



# 2024

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:

## APPENDIX A: PHASE 2 REPORT

## TOWN OF LEVERETT

JUNE 2024



# Acknowledgments

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- G.** Spring 2024 Survey and Additional Public Comments
- H.** Planning Board: Consultant Presentations
- I.** Phase 1 Report, June 2022

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

### PHASE 2 REPORT

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This Phase 2 Report supports the Town of Leverett 2024 Comprehensive Plan, which is a separate document. The report summarizes two parallel efforts that took place during the planning process. The first effort was the public engagement and outreach undertaken by the Steering Group and supported by the consultant team (Innes Associates with RKG Associates and Tighe & Bond). The complete input from this process is in the following appendices:

- **C. STEERING GROUP: MEETINGS**
- **D. STEERING GROUP: SMALL GROUP SUMMARIES**
- **E. COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS: SUMMARIES**
- **F. FALL 2023 COMMUNITY SURVEY**

This report has been revised from an earlier version. When the first draft was made public, the consultant team set up a survey to collect comments. The Steering Group and the Planning Board gathered additional comments through emails and LeverettConnects and sent them to the consultant team. Some comments were sent directly to the consultant team via email. **APPENDIX G. SPRING 2024 SURVEY AND ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENTS** contains the full results of the survey and all the comments received.

The second effort was additional data collection throughout the planning process. The Phase 1 report, completed in June 2022, provided an assessment of the known data available to the Town's Working Group and the consultant team (Innes Associates) at the time. That report is available in **APPENDIX I. PHASE 1 REPORT, JUNE 2022.**

At the June 27, 2023 meeting, the consultant team presented the first round of data updates to the Steering Group. The presentation is available in **APPENDIX C. STEERING GROUP: MEETINGS.** The consultant team made two zoning-related presentations to the Planning Board in January and April 2024. These presentations are available in **APPENDIX H. PLANNING BOARD: CONSULTANT PRESENTATIONS.**

This Phase 2 report collects much of the data from those presentations and attempts to integrate it into a single framework for the future work of the Planning Board described in the 2024 Comprehensive Plan.

### 2024 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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The 2024 Comprehensive Plan (a separately bound document) provides the following information:

- Timeline of the 2023-2024 planning process.
- Recognition of the participants.
- A list of suggestions for immediate next steps.
- Chart of responsibilities and potential partners.
- Timeline of past planning efforts.
- Recommended action steps from those plans, organized by Section 81D planning element.
- Seven key topics identified by the Steering Group at their meeting on January 15, 2024 and action steps for the Leverett community to consider, including informational resources where appropriate.
- Financial resources.



## 1.2 WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A comprehensive plan is a document that provides guidance to a municipality for its policies, actions, and investments over a defined period of time, often ten years. In Massachusetts, comprehensive plans are enabled by Section 81D. The Planning Board is responsible for creating and updating the municipal master – or comprehensive – plan.

81D requires nine elements. Of these, the Goals and Policies Statement (this is often called Vision and Goals) and the Implementation Plan are the most critical components in terms of defining the future policies, actions, and investments of the Town. These elements provide the why (Goals and Policies), what, who, where, when, and how (Implementation Plan) of the comprehensive plan.

Comprehensive planning grew out of land use planning, and the other seven elements reflect this. Those elements are as follows:

- Circulation (which originally referred to the roadways in a town and now includes transportation, transit, and mobility)
- Economic development
- Housing
- Natural and cultural resources (which include historic resources)
- Open Space and Recreation
- Services and facilities (which refer to Town services and facilities and include water, wastewater, and stormwater management)
- Land use plan (which brings together the land use recommendations of the plan)

The Leverett Planning Board undertook the planning process with the expectation that zoning changes would likely be the first action of the Town to address community needs and values for the use of land within the town. (Note that “Town” refers to the government, while “town” refers to the geographic area.) Such changes are a frequent first step after a plan has been adopted by the community through the vote of the Planning Board.

## 1.3 ABOUT LEVERETT’S PLANNING PROCESS

The Town of Leverett undertook a two-phase process for creating a comprehensive plan to guide the Town’s zoning changes, policies, and investment of resources over the next ten years.

The Leverett Planning Board started the planning process for creating a comprehensive plan in 2021, with a request for proposals (RFP) for a consultant to assist with the first phase. This phase, which began in 2022, examined the available data and previous planning efforts and resulted in a Phase 1 report that summarized the existing conditions and provided a path and scope for Phase 2. Phase 2 began in 2023, after the issuance of a second RFP in fall 2022. The funding source for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 was the Community One Stop for Growth program, with a deadline of June 20, 2023 for the first phase and June 30, 2024 for the second phase.

The Town hired Innes Associates for Phase 1 and Phase 2. Innes Associates added RKG Associates and Tighe & Bond to Phase 2 to provide specialized information relative to their respective expertise.

**Figure 2. Text of Section 81D**

**SECTION 81D: MASTER PLAN; ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUPPLEMENT**

This is the enabling legislation for master – or comprehensive – plans in Massachusetts. The legislation also defines the planning elements referred to in this document. The text is introduced here to help establish the framework for the planning process. The main focus is on these elements, although the Town can – and did – add other topics for consideration.

Section 81D. A planning board established in any city or town under section eighty-one A shall make a master plan of such city or town or such part or parts thereof as said board may deem advisable and from time to time may extend or perfect such plan.

Such plan shall be a statement, through text, maps, illustrations or other forms of communication, that is designed to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality. The comprehensive plan shall be internally consistent in its policies, forecasts and standards, and shall include the following elements:

- (1) Goals and policies statement which identifies the goals and policies of the municipality for its future growth and development. Each community shall conduct an interactive public process, to determine community values, goals and to identify patterns of development that will be consistent with these goals.
- (2) Land use plan element which identifies present land use and designates the proposed distribution, location and inter-relationship of public and private land uses. This element shall relate the proposed

standards of population density and building intensity to the capacity of land available or planned facilities and services. A land use plan map illustrating the land use policies of the municipality shall be included.

(3) Housing element which identifies and analyzes existing and forecasted housing needs and objectives including programs for the preservation, improvement and development of housing. This element shall identify policies and strategies to provide a balance of local housing opportunities for all citizens.

(4) Economic development element which identifies policies and strategies for the expansion or stabilization of the local economic base and the promotion of employment opportunities.

(5) Natural and cultural resources element which provides an inventory of the significant natural, cultural and historic resource areas of the municipality, and policies and strategies for the protection and management of such areas.

(6) Open space and recreation element which provides an inventory of recreational and resources and open space areas of the municipality, and policies and strategies for the management and protection of such resources and areas.



(7) Services and facilities element which identifies and analyzes existing and forecasted needs for facilities and services used by the public.

(8) Circulation element which provides an inventory of existing and proposed circulation and transportation systems.

(9) Implementation program element which defines and schedules the specific municipal actions necessary to achieve the objectives of each element of the master or study plan. Scheduled expansion or replacement of public facilities or circulation system components and the anticipated costs and revenues associated with accomplishment of such activities shall be detailed in this element. This element shall specify the process by which the municipality's regulatory structures shall be amended so as to be consistent with the master plan.

Such plan shall be made, and may be added to or changed from time to time, by a majority vote of such planning board and shall be public record. The planning board shall, upon completion of any plan or report, or any change or amendment to a plan or report produced under this section, furnish a copy of such plan or report or amendment thereto, to the executive office of housing and livable communities.

A city or town which has an established master or study plan under section eighty-one A and applies for a state grant from the commonwealth shall prepare and keep on file within such city or town an economic development supplement; provided, however, that such city or town shall not be required to prepare such supplement if such city or town has a supplement on file. Such supplement shall be at least one page in length and shall contain the goals of the city or town with respect to industrial or commercial development, affordable housing, and preservation of parks and open space.

## 1.4 COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is a critical component of any planning process. Comprehensive plans identify a series of policies and actions for a municipality, in this case, the Town of Leverett, to undertake over the next ten years (the typical lifespan of a comprehensive plan). The recommendations for those policies and actions come from two sets of information: the existing conditions and public input. “Existing conditions” refers to the physical (built and natural environment), economic (housing, jobs, and trends), and social (demographics) context within which the planning process takes place. **“Community engagement” seeks to understand the participants’ reactions to those conditions and their hopes and expectations for the future of the town and its community.**

### 1.4.1 LEVEL 1: STEERING GROUP

Engaging the community for a comprehensive plan happens at several levels. A Planning Board will appoint a working group, advisory committee, or other core group of volunteers who provide detailed feedback and assist with outreach.

**To assist with community engagement efforts, the The Leverett Planning Board, after calling for volunteers, appointed a Steering Group of thirteen members.**

### 1.4.2 LEVEL 2: IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

The second level of engagement is the in-person workshop or meeting. This type of engagement often reaches those who are already involved with town initiatives, and can capture people who become more interested during the process as future options are refined and they better understand the potential impacts.

The consultant team presented two options to the Steering Group at their first few meetings in Spring 2023 for either the standard large-scale community workshops or a series of smaller focus group meetings. In Fall 2023, the Steering Group decided to undertake the small group meetings themselves and asked the consultant team to prepare materials for and facilitate three larger meetings.

The Steering Group sponsored several smaller group meetings that may have captured input from some who were unable to attend the larger meetings.

**The first workshop captured 73 attendees, the second had 57, and the third had 41 attendees.** The second and third workshops included a mix of participants who had been at the previous workshop and those who were attending for the first time. Workshop attendance often drops during a planning process and table exercises (the third workshop) may interest fewer people than open houses (the first and second workshops), which are more flexible for those with multiple commitments.

Chapter 2 includes more robust summary of the engagement process and the results.

### 1.4.3 LEVEL 3: SURVEYS

Finally, surveys reach a wider audience, but may only engage them for a limited amount of time. Because of the cost of a process designed to be statistically significant, these surveys are more like questionnaires: respondents are self-selected and may not reach a representative population. However, they are useful at gathering a large amount of information and can be read as “temperature-taking” on topics of interest to community members.

**The Fall 2023 survey sponsored by the Steering Group had 411 responses, far more than were able to attend an in-person meeting.** A limitation of this survey is that the Steering Group chose not to include the same demographic questions as the Phase 1 survey, so a direct comparison of who responded to the survey in each process was not possible.

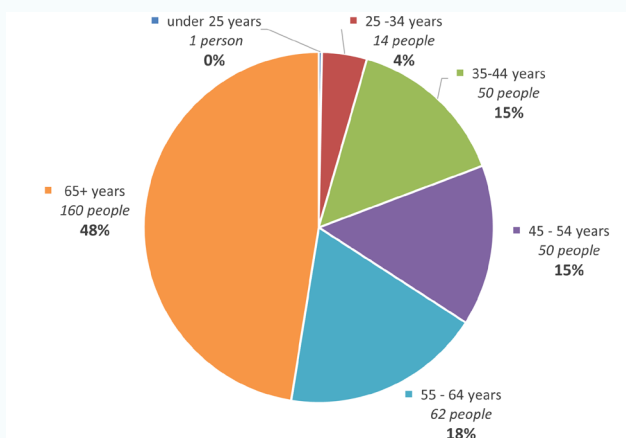
In May 2024, the consultant team created a second survey to collect responses to the first draft of the comprehensive plan. This survey only had 28 responses; additional comments were submitted through LeverettConnects and direct email. Unfortunately, because not all comments were submitted through the survey portal, the demographic information for the all respondents to the draft is incomplete.

Splitting the original document into two documents was a recommendation in the comments on the first plan. Where feasible, additional edits in response to the comments are included in both documents.

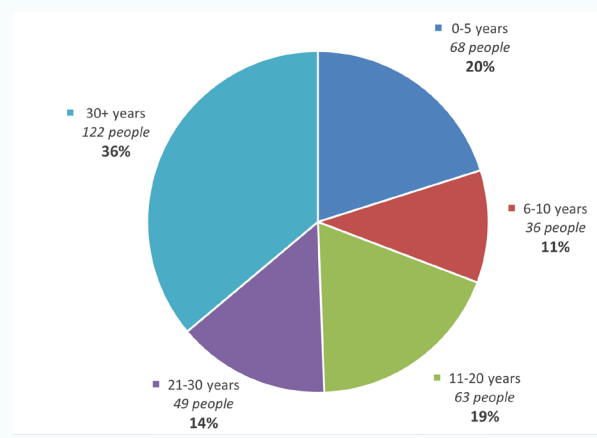
#### The Community Survey: Who Responded?

The Steering Group limited the demographic questions to two: the age of the respondent and the length of time they have lived in Leverett. The two pie charts below show the results. Most of the respondents were 65 and over. Most of the respondents had lived in Leverett for over 30 years.

**Figure 3. Age of Respondents**



**Figure 4. Length of Time Lived in Leverett**



## 2. Listening to the Community

### 2.1 SUMMARY OF THE PROCESS

#### 2.1.1 STEERING GROUP MEETINGS

The planning process for Phase 2 took place between February 2023 and June 2024. The process began with the Planning Board appointing the members of the Steering Group. The Steering Group had its introductory meeting with the consultants on **April 17, 2023**. Additional meetings between the Steering Group and the consultant team were as follows:

- **MAY 10, 2023.** At the Steering Group’s request, the consultant team presented the full scope of work and the roles of the Steering Group and the consultant team in each task.
- **JUNE 27, 2023.** The consultant team presented the updated information on existing conditions as recommended in the Phase 1 report.
- **SEPTEMBER 26, 2023.** The consultant team presented revised options for public engagement for the remaining months of the process to the Steering Group for their review, discussion, and confirmation.
- **NOVEMBER 20, 2023.** The Steering Group and the consultant team discussed the input from the survey and the first public meeting and the framework for the second public meeting.
- **FEBRUARY 12, 2024.** The Steering Group and the consultant team discussed the framework for the third public meeting and tested the draft table exercises.

To support the engagement process, the Steering Group also held its own meetings and outreach efforts. The Steering Group met, without the consultant team, on the following dates:

- July 25, 2023.
- September 19, 2023.
- October 10, 2023.

- November 6, 2023.
- November 27, 2023.
- January 15, 2024.
- February 5, 2024.
- March 11, 2024.
- April 23, 2024.
- June 4, 2024.

The available minutes for all Steering Group meetings are included in **APPENDIX C**.

#### 2.1.2 SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

As introduced in **Section 1.4**, members of the Steering Group hosted small group meetings to raise awareness of the planning process in the fall and early winter. In October 2023, the consultant team provided materials for these workshops, including a map of the town, a Word document for questions and notes for these small groups, and a handout of data resources. These meetings were as follows:

- October 24, 2023. LES Open House.
- November 5, 2023. Teawaddle Hill neighborhood group.
- November 5, 2023. Harvest Fest Village Co-op.
- November 14, 2023. Veterans’ Group.
- December 10, 2023. Shutesbury Group.
- January 19, 2024. Council on Aging.
- March-June 2024. Drop-in at the Leverett Public Library.

The available notes for these meetings are included in **APPENDIX D**.

**A summary timeline of this process is available in the 2024 Comprehensive Plan.**



### 2.1.3 COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

The Planning Board and the Steering Group sponsored three community workshops, as listed below. The Steering Group supported these workshops with significant outreach efforts, including a flyer for the Annual Town Meeting in April 2023, posting flyers throughout the town and handing them out at the transfer station on Saturdays. The consultant team prepared the materials and supplied facilitators to help answer questions at the first two workshops. At the third workshop, Steering Group and Planning Board members facilitated the discussion tables.

- **WORKSHOP 1: OCTOBER 17, 2023.** This first workshop was a “data walk” that introduced participants to selected information about existing conditions and invited their comments on both a large-scale map of the town and boards containing charts, graphs, and other data. Participants had the option of dropping into the open house from 3-5pm or 6-8pm. Topics included the following:
  - Draft values and goals based on the input from the Steering Group and the work in Phase 1; and
  - Existing conditions information presented to the Steering Group in June, including demographics, water and wastewater, the municipal budget, current land use and zoning.
- **WORKSHOP 2: DECEMBER 6, 2023.** The second workshop was also a data walk, although the hours were advertised from 3-8pm rather than as two separate sessions. The topics included the following:
  - Larger-scale maps of the Town Center, Route 63, Moore’s Corner, North Leverett, and Open Space;
  - Refined list of values, based on the survey and the information from the first workshop;
  - More detailed information about housing and zoning in Leverett; and
  - A series of questions that asked participants about specific alternatives for Town policies and actions.

- **WORKSHOP 3: FEBRUARY 28, 2024.** At the request of participants at the first two workshops and some members of the Steering Group, the final workshop was table-based to allow participants to discuss the presented options with each other. The workshop was again split into two sessions (3-5 pm and 6-8 pm) but was not an open house. Participants were greeted with information about what conditions in Leverett might be like in 2040 based on trends for the aging of the population and the impacts of climate change – two topics with potential for impacts on Town services, facilities, and infrastructure. Each table discussed the same sample recommendations, identified those they agreed or disagreed with, and prioritized the ones with which they agreed.

The full records of these workshops are included in **APPENDIX E**.

### 2.1.4 COMMUNITY SURVEYS

The Steering Group also sponsored a community-wide survey, which the consultant team hosted on SurveyMonkey. This survey, available online and in paper format, was open from October 17 through December 18, 2023 and received 411 responses. The full results for this survey are included in **APPENDIX F**.

The Planning Board put the first draft of the plan online in May 2024 and a second survey was set up to collect comments. Comments were also sent directly to the consultant team and extracted from a thread on LeverettConnects. The combined comments are included in **APPENDIX G**.

Innes Associates met with the Planning Board four times from January-June 2024 to discuss the plan progress, the zoning analysis, and the draft plan. The January 2024 and April 2024 presentations are provided in **APPENDIX H**.

Finally, the original Phase 1 Report is provided in **APPENDIX I**.

## 2.2 FALL 2023 COMMUNITY SURVEY

The Steering Group’s community-wide survey was available on-line and through paper copies from October 9 through December 18, 2023. Although not everyone answered each question, **411 respondents or just over 22% of the 2020 population of 1,865** took part in the survey. The Steering Group asked about community values, goals, livability factors (contributors to quality of life in Leverett and what could improve them), and concerns for the future of Leverett.

The workshops, survey, and small group discussions, along with the work of the Steering Group, allowed for an interactive process of education, feedback, and iteration. The final content of this plan document is based on the interactions of those discussions.

### 2.2.1 VALUES, GOALS, AND LIVABILITY

Many communities try to develop a single vision statement for the comprehensive plan that is supported by a series of goals, strategies, and actions. **The Steering Group decided early that a focus on community values was more responsive to Leverett** and the wide range of opinions, experiences, and hopes for the future that community members had expressed.

The Steering Group sought to identify shared values and goals that could be used to evaluate different paths to enhancing livability in Leverett for all over the next 10-15 years. The members identified a list of five key topics that they wanted to address during the initial planning process.

Those topics, which formed the basis of the survey content, are as follows:

- Affordable Housing
- Aging in Place
- Climate Resilience

- Recreation and Rural Character
- Town Services

At their January 15, 2024 meeting, members of the Steering Group expanded the list in response to what they heard from the first two workshops and the results of the survey. This new list is as follows:

- Environmental Stewardship
- Climate Resilience
- Affordable Housing
- Zoning
- Aging in Leverett
- Rural Character
- Recreation

The revised list forms the basis of the recommendations in the 2024 Comprehensive Plan.

This section identifies the top ten values and goals from the community-wide survey and modifications to those based on the third community workshop, which took place after the survey was closed. These values and goals were shared with the Leverett community at the third community workshop.

The lists to the right are the top ten values and the top ten goals of those tested by The Steering Group in the Fall 2023 Community Survey. **These initial discussions of values and goals are critical components of how the Leverett community chooses to proceed once this planning process is complete.**

The Steering Group also wanted to focus on livability – in other words, the quality of life – in Leverett. The top ten responses to the contributors to and needs for livability in Leverett are on page 22.

**Table 5. Top Ten Values**

#	Potential Value	Respondents Ranking the Value as Important*	
		%	#
1	Nature and conservation are important.	92.20%	331
2	Acceptance of others is important.	87.57%	310
3	Planning for climate change is important.	83.24%	298
4	Maintaining rural character is important.	82.45%	296
5	Peaceful serenity and quiet living are important.	81.07%	287
6	Social justice, promoting equity, and including everyone is important.	76.26%	273
7	Hazard planning is important.	72.88%	258
8	Strong community ties are important.	72.07%	258
9	Affordable housing is important.	61.73%	221
10	Historic preservation is important.	51.43%	180

\*362 respondents (of 411) answered Question 5 (Values).

**Table 6. Top Ten Goals**

#	Potential Goal	Respondents Ranking the Goal as Important*	
		%	#
1	Protect drinking water.	95.57%	345
2	Protect forests and nature.	90.70%	322
3	Protect soil health.	88.20%	314
4	Protect farmland.	81.02%	286
5	Promote energy conservation and efficiency.	80.95%	289
6	Support improvement of Leverett Library.	64.66%	225
7	Support improvement of Leverett Elementary School.	64.20%	226
8	Make housing more affordable.	59.83%	210
9	Improve or maintain town infrastructure and Town Hall.	56.90%	198
10	Foster arts and culture.	55.30%	193

\*361 respondents (of 411) answered Question 4 (Goals).

## 2. Listening to the Community

**Table 7. Top Ten Contributors to Livability**

#	Livability Factors	Respondents Choosing the Factor*	
		%	#
1	Preservation and use of nature and forests.	90.10%	364
2	Availability of clean water.	82.18%	332
3	Passive recreation activities (trails, picnic areas, etc.).	79.70%	322
4	Rural character and rural way of life.	78.47%	317
5	Sense of community and strong social ties.	62.87%	254
6	Proximity to larger communities.	62.13%	251
7	High quality education opportunities.	49.75%	201
8	Arts and culture.	41.58%	168
9	Preservation of and access to historic and cultural resources.	39.85%	161
10	Support for local businesses.	38.37%	155

\*404 respondents (of 411) answered Question 1.

**Table 8. Top Ten Needs for Livability**

#	Livability Needs	Respondents Choosing the Factor*	
		%	#
1	Better cell phone coverage and/or wi-fi.	67.09%	265
2	Town-owned solar/resilient community energy infrastructure.	61.48%	241
3	More quality, affordable/low-cost housing.	52.67%	207
4	Public transportation.	42.86%	168
5	More coffee shops or cafés.	42.13%	166
6	More community gathering spaces.	39.85%	157
7	More town-wide community events.	38.44%	148
8	Traffic calming measures.	36.20%	139
9	More access to Town information.	35.16%	135
10	Improving recreational spaces.	35.14%	136

\*406 respondents (of 411) answered Question 2.



## 2.2.2 SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

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The consultant team provided the raw data from the survey to the Steering Group; this data is provided in **APPENDIX F. FALL 2023 COMMUNITY SURVEY**.

This section is a high-level summary of the initial evaluation of survey results. Respondents to the survey identified specific areas of concern. Many responses included concerns about the lack of amenities within town and how it affects their quality of life. Proximity to neighboring towns such as Amherst and Hadley for access to jobs and amenities is important to Leverett's residents.

Some people support the expansion of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) into Leverett to help increase access to these amenities. 43% of respondents noted that access to public transportation is important to them.

Many respondents mention Leverett's aging community and concern for lack of senior activities and housing. 73% of survey respondents answered that meeting the needs of an aging population is important to them. Leverett's residents live in Leverett for a reason: they love their community.

Other responses in the survey focused on Leverett's lack of resources for older residents within town and how people rely on neighboring communities for these amenities. Some of these amenities may include grocery stores, health care services, and senior centers in Amherst and Hadley. Respondents who mentioned aging in Leverett also noted that a lack of affordability and inability to maintain upkeep of their home as personal concerns.

Some residents in Leverett are concerned about housing. They want their community to be more affordable and meet the needs of everyday residents. 53% of respondents noted that more quality, affordable housing is important to them. Some residents mention Leverett's high tax rate as a concern: sometimes this is also related to housing affordability.

Over-development is a concern for some residents in Leverett. Residents do not want to see development bring radical change to the community. Of those residents who support development, they want to see it directly benefit their community and not just certain stakeholders. 45% of survey respondents want to prevent development sprawl by focusing growth near town center.

Concerns about the environment expressed by respondents were related to concerns about over-development and its potential impacts and also on quality of life. Residents fell in love with Leverett due to its rural way of life. The consensus is that most residents want to keep this charm. Respondents to the survey also cite a sense of community and strong social ties as contributing positively to their quality of life in Leverett. Some disagreement came from respondents who saw Leverett as a suburb rather than a rural town, but still appreciated the natural environment.

Throughout the survey there were echoes of the need to protect Leverett for climate resiliency. These calls were not for a reactive approach but rather a preventative one to protect Leverett. 84% of respondents answered that "Planning for climate change is important." as important to their values as members of the Leverett community

## 2. Listening to the Community

Leverett is a historic town and 47% of survey respondents want to see preservation of historic buildings. 50% of people support adapting historic buildings for new purposes.

Community spaces are also important places for residents. 65% listed “Support improvement of Leverett Library” as important and 64% listed “Support improvement of Leverett Elementary School as important.” 72% of respondents answered that strong community ties are important.

Some residents want to protect and expand the access to outdoor recreation and open space in Leverett. Other residents note there is plenty of protected land already and they want to ease development restrictions to help the tax base. Protecting natural resources such as drinking water, soil, and forests is extremely important to residents. 95% of respondents listed “Protect drinking water as an important goal.”

### Key Topics for Future Discussions

As the population of Leverett ages, a major concern for senior residents is their ability to age in their community. Residents note that affordability concerns as well as a lack of existing accessibility and resources will make it hard for them to stay in Leverett and support themselves.

Development is a controversial topic. However, many survey respondents are open to thoughtful and planned development that isn’t excessive and directly benefits the community. Desires such as affordable and senior housing, community resources, and access to amenities are important to the community.

As much as residents admit the Town’s need for some development to address issues (accessibility, senior care, high taxes) they are resistant to see much change in Leverett. The town has a rural way of life that they love, and they want to protect natural resources while improving the town for its residents.

### 2.2.3 THE FALL 2023 SURVEY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

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The Fall 2023 Survey opened on October 9, before the first community workshop on October 16, and closed on December 18, after the second community workshop on December 6.

As described in **Section 2.1**, the Steering Group requested that the first two community workshops be data walks. The first workshop shared the new research the consultant team had presented to the Steering Group at their June 27, 2023 meeting but this time tied to the values and draft goals that the Steering Group were also testing in the Fall 2023 survey.

At the second workshop, the data walk was designed to present specific information around a series of choices that the Town could make on certain topics. The consultant team discussed developed the meeting materials after reviewing the results of the first workshop, discussing topics and questions with the Steering Group, and looking at the results of the survey that had been received at the time the materials were developed.

After the survey was closed, the consultant team shared the raw data with the Planning Board and the Steering Group. As part of the January 31, 2024 presentation to the Planning Board, the consultant shared a summary of the results (see 2.2.2, above, and **APPENDIX H. PLANNING BOARD: CONSULTANT PRESENTATIONS**). (This presentation was delayed from the original January 9 date).

Work in analyzing the results of the survey continued, and informed the discussion with the Steering Group on February 12 about planning for the third workshop on February 28; the workshop itself; and the presentation on zoning to the Planning Board on April 17.

## 2.3 COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

### 2.3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a summary of the input from the three community workshops. The full data is provided in **APPENDIX E. COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS: SUMMARIES**. The information from the first two workshops, both data walks, has been combined and condensed based on the Section 81D planning elements and the additional topics (values and climate change) identified by the Steering Group. The voices from the workshops, combined with the comments from respondents to the survey, provide valuable qualitative data to offset the quantitative data gathered by the consultant team and discussed in **Section 3**.

The information from the third workshop is summarized in Table 10 as the table discussion format differed from the data walk.

The consultant team did not receive significant information from the Small Group meetings held by members of the Steering Group. **APPENDIX D. STEERING GROUP: SMALL GROUP SUMMARIES** contains the information that was collected by the facilitators and provided to the consultant team.

### 2.3.2 VALUES

The values tested at Workshop 1 were the same ones the Steering Group developed for the community survey. For Workshop 2, the Steering Group developed a shorter list of values to test at the second community workshop. These values were as follows:

- Arts and self expression
- Commitment to public assets
- Democratic engagement
- Diversity (economic)
- Diversity (ethnic)
- Environmental Stewardship
- Fairness and Accessibility
- Fellowship and cooperation
- Freedom to have a sustainable cost of living
- Preservation of intergenerational knowledge
- Resilience
- Self-Determination
- Stability
- Tradition
- Transparency

#### Values: Summary

Comments from Workshops 1 and 2 indicated concerns about age and income diversity. One person saw the draft value of “including everyone is important” and suggested that making town government and social events accessible for those with hearing loss would meet that value. Others noted the need to help seniors age in place but were concerned about the lack of housing, including affordable housing, and “regular & frequent” public transit.



Affordability and the lack of housing also fed comments on the ability to have a diverse population with questions of diversity focused on age and income. However, one participant stated, “Not the job of the planning board or sub committee to engage in social engineering.”

One comment indicated a concern about the possibility of needing infrastructure upgrades to accommodate more housing. Another suggested the Town should consider incremental improvements to water and sewer.

Comments also indicated a desire to support economic diversity and a reduction of taxes through more businesses. One participant wondered, “Can we capitalize on our concentration of highly educated folks?”

One comment noted the importance of strong community ties, while another wondered how many people in Leverett had volunteered for an activity in the town.

Two comments addressed the idea of community: one person spoke of the “Sense of community connections, looking out for each other, cooperating to ensure we are welcoming + inclusive” and a second confirmed this idea, “Being a welcoming community to new residents.”

### **2.3.3 WORKSHOPS 1 AND 2: SECTION 81D PLANNING TOPICS**

The original draft of this report paired the comments from the first two workshops with the data that inspired those comments along with a selection of direct quotes. The format of this report changed in response to feedback received during the public review period, and all workshop summaries have been grouped here. The quotes have been removed to avoid the impression of “cherry-picking,” but the complete list of comments, by workshop and data presented, are contained in **APPENDIX E**.

This new section organizes the comments received by topic, starting with the Section 81D elements in alphabetical order, except for land use which is last because it ties many of the other topics together. The materials in the workshops attempted to present these topics in relationship to each other; some of the themes cross the boundaries of the topics defined by Section 81D.

#### **Overview**

A common theme throughout the workshops and survey is a concern about potential over-development in Leverett. This concern is certainly not limited to the Leverett community, but may have particular resonance in a community that values its rural qualities. Unfortunately, this high-level concern has, in some cases, led to the rejection or dismissal of potential options to address specific needs in the community because of an assumption that the options require significant changes to the built environment. In some cases that concern is expressed in terms of the impact to the Town budget; in others, the concern is expressed in terms of the impact

## 2. Listening to the Community

to natural resources and the historic built environment.

As the Leverett community continues to discuss the recommendations of this plan, members should keep in mind the scale of solutions for a rural community is very different from that of a large town and that smaller communities may need to stretch their creative muscles to come up with some solutions to the needs expressed by the community to support older adults who wish to age in place and younger adults who have different needs and expectations.

Finally, comments indicated some tension between those who think of Leverett as a rural community and those who see it as a bedroom community or a suburb.

### Circulation: Summary

Community members split on whether to pave existing dirt roads, with a strong sentiment in Workshop 1 in favor of leaving them unpaved.

Workshop 2 included a specific question on circulation that had also been raised in the Fall 2023 Survey. The question and summary of responses is as follows:

- **QUESTION.** Should the Town reopen Rattlesnake Gutter to vehicular traffic?
- The overwhelming answer was no – with a few dissenting comments.

### Economic Development: Summary

Economic development focuses on businesses and jobs. Comments included thinking about industrial development, the use of recreational land, and rethinking zoning to match the desired business sizes and locations.

One of the first comments asked, “What is meant by “development” Housing? Commercial? Non-profit? Something else?.” Section 81D defines the economic development planning element as “[identifying] policies and strategies for the expansion or stabilization of the local economic base and the promotion of employment opportunities.”

The strength of the Leverett arts community was a frequent comment in this section, including a reference to Leverett Crafts and Arts (LCA) and the need for a performance space. Eco-tourism was also identified as possible business opportunity.

Comments about the business data include the following: wanting to know if the data accounted for people who worked from home (including remote workers and those with employees who live in other states); how many people worked from home; and the services work-from-home employees might need.

### Housing: Summary

Housing as a land use is a source of concern, with comments identifying the need for housing, possible solutions, and concern about changing the zoning to make housing easier. Posted solutions, some of which sparked disagreement, include the following:

- Accessory Dwelling Units.
- Smaller plots for affordable housing.
- Easier permitting process for housing that meets community values.
- Tiny house communities.
- Cluster development to preserve open space.
- Allow flag lots.
- Allow multi-family (3+ units) somewhere.

Creative ideas around housing include having the town collaborate with landowners to build tiny homes, subdividing existing buildings to provide more affordable housing, renting rooms in housing for below-market prices, and allowing for shared wells/septic systems for 4-8 units to provide for more moderate housing for families and seniors. Identifying and doing something with condemned housing was another comment.

Workshop 2 asked two questions specific to housing. These are the questions and a summary of the responses:

- **QUESTION.** Should the Town reduce barriers to new construction/ housing to improve housing opportunities and increase economic diversity?
- The responses to this question were mixed. Some participants called out the need for environmental protection, including protecting back lands and

the aquifer, addressing the impacts on wells and septic systems, and restrictions because of climate change. A few supported small-scale density, such as allowing Accessory Dwelling Units and four-unit buildings. A few were not in favor of reducing barriers.

- **QUESTION.** Should the Town allow a wider range of housing types in residential areas?
- Most of the responses were positive, with a focus on affordable housing, varied architecture, co-housing, small cluster development, group or multi-family housing for single seniors, and Accessory Dwelling Units. Concerns include protecting the aquifer and the size of the development.

### Natural and Cultural Resources: Summary

Workshop 1 focused on presenting the data shared with the Steering Group at their June 27 meeting with the public. This was new data focused on specific gaps; natural and cultural resources were not a gap because of the wealth of resources collected and summarized in Phase 1.

Workshop 2 asked the following question because of interest in the LCA and historic resources from Workshop 1, the survey, and members of the Steering Group.

- **QUESTION.** Should the Town invest in its cultural resources?
- This question had few responses, and the focus was that the artists are a community resource and contribute to economic development. One commenter wanted arts and performance space in existing buildings while another did not want the Town to invest tax revenue in the arts.

### Open Space and Recreation: Summary

The Town has a current Open Space and Recreation Plan; again data from this was not shared at the first workshop because of the focus on new data. At the second workshop, the questions focused on two topics that were raised in the survey results available as the Steering Group and consultant team prepared for the workshop.

- **QUESTION.** Should the Town allow more forms of recreation on Town-owned land, such as four-wheeling, snow mobiles, hunting and fishing?
- Comments indicate a split response. Some participants preferred providing limited trails for vehicular use between snowmobiles and ATVs based on time of year, while others thought that trails could be shared or that ATVs and snowmobiles should not be allowed.
- Hunting on Town-owned land produced a similar divide, with some participants in favor and others against.
- **QUESTION.** Should the Town improve access to trails?
- One comment supported space for off-leash dogs and another suggested pickle ball courts on existing paved areas. A few comments requested more adult use of the gym at night and on weekends. Two questions, on trails and recreation on Town-owned land, revealed a split among participants.

### Services and Facilities: Summary

Some of the participants at the first workshop really do not want their dirt roads paved! People value the roads for their beauty and expression of rural values. However, it was unclear whether the dirt roads referred to were town-owned or

privately owned. One commenter was concerned about the lack of maintenance creating dangerous roads.

Comments were split on the Leverett Elementary School and the Leverett Library, with most comments in support of both and a few detractors.

People also expressed concerns about taxes, with a few comments on a progressive property tax (both positive and negative), and one calling for a split tax rate. One person raised the idea of expanding limited commercial uses to keep property taxes low. Another suggested that reducing Town expenses would be more effective.

Other comments included a desire to enhance the Town Center, use Community Preservation Committee funds to highlight and preserve resources, address public transit needs and include bike lanes, and maintain Town Hall. Participants saw a role for the Town in addressing concerns about Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the water.

The comments did not indicate a consensus on water and sewer. One participant thought the Town should provide it while another disagreed. One comment focused on the need to educate people about conserving water, even with private wells, during dry seasons.

Two comments addressed the need for a conservation agent; one suggested regionalizing the position while another suggested the position (full- or part-time) could include responsibility for trails and act as the town land manager.

- **QUESTION.** Should the Town invest in providing additional public utilities such as solar solutions for the Public Safety Complex, School and Library?



- In general, comments were positive. The strong preference was for solar installations on open land or previously developed land (such as the north parking lot for the Leverett Elementary School). Some commenters were concerned about the preservation of forests.
- **QUESTION.** Should the Town invest in improving cell phone and wi-fi service throughout the town?
- Most comments noted that the wi-fi is great, but that cell phone coverage needs to be improved.
- One person noted the need to increase radio communications for highway, police and fire units and stated that these departments were unable to communicate across town on the Highway system.
- **QUESTION.** Should the Town invest money to improve Town communications?
- The answers to this question were mostly positive. One commenter wanted the newsletter emailed while two others preferred it in print. A few noted the difficulty of finding out what was happening in Town.
- **QUESTION.** Should the Town make better use of its public facilities including the library, public safety, and school buildings for greater public use (such as community gatherings, Council on Aging)?
- This question received a strong positive response from participants, with support for the library as a community resource and gathering place.
- Live music.
- A large space for the community to socialize for meetings social events etc.
- A more comfortable, cozy meeting room.
- **QUESTION.** Should the Town prioritize local control of the school or consider more regionalization?
- The response to this question was mostly negative, with a preference to keep control of Leverett Elementary School local. One commenter wondered if the school would benefit from sharing with other towns. Another commenter mentioned a concern about the Town's ability to support the school. The characterization of Leverett as a bedroom community, seen at the first workshop, also appears here.
- **QUESTION.** Should the Town further investigate regionalization and more cooperative use agreements with other towns in the area to improve services even if they may not decrease costs?
- Answers in this area included rejection of regionalization and acceptance for targeted areas, including infrequently-used services (undefined) and the fire department (to address the difficulty of finding housing affordable to on-call firefighters and EMTs). Two of the twelve responses perceived a threat to the Leverett Elementary School from regionalization while a third suggested using the school for additional services, such as a senior center.

Additional comments indicated a desire for some additions to the library's offerings:

## 2. Listening to the Community

### Land Use: Summary

The maps in Workshop 2 zoomed into the Town Center, North Leverett, Moore's Corner, and Route 63 and asked people to think about what past uses and amenities the town had, what is available now, and what should be available in the future.

This is a summary of some of the thoughts:

- A café or gathering space: some identified Cushman's; others suggested something at the Leverett Center for the Arts or elsewhere in the Town Center, including Town Hall itself. Many commenters supported the existing Leverett Village Co-op and some considered expanding it (see Moore's Corner).
- More housing.
- Bus service for the elderly to access groceries.
- Gas station and convenience store.
- Pop-up stores (yarn, books, seasonal); antique store near the Co-op.
- Store with basics to support wider needs in the community.
- Sidewalks/bike lanes from Leverett Center to North Leverett.

Ideas for specific areas included the following:

#### North Leverett

- Sawmill as a museum, event, community center.
- Guard rail at Cave Hill Road and North Leverett Road.

#### Moore's Corner

- Historic park or site to recognize the importance of the charcoal industry.
- Traffic calming on North Leverett Road.

- Playground.
- Support the Co-op as an all-purpose space. Thoughts included a liquor license so it could be a pub; community space; events.

Most of the comments in this session focused on the Town Center and Route 63.

#### Town Center

- Keep the Post Office in its current location.
- Public trail around Leverett Pond with conflicting views on who should manage the pond.
- Pathway between Town Hall and the Public Safety Complex (other comments suggested the sidewalks/bike lanes notes above).
- Enforcing speed limits.
- Save the Field Library.
- Allow beehives on Town land.
- Rent the Town Hall for events (like Montague Grange).
- Revive/restore the old inn (one commenter noted that it would need water and sewer).

#### Route 63

- Reliable and frequent public transit.
- Child-safe bike trail.
- Commercial activity (split between those who wanted to see more intense activity and those who were opposed).
- Smaller-scale, environmentally sensitive commercial activity.
- Solar farm.
- Affordable housing.

Many of the comments in Workshop 2 appeared to refer to the Kittredge Estate (a Planning Board meeting on the topic had been announced for the following week). The initial proposal for the Kittredge Estate is outside the discussion of this planning process since the plans for this property were not confirmed during the public engagement process, there was no method of evaluating potential impact. However, the parallel public discussion about the future of this property did bring forward comments and concerns about the impact of larger development on the town.

### **2.3.4 WORKSHOPS 1 AND 2: OTHER TOPICS**

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The thematic overlap led to additional topics beyond those identified by Section 81D. Values were one of those topics, and discussed earlier in this section. Other themes include climate change, which was also brought up in Workshop 3, taxes, an issue that was also reviewed in Phase 1, and zoning, a topic that was part of the initial impetus for this planning process.

#### **Climate Change and Energy Resiliency: Summary**

A few comments suggested community solar – one at the Transfer Station and other public land; one was specific to Commonwealth land. Another comment raised the need to increase climate resilience for flooding, fires, smoke, pests, and shifting ecosystems.

Conversations about the Town’s role in climate resiliency and disaster planning indicated a general unfamiliarity with the Town’s MVP Resiliency Plan and the Hazard Mitigation Plan and the recommendations in those documents. The general unfamiliarity with planning work the Town has already done supports a key recommendation of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan.

Comments on energy resiliency included suggestions for solar panels on Town-owned parking lots and the roof of Leverett Elementary School or a town-owned community solar field.

### Taxes: Summary

Property taxes are the largest source of revenue for continuing operations of the Town and any new initiatives. Phase 1 and the Fall 2023 Survey indicated concerns about taxes. Workshop 2 asked three questions about taxes; the questions and a summary of the responses are as follows:

- **QUESTION.** Should the Town increase housing density to increase tax base?
- The responses to this question were mixed. Some commenters recognized that more housing would support the tax base, while others focused on increasing affordability by adding more housing. Some commenters felt that any new housing should be in accordance with community needs and goals to address climate change and land conservation, including limitations on location relative to natural resources and existing infrastructure.
- **QUESTION.** Should the Town prioritize keeping taxes as low as possible, even if it may decrease services?
- The nine responses to this question varied significantly, from those who thought the taxes were too high to those who were surprised to see that the tax rate in Leverett was lower than those of nearby towns. Others were worried about increasing housing, because of worries about a parallel increase in services. Some felt that the focus on conservation was at the expense of increasing tax revenues and affordable housing.
- **QUESTION.** Should the Town prioritize reducing expenses, even if it may decrease services?
- The six responses to this question did not provide a clear direction – one respondent wished to maintain the status quo while two others were interested in thinking about increases in tax revenue.

### Zoning: Summary

As noted in other parts of this document, Accessory Dwelling Units are a popular option. Other comments echoed the desire for cafés, other local businesses, and a focus on the Town Center. Two creative ideas not heard elsewhere included using the Town grassland for animal feed, and considering future development of the sand pits, possibly for solar.

### Figure 9: Then and Now

To spur conversations among participants at the second workshop, the consultant team found historic photos of Leverett and paired them with Google Street Map pictures of the same areas today (similar to the pictures of houses on the walls of the senior center in Town Hall where all three workshops took place). The locations were based on what the team heard at the first workshop.



## Then and Now

### Leverett Town Center: Old Post Office and Gas Station, Montague Rd



Sources: (left) <https://www.leverett.ma.us/gallery/11/35/Old-Post-Office-with-Gas-Station>; (right) Google StreetView

### North Leverett: Chapin's Store



Sources: (left) Kramer, Susan. Chapin's Grocery store: Front entrance to the store with Mobilegas gasoline pumps, ca. May 1975. Kramer-Mathews Collection (PH 080). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; (right) Google StreetView

### The Mall at Moore's Corner (originally LaClaire's store)



Sources: (left) Mange, Arthur P. The Mall at Moore's Corner, 2010. Arthur P. Mange Photograph Collection (PH 044). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; (right) Google StreetView



### 2.4.5 SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP 3

For Workshop 3, the Steering Group and the consultant agreed that table sessions would be a better way to discuss options for recommendations. The consultant team prepared information about conditions in Leverett in 2040. Boards with the relevant data, including projects for an increase in cooling days and precipitation events and intensity, the preliminary FEMA map, demographic projections, and other information provided an introduction to some of the known trends that would affect Leverett during the next sixteen years. Participants were asked to review the boards as they entered so they would be “future-focused” (printouts were also available at each table, along with a copy of the top ten values and goals).

Members of the Steering Group and Planning Board volunteered to lead the discussion about potential actions. The consultant team chose the twenty actions in Table 10 from a variety of sources, including past plans, comments from the 2023 survey, and comments from the previous two workshops.

The consultant team had also provided a prioritization matrix to encourage discussions about trade-offs between

**Table 10. Workshop 3: Strategies**

Tested Strategy					
1	Modify the zoning to allow for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) on existing single-family lots.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	7	0	0	0	0
2	Modify the zoning to allow smaller lot sizes, and/or multiple units, on existing lots (e.g. one or two duplexes on a lot).				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	6	1	0	0	0
3	Create zoning to encourage senior-friendly housing so that seniors can remain in the community.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	6	0	0	0	1
4	Apply for grants for dam maintenance and water quality monitoring.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	5	2	0	0	0
5	Develop a potable water resiliency plan.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	5	2	0	0	0
6	Prioritize climate resilient solutions for repairs and maintenance of culverts, bridges, and roads.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	3	4	0	0	0
7	Increase the Fire and Ambulance budgets to allow for 24/7 coverage to support increasing cases of slip/falls with seniors.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	1	5	1	0	0
8	Establish an energy resiliency plan.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	4	1	1	1	0
9	Develop a communications plan for the Town for emergencies and other events.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	4	1	0	0	2
10	Establish a comprehensive beaver management strategy.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	3	2	0	1	1

Tested Strategy					
11	Update land use regulations to encourage climate resiliency.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	3	2	0	1	1
12	Create a Land Stewardship Plan for Town-owned land.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	1	4	1	0	1
13	Join the Franklin Regional Transit Authority in order to increase access opportunities for residents (especially seniors).				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	2	3	2	0	0
14	Engage with regional partners to implement action plans in the Franklin County and North Quabbin Regional Action Plan for age and dementia friendly communities.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	1	3	2	0	1
15	Establish heating/cooling shelters across town that can be used during the school year.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	2	2	2	1	0
16	Allow for the development of multi-family units.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	2	1	0	1	2
17	Use CPA funds to purchase parcels to protect the aquifer.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	2	1	1	0	3
18	Modify the Town zoning to permit activity for economic resiliency.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	2	1	1	0	3
19	Modify the Town zoning to allow for senior housing, and partner with a developer to build affordable/senior housing on Town owned land, including applying for State grants to finance the construction.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	1	2	0	0	3
20	Investigate adding a community center.				
	High	Med	Low	Partner	Disc.
	1	1	4	0	2

recommendations. The facilitators used the matrix to identify High, Medium, and Low priorities, actions that would require partners, and actions that should be discarded as not useful or appropriate for the Town to undertake as part of this planning process.

In Table 10, the prioritization is indicated in the area shaded green below each action. The consultant team had to make some judgment calls: some tables put actions across the dividing lines of the matrix. The full summaries of this workshop are in **APPENDIX E**. The numbers in the boxes refer to the number of tables that assigned that priority.

The workshop had seven tables across the two sessions (4 tables in session one, from 3-5 pm and three tables in session 2, from 6-8 pm). Some groups did not finish their discussion of all twenty items; the point of the workshop was less about the completion and more about the opportunity for group discussions on topics and priorities.

## 3. Supplemental Research

### 3.1 OVERVIEW

The focus of Phase 1 was on evaluating and summarizing the existing plans, studies, reports, and other sources of data collected by the Town. This **Section 3** is not a comprehensive research study; the focus on collecting data in Phase 2 was on filling the holes in information identified in the Phase 1 report, including statistics from the 2020 Census that was not available during Phase 1 because of the delay by the federal government in releasing the data. Public comments on the draft identified gaps in information about the environment, natural resources, and climate change projects: these topics are well covered in existing plans and did not need to be updated for the purposes of the data-collection effort in Phase 2.

#### 3.1.1 LAND AND ROADS

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Leverett is a town in Franklin County, Massachusetts. Its borders are the towns of Montague to the north, Wendell to the northeast and east, Shutesbury to the southeast, Amherst to the south and Sunderland to the west. State Route 63 runs north to south through the western side of the town, connecting Montague to Amherst. Mt. Toby is to the west of Route 63 in Sunderland, part of the Mt. Toby Wildlife Management Area. To the east of Route 63, is a series of smaller hills (Stoddard, Ingram, Joshua, and Jackson) that parallel the larger Brushy Mountain on the central and east side of Leverett. Brushy Mountain is within the Paul C. Jones Working Forest Wildlife Conservation Easement (WCE) and adjacent to the Brushy Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which is in both Leverett and Shutesbury. Stoddard Hill is within the Montague Wildlife Management Area while Ingram Hill is within the Cave Hill Conservation Area. Joshua Hill is also part of the Mt. Toby Wildlife Management Area which includes land in both Sunderland and Leverett.

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) manages Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), which protect habitat for wildlife and are open for public enjoyment, including “walking, hiking, hunting, fishing, trapping, and wildlife viewing.”<sup>1</sup> The Mt. Toby Wildlife Management Area and the Brushy Mountain Wildlife Management Area are within the Connecticut Valley District.

The Cows Company created the Paul C. Jones Working Forest WCE in 2012. This land – 3,486 acres – is spread across Leverett, Shutesbury, and Amherst. It is the “largest contiguous, privately owned block of permanently conserved

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/list-of-wildlife-management-areas-by-district#connecticut-valley-district->, last accessed May 5, 2024)

<sup>2</sup> <https://wdcowls.com/forest-management/paul-c-jones-working-forest/>, last accessed May 5, 2024.

forest land in the history of the Commonwealth.”<sup>2</sup> The WCE allows public access, including hiking and hunting, and continued forestry operations by the W.D. Cowls Inc. Land Use Company. Figure 14 shows how this WCE fits within the area defined by Leverett’s major roads, and how the steep topography throughout the town limits the areas available for significant development.

Other defining geographic features that defined development patterns over the years include the Sawmill River, which runs through North Leverett and Moore’s Corner, and Doolittle Brook, which parallels Montague Road.

### Cars, Trains, and Buses

These natural features shaped the road and development patterns in Leverett. This town is car-dependent, with no regular public transportation and very few commercial uses in town. The map names of Leverett Station and Depot Road recall that Leverett once had rail service, and an active freight rail track still exists parallel to Route 63. This lie, originally owned by the New England Central Railroad (NECR), is part of the Massachusetts Central Railroad System, owned by Genesee & Wyoming, Inc. (G&W) since 2012.<sup>3</sup> The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) used to operate the #23 bus route along Route 63 until 2015 when it was rerouted to Sunderland. With this change, Leverett lost its regular public transit and its connection to both the FRTA and the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVRTA) routes. Both transit systems connect to regional bus hubs, grocery stores, and medical resources. Despite being a car-dependent community, Leverett does not have a gas station. Whether there is an electric vehicle (EV) charging station is unknown.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gwrr.com/necr/>, last accessed May 5, 2024.

### 3.1.2 POPULATION

These past community priorities for land use appear to have kept the population of Leverett low: in 2022, the population was 1,860. The population has remained steady since 2010, when it was 1,851. However, prior to that, the population experienced significant growth from 1970 to 2010, when the population increased from 1,005 to 1,851 – 846 people or an increase of just over 84%.<sup>4</sup>

The people who filled those homes from 1970-2010 are aging, and that is reflected in the analysis of demographic trends. In 2010, at the end of this building boom, 21% of the population was between 0-19 years of age; 62% of the population was the traditional working age of 20-64 years of age; 11% were younger seniors of 65-74 years of age; and 6% were older seniors of 75+ years of age.

The 2020 numbers show that population beginning to age. The most significant change was the decrease in the working population by 11% in 2020, while the school-age population decreases by 4%. Younger seniors increased by 12% and are now a quarter of the population. Older seniors increased by 3%. Younger seniors in 2020 would have been born between 1946 and 1955, representing the early Boomer demographics (1946-1964).

The trends from 2020 to 2040, calculated by the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts, show a potential major demographic change for the Town of Leverett by 2040. The projected school-age population (0-19) drops slightly further and then levels off to 15% of the population. The projected percentage of younger seniors (65-74) also declines during this period, also to 15% of the population. The working-age population (20-64) is projected to increase slightly from the 2020 number, but not to reach the 2010 number; ending up at 53% of the 2040 population. The biggest increase – an 8% jump from 2020 – is the older seniors. At 75+, the youngest members of this group would have been born in 1965 or earlier.

Overall, this means that by 2040, a third of the population will be retired and just over half will be of working age. This trend represents a problem for the Leverett community as the older working population tends to have the most discretionary income while the older senior population tends to have the most restricted income and the highest number of health problems.

<sup>4</sup> Municipality Population Table, MassDLS, last accessed May 5, 2024.

**Table 11: Projected Population Distribution by Year**

Ages	2010	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	In 2040, this population was born in...
<b>0-19</b>	21%	17%	16%	15%	15%	15%	2021 or later
<b>20-64</b>	62%	51%	49%	50%	51%	53%	1976-2020
<b>65-74</b>	11%	23%	22%	17%	16%	15%	1966-1975
<b>75+</b>	6%	9%	13%	17%	18%	17%	1965 or earlier

Source: UMass Donahue Institute, Innes Associates



### 2024 Town Census

US Census information can be inaccurate for communities of less than 5,000 people. For this reason, the consultant team reached out to the Town Clerk and requested data from the Town Census to understand who is living in Leverett now, based on the response of people 16 years old or older.

As shown in Table 12, Leverett’s current working-age population is 51.6% of the population who responded to the Town Census. In 2040, this age of this population is between 36-80, which represents a wide range of life experiences and needs. Breaking those 678 people into three smaller age ranges (see Table 13) provides a greater understanding of where those age groups will be in 2040, and how many of them may need additional services appropriate for an aging population.

The implication of this data is as follows:

- If everyone living in Leverett now who is today 49 years old or older stays in Leverett for the next 16 years, then **67.5% of the population in 2040 will be 65 years old or over.**
- The working population of 2040 is now aged 3-48. In 16 years, **this working population will be 32.4% of the total population, down from today’s 51.6%.** Again, this assumes everyone who is living in Leverett now stays in Leverett.

The limitations of this type of projection should be clear as it assumes no one moves, no one dies, and no new housing is built. Two issues are clear: **the Town must plan for the needs of an aging population and consider how best to attract more working age residents.**

**Table 12: Age Distribution of Current Population**

Current Ages	#	%	In 2040, today’s population will be within these age ranges...
0-19	29	2.2%	16-35
20-64	<b>678</b>	<b>51.6%</b>	36-80
65-74	306	23.3%	81-90
75+	300	22.8%	91+
	1,313		

Source: Town Clerk’s Office, Innes Associates

**Table 13: Breakdown of Current Working Age Population**

Current Ages	#	%	In 2040, today’s population will be within these age ranges...
20-34	190	14.5%	36-50
35-49	217	16.5%	51-65
50-64	271	20.6%	66-80
	<b>678</b>	<b>51.6%</b>	

Source: Town Clerk’s Office, Innes Associates

### 3.1.3 POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

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The few major roads in town wind their way through the hilly terrain, and over the past few decades, the Town has prioritized larger single-family housing lots to accommodate septic systems on poorly draining soils and protect the back areas from development.

The choice to prioritize single-family homes and the increase in population can be seen in the development patterns of the town. An analysis of the 2023 Assessors' data shows that, of the existing buildings in town, 33% (261 buildings) were built between the 1700s and 1959. After 1959, the pace of building begins to pick up: 66 of the buildings existing in 2023 were built in the 1960s; 134 in the 1970s; and 153 in the 1980s. The pace of building then dropped, with 70 buildings built in the 1990s and 82 buildings built between 2000-2009. These buildings are primarily residential; only three new commercial buildings have been built since 1970 – one in each decade from 1970 to 2000.

See Figures 14-16 to view how buildings spread throughout town over these decades.

### 3.1.4 DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS AND TAX BASE

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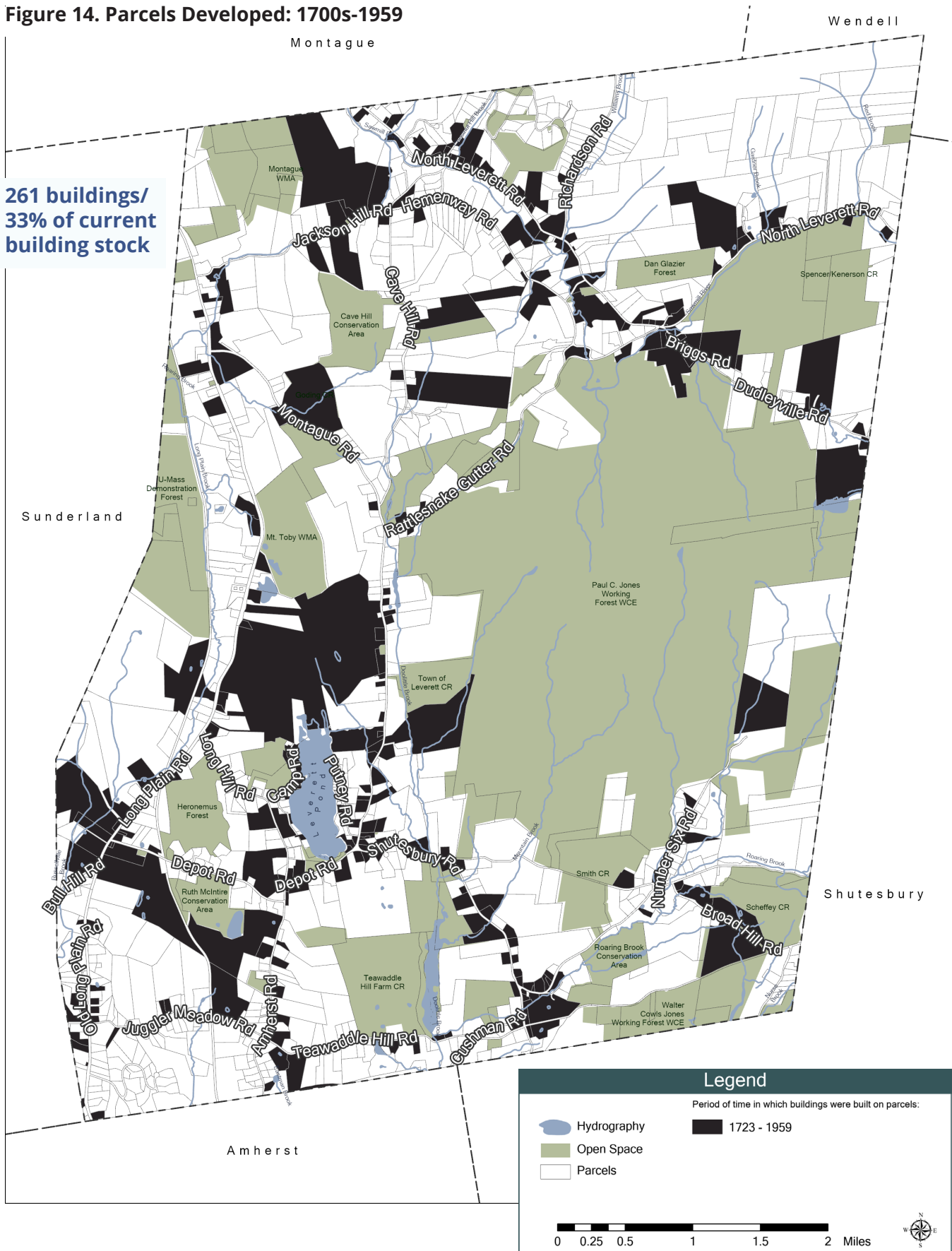
The existing tax base reflects this split: in fiscal year 2024 (FY2024), the assessed value of residential property in the town was \$344,769,800. For commercial property, during the same year, the assessed value was \$3,081,677. The assessed value of personal property was \$45,006,820.

For more information about land use and the tax base, see **Section 3.7**.

#### Development Patterns and Future Land Use

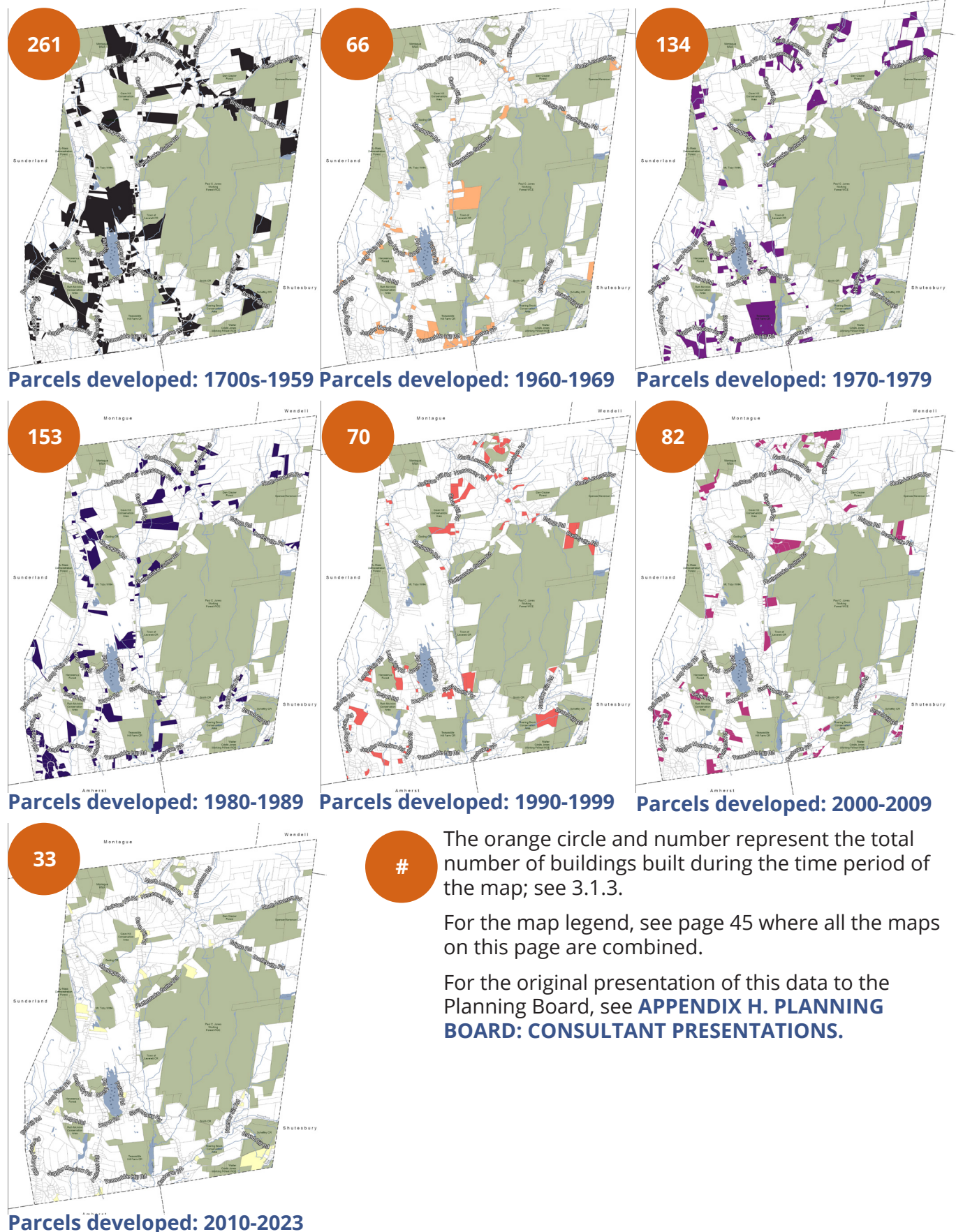
**Given the development patterns of the town and the preferences expressed by many participants in the planning process, commercial and industrial tax growth will not be a major source of future tax revenue** as any likely growth will be limited to small-scale enhancements to community life rather than major changes to the economic structure of the town. This means that most people of working age will either commute or work from home, and that future commercial uses will likely either support social interactions (such as the existing Leverett Co-op) or provide small-scale services to the increasing senior population.

Figure 14. Parcels Developed: 1700s-1959



Source: Town of Leverett Assessor's Data, MassGIS, Innes Associates

**Figure 15. Breakdown of Parcels Developed: 1700s-2023**



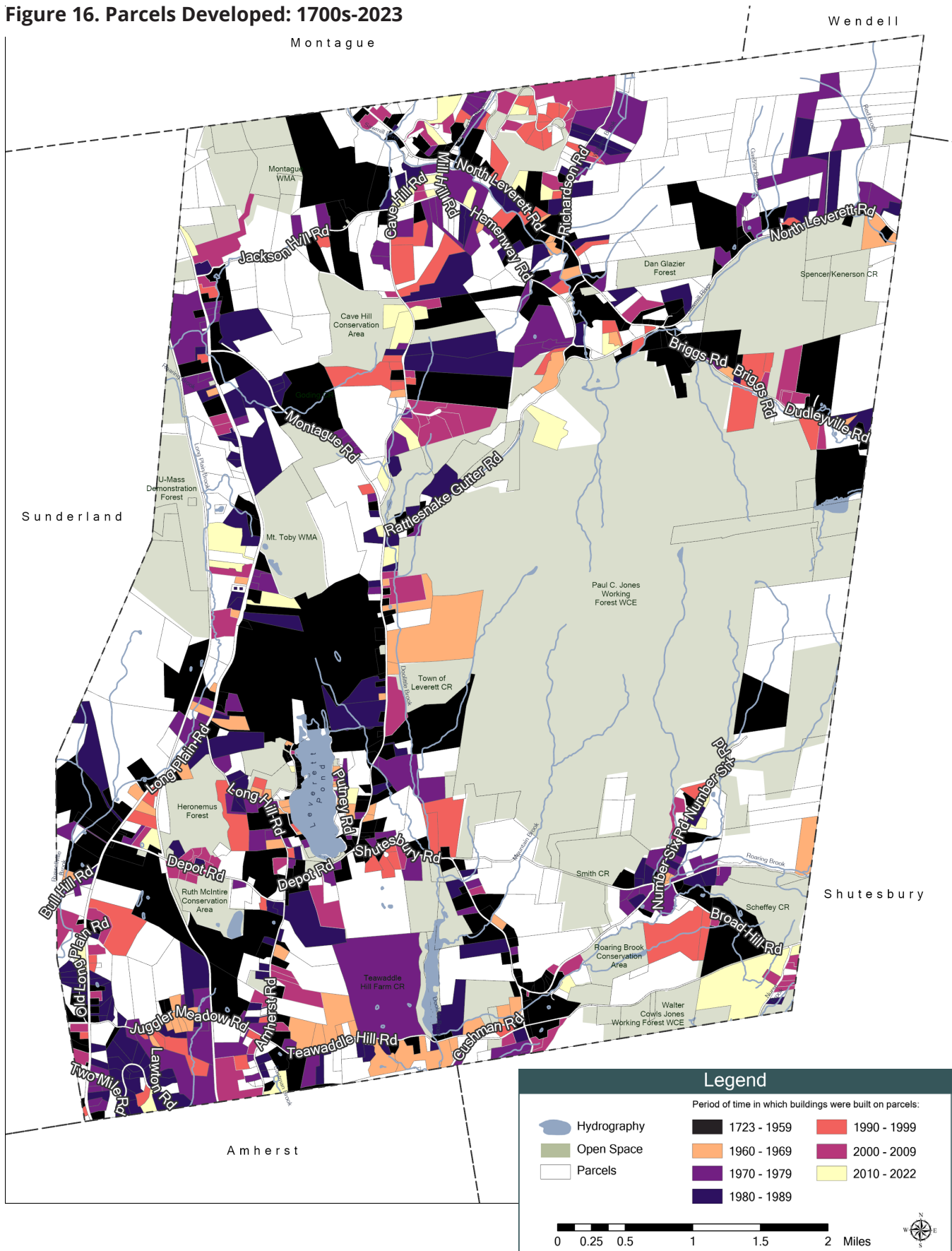
# The orange circle and number represent the total number of buildings built during the time period of the map; see 3.1.3.

For the map legend, see page 45 where all the maps on this page are combined.

For the original presentation of this data to the Planning Board, see **APPENDIX H. PLANNING BOARD: CONSULTANT PRESENTATIONS.**



Figure 16. Parcels Developed: 1700s-2023



Source: Town of Leverett Assessor's Data, MassGIS, Innes Associates



## 3.2 DEMOGRAPHICS

### 3.2.1 SUMMARY

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A comprehensive plan can be a framework for thinking about Leverett's future – the needs and goals of community members, the desire to protect the surrounding environment, built and natural, and the components that support a healthy community: housing, jobs, places to gather and play, and the infrastructure that connects those elements.

To understand the possibilities for Leverett's future, it is important to understand who is here now and who will be here in the Leverett of 2040; sixteen years from now.

Absent other changes – and there are factors that may change Leverett – the population in Leverett will be significantly older than the 2024 population. The aging of the community will have an impact on the type of community Leverett will be in sixteen years. This section explains the population trends showing that aging population.

Leverett's population is aging. In 2040, seniors over 80 will be over 10% of the population. Community members are concerned that the Town will not be able to address the needs of this population. Those needs include elder services, age-friendly housing, and non-driving access to medical appointments and shopping. Those needs also include housing that is suitable for aging within the community.

As the population ages, seniors may need to choose between remaining in Leverett, in housing that may not be suitable, affordable, or safe (seniors are more prone to falls), or leaving to find appropriate housing outside the town. Without a variety of age-friendly housing types, as the population ages in place, housing will be less available to younger residents, leading to a reduction in working-age and school-age populations. Demand for the limited housing stock could drive prices even higher in a community that is already concerned about affordability. The loss of school-age children, over time, has implications for the Leverett Elementary School.

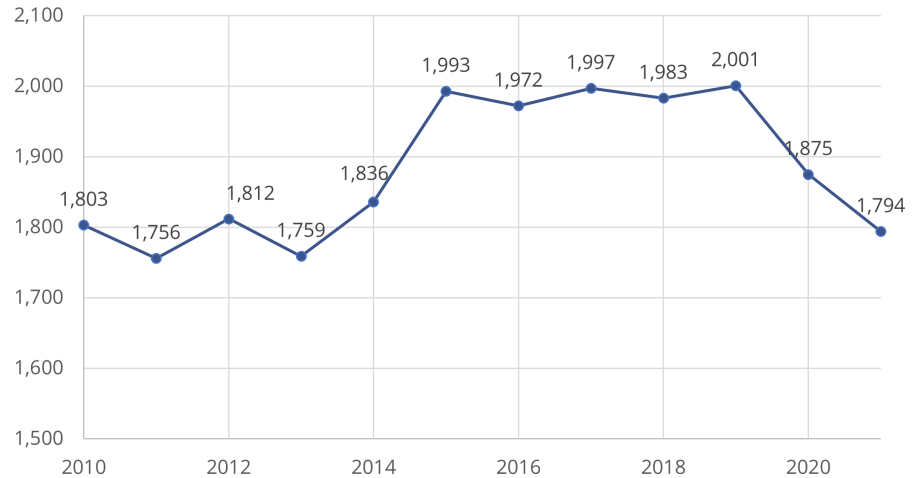
The following analysis provides an overview and insights comparing Leverett to surrounding towns; this includes Amherst, Montague, Shutesbury, Sunderland, and Wendell. Throughout the analysis, Leverett is also compared to the surrounding region which comprises the five surrounding towns plus Leverett.

### 3.2.2 WHO LIVES IN LEVERETT?

**Leverett’s population is decreasing from historic highs of the mid-2010s.**

The Census estimates indicate that over the last decade the total population of Leverett has fluctuated, with a decrease of 9% over the last five years. The encompassing region has decreased by 0.3% over the last five years, while the state of Massachusetts population has increased by 3.7%.

**Figure 17. Leverett Total Population**



Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

**Like many communities across the country, Leverett’s older adult population continues to grow.** Leverett’s median age of 50.1 is similar to two nearby communities.

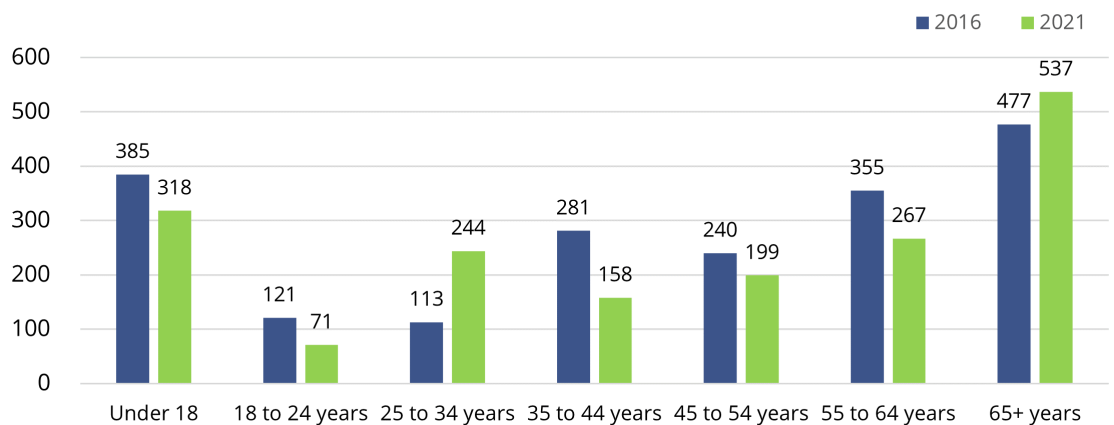
**Table 18. Average Age**

Town	Age
<b>Leverett</b>	<b>50.1</b>
Amherst	21.3
Montague	44.6
Shutesbury	51.2
Sunderland	34.5
Wendell	50.6

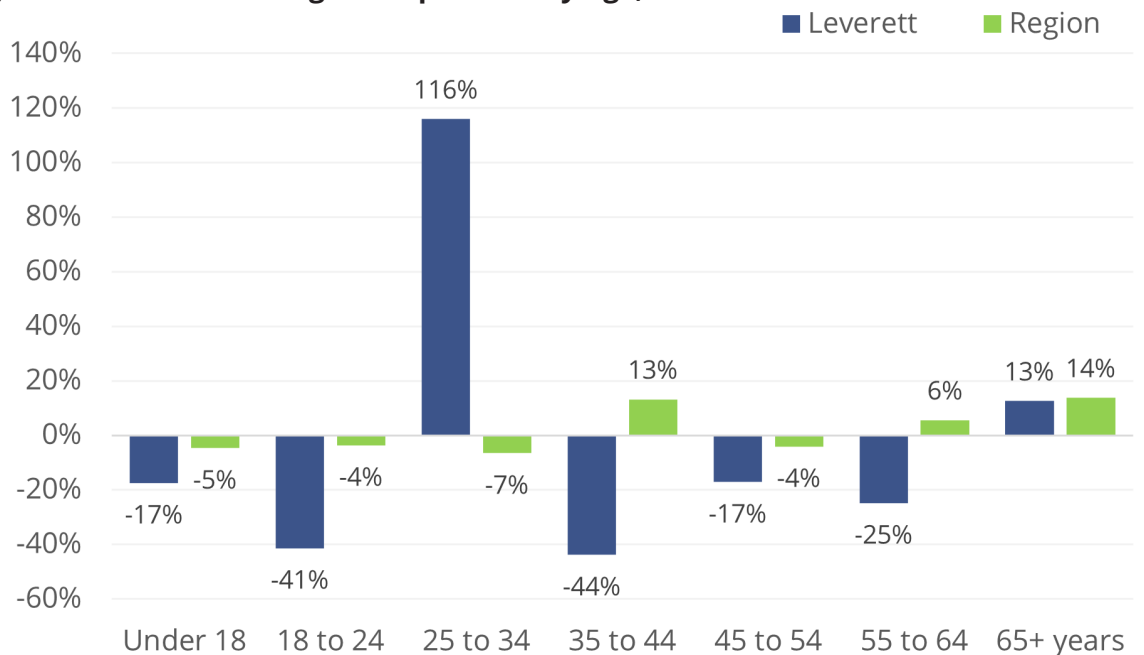
Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

Residents ages 65+ make up about 30% of Leverett’s population, a 6% increase from 2016. Residents ages 25-34 increased by 131 residents, going from 6% of the population to about 14%. Keeping current younger residents and continuing to attract new younger residents to Leverett will be important for the workforce, household spending, and the Leverett Elementary School.

**Figure 19. Leverett: Age Distribution**



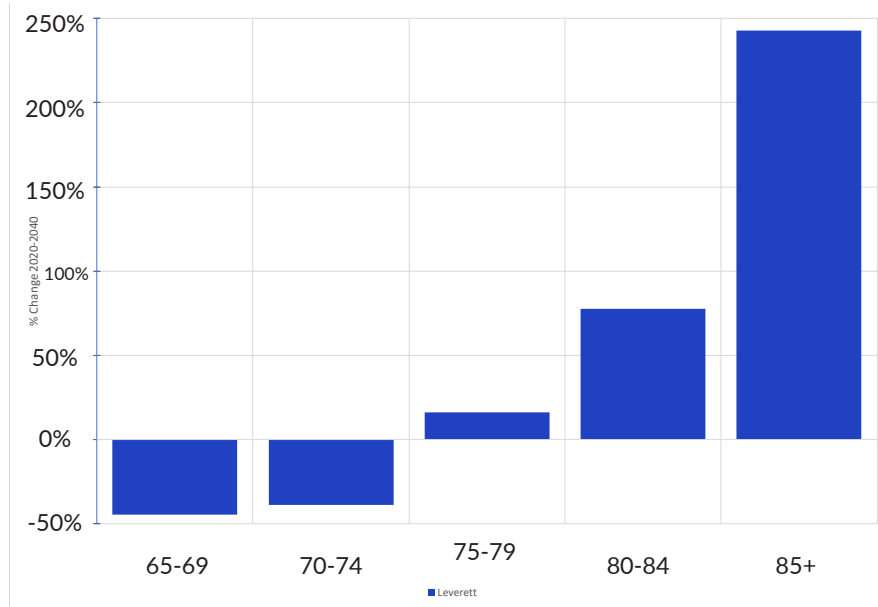
**Figure 20. Leverett: Change in Population by Age, 2016-2021**



Source for both graphs: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

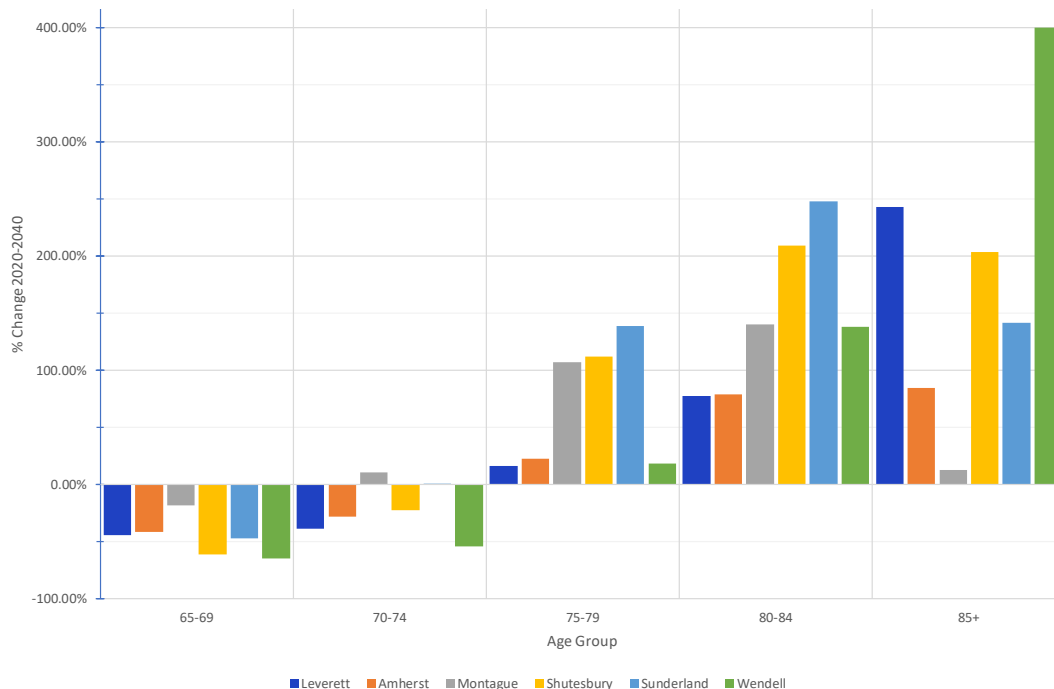
**This aging trend is projected to continue:** Figure 21 shows how Leverett’s post retirement population (those 65+) is estimated to change between 2020 and 2040. The largest increases will be in those 80+.

**Figure 21. Leverett: Projected Change in Post-Retirement Ages 2020-2040**



**The aging trend is not limited to Leverett;** Figure 22 shows how Leverett’s post retirement population will change in comparison to the surrounding towns. All towns will see a significant increase in the population over 80 which may impact the availability of senior housing and care in the immediate area.

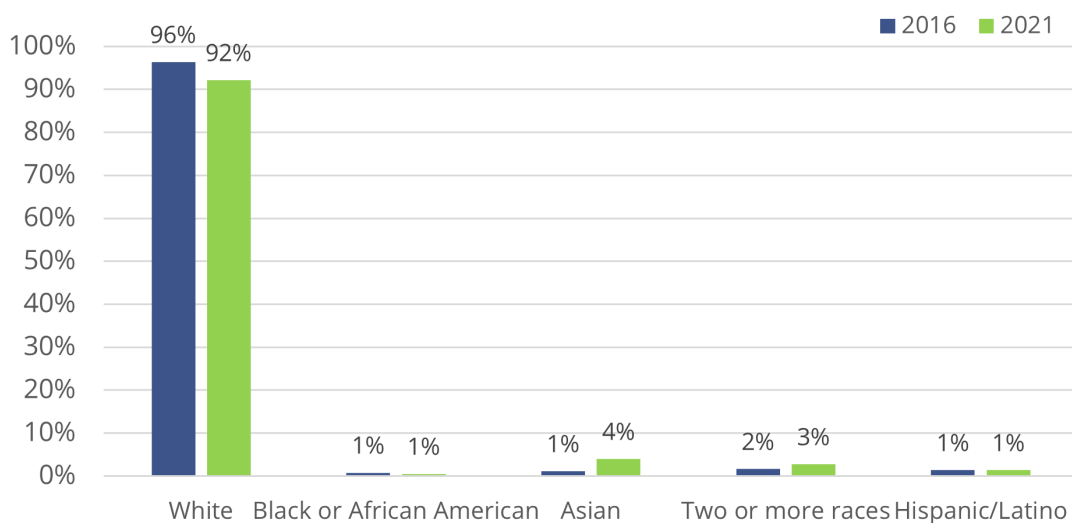
**Figure 22. Leverett and Surrounding Communities: Change in Post-Retirement Ages 2020 - 2040**



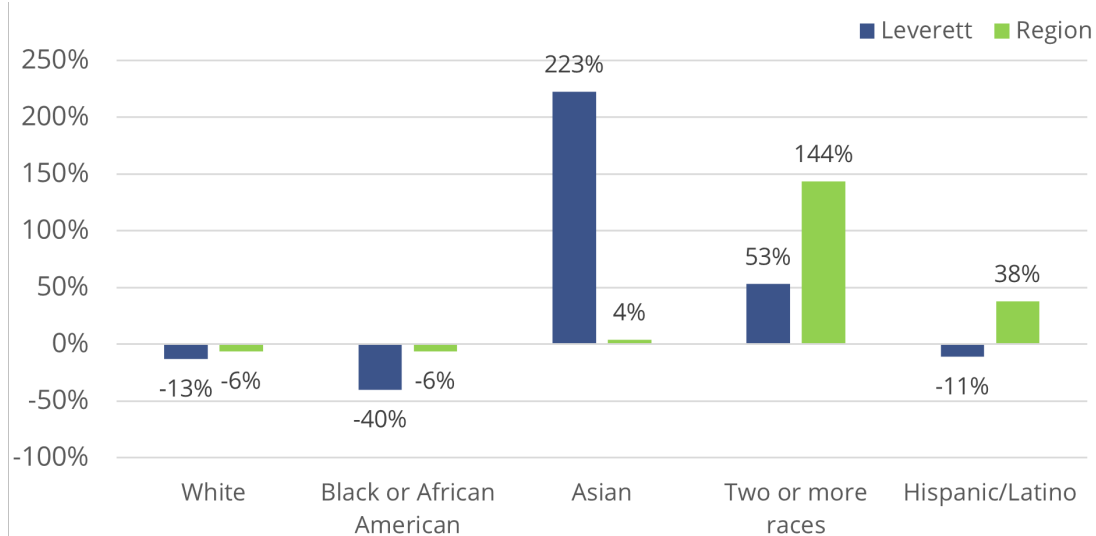
Source for both graphs: UMDI V2022 Long-Term Population Projections for Massachusetts Municipalities and Regional Planning Areas (UMDI V2022 Population Projections) UMass Donahue Institute; Innes Associates

**Leverett’s population has become slightly more diverse.** Over the past five years, the share of residents that identify as White decreased by about 4% (247 residents). The largest percentage increase was from residents who identify as Asian, with an increase of about 3% (49 residents). In comparison, the region had significant proportional increases in Hispanic/Latino residents with a 38% increase (1,114 residents) and residents who identify as two or more races with an 144% increase (2,397 residents).

**Figure 23. Leverett: Population by Race/Ethnicity**



**Figure 24. Leverett: Change in Population by Race/Ethnicity**

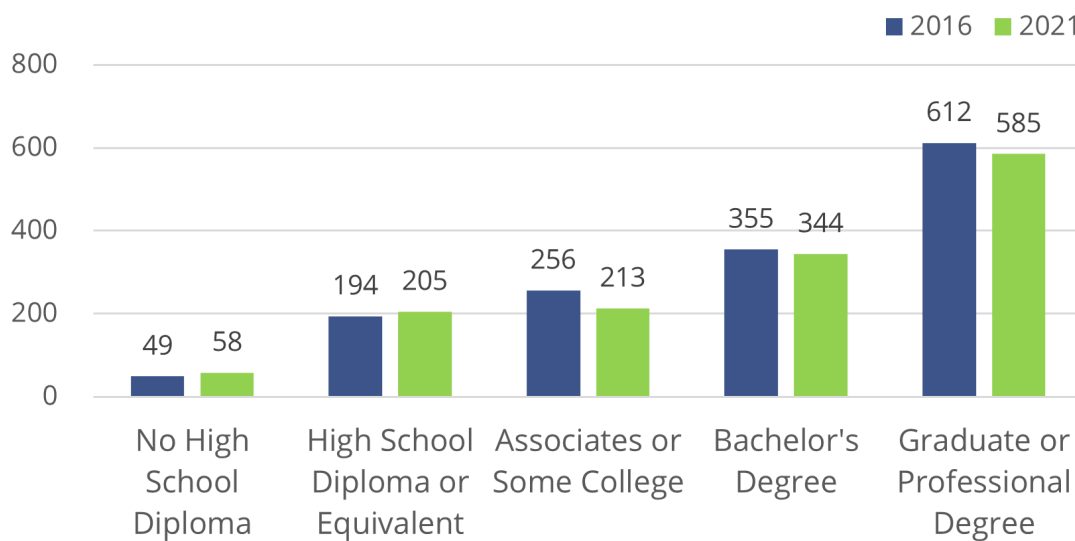


Source for both graphs: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

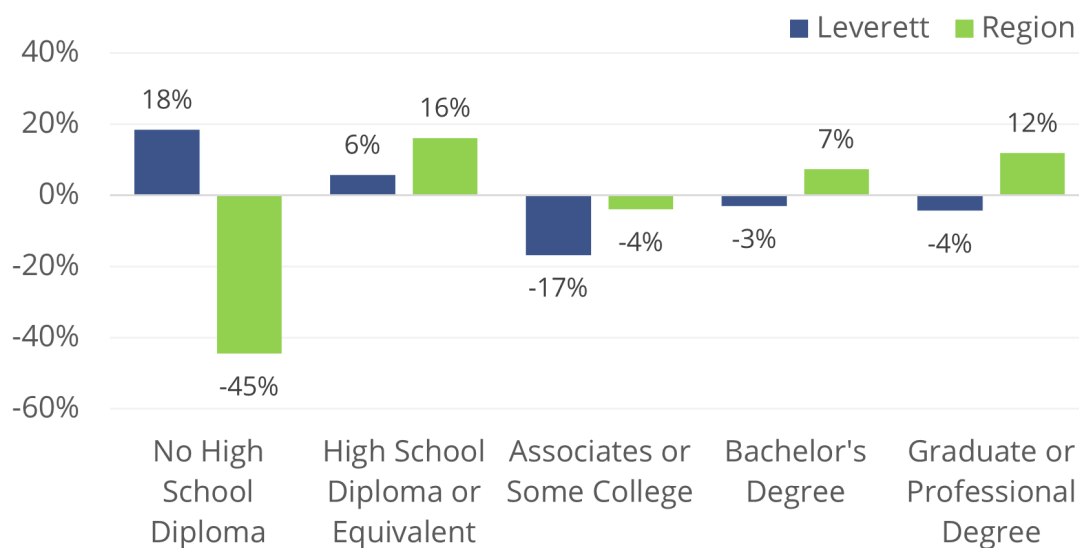


**The number of Leverett residents who attended college or hold a bachelor’s degree or higher has decreased.** Over the last decade, the number of residents with a bachelor’s degree decreased by about 3% (27 residents) and while residents with no high school diploma increased by about 18% (9 residents). This varies greatly from the region, where more highly educated people are increasing in proportion and residents with no high school diploma are decreasing in proportion. Changes in education have an impact on the workforce, including the availability of certain skill levels and lifetime earnings.

**Figure 25. Leverett: Educational Attainment**



**Figure 26. Leverett: Change in Educational Attainment**



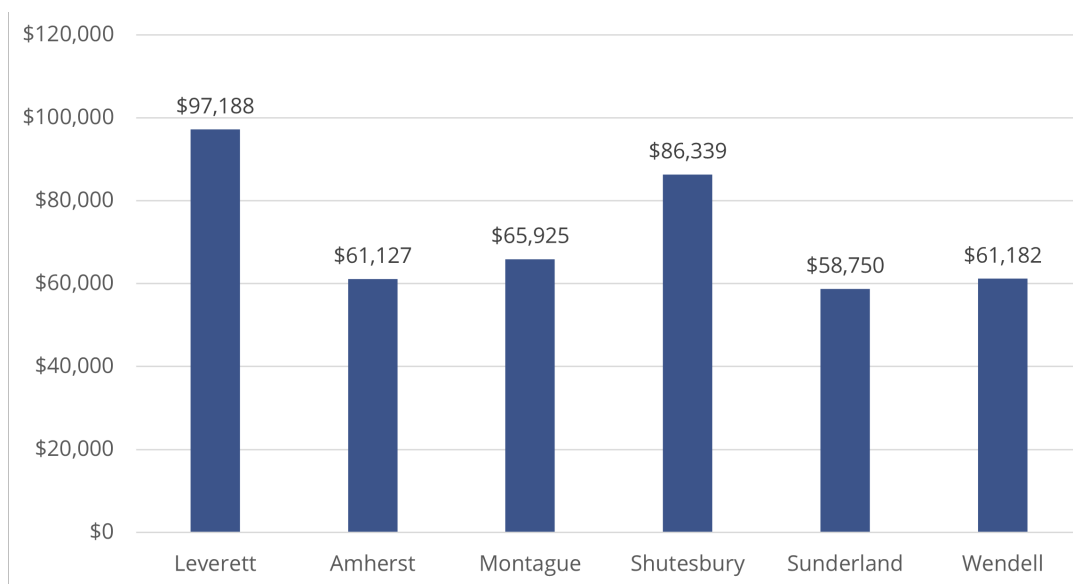
Source for both graphs: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

**Leverett has the highest median household income in the surrounding region.**

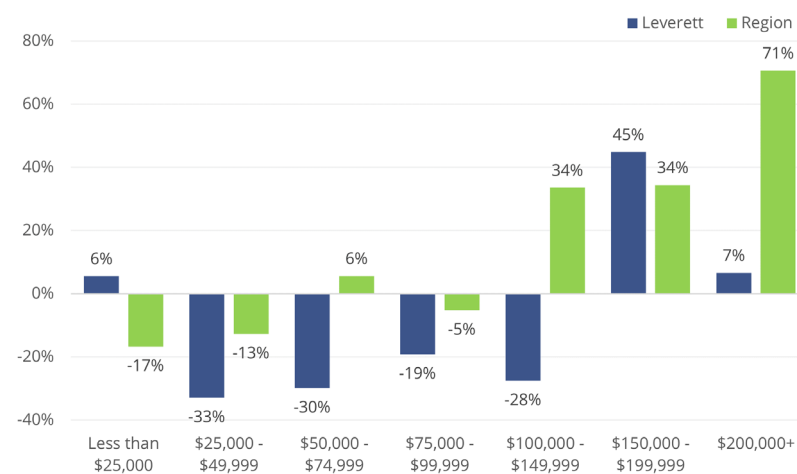
Household incomes are increasing in Leverett. Over the past five years, Leverett saw a 45% increase in households earning between \$150,000 - \$199,999 and a 7% increase in residents earning over \$200,000. The median household income in Leverett increased from \$86,771 to \$97,188.

These increases in higher income households mean high household purchasing power and spending in local businesses is a key economic driver. This may also mean households have more income to spend on housing as home prices and rents continue to rise. However, **incomes tend to decrease after retirement as people age**; this is the population that is projected to increase by 2040.

**Figure 27. Region’s Median Household Income**



**Figure 28. Leverett and Region: Change in Median Household Income**



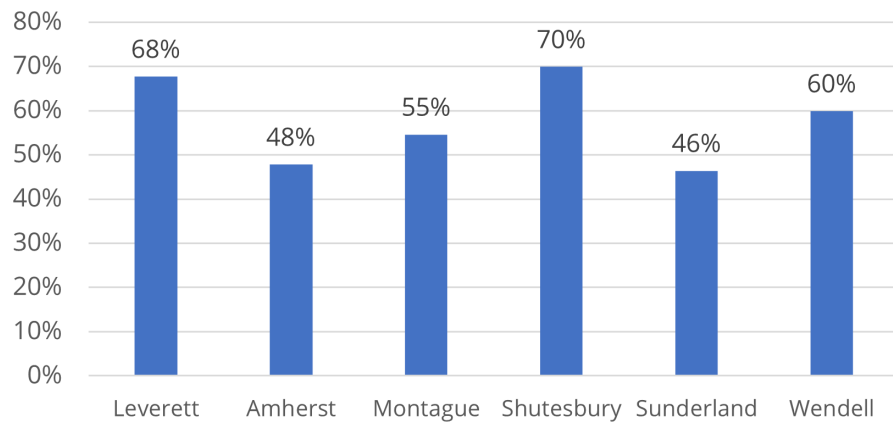
Source for both graphs: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

**Leverett has a higher percentage of family households compared to surrounding towns/cities.** Leverett has 479 family households, which makes up about 68% of their total population. However, **Leverett is the only town whose proportion of family households decreased** over the last decade, while family households as a proportion of total households increased in the surrounding towns. This decrease may also be a sign of an aging population.

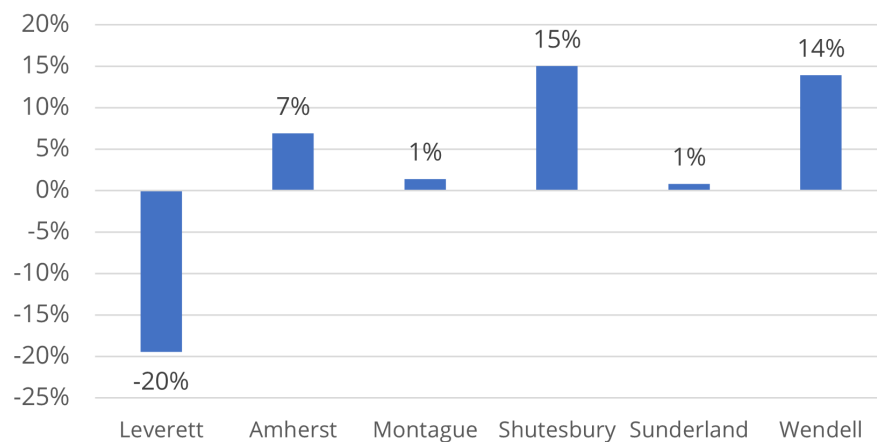
Shutesbury and Wendell have the most positive percentage change in family households.

**Household composition continues to shift as non-family households increase.** Following total population trends over the last decade, the number of households decreased from 809 to 708 households. Over the past five years, Leverett saw an increase in the number and percentage of non-family households, primarily driven by the increase in non-family households not living alone. The share of family households decreased by 116 households. Non-family householders not living alone increased by 26 households. For the region, the most significant proportional change was in householders living alone, with an increase of 637 residents.

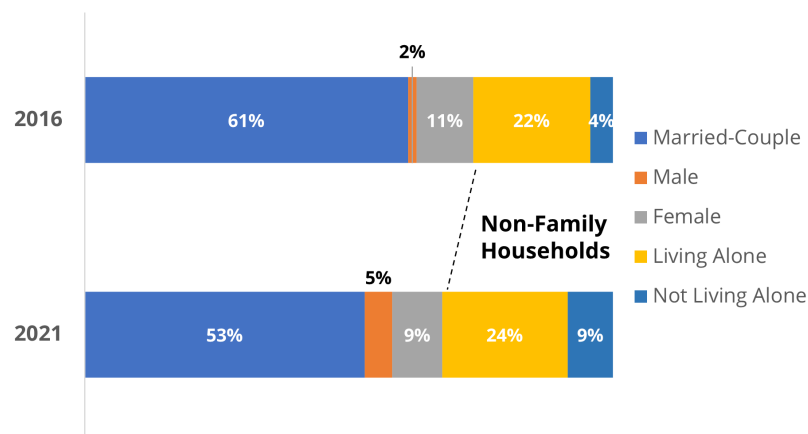
**Figure 29. Percent of Total Households that are Family Households**



**Figure 30. Percent Change of Family Households**



**Figure 31. Change in Household Composition**



Source for both graphs: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

## 3.3 HOUSING AND ECONOMY

### 3.3.1 SUMMARY

Housing and the economy are intertwined. Leverett's housing is primarily single-family, older, and spread throughout the community. The lack of diversity in housing types means that certain populations, such as seniors or young people starting their first jobs, may not find housing that is suitable or affordable. Because this problem is not limited to Leverett, appropriate housing may not be available in adjacent towns. One effect is that Leverett's seniors wishing to down-size or move to one-level living may have to leave Leverett, and therefore their social connections, to find age-friendly housing. Another effect is that people who grew up in Leverett may have to leave to find housing that matches their income levels.

Various elements contribute to a town's economic well-being. Household incomes, educational attainment, labor force composition, commercial and industrial building stock, and zoning decisions all impact the economic output of a town.

Leverett's economy is small, and the town will not be self-sufficient in terms of jobs, goods, or services. Most Leverett residents leave town to work and shop; most Leverett employees do not live in town. Because no regular public transit exists in Leverett, all traffic is by private vehicle, and dependent on the Town for maintaining its roadways, including plowing and repairs, to allow for safe and convenient travel to adjacent communities.

Widely-distributed housing must be connected to these roads and Leverett's current zoning requires large lots. Large lots mean that each lot has its own well and septic system. A study of development patterns since 1960 shows the increasing

spread of housing throughout the community which leads to the sprawl that many participants in the workshops identified as less desirable.

The labor force has continued its recovery from the disruption of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. While neither the total labor force nor the number of residents who are employed has fully returned to pre-pandemic levels, unemployment rates continue to be at historic lows. Although low unemployment rates can help drive wage growth, Leverett's rate is so extraordinarily low that it makes hiring extremely difficult for businesses.

Nearly everyone who lives in Leverett commutes outside of town to go to work. More than 7 times as many people leave town as arrive every day to go to work. The decrease in daytime population can make it harder to sustain retail and personal services enterprises.

The five most common work destinations for Leverett residents are Amherst, Northampton, Springfield, Greenfield, and Worcester.

This is consistent with the very low number of existing jobs in Leverett, with fewer than 150 people working in town. The largest industries by employment include Construction, Health Care & Social Assistance, Government, Manufacturing, and Other Services (except Public Administration). Of these, only Construction and Health Care & Social Assistance have grown over the last decade.

Leverett only has a small number of parcels and acreage dedicated to commercial and industrial uses, though these uses (along with multi-unit housing) also represent some of the properties with the highest assessed values on a per-acre basis.

### 3.3.2 HOW AND WHERE DO LEVERETT RESIDENTS LIVE?

#### Summary

- Leverett saw a boom in housing development in the period up to 1990 (77% of all housing was built by 1990). Since 2010 housing development has declined significantly.
- 88% of all housing in Leverett is single-family detached units
- Lot sizes in Leverett are large and both multi-family and multiple units per lot are not allowed by right in the zoning.
- As the Leverett population ages, seniors have two choices: remain in place (and limiting the turnover of the existing housing stock); or leave Leverett (opening up stock but breaking community ties).
- There is limited scope for further development on the remaining unbuilt parcels.

#### Housing Tenure

**The ratio of renter-occupied and owner-occupied households has stayed consistent.** Leverett’s owner occupied tenure has decreased by only 1% over the past five years. However, following population trends, households have decreased overall, with owner-occupied households decreasing by 94 households, and renter occupied households decreasing by 7 households. Across comparable communities, housing tenure has stayed relatively similar since 2016, with the percentage of renter occupied units decreasing slightly in Amherst, Montague, Shutesbury, and Sunderland. Wendell was the only town to have an increased ratio of renter occupied units.

Over the past five years, Leverett saw a total decrease of 7 renter households and a decrease of 94 owner households. There was a loss of approximately 60 4-person owner households.

**Table 32. Housing Tenure, Comparable Communities**

Town	2016		2021	
	Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied	Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied
<b>Leverett</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>12%</b>
Amherst	44%	56%	46%	55%
Montague	59%	41%	63%	37%
Shutesbury	89%	11%	91%	9%
Sunderland	43%	57%	44%	56%
Wendell	86%	14%	80%	20%

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

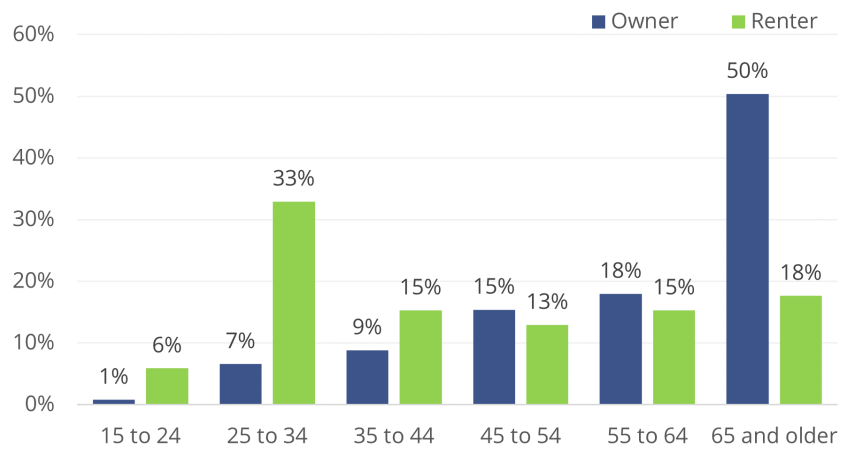


### 3. Supplemental Research

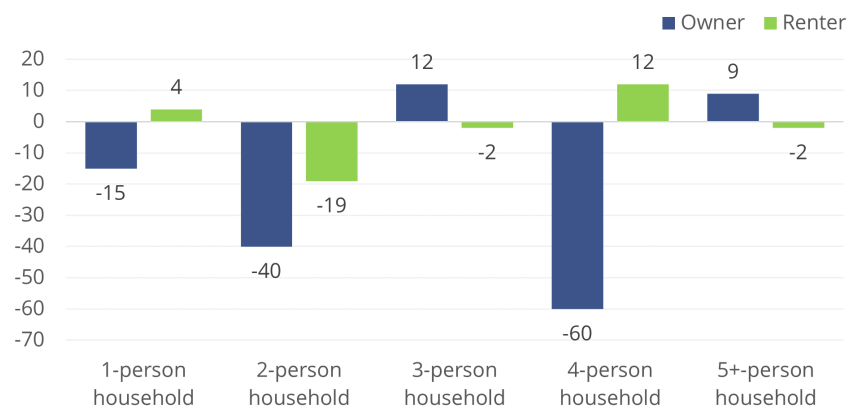
**Leverett owner households skew older**, with those 65 and older making up 50% of owner households in Leverett (314 households), while the largest cohort of renter households are aged 25-34 (28 households). This is similar to trends in other communities.

**Most of Leverett's housing stock is concentrated in single family units**, while the region has a more diverse spread of structures. Ownership units are concentrated in single unit structures and tend to be older than rental units. Leverett's median year built (1973) for housing is similar to surrounding communities.

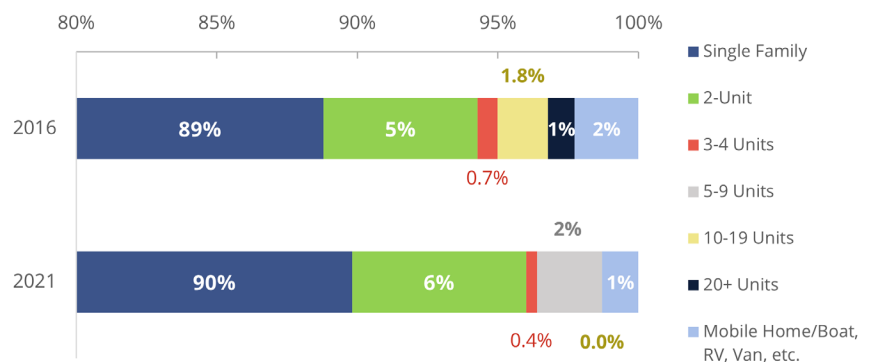
**Figure 33. Leverett: Household Ages by Tenure**



**Figure 34. Leverett: Household Size by Tenure**



**Figure 35. Leverett: Units by Structure, 2016 and 2021**



Source for all graphs: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

**Ownership units are concentrated in single unit structures.**

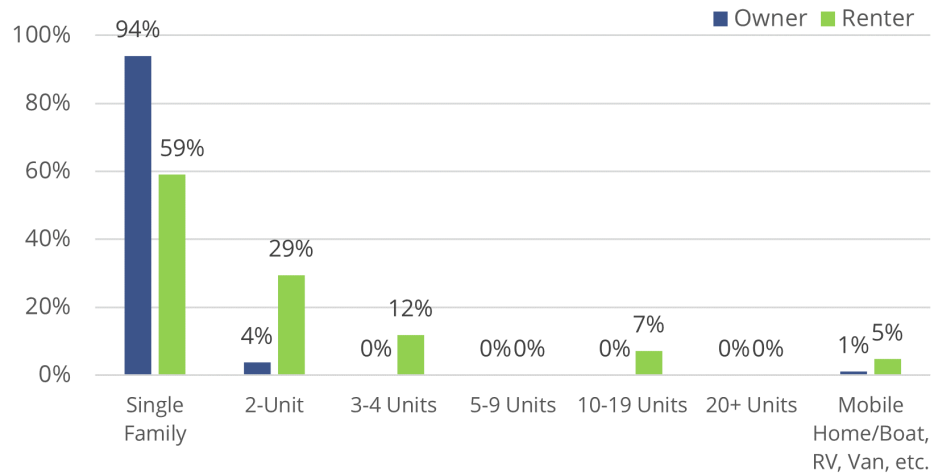
The majority (92%) of owner-occupied units are found in single unit structures, most of which are single family detached homes. The town has very few ownership units across all other building types. Renter-occupied units are more spread out, though almost half are single unit structures.

In the region, renter-occupied units have a much higher proportion in structures with more than three units.

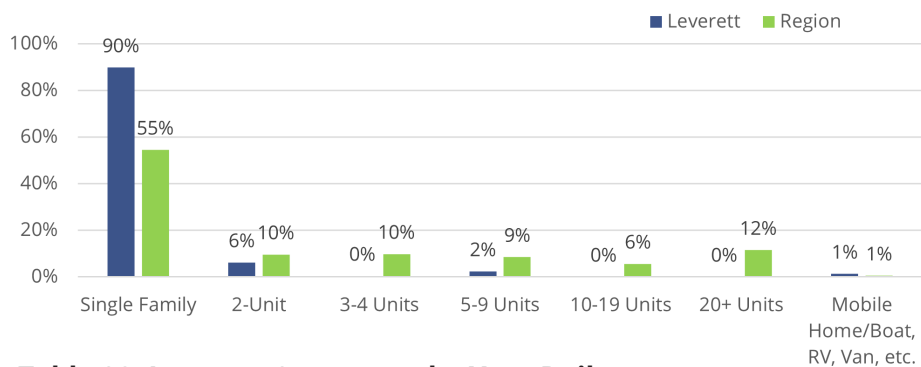
**Ownership units in Leverett tend to be older than rental units.** Leverett has a similar median year built for their housing stock to surrounding communities.

Almost 60% of ownership units were constructed over 40 years ago, while about 46% of rental units were constructed over 40 years ago. Between 1980 and 1999, about half of the rental stock was built. Since 2000, the number of structures built has decreased significantly. Older homes can have more maintenance issues and requirements compared to newer homes, something the Town may want to keep an eye on going forward.

**Figure 36. Leverett: Units per Structure**



**Figure 37. Leverett and Region: Units per Structure**



**Table 38. Leverett Structures by Year Built**

Ownership Structure	Count	Percentage
Built 2000 or later	55	9%
Built Between 1980 and 1999	189	30%
Built Between 1960 and 1979	169	27%
Built 1959 or earlier	210	34%

Rental Structure	Count	Percentage
Built 2000 or later	4	4.7%
Built Between 1980 and 1999	42	49.4%
Built Between 1960 and 1979	15	17.6%
Built 1959 or earlier	24	28.2%

**Table 39. Median Year Built by Town**

Town	Year
Leverett	1973
Amherst	1973
Montague	1953
Shutesbury	1978
Sunderland	1976
Wendell	1977

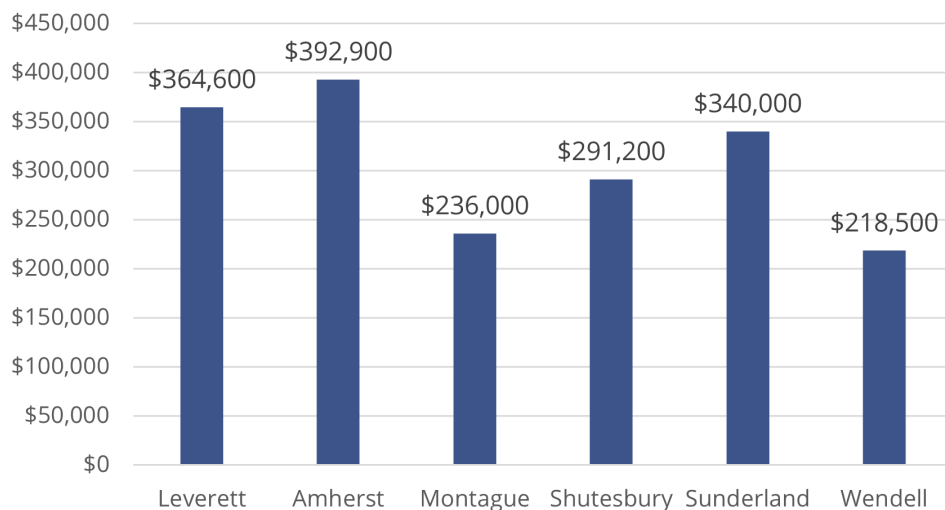
Source for all graphs: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

### Housing Values: Ownership Units

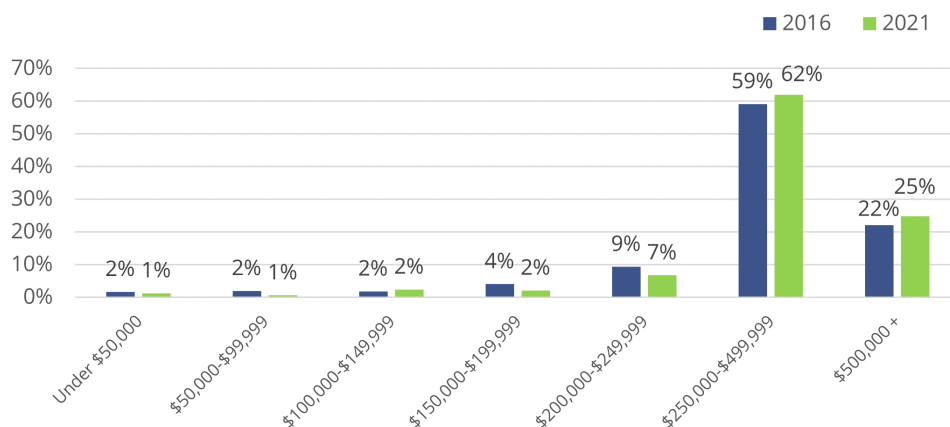
**The median home value increased by \$20,400 over the past five years.** The share of housing units valued at or above \$250,000 increased from 81.2% of the total housing stock to 86.8%. Since 2016, the median home value in Leverett increased by 5.9% with the median home value increasing from \$344,200 to \$364,600. This is above most of the median values in surrounding communities.

**Median home sale prices have fluctuated in the last decade but have reached their highest peak in the past two years.** In November 2020, Leverett had the highest median sale price at \$710,000. Since then, there prices have fluctuated between \$235,000 to \$646,000. The number of homes for sale has decreased drastically in the past two years, with 17 sold in 2021 and 8 sold in 2022. The years between 2013 and 2016 had the most consistent number of homes sold, between 113 and 119 homes sold annually.

**Figure 40. Median Home Value by Town**

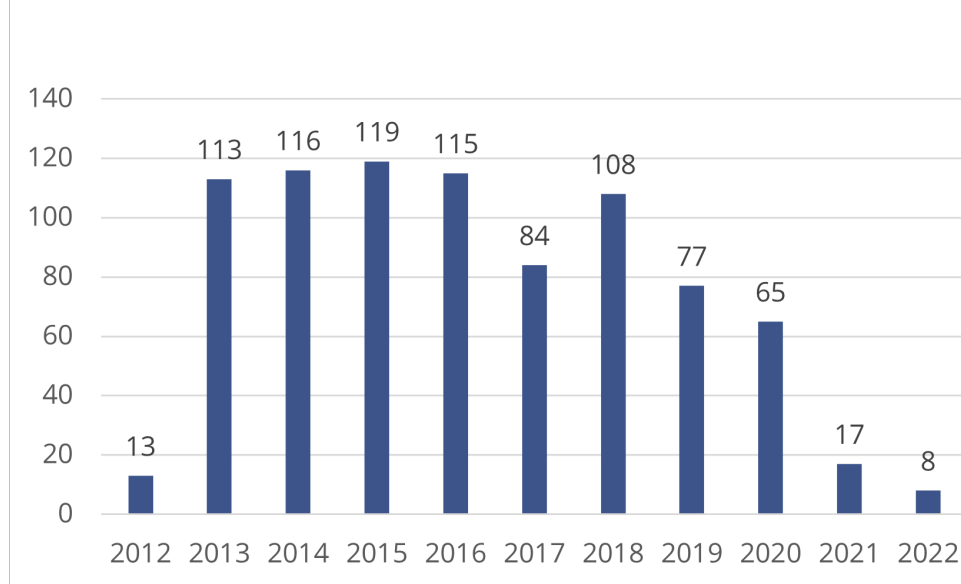


**Figure 41. Leverett: Change in Distribution of Home Values**

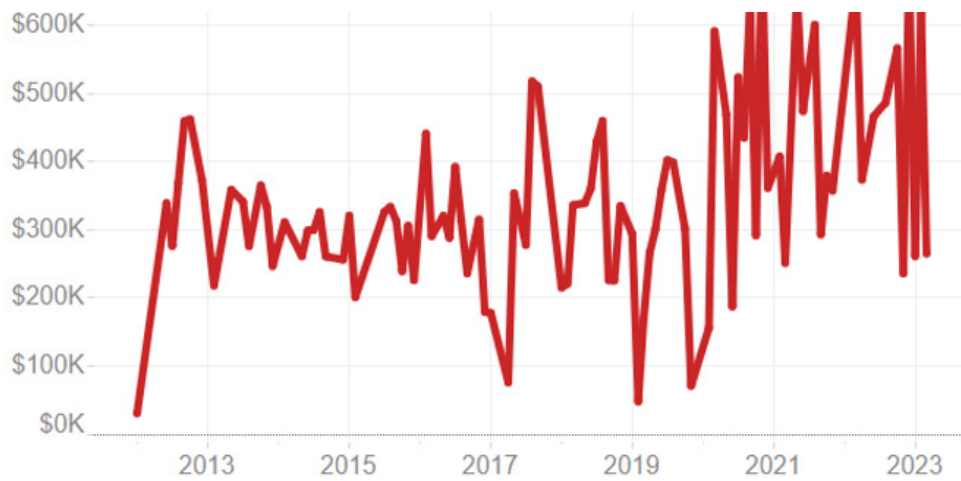


Source for both graphs: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

**Figure 42. Leverett: Number of Homes for Sale (2012-2022)**



**Figure 43. Leverett: Median Sales Price of All Homes (2012-2023)**



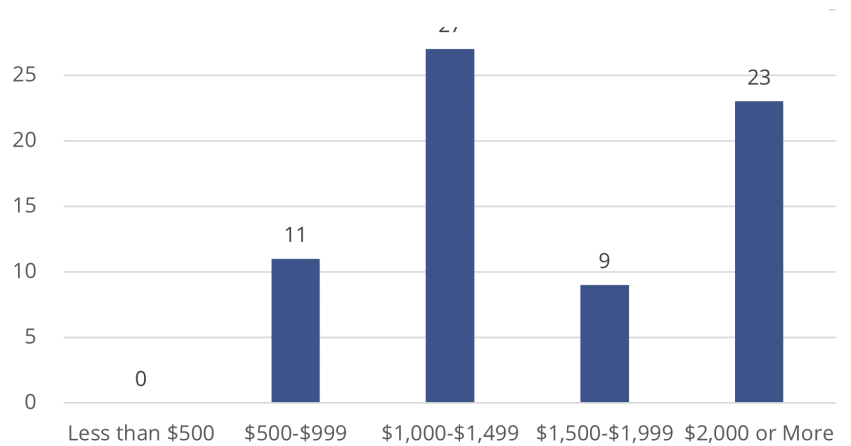
Source for both graphs: Redfin, 2012-2022; RKG Associates

### Housing Values: Rental Units

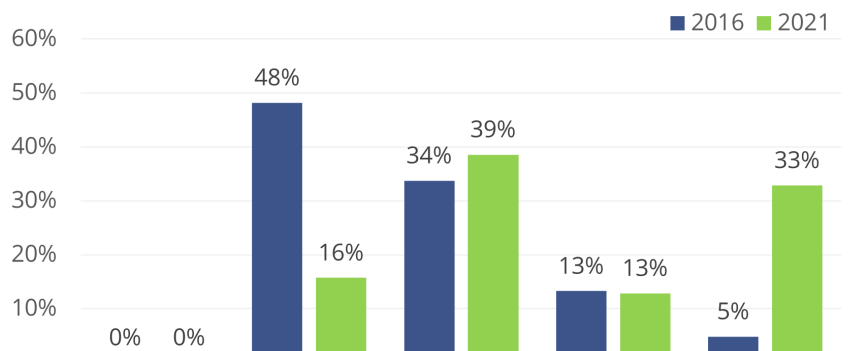
**Rental units are also increasing in price.** 46% of Leverett’s rental units are priced at or above \$1,500 per month. The share of rental units with rents of more than \$1,500 increased from 18.1% to 45.7% of the rental stock in the past five years (17 units). There were large decreases in units priced below \$1,000 with a loss of 29 units.

Leverett has a similarly high median gross rent in comparison to the region as the second highest. Increasing rents place a financial constraint on many low-to moderate-income households, and make it harder to for businesses to attract and retain employees who may want or need to live in the community where they work.

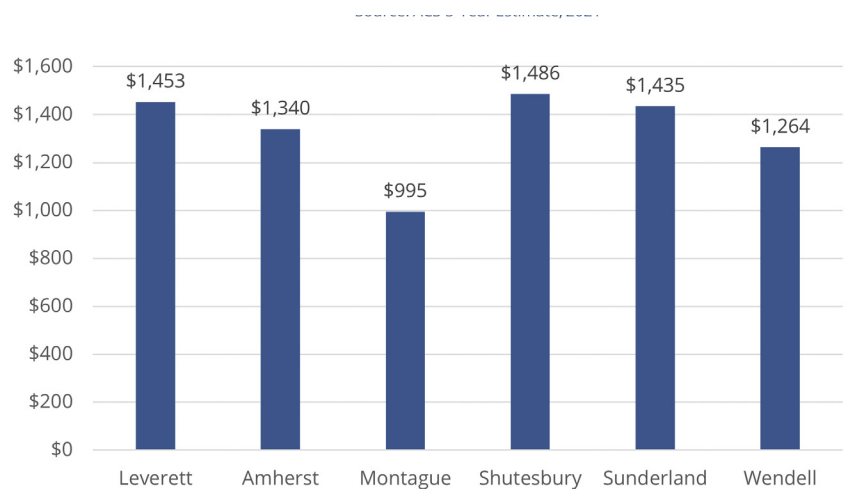
**Figure 44. Leverett: Gross Rent Distribution**



**Figure 45. Leverett: Change in Distribution of Gross Rent**



**Figure 46. Region: Median Gross Rent**



Source for both graphs: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates



**Residential vacancy in Leverett is low for available units.** In 2021, Leverett’s total vacancy was around 8.8%, with 68 vacant units out of 776 total units. The Census records vacant units a few different ways to comprise the total vacancy count for a particular geography. Housing vacancy is captured in four different categories by the Census, which includes: vacant available, vacant unavailable, seasonal, and vacant other.

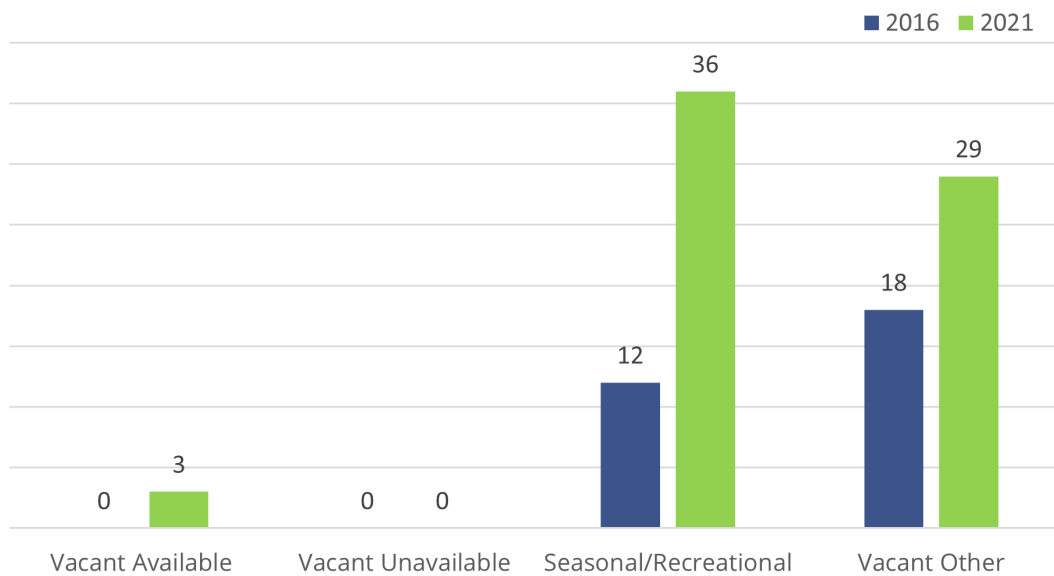
- “Vacant available” refers to unoccupied units that are currently for sale or for rent.
- “Vacant unavailable” refers to off market for sale and for rent units.
- “Seasonal and recreation” refers to housing units that are not occupied year-round such as second homes, beach houses etc.
- “Vacant Other” refers to units that are not available for rent or sale and are off the market for different reasons.

These include undergoing substantial rehab, uninhabitable units, foreclosure, among others.

In 2021, Leverett’s vacancy rate for units actively listed as for sale or for rent was 0.4%.

A healthy vacancy rate for a community is typically between 4% to 6%. Maintaining a healthy vacancy level is important, because the available for sale and for rent units allow households to move in and out of the community and across housing types within the market. This dynamic typically offers some degree of insulation for owners and renters from fluctuations in regional prices because an available supply of units can help buffer against sharp rises in price that a tighter market could experience as has been the case in communities across the state.

**Figure 47. Leverett: Vacant Housing Units by Category**

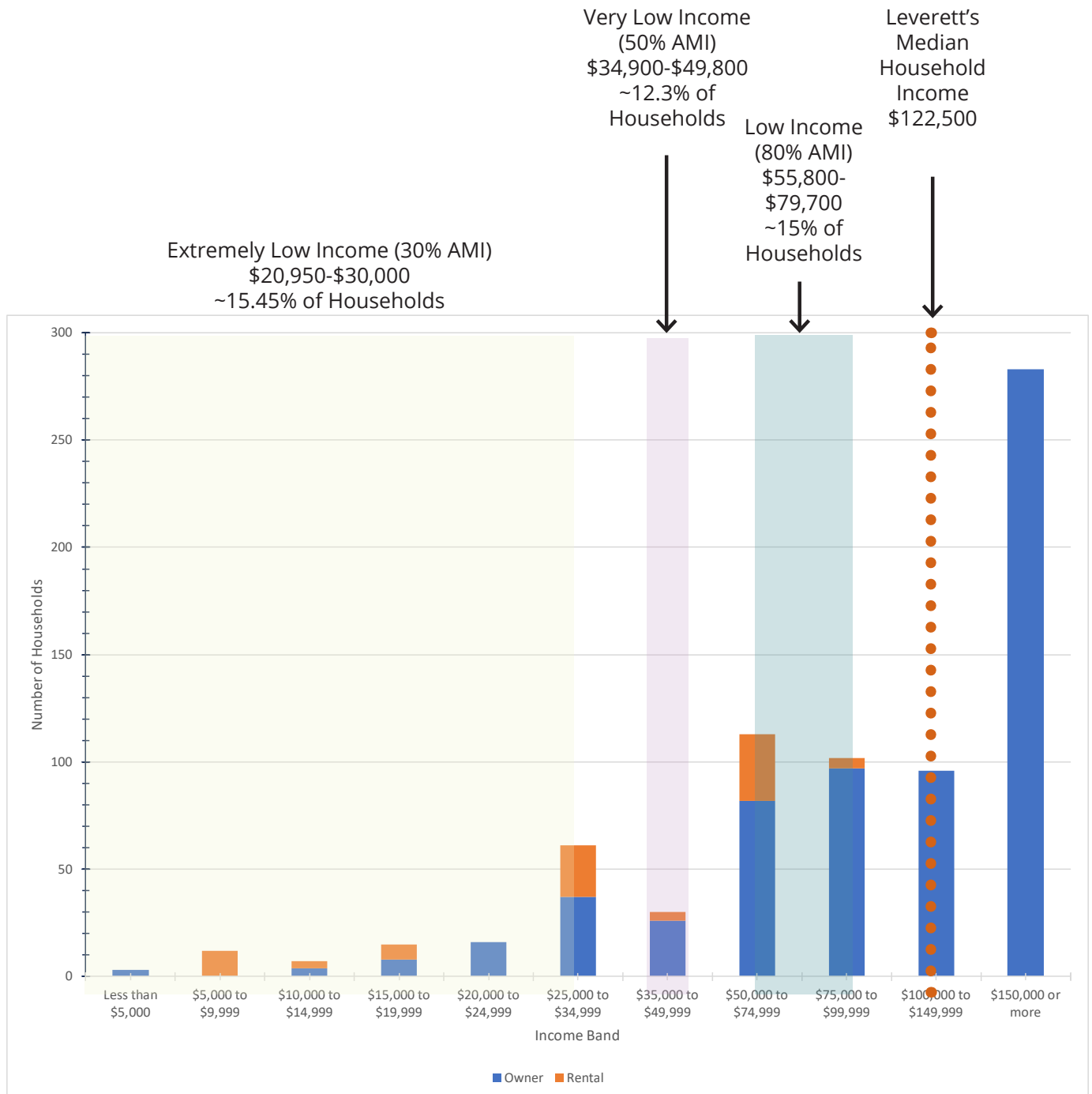


Source for both graphs: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016-2021; RKG Associates

### Current Housing Affordability in Leverett

This chart shows the breakdown of 2022 household incomes in Leverett and compares them to the HUD Area Median Income (AMI). The AMI is used to define and determine eligibility for assisted housing programs. Approximately 49% of the households in Leverett are below the AMI for Franklin County, which is between \$69,020 and \$98,600 depending on household size.

**Figure 48. Leverett Household Incomes vs HUD 1-4 Person Households Income Limits**



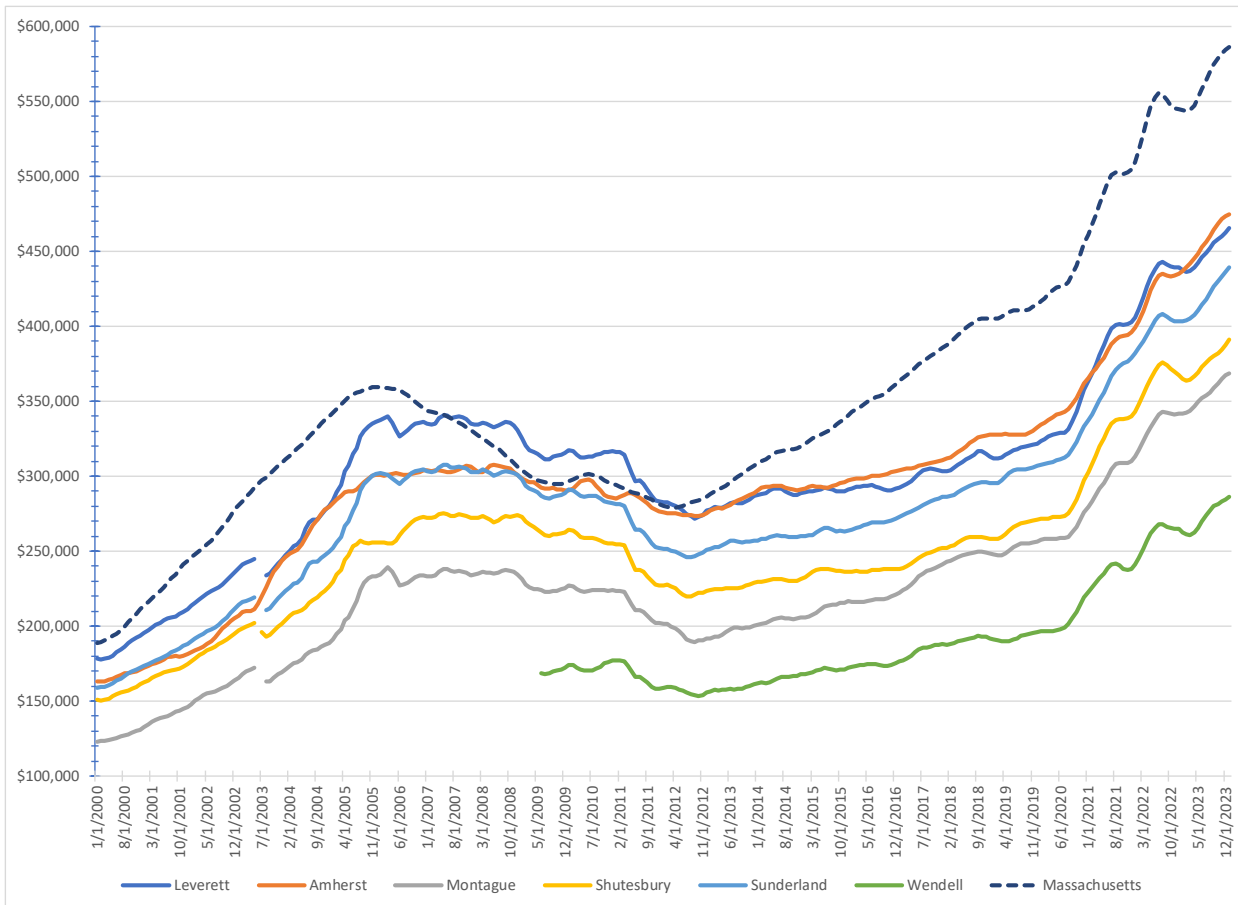
Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates; US Dept of Housing and Urban Development FY2023 Income Limits; Innes Associates

This chart shows the median housing values from 2000 to 2023 for Leverett and surrounding towns as well as for the State as a whole.

Leverett and Amherst have higher median housing prices than their neighbors, but these towns have lower housing values than Massachusetts as a whole.

Leverett is the dark blue line.

**Figure 49. Monthly Median Housing Values (2000-2023)**



Source: Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI); Innes Associates

### 3.3.3 HOW AND WHERE DO LEVERETT RESIDENTS WORK?

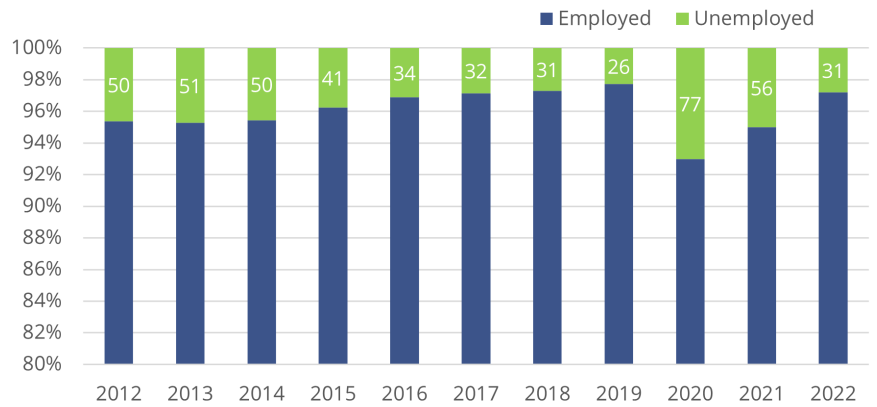
#### Labor Force

**Leverett’s labor force dropped during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic but has started to rebound.**

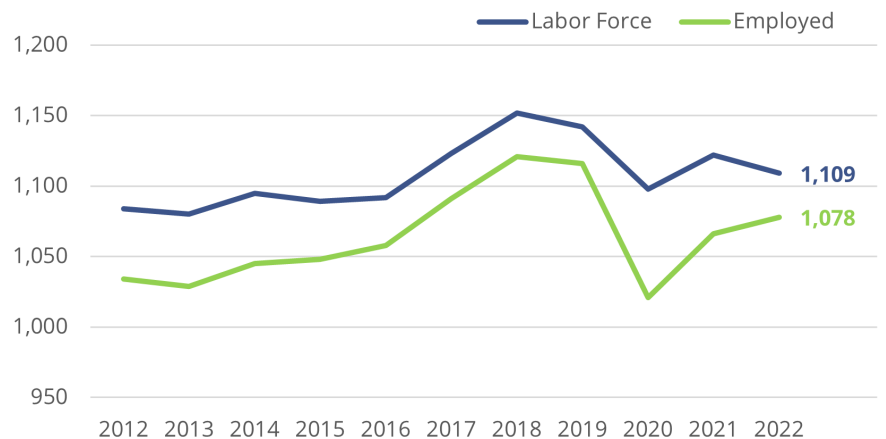
According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, 1,109 people make up Leverett’s labor force. This is an increase of 1,084 people from 2012. In 2022, Leverett had an average unemployment rate of 2.8%, a return to pre-pandemic numbers.

**Leverett and its Workforce Development Area has similar trends in labor force, employment, and unemployment.** After notable disruption during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment levels have once again decreased to historic lows. With unemployment both locally and regionally hovering around the 2% mark, Leverett and its neighbors are at what economists call “full employment” – essentially, nearly everyone who wants a job has already found one.

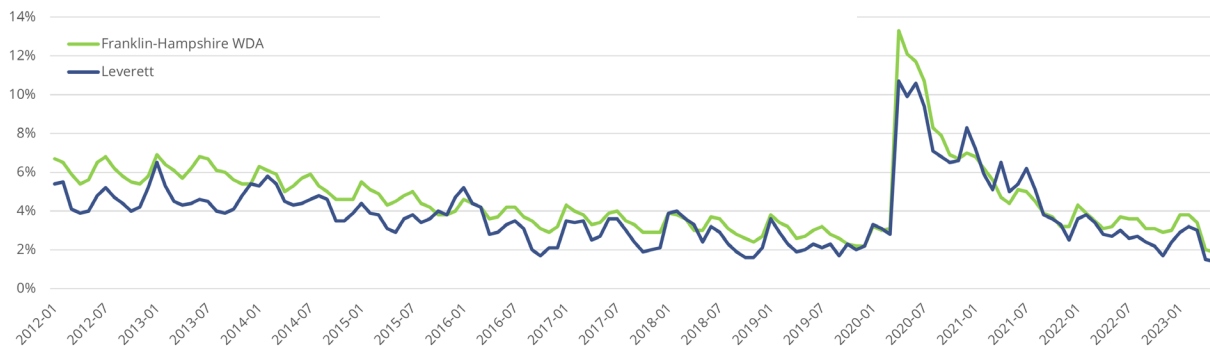
**Figure 50 Leverett: Unemployment**



**Figure 51. Leverett: Labor Force and Employment**



**Figure 52. Leverett and Region: Unemployment Rates (2012-2023)**



Source for all graphs: MA EOLWD, 2012-2022; RKG Associates

**Table 53. Leverett: Top Ten Work Destinations for Residents**

Place	Job Count	Share
Amherst	152	16.70%
Northampton	61	6.70%
Springfield	48	5.30%
Greenfield	43	4.70%
Worcester	38	4.20%
Boston	21	2.30%
Easthampton	12	1.30%
Gardner	11	1.20%
Holyoke	11	1.20%
South Deerfield	11	1.20%

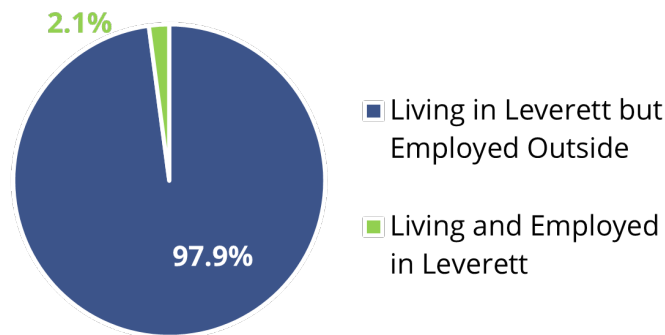
**Commuting Patterns**

**Leverett has a high volume of residents traveling outside of Leverett for work.** 128 workers enter Leverett from other communities each day and about 893 residents leave Leverett each day for work. Only around 19 working Leverett residents remain in town for work. Commuting patterns suggest that Amherst is the most popular destination for residents who are leaving town for work (152 residents), and overall, most outbound commuters travel South for work. The number of residents leaving Leverett for work each day compared to the number of commuters coming into town for work suggests Leverett serves as more of a residential community than a job center for the region.

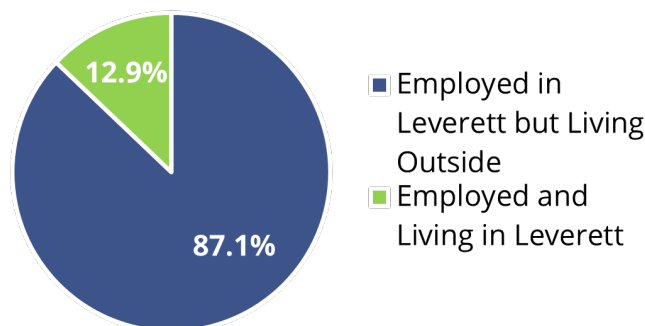
Figure 60 shows the top ten largest employers in Leverett

Leverett’s largest employers fall within the educational services and public administration sector of the economy. Leverett Elementary School is the leading employer in Leverett, with an estimated 20-49 employees. Most employers are located along Montague Road or Long Plain Road.

**Figure 54. Labor Force Efficiency (All Jobs) Among People Living in Leverett**



**Figure 55. Labor Force Efficiency (All Jobs) Among People Employed in Leverett**



Source for all graphs: OnTheMap, 2020; RKG Associates



### Leverett's Employment Base

#### Leverett's Construction and Health Care industries show stability and some growth.

Leverett's employment base consists of just 142 jobs, a 24% decrease from 2012. The largest employment industry in Leverett is the Construction sector, which increased by 36%. Some industries saw declines, like Government and Manufacturing.

#### Across the region, government and educational services have seen the most growth and remain the top two sectors.

The Health Care sector has grown the most across the region, with a growth of 30%. Government remains the largest employment sector, with the highest average annual earnings. Other Services and Accommodation & Food Services have decreased over the past decade.

**Figure 56. Leverett: Top Six Largest Employment Sectors**

NAICS	Description	2012 Jobs	2022 Jobs	2012-2022 % Change	2022 Average Annual Earnings
23	Construction	30	41	36%	\$66,904
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	19	23	21%	\$56,005
90	Government	56	17	-70%	\$64,285
31	Manufacturing	25	17	-33%	\$72,611
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	25	16	-37%	\$16,694
44	Retail Trade	11	10	-5%	\$59,842

**Figure 57. Region: Top Six Largest Employment Sectors**

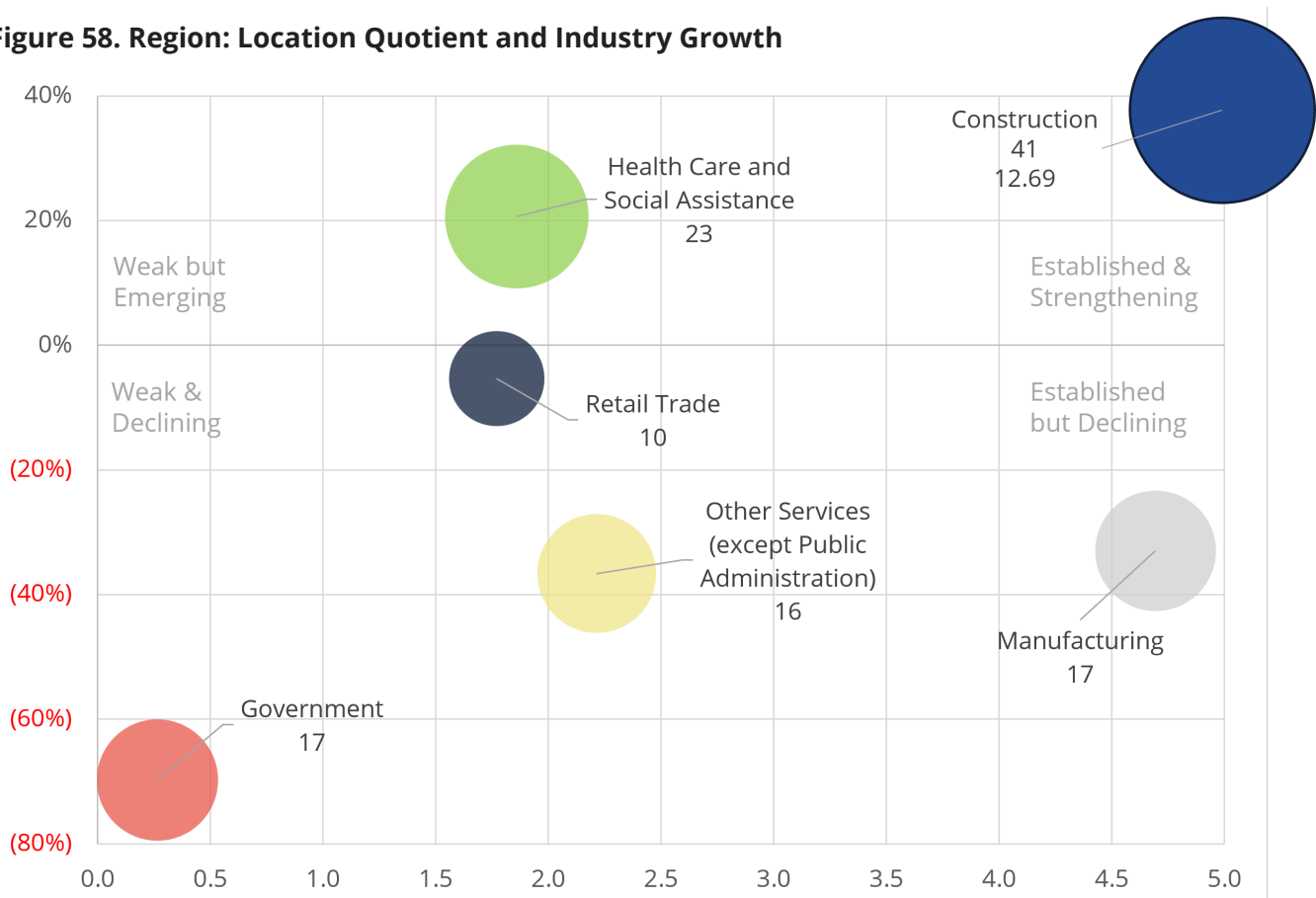
NAICS	Description	2012 Jobs	2022 Jobs	2012-2022 % Change	2022 Average Annual Earnings
90	Government	10,676	11,379	7%	\$86,407
61	Educational Services	3,987	4,077	5%	\$38,366
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	1,796	2,336	30%	\$56,121
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	2,020	1,325	-34%	\$46,437
72	Accommodation and Food Services	1,396	1,244	-11%	\$26,010
44	Retail Trade	1,074	1,079	0%	\$42,460

Source for both tables: Lightcast 2023; RKG Associates

**Leverett's Construction industry is unusually prevalent when compared to the region.** Location quotients (LQs) compare employment by industry in two or more geographic areas. The location quotient is a ratio of the percentage of an industry's employment in one geography to that of a larger comparison geography. If the ratio is less than 0.80, the identified industry sector is thought to be under-represented in the local economy. Conversely, a ratio greater than 1.20 can show a specialty within the local economy as compared to the larger geography. The location quotient can be useful in pointing out opportunities for certain industry sectors to gain a larger share of the employment base or a specialty area in the local economy. The comparison geography used for Leverett was the surrounding region.

The graph below shows the location quotients of the top six industries compared to the region. The industry sector with the highest location quotients is Construction, followed by Manufacturing, Other Services, and Health Care & Social Assistance.

**Figure 58. Region: Location Quotient and Industry Growth**

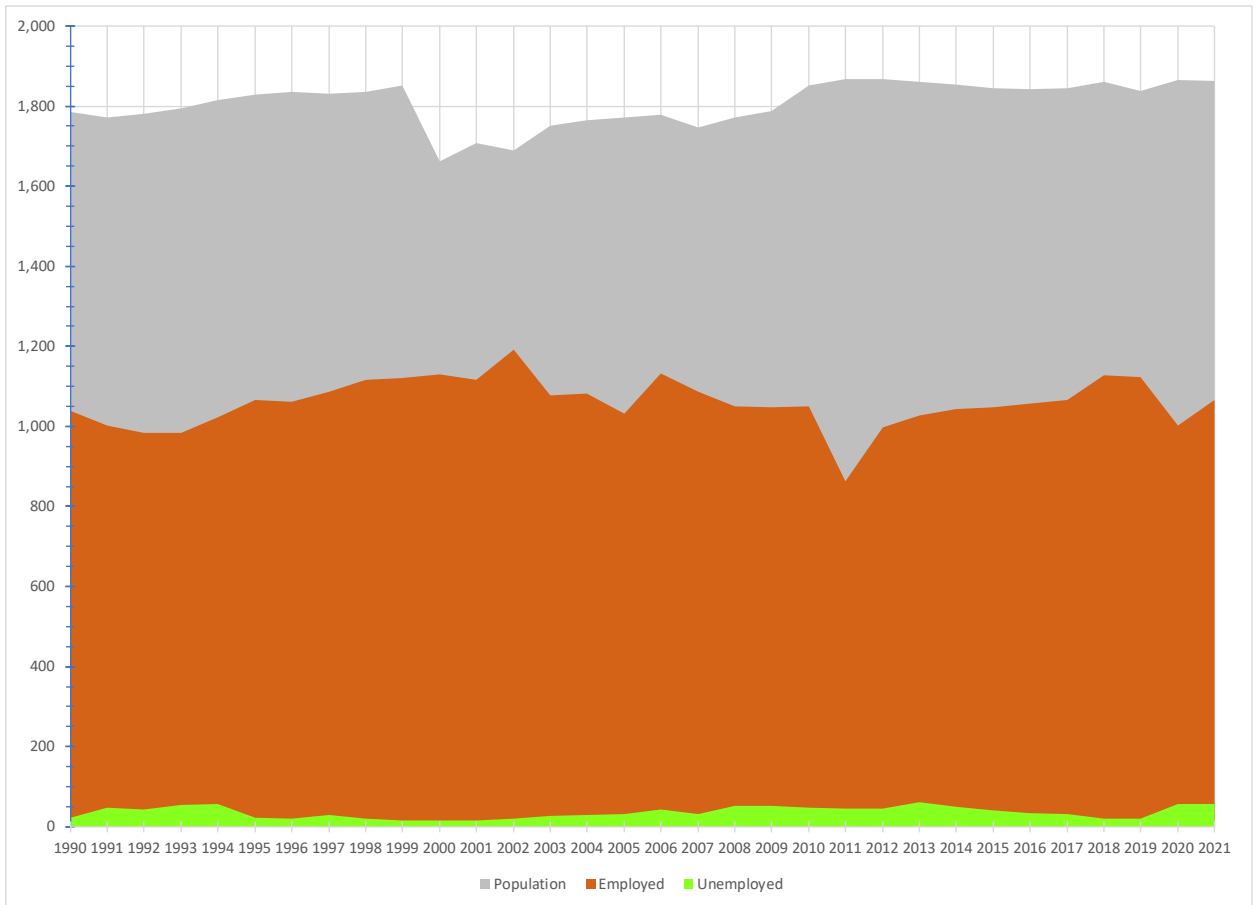


Source: RKG Associates

### Changes in Employment in Leverett over Time

This chart shows the breakdown of the labor force in Leverett between 1990 and 2021. The total population is in gray; the working population is in orange; and those who were unemployed are in green. In 2021, 60% of the population was in the labor force (i.e. aged between 15 and 64) with 95% of them employed.

**Figure 59. Leverett Labor Force 1990-2021**



Source: MA Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services; Innes Associates

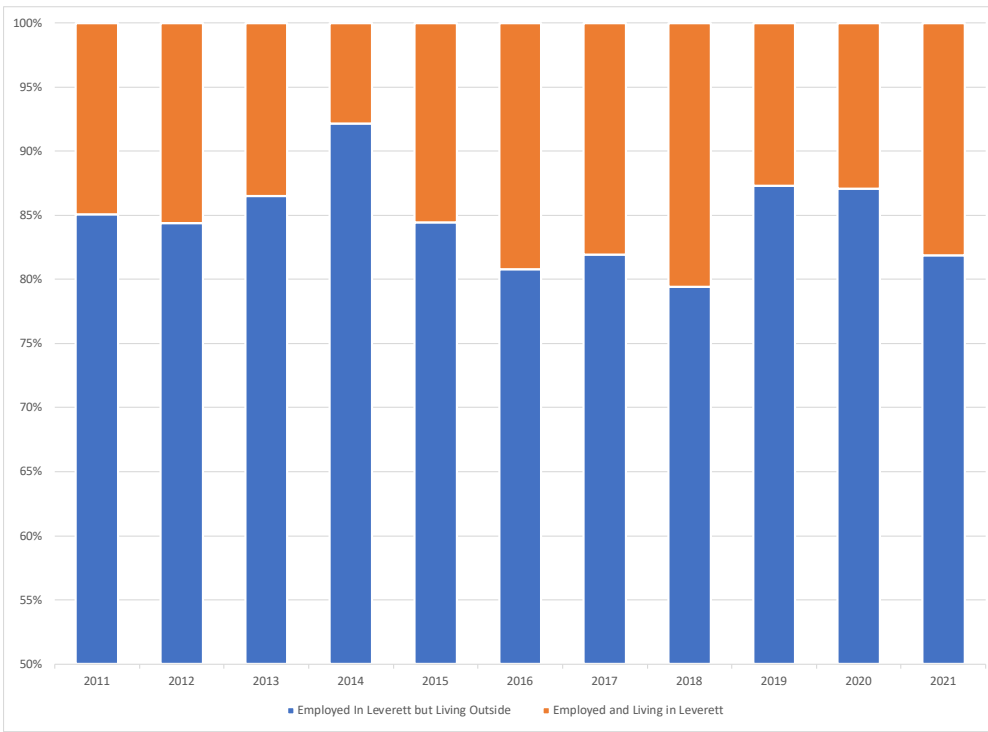
**Figure 60. Leverett: Top Employers**

Organization Name	Location	Number of Employees	2-Digit NAICS
Leverett Elementary School	Montague Road	20-49	
Leverett Fire Department	Montague Road	20-49	
Leverett Village Co-Op	Rattlesnake Gutter Rd	20-49	
Mudpie Potters	Montague Road	20-49	
Bourke Builders	Long Hill Road	5-9	
Coolcap Fund Inc.	Shutesbury Rd	5-9	
Hampshire Franklin Children's Day Care Center	Long Plain Road	5-9	
L&F Construction	Long Plain Road	5-9	
Leverett Police Department	Montague Road	5-9	
Local Harmony Inc.	Jackson Hill Road	5-9	

Source: MA Department of Economic Research 2023; RKG Associates

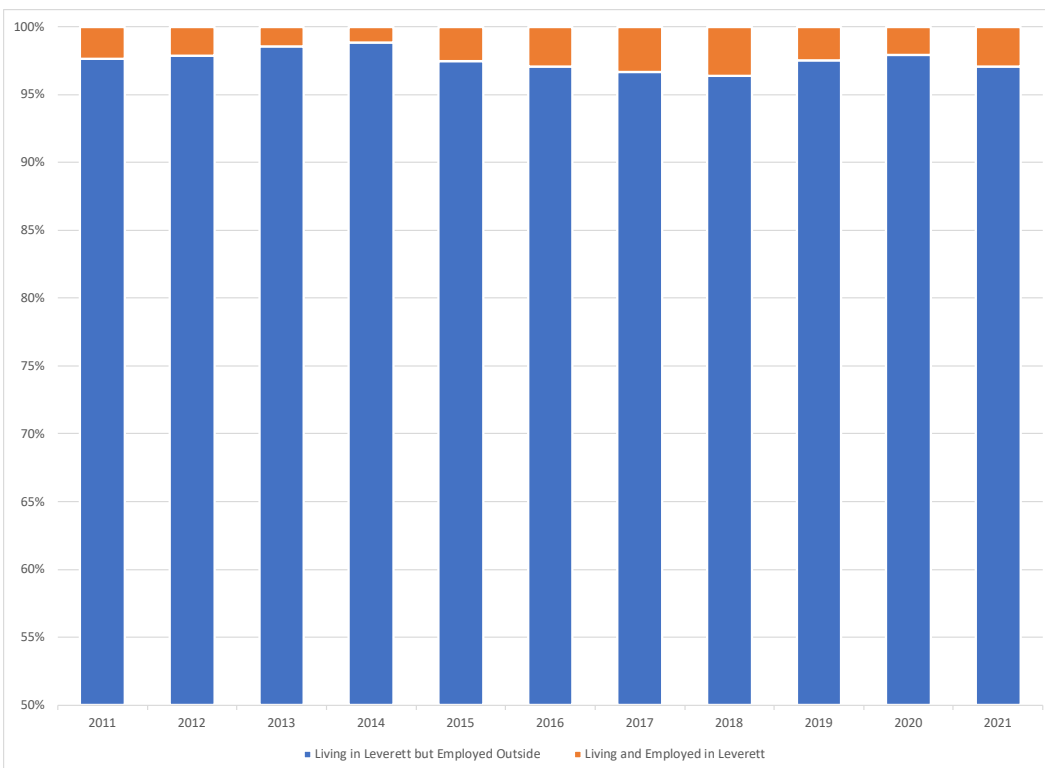
This chart shows where those who are employed in Leverett actually live. In 2021, 82% of those employed in Leverett lived elsewhere.

**Figure 61. Employment Patterns: Employed in Leverett (2011-2021)**



This chart shows where those who live in Leverett actually work. In 2021, 97% of those living in Leverett worked elsewhere.

**Figure 62. Employment Patterns: Living in Leverett (2011-2021)**

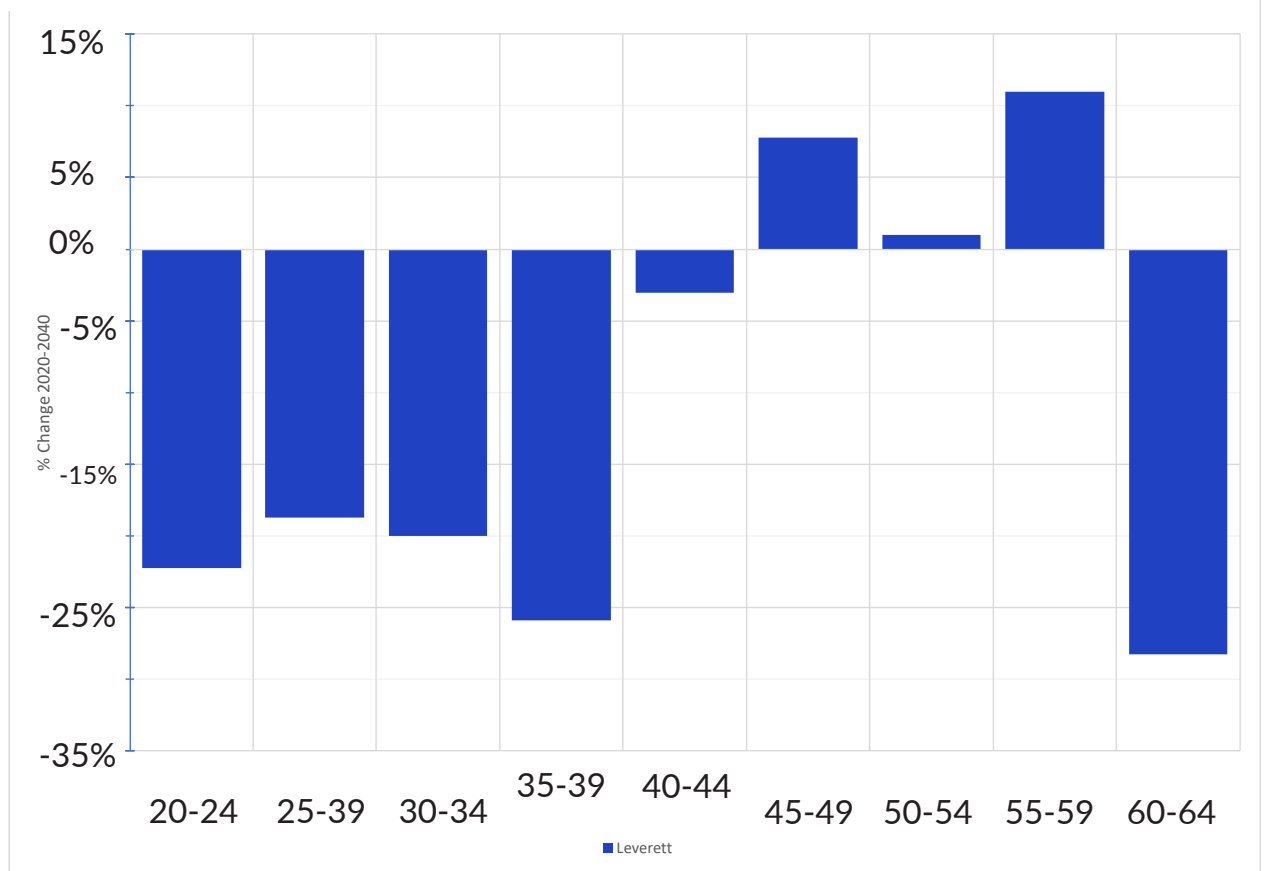


Source for both Graphs: U.S. Census Bureau: OnTheMap; Innes Associates

### Employment in Leverett in 2040

This chart shows how Leverett’s working population (those between 20 and 65) is estimated to change between 2020 and 2040. The largest decreases will be in those under 40 and those 60-64.

**Figure 63. Leverett Working Age Population Change 2020 - 2040**



Source: UMDI V2022 Long-Term Population Projections for Massachusetts Municipalities and Regional Planning Areas (UMDI V2022 Population Projections) UMass Donahue Institute; Innes Associates

#### Data from the Town Census

The Town Clerk provided the information on residents’ professions from the 2024 Town Census. Of the 1,313 people over the age of 16 who responded, approximately 227 did not provide a profession.

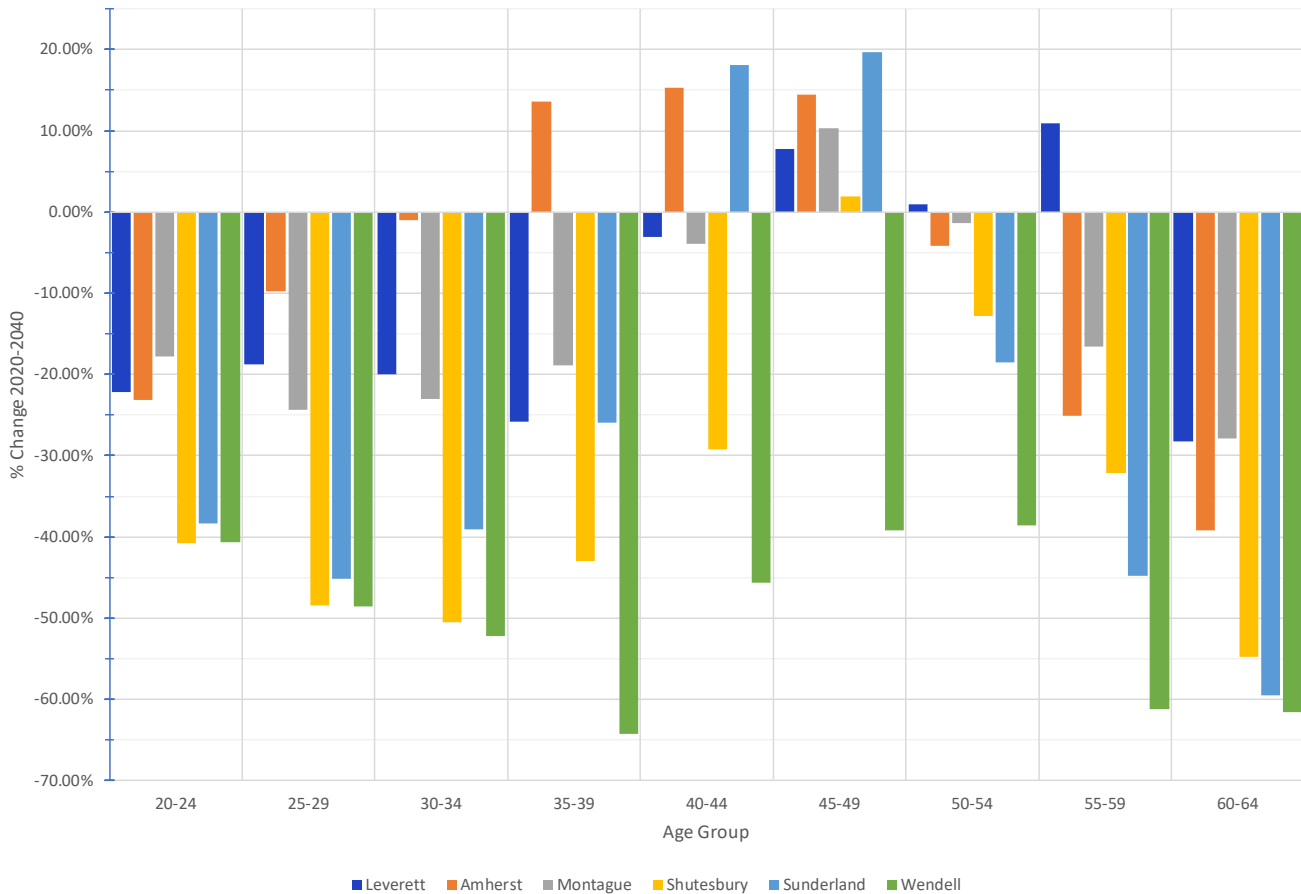
From the remaining responses 273 people identified as retired; 78 identified as students; 69 as teacher or educator (with varying descriptions); and 56 as professors.

Approximately 27 identified a self-employed or a business owner, 24 identified as contractor, construction, or landscape, and 23 identified themselves as part of the nursing profession, another 23 as an artist, musician, writer, or craftspersons, and 11 identified as some form of farm, forestry, or conservation worker. The rest were a mix of professions, but not in significant clusters.



This chart shows how Leverett’s working population (those between 20 and 65) is estimated to change between 2020 and 2040 compared to that in surrounding towns. All towns see the same declines in those under 40 and those 60-64.

**Figure 64. Leverett and Surrounding Communities Working Age Population Change (2020-2040)**



Source: UMDI V2022 Long-Term Population Projections for Massachusetts Municipalities and Regional Planning Areas (UMDI V2022 Population Projections) UMass Donahue Institute; Innes Associates

### Business Certificates from the Town Clerk

Another way of understanding the local economy is to review the current business certificates. Business certificates are filed by local businesses who are “doing business as” (DBA) or who need a certificate to open a bank account or file other forms.

The Town Clerk provided the business certificates filed between 2022 and 2024. There are 18 certificates, with businesses that include consulting, construction, carpentry, painting and other similar businesses.

## 3.4 CLIMATE CHANGE

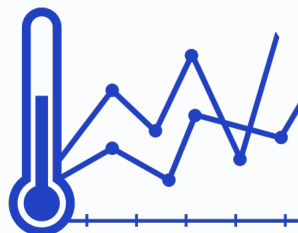
### 3.4.1 SUMMARY

Typical New England houses are built to protect us from our winters, not our summers. As the climate continues to change, our winters will become milder and our summers hotter, leading to a greater need for cooling our houses rather than heating them. In addition, older people are more sensitive to heat. Strategies include retrofitting existing houses to make them more energy-efficient and cooler, building new energy-efficient housing stock (especially those that rely on natural cooling), establishing warming/cooling centers to help those who are vulnerable during power outages, and creating microgrids to support additional electrical demands from cooling needs.

Climate change leads to increased precipitation from storms: events that are more frequent and of greater intensity. It also creates a shift in the pattern of temperature and precipitation, increasing periods of drought during certain months. The shift in temperature, precipitation, and drought places stress on vegetation and animals. Leverett is heavily wooded; such shifts can weaken trees, making them more prone to infestation. Pests such as the Emerald Ash Borer, which has wreaked havoc on ash trees in Massachusetts, are moving north as the weather warms and are likely to further stress plants in our forests. With warmer average temperatures, pests that used to die off with the cold will no longer do so.

Increased precipitation also leads to increased flooding both along surface waters, such as ponds, rivers, and streams, and from stormwater rushing off paved surfaces (with the potential for contaminating surface water with nonpoint source pollution). In Leverett, the topography of the roads may require more frequent repairs as higher-intensity storms wash away gravel or cracked asphalt. Heat will have a negative impact on paved surfaces, causing further degradation.

**Figure 65. Change in Temperatures**



By 2040 the average minimum and maximum temperatures are projected to increase from the baseline of data from 1961-1990.

- Average Maximum: from 56.3F to 60.7F
- Average Minimum: from 33.6F to 37.9F

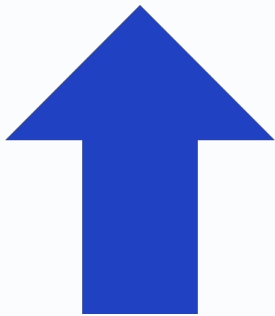
Source: National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center; Innes Associates

Figure 66. Climate Data



By 2040 the total precipitation (rain and snowfall) amount is projected to increase with the risk of flooding increasing accordingly.

50.21"



46.45"



By 2040 the number of days when air conditioning is required are projected to increase.

17.6



3.7



By 2040 the number of days when heating is required are projected to decline.

169.6



147.2

47.9



29.5

Source: National Environmental Modeling and Analysis Center; Innes Associates

**Figure 67. Summary of MVP Resiliency Plan**

## MVP Resiliency Plan

The intent of this introduction is to provide a summary of the MVP plan to aid in future community conversations.

The Town’s 2020 MVP Resiliency Plan defines the three major drivers of climate change risk in Leverett:<sup>2-1</sup>

<sup>2-1</sup> Noake MacPhee K. Rhodes M. Farrell H. Sylvain A. Gage A. (2020) Town of Leverett Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings. Franklin Regional Council of Governments., December 2020, p. 3. (“MVP Resiliency Plan”)

- “An increase in average temperature, as well as more extreme heat and extreme temperature fluctuations;
- An increase in annual precipitation and an increase in very heavy precipitation events – where more rain, snow, or ice falls in a short period of time – interspersed at times with very dry periods;
- Stronger storms with higher winds, due to an overall warmer climate with more moisture in the atmosphere.”

The focus of the MVP Resiliency Plan was a workshop with Town staff and officials to define the greatest vulnerabilities to these drivers.<sup>2-2</sup> The participants in the workshop identified the following conditions as the top four hazards affecting Leverett:<sup>2-3</sup>

<sup>2-2</sup> The plan identifies a 2010 Forest Management Plan that was not available to the consultant team.

<sup>2-3</sup> *ibid*, p. 5.

- Drought;
- Invasive species;
- Severe storms; and
- Extreme temperatures

The participants also identified four areas of concerns that would be negatively impacted by the top four hazards. These areas are as follows:<sup>2-4</sup>

<sup>2-4</sup> *ibid*, p. 6.

- Infrastructure and buildings;
- Transportation;
- Public sanitation and water;
- People; and
- Ecosystems and natural resources.

Specific concerns included the following:<sup>2-5</sup>

<sup>2-5</sup> *ibid*, pp. 8-10.

- Unpaved roads without sufficient drainage that suffer from a changed freeze/thaw cycle;
- Bridge closures;
- Power grid that is vulnerable to outages from storms;

- Extended periods of drought that cause private wells to run dry;
- Water supplies vulnerable to contamination from the landfill and beaver dams;
- Lack of shelter for vulnerable residents during periods of extreme temperatures;
- Areas prone to flooding, including Route 63;
- Invasive species, particularly those that affect trees;
- Non-working forests that are vulnerable to wildfire because of diseased trees; and
- Insect-borne diseases that affect humans.

The workshop participants identified five high-level, priority recommendations as action steps for the Town to undertake:<sup>2-6</sup>

<sup>2-6</sup> ibid, p. 12.

- Develop an energy resiliency plan;
- Improve gravel roads and drainage;
- Prioritize culvert repairs and replacements;
- Develop a communications plan;
- Develop a potable water resiliency plan.

The remainder of the plan is a matrix of the input from the participants and a list of recommended actions that the Town can take, listed from highest to lowest priority. Similar to a comprehensive plan, the MVP process is focused on what the Town's responsibilities for implementation are given the existing conditions, municipal responsibilities for those conditions, and municipal resources (time and money).

<sup>2-7</sup> ibid, p. 11.

The plan identifies the Town's strengths; including a strong sense of community and neighbors helping each other, distributed water and septic systems that prevent town-wide outages, prohibition of industrial uses to prevent contamination of water supplies, and active conservation groups who help protect open space.<sup>2-7</sup>

#### 3.4.2 CURRENT CHALLENGES

The main source of data on potential actions the Town of Leverett can take to address the impacts of climate change are the 2020 MVP Resiliency Plan and the 2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan. The MVP Resiliency Plan was a workshop-based assessment of vulnerabilities, needs, and next steps. The 2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan is a significant overview and assessment of the current assets and vulnerabilities in Leverett, the projected impacts from climate change, likely hazards that could affect the town, a detailed action plan for addressing the impacts of climate change (including prioritization of those actions) and potential funding sources.

- The Town has experienced problems maintaining water storage for fire protection for wildfires with hydrants running out of water
- The Town does not have a designated year-round warming or cooling location for vulnerable groups (e.g. seniors) to go to in the event of extreme cold or hot periods in winter and summer. As the population ages this may become a larger issue for seniors in Town.
- Wells and septic systems are impacted by climate change and beaver activity. Periods of drought may lead to wells running dry or being contaminated. Flooding can lead to contamination of the water supply from septic systems. Beavers have already impacted wells and septic systems in town leading to contamination.

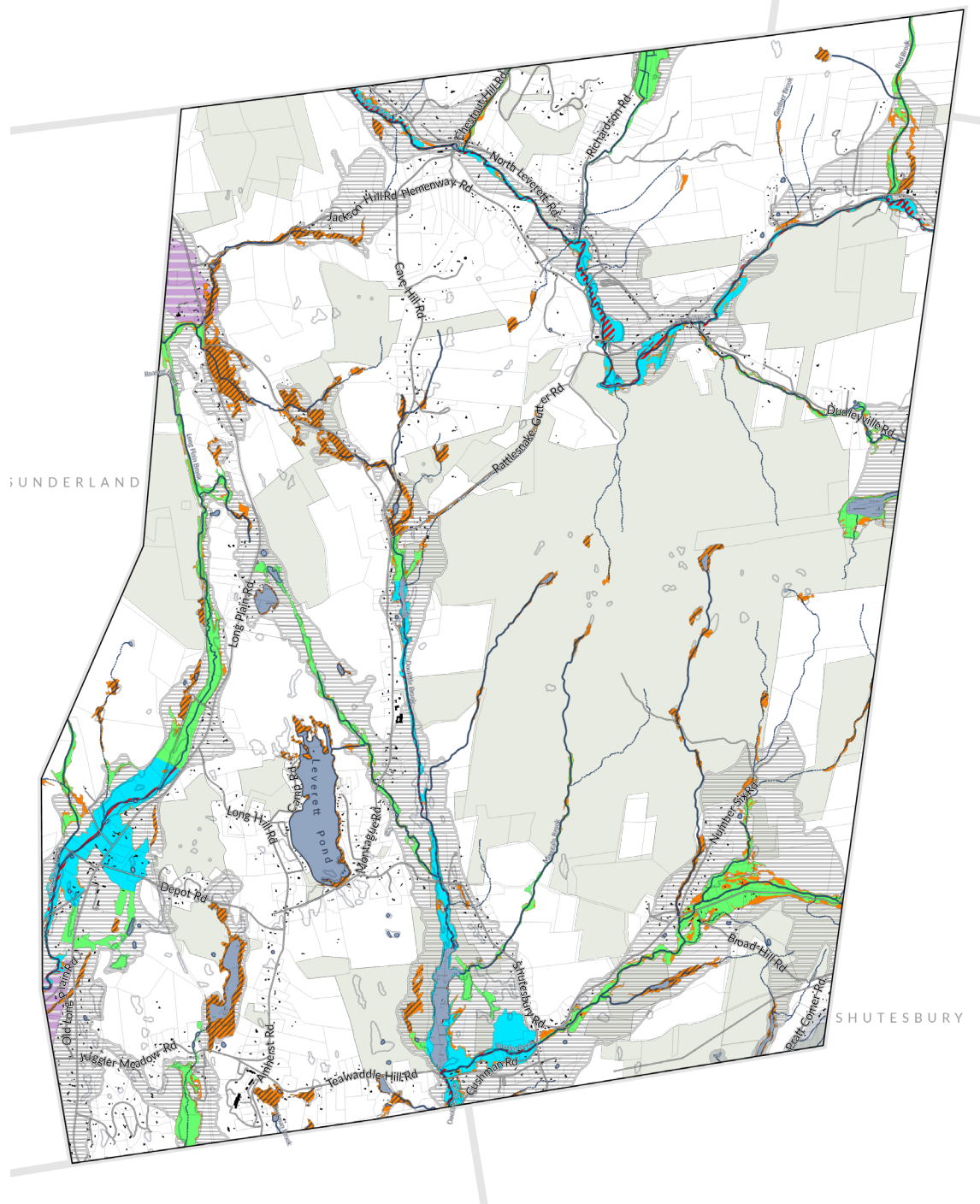
The hydrography map in Figure 68 shows the DRAFT updated 2024 FEMA flooding data which was given to the consultant team by the Town of Leverett. Once finalized, this map will replace the existing FEMA flood map that was last updated in 1980.

The map shows the location of protected land relative to the major resources: the aquifer, surface water, and streams.

The map also shows where built structures and infrastructure may be threatened by flooding. As noted in **Section 3.6**, the Town will need to update the Zoning Bylaw once the final maps are released.

If the Planning Board, or other boards or committees, sponsor future conversations about the impacts of climate change on Leverett, the 2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan provides the base dataset and recommendations for those conversations.





**Preliminary FEMA Data, 2024**

- A: 1% Annual Chance of Flooding, no Base Flood Elevation
- AE: 1% Annual Chance of Flooding, with Base Flood Elevation
- AE: Regulatory Floodway
- X: 0.2% Annual Chance of Flooding
- X: 1% Drainage Area < 1 Sq. Mi.

**Hydrological Features**

- Aquifer
- Pond and wetlands
- ~ Rivers and streams
- Title IV Setbacks

**Other Features**

- Buildings
- Roads
- Aquifer Protection Overlay District
- Open Space Protected in Perpetuity



**Figure 68. Draft Hydrography Map**

## 3.5 TOWN SERVICES AND FACILITIES

### 3.5.1 WATER AND WASTEWATER

The public water supply is limited; most residents and businesses are dependent on private wells. The public water supply system serves the Library, the Public Safety Complex, and the Elementary School. Expanded service from Amherst to Cushman and Teawaddle Hill Roads could address contaminated wells. Per the 2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan, groundwater is susceptible to contamination due to flooding hazards that may affect the widespread septic systems in Town.

#### Water

- The public water supply system serves the Leverett Library, the Leverett Public Safety Complex, and the Leverett Elementary School.
- Private wells / water supplies serve most of the town.
- Non-Transient Public Water Supplies:
  - Willow Blossom Learning Center
  - Mt. Toby Meeting of Friends Church
  - Leverett Elementary School
  - Leverett Village Co-Op

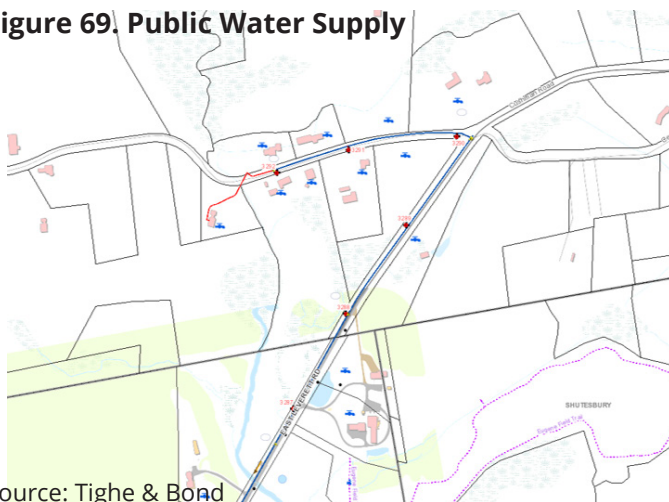
#### Wastewater Treatment

Wastewater treatment is a constraint on new development and failing septic systems are a potential environmental hazard. Most systems are primarily on-site subsurface sewage disposal systems in areas with poor soil conditions for such systems. Amherst is the closest municipal wastewater system at about one mile from the Leverett border. All uses in Leverett are therefore dependent on the on-site treatment of wastewater.

Public sewer was a topic during part of the planning process. In general, soil conditions are not favorable for groundwater discharge associated with a wastewater treatment plant.

The Board of Health's requirements for wastewater treatment are more restrictive than the state's Title V requirement. The consultant team's understanding is that the stricter requirements are because of the Town's concerns about the potential negative impact of failing or improperly installed septic systems on the water resources within the town.

**Figure 69. Public Water Supply**



Source: Tighe & Bond

**Table 70. Comparison of Leverett Board of Health and Title V Requirements**

Criteria	Title 5 Requirement	Leverett Requirement	Notes
218-3.1 Applicability to Repair Existing Systems - setbacks to abutting lot line or potable water supply	Allows for reduced setbacks.	Reduced setbacks by variance from Board of Health	
218-4 Site Evaluation and Description	Requires test pits & perc tests within the primary and reserve soil absorption system areas.	BOH agent may required additional observation holes within 25 feet of proposed system.	
218-4 Site Evaluation and Description	Requires topo within the proposed septic area.	Requires topo extending a min. of 40 feet from system, reserve area, and any associated grading.	
218-5 Required Upland Area for Groundwater Recharge	These areas are considered as land available for recharge	Impervious areas, BVW, Land Under Water not considered land area available for recharge	
218-6.1 Well setbacks in highly permeable soils	100 foot setback from SAS to potable water supply	150 foot setback	
218-6.2 Property Line Setbacks	10 foot setback from abutting lot line or public roadway layout line	25 foot setback	
218-7 Vertical Separation			
218-7.1 Depth to water table in the Aquifer Protection District	Requires separation distance of 5-feet if percolation rate is 2min/inch or less	Requires distance of 5-feet or greater in Aquifer Protection District, regardless of perc rate	
218-7.2 Depth to Bedrock in highly permeable soils	Requires separation distance of 5-feet if percolation rate is 2min/inch or less	Requires distance of 5-feet or greater in Aquifer Protection District, regardless of perc rate	
218-8.0 System Venting	Vents required if portion of SAS is under pavement.	SASs that rely on gravity distribution required to be vented.	
218-8.1 Maximum Vertical Loading Rate	Max. vertical loading rate of 0.74 gpd/sf	Max. vertical loading rate of 1.25 gpd/sf.	May be error - Title 5 is more restrictive

Source: Tighe &amp; Bond

### 3. Supplemental Research

Criteria	Title 5 Requirement	Leverett Requirement	Notes
218-8.3 Speed Levelers	Requires velocity dispersion in the distribution box if it is being pumped to	Requires distribution boxes receiving gravity flow to be equipped with speed levelers	
218-8.4 Septic Tanks & Pump Chambers	Requires water tightness, but not testing in front of the Board of Health	Requires testing water tightness in front of member of Board of Health or agent	
218-8.5.A Site Hydrology/ Hydraulics	No maximum effective width for soil absorption systems.	Maximum effective width of a SAS: 12 feet	
218-8.5.B Site Hydrology/ Hydraulics	Requires no ponding above the system.	Requires no ponding within 50 feet of proposed SAS.	
218-8.5.C Site Hydrology/ Hydraulics	Vertical offset to high groundwater in SAS area only. No setbacks for fill.	High groundwater elevation within 25 feet down-gradient of proposed SAS must be >24 inches below finished ground surface. Fill can be used to meet requirement, provided setback is in accordance with 219-9.1 of regulations.	Reference should be to 218-9.1 (fill setbacks)
218-8.6 System Access for Pumping	Does not specify maximum access distances.	Requires septic tanks and pump chambers to be located within 100 feet horizontally and 15 feet vertically of a driveway, street, or other all-weather truck access.	
218-8.7 Effective leaching area	Allows reduction for innovative technologies.	Does not allow reduction in effective leaching area, except when SAS is preceded by secondary treatment unit with general use certification that allows for 50% reduction in effective leaching area.	
218-9 Design Standards -Mounded Systems	Allows for mounded systems	Effectively bans construction of or upgrades to systems on properties where groundwater is within 24"	
218-9.1 Limit on extent of fill	No setbacks for fill	No fill can be placed within 10 feet of property line, public roadway layout line, or private ROW. Setback may be reduced to 5 feet.	
218-9.2 High Groundwater elevation Less than 48 Inches from the surface	Does not have additional requirements for systems with groundwater within 48" of the surface	Additional requirements outlined below	

Source: Tighe & Bond

Criteria	Title 5 Requirement	Leverett Requirement	Notes
218-9.2.A		Min. time between doses: 2 hours; min. single dose volume: 5 times distribution pipe network volume + volume required to initially charge system if it drains back; max. single dose volume: 0.2 inches over bottom area of SAS.	
218-9.2.B		Requires additional foot of vertical separation from Title 5 requirements for systems with high groundwater	
218-9.2.C	10 foot setback from abutting lot line	75 foot setback from property lines; 100 foot setback to property lines in Aquifer Protection District	
218-11 Review by Outside Consultant	No provisions for peer review	Provisions for peer review at discretion of Board of Health.	

### 3.5.2 SUMMARY OF UTILITIES

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#### Broadband and Phone

- LeverettNet through South Hadley Electric Light (post-2022)
- Cell Phone Service Scores (Coverage Critic.com)
  - AT&T (7.8/10)
  - T-Mobile (7.4/10)
  - Verizon (5.5/10)

#### Electricity

- Leverett Community Choice Power Supply Program (Dynergy Energy Services)
- Eversource
- Phase 3 service (220v) along Route 63

#### Natural Gas

- No service within Leverett

### 3.5.3 SUMMARY OF ROADS

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- 43 miles of total roadways
  - 16 miles gravel
  - 27 miles paved
- Major north-south corridors
  - Route 63
  - Shutesbury Road / Montague Road / Cave Hill Road
  - Amherst Road / Cave Hill Road
- Major east-west corridors
  - Cushman Road / Shutesbury Road / Leverett Road
  - North Leverett Road

- Current Projects
  - Shutesbury Road culvert improvements are underway
  - Funding received for Dudleyville Road restoration

### 3.5.4 COMMUNITY-RELATED SERVICES

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The Town has jurisdiction over the following departments:

- Leverett Library
- Transfer Station
- Elder Services
- Police
- Fire

The Leverett School Committee oversees the Leverett Elementary School (LES) which educates children from preschool - 6th grade. Under state law, school budgeting and planning is done by the school committee, not the municipality. Although LES is seen as a significant resource for the community, its operations are not part of the comprehensive planning process.



### 3.5.5 FUTURE NEED FOR SENIOR SERVICES

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Leverett has an aging population with the population of seniors (65+) constituting over 30% of the total population. In 2020, the majority of seniors were between 65 and 74, and by 2040 the senior population will be split almost evenly between those 65-74 and those 75+.

Seniors over 75 tend to require more medical services and have greater needs in terms of transportation and access to services (groceries, pharmacies etc.). The Leverett Fire department has seen a consistent upwards trend in call volume over the last several years as the population has aged (128 calls in 2018 vs. 215 calls in 2023).<sup>2</sup>

- PVTA provides a dial-a ride-service in Leverett
- Village Neighbors is a volunteer non profit that services Leverett and offers many services including transportation, household task, errands and home visits.

Figure 71 on the following pages shows the location of the closest medical facilities, grocery stores and gas stations to Leverett. Seniors need to drive or have other transportation in order to get to medical appointments or shop for groceries.

<sup>2</sup> Provided by Brian J. Cook, Leverett Fire Chief, February 6, 2024 email from Andy Vlock to Emily Innes and Tim Shore

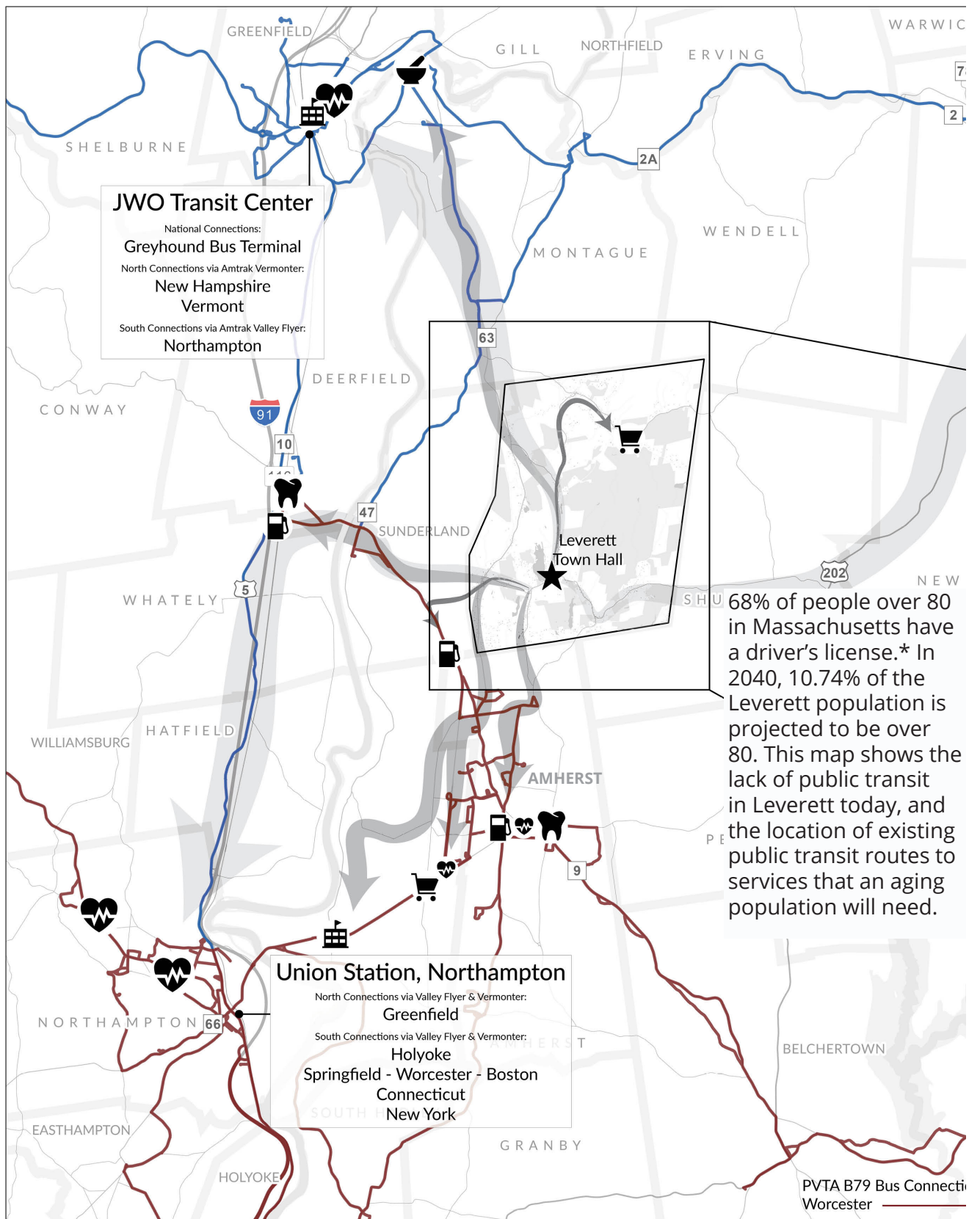
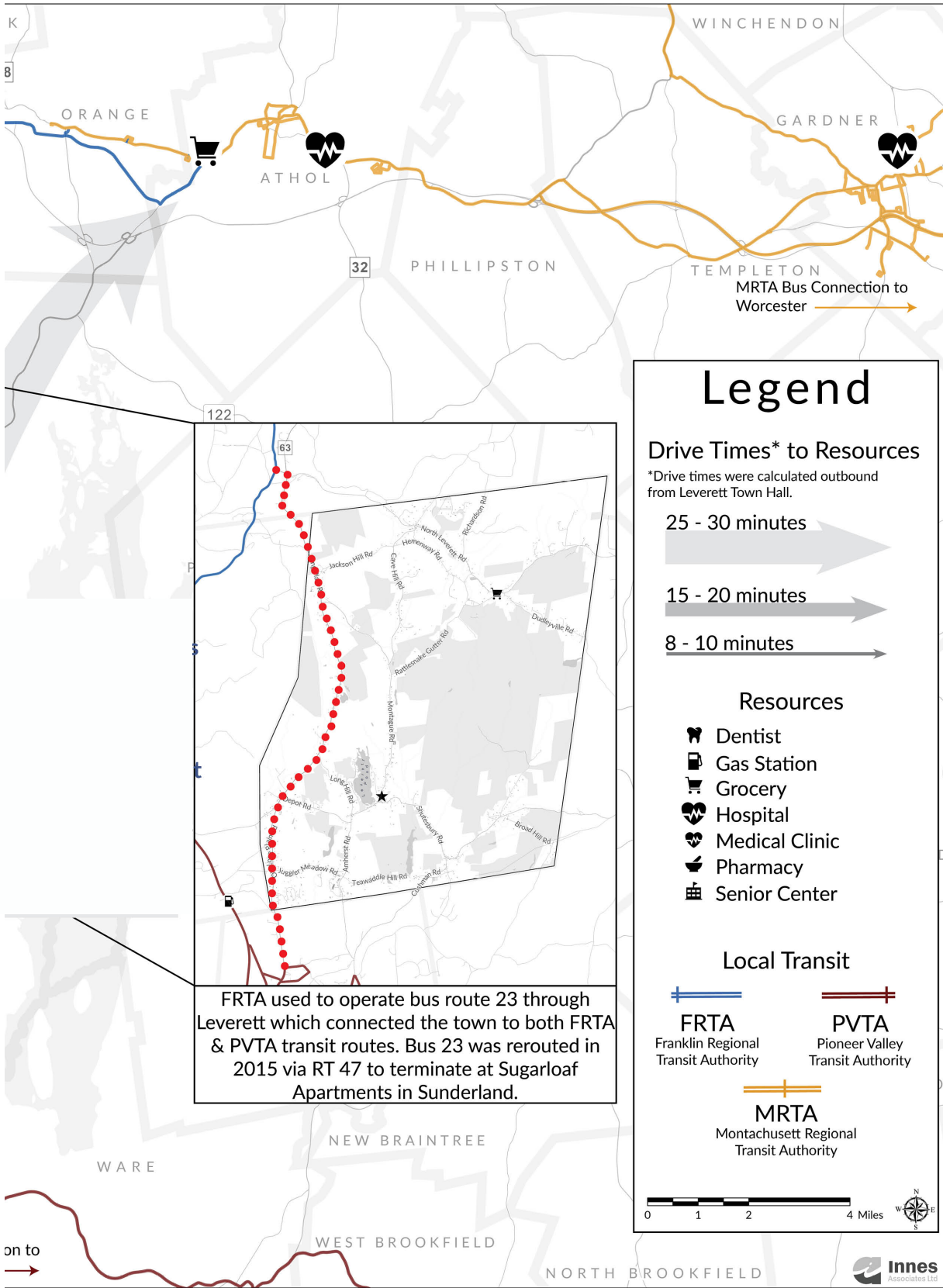


Figure 71. 2024 Accessibility of Services to Seniors



## 3.6 CURRENT ZONING AND REGULATORY LIMITATIONS

### 3.6.1 INTRODUCTION

Zoning governs how a community can change. It may not match the existing built environment. Zoning may also not match community values for future development/preservation strategies. Land use, and the zoning and other regulations that control land use, has a significant impact on the following:

- Social and economic health of a community.
  - Controls on land use impact where people live relative to where they work, shop, learn, and play.
  - Such controls may also impact how people move from place to place.
- Physical health of a community.
  - Distances between uses can determine whether someone walks, bikes, or drives to another use.
  - Development standards work with other laws and regulations to address environmental health.

Zoning controls the uses of land; including residential, commercial, and industrial and the intensity of those uses, including height, massing, position on a lot, and relationship to other buildings and the street. Zoning can also place conditions on the use, such as development standards for landscaping, vehicular and pedestrian access, and stormwater management.

The Town of Leverett has five base zoning districts:

- Rural Residential (RR)
- Residential/Village (RV)
- Rural Outlying Residential (RO)
- Commercial (COM)
- General Business (GB)

**Table 72. Principal Residential Uses by Zoning District**

	RV	RR	RO	GB	COM
One-Family	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Two-Family	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Multi-Family (3+ units)	N	N	N	N	N
Flexible Development	N	N	SPR	N	N
Boarding Houses	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP

Source: Town of Leverett Zoning Bylaws; Innes Associates







### 3.6.2 DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS

Dimensional restrictions for the districts are as follows:

**Table 74. Dimensional Standards**

Zoning District	Minimum Lot Size	Yards*	Coverage**
Rural Residential (RR)	60,000 SF	F 40 ft S 25 ft R 30 ft	B 10% L 35% OS --
Residential/Village (RV)	40,000 SF	F 40 ft S 20 ft R 30 ft	B 15% L 35% OS --
Rural Outlying Residential (RO)	200,000 SF	F 40 ft S 25 ft R 30 ft	B 10% L 25% OS --
Commercial (COM)	40,000 SF	F 40 ft S 25 ft R 30 ft	B 20% L 50% OS 40%
General Business (GB)	40,000 SF	F 40 ft S 25 ft R 30 ft	B 20% L 50% OS 40%

\*Yards: Minimum Front (F), Side (S), and Rear (R)

\*\*Coverage: Maximum Building (B) and Lot (L); Minimum Open Space (OS)

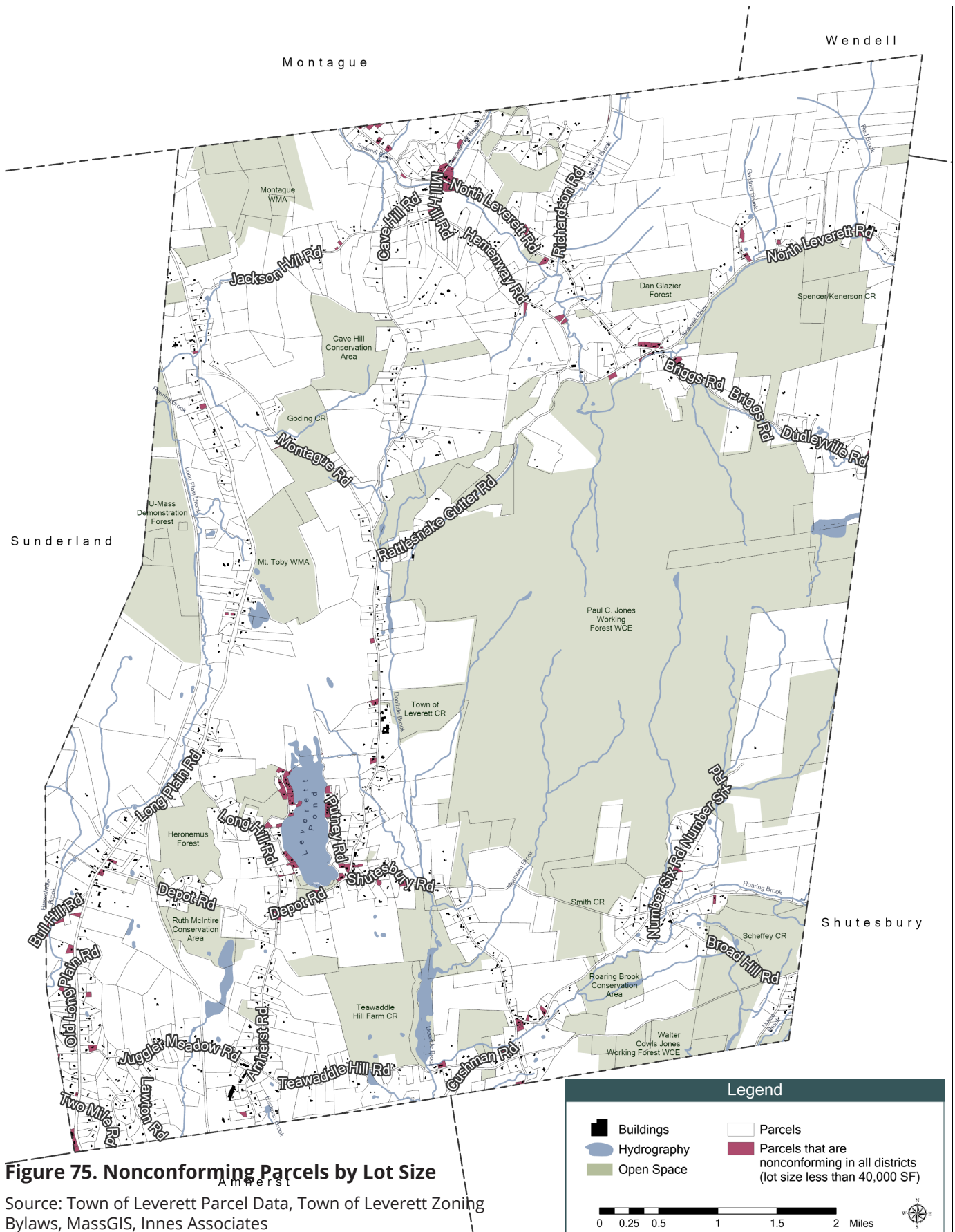
Source: Town of Leverett Zoning Bylaws; Innes Associates

The restrictive lot size for the residential districts is consistent with a more rural environment. The community has expressed concerns about the need to keep the lot sizes large to provide enough room for septic systems and to reduce the impact on the environment by restricting development. See **Section 3.1.4** for a discussion of how these lot sizes have contributed to a wider distribution of housing than the community may have anticipated when establishing these standards.

#### Nonconforming parcels

Figure 75 shows parcels that are nonconforming in all Leverett’s zoning districts. A total of 126 parcels were found to have a lot size under 40,000 SF. Most of these are around the historic centers: Town Center, North Leverett, and Moore’s Corner. Nonconforming parcels require a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals for most actions, depending on the how the lot or structure does not conform (lot size, yards, etc.). The parcels shown, because they are nonconforming by lot size, would not be considered buildable under the current zoning regulations. Such nonconforming lots are typical of New England villages built prior to the introduction of zoning in the 1930s (and later in some communities).





**Figure 75. Nonconforming Parcels by Lot Size**

Source: Town of Leverett Parcel Data, Town of Leverett Zoning Bylaws, MassGIS, Innes Associates

### 3.6.3 ALLOWABLE USES

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Allowable uses and dimensional standards vary by district. A summary of allowable uses is as follows:

- Selected Uses: All districts
  - Single and two-family are allowed as-of-right.
  - Small Home Occupations are allowed as-of-right.
  - Home Occupations, Small-scale Craft Production, Bed & Breakfasts and Inns, Restaurants require a special permit.
  - Multifamily (3+ units) is not allowed in any district.
- Selected Uses: GB and COM Districts
  - Retail grocery or general store up to 3,000 SF is allowed as-of-right; by special permit if larger.
  - All other retail stores and services are by special permit.
  - Banks and professional offices, Research facilities, Manufacturing/ Production/Processing require a special permit.
  - Conversion of non-residential historic buildings requires a special permit (short list of uses, including office, residential, microbrewery, restaurant, artisan studios, or sawmill).

### 3.6.4 PERMITTING PROCESSES

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As-of-right uses require only a building permit, unless the zoning also requires site plan review. Uses that require a Special Permit from the Planning Board have the highest level of review as the Planning Board holds a public hearing and may deny the use if the applicant does not meet the conditions for a Special Permit. Site Plan Review is in between the two level of controls; the Planning Board can require a public hearing but may not deny the use if it satisfies the conditions. The following shows the varying approval requirements in special zoned districts:.

- Special Permit – ZBA
  - Flood Hazard District
  - Stream and Lake Protection District
  - Wireless Telecommunications Facilities
- Site Plan Review (SPR) – Planning Board
  - Rattlesnake Gutter Overlay District
  - Flexible Development
  - Residential subdivision
  - Upper Elevation Site Plan Review
  - Ground-Mounted Solar Electric (also Special Permit – Planning Board)
- Other Review Process
  - Scenic Road Protection (Hearing – Planning Board)

### 3.6.5 ANALYSIS OF PROTECTIVE AND RESTRICTIVE DISTRICTS

This section summarizes the current protective and restrictive overlay districts and identifies potential actions, identified by the consultant team, and included as part of the recommendations in the 2024 Comprehensive Plan.

#### 4300 Aquifer Protection District

- **APPLIES TO.** Any property within the district boundaries as shown on a map held by the Town.
- **RESTRICTS.** Certain uses and structures that are deemed detrimental to the aquifer.
- **MODIFICATIONS.** May reduce certain dimensional requirements through the special permit process.
- **REQUIRES.** Special permit from the Board of Appeals.
- **INCENTIVES FOR USE.** Ability to modify the dimensional requirements provides added flexibility.
- **PROBLEM.** Restriction on lot sizes and frontage appears arbitrary. Could the goal be achieved by the Special Permit for design capacity of the on-site disposal system?

#### 4400 Flood Hazard District

- **APPLIES TO.** All areas delineated on the Flood Insurance Rate Map.
- **RESTRICTS.** Uses within the floodplain.
- **MODIFICATIONS.** None.
- **REQUIRES.** Special permit from the Board of Appeals.
- **INCENTIVES FOR USE.** None – this is a highly restrictive bylaw that significantly reduces the uses within the designated floodplains.

- **PROBLEM.** Will need to be updated to refer to new flood maps and requirements in the model Floodplain Overlay District.

#### 4500 Stream and Lake Protection District

- **APPLIES TO.** Land within 100 feet of a Major Stream or the highwater line of a standing open body of water, or 50 feet of a Minor Stream. Major and Minor Streams are shown on a map.
- **RESTRICTS.** Septic tanks or leachfields and dumping filling, excavation etc. within the boundary.
- **MODIFICATIONS.** None.
- **REQUIRES.** Special permit from the Board of Appeals required for a building or structure. Such building or structure may not be used for human residence.
- **INCENTIVES FOR USE.** None – this is a restrictive overlay.

#### 4600 Scenic Roads Protection

- **APPLIES TO.** All public ways in Leverett are Scenic Roads.
- **RESTRICTS.** Cutting of trees over 10" in diameter at breast height or tearing down stone walls.
- **MODIFICATIONS.** None.
- **REQUIRES.** Planning Board public hearing.
- **INCENTIVES FOR USE.** None – this is a restrictive bylaw.

#### 4700 Rattlesnake Gutter Overlay District

- **APPLIES TO.** All land 1,000 feet on both sides of Rattlesnake Gutter Road.
- **RESTRICTIONS.** No structure within 500 feet of the centerline of the traveled

portion of the road; no excavation or removal of vegetation within 250 feet of the centerline of the road.

- **MODIFICATIONS.** Design review required.
- **REQUIRES.** Site Plan Review.
- **INCENTIVES FOR USE.** None – this is a restrictive overlay.

#### 4800 Flexible Development

- **APPLIES TO.** Creation of 7 or more lots from a single parcel.
- **ALLOWS.** Single-family (60,000 SF lot) or two-family dwelling (90,000 SF).
- **MODIFICATIONS.** May reduce yards by no more than 50% and increase lot coverage by up to 50%.
- **REQUIRES.** At least 35% of the total parcel area is permanently protected open space. A Conservation Restriction is required for 50% or greater of the total area unless the Protected Open Land is offered to and accepted by the Town (Conservation Commission).
- **INCENTIVES FOR USE.** An increase in the number of residential lots up to 20% of the base is allowed if 10% of the lots qualify for the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). In other words, if ten lots are allowed under the base, 2 additional lots are allowed if 1 lot qualifies for the SHI. Lots may have single-family or two-family dwellings. The total additional units cannot exceed 20% of the base units allowed. The base units are the number of single-family units that could be allowed under a normal subdivision.
- **PROBLEM.** The incentive does not work as planned; the base maximum limits the number of units that could be added even though, in theory, two-

families would be allowed on all lots.

#### 4880 Residential Subdivision Development

- **APPLIES TO.** Any subdivision of land into 2 or more lots.
- **ALLOWS.** Greater flexibility in the design of subdivisions.
- **MODIFICATIONS.** Appears to be a variation of 4800 Flexible Development.
- **REQUIRES.** Two subdivision plans – conventional and flexible, economic impact analysis.
- **INCENTIVES FOR USE.** Flexibility in determining lot lines.
- **PROBLEM.** It is unclear whether this only applies to the RO District (4883 Procedures). See also 4899 Flexible Development. As with 4800, the allowable number of units is determined by the conventional subdivision.

#### 4970 Ground-Mounted Solar Electric

- **APPLIES TO.** Siting of medium-scale and large-scale ground-mounted solar electric installations.
- **ALLOWS.** Greater flexibility in the design of subdivisions.
- **MODIFICATIONS.** Appears to be a variation of 4800 Flexible Development.
- **REQUIRE.** Two subdivision plans – conventional and flexible, economic impact analysis.
- **INCENTIVES FOR USE.** Flexibility in determining lot lines.
- **PROBLEM.** The bylaw broadly follows the outline of the state’s model bylaw. There are some differences, including the definition of different scales (Leverett is number of panels; model bylaw is kilowatts).

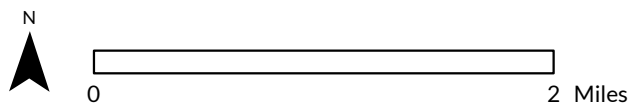


Notes:

Ch. 40A, Section 3 uses are also known as exempt or Dover amendment uses and include educational and religious use.

Chapter 61, 61A and 61B are Forest, Agricultural, and Recreational land, which are taxed differently as they are protected from development. Protection may not be permanent.

Mixed-use, primarily [X] is an assessors classification for land with more than one use.



Source: Town of Leverett Parcel Data, Town of Leverett Zoning Bylaws, MassGIS, Innes Associates

**Figure 76. Consolidated Land Use Map**

## 3.7 LAND USE, DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS, AND PROPERTY TAXES

### 3.7.1 PROPERTY TAX ANALYSIS

Leverett has a residential tax rate in the middle range compared to surrounding communities, but the second lowest commercial and industrial tax rate. The only community with a split tax rate (residential property owners charged a different tax rate per \$1,000 value than non-residential owners) is the Town of Montague. The fiscal implications of property taxes are an important consideration that businesses, and even individuals, evaluate when making choices about where to locate.

While low property taxes can help attract businesses and residents, limited funding can result in insufficient provision of public services and amenities, inhibiting a town's ability to remain competitive with its neighboring communities.

These tables show the existing land use of parcels in Leverett including acreage of land, building and land values, average building area, and average year built. Tables also break out residential uses (see page 96).

Residential uses comprise most of the land in Leverett, with a total of 4,471 acres. The average size of a residential unit in Leverett is 1,759 square feet, driven mostly by single family homes.

Of the non-residential uses, mixed use land has the highest total valuation at approximately \$13.5 million. However, on a per-acre basis, Commercial land is nearly twice as valuable as Residential land, and within Residential uses, multi-unit housing has the highest value.

The existing tax base reflects this split: in fiscal year 2024 (FY2024), the assessed value of residential property in the town was \$344,769,800. For commercial property that same year, the assessed value was

\$3,081,677. The assessed value of personal property was \$45,006,820. (The FY2023 numbers in Tables 73-75 were provided as part of the community workshops.)

The valuations of these asset classes translate to the breakdown of the tax levy, or funds raised on property taxes seen in Table 79. Property taxes represent the largest contributor to the town's budget, funding operating expenses and capital expenditures.

The Massachusetts Department of Local Services provides a wide range of information from past tax years. The oldest data readily available for property taxes is from FY2003.

As shown in Table 80, Leverett's tax levy increased by 50.8% over this twenty-one-year period, but the changes in the tax levy for each asset class is very different. The industrial tax levy dropped by 1.1% and the commercial tax levy increased by 28.3%, but these two asset classes are a negligible part of the tax structure and these changes have no significant impact on the tax levy.

The tax levy from the residential asset class increased by 46% over the same period while the increase from the personal property asset class increased by 90.1%. The purpose of this discussion is not to delve deeply into the Town's finances, but to demonstrate that the tax base of the Town is residential and personal property taxes and that the proposed actions in this plan will need to be funded either from the existing tax base, growth in the tax base, or state, federal, and private loans and grants.



**Table 77. Fiscal Year 2023 Tax Rates by Class**

Community	Residential	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property
Amherst	\$20.10	\$20.10	\$20.10	\$20.10
<b>Leverett</b>	<b>\$16.02</b>	<b>\$16.02</b>	<b>\$16.02</b>	<b>\$16.02</b>
Montague	\$15.65	\$23.78	\$23.78	\$23.78
Shutesbury	\$18.44	\$18.44	\$18.44	\$18.44
Sunderland	\$12.80	\$12.80	\$12.80	\$12.80
Wendell	\$21.41	\$21.41	\$21.41	\$21.41

Source: Mass. Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, 2023; Innes Associates

**Table 78. General Land Use**

Land Use Type	# of Parcels	Total Parcel Area (Acres)	2023 Total Assessed Value (AV)	Total AV per Acre	Avg Square Footage	Median Year Built
Commercial	5	11	\$1,203,000	\$109,763	3,856	1970
Industrial	2	3.1	\$110,400	\$35,613	-	1780
Mixed Use*	60	4,670	\$20,941,564	\$4,484	2,183	1952
Residential**	929	4,471	\$259,426,800	\$58,028	1,759	1975

Source: Town of Leverett Property Assessment Database, 2023; Innes Associates

\*Nearly all of Leverett's "Mixed-Use" lands are residential and agricultural or residential and forest uses

\*\*Includes single-family, multi-family, and other – mobile homes, multiple houses on one parcel, and vacant residential land.

**Table 79. Fiscal Year 2023 Tax Classification**

Tax Classification	Assessed Value	Tax Levy	Tax Rate
Residential	\$333,213,800	\$5,338,085	16.02
Commercial	\$3,584,768	\$57,428	16.02
Industrial	\$758,500	\$12,151	16.02
Personal Property	\$35,114,320	\$562,531	16.02
Total	\$372,671,388	\$5,970,195	

Source: Mass. Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, 2023; Innes Associates

**Table 80. Fiscal Year 2003 to 2024 Comparison**

Tax Classification	FY2003		FY2024		FY03-FY24 Difference
	Tax Levy	% of Total Levy	Tax Levy	% of Total Levy	
Residential	\$2,928,126	96.2%	\$5,419,781	87.6%	46.0%
Commercial	\$34,739	1.1%	\$48,444	0.8%	28.3%
Industrial	\$10,445	0.2%	\$10,328	0.2%	-1.1%
Personal Property	\$69,889	2.3%	\$707,507	11.4%	90.1%
Total	\$3,043,199		\$6,186,060		50.8%

Source: Mass. Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, 2024, Innes Associates

### 3.7.2 RESIDENTIAL TAX BASE

The residential tax base is often the largest source of property tax revenue, and Leverett’s assessed valuation is primarily residential, especially as much of the protected land in the Town is either not taxable or taxable at a lower valuation. Table 81 shows the high-level breakdown of tax valuation across the town’s single-family and multi-unit housing, showing little difference in the land valuation between the two asset classes.

**Table 81. Residential Breakdown**

Land Use Type	# of Parcels	Total Parcel Area (Acres)	Total Assessed Value (AV)	Total AV per Acre	Avg Living Area	Median Year Built
Single Family Residential	655	2,822	\$228,642,900	\$87,910	2,184	1975
Multi-Unit Housing	39	138	\$12,144,700	\$81,031	2,574	1983

Source: Town of Leverett Property Assessment Database, 2023; Innes Associates











### Calculating the Tax Bill

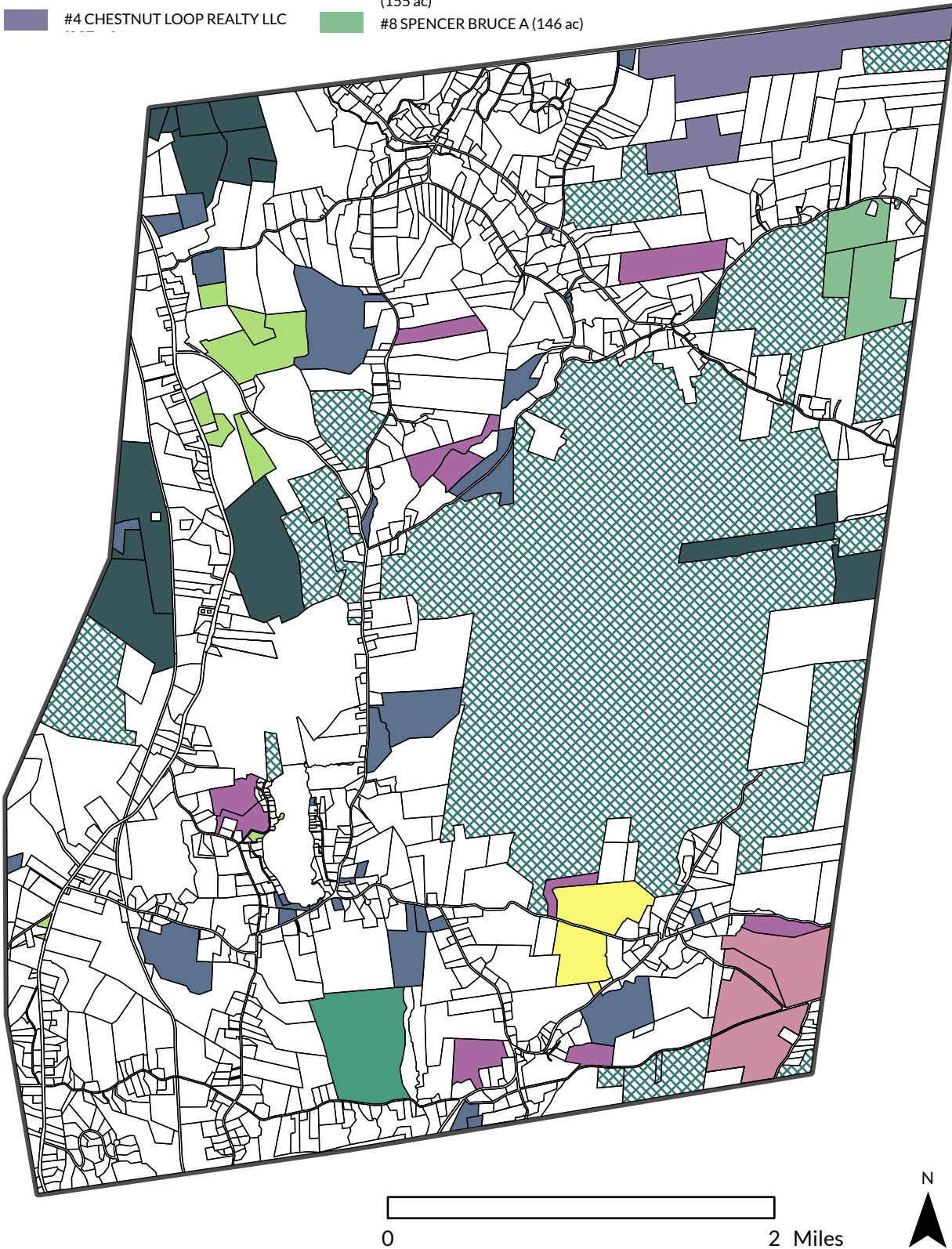
The relationship between the tax levy and an individual homeowner’s property taxes is not always clear, and misunderstandings about how residential taxes are calculated are common. Participants in the second workshop could review Table 82 which explains how the property levy is reflected in an individual homeowner’s tax bill. Individuals can substitute their property value for the average value in the table.

**Table 82. How to Calculate the Average Tax Bill**

Step	Calculation
(a) Total Amount To Be Raised	\$6,837,954
(b) Total Estimated Other Revenues	\$1,437,892
(c) Tax Levy (a - b)	\$5,400,062
(d) Residential Class %	98.8523%
(e) Amount to be raised from Residential Class (c * d)	\$5,338,085
(f) Total Residential Assessed Valuation	\$333,213,800
(g) Tax Rate (c / f * 1000)	\$16.02
(h) Average Single Family Home Assessed Value	\$415,824
(i) Average Single Family Tax Bill (h / 1000 * g)	\$6,661.50

Source: Town of Leverett Property Assessment Database, 2023; Innes Associates

- |  |   |   |                                      |   |   |
|--|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|
|  | #1 COWLS W D INC (3,790 ac)               |  | #5 RATTLESNAKE GUTTER TRUST (238 ac) |  | # 9 POINT GUARD MANAGEMENT INC (144 ac) |
|  | #2 COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS (648 ac) |  | #6 SCHEFFEY ELIZABETH W (199 ac)     |  | #10 NEW ENGLAND FORESTRY (178 ac)       |
|  | #3 TOWN OF LEVERETT (448 ac)              |  | #7 MITCHELL GWYN & WILLIAMS (155 ac) |   |   |
|  | #4 CHESTNUT LOOP REALTY LLC               |  | #8 SPENCER BRUCE A (146 ac)          |   |   |



**Figure 83. 2023 Ownership Map: Top 10 Owners by Acreage**

Source: Town of Leverett Property Assessment Database, 2023; MassGIS, Innes Associates

### 3.7.3 MUNICIPAL REVENUE SOURCES

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Land use directly impacts what the Town can spend for its operating and capital budgets as the value of land drives the amount of property taxes that can be raised. To the right are figures showing the pattern of revenue and expenses from FY2001 through FY2023. On the revenue side, property taxes have risen as a proportion of the budget while the proportion of state aid has remained relatively steady.

On the expense side, education is the largest proportion of the budget, and that is growing. In recent years, the increase of expenditures debt service, Town buildings, and other costs is a steeper curve than in previous years.

Below is a description of all funding sources available to the Town.

#### Property Taxes

The amount that can be raised from 2.5% of the Town's assessed property values. Annual increases in property taxes are limited to 2.5% (excluding any new construction/improvements in existing properties).

#### State Aid

Monies provided by the state to every city, town and regional school district.

#### Local Receipts:

This comprises motor vehicle excise taxes, local excise taxes (meals, room tax etc) plus department fees, permits fees etc.

#### Other Available Funds

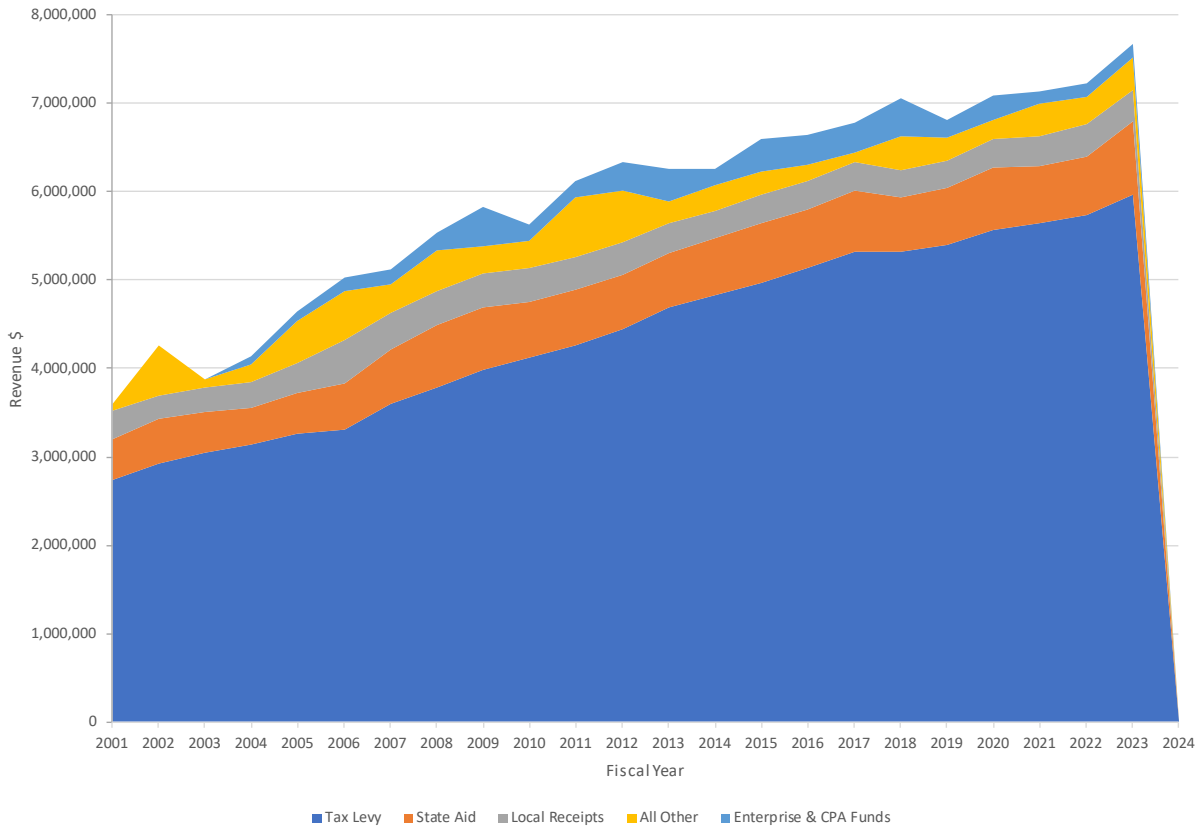
This comprises the stabilization fund ("rainy day" fund), free cash (surplus revenue, unexpended funds, outstanding property tax collections) and other funds (gifts, federal and state grants, etc.).

#### Federal and State Grants

Federal and state grants provide funds for use with specific projects (emergency management, public works, community development etc). Funds are either directed to specific projects or line items and may not be part of the general revenue.

Sources for both graphs: MA Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services; Innes Associates

**Figure 84. Revenue Sources FY2001-FY2023**



**Figure 85. Expenditures FY2001-FY2023**

