

A Community Plan for Monson Center Supplemental Chapter to the Monson Master Plan

Monson, Massachusetts
June 30, 2012



Prepared by

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
in partnership with the Town of Monson

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Acknowledgements

The creation of this Community Plan for Monson Center was truly a town-wide effort. Residents, members of volunteer boards and committees, elected officials, town staff and business representatives gave many hours to share their knowledge, insights and opinions. Their assistance is all the more deeply appreciated because it was offered during a year when there were many more civic issues to address than usual. Thank you.

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And all the residents who participated in community meetings and workshops throughout the year.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Table of Contents.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter Organization.....	2
Community Vision for Monson Center.....	5
Goals Expressed by Residents.....	5
Monson Center Local Context.....	7
Short-Term Conceptual Improvements for Monson Center.....	12
Conceptual Illustrations.....	14
Longer-Term Conceptual Improvements for Monson Center (5-20 years).....	27
Existing Downtown Environment.....	31
Overview.....	31
Traffic.....	31
Motor Vehicle Speeds.....	32
Crosswalks.....	32
Intersections.....	34
Curb-Cuts & Driveways.....	35
Parking.....	36
Zoning.....	37
Overview.....	37
Monson Center Zoning Districts.....	37
Nonconforming Lots, Uses and Structures.....	39
Dimensional Requirements Creating Nonconformities in CC and RV Districts.....	40
Commercial Zoning Districts in Monson Center.....	43
Residential Zoning Districts in Monson Center.....	46
Industrial Zoning Districts in Monson Center.....	48
Additional Zoning-related Issues.....	50
Recommended Actions.....	57
Recommended Actions—Community Vision.....	57
Recommended Actions—Downtown Physical Environment.....	57

Recommended Actions—Zoning and Regulations	58
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Appendices

1. Summary of Public Planning Process	62
2. Map of Monson Center Parcels Susceptible to Change.....	64
3. List and Map of Monson Center Parcels Susceptible to Change (CD-ROM and web only)	
4. Results of Online Residents Survey of Visual and Development Preferences (CD-ROM and web only)	
5. Monson Visioning Workshop Results September 14, 2011 (CD-ROM and web only)	
6. Draft Conceptual Improvements for Monson Center Presented to Residents May 30, 2012 (CD-ROM and web only)	
7. Additional Documents Related to Public Planning Process (CD-ROM and web only)	
8. Presentation from April 25, 2012 Community Workshop (CD-ROM and web only)	
9. Zoning Analysis Report (CD-ROM and web only)	

List of Figures

Figure 1: Community Vision for Monson Center	2
Figure 2: Monson Center Local Context	9
Figure 3: Existing and Desired Walking Routes in Monson Center	11
Figure 4: Short-Term Conceptual Improvements in Monson Center (1-5 years)	13
Figure 5: New Town Hall Site	15
Figure 6: Mid-downtown Public Plaza/Café (Adam’s Market example)	17
Figure 7: Central Commercial Town Square	19
Figure 8: New Residential Development Near Downtown	21
Figure 9: Summary of Conceptual Improvements.....	23
Figure 10: Monson Typical Streetscape Sections.....	25
Figure 11: Longer-Term Conceptual Improvements for Monson Center (5-20 years).....	29
Figure 12: Composite of Short- and Long-Term Conceptual Improvements for Monson Center	30
Figure 13: Monson Center Zoning Districts.....	38
Figure 14: Main Street: Zoning Conformity Analysis.....	41
Figure 15: Residential Uses in CC District.....	42
Figure 16: Split Lot Example: IND and RV Lots on State Street.....	54
Figure 17: Suggested Zoning Improvements Map	55

Introduction

“I dwell in possibility.”

-- *Emily Dickinson, daughter of Emily Norcross Dickinson of 14 Cushman Street, Monson*

This supplemental chapter to the Monson Master Plan was prepared during the year following the tornado of June 1, 2011 that struck Monson and eight other communities of Western and Central Massachusetts. Presented here are new ideas, concepts and possibilities expressed by the people of Monson for revitalizing their town center in response to one of the worst natural disasters ever in their community. Through the planning process, residents have embraced this unusual opportunity to re-examine their downtown and suggest how it can become a greater source of economic strength and community identity in the future.

The concepts presented were developed by residents and planners working together in community meetings; through interviews with town leaders and department heads; in conversations with elected and appointed committees; and through an online survey to which some 250 residents responded. The preparers of this plan have done their best to reflect and respect the ideas that so many people gave their time to share.

As concepts, these ideas are intended to advance the community conversation about the next steps for the town center. There are also additional specific recommendations that can be implemented quickly and at relatively low cost. This document is intended to help residents and decisionmakers build the momentum that is necessary to begin turning these ideas into realities. These concepts respond to the following major downtown needs and themes based on input from residents during the planning process:

- An enhanced site for the new Town Hall that is a welcoming gateway for people entering the downtown on Main Street and an accessible center for community gatherings.
- A recreational riverwalk along Chicopee Brook.
- Restoration of trees.
- More sidewalks, trails and bike paths that connect to each other.
- Better pedestrian accessibility to businesses, including improvements to sidewalks, crosswalks and street furniture (benches), and reduced conflicts with cars.
- Preservation of downtown’s historic character and visual appeal.
- Creation of new opportunities for larger public gathering spaces, such as a commercial town square in the mid-downtown area.

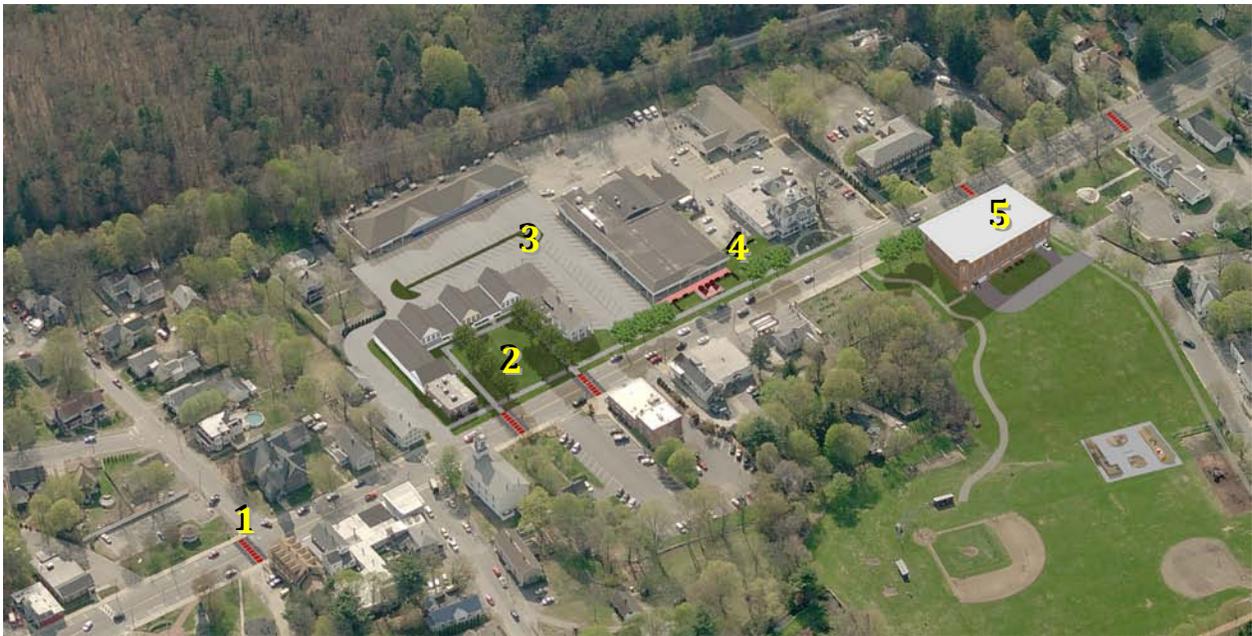
- Making greater use of Memorial Hall, possibly with enhancements to memorials and plaza area connecting with the House of Art and Rotary Gazebo.
- Building on existing economic strengths by focusing future business growth in established areas.
- Updating zoning to be consistent with residents' strong preferences for maintaining the existing look and feel of downtown.

Chapter Organization

Community Vision for Monson Center

This section describes the community's vision of short- and long-term conceptual improvements that could be made to downtown streets, pedestrian facilities, public spaces and recreation. Several of these are summarized in the illustration below.

Figure 1: Community Vision for Monson Center



From left to right: 1) Improved crosswalks; 2) A town square surrounded by commercial and mixed use buildings; 3) A “park once” shared lot for downtown businesses; 4) Street-front greenspaces, plazas and walkways; and 5) A new Town Hall site layout with the new building closer to the street. Also included but not visible is a recreational riverwalk along Chicopee Brook for which \$75,000 in state funds has been secured for design and environmental approvals, as well as residential redevelopment of the former Harper gymnasium site .

Existing Monson Center Environment

The plan includes a review of the town center physical environment and offers 21 specific recommendations to address concerns about traffic, motor vehicle speeding, crosswalk safety, problem intersections, curb cuts and driveways and parking. Field observation and review of prior studies suggests there is adequate parking supply in downtown, and that better sidewalks and parking lot improvements could help achieve a “park once” approach for the area to reduce vehicle trips. Other suggested improvements include: better signage; elimination of specific onstreet parking spaces in front of crosswalks for better visibility; an engineering study for the dangerous crosswalk at 216 Main Street; and colorful pavement treatments for crosswalks.



Concept for area in front of Memorial Hall where pavement treatment could help create a “Slow Traffic Zone” and connect with Rotary Gazebo.

Example crosswalk pavement treatment.

Zoning

The plan includes a detailed review of existing zoning and 36 targeted recommendations that would help ensure that redevelopment and new construction in Monson Center is consistent with the community’s vision for this area. Key recommendations include:

- Extend immediately the 2-year deadline for reconstruction of existing buildings to at least 3 years.
- Rezone the areas of the town center that are strongly residential in character from commercial to residential, thereby reducing permitting burdens on the large number of owners whose properties are currently nonconforming.
- Update zoning dimensional requirements so that future development is more compatible with the historic character and existing buildings in Monson Center.
- Establish a mill mixed use district to help encourage re-use of the vacant Zero Corp. and M&M Chemical mill buildings.
- Streamline the local permitting process by setting up an interdisciplinary town working group to resolve applicants’ questions before required hearings begin.

Summary and Status of Recommended Actions

This section of the plan is a matrix that conveniently summarizes the recommendations of previous sections and reports their status as of June 30, 2012.

Appendices are included with supplemental information and documentation of the planning process. Due to their length, most of the appendices are provided on the CD-ROM and web download versions of this report only.

Community Vision for Monson Center

When the people of Monson envision their future town center, they see a familiar place around which much of their community's life continues to revolve. The ideal Monson Center maintains its small town charm, but offers new community spaces, small business attractions, and recreational activities. New development fits in well with Monson's historic character. The mills are revived with a mix of residential and commercial uses. Downtown is a safe, lively and pleasant place to be all throughout the day—where residents can feel at home in their community.

The section presents illustrations and descriptions of the ideas for improving Monson Center that residents and community leaders expressed during the public outreach process for this supplemental chapter to the Master Plan. The public planning process involved multiple reviews and redrafting of concepts, and those that are presented in this chapter should still be considered “works in progress.”

Goals Expressed by Residents

Residents shared many ideas during the planning process. These have been summarized and grouped into the following six general goals. In addition, related goals for the town center from the 2004 Master Plan were incorporated. Also, findings from the physical assessment of the downtown (see Section 2) were incorporated, as well as the findings of the parcel susceptibility to change analysis (Appendix 2 and 3).

Goal 1: Redevelop the Town Hall site as an attractive and functional gateway to Monson Center.

Residents recognized that the reconstruction of Town Hall and restoration of the site on which it sits at State and Main Streets is a rare opportunity. Residents expressed the desire to use the redevelopment of the site as a way to create an attractive and welcoming gateway to downtown that is friendly for pedestrians and well integrated into the local sidewalk system. Many residents reacted positively to the idea of placing the new Town Hall close to the sidewalk for better pedestrian access. This would also create more open space to the side and rear of the building that could allow for community gatherings or recreation. A path along the side of the new building would strengthen the walking connection between downtown and Veterans Field, helping to increase overflow parking capacity.

Goal 2: Make downtown more welcoming for pedestrians.

Foremost among the ideas expressed for this goal was the need to replant trees lost as a result of the tornado. Additional ideas included: improvements to roads and sidewalk areas (i.e., wider sidewalks, better crosswalks, benches, gas lamp-style street lights); reducing motor vehicle speeds (to the 30 mph legal speed limit) through street design and

enforcement; and improving pedestrian safety at crosswalks and driveways where conflicts with cars tend to occur. Suggested improvements included wider sidewalks, repairs to those in disrepair, and on-street planters. Traffic safety at certain intersections was noted. Other suggestions included landscaping improvements and pedestrian amenities on private properties adjacent to the Main Street right-of-way, such as the parking area in the front of Adam's Market. Residents responded positively to the idea of working with property owners to eliminate curb cuts, create more shared driveways and eliminate parking in front of buildings. Also suggested were improvements to traffic flow to and within parking lots, especially at the Adam's Market/Rite Aid shared lot. Residents liked the idea of landscaping and walkways at this lot to help make conditions safer.

Goal 3: Encourage compact development that creates a lively downtown district.

Ideas expressed related to this goal include: supporting walkable, pedestrian-friendly development with good access to shopping, services and community activities; encouraging a mix of uses among the downtown and in the outlying neighborhoods to complement—and not overshadow—development in downtown; encourage residential development that increases the number of residents living within walking distance of downtown businesses; and promote redevelopment of the mills with a mix of housing and light commercial development. Residents expressed the desire for more economic activity in the town center, including more places to eat, socialize, and recreate.

Goal 4: Strengthen walking and bicycling connections to and within downtown.

Ideas related to this goal included: creating more useable pedestrian walkways between Main Street and Veterans Field and Cushman Field; developing new opportunities to walk and bike between downtown and popular open spaces; making it easier to get around downtown without a car; providing parking options for shoppers who want to “park once” and do their errands on foot; and establishing bicycle routes from Monson Center to Flynt Park, town schools, and the future bike path that is now being planned between Palmer and Hampden.

Goal 5: Create centrally located community gathering spaces.

Ideas related to this goal included: pursuing long-term opportunities to create one or more new (and larger) community gathering spaces, such as a town green or commercially oriented town square, near the mid-point of downtown. Residents were open to the idea of the town exploring different ownership and easement options with property owners to achieve this goal.

Goal 6: Establish a riverwalk along the Chicopee Brook.

This was one of the most popular ideas expressed during the planning process. Residents suggested using town-owned properties and easements on private properties (where appropriate) to establish a recreational pathway along the Chicopee Brook. An initial segment could be built from State Street south to the municipal property behind Memorial

Hall, with a future extension possible south to the former Zero Corp. mill complex. This project would likely involve restoring stream bank vegetation to improve and protect water quality and ecological functions; and installing amenities (e.g. resting areas, picnic tables, benches) along the brook.

Monson Center Local Context

Many of the ideas expressed in the six major goals above also involve parts of town and popular places that are outside the town center. Therefore, a contextual analysis of the town center's relationships to these areas and the goals was produced and is shown on Figure 1. The main themes from residents that are highlighted this contextual analysis include:

- Commercial and mixed-use developments concentrated within walkable distances of downtown.
- Improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- A riverwalk along Chicopee Brook.
- Supporting mixed uses in the neighborhood districts to the north and south of the town center.
- Mixed commercial and residential development at the Zero Corp Mill site to south of downtown.
- Concentrating new business and mixed-use developments in the downtown and neighborhood business districts and using infrastructure improvements to attract redevelopment and new projects.
- Encouraging residential development in neighborhoods that increases the number of people who live within walking distance of downtown.

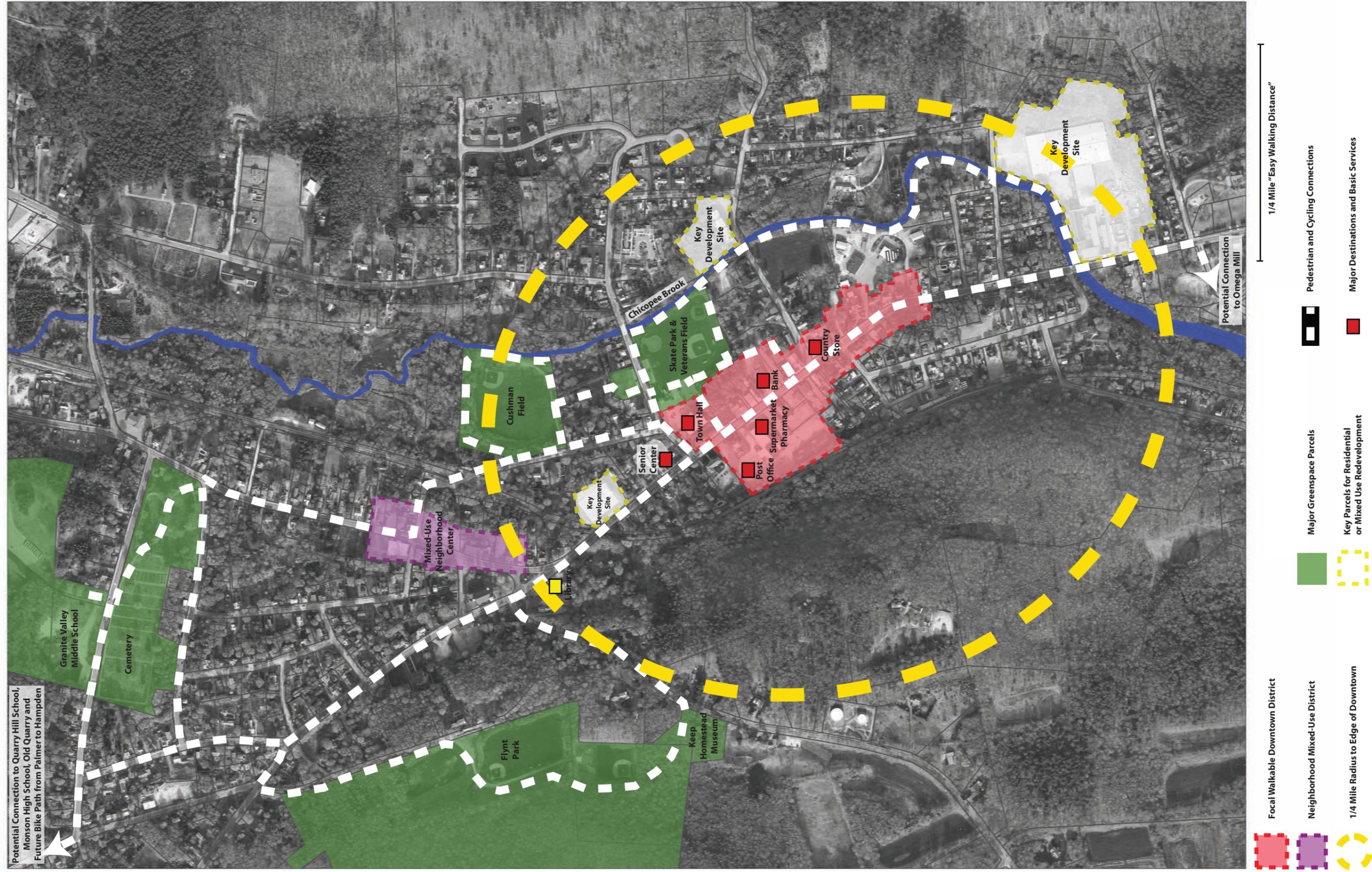
In many small towns and cities, residents who live within walking distance of the town center make a greater than average share of purchases at downtown businesses. Therefore, another strategy of this plan is to encourage more people to live near downtown by:

- Allowing flexible reuse of existing residential structures and new residential development that is consistent with existing neighborhoods.
- Encouraging multi-family residential development at key redevelopment sites (including the town's underutilized mill sites).

In terms of recreation, many residents expressed the wish for more sidewalk and pathway connections to help complete downtown walking loops, which are popular for lunchtime walks or evening strolls. Walking connections are illustrated on Figure. The key features are:

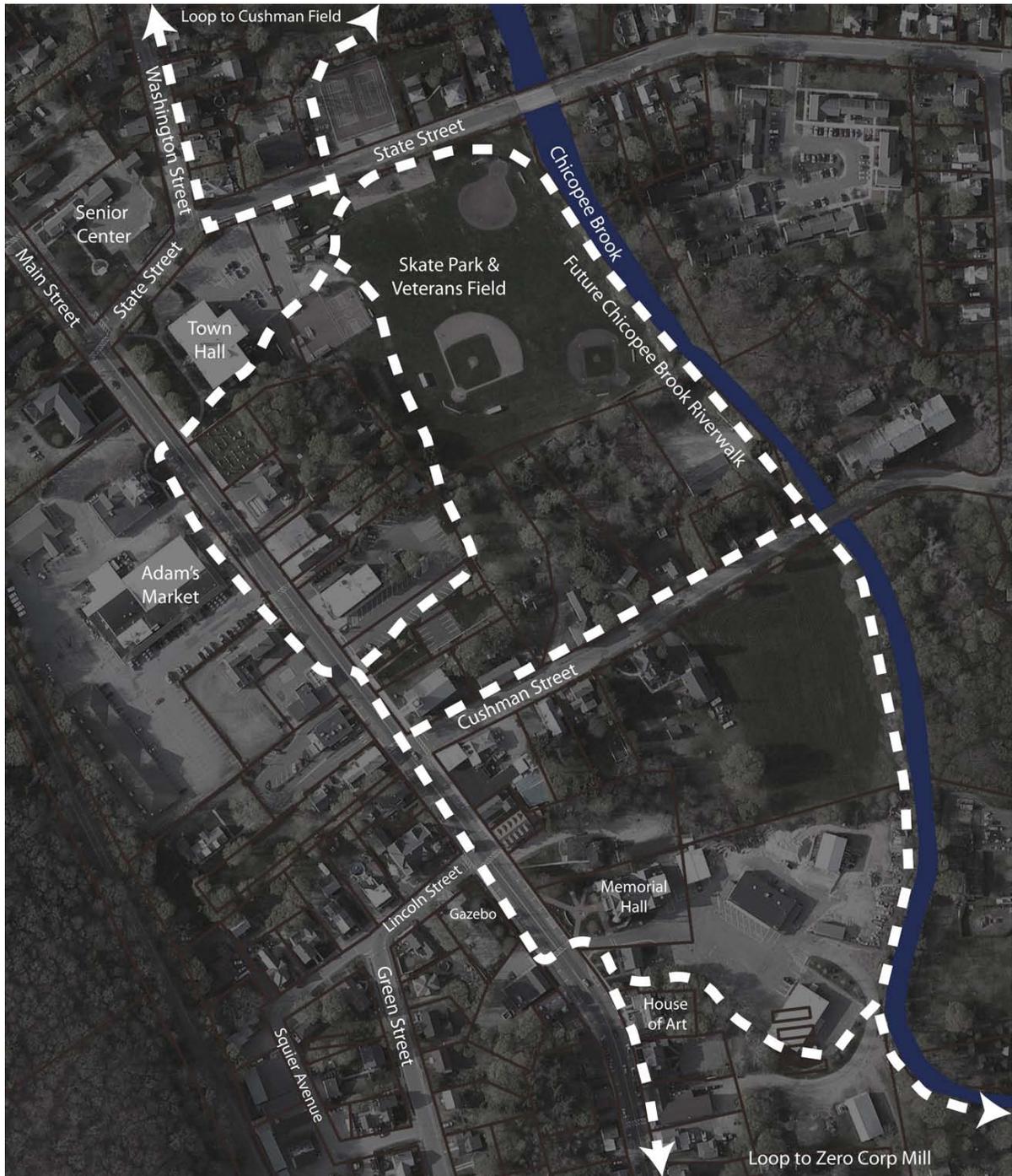
- Better connection to Omega Mill to the south of Monson Center.
- Better access to open spaces, including Flynt Park and the Hillside Cemetery.
- Better bicycling connections between downtown and the schools, and to the future planned bike path between Palmer and Hampden. Stronger connections can be created by sidewalk improvements, bike lanes and appropriate signage to establish routes and aid way-finding.

Figure 2: Monson Center Local Context



One of the major themes of residents' feedback on the local context analysis during community meetings was a desire to connect walking routes on sidewalks and trails within the town center area. Residents identified existing and potential loop routes that are popular for exercise and recreational walking. These are displayed on the following inset of downtown (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Existing and Desired Walking Routes in Monson Center

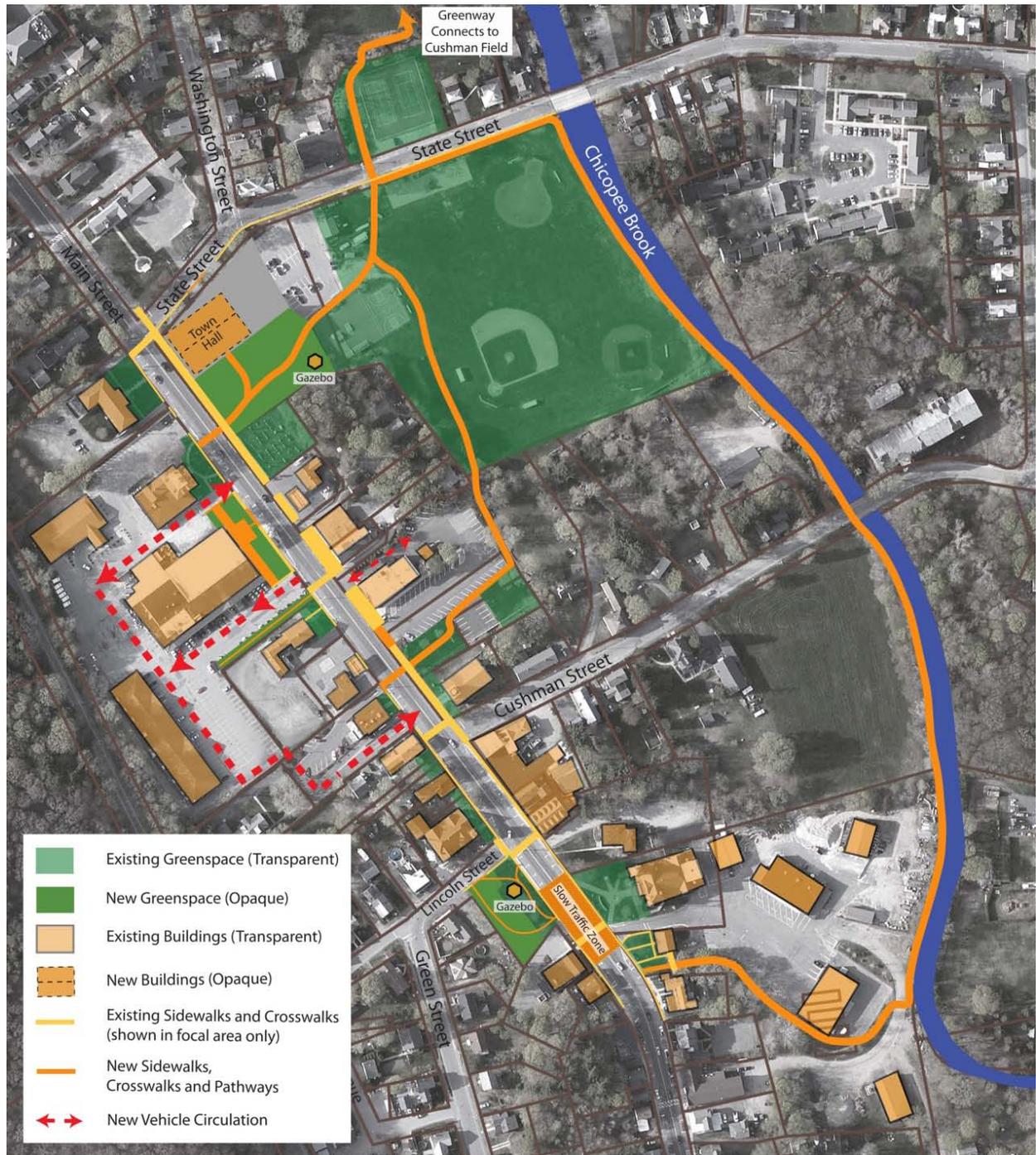


Short-Term Conceptual Improvements for Monson Center

Figure 3 describe the conceptual improvements for Monson Center that are planned or could take place in a relatively short-term timeframe of the next 1 to 5 years. The key elements, goals addressed and considerations for these short term concepts are summarized below.

Element	Goals Addressed	Considerations
New Town Hall site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create attractive gateway to downtown • Create pedestrian friendly streets • Improve walking connections to playing fields 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design of site and town hall anticipated in 1-2 years • Slope of site could allow parking to be tucked under building to create a secure area for police needs and reduce paved areas.
Chicopee Brook river walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreation desired along brook • Connections to playing fields and other pedestrian paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$75,000 in state planning funds secured for design and permitting • Requires coordination with minimal number of property owners and municipal Fire/DPW garage property for access near Memorial Hall
Pedestrian path from Main Street to Veterans Field at midpoint of downtown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better connections from Main Street to playing fields and Chicopee Brook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires coordination with Monson Savings Bank plans and other property owners
Remove curb cuts at Monson Savings Bank property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce curb cuts • Better traffic flow • Safer pedestrian conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires creating interior turnaround for drive- through banking clients and coordination with bank plans
Improvements at Rotary Gazebo park to connect with Memorial Hall and the House of Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide connection between Memorial Hall and Rotary Gazebo • Increase functionality of community area at gazebo for concerts, other uses • Create “slow traffic zone” between the Gazebo Park, Memorial Hall, House of Art and future Chicopee Brook Greenway access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could require removal/relocation of parking • May require redesign of park to create a more functional public space • Pavement surface treatment could achieve short term traffic-calming goal

Figure 4: Short-Term Conceptual Improvements in Monson Center (1-5 years)



Conceptual Illustrations

A series of illustrations to show street-level perspectives of the concepts in Figure 4 have been produced using photographs of existing downtown locations and computer visualization techniques. These illustrations are described below and presented on 11 x 17” fold-out sheets.

Figure	Goals Addressed
5. Future Town Hall and Downtown Gateway	This illustration shows potential relationships between a future Town Hall building, Main Street and Veterans Field. The location of the new Town Hall near the street would make entrances more accessible from the sidewalk. This would also encourage traffic calming by bringing the building’s exterior walls closer to the roadway. Parking would be located behind and beneath the building. There are opportunities to connect Main Street to Veterans Field via a pedestrian path, and this area could accommodate a bandstand or other structure for public gatherings.
6. New Outdoor Plaza/Café	Residents expressed interest in more opportunities for outdoor seating and dining in the mid-downtown area. This illustration shows how such a space might be created in front of Adam’s Market. The area includes a plaza area and walkways that would improve the site’s traffic flow and pedestrian friendliness. This would also address difficulties in entering and exiting the parking lot by car, as well as the desire for a safe walking path from the street to the parking lot in the rear area between Adams and Rite Aid.
7. Central Commercial Town Square	This illustration imagines how one a key parcel that is susceptible to change (see Appendix 2) in the mid-downtown area might be transformed into a commercial town square. The site’s current use as a gas station may not be its highest and best use in the future. In the years ahead, the site could be a focus of new commercial stores facing a New England-style town common. Such a development would serve the community goal of creating more community open spaces, but would be different from the existing gazebo or playing fields in that it would be larger, more centrally located and commercial in nature to complement the uses at other open spaces.
8. New Residential Development Near Downtown (former Harper Gym site)	This illustration shows how redevelopment of another key parcel that is likely to change in the near future could be pursued. For this area of Main Street just north of State Street entering the downtown, uses are primarily residential. A concept for a modest subdivision of homes that maintain the character of the neighborhood is shown. However, a zoning change would be required to build these homes because the property is currently in the CC District, which does not allow residential uses.
9. Summary of Conceptual Improvements	This aerial view summarizes several of the key recommendations of this chapter, including: enhanced crosswalk markings and pavement treatments; a commercial town square; a pedestrian plaza/café in the mid-downtown area; shared parking and improved traffic flow at the Adam’s Market/Rite Aid lot; and a pedestrian-friendly site for the new Town Hall.
10. Monson Typical Streetscape Sections	This illustration shows how existing streets and sidewalks in the mid-downtown area could be reconfigured to achieve some of the goals expressed in the Community Vision.

Figure 5: Future Town Hall and Downtown Gateway



Existing

- Town Hall is lower than Main Street. Grade change creates more difficult access from Main Street to Town Hall
- Parking occupies significant portion of site
- Veterans Field, skate park and tennis courts are hidden from Main Street

Strategies for Success

- Adopt goals for Town Hall in appropriate master plans and work with selected architects to implement these goals in Town Hall redevelopment plan



Possible Improvements

- Set Town Hall on street to signal entrance to downtown district, slow traffic, and improve pedestrian access to Town Hall
- Locate covered parking and Police Department entry below building, creating more open space. Include bicycle parking
- Create new community greenspace and pathway next to Town Hall. Strengthen connection from Main Street to downtown recreation amenities

Figure 6: New Outdoor Plazas and Cafes



Existing

- Underutilized parking lot in front of store
- Problems with traffic flow (it is difficult to exit lot, and entering lot backs up main vehicle entrance to Adams)
- Locating parking in front of downtown buildings orients development to cars instead of people and forces pedestrians to traverse parking lot to access buildings



Possible Improvements

- Create street life by transforming a parking lot into a pedestrian space and a place where people can eat outside
- Beautify downtown and make businesses more attractive by replacing asphalt with landscaping and trees
- Enhance Main Street as a place for pedestrians, with vehicles parked behind and to the side of buildings

Strategies for Success

- Adopt a Downtown Master Plan that describes desirable landscaping, parking and traffic flow improvements on private properties
- Work with private property owners and town officials (Highway Department, Fire Department, etc.) to implement desired improvements

Figure 7: Central Commercial Town Square



Existing: Gas Station, Curb Cuts and Parking Lots along Main Street



Possible Improvements: Town square with space for community events, farmer's market, and new shops around the green

Strategies for Success: Within the Downtown Master Plan, endorse a vision for a new, centrally located town square . Set aside sufficient public funds to purchase key parcels when they become available for sale. Purchase parcels and work with adjacent property owners to realize town square vision

Figure 8: New Residential Development Near Downtown



Existing

- Several key redevelopment parcels near downtown, including the old Mills and the vacant Harper Gymnasium Site



Harper Gymnasium Site After Tornado

Redevelopment Possibilities

- Encourage residential development that increases the number of residents who live within walking distance of downtown and support downtown businesses
- Ensure that new developments fit Monson's character



Harper Gymnasium Site Development Concept with approximately 15 small homes



Strategies for Success

- Adopt Downtown Master Plan goals and implement zoning amendments to obtain desirable redevelopment outcomes

Figure 9: Summary of Conceptual Improvements



Existing (Image Taken Prior to 2011 Tornado)

- Large number of curb cuts and parking lots
- Some underutilized parking and traffic flow issues
- Community desire for a walkable downtown district, outdoor eating spaces, landscaping and crosswalk improvements, a town common, and open space connections

Strategies for Success

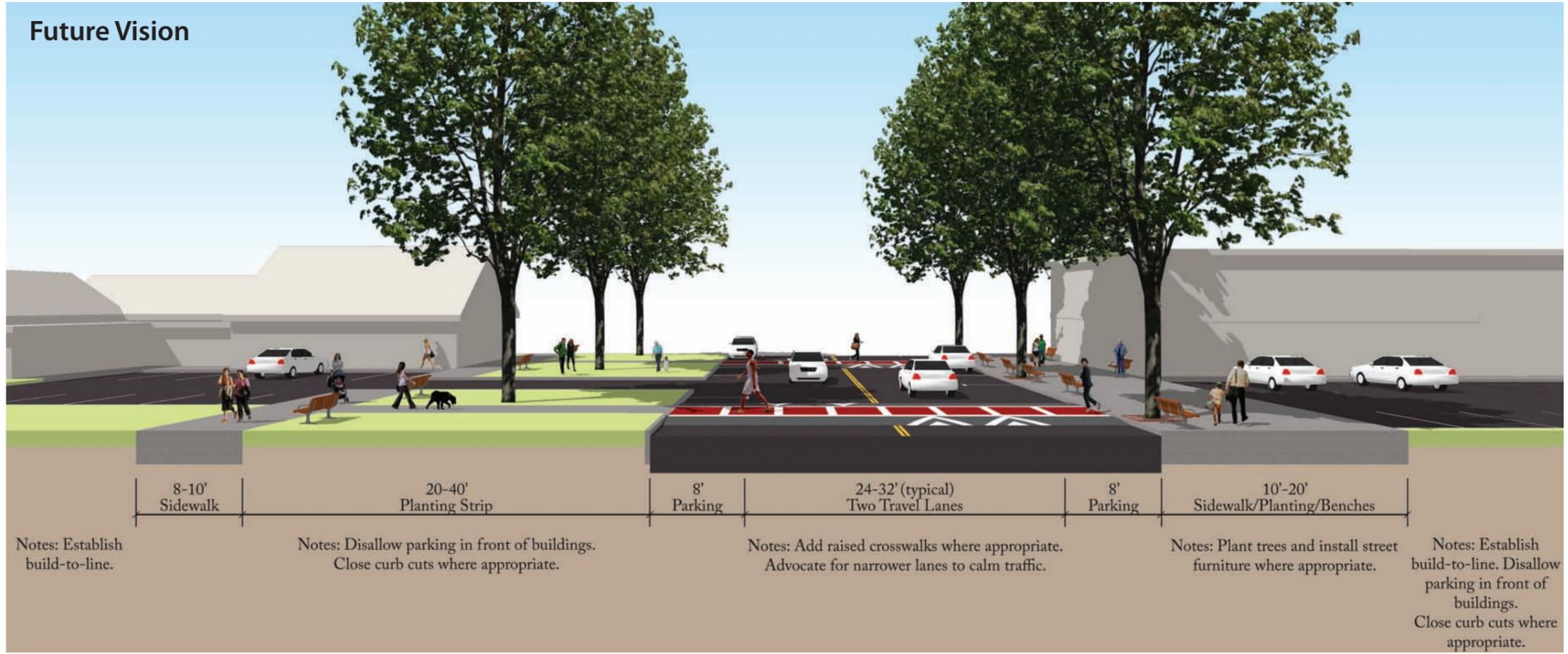
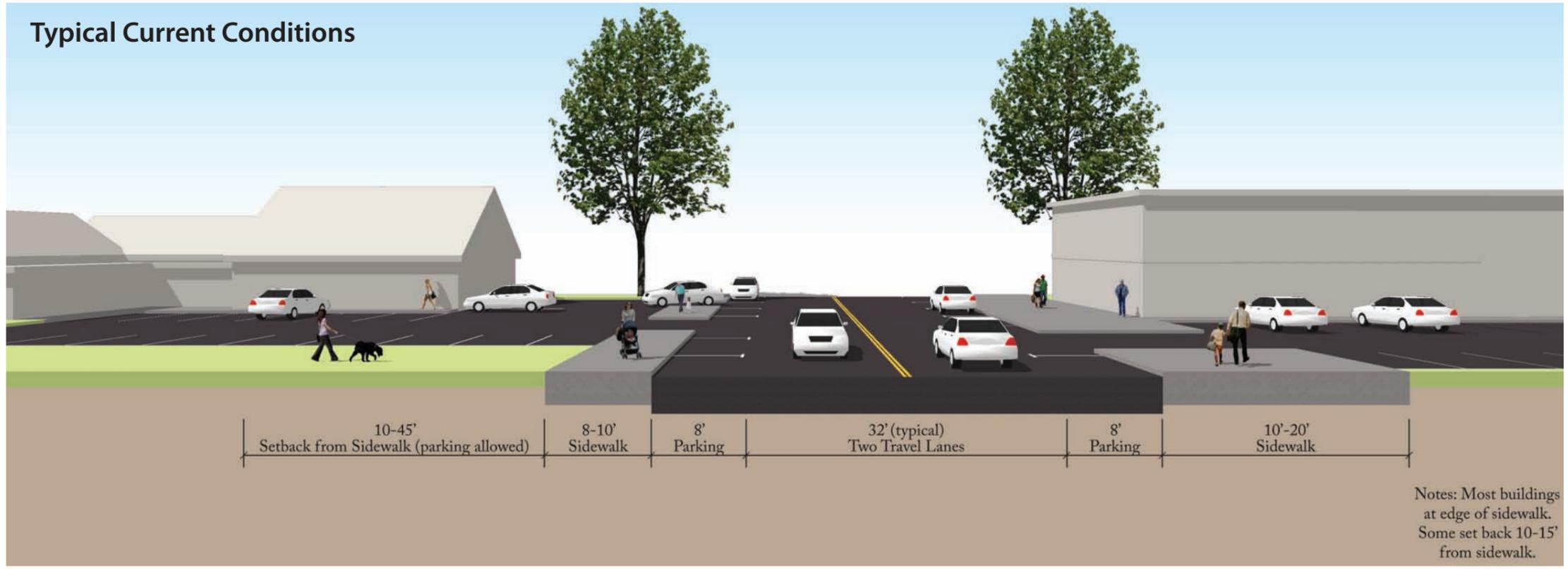
- Adopt a compelling and cohesive vision for Monson Center within the Downtown Master Plan
- Pursue multiple complementary strategies to achieve the community's downtown vision, including zoning amendments, infrastructure improvements, working with private property owners, planning downtown community events, etc.



Possible Improvements

1. Create a new, centrally located town square with greenspace surrounded by shops
2. Replace underutilized parking and excess curbcuts with landscaping and outdoor eating, improve crosswalk visibility, connect pedestrians to Veterans field, and create a Chicopee Brook Greenway
3. Set Town Hall at street to signal entrance to downtown, slow traffic and improve pedestrian access
4. Allow development that brings more residents within walking distance of downtown businesses

Figure 10: Monson Center Typical Streetscape Sections



Longer-Term Conceptual Improvements for Monson Center (5-20 years)

This section and Figure 11 describe conceptual improvements that could take place in a long-term timeframe of the next 5 to 20 years. The key elements, goals addressed and considerations of each are summarized below.

Element	Goals Addressed	Considerations
Reduce curb cuts on Main Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase pedestrian safety • Reduce motor vehicle conflicts with pedestrian and other vehicles • Enhance the appearance of storefronts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires coordination and planning with private property owners • Requires common driveways. Could be achieved with reconfigured and shared use of parking lots behind Main Street businesses
New development to create commercial and mixed-use space that reinforces downtown as a pedestrian friendly place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain historic character • Retain/grow small businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires updates to zoning and related regulations
Improve parking lot traffic flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase pedestrian safety • Create “park once” lot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires coordination with private property owners, Post Office, and Highway Department
Replace paved areas with green spaces in front of Main Street buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create pedestrian friendly downtown • Enhances storefront appearance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires coordination with private property owners.
Create continuous landscaped green space and walkway along the west side of Main Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate parking in front of businesses • Create more attractive store frontage and pedestrian areas • Encourage more walking • Traffic calming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires coordination with private property owners • Requires dedicated maintenance
Create a central Town Square	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates public gathering/meeting place • Concentrates additional commercial development in mid-downtown • Parcel is susceptible to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would encourage new commercial and shopping opportunities • Creates outdoor eating areas • Could be a commercial focal point • Could share existing parking lots • Would require acquisition of private property when available
Additional improvements at Gazebo/Memorial Hall area, such as raised crosswalk table, curb narrowing, bricked crosswalk textures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances traffic safety • Reduces vehicle speeds • Connects public areas and facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town-owned right of way on Main Street (1.6 miles in town center) gives greater discretion in decisions about roadway and sidewalk improvements

Element	Goals Addressed	Considerations
Relocated primary curb cut for municipal complex behind Memorial Hall to Park Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows better connection between public spaces • Creates a single connected space between Memorial Hall and the House of Art • Improves access to future river walk along Chicopee Brook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires significant planning to provide adequate ensure emergency vehicle access via Park Avenue • Could help reduce unwanted private parking in municipal lot
Extend Chicopee Brook river walk to former Zero Corp. Mill to the south	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend riverfront recreation to support mill redevelopment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires coordination with private property owners • Requires environmental permitting and additional design/construction costs
Additional traffic calming and infrastructure improvements, including street trees, decorative lighting, pavement treatments, other amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains historic character of downtown • Attracts pedestrian foot traffic to support new businesses • Restores trees lost in tornado 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree growth takes time • Funding for streetscape improvements and maintenance requires additional resources

Figure 11: Longer-Term Conceptual Improvements for Monson Center (5-20 years)

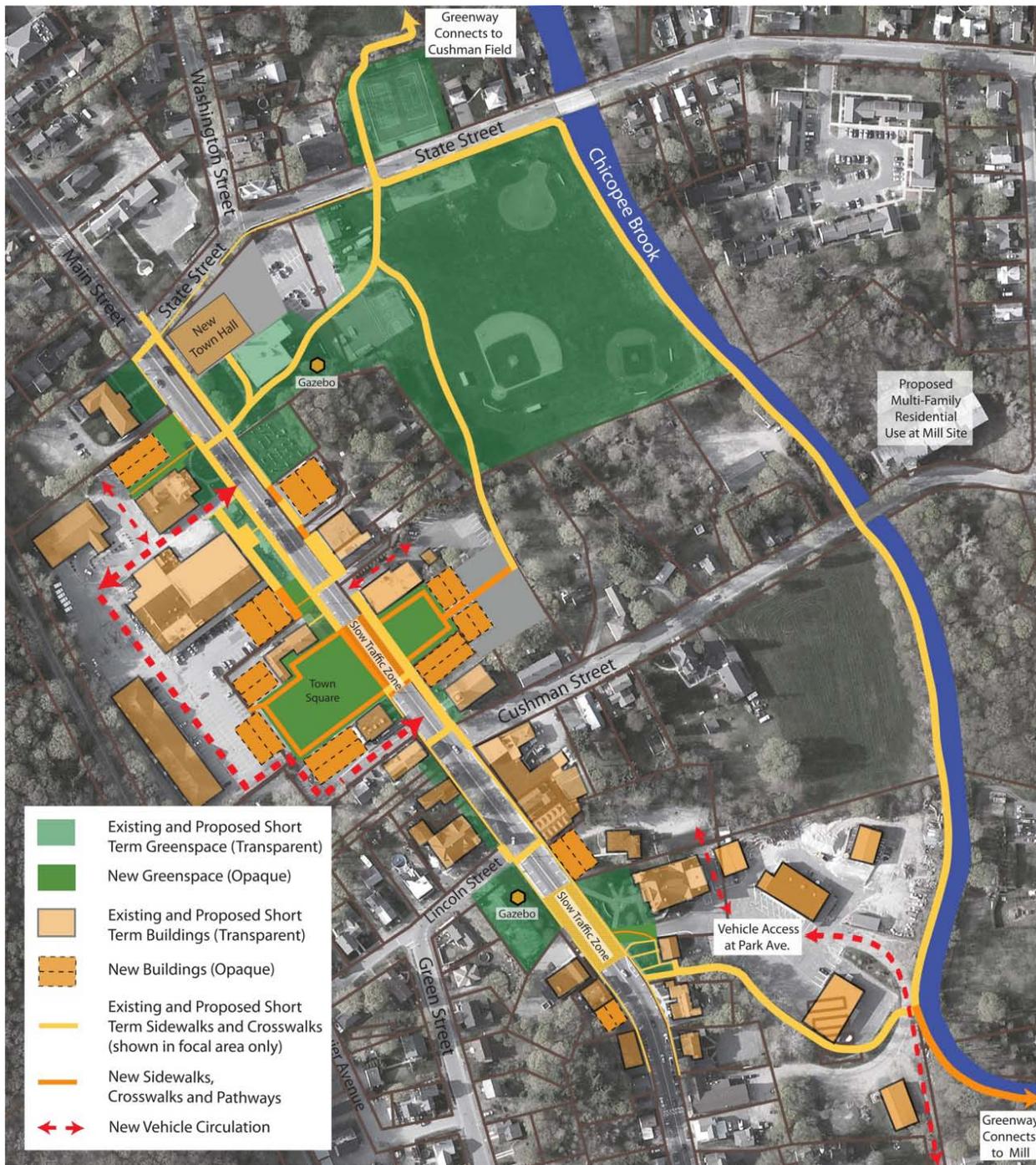


Figure 12: Composite of Short- and Long-Term Conceptual Improvements for Monson Center



Existing Downtown Environment

Overview

Monson Center is the “heart” of the Town of Monson. While the town as a whole is one of the largest in Massachusetts (45 square miles), Monson Center is relatively compact. Located within convenient walking distances of each other are the town’s major government, cultural, commercial, financial, recreational and religious buildings. There are many small locally owned and operated businesses and services, a full service local bank, two gas stations and several restaurants. It is also fortunate to have retained a small regional supermarket (Adam’s), and attracted a few national retailers and franchise operators (Rite Aid, Dunkin Donuts, Subway) in downtown.



Monson Center: Main Street at Cushman Street

The town center is surrounded by well-kept residential neighborhoods that are also within walking distance, and two historic mill buildings that are accessible to the south and east. In general, the community has done well in maintaining the historic character of the downtown, which is one of the key goals of the original 2004 Monson Master Plan. However, the economic downturn that began in 2008, coupled with the reconstruction and recovery effort in response to the tornado of June 1, 2011, have raised concerns about the types and intensity of new development and redevelopment that could occur Monson Center.

This section presents a review of the leading concerns about the physical environment of Monson Center raised by residents and stakeholders during the planning process, as well as recommendations for addressing these concerns. These are traffic, motor vehicle speeds, crosswalks, curb cuts and driveways, and parking.

Traffic

Many of the most frequently mentioned major concerns about the downtown environment were related to vehicular traffic and potential/actual conflicts with pedestrians. Main Street (Route 32) in Monson Center measures 1.6 miles long (from King Avenue in the south to Chestnut Street in the north) and is owned by the town. It is classified by MassDOT and USDOT as a “Rural Minor Arterial” road. This type of road typically links larger urban areas and large

traffic generators. They are designed and located to provide the service area with access to an arterial highway within a reasonable distance. As such, minor arterial roads such as Main Street are designed for, and are expected to accommodate, relatively high vehicle travel speeds with minimum of interference to through traffic. Therefore, while Route 32 is classified as one type of road (Rural Minor Arterial), it must actually provide both an arterial function and local access to the Main Street businesses.

Motor Vehicle Speeds

The posted speed limit for Main Street through Monson Center is 30 mph. Informal field observations conducted during peak daytime hours in April and May, 2011, found average travel speeds on Route 32 to be consistently above that, approximately 40 mph. There are relatively few speed control signs posted within downtown, so drivers may not be aware or reminded of the posted limit. Massachusetts Department of Transportation Average Daily Traffic Counts on Route 32 show a nearly 8% increase in Monson Center traffic flow from 2005 to 2009, rising from 8,800 to 9,500 vehicles per average weekday.

A contributing reason to concerns about vehicular speeds may be the fact that the vehicle travel lanes on Main Street are of a relatively generous width for a New England town. Main Street has a width of pavement of 54 feet at its widest point. In general, narrower rights of way tend to encourage slower travel speeds, and drivers tend to feel more comfortable driving faster on wider roads.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1:** *Increase the number and prominence of speed limit signs on Route 32 as it enters and passes through Monson Center.*
- 2.2:** *Add "Speed Checked by Radar" and/or other similar enforcement related signage at key locations.*
- 2.3** *Encourage slower travel speeds through downtown through roadway design techniques, including narrowing travel lanes to 12 feet, increasing sidewalk widths, maintaining on-street parking and landscaping improvements.*

Crosswalks

Pedestrian crosswalks were mentioned frequently by residents and stakeholders in discussions about the downtown environment. Field observations and interviews about crosswalks were conducted with city officials including the Police Chief, Fire Chief, and Highway Superintendent.



Main Street (54 ft curb to curb)

The following three locations were identified as priorities for improvement on Main Street, as they currently present significant safety issues.

106 Main Street (Senior Center) Many seniors were reported as choosing not to use this crosswalk, even though it is very convenient to the Senior Center. Although Main Street is not at its full 54 foot width at this location, vehicles headed southbound tend to move relatively fast. Driver visibility is somewhat limited by the descending curve as the road transitions from an area with less densely spaced structures into the commercial district. In addition to speed, site distances of and from the crosswalk are compromised in both directions by cars parked on the street near the crosswalk.

115 Main Street (Adam’s Market/Norcross House/Monson Savings Bank)

This crosswalk is located near the mid-point of Main Street (where the road is at its full 54 foot width) at the main entrance to Adam’s Hometown Market. This entrance is one of the largest curb-cuts (three lanes wide) and busiest in the entire town. Northbound traffic waiting to make a left-hand turn into the parking lot obstructs the view of pedestrians in the crosswalk. In addition, many drivers exiting the lot and turning right onto Main Street and attempting to break into the flow of traffic (which can be heavy) do not always stop for pedestrians in the crosswalk, as required. This is a very busy crosswalk linking two of the main commercial destinations in the downtown, Monson Savings Bank and the local supermarket. The wide right of way (54 feet) also creates a situation where pedestrians (especially senior citizens) may feel vulnerable when crossing the street, as must be watchful for oncoming vehicles for a the longer period of time that it takes to cross.

216 Main Street (Quarry Tavern/Salerno’s Ice Cream)

Several factors make this one of the most hazardous crosswalks in the downtown. First, the road narrows down from the wider right of way to the north, leaving barely enough width for two travel lanes. Second, traffic tends to be moving fast, as drivers have picked up speed along the wide straightaway on the approach traveling southbound out of Monson Center. Third, this crosswalk is often used by neighborhood children who frequent Salerno’s ice cream shop. On-street parking next to the crosswalk shortens the site distances for approaching traffic reducing the visibility of pedestrians entering the crosswalk and decreasing reaction time.



216 Main Street: Crosswalk obstructed by on-street parking

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.3** *Improve visibility of crosswalks and pedestrians by eliminating 1-2 on-street parking spaces immediately adjacent to the three crosswalks list above in the oncoming direction of traffic.*
- 2.4** *Improve signage at crosswalks and consider solar-powered pedestrian-activated alert flashers (not traffic signals).*
- 2.5** *Install textured pavement treatments in crosswalks to better identify and differentiate pedestrian crosswalks from the travel way.*
- 2.6** *Install raised crosswalks (“tables”) that create a slight change in elevation of the travel way. These structures improve safety by making the crosswalks and pedestrians more visible to oncoming traffic. They also are effective at reducing excessive speeds.*
- 2.7** *Construct curb extensions (“bump outs”) or pavement markings at crosswalk locations on wider sections of roadway. (In some cases, flower planters are used that can be removed for snow plowing.) These extensions shorten the distance of the crosswalk for pedestrians and narrow the travel lanes, which tend to reduce vehicular speeds.*
- 2.8** *Perform a traffic engineering study to investigate relocation of the 216 Main Street crosswalk at Quarry Tavern/Solerno’s.*

Intersections

At several key street intersections in Monson Center, the combination of on-street parking spaces and approaching grades of intersecting streets create insufficient site distances. The result is that it is difficult, and sometimes dangerous, for drivers to enter the flow of Main Street traffic side streets. In some cases, there are conflicts with crosswalks, which increase risks to pedestrians and bicyclists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.9** *State Street: Eliminate or reconfigure on-street parking space at southeast and northeast corner of intersection.*
- 2.10** *Cushman Street: Eliminate or reconfigure on-street parking space at northeast corner of intersection.*
- 2.11** *Lincoln Place: Eliminate or reconfigure on-street parking space at southwest corner of intersection.*

Curb-Cuts & Driveways

As is typical in commercial downtowns that have developed over time (especially prior to the introduction of motor vehicles), Monson Center is comprised of many small buildings on relatively small lots. To accommodate autos, these lots were often modified to have their own individual curb-cuts, driveways and on-site parking. However, multiple curb-cuts in close proximity to each other can create public safety issues.

Numerous individual curb-cuts can result in an increased number of traffic turning movements which disrupt traffic flow and create conflicts and confusion with vehicles exiting and entering Main Street traffic. Having numerous curb-cuts and driveways also increases the disruption of pedestrian flows on the sidewalks, interrupting walking and creating safety issues. In addition, the presence of on-street parking spaces located too close to curb-cuts reduces site distances for vehicles entering Main Street traffic.



141 Main Street: Undefined Curb-Cuts

RECOMMENDATIONS

Work with property and business owners to encourage the creation of common driveways to reduce the number of curb-cuts and turning movements at the following locations:

- 2.12** *Memorial Hall/Public Works/Fire Station: Eliminate 1-2 on-street parking spaces at northern corner.*
- 2.13** *Dunkin Donuts Drive-thru exit: Eliminate 1-2 on-street parking spaces at north corner. Combine curb-cut, driveway and traffic flow with abutting business/building to the south.*
- 2.14** *Monson Gas & Go Service Station: Better define/establish curb-cuts.*
- 2.15** *Monson Savings Bank parking lot: Eliminate on-street parking space at south corner and north corner.*
- 2.16** *Monson Savings Bank Drive-thru exit. Eliminate on-street parking space at south corner.*

Parking

The vehicle parking supply in Monson Center is made up of approximately 110 individual on-street spaces along Main Street and 300 off-street spaces at private lots. The largest of these lots are at the Adam's Market/Rite Aid shopping area, and at the Monson Savings Bank. Municipal lots also allow public parking at the police/fire complex and the gazebo lot; parking was also available at the former Town Hall. A study of Monson Center parking performed in 2006 found there is an adequate supply of parking in Monson Center, except for some special events.

All parking is free, with no time restrictions. Demand is generally light. Informal field observation during April and May 2012 found during most times of day, drivers have little or no trouble finding a spot to park relatively near their destination. Parking was cited as a concern on Sunday mornings near the local churches, as they have no off-street lots; during afternoon or evening ball games and other events at Veteran's Field; and when Town Meeting is held.

The front yard parking lot at Adam's Market was cited as difficult for drivers to safely access and exit, and many residents said they avoid the lot for these reasons. During field observations, this lot was closed to parking and was instead being used as a commercial display area for plants and garden products. The parking areas adjacent to the Post Office, Rite Aid and Adam's Market have multiple access points, narrow aisles and inadequate signage. Residents also said the lack of a walkway from Main Street to the parking area for Adam's Market and Rite Aid is one reason that more people do not park once and walk to their errands in downtown.

Parking at the Rotary Gazebo opposite Memorial Hall was cited as a concern. These parking spaces detract from the grassy area for public gatherings around the gazebo; however, the spaces generate revenue through leasing to tenants of nearby apartments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.17** *Perform a new parking inventory and utilization study of the town center parking supply at on-street public spaces and off-street private lots.*
- 2.18** *Use results of the parking study to develop shared parking and other improvements to the Adam's Market/Rite Aid/Post Office lot to encourage visitors to "park once."*
- 2.19** *Work with churches and neighbors to identify church-related parking concerns and opportunities to improve any significant concerns.*
- 2.20** *Work with Police, Fire, Parks & Recreation and other municipal departments to identify parking concerns related to events at Veterans and Cushman Fields and possible solutions, such as walking paths to Main Street, shared parking at the new Town Hall, and reconfiguring of fencing at the fields.*
- 2.21** *Work with owners of apartment buildings near 200 Main Street to identify alternative parking for tenants who now park at the gazebo lot.*

Zoning

Overview

The Monson Zoning Bylaw regulates the existing town center environment and provides a vision for how it will be developed in the future. One of the key goals of the 2004 Monson Master Plan is to “Maintain the existing scale and character of the downtown.” In the planning process for this supplemental chapter, residents and local officials again stressed their high value of the existing look and feel of their town center. Therefore, this section of the Community Plan examines how the Monson Zoning Bylaw can be updated to better achieve this goal, especially in areas that were damaged as a result of the tornado of June 1, 2011.

Monson Center Zoning Districts

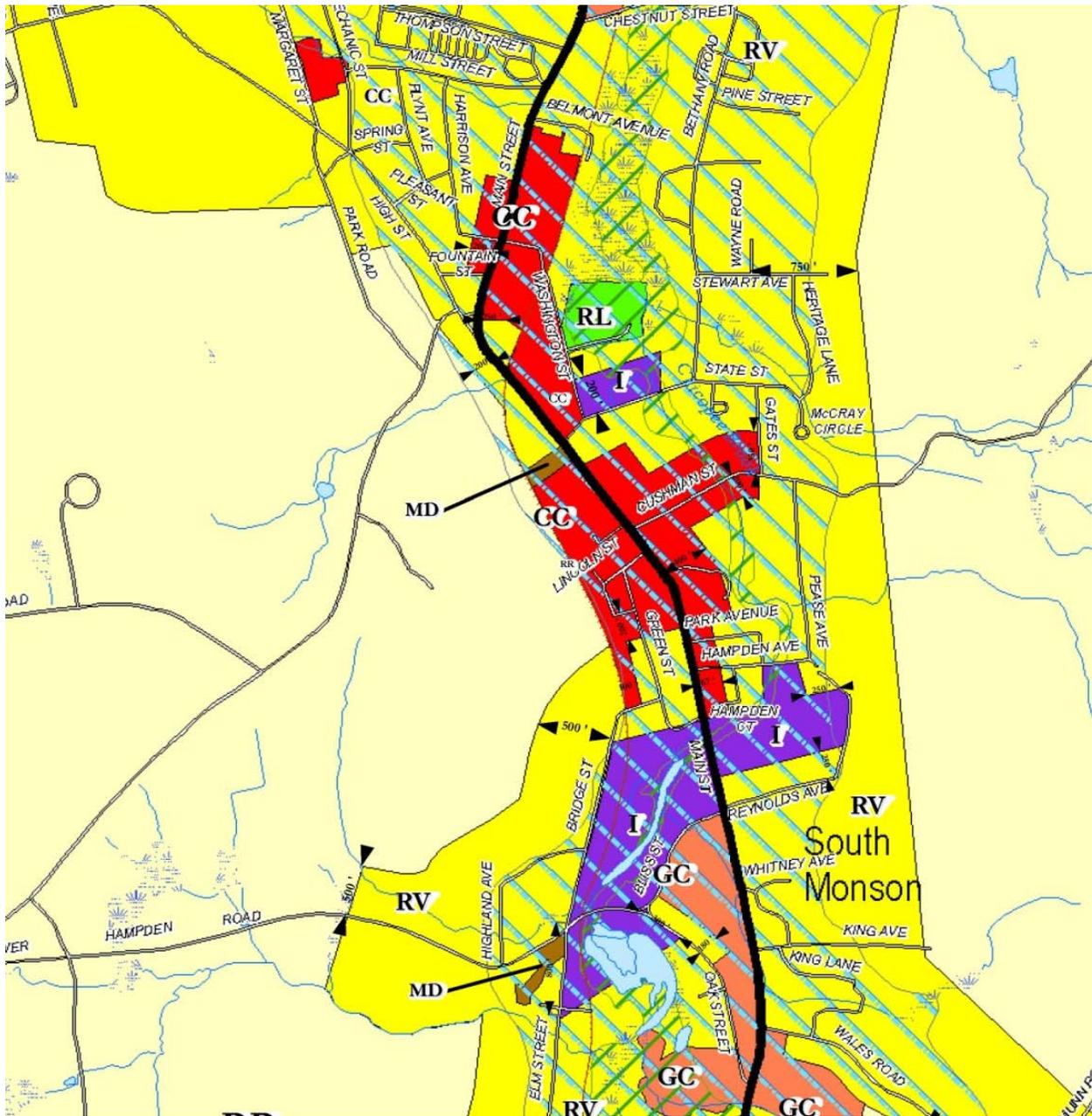
Some of the requirements of the Monson Zoning Bylaw, adopted in the early 1970s, do not reflect the scale and character of the downtown that residents say they value. In fact, Monson’s Zoning does not allow new buildings to be built that look like most of the ones that are already there!

Fortunately, Monson has already enacted two important recommendations of the Master Plan for Monson Center: 1) Limiting the size of individual developments, and 2) Establishing additional review procedures for large projects. But other zoning requirements, such as setbacks, lot coverage and building heights essentially prohibit the kind of traditional downtown development pattern that residents want. Figure 12 shows the locations of the four zoning districts that exist in Monson Center. They are:

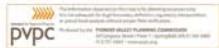
- Central Commercial District CC
- General Commercial District GC
- Village Residential District RV
- Industrial District IND

The CC District is the primary focus of the zoning discussion in the tornado recovery planning process because it is the largest district in the downtown area. At its present size, the CC District contains a considerable number of residential properties. Because residential uses are not allowed in the CC District as currently defined in the Monson Zoning Bylaw, homes that exist (and pre-existed) here do not conform with the single purpose nature of the CC District (business). This results in several hardships for property owners who may wish to improve, redevelop, or build new structures on their properties, both residential and business, because of the great uncertainty about the permitting process and/or extra requirements that must be met to simply continue use the property as it has been used for decades already.

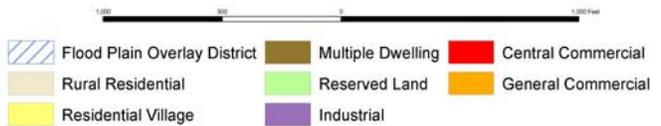
Figure 13: Monson Center Zoning Districts



Monson Downtown Zoning



Note: Due to the fact the data layers shown were created at different times and different scales, the zoning does not line up perfectly with the parcel boundaries. Both zoning and flood plain are subject field verification and update.



Town of Monson Zoning Bylaw 2009

Nonconforming Lots, Uses and Structures

In Monson Center, many properties do not conform to one or more requirements of the Zoning Bylaw in their respective districts. Typical reasons for these nonconformities include:

- Uses that are not permitted in the respective district.
- Lots that do not conform to minimum area and frontage standards.
- Structures that violate a front, side or rear yard setback.

A nonconforming property often poses significant difficulties and liabilities to the owner. State and local laws require that any change, extension or alteration of a nonconforming structure or use must first receive a special permit or variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) that finds the proposed change it is not substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing non-conformity. The general reason for this is to prevent incompatible uses on adjacent properties. A variance entails a much higher level of proof than a special permit or finding and requires that hardship to the applicant is created by a unique physical characteristic of the lot. Such approvals are intended to be granted sparingly. Where large setback requirements exist, the difficulty in satisfying this strict variance criteria may prevent otherwise reasonable expansions that would not adversely affect abutters.

But in the case of Monson Center, as is seen in many smaller New England towns, different uses can exist quite compatibly on adjacent lots—and even on the same lot. In fact, a mix of uses on a single property has been a traditional development pattern since Colonial times, when a family would typically operate a business on the first floor and live on the second. Today in Monson, like many other cities and towns in our region, some of the zoning standards adopted during the 1970s have resulted in a high proportion of nonconforming properties.

Recognizing that alterations and expansions of single family uses generally do not have profound impacts on abutters, the Monson Zoning Bylaw allows reconstruction or alteration of homes by virtue of a simple building permit, provided there is no increase in the nonconforming nature of the structure. If the proposed action would increase a nonconformity, then a special permit or finding from the ZBA is required.

Rebuilding Nonconforming Structures after a Natural Disaster

The Monson Zoning Bylaw has an exemption for nonconforming structures that are demolished or destroyed by a natural catastrophe. These structures may be rebuilt if: 1) Reconstruction commences within two years; and 2) The new building is on the same footprint as the original nonconforming structure and does not contain a greater volume of space. The destruction caused by the tornado of June 1, 2011 has led many property owners in Monson to invoke these provisions. However, the scope and severity of the recent devastation, as well as the slow pace of obtaining insurance and aid reimbursements for reconstruction, were perhaps not anticipated by the drafters of this section of the Zoning Bylaw. Currently, many property owners will have difficulty in completing their reconstructions by the two-year anniversary of the disaster (June 1, 2013).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enact two amendments immediately to the demolition and abandonment clause (cite) to help ensure residents can re-build their homes.

- 3.1 *Modify the clause to extend the time period permitting reconstruction, to at least three years. The intent is to aid owners who are still waiting to settle insurance claims, resolve complex legal issues, and address foreclosure or other consequences of the tornado.*
- 3.2 *Modify the building footprint clause to allow reconstruction in a location other than the original footprint. For example, the previous structure may have encroached on a setback, and the situation may be improved by moving the home to a new location. Rather than prohibiting a different location on the lot, which could improve the existing nonconformity, the Board of Appeals might allow siting the structure in a better location by Special Permit.*

Dimensional Requirements Creating Nonconformities in CC and RV Districts

To assess the desirability of existing zoning dimensional standards with respect to residents' preferences for the downtown environment, an analysis was performed comparing existing lots sizes and building placements to Monson's existing zoning requirements. The standards for the CC and RV Districts that make up most of the town center are shown below.

CC and RV Dimensional Standards

	CC	RV
Minimum Lot Size (sq. ft.)	15,000	20,000
Minimum Frontage	100'	125'
Minimum Front Yard	20' (a)	40'
Minimum Side Yard	10'	15'
Minimum Rear Yard	20'	40'
Maximum Building Coverage	50%	25%

Central Commercial District—CC

The analysis found that the majority of properties in the town center do not conform to zoning in at least one respect. In the CC District:

- 59% of the properties do not conform to the minimum lot size of 15,000 sq. ft.
- 68% of the properties do not conform to the minimum frontage of 100 ft.
- 65% of the properties do not meet the minimum front setback of 20 ft. 36 lots (33%) are set back 10 ft or less from the front lot line, and 15 lots have no front yard at all.

Altogether, 86% of properties in the CC District are dimensionally nonconforming.

Figure 14: Main Street: Zoning Conformity Analysis



An example of non-conforming lots in Monson Center. A red 'X' shows a nonconforming property. A green 'O' means the lot conforms to the Zoning Bylaw.

Residential Village District—RV

In the RV District, a similar situation exists. For properties zoned RV within ¼ mile of the CC District, the vast majority of lots do not conform to one or more dimensional standards.

- 61% of the properties do not conform to the minimum lot size of 20,000 sq. ft. for a single family home or 31,000 sq. ft. for a multi-family dwelling.
- 67% of the properties do not conform to the minimum frontage of 125 ft.
- 82% of the properties do not meet the minimum front setback of 40 ft.

Altogether, 93% of properties in the RV District within ¼ mile of the CC District are dimensionally nonconforming.

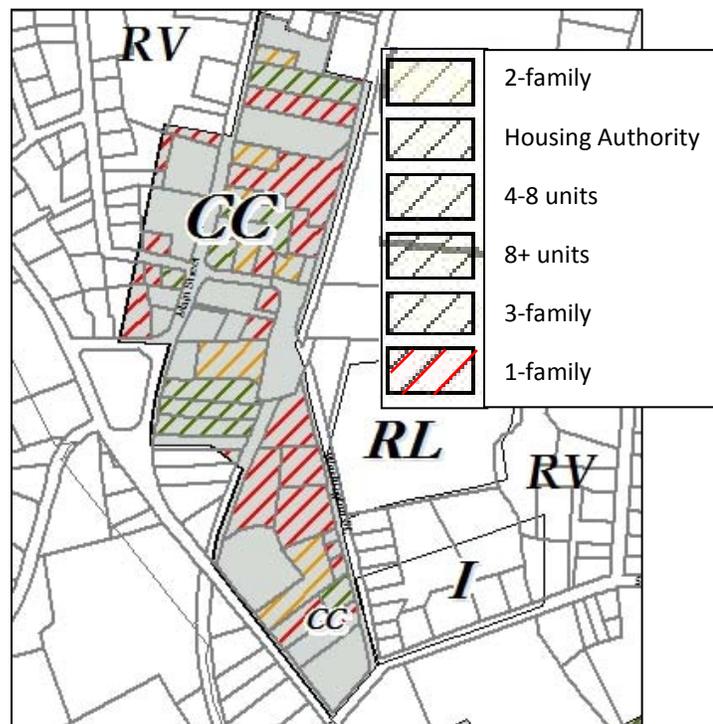


Examples of Lots in the RV District – Nonconforming in Area, Frontage, and Front Setback

Nonconforming Residential Lots in CC District

In addition to the dimensional nonconformity problems described in the previous section, the fact that residential properties are located in the CC District, which does not allow residential uses, is creating another significant nonconformity problem. By placing homes in the CC District, the current Monson Zoning Bylaw is actually encouraging the conversion of homes to commercial uses. In certain locations, this may be desirable. However, several portions of the CC District are strongly residential in character and have been so for generations—and residents have expressed the wish that they stay that way. Homes have long been an integral part of downtown Monson, enriching the center with vitality and economic stability. Below are the types of residential uses that exist in the CC District today.

Figure 15: Residential Uses in CC District



The 2004 Master Plan recommended addressing this use nonconformity issue (p. 77). Doing so could remove some commercial opportunities (though existing uses would be allowed to continue as nonconforming). But rezoning to RV would allow the vast majority of residential properties within the town center to be compatible with their current and anticipated future use. While this would render some commercial sites in the future RV District as nonconforming, variances could be obtained, as they must be for residential uses in the CC District today.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.3 *Re-zone locations that are now predominantly residential in character to RV. See Figure 17: Suggested Monson Center Zoning Improvements.*

Commercial Zoning Districts in Monson Center

Monson has two commercial districts that are designed to address two distinct needs.

General Commercial (GC) District

The GC District regulates commercial development in Monson's highway corridors (primarily Route 32) to promote responsible development with a focus on automobile access in stand-alone retail plazas or office buildings surrounded by large areas of pavement for customer parking. Small GC districts also exist on the outskirts of Monson Center and also have a highway-oriented look—a much different character than the Town Center. Much of the development in these districts predated the adoption of zoning. In the future, the redevelopment of older commercial properties will present important opportunities to dramatically improve their appearance and operation. The GC District is not addressed in this downtown zoning analysis.

Central Commercial (CC) District

The Central Commercial (CC) district encompasses the commercial core of the downtown and some adjacent residential neighborhoods. A wide variety of uses are permitted by-right (that is, without a special permit or variance): retail, office and service uses. All commercial structures in the CC District must undergo a site plan review and meet commercial design requirements administered by the Planning Board.

Shared or mixed residential and commercial uses (commercial on first floor, residential on upper stories) are allowed in the CC District with a special permit from the ZBA. There are currently 14 such permitted properties. These are typically larger, older homes with professional offices or boutique-style retail shops on the first floor. Many residents noted that these properties lend a distinctive and desirable ambience to the town center.

The Monson Zoning Bylaw allows the ZBA to relax zoning provisions for applicants seeking to improve existing nonconforming residential structures to overcome constraints like small lot sizes and a high proportion of lot coverage by buildings. Similar flexibility could be a benefit in residential properties in the CC District to encourage first floor commercial uses in existing large residential buildings on Main Street.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.4 Allow ZBA to relax zoning provisions for nonconforming residential structures, to overcome constraints like small lot sizes and building coverage, to allow greater flexibility to encourage first floor commercial uses in existing larger residential buildings.*

In the CC District, some institutional uses—such as public library, museum, parks and playgrounds, and art gallery—require a special permit. However, these uses clearly belong in the town center and are generally allowed by-right in most municipalities, typically with varying dimensional requirements that are subject to Planning Board site plan approval. However, automobile dealers should be prohibited in the town center, as these require large lots with long frontage, extensive

parking areas, and single story buildings that are out-of-character with most buildings in downtown.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.5** *Allow some institutional uses (i.e., public library, museum, parks and playgrounds, museum, art gallery) by right with site plan approval.*
- 3.6** *Update CC Uses Table to better differentiate from highway business area (i.e., prohibit new car sales establishments).*

Mixed-Uses in CC District

Other parts of the downtown that are largely residential may offer opportunities for new commercial growth and should remain in the CC District. In the case of nonconforming uses, owners may continue to live there, but market forces may act to encourage conversion to commercial uses, thereby strengthening the economic base. The Monson Zoning Bylaw currently allows mixed use properties in the CC district. Without significantly altering the appearance of older homes, the first floor may be restricted to shops and offices, with living areas retained on upper floors. First floor commercial uses would extend and enhance the commercial core with viable businesses, while the residences on upper floors will offer an lower-cost housing option for people who want to live near local shops and restaurants in an active downtown.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.7** *Add the Mixed Use provision as a new line in the Schedule of Use Regulations, and modify Section 6.13 to allow flexibility for adding commercial components in older homes in the CC district.*
- 3.8** *Require residential uses in CC to be in upper stories or in the rear of larger buildings if sufficient space exists to accommodate new units. Avoid new first floor residential uses with access on Main Street.*

Development patterns in Monson Center were set long before zoning was adopted. Indeed, if today's CC District dimensions had applied during the 1800s and early 1900s, few of us would recognize downtown. Part of the town center's charm that it does not look like a typical commercial corridor. Instead, buildings accommodate the quirks of their lots. There is a pedestrian scale to the relationships between buildings and streets. This gives Monson Center personality.



Typical Building Placement in the CC District

Residents expressed the strong preference that any changes to zoning should encourage new building to replicate the existing style of development. Some of the key characteristics that contribute to the desirability of Monson Center include:

- Most buildings are taller than one-story and have varied roof lines.
- Front setbacks are relatively shallow. Most building facades are directly on the sidewalk or within 10-15 feet of the sidewalk.
- Short-term convenience parking is located on the street, and long-term parking lots are located behind buildings, helping to reduce large expanses of asphalt in front of businesses.

In view of the community preferences expressed during the planning process, several key modifications to the CC District's zoning standards would help achieve the desired existing look and feel of the town center, as well as helping to reduce zoning nonconformities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.9** *In the CC District: Reduce the minimum lot size in the district to 5,000 or 10,000 square feet to lessen the number of nonconforming lots.*
- 3.10** *In the CC District: Require a minimum building height of two stories to maintain a height rhythm and sense of enclosure along Main St.*
- 3.11** *In the CC District: Prohibit on-site parking lots in front of buildings.*
- 3.12** *In the CC District: Change the 20 foot minimum front setback to a 20 foot maximum front setback. Rather than disconnecting the building from the street, a maximum setback brings buildings closer to the street for pedestrian convenience and maintains a consistent building wall along the street. Owners could still opt for a small setback with landscaped plantings and street furniture to enhance visual appeal of the premises.*
- 3.13** *In the CC District: Consider a special permit requirement that regulates the creation of large lots to control tear-downs of abutting residential structures in order to build a new structure that is out of scale with the character of the surrounding neighborhood.*
- 3.14** *In the CC District: Update the permitted uses, such as prohibiting new car sales, which are more appropriate for a highway corridor zone.*

Design Standards in the CC District

The Monson Zoning Bylaw contains comprehensive design standards that control site planning and architectural details and does a good job identifying development characteristics that are appropriate for the community. The sections of the Zoning Bylaw that apply to Monson Center include:

- §5.1, Performance Standards for General and Central Commercial and Industrial Uses
- §5.2, Commercial Development and Landscaping (although this section contains no landscaping standards and deals only with vehicular access and traffic circulation.)

- §6.13, Mixed Uses
- §6.21, Common Access Driveway, applicable to RR and RV only. §5.2 allows common driveways in commercial districts to minimize the number of curb cuts and improve traffic circulation.
- §6.22, Commercial Development
- §7.4.6, Site Plan Review Criteria

In addition the Flood Plain, Water Supply Protection, and Scenic Overlay Districts that cover the Downtown have additional standards to help protect the Town's resources.

Residential Zoning Districts in Monson Center

Monson Center has two residential zoning districts: Residential Village (RV), which permits medium density residential uses (multiple family and apartments), and Rural Residential (RR) which permits single family homes only by right. The RV District is the focus of this analysis.

The RV District contains many fine older single-family homes and residential neighborhoods. The availability of public water and sewer systems allows a greater density than is possible in outlying areas. These traditional neighborhoods are connected with the town center and add vitality to it. Residents can easily walk, bike or drive to near-by services, which provides a substantial customer base to support local businesses.

Part of Main Street is in the RV District and is comprised of stately homes which contribute to the architectural fabric of the Downtown. Owners have converted some of these homes to two and three-family structures, or have added home occupations.

The RV District is composed of quiet residential neighborhoods with attractive single and two family homes. Most homes are on small lots with narrow frontages and shallow setbacks. Requiring new homes to be set back at least 40 feet from a street, for example, while its neighbors are generally within 15 feet of the front lot line, would be out of character with the prevailing building pattern on the street. It is best for the neighborhood if new development fits seamlessly into the existing street fabric.

In an area that has public water and sewer systems, it is not necessary to require large lots for private wells and septic systems. Perhaps one reason for adopting the 20,000 square foot lot size (about ½-acre) was to limit the total density that would be possible in the district. However, in examining the parcel coverage for the potential to create new lots, it so happens that there is not a great deal of suitable land for new dwellings in the district. There are approximately 25 vacant lots with grandfathered protection for one or two family use. (According to G. L. c. 40A §6, lots must have been in existence and in single ownership at the time of a zoning change, and have at least 5,000 square feet of area and 50 feet of frontage.) Future zoning changes will not affect these lots.

Also, only about 55 lots in the district have sufficient area and frontage to accommodate a new home, and of these, only a few lots have sufficient area to allow for new subdivision development. A rough estimate is that a maximum of 100 new lots could be created in the RV District at the current 20,000 square foot minimum lot size, provided public water and sewer mains are present to serve the lots.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.15** *RV District: Reduce the front setback from 40 feet to 10 feet. Large front yards are not necessarily desirable here, as street traffic is generally light and speeds are slow. This would result in larger backyards, which residents favor for greater privacy and outdoor recreation. This change alone would cause 96% of the lots in the RV District to conform to the front setback requirement.*
- 3.16** *RV District: Reduce the minimum lot size from 20,000 square feet to 10,000 square feet in areas that have access to public water and sewer services. The potential future buildout for the district is relatively small, and so setting a smaller lot size would be in keeping with the character of the district. Further, it is consistent with the Master Plan's goals of preserving open spaces elsewhere in town to promote more compact development where it is already occurring. Also, growth in the RV District would benefit the merchants in the CC District by increasing the customer base that is close to businesses, while also lessening development pressure in rural parts of Monson. This change would cause 88% of the single-family lots to conform to the minimum lot size requirement.*
- 3.17** *RV District: As an alternative to reducing the minimum lot size (3.16 above), allow Open Space Communities (OSC) in the district. This approach encourages open space preservation by allowing reduced minimum lot size and frontage requirements in exchange for permanent protection of adjacent open space. This does not change the number of lots that would otherwise be possible under current zoning and subdivision regulations; only their dimensions. These smaller lots would be consistent with the traditional neighborhoods in the RV District and still provide adequate building area for an attractive home with private open space. The protected land can help Monson achieve its goal of preserving sensitive resources and/or creating passive recreation opportunities. To encourage this option, the town should consider reducing the 10-acre minimum subdivision area required, as well as modifications to OSC lot dimensions and changing the special permit requirement to site plan review.*
- 3.18** *Consider zoning amendments to allow a modest number of conversions of larger single family homes to two-family homes.*

Industrial Zoning Districts in Monson Center

A third focus of this zoning analysis is the Industrial, or IND, Districts. These uses are integral to the Downtown zoning fabric.

Main and State Streets: The industrial district near the corner of Main Street and State Street is now largely occupied by residential uses. Given the neighboring residential and institutional uses, redevelopment for industrial purposes appears unlikely and is no longer appropriate for the site.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.19** *Re-Zone the small IND district at the intersection of Main St. and State St. to RV in keeping with its current land use character and bring the current nonconforming residential uses into compliance.*

Former Zero Corp. Main Building, 288 Main Street. The former Zero Corp. building at 288 Main St. is now vacant but appears structurally sound. Typical of many old mills, the structure presents significant obstacles for conversion to modern manufacturing, which today prefers single story buildings with uninterrupted floor spans and updated mechanical/electrical systems.



Former Zero Corp. Factory in the Downtown

To facilitate redevelopment, Monson should consider adopting a new Mill Conversion District or a Mixed Use District which would allow a medley of uses, including residences, artist studios, offices, and other uses. Many such properties in New England have been redeveloped for mixed uses, often including a significant residential component. Conversion for mixed uses could meet local needs. New office and service uses should complement the downtown core and not detract from the viable businesses in the area.

The 288 Main Street location near downtown near commercial services could attract residents and provide an increased population base to support the downtown businesses. Successful redevelopment here would provide also create a southern anchor for the Downtown and improve the entire market for business owners.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.20** *Re-zone the IND district at 288 Main Street, the former Zero Corp. property. Consider a new Mill Conversion District or a Mixed Use District to provide new opportunities for redevelopment. A mix of uses should be permitted giving consideration to those that will complement, not compete, with downtown. Requirements should have design standards to prevent adverse effects on abutters.*

M&M Chemical Sales Co., Cushman and Gates Streets: The M&M Chemical Sales Co. factory (former S. F. Cushman Woolen Mill) on the corner of Cushman and Gates Streets stands vacant. It would be helpful for the Town and owner to cooperate on a feasibility study (including a structural analysis) to determine its reuse potential. The property falls within the CC District and is nonconforming as industrial uses are not permitted. Nonconforming uses and structures abandoned or not used for two years lose their protection and may not renew their nonconforming activity. Given its position within an existing residential neighborhood, redevelopment for residential purposes is an appropriate use of the property. Its close proximity to the Housing Authority's Colonial Village project on State Street may also provide an opportunity to promote additional affordable housing here.

If it turns out that the structure is indeed salvageable, zoning should encourage a mixed use development concept which would strengthen and complement the commercial center of Monson.

Income producing properties on the National Register of Historic Places may be eligible for Federal historic tax credits available for substantial rehabilitation of the old mills in the Downtown. Neither mill property is currently on the Register. Prospective developers may find it financially beneficial to comply with historic standards for rehabilitation in order to receive these incentives.



M&M Chemical Sales Co. Factory

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.21** *Zone the small IND district at the intersection of Main St. and State St. to RV in keeping with its current land use character and bring the current nonconforming residential uses into compliance. Assess feasibility of re-zoning former M&M Chemical Co. factory on Cushman Street at Gates Street to an RV or Multiple Dwelling District designation to be consistent with the surrounding neighborhood. Alternatively, the property could be placed in a new Mill Conversion District or Mixed Use District to facilitate redevelopment of the property and support the economic base of the downtown.*

Additional Zoning-related Issues

Following are additional responses to resident concerns and strategies to improve the design of new development related to architectural standards, design review, and parking.

Architectural Standards

The Zoning Bylaw contains many architectural standards to avoid franchise architecture, strip commercial development and modern styles that conflict with the integrity of Monson's architectural heritage. While these standards help to integrate commercial buildings into the fabric of the CC District, it may be difficult for board members to evaluate whether a proposed building complies with the standard. Applicants may also have a different interpretation.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.22** *Prepare a Design Guidelines Manual that contains graphic representations of each of the standards, illustrates treatments to encourage, and depicts examples of features to avoid. 'Guidelines' of course are not mandatory, but they provide a vehicle to help developers, engineers, and architects understand design features the community finds desirable. Design professionals would analyze existing conditions and work with residents and business owners to develop a consensus.*
- 3.23** *Review and amend commercial design standards in the Commercial Development Bylaw (§6.22) to be consistent with the Design Guidelines Manual recommended in 3.21 above. Consider the use of graphic and photo examples to improve usability.*

Design Review

Monson could create a Design Review Committee (DRC) to assess development proposals in the CC, GC, and IND districts. Members typically have special expertise and may include architects, engineers, landscape architects, attorneys, planners, graphic designers, historic Preservationists and representatives of local business groups. The Committee would review copies of site plans and special permit applications and provide advisory comments to the approving board. The DRC may negotiate with applicants for changes in the project design and relieve the approving board of dealing with design issues. As an advisory body, it must complete its review within a short period of time, e.g. before the public hearing on a site plan or special permit application.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.24** *The Zoning Bylaw contains a provision to create a Scenic District Review Board to review development proposals within the Scenic District and make advisory recommendations to the decision making board. However, neither the District nor the Board has been established. Since the concept of design review already exists, the Town could consider revising its Scenic District Review process in favor of a Design Review Committee. The advantage is that the process can apply to existing zoning districts and it eliminates the need for a special purpose map.*

Parking

Parking is related to both zoning and the physical environment of downtown (discussed in Section 2 Existing Downtown Environment). In the online survey and public meetings for this supplemental chapter, some residents cited a lack of sufficient parking in downtown. However, the 2004 Master Plan found that parking is generally adequate, except during holidays and community events. A shortage of parking is often perceived when in fact there may be adequate parking in the area that is not fully utilized. Shared use of existing lots could achieve increased parking efficiency.

While most existing commercial uses in the CC District are unable to provide the number of spaces that the current Zoning Bylaw specifies, owners can get a waiver for limited expansions (less than 20% floor area), new uses must comply. Because of the on-street spaces and common parking lots, downtown uses do not need to offer the same number of spaces as projects in a commercial corridor. Downtown redevelopment opportunities should not be stifled because of a lack of on-site parking. As recommended in the 2004 Master Plan, minimum parking ratios could be reduced or a special permit created to allow reduces parking when a project shows that sufficient parking is available nearby to meet the actual needs of the business.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.25** *Conduct a parking study to identify whether a parking shortage truly exists. If necessary, pursue development of a new public parking lot in cooperation with local merchants.*
- 3.26** *As part of site plan approval, allow property owners to share parking spaces if uses have different hours of operation. Encourage landowners to connect parking lots behind buildings for improved circulation, better utilization, higher occupancy rates and minimizing unnecessary trips onto Main Street. Patrons will have a much easier time finding an available space.*
- 3.27** *During site plan or special permit applications, land use permitting boards should review parking plans and seek to coordinate parking layouts with adjacent lots. Allow waivers of compliance with parking ratios if applicants demonstrate sufficient parking will be available to meet the needs of the project.*
- 3.28** *In the CC District set the parking ratios in §5.4 as maximum ratios or lower the parking ratios required in the district.*

Landscaping around the perimeter of parking lots can help to soften the impact of parked automobiles on adjacent properties. Interior landscaping can improve the aesthetics of large parking lots, provide shade, enhance pedestrian access, and help to manage the flow of runoff into public storm drains.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3.29 *The Zoning Bylaw should specify parking lot landscaping provisions, such as:*

- *Perimeter landscaping around the lot for a width of 8 to 10ft.*
- *Interior landscaping for lots over 20 spaces amounting to 5% of the lot area.*
- *Ornamental or shade trees at a ratio of one tree for every 10 spaces.*

Streamlining Permitting Procedures

While they are necessary to comply with state and federal regulations, Monson's permitting procedures can be cumbersome or daunting to applicants seeking to develop or re-develop properties in the town center. Listed below are many of the approvals that would likely be needed for a new project in the CC district under existing regulations:

- Special permit for expansion of a nonconforming structure by ZBA.
- Special permit for a use, or a special permit to change a nonconforming use, by ZBA.
- Special permit for covering more than 15% of a lot or 2,500 sq. ft. with impervious surfaces in the Water Supply Protection District, by the Planning Board.
- Stormwater management special permit, by the Planning Board.
- Site plan review, by the Planning Board.
- Scenic District Review (after this new district is adopted) by the Scenic District Review Board.
- Conformity with architectural and site plan standards, by Planning Board.
- Order of Conditions if development is within 100 ft. of a wetland or 200 ft of Chicopee Brook, by the Conservation Commission.

An unpredictable or unknown approval process can slow economic development. The multiple approvals above involve considerable costs to the applicant and multiple (sometimes seemingly duplicative) hearings that the applicant and abutters must attend. Special permits may be required from both the Planning Board and ZBA, which may render different rulings on the project, and may impose conflicting conditions.

Both the applicant and local officials are burdened with these procedural requirements. Therefore, Monson officials will benefit from any measures that will streamline this process by making it more predictable, giving applicants information ahead of time, and reducing redundancies.

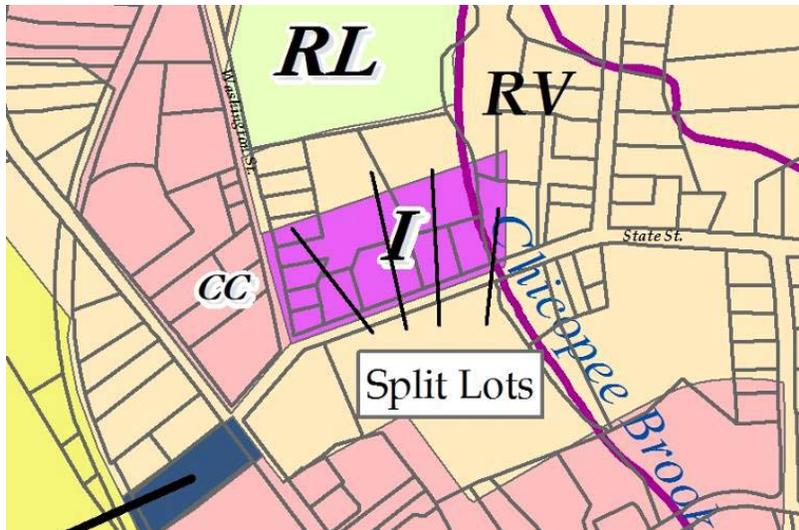
RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.30** *Prepare a “Development Guide” to explain the local development rules and walk applicants through the various permits and procedures.*
- 3.31** *Hold combined public hearings for special permits and joint Planning Board ZBA meetings to promote close communication and consistent decisions.*
- 3.32** *Consolidate multiple approvals into one Combined Permit. This would shorten the approval process, reduce redundancy among different land use boards, and help to achieve the Master Plan Goal 11a, “Encourage the retention of existing businesses and ensure that regulations do not create undue hardships.”*
- 3.33** *Establish an informal Development Coordinating Team process in which applicants can—at one meeting—present plans to officials from all pertinent departments and boards, such as Inspections, Police, Fire, Planning, Engineering, Conservation, Water, Sewer, Highway, and others. This group can help to resolve technical questions and public safety concerns quickly and before the formal submission of plans to permit-issuing boards.*
- 3.34** *Establish a single point of contact at the local level to serve as the town’s ombudsman for assisting developers through the process.*
- 3.35** *Consider adopting G.L. c. 43D, the state’s expedited permitting law.*

Split Lots

The boundaries of the zoning districts on the Monson Zoning Map typically follow cultural landmarks and natural features. These may be a stream, a road, or a railroad—or a specified distance (i.e., 300 ft) from a road centerline. But in many cases, this has the unfortunate and unintended consequence of splitting lots into more than one zoning district. One portion of the lot must conform to the rules of one district, while the other portion must conform to a different set of rules, sometimes even preventing access to the rear portion over the front portion.

Figure 16: Split Lot Example: IND and RV Lots on State Street

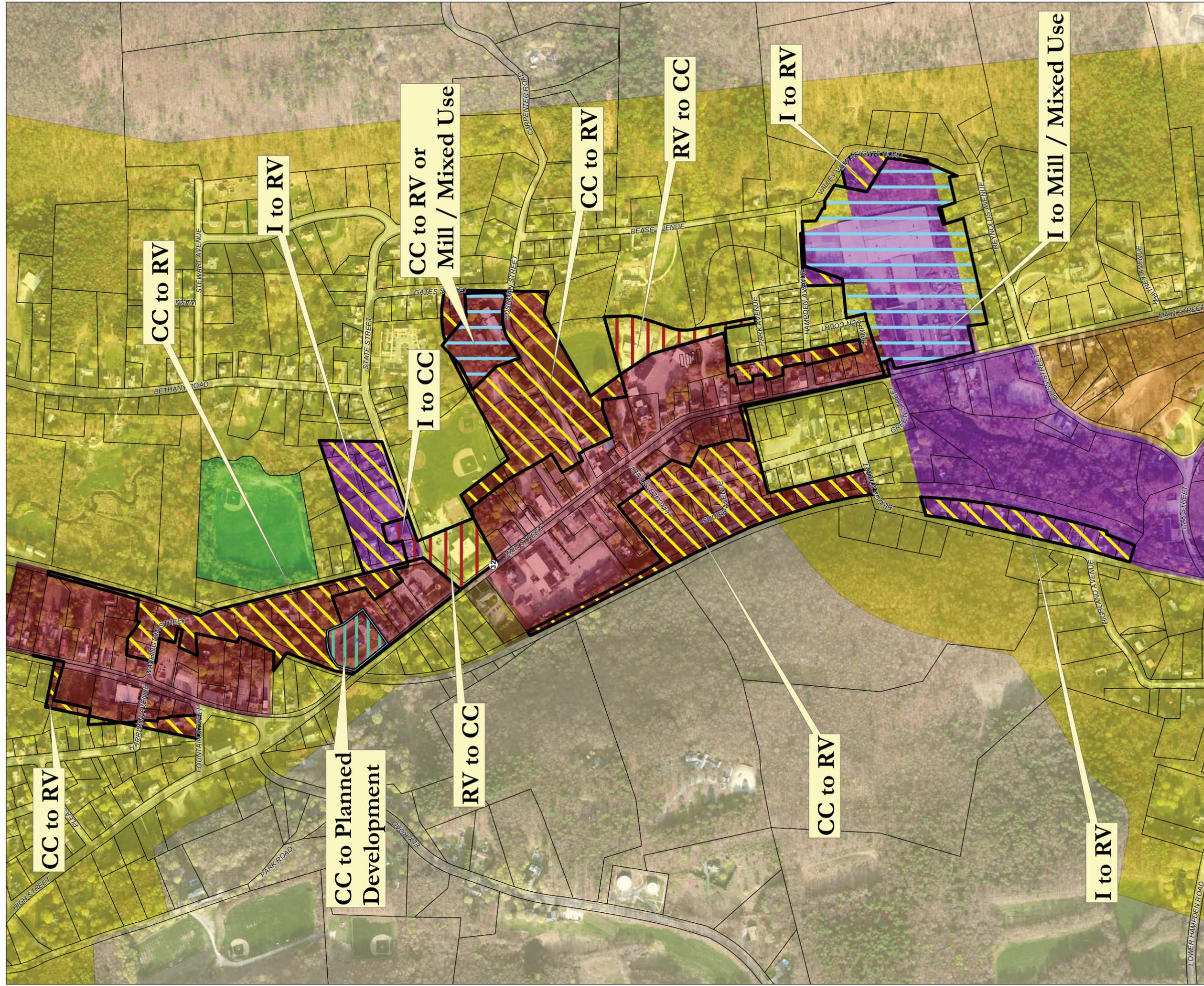


The Zoning Bylaw attempts to accommodate split lot situations by allowing the provisions of the less restrictive district to extend 25 feet into the more restrictive district if the lot has frontage on a street in the less restrictive district. However, this can be confusing and create hardships for a landowner. It can also adversely affect adjacent homeowners by allowing undesired uses to encroach. In practice, allowing commercial components of a business to extend 25 feet over a zoning line typically does not provide enough room to make a commercial use feasible. While the effect is as profound when a lot falls across two residential districts, the strong differences between the CC and RV Districts in Monson Center means that large portions of some lots are unusable.

In most circumstances, it is desirable that zoning district boundaries follow property lines. This helps eliminate uncertainty about allowed uses and the application of district standards. Monson is fortunate in that it has good parcel coverage data available, and a redrawing of zoning district boundaries is a relatively simple task.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.36** *In the Downtown, zoning boundaries should be redrawn along parcel boundary lines to eliminate the loss of economic value sometimes caused by split-lot situations.*



Monson Downtown Proposed Zoning Changes



The information depicted on this map is for general informational purposes only. It is not intended to be used for legal or regulatory purposes. Regulatory information is available at: www.monsonvt.com



- Rural Residential
- Residential Village
- Multiple Dwelling
- Reserved Land
- Industrial
- Central Commercial
- General Commercial
- Changed to CC
- Changed to Mill/Mixed Use
- Changed to RV
- Changed to Planned Development

Note: Due to the fact the data layers shown were created at different times and different scales, the zoning does not line up perfectly with the parcel boundaries. Both zoning and flood plain are subject field verification and update.

Map update: 6/21/2012

Recommended Actions

This section presents a summary of the suggested improvements and specific recommendations described in prior sections

Recommended Actions—Community Vision

RECOMMENDATION	LEAD	PRIORITY	STATUS
Future Town Hall building and site	Townwide	Immediate	Ongoing
Chicopee Brook River Walk	Townwide	Immediate	\$75,000 awarded for design/permitting
Tree replanting	Conservation, Tree Committee	Immediate	Ongoing
Sidewalk, trail and bike route improvements	Conservation, Highway, Planning Depts	Short-term	Ongoing
Improved pedestrian access to town center businesses	Planning, Highway Depts	Short-term	Ongoing

Recommended Actions—Downtown Physical Environment

RECOMMENDATION	LEAD	PRIORITY	STATUS
2.1 Vehicle Speeds: Add more speed limit signs on Main Street.	Highway Dept.	Immediate	
2.2 Vehicle Speeds: Add speed limit enforcement signs.	Highway Dept.	Short-term	
2.3 Crosswalks: Improve visibility at crosswalks by eliminating 1-2 adjacent on-street parking spaces.	Highway Dept.	Immediate	
2.4 Crosswalks: Improve crosswalk signage.	Highway Dept.	Immediate	
2.5 Crosswalks: Install textured pavement treatments.	Highway Dept.	Medium-term	
2.6 Crosswalks: Install raised crosswalks.	Highway Dept.	Long-term	
2.7 Crosswalks: Construct curb extensions.	Highway Dept.	Long-term	
2.8 Crosswalks: Traffic study at 216 Main Street.	Highway Dept.	Immediate	
2.9 Intersections: State Street – Eliminate or reconfigure on-street parking.	Highway Dept.	Immediate	
2.10 Intersections: Cushman Street – Eliminate or reconfigure on-street parking.	Highway Dept.	Immediate	
2.11 Intersections: Lincoln Place – Eliminate or reconfigure on-street parking.	Highway Dept.	Immediate	

	RECOMMENDATION	LEAD	PRIORITY	STATUS
2.12	Curb Cuts/Driveways: Memorial Hall/Public Works/Fire Station – Eliminate 1-2 on-street parking spaces.	Highway Dept.	Short-term	
2.13	Curb Cuts/Driveways: Dunkin Donuts Drive exit – Eliminate 1-2 on-street parking spaces; combine driveway with abutting business.	Highway Dept.	Immediate	
2.14	Curb Cuts/Driveways: Gas & Go Service Station – Better define/establish curb-cuts.	Highway Dept.	Short-term	
2.15	Curb Cuts/Driveways: Monson Savings Bank parking lot – Eliminate 1 on-street parking space at south corner and north corner.	Highway Dept.	Immediate	
2.16	Curb Cuts/Driveways: Monson Savings Bank Drive-thru exit – Eliminate 1 on-street parking space at south corner.	Highway Dept.	Short-term	
2.17	Parking: Parking inventory and utilization study of town center.	PVPC	Immediate	Phase 2 implementation
2.18	Parking: Use parking study results to develop “park once” lots and amenities recommendations.	PVPC, Highway Dept., property owners	Short-term	
2.19	Parking: Address church parking needs.	Highway, Police and Fire Depts.	Short-term	
2.20	Parking: Address parking needs for events at Veterans and Cushman Fields.	Highway, Police and Fire Depts.	Short-term	
2.21	Parking: Address parking needs related to municipal lot at Rotary Gazebo.	Planning Board, Select Board	Medium-term	

Recommended Actions—Zoning and Regulations

	RECOMMENDATION	LEAD	PRIORITY	STATUS
3.1	Town-wide: Extend period for reconstruction of existing structures/uses to at least 3 years.	Planning Board	Immediate	
3.2	Town-wide: Modify footprint clause to allow reconstruction in area other than original footprint.	Planning Board	Immediate	
3.3	CC District: Re-zone locations that are now predominantly residential in character to RV.	Planning Board	Immediate	Concept supported by P.B. 6/19/12
3.3	CC District: Draw district boundaries to follow parcel lines.	Planning Board	Short-term	Concept supported by P.B. 6/19/12

	RECOMMENDATION	LEAD	PRIORITY	STATUS
3.5	CC District: Allow some institutional uses (i.e., public library, museum, parks and playgrounds, museum, art gallery) by right with site plan approval.	Planning Board	Short-term	
3.6	CC District: Update uses to better differentiate from highway business area (i.e., prohibit new car sales).	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.7	CC District: Add mixed use provision to schedule of use regulations.	Planning Board	Immediate	
3.8	CC District: Require residential uses to be in upper stories or in the rear of larger buildings if sufficient space exists and discourage new first floor residential uses on Main Street.	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.9	CC District: Reduce minimum lot size to 5,000 or 10,000 sq ft to reduce nonconforming lots.	Planning Board	Immediate	Concept supported by P.B. 6/19/12
3.10	CC District: Require minimum building height of 2 stories on Main Street.	Planning Board	Immediate	
3.11	CC District: Prohibit on-site parking in front yards of buildings.	Planning Board	Short-term	
3.12	CC District: Change 20 ft minimum front setback to 20 ft maximum.	Planning Board	Short-term	
3.13	CC District: Consider a special permit requirement to regulate creation of large lots and control tear-downs of abutting residential structures.	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.14	CC District: Updated permitted uses to prohibit new car dealerships.	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.15	RV District: Lower front setback requirement from 40 ft to 10 ft.	Planning Board	Short-term	
3.16	RV District: Reduce minimum lot size from 20,000 sq. ft. to 10,000 sq. ft. in areas with public water and sewer.	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.17	RV District: Consider allowing Open Space Communities subdivisions as optional alternative to reducing minimum lot size (see 3.5 above).	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.18	RV District: Allow selected conversion of large single family homes to two-family.	Planning	Medium-term	
3.19	IND District: Re-Zone small IND district at Main St and State St to RV.	Planning Board	Short-term	Concept supported by P.B. 6/19/12
3.20	IND District: Re-zone former Zero Corp. property (288 Main Street) to Mill Mixed Use District to facilitate redevelopment.	Planning Board	Medium-term	Concept supported by P.B. 6/19/12
3.21	IND District: Assess feasibility of re-zoning former M&M Chemical Co. factory on Cushman St. to new Mill Mixed Use District to facilitate redevelopment.	Planning Board	Medium-term	Concept supported by P.B. 6/19/12

	RECOMMENDATION	LEAD	PRIORITY	STATUS
3.22	CC District: Prepare a Design Guidelines Manual.	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.23	CC District: Amend Commercial Development Bylaw (§6.22) to be consistent with Design Guidelines Manual	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.24	Consider revising Scenic District Review process.	Planning Board	Short-term	
3.25	Parking: Parking study (also noted in #2.17 above).	Planning Board	Short-term	
3.26	Parking: Allow and encourage shared parking in regulations.	Planning Board	Short-term	
3.27	Parking: For site plan review and/or special permit applications, review parking plans and coordinate parking layouts with adjacent lots. Allow waivers if applicant(s) demonstrate sufficient parking will be available.	Planning Board and ZBA	Short-term	
3.28	Parking: In CC District, set parking ratios in §5.4 as maximums, and/or lower parking ratios required.	Planning Board	Short-term	
3.29	Parking: In CC District, add site plan review standards to specify parking lot landscaping, such as: perimeter landscaping of 8-10 ft; interior landscaping of 5% or more for lots larger than 20 spaces; require shade trees at a ratio 1 tree per 10 spaces.	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.30	Streamline Permitting: Prepare a "Development Guide" to explain local development rules and procedures.	Planning Board and Building Inspector	Medium-term	
3.31	Streamline Permitting: P.B. and ZBA to hold joint public hearings for special permits.	Planning Board and ZBA	Medium-term	
3.32	Streamline Permitting: Consolidate multiple approvals into one Combined Permit.	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.33	Streamline Permitting: Establish informal Development Coordinating Team of local departments to resolve technical issues prior to submittals.	Planning Board	Short-term	
3.34	Streamline Permitting: Establish municipal "ombudsman" to assist developers.	Planning Board and Selectmen	Short-term	
3.35	Streamline Permitting: Consider adopting G.L. c. 43D (Massachusetts' expedited permitting law).	Planning Board	Medium-term	
3.36	All Monson Center districts: Revise Zoning Map to follow parcel boundaries to eliminate "split lots."	Planning Board	Short-term	Concept supported by P.B. 6/19/12

Appendices

1. Summary of Public Planning Process
2. Map of Monson Center Parcels Susceptible to Change
3. List and Map of Monson Center Parcels Susceptible to Change (CD-ROM and web only)
4. Results of Online Residents Survey of Visual and Development Preferences (CD-ROM and web only)
5. Monson Visioning Workshop Results September 14, 2011 (CD-ROM and web only)
6. Draft Conceptual Improvements for Monson Center Presented to Residents May 30, 2012 (CD-ROM and web only)
7. Additional Documents Related to Public Planning Process (CD-ROM and web only)
8. Presentation from April 25, 2012 Community Workshop (CD-ROM and web only)
9. Zoning Analysis Report (CD-ROM and web only)

Appendix 1: Monson Center Planning Process

The development of this supplementary chapter to the Monson Master Plan, “A Community Plan for Monson Center,” included five community meetings, a visual preferences survey, and numerous meetings and interviews with town staff, local boards and committees, and local business owners. Major activities are summarized below.

- ***Monson Community Visioning Workshop I:*** Wednesday, September 14th, 2011 at the Monson High School Cafeteria. During the first half of the workshop, PVPC staff and state officials provide information and technical assistance on the rehabilitation and renovation of damaged properties. During the second half, residents expressed their vision for future rebuilding efforts for the downtown and affected adjacent neighborhoods in small working groups. Approximately 80 residents attended.
- ***Monson Community Visioning Workshop II:*** Wednesday October 26th, 2011 at the Monson High School Cafeteria. PVPC staff reviewed the results of the visioning meeting that took place on September 14th, 2011 and obtained comments on the summary report of this meeting’s findings. Approximately 30 residents attended.
- ***Monson Center Preferences Survey:*** This online survey, launched in February 2012, gathered input on preferred development patterns, streetscape treatments, building types and styles, recreation opportunities, and civic spaces that residents would like to see in and near Monson Center in the future. Approximately 250 individuals took the survey. Detailed results are provided as an additional appendix item.
- ***Planning Board Meeting: Tuesday, January 17th, 2012. PVPC staff met with the planning board to update the board on the status of the project and discuss preliminary findings and ideas.***
- ***Monson Forum I:*** Wednesday, March 14, 2012, at the Town Hall (29 Thompson Street). PVPC staff reviewed project goals and the results of the community survey and downtown zoning analysis. Approximately 20 residents attended this forum.
- ***Tree Committee Meeting:*** PVPC staff met with the Tree Committee to discuss complimentary goals between their short term plans and long vision and that of the Monson Center planning project.
- ***Planning Board Meeting,*** March 20th, 2012. PVPC Zoning Consultant Bill Scanlon met with the Planning Board to obtain comments on the town’s zoning as well as planning opportunities and issues.
- ***Monson Community Forum II:*** Wednesday April 25, 2012, at the Town Hall (29 Thompson Street). PVPC staff presented updated information on the town center zoning analysis and discussed how this related to findings of the online visual

preference survey. PVPC staff also presented information on the Sustainable Knowledge Corridor. Approximately 10 people attended this meeting.

- **Stakeholder Interviews:** Monday May 14, 2012: Monson Savings Bank. Steve Lowell, President & CEO, Dan Moriarty, Vice-President & CFO.
- **Stakeholder Interview:** Monday May 14, 2012: Adam's Market. Ross Williams, Manager.
- **Stakeholder Interview:** Monday May 14, 2012: Katie Krol, Monson Public Library Director.
- **Stakeholder Interview:** Monday May 14, 2012: Lori Stacy, Monson Council on Aging, Director.
- **Stakeholder Interview:** Monday May 14, 2012: John Morrell, Highway Surveyor.
- **Stakeholder Interview:** Monday May 14, 2012: Stephen Kozloski, Police Chief.
- **Stakeholder Interview:** Monday May 14, 2012: George Robichaud, Fire Chief
- **Planning Board Meeting:** Tuesday May 15, 2012. PVPC staff met with the Planning Board to provide a status report on the planning process and obtain feedback on draft concepts being discussed in community meetings.
- **Monson Community Forum III:** Tuesday May 30, 2012, at the Town Hall (29 Thompson Street). Based on feedback from prior community meetings, PVPC staff presented concepts for improving the town center. This forum was held in an "open house" format, meaning participants could come and go as they pleased. Approximately 25 people attended this forum.
- **Planning Board Meeting:** Tuesday June 19th, 2012. PVPC staff met with the Planning Board to present suggested zoning revisions for Monson Center.
- **Board of Selectmen's Meeting:** Tuesday, June 26th, 2012. PVPC staff met with the Board of Selectmen to provide a status report on the planning process and obtain feedback on draft concepts being discussed in community meetings.
- **Additional:** PVPC staff met with town officials and local business owners at various points throughout 2011/2012 to obtain feedback on concepts, issues, and opportunities to aid the development of this plan.

Appendix 2: Susceptibility to Change Analysis of Monson Center

Overview

As part of the community planning process for Monson Center, an analysis of parcels that are susceptible to change was performed to provide a general indication of the likelihood for change at key areas of the town center in the near future (1-5 years). This analysis was presented to residents and community planning meetings. Changes could include: redevelopment of parcels with damaged structures; new development on previously undeveloped land; change of use; or intensification of use.

Method

The Appendix 2 Figure identifies the parcels that are most likely to be susceptible to change based on seven criteria:

- Land status and ownership (source: Monson Assessor's database).
- Occupancy status (source: field observation).
- Zoning and related regulations (source: Monson Zoning Bylaw, building code, town bylaws)
- Transportation corridors (source: field work, MassDOT traffic counts).
- Road access (source: field work, MassDOT road network GIS layer).
- Year built/building condition (source: field observation, historic records).
- Market conditions and estimated property value (source: field observation, registrar of deeds, real estate listings).

High Susceptibility to Change (orange shading) had one or more of the following characteristics:

- Undeveloped vacant land.
- Obsolete building structure (historic mill buildings, circa 1960 gas stations).
- Heavy damage from 2011 tornado coupled with unknown redevelopment plans.
- Large lot with acreage and frontage that would allow for future subdivision of property.

The type of change to be expected from parcels in the **High** category are noted in Table (CD-ROM/web only) that is available on the online or web-based Appendix, but may generally be described as a *Use* change, *Physical* Change, or *Subdivision* change.

Medium Susceptibility to Change (yellow shading) had one or more of the following characteristics:

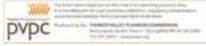
- Non conforming use (land use is not allowed by underlying zoning).
- Building vacancy.
- Vacant, landlocked parcels.
- Heavy damage from 2011 tornado coupled with unknown redevelopment plans coupled with a small lot and character of area as residential.

The type of change to be expected from parcels in the **Medium** category are noted in the Table (CD-ROM/web only) that is available on the online or web-based Appendix, but could generally be described as a *Use* change. Only one to two may result in a *Physical* Change.

Appendix 2 Figure: Monson Center Parcels Susceptible to Change



Monson Downtown Susceptibility to Change



Note: Due to the fact the data layers shown were created at different times and different scales, the zoning does not line up perfectly with the parcel boundaries. Both zoning and flood plain are subject field verification and update.

 Flood Plain Overlay District  High  Medium