2 LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS
LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

Across the country, people are moving back into downtown areas. A report by the Harvard Business School’s Initiative for Competitive Inner city tracked 100 urban areas and found that the influx of people has boosted these core areas. The study found that urban median household incomes are rising faster than the national average and poverty is falling faster as well. These and other statistics illustrate the promise of cities.

Cities are more attractive because they are vibrant places. People enjoy being amidst the culture, services and historic architecture of urban places. More and more businesses, especially those in the creative and knowledge industries, move to cities because that is where they can find the workers they need.

Successful cities offer diversity in terms of neighborhoods and commercial areas. Not every urban dweller wants to live in a multi-unit apartment building. Families may seek quieter neighborhoods with backyards. Young professionals and retired people may find downtown densities more alluring. Most people are also attracted to places with natural beauty. While relishing the vitality of a city, even urban dwellers tend to seek places where the countryside and its abundance of outdoor activities are close at hand.

Through the master planning process, Pittsfield residents and business leaders have described a vision for the city’s future that protects the urban character and natural beauty of the community – and outlines a path to make urban living more attractive in Pittsfield. This vision is one that enhances the quality of life for existing residents as well as creates an attractive place for new residents, visitors and businesses.
EXISTING CONDITIONS

Land use
The City of Pittsfield is comprised of over 27,000 acres of land, all of which have a classified use based on State of Massachusetts assessment regulations. The classifications include various types of residential, open space, commercial, industrial, cropland, recreational, and public service throughout the city.

The accompanying map, titled City of Pittsfield Land Use, describes the on-the-ground land uses in Pittsfield. The lists of land use classifications and the amount of area they take up in Pittsfield are shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total area (acres)</th>
<th>Percent of city</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>795.6</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cropland</td>
<td>1,719.6</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>10,989.9</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Density Residential</td>
<td>3,841.6</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>708.3</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Density Residential</td>
<td>1,102.9</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Density Residential</td>
<td>1,336.5</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Family Residential</td>
<td>184.0</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Land</td>
<td>1,554.9</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation Recreation</td>
<td>925.3</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasture</td>
<td>817.4</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectator Recreation</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>0.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>180.6</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Open</td>
<td>675.4</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste Disposal</td>
<td>127.5</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>1,163.7</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Based Recreation</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetland</td>
<td>927.1</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woody Perennial</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27,176.6</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: GIS data from MassGIS, analysis by Saratoga Associates.)
This land use map does not tell the whole story of Pittsfield’s natural and physical landscape. For example, many downtown parcels are classified as commercial, but actually contain a mix of uses including residential. In addition, the dense, multi-family neighborhoods around downtown share the same category as the more suburban style neighborhoods off of Vine Street or East New Lenox Road. Also, the North and South Street areas described as commercial are very different from those along West Street or near the Dalton line. Though commerce is the main function of each, the placement of the buildings, the role of the pedestrian, the size and design of signs and many other aspects make them very different experiences.

A second type of land use map is included. It is titled, “City of Pittsfield – Land use, parcel-based.” This map’s data comes from official land use classifications used for assessment and other state and municipal purposes. It provides a less comprehensive understanding of land uses because, for example, it lumps an entire parcel into a single category, even if there are different uses on it. Also, some categories are very general – for example the airport and state-owned forestlands are both classified as “community service.” Despite its shortcomings, the map is provided because it adds information that the first land use map does not have.

Pittsfield’s development pattern is fairly typical. The dense downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods are the older parts of the city. As the community grew prosperous and the population increased, workers started to move further and further into the countryside. Most of this development is in the eastern part of the city, conveniently located near the sites of historic GE operations. Currently this land is utilized by General Dynamics and Sabic Innovative PlasticsTM. Many of the streets in the center and central eastern part of the city use the more urban and efficient grid pattern. A good portion of the land to the east of downtown, not surprisingly, is designated industrial and sits along railroad lines and major roads.
INSERT PITTSFIELD LAND USE MAP HERE
INSERT PITTSFIELD LAND USE WITH PARCELS MAP HERE
Zoning
Pittsfield regulates land use through its zoning ordinance using a traditional Euclidean code, which emphasizes a separation of uses. Each district, described in the chart below has a list of permitted uses allowed in the district as well as dimensional requirements for the buildings. Each district has a geographic location in Pittsfield that is described on the accompanying map.

City staff members are making some headway rewriting the land use regulations, but, as in many urban areas, Pittsfield has realized the challenges of traditional Euclidean or “use-based” zoning. Traditional zoning is based on the premise of zoning undesirable uses out, rather than stating what the community wants to see and requiring those qualities.

One recent update to the zoning code is the Downtown Arts Overlay District, which is a zoning overlay that encompasses downtown and some of the surrounding neighborhoods. The District’s purpose is to foster the mixing of uses and break down some of the problems presented in rigid Euclidean zoning. It allows a broad range of uses more appropriate to downtown, while excluding others not appropriate to an urban core. It also adjusts some of the dimensional requirements in order to encourage a more urban building style.

Another update is the Flexible Development ordinance, which is a zoning tool intended to revamp some of the sprawl-inducing regulations. The ordinance’s purpose is to preserve open space by allowing the clustering of homes in one portion of a project site while preserving the rest of the land as open space. Studies have shown that such developments, if properly designed, are more desirable to homeowners and more profitable for builders as well as better for the environment. The ordinance also provides density bonuses as an incentive for additional open space, affordable housing, handicapped accessible housing and environmentally friendly construction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PITTSFIELD ZONING DISTRICTS</th>
<th>Total area (acres)</th>
<th>Percent of city</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial, Warehousing and Storage</td>
<td>229.0</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown Business</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Business</td>
<td>691.9V</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Industrial</td>
<td>1,241.7</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouped Business</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Density Multi-Family Residence</td>
<td>590.6</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Industrial</td>
<td>573.5</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Industrial</td>
<td>897.5</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Density One-Family Residence</td>
<td>8,675.5</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Density Multi-Family Residence</td>
<td>309.9</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-Family Residence</td>
<td>12,078.7</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-and Two-Family Residence</td>
<td>1,726.8</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27,176.6</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: GIS data from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, analysis by Saratoga Associates.)
INSERT PITTSFIELD ZONING MAP HERE
MASTER PLAN GOALS

The City of Pittsfield has committed itself to achieving three goals related to Land Use and Development Patterns. The strategies recommended to achieve these goals are found in the next section of this element.

GOAL 1
Grow and develop in a manner that reinforces and compliments Pittsfield’s urban and historic character.

Pittsfield has a distinct advantage over other communities in the Berkshires – it has a historic and urban core with compelling architecture surrounded by dense, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods. One of the priorities identified in the Pittsfield Master Plan Community Survey and seconded during the visual preference survey is the desire to protect these characteristics. The city must do this while providing for economic growth and maintaining its role as the industrial and commercial center of the Berkshires.

GOAL 2
Promote sustainable practices in all development projects.

Pittsfield policies and ordinances can be used to encourage development projects in the city to be sustainable. Projects can be incentivized or required to utilize best practices to save energy, save nature, reduce stormwater runoff, prevent erosion, promote alternatives to automobiles, increase environmental awareness and so on. The city has taken the first step by establishing the Green Commission in 2008. The city, in its own projects, needs to be a leader implementing sustainable building techniques. This mindset is not only important for the environment – it helps save money in both the public and private sectors.

GOAL 3
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.

Public officials and the general public spent a lot of time creating a vision for Pittsfield’s future. This master plan articulates that vision and sets out a roadmap for reaching it. The community set an appropriately high standard for the kind of development they want in the city. Pittsfield’s land use policies and regulations need to create a clear, easy path for property owners, developers, builders and others to create buildings and neighborhoods that fit the city’s vision.
MASTER PLAN STRATEGIES

The many good ideas described by the residents and business owners in Pittsfield have been distilled into the following strategies. These strategies are designed to steer the city towards achieving the community’s overall vision for itself as well as the specific goals enumerated in this Land Use and Neighborhood Development element.

STRATEGY 1
Revise Pittsfield’s zoning, subdivision and other regulations to clearly define and achieve the community’s physical vision.

The current zoning and subdivision regulations in Pittsfield are unwieldy and unfriendly – both to those who want to invest in the city and to those who must administer the code. The rules have become dated due to recent court rulings, changed market realities, and the updated vision of city residents as described in this plan.

The land use rules should be redesigned to make it easy for developers and property owners to give the community what it wants. The development standards for the community should be high – but they should be easily and quickly achievable.

Strategy 1A
Revise subdivision regulations to require that new housing developments be designed to have low impact on the environment and maintain the character of the community.

Development patterns based on conventional zoning codes in Massachusetts often result in “sprawl” with its associated large impervious areas, loss of natural areas, and alteration of hydrologic systems. Conventional developments commonly contain wide roads and large parking lots. These large impervious areas prevent water from infiltrating the ground and replenishing groundwater and supporting nearby wetlands and streams. Conventional landscaping brings additional concerns including the introduction of non-native plants, use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers – which runoff into waterbodies – and excessive water consumption.

Typically, subdivision designers try to deal with water runoff by constructing expensive stormwater controls such as catch basins, pipes and detention ponds.

The more development, the harder it is for natural systems to adapt. New projects – greenfield as well as infill – should have as little impact on the environment as possible. This includes stormwater runoff, water and energy use, sustainable materials, and numerous other elements.

Stormwater runoff is one of the most significant sources of water pollution in the Commonwealth. During rainstorms stormwater runoff washes over impervious surfaces, such as roads, sidewalks and rooftops – increasing in temperature and carrying pollutants such as phosphorus, nitrogen, oil and grease, and pathogens to rivers, lakes and wetlands. This “nonpoint” source of pollution (because it does not come out of a single location such as a pipe) can result in degraded water quality, blocked fish passage, fish kills, loss of wetlands, degraded aesthetics, and impaired recreation.
Planning to thrive: City of Pittsfield Master Plan / March 2009

Low Impact Development (LID) is a stormwater management approach with the basic principle of modeling nature and mimicking a site’s predevelopment water systems. Instead of managing and treating stormwater in large, costly end-of-pipe facilities, LID technology employs small, cost-effective landscape features often located at the lot level. LID allows for development with fewer environmental impacts through smarter designs and technologies that better balance conservation, growth, public health and quality of life. LID benefits the municipality, the developer, and the general public – through cost savings to developers, smaller burden on municipal infrastructure and reduced pollution to drinking water, recreational waterways and wetlands.

Some of the LID best management practices include:

- Permeable pavers
- Porous surfaces
- Tree box planters
- Green roofs
- Rain gardens
- Grassed swales
- Dense development
- Native plants
- Open space conservation
- Narrower streets
- Shorter driveways
- Smaller, better landscaped parking areas
- Storage / reuse of rainwater

Details about these and other case studies can be found at: http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/pages/SG-CS-lid.html.

Another design technique that can be applied is LEED ND (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Neighborhood Design). LEED is currently a U.S. standard for environmentally sustainable building design, and is in the process of creating and testing its ratings system for neighborhood design (LEED ND). LEED ND combines elements of green building with better site design and large-scale sustainability. Pittsfield should consider incorporating LEED ND standards—or actually using the certification process—into its own code. This would not only use widely accepted benchmarks for environmentally responsible planning, but it would also establish Pittsfield as a leader in sustainability.

**Strategy 1B**
Investigate the creation of watershed overlay districts to guide development in sensitive areas facing development pressure or redevelopment pressure around Onota Lake, Pontoosuc Lake and Richmond Pond.

Much of the land along the shorelines of the city’s lakes and rivers is vulnerable to development pressures. Although most shorelines are already developed, there are several large tracts where the community can expect some building in the near future. During public meetings many participants were concerned that these critical environmental areas be carefully designed to protect public and environmental values. The city could establish policies and rules now that will move developers in the proper direction.

The city’s existing site development standards do not incorporate current standards for sustainability that have been used successfully in other municipalities across the country. The AIA SDAT report recommends a “Focus on Water”. Water resources and water quality are important in every community, but especially in Pittsfield where the Housatonic River, as well as the lakes and ponds are a prominent natural resource.


Its basic principles include:

- Keep water local and live within municipal water budgets by addressing issues from a watershed perspective;
- Protect clean water and restore impaired waters;
> Protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat; and
> Promote development strategies consistent with sustainable water resource management.

Any projects in Pittsfield’s watershed areas should follow three guiding principles aimed at protecting the quality of the waterway as described above as well as public views and public access. As part of a well-designed neighborhood, these rules would also tend to raise the value of the project for developers.

> Maintain public access to the waterway along the water’s edge. Access need not be as complex as a beach or boat launch, but a simple path open to community residents and the general public is highly desirable.

> Site designs, landscaping and architectural standards that protect the view of the community for neighbors next to the site and across the water.

> Low impact site layouts and infrastructure that protect the water quality. (See strategy LU-2B above.)

**Strategy 1C**

*Establish development review procedures that: a) require developers to describe how their projects achieve the city’s vision and goals as described in the Master Plan. b) ensure developers design new projects to address the preservation of open space, especially the continuity of open spaces. c) encourage developers to engage in public design processes.*

The residents of Pittsfield have spent a lot of time developing their vision for the future as described in this Master Plan. Yet too often developers, local residents and even public officials fail to consult the plan before the creation or review of site plans – particularly when the rules provide room for discretion.

Requiring developers to explain how their applications help the city achieve its master plan and open space and recreation goals ensures that applicants review the comprehensive plans and apply them to their projects. Second it reminds public officials, as well as Pittsfield residents, of their long-term vision.

Applications for subdivision and site plan reviews as well as any appeals for a variance could be revised to include the requirement for a short, detailed description about the ways in which their project meets the vision and goals of the master plan and open space and recreation plan. Given the importance of these plans, the community could make this the first page or item of review applications.

The AIA SDAT report acknowledged that a balance needs to be found that preserves the existing natural character of Pittsfield while encouraging successful economic development. Many areas of Pittsfield are experiencing palpable development pressures. These increased development pressures raise questions about which areas are most appropriate for development, where are the
currently developed areas, and how has development been shaped.

One of Pittsfield’s greatest assets is its natural resources, including its lakes, rivers, vistas, parks, and vegetation. Such natural resources provide a quality of life for residents and serve as an attraction for cultural tourism within the Berkshires and within Pittsfield. The city should leverage its strength in natural resources by ensuring that all future growth enhances and respects the environment. For example, industrial development is a necessary component of economic development however the development of an industrial site can be done in a sustainable manner.

In 2007 Pittsfield adopted a flexible development ordinance to preserve open space by allowing the clustering of homes in one portion of a project site while preserving the rest of the land as open space. Ordinance guidelines require developers to make sure that the clustering of development is done in such a way as to protect sensitive and noteworthy natural, scenic and cultural resources, and preserve valuable open space linking it to other natural areas to form corridors.

Early involvement by the community and neighborhood in the review of large developments is also an important component that shouldn’t be overlooked. For developers, time is money. Project delays cut into profits. At the same time, local residents often feel rushed since the public review of projects, even large ones, often takes place relatively late in the process making residents feel that they have to be for or against something and that compromise is no longer an option. Developers have invested considerable time and money in design and quickly take the position that the fewest changes to the plan are the best. The situation often forces developers and local residents into opposite camps – and sets the stage for showdowns rather than discussions over better projects.

For all projects, large and small, there should be opportunities for public involvement. Simple matters need not require meetings other than those before the review board. Large projects, however, should have built in mechanisms that introduce the public to the projects and provide them an opportunity to respond in a manner constructive to the developer.

Many quality developers now engage in a public process before detailed design takes place. Public meetings and open design charrettes allow local residents to observe and influence projects as they are created. The process could take place in a day or over several days. This process cannot take the place of an official review, but it smoothes the way for both applicants and the public.

The process has an obvious advantage to local residents. They get to see
plans early and work together with the developer to address community interests before the developer has too much invested to make significant changes.

The advantages to the developer are numerous.

> By helping shape a design, people buy into it. They're less likely to oppose something that they helped create.

> A design charrette can eliminate repeated reviews and changes that take time and cost money.

> The disagreements are aired during the design process. If all cannot be smoothed over, then the developer can prepare to answer questions during the official review process.

> A developer gets to include local knowledge and desires in the design. This could make projects much more valuable and palatable to neighbors, thus speeding the process.

> The cost of a well-run public design process can be more than made up in savings from repeated changes in plans and the value of getting projects built quicker.

For large projects, Pittsfield should encourage a developer-driven public participation and design process, which can be done in a number of ways including:

> Create an information pamphlet discussing the importance of the public process and provide to developers interested in Pittsfield.

> List as optional but “strongly recommended”, a pre-application neighborhood meeting or series of meetings in the review process. The developer can choose how to run the meeting, but the developer would be encouraged to use it to understand neighborhood issues or seek design ideas.

> Require such a neighborhood meeting early in the process.

> Require individual notification for projects over a certain threshold to all residents and businesses within a certain distance. This should be in addition to public notices in the newspaper.

**Strategy 1D**

*Review and revise Pittsfield’s table of “Principal Permitted Uses” to make it more user-friendly and more appropriate to achieving the city’s vision.*

There are over 100 uses listed in the Pittsfield use-table. Many are unnecessarily specific. Others are not really uses, but designs, signage, or dimensional requirements that belong in other parts of the code. Some uses are to be reviewed by the Community Development Board, others by the Zoning Board of Appeals and still others by the City Council. Finally, the City may want to review the number of by-right uses allowed in each zoning district and increase the use of site plan reviews as part of its efforts to streamline permitting. Good design standards should reduce the need to require special permits for some types of uses.
Some suggested changes to the use table include:

> Group similar uses into broader categories.
> Industrial uses are better described by impact into heavy or light industrial uses with special permits and site plan review for both.
> Move non-uses into appropriate parts of the regulation. For example, the sale of propane does not deserve its own use category. The regulation of hazardous materials should be handled under special regulations or by health and building codes.
> Drive-through facilities are not a use, but a design component that is better handled in a special regulations section about drive-through facilities.
> Review definitions to make sure the final categories are appropriately inclusive.
> Revamp the review procedures to better define the roles of the Community Development Board, Zoning Board of Appeals and City Council in special permit granting.

One principle is to preserve and retain significant natural features (e.g. vegetation, terrain and rock formations) of hillside sites in essentially their natural state. This involves minimizing as much as possible the disturbance, grading and cutting of hills, slopes and ridgelines. Careful design not only minimizes visual impact, but also reduces water runoff and soil erosion problems.

“Visually subordinate” is a standard for assessing visual impacts of proposed development on ridgelines and slopes. The standard is designed to encourage development that complements the natural landscape. Visually subordinate means that the development is not the most defining feature of the landscape. There are techniques and tools easily available that make the standard practical including appropriately-defined site landscaping, building colors, roof and window styles, building density and disturbance of project areas.

Another guideline is that density should decrease as slopes increase. Conditions inherent to steep slopes make intensive uses on them dangerous and unsightly. Hillsides possess scenic views, fresh air, and the feeling of “getting away.” They also possess unstable slopes, rapid rates of runoff, natural hazards, and public health and safety concerns. Excessive density on steep hillsides not only exacerbates the hillside’s negative qualities, it even detracts

**Strategy 1E**

*Develop a hillside and ridgeline overlay district to guide development on steep slopes and scenic views.*

The purpose of a hillside and ridgeline overlay district is to preserve and protect critical natural resource areas, minimize visual impacts of man-made features and enhance the economic values of the district.
from its desirable qualities. The intent of this principle is to require densities that balance the enjoyment of the community’s hillsides with the promotion of development in harmony with steep slopes.

**Strategy 1F**

Revamp the sign ordinance to make it better fit Pittsfield’s urban character. Signs, by their very nature, play an important role in establishing community character. In places where businesses feel the need to compete for attention, signs create visual chaos and destroy any image a city has worked hard to nurture. In other areas, where ordinances make sure everyone has a fair chance to be noticed, signs can actually enhance the community’s character – and increase the desirability, and thus commercial potential for everyone.

When conducting the visual preference survey, which took place during the Pittsfield Master Planning process, it became clear that citizens consider appropriate signage an important part of preserving Pittsfield’s distinctiveness. With the preservation of historic character and natural beauty ranking very high in the community,

Pittsfield could revamp its sign ordinance and municipal sign policies to:

- Limit the size of signs – and not grant a variance for a bigger sign. Once you grant one variance for size, then other businesses have legitimate rights to say they need an even bigger sign to compete. Sign sizes would vary by district. For example, smaller signs would be more appropriate in downtown and historic districts.
- Prohibit pole signs throughout the city. Pole signs are only suitable for suburban locations and do not convey the image of a vibrant urban center. In the more sub-urban parts of the city, monument signs can be used to advertise business to passing cars without stripping those areas of their distinctiveness. Existing pole signs could be eliminated after an amortization period of seven years.
- Allow signs on the blank sides of multistory buildings in non-residential neighborhoods.
- Require that signs in the downtown and surrounding districts be attached to the front or sides of buildings.
- Sign lighting, in the limited places it is allowed, should be discrete and not intrude onto neighboring properties or allow light to spill above the top of the signs.

**Strategy 1G**

Lobby state legislators to end Approval Not Required Subdivisions. Massachusetts is the only state that permits unlimited subdivisions of land without local review along existing roads if new parcels meet zoning regulations. The creation of these lots by filing “approval not required” subdivision plans encourages sprawl and makes it difficult for the city to direct growth to downtown and other centers.
Commonwealth law should be amended to eliminate the exemption from review for these land divisions and establish that all divisions of land are subject to reasonable conditions and standards. The rules could include an expedited review for “minor” subdivisions that are limited in scope. Such revisions will help communities, including Pittsfield, achieve their vision as outlined in their master plan.

The city needs to begin a concerted effort, in collaboration with other communities, to get state lawmakers to understand the importance of this change. As with other lobbying efforts, the city could reach out to elected and staff officials in both the legislative and executive branches. The city might also consider forming a working group of officials from municipalities to build the case for change.

**Strategy 1H**
**Update FEMA flood maps.**
The natural and built environments around Pittsfield’s waterways, particularly its rivers and streams, have changed dramatically over the decades since the most recent flood maps were produced by the federal government. In addition, the understanding of hydrology and flood cycles has advanced significantly. Pittsfield is basing its development decisions near waterways on these dated maps, which, in essence, means fairly faulty information. The city needs to work with the federal and state governments to find a way to update the flood maps. This will be an expensive and long-term endeavor, but one that will pay off as better development decisions will be made and prevent problems in the years ahead.

**Strategy 1I**
**Establish an Agricultural Commission and develop a Right-to-Farm Ordinance.**
The preservation of agricultural land and farming opportunities in Massachusetts has been a high priority for state and local officials over several decades. Agricultural lands and farming opportunities are being lost at a staggering rate. The traditional landscape is drastically altered. Approximately 2,500 acres in the city are classified as agricultural lands under Chapter 61A – The Farmland Assessment Act.

Although Pittsfield is an urban center and not an agrarian community, the city needs to do what it can to support the locally grown foods. The local grown food movement is a collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies that integrate sustainable food production, processing, distribution, and consumption to enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a particular place. The local grown food movement is considered to be a part of the broader sustainability movement and is part of the concept of local purchasing and local economies (a preference to buy locally produced goods and services).

A Right-to-Farm ordinance is an important tool that can bolster efforts to protect the viability of farming. The intent of such a general bylaw (not zoning) is to reiterate the importance of – and support for – farming within the town. The ordinance
contains a notification provision that works to ensure that people moving into agricultural areas are aware of the sights, sounds, and smells associated with farming. This type of bylaw seeks to prevent conflicts between farm operations and neighbors. There is a dispute resolution process for communities that have created an Agricultural Commission, which should be formed by an existing commission or board (such as the Conservation Commission) and enacted before accepting a Right-to-Farm bylaw.

**Strategy 1J**
*Revise zoning around the Bosquet Ski Mountain to complement its recreational and economic mission*

Since 1933, the Bosquet ski area has attracted winter sports enthusiasts to Pittsfield. Today, an array of summer activities, including waterslides, mini-golf and a rock-climbing wall, has turned Bosquet into a multi-seasonal attraction.

The development policies and regulations around this recreational landmark should be conducive to supporting its economic mission in the city. The surrounding zoning should seek to create a mix of uses – residential and commercial – that will foster the area’s growth as a recreational area.

These might include allowing:
> Hotels, inns and bed & breakfast establishments
> Multi-unit buildings for apartments, timeshares and/or condos
> Retail, restaurants and other similar uses
> Other complementary outdoor recreational uses including hiking and biking trails, passive and active recreational areas, etc.

At the same time, the policies need to guide development in a manner that protects the environment as well as the quality of life for the entire city. Walkability between residential and commercial uses – as well as transit links to recreation – should be an integral part of the plan. The area’s economic asset is its natural beauty and this should be protected through Low Impact Development techniques as well as strategies that reduce the visual impact of new development. Any new development must be very sensitive to the various steep slope and wetland conditions in the area.

**Strategy 1K**
*Investigate the use of form-based codes.*

The land use code should emphasize how development looks and performs rather than the use within a particular structure. Form-based codes are an alternative to traditional zoning, where the code focuses more on the building’s scale and shape rather than on allowable use and generic calculations for lot size, dwelling units, and so on. Form-based codes still adhere to building code and state and federal regulations. Design standards become integrated into traditional zoning and provide descriptions and graphic depictions of what the community wants buildings to look like as well.

Since, form-based codes emphasize what a community wants a place to look like the
result is a higher quality built environment than what is achievable with traditional zoning. Form-based codes rely on context to determine appropriate building scale, material, and overall design, and so such a scheme may be well suited to Pittsfield’s downtown. Form-based codes should be investigated further as a potential tool for future implementation within the City of Pittsfield. Form-based codes are easier to read and interpret than traditional zoning codes – since they are written in plain English with diagrams and graphics – resulting in a more transparent process for both the public and for developers. Finally, since the “form” is built in, form-based codes eliminate the need for separate design guidelines.

None of this is to imply that the regulation of uses would end. For example, the first floor of North Street buildings could be reserved for retail (as per Strategy 2). And certain uses, such as heavy industrial, should be excluded from downtown. However, in allowing retail, for example, we need not define whether the establishment deals in clothing or haircuts or pet grooming. For the downtown, simplifying the zoning code might include, creating a short list of broad uses that would be allowed and another short list of uses excluded. These would replace the overwhelming, but still incomplete, list of allowed uses.

Another important change could be the addition of graphics to the zoning code. Too often words, particularly those written into a law, cannot convey true intent and cannot portray an accurate picture of the final result. Sketches, site plans or photographs can provide developers, builders, review board members, public officials and the public with a more comprehensive vision for the community’s future.

Form-based codes might not be needed in all Pittsfield neighborhoods. More traditional zoning controls, with some basic design guidelines, could continue to serve largely single use, residential areas.

**STRATEGY 2**

**Encourage the street-level of downtown buildings along North Street to be used for retail uses.**

One of the most important ways to get people walking in downtown Pittsfield is to make the walk an interesting experience. In commercial areas, the most interesting activity is window-shopping. Downtown vibrancy comes from people walking, talking and pointing out the coat, skirt, menu, tie or dog in the store window that catches their interest.

This policy makes retail the preferred use for ground-floor shops along North Street in Pittsfield. Offices typically do not hold the same visual attraction for passersby. These uses belong on the floors above and in the buildings behind North Street. The office workers and their clients are important customers for downtown, so they should remain close by. However, they should not be a major component of any “main street” that is seeking to create vibrancy.
Parking garages and parking lots are notorious killers of vibrancy. With their blank walls, steel structures or rows of cars, lots and garages quickly suck the interest out of a streetscape. The need for parking does not mean the above standards should be violated. Most urban areas require that parking structures maintain retail space along the street-level with the parking spaces provided behind and above.

The Downtown Arts Overlay District already prohibits residential uses on the first floor of buildings that front North Street and South Street within the district. This is a step in the right direction.

The city should not push out non-retail businesses. Such a strategy would be counterproductive. Instead it could:

> Re-locate government offices off of first floor spaces on North Street and onto the side streets and off of North Street. The city and the state should be leaders in the transformation of downtown.

> Coordinate efforts (with Downtown, Inc., etc.) to recruit retail operations for first floor vacancies.

> Provide tax incentives or streamlined permitting to building owners focusing on first-floor retail.

> Enact design standards that:
  • Require large window surfaces for new and renovated buildings on North Street. Blank walls should be prohibited.
  • Establish a build-to line to which new buildings on North Street should be built. This would replace the existing code’s zero-foot front setback that makes coming up to the sidewalk an option.
  • Limit parking lots to the back of buildings or on the side of buildings rather than in the front.

> Work with building owners and tenants to make windows as interesting as possible.
  • Many retailers need help creating engaging displays. It is an art to make displays engaging and welcoming. Downtown, Inc. or the city could provide tips, bring in experts for talks and perhaps sponsor a best window contest every season.
  • Offices that remain need to be encouraged to spruce up their windows. An architect could display models or drawings of recent projects. A real estate agent could post current listings.

STRATEGY 3
Create walkable neighborhood centers.

Neighborhood centers within the city provide for vibrant commercial and social places. The zoning rules for Pittsfield should emphasize pedestrians over cars with a park-once and walk-to-shop mentality. They are not, nor should they become, as big as downtown or other large commercial areas. However, the centers share many of the same commercial and retail goals and in some cases could have similar land use policies. This recommendation calls for
zoning these areas as neighborhood center districts.

The code could include language that achieves the following.

> Zoning to focus on form over use by using design guidelines or form-based zoning codes described in Strategy 1A.

> Eliminate from these areas non-pedestrian friendly uses (e.g. car washes, large auto dealerships) or require a design that makes them pedestrian-friendly.

> Retail should dominate the ground floors of commercial and mixed-use buildings in core areas. Upper floors used for offices and residences. (See Strategy 2 for a full description.)

> The front facades of buildings should come up to “build-to” lines and parking lots should be behind or on the sides of structures, not in front. (See Strategy 2 for a full description.)

The following six neighborhood centers have been identified because they have an existing mixed-use or commercial core or a need for the services provided by a neighborhood center.

These are on the accompanying map.

> West Housatonic Street & Route 41 intersection
> West Street/Berkshire Community College vicinity
> Elm Street
> Waconah / North Street intersection
> Upper North Street
> Tyler Street
> Allendale

**STRATEGY 4**

**Improve the appearance of city neighborhoods and gateways.**

Image is fundamentally important to economic success. People form their first opinions of Pittsfield at its gateways – the entrances to the city, downtown and different neighborhoods. The degree to which a community takes care of this “first impression” can say a lot to visitors and potential investors about the values of residents and businesses.

Each of the five primary gateways into Pittsfield has its own character. From the west along West Housatonic Street, the city is rural and emphasizes the natural beauty of the region. From the east and south, on both Dalton and South Streets respectively, retail and commerce is the main theme. The northern gateway along North Street runs by the beauty of Pontoosuc Lake and emphasizes the city's natural beauty. The northern gateway along Cheshire Road includes a combination of commercial development, industrial development, and residential development. Pittsfield should emphasize the desirable characteristics in the improvement of the gateways. All can be distinctive, but have common themes that mark this city as Pittsfield.

Gateway improvements can occur on a number of levels. On one level, there is the simple beautification of the entrance. Enhancements should include new signs that reflect community character and improve the sense of arrival. Simple flowers and/or shrubs of appropriate

1 Allendale is not a neighborhood center, but a destination shopping center serving the city and neighboring towns. The city can map out ways to start making this commercial center more pedestrian-friendly with paths, trees, pocket parks, better and more extensive sidewalks and improved access to public transit. The city can also start to push for increased automobile and pedestrian connections between shopping areas. Ideally people should be able to walk from shop to shop and, if needed, drive between adjacent shopping areas without getting back on the public roads.
size for the signs could be planted at their base. Other signs (e.g. billboards, “for sale”, organizational) should be kept sufficiently far from each community welcome sign so as not to distract from it.

Furthermore, this “entrance” need not take place right at the border, if another more suitable location makes a better statement that Pittsfield is someplace special, it is okay to move the gateway in a bit. A pleasant, innovative, artistic welcome sign with plantings would make an excellent statement. Signs that clutter many gateways should be kept a suitable distance away. Of course, any investment in gateways needs to be regularly maintained. Many communities have success assigning DPW workers, parks employees, or volunteers to do or fund the work.

Street and landscape improvements not only serve to beautify a gateway, they also signal drivers that something is changing and to be aware. Such treatments can be used to slow traffic, especially at entrances to neighborhoods.

Another consideration is the built environment at the gateways. Zoning should be changed so that, over time, the structures emphasize the vibrancy, natural beauty and urban character of the community. Each gateway will have its own set of rules to emphasize what is appropriate. For example, the western gateway on West Housatonic Street could emphasize the rural/historic nature of the area and Hancock Shaker Village.

Some rules might include:

> Residential subdivision layouts that emphasize open space, especially in the views from public rights of way.
> Design guidelines or form-based code that makes residential structures look more rural and traditional. Building designs could reflect the history in Hancock Shaker Village.
> Site layouts should emphasize rural walking and biking trail opportunities rather than creating an urban pedestrian experience.

The South Street gateway could be co-planned with the neighboring town of Lenox in order to create a unified neighborhood shopping experience. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, along with the two municipalities, is targeting money to undertake this cooperative effort.

Some design ideas could include:

> A common streetscape plan for all public and private projects.
> An access management plan to reduce curb cuts and institute shared parking.
> Requiring that all new buildings have parking behind them.
> More aggressive landscaping in order to break up large areas of asphalt parking and to screen pedestrians from parking lots.

To the north, the gateway with Lanesborough on North Street should emphasize the beauty of the lake. Right
now, people coming into Pittsfield can only catch glimpses of Pontoosuc Lake between buildings — and public access at the gateway is limited. In addition, as described in the 2004 Community Development Plan, the handful of commercial uses on small parcels at either end of the gateway create traffic conflicts and are generally unattractive. Some ideas to change this include:

> Negotiate with landowners to open access to the waterfront
> Encourage dining and customer activity on the lakeside of buildings
> Encourage shared parking
> Allow on-street parking to slow traffic and reduce the need for lots
> Eliminate non-pedestrian uses and designs
> Institute traffic calming and redesign streetscape

To the north, the gateway with Lanesborough Cheshire Road along Route 8 from Coltsville north to the Lanesborough town border should emphasize the city’s commercial hub outside of downtown. Cheshire Road itself serves as a major regional arterial highway characterized by commercial and industrial development as well as adjoining homes and residential areas. The Coltsville area is the city’s prime commercial area outside of downtown and, along with the Berkshire Mall, is a major regional draw.

> Site layouts should emphasize biking trail opportunities rather than creating a pedestrian experience.
> An access management plan to reduce curb cuts and institute shared parking.
> Institute traffic calming and redesign streetscape.

### STRATEGY 5

Revamp parking policies to complement the community’s vision of a pedestrian friendly and environmentally friendly city.

Cars are an important part of transit. However, it is important for designers of projects in Pittsfield to remember that commercial activity is a relationship between customers and stores rather than vehicles and stores. Too often communities prescribe a conventional approach to parking, which detracts from the pedestrian friendly nature of the shopping experience — walking by or through a large parking lot is not pleasant, especially in the summer heat or facing a winter wind.

Environmentally, parking lots prevent rainwater from seeping into the ground where it is absorbed and filtered. The impermeable surfaces increase stormwater runoff. The runoff washes oil and other pollutants off of parking lots and into local waterways, which worsens water quality. Unshaded lots heat the water, changing the ecology of waterbodies and threatening local flora and fauna. The lack of shade also contributes to the urban heat island effect — driving up the need for greater air conditioning in cars and buildings.
From a financial perspective, parking lots are a very ineffective use of land. First, they must be engineered correctly to handle stormwater. Also, the land reserved for sitting under cars could have gone to a more valuable use such as a building, thereby increasing developer profits and local tax revenues.

**Strategy 5A**  
Reduce minimum parking requirements.  
Too often, generic parking standards do not take into account local topographical, environmental or demographic conditions. There is no reason, for example, that a store near a main street or connected to residential areas needs the same number of parking spaces as a suburban mall with no access but by car.

In Pittsfield, the parking standards are generic and, upon close examination, seem fairly arbitrary. This is not uncommon with codes of this era and, as such, the code pushes the city towards producing sprawl rather than vibrancy. For example, some stores in Pittsfield must have one space for every 800 square feet of gross floor area (a marginally sprawling standard) while others need one space for every 300 square feet (a very sprawling standard). This latter standard applies to department stores, which tend to be bigger buildings and would therefore have enormous lots – a medium-sized store (say 75,000 square feet) would need almost two acres of parking.

**Strategy 5B**  
Require shared parking between uses and properties.  
Shared parking allows adjacent property owners to pool their efforts and reduce the overall number of spaces. The result is smaller parking lots and less pavement. Shared parking reduces the number of curb cuts, thereby reducing unsafe pedestrian/vehicle and vehicle/vehicle points of conflict. Shared parking could become a developer’s preferred option, as it would reduce the number of spaces required.

Pittsfield code makes the provision for shared parking, but has requirements that such parking be within 400 feet of the proposed project. It also imposes capacity restrictions and may require parking studies. The rules could take the extensive research into peak parking models of shared parking into account and set up rules that make shared parking the preferred, easy option and not something that a developer has to work extra hard to achieve.

**Strategy 5C**  
Create parking districts.  
Parking districts take the shared parking concept one step further. All users in a district, for example downtown, have access to all spaces and not just those on adjoining parcels or streets. Developers can pay a fee to the parking fund in lieu of providing their required spaces. In parking districts, the city may require that
developers provide a portion of their required spaces and pay an in-lieu of fee for the rest.

The city oversees the operation and maintenance of the spaces, either in lots or structures. They would make sure that parking places were well-signed and easy to find, coordinate parking/retail validation programs and provide for worker parking. It is important that the entity controlling parking realize that parking is a tool to facilitate downtown revitalization, both in terms of commerce and urban living. Parking is not an end in itself. The setting of parking fees, hours of operations, snow removal and other policies should be undertaken with downtown revitalization goals in mind.

**Strategy 5D**

*Place parking behind buildings.*

Compare the following pedestrian experiences: The west side of North Street between Union and Linden versus the east side between Maplewood and Orchard. On the west side the buildings come up to the sidewalk. It feels pedestrian friendly with window shopping possible and engaging. The walk on the east side goes by large parking lots, across multiple curb-cuts and by buildings pushed so far back that window-shopping is impossible.

Parking lots in front of commercial and multi-unit residential structures strip Pittsfield of its urban character. The large asphalt areas make it uncomfortable for pedestrians to walk from shop to shop and therefore destroy the distinctiveness of the shopping experience.

**Strategy 5E**

*Require low impact parking lot designs that protect the environment as well as the pedestrian.*

Revise landscaping standards for parking lots to better manage the stormwater and provide a better experience for people between their cars and the stores.

Design techniques include:

- Reduce parking stall size to a maximum of 9 feet wide by 18 feet long (162 square feet). Current Pittsfield code requires a minimum parking stall size of 9 feet by 20 feet (180 square feet).
- Require a certain percentage of spaces (20 or 30 percent) to be reserved for compact cars, reducing those stalls to 8 by 17 feet (136 square feet).
- Buffer portions of parking lots that run along sidewalks with nice walls, fences or natural materials including shrubs and trees.
- Carve up large parking lots by separating areas with natural vegetation. Use curb cuts to direct water runoff into these areas. These vegetated areas, especially if lined with trees, could be pedestrian paths to protect people from cars, sun and wind.
- Require trees be integrated into the parking lot to provide shading of asphalt areas.
- Use porous paving materials.
Strategy 5F

Remove the overnight parking ban and develop rules to make parking easier for residents across the city.

The city recently amended parking prohibitions to allow on-street parking during the hours of 11 PM to 7 AM from April 1 through November 30. Previously, parking was prohibited on any street after 11 PM for the purpose of all night parking. The amended prohibition also establishes that the Commissioner of Public Works shall have the power to designate all night parking on any street during December 1 through March 31.

Although, this amendment represents an improvement to the city’s prohibition on overnight parking the remaining prohibition creates a series of problems for the city’s revitalization efforts. First, it is a burden to current residents. Many existing homes do not have driveways and municipal lots do not exist in all neighborhoods. During snow emergencies it is also illegal to park in most municipal lots leaving few options for cars for most of the city.

Second, the creation of new downtown housing is much more difficult without on-street parking. People need places to put their cars overnight and requiring every multi-family building to provide parking around residential buildings contributes to the suburbanization of Pittsfield’s downtown. Parking structures, especially underground ones, are very expensive and uneconomical for the private sector to build in all but the biggest cities. On-street parking allows for the increased density that the downtown seeks.

Third, the parking ban causes Pittsfield to lose out on a simple and free traffic calming measure across the city. Parked cars lining a street, anytime of the day or night, serve to slow down traffic.

The city should lift the overnight parking ban. Parking should be allowed on both sides of all streets that have sufficient width. On narrow streets the city can limit parking to one side. This is the common practice in most cities.

During snow emergencies, Pittsfield could institute an even/odd program. For 24 hours, no parking is allowed, for example, on the odd side of the street; thus allowing that side to be cleared. During the next 24-hour period, cars must be moved to the odd side, so that the even side of the streets can be cleared. These policies would allow residents to park, but allow the city to efficiently remove snow. In the immediate downtown vehicles could be required to not park on-street during snow emergencies. These vehicles could be allowed to park in designated municipal parking lots to maximize snow removal after which they would have to be moved to allow the clearing of the lots.
STRATEGY 6
Promote the connection of new developments to the city grid whenever possible and discourage dead end streets.

Communities need many kinds of connections for people to get around. In today’s transportation environment, car connections are vital. Unfortunately, suburban land use patterns that have arisen in some parts of Pittsfield result in few or minimal connections. Even when residential and commercial areas are near each other the lack of adequate connections turns what should be a short walking or biking trip into a car trip; or it turns short vehicle trips turn into longer ones. The result is fewer people walking and biking, more people driving and the vibrancy of a city is lost.

From a housing perspective, a street grid is fairer. People living on the end of a dead end street may enjoy less traffic, but the lack of connections means those further up the road get traffic funneled by them. Also, from an emergency services perspective, the multiple access to homes afforded by a grid means faster response times. Dead ends also increase congestion, and therefore air pollution and driver frustrations, because they dump all traffic out onto a few collector streets rather than allowing cars to filter through a balanced grid.

The big fear about connecting to a grid is the amount and speed of cut-through traffic. However, in well-designed neighborhoods, that is not an issue. Narrow streets, short blocks and stop signs at intersections curb speeders. Additional traffic calming techniques, which are described in detail in separate strategies, also serve to protect neighborhoods from automobiles. Pittsfield already limits dead end streets to 1000 feet. That is a good start. However, the subdivision and zoning regulations could go further and require more gridded and neighborhood street patterns. Individual developments should be required to leave sufficient rights of way to provide for future connections to neighboring developments. Sometimes connecting to the grid is impossible, particularly when up against environmental restrictions. However, even in these cases, a good design can almost always eliminate the need for dead ends.

Retrofitting existing subdivisions onto the street grid can be challenging. In some cases, it is possible. In most cases, however, the city may need to instead seek to find ways to make pedestrian and bicycle connections to activity centers using paths, utility right of ways, old train beds or other open spaces.
STRATEGY 7
Undertake a corridor study for outer West Housatonic Street to better organize the land uses along this major gateway into the city. Outer West Housatonic Street, a gateway corridor from the west, presents a hodgepodge appearance to passersby – neither conveying the urban vibrancy nor the natural beauty that are Pittsfield’s strong points. West Housatonic Street starts with a distinctly rural flavor on the border with Hancock. The west end also has a historic flavor with Hancock Shaker Village, which is located in Pittsfield and Hancock. The businesses along the route are then a mix of small suburban strip centers with front-lot parking, residential homes, machine/auto lots, large underutilized malls, office buildings, parking lots and retail areas. Sidewalks start and stop, road shoulder widths appear to vary, natural areas and river crossings go by with scant notice. The need for a corridor study was also noted in the city’s 2004 Community Development Plan.

A corridor study of this area would:
> Identify rational land use patterns that contribute to the quality of life and economic vitality of the corridor.
> Recommend zoning changes to create the appropriate character and mix of uses.
> Propose general development concepts and uses for catalytic and underutilized areas of land.

> Establish design and/or landscaping standards for appropriate areas of the route.
> Create the appropriate environment for a coordinated and connected multi-modal transportation system including pedestrian, bicycle, handicap accessible, and public transit.
> Find and outline corrections to vehicular traffic problems especially in terms of reducing points of conflict.
> Open, improve and interpret appropriate historic places, natural areas and scenic views.
> Discuss measures to protect the historic and natural resources.
# LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS – GOALS & STRATEGIES

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<tr>
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1. Grow and develop in a manner that reinforces and compliments Pittsfield’s urban and historic character.  
Sustainable place economically and environmentally  
2. Promote sustainable practices in all development projects.  
Center of innovation  
3. Revise land use policies, regulations and procedures to make it easy for officials, city residents and the private sector to achieve the community’s vision. |
| A. Revise subdivision regulations to require that new housing developments be designed to have low impact on the environment and maintain the character of the community. |                                                                   |
| B. Investigate the creation of watershed overlay districts to guide development in sensitive areas facing development pressure or redevelopment pressure around Onota Lake, Pontoosuc Lake and Richmond Pond. |                                                                   |
| C. Establish development review procedures that:  
a. Require developers to describe how their projects achieve the city’s vision and goals as described in the Master Plan.  
b. Ensure developers design new projects to address the preservation of open space, especially the continuity of open spaces.  
c. Encourage developers to engage in public design processes.  
D. Review and revise Pittsfield’s table of “Principal Permitted Uses” to make it more user-friendly and more appropriate to achieving the city’s vision. |                                                                   |
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<td>F. Revamp the sign ordinance to make it better fit Pittsfield’s urban character.</td>
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<td>H. Update FEMA flood maps.</td>
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<tr>
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