

# CHARLEMONT MASTER PLAN

Revised by the Charlemont Planning Board

March 2003

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MASTER PLAN FOR THE  
TOWN OF CHARLEMONT, MASSACHUSETTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II. LAND USE .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>III. HOUSING .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>IV. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>V. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>VI. AGRICULTURAL, OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL RESOURCES .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>VII. TRANSPORTATION .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>VIII. SERVICES .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>IX. RECREATION .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>X. TOWN CENTER .....</b>	<b>33</b>

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## INTRODUCTION

This Master Plan for the Town of Charlemont, Massachusetts, was developed over a three year period as the joint effort of the residents of Charlemont, the members of various Town boards, and the graduate planning students and faculty from the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts. Given the process, the wide range of public input, and the many discussions of the goals and elements of this plan, it is accurate to say that it is a good representation of the town's goals. The purpose of this plan is to serve as a set of guiding principals for the future of the town. It is a collective expression of how the community views itself and what it would like to become. It is reasonable to say that the vast majority of residents like their town and they would like it to stay much as it is while continuing to emphasize its good characteristics and address its weaknesses. The people of Charlemont would like to see growth at a moderate pace and in ways that preserve its fundamentally rural character, the wonderful natural amenities, and style of life that make it what it is.

A Master Plan is a long range plan that guides development in a town through a vision of what residents would like their town to be in the future. It is a comprehensive document that looks at all aspects of a community including natural resources, agricultural resources, recreation, historic resources, transportation, public infrastructure and municipal services, economic development, housing, and land use. Additional sections may be added if a community would like to address other issues more specifically. The Master Plan includes mapping, inventory, analysis, and recommended strategies for accomplishing the goals and objectives of the town. It may also include a capital improvement program to coordinate large-scale expenditures with the goals of the Master Plan. This is a plan created by and for the citizens of Charlemont.

The Town of Charlemont began their Master Planning process in 1998 when a Graduate Regional Planning Studio from the University of Massachusetts was asked to write a Master Plan Background Document (available in Town Hall). This document includes the results of a community survey, interviews with town residents, inventories of town resources, and analysis of various needs and opportunities. This research was used as the basis upon which to formulate goals and objectives and to suggest possible strategies to help the town achieve its goals.

In Fall 2001, a second Graduate Regional Planning Studio was enlisted to write a final Master Plan that the Town of Charlemont could debate and adopt through its Planning Board as the Plan that would guide decisions in the town over the next ten years. This

recent stage in the Master Planning process used the Background Document as a foundation. The Studio group used results from a Charlemont Public Vision Forum (see Appendix), and feedback from the Master Plan Committee through meetings held twice a month (See Appendix) as guidance for generating the recommended actions listed in the Master Plan. Over sixty of the town's residents attended the Vision Forum held on Monday, October 15, 2001, thus providing a good expression of their vision for the future of the community. The basic elements of the Master Plan took shape at that time and those elements that the town viewed as its primary assets were clearly identified, as were its liabilities. Certain issues in the plan were thus given greater emphasis and one issue, the town center, was given its own section in addition to the nine required sections of the Master Plan.

The reason the Town of Charlemont undertook this major effort was to provide guidance in making future planning decisions. Many residents are concerned about issues such as the impact that Route 2 has on their community, the impact of recreational activities on the Deerfield River, and the economic and other effects that the thousands of annual recreational visitors could have on their future. Though Charlemont is located at the foot of the Berkshire Hills between two larger economic centers, Greenfield and North Adams, the town has not been subject to unusual economic or residential development pressures. Charlemont has maintained its rural character and is home to many residents who have settled in town for that reason. The Select Board and Planning Board, recognizing the potential for external pressures to influence future development, decided to take a proactive stance and take part in developing this Master Plan. The Master Plan Committee, established to manage this planning process, requested that implementation strategies, that would help municipal officials obtain future assistance and funding, be included in the Master Plan.

The Master Plan identifies many efforts in which town residents can become involved. To facilitate participation, an overview of the Master Plan (available in Town Hall) was also created and made available for all town residents. This shorter summary of the Master Plan provides town residents with a quick guide to the key steps the town will need to take in the near future. The next challenge will be sustaining the enthusiasm necessary to implement the recommendations in this plan.

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Land Use

**GOAL: Encourage land use that preserves the existing rural and agricultural land and provides for the future spatial and economic needs of Charlemont.**

Land use in Charlemont is predominantly residential, with a good mix of agricultural and forest land. The Mohawk Trail State Forest, with 1600 acres, is the largest area of permanently protected open space and has a large network of trails for hiking and other recreational purposes. Charlemont has valuable rural, agricultural, and historic land that, if not protected, could potentially be developed. According to the recent Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs build-out analysis completed in 2001, Charlemont has a total land area of 19,225 acres, and 9,563 of those acres have been deemed as potentially developable land under the current zoning in Charlemont. Of that total, some 4,850 acres have no apparent environmental constraints to development, and the remaining land has single or multiple partial constraints that may determine the type and extent of development that could occur. The acres with no constraints are the most likely sites for development if it were to occur.

Charlemont should re-examine its zoning regulations to consider if any additional zoning provisions are necessary and consider the potential effectiveness of zoning overlay districts. Improvement of scenic viewsheds and the use of conservation easements and agricultural incentive areas may also be important to future land use in Charlemont. A Community Development Plan developed under Executive Order 418 would also help to further implement this Master Plan and can specifically address future land use in town.

### Housing

**GOAL: Provide adequate and acceptable housing for Charlemont residents of all ages and income levels.**

The single-family home dominates Charlemont and makes up approximately 68% of the total housing units in the town. The majority of homes were built before 1939 and a relatively small percentage was built after 1970. According to Ch. 40 B Subsidized Housing Inventory (DHCD), only nine housing units, approximately 1.6%, are considered as *long-term affordable housing*. This number has not changed since 1993. However, this inventory doesn't list all subsidized, low- or moderate-income housing in the community. Charlemont has a very high share of mobile homes and trailers. This

type of housing makes up 13% of the total housing units and its potential to contribute to long-term affordable housing has not yet been taken into account. Market housing in Charlemont is relatively inexpensive, however, and town residents pay an average of 24% of their income for housing.

The town must identify existing housing that meets the state's affordable housing definition as well as create an inventory of current housing stock. Charlemont should continue to search out elderly housing options. Charlemont must also work with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments on Regional Housing certification under Executive Order 418 to apply for state funding for housing rehabilitation, Community Development Block Grants, and other discretionary state funding. A housing development pattern should be considered for the town that will protect its rural character and protect additional open space.

### **Historical and Cultural Resources**

**GOAL: To protect, preserve, and provide for the future management of historically and culturally significant landmarks of Charlemont.**

The history of the Town of Charlemont dates from the mid-eighteenth century, when Captain Moses Rice came with his older sons to settle in the area. Charlemont has 126 historic and culturally significant sites, which include a covered bridge across the Mill River and a grandstand at the fairgrounds. Colonial and Victorian styles are represented in the architecture of the community. The Charlemont town center was designated as a National Historic District through the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. The Charlemont Fairgrounds are also culturally and historically important to the town. The town holds a three-day event every year called the "Yankee Doodle Days" that brings people to the fairgrounds for festivities. Charlemont should continue the re-use and restoration of historic buildings in town and continue to update the current national historic conservation inventory in the town. Site plan review and design standards should also be encouraged to ensure the preservation of Charlemont's historic and architectural character. The Charlemont fairgrounds should be used for additional cultural events in town. Grants should also be pursued to restore the grandstand at the Charlemont fairgrounds and the Bissell Bridge, two key historic features of the town.

### **Economic Development**

**GOAL: To promote a moderate and orderly rate of economic development consistent with Charlemont's small population and rural heritage in order to balance its tax base.**

The economy in Charlemont, once dominated by farming and forestry, has shifted to a service base, with tourism and recreation being the primary economic activities. There are also a variety of small enterprises and industries present, from manufacturing to construction. The largest employers in town are found in the recreation industry, such as Berkshire East Ski Area, Zoar Outdoor, and Crab Apple Whitewater Rafting. Recreational businesses provide more than half of the employment in town, but it should be pointed out that many of those jobs are seasonal. Other large employers with primarily full time employees are the Hawlemont Regional Elementary School and the Charlemont Inn. The two primary economic areas in Charlemont are the Route 2 corridor and the town center, both suitable for business expansion. Businesses should be located on Route 2 carefully, so as not to mar the significant aesthetic and rural qualities of the town. Recreational businesses should continue to be promoted in town and Charlemont should find ways to encourage agricultural and forestry enterprises to continue and expand. A business-friendly atmosphere will also be key to bringing businesses into the town center. Charlemont will also need to pursue a communications infrastructure that is consistent with 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology.

### **Agricultural, Open Spaces, and Natural Resources**

**GOAL: To preserve and protect the agricultural heritage, open spaces and natural resources that give Charlemont its historic rural character.**

Charlemont has large areas of undeveloped land, including expansive meadows and parts of the Mohawk State Forest. The town is predominantly rural and the Deerfield River runs the whole length of the town. The Deerfield River and hillside slopes attract tourists and provide opportunity for recreational activities. The attractiveness of the area, its accessibility, and the availability of developable land present significant potential for residential and commercial development. The town must have the means to control any potential development and to take action on future land-use patterns if it wishes to maintain the town's rural character and to protect its natural resources. Charlemont can protect its agricultural and forest land through such state preservation programs as Chapter 61. Individual landowners can seek conservation easements through land trusts, such as the Franklin Land Trust, to provide additional open space preservation. Protection of the Deerfield River and the portion of the Deerfield River Watershed in Charlemont should receive additional attention to ensure this natural resource is protected. The Charlemont Open Space Plan is currently being updated under Massachusetts Executive Order 418.

## **Transportation**

**GOAL: To improve public safety, traffic flow, and pedestrian movement in the town of Charlemont.**

Charlemont is bisected by two major roads, Route 2 and Route 8A. Route 2 is the “primary arterial route” traveling east-west across the entire length of the town (and the State) and connects the Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts with the Hudson River Valley in New York. Route 2 crosses scenic agricultural and forestlands adjacent to the Deerfield and Cold Rivers and is important visually to the town, especially in the Fall season. Route 8A, a “local arterial route,” provides north-south connection to the town of Heath to the north and Hawley to the south. Residents of Charlemont have expressed concerns regarding the safety of their roads, primarily Route 2 but also on other town roads. Traffic passing through the center of town is a threat to pedestrian safety. Large commercial and passenger vehicles speed through the town center endangering pedestrians and disrupting nearby residents and business owners. There are also roads within the town that don't have posted speed limits. Safety and better visual aides should be installed in the town center to make the core of the town more pedestrian friendly. Traffic calming measures, such as street trees, islands, and narrow road markings, can also be designed by working with the Massachusetts Highway Department. Additional parking spaces in the town center should also be created, town roads should be evaluated for improvements, and speed limits should be posted and enforced.

## **Services**

**GOAL: Provide essential and effective municipal services in order to satisfy the needs of residents and visitors in Charlemont.**

Charlemont provides a range of services to its residents including public works, police, fire, recreation, and education. Charlemont has a Volunteer Fire Department and provides some local police service. The State Police regularly patrol the major roads in town. Residents of the town can also participate in some Franklin County programs such as limited transportation programs, a few medical programs, and the Meals on Wheels program. Charlemont students, and those of the neighboring town of Hawley, attend Hawlemont School, located in the town center, for grades K through six. Secondary students attend the Mohawk Trail Regional High School, located in Buckland, for the seventh through twelfth grades. In the eastern section of town there is also a private school, the Academy at Charlemont.

Charlemont should continue to ensure adequate services are being provided to its residents. The implementation of a capitol improvement plan would help to integrate costs and future demands of needed improvements on roads, safety equipment, and building maintenance. The town should also explore the feasibility of hiring a Town Manager to conduct day-to-day business for Charlemont. Increased communication is also needed in town, which could include additional notice boards and a Town newsletter. Additional educational opportunities and services for Charlemont's elderly population should continue to be top priorities.

### **Recreation**

**GOAL: To maintain, improve and create adequate recreational opportunities for residents and tourists of all ages.**

Recreation is extremely important to the economy of Charlemont, for both its residents and visitors. The recreation industry is one of the largest areas of employment in Charlemont as well as the highest grossing industry in town. The Mohawk State Forest offers a scenic picnic area along the Deerfield River and provides many additional recreational activities. Many of the old Indian trails still exist in Charlemont, including a portion of the original Mahican/Mohawk Trail footpath. Berkshire East Ski Area and the Deerfield River are also key recreational features in Charlemont. Three rafting companies, Zoar Outdoor, Crabapple Whitewater, and Moxie, provide rafting and boating opportunities in Charlemont.

Charlemont can better utilize existing town open space for recreational use for such purposes as a resident town beach and a walking path/greenway in town. Establishing a network of multipurpose trails that can be used for year-round use and promoting recreational uses on existing state owned land would help to increase recreational opportunities as well. Charlemont should improve existing after-school programs for children, to include additional music programs, library programs, and affordable ski programs. The potential for bike paths in town should also be examined.

### **Town Center**

**GOAL: To create a pedestrian friendly environment that is attractive to businesses and will preserve the historic character of the town center.**

Charlemont has a traditional, well-defined town center that can be used for further economic and recreational development, historic preservation/revitalization, and for the development of compact forms of housing. The center has been given its own section in

the Master Plan because many residents view the town center as important to the town's identity and cohesiveness and as the primary location for improving economic and social development. Charlemont's town center has been designated as a National Historic District. Promoting compact housing development and economic development in the center should be consistent with the existing architectural and historic character of the center. Concentrating commercial and industrial activities in the town center will enable the town to utilize the existing infrastructure to its potential, and to lower the demand on valuable open space outside the town center. The town center should also be a visually appealing place, as well as pedestrian friendly. Aesthetic improvements and traffic calming measures can improve these qualities. A special business district might be considered that would make small business development within certain limits a matter of right, rather than a requirement for special permits.

## II. LAND USE

The town of Charlemont was settled in 1741 for farming and forest-related uses. Some farming still takes place, but today the majority of town is residential development. Charlemont has 56 percent of its total acres in residential land use (refer to Master Plan Background Document). The Mohawk State Forest, approximately 1600 acres in size, is the largest tract of permanently protected land and is located in the western section of town. The Deerfield River is another important land feature in town. The river runs along Route 2 for the whole length of the town and provides a great deal of recreational use for residents and tourists. The river, rolling hills, and open fields are the dominating features of the landscape. The following is the overall land use goal, followed by several objectives and specific recommended actions the town should consider.

**GOAL: Encourage land use that preserves the existing rural and agricultural land and provides for the future spatial and economic needs of Charlemont.**

**Objective 1:** *Encourage land use that preserves rural and agricultural lands in Charlemont.*

The town of Charlemont should form a committee to consider adopting overlay districts to protect rural, agricultural, and historic lands in Charlemont. According to the recent Build-out Analysis completed for all towns in Massachusetts, Charlemont has a total land area of 19,225 acres, of which 9,563 have been deemed as buildable land under the current zoning bylaws in Charlemont. Only 4,850 acres in that total are with no constraints and the remaining land has single or multiple partial constraints. The acreage with no constraints is the most threatened for potential development. Although the Buildouts are possible “scenarios” of what could happen, Charlemont should consider that residential development growth will happen and without taking notice, could cause the town to become quite different than that it is today. Overlay districts would provide additional protection to important agricultural, environmental, and historic areas within town, while working with the current zoning. By evaluating and updating if necessary the Land Use Performance Standards for the Town of Charlemont, the town should revisit its zoning and determine whether the current zoning bylaws are adequate to deal with increased residential development. Charlemont should consider and take action on any additional zoning provisions if necessary. Conservation easements are another option to landowners to prevent further development. A conservation easement is when landowners donate or sell the development rights on their property and the land is

permanently protected as open space. By encouraging more landowners to consider conservation easements on their land, Charlemont can preserve more valuable land. The Franklin Land Trust in Ashfield can work with landowners in Charlemont considering this option.

**Objective 2:** *Develop a Community Development Plan under Executive Order 418 to further the implementation of this Master Plan.*

The town of Charlemont can further implement this Master Plan with the help of various committees and agencies in the region. By working with the Planning Board, Selectboard, Master Plan Committee, and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, the town of Charlemont can design a scope of services and file an application for funding for a Community Development Plan under Massachusetts Executive Order 418.

**Objective 3:** *Seek out the feasibility of an agricultural incentive area that can be established under the Massachusetts Right to Farm Law, Ch.40L, to protect farmers from rising property taxes, betterment assessments, and nuisance lawsuits.*

Having certain sections of town designated as agricultural incentive areas helps to protect farmers and their farmland under the Massachusetts Right to Farm Law, Ch.40L. The town of Charlemont should create a local committee of farmers and town officials to propose and seek out the feasibility of having an area or several small areas for agricultural incentive areas and evaluate the characteristics of the farms within it. Agricultural incentive areas are made official by the approval of the Department of the Food and Agriculture and by a two-thirds majority vote of the town meeting. Involvement in an agricultural incentive area is purely voluntary and farmers who do join are eligible for certain benefits. These benefits include: assessment under Chapter 61A protection for reduced property taxes, exemption from special or betterment assessments while the land is being farmed, higher priority eligibility for land preservation funds, and increased protection from nuisance suits.

**Objective 4:** *Use existing build-out data to project likely growth patterns along existing roads and its impact on town infrastructure and services.*

The town of Charlemont should work with Franklin Regional Council of Governments to assess potential development under the “Approval Not Required” (ANR) process along the town’s public ways. The ANR process allows houses to be built without approval from the Planning Board under the Subdivision Control Laws, provided the houses are going to be built on existing ways, the minimum required frontage is provided, and there

is legal access to the lot. If not carefully observed, the ANR process can produce unprotected growth and can put a strain on town infrastructure and services. Existing build-out data analysis can help the town work with the Franklin Council of Governments to determine what can be done to protect potential growth areas, especially with concern to the ANR process.

**Objective 5:** *Improve scenic viewsheds, especially along Route 2 and along the Deerfield River.*

Many visitors come to Charlemont to visit and partake in recreational activities on the Deerfield River. Residents also appreciate the beauty and ecological quality of living near such a beautiful river. In working with the Conservation Commission, residents can improve scenic areas and vistas along the Deerfield River while maintaining necessary buffer zones for the health of the river. A committee should be formed that is interested in the upkeep and beautification of public parcels of land, which are important to the scenic viewsheds and vistas in the town and the town center. This may include mowing of these lands, planting of flowers, etc. Keeping Charlemont beautiful will be important in bringing visitors back to Charlemont and allowing residents to be proud of the place they call home. Many out-of-town visitors drive along Route 2 and raft down the Deerfield River every year, and keeping the Deerfield River clean and free of litter is important. The town should also work with the Deerfield River Watershed Association to keep the Deerfield River clean and to reduce pollution sources in the town's portion of the watershed. The Deerfield River Watershed Association is a non-profit organization with the mission to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of the Deerfield River watershed in southeastern Vermont and northwestern Massachusetts. Residents should also promote programs that the Association is already doing to keep the Deerfield River watershed healthy. The Watershed Association currently has programs that involve monitoring water quality in the river, protecting and monitoring wildlife habitat and wetlands, protecting open space (they sponsor a regional open space forum), improving watershed stewardship through education and recreational opportunities (e.g. The Riverfest in Shelburne Falls, other conferences and forums), and supporting the implementation of the state's Deerfield River Watershed Team Management Plan.

### III. HOUSING

Housing has been identified as a very important topic to be discussed within the Master Plan. This section includes an assessment of current housing stock and identifies the types of housing and housing initiatives that will be needed in the future. Single family homes predominate in Charlemont and make up approximately 68% of the total housing units in the town. The majority of homes were built before 1939 (45%) and after 1970 (36%). Many homes constructed prior to 1939 still have vestiges of lead paint that might be hazardous, especially for children. The occupancy rate in Charlemont demonstrates seasonal patterns due to the inflow of tourists in the summer. The town has low activity in home sales. The average median value of Charlemont homes in 1995 was fluctuating insignificantly at a level of \$95,000. Currently the situation is changing as a result of a growing demand for housing from incoming seasonal occupants, who are attracted into the community by the efforts of the three large rafting companies operating in Charlemont.

According to Ch.40 B Subsidized Housing Inventory (DHCD, 10.01.2001) only nine housing units, approximately 1.6%, are considered as *long-term affordable housing*. This number has not changed since 1993. However, this inventory doesn't list all subsidized, low- or moderate-income housing in the community. Tenant-based assisted units are not included in the inventory because Ch.40 B serves as an indication of the effort a community has made to provide affordable housing. Charlemont has a very high share of mobile homes and trailers that comprise 13% of total housing units. Their potential to contribute to long-term affordable housing has not yet been taken into account.

Since 1982, the Massachusetts Executive Order 215 has directed that every town should offer 10% of housing stock for low and moderate-income households. In the past decade, federal and state support for housing programs has diminished in an attempt to control budget deficits. However, the need for affordable housing remains. The housing is considered affordable when households spend 30% or less of their gross income on housing costs. Housing in Charlemont may be considered as generally affordable, since median gross rent or mortgage payments don't exceed 23%. For the past ten years the median gross rent in Charlemont has been lower than the state average but higher than that of Franklin County.

Charlemont has no public housing designated for the elderly, though a diverse housing stock with a wide range of costs is a necessary component of the social and economic health of any town. Young families and the elderly often need assistance to continue to reside in the town in which they grew up. These are often the demographic sections with lower or fixed incomes. Affordability thus is lower for these groups. The high cost of

land and development makes it difficult for the private housing market to provide an adequate number of affordable rental and home ownership opportunities. General demographic trends across the country suggest that the elderly, couples who are just starting out, and single persons are all seeking housing with less space and fewer maintenance responsibilities than single family homes.

Charlemont, therefore, has an urgent need for a wider variety of housing types beyond the traditional single-family house. With more diverse housing, Charlemont could effectively retain more of its youth and elderly populations.

**GOAL: Provide adequate and acceptable housing for Charlemont residents of all ages and income levels**

**Objective 1:** *Identify housing needs of Charlemont (size, cost, accessibility).*

- 1.1 Identify existing housing that meets the state's affordable housing definition.
- 1.2 Inventory housing stock in Charlemont.
- 1.3 Identify the town's spokespersons/representatives for housing issues.

**Objective 2:** *Preserve existing affordable housing and promote its opportunities.*

- 2.1 Discuss strategies for creating and maintaining affordable housing that meets the town's needs.
- 2.2 Assess to what degree local zoning regulations constitute barriers to the provision of adequate housing.
- 2.3 Work with the FRCOG on Regional Housing certification under Executive Order 418 to enable Charlemont to apply for state funding for housing rehabilitation, Community Development Block Grants and other discretionary state funding.

**Objective 3:** *Assess elderly housing needs in Charlemont*

- 3.1 Identify suitable areas within the village for future elderly housing opportunities.
- 3.2 Encourage private developers to develop more affordable housing in Charlemont that meets identified needs.
- 3.3 Work with the Regional Housing Authority to assess and project elderly housing needs.

**Objective 4:** *Encourage a development pattern that preserves open space and the rural character of the town.*

- 4.1 Review or revise local zoning to allow for future open space conservation subdivisions.
- 4.2 Encourage the concentration of new residential growth within existing village centers.

#### IV. HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The history of Charlemont dates from mid-eighteenth century, when Captain Moses Rice came with his older sons to settle down in the area. The community inherited a rich collection of houses and structures, of which 126 have been identified as historical and culturally significant.

Cemeteries, both public and family burial grounds, are important resources rich in art, historic monuments, genealogical information and town history. Cemeteries and burial grounds should therefore be identified and protected. The Bissell Bridge is the only remaining covered bridge in town and can be found on Route 8A where it crosses Mill Brook.

The Charlemont fairgrounds have been the site of many cultural events in Charlemont since the 1850s. The fairgrounds are located to the north of the village center, along Route 8A. The center and the surrounding hills can be seen from portions of the fairgrounds, making the fairgrounds an important tourist destination within walking distance of the village center. For many years the fairgrounds were the site of the annual Deerfield Valley Agricultural Society fairs. In 1952 the Lions Club initiated the first Yankee Doodle Days, a three-day celebration that included a parade.

**GOAL: To protect, preserve, and provide for the future management of historically and culturally significant landmarks of Charlemont**

**Objective 1:** *Encourage the restoration and reuse of historic buildings.*

1.1 Assess the status of buildings and structures on the national historic conservation inventory in the town.

The town inherited a fairly large amount of important cultural and historical structures and sites. In order to preserve these resources, it is recommended that structures with a historical value be identified and incorporated into the town's national historic conservation inventory. Restoration of those buildings is strongly urged. Structures that are designated "National Register" buildings in the village historic district are entitled to a 20% Investment Tax Credit through the Federal Preservation Tax Act Certification Program if they are rehabilitated.

1.2 Promote the further development of the historic museum in the Town Hall and explore the potential public use of the private museum in Avery's store.

1.3 Identify and preserve sites of historical and archaeological importance i.e. Native American, French and Indian era forts, Underground Railroad.

**Objective 2:** *Promote future development consistent with the existing architectural style and historic character of the town.*

2.1 Develop a Site Plan Review process for the town to ensure that future development remains compatible with the village's character, in addition to a special permit requirement for any development in the village historic district.

The entire Charlemont center has been designated as a National Historic District and, while this does not prevent additional development, the historical character of the town should be considered in any proposed changes. In order to promote development consistent with the existing architectural style and historic character of the town, a Site Plan Review process should be developed, in addition to a special permit requirement for any development in the village historic district. The Planning Board is generally responsible for overseeing the Site Plan Review, although it is useful for other public agencies such as the Charlemont Historical Commission or the Conservation Commission to have input into the process through notification of hearings.

2.2 Consider minimal design standards within the present special permit requirements that will promote architectural compatibility with historic vocabulary.

The subject for Site Plan Review can be larger developments such as residential subdivisions or commercial developments. The review process allows the Planning Board to take into consideration a range of factors that could affect the character of the town beyond health and safety problems, such as noise, traffic congestion and recommendations from the design review board. Once a development plan is submitted to the Planning Board, the Board may request changes to conform to community guidelines.

**Objective 3:** *Create and promote community events and cultural activities.*

3.1 The fairgrounds and the grandstand have an important and historic significance for Charlemont. Work should be begun with the Friends of the Charlemont Fairgrounds Committee to restore the grandstand and develop the fairgrounds as a public space, and to promote its use for public events, such as farmers' markets, concerts, and communal festivities.

- 3.1- Form a “Friends of the Arts” committee to explore expanded cultural and artistic opportunities for the community.

## V. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Charlemont's economy has its roots in its agrarian history, small size and rural backdrop. The economy once dominated by farming and forestry has shifted to a service, tourist and recreation based economy. This is punctuated by a variety of small enterprises and industries from manufacturing to construction.

### **Labor Force**

The total number of jobs available in Charlemont has almost doubled, from 171 in 1990 to 376 in the year 2000, with government and service industry jobs being responsible for most of the 120% increase. The total labor force itself has remained relatively flat over the same time period, with only a small increase. The unemployment rates have followed the state's decline of the past ten years, but still maintain a percentage point above the state average. The largest employers in town are found in the recreation industry such as Berkshire East, Zoar Outdoor, Crab Apple Whitewater and the Charlemont Inn. The Hawlemont elementary school is also a large employer.

### **Fiscal Impacts**

The tax burden weighs heavily on Charlemont residents. Residential property owners are left to pay the largest portion of the town revenues. State aid is the second largest town revenue source, with commercial revenues accounting for less than 15% of the total revenue collected.

Charlemont had a tax rate of \$19.61 in the year 2001. This rate is the 15<sup>th</sup> highest in the state. However, the average tax bill per single family is \$2020, which is 16% below the state median of \$2418. While this might appear encouraging on the surface, Charlemont's equalized value for 2001 is \$52266, or 280<sup>th</sup> in the state. A high tax rate coupled with a low average equalized property value puts a tremendous financial burden on Charlemont property owners. The 1990 median annual family income for Charlemont was \$32,366 and ranked 335 out of the 351 municipalities in the state.

The lack of diversity in the tax base keeps the burden on the residential taxpayer. The total commercial assessed value for 2001 was \$6,097, 081, while the total residential assessment was \$58,019,869. Commercial property represents only 9% of the total assessment. The need to alleviate the burden is clear, and increased business activity in the town center can help without impacting the rural landscape.

### **Recreation and Services Industry**

Clearly this category has the largest impact on Charlemont's economy. Recreation has not only been a growth industry for Charlemont, but it provides more than half the employment positions available in town. It should be pointed out, however, that these are generally seasonal rather than year round positions. The service industry has added 115 jobs to the economy since 1990. This growth underscores the need to recognize the impact of the tourist industry on the community.

### **Farming and Forestry Industry**

This segment of the economy has seen a significant decline over the years, and today is but a small segment of the Charlemont economy. There are only a handful of working farms that produce milk, vegetables, maple products, lumber products, and hay. The town has expressed a willingness to support and encourage the farming and forestry industries and agrees that it should seek ways to bolster these industries. Despite their small economic impact, these are still important and visible sectors of the community. The maintenance and promotion of a viable farming and forestry segment is an oft-stated goal of the community.

### **Business Environment**

The Route 2 corridor and the village of Charlemont provide two critical areas for businesses to locate. There is a strong business presence in the area east of the village along Route 2 known locally as East Charlemont. This is where most of the motel rooms are located. It is also home to a mix of retail, restaurant and antique shops. Because of its location closer to Shelburne Falls and Greenfield, this area has the potential to attract additional residential and commercial development. This potential must be weighed against the desire of the town to have businesses locate in the village. Development along the Route 2 corridor has the potential for significant aesthetic impact. The community should take this into consideration when reviewing the adequacy of its present zoning.

The village of Charlemont has a variety of retail, restaurant and office uses, as well as town government offices, the post office, and the school. The main street is also home to a large general store. At the western end of the village are Zoar Outdoors' headquarters and retail store. There is adequate space and infrastructure for business expansion in the village core. The timing is right to form a local business association to promote and attract businesses to the town. It could be to the community's benefit to identify the village as being receptive to future commercial development.

**GOAL: To promote a moderate and orderly rate of economic development consistent with Charlemont's small size and rural heritage in order to balance its tax base.**

**Objective 1:** *Maintain an appropriate balance between economic development and the preservation of open space, natural resources and a safe environment.*

- 1.1 Designate appropriate areas for commercial development.
- 1.2 Create a Route 2 overlay district to protect the corridor as a major tourist attraction.
- 1.3 Promote and invite businesses that practice good environmental stewardship.

**Objective 2:** *Maintain the health and stability of the resort industries that help drive Charlemont's economy.*

- 2.1 Explore upgrading all rest areas along Route 2 with added amenities and access to information.
- 2.2 Form a business association to guide appropriate business and tourism development.
- 2.3 Develop a marketing and promotion plan for the town.
- 2.4 Utilize the Old Brick Schoolhouse as a tourist information center.
- 2.5 Work with the whitewater, skiing and hiking industries to develop ways to keep their customers in town longer.

**Objective 3:** *Encourage the continued operations of agriculture and forestry enterprises.*

- 3.1 The Planning Board and the Select Board should investigate to what degree local regulations create barriers to the successful operation of the agriculture and forestry industries. (e.g., local support of the state APR program, local tax breaks, local permit revisions, etc).
- 3.2 Encourage the clustering of development to protect meadows and agricultural lands.
- 3.3 Work with FRCOG (Franklin Regional Council of Governments) to develop a "Stewardship Guide" that would educate and inform landowners about programs and methods that help preserve, maintain and perpetuate the agriculture and forestry industries.

**Objective 4:** *Pursue a communications infrastructure that is consistent with the technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

- 4.1 Acquire high speed internet access that is appropriate for the town by collaborating with FRCOG on the Franklin/Hampshire Connect initiative.

4.2 Encourage local businesses (to include cottage industries, home occupations, farming, etc.) to have an Internet presence. Provide the necessary support and education to achieve this.

**Objective 5:** *Maintain and promote the village as the economic center of the town.*

5.1 Identify and promote a portion of the village for more intense commercial development (e.g., smaller lot sizes, reduced setbacks, by right use, etc).

5.2 Refurbish the downtown area (e.g., façade improvement, landscaping, etc).

5.3 Develop consistent signs that promote and inform (e.g., directional signs, promotional banners on light poles, historical markers on buildings, etc).

**Objective 6:** *Promote economic diversity.*

6.1 Identify buildings/parcels available for commercial or multifamily development and keep an inventory of them.

6.2 Encourage the establishment of environmentally benign light industries, professions, home-based businesses and mom & pop stores that will not negatively impact the rural and aesthetic quality of the area.

6.3 Establish a promotional/marketing partnership with surrounding towns.

6.4 Define “Light Industry” and “Home Occupation,” and redefine “Cottage Industry”. Develop performance standards for those industries.

6.5 Re-examine the Special Permit process to determine its adequacy as the primary approach to land use management in town.

## VI. AGRICULTURE, OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

**GOAL: To preserve and protect the agricultural heritage, open spaces and natural resources that give Charlemont its historic rural character.**

Charlemont has large areas of undeveloped land, including expansive meadows and parts of the Mohawk Trail State Forest. It has an agrarian economy and most of the landscape still has a rural character, which most townspeople wish to maintain. The Deerfield River and surrounding hills attract tourists and provide opportunity for recreation activities. The attractiveness of the place, as well as the accessibility and availability of developable land, presents a potential for residential and commercial development. The town must have the means to control potential development and to take action on future land-use patterns if it wishes to maintain the rural character and protect the town's natural resources.

Agriculture and forestry are an important part of the local economy in Charlemont. Currently, 14% of total land area in Charlemont is prime farmland, including other farmland of statewide importance (Charlemont Master Plan Background Document). Soil characteristics are suitable for both agriculture and a variety of urban uses. Potential development can occur in these areas because of their proximity to Route 2. Preservation of agricultural land and forests can help Charlemont to restrict development on these lands and in maintaining its rural character. Agricultural activities, if promoted, will also prevent dramatic changes in land use. By playing a stronger role in stabilizing and fostering active, productive farms, the town can achieve its goal of preserving rural character and agricultural heritage.

No municipal water system exists in Charlemont, and residents and businesses are solely dependent on groundwater wells for their water needs. Significant changes in land use and non-point source pollution in aquifer regions can affect both water quality and quantity. Hence, it is important to protect aquifer recharge areas not only from pollution but also from excessive development. Furthermore, local aquifers must be protected through various conservation measures by protecting perennial rivers and streams that intercept the water table.

**Objective 1:** *Preserve productive forest and agricultural lands.*

1.1 Work with the local Land Trust to provide information to the community about various land preservation options and inform landowners about the economic benefits of participating in programs such as Chapter 61 and 61A.

Land Trusts can explain the benefits of agricultural activity to the community and the ways in which it can support and encourage farming. They are equipped to educate farmers and to provide information to them about various land preservation programs. They also help landowners to understand the economic benefits of participation in programs such as Chapter 61 and 61A. Landowners can be encouraged to place conservation restrictions on their land to ensure that agricultural activities continue to take place. The Farmland Protection Program of the Natural Resource Conservation Service provides funds to communities to purchase development rights to farmland to preserve productive farmland for agricultural use. Under this program, the town can acquire conservation easements from landowners.

A town-wide soils map indicates the areas within a community that are uniquely suited for agriculture. The town must acquire this map from the Franklin County Planning Office and use it to consider existing and future land use policy in relation to agriculture and natural resources.

**Objective 2:** *Promote agricultural uses and preserve working farms.*

2.1 Work with farmers, the Department of Food and Agriculture and the FRCOG to identify ways to revitalize working farms and agricultural uses in town.

Charlemont must conduct a community-wide agricultural profile to identify current and potential farming activities. This will entail a process to inventory existing agricultural activity, active and inactive farmlands and ascertain public and farmers attitudes towards agricultural enterprises. It must then work with FRCOG to secure funding through various programs from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Berkshire-Pioneer Resource Conservation and Development (RC & D) program covering the western and central counties in Massachusetts provides technical, financial and business assistance to farmers. It can assist farmers in setting up agro-based businesses, in finding new markets for their products, and in making agricultural production more efficient. Forest landowners can be encouraged to generate income by using agro-forestry techniques. The Farm Viability Enhancement Program of the Department of Food and Agriculture can assist farmers in strengthening their business skills and combining with diversification and environmental integrity. Making farming more profitable is likely to encourage owners of farmland to keep their farm and woodlands undeveloped. Entrepreneurial efforts involving on-farm processing of value added farm products and home based businesses will better support farms and encourage farmland owners to maintain active farms.

**Objective 3:** *Identify and protect land critical to sustaining surface and groundwater quality and quantity.*

3.1- Protect future drinking water supplies, floodplains and other environmentally sensitive areas through overlay districts or other regulatory approaches. Work with other towns dependent on the Deerfield River watershed for their water supply, recreational, and economic needs to protect areas in the basin and sub-basins of the Deerfield River and its tributaries.

The Deerfield River is not only a major tourist attraction, but is also critical in maintaining the groundwater levels. This requires that the watershed areas of the river be protected from environmental degradation and destruction. At present, the town has limited regulatory power to control any kind of development in these areas and thus a potential threat exists to such areas. The town must work with FRCOG and the Deerfield River Watershed Association and use existing maps to understand how much development can occur in these areas and the ways in which the town can control its future development. The town may consider establishing aquifer recharge and watershed overlay districts as regulatory tools to specify the nature of development in these areas.

The Wetlands Conservancy Program in the Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Wetlands and Waterways has developed "orthophoto" maps to accurately locate and delineate the state's wetland resources. They can provide an accurate planning scale inventory of the community's wetlands, highway infrastructure and real estate base. These maps can be used to delineate and regulate watershed areas that contribute to public and private drinking water wells. The Planning Board can use them for a complete assessment of developable land and to use it as a base for any type of zoning overlay district.

**Objective 4:** *Protect key landscapes and environmentally critical unprotected open spaces.*

4.1- Protect large areas of significant visual quality, including agricultural landscapes, forested hillsides and hilltops and environmentally sensitive areas through watershed overlay zoning or other open space protection measures

4.2- Update Open Space Plan to help prioritize open space investments and to access funds from the state for open space protection and recreation. Investigate funding from the Deerfield River Watershed team.

Open space should be viewed as an asset to the community. It is possible to protect or increase the preservation of such landscapes by connecting them with trails. Some of

these trails may already exist or new ones could be identified. Use of these trails for recreational purposes will encourage protection of these areas. The Greenways and Trails Demonstration Grants from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management provides funds for the creation and promotion of greenways and trail networks. The town must determine whether a view shed overlay district will assist it in regulating development in areas critical to maintaining the visual quality of these landscapes.

The town must work with the Franklin County Planning Office to update its Open Space Plan. This will help it to identify parcels that are critical to protecting open space. The town must explore protection of open spaces under the Governor's Land Conservation Initiative being carried out by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA).

## VII. TRANSPORTATION

This section will discuss the transportation goals, objectives, and actions for Charlemont that were created in response to meetings with the Charlemont Master Planning Committee and from the Visioning Forum. The topics to be discussed are traffic calming, parking, pedestrian transportation infrastructure, and the condition of local bridges and roads.

Charlemont residents are concerned about the safety of their roads. Traffic passing through the center of town is a threat to pedestrian safety. Large commercial vehicles and other motorists speed through the town center, endangering pedestrians and disrupting residents and adjacent business owners. There are also roads within the town that don't have posted speed limits.

Three actions need to be taken in order to make the roads safer in Charlemont: first, safety and visual amenities need to be installed to slow traffic. These may include marked crosswalks (to allow pedestrians to safely cross the street), narrow road markings, and street trees (to give drivers a visual reminder that they are in town and need to slow down); second, curb extensions and raised crosswalks should be created in the village center; lastly, the town should consider establishing and posting speed limits on all roads throughout the town.

To better serve the community, Charlemont should increase its supply of parking space. First, an inventory needs to be taken to assess the current number of available parking spaces within the town. After conducting the parking survey and determining it needs additional parking, the town can ascertain how many spots shall be added and where those spots shall be located. Other strategies to increase the supply of parking would be to use the Hawlemont Elementary School for additional parking on weekends and to coordinate with private landowners and business owners to allow public parking on their property.

The pedestrian transportation infrastructure (sidewalks and public transportation) in Charlemont needs to be repaired and expanded where necessary. Existing sidewalks must be repaired and possibly widened, and additional sidewalks should be added wherever necessary. Charlemont should promote a bus service along Route 2.

Charlemont owns and maintains nearly fifty miles of roads and has thirty-three bridge crossings. Many of these roads and bridges are in need of repair. In regard to local roads, Charlemont should conduct a pavement management study to assess the condition

of these roads and continue to work with the Route 2 Scenic Byway Committee. Additionally, since several of the roads in town aren't paved, the Select Board should work with the town on its dirt road management program to ensure that these roads are properly maintained. In regard to local bridges, the town should continue to work with FRCOG to encourage bridge construction and refurbishment projects.

**GOAL: To improve public safety, traffic flow, and pedestrian movement in the town of Charlemont.**

**Objective 1:** *Create a more pedestrian friendly village center by installing safety and visual amenities*

- 1.1 Work with the Massachusetts Highway Department to install safety improvements: marked crosswalks, traffic calming measures such as narrow road markings, and planting street trees along Route 2.
- 1.2 Improve the condition of town roads and enhance their safety by installing curb extensions and raised crosswalks within the village center.

**Objective 2:** *Increase the supply and accessibility of municipal parking.*

- 2.1 Conduct an inventory to assess the available number of municipal parking spaces within the town.
- 2.2 Coordinate with private landowners and business owners to acquire additional village parking.
- 2.3 Consider using Hawlemont Elementary School for additional parking on weekends.

**Objective 3:** *Improve pedestrian transportation infrastructure.*

- 3.1 Expand or promote a bus route from Charlemont to Greenfield.

**Objective 4:** *Improve conditions of local bridges.*

- 4.1 Work cooperatively with FRCOG to undertake road and bridge construction projects.

**Objective 5:** *Evaluate the roadways in town*

- 5.1 Continue to work with Route 2 Scenic Byway Committee.
- 5.2 Conduct a pavement management study.
- 5.3 Work with town on a dirt road improvement management program.

## VIII. SERVICES

### **Town Services Overview**

Public facilities define a community. Parks, schools, and recreation areas become gathering places and activity centers. The patterns of roads and the availability of sewer and waste disposal define the patterns of growth. Schools, fire stations, and other local facilities like libraries are important to the future of a community.

The public forum held in Charlemont identified the need to draft a Capital Improvement Plan. This Master Plan recommends that a townwide capital planning process and budget be undertaken to encompass each of the town departments. Instructions for this process can be found in appendix X of this Master Plan Document.

The town services section addresses:

Government	Waste Disposal
Public Education	Solid and Hazardous Waste
Library	Wastewater Treatment
Schools	Regional Services
Public Safety	Elder Services
Police	Health Services
Fire	Transportation

### **Town Hall and the Tyler Memorial Library**

The Town Hall houses the local government offices, the Charlemont Historical Society, and the Tyler Memorial Library. The Hawlemont Regional School also has a library for use during school hours.

### **Schools**

Charlemont students attend Hawlemont School, located in the town center, from kindergarten through sixth grade. This school is shared with the town of Hawley and had an enrollment of 155 students in 2001. Secondary students attend the Mohawk Trail Regional High School in Buckland for the seventh through twelfth grades. The Academy at Charlemont, a private school, operates in East Charlemont. The school was established in 1981 and moved to its current location in 1989. Enrollment at the Academy is limited to 100 students, grades seven through twelve. In 2000, 85 students were enrolled, 95% of whom were day students and 5% of whom were boarders.

## **Public Safety**

### **Police and Fire Department**

Charlemont's fire department is run solely by volunteers. The police department does not have a full-time staff. A total of 108 hours a week of local police service is provided by the town and grant money. Fifty hours of police service and ten hours of administrative service are paid for by the town, and an additional 48 hours of service is paid through grant money. The rest of the time Charlemont is patrolled by state police.

### **Solid and Hazardous Waste**

A number of landfills have been closing around New England in the last ten years. There are several reasons for landfill closure, including lack of space, environmental concerns, and the will of local community groups. However, the major reason is Subtitle D of the Federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, which mandates the closure of unlined landfills.

Since 1989, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection has conducted environmental assessments of operating town landfills, which is the first step in the closure process. After landfill operations cease, capping of the site requires three to four months' work, usually July through October when the weather is most conducive to earth-moving functions. The procurement of funding to cap landfills presents a challenge to towns, as costs average \$100,000 per acre for capping. In addition, groundwater testing and monitoring at neighboring sites must be maintained for up to thirty years.

### **Wastewater Treatment and Water Supply**

Charlemont has a "Recirculating Sand Filter" type wastewater treatment facility (FRCOG, 1998a). This facility serves the town center. The remainder of the town is served by private wells and septic systems. The wastewater treatment facility is designed to process 500,000 gallons of waste per day and was working at 48% capacity in 1998. The plant uses a "compost" type of sludge treatment system and the effluent is disposed of in the Deerfield River (FRCOG 1998a).

## **Regional Services**

### **Health Services**

The Community Health Program of FRCOG assists local Boards of Health in the area. The program provides assistance in many local inspections and other Board of Health

duties such as Title V percolation tests, condemnations, litter complaints, court actions, lead paint determination, and education workshops on current issues. Fifteen hours of free Health Agent Service is available to all towns in the Franklin County/North Quabbin area (FRCOG, 1997). Franklin County Home Health Care provides services to the town, including the Meals on Wheels program, a limited transportation service, and medical programs (FRCOG 1997).

### **Transportation Services**

The FRCOG Engineering Program provides services such as land surveying, highway design, roadway layout, MEPA permitting, representation at MHD hearings, computer system advice, drainage design, highway records research, and assistance in consultant selection for communities, organizations, and individuals. It is a fee for service program (FRCOG, 1998b).

### **Local Government Assistance**

The Resource Development Program assists communities in locating resources for their specific needs. A free one hour initial meeting is available, after which it is fee for service (FRCOG 1998b). The Cooperative Purchasing Program provides bidding, contracting, and troubleshooting services to municipalities and non-profit organizations.

**Goal: Provide essential and effective municipal services in order to satisfy the needs of residents and visitors in Charlemont.**

**Objective 1:** *Commit sufficient investment to ensure continued adequate provision of town services. (fire, police, emergency management, sewer, library).*

- 1.1 Monitor the demand on all town services and the cost requirements of these demands.
- 1.2 Integrate the above costs and demands into a Capital Improvement Plan that plans for future improvements (see attached documentation).

**Objective 2:** *Examine the feasibility of hiring a Town Manager for Charlemont.*

- 2.1 Conduct a cost/benefit analysis.
- 2.2 Look at similar towns for comparison of best practices.

**Objective 3:** *Increase communication between town offices and residents.*

- 3.1 Establish a community newsletter.
- 3.2 Place a public notice board in front of the Town Hall.
- 3.3 Place a public notice board at the Charlemont Post Office.

3.4 Place a public notice board in East Charlemont at the transfer station.

**Objective 4:** *Improve investment in educational opportunities for children and adults.*

4.1 Review Mary-Lyon Education Fund School Survey to determine the needs of Charlemont families.

4.2 Apply for grants for arts and sciences enrichment and create a town resource bank.

**Objective 5:** *Develop adequate services and facilities for the town's elderly population.*

5.1 Identify where elderly members of the town live and determine whether their needs are being adequately met.

5.2 Coordinate with existing blood pressure screening and Meals on Wheels programs to better serve the elderly citizens of Charlemont.

## IX. RECREATION

Recreation is a key sector of the Charlemont economy. The Deerfield River is a major canoeing and kayaking hub. Rafting companies use the exceptional whitewater conditions to attract river enthusiasts to experience wild water rafting; professional rafters use various portions of the river, depending on their level of experience. The Mohawk State Forest, on 6,457 acres, offers a scenic picnic area along the Deerfield River, as well as camping, swimming, fishing, hunting, hiking, boating, horseback riding, and cross country skiing. Many of the old Indian trails still exist here, including a portion of the original Mahican-Mohawk Trail footpath. Charlemont has a large variety of seasonal outdoors activities but only a few in-doors activities.

**Goal: To maintain, improve and create adequate recreational opportunities for residents and tourists.**

**Objective 1:** *Better utilize existing town open space for recreational use.*

- 1.1 Form a “Friends of the River” Committee to review the following issues: identify options for a private or public beach on the Deerfield River for town residents (identify a public parcel on river that could be used for this purpose and the feasibility of using the parcel for the beach) and officially designate river access points along the Deerfield River within the Charlemont borders.
- 1.2 Develop a walking path/greenway from the fairgrounds to the village center, including the Mill Brook and the Bissell Bridge.

**Objective 2:** *Increase year round recreational opportunities for younger residents.*

- 2.1 Create a Recreation Committee to increase and improve existing after-school programs for children (music programs, increased library hours, affordable ski program).

A Recreation Committee will investigate the possibility of starting activities like football, baseball, basketball, tennis, soccer, and gymnastics on the school grounds after classes end. The committee could identify new activities that could be started with the help of school children. The Hawlemont School has facilities that could be used for after school recreation activities. The Recreation Committee could also look into possible sources of funding to obtain land and/or buildings for public recreational activities.

- 2.2 Establish a network of multipurpose trails that can be used year round for hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing and horseback riding.

At the Public Vision Forum and other meetings with town citizens, it was suggested that several committees be formed to create and maintain the trail network. Residents believe that important historical places like the fairgrounds, the village center, and the Bissell Bridge will be the main attractions. A committee should identify landowners willing to help develop this greenway.

### 2.3 Promote recreational uses on existing state owned land.

**Objective 3:** *Provide safe and adequate bike and pedestrian path connections in town.*

3.1 Form a committee of people interested in identifying, maintaining and promoting potential bike paths in town.

Massachusetts General Laws, Chapters 138 and 138A, provide a basis for “trail development and protection activities.” Massachusetts General Laws, Chapters 723 and 564, provide authorization and funding for a range of trail types including pedestrian, auto, and bicycle (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1990). Under these laws, the Department of Environmental Management has acquired trails throughout the state for recreational use.

For the handicapped and the elderly, the most favorable recreational sites will be the ones that are accessible by car, with wide, stable paths surfaced with asphalt, concrete or wood tiles. There should be signs on the trails to inform people about the level of difficulty, trail surface, length and width. This information should be available to the public in such strategic places as the Town Hall, the Post Office, or the Charlemont Inn.

**Objective 4:** *Explore the expansion of the Mahican-Mohawk Hiking Trail on its way from the Connecticut River to the Hudson.*

4.1 Collaborate with the Deerfield River Watershed Association to extend the existing trail by identifying parcels and landowners for new sections, to help maintain existing sections in town, and to promote the trail as a recreational attraction for both residents and tourists.

## X. TOWN CENTER

**Goal:** To create a pedestrian friendly environment that is attractive to businesses and will preserve the historical character of the town center.

Charlemont's town center was designated as a National Historic District in 1985 through the National Register of Historic Places. Charlemont has a traditional, well-defined town center that could be used as a basis for economic and recreational development, further historic preservation and revitalization, and to provide more varied forms of housing in a compact, rural setting (Background Document). While limited development has occurred within and outside of the town center, Charlemont has retained the compact urban form that largely developed in past centuries. This commercial district contains several stores including Avery's General Store, the Charlemont Inn, two gas stations, the Post Office, the Town Hall, Hawlemont School, and the town's fire department. In addition to the various mixed uses found within the town center, several elements combine to give the town center a strong identity.

Town centers have traditionally been the focal point for the community in small rural towns. In Charlemont, it assumes greater significance because it has the potential to bring together the three disjointed parts of the town - Zoar Village, the village center, and East Charlemont. A vibrant town center can be a place of community pride, where people assemble for commercial and social activities. As a prerequisite to an active town center, it should be oriented to pedestrian traffic and also provide adequate and convenient parking. In Charlemont, concentrating commercial activities in the town center will enable the town to utilize the existing infrastructure to its best potential and lower the demand on valuable open space outside the town center. Re-use of existing structures will reduce development costs, preserve the unique character of the town center and enhance property values in and around it. On its part, the town must make the required infrastructure improvements, facilitate diversified commercial development and refurbish the town center to make it a more attractive place to locate businesses.

**Objective 1:** *To make town center an attractive location for businesses and to promote diversity in commercial activities.*

1.1 Identify areas for intense commercial activities and acquire additional parking. A compact urban form exists in the town center, and creating smaller lot sizes and reducing setback requirements should maintain it. Existing buildings should be renovated and multiple uses should be allowed to achieve higher density of development. Development of under-utilized parcels should be encouraged for large commercial or light industrial establishments. An active town center provides a walking experience for the visitor and

discourages the use of the automobile. The town must identify suitable parcels of land and co-ordinate with private landowners and businesses to develop them for public parking.

**Objective 2:** *Create a visually appealing space for commercial and recreational activities*

2.1 Initiate design and aesthetic improvements to building facades and landscape in the town center. A signage system should be prepared that promotes the town center and informs visitors about it while also ensuring the visual compatibility of all signs. This must be complemented with the erection of directional signs at strategic locations, promotional banners on light poles, historical markers on buildings, and the re-painting of buildings.

**Objective 3:** *To encourage development that is consistent with the existing architectural character of the town center.*

3.1 Re-examine zoning by-laws pertinent to development in the town center. The core of the town center has been designated as a National Historic District. A Historic Overlay District would be an effective tool to preserve the architectural character and to ensure that future development in the town center will be architecturally compatible with the surrounding buildings. A site plan review process will ensure that the proposed development is consistent with the character and scale of surrounding structures, and that design issues relating to traditional facades, use of traditional building materials, landscape, and parking requirements are adequately addressed. Certain businesses and commercial activities may be permitted by right to encourage re-use of existing buildings.

**Objective 4:** *To increase pedestrian access to the town center for town residents.*

4.1: Make improvements to calm traffic on Route 2 in the town center. Heavy trucks and speeding traffic on Route 2 have limited pedestrian movement in the town center. The town must work with Mass Highway Department and other transportation officials at the Franklin Regional Planning Agency to implement traffic calming techniques such as curb extensions and raised crosswalks in the town center. Narrow road markings should be created on Route 2 in the center of town to slow down traffic. Street trees should be planted along Route 2 to create a visual and psychological barrier between the highway and adjoining uses, and to provide cues to motorists by identifying it as “shared space”.

4.2. Develop a walking path/greenway from the fairgrounds to the town center. Public and quasi-public open spaces in the town center could be connected by a corridor to enhance activity and pedestrian access to the town center. This corridor would cross numerous private properties. A committee should be formed to investigate the possibility of creating this greenway.