Freetown
Community Master Plan
2024

SRPEDD
Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District

Federal Disclaimer, Title VI and Nondiscrimination Notice of Rights of Beneficiaries

The Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO) through the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) operates its programs, services, and activities in compliance with federal nondiscrimination laws including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, and related statutes and regulations. Title VI prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and requires that no person in the United States of America shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin (including limited English proficiency), be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal assistance. Related federal nondiscrimination laws administrated by the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, or both prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, sex, and disability. These protected categories are contemplated within SRPEDD's Title VI Programs consistent with federal interpretation and administration. Additionally, SRPEDD provides meaningful access to its programs, services, and activities to individuals with limited English proficiency, in compliance with US Department of Transportation policy and guidance on federal Executive Order 13166.

Individuals seeking additional information or wishing to file a Title VI/Nondiscrimination complaint may contact the SRPEDD Title VI/Nondiscrimination Coordinator at the contact information here. All such complaints must be received, in writing, within 180 days of the alleged discriminatory occurrence. Assistance will be provided, upon request, to individuals unable to provide the complaint form in writing.

Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO)
Andrea Duarte -SRPEDD
88 Broadway, Taunton, MA 02780
Phone: 508 824-1367 or dial 711 to use MassRelay
Email: aduarte@srpedd.org

Massachusetts Public Accommodation Law (M.G.L. c 272 §§92a, 98, 98a) and Executive Order 526 section 4 also prohibit discrimination in public accommodations based on religion, creed, class, race, color, denomination, sex, sexual orientation, nationality, disability, gender identity and expression, and veteran's status, and SRPEDD and the SMMPO assures compliance with these laws. Public Accommodation Law concerns can be brought to SRPEDD's Title VI /Nondiscrimination Coordinator or to file a complaint alleging a violation of the state's Public Accommodation Law, contact the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination within 300 days of the alleged discriminatory conduct.

The SMMPO is equally committed to implementing federal Executive Order 12898, entitled “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations” and Executive Order 13985 (2021) entitled “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.”

In this capacity, the SMMPO identifies and addresses disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on low-income and minority, including BIPOC, Asian or Pacific Islander populations, as well as religious minorities, LQBTQ+ persons, Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons or those who have a disability. The SMMPO carries out this responsibility by the consistent, fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, and by involving underserved individuals in the transportation process and considering their transportation needs in the development and review of the SMMPO’s transportation plans, programs and projects.

English: If this information is needed in another language, please contact the MPO Title VI Coordinator at 508-824-1367 ext. 235 or aduarte@srpedd.org.

Spanish: Si necesita esta información en otro idioma, por favor contacte al coordinador de MPO del Título VI al 508-824-1367 ext. 235 o en aduarte@srpedd.org.

Portuguese: Caso estas informações sejam necessárias em outro idioma, por favor, contate o Coordenador de Título VI da MPO pelo telefone 508-824-1367, Ramal 235 ou em a aduarte@srpedd.org.

Haitian Creole: Si yon moun bezwen enfòmasyon sa a nan yon lòt lang, tanpri kontakte Koòdonatè a Title VI MPO nan 508-824-1367 ext. 235.

Simplified Chinese: 如果需要其他语言的此信息，请致电 508-824-1367 分机联系 MPO Title VI 协调员。 235 或发送电子邮件至 aduarte@srpedd.org。

Simplified Chinese: 如果需要其他语言的此信息，请致电 508-824-1367 分机联系 MPO Title VI 协调员。 235 或发送电子邮件至 aduarte@srpedd.org。

Traditional Chinese: 如果需要其他語言的此信息，請致電 508-824-1367 分機聯繫 MPO Title VI 協調員。 235 或發送電子郵件至 aduarte@srpedd.org。

Mon Khmer Cambodian (Khmer): បុរសិនបើព័ត៌មាននេះត្រូវការជាភាសាផ្សេង សូមទាក់ទង អ្នកសម្របសម្រួល MPO Title VI តាមរយៈលេខ 508-824-1367 ext ។ 235 ឬនៅ aduarte@srpedd.org

Acknowledgements

This report was made possible with participation and technical assistance from the following:

Town of Freetown

Victoria Alfaro Duran - Planning and Land Use Administrator

Deborah L. Pettey - Town Administrator

Freetown Planning Board

David Crose, Chairman	2027
Christopher Mello, Vice Chairman	2025
Gary S. Amaral, Member	2026
Chad S. Carvalho, Member	2028
Steven Tripp, Member	2029
James Boivin, Associate Member	2025

Freetown Selectmen

Trevor Matthews

Jared Zager

Carlos Lopes

Comprehensive Plan Committee

Patricia Kelleher-Parker

Trevor Matthews

David Crose

Charlie Sullivan

Gregory Goodwin

Keith Mello

Nick Velozo

Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD)

Grant King, AICP - Deputy Director & Comprehensive Planning Manager

Phillip Hu - Assistant Director of Planning and Design (former)

Chris Welch - Principal Comprehensive Planner

Maria Jones - Senior Public Engagement and Communications Planner

Danyel Kenis - Urban Design Planner

Laura Tsang - Senior GIS and Data Planer

Aubrey Hoes - Comprehensive Planner

Kaitlin Whalen - Comprehensive Planner

Kevin Ham - Director of Homeland Security

Contents

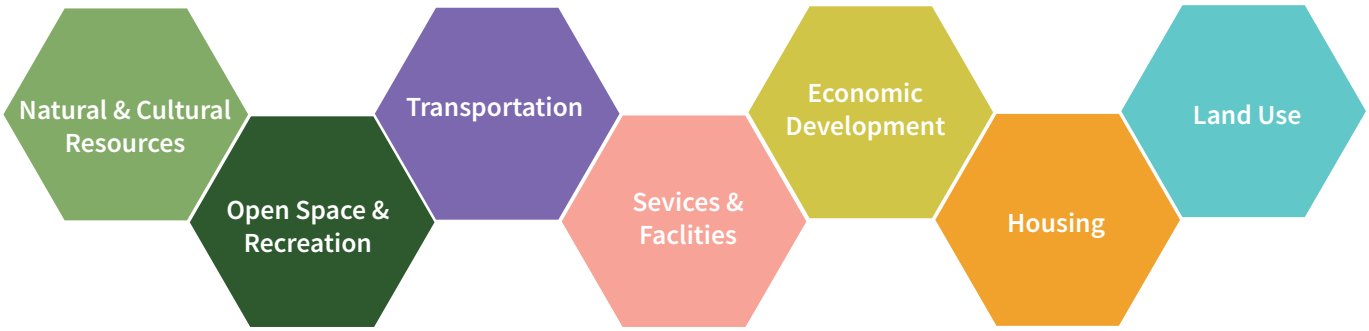
Introduction

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A Master Plan is a technical document, historical narrative, and an objective outline for a community to understand its own past, present, and future goals. Master Plans are created through public events, surveys, interviews, and workshops. They rely on local knowledge, current data, and community aspirations. In Massachusetts, communities approach the Master Planning process through seven (7) lenses or planning elements:

Master Plan chapters typically begin with a summary of data, historical context, and existing policies that are relevant to each element; however, each element also incorporates residents' experiences of their own community and how they envision its future. This collaboration between residents, Town staff, and planners culminate in a list of implementation goals and strategies – thus helping the Town create an actionable set of initiatives and actions to achieve the community's vision over the next ten (10) years.

We organize this plan so that each "element" is a single chapter.



Statutory Elements

According to MGL c.41 s.81D, a Master Plan has some required "elements." They are:

The **Statement of Goals and Policies** sets out Freetown's vision for the future. It presents community values, goals, and the land use objectives that will meet these goals.

The **Natural and Cultural Resources Element** is an opportunity for Freetown to highlight and take stock of its natural, cultural, and historic resources.

The **Open Space and Recreation Element** describes existing open space and recreational facilities in town and aligns plans for future recreation and open space with population needs.

The **Circulation and Transportation Element** provides an inventory of existing and proposed transportation infrastructure and services across all modes including private cars, public transit, and bicycle and pedestrian routes.

The **Services and Facilities Element** identifies existing and anticipated needs for public infrastructure and services.

The **Economic Development Element** identifies strategies for growing the town's economy by building upon local strengths and bringing new and compatible opportunities to Freetown.

The **Housing Element** creates a plan to meet the town's housing needs, which are identified using demographic and market information

The **Land Use Element** describes Freetown's current and future land use patterns, including proposed locations for various types of activity, such as residences, businesses, and recreation, and the preferred relative intensity of development across the town's diverse built landscapes.

Photo 1: Assonet River, Kevin Ham SRPEDD

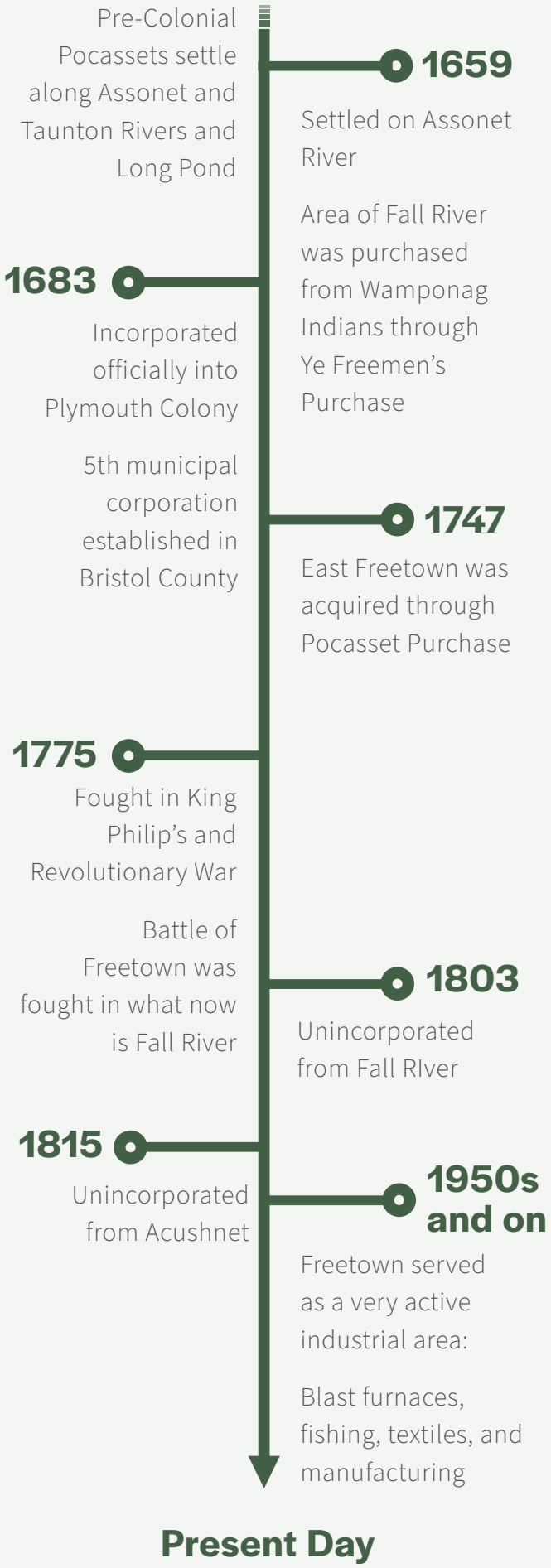
About Freetown

Freetown is a rural town[1] containing many natural resources, some suburban neighborhoods, and areas with commercial activity. The community is located in Bristol County–the Southeastern portion of Massachusetts. The town is bordered by the Town of Berkley to the northwest, the Town of Lakeville to the northeast, the Town of Rochester to the east, the Town of Acushnet, the City of New Bedford and the Town of Dartmouth to the south, and the City of Fall River to the southwest. Route 140 to the east and Routes 24 and 79 to the west connect Freetown to the rest of the southeastern Massachusetts. Freetown is thirty-seven (37) miles south of Boston, and twenty-three (23) miles east of Providence, Rhode Island.

1 According to the Massachusetts Rural Policy Plan, Freetown is one of the Commonwealth's 170 rural communities. Rural areas are defined as cities and towns with a population density of less than 500 residents per square mile. Freetown has roughly 250 residents per square mile.

Though Freetown is the town's official name, residents will typically identify themselves – historically and colloquially–as being from either Assonet or East Freetown. Historical evidence indicates the Pocasset Tribe, a sub-set of the Wampanoag Tribe, settled along Long Pond and the Assonet and Taunton Rivers.[2] In 1659, what would eventually become Assonet was purchased by English settlers through the "Freemen's Purchase."[3] The settlement was formally incorporated in 1683; the population slowly continued growing and in 1747 Freetown expanded geographically through the formal acquisition of East Freetown. Like most Towns in the southeast region of Massachusetts, Freetown participated in both King Philip's War and the Revolutionary War in the late 18th Century. Its town boundaries fluctuated through the early 19th century; however, by 1815, the modern-day borders of Freetown were already in place.

Freetown's proximity to the Assonet and Taunton Rivers permitted the growth of textile mills, sawmills, and shipyards during 19th century industrialization. As rail networks expanded and industry was no longer reliant on coastal freighting, Freetown reverted to its agricultural roots in the late 19th century–turning to small-market gardening, dairy production, and lumbering while also producing bleach for cloth processing in Fall River. The construction of Route 24 and Route 140, along with suburbanization after World War 2, caused Freetown's population to spike in the mid-20th century from 2,104 in 1950 to 7,058 in 1980.[4] Today, Freetown is known as a historical community, notable for the historic Assonet Village, the Freetown-Fall River State Forest, and its scenic riverine and pastoral aesthetic.



2 Freetown Reconnaissance Report, Town of Freetown, 2, https://www.mass.gov/doc/freetown/download.

3 Lisa Brooks, "'I, Namumpum, '," https://ourbelovedkin.com/awikhigan/namumpum.

4 "Local Town Census," Town of Freetown, https://www.freetownma.gov/the-office-of-the-town-clerk/pages/local-town-census.

Why Did Freetown Create a Master Plan?

Though Freetown has clearly participated in specific planning processes prior to the creation of the 2024 Master Plan – Freetown has never created a formal Master Plan recognized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This plan was initiated by the Town of Freetown and funded through the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). Prior planning in Freetown includes:

Local Planning

- 2017 Housing Production Plan
- 2019 Municipal Vulnerability Plan (MVP)
- 2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)
- Zoning By-law (1975 and numerous subsequent amendments)

Regional Planning

- 2005 Taunton River Landscape Inventory
- 2013 and 2023 Priority Area Reports (PDA/PPA)
- 2022 APC/Nemasket Watershed Management and Climate Action Plan

Other Documents

- 2021 COA Feasibility Study
- 2022 Four Corners Intersection Analysis
- (Ongoing) MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program Planning

Photo 2: Master Plan Open House, SRPEDD

Photo 3: Danyel Kenis and Philip Hu speaking to residents at 2023 Strawberry Festival

Community Engagement

While data and research play an important role in describing the technical facets of Freetown (including population trends, land uses, and other data), it is equally important to seek, understand, and synthesize input from the public. Community Engagement is key to shaping and influencing the Master Plan's resulting goals and strategies. Over the course of 2023 and 2024, the project team worked with key stakeholders and residents to conduct a variety of outreach efforts to best capture the spirit and desires of the Freetown community.

Engagement Timeline

Event	Links
Strawberry Festival June 18, 2023	
Police and Fire Charity Softball Game September 9, 2023	
Freetown Historical Society Open House September 10, 2023	
Master Plan Discovery Open House October 11, 2023	
COA Bingo Lunch October 26, 2023	
Freetown Christmas Tree Lighting December 3, 2023	
Freetown Library Teatime February 22, 2024	
Land Use, Housing, and Economic Development Deep Dive Workshop March 13, 2024	Link to Presentation Canva Link
Services/Facilities and Transportation Deep Dive Workshop April 1, 2024	Presentation PDF
Freetown-Lakeville Middle School Civics Class Presentations April 4, 2024	
Natural/Cultural Resources and Open Space/Recreation Deep Dive Workshop May 9, 2024	Canva Link

Photo 4: Strawberry Festival, SRPEDD

Online

The project team also worked to reach residents where they are most active these days–online!

- A comprehensive survey via Survey Monkey and an interactive map were promoted by Town Staff and relevant stakeholders.
    - Survey Respondents: 344
    - Interactive Map Respondents: 72

Photo 5: Freetown Historical Society SRPEDD

Photo 6: Bandstand, SRPEDD

Vision

Freetowners take great pride in and wish to preserve the town's lush green spaces, serene bodies of water, rural character, and small-town community feel. There is also an expressed sentiment to create vibrant town centers in Freetown's historic villages and to improve town services and facilities. These goals, combined with potential new population growth around Freetown's new MBTA Commuter Rail station, put Freetown in a perfect position to create a productive roadmap for the town's future–one that balances preservation goals with desired growth where residents want to see it. The project team worked to address these challenging issues throughout the 2024 Master Plan engagement process–all to base the Master Plan's final goals and strategies on a vision that responds directly to current and future residents of Freetown.

What do you love about Freetown?	What is Freetown missing?
• Visiting local businesses. • Hiking and exploring Freetown's natural resources. • Small-town character.	• More local businesses, such as restaurant and cafe options. • Places to gather for residents young and old.

Element	Vision (Feedback Synopsis)
Natural and Cultural Resources	• Expand the number of Town events. • Protect historic structures and landmarks. • Maintain small-town character.
Open Space and Recreation	• Create more hiking trails. • Maintain open space and recreation facilities to support a family-oriented community. • Protect additional open space and natural areas. • Create more parks and trails.
Transportation	• Upgrade dangerous intersections. • Expand sidewalks and bike paths.
Services and Facilities	• Maintain small town family-oriented community. • Improve town infrastructure. • Expand programming and activities
Economic Development	• Attract new services and amenities, such as restaurants. • Attract and support small business. • Improve infrastructure and tax rates for existing businesses.
Housing	• Create more housing options for seniors and young families. • Create affordable housing for seniors and veterans. • Ensure housing stability for future generations.
Land Use	• Maintain small-town, family-oriented community. • Introduce and control growth in town center. • Preserve Freetown's historic and scenic Open Space

Implementation Priority

This plan recommends many different strategies, and many of these strategies call on the same departments or boards to take action. Each strategy is assigned a Priority (High, Medium, or Low) and a Level of Attention (Flexible or Immediate) needed.

- Natural & Cultural Resources
- Open Space & Recreation
- Transportation & Circulation
- Services & Facilities
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Land Use

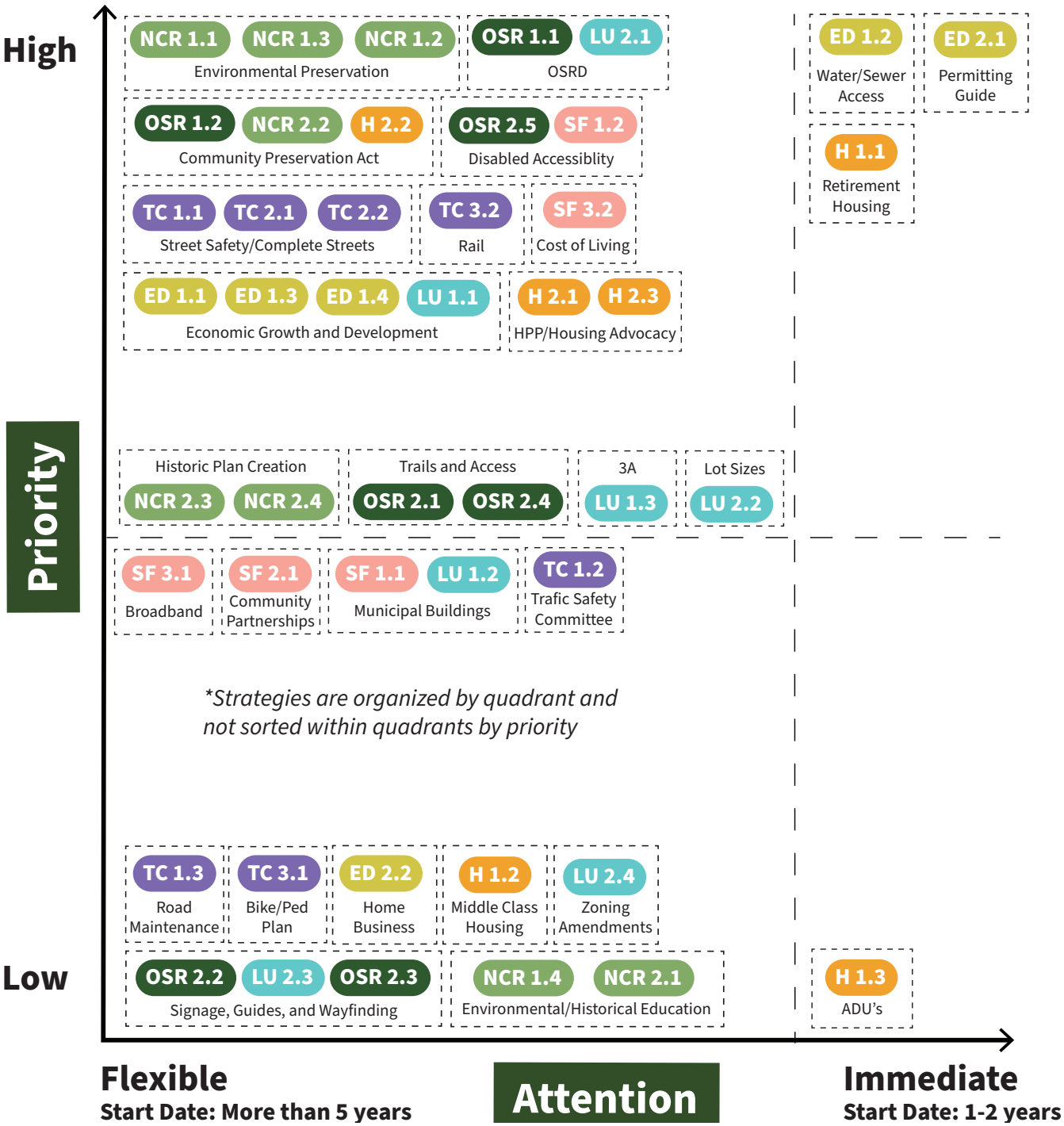


Photo 7: Assonet River, SRPEDD

Photo 8: Taunton River, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Natural & Cultural Resources

Support Freetown's strong tradition of environmental conservation and preserve historic and cultural assets that represent Freetown's heritage.

Freetown has a rich history. As of August 2024, the town contains 231 inventoried properties registered in the Massachusetts Historical Commission database. Freetown also hosts a wealth of natural resources, including: parts of the Freetown-Fall River State Forest; numerous Wampanoag heritage sites; numerous Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) vernal pools; the shores of Long Pond (part of the Assawompset Ponds Complex; the largest natural pond system in Massachusetts), and; the Taunton and Assonet Rivers. The rivers also host significant associated habitat areas¬¬–many of which are designated as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), NHESP habitats, and BioMap2 habitats.

Freetown's current Open Space and Recreation Plan does an excellent job describing its natural and cultural resources and how growth competes with efforts to maintain and protect these assets. This Master Plan element seeks to continue the work of protecting–and even promoting– these assets through the following actions.

Natural & Cultural Resources Goal 1

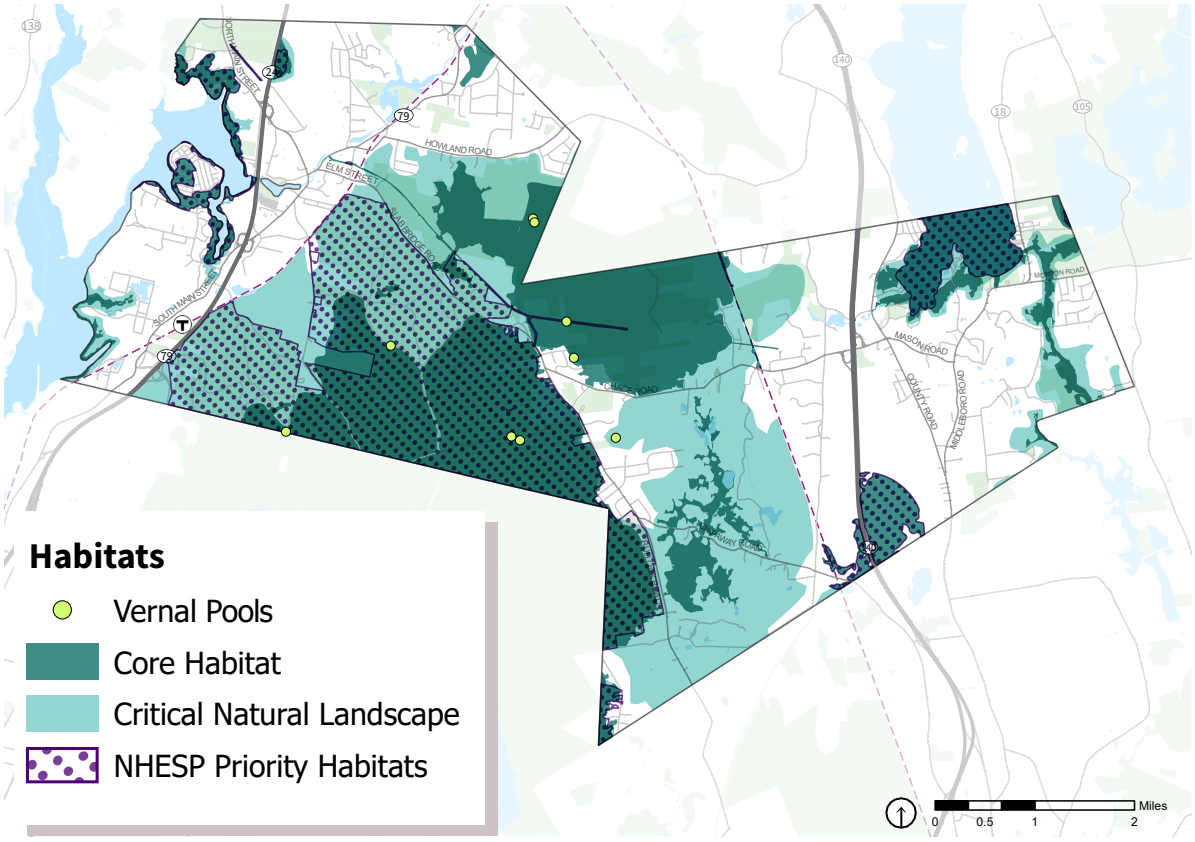
Protect Freetown's significant habitats, agricultural areas, water resources, and riverfront areas.

NCR Strategy 1.1	Build upon existing partnerships between the Town, private landowners, land conservation groups, neighboring communities, and the State to acquire and preserve open space.
NCR Strategy 1.2	Examine methods to reduce fertilizer, pesticide, and septic-related nitrogen pollution in Freetown's rivers, lakes, and beaches.
NCR Strategy 1.3	Protect critical habitats and aquifer recharge areas through a new zoning overlay, such as a Water Resource Protection Overlay District.
NCR Strategy 1.4	Actively partner with the Taunton River Stewardship Council (TRSC) and other regional environmental groups, non-profit organizations, and State agencies to promote awareness of areas and events in Town.

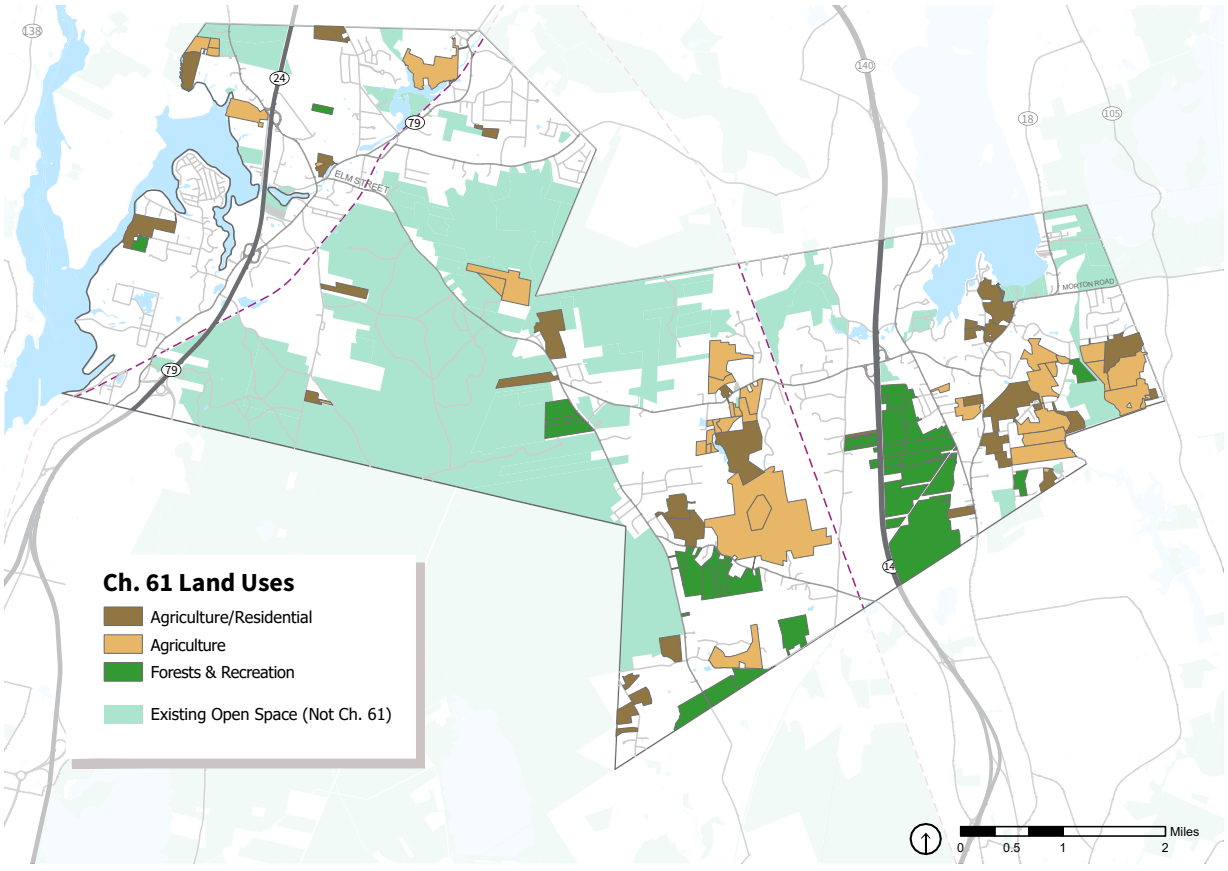
Natural & Cultural Resources Goal 2

Incorporate Freetown's historical resources into the Town's development and community programming.

NCR Strategy 2.1	Promote the importance of the Town's Historical Commission and Historical Society and highlight their short- and long-term goals.
NCR Strategy 2.2	Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund preservation efforts of historic buildings.
NCR Strategy 2.3	Complete and implement a Historic Preservation Plan in Town to prioritize their preservation through CPA or other funding sources.
NCR Strategy 2.4	Create simple Historic District Design Guidelines to encourage modest developments and "Placemaking" improvements in the character of the Assonet Village and East Freetown Historic Districts.



Map 1: Key habitat and Landscape Areas, MassGIS



Map 2: Chapter 61 Land Uses, MassGIS

Strategy 1.1 Develop an Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) bylaw to preserve natural environments while producing housing.

The Town has active and successful partnerships with several environmental protection and land conservation agencies. In the past, the Town of Freetown, through their Conservation Commission, has partnered with various outside organizations, such as the Taunton River Stewardship Council (TRSC) and the Division of Conservation Services (DCS) for preservation of open space. For example, as of writing this plan in late 2024, Freetown is working with a private land owner to acquire 20 acres on Richmond Road for the purpose of permanent conservation; this acquisition was made possible thanks to the implementation of the Taunton River Stewardship Plan. This plan supports and advocates for continued, affirmative partnerships between the Town and its conservation-minded partners to preserve more land for open space and recreation.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Ongoing: The Town will continue to work with outside agencies to pursue further grant funding and projects that increase open space acquisitions in Freetown.

Complementary Strategy:

NCR 1.3: Protect critical habitats and aquifer recharge areas through a new zoning overlay, such as a Water Resource Protection Overlay District.

OSR 1.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the acquisition of open space and community development projects.

Complementary Plan: Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023: Develop local funding sources dedicated to open space acquisition.

Responsible Parties: Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Local champions

Strategy 1.2 Examine methods to reduce fertilizer, pesticide, and septic-related nitrogen pollution in Freetown's rivers, lakes, and beaches.

Nitrogen-loading (excessive quantities of nitrogen entering water resources) leads to damaging disruption to marine and riverine ecosystems. Outdated or poorly functioning septic systems are a major contributor to the increased nitrogen content in groundwater and coastal waters. Freetown could participate in the various public programs intended to modernize and repair septic systems that contribute to this problem.

Some communities use local rules and regulations to regulate the use of fertilizers and pesticides near water resources. Doing such can reduce toxic algae blooms and pollution. Freetown's Board of Health, in partnership with its Planning Department, can research and adopt similar regulations.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Conduct a literature review of sample Board of Health Rules and Regulations to address Freetown's needs.
- Create a simple education campaign and slideshow to propose the new rules, their benefits, and example outcomes.
- Hold Planning Board- and Board of Health-sponsored public meetings to present the initiative to the public in advance of a public hearing.
- Adopt new Regulations at a public hearing.

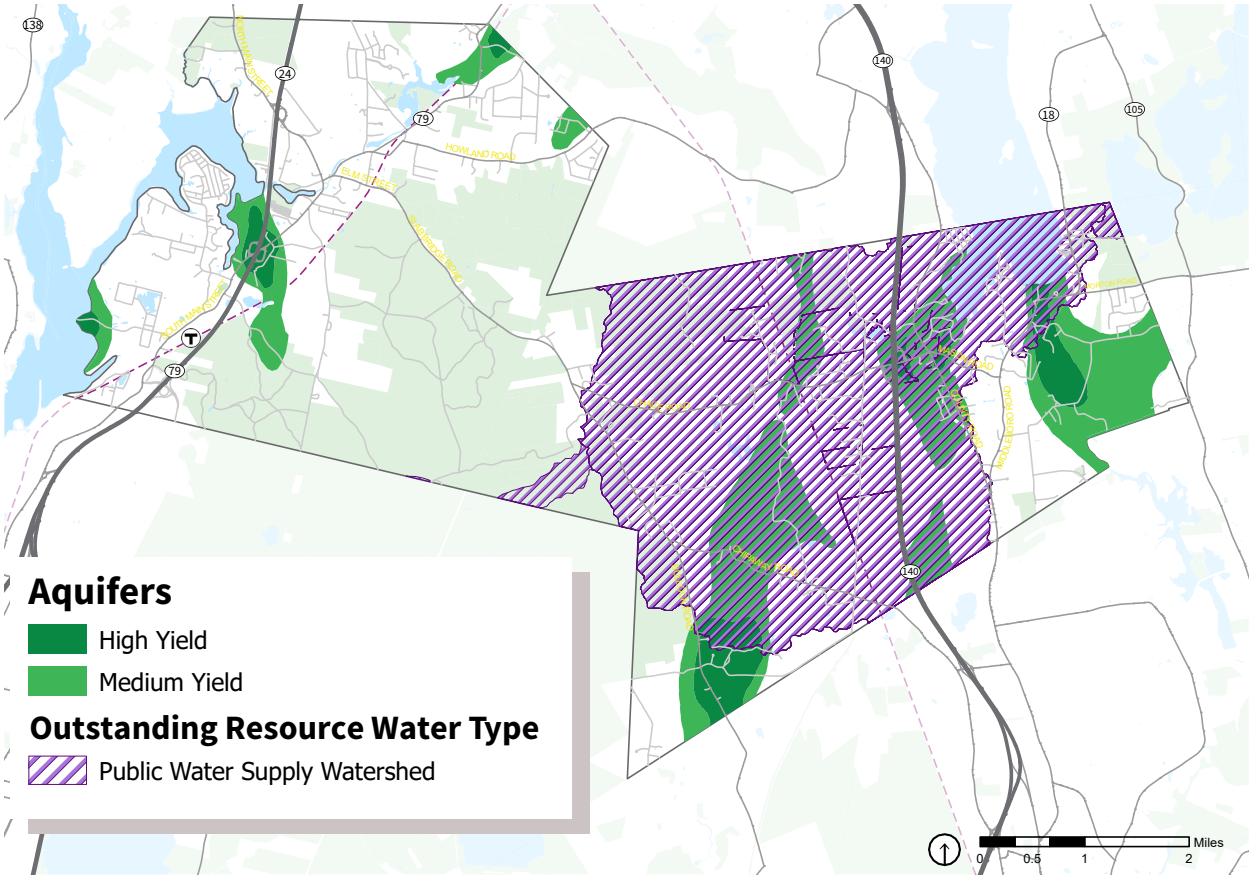
Complementary Strategy:

NCR 1.3: Protect critical habitats and aquifer recharge areas through a new zoning overlay, such as a Water Resource Protection Overlay District.

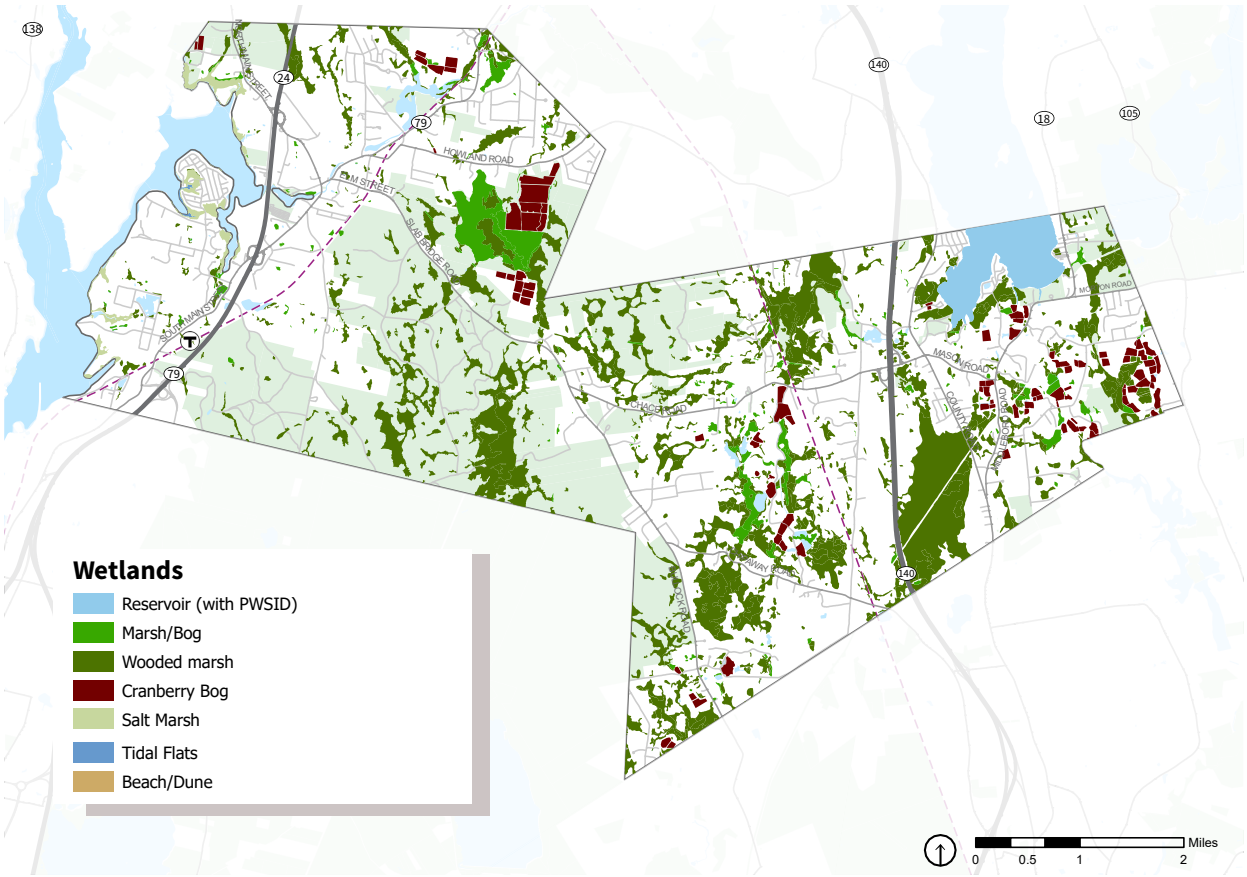
SF 3.2: Investigate funding opportunities to reduce costs for vital services, including septic systems and home maintenance.

Responsible Parties: Planning Department, Board of Health, Conservation Commission acquisition.

Success Story: Nantucket's Fertilizer Program and Board of Health Local Regulation 75, which strictly regulate fertilizer use.



Map 3: Water Resources, MassGIS



Map 4: Wetlands, MassGIS

Strategy 1.3 Protect critical habitats and aquifer recharge areas through a new zoning overlay, such as a Water Resource Protection Overlay District.

Similar to 'updated Board of Health regulations' and 'public education' envisioned in Natural & Cultural Resources Strategy 1.2, this Strategy explores the viability of additional Water Resource Protection Zoning in critical areas in Freetown. Freetown contains several water resource areas, including MassDEP Medium- and High-Yield Aquifers and Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW) associated with the Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards[1]. While one of the most straightforward ways to protect water resources is to acquire and conserve land in these areas, this is often not feasible for a community–especially one without a dedicated funding source for these efforts (such as the Community Preservation Act). Therefore, changes to regulations may also play an important role when–as is the case throughout Massachusetts and the nation–a municipality cannot feasibly acquire all open space parcels of interest for conservation and water resource protection.

Numerous communities across the region and the Commonwealth have adopted Water Resource and/or Groundwater Protection By-laws in critical areas within their boundaries. In Freetown, there are numerous water resources in East Freetown associated with the Assowompset Pond Complex and Long Pond, which provide essential drinking water resources to over 250,000 residents in Southeastern Massachusetts. Local regulations can help enforce applicable state or national standards through local land use control and enforcement (e.g., preventing noxious uses, such as junk yards, or applying additional standards to activities such as earthwork and wastewater discharge).

1 According to MassGIS, "Outstanding Resource Water (ORW) [are protected] under the Massachusetts Surface Water Quality Standards, 314 CMR 4.00 (WQS). According to 314 CMR 4.04(3): "Certain waters are designated for protection under this provision in 314 CMR 4.06. These waters include Class A Public Water Supplies (314 CMR 4.06(1)(d)1.) and their tributaries, certain wetlands as specified in 314 CMR 4.06(2) and other waters as determined by the Department based on their outstanding socio-economic, recreational, ecological and/or aesthetic values. The quality of these waters shall be protected and maintained." For more information, please see https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massgis-data-outstanding-resource-waters.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Town identifies desirable areas and model Water Resource Protection by-laws.
- Planner and associated staff identify and refine proposed zoning language and designated areas.
- Draft and present preferred amendments to the zoning by-law, conduct public outreach, and follow adoption procedures.

Complementary Strategy:

NCR 1.1: Build upon existing partnerships between the Town, private landowners, land conservation groups, neighboring communities, and the State to acquire and preserve open space.

OSR 1.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the acquisition of open space and community development projects.

Responsible Parties: Planning Department, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Select Board

Success Stories: MassDEP Model Groundwater Protection District By-law; numerous communities across the region (including Dighton, Berkley, Rochester, Swansea, Fall River, Norton, Raynham, and Dartmouth) and the Commonwealth (including Wellesley, Wenham, West Tisbury, Westborough, and others).

Photo 9: Taunton River, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Strategy 1.4 Actively partner with the Taunton River Stewardship Council (TRSC) and other regional environmental groups, non-profit organizations, and State agencies to promote awareness of areas and events in Town.

Partnerships with local and regional environmental groups, non-profit organizations, and state agencies can help to support the protection of valuable resources and areas in Freetown. Local conservation-oriented organizations can inform the Town about important initiatives and potential funding opportunities. The Town may consider continued coalition-building between these organizations to conserve tracts of open land in town with high conservation, habitat, water resource protection, recreational, and cultural value.

The Taunton River Stewardship Council (TRSC) is one such organization that directly influences the Town's ability to manage and protect the resources along the Taunton River. The organization also promotes important cultural events and assets associated with the river. The Stewardship Council is the central coordinating body tasked with implementing the Taunton River Stewardship Plan of the National Wild and Scenic Taunton River. Active participation in this group would enhance Freetown's ability to coordinate the river's management with its neighbors while also creating opportunities to fund projects and planning efforts related to the Taunton River. These opportunities are especially important, given that the high priority properties for acquisition include the 2013 community Priority Protection Areas (PPAs), undeveloped shoreline on the ponds, and areas along the Taunton River.

Other opportunities for partnerships include the Resilient Taunton Watershed Network (RTWN), the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game (DFG), and other Massachusetts state agencies.

Priority: Low - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Ongoing: Continue partnering with the Taunton River Stewardship Council (TRSC) to maintain protection efforts, strengthen partnerships, and to take advantage of local grant funding.

Complementary Strategy:

NCR 1.1: Build upon existing partnerships between the Town, private landowners, land conservation groups, neighboring communities, and the State to acquire and preserve open space.

NCR 1.3: Protect critical habitats and aquifer recharge areas through a new zoning overlay, such as a Water Resource Protection Overlay District.

Responsible Parties: Freetown Representatives to the TRSC, Planning Department, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Select Board

Strategy 2.1 Promote the importance of the Town's Historical Commission and Historical Society and highlight their short- and long-term goals.

Freetown is rich in its historical identity with many noteworthy locations, including 2 Historical Districts, 231 properties inventoried for historical significance, and the presence of significant Native American heritage. The Historical Commission and Historical Society continue to advocate for the preservation and presentation of important historical resources in town. The Town should continue to support these efforts by supporting and advertising various events hosted by these groups.

The Town should also continue interfacing between the Historical Commission and Historical Society to ensure that efforts are not being duplicated and that collaboration continues between these separate, but complementary entities; this may lead to improved outcomes and resource-sharing. In general, a Historical Commission is responsible for identifying and protecting the town's significant historical, archaeological, and cultural resources. Therefore, as an official town entity, enabled in 1963 by state legislation, the Commission is responsible for administering local historic preservation by-laws, developing a municipal inventory of significant areas and structures, and educating the public about the importance of preserving historic resources. On the other hand, the Historical Society, founded in 1968 as a private non-profit organization, maintains the Museum and an extensive collection of historic artifacts. The Historical Society also hosts numerous events and classes, such as blacksmithing.

Priority: Low - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Ongoing: Support the Freetown Historical Commission and Historical Society and promote coordination between the two parties.

Complementary Strategy:

NCR 2.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund preservation efforts of historic buildings.

NCR 2.3: Complete and implement a Historic Preservation Plan in Town to prioritize their preservation through CPA or other funding sources.

NCR 2.4 Create simple Historic District Design Guidelines to encourage modest developments and "Placemaking" improvements in the character of the Assonet Village and East Freetown Historic Districts.

Responsible Parties: Town Planner, Historical Commission, Historical Society

Strategy 2.2 Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund preservation efforts of historic buildings.

Utilizing Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding is an effective way to preserve historic resources in municipalities and is one of the main purposes of these funds. The definition of a historic resource is “a building, structure, vessel, real property, document or artifact that is listed on the state register of historic places or has been determined by the local historic preservation commission to be significant in the history, archaeology, architecture, or culture of a city or town.” However, Freetown is one of the few communities in the region that has not adopted the CPA. This Master Plan advocates for the Town to strongly consider CPA adoption as a primary tool for achieving and implementing several Goals and Strategies herein.

Please refer to Open Space Strategy 1.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the acquisition of open space and community development projects, where program participation is described in full.

Photo 10: Historical Society, SRPEDD

Strategy 2.3 Complete and implement a Historic Preservation Plan in Town to prioritize their preservation through CPA or other funding sources.

Communities across Massachusetts have created plans dedicated to preserving and promoting their culture and local history. Freetown has an opportunity to thoroughly document and advocate for its rich historical resources through the creation of a Historic Preservation Plan. According to the Massachusetts Preservation Planning Division, "Preservation planning begins with a survey of any historically significant buildings, structures, objects, areas, burial grounds, landscape features, or sites. This comprehensive historical asset inventory informs all future city or town preservation activities." According to public visioning comments, Freetown's Cultural and Historic Inventory includes:

Historical Places:

- Historical Society Museum
- Profile Rock
- Historic Homes
- The Historical Society Grounds

Special Locations:

- Little Fenway
- Long Pond
- Assonet River
- Taunton River
- East Freetown Congregational Christian Church
- Freetown/Fall River State Forest
- Hathaway Park
- James White Memorial Library
- Porter Pasture

Special Events:

- Fourth of July Parade
- Historical Society Open House
- Strawberry Festival

Photos 11,12,13, 14, Various Locations, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Photo 15: Fall River-Freetown State Forest, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Create a GIS database of Freetown's Cultural Inventory, including attributes, photos, text, and as much documentation as possible.
- Obtain grant funding or use CPA funding for the development of a Historic (and Cultural) Preservation Plan.

Complementary Strategy:

NCR 2.1: Promote the importance of the Town's Historical Commission and Historical Society and highlight their short- and long-term goals.

NCR 2.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund preservation efforts of historic buildings.

Responsible Parties: Planning Department, Historical Commission

Success Story: The Town of Sudbury implemented their Historic Preservation Plan in 2022, where the Historical Commission led the project.

Photo 16: Assonet River, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Strategy 2.4 Create simple Historic District Design Guidelines to encourage modest developments and "Placemaking" improvements in the character of the Assonet Village and East Freetown Historic Districts.

Freetown's two centers–Assonet Village and East Freetown–are designated as Historic Districts on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. As such, creating Historic District Design Guidelines will allow the Town to achieve some of its goals for these areas, such as increasing activity and placemaking–while also preserving the cultural, aesthetic, and historic significance of these areas. Further, as part of the Master Plan public input process, Freetown residents chose places of historic, archaeological, or cultural importance as 'very important' for protection. Design Guidelines are documents that illustrate desirable characteristics for various development types within specific zones or areas. Planning Boards can include these images within their zoning or in associated Planning Board Rules and Regulations (e.g., for Site Plan Review). Design Guidelines are particularly appropriate for historic areas that have existing characteristics that should be respected by any new construction or significant alteration of existing structures; these characteristics include architectural styles (such as rooflines and façade types), building materials, signage, site planning, and so forth.

Similar to Design Guidelines, placemaking strategies consider physical improvements and programmatic (experience-based) initiatives to foster or build upon a sense of place within neighborhoods, corridors, or historic areas, such as Assonet Village and East Freetown. Minor improvements to the public realm and public amenities can create experiences that connect people to the existing look, feel, and characteristics of a place; these modest investments can include wayfinding and signage, public seating, landscaping, historic monuments or plaques, and so forth. Wayfinding and signage can help create a sense of place by differentiating a specific area or neighborhood from others through the use of graphic elements such as type, color, or pattern. Implementing placemaking strategies, such as installing branded signage in and around the Assonet and East Freetown Centers, may also enhance the sense of place, carve a distinct cultural identity, and foster community and business activities. Any potential wayfinding in the placemaking strategies should coordinate with conservation and bike path wayfinding efforts (envisioned in the Open Space and Recreation Element of this plan) as well as any proposed design standards for commercial façades discussed above.

Similarly, programmatic placemaking fosters experiences around existing public spaces and amenities, such as the Assonet Bandstand. Working with local business groups, partners (such as the Taunton River Stewardship Council), and local entities (such as the Freetown Historical Society, Council on Aging, or Public Libraries),

the Town can work to foster experiences in and around the Assonet and East Freetown Centers through farmers markets, arts festivals and performances, as well as “shop local” days and outdoor dining weekends. Freetown has several existing events to build upon for these programmatic improvements; in fact, these events already have a large draw, not only for Freetown residents but also for residents from other communities (and they were integral to the Master Plan public input process). Some of these events include the Fourth of July Parade, the Strawberry Festival, Summer Sounds Concert Series, and the Historical Society Open House. Many residents, through the public input process, expressed that they would like to see more cultural events take place in town.

Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Work with partners to explore and create Design Guides for the Assonet Village and East Historic Districts.
- Work with the Planning Board to consider adoption of Design Guidelines into Planning Board Rules and Regulations for Site Plan Review; consider enforcement strategies.
- Work with partners to obtain grant resources and develop Placemaking strategies for Assonet Village and East Historic Districts.

Complementary Strategy:

NCR 2.1: Promote the importance of the Town’s Historical Commission and Historical Society and highlight their short- and long-term goals.

NCR 2.3: Complete and implement a Historic Preservation Plan in Town to prioritize their preservation through CPA or other funding sources.

LU 2.3: Update the Town’s Sign By-law to encourage signage that complements the rural, historical, and natural characteristics of Freetown and is “content neutral.”

Responsible Parties: Town Planner, Historical Commission; several partners, including the Historical Society, Council on Aging, and Public Library.

Success Story: The Town of Plymouth created a Historic District Commission Handbook that outlines Historic District Guidelines for the town. This handbook talks about the design review process and design review guidelines for each portion of a building. The Town of Foxborough commissioned wayfinding signage for downtown that spoke directly to the history of the town. Wayfinding in Foxborough serves to signal its role as a destination and directs visitors to centers of activity.

Photo 17: Town Beach, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Open Space & Recreation

Improve access to the town's parks, water bodies, and other natural areas to provide recreational opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities.

Freetown residents value their access to parks, water bodies, and natural areas. The Town's strong tradition of open space stewardship and conservation is coordinated and guided by its current Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP 2023 - 2030). Freetown's OSRP is intended to be a more specialized, detailed document than this Master Plan, which highlights main actions and themes from the OSRP that the Town can consider and balance along with all its other comprehensive planning and policy-making activities.

Open space broadly includes parks, conservation land, forested land, and agricultural land. Additionally, open space includes undeveloped or underutilized parcels with potential conservation or recreational significance. Strategies and programs such as agricultural preservation, direct investments, continued participation in the Chapter 61/61A/61B programs, and coordinated land conservation efforts will all be necessary to preserve and add to the town's open space. Finally, during the Master Plan public outreach process, residents emphasized the importance of expanding and improving open space networks, particularly in areas with strategic habitat, recreational, or water resource protection roles. The trails of the town and of the Freetown/Fall River State Forest received particular focus and attention.

Open Space & Recreation Goal 1

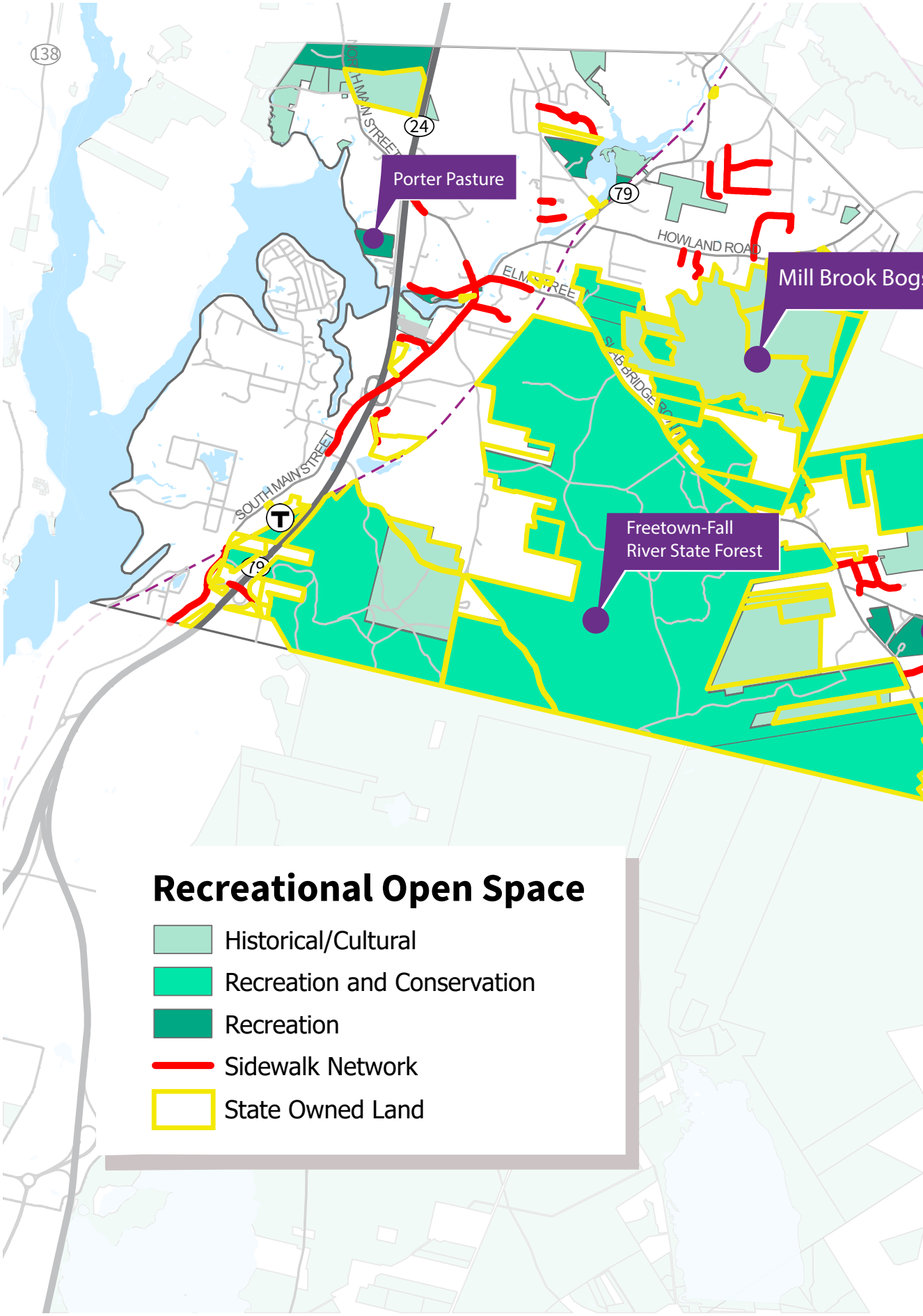
Preserve open space and manage growth.

OSR Strategy 1.1	Continue to protect open space through innovative best practices, such as the adoption of an Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) by-law.
OSR Strategy 1.2	Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the acquisition of open space and community development projects.

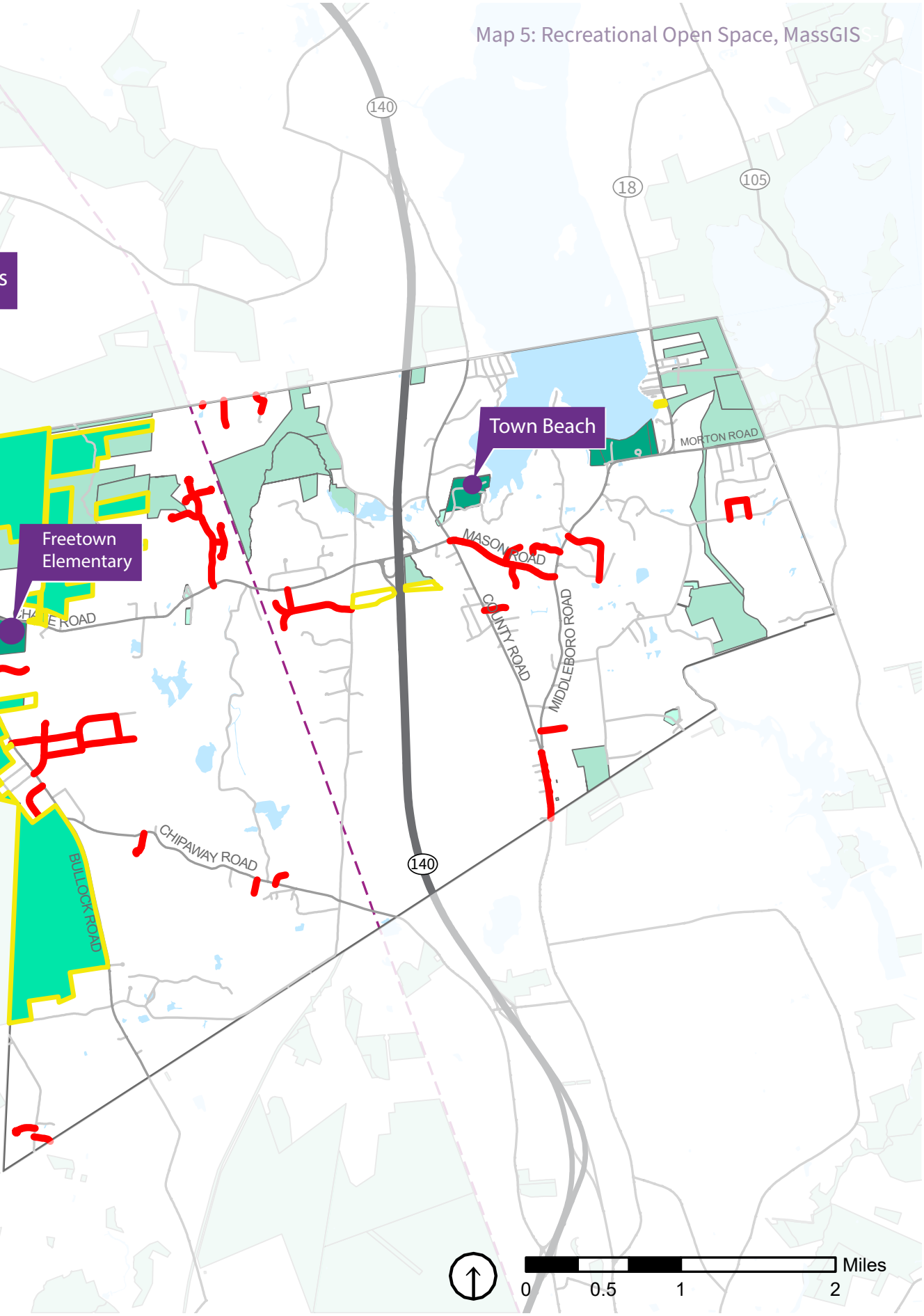
Open Space & Recreation Goal 2

Improve access to natural areas, parks, and recreation facilities.

OSR Strategy 2.1	Collaborate with the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) and other partners to expand the trail network.
OSR Strategy 2.2	Develop a coordinated, town-wide wayfinding and signage model for conservation and recreation properties, assets, and opportunities.
OSR Strategy 2.3	Develop a Comprehensive Town Trail, Canoe, and Open Space Guide.
OSR Strategy 2.4	Improve access to key water bodies for boating, canoeing, and fishing.
OSR Strategy 2.5	Improve ADA accessibility of parks and recreation facilities.


138
24
79
Porter Pasture
HOWLAND ROAD
Mill Brook Bogs
SOUTH MAIN STREET
Freetown-Fall
River State Forest
Recreational Open Space
Historical/Cultural
Recreation and Conservation
Recreation
Sidewalk Network
State Owned Land

Map 5: Recreational Open Space, MassGIS



Strategy 1.1 Continue to protect open space through innovative best practices, such as the adoption of an Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) by-law.

In Freetown, residential development accounts for most of the new growth in town–as is the case with most communities. This growth often takes the form of medium- to large-lot suburban homes that convert acres of natural spaces or agricultural uses into conventionally designed subdivisions of single-family homes. During the Master Planning process, stakeholders expressed a desire to explore zoning tools that might help Freetown better manage growth by looking beyond traditional subdivision development. One common mechanism available to the Town is the adoption of an Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) by-law.

For detailed information on implementation, see Land Use Strategy 2.1: Develop an Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) by-law to preserve natural environments while producing housing, where the by-law is described in full.

Photo 18: Assonet River, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Strategy 1.2 Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the acquisition of open space and community development projects.

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is a popular tool for communities across Massachusetts; as of the date of this plan, over half (196 out of 351) of all cities and towns in Massachusetts have adopted this program, including many nearby communities[1]. Further, the CPA appears in several elements of this Master Plan. Its importance as a key ingredient to successfully achieving many of Freetown's open space, housing, and community development goals cannot be overstated. Simply put–it is essential to making many aspects of this plan a reality, rather than just aspirations.

Municipalities must adopt the CPA by a ballot referendum. Each CPA community forms a local five- to nine-member Board called the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), which makes recommendations on which projects to fund. To fund these CPA projects, each community adopts a property tax surcharge (of not more than 3%). Each community can then tailor the surcharge to reflect local conditions and include exemptions, such as an exemption for low-income seniors or an exemption for the first $100,000 of a property's value. In addition, the State provides an annual partial match to the funds raised by CPA communities.

To create a local CPC and access a dedicated funding source for open space preservation (and other CPA-funded projects, such as the production of affordable housing), the Town could work in partnership with the state Community Preservation Coalition and the state Attorney General's Office to initiate the process of adopting the CPA. To approve the CPA, a ballot measure must be put to a vote at Town Meeting before being placed on the local election ballot. To be successful, this process must be accompanied by a public education campaign that accurately describes the benefits and costs of CPA, clarifies the origins of this idea, and answers frequently asked questions (FAQs).

.

1 Lakeville, Acushnet, New Bedford, Dartmouth, Fall River, Somerset, Dighton, and Middleborough are CPA Communities.

Photo 19: Taunton River, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Work with SRPEDD to create and circulate public education materials. Publicize and hold several informal public information meetings.
- Adopt the CPA.

Complementary Strategy:

NCR 2.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund preservation efforts of historic buildings.

H 2.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the construction of affordable housing for seniors, near existing amenities, such as Porter Pasture and Hilltop Park.

Complementary Plan:

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023: Assess the adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA), to qualify for funding.

Responsible Parties: Select Board, Conservation Commission, Local champions, regional partners

Strategy 2.1 Collaborate with the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) and other partners to expand the trail network.

Residents highlighted in the Master Plan survey that they would like "to create new parks and trails;" in fact, this was the 2nd-highest-ranked change residents would like to see in the next 10 to 20 years. The Town's 2023 OSRP addresses this topic in detail; given the large amount of Freetown's land that is already dedicated to open space–and the presence of the Freetown-Fall River State Forest–this Strategy focuses on methods to improve and connect the Town's trail network. These improvements will provide residents with more diverse opportunities to engage with the Town's open space and recreation areas. Further, doing so will also improve the residents' awareness and perception of Freetown's existing wealth of recreational open space.

Massachusetts provides multiple grant and loan programs for the planning and development of well-planned trails across the Commonwealth; these include the MassTrails Program, Greenways & Trails Program, MassDOT Shared Streets and Space Program, and the SMMPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Future open space planning work may catalogue and identify specific trail alignments and determine which of these options offer the greatest and most feasible (e.g., cost-effective) opportunities to meet the Town's goal.

The resulting work can also allow the Town to coordinate with bordering communities and with the Commonwealth to conduct a comprehensive and prioritized trail expansion planning exercise. The Master Plan public input process and the 2023 OSRP also explored more ambitious ideas, such as connecting Assonet and East Freetown via a multi-use path; the type of detailed feasibility planning envisioned here would allow the Town to test the viability of all such potential projects and project alternatives.

Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Explore potential funding opportunities for establishing trails and pathways.
- Add and maintain trails, through a partnership between DCR, nonprofit groups, and the Town.
- Work with private developers to conserve land and fill in trail network gaps.

Complementary Strategies:

OSR 1.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the acquisition of open space and community development projects.

OSR 2.3: Develop a Comprehensive Town Trail, Canoe, and Open Space Guide.

OSR 2.4: Improve access to key water bodies for boating, kayaking, and fishing.

OSR 2.5: Improve ADA accessibility of parks and recreation facilities.

Complementary Plans:

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023: Link East Freetown with Assonet Village through on- and off-road trails and pathways.

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023: Connect to the State Forest/Bioreserve trail network.

Responsible Parties: Town Administrator, Highway Department, Open Space and Recreation Advisory Committee

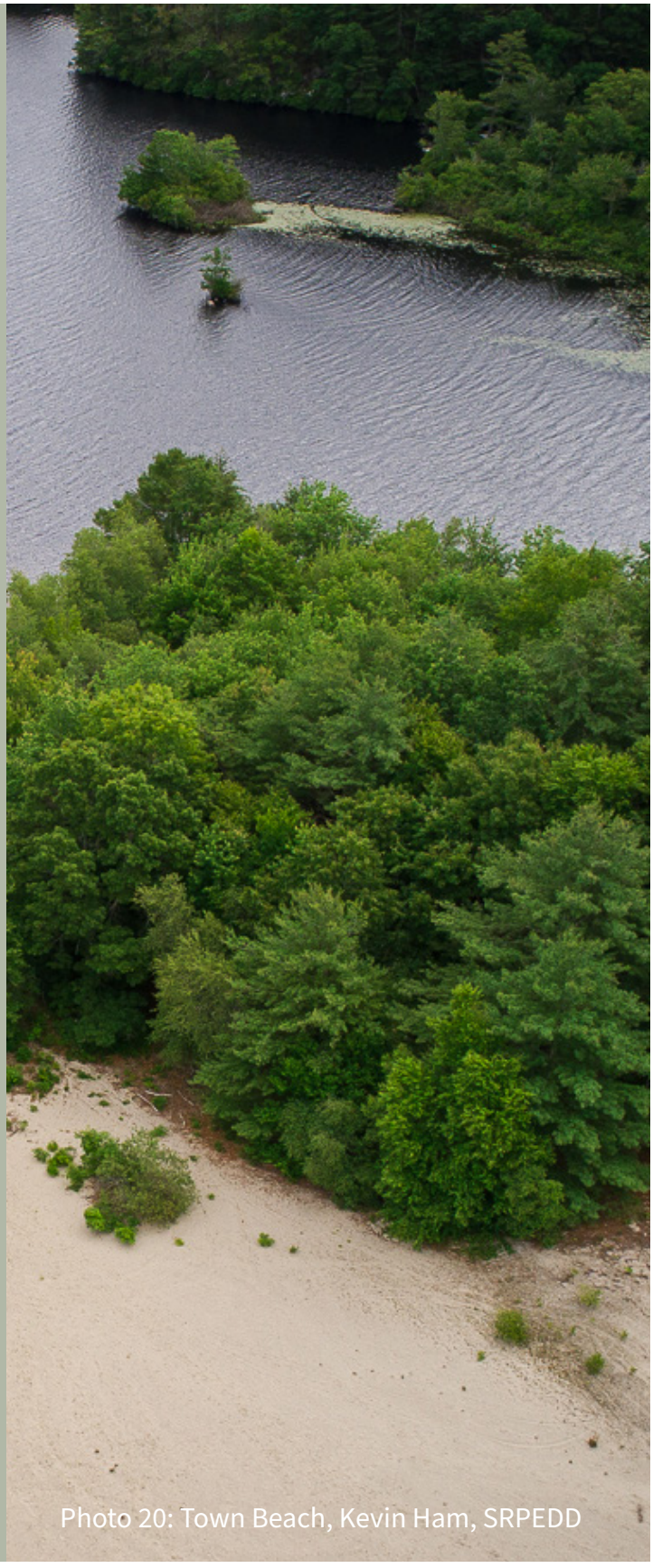


Photo 20: Town Beach, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Strategy 2.2 Develop a coordinated, town-wide wayfinding and signage model for conservation and recreation properties, assets, and opportunities.

One low-cost method to increase awareness of open space properties and add to Freetown's "small-town character" –two prominent goals from the Master Plan public input–is to create simple signage. The presence of consistent and coordinated signs in these spaces can simply make these assets more visible. Information panels can also provide visitors with maps, QR codes to related websites, and other valuable information about the history, permitted activities, and the greater open space network in Freetown. In short, many Freetown residents indicated that they are interested in protecting open space and natural areas, as well as creating more parks, trails, and pedestrian walkways and biking paths. Developing a wayfinding and signage model will allow residents and visitors to more easily navigate and utilize the Town's existing high-quality open spaces.

Priority: Low - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Work with the Conservation Commission and Open Space and Recreation Committee to create a wayfinding and signage model for the whole town.

Complementary Strategies:

TC 2.1: Improve the safety and appearance of North and South Main Street by conducting a Corridor/Safety Study.

LU 2.3: Update the Town's Sign By-law to encourage signage that complements the rural, historical, and natural characteristics of Freetown and is "content neutral."

Complementary Plans:

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023: Mark and map (physical and GIS based) all Town-owned parcels and trails and install uniform wayfinding signage.

Responsible Parties: The Conservation Commission, Open Space and Recreation Committee

Success Story: The Town of Lincoln installed wayfinding signage on Town properties to give people a means of getting around the town and seeing specific destinations and amenities that the town has to offer. Closer to Freetown, the Taunton River Stewardship Council (TRSC) has created a signage program for tributaries and access points to the Taunton River.

Strategy 2.3 Develop a Comprehensive Town Trail, Canoe, and Open Space Guide.

Like Open Space & Recreation Strategy 2.2, above, improving online resources can increase awareness and support for the Town's many open spaces. For example, Freetown's Open Space and Recreation Advisory Committee's web page could be updated to provide relevant information for residents. The website can act as a central portal for residents to obtain information related to the Town's open spaces; it can host a simple interactive map of open space areas in the town and provide information such as photos, addresses, maps, hours of operation, permitted/prohibited activities, level of accessibility, and other desired information.

Priority: Low - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Work with the Conservation Commission and Open Space and Recreation Committee to update the web page to serve as source of interactive information about Freetown's existing open space assets.

Complementary Strategies:

OSR 2.1: Collaborate with the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation to expand the trail network.

OSR 2.4: Improve access to key water bodies for boating, kayaking, and fishing.

Complementary Plans:

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023

Responsible Parties: Open Space and Recreation Committee, Town Planner

Success Story: The Town of Norton's Open Space Committee website provides all information relevant to the town's open spaces in one location. Visitors can view trail maps, hunting information, an open space map, and information about conservation land in one place..

Strategy 2.4 Improve access to key water bodies for boating, canoeing, and fishing.

As discussed previously, many Freetown residents cite the town's open spaces as one of their biggest strengths. Residents also mention protecting open space and natural areas, as well as creating more parks and trails as one of the top changes they would like to see in Freetown over the next 10 to 20 years. Alongside this, most residents stated that they think Long Pond Beach needs improvements. Further, water access was the top recreational amenity that residents would like to see more of in town. The federally designated Wild and Scenic Taunton River and Long Pond are key water bodies, allowing Freetown residents to enjoy activities such as boating, kayaking, and fishing. Long Pond covers 1,780 acres across Freetown and Lakeville. There is currently one boat ramp on Long Pond, accompanied by a parking lot big enough for 47 trailers.

There is also an area with a smaller boat launch for kayakers to enter the pond. Implementing wayfinding signage will also help with identifying locations where visitors can utilize these access points.

Clear signage indicating when the location is open and which activities are permitted would be beneficial for residents. Opportunities to provide additional public access to the Taunton River could be explored as well; one such location highlighted in the 2023 OSRP is Porter Pasture/Porter Shore. [1]

.

1 According to the 2023 Freetown Open Space and Recreation Plan, page 127: "Currently, the area is used primarily for fishing, swimming and as a launch area for canoes, kayaks, and small boats. The area is subject to indiscriminate dumping of various types of trash and waste, and despite past clean-up efforts, remains a persistent problem. The marsh is unfortunately subject to vehicular traffic causing damage and loss of integrity in addition to that which is occurring as documented in site surveys. Recommendations: To help prevent further degradation of the marsh, the Town should remove and grade the dirt road (block it off with heavy wooden guard rail or boulders) and relocate access and parking away from the marsh. These measures would improve road surfaces and vehicular and pedestrian access, preserve an unobstructed route of upland retreat for the marsh and allow compromised areas to possibly be restored."

Photo 21: Long Pond, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Work with Conservation Commission to determine areas best suited for water access.

Complementary Strategies:

OSR 2.1: Collaborate with the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation to expand the trail network.

OSR 2.2: Develop a coordinated, town-wide wayfinding and signage model for conservation and recreation properties, assets, and opportunities.

OSR 2.3: Develop a Comprehensive Town Trail, Canoe, and Open Space Guide.

Complementary Plan:

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023: Improve water access at existing points and explore future potential access points.

Responsible Parties: Open Space and Recreation Committee, Conservation Commission

Success Story: The Town of Norton created a Recreational Waters Access Plan to improve recreational water access in the town.

Strategy 2.5 Improve ADA accessibility of parks and recreation facilities.

The 2023 Freetown Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) examined the condition of the Town's open space and recreational services as they pertain to ADA accessibility features and ADA compliance. The purpose of this section of the OSRP is to continue to assess the Town's recreation facilities for accessibility to persons with disabilities; whereas the ADA Transition Plan, started in 2022, examines all Town-owned buildings and Town-sponsored services. Once this plan is finalized, it will not only reduce its potential liability for ADA issues, but it will also enable the Town to become eligible for capital improvement funding to make ADA-related investments.

Survey responses from residents have revealed that Freetown needs better accessibility for vulnerable members of the population–particularly seniors and those with disabilities. To provide adequate accessibility resources, and to comply with the ADA, the Town could implement various changes to existing open spaces, such as: adapting existing or developing new ADA-compliant walking and biking paths; installing handrails, signage, accessibility ramps, and seating areas across all recreational spaces; and adapting the applicable parking infrastructure to provide handicap parking spaces. These changes will continue to improve the town's open space facilities for all residents.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measure:

- Continue to implement recommendations of the 2023 ORSP and ongoing ADA Transition Plan.

Complementary Strategies:

OSR 2.1: Collaborate with the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation to expand the trail network.

OSR 2.4: Improve access to key water bodies for boating, kayaking, and fishing.

SF 1.2: Pursue Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) funding to improve accessibility for Town-owned facilities based on the findings of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self-Assessment and Transition Plan.

Complementary Plan:

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023: Complete an updated ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan.

Responsible Parties: Conservation Commission, ADA Coordinator

Success Story: The Town of Franklin, MA, implemented key ADA infrastructure upgrades at the Dacey Community Field, including the construction of an ADA-compliant playground in 2007, making it the largest handicap-accessible playground in the state of Massachusetts.

Photo 22: Washburn Rd and Country Rd Intersection , Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Transportation & Circulation

Improve roadway circulation, safety, and appearance for all users of Freetown's roads; promote alternatives to driving when enjoying Freetown's natural and recreational spaces.

Most trips in Freetown are taken by car; however, according to Master Plan public comments, residents want more opportunities to walk, bike, and engage with public transit. Most respondents noted that they walk and bike for recreation and fitness purposes and would like better pedestrian and bike infrastructure throughout town.

Freetown's existing road network includes state numbered Routes 24, 140, 79 (South Main Street, Mill Street, Richmond Road), and 18 (Middleboro Road, County Road). The town's major bottleneck is the complex intersection of Route 79 and North Main Street, which has a high rate of crashes compared to the rest of town; in fact, this intersection is the focus of an ongoing traffic study (2024) and remains one of the top concerns from the public engagement process. Existing MBTA Commuter Rail Stations in Mansfield and Middleboro are located about a 30-minute drive from Assonet Center, with the Freetown Commuter Rail Station expected to be in operation sometime in 2025. One SRTA bus route runs through Freetown in southern Assonet.

This Master Plan's recommendations focus on supporting and coordinating the Town's existing transportation planning work. Most of the recommendations focus on improving safety and providing facilities for alternative modes of mobility, including walking, biking, and taking public transit. The more convenient, safe, and comfortable these modes are, the more residents will walk or bike instead of driving.

Transportation & Circulation Goal 1

Complete key transportation projects that improve circulation and safety in Freetown.

OSR Strategy 1.1	Seek Tier 3 funding for projects from the Town's MassDOT Complete Streets Prioritization Plan.
OSR Strategy 1.2	Investigate the creation of a Traffic Safety Committee that would regularly meet to review documented safety issues, certain types of proposed developments and other transportation related issues.
OSR Strategy 1.2	Establish a low-cost, online portal for residents to flag key transportation areas that require maintenance.

Transportation & Circulation Goal 2

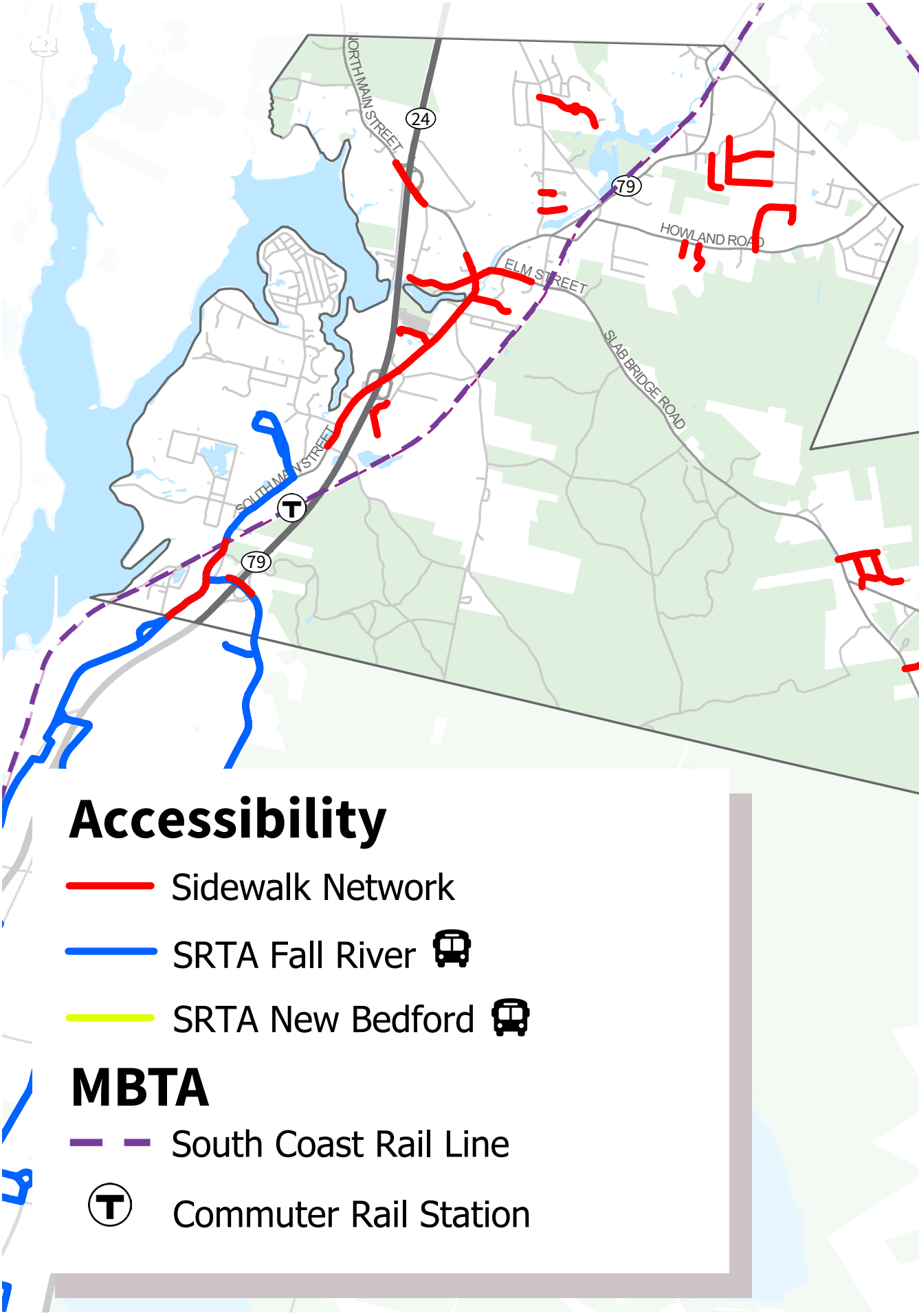
Work with MassDOT and other partners on traffic and safety improvements at key corridors and intersections.

OSR Strategy 2.1	Improve the Safety and Appearance of North and South Main Street by conducting a Corridor/Safety Study.
OSR Strategy 2.2	Perform safety studies on other locations with high crash rates, such as Chace Road, Mill Street/Forge Road, and Gurney Road.

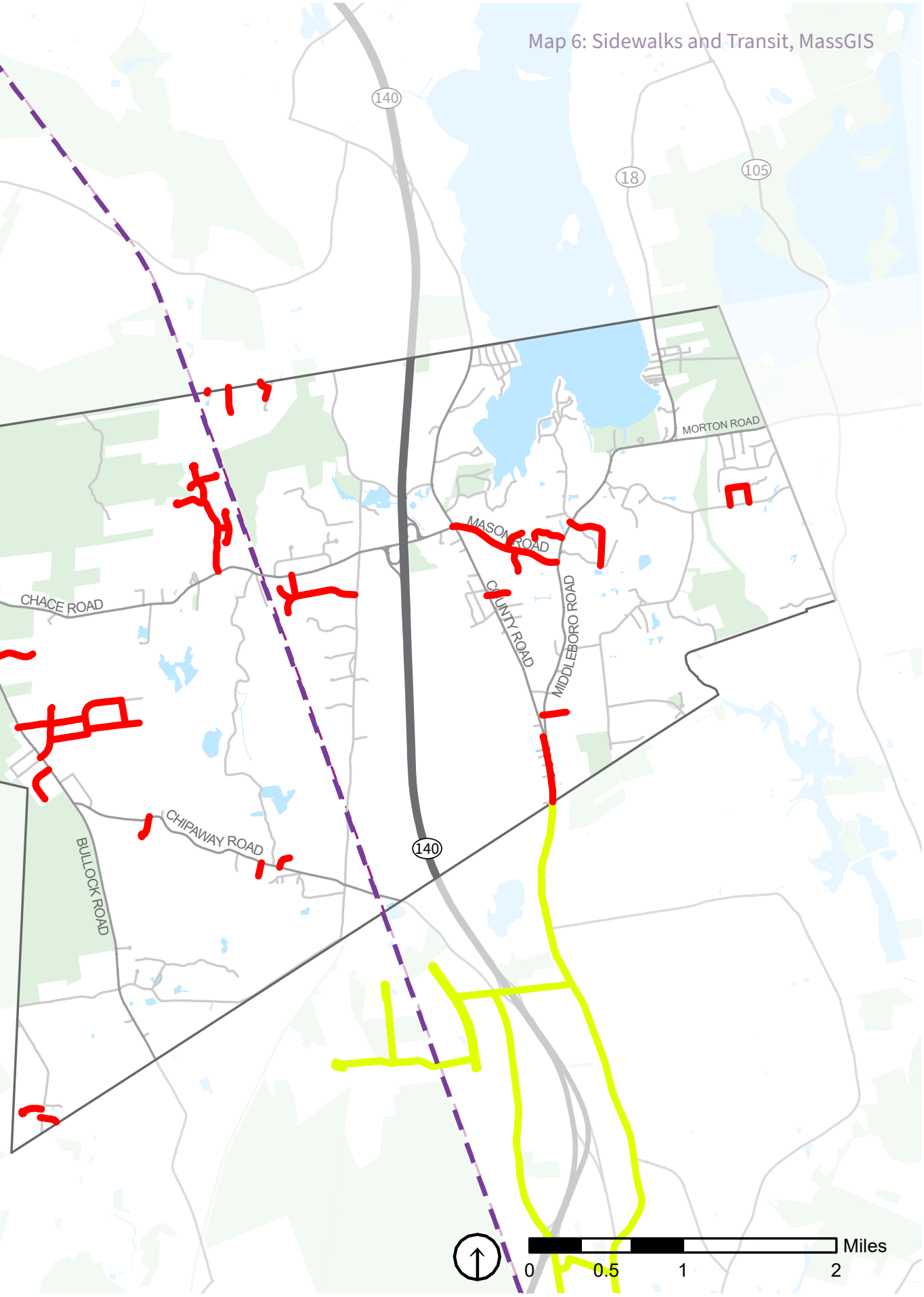
Transportation & Circulation Goal 3

Provide more bicycle, pedestrian, and transit amenities in appropriate areas in Town.

TC Strategy 3.1	Provide more bicycle, pedestrian, and transit amenities in appropriate areas in Town.
TC Strategy 3.2	Continue communication and coordination efforts with the MBTA regarding the future of South Coast Rail commuter rail service through Town.


NORTH MAIN STREET
24
79
HOWLAND ROAD
ELM STREET
SLAB BRIDGE ROAD
SOUTH MAIN STREET
79
Accessibility
Sidewalk Network
SRTA Fall River
SRTA New Bedford
MBTA
South Coast Rail Line
Commuter Rail Station

Map 6: Sidewalks and Transit, MassGIS



Strategy 1.1 Seek Tier 3 funding for projects from the Town's MassDOT Complete Streets Prioritization Plan.

In 2016, the Commonwealth launched its MassDOT Complete Streets[1] Funding Program, which provides technical assistance and capital improvement grants for public infrastructure investments specifically intended to improve roadway safety and accessibility. Qualifying investments include curb ramps, bike lanes, ADA-compliant pedestrian walkways and crossings, bus shelters, public benches, street lighting, signage, and so forth. In December 2022, Freetown completed a required Tier 2 Complete Streets Prioritization Plan for MassDOT review and approval; however, Freetown has yet to apply for Tier 3 capital improvement grants to address the high priority projects identified in its plan; these would allow Freetown to adequately address many of this Master Plan's goals for circulation, safety, and multi-model transportation, including planned accessibility improvements to Gurney Road and Chace Road, which both rank #1 in the Town's Tier II Prioritization Plan.

Complete Streets

Site Specific Projects

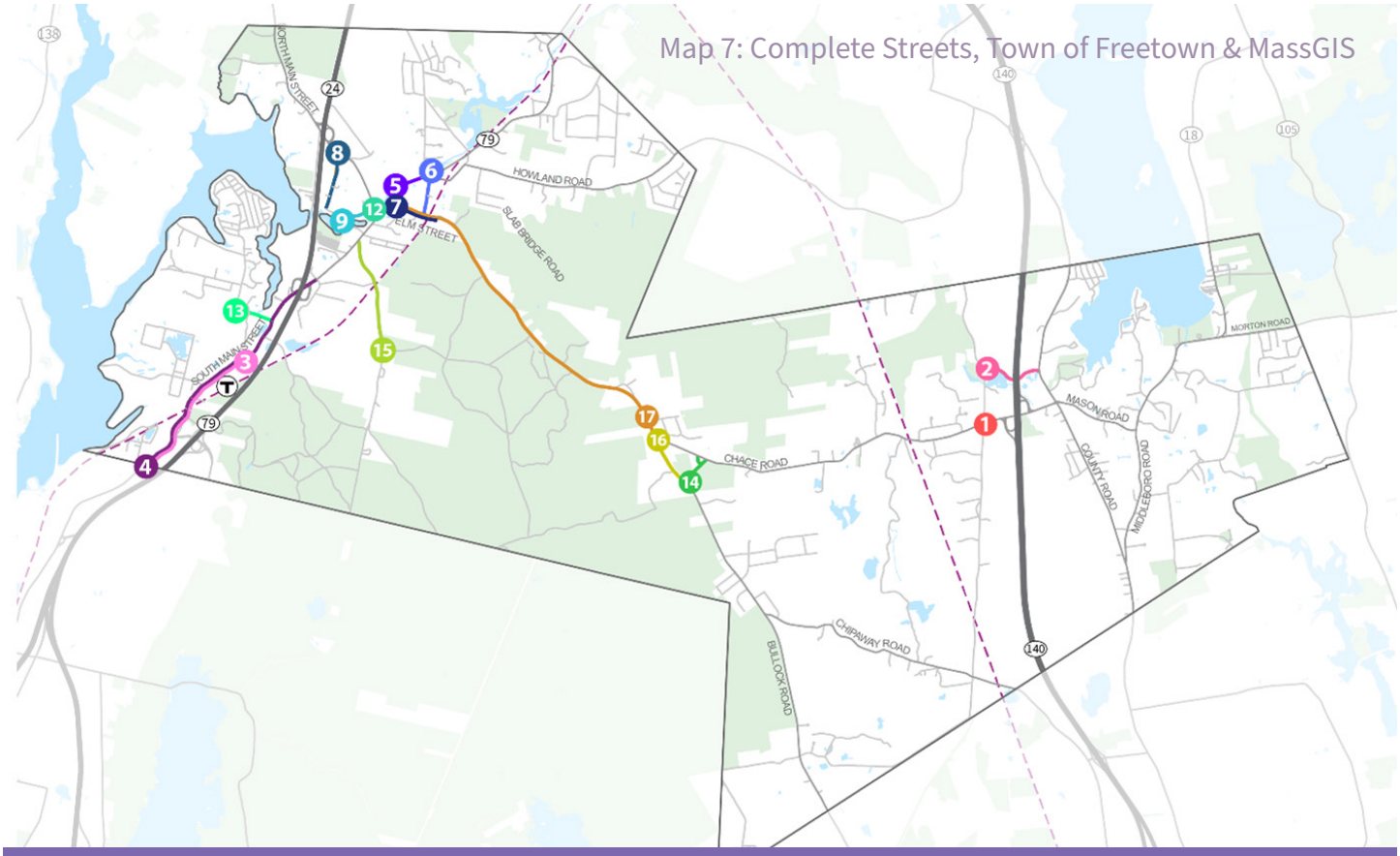
1. Gurney Road and Chace Road Improvements
2. Washburn Road Sidewalk
3. North and South Main Street Crossing Improvements
4. South Main Street Sidewalk Connection
5. Mill Street Sidewalk
6. Walnut Street Sidewalk
7. Elm Street Sidewalk
8. Pleasant Street Sidewalk
9. Hathaway Park Sidewalk Connection
12. "Four Corners" Intersection Improvements
13. Narrows Road Sidewalks
14. Memorial Drive and Chace Road Shared Use Path
15. High Street Sidewalk
16. Bullock Road Shared Use Path
17. Slab Bridge Road Shared Use Path

Town-Wide Projects

10. ADA Pedestrian Curb Ramp Upgrades
11. Poor Sidewalk Reconstruction

.

1 A Complete Street is a street that everyone can use safely and comfortably, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. Today, most of the space in a street is dedicated to cars, including travel lanes and parking. Streets are places and not just roadways that people use to go from Point A to Point B. Ideally, Complete Streets balance the needs of everyone who shares the street: drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, emergency responders, transit and school bus riders, delivery trucks, and more. We can accomplish this by creating space for everyone, adding things like sidewalks, bike lanes, safer intersections, and streetscape amenities, such as trees and benches. Speed Limits aren't as effective as good design. We can also design streets to encourage drivers to go slower at places like Assonet Village or around schools where there might be more pedestrians or children around. This might include narrowing streets and adding more visual complexity, such as street trees.



Map 7: Complete Streets, Town of Freetown & MassGIS

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Ongoing: Ensure active engagement with the Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO) and its Joint Transportation Planning Group (JTPG).
- Coordinate with MassDOT, SMMPO, and stakeholders to apply for Tier 3 Complete Streets funding.

Complementary Strategy:

TC 2.1: Improve the safety and appearance of North and South Main Street by conducting a Corridor/Safety Study.

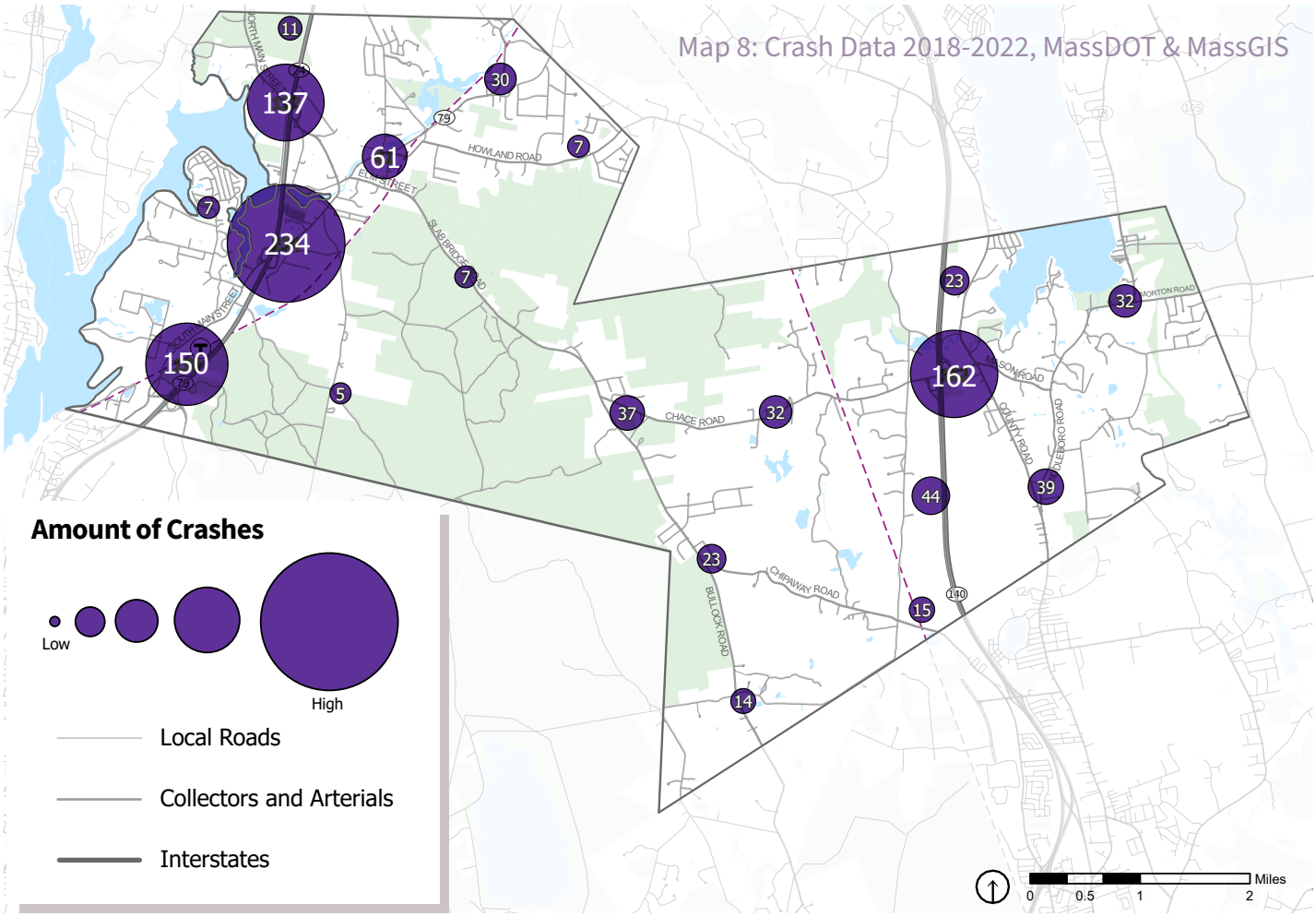
TC 2.2: Perform safety studies on other locations with high crash rates, such as Chace Road, Mill Street/Forge Road, and Gurney Road.

TC 3.1: Create a town-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to evaluate safe, feasible areas to encourage multi-modal transportation.

Responsible Parties: Board of Selectmen, Highway Department, Freetown's representatives to the SMMPO's JTPG and the SRPEDD Commission

Success Story: Numerous communities across the region and Commonwealth have funded projects through the MassDOT Complete Streets program. Please see nearby Dighton's Center Street Improvements around Bristol County Agricultural High School for an example.

Strategy 1.2 Investigate the creation of a Traffic Safety Committee that would regularly meet to review documented safety issues, certain types of proposed developments and other transportation related issues.



Poor design and inconsistent speed enforcement can create hazardous conditions on any roadway, and Freetown's streets and major routes are no exception. Physical measures, such as speed bumps, roundabouts, and curb extensions may be implemented in appropriate locations to reduce hazards and improve both vehicular and pedestrian safety. To effectively put these measures in place, a community requires a formal process through which residents can inform Town officials of existing or emerging safety issues. Freetown may consider the establishment of a Traffic Safety Committee that would take authority of this process and address these types of traffic safety concerns.

Several communities in the region have established this type of Committee, normally consisting of members from the Police Department, the Fire Department, the Planning Board, DPW/Highway Department, the School Committee, and representation from other appropriate groups or departments, such as the Council on Aging. The Committee could meet on a regular basis to discuss identified traffic safety issues in town, identify potential low-cost improvements (e.g., signage or targeted enforcement), and allocate funding to pay for the improvements.

Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Obtain full authorization from the Board of Selectmen for a Traffic Safety Committee.
- Create accessible facilities to allow for public reporting and highlighting of ongoing roadway safety issues.
- Hold regular meetings to address publicly reported concerns and to identify potential solutions

Complementary Strategy:

TC 1.3: Establish a low-cost, online portal for residents to flag key transportation areas that require maintenance.

TC 2.1: Improve the safety and appearance of North and South Main Street by conducting a Corridor/Safety Study.

TC 2.2: Perform safety studies on other locations with high crash rates, such as Chace Road, Mill Street/Forge Road, and Gurney Road.

TC 3.1: Create a town-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to evaluate safe, feasible areas to encourage multi-modal transportation.

Responsible Parties: Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Planning Board, Building Department, Police Department, Fire Department, Highway Department, School Departmentand the SRPEDD Commission

Success Story: Towns of Grafton, Halifax, and Boxborough Traffic Safety Committees.

Strategy 1.3 Establish a low-cost, online portal for residents to flag key transportation areas that require maintenance.

The Master Plan public input process identified a desire to more frequently communicate with Town Departments about local needs. One simple method to meet this goal would be to explore the creation of an online portal to give residents the ability to flag transportation areas that require maintenance, such as potholes. Creating or utilizing a streamlined portal (there are many existing low-cost solutions for Freetown to consider, such as OpenStreetMap.

Priority: Low - Flexible

Performance Measure:

- Explore the creation of a low-cost, online portal for Freetown residents to identify transportation issues.

Responsible Parties: Highway Department

Success Story: The City of Taunton utilizes the online portal SeeClickFix to identify areas that require maintenance. Residents can create a request in the portal for things related to road maintenance, sidewalks, streetlights, fallen trees, and animal control issues. Residents can also track the status of their request.

Photo 23: Route 79, SRPEDD

Strategy 2.1 Improve the Safety and Appearance of North and South Main Street by conducting a Corridor/ Safety Study.

Freetown's Main Street Corridor runs north-south through Assonet on both sides of Route 24, providing access to key locations throughout Assonet Village. The Corridor additionally serves as a throughway to Berkley (to the north) and Fall River (to the south, where South Main Street is also Massachusetts State Route 79 until the Route 24 Interchange). Route 24, bisecting this Corridor, also allows direct access to Raynham, Taunton, and Rhode Island. Freetown's MBTA Commuter Rail Station, allowing further access to the rest of the State, is also situated on South Main Street. This Corridor encompasses a combination of uses, though the primary land use types are Residential, undeveloped land, Light Industrial, and Commercial (particularly from the Interchange with Route 24 south to Fall River).

The Main Street Corridor has three high-crash locations: two around the Route 24 interchanges, and one near the future MBTA station. Additionally, the Corridor currently lacks adequate bicycle access, and sidewalks do not form a continual pedestrian network; further, there are very few opportunities to cross the Corridor. Without proper facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, non-vehicular road users are discouraged from utilizing the Corridor due to safety concerns.

In 2024, the Town began work on the replacement of an aging stone bridge on South Main Street with completion of a replacement options study[1]. This study outlined several options for the Town to pursue in order replace the bridge, and Option 3 was the final recommendation, which would "rehabilitate the existing stone arch with the addition of a concrete saddle and relieving slab to help mitigate the cracking in the existing stone arch." This option was deemed to be the most cost effective, allowed for an ease of permitting, and minimized environmental impacts compared to Options 1 and 2. In addition, to improve this Corridor and achieve the goals laid out in this Master Plan ("Upgrade dangerous intersections" and "Expand sidewalks and bike paths"), Freetown can consider the following measures:

- Conducting Road and Intersection Safety Audits and Corridor Studies[2] to comprehensively address problems, such as intersection design, signalization and timing, lane departure crashes, and red light/Stop sign running.
- Implementing Speed Management strategies
- Providing guidance in implementing a strong, safe, clearly identified bicycle and pedestrian network.
- Ensuring that Freetown's most vulnerable populations are protected through safety (e.g., regional, state, and federal Safety Performance

1 "Bridge Replacement Options Study: South Main St Over Assonet River Freetown, Massachusetts," GPI,https://www.freetownma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif4441/f/uploads/2024-01-30_-_freetown_-_south_main_st_bridge_replacement_study_final.pdf

2 For example, the SMMPO worked with Attleboro and North Attleborough to study the Route 1 Corridor, completed in 2019; please see www.srpedd.org/transportation/regional-corridor-study-projects/

Measures) and accessibility requirements (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA).

- Connecting community leaders and municipal employees with available state and federal resources.
- Please also note that this study may lead to suggestions for amending Zoning Article 11.25, South Main Street Corridor Overlay. The goals of this Master Plan Strategy overlap with those of this existing zoning district.[3]

Freetown could work proactively work with the SMMPO and its Joint Transportation Planning Group (JTPG) to explore these possible initiatives and partnerships.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Ensure continued active participation with the JTPG and SMMPO.
- Collaborate with MassDOT, the SMMPO, and other stakeholders to choose appropriate studies and interventions for North and South Main Street.
- Implement the findings of the Corridor Plan, including capital improvements and zoning/policy changes (e.g., Article 11.25, South Main Street Corridor Overlay District).

Complementary Strategies:

TC 1.1: Seek Tier 3 funding for projects from the Town's MassDOT Complete Streets Prioritization Plan.

TC 1.2: Investigate the creation of a Traffic Safety Committee that would regularly meet to review documented safety issues, certain types of proposed developments and other transportation related issues.

TC 2.2: Perform safety studies on other locations with high crash rates, such as Chace Road, Mill Street/Forge Road, and Gurney Road.

TC 3.1: Create a town-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to evaluate safe, feasible areas to encourage multi-modal transportation.

TC 3.2: Continue communication and coordination efforts with the MBTA regarding the future of South Coast Rail commuter rail service through Town.

Responsible Parties: Planning Department, Highway Department, Planning Board, Neighborhood groups and representatives.

Success Story: In 2019, the Town of Norton conducted a Village Center Vision Plan to determine needed improvements to the use table, design standards, dimensional requirements, and parking.

3 Freetown Zoning by-laws, Article 11.25, Section A: "This overlay district shall be called the South Main Street Corridor Overlay. The purpose of this overlay district is to maintain the integrity, viability, and safety of South Main Street, particularly as it relates to the Route 79/ Exit 9 Highway corridor. As the Town of Freetown grows, and in order to protect the public interest, it is vital to ensure that the region encompassing the limited highway, public way, private way, and ancillary traffic resources adjacent to and contributing to traffic along South Main Street and the intersection of Rt. 24 and Rt. 79 is not overburdened, becoming an inoperable and unsafe "gateway" to our community and causing detriment to the public safety and harm to the existing businesses and residents currently within this district."

Strategy 2.2 Perform safety studies on other locations with high crash rates, such as Chace Road, Mill Street/ Forge Road, and Gurney Road.

Freetown can proactively work with the SMMPO and its Joint Transportation Planning Group (JTPG) to conduct safety initiatives on high-crash locations throughout town. While these locations may have lower overall crash rates, they nonetheless represent important priorities for residents who utilize those roadways on a daily basis. Detailed

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Ensure active engagement with the JTPG and SMMPO
- Coordinate with MassDOT, SMMPO, and stakeholders to identify priority areas of concern for roadway safety and determine the appropriate studies to conduct on critical corridors and intersections, especially Gurney Road and Chace Road.

Responsible Parties: Board of Selectmen, Highway Department, Freetown's representatives to the SMMPO's JTPG, and the SRPEDD Commission.

Photo 24: Chace Road, SRPEDD

Strategy 3.1 Create a town-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to evaluate safe, feasible areas to encourage multi-modal transportation options.

The Master Plan's public input process identified a goal of increasing sidewalks and bike paths; however, many of Freetown's roadways lack adequate access for pedestrians and bicyclists–a situation that is common in rural communities across Massachusetts. Put simply, due to existing roadway design, many of the town's major routes fail to accommodate for multi-modal transportation, almost always requiring pedestrians and cyclists to share the roadway with vehicles.

To ensure safe travel for these road users, the Town may consider the creation of a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan that will be charged with identifying appropriate locations for "bike/ped" interventions (not all areas of town are suitable), closing existing gaps in the transportation network, and providing or improving safety facilities, such as bicycle lanes, sidewalks, crosswalks, bicycle parking, and signage.

The Bike and Pedestrian Plan will also identify sources of state and federal funding, such as the One Stop Grant Program, to finance infrastructure improvements within the Town. Additionally, the Plan will take input from residents, business owners, and other stakeholders to determine priority roadway design improvements where this funding can be effectively allocated.

Priority: Low - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Create a Freetown Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

Complementary Strategy:

TC 1.1: Seek Tier 3 funding for projects from the Town's MassDOT Complete Streets Prioritization Plan.

TC 1.2: Investigate the creation of a Traffic Safety Committee that would regularly meet to review documented safety issues, certain types of proposed developments and other transportation related issues.

Responsible Parties: Planning Board, Select Board, Highway Department

Success Story: In June 2016, the Town of Grafton, MA, developed a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to address inadequacies with multi-modal mobility. This plan identified necessary improvements to the town's infrastructure, zoning policies, and sub-division regulations to improve and protect pedestrian and bicycle safe into the future.

Strategy 3.2 Continue communication and coordination efforts with the MBTA regarding the future of South Coast Rail commuter rail service through Town.

Continuing communication with the MBTA to keep residents informed of the progress of the South Coast Rail and the Freetown Station is important, especially because many Freetown residents are skeptical of the opening of this station. Thirty nine percent of Freetown residents surveyed listed the South Coast Rail MBTA Station as one of their top concerns.

In 2017, MassDOT announced plans to accelerate the planned extension of commuter rail service from Boston to Fall River & New Bedford by splitting the South Coast Rail project into two phases. Known as the "Middleborough Alternative" or "Phase 1," the new commuter rail service will extend the Middleborough branch of the Old Colony Line using the 7.5-mile Middleborough Secondary Line. The second phase is known as the "Full Build;" this commuter rail service will continue from the Stoughton line down through Raynham to New Bedford and Fall River. Freetown will host its new MBTA Commuter Rail Station under both Phases 1 and 2.

Beginning in summer of 2024, the MBTA is running test trains through the South Coast Rail, and it is expected to be open to passengers beginning in Spring 2025. The "Full Build" preliminary designs are ongoing, and the completion of this line will come years after "Phase I."

To be kept informed of the project's progression and significant service or logistical changes between Phases 1 and 2, and to relay any concerns, the Town should continue to communicate regularly with MassDOT and the MBTA and consider scheduling meetings or conference calls on a regular basis as the "Full Build" gets closer to construction.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Work with MassDOT to schedule regular meetings or conference calls.

Responsible Parties: Town Administrator, Planning Department, Planning Board

Success Story: In January 2023, Pawtucket, Rhode Island opened a new commuter rail station, providing service between Pawtucket and Boston for the first time in over fifty years.

Photo 25: Intersection of Washburn Rd and Country Rd, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Services & Facilities

Ensure that Freetown's municipal infrastructure and services meet the demands of residents and businesses.

Freetown's facilities house and provide many services expected by residents. These services include day to-day administrative activities that ensure the smooth operation of the Town and the social and cultural programming that enriches life in Freetown. The Council on Aging and two Public Libraries are highly regarded sources of entertainment, community, and support. Yet, despite the demand for services from these institutions, their physical limitations inhibit programmatic growth. Constructed over 100 years ago, the Guilford H. Hathaway Library does not have plumbing, while the James White Memorial Library, constructed over 80 years ago, also requires major upgrades and repairs. To meet the demands of the growing senior population, the Council on Aging building requires significant renovations. In addition, the Town Hall is limited in its capacity to house various departments. Recent efforts led to the creation of the Council on Aging/Library Community Building Committee to seek funding for the future construction of a joint COA/Library building. Additionally, providing wastewater processing and public water are two key infrastructure services Freetown provides to select areas in town. Freetown has an intermunicipal agreement (IMA) with the City of Fall River, providing residents access to water/wastewater services. Currently, there is no IMA with the City of New Bedford, limiting the provision of water/sewer services in East Freetown. Further, water/sewer services are currently limited to southern Assonet.

Services & Facilities Goal 1

Replace, modernize, and improve aging Town buildings that provide vital services.

SF Strategy 1.1 Create a Civic Center (or Municipal Campus) in the geographic center of Freetown.

SF Strategy 1.2 Pursue Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) funding to improve accessibility for Town-owned facilities based on the findings of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan.

Services & Facilities Goal 2

Explore initiatives to support community led programming.

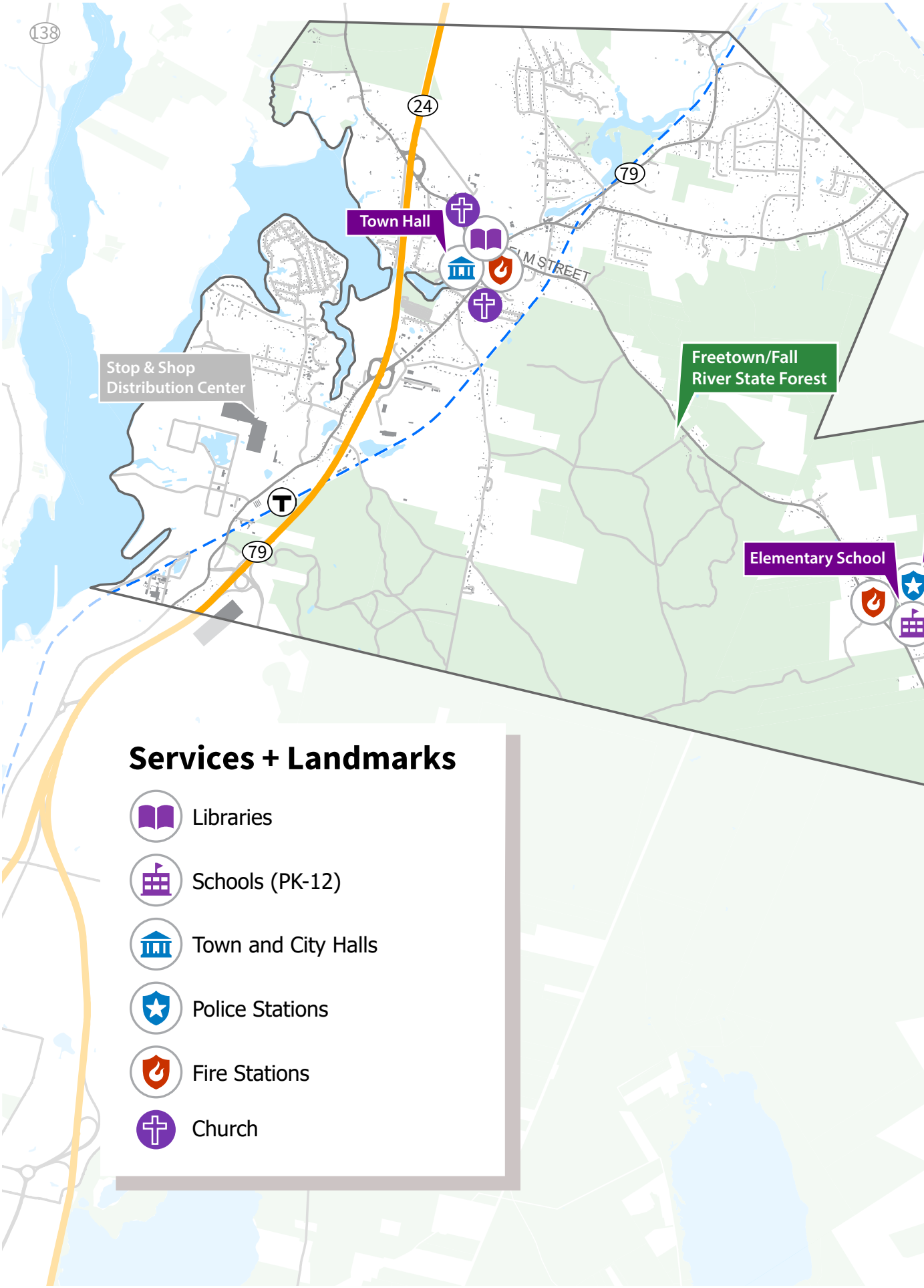
SF Strategy 2.1 Investigate partnerships with other municipalities, such as Lakeville and New Bedford, to improve or expand services and programming.

Services & Facilities Goal 3

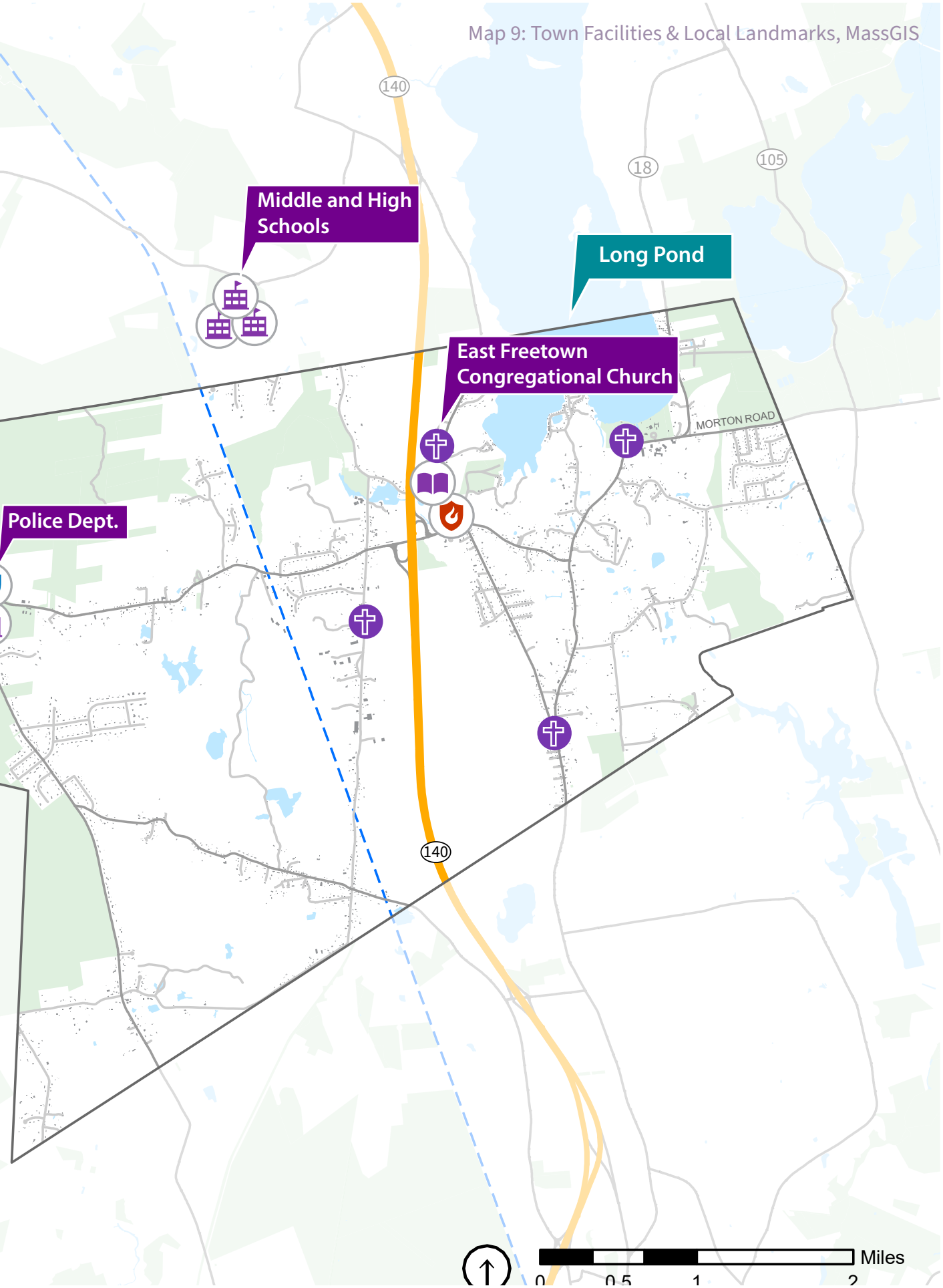
Expand key services to meet residential and commercial demands and make Freetown an attractive, affordable place to live.

SF Strategy 3.1 Ensure reliable access to electricity and broadband internet through Municipal Digital Equity Planning.

SF Strategy 3.2 Investigate funding opportunities to reduce costs for vital services, including septic systems and home maintenance.


138
24
79
Town Hall
M STREET
Stop & Shop
Distribution Center
Freetown/Fall
River State Forest
79
Elementary School
Services + Landmarks
Libraries
Schools (PK-12)
Town and City Halls
Police Stations
Fire Stations
Church

Map 9: Town Facilities & Local Landmarks, MassGIS



Strategy 1.1 Create a Civic Center (or Municipal Campus) in the geographic center of Freetown.

To provide residents with a centralized and accessible location to seek municipal services, the Town should continue to pursue its plans to build a Civic Center in the geographic heart of Freetown. The lack of a Town Center was the 5th highest concern among residents participating in the Master Plan survey. These new facilities may interconnect with Town-owned facilities and with trail networks nearby.

For detailed information on implementation, see Land Use Strategy 1.2: Pursue the creation of a Civic Center that provides key services and community space that unites the town, where this strategy is described in full.

Photo 26: Freetown Police Station, SRPEDD

Strategy 1.2 Pursue Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) funding to improve accessibility for Town-owned facilities based on the findings of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan.

ADA Self-Evaluations and Transition Plans are a municipality's way of diagnosing problems with accessibility and making a "plan of care" to correct them. Funded by the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD), these plans are the first step in making improvements that ensure all Freetown residents can access the broadest possible range of community resources. Freetown may consider pursuing funding, based on the findings of the Town's ADA planning through MOD, to comply with federal law and improve accessibility of Town-owned buildings and facilities. The Town could also ensure that all locations studied in their ADA plan pursue reasonable improvements and seek capital improvement funding to maintain accessibility. These locations include: Town Hall, the Council on Aging building, Fire Station 3, Police Station, Hathaway Library, Old Police Station, Highway Barn, Transfer Station, Town Beach, Bandstand, Hathaway Park, K.R. Rezendes Baseball Complex, Veterans Memorial Park, and Porter Pasture.

.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Obtain an ADA planning grant from MOD and completes its initial planning.
- Ongoing: Make reasonable efforts to implement the findings of the ADA Transition Plan.

Complementary Strategy:

OSR 2.5: Improve ADA accessibility of parks and recreation facilities.

Complementary Plan:

2022 Open Space and Recreation Plan: Complete an updated ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan.

Responsible Parties: ADA Coordinator, Planning Board, Town Planner

Success Story: The City of Attleboro completed an ADA Transition Plan and received $87,000 in an ADA Improvement Grant in FY 2024.

Strategy 2.1 Investigate partnerships with other municipalities, such as Lakeville and New Bedford, to improve or expand services and programming.

The services provided by a municipality are often the main way citizens interact with their local government. The Master Plan survey revealed that Freetown residents viewed most municipal services favorably; however, the Libraries had a lower "very good" percentage compared to other services, such as public safety. Limited services and outdated facilities may be contributing to residents seeking services outside of town in neighboring Lakeville and New Bedford. This could be exacerbated by the location of these facilities as well, specifically with the James White Memorial Library, which is a small facility located in East Freetown, within rough proximity to larger facilities in the city. In other words, Freetown residents may be seeking out amenity services in nearby communities. This reality may present an opportunity to coordinate with these other communities to provide inter-municipal recreational amenities and programming, especially if there are holes in services that other communities can fill and if doing so provides cost savings to residents and the participating communities. The Town may work to partner with nearby communities to meet the needs of its residents, while also providing needed services to residents of nearby communities.

Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measure:

- Ongoing: Communicate with nearby communities, such as New Bedford and Lakeville, to explore opportunities to coordinate programming.

Complementary Strategy:

SF 1.1: Create a Civic Center (or Municipal Campus) in the geographic center of Freetown.

LU 1.2 Pursue the creation of a Civic Center that provides key services and community space that unites the town.

Responsible Parties: Town Administrator, Library Administrator, COA Director

Strategy 3.1 Ensure reliable access to electricity and broadband internet through Municipal Digital Equity Planning.

Freetown is currently working with SRPEDD to create a Municipal Digital Equity Plan (MDEP). Most of the town has access to broadband internet, but many residents cite their monthly internet bill as being hard to afford, and, with little to no competition in the market, residents are forced to use Comcast as their internet provider. Supporting and implementing this plan will create pathways for better broadband internet service and digital equity in the town. The Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) is fully funding Freetown's MDEP.

Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Complete and Present the Municipal Digital Equity Plan to the Board of Selectmen.
- Pursue funding to implement the goals and recommendations of the Digital Equity Plan.

Complementary Strategy:

TC 1.3: Establish a low-cost, online portal for residents to flag key transportation areas that require maintenance.

Complementary Plan:

2022 Open Space and Recreation Plan: Complete an updated ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan.

Responsible Parties: Town Planner, Town Administrator

Success Story: The Towns of Everett, Chelsea, and Revere completed a regional MDEP, which paved the way for the implementation of digital equity initiatives in these communities. For example, the plan recommends implementing apartment Wi-Fi initiatives, which would make Wi-Fi readily available for free in certain apartment buildings. Based on this recommendation, Chelsea and Revere have started to implement this at 178 housing authority apartment units. .

Strategy 3.2 Investigate funding opportunities to reduce costs for vital services, including septic systems and home maintenance.

Residents around the region, and in Freetown, are facing growing costs for a variety of aspects of their lives, whether that is for food, gas, heating, and so forth. One of the costliest of these is the replacement of a residential septic system. Residents nowadays could pay upwards of $30,000 to fully replace their aging septic system. This a huge cost–especially for those who rely on fixed incomes. These costs could displace residents, forcing them to leave the community. The Town may consider taking extra care with identifying cost saving means and funding opportunities to help residents.

There are several programs that the State has created to help alleviate costs for the most vulnerable residents. Freetown luckily has many different avenues and funding sources at its disposal to support these vulnerable communities. For example, the Massachusetts State Revolving Fund Program (SRF) is a financial assistance program that offers affordable financing options to cities, towns, and public water utilities to improve water infrastructure and drinking water safety; the program can provide financial assistance to communities to create and implement their septic management programs that make available loans to homeowners with failed septic systems.

Similarly, Freetown can consider actively partnering with other nearby towns through a housing consortium. Housing consortiums enable communities to work with nearby municipalities and combat complex housing and service problems. These partnerships enable groups to pool resources and create active programs to assist with a variety of housing problems, such as maintenance. A great example of this is the Greater Attleboro/Taunton Home Consortium (GATHC), where 14 member communities, including Freetown, have access to funds for housing rehabilitation and a first-time homebuyer assistance program. Freetown can work with nearby communities to apply for funding sources, such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), to increase their chances of a successful application and to develop a more impactful program. The Town can also apply on their own for this funding if they deem it to be the preferred option.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Explore participation in the Community Septic Management Program to better understand the town's septic systems and lay the foundation for accessing and providing financial assistance, including betterment loans, to homeowners.
- Explore more active participation in GATHC.

Responsible Parties: Town Manager, Town Planner

Success Story: Old Colony Planning Council's Septic Loan Program; The City of New Bedford's several home rehabilitation and accessibility assistance programs that aim to improve low- and moderate-income residents' housing. These programs offer direct funding and/or low-to-no-interest loans to make necessary accessibility, safety, or home rehabilitation repairs in owner-occupied or investor-owned homes. The programs are funded through HUD's HOME Investment Partnership Program and CDBG.

Photo 27: Assonet, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Economic Development

Encourage appropriate economic development projects at key locations to expand the tax base and support local businesses.

Strategically located between Providence and Boston, Freetown is a draw for both residents and business owners. Although the MBTA commuter rail is not immediately available in town as of writing this plan in late 2024, residents can take the approximately 30-minute trip to nearby Middleborough or Mansfield to travel north to Boston; alternatively, residents can travel via car to nearby Fall River, New Bedford, or Providence for work or leisure. Over the next ten years, by pursuing a diverse and coordinated set of actions, Freetown seeks to retain existing businesses and build upon existing critical sites for economic development. Maintaining a healthy local commercial tax base, by supporting small businesses throughout town and creating new business development where appropriate, will enable Freetown to continue providing high-quality municipal services and facilities for residents.

An expanded tax base can also allow the Town to expand upon the supportive infrastructure that is so necessary to future growth–particularly in existing commercial centers such as South Assonet; any meaningful future economic development activity in town hinges on the ability to provide the proper water and sewer infrastructure at sites suited and identified for economic growth.

Economic Development Goal 1

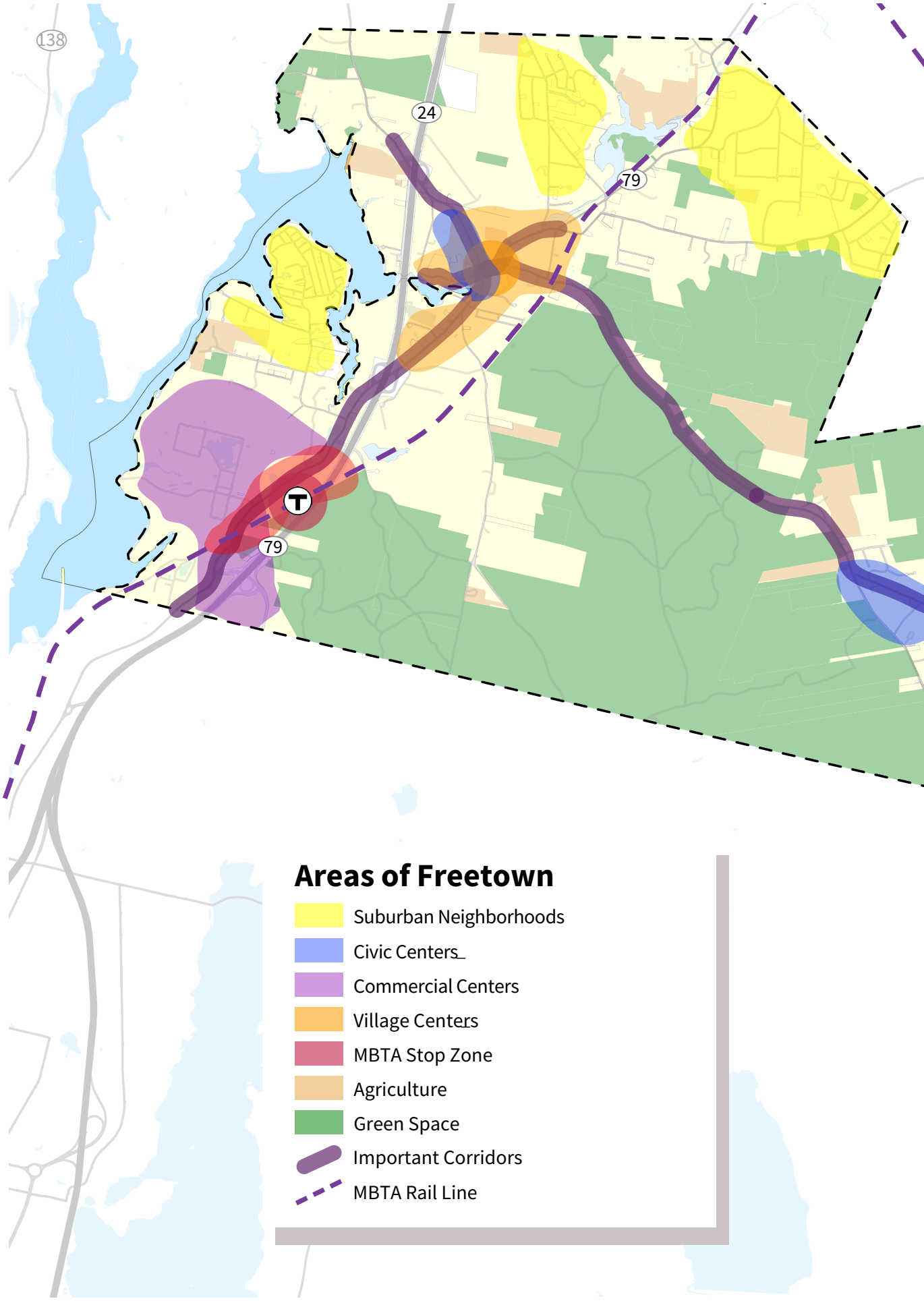
Balance economic development with Freetown's rural character by encouraging larger scale growth only in appropriate locations.

ED Strategy 1.1	Pursue commercial growth in existing Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and appropriate business and industrial zones.
ED Strategy 1.2	Work closely with the City of Fall River to negotiate Inter-Municipal Agreements (IMAs) for wastewater and water service in key locations on South Main Street.
ED Strategy 1.3	Explore funding opportunities to build municipal water and wastewater infrastructure to key locations for economic development.
ED Strategy 1.4	Continue fostering growing and important industries in Town, such as transportation and warehousing, healthcare, construction, and wholesale trade.

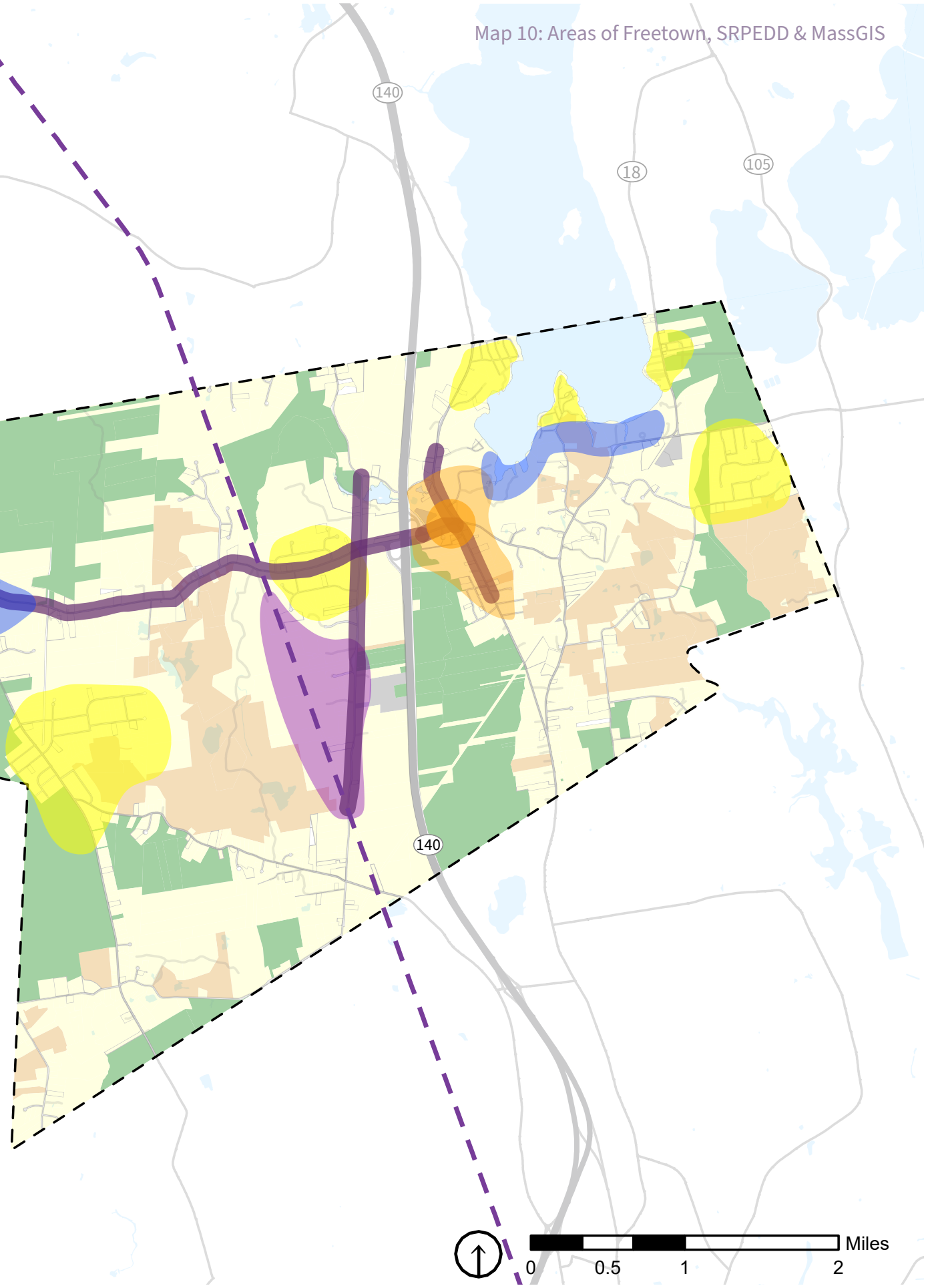
Economic Development Goal 2

Support the local small business community.

ED Strategy 2.1	Create a user-friendly Development and Permitting Guide to facilitate all types of business activity and development.
ED Strategy 2.2	Support continued operation and growth of home-based businesses.


138
24
79
79
Areas of Freetown
Suburban Neighborhoods
Civic Centers
Commercial Centers
Village Centers
MBTA Stop Zone
Agriculture
Green Space
Important Corridors
MBTA Rail Line

Map 10: Areas of Freetown, SRPEDD & MassGIS



Strategy 1.1 Pursue commercial growth in existing Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and appropriate business and industrial zones.

Through its existing zoning, Freetown continues to enable new business and development opportunities in town; these include areas designated as Priority Development Areas (PDAs) in 2008, 2013, and again in the 2024 update to the Town's Priority Area Report. All current PDAs correspond identically with Freetown's Business, Industrial, Industrial 2, or Planned Mixed-Use Development (PMUD) Zoning Districts. This Master Plan continues to highlight these locations as the areas where the Town, through its long-range planning and day-to-day land use permitting procedures, would like to see further economic development. In total, these sites amount to about 1,153 acres, with the largest PDA being centered on the Riverfront Business Park in Assonet at about 533 acres.

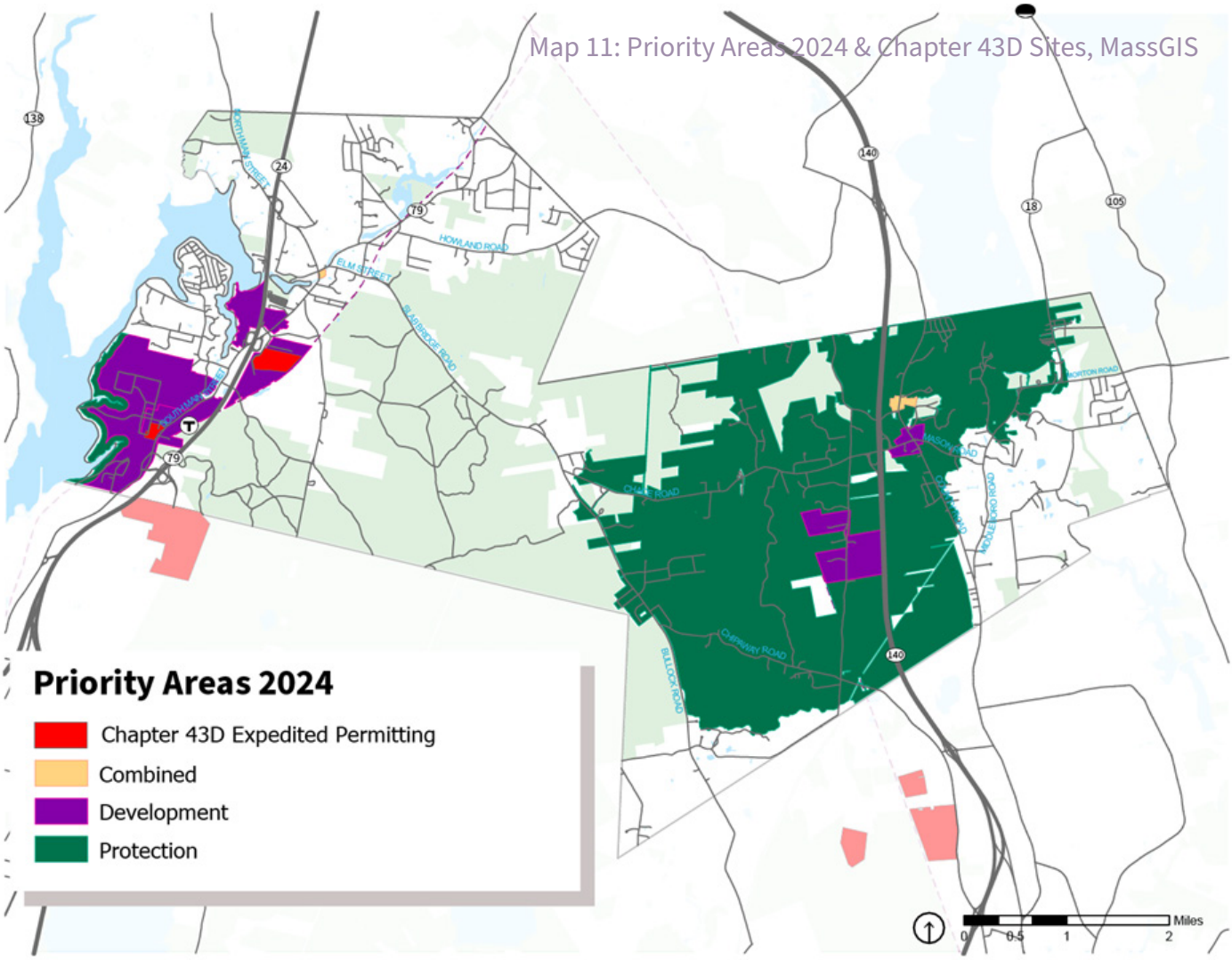
Additionally, in 2008, Freetown designated two sites within these areas as Chapter 43D Priority Development Sites[1]. Freetown's Chapter 43D sites are located at:

- 7 Campanelli Drive (47 acres, 40,000 s.f. of development completed in 2018, Industrial 2 Zoning) and
- 170 South Main Street (12 acres, minor apparent utility infrastructure and building, Industrial 2 and PMUD Zoning), part of the large Copart land holding.

This valuable economic development and marketing tool can be more fully utilized and potentially extended to other sites within Freetown's PDAs. Further, the Town can explore other state economic development tools, such as District Improvement Financing (DIF) or Tax Increment Financing (TIF)[2]; these programs would add another layer of incentives to development on key sites in town. Freetown implemented an ongoing TIF in 2014 with the

1 Chapter 43D is a tool that facilitates commercial, industrial, or mixed-use development on specific properties. It is a voluntary, local option. In other words, towns must "opt-in" through town meeting and property-owners must "opt-in" through written approval. The program creates a "streamlined permitting process" that promotes transparency and predictability for local permits. It also guarantees permitting decisions - "Yes" or "No" - on pre-determined priority development sites (PDS) within 180 days.

2 For example, Freetown could work with the Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) to implement Tax Increment Financing (TIF) under the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP). TIF is authorized by M.G.L. c. 40 § 59; it is "a local real estate property tax exemption negotiated and executed between a host municipality and an expanding or relocating company. The business must create new employment opportunities and make significant private investment that increases the base assessed value of the property as the tax abatement is given only on the incremental increase in the property value." Once the tax abatement expires, the Town collects all applicable property taxes. This strategy has been employed to attract businesses to towns across Massachusetts.

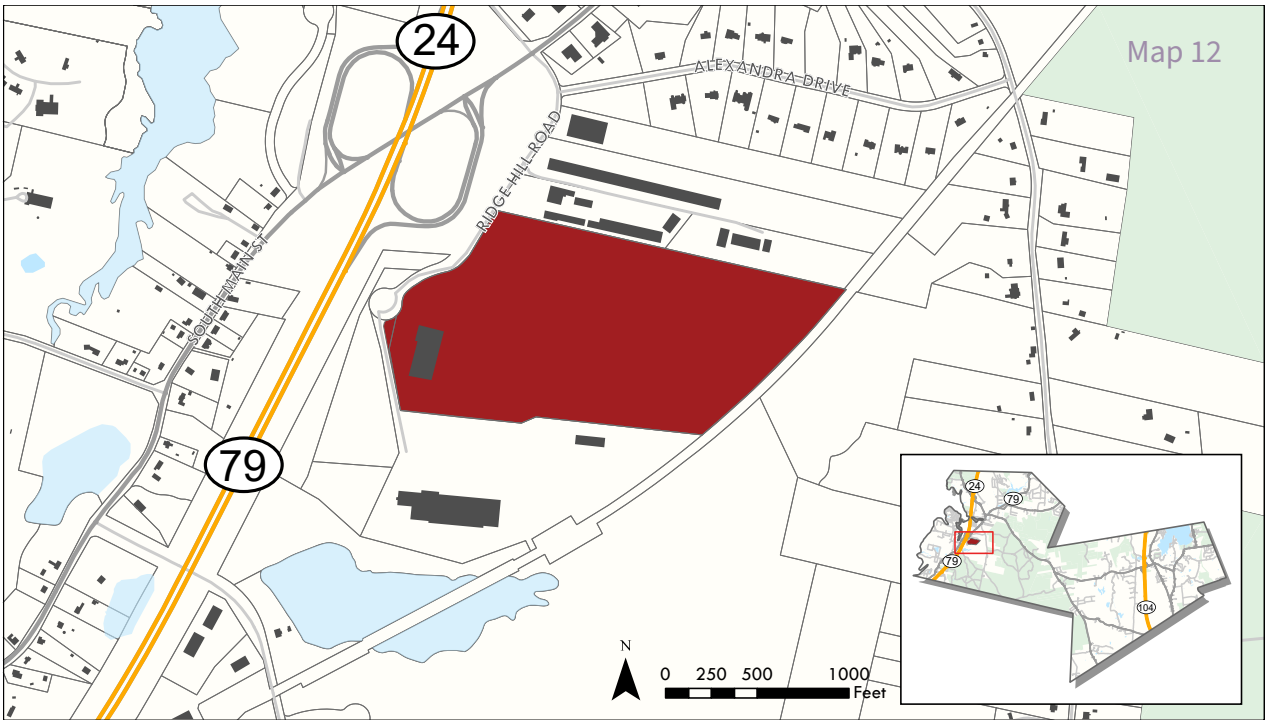


Map 11: Priority Areas 2024 & Chapter 43D Sites, MassGIS

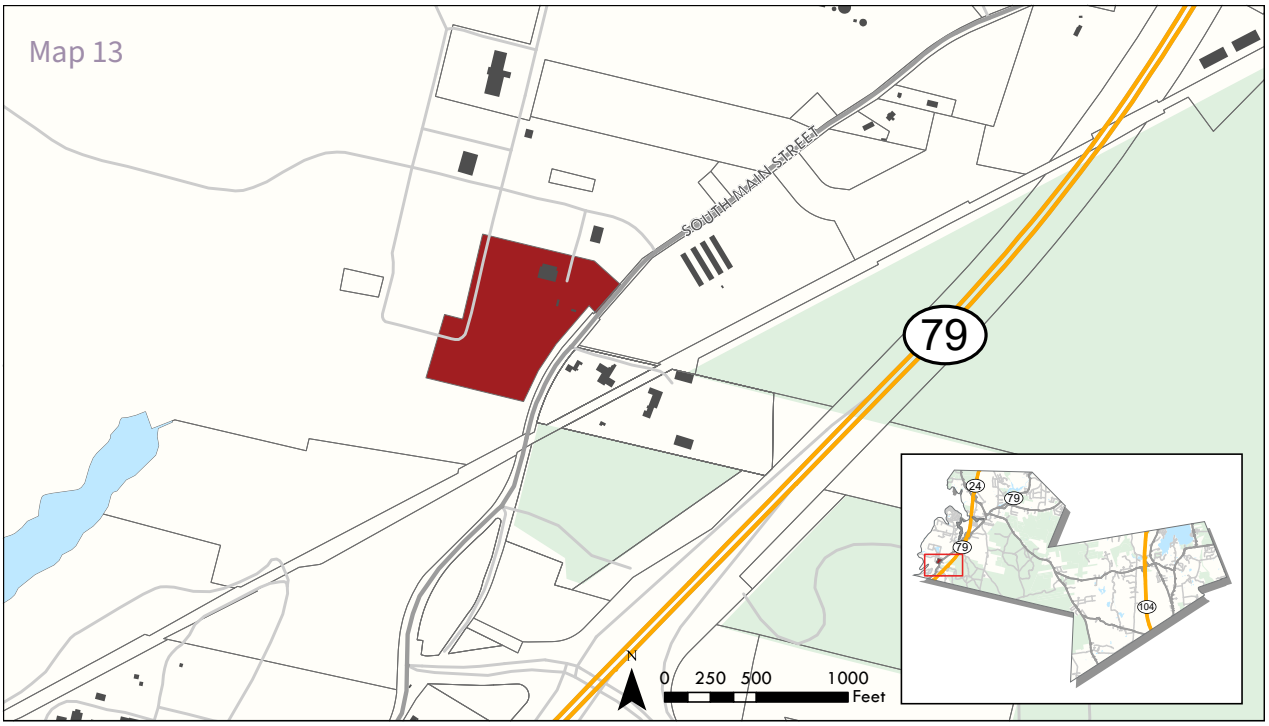
Amazon distribution center on the border with the City of Fall River.

The Town has additional options for improving existing zoning to guide local economic development outcomes. For example, working in partnership with the Economic Development Committee, Planning Board, Town Counsel, and the local development community, the Town Planner can revisit existing Business and Industrial zoning language for potential improvements or incentives (for example, reducing parking requirements, allowing for increased densities, or clarifying process and procedures). The Town can also revisit or expand its Science and Technology Overlay District (STOD). Focusing activities to desirable sites and encouraging public-private partnerships present opportunities for the Town to advance its economic development goals relating to the local industrial or manufacturing sectors

By coordinating the development of these sites through Chapter 43D or collaborative zoning, the Town establishes itself as a partner to the private sector while acting as a representative for the needs of the public.



Source: SRPEDD; map of the 7 Campanelli Drive 43D site.



Source: SRPEDD; map of the 170 South Main Street 43D site.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Determine the viability of DIF and TIF programs in town.
- Review the existing zoning to determine if there are additional paths to incentivize economic development in town.

Complementary Strategy:

ED 1.3: Explore funding opportunities to build municipal water and wastewater infrastructure to key locations for economic development.

ED 1.4: Continue fostering growing and important industries in Town, such as transportation and warehousing, healthcare, construction, and wholesale trade.

ED 2.1: Create a user-friendly Development and Permitting Guide to facilitate all types of business activity and development.

Responsible Parties: Planning Department, Planning Board, Select Board, Economic Development Committee

Photo 28: South Main St, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Strategy 1.2 Work closely with the City of Fall River to negotiate Inter-Municipal Agreements (IMAs) for wastewater and water service in key locations on South Main Street.

Very few businesses and households in Freetown have access to municipal water and wastewater service. However, these services–especially wastewater infrastructure–are a crucial public sector mechanism in promoting large-scale economic development. The neighboring City of Fall River (which provides wastewater service to one commercial customer in Freetown) offers an opportunity to negotiate an expanded Inter-Municipal Agreement to bring wastewater service to Freetown. The Town can further utilize the DIF[1], or capital improvement grants programs, such as MassWorks, to construct wastewater infrastructure. For more information, please see Economic Development Strategy 1.3, below.

Many Massachusetts communities use IMAs to combine resources and provide drinking water and sewer facilities to residents; these agreements typically take the form of written contracts. IMAs can also open new grants and funding opportunities.

Freetown may also consider exploring potential funding opportunities to expand water/ wastewater capacity and upgrade its pump stations.

.

1 According to MassDevelopment, "District Improvement Financing (DIF) is a locally enacted tool that enables a municipality to identify and capture incremental tax revenues from new private investment in a specific area, and direct them toward public improvement [such as wastewater] and economic development projects. DIF is not a new tax or special assessment and it does not increase a municipality's tax rate." For more information, please see https://www.massdevelopment.com/products-and-services/real-estate/planning/district-improvement-financing.

Priority: High-Immediate

Performance Measures:

- Begin discussions with the Cities of Fall River and New Bedford and start the process of negotiating terms and agreements for pump station expansion.

Complementary Strategies:

SF 1.1: Create a Civic Center (or Municipal Campus) in the geographic center of Freetown.

ED 1.3: Explore funding opportunities to build municipal water and wastewater infrastructure to key locations for economic development.

Responsible Parties: Board of Selectmen, Water & Sewer Commission, Economic Development Committee

Success Story: The Towns of Swansea and Somerset worked with SRPEDD and the U.S. Economic Development Administration to create an IMA to obtain wastewater service, ensure sufficient capacity, and enable economic development opportunities from Somerset into Swansea along Route 6.

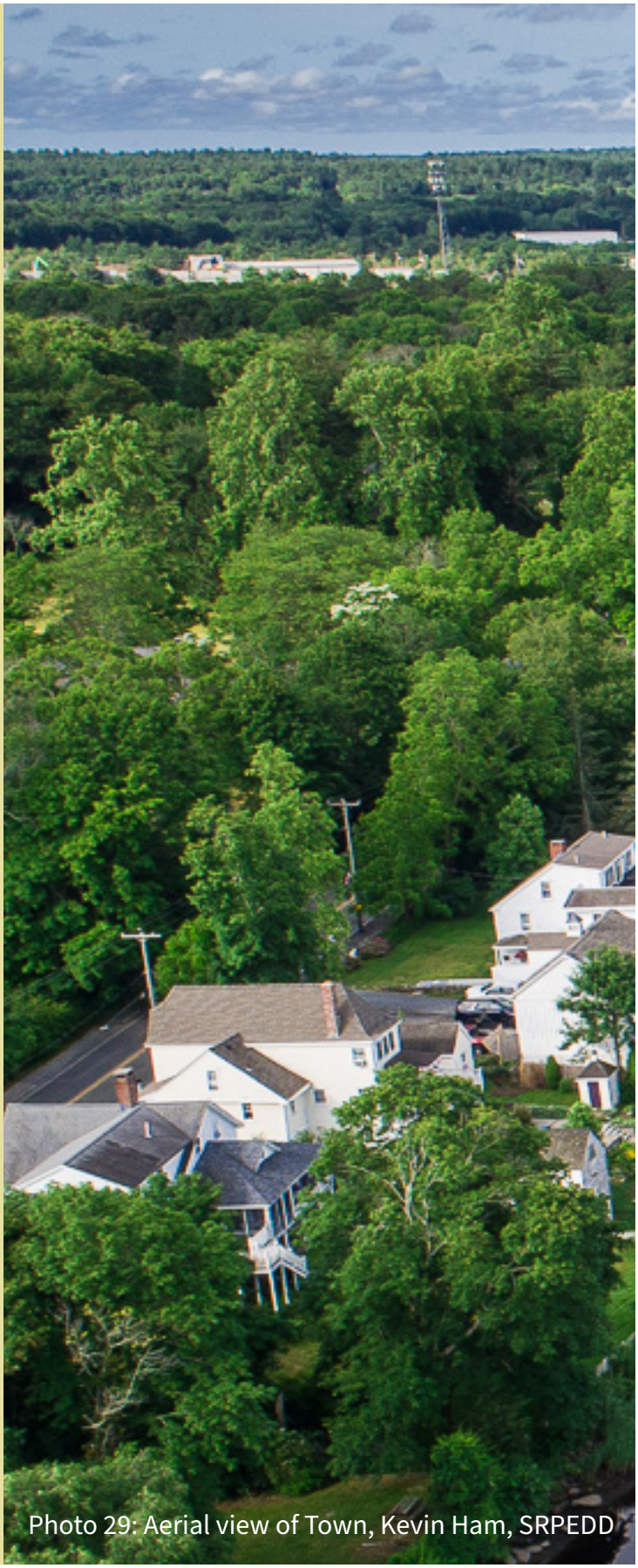


Photo 29: Aerial view of Town, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Strategy 1.3 Explore funding opportunities to build municipal water and wastewater infrastructure to key locations for economic development.

Once Freetown successfully negotiates an IMA with Fall River (see Economic Development Strategy 1.2), the Town can explore funding opportunities to bring water/sewer lines to the Chapter 43D Priority Development Sites and 2024 Priority Development Areas (PDAs). Expanding water and sewer capacity is key to facilitating growth and increasing the economic development potential for these areas. Unfortunately, these infrastructure improvements are cost prohibitive for many communities to fund on their own (through bond issues and other public finance methods); as such, the Town may consider strategically planning these improvements to prepare for future grant opportunities.

State-funded water and sewer infrastructure grants are limited; available grants are typically awarded to projects that promote economic development and present shovel-ready plans. Freetown could plan to fund design and engineering activities along major corridors which they wish to connect to new or expanded infrastructure. As a rural community, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers Water & Waste Disposal Predevelopment Planning Grants that are tied exclusively to population size. Alternatively, the Massachusetts Community One Stop for Growth Grant Program provides predevelopment funding through MassWorks that would support design and engineering activities.

Next, with design and engineering complete, the Town can prepare to submit grants to support construction. Depending on the ultimate goal of the envisioned development–commercial/industrial, rural development initiatives, or mixed-use–Freetown can consider sources for funding. The following organizations provide infrastructure construction grants:

- Massachusetts State Revolving Fund Program (SRF) – The State Revolving Fund (SRF) financial assistance program offers affordable financing options to cities, towns, and public water utilities to improve water infrastructure and drinking water safety. In addition, the program helps communities comply with federal and state water quality requirements for wastewater treatment plants and collection systems, and evaluate issues related to watershed management priorities, stormwater management, and green infrastructure. The SRF also provides financial assistance to communities to implement their community septic management programs that make loans available to homeowners with failed septic systems.
- MassWorks – The MassWorks Infrastructure Program is a competitive grant program that provides the largest and most flexible source of capital funds to municipalities and other eligible public entities, primarily for

public infrastructure projects that support and accelerate housing production, spur economic/private development, and create jobs throughout the Commonwealth.[1]

- U.S. Economic Development Administration (U.S. EDA) Public Works – U.S. EDA's Public Works program helps distressed communities revitalize, expand, and upgrade their physical infrastructure. This program enables communities to attract new industry, encourage business expansion, diversify local economies, generate local investment, and create or retain long-term jobs through infrastructure improvement projects that establish or expand industrial or commercial enterprises.
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) – Community Development Block Grants provide funding for a variety of activities that benefit underrepresented groups, including water and sewer expansion.
- USDA – USDA's Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program provides funding for clean and reliable drinking water systems, sanitary sewage disposal, sanitary solid waste disposal, and storm water drainage to households and businesses in eligible rural areas.

Priority: High-Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Explore grant sources for 1) design and engineering, and 2) the construction of water and wastewater infrastructure to key sites, including PDAs and Chapter 43D PDSs.

Complementary Strategies:

ED 1.1: Pursue commercial growth in existing Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and appropriate business and industrial zones.

ED 1.2: Work closely with the City of Fall River to negotiate Inter-Municipal Agreements (IMAs) for wastewater and water service in key locations on South Main Street.

Responsible Parties: Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen, Water District, Sewer Commission

Success Story: Numerous water and wastewater design and engineering and construction grants are awarded annually. For example, the City of Taunton applied successfully for MassWorks grant funding totaling in $3.1 million during the 2010's to develop infrastructure at the Myles Standish Industrial Park. Similarly, neighboring Fall River is nearing completion of Phase I of the $1.3 million Mothers Brook and Industrial Way sewer upgrades; this work is funded through a U.S. EDA grant awarded in 2021. Phase I of the project will enable the design and permitting of approximately 27,600 linear feet of sewer lines at Mothers Brook and Industrial Way. Located along a cluster of three (3) industrial parks (including Fall River Industrial Park, Fall River Commerce Park, and South Coast Life Science and Technology Park) Phase I will set the stage to pursue upgrades and improvements that will help expand development and employment opportunities from this regional employment center.

1 As of writing this plan in late 2024, Freetown is not eligible to apply for funding through MassWorks as a result of not complying with MBTA Communities Act, M.G.L c. 40A § 3A. However, it is likely that in the future a solution can be reached for this eligibility status to change.

Strategy 1.4 Continue fostering growing and important industries in Town, such as transportation and warehousing, healthcare, construction, and wholesale trade.

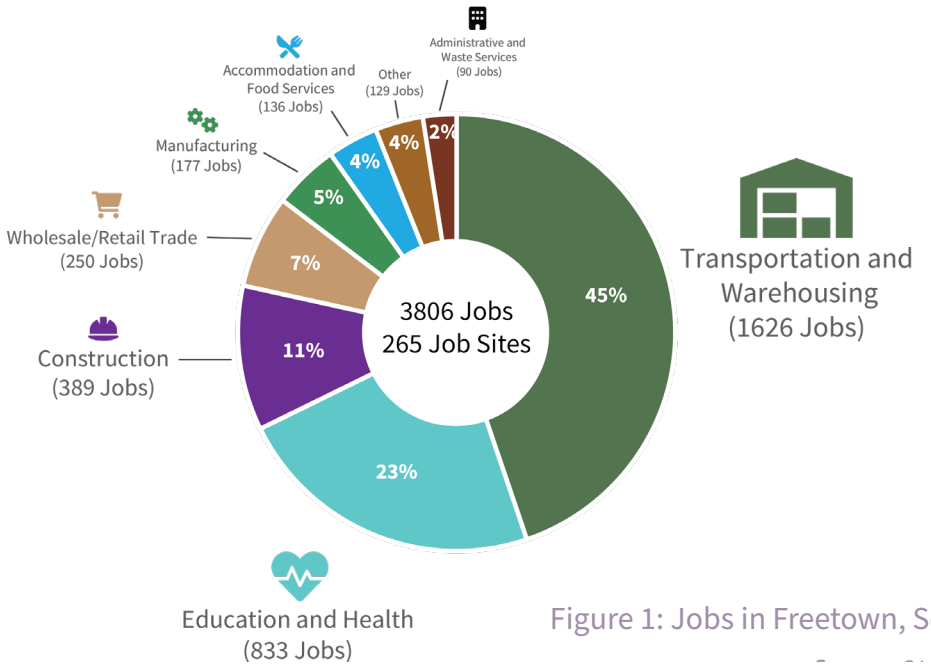


Figure 1: Jobs in Freetown, Source: 2020 Census

With the potential expansion of water and sewer infrastructure, potential increased programmatic participation (e.g., Chapter 43D), and possible amendments to zoning that encourage economic development, the Town may consider taking special care in supporting industries of importance. Data from the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development's (EOLWD) Department of Economic Research show recent strong growth in the number of jobs from 2010-2020 in several industries in Town, including Healthcare (68%), Construction (23%), and Wholesale Trade (12%). Similarly, the overall share of Transportation and Warehousing jobs, at roughly 45% of all jobs based in Freetown, demonstrate the industry's importance to the town's economy.

Freetown can ensure that local zoning and permitting allows for these uses, as well as ancillary uses and emerging activities (such as lab and research-oriented "flex space"). Town officials can also maintain an open dialogue with representatives from firms based in these industries to discuss ways in which Freetown can support their continued growth and activities; some communities work through formal committees, such as Freetown's Economic Development Committee, to regularly meet with existing businesses to discuss how the Town can help them retain employees, remain in operation, or expand in desirable ways. This type of public-private partnership may be particularly important when working with Freetown's most important sectors and firms.

Photo 30: Stop N Shop Distribution Center, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measure:

- Work with the Economic Development Committee to establish strong industry relationships and collaborate to meet industry needs while protecting the public interest.

Complementary Strategies:

ED 1.1 Pursue commercial growth in existing Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and appropriate business and industrial zones.

ED 1.3: Explore funding opportunities to build municipal water and wastewater infrastructure to key locations for economic development.

Responsible Parties: Economic Development Committee, Planning Board, Town Planner

Strategy 2.1 Create a user-friendly Development and Permitting Guide to facilitate all types of business activity and development.

Freetown began using an online permitting system to streamline the permitting process for the building inspector in February 2023; recently, the Health Department joined the service. There are also plans for the Planning Board to be added as well. To supplement the online permitting system, a user-friendly economic development and permitting guide, developed by the Economic Development Committee, would further help businesses, landowners, and developers navigate the permitting process.

Development and permitting guides can take many forms, including concise handbooks, topic-specific brochures, marketing campaigns, E-Government web pages, or all the above. Permitting guides lean on visual references such as flow charts or process diagrams to describe required procedures, identify departmental points of contact, and to highlight fees, resources, and timelines needed to obtain various permits (including 43D permits). A Development and Permitting guide could emphasize Freetown's values, town-character, and emphasis on balancing environmental protection with development and growth to inform the types of business activity that are encouraged in town. The Guide can assist new businesses, seeking to establish their business or relocate to Freetown, in navigating the development and permitting process. The Town's role in helping applicants through this process will further support the recruitment of new businesses that address specific gaps.

Priority: High - Immediate

Performance Measure:

- Create a Development and Permitting Guide.

Complementary Strategies:

LU 1.1: Pursue commercial growth in existing Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and Appropriate Business and industrial zones.

LU 1.2: Pursue the creation of a Civic Center that provides key services and community space that unites the town.

ED 2.2: Support continued operation and growth of home-based businesses.

Responsible Parties: Economic Development Committee

Success Story: The Town of Dedham Business Guide; the City of Attleboro's Business and Permitting Guide; the Town of Mansfield's Business Guide, Market Profile, and "Who Can I Call?" Flyer; neighboring Middleborough's Permitting Guide and Marketing Brochure. The Town of Middleborough completed the Permitting Guide to streamline their permitting process and front-facing contact with business leaders.

Strategy 2.2 Support continued operation and growth of home-based businesses.

According to Freetown Building Department data, approximately 109 Freetown residents operate home-based businesses. Further, a review of the Town's zoning by-laws addressing home-based business operations revealed that Freetown allows home-occupations by-right, and–in some instances–via special permit. Freetown follows several best practices with regards to regulating its home-based businesses; for example, the floor area maximum of 25% for the home-based business use is reasonable and the zoning language does not limit the number of employees as long they are a resident of the home. One clear exception is food establishments, which are required to acquire permits through the Town; however, other home-based occupations or business types are not explicitly regulated.

Despite Freetown's regulatory ease for managing the operations of home-based businesses, certain restrictions may create barriers to small business operation. For example, home-based business employees must be inhabitants of the structure in which they are employed. Working in partnership with home-based business-owners and the Economic Development Committee, the Town may consider revisiting this particular requirement and any other potential barriers that may prevent home-based businesses from thriving. Eliminating this regulation, and instead incorporating conditions to hiring employees would effectively reflect the spirit of Freetown's approach to home-occupations, while mitigating impacts to the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measure:

- Work with the Economic Development Committee to reexamine regulations that allow home-based businesses to thrive.

Complementary Strategies:

ED 2.1: Create a user-friendly Development and Permitting Guide to facilitate all types of business activity and development.

Responsible Parties: Planning Board, Economic Development Committee

Success Story: The Town of Maynard has a dedicated page on their Town website detailing important information about the process of starting a home-based business and detailing which types are allowable.

Photo 31: Home in Assonet, SRPEDD

Housing

Diversify Freetown's housing stock, including "downsizing" options for Freetown's seniors and small households.

Like many communities across Massachusetts, Freetown exhibits common demographic trends, including an aging population and decreasing household sizes. Over the last twenty years, Freetown's median age increased by about 5 years, indicating a growing proportion of seniors in town. Household size has also decreased, and data show a 12% decrease in households with children under 18 years of age[1]. As Freetown's population ages and households become smaller (with fewer school-age kids), Freetown can confidently anticipate a shift in housing needs. Older adults who live alone may consider downsizing from the home where they raised their children. Individuals entering retirement may consider alternative housing as their physical mobility changes and they budget based on fixed incomes. According to M.G.L. Chapter 40B, all communities in the Commonwealth should contribute to the statewide need for affordable housing by committing at least 10% of all year-round housing units for low-income households. Recent data shows that Freetown is well below the 10% threshold, at 2.49%[2]. It is therefore likely that further housing developments may take place through the Chapter 40B process. Taken together, these trends highlight a future demand for affordable housing (both subsidized housing and housing produced at affordable market-rate prices) and diverse housing types which can all be achieved through specific strategies that harness state housing programs, zoning changes, and community development strategies.

1 Sources: American Community Survey 5-Year Data, 2021 & Decennial Census, 2000.

2 Source: Chapter 40B Planning & Information, Subsidized Housing Inventory

Housing Goal 1

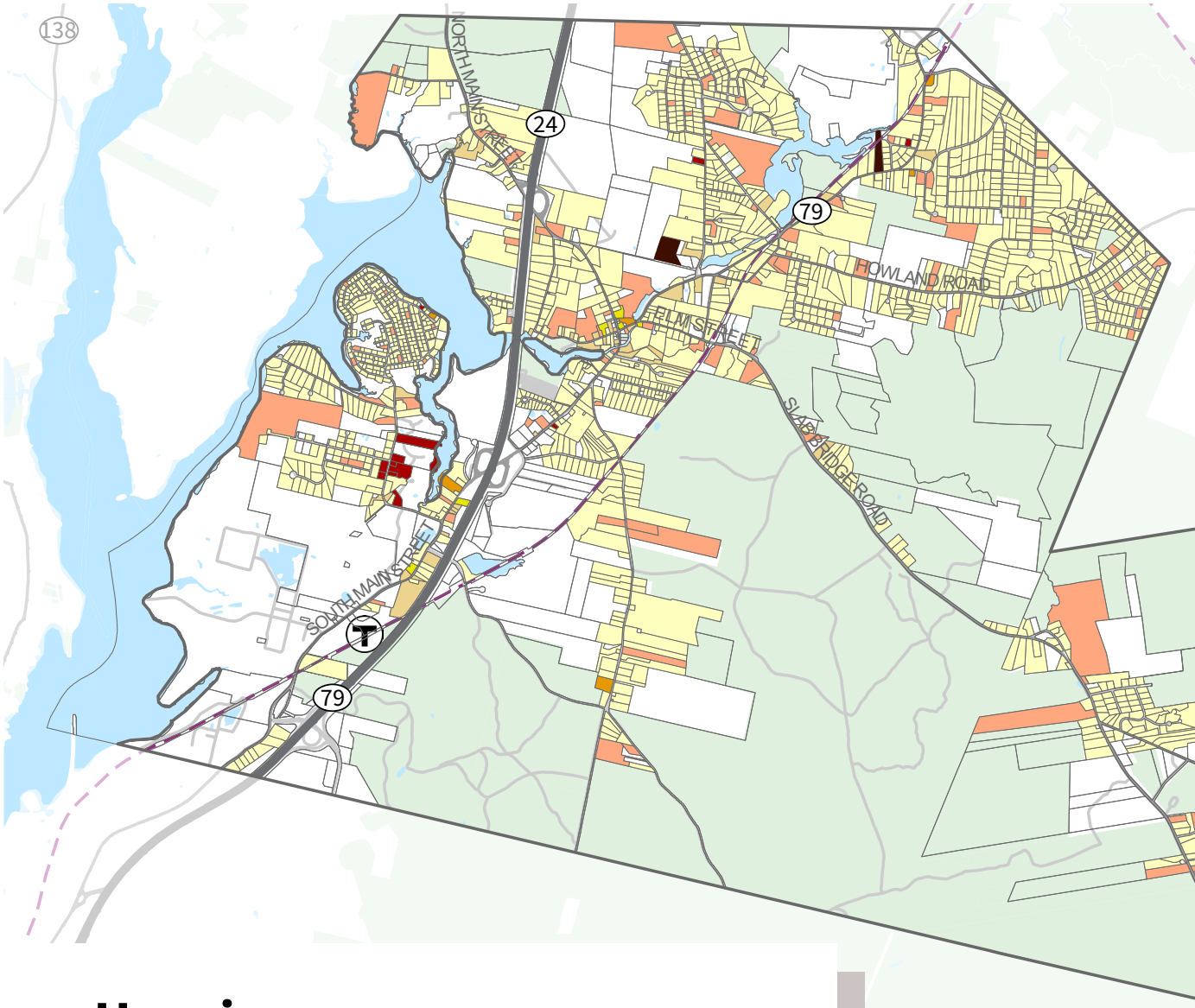
Produce a range of housing types that meet the needs of seniors, first-time homebuyers, families with children, and other household types.

H Strategy 1.1	Introduce more flexibility to the Adult Retirement Community (ARC) by-law to expand housing options for seniors.
H Strategy 1.2	Explore creative zoning and development approaches in strategic locations to build a range of market-rate, "missing middle" housing to meet the demands of young families, the senior population, and first-time homebuyers.
H Strategy 1.3	Meet or exceed new Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) standards in the Commonwealth's 2024 Affordable Homes Act (AHA).

Housing Goal 2

Create more affordable, income-restricted housing that maximizes access to services and minimizes impacts on the environment and existing neighborhoods.

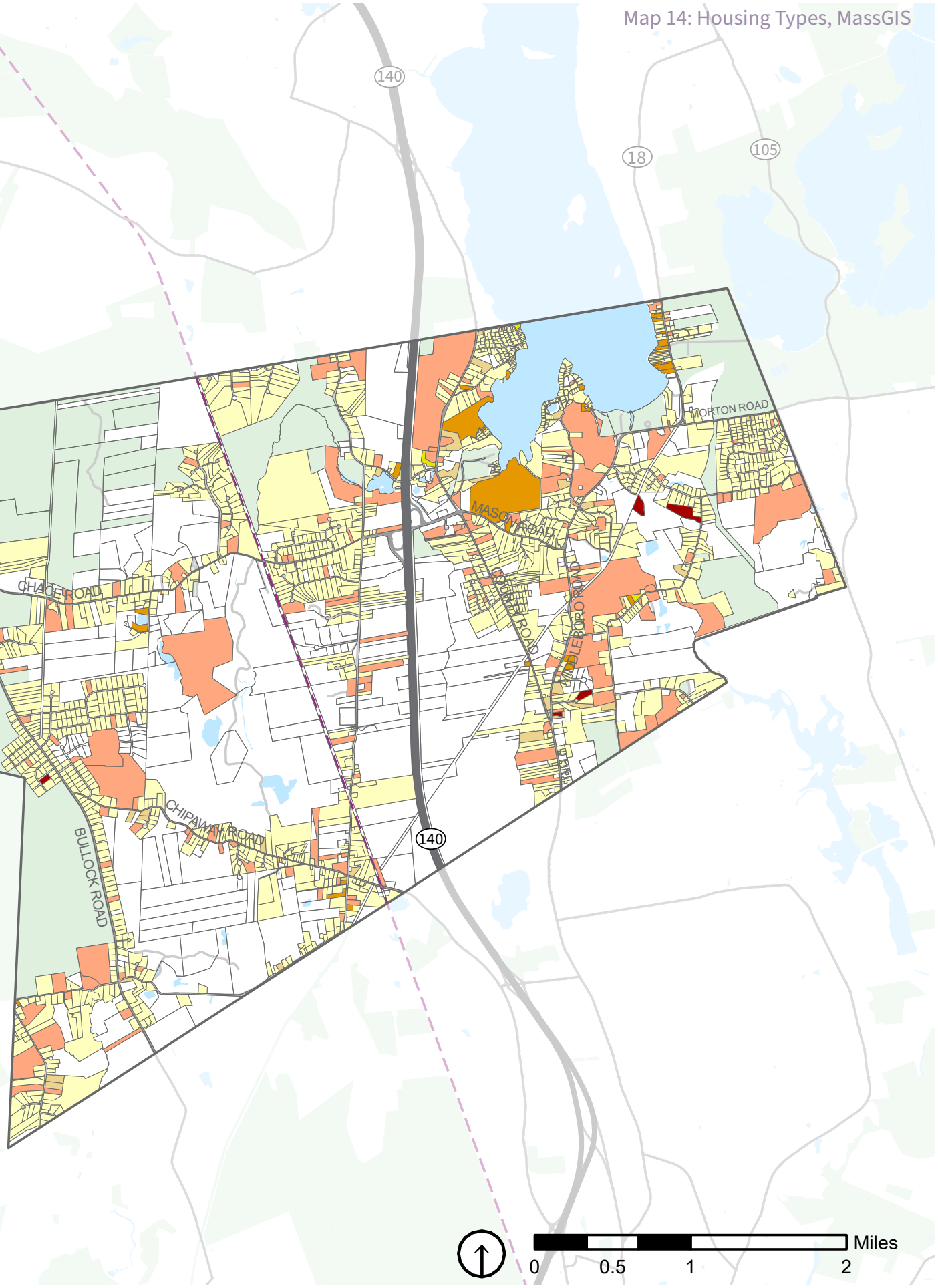
H Strategy 2.1	Update Freetown's 2017 Housing Production Plan.
H Strategy 2.2	Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the construction of affordable housing for seniors, near existing amenities, such as Porter Pasture and Hilltop Park.
H Strategy 2.3	Work with the Freetown Housing Authority to become more active in affordable housing advocacy and other activities.



Housing

- Single Family Residential
- Two-Family Residential
- Three-Family Residential
- Multiple Houses on one parcel
- Apartments and Condominiums
- Other Congregate Housing
- Mixed-Use some Residential

Map 14: Housing Types, MassGIS



Strategy 1.1 Introduce more flexibility to the Adult Retirement Community (ARC) by-law to expand housing options for seniors.

Added to the zoning by-laws in 2009, the Town created the Adult Retirement Community (ARC) zoning by-law to provide alternative housing for residents 55 years and older, while at the same time encouraging a creative use of space in these communities. Though the ARC by-law was adopted to address the need for more senior housing in Freetown, it has not produced any development in the last 15 years. As the Town considers ways in which to increase housing diversity and the needs of a growing senior population, a reassessment of the ARC by-law could help Freetown meet these needs. An overview of the by-law reveals barriers that may prevent more frequent implementation, including minimum parcel sizes and eligible districts. To develop an ARC community in Freetown, the tract of land must be 10 acres and must be zoned for General Use or Residential, via special permit, to be allowable.

Identifying these barriers allows the Town to address the shortcomings of the by-law and ensure that it achieves the intended outcome–more diverse and easily-developable senior housing. The first step is working with Town Counsel and consulting partners in the development community to analyze similar successful by-laws (through a literature review) and evaluate Freetown's potential barriers to ARC developments. To further enhance the effectiveness of this by-law, the Town could also consider similar senior-housing strategies in nearby towns such as Marion, Carver, and Lakeville and incorporate useful elements.

Photo 32: Home in Assonet, SRPEDD

Priority: High - Immediate

Performance Measures:

- Complete collaborative assessment of ARC by-law.
- Propose changes through the Planning Board, conduct public outreach, and follow adoption procedures.

Complementary Strategy:

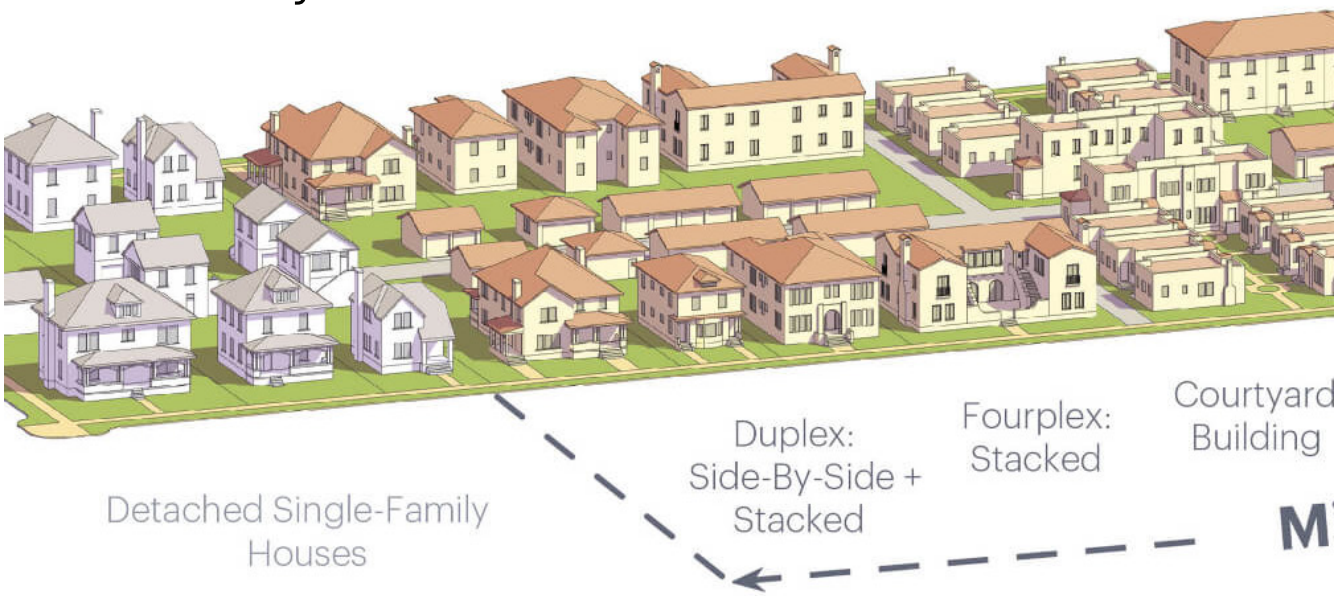
H 1.2: Explore creative zoning and development approaches in strategic locations to build a range of market-rate "missing middle" housing to meet the demands of young families, the senior population, and first-time homebuyers.

Responsible Parties: Planning Department, Planning Board, Town Counsel

Success Story: Numerous communities across the Commonwealth have effective senior housing by-laws that have lower barriers to participation; see Sudbury, MA.

Strategy 1.2

Explore creative zoning and development approaches in strategic locations to build a range of market-rate, "missing middle" housing to meet the demands of young families, the senior population, and first-time homebuyers.

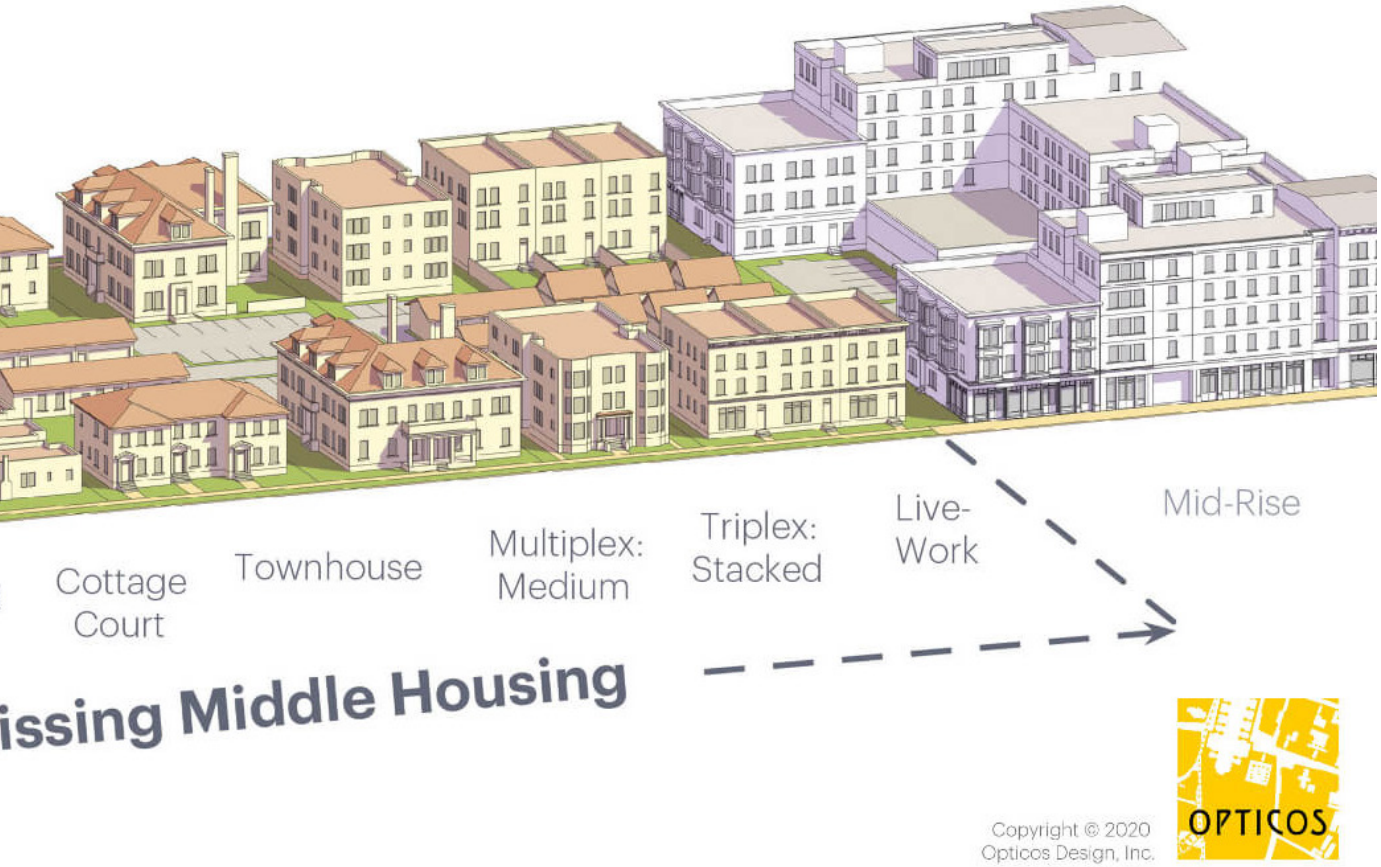


Zoning changes are one of the main tools available for increasing affordable housing production. Freetown can explore implementation of a variety of zoning changes in key locations designed to suit residents' needs, such as reducing lot size requirements, expanding allowed residential uses, and incorporating mechanisms to produce affordable units on town land under the Chapter 40B Local Initiative Program. These changes will encourage smart growth, reduce barriers for accessory or multi-family units, and actively promote housing development for populations whose options may be limited (e.g., retirement-age residents, first-time homebuyers, low-income residents).

With enough outreach and subsequent buy-in, the Town could implement new zoning that allows for smaller-scale housing development. Freetown could modify their existing base zoning district to create a new residential zone in an appropriate location with reduced lot sizes (between 30,000 -40,000 s.f., as deemed appropriate by the Town), or allow for a broader mix of uses, including two- and three-family homes.

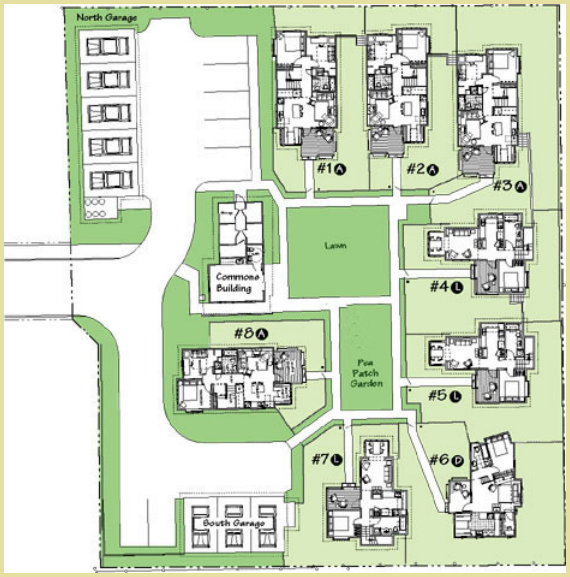
An OSRD would allow for more compact, "clustered" development within a subdivision rather than the typical grid pattern (which tends to promote deforestation and suburban sprawl). These clustered developments lower the cost of roads, municipal services, and infrastructure, while also preserving open space and natural resources. These by-laws can be written to include an affordability/inclusionary component as to produce new SHI-eligible housing

Figure 2: Missing Middle, Source: Opticos



Freetown could also examine the feasibility of creating a MGL c. 40Y Starter Home Zoning District (SHZD), which promotes the development of small single-family homes or accessory dwelling units (not exceeding 600 s.f.) on the same lot. SHZDs may not exceed 15% of a city of town's total land area, unless otherwise approved by the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). These districts allow single-family home development by-right at a density of no fewer than four (4) units per acre (approximately 10,000 s.f. in size). These districts have an inclusionary component, where, in developments of more than 12 starter homes, not less than 10% of the homes shall be affordable to and occupied by individuals and families whose annual income is less than 110% of the Area Median Income ($91,300 for a family of 4). This feature is highly suitable for Freetown when considering the prevalence of moderate- and high-income households in town. The SHZD must also incorporate sustainable development standards; the siting of the district would likely have to be paired with an assessment of infrastructure capacity, including the need for septic versus sewer (which is not currently serviced in town).

Success Story: Built in 2001 in Shoreline, WA, the Greenwood Avenue Cottages make up a pocket neighboord and contain 8 cottages in a 0.9 acre site. The 2 and 3 bedroom cottages are all less than 1000 square feet. They share amenities, such as a community building, lawn, community garden, and 15 off street parking spaces.



It is worth noting that, thanks to recent amendments to the M.G.L. c. 40A § 5 (commonly known as the Zoning Act), the process for amending or adopting certain kinds of zoning that produces more housing has been simplified by reducing the required Town Meeting vote from a two-thirds supermajority to a simple majority. This important change can contribute to the Town's implementation of many of the above zoning-related strategies.

Priority: Low - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Identify desirable areas and possible creative mechanisms to produce more housing types.
- Planner and associated staff identify case studies and scenarios for sample lots and potential zoning changes.
- Draft and present preferred amendments to the zoning by-law, conduct public outreach, and follow adoption procedures.

Complementary Strategies:

OSR 1.1: Continue to protect open space through using innovative best practices, such as the adoption of an Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) by-law.

H 2.1: Update Freetown's 2017 Housing Production Plan.

Responsible Parties: Planning Board, Select Board, and Town Planner

Success Story: The Town of Middleborough recently adopted a new 40R zoning overlay district consisting of two sub-districts within their downtown. Through thoughtful planning and the creation of design guidelines, the new zoning will directly contribute to Middleborough's SHI while producing housing and commercial development that is consistent with its traditional Downtown.

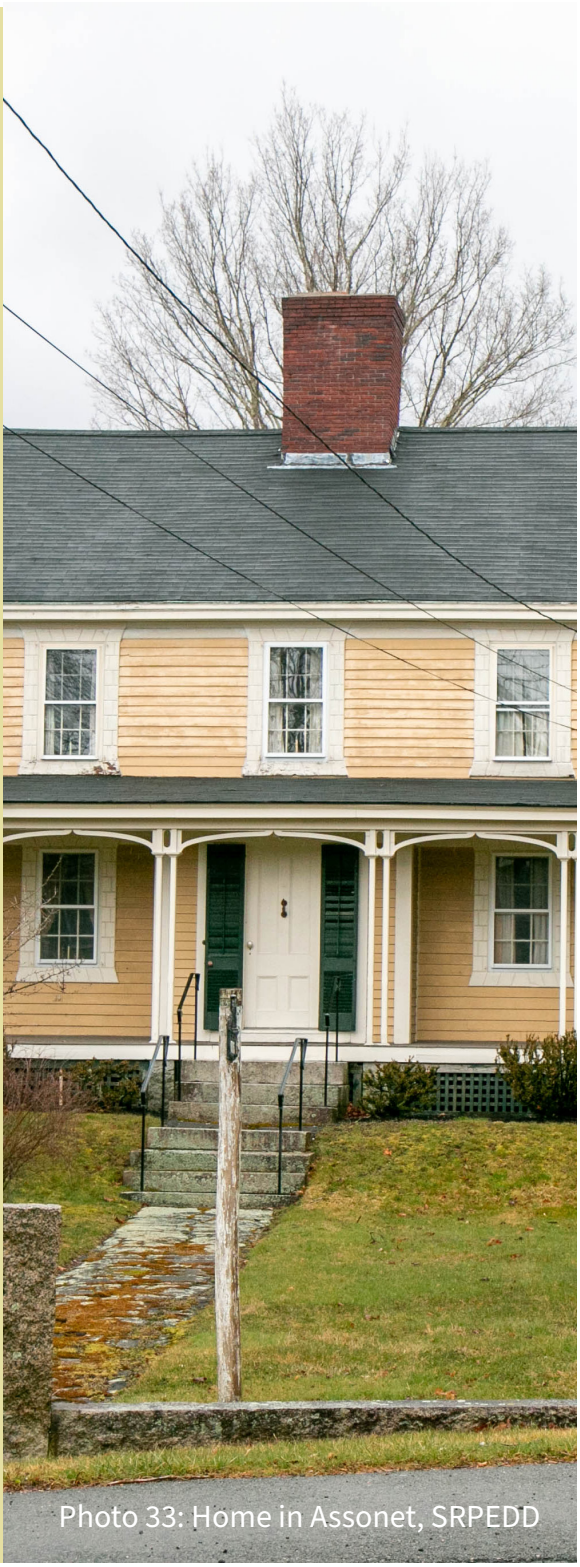


Photo 33: Home in Assonet, SRPEDD

Strategy 1.3 Meet or exceed new Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) standards in the Commonwealth's 2024 Affordable Homes Act (AHA).

An ADU is a smaller, secondary house or apartment that shares the lot with a larger, primary house. Some ADUs are stand-alone, meaning that they are built in the rear yard or above an existing outbuilding, such as a garage. Some ADUs are built in rear additions, attics, or the existing building area of a larger home. ADUs are useful for older households who do not need as much space but would benefit from additional income.

Currently, ADUs or "accessory apartments" are only allowed in Freetown by special permit. However, effective in February of 2025, ADUs will be considered a by-right use in every single-family zoning district across the Commonwealth due to the Healy-Driscoll Administration's new Affordable Homes Act (AHA). According to the Fall issue of the Massachusetts's Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA)'s Massachusetts Planning Journal:

"The most significant change is the Zoning Act amendment that makes Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) available as-of-right in every single-family zoning district throughout the Commonwealth. In February 2025 when the ADU provisions take effect, property owners will be able to apply for a building permit to create an ADU on the same lot as a single-family home. The AHA limits as-of-right ADUs to the lesser of 900 square feet or 50 percent of the floor area of the single-family home, but communities also set reasonable restrictions on size, bulk, height, and setbacks, and subject ADUs to site plan approval. More than one ADU on a single-family property requires a special permit. Finally, communities cannot require more than one parking space for an ADU or any additional parking for an ADU within a half mile of public transportation." [1]

Additionally, any potential updated Housing Production Plan (HPP, see Housing Strategy 2.1) could examine how many accessory apartments currently exist and evaluate appropriate regulations and design guidelines to help Freetown navigate the AHA.

Note: Affordable, income-restricted housing is subsidized and deed restricted. Housing that is affordable to a family is generally defined as costing less than 30% of a household's income.

1 "The Affordable Homes Act," Massachusetts Planning, 3, https://www.apa-ma.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/MA-Planning-F24-1.pdf.

Priority: Low-Immediate

Performance Measures:

- Work to adopt reasonable standards for ADUs; consider basing standards on real-world ADU examples in Freetown or the neighboring communities.
- Draft and present preferred amendments to the zoning by-law, conduct public outreach, and follow adoption procedures.

Complementary Strategy:

H 1.2: Explore creative zoning and development approaches in strategic locations to build a range of market-rate "missing middle" housing to meet the demands of young families, the senior population, and first-time homebuyers.

Responsible Parties: Town Planner, Planning Board

Photo 34: ADU, Source: Nick Wagner

Strategy 2.1 Update Freetown's 2017 Housing Production Plan.

Freetown's most recently completed Housing Production Plan (HPP) was produced in 2017; however, the Town never formally submitted the document for State approval, and given its age (HPPs expire after 5 years), Freetown may consider creating a new one.

An HPP is a municipal planning document that:

1. identifies a town's housing needs by conducting a thorough data survey and recognizing potential barriers to housing production;
2. Creates goals for housing based on those needs; and
3. Presents a Town's plan to meet those goals in a manner consistent with Chapter 40B and 760 CMR 56.00 regulations.

By taking a proactive approach to housing production, towns are much more likely to achieve both their housing and community planning goals. Moreover, HPPs give communities that are under the 10% affordable housing threshold of Chapter 40B more control over comprehensive permit applications. This increased control and participation is particularly important for communities such as Freetown, where the share of affordable housing as a percentage of year-round housing units is well below 10%.

Finally, HPPs require that communities create an Action Map of municipally owned (for example, properties taken through tax title) land that is appropriate for affordable housing. Freetown can consider conducting a Vacant and Underutilized Property Survey to determine various distressed properties throughout town– particularly tax title properties in residential neighborhoods. The Town can dispose of such property through a negotiated sale or an RFP, which allows the Town to control future use of the property, including designating the property for the creation of affordable housing with partners, such as Habitat for Humanity.

Priority: High-Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Secure grant funding and update the HPP, ensuring it is submitted to EOHLC for approval.
- Implement the HPP with partners.

Complementary Strategies:

H 1.2: Explore creative zoning and development approaches in strategic locations to build a range of market-rate "missing middle" housing to meet the demands of young families, the senior population, and first-time homebuyers.

H 2.5: Work with the Freetown Housing Authority to become more active in affordable housing advocacy and other activities.

LU 2.1: Develop an Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) by-law to preserve natural environments while producing housing.

Responsible Parties: Planning Board, Town Planner, Freetown Housing Authority

Success Story: In the SRPEDD region, there are 12 communities that have either completed an approved HPP or are in the process of doing so, as of the date of this plan.[1]

1 Housing Production Plans," SRPEDD, https://srpedd.org/comprehensive-planning/housing-community-development/housing-production-plans/.

Photo 35: Housing on the Taunton River, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Strategy 2.2 Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the construction of affordable housing for seniors, near existing amenities, such as Porter Pasture and Hilltop Park.

At least 10% of local Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds must be spent to support affordable housing. Strategies range from subsidizing the development of new affordable housing, extending the affordability of existing affordable housing, and providing housing financial support to seniors, such as acquiring their homes and placing them in a housing trust as permanently affordable housing.

For detailed information on implementation, see Open Space Strategy 1.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the acquisition of open space and community development projects, where program participation is described in full.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Publicize and hold several informal public information meetings about CPA adoption. The Town can partner with SRPEDD to create CPA adoption information materials.
- Adopt the CPA.

Complementary Strategies:

NCR 2.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund preservation efforts of historic buildings.

OSR 1.2: Adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) to fund the acquisition of open space and community development projects.

Responsible Parties: Select Board, Conservation Commission, Local champions, regional partners

Success Story: Numerous cities and towns in the region and across Massachusetts have adopted CPA and pursued CPA projects in their communities. [1]

1 CPA State Map, Community Preservation Coalition, https://www.communitypreservation.org/map.

Strategy 2.3 Work with the Freetown Housing Authority to become more active in affordable housing advocacy and other activities.

The Freetown Housing Authority represents a great opportunity for the Town to expand affordable housing advocacy work. The Freetown Housing Authority was established in 2011; however, it has not been active for several years. The Town could revitalize the Housing Authority by appointing local champions to help facilitate public outreach and advocacy, and by reestablishing regular meetings of the Housing Authority Board.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Work to reinvigorate the Town's existing Housing Authority.

Complementary Strategy:

H 2.1: Update Freetown's 2017 Housing Production Plan.

Responsible Parties: Freetown Housing Authority, Planning Department

Photo 36: Intersection of Rt 79, Elm St & Water St, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Land Use

Encourage development that helps Freetown to grow as a vibrant and recognizable place, while continuing to protect Freetown's natural and cultural resources and neighborhoods.

Freetown's primary active land uses are residences with large amounts of open space. The community is also home to a few mixed-use nodes and commercial corridors, including on South Main Street and County Road. Larger commercial and industrial sites are interspersed throughout the town, particularly close to its borders or along major roadways, such as those seen on the Fall River border with Assonet.

Freetown's most recent population "growth spurt" occurred in the 2000s with a 5% increase between 2000 and 2010.[1] Afterwards, Freetown has steadily grown at a rate comparable to other small towns in the region, such as neighboring Berkley and Acushnet. In contrast, Freetown has seen a 5% decline in job creation from 2010-2020, which differs from the rest of the region and State.[2]

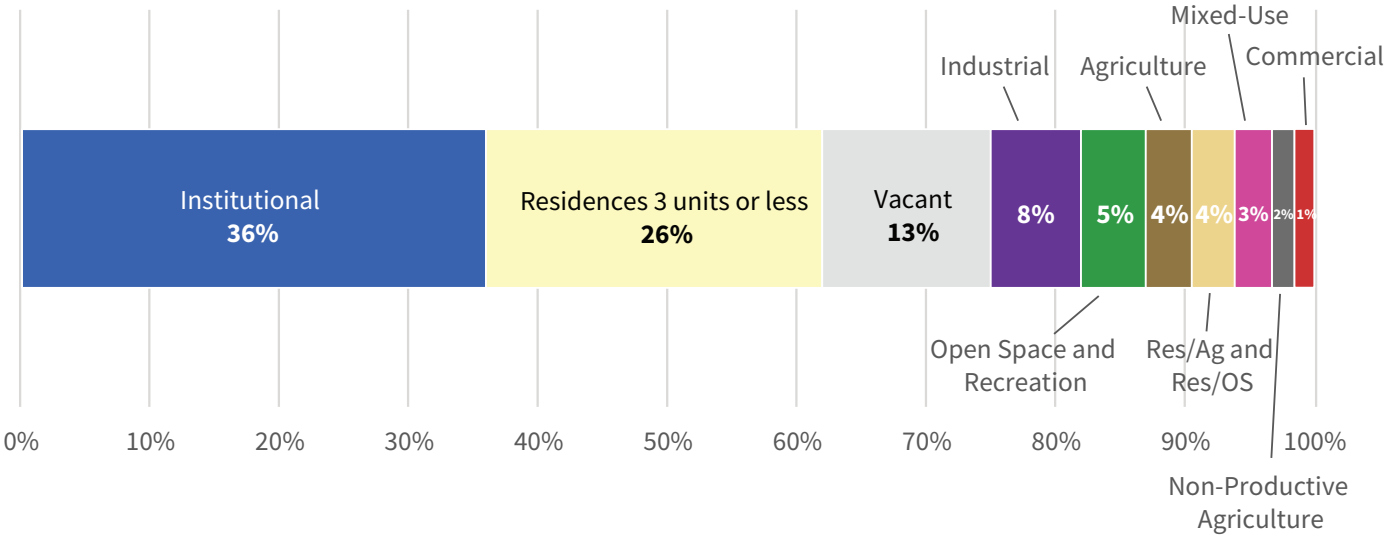
1 Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1990-2020

2 Source: Department of Economic Research, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Employment and Wage Industry Data 2010-2020.

Figure 3: Land Use, MassGIS

Freetown has significant portions of Institutional and Vacant Land

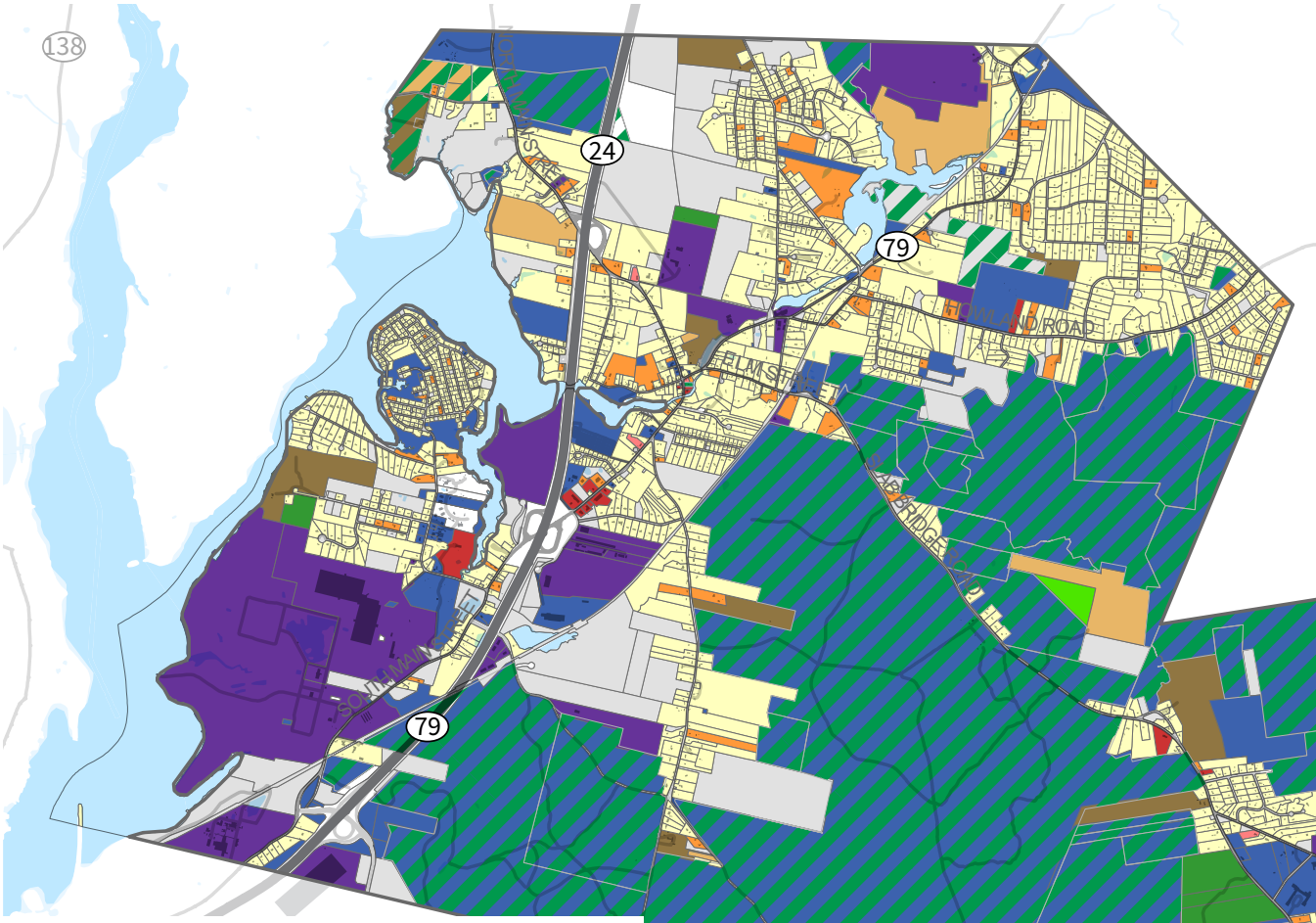
It also posses zero office space land use, and little transportation



The Town's Zoning Bylaws regulates the use and development of land in Freetown. Freetown established its first zoning code in 1975 and last updated it in 2020. Recent changes included amendments to the use table, and the removal of density and dimensional requirements from the Planned Mixed-Use Overly District (PMUD).

Freetown's Zoning also incorporates modern zoning policies and best practices, such as an Adult Retirement Community bylaw. However, much of Freetown's Zoning follows typical suburban-style zoning code, calling for medium-sized minimum lots[1], large setbacks, and high parking requirements. While these policies were intended to protect Freetown's character, such policies can often encourage the loss of green open spaces and increased reliance on driving while discouraging a compact, walkable, and vibrant town center.

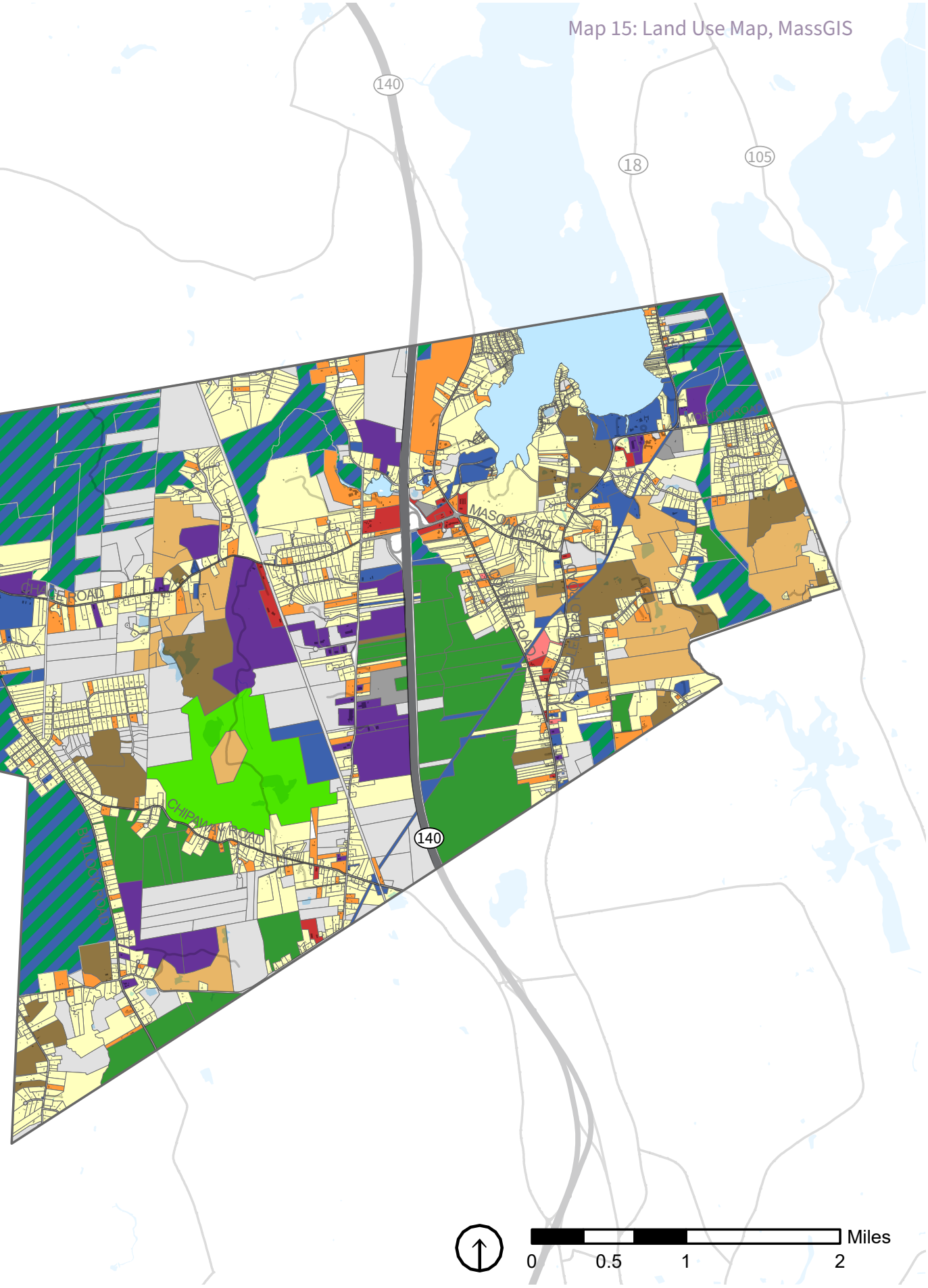
1 Freetown's suburban-style 70,000 s.f. (roughly 1.6 acre) minimum residential lot requirement has resulted in the conversion of significant areas of forests, farmlands, and open fields for every unit of housing. Extremely large lot sizes (over 5 acres per housing unit) in preservation or agricultural districts or significantly smaller lots sizes combined with accompanying conservation design strategies, such as "cluster bylaws," can reduce conversion of natural areas into suburban areas.



Land Use

- Res/Ag and Res/OS
- Residences ≤ 3 units
- Residential Condos
- Apartments ≥ 4 Units
- Moblie Homes
- Multiple Uses
- Office
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Open Space (Instiutional)
- Institutional
- Agricultural
- Open Space / Recreational / Conservation
- Utility and Transportation
- Vacant
- No Data
- Water

Map 15: Land Use Map, MassGIS



Land Use Goal 1

Focus activity to appropriate areas that are compatible with Freetown's small-town character.

Land Use Strategy 1.1	Pursue commercial growth in existing Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and appropriate business and industrial zones.
Land Use Strategy 1.2	Pursue the creation of a Civic Center that provides key services and community space that unites the town.
Land Use Strategy 1.3	Work with residents, local and state officials, and Town Counsel to find a compromise solution to meet the requirements of Section 3A of Chapter 40A.

Land Use Goal 2

Protect Freetown's small town character by preserving open space while allowing for modest growth in appropriate parts of town.

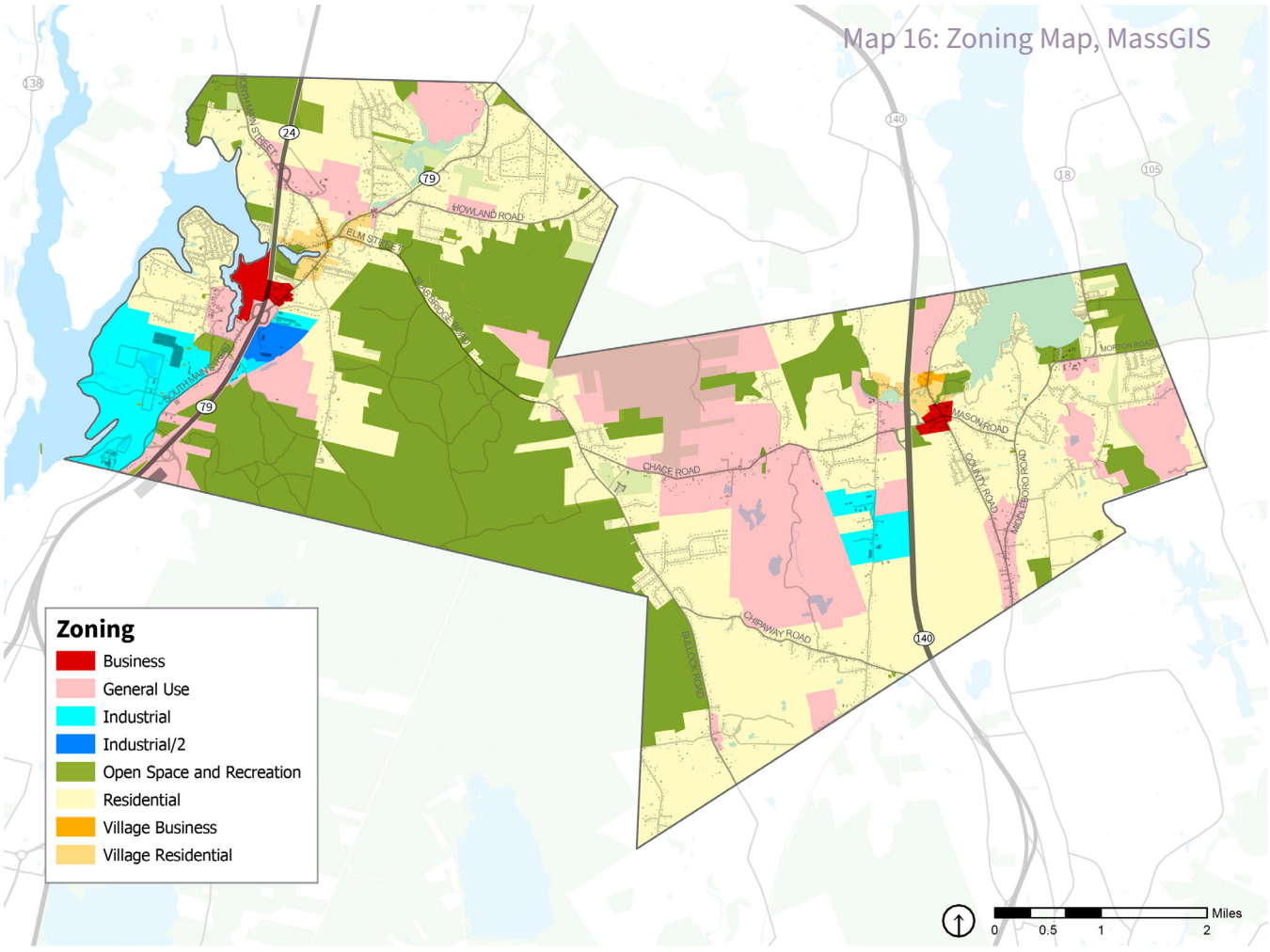
Land Use Strategy 2.1	Develop an Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) bylaw to preserve natural environments while producing housing.
Land Use Strategy 2.2	Reevaluate minimum lot size and frontage requirements for housing typologies in the General zoning districts, such as duplexes.
Land Use Strategy 2.3	Update the Town's Sign Bylaw to encourage signage that complements the rural, historical, and natural characteristics of Freetown and is "content neutral."
Land Use Strategy 2.4	Reconcile instances of split-zoned lots and non-conforming uses by completing zoning studies and adopting necessary amendments.

Strategy 1.1 Pursue commercial growth in existing Priority Development Areas (PDA's) and appropriate business and industrial zones.

Through its existing zoning, Freetown continues to enable new business and development opportunities in town; these include areas designated as Priority Development Areas (PDAs) in 2008, 2013, and again in the 2024 update to the Town's Priority Area Report. All current PDAs correspond identically to Freetown's Business, Industrial, Industrial 2, or Planned Mixed-Use Development (PMUD) Zoning Districts. This Master Plan continues to highlight these locations as the areas where the Town, through its long-range planning and day-to-day land use permitting procedures, would like to see further economic development.

For detailed implementation information, please see Economic Development Strategy 1.1.

Map 16: Zoning Map, MassGIS



Strategy 1.2 Pursue the creation of a Civic Center that provides key services and community space that unites the town.

Although Freetown has several core areas, there is no shared center for municipal services between Assonet and East Freetown. According to survey results and workshop comments, Town-wide services are viewed favorably by residents, business owners, and staff; however, there is a difference in the perception in Town owned facilities. Geographically, many Town-owned facilities are scattered throughout the community, which makes them difficult to reach for residents living in further areas of town, especially if they do not have access to a car. Major facilities, such as Town Hall and Guilford H. Hathaway Library, are located in Assonet. This is a fair distance from residents in East Freetown, and likewise for Assonet residents with the James White Memorial Library in East Freetown. Luckily, the Town has already begun to undertake plans to consolidate their Town-owned facilities into a centralized location that is accessible for the residents of both Assonet and East Freetown.

The first step of this process was to bring the shared Public Safety building to an area more geographically central in town where the Council on Aging (COA), Fire Department Headquarters, Freetown Elementary School, and the Highway Departments are already located. The Town is also actively planning to build a combined modern COA and Library facility in the vicinity of these already existing facilities. To help further solidify this area as a hub of community facilities, the Town should continue this process of creating a central "Civic Center" to meet the needs of residents and business owners; the next step of this process would be to conduct a Feasibility Study and Alternatives Analysis for building a new Town Hall facility at the geographical center of Town. The Town already owns a sizeable amount of land in the area, (roughly 306 acres) which will facilitate the selection of viable sites. Once an appropriate site is selected, the Town may actively pursue capital improvement and grant funding to construct these facilities in concert with the nearby State Forest and other recreational activities.

Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Partner with an area engineering, planning, or architecture consultant to conduct a Feasibility Study and Alternatives Analysis for the new Town Hall and Civic Center, ensuring that the study includes key cost estimates.
- Develop a financing and grant-funding menu for the Feasibility Study and Alternatives Analysis's preferred alternative.

Complementary Strategy:

SF 1.1: Create a Civic Center (or Municipal Campus) in the geographic center of Freetown.

Responsible Parties: Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Planning Board, Town Planner

Photo 37: Police Station, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Strategy 1.3 Work with residents, local and state officials, and Town Counsel to find a compromise solution to meet the requirements of Section 3A of Chapter 40A.

As the host of a new MBTA Commuter Rail station, Freetown has an obligation to comply with the new Section 3A requirements of M.G.L. c. 40A. This new state legislation dates from the Baker-Polito Administration's 2021 Economic Development Bill. Section 3A provides that "an MBTA community shall have a zoning ordinance or by-law that provides for at least 1 district of reasonable size in which multi-family housing is permitted as of right." A compliant zone will also allow:

- 15 units per acre of gross density;
- Have 50 acres of contiguous spaces and no location requirements regarding proximity to a station or transit. District can be non-contiguous if at least one sub-district is 51% of the acreage requirement (for adjacent communities); and
- Families and children (i.e. the zone cannot have age restrictions). [1]

Because of this law and state regulations, Freetown has until December 31, 2024, to submit a Section 3A compliant district to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) for review.

The Commonwealth's Section 3A Multifamily requirements do not mandate housing production; rather, they require MBTA communities to provide a zoning district that meets its guidelines. A community could have zero units be built and be fully compliant, as long as it has a district that allows new units to be built. Non-compliant communities would lose access to state grants.

The Town is currently considering pursuing an amended overlay district that would cover the area around South Main Street, adjacent to the new MBTA station. This overlay district is currently called the Planned Mixed-Use Development Overlay District or PMUD.[2]

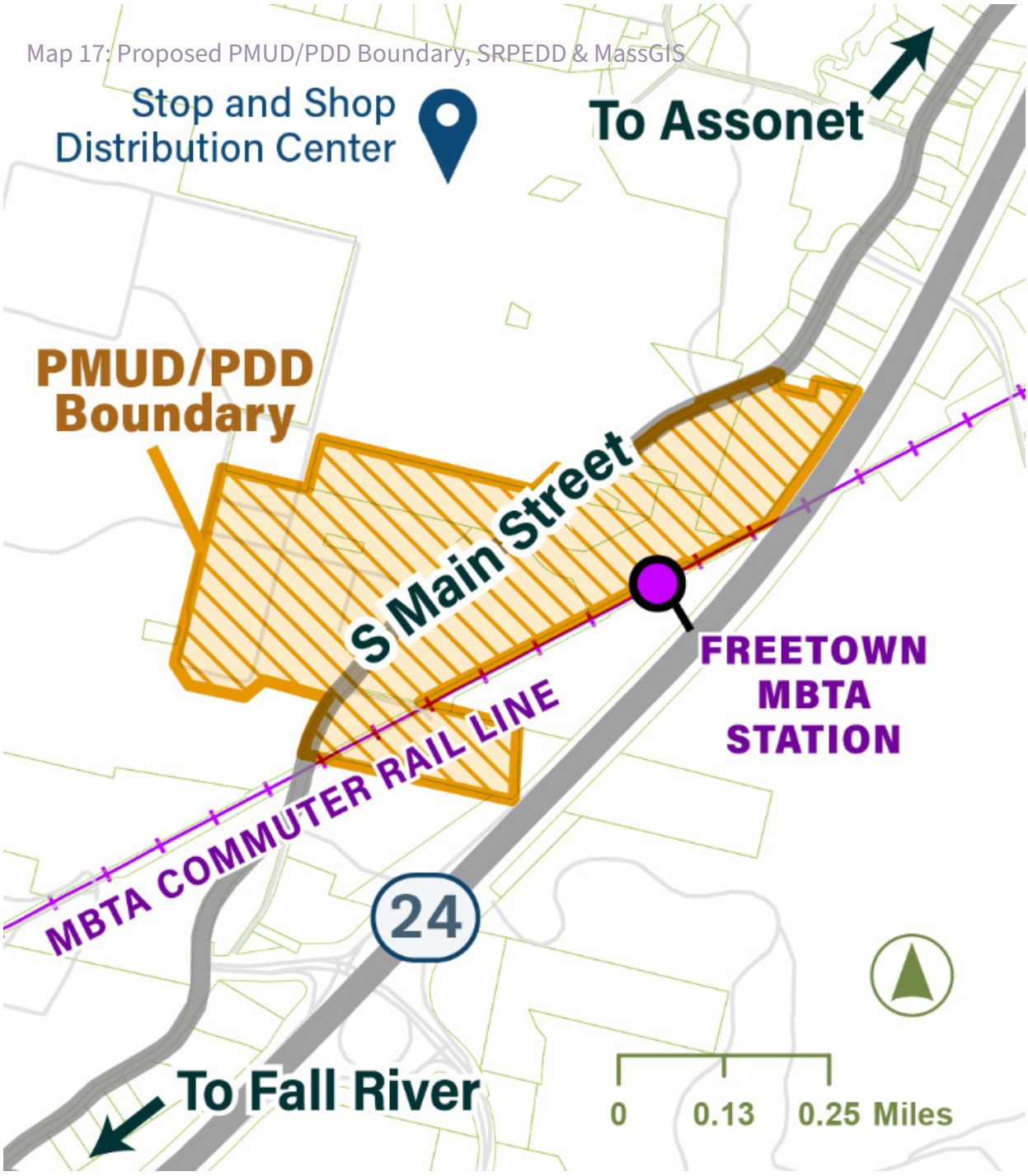
The area under consideration is mainly vacant with some residential properties, and its proximity to the new commuter rail station makes it an ideal candidate for district compliance.

While the zoning cannot have age restrictions, the Town can still incentivize the creation of senior- friendly housing by allowing a density bonus or through active advocacy (e.g., requiring more accessible units in exchange for certain dimensional flexibility).

1 MBTA Communities Act, M.G.L c. 40A § 3A

2 Please note that the Spring 2024 Town Meeting rejected a proposed Section 3A-compliant overlay, the Planned Development District (PDD), which would have replaced the PMUD. For more information, please see the June 3, 2024, Town Meeting Warrant.

Map 17: Proposed PMUD/PDD Boundary, SRPEDD & MassGIS



Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- In the event of confirmed and continued 3A obligations, pursue necessary modifications to the Town's zoning to achieve 3A compliance.

Responsible Parties: Planning and Development, Planning Board, Selectboard

Strategy 2.1 Develop an Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) bylaw to preserve natural environments while producing housing.

OSRD by-laws, also known as "cluster" by-laws, are a common method of balancing growth and land conservation–one of the main goals identified in the Master Plan public process. Numerous communities have OSRD by-laws that are, in essence, a simple method of planning residential growth that conserves more open space in a new subdivision. Typically, these subdivisions include the same number of homes as a conventional subdivision would. However, through compact site design and efficient infrastructure construction (e.g. roadways and stormwater/water/wastewater management), OSRD developments distribute those units over less land area. The remaining undisturbed land area is conserved in perpetuity for conservation, open space, or agricultural uses.

In short, OSRD is a method of planning residential development that conserves open space in a new subdivision. The same number of homes as would be permissible in a conventionally zoned subdivision are allowed using OSRD. Municipalities using a "Special Permit" version of OSRD can allow voluntary density bonuses if desired. [1]

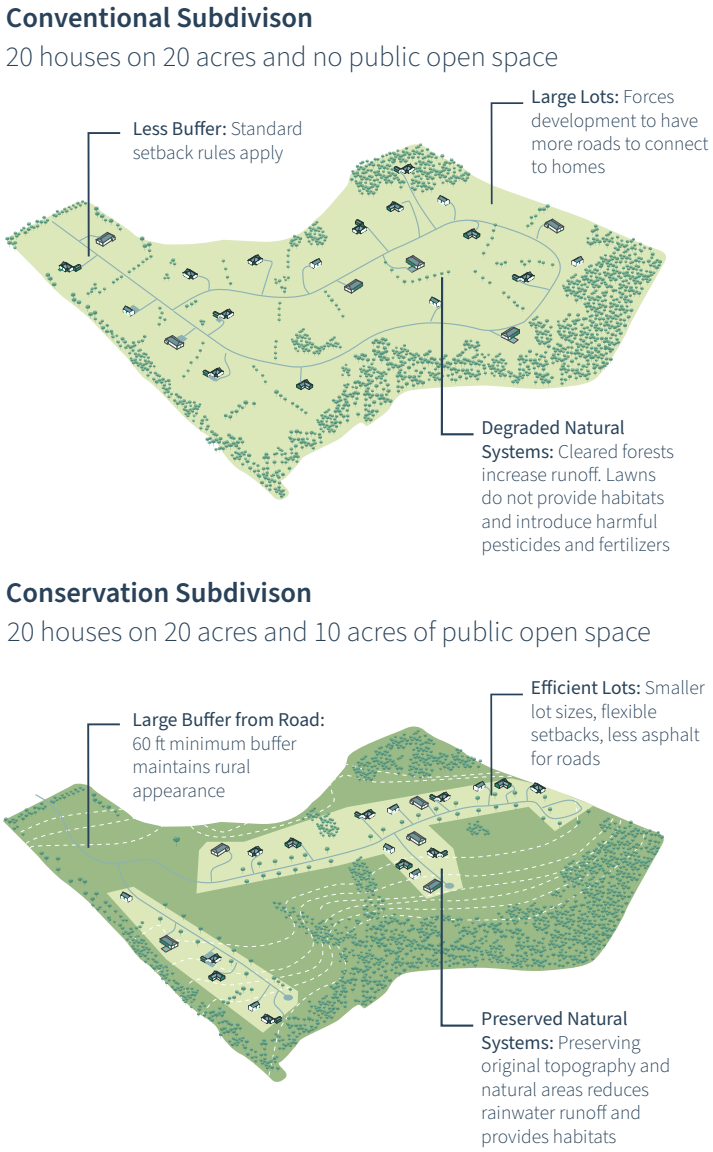


Figure 4: Conservation Subdivision, SRPEDD

1 "Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) Model Site Plan Review," Commonwealth of Massachusetts https://www.mass.gov/doc/open-space-residential-development-osrd-model-site-plan-bylaw/download.

Priority: High - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Identify desired standards for new by-law.
- Pass zoning by-law.

Complementary Strategy:

OSR 1.1: Continue to protect open space through innovative best practices, such as the adoption of an Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) by-law.

H 1.2: Explore creative zoning and development approaches in strategic locations to build a range of market-rate, "missing middle" housing to meet the demands of young families, the senior population, and first-time homebuyers.

H 2.1: Update Freetown's 2017 Housing Production Plan.

Complementary Plans:

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023: Protect critical vulnerable open space areas through various means, such as: outright land purchase, Conservation Restriction (CR), Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR), Deed Restrictions, Bequeathals.

Open Space and Recreation Plan 2023: Working collaboratively with the Planning and Zoning Boards to support recommendations for zoning changes that enhance open space protection.

Responsible Parties: Planning Board, Town Planner

Success Stories: Numerous communities across the Commonwealth have enacted OSRD by-laws, including Caldwell Farm, Newbury, MA; Old North Mill, Hopkinton, MA; Woodbury Ridge, Bellingham, MA

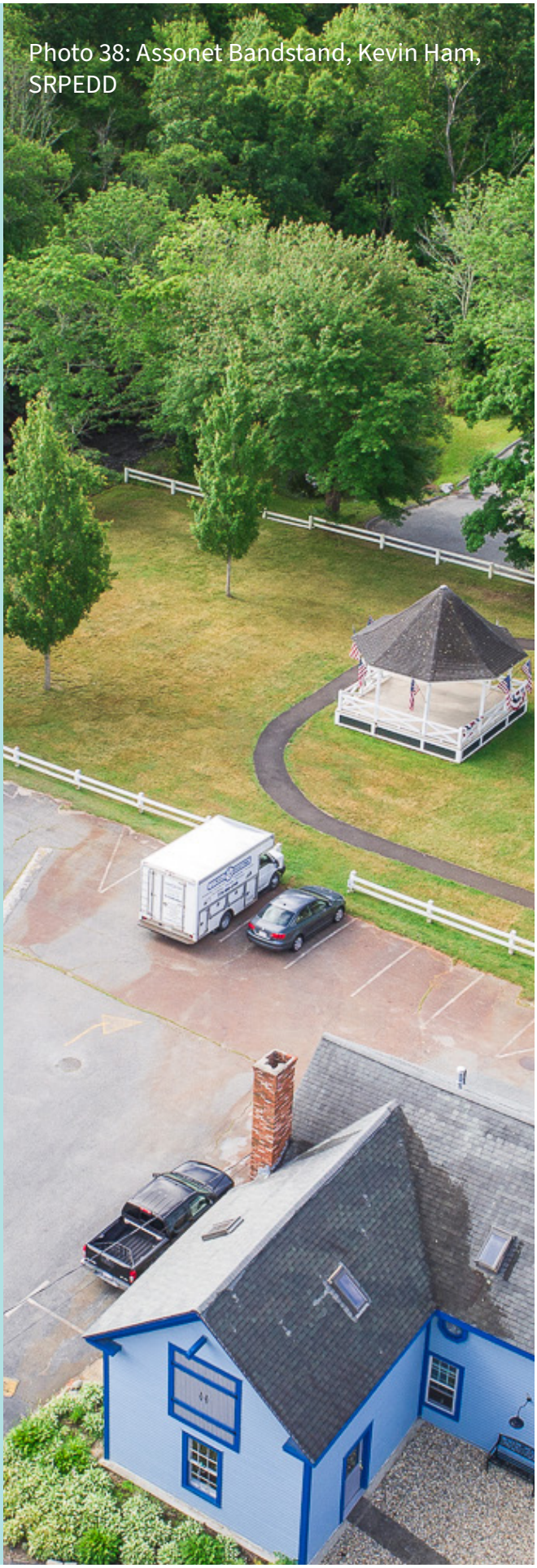


Photo 38: Assonet Bandstand, Kevin Ham, SRPEDD

Strategy 2.2 Reevaluate minimum lot size and frontage requirements for housing typologies in the General zoning districts, such as duplexes.

The second largest zoning district (in terms of total land area) in Freetown is the General Use District; this zone enables a broad range of uses, including single-family homes, business activities, and duplexes. The General Use District restricts lot sizes to a minimum of 70,000 s.f. , or roughly 1.6 acres per home; for duplexes, this standard is increased by 40,000 s.f. to 110,000 s.f. total, or roughly 2.5 acres per duplex.

During the Master Plan process, Planning Board members requested that the town reevaluate its barriers to development–mainly the aforementioned minimum lot size requirement. The Town could conduct a study to explore the feasibility of reducing the minimum lot size requirements (and/or other dimensional requirements) for this use down to 1.6 acres or even 1 acre. The Town could also determine whether including improved language for site plan review and additional design guidelines[1] would be appropriate and feasible; these supporting procedures and documents would ensure that any new duplex developments align with the Town's desire to promulgate more housing while producing buildings that complement the Freetown's existing housing stock and rural character.

Priority: Medium - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Identify parcels that could be affected by these zoning amendments.
- Identify case studies and scenarios for sample lots and potential changes to dimensional regulations in the General Use zone.
- Draft and present preferred amendments to the zoning by-law, conduct public outreach, and follow adoption procedure.

Complementary Strategy:

H 1.2: Explore creative zoning and development approaches in strategic locations to build a range of market-rate, "missing middle" housing to meet the demands of young families, the senior population, and first-time homebuyers.

H 2.1: Update Freetown's 2017 Housing Production Plan.

Responsible Parties: Planning Board, Town Planner, and Zoning Board of Appeals

1 Many communities across the Commonwealth create design guidelines documents to illustrate desirable characteristics of development types in specific zones or specific areas. Planning Boards can include these images within their zoning or (more frequently and more flexible) in associated Planning Board Rules and Regulations (e.g., for Site Plan Review)

Strategy 2.3 Update the Town's Sign By-law to encourage signage that complements the rural, historical, and natural characteristics of Freetown and is "content neutral."

Zoning regulates many aspects of the signage that residents and business owners display on their properties. This part of a zoning by-law–regulations controlling signs can be found in several sections of Article 11.20–controls characteristics such as the size, shape, height, placement, number, and illumination of signs throughout a town or city. A thorough "sign by-law" also produces signs that are compatible with nearby land uses and protect the physical appearance of roadways and neighborhoods.

A modern sign by-law must also be consistent with the 2015 Reed v. Gilbert U.S. Supreme Court decision, which requires that sign by-laws be "content-neutral."[1] This means that a municipality's sign by-law can regulate physical characteristics of signs but cannot do so based on what they contain or who is posting them; for example, laws cannot discriminate between commercial or residential signage.

Freetown's signage regulations appear to be largely content-neutral; however, Town Counsel and the Planning Board may conduct a thorough analysis of Article 11.20 to ensure that the by-law does not risk challenge. During this review process, the Planning Board may consider consolidating all sign-related regulations into one section and simplifying some of its regulations. Some communities have also created simple design guidelines to illustrate allowed signage, embedding these images within their zoning or in associated Planning Board Rules and Regulations (e.g., for Site Plan Review). These minor edits and additions will not only help Freetown achieve consistent appearance and community development, but ensure residents and business-owners have equal, clear, content-neutral guidance for signs in town.

Priority: Low - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Review Article 11.20 for content neutrality and improvements.
- Draft and present preferred amendments to the zoning by-law, conduct public outreach, and follow adoption procedure.

Responsible Parties: Planning Department, Planning Board, Town Administrator, Town Counsel

Success Story: The Town of Reading, Massachusetts recently adopted a comprehensive sign by-law that includes detailed definitions, descriptions, and drawings of allowed signs. It is also consistent with the "content-neutral" requirement.

1 A current sign by-law needs to be consistent with the 2015 Reed v. Gilbert U.S. Supreme Court case, which required sign by-laws to be "content neutral." In other words, a municipality's sign by-law can regulate signage but cannot violate free speech by creating laws that discriminate between, for example, commercial or residential signage.

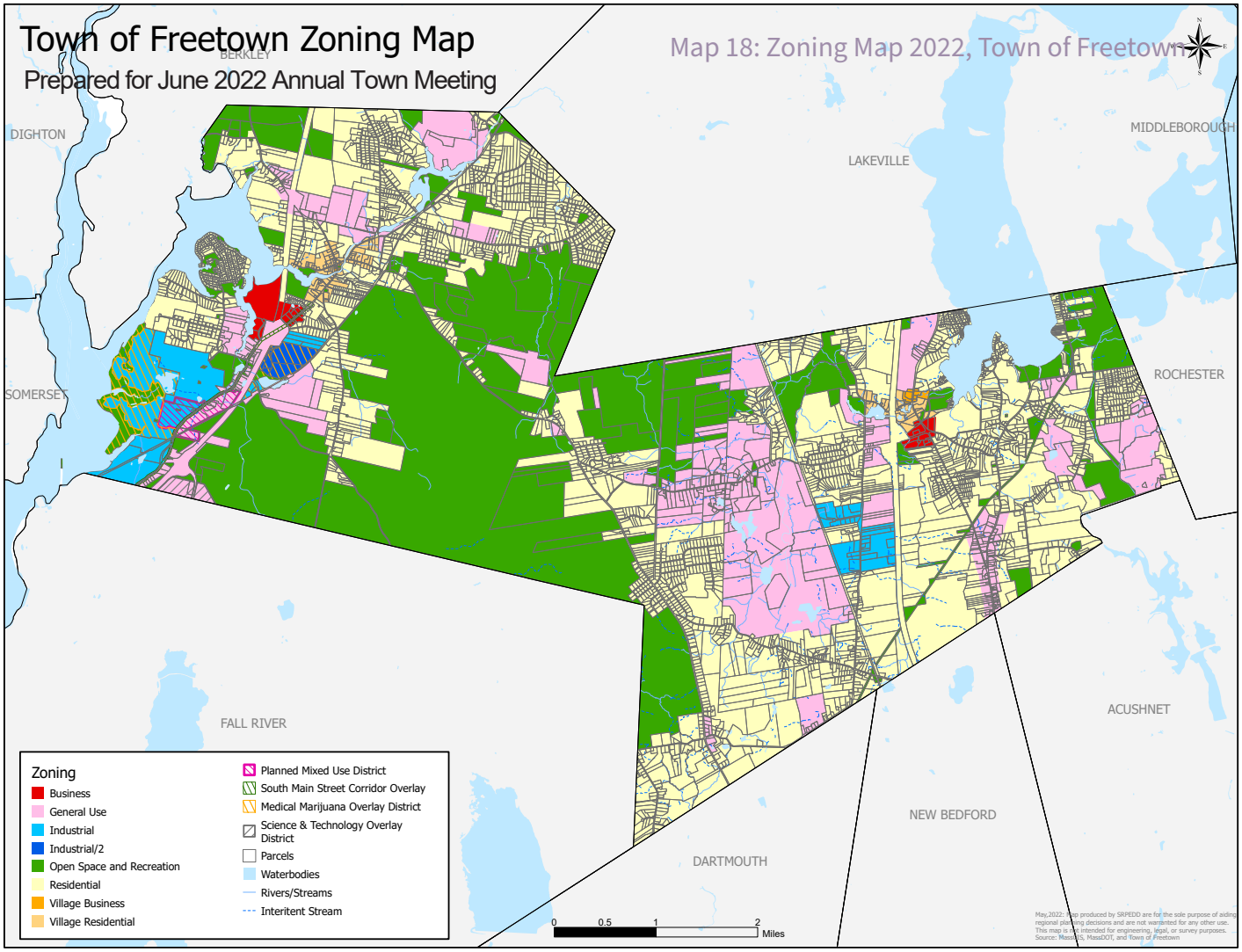
Strategy 2.4 Reconcile instances of split-zoned lots and non-conforming uses by completing zoning studies and adopting necessary amendments.

Split-zoned lots, as well as lots with non-conforming uses, present two related and common situations where property owners must navigate subtle, and sometimes unclear language in a Town's zoning code.

In an instance of Split-lot zoning, a single parcel may find itself located across two different zoning districts. For example, a portion of a parcel may be in a commercially zoned area and another portion in a residentially zoned area. This presents a complex and confusing process for most property owners, and it can generate conflicts with a location's current land-use context.

Similarly, non-conforming uses typically exist in instances where a property's current use was allowed at the time said use began, but the zoning code has since been changed, and no longer allows that use in the case of new construction or significant alterations. We often describe this, colloquially, as a 'grandfathered' property. While the zoning code may be legally straightforward in these instances, it may seem at odds with the land-use pattern in a certain location or community, leading to confusion for a current or prospective property owner.

Freetown is similar to many communities across the Commonwealth that have instances of both split-zone and non-conforming uses. In both cases, the Town could examine where its current zoning conflicts with local land-use patterns that already fit the desired direction for the town's development. Doing so will also streamline the development and permitting process, making decisions about a property easier to understand for current and future property owners.



Map 18: Zoning Map 2022, Town of Freetown

Priority: Low - Flexible

Performance Measures:

- Identify instances of split-zoned and non-conforming properties in Freetown.
- Identify solutions for these conflicts and propose appropriate amendments to the zoning by-law.
- Pass necessary amendments to the zoning by-law.

Complementary Strategy:

ED 1.2: Pursue commercial growth in existing Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and appropriate business and industrial zones.

Responsible Parties: Planning Board, Town Planner, and Zoning Board of Appeals

Photo 39: Assonet, SRPEDD