



## LAND USE ELEMENT TECHNICAL PAPER

The land use element of a master plan provides a framework for growth management and an understanding of the kinds of development the community wants balanced with the existing physical and regulatory environment. A community's land use pattern is the physical arrangement and intensity of residential, commercial, industrial and institutional development, open land, natural resources and roadways. Land use is the hub of a master plan, with the other elements acting as critical spokes. All are important, and land use is the element that ties them all together.

Additionally, land use is often equated with zoning because a master plan's future land use map forms the basis for the town's key zoning policies. Land is divided into zones for specific uses and is managed and administered by the municipal land use regulations, policies and procedures. Today, the basis for logical land use planning, protecting valuable natural resources while promoting economic development, still exists.

### *Defining East Longmeadow's Landscape*

East Longmeadow is a suburban town of 13 square miles located in the Connecticut River Valley. It is a part of the Springfield-Chicopee-Holyoke Metropolitan Area and falls within the Connecticut River watershed. It is bordered on the west by Longmeadow, on the north by Springfield, on the east by Wilbraham and Hampden, and on the south by Enfield and Somers, Connecticut.

The Town's land use regulations, also referred to as zoning code, identify thirteen use districts: Residence AA, Residence A, Residence B, Residence C, Commercial, Business, Industrial, Industrial Garden Park, Golf Recreational, Elderly Residential, Planned Adult Residential, Planned Unit Residential and Mixed-Use Village Districts, which dictate the type of development allowed in different locations throughout the town. Additionally, there is one overlay district, known as the Floodplain Overlay District, which encompasses floodplain areas within the town designated as Zone A or AE on the Hampden County Flood Insurance Rate Map.

In recent years, the town has permitted solar developments and has experienced a slow expansion in home building. The town recently adopted standards for a new Mixed-Use Village District.

East Longmeadow was originally settled as a farming community. The existing subdivisions in town occupy the same parcels that were originally farms. Outside of the town center, most of the older homes were originally farmhouses. The important quarry industry in East Longmeadow's history, beginning in 1872, expanded and brought in an influx of Italian and French- Canadian immigrants to mine and dress the stone. The center of town was settled by the French Canadians and the Italians to the northwest. The few remaining, pre-existing, non-conforming, multi-family homes near the center of town are relics of this period. Future development was concentrated where water and sewer infrastructure were present, first occurring in the northeast and southeast quadrants in the mid-twentieth century and expanding town-wide later in the twentieth century. The southwest quadrant was developed last.

In 1894, the State Legislature granted a partition of the Longmeadow land, a 13 square mile tract to the new town of East Longmeadow. No longer primarily a farming community, the quarrying industry provided the Town's economic backbone until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. As the quarrying industry declined East Longmeadow morphed into a suburban community for the nearby city of Springfield. Since 1990, the economic base has been expanded by industrial growth in the southwestern portion of the town.

Current development patterns are governed by the limited availability of land and then by the zoning of that available land. Most of the developable land is found in the southern half of town, in land area mostly zoned for one and 0.5-acre residential lots and in the Industrial Garden Park. Most recent development consists of higher-end single-family housing. As mentioned previously, the town has unlocked mixed use development potential by introducing a new mixed-use village district to provide denser housing opportunities and greater variety of uses.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an inventory of existing land use patterns, an analysis of zoning, regulations, as well as a summary of existing development and trends; it will draw on other plan elements and identify opportunities to address growth and preservation.

## INVENTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

Figure 1 is the most recent data for land use type prepared by MassGIS and mapped in Map 1 represented by the Property Type Classification Code associated with “use codes” from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, along with custom use codes that the Assessors’ Office includes in their parcel data when submitted to the state.

It shows that almost half of the land uses in town are residential (4,011 acres @ 48%). Commercial and industrial uses, including the ‘mixed use’ category of commercial + residential) take up 13 percent. Agriculture is currently just 2% of land use, but almost 22% is “Open land”.

**Figure 1 East Longmeadow Land Use**

Land Use Type	Acres	Percent of Total (%)
Agriculture	182.15	2.18
Commercial	217.03	2.61
Water	3.14	0.00
Industrial	421.90	5.07
Mixed use (other, primarily commercial + residential)	455.07	5.47
Open land	1,814.21	21.79
Recreation	21.50	0.03
Residential (other, multi-family + single family)	4,011.80	48.19
Right-of-way	726.20	8.72
Tax exempt	464.14	5.58
Unknown	8.10	0.01
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,325.25</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Mass GIS

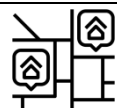
Another measurement that shows how lands have been transformed by new residential and commercial development throughout the Commonwealth is the *Losing Ground* report produced by Mass Audubon every five years. The Sixth Version of *Losing Ground* analyzes changes from 2012-2017. The table below provides specific land use measurements for East Longmeadow, and shows how the town ranks against other Massachusetts municipalities by percent of land use measurement of change.



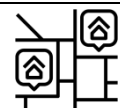
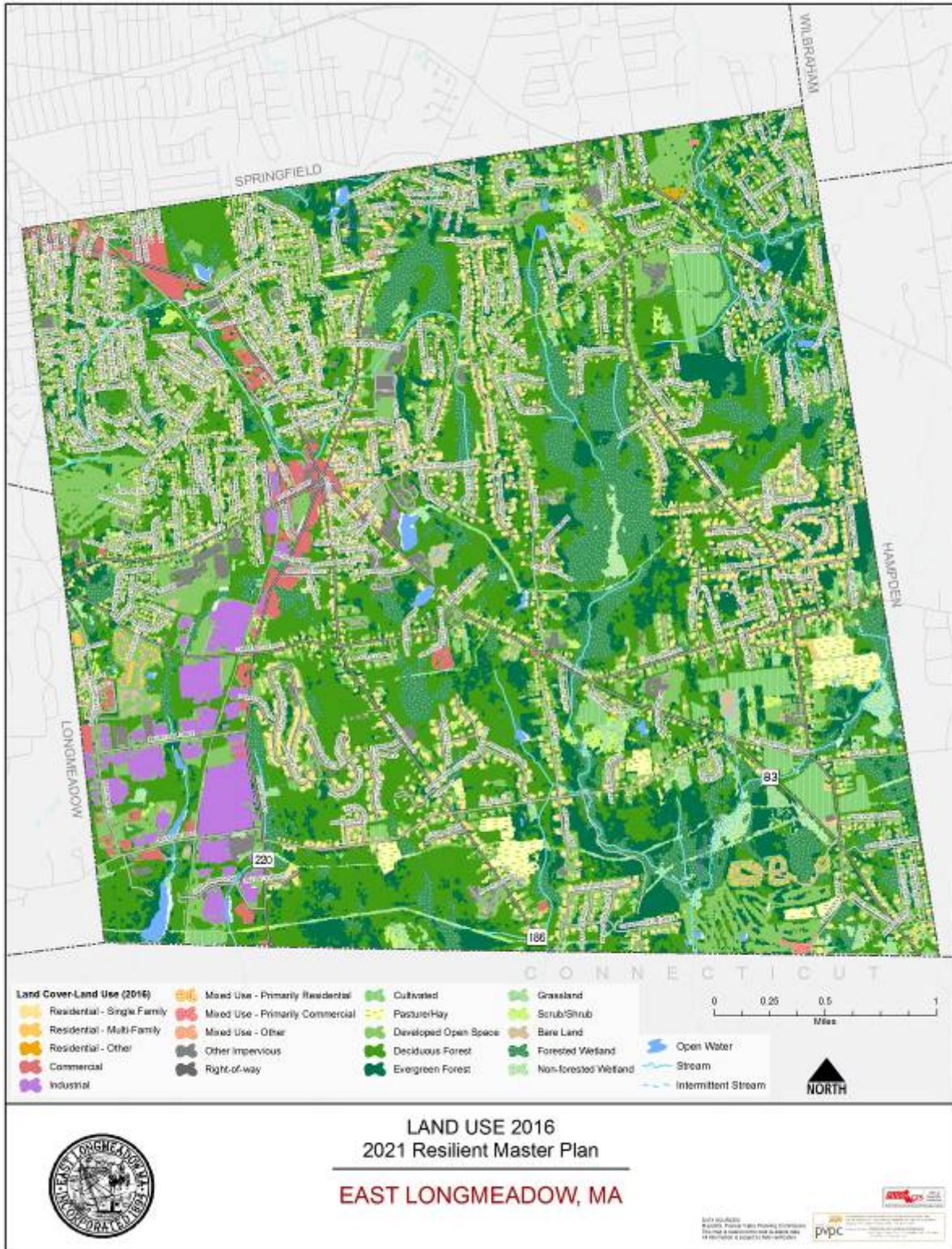
**Figure 2 East Longmeadow Land Use, Recent Development, and Protection (2012-2017)**

<b>Land Use Measurement of Change</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent of Total Land (%)</b>	<b>Rank in State Out of 351 municipalities</b>
Total area of newly developed land from 2012-2017	56	0.67	79
Total area of development	4,046	48.55	90
Total area of natural land	3,323	39.87	296
Total area of open land	823	9.88	205
Total area of permanently conserved land	448	5.38	328
Total area of newly conserved land from 2012-2019	21	0.25	346

Additional breakdowns of protected and permanently conserved land can be found in the *Open Space and Natural Resources* element.



# Map 1 East Longmeadow Land Use Map



East Longmeadow’s population has grown over the past four decades, from 12,905 people in 1980 to the 2019 population estimate of 16,242 (from US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-year data, 2015-2019), an increase of approximately 26 percent. By 2040 the population is projected to be 17,936 residents, according to the UMass Donahue Institute. Residents, municipal officials and other stakeholders throughout the resilient Master Planning process lifted up the importance of making sure the town has the regulatory tools and procedures in place to manage growth to maintain and improve the quality of life and to enhance opportunities for residents and business owners alike.

*Zoning*

Zoning regulations, zoning districts, and other land use laws constitute a town’s “blueprint” for its future. These tools help the community shape the physical landscape through permitting and mapping where land is dedicated to different types of residential and non-residential uses. Zoning regulations and districts are the primary land use tools to manage development and direct growth to suitable and desired areas, while also protecting critical resources and ensuring that development is in keeping with the town’s character as prescribed by the regulations the community adopts. Land use patterns over time will continue to look more and more like the town’s zoning map until the town is “built out” – that is, there is no more developable land left. In looking forward, it is important that the town focus not on the current use and physical build-out of today, but on its potential future uses and build-out allowed under the town’s zoning map and bylaws. This Master Plan captures community input and priorities for future land uses.

East Longmeadow’s current zoning bylaw has been amended through 2020 with the previously mentioned Mixed-Use Village District. For the purposes of the Master Plan, the zoning assessment addresses pertinent zoning regulations and permitting procedures as they relate to potential obstacles to achieving goals outlined in the Master Plan. The zoning code affects development and redevelopment potential based on where the town allows housing types and commercial and industrial activities throughout town. See Map 2 for East Longmeadow’s current zoning map.

**Residential Zoning Districts**

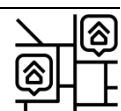
Residence AA, Residence A, Residence B, Residence C, Elderly Residential, Planned Adult Residential, Planned Unit Residential

East Longmeadow’s Residence AA, A, B, and C Districts are particular districts for development of single family homes in the various parts of town. Actual densities have been measured using GIS mapping analysis:

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Dwelling Units/Acre</b>	<b>Population/Dwelling Units</b>	<b>Population/Acre</b>
Residence AA	0.5	2.8	1.4
Residence A	0.7	2.5	1.9
Residence B	1.3	2.7	3.8
Residence C	2.5	2.5	

Most of the new residential development in town is located in Residence Zones A, AA, supplemented by ANR development elsewhere. This means new development consisting primarily of larger homes on larger lots with smaller homes as the infill development.

Brownstone Gardens is a senior living development that was built in the Elderly Residential Zoning



District and offers density options for multi-family development. The Planned Unit Residential District and the newly approved Mixed-Use Village District also provide an opportunity for multi-family development with a Special Permit and Site Plan Review, however, a minimum of 40 acres is needed to develop within these zones.

The town has zoned for Planned Unit Residential Development (similar to Open Space Residential Development), allowing a mix of housing types on smaller lots and requires permanently protected open space as part of the development.

#### Commercial and Business Districts

The town currently has two districts specifically for commercial activity – the Business District and the Commercial District. The Commercial District is intended for low-intensity commercial uses, like professional offices; whereas, the Business District permits higher-intensity commercial uses that have a higher number of employees and higher traffic volumes, like supermarkets or gas stations.

#### Industrial and Industrial Garden Park Districts

The Industrial and Industrial Garden Park Zoning Districts traverse the old railroad line and current Redstone Rail Trail. High-intensity commercial uses, such as retail and services, as well as low-intensity business uses are permitted by-right in the Industrial District. Industrial uses, like warehousing and construction supply are permitted. Special permits would be required for non-industrial uses as identified in the town’s Schedule of Use Regulations – Table 3-1.

#### Golf Recreational District

The Golf Recreational Zoning District covers the two existing golf courses in town. This allows for development of single family homes and multi-family dwellings, among other types of uses allowed by-right, in accordance with the Town’s Schedule of Use Regulations.

#### Mixed-Use Village District

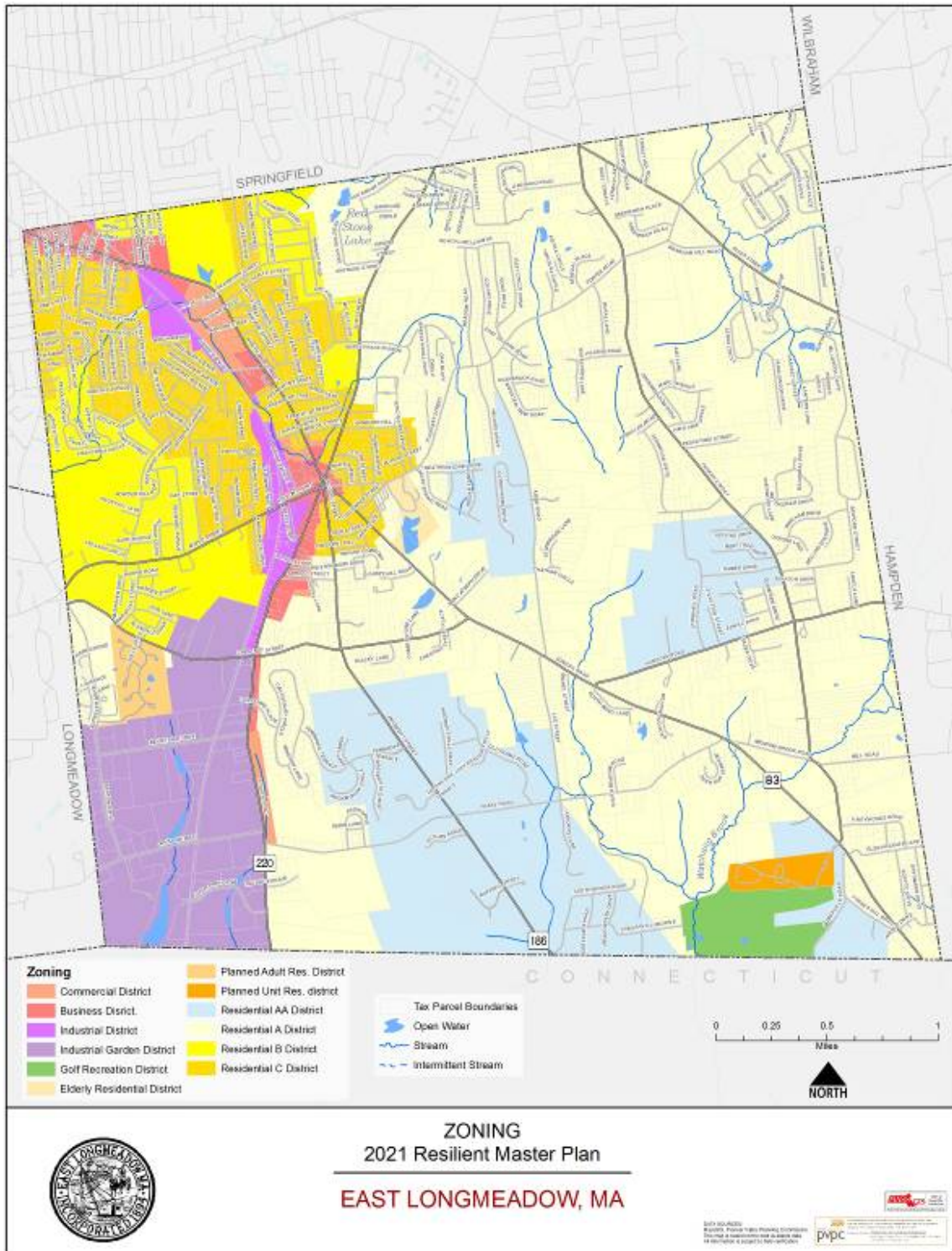
Adopted in 2020, the Mixed-Use Village District allows for development of a mixture of residential, commercial and business uses and building types including single family dwellings, town houses, multi-family dwellings with or without attached business or commercial spaces, business and commercial buildings, recreation facility, and open space. The district is intended to allow for greater integration of various types of housing and business and commercial uses within a walkable community.

Development of affordable housing units are identified in this new bylaw, with a requirement of 10 percent of total housing in the district being afforded to those who qualify under the limits by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.





## Map 2 East Longmeadow Zoning Map



## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Master Plan process has provided the opportunity for residents to present comment and concerns about growth in East Longmeadow and the 302 survey respondents, along with committee members and focus group participants have affirmed the importance of the Town’s “small-town character and charm.” It was very important to survey takers (62.3%) that the town manages and guides commercial development – all of which can be addressed through the Town’s land use policies and regulations. Comments at the visioning and implementation workshops affirm this perspective. The intention of this plan is to help East Longmeadow achieve the balance of development with preservation of all that is treasured about the community. This requires maximizing opportunities to preserve open space, where appropriate, and addressing development thoughtfully. The town could realize the benefits of this balance by becoming more proactive in planning for growth and conservation, exploring targeted plans for key nodes and corridors, and implementing the recommended policies and regulations.

As with many other towns in western Massachusetts where there are large tracts of open land, solar developers are seeking to site large scale developments of up to 20-30 acres of land per parcel in East Longmeadow. With constrained financial resources, the Town must be strategic about which parcels provide the most benefit as protected open space and which areas the town can develop. The town can be more proactive about supporting other economic development opportunities.

### *Encouraging Redevelopment*

Seventy-one percent of survey respondents find it somewhat important or very important for the town to encourage more economic development. There are multiple corridors in town, in addition to the town center, which can support this development. The town center also provides the opportunities for walkability and access to services like the town offices, library, and multiple amenities in and around the Center Square complex.

The Town Center can continue to attract small businesses to support the local economy and offer a continuation of the types of structures and character the town seeks. A Village Center bylaw, or exploring an expansion of the Mixed Use Village District and those standards, could help the town advance the maintenance of appropriate development in the center. The bylaw can offer standards of which future development could be allowed, such as requiring any new or redeveloped buildings to demonstrate similar architectural features as the surrounding buildings, with an allowance for a smaller setback or frontage requirement, etc. The developer would need to demonstrate that the development can fit within the context of the neighborhood it is in. The town can even explore identifying more than one area where they could foresee this type of development.

### *Small Town Features*

Urban design can help preserve historic small-town character, ensuring that new development complements the area surrounding it, and creates an accessible, pedestrian-friendly environment. By addressing fundamental site dimensions, like building height, width, coverage, and setbacks, design guidelines can also focus on elements such as signage, building materials, streetscape components, and landscaping.

To some extent we can maintain the remnants of East Longmeadow’s past by preserving roads, overarching trees, barns and other artifacts of the earlier times, as the town still has some visual





characteristics of a New England town. More significant, however, is the opportunity to revitalize the type of uses and activities that support and maintain small-town character:

- Preserving and supporting the expansion of the remaining working farms, including on public land, if appropriate;
- Providing an opportunity for volunteers to assist with taking care of roadside trees, and planting new ones to replace those that have died;
- Centralizing activity with working greenbelts of gardens, farms and forest;
- Building more support for the strong values of recreation in town.

As the landscape continues to change and evolve, the town can take control and preserve its character and beauty by creating specific standards and incorporating them into each of the zoning designations, in addition to exploring overlay districts to preserve qualities unique to specific neighborhoods.

### *Affordable Housing*

East Longmeadow could support additional affordable housing in town by exploring an expansion to the inclusionary zoning component in the Mixed Use Village District. This would support implementation of the recommendation raised by residents and other stakeholders for varying housing types and affordable units. As described, new housing constructed under this zoning can require affordable units built on-site, payment in lieu of units, or donation of land that could support affordable housing development.

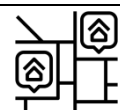
Many towns strive to achieve a 10 percent subsidized housing inventory (SHI) threshold so they are not subject to development regulated under the State's Chapter 40B laws. A Comprehensive Permit proceeding, as governed by Chapter 40B, bypasses many local review processes. As of November 2019, the State's records show the town's SHI at 7.4 percent, making the Town subject to Chapter 40B and housing development being permitted through the Zoning Board of Appeals. The Housing Element Technical Paper, in addition to a Housing Production Plan to be prepared in 2021, provides some additional context of regional housing perspectives and how East Longmeadow may play a part in housing production.

### *Community Resilience*

The Town's ability to utilize its available resources (energy, communication, transportation, food, etc.) to withstand and recover from adverse situations is known as its community resilience. East Longmeadow's resilience will rely on a proactive and planned approach to protect its resources and direct where development and redevelopment can occur.

The recommendations of the land use element meet these objectives in a number of ways including:

- Promoting the development of a town center that facilitates walkability and the efficient use of existing buildings and infrastructure. It also facilitates community building by formalizing a civic space and community programming, utilizing the town offices, the library, or Center Field.
- Working to expand affordable housing opportunities, like a variety of housing types, would provide housing for those who want to remain in town and contribute to the success of East Longmeadow, while also offering opportunities for new residents who can contribute to the



growth of East Longmeadow.

- Preserving the Town's small-town character will help protect some of the natural resources and open spaces, which is a benefit to the existing, though evolving, ecosystem.

