AMHERST HOUSING PRODUCTION PLAN

Amherst Housing and Sheltering Committee

Andrea Battle

Nancy Gregg, Co-Chair

John Hornik

Denise LeDuc

Aaron Blodgett

Greg Stutsman, Co-Chair

Alisa Brewer, Liaison to SB

Connie Kruger, Liaison to PB

Prepared By:

Karen Sunnarborg Consulting
Abacus Architects + Planners

PART 1 - AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

- What is affordable housing?
- How much does Amherst have, and how much is required?
- What are the demographic trends that suggest future need?
- What can Amherst do to help meet that need?

The following pages provide background on these questions and suggest a direction for the future.

What is Housing Production?

- **State regulations under Chapter 40B offer communities greater local control over affordable housing development.**
- **First step is getting *Housing Plan approval* from the state. Plan must include affordable housing production goals (1/2 of 1% of year-round housing or 48 units/year).**
- **For each one-year or two-year goal met, the Town can apply for and receive state *certification* with a 1- or 2-year period during which developer-initiated 40B projects can be denied by the ZBA without the developer's ability to appeal.**

Benefits

Senior Housing

Clark House * State Financing * Privately Owned

- **Greater local control over housing development**
- **Explains housing market conditions and affordability gaps**
- **Provides information on priority housing needs**
- **Supports future planning and grant making efforts**
- **Assists in making funding decisions**

Housing Goal

Overriding Housing Goal from the Town's Master Plan:

To provide a <u>mix of housing</u> that meets the physical needs of and is affordable to the broadest possible spectrum of our community, and that minimizes the impact on the environment.

Public Housing

Housing Authority Duplex

Scattered Site Housing Fits into its Rural Setting

What is Affordable Housing?

Chapter 40B

- Mass. Law passed in 1960s
- Anti-snob Zoning Act
- Minimum 25% units for low- or moderate-income households
- overrides local zoning if municipality below 10%

Federal definition: Paying no more than 30% of income on housing.

40B definition:

- **Deed restricted**
- **Affirmatively marketed**
- **Available to households earning at or below 80% of area median income**

What housing is “affordable” in Amherst?

Expiring Use Projects

Puffton Village IV

Rolling Green Apartments

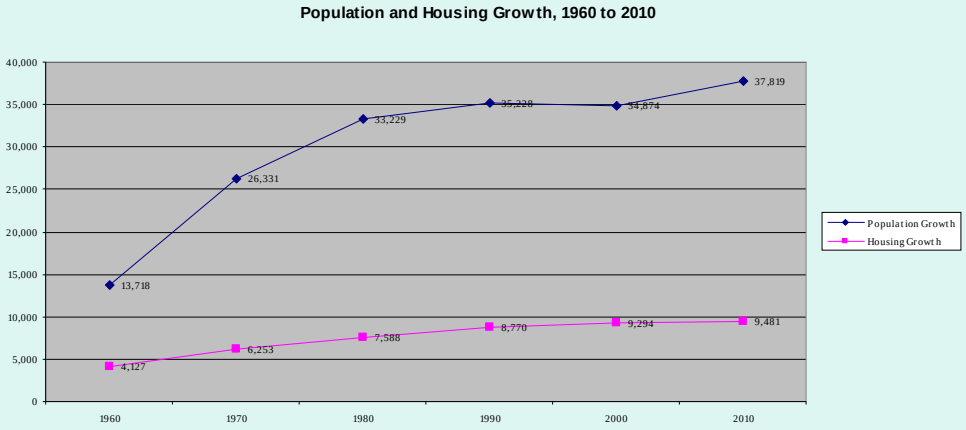
- **Of the 9,621 year-round housing units, 1,035 units or 10.76% are included in the Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI).**
- **15 affordable units were lost during the past few years.**
- **Potential loss of affordable units to drop below 10% including Rolling Green with 204 units.**
- **AHA has 417 rental subsidies, only 239 of which are being used in Amherst despite higher payment provisions.**

Who Needs Affordable Housing?

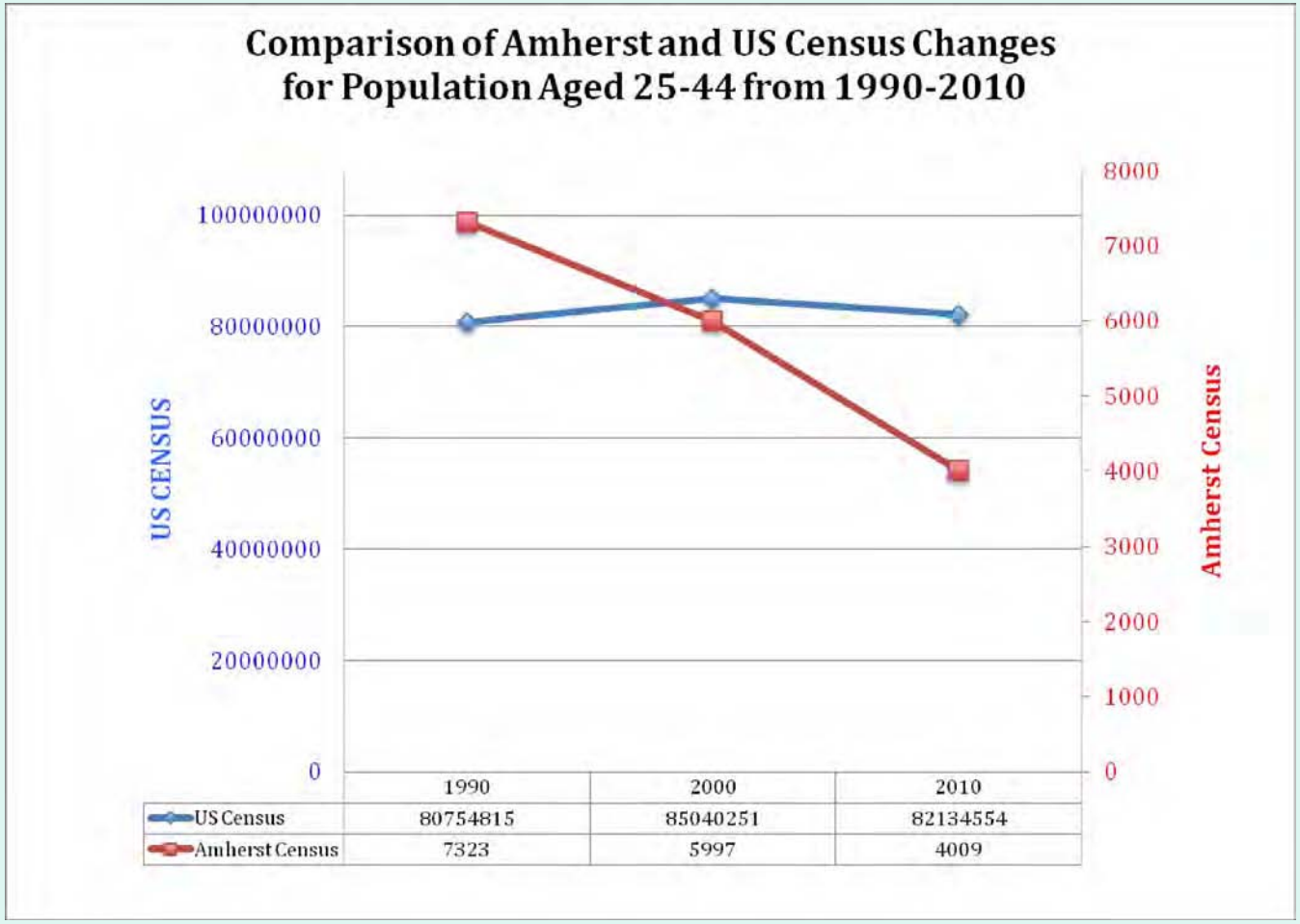
- **Children who grew up in Amherst and want to raise their own families locally.**
- **The cashier in the local grocery store earning little more than minimum wage.**
- **The school cafeteria worker and spouse who is a grounds worker at UMass with combined earnings of less than $55,000 and 2 children.**
- **An elderly woman who just lost her husband and can't afford to remain in her home.**
- **The disabled veteran returning home from the military.**

Key Demographic Trends

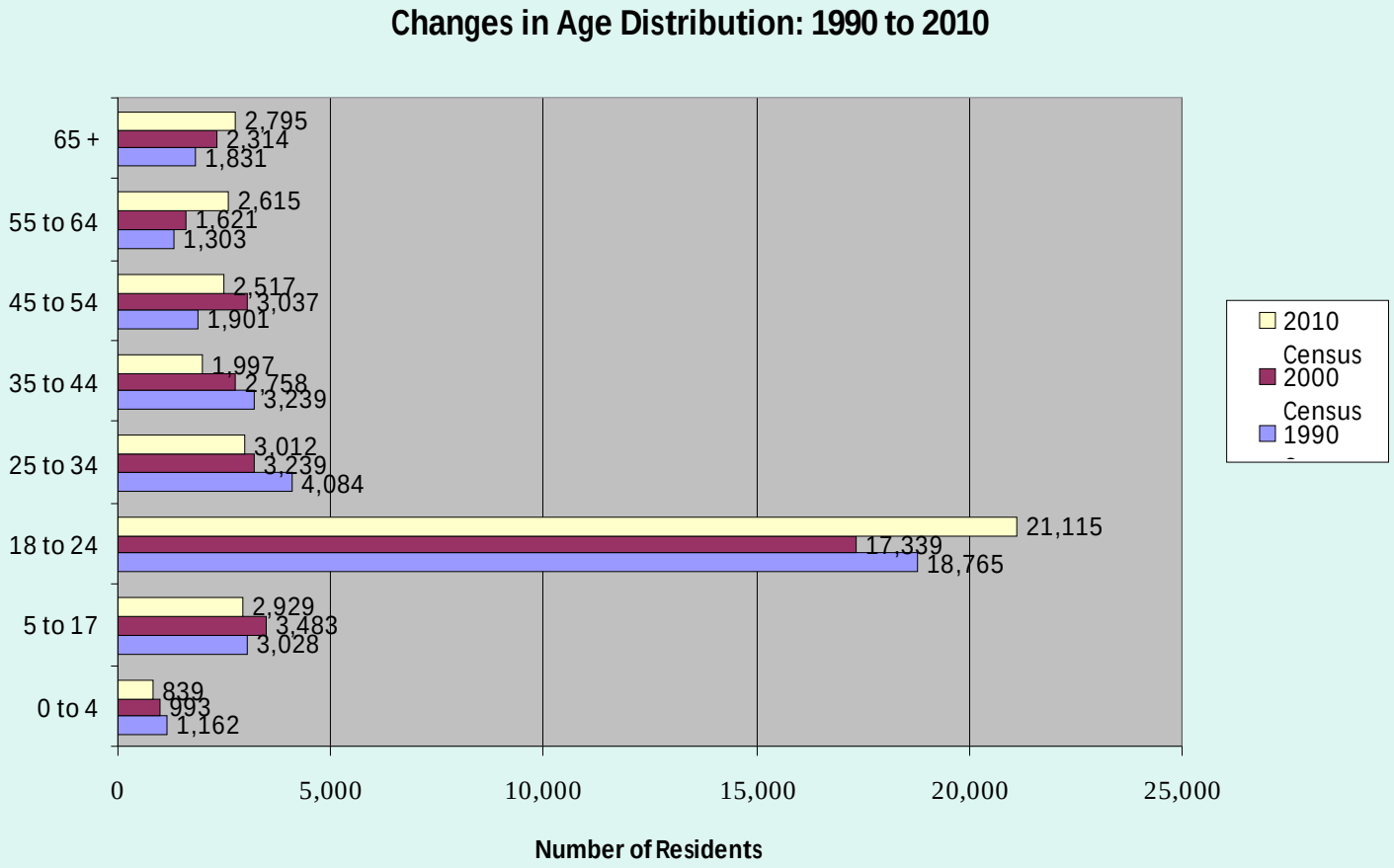
- **Students, students, students!**
- **Growth linked to enrollment levels**
- **Decreasing household size**
- **Growing numbers of middle-aged and older residents and declining younger residents**
- **Significant numbers of nonstudent households with low incomes**



Losses in Residents Aged 25-44



Age Distribution



Key Housing Trends

- **Declining rate of housing growth despite increasing enrollment**
- **Recent growth in single-family, owner-occupied stock**
- **54% of units are rentals, down from 60% in 1990**
- **Conversions of owner-occupied units to student rentals**
- **Low rental vacancy rates**
- **Prices remain high with substantial affordability gaps**
- **Wide income disparities between owners and renters**
- **56% of households were spending too much on housing including about a thousand owners**

Priority Housing Needs

Privately Owned Affordable Rental Projects

- **Rental housing for families**
- **Rental housing for individuals / students and year-round residents**
- **Preservation and improvement of existing housing stock**
- **Affordable homeownership for families**
- **Housing for at risk and special needs populations**

Unmet Housing Needs

Population in Need	Housing Units Available	Unmet Need in Housing Units	Recommended in HPP
Ext. low income (<30% AMI)	2,490	1,970 (includes 1,500 students)	200 units (83% of 5-year production goals of 48 units/year)
Very low income (30-50% AMI)	1,190	505	
Low to moderate 50-80% AMI)	1,050	575	40 units
Families	3,430	870	150
Seniors	1,860	830	50 units
People with dis.	253	2,200 (census)	25 units
Homeless	18 + 8	15 estimate	Part of 200 above

Housing Strategies

- **Ongoing Strategies**
  - **Conduct community education**
  - **Continue to pursue Town-Gown partnerships, especially UMass**
  - **Insure effective enforcement of zoning bylaw and Town regulations**
  - **Work cooperatively to increase student housing, on and off campus**
  - **Continue support for current CDBG-funded housing assistance programs**
  - **Continue to partner with developers on privately-owned properties**

Housing Strategies

- **Short-term Strategies – Years 1 and 2**
  - **Establish and capitalize a MAHTF**
  - **Modify inclusionary zoning and supplemental apt. bylaws**
  - **Rezone village centers**
    - **Ease restrictions on infill development**
  - **Continue to make suitable public property available for affordable housing**
- **Short-term Strategies – Years 3 to 5**
  - **Monitor and maintain SHI units**
  - **Fund housing rehab efforts**

Housing Strategies

- **Longer-Term Strategies**
  - **Pursue 40R/40S or Compact Neighborhoods smart growth zoning**
  - **Allow two-family structures in all residential zoning districts**
  - **Adopt a TDR bylaw**
  - **Waive permitting fees for affordable housing**
  - **Convert existing housing to long-term affordability**

Next Steps

Affordable Home Ownership

Misty Meadows

Charles Lane

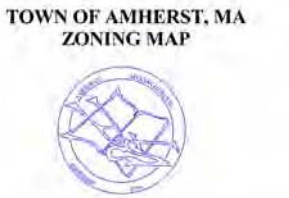
- **Obtain approvals from Planning Board and SB**
- **Submit Plan to the state**
- **Visit Town's website for more information**

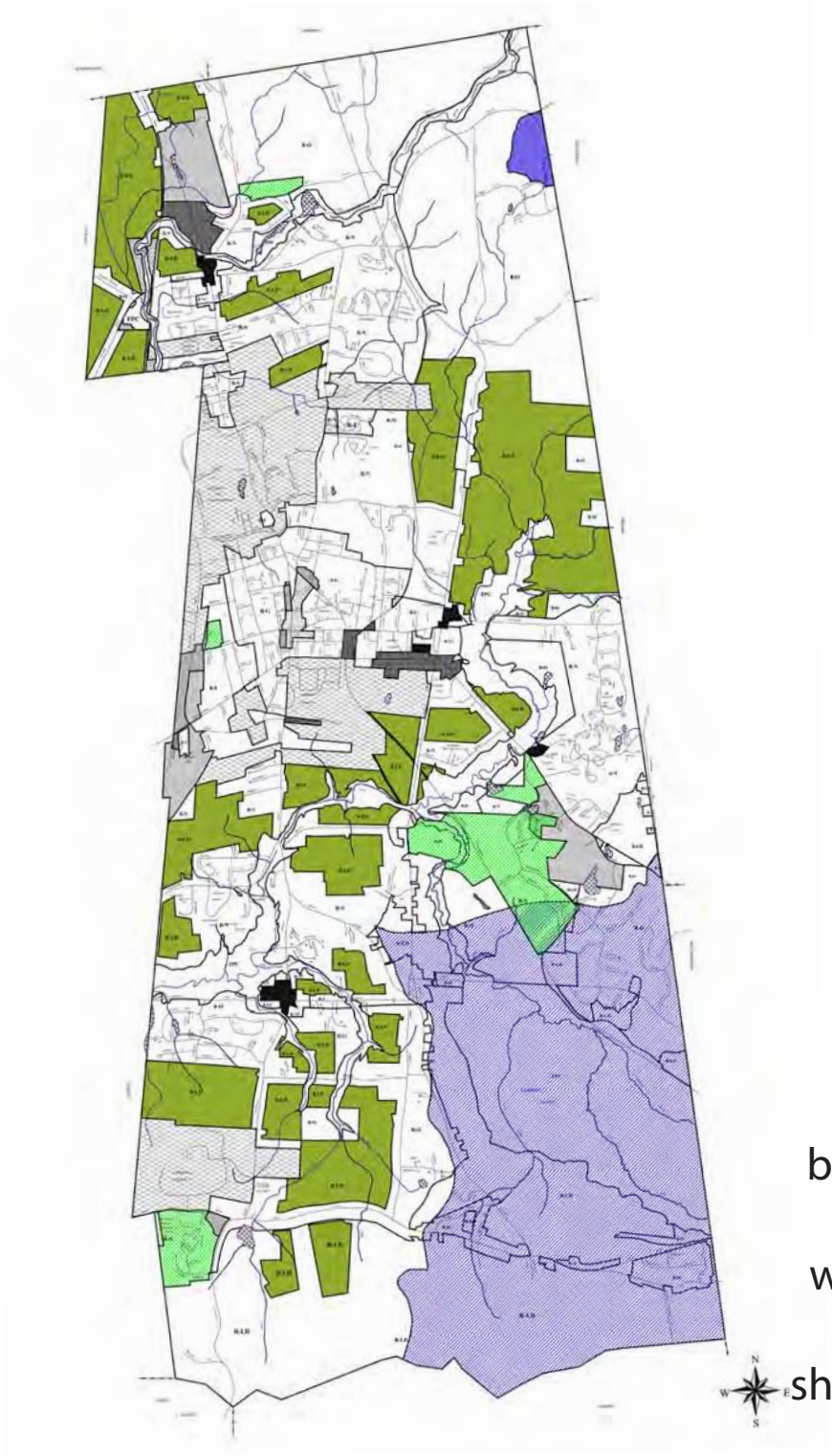
PART 2 - AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Meeting Amherst's need for affordable housing will require new goals and policies – and new construction too. It is important that housing be located in appropriate areas, be designed to reinforce town character, and contribute to other civic goals: downtown revitalization; the development of walkable communities; open space access; and the preservation of local businesses.

Since most housing is built by developers, Amherst should be proactive - defining what kind of development it wants, and where. The following pages lay out factors that should be taken into account in formulating planning goals, note sites where development should be considered, and suggest design prototypes for four typical sites. All are privately owned. These hypothetical planning studies illustrate general approaches to design that could take place on a variety of sites, showing how affordable and mixed income housing can meet both private and public needs.

Amherst is a small town that has maintained its rural character while accommodating a number of major educational institutions and a thriving downtown





Many factors determine what is built in Amherst, but zoning is certainly one of them. Zoning codifies what can be built, how tall it can be, and its relationship to adjacent properties.

Amherst Master Plan
Land Use Policy Map

BUILT AREAS

Centers

- 3/4 Mile From Center 'Core' - 15-20 Minute Walk
- Center Business Zoning Districts
- Existing/Potential Mixed Use Centers
- Existing/Potential Center Residence Areas

Outlying & Other Areas

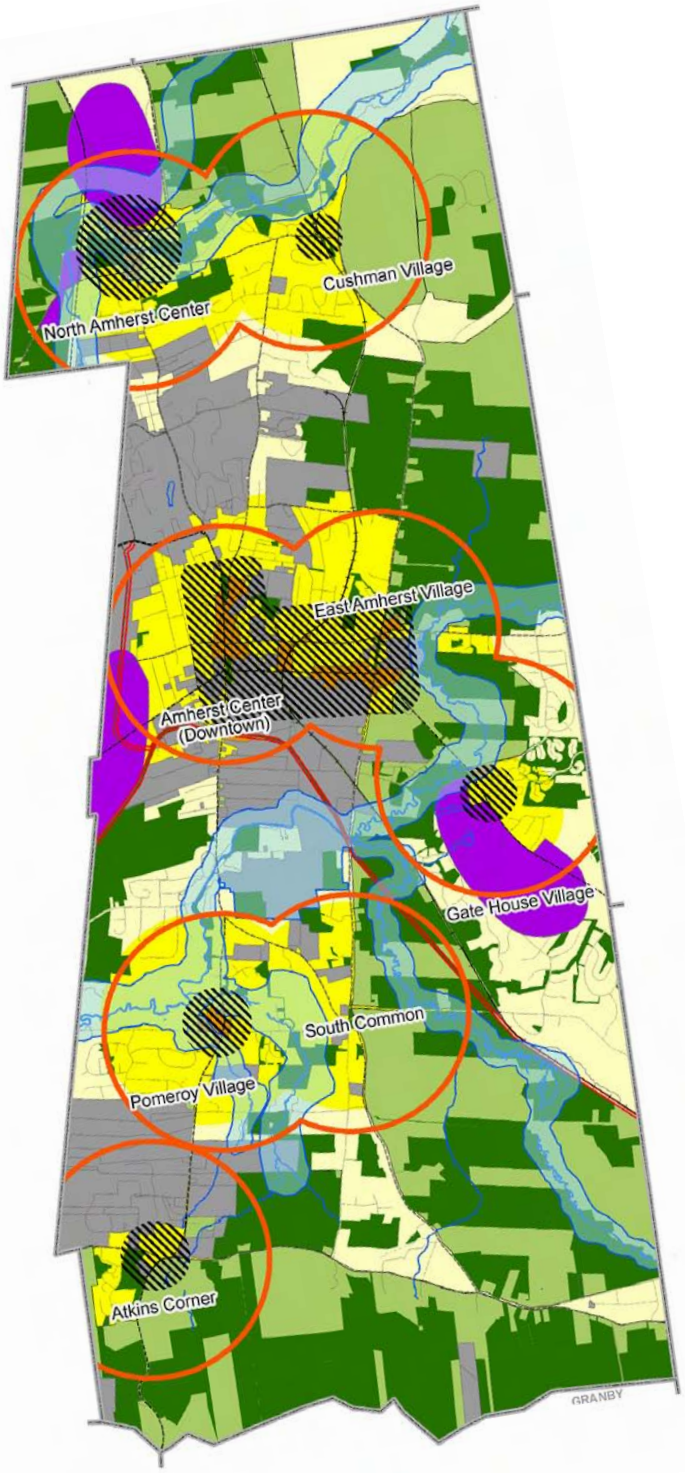
- Existing/Potential Non-Residential Development
- Outlying Residential Areas
- Institutional/Town Lands

PRESERVATION PRIORITY AREAS

- Permanently Protected Lands
- Potential Future Protected Lands - currently zoned residential
- Existing/ Potential Riparian Corridor Protection
- Streams

ROADS & TRAILS

- Roads
- Railroads
- Norwottuck Rail Trail



The character of different areas determines what may or may not be appropriate to build. Previous master plans have defined existing conditions and suggested the kind of development that may be advantageous to the town.

Town of Amherst Undevelopable Land

Legend

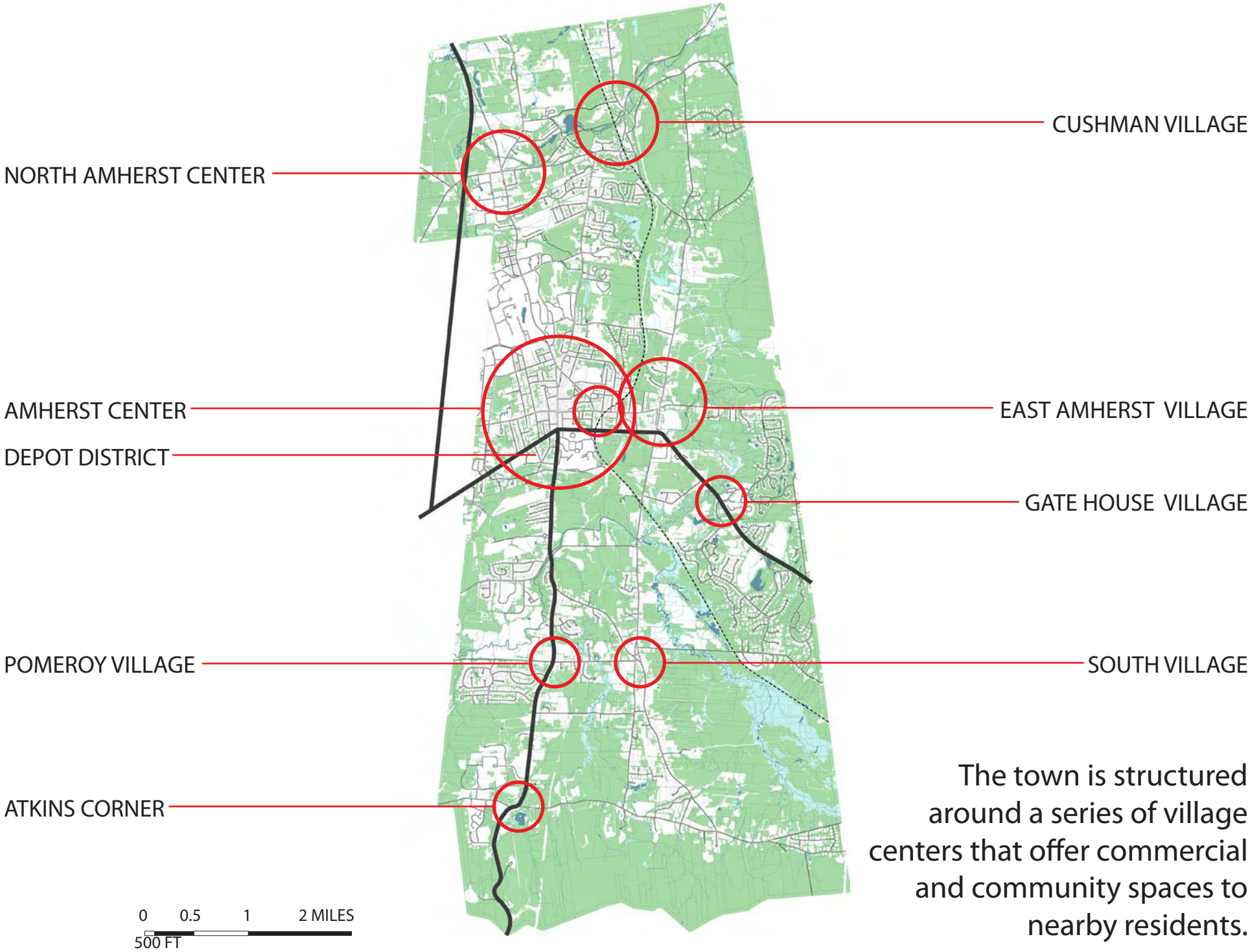
Permanently Preservend Lands

- Town Conservation Areas, MA DCR, APR, Schools, Cemeteries
- Institutional Lands

Streets

- Local Roads
- Major Roads
- State Routes

More than half the land in Amherst is not available for development. Conservation areas, institutional land and permanently preserved farmland help maintain open space, and suggest that new construction is clustered in certain areas .



The town is structured around a series of village centers that offer commercial and community spaces to nearby residents.

AMHERST CENTER - COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

Three and four story buildings define main thoroughfares and the Common, and contribute to the town's character. Ground floors are generally retail, with offices and housing opportunities on floors above.

Just beyond the town's commercial center, stately old houses line the streets. Many nearby have been sub-divided and are often rented to students. Maintaining the stock of older houses could be a Town priority.

Railroad tracks, power line easements, and industrial uses undermine the neighborhood character of an area within walking distance of Amherst Center. Modest houses contribute to the affordability of the community.

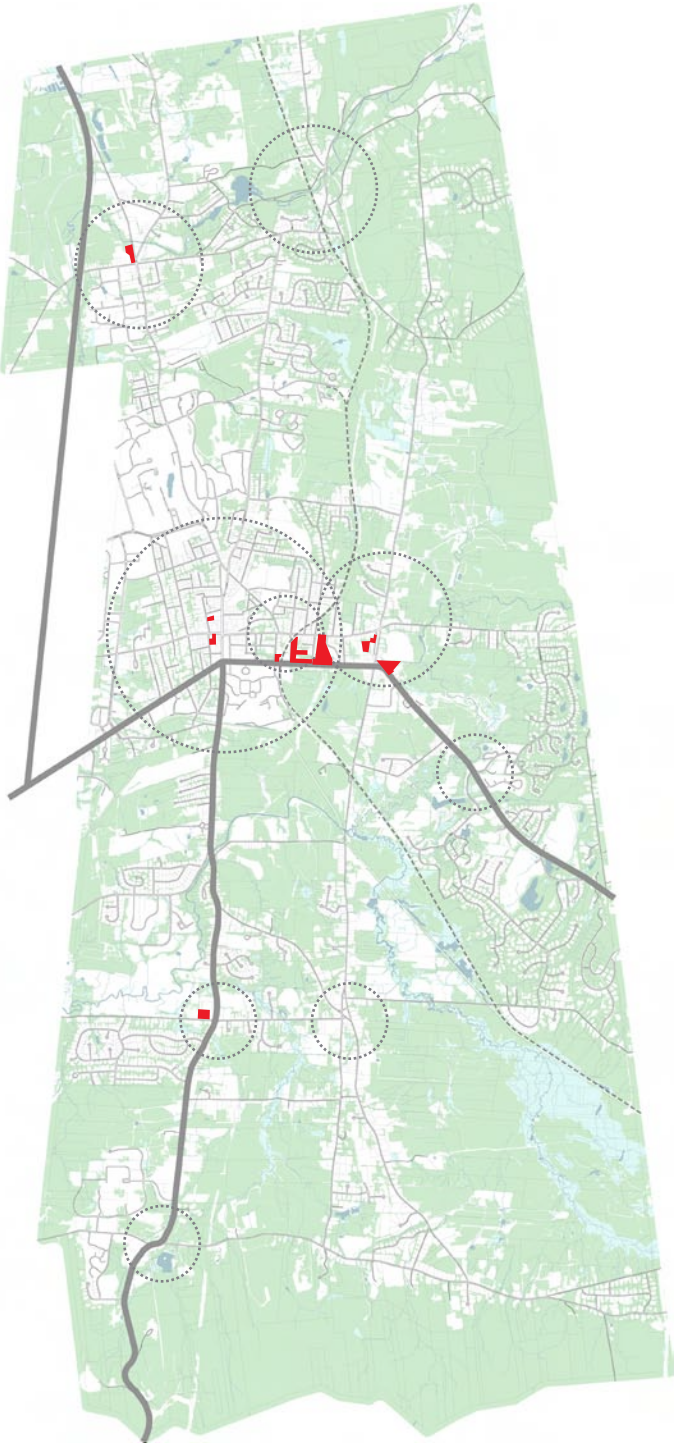
Smaller village centers are built around libraries, churches, and neighborhood retail. Mixed use development that includes housing and retail could reinforce the village-like character and reduce the need for cars.

Away from Amherst Center multi-family housing has taken a variety of forms. With proper planning, design and landscaping this kind of housing can create an elegant transition from the town center to the rural areas around it - although this has not always happened.

Clustered housing can make effective use of smaller parcels, reinforcing the neighborhood character and defining attractive open space.

Auto oriented development provides valuable services but does not always create an attractive pedestrian environment. Redevelopment can increase property values while strengthening the neighborhood's character.

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES



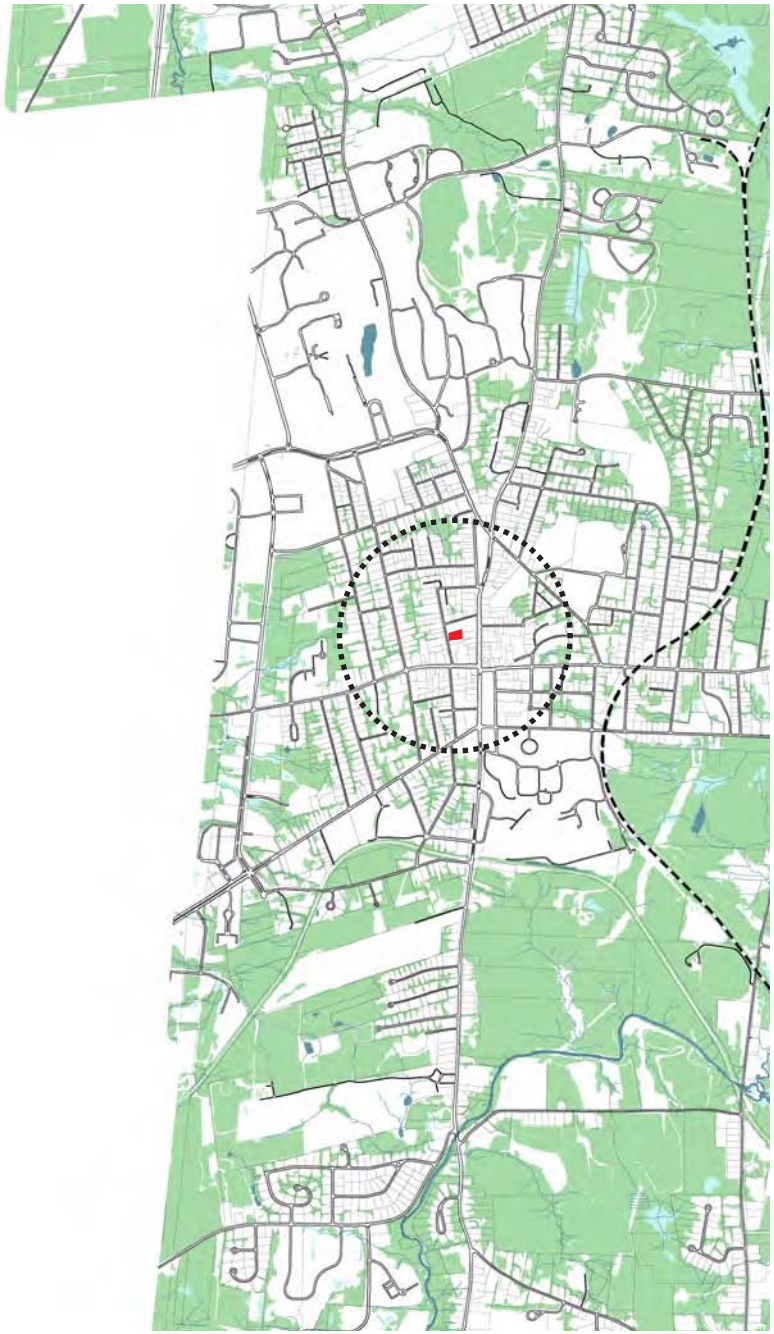
0 0.5 1 2 MILES

500 FT

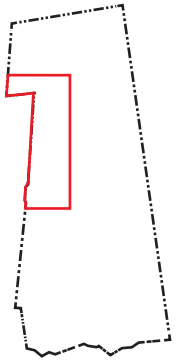
The best opportunities for affordable housing development are likely to be near village centers. This helps support shops and cafes and reduces the dependency on cars.

AMHERST CENTER - NORTH PROSPECT STREET PARKING LOT

0 500 FT 0.5 1 MILE

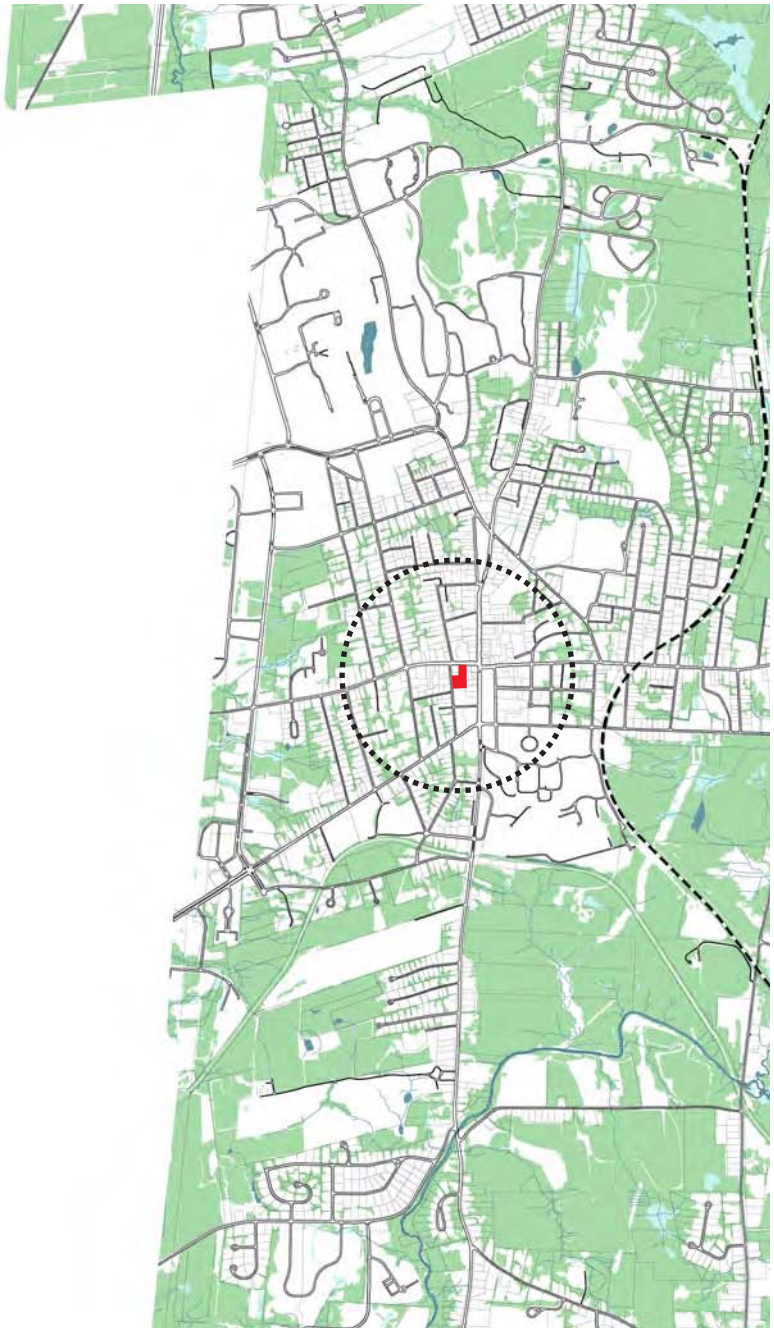


Parking is critical for downtown vitality, but doesn't preclude housing construction. Apartments could line the street with parking behind and below, balancing a number of Town needs.

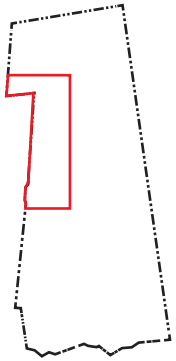


0 500 FT 0.5 1 MILE

AMHERST CENTER - SOUTH PROSPECT/AMITY STREET PARKING LOT

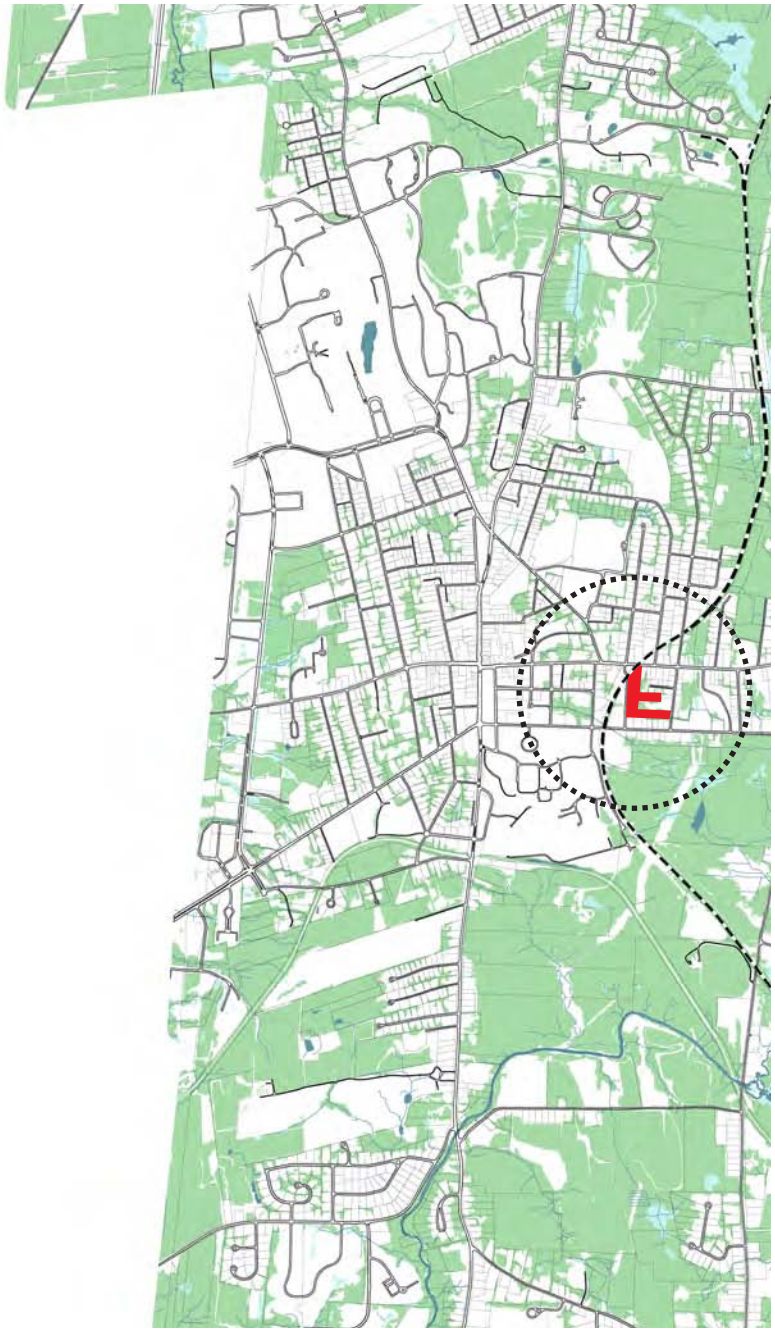


Parking currently breaks the continuity of the retail frontage on Amity St. and the residential along South Prospect. Parking could be accommodated below or behind new construction to strengthen the neighborhood character along both streets.

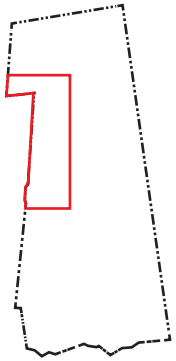


0 500 FT 0.5 1 MILE

DEPOT DISTRICT - RAILROAD STREET

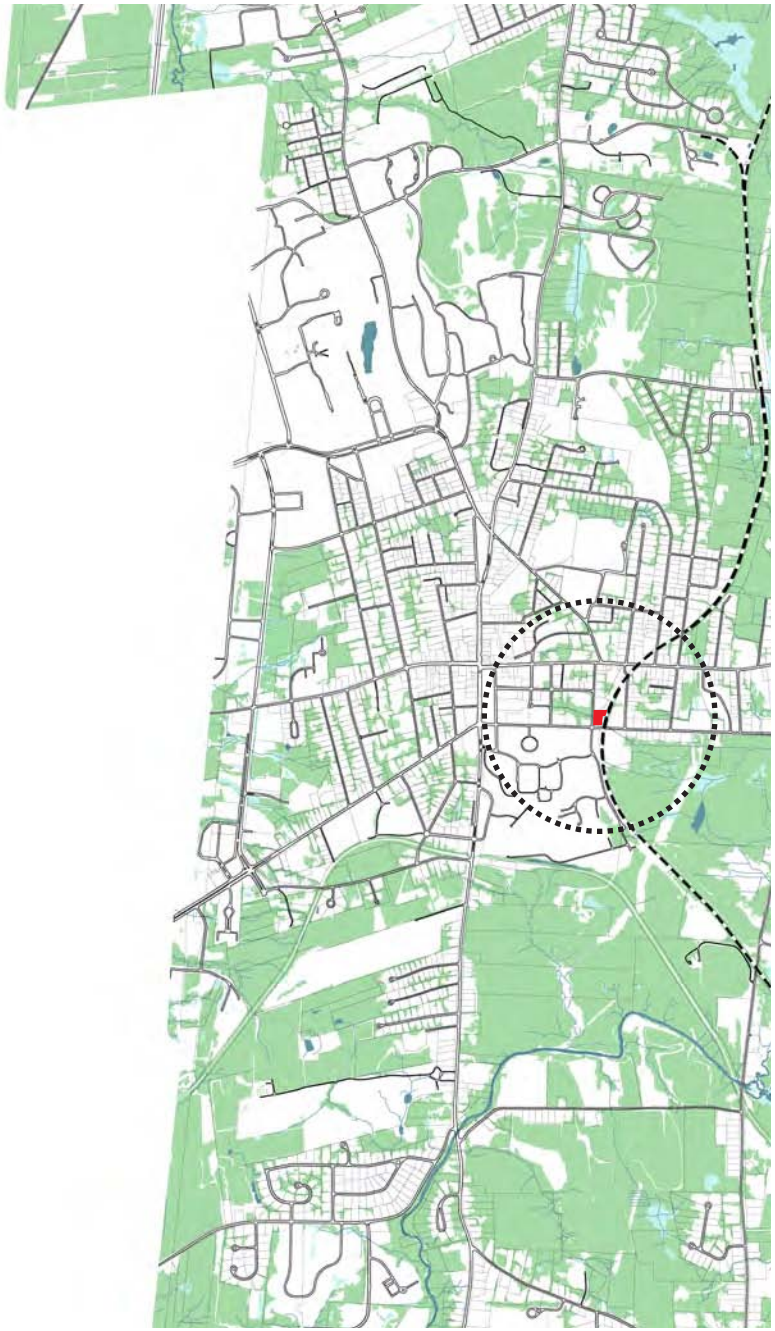


Underutilized residential sites could be redeveloped to link College St. to Main St. while providing affordable and mixed use housing. The proximity to Amherst Center is advantageous to those at all income levels.

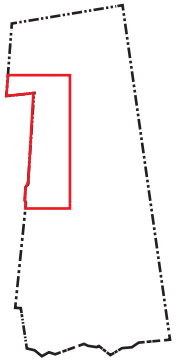


0 500 FT 0.5 1 MILE

DEPOT DISTRICT - COLLEGE STREET/DICKINSON STREET

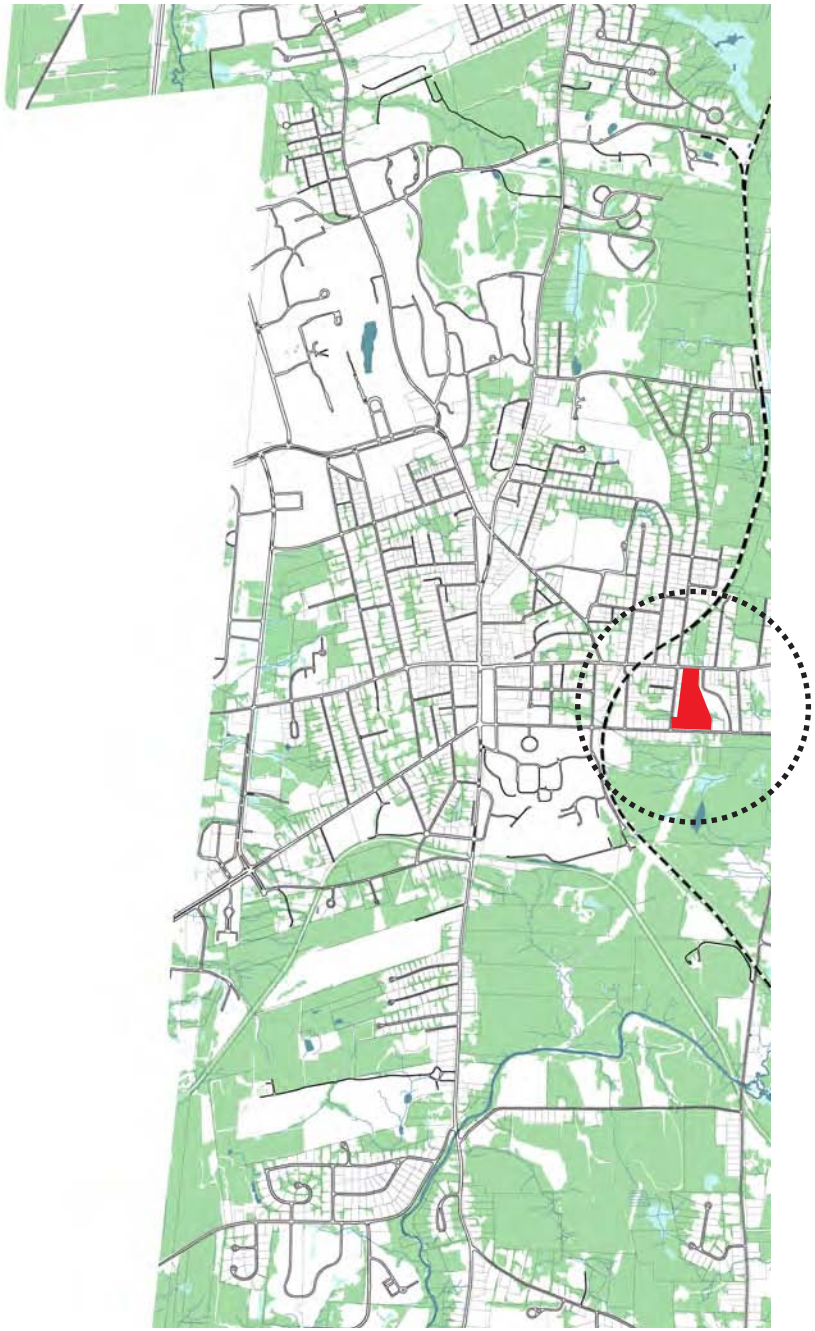


This is a pivotal site where Amherst College could connect to nearby commercial and residential neighborhoods. Retail uses could hold the corner with residential uses above or behind.

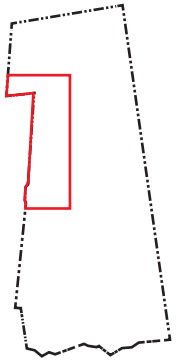


0 500 FT 0.5 1 MILE

DEPOT DISTRICT - COLLEGE STREET/ SOUTH WHITNEY STREET

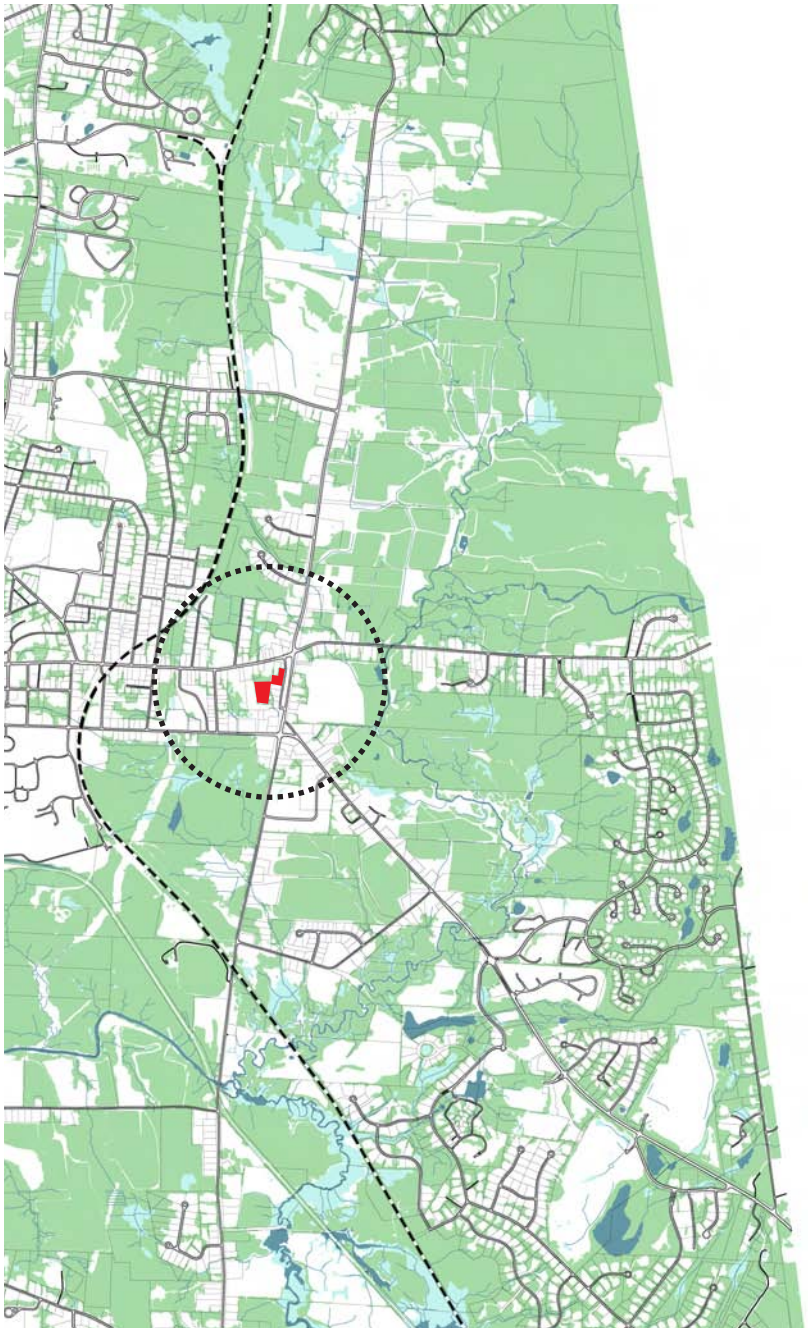


The Depot district is constrained by overhead powerline easements, railroad tracks, and the lack of a clear neighborhood character. Residential or mixed use development along College St. could help connect Amherst Center to Belchertown Road while still leaving room for other uses.

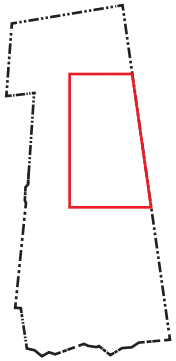


0 500 FT 0.5 1 MILE

EAST AMHERST VILLAGE - EAST STREET SCHOOL

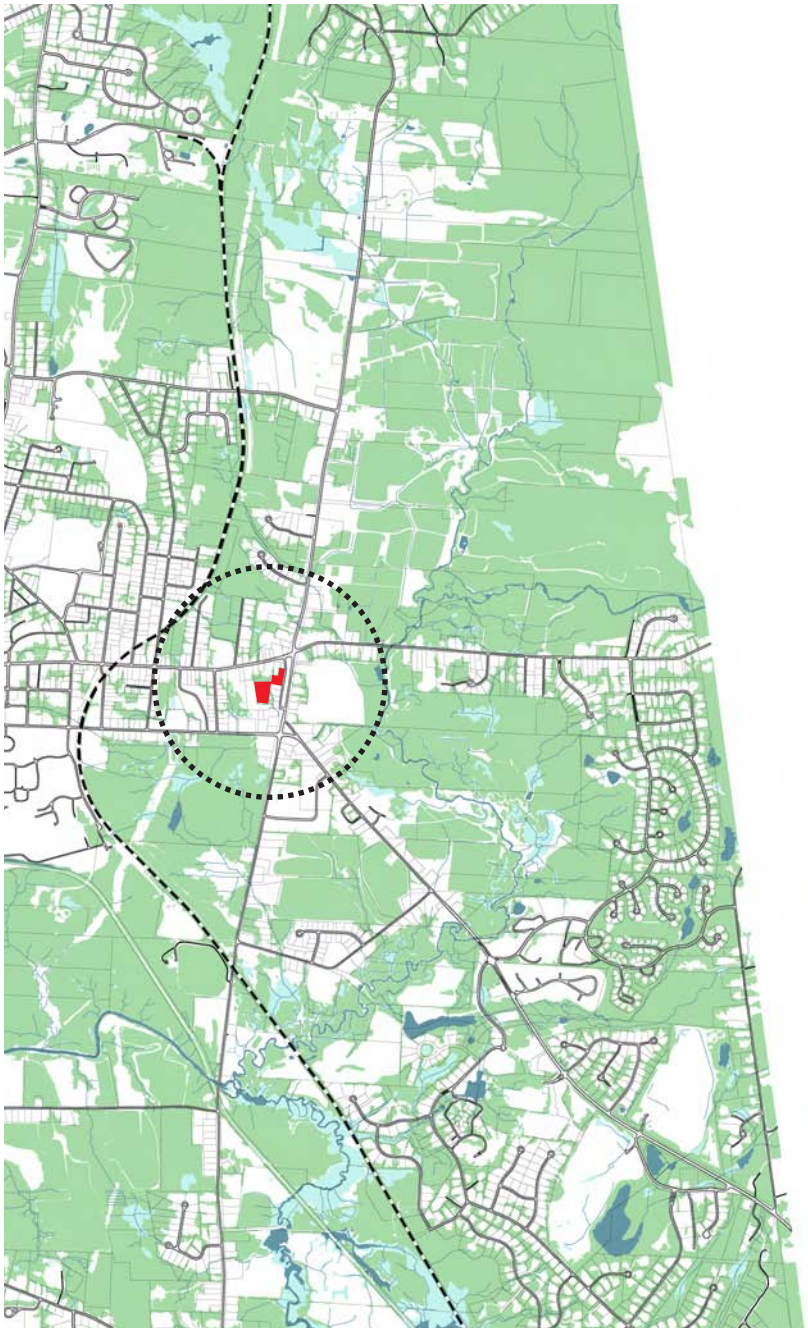


Conversion of the East Street School to housing would preserve this historic structure while providing mixed income or affordable housing. Combining this site with the development of the playing fields behind would allow parking to be placed where it fits in the best while leaving usable open space.

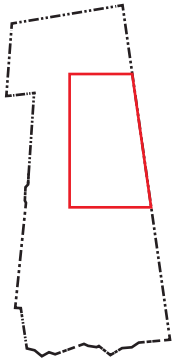


0 500 FT 0.5 1 MILE

EAST AMHERST VILLAGE - EAST STREET SCHOOL PLAYING FIELDS

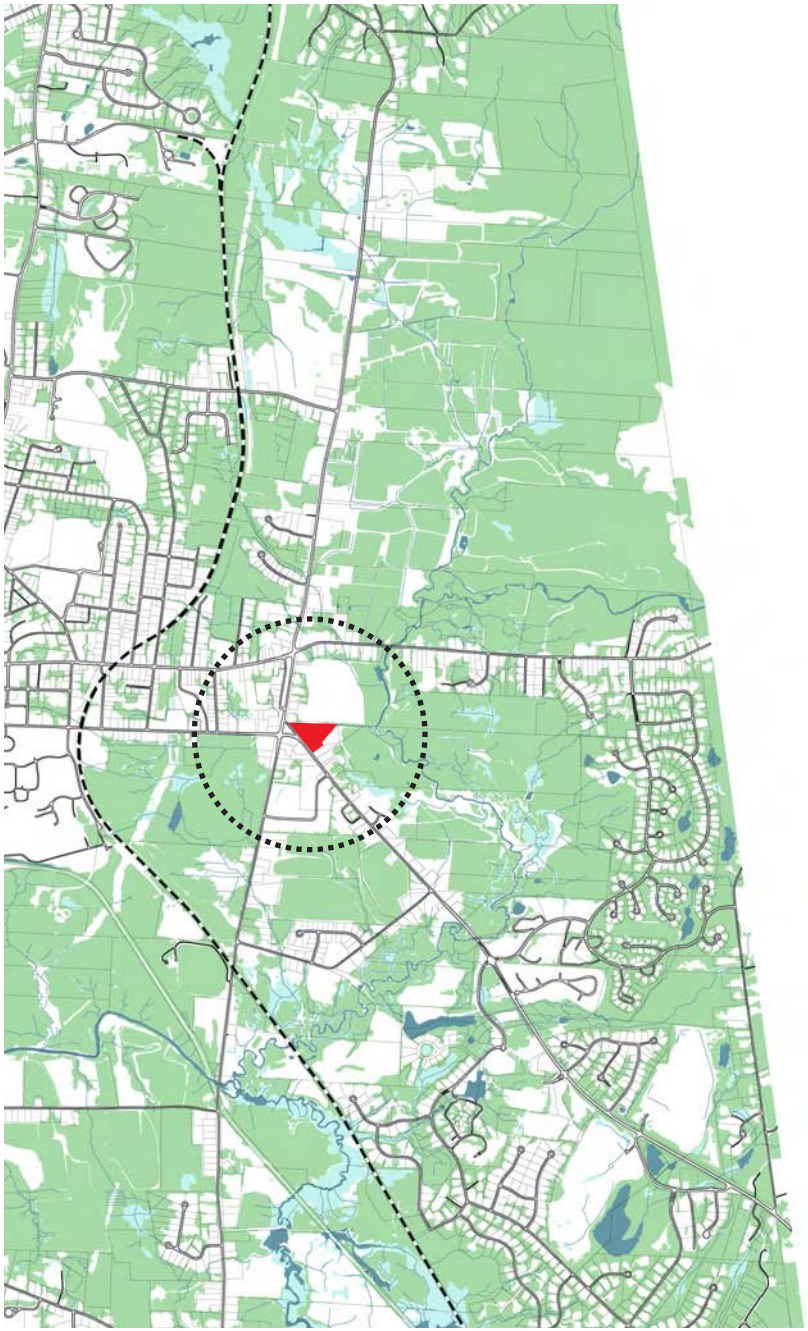


Underutilized playing fields could continue to provide open space with housing clustered around it. Cottages-style houses, duplexes or fourplexes could be nested into the tree-wrapped landscape, accessed from East Street next to the school.

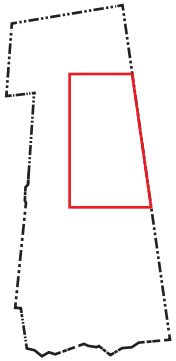


0 500 FT 0.5 1 MILE

EAST AMHERST VILLAGE - BELCHERTOWN ROAD

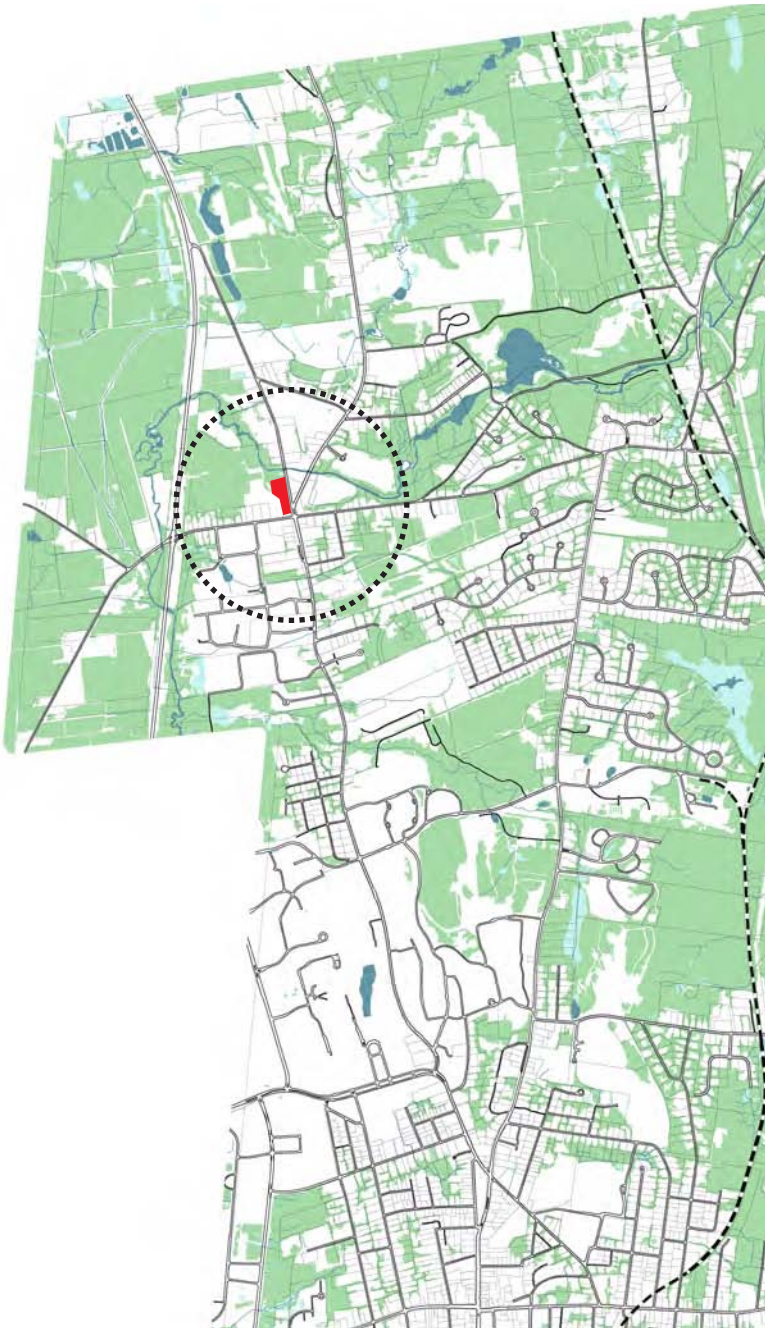


This major crossroads has confusing circulation patterns and development that prioritizes parking and cars over pedestrians. Mixed use development could reinforce the village center character, provide affordable housing and retail, and clarify the structure of streets and walking spaces.

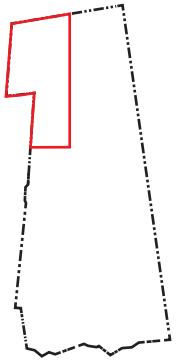


0 500 FT 0.5 1 MILE

NORTH AMHERST CENTER

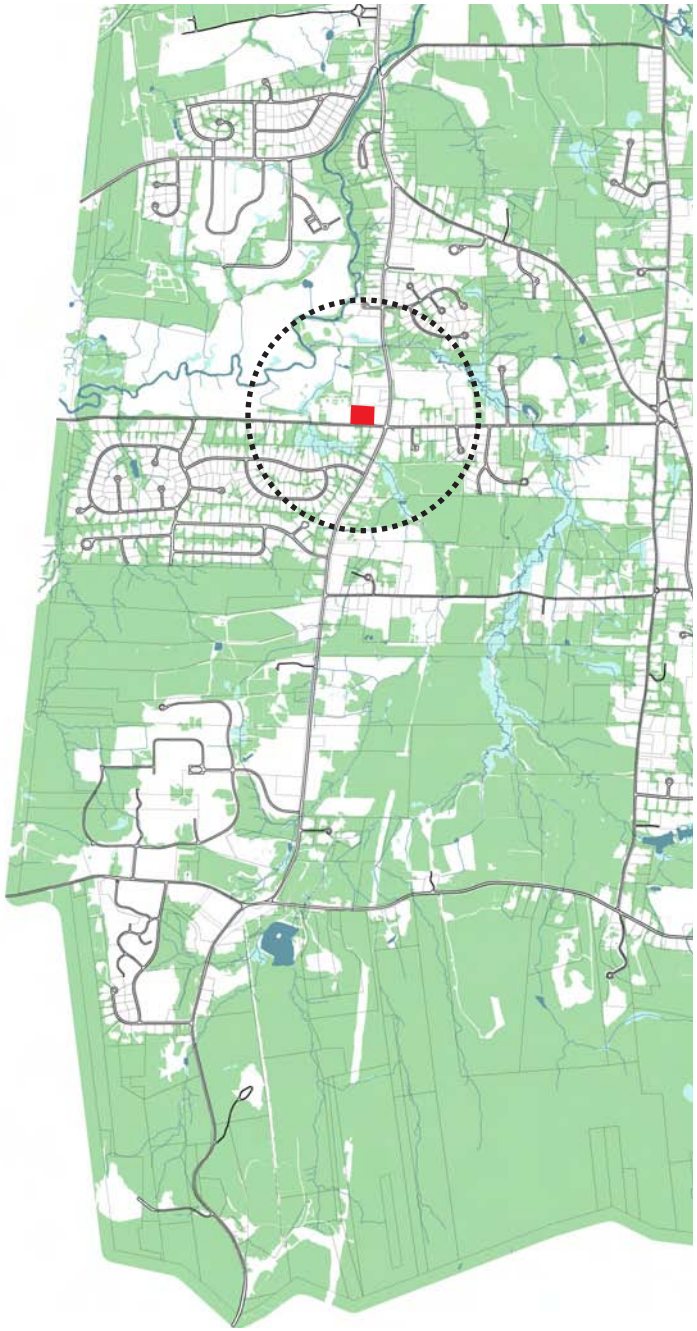


The village center provides a focus for community life that includes a branch library and retail, but abuts a series of parcels that could provide additional housing and commercial options. Existing commercial properties could include housing above, and industrial sites could be redeveloped as cluster housing.

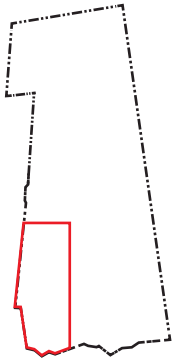


0 500 FT 0.5 1 MILE

POMEROY VILLAGE - WEST POMEROY LANE



An open field adjacent to Pomeroy village offers the opportunity for multifamily housing or mixed use development. Residential will add to the vitality of the village center, while commercial will offer services for those living in the area, as well as job opportunities.



A detailed investigation of development on the parking lot off of Amity Street suggests that housing development and downtown revitalization can go hand in hand. Mixed use construction would reinforce the traditional pattern of town center building.

N

Development would need to include parking. It should be coordinated with a broad based approach to downtown parking that balances convenience with the desire to create a walkable community center.

N

This is a pivotal site - connecting the commercial core to the surrounding residential areas. Two new buildings with different massings recognize the transitional nature of the this corner.

HOUSING	46,000 SF - 30 UNITS
RETAIL	8,200 SF
PARKING	59 SPACES

N

A proposed 4 story building on Amity Street matches the height of buildings around the corner on South Pleasant St. A three story building on South Prospect is closer in height to the residential buildings across the street.

Housing over commercial space helps support local businesses and should have a significant affordable component. It could include artist's work-live studios that contribute to Amherst's character.

The buildings step down as they approach the residential neighbors. The entry to the apartments is on the corner, with ground floor residential in the adjacent proposed building.

Parking is behind the buildings, allowing new facades to address the street. It can serve both residential and commercial tenants.

Just north of downtown are other sites where commercial areas abut residential neighborhoods. Denser development would allow these sites to meet a broad range of needs.

N

The area has parks, playing fields, stores and restaurants right nearby. Residential development would take advantage of these amenities.

N

Mixed use development might be primarily residential with commercial at the corner of Triangle and East Pleasant. Parking would be located behind, screened from view.

HOUSING	123,000 SF - 82 UNITS
RETAIL	9,900 SF
PARKING	167 SPACES

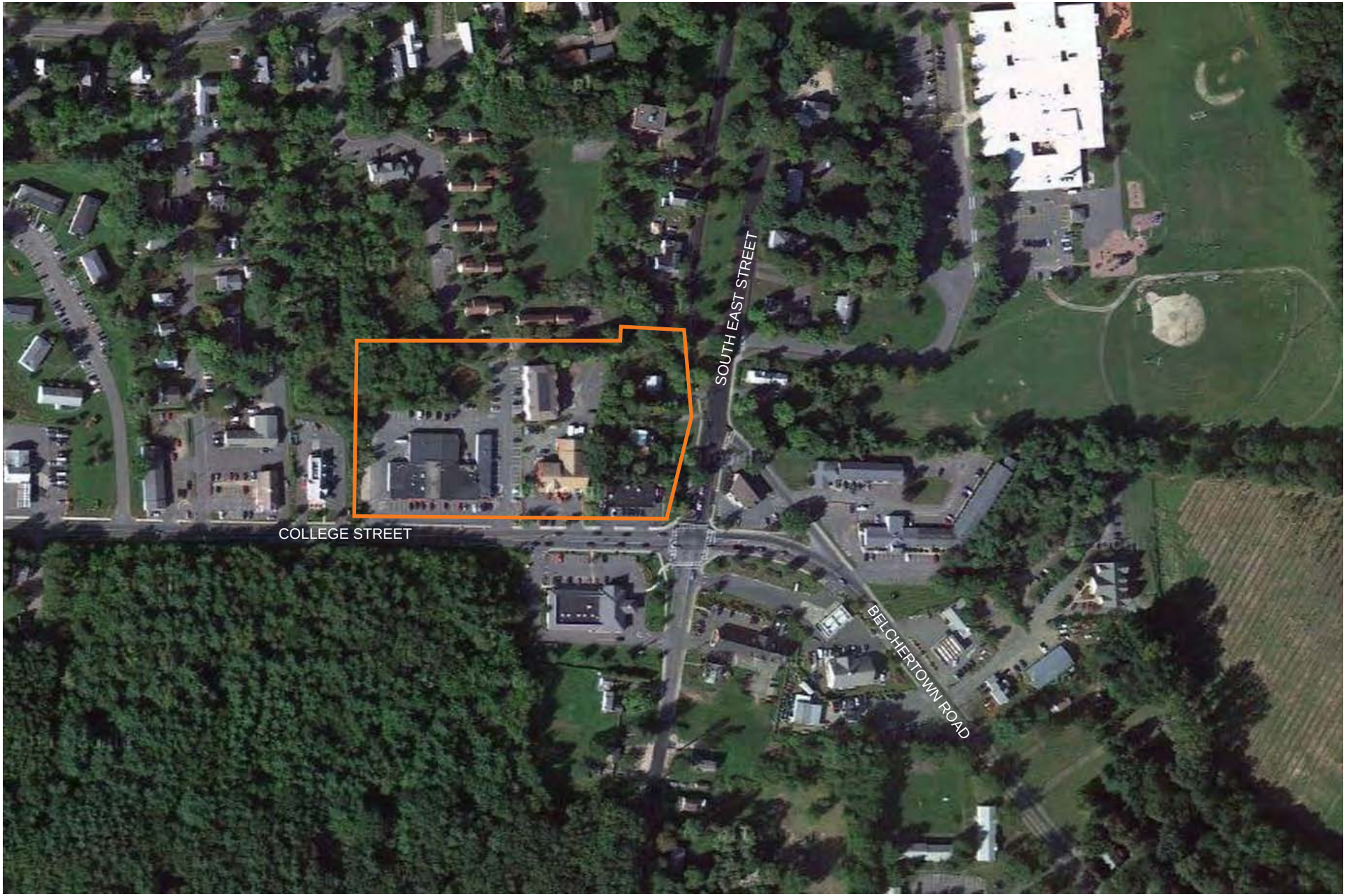
N

First floor retail could be a restaurant or a food store and might feature a patio with outdoor dining. Parking could be shared with the residential.

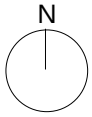
Four stories of construction would not be out of place on the prominent corner, and could then step down towards the side streets and residential areas.

Townhouses maintain a residential scale with individual entries lining the sidewalk, but maintain a high enough density to begin to meet Amherst's substantial need for more housing.

Front steps help maintain a sense of privacy for residents, but accessible units are also an important component of any housing development.

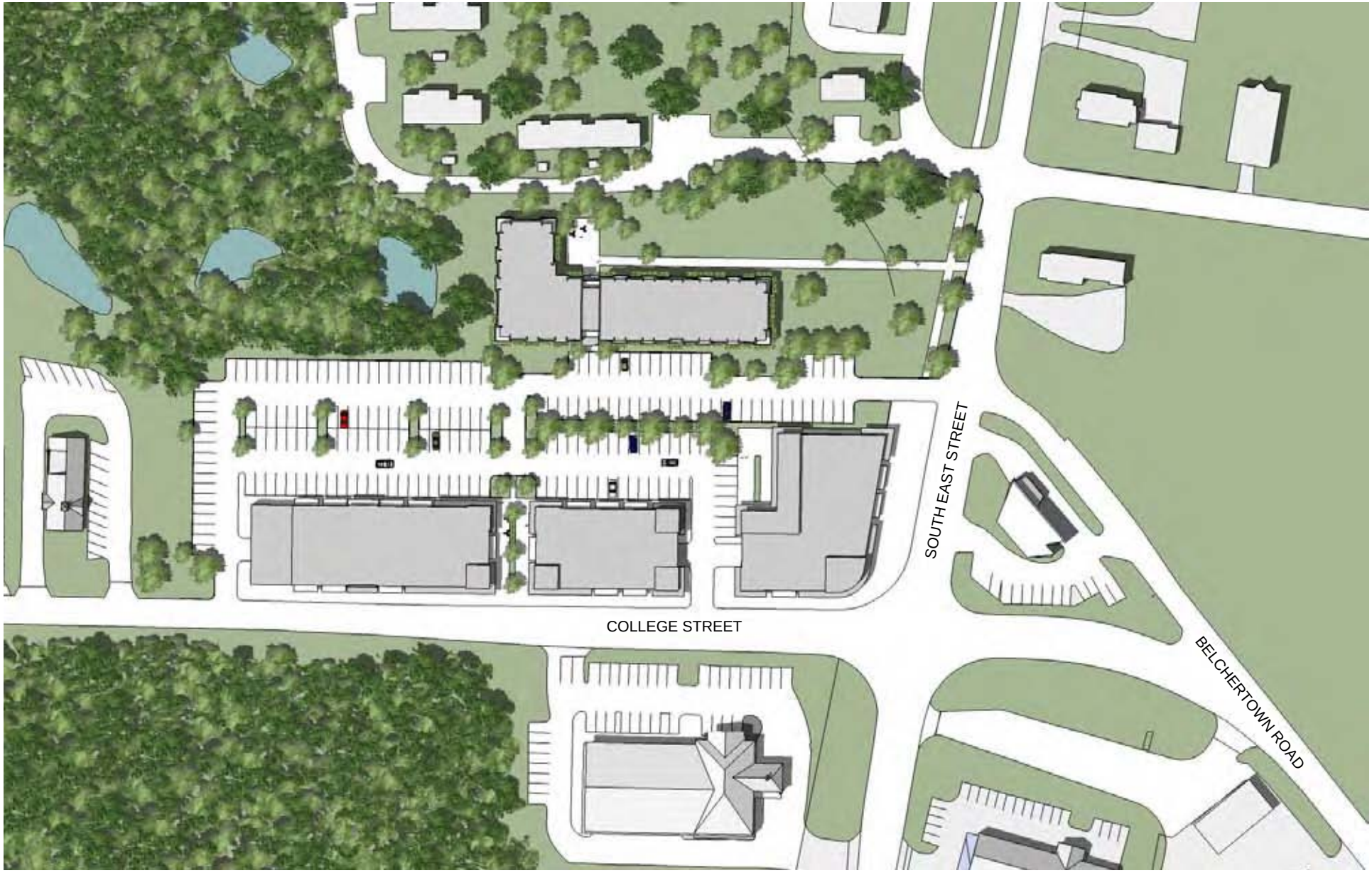


The intersection of College Street, South East Street and Belchertown Road has a strip commercial character that prioritizes cars over people. It could have a stronger downtown feeling that would make a better gateway into Amherst.



Wetland areas are interspersed with commercial building and parking, and should be maintained even if the density of development is increased.

N



New commercial buildings line College St. to help create a strong pedestrian character. A residential building occupies the area behind it, linked to South East St. as it transitions into a residential area.

HOUSING	62,690 SF - 41 UNITS
RETAIL	37,830 SF
PARKING	202 SPACES

N

Parking could serve both the commercial and residential buildings; one using it primarily during the day, the other primarily at night.

Residential development combined with commercial is good for business, and allows more people to walk to local shopping. Outdoor dining and greenery provide a neighborhood character.

Housing faces away from the stores and restaurants behind it, and towards the open spaces and wetland areas.

Bays, terraces and balconies can be a part of residential development whether it is affordable or market rate. Mixed income development often allows high design standards to be achievable.

Pomeroy Village is pretty distant from downtown, but can achieve its own balance of commercial and residential development.

N

Existing parking lots on three sides suggest housing that is oriented inward and towards West Pomeroy Lane. New development should include sidewalks that help create a pedestrian environment.

N

Buildings are clustered around courtyards that provide greenery and parking, and maintain a residential scale appropriate to the area's semi-rural location.

HOUSING	45,400 SF - 26 UNITS
RETAIL	N/A
PARKING	48 SPACES

N

Multiple entries, porches and articulated massing suggest a village-like neighborhood that could include both market rate and affordable apartments or townhouses.

Ground floors could include small businesses: a lawyer's or accountant's office, a small boutique, or an artist's studio. The owner could live up above.

Although parking is necessary, it doesn't need to dominate new housing development. Good planning can encourage people to walk - which has health and environmental benefits.

New housing doesn't need to imitate traditional building to offer the kind of comfortable and affordable environments balancing community and privacy that should be encouraged throughout Amherst.