

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FINAL DRAFT OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN FOR CHESTERFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

February 2024



the **Conway** School
Graduate Program in Sustainable Landscape Planning • Design

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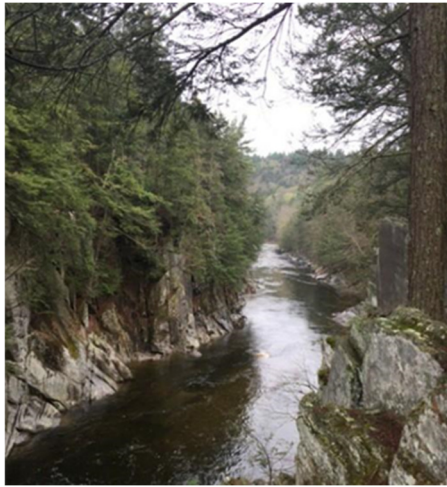
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Acknowledgements

This plan was created as a collaboration between the Conway School of Landscape Design (CSLD) and the Chesterfield Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSP) Committee. An enthusiastic team of CSLD students conducted research, led community meetings, created extensive maps, and drafted the plan: Liam Gude '23, Bindu Nicholson '23, and Adam Stoumen '23 with guidance and support from OSP Committee members John Follet, Sarah Hamilton, Julia Freedgood, Jan Gibeau, Don Willard, and Denise Cormier. Thanks also to Chesterfield residents who engaged early in the process and helped with the community survey: Nancy Rich, Sherrill Redmon, and Michael Leff. Thanks also to Dee Cinner and Eileen McGowan for their input on historic and cultural resources, and Justin West who provided graphic design and final layout assistance.

Introduction

Chesterfield is a western Massachusetts Hilltown located in Hampshire County in the eastern foothills of the Berkshire Mountains. Its small population is stable, but like many rural communities, its residents are older than the national average, with more than 20% aged 65 or older. Median income is \$80,156 and most residents work outside of town. The town has abundant natural resources and rural features. Stone walls are dispersed along rolling hills, open fields, forests, and wetlands. The



East Branch of the National Scenic and Wild Westfield River flows through its valleys, forming the entrance to the Chesterfield Gorge, a dramatic canyon carved by centuries of rushing water.

The Westfield River corridor is an important tributary to the Connecticut River and part of the national recreation and wildlife plan for the Upper Connecticut Valley, a tri-state area encompassing two million acres. It provides important flood control for Chesterfield and for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Its significant forested lands sequester carbon, playing an important role in climate resiliency.

Incorporated in 1762, Chesterfield's natural resources remain vital to its value and identity. A recent survey and community engagement meetings highlight how much residents care about the town's dark night skies, rural, cultural/historic amenities, and ecological features. Residents hunt, fish, forage, and garden. They hike, bike, track, horseback ride, and engage in both water and winter sports. They value the town's farmland, forests, and water resources. Chesterfield also is part of the Northern Hilltown Collaborative which has spearheaded regional planning initiatives including a multi-town Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) plan.

This Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) lays the groundwork to protect and sustain Chesterfield's natural resources today and for the future. It also suggests that the town could augment sidewalks, trails, Russell Park, and other infrastructure to improve connectivity and recreational resources.

An OSRP is a tool Massachusetts communities can use to plan for conservation and recreational resources. Plans are informed by a thorough public participation process to ensure they reflect the needs of community residents. Then they are reviewed and approved by the Commonwealth. Once approved, Chesterfield will be eligible for Division of Conservation Services (DCS) grant programs for seven years.

Chesterfield's last OSRP was approved in 2003. On the surface, not much has changed. However, the quiet turnover of properties and the aging population kindled interest in updating the plan to conserve the town's cherished resources while maintaining fiscal stability. Other motivations included a desire to prepare for anticipated development pressure from improved broadband access, renew eligibility for DCS grants, better manage ecologically sensitive areas, and support the open space needs of all residents including senior citizens. Additionally, community feedback received during the engagement process shows residents' strong desire to jump start the process of updating the town's master plan for the 21st Century.

Plans have no value if they sit on a shelf collecting dust. Turning this OSRP into meaningful action requires further town engagement and harnessing the energy and enthusiasm expressed during community meetings. Some actions require funding. To that end, the plan is written to meet DCS requirements to ensure that Chesterfield can participate in public grant programs and the plan includes a list of potential funding sources.

Process

The OSRP was initiated in 2020 based on conversations between Conservation Commission Chair John Follet and then Planning Board Chair CJ Lammers. After a couple of failed attempts to fund it, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) awarded funding in October 2021. Over the winter of 2022, an informal OSP committee developed and distributed an open space survey to town residents. The survey collected information from 149 responding households. It asked residents about the town's open space and recreation opportunities they value and use. It also asked residents to share priorities they would like to see the OSRP plan address. The Committee created a summary report of the survey results and distributed it to town residents. This, along with multiple appendices, maps, tables, and other materials, is included with the full FINAL DRAFT plan, which is posted for review on the town website.

In March 2022, Chesterfield contracted with the Conway School of Landscape Design (CSLD) to provide a team of three graduate students to conduct research, assist with community engagement, and Final DRAFT the OSRP. Over the summer, the committee solidified into a core planning committee that worked with the students to develop the plan. In January 2023, the CSLD students began research and worked with the OSP committee to plan and conduct two community engagement workshops.

The meetings were publicized through the Town website, robocalls, roadway message boards, flyers, and word-of-mouth and held at the Chesterfield Community Center. The first was on February 4 and included more than 40 residents who shared their visions, interests, needs, and concerns for the town's open space and recreational assets.



The second meeting on March 5 was attended by about 35 residents. CSLD students presented what they learned during the first meeting and offered an analysis of the town's open space conditions. Residents used this information to refine their goals and consider how to achieve them. The students recorded responses and compiled the data into a workshop results document which is included in the Final DRAFT plan (www.townofchesterfieldma.com).

The CSLD students also interviewed key stakeholder groups including:

- Conservation Commission
- Council on Aging
- Planning Board
- Westfield River Wild and Scenic Committee
- Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
- Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Committee, and
- The Trustees of Reservations.

Once they completed their research and mapping, the students wrote a draft report with help from the OSP Core team, Conway faculty and staff, and relevant stakeholders. Subsequently, the OSP Core Committee edited the draft and prepared to solicit input from Chesterfield residents through additional stakeholder and community meetings planned for the winter of 2024.

What follows is a summary of what came out of the 2023 research and engagement process and is included in the plan. The entire Final DRAFT OSRP including more maps, tables, and references is posted on the Town website: www.townofchesterfieldma.com. It has nine sections with maps and tables numbered sequentially by section. For consistency, the numbering of maps and charts in the Executive Summary reflects their order in the full OSRP.

Vision and Goals

Through the open space survey, community workshops and stakeholder conversations, residents expressed varied priorities and concerns, but also showed strong common ground. The process led to a draft vision statement and goals to guide the OSRP.

Chesterfield Residents Vision for Open Space and Recreation

Chesterfield is a vibrant, connected community with village sidewalks and well-maintained trails to herald the town's fields, farmlands, woodlands, and spectacular sunsets. Town leadership and residents value our natural resources and use them to drive economic development, guide planning and zoning, and contribute to the state's resiliency goals. Together we maintain recreational resources like Russell Park and a town beach, and protect working lands, biodiversity, dark night skies, and water resources.



Chesterfield Residents' Goals

- Goal #1:** Encourage the sustainable use, management, and protection of working lands and open spaces through public education and updating the town's master plan.
- Goal #2:** Maintain and preserve the town's historical and cultural heritage including the history of indigenous peoples who once lived in what is now Chesterfield.
- Goal #3:** Enhance and expand recreational amenities and opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities including improved access and pedestrian connectivity, increased community gathering spaces, and better communication and planning with public, private, and nonprofit landowners for land stewardship and recreational access. Accommodate the needs of older adults by providing amenities such as ADA accessible walking paths and sidewalks to further connect the Town Center Village center.

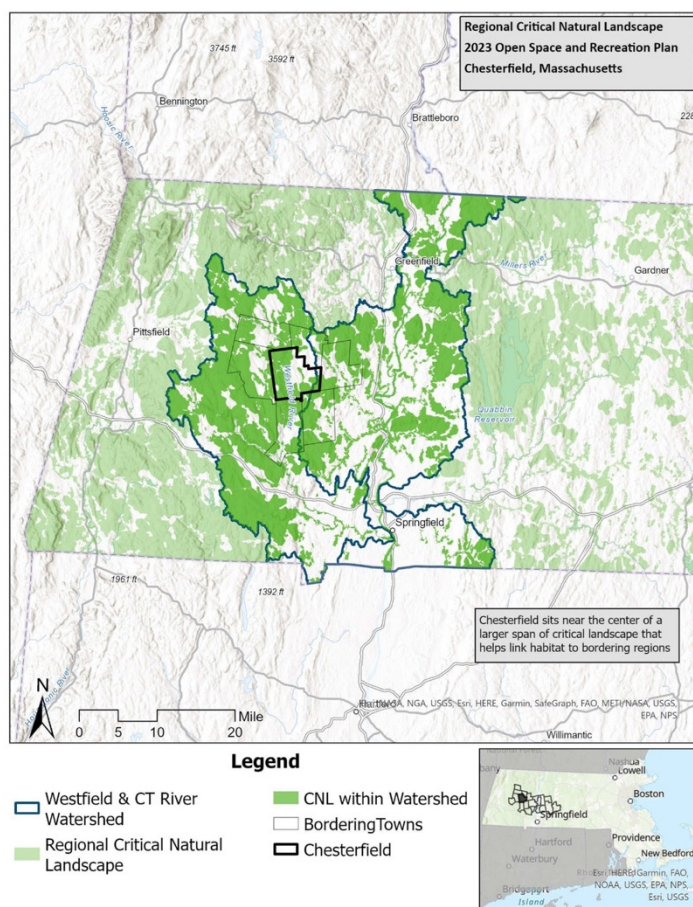
Community Setting

Chesterfield encompasses 31 square miles and plays an important role in regional connectivity and resilience. Its peaks and valleys reveal a dynamic landscape with elevations ranging from 570 to 1500 feet. Its diverse vegetative, hydrologic, and topographic patterns create three distinct zones. The eastern zone consists of forested rolling hills interspersed with wetlands, water bodies, and some farmland. The northwest is rugged with steep hills and peaks which support dense forest cover. The southwest contains a defining ridgeline which supports some ridgetop agriculture then gives way to a wet valley before rising again to cross into the neighboring town of Worthington. Chesterfield is bisected by Route 143, running east to west, and the Westfield River, running north to south. The village center, West Chesterfield, four cemeteries and Bisbee Mill are nationally registered historic districts and eligible for a 50/50 matching grant to preserve and improve elements like gravestones, rebuilding walls, and new paint.

History

Before European settlers, the Nipmuc, Pocumtuc, and Pequot people were active in what became Chesterfield in the late 18th Century. The area provided quality habitat for the wild game and fowl sought by native hunters and archeological evidence suggests a former Pequot village near the Chesterfield Gorge. Today the town's center village is located along Route 143, but Bisbeeville, West Chesterfield, Sugar Hill, and Bofat Hill once served as small village centers. From the town's inception in 1762 through the mid-20th centuries, agriculture, timber, tanneries, and water-powered industries fueled the economy but have subsequently declined.

Map 3-1



The Westfield River and Watershed

Most of Chesterfield lies within the Westfield River Watershed. The East Branch runs north to south along the length of the Town's north and south borders. A small portion in the town's southeast corner lies within the Connecticut River Watershed.

In 1993, sections of the Westfield were the first in the state to receive federal designation as a "wild and scenic river system." It meets federal criteria including remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish, wildlife, historic, and/or cultural features). Today, the wild and scenic designation has extended to 78 miles of the river which also has a management plan in place.

The East Branch and its tributaries provide a variety of important habitats. These include cold water streams, juvenile salmon habitat, freshwater wetlands, a variety of rare natural communities, and an intact forest area of more than 15,000 acres. About 4,000 acres of protected forests and low development surrounding its banks help preserve an abundance of critical habitat, recreational opportunities, and support a healthy watershed with clean water.

Recreation

Chesterfield has resources for both passive and active recreation, including trails, waterbodies, and dirt roads. Publicly accessible natural areas like the Chesterfield Gorge provide dramatic features which attract visitors as well as residents. In the center of town, Russell Park offers a baseball field, tennis and basketball courts, a skate park, and a playground. The Four Seasons Club maintains trails for hunting and leads fishing trips and snowmobiling tours. A dog-sledding company offers outdoor adventures.

Regional Partnerships

Chesterfield plays a key role in connecting conserved land in the region. Many private organizations and public agencies have invested in conservation here including Mass Division of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Mass Fish and Wildlife, Hilltown Land Trust, The Trustees of Reservations, the Westfield Wild and Scenic Committee, The Nature Conservancy, and US Fish and Wildlife.

Population Characteristics

According to the U.S. Census, Chesterfield's 2020 population was 1,186. This does not include people with second homes or who may be living or renting in town part-time. The town's population has been stable since 1790 when it was 1,183, although more recently it has fluctuated between 1,000 residents in 1980 and 1,222 in 2010. A modest population decrease of 3% since 2010 is consistent with most of the Hilltowns and less significant than national trends as rural communities face historic population losses.

Table 3.1 Chesterfield and Surrounding County Hilltown Populations

Town	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Chesterfield	1,000	1,048	1,201	1,222	1,186
Cummington	657	785	978	872	829
Goshen	651	830	921	1,054	960
Huntington	1,804	1,987	2,174	2,180	2,094
Middlefield	385	392	542	521	385
Plainfield	425	571	589	648	633
Westhampton	1,137	1,327	1,468	1,607	1,622
Williamsburg	2,237	2,515	2,427	2,482	2,504
Worthington	932	1,156	1,270	1,156	1,193

Source: American Community Survey 2020

Population by Age and Income

By 2030, 21% of the U.S. population will be 65 and older. At nearly 22%, Chesterfield already exceeds this estimate, exceeding the portions of young people aged 19 and younger and those between 20 and 44. At about 33%, the largest segment of the population is between ages 45 and 64.

Residents' median income is \$80,156 and most work outside of town. Those employed in town mostly work in Education Services, and the Health Care and Social Assistance industry. Median family income has increased considerably since 2000 when it was \$57,361—or about \$61,752 adjusted for inflation.

Table 3.2

<u>Selected Age Categories</u>	<u>Number of Individuals</u>	<u>Percent of Total Population (1,186)</u>
<u>19 Years & Under</u>	<u>221</u>	<u>18.5%</u>
<u>20-44</u>	<u>239</u>	<u>20.3%</u>
<u>45-64</u>	<u>391</u>	<u>32.9%</u>
<u>65 & Over</u>	<u>236</u>	<u>21.7%</u>

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Growth and Development Patterns

Chesterfield's development pattern has changed from village-centric to scattered, low density residential development on 2-acre or larger lots. Its population density is 39 people per square mile, eight times less than the county average. Over 90% of its homes are single family, dispersed widely throughout the town. According to Town Assessor data, out of 975 tax parcels, 79 have an out-of-state primary address suggesting many are occupied as second homes and/or rental units. And although the population is quite stable, 96 new homes have been built over the past 20 years.

In 2020, 8.3% of Chesterfield residents worked from home. Since then, in 2022, Chesterfield installed broadband, bringing high speed internet to over 80% of its residents. Access to broadband supports business development and remote employment opportunities. During the Covid-19 pandemic, rural communities received an influx of new residents, especially to towns with recreational amenities. Suggesting this trend has come to Chesterfield, town data shows an uptick of new housing between 2020 and 2023. Further, according to the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), as sea levels rise and disruptions increase from fires, droughts and other impacts of climate change, climate migration may increase Chesterfield's population.

New development is most evident along the Route 143 axis as gradual suburban expansion has claimed upland vistas. With flat topography and well-drained soils, cleared agricultural fields are prime targets. In the 2003 OSRP, farmland comprised almost 20% of the town. Since then, farmland land enrolled in Chapter 61A has dropped to 4.9% as 13 parcels with agricultural land were developed into single-family homes, including nine with prime agricultural soils. This is concerning because prime soils have the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. According to the USDA Natural Conservation Service, Chesterfield only has 1,435 acres of prime soils—or 7% of the town.

Chesterfield's AR-1 and AR-2 zoning encourages low-density residential development in 99% of the town. Without forward-thinking land use planning, single-family homes on large lots scattered around town will lead to suburban sprawl, drive up property taxes, fragment working lands and ecosystems, and erode the town's rural character.

Long-Term Development Patterns

Where once it was believed that low density residential development preserved rural character, instead it has been found to propel suburban sprawl, increase the cost of community services, and inflate property taxes. A possible maximum development build-out analysis shows that under this type of zoning, the current number of structures could double over time.

Map 3-7

This map shows what is possible under current zoning but does not account for physical constraints such as wetlands and topography, or setbacks and other restrictions. It shows what *could* happen, not what *will* happen. While it is not predictive, it suggests the need for a new land use plan and updated zoning bylaws to support residents' goals for the sustainable use, management, and protection of working lands and open spaces, preservation of local heritage, and enhancing the town's recreational amenities and opportunities.

Zoning and Subdivision Bylaws

Chesterfield's zoning bylaws include three residential districts: Town Center, Residential/Agricultural 1 (AR-1), and Residential/Agricultural 2 (AR-2). Both AR-1 and AR-2 state that these areas are "best suited for low-density" and affect 99% of developable lots.

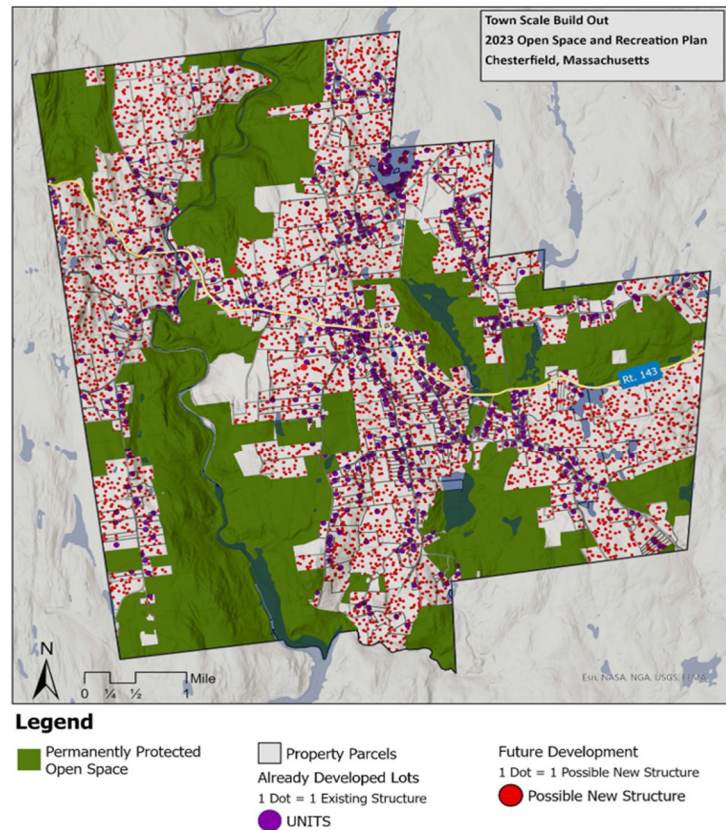
The minimum lot size is 2 acres with a 200-foot frontage requirement for single-family homes. Cluster housing, which increases density while also protecting open space, is permitted on 10 or more acre lots, and limited to six living units. Subdivision by-laws require that 35% of lots should be shaded by trees and the town's tree replacement and preservation policy includes species selection and required street tree plantings.

Chesterfield's important ecosystems are home to a myriad of rare, endangered, and common species of plants and animals. Poorly planned, low-density development will impact fragile ecosystems. More home septic systems could contaminate surface and groundwater resources affecting drinking water and aquatic life. A comprehensive land-use plan—or master plan—is needed to guide future development and protect the town's valuable natural resources.

Infrastructure and Transportation

State Route 143 connects Chesterfield to Route 9 and I-91 and cities including Pittsfield, Greenfield, Northampton, and Springfield, making it easy to work outside of town. The average commute time has remained relatively constant: 29.4 minutes in 2000 to 30.8 minutes in 2020. The primary north-south running streets are aptly named North Road and South Street. North Road turns into Damon Pond Road and connects back to Route 9. The historic Town Center village is at the main intersection of 143, North Road and South Street, and supports a small library, town offices, Town Hall, a park, and a store with a café. Also on Route 143, the historic village of West Chesterfield intersects with the Westfield River.

The closest public transportation is the last stop on the Pioneer Valley Transportation route in Williamsburg, about 6 miles away from the Town Center village. To augment this, the Hilltown Community Development Corporation offers elderly residents a 'Hilltown Easy Ride' to shopping and appointments. Even so, a 2016



Hilltown Transportation Committee (HTC) study found that Chesterfield's greatest transportation need was more services for the non-driving senior population. The HTC is working to promote ride-sharing programs and a fixed route service to create a more reliable system.

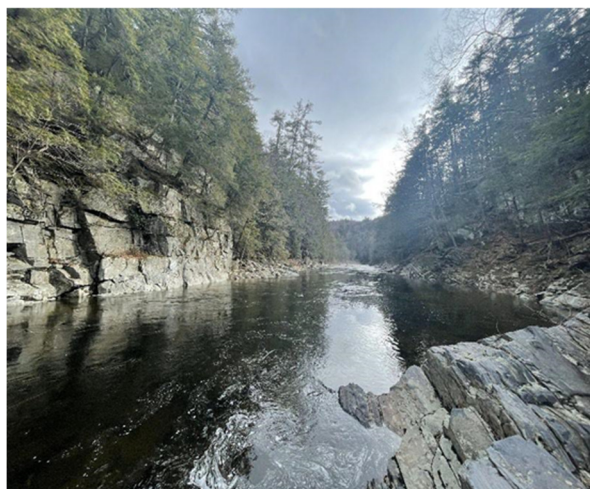
Most town roads are paved but some scenic dirt and gravel roads are still maintained. Although there are no official bike routes, heat maps from Strava, a recreation application on smart phones, indicates that many of the town's main roads are used by cyclists, with a notable pattern of use on trails in the Gilbert A. Bliss State Forest south of the Gorge. The town's only sidewalks were installed between 2012 and 2014 at the intersection of Route 143 and North Road/South Street to connect pedestrians to buildings in the Town Center village. Residents still express the need for sidewalks to connect to the Hilltown CDC office and Davenport Childcare Center. Walk Boston conducted a walk audit for the Council on Aging which noted that many residents desire more safety features, especially when crossing Main Road and when walking the common route loop (Main Road to South Street and onto Bryant Road to Bagg Road and back to Main Road).

Chesterfield does not have a public water supply or wastewater system, so residents rely on private wells and septic systems. Septic tanks are dug and placed in soils and slopes that allow for percolation into the ground. To protect water resources, it is important that septic systems are installed properly and maintained. The town does have a few public wells under permit from DEP: two provide water to Tolgy Wood (the former Boy Scouts camp), with others located in the town center village at the Hilltown CDC, the Chesterfield Congregational Church, the Davenport Building, and the General Store. The New Hingham Regional Elementary School also has a public well.

Environmental Inventory and Analysis

Chesterfield's open spaces take the form of large tracts of forests, densely vegetated and open wetlands, high-quality water bodies, agricultural land, trails and active recreational fields, courts, and other amenities. Its landscape is characterized by smooth ridge tops and gently rolling hills. More dramatic elevation occurs along the Westfield River East Branch, the dominant landform which runs north/south through the western half of town.

Chesterfield has a wealth of valuable vegetation for wildlife habitat, scenic and cultural resources, and unique environments whose ecological value is evidenced by the many agencies that have conserved land and exemplify the community's value of its rural character and identity.



The Westfield River

The East Branch of the Westfield River is the town's main surface water. In 1993, it was the Commonwealth's first river to be designated as a National Wild and Scenic River. Since then, the designation was expanded and now includes corridors that stretch for 78.1 miles along the East Branch, Middle Branch, and West Branch as well as about a dozen smaller tributaries. These water resources have environmental value and support essential habitat along with recreational uses like fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and swimming. The Westfield flows through the Gilbert A. Bliss State Forest, Chesterfield Gorge, the "Bend," Indian Hollow, and other public and private areas where the riverfront is accessible for recreational activities.

Dead Branch Brook at Fisk Meadows and other brooks are used for recreation. Beavers frequently dam many of these brooks, which provide a wet, swampy habitat supporting waterfowl and fur-bearing animals.

Wetlands

Wetlands are abundant throughout the town, protecting water quality, retaining flood storage capacity, providing recharge through infiltration into the ground and essential habitat for nesting and nourishment of a



wide variety of species. Development around wetlands is regulated and, according to the provisions of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, requires an Order of Conditions from the Conservation Commission.

Recreation Trails

Chesterfield residents and visitors enjoy an extensive network of formal and informal hiking trails in public and some private open space areas. In addition to walking, jogging, hunting, horseback

riding, skiing, and cycling along winding forested trails, the town has miles of scenic rural roads. Some trails have been formally mapped but others, most notably those in the Gilbert A. Bliss State Forest, have not.

The Four Seasons Club plays an important role in trail access and stewardship. A private business located on River Road near the Gorge, the club promotes outdoor activities and works with many different user groups to promote all outdoor adventures and activities. Chesterfield's Council on Aging also plays a role. In 2020, in collaboration with the Hilltown Community Development Corporation, it created a "walking" map of sidewalks, streets, and trails with cultural significance with descriptions of the walking routes and their difficulty level. These maps are publicized and available online for Chesterfield residents at <https://www.hilltowncdc.org/healthyaging>.

COVID-19, the Gorge, and Other Areas of Popular Recreation Interest

Owned and operated by the Trustees of Reservations, the Chesterfield Gorge is one the town's most cherished spots. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it received a significant spike in use. This led to residents' concerns about the health of its ecosystems and their ability to enjoy it.

A popular spot for swimming, fly fishing, and hiking, the influx of tourists surprised residents and sparked concern about overuse, erosion, trash, traffic, and parking. Many residents stopped going to the Gorge, and other popular spots like Indian Hollow and the East Branch Trail during the pandemic.

Land Protection

About 40% of the town's open space is permanently protected. An inventory of lands for conservation and recreation interest shows that 8,024 acres of a total of 19,996 total acres is either owned by a public entity or protected with a conservation restriction (CR)—1,107 acres, or an agricultural preservation restriction (APR)—432 acres. The Commonwealth owns the largest share of protected land at 5,943 acres—nearly 30% of the total—followed by private landowners who have placed permanent conservation restrictions on 1,539 acres—about 8%. Land trusts and the federal government make up the rest with 251 and 291 acres respectively—a little over 1% each.

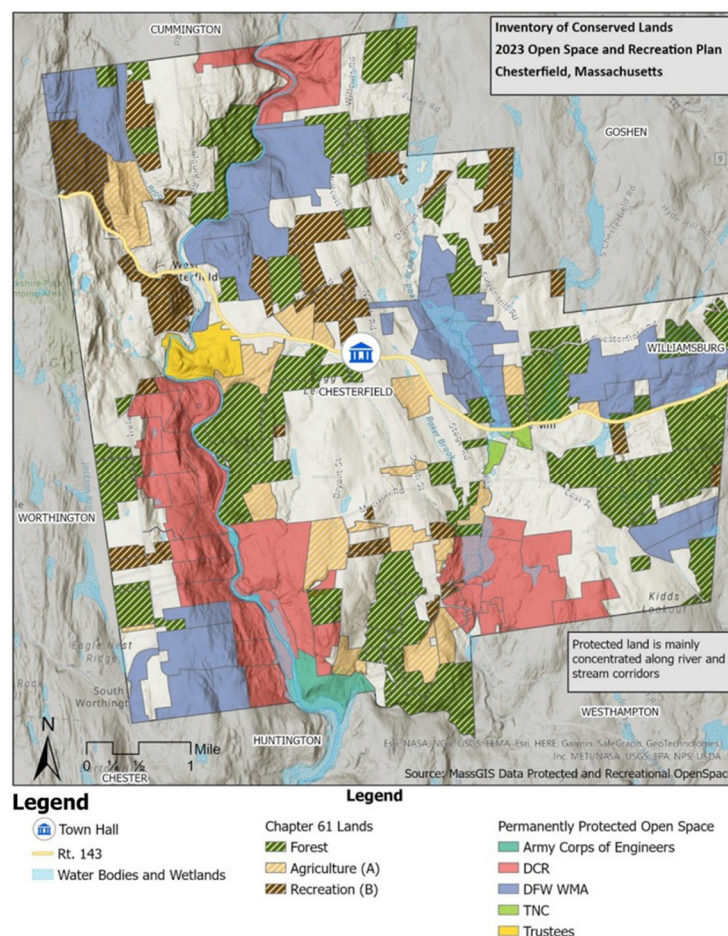
While conserved land owned by nonprofit organizations and government agencies is typically property tax exempt, land under CR or APR is not. However, according to PVPC, to mitigate tax losses, state agencies paid \$10.84/acre in lieu of taxes in 2019—up from \$6.40/acre in 2010 (adjusted for inflation). Federal agencies also made payment in lieu of taxes and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides annual Refuge Revenue Sharing Program dollars for land that it owns.

Finally, private landowners have enrolled 6,083 acres in three different Chapter Land programs, further stabilizing the land base. Conserved privately owned lands remain on the tax rolls and contribute to the town's fiscal as well as environmental health.

Table 5.2

Chapter Program	Acres	Percent
Chapter 61: Forest	3,798	19%
Chapter 61A: Agriculture	985	4.9%
Chapter 61B: Recreation	1,302	6.5%
	6,083	30.4

Map 5-2

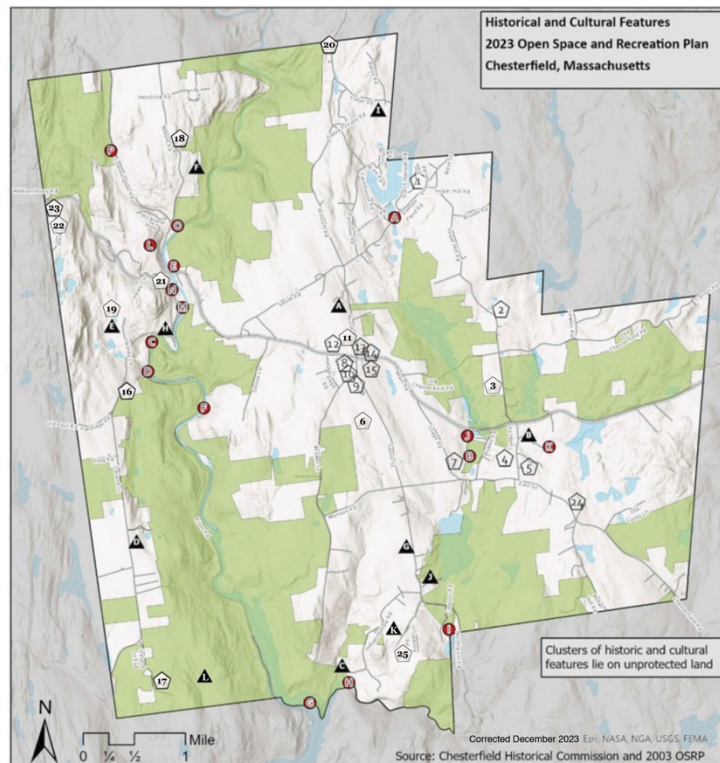


Cultural Resources

Along with open hilltops and fields with distant views, residents treasure Chesterfield's stone walls, historic homes, and remnants of stone mills and old house foundations. Special features like the first meeting house site, Damon Pond and Burnell Mills, the High Bridge, and the site of Clapp Tavern are important to the town's history. Several cemeteries were established as early as 1764, recording Chesterfield's history on gravestones. Although some of these cemeteries are owned by the town, none of them are listed in the MassGIS open space layer as under any type of protection. They could be registered as National Historic sites and become eligible for funding for gravestone maintenance and rebuilding of stone walls. Natural resources and their numerous unique environments are central to conservation efforts, but historic and cultural features are also important for preserving the town's rural character.

Chesterfield has two Historic Districts: Chesterfield Center Historic District and West Chesterfield Historic District. Two cemeteries are listed as historic sites: Center Cemetery and Ireland Street Cemetery. The town received grant funds from the Massachusetts Historical Commission to place preservation restrictions on these properties for gravestone conservation, rebuilding of parts of the east wall, and a holding tomb in Center Cemetery. It received additional grants to rebuild the stone walls at Ireland Street Cemetery. The following map shows the location of Chesterfield's historical and cultural features.

Map 4-11



Legend

- ▲ Cemeteries
- Mill Sites
- ◻ Cultural & Historic Homes
- Permanently Protected Open Space

Town projects that involve any expenditure of state or federal money are supposed to be reviewed by the Chesterfield Historical Commission. The Commission then submits comments on the project to the appropriate state or federal authority. This is why the sidewalks in the Town Center village are concrete and why they connect to elements the Historical Commission thought important, like the post office and community center.

Analysis of Needs

Chesterfield has protected some core and critical habitat, but much remains vulnerable to development. Its prime farmland soils are an irreplaceable resource and uncommon in the Hilltowns. The steep decline of the town's farmland since the 2003 OSRP suggests the need to protect the most arable soils from development and steward other agricultural lands with conservation management. In addition, there are tensions between community resource needs, public agencies' policies and practices, and tax base concerns.

Along with prime farmland, important unprotected areas include corridors along the east side of the Westfield River and the Dead Branch Brook. The southern part of town, practically all stream corridors, and a large portion of the Gilbert A Bliss state forest are designated as core habitats for endangered and threatened species. Other unprotected habitats include non-certified vernal pools, areas estimated to be habitat for state-listed rare and endangered species, and core and critical habitats on Chapter 61 lands, which only grants them temporary protection. Large tracts of Chapter Lands along the Dead Branch Brook are separated by several roads and residential development. These connector lands are especially vulnerable to development. Overall, Chesterfield has protected a largely intact forest corridor along the west side of the Westfield River. The east side is mostly protected except for some privately owned land. But other areas are vulnerable and require better land use planning, increased protection, and resource conservation.

Chesterfield residents want to use and sustain the town's natural resources and maintain its rural character, cultural and historic resources. This will require managing development, improving recreational amenities, and protecting threatened areas. At the same time, some town officials and residents are concerned about the tax base, which is exacerbated by a 10% drop in state aid since 1990.

Cost of community services studies find that privately owned farmland, forest land, and open space make a positive contribution to the local tax base. Residential development—especially scattered low density development—costs more in services than it pays back in property taxes.

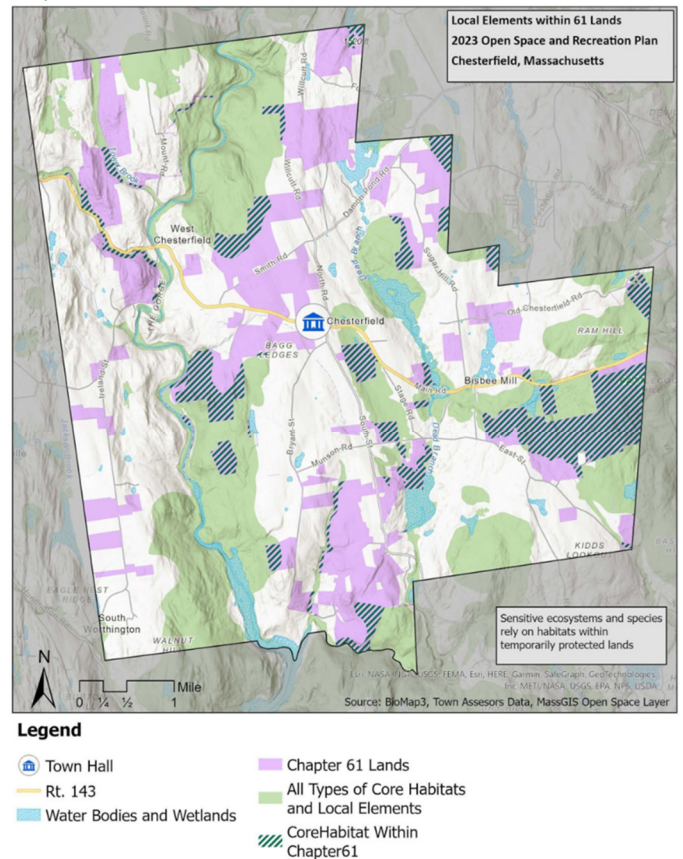
Employing smart growth practices reduces the drain on local coffers. It encourages a mix of land uses and housing choices, creates walkable communities, provides a range of transportation options, and preserves open space, farmland, and critical environmental areas. The full range of these issues cannot be solved in an OSRP but point to the need for a 21st Century town master plan.

Summary of Key Recommendations

1. Develop a master plan and update zoning bylaws to manage future development.
2. Convene a new Open Space and Recreation Committee.
3. Protect wildlife and critical habitats by monitoring key parcels for change, educating landowners on conservation options and practices, and creating a wildlife corridor across Route 143 to complete the Westfield River corridor.
4. Maintain healthy water resources by enforcing strong requirements for perc tests and building restrictions on lands that are steeper than 25% and evaluating ice melt alternatives to road salt on major roads directly adjacent to town water bodies.
5. Prioritize high quality farmland soils for protection through CRs or enrollment in Chapter programs, buy local farm products, and celebrate Chesterfield's remaining farmers and farms.
6. Resolve the tension between conservation priorities and a healthy tax base.
7. Develop a system of connected sidewalks with signage for all ages and abilities, improve trails and water amenities and work with public agencies to improve access to them.
8. Maintain the town's historic artifacts: cemeteries, stone walls, mills, cellar holes, etc., work with property owners to prioritize and register historic resources and identify and preserve the history of Indigenous tribes.
9. Increase awareness of human impact on wildlife or recreational activities
10. Convene a group to explore expanded uses of Russell Park.

More detailed recommendations are included in the following Seven-Year Action Plan.

Map 7-1



5. Create and regularly update an inventory of recreational amenities and resources (trails, swimming/boating/fishing areas, etc.). Share on the town website and in public spaces.	3	Yr. 3 Inventory Yrs. 4-7 Brochure of inventory to share	OSP, CC, Parks and Rec, Westfield Wild & Scenic	Mass Trails Grant
6. Partner with educators to develop field courses, conduct scientific field studies, and conduct workshops and tours about protecting ecologically sensitive areas and managing open spaces.	2	Yr. 1-2 Explore partnerships Yr. 2-3: tour & workshop schedule Yr. 3-7 conduct field studies	OSP, Schools, Volunteers	Neighborhood Outreach Project Grant
II. CONSERVATION COMMISSION				
Secure volunteer or intern to assist with tasks below.	1	Yr. 1	Con Com Associate Members	AmeriCorps
1. Identify, inventory and map unprotected working lands especially land with prime agricultural soils. Prioritize these lands for conservation. Use land use land cover datasets for guidance on identifying unprotected lands that should be prioritized for protection.	1	Yr. 1 Inventory Yr. 2, Map	PB, PVPC, American Farmland Trust, Hilltown Land Trust	
2. Build support for open space acquisition of BioMap3 priorities by developing a vibrant public education program about the economic, social, and environmental importance of Chesterfield's ecological assets, carrying capacity of ecologically sensitive resources and give residents tools to steward their own properties and protect them for future generations.	2	See I. 6 Yr. 1 Plan Yrs. 2-7, Deliver	OSC, Farm & Forest Committee, Trustees of Reservations, Paul Catanzano (UMASS)	Neighborhood Outreach Project Grant MA DCR Service Forestry Program
3. Create a town Open Space Trust fund to enable donations of unprotected lands or funds.	2	TBD	CC, Select Board, Board of Assessors	Conservation Trust Fund, LAND fund, MA Land & Water Conservation Fund
4. Evaluate opportunity for protection of uplands through bylaw modification.	3	Yr. 3+	CC, PB	
III. HAZARD MITIGATION				
1. Identify eroding stream banks, flooding culverts, vulnerable bridges, wells, septic systems etc. due to climate change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fund studies, inventories, any needed infrastructure/physical changes. Determine if additional properties will become undevelopable and need zoning or regulatory protection. 	4	Yr. 1-7	CC, DPW, BOH, PB, UMASS Climate Research Center, Mass Bridge & Culvert Work Group	MA Riverways MA Bridge & Culvert Work Group Mass Works Infrastructure Program, DER Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant Program, Federal PROTECT Grant Program

IV. PLANNING BOARD				
Create Volunteer or Funded Intern position to provide technical support for the following activities	1		PVPC, AmeriCorps	Planning Assistance Grant
1. Update Chesterfield Land Use/Master Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convene residents to inform a 21st century master plan to guide development and encourage sustainable use, management, and protection of open space and the town's historic character. Secure funding to create and develop master plan; retain consultants to conduct the plan. Approve the plan and develop land use policies/zoning ordinances to implement the Plan. 	1	Yr. 1 Facilitate Citizen Meetings Yr. 2 Yr. 2-5	MVP, PVPC, residents, all town boards, and commissions	
2. Secure Planning Grant and use funding to inventory zoning compliance with state law, review relevant small town zoning initiatives and consider updates (i.e., Dark Sky, Farmland and Woodland Protection, Scenic Byway, etc.).	1		PVPC	PVPC Delta Grant
V. HISTORICAL COMMISSION				
Fill 4 openings on Historical Commission	1	Yr. 1 Appoint volunteers	Historical Society, Select Board	
1. Implement historic landscape actions such as participating in annual town building maintenance walk around, review of town road project and other town plans.	1	Yrs. 1-7	other commissions or boards	
2. Establish liaison to OSC to review actions on historic and cultural resources, provide info to public land management agencies to ensure coordination on historic preservation, restoration and policy in public open spaces.	1	Yr. 1	OSC	
3. Designate select roads as scenic roads. Develop bylaws to protect cultural and historic assets that are in the road right-of-way such as stone walls.	1	Yr. 1 Prioritize Yr. 2 Evaluate Zoning		
4. Research and develop a plan for how to maintain cemeteries, stone walls, mills, cellar holes, bridges, foundations, wells, and other archaeological sites. Share the plan with private landowners and use it to guide and implement maintenance.	3	Yrs. 3-7	Volunteers, Historical Society & Cemetery Commission	MA Preservation Projects Fund (MA Historical Commission) Planning Assistance Grant
5. Maintain inventory of cemeteries, stone walls, mills, cellar holes, bridges, foundations, wells, and other archaeological sites	4	Yrs. 1-7	Historical Society	MA Historic Commission
6. Develop and implement standards for signs at historic sites, brochures, and interpretive programs.	3	Ongoing, Yrs. 1-7	Historical Society	MA Preservation Projects Fund