

Spencer, Massachusetts Community Master Plan



1753 -
- 2003



June 2003

Prepared for the Spencer Planning Board
by the
Spencer Master Plan Committee

Technical Assistance Provided by:
The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
Dr. John Mullin, UMass Center for Economic Development
Haley & Ward Inc., Engineers

COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN

For the Town of

SPENCER, MASSACHUSETTS

Prepared for the
Spencer Planning Board

By the
Spencer Master Plan Committee

Michael Engel, Chairman
William Bowles, Vice Chairman
Hal Campbell, Planning Board
Kenneth Wheeler
Joan Allen
Marilyn Sharry
Linda Mandella

Former Committee Members: Wendy Beauvais, James Laney, Donna Flannery, Rick Gonzalez, David Beer, and Charlene Kaiser – Spencer Housing Authority.

Planning Board support provided by Timothy Smith, Planning Board Assistant.

April 2003

Technical Assistance Provided
by the
Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
(Stephen J. Wallace, Project Manager),
Dr. John Mullin, UMass Center for Economic Development,
and
Haley & Ward Inc., Engineers

Partial funding for this project was provided under Executive Order-418, through a scope of work approved by the State's Interagency Working Group.

SPENCER MASSACHUSETTS, 2003 COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN

Table of Contents

Chapter

Page

Introduction.....	1
Goals & Policies.....	3
Brief Town History.....	6
Town Government: Facilities & Services.....	8
Transportation Network	34
Housing.....	52
Economic Development	70
Land Use & Zoning.....	88
Implementation Plan.....	112

Maps

Following Page

Water System Service Area Map.....	11
Sewer System Service Area Map.....	12
Daily Traffic Volume Map	39
Existing Land Use Map.....	88
Town Zoning Map	90
Land Use Analysis Map.....	94
Future Land Use Map	100

Appendices

- Appendix A – Spencer Open Space & Recreation Plan
(serves as the Master Plan’s chapters on natural features and open space/recreation)
- Appendix B – Report of the Traffic & Parking Advisory Committee
- Appendix C – Fire Department Capital Equipment Needs Assessment
- Appendix D – Reuse Proposal for the David Prouty Intermediate School
- Appendix E – Water & Sewer System Analysis Report by Haley & Ward Inc.
- Appendix F – Master Plan Citizen Survey Results
- Appendix G – DHCD Downtown Resource Guide
- Appendix H – Master Plan Public Forums

TOWN OF SPENCER MASTER PLAN

AN INTRODUCTION

As with every entity, from the largest governmental and private organizations, to the individual family unit, the need to plan for the effective use of available resources is paramount. Without planning and structure, the chances of optimizing the best and highest value of human, natural and capital resources is diminished. In the case of community planning, small towns such as Spencer need a plan for managing its future growth. It is a fact of life that communities grow, whether through an increase in population, housing, and/or economic development activity. Managing growth has always been a considerable challenge for local governments. Towards this end, Spencer's town planners have recognized the need for a community Master Plan in order to help local officials act in concert on a common agenda for the long-range good of the Town.

Chapter 41, Section 81-D of Massachusetts General law states that a community Master Plan shall be "...a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality." It further states that such a plan "...identifies the goals and policies of the municipality for its future growth and development." In a practical sense, community Master Plans have always been intended to serve as a land use and future development policy guide for local decision makers. Typically, a community Master Plan does five things:

- ◆ Articulates the goals and objectives of the community (i.e., what the community wants for its future, what type of community it wants to be);
- ◆ Outlines the existing resources and conditions of a community (this is usually done through a review of existing data sources, collection of new data, and updates of inventory information);
- ◆ Evaluates and assesses the existing resources and conditions with an eye towards identifying shortfalls and deficiencies;
- ◆ Projects the current trends and conditions into the future in an effort to identify shortcomings that can be corrected through advanced planning, as well as the future needs of the community;
- ◆ Sets forth a strategy for addressing the needs of the community and helping the community become what it wants to be.

Although a community Master Plan has the latitude to deal with a variety of issues and concerns, there are several subjects that such a plan must address by law. Chapter 41, Section 81-D states that community Master Plans must contain the following elements: a goals and policies statement; a land use plan; chapters that deal with economic development, traffic circulation, natural and cultural resources, open space and recreation, community services and facilities; and an implementation plan.

This community Master Plan for the Town of Spencer sets forth the community's goals and provides the background data and analysis necessary for developing strategies to employ when guiding Spencer as it continues to grow and develop over the coming decades.



The Master Planning Process in Spencer: The Spencer Community Master Plan was prepared by the Spencer Master Plan Committee, which was appointed by the Town Administrator. The Committee reported to the Spencer Planning Board throughout the process. The Master Plan Committee was composed entirely of Spencer residents, some with experience on local boards, and some with no previous municipal experience. The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) provided technical assistance throughout the entirety of this project and Dr. John Mullin of UMass-

Amherst provided assistance with the public workshops and guidance on the overall direction of the Plan. The Master Plan Committee met on a monthly basis (often twice a month) and all meetings were open to the public. Several joint meetings were held with some of Spencer's municipal boards and committees including the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Water and Sewer Department Superintendents, and other municipal department heads. Interested citizens also stopped by on a regular basis to provide their input.

During the initial stages of the Master Plan's preparation, interviews were conducted with all key municipal committees, boards, commissions and personnel. Everyone contacted was very helpful in terms of assisting with the update of inventory information, identifying upcoming needs, and providing candid assessments of the challenges they face. The Master Plan Committee reviewed this input in detail and is very grateful for the assistance rendered.



To further increase the public's involvement in the Master Plan update process, the Committee prepared a citizen survey to solicit the opinions and desires of the people and businesses residing in Spencer. The survey was sent to every household and business in Spencer in early 2002. The survey results were tabulated during the spring of 2002 and presented to the Spencer Board of Selectmen at their evening meeting on June 10, 2002. All told, the Spencer Master Plan Committee held 35 evening meetings (all open to the public), eleven

meetings with other municipal entities, and three well-attended public forums. All Master Plan Committee meeting agendas and minutes are available for public review at the Planning Board's office in the Town Hall.

SPENCER MASTER PLAN GOALS & POLICIES

Spencer Master Plan - Vision Statement -

In the year 2013, we envision Spencer to be a cohesive and vibrant community in which people can enjoy living and working together throughout all the stages of their lives.

Spencer will achieve this vision by providing quality educational and municipal services, and by creating an environment that encourages participation in community life, while maintaining its rural character.

Community Facilities & Services – Goal

The goal of Spencer’s Town Government is that its infrastructure provides a level of public safety and service that meets the current and future needs of the community, while ensuring an efficient use of resources and enhancing the quality of life in Spencer.

Community Facilities & Services - Objectives

- Compliance with all federal, state and local laws and regulations;
- Provide necessary police and fire services that ensures proper public safety;
- Provide a quality education climate that promotes enthusiasm for learning and knowledge;
- Stabilization of the local tax rate; and
- Increased access and delivery of town information and services through the utilization of technology.

Transportation - Goal

The goal of Spencer’s transportation circulation system is to provide a well-maintained and efficient system of roadways.

Transportation - Objectives

- Provide a system of roads, sidewalks, and bridges that are safe and structurally sound.
- Ensure that Spencer’s transportation system has sufficient capacity to handle projected levels of traffic.
- Ensure the safety of residential areas while optimizing traffic flow and parking in commercial zones.
- Ensure that Spencer’s traffic circulation system works with the natural contours of the land in an effort to minimize negative environmental impact.
- Promote regional mass transit options in an effort to reduce traffic congestion.

Economic Development - Goal

The goal of Spencer's economic strategy is to maintain stability and manage growth of our in-town commercial and industrial sectors in order to expand local opportunities for meeting the employment and commerce needs of Spencer residents.

Economic Development - Objectives

- Increase employment opportunities for Spencer residents.
- Increase the tax base through controlled commercial and industrial development.
- Expand retail and service opportunities to meet the daily needs of Spencer's growing population.
- Maintain a quality educational system that produces a professional and educated population that is able to fulfill the regional economy's emerging employment needs.

Housing – Goal

Spencer's goal for housing is to ensure that housing opportunities are available that meet the needs of a diverse population having a broad range of income levels, and that future housing growth occurs in a controlled manner consistent with the Town's rural character.

Housing - Objectives

- The growth of housing should be controlled so that it is proportional to the Town's ability to provide municipal services.
- The Town of Spencer should seek to meet the State goal of having 10% of its housing stock available to low and moderate-income households.
- The Town should encourage developers to incorporate open space designs into new housing projects.
- The Town should ensure that Spencer's housing stock is developed and maintained in a manner that ensures compliance with existing building codes and work with property owners to achieve compliance.
- The Town should revise its zoning bylaw to clearly define the various housing types allowed in its residential zoning districts.

Land Use – Goals

The goals of Spencer's land use and zoning policies are to:

- Revitalize and beautify downtown Spencer.
- Preserve the rural character of north and south Spencer.

Land Use – Objectives

- Revise and upgrade the Town's zoning bylaw and subdivision regulation to reflect specific recommendations of the Master Plan elements.

- Achieve consistent, coordinated planning and administration among Town boards.
- Strengthen the downtown's land use pattern by pursuing streetscape and façade improvements, building use and reuse projects that enhance the area's variety of businesses and activities, and through public and private efforts to move the downtown toward being more pedestrian friendly.
- Protect Spencer's natural resource base, including water resources, corridors of wildlife habitats, and scenic landscape views.
- Strengthen the industrial districts land use pattern by developing these districts in ways that are consistent with the carrying capacity of the land and associated infrastructure and which provide tangible benefits to the community such as jobs and tax base.

SPENCER, MASSACHUSETTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Spencer is a small town rich in history and many structures of architectural value. Over the years, it has grown from a tiny village beside the Boston Post Road to a town of about 11,000 inhabitants.

Spencer is located halfway between Boston and Springfield on Route 9. It was established as a district from a part of Leicester and assigned its name by Lieutenant Governor Spencer Phipps. It was incorporated as an independent town in 1753. Spencer was a major stopping place on the Old Boston Post stage route between Boston and Hartford and on to New York. The town has its spot in history. George Washington spent the night in Jenk's Tavern and General Henry Knox pushed his cannons through the streets of the town on his way to Boston from Ticonderoga. In 1753, Spencer had only one road called Route 9. In 1756, two new roads were laid out, the South Country Road and the North Country Road.



In the beginning, the main source of livelihood in Spencer was farming. In 1812, two new industries had their beginnings and played a major part in Spencer's development. They were boot (later shoe) factories and the wire mills. Spencer's first mill was built in 1740 on the Seven-Mile River. In 1811, Josiah Green began making shoes and in 1812, Elliot Prouty began manufacturing wire.

At one time, Spencer had eleven (11) factories and twenty-six (26) buildings for wire drawing. The Howe family of Spencer was known for its inventions. William Howe developed a wooden truss bridge and his brother Tyler patented a spring bed. Their nephew Elias Howe, Jr., invented the lock stitch sewing machine.



In the following years, Spencer grew and prospered. In 1839, the first town hall was constructed and eighteen (18) years later, Denny Hall, the town's first high school, was built. In 1888-1889, four (4) prominent citizens (David Prouty, Richard Sugden, Luther Hill and Nathaniel Myrick) presented the town with a new high school, a library, a public park and the Spencer Agricultural Fair Grounds.

At one time, Spencer had four major taverns that served travelers passing through Spencer on the Old Country Road. They were located in what was know as the “lower village” in the present downtown area and one (1) at the “upper village”, the area near the Congregational Church. These three (3) taverns in the lower village were:

- “Jenks Tavern” located on the west corner of Pleasant and Main Streets (later the site of the Massasoit Hotel).
- The “Mason House” located on Main Street east of Sugden Block where the current shopping center parking lot is located.
- The “Livermore House” located on the west corner of High and Main Streets.
- The “Bemis Tavern” located in the “upper village” stood on the corner of Ash and Main Streets.

The war of Independence broke out in 1774 and found Spencer ready to take part in it. Fifty-six (56) men under Captain Ebenezer Mason immediately set out to Boston. Many of these men later took part in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Three hundred and thirteen (313) Spencer men are known to have served in the Civil War. Thirty-two (32) lost their lives in the service of their country.

When wire making and shoe manufacturing went out of business, they were replaced by many new industries. Spencer from the beginning has been an extraordinary and vigorous community. The future continues to be bright and promising.



TOWN GOVERNMENT: FACILITIES AND SERVICES

This chapter of the Master Plan presents a general description of Spencer's town government, municipal facilities and services. For this chapter, each department head was interviewed and information was collected regarding organizational structure, staffing, budget, responsibilities, equipment, facilities, programs offered and upcoming capital needs. Before beginning an in-depth analysis of each municipal department, it is important to understand from where the Town gets its revenue and the tax implications for Spencer households (local tax rate, average single family home tax bill, average single family home assessed valuation, local tax levies and state aid).

Table TG-1
Year 2001 Local Tax Rates

<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Charlton</u>	<u>Dudley</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
\$11.27	\$14.31	\$12.50	\$16.89	\$17.40	\$14.79	\$14.47

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Tax rate is per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

The table above indicates that Spencer has the lowest tax rate of other comparable communities in the region, while Oxford had the highest. The next table translates the local tax rate into the average single-family home tax bill for the year 2001.

Table TG-2
Average Single Family Tax Bill - Year 2001

<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Charlton</u>	<u>Dudley</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
\$1,465	\$1,937	\$1,422	\$1,802	\$1,882	\$2,520	\$1,790

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

The table above indicates that Spencer has one of the lowest single-family tax bill averages of comparable communities in the region, with only Dudley having a slightly lower average tax bill. The average single-family tax bill in Uxbridge was over \$1,000 higher than the average in Spencer. As the average household tax bill is based on the assessed valuation of the home in question, the next table looks at the average assessed valuation of households in Spencer and comparable communities in the region.

Table TG-3
Average Assessed Valuation Per Household - Year 2001

<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Charlton</u>	<u>Dudley</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
\$130,034	\$135,331	\$113,765	\$106,670	\$108,163	\$170,391	\$123,714

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Before going further, it is important to understand from where Spencer gets its money in terms of both local tax levies and State assistance. The next two tables look at where Spencer is getting their tax dollars from at the local level and the amount of State aid the Town receives.

**Table TG-4
Local Tax Levies - Year 2001**

<u>Community</u>	<u>Taxes - Residential</u>	<u>Taxes - Commercial</u>	<u>Taxes - Industrial</u>	<u>Personal Property</u>	<u>Total Taxes</u>
Spencer	\$5,444,418	\$499,538	\$237,712	\$200,358	\$6,382,026
Charlton	\$7,648,494	\$555,234	\$396,800	\$473,759	\$9,074,287
Dudley	\$4,647,355	\$251,883	\$137,284	\$119,946	\$5,156,468
Leicester	\$6,107,824	\$403,955	\$215,708	\$212,861	\$6,940,348
Oxford	\$8,015,139	\$842,419	\$652,761	\$454,914	\$9,965,233
Uxbridge	\$9,388,828	\$629,293	\$400,377	\$416,144	\$10,834,642
Webster*	\$8,385,816	\$2,443,924	\$562,491	\$690,293	\$12,116,607

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Webster* total tax figure includes \$34,084 in open space tax levies.

In terms of total tax dollars generated by the economic sector (businesses and industries), Spencer ranks in the middle of the pack when compared to other similar communities in the region. However, Spencer's economic sector fairs better when looked at as a percentage of the local tax base. Spencer's economic sector accounts for 11.5% of the Town's total tax base. Only Oxford (15%) and Webster (25%) have a higher percentage. This indicates that Spencer has a decent economic base when compared to its neighbors.

**Table TG-5
Non-Education State Aid - Year 2001**

<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Charlton</u>	<u>Dudley</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
\$2,289,797	\$1,416,714	\$1,689,343	\$1,996,773	\$2,490,551	\$1,753,585	\$2,870,603

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Presented figures DO NOT include State education aid.

The above table indicates that Spencer received just over two and one-quarter million dollars in State aid in 2001. Only Oxford and Webster received more in State aid during this time period. Please note that school-related State aid was not included in these figures because some of the communities in the table are part of a regional school district (thus State aid goes directly to the district), while other towns have individual school systems (thus State aid goes directly to the town). On the whole, Spencer's amount of State aid has risen steadily over the past five years, the only exception being State highway funds (Chapter 90). Chapter 90 funds are provided for local road maintenance and repair, and the amount of money a town receives is based on the amount of public roadway mileage. Spencer received roughly \$395,000 in Chapter 90 funds in 1998, and this amount was reduced to roughly \$260,000 in 1999, with slightly lesser amounts for the next two years. Further cuts in Chapter 90 assistance are expected for the next couple of State budget cycles.

Adding the taxes raised locally (\$6.38 million) to State-aid received (\$2.48 million), plus roughly two million dollars raised from other funds (licenses, permits, fees, interest, etc.) equals the amount of money that Spencer had to work with in 2001. All told, the Town of Spencer appropriated **\$10,810,093** for the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001. Please note that this figure **does not** include the budgets of the water & sewer departments, as they are paid for through user fees.

Water Department:

Organization: A three-member elected Board of Water Commissioners manages the Water Department. The Board meets on a monthly basis. The Water Superintendent is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Department and is appointed by the Board.

Staff: The Department consists of the Water Superintendent, Assistant Water Superintendent, one laborer and two administrative support staff that are shared with the Sewer Department.

Budget: For the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001, the Department had an operating budget of \$645,464. Water customers pay for the system's operation, however, the Water Department is not considered an "enterprise system" (where the users cover all of the costs) in the classic sense. Major capital equipment is usually paid for as a warrant article at the annual Town Meeting. Customer billing is done quarterly, in conjunction with the sewer bills. It should be noted that the water rates are currently partially subsidized by a water rate stabilization grant from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The DEP grant provides the Water Department with roughly \$71,000 per year to help stabilize local water rates. The grant is for ten years and Spencer is in the fifth year of the grant cycle, meaning the grant will expire sometime in 2007.



Facilities: The Department's main facility is on located Meadow Road. There are two pump stations, one along South Spencer Road and one on Watson Street in Leicester. There is one water tower on Moose Hill behind David Prouty High School (capacity: 1.5 million gallons).

Equipment: The Department's equipment consists of three trucks (dump, pick-up and utility vehicle). All are in good shape.

System Description: The water system is comprised of two groundwater wells. The first is located at Meadow Road, and has the capacity to deliver one million to 1.3 millions gallons per day (gpd). The Meadow Road well went on line in 1995. The second well is located in South Spencer, and has the capacity to deliver one million gpd. The South Spencer well went on line in 1980. All told, the water system has the capacity to deliver 2.3-million gpd. The system's average daily water use is roughly 650,000 gpd with a summertime peak demand of 1.1-million gpd. The Water Department estimates a per capita water usage of 67 gpd per person, which is consistent with other municipal water systems. The Department can also utilize a surface water source (Shaw Pond) in

case of emergencies. Shaw Pond is currently not an active water supply source and its water is not treated. A map of the Water Department's service area can be found on the following page.

The Department uses a metered system to keep track of water usage. Currently, less than 10% of the system's water is unaccounted for, and this is an excellent water retention rate (leakage from older pipes is the major contributor to water loss in the system). Most municipal water departments experience a water loss of anywhere from 20% to 30%, depending on the age of the system.

The Department will resume its pipe replacement program in the spring of 2002. The majority of the system's pipes are 40-50 years old, although some are quite a bit older. Water quality problems include iron and manganese (the Department's treatment plant filters for both). The water system's pH level is a bit high, and this will likely have to be dealt with in the future. The Water Department owns all of the land within the Zone I protective well radii (the land around the well's zone of contribution), and most of the land within the Zone II protective well radii.

Upcoming Capital Needs: There are no concrete plans for expanding the water system and no new sources will be needed during the next ten years as the system's demand is well below its capacity. A satellite well is scheduled for construction near the current Meadow Road well sometime in 2003 (estimated cost: \$100,000). This new well will essentially replace the existing well at Meadow Road. The South Spencer well will need to be retrofitted for corrosion control next year (estimated cost \$150,000). A larger building may be needed for the South Spencer pump station, depending on the equipment needed for corrosion control. The Department will likely pursue grants in order to offset the cost of expanding the South Spencer pump station.

Sewer Department:

Organization: A three-member elected Board of Sewer Commissioners manages the Sewer Department. The Board meets on a monthly basis. The Sewer Superintendent is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Department and is appointed by the Board.

Staff: The Department's staff consists of three full-time employees. The State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is mandating the Town to hire a fourth person for the wastewater treatment plant, and the additional person may be brought on board next year. The Sewer Department shares two part-time clerks with the Water Department. Currently, the Department does not have the manpower for sewer line and manhole inspection/maintenance. Lack of maintenance creates problems for the system's users, and the Town has had to settle several large insurance claims because of the system's lack of maintenance. Except for sewer pipe blockage inspections, private contractors handle all sewer repairs and emergencies.

Budget: For the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001, the Department had an operating budget of \$600,186. Unlike the Water Department, the Sewer Department operates under the Enterprise System, which means that sewer users pay for the system's operating costs **and** capital equipment. The Department tries to pay for large-scale capital improvements through state and federal grant opportunities.

TOWN OF SPENCER

Map 1 Municipal Water System Map



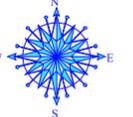
LEGEND:

Infrastructure
Municipal Water Service Line

Transportation

Road
Railroad
Route
Unimproved Road

Hydrography
Stream
Intermittent Stream
Water Body



1000 0 1000 Feet

Source data:
Water Service Line information was supplied by the Town of Spencer. Digital data was developed by CMRPC.
Water Service Line information was supplied by the Town of Spencer. Digital data was developed by CMRPC.
1:25,000 hydrography was derived from USGS Digital Line Graph files and later enhanced by MassGIS.
MassGIS 1:5,000 roads were derived from digital orthophotography and distributed by MassGIS.
All other data are from MassGIS.



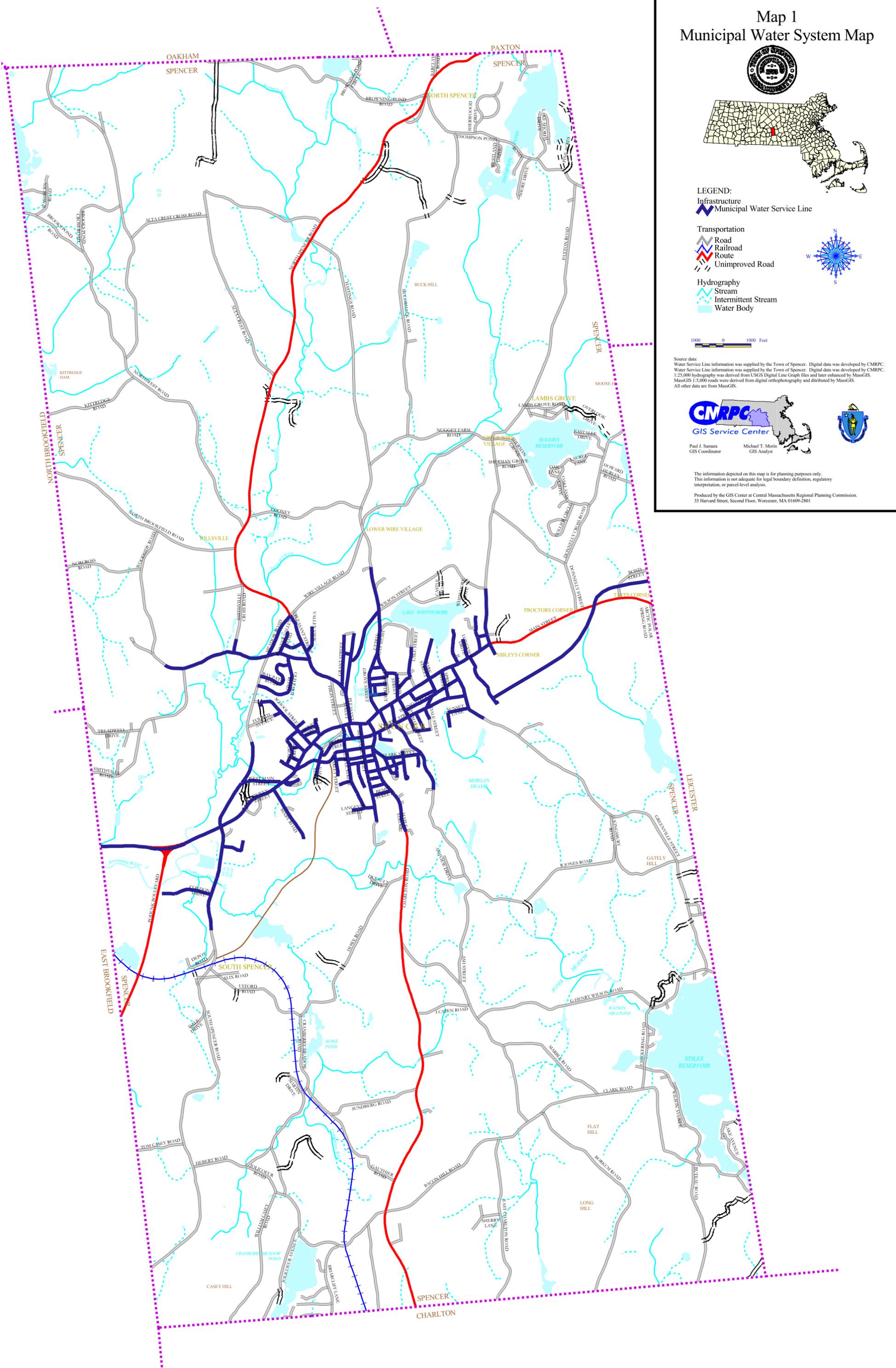
Paul J. Samara
GIS Coordinator

Michael T. Morin
GIS Analyst



The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only.
This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis.

Produced by the GIS Center at Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission,
35 Harvard Street, Second Floor, Worcester, MA 01609-2801



Treatment Plant Details: The Town of Spencer constructed its first wastewater treatment plant in 1897, which consisted of eleven sand filter beds off of Main Street and South Spencer Road. The plant's primary treatment system was built in the 1940's, and the secondary system was built in 1970. The constructed wetlands for advanced treatment were built in 1988. Treated wastewater is discharged into the wetlands for settling before it empties into Cranberry Brook (a monitoring well is in place at each wetland although the Department is not required to monitor them). The plant's aeration system was updated in 1996. The wastewater treatment plant was privately operated until the Town took over its management in 1992. A map of the Sewer Department's service area can be found on the following page.

The plant's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit is currently under review by the State DEP and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The new NPDES permit is expected to be issued early in 2002; however, the plant is currently permitted to discharge 1,000,080 gallons per day (gpd). The plant's point of discharge is Cranberry Brook. The Brook's carrying capacity is quite limited in terms of water volume. Thus, it is unlikely that Spencer will ever be able to discharge more than the currently permitted amount. Other than FlexCon, the plant does not treat any industrial wastewater. Sludge from the plant is hauled away to Woonsocket, RI where it is incinerated.

The system currently treats an average of 480,000 gallons of wastewater per day. This is well below the system's normal demand of roughly 700,000 gpd. The drop-off in system demand is due to the region's extended dry period. It should be noted that the system has a serious problem with groundwater infiltrating sewer pipes. Many of the system's pipes are over 100 years old and are either broken, have tree roots growing through them, or have some other type of flow restriction. This infiltration problem has been quite serious in the past, forcing the Sewer Department to install a moratorium on new sewer connections. The moratorium is no longer in place, but new large-scale users cannot tie into the system without DEP approval. During heavy storm events, the system is forced to operate at maximum capacity and overflows are a frequent occurrence.

The Sewer Department does not have a sewer pipe preventative maintenance program; rather, the pipes are replaced as they break. The pipes within Spencer's industrial park are relatively new; however, they were paid for and are maintained by the businesses within the park. The Sewer Commissioners do not have a system expansion plan and a definitive service area has never been finalized. Rather, the Commissioners are willing to extend sewer lines if the developer pays the cost and DEP approval is granted.

Water Quality Issues: As evidenced by the Department's on-going negotiations for renewing its NPDES permit, the EPA is concerned with the amounts of copper, phosphorous, chlorine and nitrogen discharged by the plant. The EPA is requiring the Department to monitor its discharge of these chemicals and prepare an evaluation study. Additional treatment requirements may be required based on the study results.

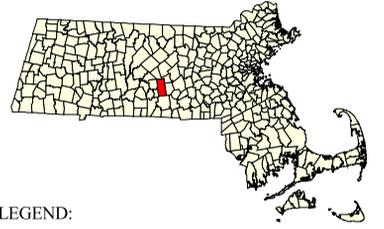
General Issues Facing the Department:

- Although the Sewer Department periodically raises the service rates, the Department's fee structure has not been reviewed in a very long time (1982). The Department is barely bringing

TOWN OF SPENCER

Map 2

Municipal Sewer System Map



LEGEND:
Infrastructure
Municipal Sewer Service Line

Transportation
Road
Railroad
Route
Unimproved Road

Hydrography
Stream
Intermittent Stream
Water Body

1000 0 1000 2000 Feet

Source data:
Sewer Service Line information was supplied by the Town of Spencer. Digital data was developed by CMRPC.
Water Service Line information was supplied by the Town of Spencer. Digital data was developed by CMRPC.
1:25,000 hydrography was derived from USGS Digital Line Graph files and later enhanced by MassGIS.
MassGIS 1:5,000 roads were derived from digital orthophotography and distributed by MassGIS.
All other data are from MassGIS.



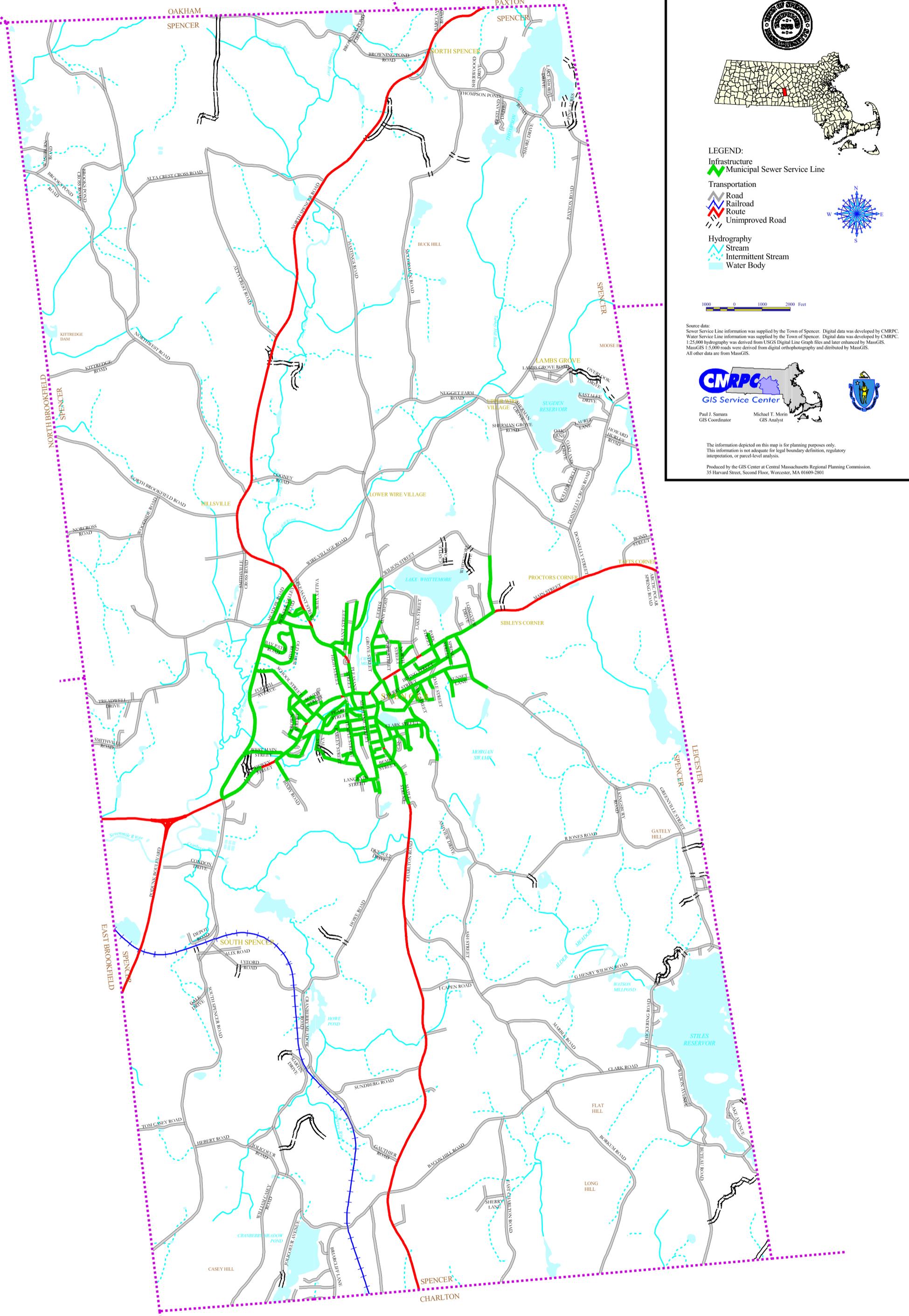
Paul J. Samara
GIS Coordinator

Michael T. Morin
GIS Analyst



The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only.
This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis.

Produced by the GIS Center at Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission,
35 Harvard Street, Second Floor, Worcester, MA 01609-2801



in enough revenue to cover its operating costs, let alone system inspection, system maintenance and long-term capital improvements.

- The Department does not have a policy on treating industrial wastewater. This makes it difficult for new industries proposing to tie into the sewer system because there is no clear guidance as to what they will need to do in order to tie in. Rather, industrial sewer connections are considered on a case-by-case basis.
- The Sewer Department does not have a plan for sewer line expansion, nor has it reserved any excess capacity for future economic development. What little excess capacity exists could easily be used up by future residential development (if the developer was willing to pay for sewer line extension). Thus, the Department may not be able to offer sewer service to new businesses and industries wishing to locate in Spencer.
- Staffing is a concern. Right now, the Department has one less person than the minimum staffing level mandated by DEP for the wastewater treatment plant, let alone work on a much needed sewer pipe replacement program.
- The infiltration problem needs to be dealt with because it will seriously hamper Spencer's efforts to promote economic development. New businesses and industries cannot tie into the system without DEP approval because the infiltration problem has reduced the plant's treatment capacity. Municipal sewer and water are two key services that new businesses and industries look for when deciding where to locate.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

- Depending on what the DEP requires as part of issuing the Town's new NPDES permit, studies for chlorination, copper and phosphorus may be needed (currently estimated at \$30,000). If the studies indicate that facility upgrades are necessary, then additional funds would be needed.
- The Department sorely needs a detailed sewer line capacity study (currently estimated at \$100,000), so that it may develop a prioritized sewer pipe replacement program.

Highway Department:

Organization: The Town Administrator appoints the Highway Superintendent, who manages the Department on a day-to-day basis.

Staff: The Highway Department consists of nine full-time staff, including the Highway Superintendent. There are two part-time secretaries and part-time labor help during the summer.

Budget: For the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001, the Highway Department had an operating budget of \$616,015. Locally raised funds cover the Department's operating budget, while State funds (Chapter 90 highway money) are used for road maintenance & repair, and the purchase of equipment. It should be noted that there has been a steady reduction in the Chapter 90 highway funds over the past five years. In 1998, Spencer received roughly \$395,000 in Chapter 90 funds. This figure was reduced to roughly \$260,000 in 1999. The Chapter 90 funds were further reduced over the next two years, with Spencer receiving \$256,860 in such funds in 2001. Given the State's current fiscal crisis, further cuts to the Chapter 90 fund may be in the offing. The State has also introduced new guidelines for how local communities may use Chapter 90 funds, in particular, the purchase of equipment.

Equipment:

- 1995 pick-up truck (fair condition)
- 1987 pick-up truck (poor)
- 1972 catch basin cleaner (poor)
- 1982 & 1984 sand trucks (both in fair condition)
- 1994 & 1996 dump trucks (both in good condition)
- 1998, 2000 & 2002 combination sander/dump trucks (all three in good condition)
- 1984 loader (fair)
- 1996 loader (good)
- 1995 backhoe (good)
- 1997 tractor (good)
- 1998 street sweeper (fair-to-good)
- 1974 chipper (poor)
- 1995 compressor (good)
- 1960's roller (poor)
- 1970 & 1977 trailers (both in fair condition)
- 2001 trailer (good condition)
- 1974 one-ton roller (good)
- 1982 3.5-ton roller (good)
- 1970's paver (fair)
- 1991 hanging sander (good)

Duties: The Department's primary responsibility is road maintenance, although it also maintains several municipal facilities, the Old Cemetery on North Street and several Town parks. The Department oversees the construction of new roads in subdivisions to make sure they will meet the Town's roadway standards. The Department will participate in a pre-review of large-scale subdivision plans in conjunction with the Building Inspector and other municipal department heads. The Department also issues driveway and open road permits. The Department is also responsible for maintaining the numerous dams throughout Town.

Although they are State roads, the Town maintains the entirety of Route 31 and a large stretch of Route 9 (from Water Street to Spring Street). The northern section of Route 31 has recently been repaved; however, the southern section is in disrepair.

The Highway Superintendent maintains a list of Town roads in need of repairs, a local roadway improvement plan, if you will. The Board of Selectmen approves the annual list of roads to be repaved, and the list is shared with the Water & Sewer Departments in an effort to promote coordination. In the past, the Water & Sewer Departments would conduct their pipe repair work without first contacting the Highway Department. This led to repaved roadways being torn up for pipe replacement and manholes being paved over. The Highway Superintendent is willing to take suggestions from the Sewer & Water Departments as to what roads to repave based on their pipe replacement programs. Repaving is usually paid for by the State's Chapter 90 funds. The following streets have been scheduled for repaving in the summer of 2002:

- Urban Streets: May, Holmes, Irving (from May to Muzzy), and Bixby Road.
- Streets With Sewer and/or Water Lines: Maple, Highland, Summit, Starr, Pope, Church, Lincoln, Langevin, Pearl, Valley, McDonald, Grant, Lake, Power, Duggan, Brown and Jones Street.
- Country Roads: Gauthier Road, East Charlton Street, Greenville Street, Brooks Pond Crossroad, Wire Village Road, a section of Northwest Street, and GH Wilson Road.

Issues Facing the Department: The Superintendent does not feel that roadside drainage is a big issue for Spencer. He estimates that roughly 90% percent of local roads are free of drainage problems. In terms of drainage, the Department conducts basic maintenance: cutting back vegetation and replacing broken drainage structures. The Superintendent believes that beavers cause most of the local road flooding problems in Spencer.

One area of concern involves the narrow, unimproved roads leading to the houses around Spencer's many lakes. The roads are very narrow and may not be able to accommodate emergency vehicles. The Department receives a modest amount of money (\$2,000-\$4,000) per year to maintain private roads for emergency vehicle accessibility (this is over and above plowing and sanding). There are over 90 private roads consisting of approximately twenty miles in Spencer.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

- The 1998 street-sweeper may need to be replaced in the near future. The dealer is out of business and the Department can no longer get parts for it. The Superintendent would like to replace it with a combination street-sweeper and catch basin cleaner (estimated cost: \$110,000).
- Replace both sander trucks (estimated cost: \$100,000 a piece).
- Replace the 1987 pick-up truck (estimated cost: \$30,000).
- Depending on how strict the State will be in enforcing the federal stormwater management regulations, the Department may have to expend significant funds for this purpose.

The Department will not be able to purchase any of the above capital equipment items if it continues to rely on the State's Chapter 90-highway aid as the funding source for purchase. This is due not only because of the reduction in Chapter 90 funding, but also because of new restrictions on how the funds may be used. It is unlikely the Department can identify other options for funding the purchase of capital equipment, other than the local tax levy. In terms of staff, the Department needs to add an additional laborer or two.

Board of Health:

Organization: Spencer has a three-member elected Board of Health. Each member is elected to a three-year term. The Board meets on a monthly basis. The Board of health appoints the Health Agent who handles all health inspections.

Staff: The Health Agent is full-time. The Development Services Department provides administrative support to the Health Agent. The Town's transfer station falls under the Board of Health's jurisdiction and has two part-time employees.

Budget: For the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001, the Board's operating budget was \$54,115, while the transfer station's operating budget was \$594,293 for the same period.

Programs:

- Transfer station compliance monitoring
- Blood pressure, rabbi, and flu clinics
- Health regulations briefings for local restaurants
- Health inspections for restaurants, retail stores, taverns, tanning establishments, therapy establishments (including massage), camping establishments, and bathing beaches
- Household hazardous waste disposal days (four a year, in conjunction with five other towns)
- Title V inspections (including performing soil percolation tests for new building lots, reviewing septic plan revisions and witnessing the installation of all on-site sewage treatment systems)
- Permits and approves all private drinking water wells
- Health code inspections for all Section 8 housing
- All housing complaints

It should be noted that the Town and Spencer Savings Bank have grant money available for homeowners with failed septic systems. Soil is a major issue for Spencer, as there is not much percable soil left. It should also be noted that the small cottages around the lakes are all on on-site septic systems.

Upcoming Capital Needs: Much depends on which option the Town chooses to meet its solid waste disposal needs. The Town will begin negotiating a new 20-year disposal contract next year and will have several options from which to choose. If the current situation is extended into the future, the following capital expenditures will be required:

- Site improvements at transfer station (estimated at \$50,000-\$100,000)
- Three trash trailers at \$75,000 a piece
- \$50,000-\$60,000 for valve replacement/equipment maintenance

In addition, the Board of Health will likely need an additional inspector (at least part-time) at some point during the next decade. There has been a steady increase in the number of inspections to perform, as well as in the number of items to inspect. It is quite likely that the State's health code will continue to expand rather than contract. More items to inspect means more time needed to complete an inspection.

Development Services Department:

Organization: The Town Administrator appoints Department's various inspectors.

Staff: The Building Inspector position is full-time. There are two part-time clerks that provide administrative support to the Department's various inspectors, as well as the Health Inspector, and the Conservation Commission. The Department's other inspectors include a Wire Inspector, Gas Inspector, and a Plumbing Inspector that serve part-time as needed.

Budget: For the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001, the Building component of the Development Services Department had a modest operating budget of \$70,477.

Development Review Procedures: The Building Inspector has limited interaction with Planning Board on new development plans. The Inspector will review large-scale development plans for zoning compliance *before* they are brought to the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals. It is quite likely that large-scale development plans will be reviewed together by several of the Town's major department heads (in essence, an ad hoc technical review committee), with the applicant present at this meeting. Thus, outstanding issues and conflicts can be resolved before the development application makes it to the public hearing stage.

House Inspection Procedures: Each new home will likely go through five or six inspections before a Certificate of Occupancy is granted at completion. The Building Inspector conducts an inspection before the foundation is poured, before the foundation is backfilled, when the house is framed, and when the house is insulated. The other three inspectors will conduct their inspections as needed.

Other Responsibilities: The Building Inspector provides technical assistance to the Town's land use boards regarding zoning changes (research and drafting of zoning amendments).

Upcoming Capital Needs: There were no capital needs identified for the Development Services Department, however, staffing is an issue. The Department needs more clerical help to free up inspectors for other duties for which they haven't had the time. For instance, State law says that multi-family units (3 units or more) must be inspected every five years. This is not happening in Spencer because the Building Inspector has to spend so much time on paperwork that could be accomplished by additional clerical support. The Department may eventually need an additional inspector, probably part-time at first.

Fire Department :

Organization: The Fire Department is overseen by a full-time Fire Chief operating under the form of a strong chief statute that is appointed by the Town Administrator. The chief recommends all department officers to the Town Administrator for appointment.

Staff: the Fire Chief is the only full-time employee. There are 50 paid on-call fire fighters that serve as needed. The on-call fire fighters are paid by the hour. The Department does not have any clerical support. The Department is part of the District #7 Fire/Ambulance Mutual Aid Compact, which consists of 26 Worcester County communities. The Spencer Rescue Squad is operated as a separate independent entity.

Budget: For the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001, the Department had an operating budget of \$178,875.

Equipment:

- Engine #2 - pumper truck, (1998, good condition)
- Engine #3 - pumper truck, (1986, poor condition)
- Engine #4 - pumper truck, (1995, good condition)

- Combination ladder/pumper truck (1983, poor condition)
- Tanker truck (1977, fair condition)
- Special operations vehicle (1984, fair condition)
- Rescue vehicle (1999, good condition)
- Forestry Unit #1 (1980, fair condition)
- Forestry Unit #2 (recent acquisition from military surplus, fair condition)
- 4-Wheel ATV (2000, good condition)
- Car – old cruiser (1995, fair condition)

The Department attempts to replace a piece of equipment after 20 years of service. In some cases, older equipment is refurbished in order to extend its service life. Large-scale equipment purchases are usually funded through a Proposition 2½ debt exclusion.



Facility: The current fire station was built around 1975. In terms of housing the Department's equipment, the station is at full capacity and has no additional room for new equipment. Sub stations in the outlying areas may be needed in the future to address future growth.

Permits Issued: All told, the Department issues 39 different permits, most of which require on-site inspections. The Department conducts inspections for fire alarms and sprinkler systems for businesses, industries,

residences, schools, rest homes, day care facilities and medical facilities.

Programs: The Department offers fire safety programs to a variety of audiences, particularly school-age children. The fire safety programs are made available through a S.A.F.E. grant from the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services. Without this grant, the fire safety programs would cease to exist.

Other Responsibilities: The Fire Department is the first line of response for hazardous waste spills. The Department will call in the State's regional hazardous materials response team if the spill is more than they can handle. The Department also provides rescue services for auto accidents, rapid intervention teams, as well as search and rescue services. The Department provides each fire fighter with close to 100 hours of training per year and a training course consisting of 50 classes for new recruits administered by Fire District 7. The Department also supports a dive team.

Trends and Comparisons: In addition to records kept by the Spencer Fire Department, the Office of the State Fire Marshall maintains an inventory of fire statistics for all Massachusetts communities, the last available inventory year being 1999. The table below presents a count of the total fires for Spencer for the year 1999, as well as other comparable communities in the region.

**Table TG-6
Total Fires by Community - Year 1999**

<u>Community</u>	<u># of Fires</u>	<u>Per 1,000 Residents</u>	<u>Estimated Dollar Loss</u>
Spencer	46	3.9	\$64,000
Charlton	47	4.2	\$44,516
Dudley	14	1.4	\$157,600
Leicester	49	4.7	\$350,500
Oxford	14	1.1	\$62,550
Uxbridge	4	0.4	\$11,000
Webster	119	7.2	\$357,984

Source: 1999 Annual Report of the Massachusetts State Fire Marshall.

The Fire Department responded to 320 calls in the year 2000, down from a high of 394 response calls in 1996. The number of response calls has varied year to year, but the overall trend has been a decline in the number of calls both in Spencer and statewide. Although a thorough analysis has not been prepared, the State Fire Marshall believes that much of the drop can be attributed to the installation of sprinkler systems in newly constructed buildings.

Upcoming Capital Needs: The Department will likely need to replace or refurbish Engine #3, the combination ladder/pumper truck, the tanker truck, the special operations vehicle and forestry Unit #1 at some point during the next five-to-seven years. The current cost estimate for replacing all four vehicles is one million dollars. Maintenance of the current fire station will most certainly be needed. The roof is in need of repair (money has already been budgeted for this purpose), the bays need new doors, building insulation is needed, an exhaust system is needed for the equipment area (this last item is estimated at \$50-\$75,000), paving is needed around the station, and removing the hump near Dewey Street (estimated cost: \$20,000). The Department would also like to investigate its options for building a training facility in Spencer, perhaps in conjunction with some of the neighboring communities (current cost estimated at \$250,000). In terms of staff, the Department foresees the need of adding two additional full-time fire fighters over the next decade. Currently, weekday staffing is an issue. Since so many of the volunteer firefighters work outside of town, the Department has to scramble to cover weekday emergencies. The Department also foresees the need of adding some clerical support, even if it's part-time.

Police Department

Staff: The Department has 17 full-time officers (including the Chief of Police), four full-time dispatchers, five part-time dispatchers, and a part-time maintenance person.

Budget: For the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001, the Department had an operating budget of \$1,058,747.

Equipment:

- 2 cruisers from 2000 (good condition)
- 1 cruiser from 1999 (good)
- 1 cruiser from 1995 (fair)
- 1 cruiser from 1994 (fair)
- 1 four-wheel drive blazer 1998 (good)
- 2 disabled cruisers (unusable)

Facility: The police station was built in 1987. The station has a lockdown facility consisting of seven holding cells. The Department makes a bit of additional income by letting other towns use its lockdown facility. In terms of interior space utilization, the station is currently at full capacity. It should be noted that the Department's dispatch center does not meet State standards and will have to be dealt with in the near future (no cost estimates available).

Programs:

- DARE drug education program at Maple Street School and David Prouty High School
- Safety program for 3rd graders
- Bicycle patrols in downtown Spencer
- Summertime lake patrols (watercraft loaned to the Department by local watercraft dealer)
- Crime prevention programs for seniors
- Teen dating violence program for 7th and 10th grades
- Drunk driving program for the 10th grade
- Neighborhood watch program with quarterly public forums
- Crime tip hotline
- Monthly news column in the New Leader
- Free security surveys for Spencer residents and businesses
- Web page for the Department

Trends and Comparisons: A complete review of the Police Department's crime statistics for the past decade is not possible due to changes made to the Department's data management system instituted in the mid-1990s. However, a review of available statistics indicates that Spencer is relatively free of serious criminal activity. The Spencer Police Department 32,707 calls were made to the Police Department's dispatch center in the year 2000, and the Department made a grand total of 871 arrests. The Massachusetts State Police keep crime statistics that allow for comparisons with other communities. The table on the following page takes a look at Spencer's crime statistics for the year 2000 as matched against comparable communities in the region.

Table TG-7
Community Crime Rate per 1,000 Residents - Year 2000

<u>Community</u>	<u>Total of Crimes</u>	<u>Rate per 1,000 Residents</u>
Spencer	170	14.5
Charlton	71	6.3
Dudley	NA	NA
Leicester	112	10.7
Oxford	246	18.4
Uxbridge	136	12.1
Webster	421	25.6

Source: Massachusetts State Police Uniform Crime Report for 2000 (the last available year).

It should be noted that most of the above communities (and the State as a whole) have seen a decrease in crime over the past five years. The Spencer Police Department's last full year of crime statistics is 1999, when 207 crimes were reported to the State Police for that calendar year.

Issues Facing the Department: Police Department was taken over by State Police from May of 1997 to February of 1998 (a total of nine months). Getting the police staff up to full force has been a drain on Town's budget over past several years; however, this situation is expected to stabilize now that the force is fully staffed.

Upcoming Capital Needs:

- As mentioned above, the police station is at full capacity and a building addition may be needed in the next ten years (no cost estimates available).
- The two disabled police cruisers are scheduled for replacement in 2003 (cost estimate: \$29,000 per vehicle). Two more cruisers will be needed for 2004 and then one cruiser per year after that. The Chief hopes to pay for the cruisers through a debt-exclusion under Proposition 2 ½.
- The Chief would like to expand foot patrols and bicycle patrols in downtown Spencer.
- The Chief would like to add another detective to the Department to cover the evening shift.
- New dispatch center and improved communications equipment.
- Other than the above items, the Chief would like to continue improving the Department's technological capability.

Spencer Emergency Management Agency:

Organization: The Spencer Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) currently consists of twelve members. The Town Administrator appoints SEMA's Director and Deputy to one-year terms.

Staff: SEMA does not have any paid staff, rather, the appointed members handle all tasks.

Budget: For the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001, SEMA had an operating budget of \$9,093.

Equipment: Located in an office at the Town Hall, SEMA maintains an emergency operations center that consists of the following equipment: a radio dispatch system, several hand-held radios, ham radios, CB radios and a television. SEMA also keeps an emergency rescue vehicle at the old Water Department building on Cherry Street. This vehicle serves as a mobile command center and contains all of the equipment listed above for the Town Hall. It should be noted that the old Water Department building is unheated and quite dilapidated. At some point, SEMA may wish to relocate its emergency vehicle (and Town Hall operations center) to a single location within a sturdy, modern structure with heating.

Duties: SEMA is responsible for handling the response logistics for large-scale emergencies such as natural disasters and civil emergencies.

Upcoming Capital Needs: SEMA would like to continue upgrading its communication equipment, as well as purchase another emergency rescue vehicle sometime within the next five years. It is quite likely that SEMA will need to find a suitable location for its emergency response center and equipment sometime over the next decade.

Richard Sugden Library:

Organization: A three-person, elected Board of Library Trustees oversees the Library's operations. The Trustees meet on a monthly basis. The Head Librarian manages the Library on a day-to-day basis. The Library is open from 10AM to 8PM Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10AM to 5PM on Fridays, and 10AM to 1PM on Saturdays.

Staff: The Head Librarian is the only full-time employee, and there are seven part-time employees. The Library makes great use of volunteers from the community with volunteers contributing over 1,500 hours of time to the Library last year.

Budget: For the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001, the Library had an operating budget of \$226,086 (\$206,086 in town-appropriated funds and \$20,000 from State assistance).

Facility: The original Library building was a single-floor structure built in 1889 consisting of roughly 5,000 square feet. The Library received a major renovation in 1996, increasing its floor space to roughly 14,000 square feet over three floors. The Library is handicapped accessible and continues to make accessibility improvements on a yearly basis. There is a small parking area (10-12 spaces) adjacent to the building, although the majority of people park at the Sovereign Bank parking lot across the street. The Town leases this parking area from the bank.

Circulation: The Library has an ever-increasing circulation of roughly 60,000 items. The staff is always willing to work with other lending libraries to obtain special order books on behalf of Spencer citizens. There are two computers with Internet service available to the public.

Programs:

Children - story hours, early literacy, toddler playgroups, crafts, performers, music, summer reading.

Young Adults - movie nights, writing groups, teacher outreach.

Adults - historical programs, art workshops, Internet nights, book discussion groups, annual open house.

The Library regularly receives grants from the Spencer Cultural Council. There is a “Friends of the Library” group that holds fund raising events for specific items. The Friends group also handles memorial donations to the Library. Local merchants and businesses have also been very generous with contributions.

Upcoming Capital Needs: There are no large-scale capital needs on the horizon; however, staffing is an issue. The Library would like to expand its staff in order to improve their substitute coverage. Currently, the Library would have to shut down on days where a minimum staffing level of three people could not be achieved. The Library would also like to expand its outreach program to local schools and the elderly population. Other efforts for the future include the creation of an interactive web page. Parking is also a concern for the future, especially if anything happens to the Sovereign Bank parking lot across the street.

Council on Aging:

Organization: The Council on Aging (COA) currently consists of six members. Each member is appointed by the Town Administrator and serves a three-year term.

Staff: The COA does not currently have any staff members under its employ; however, it is looking to hire a program coordinator next year. The COA makes great use of volunteers, with roughly 200 hours of volunteer time contributed last year.

Budget: For the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2001, the COA had an operating budget of \$8,900.

Facility: The COA leases a space on Wall Street from the Spencer Housing Authority for use as a senior center. The Wall Street facility is fully handicapped-accessible. The COA’s lease with the Housing Authority is for five years, beginning in June of 2001. This is also when the COA moved its operation to Wall Street. The senior center at this site is relatively small at 1,500 square feet of floor space. Most communities of similar size have senior centers that range in size from 4,000 to 6,000 square feet of floor space. The Town of Barre (half the population of Spencer) recently received a CDBG grant from the State to build a senior center that will contain 5,260 square feet of floor space. It is quite likely that the COA will need to look for a larger site sometime within the next decade, but for now, the current space will suffice. It should be noted that Spencer’s previous senior center site consisted of a paltry 500 square feet of floor space.

Programs: The COA offers a very popular senior exercise class at the local American Legion hall, as well as a number of activities at the senior center including bingo and cribbage. The COA also offers income tax help sessions. The COA conducts outreach to Spencer’s seniors through a quarterly newsletter and programs on the local cable access channel.

Upcoming Capital Needs: As mentioned above, it is quite likely that the COA will need a larger space for its senior center sometime within the next decade. No further needs of the capital variety were identified. The COA hopes to expand its program offering once a part-time program coordinator can be hired.

Public School System:

Organization: Spencer is part of the Spencer-East Brookfield Regional School District. There is a seven-person School Committee, which sets school policies as well as manages the district’s operations. The School Committee is elected and consists of five people from Spencer and two people from East Brookfield. Spencer has more representatives than East Brookfield due to its larger population.

Budget: The School District had an overall operating budget of \$16,479,500 for fiscal year 2000, with Spencer’s portion consisting of \$5,261,041. The District received \$10,421,034 in State education aid (Chapter 70) for this time period. The tables on the following page present the District’s State education aid figures and per pupil expenditure figures in comparison with other school districts in the region.

**Table TG-8
State Education Aid (Chapter 70) - Year 2000**

<u>Spencer/ E. Brookfield</u>	<u>Dudley/ Charlton</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
\$10,421,034	\$15,686,267	\$7,505,709	\$7,318,851	\$6,942,019	\$6,682,971

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education.

**Table TG-9
Per Pupil Expenditures Year 2000**

<u>Spencer/ E. Brookfield</u>	<u>Dudley/ Charlton</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
\$5,802	\$4,757	\$5,147	\$5,507	\$4,686	\$5,061

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education.

For both of the above tables, please note that Spencer and East Brookfield form a regional school district, as does Dudley and Charlton. The other communities (Leicester, Oxford, Uxbridge & Webster) are single community school districts.

Facilities: The School System currently consists of eight schools, six of which are located in Spencer. A new Intermediate School is under construction on Paxton Road. A brief description of the schools that Spencer students attend is presented on the following page.

David Prouty High School

Location: 302 Main Street
Built: 1966, no additions
Size: 90,000 square feet
Capacity: 700 students
Facility is compliant w/Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
Students: 576, grades 9-12
Facilities: numerous classrooms, library, auditorium, gym & cafeteria
Owned by the Regional School District

Knox Trail Junior High School

Location: 73 Ash Street
Built: 1994, no additions
Size: 90,000 square feet
Capacity: 500 students
Facility is ADA compliant
Students: 364, grades 7 & 8
Facilities: classrooms, gym, auditorium, library & cafeteria
Owned by the Regional School District

Lake Street School

Location: 17 Lake Street
Built: 1956, addition in 1977
Size: 50,000 square feet
Capacity: 500 students
Facility is ADA compliant
Students: 428, grades K-3
Facilities: 22 classrooms, library, one all purpose room
Owned by the Town of Spencer, leased to School District

Maple Street School

Location: 68 Maple Street
Built: 1956, no additions
Size: 23,600 square feet
Capacity: 350 students
Facility is ADA compliant
Students: 233, grades 4-6
Facilities: 14 classrooms, one all purpose room
Owned by Town of Spencer, leased to Regional School District

David Prouty Intermediate School

Location: 195 Main Street
Built: 1888, addition built in 1937
Size: 44,200 square feet
Capacity: 400 students
Facility is **not** ADA compliant
Students: 236, Grades 4-6
Facilities: 16 classrooms, gym, library & cafeteria
Owned by the Town of Spencer, leased to Regional School District

West Main Street School

Location: 45 Main Street
Built: 1878, no additions
Size: 7,900 square feet
Capacity: 100 students
Facility is **not** ADA compliant
Students: 96, Grades kindergarten
Facilities: 4 classrooms
Owned by the Town of Spencer, leased to School District

The new Intermediate School is currently under construction and is scheduled to open in January 2004. This new school will have the capacity to handle house 600 Spencer students. The school will serve grades 4-6, and will consist of 97,000 square feet. The school, once built, will belong to the Town of Spencer and leased to the School District.

Enrollment Projections: The New England School Development Council (NESDEC) prepares an annual report of enrollment trends and projects for the School District. NESDEC’s most recent enrollment forecast was reviewed as part of this chapter. The forecast indicates that grades K-3 will experience a classroom space crunch during the next decade. Lake Street School and the West Main Street School currently serve grades K-3. With a combined capacity of 600, these two schools will

not be able to handle the 659 K-3 students projected for year 2007. This capacity crunch will be dealt with through a grade-realignment plan, to be implemented in 2004. The Lake Street and Maple Street Schools will serve grades K-3 and their combined facility capacity of 850 students will be more than enough to accommodate the expected growth in student population. The new Intermediate School under construction will be large enough to handle the expected growth in grades 4-6. Knox Trail Junior High School is large enough (500 student capacity) to handle the expected growth in grades 7 & 8 (a high of 405 students is expected in year 2005).

Although it is technically under capacity, the High School is indeed experiencing a classroom space crunch. Currently, every classroom is utilized during every period of the day. With an additional 83 students projected by the year 2007, it is quite likely that the School District will need to address the High School's space needs sometime within the next five years. The School Superintendent recognizes the High School's space deficiencies and will be organizing a "building needs committee" for the High School in the near future.

Spencer Housing Authority:

Organization: The Spencer Housing Authority's Board of Directors is composed of four elected members and one State appointee. The Housing Authority's Director is responsible for the day-to-day management of the facilities.

Staff: The Housing Authority has a full-time staff of five people and a part-time secretary.

Budget: The Town does not provide any funding to the Housing Authority; rather, the Authority obtains its revenue primarily from rents and the State makes up the remainder. The Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) pays for large-scale capital equipment through a "Corrective Action Request". Such a request may take years before it is funded.



Facilities: The Spencer Housing Authority manages three facilities:

- Depot Village - Built in 1989, this facility consists of 24 elderly/handicapped units, plus a congregate care facility and an adult daycare center (Project #67-3).
- Howe Village - Built in 1970, this facility consists of 144 one-bedroom elderly/handicapped units. The Tri-Valley Meals on Wheels program is operated on site (Project #667-1 & 667-2).
- Lloyd Dyer Drive (adjacent to Depot Village) - This facility consists of four duplex units for eight families of low-income (Project #705).

Waiting List: A waiting list is not uncommon for local housing authorities. Spencer's Housing Authority currently has a waiting list of 10-50 elderly Spencer residents at any given time, and over 100 families on the family list. The non-local elderly list varies depending upon residency. Note: 13.5% of the units must be reserved for the non-elderly handicapped population, per State order.

Other Group Housing Facilities:

- #77 Maple Street - 8 units for severely disabled, managed by the Glavin Center.
- Asterwood Place - 24 units of elderly/disabled housing, managed by SK Management on behalf of Rural Development (USDA).

Voucher Program: The Housing Authority has nine vouchers for off-site housing made available from DHCD. There are twelve vouchers for non-elderly/ disabled alternative housing made available from DHCD. There are over 100 people on the waiting list for each voucher program.

Upcoming Capital Needs: The Housing Authority would like to obtain a bus to take its residents to doctor appointments/grocery store/downtown shopping. However such an item is not eligible for funding through a DHCD Corrective Action Request and another manner of funding will be required. The Housing Authority does hope to obtain funding for window/roof maintenance through a DHCD Corrective Action Request.



Other Town Government Entities - Administration & Finance: Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Town Clerk, Board of Assessors, Contract Compliance Officer, Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, Finance Committee, Personnel Board, Town Accountant, Chief Procurement Officer, Town Collector, Town Treasurer, Parking Clerk and Registrar of Voters.

Other Town Government Entities - Development Services: Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Fence Viewer, Conservation Commission, Parking & Finance Authority, Sealer of Weights & Measures and Public Weigher.

Other Town Government Entities - Public Safety: Hazardous Waste Coordinator, Safety Officers, Dog Officer, Constables, Public Health Advisory Committee and Harbormaster.

Other Town Government Entities - Health & Human Services: Veterans Agent, Animal Inspector, Charitable Needs Commission, Disability Commission, Fair Housing Commission, Insect & Pest Control Inspector.

Other Town Government Entities - Recreation & Culture: Spencer Youth Commission, Recreation Commission, Parks Commission (Luther Hill Park), and Athletic Fields Commission (O’Gara Park), Historical Commission and Cultural Council,

Town Government Issues in Spencer

1. Municipal Sewer Service: The Sewer Department finds itself in a “Catch 22” situation. Solely supported by its users, the Department can barely afford to fully staff its wastewater treatment plant, let alone conduct inspections or work on a much needed sewer pipe replacement program. Part of the problem lies with the fact that the Sewer Department has not reviewed its fee structure or raised its fees in a very long time. The Department barely brings in enough revenue to cover its operating costs. Large-scale projects, like a sewer system master plan or a pipe replacement program, are currently beyond the Department’s ability to pay for them.

The only way to solve the system’s infiltration problem is through a detailed sewer line capacity study and a well-coordinated sewer pipe replacement program. The sewer system probably will never be able to discharge more than the currently permitted amount into its receiving source (Cranberry Brook) simply because the Brook does not have the capacity or the volume to carry any more wastewater. In fact, the Brook’s ability to handle the current amount of wastewater discharge is already severely hampered during the drier summer months (as the Brook’s volume shrinks). Thus, the Department’s primary option for expanding capacity is to deal with its infiltration problem through a sewer line capacity study and a pipe replacement program. The Department needs to find a way to fund such an effort because the system’s lack of capacity is hurting the Town’s economic development potential. Addressing the infiltration problem would result in additional capacity to accommodate new users including new businesses and industries. More businesses and industries would expand the Town’s non-residential tax base and help alleviate the tax burden on homeowners. As one will see in the Land Use Plan, studies have shown that residential development typically costs more to service than the tax dollars it provides, while the reverse is true for economic development. New businesses and industries look for municipal sewer and water as two key factors when decided where to locate. Currently, the Sewer Department has to seek DEP approval before new businesses and industries can tie into the system.

Once the infiltration problem is addressed and excess system capacity is created, the Sewer Department needs to make sure that this excess capacity is not consumed solely by residential development. The Sewer Department does not have a plan for sewer line expansion, nor has it reserved any excess capacity for future economic development. Currently, the Department is willing to approve sewer line extensions to developers who are willing to pay for them (and obtain DEP approval). If newly created system capacity is used up by future residential development, the Department may not be able to offer sewer service to new businesses and industries wishing to locate in Spencer.

Another complicating factor for new industries wishing to locate in Spencer is that the Department does not have a policy on treating industrial wastewater. This makes it difficult for new industries proposing to tie into the sewer system because there is no clear guidance as to what they will need to do in order to tie in. Rather, the Commissioners consider industrial sewer connections on a case-by-case basis.

2. Fire Department: The Department will likely need to replace or refurbish Engine #3, the combination ladder/pumper truck, the tanker truck, the special operations vehicle and forestry Unit #1 at some point during the next five-to-seven years. The current cost estimate for replacing all four vehicles is one million dollars. Maintenance of the current fire station will most certainly be needed. The roof is in need of repair (money has already been budgeted for this purpose), the bays need new doors, building insulation is needed, an exhaust system is needed for the equipment area (this last item is estimated at \$50-\$75,000), paving is needed around the station, and removing the hump near Dewey Street (estimated cost: \$20,000). The Department would also like to investigate its options for building a training facility in Spencer, perhaps in conjunction with some of the neighboring communities (current cost estimated at \$250,000).

3. Waste Disposal: Spencer's current waste disposal contract is set to expire at the end of June 2002. The Town will soon be negotiating a new 20-year contract for waste disposal. Much depends on which option the Town chooses to meet its solid waste disposal needs. If the Town wants to stay with the current manner of disposal (drop-off transfer station/recycling center), a considerable monetary investment will be required (currently estimated at \$300,000). The Town has several options for addressing its waste disposal needs:

- Maintain the current transfer station operated with an appropriation from the General Fund.
- Maintain the current transfer station funded through a "pay as you throw" program supported by the users of the transfer station.
- Institute a curbside pick-up program (trash & recyclables) where the cost of collection is paid for by the users and the disposal cost is paid for by an appropriation from the General Fund.
- Institute a curbside pick-up program (trash & recyclables) supported by a "pay as you throw" utility fund paid for by the users.
- Institute a curbside pick-up program (trash & recyclables) where the cost is paid by the user and paid directly to the trash disposal company.
- Close the transfer station and keep recycling area open twice a month on Saturday and two other weekdays to be determined, with the costs offset by an appropriation from the General Fund.

Spencer's Board of Health is currently investigating the above options in conjunction with the Board of Selectmen. Whatever option the Town chooses, Spencer residents will be paying more (quite likely much more) to dispose of their trash. The Master Plan will not make a recommendation on this issue, as the Town may address its waste disposal needs during the summer of 2002, well before the planned publication of the Master Plan (April 2003).

4. Long Range Capital Planning: Spencer does not have a long-range capital improvement plan (CIP) in place at this time. A CIP is an on-going capital expenditure plan that identifies upcoming capital needs, schedules their purchase, and outlines how they will be purchased. Such plans usually look six-to-ten years down the road in terms of identifying capital needs. A capital need is a tangible item (equipment, building, etc.) that is above and beyond a municipal department's regular operating budget. Spencer currently plans its large-scale capital improvements on a year-to-year basis. Presently, the Town Administrator prepares a draft budget and submits it to the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee. If a department wants to replace a piece of equipment, it makes its case to the Town Administrator, and in turn to the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee.

Spencer has quite a few long-range financial matters (mostly capital needs) that need attention during the next decade. The following is a brief description of the Town's upcoming capital needs and financial concerns:

- Facility Upgrades - The Fire Station is in need of substantial maintenance. The Water Department needs a new satellite well at the Meadow Road site, and the South Spencer pump station needs to be retrofitted for corrosion control. Spencer's Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) will likely need a new facility within the upcoming decade. Other facility needs looming on the horizon are a larger senior center and a possible youth center within the larger reuse proposal for the David Prouty Intermediate School. Details of the Prouty School's reuse proposal can be found in Appendix D of this document.
- New Vehicles & Equipment - It is clear from reading the departmental overviews that Spencer will need to replace quite a few vehicles and purchase a number of new capital items over the next decade. Departments needing new capital equipment include the Highway Department, Police Department, SEMA and Fire Department. New computer equipment will be an ongoing need for the Town Hall and Library, as well as for individual departments.
- Additional Municipal Staff - As mentioned previously, the Fire Chief position will likely need to be expanded to a true full-time position with an increase in salary. The Fire Department would eventually like to have two additional full-time firefighters in order to increase its coverage during the weekdays when most of its volunteers are working. Other departments hoping to increase their staffing include the Sewer Department, Board of Health, Building Inspection Department, Police Department, Highway Department and Library.
- Solid Waste Disposal - As mentioned previously, the Town's 20-year contract for solid waste disposal is set to expire. Whatever option the Town chooses to meet its solid waste disposal needs, the cost of disposal will undoubtedly increase.
- Studies - As mentioned previously, the Sewer Department desperately needs a detailed sewer line capacity study and a well-coordinated sewer pipe replacement program. If such an effort is to ever take place, it is quite likely that Town funding will be needed. The Sewer Department may also need to undertake several chemical analysis studies in order to achieve compliance with its newly reissued NPDES permit.

5. Municipal Government Organization: One of Spencer's greatest strengths can also be seen as a weakness in some respects. Spencer has been very fortunate to have so many dedicated citizens who have given their free time to serve on the Town's various boards, committees and commissions. However, Spencer has such a plethora of committees that the situation can be seen as a prime example of local government balkanization. It gets harder and harder each year for the Town to round up people to serve on its various boards, committees and commissions. Terms expire every year, people leave town and people resign because of new job or family commitments. Vacancies often go unfilled for quite a while because Town fathers have so much trouble finding new volunteers. And yet, so many of the Town's boards, committees and commissions have such limited duties and responsibilities. Taking recreation as an example, there are two entities that deal

with recreational programs (Youth Commission and Recreation Commission), Luther Hill Park has its own management entity (Parks Commission), as does O’Gara Park (Athletic Fields Commission). All told, 14 Spencer residents comprise these four commissions. There are other examples as well. The Town has an Industrial Development Finance Authority that hasn’t met in ten years. Certainly the Town could benefit from consolidating its various boards, committees, and commissions so that there is a lesser reliance on volunteers (both in terms of hours committed and the number of volunteers needed), coordination is improved, and an economy of scale is achieved. Once again using recreation as an example, a consolidated recreation department would have the cost-saving benefit of having a consolidated recreation budget to handle the maintenance and improvement needs for all of Spencer’s public parks and recreation facilities.

6. Information Management Technology: The current computer system at the Town Hall is fourteen years old and is COBOL-based. The Town’s computerized record keeping system is not at all compliant with the standards of the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB). These standards deal with accounting, financial management and inventory. The standards are to be applied to all municipal governments in Massachusetts over the next seven years. To date, Spencer has not addressed its required compliance with the GASB standards.

There are many other benefits to upgrading the Town’s information management technology. The Internet and new computer technology has enabled many Massachusetts communities to set up town government homepages where residents can obtain information on departmental hours, public meetings & hearings, permit applications, and a variety of other information they would normally have to obtain by physically visiting town all. In addition, residents can e-mail town officials, and town officials can e-mail each other, thus improving inter-departmental communication. Many towns have also made use of newly developed software that allows residents to easily obtain property information at the local assessor’s office. Many towns have also invested in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which is essentially a computerized method of graphically displaying data and maps. GIS technology allows for an infinite number of applications. Examples of GIS applications include display of tax parcel boundaries, property-specific information, zoning district boundaries, road network, water & sewer pipe locations (including elevation & flow direction), natural feature information (wetlands & floodplains), emergency response call box locations, and so many other applications that it is impossible to list them all.

Town Government - Goal

The goal of Spencer’s Town Government is that its infrastructure provide a level of public safety and service that meets the current and future needs of the community, while ensuring an efficient use of resources and enhancing the quality of life in Spencer.

Town Government - Objectives

- Compliance with all federal, state and local laws and regulations;
- Provide necessary police and fire services that ensures proper public safety;
- Provide a quality education climate that promotes enthusiasm for learning and knowledge;

- Stabilization of the local tax rate; and
- Increased access and delivery of town information and services through the utilization of technology.

Town Government - Recommendations

1. Fire Department Staffing and Building Maintenance: It is recommended that the Town develop a financial strategy for addressing the Fire Department’s various needs including:

- Developing a comprehensive equipment replacement plan with front-line vehicles being replaced every five years and back-line vehicles every seven years.
- Adding two full-time firefighters to cover the weekday period when most of the Department’s volunteers are working and may not be available; and
- Addressing the maintenance needs of the existing fire station.

Responsible Municipal Entity: The Fire Department, Finance Committee, Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen.

2. Capital Improvement Plan: It is recommended that the Town establish a long-range capital planning committee and charge them with the responsibility of preparing a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The CIP should be a rolling five-year plan that identifies and prioritizes the Town’s capital needs, and recommends how such needs should be paid for. As noted previously, the various municipal departments have numerous capital needs coming up in the next decade. There are also a number of needed facility improvements on the horizon. Spencer should plan for its capital needs in a comprehensive manner with an eye towards the long-term, rather than the current piece-by-piece, year-to-year method of evaluating capital requests. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator and Finance Committee.

3. Sewer System Master Plan: It is recommended that the Sewer Department find a way to fund a “master plan” for the sewer system. Such a plan would consist of a detailed sewer line capacity study and a well-coordinated sewer pipe replacement program. Details of the plan should include identifying system deficiencies, prioritizing their repair (with cost estimates), and establishing a rolling five-year work program for sewer pipe repair and replacement. Such a master plan should also outline a long-range system maintenance strategy for the Sewer Department. Implementing the plan’s recommendations would be of great benefit to the system’s existing users (a “righting of the ship”, so to speak), but would also help the Town’s economic development strategy, such as it is. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Sewer Department in conjunction with the Finance Committee and the Town Administrator.

4. Sewer/Water System Expansion Policy – Definition of Service Area: The presence of municipal water and sewer often dictates where development takes place in a community and how intensive that development is. Water and sewer service that continues to radiate from the center, with no well-defined limits to the service area, results in an inefficient land use pattern and an infrastructure system that is expensive to maintain, let alone upgrade (it is clear from the Municipal

Services & Facilities chapter that Spencer's municipal sewer system is in serious need of an upgrade). The current practice of extending water and sewer ever further down the road as long as a developer/builder is willing to pay for it will eventually result in landowners pushing to increase the densities of these areas and reduce the minimum required lot sizes. Thus, expanding water and sewer service based on the ability to pay for it will create pressure to increase the amount and intensity of development in these areas because water and sewer service is now available. Smart progressive municipalities use their infrastructure systems to encourage growth in those areas where it's suitable and discourage growth in those areas that they want to keep rural or where high-density development is not suitable.

It is highly recommended that Spencer's Water and Sewer Departments work with the Planning Board and Conservation Commission to clearly delineate a definitive infrastructure service area with the understanding that water and sewer will *not* be extended beyond the delineated service area. Spencer needs to start using its infrastructure to direct growth where it wants it to happen instead of extending the water/sewer service areas willy-nilly based on the ability of a landowner/developer to pay for service extensions. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Spencer Sewer and Water Departments in conjunction with the Planning Board and Conservation Commission.

5. Municipal Services Consolidation Plan: It is recommended that the Town develop a municipal services consolidation plan for its various boards, committees, and commissions. Currently, Spencer has over 50 municipal entities and many of them have overlapping subject matter, duties and responsibilities. This has resulted in a situation where the Town has to scramble every year to find people to staff the various boards, committees and commissions. Developing and implementing a municipal services consolidation plan would result in a lesser reliance on volunteers, improved coordination, and an economy of scale. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator in consultation with Spencer's various municipal entities.

6. Information Management: It is recommended that the Town develop an integrated information management plan that will result in Spencer's full compliance with GASB standards, as well as a Town government website, and inter-departmental e-mail. This will entail "wiring" the Town Hall and finding space there to install a computer system "server", i.e., the main computer that links the network together. The Town should undertake this effort in a coordinated approach by establishing a central Town of Spencer website, rather than having each department develop its own website. A partial list of benefits to be reaped by having an official Town of Spencer website include: the ability to contact municipal officials by e-mail; citizens could access and review meeting notices and minutes on-line; citizens could access permits, forms and records on-line; citizens could access information on the Town's development review process; and such a website could serve as a clearinghouse of information relating to Spencer Town government (reports & maps, etc). Having such services and resources available on-line will help reduce the demand for expanding service hours at the Town Hall. The Town will also need to decide whether or not to include GIS technology in its information management plan. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator. It may be advisable to establish a committee to investigate the Town's options for acquiring and utilizing information management technology.

TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Roadway Network:

Spencer has a well-developed transportation network consisting of 111.6 miles of paved roadways. The Town's major transportation corridor is Route 9, which runs through Town in an east-to-west direction. Route 31 is Spencer's other main thoroughfare, albeit much more rural than Route 9. Route 31 runs through Spencer in a north-to-south direction. Spencer does not have direct access to any of the region's interstate highways, although the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) is a mere 10-minute drive away. Route 49-south, west of downtown is Spencer's most direct way of accessing I-84 in Sturbridge (the main thoroughfare to Hartford, Connecticut) and eventually I-90 (the main thoroughfare to Boston and Springfield).

Roadways - Maintenance Responsibilities:

MassHighway, the Massachusetts Highway Department, is responsible for maintaining the majority of Route 9, although the Town is responsible for its maintenance between Greenville Street (east of downtown) and Water Street (west of downtown), a distance of roughly 1.4 miles. Route 31 is considered a State-numbered route; however, the Town is responsible for its day-to-day maintenance. MassHighway maintains the entirety of Route 49 in Spencer. All other roads in Spencer are considered "local" and the Spencer Highway Department is responsible for their maintenance.

State Roads/Bridges - Planning for Improvements:

In most cases, major transportation projects are planned at the regional level. The Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is the decision-making body responsible for planning and funding federal-aid transportation projects in this region. The regional MPO is made up of representatives from four organizations: MassHighway, the Executive Office of Transportation & Construction (EOTC), the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), and the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA). CMRPC's transportation staff does the planning for the MPO. The MPO prepares an annual update to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for the region. Each annual TIP lists projects at least three years into the future. The improvements included in the TIP are paid for through federal-aid funds provided to MassHighway by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Projects slated for non federal-aid are also included in the TIP listing.

The most recent draft of the TIP (years 2003-2007) lists three transportation improvement projects for Spencer. The first project is the replacement of the bridge spanning Brooks Pond Road over the Five-Mile River in the northwest corner of Town, just south of Brooks Pond. The bridge replacement project is scheduled for a 2002 start-date and is listed on the TIP as a Priority Bridge Project, ranking second out of the various bridge replacement projects in the region. The project is well underway with its total cost currently estimated at \$412,000 in non federal-aid funding. The second Spencer project listed on the TIP is resurfacing Route 31-south from Bemis

Street all the way to the Charlton town line. The design work for this project is currently underway with a 2004 completion date and a current cost estimate of \$750,000. The last Spencer project listed on the TIP is resurfacing the portion of Route 31-north from the Route 9/31 intersection in the downtown all the way to the South Meadow Road/Wire Village Road intersection. This project is scheduled for 2007 and is currently estimated at \$300,000. It is quite likely that these last two projects may be pushed further back in time because of limited funds and rising construction costs.

It should be noted that transportation projects take a long time to come to fruition in Massachusetts. It is not uncommon for a decade to pass from the idea for a transportation improvement project to its actual implementation. From formulating the idea, to getting the project listed on the region's TIP, to the design stage, to securing funding, to bidding out the construction work, to the actual construction, transportation projects take a long time to unfold. Due to the long length of time to get projects started, initial cost estimates are almost always revised upwards as the project moves closer to construction. This situation is a nationwide phenomenon and not just peculiar to Massachusetts.

Structurally Deficient Bridges:

According to MassHighway, there are 649 bridges in the CMRPC region. All of the bridges have been evaluated for structural integrity according to standards set forth by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). According to the AASHTO bridge evaluations, there are 66 bridges that have been identified as structurally deficient within the CMRPC region. The bridge crossing Brooks Pond Road in the northwest corner of Spencer (originally built in 1939) is the Town's only structurally deficient bridge. As mentioned previously, the bridge has been scheduled for replacement starting in 2002 and the project cost is currently estimated at \$412,000.

Functionally Obsolete Bridges:

The AASHTO bridge evaluations also identify those bridges considered to be functionally obsolete, that is, those bridges in need of modernization. There are 124 bridges that have been identified as functionally obsolete within the CMRPC region. There are three functionally obsolete bridges in Spencer, none of which yet appear on the TIP listing:

- ◆ Route 31 (North Spencer Road just south of Hastings Road) crossing the Seven Mile River
- ◆ Route 31 (North Spencer Road near Pine Grove Cemetery) crossing the Seven Mile River
- ◆ Route 9 (West Main Street) crossing the Seven Mile River

State Aid for Local Roads:

MassHighway distributes funds for local roadway repair & maintenance to municipalities in Massachusetts on an annual basis through Chapter 90 of the Massachusetts General Laws (MGL). Since 1994, the State has used Chapter 90 to distribute approximately \$150 million per year to cities and towns. Up until 1999, Spencer received an average of roughly \$375,000 per year in Chapter 90 highway funds over the previous decade. However, 1999 saw the State

Legislature reduce the Chapter 90 program by 44%. This led to Spencer receiving only \$260,000 in Chapter 90 funds in 1999 and the Town's annual Chapter 90 appropriation has been slightly reduced every year since. Spencer's 2001 allotment of Chapter 90 funds was \$256,860. Given the State's current fiscal crisis, it is quite likely that Chapter 90 funds may see yet further reductions.

Further complicating the issue in Spencer is how Chapter 90 funds may be used. Historically, the Spencer Highway Department has used these funds to purchase new vehicles and equipment. New State guidelines regarding how communities can use Chapter 90 funds will no longer allow such funds to be used for purchasing large-scale capital items such as new vehicles. Thus, Spencer's Highway Department will need to identify other sources to pay for new vehicles and equipment. Unless the State's new restrictions on using Chapter 90 funds are relaxed, it is quite likely that the Highway Department will need to pay for new vehicles and equipment through the local tax levy.

Road Classifications and Federal-Aid Eligibility:

MassHighway maintains an inventory of local roadways as reported by municipalities in Massachusetts. MassHighway also maintains an inventory of those State-maintained roads that are considered to be part of the federal-aid system. The federal-aid system has a three-tier functional classification system for roads:

- Arterial Roads: These are roads that serve through traffic. Arterial roads are the highways of the Interstate Highway System, such as I-90, I-84, etc.
- Collector Roads: These are roads that link local roads to arterial roads. Collectors are heavily traveled local roads and those roads associated with the State highway network (Routes 9, 31 & 49).
- ◆ Local Roads: These are roads that are used primarily to access the community's housing stock.

MassHighway classifies Spencer's roadways in the following manner:

- Principal Arterial Roads: Route 9 (eligible for federal-aid).
- Rural Minor Arterial Roads: Route 49 (eligible for federal-aid).
- Rural Major Collector Roads: Route 31; Meadow Road; and West Main Street (from its intersection with South Spencer Road to its intersection with Meadow Road). These roads are all eligible for federal-aid.
- Rural Minor Collector Roads: Water Street; Chestnut Street; West Main Street (from its intersection with Meadow Street to its intersection with Dewey Street); North Brookfield Road; Browning Pond Road; Thompson Pond Road; Paxton Road; Wire Village Road; Gold Nugget Road (between Paxton Road and Wire Village Road); Greenville Street; Bacon Hill Road; Clark Road (between East Charlton Road and Chickering Road); East Charlton Road (between Bacon Hill Road and Clark Road); Chickering Road; G. Henry Wilson Road

(adjacent to Stiles Reservoir); South Spencer Road; Herbert Jolicoeur Road; and Cranberry Meadow Road (between Henry Jolicoeur Road and Bacon Hill Road); Kingsbury Road (east of Greenville Street); and Barclay Road (north of Route 31). Certain sections of these roads may be eligible for federal-aid in some cases.

- Local Roads: All other roads in Spencer. These roads are not eligible for federal-aid.

Spencer can compete for limited federal-aid funding to repair their Federal-Aid eligible roads listed above through the annual TIP process. Roads classified as “local” are maintained solely by the municipalities and are not eligible for Federal-Aid. Local roads are eligible for State Highway funds under Chapter 90 (previously described).

Current Condition of Local Roads:

CMRPC conducted a Local Pavement Management Study for Spencer in the fall of 1996, with a summary report issued to the Town in March of 1997. CMRPC worked with MassHighway and the Spencer Highway Superintendent to define the Town’s entire road network for this project. CMRPC then drove along each segment of roadway in Spencer, collecting detailed pavement condition information using a specialized computer program. The CMRPC roadway analysis incorporated the severity and extent of the following types of pavement distress:

- ◆ potholes
- ◆ cracking (block, alligator, transverse and longitudinal cracking)
- ◆ rutting
- ◆ surface wear and raveling
- ◆ corrugations, shoving and slippage

The collected data allowed CMRPC to evaluate each roadway’s pavement condition segment-by-segment, and determine an estimated repair cost. A pavement condition index (PCI) was calculated for each roadway segment. The PCI rated each road on a scale from one (extreme distress - substantial repair work needed) to 100 (no need of repair). A PCI of 85 is generally used as the threshold between no maintenance and routine maintenance. Slightly more than half (52%) of Spencer’s roads received PCIs greater than 85. The average PCI for all of Spencer’s roadway segments was 74.3, a relatively strong PCI average for local roads in a New England small town. Spencer’s PCI compares favorably to similar-sized communities in the region that have recently completed Pavement Management studies:

Spencer: 74 Charlton: 71 Dudley: 68 Oxford: 77 Uxbridge: 76

(Note: Leicester has not conducted a Pavement Management study and Webster is having one prepared by a private sector consulting firm).

The table on the following page presents a listing of the top ten roads with the worst pavement conditions in Spencer, according to the 1997 Pavement Management Study.

**Table TR-1
Top 10 Roads Having the Worst Pavement Conditions in Spencer**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Road Name</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>PCI Score</u>
1.	Alta Crest Road (dead-end)	0.20 miles	12
2.	William Casey Road (from Charlton town line)	0.20 miles	18
3.	Dufault Drive (dead-end)	0.11 miles	22
4.	Martin Drive (dead-end)	0.16 miles	22
5.	Treadwell Drive (cul-de-sac)	0.34 miles	22
6.	Kingsbury Road	0.70 miles	23
7.	Browning Pond Road (from Oakham town line)	0.89 miles	24
8.	Brooks Pond Road	1.33 miles	24
9.	Jolicoeur Road (from Herbert Road)	0.22 miles	24
10.	Cranberry Meadow Road	0.44 miles	25

Source: CMRPC Local Pavement Management Study for Spencer, Massachusetts, March 1997.

As can be seen from the previous table, most of the roads with low PCI scores are quite short in length and quite a few are dead-ends or cul-de-sacs. Brooks Pond Road has the longest length (1.33 miles) of the Spencer roadways having low PCI scores. It should be noted that the Highway Department has made improvements to all but the four dead-ends/cul-de-sacs since the issuance of the 1997 Pavement Management Study.

The 1997 Pavement Management Study also estimated the cost of repairing the identified roadway deficiencies. The table below presents the top ten most expensive roadway improvement projects as identified in the 1997 Study.

**Table TR-2
Top Ten Most Expensive Roadway
Improvement Projects in Spencer**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Road Name</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Estimated Repair Cost</u>
1.	McCormack Road	2.28 miles	\$214,027
2.	Browning Pond Road	1.64 miles	\$173,180
3.	Cranberry Meadow Road	1.41 miles	\$148,900
4.	Brooks Pond Road	1.33 miles	\$140,440
5.	Woodside Road	1.13 miles	\$139,207
6.	Clark Road	2.01 miles	\$132,111
7.	Greenville Street	2.98 miles	\$99,914
8.	Cooney Road	0.81 miles	\$85,540
9.	Kingsbury Road	0.70 miles	\$78,027
10.	William Casey Road	1.00 mile	\$75,465

Source: CMRPC Local Pavement Management Study for Spencer, Massachusetts, March 1997.

The 1997 Pavement Management Study identified a total of \$202,655 worth of improvements for all of Spencer's Federal-Aid eligible roadways and a total of roughly \$2.7 million dollars worth of improvements for the Town's entire local road network. Thus, a grand total of approximately **\$2.96 million dollars** of roadway improvements were identified for the Town's transportation network. However, please note that the Highway Department has dealt with all but two of the roadways listed above (Clark Road & Greenville Street) since the issuance of the 1997 Study, and Greenville Street is slated for repaving sometime during 2002.

The 1997 Pavement Management Study developed three future funding scenarios for the Town:

- ◆ Scenario A: If Spencer continued to use its annual allotment of Chapter 90 funds (\$346,000 in 1996 when the study was prepared) for road repair and maintenance, the Town's roadway network would have an average PCI rating of between 72 and 77 for the next twenty years.
- ◆ Scenario B: If Spencer allocated \$400,000 (Chapter 90 funds and other sources) for road repair and maintenance, the Town's roadway network would raise its average PCI rating to 85 by the year 2013.
- ◆ Scenario C: If Spencer allocated \$500,000 (Chapter 90 funds and other sources) for road repair and maintenance, the Town's roadway network would raise its average PCI rating to between 90 and 92 by the year 2005.

With the 44% reduction in Chapter 90 funds that occurred in 1999, it is clear that Spencer will need to increase its annual roadway maintenance/repair budget just to maintain the current condition of its road network. Even more money will need to be allocated if the Town wishes to improve the network's current condition.

Yet another complicating factor is the new State restrictions regarding how the Chapter 90 funds can be spent. Spencer's Highway Department will need to find alternative funding sources to pay for new vehicles and equipment. As mentioned in the previous Community Facilities & Services chapter, the Highway Department would like to add an additional laborer or two, and this too will impact the Department's budget.

Traffic Volume:

CMRPC conducts traffic counts throughout the region on an ongoing basis. Automatic traffic recording machines are placed along a roadway and they record the number of vehicles travelling in each direction over a 48-hour period. The Daily Traffic Volume Map on the following page shows the total number of vehicles (i.e., both directions) travelling on Spencer's main roads during a 24-hour period. The volumes shown on the map are taken from a series of traffic counts conducted throughout the 1990's. Most of Spencer's local roads handle less than 1,000 cars a day. The more heavily traveled roads have the following ranges of daily traffic volume:

TOWN OF SPENCER

Map 3

Daily Traffic Volume & Scenic Roads

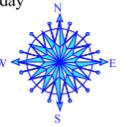


LEGEND:

- Traffic Volume per Day
- 1,000 - 2,499 Vehicles per day
 - 2,500 - 4,999 Vehicles per day
 - 5,000 - 14,999 Vehicles per day
 - > 15,000 Vehicles per day

- Transportation
- Road
 - Scenic Road
 - Railroad

- Hydrography
- Stream
 - Intermittent Stream
 - Water Body



Source data:
Traffic count data collected by CMRPC staff.
1:25,000 hydrography was derived from USGS Digital Line Graph files and later enhanced by MassGIS.
MassGIS 1:5,000 roads were derived from digital orthophotography and distributed by MassGIS.
All other data are from MassGIS.



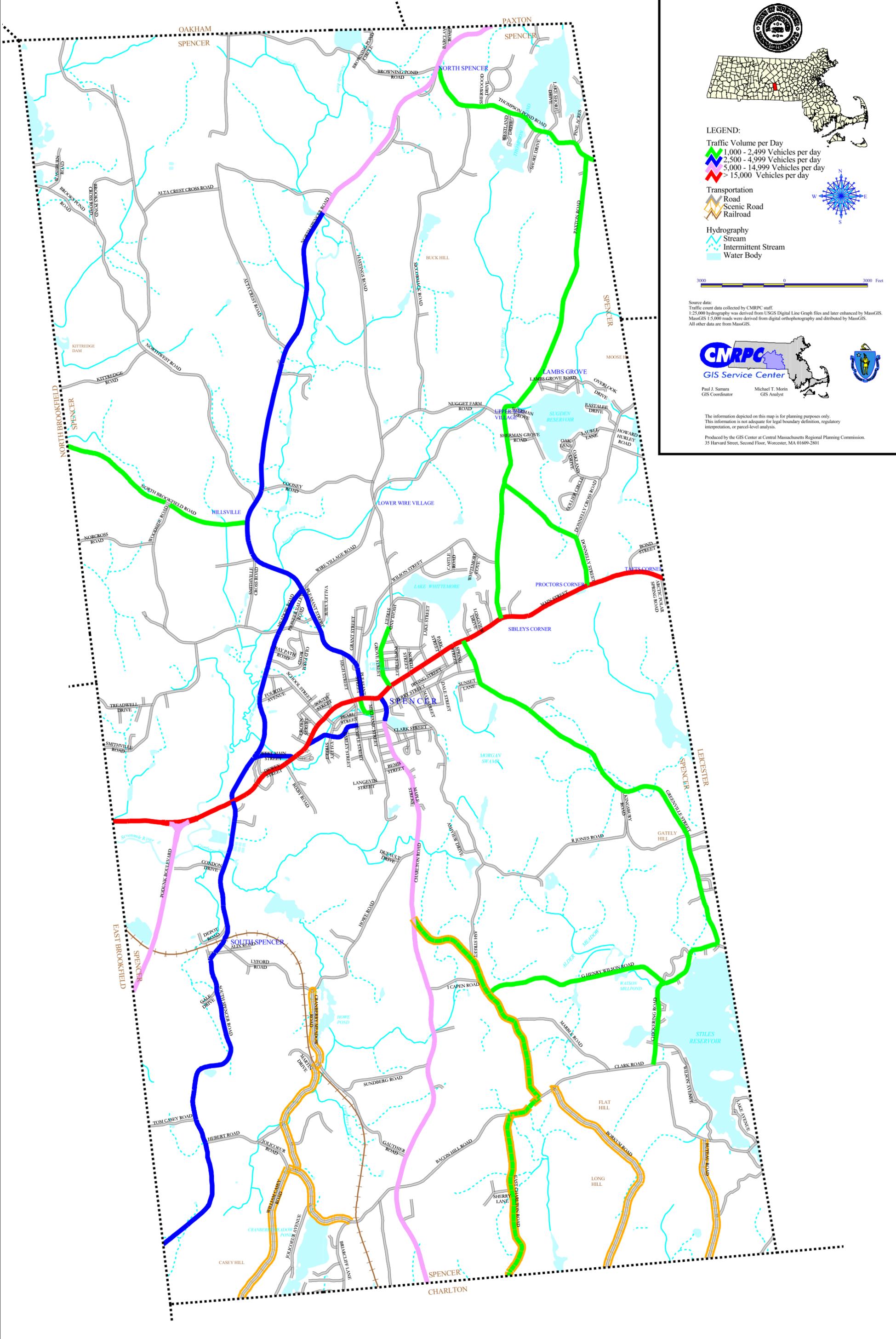
Paul J. Samara
GIS Coordinator

Michael T. Morin
GIS Analyst



The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only.
This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis.

Produced by the GIS Center at Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission,
35 Harvard Street, Second Floor, Worcester, MA 01609-2801



1,000 - 2,500 vehicles per day: Chickering Road, Donnelly Road, East Charlton Road, Greenville Street, Grove Street, G. Henry Wilson Road, North Brookfield Road, Paxton Road, Thompson Pond Road, and Wall Street.

2,500 - 5,000 vehicles per day: A portion of Chestnut Street (west of Elm Street), Maple Street, Meadow Road, a portion of Route 31 (south of Hastings Road, north of Howe Road), a portion of South Spencer Road (south of West Main Street), Water Street, and a portion of West Main Street (north of Route 9).

5,000 - 15,000 vehicles per day: Several portions of Route 31 (south of Adams Street, north of North Brookfield Road, and north of Route 9), and a portion of Route 49 (south of Route 9).

Over 15,000 vehicles per day: Route 9 throughout Spencer. Traffic counts conducted over the past five years indicate that Route 9 has a daily traffic volume that ranges between 15,000 (at Leicester town line) and 28,000 (between Route 31 and Route 49) vehicles per day. However, the volume significantly drops off beyond the Route 49 intersection heading west towards East Brookfield.



Based on the accompanying Traffic Volume Map, it appears that several of Spencer's local roads are being used as shortcuts to either get into or out of downtown Spencer (or through it). Roads fitting this description include South Spencer Road, Meadow Road, Donnelly Road, Paxton Road, and Greenville Street. East Charlton Road, G. Henry Wilson Road, and North Brookfield Road also show significant traffic volumes for local roads. The increase in traffic volume for all of these roads should be monitored closely over the next decade through

the use of traffic-count data, ideally once a year but at least once every three years at a minimum.

Projected Traffic Volume:

It should be noted that all of Spencer's roadways are projected to have moderate increases in their traffic volumes over the next twenty years, with Spencer traffic volume growing slower than the region as a whole. CMRPC has developed a Regional Traffic Demand Forecast Model (RTDFM) that projects travel demand through the year 2020. Although the model is intended to forecast traffic volume at the regional level, CMRPC staff made a few modifications and ran the model for Spencer traffic only. According to the model, Spencer's roadways will experience a traffic volume increase of as much as 10.3% over the next decade, as compared to the CMRPC region as a whole which is expected see its traffic volume increase by as much as 14.8% during the same time period.

The anticipated rate of traffic volume increase for the following decade (2010-2020) is projected at 3.5% for Spencer, and 9.9% for the CMRPC region as a whole. However, the 1992 CMRPC Traffic Study projects that Route 9 will experience a 6.4% growth in traffic volume by the year 2015. It should be noted that the projections are less accurate the further out in time they are projected and that CMRPC will adjust the RTDFM on a periodic basis.

Roadway Capacity and Level of Service:

CMRPC conducted an in-depth analysis of Route 9 through Spencer in its 1992 report entitled, Route 9 West Corridor Planning Study. This study reviewed the traffic conditions along Route 9 from Worcester west to the East Brookfield town line. As part of this study, Route 9 was broken into segments, and each segment was screened and evaluated for a number of characteristics: volume (both daily and peak hour, in-bound and out-bound), capacity, level of service, posted speed, average observed speed (including delays), average travel time, accidents, and land use.

The 1992 Study evaluated the following segments along Route 9 in Spencer:

- Leicester/town line/Bond Street - 0.35 miles in length
- Bond Street/Donnelly Road - 0.20 miles in length
- Donnelly Road/Paxton Road - 0.63 miles in length
- Paxton Road/Greenville Street - 0.31 miles in length
- Greenville Street/Ash Street - 0.48 miles in length
- Ash Street/Grove Street (near Linden Street intersection) - 0.12 miles in length
- Grove Street/Maple Street (Route 31 south) - 0.09 miles in length
- Maple Street (Route 31 south)/Pleasant Street (Route 31 north) - 0.12 miles in length
- Pleasant Street (Route 31 north)/Water Street - 0.50 miles in length
- Water Street/South Spencer Road - 0.65 miles in length
- South Spencer Road/Podunk Pike (Route 49) - 0.39 miles in length
- Podunk Pike (Route 49)/East Brookfield town line - 0.45 miles in length

Each roadway segment was evaluated for their Level-Of-Service (LOS), i.e., the existing volume of vehicles using the road versus the road's theoretical carrying capacity. If the traffic volume is the same or greater than the roadway's theoretical capacity, then the road's LOS gets a failing grade. A road's LOS is graded similar to a school report card: LOS with "A" ratings (low volumes and minimal congestion), through LOS with "F" ratings (high volumes and significant travel delays).

According to the 1992 Study, all of Spencer's Route 9 segments had LOS ratings in the "A" range, with two exceptions: the Grove Street/Maple Street segment and the Maple Street/Pleasant Street segment. These two segments had peak period observed travel speeds that were well below the posted speed limit, with significant delays for both through and turning traffic. In other words, there are volume/capacity problems at the two points where Route 31 intersects with Route 9.

The table on the following page outlines the volume/capacity problems along these two segments of Route 9 for both peak hour periods (east and west).

**Table TR-3
Route 9 Volume/Capacity Problems**

<u>Segment</u>	<u>Posted Travel Speed</u>	<u>Observed Travel Speed</u>	<u>Traffic Volume*</u>	<u>LOS Rating</u>
Grove Street/Maple Street (eastbound, AM peak hour)	35	17	725 vph	C
Grove Street/Maple Street (westbound, AM peak hour)	35	13	473 vph	C
Maple Street/Pleasant Street (eastbound, AM peak hour)	35	16	738 vph	C
Maple Street/Pleasant Street (westbound, AM peak hour)	35	19	331 vph	B
Grove Street/Maple Street (eastbound, PM peak hour)	35	22	548 vph	B
Grove Street/Maple Street (westbound, PM peak hour)	35	16	931 vph	C
Maple Street/Pleasant Street (eastbound, PM peak hour)	35	12	660 vph	D
Maple Street/Pleasant Street (westbound, PM peak hour)	35	16	738 vph	C

Source: Route 9 West Corridor Planning Study, CMRPC 1992. * Please note that traffic volume for the table above is for peak hours (7-9AM, and 4-6PM), with vph = vehicles per hour.

It is important to remember that the statistics in the above table are from a 1992 study of Route 9. As discussed above, the roadway's volume of traffic has continued to grow over the past decade, with an increase in delays and a corresponding decline in its LOS. Another important finding of the 1992 Study is that heavy vehicle (i.e., truck traffic) accounted for as much as 6% of Route 9's traffic volume during the early morning peak hours.

Traffic Safety and High Vehicle Crash Intersections :

The Spencer Police Department instituted a computerized tracking system for traffic accidents in 1999. Although long-term vehicle crash data is not available for all of the Town's intersections, the Police Chief has identified the following as "problem intersections" in Spencer:

1. Route 9/Route 49
2. Main Street/Wall Street
3. Main Street/Pleasant Street
4. Maple Street/Cherry Street
5. Maple Street/McDonald Street
6. Pleasant Street/Meadow Road
7. Greenville Street/Chickering Road
8. Main Street/Lake Street
9. Paxton Road/Thompson Pond Road
10. Main Street/Donnelly Road

The Police Department's vehicle crash data for the past three years indicate a steady decline: 846 crashes reported in 1999, 774 reported in 2000, and 724 in 2001. Although the period of time is too short to draw any definitive conclusions, the reduction in vehicle crashes may or may not be due in part to the slower travel speeds observed in Spencer's downtown area. Of the vehicle crashes reported over the past three years, the vast majority involved minor fender-benders. There have been, however, several serious crashes resulting in people being injured. The available data indicates that the intersections along the Route 9 corridor are the most potentially hazardous in town and are the most prone to traffic accidents.

It should be noted that in early 2002, the Town conducted a thirty-day trial where a restriction was placed on taking right-hand turns from Wall Street onto Main Street. The trial was successful and the ban on right-hand turns is still in place, in fact, the Highway Department has installed permanent signage at this location regarding the right-hand turn situation.

Scenic Roads:

Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40, Section 15C authorizes a municipality to designate certain local roads as "Scenic Roads". Any local road, other than a state numbered route, is eligible for such designation. The purpose of the statute is to provide for Planning Board review of the cutting or removal of trees or the alteration of stonewalls incidental to work on a Scenic Road. After a road receives its "Scenic" designation, the Planning Board is delegated certain limited powers by the statute. Any repair, maintenance, reconstruction, or paving work done with respect to a Scenic Road that entails cutting or removal of trees, or tearing down or destruction of stone walls is subject to Planning Board review. A public hearing must be held on the application, and strict notice requirements must be met. In Spencer, the following roads have been designated as "Scenic":



- Borkum Road
- Buteau Road
- Cranberry Meadow Road
- East Charlton Road
- William Casey Road

New Subdivision Roads:

Section 5.B.2 of the Spencer Subdivision Regulations requires that all new subdivision roads have a minimum width of thirty (30) feet. Thus, every subdivision new road in Spencer must have a minimum paved width of 30-feet, whether it serves 200 units or whether it serves a six-lot cul-de-sac. Since this is a requirement of the Subdivision Regulations and not the Zoning Bylaw,

the Planning Board does have the authority to waive or modify this requirement based on individual circumstances (although the Board has rarely used this discretion). Several nationwide transportation planning organizations have begun promoting variable road width standards where the required road width is dependent on the amount of traffic volume expected. The national Institute of Traffic Engineers (ITE) recommends the following road width standards:

- 20-28 feet for low density roads (1-2 dwellings per acre)
- 28-34 feet for medium density roads (3-6 dwellings per acre)
- 36 feet for high density roads (over 6 dwellings per acre)

The ITE cites several reasons for having variable road width standards. Having large swaths of pavement encourages increased travel speeds (speeding). A large amount of natural vegetation must be removed to create these large paved areas, which in turn discourages groundwater recharge and creates a high volume of stormwater runoff that must be accommodated by down-slope drainage structures. Laying down large swaths of pavement is expensive for developers and adds to the cost of development (which in turn adds to the cost of housing). Lastly, wide swaths of pavement can increase maintenance costs for a municipality, especially in those cases where the way is intended to become a town road.

MassHighway does not recommend a definitive road width standard for local roads, rather, the department leaves it up to the municipalities to set their own road width standards. Outlined below is a sampling of road width standards from across the region.

Charlton: 35 feet for all new roads (according to Town Planner, this is a very old standard from the 80's and is frequently waived down to 26-28 feet).

Grafton: Minor streets (no through-traffic): 22-30 feet pavement width.
Major roads (through-traffic): 30-38 feet pavement width.

Holden: Minor roads: 28 feet.
Collector roads: 30 feet.

Leicester: All roads: 28 feet.

Oxford: Rural roads and urban collector roads: 22 feet.
Rural collector roads: 26 feet.

Princeton: Minor roads: 26 feet.
Secondary roads: 30 feet unless the subdivision lots are at least two-acres in size, then 26 feet pavement width is required.

Uxbridge: Has a minimum road right-of-way width, but no minimum pavement width.

Webster: All roads: 32 feet.

It is interesting to note that each town has its own unique local roadway width standard. The Planning Board should be cognizant of its ability to waive/modify its current roadway width standard based on individual circumstances such as the lay of the land and the expected traffic volume.

Parking & Traffic Advisory Committee Recommendations:

The Town established a Parking and Traffic Advisory Committee in early 2001 to evaluate the parking/traffic situation in the downtown area. The Committee issued several recommendations in its final report issued to the Town Administrator in December of 2001:

Parking Lot Corner of Main & Pleasant: After review of the recent surveys, study of the demographics and the layout of the businesses within the downtown area, the Committee feels that it is imperative the Town of Spencer own the parking lot at the corner of Main and Pleasant Streets. At present, the agreement between the Town and the owner is only a simple thirty-day notice to quit. If this lot were to be sold for development, the downtown businesses could be devastated.

Parking Lot Lighting: Lighting at all municipal parking lots should be reviewed to insure security and encourage use in the evening/night hours.

Parking Time Limits: Consider uniform parking limitation, posting of signs throughout Central Business Zone.

Signal Coordination: Coordinate traffic lights on Route 9 and increase the proportional length of Route 9 westbound green time in the PM peak hours.

A. The traffic lights in the downtown should be coordinated if they are not already. If they are currently coordinated, then either a police officer or a traffic engineer should review the effectiveness of the coordination during peak hours. A correction should be made if required.

B. The length of green time in the PM peak hours should be increased as compared to other movements. Traffic approaching from the east in the westbound lane of Route 9 will wait several light cycles during the PM peak hours. Traffic approaching from the south in the northbound lane of Route 31 will wait only one cycle maximum. Thus the savvy PM commuter will cut through the local neighborhoods to find a more efficient route making local streets more dangerous. Therefore, increasing the proportion of westbound green time will decrease driver frustration and make our neighborhoods safer.

Right Turn Lane Pleasant onto Main: The Committee believes this would greatly reduce traffic back-ups and help increase flow.

Right Turn Lane into High School: The Committee feels that creating a right turn lane on the eastbound Route 9 into David Prouty High School would alleviate traffic congestion in the AM peak hour. The crossing guard should only help people cross. If the guard is going to direct traffic, the guard should allow a longer eastbound movement during the AM peak hour. Again,

traffic backs up over the top of the hill and the frustrated commuters take short cuts through the local neighborhoods. A temporary solution would be to either instruct crossing guard that their job is to get pedestrians across the street and not to direct traffic, or have said crossing guards properly trained in traffic flow and management.

FLEXcon & Big Y Plaza Area: Study traffic calming measures between Route 49 and South Spencer Road on Route 9. The Committee recommends requesting the State to re-evaluate lane layout and markings to insure that data is current with traffic patterns and flows. (i.e. consider left only lanes at signal and/or double left-turn lane.)

Accident Data: The Committee recommends the Town hire a consultant to review accident data, identify trouble spots and aggressively correct problems, as funding is available.

Impact Study Paxton & Route 9: The Committee recommends an impact study be done after the new Intermediate School is constructed on Paxton Road.

It is expected that the Town will take action on many of the above recommendations over the course of 2002.

Mass Transit Alternatives:

Mass transit can be loosely defined as a public transportation service designed to move groups of people from one place to another. Such services include busses, trains, and boats for some areas of our nation. Typically, mass transit serves persons who would find it difficult to make their trip by any other mode. Such persons include the elderly, people with disabilities, young people, and people living on limited incomes. However, long-distance commuters are increasingly making use of mass transit alternatives. Mass transit opportunities are somewhat limited in Spencer, however, such opportunities can be found at the regional level.

Bus Service: The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA), the region's bus service provider, continues to play a small but vital role in Central Massachusetts. The WRTA currently has 32 bus routes, all of which radiate from downtown Worcester. Overall, the WRTA serves approximately 1% of all person travel trips in the region. The WRTA estimates that on any given business day, there are 1,620,000 person travel trips in the region. A 1999 WRTA study identified 16,000 riders per weekday, or roughly 1% of the region's total person travel trips. The number of people served by the WRTA is expected to increase due to the region's non-attainment status with regard to federal air quality standards. An increase is also expected due to the fact that the WRTA system leads into downtown Worcester, which serves as the region's commerce center.

Spencer has been a member of the WRTA since 1975. The WRTA provides one bus route (Bus #33) through the Spencer area. Bus #33 starts from downtown Worcester and terminates in the center of Brookfield, stopping in Spencer along the way. The bus makes seven trips on weekdays and three trips on Saturdays (no Sunday service). The bus stops in downtown Spencer near the Route 9/Pleasant Street intersection. The latest WRTA ridership statistics indicate there are, on average, roughly 74 bus boardings/alightings in Spencer on any given weekday.

Spencer elders and residents with disabilities can access the para-transit (van) service provided by South Central Massachusetts Elderbus Inc., under a contract with the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA). Spencer residents wishing to utilize the Elderbus need to call and make arrangements in advance. The Elderbus service operates out of Charlton and provides weekday service to locations throughout Spencer. It should be noted that the Elderbus only goes to Worcester on certain days of the week, with limited drop-off/pick-up hours. Roughly 4,500 Spencer residents utilize the Elderbus service on an annual basis.

In terms of interstate bus service, there are two such providers operating out of downtown Worcester: Peter Pan and Greyhound. These carriers provide transportation to Boston, Springfield, and various points out of state.

Train Service: Worcester's historic Union Station now serves as the region's primary rail passenger hub. The station currently provides inter-city train service through Amtrak, and commuter service through the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). Amtrak is the region's sole railroad passenger service provider and Worcester is the only stop in the region along Amtrak's New York-to-Boston route. However, this may end in the not-too-distance future because of Amtrak's budget difficulties.

There is an extensive freight rail network in central Massachusetts that is currently utilized by five freight rail providers. The Providence & Worcester Railroad Company (P&W) maintains an active rail line beginning in southeast Connecticut and terminating in downtown Worcester. This rail line enters Massachusetts in Webster and extends north directly parallel to the French River. This active rail line extends into east Spencer for about a half a mile, just east of Oxford Avenue.

Also of note is the CSX rail line (formerly ConRail) that runs east to west from Boston to Springfield via Worcester. This rail line passes through Charlton Depot and South Spencer, carrying both passengers and freight. Access to the rail line was one of the primary factors that influenced an entrepreneur's decision to establish an automobile distribution center between Route 49 and South Spencer Road.



Off-Road Trail Development: It should be noted that the Spencer Conservation Commission recently received a grant from the Department of Environmental Management's Greenways & Trails Program to develop a trail out of an old railbed. Known as the Depot Road/Town Center Trail, the Commission plans to establish a trail on an abandoned railroad right-of-way that will connect O'Gara Park with Depot Road and South Spencer Road. The 1.1-mile trail passes by the Spencer State Forest property and a formal connection here may be established at some point. The Commission plans to use the

grant money for engineering drainage improvements along the trail. Plans call for using stonedust as a trail surface at first with paving the trail being a future possibility.

The Commission is also working to re-establish five-miles worth of trails at a property owned by the 4-H Club near Buck Hill. AmeriCorps is doing the work on the Commission's behalf. In addition to providing recreational opportunities, trail systems (especially those in urban areas like the Depot Road/Town Center Trail) can provide an alternative means of transportation for people that live and work in close proximity. Trail systems are increasingly becoming tourist attractions (mostly for day-trips) and can provide a modest economic benefit to their host communities.

Air Travel: Worcester Regional Airport represents the only inter-state air travel provider located in Central Massachusetts, however, area residents are more likely to utilize Bradley Airport (in Hartford), Logan Airport (in Boston) and Green Airport (in Providence) for their cross-country and international travel needs. There are five local airports that are designed to accommodate smaller, lighter, general aviation aircraft. These local airports include the Spencer Airport (small paved runway for small planes), the Oxford Airport (located in east Oxford near the Millbury town line), the Southbridge Municipal Airport (located in the northwest corner of town), the Hopedale Industrial Park Airport, and the Tanner-Hiller Airport in New Braintree.

Transportation - Goal

The goal of Spencer's transportation circulation system is to provide a well-maintained and efficient system of roadways.

Transportation - Objectives

- Provide a system of roads, sidewalks, and bridges that are safe and structurally sound.
- Ensure that Spencer's transportation system has sufficient capacity to handle projected levels of traffic.
- Ensure the safety of residential areas while optimizing traffic flow and parking in commercial zones.
- Ensure that Spencer's traffic circulation system works with the natural contours of the land in an effort to minimize negative environmental impact.
- Promote regional mass transit options in an effort to reduce traffic congestion.

Transportation - Recommendations

1. Structurally Deficient & Functionally Obsolete Bridges: The Town should address its structurally deficient and functionally obsolete bridges. As mentioned previously, Spencer has one structurally deficient bridge and three functionally obsolete bridges. The Town should work with MassHighway and CMRPC to obtain federal-aid or state-aid bridge repair funds through the TIP process for those eligible bridges and State highway aid for those bridges that are not eligible for federal-aid. Once again, it is important to remember that bridge repair projects take a

long time to unfold, often as long as a decade from having the project listed on the regional TIP to the actual repair work. Thus, it is important for the Town to start the planning stage as soon as possible. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen, Highway Department and Spencer's delegates to CMRPC.

2. Tracking the Impact of New Large-Scale Development Proposals: The Town should track the traffic-related impacts of new large-scale development proposals such as the new Intermediate School being built along Paxton Road and the auto distribution center proposed for Route 49. Regarding the new school, traffic counts should be taken along Paxton Road prior to opening the school. Counts should also be taken along Paxton Road after the school opens up, preferably having one traffic counter placed before the school's main entrance and one just beyond. Counts should also be taken along Donnelly Road as well. The traffic count data should be collected in preparation for an intersection analysis, should the traffic count data warrant such an effort. Intersections to keep an eye on include Paxton Road/Main Street, Paxton Road/Donnelly Road, Paxton Road/Wilson Street, Donnelly Road/Main Street and Donnelly Road/Donnelly Cross Road. Regarding the auto distribution center proposed along Route 49, counts should be taken along Route 49 along either side of the facility's driveway before and after the center goes on line. Responsible Municipal Entity: CMRPC's Transportation Division can conduct traffic counts at the request of the Spencer Board of Selectmen and/or Highway Department.

3. Recommendations of the Parking & Traffic Advisory Committee: The Town should begin to implement the recommendations of the Parking & Traffic Advisory Committee as outlined in their December 2001 report. The Committee has prioritized its recommendations per the request of the Master Plan Advisory Committee. Although the downtown traffic situation would benefit from implementing all of the report's recommendations, the Committee believes the signalization improvements are of top priority, followed by a review of the Town's accident data by a qualified transportation planning professional. In addition, the Town should promote and prominently advertise through signage those municipal parking areas located off of Route 9 in the downtown area. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator and Highway Department.

4. Secure Existing Parking Facilities: Securing the parking lot at the corner of Main & Pleasant Streets for the Town's long-term use should be at the top of the list. The Town currently leases the parking lot from the nearby bank with only a 30-day notice to quit required. Spencer's downtown would be devastated if this parking area were lost. Downtown parking would be at a higher premium, traffic congestion would increase as drivers scour the landscape for parking and downtown merchants would suffer. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator and the Highway Department.

5. Problem Intersections: The Town should take a proactive approach to addressing its problem intersections. The first priorities are the two downtown traffic signals where Route 31 intersects with Route 9. As stated previously, these roadway segments have poor LOS and are prime vehicle crash locations. The Town has two options here: working on its own or working with MassHighway. The Town could hire a professional traffic engineering firm to evaluate the two downtown traffic signals with an eye towards coordinating signalization and improving

traffic flow. Another option, albeit less likely, is to petition MassHighway to take control of the two downtown traffic signals and let them work on the necessary signalization improvements. However, it is quite likely that MassHighway would insist on prohibiting the off-street parking that currently exists along this portion of the roadway.

CMRPC's 1992 Route 9 study identified several roadway geometric improvements that could improve the downtown traffic flow, although most of the suggested improvements were never implemented by the Town (such as increasing the turning radii available at the intersection of Route 9 and Grove Street). Since both Route 9 & Route 31 are eligible for federal-aid funding, the Town has the option of working with MassHighway and CMRPC to implement some of the intersection improvements recommended in the 1992 Traffic Study by having such projects included in the region's annual Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Towards this end, improved coordination of the two downtown traffic signals should be the first priority.

A cautionary note: It is important to remember that it will likely take years (even a decade or more) to implement a solution to a current transportation problem. Solving today's transportation problem from scratch is likely ten years away even if the Town has initiated the planning stage. When one considers the small amount of federal-aid available and that forty communities in the region compete for it, it is not surprising that there is a significant backlog of transportation projects waiting in the wings. If Spencer is serious about using federal-aid for a local transportation project, it needs to begin the process of securing funding now. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen, the Highway Department, and Spencer's delegates to CMRPC.

6. Mass Transit: With both the Town's population and local roadway traffic volume projected to expand over the next decade, it would serve Spencer well to encourage mass transit alternatives where possible. Towards this end, it is recommended that the Town pursue three recommendations in this regard:

- *Bus Service* - The Town should continue its membership in the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) and support its efforts to provide public transportation alternatives on a regional scale. A viable para-transit system keeps cars off the roads, which in turn helps to reduce congestion and facilitate circulation. Also, mass transit often provides the only method of transportation for the elderly and disabled. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and Spencer's representatives to the WRTA.
- *Train Service* - The Town should investigate the possibility of extending the current Boston-to-Worcester commuter rail into Spencer. CSX Inc. owns the rail, which is known as the CSX Mainline. The rail carries mostly freight; however, Amtrak does use the tracks for its New York-to-Boston route. In Spencer, the rail begins at the East Brookfield town line, cuts across Route 49, passes south of Depot Road and across South Spencer Road, before turning south and extending into Charlton. Extending the commuter line into Spencer would most certainly be a long-term project and would require numerous negotiating sessions, logistical maneuvers and construction of new facilities. However, extending the passenger service into Spencer would provide area residents with a no-hassle method of commuting into Worcester and Boston. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen.

- *Park & Ride Facility* - The Town should investigate its options for establishing a permanent Park & Ride facility so that more Spencer residents can utilize the WRTA's bus service. Ideally such a Park & Ride facility would be located in the downtown. However, with parking at such a premium in downtown Spencer, it may be more appropriate to locate such a facility to the east or west of downtown along Route 9. The WRTA should be consulted early on before the planning stage gets too far along. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and Spencer's representatives to the WRTA.
- *Trail Development* - The Town should continue to develop new trail systems that link residential areas with destination points such as the downtown, public parks, and places of employment. The current Depot Road/Town Center Trail project can serve as a valuable lesson on how to create new trail systems in other portions of Spencer. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Conservation Commission working in conjunction with the Board of Selectmen.

7. Update CMRPC's Route 9 West Corridor Planning Study: CMRPC issued the initial Route 9 study in September of 1992. A decade has passed and yet there has been no qualitative analysis to assess how the traffic situation has deteriorated along Route 9. The communities in the study area (Worcester, Leicester, and Spencer) would benefit from an updated assessment of the traffic issues facing the Route 9 corridor. Spencer's CMRPC delegates would need to convince CMRPC of the need for such a study. CMRPC would, in turn, need to petition MassHighway to have an update of the 1992 Route 9 Study incorporated into its annual work program funded by the Department. Before contacting CMRPC, the Town should thoroughly review the recommendations of the 1992 Study and determine which recommendations have been implemented over the past decade and which recommendations were not. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen, Highway Department, and Spencer's delegates to CMRPC.

8. Utility Work: The Town should develop a formal policy which ensures that utility companies who dig up town-maintained roads for the placement of their utility lines incur the full cost of repairing the roadway to its previous condition. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Highway Department.

9. Communication: The Town's representatives to the WRTA and the CMRPC should continue to brief the Board of Selectmen on regional transportation projects and issues that may have relevance to Spencer.

10. New Subdivision Road Width Standard: The Town should investigate the possibility of establishing a tiered road width standard for new subdivision roads. Issues to consider during the deliberative process include safety, emergency vehicle accessibility, expected traffic volume, density of development, impact on down-slope drainage facilities and maintenance. Responsible Municipal Entity: This should be a joint effort of the Planning Board and Highway Department. The Town's public safety officials should review any proposed changes to the current road width standard.

HOUSING

Population:

The 2000 US Census counted 11,691 residents in Spencer, a slight increase from the 1990 Census count of 11,645 residents. With a total landmass of 32.85 square miles, Spencer has a population density of roughly 356 people per square mile. The Census Bureau has designated Spencer's downtown area as a Census Designated Place (CDP), essentially this is a term given to a high-density urban cluster. According to the 2000 Census, 6,032 Spencer residents (or 51.6% of the Town's total population) live in the downtown area. The table below presents Spencer's growth in population over the years, as well as the Town's projected population for the year 2010.

**Table H-1
Spencer Population Growth**

<u>Year</u>	<u># of People</u>	<u>Numerical Change</u>	<u>% Change</u>
1920	5,930	----	----
1930	6,272	342	5.8%
1940	6,641	369	5.9%
1950	7,027	386	5.8%
1960	7,838	811	11.5%
1970	8,779	941	12.0%
1980	10,774	1,995	22.7%
1990	11,645	871	8.0%
2000	11,691	46	0.4%
2010*	12,332	641	5.5%

Sources: US Census Bureau; forecast for 2010 provided by the Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER) at UMass Amherst.

The table above shows that Spencer experienced a significant growth in population between 1950 and 1980. The growth rate has since stabilized, especially during the past decade when Spencer's population grew by a mere 46 residents. According to the Massachusetts Institute for Social & Economic Research (the State's premier statistical forecaster), Spencer's population growth rate is projected to see a modest increase (5.5%) over the next ten years.

**Table H-2
Population Growth – Comparable Communities**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Charlton</u>	<u>Dudley</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
1980	10,774	6,719	8,717	9,446	11,680	8,374	14,480
1990	11,645 (8.0%)	9,576 (42.0%)	9,540 (9.4%)	10,191 (7.9%)	12,588 (7.8%)	10,415 (24.4%)	16,196 (11.8%)
2000	11,691 (0.4%)	11,263 (7.6%)	10,036 (5.2%)	10,471 (2.7%)	13,352 (6.1%)	11,156 (7.1%)	16,415 (1.3%)
2010*	12,332 (5.5%)	16,655 (47.8%)	10,710 (6.7%)	12,012 (14.7%)	14,339 (7.4%)	13,803 (23.7%)	17,630 (7.4%)

Sources: US Census Bureau; forecast for 2010 provided by the Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER) at UMass Amherst.

The previous table indicates that Spencer has had a fairly moderate growth in population over the past twenty years, while Charlton and Uxbridge have grown at a rapid rate. The 2010 population projections suggest that Spencer will have the slowest growth rate of the comparable communities, while Charlton and Uxbridge will have the fastest rate of growth. Charlton's vast amount of vacant land with good soil makes it a prime candidate for growth while Uxbridge's proximity to Route 495 has swept it into the growth occurring in the Boston-metro area.

Housing Growth:

The table on the following page shows how the housing stock has grown over the years and allows for a comparison against the growth in population. Please note that this table refers only to Spencer's year-round occupied housing units.

**Table H-3
Housing Unit Growth**

<u>Year</u>	<u># of Occupied Housing Units</u>	<u>Numerical Change</u>	<u>% Change</u>
1960	2,396	---	---
1970	2,772	376	15.7%
1980	3,708	936	33.8%
1990	4,321	613	16.5%
2000	4,583	262	6.1%

Sources: = US Census.

**Table H-4
Housing Unit Growth – Comparable Communities**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Charlton</u>	<u>Dudley</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
1980	3,708	2,107	2,929	2,961	3,813	2,900	5,626
1990	4,321 (16.5%)	3,147 (49.3%)	3,387 (15.6%)	3,458 (16.8%)	4,492 (17.8%)	3,773 (30.1%)	6,529 (16.1%)
2000	4,583 (6.1%)	3,788 (20.4%)	3,737 (10.3%)	3,683 (6.5%)	5,058 (12.6%)	3,988 (5.7%)	6,905 (5.8%)

Sources: US Census.

Taken together, Tables H-2 and H-4 indicate that the housing stock of the comparable communities is growing at a faster rate than their populations. The period between 1980 and 1990 saw a tremendous growth in the number of housing units throughout the region; however, the housing unit growth rate for the past decade was much more modest (with Charlton being the exception).

Average Household Size:

A comparison of the two previous tables clearly indicates that Spencer's housing stock has and continues to grow at a faster rate than its population. This is not surprising when one considers the national trend towards smaller household sizes. Couples are having fewer children today and many households are of the single parent variety. Spencer's US Census data confirms this trend.

In 1960, the typical Spencer household contained 3.27 people. By 1980, the persons per household figure had declined to 2.86 and by 2000, to 2.55 persons per household.

Another factor contributing to smaller household sizes is “the graying of America”, that is, our nation’s elderly population is expanding. The Census data clearly demonstrates that this national trend is taking place in Spencer. In 1970, the median age of Spencer’s population was 29.2 years of age. By 1990, the median age had increased to 32.5 years of age, and the recent year 2000 Census shows the median age has continued to increase and now stands at 37.0 years of age.

Housing Unit Inventory:

**Table H-5
Type of Housing Units - Year 2000**

	<u># of Units</u>	<u>Percentage of Total</u>
One Unit (detached):	2,893	58.6%
One Unit (attached):	52	1.1%
Two Units:	675	13.7%
Three or Four Units:	734	14.9%
Five or More Units:	566	11.5%
Mobile Homes:	<u>18</u>	<u>0.2%</u>
TOTAL:	4,938	100%

Source: 2000 US Census.

**Table H-6
Type of Housing Units in Comparable Communities - Year 2000**

<u>Town</u>	<u>One Unit</u>	<u>Two Units</u>	<u>3-4 Units</u>	<u>5+ Units</u>	<u>Mobile Homes</u>
Spencer	2,945	675	734	566	18
Charlton	3,337	188	286	167	30
Dudley	2,697	488	513	243	9
Leicester	2,901	259	223	436	7
Oxford	3,802	479	395	524	28
Uxbridge	2,996	501	285	294	0
Webster	3,463	1,184	1,537	1,291	79

Source: 2000 US Census.

Please note that Tables H-5, H-6 above, and H-7 on the following page include *all* housing units in Spencer, including vacant houses and seasonal houses. The two tables above indicate that slightly less than 60% of Spencer’s housing stock is of the single-family home variety and just over 40% is of the multi-family variety (only Webster has a higher percentage of multi-family units). This indicates a healthy mix of housing opportunities for Spencer residents, especially when one considers that the majority of multi-family units are rental properties. The Town’s housing mix has been fairly stable over the past twenty years, although the percentage of single family homes has grown at a faster rate than multi-family housing units during this period.

Table H-6 indicates that, outside of Webster, Spencer has the largest supply of multi-family (2 units or more) housing of the comparable communities. Thus, Spencer fairs well in the provision of multi-family housing opportunities when compared to similar communities in the region. Spencer and Webster both have urbanized downtown areas and this is where multi-family housing is usually found.

Age of Housing Stock:

**Table H-7
Age of Housing Stock**

<u>Year Structure Built</u>	<u>Number of Units</u>	<u>% of Housing Stock</u>
1990-2000	384	7.8%
1980-1990	578	11.7%
1970-1980	796	16.1%
1960-1970	537	10.9%
1940-1960	980	19.8%
1939 or earlier	<u>1,663</u>	<u>33.7%</u>
TOTAL:	4,938	100%

Sources: US Census.



The previous table indicates that roughly one third of Spencer’s housing stock was built before World War II. Of the six communities in the region that are comparable to Spencer (Charlton, Dudley, Leicester, Oxford, Uxbridge and Webster), only Webster has a larger percentage of pre-World War II housing stock (37%). The remaining five comparable communities have a much lower percentage of pre-World War II housing (20-25%). Charlton has the lowest percentage of older housing (14.1%), although this is not surprising when one considers that Charlton

has one of the highest population growth rates in the region. With one third of Spencer’s housing stock being over 60 years old and more than half (53.5%) being over 40 years old, it is safe to say that many of Spencer’s residential dwellings would not meet the State’s current building code or pass muster with the Town’s Building Inspector.

Housing Occupancy:

**Table H-8
Type of Occupancy (Owner/Renter - 2000)**

	<u># of Units</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Owner Occupied Housing:	2,871	62.6%
Renter Occupied Housing:	1,712	37.4%

Source: 2000 US Census.

The previous table indicates that just over 60% of Spencer's housing stock is owner-occupied. Of the six comparable communities in the region, only Webster had a lower percentage of owner-occupied housing (54%). The other five comparable communities had owner-occupancy rates ranging from 71% to 83%. The percentage of owner-occupied housing in Spencer has remained fairly stable over the past thirty years, hovering right around 60%.

In terms of the percent of occupied housing units versus the percentage of vacant units, the 2000 Census reported that 92.8% of Spencer's housing units were occupied, indicating a vacancy rate of 7.2% (mostly rental units). Once again, of the six comparable communities in the region, only Webster had a higher vacancy rate (8.6%). The other five comparable communities had vacancy rates ranging from 2% to 5%.

**Table H-9
Type of Occupancy in Comparable Communities (Owner/Renter - 2000)**

	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Charlton</u>	<u>Dudley</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
Owner Units:	2,871 (63%)	3,143 (83%)	2,655 (71%)	2,811 (76%)	3,801 (75%)	3,139 (79%)	3,728 (54%)
Renter Units:	1,712 (37%)	645 (17%)	1,082 (29%)	872 (24%)	1,257 (25%)	849 (21%)	3,177 (46%)

Source: 2000 US Census.

The table above indicates that, outside of Webster, Spencer has the largest supply of rental units. As was shown in Table H-8, more than 37% of Spencer's housing stock is comprised of rental units. Only Webster has a higher percentage of rental units (46%) and none of the other comparable communities get past 30%. Once again, this indicates that Spencer fairs well in the provision of rental units when compared to similar communities in the region.

Types of Households:

**Table H-10
Households by Type (2000)**

	<u># of Households</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Married Couple Family:	3,094	67.5%
Non-Family Household:	1,489	32.5%

Source: 2000 US Census.

The previous table indicates that just over two thirds of Spencer’s households consists of married families. This represents a significant increase since the 1990 Census when family households accounted for 60.5% of all Spencer households. There has been a further reduction in the number of households headed by females. The 1990 Census counted 393 households headed by females while the 2000 Census counted 318 such households.

**Table H-11
Households by Type – Comparable Communities (2000)**

<u>Household Type</u>	<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Charlton</u>	<u>Dudley</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
Married Couple Family:	3,094 (68%)	3,045 (80%)	2,669 (71%)	2,708 (74%)	3,598 (71%)	3,036 (76%)	4,271 (62%)
Non-Family Household:	1,489 (32%)	743 (20%)	1,068 (29%)	975 (26%)	1,460 (29%)	952 (24%)	2,634 (38%)

Source: 2000 US Census.

The table above indicates that of the comparable communities, only Webster has a smaller percentage of married couple households than Spencer. This is fairly typical for communities that have a large number of multi-family units and rental units. Those communities where the vast majority of the housing stock is made up of single family homes tend to have a higher percentage of married couple households than those communities with a significant number of multi-family rental units in their downtown.

Housing Demand Assessment & Needs Analysis:

The following analysis will document the demand for housing in Spencer, the housing needs of local residents and what is actually available (and affordable) for housing opportunities. Before going any further, it is important to outline the assumptions used in this analysis.

- The analysis makes use of year 2000 statistics so that they may be cross-referenced to the 2000 US Census data.
- The median family income for the Worcester Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA), as determined by the federal Department Housing & Urban Development (HUD) HOME Program income limits for the year 2000 is \$54,400.
- The State Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD) Year 2000 Housing Certification Program lists the median family affordable purchase price for a new home in the Worcester PMSA at \$246,000.
- Spencer’s poverty-level income figure was obtained from the 2000 US Census.
- Housing demand and need was calculated for poverty-level households, low-income households (poverty-level to 50% of the area median income), low-to-moderate income households (50-65% of the area median income), moderate-to-middle income households (65-80% of the area median income), middle-income households (80-150% of the area median income) and upper income households (above 150% of area median income).
- It was assumed that households making up to 65% of the area median income would not be in the market for buying a home but instead would most likely rent their housing.

- It was assumed that households making more than 65% of the area median income would most likely be in the market for buying a home.
- For renters, it was assumed that 30% of their annual income would go towards rent.
- For homebuyers, it was assumed that 28% of their monthly income would go towards a house mortgage principal and interest. It was further assumed that homebuyers would make a down payment of at least 10% and have a 30-year mortgage at 7%.
- The number of rental units and their price ranges were estimated from the 2000 Census.
- Year 2000 home sales data was obtained from the Spencer Assessors Office and only qualified homes sales were used in the ensuing analysis.

The table below provides an affordability analysis for Spencer rental units. The table outlines the various renter income categories, the number of Spencer households fitting the income categories, the number of rental units in Spencer that are affordable to the various income categories and the gap/surplus for such rental units.

**Table H-12
Rental Unit Need/Demand Analysis**

Income Group	Range of Incomes	Range of Affordable Rent	# of Households	# of Actual Units	Deficit/Surplus
Poverty	\$13,290 and below	\$332 and below	618	303	-315
Poverty-to-Low	\$13,290 - \$27,200	\$332 - \$680	731	930	+199
Low-to-Moderate *	\$27,200 - \$35,360	\$680 - \$884	408	316	-92

* = Households earning between 50-65% of the area median income.

The previous table indicate that Spencer has a shortage of rental units that are affordable to poverty-level households. The 2000 US Census further supports this assertion as 424 Spencer households were identified as paying more than 30% of their monthly income towards rent. It is generally assumed that renters paying more than 30% of their monthly income towards rent are exceeding their affordability. The waiting list of the Spencer Housing Authority further supports the need for affordable rental units:

- Elderly/Handicapped Housing Units (DHCD Program 667): There is a current waiting list of 65 people (34 local residents and 31 non-local).
- Low Income Family Housing (DHCD Program 705): There is a current waiting list of 181 families (12 local families and 169 non-local families). This list has been closed for months because of the high volume of demand, but is set to re-open at the end of November 2002.
- Low-Income Rental Assistance (Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program managed by DHCD): There is a current waiting list of 184 people (12 local residents and 172 non-local). The State's budget crisis has resulted in DHCD freezing this particular program for at least the current fiscal year. In addition, tenant rent shares will be increased, meaning low-income people will have to cover a larger percentage of their monthly rent.

- Non-Elderly Disabled Housing (DHCD’s Alternative Housing Voucher Program): There is a current waiting list of 21 people (five local residents and 16 non-local). Once again, the State’s budget crisis has resulted in DHCD freezing this particular program for at least the current fiscal year and tenant rent shares will be increased.

The Spencer Housing Authority’s waiting lists indicate a significant demand for elderly/low-income/disabled housing and the substantial number of non-local people on the waiting lists indicates that the demand is regional in nature. However, in terms of affordable rental units, Spencer ranks fairly well when compared to the region’s other communities. The Year 2000 DHCD Housing Certification Program lists an affordable monthly rent figure of \$1,360 (30% of area median family income) for the Worcester PMSA. According to the Year 2000 US Census, there were only 13 rental units in Spencer (out of a total of 1,712 rental units) that had monthly rents between \$1,000 and \$1,499. Thus, Spencer’s rental units are quite affordable when considered within the regional context.

As most rental units are within multi-family dwelling structures, it should be noted that Spencer allows multi-family housing by Special Permit in all three of its residential zoning districts and two out of three of its commercial zoning districts. The bottom line is that Spencer has more than enough vacant developable land (11,923 acres all told in the residential and commercial zoning districts according to CMRPC’s buildout analysis) to accommodate new multi-family housing units if such developments can pass the muster of the Town’s Special Permit process.

Spencer fares much better in terms of homeownership opportunities. There were 389 property sales in Spencer during the year 2000, of which 159 were qualified home sales. The table on the following page provides an analysis of demand for homeownership in Spencer. The table outlines the various homeownership income categories, the number of Spencer households fitting each category and the median sales price of various types of housing units in Spencer for the year 2000.

**Table H-13
Homeownership Need/Demand Analysis**

<u>Income Group</u>	<u>Range of Incomes</u>	<u>Range of Affordable Housing Prices</u>	<u># of Households</u>
Moderate-to-Middle	\$35,360 - \$43,520	\$138,000 - \$169,000	408
Middle-to-Upper	\$43,520 - \$81,600	\$169,000 - 318,000	1,493
Upper	\$81,600 and above	\$318,000 and above	921

Year 2000 Median Sales Price For Single Family Home: \$139,900
(122 qualified sales in 2000)

Year 2000 Median Sales Price For Two-Family Home: \$60,000 per unit
(29 qualified sales in 2000)

Year 2000 Median Sales Price For Three-Family Home: \$51,250 per unit
(6 qualified sales in 2000)

* Please note that an analysis was not done for condominium units or four or more unit multi-family dwellings as there was only one condominium unit and one four-unit multi-family dwelling sold in Spencer during year 2000.



The previous table indicates that homeownership in Spencer is well within the grasp of all the various income groups that can participate in the homebuyer market (those households that earn at least 65% of the median area income). As mentioned previously, the median family income in the Worcester PMSA was \$54,400 for the Year 2000, with an affordable home purchase price of \$246,000 for the median family income. Of the 159 qualified home sales that took place in Spencer during 2000, only twelve

homes sold above the median family income affordable purchase price of \$246,000. In fact, only 21 homes were sold for \$200,000 or more, meaning that 138 homes (or 87% of the qualified home sales) sold for less than \$200,000. Thus, housing in Spencer is quite affordable when considered within the regional context.

It should be noted that single family homes are allowed by right in all three of Spencer's residential districts and that two-family homes are allowed in all three residential districts by Special Permit. According to the CMRPC 2002 revised buildout analysis, there are 11,258 vacant developable acres of land in Spencer's residential districts, enough to accommodate 6,108 new housing lots.

Housing-Related Issues in Spencer

1. Zoning Issues:

1-A. *Accessory Apartments:* Spencer's Zoning Bylaw currently does not allow for accessory apartments. An accessory apartment can be a second dwelling unit located within a single-family home, or it can be located above a garage or within a barn on a property whose primary use is for a single-family home. Another term for accessory apartments is "in-law apartments", as in the apartment is used by a related family member. Accessory apartments allow elderly people to live in close proximity to their family, as well as young people who cannot afford their own home at the time. Surely the families having 18-and-older children living with them would appreciate the option of setting them up with their own separate living space. Accessory apartments also allow the primary homeowner to collect a bit of rent, thus helping them cope with property taxes. Many communities in the region have adopted accessory apartment bylaws and have found that they provide another housing alternative for their residents.

1-B. *Senior Housing:* Spencer's Zoning Bylaw does not contain any provisions that directly address the need for senior housing alternatives. Spencer's over-55 population has grown by 12.7% since 1990, from 2,234 over-55 residents in 1990 to 2,517 over-55 residents in 2000. The segment of the Town's population aged 45-54 (i.e., Spencer's next generation of senior citizens) has grown by 50% over the last decade. Thus, Spencer will be dealing with the issue of elderly housing for some time to come. Although the Spencer Housing Authority manages two senior housing developments (Depot Village and Howe Village), the Authority's waiting list indicates a strong demand for senior housing. As

Spencer's elderly population is the fastest growing segment of the Town's overall population, the demand for senior housing will become even more pronounced over the next decade. Many communities in Massachusetts have adopted senior housing bylaws within their zoning framework. Such bylaws can take the form of senior residential communities, retirement communities, as well as assisted living and residential care facilities (both are governed by State regulations).

1-C. *Two-Family and Multi-Family Housing:* Currently, Spencer's Zoning Bylaw does not allow two-family dwellings or multi-family dwellings anywhere in Town by right. Rather, two-family dwellings are allowed by Special Permit in the Town's residential zoning districts and multi-family dwellings are allowed by Special Permit in the residential zoning districts as well as the Central Business and Local Business districts. Allowing such uses by right in the downtown area, where the infrastructure exists to serve them, could help to revitalize the downtown area by allowing the many underutilized buildings to be turned into multi-family dwellings. Having more people live in the downtown area will increase the demand for shopping opportunities, services and food establishments. Having a higher population density in the downtown would also alleviate some of the pressure to develop housing in the more rural areas of Town.

2. Deficiencies in the Subdivision Regulations:

2-A. *Erosion Control During the Construction Phase:* Spencer's Subdivision Regulations contain no erosion control standards whatsoever. Topsoil is often exposed for long periods of time during the construction phase and erosion control measures (silt fences, hay bales, etc.) need to be in place to minimize soil erosion. Failure to adequately control erosion during the construction phase can result in the erosion of topsoil, clogging of down-slope drainage facilities, as well as flooding of the property and adjacent properties. Erosion control measures need to be in place during the construction phase in order to ensure that disturbed soil does not wash away. Erosion control problems can be expensive to fix after the fact.

2-B. *Subdivision Road Design Standards:* The Subdivision Regulations currently require that new subdivision roads have a 50-foot right-of-way and a pavement width of 30 feet. These standards are suitable for large-scale subdivisions (20 lots or more); however, they are a bit excessive for small-scale subdivisions. Having these standards apply to all new subdivisions will result in an inefficient use of land and contribute to residential sprawl. The Planning Board does the option of reducing the right-of-way and pavement widths if the subdivision is small-scale, if it is highly unlikely that a connection will ever be made to the new subdivision road (making it a through road), and/or the new subdivision road is intended to be a private way.

3. Subsidized Housing and Affordable Housing: Chapter 40-B of Massachusetts General Laws outlines a municipality's responsibilities regarding the provision of low and moderate income housing. The law defines low and moderate-income housing as "...any housing subsidized by the federal or state government under any program...". Thus, by definition, a government subsidy is required in order to qualify as low and moderate-income housing. Please

note that this is quite different from the issue commonly known as “affordable housing” which is generally defined as housing that costs no more than one third of a person’s total income. Looking at the average home sale price and average contract rent in Spencer, it would be hard to argue that Spencer does not provide opportunities for affordable housing especially when Spencer’s numbers are compared to similar communities in the region.

Chapter 40-B states that at least 10% of a community’s housing stock must consist of low and moderate-income housing (keep in mind the State’s definition). Currently, there are only a handful of municipalities in Massachusetts that have achieved this 10% threshold (only Southbridge and Worcester in the CMRPC region). At the present time, only 4.53% of Spencer’s housing stock is considered low and moderate income (or 218 units). The residential developments managed by the Spencer Housing Authority are counted towards Spencer’s 10%. For municipalities that do not meet the 10% threshold, the practical consequences are as follows (beware the hammer!):

Any developer proposing low and moderate income housing can have the project exempted from local zoning and subdivision requirements and the development could be built in any zoning district, regardless of suitability. In reality, low and moderate-income housing developments are usually built in areas that have suitable infrastructure and convenience amenities (water, sewer, proximity to public transportation, etc.). Chapter 40-B is commonly known as the “Anti-Snob Zoning Act”.

The table below looks at how Spencer’s percentage of low and moderate income housing stock stacks up against comparable communities in the Central Massachusetts region.

Table H-14
% of Low/Moderate Income Housing – Comparable Communities

<u>Spencer</u>	<u>Charlton</u>	<u>Dudley</u>	<u>Leicester</u>	<u>Oxford</u>	<u>Uxbridge</u>	<u>Webster</u>
4.53%	1.96%	2.27%	3.48%	7.68%	5.25%	8.69%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development – Chapter 40-B Subsidized Housing Inventory (April 2002).

The table above indicates that Spencer falls in the middle of the comparable communities in terms of its percentage of low/moderate income housing; having a higher percentage than Charlton, Dudley and Leicester, but a lower percentage than Oxford, Uxbridge and Webster. With 218 housing units currently counted towards Spencer’s 10% low/moderate income housing unit threshold, the Town would need to have another 276 such units created in order to reach the goal of having 10% of its housing stock consist of low/moderate income housing. However, if non-subsidized housing continues to be built at a faster pace than low/moderate income housing, Spencer’s percentage of low/moderate income housing will decrease. This scenario has been taking place in Spencer for quite some time. In 1990, Spencer’s percentage of low/moderate income housing was 4.80%; thus, the Town’s percentage of low/moderate income housing has declined as a percentage of Spencer’s overall housing stock. A further decline is anticipated unless the Town takes proactive steps to counter this trend.

4. Older Homes in Need of Rehabilitation: As indicated in Table H-4, roughly one third of Spencer's housing stock was built prior to World War II. Much of this housing is old mill housing (now multi-family units) located in urbanized downtown. Although no comprehensive inventory has been compiled, it is quite likely that many of these older residences would not meet today's various housing codes (plumbing, electricity, weather-proofing, building code, etc.). Our federal government offers numerous grant opportunities for building rehabilitation projects, especially when they benefit low and moderate-income families. A brief description of available federal housing rehab grants is provided on the following pages.

- *Community Development Block Grant Program*: This program was developed at the federal level by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The program is implemented at the State level by DHCD. Offered annually, the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) presently has two pots of money available to Massachusetts municipalities: Community Development Fund I (CDF-I) and Community Development Fund II (CDF-II). A community is eligible to apply for one or the other. In Spencer's case, the Town is eligible to apply for CDF-I Program. Be forewarned that communities interested in applying for CDF funds need to do a substantial amount of advance work prior to submitting a grant application. Eligible activities include: economic development projects that create and/or retain local/regional jobs, community facilities, housing rehabilitation and infrastructure improvements (including sewer and water). A CDF project must either benefit low and moderate-income people, aid in the prevention and/or elimination of slums and/or blight, or meet an urgent condition posing a serious threat to the health and welfare of the community.
- *The Housing Development Support Program*: The Housing Development Support Program is a component of the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program administered by DHCD. The program is designed to assist with project-specific affordable housing initiatives with the emphasis on small-scale projects that might otherwise go un-funded. Typical projects include housing rehabilitation, new construction, reclamation of abandoned properties, elderly and special needs housing, and the conversion of obsolete and under-utilized buildings for housing. Funds can be used for acquisition, rehabilitation, site work and related infrastructure. Projects are limited to a maximum of seven housing units, 51% of which must be affordable to and occupied by low and moderate-income households (up to 80% of the area's median household income). This is a grant program and communities that have been Housing Certified by DHCD (Spencer is currently certified) receive bonus points totaling 10% of the available points for this program.
- *The Massachusetts Affordable Housing Trust Fund*: The Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) was established by an act of the State Legislature and is codified under Chapter 121-D of the Massachusetts General Laws. The AHTF operates out of DHCD and is administered by the Massachusetts Housing Finance Authority (MHFA) with guidance provided by an Advisory Committee of housing advocates. The purpose of the fund is to support the creation/preservation of housing that is affordable to people with incomes that

do not exceed 110% of the area median income. The AHTF can be used to support the acquisition, development and/or preservation of affordable housing units. AHTF assistance can include:

- Deferred payment loans, low/no-interest amortizing loans.
- Down payment and closing cost assistance for first-time homebuyers.
- Credit enhancements and mortgage insurance guarantees.
- Matching funds for municipalities that sponsor affordable housing projects.
- Matching funds for employer-based housing and capital grants for public housing.

Housing developments financed by the AHTF can include market-rate units, but the Trust Fund cannot be used to support such units. The level of assistance provided by the AHTF to a specific project must be the minimum amount necessary to achieve the desired degree of affordability. Housing units created through the AHTF can be counted towards the Town's 10% threshold for affordable housing under Chapter 40-B (see the previous discussion under Item #3).

- *The Local Initiative Program:* The Local Initiative Program (LIP) is administered by DHCD and was established to give municipalities more flexibility in their efforts to provide low and moderate-income housing. The program provides technical assistance and other non-financial assistance to housing developed through the initiative of local government to serve households below 80% of the town's median household income. The program limits the State's review to the most basic aspects of affordable housing: the incomes of the people served, the minimum quality of the housing provided, fair marketing and level of profit. LIP projects must be initiated by the municipality, either through zoning-based approvals (rezoning, special permits, density bonuses, etc.), financial assistance and/or through the provision of land and/or buildings. LIP projects can include new construction, building conversion, adaptive re-use and building rehabilitation. LIP projects are usually administered at the local level by a local housing partnership or, in the absence of a housing partnership, the Board of Selectmen. Affordable housing units created by a LIP project will be counted towards the municipality's 10% low and moderate-income housing threshold.
- *The HOME Program and the Housing Stabilization Fund:* These programs are offered by HUD (managed at the state level by DHCD) and are designed to support the acquisition and/or rehabilitation of existing structures. Acquisition funds are only available to low-income families. Eligible projects include: property acquisition; housing construction and/or rehabilitation; connecting to public utilities (sewer & water); and making essential improvements such as structural improvements, plumbing improvements and energy-related improvements. These programs are offered every two years. Once again, interested communities need to do a substantial amount of advance work prior to submitting a grant application.

- *The ‘Get the Lead Out’ Program:* This HUD-sponsored program is managed at the State level by the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (MHFA). This is a lead abatement program available to single family homes and 2-4 family properties. The Town of Southbridge has used this program to great effect. Offered on an annual basis, these funds are generally easier to apply for than the above referenced CDBG funds.
- *Home Improvement Loan Program:* Another HUD program managed by the MHFA, this program offers funds to eligible owners of one-to-four unit residential properties so that they can make necessary improvements to their residential structures. Eligible improvements include: sewage disposal systems and plumbing needs; alterations and renovations that will enhance property safety; energy-related improvements and repairs designed to bring the structure up to local building codes. Offered on an annual basis, these funds generally have an easier application process than the above referenced CDBG funds.
- *Community Septic Management Program:* This program was developed at the federal level by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and is administered at the State level by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The program makes available to homeowners loan money (at 5% interest) for repairing failing septic systems.
- *Weatherization Assistance:* HUD provides funding assistance to regional non-profit organizations for fuel assistance and weatherization programs. The Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. is the regional agency that provides such services for Worcester County communities. In order to be eligible for the weatherization program, the applicant must receive some form of federal fuel assistance benefits.

5. Open Space and Preserving Rural Character: It is evident that Spencer citizens are concerned about maintaining the community’s rural character. Although most of north and south Spencer currently consists of rolling hillsides, agricultural land and old homesteads, development pressure does have the potential to alter the landscape in less than desirable ways. There are several options for allowing residential development in the north and south of while maintaining the landscape’s rural character:

5-A *Cluster Housing:* Cluster housing allows for building houses closer together than would normally be allowed under the underlying zoning requirements, while preserving the remaining land as open space. It should be noted that Spencer’s Zoning Bylaw does have a definition for cluster housing in its Definitions section, however, the phrase “cluster housing” does not appear again anywhere within the Bylaw or the Subdivision Regulations. Cluster housing appeals to developers because it enables them to build shorter subdivision roads and (where available) extend public utilities at a reduced cost. Cluster housing can help to preserve rural character *if* the local bylaw gives the Planning Board the flexibility to determine what areas of the property are to remain as undeveloped open space. Cluster housing can make economic sense for a municipality in several instances such as having a central location for picking up school children instead of having the bus stop at every student’s house, reduced infrastructure costs and the permanent protection of open space. If municipal utilities are required, the lines for such

utilities can be extended into a cluster subdivision cheaper than they can be extended down an existing road as part of a conventional development proposal and a portion of the cluster development's open space can be used to provide recreation facilities for the residents instead of the Town having to acquire and develop recreational lands.

5-B Major Residential Development Review: Currently the Town does not have any mechanism to review development plans unless they are submitted to the Planning Board as a subdivision proposal (which means the construction of a new subdivision road). Thus, if a developer wanted to create 20 new lots along an existing Town road, the Town would have limited review authority. The plan would simply be submitted to the Planning Board for their signature as an Approval Not Required (ANR) plan. The only municipal review would occur when the developer applies for driveway permits from the Highway Department or building permits from the Building Inspector and these permits are issued *after* the lots have been created.

The current ANR approval process does not allow for a review of site drainage issues including: volume, degree of infiltration, flow direction and the ability of down-slope drainage structures to accommodate the increased surface water runoff. Many Massachusetts communities have Major Residential Development bylaws in place that provide for municipal review of site planning issues such as drainage, environmental impact and neighborhood impact. It is up to the community to determine what constitutes a "major" residential development. Some local bylaws start the review process at four newly created lots while others aren't triggered unless ten or more lots are proposed. The Town should have some sort of mechanism in place that allows for municipal review of major residential development proposals.

Housing – Goal

Spencer's goal for housing is to ensure that housing opportunities are available that meet the needs of a diverse population having a broad range of income levels, and that future housing growth occurs in a controlled manner consistent with the Town's rural character.

Housing - Objectives

- The growth of housing should be controlled so that it is proportional to the Town's ability to provide municipal services.
- The Town of Spencer should seek to meet the State goal of having 10% of its housing stock available to low and moderate income households.
- The Town should encourage developers to incorporate open space designs into new housing projects.
- The Town should ensure that Spencer's housing stock is developed and maintained in a manner that ensures compliance with existing building codes and work with property owners to achieve compliance.

- The Town should revise its zoning bylaw to clearly define the various housing types allowed in its residential zoning districts.

Housing - Recommendations

1. Major Residential Development Review: The Town should have a mechanism in place that allows for the municipal review of major residential development proposals, that is, multiple lots (five or more) being created along the frontage of an existing Town road. Currently, such development proposals receive no municipal review as they are created under the Approval Not Required (ANR) process. Having a major residential development review provision in the Town's Zoning Bylaw would allow for the municipal review of such site planning issues such as the cumulative impacts of the proposed development in regards to drainage, stormwater management, erosion control, environmental impact and neighborhood impact. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board.
2. Affordable Housing: The Town should review its non-regulatory options for providing low and moderate-income housing and make every effort to ensure that 10% of Spencer's housing stock consists of low and moderate-income housing. Towards this end, the Town should take a closer look at the State's Affordable Housing Trust Fund and the various housing grant programs offered by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator. Once again, the Board of Selectmen may opt to establish a local housing needs committee to assist in this effort.
3. Chapter 40-B Housing Proposals: The Zoning Board of Appeals should receive training on how to deal with Special Permits as they relate to low/moderate income housing projects as defined by Chapter 40-B of Massachusetts General Laws. The UMass Extension's Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC) offers classes on this subject on an annual basis and will even provide customized training sessions to individual communities. In addition, DHCD has prepared a procedural "how to" booklet for local communities. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Zoning Board of Appeals.
4. Inclusionary Zoning/Incentive-Based Zoning: The general purpose behind inclusionary zoning and incentive-based zoning is to increase a community's affordable housing stock. Inclusionary zoning can be seen as the "stick" approach while incentive-based zoning is the "carrot" approach. An inclusionary zoning bylaw is one that requires new subdivisions to set aside a certain percentage of new housing units as below-market units, i.e., units that can be counted towards the town's affordable housing unit inventory under Chapter 40-B MGL. Typically, inclusionary bylaws require anywhere from 10% to 25% of new subdivision housing units consist of below-market units. The Massachusetts Zoning Act does not explicitly authorize inclusionary zoning, however, many Commonwealth communities have inclusionary zoning bylaws on the books and have made the case that such bylaws are legally valid under the State's "Home Rule" approach to zoning. Massachusetts courts have generally approved of inclusionary zoning, however, they have frowned on assessing fees in lieu of providing actual affordable housing units.

Incentive-based zoning attempts to increase the affordable housing stock by offering incentives to developers to create below-market units as part of their developments. Such incentives can include higher densities, reduced frontage, reduced setback requirements, a reduction in the required roadway width, reduced infrastructure connection fees, and other incentives that can improve a developer's bottom line. Incentive-based zoning is an example of giving something to get something. Incentive-based zoning is explicitly authorized within the Massachusetts Zoning Act. Although Spencer's affordable housing situation is not nearly as dire as it is in other comparable communities in the region, the Town may wish to take some pro-active steps to bring its affordable housing unit inventory closer to the 10% required under Chapter 40-B MGL. Towards that end, Spencer should investigate both inclusionary zoning and incentive-based zoning and determine which approach would work best for the Town. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board.

5. Substandard Housing: The Town should proactively examine its housing stock and work with property owners to identify needed improvements. Once this is done, the Town should further investigate the various State grant opportunities to see if they make sense for Spencer and its property owners. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen in conjunction with the Building Inspector. The Board of Selectmen may opt to establish a local housing needs committee to assist in this effort.

6. Senior Housing: The Town should consider adopting a senior housing provision within its Zoning Bylaw as a Special Permit. The Town would need to give serious consideration as to which type of senior housing alternative would best suit its elderly population, whether it be a senior residential community, retirement community, assisted living facility or a residential care facility (please note that the last two options are governed by State regulations). Responsible Municipal Entity: The Zoning Board of Appeals in conjunction with the Building Inspector and Health Inspector. This could also be another agenda item for a local housing needs committee.

7. Cluster Housing: The Town should consider a cluster-housing bylaw as a tool for preserving open space in the rural north and south of Spencer. In order for such a bylaw to be effective, it must be written in such a way that a developer would prefer to utilize the cluster concept as opposed to the standard subdivision process. Factors to consider when designing a cluster-housing bylaw include: density bonuses, minimum lot sizes, quantity and quality of required open space, drainage, water, waste disposal, length and width of interior roads and of course public health and safety. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board.

8. Accessory Apartments: The Town should consider adopting an accessory apartment provision within its Zoning Bylaw. Issues to consider when drafting an accessory apartment provision include access/egress to the apartment, external appearance of the principal or secondary structure, parking, sewage disposal, trash disposal, size limitations and the permitting process. Allowing accessory apartments would provide another housing choice for Spencer's elder residents and young people who cannot yet afford to buy a home. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector and Health Inspector.

9. Erosion Control Standards: The Town's Subdivision Regulations should be amended to require detailed erosion control plans as part of the submission for definitive subdivision approval. The design standards for such plans should be clearly stated within the Town's Subdivision Regulations. It should be required that erosion control plans be prepared by a registered professional civil engineer and the Subdivision Regulations should be further amended to give the Planning Board the power to have such plans reviewed by an independent engineering consultant of the Planning Board's choice at the developer's expense. The Planning Board has had its own engineering consultant review subdivision plans on occasion but this has been an informal arrangement and has not been codified within the Board's Subdivision Regulations. The Subdivision Regulations should be absolutely clear on the Planning Board's procedures for reviewing definitive subdivision plans so that developers wishing to build in Spencer know what they're getting into. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board.

10. Two-Family and Multi-Family Dwellings: The Town should encourage two-family and multi-family dwellings in its downtown rather than the rural north and south. The downtown already has the infrastructure in place to accommodate higher density housing. Such housing tends to be more affordable than single-family homes on one-acre lots, thus having more multi-family units would help the Town bridge the gap in affordable rental units. Having more people living in the downtown will increase the need for a variety of businesses and services, thus helping to revitalize the downtown's economic base. It is therefore recommended that Spencer allow two-family and multi-family units by right (as opposed to Special Permit) in its downtown area. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector and Health Inspector.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Spencer's Labor Force:

The number of employed Spencer residents has grown steadily over the past decade, growing from 5,715 employed people in 1990 to 6,051 people by the decade's end (an overall increase of roughly 6%). Conversely, Spencer's local unemployment rate dropped from a high of 10% in 1991 to 2.6% by the decade's end. The second half of the 1990's saw the largest increase in the number of employed Spencer residents, along with a concomitant drop in the Town's unemployment rate. Spencer's unemployment rate started to creep up in 2001, hitting a high of 5.5% in January of 2002. The State as a whole saw a similar jump in its unemployment rate. Spencer's unemployment rate (as well as the State's) has since started to decline, dropping down to 4.6% by the end of April 2002. It would appear the economic tumble that occurred at the decade's start has begun to right itself.

The table below presents the number of employed/unemployed Spencer residents dating back to 1990. The table also allows for a comparison of Spencer's unemployment rate with the State's overall unemployment rate.

**Table ED-1
Employment Status of Spencer Residents**

Year	Total Spencer Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Spencer Rate of Unemployment	State Rate
1990	6,093	5,715	378	6.2%	6.0%
1991	6,014	5,413	601	10.0%	9.1%
1992	6,084	5,523	561	9.2%	8.6%
1993	6,040	5,613	427	7.1%	6.9%
1994	6,007	5,679	328	5.4%	6.0%
1995	6,069	5,742	327	5.5%	5.4%
1996	6,157	5,864	293	4.8%	4.3%
1997	6,358	6,139	219	3.4%	4.0%
1998	6,452	6,244	208	3.2%	3.3%
1999	6,351	6,166	185	2.9%	3.2%
2000	6,197	6,037	160	2.6%	2.6%
2001	6,329	6,110	219	3.5%	3.7%

Source: Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training.

CMRPC projects the number of employed Spencer residents will grow to 6,444 by the year 2010. If this projection is correct, it will represent an increase of 6.5% over the course of the decade. This projected increase is slightly lower than the CMRPC region as a whole whose percentage of employed residents is projected to increase by a total of 6.9% by the end of 2010.

Where Spencer Residents Work:

The US Census Bureau compiles workplace origin/destination statistics as part of once-a-decade national census effort. Although such information was collected for the 2000 US Census, the Bureau is not likely to release Spencer-specific workplace origin/destination statistics until early 2003. However, the 1990 US Census figures do provide some insight, albeit dated, as to where Spencer residents work.

In Spencer: 1,486 Worcester: 2,144 Auburn: 220 Leicester: 205 Holden: 139
 Shrewsbury: 109 Southbridge: 108

Elsewhere in the CMRPC Region: 718
 Elsewhere in Worcester County: 86
 Elsewhere in the State: 395
 Out of State: 69

The above numbers indicate that roughly 26% of Spencer’s employed people worked in Town during 1990, while roughly 38% worked in Worcester. The number of Spencer residents working in Worcester is not surprising as the City serves as the region’s center of commerce. Conversely, only 273 Worcester residents worked in Spencer in 1990. Although these figures are over ten years old, it is unlikely that the regional workplace origin/destination trends have changed significantly since 1990.

The Number and Types of Jobs in Spencer:

The Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training is the State entity in charge of tracking the changes taking place in the various sectors of the State’s economy at both the state and local levels. The table below presents the changes that took place in Spencer’s local economy during the 1990’s.

**Table ED-2
 Employment and Wages in Spencer**

Year	Total Annual Payroll	Average Annual Wage	# of Establishments	# of Workers	Agri/Forest/Fish	Government	Construction	Manufacture	TCPU*	Whole/Retail Trade	FIRE*	Service
1990	\$64 mill.	\$20,263	247	3,098	46	438	150	1,089	92	941	98	227
1991	\$64 mill.	\$21,682	231	2,947	40	436	101	1,109	77	858	96	214
1992	\$71 mill.	\$23,400	213	3,034	35	420	159	1,208	42	829	95	229
1993	\$75 mill.	\$23,270	212	3,208	43	438	185	1,246	50	866	111	251
1994	\$77 mill.	\$23,854	212	3,218	45	436	170	1,253	59	873	114	250
1995	\$78 mill.	\$24,609	222	3,170	54	435	141	1,248	65	847	98	262
1996	\$81 mill.	\$25,069	221	3,244	59	444	137	1,101	64	996	110	313
1997	\$88 mill.	\$26,822	218	3,264	51	464	151	1,134	69	887	114	374
1998	\$93 mill.	\$28,199	226	3,290	56	470	175	1,175	78	867	109	340
1999	\$99 mill.	\$29,658	228	3,342	66	408	167	1,239	119	902	105	315
2000	\$127mill	\$35,759	241	3,564	70	420	189	1,236	135	914	128	450

TCPU = Transportation, Communication, and Public Utilities.
 FIRE = Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate.

Source: Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training.

The previous table indicates that the number of business establishments operating in Spencer remained fairly stable over the past decade, while the number of workers (or jobs in Spencer) increased by 15%. The most notable increase in jobs took place in the service sector where the number of such jobs in Spencer almost doubled during the 1990's. The table also indicates that the total annual payroll and average annual wage almost doubled during the previous decade.

It is interesting to note that the number of manufacturing jobs in Spencer actually increased during the 1990's, whereas the CMRPC Region as a whole lost close to 7,000 such jobs during the same time period. In fact, it appears that manufacturing has been on the rebound in Spencer for the past thirty years in stark contrast to the rest of the region. The Town has a long and proud history as a mill village, however, the number of manufacturing jobs declined significantly during the middle of the last century, dropping from 1,158 manufacturing jobs in 1950 to just 191 such jobs by 1970. Spencer manufacturing jobs have steadily increased since the 1970's, while the region, state and all of New England for that matter, lost a significant amount of manufacturing jobs. The previous table indicates there were 3,564 jobs in Spencer as of the year 2000, with manufacturing jobs accounting for slightly less than 35% of the total jobs and retail jobs accounting for roughly 24%.

The employment categories presented in Table ED-2 are comprised of a variety of businesses that fit each category description. Presented below are the various businesses that make up each employment category along with the number of such businesses within Spencer.

Major Employment Category - Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, Agriculture & Mining: Crop production; animal production (including aquaculture); forestry and logging; fishing, hunting and trapping; support activities for agriculture and forestry; oil and gas extraction; mining;

According to the Massachusetts Division of Employment & Training, there are **two** logging operations and **one** sand & gravel mining operation in Spencer. All told, these firms employ roughly **70** people.

Major Employment Category - Government & Education: Federal, state, regional and local governmental entities; elementary and secondary schools; junior colleges; colleges, universities and professional schools; business schools and computer training; technical and trade schools; fine arts schools; and support services.

According to the 2000 US Census, there is **one** educational service operation in Spencer (the School District), and **one** governmental entity (the Town of Spencer). These two entities employ roughly 420 people. Please note that the federal Postal Service falls under the Transportation employment category.

Major Employment Category - Transportation; Communication; and Public Utilities: Air transportation; railroads; water transportation; truck transportation; transit and ground passenger transportation; pipeline transportation; scenic & sightseeing; transportation support activities; postal service; couriers and messengers; warehousing & storage;

electric; hydroelectric; fossil fuel; nuclear; natural gas; other fuel; water supply and irrigation systems; sewage treatment facilities; steam and air-conditioning; publishing industries; motion picture and video industries; broadcasting and telecommunications; information and data processing services.

According to the Division of Employment & Training, there are **five** transportation and warehousing operations, **one** software-publisher, and **one** electrical power distribution firm in Spencer. All told, these firms employ roughly **135** people.

Major Employment Category - Construction: Building, developing & general contracting; heavy construction; and special trade contractors.

According to the Division of Employment & Training, there are **48** construction firms in Spencer, employing roughly **189** people.

Major Employment Category - Manufacturing: Food manufacturing; beverage and tobacco products; textile mills; textile product mills; clothing and apparel; leather and allied products; wood products; paper; printing and related support activities; petroleum and coal products; chemicals; plastics and rubber products; nonmetallic mineral products; primary metals; fabricated metal products; machinery; computer and electronic products; electrical equipment, appliances and components; transportation equipment; furniture and related products; miscellaneous manufacturing.

According to the Division of Employment & Training, there are **15** manufacturing operations in Spencer, employing roughly **1,236** people.

Major Employment Category – Wholesale/Retail Trade: Durable goods and non-durable goods; motor vehicle & parts dealers; furniture and home furnishing stores; electronics and appliance stores; building material and garden equipment and supply dealers; food and beverage stores; health and personal care stores; gasoline stations; clothing stores; sporting goods, hobby and musical instrument stores; general merchandise stores; miscellaneous retail stores.

According to the Division of Employment & Training, there are **5** wholesale trade and **37** retail trade establishments in Spencer. All told, these establishments employ roughly **914** people.

Major Employment Category – Finance; Insurance & Real Estate: Monetary authorities; credit intermediation and related activities; securities, commodity contracts, & other financial investments and related activities; insurance carriers and related activities; funds, trusts and other financial vehicles; general real estate, rental and leasing services.

According to the Division of Employment & Training, there are **11** finance and insurance establishments and **5** real estate establishments in Spencer. All told, these firms employ roughly **128** people.

Major Employment Category – Services: The Service employment category includes a number of subcategories, including professional, scientific and technical services; administrative support; health care; accommodations and food services; as well as arts, entertainment and recreation.

According to the Division of Employment & Training, there are **12** professional service providers, **13** administrative support establishments, **15** health care and social assistance establishments, **4** arts, entertainment and recreation establishments, and **18** food service establishments, and **22** “other” service providers in Spencer. All told, these businesses employ roughly **450** people.

The Division of Employment and Training did not classify the remaining business establishments in Spencer.

It is interesting to note that the Master Plan’s citizen survey found that the “lack of retail shopping opportunities” was the most undesirable aspect of living in Spencer. According to the survey, Spencer residents would like to see more new restaurants in Town, a movie theater, large-scale retail stores and more clothing stores. Spencer once had a movie theater on Mechanic Street however it burned down during the 1980’s and has never been replaced.

The table below allows for a comparison of the types and number of jobs for similar-sized communities in the region. The table also provides a year 2000 employment and wages comparison for Spencer and comparable communities.

**Table ED-3
Employment and Wages - Year 2000 Comparison**

Town	Total Annual Payroll	Average Annual Wage	# of Establishments	# of Workers	Agri./ Forest/ Fish	Government	Construction	Manufacture	TCPU *	Whole/Retail Trade	FIRE *	Service
Spencer	\$127mill	\$35,759	241	3,564	70	420	189	1,236	135	914	128	450
Charlton	\$83 mill.	\$31,036	258	2,676	40	511	209	360	139	666	43	708
Dudley	\$80 mill.	\$28,489	160	2,813	14	534	124	1,114	29	490	47	455
Leicester	\$65 mill.	\$30,427	189	2,122	16	373	113	237	44	910	24	405
Oxford	\$10 mill	\$30,887	264	3,338	77	484	354	633	276	1,028	51	426
Uxbridge	\$74 mill.	\$27,324	271	2,691	158	484	160	337	42	1,061	45	379
Webster	\$193mill	\$30,763	360	6,285	67	542	219	808	173	1,333	1,641	1,502

TCPU = Transportation, Communication, and Public Utilities.
 FIRE = Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate.

Source: Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training.

The previous table indicates that Spencer has the highest average annual wage of the comparable communities. Webster has the largest annual payroll, number of establishments and far and away the highest number of jobs in the finance/insurance/real estate trades and service sector jobs. No other comparable community comes close to Webster in terms of having such jobs account for such a high percentage of the local economy.

CMRPC's Regional Traffic Demand Forecast Model allows for the projection of jobs per community based on modeled traffic patterns. According to CMRPC's most recent job projections for Spencer, the Town will have 3,967 in-town jobs by the year 2010. This represents an increase of 11.3%. Of the 3,967 in-town jobs projected for the year 2010, only 21% will be of the retail variety, meaning the other sectors of Spencer's economy are projected to grow at a faster rate. The table below provides a year 2000 employment and wages comparison for Spencer and similar towns within the region.

**Table ED-4
Employment and Wages - Year 2000 Comparison**

Town	Total Annual Payroll	Average Annual Wage	# of Establishments	# of Workers	Agri./ Forest/ Fish	Government	Construction	Manufacture	TCPU*	Whole/Retail Trade	FIRE*	Service
Spencer	\$127mill	\$35,759	241	3,564	70	420	189	1,236	135	914	128	450
Charlton	\$83 mill.	\$31,036	258	2,676	40	511	209	360	139	666	43	708
Dudley	\$80 mill.	\$28,489	160	2,813	14	534	124	1,114	29	490	47	455
Leicester	\$65 mill.	\$30,427	189	2,122	16	373	113	237	44	910	24	405
Oxford	\$10 mill	\$30,887	264	3,338	77	484	354	633	276	1,028	51	426
Uxbridge	\$74 mill.	\$27,324	271	2,691	158	484	160	337	42	1,061	45	379
Webster	\$193mill	\$30,763	360	6,285	67	542	219	808	173	1,333	1,641	1,502

TCPU = Transportation, Communication, and Public Utilities.
 FIRE = Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate.

Source: Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training.

The previous table indicates that Spencer has the highest average annual wage of the comparable communities. Webster has the largest annual payroll, number of establishments and far and away the highest number of jobs in the finance/insurance/real estate trades and service sector jobs. No other comparable community comes close to Webster in terms of having such jobs account for such a high percentage of the local economy.

Spencer's Largest Employers:

Spencer's three largest employers include:



FLEXcon Inc. located in the industrial park along South Spencer Road currently has roughly 1,100 employees, far and away Spencer's largest employer. This international company does have plans to expand, however, not in Spencer as its property is fully built out.

Mercury Wire Inc. located along Route 9 east currently employs 83 people. The company expanded its building site last year, adding 20,000 additional square feet. The company does not have any plans to expand its workforce in the near future.

The *Spencer-East Brookfield School District* employs roughly 280 people for the schools it operates in Spencer (150 teachers/administrators and 130 support staff). There are no concrete plans for expanding the District’s workforce until the new Intermediate School opens.

These three employers account for approximately 40% of the jobs in Spencer.

Economic Sector’s Contribution to the Local Tax Base:

In fiscal year 2002, Spencer levied a total of \$6,554,610 in taxes, based on a local tax rate of \$11.40 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. Spencer homeowners accounted for approximately 85% of the total 2002 tax base (\$5,571,068), while the businesses and industries accounted for approximately 11.7% of the tax base (\$768,340). The remainder (3.3%) was derived from taxes on personal property (\$215,202). The next two tables look at how Spencer compares to similar communities in the region in terms of the commercial and industrial tax base.

**Table ED-5
Commercial Tax Base Comparison**

<u>Community</u>	<u>FY 2002 Tax Rate</u>	<u>Commercial Taxes Levied</u>	<u>Assessed Valuation</u>	<u>% of Total Tax Levy</u>
Spencer	\$11.40	\$523,363	\$45.9 mill.	8.0%
Charlton	\$12.80	\$572,785	\$44.7 mill.	4.6%
Dudley	\$10.39	\$237,462	\$22.8 mill.	2.5%
Leicester	\$13.81	\$355,806	\$25.7 mill.	4.9%
Oxford	\$14.60	\$834,708	\$57.1 mill.	8.0%
Uxbridge	\$15.24	\$675,910	\$44.3 mill.	5.8%
Webster	\$28.35*	\$2,605,868	\$91.9 mill.	20.2%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

* Webster has a split tax rate (\$15.27 for residential and \$28.35 for commercial and industrial).

The previous table indicates that Webster’s commercial development nets the highest amount of tax dollars of the comparable communities both in terms of actual dollars and its percentage of the Town’s total tax levy and this would be true even without the Town’s split tax rate. Most of Webster’s commercial enterprises are located in its downtown area, as they are in Spencer. The question that comes to mind is what makes Webster’s downtown different than Spencer’s downtown?



**Table ED-6
Industrial Tax Base Comparison**

<u>Community</u>	<u>FY 2002 Tax Rate</u>	<u>Industrial Taxes Levied</u>	<u>Assessed Valuation</u>	<u>% of Total Tax Levy</u>
Spencer	\$11.40	\$244,977	\$21.5 mill.	3.7%
Charlton	\$12.80	\$455,182	\$35.5 mill.	4.6%
Dudley	\$10.39	\$137,736	\$13.2 mill.	4.3%
Leicester	\$13.81	\$191,994	\$13.9 mill.	2.7%
Oxford	\$14.60	\$662,122	\$45.3 mill.	6.4%
Uxbridge	\$15.24	\$438,018	\$28.7 mill.	3.8%
Webster	\$28.35*	\$575,925	\$20.3 mill.	4.5%

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

* Webster has a split tax rate (\$15.27 for residential and \$28.35 for commercial and industrial).

The previous table indicates that only Dudley and Leicester raise less tax dollars from their industrial sectors. A further breakdown of the numbers indicates that Oxford nets the most tax dollars from its industrial development, both in terms of actual dollars and its percentage of the Town's total tax levy. When the industrial and commercial tax levies are combined, only Oxford and Webster have a higher percentage of non-residential tax levies. Spencer's non-residential tax levies and assessed valuation have risen steadily since 1990, while the non-residential percent of total taxes levied has remained somewhat constant in the range of 10-12%.

Home Occupations and Accessory Retail Uses:

Spencer's existing zoning scheme currently allows home occupations by Special Permit (granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals) in every zoning district in Spencer, with the following restrictions:

- ◆ The occupation must be carried out within a principal building or accessory structure and cannot occupy more than 300 square feet.
- ◆ Not more than one person outside the family can be employed on the premises.
- ◆ No exterior display is allowed, no exterior sign (except as allowed in the sign by-law), no exterior storage of materials, and no other variation from the residential character of the principal building or accessory structure.
- ◆ The home occupation shall not generate more traffic in greater volumes than would be normally be expected in a residential neighborhood and any parking shall be off-street and located other than in the required front yard.
- ◆ The home occupation cannot create nuisance conditions for abutting neighbors.

In addition to the home occupation provisions described above, Spencer also has a Residential Business Overlay District that extends 200 feet on either side of Route 31 north. The overlay district allows for some small-scale businesses above and beyond what is permitted by right in the underlying zoning district. The Residential Business Overlay District was established in December of 1997 and contains the following provisions:

- ◆ Accessory retail use of an artisan or craftsman must be accessory to the owner-occupied dwelling of said artisan/craftsperson.
- ◆ The retail use is allowed in a principal or accessory structure, provided the retail use does not exceed 35% of the principal structure's total floor space, and cannot exceed 800 square feet in total retail space.
- ◆ At least 50% of all retail items must be produced on the premises.
- ◆ The Business Overlay District allows for accessory retail uses by Special Permit, to be granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals, as is the case with home occupations.

It is a trend of our modern-day economy that more people are establishing home businesses and/or working from their homes. Increased numbers of people are employed by a company and yet spend a good deal of their workweek working from home or "telecommuting". The Internet and advances in home computers have created conditions where people can be quite productive working out of their homes. There are no definitive rules or regulations that govern telecommuting and the practice is still evolving. Spencer can expect to see an increase in the number of people working from their homes, whether they are starting home businesses or simply telecommuting.

Regional Economic Trends:

In 1996 the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) prepared a document entitled, Economic Conditions and Prospects Study for Central Massachusetts. The Worcester Area Chamber of Commerce and the Worcester Office of Planning and Community Development provided technical assistance in support of the study. The following are the key findings of the 1996 study:

Manufacturing -

- In spite of declines, manufacturing still accounts for 22% of the region's employment base and the following industries are actually on the rise: biotechnology, photonics, plastics, and electronic components.
- Roughly two thirds of the region's manufacturing firms have plans to expand in the next five years and three quarters have plan to diversify their product lines.

Service Industry -

- The service sector of the regional economy has shown the highest increase in jobs created since the 1980's with the health care industry responsible for the largest amount of job growth in the service sector.

Start Up and Small Businesses -

- Although small businesses are becoming an ever-increasing part of the regional economy, all of the banks interviewed for the study said they cannot make commercial loans under \$10,000 profitably and none of them have microloan programs for under \$2,000.

Workforce Development -

- Over one third of the firms surveyed indicated having difficulty finding skilled and semi-skilled workers or people with strong engineering skills.
- A majority of the firms surveyed (71%) were not familiar with area job training programs and yet the Regional Employment Board (REB) has experienced more demand for job training than it has the resources to deliver.

Industrial Space Availability -

- State and regional economic development officials have noted a regional shortage of fully serviced industrial land and many companies have had difficulty finding suitable expansion land in their host community and the region as a whole.
- While water and sewer capacity is sufficient on a regional-basis, such infrastructure often does not extend to key parcels of land.
- The regional as a whole has not done a very good job of cleaning up its “Brownfield” sites. Only 21 of 473 “Brownfield” sites had been cleaned-up by the time of the study’s publication.

Opportunities for Economic Development:

As outlined in the Municipal Facilities and Services chapter, Spencer has a long list of financial matters (mostly capital equipment needs) that will need to be addressed during the next decade. If Spencer’s commercial and industrial sectors do not grow and increase their contribution to the local tax base, then it will be up to the homeowners to cover an ever-larger percentage of the Town’s annual budget. Simply put, a revitalized downtown combined with appropriate industrial development will help ease the tax burden on local homeowners. Spencer’s downtown does have significant revitalization potential and the Town has enough vacant industrially zoned land to accommodate new industries, the issue of infrastructure aside. Spencer’s upcoming municipal needs are going to be there even if the downtown remains unchanged and the Town’s vacant industrial land lies dormant. Thus the question becomes, what opportunities for appropriate economic development exist for Spencer?

There are several State-sponsored and regional economic development programs to which Spencer has access, however, the Town has yet to fully utilize any of them and an overall economic development plan is lacking. As an example, the Town has an Industrial Development Finance Authority that hasn’t had a single meeting in over eleven years. The ensuing discussion outlines the economic development opportunities available to Spencer as well as the impediments to economic development facing the Town.

1. *The Massachusetts Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP):* Created by the Legislature in 1993, the EDIP is designed to stimulate job creation in distressed areas, attract new businesses, encourage existing businesses to expand and increase overall economic readiness among Massachusetts towns and cities. The Massachusetts Office of Business Development administers the EDIP. The Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) oversees the EDIP and is charged with three responsibilities:

- Designating Economic Target Areas (ETAs)
- Designating Economic Opportunity Areas (EOAs) within an ETA
- Designating Certified Projects within an EOA

There are two benefits that the State confers on Certified Projects within designated EOAs: a 5% State Investment Tax Credit for qualifying tangible, depreciable investments and a 10% Abandoned Building Tax Deduction for costs associated with renovating an abandoned building.

Spencer is a member of the South Central Massachusetts Economic Target Area (ETA) established in 1994. Other communities in this ETA include Brimfield, Charlton, Dudley, Holland, Oxford, Southbridge, Sturbridge, Wales and Webster. The entirety of Spencer has been designated as an Economic Opportunity Area (EOA), however, there are no Certified Projects in Town at present and there are none on the horizon.

2. *Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Program*: In an effort to lure new economic development and retain existing businesses, Spencer has the option of establishing a local Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program. A local TIF program usually operates in the following manner: a new business or existing business wishing to expand would need to demonstrate that it will hire people from Spencer and the immediate area and that it will utilize local businesses and construction firms for its new/expanded building. In return, the Town would forgive a percentage of the taxes assessed on the new/expanded building over a period of several years. The percentage of forgiven assessed taxes would get smaller over a designated period of time. The establishment of a TIF project would require Town Meeting approval.

Local TIF programs have been the subjects of criticism lately due to concerns over lost tax revenue. However, citizens need to realize that local TIF programs help to keep jobs in their community (most of which are held by local residents), promote the use of local businesses for the building/expansion effort and help to attract new businesses that otherwise may not come to their community. A local TIF program in Spencer would be a valuable tool for attracting new businesses and industries, especially when one considers that the Town cannot offer much in the way of infrastructure (namely, municipal sewer service and publicly controlled industrial land).

3. *The Central Massachusetts Economic Development Authority (CMEDA)*: Established in 1996, this regional organization was created to address former industrial sites that have been contaminated, specifically, cleanup and re-use. Under Chapter 21-E of the Massachusetts General Laws, the State's Department of Environmental Protection has the authority to designate such sites for cleanup. Such sites are more commonly known as "Brownfields". There are over 950 such sites in Central Massachusetts (up from 471 sites in 1994), however, there are no such sites in Spencer at present and the Town is not currently a member of the CMEDA. Should such sites be identified in Spencer at a later date, the Town does have the option of working with the subject property owners to utilize the CMEDA process for cleanup and re-use. It should be noted that recent State budget cuts have decimated CMEDA's staff and institutional capability.

4. *MassDevelopment*: MassDevelopment acts as the State's industrial financing authority. It works primarily with industries and non-profit organizations; however, it does offer several programs that provide technical assistance to municipalities. MassDevelopment administers the

Predevelopment Assistance Program that can help municipalities fund projects that will result in economic benefits to the community and the region. MassDevelopment can help with site-specific projects and can assist with appraisals, financing, site planning and architectural services. Under its Economic Development Lending program, MassDevelopment can also assist with the planning and financing of industrial parks. It should be noted that MassDevelopment does have a regional office in Worcester.

5. *The Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QV CDC)*: The Quaboag Valley CDC is a private non-profit corporation that promotes economic development and workforce training within its 15-community service area. Spencer is its furthest community to the east but the CDC also serves the communities of Belchertown, Brimfield, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Hardwick, Holland, Monson, New Braintree, North Brookfield, Palmer, Wales, Ware, Warren and West Brookfield. Managed by a board of directors, the CDC's objectives include:

- Redevelopment of blighted commercial areas
- Coordination of public & private resources on regional economic development projects and
- Job creation for unemployed/underemployed persons through specialized training programs.

The CDC offers training programs for job hunting, computer skills, workforce training, business planning as well as a business peer program for early-stage entrepreneurs. Many of these programs have been offered at Spencer locations. A subset of the agency is the Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation (BAC) that serves as the CDC's lending agency. The BAC offers small business loans of up to \$100,000, micro-enterprise loans of up to \$25,000 and peer lending group loans of up to \$20,000. The BAC's revolving loan fund has been capitalized by grants from the DHCD and the federal Department of Agriculture. Several area banks provide a line of credit to the BAC, including the Spencer Savings Bank. As of 2002, the BAC has issued 1.2 million dollars in loans and has provided business-planning assistance to 94 companies. The CDC and the BAC are valuable resources that Spencer businesses and local entrepreneurs have yet to take full advantage of.

6. *Vacant, Developable Industrially Zoned Land*: CMRPC completed a buildout analysis for the Town of Spencer in the spring of 2001 and this exercise was repeated in December 2002 to take into account the Town's Aquifer Protection District and to remove wetlands as a development factor (this was not done for the 2001 exercise). A build-out analysis is a planning tool that determines the amount of vacant, developable land in town and assesses the potential impacts if this land were fully developed under the town's existing zoning standards. A buildout analysis does not attempt to determine *when* a community will reach full buildout; rather, it simply attempts to determine what the community would look like if it were fully built out according to the town's current zoning policies.

In the case of Spencer, roughly 381 acres of vacant, developable land was identified within the Town's commercial and industrial zoning districts. The table on the following page presents a rough breakdown of the amount of vacant, developable land in each of the Town's non-residential zoning districts and how much commercial/industrial floor space could be created if the land were fully developed under the Town's current zoning standards.

**Table ED-7
Non-Residential Buildout Analysis**

<u>Zoning District</u>	<u>Developable Land</u>	<u>Potential Floor Space</u>	<u>Potential New Jobs*</u>	<u>Estimated** Tax Revenue</u>
Commercial	106 acres	283,573 sq. ft.	1,134	\$143,814
Local Business	43 acres	149,649 sq. ft.	599	\$75,894
Industrial	<u>248 acres</u>	<u>882,715 sq. ft.</u>	<u>3,531</u>	<u>\$298,446</u>
TOTAL:	397 acres	1,315,937 sq. ft.	5,264	\$518,154

Source: CMRPC Buildout Analysis for the Town of Spencer, March 2001 and December 2002.

* The new jobs figure is based on four employees per 1,000 square feet of floor space (multiplier supplied as part of the EOEa buildout methodology).

** The estimated tax revenue is based on the year 2001 tax rate (\$11.27 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation) and the assessed value of the newly created floor space is based on the Assessor's Base Rate Table for commercial uses (an average of \$45 per 1,000 square feet) and industrial uses (an average of \$30 per 1,000 square feet).

The previous table indicates that Spencer has a moderate amount of developable commercial land. This is not the problem it would be for some communities because downtown Spencer contains numerous underutilized properties and buildings that could easily be redeveloped/rehabilitated to create new retail/service enterprises that would contribute substantially more to the local tax base than do the current businesses on site. The Town does have a healthy amount of industrial land, however, much of it lies behind the FLEXcon campus and its only road frontage is on Bixby Road (a primarily residential area). There is a substantial amount of vacant industrial land to the west of Route 49 that is relatively free of environmental constraints. It should be noted that all of Spencer's vacant, developable industrially zoned land is under private ownership.

The new jobs created figure of 5,264 is somewhat dubious, as a full buildout of Spencer's vacant commercial/industrial land is quite unlikely. With 3,564 jobs existing in Spencer as of the year 2000, this would mean that Spencer would have 8,828 jobs if the Town were fully built out under its current zoning standards. Again, this is highly unlikely. Zoning standards will likely change periodically, new development can render backland unusable and land protection efforts can effectively preclude development on certain properties. Please note that the estimated tax revenue of \$518,154 is based on the assumption of a full buildout of the Town's commercial and industrial districts and is based on the Town's 2001 tax rate of \$11.27 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. Again, a full buildout of the commercial/industrial districts is highly unlikely in the near future.

Impediments to Economic Development:

1. *Lack of Sewer System Capacity:* The single biggest impediment to future economic development in Spencer is the municipal sewer system's lack of capacity. As discussed in the Town Government Facilities & Services chapter, Spencer's sewer system has a serious inflow/infiltration problem that reduces the system's capacity and limits the number of new connections

to the system. Complicating matters further, the sewer system's receiving source (Cranberry Brook) does not have the capacity to accommodate any more wastewater than is currently being discharged into it. The Sewer Department is also understaffed and does not have the manpower to conduct routine system inspections or implement a pipe replacement program. The Sewer Department also does not have a clear-cut policy regarding the treatment of industrial wastewater.

All of the above factors combine to create a situation where new businesses and industries wishing to settle in Spencer cannot be assured municipal sewer service. The ability to tie into a municipal sewer system is one of the key elements that new businesses and industries look for when deciding where to locate (in addition to municipal water, easy highway access and a skilled labor force). Spencer clearly needs to deal with its inflow/infiltration problem in order to free up additional system capacity and the Sewer Department needs to become a partner in the Town's overall effort to attract new economic development. The Department needs to be able to provide clear direction and assistance to new businesses and industries wishing to set up shop in Spencer.

One option for covering the cost of an infiltration/inflow study (a sewer master plan) and for actually fixing the problems identified by such a study is the State's Clean Water Revolving Loan Fund. Funded by the Massachusetts Water Pollution Abatement Trust (MWPAT) and administered by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the revolving loan fund offers municipalities no-interest loans for planning, designing and implementing improvements to their water and sewer systems. To apply for this loan program, Spencer would first need to complete a DEP Project Evaluation Form. Utilizing the State's revolving loan fund would be a great way to start dealing with the myriad of problems facing Spencer's Sewer Department.

2. *Lack of Town-Controlled Industrial Land:* Spencer does not have much in the way of Town-controlled land (industrially zoned or otherwise) to offer new businesses and industries. Many Massachusetts communities create industrial parks on town-owned land so that it may attract the types of businesses/industries it wants and offer them a coordinated delivery of municipal services. In Spencer, it is up to the new business to identify a suitable property and work with the various Town departments to obtain the necessary municipal services as best as it can. It does not help matters that the Town's Industrial Finance Authority is for all intents and purposes defunct and cannot offer much in the way of assistance to new businesses and industries.

3. *Lack of Water & Sewer Infrastructure for the Industrial District that Abuts Route 49:* This particular zoning district is bounded on the east by Route 49 and on the west by the East Brookfield town line. This is the only industrial zoning district in Spencer that does not have access to municipal water and sewer. As mentioned previously, new industries often have the presence of municipal water and sewer at the top of their list when looking for land to develop. This particular zoning district is one of Spencer's more attractive industrial districts because Route 49 offers excellent access to the Turnpike, Route 84 and Route 20. There are plans to build an auto-distribution facility in this district. This proposal would utilize roughly 30% of the district's total land area (61 acres of the district's total area of 189 acres). This proposal is unique in the fact that the lack of municipal water and sewer did not preclude moving forward with the

project. It may be possible to have this district fully utilized by new industries without the presence of municipal sewer and water, however, the district becomes that much more attractive to new industries if such infrastructure were in place.

One option for extending municipal water and sewer to this particular industrial district is the Community Development Action Grant (CDAG) offered by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Eligible CDAG projects are those that help attract and leverage private investment, create/retain jobs for low and moderate-income persons and address the needs of blighted neighborhoods. Spencer could make a decent case that extending its infrastructure to this industrial district will meet the CDAG program's first two objectives.

4. *Lack of Parking in the Downtown:* Parking is at a premium in downtown Spencer and one of its primary parking locations is perpetually in jeopardy (the bank parking lot across the street from the Library) because the Town does not own this site. The bank need only give 30-days notice to the Town before selling/developing the parking lot on Pleasant Street. Such a scenario would certainly wreak havoc in a downtown already pressed for parking. The Town needs to develop a proactive strategy for securing this parking area, whether through outright purchase or through the negotiation of a long-term lease. The parking in downtown Spencer is such that the Post Office site cannot even provide handicapped parking. The Town should offer its assistance to the post office in an effort to rectify this situation. Perhaps one of the on-street parking spaces in front of the Post Office could be designated for handicapped parking.

Economic Development - Goal

The goal of Spencer's economic strategy is to maintain stability and manage growth of our in-town commercial and industrial sectors in order to expand local opportunities for meeting the employment and commerce needs of Spencer residents.

Economic Development - Objectives

- Increase employment opportunities for Spencer residents.
- Increase the tax base through controlled commercial and industrial development.
- Expand retail and service opportunities to meet the daily needs of Spencer's growing population.
- Maintain a quality educational system that produces a professional and educated population that is able to fulfill the regional economy's emerging employment needs.

Economic Development - Recommendations

1. Secure the Pleasant Street Parking Lot: It is recommended that Spencer develop a proactive strategy for securing the Pleasant Street parking area (currently owned by Sovereign Bank), either through outright purchase or through the negotiation of a long-term lease. The

Town's Traffic & Parking Advisory Committee also put forth this recommendation in its final report to the Board of Selectmen, issued in December 2001. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

2. Revitalize and Expand the Industrial Development Finance Authority: As mentioned in the Town Government Facilities & Services chapter, Spencer's Industrial Development Finance Authority (IDFA) has not met in over ten years and is all but dormant. No other municipal entity has stepped up to fill the void and take the lead in developing and implementing an economic development strategy for Spencer. There is no local Chamber of Commerce and the Town is unlikely to hire an Economic Development Coordinator. Thus, the Town is left with the options of revitalizing its IDFA or creating a new municipal entity charged with creating/implementing an economic development strategy for Spencer. In keeping with the Town's ongoing effort to consolidate its municipal services and entities, it is recommended that Spencer reorganize its IDFA, expand its membership and charge them with the task of developing and implementing an economic development strategy for Spencer. A revitalized IDFA would need to begin by reviewing the Town's zoning scheme, tax policies, road improvement plans and water/sewer expansion plans as they relate to Spencer's ability to attract new businesses. The IDFA would then need to work with the various municipal boards and departments to develop an economic development strategy for Spencer. As part of an economic development strategy, the Town should designate a staff person in Town Hall to handle economic development issues. One contact person is essential, as businesses want straight answers fast. Responsible Municipal Entity: The IDFA, Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

3. Develop the Town's Grant Writing Capacity: Spencer is eligible for a wide variety of federal and State grant programs, however, applying for them can be a time consuming endeavor that requires a great deal of research and narrative writing. Many town departments would like to apply for grants but simply do not have the manpower or time to adequately deal with the application process. With numerous capital expenditures on the horizon, it is imperative that the Town cultivates its grant writing capacity so that it may access the significant amount of money being made available through State grants. The Town's grant writing capacity could be developed in-house by hiring a professional grant writer, or through establishing a town planner/economic development coordinator position. If the Town cannot afford to hire additional municipal staff for the purpose of grant writing/administration, then perhaps the Town could contract with a professional grant writer on an as-needed basis. There are numerous private sector planning consultants that would be happy to work with Spencer on a specific grant application. Another option would be to utilize the grant writing services of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC). As a member of CMRPC, Spencer is eligible to receive 24-hours of planning assistance every year. Many member communities have utilized their 24-hours of planning assistance for the purpose of having CMRPC assist them with a particular grant application. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

4. Sewer System Master Plan: It is recommended that the Sewer Department find a way to fund a "master plan" for the sewer system. Such a plan would consist of a detailed sewer line capacity study and a well-coordinated sewer pipe replacement program. Details of the plan should include identifying system deficiencies, prioritizing their repair (with cost estimates) and

establishing a rolling five-year work program for sewer pipe repair and replacement. Such a master plan should also outline a long-range system maintenance strategy for the Sewer Department. Implementing the plan's recommendations would be of great benefit to the system's existing users (a "righting of the ship", so to speak), but would also help the Town's economic development strategy, such as it is. As mentioned previously, the State's Clean Water Revolving Loan Fund could be utilized to pay for both an infiltration/inflow study (a sewer master plan), as well as for constructing the improvements identified by such a study. Once the sewer system's inflow/infiltration problem is sorted out, the Town may want to consider applying to DHCD for a CDAG grant to extend municipal water and sewer to its western-most industrial district that abuts Route 49. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Sewer Department in conjunction with the Finance Committee and the Town Administrator.

5. Coordinate Development Activity With the Owners of Industrial Land: As mentioned previously, the vast majority of Spencer's industrially zoned land is under private ownership. Since the Town is highly unlikely to purchase such land, it is paramount that Spencer planners work in partnership with the owners of industrial land to make sure this land is developed in accordance with the Town's objectives and render assistance when possible. Such assistance could be in the form of extending municipal infrastructure (as in the case with the Town's western-most industrial district along Route 49), or simply helping the landowners access the technical assistance made available by the myriad of private/public entities that promote economic development. Responsible Municipal Entity: The IDFA, Board of Selectmen, the Town Administrator, the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals.

6. Develop a Computerized Database of Available Industrial Properties: The Town should develop a computerized database of its available industrially zoned properties as a service for new industries investigating Spencer as a potential location. The database should be searchable by parcel size, availability of water and sewer, proximity to major highway, easements in place, and any other information that a potential developer may find useful. Not only would such a database be very useful to potential developers, it would show that Spencer is business-friendly and willing to provide resources in support of new industrial development. Responsible Municipal Entity: The IDFA in conjunction with the Board of Assessors.

7. Tax Increment Financing: Spencer should investigate the possibility of establishing a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program to create and retain jobs in Town and stimulate the local economy. A local TIF program should insist that new businesses reserve a certain percentage of jobs for Spencer residents, local contractors are used for building construction/rehabilitation and that local businesses are used as service providers. Although it would take a few years before Spencer could reap the tax benefits from any TIF-created projects, the benefits to the local economy will be felt immediately. If Spencer wants to maintain a low tax rate while still providing quality municipal services, then it has to grow its non-residential tax base, even if the tax benefits get pushed ten years into the future. Since the Town cannot offer new businesses much in the way of infrastructure (read municipal sewer), a local TIF program would be a significant draw for new economic development. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator.

8. High Speed Cable Access: The Town needs to influence local cable companies and telecommunication firms to provide access to high speed data and networking technologies in preparation for existing and new businesses that may want to take advantage of these technologies. Put quite simply, these technologies are the wave of the future and if businesses can't find them in Spencer, they *will* look elsewhere. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

9. Brownfields: Spencer should join the Central Massachusetts Economic Development Authority (CMEDA) so that it may utilize their services if and when a contaminated property is identified. Getting contaminated properties cleaned up and back on the tax rolls will add to the Town's non-residential tax base and benefit the local economy. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.



EXISTING AND FUTURE LAND USE

Spencer's Existing Land Use Pattern:

Spencer's land use pattern can be divided into two segments: the densely settled downtown area, and the sparsely developed rural north and south. The Town's multi-family housing units are located almost exclusively within the downtown, while single-family homes are the dominant land use in the north and south. Dense residential development is fairly extensive around Cranberry Meadow Pond, Stiles Reservoir, Lake Whittemore, Sugden Reservoir and Thompson Pond.

Route 9 (Main Street) serves as the Town's primary commercial corridor, with a dense concentration of small-scale retail/service/food establishments in the downtown and some larger retail uses located along West Main Street. FLEXcon, the Town's largest manufacturing operation, is located off of South Spencer Road, west of the downtown. The Town's various institutional uses are primarily located in the downtown, although there are several municipal services that have located their base of operations west of the downtown, including the Fire Department, Police Department, Sewer, Water and the Public Works Department.

The table below outlines how Spencer's land is currently used. The land use totals were taken from an orthophotograph of Spencer taken in 1999 by the University of Massachusetts-Amherst as part of a statewide land use mapping effort. The UMass land use maps were further refined by CMRPC, using its Geographic Information System (GIS). A graphic depiction of Spencer's land use Pattern can be seen on the map on the following page (Existing Land Use Map).

**Table LU-1
Spencer Land Use – Categories of Land**

<u>Developed Land</u>	<u>Permanently Protected Land*</u>	<u>Land With Environmental Constraints (non-buildable)</u>
2,846 acres	4,351 acres	2,740 acres
2,439 acres of residential 130 acres of institutional** 142 acres of industrial 135 acres of commercial		820 acres of waterbodies 1,053 acres of wetlands 867 acres of wetland buffers (State Wetlands Law)

* Permanently protected lands: farmland protected by the State, Conservation Commission and St. Joseph's Abbey.

** Institutional lands: active municipal properties; churches (not including the Abbey); and schools.

Source: CMRPC GIS analysis (December 2002) based on 1999 UMass land use data.

TOWN OF SPENCER

Map 4 Existing Land Use



Legend

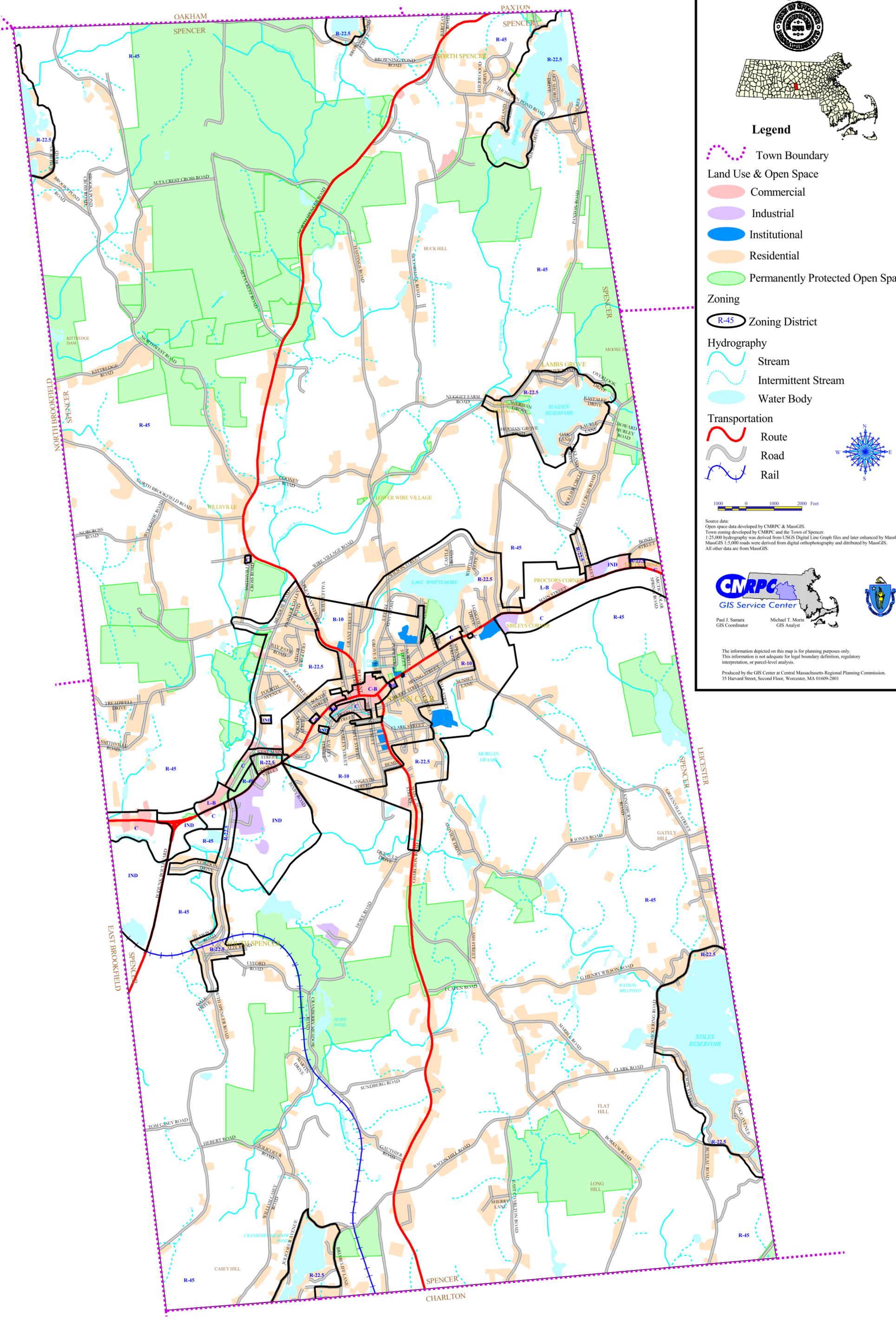
- Town Boundary
- Land Use & Open Space
 - Commercial
 - Industrial
 - Institutional
 - Residential
 - Permanently Protected Open Space
- Zoning
 - Zoning District (R-45)
- Hydrography
 - Stream
 - Intermittent Stream
 - Water Body
- Transportation
 - Route
 - Road
 - Rail



Source data:
Open space data developed by CMRPC & MassGIS.
Town zoning developed by CMRPC and the Town of Spencer.
1:25,000 hydrography was derived from USGS Digital Line Graph files and later enhanced by MassGIS.
MassGIS 1:5,000 roads were derived from digital orthophotography and distributed by MassGIS.
All other data are from MassGIS.



The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis.
Produced by the GIS Center at Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, 35 Harvard Street, Second Floor, Worcester, MA 01609-2801



**Table LU-2
Spencer Land Use – Breakdown of Total Town Land Area**

Total Town Land Area:	21,592 acres
Total Developed Land:	2,846 acres (13.2% of total land area)
Total Permanently Protected Land:	4,351 acres (20.1 % of total land area)
Total Non-Buildable Land:	2,740 acres (12.7% of total land area)
Remaining Developable Land:	11,655 acres (54.0% of total land area)

Source: CMRPC GIS analysis (December 2002) based on 1999 UMass land use data.

According to the tables above, Spencer’s developed land currently accounts for just over 13% of the Town’s total land area. It should be noted that an additional 4,291 acres (19.9% of the total land area) are considered lands having “limited” protection as they fall under the State’s Chapter 61, 61-A & 61-B taxation program. The landowners of these parcels receive a tax break as long as their land remains undeveloped. However, these lands can be pulled out of the Chapter 61 program at any time (with a tax penalty applied) and the lands can then be developed. Thus, the term “limited protection” is used for these lands. The next table compares Spencer’s land use totals with those of its adjacent neighbors.

**Table LU-3
Community Land Use Comparisons**

Paxton

Total Town Land:	9,904 acres
Developed Land:	1,643 acres (16.6%)
Protected Land:	2,770 acres (28.0%)
Non-Buildable Land:	1,310 acres (13.2%)
Remaining Vacant Land:	4,181 acres (42.2%)

Leicester

Total Town Land:	15,769 acres
Developed Land:	2,959 acres (18.8%)
Protected Land:	1,892 acres (12.0%)
Non-Buildable Land:	1,873 acres (11.9%)
Remaining Vacant Land:	9,045 acres (57.3%)

Charlton

Total Town Land:	28,047 acres
Developed Land:	4,945 acres (17.6%)
Protected Land:	1,772 acres (6.3%)
Non-Buildable Land:	3,577 acres (12.8%)
Remaining Vacant Land:	17,753 acres (63.3%)

Oakham

Total Town Land:	13,625 acres
Developed Land:	915 acres (6.7%)
Protected Land:	4,010 acres (29.4%)
Non-Buildable Land:	1,553 acres (11.4%)
Remaining Vacant Land:	7,147 acres (52.5%)

East Brookfield

Total Town Land:	6,652 acres
Developed Land:	805 acres (12.1%)
Protected Land:	473 acres (7.1%)
Non-Buildable Land:	1,430 acres (21.5%)
Remaining Vacant Land:	3,944 acres (59.3%)

North Brookfield

Total Town Land:	14,067 acres
Developed Land:	1,526 acres (10.9%)
Protected Land:	1,835 acres (13.0%)
Non-Buildable Land:	1,811 acres (12.9%)
Remaining Vacant Land:	8,895 acres (63.2%)

Source: CMRPC GIS buildout analysis based on 1999 UMass land use data.

The previous table indicates that Paxton, Leicester and Charlton have a higher percentage of developed land, while only Oakham and Paxton have a higher percentage of permanently protected land. With the exception of Paxton, all of the adjacent communities have more than half of their total land area remaining as vacant developable land.

**Table LU-4
Spencer Land Use Changes Over the Years**

<u>1971</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>1999</u>
1,907 developed acres	2,480 developed acres	2,846 developed acres
(1,680 residential)	(2,181 residential)	(2,439 residential)
(133 institutional)	(142 institutional)	(130 institutional)
(13 industrial)	(56 industrial)	(142 industrial)
(81 commercial)	(102 commercial)	(135 commercial)

Source: CMRPC GIS analysis (December 2002) based on 1999, 1985 & 1971 UMass land use data.



In terms of the actual number of developed acres, residential development in Spencer has seen the largest increase over the past 30 years, adding 939 acres of new residential development during this timeframe. In terms of the largest increase percentage-wise, industrial development in Spencer has seen the largest increase, growing more than tenfold during the past 30 years. Commercial development has seen a moderate increase over the past 30 years while the land devoted to institutional uses has remained fairly constant.

Spencer’s Existing Zoning Scheme:

A graphic depiction of Spencer’s zoning scheme can be found on the following page (Zoning Map). It is clear from reviewing the land use pattern that the Town’s zoning scheme has been the determining factor as to the location and density of Spencer’s various land uses. The discussions regarding the remaining developable land in each zoning district are based on the results of Spencer’s buildout analysis prepared by CMRPC in 2001 and revised in December of 2002.

Residential Development: The Residential-10 (RES-10) zoning district radiates outward from the downtown. This district requires the smallest lot size of Spencer’s residential zoning districts (10,000 sq. ft.), and thus has the highest density of people per square mile. Municipal water and sewer is available for the entirety of the RES-10 district. The RES-10 district is fully built out from a technical point of view (no more remaining developable land); however, many of the residential structures in the downtown are in need of rehabilitation and at some point may

be torn down to be replaced by new residential structures. Total amount of land zoned RES-10: 570 acres. Remaining vacant developable land in the RES-10 district: none.

The Residential-22.5 (RES-22.5) zoning district can be found at several locations in Spencer. This district has a required minimum lot size of 22,500 square feet. The largest RES-22.5 district surrounds the RES-10 district, once again radiating outward from the downtown. Another RES-22.5 district can be found along either side of South Spencer Road from Route 9 south to the start of Gale Drive. The RES-22.5 district can also be found along the shorelines of Spencer's major ponds: Cranberry Meadow Pond, Stiles Reservoir, Sugden Reservoir, Thompson Pond, Browning Pond and Brooks Pond. Total amount of land zoned RES-22.5: 1,921 acres. Remaining vacant developable land in the RES-22.5 districts: 446 acres.

The vast majority of north and south Spencer is zoned Residential-45 (RES), which has a required minimum lot size of 45,000 square feet. Total amount of land zoned RES-45: 18,381 acres. Remaining vacant developable land in the RES-45 districts: 10,812 acres.

Commercial Development: The downtown consists of two business districts, the Central Business (C-B) district with frontage along Route 9 and a Commercial (COM) district which fronts on Pearl Street and a portion of Mechanic Street. Both of the downtown commercial districts are fully built out in a technical sense (no more remaining vacant developable land), however, both districts do have substantial redevelopment potential. Many of the existing buildings in the downtown have low building values and thus do not generate much in the way of local tax revenue. The redevelopment potential exists to rehabilitate many of the downtown buildings, or to tear them down and build new commercial buildings of higher value (i.e., more tax revenue).

There are two very small C-B districts in the downtown (one on the north side of Route 9 between School Street and Bell Street and another on the south side of Route 9 at the corner of Ash Street). These two very small C-B districts appear to be the results of spot zoning and neither contains any remaining vacant developable land. The Local Business (L-B) district appears in two locations in Spencer: the first is located on the north side of Route 9 in the vicinity of Proctors Corner and the second is located west of the downtown on the north side of Route 9 between South Spencer Road and Route 49 (this particular L-B district has no remaining vacant developable land). In addition to the downtown, the Commercial (COM) district can be found at six other locations. The largest COM district is located east of downtown on the south side of Route 9 between the Leicester town line and Sibley's Corner. There is also a very small COM district (more spot zoning) with no further development potential on the north side of Route 9 abutting the west side of Roys Drive. There is a very small COM district (more spot zoning) with no further development potential on the west side of Route 31 in the vicinity of Smithville Cross Road. There is another COM district west of the downtown and north of Route 9 that runs along either side of West Main Street (where the car wash is located). There is another COM district further west on the south side of Route 9 (where McDonalds is located). And the last remaining COM district is located along either side of Route 9 between Route 49 and the East Brookfield town line.

Total amount of land zoned C-B: 39 acres. Remaining vacant developable land in the C-B districts: None. Total amount of land zoned L-B: 70 acres. Remaining vacant developable land in the L-B districts: 43 acres. Total amount of land zoned COM: 225 acres. Remaining vacant developable land in the COM districts: 106 acres.

Industrial Development: Spencer's Industrial (IND) zoning district can be found in eight locations throughout town. Four of the IND districts are very small (more spot zoning) and have no further development potential. The first is located on the south side of Route 9 abutting the east side of Linden Street. The second is located on the south side of Route 9 abutting the western end of the downtown C-B district. The third is located slightly west of the downtown at the corner of Water Street and Valley Street. The fourth small IND district is located on the east side of Meadow Road, halfway between Fourth Avenue and West Street. There are four larger IND districts in Spencer that still have further development potential. The first such IND district is located east of the downtown on the north side of Route 9, between Donnelly Road and Bond Street. The largest IND district is located west of the downtown on the south side of Route 9 and set back to the west of South Spencer Road (this is where FLEXcon is located). Yet another IND district is located on either side of Route 9 at its intersection with Route 49. The last IND district is located between Route 49 and the East Brookfield town line, south of the Sevenmile River. This particular IND district is the only one that does not have access to municipal water and sewer. Total amount of land zoned IND: 386 acres. Remaining vacant developable land in the IND districts: 248 acres.

Zoning of Neighboring Communities Bordering Spencer:

A review of the zoning of neighboring towns abutting Spencer indicates a fairly uniform zoning scheme along Spencer's boundaries, with one exception that represents a potential conflict.

East Brookfield: East Brookfield has established a commercial zoning district along a portion of its boundary with Spencer, beginning at the point where Route 49 crosses into East Brookfield and extending south to the southwest corner of Spencer. The East Brookfield commercial zoning district allows for retail sales/services and the district has a required minimum lot size of 30,000 square feet. This is in conflict with Spencer's zoning for this area. Spencer has zoned this area for strictly residential purposes, with a minimum required lot size of 45,000 square feet (RES-45). This zoning conflict is the most significant presented by the zoning of Spencer's neighbors. However, it is the frontage along East Brookfield's portion of Route 49 that will most likely be developed commercially, and not the backland abutting Spencer.

From Route 49 north to the railroad tracks, East Brookfield is zoned for residential purposes, with a minimum required lot size of one acre. Abutting Spencer's westernmost IND district, East Brookfield has this area split between two zoning districts: the first is a commercial district (30,000 sq. ft. minimum lot size) and the second is a residential district (one acre minimum lot size). Spencer's portion of Route 9 along the East Brookfield town line is zoned commercially (COM), and this is true for East Brookfield as well (minimum lot size of 30,000 sq. ft.); however, East Brookfield's commercial district does not extend as far south as the Sevenmile River, as is the case with Spencer's commercial district. North of the Route 9 commercial districts, the zoning in East Brookfield reverts to residential with a one acre required

minimum lot size all the way to the North Brookfield town line. There is a smaller residential district in East Brookfield that appears on either side of Smithville Road for a depth of 150 feet. This particular residential district has a minimum required lot size of 30,000 square feet.

North Brookfield: The entirety of North Brookfield's zoning along its boundary with Spencer is zoned for residential purposes with a required minimum lot size of 60,000 square feet. Spencer's zoning in this vicinity is residential with a minimum required lot size of 45,000 square feet (RES-45). The only exception is the area around Brooks Pond, which is zoned residentially with a required minimum lot size of 22,500 square feet (RES-22.5).

Oakham: The entirety of Oakham's zoning along its boundary with Spencer is zoned for residential purposes with a required minimum lot size of three acres. Spencer's zoning in this vicinity is residential with a minimum required lot size of 45,000 square feet (RES-45). The only exception is the area around Browning Pond, which is zoned residentially with a required minimum lot size of 22,500 square feet (RES-22.5).

Paxton: The entirety of Paxton's zoning along its boundary with Spencer is zoned for residential purposes with a required minimum lot size of 60,000 square feet. Spencer's zoning in this vicinity is residential with a minimum required lot size of 45,000 square feet (RES-45). The only exception is the area around Thompson Pond, which is zoned residentially with a required minimum lot size of 22,500 square feet (RES-22.5).

Leicester: With the exception of the Route 9 area, the entirety of Leicester's zoning along its boundary with Spencer is zoned for residential purposes with a required minimum lot size of 80,000 square feet. Spencer's zoning along the Leicester boundary is residential with a minimum required lot size of 45,000 square feet (RES-45). Leicester and Spencer both have commercial zoning districts along either side of Route 9 at the town line, the only difference is that Leicester requires a minimum lot size of 50,000 square feet while Spencer requires a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet.

Charlton: The entirety of Charlton's zoning along its boundary with Spencer is zoned for residential purposes with a required minimum lot size of 60,000 square feet. Spencer's zoning in this vicinity is residential with a minimum required lot size of 45,000 square feet (RES-45). The only exception is the area around Cranberry Meadow Pond, which is zoned residentially with a required minimum lot size of 22,500 square feet (RES-22.5).

With the exception of East Brookfield's commercial zoning district along Route 49, there are no serious town line zoning conflicts between Spencer and its abutting neighbors. In fact, most of the residential districts that abut Spencer require larger minimum lot sizes than what Spencer requires in its RES-45 and RES-22.5 districts.

EOEA-Sponsored Build-Out Analysis for Spencer:

In 1999, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) began a statewide effort to prepare a build-out analysis for each community in the State. In short, a build-out analysis attempts to determine the number of developable lots and the town's total population

at full build-out, that is, if the town were completely developed under the standards of the current zoning scheme. Existing developed lands, protected lands and land with environmental constraints are taken out of the equation, and the remaining developable land is divided by the standards of the local zoning by-law. The regional planning commissions across the State were contracted to perform build-out studies for each community in their respective regions. The project will achieve statewide coverage by the end of 2002. In Spencer's case, the CMRPC completed a build-out analysis for the Town in early 2001. CMRPC updated the Spencer buildout analysis in December 2002 in order to take into account the Town's Aquifer Protection Overlay District and to remove wetlands from the calculations by deeming them to be a development constraint (this was not done for the buildout's first iteration).



Spencer's current population stands at 11,691 people (2000 US Census). The revised build-out analysis indicates that Spencer could accommodate another 14,901 residents under the current zoning scheme. Based on the Town's growth rate over the last fifty years (12% growth per decade), Spencer can expect to be fully built out in roughly 75-80 years under the standards of the Town's current zoning by-law. The table below shows a district-by-district breakdown of where growth can occur in Spencer. The amount of buildable land in the second column is the

amount of land left after all of the developed land, protected land and unbuildable land is removed.

**Table LU-5
Summary of Buildout Analysis**

Zoning District	Amount of Buildable Land	Number of Buildable Lots	Amount of New Floor Space	Additional Population	Additional Students
C-B	0 acres	----	----	----	----
L-B	42.9 acres	64	149,649 sq. ft.	----	----
COM	105.6 acres	161	283,573 sq. ft.	----	----
IND	248.1 acres	171	882,715 sq. ft.	----	----
RES-10	0 acres	----	----	----	----
RES-22.5	446.1 acres	453	----	1,102	224
RES-45	<u>10,811.9 acres</u>	<u>5,655</u>	<u>----</u>	<u>13,799</u>	<u>2,793</u>
Totals:	11,654.6 acres	7,277 lots (6,108 residential) (225 commercial) (171 industrial)	1,315,9372 sq. ft.	14,901	3,017

Source: CMRPC February 2000 and December 2002.

TOWN OF SPENCER

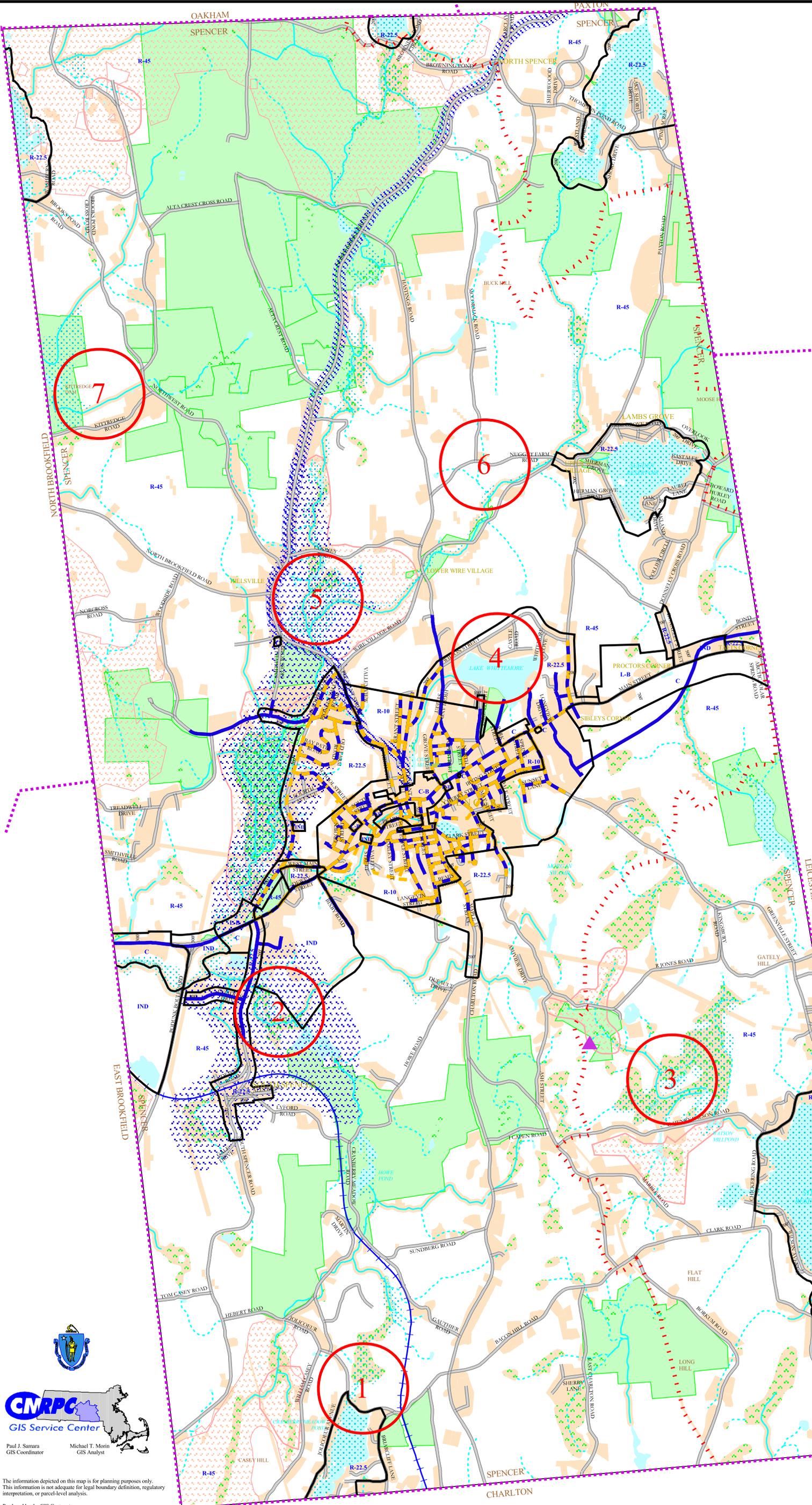
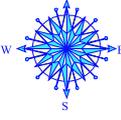
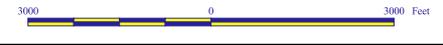
Map 6

Land Use Analysis Map



Legend

- Town Boundary
- Zoning & Overlay Districts**
- Zoning District
- Residential Business Overlay District
- Aquifer Protection Overlay District (Zone 2)
- Land Use & Open Space**
- Developed Lands
- Permanently Protected Open Space
- Hydrography**
- Stream
- Intermittent Stream
- Water Body
- Wetland
- 100 Year Floodplain
- Transportation**
- Road
- Rail
- Midstate Trail
- Infrastructure**
- Municipal Water Service Lines
- Municipal Sewer Service Lines
- Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program**
- NHESP Habitat Areas
- NHESP 1999-2001 Massachusetts Certified Vernal Pools
- Conservation Priorities (2001 Open Space & Recreation Plan)**
- Cranberry Meadow & Related Habitat
- Lower Cranberry River
- Alder Meadow
- Lake Whittemore
- Aquifer Protection
- Ralph Warren Park Area
- Kittredge Dam Area



Paul J. Samara
GIS Coordinator

Michael T. Morin
GIS Analyst

The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis.

Produced by the GIS Center at
The Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission,
35 Harvard Street, Second Floor, Worcester, MA 01609-2801

Source data:
NHESP data developed by the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program and distributed by MassGIS.
Open space & Land use data developed by CMRPC & MassGIS.
Zoning & Overlay districts developed by CMRPC and the Town of Spencer.
1:25,000 hydrography was derived from USGS Digital Line Graph files and later enhanced by MassGIS.
MassGIS 1:5,000 roads were derived from digital orthophotography and distributed by MassGIS.
Conservation priority areas developed by Town of Spencer.
Midstate Trail developed by the Midstate Trail Association, DEM, MDC, CMRPC, and Town of Spencer.
All other data are from MassGIS.

Remaining Development Potential:

Residential Development: The previous table indicates that Spencer's RES-45 District has the largest amount of land available for future development, enough to accommodate an additional 5,655 new house lots. As can be seen from the Zoning Map, the RES-45 District covers the vast majority of north and south Spencer, except around the major ponds where the shorelines are zoned RES-22.5. The RES-22.5 District can also accommodate quite a few new house lots (453); however, this is more a function of the district's small minimum lot size requirement (22,500 sq. ft.) than the amount of land available for development. The RES-10 district is for all practical purposes fully built out, although the potential still exists to increase the population density in this area by rehabilitating existing structures to accommodate multi-family development.

Commercial Development: The L-B district in the vicinity of Proctors Corner and the COM district located south of Route 9 between Leicester and Sibleys Corner still have a healthy amount of vacant developable land (43 acres and 87 acres respectively). In addition, there are still 15 acres of vacant developable land within the COM district located on either side of Route 9 abutting the East Brookfield town line. The Town's remaining commercial zoning districts are almost fully built out and have limited development potential. Although the downtown may be fully built out in a technical sense (no more remaining vacant developable land), the downtown still has significant potential for redevelopment. As mentioned previously, many of the existing buildings in the downtown have low building values and thus do not generate much in the way of local tax revenue. The redevelopment potential exists to rehabilitate many of the downtown buildings, or to tear them down and build new commercial buildings of higher value (i.e., more tax revenue).

Industrial Development: There is still a considerable amount of vacant developable land within the three large IND districts located west of the downtown. There are still 133 acres of vacant developable land within the IND district located south of Route 9 and east of South Spencer Road; however, the vast majority of this land consists of backland with limited opportunities to gain frontage on either Route 9 or South Spencer Road. There are still 100 acres of vacant developable land within the IND district located between Route 49 and the East Brookfield town line; however, this land currently does not have access to municipal water or sewer.

Problems Created by the Current Zoning Scheme: This discussion looks at the problems of Spencer's current zoning scheme as it affects residential development, commercial development and industrial development.

Downtown Residential Development:

- *Apartments & Multi-Family Dwellings:* Spencer's current zoning bylaw does not contain a definition of what constitutes an "apartment", nor are apartments specifically listed in the bylaw's table of regulations. It is assumed that apartments are considered as multi-family dwellings although the bylaw does not contain a definition of what constitutes a "multi-family dwelling". The Central Business district allows

multi-family dwellings by Special Permit (granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals); however, multi-family dwellings are not allowed in the downtown Commercial district (between Main Street and Chestnut Street). The landscaping requirements outlined in Section 8.1.1 of the bylaw are a further hindrance for apartments in the downtown area, as these standards cannot possibly be met in the downtown.

- *Senior Housing*: Spencer's Zoning Bylaw does not contain any provisions that directly address the need for senior housing alternatives. An analysis of Spencer's demographics indicate that the Town will be dealing with the issue of elderly housing for some time to come. Although the Spencer Housing Authority manages two senior housing developments (Depot Village and Howe Village), the Authority's waiting list indicates a strong demand for senior housing. As Spencer's elderly population is the fastest growing segment of the Town's overall population, the demand for senior housing will become even more pronounced over the next decade.

Spencer's zoning bylaw should be amended to address the disincentives for creating new apartment units noted above so that such units can be created in the downtown, especially for the elderly. Addressing the zoning flaws noted above should be part of the Town's overall strategy for revitalizing the downtown area.

Downtown Commercial Development:

- *Offices & Stores in the Same Building*: For building-owners in the downtown who want to create offices and stores within the same building, Spencer's zoning bylaw creates a number of hurdles. Section 5.4 (Table of Use Regulations), Item E-13 (Retail Business and Consumer Service Establishment – offices and stores located in the same building) states that owners of buildings wanting to contain a mixture of stores and offices cannot exceed 25,000 square feet of floor space per floor, cannot exceed two stories in height and must have a minimum lot size of four acres. These restrictions make it quite difficult to create office/retail buildings within the Commercial and Local Business zoning districts, and such buildings are not permitted within the Central Business district. However, it is precisely those buildings within the Central Business district that lend themselves to having a mixture of non-residential uses within the same building. Are there any good reasons why one of the buildings in the downtown could not have a few retail establishments on the first floor and a few professional offices on the second?
- *Floor Space Limitation for Retail Business and Consumer Services*: Section 5.4 (Table of Use Regulations), Item E-13 (Retail Business and Consumer Service Establishment – stores serving local retail business needs) creates an additional hurdle for economic development in the downtown. According to the bylaw, local retail business establishments cannot exceed 4,000 square feet of gross floor area. This strict limit on the amount of floor space for local retail businesses is not appropriate for the Central Business district or the downtown Commercial district.

- *Different Building Height Standards:* The two zoning districts that cover the heart of the downtown (Central Business and its abutting Commercial district) have two different building height standards. The CB district allows buildings to be 40-feet in height while the COM district restricts building height to 35-feet.
- *Signage:* The Town's sign bylaw (Section 7) is a complete mess, unintelligible, unworkable, and according to the Town's Code Enforcement Officer, unenforceable. The current hodgepodge of signage in the downtown is visually unattractive and confusing. Although every community struggles with its signage bylaw (both in terms of standards and enforcement), the practical effect of Spencer's signage bylaw is that there are no standards and anything goes.

Commercial Development Outside of the Downtown:

- *Planned Shopping Centers:* The zoning bylaw's provisions for planned shopping centers (located in the Definitions section) are quite strict and may be hindering the Town's economic development efforts. Currently, planned shopping centers cannot be more than 35-feet in height, must have a minimum lot size of five acres, must have 400-feet of frontage, cannot have the building cover more than 25% of the lot, and provide 5.5 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross leasable floor area. A survey of the parking standards for comparable communities indicates that most towns require one parking space for every 250-300 feet of commercial floor space. This does not compare well with Spencer's parking standards for planned shopping centers, which requires one parking space for every 180 feet of commercial floor space. Thus, Spencer's parking standards for planned shopping centers are somewhat excessive and will result in such centers having more parking than necessary, large paved parking areas that inhibit stormwater from getting back into the ground and recharging aquifers, and to make matters worse, the bylaw does not have any landscaping standards for large parking areas.

Industrial Development:

- *Lack of Industrial Development Options:* The zoning bylaw's Table of Use Regulations (Section 5.4) is very limited in terms of industrial land development options. Our nation's economy has changed significantly over the past twenty years and Spencer's zoning bylaw has not kept pace. The current zoning bylaw does not contain definitions for the following types of industries, nor are they listed within the bylaw's Table of Use Regulations:
 - Bio-technology facilities, laboratories and parks
 - Fiber-optics manufacturing facilities
 - Professional/business office parks
- *Light Industry versus Heavy Industry:* The zoning bylaw does not differentiate between light and heavy industries. The bylaw currently states that places for manufacturing, assembling and packaging of goods must confine to the immediate

premises all cinders, dust, flashing, fumes, gases, odors, refuse matter, smoke and vapors; however, these nuisance provisions are not listed under any other permitted industrial use.

- *Lack of Site Plan Review Standards:* The zoning bylaw does not have any site plan standards that provide clear and consistent guidance to developers on how the Town would like to see their property developed. Rather, the standards for developing individual sites are handled on a case-by-case basis by the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) during its Special Permitting process.

Residential Development in Rural Spencer:

- *Lack of Review for Multiple Lots Created Under the Approval Not Required (ANR) Process:* As with most communities that have extensive town roads throughout their rural areas, Spencer is at the mercy of the State's Approval Not Required (ANR) new lot creation process. Simply stated, the State's ANR law (MGL Chapter 41, Section 81-P) allows for landowners and developers to create new lots on existing ways (as long as they have the required minimum lot size and frontage) without any local review whatsoever. Thus, if a property owner had enough land along one of Spencer's rural roads, he/she could create as many new lots as they had frontage for without their plan receiving any review by town departments – no review whatsoever in regards to drainage, stormwater management, erosion control, environmental impact and neighborhood impact. Many Massachusetts communities have devised a way to work around the State's flawed ANR process by enacting a Major Development Review (MDR) provision within their existing zoning bylaws. Such MDR provisions vary from town to town, but most allow for the municipal review of proposals involving five-to-ten lots being created along the frontage of an existing town road. The Housing Chapter recommends that the Planning Board amend the zoning bylaw to include an MDR provision.
- *Lack of Backland Development Options:* The Town's current zoning bylaw does not contain any provisions for backland development, i.e., "pork-chop" lots, or flag lots. As more and more road frontage is developed, a substantial amount of inaccessible backland is created. The intensity of this problem will increase as the Town continues to grow and the frontage along existing roads continues to be developed residentially.
- *Lack of Cluster Housing Provisions:* Another hindrance for preserving Spencer's rural character in the north and south is the lack of an open space development (otherwise known as "cluster housing") provision in the zoning bylaw. The current zoning bylaw includes a definition for cluster development within its Definitions section (Section 2); however, there is no further mention of the cluster development option within the entire bylaw – no standards, no dimensional requirements, and it is not included in its Table of Use Regulations. It is highly recommended that the Town consider a cluster development provision as a tool for preserving open space in the rural north and south. In order for such a bylaw to be effective, it must be written in such a way that a developer would prefer to utilize the cluster concept as opposed to

the standard subdivision process. Factors to consider when designing a cluster-housing bylaw include: density bonuses (i.e., allowing smaller lot sizes in return for protecting open spaces and critical environmental resources), quantity and quality of required open space, the location of protected open space, drainage, water, waste disposal, length and width of interior roads, public health and safety.

- *Accessory Apartments:* Lastly, accessory apartments are an issue for rural Spencer as well as the downtown. The Town should consider adopting an accessory apartment provision within its zoning bylaw. Allowing accessory apartments would provide another housing choice for Spencer’s elder residents and young people who cannot yet afford to buy a home.

Land Use – Goals

The goals of Spencer’s land use and zoning policies are to:

- Revitalize and beautify downtown Spencer.
- Preserve the rural character of north and south Spencer.



Land Use – Objectives

- Revise and upgrade the Town’s zoning bylaw and subdivision regulation to reflect specific recommendations of the Master Plan elements.
- Achieve consistent, coordinated planning and administration among Town boards.

- Strengthen the downtown’s land use pattern by pursuing streetscape and façade improvements, building use and reuse projects that enhance the area’s variety of businesses and activities, and through public and private efforts to move the downtown toward being more pedestrian friendly.
- Protect Spencer’s natural resource base, including water resources, corridors of wildlife habitats, and scenic landscape views.
- Strengthen the industrial districts land use pattern by developing these districts in ways that are consistent with the carrying capacity of the land and associated infrastructure and which provide tangible benefits to the community such as jobs and tax base.

Land Use - Recommendations

The single most important recommendation of the Land Use chapter is the Future Land Use Plan. The Future Land Use Plan looks at each of the Town’s zoning districts and evaluates how the land is used, identifies the available municipal services (sewer/water), identifies the problems that have been created under the current zoning scheme, and evaluates the future development potential of each zoning district. Based on this analysis, a plan for the future development of the Town is prepared. A graphic depiction of Spencer’s Future Land Use Plan can be seen on the map on the following page.

Future Land Use Plan for Spencer - A Rationale:

The intent of Spencer’s Future Land Use Plan is to strengthen the existing land use pattern while limiting opportunities for sprawling residential development. Spencer’s land use pattern has remained fairly consistent during the past century: densely developed (multi-family housing & small-scale businesses) in the downtown and rural (single-family homes & farms) in the north and south. The Future Land Use Plan strives to strike a balance between the two stated goals of maintaining the rural character of the north and south while revitalizing the downtown in an effort to increase the Town’s non-residential tax base. These goals are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are complementary. Slowing development in the rural north and south enables the Town to plan for and provide municipal services to these areas in an orderly fashion. When these areas grow too fast, it puts a burden on Town services and the taxpayers that support these services. Growing the non-residential tax base through a comprehensive downtown revitalization effort will provide the Town with additional tax revenues to upgrade the identified deficiencies in its infrastructure. Having the non-residential tax base remain stagnant will mean that Spencer taxpayers will be relied upon more and more to cover the cost of municipal services.

The thrust of Spencer’s Future Land Use Plan will be to address two major issues:

- How to revitalize downtown Spencer so that it comes closer to reaching its potential as a source of local tax revenue and, moreover, how to make the downtown a more attractive place to shop, work and live.

TOWN OF SPENCER

Map 7

Future Land Use / Housing Suitability



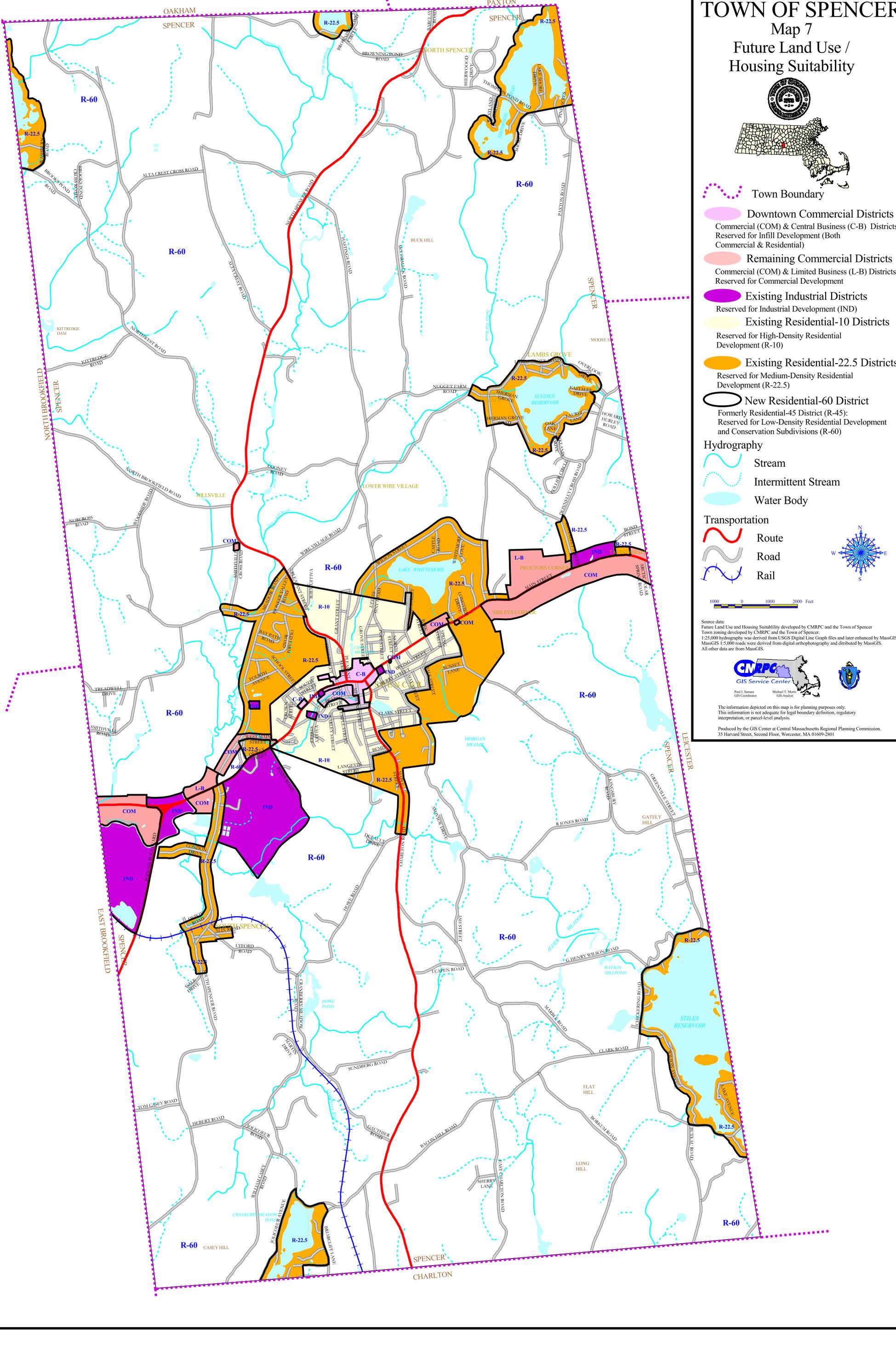
- Town Boundary
- Downtown Commercial Districts
Commercial (COM) & Central Business (C-B) Districts:
Reserved for Infill Development (Both Commercial & Residential)
- Remaining Commercial Districts
Commercial (COM) & Limited Business (L-B) Districts:
Reserved for Commercial Development
- Existing Industrial Districts
Reserved for Industrial Development (IND)
- Existing Residential-10 Districts
Reserved for High-Density Residential Development (R-10)
- Existing Residential-22.5 Districts
Reserved for Medium-Density Residential Development (R-22.5)
- New Residential-60 District
Formerly Residential-45 District (R-45):
Reserved for Low-Density Residential Development and Conservation Subdivisions (R-60)
- Hydrography**
 - Stream
 - Intermittent Stream
 - Water Body
- Transportation**
 - Route
 - Road
 - Rail



Source data:
Future Land Use and Housing Suitability developed by CMRPC and the Town of Spencer
Town zoning developed by CMRPC and the Town of Spencer.
1:25,000 hydrography was derived from USGS Digital Line Graph files and later enhanced by MassGIS.
MassGIS 1:5,000 roads were derived from digital orthophotography and distributed by MassGIS.
All other data are from MassGIS.



The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only.
This information is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analysis.
Produced by the GIS Center at Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission,
35 Harvard Street, Second Floor, Worcester, MA 01609-2801



- How to preserve and enhance the rural character of north and south Spencer.

The Role of Infrastructure:

The presence of municipal water and sewer often dictates where development takes place in a community and how intensive that development is. Water and sewer service that continues to radiate from the center, with no well-defined limits to the service area, results in an inefficient land use pattern and an infrastructure system that is expensive to maintain, let alone upgrade (it is clear from the Municipal Services & Facilities chapter that Spencer's municipal sewer system is in serious need of an upgrade). The current practice of extending water and sewer ever further down the road as long as a developer/builder is willing to pay for it will eventually result in landowners pushing to increase the densities of these areas and reduce the minimum required lot sizes. Thus, expanding water and sewer service based on the ability to pay for it will create pressure to increase the amount and intensity of development in these areas because water and sewer service is now available. Smart progressive municipalities use their infrastructure systems to encourage growth in those areas where it's suitable and discourage growth in those areas that they want to keep rural or where high-density development is not suitable.

It is highly recommended that Spencer's Water and Sewer Departments work with the Planning Board and Conservation Commission to clearly delineate a definitive infrastructure service area with the understanding that water and sewer will *not* be extended beyond the delineated service area. Spencer needs to start using its infrastructure to direct growth where it wants it to happen instead of extending the water/sewer service areas willy-nilly based on the ability of a landowner/developer to pay for service extensions.

DRAFT FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

Housing Recommendations for Downtown Spencer

1. Allow Apartments by Right: Allowing apartments by right in the downtown area where the infrastructure exists to serve them, could help to revitalize the downtown area by allowing the many underutilized buildings to be turned into multi-family dwellings. Having more people live in the downtown area will increase the demand for shopping opportunities, services and food establishments. Having a higher population density in the downtown would also alleviate some of the pressure to develop housing in the more rural areas of Town. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town's Building Inspector and Health Inspector.

2. Allow Senior Housing by Special Permit: As documented in the Housing chapter, Spencer's population is getting older and housing opportunities for seniors will become an increasingly important issue for the Town over the next few decades. Although the Spencer Housing Authority manages two senior housing developments (Depot Village and Howe Village), the Authority's waiting list indicates a strong demand for senior housing. Many communities in Massachusetts have adopted senior housing bylaws within their zoning framework. Such bylaws can take the form of senior residential communities, retirement

communities, as well as assisted living and residential care facilities (both are governed by State regulations). It is recommended that Spencer prepare a senior housing bylaw that will allow senior housing developments in the downtown by Special Permit granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Zoning Board of Appeals in conjunction with the Town's Building Inspector and Health Inspector.

3. Allow for Accessory Apartments: Spencer's current zoning bylaw is silent on the issue of accessory apartments and, as such, accessory apartments are not allowed in the downtown even though there are wonderful stately old homes in the vicinity that are large enough to allow for such units to be created within them or within an accessory structure. An accessory apartment can be a second dwelling unit located within a single-family home (attached), or it can be located above a garage or within a barn (detached) on the property whose primary use is for a single-family home. Another term for accessory apartments is "in-law apartments", as in the apartment is used by a related family member. Accessory apartments allow elderly people to live in close proximity to their family, as well as young people who cannot afford their own home at the time. Accessory apartments also allow the primary homeowner to collect a bit of rent, thus helping them cope with property taxes. For detached accessory apartments, local bylaws usually include a number of safeguards aimed at ensuring that the apartment does not obtain legal status as the lot's primary dwelling unit. Such safeguards typically include a provision that the apartment can only be rented to a member of the extended family, the lot owner must reside in the lot's principal dwelling structure, the apartment be limited to a single bedroom, that no new driveways are created, and that Board of Health approval must be obtained in order to ensure that the on-site septic system has enough capacity to accommodate the increased load. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town's Building Inspector and Health Inspector.

Economic Development Recommendations for Downtown Spencer

4. Secure the Pleasant Street Parking Lot: The Town simply must secure the Pleasant Street parking area (currently owned by Sovereign Bank), either through outright purchase or through the negotiation of a long-term lease. Loss of this parking facility would have a devastating effect on the downtown economy. The Town's Traffic & Parking Advisory Committee also put forth this recommendation in its final report to the Board of Selectmen, issued in December 2001. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

5. Delete the Floor Space Limitation for Retail Business and Consumer Services: Spencer's current zoning bylaw limits the square footage of local retail business establishments to 4,000 square feet of gross floor area. This strict limit on the amount of floor space for local retail businesses is not appropriate for the Central Business district or the downtown Commercial district and should be deleted. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town's Building Inspector.

6. Revise the Regulations Governing Offices & Stores in the Same Building: The Town should revise Item E-13 (Retail Business and Consumer Service Establishment) in the Table of Use regulations to relax the floor space, building height and lot size limitations for the downtown

buildings wanting to contain a mixture of stores and offices. These restrictions make it quite difficult to create office/retail buildings within the Commercial and Local Business zoning districts. Also, the downtown Central Business district should allow such mixed-use proposals by right. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town's Building Inspector.

7. Monitor the Effect of New Parking Standards: The Town recently revised its parking standards for the Central Business district in order to make the parking requirements for this area less restrictive. The Town should monitor how these new standards are used over the next few years in order to determine whether they've had the desired effect. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town's Building Inspector.

Recommendations for Improving the Appearance of Downtown Spencer

8. Utilize Available Grants for Downtown Improvement Projects: Spencer is eligible for a wide variety of grant programs that could be used to address a number of issues facing the downtown. Listed below are a variety of state/federal/non-profit grant opportunities that Spencer may utilize for downtown improvement projects. Please note that a complete list of available downtown resources can be found in Appendix H of this document (DHCD Downtown Resources Guide).

State and Federal Grant Opportunities

- Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG): Administered at the state-level by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), this program offers grant money for the following activities: economic development projects that create and/or retain local/regional jobs, community facilities, housing rehabilitation, and infrastructure improvements. Spencer could utilize the CDBG program for demolishing condemned buildings in the downtown, rehabbing substandard housing units, and/or upgrading the downtown-area sewer lines.
- The Housing Development Support Program: The Housing Development Support Program is a component of the CDBG program. The program offers assistance for affordable housing initiatives with the emphasis on small-scale projects that might otherwise go un-funded. Typical projects include housing rehabilitation, new construction, reclamation of abandoned properties, elderly and special needs housing, and the conversion of obsolete and under-utilized buildings. Spencer could use this program to work with downtown property owners that have vacant building space that could be turned into apartments.
- The Massachusetts Affordable Housing Trust Fund: The Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) operates out of DHCD and is administered by the Massachusetts Housing Finance Authority (MHFA). The fund supports the creation/preservation of housing that is affordable to people with incomes that do not exceed 110% of the area median income. The AHTF can be used to support the acquisition, development and/or preservation of affordable housing units.

- Municipal Incentive Grants (MIGs): This DHCD program provides grants that can be used for the preparation of downtown improvement plans and economic development strategies, among other things.
- Community Development Action Grants (CDAG): Administered by DHCD, this grant program funds economic development projects on publicly owned properties, including work on buildings, facades, streets, roadways, sidewalks, water/sewer lines, parks, playgrounds and demolition of condemned buildings. Spencer could utilize the CDAG program to improve the streetscapes and building facades in the downtown. Spencer already owns the downtown sidewalks. Regarding building façade improvements, typically what happens is the community arranges an easement agreement with a property owner that covers the building's façade and allows for the town to use CDAG funds for its repair and improvement. Spencer could also utilize a CDAG grant for demolishing a few of the abandoned buildings in the downtown, as well as for improving the Pleasant Street parking lot if this lot ever becomes town property.
- Public Works Economic Development (PWED): Offered by the Executive Office of Transportation & Construction (EOTC), this grant program funds the design and construction of roads, bridges, curbing, sidewalks, lighting, traffic control devices, and drainage systems associated with municipal economic development initiatives. Spencer could utilize a PWED grant to improve sidewalks downtown, street lighting, and some of the problems created by the existing geometry of intersections downtown.
- Demolition of Abandoned Buildings: DHCD offers limited funding for the removal of abandoned buildings that pose severe health and safety risks.
- Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI): Administered by DHCD, this program offers a range of services and assistance to communities seeking help with downtown revitalization efforts. Upon request, the MDI program will arrange a technical assistance visit from a team of downtown revitalization specialists who will prepare a written follow-up report providing recommended next steps and referrals for additional assistance. It should be noted that Spencer has already contacted DHCD about its participation in the MDI program.
- Commercial Area Revitalization Districts (CARD): Administered by DHCD, this program offers assistance to communities with older downtowns that are threatened by disinvestments. Having a downtown CARD designation allows for the use of CDBG funds for signage and façade improvements, and allows state agencies to give special consideration to CARD areas for a variety of grant programs such as PWED and CDBG grants.
- Off-Street Parking Grants: Administered by the Executive Office of Administration & Finance (EOAF), this grant program provides up to 75% of the funds for off-street parking facilities. Eligibility is limited to commercial area revitalization districts (CARDs), or areas in which the facility would increase the use of public transportation.

Non-Profit Grant Opportunities

- Greater Worcester Community Foundation: Offers grants for such work as neighborhood revitalization, environmental management, community development, and arts and culture.
- Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust: Provides grants for outdoor park and open space initiatives.

- American Communities Fund: Operated by Fannie Mae, the fund provides equity investment, debt financing, and historic tax credits to revitalization projects in underserved communities.
- Development Assistance Loans: Operated by the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation out of Boston, the loan program can be used by non-profit developers to hire architects, engineers, attorneys and development consultants for downtown-related economic development initiatives.
- Mabel Louise Riley Foundation: Provides grants to low income neighborhoods for job development/training, housing, historic preservation, and the arts. Funds can be used for capital improvements, historic preservation, building acquisition, and community planning. The Foundation has done very little work in Central Massachusetts.
- Johanna Favrot Fund: Provides grants up to \$25,000 to non-profit organizations and public agencies for projects that contribute to the preservation of an authentic sense of place. Funds can be used for architectural services, planning, and historic preservation.
- Crossroads Community Foundation: Provides grants for projects that deal with the environment, culture, and economic development.

It is imperative that the Town cultivates its grant writing capacity so that it may access the significant amount of money being made available through State grants. The Town's grant writing capacity could be developed in-house by hiring a professional grant writer, or through establishing a town planner/ economic development coordinator position. If the Town cannot afford to hire additional municipal staff for the purpose of grant writing/administration, then perhaps the Town could contract with a professional grant writer on an as-needed basis. Another option would be to utilize the grant writing services of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC).

9. Rewrite the Signage Bylaw: The Town should completely rewrite its sign bylaw. The current bylaw is neither understandable nor equitable. The current hodgepodge of signage in the downtown is visually unattractive and confusing. Although every community struggles with its signage bylaw (both in terms of standards and enforcement), the practical effect of Spencer's signage bylaw is that there are no standards and anything goes. The signage bylaw should be completely rewritten from scratch. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board working with the Code Enforcement Officer and a committee of local business people.

10. Synchronize the Building Height Standards: The two zoning districts that cover the heart of the downtown (Central Business and its abutting Commercial district) have two different building height standards. The CB district allows buildings to be 40-feet in height while the COM district restricts building height to 35-feet. This discrepancy should be resolved for these two particular zoning districts in the downtown, with the higher building height standard (40-foot) being the preferred option. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town's Building Inspector.

Recommendations for Maintaining Spencer's Rural Character

11. Adopt a Phased Growth Bylaw: Many Massachusetts communities have adopted phased growth provisions (or building permit cap) within their local zoning bylaws as a means to ensuring that municipal services are not outpaced by excessive growth in any given year or by a single large-scale development proposal. The building permit cap number is usually determined by the community's historic growth rate. Here is Spencer as an example: between 1990 and 2000, Spencer averaged 52 building permits per year for new homes. Thus, this figure could be used as Spencer's historical growth rate for the purpose of a phased growth bylaw. Any phased growth provision should include a mechanism that ensures that a single subdivision development does not grab up all of the new home building permits for a year. Also, many communities allow exemptions for senior housing developments, as they usually do not overly tax municipal services to the extent of traditional residential development. Be forewarned that phased growth provisions can be complicated to administer at the local level. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector.



12. Increase the Minimum Required Lot Size in Rural Spencer: Another option for preserving Spencer's rural character would be to require a larger minimum lot size in the rural north and south. Spencer's rural areas are currently zoned RES-45, which requires that each new lot contain a minimum of 45,000 square feet. The minimum lot size requirement for those communities abutting Spencer ranges between 60,000 square feet and three acres. It would be to the benefit of Spencer's rural character to increase the minimum lot size in its rural north and south from 45,000 square feet to 60,000 square feet. The impact of this change to Spencer's buildout analysis would be as follows:

	<u>Current R-45</u>	<u>Proposed R-60</u>
New house lots:	5,655	4,485
Additional population:	13,799	10,943
Additional school-aged kids:	2,793	2,216

These numbers indicate that requiring a larger minimum lot size in rural Spencer would result in less new house lots in north and south Spencer, as well as a lower population density and fewer school-aged children. It is important to understand that residential development DOES NOT pay for itself when the taxes generated by such development is matched against what it costs the community to provide municipal services. There are several studies that document this contention, two of which have relevance for Spencer:

- The Northeastern Office of the American Farmland Trust studied six rural towns in Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York and found that, on average, residential development required \$1.13 in municipal services for every \$1.00 of tax revenue generated.
- The Commonwealth Research Group studied eleven New England towns and found that, on average, towns spent \$1.14 in services for every dollar raised from residential development; \$0.43 in services for every dollar raised from commercial/industrial development; and \$0.42 in services for every dollar raised from forest, farmland and open space.

Before rezoning rural Spencer to require a new minimum lot size of 60,000 square feet, it is important to understand what implications this will have for property owners. Increasing the minimum required lot size will render some of the existing lots non-conforming. What will this mean to Spencer property owners?

Property Owners Who Own Just One Lot: These lots are considered “grandfathered” or protected from changes in a district’s dimensional requirements if:

- The lot is at least 5,000 sq. ft. in size and has at least 50 feet of frontage;
- The lot is located in an area zoned for single or two-family homes;
- The lot conformed to the existing zoning prior to a zoning change; and
- The lot is in separate ownership prior to the town meeting vote, which made the lot non-conforming.

If someone has a single lot in a residential district that gets re-zoned to a non-residential district, the lot is considered “grandfathered” or protected from changes in a district’s dimensional requirements.

Property Owners With Three or Less Adjoining Lots Held in Common Ownership: Any change in a district’s dimensional provisions shall not apply to lots held in common ownership for a period of five years from the date of the change (town meeting approval date), provided that:

- The lots are at least 7,500 sq. ft. in size and have at least 75 feet of frontage; and
- The lots conformed to the existing zoning prior to a zoning change.

Thus, someone owning two or three adjoining lots would have them merged into a conforming lot five years after the date of the zoning change approval (town meeting date).

Property Owners With Four or More Adjoining Lots Held in Common Ownership: Only three of the lots held in common ownership would receive protection for a period of five years from the date of the change (town meeting approval date), provided that:

- The lots are at least 7,500 sq. ft. in size and have at least 75 feet of frontage; and
- The lots conformed to the existing zoning prior to a zoning change.

Thus, if someone owns four or more adjoining lots, they would receive a five-year period of protection from a zoning change for three of the lots, but the fourth lot would be considered unbuildable. If someone has a fourth and a fifth lot, these two lots would be merged after the zoning change to create a conforming lot.

Subdivision Plans before the Planning Board: All changes to a local zoning by-law are approved as articles at a town meeting. Any preliminary subdivision plan submitted to the Planning Board *before* the town meeting shall be governed by the zoning standards in place at the time when the plan was submitted to the Planning Board, and this protection from the zoning change under consideration shall last for a period of eight (8) years from the time that the Planning Board endorses the definitive plan. The applicant has seven (7) months to file a definitive subdivision plan starting from the submission date of the preliminary subdivision plan.

13. Cluster Housing: The Town should consider adopting a cluster-housing or open space development bylaw as a tool for preserving open space in the rural north and south of Spencer. In order for such a bylaw to be effective, it must be written in such a way that a developer would prefer to utilize the cluster concept as opposed to the standard subdivision process. Factors to consider when designing a cluster-housing bylaw include: density bonuses, minimum lot sizes, quantity and quality of required open space, drainage, water, waste disposal, length and width of interior roads and of course public health and safety. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board.

14. Work With Area Land Trusts: Research conducted on behalf of the Master Plan indicates there are 81 tax parcels in Spencer that are at least fifty acres in size. Ten of these parcels are owned by the State, two by the Town, 13 are owned by non-profit entities, and 30 properties are currently enrolled in the State's Chapter-61A & B programs. All but a few of these parcels are located in Spencer's rural north and south. Many of the large lot property owners are in their "golden years". Elderly property owners are often faced with the following dilemma: how to conduct their estate planning in such a way as to maximize assets while at the same time protecting the land they lived on for many years. This can be a very complicated proposition, one that requires professional legal and estate planning assistance. There are several regional land trusts (such as the Greater Worcester Land Trust and the Trustees of Reservations to name a few) that have such expertise on staff. Land trusts often work with property owners to create estate plans that meet the financial needs of the landowners while protecting the land (albeit sometimes in a limited fashion). It is therefore recommended that Spencer work with the region's larger land trusts to identify land protection opportunities. The list of large-lot property owners should be kept with the Conservation Commission, who in turn, should be the Town's liaison with the region's land trusts. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Conservation Commission.

15. Adopt a Major Residential Development Bylaw: The Town should have a mechanism in place that allows for the municipal review of major residential development proposals, that is, multiple lots (five or more) being created along the frontage of an existing Town road through the Approval Not Required (ANR) process. Currently, such development proposals receive no municipal review whatsoever. Many Massachusetts communities have enacted Major Development Review (MDR) provisions within their existing zoning bylaws. Such MDR provisions vary from town to town, but most allow for the municipal review of proposals involving five-to-ten lots being created along the frontage of an existing town road. Having a major residential development review provision within Spencer's regulatory framework would allow for the municipal review of such site planning issues such as the cumulative impacts of the proposed development in regards to drainage, stormwater management, erosion control, environmental impact and neighborhood impact. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board.

16. Adopt Provisions for Backland Development: The Town should adopt a zoning provision for backland development, i.e., "pork-chop" lots, or flag lots. As more and more road frontage is developed, a substantial amount of inaccessible backland is created. The intensity of this problem will increase as the Town continues to grow and the frontage along existing roads continues to be developed residentially (think Paxton Road). Issues to consider when creating a backland development provision include:

- Allowing such lots by right or by Special Permit
- Having a reduced frontage requirement in exchange for shared (common) driveways
- Requiring larger lot sizes with interior dimensional standards in order to prevent odd lot configurations
- Limiting the number of flag lots that created under a single development proposal or in close proximity to each other

Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals depending on whether such lots are allowed by right or by Special Permit.

17. Allow for Accessory Apartments in Rural Spencer: Accessory apartments are an issue for rural Spencer as well as the downtown. The Town should consider adopting an accessory apartment provision within its zoning bylaw. Allowing accessory apartments would provide another housing choice for Spencer's elder residents and young people who cannot yet afford to buy a home. An accessory apartment can be a second dwelling unit located within a single-family home (attached), or it can be located above a garage or within a barn (detached) on the property whose primary use is for a single-family home. For detached accessory apartments, local bylaws usually include a number of safeguards aimed at ensuring that the apartment does not obtain legal status as the lot's primary dwelling unit. Such safeguards typically include a provision that the apartment can only be rented to a member of the extended family, the lot owner must reside in the lot's principal dwelling structure, the apartment be limited to a single bedroom, that no new driveways are created, and that Board of Health approval must be obtained in order to ensure that the on-site septic system has enough capacity to accommodate the increased load. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals

depending on whether accessory apartments are allowed by right or by Special Permit. The Building Inspector and Health Inspector should also be consulted when drafting up standards for accessory apartments.

Other Land Use/Zoning Recommendations

18. **Revise the Zoning Bylaw's Definitions Section:** The definition section (Section 2) of the Town's zoning bylaw should be revised to offer more clarity for the existing definition entries and expanded to include numerous definitions that are not addressed in Spencer's zoning. Definitions in need of revision include the various dwelling unit definitions, hazardous waste, low-level radioactive waste, contractor yards and home occupations. Suggested terms in need of definition include: accessory apartments, light industry, heavy industry, adult uses, bio-technology facilities, laboratory, manufacturing facilities, and office parks. **Responsible Municipal Entity:** The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector.

19. **Site Plan Review Authority:** The zoning bylaw should be amended to give the Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board more power to review how a individual building sites get developed for commercial or industrial purposes. Of the commercial and industrial uses allowed in Spencer, the vast majority are handled by Special Permit granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals. However, there are a number of commercial and industrial uses that Spencer allows By Right, meaning that all that is currently required is obtaining a building permit from the Building Inspector. In order to bring such uses under municipal review, it is suggested that the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals institute a "site plan review" process. A site plan review process is typically used to regulate how an individual building site gets developed. Issues typically addressed during the site plan review process include: drainage, landscaping, lighting, dumpster location, parking area design and location, access/egress, screening and fencing. Spencer's department heads do review such items during their "scoping sessions" for large-scale development projects; however, the Town has never formally articulated a set of site plan development standards. The lack of such standards is an obstacle to economic development because developers cannot be sure what the Town will require of them. A clear articulation of site development standards should be included in the zoning bylaw so that both the Town and developers know what is expected. In terms of applicability, it is suggested that any site plan review process adopted by Spencer be applied to large-scale multi-family residential developments (ten units or more), and those commercial/industrial developments proposing more than 10,000 square feet of floor space. Any site plan review provision should address the following items:

- Intent of the provisions;
- Applicability;
- Site plan submission standards (what you need for mapped information);
- Procedures for submitting/reviewing the plan, holding hearings, and rendering decisions;
- Site development standards (ingress/egress, lighting, drainage, landscaping, screening/fencing, parking area design and location, waste disposal, etc.);
- A waiver provision; and
- A time limit for developing the site, after which site plan approval will lapse.

In Spencer's case, for those commercial/industrial/large-scale residential development proposals requiring a Special Permit, it is the Zoning Board of Appeals that should be the site plan review authority. For those commercial/industrial/large-scale residential development proposals that are allowed By Right, it is the Planning Board that should be the site plan review authority. The site plan standards should be the same for both the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Planning Board. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector and other local review entities such as the Water & Sewer departments and the Board of Health.

20. Expand Industrial Development Options: The zoning bylaw's Table of Use Regulations (Section 5.4) should be expanded to allow a broader range of industrial land development options. Our nation's economy has changed significantly over the past twenty years and Spencer's zoning bylaw has not kept pace. It is recommended that the Table of Use Regulations be broadened to allow for bio-technology facilities, laboratories and parks, fiber-optics manufacturing facilities, and professional/business office parks. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector.

21. Revise Dimensional Standards for Planned Shopping Centers: Spencer's zoning bylaw should be amended to reduce the dimensional requirements for planned shopping centers, including the minimum lot size requirement of five acres, frontage requirement, lot coverage limitation, and the amount of required parking. The current dimensional requirements for shopping centers are overly restrictive and act as a disincentive for economic development. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector.

22. Investigate the State's Community Preservation Act: Signed into law in September 2000, the Community Preservation Act (CPA) enables Massachusetts communities to establish a local Community Preservation Fund through a surcharge of up to 3% on the local property tax levies with the funds raised earmarked for three purposes: open space preservation, historic preservation, and low & moderate-income housing. The CPA also created a significant State matching fund of more than \$25 million annually, which has thus far translated into a dollar-for-dollar match for local communities that have adopted the CPA. Once the CPA is adopted locally, the Act requires that at least 10% of the monies raised be distributed to each of the three purposes specified above. This allows a community to focus the bulk of the funds raised for the purpose that is most important to them. For instance, if Spencer believes its most pressing need is open space acquisition, it can dedicate up to 80% of the monies raised under the CPA for this purpose (as long as historic preservation and affordable housing each receive 10% of the monies raised). The Town should further investigate the CPA as a method of addressing its needs in the categories of open space preservation, historic preservation, and low & moderate-income housing. In terms of a regional example, the Town of Sturbridge is the only community within the CMRPC region to adopt the CPA locally. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Conservation Commission.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The recommendations contained herein were developed with the Town's financial status, staffing capability and administrative capacity in mind. Some of the recommendations in the Master Plan will take a long time to accomplish, while some can be accomplished within a year of the Plan's completion. The following implementation schedule is broken down into three periods of time:

- Short-term: recommendations that can be implemented within a year of the Master Plan's completion.
- Mid-term: recommendations that will take one-to-five years to implement.
- Long-term: recommendations that will take five or more years to implement.

Some of the recommendations will take several years before the Town can start reaping their benefits, but only if the Town begins working on them now. For recommendations such as these, they will be listed under the "short-term" actions, meaning the Town should begin working on them immediately.

In terms of cost estimates, many of the recommendations are low cost measures that the Town can undertake on its own without professional assistance. However, there are several recommendations that deal with large-scale capital improvements that will require substantial financial resources. Where a detailed cost estimate has been prepared for a particular recommendation, it is listed. However, most of the Plan's recommendations cannot be tied to an exact cost estimate. In such cases, the cost of implementing the recommendation are broken down into three cost estimate categories:

- Low cost: recommendations that will take less than \$1,000 to implement.
- Medium cost: recommendations that will cost between \$1,000-to-\$10,000 to implement.
- Big bucks: recommendations that will cost over \$10,000 to implement.

Regarding the recommendations that deal with amending the Town's Zoning Bylaw and/or Subdivision regulations, they can be handled in one of two ways: the Town can choose to tackle them one at a time on its own (the low cost option), or they can hire a planning consultant to prepare a comprehensive update to its Zoning Bylaw (the big bucks option). CMRPC currently estimates the cost of a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw update for Spencer at \$12,000-to-\$15,000.

The following Implementation Plan provides a three-phase implementation schedule for each of the Master Plan's recommendations, the chapter/chapters containing each recommendation, as well as a cost estimate and a denotation of the municipal entity/entities responsible for implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE: SHORT-TERM

1. Capital Improvement Plan: It is recommended that the Town establish a long-range capital planning committee and charge them with the responsibility of preparing a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for Spencer. The CIP should be a rolling five-year plan that identifies and prioritizes the Town's capital needs, and recommends how such needs should be paid for. As noted previously, the various municipal departments have numerous large-scale capital needs coming up in the next decade. Spencer should plan for its capital needs in a comprehensive manner with an eye towards the long-term, rather than the current piece-by-piece, year-to-year method of evaluating capital requests.

Master Plan Chapter: Town Government: Facilities & Services.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator and Finance Committee.

2. Sewer/Water System Expansion Policy – Definition of Service Area: The presence of municipal water and sewer often dictates where development takes place in a community and how intensive that development is. Water and sewer service that continues to radiate from the center, with no well-defined limits to the service area, results in an inefficient land use pattern and an infrastructure system that is expensive to maintain, let alone upgrade (it is clear from the Municipal Services & Facilities chapter that Spencer's municipal sewer system is in serious need of an upgrade). The current practice of extending water and sewer ever further down the road as long as a developer/builder is willing to pay for it will eventually result in landowners pushing to increase the densities of these areas and reduce the minimum required lot sizes. Thus, expanding water and sewer service based on the ability to pay for it will create pressure to increase the amount and intensity of development in these areas because water and sewer service is now available. Smart progressive municipalities use their infrastructure systems to encourage growth in those areas where it's suitable and discourage growth in those areas that they want to keep rural or where high-density development is not suitable. It is highly recommended that Spencer's Water and Sewer Departments work with the Planning Board and Conservation Commission to clearly delineate a definitive infrastructure service area with the understanding that water and sewer will *not* be extended beyond the delineated service area. Spencer needs to start using its infrastructure to direct growth where it wants it to happen instead of extending the water/sewer service areas willy-nilly based on the ability of a landowner/developer to pay for service extensions.

Master Plan Chapters: Town Government: Facilities & Services, and Existing & Future Land Use.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: Spencer Sewer and Water Departments in conjunction with the Planning Board & Conservation Commission.

3. Municipal Services Consolidation Plan: It is recommended that the Town develop a municipal services consolidation plan for its various boards, committees and commissions. Currently, Spencer has over 50 municipal entities and many of them have overlapping subject matter, duties and responsibilities. This has resulted in a situation where the Town has to scramble every year to find people to staff the various boards, committees and commissions. Developing and implementing a municipal services consolidation plan would result in a lesser reliance on volunteers, improved coordination and an economy of scale.

Master Plan Chapter:

Town Government: Facilities & Services.

Cost Estimate:

Low cost.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator in consultation with Spencer's various municipal entities.



4. Revitalize and Expand the Industrial Development Finance Authority: As mentioned in the Town Government Facilities & Services chapter, Spencer's Industrial Development Finance Authority (IDFA) has not met in over ten years and is all but dormant. No other municipal entity has stepped up to fill the void and take the lead in developing and implementing an economic development strategy for Spencer. There is no local Chamber of Commerce and the Town is unlikely to hire an Economic Development Coordinator. Thus, the Town is left with the options of revitalizing its IDFA or creating a new municipal entity charged with creating/implementing an economic development strategy for Spencer. In keeping with the Town's ongoing effort to consolidate its municipal services and entities, it is recommended that Spencer reorganize its IDFA, expand its membership and charge them with the task of developing and implementing an economic development strategy for Spencer. A revitalized IDFA would need to begin by reviewing the Town's zoning scheme, tax policies, road improvement plans and water/sewer expansion plans as they relate to Spencer's ability to attract new businesses. The IDFA would then need to work with the various municipal boards and departments to develop an economic development strategy for Spencer. As part of an economic development strategy, the Town should designate a staff person in Town Hall to handle economic development issues. One contact person is essential, as businesses want straight answers fast.

Master Plan Chapter: Economic Development.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The IDFA, Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

5. Develop the Town’s Grant Writing Capacity and Utilize Grants to Improve Downtown Spencer: Spencer is eligible for a wide variety of federal and State grant programs, however, applying for them can be a time consuming endeavor that requires a great deal of research and narrative writing. Many town departments would like to apply for grants but simply do not have the manpower or time to adequately deal with the application process. With numerous capital expenditures on the horizon, it is imperative that the Town cultivates its grant writing capacity so that it may access the significant amount of money being made available through State grants. The Town’s grant writing capacity could be developed in-house by hiring a professional grant writer, or through establishing a town planner/economic development coordinator position. Some grant writers will write grants on behalf of a town for a fee only if the grant is successful. If the Town cannot afford to hire additional municipal staff for the purpose of grant writing/administration, then perhaps the Town could contract with a professional grant writer on an as-needed basis. There are numerous private sector planning consultants that would be happy to work with Spencer on a specific grant application. Another option would be to utilize the grant writing services of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC). As a member of CMRPC, Spencer is eligible to receive 24-hours of planning assistance every year. Many member communities have utilized their 24-hours of planning assistance for the purpose of having CMRPC assist them with a particular grant application.

Master Plan Chapter: Economic Development.
Cost Estimate: Medium cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

6. Brownfields: Spencer should join the Central Massachusetts Economic Development Authority (CMEDA) so that it may utilize their services if and when a contaminated property is identified. Getting contaminated properties cleaned up and back on the tax rolls will add to the Town’s non-residential tax base and benefit the local economy.

Master Plan Chapter: Economic Development.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

7. Chapter 40-B Housing Proposals: The Zoning Board of Appeals should receive training on how to deal with Special Permits as they relate to low/moderate income housing projects as defined by Chapter 40-B of Massachusetts General Laws. The UMass Extension’s Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (CPTC) offers classes on this subject on an annual basis and will even provide customized training sessions to individual communities. In addition, DHCD has prepared a procedural “how to” booklet for local communities.

Master Plan Chapter: Housing.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entity: The Zoning Board of Appeals.

8. Major Residential Development Review: The Town should have a mechanism in place that allows for the municipal review of major residential development proposals, that is, multiple lots (five or more) being created along the frontage of an existing Town road. Currently, such development proposals receive no municipal review as they are created under the Approval Not Required (ANR) process. Having a major residential development review provision in the Town's Zoning Bylaw would allow for the municipal review of such site planning issues such as the cumulative impacts of the proposed development in regards to drainage, stormwater management, erosion control, environmental impact and neighborhood impact.

Master Plan Chapters: Housing, and Existing & Future Land Use.
Cost Estimate: Low cost if handled by the Town, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board.

9. Allow Senior Housing by Special Permit: As documented in the Housing chapter, Spencer's population is getting older and housing opportunities for seniors will become an increasingly important issue for the Town over the next few decades. Although the Spencer Housing Authority manages two senior housing developments (Depot Village and Howe Village), the Authority's waiting list indicates a strong demand for senior housing. Many communities in Massachusetts have adopted senior housing bylaws within their zoning framework. Such bylaws can take the form of senior residential communities, retirement communities, as well as assisted living and residential care facilities (both are governed by State regulations). It is recommended that Spencer prepare a senior housing bylaw that will allow senior housing developments in the downtown by Special Permit granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Master Plan Chapters: Housing, and Existing & Future Land Use.
Cost Estimate: Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Zoning Board of Appeals in conjunction with the Building Inspector and Health Inspector. This could also be another agenda item for a local housing needs committee.

10. Cluster Housing: The Town should consider a cluster-housing bylaw as a tool for preserving open space in the rural north and south of Spencer. In order for such a bylaw to be effective, it must be written in such a way that a developer would prefer to utilize the cluster concept as opposed to the standard subdivision process. Factors to consider when designing a cluster-housing bylaw include: density bonuses, minimum lot sizes, quantity and quality of required open space, drainage, water, waste disposal, length and width of interior roads and of course, public health and safety.

<i>Master Plan Chapters:</i>	Housing, and Existing & Future Land Use.
<i>Cost Estimate:</i>	Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
<i>Responsible Municipal Entities:</i>	The Planning Board in conjunction with the Conservation Commission.

11. Increase the Minimum Required Lot Size in Rural Spencer: Another option for preserving Spencer’s rural character would be to require a larger minimum lot size in the rural north and south. Spencer’s rural areas are currently zoned RES-45, which requires that each new lot contain a minimum of 45,000 square feet. The minimum lot size requirement for those communities abutting Spencer ranges between 60,000 square feet and three acres. It would be to the benefit of Spencer’s rural character to increase the minimum lot size in its rural north and south from 45,000 square feet to 60,000 square feet.

<i>Master Plan Chapter:</i>	Existing & Future Land Use.
<i>Cost Estimate:</i>	Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
<i>Responsible Municipal Entity:</i>	The Planning Board.

12. Rewrite the Signage Bylaw: The Town should completely rewrite its sign bylaw. The current bylaw is neither understandable nor equitable. The current hodgepodge of signage in the downtown is visually unattractive and confusing. Although every community struggles with its signage bylaw (both in terms of standards and enforcement), the practical effect of Spencer’s signage bylaw is that there are no standards and anything goes. The signage bylaw should be completely rewritten from scratch.

<i>Master Plan Chapter:</i>	Existing & Future Land Use.
<i>Cost Estimate:</i>	Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
<i>Responsible Municipal Entities:</i>	The Planning Board working with the Code Enforcement Officer and a committee of local business people.

13. Adopt a Phased Growth Bylaw: Many Massachusetts communities have adopted phased growth provisions (or building permit cap) within their local zoning bylaws as a means to ensuring that municipal services are not outpaced by excessive growth in any given year or by a single large-scale development proposal. The building permit cap number is usually determined by the community’s historic growth rate. Here is Spencer as an example: between 1990 and 2000, Spencer averaged 52 building permits per year for new homes. Thus, this figure could be used as Spencer’s historical growth rate for the purpose of a phased growth bylaw. Any phased growth provision should include a mechanism that ensures that a single subdivision development does not grab up all of the new home building permits for a year. Also, many communities allow exemptions for senior

housing developments, as they usually do not overly tax municipal services to the extent of traditional residential development. Be forewarned that phased growth provisions can be complicated to administer at the local level.

Master Plan Chapter: Existing & Future Land Use.
Cost Estimate: Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector.

14. Work With Area Land Trusts: Research conducted on behalf of the Master Plan indicates there are 81 tax parcels in Spencer that are at least fifty acres in size. Ten of these parcels are owned by the State, two by the Town, 13 are owned by non-profit entities, and 30 properties are currently enrolled in the State’s Chapter-61A & B programs. All but a few of these parcels are located in Spencer’s rural north and south. Many of the large lot property owners are in their “golden years”. Elderly property owners are often faced with the following dilemma: how to conduct their estate planning in such a way as to maximize assets while at the same time protecting the land they lived on for many years. This can be a very complicated proposition, one that requires professional legal and estate planning assistance. There are several regional land trusts (such as the Greater Worcester Land Trust and the Trustees of Reservations to name a few) that have such expertise on staff. Land trusts often work with property owners to create estate plans that meet the financial needs of the landowners while protecting the land (albeit sometimes in a limited fashion). It is therefore recommended that Spencer work with the region’s larger land trusts to identify land protection opportunities. The list of large-lot property owners should be kept with the Conservation Commission, who in turn, should be the Town’s liaison with the region’s land trusts.

Master Plan Chapter: Existing & Future Land Use.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entity: The Conservation Commission.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE: MID-TERM

1. Fire Department, Capital Equipment, Staffing and Building Maintenance: It is recommended that the Town develop a financial strategy for addressing the Fire Department’s various needs including:

- Developing a comprehensive equipment replacement plan with front-line vehicles being replaced every five years and back-line vehicles every seven years.
- Adding two full-time firefighters to cover the weekday period when most of the Department’s volunteers are working and may not be available; and
- Addressing the maintenance needs of the existing fire station.

Master Plan Chapter:
Cost Estimate:

Town Government: Facilities & Services.
The Fire Department has identified \$1,345,000 worth of capital equipment needs, including one million dollars to replace four vehicles, and \$250,000 for a fire training facility. The cost of adding two full-time fire fighters could not be estimated at this time, however, adding such staff would undoubtedly fall under the “big bucks” category.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Fire Department, Finance Committee, Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen.

2. Sewer System Master Plan: It is recommended that the Sewer Department find a way to fund a “master plan” for the sewer system. Such a plan would consist of a detailed sewer line capacity study and a well-coordinated sewer pipe replacement program. Details of the plan should include identifying system deficiencies, prioritizing their repair (with cost estimates) and establishing a rolling five-year work program for sewer pipe repair and replacement. Such a master plan should also outline a long-range system maintenance strategy for the Sewer Department. Implementing the plan’s recommendations would be of great benefit to the system’s existing users (a “righting of the ship”, so to speak), but would also help the Town’s economic development strategy, such as it is. As mentioned previously, the State’s Clean Water Revolving Loan Fund could be utilized to pay for both an infiltration/inflow study (a sewer master plan), as well as for constructing the improvements identified by such a study. Once the sewer system’s inflow/infiltration problem is sorted out, the Town may want to consider applying to DHCD for a CDAG grant to extend municipal water and sewer to its western-most industrial district that abuts Route 49. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Sewer Department in conjunction with the Finance Committee and the Town Administrator.

Master Plan Chapters:

Town Government: Facilities & Services, and Economic Development.

Cost Estimate:

The cost of a sewer system “master plan” is currently estimated at \$100,000.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Sewer Department in conjunction with the Finance Committee and the Town Administrator.

3. Information Management: It is recommended that the Town develop an integrated information management plan that will result in Spencer’s full compliance with GASB standards, as well as a Town government website, and inter-departmental e-mail. This will entail “wiring” the Town Hall and finding space there to install a computer system “server”, i.e., the main computer that links the network together. The Town should undertake this effort in a coordinated approach by establishing a central Town of Spencer website, rather than having each department develop its own website. A partial list of benefits to be reaped by having an official Town of Spencer website include: the ability to contact municipal officials by e-mail; citizens could access and review meeting notices and minutes on-line; citizens could access permits, forms and records on-line; citizens could access information on the Town’s development review process; and such a website could serve as a clearinghouse of information relating to Spencer Town government (reports &

maps, etc). Having such services and resources available on-line will help reduce the demand for expanding service hours at the Town Hall. The Town will also need to decide whether or not to include GIS technology in its information management plan. Responsible Municipal Entity: The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator. It may be advisable to establish a committee to investigate the Town's options for acquiring and utilizing information management technology.

Master Plan Chapter:

Town Government: Facilities & Services.

Cost Estimate:

Medium cost.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator. It may be advisable to establish a committee to investigate the Town's options for acquiring and utilizing information management technology.

4. Structurally Deficient & Functionally Obsolete Bridges: The Town should address its structurally deficient and functionally obsolete bridges. As mentioned previously, Spencer has one structurally deficient bridge and three functionally obsolete bridges. The Town should work with MassHighway and CMRPC to obtain federal-aid or state-aid bridge repair funds through the TIP process for those eligible bridges and State highway aid for those bridges that are not eligible for federal-aid. Once again, it is important to remember that bridge repair projects take a long time to unfold, often as long as a decade from having the project listed on the regional TIP to the actual repair work. Thus, it is important for the Town to start the planning stage as soon as possible.

Master Plan Chapter:

Transportation.

Cost Estimate:

The cost of replacing the Brooks Pond Road Bridge is currently estimated at \$412,000, with MassHighway covering the reconstruction cost. Regarding the Town's three functionally obsolete bridges, none of them appear on CMRPC's Regional Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). Getting these bridges listed on the TIP will mean that the Town will be responsible for the design costs, thus putting this effort in the "big bucks" category.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Board of Selectmen, Highway Department and Spencer's delegates to CMRPC.

5. Tracking the Impact of New Large-Scale Development Proposals: The Town should track the traffic-related impacts of new large-scale development proposals such as the new Intermediate School being built along Paxton Road and the auto distribution center proposed for Route 49. Regarding the new school, traffic counts should be taken along Paxton Road prior to opening the school. Counts should also be taken along Paxton Road after the school opens up, preferably having one traffic counter placed before the school's main entrance and one just beyond. Counts should also be taken along Donnelly Road as well. The traffic count data should be collected in preparation for an intersection analysis, should the traffic count data warrant such an effort. Intersections to keep an eye on include Paxton Road/Main Street, Paxton Road/Donnelly Road, Paxton Road/Wilson Street, Donnelly Road/Main Street and Donnelly Road/Donnelly Cross Road. Regarding the auto distribution center proposed along Route 49, counts should be taken along Route

49 along either side of the facility's driveway before and after the center goes on line. Responsible Municipal Entity: CMRPC's Transportation Division can conduct traffic counts at the request of the Spencer Board of Selectmen and/or Highway Department.

Master Plan Chapter: Transportation.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entity: CMRPC's Transportation Division can conduct traffic counts at the request of the Spencer Board of Selectmen and/or Highway Department.

6. Recommendations of the Parking & Traffic Advisory Committee: The Town should begin implementing the recommendations of the Parking & Traffic Advisory Committee as outlined in their December 2001 report. The Committee has prioritized its recommendations per the request of the Master Plan Committee. Although the downtown would benefit from implementing all of the report's recommendations, the Committee believes the signalization improvements are of top priority, followed by a review of the Town's accident data by a qualified transportation planning professional. In addition, the Town should promote and prominently advertise through signage those municipal parking areas located off of Route 9 in the downtown area.

Master Plan Chapter: Transportation.
Cost Estimate: Big bucks.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator and Highway Department.

7. Utility Work: The Town should develop a formal policy which ensures that utility companies who dig up town-maintained roads for the placement of their utility lines incur the full cost of repairing the roadway to its previous condition.

Master Plan Chapter: Transportation.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entity: The Highway Department.

8. Communication: The Town's representatives to the WRTA and the CMRPC should continue to brief the Board of Selectmen on regional transportation projects and issues that may have relevance to Spencer.

Master Plan Chapter: Transportation.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: Spencer's representatives to the WRTA and CMRPC.

9. New Subdivision Road Width Standard: The Town should investigate the possibility of establishing a tiered road width standard for new subdivision roads. Issues to consider during the deliberative process include safety, emergency vehicle accessibility, expected traffic volume, density of development, impact on down-slope drainage facilities and maintenance.

Master Plan Chapter: Transportation.
Cost Estimate: Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw/Subdivision Regulation rewrite.
Responsible Municipal Entities: This should be a joint effort of the Planning Board and Highway Department. The Town's public safety officials should review any proposed changes to the current road width standard.

10. Coordinate Development Activity With the Owners of Industrial Land: As mentioned previously, the vast majority of Spencer's industrially zoned land is under private ownership. Since the Town is highly unlikely to purchase such land, it is paramount that Spencer planners work in partnership with the owners of industrial land to make sure this land is developed in accordance with the Town's objectives and render assistance when possible. Such assistance could be in the form of extending municipal infrastructure (as in the case with the Town's western-most industrial district along Route 49), or simply helping the landowners access the technical assistance made available by the myriad of private/public entities that promote economic development.

Master Plan Chapter: Economic Development.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The IDFA, Board of Selectmen, the Town Administrator, the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals.

11. Develop a Computerized Database of Available Industrial Properties: The Town should develop a computerized database of its available industrially zoned properties as a service for new industries investigating Spencer as a potential location. The database should be searchable by parcel size, availability of water and sewer, proximity to major highway, easements in place and any other information that a potential developer may find useful. Not only would such a database be very useful to potential developers, it would show that Spencer is business-friendly and willing to provide resources in support of new industrial development.

Master Plan Chapter: Economic Development.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The IDFA in conjunction with the Board of Assessors.

12. Affordable Housing: The Town should review its non-regulatory options for providing low and moderate-income housing and make every effort to ensure that 10% of Spencer's housing stock consists of low and moderate-income housing. Towards this end, the Town should take a closer look at the State's Affordable Housing Trust Fund and the various housing grant programs offered by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

Master Plan Chapter: Housing.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.

Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator. The Board of Selectmen may opt to establish a local housing needs committee to assist in this effort.

13. Substandard Housing: The Town should proactively examine its housing stock and work with property owners to identify needed improvements. Once this is done, the Town should further investigate the various State grant opportunities to see if they make sense for Spencer and its property owners.

Master Plan Chapter: Housing.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen in conjunction with the Building Inspector. The Board of Selectmen may opt to establish a local housing needs committee to assist in this effort.

14. Inclusionary Zoning/Incentive-Based Zoning: The general purpose behind inclusionary zoning and incentive-based zoning is to increase a community's affordable housing stock. Inclusionary zoning can be seen as the "stick" approach while incentive-based zoning is the "carrot" approach. An inclusionary zoning bylaw is one that requires new subdivisions to set aside a certain percentage of new housing units as below-market units, i.e., units that can be counted towards the town's affordable housing unit inventory under Chapter 40-B MGL. Typically, inclusionary bylaws require anywhere from 10% to 25% of new subdivision housing units consist of below-market units. The Massachusetts Zoning Act does not explicitly authorize inclusionary zoning, however, many Commonwealth communities have inclusionary zoning bylaws on the books and have made the case that such bylaws are legally valid under the State's "Home Rule" approach to zoning. Massachusetts courts have generally approved of inclusionary zoning, however, they have frowned on assessing fees in lieu of providing actual affordable housing units.

Incentive-based zoning attempts to increase the affordable housing stock by offering incentives to developers to create below-market units as part of their developments. Such incentives can include higher densities, reduced frontage, reduced setback requirements, a reduction in the required roadway width, reduced infrastructure connection fees and other incentives that can improve a developer's bottom line. Incentive-based zoning is an example of giving something to get something. Incentive-based zoning is explicitly authorized within the Massachusetts Zoning Act. Although Spencer's affordable housing situation is not nearly as dire as it is in other comparable communities in the region, the Town may wish to take some pro-active steps to bring its affordable housing unit inventory closer to the 10% required under Chapter 40-B MGL. Towards that end, Spencer should investigate both inclusionary zoning and incentive-based zoning and determine which approach would work best for the Town.

Master Plan Chapter: Housing.
Cost Estimate: Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
Responsible Municipal Entity: The Planning Board.

15. Accessory Apartments in the Downtown and Rural Spencer: Spencer’s current zoning bylaw is silent on the issue of accessory apartments and, as such, accessory apartments are not allowed in the downtown even though there are wonderful stately old homes in the vicinity that are large enough to allow for such units to be created within them or within an accessory structure. An accessory apartment can be a second dwelling unit located within a single-family home (attached), or it can be located above a garage or within a barn (detached) on the property whose primary use is for a single-family home. Another term for accessory apartments is “in-law apartments”, as in the apartment is used by a related family member. Accessory apartments allow elderly people to live in close proximity to their family, as well as young people who cannot afford their own home at the time. Accessory apartments also allow the primary homeowner to collect a bit of rent, thus helping them cope with property taxes. For detached accessory apartments, local bylaws usually include a number of safeguards aimed at ensuring that the apartment does not obtain legal status as the lot’s primary dwelling unit. Such safeguards typically include a provision that the apartment can only be rented to a member of the extended family, the lot owner must reside in the lot’s principal dwelling structure, the apartment be limited to a single bedroom, that no new driveways are created, and that Board of Health approval must be obtained in order to ensure that the on-site septic system has enough capacity to accommodate the increased load.

Master Plan Chapters:

Housing, and Existing & Future Land Use.

Cost Estimate:

Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector and Health Inspector.

16. Erosion Control Standards: The Town’s Subdivision Regulations should be amended to require detailed erosion control plans as part of the submission for definitive subdivision approval. The design standards for such plans should be clearly stated within the Town’s Subdivision Regulations. It should be required that erosion control plans be prepared by a registered professional civil engineer and the Subdivision Regulations should be further amended to give the Planning Board the power to have such plans reviewed by an independent engineering consultant of the Planning Board’s choice at the developer’s expense. The Planning Board has had its own engineering consultant review subdivision plans on occasion but this has been an informal arrangement and has not been codified within the Board’s Subdivision Regulations. The Subdivision Regulations should be absolutely clear on the Planning Board’s procedures for reviewing definitive subdivision plans so that developers wishing to build in Spencer know what to expect.

Master Plan Chapter:

Housing.

Cost Estimate:

Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.

Responsible Municipal Entity:

The Planning Board.

17. Two-Family and Multi-Family Dwellings: The Town should encourage two-family and multi-family dwellings in its downtown rather than the rural north and south. The downtown already has the infrastructure in place to accommodate higher density housing. Such housing tends to be more affordable than single-family homes on one-acre lots, thus having more multi-family units would help the Town bridge the gap in affordable rental units. Having more people living in the downtown will increase the need for a variety of businesses and services, thus helping to revitalize the downtown's economic base. It is therefore recommended that Spencer allow two-family and multi-family units by right (as opposed to Special Permit) in its downtown area.

Master Plan Chapter:

Housing.

Cost Estimate:

Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector and Health Inspector.

18. Allow Apartments by Right in the Downtown: Allowing apartments by right in the downtown area where the infrastructure exists to serve them, could help to revitalize the downtown area by allowing the many underutilized buildings to be turned into multi-family dwellings. Having more people live in the downtown area will increase the demand for shopping opportunities, services and food establishments. Having a higher population density in the downtown would also alleviate some of the pressure to develop housing in the more rural areas of Town.

Master Plan Chapter:

Existing & Future Land Use.

Cost Estimate:

Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town's Building Inspector and Health Inspector.

19. Delete the Floor Space Limitation for Retail Business and Consumer Services: Spencer's current zoning bylaw limits the square footage of local retail business establishments to 4,000 square feet of gross floor area. This strict limit on the amount of floor space for local retail businesses is not appropriate for the Central Business district or the downtown Commercial district and should be deleted.

Master Plan Chapter:

Existing & Future Land Use.

Cost Estimate:

Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town's Building Inspector.

20. Revise the Regulations Governing Offices & Stores in the Same Building: The Town should revise Item E-13 (Retail Business and Consumer Service Establishment) in the Table of Use regulations to relax the floor space, building height and lot size limitations for the downtown

buildings wanting to contain a mixture of stores and offices. These restrictions make it quite difficult to create office/retail buildings within the Commercial and Local Business zoning districts. Also, the downtown Central Business district should allow such mixed-use proposals by right.

Master Plan Chapter: Existing & Future Land Use.
Cost Estimate: Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town’s Building Inspector.

21. Monitor the Effect of New Parking Standards: The Town recently revised its parking standards for the Central Business district in order to make the parking requirements for this area less restrictive. The Town should monitor how these new standards are used over the next few years in order to determine whether they’ve had the desired effect.

Master Plan Chapter: Existing & Future Land Use.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town’s Building Inspector.

22. Synchronize the Building Height Standards: The two zoning districts that cover the heart of the downtown (Central Business and its abutting Commercial district) have two different building height standards. The CB district allows buildings to be 40-feet in height while the COM district restricts building height to 35-feet. This discrepancy should be resolved for these two particular zoning districts in the downtown, with the higher building height standard (40-feet) being the preferred option.

Master Plan Chapter: Existing & Future Land Use.
Cost Estimate: Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Planning Board in conjunction with the Town’s Building Inspector.

23. Adopt Provisions for Backland Development: The Town should adopt a zoning provision for backland development, i.e., “pork-chop” lots, or flag lots. As more and more road frontage is developed, a substantial amount of inaccessible backland is created. The intensity of this problem will increase as the Town continues to grow and the frontage along existing roads continues to be developed residentially (think Paxton Road). Issues to consider when creating a backland development provision include:

- Allowing such lots by right or by Special Permit
- Having a reduced frontage requirement in exchange for shared (common) driveways
- Requiring larger lot sizes with interior dimensional standards in order to prevent odd lot configurations

- Limiting the number of flag lots that created under a single development proposal or in close proximity to each other

Master Plan Chapter:

Existing & Future Land Use.

Cost Estimate:

Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.

Responsible Municipal Entity:

The Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals depending on whether such lots are allowed by right or by Special Permit.

24. Revise the Zoning Bylaw’s Definitions Section: The definition section (Section 2) of the Town’s zoning bylaw should be revised to offer more clarity for the existing definition entries and expanded to include numerous definitions that are not addressed in Spencer’s zoning. Definitions in need of revision include the various dwelling unit definitions, hazardous waste, low-level radioactive waste, contractor yards and home occupations. Suggested terms in need of definition include: accessory apartments, light industry, heavy industry, adult uses, bio-technology facilities, laboratory, manufacturing facilities, and office parks.

Master Plan Chapter:

Existing & Future Land Use.

Cost Estimate:

Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector.

25. Site Plan Review Authority: The zoning bylaw should be amended to give the Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board more power to review how a individual building sites get developed for commercial or industrial purposes. Of the commercial and industrial uses allowed in Spencer, the vast majority are handled by Special Permit granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals. However, there are a number of commercial and industrial uses that Spencer allows By Right, meaning that all that is currently required is obtaining a building permit from the Building Inspector. In order to bring such uses under municipal review, it is suggested that the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals institute a “site plan review” process. A site plan review process is typically used to regulate how an individual building site gets developed. Issues typically addressed during the site plan review process include: drainage, landscaping, lighting, dumpster location, parking area design and location, access/egress, screening and fencing. Spencer’s department heads do review such items during their “scoping sessions” for large-scale development projects; however, the Town has never formally articulated a set of site plan development standards. The lack of such standards is an obstacle to economic development because developers cannot be sure what the Town will require of them. A clear articulation of site development standards should be included in the zoning bylaw so that both the Town and developers know what is expected. In terms of applicability, it is suggested that any site plan review process adopted by Spencer be applied to large-scale multi-family residential developments (ten units or more), and those commercial/industrial developments proposing more than 10,000 square feet of floor space. Any site plan review provision should address the following items:

- Intent of the provisions;
- Applicability;
- Site plan submission standards (what you need for mapped information);
- Procedures for submitting/reviewing the plan, holding hearings, and rendering decisions;
- Site development standards (ingress/egress, lighting, drainage, landscaping, screening/fencing, parking area design and location, waste disposal, etc.);
- A waiver provision; and
- A time limit for developing the site, after which site plan approval will lapse.



In Spencer's case for those commercial/industrial/large-scale residential development proposals requiring a Special Permit, it is the Zoning Board of Appeals that should be the site plan review authority. For those commercial/industrial/large-scale residential development proposals that are allowed By Right, it is the Planning Board that should be the site plan review authority. The site plan standards should be the same for both the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Planning Board.

Master Plan Chapter:

Existing & Future Land Use.

Cost Estimate:

Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.

Responsible Municipal Entities:

The Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector and other local review entities such as the Water & Sewer departments and the Board of Health.

26. Expand Industrial Development Options: The zoning bylaw's Table of Use Regulations (Section 5.4) should be expanded to allow a broader range of industrial land development options. Our nation's economy has changed significantly over the past twenty years and Spencer's zoning bylaw has not kept pace. It is recommended that the Table of Use Regulations be broadened to allow for bio-technology facilities, laboratories and parks, fiber-optics manufacturing facilities, and professional/business office parks.

<i>Master Plan Chapter:</i>	Existing & Future Land Use.
<i>Cost Estimate:</i>	Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
<i>Responsible Municipal Entities:</i>	The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector.

27. Revise Dimensional Standards for Planned Shopping Centers: Spencer’s zoning bylaw should be amended to reduce the dimensional requirements for planned shopping centers, including the minimum lot size requirement of five acres, frontage requirement, lot coverage limitation, and the amount of required parking. The current dimensional requirements for shopping centers are overly restrictive and act as a disincentive for economic development.

<i>Master Plan Chapter:</i>	Existing & Future Land Use.
<i>Cost Estimate:</i>	Low cost if handled by the Town on its own, or big bucks if it is integrated into a comprehensive Zoning Bylaw rewrite.
<u><i>Responsible Municipal Entities:</i></u>	The Planning Board in conjunction with the Building Inspector.

28. Investigate the State’s Community Preservation Act: Signed into law in September 2000, the Community Preservation Act (CPA) enables Massachusetts communities to establish a local Community Preservation Fund through a surcharge of up to 3% on the local property tax levies with the funds raised earmarked for three purposes: open space preservation, historic preservation, and low & moderate-income housing. The CPA also created a significant State matching fund of more than \$25 million annually, which has thus far translated into a dollar-for-dollar match for local communities that have adopted the CPA. Once the CPA is adopted locally, the Act requires that at least 10% of the monies raised be distributed to each of the three purposes specified above. This allows a community to focus the bulk of the funds raised for the purpose that is most important to them. For instance, if Spencer believes its most pressing need is open space acquisition, it can dedicate up to 80% of the monies raised under the CPA for this purpose (as long as historic preservation and affordable housing each receive 10% of the monies raised). The Town should further investigate the CPA as a method of addressing its needs in the categories of open space preservation, historic preservation, and low & moderate-income housing. In terms of a regional example, the Town of Sturbridge is the only community within the CMRPC region to adopt the CPA locally.

<i>Master Plan Chapter:</i>	Existing & Future Land Use.
<i>Cost Estimate:</i>	Low cost.
<i>Responsible Municipal Entity:</i>	The Conservation Commission.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE: LONG-TERM

1. Secure the Pleasant Street Parking Lot: The Town simply must secure the Pleasant Street parking area (currently owned by Sovereign Bank), either through outright purchase or through the negotiation of a long-term lease. Loss of this parking facility would have a devastating effect on the downtown economy. The Town's Traffic & Parking Advisory Committee also put forth this recommendation in its final report to the Board of Selectmen, issued in December 2001.

Master Plan Chapters: Transportation, Economic Development, and Existing & Future Land Use.

Cost Estimate: Big bucks (in the range of a quarter of a million dollars).

Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

2. Problem Intersections: The Town should take a proactive approach to addressing its problem intersections. The first priorities are the two downtown traffic signals where Route 31 intersects with Route 9. As stated previously, these roadway segments have poor LOS and are prime vehicle crash locations. The Town has two options here: working on its own or working with MassHighway. The Town could hire a professional traffic engineering firm to evaluate the two downtown traffic signals with an eye towards coordinating signalization and improving traffic flow. Another option, albeit less likely, is to petition MassHighway to take control of the two downtown traffic signals and let them work on the necessary signalization improvements. However, it is quite likely that MassHighway would insist on prohibiting the off-street parking that currently exists along this portion of the roadway.

CMRPC's 1992 Route 9 study identified several roadway geometric improvements that could improve the downtown traffic flow, although most of the suggested improvements were never implemented by the Town (such as increasing the turning radii available at the intersection of Route 9 and Grove Street). Since both Route 9 & Route 31 are eligible for federal-aid funding, the Town has the option of working with MassHighway and CMRPC to implement some of the intersection improvements recommended in the 1992 Traffic Study by having such projects included in the region's annual Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Towards this end, improved coordination of the two downtown traffic signals should be the first priority.

A cautionary note: It is important to remember that it will likely take years (even a decade or more) to implement a solution to a current transportation problem. Solving today's transportation problem from scratch is likely ten years away even if the Town has initiated the planning stage. When one considers the small amount of federal-aid available and that forty communities in the region compete for it, it is not surprising that there is a significant backlog of transportation projects waiting in the wings. If Spencer is serious about using federal-aid for a local transportation project, it needs to begin the process of securing funding now.

Master Plan Chapter: Transportation.

Cost Estimate: Big bucks.

Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen, the Highway Department, and Spencer's delegates to CMRPC.

3. Mass Transit: With both the Town's population and local roadway traffic volume projected to expand over the next decade, it would serve Spencer well to encourage mass transit alternatives where possible. Towards this end, it is recommended that the Town pursue three recommendations in this regard:

- *Bus Service* - The Town should continue its membership in the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) and support its efforts to provide public transportation alternatives on a regional scale. A viable para-transit system keeps cars off the roads, which in turn helps to reduce congestion and facilitate circulation. Also, mass transit often provides the only method of transportation for the elderly and disabled. Responsible Municipal Entity: the Board of Selectmen and Spencer's representatives to the WRTA.
- *Train Service* - The Town should investigate the possibility of extending the current Boston-to-Worcester commuter rail into Spencer. CSX Inc. owns the rail, which is known as the CSX Mainline. The rail carries mostly freight; however, Amtrak does use the tracks for its New York-to-Boston route. In Spencer, the rail begins at the East Brookfield town line, cuts across Route 49, passes south of Depot Road and across South Spencer Road, before turning south and extending into Charlton. Extending the commuter line into Spencer would most certainly be a long-term project and would require numerous negotiating sessions, logistical maneuvers and construction of new facilities. However, extending the passenger service into Spencer would provide area residents with a no-hassle method of commuting into Worcester and Boston. Responsible Municipal Entity: the Board of Selectmen.
- *Park & Ride Facility* - The Town should investigate its options for establishing a permanent Park & Ride facility so that more Spencer residents can utilize the WRTA's bus service. Ideally such a Park & Ride facility would be located in the downtown. However, with parking at such a premium in downtown Spencer, it may be more appropriate to locate such a facility to the east or west of downtown along Route 9. The WRTA should be consulted early on before the planning stage gets too far along. Responsible Municipal Entity: the Board of Selectmen and Spencer's representatives to the WRTA.
- *Trail Development* - The Town should continue to develop new trail systems that link residential areas with destination points such as the downtown, public parks, and places of employment. The current Depot Road/Town Center Trail project can serve as a valuable lesson on how to create new trail systems in other portions of Spencer. Responsible Municipal Entity: the Conservation Commission working in conjunction with the Board of Selectmen.

Master Plan Chapter: Transportation.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.

4. Update CMRPC's Route 9 West Corridor Planning Study: CMRPC prepared the Route 9 study in September of 1992. A decade has passed and yet there has been no qualitative analysis to assess how the traffic situation has deteriorated along Route 9. The communities in the study area (Worcester, Leicester, and Spencer) would benefit from an updated assessment of the traffic issues facing the Route 9 corridor. Spencer's CMRPC delegates would need to convince CMRPC of the

need for such a study. CMRPC would, in turn, need to petition MassHighway to have an update of the 1992 Route 9 Study incorporated into its annual work program funded by the Department. Before contacting CMRPC, the Town should thoroughly review the recommendations of the 1992 Study and determine which recommendations have been implemented over the past decade and which recommendations were not.

Master Plan Chapter: Transportation.
Cost Estimate: Low cost. It is most likely that CMRPC would integrate this project into its annual work program with MassHighway, thus MassHighway would be responsible for funding this study.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen, Highway Department, and Spencer’s delegates to CMRPC.

5. Tax Increment Financing: Spencer should investigate the possibility of establishing a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program to create and retain jobs in Town and stimulate the local economy. A local TIF program should insist that new businesses reserve a certain percentage of jobs for Spencer residents, local contractors are used for building construction/rehabilitation and that local businesses are used as service providers. Although it would take a few years before Spencer could reap the tax benefits from any TIF-created projects, the benefits to the local economy will be felt immediately. If Spencer wants to maintain a low tax rate while still providing quality municipal services, then it has to grow its non-residential tax base, even if the tax benefits get pushed ten years into the future. Since the Town cannot offer new businesses much in the way of infrastructure (read municipal sewer), a local TIF program would be a significant draw for new economic development.

Master Plan Chapter: Economic Development.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator.

6. High Speed Cable Access: The Town needs to influence local cable companies and telecommunication firms to provide access to high speed data and networking technologies in preparation for existing and new businesses that may want to take advantage of these technologies. Put quite simply, these technologies are the wave of the future and if businesses can’t find them in Spencer, they *will* look elsewhere.

Master Plan Chapter: Economic Development.
Cost Estimate: Low cost.
Responsible Municipal Entities: The Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator.

GETTING THE PLAN OFF THE GROUND.....

This document represents the Town of Spencer’s first ever community Master Plan. No such document has ever been prepared for the Town during its 250 years of existence. Spencer needs to move quickly on the Plan’s recommendations in order to avoid the pitfalls of other communities

that have previously engaged in the master planning process. Many communities went to the trouble and expense of preparing a Master Plan for their community only to have it sit on the shelf and never be used by the public officials during their land use deliberations. You might even hear one of the policy makers remark “do we even have a Master Plan?” If your public officials don’t use the Plan in their decision making process and the community’s zoning scheme is not a direct reflection of the Master Plan’s land use strategy, then your master planning process has failed. Certainly, an ever-frugal town like Spencer does not want this to happen. So what can be done to get this Master Plan off the ground?

- Establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee: The Town should establish a Master Plan Implementation Committee whose job it is to make sure that the Plan’s recommendations get implemented. This Committee would meet with the Town’s other municipal entities that have Master Plan implementation responsibilities and work with them to keep the Plan on track. It is suggested that the Committee periodically brief the Board of Selectmen on the Plan’s progress, say twice a year.
- Use the Resources That Already Exist in Your Community and the Region: There are civic organizations, senior groups and youth groups that can help with some of the community improvement projects suggested in the Master Plan. These groups could help with a “Downtown Cleanup” day, assist in creating new trail systems, or help with monitoring the water quality of Spencer’s lakes and ponds, just to name a few ideas. Here are a couple of organizations that can lend direct assistance:
 - The Mass Water Watch Partnership and the Congress of Lakes and Ponds can provide citizen training on water quality sampling techniques and creating a baseline of environmental conditions in the Town. The Massachusetts Audubon Society can provide more information on these groups.
 - Students from Clark University’s Small Business Development Center can prepare a profile of Spencer resident’s buying patterns, based on a zip code analysis. This effort can reveal what Spencer residents are buying and where they are spending their money. This research is useful in determining what types of businesses and services are missing in Spencer and can further be used in a marketing strategy for the Town. Clark University’s Urban Design Program can also be tapped to help the Town prepare a street-tree plan for the downtown.
 - The Senior Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) operating out of the Worcester Area Chamber of Commerce can be tapped for a variety of economic development projects, whether it be interviewing the members of the local business community about their needs, or developing property profiles for vacant industrial properties.
 - Other ideas for community service assistance can be found in the notes section of the Master Plan public forum summaries (found in Appendix I).
- Have the Revitalized Industrial Development Finance Authority (IDFA) sponsor an Economic Development Roundtable: Upon its revitalization, the IDFA should as its first order of business hold an economic development roundtable and invite economic development entities from across the region. It is important for the IDFA (and the Town) to

know what resources are available and how to access them. Many of these entities were contacted during the master planning process and quite a few have expressed a direct interest in expanding their presence in Spencer. Entities to invite to such a roundtable should include:

- The Worcester Area Chamber of Commerce and its SCORE program.
- The Massachusetts Office of Business Development and the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council. These two entities administer the South Central Massachusetts Economic Target Area (ETA) of which Spencer is a member.
- The Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA). The MMA have assisted several communities with developing local Tax Increment Financing (TIF) programs.
- The Central Massachusetts Economic Development Authority (CMEDA). This entity can assist with funding “brownfield” cleanup projects.
- The Worcester Area MassDevelopment Office. Serving as the State’s industrial financing authority, MassDevelopment can provide technical assistance on industrial development options as part of the Town’s overall economic development strategy.
- The Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QVCDC). This private non-profit corporation can provide workforce training programs and funding for small business start-ups.
- Village Ventures Inc. This organization offers two venture capital funding programs (Worcester Venture Fund and Long River Ventures) that can be used for funding small business start-ups.
- The Regional Technology Alliance (RTA). This entity works to extend access to broadband communication services within an hour’s driving radius of Springfield, MA (yes, this includes Spencer).
- The US Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA has a new broadband communication initiative and they are currently looking for partners at the local level. Spencer would be an ideal candidate for this initiative.
- The grant program managers of the Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD). As mentioned previously, DHCD offers a number of downtown improvement/economic development grant opportunities for which Spencer is eligible to apply. Several DHCD grant specialists were contacted during the master planning process and a keen interest was expressed in coming to Spencer to brief the local decision makers on the Department’s grant opportunities.
- The local banks. Under the federal Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), local banks are required to set aside a certain amount of funds for community improvement projects. The Spencer Savings Bank and the Spencer branch of Sovereign Bank are subject to the CRA and could be tapped for funding one or more initiatives of the downtown improvement plan.

This economic development roundtable could be a public event that is billed as a follow-up to the Master Planning Process.

- Host a Downtown Revitalization Workshop: The Town should host a downtown revitalization workshop and invite many of the previously mentioned entities that provide technical and funding assistance for downtown improvement projects. This would most certainly be a public event and perhaps some of Spencer's major businesses and industries could help sponsor this event and cover its costs. This workshop could include an element whereby local architects are invited and asked to sketch out some downtown improvement ideas and streetscape improvements. In such instances, the workshop sponsor usually provides a small stipend to the architects (in the range of \$250 or so), and the architects spend an afternoon or evening participating in the workshop's proceedings.



Establishing a Master Plan Implementation Committee, hosting an economic development workshop and hosting a downtown revitalization workshop are three things that Spencer can start on right away in an effort to get the Master Plan off the ground and in flight. The master planning process has clearly demonstrated that there are many Spencer residents that care about their community and are willing to help make the Town a better place to live. The leaders of Spencer's town government should involve its citizens in the Master Plan's implementation and avail themselves to the multitude of resources

(grants and technical assistance) that can help the Town achieve its vision for the future. It is time for the rebirth of the Town of Spencer.....so let's get started!