



1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





A VISION FOR PITTSFIELD

Pittsfield will prosper as the creative and commercial hub of the county – a bustling economic center amidst the natural beauty of the Berkshires. For this and future generations, Pittsfield will be a city in the country that retains and enhances livability. By encouraging appropriate growth and development, we will become economically stronger as well as a more attractive place to live, work, and visit.

PITTSFIELD WILL BE A...

... Vibrant place to live

Neighborhoods will be dynamic, interesting, healthy and attractive places, where people feel safe walking or biking and talking to neighbors. A network of parks and trails will connect these neighborhoods to the greater community and link Pittsfield to the beauty within and beyond its borders. Older residential areas will be revitalized as exciting, historic, and urban communities. The design of new neighborhoods will complement Pittsfield's city character. All will offer affordable places for people and families to live in various stages of life.

... Center of innovation

Pittsfield will build on its entrepreneurial legacy and lead the region in the knowledge economy. We will be a haven for innovators drawn to the region's natural heritage and urban amenities. Our thriving downtown will be a place of commerce that brings together prosperous enterprises. A diversity of creative entrepreneurs will drive the city's economy, increase job opportunities and contribute to a greater quality of life for all.

... Heart of regional culture

Pittsfield's theaters, music venues, movie houses and art galleries will be a focus of the cultural economy in the Berkshires. Our reputation as a lively center for arts, culture and creativity will attract more artisans, businesses, visitors and residents – all of whom will increase the city's prosperity. We will

protect the historic character embodied in our community, from Arrowhead and the Hancock Shaker Village to downtown and older residential neighborhoods. The design of new buildings will enhance Pittsfield's distinctive character.

... Compassionate place

As an urban center, Pittsfield has traditionally been an economic and ethnic melting pot. We will continue to embrace different cultures and support those in need. We will offer residents the educational, social and economic opportunities to make a good life for themselves and their families.

... Sustainable place economically and environmentally

Sustainability in the 21st century will be paramount to the community's long-term growth and prosperity. Pittsfield will strive for economic as well as environmental sustainability in our endeavors. We will maximize opportunities in areas such as public transportation, energy efficiency, water conservation and the use of environmentally-friendly building materials as well as healthy and pedestrian-friendly community design.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PLANNING TO THRIVE CITY OF PITTSFIELD MASTER PLAN

Welcome to the City of Pittsfield Master Plan.

This master plan, created with the extensive involvement of citizens, business leaders, public officials and planners, describes a vision for Pittsfield's growing and revitalized future – a bustling economic center amidst the beauty of the Berkshires – a community wanting to thrive.

The Vision for Pittsfield is the starting point for planning the city's future. This short, seven-paragraph statement pulls together the major components of a thriving Pittsfield in the 21st century – a city that is attractive to residents, workers and visitors.

As always, economic development is a cornerstone of growth. Today's new and growing businesses are built on the creativity and innovation of entrepreneurs, business people and skilled workers. These people can choose to live anywhere in the world. Pittsfield must seek ways to attract them to this city – to set up enterprises and put down roots.

Adding that dimension – the concept of improving the “people climate” – is a major thrust of this master plan. A favorable business climate is important,

but alone it can only take a community so far. Economic sustainability requires creating a place where people want to be.

This master plan is a roadmap for improving the “people climate” of Pittsfield. The city has many attractive assets – its historic and urban character as well as the region's natural beauty. Pittsfield has some strong neighborhoods and natural resources. The plan builds on and protects these components in order to attract the “creative class” of people that will drive the economy in the decades ahead.

The business climate of the 21st century will require the city be prepared to house a variety of enterprises. Traditional heavy industries, though on the decline in the northeastern United States, still have a foothold in Pittsfield and need to know their continued growth is supported by the city and community.

At the same time, many new businesses will be knowledge-based or creative enterprises. These lighter operations would fit easily into mixed-use centers. In fact, many of the creative class of people would want to be in a place where they can blend the personal and professional hours of the day – work, grab coffee with friends and then finish up a project. Entrepreneurs, no matter their field, need to have a business and people climate that suits their lifestyle.



MASTER PLAN ELEMENTS

These complementary notions of improving the city's people and business climates weave their way into all five of the elements (or "subject areas") of the City of Pittsfield Master Plan.

The five elements are:

- > Land Use and Development Patterns;
- > Housing Quality and Affordability / Neighborhood Development;
- > Economic and Cultural Development / Historic and Cultural resources;
- > Transportation and Circulation / Public Facilities and Services; and
- > Open Space and Recreation / Natural Resource Protection.

Each element contains the same building blocks. First, an introduction and inventory of the existing conditions using current and historical data as well as maps and spatial analysis. Second, a list of goals that reinforce the community's vision as it pertains to the particular element. Finally, a list of strategies and actions the city needs to undertake, in keeping with applicable federal, state, and local laws, to achieve those goals and the community-wide vision.

Each of the strategies contains implementation components – the how, who, and resource requirements of getting each strategy completed. These implementation components are then summarized and organized by priority, responsible party, and resource requirements in the Implementation Chapter.



Downtown Arts Overlay District boundaries

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Many components of the physical environment impact the ability of a community to grow and thrive. This element of the plan contains goals and strategies that call for new policies and regulations on land use to enhance the quality of life throughout the city and boost economic development. It includes strategies to protect the city's urban character as well as its natural beauty – two important community assets.

Protecting the urban character of Pittsfield is an important emphasis of numerous strategies. The city has a major advantage over suburban commercial areas in its dense, walkable downtown. Residents and visitors increasingly prefer to shop in these areas – if they are safe and vibrant. In addition to downtown, the strategies define a series of commercial and village centers as such places of urban vibrancy and economic activity.

The Land Use and Development Patterns element goals are to:

- > Grow and develop in a manner that reinforces and compliments Pittsfield's urban and historic character;
- > Promote sustainable practices in all development projects; and
- > Revise land use policies, regulations and procedures to make it easy for city officials, city residents and the private sector to achieve the community's vision.

The strategies also describe areas for public investment – crucial to showing the private sector that the city is serious about economic success. Other strategies will change land use regulations and policies in order to make the private sector a partner in achieving the city's vision.

In many ways, traditional zoning hampers economic growth and the creation of vibrant neighborhoods. The master plan describes ways to revamp the land use regulations so that they welcome growth without ruining the urban, historic and natural resource values that city residents and business leaders describe as important. The new concepts emphasize worrying about the look and performance of buildings and sites and less about the particular uses that go into them.

Another major theme is the desire to make it easy for developers to give the City of Pittsfield what it wants. The land use regulations and policies need to have high, strong standards for public and private projects in Pittsfield. However, it should be easy for developers and builders to understand those standards and to move quickly through the approval process if they adhere to them.



HOUSING QUALITY AND AFFORDABILITY / NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Vibrant, desirable neighborhoods are a key part of economic development. Business owners and their employees need safe, attractive places to live. During the public process much discussion focused on providing high quality and affordable residential areas as the foundation for social vitality and economic success.

The strategies emphasize the city becoming proactive in examining and acting to improve residential areas – particularly on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. Protecting the character of each neighborhood is important as is continuing to improve and broaden code enforcement across the city.

The goals of the Housing Quality and Affordability / Neighborhood Development element are:

- > Create and preserve neighborhoods that attract new people to live in Pittsfield and retain current residents;
- > Provide a diversity of affordable workforce housing for current and future residents;
- > Provide a diversity of housing choices to attract people in all stages of life;
- > Raise the quality of housing stock.

Housing and neighborhoods in Pittsfield run the gamut from some of the most sought after in the region to some of the most distressed. Cost and affordability are issues in some areas; quality and safety are top priorities in others. A major strategy of this element is to, in detail, assess the condition of housing and residential areas in Pittsfield and find the right tools for the city to make sure the neighborhoods are an attractive and safe place for people to live.



ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT / HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Economic health is a fundamental part of any revitalization effort. The goals and strategies of this element support Pittsfield’s existing manufacturing industries, but prepare for the new industries of the 21st century – better weaving both into the city’s urban fabric.

Pittsfield has chosen to combine economic development and cultural and historic resources into a single element of the Master Plan. This emphasizes the recognition that historic architecture and cultural venues are important assets in Pittsfield. These can be leveraged to drive and enhance the city’s entire economy – not just tourism; as such assets increase the marketability of Pittsfield to business people, entrepreneurs and creative workers

The goals of the Economic and Cultural Development / Historic and Cultural Resources element are:

- > Promote the growth and expansion of new and existing businesses that support the city’s economic, environmental and social vision;
- > Pursue stable, high-paying jobs and long-term career paths;
- > Generate a highly educated, well-trained workforce to meet the needs of a growing, diverse economy;
- > Expand and capitalize on Pittsfield’s diverse cultural institutions and historic fabric; and
- > Foster the growth of higher education

in Pittsfield and throughout the region, including seeking out opportunities to partner with BCC and/or MCLA to achieve shared community, economic and educational goals.

Regional economic development organizations have done a lot of research and planning to capitalize on the assets of the Berkshires. The strategies in this element of the master plan outline ways to adapt these regional plans to the Pittsfield-specific level – making sure that the city has the infrastructure and plans to attract new businesses and retain existing operations.

This element continues the focus on strengthening downtown that was established within the land use element. The mission is to create a vibrant environment for increased retail operations as well as a city center that will be attractive to tourists and business officials seeking a place for their next enterprise. Boosting historic and cultural resources across the city serves to help that economic sector as well as make Pittsfield a more exciting place for people.



TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION / PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Transportation, public facilities and public services are crucial to supporting various land use, neighborhood, economic development and open space initiatives. The health of the city is determined by its supporting infrastructure. All aspects from roads to public safety to education facilities need to be managed to meet the vision of creating a vibrant, economic center.

The goals of the Transportation and Circulation / Public Facilities and Services element are:

- > Manage the flow of traffic in and through the city;
- > Enhance the walkability of the community as a whole – connecting activity centers to neighborhoods with bicycle and pedestrian connections as well as improving public transit; and
- > Provide public facilities and government operations that contribute to the city’s economic and environmental vision as well as ensure a high quality of life for Pittsfield residents.

For Pittsfield to grow into a place of excellence for business and residents, it must provide safe, comfortable, and convenient ways to get around. The automobile is not going away soon. However, car usage should not drive land use decisions. Many of the strategies in this element seek ways to increase the range of transportation options including

pedestrian, bicycle and mass transit. They also describe ways to better manage traffic and parking.

Other services must also support Pittsfield’s vision as a bustling economic center. Public safety, improving and publicizing it, is crucial to the city’s revitalization. Other public facilities must also strive to become models of excellence that support city goals. Education of young people, as well as continuing education, and vocational training for workers in transition, is important to making sure our businesses have the staffing they need to prosper.

Strategies in this area also include requiring city operations to investigate new ways to become more economically and environmentally sustainable.



OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION / NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

The juxtaposition of Pittsfield as a “city in the country” links two of the city’s most important assets – urban character and natural beauty. Pittsfield’s location in the Berkshires is a vital quality of life asset that will prove valuable to attracting people to the city. This element of the plan aligns these important natural resources with the vision of the city as a vibrant community.

The goals of the Open Space and Recreation / Natural Resource Protection element are:

- > Protect, preserve and maintain natural resources and ensure adequate funding for open space and park planning as necessary to provide a high quality of life for Pittsfield’s residents as well as an adequate amount, variety, and distribution of open space and water resources;
- > Provide opportunities, resources, accessibility and quality facilities for both recreation and conservation uses to all citizens; and
- > Develop while preserving traditional land use patterns, decreasing sprawl and protecting large open spaces.

While much of the city’s open space appears to have adequate long-term protection, privately owned natural areas are vulnerable to change. Some strategies in this element include ways to encourage landowners to maintain as much land as possible in a natural state

and balance the drive to develop with the preservation of valuable open space.

A major vision is a network (a “necklace”) of open space that rings the city. Not all of this land needs to be publicly accessible, but it provides corridors for wildlife, protects biodiversity and maintains the health of rivers and lakes. Another initiative is to find a way for the Ashuwillticook Trail to connect through Pittsfield.

In addition, this element tackles other issues such as the provision of recreational opportunities in Pittsfield. Many of these are quality of life (and, therefore, economic development) issues; the element seeks ways to provide for their ongoing operations and sustainability.

MASTER PLAN MAP

Some strategies, which are described in detail in the different chapters of the master plan, are summarized on the Pittsfield Master Plan map found on the following page. The map also depicts where, geographically, some of the strategies are focused around the city.





INSERT PITTSFIELD MASTER PLAN MAP HERE





THE MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

Cities must make choices. What kind of a community do residents want to live in? What kind of economic growth should be encouraged? Where and why? What should new businesses look like? Where should new neighborhoods be built? What should they look like?



Pittsfield residents, business owners and public officials have asked themselves these questions during the master planning process. The result is a vision and set of goals for the future and a plan, with specific strategies and a timetable for action, to achieve those goals.



This master plan is not an instruction manual. It gives specific guidance in some areas, but, by and large, it serves a broader purpose. Pittsfield's master plan establishes a vision and creates a framework for a community's growth. This plan gives decision makers and stakeholders (including elected officials, city and regional staff, planning and zoning board members, developers, property owners and other citizens) a guide as they create new policies and judge new development projects. It also helps the community increase opportunities for grant money, as the state and federal government prefer to fund projects that fit into a plan for the future.

Pittsfield's master plan is a living document. The community must be alert to the need for changes and updates. It is important to remember, however, that adjusting the comprehensive plan does

not mean lowering standards. The plan will not succeed if it is constantly changed to meet the demands of every particular project. A good test is to make sure that proposed change furthers the vision and accomplishes the goals of the plan. Otherwise, the city should review the plan at least every five years.

The State of Massachusetts says that a city's master plan "shall be a statement, through text, maps, illustrations or other forms of communication that is designed to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality." State law goes on to describe the elements that should be included in the plan: goals and policies statement, land use plan, housing, economic development, natural and cultural resources, open space and recreation, services and facilities, circulation and the implementation program.

The Mayor and Community Development Board designated a committee to craft the master plan with the help of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and a planning consultant, Saratoga Associates. Each member of the committee was assigned to a subcommittee and given the task of crafting the first draft of one of the elements. Members of the City Council participated actively in the creation of the master plan. The plan is the culmination of their work and efforts.

Public participation weaves itself through all aspects of the master planning



process. Engaging the public, educating them about planning, and listening to their concerns, ideas, and dreams is crucial in developing a plan that will stand the test of time. In the Pittsfield master planning process, there were many opportunities for the public to become involved.

Saratoga Associates, the master plan consultant, ran an extensive public process for the Pittsfield Master Plan. First it should be noted that every one of the Master Plan Advisory Community meetings and subcommittee meetings was open to the public. Almost every one of the Master Plan Advisory Community meetings was broadcast on local cable access television. Also open to the public and broadcast was a briefing given to the Pittsfield Community Development Board.

The public participation outreach process involved the following:

- > Four issues identification and ranking workshops held at neighborhood schools on July 25, 26, 31, and August 3, 2006.
- > Two visioning sessions held on January 20, 2007 for the general public and on March 8, 2007 for members of the business community.
- > Community-wide mailed survey in November 2006 to a random sample of 1655 households that achieved a 38.4 percent response rate.
- > Three topic specific workshops on housing, economic development and public safety/transportation.
- > Interviews in-person and on the telephone with numerous stakeholder representatives from the arts, tourism, economic development and downtown

business community.

- > A community-wide update meeting where the vision, goals and strategies of the master plan were presented for comment to the general public.

Through all of the public participation a number of common themes emerged, which include in no particular order:

- > Creation of high quality employment opportunities
- > Educational excellence
- > Enhancement of walkable / bikeable communities
- > Environmental sustainability
- > Increase in public safety, including the reduction of crime
- > Preservation of historic and urban characteristics
- > Protection of open space and natural beauty

The vision, goals and strategies set forth in this plan are based on these themes.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Baseball... Moby Dick... Plastics...

Inventiveness... Creativity... Ingenuity...

Since the first farmers moved to this part of the Berkshire Mountains, Pittsfield has been a place of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit. Pioneers of farming, baseball, literature and manufacturing lived, worked and became inspired while in Pittsfield. The city has always been a place of innovation and urban vitality amidst the natural beauty of the Berkshires.

Pittsfield is the heart of the Berkshires. The city of 43,497 people is tucked into the rolling hills of the Berkshires just inside of Massachusetts's western border with New



1791 Town Bylaw banning baseball among other things in Pittsfield.

York. It lies 45 miles east of Albany, 80 miles from Hartford, 135 miles from Boston and 150 miles from New York City.

Solomon Deming moved to the township of Poontoosuck to farm in 1752. Other agricultural entrepreneurs followed and soon the group incorporated as the Proprietors. Five decades later, the innovation continued. In 1810, Pittsfield (as it was renamed in 1761) hosted the first agricultural fair in America.

Although agriculture was the primary occupation, by the early 1800s, the landscape in and around Pittsfield was dotted with lumber, grist, paper and textile mills. In 1800 Arthur Scholfield smuggled his wool-carding machine out of England and set up his revolutionary cloth making processes in Pittsfield. With the introduction of Merino sheep in 1807, the region became the American hub for woolen manufacturing. Textiles would be the dominant industry for almost a century.

Pittsfield also hosted many innovators in the creative and intellectual sector. Among the noteworthy who lived or took up residence here were Oliver Wendell Holmes, Herman Melville, and the Shakers. Today Pittsfield is the creative center of the region; the city art scene includes the Barrington Stage Company, the Berkshire Museum and the newly renovated Colonial Theater.

Baseball became an important pastime to the growing number of factory workers in the mid-19th century Pittsfield. The

sport was not new to Pittsfield – it was born here. A 1791 town bylaw stated that: "...for the Preservation of the Windows in the New Meeting House . . . no Person or Inhabitant of said town, shall be permitted to play at any game called Wicket, Cricket, Baseball, Football, Cat, Fives or any other game or games with balls, within the Distance of Eighty Yards from said Meeting House." This was the first mention of baseball in North America. In 1892, George Burbank built Waconah Park, which stands today as a landmark stadium for ball games though it also hosted bike races and track meets. In the 1920s, a Hartford Senators player by the name of Lou Gehrig hit a home run into the nearby Housatonic River.

In 1890, William Stanley founded the Stanley Electric Company in downtown Pittsfield to build electricity transformers. By 1900, the company had grown and construction on a new plant began east of downtown. It employed up to 5,000 people. General Electric bought a controlling interest in the Stanley Electric Company in 1903 and by the 1950s the company, now known as GE, was building the largest transformers in the world.

The market for transformers began to decline in the 1970s and eventually came to a halt in 1986. The closing left a huge economic void in the city's economy. General Electric had branched out into other fields and still had operations in the city until recently, but none on the scale of the transformer manufacturing. In 2007 GE's Polymer Plastics Division was sold to Sabic.



Appearance is fundamentally linked to economic success. Whether recognizing that or just trying to beautify their community, numerous Pittsfield investments in the public realm have contributed to a better community. One such effort, first described in the 1957-1958 City Report, was the Shade Tree Commission, which beautified parkways and residential streets.

As occurred in other former manufacturing centers, the city's population followed the economy's decline – and the flight from urban centers that afflicted most communities. The number of people living in the city peaked in 1960, at 57,879, and has since declined to an estimated 43,860 in 2005.

A COMMUNITY AT A CROSSROADS

In 1964, Urban Renewal dominated the front of the Pittsfield City Report. Urban renewal advocated for tearing down dense areas, often designated as slums, and putting up enclosed malls, large parking lots, and modern office buildings. The Jubilee project, described in the 1964 Pittsfield City Report, planned to clear so-called “slums” along West Street and Center Street. These areas were described as “rundown dilapidated buildings on the city's most valuable land.” The eyesores would give way to “a thing of beauty, which would identify Pittsfield as the most attractive community in the Commonwealth.” Another project in the 1970s hoped to bring a shopping mall, surrounded by acres of parking to downtown.

Unfortunately, the result wasn't the rejuvenation predicted the new form of the buildings did little to return vibrancy to the streets of Pittsfield. The city continued to lose its population because of larger economic factors. In terms of land use planning, experiences around the country mirrored those in Pittsfield. The lesson learned is that urban cores cannot compete with suburbs for automobile centered commerce. Policies have to be more strategically urban.

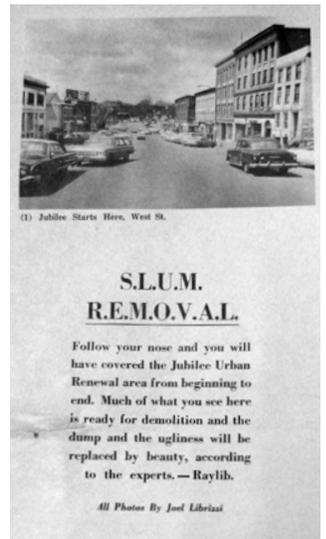
Today, those buildings and their streetscape, which had been deemed to be “of low value, unattractive to both commercial and residential occupants” turn out to be important economic drivers. Many of the entrepreneurs in today's creative, knowledge-based economy crave the urban, walkable communities that were lost in many cities including parts of Pittsfield. Luckily, significant blocks of historic buildings remain, particularly along North Street, South Street and around Park Square.

SEEKING THE CREATIVE CLASS

Economic development in the 21st century has taken on an added dimension. First, the trend towards smaller business continues. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration 97.5 percent of firms have fewer than 20 employees – and those firms have generated up to 80 percent of new jobs over the past decade. As the “Heart of the Berkshires”, Pittsfield has become an increasingly desirable place to live, work, and play and offers



General Electric's transformer business boomed in Pittsfield during the middle decades of the 20th Century.



Page from a city annual report describing so-called “slums” selected for removal..



tremendous opportunities for residents, business owners, employees, and tourists.

As the region's cultural hub, Pittsfield hosts many artistic, culinary, entertainment and historic venues including the Colonial Theatre, Berkshire Museum, and Hancock Shaker Village. Numerous recreational facilities, including Bousquet ski area, Pittsfield State Forest, and Onota and Pontoosuc Lakes, offer extensive skiing, hiking, swimming, fishing and boating.

The city is home to superior health-care services including Berkshire Health Systems, Hillcrest Campus, and Veterans Administration Medical Clinic. Berkshire County Community College, Berkshire Music School and the satellite campus to the UMASS Isenberg School of Management offer first-class educational opportunities within the city. When such assets are combined with the restaurants, galleries, community-wide events and festivals, the city quickly becomes an ideal location for those wishing to spend a weekend, a summer, or a lifetime in Pittsfield.

Attracting and retaining small business entrepreneurs, especially in the knowledge and creative sectors, takes a different approach to economic development. Successful communities no longer solely focus on creating a friendly business climate. Many have found that they must devote some of their resources to creating the kind of environment that

innovative people find interesting. The major proponent of this, Richard Florida, wrote recently that creative centers are not thriving due to traditional economic reasons such as access to transportation routes, tax breaks or fiscal incentives. "They are succeeding largely because people want to live there. The companies follow the people – or, in many cases, are started by them."

Florida's research has found that creative and innovative people want to live in places that offer high-quality experiences, tolerate diversity, and validate their identities as creative people. He has found that most of these creative centers contain a vibrant, often historic, urban experience with easy access to natural recreation such as hiking or biking.

Creating a people climate in Pittsfield requires rethinking economic development to include the concept of attracting talented, creative people. In Pittsfield, much work has been done in that regard by the arts and cultural institutions.

The effort needs to be supported by economic, land use and transportation planning efforts – in terms of resources as well as the regulations and policies that protect the urban environment and find the physical forms that enhance vibrancy. This master plan seeks to integrate those efforts in order to create a city that seeks to attract new entrepreneurs and retain the ones we have.

