

# Pelham Village Center

## *Vision and Potential: A Community Plan*



Robert Frost Trail (Orange)  
Whitney  
Conservation  
Area  
Catalyst for Regional Progress

**pvp**pc

**Pioneer Valley Planning Commission**

June 2025

Plan funded by a Technical Assistance Grant  
from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Program

PELHAM

# **Pelham Village Center**

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## Acknowledgements

This plan was spearheaded by the Pelham Planning Board and was carried out with the contributions of many local participants, including the following:

### **Pelham Planning Board**

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Bruce Klotz  
Stacey McCullough  
Anne Stoddard  
Peter Wilson

### **Pelham Select Board**

Bob Agoglia, Chair  
Tara Loomis, Vice-Chair  
David Shanabrook

### **Pelham Department of Public Works**

Richard Adamcek

### **Pelham Police Chief**

Gary Thomann

### **Pelham Fire Chief**

Dennis Nazzaro

### **Pelham Housing Committee**

Barbara Cooper

### **Pelham Conservation Commission**

David Gross

### **Pelham Library**

Jodi Levine, Librarian

### **Pelham Library Committee**

Diane Gray  
Abigail Jenks

### **Pelham Elementary School**

Micki Darling, Principal

### **Pelham School Committee**

Margaret Stancer, Chair

### **Other Residents and Abutters**

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Photos courtesy PVPC unless otherwise indicated

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## Introduction

### Background and Purpose

The Town of Pelham is seeking to create a livable and close-knit Village Center in the three zoning districts established in 2018. Pelham is a small, rural community without a business center other than a Limited Business District off Route 9 to accommodate a pre-existing veterinary practice. It also lacks a traditional town center, due in part to the loss of nearly half of the town for the Quabbin Reservoir watershed. Therefore, this project seeks to identify potential development and activities that could serve as a destination and a cohesive center for its residents. There is a vacant town-owned parcel in the village center that could be used to support these goals in a variety of ways, and potential uses for this property are analyzed. The Town sought and received a technical assistance grant from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI), under the Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED), towards the goal of maximizing the three Village Center Districts as the community center for Pelham. The Town intends to do this by enhancing walkability, traffic calming, and biking safety; fostering cultural activity with some small business and affordable housing development; and by modifying existing infrastructure and/or landscaping to meet these needs. The study takes into account Pelham's close relationship with the Town of Amherst, with which it shares a regional school system, a major east-west roadway, and water and sewer systems for a portion of Pelham.

The project is focused on the area encompassing the Village Center Zoning Districts and was an inclusive process with several opportunities for discussion through meetings, interviews and community outreach. A demographic analysis lays a foundation for the research, and the subsequent analysis paired with community engagement leads to a set of recommendations with strategic guidance for use by the Town as it moves forward with the effort to create community-focused development in the Village Center.

Environmental sustainability is a key consideration for this project. The Village Center zoning aligns with traditional New England neighborhood development, promoting compact development along existing infrastructure and minimizing environmental impact. The project seeks to enhance walkability, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, maintain a rural woodland character, and support economic growth in an environmentally responsible manner.

### Community Initiatives

This Village Center planning initiative has evolved from a series of planning efforts over the past decade, as town officials and resident volunteers have accomplished many of the goals the community has set for itself. While commercial development has yet to happen in the Village Center, residential growth is accelerating. A new affordable housing project near the municipal complex and school will bring more residents to the center, and new sidewalks will be constructed to serve them and others



walking in the area. The Town, as a significant property owner in the Village Center, is exploring how to leverage its property to spur community activity and possibly other types of development in the future.

### *Existing Town Plans*

The Town has already completed a number of plans, studies and surveys over the past 20 years, overseen by the Planning Board, Select Board, and Housing Committee. These include the following:

- Pelham Growth Study Report (2006)
- Pelham Open Space and Recreation Plan (2008)
- Pelham Village Center Report (2010)
- Pelham Housing Needs Study (2014)
- 2017 Land Inventory and Assessment for Future Housing Development
- Pelham Walking, Biking and Traffic Calming Plan (2018)
- Village Center Zoning and Bylaw changes (2018)

### *Town of Pelham Initiatives*

A number of initiatives have been undertaken by the Town as a result of the above-mentioned planning processes; these will be described briefly here and explored in more detail later in the report.

- Most recently, the Town rezoned the area surrounding the Elementary School and Library/Community Center to allow higher densities and small commercial development.
- The Town also participated in the development of an affordable rental housing complex in the Center, initiated through the Chapter 40B process in 2018.
- To support this growth, a grant application has been submitted to fund a sewer extension for several side streets (looped), and a sidewalk has been designed for a section of Amherst Road from the new housing to the Community Building. Grant funding will be sought to construct the sidewalk.
- There have also been efforts to find a suitable use for a vacant town-owned lot behind the Community Building. A land and wetlands survey was conducted, and a survey of residents was also conducted to determine wishes and needs for the area.
- During the pandemic, the Select Board investigated building a pavilion to use for outdoor town meetings, school activities, and community uses on the school grounds. A local architect designed a large pavilion for potential use on school property, but the project did not proceed due to underground water and infrastructure issues.

- The Town implemented a recommendation of the 2018 traffic-calming study by having the Village Center designated as a “thickly settled” area, allowing the Town to impose a 30-mph speed limit.

### *Community Events and Activities*

Residents have spearheaded several community-oriented events in order to build connections and enhance the sense of place in the Village Center. These include the following, also discussed later in the report.

- Community events at the Community Hall, including potlucks, a monthly coffee hour, and more.
- Community gatherings in the area between the library and elementary school, dubbed the “Village Square” by some participants. These have included picnics and barbecues with music and fire pits.
- Raised garden beds behind the school on the library side were built by volunteers and used for a couple of years by the schoolchildren

### *Process and Methodology*

The PVPC, with guidance and assistance from the Pelham Planning Board, created this Village Center Community Plan by incorporating past planning efforts, current initiatives, and local visions and wishes for the area. The report reflects priorities expressed to the PVPC during public outreach as well as needs and opportunities identified throughout the planning process.

Additionally, the PVPC has collected and analyzed demographic and economic data to determine Pelham’s local economic conditions within the context of the regional economy. The local and regional data include:

- Population data and projections
- Tax base
- Workforce and labor statistics
- Commuting patterns
- Industry employment trends including top local employers

### *Community Outreach and Engagement*

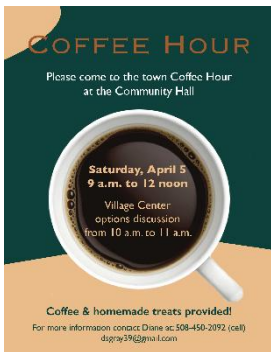
For this Massachusetts Downtown Initiative study, a number of efforts were made to reach out to community members about the Village Center and the options that might be pursued. The PVPC built upon the existing community connections and also contacted additional residents for a robust community engagement process. In addition to committee meetings with Planning Board representatives, several other on-site meetings were held, as described below.

### *Public Meeting*

A public meeting was held on March 3, 2025 at the Ramsdell Room in the town library (attended by 11 people), and a site walk was conducted with one of the abutters. Along with abutters, interested residents, and the DPW director, members of the following local boards and committees were represented (see acknowledgements page for full list):

- Select Board
- Housing Committee
- Planning Board
- Community Preservation Committee
- Conservation Commission
- Anti-Racism Committee
- Library Committee

### *Community Event and Presentation*



On April 5, 2025, a special community outreach event was held at the regular monthly Pelham Community Coffee Hour from 10-11 a.m., attended by 10 people. The date conflicted with several other regional events that day, including the Town of Amherst’s Global Village Festival, which featured live performances and many other activities and offerings, so this may have suppressed attendance. The event was publicized via a full color poster in all public buildings and emailed to all town residents.

The PVPC attended and presented on the planning process, issues for consideration, and visual representations of various development and/or activity options on vacant town land. PVPC staff also conducted an additional field visit and took photographs of the area.



### *Phone Interviews*

In April and May 2025, phone interviews were held with a couple of people who were unable to meet in person: planning board member Stacey McCullough and retiring Select Board member David Shanabrook.

*Onsite Meetings and Field Survey*

On May 13, 2025, a series of onsite meetings were held with the following officials and residents:

- Police Chief Gary Thomann
- Fire Chief Dennis Nazzarro
- Department of Public Works (DPW) Director Robert Adamcek
- Town Librarian Jodi Levine
- Elementary School Principal Micki Darling
- Residents and volunteers Matthew Wolaver (also an abutter) and Nicholas Cichanowski

Follow-up email exchanges were also conducted with many of the above participants.



## Demographic and Socio-Economic Overview

### Population

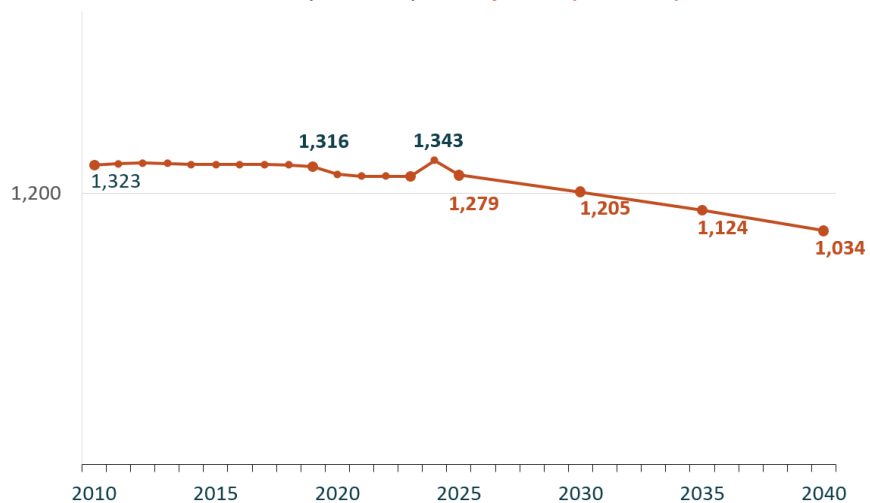
While Pelham’s population has generally been declining in recent years, the 2024 population estimate shows Pelham’s population growing by 71 to 1,343 people between July 2023 and July 2024, an increase of more than 5%. According to the UMass Donahue Institute’s Population Projections program, Pelham is currently projected to see modest decline in the future, to a population of 1,034 by 2040, down 19% from its 2025 population projection of 1,279. This projection may prove inaccurately low, given the recent construction of 34 units of affordable housing.

By comparison, across Hampden and Hampshire Counties, the population is projected to decline 5% between 2025 and 2040, while statewide, the 2040 population is projected to be only very slightly higher, by 0.3%.

### Race and Ethnicity

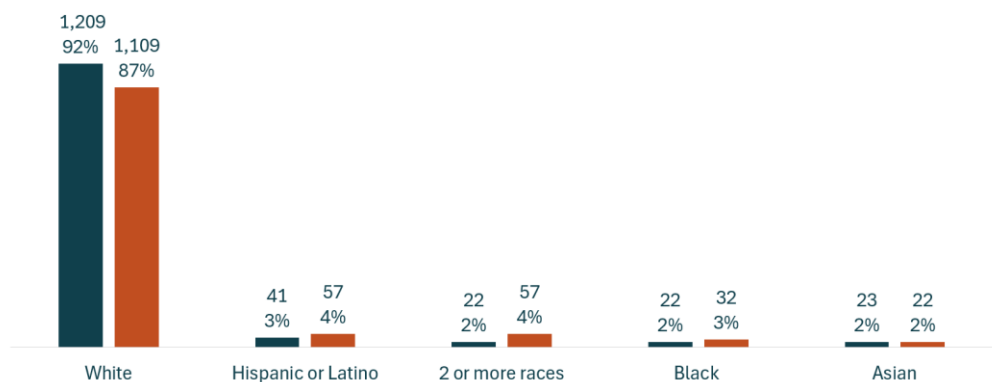
The Town of Pelham remains predominantly white and non-Hispanic. While no single race/ethnicity group saw substantial growth between the 2010 and 2020 Decennial Censuses, the share of the overall population that are not white and not Hispanic (i.e. the BIPOC population) has grown over the decade 2010 to 2020, from 8.5% of the overall population to 13.4% of the overall population, while both the number and share of white non-Hispanic residents has declined.

**Population Trends for Town of Pelham, MA**  
Estimates (2010-2024) and Projections (2025-2040)



Source: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, 2000-2024, and UMass Donahue Institute, Population Projections, V2024.

**Slight Changes in Race and Ethnicity of Residents of Pelham between 2010 and 2020**  
Censuses: (Number and Percent of Residents)

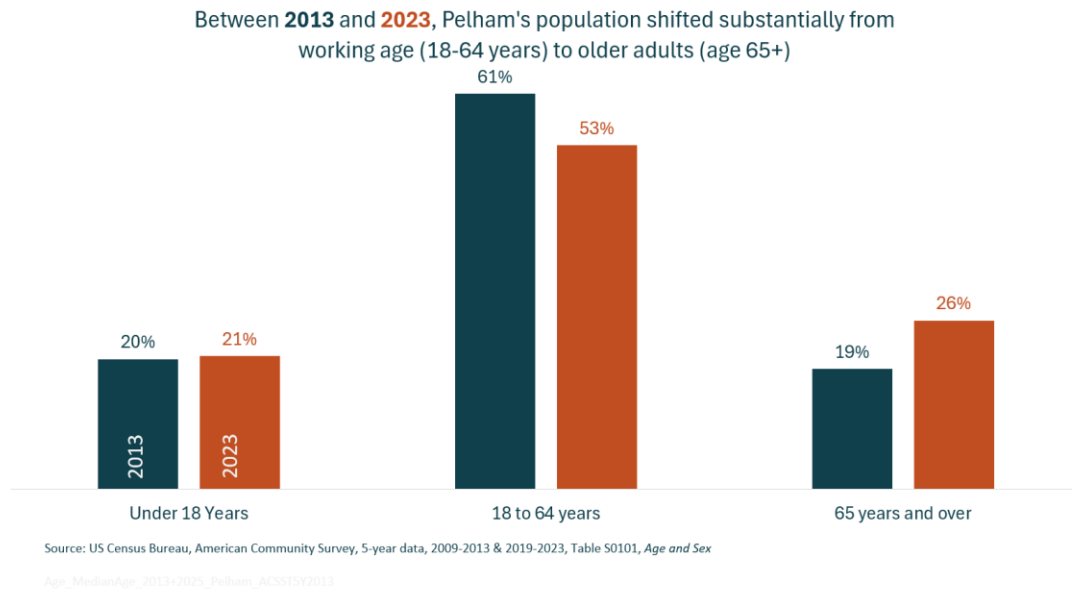


U.S. Census Bureau. "HISPANIC OR LATINO, AND NOT HISPANIC OR LATINO BY RACE." Decennial Census, DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171), Table P2, 2020, [https://data.census.gov/tables/DECENNIALPL2020.P2?g=060XX00US2501552560&d=DEC+Redistricting+Data+\(PL+94-171\)](https://data.census.gov/tables/DECENNIALPL2020.P2?g=060XX00US2501552560&d=DEC+Redistricting+Data+(PL+94-171)). Accessed on May 1, 2025.  
Note: Hispanic or Latino residents can be of any race. White, Black and Asian are single race and are not Hispanic or Latino.

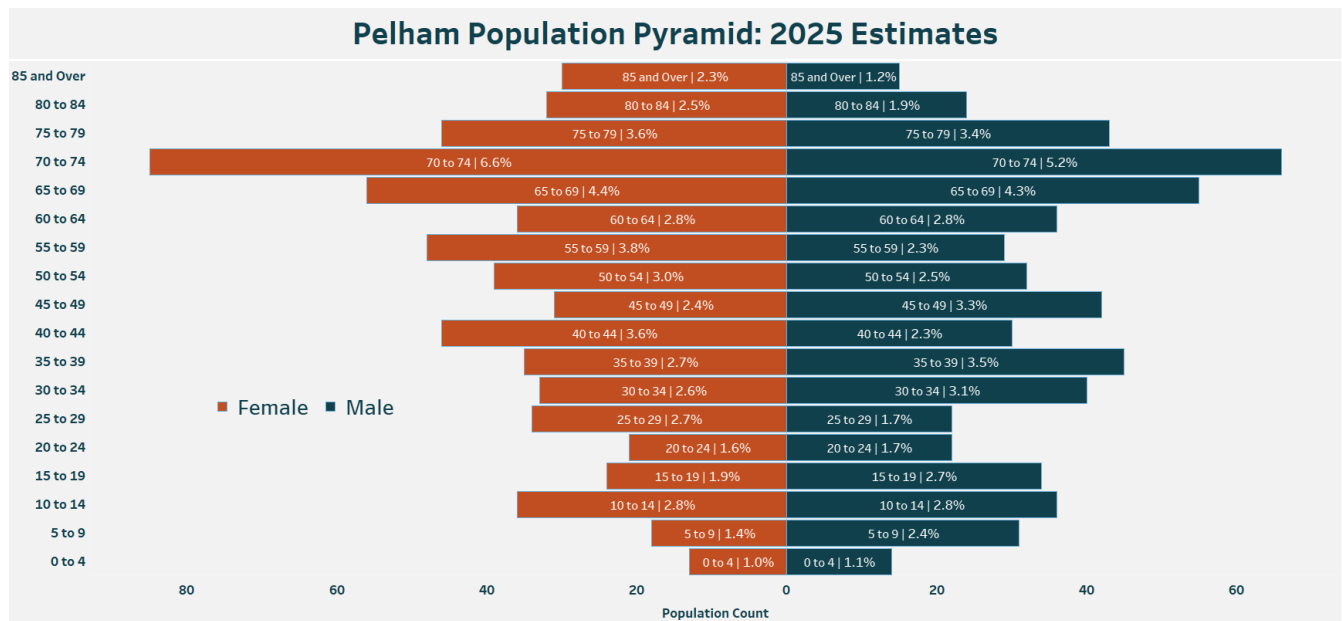
## Age Distribution

The distribution of Pelham’s population by age has shifted substantially between 2013 and 2023.

Most noteworthy is growth of the town’s senior citizen share of the population (ages 65+), which increased from 19% of the population in 2013 to 26% in 2023. This is consistent with regional and statewide trends, and reflects



the continued aging of the Baby Boom generation, the youngest of whom would be turning 61 years old in 2025. Pelham’s population pyramid shows the projected breakdown of total population by age and sex. For both

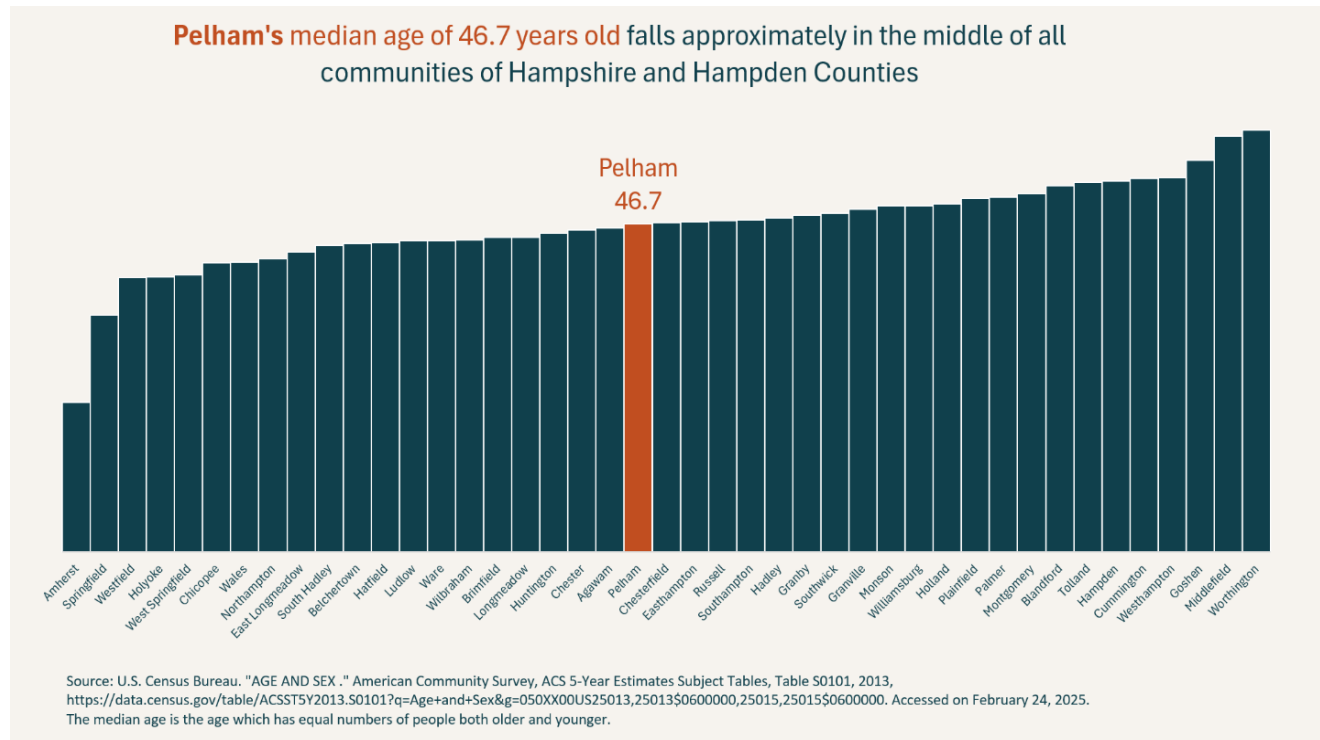


Source: UMDI-V2024 Massachusetts Population Projections

females and males, the largest five-year “slice” falls between 70 and 74 years of age, followed by the next younger grouping, those 65 to 69 years of age.

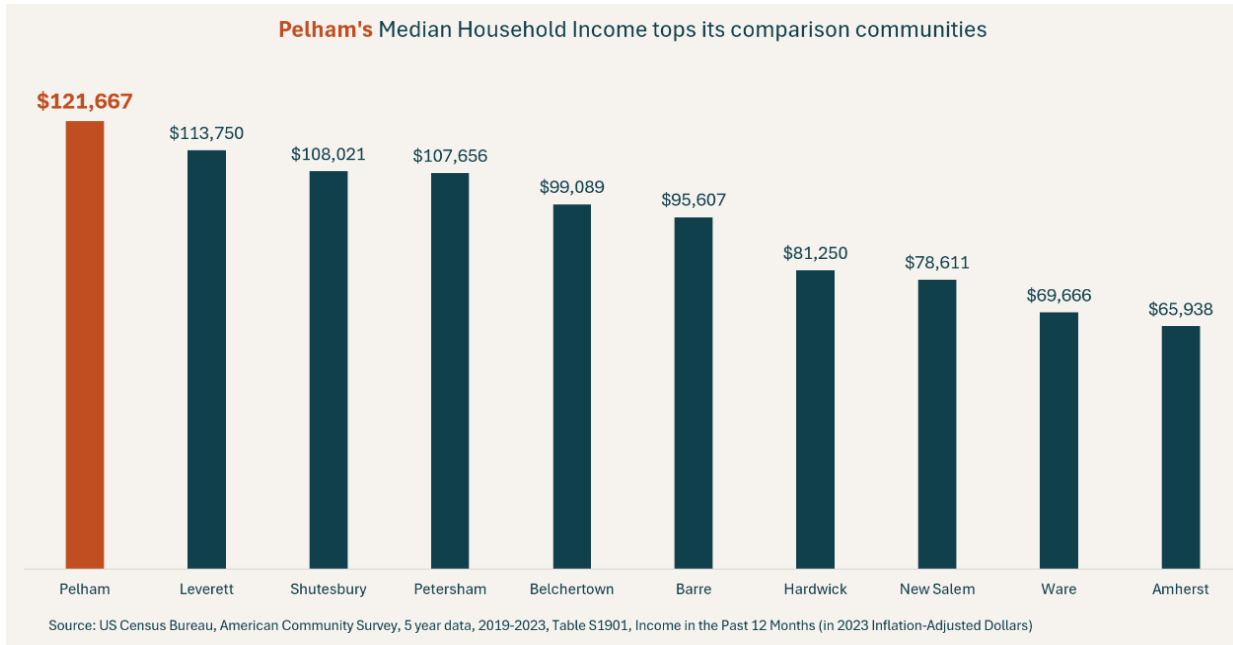
## Median Age

Pelham’s median age (46.7 years) places Pelham near the middle of all communities in Hampshire and Hampden Counties.

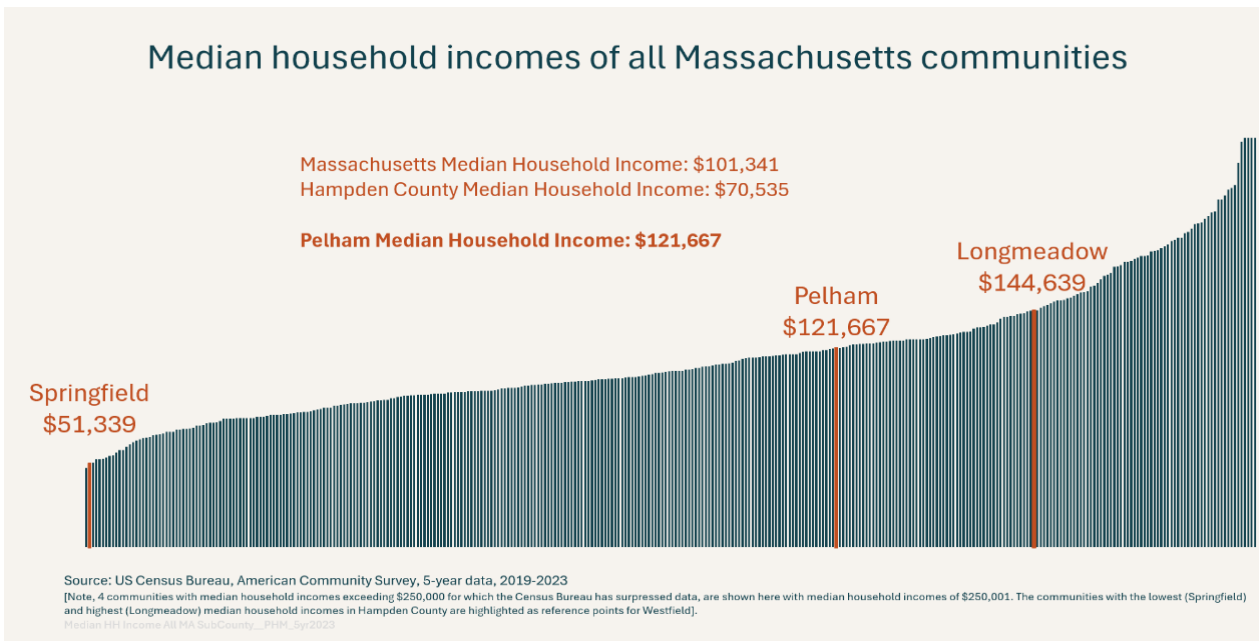


## Median Household Income

Pelham’s median household income of \$121,667 leads each of its comparison communities. It is also substantially higher than the median household income for Hampshire County (\$86,391). The median household income for neighboring Franklin County is also substantially lower, at \$72,584.



Comparing Pelham’s median household income with those of all Massachusetts communities, we see that Pelham fares better than approximately 2/3 of the Commonwealth’s cities and towns.



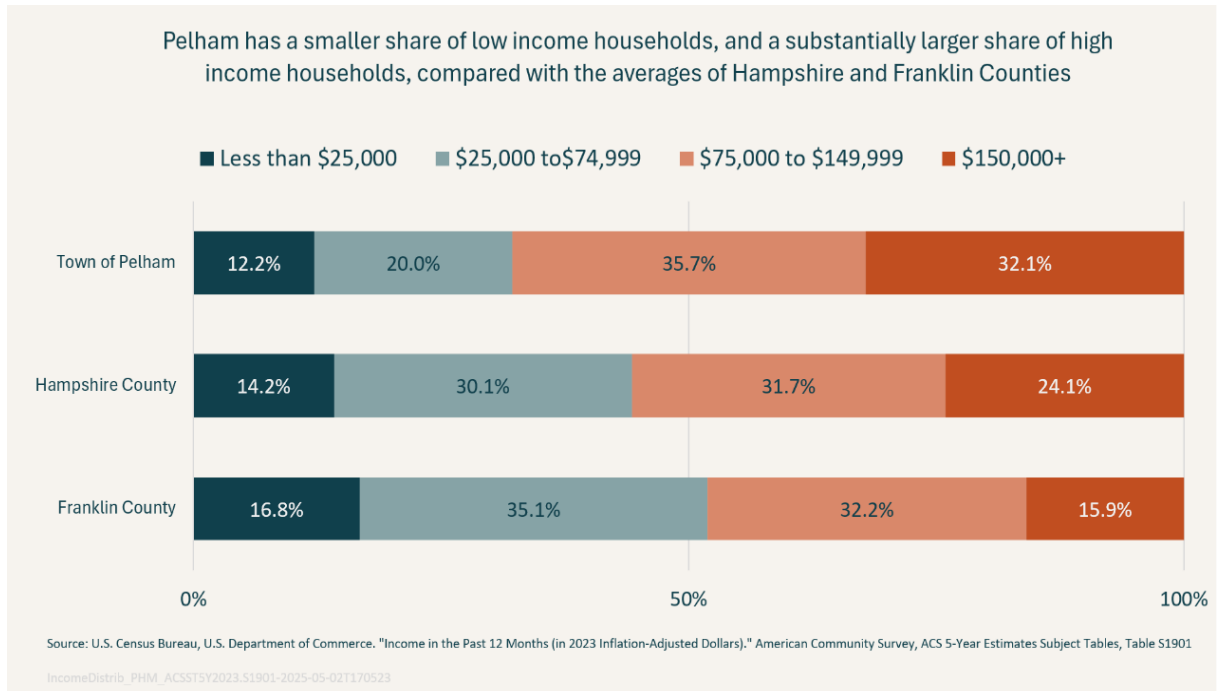
## Income Distribution

Twelve percent of Pelham households had annual incomes less than \$25,000 compared with 14% of Hampshire County households, and 17% of Franklin County households.

By contrast, 32% of Pelham households had incomes of \$150,000 or higher, compared with 24% of Hampshire County households, and 16% of Franklin County households.



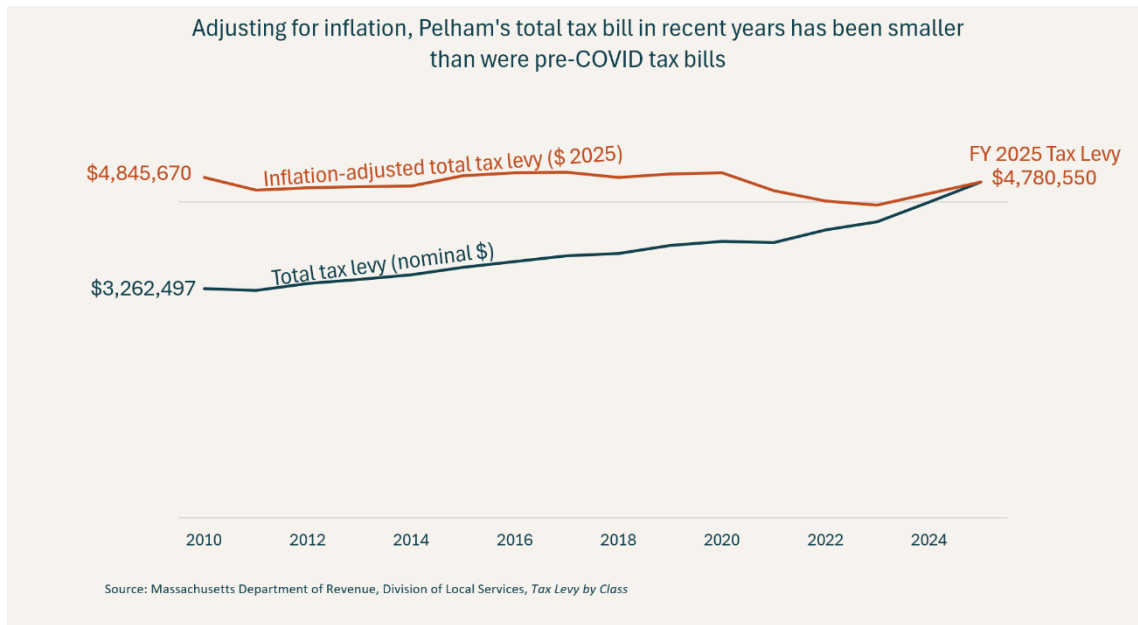
## Pelham Village Center – Vision and Potential: A Community Plan



## Taxes

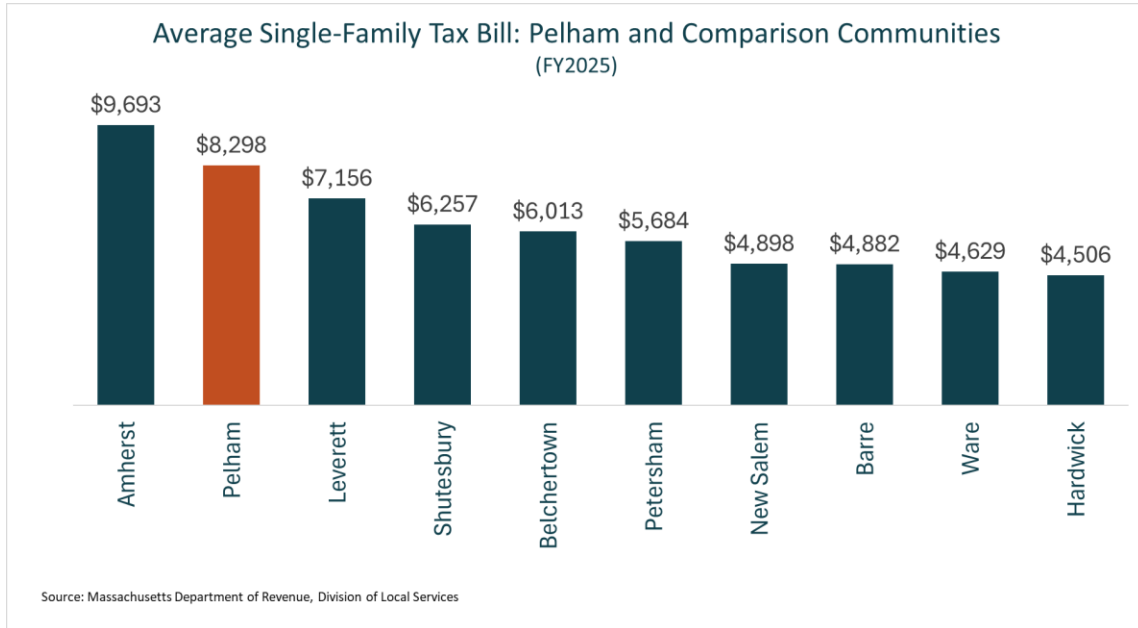
### Trends in overall tax levy

Adjusted for inflation (orange line in chart below), local property taxes have declined since 2020 and are lower in 2025 than they were fifteen years ago. Compared with the inflation-adjusted 2010 levy of \$4,845,670, the 2025 levy of \$4,780,550 was smaller by \$65,120, a decline of 1.3%.



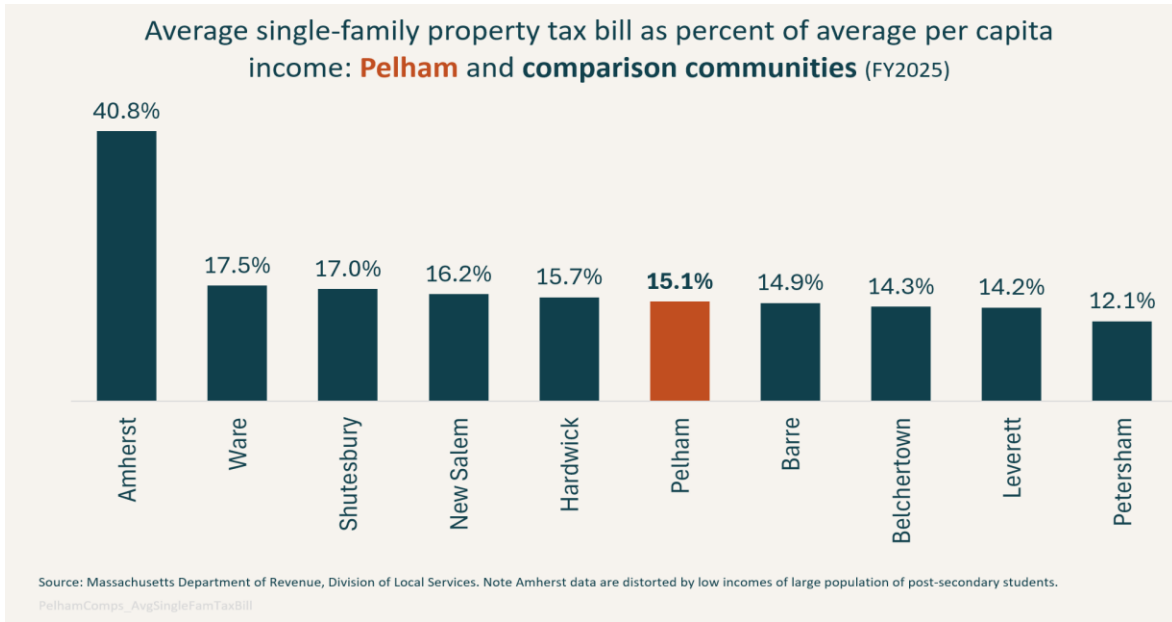
## Average single family tax bills

Pelham's single family tax bill (\$8,298 in FY2025) is higher than the single family tax bills in most of its comparison communities. Only the City of Amherst's average single-family tax bill of \$9,693 is higher than Pelham's.



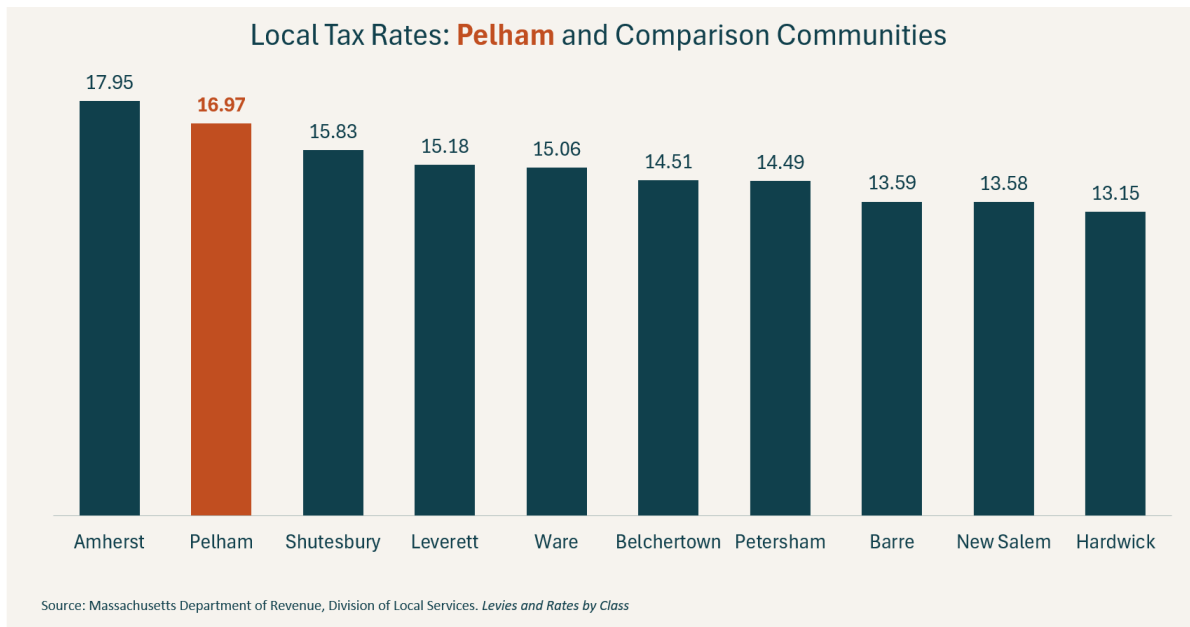
## Property taxes compared with incomes

One way to determine the tax effort within each community is to calculate the share of per capita income that goes to local taxes. In Pelham, the 2025 rate translates to 15.1% of the town's per capita income. This rate places Pelham higher than four of its comparison communities – Barre, Belchertown, Leverett & Petersham, but lower than five comparison communities – Amherst, Ware, Shutesbury, New Salem, and Hardwick. This largely reflects the fact that although its taxes are higher than most of its comparison communities, the per capita income outpaces others' by an even greater margin.



## Tax rates

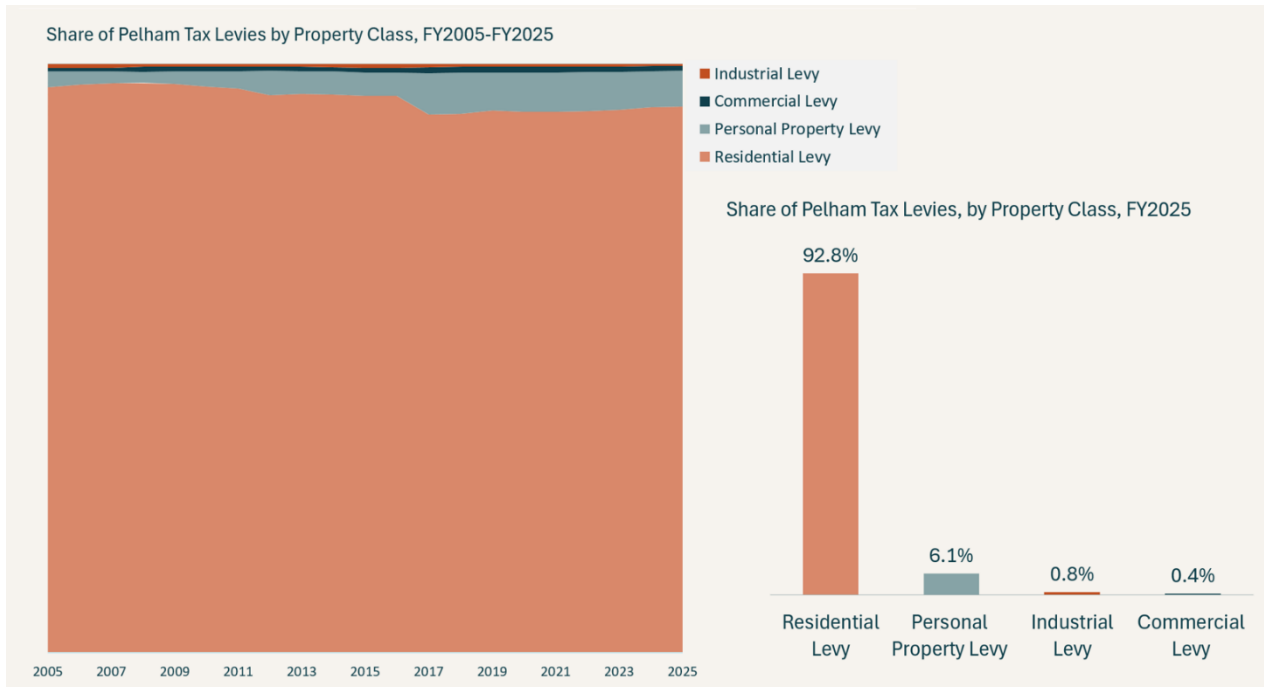
Pelham's FY2025 tax rate of \$16.97/\$1,000 of assessed value is lower than in neighboring Amherst, and higher than its other comparison communities: Shutesbury, Leverett, Ware, Belchertown, Petersham, Barre, New Salem, and Hardwick.





## Tax Levies by Property Class

Pelham is very heavily reliant on the residential property tax, though slightly less so since FY2017, when the personal property tax share jumped from 3.9% in 2016 to 7.1% in 2017. Pelham’s residents are carrying the largest share of the current tax levy, at 92.8% in FY2025, compared with 6.1% from the personal property levy, and less than 1% from each of the industrial (0.8%) and commercial (0.4%) levies.

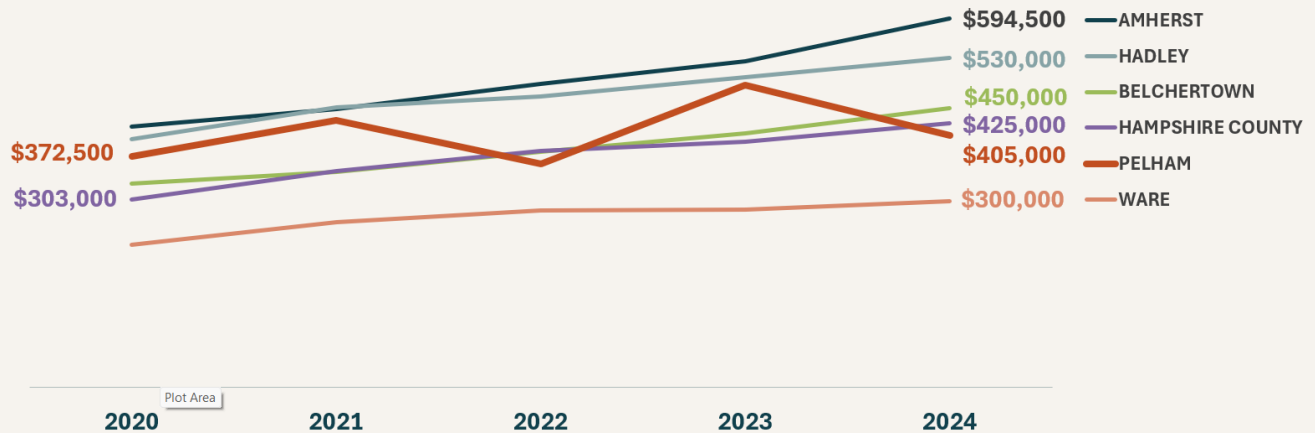


## Housing Prices

In the chart below, we see that Pelham’s housing prices (based on median annual sales prices) have generally followed similar patterns to its comparison communities, and the overall trend across Hampshire County. The up and down trend we see in data over the past five years is primarily reflective of the comparatively small number of homes selling in Pelham, which makes fluctuations more likely due to selling prices that are either atypically high or low. By comparison, the more consistent pattern we see with Hampshire County reflects a much larger number of sales. In fact, over the past three years, Pelham has seen just 63 total housing units sold, just 1.1% of sales throughout the County.

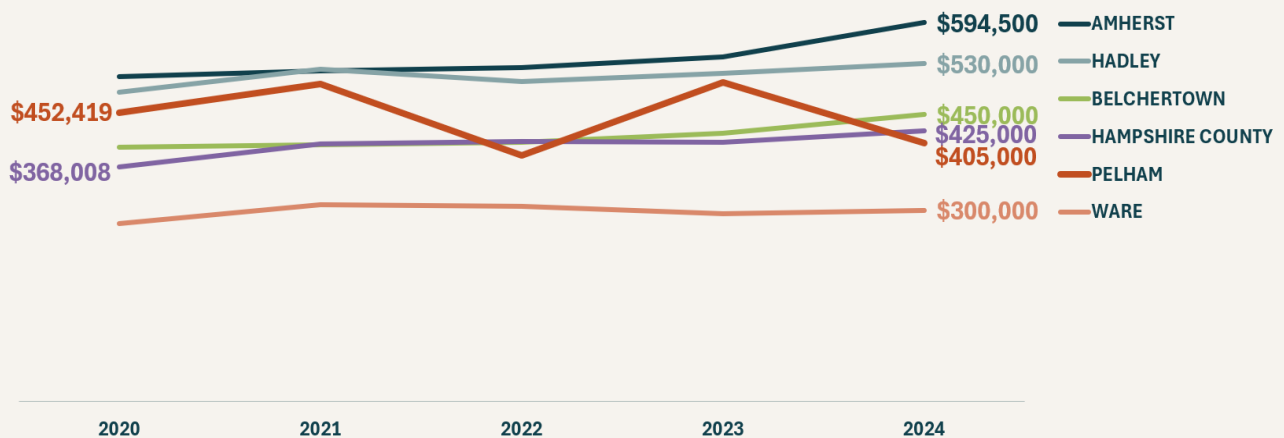
While median selling prices have grown over the past five years, when we inflation-adjust the data, we see that increases in Pelham are totally erased by inflation, with Pelham’s 2024 median sales price of \$405,000 falling short of the inflation adjusted 2020 median price of \$452,419.

### Median Sale Prices of Single Family Homes: Pelham and Regional Comparisons



Source: The Warren Group, Hampden Five-Year Report & Hampshire Five-Year Report, Median Sales Price by County, 2020-2024

### Median Inflation-Adjusted Sale Prices of Single Family Homes: Pelham and Regional Comparisons (2024 \$)



Source: The Warren Group, Hampden Five-Year Report & Hampshire Five-Year Report, Median Sales Price by County, 2020-2024

The number of building permits issued in Pelham is normally quite small. As seen in the figure below, 2023 stands out as a notable exception. The addition of 34 housing units in two buildings at Amethyst Brook Apartments stands out as a potentially transformational addition to the community.

HOME RENTAL PROPERTIES ▾ ABOUT US ▾

**HOME CITY**  
DEVELOPMENT, INC.

**Amethyst Brook Apartments**

**SCAN ME**

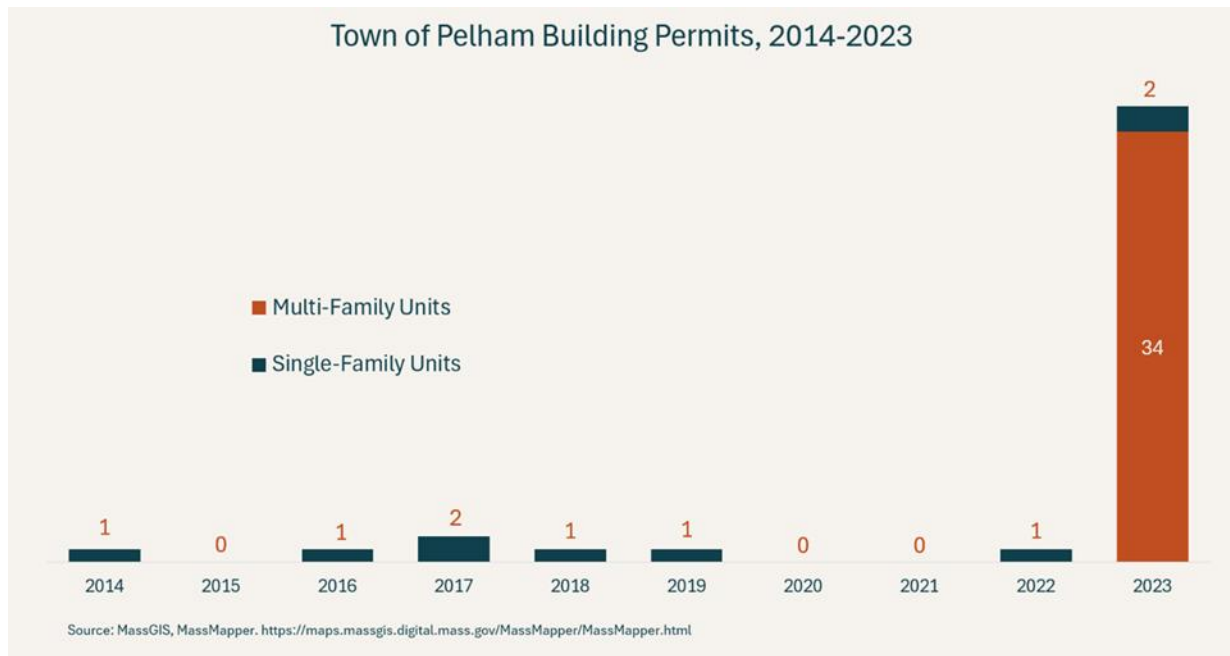




**New Affordable  
1, 2 & 3 Bedroom Apartments!**

Located at 20-22 Amherst Road in Pelham, Massachusetts. Amethyst Brook, is just 2.5 miles from downtown Amherst and situated within the beautiful Amethyst Brook conservation area. The property is walking distance to the Pelham Elementary school and Pelham is part of the highly rated Amherst Public School system.

Pelham offers a lovely country setting, the property will offer 34 affordable apartments, consisting of a six-unit, two-story walk-up building and a 28-unit four-story building with elevator. On-site laundry room, community room and management office. Free parking for one vehicle per household.

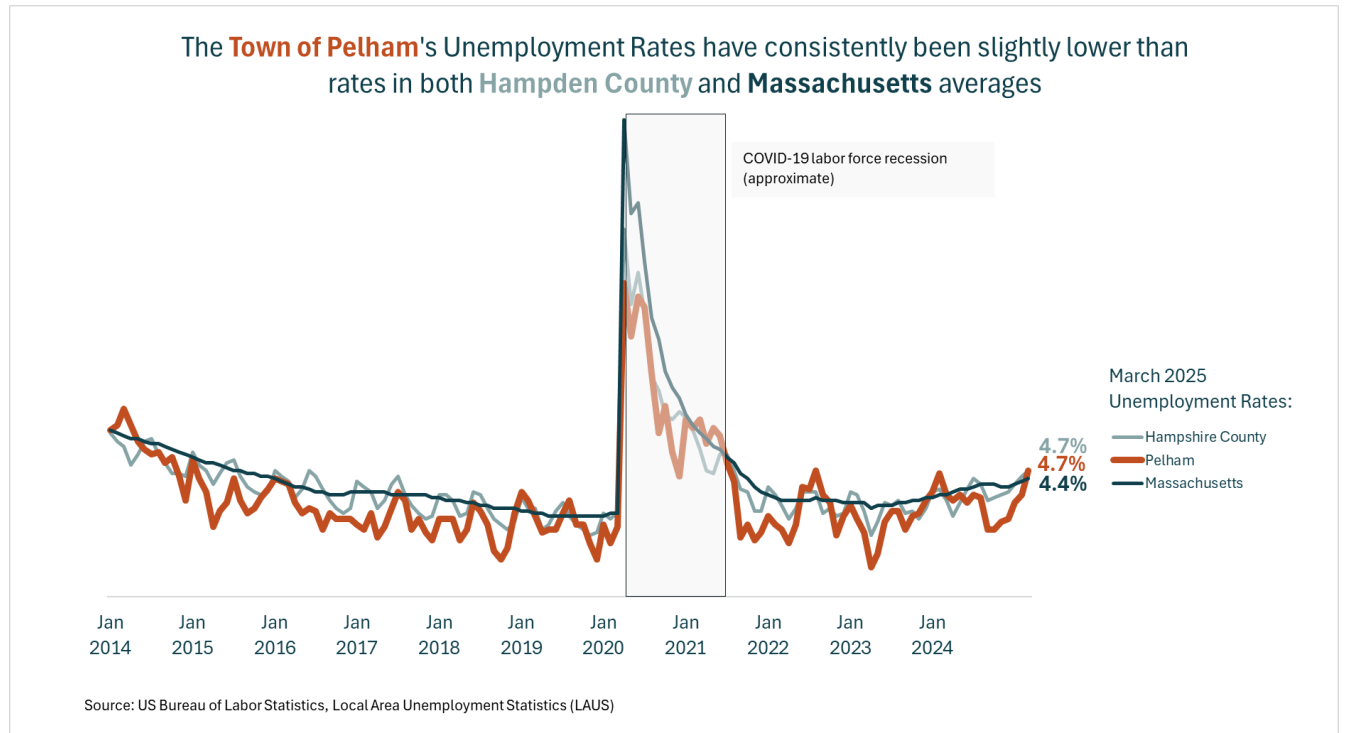


## Labor Market and the Economy

### Unemployment Rates

Pelham’s unemployment rate has been very similar to rates throughout Hampshire County, and generally slightly lower than rates across the Commonwealth.

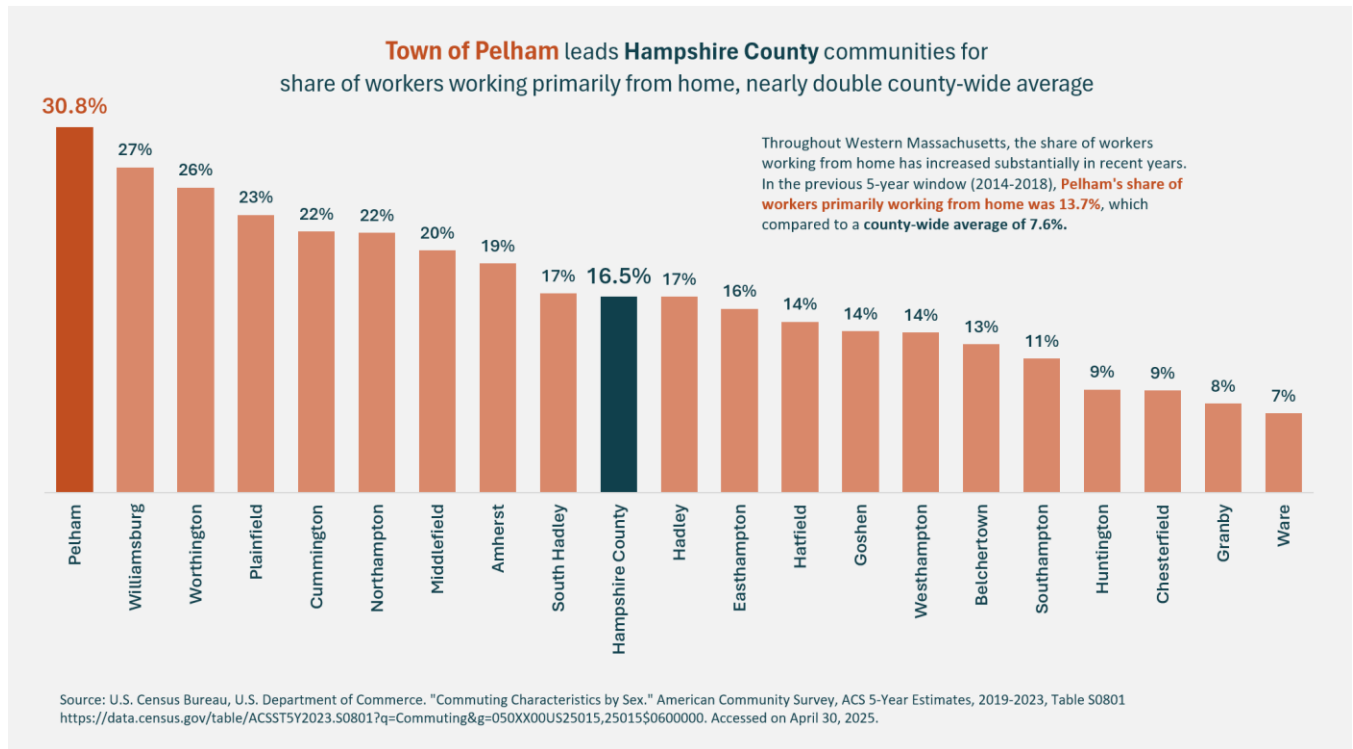
Unemployment rates in both Pelham have returned to pre-COVID levels, after soaring to record high levels following the shutdown of the state economy in late March, 2020.



### Share of workers working from home

The Town of Pelham leads Hampshire County in the share of workers working primarily from home. The 2019-2023 Census Bureau estimate shows nearly one third of workers (30.8%) working primarily from home.

Similar to most communities in the region, Pelham has seen a marked increase in the share of workers working from home in recent years. During the preceding five year window (2014-2018) Pelham’s share of workers working from home was 13.7%, compared to a county-wide average of 7.6%.

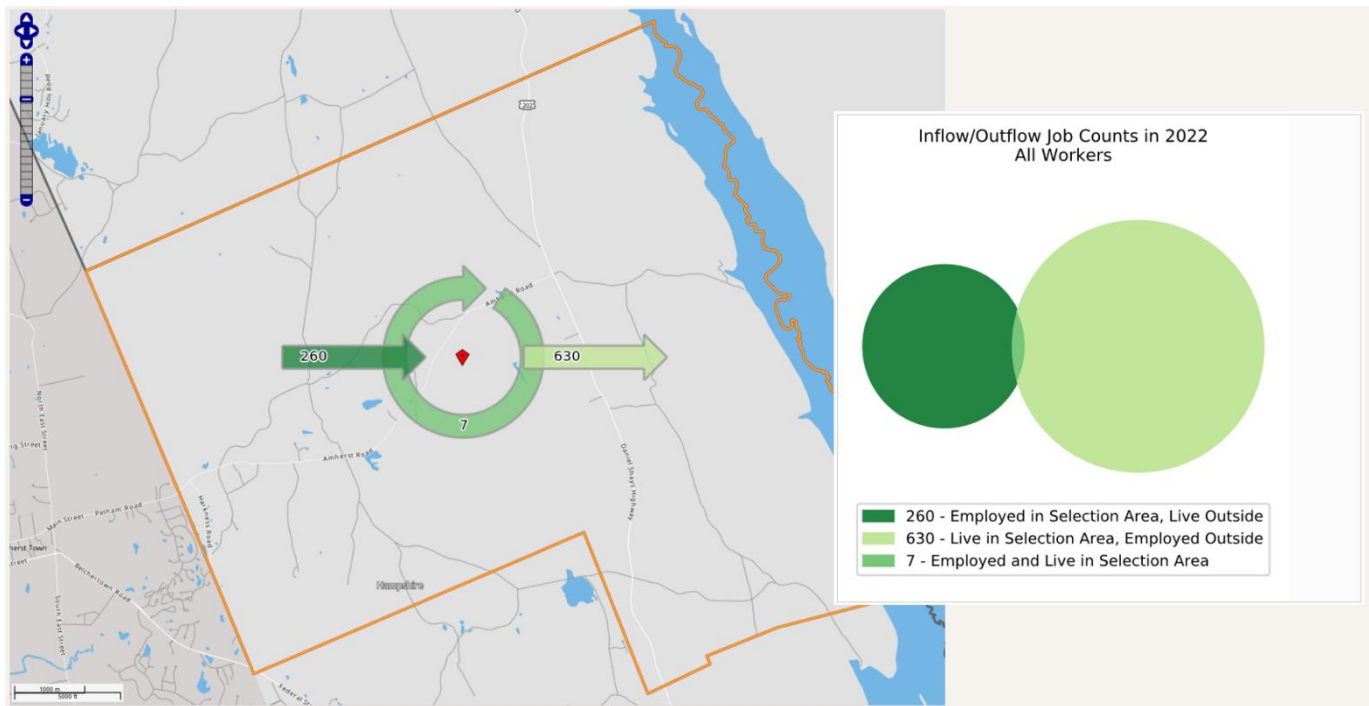


## Commuting Patterns<sup>1</sup>

The vast majority of people (97%) who work in Pelham live elsewhere. Of the people employed in the 267 jobs based in Pelham, 260 were residents of communities outside of Pelham, compared with just 7 who both lived and worked within the Town of Pelham.

A similar share of the jobs held by Pelham residents were outside the Town of Pelham: 97% vs just 3% within the Town of Pelham.

Location of Jobs held by Pelham Residents	#	%
Total workers living in Pelham	637	100%
Pelham residents working outside Pelham	630	99%
Workers living and working in Pelham	7	1%
Jobs located in Pelham	#	%
Workers employed in Pelham	267	100%
Workers employed in Pelham, but living elsewhere	260	97%
Workers living and working in Pelham	7	3%



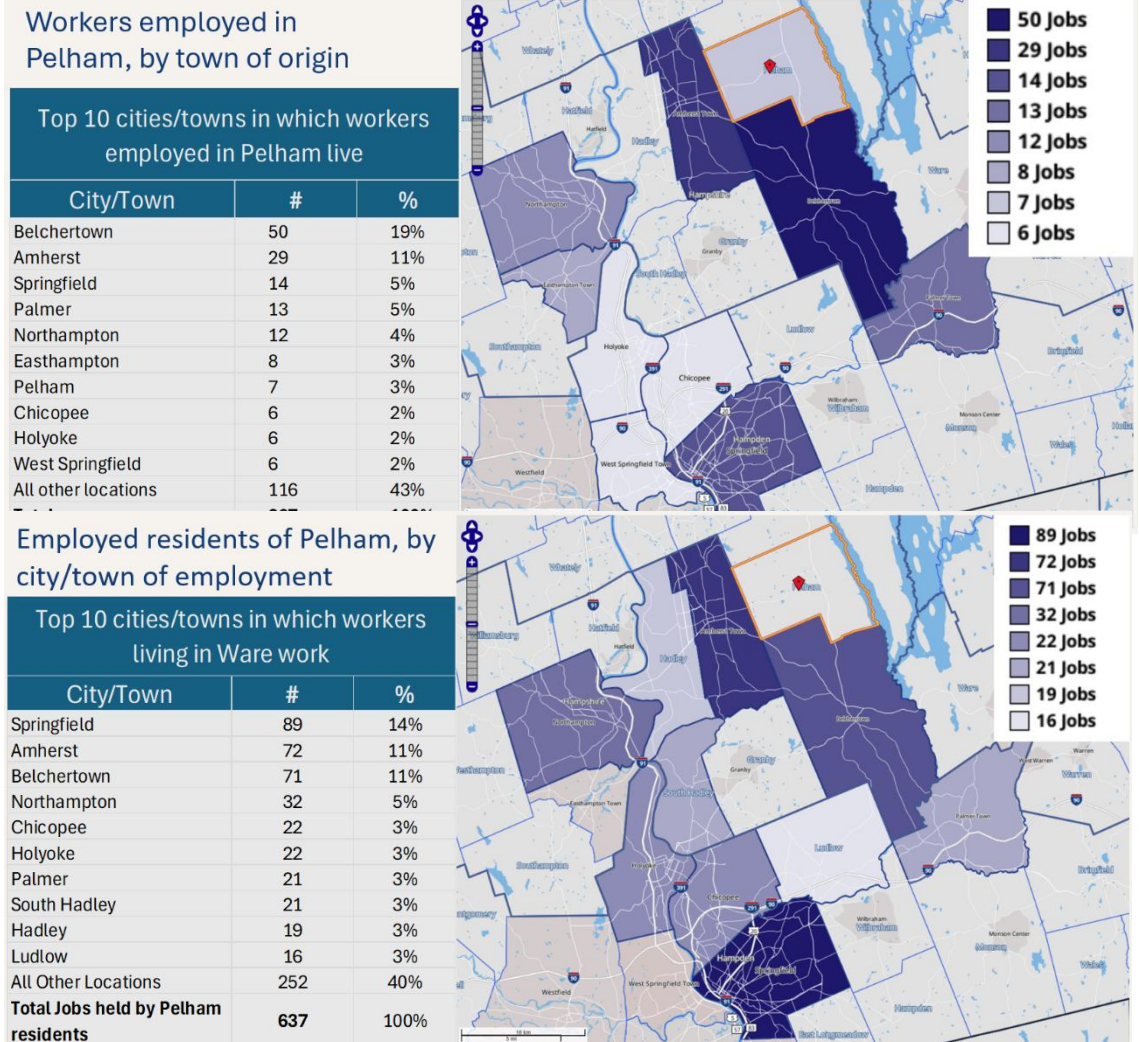
<sup>1</sup> All of the commuting data comes from the US Census Bureau's *On the Map* web site. Data are for 2022, the most recent available data.



U.S. Census Bureau data show that only 3% of Pelham’s jobs are filled by Pelham residents, with most jobs filled by workers traveling throughout the region to their Pelham-based jobs. Nineteen (19) percent live in Belchertown, 11% live in Amherst, 5% live in each of Springfield and Palmer, 4% live in Northampton, 3% live in Easthampton, and

2% live in each of Chicopee, Holyoke, and West Springfield. Notably 43% of Pelham jobs are filled by residents of other communities.

Of the 637 workers living in Pelham, just 1% (7) work in Ware. Substantial numbers work in neighboring cities and towns, including 89 (14%) in Springfield, 72 (11%) in Amherst, 71 (11%) in Belchertown, and 32 (5%) in Northampton. Three Percent work in each of Chicopee, Holyoke, Palmer, South Hadley, Hadley, and Ludlow while 40% work in other communities, primarily, but not exclusively, within Massachusetts. Thirty-eight (38) Pelham residents work in jobs based in Connecticut, across 24 communities.



## Largest Employers

Pelham does not have any large sources of private sector employment. The largest employers are in the public sector – Pelham Elementary School and the Town of Pelham (all departments except school), each with between 20 and 49 employees. All of the private sector businesses in Pelham have less than 10 employees, and most are in the trades or farming/forestry.

Company name	Address	Number of employees	NAICS Code
Pelham Elementary School	Amherst Rd	20 to 49	6111
Town of Pelham	Amherst Rd	20 to 49	9211
Hall Poultry	Enfield Rd	5 to 9	4244
Westbrook Veterinary Hospital	Belchertown Rd	5 to 9	5419
Shepard Electric	N Valley Rd	5 to 9	2382
Wilson Construction	Buffam Rd	5 to 9	2381
Arrowwood Design & Constr.	Amherst Rd	1 to 4	2361
JMR Inspections	Meetinghouse Rd	1 to 4	5313
Rick Light Bldg & Remodeling	Boyden Rd	1 to 4	2362
Partnership For Policy Integrity	Arnold Rd	1 to 4	5416
Pelham After School Prgm Inc.	Amherst Rd	1 to 4	8134
Urban Forestry Solutions Inc.	Buffam Rd	1 to 4	1153
Vital Statistics Consulting LLC	Harkness Rd	1 to 4	5417
Sources: Data Axle, 2025, via Massachusetts Department of Economic Research; PVPC online research			



## Pelham’s Village Center – Existing Conditions

### General Land Use and Zoning

#### *A Rural Community*

Pelham is a rural community with about 1,300 residents. Most of the land area is in forest, with some parcels in farmland or other open space. Residential uses are located primarily along main roads, with a few small subdivisions. A few commercial uses exist – including a veterinary hospital and a poultry farm exempted from zoning laws by the “grandfather” clause. There is no central business district or commercial strip, and the school system is the largest employer.

Most of the land in Pelham is protected in perpetuity. The eastern one-third of the town, roughly corresponding to the area east of Route 202, is state-owned Quabbin watershed land. Other large forest tracts in Pelham are owned by the Town of Amherst for drinking water supply, and some are owned by the University of Massachusetts and Amherst College for research and recreation. The Town of Pelham has also acquired several key tracts for conservation and passive recreation.

Accordingly, the town is generally zoned for low-density residential and agricultural uses. However, in 2018 and 2019, a Village Center Bylaw was adopted and amended to allow higher densities in the western-most section of Pelham, including commercial and mixed uses. Combined with the 2025 Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bylaw passed as a result of state requirements, there is an opportunity for greater development density in the village center, particularly if more properties can tap into the existing sewer lines from Amherst while maintaining wetland and water supply protection.

#### *Village Center Zoning Updates – Increasing Local Vitality*

With the Village Center Bylaw, the town allows for smaller lot sizes and frontage requirements for residential and some commercial uses. Subdivision of existing lots is allowed if a minimum frontage per lot is maintained; the minimum requirement depends on the specific zone as described below.

From the zoning bylaw, the goals of this Village Center bylaw are as follows:

To foster well-planned business and residential development in a compact village center in West Pelham, in keeping with the character of traditional New England villages, in order to create a place with a unique and positive local identity and provide opportunities for development to expand the Town's economic and residential diversity and vitality.

Development within the Village Center Districts should provide commercial, civic, residential uses and public open space within easy, safe walking distance of each other. Vehicular circulation should be safe and well organized, with the use and visual impact of cars minimized. There should be tree-lined streets, sidewalks or paths for pedestrians, well-designed architecture, and public spaces. Property developers are encouraged to provide amenities such as protected open space, high-quality landscaping, street furniture, public spaces, and greater integration of mixed uses.

This new zoning divides the Village Center into three neighborhoods:

**1) Village Center Mixed Use District (VC-MU)**

The purpose of the Village Center Mixed-Use District is foster the development of a village center that features a mix of civic, commercial, institutional, residential, and open space uses within close proximity to each other, while ensuring that development reflects patterns of development characteristic of traditional New England village centers, including the design of buildings, sites, streets, and public spaces.

This district is the heart of the village center. This neighborhood includes parcels that are a short walk from the library and the elementary school along Amherst Road, Jones Road, North and South Valley Roads and Cadwell Street. This area has existing and potential sewer capacity. In this neighborhood, fostering small businesses and a mix of uses characteristic of a traditional New England village is the goal. Small village lots (1/4 acre, 80 ft of frontage) enable limited infill development.

**2) Village Center Rural Edge District (VC-RE)**

This zone includes parcels on the east and southeast edges of the Village Center. Some parcels are served by sewer; some are not. Parcels are adjacent to large forested areas or important habitat and may require permits to protect ecological resources, rural character and watershed values. The default lot size in this area is 2 acres with 125' of frontage. Open Space Design (OSD) is the preferred development approach for this area. It requires significant open space protection, allows flexibility in lot layout, and allows density bonuses for affordable housing, extra protected open space, and/or public access to protected open space. The plan for this area attempts to strike a balance between conservation of natural areas & creation of an attractive neighborhood.

**3) Village Center Neighborhood District (VC-N)**

Parcels in these areas are a minimum lot size of 3/4 acre with 125' of frontage. This lot size requires innovative septic design or a sewer connection. Parcels on Amherst Road are currently served by sewer or have it available to them. Greater diversity of housing and limited businesses would be allowed in this area with detailed standards to ensure compatability with the neighborhood.

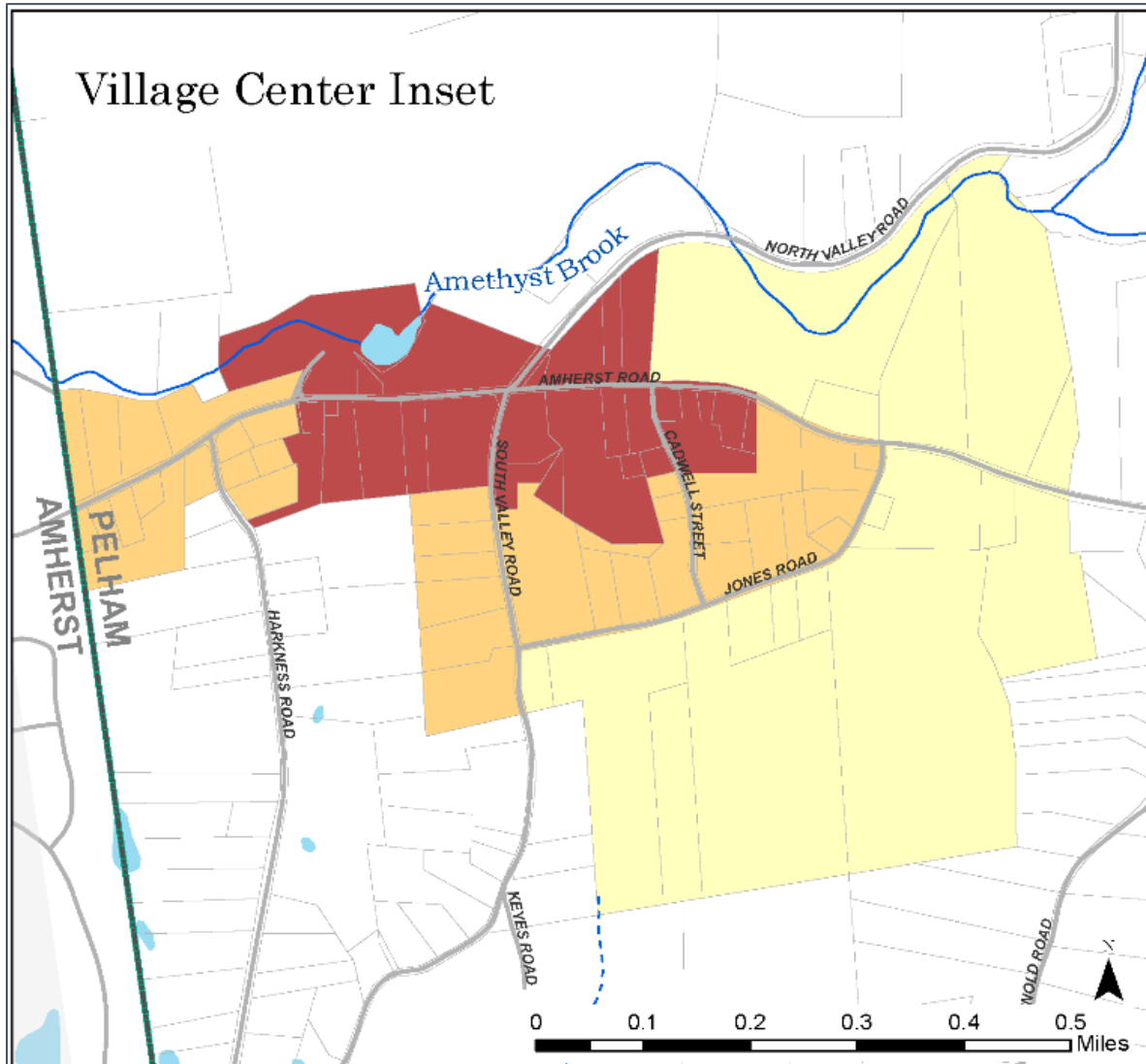
The purpose of the Village Center Neighborhood District is to support and enhance the residential neighborhood adjacent to the Village Center by providing opportunities for diverse and innovative housing options, providing additional opportunities for home occupations and small-scale commercial and institutional uses, and improving the walkability of the district, while ensuring that development reflects patterns of development characteristic of residential neighborhoods surrounding the centers of traditional New England villages, including the design of buildings, sites, streets, open spaces, and pedestrian accommodations. A further purpose of this district is to support the economic viability of the Village Center and allow the gradual expansion of the Village Center.

### *Accessory Dwelling Unit Bylaw*

A new Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) bylaw has also been established. The ADU bylaw gives property owners the option to add a new rental apartment in their home or on their property. Accessory dwelling units are now permitted by-right statewide in Massachusetts due to the Healey-Driscoll Administration's Affordable Homes Act, signed into law in August 2024. Sometimes called tiny homes or in-law suites, ADUs are small, independent living spaces located on the same lot as a principal dwelling in a single-family residential zoning district. Garages, attics, and basements can be converted into ADUs, or an ADU can be a newly constructed detached cottage or addition onto the primary home, with a separate entrance. Such units could theoretically double the population of the Pelham village center, although it is unlikely that every village center resident would take advantage of this opportunity.

Maps of the town's current zoning are on the following pages and on the town's website.

2025  
Pelham Village Center Inset Map



2024 ZONING MAP  
OF THE  
TOWN OF PELHAM



Zoning & Overlay Districts  
(R) Residential  
(VC-RE) Village Center Rural Edge  
(VC-N) Village Center Neighborhood  
(VC-MU) Village Center Mixed Use  
(LB) Limited Business  
Water Supply Protection Overlay District

Town Boundaries  
Tax Parcel Boundaries  
U.S. Highway  
Local Road  
Open Water  
Stream  
Intermittent Stream

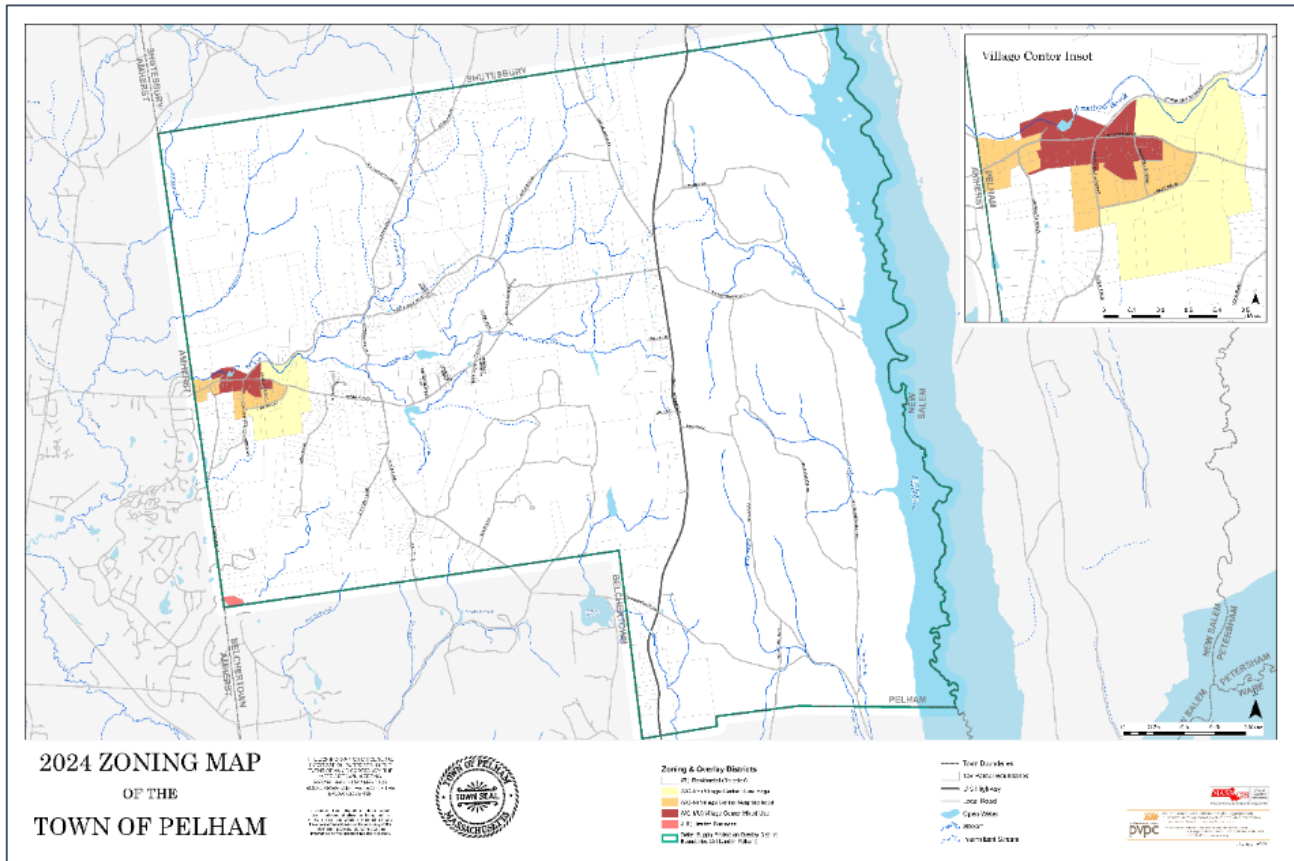


**Zoning & Overlay Districts**

- (R) Residential (No color)
- (VC-RE) Village Center Rural Edge
- (VC-N) Village Center Neighborhood
- (VC-MU) Village Center Mixed Use
- (LB) Limited Business
- Water Supply Protection Overlay District Boundaries (All Land in Pelham)

- Town Boundaries
- Tax Parcel Boundaries
- U.S. Highway
- Local Road
- Open Water
- Stream
- Intermittent Stream

## Pelham Zoning Map - 2025





## Community Buildings and Infrastructure

Town-owned buildings in the Village Center include the ca. 2000 Community Center, ca. 1893 Community Hall, and the ca. 1967 Pelham Elementary School, as well as two sheds and two carports.

### *Community Hall*

The 1893 Community Hall at 40 Amherst Road was originally a one-room schoolhouse and has been restored, renovated and made fully accessible. It has a full kitchen, bathroom, and sufficient tables and chairs for medium-sized gatherings.<sup>2</sup> The space is available for official town business as well as use by school and established non-profit groups based in Pelham, individuals or other non-profit groups with a Pelham contact, and Pelham residents, including for private events. It has recently been used for a variety of meeting and social uses, including regular planning board meetings, Council on Aging meetings, a monthly “Coffee Hour,” potluck gatherings, live music and open mics, art showings, and seasonal activities such as pumpkin carvings. There is a gravel parking lot that can fit two regular spaces and one fully accessible space, and there is additional space for parking along North Valley Road. There is also space on the front lawn to display signs for upcoming events.



### *Community Center*

The Community Center building at 2 South Valley Road was built in 2000 to house the Pelham Free Public Library and the Pelham Police and Fire departments. The police and fire offices and garages are on the first floor of the building, and they are served by two smaller parking areas, with a carport that houses two police vehicles and a large shed for equipment.



<sup>2</sup> The space houses several tables that each seat eight or more people and plenty of chairs. Maximum capacity is 49 people.

The library serves as the school library during the school day and as a public library at other times. During school hours, students use the facility for class research and quiet reading time. Afternoons, evenings, and weekends the library is available to residents of Pelham and neighboring communities.<sup>3</sup> The library has two conference rooms available for public use: the Ramsdell Room (large enough for community meetings with a 60-person maximum) and the History Room (a small room that seats up to eight). There is also a bulletin board in the library for community announcements, including the schedule for the Community Hall.



Public bathrooms are currently available at the library and Community Hall, but the Hall is only open occasionally for specific events. Excluding major holidays, the library is open most afternoons and evenings during the week and mid-day on Saturdays.<sup>4</sup>

Public parking is available at the lower level for the police and fire stations (eight spaces in addition to employee and police vehicle spaces) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor library level (31 spaces), with some of the latter intended for school access. There are two sheds behind the property; one is used by the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) for equipment and supplies and the other by the Town for maintenance equipment.

Because the Community Building is built into the hillside, both the first and second floors have ground-level access. However, there is no easy access from the library entrance and parking lot down to the police and fire level. The hillside is steep and there are no steps. One must drive or walk around on the roadways (or hike down the slope).



*Left: View of slope between the two stories of the Community Building (Source: Google Maps Street View). Right: Library/School parking lot viewed from the vacant town lot.*

<sup>3</sup> Public library hours are: Monday: 2:00 -7:00 p.m, Tuesday and Thursday: 2:30-7:00 p.m., Wednesday: 1:00 – 7:00 p.m.,Friday: 10:00 a.m. – noon, Saturday: 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid



The outdoor area between the library and elementary school has been used as a “Village Square” for events, including music and barbecues. One resident has brought a fire pit for these gatherings in the cooler weather. There are small gardens tended by the school between the two buildings, installed by local residents who worked with a nearby farm to source and test the soil. They were used for about 1.5 years but are not used as much because the school installed additional gardens on the other side of the building.



The buildings are linked by paved pathways, where there are three benches, and there is a paved area that is currently being set up with metal picnic tables. Underneath the concrete slab are fuel tanks for the school, precluding construction or landscaping.

A local resident initiated the concept, cleared the space, and bought three picnic tables with umbrellas. Once they started to deteriorate,

they were removed by the town, which is now installing three new powder coated metal tables acquired by the Pelham Elementary PTO with funding from the town and library. Community members value them for use during school pick-up, meetings, reading, eating and even outdoor school classrooms.





*This view of the school from a bench outside the library illustrates the park-like environment between the two buildings.*

The exact demarcation between school and library use is unclear, although they are two separate lots. Parents picking up their children after school utilize the common parking lot and wait outside the library for kids to emerge from a back door of the school next to the garden planters.



### *Elementary School*

The 23,000 square foot Pelham Elementary school at 45 Amherst Road currently serves 131 students. This K-6 school functions both as its own district and also as part of the Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools (APRPS) District (which includes four elementary schools: three in Amherst and this one in Pelham). The Town of Pelham owns the land and building, and the school has its own budget and school committee. However, the Pelham District also pays into the APRPS District in order to access the administrative resources, including a superintendent of schools.

The Pelham Elementary School employs a principal, 25 teachers and para-educators, and three staff members (29 total, or 13.8 FTE). School attendance has been steady in recent years, with attendance increasingly bolstered by school choice students. Currently, about 55% of students are



from surrounding towns, and 45% are from Pelham. The ca. 1967 building, while renovated in 2003, is in need of a new roof and HVAC system.

The school is a valued community asset, as it is a high-performing school as measured by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)<sup>5</sup> and easily accessible for Pelham residents as well as nearby residents from other towns. It includes basketball courts and a soccer field, as well as a generously sized playground—currently being redesigned for ADA accessibility—with picnic tables. Behind the fenced-in soccer field is a large area of wetlands, which are only accessible to students via



the adjacent lot. Teachers occasionally use some areas of the property for art and environmental activities. The school has also created an additional garden area within the “U” shaped portion of the building near the front entrance. There is an active Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), which holds events and fundraisers throughout the year.

*View of path from library to back of elementary school. Playground can be seen at middle right.*

### **Vacant Town-owned Property**

The town also owns two properties behind the library and school, including a 37,500-square foot parcel that is under consideration for community uses and another, smaller, property that is mostly wetlands. The larger lot was formerly occupied by a two-family house which was considered for use by the town as a rental property but was in disrepair and contained lead paint. It was therefore demolished about 25 years ago and a portion of that lot was incorporated into the library parking lot.

A volunteer subcommittee of the Planning Board, working with the Housing Committee, Select Board, Conservation Commission, and other stakeholders convened in February 2024 and explored options for the town-owned lot. Their mission was to consider potential uses for the property and report back to the Planning Board, with a focus on the larger village center development. The group began with a land and wetlands survey that clarified property ownership and identified land use constraints. The survey revealed that only a small portion of the property is buildable due to wetland setbacks, access issues, and ADA compliance needs.

About this time, the Town applied for One Stop for Growth funding to conduct a study of the downtown and particularly the areas within the mixed-use zoning district. Technical assistance funding was awarded in late 2024 for the current study.

<sup>5</sup> [MCAS Tests of Spring 2024 Percent of Students at Each Achievement Level - Pelham \(02300000\)](#)





*View of front corner of vacant town property in March and again in May.*

The group also reviewed a 2022 citizen opinion survey that gleaned 160 responses (16% of the adult population) and showed a preference for small commercial uses such as a café, deli, or bakery, as well as home-based businesses. However, the land constraints are significant; a prominent Amherst developer viewed and assessed the features of site and found there to be a number of obstacles to commercial development, although he did say that two residential units could be feasible, thus not ruling out some sort of combined housing/small business development.

The committee decided that further research into commercial development might not be fruitful due to the land constraints, but some key community-building ideas emerged, such as a wildflower garden to be shared with the school, space for music events, a picnic area, larger pavilion, and potential reconfiguration of parking lot and sewer connection for the library which could free up some portions of land for other uses, among other ideas.



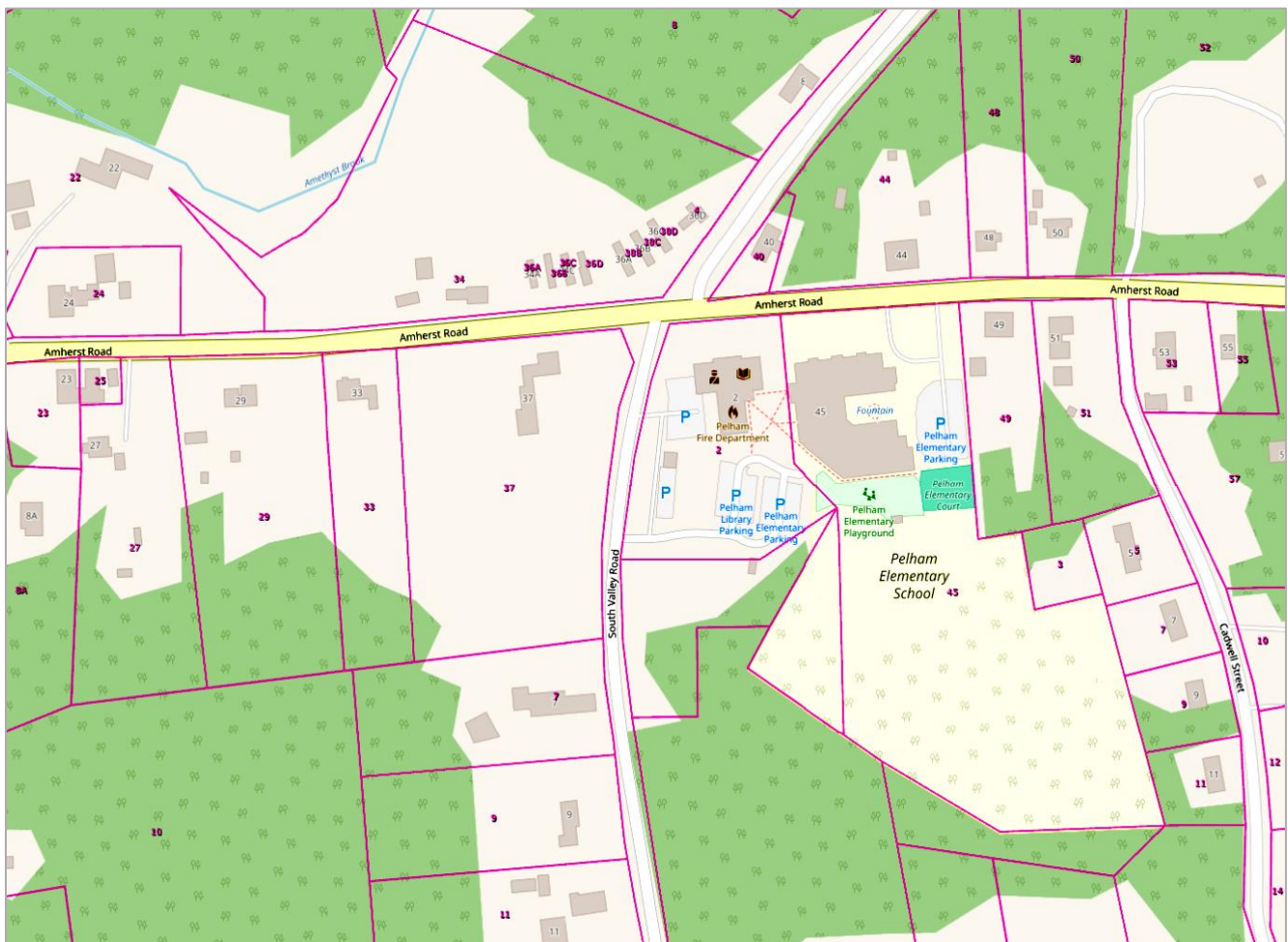
*Vacant town lot, facing the school and Community Building, showing open area alongside wooded land. In the foreground of the open area is the leach field for the former house; the septic tank is near the white shed.*



In light of these findings, the subcommittee recommended several non-building uses for the parcel to enhance community engagement and support the village center concept. At the time of this report, the Planning Board is considering these and other concepts.

The following maps from MassMapper<sup>6</sup> show details of the Village Center, including roadways, property lines, building footprints, parking lot, and areas of wetlands. They also show the current walkways between the school and Community Building (in light red) and the playground and basketball court on the school grounds.

### Pelham Village Center – Main Intersection



<sup>6</sup> [MassMapper](#)

### West Pelham



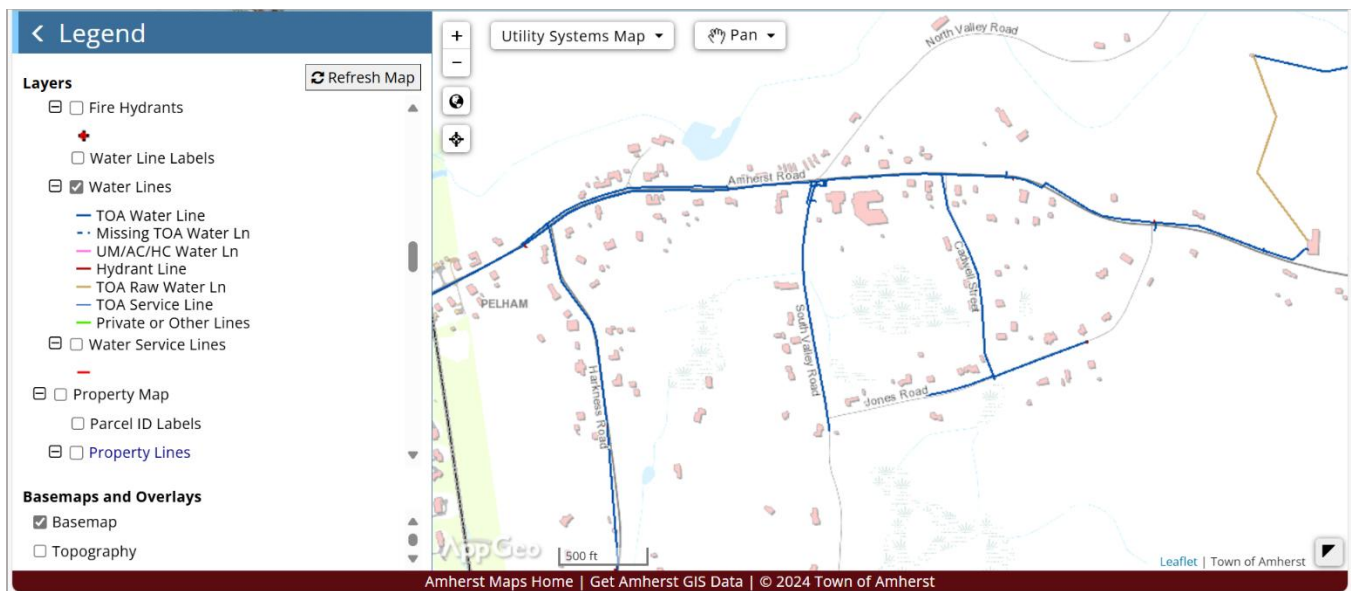
These maps from [MassMapper](#) show roads, power lines, parcel lines, and structures in West Pelham. Areas of wetlands, a small reservoir, and streams are also illustrated. Lots are numbered, and there is some detail regarding parking areas and other features at the Community Center (police/fire/library) and Pelham Elementary School.

The following section on Water and Sewer facilities in the Village Center shows maps of about the same area with infrastructure details from the Town of Amherst GIS maps.

## Water and Sewer

As shown in the map below, Pelham is served by water lines from Amherst extending along Amherst Road through the village center and serving the streets within the center (including South Valley Road, Cadwell Street and Jones Road).

The town has joined other Quabbin watershed towns in exploring financial recompense and better representation on the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) Board for the environmental and watershed protection values provided by Quabbin communities. These towns value their rural communities but also seek acknowledgment and just compensation for the loss of this land from their towns. Legislation has been proposed by western Massachusetts legislators Senator Comerford and Representative Saunders toward this end.<sup>7</sup>



*Town of Amherst water lines in Pelham, including pump house and raw water line to a small reservoir (not visible)*

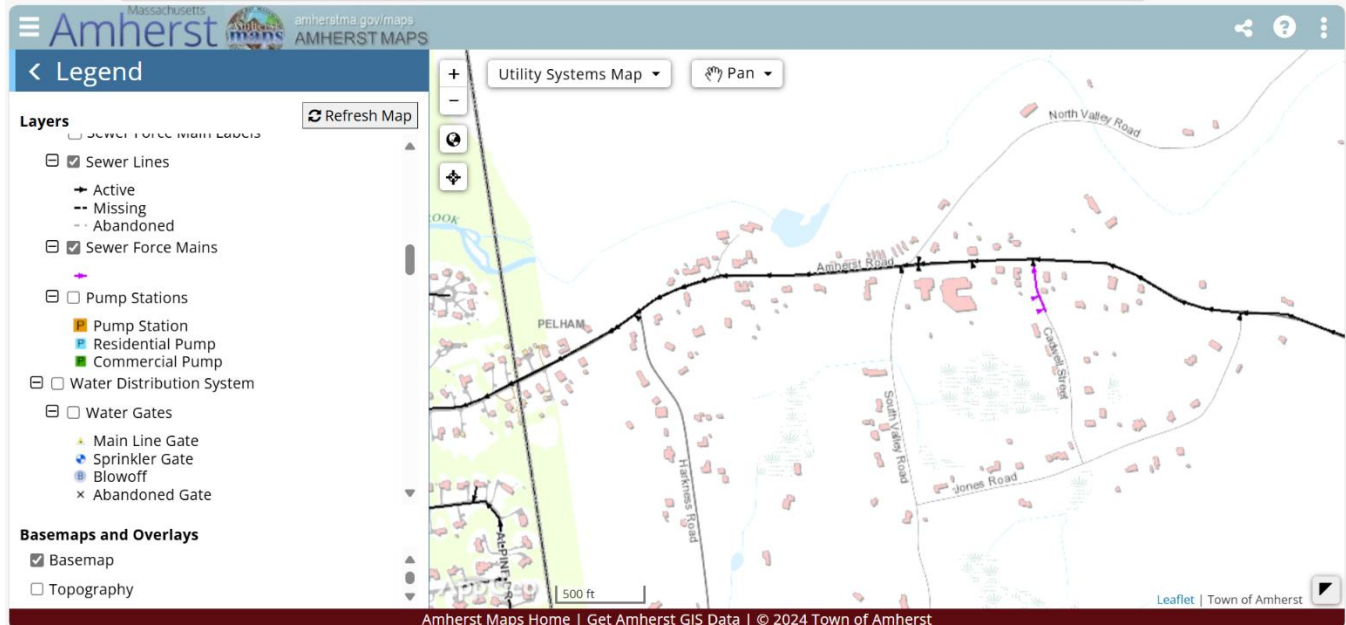
A sewer line extension from the Town of Amherst serves some properties on Amherst Road and Harkness Road, including the new apartment complex, and was extended further to serve two new Habitat for Humanities homes to be built on Cadwell Street near Amherst Road. Additional sewer line is also proposed for a looped extension onto Jones Road, South Valley Road and Cadwell Street. It would thus serve most of the Village Center Mixed Use District. The Town of Pelham and the Amherst Public Works Department have submitted a grant application for this extension.

There already exist unused stubs at each intersection (visible as small arrows on the map below), including at the main Village Center intersection at Amherst Road with North and South Valley Roads. These would allow sewer connections to adjacent properties without a major sewer extension. At present the school, Community Building, and Community Hall could connect to the existing sewer line running along Amherst Road but have not yet done so. Instead, these facilities are using on-site septic

<sup>7</sup> Bill [S.546/H.104](#)

systems with leach fields, located in the properties surrounding the buildings. Most town residents currently rely on septic systems.

See map below for the locations of the existing sewer lines. Both water and sewer maps are from the Town of Amherst's GIS resources.<sup>8</sup>



*Town of Amherst sewer lines in Pelham, including recent extension on Cadwell Road*

## Other Utilities

The town of Pelham is served by Eversource for its electricity needs. There are no natural gas lines in town, and given state regulations limiting new gas infrastructure, it is unlikely that Pelham will ultimately be served by natural gas. Other options may include networked geothermal systems or electricity from solar and wind power. The state is also promoting the use of non-gas appliances and battery-driven tools and vehicles.

The town is served by several internet providers:<sup>9</sup>

- Xfinity offers a cable connection to 71% of Pelham.
- T-Mobile offers fixed wireless internet to 97% of Pelham.
- AT&T also offers fixed wireless to 45% of town.
- Spectrum provides cable to about 35% of the community.
- EarthLink 5G Home Internet offers service to about 45% of Pelham.
- South Hadley Electric Light provides fiber optic lines to about 10% of the town.

<sup>8</sup> [Amherst Utility System Viewer](#)

<sup>9</sup> [TV and Internet Providers in Pelham, MA | BestNeighborhood.org](#)



## Transportation and Access

### *Traffic Levels in the Village*

The Village Center is located at the intersection of Amherst Road and North Valley Road. Amherst Road is a major east-west route for commuters, students, and others traveling to and from central or eastern Massachusetts. It is a narrow road with minimal shoulders and takes a winding route as it travels through the Village Center. Despite this intended traffic calming and road speed limitations, speeding is still an issue, and radar speed signs have been installed to help slow traffic. Traffic levels are moderate on Amherst Road, classified as a Major Collector, with an average annual daily traffic count (AADT) of 2,500 overall and 5,000 at the village center.

North Valley Road is a commuter route for residents of Shutesbury and Wendell. Traffic is quite low on North Valley Road, a “local road” with an AADT of about 1,500.<sup>10</sup>

There is virtually no transit service in Pelham, although two Pioneer Valley Transit Authority routes come close to Pelham. Route 30 ends well before the Pelham line at the intersection of Main Street and North East Street in Amherst and then travels southeast on Route 9, again stopping short of Pelham on Old Belchertown Road. PVRTA Route 45 travels Route 9, where it briefly intersects the southwest corner of Pelham at Harkness Road. A bus stop also exists at Heatherstone Road and Amherst Road in Amherst, relatively near the town line with Pelham.

### *Sidewalks*

As the town continued to refine the new Village Center Zoning District along Amherst Road, and as a 34-unit housing development was being planned a quarter of a mile down the street, it was clear that the addition of a sidewalk along this busy commuter road was necessary. The new public sidewalk, if funding can be found, will be built along the south side of Amherst Road, linking the new affordable housing project at 22 Amherst Road to the Community Center/Community Hall area at the corner of Amherst Road and North/South Valley Road. When complete, the project will include over 1,200 LF of new sidewalk, drainage work to improve stormwater discharges to a cold-water fishery (Amethyst Brook) and include new pedestrian crossings complete with flashing beacons to improve overall safety.

Once pedestrians arrive at the intersection, access to the library and/or elementary school is available by walking along South Valley Road and up the access road into the parking lot. There is no pedestrian walkway or stairway between upper and lower levels of the Community Building which many see as a potentially desirable improvement.

## Environmental Constraints

The most significant environmental constraint in the Village Center is the presence of wetlands, followed by limited areas of steep slopes. As the previous map shows, much of the land surrounding the existing buildings is comprised of wetlands. Without the availability of sewer service, development

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<sup>10</sup> MassDOT Traffic Volume Interactive Map: [Transportation Data Management System](#)



potential in the Center is quite limited. There are plans to extend sewer service to the roads that loop to and from Amherst Road, but additional sewer connections will be needed along the main road, as well.

### Residential Housing Development

Most of the 556 homes in Pelham and the several dozen in the Village Center are single family dwellings. However, there are eight mobile homes at the main intersection in the Village Center, and a new rental apartment development was completed in June 2025. This 34-unit affordable rental housing development, called Amethyst Brook Apartments, is being built by Home City Development on a 2.6-acre site at 20-22 Amherst Road, about a quarter mile south of the Village Center intersection. There are also two recently built Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity homes on Amherst Road. Two additional Habitat for Humanity homes are planned for Cadwell Street.



*In May 2025, the apartments were nearing final construction; on the left is the 6-unit building, and at right is the 28-unit building.*

The new apartments will consist of a 28-unit building and a 6-unit building, which will include 24 one-bedroom, seven two-bedroom, and 3 three-bedroom apartments. The location is the site of the former Montague Fish Rod Company and is directly adjacent to Amethyst Brook. It is connected to the Amherst-owned sewer line in Amherst Road. All apartments will be affordable to households with income at or below 60% of area median. The current median income for the Amherst Town-Northampton, MA MSA is \$119,000. The exact income limits depend on how many individuals live in each household and is determined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.<sup>11</sup> Five apartments will be further restricted to households with income at or below 50% of area median, while

<sup>11</sup> [FY 2025 Income Limits Documentation System -- Summary for Pelham town, Massachusetts](#)

eleven apartments will be restricted to households with income at or below 30% of area median. Residents will be selected by lottery. It is the first rental housing development in Pelham and represents a significant percentage of the town's affordable housing portfolio.

Amethyst Brook Apartments will be energy efficient, by current standards. The 28-unit building will be certified to Passive House standards while the 6-unit building will be certified by Energy Star. The property will include a rooftop solar array and electric vehicle charging stations. The Pelham Zoning Board of Appeals issued a Comprehensive Permit for Amethyst Brook Apartments in August 2021. The project is supported by acquisition financing from The Life Insurance Community Investment Initiative and pre-development financing from Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation. The Town of Pelham also approved Community Preservation Act funds for the project, and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (now Housing and Livable Communities) awarded affordable housing resources to Home City Development for the project.

### **Market Potential**

While this study can provide a brief discussion of the marketability of certain commercial uses, a thorough market study would need to be conducted to fully evaluate the potential of Pelham's village center to support commercial uses.

#### *Market Area*

Pelham is a rural residential town adjacent to the town of Amherst, Massachusetts, a western Massachusetts educational hub with a traditional town center and population of over 39,000, including nearly 32,000 students at UMass alone (with more than half of the town's population between age 18 and 24).<sup>12</sup> It is bordered on the west by Amherst, and on the other three sides by the rural communities of Shutesbury, New Salem, and Belchertown, all bordering the Quabbin Reservoir and where significant areas of land are permanently preserved for the Quabbin watershed.

Based on these numbers, it is possible to get a very general sense of the potential for small commercial use in Pelham's Village Center.

The current population within a one-mile radius of Pelham's village center is about 1,550. Within a two-mile radius, which does not yet reach Amherst Center, it is about 7,400. Within three miles, which encompasses Amherst Center and much of the University of Massachusetts, the total population is estimated to be about 25,000.<sup>13</sup> Cushman Market and Café in Amherst is just outside the three-mile radius.

It is possible that the population within the current three-mile radius of the village center will grow, but only if sewer lines are extended throughout the Village Center. Most of the land in the village center is located in or near wetlands, and an increased number or increased usage of septic systems

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census

<sup>13</sup> [Calculate the estimated population within any area on a map](#)

would exceed the land's capacity. A recent buildout study conducted by the PVPC found that if all property owners in the Village Center redeveloped their properties according to the new Village Center zoning bylaw using ANR development, the total new ANR lots could be up to 49.<sup>14</sup> These estimates assume reliance on septic systems; if the properties also benefitted from wastewater service, the number could be much higher, and if property owners developed Accessory Dwelling Units, the numbers would rise further.

On Amherst Road, the average annual daily traffic count (AADT) is 2,500 overall and 5,000 at the village center. There is virtually no transit service in Pelham. Much of the traffic is commuter and student travel into and out of Amherst to UMass and other colleges and employers. For those living and working in Amherst or west of Amherst, there is little reason to travel through Pelham other than to get to Route 202 for points north and east. Other traffic in Pelham is local travel by local residents to various town locations, including destinations in the Village Center.

Based on these numbers, it is possible to get a general sense of the potential for small commercial use in Pelham's Village Center.

### *Coffee Shop*

A variety of sources indicate that a coffee shop would need from 100-300 customers a day to be profitable, although some say as low as 70.<sup>15</sup> Sources emphasize that location is crucial in determining the success of a coffee shop:

*"A prime location with high foot traffic, visibility, and accessibility can attract a robust customer base. Coffee shops situated near office complexes, universities, or busy shopping districts often perform better than those in more secluded areas."*<sup>16</sup>

Some sources indicate that it is impossible for a single small coffee shop to survive (as opposed to a franchise)<sup>17</sup>

### *Convenience Store/Deli*

Another possibility in this area might be a convenience store with a delicatessen serving freshly made soups and sandwiches along with other items, similar to Cushman Market and Café in North Amherst. For convenience stores, one source states:

*"Ideal convenience store sites see traffic of 3,000 to 4,000 vehicles per day within neighborhoods, along busy streets, and near freeway exits. Assessing the potential customer*

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<sup>14</sup> "Pelham Village Center Zoning: Buildout using ANR," Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. Note that: "This estimate does not account for all the deterrents to build-out, including, property owners who do not want to develop their property, wetlands, steep slopes, lot access issues, septic requirements, and/or insufficient market demand. It also does not show what the results would be of potential subdivision by building a new road, common driveway development, or open space design."

<sup>15</sup> [When can a coffee shop expect to break even? – BusinessDojo](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Unlocking the Potential: How Much Money Can You Make with a Small Coffee Shop? - The Proper Kitchen](#)

<sup>17</sup> [How Does That Independent Coffee Shop Survive? | Entrepreneur](#)

*base within a 1-3 mile ring helps determine if the surrounding population meets the ideal threshold of 2,500-8,500 people. Consider the existence of other retail locations such as farmers' markets and grocery stores.”<sup>18</sup>*

Zoning in Amherst adjacent to the Pelham border is low-density residential (mostly 30,000-80,000 square foot minimum lot sizes, with the higher end in Farmland Conservation zones), with a Neighborhood Residential zone along Pelham Road allowing minimum lot sizes of 20,000 sq. feet (just less than half an acre). This zone is largely developed, although it may not be completely built out. The nearest high density residential center is Amherst Center, where apartment buildings and mixed-use developments are allowed in several business zones, and this is where a large number and variety of small shops are located, with a significant number offering food and beverages.

As mentioned above, a local developer assessed the town-owned site behind the library and found there to be a number of obstacles to commercial development, although he thought that two residential units could be feasible.

### Commuter Rail

One possible long-term impact on Pelham is the potential for residential growth related to future passenger rail service in Palmer. Plans for a new passenger rail station in Palmer, along the line from Albany to Boston, will most likely result in significant residential growth in the immediate vicinity, with possible impacts as far as Pelham. This would mostly impact the eastern end of town, which still has 88,000 square-foot (roughly two acre) zoning, and it is unclear how much these new residents would head westward using Amherst Road through the Pelham Village Center.

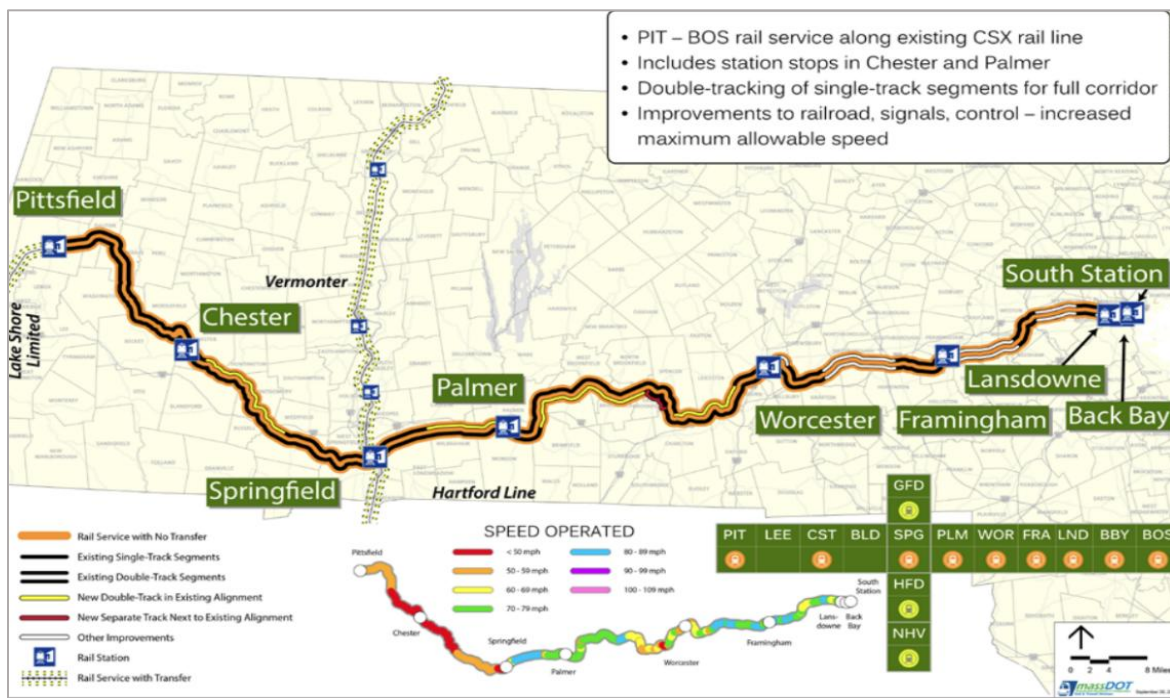


Image Source:  
East-West  
Rail  
Final Report

<sup>18</sup> [How to Open a Convenience Store in 14 Steps \(In-Depth Guide\)](#)

By 2029, Amtrak plans to run two round-trip trains between Boston and New Haven, with a stop in Palmer. MassDOT, consulting firm VHB, and Palmer officials are currently evaluating eleven potential passenger rail platform locations and the planning should be completed by mid-2025.

### **Other Community Suggestions**

There have been other suggestions for future uses of town-owned land in the Village Center. Potential exists for a farmer's market, craft shows, food trucks and/or coffee carts to be made available at specific times when large gatherings or meetings are expected to be held. There is also some interest in having a venue like the Shutesbury Athletic Club somewhere in town. The Shutesbury club permits alcohol and has sanitary facilities as well as ample parking, but a smaller version might be possible in Pelham with on-street parking permitted.



## Recommendations

The purpose of the Village Center Development Plan is to increase activity in the Village Center area by improving walkability; supporting economic growth in an environmentally responsible manner; fostering cultural activity and potentially small business development; and expanding existing infrastructure to meet these needs.

**The five major goals to be addressed in the plan include:**

- 1) Enhance attractiveness of Village Center.**
- 2) Enhance access and circulation.**
- 3) Improve and upgrade infrastructure.**
- 4) Develop new amenities that contribute to community spirit and vitality.**
- 5) Create a process by which to implement these measures.**

These goals are addressed on the following pages through a variety of specific action steps.





## GOAL #1: Enhance the Area’s Appeal, Attractiveness and Welcoming Atmosphere

### Action Step: Enhance Village Center with additional plantings

Existing landscaping contributes to the inviting atmosphere, but there are areas that could use additional plantings or hardscaping.

- Increase native plantings in the Village Center, including small trees.
- Consider environmentally responsible landscaping with relocation or redesign of portions of impervious surfaces.
- Decommissioning the septic tank and connecting to public sewer will permit additional landscaping possibilities.
- Extend the tree belt: plant street trees in right of way in front of mobile homes and the Community Hall.
- Incorporate plantings into a sustainable drainage system (“green infrastructure”)



Image source: [www.serenityfarmlandscaping.com](http://www.serenityfarmlandscaping.com)



**Action Step: Upgrade amenities within the parking lots around the Community Center.**

Some of the existing features of the property have evolved out of practicality and/or tight funds. In some cases, small investments could significantly enhance the appearance of the area. Lighting could be improved; however, all lighting should be compliant with the town’s Dark Sky Bylaw.

- Replace metal sheds with permanent garage structure to house police vehicles.
- Remove existing concrete posts formerly used for light posts.
- Bring existing lighting into compliance with the town’s Dark Sky Bylaw.
- Judiciously add new lighting fixtures that comply with Dark Sky provisions and consider motion-activated lights.
- Consider installing solar-powered lighting.



Image: [Outdoor Lighting Fixtures Parking Lots | Shelly Lighting](#)



Image: [www.bigbuildingsdirect.com](http://www.bigbuildingsdirect.com)

**Action Step: Install attractive signage welcoming travelers to Pelham Village Center**

A “Welcome to Pelham Village” sign will help to slow down through traffic and will provide a sense of place. *Examples below are for illustration only.*

- Research signage designs and sizes.
- Poll residents on various design options and test several locations where drivers enter the Village Center area, adhering to appropriate .



Image: [www.gothamsignsandgraphics.com](http://www.gothamsignsandgraphics.com)



Image: [www.assets.site-static.com](http://www.assets.site-static.com)



**GOAL #2: Improve Access and Circulation for Residents and Visitors**

**Implement existing sidewalk design and traffic calming plans for Amherst Road and the intersection with North/South Valley Roads.**

The Town has been working with Berkshire Design Group to develop detailed plans for new sidewalks, pedestrian amenities, and traffic calming elements for Amherst Road from the town line to the Village Center.

- Continue planning process and seek community consensus.
- Seek funding for project with appropriate phasing.



*Image: Google Maps Street View – Intersection of Amherst Road and South Valley Road*

**Action Step: Consider re-designing, reconfiguring, and possibly expanding parking lots on town property to improve circulation and increase access.**

There are several small parking areas on the Community Center property, serving police, fire, library, and the elementary school. Circulation is tight, and there is little landscaping to shade and enhance the area. There are no pedestrian paths between the lots. If the property is ultimately connected to sewer lines, this would make the existing leach field available for parking and/or landscaping and could allow a reconfiguration of parking. Some of the additional land in the vacant lot south of the existing paved areas could also be incorporated into an overall parking plan, once its primary use is determined.

- Engage a landscape architect to assess the existing parking areas and evaluate possibilities for reconfiguration.
- If sewer connection is made, consider using the leach field property for green infrastructure, pathways, and other circulation elements.

- Plan circulation on vacant South Valley Road lot.
- Consider adding an electric vehicle charging station.



MassGIS orthophoto: Existing parking layout



Image source: [Parking Lot Landscaping Plan](#)

**Action Step: Investigate the possibility of a new PVTA stop in Pelham Village Center, given the new apartments.**

Although the Town has previously inquired about a PVTA stop and the request was declined, there is now a significant increase in population in the Village Center, due to the new apartment buildings, which have a total of 47 bedrooms (in one-, two-, and three-bedroom units).

Recalculate population within one mile of the Village Center, once apartments are fully occupied, and contact Pioneer Valley Transit Authority to request consideration for an additional stop.

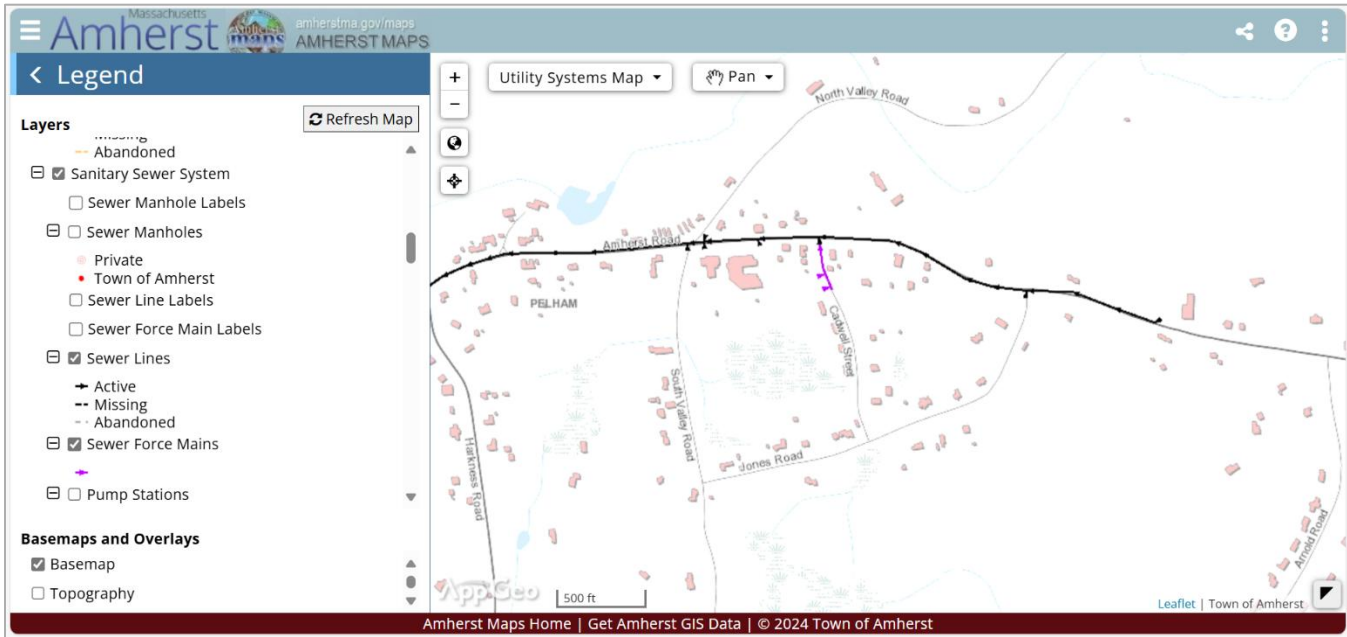


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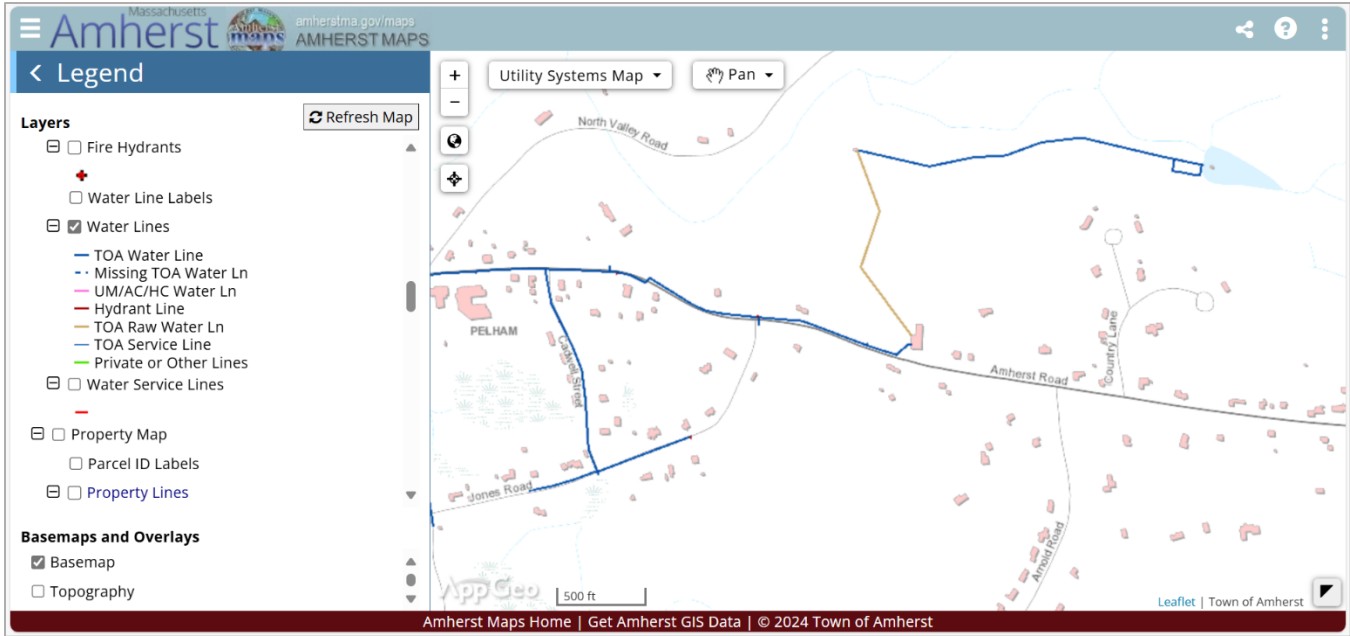


**GOAL #3: Improve and Upgrade Infrastructure and Amenities to Support More Activities**

<b>Action Step: Implement plans to extend sewer lines throughout the Village Center</b>
An existing sewer line extends along Amherst Road to the water treatment plant less than a mile up the street from the Village Center. There are plans to extend the line to the loop that includes South Valley Road, Jones Road and Cadwell Street, but the timeframe for this is uncertain.
Work with the Town of Amherst to connect Community Center, Community Hall, and the elementary school to the existing sewer line in Amherst Road



*The map above shows the existing sewer line from Amherst to facilities in Pelham. The sewer line was initially established to drain impurities from the water supply coming from the reservoir. This map shows only sewer lines and sewer force mains (note: the water system is shown in the next map). The small arrows represent stubs to individual properties, but most are not connected.*



*This map shows water lines only: see legend (TOA = Town of Amherst). The reservoir and the service line to the Centennial Water Treatment Plant are visible.*

**Action Step: Investigate potential improvements to storm drainage system in the Village Center**

Storm drains from the Community Center have not been functioning at maximum capacity and don't sufficiently capture downhill runoff.

As other work in the Village Center is completed, incorporate drainage improvements accordingly.



**Action Step: Increase access to public sanitary facilities for public events outside of library hours.**

One of the deterrents to holding outdoor community events is the limited access to restrooms.

- Streamline the process to gain access to the library bathrooms for community events.
- Facilitate access to the Community Hall bathrooms (across the street) for events on town property.
- Provide a free-standing bathroom that is more appealing, spacious, and sanitary than a “Porta Potty” style facility.



Source: [www.aliexpress.us](http://www.aliexpress.us)

**Action Step: Consider designating additional parking spaces (unless parking lots are reconfigured as per previous recommendation)**

Parking exists at the library, and there are limited spaces in front of the police/fire station and the Community Hall. There is also parking in the front of the elementary school (east side) that could be used during off-hours. However, in order to access the Community Hall, visitors must park along the road, and if an event is being held in the area between the library and school or at the vacant lot behind it, the library parking may be insufficient.

- Designate formal parking spaces along North Valley Road adjacent to Community Hall.
- Consider creating a parking area on the lower portion of the vacant lot, near South Valley Road or designating spaces on South Valley.



**Action Step: Consider locating all town offices in the Village Center**

One possible way to increase community activity in the Village Center would be to relocate all of the town's offices there, except the DPW, which needs the space at its current site. This would be a long-term project and would require additional land, such as using all of the vacant lot behind the library.

- Hold community forums to discuss the feasibility of this idea.
- If desired, have conceptual plans drawn to assist in consideration of the feasibility and impact of such a move.

**Action Step: Increase and improve communications to town residents about upcoming and available activities.**

While some residents may keep close track of local events via flyers at the library and temporary signs at the Community Hall, the Town's Facebook page does not appear to be up to date, and the calendar on the Town website does not show local events. The Community Hall site is occasionally used to post a temporary signage, due to its visibility on Amherst Road, but more communication will be needed.

- Update and improve the Town website to make it easier for residents to use and to find local events.
- Re-establish Facebook or other social media notifications.
- Consider installing an outdoor information kiosk at the Community Hall and/or the library to post events and activities, and monitor and maintain it regularly.



Image source: [www.timberhomesllc.com](http://www.timberhomesllc.com)



## GOAL #4: Encourage New Activities that Contribute to Community Spirit and Vitality

### Action Step: Create additional places to sit and meet

Existing facilities for small outdoor gatherings and waiting areas include several picnic tables and two benches outside the library. One to three additional benches might be helpful to have.



- Consider utilizing other common areas to install small benches or other types of seating.
- The vacant lot to the south is being maintained and mowed; if no major changes occur to the lot in the near future, perhaps a small seating area could be installed.
- Perhaps the school might install a small seating area for children (that adults could use, too).



Sources: [Double Chair Bench With Middle Table Plan - Etsy](#) [Recyclable Plastic Curved Seating Unit | Seating | TTS](#)

### Action Step: Utilize town property to hold a variety of community events and activities.

The Village Center already has indoor spaces to hold community events, and there are outdoor spaces with potential. All of these could be significantly enhanced with the addition of various amenities discussed above. Some activities that have been held in the past or suggested for the future include picnics, barbecues, music performances, craft fairs, farmers' markets, and food truck

festivals. Square dancing or community dancing or classes could be held in the school gym or in a pavilion if one is constructed.

Events and activities specifically for children are also in high demand. The school and library could also use outdoor spaces for art, science, and even literature programming.

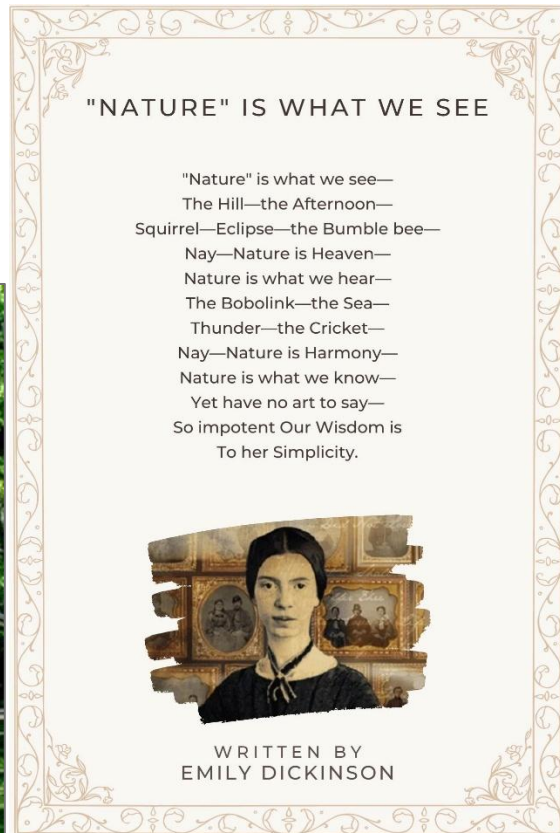
- Brainstorm all possible activities desired by residents and identify which ones the community wishes to hold regularly and what amenities would be required. Thus far, the community has expressed a desire for outdoor activities in a sheltered space, such as a pavilion, large enough to accommodate 20-40 people.
- Research public pavilions located at other town parks to compare possibilities. Look Park in Northampton has a variety of small to moderate-sized pavilions in woodsy settings.
- One possibility is to build a pavilion that incorporates bathroom facilities. This could be feasible on the vacant lot, as it has water service and a potentially functioning septic tank.
- Utilize wetland areas for nature studies, while protecting vegetation and wildlife.
- Identify what activities could ideally be held indoors, particularly in cold weather, with consideration to the space at the Community Hall and the Ramsdell Room in the library.
- Establish a wifi hub.



*Medium-sized pavilion with attached restrooms: [Standard Restrooms - Romtec Inc.](#)*



**Hold a variety of community events and activities on town property.**



Timberhomes LLC; Framed Emily Dickinson poem from: [367289\\_poem\\_7.jpg \(1280×1920\)](#); Shutesbury Holiday Shop at Shutesbury Athletic Club; [Vital wetlands lessons for Children](#)



**Action Step: Provide play areas for children and amenities for parents and guardians picking them up from school.**



Given the proximity of the elementary school, with many parents picking their children up from school from the rear entrance next to the library, having spaces to sit or play in that area are important. It will also be critical to provide safe and enjoyable spaces for children when community events are held in that area. The new picnic tables and the existing benches in the common space are very helpful for those purposes. Kids can also play in the school playground after hours. Additional spaces may be desirable to provide more options.

- A standalone bathroom facility would be helpful, whether a high-end portable bathroom or a small structure that also provides storage (folding tables, tableware, etc.). As described above, a pavilion with picnic tables and an attached bathroom would provide for the needs of children as well as adults.
- The vacant land behind the library could be used to create a woodsy play space for children or other creative options.
- Food, coffee, or ice cream trucks at school pick-up time or other events could encourage congregating and interaction.





**Action Step: Plant native trees and shrubs**

One of the suggestions that came up most frequently in community discussions was native plantings.



Source: [Live in the Northeast? Try These Native Plants in Your Landscape Instead of Exotics](#)

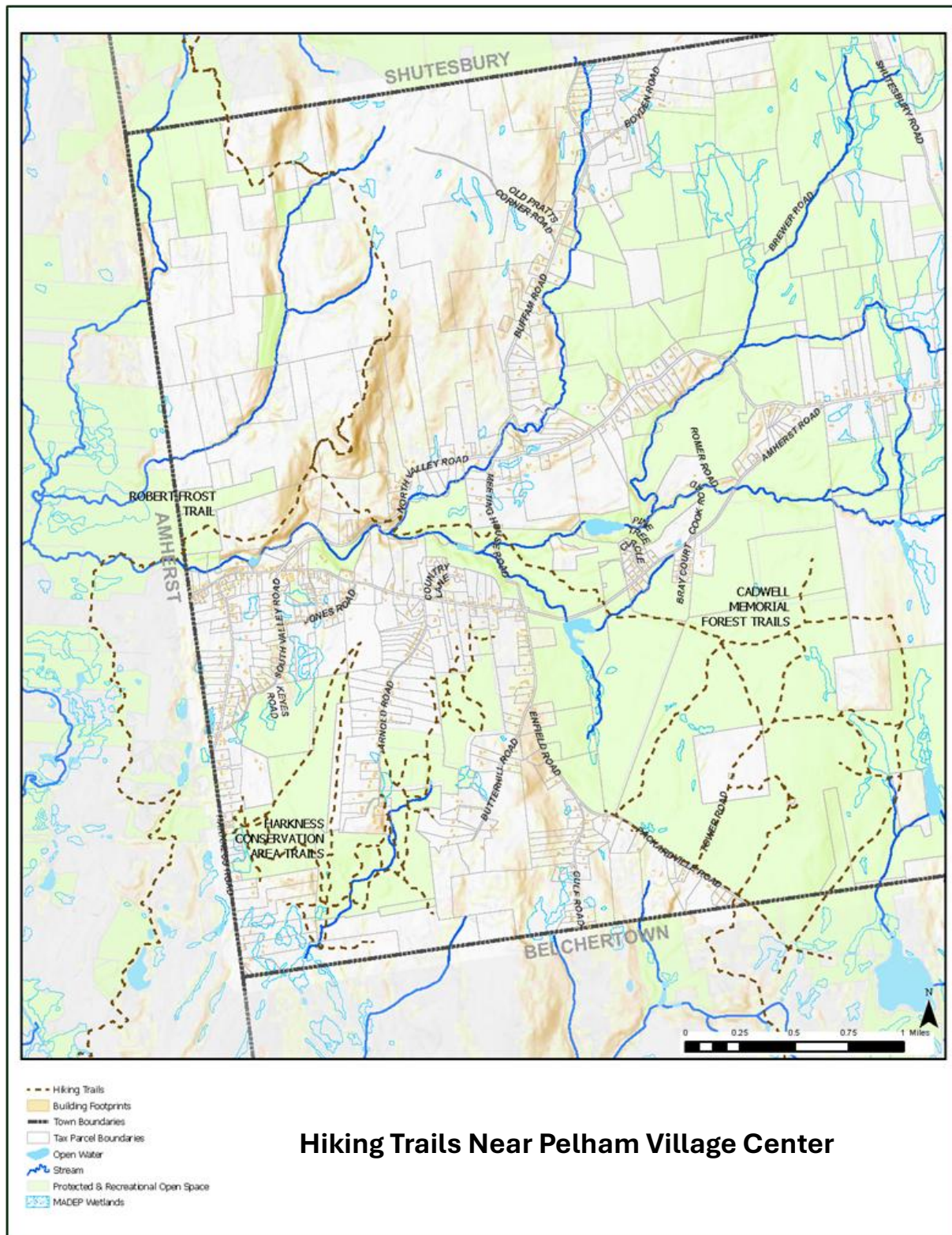
**Action Step: Promote Pelham Center as a destination and launch point for hikers.**

Pelham has an extensive network of trails throughout large, preserved parcels of land, such as the Harkness Conservation Area and Cadwell Memorial Forest, and also through a patchwork of Chapter 61 lands, Kestrel Trust lands, and private property, such as the Robert Frost Trail. There are also sites to explore such as the Well Away Farm Conservation Area and Lilacland (during lilac season).

- Continue Conservation Commission initiative to digitize trail maps and make them widely available.
- The town could conduct outreach to property owners and monitor their experiences in order to hear any concerns about an initiative to draw more hikers.
- Install a small kiosk that protects paper maps and provides QR codes for digital maps. This could be located in the library parking lot or on the vacant property behind it. For the latter option, possibly create a small gravel parking lot to access the kiosk.

See the following page for a map of preserved lands and hiking trails in Pelham.

## Pelham Village Center – Vision and Potential: A Community Plan





## Pelham Village Center – Vision and Potential: A Community Plan



[Lilacland and the Artwork of James Lumley – Lilacland, Lilacs, Paintings, Drawings, Art Instruction, Woodturning](#)



[www.tourismbowenisl.com](http://www.tourismbowenisl.com)



[www.dreamstime.com](http://www.dreamstime.com)



[www.tourismbowenisl.com](http://www.tourismbowenisl.com)



**Action Step: Consider establishing permanent venues in new or existing spaces.**

Residents have discussed many creative ideas based on what other rural communities have done. There are existing resources that can be used, such as existing town-owned buildings and land, and there is also the potential for new facilities.

- Consider establishing something like the Shutesbury Athletic Club.
- Investigate the possibility of creating a Community Co-op.
- As the views to the west from the parking lot and vacant lot are notable, it was suggested to build a tower, tree fort, or other way to climb to a greater height to enjoy the view (In fact, building a treehouse was independently suggested by several community members).
- The town could possibly add onto Community Hall, while honoring its historic nature.
- Some residents have suggested that the current elementary school may someday need to be repurposed.
- Consider feasibility of bringing all town offices to the Village Center site.





**GOAL #5: Develop a Standard Process to Plan and Carry Out Village Center Improvements and Activities**

<b>Action Step: Identify authorizing entity and establish process</b>
<p>At present, the Planning Board is the lead entity carrying out Village Center planning, with oversight, input and involvement from the Selectboard and other boards and committees. Many of the activities and initiatives described in this report are being undertaken by a variety of entities and could be more aligned. It may make sense to re-establish a formal Village Center Committee to consider this report and possible avenues forward.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider establishing a Pelham Village Center Committee, comprised of representatives from the Selectboard, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Committee, School Committee, and Parent-Teacher Organization, as well as others as appropriate.</li><li>• Re-evaluate and streamline any procedures that involve planning events and activities in the Village Center, including access to the existing buildings (Community Center and Community Hall). Coordinate with all parties, including the library and school, when planning activities.</li><li>• Ensure that all parties receive communications about ongoing initiatives, including electronic copies of conceptual plans, engineering designs, project proposals, price estimates, etc.</li><li>• Given the need for greater coordination and oversight, it may be necessary to hire a part- or full-time staff person to assist with implementation of Village Center initiatives.</li></ul>



Pioneer Valley Planning Commission