

LAND USE AND ZONING

In recent decades, Franklin County has faced both a reduction in farmland and increased residential, commercial, and industrial development. Nonetheless, the county is still primarily rural in character. The county comprises approximately 725 square miles, including 702 land square miles (449,000 acres). The county contains only 38,094 land parcels (for an average parcel size of 11.8 land acres), suggesting that little high-density development has occurred. Also, the majority of towns in Franklin County are zoned primarily for rural residential development, and nine of these towns are zoned entirely rural residential with no other zoning districts. Table 8 summarizes some general land use statistics for Franklin County towns which was collected by the State Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services (DLS) and the State Department of Housing and Community Development.

Table 8: General Land Use Figures

Town	Public Road Mileage (1999)	Total Square Miles	Land Square Miles	Road Mileage Per Land Sq Mile	Total Parcels (FY 2001)	Community Type (DLS designation)
Ashfield	70.9	40.4	40.3	1.76	1,431	Resort, Retirement, Artistic
Bernardston	41.8	23.4	23.4	1.78	1,245	Rural Economic Center
Buckland	42.1	19.8	19.6	2.15	1,105	Rural Economic Center
Charlemont	42.9	26.4	26.1	1.64	885	Small Rural Community
Colrain	78.9	43.5	43.4	1.82	1,343	Rural Economic Center
Conway	64.1	37.8	37.7	1.70	1,109	Resort, Retirement, Artistic
Deerfield	77.6	33.4	32.3	2.40	2,924	Rural Economic Center
Erving	17.0	14.4	13.9	1.23	832	Rural Economic Center
Gill	34.8	14.9	14.0	2.48	812	Rural Economic Center
Greenfield	101.6	21.9	21.7	4.68	6,310	Urbanized Center
Hawley	44.8	30.9	30.9	1.45	269	Resort, Retirement, Artistic
Heath	52.1	24.9	24.9	2.09	924	Small Rural Community
Leverett	34.5	23.0	22.9	1.51	1,108	Resort, Retirement, Artistic
Leyden	35.5	18.0	18.0	1.97	620	Small Rural Community
Monroe	16.7	10.8	10.7	1.56	161	Rural Economic Center
Montague	103.7	31.4	30.4	3.41	4,251	Rural Economic Center
New Salem	38.0	58.8	45.0	0.84	664	Small Rural Community
Northfield	65.6	35.4	34.4	1.90	2,219	Rural Economic Center
Orange	84.1	36.0	35.4	2.38	3,251	Rural Economic Center
Rowe	35.8	24.1	23.6	1.52	467	Resort, Retirement, Artistic
Shelburne	49.7	23.5	23.3	2.14	1,005	Rural Economic Center
Shutesbury	31.2	27.2	26.6	1.17	1,224	Resort, Retirement, Artistic
Sunderland	38.9	14.8	14.4	2.70	1,431	Growth Community
Warwick	56.4	37.6	37.3	1.51	698	Small Rural Community
Wendell	48.3	32.2	32.0	1.51	724	Growth Community
Whately	31.2	20.7	20.2	1.55	1,082	Resort, Retirement, Artistic
Franklin Co	1,338	725	702	1.91	38,094	

Source: Road mileage, parcels, and community type: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, Comparison Criteria Report, August 2001; total area and land area: Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, 2000.

DLS characterizes the majority of the towns as "rural," designating them either as "rural economic centers" (11 towns) or as "small rural communities" (5 towns). Seven towns are identified as "resort, retirement, or artistic" communities and two (Sunderland and Wendell) as "growth

communities.” According to the latest 1990 US Census data, between 1990 and 2000, the population in Sunderland and Wendell grew by 11 percent and 9 percent respectively. DLS characterizes Greenfield as an “urbanized center,” the only one in the Franklin County. The DLS data also show that Greenfield, as expected, has the highest density of road mileage (4.68 miles of roads per land square mile). In comparison, New Salem has the lowest road mileage density, less than one-fifth of Greenfield’s, with only 0.84 miles of road per land square mile.

Transportation and land use are inextricably linked. Certain land uses, especially commercial and multi-residential development, can increase the demand for new or expanded transportation facilities. Further, the construction of new or expanded roadways can itself promote new development. Additionally, if new or expanded roads are not properly designed or located, they can encourage sprawling, low-density development that may increase road maintenance costs including snow plowing, and require new services infrastructure, including expanded service routes for police, fire, and emergency vehicles. Sprawl can also lead to increased air pollution from automobiles, due to the greater miles traveled, as well as fragmented wildlife habitats and the loss of farmland.

Among key factors that affect land use and growth management are local zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations. As mentioned above, the majority of Franklin County towns are zoned primarily for rural residential development, with minimum lot sizes typically ranging from one to two acres. In fact, nine of the twenty-six county towns are zoned entirely rural residential and have no other zoning districts. Although most Franklin County towns are predominantly rural in character, many of them are still facing some development and growth pressures. Yet, so far, few towns in the county have enacted comprehensive measures to help direct future growth.

Local Master Plans can reduce the problem of unplanned sprawl, by helping to guide future land use and development within a town. Communities are encouraged to prepare a Master Plan to help future development occur in an orderly way. The Master Plan can identify zoning and subdivision changes that can help preserve rural areas and enliven village and town centers. It can also define local growth centers where greater density and growth may be appropriate and orient development to these areas. Further, the Master Plan can prioritize future investments in infrastructure including roads, water and sewer.

Last year, the Governor issued Executive Order 418, which offers communities grants of up to \$30,000 to create Community Development Plans. These plans are similar to a traditional Master Plan in that they are intended to provide general guidance to communities as they consider future development options. The Community Development Plans are required to cover a variety of topics including transportation, economic development, housing, and open space. Franklin County towns may find it advantageous to create Community Development Plans for themselves as a start toward creating a more comprehensive Master Plan, or to supplement an existing one. The Franklin Regional Council of Governments is available on a contract basis to assist communities with master planning and community development planning efforts.

A prerequisite for accessing this \$30,000 in planning funds was the completion of an Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) sponsored and funded build-out analysis. Under the EOEA’s Community Preservation Program, build-out analyses were developed for all municipalities in Massachusetts. The goal of the Community Preservation Program is to promote an enhanced quality of life in Massachusetts through sensible growth and environmental preservation. The build-out project was intended to encourage informed decision-making on the local level. The FRCOG worked with MassGIS and completed a build-out analysis for each

Franklin County town by June 30, 2001. Each town was then presented with a complete set of Geographic Information System (GIS) maps from its build-out (including maps showing land use and open space) to assist it and to inform further local planning efforts.