

Septic Suitability

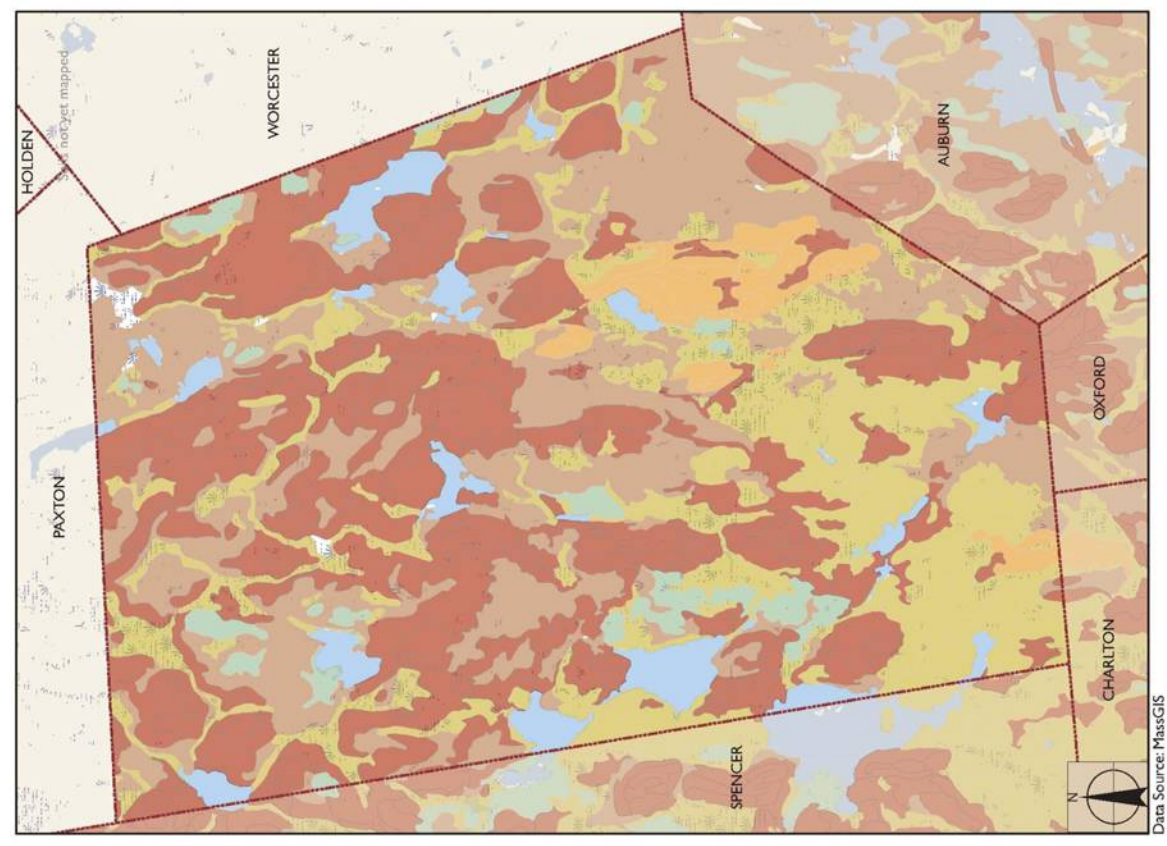
Severe limitations for septic systems occur on 55% of the land in Leicester, leaving only 45% unconstrained by septic limitations on development where leaching septic systems are used.

Areas of poor filter soils, high water table, and shallow depth-to-bedrock should be avoided when siting septic systems. Fertilizers and road salts also pose hazards to ground and surface water quality and should be avoided in these areas.

Areas unsuitable for development may be good places to consider for preservation of open space or development of recreational areas.

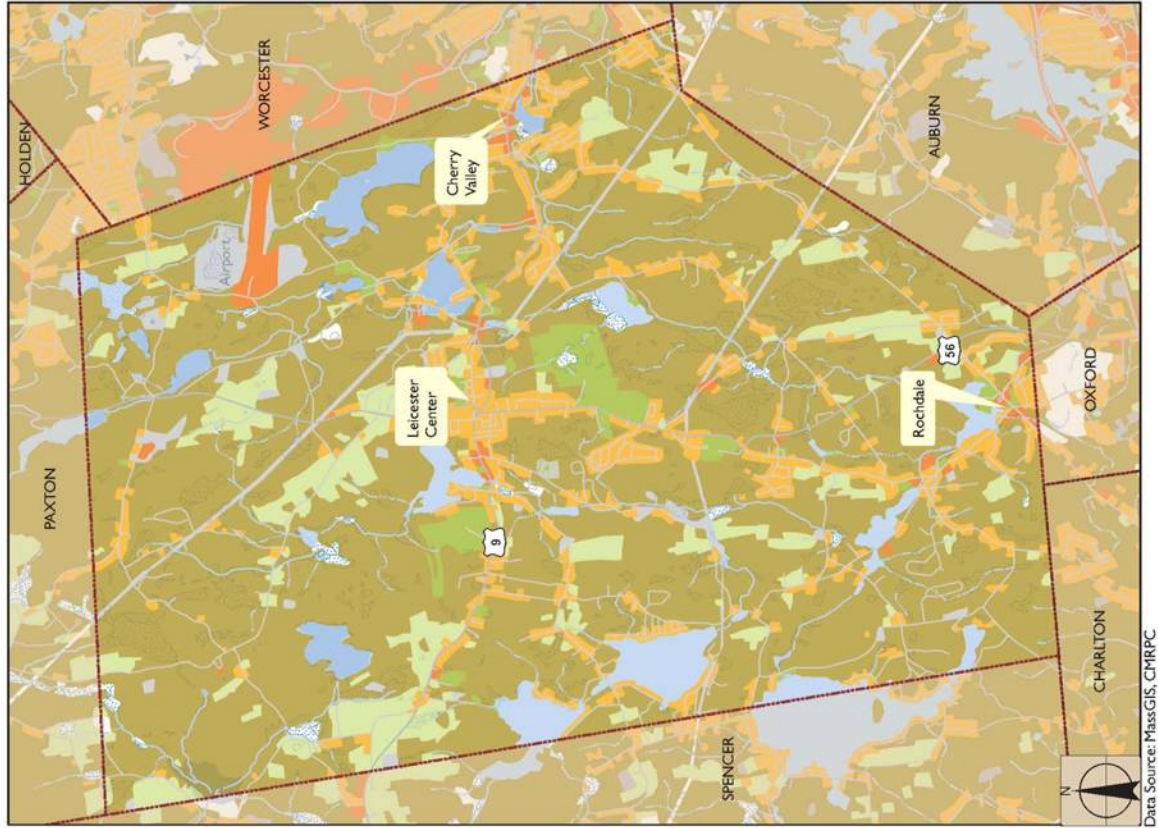
Leicester Open Space and Recreation Plan

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March 2007
Priscilla Miner and Annie Scott



Land Use

Developed land constitutes approximately 14% of Leicester, and is concentrated in the central and southern portions of town: most building has occurred along established roads. This pattern of development fragments open space, leaving large unbuilt areas behind developed frontage strips.



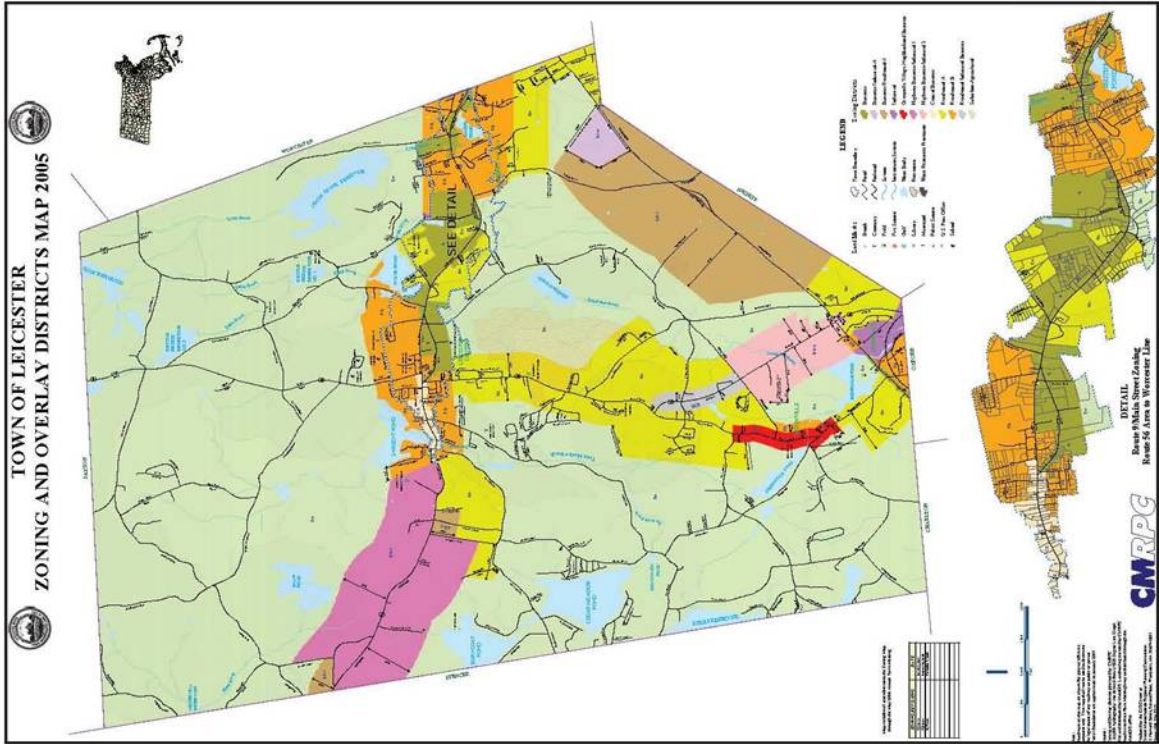
LEGEND

- Fields
- Forest
- Mining
- Recreation
- Residential
- Commercial/Industrial
- Water
- Marsh or Swamp



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Zoning

Ninety percent of Leicester can become residential land use according to current zoning laws. Approximately forty percent of the town lies within the Water Resource Protection overlay zone which limits activities, such as applications of fertilizers and pesticides, to protect water quality. Since the last update, several zoning amendments, including the adoption of an Adaptive Reuse Bylaw, have been adopted by the town.

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Soils

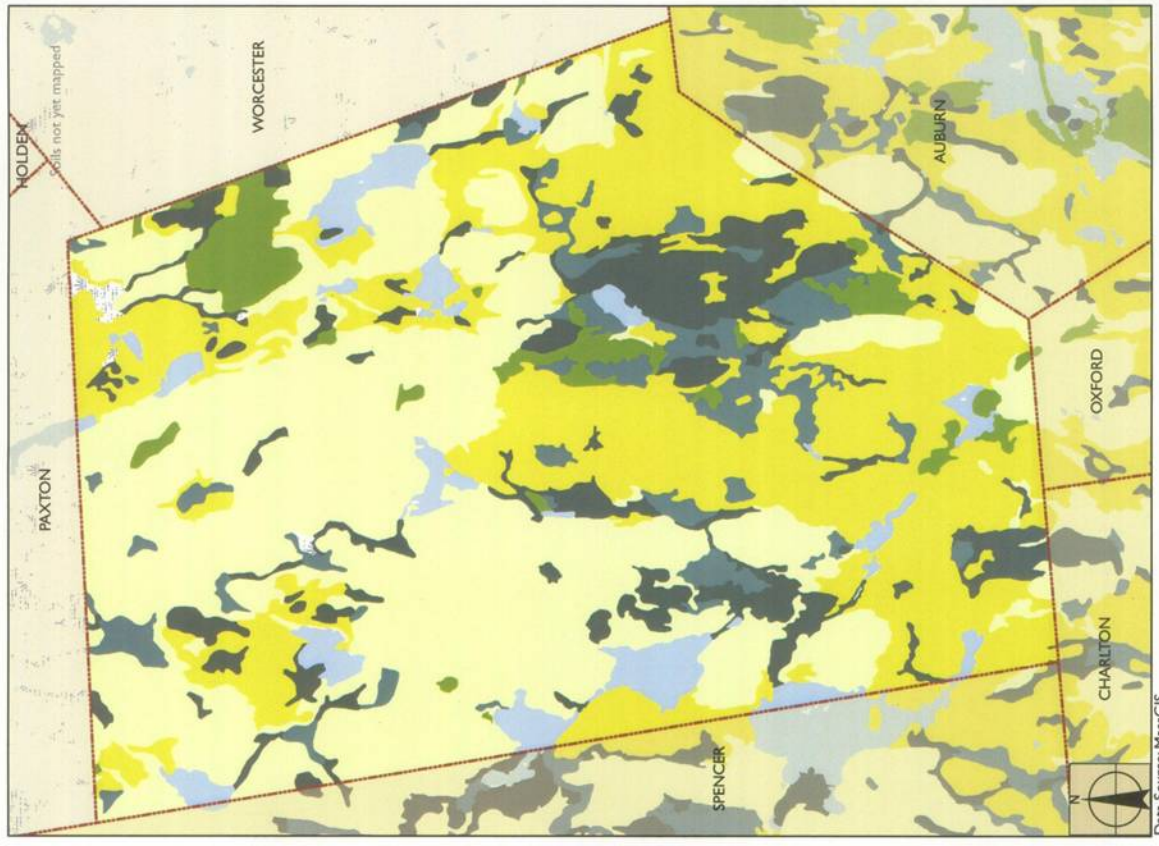
Identification and delineation of the soils in Leicester can help provide a basis for sound land use planning and help to determine specific uses such as active and passive recreation. Physical characteristics and management of soils impact many environmental factors such as wetlands, drainage characteristics, and permeability.

Soils in Leicester range from poorly drained in floodplain zones to excessively drained in over half of the town. Excessively drained soils can pose a threat, as contaminants do not filter properly through the soil before reaching the water supply.

Canton-Montauk-Scituate soils are deep and well to excessively drained, and make up almost half the town. Paxton-Woodbridge-Ridgebury series are deep soils that range from poorly to well drained and are only moderately permeable. Brookfield-Brimfield soils are rocky and have a large amount of exposed bedrock, limiting many of their potential uses. Merrimac-Hinkley-Windsor soils are primarily on outwash plains, and in general are excessively drained.

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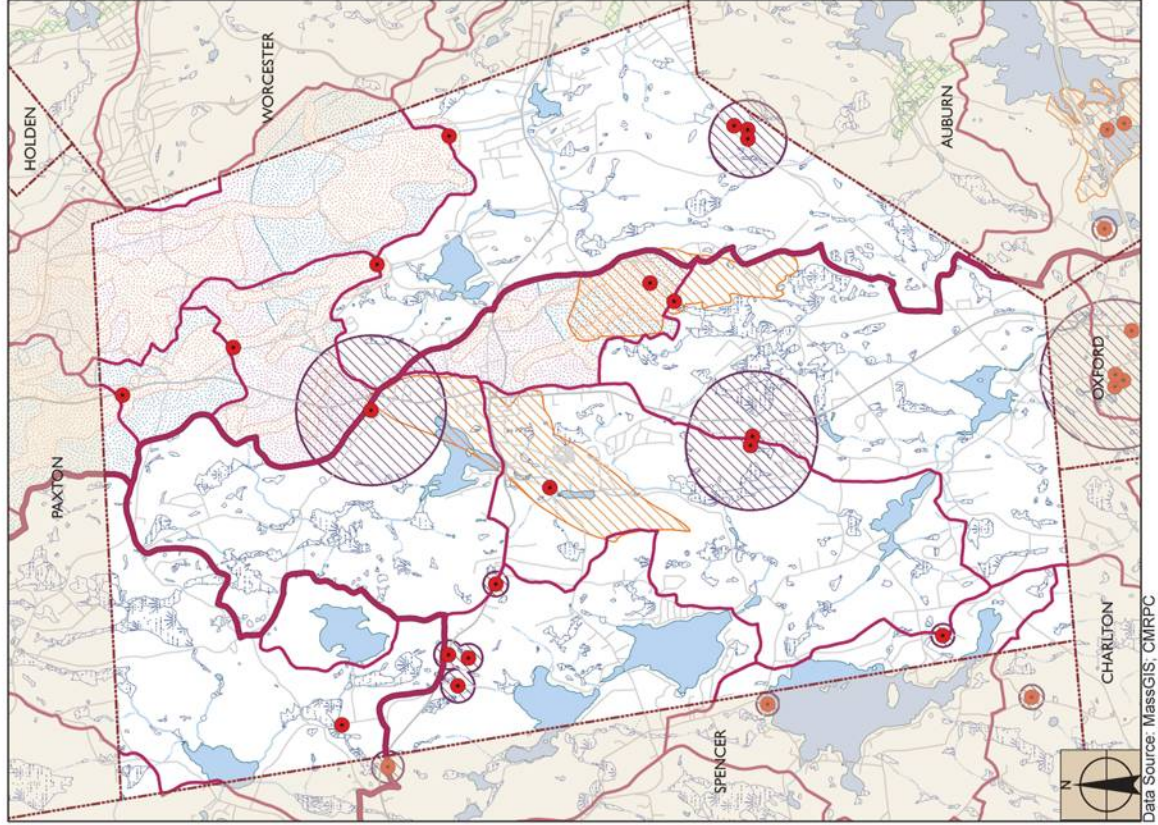
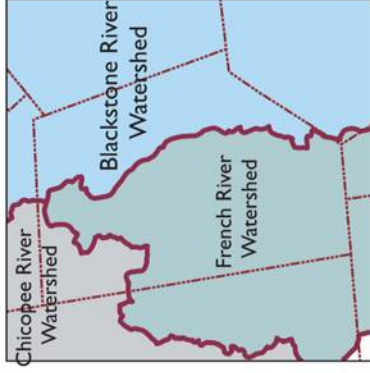


Water Resources

Leicester lies at the headwaters of three major watersheds: the Chicopee River Watershed to the west, the French River Watershed to the south and the Blackstone River Watershed to the east.

This abundance of water provides both major constraints and major assets to Leicester.

The network of surface waters and wetlands provides wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, flood control, and drinking water to surrounding towns. In order to protect the water supply, land uses are limited in approximately one third of town.



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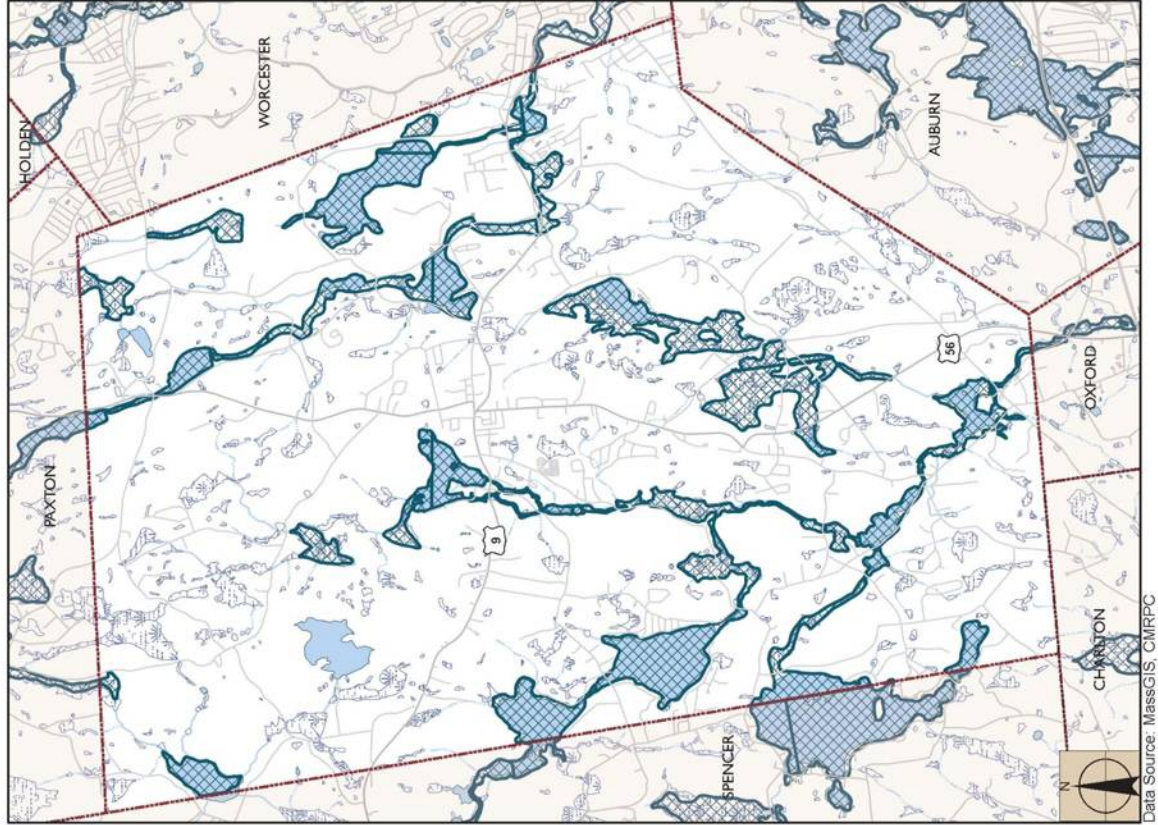
Flood Hazard Zones

Despite the abundance of wetlands and waterbodies throughout town, there are relatively few flood-prone areas. The floodplains, which handle large volumes of water in times of flood, are mostly in north-south running corridors along Kettle Brook, Grindstone Brook, and Town Meadow Brook.

Development may occur on floodplains, but it is regulated by the Wetlands Protection Act and the Army Corps of Engineers to ensure flood storage capacity remains unchanged. Since the floodplains change constantly and flood periodically, any development or land use that restricts the rivers' flood capacity is undesirable.

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Title Five Setbacks

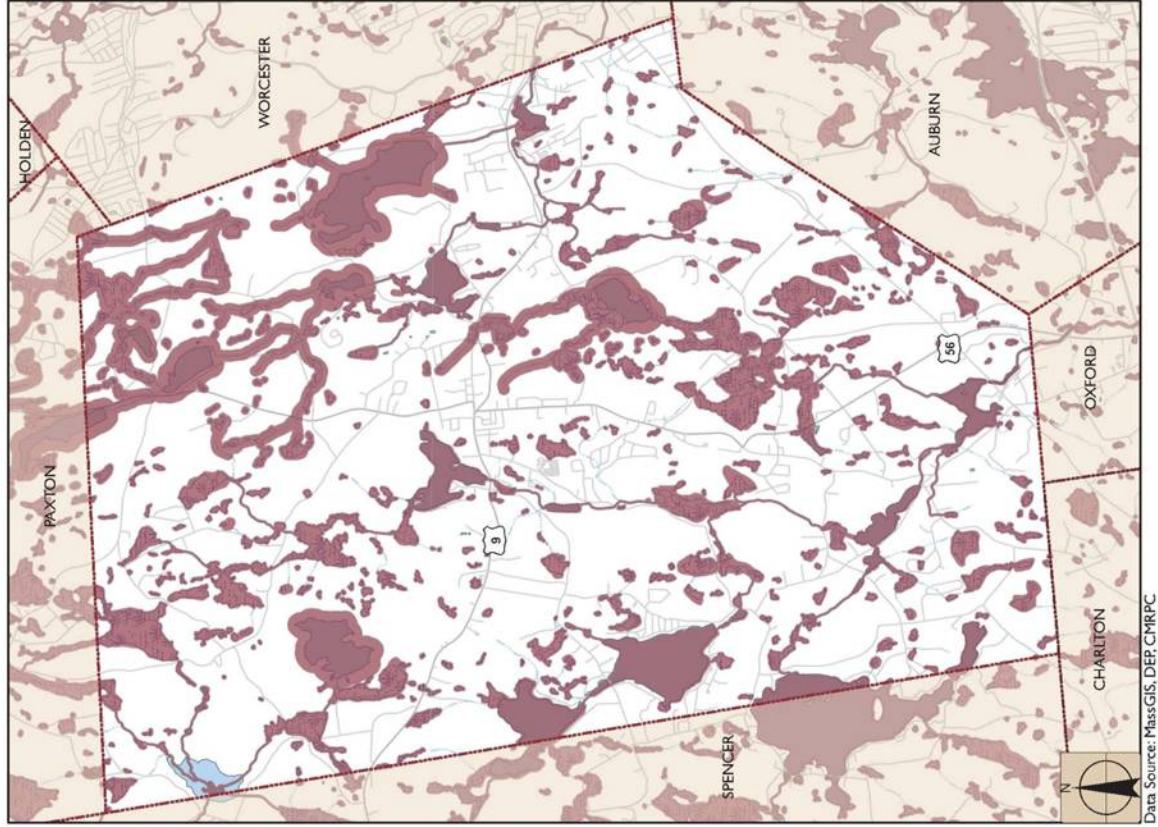
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has established Title Five Setbacks for on-site wastewater disposal systems in order to protect groundwater and surface water, drinking water supplies, shellfish water beds, and surface water bodies.

The buffer area is 50 feet around all hydrologic features and wetlands, except within the drainage basin for a public surface water supply, where the buffer zones are 100 feet around wetland features, 200 feet around streams and ponds, and 400 feet around public surface water supplies.

In addition to protecting water supplies, these buffer zone areas can provide valuable riparian habitat.

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Plant & Wildlife Habitat

The National Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has documented several rare species and ecologically significant natural communities in Leicester.

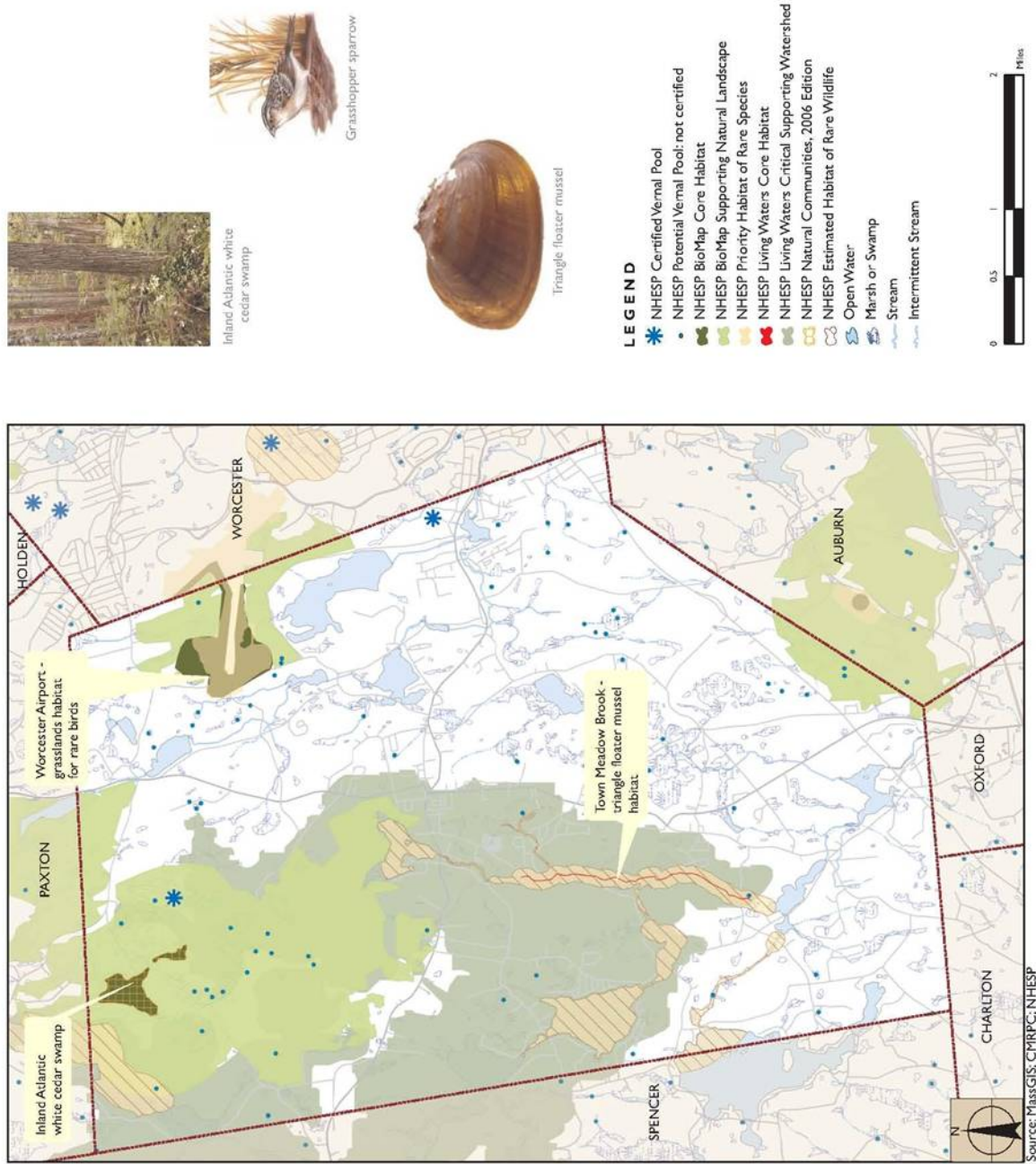
Ecologically significant habitat, critical in the conservation of biodiversity, includes two certified vernal pools, sixty-eight potential vernal pools, a Living Waters Core Habitat (Town Brook), and an inland Atlantic white cedar swamp.

Approximately one-third of town, primarily in the western half, lies within supporting habitat. Vernal pools throughout town have yet to be certified.

A wealth of vegetation and wildlife resources provide habitat, visual background, and recreational opportunities like hiking and wildlife viewing.

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Unique Features

Leicester residents have indicated numerous places in town that make Leicester a special place to live, including the old mill ponds, Cooper's Hilltop Farm, Moose Hill, Spider Gates Burial Grounds, the Town Common, and two certified vernal pools. The Midstate Trail passes through the northwest part of Leicester, linking it with nearby communities.

Natural and built, passive and active, historic, civic and commercial, these diverse features contribute to Leicester's rich community character. Trail links between some of these features and schools could provide rich educational opportunities.



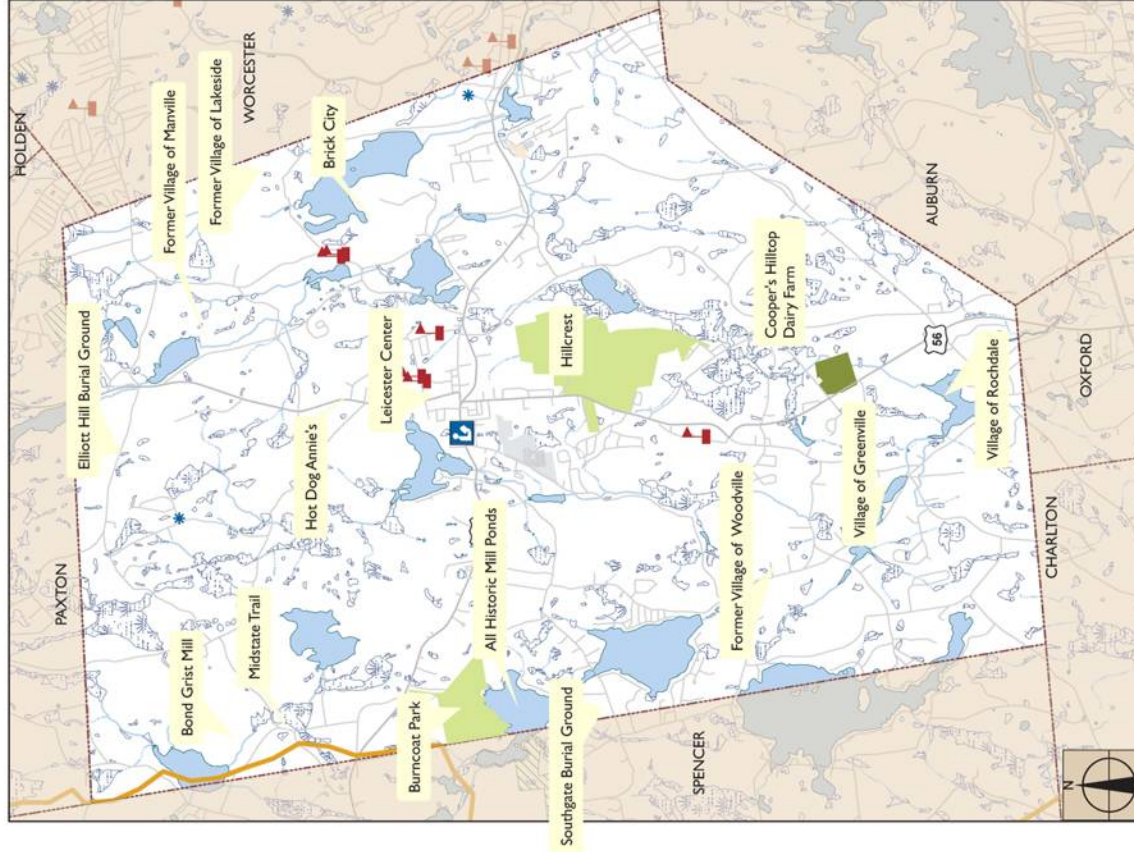
Leicester has many beautiful historic buildings, including those on the Town Commons.



Hot Dog Annie's has been a Leicester Institution since 1947.



Residents enjoy visiting Cooper's Hilltop Dairy Farm for fresh milk in glass bottles.



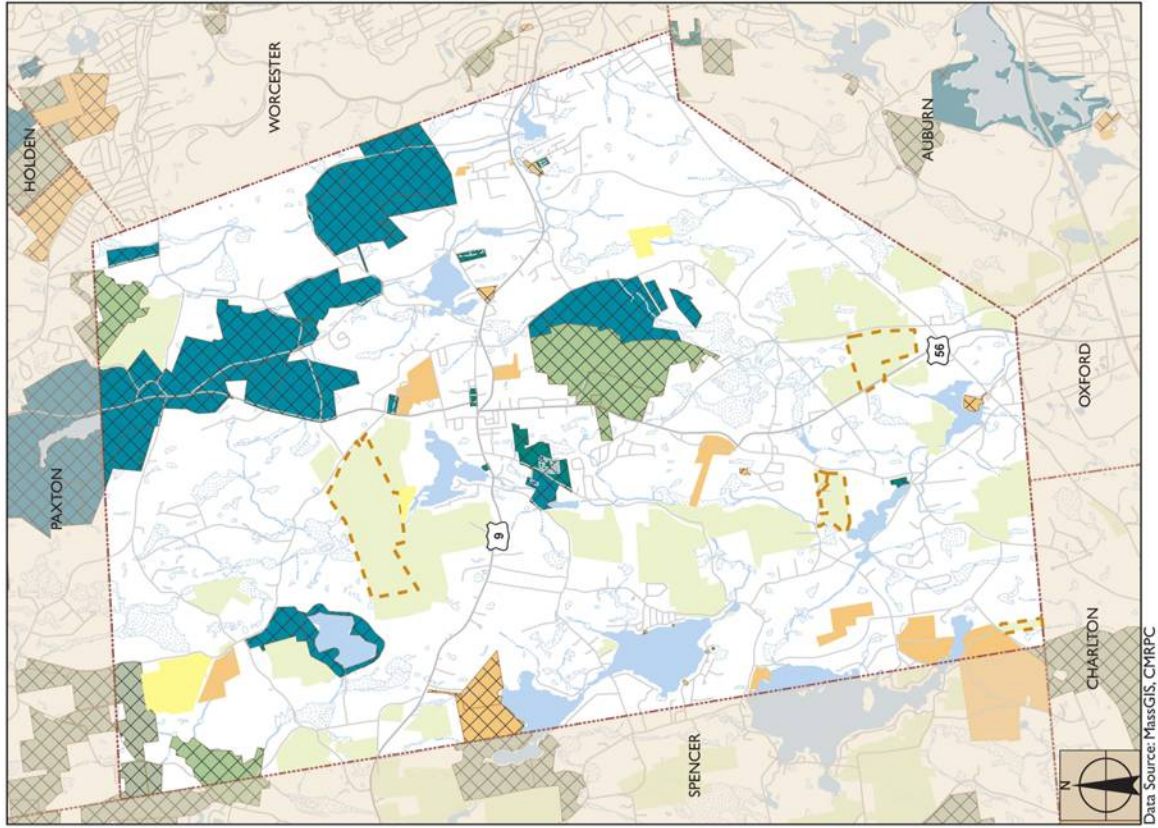
Data Source: MassGIS and Resident input

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LEGEND

- School
- Public Library
- NHESP Certified Vernal Pool



Hillcrest, located just south of the town center
(in green on this map)

Levels of Protection for Open Space

Approximately one-quarter of the town is protected to some degree as open space. Temporarily protected Chapter 61 lands, nearly all agricultural, form a band running north-south to the west of Route 56. These areas represent about 28% of all protected land in town, and are the most vulnerable to development, as landowners can withdraw their properties from Chapter 61 at any time. Chapter 61 is a state program that gives private landowners a property tax reduction in exchange for managing the land for agriculture, recreation, or forestry.

Municipal land, primarily water supply, is concentrated in the northeast and is permanently protected. Areas protected for water supply in the northeast section of town are not available for recreation.

LEGEND

- Permanently Protected
 - Primary Purpose:**
 - Conservation; Habitat
 - Recreation
 - Conservation & Recreation
 - Historical/Cultural
 - Water-related
 - Chapter 61
 - Change since 2000 OSRP update - new Ch 61
 - Change since 2000 OSRP update - no longer in Ch 61
- 0 0.5 1 2 Miles

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Regional Levels of Protection for Open Space

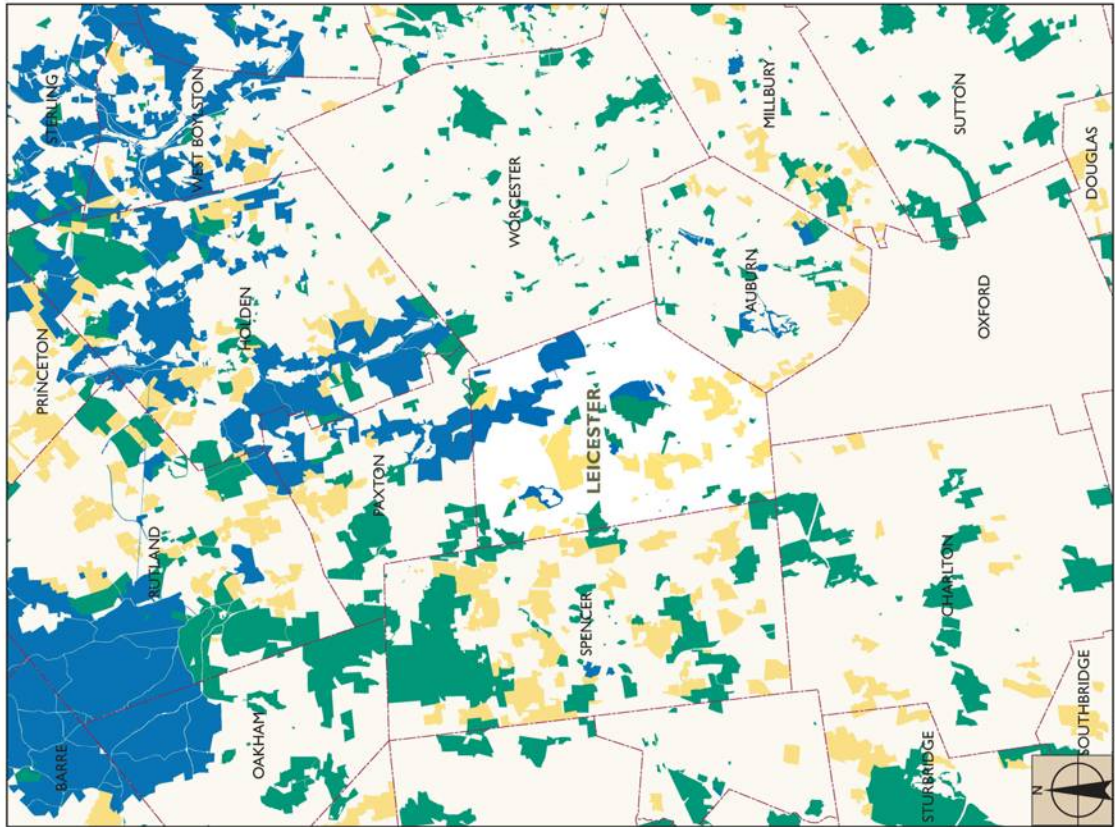
Leicester's open space is part of a larger regional pattern; it lies on an edge between areas to the east and south that have very little protected space, and areas to the north and west that have substantially more protected open space.

Lands in Leicester's northeast corner protected for water supply are part of a band of water-related protected open space that extends to the northeast. Temporarily protected Chapter 61 lands form a north-south running band that runs through and to the west of Leicester.

Protecting open space in town, and developing links to larger systems of greenbelt corridors, can make an important contribution to this larger pattern.



Contrasting development patterns:
Leicester (left) and Worcester (right)



Source: MassGIS

LEGEND

- ◆ Protected Open Space (water-related)
- ◆ Protected Open Space (other than water)
- ◆ Chapter 61



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Recreation Lands

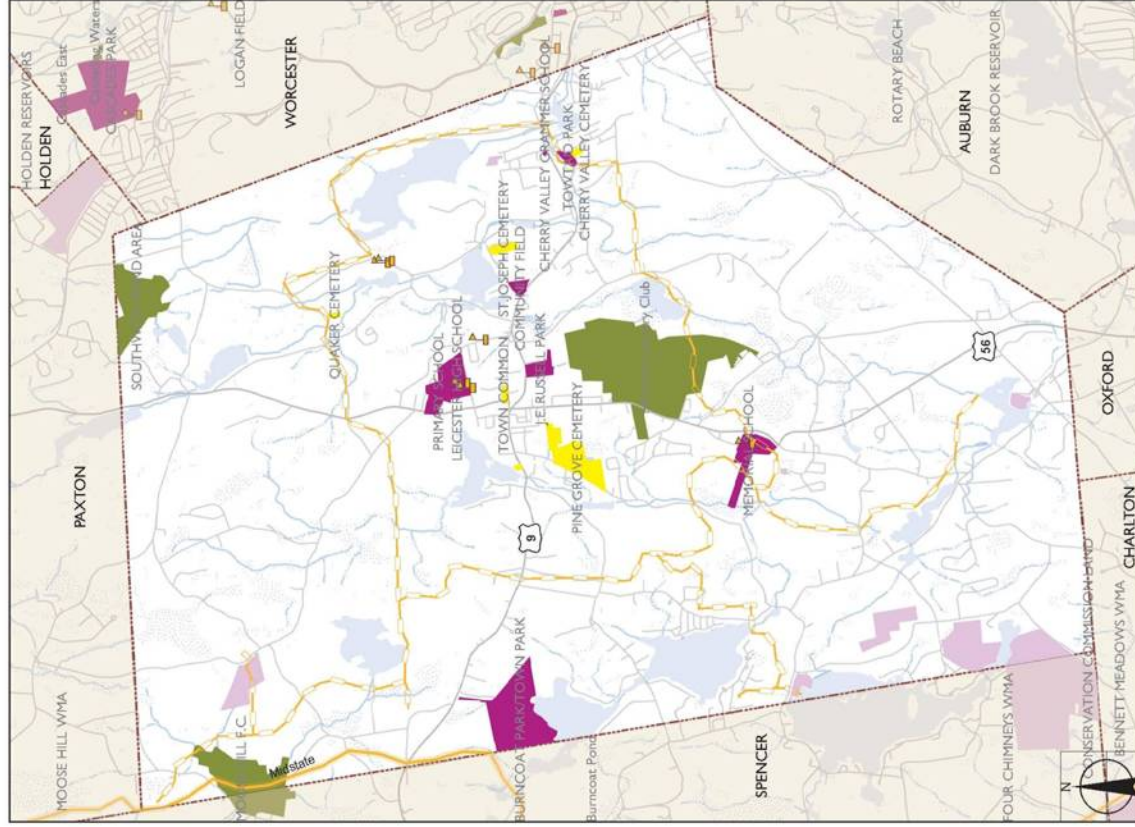
Recreation lands make up less than 5% of town; surveys indicate that existing facilities are inadequate. Rochdale Park and Towald Park offer active recreational opportunities, while Burncoat Park offers passive recreational opportunities in a 115-acre woodland setting. Hillcrest offers a mix of conservation and passive and active recreation. While these four facilities are open to all, several are in disrepair.

Privately owned commercial recreational lands also contribute a limited amount to the recreational opportunities in Leicester.

Residents would like to see improvements made to existing facilities, and the development of new recreational facilities and programs that are available and accessible to all age groups. Proposed new trails could link schools to each other and to existing recreational facilities. Links to existing trails in the region, and to cultural and natural resources in nearby communities, would help to expand recreational opportunities.

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Data Source: MassGIS, CHRPC

Action Plan

In setting open space and recreation priorities, natural and cultural resources were carefully considered, as were opportunities to establish links for people and wildlife.

Proposed for protection:

Develop Trails

- Proposed trails
- Proposed Midstate-Worcester Connector Trail
- Existing Midstate Trail
- Existing snowmobile trails

- * Connect the Moose Hill Reservoir area and Burncoat Park with the Midstate Trail.
- * Link schools to open space that can serve as outdoor classrooms.
- * Connect natural and scenic resources in Leicester.
- * Connect Leicester to Providence, Rhode Island, with a trail proposed by the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission.
- * Create a greenway starting at the Midstate Trail in Leicester, crossing the northern part of town, and then connecting to the Blackstone River Bikeway in Worcester.

Protect Forested Blocks

Protect forested blocks from further fragmentation and thereby contribute to the visual character of the town, and provide important habitat and recreational opportunities.

Protect Core Habitat



- * Core habitat identified by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program
- * Town Meadow Brook (provides habitat for a rare freshwater mussel, the triangle floater)
- * A rare inland Atlantic white cedar swamp, well-buffered by upland forest

Protect Vernal Pools

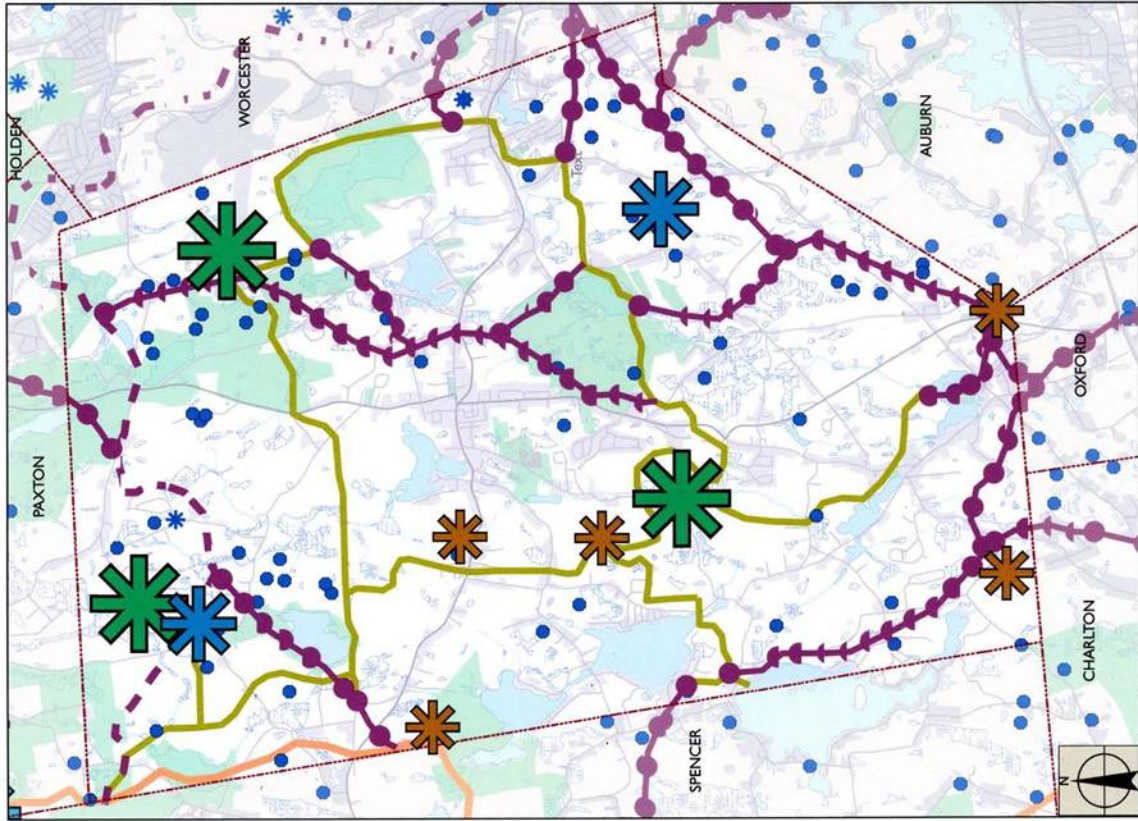


- * NHESP Certified Vernal Pool
- * NHESP Potential Vernal Pool-not certified
- * Certified vernal pools (isolated, shallow ponds characterized by periods of dryness that prevent fish from surviving, and thus provide vital habitat to a variety of wildlife species).
- * Potential vernal pools, especially where they occur in clusters. (Clusters of vernal pools can be especially valuable habitat, as each pool provides slightly variable conditions in different seasons and different years.) The large asterisk indicates clusters of vernal pools that occur in forested areas - one, in the southeast part of Leicester, in potential primary forest.

Protect Prime Agricultural Soils



Prime agricultural soil is a resource to the community, and is found on some land that is temporarily protected for agriculture under the state's Chapter 61 program. It may be best to avoid development on lands where this prime farmland soil occurs, and to preserve them for future uses.



Data Source: MassGIS, CMRPC, Leicester Snowmobile Club, BRVNH

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