Athol Memorial Hospital in Athol, Harrington Memorial Hospital in Southbridge and Baystate Wing Hospital in Palmer, which is the closest, at 20 minutes from the Mary Lane site. The loss of medical services is compounded by the loss of jobs and the

¹² [County Bank willing to donate Ware building to town for use as new police HQ - masslive.com;](#)
[Country Bank Donates Its Former Headquarters to the Town of Ware - BusinessWest](#)

¹³ [Ware needs a hospital, residents say, as reuse of site considered - The Reminder](#)

economic impact of the facility in the town. Employees of the hospital utilized local stores and restaurants, creating a multiplier effect.

The Town contracted with HKT Architects in 2023 to assess the hospital buildings and their possible reuse, and input was sought from residents. Ideas for the site beyond potential re-use for medical services have included a YMCA-style facility, open space, housing, and even a possible expansion of the Cedarbrook Village assisted living facility adjacent to the hospital.¹⁴

Ware Opportunity Zone

The U.S. Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017 created the Opportunity Zone Program to provide incentives for investment in low-income communities throughout the country. An Opportunity Zone is a designated geographic area in which individuals can gain favorable tax treatment on their capital gains, by investing those funds (through a privately-created Opportunity Fund) into economic activities in the area. The map of Opportunity Zones can be found online at [Opportunity Zone Map | Mass.gov](#). Ware has an Opportunity Zone designation for the downtown and immediately surrounding area. It has a total population of about 3,390 and a median household income of \$38,728. The unemployment rate was 9% at the time of designation (2018).

In 2018, the Massachusetts governor nominated 138 census tracts for Opportunity Zone designation, including the one in Ware, and the U.S. Treasury certified these census tracts. Tax incentives can only be claimed for investments within these specific census tracts. There are three incentives for investors, which accumulate over the life of the investment. All three are federal incentives, and are non-competitive, so all qualified investors may claim them. Because they end on December 31, 2026, there are only two more years to benefit.¹⁵

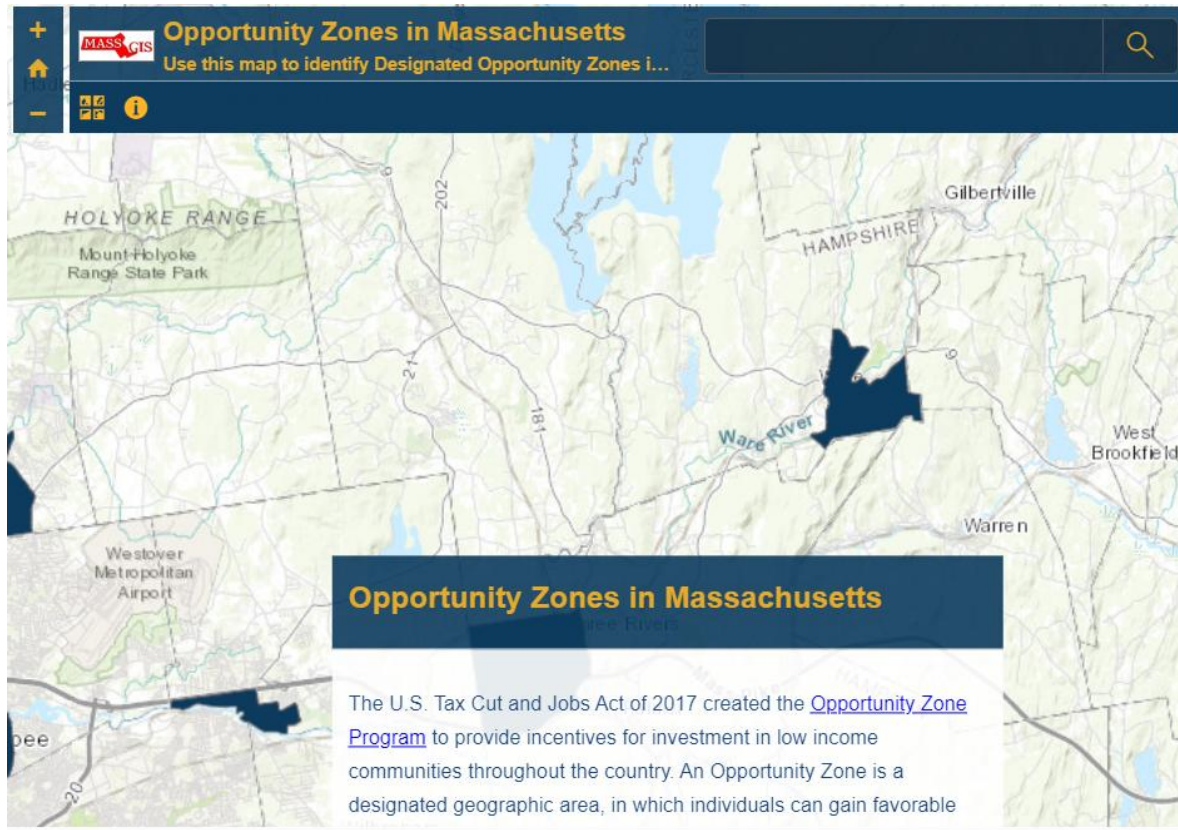
1. **Temporary Deferral:** Investors may defer capital gains on income reinvested into Opportunity Funds. The deferred gain must be recognized when the investor exits the fund, or on Dec. 31, 2026, whichever comes earlier.
2. **Step-Up in Basis:** If the investor remains within an Opportunity Fund for at least 5 years, their tax liabilities related to the original capital gains are reduced by 10 percent. If the investment is held in the Opportunity Fund for 7 years, this increases by an additional 5 percent, meaning that investors can reduce capital gains liability by 15 percent total.
3. **Permanent Exclusion of Fund Gains:** If an investor keeps their investment in an Opportunity Fund for 10 years, any gains from the Opportunity Fund are exempt from taxation.

Communities with a designated Opportunity Zone can determine how they aim to attract private investment, and what kinds of private investment they are seeking. Opportunity Zone designation has made investments eligible for tax incentives, but it is now up to the communities to attract these investments.

¹⁴ [Ware needs a hospital, residents say, as reuse of site considered - The Reminder](#)

¹⁵ [Four Reasons to Tap Opportunity Zones Before They Expire | Kiplinger](#)

In order to successfully attract Opportunity Fund investment, the MA Executive Office of Economic Development recommends that communities ensure that local permitting and zoning is conducive to the kinds of investments they aim to attract. Additionally, the community may want to think about how to market the Opportunity Zone to private investors both within and beyond Massachusetts.¹⁶



The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in 2017 was designed with a 10-year lifespan; accordingly, opportunity zones are currently set to expire on December 31, 2026. This means that investors have a limited time to take advantage of the tax incentives. It is possible that the 2026 expiration could be extended. A new bipartisan bill, the Opportunity Zones Transparency, Extension, and Improvement Act of 2023 ([HR 5761](#)), was introduced for consideration in Congress; if passed, it would extend opportunity zones for an additional two years (through December 2028).

¹⁶ [Frequently Asked Opportunity Zone Questions | Mass.gov](#)

Action Plan

This plan sets forth six major strategies that together can move Ware forward in the direction the community wishes. The recommended strategies can be addressed one or two at a time or more comprehensively, depending on the staffing allocated. Each strategy includes one or more examples of best practices elsewhere.

Several of the strategies recommended in this plan have been previously recommended in other local plans. These previous plans are still valuable sources of information and guidance, particularly the 2022 West Street Corridor Study by McCabe Enterprises/Pare Corporation and the Appendix of the 2016 Master Plan, which is still quite relevant. The 2021 Rapid Recovery Plan is also a useful source of recommendations. This report will focus on the most essential and most transformative actions that need to be taken by the Town to move the needle on economic development.

Strategy #1: Support Local Businesses to Start Up and Grow

- Revise the Town Webpage to Promote Business Resources
- Develop a Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Program

Strategy #2: Enhance Collaboration Internally and With Key Stakeholders

- Hold Periodic Meetings with Key Decision Makers
- Hold an Annual Economic Development Forum

Strategy #3: Continue to Create a Vibrant Downtown

- Plan Creative and Unique Town Center Events
- Organize Pop-up Activities in Vacant Storefronts

Strategy #4: Develop Priority Sites for New Activities

- Conduct Feasibility Studies for High-Potential Sites
- Pursue Developers for Currently Vacant Properties

Strategy #5: Promote Ware as Recreation Destination

Strategy #6: Review and Update the Zoning Bylaw to Support Economic Development

These six goals and their associated strategies are discussed in the next section of the report. Each strategy includes examples from other communities and/or guidelines that can serve as resources for Ware. While these are helpful references, additional resources can be found by talking to other communities, attending conferences and trainings, and researching online resources. Economic development issues and needs are certain to evolve over the next decade and beyond, and the Town will need to remain nimble to address them.

STRATEGY #1: Support Local Businesses to Start Up and Grow

RATIONALE:	Small businesses are the lifeblood of a community, and yet they must tirelessly fight for survival. Small businesses generate income at a neighborhood level and play a significant role in job creation and employment opportunities within communities. Additionally, these businesses source goods and services from other local providers, further stimulating the economy.
PURPOSE:	To assist new businesses to start up and locate in Ware and to help all local businesses to flourish and grow.
CURRENT STATUS:	Businesses don't always know where to go for technical assistance or permitting guidance, and the Town website does not provide an easy roadmap for them.
OBJECTIVES:	Provide easy access to information about starting or growing a business in Ware, and support businesses once they are established.

Revise the Town Website to Promote Business Resources

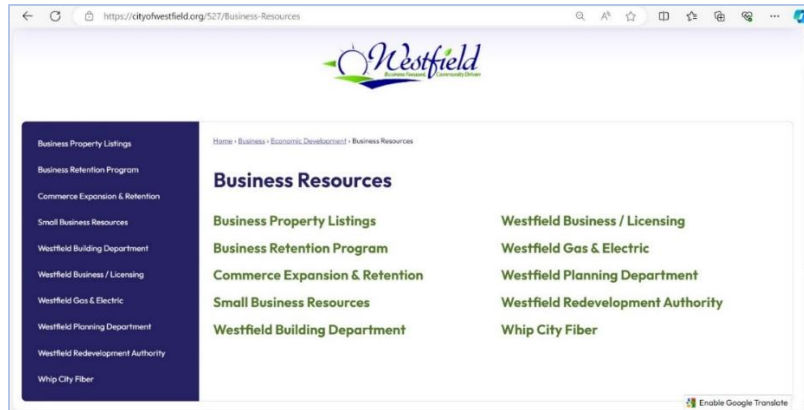
What:	Revise the existing Town website to more clearly provide information for businesses, links to required forms and procedures, and links to resources. Provide a list of available properties for development.
Who:	Director of Planning and Community Development, Town IT Staff
Budget:	Low cost
Timeline:	Short-Term
Location:	Town Hall

Example: City of Westfield

The City of Westfield has created a main page under the “Business” Tab at the top of the website. This page has links to additional pages with important resources specific to business needs. If the user chooses the “How Do I...” link, it brings them to a second page with several options. (*see next page*)



The “Business Resources” link from the first page brings users to the key areas in the community that support business development.



One of these key resources is a list of available properties. Another is a personal invitation from the city's economic development staff person to reach out and contact him as needed.

Business Retention Program

Commerce Expansion & Retention

Small Business Resources

Westfield Building Department

Westfield Business / Licensing

Westfield Gas & Electric

Westfield Planning Department

Westfield Redevelopment Authority

Whip City Fiber

Business Property Listings

Industrial Buildings for lease:

- [77 Servicestar Rd](#)
- [69 Neck Rd](#)
- [66-68 Broad St](#)
- [323 Lockhouse Rd](#)
- [64 Lockhouse Rd](#)
- [39 S Broad St Warehouse](#)

Retail Buildings for lease:

- [212 Southampton Rd](#)
- [420 Union Rd](#)
- [45-63 Southwick Rd](#)
- [301 E Main St](#)
- [74-82 Franklin St](#)
- [64 Main St](#)

Commercial Land for lease:

- [420 Union St- Union Pad Site Ground Lease](#)

Industrial Land for lease:

- [67 Neck St](#)
- [501 Southampton Rd Pad Site](#)

Retail Buildings for sale:

- [53 Elm St](#)
- [297 Aoremont Hwy](#)
- [1251 E Mountain Rd](#)
- [182-184 Southampton Rd](#)

Specialty Buildings for sale:

- [420 Russellville Rd- Winery/Vinyard](#)

Office buildings for lease:

- [30 Court St](#)
- [182-184 Southampton Rd](#)
- [130 Southampton Rd](#)
- [94 N Elm St \(Westwood Building\)](#)
- [595 Southampton Rd](#)
- [65 Springfield Rd](#)
- [70 Court St](#)

Industrial Buildings for sale:

- [387 Southampton Rd](#)

Business Property Listings

Business Retention Program

Commerce Expansion & Retention

Small Business Resources

Westfield Building Department

Westfield Business / Licensing

Westfield Gas & Electric

Westfield Planning Department

Westfield Redevelopment Authority

Whip City Fiber

Home > Business > Economic Development > Business Resources > Commerce Expansion & Retention

Commerce Expansion & Retention

As you guide your company's growth, certain challenges and issues are bound to arise. How will you enter new markets? Are your employees ready to compete in the global economy? Can you afford more training? What resources or incentives are available to mitigate your costs of doing business? The City of Westfield and its strategic partners are committed to helping you answer these questions and face these challenges.

We will work with you to:

- Build the relationships you need to be successful
- Understand your business and its needs
- Keep a database of pertinent information
- Ensure you're aware of local, state and regional service providers
- Provide short and long term solutions to your needs

Contact

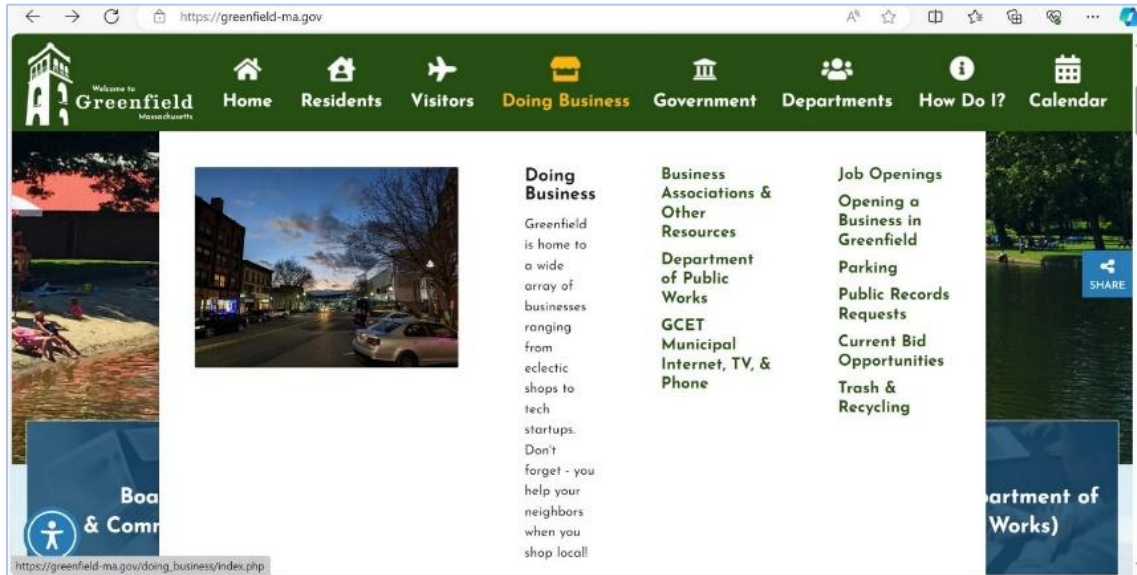
Peter J. Miller

Ph: (413) 572-6246

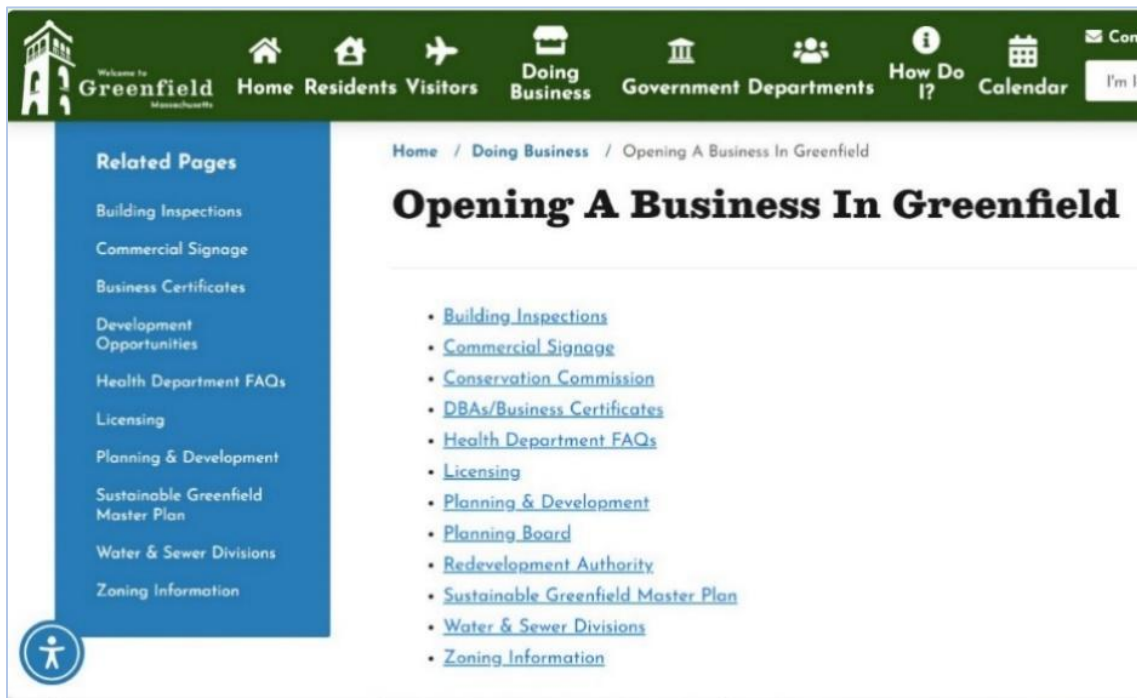
[Email](#)

Example: City of Greenfield

The Greenfield website also has a “Doing Business” tab, and the image below illustrates the drop-down options when the tab is selected.

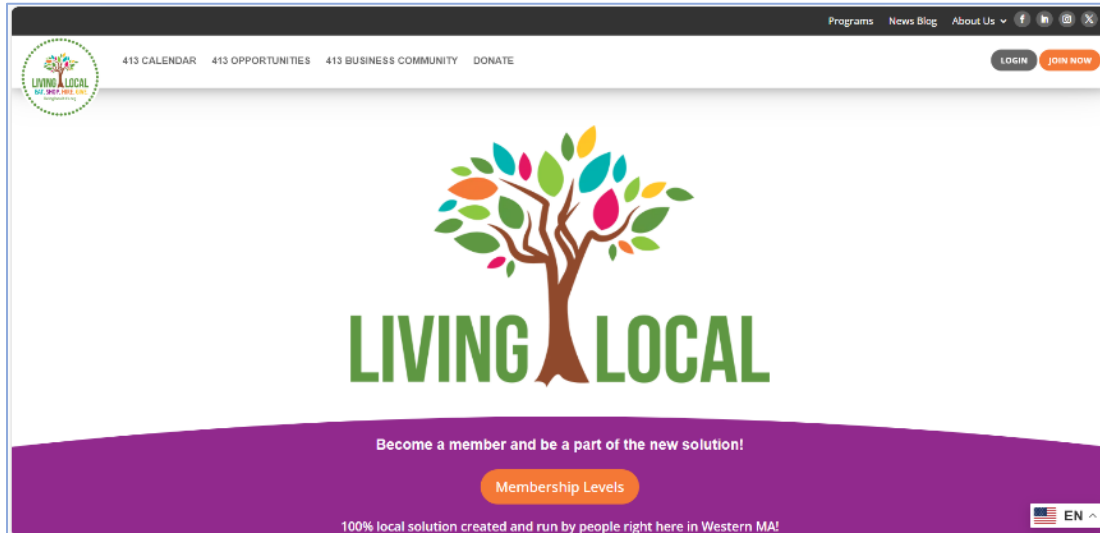


If the user selects the link to “Opening a Business in Greenfield,” they are able to access the full list of important links needed for permitting and site review.



Additional Resource: Living Local 413

The Ware website could also link to the Living Local 413 website, which has a variety of resources and effectively serves as a regional chamber by promoting local businesses. Memberships range from \$150/year for microenterprises to \$5,000/year for large companies: [Home](#) | [Living Local 413](#)



Develop a Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Program

What:	Develop relationships with existing businesses to assist them in solving their staffing, logistics and other business problems so they can remain in the community and grow, potentially hiring additional employees.
Who:	Town Manager, Director of Planning and Community Development, Community Development Authority, Ware Business and Civic Association
Budget:	Low cost
Timeline:	Long-term
Location:	N/A

It has been established that business retention as a strategy for job creation is generally more successful than just focusing on business attraction ([Incentives for Business Attraction and Retention | icma.org](https://www.icma.org/2014/01/01/incentives-for-business-retention/)). If incentives are used, they should be made available to existing firms as well as to new prospects, as local businesses will often find staying and expanding easier than relocating. Incentive packages designed to induce businesses to stay and expand might be viewed as rewards for their loyalty to the area, whereas inducements designed to attract new firms may be perceived by existing firms as signals that they are either taken for granted or perceived to have less value than newcomers.

Example: Guidelines from International City/County Management Association (ICMA)

When a community elects to pursue a business retention strategy, it is wise to pursue the following steps, according to the ICMA:

- First, make a complete inventory of all existing businesses.
- Second, contact these firms to determine their current situation and their needs. The municipality can prepare a simple and short survey, focused on learning what factors each business thinks would make it more successful and how the local government can help. The municipality will not unquestioningly provide what existing businesses claim to need, but it will analyze the feedback to determine where and how best to use its business retention resources.
- Third, the municipality initiates an ongoing effort to meet existing firms' short-term needs, and it maintains a pro-business attitude.

Business retention strategies and tactics can take a variety of forms. Financial inducements, including tax incentives, loans, and loan guarantees, constitute one retention strategy. Nonfinancial incentives, also important, can include training targeted to specific labor needs.

Some retention activities include providing adequate, appropriate physical infrastructure (roadways, public transit facilities, water and sewer lines, high-speed communications networks, airport facilities, and speculative industrial buildings) and access to sufficient energy resources (water, electricity, natural gas, and geothermal or other sources of power for operations).

Source: [Incentives for Business Attraction and Retention | icma.org](https://www.icma.org/2014/01/01/incentives-for-business-retention/)

For helpful guidelines, also see:

- 1) [Business Retention and Expansion Far More Important Than Recruitment \(useful-community-development.org\)](https://useful-community-development.org/)
- 2) [Business Retention & Expansion – Community Economic Development \(wisc.edu\)](https://wisc.edu/)

Example: Framingham, Massachusetts

The City of Framingham has a business retention, expansion and attraction program that includes outreach to local businesses, expedited permitting, Tax-Increment Financing, and information about the Investment Tax Credit through their Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP). These services are highlighted on the city's website at [Growing Your Business in Framingham | City of Framingham, MA Official Website \(framinghamma.gov\)](https://www.framinghamma.gov/growing-your-business)

The website has a number of other features, including a summary of the city's business advantages and amenities, data on employment figures, information about products made in Framingham, and a discussion of the Creative Economy. [Business Profile | Choose Framingham, MA - Official Website](https://www.framinghamma.gov/business-profile)

STRATEGY #2: Enhance Collaboration Internally and With Key Stakeholders

RATIONALE:	One of the most important elements that successful communities report is the collaboration and coordination among the various stakeholders. The local government is working in synchrony, and community partners are able to communicate at ease.
PURPOSE:	To work together seamlessly to create and maintain a business-friendly community that has a high quality of life for its residents.
CURRENT STATUS:	Departments already work well together and could further enhance results with additional connection and interaction. Outside stakeholders may not be as tied in to Town government.
OBJECTIVES:	Find ways to connect more frequently internally and externally so that relationships are positive, coordinated, and helpful to businesses.

Hold Periodic Meetings with Key Decision Makers

What:	Hold a monthly check-in meeting with the Town Manager, Director of Planning and Community Development, Community Development Authority and Building Commissioner to discuss any new issues or opportunities. Regularly invite outside stakeholders to planning and strategy meetings for economic development purposes.
Who:	Town Manager, Director of Planning and Community Development, Community Development Authority and Building Commissioner. Also include representatives from the Ware Civic and Business Association, Quaboag Valley CDC, Millyard property owners, Workshop 13, and Holyoke Community College.
Budget:	Low cost
Timeline:	Ongoing - monthly
Location:	Town Hall

Examples: Guidelines for Policy Meetings

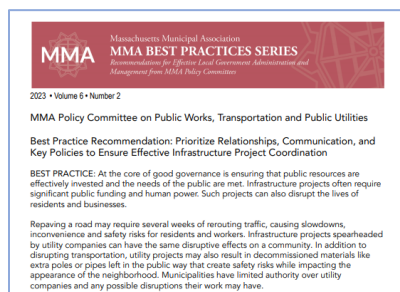
The International City/County Management Association provides a number of resources, including these suggested guidelines for engaging with elected officials and other community stakeholders to create and execute policies that achieve common goals and objectives:

- Help elected officials develop a policy agenda that can be implemented effectively and that serves the best interests of the community.
- Understand the policy cycle, including problem definition, data gathering, development and analysis of alternatives, and ranking and recommendations.

Ware Economic Development Strategic Plan

- Communicate sound information and recommendations.
- Develop fact sheets, issue briefs, and other materials to provide information to decision makers and other stakeholders.
- Recognize interdependent relationships and multiple causes of community issues.

More information and resources are available at: [Practices for Effective Local Government Management and Leadership | icma.org](https://www.icma.org/publications/practices-for-effective-local-government-management-and-leadership)



The Massachusetts Municipal Association has developed a Best Practices Report for coordinating a project, specifically an infrastructure project. However, these principles could be used for any significant project.

Source: [MMA Best Practices Project Coordination](#): Prioritize Relationships, Communication, and Key Policies to Ensure Effective Infrastructure Project Coordination.

Hold an Annual Economic Development Forum

What:	Host an Economic Development Forum once a year for Town officials and key stakeholders.
Who:	Town Manager, Director of Planning and Community Development, Community Development Authority, Ware Business and Civic Association, Workshop 13, the Millyard owners and tenants, and other business owners and employers. The events should also include Baystate Health and Westmass Area Development Corporation.
Budget:	Moderate Cost
Timeline:	Annual
Location:	Town Hall or other venue

Ware could benefit from regular forums with key stakeholders to discuss current economic conditions, trends, and opportunities. These could be hosted by the Town or they could rotate among stakeholders, located in a different setting each time. In many communities, it is the Chamber of Commerce that takes the lead on such forums, while in others it is an Economic Development Corporation or similar organization. In Ware, the regional planning agency, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, could assist with such an event. Each community will find its own format and setting, as well as time frame; the meeting can range from a couple of hours in the morning to an all-day gathering.

Example: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

In Harrisburg, it is the Young Professionals Society that held a forum in April 2023. The group hosted a two-hour evening event focused on the future of development in Harrisburg, with a panel of entrepreneurs, developers, and longtime residents. The panelists were asked to describe what inspires them as they think about the future of the community, and they also showcased the latest mixed-use, residential and commercial



developments from around the city. The presentation and discussion were moderated by the President & CEO of real estate company, Harristown Enterprises.

[Economic Development Forum - HYP](#)



Example: Modesto, California

In Modesto, California, the city hosted a pair of summits as part of their economic development planning in May 2024. The first event was for key stakeholders and began with a continental breakfast at 7:30 a.m. with the summit meeting from 8-10 a.m. They followed this up with a community summit (open to all interested members of the public) as well as smaller focused groups organized around specific themes (e.g., real estate development, workforce development, etc.). The meetings were facilitated by the city's strategic planning consultants, and the purpose was to help identify issues that the plan should address. This format could be adapted to implementation of an existing plan, as well as updates to a plan.

[Economic Development Summit - Registration Now Open! \(modestogov.com\)](https://modestogov.com)

STRATEGY #3: Continue to Create a Vibrant Downtown

RATIONALE:	Downtown Ware experienced significant effects from the pandemic shutdown and has not fully recovered.
PURPOSE:	To create a Town Center environment that draws Ware residents as well as visitors during the week and on weekends.
CURRENT STATUS:	Downtown Ware has many vacant buildings and storefronts and is perceived to have limited parking. However, several successful businesses are still operating, and Workshop 13 manages two arts-based venues.
OBJECTIVES:	Create attractions to draw residents and visitors to Ware’s Town Center.

Plan Creative and Unique Town Center Events

What:	Plan and host or partner with local businesses to hold regular downtown events that highlight the available business and community offerings. Seek creative ideas to promote the existing shops and services in an appealing way.
Who:	Town Manager, Director of Planning and Community Development, Community Development Authority, Ware Business and Civic Association, Workshop 13, the Millyard owners and tenants, and other business owners and employers.
Budget:	Moderate Cost
Timeline:	Ongoing – quarterly or biannual
Location:	Downtown Ware

Given the significant presence of the arts community on Main Street, it may be desirable to plan a series of arts and culture events or walks downtown. Parking areas could be marked with additional visible signage, and other temporary signage placed throughout the downtown. Tours could be self-led or curated and hosted.

Ware is fortunate to be the home of Workshop 13, which hosts numerous arts events and activities in three locations in town. The organization was a catalyst for the Where? Ware! Campaign that resulted in street art enlivening vacant buildings. The town could build on these offerings to create an Art Walk or Arts Night Out event. These could be coordinated with special events at the new brewery and other eateries. There could also be an Arts and Culture walk during the day, highlighting architecturally significant buildings and places like the restored



fountain. Many examples of similar activities can be found, both in other Pioneer Valley communities and throughout the country.

The term “creative placemaking” has been coined to describe many of these efforts, which can range from a short-term installation to a weeks-long event, or a permanent exhibit or venue. A number of more ambitious ideas can be found here: [These Four Rural Towns Are Using Creative Placemaking to Thrive](#)

Example: Northampton Arts Night Out, Northampton, Massachusetts

In Northampton, every second Friday night is Arts Night Out, an event hosted by Northampton art spaces to promote creative works and community. A number of local galleries and performing arts venues remain open well into the evening to encourage residents and visitors to make an evening of it, perhaps having dinner downtown as well.



Northampton Arts Night Out

Example: The Volland Store: A Place for Art and Community, Volland, Kansas

Volland is an unincorporated rural community that struggled economically and has recently experienced some revitalization. Initially the community developed because of the railroad that runs through it and grew into a ranching community. The establishment of a general store built and run by the Kratzer Brothers in the town brought accessible goods to the small community but also served as a gathering place for Volland and its surrounding residents. The founder of the Volland Store, Otto Kratzer, was never without his classic Kodak camera, documenting the community members of Volland while at work and play throughout their daily lives. The Volland Store stood as a centerpiece of the community until the early 1970s when it closed after Otto’s death.

Forty or so years later, newcomers to the town saw the potential of the building and renovated the store in 2025 for reuse as “A Place for Art and Community” and displays artwork from a wide variety of

artists. The community has found that there is a sense of community that is heightened during exhibitions and events at the venue.¹⁷



Community art opening in the Volland Store



Artist Lily Brooks with her photographs

Organize Pop-up Activities in Vacant Storefronts

What:	Transform vacant spaces downtown to draw visitors and support nascent local businesses.
Who:	Town Manager, Director of Planning and Community Development, Community Development Authority, Ware Business and Civic Association, Workshop 13, the Millyard owners, and other property owners.
Budget:	Moderate Cost
Timeline:	Ongoing, as needed
Location:	Downtown Ware

If a storefront becomes vacant or underutilized downtown, one of the most recent strategies to address it is the pop-up shop. These are temporary installations of crafters, artists, packaged food purveyors and other retailers who do not have their own spaces yet. The rent can be shared by the vendors and/or subsidized with grant funding. The vendors can rotate for seasonal events or take up a longer-term tenancy. Some may be able to increase sales to the extent that they can open an online shop or even their own storefront.

¹⁷ [The Importance of Art in Rural Communities](#)

Example: “Project: Pop-Up” in Lowell, Massachusetts

In Lowell, the city is partnering with UpNext on a multi-year pop-up incubator space in a vacant store in their historic district. UpNext is the company behind the “Project: Pop-Up” initiative and has experience guiding entrepreneurs through the pop-up process, liaising with public and private stakeholders, and working to make sure that the project succeeds. The initiative is a grant-funded, public-private partnership that first launched in June 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the negative impact on local retail was at its height. It was initially piloted across five storefronts in Newton and Needham, Massachusetts with grant funding through the Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) and quickly expanded to Melrose, Burlington, Wellesley, Lexington, Gloucester and more. More than 20 emerging brands have popped up to date, and in each case the pop-up space has had tremendous community support. Some communities have used ARPA funding to support these initiatives. In Lowell’s case, the rent may be shared by up to three brands at a cost of \$100 per month including utilities. The market rate for this space is over \$2,600. Additional resources are available to help vendors set up and market their wares.

Photos Courtesy Project-Pop-Up.com

For more information on this project and others, see: [Project Pop-Up | 51 Market Street / Lowell, MA \(project-pop-up.com\)](https://project-pop-up.com) and [Pop-up stores help fill vacant storefronts throughout eastern mass. \(wickedlocal.com\)](https://wickedlocal.com)





Example: Marlborough, Massachusetts Downtown Pop-Up Shops

In Marlborough's case, and many others across the country, the shops are installed in temporary sheds located in a parking lot, an alternative option if there are no vacant storefronts available. In Ware, this could occur at the Millyard or perhaps

Veterans Park.

In early 2023, the city of Marlborough was awarded a \$35,466 Regional Economic Development Organization (REDO) grant by the Massachusetts Office of Business Development. The grant was made possible through the efforts of a partnership between the Marlborough Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) on behalf of the city and the 495/MetroWest Partnership. The project intends to create increased retail opportunities for online or home retailers in the community interested in testing their concept in a physical setting in the downtown area.

The shops opened in May 2023 and are back for the 2024 season. From May through September, local retailers, makers and artists offer a variety of wares, from jewelry to clothing and books from three picturesque sheds within the parking lot along Court and Weed streets. A variety of vendors will use the pop-up shops on a rotating basis, and there will also be tables so that visitors can sit and relax while shopping. The sheds have vibrant art on the outside, created by a local artist, featuring a butterfly on the side and "Live, Work, Play" across the backs of all three sheds. This elaborate painting was done with spray paint. Inside the sheds are shelves and electricity.



Shop hours are Thursdays and Fridays from 4 to 8 p.m. and weekends from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Sources: [Local businesses 'pop up' downtown Marlborough \(communityadvocate.com\)](https://communityadvocate.com/local-businesses-pop-up-downtown-Marlborough) and [Grant enables downtown Marlborough to have 'pop-up shops' \(communityadvocate.com\)](https://communityadvocate.com/grant-enables-downtown-Marlborough-to-have-pop-up-shops)

Photos: [Downtown Pop-Up Shops - Visit Marlborough \(visit-marlborough.com\)](https://visit-marlborough.com/downtown-pop-up-shops)

Resource: Massachusetts Rapid Recovery Toolkit for Vacant Storefront Activation

As part of the Local Rapid Recovery Program led by the Commonwealth in 2021, expert consultants prepared detailed guidelines for a variety of effective recovery strategies. This document is particularly helpful for addressing vacant storefronts.

For complete toolkit, see: [Rapid Recovery Vacant Storefronts Tool Kit](#)

3

Step 3: Select the type (or types) of activations that best address your goals.

Given your goals (step 1) and the nature and location of your vacancies (step 2), what type of activation will have the most impact and ease of implementation? This toolkit covers two types of activations:

- **Interior Activations of Vacant Storefronts**
Interior storefront activations involve use of the interior of a shop, whether the entire store or a portion of it. People will be coming in and out of the space. This type of activation will require a license agreement or a lease with the property owner for temporary use. *If your goals involve helping entrepreneurs get into downtown retail space, you will need an interior storefront activation.*
- **Exterior Activations of Vacant Storefronts**
Exterior storefront activations involve only window displays or other changes to the façade of the building. There is no interior access in this scenario, outside of setting up the display. As such, these activations are much simpler to implement, though a written agreement with the landlord will still be required. *If your goals are about creating vibrancy on a street and supporting existing businesses, an exterior storefront activation is simpler to implement to meet your goals.*



Images: 12 Essex St Melrose (top),
Storefront display via blog.bonbrand.com

Rapid Recovery Plan Program - Toolkit

11

STRATEGY #4: Develop Priority Sites for New Activities

RATIONALE:	Ware has a number of older buildings that could benefit from redevelopment, some town-owned and others privately-owned. It makes sense for the community to maximize vacant properties and buildings for the benefit of the town.
PURPOSE:	To find creative ways to utilize and redevelop available spaces in Ware.
CURRENT STATUS:	There are several properties with development and redevelopment potential, particularly downtown and in the Millyard.
OBJECTIVES:	Conduct feasibility studies and assessments for each property and seek developers who will ideally realize the Town's vision for those properties.

Conduct Feasibility Studies for High-Potential Sites

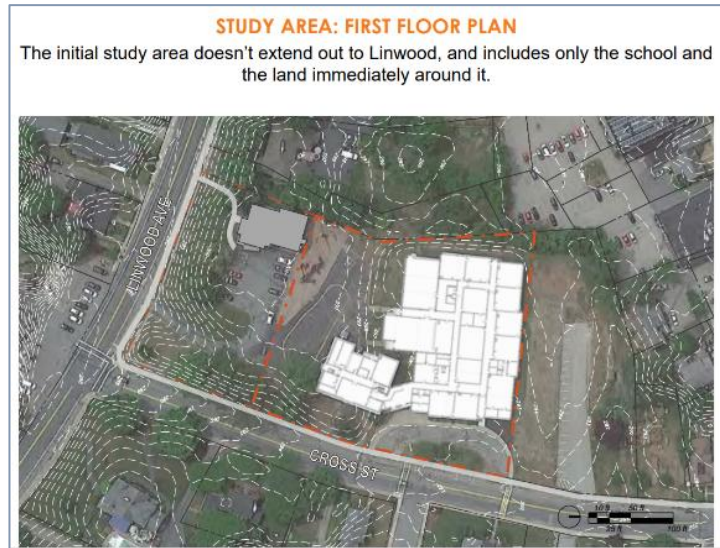
What:	The Town is conducting a feasibility study for the Millyard, and also actively researching potential uses for the former Mary Lane Hospital. There may also be sites in the future that will be impacted by the new Palmer rail station.
Who:	Town Manager, Director of Planning and Community Development
Budget:	Moderate to High cost
Timeline:	Medium to Long Term
Location:	n/a

Example: Northbridge Elementary School Reuse Feasibility Study, Northbridge, Massachusetts

The Northbridge Elementary School Reuse Feasibility Study was conducted in 2023. The Housing Production Plan for Northbridge recommended the site for housing, but the study evaluated numerous possibilities from partial demolition of the older sections to full demolition: [Northbridge Elementary School Reuse Feasibility Study](#).

In addition to hiring a consultant to prepare a study of the available sites, depending on available funding, the Town might consider the following steps:

- Elicit community input and support and show renderings.
- Build public-private partnerships.
- Prevent further potential structural and environmental degradation.
- Maintain a comprehensive inventory of pertinent information about the property.




Northbridge School Reuse Study

Some possible resources include a slide presentation from the Massachusetts Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit: [Mill Revitalization Projects](#). The document addresses the multiple steps involved and lays out several Massachusetts case studies. Below are two of the slides.

Building Community Support


- Show renderings.
- Prepare Pro Forma Studies.
- Ground truth vision.
- Encourage a mix of volunteers and professionals.
- Consider an Economic Development Investment Corporation (EDIC).



Smart Growth / Smart Energy Toolkit Mill Revitalization Districts

Case Study: Whitin Mill, Northbridge, MA The Buildings

- Five red brick buildings
- 36,500 square feet
- Manufacturing ranged from cotton to steel spinning rings



Smart Growth / Smart Energy Toolkit Mill Revitalization Districts

Pursue Developers for Currently Vacant Properties

What:	The Town can proactively seek developers for town-owned properties, once a feasibility study has been completed, and can also work with current owners of other properties that have significant potential.
Who:	Town Manager, Director of Planning and Community Development.
Budget:	Low Cost
Timeline:	Ongoing
Location:	N/A

The significant properties to address include:

- Millyard buildings
- Former Mary Lane Hospital building and site
- Former Country Bank building

For town-owned properties, developers can be sought through RFPs, while for privately owned sites, working with the current owner is the first step.

Guidelines: American Planning Association (APA) Policy Guide on Smart Growth

It may be helpful to take a step back and look at the Town as a whole when evaluating individual properties. What are the existing activities in each area? What is most needed, and where? What are some ideal uses for various available lots? The APA has many resources, of course, including this Smart Growth policy guide:

“The American Planning Association supports the development of mixed use, mixed income livable communities where people choose to live, work, and play because they are attractive and economical options rather than forced decisions...”

...Smart Growth is largely about retrofitting communities to offer more choices both in terms of housing types and prices but also in terms of transportation options. This approach to growth and planning can not only deliver dynamic attractive communities with greater choices for consumers but can be a powerful tool for farmland, open space and habitat preservation.” [APA Policy Guide on Smart Growth \(planning.org\)](https://www.planning.org/policyguide/)

Partner with Mill Owners to Develop Business Incubator

What:	Work with existing mill owners at the Millyard to develop the properties as active commercial and potentially residential locations.
Who:	Town Manager, Director of Planning and Community Development, Building Commissioner.
Budget:	Low Cost
Timeline:	Ongoing
Location:	Ware Millyard

Example: Orange Innovation Center

The Orange Innovation Center, LLC supports initiatives in job creation, entrepreneurship resources, artisanship and community. The Center was launched as a mixed-use destination 20 years ago, but occupancy really began to grow under its current owner, Jack Dunphy, who bought the complex in 2013 and has increased its tenant roster from 26 to 48. Businesses that locate at the Orange Innovation Center tend to be in the service industries, which bring in foot traffic - a nail salon, hair salon, gym, massage therapist, brewery, and café. However, there are also professional offices and some retail shops.

Sometimes businesses outgrow the space, like the North Quabbin Food Co-op, which incubated at the Innovation Center and then changed its name to Quabbin Harvest and moved into a building in



downtown Orange.

Jack Dunphy is owner of Dunphy Real Estate, and Brianna Drohen is the center's

Development Director. The building is 128,000 square feet on 3.47 acres along the Millers River and PanAm railway.

[Orange Innovation Center - Innovation Center, Business Center \(orange-innovation.com\)](http://orange-innovation.com)



Photo Courtesy BusinessWest - Brianna Drohen and Jack Dunphy

Example: 3 Ferry Street at One Ferry Project, Easthampton

Three Ferry Street is another one of the six buildings under redevelopment at the former ca. 1903 Hampton Mill site in Easthampton and is now primarily commercial with some live/work units. The overall mill complex, located at One Ferry Street, has been undergoing a \$90 million conversion to commercial and residential space since 2018. The six brick and concrete mill building at the corner of Ferry, Pleasant and Lovefield Streets in Easthampton and were abandoned for decades. In 2016 Mike Michon and One Industrial Lofts LLC began developing a plan to renovate the buildings, and in 2018, they worked with the City of Easthampton and Commonwealth of Massachusetts to develop grant funding to start the One Ferry Street project. One Industrial Lofts LLC supplied most of the capital and the revitalization work; the city created a District Improvement Finance Zone (DIF) to leverage local and federal tax incentives; and a MassWorks grant from the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development provided the seed money for the necessary infrastructure.

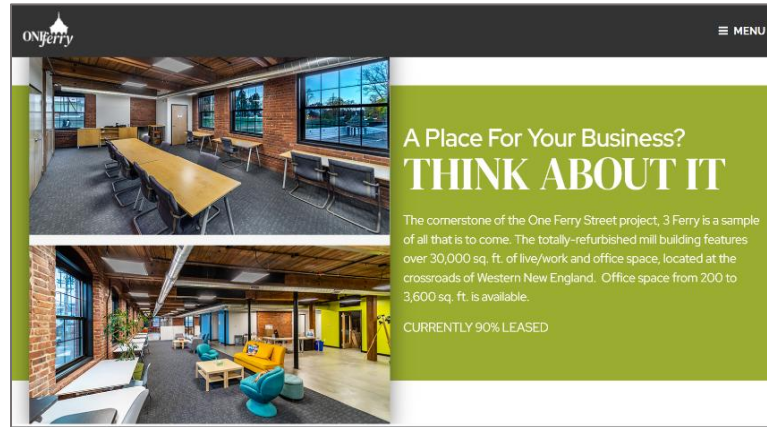


3 Ferry Street, Easthampton, from MassLive (during demolition) and [3 Ferry Street - One Ferry Project](#)

The ultimate buildout is planned to be a 310,000-square-foot project with 152 housing units, sixty of which would be affordable as "workforce housing." The city's work included design and construction of new sidewalks and pedestrian crossings; a Manhan Rail Trail crossing at Ferry Street; a parking area with electric vehicle chargers at Lovefield Street; retaining wall adjacent to the rail trail; improvements to the Lower Mill Pond; and a roundabout at the intersection of Lovefield, Pleasant and Ferry Streets.

Improvements included landscaping, plants, trees, benches, placement of utilities underground on Ferry Street and addition of street lighting in the project area, new pavement and curbing. The One Ferry Street Development project is about 25% complete.

Three Ferry Street is a mixed-use building that is fully leased for residential space and 90% leased for commercial space. The commercial space includes live/work studios and standard office space in a variety of sizes. The residential spaces are 1,500 square feet, with oversized windows and high ceilings. For more information, see: [3 Ferry Street - One Ferry Project](#).



3 Ferry Street, Easthampton, from [3 Ferry Street - One Ferry Project](#)

STRATEGY #5: Promote Ware as a Recreation Destination

- RATIONALE:** Ware is home to a wealth of remarkable outdoor recreational resources, including an interstate rail trail, the stunning Grenville Park, the Ware River, and the Quabbin Reservoir and the many trails around it.
- PURPOSE:** With outdoor recreation as a draw, visitors will partake of other offerings in the town, including food and beverage venues, arts, and culture.
- CURRENT STATUS:** While local residents are aware of the town’s natural resources, and the town may be a draw for regional communities, there is an opportunity to increase the visibility of Ware as a recreation community.
- OBJECTIVES:** Enhance, celebrate and promote outdoor activities in Ware.

The Town of Ware has an opportunity to promote its scenic natural beauty and outdoor recreational activities, including utilizing wheelchair-accessible trails, walking, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, birdwatching, fishing and boating. Grenville Park is a local jewel, with its 40+ acres along the Ware River, and it also provides athletic fields. The Ware River Rail Trail is part of the longer Massachusetts Central Rail Trail, and volunteers, local property owners, state government agencies and business partners in 25 communities are working to open up its entire length as a linear park. The goal is to encourage tourists and locals, bed & breakfast inns, cross-country skiers, bicyclists, hikers, joggers, babies in baby carriages and people in wheelchairs.¹⁸



Ware River Rail Trail (part of the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail)

¹⁸ [About | Massachusetts Central Rail Trail](#)

The Quabbin Reservoir and surrounding protected lands provide opportunities for hiking, bird-watching, fishing, and even limited boating.



Quabbin Reservoir: Photo courtesy MassDayTripping.com

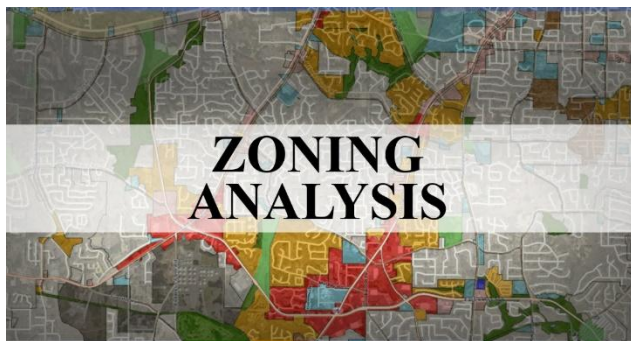
One step the Town could take is to establish an Open Space Committee, which currently does not exist, and update the Open Space and Recreation Plan. Additionally, the town website could promote these resources more vigorously.

STRATEGY #6: Review and Update the Zoning Bylaw to Support Economic Development

RATIONALE:	A community's regulations are one of the first stops for potential developers as well as entrepreneurial citizens. A straightforward, easy to understand, and development-friendly set of zoning bylaws will make the community more welcoming to economic activity.
PURPOSE:	To review and evaluate the town's zoning bylaws for their impact on economic development.
CURRENT STATUS:	The permitting and approval process could be streamlined, and the mixed-use zoning districts could be re-examined to be sure they are promoting the desired effect. In general, the zoning bylaw could be assessed for its ease of use and real-life impacts on development, potentially reducing requests for special permits, variances, and other time-consuming provisions.
OBJECTIVES:	Conduct a zoning review to evaluate the impact of the local bylaws on economic development in Ware.

A Town's zoning bylaws are a factor over which planners have the most influence. Examining the zoning bylaw can help to:

- Promote development of downtown retail and services;
- Integrate transit and real estate development, and build more housing within walking distance of transit stops;
- Accommodate options other than driving and car ownership and a shift toward transit, biking, and walking by supporting the development of compact, mixed-use communities;
- Promote community-serving retail development;



For the best results, stakeholders need to work together—including city leaders, community members and groups, real estate developers, and nonprofit organizations. Real estate developers are essential constituents and partners in efforts to enact zoning reform. Some experienced, well-resourced developers may be adept at navigating complex local bureaucracies and may see zoning regulations as fixed frameworks. But zoning

reform can make development easier and can broaden the spectrum of those who can participate in the development market, such as small-scale developers and people from underserved communities.

Advancing zoning reform can create more flexibility in the development process, potentially making projects less expensive and risky. Outdated zoning policies can make projects that aim to support in-demand types of development illegal or difficult, time intensive, and costly to complete. Outdated zoning

may make projects riskier for developers and investors, may lead to expensive legal bills, and may even stall or end projects. In contrast, zoning that advances local priorities and responds to market demand for healthier and more environmentally friendly projects allows more projects to be approved by right, making development application outcomes more certain.

Ware may wish to examine the regulations for its commercial and mixed use zoning districts, for example. In particular, the zoning along West Street and Palmer Road (Rt. 32) should be assessed.

Partners and Resources

Federal Partners

U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) within the U.S. Department of Commerce supports development in economically distressed areas of the United States by fostering job creation and attracting private investment. EDA has a number of grant programs that provide investments that support construction, design engineering, planning, technical assistance, and revolving loan fund projects under EDA's Public Works program and Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) program (which includes Assistance to Coal Communities, Nuclear Closure Communities, and Biomass Closure Communities). Other grant programs are developed periodically, as well. See the section on grant opportunities below for more details, as well as: [All Funding Opportunities | U.S. Economic Development Administration \(eda.gov\)](#). Projects must create jobs in a "distressed" area as defined by EDA (see guidelines at the Code of Federal Regulations: [EDA Economic Distress Criteria](#)). The project location may be in the distressed area or may provide jobs to workers in an adjacent area.

U.S. Small Business Administration – Massachusetts Office

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) provides loans, loan guarantees, contracts, counseling sessions and other forms of assistance to small businesses. SBA provides assistances primarily through four programmatic functions:

- Access to Capital (Business Financing)
- Entrepreneurial Development (Education, Information, Technical Assistance & Training)
- Government Contracting (Federal Procurement)
- Advocacy (Voice for Small Business)

The Massachusetts office provides help with SBA services including funding programs, counseling, federal contracting certifications, and disaster recovery. It can also connect to partner organizations, lenders, and other community groups that help small businesses succeed.

The Massachusetts District Office services the entire state of Massachusetts, with offices in Boston and Springfield. See [Massachusetts | U.S. Small Business Administration \(sba.gov\)](#)

State and Regional Partners

Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD)

The Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) assists companies with job creation and retention and promotes private investment throughout Massachusetts by facilitating access to a wide range of resources and incentive programs. To achieve its mission, MOBD works with other

governmental and quasi-governmental agencies, including municipalities, Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation, redevelopment organizations, and chambers of commerce.

MOBD serves as the umbrella organization for all business development activity on behalf of the state, offering expertise and services to small businesses and entrepreneurs, including permitting assistance, tax incentives, regulatory support, assistance with site selection and infrastructure support for businesses wishing to locate or expand in the Commonwealth, workforce training, and business consultation. MOBD has six regional offices (Greater Boston, Northeast, Southeast, Central, Merrimack Valley / MetroWest, and West), each of which is led by a regional director.

[Massachusetts Office of Business Development | Mass.gov](#)

MassDevelopment

MassDevelopment is the state's finance and development authority. It is both a lender and a developer that works with public- and private-sector clients to stimulate economic growth by eliminating blight, preparing key sites for development, creating jobs, and increasing the housing supply in Massachusetts. MassDevelopment provides technical assistance in Expedited Permitting (43D) and consulting services in planning and development to cities and towns.

MassDevelopment offers a wide range of finance programs and real estate development services that support public, private, commercial, industrial, residential, and nonprofit projects, including healthcare, educational, cultural, and human service providers. The staff works in collaboration with private- and public-sector developers, businesses, and banks to identify investors and leverage public and private funds to support economic growth.

<http://www.massdevelopment.com/>

Massachusetts Economic Development Council (MEDC)

The Massachusetts Economic Development Council (MEDC) is the state's professional organization of economic development practitioners. Its primary objective is the promotion and development of the state's economic welfare through economic and industrial development. The MEDC also provides professional development programs to its members.

<http://www.massedc.org/>

MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, Inc. (MHHCWB)

The MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, Inc. (MHHCWB), formerly the Regional Employment Board, Inc. is the region's primary planner and convener to address workforce development issues. Established by federal and state legislation, the MHHCWB is a business-led non-profit corporation that works in partnership with government, business, labor and education, and training providers to improve and implement workforce training. The agency coordinates, funds and oversees all of the region's

publicly funded worker training and job placement programs. It is also involved in researching local labor market demands and developing appropriate strategic alliances among employers and training vendors to meet those needs.

As part of this effort, MassHire has a One-Stop Career Center system that workers can access, via FutureWorks, Inc., dba MassHire Springfield Career Center, and Hampden County Career Center, Inc. dba MassHire Holyoke Career Center.

[MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board | Building A Better Workforce \(masshirehwcwb.com\)](https://masshirehwcwb.com)

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission has been the designated regional planning body for the Pioneer Valley region since the 1962 Massachusetts enabling legislation that created regional planning agencies throughout the state. The Commission serves the planning, policy, development, and service needs of the region's 43 cities and towns in Hampden and Hampshire Counties. PVPC is responsible for increasing communication, cooperation, and coordination among all levels of government as well as the private business and civic sectors in order to benefit the Pioneer Valley region and to improve its residents' quality of life.

Although PVPC is a public sector agency, it is not a direct arm of the federal or state governments. Rather, it is a consortium of local governments that have banded together under the provisions of state law to address problems and opportunities that are regional in scope. As a result, PVPC's planning area is designated as a special district under the provisions of state enabling legislation. PVPC is funded through modest annual assessments from its member communities, state and federal grant programs, fees for administering community development block grants, and matching funds.

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission also represents an Economic Development District designated by the Economic Development Administration, and it has a 501(c)(3) sister organization known as the Pioneer Valley Regional Ventures Center, which can receive grant and pass-through funding and manage projects designed to alleviate socioeconomic problems and assist business development in the Pioneer Valley Region of Western Massachusetts.

[PVPC | PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION](https://pvpc.org)

Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

The Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is the body which approves federally funded projects in Hampshire and Hampden counties. The MPO jointly develops, reviews, and endorses a Planning Works Program which includes a Unified Planning Works Program (UPWP); a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP); a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), as well as any transportation plan or program that may be required by federal and state laws and regulations. The MPO is a forum for cooperative transportation decision making and will seek and consider the advice of any interested party in the Pioneer Valley. The Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) meets monthly to discuss

transportation issues and makes recommendations on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), and Unified Planning Works Program (UPWP) endorsements to the MPO.

The MPO consists of ten members including: the Chairperson of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC); the Chairperson of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA); the Secretary of Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Highway Department (MHD) and six local representatives. These six representatives must each be an Elected Official from a given community. The full list of MPO members is in the resources section of the website.

[Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization](#)

Massachusetts Small Business Development Center (MSBDC)

the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center (MSBDC) is supported by the U.S. Small Business Administration but is focused on local issues and has several regional offices in Massachusetts, including a Western office. The agency provides free and confidential one-to-one business advice to prospective and existing small businesses. It also provides in-depth advising, training, and capital access. Services from the Western Massachusetts office are available to start-ups and existing businesses located in Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin counties. Areas of assistance include business plan development, pre-venture feasibility, conventional and non-conventional financing, cash flow analysis, organizational and personnel issues and marketing.

Training programs are offered for a nominal fee on a wide variety of management issues. Many programs are cosponsored with chambers of commerce, banks, local colleges and universities, community development organizations and trade associations.

The MSBDC has a state office in Amherst and several regional offices, including the Western Region office, which is located at the UMass Amherst Center at Springfield in Tower Square.

[Home](#) | [MSBDC Western Regional Office](#) | [UMass Amherst](#)

Regional Initiatives and Plans

Pioneer Valley Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

The Pioneer Valley CEDS is a strategy-driven five-year plan for regional economic development funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The plan is the result of a regional process designed to build capacity and consensus and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of our region. The CEDS was first developed in the late 1990s, when the Pioneer Valley region was initially designated as an Economic Development District.

The CEDS provides a vehicle for individuals, organizations, local governments, institutes of learning, and private industry to engage in a meaningful conversation and debate about what capacity building efforts would best serve economic development in the region. Following development of the CEDS, the region's partners lead efforts to implement its recommendations over the next five-year period and report back to the EDA on its progress. The plan may include projects that are eligible for EDA funding.

The new 2024-2029 CEDS will be released in the fall of 2024 and will be available at www.pvpc.org.

Valley Vision IV

The Valley Vision IV Land Use Plan Update for the Pioneer Valley lays out a detailed strategy to promote compact, mixed-use growth in and around urban, town, and village centers while protecting open space and natural resources outside the developed center. The purpose of Valley Vision IV is to create a more sustainable Pioneer Valley region by managing growth and development to reduce sprawl; support and strengthen urban and town centers; reduce vehicle miles traveled and the resulting air emissions; promote availability of affordable housing for all; reduce water pollution; and protect farmland, open space and natural resources.

Initially developed in 1997 and updated in 2007 and 2010, the latest 2013 update provides specific tools and actions to address land use equity issues and empower local governments to address environmental justice more effectively through land use planning and zoning. With the expanded passenger rail and bus service along the Knowledge Corridor (Connecticut River Valley communities in Massachusetts and Connecticut), there are also opportunities to identify and implement innovative strategies and actions that will encourage higher density, transit-oriented development in identified locations.

[Valley Vision 4: The Regional Land Use Plan for the Pioneer Valley | PVPC](#)

Climate Action and Clean Energy Plan

The purpose of the Climate Action and Clean Energy Plan is to promote greater understanding of the causes and consequences of climate change in the Pioneer Valley. The plan is intended to help the people of the region respond to climate-related changes in their communities by creating workable strategies for local and regional actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including greater use and production of clean and renewable energy, and protect their communities from climate-related damage.

[Climate Action and Clean Energy Plan | PVPC](#)

Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

The Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) outlines the direction of transportation planning and improvements for the Pioneer Valley through the year 2050. It provides the basis for state and federally funded transportation improvement projects and planning studies. Last published in 2024, the RTP is updated at least every four years and is endorsed by the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

[Regional Transportation Plan - PVPC](#)

[RTP Final Report and Individual Chapters – RTP 2024 \(pvpc.org\)](#)

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is a narrative description of the annual technical work program for a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3C) transportation planning process in the Pioneer Valley region. The UPWP provides an indication of regional long- and short-range transportation planning objectives, the manner in which these objectives will be achieved, the budget necessary to sustain the overall planning effort, and the sources of funding for each specific program element. Work tasks within the UPWP are reflective of issues and concerns originating from transportation agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. Many tasks are specifically targeted to implement provisions of federal legislation such as TEA-21, the CAAA, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

[Unified Planning Work Program \(UPWP\) – Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization \(pvpc.org\)](#)

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a requirement of the federal Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process as described in the Metropolitan Planning Final Rule 23 CFR 450 section 324. This regulation developed by the U.S. Department of Transportation defines the Transportation Improvement Program as “a staged, multiyear, intermodal program of transportation projects which is consistent with the metropolitan transportation plan.”

The Pioneer Valley TIP is a four-year schedule of priority highway, bridge, transit, and multimodal projects identified by year and location complete with funding source and cost. The TIP is developed annually and is available for amendment and adjustment at any time. Each program year of the TIP coincides with the Federal Fiscal Year calendar, October 1 through September 30. All TIPs and amendments are consistent with the goals and objectives of the Regional Transportation Plan for the Pioneer Valley region. This TIP is financially constrained.

[Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\) – Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization \(pvpc.org\)](#)

Pioneer Valley Regional Brownfields Plan

The purpose of the Pioneer Valley Regional Brownfield Plan is to facilitate assessment, cleanup, and redevelopment of contaminated and blighted properties in the region. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines a brownfield site as real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Thus, brownfields are sites with known or perceived contamination.

The Pioneer Valley Regional Brownfield Plan identifies 20 neighborhood scale Areas of Brownfield Interest (ABI) where brownfields are pervasive, and resources to address them are most needed. The plan provides an analysis of the disproportionate number of brownfields within low income and minority block groups and offers a series of strategies for each ABI relative to site-specific environmental assessment, cleanup and/or redevelopment planning.

[Pioneer Valley Regional Brownfields Plan | PVPC](#)

Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint

A Workforce Skills Cabinet was convened in 2017 in order to align the Executive Offices of Education, Labor and Workforce Development, and Housing and Economic Development toward a comprehensive economic growth agenda. The Cabinet was charged with creating and implementing a strategy to ensure that individuals can develop and continuously improve their skills and knowledge to meet the varying hiring needs of employers in the Commonwealth.

Working under the tenets of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Cabinet implemented a statewide regional planning process that resulted in the creation of the Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint. The Blueprint guides the work of regional partners to address talent gaps and needs.

[Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint | PVPC](#)

Loans, Grant Programs and Technical Assistance

U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) offers a variety of grant programs for areas and projects that meet specific criteria elaborated in the agency's Notices of Funding Opportunity.

EDA Planning Programs

Under the Planning program, EDA makes Partnership Planning, Short-Term Planning, and State Planning awards to eligible recipients to create and implement regional economic development plans designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region. More specifically, EDA makes Partnership Planning investments to designated planning organizations (i.e., District Organizations) serving EDA-designated Economic Development Districts to facilitate the development, implementation, revision, or replacement of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS). EDA also makes Short-Term and State Planning awards for economic development planning activities that guide the eventual creation and retention of high-quality jobs, particularly for the unemployed and underemployed in the most economically distressed regions.

The Pioneer Valley region that includes the 43 cities and towns of Hampden and Hampshire Counties has been designated an EDD by the Economic Development Administration, with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) as the District Organization. The Pioneer Valley EDD is eligible for this designation based on several areas of economic distress – mostly due to areas of poverty in Springfield and Holyoke. However, other individual census tracts in other communities may qualify for distress and could be eligible for EDA funding.

The PVPC has created a strategic regional economic blueprint, known as a [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) (CEDS), required by EDA as part of the EDD designation. A CEDS is the result of a regional planning process designed to guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region. It provides a coordinating mechanism for individuals, organizations, local governments, and private industry to engage in a meaningful conversation and debate about the economic direction of their region. The CEDS is revamped every five years; the most recent version will be available at www.pvpc.org in August 2024 or can be requested at the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission in Springfield, Massachusetts.

As part of the CEDS, the PVPC helps coordinate implementation of the strategies by collaborating with partners and assisting communities with their EDA grant applications.

EDA Local Technical Assistance Program

Under the Local Technical Assistance program, EDA makes awards to strengthen the capacity of local or state organizations, institutions of higher education, and other eligible entities to undertake and promote effective economic development programs through projects such as feasibility studies, impact analyses, disaster resiliency plans, and project planning. The purpose is to promote economic development and alleviate unemployment, underemployment, and outmigration in distressed regions.

EDA Public Works Program

EDA's Public Works program helps distressed communities revitalize, expand, and upgrade their physical infrastructure. This program enables communities to attract new industry, encourage business expansion, diversify local economies, generate local investment, and create or retain long-term jobs through land acquisition, development, and infrastructure improvement projects that establish or expand industrial or commercial enterprises. Public Works program investments help facilitate the transition of communities from being distressed to becoming competitive by developing key public infrastructure.

EDA Economic Adjustment Assistance Program

The [Economic Adjustment Assistance](#) (EAA) program is EDA's most flexible program; it provides a wide range of technical, planning, and public works and infrastructure assistance in regions experiencing adverse economic changes that may occur suddenly or over time. These adverse economic impacts may result from a steep decline in manufacturing employment following a plant closure, changing trade patterns, catastrophic natural disaster, a military base closure, or environmental changes and regulations. The EAA program can assist state and local entities in responding to a wide range of economic challenges through: (1) Strategy Grants to support the development, updating or refinement of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and (2) Implementation Grants to support the execution of activities identified in a CEDS, such as infrastructure improvements including site acquisition, site preparation, construction, rehabilitation and equipping of facilities.

Under EAA, EDA can also fund market and environmental studies, planning or construction grants, and capitalize or recapitalize [Revolving Loan Funds \(RLFs\)](#) to help provide small businesses with the capital they need to grow.

Also see the EDA website for a full list of EDA programs:

[EDA Program List | U.S. Economic Development Administration](#)

Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED)

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development (MA EOED) oversees a number of organizations and programs that provide assistance to municipalities, including the Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) and the Community One Stop for Growth.

The Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD)

The Massachusetts Office of Business Development assists businesses relocating to Massachusetts as well as businesses wishing to expand their current operations, with specific attention being paid to jobs created, jobs retained, and capital invested. The organization provides a central point of contact that facilitates access to resources, expertise, and incentive programs. One of the most useful programs at MOBD for municipalities is the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP), which is overseen by the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council.

The Economic Assistance Coordinating Council

The Massachusetts Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) is a state board comprised of public and private sector officials that review and approve Economic Development Incentive Program projects and tax credit incentives. The EACC also approves all local Tax Increment Financing and Special Tax Assessment agreements for municipal property tax relief. The EACC is part of the [Massachusetts Office of Business Development](#) (MOBD), which assists businesses expanding in and relocating to Massachusetts, with specific attention paid to projects that create and retain jobs and invest capital.

Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP)

The Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) is designed to foster job creation and stimulate business growth. A company that participates in EDIP may receive state tax credits and/or local property tax incentives in exchange for a commitment to new job creation, existing job retention, and private investment in the project. There are many factors and criteria that the EDIP Review Team and Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) will consider throughout the process, chief among them being whether a project is unlikely to move forward without state and local government support.

An [MOBD Regional Director](#) can help with the required state and municipal processes to apply for EDIP. It is preferable to contact MOBD early in the process as the regional director can help to pre-qualify a project, determine whether EDIP tax credits or a different program may be more appropriate, improve an application, and set realistic expectations. Regional directors also know program deadlines and nuances, eligibility requirements, and a city or town's historic use of EDIP.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is authorized by M.G.L. 40 § 59, Tax Increment Financing Agreements. A TIF Agreement is a local real estate property tax exemption negotiated and executed between a host municipality and an expanding or relocating company. The business must be making a significant private investment that increases the base assessed value of the property as the tax abatement is given only on the incremental increase in the property value. It may be associated with an EDIP Certified Project Application, but also may apply as solely as a Tax Increment Financing project

A TIF creates tax incentives for private entities, something that DIF does not do. TIF and DIF can be used together, and they have been in some communities. Forecasted revenues must take into account any reduced amounts resulting from the TIF, or any other tax reduction agreement. The DIF Statute does not set forth a formula or method of managing or negotiating a TIF within a DIF District. For more information, see [General Law - Part I, Title VII, Chapter 40, Section 59 \(malegislature.gov\)](http://malegislature.gov/General-Law-Part-I-Title-VII-Chapter-40-Section-59).

Massachusetts Vacant Storefronts Program (MVSP)

The purpose of the program is to help municipalities revitalize their downtowns and commercial areas. Municipalities may apply to the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) for certification to designate a defined downtown or other commercial area, as a Certified Vacant Storefront District. After achieving such a designation, and achieving a commitment of local matching funds, businesses or individuals may apply to the EACC for refundable EDIP tax credits for leasing and occupying a vacant storefront in that district. This subsequent application is to become a Certified Vacant Storefronts Project.

EOHED's Community One Stop for Growth

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Economic Development (MA EOED) also oversees the relatively new umbrella grant program, the Community One Stop for Growth. While the available grants include programs from three entities – the Executive Office of Economic Development, Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, and MassDevelopment – the One Stop for Growth program provides a single application portal and collaborative review process of grant programs on a specific Development Continuum. The Development Continuum represents the life cycle of a major community development endeavor, from the initial community visioning to design plans and final construction.

In the most recent round, 12 programs were administered through the Community One Stop for Growth. The Chapter 43D program has also been added to the One Stop, resulting in a total of 13 programs, listed below with the granting agency specified:

Executive Office of Economic Development One Stop Programs:

- [MassWorks Infrastructure Program](#) The MassWorks Infrastructure Program is a competitive grant program that provides the largest and most flexible source of capital funds to municipalities and other eligible public entities primarily for public infrastructure projects that support and accelerate housing production, spur private development, and create jobs throughout the Commonwealth.
- [Chapter 43D - Expedited Local Permitting](#) - This program creates an expedited permitting process at the local level that facilitates economic development and guarantees local permitting decisions within 180 days. The site may be zoned for commercial, industrial, residential or mixed-use purposes and must be approved by the state Interagency Permitting Board. This increases the visibility of a community and its target development site(s) and also makes the project site eligible for priority consideration for the MassWorks Infrastructure Program grants, brownfields remediation assistance, and other financing through quasi-public organizations.

- [Urban Agenda Grant Program](#) - The Urban Agenda grant program offers funding on a competitive basis to local partnerships in selected urban communities. The purpose is to implement projects that are based on creative collaborative work models that foster economic progress.
- [Massachusetts Downtown Initiative](#) This program offers a range of services and assistance to communities seeking help revitalizing their downtowns.
- [Rural Development Fund](#) This program funds capital projects exclusively for qualifying Rural and Small Towns, including the construction, modernization, or major repair of physical infrastructure; the acquisition of property or interests in property; the purchase of long-lived equipment; or feasibility, engineering or schematic designs for capital projects. For this program, rural and small towns are those with a population density of 500 persons per square mile and/or a total population less than 7,000 as of the 2020 US Census.

Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities One Stop Programs:

- [Housing Choice Grant Program](#) This is a competitive grant program open to designated Housing Choice Communities. Grants fund various improvements in those communities that have shown commitment to advancing sustainable housing production.
- [Community Planning Grant Program](#) Community Planning grants may be used for a variety of activities related to land use, including the development of a Master Plan, Housing Production Plan, Zoning Review and Updates, Urban Renewal Plan, Land Use Plan, Downtown Plan, Parking Management Plan, Feasibility Study, or Other Strategic Plan.
- [HousingWorks Infrastructure Program](#) This is a competitive grant program to municipalities and other public entities for a variety of infrastructure related activities to support and unlock housing opportunities.

MassDevelopment One Stop Programs:

- [Underutilized Properties Program](#) This new grant program, administered by MassDevelopment, funds projects that will improve, rehabilitate or redevelop blighted, abandoned, vacant or underutilized properties to achieve the public purposes of eliminating blight, increasing housing production, supporting economic development projects, increasing the number of commercial buildings accessible to persons with disabilities.
- [Site Readiness Program](#) The Site Readiness Program, administered by MassDevelopment, aims to increase the Commonwealth's inventory of large, well-located, project-ready sites; to accelerate private-sector investment in industrial and commercial projects; and to support the conversion of abandoned sites and obsolete facilities into clean, actively-used, tax-generating properties.
- [Brownfields](#) The Brownfields Redevelopment Fund finances the environmental assessment and remediation of brownfield sites in [Economically Distressed Areas \(EDAs\)](#) of the Commonwealth.

- [Collaborative Workspace Program](#) This program supports collaborative workspaces and makerspaces that encourage new business formation, job creation, and entrepreneurial activity in communities.
- [Real Estate Services Technical Assistance](#) MassDevelopment provides a full range of real estate services in communities across the Commonwealth.

Other Mass EOED Economic Development Programs and Grants for Municipalities

[Community Empowerment and Reinvestment Grant Program](#) - This program seeks proposals for projects and programming located within eligible communities that entail community-driven responses to community-defined economic opportunities, and that build leadership, collaboration, and capacity at the local level. The Administration recognizes that some communities face unique challenges, and that the path to success lies in tapping into and strengthening the unique local assets that they already possess.

[New Markets Tax Credit](#) - The New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) Program was created to stimulate investment in designated low-income communities.

[TDI Equity](#) - MassDevelopment uses its TDI Equity Investment Program to support properties with potential to spur transformative development in and around a TDI District.

[Regional Economic Development Organizations](#) - Working with the Office of Business Development, REDOs facilitate regional projects that grow businesses and the Massachusetts economy. Their successes attract new employers and foster existing businesses.

[Business Improvement Districts](#) - Business Improvement Districts (BID) are special assessment districts in which property owners vote to initiate, manage and finance supplemental services or enhancements above and beyond the baseline of services already provided by their local city or town governments. A special assessment, or common area fee, is levied only on property within the district. The assessments are collected and expended within the district for a range of services and/or programs, including marketing and public relations, capital improvements, public safety enhancements, and special events.

A BID creates a stable local management structure that provides a sustainable funding source for the revitalization and long-term maintenance of downtowns and city/town centers. The goal of a BID is to improve a specific commercial area by attracting customers, clients, shoppers and other businesses.

Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC)

In addition to the programs EOHLC offers under the One Stop program, there are at least two others that are pertinent to local economic development.

Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) Program

The Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing (UCH-TIF) Program is a statutory program authorizing cities and towns to promote housing and commercial development, including affordable housing, in commercial centers through tax increment financing. 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.

All Massachusetts cities and towns having designated commercial centers and a need for multi-unit housing are eligible. In order to participate in the program, a city or town must adopt a detailed urban center housing tax increment financing plan ("UCH-TIF Plan") for a designated area with high business or commercial use (the "UCH-TIF Zone"). [Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing Program](#)

Urban Renewal Program

EOHLC's Division of Community Services administers the Urban Renewal Program, including assisting municipalities which are establishing urban renewal agencies and providing technical assistance to prepare and implement Urban Renewal Plans. Any city or town in the Commonwealth may establish either a Redevelopment Authority under M.G.L. Chapter 121B, or Consolidated Community Development Departments under [M.G.L. Chapter 43C](#), and undertake urban renewal activities.

Urban renewal is a strategy for redeveloping and revitalizing substandard, decadent and blighted open areas for residential, commercial, industrial, business, governmental, recreational, educational, hospital or other uses. Under M.G.L. Chapter 121B, urban renewal agencies are authorized to take a range of actions to address disinvested and underutilized neighborhoods and substandard, decadent and blighted conditions in order to create the environment needed to promote sound growth and attract and support private investment in designated urban renewal areas.

An Urban Renewal Plan is a blueprint for decision-making and dictates the allocation of resources and public actions in support of actual redevelopment (e.g., new development, redevelopment of existing sites, expansion of existing uses, reconfiguration of land use, etc.). The Plan spells out the manner and means of renewing a defined area, detailing what will happen and why changes are being proposed for parcels in the project area, and stating what is expected of its partners in the project, e.g., private development interests. Once a Plan is approved, there can be use restrictions on some of the properties within the project boundaries. For more information, see: [Urban Renewal Program](#).

MassDevelopment

MassDevelopment is a quasi-public agency offering financing, real estate, and community development solutions for companies as well as cities and towns across Massachusetts. Some of the programs relevant for municipalities include:

Tax-Exempt Bonds

Exempt from federal taxes and in certain cases Massachusetts state taxes, tax-exempt bonds are usually the lowest interest rate option for real estate projects and new equipment purchases. Tax-exempt bonds can be sold in the capital markets or directly to a bank or another financial institution. Tax-exempt equipment financing can be structured as leases issued by MassDevelopment and purchased by financial institutions which engage in lease financing.

Projects eligible for tax-exempt financing include:

- 501(c)3 nonprofit real estate and equipment
- Affordable rental housing
- Assisted living and long-term care facilities
- Public infrastructure projects
- Manufacturing facilities and equipment
- Municipal and governmental projects
- Solid waste recovery and recycling projects

Infrastructure Financing

MassDevelopment offers three unique financing programs designed to support public infrastructure projects. The programs can be used independently or in combination, and they involve the establishment of an identified development/redevelopment district to finance infrastructure that will spur real estate development that may not otherwise occur. MassDevelopment can issue tax-exempt and taxable bonds for these projects.

The following projects can be financed using one or more of the three programs (described in detail below):

- Roadways and intersections
- Water and wastewater facilities and related lines
- Transportation facilities such as train stations, bus depots, etc.
- Seawalls, docks, wharves, bridges, culverts, and tunnels
- Streetscape, sidewalks, electric lines, and streetlights
- Parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities
- Parking garages

- Brownfield mitigation
- Site acquisition, demolition, and site pad development
- Soft and financing costs (engineering, architectural, etc.)
- Infrastructure financed can be located in or be supporting development in the district. It must be publicly owned upon completion. In certain circumstances, ownership can be via an easement or a lease.

Following are the three financing programs offered by MassDevelopment:

1) Infrastructure Investment Incentive Program (I-Cubed)

- Public-Private partnership to support approved development projects with major infrastructure needs in the range of \$5 million to \$50 million.
- Administered by the Secretary of Administration and Finance and the Commissioner of the Department of Revenue in partnership with MassDevelopment.
- Once development is complete, debt service is paid by the Commonwealth from new state tax revenue generated from job creation and other economic activity from the project.

2) District Improvement Financing (DIF)

- Known as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) in other states.
- Using new property tax revenues collected from a predefined geographic area to pay infrastructure project costs through a bond or pay-as-you-go.
- Incremental property taxes from new growth in a district used to create infrastructure investment.
- Bonds can be issued by the municipality or MassDevelopment on behalf of the district.
- Review [MassDevelopment DIF tools and resources](#) and [DIF-FAQs.pdf \(massdevelopment.com\)](#)

3) Local Infrastructure Development Program (23-L)

- Special assessment financing for infrastructure improvements.
- Landowners in benefited district pay bond debt service through special assessments on parcels that stay in place if the property is sold.
- Shifts burden for infrastructure to the private sector; landowner consent needed.
- Bonds can be issued by MassDevelopment on behalf of the district.

Other MassDevelopment Programs

These programs are offered by MassDevelopment through the Community One Stop for Growth grant application system, which is described in detail on the following page and can also be found at [Grant Programs - MassDevelopment](#).

- The Brownfields Redevelopment Fund finances the environmental assessment and remediation of brownfield sites.
- The Underutilized Properties Program funds projects that will improve, rehabilitate or redevelop blighted, abandoned, vacant or underutilized properties.
- The Site Readiness Program supports the conversion of abandoned sites and obsolete facilities into clean, actively-used, tax-generating properties and helps to create large, well-located, project-ready sites.
- The Collaborative Workspace Program supports collaborative workspaces and makerspaces that encourage new business formation, job creation, and entrepreneurial activity in communities.
- MassDevelopment provides a full range of Real Estate Services Technical Assistance in communities across the Commonwealth.